

FULL COUNCIL, Wednesday 12th July 2023

MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

Note: All questions for the Cabinet Member for Environment were responded to at the meeting by the Leader of the Council.

Litter in Thurloe Gardens

**1) To the Cabinet Member for Environment (Councillor Barry Mugglestone)
From Councillor Judith Holt**

Please could you advise what plans are in place to overhaul the bushes and planters in the stretch of the ring-road along Thurloe Gardens, Romford, which are currently full of bottles and weeds?

Answer

Our grounds maintenance teams are working with residents & community groups to bring these back to a good standard over the coming weeks. Going forward they will be regularly monitored to ensure they are kept litter free.

There are some areas which are providing protection to birds and these will be cut back once the nesting season is over in October.

A supplementary question asked if the Cabinet Member could meet with Councillor Holt to discuss the condition of this part of the ring road. The Leader of the Council confirmed that this would be possible.

Timescale for Members' Enquiries

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

Can the Cabinet Member please confirm what the service levels are for officers dealing with Members' enquiries and for dealing with Road/Pavements defects once they have been reported to officers?

Answer

When a report of a highways defect is received by the Council a Highways Inspector will inspect the area as soon as practicable and usually within 48 hours, of course where it is highlighted as an immediate danger the inspection will be prioritised. The Highways Inspector will raise a repair order for any works required in line with the Council's Highways Maintenance Plan (HMP).

As part of this approach the repair order will be assessed for severity and in line with a risk assessed approach. Orders can range from 2 hours to 28 days depending on the severity of the defect and priority associated with it. Highways Officers will then monitor both the Highways DSO and the Highways Contractor to ensure that all repairs are

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carried out to the required standards and within the required timescales. KPIs are in place with the Highways Contractor to ensure that these targets are met.

The query regarding service levels for responding to Members' Enquiries will be addressed under question 5.

A supplementary question asked if the Cabinet Member would investigate incidents where the 15-21 days target for officers to programme works was not taking place and also cases of there not being any follow up to Members who had reported issues. In response, the Leader of the Council agreed that the service to Members was not currently satisfactory and this would be prioritised.

Public Footpaths in St Alban's Ward

3) To the Cabinet Member for Environment (Councillor Barry Mugglestone) From Councillor Judith Holt

Public Footpath 157, which runs behind Park Lane and Douglas Road, Hornchurch, is regularly overgrown with foliage and poorly lit. Please could you advise what plans are in place to make the Public Footpaths 133, 156 and 157 in St. Alban's Ward cleaner and safer?

Answer

The areas mentioned are on a regular cleaning cycle of approximately every 3 weeks, operatives will also respond to complaints of poor standards.

Unfortunately, these areas do become obstructed by foliage from private properties, however our enforcement teams will engage with property owners and take action as necessary.

Council maintenance teams will be visiting over the coming weeks to ensure the areas are satisfactory.

There are currently no plans to increase the level of street lighting along these footpaths.

A supplementary question asked if the Cabinet Member would meet with Councillor Holt to discuss the condition of the footpaths. The Leader of the Council confirmed that this would be possible.

Kings Park Estate, Harold Wood

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

Can the Cabinet Member please confirm the date when all the remaining parts of the King's Park Estate become fully adopted by Havering Council and when will the subsequent parking scheme be implemented?

Answer

As part of the highways adoptions process the Council needs to be confident that the construction of any newly adopted highway is to sufficient standards and specification. Officers have concerns with aspects of the Kings Park Estate and thus would not want

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to take on the maintenance liability at cost to the Council. Officers have met with the developer to advise on these concerns and have asked them to address identified issues. Subsequently the developer has advised that works to address affected areas will commence in late July 2023. Officers will monitor this and after works are completed will inspect before approving and adopting. Officers hope the highway will be adopted in late summer 2023.

Work on implementing a Controlled Parking Zone in the Kings Park Estate will commence after the roads are adopted. Residents will be advised of the designed scheme and site notices will be placed on affected roads. The responses to the public consultation will be collated in autumn and a report outlining the responses received and recommending a further course of action will be prepared and presented to the Lead Member for Environment. It is expected that should there not be any major redesigns to the proposals, it is predicted that an agreed scheme can be implemented in the new year.

A supplementary question thanked the Leader of the Council for acknowledging the poor state of repair of parts of the estate and asked for the current position with the contractor making repairs. In response, the Leader of the Council stated that Members would be kept advised. The contractor was now at the point of doing the work and this would then be inspected by the Council.

Member Enquiries

5) To the Leader of the Council (Councillor Ray Morgon) From Councillor Christine Smith

Can the Administration please explain why officers' response times to members' inquiries is now regularly exceeding the corporate response target of 15 working days?

