

Leader's Announcement to Council
Wednesday 8 June 2016

MADAM MAYOR

Further to my statement at the Annual Council Meeting I would now like to give members an update on various current matters.

FINANACIAL STRATEGY

In formulating the budget and developing the Medium Term Financial Strategy following the Government's support grant statements we recognised that there would need to be further savings identified to balance the budget in 2017/2018 and 2018/2019. The amount to be found is being considered and updated, and Executive members are currently examining in detail in Star Chamber sessions the current and future spending projections and needs of each department in order to assess the scope for savings plans. I expect this process to be completed by the end of July and that a fresh contingent savings plan will be available for consideration and scrutiny in the Autumn.

The Government is also now talking about 100% Business Rates Retention being introduced as a pilot in London in 2017/2018. We are having to keep a close watch on this in view of potential budgetary implications. At this stage it is too early to say what they might be. Consideration is being given to what is being termed a "Fair Funding Formula" which could result in a more equitable allocation of equalisation between councils.

COUNCIL EVENTS

Despite cuts in recent times I am pleased to record that public events staged by the Council and valued by our residents are still being held. The most recent was of course the Langtons Summer Concert held last Sunday. This was attended by a large number of our residents together with some 14 visiting mayors who were able to admire Langtons House and its park as one of the cultural gems of our borough. The substantial improvement scheme there will be fully completed during the next couple of months. The Westminster Symphony Orchestra were in fine form and the weather was brilliant.

On June 25 Romford will again host the Armed Forces Day Parade when we have an opportunity to pay tribute to our forces who stand so high in our admiration.

Also, though not a Council event, I understand that the Elm Park Royal British Legion are holding a service to mark the centenary of the start of the First World War Battle of the Somme on July 3 which you will be attending Madam Mayor.

I hope councillors will support these events if able to do so.

I am hoping also to arrange in the coming months flag raising ceremonies to mark the Battle of Britain and Merchant Navy Day.

HARROW LODGE PARK

With officers and the Lead Member I have had meetings with Thames Water about measures to resolve the problems of waste and foul water seepage.

After extensive research, Thames Water have discovered that misconnected plumbing in local homes and businesses has been the cause of years of pollution in Harrow Lodge Park.

Since the discovery, which involved checking nearby properties, works to rectify the problem has already begun and Thames Water has said that it is already having a positive impact

Private plumbing work, not carried out by Thames Water, has been discovered to be the problem. Waste, which should have been connected to a separate foul sewer network, has been connected to the surface water sewer system, meaning that water that should be going to sewage treatment plants from washing machines, toilets and kitchen sinks has been flowing into the water ways and into the lake.

Since the discovery immediate works have taken place. Six properties have so far been identified as being misconnected, with nine appliances sending waste water to the wrong place. One was a local café which immediately rectified the problem and we are already seeing an increase in the quality of the water in the lake.

Thames Water needs to check about 1,100 nearby properties. A team goes from door to door and using a harmless dye, which can check that each is connected to the correct sewer system. It is the property owner's responsibility to correct these misconnections.

HEALTH DEVOLUTION

Members will be aware that we together with Barking and Dagenham and Redbridge are working together with NHS health partners to prepare a business case for a health devolution pilot in our part of east London. Meetings are being held almost every week on this and on Monday I met my counterparts at Barking and health chief executives. Although it is a mammoth task for us all the level of aspiration and cooperation is high, and we are ably supported by Cheryl Coppell. Outside consultants PWC have been scoping the financial challenges facing all partners in health and social care in the years ahead and identifying ways in which co-working can help bridge the gaps and produce better and more holistic outcomes for our residents.

The business case is due to be submitted by the end of July and so the pressure on us all is significant. I would like to thank Wendy Brice Thompson who has applied herself assiduously to this.

The process has been even more complicated in that NHS England have directed all their areas to come up with Sustainable Transformations Plans by this month. For this our area includes not just the three boroughs but also the remainder of north east London down to Tower Hamlets and Hackney.

EDUCATION TRADED SERVICES

We are discussing later in the agenda future Education arrangements. However I felt that I should share with the council what I regard as a real success by our staff in providing central services to schools. As members may know schools whether academies or maintained may choose their own specialist services and support - not necessarily from the Council. When this came into being we created a traded services offer to schools. This has now developed so that our teams provide services to some 82 schools here and 100 schools in 33 other local authorities. I commend our staff for the valued work and the support this gives to schools.

COMMUNICATION CONSULTATION

The Council needs to communicate effectively with our residents and a consultation exercise is underway.

We all know that the way in which people get the news and information they need has changed, and continues to at an unbelievable rate, so we want to find out if there is a way that we can communicate with residents better.

The consultation asks people how they prefer to receive Council information and also what their experiences have been of contacting the Council.

We know that some answers we get to some of the questions may be challenging but we need to be serious about making the work we do here completely transparent, and always focussing on better outcomes for residents.

So far, we have had more than 1,700 responses online, and a number of hard copies have been received too, which is excellent and shows that people want to contribute,

The consultation closes at the end of this week.

Thank you Madam Mayor.