

FULL COUNCIL, Wednesday 22 January 2020

MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

Hornchurch Police Station

**1) To the Leader of the Council (Councillor Damian White)
From Councillor Ray Morgon**

In a video outside Elm Park Station prior to the General Election, the Leader of the Council stated that the council had purchased or was about to purchase Hornchurch Police Station. It is my understanding that neither statement is correct. Would the Leader of the Council provide some clarity on the matter?

Answer

Arising from judicial review proceedings initiated by the Council in response to the proposed closure and sale of Hornchurch Police Station, the Council secured an exclusive option to purchase the Police Station. Contracts were formally drawn up for the purchase, containing also an agreement for Police services to operate from part of the property.

Immediately ahead of the proposed exchange of contracts, the Council were asked to defer the purchase following an announcement by the government on a proposed increase in police officers and the consequent need for the Police to review its estate strategy. The underlying consideration being whether a further Police station for the Borough would now be required.

The Council would regard this as a very welcome outcome and has agreed to await the review. The Council can reflect that as a result of its initial legal challenge, this building has remained available for ongoing police services and that, subject to the review, could now be retained as a Police Station. Had the Council not initiated legal action, the Police Station would now be closed.

A supplementary question asked why the Leader had misled the public by stating the Police Station had already been purchased or was about to be purchased. In response the Leader stated that he had not said this and that the Council had initiated a judicial review of proceedings.

Approach road to St Helen's Court, Rainham

**2) To the Cabinet Member for Housing (Councillor Joshua Chapman)
From Councillor Jeffrey Tucker**

St Helen's Court, Rainham Village is council housing and the approach road is controlled by the Housing Department. The Housing Department has left it unrestricted and it appears won't allow the Highways Department to introduce restrictions resulting in commuter all day/week parking and anti-social activity.

This is a long running saga as many visits and meetings have been held that go

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nowhere. Can this matter be looked at again as local Councillors would like restrictions introduced to assist parking for both tenants and high street.

Answer

The Council is aware of the parking issues at St Helens Court and officers in the past have met with residents of the estate along with Ward Members. The estate and the road network within it are not adopted roads, which means there are legal restrictions on the penalties that can be imposed for parking contraventions.

We have taken legal advice, and are waiting for further clarity. However, officers from Parking and Housing are working together to agree an approach which can be taken to enforce parking on the estate as part of a trial. Legal advice has been sought.

This will be a first for the Council but should ease the parking issues in the area and pave the way to further collaborative working on other housing estates.

(Question withdrawn by Group from discussion at the meeting).

Blocked Drains Leading to Local Flooding

**3) To the Cabinet Member for Environment (Councillor Osman Dervish)
From Councillor Paul McGeary**

In view of the apparent increase in local flooding events caused by blocked drains what arrangements are being made with Water Companies and other agencies to expedite clearing of blockages to mitigate the adverse impact on residents and businesses?

Answer

The recent localised flood events in Romford Town Centre and Rainham were isolated incidences caused by surface level blockages and were quickly cleared to resolve the situation.

The road gullies are the Council's responsibility to clear. Critical drainage areas which have been identified will see increased maintenance take place, where necessary.

Thames Water is responsible for the main sewers but do not carry out regular cleaning or inspections. They will only respond to complaints once they have been notified.

The Council's Environment Services work in partnership with Thames Water and Anglian Water to identify any main sewer failures and engage with the utility company to ensure a repair as soon as practical from a reactive perspective.

A supplementary question asked if sufficient funding was available in Joint Venture proposals to ensure treatment works did not overrun. In response, the Cabinet Member confirmed that officers sought to ensure that funding for these types of works was included within development proposals.

Grass Verges in Harold Hill

4) To the Cabinet Member for Environment (Councillor Osman Dervish) From Councillor Darren Wise

Could the Cabinet Member confirm what action is being taken by the Council to preserve the grass verges that are being churned up in Harold Hill most notably in Kingsbridge Close and various grass verges in Gooshays Drive which are all known by enforcement officers?

Answer

Damage to grass verges is caused usually by one of the following:-

- Residents accessing frontages without suitable vehicle crossings
- Heavy goods vehicles overrunning at junctions
- Damage/anti-social behaviour caused by unknown persons

It is a sad indictment of society that these things happen but the Council is left to pick up the pieces.

Enforcement investigation and action can be taken against properties identified with no or inadequate vehicle crossings. Verge overrun at junctions are identified for small engineering works/parking schemes. Bollard installation is the last measure considered as compliance is preferred to prevent further damage rather than increase street clutter and maintenance issues.

The council has reviewed over 70 locations across the borough where there is a need to improve parking and access relating to grassed areas. A criteria has been developed to identify priority sites for improvements which includes Kingsbridge Close. Approval will be sought for implementation in 20/21.

Gooshays Drive will be considered for improvement works as part of the 2021/22 programme.

