

FULL COUNCIL, 27 MARCH 2013

MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

1 CAR POOL SCHEME

To the Cabinet Member for Value (Councillor Roger Ramsey)

By Councillor June Alexander

A saving of £200,000 was agreed as part of the 2012/13 budget which related to the introduction of a car pooling/car club arrangement whereby staff would use the pool cars instead of their own cars on council business. Would the Cabinet Member advise:

- a) when did the scheme begin and how many cars are involved?
- b) how much of the £200,000 saving will be achieved in 2012/13?
- c) has it led to more efficient working practices?

ANSWER

We are currently trialling the pool car arrangement using 10 vehicles – this trial began in February this year and runs until May. If the trial is successful, there will be a full roll-out of the arrangement from Summer 2013 and we are confident that this will achieve the £200,000 saving.

The details of the final arrangement will be informed by the results of the trial. The decision to implement the scheme was delayed while we explored all of the implications. The saving for 2012/13 has been absorbed by services through other means for this year only, pending the outcome of the pilot.

In response to a supplementary question the Cabinet Member confirmed that the pool cars would only be left on the town hall car park for the duration of the trial period and would be removed after that point.

2 **TEMPORARY ICE RINK**

To the Leader of the Council (Councillor Michael White)

By Councillor Jeffrey Tucker

Please would the Leader provide an update on the negotiations that have taken place between the Council, Government, GLA, MPs and ice rink user groups regarding the provision of a temporary ice rink.

3 **TEMPORARY REPLACEMENT ICE RINK**

To the Leader of the Council (Councillor Michael White)

By Councillor Keith Darvill

Will he make a statement about progress in facilitating a temporary alternative ice rink within the Borough following the anticipated closure of the Romford Ice Rink in April?

ADDRESSED IN ONE ANSWER

ANSWER

Building a new swimming pool and ice rink in Romford is one of our top priorities. I am delighted that the deal we struck with Morrison's allows us to build one, in the heart of the town centre, with no major draw on council taxpayer's money - at a time when other authorities are closing these types of facilities.

We have examined options for a temporary ice rink very carefully but the costs are just too much for Havering council tax payers to bear. We are already managing a £40million cut in our funding over a four year period and, with austerity measures set to continue, there are likely to be further savings necessary in the future - so we must focus our efforts on protecting vital front line services for residents.

However, we have always said that we will provide the land and a rent free building if skaters can put together a business case to fit out the new rink and run it at no cost to council tax payers. We have held meetings with groups representing skaters and clubs that use the rink, but so far no concrete proposals have come forward.

In response to a supplementary question the Cabinet Member explained that the land swap deal could only take place in the Romford area as this was where Morrisons owned the land. The land swap was a very good deal for Havering and there was no facility for a swimming pool to be developed in the Rainham area. Any problems related to the Chafford Sports Centre were a separate resource issue.

In response to a supplementary question it was confirmed that options for a temporary ice rink were continuing to be considered but that, under procurement rules, it was not possible to link the building of the temporary facility with the contract for the permanent ice rink. The Council remained committed to finding a way forward as regards a temporary solution but suitable providers needed to come forward.

4 **COST OF INTERPRETERS AND TRANSLATION SERVICES**

To the Cabinet Member for Value (Councillor Roger Ramsey)

By Councillor Ray Morgon

Would the Cabinet Member confirm the amount of money spent on interpreters and translation services in each of the last four years?

ANSWER

Working through the East London Solutions partnership we have been able to get the best value for some of our corporate contracts.

Through the partnership, since April 2011 we introduced a central contract with The Language Shop to provide all our translation and interpreting services. These are the figures that we hold centrally. They show that in 2011/12 the Council spent £2,569 with the Language Shop.

Previous year's figures are not held centrally and it will take some time to pull these figures together and also to run further checks on the figures for the current year. I will be happy to provide Cllr Morgon with a fuller answer in due course.

In response to a supplementary question the Cabinet Member explained that other Councils with higher levels of immigration than Havering had an increased need for interpreters or translation services. The Council was required to comply with the Equalities Act 2010 and therefore had to be ready to provide translations etc should they be needed.

