

CABINET

19 JUNE 2008

AGENDA PART I

COUNCILLOR QUESTIONS (ITEM 6)

Fifteen minutes will be allowed for Members of the Council to ask a Portfolio Holder a question on any matter in relation to which the Executive has powers or duties.

1.

Questioner: Councillor Bill Stephenson.

Asked of: Councillor Susan Hall, Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Environment Services

Question: "Following the loss of the Safeway supermarket the North Harrow Shopping Centre remains in a perilous state. Just recently two major shops have closed down. Meanwhile there is no definite news about whether a new supermarket will be installed in the new development on the former supermarket site and this development although nearing completion has still not been completed. At the last meeting of Cabinet in a supplemental agenda item it was agreed to end the free first hour parking in the North Harrow Shopping Centre. In light of this information will you agree not to implement this decision at the present time and will you further agree to meet representatives of local traders, local residents and the local ward Cllrs for Headstone North and South to discuss this matter further."

Answer: The free period in North Harrow was introduced following the sudden closure of the Safeway supermarket. It was never intended to stay first hour free on a permanent basis. We are taking a view as to when to start charging again.

I am, of course, only too happy to meet with you and the representatives.

Supplemental Question: Will you consider an overall strategy for car parking to ensure equality across the borough?

Answer: One of the reasons that we have not looked at this so far is because in one of the two areas where car parking was first hour free - the good reasons for it - we knew would be coming to an end. Once we have stability in those areas, we hope to look at the whole borough.

It would cost in excess of £30,000 to change all the parking meters. We did not want to waste taxpayers' money by altering tariffs and then changing them again. We want to look at this issue as a whole.

2.

Questioner: Councillor Bill Stephenson.

Asked of: Councillor Paul Osborn, Portfolio Holder for Performance, Communication and Corporate Services

Question: "You have been quoted in the local and national press as saying 'We have been hit very heavily. We have already cut down on management, upped charges for day care charges and cut back on street cleaning' to justify plans to install vending machines offering crisps, chocolates etc in local libraries.' Bearing in mind the large under spend reported in the Cabinet papers for this evening and the report of the cross-party scrutiny report on obesity will you re-consider this decision?"

Answer: The short answer is no, I will not be reconsidering the decision.

The question is flawed on two fundamental levels. The scrutiny review report recommendations did not mention vending machines. The only time the report mentioned vending machines was on page 18 in relation to Pinner Community Centre and on page 21 in relation to the new healthy food standards.

Within the Civic Centre, I take the view that people are adults and we are going to keep the vending machines. They can make their own choice but there will be healthy options available.

If we were to put vending machines in libraries, and this has not been decided, where there would be children present, we would be responsible and only have healthy options in the machines.

The other reason this question is flawed is the fact that we had an under spend last year should not impact on revenue spend year after year. We have put a prudent budget in place and we intend to continue to budget sensibly.

Supplemental Question: I did not mention the Civic Centre in my question, I mentioned libraries.

In schools, will there only be healthy options in vending machines and would you agree that it would be a good idea if you took advice from school governing bodies?

Answer: We will have healthy options in vending machines in this building and we may have even more, or exclusively healthy options, in libraries. It is absolutely clear that where children are likely to be present that we will be responsible. However, we will also treat our staff like adults.

3.

Questioner: Councillor Krishna James.

Asked of: Councillor Susan Hall, Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Environment Services

Question: “Why does the council want to take away the free parking period at Peel House Car Park. The local traders are concerned about the effect this will have on their businesses. Would it be possible to reconsider the decision?”

Answer: The first free hour in Peel House car park was introduced in 2005 in response to a petition from Wealdstone traders. I was Chair of the traders at the time. They were concerned that at the same time the High Road was closed the surface car parks were removed which caused a huge amount of stress to the businesses there.

This Administration promised to open up the High Road, which will happen at the beginning of July. By giving the first hour free, lots of people use Peel House car park. No, we will not reconsider and we will start charging from September. This Administration has now done much for the traders of Wealdstone.

Supplemental Question: I would still like to reiterate how important it is to reconsider the decision – do you not agree?

Answer: The Labour Administration caused damage to the Wealdstone traders by closing the High Road and removing the surface car parks so the least they could offer was the first hour parking free. This Administration is addressing the problems experienced by the Wealdstone traders.