



MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

Royal Jubilee Court

1) To the Cabinet Member for Climate Change & Housing Need (Councillor Keith Darvill)

From Councillor Michael White

Can the Cabinet Member for Housing please confirm why the decision to reopen Royal Jubilee Court had the option to call-in waived, meaning that there is reduced scrutiny on a spend of over £500000 of taxpayer's money?

Answer

Opposition members will be aware of the financial crisis facing the council and the impact the costs of providing bed and breakfast accommodation for homeless families has in that crisis. This has meant young children living in one room with their parents, with no cooking facilities. I hope you will agree that that is unacceptable.

Officers have moved quickly to bring Royal Jubilee Court back in use to accommodate homeless families and save the council money. The funds used to bring the building back into use are from the Housing Revenue Account, tenants money, and therefore not tax payers money. The rental income from the residents will also go the HRA. The substantial savings on hotel costs will however benefit the Councils general fund.

Ward councillors were also invited to a meeting on 3rd August 2023 however none of them turned up. A delay in making the decision would have cost the council in the region of £265,000.

Finally, I hope you agree, that we should do the best we can for our homeless families from the borough as this is about people too.

A supplementary question asked if the Cabinet Member felt that the way in which the matter was handled had met the Council's open and transparent standards. The Cabinet Member felt that this was the case and that it would have been a dereliction of duty not to take the decision. The decision helped both homeless families and the Council's finances and was able to be scrutinised going forward.

Signage relating to ULEZ

2) To the Cabinet Member for Environment (Councillor Barry Mugglestone) From Councillor Darren Wise

At the ULEZ extraordinary council meeting in August, a motion was passed which stated that 'We will remove all illegal signage on Havering Council property and land.'

Would the Cabinet Member please define what illegal signage means in this instance?

Answer

I thank Councillor Wise for his question.

In this instance illegal would mean any sign that is installed in connection with the scheme that is not done so under statutory powers or specific Council agreement.

To date, no illegal signs have been identified or removed.

A supplementary question asked if the ULEZ number plate recognition cameras were in breach of the law and should be removed. The Cabinet Member responded that this was not relevant to the issue of ULEZ signage.

Asset Disposal

3) To the Cabinet Member for Housing & Property (Councillor Paul McGeary) From Councillor David Taylor

Could the Cabinet Member for Housing & Property please provide an update on the sale of assets, such as the disposal of Como St, Angel Way and Slaney Road car parks?

Answer

The Cabinet decisions in February and August declared a number of sites surplus to the Council's requirement. Completed sales to date have generated capital receipts of £7.6m while other sites in the pipeline are either being marketed or being prepared for marketing.

With respect to the car parks, officers have been preparing the sites for appropriation for planning purposes to facilitate development in line with the Cabinet approval. Notices have been published in the Romford Recorder this month to advertise the Council's intention to appropriate Como St, Angel Way, Keswick Avenue and Dorrington Gardens car parks. Cabinet decided not to include Slaney Way for appropriation until completion of a review with stakeholders of the options for retaining part of the site. Officers are currently exploring these options.

The intention is to sell those car park sites approved for disposal to the Council's wholly owned development company, Mercury Land Holdings. Pre-application discussions are

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currently in progress with Planning officers for each of the 4 car park sites as a pre-cursor to formal planning applications being submitted.

A supplementary question asked if the Cabinet Member would meet with Councillor Taylor and local residents to discuss the process in more detail. The Cabinet Member indicated he was happy to do this.

Council's Financial Position

4) To the Leader of the Council (Councillor Ray Morgon) From Councillor Martin Goode

With the recent announcements in the local press that Havering Council, could issue a section 114 notice, would the Leader please explain what cutbacks are being planned on council services to avoid this notice being issued?

Answer

As a Council with low unit costs for its services it is very difficult to find the savings to balance the budget. A report to November Cabinet set out £11.9m of savings and efficiency proposals which will now be consulted on before final decisions are taken early next year. These proposals include increases in Car Parking charges, reducing the number of libraries and further pilots on re-ablement aimed at enabling more people to return home following discharge from hospital.

We do not want to reduce any public facing services but the failure of central government to recognise the demographic pressures we are facing have left us no choice but to propose these savings in order to close the budget gap.

We have been lobbying the Government, which includes meetings with Ministers and officers. So far they have not offered any solutions other than a Capitalisation order, but we will continue talking to them to see if we can agree a better outcome. Finally, it is important to note we are not the only council now in this position and the list is growing, and we have been working with the LGA and London Councils to try and put more collective pressure on the Government.