5 **THREAT TO THE GREEN BELT**

To the Cabinet Member for Individuals (Councillor Steven Kelly)

By Councillor Deon Burton

Newspapers such as the Sunday Telegraph claims that more than 9,000 acres of land is to be removed from the green belt by local authorities following the government's planning reforms. Newspapers state that at least 40% of councils with green-belt land in their areas have already redrawn, or plan to alter, the boundaries of the protected areas in an attempt to meet demand for housing and development.

Councillors such as myself who fight against overdevelopment and for the protection of Havering's open space, are filled with dread that such moves will

make a mockery of promises by ministers that their reforms under the National Planning Policy Framework would not lead to a degradation of the green belt.

Will the Executive give clear and unequivocal assurance that they will not pursue proposals which put a risk our Green Belt and make comment as to this administration's position in regards to the above media statements.

ANSWER

I understand that people are worried following coverage in the press about changes to the national planning system. I am grateful for the chance to again declare our commitment to the green belt and reassure local people that this commitment underpins our planning policies.

Our planning policies for protecting the green belt are well established and there are no proposals to change these or the green belt boundary. Only proposals which satisfy green belt policy are allowed within it.

Recent national planning policy and planning policy from the London Mayor support strong protection to the Green Belt principles and the Council's approach is consistent with these.

The Administration is committed to the Green Belt and will unequivocally oppose any attempts to remove or sell off any areas of this in Havering.

In response to a supplementary question the Cabinet Member confirmed that there were no plans to allow any building works on Green Belt areas in Havering. For example the planned development at St. George's Hospital would only be allowed to cover the existing footprint of the buildings on the site.

6 NORTH HILL DRIVE HAROLD HILL PLAY AREA

To the Cabinet Member for Culture, Towns and Communities (Councillor Andrew Curtin)

By Councillor Paul McGeary

What proposals are there to replace play equipment in the North Hill Drive Play Area?

ANSWER

We're working hard to secure funding to restore the North Hill Drive play area and have submitted bid applications to external sources. Sadly, one of our bids to the London Marathon trust was unsuccessful, but we're still hopeful about the other bid we have submitted to Veolia.

We are also making significant improvements to park spaces in Harold Hill including Dagnam, Central and Broxhill Parks as part of our Ambitions programme. This includes providing new play equipment in Central Park, and turning Broxhill Park into a state-of-the-art sports activity park

In response to a supplementary question the Cabinet Member was in agreement that early development was very important and agreed to take on board the need to continue to seek funding to replace play equipment in the North Hill Drive Play Area.

7 **STAFF SICKNESS ABSENCE**

To the Leader of the Council (Councillor Michael White)

By Councillor Clarence Barrett

With average staff sickness absence running at 7.9 days per annum per employee (as at December 2012), would the Leader set out what corrective actions are being taken?

ANSWER

Although this average is in line with other public services, we always want to improve our sickness rates and have introduced new measures to help keep sickness levels as low as possible.

We've introduced a new policy to manage sickness and absence and an improved strategy for managing the health of our staff. All managers are being trained on the new scheme and it will come into operation in April. With public health transferring into the Council in April, managers will have the chance to work more closely with health colleagues to support staff to remain at work.

Sickness levels are monitored by senior management to ensure any trends can be identified and are dealt with quickly.

In response to a supplementary question it was confirmed that the sickness absence target of 7.6 days per employee per annum was in line with targets in other Councils and public services.

8 **RAINHAM WAR MEMORIAL: RENOVATION**

To the Cabinet Member for Culture, Towns and Communities (Councillor Andrew Curtin)

By Councillor David Durant

The Council obtained funding from the Veolia community fund towards improvements to the Rainham Conservation Area and War Memorial. Alas for technical reasons the War Memorial itself was not renovated.

Could the Cabinet Members for Rainham Compass and Culture seek further funds to renovate the War Memorial and add new names following the research of local resident Sean Connolly?

ANSWER

I am pleased to say that we are discussing the renovations to the war memorial with English Heritage, from whom we require listed building consent to undertake the works.

