

COUNCIL

26 FEBRUARY 2020

MEMBERS QUESTIONS

I Question from Councillor Matt Hartley, to Councillor Danny Thorpe, Leader of the Council

What steps has the Leader of the Council taken since the conviction of Tonia Ashikodi for housing fraud on 12th February in relation to a) Tonia Ashikodi's continued status as a Councillor, b) suggestions made during the trial that a Cabinet Member improperly released Council data to a media outlet, and c) ensuring that any lessons are learned in terms of the Council's processes for agreeing council tenancies?

Reply -

I thank Councillor Matt Hartley for his question.

a) Tonia Ashikodi's continued status as a Councillor

Councillor Ashikodi cannot be removed as a Councillor of the Royal Borough of Greenwich until the legal process has run its full course. I share the frustrations of everyone who has called for her resignation but the Council has no powers to remove her. Whilst the Council itself has no legal powers to disqualify Councillor Ashikodi at this point, I have called for her to resign as a councillor with immediate effect both via the media and a letter to Councillor Ashikodi.

Section 80 of the Local Government 1972 provides that there must be disqualification of someone who is a councillor and is convicted of an offence where they are sentenced to more than 3 month in prison (whether or not suspended), if they are convicted whilst an elected member. However, this is subject to any appeal rights and so the disqualification cannot take place until any potential or actual appeal process has come to an end. As has been reported, Councillor Ashikodi will be sentenced on 4th March 2020.

b) suggestions made during the trial that a Cabinet Member improperly released Council data to a media outlet

The media outlet were asked to reveal their source at the time of the initial enquiry and refused to do so. At the same time, Council officers carried out an investigation but were unable to identify the source of the information.

c) ensuring that any lessons are learned in terms of the Council's processes for agreeing council tenancies?

The Council has robust processes in place for agreeing Council tenancies. In line with the Council's commitment to continuous improvement, these are kept under regular review. However, there are limits to the Council's powers to make reasonable and proportionate enquiries when assessing a person's entitlement to housing. As an example, the Council does not have the power to make speculative enquiries of HM Land Registry regarding an individual's property ownership except in the course of a criminal investigation. All applicants are made aware of their legal obligation to ensure that they provide truthful accurate information and don't withhold relevant information. Failure to comply with these requirements will result in prosecution and proceedings to recover possession of any property fraudulently obtained.

COUNCIL

26 FEBRUARY 2020

MEMBERS QUESTIONS

2 Question from Councillor Matt Hartley, to Councillor Danny Thorpe, Leader of the Council

In July 2019 the Council passed a cross-party motion calling for improved support for our Armed Forces Community. What steps have been taken to implement the measures contained in the motion since it was passed?

Reply -

I thank Councillor Matt Hartley for his question.

The Council is in a privileged position to have robust systems in place to support our large Armed Forces Community. This includes specialist housing support and accreditation as an Armed Forces recruiter. To further strengthen these links, an overall Armed Forces Officer Champion has been nominated, as well as Armed Forces Directorate Champions established from across all directorates of the council. Meetings with the MOD Armed Forces Covenant Project Manager have taken place and work is ongoing to bring training to the Customer Contact Centre staff, building a new webpage outlining the support available and links to other organisations and develop communications to highlight all these efforts, both internally and externally.

COUNCIL

26 FEBRUARY 2020

MEMBERS QUESTIONS

3 Question from Councillor Matt Hartley, to Councillor Miranda Williams, Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure and the Third Sector

Can the Cabinet Member provide further information on the planned review of play centres across the borough? Who and what will be involved and what timescale is the review working to?

Reply -

I thank Councillor Matt Hartley for his question.

I visited all the Adventure Play Centres last week and was immensely impressed by the hard work and commitment of centre staff, the good levels of usage and the range of services on offer. The review of the Adventure Play Centres will be led by the Communities, Culture and Leisure service and will be supported by the Corporate Property Board which has representatives from every directorate. The review will consider the availability of other facilities in each locality, the condition of the buildings, possibilities for colocation of services, the views of user groups, usage of the facilities, levels of need in each area and the options for improving the facilities on offer.

COUNCIL

26 FEBRUARY 2020

MEMBERS QUESTIONS

4 Question from Councillor Matt Clare, to Councillor Denise Scott-McDonald, Cabinet Member for Air Quality, Sustainability and Transport

Santander cycles are being extended to Rotherhithe, Canada water and Surrey Quays. This makes a future extension to Greenwich much easier. If TfL can find funds to extend Santander cycle hire to an area which has the Jubilee Line and London Overground then surely Greenwich with weaker public transport should be considered also.