Answer

The current service level is 15 days. We are aware that on average the response time is around 21 days and that this is not acceptable. We have seen an increase in volume and a decrease in resources which has impacted the services ability to respond in a timely manner.

During our analysis of data for 2022/23 we have also identified a higher than expected level of duplicate member enquiries caused by multiple entry/contact points, this can impact the time it takes to correctly log the enquiry and channel the enquiry.

Our goal is that member's enquiries are channelled via the correct and consistent pathway to ensure that our residents and members do not experience avoidable administrative delays.

To tackle the issues faced above we;

- continue to introduce new online processes and tools for our residents and members to enable them to log and track enquiries
 - are integrating siloed complaints teams in to a centralised service
- are releasing a new integrated complaints policy with simplified guidance and reduced stages. This would be the subject of a report to Cabinet next week.

A supplementary question asked if the new system for raising queries would increase the risk of digital exclusion. In response, the Leader of the Council confirmed that the call centre would still be available as an alternative and that the new systems would be as simple and easy to use as possible.

Biodiversity Net Gain in Planning

6) To the Cabinet Member for Development & Regeneration (Councillor Graham Williamson)

From Councillor Jason Frost

From November 2023, planning permissions granted in England (with the exception of some small sites) will have to deliver a Biodiversity Diversity Net Gain (BNG) of at least 10%. Can the Administration confirm that the Havering Planning Service is sufficiently aware of its obligations with regard to the delivery of this new nationally mandated requirement?

Answer

The Council has established a cross department working group to address Biodiversity Net Gain and its implications for Havering. The working group will consider the actions needed to ensure different Council departments, including the Planning Service, are prepared for the regulations that will come into force in November 2023. Awareness training has already been provided to Development Management, Enforcement and Planning Policy officers, and further training is planned. The Council has also commissioned a Biodiversity Survey of the borough that will inform Local Plan policies on biodiversity net gain and the development of a Local Nature Recovery Plan.

A supplementary question asked if the new requirements would pose a risk to achieving housing targets. The Cabinet Member agreed that the new requirement was challenging and he was happy to update Members on progress in due course.

Supported Accommodation Providers for Looked After Young People

7) To the Cabinet Member for Children & Young People (Councillor Oscar Ford)
From Councillor Jason Frost

As of October, this year, all supported accommodation providers for looked after 16 and 17 year olds will be required to register with Ofsted and meet new quality standards. What actions is this Administration taking to ensure that all Borough-based providers adhere to these new nationally mandated requirements?

Answer

All children placed in semi-independent, supported accommodation are considered at our access to resources panel before a move to this type of accommodation, to ensure it is suitable.

The Joint Commissioning Unit (JCU) has been working with providers to advise them of the requirements and have been prepared them for the upcoming changes. We have written out to all commissioned providers about the new Ofsted requirements, a rag-rated list of providers detailing progress with registration is being maintained in the team. The team are contacting providers regularly to offer support and to understand issues.

An Ofsted briefing/workshop with providers is being planned for the end of July 2023, details will be shared with commissioned providers and will be made available on the LBH website. This will allow providers to ask direct questions to an Ofsted representative.

The JCU is working with other LA's in the sub-region to ensure that provider information/intelligence is shared. Providers will be informed that new placements will not be commissioned if they are not registered by the deadline.

The JCU is working with the transformation team to identify a Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS) to commission future placements via the DPS. The specification for services will be aligned to the Ofsted regulations and include the quality standards that the LA will use to monitor provision.

A supplementary question asked if the provider market had expressed any interest in the Havering market. The Cabinet Member responded that he had not heard anything direct on this but check the position.

Homelessness in the Borough

**8) To the Cabinet Member for Housing (Councillor Paul McGeary)
From Councillor Tim Ryan**

Could the Administration please outline what it is doing to combat the rise of homelessness across the Borough?

Answer

In common with the rest of the country, Havering has experienced a steep increase in the number of families becoming homes and requiring our support. The government policies have created this problem through:

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- Increasing interest rates causing private landlords to increase rents to cover their mortgage payments.
- Increasing taxes and regulation on private landlords forcing them to sell their properties; making the tenants homeless; and making it more difficult for the council to take on new private sector leases.
- The failure of the Home Office asylum dispersal programme adding more pressure on the Havering housing market.

The Council has responded to this crisis by implementing a number of key initiatives to try to overcome the acute and significant challenge of homelessness.

