

APPENDIX VII

LONDON BOROUGH OF HARROW

COUNCIL

5 JULY 2012

QUESTIONS WITH NOTICE (ITEM 17)

Fifteen minutes will be allowed for Members of the Council to ask a Portfolio Holder a question on any matter in relation to which the Executive has powers or duties.

1.

Questioner: Councillor William Stoodley

Asked of: Councillor Graham Henson (Portfolio Holder for Performance, Customer Services and Corporate Services)

Question: Are you please able to tell me when the advice and guidance for Councillors on blogging and using other such media will be published, as directed by Dr John Kirkland in my Standards Board hearing?

Answer: The Social Media Protocol was published and contained as part of the Constitution in November 2011 and is now currently on the website.

Supplemental Question: Do you agree that, as I am most anxious to start my new blog which will be called 'Not the Harrow Observer', in order to continue to dispel and further expose Tory myths and propaganda, the arrival of this information and knowledge of where to obtain it is a most welcome development?

Supplemental Answer: I do.

2.

Questioner: Councillor William Stoodley

Asked of: Councillor Graham Henson (Portfolio Holder for Performance, Customer Services and Corporate Services)

Question: Would you please kindly tell me how many Standards Board for England investigations set directives to be complied with but did not set a time limit within which that directive had to be complied with?

Answer: The Standards Board for England under the Localism Act was done away with. Investigations now take place through local councils. We have agreed that process a few items ago tonight. There are no outstanding directives arising from Standards for England.

Supplemental Question: Would you agree that if a Councillor was to ignore a directive just because no time limit had been set, for example by not writing an apology letter, that that action would show that that Councillor had no respect for either the spirit of the directive or for their fiduciary responsibility and status as a Councillor? If so, are you able to assure Members that any directives put in place under a new system will always set time limits for the compliance so that even disrespectful Councillors are forced to comply?

Supplemental Answer: I always believed that there should be timescales that people should respond to. I am sure that will be taken up by the Standards Committee when they reinvestigate or reconsider the processes further. I do believe there should be timescales in place, exactly the same as we have within our own employment practices across the Council.

3.

Questioner: Councillor Stanley Sheinwald

Asked of: Councillor Phillip O'Dell (Portfolio Holder for Environment and Community Safety)

Question: "Can the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Community Safety advise me of the cost of the Hatch End Parking consultation and what has been learned from it?"

Answer: An estimated cost of materials and officer time is that the cost of this consultation is in the region of £18,960.

Supplemental Question: So what is the point of this consultation if the residents and traders have clearly stated they do not want to pay for parking along the Uxbridge Road or the Grims Dyke Car Park and will he now take into consideration that trade is so bad in Hatch End that another café has closed and even Nationwide Building Society is closing down in August? So will you now listen to the people of Hatch End? Thank you.

Supplemental Answer: Yes, of course we will. It is regrettable that this Government has imposed such financial rigour on the nation that even the cafés and restaurants in Hatch End have to close.

We have learned a number of things from the consultation. It has provided an evidence base for a report that was discussed

at a Traffic and Road Safety Advisory Panel meeting on 21 June 2012.

The response rate for this consultation was comparatively high compared with other consultations with many individual responses and a number of petitions.

We learned marginally that more people feel that parking there is not a problem but a significant proportion think there is a problem (44%).

4.

Questioner: Councillor James Bond

Asked of: Councillor Brian Gate (Portfolio Holder for Children, Schools and Families)

Question: "David Milliband has warned that high and growing youth unemployment is a "ticking timebomb" under the nation's finances and social wellbeing.

Why, then, are Harrow and Brent councils scrapping Brent and Harrow Education Business Service which for years has given thousands of young people in the two boroughs an invaluable advantage as they prepare to enter the jobs market?

And why have the councils looked only at short-term, minor financial savings and ignored the infinitely greater long-term cost, financial and otherwise, of scrapping the service?"

