

Leader's statement to Full Council – Wednesday 14 June 2017

Madam Mayor

Before I start I would like to pass on the sympathies of myself, the administration and, I am sure the entire Council to the families and loved ones of all those affected by this tragic fire incident today. There are no words that can adequately describe how we all feel at this time and our thoughts and prayers are with all those involved.

We have all seen the horrific pictures on the TV and heard the harrowing accounts of residents. It is far too early to speculate on what has happened in the Grenfell Tower fire, what the cause was or what may have contributed to what has clearly been an unprecedented outcome. However, I would like to say a few words about fire safety in Havering blocks of flats.

Havering Council has no tower blocks over fourteen stories. All our blocks of flats have up to date fire risk assessments and regular fire safety inspections. Many of them have also received ad hoc inspections from the fire brigade over previous years. We are therefore confident that our blocks comply with necessary safety regulations.

However, we are not complacent and we have started a programme of inspections of the common parts and public areas to ensure all fire safety requirements are complied with, including the removal of all rubbish or items that could create a risk. We will also be re-issuing our fire safety leaflet to all residents, both tenants and leaseholders to remind them of the need for care and caution when it comes to fire and not to engage in behaviours that increase the risk of fire or fire spread.

Over the coming days, weeks and months, we will keep a watchful eye on the issues that come out from the investigation of this tragedy and work with the fire authority to ensure any changes that need to be made are carried out without delay so that we protect our residents where ever we can.

I would now like to start by adding my congratulations to you as our newly elected Mayor for 2017/18 and to the Deputy Mayor and both your consorts. I hope that your year is a successful one.

Madam Mayor although it has been the practice for the Leader to deliver a report to the annual full Council meeting in May, this was not appropriate this

year as we were in the purdah period, and I thought it more sensible to leave this until tonight's meeting.

Following the General Election last week I would like to congratulate the duly elected Members of Parliament those being Andrew Rosindell MP who retained his seat for Romford, Jon Cruddas MP who retained his seat for Dagenham and Rainham and Julia Dockerill MP who won the seat for Hornchurch and Upminster following the retirement of Dame Angela Watkinson. I am sure they will all diligently represent the Borough and our residents in Parliament and that we as councillors will work with them in our respective capacities in a spirit of cooperation.

As you did on the night, or should I say in the early hours of the morning, Madam Mayor, I would also like to thank all of the 400 plus staff that opened and ran our 134 polling stations across the Borough, open from 7am right through to the close at 10pm, as well as the 200 plus staff that were at the count for the two constituencies, firstly to validate the number of votes and then count them. I would particularly like to thank Andrew as the Acting Returning Officer and Zena Smith our Elections Manager and her team for organising and delivering it. The turnout in the Romford and Hornchurch constituencies was 68% and 70% respectively and the count was concluded and you were able to make announcements Madam Mayor before the 3am target. I am sure Andrew and Zena will take all of the learning from the election into the planning for future elections including in particular those to be held next May in which some of us may well be involved.

With the outcome of the General Election and any consequential ministerial changes we shall need to ensure that the progress which we have made in important issues, especially the need for a fair funding review, is maintained and that any new ministers do not take a different course.

Before I turn our attention to some of the progress made over the past year, I feel that it is important to reflect on the recent weeks' other tragic events. London and Manchester have faced atrocities beyond belief, which I know has shocked the nation. At the Town Hall, the flags were lowered to half-mast, and most recently a minute's silence was held on Tuesday 6 June, which saw council staff, Councillors and members of community groups come together in memory of the victims of the London attacks. The attendance was impressive and showed that no matter what age, faith, background or culture we are from, we will all stand together against those who seek to divide us.

While I endeavour to bring members up-to-date with current matters through the year at Council meetings, I would like to take the opportunity today to

highlight some of the most significant achievements, whilst not forgetting some of the challenges and issues that we have faced, and will continue to face in the coming years.

I am pleased to report that with some committed work from our staff and policy decisions from my Cabinet colleagues, we have made substantial progress in a number of areas:

Vision

This year, we saw the launch of the Council's new vision: Havering – Making a greater London – with four cross-cutting themes that clearly define the focus of our objectives to serve the people of Havering, working with residents, businesses, partner agencies and the voluntary sector to shape the Borough for the future. These are:

- Communities making Havering
- Places making Havering
- Opportunities making Havering
- Connections making Havering

The vision reflects our aspirations for Havering as a Borough, within the context of the challenges, and the opportunities that we collectively face.

