

COUNCIL
26 OCTOBER 2016
MEMBERS QUESTIONS

1. Question from Councillor Sarah Merrill to Councillor Denise Hyland, Leader of the Council

Can the Leader say what she thinks the impact on Greenwich businesses will be of the Government's revaluation of London's rateable properties which may increase some rates in the borough in the bigger properties, such as the supermarkets for example, by as much as 45%?

2. Question from Councillor Sarah Merrill to Councillor Denise Hyland, Leader of the Council

Can you please let me know what she think the effects of the London Business rate rises will have on consumers in the Royal Borough of Greenwich?

Composite Response to questions a 1 and 2 -

I thank Councillor Merrill for her questions.

Business rates revaluation is an important issue facing businesses, particularly due to the time since the last revaluation in 2010 based on 2008 data, and the increase in rental values since then.

London businesses will be hit hardest from increases with average increases of 21% across the borough. The impact of this will be felt disproportionately by the 2,000 retail and leisure premises operating in our high streets, town centre and across the borough, along with larger employers.

London businesses will pay an extra £900 million as a result of the revaluation, while all other parts of the country will see a fall in average business rates.

Businesses are already operating in an environment of growing uncertainty, and the ill-advised 2 year delay in business rates revaluation is one of a number of key factors impacting on business and consumer confidence along with the outcome of the EU referendum. Whilst there is evidence that the national economy has initially absorbed the shock following the referendum, the weak pound and forecast rising inflation will inevitably hit consumers.

COUNCIL
26 OCTOBER 2016
MEMBERS QUESTIONS

A combination of the increased costs and protracted period of Brexit negotiations is adding to uncertainty and instability which means that businesses are likely to hold off making any investment decisions. Without the required intervention by central government in the medium to longer-term this could impact on the local economy with fewer jobs being created and subsequently higher unemployment. The Council will, as part of our discussions on devolution, continue to petition government to address the cumulative impacts of their inaction.

And of course locally I will do all I can to continue to support the local economy building on successful programmes such as the Council's London Living Wage commitment and ebusiness support programme having already supported 400 businesses enabling them to increase their turnover by £8m.

The Council is also building on the opportunities arising from the fantastic attractions in the borough continuing to put the borough on a world stage for tall ships as well as expand on our collaborations through our digital innovation

These examples show how this Council is well placed to develop programmes that support economic development and growth and protect our high streets and town centres to ensure they continue to be an important source of new and existing jobs for local residents.

COUNCIL
26 OCTOBER 2016
MEMBERS QUESTIONS

3. Question from Councillor Matt Hartley to Councillor Denise Hyland, Leader of the Council

At the July Full Council meeting, in answer to my question proposing a council tax exemption for care leavers under 25, the Leader of the Council agreed to instruct officers to consider this proposal - including considering both the arrears and collections aspects to more accurately assess the financial cost of this move to the Royal Borough. Can the Leader update us on the results of this work, and whether any decision has been made?

Reply -

I thank Councillor Hartley for his question.

I was fortunate to be able to meet with the Children's Society in September to discuss this issue amongst others.

The matter has now been referred to the Fairness Commission for consideration, alongside the full range of measures available to the Council and its overarching anti-poverty programme and overall funding envelope.

COUNCIL
26 OCTOBER 2016
MEMBERS QUESTIONS

4. Question from Councillor Matt Hartley to Councillor Denise Hyland, Leader of the Council

Why were members not consulted on plans to reorganise the council's Members Services function in advance of the current restructuring consultation?

Can the Leader outline this plan - which affects all of our roles as councillors - in full in her response?

Does she consider it appropriate that this essential support function for members - including for backbench and opposition members whose role it is to hold the administration to account - is to be run from her Leader's Office in the future?

Reply -

I thank Councillor Hartley for his question.

Staffing issues are a matter for the Chief Executive, as the Head of Paid Service. Questions relating to issues of this nature should be addressed to the Chief Executive.

COUNCIL
26 OCTOBER 2016
MEMBERS QUESTIONS

5. Question from Councillor Matt Hartley to Councillor Maureen O'Mara, Cabinet Member for Customer Services and Anti-Fraud

I have previously asked whether the Council will consider exploring shared IT systems with other authorities, which is saving significant sums in other parts of London (for example, the One Source shared service arrangement between Newham and Havering boroughs).

Can the Leader provide an update on whether this option is being formally considered?

Can she provide figures' showing how much the Council spends on delivering IT services and infrastructure, along with comparable figures for other London boroughs?

Reply -

I thank Councillor Hartley for his question.

The overall position hasn't changed and the Council remains open to considering shared service arrangements where they fit with our strategic objectives. That said, the market place remains difficult for the procurement of high quality ICT services, with many Councils therefore still looking to appoint a sole managed service provider, rather than moving to genuine in-house provisions that can be shared. Using a sole managed service provider is not the strategic direction that the Council wishes to take, as this has proven to be both costly and poor performing for the Council in the past.

It is difficult to provide a true comparison with other London Boroughs as we are unable to extract figures with sufficient detail from their publicly available records. However, from the data available, by way of illustration:

The LB of Bexley, recently signed a contract with Northgate for the provision of a managed ICT service at an approximately £2.4m per annum. This contract replaces a contract with Sopra Steria which was nearer £5m per annum. The LB of Southwark, are in the process of running a procurement to replace their existing supplier (Capita). In order to give them time to implement the new operating model they have extended Capita's contact for a further 12 months at a cost of £12m.

