

Cabinet – 19 November 2015

Written Responses to Questions 9-28 and 34-35 not reached at Cabinet

9.

Questioner: Councillor Barry Macleod-Cullinane

Asked of: Councillor Glen Hearnden, Portfolio Holder for Housing

Question: “Regarding the HRA Purchase Programme, can you confirm how many properties have been purchased since the policy was passed?”

Written Response: 1 Property Purchased - 9 Howards Close.

10.

Questioner: Councillor Barry Macleod-Cullinane

Asked of: Councillor Glen Hearnden, Portfolio Holder for Housing

Question: “Can you provide month to month breakdown of the properties purchased to date?”

Written Response: 9 Howards was purchased on 16 September.

11.

Questioner: Councillor Barry Macleod-Cullinane

Asked of: Councillor Glen Hearnden, Portfolio Holder for Housing

Question: “Can you please also supply a breakdown of the number of bedrooms in each of the properties purchased to date?”

Written Response: 9 Howards Close is a 2b4p flat.

12.

Questioner: Councillor Barry Macleod-Cullinane

Asked of: Councillor Glen Hearnden, Portfolio Holder for Housing

Question: “Why does the Cabinet paper appear to transfer authority to

approve property purchases made with HRA funds from the Cabinet member for Business, Planning and Regeneration to the Divisional Director for Housing, rather than to the Housing Cabinet member?"

Written Response: Corporate Directors currently have delegated authority for General Land and Property transactions in conjunction with the relevant portfolio holder, with the proviso that anything above the value of £0.250m must be reported to Cabinet for approval. The purpose of this report is to try to streamline the property purchase process and to both remove some of the administrative burden currently present in the process and enable decisions to be made quickly so as to not miss out on opportunities as they arise. Decisions would be made in conjunction with the Portfolio Holder to ensure an adequate degree of oversight and appropriate governance.

13.

Questioner: Councillor Barry Macleod-Cullinane

Asked of: Councillor Glen Hearnden, Portfolio Holder for Housing

Question: "Does the Cabinet member for Housing support the Government's policy of right to buy?"

Written Response: A national RTB scheme could be a brilliant policy, allowing councils to match the aspirations of many residents to own their own homes, however I do not support the RTB policy in its current form. We have hundreds of people on the waiting list and in temporary accommodation in desperate need of housing. The rules governing RTB do not allow replacement on a like for like basis, and the irony is that many of the homes we are now purchasing are ones that we sold off in the first place, so not only do the purchasers benefit from the discounts, they also get the benefit of a huge increase in market value and the property returns to the Council to house people in need who should have been living in there in the first place.

14.

Questioner: Councillor Barry Macleod-Cullinane

Asked of: Councillor Glen Hearnden, Portfolio Holder for Housing

Question: "How many right to buys have been completed to date in this financial year?"

Written Response: 19 RTBs have been completed from 01/04/15 – 19/11/15 (to-

Response: date)

The budget assumption is that 35 RTB will be completed this financial year.

15.

Questioner: Councillor Barry Macleod-Cullinane

Asked of: Councillor Glen Hearnden, Portfolio Holder for Housing

Question: "Can the number of right to buy completions to date in 2015-16 be provided on a month by month basis?"

Written	April	2
Response:	May	1
	June	1
	July	5
	Aug	3
	Sep	4
	Oct	1
	Nov	2

16.

Questioner: Councillor Barry Macleod-Cullinane

Asked of: Councillor Glen Hearnden, Portfolio Holder for Housing

Question: "What is the current numbers of households in temporary accommodation (and how many in B&Bs)?"

Written There are 240 families in B&B and 777 in Temporary
Response: Accommodation overall, including B&B.

17.

Questioner: Councillor Barry Macleod-Cullinane

Asked of: Councillor Glen Hearnden, Portfolio Holder for Housing

Question: “What is the total number of households in temporary accommodation, including specific totals for B&Bs, for each of the last 3 months and for the same months in 2014, on a month-by-month basis?”

Written

Response: Total households in TA

	Aug-14	Sep-14	Oct-14	Aug-15	Sep-15	Oct-15
B & B	112	119	140	212	219	235
Total	484	494	520	711	742	790

18.

