

COUNCIL – 4 JULY 2013

QUESTIONS WITH NOTICE

A period of up to 15 minutes is allowed for the asking of written questions by members of the public of a Member of the Executive or the Chairman of any Committee.

1.

Questioner: Matthew Lloyd

Asked of: Councillor Thaya Idaikkadar (Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Business Transformation & Communications, Finance, Performance, Customer Services & Corporate Services, Property & Major Contracts)

Question: “Harrow is experiencing a housing crisis. The inaction of the previous Conservative administration and the lack of infrastructure funding announced in the latest Spending Review has left Harrow's young people with high rents and very limited places to live in their home borough. Given this is the case, will you condemn the previous council administration for their lack of action and call on the government to follow Labour's infrastructure investment programme to provide the vital housing needed for Harrow residents.”

Answer: Thank you for your question.

I agree that there is a shortage of affordable housing in Harrow and that rents following the introduction of the benefit cap will be harder to afford. I also think there are going to be rent arrear pressures following the introduction of direct housing benefit payments.

The pressures will be faced by both families and young people and anything we can do to help more people into work and increase their access to affordable housing is going to help.

However, the last four years has seen a significant increase in the delivery of new housing in Harrow, particularly affordable housing. In April 2013 we celebrated the completion of the 1000th affordable home in Harrow since April 2010.

Affordable housing remains a high priority for this administration to continue to exploit all opportunities available to us to increase the supply of housing, especially affordable housing in the borough. That is why we approved plans in June 2013 to build 50 new Council homes on vacant, underutilised housing land in Harrow and why we continue to negotiate with private

developers to make sure they provide the maximum reasonable amount of affordable housing on private housing developments.

At this point, I would like to give credit to Councillor Bob Currie who worked very hard on that and he always talked to me day in, day out, about increasing the housing supply. Thank you Bob.

By increasing the supply of new affordable housing we also aim to improve local employment opportunities and maximise the benefits to the local economy from all of the tendering, partnering and procurement opportunities and maximise the benefits to the local economy from all of the tendering, partnering and procurement opportunities that result from this work.

In addition, we are providing grants to people living in Council properties to encourage them to free up their properties for people more in need.

Of course, I would call on the government to support programmes of local employment and new affordable housing. I would also urge the government to consider relaxing the borrowing cap for local authorities that, like Harrow, can afford to pay back borrowing to fund new housing but the treasury rules prevent this from happening at the moment.

Supplemental Question: Given that is the fact, will the Portfolio Holder agree with me that residents will be shocked to hear that Council Tax is up; funding for housing is cut and yet Conservative expenses are going up; taking away the money that is meant to be going towards housing and stuffing the pockets of Councillors with taxpayers' hard earned cash?

Supplemental Answer: You have got to look at all these things and the wider economy. The way the country is and what caused all these problems. We can only manage what we can afford.

I can only understand and sympathise with people who are suffering. We should do everything we can to help them. This is why the community project is going to help a lot. Did you know we spent £2billion in Harrow, government money, where all the agencies are together. There are a lot of duplications, there is a lot of waste. That will be a way to help you.

Thank you.