

FULL COUNCIL, Wednesday 18th January 2023

MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

Congratulate Romford FC

1) To the Leader of the Council (Councillor Ray Morgon)

From Councillor David Taylor

Will the Council join me in congratulating Romford FC on the 30th anniversary of their reforming in 1992; recognising their fantastic FA Cup run, the announcement of a Women's Team, and their development partnership with West Ham?

Answer

We are delighted to see the positive steps taken by Romford FC in recent months and look forward to further success and sustainability in the future.

Steve Butterworth and his team have performed fantastically in competitive action this season and in particular we congratulate the team's fans, players and staff for a great FA Vase run which sadly came to an end in the Channel Islands at the weekend.

A supplementary question asked if the Leader would meet with Romford FC to discuss their returning to the Romford area. The Leader of the Council responded that the club had submitted a number of planning applications since 2008 but that he was happy to discuss any future plans.

Blue Badge Eligibility

2) To the Cabinet Member for Adults and Health (Councillor Gillian Ford)

From Councillor Darren Wise

In August 2019, New rules were widened by the government on Blue Badge eligibility criteria to help people with 'invisible'/hidden disabilities. Therefore, can the cabinet member please confirm, how many applications since 2019 broken down by year have there been from individuals and/or their carers with autism? and of those applications, how many have been approved and how many rejected broken down by year?

Answer

Before coming to the specific response requested, it is worth mentioning that there are a number of hidden-non visible conditions including dementia, Parkinson's, ADHD, autism and Crones disease, some may apply under the criteria for arthritis or cancer.

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The completed blue badge application comes through from the gov.uk site and is steered to each individual issuing Council where the applicant lives. The application form is on our website at www.havering.gov.uk/bluebadge

However, with regards to the information requested, we do not hold any statistics of the medical conditions the applicants have and therefore would not be able to supply the information requested.

All applications for blue badges either meet the criteria or doesn't meet the criteria, each case is considered separately as all conditions can range from one end of the scale to the other.

Some will meet the criteria and others will not, whether applying under a hidden application or otherwise. Applications are not approved on whether a person has a particular condition.

Some may have been refused due to applying the wrong criteria and will then have to reapply under the correct criteria, therefore any statistics given would only be how many applications are received and how many refused.

A supplementary question asked if the eligibility criteria were being too strictly applied by Council officers. The Cabinet Member responded that she would come back to Councillor Ford with details of the specific criteria used.

Purchase of Land at Bridge Close

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

Given the predicted drop in land values, and the increasing costs of construction, can Councillor Ray Morgon please provide a statement on the decision to purchase the land at Bridge Close?

Answer

As previously approved by your Administration, the Council has been supporting the acquisition of the land and property that is necessary for the redevelopment of Bridge Close, via both Bridge Close Regeneration LLP, and on occasion directly, through private treaty negotiations with land owners.

Although these negotiations take time to reach a conclusion, the approach being taken is appropriate given the objective of regenerating the site and providing new homes (with supporting infrastructure).

As you will know, the Council takes professional advice on a range of matters concerning its regeneration schemes, including on current and predicted market conditions, sales values, interest rates and construction costs. You will also be aware there are regular robust viability tests.

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This information is used to inform and update the business case for Bridge Close, which is presented to Cabinet on an annual basis. The next report is scheduled for February 2023.

My Administration is committed to advancing this regeneration scheme and recognises the contribution that it will make to the overall regeneration of Romford.

A supplementary question asked if the Leader would commit to a meeting to discuss the Mercury Land Holdings financial position. The Leader responded that he was willing to accommodate this.

Household Waste Collections Service

**4) To the Cabinet Member for Environment (Councillor Barry Mugglestone)
From Councillor Martin Goode**

Can the Cabinet member please confirm that the new proposed integrated public realm contract will include a commitment to the Residents of Havering, to continue to collect all residential household waste on a weekly basis.

Answer

The new Integrated Waste and Street Cleansing Contract is being let as an as-is service. Until we have received the feedback from residents through the draft consultation on containerisation, I am unable to commit to a specific methodology. I am sure you will agree it is important to consider residents' views when looking at this area of service provision.

