

**LONDON BOROUGH OF HARROW**

**COUNCIL**

**4 JULY 2013**

**QUESTIONS WITH NOTICE (ITEM 12)**

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 Bill Phillips

**Asked of:** Councillor Zarina Khalid (Portfolio Holder for Children, Schools and Families)

**Question:** “Following a previous Conservative Administration’s decision to abolish the ceremony to celebrate the achievements of looked after Children, the previous Labour Administration reinstated that ceremony. At the Ofsted inspection in 2012, Ofsted Inspectors were pleased with the Labour Administration’s decision to reinstate this. Does the PH give her commitment to continue with this ceremony which means so much to vulnerable children in the Borough?”

**Answer:** Thank you for your question.

The short answer is yes, I definitely will.

The Children Looked After and Young People Leaving Care ceremony, as you mentioned, has been reinstated since 2011, with the leadership support of Catherine Doran, our Director, to take place annually and provide a rewarding and aspirational experience for Children Looked After and Young People leaving care.

The Corporate Parenting Panel, I know, will continue to support this aspiration and I most certainly will hope to ensure meaningful celebration of achievement, where real achievements are recognised and all young people can celebrate. All young people have valued this opportunity and support from the Council.

We will look to discuss proposals at the next Corporate

Parenting Panel on 8 July. The event this year will take place on 29 October at Harrow Arts Centre and will be hosted by the Children Looked After Service Manager and Placements Service Manager with support from the newly established virtual school and myself. Recognising economic restraints, costs are being reduced from previous years but managed within the budget held by the Children Looked After Life Chances Forum with the Care Matters Grant. With feedback and participation from young people, the event is being restructured to have an afternoon session for younger Children Looked After, then will have a break and an early evening session for the older children looked after and careleavers. We will be engaging foster carers and social workers as Corporate parents to cook and prepare food to bring and would welcome Councillors to be engaged to do the same, as actively undertaking our role as corporate parents. I hope that many of you will come along.

Members and senior officers across all parties will be invited as before to contribute to this event, recognising the Council's responsibility as Corporate parents, across all parties.

**Supplemental Question:** I agree with you that these young people are very important to us. We are Corporate parents and everybody should be at that achievements meeting and I am pleased with what you are doing. What I would like to know is what achievements are our young people working towards?

**Supplemental Answer:** That is quite a specific question. I have not got the detailed answer that I know you might well have wished.

I know that we will be celebrating the educational achievements of our CLA. I understand that we are not reaching the targets that we quite want in terms of education but the teams are working very hard to improve this. Our virtual school is working with these children but I would have to provide that answer – about the exact achievements of each child - to you at a later stage.

2.

**Questioner:** Councillor Susan Hall

**Asked of:** Councillor Asad Omar (Portfolio Holder for Environment and Community Safety)

**Question:** “Can you provide an update on recruitment to the Neighbourhood Champion; is the decline that set in under the previous Portfolio Holder, Cllr. Phil O’Dell, still continuing?”

**Answer:** Thank you for your question.

The number of Neighbourhood Champions has remained fairly constant for the last 2 years, with annual figures of around 1,000, +/- 10%. At the end of Quarter 4 2011/12 there were 1,110 Neighbourhood Champions and at year end 2012/13 there were 919 active Neighbourhood Champions and that includes 24 Members.

The original scheme allowed Neighbourhood Champions to be anonymous which led to the situation where some roads were unable to access their Champion because they did not know who their Neighbourhood Champion was. At the Neighbourhood Champion Conference it was decided by the majority that this practice could not continue and they were given the option to opt out of the Scheme. Some did leave the Scheme because of that as they did not want their name to be known to the residents living in their street but we have maintained a fairly stable but reduced membership since that time.

Now there are new initiatives to bolster the number of Neighbourhood Champions; the new Neighbourhood Champion Portal, using the 'My Harrow' account, will provide new and improved access to Council information and will improve access to information for the police.

We have also worked with the Police over the last year. They have carried out recruitment exercises across multiple Wards to identify residents that are interested in joining the scheme.

