

LONDON BOROUGH OF HARROW

COUNCIL MEETING

7 JULY 2011

PUBLIC QUESTIONS (ITEM 6)

A period of up to 15 minutes is allowed for the asking of written questions by members of the public of a Member of the Executive, or the Chairman of any Committee.

1. **Questioner:** Matthew Lloyd

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

Responded to by Councillor David Perry (Portfolio Holder for Community and Cultural Services)

Question: "Will your administration continue the Councils' commitment, to protect the much needed youth facilities such as, Harrow libraries from government spending cuts?"

Answer: We are committed to protecting libraries in the borough. As you are very much aware, we have taken steps to make savings of over £1,000,000 to put in self-service machines within our libraries. We are passionate to protect our libraries not only for the young but the old as well. We are committed to improving the provision and protecting our Library Service.

Matthew Lloyd: In relation to the Youth facilities I asked for, you said that you would defend them. So I am asking will you also defend our facilities from backdoor privatisation and abolition based on ideological scaremongering and debt myths?

Supplemental Answer: We will of course protect the service. It might be an ideal opportunity to promote and plug the "Let's Talk" campaign. You, yourself, friends and others will be able to shape the cultural strategy for libraries and others, I am sure you are a user. So there are lots of applications downstairs on the foyer or I am happy to send you one and you can get involved and help protect and improve our Library Service going forward.

2. Questioner: Mark Gillham

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

Question “What specific initiatives would the newly established Transformation and Priority Initiatives Fund pay for, which the Council could not otherwise afford?”

Answer: Thank you for your question. The general guidelines for the use of the Transformation Priorities Fund were given in the July Cabinet report and the general outline is ‘invest to save’ initiatives, including paying up-front redundancy costs and other transformation one-off priority actions. It is very much ‘one-off’ money.

We are currently considering help for a bid to the Mayor’s Outer London Commission Town Centre £50m fund. A one-off development to the web both to increase channel migration, develop more efficient methods for customers to transact business with us, as well as improving our ability to engage with residents better through the web.

We are also considering to fund a project to help modernise the terms and conditions of our staff and to fund further Voluntary Severance redundancy schemes in support of invest to save schemes.

This is ‘one-off’ money put into invest to save which will improve revenue savings in the future. Any proposal will be carefully vetted before being approved and any use of the fund will be reported to the next Quarterly Monitoring Report to the Cabinet. Any savings that we make by using this fund will help us to find £30m savings we need to make over the next 3 years, will benefit all directorates including Adult and Social Care. Adult and Social Care, and all other directorates can, and I know will, bid for funds for their own innovative invest to save schemes.

Supplemental Question: We strongly are urging Councillors tonight to vote against the establishment of this fund because of the serious implications for the most vulnerable Harrow residents.

Will the Harrow Leader recommend a change to the purpose of this fund so that it is spent solely on Adult Social Care, as the Council agreed formally with the Department of Health?

Supplemental Answer: We feel we have used the grant from the Department of Health properly in the proper way. Any savings we make by

this fund will help us not to have to make cuts in frontline services. We have got £30m savings to make over the next 3 years that is a tremendous difficulty for us. I am not going to recommend that we do what you ask and we will come that debate later on.

3. Questioner: Angela Dias

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

Question “How does the Council intend to fill the gaps in necessary services for local people, (such as the Welfare Benefit service at HAD), arising from services which are no longer being funded, or to deal with the consequent difficulties which will result for vulnerable people?”

Answer: We are facing very serious financial cuts in our funding. We cannot and never have, been able to fund everything we would like to fund. It is even more difficult given the cuts being imposed on us by the Government.

The Main Grants Programme is an annual competitive funding round and we had a record number of 131 applications, most of them a very high standard and the total applied for was £2.3m against an available budget of £600,000. We had a strict selection criteria of panels across the council, each application being assessed against the criteria as rigorously as possible. Sadly, we are not able to fund a large number of organisations who applied for funding this year.