Local Plan

During the past two years the Council has been going through the various preliminary stages required for the preparation of the final draft Local Plan. As with all councils we are expected to have an up to date development plan which forms the background for regulation of land use and development over the next 15 years. Once agreed by the Council it needs to be approved by an inspector after examination on public inquiry. Objectors including landowners may be heard in this process. To date some 70 sites in the Green Belt have been proposed by landowners for residential development. . Therefore in our draft plan which is about to be put before us prior to final public consultation the very character of our area is under review. This is a major task which is almost upon us, and we owe it to our residents to get it right. One crucial feature of the Local Plan will be the setting of annual housing targets which are sufficiently realistic and evidence based to make the plan fit for purpose as a sustainable development plan.

The new Local Plan is therefore key to our aspirations for the future of the Borough. Having a strong Local Plan will help us to shape and influence development at a local level, which is critical in allowing us to cater for the needs of local people and future generations. It will also help make sure new homes are built in the right places and alongside the required investment in infrastructure. Thank you to those Councillors who attended the session with our expert legal adviser earlier this week. It is important that we all understand the need to agree a Local Plan so we may retain control locally and therefore ensure the nature, quality and sustainability of new developments in the Borough. Final consultation on the new draft Local Plan is expected to be held over the summer.

Estate regeneration programme

Our officers have been in extensive consultation with tenants and residents as to plans for 12 estate regeneration schemes over the next 10 to 15 years. Following the Council's participation in the proactive marketing organised by the Local London group of boroughs at the important MIPIM conference this year 48 companies have so far expressed interest in working with us on this project.

The required notices have been published in OJEU (Official Journal of the European Union) so that the formal competitive dialogue can take place throughout the remainder of this year with the aim of selecting a partner to work with us in the Joint Venture Company early next year.

There are currently 12 estates included within the regeneration project, which will see phased implementations, the first three being Waterloo Road Estate Romford, Napier and New Plymouth Houses Rainham and Serena, Solar & Sunrise Hornchurch. Normally in Havering, where there are new housing developments, we have typically come to expect between 10 and 12 per cent of the new properties to be affordable homes. However over the 10-15 years of the projects, it is proposed to build 3,000 new homes of which 35 per cent will be affordable homes for local people. This will double the amount of affordable homes currently on the 12 sites, thus providing much needed affordable housing for Havering residents as well as reducing the financial pressures on the General Fund from the costs of temporary accommodation.

By increasing the numbers of homes through regeneration of these estates we are helping to protect our Green Belt and meet any targets ultimately required of us.

Residents living on the regeneration sites are already being matched to new homes that meet their needs in areas they have chosen. More than 100 Council tenants have voluntarily been moved to date and 15 leaseholders have sold their homes back to the Council.

Where appropriate the homes in the regeneration areas that become vacant are being used for temporary accommodation, which means we now have no one in bed and breakfast, compared with around 100 at the start of 2017. This has already had a positive financial impact on the General Fund.

We also have some vacancies in our three hostels which, incidentally, were inspected by the Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) in December last year. The CIH report was published recently and praised the improvements we have made to the support and accommodation for people needing to live in the hostels. Our congratulations go to the lead member and all the staff who have worked hard to achieve these improvements.

Rainham and Beam Park

The Council is also working to deliver new homes for residents through the Rainham and Beam Park Housing Zone. We have recently selected a preferred development partner for many of the sites and are in the process of submitting planning applications. The Housing Zone will go alongside infrastructure improvements, including the new Beam Park station, which will improve transport links in the south of the borough. The designs of the new station are currently being developed in partnership with Network Rail. Havering is also working with the local NHS to ensure that the improved health facilities are delivered. The development plans include also a new school.

Romford Housing Zone

A great deal of scoping work has been undertaken for the proposed Bridge Close development. Following preliminary consultation and information about plans for the area the voluntary acquisition of properties has commenced. A planning application will be forthcoming prior to any necessary compulsory purchase orders. Formal process and decisions as to joint venture arrangement will also be required.

