

COUNCIL, 16 July 2014

**MEMBERS' QUESTIONS**

**1 Harrow Lodge Park**

**To The Cabinet Member for Culture & Community Engagement, Cllr Melvin Wallace**

By Councillor Cllr John Mylod

**Question:**

As we were informed prior to the recent election that the Environment Agency would be financing works in Harrow Lodge Park, could the Cabinet Member set out what these works are, their cost and a timetable for when they will be carried out to ensure this park is brought up to the standard of other parks in the borough?

**Answer:**

It's not the case that the Environment Agency will be paying for works in Harrow Lodge Park.

The Council has set aside £300k to be spent on reducing the amount of silt that is present in the lake but we need to wait until the nesting season is over to begin the work. We have also secured a commitment from Thames Water that the main sewer pipe through the park will be cleaned, which should prevent the chances of flooding in the future.

There is also a programme of improvements works that will see standards in the park improve in the coming years.

We have been in discussion with the Environment Agency and a number of other interested parties about the possible naturalisation of the River Ravensbourne in Harrow Lodge Park. Initial proposals have been discussed and an approximate cost for the works is about (£10-£12m). We will need to look at this further and see what funding from Government or other sources may come available.

In response to a supplementary question, the Cabinet Member reported that the conservation lead for the park was happy that silt removed from the area would be retained to strengthen the surrounds of the lake.

## 2 Social Housing Stock

### **To the Cabinet Member for Housing, Cllr Damian White**

By Councillor Philip Hyde

#### **Question:**

With an ever greater strain being put on our limited social housing stock. It is imperative that all recipients of this discounted social asset should be in a social wealth bracket that it is intended for. To this end, I would like to request information on the number of council property tenants that earn over £50,000 and £100,000? This can be as a joint or single income.

#### **Answer:**

Although the Council collects income data for all applicants for Council housing, it does not ask for any further income updates after the tenant has moved in, unless they apply for Housing benefit. We know that currently 71% of our tenants are in receipt of Housing benefits and we also have a policy in place preventing new applicants from joining the housing register if they earn more than Havering's average income of £25,000. But we're not able to say how many council tenants may have seen their incomes rise to over £50,000 or £100,000 since moving into a council home.

Since April 2012, we have also introduced flexible tenancies which means we can check financial details. If at the end of the five years the person has enough income or savings to buy for themselves we can end the tenancy.

In response to a supplementary question, the Cabinet Member confirmed that a review of tenants with high incomes would commence in April 2015 and he would keep Councillor Hyde advised of progress with this.

## 3 Chaffords School

### **To The Cabinet Member for Culture & Community Engagement, Cllr Melvin Wallace**

By Councillor Jeffrey Tucker

#### **Question:**

Chaffords School, Rainham has recently been granted Academy status. What impact will this have on the school's relationship with the Council and future of the swimming pool? Will the swimming pool be retained and open to the public and what action can/will the Council take to assist in keeping it open?

#### **Answer:**

Chafford pool is currently operated by our leisure contractors Sports and Leisure Management Ltd. The leisure contract is up for renewal in 2016 and the council is in discussions with the school about whether the pool continues to be managed through the new leisure contract beyond 2016. That is ultimately the school's decision, though we would certainly prefer to see the pool remain open to the public.

In response to a supplementary question, the Cabinet Member confirmed that a budget had been set aside for health & safety and unforeseen items at the swimming pool.

#### 4 Care Act – April 2015

##### **To the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Services & Health, Cllr Wendy Brice-Thompson**

By Councillor June Alexander

##### **Question:**

With much of the Care Act coming into force in April 2015, would the Cabinet Member set out what progress is being made in order to meet the requirement for this Council to carry out 'needs assessments' for all carers?

##### **Answer:**

The Care Act (2014) will bring in sweeping changes to how we work with vulnerable adults and their carers, and we welcome the opportunity to improve services for these people, in particular providing more support for those who look after their loved ones.