The Rainham Traffic Management scheme has delivered a large programme of improvements within the village. A major part of this was the creation of the pedestrianised area around the war memorial.

As Cllr Durant alluded to, we wanted to renovate the War Memorial itself, but this could not be completed within the scheme because it requires a specialist conservation builder. This work will need to be done on a separate contract.

We welcome the research undertaken by Mr Connolly and would very much like to add the names he uncovered to the memorial. We also welcome the offer from the Romford Recorder to co-ordinate donations towards the cost of this project. Once again, we will discuss with English Heritage how this can be done sensitively and we will need to follow the formal authentication processes established through the war graves commission and the war memorial trust.

In a supplementary question Councillor Durant thanked the Cabinet Member for his assistance with this matter.

9 **PRECAST REINFORCED CONCRETE (PRC) HOMES OWNED BY THE COUNCIL**

To the Cabinet Member for Housing (Councillor Lesley Kelly)

By Councillor Pat Murray

Are all PRC constructed homes owned by the Council to be fully insulated to current standards within the Decent Homes Funding Programme?

ANSWER

Yes.

10 **HORSEMEAT: SAMPLING**

To the Cabinet Member for Housing and Public Protection (Councillor Lesley Kelly)

By Councillor Ray Morgon

Would the Cabinet Member confirm what actions, including sampling, have been taken by the Council in light of the recent horsemeat scandal?

ANSWER

We have taken the horsemeat scandal very seriously and put a number of processes in place. We are satisfied that our supply chain is robust and the meat we use is traceable.

We intend to contact schools that cater independently from H & T CS to ensure that they have adequate traceability and there is also a program to contact care homes and nursing homes in the borough. Evidence found during these contacts will determine if sampling is required.

We have also visited and discussed traceability of products and supplies with manufacturers operating in the borough who are approved to handle meat and other animal products. We have taken samples and submitted them for testing where necessary. Results of sampling can take up to two months. The results of sampling completed by other local authorities and a full report from the Food Standards Agency are expected in April.

In response to a supplementary question it was confirmed that schools that made independent catering arrangements would also be contacted as part of this programme.

11 **RAINHAM LIBRARY - UPDATE**

To the Cabinet Member for Culture, Towns and Communities (Councillor Andrew Curtin)

By Councillor Jeffrey Tucker

Please would the Cabinet Member provide an update on the building of the new Rainham Library?

ANSWER

We have now moved on to finalising details of materials with contractors. This aspect of the work is absolutely critical at this important location in the setting of very significant listed buildings and in a conservation area.

This gives us grounds for optimism that work will soon start on site. The new building will remain the focus of my complete and undivided attention throughout this process.

12 **“BEDROOM TAX”**

To the Cabinet Member for Housing (Councillor Lesley Kelly)

By Councillor Denis Breading

How many tenants in Havering will be adversely affected by the introduction of the bedroom tax?

Answer:

The Welfare Reform Act 2012 reproduces in social housing what was already in place within the private rented sector, namely that working age tenants in receipt of housing benefit will receive public support for only those bedrooms required for the size of their households.

The initial list of those affected in Havering, provided by the DWP, contained 804 Council tenants, and 300 Housing Association tenants. Following work done by the Council to contact all these households, this list has reduced to around 680 households in all. It should be stressed that the number of households fluctuates because households move in and out of work, and additional information about their circumstances comes to light which may change the assessment.

13 **NEW MORRISONS SUPERSTORE: IMPACT ON ROMFORD MARKET**

To the Cabinet Member for Community Empowerment (Councillor Robert Benham)

By Councillor Clarence Barrett

The introduction of Morrisons Superstore in Romford will no doubt increase consumer choice in the area. However has the Cabinet Member undertaken any risk based assessment of the potential impact on existing small businesses/retailers in the area and in particular Romford Market?

ANSWER

A retail impact assessment has been commissioned by Morrisons and submitted as part of the planning application. The assessment considers the impact of the development on the overall health of the town centre and the extent of likely trade diversion from existing stores.

