



MINUTES OF A CABINET MEETING
Council Chamber - Town Hall
Wednesday, 17 September 2025
(7.05 - 8.26 pm)

Present:

Councillor Ray Morgon (Leader of the Council), Chairman

Cabinet Member responsibility:

Councillor Gillian Ford (Vice-Chair)	Lead Member for Adults & Wellbeing
Councillor Paul McGeary	Lead Member for Housing & Property
Councillor Paul Middleton	Lead Member for Digital, Transformation & Customer Services
Councillor Barry Mugglestone	Lead Member for Environment
Councillor Natasha Summers	Lead Member for Housing Need & Climate Change
Councillor Christopher Wilkins	Lead Member for Finance
Councillor Graham Williamson	Lead Member for Regeneration

In attendance: Councillor Viddy Persaud (CON), Councillor Keith Darvill (LAB), Councillor Martin Goode (EHRG)

14 ANNOUNCEMENTS

On behalf of the Chair, there was an announcement about the arrangements in case of fire or other events that might require the meeting room or building's evacuation.

Please note that, due to unforeseen technical difficulties, the meeting was not webcast live. However, a full recording of the proceedings is available for public access.

15 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies received from Councillor Oscar Ford.

16 DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

17 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on **13th August 2025**, were agreed as a correct record and the Chair signed them.

18 LAUNDERS LANE (ARNOLD'S FIELD) UPDATE

Report Title: **Launders Lane (Arnold's Field)**

Presented by: **Cllr. Ray Morgon, Leader of the Council**

The Chair agreed to present this item first to allow residents in the Chamber to hear the discussion.

Summary

In response to the motion agreed by Full Council, this report describes the history of Arnold's Field; the investigations initiated by the Council in response to the fires on the site; and proposed options to stop the fires currently under consideration.

The Council acknowledges and understands the concerns from residents and recognises that the volume of fires being experienced, having to close their windows (due to the smoke) for extended periods of time and having to lose use of their gardens and local parks in the summers is not acceptable. The Council also recognises that the recurrent fires have an impact on the physical and mental health of local residents.

The Council continues to do all it can to find a solution to stop the fires (and associated smoke) and to ensure that those legally responsible for resolving the situation do so as quickly as possible. However, the situation remains complex.

Arnold's Field on Launders Lane, Rainham, RM13 9FL (the "Site") is privately owned and, between circa 2002-2014, the site was subject to illegal activities, including significant fly tipping, firearms storage and drug cultivation. The volume of illegal waste dumped, combined with the Site not being managed in the manner of an authorised landfill, is the root cause of the present ongoing fires and smoke. However, visible fires did not become a significant annual occurrence at the Site until the summer of 2019.

From 2004 to 2018, a range of enforcement action was taken in relation to the site by the Council, Environment Agency and the Metropolitan Police. This included the serving of Planning Enforcement and Stop Notices and with individuals being prosecuted and sentenced to prison. Further enforcement action was taken by the Council in 2024 with the serving of an Abatement Notice and a Community Protection Warning on the current landowner.

Between 2022 and 2025, the Council also carried out air quality monitoring, commissioned an intrusive soil investigation, arranged testing of the watercourse, sampled for asbestos in the air, analysed health impact data and has explored options for stopping the fires. Discussions have also been held with expert/scientific advisers, national agencies, the landowner, local residents, the local MP, the Greater London Authority and the London Fire Brigade.

Following analysis of the air quality monitoring results, officers concluded that pollution levels, as a result of the Site, had not breached the World Health Organisation's Air Quality guideline values, nor the UK's current legal requirements regarding air quality. Equally, officers concluded that these limits were not helpful in assessing the impact of the fires on the health of residents living around Arnold's Field.

Although initial appearances suggested that the fires originated at the surface as a result of human action (eg. discarded glass or arson), officers latterly came to the view that the vast majority of the more recent fires start in materials underground and that the most effective means of stopping these "subterranean fires" (technically smouldering hotspots underground) is to prevent oxygen from reaching below the surface.

Following the judicial review ruling in June 2025, the Council has continued to carefully consider the available information, data and evidence and is in the process of making a new decision on whether or not the site should be determined as "Contaminated Land" under the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

If the Site is formally designated as "Contaminated Land", the Council would be required to enter further discussions with the landowner prior to the service of a Remediation Notice to address significant contaminant linkages. If the Site does not meet the threshold for designation as "Contaminated Land", the Council will serve an Abatement Notice on the landowner to abate the nuisance from smoke and to take the necessary steps to stop the fires.

Any substantial works to stop the fires may take 3-7 years but it may be possible to achieve an effective (albeit interim) stop to the fires within 6-12 months.

The Council is in the process of making a new determination regarding the status of the land under Part 2A of the Environmental Protection Act.

The previous determination was deemed premature by the court; more evidence is now being gathered.

A decision is expected within a few weeks, with two possible outcomes:

Contaminated Land: triggers a remediation notice.

Not Contaminated: triggers an abatement notice under statutory nuisance provisions.

The legislation is described as unclear and outdated, complicating the decision-making process.

The **Judicial Review (JR)** highlighted gaps in the original assessment, especially regarding smoke and mental health impacts, which are now being considered in the new determination. The JR outcome may set new case law.

Residents are experiencing significant distress due to smoke, fires, and inability to use gardens or open windows, especially during hot weather.

Mental and physical health impacts will be key factors in the final decision.

The Council acknowledged the urgency and seriousness of the issue.

The land is privately owned, and the cost of remediation is expected to fall on the landowner.

Financial implications for the Council are being monitored but are not part of the determination criteria.

Potential for legal challenges from the landowner or residents following the determination.

The Council is preparing for both outcomes and associated **litigation risks**.

Members suggested raising the issue with national bodies (e.g., LGA) to advocate for clearer legislation.

