

MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

Subways on Romford Ring Road

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

Could the Cabinet Member confirm if there is an agreed start date, or expected start window, for the Liveable Streets scheme on Romford Ring Road i.e. the in-filling of the subways

Answer

The original Liveable Neighbourhoods Scheme comprised improvements to pedestrian and cycle accessibility at the three roundabouts on the western side of the ring-road:

- Oldchurch Road roundabout
- London Road roundabout
- North Street roundabout.

TfL withdrew funding from the Liveable Neighbourhoods Scheme on Romford Ring Road in 2023 due to their financial position after Covid. Given this the scheme, as originally set out, cannot be started.

That said, the Council is proposing improvements to North Street roundabout, that have been funded by CIL, S106 and external UKSPF grant. These proposed improvements include the infilling of subways at North Street Roundabout (i.e. those linking North Street to St Edwards Way) and the creation of surface level crossings, which were originally included in the Liveable Neighbourhoods Scheme.

The current indicative programme for North Street Roundabout shows construction work provisionally starting towards the end of 2026. This date is however, dependent on TfL and other factors over which the Council has no direct control.

It is also hoped, in time, to deliver improvements to pedestrian accessibility at Oldchurch Road roundabout as part of the Bridge Close regeneration proposals.

There are, as yet, no revised proposals for changes to the London Road roundabout following withdrawal of TfL funding.

The Council is continuing to actively seek funding for the rest of the construction work that was originally proposed in the Liveable Neighbourhoods Scheme. In particular, S106 contributions are being sought from all developments in the vicinity of the Ring Road as they come forward.

A supplementary question asked, given that work would not be starting until late 2026, how the Administration planned to keep subways safe and clean. The Cabinet Member responded that £2.99m had been spent on improving CCTV in the borough. Police had reviewed 300 hours of CCTV footage in response to a recent incident and the position with CCTV in the borough would continue to be monitored.

Use of Bed & Breakfast Accommodation

2) To the Leader of the Cabinet Member for Climate Change & Housing Need (Councillor Natasha Summers) From Councillor Keith Darvill

Will the Cabinet Member for Housing Need provide details of the Council's Bed & Breakfast Elimination Plan and the progress made in implementing it?

Answer

The objective of the 2024/25 B&B Elimination Plan is to eliminate the use of hotels to accommodate homeless families and, in particular, set out plans of how we will meet our statutory duty not to accommodate families with children in hotels for more than six weeks. We have made good progress on delivering these objectives with the number of families in hotels reducing in the last year from 31 to 22 now and the number who have been in hotels for more than six weeks is now just 6. We have done this by:

- Initiatives such as the Pay to Stay scheme, Find Your Own (FYO) programme, and Private Rented Sector (PRS) placements have been instrumental in this success.
- Making Direct Nominations of families in temporary accommodation to Housing Association stock
- Delivering 51 properties for homeless families through our buyback scheme
- We are well on the way delivery of 150 properties through the Chalkhill property acquisition scheme.

Coming up are:

- Construction of 18 new Modular Housing for Homeless Families
- Completion of the Family Welcome Centre development

Delivery of new schemes such as the Chesham and Eastgate Houses.

A supplementary question asked if early intervention had been considered to avoid the need for temporary accommodation. The Cabinet Member replied that this had been looked at.

Licensing conditions, as set out for the 'The Array' Bar and Restaurant, Shepherd's Hill, Harold Wood.

**3) To the Cabinet Member for Environment (Councillor Barry Mugglestone)
From Councillor Brian Eagling**

Can the Cabinet Member please confirm, what oversight and follow up action is taking place for adherence to the licencing conditions that were set out for 'The Array' Bar and Restaurant, following its licence review.

Answer

Initial visits with the business were carried out following the review of the licence to ensure all licensing conditions were being met. The business was given advice on two issues, namely a telephone number and email address being on the business website for residents to access and advice on complaint and incident record keeping.

Following on from a change of owner, there has been further communication and visits to confirm that the licensing conditions are being met. Advice was given on the published contact information for residents on the web site. Information displayed online was corrected. All licensing conditions are now being met.

The last visit to the business was on 27th June 2025.

A supplementary question asked if the Cabinet Member was willing to meet with Councillor Eagling to discuss whether licensing conditions at the premises were being followed. The Cabinet Member responded that he had not had any concerns raised with him since the review of the premises' licence in 2022. He was however happy to meet with Councillor Eagling to discuss the matter.