Questioner: Councillor Barry Macleod-Cullinane

Asked of: Councillor Glen Hearnden, Portfolio Holder for Housing

Question: “How many homeless households have been assisted by the Council’s acquisition of new properties since that scheme’s inception?”

Written

Response: One HRA property (the only one purchased to date). We have acquisitions in process for the 100 homes funded from the General Fund.

19.

Questioner: Councillor Barry Macleod-Cullinane

Asked of: Councillor Glen Hearnden, Portfolio Holder for Housing

Question: “How many households with children are there currently in B&B?”

Written

Response: 194 households with 432 children under 18.

20.

Questioner: Councillor Barry Macleod-Cullinane

Asked of: Councillor Glen Hearnden, Portfolio Holder for Housing

Question: “How many households are affected by the extension of the transitional relief?”

Written Response: The original transitional relief scheme aimed to help about 100 families. 69 families will be assisted by the extension of transitional relief. This does also have some impact on everyone in Bands B, C and C minus as there are less properties available for applicants in these bands to bid for.

21.

Questioner: Councillor Barry Macleod-Cullinane

Asked of: Councillor Glen Hearnden, Portfolio Holder for Housing

Question: “How many households will be affected by the change from 3months to 6 months when it comes to demonstrating their ability and willingness to follow arrears and other debt repayment plans?”

Written Response: No current families are affected. This will affect applicants owing the council money in the future. We can't predict how many and we only know that an applicant owes the council when we come to verify their application, at the point they are about to be offered accommodation.

22.

Questioner: Councillor Barry Macleod-Cullinane

Asked of: Councillor Glen Hearnden, Portfolio Holder for Housing

Question: “How many families who moved to council arranged lets outside the M25, believing that this would not undermine their application to be housed in Harrow, will be affected by the proposal to downgrade their applications from Band B to Band C or C-?”

Written Response: 4 families are affected by this change. But this does not undermine their application to be housed in Harrow. We are in fact treating them exactly the same as homeless households accommodated in Harrow, so have the same chance for rehousing as all other homeless households.

23.

Questioner: Councillor Barry Macleod-Cullinane

Asked of: Councillor Glen Hearnden, Portfolio Holder for Housing

Question: “By removing the low income priority criteria (8, p. 43), isn’t Labour-run Harrow Council rather going against the grain of the Government’s welfare reforms that are intended to encourage people into work?”

Written Response: The way the policy was drafted did not result in any families receiving priority. We considered amending it, but this resulted in so many families receiving extra priority it became meaningless. We don’t believe this aspect of the policy encouraged anyone into work.

24.

Questioner: Councillor Barry Macleod-Cullinane

Asked of: Councillor Glen Hearnden, Portfolio Holder for Housing

Question: “Will removal of ‘strategic aim f’ in Appendix 2 risk the creation of “sink estates” rather than the promotion of mixed communities across Harrow?”

Written Response: With major homelessness pressures and very little social housing this objective is difficult to achieve, at present. But following consultation we decided not to remove strategic aim f.

25.

Questioner: Councillor Barry Macleod-Cullinane

Asked of: Councillor Glen Hearnden, Portfolio Holder for Housing

Question: “Please explain the full range and type of actions and behaviours that the Council considers constitutes “a deliberate change of circumstances which has resulted in the worsening of a household’s housing circumstances” (13, p. 44)?”

Written Response: It is not possible to enumerate every possible situation, and where this may be a factor, each situation will be carefully considered, and there will be a right to a review.

But examples of scenario that sometimes occurs is a family becoming overcrowded because they have moved to smaller accommodation when they don’t need to, either because their previous accommodation remained available, or alternative

suitable sized accommodation was available. Or overcrowding caused by inviting another household (who are non-dependants) to move into their home.

26.

Questioner: Councillor Barry Macleod-Cullinane

Asked of: Councillor Glen Hearnden, Portfolio Holder for Housing

Question: “Has the Council made any representation to the Local Government Association and/or to the Housing Minister over both the recent judgements (Nzolameso v. City of Westminster and Jakimaviciute vs. LB Hammersmith & Fulham) and the additional risks and costs they establish for the Council and the need for an appropriate legislative response?”

Written Response: The Council has been feeding back to the government through London Councils on a range of issues causing homelessness pressures, including these recent judgments.