We are:

- partnering with a Real Estate Investment Trust to buy 150 properties in the open market to be let as private rented accommodation
- Using empty existing stock as hostel accommodation
- sourcing nightly charged self-contained emergency accommodation
- reducing the backlog of homeless applications
- building our new family welcome centre in Harold Hill
- Lobby for changes to LHA rates and a level playing field between private sector and TA subsidy
- Continuing with our HRA Acquisition programme; supported with grant from DLUHC
- Deliver on our regeneration schemes to deliver 3,500 new homes in the next 12 to 15 years
- Make sure we are getting our full number of nominations from housing associations
- Developing modular homes on un-used land earmarked for regeneration
- Develop a long-term sustainable strategy to discourage private sector properties being left empty.

Given it is the Conservative government that has created this crisis we look forward to the support of the Conservative opposition in helping us mitigate the impact on the people of Havering.

We have also successfully obtained £6m Government funding to purchase properties for Afghan and Ukrainian refugees. This will become additional Council housing in three years.

(No supplementary question asked).

Municipal Planting

**9) To the Cabinet Member for Environment (Councillor Barry Mugglestone)
From Councillor Ray Best**

Given a disappointing lack of floral display by the Council at the recent Coronation, will this Administration commit to returning the floral crowns to the various Borough communities this coming planting season?

Answer

Costs involved in preparing, installing & maintaining the crowns are approximately £66k per annum. These are reliant on sponsorship, however last year Havering only received £5K in sponsorship. Grounds Maintenance budget paid for the rest, which resulted in a large overspend. The Crowns & Carpet bed are not sustainable nor environmentally friendly as they are replaced each year and have high maintenance costs. As The King is a champion for environmental issues, we wanted to create something that would be sustainable & reduce the need for maintenance. Delphiniums are one of his favourite flowers, so these feature highly, along with other pollinators including Roses & sage into the beds. Langtons bed has a Magnolia x Brooklynensis Elizabeth in the centre as a tribute to our late Queen.

(No supplementary question asked).

Parking Permit Costs

**10) To the Cabinet Member for Environment Councillor Barry Mugglestone)
From Councillor David Taylor**

Has the Administration completed its investigation into the parking permit price rises? If so, when will they release the report's findings to the chamber and public for further scrutiny?

Answer

You will be aware that we have already set out what happened publicly in the media. I will repeat this here in response to your question.

The process of agreeing the new permit parking charges was reviewed. A paper showing the first permit parking increases for many years was included at the Overview and Scrutiny committee and at the Cabinet Meeting held on the following evening.

An Addendum was emailed to Cabinet Members on the day of their meeting, with higher increase charges to those presented to the Scrutiny Committee. This was received too late for Cabinet Members to have oversight of and comment on.

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If an Addendum is attached to a report, the normal practice is for this to be highlighted at the meeting. This however did not take place at the Cabinet Meeting. Officers have made the Leader and Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee aware and have apologised for this and are looking at the process to make sure that this does not happen again.

As an Administration we take the process of scrutiny very seriously and encourage our own Members to call in decisions if they have any concerns or require further information. It is therefore disappointing that on this occasion, scrutiny did not have that opportunity to discuss the Addendum that was published late on the following day.

As I said before, we are sorry for this error and the stress and inconvenience this may have caused residents. You will know that the outcome of this is that officers were requested to set parking permit charges to the agreed Overview and Scrutiny Board figures and any resident that has already paid the higher charge, will be reimbursed the difference. I understand all people who paid the higher amount received an incorrect refund.

A supplementary question asked if there had been any failings by members of the Cabinet. In response, the Leader of the Council accepted that the late addendum to the report had not been picked up in time to be specifically considered at the Cabinet meeting.

Street Cleaning in Romford Town Centre

11) To the Cabinet Member for Environment (Councillor Barry Mugglestone) From Councillor Nisha Patel

The new street cleaning arrangements have Romford town centre cleaners finishing at 6pm. With the market still packing down at this time, and large amounts of litter being present until 9pm on a regular basis, will the Administration commit to a later finish for town centre cleaning?

Answer

The street cleansing department is currently reviewing operations to ensure that the market areas are cleaned to a good standard following market operations. Cleaning can take place up to 7.30pm to support the activity around the market which closes at 4.30pm during the week and 5pm on Saturdays, thereby providing time to clear away any debris.

The Market Management Team are working with stallholders to ensure they are taking responsibility for their pitches and control litter and waste that may be generated.

The Council's new enforcement team can issue fines for littering which will also include the market area.

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A supplementary question asked if the Cabinet Member would commit to later cleaning of the market on market days. The Leader of the Council responded that he was open to possible adjustments if the required cleaning was not completed by 7.30 pm.

