

**LONDON BOROUGH OF HARROW**

**COUNCIL**

**8 NOVEMBER 2012**

**QUESTIONS WITH NOTICE (ITEM 14)**

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 Stanley Sheinwald

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

*[Answered by Councillor Sachin Shah (Portfolio Holder for Finance)]*

**Question:** “Can Cllr Davine explain why the Council is cutting the number of journeys for taxi card holders who as the most vulnerable people in the borough will probably be made prisoners in their own homes by this decision and would benefit greatly if it could be rescinded?”

**Answer:** I, like you, think it is outrageous the Mayor of London has cut the grant for this scheme. The Mayor’s decision to reduce the subsidy is wrong and I will campaign against it.

However, once the subsidy was cut, Harrow had little choice but to pass on the reduction. So instead of making a pure cut to the scheme, we went back to first principles. We looked at the purpose of the scheme, which was to provide subsidised door-to-door transport for people who have serious mobility impairment and difficulty in using public transport. We then worked with the Voluntary Sector and other representative stakeholders to come up with a scheme that fairly distributes the reduced allocation of money.

Following this consultation, Cabinet adopted the following changes to the Taxicard policy;

1. Applicants with an Age related/Disabled Freedom Pass or a Blue Badge or both, will be entitled to a Taxicard with a maximum allocation of 52 trips annually.
2. Applicants who do not hold a Freedom Pass or Blue

Badge will be entitled to a Taxicard with a maximum allocation of 104 trips annually.

3. Applicants who hold a Discretionary Freedom Pass will not be entitled to a Taxicard.

Those policies allow us to fairly distribute a smaller pot of money in a way that holds up to the purpose of the scheme when it was introduced.

**Supplemental Question:** How many Taxicards are there in the Borough?

How much does each one cost the council and how much money is being saved by cutting the journeys?

**Supplemental Answer:** I do not have any of those figures with me now but I will write to you.

Answers provided after the meeting as follows:

**How many Taxicards are there in the Borough?**

There are currently 4,970 scheme members

**How much does each one cost the council?**

If all taxicard users used their full entitlement and the average cost per trip stayed the same as now ( 6.31) the cost to Harrow would be £1,630,756.00. However on average there are 15.3 trips per scheme member, costing Harrow around £480,000.

**How much money is being saved by cutting the journeys?**

The expenditure had fallen from £700k to just under £500k over the last two years.

2.

**Questioner:** Councillor Susan Hall

**Asked of:** Councillor Thaya Idaikkadar (Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Property and Major Contracts)

**Question:** “Your predecessor claims Harrow is a Council which ‘listens’; do you believe this to be case?”

**Answer:** I am Portfolio Holder for Property and Major Contracts. My predecessor is a Portfolio Holder for Property from the opposition. So why are they asking me? Why aren't they asking themselves?

But anyway, I will still answer you.

Yes I do believe it. We as an Administration, and as a Council, agreed our Corporate Priorities at Council in 2011 following extensive consultation through Let's Talk, our street based engagement approach. One of these priorities was to be a Council that listens and leads and there are many examples of us doing this well, from the consultation on Fairer Charging in Adults, changes in Children's Centres and our parks, open spaces and leisure and cultural facilities in the borough.

I remind you that when this Administration came into power the net result, through our Involvement Tracker for residents who felt that the Council took account of residents' views when making decisions, was -5%. This meant that more people felt that the Council did not take account of residents' views than felt that it did. Under this Administration with a our clear policy steer that we became a listening Council, we have achieved positive scores in each of the three Involvement Trackers which have taken place and the last one in May 2012 was +13%. My view is that we should build from this success.

**Supplemental Question:** You have still got people asking you questions about Whitchurch. You ignore the consultation response on the running of the libraries because you did not like the answer. Every month residents ask questions at Cabinet about mental health services because they are not happy.

So, on these issues, do you think you have listened at all?

**Supplemental Answer:** Whitchurch had the biggest consultation ever happened in the borough. It has over 3,000 people responded to it This is all in the Cabinet papers. You say that it was not consulted properly. Do you know that in your experience, the Council does consultations sometimes, send 25,000 copies and get 5 back?

