

COUNCIL – 28 FEBRUARY 2013

QUESTIONS WITH NOTICE

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

1.

Questioner: Councillor Susan Hall

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

Question: "Could you provide a breakdown of the £273,000 cut to the highways maintenance budget?"

Answer: This will include a review of the highways maintenance contract and the scale back on response times for some these the services and a review of standards.

2.

Questioner: Councillor Stanley Sheinwald

Asked of: Councillor Sachin Shah (Portfolio Holder for Finance

To be responded to by Councillor Graham Henson (Portfolio Holder for Performance, Customer Services and Corporate Services)

Question: "I see from the council tax budget papers that you propose to reduce the number of formal council committee meetings so can you tell me which ones are you considering and how much money will this save?"

Answer: We plan to make savings of £30k in 2013-14, and £70k in 2014-15. In order to deliver these savings we will condense the minutes we produce, scale back democratic services support to some meetings, and reduce some meetings. The final decision as to which meetings will be reduced has not yet been made.

3.

Questioner: Councillor Susan Hall

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

Question: "Could you provide breakdowns of the £490,000 and £273,000 procurement savings in Environment and Enterprise over the next two years?"

Answer: The £490k includes a specific savings target of £350k against the Council wide Fraikin contract. The remainder is to be found in collaboration with Procurement on review of contracts, category management.

4.

Questioner: Councillor Barry Macleod-Cullinane

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

Question: "Could you provide a breakdown of the £350,000 'voluntary sector funding' investment that has been added to the final revenue budget? Additionally, "investment" implies a return; what is the rate of return to that £350k 'investment'?"

Answer: In December the council considered a number of options to reduce budgets in order to meet the financial challenge for the next 2 years. This included savings across voluntary sector funding. In response to the consultation on the December budget proposals the council has decided to look elsewhere for this saving and has reinstated funding to the voluntary sector for work with vulnerable adults.

5.

Questioner: Councillor Barry Macleod-Cullinane

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

Question: "At February's Cabinet, you spoke of how Circles of Support (funded by the TPIF) had improved services for users and made savings the council. If all the £2.1m of the s256 money from the Department of Health to support "social care services with health benefits" had actually been invested on social care services with health benefits, like Circles of Support, can you describe the resultant service improvements for users and savings for the Council that would have been achieved?"

Answer: I am pleased that this budget allows us to invest in our community by developing the Circles concept in Harrow. You reference the 2011-12 s256 monies allocated to Harrow. The £2.1m replaced the Council's own resources in funding Adult Social Care and enabled known demographic pressures of £1.5m to be fully funded. In addition, through the Corporate contingency, provision was made to manage risks around from the PCT's financial position and cover any savings proposals subject to consultation which could not be achieved. As a result of this decision, the Council did not consider any alternative proposals, therefore, it is not possible to speculate the resultant service improvements for users and savings for the Council.

6.

Questioner: Councillor Susan Hall

Asked of: Councillor Sachin Shah (Portfolio Holder for Finance)

Question: "Can you confirm how the hoped for income from Treasury Management investments essentially doubled to £939,000 between December and February's budgets?"

Answer: Yes. This council has an excellent in house treasury management team who do a great job for the council, and their work has taken us in to the top 20 for investment returns on the money we hold.

The council holds money on behalf of other organisations such as WLWA, who were getting the benefit of the councils work free of charge.

We will now use, to allocate returns will be the higher of

- (1) the annual average 3 month Libid rate and
- (2) the rate earned for call deposits with the Council's main bank.

The change will provide a range of benefits to third party balances:

- greater certainty as to interest income
- increased transparency
- protection against any investment losses
- provide a rate at least comparable with that available if balances were separately invested
- align Harrow's approach with the majority of London Boroughs.

7.

Questioner: Councillor Barry Macleod-Cullinane

Asked of: Councillor Sachin Shah (Portfolio Holder for Finance)

Question: "In closing the budget gap between December and February, nearly £1.5 million of 'transformation' savings were found. Can you itemise and detail these savings, and explain why they did not feature in the draft budget?"

Answer: The Transformation savings included between December and January were

Procurement - Category Management savings	£500K
Agency Staff - reduction in usage	£500k
Staffing - Vacancy management	£470K

As you are aware the budget presented to Cabinet in December 2012 was not balanced and officers and members continued to develop proposals to enable a balanced budget to be set.

The procurement saving was identified following a review undertaken during December with external support that confirmed their achievability via improved category management. They are currently being broken down to spending areas to enable them to be incorporated into budgets prior to April.

The agency staff and vacancy management savings will be realised through improvements in the operation of establishment controls. These will involve a tightening up of existing controls and an additional element of scrutiny of all recruitment, compared to previous practice. The detail of these controls is still being developed but will be in place from April.

8.

Questioner: Councillor Barry Macleod-Cullinane

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

Question: "Could you provide a breakdown of the £260,000 'Business Support' savings in the Children's Services Budget?"

Answer: The £260,000 is all staffing within Business Support. The implementation of Business Support was on the basis that it would take some time for the structure to bed in and that 9 staff would be required during 2012-13 but not in 2013-14. This saving is removing the budget for those 9 staff.

9.

Questioner: Councillor Susan Hall

Asked of: Councillor David Perry (Portfolio Holder for Community and Cultural Services)

Question: "Could you itemise and break down the £600,000 over two years saving from the Cultural Strategy Review?"

