

CABINET

19 JUNE 2008

AGENDA PART I

PUBLIC QUESTIONS (ITEM 5)

Under Rule 16 of the Executive Procedure Rules, members of the public may question the Executive and Portfolio Holders at meetings. There is a time limit of 15 minutes for the asking and answering of public questions.

1.

Questioner: Yvonne Lee, Harrow Mencap

Asked of: Councillor Barry Macleod-Cullinane, Portfolio Holder for Adults and Housing

Question: “The recent CSCI inspection rated learning disability services as poor. Whilst welcoming the recent changes in HLDT and the directorate as a whole it must be acknowledged that service users their carers and Harrow Mencap have made several representations to Councillors as to how poor the services were becoming, with little or no response in fact if one was cynical may considered more than coincidence that the recent improvements were made to coincide with the CSCI inspection. How will the Council ensure that the lack of accountability that was allowed to develop will not reoccur?”

Answer: I am pleased that you acknowledge recent improvements in Learning Disability Services. Thank you for your contribution to these improvements.

I do acknowledge that stakeholders had expressed concern over time about the service prior to new management arrangements being put in place.

Let me be absolutely clear that the Councils commitment to improve this service is driven by our focus on needs of users and not by an inspection process.

The improvement plan for the service is a crucial part of our recently agreed ‘Your future, Our Future’ programme. We have strong accountability for this programme.

We are going to be looking at

- (a) Monthly reporting of progress through the Adults and Housing Programme Board to the Corporate Director.

- (b) Weekly updates to the Divisional Director, Community Care.
- (c) Monthly review by myself with the Corporate Director.
- (d) Regular review by CSCI.
- (e) Most importantly we are developing strong service user engagement to make sure improvements are felt by those receiving the service.

I can assure you that we have no intention of losing focus on improving this service.

Supplemental Question: Can we have a real commitment from the Council that all future correspondence will be written in an accessible format?

Answer: Very much so and if you would like to sit down with me at some stage to go through that documentation showing why it is wrong and how we need to improve it I would be happy to do so.

2.

Questioner: Brian Stoker

Asked of: Councillor David Ashton, Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Strategy, Partnerships and Finance

Question: “In the matter of Cedars Hall development, the Council key decision of 21st May was based on a report that stated that the Council had taken legal advice regarding breaking the covenant preventing building on the site. From which legal firm or partnership was this obtained, and at what cost to the Council?”

Answer: Advice was provided by the Council's in-house legal practice, whose costs are met from the Revenue Budget and no specific cost was identified for this particular piece of work.

Additionally, Counsel's opinion was obtained from Falcon Chambers. The cost of this was £1,000 plus VAT (total £1,175).

Supplemental Question: Did you take advice from the same source about the 1906 open space status of the land?

Answer: I will have to check the position and come back to you.

3.

Questioner: Frances Pickersgill

Asked of: Councillor David Ashton, Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Strategy, Partnerships and Finance

Question: "At the last cabinet meeting on 21 May, a petition on the issues concerning the future of Cedars Hall was received by the Cabinet. The Cabinet constitution says that relevant public petitions will be taken into account during decision making.

In fact the petition was not referred to at all during the presentation of the case for decision. As Chair of the meeting, why did you allow the Committee constitution to be defied in this way?"

Answer: The issues set out in the petition regarding Cedars Hall, presented to Cabinet on 21 May, had been raised by residents, at the residents' meeting, or as part of other communications with the Council.

The officer report and the subsequent decision taken by Cabinet, therefore, in my opinion, took account of relevant issues.

There is no requirement for a petition to be explicitly referred to during Cabinet deliberations, and in no way did I defy the Constitution, as suggested.

4.

Questioner: Ann Freeman

Asked of: Councillor David Ashton, Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Strategy, Partnerships and Finance

Question: "Is Cabinet happy that, remembering the stress that was caused to disabled people in Harrow because of the oversight of a consultation the first time that changes were being proposed for Wiseworks Enterprises, that there appears to be no consultation planned with those affected by proposed changes to 'Harrow Consortium for Adults with Special Needs'?"

Answer: Support for Living is the new name of the organisation which manages residential provision for adults with learning disabilities and mental health issues for both the Council and the PCT.

Support for Living was formed as a result of the merger of the Harrow Consortium of Special Needs and Ealing Consortium of Special Needs in the summer of 2007.

Proposals relating to the future management arrangements for residential provision in Harrow will be the subject of a report to Cabinet in July.

Any proposals to make changes to the current services delivered through Support for Living would be subject to statutory consultation with those affected.

Supplemental Question: Did you know that when the Cabinet initially approved the Harrow Consortium of Special Needs (HCSN) business plan in 2006, the HCSN were already in negotiation with Ealing Consortium at that time to merge but did not disclose this in their business plan so any merger will have an impact on the structure and financial projections that they presented? Residents and carers have reported negative changes to the service they are receiving.

Answer: If there are negative changes we will investigate them. There are no structural changes to service. If any were to be proposed they would be fully consulted on.