

MADAM MAYOR,

I would like to give members an update on a number of current matters and issues facing the Council.

TEMPORARY ICE RINK & FESTIVE EVENTS

Firstly, I would like to thank our staff for their work in arranging Christmas events across the Borough which were attended by thousands of our residents and added to the vibrancy and enjoyment of this special time of the year. I would also like to thank *Very Nice Ice* for bringing their temporary ice rink to Romford Market over the festive period.

It served as a focal point for many families' Christmas entertainment and attracted numerous visitors to our historic market, and I congratulate everyone involved for making this attraction such a success. Romford has long been known as a town with an ice skating tradition and this temporary ice rink in Romford has given everyone a taste of the fantastic new permanent ice skating facilities that our new leisure centre in Western Road will provide from early 2018. I am pleased to say that the project is well on schedule.

Congratulations are also due to the Queens Theatre at Hornchurch where the Pantomime clocked up a record 28,000 attendances, and I congratulate and thank its board chairman Denis Rycroft who has just retired after 16 years of dedicated voluntary work there.

One that note thanks are due to the excellent local acts who performed at your Charity Concert yesterday evening including the Newtons Primary school dancers who charmed us all.

OFSTED CHILDRENS REPORT

Just before Christmas we received Ofsted reports on Children's Social Services and some schools. Our Childrens' Director Tim Aldridge and his team are working to address the issues raised in both these reports. Existing plans for improvement have been acknowledged, and a plan of action is in place for both School Improvement and Social Care to ensure that both services are enhanced further in line with Ofsted's recommendations. Funding is always a problem for Councils like ours where we receive so much less government support those areas whose needs are perceived to be greater. However we are determined to drive up performance in all sections.

In response to the challenges across the school sector, we have in conjunction with the Regional Schools Commissioner (who is responsible for academies) recruited Dame Joan McVitie to chair an Improvement Board to focus in on the key challenges facing the secondary sector.

In relation to social care service, a key area of focus is the leaving care service, which was judged to be our worst performing section. The priorities in this area are to ensure that young people Leaving Care are fully aware of their entitlements and receive the support they need to make a successful transition to adulthood. The service has also reviewed the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH), with a view to strengthening the first response to safeguarding concerns.

HAVERING COLLEGE

I am looking forward to Havering College taking up a £5.4 million grant from The London Economic Action Partnership, which is the new name for the Local Enterprise Partnership, to help create a Construction & Infrastructure Skills & Innovation Centre at their site in Rainham, as well as additional learning space for professional and trade skills in infrastructure and construction engineering.

The project will also see the refurbishment of the college's existing construction centre and the installation of a Virtual Reality, simulated learning environment – this will be unique for a construction further education establishment in the UK.

To enable the College to take up this grant the Council will be working with the college on financing and exploring the current use they make of their property estate across the borough.

The Principal of the College will also be giving a Members' Briefing shortly that will also encompass a scheme for a possible merger with Barking & Dagenham College.

MEETING WITH MINISTER TO DISCUSS SETTLEMENT

Last week Andrew Rosindell MP, Andrew Blake-Herbert and I met with the Minister for Local Government, Marcus Jones, to renew our call for a review of the funding formula which sees our borough unfairly penalised financially, and disproportionately compared to other London councils. Although we are planning ahead and looking for ways to increase our income, we will continue to argue for a fairer deal from Central Government. On this occasion we also emphasised the inequitable way the Better Care Fund is distributed. This particularly impacts on us with the largest percentage of older people of any London borough and no less than 60 care homes within our boundary.

NOAK HILL SPORTS CENTRE

On a brighter note, I am very pleased to announce that the new Noak Hill Sports Centre in Heaton Ward at Harold Hill opened this week and has already had visitors with local football clubs securing booking for the 3G football pitch. There are some small areas of work left to complete including landscaping and completing the Sports Hall floor but in all, the facilities are already very impressive with an official launch planned for the end of February or March.

T&C UPDATE

The Council started its formal consultation with staff and trade unions on the Council's Terms and Conditions of Employment proposals in September 2016. As you know we launched the review to modernise and standardise our Terms and Conditions, and find yearly savings from our pay bill of £95m to protect our services and fill our budget gap. Like other councils, we had to look at all our options and it wasn't a step we took lightly. In fact it took us longer than we had planned because we wanted to make sure that it was the right thing to do and that our proposals for the annual savings of at least £500,000, were fair and measured, and applied to all Council staff from the Chief Executive down. This process is now in its final stages, with feedback from staff and Trade Unions taken into account and, where we could, acted upon. The number of staff that would see either no change in their pay - or see it increase - is slightly higher than under the original proposals. The Job Evaluation Appeals process is nearing completion, and the implementation of the proposals is expected in the summer. It has been a long hard process that isn't over yet, but we have tried to make it a

fair, open, and honest one. The process will continue to be reviewed by Governance Committee.

THE MARKET HOUSE

Members will know that we want to see the historic Romford Market return to full strength in the heart of the retail community, and if I may, I'll borrow Mayor Sadiq Khan's words on visiting Gallows Corner last year when he said "the status quo is not an option." That applies to Romford Market. If we do nothing it is in danger of withering and dying. We are fortunate to have access to money from the Mayor of London to help reinvigorate the market and the firm advice that we have received is that one important element of that is the building of a new Market House.

We are looking for the new Market House to provide a quality catering offer every day of the week, and act as a focal point, to complement existing businesses and the new public space in front of St. Edward's Church. Plans for that Market House will go to our Regulatory Service Committee next month where there will be further opportunity for objections and expressions of support to be considered fully.

SOLAR FARM UPDATE

Although we shall be discussing a motion and amendments on this topic later in the agenda I thought that it would be helpful as a backdrop to bring members right up to date as to the Administration's position.

The proposal for two solar parks in the borough (which was agreed as an item of the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy) is part of a wider strategy to provide clean, sustainable and renewable energy and also to generate significant income to maintain vital services in the face of loss of much of government funding.

Following the outcome of an initial public consultation prior to any planning application we have been considering with officers how to proceed further. We are grateful for the interest and views on both possible sites.

I myself have had meetings with officers of the Friends of Dagnam Park and other individuals. I have also carried out inspections. On Friday the 13th January I toured the whole site with officers and on Friday last the 20th I walked through the area with the Chairman and Secretary of the Friends Group and a concerned resident. I am grateful to them for their time and courtesy.

Although work is continuing on financial and practical analysis I can say that we do not now consider that the Dagnam Park proposal should proceed in its current form.

My particular concerns include the size of the area proposed and its topography. If a smaller scheme for Dagnam Park is to be suggested the form and content of consultation will be discussed in advance with the Friends Group. If no scheme is proposed no further consultation will be needed. I hope to be able to give final confirmation on this by our next meeting.

The Gerpins Lane scheme is still being examined. Planning approval and ministerial consent would be needed for any proposal.