**Supplemental Question:** Can you assure us that you will put in every effort into getting some more Neighbourhood Champions? I had asked the previous Portfolio Holder but to no avail.

**Supplemental Answer:** Yes, I can assure you that personally I have already put some effort into it because, as you know, there have been some neighbours interested in becoming Champions and there was training scheduled for June. There were two training days but there was very low take up so they were cancelled. I have asked them to do, as soon as possible, is set the next training which will be in September over two days. I hope those who have not been trained, they will be trained, they will come along and, again, we will be recruiting through the Police and SNTs.

3.

**Questioner:** Councillor Susan Hall

**Asked of:** Councillor Nizam Ismail (Portfolio Holder for Community and Cultural Services and Housing)

**Question:** "What are the full costs, including a quantification of officer time by total hours and total cost, of organising this summer's UnderOneSky, and how much has income has sponsorship and ticket sales generated?"

**Answer:** Thank you for the question.

I am delighted to say that Under One Sky was a great success in terms of attendance and feedback this year. 95% of those attendees who were surveyed thought the event was great. We estimate around 8-9,000 attended and participated. Considering it was a different venue this year, this is excellent and certainly due to the excellent marketing which included free editorials/marketing in the Harrow Observer and Harrow Community Radio's, as well as our own Facebook and Twitter sites which generated a lot of interest. Comments at the gate were that it was very family friendly and felt safe.

Officers are still finalising the costs with some invoices yet to arrive so clearly I cannot give you the detailed breakdown you are requesting this evening because it is just only four days since we had Under One Sky.

It is clear that a major event of this kind cannot be staged without incurring cost to the Council. However, I can say that we achieved ticket sale income of £13,500 which is above the target of £13,000. Unfortunately, we did not achieve our sponsorship target of £9,000; although we did receive expressions of interest, not all of these came through and we received around £2,000 not counting the advertising that paid for the programme and other in kind support. I am happy to ask officers to provide you with the detailed breakdown you are requesting as soon as possible. Officers will also be reviewing the event and preparing a full report for me on the delivery and lessons learnt for the future.

**Supplemental Question:** Can you tell me then how much money that you would have estimated that you needed to take or to achieve, in order for the event to achieve what it said?

**Supplemental Answer:** First and foremost, I would like to thank the officers for all their efforts in making Under One Sky a great success in the midst of the changing of the Portfolio Holders but as you know, indeed the sponsorship has been very short of money. I did not have much time to explore and get the sponsorship as I would have liked to if I had had enough time but we estimated to have received around £27,000.

I am not sure about the figures yet but obviously a thing of this calibre, something which supports the community cannot be assessed in terms of finance only. There are also invisible

incomes that have to be costed, such as service to the community. I will provide you with a figure when every account and invoices are paid.

4.

**Questioner:** Councillor Simon Williams

**Asked of:** Councillor Asad Omar (Portfolio Holder for Environment and Community Safety)

**Question:** “Across the borough, give-way lines and markings, yellow lines and other road markings – particularly on the High Street, in my ward of Harrow on the Hill, have virtually worn away leaving motorists with little or no information about parking restrictions or rights of way; can you provide a timescale as to when this backlog of maintenance inherited from the previous Labour administration will be addressed?”

**Answer:** Thank you for your question.

Engineering Services are aware of the condition of road markings in your area and across the borough. They recognise that there have been some difficulties in getting the lining remarked due to contractor issues.

We are working with May Gurney to address these supply problems and a new lining contractor has been commissioned to improve the service.

It should however be noted that maintenance budgets have been cut this year and there has to be a backlog of highway maintenance which will delay or cause some maintenance works to remain unrectified for some time.

**Supplemental Question:** Could you please as a matter of priority review the road markings on the Hill itself within the Conservation Area and in particular the double yellow lines marked recently? On many of the streets some of the double yellows look like zigzag lines especially around the Castle pub.