Will the Cabinet member join with us in lobbying candidates for the London mayoral elections to commit to extending Santander Cycle Hire into Greenwich borough ?

Reply -

I thank Councillor Matt Clare for his question.

Bike share schemes have great potential for increasing sustainable travel options in the borough.

The Council is continuing to work through London Councils on the creation of a London-wide byelaw to manage dockless bike share across the city.

I would be happy to join other councillors in lobbying for an extension to Santander Cycle Hire, into Royal Greenwich.

COUNCIL

26 FEBRUARY 2020

MEMBERS QUESTIONS

5 Question from Councillor Matt Clare, to Councillor Miranda Williams, Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure and the Third Sector

Recently a large section of pipe fell from the roof in the Waterfront centre. Fortunately the centre was closed. However had it been open significant injuries could have resulted potentially. What actions have taken place since this incident to prevent similar occurrences both in Woolwich and in other GLL managed facilities?

Reply -

I thank Councillor Matt Clare for his question.

GLL have confirmed that the fixing that failed in the Waterfront pool hall is not used anywhere else in the borough. They are carrying out high-level fixture and fitting inspections at the other centres and have assured me that any remedial action required will be taken urgently.

COUNCIL

26 FEBRUARY 2020

MEMBERS QUESTIONS

6 Question from Councillor Matt Clare, to Councillor Miranda Williams, Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure and the Third Sector

It has been stated in the local press that the Waterfront centre pool may be closed until the summer. Would she please confirm if this is the case and why such a long closure is currently deemed necessary? Finally, what alternative arrangements will be made for people based in Woolwich to be able to swim until the Waterfront is again available?

Reply -

I thank Councillor Matt Clare for his question.

I am pleased to confirm that phase one of the urgent works to Waterfront Leisure Centre's fitness pool have been completed, which allowed it to re-open on Thursday 20th February following its temporary closure on 8th February. The multi-lane slide has also returned to operation but the rest of the pool hall – including the leisure pool and anaconda flume - will remain closed for now.

A new fitness pool programme has been in place, prioritising school lessons and Better Swim School during the day, with public provision in the early morning, at lunchtime and in the evening.

Phase two will see works to boilers, air handling units and roof repairs, as well as improvements to the changing facilities. The works form part of a joint £1.4m investment from GLL and Royal Borough of Greenwich and will enable the centre to remain open until its brand new town centre replacement is completed in five years time. A further closure of the full pool hall will be required in the coming months to allow Phase Two works to be completed, during which time swimming lesson customers will be relocated to alternative facilities. It is expected that all repairs will be completed prior to the summer holidays.

COUNCIL

26 FEBRUARY 2020

MEMBERS QUESTIONS

7 Question from Councillor Pat Greenwell, to Councillor Siwe James, Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Growth

Do you feel that the £70,000 spent on the wooden Eltham sign at the top of the High Street was money well spent.?

Reply -

I thank Councillor Pat Greenwell for her question.

As members will know the Eltham High Street Major scheme, delivered as part of the wider Eltham Master Plan, saw an investment of well over £6m. The measures were designed to support the vitality and vibrancy of Eltham town centre. Like many high streets up and down the country the Council recognised the need for the investment to help ensure the high street can continue to thrive in to the future.

The sign in question is one of a number of features installed to not only improve the physical infrastructure but also help create a sense of place and encourage civic pride. This theme came out strongly through the extensive public engagement and consultation. Other features include the benches named after famous people with a connection to Eltham and the stone gateway “Eltham” feature at the High Street/Well Hall junction.

I am sure members will also recognise that the scheme, which was developed in partnership with the local community, has positively transformed the High Street at little direct cost to the Council. The vast majority of the work was funded by Transport for London and S106 developer contributions.

The cost of the sign was approximately £40,000. I recognise that is a large sum of public money. In my view the sign makes a significant contribution to the overall scheme objectives at a cost that forms a relatively small part of the overall scheme cost.

COUNCIL

26 FEBRUARY 2020

MEMBERS QUESTIONS

8 Question from Councillor Pat Greenwell, to Councillor David Gardner, Cabinet Member for Public Realm

How were people made aware of the public consultation regarding future bin collections?

Reply -

I thank Councillor Pat Greenwell for her question and I am glad she has asked, as the Towards Zero Waste consultation she refers to is already among our most successful examples of engagement – and was recently praised by the Leader of the Opposition at an Overview and Scrutiny meeting.