Answer: There is no statutory duty on the Council to deliver such a service which will help schools to place young people on work experience. Prior to April 2011, there were grants given by Government which assisted Councils to run such services and many did so. However, as you know and we have alluded to already from the previous speakers this evening, that central funding has now been cut and not provided to us or Brent and therefore, as I refer to Brent and Harrow Education Business Services as BHEBS, we had to substantially adjust to the new environment which needed to be a self sustaining service.

Increasingly funds which were held normally by local authorities or managed through local authorities are now devolved right down to the school level and this direction of movement has been intensified through academy conversion for instance and schools can still purchase places to place pupils on work experience through the other agencies that do exist to offer a cost effective service within the economies of scale.

The responsibility to provide work related learning currently rests with schools and colleges and not with the local authority.

The Government, however, has stated its intention to remove this responsibility from schools with respect to many of the young people at school and that would therefore unfortunately put a financial pressure on any service as schools may choose not to provide or actually fund work experience.

We tried to find a financially viable model and we also tried to review that in consultation with Brent Council, who actually made their own separate consultation as well. The review showed that projected income would fall far short of the funds that would be needed to make it a service which could be viable. The review of the practice in other areas provides little evidence that local authority that runs BHEBS can be self-sustaining in any model and small scale private providers struggle to continue without some LA commissioning. The service was financially vulnerable and posed a high risk to both councils at a time of shrinking council budgets, again something that the Leader alluded to earlier on. As a result Brent and Harrow consulted with staff on a proposal to close the service. We extended the consultation to service users but we did not have any responses.

This Council, after due consideration of the responses received during the consultation decided to implement the proposal to close BHEBS on 31 August 2012 which had been consulted on and staff had been informed of this on 18 June 2012. Brent also carried out a staff consultation on a proposal to close the BHEBS and came to the same decision.

I actually share your concern about youth unemployment, as I think certainly all Members of this local authority should, cannot afford, to run a loss making service and we have known that from colleagues' comments about how we actually had to ensure that we were efficient services which are not loss making to the Council Tax payer. I am certain our schools will actually maintain their responsibility to equip all school leavers in the most appropriate ways to enter the job market, whether that be immediately on leaving school or at a later time but I would hope also that we as a local authority in whatever we can as Ward Councillors, whatever we can actually utilise our own influence into actually helping young people find jobs in this very, very difficult time.

Supplemental Question:

Could I just ask a sort of a wider question, it probably applies to so many different things? I was at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting on Tuesday night and the Chief Executive, said as a Council we have to focus our minds on the most important things and quite rightly you said education is one of those important things.

Can you assure me that whilst the Council finances may or may not in the future be able to provide this service, we can work

with other Outside Bodies to ensure that this very valuable service, if any way, can be rescued in the future?

Supplemental Answer: You have my assurance and may I just also just pay tribute to Councillor Green, who has my predecessor in the two years that she was the Portfolio Holder, she championed young people. It was her championing of the Corporate Parenting that made sure that that stand was outside for Members to look at today, so I am following in her footsteps and you have my assurance that I will be continually championing young people within Cabinet, continually championing young people within group meetings and continually championing young people in this Borough. I we must do everything we possibly can to make sure they actually do have a future.

5.

Questioner: Councillor Susan Hall

Asked of: Councillor Phillip O'Dell (Portfolio Holder for Environment and Community Safety)

Question: Could you please provide the quarterly recycling figures for the last two years?

Answer: I would be delighted to give those figures in a written reply.

Supplemental Question: In your manifesto on page 9 you said that you would like to achieve 65% recycling. I can only assume that the figures have slipped backwards.

Do you still think then that you will achieve 65% recycling within the next two years?

Supplemental Answer: Yes. With cross party support the recycling rates within Harrow has increased since 2006 to 2007, an increase of 73%. I would like to take the opportunity to thank all those residents in the London Borough of Harrow that helped us to achieve this figure. We have also robustly introduced more recycling to flats so this will help us achieve our goal of 65%.

6.