The Council is committed to sharing learnings with other authorities facing similar environmental issues.

Cabinet:

- **Noted** the report in general.
- **Noted**, in particular, the actions taken to date and possible future actions.
- **Noted**, in particular, the costs to the Council to date and potential future costs/risks.

19 **ASBESTOS CONTROL POLICY (2025)**

Report Title: **Asbestos Control Policy (2025)**.

Presented by: **Councillor Paul McGeary, Cabinet Member for Housing & Property.**

Summary:

Up until the 1990s, Asbestos was a product that was widely used in construction due to its excellent heat resistance and thermal properties. It was present in a variety of forms and uses, including but not limited to; asbestos cement; artex ceilings; soffits and fascia boards, and pipe lagging.

However, asbestos was, subsequently identified as a substance that can pose a significant risk to health, and is classified, as a human carcinogen.

This policy sets out to clarify the Council's commitment to supporting the health, safety and wellbeing of its residents, through undertaking the removal of any detected presence of asbestos in its properties.

In so doing, the Council will fulfil its legislative and regulatory obligations, whilst further protecting the health, safety and wellbeing of affected households.

All buildings have management surveys, and refurbishment surveys are conducted as needed.

The Council is committed to going beyond legal minimums to protect residents.

Cabinet:

Approved the Property and Housing Services Asbestos Policy (2025) as set out in Appendix A of the report.

20 **ADOPTION OF THE ROMFORD, RAINHAM AND GIDEA PARK CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL AND MANAGEMENT PLANS**

Report Title: **Adoption of Conservation Area Appraisals and Management Plans for Romford, Rainham, and Gidea Park**

Presented by: **Councillor Graham Williamson, Cabinet Member for Regeneration**

Summary:

This report seeks approval to adopt and publish Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plans (CAAMPs) for Romford, Rainham and Gidea Park. Draft CAAMPs were consulted on earlier this year, comments have been incorporated, and final CAAMPs are now ready for adoption.

Boundary changes were proposed based on consultation and expert analysis.

Future reviews of remaining conservation areas are planned.

Cabinet:

1. **Agreed** to adopt and publish the Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plans for Romford, Rainham, and Gidea Park (attached as appendix 1, 2 and 3)
2. **Delegated** authority to the Director of Planning and Public Protection for adoption of future CAAMPs, if there are no boundary changes proposed.

21 **HOUSING OMBUDSMAN ANNUAL REPORT**

Report Title: **Housing Ombudsman Annual Report**

Presented By: **Councillor Paul McGeary, Cabinet Member for Housing & Property**

Summary:

The report is a requirement of the self-assessment against the Housing Ombudsman Complaints Handling code. The code has to be reviewed annually and a self-assessment completed by Social Housing Landlords to ensure they are complying with the code. Part of the self-assessment is to complete an annual report.

Discussion on underutilisation of the Apprenticeship Levy due to structural limitations.

Council is encouraging internal staff development and outreach to improve uptake.

Cabinet:

Noted the report and **agreed** to publish the report along with the self-assessment on the Council website no later than the 30 September 2025.

.

22 **COMPLAINT POLICY**

Report Title: **Complaint Policy**

Presented by: **Councillor Ray Morgan, Leader of Havering Council**

Summary:

The changes to the Policy have been updated, to ensure compliance with the Ombudsman codes for handling complaints.

The HO code self-assessment is due by the 30th September 2025 and the new Policy must be published, to meet full compliance. The Policy changes

must also be brought in, in preparation for the self-assessment against the LGSCO complaints handling code due to be in force in April 2026.

The changes have also taken into account the LGSCO review around handling statutory children's social care complaints handling.

Emphasis on using the online corporate form for formal complaints.

Concerns were raised about accessibility and communication of the complaints process.

Cabinet:

Noted the Policy changes and **agreed** that the August 2025 version will be published on the Council website no later than 30 September 2025.

23 **Q1 CORPORATE PLAN PERFORMANCE REPORT**

Report Title: **Corporate Plan Q1 Performance Report - (2025/26)**

Presented by: **Councillor Ray Morgon, Leader of the Council**

Summary:

The Council's Corporate Plan was formally adopted in April 2024. A review of the metrics took place towards the end of the financial year and the updated corporate plan was agreed and formally adopted at cabinet in April 2025.

The Corporate Plan continues to be made up of the three Strategic Director Service plans and describes how we will deliver the vision under the following three themes:

- Supporting our residents to stay safe and well
- A great place to live work and enjoy
- Enabling a resident-focussed and resilient council

Under each theme sit a number of outcomes and key deliverables associated to the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) that were agreed to be the most appropriate for measuring progress. These KPIs have been brought together into a Corporate Plan Performance Report, which provides an overview of the Council's performance. The report is presented in PowerBI and highlights good performance and potential areas for improvement.

The Overall KPI status page identifies where the Council is performing well (**Green**) and not so well (**Amber** and **Red**). KPIs which are narrative only, or for which it is not appropriate to set a target, are shown in **Blue**. RAG ratings for 2025/26 are as follows:

- **Red** = Below target
- **Amber** = Below target but within target tolerance
- **Green** = On or above target

Also included in the Power-BI report are Direction of Travel (long-term and short-term), which compares:

- Short-term performance – with the previous quarter (Quarter 4 2024/25)
- Long-term performance – with the same time the previous year (Quarter 1 2024/25, where available)

Please note the green arrow shows if (↑) higher performance is better or (↓) lower performance is better.

Cabinet acknowledged the challenges and committed to improvement plans.

Clarification provided that targets are aspirational and reflect ongoing service delivery.

Cabinet:

Noted all indicators (especially the red indicators highlighted within the body of this report) and **noted** the levels of performance set out in the power-bi report.

Chairman