IBIS Hotel

**12) To the Cabinet Member for Environment (Councillor Barry Mugglestone)
From Councillor Keith Prince**

Will the council require the IBIS Styles to register as an HMO, as it is being used for long term accommodation?

Answer

To date the Private Sector Housing team has not been able to obtain sufficient evidence that the hotel is being used in a way that would require it to be licensed as a house of multiple accommodation. The details provided to the team indicate that the hotel is being used as temporary accommodation for asylum seekers with occupants of a highly transient nature. This means the provisions of the Immigration and Asylum Act apply. Officers will continue to monitor the use of the hotel.

A supplementary question thanked the Leader of the Council for his assurance and asked if he would continue to monitor the situation. The Leader confirmed that London Councils was also monitoring the situation.

Parking App

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

How many parking spaces will become pay-by-app only, in Havering, under current plans?

Answer

The Council has a total of 120 pay and display parking locations (both on and off street).

Members will be well aware that we have old and antiquated stock of pay and display ticket machines that routinely go out of service. This Administration is taking steps to replace these machines and new machines will be installed in the autumn.

Many customers now prefer to pay by cashless methods and machines that accept coins have very high maintenance costs. The Council is therefore taking advantage of the latest technology to provide the greatest range of choice to customers. New ticket machines accepting cashless payments will be in place in all of our busiest and most popular sites. Those who want to pay by cash can use one of many local PayPoint services in shop . Phone and app payments will continue to be offered.

Accordingly 75 locations will be Pay by Phone / app / PayPoint only and all these locations will display the phone number to book a parking session.

However, these locations will have different nearby parking places, such as a car park with a ticket machine, which will accept other forms of payment.

A supplementary question asked if the Cabinet Member would meet with Councillor Persaud to discuss the position further. The Leader of the confirmed that this would be possible.

Romford Car Parks

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

The recent consultation, on selling Romford's car parks, went below the radar. There was no public announcement, no letters to residents and businesses, and no email to ward councillors. The consultation was only published as a 'legal notice' in the Romford Recorder.

Given this Administration's claim to wanting to work with Ward Councillors and to engage the public, will the administration commit to a more visible, public, consultation before Cabinet vote on the matter?

Answer

To offer some clarification, the recent consultation relating to car parks was about stopping their use for parking purposes. It was not about selling them. The consultation approach for this is a statutory process, which the Council complied with in full, to amend the relevant Traffic Management Order which includes a legal notice in the local press (Romford Recorder – 10th March 2023) and formal notices placed at each site.

Surveys have also been conducted to look at the potential impact and likely displacement arising from the closure of each car park. This information is due to be made available to Cabinet prior to any final decision being made on closure.

If, at a future date, a proposal comes forward to redevelop the site, local residents and businesses will be consulted in accordance with the separate, statutory process associated with any planning application. Ward councillors will be advised in advance of any planning application being submitted.

A supplementary question asked if the Leader would re-run the consultation on stopping the use of car parks for parking purposes. The Leader responded that he would need to discuss this with the Monitoring Officer and come back to Councillor Taylor.

Leaseholders Consultation

15) To the Cabinet Member for Housing (Councillor Paul McGeary) From Councillor Dilip Patel

Havering Council wrote to Leaseholders on 15th June, inviting them to a new Leaseholder Forum. Letters have been landing as late as 23rd June, by which time the event was already fully booked

Will the Council commit to opening up further dates, to ensure as many residents have a chance to contribute as possible?

Answers

The response for the forum has been much higher than we expected and we will be looking at different ways to hold the forum in the future.

In acknowledgment of the demand we have created an option for homeowners to attend the forum virtually. Leaseholders should contact the resident engagement team for details of how to attend.

Longer term, we are working towards implementing our Resident Engagement Strategy.

The strategy places an emphasis on both formal and informal methods for a Resident to engage and help shape services. We will concentrate our engagement towards more informal methods which reflect how our resident want to engage and maximises opportunities for a wider group of residents to be involved.

This includes more transactional surveys for our services to give immediate feedback, and will look at more subject specific engagement.

We are piloting the use of technology to engage residents around 'Resident Safety', specifically in high rise buildings and opening up more avenues for residents to engage such as our new repairs sub-committee, and are developing methods to deliver this in ways which better fit into residents daily life and not requiring people to be there in person.

A new range of tenant satisfaction measures (TSMs) is being introduced by the Regulator of Social Housing, which includes a number of tenant perception measures, and we will be using the feedback from these, benchmarked against our peer organisations, to shape our engagement for the future.

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A supplementary question asked if the Cabinet Member would ensure that, for future leaseholder forum meetings, letters were sent at least two weeks prior to the event. The Cabinet Member responded that he would speak to officers and arrange this.