Questioner: Councillor Mrs Camilla Bath

Asked of: Councillor Bob Currie (Portfolio Holder for Housing)

Question: Given this administration's promise to ensure that the Council's housing stock is regularly externally redecorated, could you provide quarterly figures for the last two years of how many houses have been accordingly decorated?

Answer: It is difficult to break the work down into quarterly figures but I can give you annual figures.

In 2010/11, 180 homes received works under the external decorations programme.

In 2011/12, the number was 312.

You will be aware we have just started consultation on the five year External Decorations Programme with events held on the 27 June and 4 July to which a wide range of stakeholders were invited. This will mean the Council will have in place an effective, fully consulted five years' working programme, with year one starting this year.

Where possible we try to cut down the need for external decoration by providing windows, soffits, cladding and fascias with PVC; that is plastic. This means that a number of properties no longer require work under the programme as they are fully PVC for the main external key compartments.

I would just like to add that these ongoing programmes have come about because of our new Year 30 Plan investment in the housing.

Supplemental Question: How many houses do you estimate will qualify for redecoration during your five year plan?

I would also like to know what are your quarterly redecoration targets for the next two years?

Supplemental Answer: I have not got it at hand but as you know, you sit on the Tenants' Leaseholders and Residents Consultative Forum. On 17 July 2012 this whole programme will be presented and you will see the five year programme.

GUILLOTINE REACHED (the following answers were circulated after the Council meeting, by written response, at the request of the Mayor).

7.

Questioner: Councillor Paul Osborn

Asked of: Councillor Bill Stephenson (Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Business Transformation and Communications)

Question: In 2010, you promised a Labour administration would focus on 'invest to save' opportunities, and strive to avoid redundancies. Can you therefore explain why the invest to save / redundancy portion of the Transformation and Priority Initiatives Fund has veered so heavily towards redundancies?

Written Answer: This Administration has said it will do its utmost to prevent compulsory redundancies. Our biggest cost is our staff so that in making savings it is inevitable that we will need to lose staff. However in very difficult circumstances we will attempt to do this by defending or indeed enhancing front-line services. We will do our best to re-deploy staff and offer them voluntary severance. Many invest-to-save schemes are based on delivering a service with less staff. A good example would be the introduction of RFID in libraries where we saved over £1.1 million. The TPIF will be based on this principle. In this case any redundancy costs will be part of the investment and will be paid back to the fund out of the savings which are made.

8.

Questioner: Councillor Kam Chana

Asked of: Councillor Bill Stephenson (Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Business Transformation and Communications)

Question: What creative ways to generate income for the Council that you have you so far introduced, and what are your future plans in this respect?

Written Answer: The Council is continually reviewing the options available to generate additional income. We have set up a central procurement section which is scheduled to save £2 million a year - an area which the previous administration totally neglected. Shame on them!

In the previous Labour Administration I was responsible for appointing a fundraiser who has helped to raise literally millions of pounds by helping the Council and their partners to apply for funding from other bodies. I am glad to say our fundraiser is still in place earning his salary many times over.

Since this Administration came to power we have introduced advertising on the web and our Council Tax Booklet is self-funding through advertisements and large part of the award-winning Harrow People is funded by advertisements and articles sponsored and paid for by our partners in the polices and the PCT. We continue to get private firms to sponsor roundabouts and also flower beds in shopping centres.

Through contract procurement we have been able to turn the cost of disposing of recyclable materials into an income of £1m.

Likewise by hard-nosed procurement we managed to save £400k on our Leisure Centre contract, improving the service at the same time.

By moving to a hub and spokes base system for Children's

Centres we managed to increase income and secure a commercially viable system to secure the future of our Children's Centres, and indeed open three new ones, whilst other Local Authorities are closing theirs. The overall saving from the project is £1.2m.

We are currently undertaking a commercialisation project which is looking specifically at the following areas:

Trade Waste, Harrow Helpline and Telecare, Garages, Pest Control and Animal Services and lots more.

If Cllr Chana has any ideas himself, we would be very happy to consider them.

9.

