

FULL COUNCIL, Wednesday 16 September

**MEMBERS' QUESTIONS**

1) **To the Cabinet Member for Culture and Community Engagement, Councillor Melvin Wallace**

**From Councillor Jody Ganly**

Would the Cabinet Member confirm the full breakdown of costs in obtaining Green Flag status for our parks each year.

**Response:**

We don't carry out specific work to get Green Flag status, but the high standard of maintenance and improvement work in our parks has helped us to achieve these prestigious awards. We have a budget of £40k a year for maintenance which includes filling the pot holes in the paths, replacement planting, repairs to play equipment, new benches and bins. The breakdown of costs varies each year dependent on what works are required at each site.

Havering has also recently won a total of 47 awards at the London in Bloom Awards including Borough of the Year and an outstanding contribution award for the relevant officer – Mark Jones. Havering has also now been invited to represent London in the Britain in Bloom Awards.

In response to a supplementary question, the Cabinet Member confirmed that all Havering parks were entered for the Britain in Bloom Awards and were judged accordingly. A lot of good progress had been made with Havering's parks over the last five years.

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

**From Cllr Barry Mugglestone**

Would the Cabinet Member confirm for each of the last five financial years, the number and financial cost of court cases (including successful claims against the council) the council has been involved with in relation to road and pavement defect claims.

**Response:**

The Council's claims handling system does not highlight cases that have been heard at court specifically, although cases have been noted in the last three years to record where solicitors have been instructed on the Council's behalf. They have not been noted by financial years.

In the last three years 21 highway related cases have been heard at court, 14 of these have been found in the Council's favour and the claims dismissed, while seven were found in the claimant's favour. The cost of these to the council has been £15580.70 for the 14 found in the Council's favour as costs can usually be recovered. For those found against the Council the cost is currently £182,497.27

In addition there have been 17 cases discontinued against the Council before trial, amounting to a cost of £28,451.12 to the council.

This record reflects the extremely efficient and robust highways inspection and maintenance system operated by the Council.

In response to a supplementary question, the Cabinet Member indicated he would check whether the figure for cost of cases found against the Council included the cost of officer time.

### **3) To the Cabinet Member for the Environment, Councillor Robert Benham**

#### **From Councillor Stephanie Nunn**

Would the Cabinet Member confirm the current number of road and pavement reactive repair orders that have been outstanding for more than 28 days.

#### **Response:**

There have been 3950 requests for highway repairs this financial year, of which, 3582 have been completed within 28 days, which equates to 91 per cent. It should be noted that urgent requests that have serious safety implications are rightly prioritised and completed within 24 hours. This does affect the overall performance as resources have to be redeployed to address the most high risk road and pavement failures.

In response to supplementary question, the Cabinet Member agreed to confirm how many road and pavement reactive repair orders were currently outstanding for more than 28 days.

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

#### **From Cllr Reg Whitney**

Would the Cabinet Member confirm for the last five financial years, the total surplus/deficit between income and expenditure for the Planning Department.

**Response:**

Over the last five financial years, total expenditure has dropped by approximately £486,000 and income has increased by £265,685.

The following figures show the difference between income and expenditure for the Planning Service.

2014-15 Deficit of £762,905  
 2013-14 Deficit of £650,065  
 2012-13 Deficit of £768,722  
 2011-12 Deficit of £1,309,148  
 2010-11 Deficit of £1,514,638

The Planning Service is partly funded by the income it receives, and the remainder is subsidised by the Council. Planning application fees are set nationally by the Department for Communities and Local Government. Fees for pre-application advice, copies of documents and planning history searches are set locally.

In response to a supplementary question, the Cabinet Member confirmed that Havering was a member of the Local Government Association which sought to lobby for an increase in planning fees in order to allow the service to break even. The service's own costs were also being addressed in order to try and achieve this.

