

COUNCIL - 17th September 2014

MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

Q1 Refund of Penalty Charge (PCN)

To the Cabinet Member for Environment, Cllr Benham

By Councillor Morgon

Question:

In the Romford Recorder (edition 22nd August 2014) there was a letter from Mr. S. Delieu in relation to a disputed parking ticket issued over a year ago. Would the Cabinet Member confirm whether a refund of the Penalty Charge Notice (PCN) was due in this case and if so when was it paid?

Answer:

Yes, Mr Dulieu was due a refund, however, this has not been issued yet. We have taken immediate action to rectify this and sent him a letter of apology. As soon as we receive his completed refund request form, he will be given a full refund.

In response to a supplementary question, the Cabinet Member agreed to advise Councillor Morgon separately of the precise reason for the delay in issuing the refund.

Q2 Pensions Contributions

To the Leader of the Council & Cabinet Member for Value, Cllr Ramsey

By Councillor Webb

Question:

Given that that the Numbers of having staff have reduced over the last couple of years why have the number of people contributing to the pension increased?

Answer:

There are a number of reasons for the increase in numbers in the pension scheme. In total this has risen to 451 members across all 28 employers that are involved in the scheme. To be a member of the scheme, you do not have to be a council employee but an employee of any of the organisations I am about to refer to. Automatic enrolment has considerably pushed up the number of people contributing to the fund, especially those employed by schools. 151 Employees were added when Homes in Havering came back in-house.

There have also been additions from Havering Sixth Form College and Havering College of Further and Higher Education. In addition, there have

been increasingly complex contracts with employees from different organisations such as schools and academies who employ people with multiple contracts, therefore showing them as individual members when in reality they are one contributor.

Q3 Newham merger

To the Leader of the Council & Cabinet Member for Value, Cllr Ramsey
By Councillor Tucker

Question:

Following the merger with Newham how often have senior Havering council officers spent time in Newham covering for absent senior Newham staff.

Answer:

None. Our partnership with Newham, oneSource, brings together both councils, with no staff dedicated to one council in particular, but providing services across both Havering and Newham.

In response to a supplementary question, the Leader of the Council emphasised that Havering staff were not covering for Newham. Specific reports would be investigated but the merger allowed substantial budget savings and should be given a chance.

Q4 New Leisure Centre & associated retail development

To the Leader of the Council & Cabinet Member for Value, Cllr Ramsey
By Councillor Darvill

Question:

Will the Lead Member make a statement about the progress of the new leisure and recreation complex in Romford and the associated retail development on the former ice rink site at Rom Way?

Answer:

The Council is in the final stages of negotiation on a small number of legal, construction and financial issues. These need to be resolved before the contract agreement between the Council and Morrisons becomes unconditional and the project can proceed.

Certain site preparation works have already been completed and the demolition of the existing ice rink is due to happen next week (W/C 8 Sept).

It is envisaged that all outstanding contractual matters will be resolved and work will begin on the building of the leisure centre in early 2015.

In response to a supplementary question, the Leader of the Council confirmed that highway works notices, development cost issues and the preparation of

final legal documentation were all progressing as planned. Initial works would involve the substation and the demolition of the west wing of Chaucer House. There was currently no specific date for the completion but this would be announced in the press once confirmed.

Q5 Housing - Landlords tenancy management

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

By Councillor Nunn

Question:

In order to ensure that landlords take responsibility for the condition of their properties and tenancy management, would the Cabinet Member consider introducing a borough wide landlord licensing scheme?

Answer:

The Council does not currently operate any kind of licensing or accreditation scheme for landlords of private rented dwellings.

The Council's Housing Strategy 2014-2017 contains a Private Sector Housing sub-strategy. One of the key priorities is to improve private rental property standards and management practices.

In taking this action forward, various licensing and accreditation schemes will be assessed, including the London Landlords Accreditation Scheme and Newham's Selective Licensing Scheme.

The aim will be to support landlords to meet their legal obligations, provide a good standard of accommodation, prevent homelessness and make landlords aware of the sanctions that will be imposed if they break the law.

In response to a supplementary question, the Leader confirmed that a robust approach was taken by the Council as regards unscrupulous landlords and environmental health powers could be used if necessary to undertake enforcement action.