Questioner: Councillor Stephen Wright

Asked of: Councillor Thaya Idaikkadar (Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Property and Major Contracts)
To be responded to by Councillor Keith Ferry, Portfolio Holder for Planning and Regeneration

Question: Can you update us on your administration's efforts to encourage and expand the provision of private leisure facilities for Harrow residents?

Written Answer: Over the last 12 months, the Council has continued to work with a number of potential and existing operators in Harrow to support the enhanced provision of facilities through partnership with private and community enterprises.

I am delighted that in May this year Cedars Youth and Community Centre opened its doors for the first time in Harrow Weald. Last week, the Planning Committee resolved to approve, amongst other things, proposals for new health and fitness facilities on the Kodak site and at cabinet in July, the Council will be considering an opportunity to explore enhanced community access for the growing facilities at the Hive (in exchange for alternations to the lease). At the last cabinet meeting, approval was also given to progress negotiations to provide new, high quality sports and leisure facilities at Whitchurch, in partnership with a private consortium.

10.

Questioner: Councillor Manji Kara

Asked of: Councillor David Perry (Portfolio Holder for Community and Cultural Services)
To be responded to by Councillor Keith Ferry, Portfolio Holder

for Planning and Regeneration

Question: Can you provide an update on your plans to introduce a 'Harrow Card' for entertainment and shopping discounts within the Borough?

Written Answer: In the current period of ongoing economic uncertainty it is important to ensure that plans for the Harrow Card are well considered, in respect of technology, utility, take up, impact and our own priorities.

The council is therefore undertaking work to determine the

- type of use for a Harrow Card;
- distribution methods;
- the level of discounts that can be offered to card users and how these can be funded;
- how a Harrow Card can be promoted;
- procurement of card;
- integration with other Cards;
- costs.

The Harrow Card is one mechanism to support the Town Centre, in the meantime, the Council is progressing a suite of other measures, including

- investing £5m in the town centre as a catalyst to the £1billion in investment we will be attracting to develop Harrow's key sites;
- develop a place promotion campaign with developers to market Harrow as a place for new investment and visitors;
- using events and promotions to stimulate footfall and promote the attractiveness of our town centres.

In September we will launch a toolkit to support new businesses opening in the town centre and local shopping centres. This will guide businesses through the regulatory processes, and ensure they are informed of the standards they should meet. This will help reduce business cost, by ensuring they get things right first time. It will also protect residents and shoppers by ensuring that traders conform for example to building control standards or food hygiene licensing standards.

The council has now produced investment profiles for Stanmore, North Harrow, South Harrow, Wealdstone, Rayners Lane and Pinner. These profiles have been welcomed as invaluable information guides, providing business with information on the catchment area, transport routes, customer profiles and demographics within each district shopping centre.

11.

Questioner: Councillor Barry Macleod-Cullinane

Asked of: Councillor Bill Stephenson (Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Business Transformation and Communications)

Question: Do you share my concern at the news reported by the Municipal Journal that £115 million of Department of Health funding provided to councils to fund additional social care with health benefits, has ended up being diverted to other services; and can you assure us this did not happen in Harrow?

Written Answer: The MJ article that you refer to does not state that £115m has been diverted to other services; rather it says that this money has been spent on funding existing services rather than creating new ones.

I believe that we spent the money we were allocated entirely properly to cope with the extra demographic pressures faced by the Council in line with the guidelines we were given. In the two years that this money has been available, it has been spent entirely for what it was intended. The PCT funding in 2012-13 due to Harrow is £2.497m. The necessary demographic growth in Adults Services necessitates extra expenditure of £3.157m which covers the requirement to fund social care which benefits health and addresses the other priority needs of the service. Our £2.497 will help to cope with this but will not entirely cover all these needs.

With regard to 2011-12 exactly the same principle applied. The funding due to Harrow was £2.6m, of which £0.5m was handed back to the PCT to meet its social care provision. The balance of £2.1m replaced the Council's own resources in funding severe demographic pressures in Adult Social Care.