**5) To the Leader of the Council, Councillor Roger Ramsey**

**From Councillor Ray Morgon**

Would the Cabinet Member confirm:

- a) How many awards the council has put itself forward for over the past two years,
- b) The cost in doing so,
- c) What direct benefit would residents see for applying for such awards.

**Response:**

In the last two years, the Council has submitted around 40 nominations for a host of awards in various different categories, and successfully won a number of these. Some have been very high profile, such as the Municipal Journal (MJ) awards, Metropolitan Police awards, Customer Service Excellence awards, UK housing awards, London in Bloom and Green Flag awards.

We're not able to put a price on submitting the entries as we cannot quantify the officer time that's gone into preparing them; however, we can certainly show how valuable they are.

Being recognised, often on a national level, raises the profile of the work that Havering Council does. It demonstrates that we're leading the way in a number of innovative

areas of work, such as in the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub, and has helped with recruitment by attracting high calibre staff to the organisation. It also adds to the influence we have when lobbying on important matters at government level, such as the Care Act. In addition, awards such as London in Bloom and Green Flags attract people to the borough, which supports businesses and boosts the local economy. And I am very pleased to say that the hard work of our parks and streetcare officers was recognised yesterday at the London in Bloom awards with a haul of 47 awards, including 8 gold medals. More than any other London borough.

All the work we do is ultimately aimed at benefiting Havering residents, and as you can see, we enter awards for that very reason.

In response to a supplementary question, the Leader of the Council agreed that the costs and financial benefits of applying for awards needed to be considered but added that Havering currently had lower costs in nearly all areas than other boroughs. The Leader felt it would be a pity if standards dropped and pride in the borough and the quality of its environment was no longer considered.

#### **6) To the Leader of the Council, Councillor Roger Ramsey**

##### **From Cllr John Wood**

1. Would the Cabinet Member confirm:
  - a) What specific work has been carried out under the Community Payback Scheme during this current financial year,
  - b) What monies have been allocated by this council (if any) to this area of work,
  - c) How does the council monitor and evaluate the results of the completed work.

##### **Response:**

Community Payback is now managed by the Community Rehabilitation Company, MTC NOVO for London.

The Council receives quarterly reports on work delivered in the Borough.

In quarter 1 of 2015-16 (April –June) Community Payback delivered a total of 5,423 hours on Community group projects

In addition, a further 2,651 hours were delivered in agency placements, where people on payback are placed with local agencies such as charity shops. All are risk assessed by the Community Rehabilitation Company (CRC). Contracts are arranged between the CRC and the agency and the Council plays no part in this.

No funds have been allocated to Community Payback this financial year, although the Council does provide supplies such as paint and tools. The approximate cost of this was £3,000.

Community Payback provide before and after photographs of work completed in most cases. Council officers monitor and evaluate the results of the completed works for their respective areas. Quarterly monitoring meetings are held with key council officers from Streetcare and Housing. Schools and other external stakeholders oversee and supervise work in their respective areas.

A list of the projects is as follows:

1. The Following car parks are cut back and litter picked-up on a regular basis:
  - Keswick Car Park,
  - Hoppy Hall Car Park,
  - Appleton Way Car Park,
  - Dorrington Way Car Park,
  - Fairtykes Car Park,
  - Wingletye Lane Car Park,
  - Fentiman Way Car Park and
  - Como Street Car Park.
  
2. The following footpaths have been cleaned and had vegetation cut back, and graffiti has been removed:
  - Rom Valley Way to South Street
  - Meadow Road to Crow Lane
  - Mungo Park Road to Tuck Road
  - Florence Close to Mill Park Avenue
  - Heath Drive/A12
  - Brooklands Close
  - Rush Green Road to Gorse Way
  - Cotleigh Road to Nursery Walk
  - Parkside Avenue
  - Abbs Cross Lane/Ravens Bridge
  - Devonshire Road to Stanley Road
  - Station Lane
  - The Avenue
  - Suttons Avenue
  
3. In addition, the wooden fencing along Rom Valley Way starting at junction of Rush Green Road is in the process of being painted/treated.
  