There are of course never a one size fits all option for these types of operations and were any scheme to be adopted it would be dependent on the results of detailed reviews of the Boroughs demography in respect of building make up and the results of future Equalities Impact Assessments.

A supplementary question asked if the Cabinet Member would commit to the retention of weekly bin collections. The Cabinet Member responded that this would be decided once the results of the consultation were known but he would achieve a value added solution for Havering residents.

Flooding around Jutsums Lane and Crow Lane

**5) To the Cabinet Member for Environment (Councillor Barry Mugglestone)
From Councillor Viddy Persaud**

Following emails and discussions with officers, please can the cabinet member update us on action taken to deal with the flooding on the roundabout on the corner of Jutsums Lane and Crow Lane and the continuing flooding under the bridge in Jutsums Lane?

Answer

I thank Cllr Persaud for her question.

I can advise that this area has low flood risk from surface water and very low risk from rivers. The area had no recorded flooding during the exceptional rainfall events of 2016, 2020 and 2021.

The Council is aware the Jutsums / Crow Lane roundabout occasionally experiences standing water in the road. This can be as a result of general detritus blocking drains and leaf fall covering grilles.

Arrangements are in place to routinely clean the gullies and respond to reports as they arise. The next programmed clean is due in February.

Regarding the area under the bridge, there is a known historic issue of some flooding during heavy rainfall. Like some other places in the Borough, this is due to the Thames Water sewer capacity.

I am in the process of writing to Senior Directors at Thames Water to express our concerns about a number of sites in the Borough. I am also seeking information about their cleaning and maintenance regimes and a copy of their investment programme in our area.

A supplementary question asked what was causing the flooding problem in Crow Lane. The Cabinet Member responded that he was in the process of writing to the senior directors of Thames Water regarding all areas affected by flooding in Havering and asking what the relevant maintenance and investment programmes consisted of.

Sale of Illegal Vapes

**6) To the Cabinet Member for Environment (Councillor Barry Mugglestone)
From Councillor Dilip Patel**

Recently the alternative to cigarette the sales of legal disposal vapes have rocketed. What is the Council doing to stop the illegal vapes being sold in the shops in our Borough?

Answer

One of the statutory duties of the Council's Public Protection Officers with a trading standards remit is to prevent the sale of non-compliant e-cigarettes, also known as vapes. Non-compliant e-cigarettes are those which do not comply with the Tobacco and Related Products Regulations 2016 as amended.

This work involves awareness raising with Havering businesses to ensure that they are meeting their legal duties by only selling compliant e-cigarettes. In December last year, more than 250 businesses which sell e-cigarettes, including

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newsagents and off licenses, received advice from Officers on how to prevent the sales of non-compliant vapes and refills.

Officers also take enforcement action to seize non-compliant e-cigarettes to prevent their sale. More than 350 non-compliant e-cigarettes were seized in October last year.

It is also an offence to sell e-cigarettes to those under 18 years of age. Officers have carried out 7 underage operations since June 2022. These operations involved visits with children to 24 separate businesses selling e-cigarettes. During these operations, 5 businesses sold vapes to children. Each of these businesses has received advice on how to prevent such sales and warned that they will be retested to ensure compliance. In the event of further non-compliance, formal action will be taken which can include prosecution. Under age sales operations are a key component of the work our Trading Standards Officers undertake.

(No supplementary question asked).

Hardship Fund

**7) To the Cabinet Member for Finance and Transformation (Councillor Chris Wilkins)
From Councillor Damian White**

Following the decision to top-up the hardship fund, please outline if the money has been spent in full or has the Council taken some of this money back?

Answer

The top-up to the hardship fund is likely to be spent by the end of the year 2022-23. Any unspent monies will remain in the hardship reserve to fund expenditure in 2023-24. Between April 2022 and January 2023, 8,870 awards totalling around £962k were made as well as additional expenditure of £882k supporting around 6,000 Havering households. Families from the Ukraine, care leavers and those in supported accommodation have also been supported.