COUNCIL
26 OCTOBER 2016
MEMBERS QUESTIONS

The Northgate and Capita contracts excludes the cost for software licences and payments to other service providers for line of business applications. These have not been disclosed. Both Councils support a similar number of staff and both have a diverse network of remote sites.

The Council's budget for 2015/16 was £5.4m. This figure included internal staff costs and payments to line of business application suppliers.

The Council has previously contracted with Northgate and for a managed ICT services. The Northgate managed service contract came to an end in February 2016, as part of an insourcing of the service. This process has given the Council full control over its ICT service and spend, allowing the service to make the best use of the resources available to achieve the Council's business objectives.

COUNCIL
26 OCTOBER 2016
MEMBERS QUESTIONS

6. Question from Councillor Matt Hartley to Councillor Averil Lekau, Cabinet Member for Housing and Anti-Poverty

In September 2015 the Royal Borough of Greenwich announced that it was prepared to play its part in the then Prime Minister's extension of the Syria Vulnerable Persons Resettlement programme to resettle a total of 20,000 refugees from war-torn Syria. This is an issue on which there is cross-party support. The Government subsequently announced five-year funding for local authorities to support the scheme. Can the Cabinet Member update us on the council's implementation of the scheme, including how many, if any, refugees have been resettled in the borough so far?

Reply –

I thank Councillor Hartley for his question.

The Royal Borough is fully committed to playing its full part in supporting Syrian refugees, who have experienced unspeakable suffering, to rebuild their lives in London. Accordingly, the Royal Borough has given an undertaking to provide up to 20 properties for Syrian refugees. This is an issue that has recently been discussed at London Councils'.

London is facing a housing crisis and the lack of available and affordable housing makes it very challenging to secure appropriate accommodation and provide sustainable resettlement for refugees. We know that delivering sustainable resettlement in London on any significant scale will require more financial support from Government. That is why, in early June, the Mayor of London wrote to Richard Harrington MP, the relevant minister at the time for the resettlement of Syrian refugees. This set out London's desire to help resettle Syrian refugees, whilst at the same time, highlighting the need for appropriate Government funding that recognised the unique challenges London faces. The Mayor's proposal, developed with London borough leaders, was for an innovative regional model that sought to mobilise the resources of the whole city to enable London to participate at scale, providing sustainable offers of resettlement to Syrian refugees. Additional Government funding of £6.5m could unlock resources from communities and the charitable sector which would help meet an estimated funding gap of £14.5m to 2025.

COUNCIL
26 OCTOBER 2016
MEMBERS QUESTIONS

Unfortunately, the new Immigration Minister, Robert Goodwill, has indicated that he does not believe the Mayor's proposal would constitute value for money. The Minister has, however, expressed an interest in working with the Mayor of London and the boroughs to develop a community sponsorship model that could build on the goodwill of so many Londoners and lead to offers of resettlement.

The Royal Borough will continue to work with the Mayor and other London boroughs to ensure that Syrian refugees resettled in London are able to rebuild their lives by moving into stable and secure accommodation. It is essential that the Government recognises the scale of this challenge and makes a commitment to the provision of a comprehensive and sustainable package of funding able to meet the long-term housing and support needs of Syrian refugees.

COUNCIL
26 OCTOBER 2016
MEMBERS QUESTIONS

7. Question from Councillor Matt Hartley to Councillor Averil Lekau, Cabinet Member for Housing and Anti-Poverty

In October the Department for Communities and Local Government announced a £40 million homelessness prevention programme, which included inviting local authorities to bid for a pot of £20 million in funding to pilot new initiatives to tackle homelessness in their areas. Can the Cabinet Member provide an update on whether she has reviewed this offer, whether the council will be bidding for a share of this funding, and the details of the bid if so?

Reply -

I thank Councillor Hartley.

The Royal Borough has an excellent track record preventing homelessness – and was awarded the Government “Gold Standard” for tackling homelessness by the National Practitioner Support Service in September 2015. However, homelessness is increasing nationally and London boroughs are experiencing the most significant rises. The number of homeless households to whom London boroughs have accepted a duty rose by 118% between 2010/11 and 2015/16 and levels of homelessness are set to continue rising, given the acute shortage of affordable private sector housing. This has been exacerbated by the Government’s freeze on Local Housing Allowance, the introduction of the lower Benefit Cap and the other changes in welfare legislation. Consequently the Royal Borough is experiencing an unprecedented demand and a parallel increase in the number of homeless households placed in temporary accommodation.

The Royal Borough has received the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG’s) information inviting local authorities to submit bids for funding to support work on homelessness prevention. The Royal Borough is reviewing the criteria for the programme with the intention of submitting a bid for funding before the deadline at the end of November. However, the limited funding that the DCLG is making available (£40 million nationally) does not address the fundamental challenges and budget pressures which local authorities are facing in responding to the escalating levels of homelessness, which previously under the Labour Government fell by 75%.

COUNCIL
26 OCTOBER 2016
MEMBERS QUESTIONS

8. Question from Councillor Matt Hartley to Councillor David Gardner, Cabinet Member for Health and Adult Social Care

Does the Council hold information on the number of public defibrillators in the borough, and if so, could she share details including where these are distributed?

Reply -

I thank Councillor Hartley for his question.

The Council does not hold this information; nor does the Council believe does the local NHS or Ambulance service.

The provision of defibrillators is a matter for individual business or premises.

There are a range of places where defibrillators are in place, usually as business or services take the view that this would be helpful to support people working or visiting. The issue of training and maintenance of each defibrillator rests with the organisation, which has purchased it.

There is a view that the provision of defibrillators is helpful to the population and can help to save lives.