We know that assessing every carer is a huge undertaking, and that identifying people who wouldn't even consider themselves as carers will be a large part of that. Adult Social Care already works with carers, including undertaking assessments – we assessed just over 2000 carers in 2013/14, providing information and advice, respite, pointing people to other services (such as in the voluntary sector and elsewhere) to support them in their caring role. We already operate a Carers Register

We have brought together people with a range of skills from across the council to work closely together in the run-up to April 2015, to put in place everything needed to ensure we comply with the Act. This group will be working with our existing carers to ensure they are aware of the Act and how it will affect them, arranging the undertaking of assessments, and, most importantly, working to identify those carers who are not already known to us.

In the coming 6 months we will work with carers to redesign their services, based on what carers tell us will best support them in the future. This work will also ensure that the Council continues to meet the requirements of the Care Act. The next stage of that redesign will happen later this summer when we bring the voluntary sector providers of services together to consider how best to meet the needs of Havering's carers.

In response to a supplementary question, the Cabinet Member confirmed that she would be delighted to involve the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee in this work.

#### 5 Infrastructure plans for development of the old Somerfield site

##### **To the Cabinet Member for Regulatory Services & Community Safety, Cllr Osman Dervish**

By Councillor Phil Martin

##### **Question:**

What are the infrastructure plans for the proposed development of the Old Somerfield Site? Please provide particular detail for; Schools, Doctor's Surgeries and NHS support clinics?

##### **Answer:**

In accordance with current Council planning policies, as part of the grant of planning permission for residential development of the former Somerfield Depot, the developer will make a financial contribution of £2,236,500. This would be pooled with other developer contributions and used to provide infrastructure in the Borough required as a result of new development. The infrastructure to be provided may include education provision and subject to demonstration of need, could include funding toward health services.

In response to a supplementary question, the Cabinet explained that he could not give an assurance that the Mayor of London would put pressure on the Government to include a new school as part of the development plans as this was a separate issue.

## 6 **Parking charges for employees**

### **To The Leader and Cabinet Member for Value, Cllr Roger Ramsey**

By Councillor David Durant

#### **Question:**

The recently imposed Town Hall parking charges for all employees [irrespective of job description and working hours] are a de facto pay cut that cost the lower paid proportionately more than the higher paid.

The poll tax nature of these parking charges will incite a grievance far beyond the amounts involved and be bad for employee relations at a time when employees are being asked to do more for less.

In view of this why did the Administration refuse to negotiate with staff and unions and seek a compromise over these parking charges before they were imposed?

#### **Answer:**

As I believe the member has previously been informed, nearly half of our staff have been paying for using council car parks for a number of years. The move to charge all staff who use Romford council car parks was in part to create a level playing field amongst all staff and reduce the inequity of some paying while others did not. Many councils already charge for staff using council car parks. Redbridge, Waltham Forest, Brent, Bromley, Haringey to name a few from various locations across London. We are therefore by no means alone in introducing these charges. At £1 a day, staff receive a highly subsidised rate for the use of council car parks that would, I believe, be the envy of many working in the private sector.

The changes, at £1 a day include concessions for those working part time and are at such a modest rate that it can hardly be referred to as a poll tax. I am unaware of parking charges anywhere being means tested, presumably because the fee charged is so low as to make complicated administration outweigh the benefits of the charge.

These charges form part of a saving worth £250,000. Our staff do good work and I am sure that we all want to support them as much as is possible, but in the current financial climate a benefit of free access to council car parks is something I believe we can no longer afford. In the face of alternatives like cutting front line services I do believe this is a least worst proposal.

In response to a supplementary question, the Leader confirmed that discussions with unions continued on issues such as ensuring security staff were available to operate car park barriers.

## **7 Bretttons Site and Associated Land**

### **To The Cabinet Member for Culture & Community Engagement, Cllr Melvin Wallace**

By Councillor Barry Mugglestone

#### **Question:**

Would the Cabinet Member confirm why the previous two Conservative Administrations failed to develop a long term strategy for the Bretton's site and associated land?

#### **Answer:**

The Council's Parks and Open Spaces Strategy 2013-15, agreed by Cabinet in February 2013, includes a plan to agree a way forward for Bretons and to produce a Master plan for the site, before 2015.

We will need to complete a Historic Environment assessment and then we will develop the Master plan. Work on this is due to begin in the autumn.

In response to a supplementary question, the Cabinet Member agreed to check if the Historic Environment assessment would include the lake area and advise the Councillor accordingly.