The proposed Morrisons foodstore would have a very different offer to that of Romford Market so does not specifically refer to this in the assessment. However, the retail impact assessment does identify that the development would contribute to the level of investment in the town centre, thereby making the town centre more viable, by drawing in more people.

The report also concludes that there would not be a harmful degree of trade diversion from the other town centre supermarkets. The Council has had the retail impact assessment independently scrutinised and this has verified the overall conclusions of the report.

14 **PARKING INCOME - TARGET**

To the Cabinet Member for Environment (Councillor Barry Tebbutt)

By Councillor Deon Burton

Minded of the revenue generated by this Council's parking schemes, is there in existence a target amount for the current or forthcoming year?

ANSWER

We set the income budget for traffic and parking control based on income data collected over previous years. The budget for 2012-13 shows an expected income from on and off street parking provision - including permit scheme and penalty charge notices of £3,831,500.

15 **MEETINGS CLASHING WITH FULL COUNCIL**

To the Leader of the Council (Councillor Michael White)

By Councillor Denis O'Flynn

Will the Administration ensure that officers do not arrange meetings where Ward Councillors are expected to attend at the same time as Full Council Meetings?

ANSWER

Yes, we will do that. If this has happened then it should not have done and we will raise that with officers from the relevant departments

16 **REMEMBERING THOSE WHO HAVE DIED IN THE SERVICE OF THEIR COUNTRY**

To the Leader of the Council (Councillor Michael White)

By Councillor John Mylod

Would the Leader of the Council confirm if he will consider naming new roads in Havering after those Havering residents who have died whilst serving their country abroad?

ANSWER

As many of you know, I have taken a strong interest in Havering's recognition of the outstanding work that the armed forces community does on our behalf and most importantly of the sacrifices made by our servicemen and women in the line of duty.

Since I signed the Armed Forces Community Covenant in June last year, this Council has been working hard in support of the military community through such things as Armed Forces Day and prioritising housing support for ex-service personnel for example.

I can confirm that we are considering a number of further measures in support of the armed forces community and how we recognise the work that they do including looking at the naming arrangements for new roads.

17 **OLYMPIC GAMES: GLA LEVY**

To the Cabinet Member for Value (Councillor Roger Ramsey)

By Councillor David Durant

Havering residents are required to pay a surcharge on top of the GLA levy towards the cost of the Olympic Games. What will be the total cost of this GLA surcharge to Havering residents and how much has already been paid?

ANSWER

The cost of the Games is an element within the overall GLA precept, rather than a surcharge on top of it. The standard amount to be paid by residents in a band D property in the forthcoming year is £20 out of the £303 GLA levy.

This was introduced in 2006/7 and will continue at £20 annually until 2015/16 with a final payment of £9 in 2016/17.

Therefore, the overall charge related to the Games for residents in a band D property, will be £209 paid over an 11 year period. To date, Band D households will have paid £140.

18 **PERFORMANCE INFORMATION**

To the Leader of the Council (Councillor Michael White)

By Councillor Ray Morgon

Would the Leader confirm what he thinks is the benefit of looking at performance information at the Value Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the quarter ending September 2012 in February 2013?

ANSWER

Councillor Morgan is quite right that it was too late to be looking at this data in February and we will be ensuring that this sort of delay does not happen again. I took the decision to publish our performance data in the cabinet report each quarter to improve the Council's openness and transparency and I expect this will continue in a more timely fashion from now on.

19 **"TROUBLED FAMILIES": HELP**

To the Cabinet Member for Housing and Public Protection (Councillor Lesley Kelly)

By Councillor Ray Morgon

Would the Cabinet Member confirm what progress has been made in helping "Troubled Families" in Havering?

ANSWER

We've made a really positive start to this project and have hit our first year target of identifying and starting to work with 166 families. We have successfully supported some families throughout the project and completed work with them and have already begun looking for families to work with in the next year.

Our work has received positive feedback from both DCLG and Ofsted and due to our success; DCLG will release full funding for the 207 families we will be working with in the second year of the project.

Much of the troubled families funding is supporting the development of early help for vulnerable families across the borough, which aims to prevent a family's problems escalating which can lead to family breakdowns and also costs more to deal with in the longer term.