**Supplemental Answer:** Yes, I will take note of that and I will see that they are done as a priority but what I would say is that May Gurney have got a new contractor called Excel and they are working on the backlog as well and also the ongoing marking as well. So hopefully within a short time we will be able to re-mark all of the roads.

5.

**Questioner:** Councillor Barry Macleod-Cullinane

**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:** "Does the Council's continued membership of the LGA represent good value for taxpayers' money and why?"

**Answer:** Thank you for your question.

Given the very challenging settlement for local government both in the 2010 and the recent Comprehensive Spending Review, I believe that it is vitally important that local government has a strong voice to feed into central government setting out the real challenges we face whilst also proposing how less central government interference will enable Councils to deliver more effective services to our residents. Successes in the last year from LGA influence have been on securing a voice for local government with central government on the merits of community budgets, successfully renegotiating the budgets for the recently acquired Public Health responsibilities (which saw Harrow gain an additional £1m in 2013/14) and challenging the government on the importance of a local solution for health and social care integration.

Both you and I saw some of the benefits of the LGA in the last couple of days.

I believe that the need to have a collective local government voice has never been more important and it therefore makes sense to remain an LGA member and to work with them to give voice at a national level to the issues which matter to our residents. The cost of membership for 2013/14 is £38,044. This compares to £39,045 in 2012/13, £43,553 in 2011/12 and £50,040 in 2010/11. This is an overall decrease of £11,996 over the last 4 years which demonstrates better value for money for the same level of support.

**Supplemental Question:** Thank you very much for a very comprehensive answer.

Perhaps we could look at the LGA's value for money through a scrutiny review along with the LGA and other external bodies. It will be worth looking at those things but also at the LGA Conference there was a very interesting section on Magna Carta and we are coming up to the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of that and perhaps it might be useful that we can establish a Working Group to take that forward to make sure that we engage with the

separations of that?

**Supplemental Answer:** I think that is a sensible suggestion. I agree with you but in all this I would like to see is still meeting a need because the number of outside bodies now is getting complicated and the Magna Carta again, I am quite happy to set up a cross-party Working Group so that we can go forward on that.

*The following questions were not reached in the time limit of 15 minutes. It was noted that written responses would be provided, which have been reproduced below:*

6.

**Questioner:** Councillor Barry Macleod-Cullinane

**Asked of:** Councillor Asad Omar (Portfolio Holder for Environment and Community Safety)

**Question:** “Can you advise me and my residents what they can expect from the new street-sweeping regime across Belmont ward that was introduced by Labour’s budget in February 2013, which you voted for, which you are continuing to implement?”

**Written Answer:** As a result of the financial challenges facing Harrow, we have to make savings to balance our budget. The funding challenge is too great to maintain current levels of service provision in all areas; however we have worked to minimise impact and target our services very carefully.

In the Belmont Ward there are two changes affecting street cleansing.

The cleansing cycle on residential roads has been reduced from a four week cycle to six weeks.

The changes in cleaning cycles may result in some increase in litter but we have ensured that a reactive workforce is in place to respond to customer referrals in the case of fly tips or excessive littering.

The other change will be to the area of Belmont Circle where the static sweeper who operates Monday to Friday covering Belmont and Queensbury Circles will be changed to a mobile crew. The new arrangements are that a mobile team undertakes one single cleansing operation only, ensuring that the area is cleansed early in the day. We have contacted traders in these areas to discuss ways that we can work together to discourage littering throughout the day.

The Rapid Response fly tip service will still be able to react to

requests from residents in the case of fly tipping.

7.

**Questioner:** Councillor Barry Macleod-Cullinane

**Asked of:** Councillor Asad Omar (Portfolio Holder for Environment and Community Safety)

**Question:** “With the cuts to the public realm budgeted initiated by the previous Labour administration, as part of the Budget you voted for, what measures are being taken to reduce the amount of littering in Centenary Park, on the border of Belmont and Queensbury wards?”