COUNCIL
26 OCTOBER 2016
MEMBERS QUESTIONS

9. Question from Councillor Matt Hartley to Councillor Jackie Smith, Cabinet Member for Community Safety and Environment

I am sure the Cabinet Member is as alarmed as I am to learn that there have been 53 fires caused by faulty electrical goods in the borough over the last 5 years, which as well as posing a threat to life are estimated to have cost more than £3 million in damage and cost to the taxpayer. Does the council have any plans to support London Fire Brigade's 'Total Recalls' campaign on this issue, or to raise awareness of particular product recalls amongst council tenants in particular?

Reply -

Thank you for the question.

Greenwich's Trading Standards team are routinely notified by the London Fire Brigade's Fire Investigation Team of fire incidents caused by faulty electrical appliances within the borough. There have been two such relevant notifications in the past year, one fridge/freezer incident in June 2016 and the other a tumble dryer incident in November 2015.

Trading Standards will be raising awareness of the "Total Recalls" campaign as part of their on-going communications, including social media. The Trading Standards Team is supportive of the local LFB teams operations, particularly with regards to explosive licensing arrangements, and participates in the pre-planned safety campaigns of London Trading Standards (a co-ordinating body) which ensures a London-wide approach to promoting consumer safety.

It is helpful if residents register their new products with the Company, making it easier to notify them of any product recalls.

COUNCIL
26 OCTOBER 2016
MEMBERS QUESTIONS

10. Question from Councillor Matt Hartley to Councillor Denise Scott-McDonald, Cabinet Member for Culture, Creative Industries and Community Wellbeing

Can the Cabinet Member update us on the promised mitigations against the impact of closing the mobile library service since the last meeting?

Reply -

Thank you for the question.

Since the withdrawal of the mobile vehicle, Greenwich Leisure Limited (GLL) has worked hard to continue to provide a high quality library outreach service.

All regular users of the mobile library at roadside stops were notified and invited to become users of the Home Visit service. 26 new members of the Home Visit have signed up in this time and all are now receiving regular visits.

Similarly, all primary schools and nurseries were contacted by GLL to offer a deposit and collection service.

GLL has not received any complaints thus far following the withdrawal of the vehicle.

GLL continue to discuss with staff how they might further enhance the outreach service. As an example, the service is looking to provide visible mobile shelving units that can display books and materials for the deposit and collection service to schools and nurseries.

A full assessment to measure the impact of withdrawing the mobile vehicle will be presented to the Libraries Advisory Board before May 2017. This will enable GLL to evaluate the first 9 months of the outreach service following the withdrawal of the vehicle.

COUNCIL
26 OCTOBER 2016
MEMBERS QUESTIONS

11. Question from Councillor Mark Elliott to Councillor Jackie Smith, Cabinet Member for Community Safety and Environment

When reports are made of breaches of licence conditions such as opening hours, can the Cabinet Member explain what measures are then taken to remedy the situation and how many random in-person checks are subsequently routinely made in order to enforce the condition?

Reply –

I thank Councillor Elliott for his question.

The Licensing team respond to complaints relating to i) breaches of licensing conditions where a premises holds a licence and ii) complaints where a business is operating without a licence. A range of measures are taken by the team to draw the business owner's attention to the fact that they are either operating without a licence or operating in breach of their conditions. These measures include in-person inspections, formal meetings and written warnings. The number of random, in-person checks undertaken by the team will depend on the severity of the situation and whether or not other partner agencies (such as the police) are needed in order to enforce relevant breaches or to gather evidence. The team operates a regular schedule of out-of-hours and weekend inspections to target premises and provide feedback to partner agencies and internal teams.

When Greenwich's licensing team receives a complaint regarding a premises breaching the "terminal hour" of their licence (i.e. when the permitted activity should cease), the premises are formally written to and then monitored for compliance, by licensing and the police, or both. If they continue to breach the terminal hour of their licence, they are invited to a formal meeting with the relevant 'responsible authorities' (defined in the Licensing Act 2003), depending upon the nature of the issue. For instance, if concerns exist with respect to noise and anti-social behaviour, a formal meeting may be arranged with licensing, the police and the noise team. The premises licence holder will be told that if they do not comply with their licence conditions they may be subject to a formal review process, which could change the licence conditions or, ultimately, revoke the licence. The team and other agencies would then undertake follow-up inspections.

COUNCIL
26 OCTOBER 2016
MEMBERS QUESTIONS

Should the premises not improve, they would most likely be subject to a review rather than prosecution as this is a more effective deterrent.

If the premises is not licensed but is providing licensable activity (such as late night refreshment after 2300) a warning letter would be sent to them and the premises monitored by the team. Should the premises not comply, they would be prosecuted. For those premises who do not hold a licence but are operating in breach of conditions imposed through the planning regime, the planning enforcement team take the lead.

COUNCIL
26 OCTOBER 2016
MEMBERS QUESTIONS

12. Question from Councillor Mark Elliott to Councillor Jackie Smith, Cabinet Member for Community Safety and Environment

It is imperative we encourage people enjoying our parks to use the bins provided. Can the Cabinet Member detail the programme to keep those bins emptied and comment on claims that, this summer, collections have less frequent. I hear reports of bins not being emptied regularly enough and that bags of rubbish have sometimes been left by the bins for days (attracting vermin and pests).

Reply -

I would like to thank Councillor Elliott for his enquiry regarding the rubbish collection in the Royal Boroughs Parks.