Some examples include the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Support (CAMHS), working with the voluntary and third sector to help the community support families, the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) and working with Job Centre Plus to help develop skills and opportunities for workless families.

All this work has helped to build stronger partnerships across the Council and the community which will continue to help support our most troubled families.

20 **UNEMPLOYMENT IN HAVERING**

To the Cabinet Member for Individuals (Councillor Steven Kelly)

By Councillor Nic Dodin

Would the Cabinet Member confirm the following:

- a) The current number of people unemployed in Havering?
- b) The number of long term unemployed?
- c) The number of Young People (under 25) unemployed?
- d) What steps the council are taking to reduce the number of people unemployed in Havering?

ANSWERS

- a) The most recent figures published by the Government relate to January 2013. At that time the number of people claiming job seekers allowance in Havering was 5,418, or 3.6% of the resident working age population. This compared to 3.9% in London and 3.8% across Great Britain.
- b) Of the 5,418 job seekers allowance claimants in the borough 1,450, or 1% have been unemployed for longer than 12 months, compared to 1.1% in London and 1.0% in Great Britain.
- c) Of the 5,418 job seekers allowance claimants in the borough 1,480 are aged between 18 and 24. This constitutes 7.1% of the resident population aged 18-24 and compares to 5.6% of the London population and 7% of the GB population.
- d) The Council meets regularly with Jobcentre Plus, the Work Programme and other providers to develop and implement projects that will help reduce the number of people unemployed in Havering. The Employment and Skills Group has considered issues such as mapping employment and skills provision in the borough and encouraging local recruitment. We have a number of initiatives, such as employment support, business support, apprenticeship programmes and town centre regeneration to encourage employment. We also have a local partnership of schools, colleges and training providers.

21 **LIBRARY SERVICE: PERFORMANCE**

To the Cabinet Member for Culture, Towns and Communities (Councillor Andrew Curtin)

By Councillor Linda Hawthorn

Would the Cabinet Member confirm the following:-

- a) How are the number of visitors to Havering's Library in the Members Performance pack calculated?
- b) How many residents hold a library card (split between Havering and non-Havering residents)?

ANSWERS

- a) Our visitor numbers are measured by electronic people counters at the entrance to all of our libraries.

Unlike in some other boroughs, we make full use of our libraries and have a number of ways of encouraging attendance. For instance, we held 3,619 events between April 2012 - Feb 2013 in our libraries, encouraging people to read and enjoy life more. Libraries also support other key objectives of the Council such as recycling initiatives. This ensures both that tax payers get maximum benefit from the library service and that public libraries serve as the badly needed heart of every community they are in. In my opinion, other boroughs would do well to emulate the outstanding model established by Havering Library Service.

- b) We currently have 158,375 Havering residents who hold a library card, which is almost 70 per cent of all residents – and that's great to see.

Non-Havering residents do use our libraries as well, just as Havering residents can use libraries in other boroughs, as we are part of the London Libraries Consortium, which not only increases the resources available to Havering residents in a cost-efficient way, but also allows us to make savings through efficiencies without reducing frontline library services. We do not hold specific figures for non-residents.

22 **PLANTING STREET TREES - COST**

To the Cabinet Member for Environment (Councillor Barry Tebbutt)

By Councillor Clarence Barrett

Would the Cabinet Member set out the full unit cost to the Authority to supply and plant a street tree?

ANSWER

The average cost to supply and plant a tree is £148.50. However, this might vary depending on the specific locations.

23 **RECYCLING REFUSE**

To the Cabinet Member for Environment (Councillor Barry Tebbutt)

By Councillor Clarence Barrett

While recycling is to be encouraged, the orange recycling bags given to residents are woefully thin and split under the slightest pressure. Would the Cabinet Member confirm what steps are being taken to make the sacks more robust?

ANSWER

We recognise this and have raised the issue with the East London Waste Authority who manage the contract with Shanks. Shanks have agreed to review the quality of the sacks and come back to us, so we can discuss a sensible and cost-effective solution.