Cabinet Members and Scrutiny
**4) To the Leader of the Council (Councillor Ray Morgon)
From Councillor Phil Ruck**

Scrutiny represents a clear way, apart from the ballot box, of holding the Administration of a Council to account. Does the Leader of the Council agree with this and if so, can the Leader explain the absence of Cabinet portfolio holders or their deputies at scrutiny meetings and what will he do to correct this oversight?

Answer

I wholeheartedly agree, and have been very clear of my unwavering support for Scrutiny.

I am aware that certain Cabinet Members and officers did not attend a recent scrutiny meeting due to scheduling issues or some confusion as to the nature of such matters to be discussed at the scrutiny meeting. I am not aware that this is a recurring issue.

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Cllr Ruck may not be aware but the Monitoring Officer issued a guidance note last week to all Cabinet Members, the Chairs and Vice Chairs of all the scrutiny committees and ELT. This reiterates the constitutional provisions that apply to ensuring proper attendance at scrutiny committee. A copy of that note can be provided to any member who wishes to see it. It covers the responsibilities of the Chair and the relevant member or officer who has been asked to attend.

You will also remember that at May's Cabinet I received a report from the Chair and Deputy Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Board that asked Cabinet to accept seven recommendations to aid effective scrutiny. Cabinet agreed five of them. As a result of that I have asked the Council's Statutory Scrutiny Officer to develop a working protocol for Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny Board to further strengthen scrutiny practices.

(No supplementary question).

Unauthorised Encampments in Parks

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

What plans does the Council have to renew the legal restrictions which had been in place to stop Gypsy and Traveller groups from entering the Borough's parks and open spaces illegally?

Answer

The Council currently benefits from an Injunction that covers all unauthorised encampments, not just those consisting of Gypsies and Travellers. The Injunction expires on 19 October 2025.

An Injunction is not the only legal remedy for dealing with unauthorised encampments, but it is recognised that it has been effective during the period it has been in place.

Once the options have been reviewed and an estimate of costs is available, a business case will be put forward and a decision made on whether renewal will be progressed.

A supplementary question asked what alternative steps could be taken to protect parks and open spaces. The Cabinet Member replied that London Borough of Redbridge did not have a similar injunction but had not seen a rise in encampments. Other options included using Police powers under s 61 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act or s 87 and 88 of the same legislation.

Support for Residents on Low Incomes

**6) To the Cabinet Member for Finance (Councillor Chris Wilkins)
From Councillor Jane Keane**

What plans does the Cabinet Member for Finance have in place to support residents with low incomes to support the uptake of Pensions Credit, Attendance Allowance and Emergency Household Funds, through in person support sessions in community places?

Answer

We are continuing to use the Household Support Fund (HSF) to help us deliver the Council's Poverty Reduction strategy. This year the HSF has funded a dedicated Benefits advisor in the CAB; two new Local area Coordinators (LACs); a Community Hub coordinator, who will bring together Council and community led hubs to deliver help more strategically; and the Food Alliance to bring discounted food to communities using existing community assets. Finally, the HSF is being used to fund events around the borough in collaboration with the Council and the NHS to deliver help and support in communities.

This work is all underpinned by a marketing campaign (funded by the HSF) which aims to be preventative by targeting help and support to people before they get into crisis.

This work is delivered under the Council's Poverty Reduction Strategy.

A supplementary question asked what more could be done to support residents on low incomes. The Cabinet Member responded that he would discuss this with officers and respond to Councillor Keane.

Highway Tree Maintenance in Harold Wood

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

Can the Cabinet member please confirm when this Council will be attending to The overgrown trees within the Harold Wood Ward, which are now in desperate need of a prune and cut back, including the trimming of the feathering for a number of trees, which are causing obstructions to the public walkways

Answer

The tree 'feathering' work is managed proactively on an annual cycle. Our contractors are currently working through the trees across the borough.

Tree pruning is also managed on an annual cycle. The trees are due to be inspected this year. However, now the member has highlighted this specific issue - we can arrange an ad-hoc inspection and make pruning recommendations.

We encourage residents to report concerns or requests for tree maintenance through the council's website so they can be investigated accordingly.

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A supplementary question asked for confirmation of when trees in Harold Wood would be pruned as some residents had been waiting over a year for this. The Cabinet Member responded that, if residents could prove damage to trees, the Council could carry out root repairs. Members should follow the standard process for reporting these types of issues on behalf of residents.

