

## APPENDIX II

### LONDON BOROUGH OF HARROW

### COUNCIL MEETING

14 APRIL 2011

### QUESTIONS WITH NOTICE (ITEM 10)

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 Susan Hall

**Asked of:** Councillor Phillip O'Dell (Deputy Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Environment and Community Safety)

**Question:** "We saw recently that both Wealdstone and Hatch End now have full complements of Neighbourhood Champions. Can you provide an update on the recruitment figures for the Neighbourhood Champions scheme, both in terms of those signed up and those who have completed training?"

**Answer:** There are currently 636 Neighbourhood Champions trained and 535 Neighbourhood Champions awaiting training.

**Supplemental Question:** Given that your party was completely against their introduction, I was delighted but puzzled also, to see that there was a very positive quote about Neighbourhood Champions in March's Harrow People under the heading of "Our priorities in action".

Are you going to start taking these as one of your ideas, as you have just rebranded the Pride in Harrow, which was actually weeks of action, which the Conservatives brought in over four years' ago?

**Supplemental Answer:** Yes, we probably will.

2.

**Questioner:** Councillor Susan Hall

**Asked of:** Councillor Phillip O'Dell (Deputy Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Environment and Community Safety)

**Question** “Could you provide us with an update on how the Public Realm Maintenance Transformation Project is progressing?”

**Answer:** The project is progressing at a satisfactory pace, especially as it is a complex project bringing together organisational change and the introduction of new technologies. There have been some minor delays of the programme due to progress in a complex staff change but this is thought this will not have any significant impact on the current business case.

**Supplemental Question:** Well yes, because that is the wrong answer actually Councillor O’Dell. It is a significant delay in this. Are you aware that by June over £1.1m will have come off the Public Realm budget and yet the Transformation Project, which should be well and truly underway by now, has not yet begun?

Can you explain why this is not cutting money from the frontline? How you are going to sort it out and how, indeed, you are going to cope with an extra £70,000 a month that Capita tells me they are going to be charging you when this does not happen on time?

**Supplemental Answer:** As I say, we do acknowledge there are some delays but as I previously said, we and the officers advising us do not agree that there will not be a significant impact on this business case.

3.

**Questioner:** Councillor Susan Hall

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

**Question** “What steps are being taken to reduce occurrences of meetings being moved at short notice, as well as meetings being either scheduled or moved to clash with other meetings, as this can make it difficult or impossible for councillors of all parties to attend?”

**Answer:** As far as possible, all major meetings are programmed for a year in advance. As we all know, from time to time, issues arise that require a change in meeting dates. We work hard to minimise these occurrences but they can and will arise, particularly where special additional meetings are needed.

When this occurs, as far as possible, this is negotiated with the Chairman and appropriate Nominated Member.

However, regrettably, occasionally clashes will occur and we will continue to do our very best to avoid this.

**Supplemental Question:** Would you not, therefore, agree with me that it is absolutely unacceptable for a Labour Member of the Planning Committee to miss ten out of the twelve scheduled meetings during the past year, with actually no apparent clashes with other Council meetings?

**Supplemental Answer:** I cannot possibly comment on something I do not know anything about. We have a system of rotating our Planning Committee meetings.

4.

**Questioner:** Councillor Anthony Seymour

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

**Question** “I understand that the request for financial support regarding the closure of the North Harrow Lloyds TSB has been rejected by the bank. Are there any plans to appeal this decision, and what alternative sources of support funding are being explored?”

**Answer:** Again, I understand the request for financial support arising from the meeting between Gareth Thomas and the representatives of Lloyds TSB, a promise was made by Lloyds TSB to give some financial help to the North Harrow shopping centre.

In good faith, the Council put forward a modest proposal to Lloyds TSB. However, it turns out there was no specific fund available from Lloyds TSB, no set criteria to guide any application for funds and no appeals process in place to request that Lloyds TSB reconsider their decision. This has been made crystal clear to us by Lloyds TSB that no money will be made available.