In total in 2022/23, some 20,000 Havering households had been supported, at a total cost of £3.4m. At the end of March there will be around £500k left in the hardship fund and the Council will also be due a payment from the Government in the region of £550k.

In the autumn statement, the Government announced further funding for 2023-24 and we look forward to the detail regarding this funding soon. If it is at the same level as last year, this is likely to be a total hardship fund for 2023/24 of around £4.2m.

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A supplementary question asked if the Cabinet Member would meet with Members to discuss the hardship fund figures. The Cabinet Member indicated he was happy to do this.

Housing repair Services

**8) To the Cabinet Member for Housing (Councillor Paul McGeary)
From Councillor Jason Frost**

Following a spike in reports of poor performance by Mears, could the Cabinet Member for Housing confirm whether or not a contact management plan has been introduced to address these shortcomings in the housing repairs service?

Answer

Havering/Mears mobilised the Havering Repairs contract on the 1st April 2022. Since then, both parties have worked hard to ensure its success, but we have encountered some challenges that have hampered our ability to fully deliver the service as we would expect at this stage.

The Council & Mears both fully recognise the need for improvement and have jointly implemented an improvement plan.

WIP Reduction

Our current works in progress (WIP) level was 2028 at the end of November last year, and this is 378 above our acceptable upper limit. To reduce the WIP in line with our target parameters, that is, 2 weeks of WIP, we will be taking the following actions.

- Mears will be filling 10 vacancies between November 2022 and February 2023 (5 operatives started in December)
- Increasing productivity from 3.2 to 3.5 jobs per day by dealing with larger works more efficiently
- With the assistance from the Mears Task Team in January to remove the backlog of repairs. This will provide 16 additional operatives).
- Using the Task Team to fill vacant positions in February, if required, and until permanently filled.

Mears are on target to reduce the WIP to acceptable levels. The Council will continue to robustly contract manage Mears in order to drive improvements in the delivery of service.

We are also working on developing and integrating the contact centre with Mears to create a better more seamless customer journey.

A supplementary question congratulated the Cabinet Member on implementing the performance plan.

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Budget Consultation Data

**9) To the Leader of the Council (Councillor Ray Morgon)
From Councillor David Taylor**

Will the Council commit to publishing the raw, anonymised, data to the budget consultation, showing the level of support or objection to each proposal?

Answer

Yes.

A supplementary question asked if the Leader of the Council would commit to dropping a budget proposal if a majority of residents were opposed to it. The Leader responded that around 3,000 responses had been received to the consultation which was a very good response rate. These responses would be taken into account in the budget proposals.

Spends on Highway Improvement

**10) To the Cabinet Member for Environment (Councillor Barry Mugglestone)
From Councillor Osman Dervish**

In light of the recent inclement weather, will the Council please provide a figure on the predicted total spend on highway improvement programme (proactive and reactive maintenance, capital and revenue) by the end of this year?

Answer

I thank Councillor Dervish for his question.

There's no question that inclement (winter) weather accelerates deterioration of our roads and other parts of the highway network. The Council has arrangements in place to identify defects as they arise and respond to helpful reports from our residents.

In general, revenue funding covers the cost of reactive works and capital investment covers the cost of area wide resurfacing and renewals (like the Highways Improvement Programme).

The estimated expenditure this year is £2m revenue and £7.5m capital. Our funding for the highway improvement programme for the next financial year will be agreed at budget setting by Cabinet and Council.

A supplementary question asked if the Cabinet Member would commit to spending £10m a year on the borough's roads as had happened under the previous Administration. The Cabinet Member responded that a budget would be put forward by the Administration and the Opposition was welcome to propose amendments to it.

Graffiti Prevention

**11) To the Cabinet Member for Environment (Councillor Barry Mugglestone)
From Councillor Tim Ryan**

Will the Council outline what work is it doing to prevent and clear up graffiti across the Borough?

