

**FULL COUNCIL,
MEMBERS' QUESTIONS**

1) To the Cabinet Member for Culture, Councillor Wallace.

From Councillor Mugglestone

In order to demonstrate the Administration's commitment to remembering those Havering citizens who have either lost their lives in armed conflict abroad and at home, would the Cabinet Member make a commitment to ensure that all names that should be included on the various war memorials in the borough are completed as soon as possible and for steps to be taken to ensure that all those who have lost their lives over the past 50 years are traced and included in the Roll of Honour.

Answer:

We are seeking advice from the war memorial trust about adding names that should have previously been included on to the Borough's War Memorials and how to ensure that the correct names are added and the right approvals secured.

The Council is quite rightly committed to remembering Havering citizens who have lost their lives in armed conflict, either abroad or at home, and will ensure that those who have died are recognised in an appropriate manner.

In response to a supplementary question, The Cabinet Member confirmed that as much time as possible would be given to researching names to be included on the Roll of Honour. Research was being undertaken with the War Memorial Trust and this organisation would give guidance to the Council on which names should be included.

2) To the Cabinet member for the Environment, Councillor Benham

From Councillor Glanville

In view of concerns about dog fouling expressed by residents it would be helpful to get some idea of the scale of the problem; would it therefore be possible to know how many incidents of dog fouling have been reported to Streetcare over the past twelve months and how many fines have been issued in that period?

Answer:

For the twelve months to March 2015 there have been 625 reports of dog fouling made via CRM. During that time there have been 2 Fixed Penalty Notices issued, although there have been no prosecutions.

It should be remembered that it's difficult to capture evidence of dogs fouling the pavements as offenders have to be caught in the act. This is why we've had a low number of fixed penalty notices issued. We have a very small team covering a very large area.

We're also exploring the use of CCTV to capture footage of those responsible, publicising this and encouraging the public to provide more information in reports. This will help us to establish patterns around repeat offenders and help catch them in the act.

I'm looking at working with the People's Dispensary for Sick Animals (PDSA) on its responsible dog owners campaign. In addition, we're preparing to install more dog bins around the borough and, as with previous years, we'll be giving advice to residents and free pooper scoopers at the Havering Show.

In response to a supplementary question, the Cabinet Member agreed to meet with Councillor Glanville separately in order to discuss ways of dealing with the issue of dog fouling.

3) To the Cabinet Member for the Environment, Councillor Benham

From Councillor Reg Whitney

Would the Cabinet Member confirm why the former NALGO site in North Street, Hornchurch has been left creating an eyesore in the Town Centre.

Answer:

We are looking at ways to smarten up the hoardings that are around the site. They had been left in place after the demolition works in order to secure the site and protect against public access but they do need looking at and I understand a designer has already visited. We are considering a number of options for the site and want to make sure they are right and appropriate for the area. No decision has been made as yet but work is continuing on possible future uses for the site.

In the meantime, we will be cleaning-up the site, cutting back overgrown plants and having the grass mown. This will improve the overall appearance of the site.

In response to a supplementary question, the Cabinet Member confirmed that options for exploring the future use of the site were currently being explored.

4) To the Cabinet Member for Regulatory Services, Councillor Dervish,

From Cllr Williamson

Given the present consultation on the Borough's intended Local Plan, does the Administration have any plans, or is it open to suggestions, of removing or re-designating Green Belt land?

Answer:

A review of greenbelt land is part of the new Local Plan for Havering. The initial consultation on the plan took place between February and March and a number of owners of Green Belt land are promoting their sites for development through the local plan process. However, it is important to note that all proposals will be reviewed in line with national planning policy and that no decisions have been made yet

In response to a supplementary question, the Cabinet Member agreed that Green Belt land should be protected. If however, Green Belt land was for example surrounded by other land or houses or able to be swapped for a larger area of Green Belt land, then options should be explored in instances such as this.

5) To the Cabinet Member for the Environment, Councillor Benham

From Councillor Wood

Would the Cabinet Member confirm that private vehicles and commercial vehicles are treated in exactly the same way when considering parking violations.

Answer:

Civil Enforcement Officers (CEOs) treat all vehicles equally when patrolling. If an officer witnesses a contravention, then, following a suitable period of observation, action will be taken. Decisions by officers to enforce parking contraventions and issue Penalty Charge Notices (PCNs) are not influenced by the type of vehicle involved.

However, to support commercial activity there is a legal requirement to allow additional observation time for loading and unloading. As this is mainly carried out by commercial vehicles, it may look like someone is getting preferential treatment but this is not the case. It's important to make it clear that all decisions about issuing PCNs to commercial vehicles are based on individual circumstances and our CEOs are expected to use a healthy dose of common sense.

In response to a supplementary question, the Cabinet Member indicated he was willing to investigate reports of commercial vans not being ticketed by Civil Enforcement Officers, if Councillor Wood could provide details. Some commercial vehicles were however granted a license to park temporarily.