Collection of Council Tax

**8) To the Leader of the Council (Councillor Ray Morgon)
From Councillor Nisha Patel**

Would the Leader of the Council please provide a detailed explanation as to why the Council collected the Council Tax (due on 1st April) earlier than its scheduled payment date?

Answer

The Council collected the first direct debit for Council Tax from some accounts on the 31st March instead of 1st April 2025 due to an administrative error

As soon as the Council became aware of the error on a message was placed on the Councils website to inform residents together with a phone number to contact if needed.

We also communicated this widely across our social media and email channels – signposting residents to further help and advice.

We once again apologise for this error which we understand must have caused unnecessary distress to a number of residents.

(No supplementary question).

Abandoned Shopping Trolleys

**9) To the Cabinet Member for Environment (Councillor Barry Mugglestone)
From Councillor Matthew Stanton**

Following the motion adopted by Council on 15th January 2025 relating to abandoned shopping trolleys, what consideration and/or progress has the Administration made in implementing measures to deal with abandoned trolleys given the powers provided by the Environment Protection Act 1990?

Answer

The Powers conferred under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 (EPA 1990) were explored and found not to give the Council any new or additional powers than already provided by under the ASB Crime and Policing Act 2014 which has already been used to address the issue.

Implementing the EPA powers would also incur new obligations that would require additional funding, the sourcing of a storage facility and the necessity of issuing additional notices and administering other activity to coordinate the return of the seized trollies.

Instead, it has been agreed that damaged and homeless trollies will be collected and disposed of as 'waste' under existing arrangements without the need to implement new legislation and processes. Homeless trollies will be collected under existing processes (via reporting on the Trolleywise App, via existing shop routines with help from local volunteers).

A supplementary question asked if the Cabinet Member would encourage the service provider to promptly collect abandoned trollies. The Cabinet Member responded that, if details of non-collected trollies and their locations could be supplied, he could discuss this with the relevant officers.

Tree Cutting in the Borough

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

Would the Cabinet Member for Environment explain why the activity of cutting back 'feathering' is not proactively attended to ahead of the late spring-summer season?

Answer

The tree 'feathering' work is managed proactively on an annual cycle. Our contractors are currently working through trees across the borough.

The work cannot begin any earlier, as the growth on some of the trees would not be of an issue at this stage and would mean a further visit a month or two later. This would not be cost effective.

The vigorous growth, due to environmental factors such as the recent weather we have been experiencing has no doubt made those trees still awaiting work even more noticeable.

We encourage residents to report concerns or requests for tree maintenance through the council's website so they can be investigated accordingly.

A supplementary question asked if priority should be given on safety grounds to the feathering of trees near schools. The Cabinet Member confirmed that current priority areas were those where there had been the most complaints of tree feathering being needed. He was happy to look at school sites requiring tree feathering having priority for next year.

Commercial Activities Unit

11) To the Cabinet Member for Finance (Councillor Chris Wilkins)

From Councillor Trevor McKeever

How much revenue has the Commercial Activities Unit generated and what proposals are being developed to increase the revenue received by the Council?

Answer

The Council published its Commercial Strategy in September 2024, which provides a corporate direction for the delivery of commercial activities across the Council.

In 2024/25, the Council achieved income of £84.4m related to fees and charges, of which £28m related to discretionary services, including on/off street parking, permits, green waste, commercial income, registration, births deaths and marriages, highways, grounds maintenance and other income.

Some of the key achievements since the launch of the strategy include;

- Established Strategic and Operational Commercial Boards
- Identified resource for grants, bidding, & sponsorship opportunities.
- Integrated commercial innovation into STAR Awards
- Created a forum for sharing ideas relating to commercial activities.

Key priorities for the next year include;

- Embedding 'commercial opportunities' with existing decision-making processes.
- Identify training and development opportunities for staff on commercial awareness and customer service.
- Increase awareness across the borough about the range of services offered by the Council.
- Implement risk escalation and management process.
- Develop a 'prospectus' of services for potential new customers.

A supplementary question asked if the Cabinet Member would confirm if he felt the Council would get value for money from the Joint Venture process and if he could report back in 3 months on the financial gain received. The Cabinet Member felt that the Joint Ventures were a key opportunity to try to secure better value for money for the Council. He was happy to report back to Councillor McKeever on this.

Potholes

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

Since the Council received additional funding from the Government to repair potholes, could the Cabinet Member for Environment confirm how many additional potholes were filled compared to the last two years?