Q6 Residential Care Homes

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

By Councillor Webb

Question:

What provision does Havering Council have to prevent newcomers moving into residential care homes within the borough and becoming a financial

liability to the council. Given that there are currently 700 people in retirement/residential care homes who cost the borough 17m.

Answer:

We have led, through our Director of Social Care, a London-wide lobbying campaign arguing that these rules known as ordinary residency rules, which remain unchanged in the Care Act, are unaffordable and unsupportable. As care homes are private businesses and can accept residents from outside of Havering, we are limited in preventing them admitting new residents. This is why we will continue to press the government for a change in the Care Act to change these outdated rules.

Q7 Oasis Academy Free School

To the Cabinet Member for Children & Learning, Cllr Davis

By Councillor Durant

Question:

What relationship does the Council have with the Oasis Academy Free School and are their present difficulties an advertisement or indictment of the Government's policy of removing all schools from local authority control.

Answer:

We have a very good relationship with Oasis and have worked closely with them at all stages of their application.

The difficulties they had were due to arrangements they had made with the YMCA to use part of its land for the next two years as a temporary location, which were withdrawn at the last minute.

We found school places for all 43 children affected and continue to work closely with Oasis Academy.

In response to a supplementary question, the Cabinet Member confirmed that the Council was working with all schools to ensure the best possible education was provided to increasing numbers of children.

Q8 Planning Applications

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

By Councillor Ganly

Question:

Would the Cabinet Member confirm the current procedure for notifying neighbours of planning applications?

Answer:

Notification of adjoining occupiers is done as a matter of routine on all applications. The Council is required to notify all properties that share an immediate boundary with the development site. Anything further than that is at the discretion of the Council.

Each development is considered on an individual basis and in many cases the Council will notify more neighbours than the minimum required. Neighbouring property owners will be notified by letter and a statutory period of 21 days is given for responses to the notification.

Larger schemes, such as those for more than 10 houses, which are classified as major developments and certain other types of applications, for example those in Conservation Areas or affecting listed buildings, are also advertised by way of the posting of a site notice and a local newspaper advertisement. This is usually done in addition to direct neighbour notification.

In response to a supplementary question, the Cabinet Member agreed to look into the specifics of why residents were not notified of a recent planning application in the Roneo Corner area.

Q9 Flower beds – planting programme**To the Cabinet Member for Environment, Cllr Benham**

By Councillor Wilkes

Question:

Would the Cabinet Member explain why the flower beds in Hornchurch, Upminster and Romford are beautifully planted and all we have had in Elm Park since 2013 are weeds?

Answer:

We had actually planned to re-landscape all the flower beds in Elm Park during the last planting season, but due to persistent spells of bad weather, this wasn't possible. However, we did maintain them with weed control to prevent excessive growth.

There are also thin strips either side of the road sewn with poppies, from Elm Park Station to the junction with Tadworth Parade and Station Parade, which do provide a display but at times can appear unkempt.

I'm pleased to tell you however, that all the flower beds are currently being cleared in readiness for planting from November. There will be living walls on Station Parade and Tadworth Parade and the whole area will be re-landscaped with colourful plants that support and encourage native species, like butterflies and bees.

A further two large flower tubs will be installed to provide extra seasonal colour on the highway – one at the junction with Elm Park Avenue and one in Tadworth Parade. Daffodils, Iris and Fritilarias will be used to provide spring colour in the area.

In response to a supplementary question, the Cabinet Member agreed to investigate why only a small number of flowers had thus far been planted in Elm Park.

Q10 Free School Meals

To the Cabinet Member for Children & Learning, Cllr Davis

By Councillor Ford

Question:

Would the Cabinet Member confirm that arrangements are in place to provide free school meals to reception, year one and year two pupils as from this month and what is the additional cost, if any, to this Authority?

Answer:

We had everything in place to ensure we could provide hot meals to all infant school children that wanted one as they returned this September.

We received a grant from the government of £536,417 for council maintained schools and an additional £106,325 for voluntary aided schools, which we used to upgrade school kitchens, and have not so far needed to top up with any Council money.

Staff at Parklands Primary took their own decision not to provide meals for the first few days that pupils returned, and began serving free meals from Monday 8 September.