We are extensively listening to people and consulting. I do not see anything wrong with that.

3.

**Questioner:** Councillor Susan Hall

**Asked of:** Councillor Thaya Idaikkadar (Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Property and Major Contracts)

**Question:** "What innovative policies do you hope will become the cornerstone initiatives of your administration?"

**Answer:** The first two years of this administration have successfully steered us through one of the most challenging financial environments the public sector has ever seen.

This Administration has laid out its vision 'Working Together, Our Harrow, Our Community' and has laid out its top four

priorities.

We are also proud that in the face of the cuts that we are being forced to make, we have saved money and been highly innovative at the same time. For this we were recognised as the Best Achieving Council in 2011.

There are too many examples to go though but our innovative work on the MyHarrow account won us a further MJ Award for Transformation through IT in 2012. We are national leaders on reablement. Our success of Let's Talk I have previously mentioned. The Help 2 Let scheme is pioneering.

There are a number of things I am passionate about and want to see this council achieve. Some of my initial priorities will be in the following areas:

- We must continue to manage the difficult financial challenges to the standard of the past two years – finding innovative solutions to Coalition cuts.
- Secondly, that we do what we can to look after those most in need and most affected by the Coalition's shocking welfare reforms.
- I want to see us grow our housing stock and provide a roof over the head for those people most in need.
- We have to find enough school places for our growing population.
- We need to become a more commercial Council, one that is better at procuring our goods and services

We are in the midst of our budget planning process and I look forward to bringing forward proposals when we bring our budget and corporate plan next year.

**Supplemental Question:** Obviously you have just gone through the leadership campaign and we congratulate you for that and you were against some very good other people. So you must have had something that you sold to the others in your leadership campaign and recently you have been interviewed and you said that you would be prepared to think outside the box.

So what has come from your thoughts, thinking outside the box, to quote yourself, that you obviously convinced all your colleagues that that would be something that you would put in that would stand you above all of the others and therefore, that is why you were the ideal choice as Leader?

**Supplemental Answer:** Look at what happens with waste disposal. Instead of giving £1 million to take our waste away, we are now getting £1 million

from somebody coming and taking our waste away. It is thinking outside the box.

I have given an extra brief to Councillor Ferry to bring in extra income to the borough. Extra income streams, that is thinking outside the box.

One idea relates to safe deposit boxes. People are crying out for them. You will never know the figures until the officers do a research and find out how many people actually they need. How much it is going to cost. How you are going to do it. How such decisions you are going make. They are all outside the box. A number of things.

Within the 2½ years of our administration, we have delivered approximately 47 innovations.

4.

**Questioner:** Councillor Barry Macleod-Cullinane

**Asked of:** Councillor Thaya Idaikkadar (Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Property and Major Contracts)

**Question:** “What experience gained during your time as portfolio holder do you hope to bring to your role as Leader?”

**Answer:** Your experience is very different from my experience. I went to a village school that taught me a lot about life and how poor people live.

Additionally, contracts are cross cutting, giving me an insight across all departments, of their work.

Until 2011-2012, the financial year, I was a Member of almost every single Committee. That gave me an experience of many fields.

In my personal life I am an accountant. That gives me an overview of what is happening to businesses in this country, how the small traders are suffering, in corner shops, hairdressers and pharmacists.

I have been working with many different communities all my life. That gives me new experience which fundamentally makes me understand how human beings think and act, how they manage in their life when you have cut, after cut, after cut, from this Government and how they learn new ways to survive, never mind living.

**Supplemental Question:** Putting aside these very personal remarks you have made, and also to focus in on the point of the question, in fact, I asked you about your experience when you were a Portfolio Holder, not

about your education or anything like that. Your experience as a Portfolio Holder.

So let us return to that. I previously asked about when you were a Portfolio Holder for Major Projects and Contracts and you blamed missing the opportunity to tender for a new highways contract on the fact that you were new in your job. Are you not also concerned now at making the same sort of errors in your new role as Leader, since you are new to that and things might come up that you do not read, do not look at, do not consider and Harrow loses as a result?

