

HARROW BUSINESS CONSULTATIVE PANEL MINUTES

26 JANUARY 2016

Chair: * Councillor Keith Ferry

Councillors: † Jeff Anderson * Bharat Thakker
* Kam Chana

* Denotes Member present

† Denotes apologies received

7. Declarations of Interest

RESOLVED: To note that the following interest was declared:

Agenda Item 8 – Information Report – Draft Revenue Budget 2016/17 and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2016/17 to 2019/20 and Capital Programme 2016/17 to 2019/20

During the course of the meeting, Councillor Bharat Thakker declared a non-pecuniary interest in that his wife, who was a solicitor based in Harrow town centre, had had her office relocated outside of Harrow. He would remain in the room whilst the matter was considered and voted upon.

8. Appointment of Vice-Chair

RESOLVED: To appoint Councillor Kam Chana as Vice-Chair of the Harrow Business Consultative Panel for the 2015/2016 Municipal Year.

9. Minutes

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 27 January 2015 be taken as read and signed as a correct record.

10. Public Questions

RESOLVED: To note that no public questions were received.

11. Petitions

RESOLVED: To note that no petitions had been received.

12. Deputations

RESOLVED: To note that no deputations were received at this meeting under the provisions of Executive Procedure Rule 48 (Part 4D of the Constitution).

RESOLVED ITEMS

13. INFORMATION REPORT - Draft Revenue Budget 2016/17 and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2016/17 to 2019/20 and Capital Programme 2016/17 to 2019/20

Members received a report of the Director of Finance which set out the Council's proposals for the draft Revenue Budget 2016/17 and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2016/17 to 2019/20 and Capital Programme 2016/17 to 2019/20 for consultation.

The Chair welcomed local business representatives to the meeting. He explained that it was a statutory requirement that the Council consulted the business community before setting the budget and Council Tax for the forthcoming year.

The Interim Head of Strategic Finance and the Head of Collections and Benefits gave a presentation on the content of the report and outlined, in summary, the budget target and progress being made, the Capital Programme 2016/17 and the position in terms of business rates. The officers and Panel then received questions and comments from the business representatives present.

In response to a question as to how the trend in employers leaving Harrow could be reversed, the Chair advised that the Council did not have the economic levers to prevent this as it did not set the non domestic rate multiplier. The Council did, however, provide a number of services to the business community and the number of small businesses was on the increase.

The businesses representatives stated that the conversion of offices into residential use was a significant issue, particularly for small and medium businesses as it reduced the ability of businesses to grow due to space constraints. Harrow town centre was ideal in terms of business location due to its transport links with central London but due to the conversion of offices into residential, growth was difficult. The Chair advised that this problem was not unique to Harrow and that what the Council was losing in business rates would be gained in Council Tax.

In response to the concerns expressed by business representatives, a Member stated that, in his view, the Council could do more to retain businesses by using existing facilities and premises. He acknowledged that work was being done to look at other ways businesses could be supported.

A business representative emphasised the need for office space, referring to the change from office to residential in College Road which would, in turn, change the types of shop on offer. The Chair advised that retail premises, as well as offices, could now be converted to residential use due to permitted development.

The Interim Head of Strategic Finance confirmed that the Capital Programme included provision for the schools expansion programme due to the need for an increase in the number of school places. The revenue budget gap of £83m did not, however, include schools as they had a dedicated schools grant. Harrow had historically been poor in its leisure offer and the Council was looking to address this.

The Chair provided clarification on the location of the new Civic Centre in Wealdstone and the master planning for the existing Civic Centre site, which would include office space, a school and residential units.

The Panel and business representatives discussed the refurbishment of Harrow on the Hill Station and the need for step free access. The Chair confirmed that step free access was within the remit of Transport for London (TfL) but that the Council had offered to fund the development of lifts on either side of the station. Progress had, however, been slow on this issue with TfL estimating that the provision of five lifts would cost £20m. The Council had a provision of £3m in the Capital Programme as a contribution towards the project.

A Member stated that the developers of Jubilee House had offered to put in a lift at Stanmore Station and that perhaps developers could provide lifts at Harrow on the Hill Station as part of a larger development. The Member also urged caution in that Harrow could end up with a surplus of residential properties.

In response to a question as to whether Vaughan Road car park could be considered for office development, the Chair advised that consultation was on going with the local church and synagogue in relation to usage.

The Chair thanked those present for their attendance and contribution.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

(Note: The meeting, having commenced at 7.30 pm, closed at 8.21 pm).

(Signed) COUNCILLOR KEITH FERRY
Chair