During this year's peak summertime, the Royal Borough experienced a particularly high usage of the parks by families and social groups. This is excellent news. Officers have noted an increase in late evening picnics. This resulted in an increase in food packaging placed in the bins or left near the bins, which does attract animals. To address this issue, the Park Ranger mobile team, who lock the parks at the end of the day, now carry out inspections of the bins and empty them as required. The frequency of bin emptying has not decreased and where parks have a resident Park Ranger, the bins are checked and emptied daily.

COUNCIL
26 OCTOBER 2016
MEMBERS QUESTIONS

13. Question from Councillor Mark Elliott to Councillor Danny Thorpe, Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Sustainability

Can the Cabinet Member update us on responses to the Royal Greenwich Local Plan: site allocations? When can we expect the next stage of the consultation to begin?

Reply -

Thank you for your question

The Council is currently updating the evidence base in support of the next stage of the Site allocations local plan process. A key input to this work is The London Plan which is also being reviewed at this time. We are working closely with the GLA on key studies such as the Strategic Housing Market Assessment and Employment Study as these must inform our site allocations document. As and when these studies are concluded and the outputs available, which I anticipate will be early next year, Officers will incorporate this into the considerations for our own local plan.

As a result once the studies are concluded I can assure you we will update our local Plan timetable and publish a revised version on our website.

COUNCIL
26 OCTOBER 2016
MEMBERS QUESTIONS

14. Question from Councillor Geoff Brighty to Councillor Danny Thorpe, Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Sustainability

The Cabinet Member is probably aware of the frustration some applicants have experienced in recent months over delays in dealing with planning applications in a timely way. Can he say whether there is still a backlog and if so when it will be cleared?

Reply –

I thank Councillor Brighty for his question.

I am indeed aware of the frustration among some applicants about the timeliness of planning decisions. I do acknowledge that, at the moment, we are not providing the quality of service in the Royal Borough's planning system that applicants, agents, Members, even our own officers, would expect to see delivered by this Council.

The planning service has a fantastic record of work with applicants to facilitate sustainable growth. We are however experiencing unprecedented demand for our services at a time when there has been some turnover of permanent staff and some recruitment challenges to secure the right level of experience and expertise. I can assure you I am working closely with Officers to ensure that we respond to applications in a timely manner

The service is currently working on an improvement plan of 'quick wins' to remove some of the clear barriers to effective and efficient working. I can say that staff are fully committed to getting on top of the caseload. We are already seeing, for example, some significant improvement in the time taken for applications to be validated and registered so that they can be with the relevant case officer ready for their professional assessment a lot sooner than has been the case of late.

Longer term, once we have implemented the improvements that can deliver some immediate benefit, we will be turning to some more substantive opportunities to improve the service and ensure we make decisions in an even more timely manner. That will take a little longer to bring about but will deliver transformational change in how the service operates.

COUNCIL
26 OCTOBER 2016
MEMBERS QUESTIONS

I will of course keep Members informed as those longer term plans are formulated and their impacts for Members, applicants, agents and members of the public are understood.

COUNCIL
26 OCTOBER 2016
MEMBERS QUESTIONS

15. Question from Councillor Geoff Brighty to Councillor Danny Thorpe, Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Sustainability

There is growing concern about the number of basement applications, especially in areas with potential for subsidence, and that the recently adopted Residential Extensions, Basements and Conversions Supplementary Planning Document may not be comprehensive enough in dealing with basement applications. How does Greenwich's SPD compare with restrictions in other Boroughs - Camden, Westminster and Kensington & Chelsea for example - on basements?

Reply -

First of all let me say that I think there is a premise in the question that I need to challenge. The reference to the basement documents in other London Boroughs insinuates that because they are bigger, longer documents than the Greenwich document they must somehow be better and more appropriate. I do not believe that is true.

The Greenwich Residential Extensions, Basements and Conversions SPD was, as Councillor Brighty recognises, only recently adopted in early 2016. I think it is somewhat churlish to suggest that already it can be concluded that it is not fit for purpose. The document was adopted by the Council on the basis that it strengthened certain aspects of its consideration of the impacts of basements. It was prepared with reference to other similar SPDs in other parts of London although it was considered unnecessary to simply cut and paste them given Greenwich's circumstances differ from other Boroughs. I'm sure we are all aware of some of the extensive pressures to undertake major basement works in areas like Kensington and Chelsea that are major feats of engineering in themselves, of a scale and depth that have not been a feature of basement conversions here.

Of course, the technical aspects of installing new or extended basements still need to comply with the requirements of other relevant legislation. Planning can only look at the material planning issues. Standards of design and construction are still expected to comply with Building Regulations, for example, while the Party Wall Act requires developers to obtain from neighbours consent for works that affect shared boundaries between properties.

COUNCIL
26 OCTOBER 2016
MEMBERS QUESTIONS

Nevertheless, I acknowledge the concerns amongst certain residents living in areas where basement conversions are currently more likely to be a key feature of property investment in this Borough. It is important to get the balance right however between the needs of residents affected by development and our residents wanting to carry out the legitimate improvement and extension of their homes. The planning system must be proportionate.

I am happy to agree to a review in 12 months to assess the impact of the new policy.

COUNCIL
26 OCTOBER 2016
MEMBERS QUESTIONS

16. Question from Councillor Geoff Brighty to Councillor Danny Thorpe, Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Sustainability

Can the Cabinet Member confirm whether the Council has looked at the combined potential impact on air pollution levels in the area of all the new developments in the East Greenwich area - including Silvertown Tunnel, IKEA, and Enderby Wharf?