The consultation is ongoing and closes on 15 March, but planned and completed activity includes:

- Printed information in Greenwich Info (including a wrap) and The Weekender
- Targeted and organic posts on social media totalling a reach of around 65,000 (20 Feb) and producing nearly 5,000 direct actions
- Information and advertising on the Council website
- 15 face-to-face events across the borough

Within the first 48 hours we had 600 responses to the survey and there are now over 3,000 responses with more than a fortnight left to go. I would urge anyone who has not completed the survey to go to the Council website and have their say.

COUNCIL

26 FEBRUARY 2020

MEMBERS QUESTIONS

9 Question from Councillor Charlie Davis, to Councillor Sizwe James, Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Growth

Can the Cabinet Member confirm how many brownfield sites are owned by the Council across the Borough, and where these are located?

Reply -

I thank Councillor Charlie Davis for his question.

The Council's Planning Department maintains a Brownfield Land register. This can be accessed through the following link, where a map, downloadable schedule and methodology is available:

https://www.royalgreenwich.gov.uk/info/200191/planning_policy_and_strategy/1955/brownfield_land_register

This register records sites with planning permission or applications received and is compiled to meet the Council's statutory duty under the Town and Country (Brownfield Land Register) Regulations 2017. It comprises land in the planning system but does not identify specific ownerships.

The Council-owned properties that appear on the register are:

- Parts of The Kidbrooke Estate (under a Development Agreement with Berkeley Homes)
- The Woolwich Estates (under a Development Agreement with Lovell)
- Riverside House, Woolwich High Street (freehold sale due to be completed)
- Part of Spray St SPD area, Spray St Woolwich

COUNCIL

26 FEBRUARY 2020

MEMBERS QUESTIONS

10 Question from Councillor Charlie Davis, to Councillor Jackie Smith, Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Community Safety

Given the welcome announcement from the Conservative Mayoral candidate, Shaun Bailey, that all Police Station closures carried out by Sadiq Khan would be reversed under his Mayorship - including Eltham Police Station - can the Cabinet Member confirm she will write to the incumbent Mayor to seek the same pledge?

Reply -

I thank Councillor Charlie Davis for his question.

I have to regularly remind the Conservatives of my position regarding the closure of police stations across the Borough, and that this remains an operational matter for the Metropolitan Police Service how and where they accommodate their officers.

Police station closures along with a reduction in officer numbers since 2010 are linked to the austerity cuts imposed on the Police by the Conservative Government. I do not intend to write to the incumbent Mayor on that basis.

COUNCIL

26 FEBRUARY 2020

MEMBERS QUESTIONS

11 Question from Councillor Charlie Davis, to Councillor Danny Thorpe, Cabinet Member for Leader of the Council

Can the Leader confirm when Blackheath Rugby Club's new business plan for Hervey Road will have been reviewed? And when the club will resume their loan repayments?

Reply -

I thank Councillor Charlie Davis for his question.

The Business Plan has been received by the Council, with officers having an initial conversation with the Club on their business plan. The Council has a scheduled meeting with Club representatives in due course to agree on a loan repayment schedule.

COUNCIL

26 FEBRUARY 2020

MEMBERS QUESTIONS

12 Question from Councillor Charlie Davis, to Councillor Danny Thorpe, Cabinet Member for Leader of the Council

As the Leader knows, pages 11, 12 and 20 of the Eltham Masterplan explicitly state and illustrate that the existing Council car park and M&S car park would be developed to create an 'Orangery Square'. Can the Leader explain to Council why he attempted to indicate this was not the case at the last meeting of Full Council?

Reply -

I thank Councillor Charlie Davis for his question.

The Eltham Town Centre SPD is a material consideration in the determination of planning applications. It sets out development principles for the town centre as whole, and also identifies 10 sites where there are specific opportunities for change. Site 8 is referred to as 'Orangery Square', split into four areas. The SPD includes indicative development layouts, but is not prescriptive regarding how or when development should come forward and the guidance for Site 8 does not represent a preferred option for the redevelopment of the area (as stated on pg. 20 of the SPD). Given the heritage value of the Orangery, we would support development that preserved or enhanced the setting of the building.

