

Full Council, 14 September 2016, Announcements by the Leader of the Council

MADAM MAYOR

By your leave I would like to update members on some current issues and recent developments.

Good evening, councillors,

RICKY HAYDEN

Firstly, I would like to take a moment to acknowledge the tragic death of one of our staff last night. Ricky Hayden, a member of our Highways Maintenance team, died following an attack outside his home in Chadwell Heath.

It goes without saying that everyone at the Council is devastated by the news of this horrendous and senseless crime.

Ricky was a well-liked team member and we are offering support to his friends and colleagues who will be feeling this loss very deeply.

I would like to offer my heartfelt condolences to Ricky's family and friends, our prayers are also with his father who remains in hospital.

HAVERING SCHOOL PERFORMANCE

I would also like to address an item very recently in our local paper, the Romford Recorder, with a very surprising headline about the performance of our schools, stating they have the "worst Ofsted ratings in city." I know that this has caused dismay amongst those involved in education locally.

The figures used by the paper were based on Ofsted judgements, many of which are now several years old. Many schools are waiting to be inspected and we anticipate that performances will improve significantly in the next round of inspections. Furthermore this type of generalisation does a disservice to those schools which have excelled and been rated as outstanding.

It is also important to note that Ofsted judgements are not the only indicators of school performance. Another is pupil attainment, and our schools perform well above the national average as recent results demonstrate. In Havering, the percentage of pupils that reached the 'Expected Standard' in Reading, Writing and Maths combined was 62%, compared with the national average of 53%. When rank ordered, Havering is 8 out of the 152 local authorities. In addition, Havering's GCSE performance in 2016 rose by between 4-5% compared to a well-documented decline nationally.

Given these high levels of attainment and strong progress, it is only a matter of time before this is reflected in Ofsted judgements, when a small number of improving schools can make a big difference to the statistics.

In addition, Havering's students proved once again that they are, in fact, among the best in London, with another year of outstanding results in A levels. The overall pass rate in Havering went up to a remarkable 99.9% this year, which is above the national pass rate.

With many schools, especially secondary becoming academies it is increasingly the Regional Schools Commissioner and not the Council who has responsibility for school performance. The influence, if any, of Councils will be diminished even further as this process progresses. Going forward I have it in mind to seek regular review meetings with the Commissioner in order to ensure that we are able to fulfil a role of champion of local education and to take all these matters on board.

PUPIL REFERRAL SCHEME

On the separate matter of the pupil referral scheme, a 125 lease has been signed with Olive Academies for alternative provision for Havering pupils. The Academy will be situated on the same site as the Robert Beard Centre at Birnham Wood in Hornchurch. This is an exciting opportunity to change the lives of some of our most vulnerable and disadvantaged children.

The Robert Beard Centre is remaining open for use by young people and community groups in the evenings and at weekends. It will continue to be available in the daytime for the time being.

FINANCIAL STRATEGY

This brings me on to the upcoming financial strategy for the Council.

In February, the Council agreed a balanced budget for 2016/17 as part of its financial strategy for the three years ending 31 March 2019. In doing so, the Council recognised that further efficiencies would be needed in order to set a balanced budget beyond the current financial year.

In October, Cabinet will receive the first report of the year setting out the progress made to date and the further steps required to establish a draft budget for 2017/18, and to take the financial strategy forward to March 2020.

Greater certainty in the council's funding will be provided through acceptance of the Government's offer of a four-year financial settlement whilst using the opportunity to continue to press for fairer funding. However, we should not underestimate the challenges we face in managing with a reducing grant settlement.

Further steps will be developed during the budget cycle and progress will be reported in subsequent Cabinet reports culminating in the financial strategy report in February 2017.

HAVERING SHOW

I'd now like to turn to this year's Havering Show. The event was a huge success with some 50,000 people taking advantage of the good bank holiday weather to enjoy the wide range of entertainment on offer in Harrow Lodge Park.

I was one of them and I am particularly grateful to the hard work of all of the staff involved and the show's sponsors – West & Co, the Romford Recorder, Chigwell Window Centre, the Liberty Centre Romford, Time FM and Serco – without whom the Council would not be able to sustain a free two-day show.