Reply -

Thank you for your question

I can confirm that the Council does consider the cumulative effects of new development on air quality in respect of those developments that require the submission of an Environmental Impact Assessment. Where those assessments show an increase over baseline levels of air pollution that are considered unacceptable then mitigation measures would be sought through the planning process. The specific examples mentioned in the question were all developments that did require the submission of an EIA. But, as he is aware, not all developments require EIAs and so the Council cannot, as a matter of course, take cumulative air quality effects into account. As Councillor Brighty knows, air quality is a matter of intense interest amongst Londoners and the new Mayor has made it a top priority. It was an issue raised in the legal challenge into the Council's decision on Enderby Wharf where the judge found that the Council had done all it could do in respect of the proposal's air quality impacts. We await a further appeal against that judgement.

In the meantime, Councillor Brighty as a member of the Planning Board and Greenwich Area Planning Committee is already aware of the extent to which the Council can take account of air quality in its assessments of planning applications. For significant schemes such as Silvertown Tunnel and Enderby Wharf an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) has been undertaken assessing the cumulative impact of other consented schemes in the vicinity in combination with the proposals are assessed. These EIAs are then reviewed by the Council and taken into consideration in the decision making process.

COUNCIL
26 OCTOBER 2016
MEMBERS QUESTIONS

17. Question from Councillor Spencer Drury to Councillor Averil Lekau, Cabinet Member for Housing and Anti-Poverty

I note that the Cabinet Member for Housing & Anti-Poverty has appointed Savills to carry out a stock condition survey to look at Council Housing. Given that the survey will only cover 20% of stock internally, how will the Council know which specific properties are in need of repair or suffer from excessive damp?

Reply –

Thank you for the question.

The aim of the stock condition survey is to inform our understanding of where investment decisions in the Council's housing stock should be prioritised. Social rent reductions have a significant impact on the future income the Council receives (projected at a reduction of £33m to the Housing Revenue Account over the next 4 years). It is critical that the Council has a clear and robust picture of its liabilities regarding the condition of its housing stock. The stock condition survey will enable the Council to forecast its investment needs over the long term and budget accordingly.

The intention of the survey is to assist with determining future investment needs. With regards to 'internals' i.e. Kitchens/bathrooms, a 20% sample is considered statistically sound and will provide sufficient accuracy (within 5%) at an individual property level due to the similarity of the internal components across high rise/blocks/houses, with no need to incur the costs that visiting every property would require. In essence, officers do not need to see every property internally.

This is not the case with "externals" (i.e. the outside of buildings) which are more complex and vary considerably with each building type (window/roof type/size etc.) and hence the need for a 100% on externals to achieve the necessary accuracy.

Before any work starts within any property, an internal survey will be undertaken (of those not previously surveyed) to establish the exact work requirements.

COUNCIL
26 OCTOBER 2016
MEMBERS QUESTIONS

18. Question from Councillor Spencer Drury to Councillor Sizwe James, Cabinet Member for Transport, Economy and Smart Cities

In the past it has been suggested that the Council will ensure that Adult Education classes continue to be offered from the Eltham Centre, however, this autumn all classes except a single session first aid course have been cancelled. Can the Cabinet Member explain how the Council's policy led to the loss of all substantial Adult Education classes from the Eltham Centre, including the Eltham History ones run by local historian John Kennett which were traditionally well subscribed and I would have thought self-funding?

Reply -

I thank Councillor Drury for his question.

The Council has a dedicated space for adult and community learning (ACL) within the Eltham Centre and as previously stated has committed resources to support this over the next three years. The Eltham Centre will be used to offer courses delivered by several of the Council's ACL providers which as well as London South East Colleges (formerly Bromley, Bexley and Greenwich Community Colleges) includes City Lit, Ravensbourne and Greenwich Cooperative Development Agency.

The Council procures its ACL provision through a Framework Agreement. This year the commissioning process took longer than anticipated as a new four year Framework had to be set up and a high number of good quality submissions were received in response to tenders. This led to a delay in the start of some classes, but the 2016/17 programme is now up and running.

There are over 30 courses scheduled at the Eltham Centre this autumn giving people an opportunity to gain qualification, improve skills, start a business, run a club, and learn for general interest. Some of the courses LSEC plan to run at the Eltham Centre will start in January. Any self-financing classes that the College are no longer running can book rooms at the Eltham Centre free of charge. Contact has been made with John Kennett regarding the History of Eltham group to offer this facility.

We will be holding another open day at the Eltham Centre in November with taster sessions and advice and guidance run by our providers including LSEC.

COUNCIL
26 OCTOBER 2016
MEMBERS QUESTIONS

If there is sufficient demand, for particular courses we will work with providers or interest groups to facilitate this.

COUNCIL
26 OCTOBER 2016
MEMBERS QUESTIONS

19. Question from Councillor Spencer Drury to Councillor Jackie Smith, Cabinet Member for Community Safety and Environment

I note that the tennis coach who previously provided coaching sessions at Eltham Park has left. Can the Cabinet Member provide me with the date that the coach left, why he decided to leave and what maintenance has been done over the last year on both the hard and grass courts in Eltham Park?

Reply –

I thank Councillor Drury for his enquiry regarding tennis provision at Eltham Park South.

The tennis coach recently ceased his coaching session at the park to focus on training sessions at John Roan School Playing Fields, Kidbrooke, and a new indoor facility at Eltham Hill School.

Parks officers are in discussion with another coach who has expressed an interest to offering sessions in the park next year.

The Council's Ground Maintenance staff carry out a routine maintenance programme for both the grass court and hard surface court. Park Rangers also routinely inspect the courts, undertake litter picking and report any repairs that may be required. At the end of each season more major repairs are undertaken to ensure the courts are fit for use for the following season. Parks officers are currently dealing with issues relating to the lighting and also as a result of the courts being used wrongly for playing football.