6) To the Leader of the Council, Councillor Ramsey

From Councillor Rumble

The council produces a number of publications such as Living, in Havering plus housing specific ones.

In total how many publications are there and what is the total print run per year?

The Council produces a number of stand-alone publications, but only a few regular publications for residents or staff. We do, of course, produce Living in Havering four times a year. 106,000 copies are distributed to homes and businesses across the borough.

We also produce four editions per year of At the Heart magazine, sent to 12,000 council tenants and leaseholders, and 900 copies of Sheltered Times sent to residents living in our sheltered accommodation. There is also an internal magazine for staff – we print around 2,000 copies every two months.

We are increasingly circulating material to residents electronically. More than 50,000 people currently subscribe to our email updates on various subjects and we want to continue to grow and develop this channel. However, at the moment Living in Havering and the other regular publications are a very effective way to inform and engage our residents and so they remain part of the mixture of different ways we communicate with local people.

In response to a supplementary question, the Leader of the Council confirmed that advertising in Council publications was sought where possible and he would be grateful for any further advertising that could be secured. It had been cost effective to insert legal notices in Living in Havering but this was no longer possible as the Council was prevented legally from publishing any more frequently. It was possible that Living in Havering could be put on-line but again, current Regulations prevented any more frequent publication on-line.

7) To the Cabinet Member for Culture, Councillor Wallace

From Councillor Nunn

Would the Cabinet Member confirm the cost of employing consultants for the “Open Spaces Needs Assessment” and that given the current climate of cuts whether this is essential spending.

Answer:

The Havering Open Space, Allotment, Sport and Recreation Needs Assessment has been commissioned at a cost of £64,896 (excluding VAT).

This is part of the new Local Plan for Havering. In line with national planning policy, the new Local Plan is required to be supported by a robust and up-date assessment of the needs for open space, sports and recreation facilities in the Borough.

It will provide us with an audit of the current provision of open space, sports facilities and playing pitches, an assessment of current and future needs to help identify any over or under supply, or quality or accessibility issues and recommendations on how these can be addressed.

In response to a supplementary question, the Cabinet Member stated that it was necessary to reassess the previous report on this that had been completed 10 years ago in order to modernise and equip facilities moving forward.

8) To the Cabinet Member for Financial Management, Councillor Barrett

From Councillor Durant

Following the localisation of council tax support and a 10% cut in government funding the Administration made changes to recoup the shortfall. These changes included seeking a partial council tax payment from disabled residents and this change was included and passed in the February Budget. However on 23rd June local resident and former councillor Mark Logan took this matter to the Royal Court of Justice to seek a Judicial Review of this change in defence of disabled people.

Please explain this legal action and provide an update about the outcome of court proceedings, the anticipated costs and the Council's intended response regarding this equality issue.

Answer:

As colleagues will appreciate, Court proceedings are currently on-going and therefore it would be inappropriate to comment on the specific issues and actions the Council is taking. However, I can confirm that Mr Logan has been granted permission to pursue a case for judicial review of Havering's Council Tax Support Scheme following a hearing at the High Court on 23 June. The Council continues to defend the case. The final hearing is currently scheduled for September.

Currently it is not possible to assess the costs involved as the extent of the court action is not known at this time.

The decision to reduce Council Tax Support for working age claimants by 15% was difficult to take, but I am sure all members would have read the paperwork fully when Full Council approved the budget back in February 2015. I can also confirm that a full Equalities Impact Assessment was completed as part of the process and taken into account as part of the decision making process.

In response to a supplementary question, the Cabinet Member agreed that funding formulas had penalised Havering and added that there had been a 10% shortfall in funding received for the Council Tax Support Scheme. The Cabinet Member reiterated that the outcome of the court proceedings was likely to be known in September.

9) To the Cabinet Member for the Environment, Councillor Benham

From Councillor Morgon

Would the Cabinet Member confirm what steps are being taken to ensure that Serco honours its contract by ensuring orange sacks and cardboard is placed in the Recycling section of the vehicles and that batteries and small electrical items are placed in the appropriate section of the vehicle.

Answer:

We have a dedicated contract monitoring officer who carries out daily spot checks on all collection crews. This involves making sure that all recycling, batteries and general waste are deposited in the correct compartment on the vehicle. Where issues are identified or reported, they are taken up with the contract manager at Serco, and when appropriate, there are financial penalties. We also carry out extra spot checks on any crews that have been reported to us to make sure they are working correctly.

In addition, monthly contract liaison meetings are attended by a Serco Director. At the most recent meeting we questioned the level of team supervision provided by Serco, and as a result there will be more supervision every day. We are also exploring the possibility of using CCTV to capture footage of those responsible, publicising this and encouraging the public to report incidents. This should improve all aspects of the service.

In response to a supplementary question, the Cabinet Member agreed to investigate reports of crews not disposing of recycling correctly if Councillor Morgon could provide further details.

10) To the Cabinet Member for Housing, Councillor D. White

From Councillor De Wulverton

How many council tenants were evicted over the last 12 months?