4. Dycorts School. The team is assisting with outside grounds maintenance, and painting the exterior of the school. The kitchens and school hall have now been completed.
  
5. Marshalls Park School. The Team are assisting with grounds maintenance, painting of classrooms and corridors when required. They also assist the caretaker with school furniture, and the clearing and assembling of school furniture

6. Mead School. The team are assisting with grounds maintenance, creations of foot paths, painting of classrooms, corridors and toilets. Assembling for school furniture, setting up of classrooms with new furniture and removing old furniture. This may be disrupted due to on-going building work taking place at the school.
7. LBH Havering Homes. Work at Brunswick Court, refurbishing all garden furniture from various sheltered accommodation in the area has now been completed. The group have commenced the redecoration of guest rooms at various sheltered accommodation within the borough. Garrick has been completed, and the group are currently at Sunrise Lodge and Cottons.
8. Raphaels Park. Painting of the internal railings. Project currently suspended due to winter weather conditions. This will resume in the summer once a group becomes available.
9. Ardleigh Green School. The team undertook some decorating work in school, redecorated the school swimming pool changing rooms and painted some exterior walls around the school. They also undertook grounds maintenance, repairing and treating of playground furniture, and other ad-hoc work required within the school grounds where required.
10. April to May 2015 the Community Payback team refurbished garden furniture from all different parts of the borough working one day a week. The team were based in a workshop at one of our supported housing sites.

Since June they have been working at supported housing schemes redecorating guest rooms, hallways and bathrooms. These schemes include:

Garrick House  
Sunrise Lodge  
Cotton Court  
Cole Court  
Charlbury Court.

They are currently working at additional supported housing sites.

In conclusion, the Community Payback scheme is currently doing extensive work in the borough.

In response to a supplementary question, the Leader of the Council agreed to supply, if available, before and after photographs of the work undertaken in car parks etc.

**7) To the Cabinet Member for Culture, Councillor Melvin Wallace**

**From Councillor Jeffrey Tucker**

Chafford School, Rainham includes a swimming pool and after becoming an Academy and following a land tribunal this formerly council owned pool became a school owned pool. The Council contract to run the pool ends in 2016 and the school say they don't have the money to maintain the pool.

Following negotiations Chafford submitted plans to expand the school and close the pool but the approved plans include a site for a new pool when the funding becomes available.

As there are already swimming pools in Hornchurch and Romford (Central Park) and due to the lack of progress for an additional Romford pool (Romford Leisure Centre) will the Administration now take action to ensure there is a swimming pool at Chafford that serves Rainham and the growing population in the south of the borough?

**Response:**

The Council is aware of the need for a leisure centre, including a swimming pool, to be provided in the south of the borough. Council officers are in the middle of on-going discussions with the head teacher of The Chafford School about the future of the existing sports facilities once their ownership is formally transferred back to the school in October 2016 (following a Land Adjudication decision in the school's favour).

The Council is working with the school to see if investment can be secured to either improve the existing facilities, or provide new sports facilities on the site. However, the only realistic opportunity that is currently available is to try to secure investment from Tenderers who will be submitting bids to run the Council's leisure facilities from October 2016. The Council will receive first stage bids for the Sports and Leisure Management contract in late 2015 and will be in a position to know if viable proposals have been put forward in early 2016.

In response to a supplementary question, the Cabinet Member emphasised that he was unable to confirm anything as regards funding for a swimming pool at this stage.

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

**From Cllr Keith Roberts**

During a period of austerity it's difficult but vital to maintain staff morale!

Following a review of parking policy all council employees now pay for parking at the Town Hall and this becomes a de facto pay cut that is proportionally higher for lower paid staff. Pay cuts are bad for morale and particularly so when the money raised is spent to install new, unnecessary and expensive barriers in the rear Town Hall car park, requiring the removal of many trees.