COUNCIL
26 OCTOBER 2016
MEMBERS QUESTIONS

20. Question from Councillor Spencer Drury to Councillor Jackie Smith, Cabinet Member for Community Safety and Environment

In August the BBC published an article about recycling rates nationally and the Royal Borough of Greenwich received a special mention as it has one of the highest levels of recyclable waste rejected in 2014-15 (14.4% compared to a national average of 3%). Following this article the News Shopper published a follow up with a longer quote from a Council spokesperson which read:

“The Royal Borough of Greenwich takes the contamination of recycling very seriously.

"We pursue a proactive approach on this issue through engaging with residents, businesses, managing agents and landlords on how to make best use of the services the Council provides, including the proper separation of recyclable material.

"Following our engagement activity, anyone found to be continually contaminating will have their recycling bins removed.”

As a naturally curious Councillor I followed up on this comment asking exactly how many bins had been removed in previous years and discovered that the Council kept no record of this figure.

How can the Cabinet Member know if this policy is working if there are no figures available to know how many bins have been removed?

Reply -

Thank you for the question.

Street Services do keep a record of those individual properties where bins have been removed - as this action is only taken after officers have made visits and letters to the property owners over a period of time, in an attempt to improve matters. It is simply that this information is not held in summary format. The Council is in the process of procuring a new Environment Management system that will address this.

COUNCIL
26 OCTOBER 2016
MEMBERS QUESTIONS

The overall effect of the policy is evident through the total contamination levels reported through analysis undertaken when material is delivered to the materials recycling facility.

This information is regularly reviewed to identify areas of poorer performance which enables waste awareness officers to prioritise their work and focus on those addresses which are presenting contaminated recycling bins.

COUNCIL
26 OCTOBER 2016
MEMBERS QUESTIONS

21. Question from Councillor Spencer Drury to Councillor David Gardner, Cabinet Member for Health & Adult Social Care

I understand that the Council uses a substantial number of locums or temporary staff in its Occupational Therapy (OT) Department. I was informed in the summer that the majority of permanent Occupational Therapists were temporary (8 compared to 3 fully employed) and both the Principal OT and Manager were locums. Can the Cabinet Member outline the cost of a temporary OT as against a permanent one over the course of a year and suggest whether this arrangement is efficient in cost or service terms?

Reply –

I thank Councillor Drury for his question.

Recruiting Occupational Therapists (OT's) is difficult for Council's across London. Royal Greenwich has recently undertaken a public advertisement recruitment for OT's. This included national advertising. The process yielded one candidate. The Council's wage rates were benchmarked with other Local Authorities. The Royal Borough of Greenwich's rates were broadly comparable. The Council has appointed a Principal OT, to create stronger professional leadership, following the model used in Social Work. Work is underway to develop a common career structure with our partners Oxleas NHS Trust, with a view to common recruitment, including graduate recruitment and shared career paths.

Continued use of agency staff therefore is essential. We are committed to working with other Councils across London to look at OT recruitment, but there is a shortage of OTs and Councils compete with the NHS and the private sector for available staff. Inevitably there is a premium for an OT from an agency. This varies on the length of the contract/assignment and skill/experience level of the OT. The Council's salary cost per OT averages £47k per year, the agency cost averages at around £62k per year (this includes the agency fee). This is a premium of around 30%.

COUNCIL
26 OCTOBER 2016
MEMBERS QUESTIONS

22. Question from Councillor Spencer Drury to Councillor Denise Hyland, Leader of the Council

Given residents have the option of not having Greenwich Info delivered, can the Council either refund the money saved by not producing a copy for each household or allow people to nominate the services they would rather the funds were spent on?

Reply -

I thank Councillor Drury for his question.

Greenwich Info has been so well received by local residents that only 19 households have opted out of receiving our information sheet.

Council tax is levied upon the value of a resident's home and not the services that the residents in a household choose to use.

Even if the Council could offer a rebate, given the low number of opts out and the low unit costs associated with producing Greenwich Info, the costs of administering and issuing the rebate would likely be more than the amounts involved.

COUNCIL
26 OCTOBER 2016
MEMBERS QUESTIONS

23. Question from Councillor Matt Clare to Councillor Jackie Smith, Cabinet Member for Community Safety and Environment

Would the cabinet member please confirm if there is now a timetable for delivery of the Anaerobic Digestion plant?

Reply -

Thank you for the question.

Councillor Clare asked previously a very similar question to this – at the 29th July 2015 Council meeting. At the time the response was:

“In April 2014, the procurement to design, construct and operate an Anaerobic Digestion plant was ceased as the Council was unable to secure acceptable commercial terms from the only bidder remaining in the process, which meant the proposal no longer represented value for money. A procurement exercise is now underway for a contract to process organic waste collected at the kerbside. Three tenders have been received and are due to be evaluated. It is expected that the contract will be awarded in August/September 2015.”

I am happy to report that officers concluded the process to award the organic waste contract in September 2015. Food and garden waste is now transported and treated at an “in-vessel composting facility” as part of a contract that will continue until 2027.

COUNCIL
26 OCTOBER 2016
MEMBERS QUESTIONS

24. Question from Councillor Matt Clare to Councillor Danny Thorpe, Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Sustainability

In light of the delays in delivering the Anaerobic Digestion plant what progress is the council making to facilitate maximum generation of local clean energy from renewable sources?