## **8 Risks to flooding in Havering**

### **To the Cabinet Member for Regulatory Services & Community Safety – Cllr Osman Dervish**

By Councillor Lawrence Webb

#### **Question:**

Given that the Environment Agency states that the principal risk to flooding in Havering excluding the Thames is along the rivers Rom and Ingrebourne, what plan is in place to deal with flooding in areas affected by these two rivers?

#### **Answer:**

All London Authorities are designated lead local flood authorities and are responsible for the management of water, especially rivers and rain.

Havering Council has a number of policies in place which are all available on the Havering website. A flood Risk Management Strategy will be available on the website soon.

A programme of work has already been carried out on both the Rom and the Ingrebourne. We are also working with the Environment Agency to identify and address any further risks.

We also help the community protect their own property and we have put together an Emergency Planning Handbook which gives advice and guidance to the both staff and public to help them. This guide is available free of charge in libraries and on the website.

## 9 **Audit of merger with Newham**

### **To The Leader and Cabinet Member for Value, Cllr Roger Ramsey**

By Councillor Graham Williamson

#### **Question:**

How does the Council intend to audit the progress of the merger of all back-office administrative services with Newham?

#### **Answer:**

This Council needs to save £60 million over the next four years and the merger of our back office systems with Newham is one way of reducing our costs without cutting public services.

As with all of our savings, the oneSource partnership will be monitored rigorously, through normal management processes, regular budget monitoring procedures and performance management.

Members will also be able to audit the process through the joint committee and the overview and scrutiny committee for value.

## 10 **Funding for pot holes**

### **To The Cabinet Member for Environment, Cllr Robert Benham**

By Councillor Darren Wise

#### **Question:**

Given the recent allocation of £404,000 from the Government to repair pot holes across the borough, would the Cabinet Member set out, on a ward basis, how and where this will be spent and how ward members will be involved in the allocation process?

#### **Answer:**

We found out about the grant on 20 June, so officers are putting together a list of locations for where the money will be used.

Comments from Councillors will be taken into account; however, as agreed by the Department for Transport, the funding will be used to carry out repairs and preventative maintenance work, particularly on some rural roads and country lanes, which officers have identified.

We are considering surface dressing these roads, which will seal the surfaces and stop water seeping in, which is a massive contributor to potholes.

In accordance with the terms of the grant, we will publish a list of locations where we have used this funding on a monthly basis on our website.

In response to a supplementary question, the Cabinet Member confirmed that funding was allocated on a needs basis. A total of 2,031 potholes in Havering had been mended in the last year and a list would be supplied to Councillor Wise.

## 11 Dog mess fines

### **To The Cabinet Member for Environment, Cllr Robert Benham**

By Councillor Julie Wilkes

#### **Question:**

Given the recent campaign to tackle dog mess, would the Cabinet Member set out how many fines have been issued in the last six months and what measures will be taken to reinforce the Council's commitment to confront this issue?

#### **Answer:**

No fixed penalties have been issued since January, however, prior to that, five penalty notices were issued and one prosecution secured for dog foul offences since February 2013.

Over that last few years we've been running a high-profile campaign to raise awareness of the importance of residents cleaning up after their dogs and generally keeping the borough clean. And in the last Your Council Your Say survey, we found that residents feel that their streets and parks are cleaner.

We will of course continue to reinforce our commitment to tackle the issue of dog fouling.

There are a series of new advisory stickers, which are deployed as required at key locations, and we have a web form so that residents can report offenders and enforcement officers can investigate.

However, we're reliant on residents supplying as much information as possible, such as times, places, and descriptions of offenders.

## 12 Community Infrastructure Levy

### **To the Cabinet Member for Environment, Cllr Robert Benham**

By Councillor Cllr Linda Hawthorn

#### **Question:**

Would the Cabinet Member update Members what progress is being made to introduce a Havering based Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) schedule for planning applications?

#### **Answer:**

The Council supports the principle that new developments should contribute towards the cost of new infrastructure necessary to support the borough's development.

In 2013, it adopted planning guidance that includes a tariff-based approach to new development.

The guidance requires the developers of new homes to pay a 'standard' charge to the Council for each new unit of residential accommodation that they provide. In order to

maintain the focus on the growth of the economy in the borough, the strategy does not currently apply to uses other than residential.