Mercury Land Holdings

The Council's wholly owned company has acquired its first apartment block in Romford, Cathedral Court, and lettings have been progressing ahead of schedule. Planning consents having been given for the proposed development

in North Street Hornchurch, construction will be commencing in the near future.

Culture, Sports and leisure

Our sports and leisure provision across the Borough has seen major progress and improvement over the past year with significant investment. In line with the Vision, it will hopefully encourage residents to lead more active and healthy lifestyles, while at the same time, providing competition-level facilities for aspiring athletes in swimming and ice-skating.

The Romford Leisure Development

Romford Leisure Development is currently on schedule and due to be completed early next year. The centre is very much starting to take shape. The construction of the pool is complete and currently undergoing testing. The structure of the ice rink is in place above the pool and is moving on to fitting out. On the 17th May we had the topping out ceremony so the building is now water tight, and the plaque we have been given by the builders is displayed next to the Mayor tonight.

The Noak Hill Sports Complex

In January this year, Havering opened another new sports centre in the Borough - Noak Hill Sports Complex in Harold Hill. The facilities there include a full size 3G artificial turf football pitch and a multi-use games area which has four floodlit tennis courts. A grand opening Family Fun Day is currently being planned and I look forward to sharing details of this with you soon.

Central Park Leisure Centre

Major refurbishment work began in April at Central Park Leisure Centre to improve its facilities, which includes extending the centre's gym area with an additional area for cardio exercise and over 140 pieces of brand new equipment. There will also be a new reception with a retail area, all to be complete by the end of this year.

Hornchurch Sports Centre

The proposed replacement of the existing centre as part of the new leisure contract is at an advanced stage of preparation, and a planning application is expected to be lodged in the near future. This will provide up to date and

modern facilities and offer to local residents enviable facilities to enhance the quality of life and leisure opportunities.

Harold Hill Library opening

The new Harold Hill Library, based in the eastern arcade of the Hilldene shopping centre in Harold Hill opened in September 2016. The library is bigger than the previous 1950s building and offers local residents contemporary facilities including 19 new public access PCs and a meeting room available for hire. It has been welcomed by the community.

Langtons Gardens and Park Improvements

Over the past year the improvement works at Langtons gardens and park have been completed enhancing one of the Borough's environmental gems. Visitors to last weekend's Concert in the Park were able to enjoy the facilities and to see a special flowerbed complete with a magnificent crown feature in honour of Her Majesty's Sapphire Jubilee. We are grateful to sponsors for their support.

Britain in Bloom/London in Bloom/Green flag

The Council's commitment to our 108 parks and green spaces continued to pay off over the past year.

The Borough surpassed all expectations in the London in Bloom competition, winning 55 awards, the most across London. There was also success for Havering in the Britain in Bloom competition – with the Borough earning a Silver Gilt award. This success along with a record number of 11 green flags for Havering parks - again demonstrates the Council's ambitions for our parks.

The New Website

The council's new website has been put in place over the past year. Sitemorse have rated it as the most improved in the UK and the best for a London Borough.

Events

In the past year we have again successfully delivered a number of free public events despite reduced budgets. These have included the Havering Show attended by tens of thousands of people, Armed Forces Day, Remembrance Sunday, Holocaust Memorial Day, and the various Christmas lights illuminations across the Borough, the largest in Romford attended by

thousands of residents and the Business Awards. Our programme of events continues in the coming year, with the Concert in the Park having already been enjoyed by the many residents who attended and the popular Armed Forces Day Parade coming upon the 24th June.

In addition, Havering is marking Her Majesty the Queen's Sapphire Jubilee year with a number of events and activities throughout the year,

Sapphire Jubilee

The celebrations began last month with a special service held at St Helen and St Giles Church in Rainham, where residents and local dignitaries attended to honour Her Majesty's long reign.

In addition to the brilliant flower bed at Langtons we will also see the planting of a special flower bed in front of the Town Hall. Music to celebrate the Queen's Sapphire Jubilee formed part of the Concert in the Park.