COUNCIL

26 FEBRUARY 2020

MEMBERS QUESTIONS

13 Question from Councillor Charlie Davis, to Councillor Danny Thorpe, Cabinet Member for Leader of the Council

As the Leader knows, site E2 included in the Council's Site Allocations Preferred Approach, includes the M&S car park as a future site for 'mixed use development appropriate to the town centre at ground floor level, including BI workspace, and residential on upper floors.' Can the Leader explain why he attempted to indicate this was not the case at the last meeting of Full Council?

Reply -

I thank Councillor Charlie Davis for his question.

The Site Allocations Preferred Approach went out for consultation with the public last year. The allocation for Site E2, Orangery Lane, indicates a mixed-use **potential** development including a mix of uses appropriate to a town centre. Any development to enhance the townscape and the setting of the Orangery.

In the Development Guidelines, the allocation recommends the enhancement of the pedestrian route between Eltham High Street and Orangery Lane and general improvements to the public realm along Orangery Lane. Officers are currently reviewing responses to the consultation, and an updated version of the site allocations will be subject to a further 6 week consultation period in Spring 2020.

COUNCIL

26 FEBRUARY 2020

MEMBERS QUESTIONS

14 Question from Councillor Spencer Drury, to Councillor Chris Kirby, Cabinet Member for Housing

During the recent General Election campaign the Leader of the Labour Party said “I can’t imagine that any landlord would object to their property being inspected to make sure it is up to standard”. Given that statement of principle, would the Cabinet Member commit to publishing the findings of the most recent stock condition survey for the homes owned by the Council and to a regular programme of inspections for all Council properties which is something Mr Corbyn described as a ‘reasonable, basic thing to do in society’?

Reply –

I thank Councillor Spencer Drury for his question.

The detailed data from the Stock Condition Survey is being analysed and loaded into our asset management system, Keystone. This has been a significant undertaking and also combined with a much-needed system upgrade. This process will finish at the end of March 2020, and a high-level summary analysis will be published.

The Repairs and Investment team will be offering local member briefings on the findings for their ward. We will be contacting Members in May to schedule these for June and July 2020.

COUNCIL

26 FEBRUARY 2020

MEMBERS QUESTIONS

15 Question from Councillor Spencer Drury, to Councillor Jackie Smith, Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Community Safety

As I understand it, the Council has employed a private company 'LA Support Limited' to provide the on the ground services previously supplied by the Town Centre Warden service. In my opinion, the decision to employ LA Support Limited was inventive and forward thinking, however, as the service will be focused on only Woolwich Town Centre for at least a year, how does the Cabinet Member propose that other parts of the Borough (like Eltham) cope with the withdrawal of the Town Centre Warden service? At a time of rising crime, surely this decision (focusing on the enforcement of anti-social behaviour and envirocrime) will limit services to one part of the Borough and is to the detriment of other areas?

Reply -

I thank Councillor Spencer Drury for his question and his positive comments for what I agree is an innovative proof of concept exercise.

Firstly, contrary to some media reporting, the Town Centre Enforcement Warden Service have not been replaced by LA Support. We have in fact created a new Safer Spaces service which includes our excellent CCTV team but also a new in-house team of enhanced Community Safety Enforcement Officers. The Community Safety Enforcement Team will be key in delivering our ambition for safer public spaces and will be more flexible and able to tackle a wider range of community safety and enviro-crime issues than the former warden service. We are currently in the process of launching the new service and Members were invited to a briefing before Council on this very subject.

In support of, and integrated within, the Safer Spaces service, we have indeed contracted LA Support Ltd for an initial 12-18 month proof of concept exercise.

LA Support Ltd, from March, will initially operate within a defined area within Woolwich Town Centre. The contract does allow us to negotiate

their use in other parts of the Borough and utilise other powers if felt appropriate and beneficial. There is no requirement to wait a year for this to happen but we do want to be confident that service delivery is being met before expanding the pilot more widely. This may also require the company to provide additional officers and this would have to be mutually discussed and agreed.

COUNCIL

26 FEBRUARY 2020

MEMBERS QUESTIONS

16 Question from Councillor Spencer Drury, to Councillor Danny Thorpe, Cabinet Member for Leader of the Council

I note that the London Councils independent 'Remuneration of Councillors in London 2018' report states: "We reiterate our view that no more than 50% of councillors should receive a special responsibility allowance." (Page 5). Given that the London Councils independent report is supposed to form the basis for the Royal Borough of Greenwich's Members' Allowance scheme, can the Leader commit to ensuring that 50% (or less) of Councillors will receive allowances for 2020-2021 municipal year?

Reply -

I thank Councillor Spencer Drury for his question.

This will be reviewed at the next Annual Meeting