What was the cost of installing the barriers and associated changes and are there plans for further CCTV additions to the scheme?

**Response:**

Charges for staff and member parking were introduced in 2011 as part of the 'Havering 2014' savings measures, when the Council was able to make significant efficiency savings while minimising the impact on front-line services. The charges have remained the same since.

The car park barrier at the back of the Town Hall has been moved at a cost of £23k, to allow the entire parking area to be controlled via a single entry barrier. There were previously three barriers, two of which were out of action and needed replacing. So, moving one to the front meant that we didn't have to spend more on the others, which will save money in the long-run.

One of the out of action barriers allowed uncontrolled access to the gravel car park, which led to people abusing parking arrangements and, not surprisingly, frustrated those who pay for a permit.

The one-off capital outlay will be recovered by reduced maintenance costs, and access to all staff parking areas will be fair and secure.

As for introducing further CCTV, there are no plans to do this as part of the scheme at this time.

**9) To the Cabinet Member for Housing, Councillor Damian White**

**From Councillor David Durant**

In a Recorder article the Council Leader announced that the proposed Commonwealth name changes for the Hillrise Estate have been abandoned due to a lack of public support! It also reported that the Cabinet Member for Housing said the new community centre would be named after Her Majesty and he was sure residents would agree! Cllr Damian White, what progress has been made in securing residents, Council and Her Majesty's agreement for this new proposal?

**Response:**

At this stage we are developing plans, following our recent meeting with residents. We expect to be able to go back with a proposed name for the community facility in November, should funds be made available through a recent bid to the Veolia Trust.

In response to a supplementary question, the Cabinet Member emphasised that this would be a new Community Centre and confirmed that the permission of the Lord Chamberlain would be needed to name the new facility after the Queen. This suggestion had received overwhelming support from the Residents Steering Committee who had also come up with the original proposal.



**10)To the Cabinet Member for Housing, Councillor Damian White**

**From Councillor Patricia Rumble**

Before Liberty Housing enter into a leasing contract with a private landlord what checks are carried out to the properties, regarding condition, quality and safety?

**Response:**

Liberty Housing will carry out a thorough inspection of a new property, including gas and electricity checks, before accepting a contract with a private landlord. This is to ensure the property meets the minimum health and safety requirements and is in a suitable condition before it is made available for renting out to residents. If a further inspection is needed, then the required improvement work will need to be completed by the landlord before a contract can be signed.

In response to a supplementary question, the Cabinet Member agreed to supply a copy of the checklist used by Liberty Housing inspectors. The Cabinet Member also suggested it may be useful if he met with Councillor Rumble and the Interim Head of Housing to discuss concerns related to specific properties.

**11)To the Cabinet Member for Financial Management, Councillor Clarence Barrett**

**From Councillor Philip Hyde**

Given the recent significant decline in the Stock Market, our pension deficit will have grown from its already precarious position. If this situation does not improve by year end, will the council be required to make further additional contributions in this or the next fiscal year. If so, has a provision been made?

**Response:**

The value of the pension fund's investments has fallen in recent weeks in line with movement in worldwide markets. However, the fund invests for the longer term and is able to cope with short term market volatility.

Based on the impact of recent market movements, and taking into account the potential impact on the fund, we don't believe it's necessary to make additional contributions beyond those already included in the Council's financial strategy. We will of course keep this position under review and consider the implications for the next fund valuation very carefully.

In response to a supplementary question, the Cabinet Member explained that the pension fund had a diversified portfolio in order to spread risk and was not solely reliant on the level of the Stock Market. Decisions on the future level of contributions would be made in conjunction with the Council's Actuary in March 2016.

**12)To the Cabinet Member for Financial Management, Councillor Clarence Barrett**

**From Councillor Julie Wilkes**

Would the Cabinet Member confirm:

- a) What ICT strategy this council currently has in place,
- b) What monies has been allocated to IT improvements this financial year,
- c) What projects have been agreed,
- d) How were these priority projects selected.