At this year's Havering Show over 100 residents went aboard a vintage red Routemaster bus and had their say on what they loved about Havering and what they would like the Council to improve or change. Here is a short clip on what some of those who came onboard had to say.

The bus has proved itself to be a very useful tool for consultation and engagement and we will be considering how we can do more of this in the future.

HAVERING BUSINESS AWARDS

We are now also preparing for another major event, the 2016 Havering Business Awards, which will be held on Friday 7 October at CEME in Rainham. The finalists in 11 of the 13 award categories were announced on 29 July. The other two categories will be announced on the awards night. Tickets for that evening can be ordered at: haveringbusienssawards.co.uk.

ROMFORD CONSULTATION

Moving on, members will all be aware of the fact that central Romford is changing, with significant investment in housing, Romford Market and key transport hubs. With such important change on the horizon, it is vital that residents and businesses are able to have their say on the future of the town.

We will be engaging in a consultation exercise over the coming months involving all these aspects and giving residents a chance to tell us what they want for Romford.

A BOARDS

In another matter, the council is reviewing how it deals with A boards. Following an earlier consultation with businesses in 2013, the responses overwhelmingly stated that businesses did not want to see the licensing of A Boards via a Street Trading Policy but would prefer a Code of Practice. As such, the Council is developing a code of practice which will outline how offences will be enforced. This will be subject to a Lead Member decision.

LANGTONS REFURBISHMENT

The large scale restoration works are progressing well and due to be complete by Christmas. These include a new café/restaurant, a fully refurbished stable yard, garden bothy, gazebo and bath house. Navigation and access to the park will be enhanced by the creation of two new entrances, one from Cromer Road and one from Boscombe Avenue. The gardens will feature a brand new 12-metre long greenhouse, two new orchards, a vegetable garden and petal-bed garden. The lake will benefit from a safer terrace area for children and the implementation of a headwall at the far end of the lake which will serve as a new photo opportunity for newlyweds. Residents will start to see the changes in the next edition of Living in Havering. I would also

like to record my thanks to the Friends of Langtons for their role in the project.

STAFF SURVEY

Now turning to the subject of staff survey. Members will be interested to know that the Council's communications department recently carried out a staff survey. The results were encouraging and showed the percentage of staff who are satisfied working for Havering Council / oneSource is now around nine points above the average for London boroughs.

Over 700 staff responded to the survey which showed an increase in staff satisfaction levels by two per cent since 2013 despite the huge change that has occurred across the Council since.

MEMBER DEVELOPMENT

I have been asked to remind Members of the importance of the forthcoming development events that have been arranged. These have been set up by the Member Development Group – an all-party group, to increase Members' knowledge about Council services and changes to these, and I would urge all Members to attend if you are available. A very useful meeting was arranged yesterday concerning the Romford Market proposals. Appointments and further details of the events will be supplied by officers but Members may wish to note the following activities that have been scheduled:

Thursday 29 September, 7.30 pm, Council Chamber – An Overview of Streetcare Services

Wednesday 5 October, 7.30 pm, Council Chamber - A briefing from officers on Road Safety Initiatives

Thursday 10 November, 7.30 pm, Council Chamber – A session on the Roles and Responsibilities of Bailiffs

Members may also wish to note two further dates which have been scheduled for Member development activity – the evenings of Thursday 26 January and Wednesday 5 April and Members are most welcome to contact Councillor Thompson or any member of the Member Development Group if you have suggestions for future events.

Details of all future events will be circulated to Members via Calendar Brief and other channels as arrangements are confirmed.

MECCA BINGO

And finally, I'd like to acknowledge the public concerns about the former Mecca Bingo building in Hornchurch. I fully accept that the decision to demolish the building is unpopular with many residents. The Department for Culture, Media and Sport decided that the building did not have sufficient historical or architectural merit to justify it being a 'listed' building. In light of this, the Committee had to consider how it could best serve its local community, against the risk of it remaining derelict and in accordance with planning law. I would ask residents to accept that this decision was taken in good faith.