**Written Answer:** We have had some talks with the school and they are taking better care of the park than previously, school staff monitor daytime use and encourage students to respect the park. As an unregulated Open Space there is little we can do to control day-to-day activities of park users. However, with regard to longer term aims, the park franchise which is currently held by 'Centenary Park Sports Club and covers the Pitch and Putt course, Putting Green and Multi Sports area' is reaching the end of its term. As a part of the re-tender process we are looking to formalise school use and extend the franchise area to accommodate a larger area of the park and encourage greater community sports participation. The school use of the park for semi formal activities will be integrated to ensure balanced use of the park and adequate maintenance.

8.

**Questioner:** Councillor Barry Macleod-Cullinane

**Asked of:** Councillor Asad Omar (Portfolio Holder for Environment and Community Safety)

**Question:** “Under the previous Labour administration, a number of roads across the borough, such as Ventnor Avenue in Belmont, were “treated” with a new surfacing, leaving lots of loose chippings which are particularly problematic to cyclists, and often were not properly marked – when will they be properly resurfaced and properly lined?”

**Written Answer:** Ventnor Avenue is one of the roads where a trial of a surfacing process called Microasphalt was carried out earlier this year.

Microsphalt puts a thin new surface on the road which after initial laying further compacts under vehicular traffic to provide an impervious road surface sealing up the underlying layers to make the road waterproof and stop the formation of potholes.



Immediately after laying there are small loose stones on the surface and as this process is unlike the more normal resurfacing a detailed letter drop was carried out to all affected frontages and ward councillors to get the message across that this was not the more normal type of surfacing.

Microsphalt was chosen as the cost of the resurfacing in this material was between 10 and 170% cheaper than traditional methods depending on the original construction of the road. This saving allowed more roads to be repaired with the available budgets.

There was a delay in completing some of the lining works following the resurfacing for the reasons outlined in Q4 above but these have all now been addressed and the lining works are completed.

We are currently monitoring the effectiveness of the Microasphalt trial and until we are satisfied of the overall effectiveness of the treatment no further roads will be treated in this way.

9.

**Questioner:** Councillor Susan Hall

**Asked of:** Councillor Asad Omar (Portfolio Holder for Environment and Community Safety)

**Question:** "What is being done to reverse the drop in recycling figures that began under the Labour administration's Portfolio Holder, Cllr. Phil O'Dell?"

**Written Answer:** Recovering the position to achieve 50% again is likely to be difficult. We have done all the easy and most of the more difficult things (e.g. alternate week collections, compulsory recycling). Without doubt there are still materials in the residual waste bin that could be recycled or composted. It is some years since we had a general campaign to remind people of what can go in each bin. Such a campaign may be useful. During the major changes in 2005/6 and 7 the publicity and information campaign was based on a figure of £2 per household pa. A budget of £1 per household would probably be sufficient for a leaflet to each home and an advertising campaign. If the campaign diverted 600 tonnes of waste from landfill to recycling it would pay for itself. A diversion of 900 tonnes would increase the recycling rate by 1% (and produce a net saving).

In the past year we have introduced recycling to the remainder of our flats and this has met the predicted tonnage targets from those households.

We will be looking to introduce a trade waste recycling service to businesses within the borough. Whilst we currently offer this service the participation levels are low and we will now focus on assisting business in reducing the waste taken to landfill and increase their recycling.

Attending events within the borough in partnership with the West London Waste Authority to provide information on recycling and waste minimisation to residents.

Continue with the work on the upper level of the Civic Amenity Site in ensuring waste taken to the site is separated into the correct recycling bays to increase recycling and reduce the waste taken to landfill.

10.

**Questioner:** Councillor Susan Hall

**Asked of:** Councillor Asad Omar (Portfolio Holder for Environment and Community Safety)

**Question:** "Can you confirm how many SmartWater kits and as a percentage of the total number ordered remain to be distributed to Harrow's households?"

**Written Answer:** A total of 42,000 Smartwater kits were purchased and were paid for in 2010. These kits were delivered to the Council in stages as the kits have a defined shelf life. The final batch was delivered in May 2013. Approximately 6,000 kits are currently held in stock by the Council. This stock amounts to approximately 14% of the total purchased.