Answer

Havering's Street Cleansing department is very reactive to reported graffiti on council land or street furniture, usually removing it within 24hrs, or same day if deemed offensive. If the graffiti is deemed offensive and is on private land then this will be removed accordingly. The team has a supply of chemicals and specialist equipment for the various types of graffiti encountered. Should the graffiti be on private land then a waiver is sought for the Council to remove and re-charge the costs back to the landowner. Havering does not remove all graffiti on utility boxes as this is the responsibility of the utility companies.

The Street Cleansing department does not remove graffiti from bridges, watercourses or anything above a certain height. These locations require a coordinated response and specialist arrangements that can be arranged on a case-by-case basis.

Graffiti removal will fall under the new waste and street cleansing contract from 30th July 2023. There will be easier ways of reporting graffiti and evidencing its removal, as well as identifying hotspots through the use of GIS systems. This will enable the cleansing service to work more closely with Enforcement and Public Protection to combat antisocial behaviour.

A supplementary question if the Administration would meet with local Councillors in order to view graffiti hotspots. The Cabinet Member responded that graffiti should be reported through the Neighbourhoods Directorate and that Councillor Ryan was welcome to send him details of particular hotspots.

Budget Consultation Cost

**12) To the Leader of the Council (Councillor Ray Morgon)
From Councillor David Taylor**

Please provide the total cost of the urgent message from Cllr Ray Morgon as part of the 2023/2024 budget consultation delivered across Havering, broken down into design, print, and delivery costs, providing a breakdown of officer time, spread across communications, legal and HR, spent on this project.

Answer

The costs for the leaflet are as follows:
Design £165 + vat

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Print £3,280 + vat

Distribution £13,636,75 + vat

It is not possible break down any costs associated to officer time as it was delivered as part of normal business.

A supplementary question asked why page 17 of the consultation document stated that savings were over four years whilst page 11 stated that they were over one year and whether the Leader thought this was misleading. The Leader responded that he would investigate this and come back to Councillor Taylor in due course.

Fraud Detection

- 13) **To the Cabinet Member for Finance and Transformation (Councilor Chris Wilkins)**
From Councillor David Taylor

Can the Council outline the estimated cost of benefit fraud, to Havering Council, whilst also outlining the number of detections and successful prosecutions over the last 4 years?

Answer

The Council has not investigated Housing Benefit fraud since 2013 when the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) took over the responsibility and resource for the investigation of these cases. The DWP also investigate Universal Credit fraud. The information requested is not therefore within the Council's gift to provide.

(No supplementary question asked).

Homelessness Count and CHAIN Data

- 14) **To the Cabinet Member for Housing (Councillor Paul McGeary)**
From Councillor Joshua Chapman

Can the Council provide an update on homelessness count and CHAIN data?

Answer

The total number of referrals received from Chain was 52 referrals in December 2022.

Out of 52 referrals we had 31 duplicates from the public and Chain. Eight sites checked were during the month.

The most recent count took place on 15th December 2022 where 8 sites were visited. During the count, 3 people were identified as sleeping rough. All of the these three were offered support. Two were placed in a hotel and one refused to support.

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All clients placed in the accommodation are still in an accommodation, and referrals made to Housing Solutions for assessment to help with their on-going housing needs.

A supplementary question asked what new schemes the Administration had brought forward to deal with housing supply in the last 8 months, including both temporary and permanent accommodation, in addition to those already brought forward by the previous Administration. The Cabinet Member indicated he would respond separately to Councillor Chapman on this.

Petition Concerns

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

Please could you detail information on any concerns raised by the Council's legal department on running a petition regarding the local government finance settlement for Havering?

Answer

The Director of Law & Governance at One Source was consulted on the matter and confirmed that the action we took is fully in line with the Local Authority Code on Publicity.

It is not unusual that administrations seek to campaign on critical issues on behalf of residents. In 2001 the then Conservative administration ran a "Justice for Havering" campaign to raise awareness of the borough's unfair funding settlement. In more recent times the then Conservative administration, using Council resources, ran a petition on the Lower Thames Crossing.

A supplementary question asked if the Leader would commit to releasing the correspondence between the Leader, Chief Executive and Cabinet on this matter. The Leader responded that Councillor White was welcome to use the Freedom of Information Act to request this.