We are all very concerned about the funding for adult social care in this country and the fact that it is not sufficient to meet rising demand. The MJ article talks about funding being used to prop up existing services and includes a quote from the LGA that "it is hardly surprising...given the funding crisis we are facing in providing care to our rapidly ageing population".

This is a point that is particularly relevant given the publication of the new White Paper on social care reform. The response from the Chair of ADASS, Sarah Pickup, in relation to this echoes my own feelings when she worries about "the potential impact on the availability of services for individuals before a longer term solution is found."

I would welcome your support to lobby the government, as we

have, to find a sustainable model for social care funding immediately today and not tomorrow.

12.

Questioner: Councillor Simon Williams

Asked of: Councillor Margaret Davine (Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care, Health and Wellbeing)

Question: Have you managed to negotiate with the PCT the provision of extended opening hours and extra services for GP-led surgeries?

Written Answer: My Portfolio includes leading for the Council on improving the working relationship with the Health Service. I am very passionate about improvements in the well being of our residents. I am delighted therefore that during my time as Portfolio holder there have been a number of developments focussed on improving access to GP surgeries: 32 out of our 35 GP surgeries in Harrow now have extended hours. I am of course concerned that given financial pressures the PCT had to reduce extended hours in the Alexandra Ave Health and Social Care Centre from 1 January this year.

There are many ways that we positively work with health partners to influence developments in Harrow's health services. We are actively involved in partnership working with NHS Harrow through a number of forums such as the Clinical Commissioning Group which started in shadow form in April 2012 and also through the Health and Well Being Board.

An "Out of Hospital" Strategy is at the centre of future plans. The strategy will see a lot of services currently provided in hospital shifted into the community to provide residents with more care in their homes and at convenient community settings including GP surgeries, children's centres and schools.

Patient surveys continue to identify access to GP surgeries as a major concern. The Out of Hospital Strategy will include plans for more patients being able to receive blood tests in their local GP surgery. For example, Rheumatology patients, where stable will be able to have their blood tests locally, reducing the need for hospital appointments for their condition to once a year. Cardiac patients will also have more community based care.

I will continue to work with the PCT and CCG through the Out of Hospital Strategy to improve access and services.

13.

Questioner: Councillor Stephen Greek

Asked of: Councillor Keith Ferry (Portfolio Holder for Planning and Regeneration)

Question: Can you provide an update on the changes to the enforcement capacity of the Council's planning department over the last two years, and the proposed changes for the next two years?

Written Answer: The Planning enforcement team comprises a Head of Enforcement, a senior enforcement officer and two enforcement officers. Two years ago, the Council recruited a qualified town planner to one of the enforcement officer posts (replacing an agency planner). The other enforcement officer post was filled by an agency staff member. The senior enforcement officer and Head of Enforcement roles were filled by permanent staff, in the case of the senior role, on acting up basis.

During 2011/12, the Council replaced the temporary officer with a permanent trainee planning officer, dedicated to the enforcement team as part of the workforce strategy to support the development of specialist planning skills. During 2012/13, in accordance with the MTFs for the service, the Head of Enforcement post is to be deleted. This process is in train.

To address the capacity issues arising from this change, the service is currently exploring with its staff ways to integrate the remaining enforcement resource into the two area planning teams, under the management of the two respective team leaders. The Council has also updated and adopted an enforcement policy, which seeks to set out more clearly the priorities of the service with regard to investigation and action to assist in managing what continues to be a strong demand for investigations. Further work, in partnership with others has also seen a shift in strategy towards targeted interventions, including direct action and the use of Proceeds of Crime Act in to promote compliance and bring persistent offenders to book.

The directorate MTFs proposes to reduce the development management resources within the planning division by two officers in 2013/14. The generic nature of planning officer role profiles (which includes the existing enforcement officers) means that all officers are able to undertake enforcement activities. At the present time, no decision has been made about what part of the development management resource will be subject to a reduction in staffing. Existing work to try and LEAN the processes within DM to minimise the impact of staffing reductions, is nevertheless, already underway.