**Supplemental Answer:** It is a new role but I have wide experience in my role as a Portfolio Holder. You criticise me for one contract on highways being one year late. Why did you not renew it? I took my time and saved £700,000 a year on the highway contract and about £7-8 million on capital. Only by taking more time and renegotiating it.

The latest contract is going through. That again is another saving of £500-600-700,000.

Look at housing. We took our time. There is about 20% improvements on repairs and maintenance. It goes on and on.

All my experience is benefiting the Council in millions.

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

5.

**Questioner:** Councillor Barry Macleod-Cullinane

**Asked of:** Councillor Thaya Idaikkadar (Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Property and Major Contracts)

**Question:** "You said you were committed to providing the 'highest quality services and value for money' for residents; can you confirm which services you intend to prioritise and which you feel could deliver better value for money?"

**Written Answer:** The Council is in the process of looking at its budget for the next two to four years, and key to this is understanding our cost base and where there is scope for further efficiencies.

The Council is committed to delivering services which offer local taxpayers value for money, and we have set this out clearly in our Corporate Plan. The London Authorities Performance Solution, which is an independent benchmarking system ran by London Councils, indicates that on the whole the Council is low cost and high performing.

So in answer to your question, I believe that the vast majority of our services are providing excellent value for money.

We are in the middle of our budget planning process and I look forward to bringing forward our budget proposals next year.

For the first time of any Administration at Harrow we have started to articulate the 'core outcomes' that we will prioritise for our residents. Not vague priorities but hard outcomes. We will use these outcomes to guide how we make savings and any areas we are able to invest and how we meet the financial challenges ahead.

6.

**Questioner:** Councillor Susan Hall

**Asked of:** Councillor Mitzi Green (Portfolio Holder for Children, Schools and Families)

**Question:** "Given you were portfolio holder for Children's Services when both the OFSTED and YOT inspections were carried out, what lessons have you learned personally from their highly critical conclusions?"

**Written Answer:** Firstly I must address the premise of your question. OFSTED and YOT were both entirely different inspections with entirely different results.

It is therefore important to state that we did not fail our Ofsted as she infers but achieved a grade of adequate which we are not complacent about and have instituted an improvement plan.

But she asks what I have learned personally.

I have learned that it takes more than 2 years to improve a Children's Services department which when we inherited it was in a parlous state being £2m overspent.

As a result unlike the previous administration I have learned never to be complacent about Children's Services

I have learned that it takes more than 2 years for the necessary root and branch review and the following implementation of the NOM to bear fruit.

I have learned that without such improvements we could well have failed our Ofsted.

I have learned how to work with officers to protect children's services in the face of draconian government cuts. We have had to make over 6 million pounds worth of savings as a result of such cuts.

I have learned to concentrate on the hard work we have to do and not use children's services as a political football.

I have learned that we achieve more working together.

Most importantly I have learned that children should be at the heart of everything we do and will continue to work hard to achieve the best children's services possible for children and families in Harrow.

7.

**Questioner:** Councillor Susan Hall

**Asked of:** Councillor Thaya Idaikkadar (Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Property and Major Contracts)

**Question:** "As part of focussing your administration, do you have plans to introduce or abolish any flagship/priority actions?"

**Written Answer:** We are reviewing Quarter 2 performance of the Council at the moment, where we will look at how we are delivering against our Priority Actions.

These were agreed by Cabinet and Council in February as part of our Corporate Plan and I am committed to these as things we, as a Council, want to deliver this financial year. This Administration to date has not 'abolished' any Priority Actions in year, and I have no intention to do this as Leader. In planning for next year, we will of course consider how we set out our key priority delivery areas for 2013/14, and these will come forward through the Corporate Plan in February Cabinet, and then through Council.

8.

**Questioner:** Councillor Barry Macleod-Cullinane

**Asked of:** Councillor Thaya Idaikkadar (Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Property and Major Contract)

**Question:** "Can you provide the rationale behind your Cabinet selection and explain the main challenges you believe they face in their departments?"

**Written Answer:** There are no changes to the Cabinet as such there is no need for a response.