Answer: In January 2012 Cabinet approved the future of cultural services review report which outlined a cross borough project to investigate the feasibility of commissioning two key cultural services (libraries and leisure) in partnership with Ealing and Brent councils. In June 2012 Cabinet approved a formal commissioning process to deliver joint leisure management services with Ealing and Brent and joint library management services with Ealing. The outcome of this process is currently under conclusion and the result will be brought for Cabinet approval in April 2013. There is the potential to deliver significant savings for Harrow by working in partnership with other boroughs, however, no decisions have yet been taken on the outcome.

10.

Questioner: Councillor Susan Hall

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

Question: "Can you confirm what form of service impact assessment was conducted on the PRISM transformation?"

Answer: PRISM was agreed by Cabinet in Nov 2012, and this included a comprehensive business case on the benefits to be achieved from the investment we have made in the PRISM project.

11.

Questioner: Councillor Susan Hall

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

Question: "Earlier this month your administration announced £200,000 extra for fixing potholes, and £70,000 for free parking at Christmas. Can you confirm where this funding is coming from, as it appears to be outside the budget framework?"

Answer: The 200K for highways improvements comes from the Transformation Priority and Initiatives Fund. The free parking concession does not run up to Christmas but once implemented will be on going benefit to the community funded by a growth bid in the MTFS .

12.

Questioner: Councillor Susan Hall

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

Question: "Could you provide a breakdown of the £70,000 free parking figure, and confirm where in the borough this scheme will be implemented?"

Answer: This is a borough wide implementation

We are not sure where the £70k figure has come from.

13.

Questioner: Councillor Susan Hall

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

Question: "How much does it cost to change the tariff on all the pay-and-display machines in the borough?"

Answer: All machines are able to be changed to meet the requirement. There are approximately 40 different tariffs in the borough and 210 machines. On average, every 6 machines will require a master chip at £174.00 and then £55.60, equalling an approximate cost of £452.00 per 6 machines x 35 = £15820.

In addition there are two barrier controlled car parks which will require the equipment to be upgraded as it is outdated and passed its useful life. The approximate cost is £65,000 per site, giving an approximate total of £150,000.

14.

Questioner: Councillor Susan Hall

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

Question: “Are all our pay-and-display machines compatible with providing 20 minutes free parking for a set period of time?”

Answer: No. They will need to be modified.

15.

Questioner: Councillor Susan Hall

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

Question: “Over what time period is this free parking scheme set to run - from when until when - and how much loss of revenue is anticipated to arise from it?”

Answer: Times of operation will be as per current times and it is anticipated that the loss of revenue income will be approx. £522K pa.

16.

Questioner: Councillor Barry Macleod-Cullinane

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

Question: “Could you provide the page and paragraph references in the Budget papers presented to Cabinet on February 14th 2013 that set out the role profile and list of responsibilities for the new Portfolio Adviser role, newly created at paragraph 56, page 121, of the documentation?”

Answer: The overall JD for any given Portfolio remains the same and the job description for any possible Portfolio Adviser will be based on the same principle as the Portfolio Assistants. It may be that none of the Portfolio Holders may wish to appoint a Portfolio Adviser.

If a Portfolio Holder requires a Portfolio Adviser then there will be a discussion and an agreement reached about allocation of responsibilities depending on each specific area since it may differ for each area. We will be happy to publish the agreement once in place.

I have also provided the details about the role to you at the Cabinet meeting on 14 February.

17.

Questioner: Councillor Barry Macleod-Cullinane

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

Question: “Could you provide the role profile and list of responsibilities for the Portfolio Adviser role?”

Answer: Not applicable, please read the answer given to Q16, along with the answer to Cabinet question.

18.

Questioner: Councillor Barry Macleod-Cullinane

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

Question: “Could you clarify why you chose to amend the SRA schedule to allow for Portfolio Holders and Portfolio Advisers to split SRAs upon the appointment of the latter?”

Answer: This appointment is only considered at the request of the Portfolio Holder as explained to you at the Cabinet meeting. This will only come into play where a Portfolio Holder would request to share their responsibilities due to a number of factors, such as, employment, health, family commitments etcetera to name a few. It may be that no Portfolio Holder may wish to do that.

This will help with the forward planning, capacity building and to provide effective leadership among other things – at no extra cost to Council or tax payers.

19.

Questioner: Councillor Barry Macleod-Cullinane

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

Question: “Had legal advice been sought on the legality of an arrangement whereby a Portfolio Adviser would be paid personally by their Portfolio Holder, in the absence of suitable bandings on the SRA schedule?”

Answer: Portfolio Holder advisers will not be paid personally by portfolio holders, and so there was no need to seek legal advice on the point.

20.

Questioner: Councillor Barry Macleod-Cullinane

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

Question: “Was legal advice sought on whether this arrangement would have established a pecuniary interest for the Portfolio Adviser?”

Answer: Portfolio holder advisers are appointed by the Leader, and so the issue of whether the adviser has an interest in that decision does not arise.

21.

Questioner: Councillor Barry Macleod-Cullinane

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

Question: “And, if this proposed arrangement would have established a pecuniary interest, was legal advice taken as to whether and to what extent that pecuniary interest would have hampered the Portfolio Adviser in the carrying-out of their role?”

Answer: Not applicable, given the response to question 20.