**Response**

I have a copy of the ICT strategy, which I'm more than happy to share with you.

Over and above the annual ICT running costs and specific programme budgets, £0.5M of corporate capital funding has been allocated for ICT enabled efficiency improvements this year, and a further £0.5M for next year.

A number of projects have been agreed, subject to the provision of a demonstrable business case and return on investment. Projects that draw on capital funds are expected to start very soon and relate to digitising processes, online customer service improvements, mobile working and better use of data and business intelligence.

The priority projects are selected through the ICT steering group, which is chaired by the Director of ICT and attended by senior officer representatives from all service areas.

In response to a supplementary question, the Cabinet Member agreed that development of the portal should be on the list of IT projects.

**13)To the Leader of the Council, Councillor Roger Ramsey**

**From Councillor Michael Deon Burton**

Persimmon Homes gave a presentation at Rainham Library regarding their plans for Dovers Corner. There was a good attendance and some group discussion tables made suggestions of what was needed to make the development a success. The Council Leader attended the presentation and addressed the meeting saying this was a great opportunity to help shape the development of a Garden Suburb in the south of the borough.

Persimmons promised to hold a further feedback meeting before submitting any planning application, but have submitted an application without holding the promised meeting and prior to the completion of the Local Plan.

Cllr Ramsey, do you regret that Persimmons Homes have acted this way and agree a Local Plan is needed for the area rather than piecemeal development?

**Response:**

First of all, let me clarify, I attended a stakeholder workshop, organised by the Council on 18 March, to discuss ideas for the regeneration of the Rainham and Beam Park areas, and not the pre-application presentation from Persimmon on 4 February.

Of course, a local plan is needed for the area to prevent piecemeal development and ensure that developers understand our aspirations. However this isn't complete yet and in the meantime, we must still consider planning applications in the area.

Therefore, the application will be assessed in relation to current planning policies, but will also take into account the Housing Zone, Masterplan and Planning Framework aspirations for the area.

We expect the Masterplan and Planning Framework to be adopted by Cabinet in December, after a further round of public consultation. The local plan is not expected to be adopted until autumn 2016.

In response to a supplementary question, the Leader of the Council added that he did not know enough about the way Persimmon Homes had acted to be able to comment on this.

**14) To the Cabinet Member for Environment, Councillor Robert Benham**

**From Councillor Glanville**

Given the ever increasing tariffs imposed upon landfill by the European landfill directive how has the council decided upon the new figure of £150 as an on the spot fine for fly tipping?

**Response:**

The Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA) ran a consultation which ended in early May, on a range of new enforcement Powers for Local authorities. One of these was the possibility of offering a fixed penalty for fly tipping.

The outcome of the consultation is not known yet, but the level of fine will be determined by DEFRA as part of it. The £150 level has not yet been confirmed and the final figure might be different.

We did respond to the consultation, although not specifically on the fine. We always aim to prosecute fly tipping offences where we have sufficient evidence to put before a magistrate. A fixed penalty can only be offered as an alternative to a court appearance where there is sufficient evidence to prosecute. The Council isn't obliged to offer this as an alternative and each case is considered on its merits.

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There have been a number of prosecutions of fly-tippers in recent months, which have achieved considerable coverage in the media. We've invested significant resources into catching fly-tippers, including the use of CCTV. Our enforcement teams will continue to take robust action against these criminals who pollute the environment and cost the hard-pressed council taxpayer hundreds of thousands of pounds every year.

I have been arguing and lobbying London Councils for heavier fines and tougher punishments for fly tippers. In addition Cllr Barrett submitted a Council motion several months ago to lobby London Councils for fines of up to £1,000, which was supported by the Council.

In response to a supplementary question, the Cabinet Member agreed that the current level of fines did not meet the cost of clearing away fly tipped refuse. For this reason, he wished for London Councils and the Local Government Association to introduce tougher penalties.