A supplementary question asked if the Cabinet Member agreed that enforcement in the area had taken too long to implement. In response the Cabinet stated that he sympathised and he hoped the current enforcement review would enable more prompt action to be taken in the future.

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Enforcement Group Re-Structure

5) To the Cabinet Member for Public Protection and Safety (Councillor Viddy Persaud)

From Councillor Ray Morgon

Would the Cabinet Member confirm if the re-structure of the Council's Enforcement Group has been completed and is now fully operational?

Answer

The Organisational Change Addendum Report for the Enforcement and Safety Review within Neighbourhoods to create an integrated Enforcement and Safety service for Havering was agreed on 20th December 2019. This will mean that the proposed structure will be formally launched in late February. The service is actively preparing to be ready for the launch.

The proposed changes to the Community Warden Service were subject of a formal consultation with all Council tenants and leaseholders in October 2019, and the outcome report will be published in the near future.

Once implemented, the new service will have more officers to deal with crime and anti-social behaviour and will have increased powers to act on issues like noise and nuisance complaints.

This will include dedicated officers operating across different areas, including extra focus on hotspots, from Monday-Saturday.

They will also work more closely with our community safety teams, CCTV Control Room, and our partners, including the police.

A supplementary question asked how, given that the re-structure was not yet fully operational, section 92 Police Officers were already at work and making arrests. In response, the Cabinet Member explained that the Police Officers were currently the responsibility of a different Council service but they would be integrated with the enforcement group in due course.

Gooshays Green

6) To the Leader of the Council (Councillor Damian White)
From Councillor Jan Sargent

Following the decision not to build on Gooshays Green, what measures does the Executive propose to safeguard the land from any future development plans?

Answer

The Council is committed to safeguarding the character and appearance of Havering as this is a priority for our residents. It has to balance this against the importance of

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ensuring that there are enough high quality homes in the borough in line with national and Mayoral planning policy and in accordance with this Council's commitment to providing new homes for the sons and daughters of our residents.

These objectives underpin the new Havering Local Plan which is expected to be adopted by the Council later this year.

The new plan will include strong policies that will take account of local circumstances so the Council can robustly continue to protect Havering's character, appearance and features and deliver new homes.

I gave clear commitments and assurances in September 2019, which I repeat again this evening, that the Council will undertake an update of the new Local Plan following its expected adoption later this year.

That work will provide an opportunity for the Council to work with the community to look at how best the Council may bring forward effective measures to retain and protect Gooshays Green through the mechanism of a local plan and its policies.

(Question withdrawn by Group from discussion at the meeting).

Waterloo Road, Romford Proposed Pedestrian Crossing

7) To the Cabinet Member for Environment (Councillor Osman Dervish) From Councillor Keith Darvill

What is the planned target date to complete the works required to provide a new pedestrian crossing in Waterloo Road, Romford?

Answer

I am pleased to be able to report that, weather permitting, the works commenced on the 13th January 2020 and will be completed by the last week of March 2020. Should any unexpected delays arise officers will notify all local ward Councillors.

The work is highly complex as we'll be working in close proximity to medium and high pressure gas mains. Therefore we must be extra diligent and are working closely with Cadent gas to ensure the project is carried out safely and in good time. In addition, due to the restrictions on-site, a bespoke signal system will be installed to ensure the crossing functions correctly once open. I am pleased to report that the project is finally moving forward.

(No supplementary question asked).

Parking on High Streets

8) To the Leader of the Council (Councillor Damian White) From Councillor Paul Middleton

We have now lost a long established business (over 80 years old) in Upminster. This was in part due to the removal of the free parking that has affected both Hornchurch

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and Upminster. The traders in both Hornchurch and Upminster are fighting to keep a presence on the high street. Will the Leader reverse his decision and give back the 30 minutes free parking?

Answer

It is obviously very sad to see the closure of any of our local businesses. However, the closure cannot be blamed purely on the changes to parking charges, but rather the challenges facing our high streets with ever changing shopping habits and online competition.

Recent figures released from the British Retail Consortium (BRC) said total sales fell 0.1%, marking the first annual sales decline since 1995. Sales in November and December were particularly weak, falling 0.9%, the BRC said.

It is of course never popular when you have to make tough decisions like raising parking charges. When our residents told us they wanted our roads and pavements improved, this was the only way we could fund it. However, we have been meeting with businesses and listening to their views.

We offered free parking over the Christmas weekends. We are also looking at other ways of helping businesses which includes investing in our town centres and creating a marketing campaign. We will continue to look at ways of making it more attractive for shoppers to come to our high streets.

A supplementary question asked how many more businesses would close before the 30 minutes free parking was reinstated. In response, the Leader of the Council stated that it would cost £770k to do this for Hornchurch & Upminster and the Opposition could propose amendments to the budget in order to generate the revenue for this.

Chafford Leisure Centre

9) To the Leader of the Council (Councillor Damian White) From Councillor David Durant

Does the Council Leader regret his short-sighted decision to close Chafford leisure centre and does he still stand by his promise to build a new centre in the south of the Borough and if so, please provide an update on the situation.