Reply -

I thank Councillor Clare for his question

The Council is committed to supporting the development of local clean and renewable energy production, such as district heat networks and solar power; and is continually exploring ways in which it can do this. The Anaerobic Digestion plant has been cancelled as it was non-viable.

District heat networks are a fantastic opportunity to provide local lower emission heat to the Borough's residents; they are more efficient in the use of fuel and therefore produces less pollution than equipment supplying individual premises. In the last two years the Royal Borough has facilitated the development of such a network on the Peninsular which will supply 13,000 homes with low emission energy; and further networks exist in Woolwich and Kidbrooke. Work is also ongoing to better understand the potential of a new network in East Greenwich, which would make use of waste heat from Transport for London's operations at Greenwich Power Station, to provide low carbon heat to residents of Greenwich and Greenwich Peninsula. In addition, as part of the European Union funded project, the innovative addition of a water source heat pump to this network is being explored, which would use heat from the Thames to supply local social housing blocks; if installed this would be the first project of its kind in the UK.

The Royal Borough has voluntarily committed to procuring all of its electricity from green sources, and has recently invested in a solar PV programme which saw the installation of Solar PV to 7 Royal Borough owned sheltered and residential blocks.

Through the planning process the Royal Borough also advocates the installation of low carbon and renewable energy technologies in new developments.

COUNCIL
26 OCTOBER 2016
MEMBERS QUESTIONS

It is recommended that all new major development establish, connect, or provide for future connection to decentralised energy networks. Major developments are also required to achieve reductions in CO₂ emissions by utilising renewable energy technologies. This has resulted in over 35,000 m² of solar panels being installed on new developments in the Borough since 2010, the equivalent of 3 football pitches worth of solar panels; and the application of other renewables such as biomass, solar thermal and ground source heat pumps.

Regarding waste to energy development in the Borough, although Anaerobic Digestion is no longer a feasible consideration, the Royal Borough has one of the lowest proportions of waste sent to landfill, a good recycling rate for a dense urban area and much of the waste that is not recycled is sent to SELCHP, a waste to energy centre in South East London which has been running for 20 years. For example in 2014/15, around 35% of the waste collected in the Royal Borough was reused, recycled or composted, and only 6.5% was sent to landfill, one of the lowest figures in the UK.

COUNCIL
26 OCTOBER 2016
MEMBERS QUESTIONS

25. Question from Councillor Matt Clare to Councillor Sizwe James, Cabinet Member for Transport, Economy and Smart Cities

Several cycle superhighways have been successfully delivered across much of London. However South East London has missed out so far. CS4 (From Tower Bridge to Greenwich) and CS5 (From Pimlico to New Cross Gate) are significantly behind schedule. Would the cabinet member please outline what council is doing to help secure these 2 essential routes as soon as possible?

Reply -

I thank Councillor Clare for his question.

The Cycle Superhighway programme put forward by the previous Mayor of London included proposals for CS4 from Central London to Woolwich. This scheme was originally scheduled to be delivered as one of the early Cycle Superhighways but has suffered numerous delays as TfL and the Mayor Johnson's delivery priorities changed.

Subsequently CS4 was planned for completion by 2017. Again implementation has been significantly delayed by a TfL review of design standards for Cycle Superhighways after the standards employed for the initial Cycle Superhighway programme proved to be inadequate. This review has also affected delivery of CS5 to New Cross, with the focus of this scheme to date being improvements to the route within Central London.

The new Mayor of London is yet to outline his Transport Strategy for the whole of London. A new Transport Strategy is anticipated in the first half of 2017, and will give clarity on how the Cycle Superhighways programme will be taken forward under the new administration.

In the meantime, and despite the delay to the programme, officers have been working closely with TfL's Cycling team to review initial designs for Phase I of CS4 which is proposed to link central London to Greenwich Town Centre. Our understanding from TfL is that initial consultation on this route is now scheduled for early 2017, and we are continuing to press TfL to bring forward these proposals as quickly as possible, and deliver the full scheme to Woolwich as originally intended.

COUNCIL
26 OCTOBER 2016
MEMBERS QUESTIONS

26. Question from Councillor Matt Clare to Councillor Jackie Smith, Cabinet Member for Community Safety and Environment

Every year the council plants trees in our borough at a cost of £200-400 each only to see an unacceptable number die through inadequate care in planting or insufficient watering. In some cases 2 buckets of water a week in the summer months (perhaps poured by residents, council or local business employees in the area) would help these vital filters of our polluted air survive and thrive. We have a vibrant network of community environment champions. Should the council either widen their role or should a second network of 'Green Guardians' be created?

Reply -

I thank Councillor Matt Clare for his observations and suggestions regarding the care of newly planted trees in the borough.

The majority of tree planting is undertaken on behalf of the Highways Department, with a small number planted on Housing sites. Over the past 4 seasons, approximately 1,500 trees have been planted on the public highway and careful consideration is taken on the variety of tree for each location. The survival rate of the trees we have planted is good with an 89% success rate in recent years.

To assist the new trees a watering programme is put in place to either water weekly or make approximately 20 visits in their first growing season.

Greenwich Transportation runs a tree adoption scheme where residents care for newly planted trees. Approximately 20-25% of trees planted are adopted by residents. Greenwich Transportation has also planted 153 trees on Housing sites which have been included in the annual watering programme.

COUNCIL
26 OCTOBER 2016
MEMBERS QUESTIONS

27. Question from Councillor Matt Clare to Councillor Jackie Smith, Cabinet Member for Community Safety and Environment

In June the council committed to £400 fixed penalty notices and put in place 2 'dedicated task forces assigned to Plumstead and Charlton.'

