

CABINET

THURSDAY 17 MARCH 2011

COUNCILLOR QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

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APPENDIX

LONDON BOROUGH OF HARROW

CABINET – 17 MARCH 2011

Minute 166 (Agenda Item 5, Councillor Questions 9 - 11)

The following questions to which written responses have been provided subsequent to the meeting are hereby appended to the minutes.

9.

Questioner: Councillor Barry Macleod-Cullinane

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

Question: In light of the cross-party consensus on the age of transfer and the introduction of sixth forms, why has the Leader eschewed developing a cross-party approach to academies in Harrow, in favour of formalising a position paper through Cabinet?

Answer:
(Response provided by Councillor Brian Gate) The meeting of the Education Consultative Committee held on 1 March discussed the paper that has been presented to Cabinet this evening. The elected Members side is made up of 4 Labour and 3 Conservatives. There was a briefing held for all of the Elected Members and the Forum was held in public. We therefore already have a cross-party approach and our Conservative colleagues were able to give their opinion on the Academies issue freely. I am always pleased when cross party consensus can be achieved on policy, and I would welcome a meeting with the Conservative Education lead member to that effect. There are always likely to be issues where there are differing views about what is in the best long term interests of Harrow. Under our constitution, Cabinet and relevant Portfolio Holders are charged on behalf of the Council with developing policy and positions on a wide range of significant issue. The Labour Administration will do so in the best interests of Harrow residents and more importantly our young people. My door is always open to discussions with elected members from all parties on this or other significant issues affecting the Borough, and I would welcome further dialogue.

10.

Questioner: Councillor Barry Macleod-Cullinane

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

Question: Can the Leader assure us that his administration will provide a fair and balanced presentation of the arguments for and against schools becoming academies or remaining in local authority control in the run-up to governors' bodies voting on the matter?

Answer:
(Response provided by Councillor Brian Gate) The issue of potential transfer to academy status for some of the Borough's high schools is of real importance to Harrow's young people and their families. The widest possible public debate and access to information from a variety of sources is essential if our residents are to form objective opinions and have their voices properly heard. We are clear that the "light touch" consultation envisaged by the Academies Act is insufficient for an issue of this nature and are pleased that the schools concerned have opened the process more widely. To be clear however, the consultation process is for the Governing Bodies to undertake and it is essential that process is fair and balanced. I am convinced that it is right that the Council, as the democratically elected community leader, will be facilitating understanding and a proper wide-ranging civic debate on the issue where it can.

11.

Questioner: Councillor Barry Macleod-Cullinane

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

Question: If governors' bodies believe that becoming academies is in the best interest of their children's education, can the Leader assure us that those Harrow schools that do opt to become academies will receive the full support of your administration?

Answer:
(Response provided by Councillor Brian Gate) Yes. I refer to Item 14 Cabinet meeting 17 March 2011, "Position on the Potential Conversion of High Schools to Academies". On page 2, the second bullet point under the heading "Proposed Council Position on Conversion to Academy", it is clear that if a Governing Body decides to transfer to Academy status, Harrow Council will continue to support and work closely with all of our schools and academies as long as the best interests of our young people is served. The Local Authority is working very hard in Finance, HR, Property Services and Legal, as well as Service Level Agreements to provide support for potential conversion, and a framework for future partnership. It will be up to the Academies as to which services if any they choose to continue in partnership with the Council after conversion.