27.

Questioner: Councillor Barry Macleod-Cullinane

Asked of: Councillor Glen Hearnden, Portfolio Holder for Housing

Question: “Does the Housing Department have sufficient capacity to deliver its current workstream?”

Written Response: Homelessness pressures are causing capacity issues in the Housing Needs Service, But extra resources are being made available on a spend to save basis to assure homelessness prevention can be maximised, and suitable assessment and support for homeless applicants can be offered. In 2016, working to support families affected by the reduction in the benefit cap will cause further pressures.

28.

Questioner: Councillor Barry Macleod-Cullinane

Asked of: Councillor Glen Hearnden, Portfolio Holder for Housing

Question: “According to the report on communal boilers (3.5, p. 357), “Quality Heating have through regular inspections identified that the Council’s commercial heating systems are in need of some significant investment”; elsewhere, the Council is, finally, moving to demolish and re-build the failing housing stock at Grange Farm. Given this seeming inability to properly maintain its current

housing stock, do you think that the Council will really be able to effectively manage rental properties through its proposed, arms-length private rental sector company?"

Written Response:

The reason there is an outstanding need for investment in the Council's commercial heating systems is that this type of work was outside the Governments Decent Homes Standard-and so not something that limited funds allowed us to invest in under that regime. Since moving away from these requirements in 2012 we have been able to rectify most of the outstanding issues, caused by historic inadequate investment, and indeed the stock is in a much improved condition and customer satisfaction has significantly improved. Putting things right with the communal heating systems will be a priority with the new contract.

The Grange Farm properties are in need of regeneration not because of the Council's inability to maintain them but because the non-traditional construction used to build these homes gave them a relatively short life. The cost of bringing the existing properties up to an acceptable standard would be very high, and their life would only be extended for a few more years-so demolition and re-build will both give the Council a more valuable asset and provide homes that meet resident's needs for many years to come. Managing homes for private letting is outside the constraints of Central Government's funding regimes-so these problems will not be encountered by the arms-length company.

34.

Questioner: Councillor Barry Macleod-Cullinane

Asked of: Councillor Kiran Ramchandani, Portfolio Holder for Performance, Corporate Resources and Policy Development

Question: "Do you think that the level of BAME representation in Payband 6, reported at last week's Employees' Consultative Forum (in Item 9, Part 1 of Annual Equality in Employment Monitoring Report (Data and Corporate Equalities Action Plan update) for 1 April 2014 - 31 March 2015) is acceptable and what is the Council proposing to do to change things?"

Written Response:

The Council's equality objectives include '**a workforce that is reflective of the diverse community we serve**' and over many years and successive administrations we have continued to improve the representation of BAME staff, which now stands at its highest recorded level at over 43% of the workforce. However, like the majority of organisations including those in the public sector, representation of BAME staff is lowest in the higher pay bands (Percentage of top 5% earners from BME

communities = 16.67%) and this is something we want to improve.

The Council's current Equality in Employment Action Plan identifies '**Under representation of BAME employees and employees with disabilities at higher levels in the workforce**' as a priority issue. The Councillor will be aware, from the report to the Employees' Consultative Forum, that the Plan includes specific actions to address this priority that were agreed by the Council's Corporate Equality Group, which includes representatives from community groups including Harrow Equalities Centre and progress against the plan is regularly monitored by the Group.

The Councillor will also be aware that members of the Employees' Consultative Forum, which was attended by the Leader of the opposition, have been asked to consider and comment on the data reported and provide any feedback on issues to prioritise for action from January 2016, we welcome feedback from opposition members on this important issue.

35.

Questioner: Councillor Barry Macleod-Cullinane

Asked of: Councillor Kiran Ramchandani, Portfolio Holder for Performance, Corporate Resources and Policy Development

Question: "Can you provide the latest breakdown for each of the Council's paybands, by protected characteristics, of the Council's recruitment processes for those who "applied", were "shortlisted", were "appointed", for the "council excluding schools" and for the "whole council"?"

Written Response: Yes, however, this will require more detailed analysis of the data for 2014/15 that was presented in the report to the recent Employees' Consultative Forum and so I will arrange for the Councillor to receive this data once this has been completed.