The current tariff sets out different rates for new housing at London Riverside (south of the A1306) and in the rest of the borough to reflect the differences in the costs of development between the two areas.

The current charges are discounted to take account of wider economic and viability matters. The rate for London Riverside is currently £4,500 per new unit and for the rest of the borough it is currently £6,000 per new unit.

In line with national planning legislation, the Council has started to prepare a Havering Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) to update and replace the planning guidance standard charge tariff approach.

Subject to approval, the initial consultation on the draft CIL scheme for Havering should take place later this year.

### **13 Excessive basal growth – borough trees**

#### **To The Cabinet Member for Environment, Cllr Robert Benham**

By Councillor Gillian Ford

#### **Question:**

Would the Cabinet Member advise Members what measures are in place to tackle excessive basal growth (feathering) affecting many of the borough's trees?

#### **Answer:**

Feathering is an annual problem most common with Lime Trees and Acers and a programme is in place to deal with this issue.

The feathering programme for this year was issued to our Tree Maintenance Contractor in May, who started the programme in the first week of June. The programme takes approximately eight weeks to complete and is prioritised so the roads where the feathering causes safety risks - such as restricting sight lines around schools or near crossings - are dealt with first.

There is an element of flexibility within the programme and officers will try to incorporate changes following complaints or concerns raised by our residents.

## 14 Weed Spraying Contract

### To the Cabinet Member for Environment, Cllr Robert Benham

By Councillor Ray Morgon

#### **Question:**

Given the concerns raised about the effectiveness of the weed spraying contract over the last couple of years, would the Cabinet Member please set out the Council's plan to ensure that our roads and pavements will be as free as possible from weeds this year - including what checks will be in place to ensure that the terms of the contract are adhered to by the contractor?

#### **Answer:**

A contract is in place to control weed growth on roads and pavements.

This year's weed spraying programme started in March, and the second of the four borough-wide scheduled treatments has almost been completed.

Legislation sets out which chemicals can be used to treat weeds on hard surfaces. While it is effective on annual grasses - as these will die off within three weeks of spraying - it takes longer to kill weeds such as knotgrass and broad leaved weeds. We're aware that these type of weeds are a problem in some areas of the borough.

We've raised this with the contractor and they have said they will ensure their operators are applying the chemical at the maximum permissible rate and record areas where weeds such as knotgrass are present. They will then arrange for these locations to be retreated or, in high profile areas, for the weeds to be hand pulled, if they are not killed off by the scheduled treatment.

The contractor self-monitors a percentage of the roads, which have been treated, and the Council's Environmental Maintenance Supervisors also undertake inspections.

In response to a supplementary question, the Cabinet Member confirmed that he could supply a record of roads checked for weeds.

## 15 Gallows Corner Flyover

### To the Cabinet Member for Regulatory Services & Community Safety, Cllr Osman Dervish

By Councillor Reg Whitney

#### **Question:**

Would the Cabinet Member set out what he plans to do to bring about a long awaited solution to the severe congestion and hazardous driving conditions frequently encountered at Gallows Corner Flyover?

#### **Answer:**

This is a very important question and considering the recent reports in the local paper it is an important decision for us to discuss.

The Gallows Corner junction forms part of the Transport for London Road Network (TLRN) and is the responsibility of Transport for London rather than the Council.

The Gallows Corner junction is a significant 'gateway' into the borough and the Administration would certainly agree that it is not the most appealing feature for road users to encounter as they come into Havering. We have all had experience of that.

We have previously raised issues about the Gallows Corner junction directly with Sir Peter Hendy (Transport for London Commissioner). The Council worked closely with Transport for London in 2009 when parapet repairs were needed to the flyover to ensure that the works were completed efficiently and effectively. The Council will continue to work closely with Transport for London to secure improvements at Gallows Corner.

Through the Mayor's Road Task Force, the Council lobbied for the junction to be reviewed and improvements brought forward. I am aware that TfL is undertaking a safety review of the junction and we are awaiting the outcome.

Yes, we share these concerns, but recognise the substantial challenges including costs which would have to be overcome in order to make changes.

I am pleased to inform the councillor that I am going to take this vigorously forward and I have a meeting with the Leader of the council and Peter Hendy later in the year and will be raising this and happy to take comments on what people would like to see.