A supplementary question asked if the Leader of the Council would agree that any provisions for cutbacks or savings must be achievable. The Leader of the Council responded that savings proposals would continue to be reviewed until the point of the Council Tax setting meeting next year.

School Streets Phase 3

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

Could the Cabinet Member for the Environment please outline the administration's current, future, plans for the school streets scheme on completion of Phase 3?

Answer

Seven School Streets were implemented as part of Phase 2 of the School Streets programme. These have been in place since September 2022 on an experimental basis. Officers are currently using the results of a recent consultation exercise to examine whether these School Streets should become permanent, and an Executive Decision will be progressed in due course. Three School Streets were implemented as part of Phase 3 of the programme in October 2023, again under an experimental Traffic Order. A decision on whether or not these should be made permanent will be made in the next 18 months.

Council Officers are currently working with Sustrans to examine the success of the first two phases of the programme. The findings will be presented in a Report that will go before the Places Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Committee next year. The report will also make recommendations regarding the school streets programme going forward.

At the same time, Officers are developing a selection criteria for Phase 4 of the programme and investigating what schools could be included. Consultation with stakeholders will take place with any schools that are progressed.

A supplementary question asked what had been the cost of rolling out the school streets scheme so far. The Cabinet Member responded that he would check this, including the period covered by the previous Administration and confirm these figures.

Members' Enquiries

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

Could the Leader of the Council please confirm why the Administration's well publicised policy of restructuring the organisation of the Authority has led to a significant increase in the time it takes officers to respond to Members' queries?

Answer

The restructure programmes relevant to the administration of Member enquires are in the final stages of delivery and will significantly increase the collective resources available to oversee Member enquiries, complaints and information requests.

We now have a central complaints service and system in place where all activity is logged, distributed and monitored for response and/or action. In parallel to this we have launched new tools via our Dynamic 365 platform that enable residents to log

requests direct into the system therefore removing unnecessary manual referrals and improving response times by responding direct to the requestor.

As these new systems come online, we can monitor response times with greater accuracy and scrutiny. To support us in our transition to these systems we have allocated additional resources especially in Housing and Neighbourhoods where we see our highest levels of Member enquiries.

In order to further reduce time spent on manual referrals and improve response time further we ask and invite all Council members to use the online tools in order to initiate action and response.

A supplementary question asked if Members could still phone staff during the interim period and if responses to Members would be quicker in the future. The Leader of the Council replied that response times would be quicker under the new operating model but that Members would also be expected to use the on-line tools when reporting issues.

Research Programme for Social Care

7) To the Cabinet Member for Adults & Wellbeing (Councillor Gillian Ford) From Councillor Jason Frost

Could the Cabinet Member for Health please state whether or not Havering will put itself forward to participate in the National Institute for Health and Care Research's new Research Programme for Social Care initiative?

Answer

Officers in social care welcome the opportunity to undertake research at points in time, and for example through our Research Governance Framework consider proposals from external bodies such as universities or our own staff. The RGF offers rigour to examining proposals for their efficacy and to ensure data protection issues are carefully considered.

The National Institute for Health & Care Research looks very interesting, and we note an application deadline of 17th January 2024. Another call for applications is anticipated in mid 2024 for projects to start no earlier than 1st April 2025. Officers are not proposing to make an application by the January deadline, and depending on capacity and resources, will consider the mid 2024 application deadline in due course. It is noted that an application can include applying for funding for additional resources, but it is also important to consider the impact on staff time of participating in such research at a time when our staff resources are stretched. It is inevitable that staffing resources do get pulled into research projects.

We are already working with the London School of Economics (LSE) participating in a longitudinal study of the impacts on residents of 'discharge to assess' hospital which as Cllr Frost knows is the government policy of long term assessments for

inpatients being undertaken out of the acute hospital setting. We remain concerned about the numbers of residents who are discharged to care home settings (and the cost) as a result of this policy, so our key focus in the coming months will be working with LSE.

A supplementary question asked if notification could be given of any applications by the Council under this programme. The Cabinet Member indicated this would be possible.

Flood Management in the Borough

8) To the Cabinet Member for Environment Councillor Barry Mugglestone) From Councillor Viddy Persaud

Could the Cabinet Member for the Environment please outline what the Council's plans are for the control and management of flooding in the Borough?