11.

**Questioner:** Councillor Susan Hall

**Asked of:** Councillor Asad Omar (Portfolio Holder for Environment and Community Safety)

**Question:** "How much larger would have been the fall in burglary rates across Harrow if the previous Labour Portfolio Holder, Cllr. Phil O'Dell, had been more robust and proactive in pushing for greater distribution of the SmartWater kits to households across the borough?"

**Written Answer:** Smartwater has been distributed by the Police in targeted operations since 2010. These operations are ongoing.

Burglary rates, as with rates of all crime types, have been

influenced in the intervening time by a wide variety of factors, presumably including the distribution of Smartwater.

There is no accepted means of determining the actual impact of individual measures. Any attempt to do so would be mere speculation.

12.

**Questioner:** Councillor Susan Hall

**Asked of:** Councillor Zarina Khalid (Portfolio Holder for Children, Schools and Families)

**Question:** “With the expansion of Vaughan School only being approved in mid/late June, what are the implications for education provision at Vaughan, what has been or is being done to reduce any negative impacts, and are there any wider implications for the provision of primary education places in Harrow?”

**Written Answer:** Vaughan school is able to house the additional expansion class arriving in September 2013 in the current school building. This was always the plan as construction was due to start in the spring of 2013 with phase 1 of the building programme running for one year.

The first phase of construction works is planned to commence shortly and the new junior block will be ready for September 2014. The infant school classes will then move to allow the renovation of the infant block. The new junior block will have enough classrooms to hold the current infant and junior school pupils, and the additional expansion class arriving in September 2014. Although the delay in receiving planning permission will delay the completion of the infant school block until Easter 2015, there will be sufficient accommodation on site at all times for the annual increases in pupil numbers. We therefore do not expect the delayed planning permission to affect the education provision at Vaughan.

Given that the planned pupil places will come onstream as planned as part of the Phase 1 Primary Expansion Plan, there should not be any effect on pupil place planning in the short term as a result of the planning permission delay. The Primary Expansion Plan Phase 2, the focus of the Cabinet report tonight, provides essential growth for the projected pupil numbers in the medium term, including the peak pupil number projection later in the decade.

13.

**Questioner:** Councillor Barry Macleod-Cullinane

**Asked of:** Councillor William Stoodley (Portfolio Holder for Planning and Regeneration)

**Question:** "Can you provide an update on the Planning Committee's proposed review of Stanburn School's Travel Plan set as a condition to its expansion?"

**Written Answer:** Stanburn School have been working with Harrow Council to achieve at least a Silver Accredited Travel Plan for the academic year 13/14. Unfortunately, their travel survey results have shown a consistent increase in car use since 2008 and as such the Star-accreditation system can only award them a Bronze at present.

The School Travel Plan Advisor and the Safety Education officer intend to work with Stanburn School to reduce car usage and meet the targets required for Silver Accreditation.

Stanburn School are aware that their Travel Plan is to be promoted and maintained at a Silver level, as agreed with Planning as part of their expansion, for a period of at least 3 academic school years and their co-operation and engagement is paramount to achieving this target.

14.

**Questioner:** Councillor David Perry

**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:** "Could you indicate how you feel the new Cabinet set-up is progressing?"

**Written Answer:** Women are better represented in the Cabinet. BME Members are better represented in the Cabinet to reflect the community.

We are better scrutinised and the public says that the last Cabinet meeting was the best they had. I believe the current set up is the best we have had for a long time in the eyes of the public.

15.

**Questioner:** Councillor Phillip O'Dell

**Asked of:** Councillor Asad Omar (Portfolio Holder for Environment and Community Safety)

**Question:** "What is the final percentage for last year (2012/13) for recycling rates in Harrow?"

**Written Answer:** 44.7%.

16.

**Questioner:** Councillor Sachin Shah

**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:** "In the June cabinet papers, you list around half a million pounds of spend in the carry forward as 'minor projects'. Do you think the council tax payers in Harrow will agree with you that half a million pounds is 'minor'?"

