

## Cabinet - 19 February 2015 - Questions not reached at Cabinet

16.

**Questioner:** Councillor Barry Macleod-Cullinane

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

**Question:** "Could you provide a by-quarter breakdown of how many residents have been helped financially by the Welfare Reform Contingency since its inception?"

**Written Response:** The Emergency Relief Scheme (ERS) sits within the wider Harrow Help Scheme, and has been developed to help mitigate the impacts of welfare reform. It is designed to provide short-term support to people who are experiencing a risk to their health or safety because of an emergency situation. The scheme in the main provides non-cash support through a mix of goods, foods, vouchers, pre-paid cards, commissioned support services and sign-posting to appropriate services.

I attach the Services statistics regarding the support the Emergency Relief Service has provided since its inception on 1/4/2013. The Support has now been available for almost two years and the monetary value of awards has increased from £124k in 2013/14 to almost £164k so far this year (to 31/1/2015).

Most of the money is spent on Furniture and white goods (cookers/washing machines/fridges) as demand is coming mainly from those affected by housing benefit reforms as affected households transition through the implementation of various measures which for the services customers mainly means having to move and needing support with setting up home costs, or moving from temporary accommodation into affordable accommodation within the benefits allowance. However we also support those suffering from unexpected redundancy or benefit sanctions enforced by DWP, which may also mean referring customers to food banks or supporting them with fuel utility, clothes or travel costs for job interviews.

In line with other local authorities, the funding for this service has been cut by Central Government but this administration has allocated £270k growth to the area from 1/4/2015 in order that the level of demand experienced historically is fully met on an on-going basis. This will ensure our most vulnerable residents are looked after and given the basic essentials to look after themselves.

**2014/15**

Month	Number of referrals	Refused LWP	Awarded LWP	Total value of awards
Apr-14	98	43	55	£17,211.39
May-14	84	44	44	£19,610.16
Jun-14	64	29	35	£14,786.02
Jul-14	108	55	53	£19,588.89
Aug-14	76	38	35	£16,446.02
Sep-14	84	41	43	£22,678.46
Oct-14	67	26	41	£15,773.19
Nov-14	53	33	20	£9,087.80
Dec-14	57	31	26	£11,819.60
Jan-15	62	39	23	£15,726.64
Feb-15				£1,224.60
Mar-15				£0.00
<b>Totals</b>	<b>753</b>	<b>379</b>	<b>375</b>	<b>£163,952.77</b>

**2013/14**

Month	Number of referrals	Refused LWP	Awarded LWP	Total value of awards
Apr-13	152	118	34	£3,212.12
May-13	99	76	23	£3,391.54
Jun-13	97	57	40	£4,894.31
Jul-13	81	41	40	£5,505.70
Aug-13	83	25	58	£10,094.39
Sep-13	86	32	54	£9,839.33
Oct-13	78	23	55	£10,974.04
Nov-13	75	25	50	£10,825.80
Dec-13	83	25	58	£18,258.36
Jan-14	103	51	52	£15,669.86
Feb-14	88	39	49	£16,299.72
Mar-14	98	39	59	£15,656.20
<b>Totals</b>	<b>1123</b>	<b>551</b>	<b>572</b>	<b>£124,621.37</b>

17.

**Questioner:** Councillor Barry Macleod-Cullinane

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

**Question:** “Could you clarify the reasoning behind your proposals to change the Members’ Allowances Scheme?”

**Written Response:** We made changes to the scheme at the start of this administration in June 2014. The reasons for those changes were to reverse the back room deal between the Conservatives and the ILG. This included reducing the allowance for the non-executive members, which we believe was set too high.

We are proposing further changes, including reducing the SRA for scrutiny leads to bring them in line with the Cabinet assistant role, as we believe that both roles have comparable additional work loads.

With the reduced work load of the Chair of the Licensing and General Purposes Committee, this SRA has also been reduced.

Overall we have also applied the local government pay settlement to Councillors’ basic allowances and SRAs. We believe it is fair that if staff get an increase, Councillors’ allowance reflect that. It was on that same basis that Labour made reductions to some SRAs, when staff agreed to a 1% pay cut.

18.

**Questioner:** Councillor Barry Macleod-Cullinane

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

**Question:** “Are you satisfied with the inflation predictions in the Budget, given inflation rates are currently at the lowest on record?”

**Written Response:** There are no predictions for inflation in the budget, but there is a budget line to allow departments to fund the cost of inflation. Harrow Council is not, and will never be, in the business of predicting or forecasting inflation.

I am happy with the amount set side in the budget to cover the costs of inflation.