Answer:

In the last financial year there have been a total of 58 evictions. The majority, 49, were due to rent arrears, and the remainder, 9, were because of a breach in their tenancy agreements.

Recently the Council has set up a Post Eviction Working Group which has officers from both housing and social care working together to look at the figures, see what they are telling us about the circumstances, and to use that information to put in place changes at the early pre-tenancy stage to reduce the possibility of evictions.

The Cabinet Member assured the Council that at the point of eviction the Council would have explored every avenue that would have allowed people being evicted to remain as tenants, including making realistic arrangements for repayment of arrears.

11) To the Leader of the Council, Councillor Ramsey

From Councillor Matthews

Would the Leader of the Council confirm his view and that of NELSA in agreeing with organisations such as London Councils and London Chamber of Commerce for business rates to be determined locally.

Answer:

It is my view that I do agree with the organisations which are calling on the government to give the power to local authorities to set their own business rates.

If these changes were implemented under the review, this council would be able to more appropriately respond to local needs. Each borough is different and has its own issues to consider and more power over business rates would allow us to go that extra mile to promote growth and prosperity among local businesses in Havering.

But I have to emphasise I do not speak on behalf of all NELSA members as this is not for NELSA to decide on.

12) To the Cabinet Member for Regulatory Services, Councillor Dervish

From Councillor Deon Burton

In view of the existing and pending applications for gravel extraction, landfill and housing development in the south of the borough, will the Council undertake regular tests of air quality to comply with GLA policy and ensure that planning conditions are put in place to minimise dust and ensure air quality is maintained and improved?

Answer

We always do ensure any major planning applications are assessed for potential impact on air quality and the necessary conditions are put in place and any reports submitted by developers are assessed by the Council's technical specialist in air quality.

Developers are also encouraged to discuss any potential air quality impacts with officers before submitting their application to ensure these matters are dealt with at the earliest possible opportunity.

Havering has better air quality than many other London Boroughs and we are currently meeting EU targets which is the basis for GLA policy.

In response to a supplementary question, the Cabinet Member stated the did not feel a higher number of chest in infections in the Rainham area was due to poor air quality as these conditions could be caused by any number of factors.

13) To the Cabinet Member for the Environment, Councillor Benham

From Councillor Alexander

Would the Cabinet Member confirm whether there are problems with timers on the new LED street light lanterns. (Cllr June Alexander)

Answer:

We are aware that the new LED lanterns that have been installed across the borough are faulty, and are demanding that the manufacturer replaces the lanterns and pays for the replacements to be fitted.

In response to a supplementary question, the Cabinet Member added that all avenues were being explored in order to rectify this situation and that legal action had not been ruled out.

14) To the Cabinet Member for Regulatory Services, Councillor Dervish

From Councillor Webb

Can the Leader provide a comprehensive update on the progression of the introduction of the Article 4 Direction in the borough covering HMOs?

Answer:

We are progressing well with introducing the Article 4 Directions and these are on target to be in action in 12 months' time.

The Council made two Article 4 Directions July earlier this week to remove permitted development rights for changes of use from dwelling houses to a house in multiple occupation (HMO).

The first Direction covers Brooklands, Romford Town, Heaton and Gooshays wards. The second Direction covers the whole of the Borough, excluding those wards. This provides a belt and braces approach.

For the reasons set out within the 13 May Cabinet Report, non-immediate Article 4 Directions will be made. A consultation began two days ago and will run until 31 August and full details are available on the council's website.

Subject to a successful consultation period and the Directions being agreed by the Council, both Directions would come into effect in 12 months' time.

15) To the Leader of the Council, Leader of the Council, Councillor Roger Ramsey

From Councillor Darvill

What is the agreed/proposed timetable for commencement of works for construction of the new Romford Leisure Centre and the estimated time for completion of the works and opening for the public of the Centre.

Answer:

The timetable for the leisure centre has slipped but we are in final contractual negotiations which, when completed, will mean works can start on the Western Road site and we will update our programme accordingly. Members may be aware of press reports suggesting that Morrison's have put the Rom Valley way site on the market and I

would like to be quite clear that we're determined to hold Morrison's to their contractual obligations - which will deliver a new leisure centre for Romford, as planned.

Morrison's do not yet own the Rom Valley Way site – and the only way they will own it is to deliver the leisure centre as promised on Western Road. If, having met their obligations, Morrison's then choose to sell the Rom Valley Way site, we will use all of our planning powers to ensure that the site is developed appropriately and in keeping with the needs of the town.

In response to a supplementary question, the Leader of the Council confirmed that all contractual conditions had been met on the Council's side. The delay had been due to Morrisons not taking the required steps. Morrisons would be held to the contract and the Council would take the appropriate action if this did not happen.

The Leader of the Council added that it was difficult at the present time to give meaningful timescales. The next step in the project would be to demolish part of Exeter House and this could be done quite quickly. The construction contract could also be let quickly. While a specific timescale could not be given at this stage, the Leader confirmed that the Council would not put up with further delay to the project.