

Item 12

Questions on Notice with Answers

1. Asbestos in City Parks

By Councillor Scott

Question

1. In response to Councillor Scott's request to test for asbestos on 13 January 2024, what actions did the Chief Executive Officer take prior to the Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) notifying the City?
2. When did the Chief Executive Officer communicate with the Lord Mayor about this matter, in person, via phone or in writing? Please detail each instance and the contents covered.
3. Please detail, by date and time, all engagement with the NSW EPA since 12 January 2024.
4. Please detail, by date and time, when all fencing was set up in parks.
5. Please detail, by date and time, all public communications about the asbestos contamination.
6. Did the City issue a media release before fencing the asbestos contaminated parks or contacting the EPA?

X086668

Answer by the Chief Executive Officer

1. Following media reporting on 10 January 2024, the City's Environmental Engineer requested that the Parks Team confirm with our suppliers/contractors that their mulch is from compliant sources. The Chief Executive Officer requested specific advice about the matter on 11 January 2024 and requested further advice once the supplier of interest was known. Councillors were advised on 19 January 2024 that our contracts did not include the supplier of interest.
2. After receiving notification from Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) that their supply chain investigations had revealed that the City of Sydney may have received contaminated mulch the Chief Executive Officer contacted the Lord Mayor's Chief of Staff. The Chief Executive Officer advised the Chief of Staff that we had been contacted by EPA, that we had ordered testing of priority parks, and that we were preparing the action we would need to take if tests were positive, including how we would communicate to the community. The Chief Executive Officer called the Chief of Staff on Friday 9 February 2024 and Saturday 10 February 2024 to advise no further information had been received yet.

After receiving the test results on the afternoon of Monday 12 February 2024, staff read and assessed the test results to determine appropriate mitigation plans, including fencing. This along with communications plans took until about 10.30pm when all Councillors were advised of the situation.

3. On the afternoon of the 8 February 2024, the EPA rang the City of Sydney call centre and advised they were planning to undertake testing in some City of Sydney parks. Staff who followed up on this advice assessed the information provided by the EPA, following which the EPA then advised they had to postpone the testing. On Friday 9 February 2024 it was agreed that the fastest course of action, given the initial advice from the EPA, would be to commission our own testing. The information provided by the EPA enabled staff to narrow down the top five parks to be tested first.

The test results were received late Monday 12 February 2024. Following receipt of these first test results there have been multiple contacts with the EPA addressing matters such as testing methodology, identification of new sites to be tested, informing of test results and forecasting of logistical issues such as access to fencing and the approach being taken to the remediation of the sites.

Additionally, the Chief Executive Officer spoke to the Chief Executive Officer of the EPA at about 8.15am on Tuesday 13 February 2024. The Chief Executive Officer advised the Chief Executive Officer of the EPA of the names of the EPA staff that our staff had been liaising with and who we had sent the test results too. During this phone call the Chief Executive Officer of the EPA advised the Chief Executive Officer of the City of Sydney that a City of Sydney contact person had been assigned, he then sent the contact details to the Chief Executive Officer. The Director City Services immediately contacted this assigned contact. This contact has since been changed and the Director City Services has maintained regular contact.

4. Fencing commenced at Harmony Park on Tuesday 13 February 2024. A temporary fence was in place by approximately 8.00am. The fencing of affected areas at Victoria Park and Belmore Park was completed on Tuesday 13 February 2024. The positive test for Munn Reserve was received late on Friday 17 February 2024 and fencing was completed on the same day.
5. Council have been advised and provided links to all public communications as soon as they were finalised and disseminated and also provided the links to the relevant website pages and informed they would be regularly updated.
6. Upon receiving positive test results staff immediately commenced action to secure contaminated sites and notifying the public. The most efficient way to notify the public is via the media which is why a press release was prepared. The information about the potential contamination and priority sites came from the EPA and staff had been in contact with the EPA since the first phone call on 8 February 2024.

2. Bilingual Library Cuts

By Councillor Scott

Question

1. Why were there cuts made to the Darling Square Library Mandarin Bilingual Rhyme Time programs, changing it from weekly to monthly?

2. At what point was it reversed back to weekly?
3. Why were Councillors not informed about this?

X086668

Answer by the Chief Executive Officer

1. No programs have been cut. All programs continue on a weekly basis. Staff regularly review programming in our libraries and will continue to do so to suit community needs and feedback.
2. There was no reversal as the reduction never happened. In response to changes in demand for both English language and bilingual programming, staff planned to adjust programming on a trial basis, increasing the frequency of rhymetime and story time in Green Square and reducing the frequency in Darling Square. These changes were listed on the City of Sydney website in late January, and the proposed revised program schedule linked in the City of Sydney library newsletter. Based on community feedback, the City decided not to proceed with the trial before the beginning of the term and updated the City of Sydney website on 1 February 2024 to confirm that.
3. The City regularly reviews programming in libraries and will continue to do so to suit community needs and feedback. Adjustments to the timing of programs are occasionally made based on demand or as community interest changes at an operational level.