Answer

The Flood Management Act 2010 sets out legal duties on the Council and designates the Council as a Lead Local Flood Authority. Key functions of a LLFA are:

- Publish a local flood risk management strategy
- Coordinate activity with other local bodies and communities
- Carry out works to manage local flood risks
- Maintain a register of assets
- Investigate significant local flooding incidents and publish results
- Regulate ordinary watercourses
- Be a statutory consultee role for surface water drainage on major developments
- Contribute to emergency planning and recovery for flooding.

The Council is currently working with consultants to develop a Local Flood Risk Management Strategy and Surface Water Management Plan, which are due to be published in Autumn 2024.

In the meantime, the Council discharges its duties effectively and manages flood risk. This work has been evidenced by strategic actions such as commissioning studies following high surface water events, reviewing drainage in relation to planning applications and assessing potential watercourse issues. There are ongoing operational activities, such as cleansing gullies on the road network and removing obstructions from rivers and culverts.

Flood management is complex as it involves several agencies and stakeholders. The Council only has responsibility for certain elements of the network such as minor watercourses, gullies and gulley leads into sewers. Beyond this the responsibilities lie with other asset owners such as the Environment Agency, Thames Water and private river bank or water course owners. The Council do need to oversee issues however and co-ordinate management.

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In most cases funding will need to be sought externally to address strategic issues. The Council will work with the Environment Agency to bid for this once the plans are in place.

A supplementary question asked what could be done to improve the position with flooding in underpasses in central Romford. The Cabinet Member replied that he had asked officers to check these areas and would pass the Councillor's concerns onto officers.

Visitor Parking Permits

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

Will the Administration consider, in emergency situations, allowing residents to apply for more than the current annual maximum of 250 visitors parking permits

Answer

Yes, in exceptional circumstances. I can also confirm that the Council already offer an increased provision of visitor permits to residents with other extenuating circumstances.

The Council offer a range of permits to assist residents and businesses. In instances where the resident is undergoing building works, there is a permit for tradespeople to apply for, allowing parking within the residential parking bay. This ensures residents do not need to use their visitor permit allocation. Where a resident is receiving care at home, we provide the Health & Homecare permit (for medical professionals) or the Domestic Carer permit (for those receiving care from relatives/friends).

A supplementary question thanked the Cabinet Member for improving the position in Carlisle Road and asked if the Cabinet Member would confirm in writing that the 250 permit limit could be exceeded in emergencies. The Cabinet Member confirmed that there were plans in place to support residents in these circumstances.

Municipal Planting

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

As the Administration has now chosen to withdraw funding for the maintenance of the Borough's highway planters, would they not agree that the current approach to procurement of plants and bulbs is leading to excessive costs which could be better controlled through more extensive market engagement; including through direct negotiation with in-Borough suppliers?

Answer

The Council obtains a minimum of three quotes for bulbs and plant orders, regularly checking the market for competitive prices.

The Council also assesses the stock quality and whether there are new suppliers that may offer better value.

To contribute towards the Council's ongoing savings, changes have been made to further reduce costs by removing all seasonal bedding from planters and beds across the borough, replacing this with permanent sustainable planting.

The Council is actively working with community groups to take on maintenance of highway planters to ensure they still have amenity value but at reduced cost to the Council.

The Council is actively seeking sponsorship with local businesses to contribute towards maintenance of some of the larger flower beds in the borough.

A supplementary question asked if it was the Council's responsibility to maintain its own planters. The Cabinet Member responded that the Council's finances meant that community groups were being asked to assist with this.

Repairs to Roundabout, London Road

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

The brickwork at the roundabout near to Allens of Romford was damaged nearly a year ago, and despite repeated reassurances from officers, the Cabinet Member and the responsible Director, repairs remain outstanding. Can the Cabinet Member for the Environment please provide a lead time to the completion of this work?

Answer

Following a road traffic collision extensive damage was incurred to the roundabout and associated infrastructure. Emergency repairs were completed immediately to both recover the vehicle, tidy up the area, make the area safe and reinstate lighting.

Design and procurement of the permanent repair is now complete and the work is scheduled to be completed by the end of November 2023.

A supplementary question asked for confirmation that the work would be completed by the end of November. The Cabinet Member replied that he understood the work had now been completed but would check later this week.

Roadworks in the Borough

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

What can the Administration do about the numerous road works around the Borough which are causing hold-ups when no work appears to be taking place?

Answer

The Council has legal duties to coordinate road works on the highway network. This function is discharged by the Streetworks team. Every year over 30,000 individual works sites are

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established on the borough's roads related to utility companies, third parties and the Council's own works.