Lloyds TSB, in a letter, stated “Regrettably the Bank has been unable to support the request. The bank, however, has offered to help traders to gain financial assistance through its Commercial Banking offer. A message has been relayed to the Chair of Traders Association.” I think we must all be shocked and disappointed at what has occurred.

**Supplemental Question:** I have to say that this is really a bitter blow for residents and for the traders of North Harrow, particularly as the source of funding, the bid was only some £36,000 from a bank which was one of the biggest banks in the world. £36,000 for a bank that is worth £36 b/million.

The bank is one of the biggest banks in the world and I think it is really a disaster for North Harrow residents and businesses and can you perhaps expand on the exact reasons why one of the biggest banks in the world cannot give £36,000, in light of the

fact that Gareth Thomas MP had apparently secured agreement and has failed to deliver?

**Supplemental Answer:** I cannot think of any reasonable reason and I think it is a disaster and I think it is a real shame because Lloyds Bank ought to be putting a bit back into the community. I am as disappointed as you are.

5.

**Questioner:** Councillor Barry Macleod-Cullinane

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

**Question:** "Is the Leader aware of how many residents applied to the Harrow Observer to have him visit them in their homes to discuss Council finances, as per the competition it ran in February, and has the visit yet been undertaken?"

**Answer:** Before setting the toughest Council budget in a generation and in the face of severe cuts, the administration was determined to listen to residents first and give them a real say in the decisions we took.

Through our Let's Talk campaign, Council officers spoke to 800 residents face-to-face and more than 1,600 survey forms were returned by post. In partnership with the Harrow Observer I also offered to visit the home of a Harrow family to answer any questions about our draft budget. It was not a competition. So far we have not received any applications. I take this as a clear indication that residents were very happy with the way this administration has handled and set a robust budget and making savings at the same time as enhancing frontline services. This might also be the reason that there was a very small public gallery at the budget debate.

A possible home visit was just one strand in a wide campaign including information questionnaires on our website, in Harrow People and the local media, as well as five public roadshows. We have already had 2,500 hits on the budget pages on our website since March and a new phase of Let's Talk will be launched in the next months ahead, giving residents another opportunity to come and talk to us, tell us about their concerns and aspirations and work with us to find the solutions to the challenges we face.

**Supplemental Question:** With over 4,000 returns on the Redbridge consultation website, does the Leader believe that Harrow has held its own or has been left behind by Redbridge, in how to consult with its residents?

**Supplemental Answer:** We have looked into the Redbridge scheme. It cost quite a lot of money to run and we are still considering whether it is a good investment for our money. We are making 30% cuts in our communications budget because like everywhere else, communications budget has to achieve the same savings as other departments.

6.

**Questioner:** Councillor Paul Osborn

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

**Question** "When will you be adopting the list of constitutional amendments that you proposed as Leader of the Opposition on 15<sup>th</sup> April 2010?"

**Answer:** Any suggestions for changes should be made by the Constitution Review Working Group and the matters which you have mentioned have been submitted to the Group and indeed are due to be considered again at its next meeting.

Any appropriate amendments or changes to the Constitution will come through the Council for approval via that avenue.

**Supplemental Question:** Is the Leader of the Council aware that it was me who submitted his own list to that Group and he did not?

Is he further aware that of the fifteen recommendations that he put forward as Leader of the Opposition, we implemented six of those fifteen? So far of the nine remaining ones, he has only implemented one. Does he really want to be remembered as someone who says one thing in opposition and another thing when he takes power?

**Supplemental Answer:** The proposal to have a Chair of Scrutiny from the Opposition, it not only says it is not agreed, you said that if we did it and you came back to power, you would reverse it. So I think we can have the discussion but remember, you disagreed with all those proposals, more or less and we are willing to do that.

I would say when the Localism Bill becomes an Act, we will have to look at the whole way that we conduct affairs in the Council. There are a whole range of issues to discuss. So I think those things will go into the pot.