Tri-Borough Policing Pilot

Now I turn to matters of the safety of our residents. As members are aware our Borough is part of a tri-borough command policing pilot scheme at the request of the Metropolitan Police. Since the inception of this Havering has seen an increase of 20 extra Dedicated Ward Officers (DWOs) working in the Borough as part of the Met's ambition to improve neighbourhood policing. This is hopefully a comfort in these times of uncertainty, and I hope this helps to go some way to reassure our residents. Chief Superintendent Jason Gwillim leads the new East Area Command Unit which includes neighbouring boroughs Barking & Dagenham and Redbridge, and having Jason lead this as the former Borough Commander for Havering is beneficial for the Borough. We are also seeing much better interaction and response through the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub.

As we continue to keep under review the impact of the pilot some colleagues have helpfully passed on issues and comments and these are being looked at. One of the matters which appears to warrant scrutiny in response times and any related operational changes. Members should continue to feed back anything of relevance so that the pilot can be properly assessed.

Health devolution (Localities)

I would also like to update members about the work on the health devolution pilot which has been in progress over the past year. The Council is leading

work with partners across the NHS, local Pharmacies and Voluntary Sector to make changes to the way our local health and care services work together. We have been looking for the best ways of joining up services and are developing approaches built on the needs of local communities. This also links into the way forward for the NHS and the Strategic Transformation Plans (STP's) being picked up for us across North East London.

For our Children's services we will be take a whole family approach to 'emotional wellbeing', with a 'key worker' assigned according to their case dependant on their individual needs, who can give them the support and information that they require, drawn from a team of professionals with a variety of specialisms. This will feel like a more seamless, easier to access, joined-up service and will deliver better outcomes for our service users. It will aim to prevent the need for further, more intensive services later in life.

For our Adult services too, we are aiming to provide a more seamless 'virtual team' approach, again drawing the right support from a range of options, dependent upon need. This team, including GPs, therapists, carers and pharmacists, will support people to live independently in their own home, try to avoid unnecessary stays in hospital or visits to A&E. It will also help to get people home from hospital as quickly as possible and to get settled at home for a better recovery.

Challenges

So Madam Mayor, having dealt with some of the many positive and progressive matters of the past year I will now highlight serious challenges facing the Council over the coming years.

Financial Strategy

At the core of all the Council does is its budget and financial strategy. After the elections in 2014 we launched the MTFs proposals to secure most of the reductions in spending needed to balance the budgets to 2018. These were adjusted to reflect the outcome of extensive public consultation. They have subsequently been varied and augmented to cope with unforeseeable events and funding changes. Latterly in 2016/2017 there has been excessive demand on Adults' and Childrens' services which has led to overspending against even enhanced budgets in those areas. This has been mitigated by management action so far as possible but still presents a significant risk for which we will have to cater. These are services which are demand led, and the rate of demographic change in the Borough is only predictable to a certain extent.

Central Government has assisted us by allocating an additional Adult Social Care Grant to the Better Care Fund. Although precise rules for spending this have been held up by the general election the extra money should assist in providing more effectively for our elderly and those needing intensive social care.

Our excellent Childrens' officer team have also secured a £2m grant towards a project supporting the improvements in children's social services which have been endorsed by OFSTED.

There is more to be done to prepare the 2018/2019 budget and the Executive will be working on this in the coming months. In 2018 there will be a need for the new Council to commence the work on another round of savings to meet future predicted budget gaps. Members will need to bear this firmly in mind when considering aspirations for spending by the Council.

One of the main challenges continues to be balancing the budget in the face of continued reductions in Government grants and funding, whilst still meeting the demand-led needs of those who are the most vulnerable in our Borough to which I have referred. We expect that we will also continue to be limited in the tax that we can raise, and we do not want to overburden hard-pressed families with excessive tax increases. Reports will come back during this autumn as we firm up what the next financial year will look like.

With the highest proportion of older people in London, the new Government imposed obligations, and large increases in the numbers of children in the borough, the pressures on our budgets have continued to grow. Our responsibility to vulnerable residents to whom we owe a duty of care is a heavy one that demands our full attention. This will be particularly challenging despite the extra government funding to which I have referred.