The coordinating function involves the receiving and issuing of permits to work to minimise disruption and maximise network safety. The team also monitors breaches of street works procedures and issues Fixed Penalty Notices for contraventions.

Whilst the Council must coordinate work it has no powers to prevent or delay works being undertaken by statutory undertakers through their own legal powers. It is not possible to effectively coordinate emergency works and this can sometimes lead to clashes.

The Council also carries out necessary traffic liaison with our statutory bodies including London Buses and TfL to agree work and any other works programmed by the utilities affecting our borough.

With regard to works sites not being staffed this could be to do with materials (for example concrete) curing or a delay while a specialist crew or bespoke material arrives. Where these are observed the Council will:

1. Take note of the unmanned or non-operational sites – permit numbers/locations/date/time sites were visited.
2. Contact the work promoter and challenge the current status
3. Discuss reasons and usually refuse extension requests
4. Continue to monitor the site and record findings
5. Where possible make a charge against the promoter under Section 74 of the relevant regulations (over running)

A supplementary question asked if sites where no work was taking place could be removed temporarily. The Cabinet Member replied that he would like Members to make him aware of sites of this type where no work appeared to be taking place.

Issue of Parking Charge Notices

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

Could the Cabinet Member for Environment please provide how many PCNs were issued for the last four quarters compared to the previous four quarters?

Answer

In the year to October 2023 the Council issued 188,361 Penalty Charge Notices of all types of contraventions (parking, bus lane, moving traffic). In the year to October 2022 the Council issued 138,901 PCNs.

A detailed breakdown, per quarter, is included in the following table and can be issued to Cllr Patel if needed (and other elected members) after the meeting.

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Quarter	Period	Issuance	Period	Issuance
1	Aug - Oct 23	46,440	Aug - Oct 22	42,315
2	May - Jul 23	58,550	May - Jul 22	36,825
3	Feb - Apr 23	41,705	Feb - Apr 22	31,638
4	Nov 22 - Jan 23	41,666	Nov 21 - Jan 22	28,123
Total		188,361		138,901

A supplementary question asked how many appeals against Penalty Charge Notices had been made in the last four quarters. The Cabinet Member responded that he would provide these figures after the meeting.

Proposed Havering Tramway

**14) To the Leader of the Council (Councillor Ray Morgon)
From Councillor Keith Prince**

Could the Leader of the Council please outline the costs of the feasibility study for the proposed Havering Tramway?

Answer

Thank you for your question, Councillor Prince.

To date, almost £200k has been spent on feasibility work looking at a new north to south public transport link for the borough.

The high-level work carried out to date, looking at potential route options, high level costs, and passenger demand and housing growth was funded by Transport for London through the Local Implementation Plan programme. This work was entirely carried out under the previous Conservative led administration.

Whilst the Council is in a challenging environment at present, improving north-south connectivity in Havering is a key priority for my administration, and is a key component of the Council's infrastructure vision that was launched at the Palace of Westminster in May.

The Council is still at a very early stage of looking at the potential for a new public transport link connecting Romford, Rainham and beyond and it is not yet identified if the link will be provided by a tramway, light rail, bus or some other method of transport.

Officers are in the process of preparing a paper for my administration to consider, on the next phase of the study which will include costs for further work. A decision will then be taken on whether to progress the work to the next stage of feasibility.

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A supplementary question asked if the Leader agreed that any scheme must be affordable. The Leader responded that any scheme had to be the right option and affordable.

Litter Enforcement

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

With 916 out of 1850 litter enforcement fines outstanding, and just 10 of those being prepared for court action, can the Cabinet Member confirm what steps the council and their contractors are taking to secure payment of the remaining 906 fines?

Answer

Fixed Penalty Notices issued for breaches of environmental legislation (such as littering) are criminal matters.

For FPNs that remain unpaid, final reminder letters are sent to all alleged offenders. This has happened in every case.

If there is no reply to those letters, case files are created and lodged with the local Magistrates Court in preparation for a **Single Justice Procedure** (SJP) Hearing.

So far, in addition to the final warning letters, 40 case files have been prepared via the SJP process.

Unpaid FPNs cannot be followed up as a 'debt' by the Council in the same way that unpaid PCNs or other invoices are. Having committed an offence, we expect those fined to pay the FPN fine without delay.

A supplementary question asked if the Cabinet Member felt that the low number of cases being prepared gave the wrong signal on littering. The Cabinet Member responded that he did not agree and that it was intended to chase every unpaid Fixed Penalty Notice.