Answer

I am delighted that Cabinet agreed to progress a new leisure centre at Rainham Recreation Ground at their meeting on 15 January. I made a commitment to deliver a new leisure centre for the south of the borough and the Administration is now delivering on that promise.

Chafford Sports Complex was an old, not fit for purpose leisure facility. This new leisure centre will provide residents in the south of the borough with the high quality facilities that they deserve to help with leading healthy and happy lives.

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(Question withdrawn by Group from discussion at the meeting).

High Street Emergency

10) To the Leader of the Council (Councillor Damian White) From Councillor Tele Lawal

In view of the nationwide steep decline in applications for new shops District Council Leaders are calling on HM Government to give all districts the long term funding they need to revive high streets and town centres. Does the Leader of the Council agree with the District Council Leaders and if so what steps does he intend to take to address the crisis in Havering's High Streets?

Answer

It has been widely acknowledged across the UK that town centres and high streets are facing some extremely difficult and challenging times.

Online sales are negatively impacting traditional high street retail performance; UK town centres are emerging as leisure and social destinations that are slowly less retail-dominant.

This brings the opportunity to consider alternatives such as housing within the reconfiguration of town centres.

The Council supports the need for long term funding to support the decline in town centres and will consider any future funding opportunities.

The Council regularly monitors the performance of our town centres via quarterly health checks and realises the need for our town centres to change fundamentally their core function of 'Retail' and shift towards a broader mix of uses.

The Council is currently in the process of developing a masterplan for Romford Town Centre and Rainham and is developing a transformational housing and commercial regeneration programme for Harold Hill town centre. It will continue to work with key stakeholders, businesses and the local communities within Hornchurch, Upminster, Collier Row and Elm Park town centre with a future view to develop local plans for these town centres while recognising that each town centre has its own local character.

A supplementary question asked why the Council had only applied for the Government's Future High Street Fund on behalf of Romford town centre and if other town centres would be included in future applications. In response, the Leader of the Council stated that he was happy to support any applications for funding for the benefit of any part of the borough. The Leader was also happy to provide to all Members details of future funding applications for areas outside Romford.

Fire Safety in Housing Stock

**11) To the Cabinet Member for Housing (Councillor Joshua Chapman)
From Councillor Reg Whitney**

Would the Cabinet Member confirm what arrangements are in place to ensure that all private and public sector flats in Havering are safe from the threat of a Grenfell Tower type incident?

Answer

The Council takes the safety of all its residents extremely seriously and our responsibilities and powers to respond to safety issues differs significantly depending on whether we own the building or not.

In December 2019, the Building (Amendment) Regulations implemented a ban on use of combustible materials anywhere in the external walls of residential high-rise buildings over 18m. This amendment does not apply on a retrospective basis to flats which already existed at the time of the revision. The robust enforcement of this amendment by the Council's Building Control Team on sites, which they are dealing with, will ensure that building regulations of this nature are complied with.

Building Regulation Consent can be granted by the Council or by a private provider, known as an Approved Inspector (AI). It is open to a developer to choose between the Council or an AI.

For privately owned properties, once completed and occupied, the responsibility rests with the freeholder(s) and leaseholder(s) where appropriate.

Local Authorities are able to use the powers under the Housing Act 2004 to inspect and carry out Housing Health and Safety Rating System assessments within the common parts of these buildings and to issue notices to ensure remedial action is taken, if it is identified as being required. The notices however are issued against the owner of the building, whose responsibility it is to carry out the works to make the building safe.

In relation to its own housing stock, the council regularly carries out Type 4 fire risk assessment on all high risk buildings, primarily high rise tower blocks and sheltered housing. Type 4 FRAs consist of an intrusive and in-depth inspection of all communal areas of the building as well as 10% survey of the inside of flats. These are carried out by qualified inspectors and they recommend any remedial action that needs to be carried out to make sure that the building is maintained and is safe. The council monitors to ensure that the work is carried out in time and to the required standard.

(No supplementary question asked).

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Stop Hate UK Group

12) To the Leader of the Council (Councillor Damian White) From Councillor David Durant

The Council Leader has been hosting a group called “Stop Hate UK”. This group claim the “Brexit referendum produced a 41% increase in hate crime focused on Muslim, LGBTQ and BME communities”! Does the Council Leader agree with their claim and any similar claims?

Answer

The figures cited by Stop Hate UK are Home Office figures provided in October 2016, there was a 41% increase in Racist or Religious Abuse (nationally) following the EU Referendum rising from 3,386 in July 2015 to 5,468 in July 2016.

A more detailed breakdown of the figures can be found on the Home Office’ website – I am happy to share the link with councillors.

In Havering – this council is a proud champion for community cohesion. Through the work we are doing and our One Havering strategy - we aim to promote a healthy and optimistic borough where every community group feels included, are able to get on with one another and is treated equally.

(Question withdrawn by Group from discussion at the meeting).