

**LONDON BOROUGH OF HARROW**

**COUNCIL – 8 July 2010**

**35. Questions With Notice**

**1. Questioner:** Councillor Barry Macleod-Cullinane

**Asked of:** Councillor Margaret Davine  
Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care, Health and Wellbeing

**Question:** “Can you provide a statement about Harrow PCT’s financial situation and its impact on the Council, the voluntary sector and our residents.”

**Answer:** The financial position of NHS Harrow has changed considerably during the last couple of months since April. At their last Board meeting there was a deficit of £26.2m, with a savings plan of £18.3m in place and sector support of £7.9m which is non-recurring and non returnable. That would leave £1.8m not allocated savings to find. That is the position as it was at the last Board meeting and we will see how far they have got next time.

This is still a very serious situation and I do appreciate that. Our Corporate Directors of Adults & Housing and Finance have tried unsuccessfully to get details of the savings proposed so as to assess the likely impact on the Council, voluntary sector and residents but I will be seeking more information. I have a meeting on Monday in order to inform our planning and I know that the Corporate Director of Adults and Housing also is going to a meeting next week.

It is true there are disputed amounts between NHS Harrow and the Council and I will ensure that meetings are held to address this and make sure that the impact on residents is minimised. I am sure we all know that when partners get into difficulties that it is very important that we work them, sit down and talk with them so that we can reach amicable solutions which will help both sides. So the last thing we need is starting talking again about cost shunting. I have lived through that before and seen shutters go up and things become more difficult rather than get resolved.

Everyone in this Chamber knows that all authorities and partner organisations, including ourselves are facing

enormous financial challenges but that makes it more important that we work together. As Portfolio Holder, I will be seeking to bring partners together to build a consensus for the benefit of residents and our community. As you know, Councillor Stephenson, as Chairman of Harrow Partnership Board has already invited NHS Harrow to attend the special meeting of the Board on 22 July to explain its current financial situation. This should enable further clarity on the potential impact of the PCT position on the Council, voluntary sector and residents.

**2. Questioner:** Councillor Barry Macleod-Cullinane

**Asked of:** Councillor Bob Currie  
Portfolio Holder for Housing

**Question:** "What is the Portfolio Holder doing to ensure that Harrow obtains the maximum benefit from the new Government's devolution agenda"

**Answer:** I am aware that the planned Decentralisation and Localism Bill is designed to provide council and neighbours with greater control over important services' decisions.

As Portfolio Holder for Housing I welcome any measure that gives residents greater control. Even though this Bill will not be presented to Parliament until the autumn, officers have been looking at the implications from recent papers and speeches and are working to ensure that the Housing Ambition Plan is implemented in the way that gives residents a greater say in how things are done.

I am aware of suggestions likely to end up on the Bill, for example providing existing social tenants with a share in their properties in return for good behaviour and the desire to develop new affordable housing through community led delivery models.

Clearly there are many more suggestions likely to materialise in the Bill and I will ensure that each and every one of the ideas is given due consideration and discussed with residents before making a decision on how we should proceed to ensure that Harrow Council and its residents obtain maximum benefits.

**Supplemental Question:** Can the Portfolio Holder give us one example of how the Housing Ambition Programme, which was being developed before this Bill being mooted, is going to have to be altered in order to accommodate the new proposals coming through from Government.

**Supplemental Answer:** As I explained, the Bill does not come before Parliament until autumn. Once I get more information on what the Bill is entitled, then I will respond.

3. **Questioner:** Councillor Susan Hall

**Asked of:** Councillor Rekha Shah  
Portfolio Holder for Community and Cultural Services

**Question:** “Your manifesto states that you intend to promote and facilitate the building of a new function hall to replace Byron Hall. What sort of consultation, feasibility study and research do you intend to conduct into this pledge, and has a timetable been established for it?”

**Answer:** The ambitions set out within our manifesto are intended to provide a long-term vision for the development of our Borough and in particular, the development of essential community facilities.

The Area Action Plan during the course of this year will provide the basis for the research, feasibility and most importantly, the arrangements for the consultation regarding the development of the modern, high quality community facility.

To answer to your question, consultation will be wide-ranging research and feasibility work will be effective and we will ensure that all new facilities are developed in a way which will ensure their long-term success and viability.

**Supplemental Question:** Can you tell me how you are going to pay for any of that?

**Supplemental Answer:** Once we do the feasibility and we have more information, we will of course release the information. I am not going to say anything now.

4. **Questioner:** Councillor Susan Hall

**Asked of:** Councillor Phillip O’Dell  
Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Environment & Community Safety

**Question:** “In your manifesto, you promised to sign up to the 10:10 Charter; a pledge to reduce the Council’s carbon emissions by 10% in 2010. What progress has been made in signing up to 10:10?”

**Answer:** Harrow Council is committed to making a contribution to combat climate change by reducing carbon emissions of the Council.

The 10:10 campaign is one that has caught the imagination of the country and is providing a strong impetus for individuals and organisations to reduce their carbon emissions. The campaign provides encouragement and practical examples that can be followed by residents, staff as well as the Council.

We are currently calculating our baseline data. That is being undertaken anyway for the National Indicator 185 and we expect to make a formal commitment once this is available.

**5. Questioner:** Councillor Susan Hall

**Asked of:** Councillor Bill Stephenson  
Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Finance and Business Transformation

**Question:** “How much is the new Government’s decision to scrap the Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) inspection regime expected to save the Council in compliance and other costs over the course of the next four years?”

**Answer:** The decision to scrap CAA and use of resources should result in a reduction from our audit and inspection fees but we have not been notified of details yet by the Audit Commission.

It is anticipated almost all of the fees will be payable in the current year as most of the work to inform the 2010 assessment had already been completed when the announcement was made.

The total audit and inspection fee for 2010/11 is £527,000. This includes £80,000 for use of resources and £20,000 for the CAA. Much of the use of resources work will still be required to support the Value for Money conclusion in the Council’s accounts, so whilst the Council should save some of this £100,000, it is not yet clear how much.

There will be some savings in officer time. It should be noted that many inspection activities, such as those carried

out by Ofsted and CUQSC are expected to continue. Officers have found some of the use of resources inspection very useful and may wish to continue with aspects of it in the future.

- 6. Questioner:** Councillor Susan Hall
- Asked of:** Councillor Bill Stephenson  
Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Finance and Business Transformation
- Question:** “What level of reserves does the Audit Commission require Councils to maintain as a percentage of their budget, and what amount in pounds does this mean for Harrow Council?”
- 7. Questioner:** Councillor Barry Macleod-Cullinane
- Asked of:** Councillor Bill Stephenson  
Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Finance and Business Transformation
- Question:** “Why, in the June 2010 edition of Harrow People, did you say that "central government cuts mean that we will have to save nearly £50 million over the next three years?”
- 8. Questioner:** Councillor Barry Macleod-Cullinane
- Asked of:** Councillor Bill Stephenson  
Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Finance and Business Transformation
- Question:** “When London Assembly Members chair certain public meetings, the GLA conducts surveys of the audience members to gain feedback on the performances of the chairmen. Do you think that such an initiative could have a part to play in the Member Development programme of the Council?”

In respect of questions 6, 7 and 8 which were not answered within the time available for Councillors questions, it was agreed that the relevant Portfolio Holders would provide written responses to the relevant Members and copied to all Councillors.