In response to a supplementary question, the Cabinet Member agreed to check that no additional funding had been required for free school meals.

Q11 Illegal Traveller encampments

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

By Councillor Mugglestone

Question:

Would the Cabinet Member set out the cost to this Council of dealing with illegal traveller encampments over each of the last three years?

Answer:

The cost of obtaining a straightforward court order per incursion is approximately £1000; this would include court fees, any external expenditure

and legal officer time, to which we would add all the non -isolated operational costs of the responding services.

The total costs of dealing with illegal traveller encampments are absorbed within the operational budgets of the responding services. There are no separate budgets for dealing specifically with traveller encampments, so it is not possible to provide an exact figure.

In response to a supplementary question, the Cabinet Member agreed to check that no agency staff were used and also to confirm why Romford Magistrates court was not used to obtain the required court orders.

Q12 Right to Buy

To the Deputy Leader of the Council & Cabinet Member for Housing, Cllr White

By Councillor Alexander

Question:

Can the Lead Member for Housing confirm how many properties have been sold under the Right to Buy privilege in the last four years and then rented back to the Council?

Answer:

One.

Q13 Community Engagement & Communications with Stakeholders

To the Leader of the Council & Cabinet Member for Value, Cllr Ramsey

By Councillor Mylod

Question:

Given the Council is committed to community engagement and communications with stakeholders, would the Leader:

- a) Set out what measures will be put in place to encourage community participation in how the Council is run and the decision making processes since the demise of Area Committees and Ask the Cabinet?
- b) Ensure that ward councillors are kept informed of issues and events pertinent to their wards?

Answer

- a) **Set out what measures will be put in place to encourage community participation in how the Council is run and the decision making processes since the demise of Area Committees and Ask the Cabinet?**

We are always very keen for the public to help shape the decisions that we make on their behalf we are indeed committed to good communication with residents. Following the next Cabinet meeting, we will be launching a three month period of consultation on our budget proposals.

That will be a huge undertaking, including a budget edition of Living in Havering, public meetings, online information, consultation questionnaires and the provision of detailed information to specific sections of the community who might be particularly affected by different proposals.

Once that very comprehensive consultation is completed in the New Year, I will review communication and engagement with local residents in the light of this exercise.

- b) **Ensure that ward councillors are kept informed of issues and events pertinent to their wards?**

Every week calendar brief provides pertinent updates to all councillors and local events are publicised on the Council's website and the 'Havering Events' Facebook page. I know that officers make every effort to let ward members know about activities that are specific to their wards in advance, but as a large organisation that carries out a great deal of work, it is not always practicable in every case.

In response to a supplementary question, the Leader emphasised that communication did take place with ward members but would look into any specific instances where this may not have taken place. Area committees would not be brought back as these had attracted only very low attendances.

Q14 Air Pollution

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

By Councillor Whitney

Question:

Would the Cabinet Member clarify what measures are in place to tackle excessive levels of air pollution across the borough which, left unchecked, run the risk of this Council facing substantial EU fines.

Answer:

Havering has better air quality than many other London Boroughs and is meeting all current European Union targets. This is mainly due to improvements in fuel and vehicle engine technologies.

Work is continuing to reduce the health impact of poor air quality and comply with European Union limits. This would ensure that Havering would not contribute to the European Commission fines for London-wide breaches of air quality limits.

We have obtained funding until 2017 from the Mayor of London and Transport for London to deliver the *Clean Air for Havering* campaign. A key focus of the campaign centres around Romford Town Centre as it is the largest pollution hotspot within the borough.

This campaign will include:

- Installation of small parks, green screens and tree planting. To date, 60 trees have been planted in Romford town centre with over 50 per cent of them being species that can absorb pollution from road traffic.
- An information pack will be produced to help business to reduce their pollution in 2015.
- An expanded monitoring network was implemented from March 2014. This will more accurately demonstrate compliance and highlight any key hotspots requiring action.
- Discussions with current community groups to have Air Quality Champions to promote more cycling and walking.
- The text messaging service airTEXT publicised to assist residents to protect themselves during high pollution episodes. This service has started to be used by the NHS and in Libraries.