**Written Answer:** The Revenue and Capital outturn report detailed how the council spent its £172m budget during the course of 2012-13.

As stewards of public money it is important that all expenditure is scrutinised, particularly in this time of reducing budgets.

Minor projects is a collective term for small pieces of activity that would be too numerous to detail in the cabinet report. That notwithstanding, the appendix 4 of the report does give further detail regarding the Minor Projects for example "Training and Development Programme and recruitment costs" and "Pinner Park Farm and priority action energy green deal"

£0.5m represents 0.3% of the Council's budgets.

17.

**Questioner:** Councillor Phillip O'Dell

**Asked of:** Councillor Asad Omar (Portfolio Holder for Environment and Community Safety)

**Question:** "Does the PH support the Borough Commander of Harrow Police aim to make Harrow the safest borough in London?"

**Written Answer:** Harrow has, for many years, been one of the safest boroughs in London, with one of the strongest crime reduction partnerships in the city. This partnership has been supported strongly by a succession of Portfolio Holders from across the political spectrum. Indeed one of the strengths of the Harrow partnership is that crime reduction has not been a party political issue in recent years. As the current Portfolio Holder, I am committed to building on the work of my predecessors and fully support the Police in the aim of making Harrow the safest borough in London.

18.

**Questioner:** Councillor Sachin Shah

**Asked of:** Councillor William Stoodley (Portfolio Holder for Planning and Regeneration)

**Question:** "It is very bold of Barnet Football club to send the Chair of the Planning committee an email showing they are in breach of planning conditions. Do you think they did this because they don't believe the council will act, or because they are truly sorry for the problems they are causing?"

**Written Answer:** The Council officers are following up a number of lines of investigation in respect of planning matters at the site. The Chair of Planning and Senior officers from the Environment & Enterprise directorate have been providing challenge to Mr Kleanthos in response to feedback from local councillors and the community on the current planning proposals, and recent alleged breaches of the existing planning conditions. Officers are working with the Club to try and ensure that the lawful use of the site for non league football, now planned by Barnet FC is properly managed, alongside the other permitted activities. The objective is to ensure that the concerns and interests of the wider community are respected alongside the need for the site to operate on a financially sustainable basis that will enable it to continue to provide high quality facilities to the community at large in this part of Harrow.

19.

**Questioner:** Councillor Bill Phillips

**Asked of:** Councillor Nizam Ismail (Portfolio Holder for Community and Cultural Services and Housing)

**Question:** "What are the Portfolio Holder's plans and commitments to collect the monies outstanding on commercial properties owned by the HRA and will you ensure that all debtors of the HRA are

treated equally.”

**Written  
Answer:**

The Council has 31 properties in the HRA which include 25 shops in five parades, one church, one theatre, one office, one doctor's surgery and two advertising hoardings. The total current rent roll is £326,000 with two properties vacant and currently being marketed for rent.

The Council approach is to work positively with all its commercial tenants to try to ensure that rental arrears do not accrue. However, in cases where tenants fail to keep up with their rental payments then the Council employs all the recovery methods applicable under the commercial lease agreements to ensure payment of the sums due is made to the Council.

We will of course ensure that we treat all organisations equitably and that we deal robustly and transparently with those where it is clear that there are arrears to be paid. Where we have inherited longstanding issues, going back years, that have not been resolved (such as Flash Musicals), we will make sure that we bring a solution that will work for everyone whilst not giving preferential treatment.

20.

**Questioner:**

Councillor Sachin Shah

**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:**

“For the months of April, May and June, will the Portfolio Holder please provide the expenditure from the Mayor's budget on:  
Staffing costs  
Staff overtime  
Agency costs  
Catering costs”

**Written  
Answer:**

**Total Mayoral staffing costs** (not including Agency staff) =  
£34, 251.34

**Staff overtime** = £2,615.11

**Agency costs** = £ 6,725.73

**Catering costs** = £6,001.66