The Government's plans to move to Business Rates retention to local authorities and a Fair Funding Formula have been progressing more slowly than originally anticipated. Responses to the Business Rates Retention consultation were submitted at the beginning of May and it will be some time before local authorities learn the outcome. The consultation on Fair Funding has been deferred due to the General Election and a revised date is yet to be provided. These developments will need to be closely followed and Havering's position will need to be presented robustly taking into account any ministerial changes. A "Fair" system for government funding must adequately address the pressures associated with the demands of a growing population and more vulnerable residents. As members will be aware we do not believe that Havering has been fairly treated by successive

governments (of whatever political party or parties) in determining our need for Government funding.

Managing the homeless agenda also remains a challenge. We are required to carry out new prevention duties that will help find alternative solutions in the private sector. If we are not able to achieve this, we will need to find another way of coping with any increase in homelessness.

In addition, there remains the need to provide affordable homes for residents at a time when house prices in the Borough have been rising steeply, which is key to the provision of additional affordable housing through the estate regeneration programme.

Education

During the past year our primary schools have continued to secure impressive results whereas some of our secondary schools have attracted criticism from OFSTED. Working in conjunction with the Regional Schools Commissioner our officers have secured cooperation of the secondary academies in the formation of an improvement board and in some cases highly rated schools are joining with those with less impressive inspection outcomes as multi-academy trusts. Whilst local authority roles in Education have changes and powers diminished the Council is using all its influence to ensure the best outcomes for our children. The lead member and I have visited and met heads to review issues and assure them of our support in the improvement programme.

With a great deal of cooperation from the Education community the Council has also been able to provide school places for the rapidly increasing school aged population. More will need to be done year by year to keep pace with demand.

Highways and Parking

Being a large Borough geographically and with the highest level of car ownership in London car parking and highway usage is one of our main challenges. The PSPO pilot scheme around some schools has been a success and resources to extend it are significant. Priorities need therefore to be judged. However this is a potent tool in tackling the dangers associated with unlimited drive to school parking.

Pending completion of a comprehensive borough-wide parking review it will be necessary to address individual areas of difficulty.

Major issues like the Lower Thames Crossing and new M25 junction in the Borough, the plans for a river crossing at Rainham, major work on junction 28, Gallows Corner improvements and delays in the A127 road bridge replacement are all work in progress for our officers and members.

Finally I will turn to some specific current matters.

Orchard Village

Residents have raised concerns regarding the Orchard Village Development, which were first brought to the attention of the Council back in early 2016. The development had been undertaken by Circle Housing Association (now Clarion) following a stock transfer from the Council in 2008. Following the concerns raised, regular meetings were set up between ward councillors, Council officers and senior representation from Circle to identify the issues and find resolution to those issues. The Council has been holding Clarion responsible for ensuring those matters are resolved to the satisfaction of the residents. Generally the issues raised related to poor build quality, poor insulation, high heating costs, poor or inadequate plumbing, and pest infestation although this is not an exhaustive list. A weekly update on progress is provided to the council and the ward councillors by Clarion.

Wennington Village Planning Appeal

I also wanted to make reference to the recent decision of the Planning Inspector following the appeal against the Council's decision to refuse permission for the extractions of minerals and subsequent landfill in Wennington Village. We have sought expert legal advice from a QC on appealing the Planning Inspector's decision to the High Court. Any such decision can only be challenged on legal grounds such as failure on the part of the Planning Inspector to apply the correct legal test, or making a perverse decision. Having carefully considered the background to this matter and the written decision of the Planning Inspector, counsel has advised that there is no prospect of a successful appeal by the Council.

Madam Mayor, these matters are not exhaustive but I am pleased to have been able to update members with examples of positive progress on important issues and highlight some of the challenges that will have to be faced over the coming years.

I would like to thank all my Cabinet colleagues for their tireless efforts in their areas of work and for enabling policies to be put in place to make this progress

and to tackle the challenges that we face. I would also like to thank the Council's Senior Leadership Team, for implementing these policies. A year into the Chief Executive's tenure, we have successfully recruited some very capable individuals into his new structure and those individuals have settled in well and are driving the services forward on a positive footing. So despite the challenges we collectively face, we have a strong team in place to help guide us through them.

So Madam Mayor, thank you for your forbearance and we look forward to your year in office.