

CABINET - 26 JUNE 2014

WRITTEN RESPONSES TO COUNCILLOR QUESTIONS NOT REACHED AT CABINET

5.

Questioner: Councillor Barry Macleod-Cullinane

Asked of: Councillor Sachin Shah, Portfolio Holder for Finance and Major Contracts

Question: "P.86 of the Cabinet papers shows you intend to put £3 million of the 2013-14 underspend into the Transformation and Priority Initiatives Fund. Can you provide more information on which projects and schemes you will be looking to fund with this sizeable sum of money?"

Written Response: At the recent local election, Labour won a majority of seats on the Council. This win was because of the superior manifesto of the Labour Party.

The TPIF will be used to implement the manifesto and for other initiatives that have the support of the democratically elected administration of Harrow.

7.

Questioner: Councillor Susan Hall

Asked of: Councillor David Perry, Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Strategy, Partnerships and Corporate Leadership

Question: "You have spoken a lot about the importance of resident engagement and consultation since the election, and it was the subject of your first blog as Leader. Can you detail some of the proposals your administration will look to roll out to improve resident engagement?"

Written Response: Thank you for your question on our intention to improve consultation and engagement with Harrow residents. As you know, this is something which I feel is vitally important, not least because the people of Harrow have had to experience the last year without any meaningful dialogue with their Council, but also because I genuinely feel that we'll make better decisions by listening to residents and working together.

There is strong evidence that we need to change our approach as a Council. For instance, this Council now has the lowest satisfaction rating it has had since 2007 at 43%, a 20 point fall since its height in 2011 of 63%. The Council is obviously getting

something wrong for satisfaction to be this low.

As further evidence of what residents think of this Council, in March 2014, when asked whether residents felt that they can influence decisions in their local area they gave the lowest score since we started asking them the question in 2008. In the same survey when asked whether the Council takes account of their views what was the verdict? The lowest score ever. When asked whether the Council acts on the concerns of residents? The lowest score ever. When asked whether the Council treats residents with respect? Again, the lowest score ever.

It is clear that Harrow residents want to be treated differently by this Council and I and my cabinet will deliver this different approach.

Labour administrations at Harrow have a strong track record on engaging with people. In 2010 we launched our nationally acclaimed Let's Talk campaign, the success of which was recognised by residents and which was evident in the impact it had on our satisfaction ratings. We led major consultations on Adult care and on Council Tax Support, both of which introduced difficult changes but which were supported by local people and local groups because of the way we had worked with them.

Our approach will continue. We will aim to consult residents at every opportunity to bring about real and positive change in these challenging times. To meet these challenges, we are going to govern in a new way, one where the administration works by consultation with staff, local people and the voluntary sector at all times. The Town Hall does not always know best and as a council we no longer have the chequebook to pay for all of the council's policies.

But onto some specifics. On the Cabinet agenda this evening is a report on the Council Tax Benefit Scheme. We know we have some very tough decisions ahead, and we're not going to duck these tough decisions. When we introduced the first scheme, we did so following a robust and detailed consultation and engagement with residents and stakeholders on possible scheme changes. Tonight we'll agree to the approach to consultation in the same meaningful and authentic way and we will listen to the views of residents as we move through this process.

I've also committed that each of our members will carry out one hour of community activity a week. Is this something that the Conservative Group or other Councillors would be willing to commit to? We shouldn't let our political differences stop us working in and with our community so I'd be happy that we made this a Council commitment rather than just the Harrow Labour

Group.

In terms of our other plans, more will be revealed over the coming weeks and months. When we make an announcement it will be closely followed by an action, so I don't intend to launch anything as a result of answering your question this evening. However, the people of Harrow have stated clearly that they want a different approach from their Council to the one they've received over the last year. This Labour Administration will deliver it for them.

8.

Questioner: Councillor Barry Macleod-Cullinane

Asked of: Councillor David Perry, Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Strategy, Partnerships and Corporate Leadership

Question: "Your manifesto promised a review into the senior management structure of the Council. Can you confirm when this review is due to begin, who will be involved in the process, and when you expect its conclusions to be published?"

Written Response: We have already had meetings with senior Council staff to ask for their professional guidance on the range of potential options available for our review of the management structure, after the damaging void left by the Tory administration.

Following internal discussions we will look to start a consultation with staff in the immediate future. This process demonstrates the Labour Administration's commitment to working collaboratively with others to ensure the Council is best placed to protect residents from the £75m of cuts the Conservative Government is imposing on Harrow Council, and our residents.

9.

Questioner: Councillor Stephen Greek

Asked of: Councillor Simon Brown, Portfolio Holder for Children, Schools and Young People

Question: What plans do you have to help secure the long term future of Kids Can Achieve in Harrow?

Written Response: Kids Can Achieve is a valued provider for our Activities and Short Breaks service for disabled children in Harrow. Children and Family Directorate and Environment and Enterprise Directorate are negotiating with Kids Can Achieve about the rent for their current accommodation provided by the Council. Once the rent discussions have concluded we understand that Westminster Society intends to merge with KCA, securing the

future of the services that KCA deliver.

10.

Questioner: Councillor Susan Hall

Asked of: Councillor David Perry, Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Strategy, Partnerships and Corporate Leadership

Question: “You have said you will be undertaking a review of the position of non-executive Cabinet members, and have changed the constitution to remove your obligation to appoint any prior to this Cabinet meeting. When is this review taking place, who will be involved, and when will the outcome be known?”

Written Response: The Labour Administration will conduct a full review of Non-Executive Cabinet Members in due course, following discussions internally and with the Voluntary and Community Sector in Harrow.

The Labour Administration will bring forward proposals on a future Cabinet Scrutiny Structure in due course.

11.

Questioner: Councillor Marilyn Ashton

Asked of: Councillor Keith Ferry, Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Business, Planning and Regeneration

Question: “Are you confident that the members of the Planning Committee were given enough information in respect of the traffic study when determining the Anmer Lodge/Surface Level Car Park planning application?”

Written Response: The planning application was accompanied by a substantial Transport Assessment, the scope of which had been agreed with officers as part of extensive pre-application discussions. The Assessment and appendices were available for inspection online and at Stanmore library throughout the course of the Council's consideration of the application. The Transport Assessment was subject to scrutiny by officers from the Council's transport team as well as by the GLA and Transport for London. The Planning Committee report included 12 pages appraising the transport and highways implications of the proposal and set out in proposed conditions and planning obligations specific mitigation measures/interventions relating to the identified transport and highways impacts. It is not appropriate to include very technical information in a Planning Committee report but Members were given the opportunity to ask technical questions at the Planning Committee's briefing on 7th April and at the Members' site visit

carried out on 5th April.

I am therefore satisfied that the Planning Committee had sufficient information in respect of transport impacts to determine the planning application.