A) What concrete results have been achieved?

- How many FPNs of over £200 have been issued, and what proportion paid?
- What proven, measurable improvements have there been (i.e. reductions in resident calls to the Contact Centre vs. the same period in the previous year)

B) Has the location of these 2 dedicated task forces proven to be optimal to cover the whole borough so far?

C) By dedicated does that mean these 2 task forces are fully utilised full time on fly tipping enforcement? If so how much of that cost is being recouped in fixed penalty notices?

Reply -

Thank you for the question and I will address each point:

A) What concrete results have been achieved:

- **How many FPNs of over £200 have been issued, and what proportion paid?**

The Unauthorised Deposit of Waste (Fixed Penalties) Regulations 2016 came into force on the 9th May 2016. Greenwich adopted the Policy on 8th September 2016 and a fly tipping FPN (£400) was made available to officers to issue from this date. Officers have so far issued 2 x £400 FPNs and both have been paid in full. In addition to the 2 FPNs issued, officers also recovered an additional £300 for the removal and disposal of the waste.

COUNCIL
26 OCTOBER 2016
MEMBERS QUESTIONS

- **What proven, measurable improvements have there been (i.e. reductions in resident calls to the Contact Centre vs. the same period in the previous year)**

Given that the new policy has only been in operation for six weeks, it is too early to measure the success as the £400 FPN policy was only adopted on the 8th Sept 2016. I have asked officers to carry out a full evaluation of its impact after six months.

B) Has the location of these 2 dedicated task forces proven to be optimal to cover the whole borough so far?

The two taskforce teams each work in clearly defined areas, specifically within Plumstead and Charlton. The rest of the borough is serviced by the existing waste management services.

C) By dedicated does that mean these 2 task forces are fully utilised full time on fly tipping enforcement? If so how much of that cost, is being recouped in fixed penalty notices?

The taskforce teams consist of an Enforcement Officer and an operational street cleansing crew (two officers) with the support of a Waste Advisor. The teams have a constant presence - one within the defined Plumstead area and the other in the Charlton area – every day, Monday to Friday, with frequent weekend visits. The teams were set up as the Council recognised that normal cleansing arrangements were not sufficient to maintain acceptable levels of cleanliness in these particular areas. In Plumstead, the high number of HMOs posed a particular problem with high levels of bulky furniture being dumped on the pavement. Businesses on Plumstead High Street and in surrounding roads (Lakedale Road, Conway Road, Plumstead Road) also presented other issues associated with illegal trade waste. Similar issues were being experienced in the Charlton area with street cleansing: bags frequently dumped on the pavement in specific roads (egg: Floyd Road), and businesses in Charlton Church Lane using street litter bins for business waste and not complying with their “Duty of Care” responsibilities to manage and dispose of waste appropriately.

COUNCIL
26 OCTOBER 2016
MEMBERS QUESTIONS

Whilst dealing with fly tipping and taking enforcement action where perpetrators are identified, the teams also provide advice to residents of the correct routes for disposal (e.g. by using the Council's bulky waste collection service and/or by taking items to the Reuse and Recycling Centre in Nathan Way free of charge) and advise residents of the waste and recycling collection service's work, particularly reminding them of their collection days

The taskforce vehicles are marked with posters warning of the consequences of fly-tipping. As a result of the Taskforce activity, 113 FPNs (at £75 each) have been issued to offenders in the Plumstead area since June 2015. In addition to this, officers have recovered £3,608.71 in disposal costs as a result of the proactive removal of bulky items and fly tips. In the Charlton area, 30 FPNs have been issued since the end of November 2015.

More recently, at the end of August 2016, a third taskforce team was established in Abbey Wood to address increasing problems in the area.

COUNCIL
26 OCTOBER 2016
MEMBERS QUESTIONS

28. Question from Councillor Matt Clare to Councillor Denise Hyland, Leader of the Council

A growing number of public and private sector organisations are offering the gender neutral title of Mx (Mixter) in forms and systems which some transsexual people feel is more suited to them than Mr/Mrs/Ms/Miss. Is the council among them?

Reply -

Thank you for the question.

As a Council which takes Equality issues seriously we are happy for any resident to use the term Mx as a prefix.

COUNCIL
26 OCTOBER 2016
MEMBERS QUESTIONS

29. Question from Councillor Sarah Merrill to Councillor Averil Lekau, Cabinet Member for Housing and Anti-Poverty

Can the Cabinet Member say what she thinks the impact of the pressure on the Royal Borough of Greenwich to sell its high value properties will be on homelessness in the borough?

Reply -

Thank you for the question.

The Royal Borough has more than 15,000 households on its waiting list for social housing and in common with other London boroughs is also facing a dramatic rise in the number of households applying and accepted as homeless. The number of homeless households to whom London boroughs have accepted a duty rose by 118% between 2010/11 and 2015/16.

In this context, the sale of high value properties would have a serious adverse effect on the Royal Borough's ability to rehouse homeless households and other priority groups. This difficulty would be especially severe if the Royal Borough had to sell larger properties, as there is an acute shortage of 3 & 4 bedroom properties. In consequence, homeless households and other priority groups, such as those who are severely overcrowded or have serious medical needs would have to remain longer in temporary accommodation or unsuitable housing conditions. This would increase the Royal Borough of Greenwich's existing budget pressure related to the provision of temporary accommodation. In addition, it is likely to put additional pressures on health and social care services, if homeless people and other vulnerable groups face increased delays before they are rehoused to suitable accommodation.

The new Government should review the previous Tory Government's legislation which has disproportionately affected working class people, the poor and vulnerable.