Answer

The Council has received £1.082m of grant funding from the Department for Transport for road repairs this financial year. The conditions of the funding requires the Council to deliver longer term maintenance repairs rather than short term quick fixes. Therefore, the funds are being used to supplement the planned resurfacing and patching programme rather than repairing isolated potholes.

One of the conditions of the funding agreement was that the Council produce and return a Highways Transparency Report that identifies the Council's approach towards both planned and reactive highways maintenance, how much has been spent on both as well as the outcomes in the last five years.

The Council's Transparency Report is published on our website. It shows that last financial year the Council repaired 2006 potholes compared to 3080 the year before (2023/24 financial year). The lower number of pothole repairs reflects the administration's commitment to investing in the Highway Improvement Programme over recent years and the improving state of the Council's road network.

A supplementary question asked why there were so many potholes in Havering. The Cabinet Member responded that he was happy to look at cases of reported potholes.

School Budgets

13) To the Cabinet Member for Children & Young People (Councillor Oscar Ford) From Councillor Dilip Patel

Could the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People please explain the impact of the recent National Insurance rise on schools' budgets?

Answer

The recent rise in employer National Insurance (NI) contributions is having a significant impact on school budgets across the UK, including in Havering. Key pressures include;

- Increased staffing costs: Schools are already under pressure from rising wages, and the NI rise compounds this by increasing the cost of employing staff.
- Budgetary strain: Schools with tight budgets, especially those with high numbers of support staff or part-time workers, will feel the impact most acutely.

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- Contracted services: Providers of outsourced services (e.g. cleaning, catering) are likely to pass on their increased employment costs to schools, adding further pressure to stretched budgets that schools are managing.

The UK government has announced a £1 billion NI contributions Grant to support schools, colleges, and high needs settings to manage these increased costs.

Whilst this funding is intended to offset the increased cost from the rise in NI contributions, even with this grant, schools continue to be supported by the LA and are being encouraged to use LA devised financial planning tools to model the impact of NI and wage increases, and some schools may need to review staffing structures and or renegotiate contracts with service providers, to ensure financial sustainability moving forward.

A supplementary question asked what support the Council was offering to schools with additional costs to absorb. The Cabinet Member replied that regular reviews were conducted by officers of schools' financial positions both individually and collectively.

Gidea Park Library Consultation

14) To the Cabinet Member for Adults & Wellbeing (Councillor Gillian Ford) From Councillor Christine Vickery

Can the Administration please explain why the Squirrels Heath Ward members were excluded from the ongoing discussions on the immediate and future use of the now-closed Gidea Park Library?

Answer

Officers have been reviewing interim and long-term options for the re-purposing of each of the three former library sites.

In many cases, these considerations are at a formative stage, but is proposed to bring a report to Cabinet in September setting out recommendations for each site.

I'm sure and would expect officers will be liaising with Ward members in advance of this report being concluded.

A supplementary question asked if the Cabinet Member felt it was right that the first Members heard about library proposals was via social media. The Cabinet Member reiterated that no final decision on the issue had been taken.

Gallows Corner

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

In light of the ongoing works at Gallows Corner roundabout, can the Administration confirm whether they are pausing enforcement at the yellow box junction restrictions

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within the area designated for traffic diversions i.e. Ardleigh Green, Gidea Park and Collier Row?

Answer

Enforcement of yellow boxes at junctions is being retained throughout the Transport for London works to prevent key junctions on the Local Authority road network becoming gridlocked during peak periods

The council recognises the significant, but unavoidable, disruption to residents and businesses caused by these works. For months we have been working with TfL to ensure widespread communication and advance notice as well as pressing for mitigation to reduce delays wherever possible.

Congestion is expected to improve following the on-set of the school holidays by virtue of a general reduction in traffic across our network, particularly softening the morning and afternoon peak periods and my officers will continue to work with Transport for London to minimise the impact of their works on local residents and businesses.

The Council has also suspended all other general road works in and around the area during the Gallows Corner TfL project.

However, closures and temporary traffic lights for emergency repairs such as burst water mains or gas works, which are carried out by external utility companies, have to go ahead where necessary.

A supplementary question asked that, given the location of yellow box junctions was based on traffic volume data and that this had increased significantly on Ardleigh Green Road, could some leeway be allowed re the use of yellow boxes. The Cabinet Member responded that the enforcement of yellow box junctions had to be retained as to do otherwise would lead to gridlock and impact on the Gallows Corner works.