

Full Council – Wednesday 25 November - Leader's statement

There are a number of items of note that I would like to make reference to today.

Firstly, I'd like to offer my sincere thanks to the Mayor, Members and the local police in particular for their participation in, and support of, Remembrance Sunday events across the borough. Not to mention the staff who worked hard to ensure that the events, which are among the most important that we hold, ran smoothly throughout the various parts of the borough where events were held.

It is vital that youngsters know and appreciate the sacrifices members of our armed forces have made for us, and that is why it was particularly heart-warming to see so many young people in attendance at the ceremonies which took place.

I mentioned at our last meeting Morrison's entered into a supplemental contract with the Council which required them to start work on demolition of the building forming part of the Western Road site by 26 October, and I'm pleased to say that they have done just that. External demolition of the office block is expected to start next week, and we are optimistic that we will be able to start work on the new leisure development by the beginning of April of next year, if not earlier.

This month, we also saw the launch of the Romford Development Framework at Fiction night club in South Street. This building when known as the Havana cinema was the place where the first borough charter for Romford was given by the Lord Mayor of London to the first mayor of the new borough on behalf of the King in September 1937. The launch was a great success and I am pleased to say that it was well-attended by over 100 developers and local business people and we hope we can move on to even bigger things for our Romford town centre.

Many of you will also have heard about the outcome of the recent judicial review in relation to our Council Tax Reduction scheme brought by former Councillor Logan. The High Court rejected Mr Logan's arguments that the scheme was discriminatory and permission to appeal the decision was refused by the judge. The Council put a lot of thought into the scheme before it was implemented to ensure that it was not discriminatory in any way, and I am glad the Court found in our favour.

The Council did, however, lose on one count with regard to our Public Sector Equality Duty, and it was decided that Equality Impact Assessment Reports must be copied in full to Cabinet, Committee and Full Council Meetings with the reports made to these bodies rather than just being available for reference on the internet, website or intranet.

The ruling gave clarification to Local Government generally as I am advised that the practice followed by Havering has been similarly used by others. That has now been established and processes have been put in place to ensure that this does not happen again. This decision indicates that councils must pay particular regard to their processes and how we ensure they are followed properly.

I sent you all an email last week announcing that health and social care partners in Havering, Barking and Dagenham and Redbridge have put forward a proposal to the Government to devolve power and resources to meet more effectively the needs of local residents. The current health and adult social care budget in the three boroughs is £1.2bn, and most of this goes on hospital care, even though we all recognise there needs to be greater focus on prevention and primary care. This is why we are exploring whether a partnership-led Accountable Care Organisation model will deliver better outcomes for our residents whilst bridging a funding gap. Our three boroughs' scheme would become a pilot for the whole of London for devolution in health services and as such is supported by our NELSA and Local London partners. I hope to be able to report further on this matter as the project progresses.

And finally, colleagues will know that we have been searching for a replacement Director of Children Adults and Housing for some time. We held an Appointments Panel last week but sadly, were unable to make an appointment. Consequently I have been discussing the option of reviewing the scope of the role and the current management structure with the Chief Executive. When these matters have been fully examined I will report to Members further. In the meantime, I am very pleased to tell you that Isobel Cattermole has agreed to stay on with us as interim Director for an extended period.