

Leader's Remarks to Council, 16 September 2015Appendix 1

Good Evening

Before we start with regular business, I'd like to give an update on the current position with regard to the Romford leisure development.

As members are aware, the Council entered into a legal contract with Morrisons involving the former ice rink site and a site in Western Road to enable the provision of a new ice rink and swimming pool. The contract provided for the demolition of part of an office block in the Western Road site to open the site for the leisure development.

Morrisons' lack of progress in implementing the steps to be taken and their resistance to start demolition on the Western Road site have been a subject of much frustration for all of us here today, and to our residents who have been waiting a long time for a pool and new ice rink in Romford.

We have been tackling the issue behind the scenes and have had prepared legal action against Morrisons for failure to fulfil contractual agreements. As a result, Morrisons have now entered into a supplementary contract with the Council that requires them unconditionally to have started demolition on site by 26 October and to have completed the work and handed the new site over to us within six months, by April 2016. This will allow us to start building the new leisure centre without further delay.

If for any reason Morrisons breach the terms of this contract, we will not hesitate in taking the company to court and will consider a compulsory purchase order of the site.

This has been a long time coming and it is positive news that takes us a step closer to securing state of the art sporting facilities for the borough.

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank officers who have worked hard, and in difficult circumstances, to get us in this more satisfactory position. I'd also like to thank ice skaters and hockey players for their patience and support. I hope this news will reassure residents that we are doing everything we can to get on site and deliver the leisure centre as early as possible.

Moving on, I also wanted to take this opportunity to remind councillors about the budget process.

Nationally, the country continues to face the measures which are needed to put the nation's finances on a sound footing and local government in particular has to meet the challenges involved in this. We in Havering continue to take a proactive and vigorous approach to these challenges and remain committed to seeking out and delivering efficiencies wherever possible.

Heads of services have delivered briefings to members of all the political groups, updating them on the current budget position and challenges each service area faces. Opposition groups are invited to submit any budget proposals for consideration by the end of September.

These proposals will then be considered, along with those from the administration, and those that can be taken forward will be subject to final pre-publication consultation with opposition groups between 13-27 October. Final proposals will be published for consideration at a special Cabinet meeting on 4 November.

The Council will then seek the views of our residents and public consultation will run until the end of December. The proposals will be reconsidered in light of the comments and suggestions made.

The budget proposals will then be progressed towards the final decision-making process, with a part of that process being the opportunity for full scrutiny by the Overview and Scrutiny Board.

I would like to say that, despite the British weather trying to dampen spirits, the Havering Show over the recent Bank Holiday was a resounding success.

The show offered something for everyone, rain or shine, and I am always impressed by the wealth of musical talent the borough has to offer. Despite the one day being very wet, over 30,000 local residents enjoyed all the great things at the Show.

Well done and thank you to all the Council staff who organised such a well-run event and all those who turned up over the two days to ensure it was delivered in such good humour.

Finally, I am pleased to report that Havering has today has won the award for Best Dementia Friendly Community Initiative, presented by the Alzheimer's Society.