For 2012/13, we are working towards the adoption of a Commissioning/small grants model which has been consulted on with the voluntary and third sector and other organisations. If this is implemented, then some of the problems that some of the large funders are facing will be able to be dealt with by commissioning. So again, if you have an annual competitive process I do not think this is a very good way to fund some of the major, like the Citizens' Advice Bureau or Welfare to Work in your area. Therefore I think commissioning will help to solve that problem and this is an interim year and we will be moving to a new system next year.

Supplemental Question: Given that there is a legal duty to consider possible adverse effects of significant decisions on protective groups, can you explain why there was no consultation or equality impact assessment that was considered to be important on the removal of the Department of Health funding from Adult

Social Care, given that in the consultation that we are supporting Adult Social Care with now, we have done a very thorough equality impact assessment which has identified a number of important equality issues, which need to be addressed when asking people to contribute towards the cost of their own services?

Supplemental Answer: I am happy to answer the question. I do not know that it necessarily follows that it is a supplementary.

We do not agree with you. We have put the £2.1m into the Social Care. Originally we were not sure that we would get the money, when we did get the money we put it into Social Care and we then put the money which was no longer needed for Social Care into the Priority and Transformation Fund. So I do not agree with the premise of the question.

4. Questioner: Deven Pillay

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

Responded to by Councillor Margaret Davine (Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care, Health and Wellbeing)

Question "Can the Leader of the Council tell us how much the current consultation on proposals to reduce and charge for Adult services will cost the Council and how much savings the Council will make if these proposals are agreed and implemented?"

Answer: Thank you Deven, for your question. The full cost of the consultation is an estimated cost, of course because we are not halfway through yet, is £100,000. The anticipated savings from the proposals will depend, of course, on the outcome of the consultation exercise and whether these are agreed by Cabinet in October, but as part of the Council's 2011/12 budget approved in February we estimated possible savings for the Social Care budget of £950,000 and for the finance budget which is to do with the travel concessions of a further £500,000. This of course depends on what is agreed through the consultation. So we cannot possibly be firm about those savings. That is why we are going out and asking people.

Supplemental: Proposed supplemental was ruled by the Mayor to not be related to the question.

- 5. Questioner:** Avani Modasia
- Asked of:** Councillor Bill Stephenson (Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Finance and Business Transformation)
- Question** “When was the application for funding to Department of Health made?”
- Answer:** I have had to make an assumption about the question you are asking. I assume this question relates to the money that the Department of Health has paid to PCTs for directing to local authorities. In this respect there is not a bidding or application process. Resources were notified to Council following the Comprehensive Spending Review and as part of the Local Government Finance Settlement in January 2011.
- Negotiations took place between the Council and PCT between January and March and the 256 agreement was signed in March 2011.
- Supplemental Question:** In that case, when was the Department of Health notified that the Section 256 agreement relating to the specific PCT allocation for Social Care to meet the rising costs of provision has now been apportioned for other purposes?
- Supplemental Answer:** I will have to give you an answer in writing.
- 6. Questioner:** Brewster White
- Asked of:** Councillor Phillip O’Dell (Deputy Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Environment and Community Safety)
- Question** “Why was a Temporary Events Notice (TEN) issued to the Council for an event under s100 of the Licensing Act 2003 for a music event, and granted, for Yeading Walk from 2-4 July 2011, even though Yeading Walk is a Conservation Area?”
- According to the Harrow Council Unitary Development Plan: Environmental Protection and Open Space, EP45, ‘Yeading Walk is designated a Green Chain. Green Chains are managed for nature conservation, public access and open air recreation’.
- Were the personnel in Public Realm Maintenance Service - Community & Environment not aware of the Council's policies. Why did they act Ultra Vires?

This application was submitted 12 months ago yet only the residents in the lower half of Lincoln Road and Suffolk Road were informed on Monday 27 June 2011 that such an event would be taking place. The residents of Lincoln Road, Suffolk Road and the surrounding roads are truly dissatisfied with this blatant disregard for the officers' duty to residents and their non adherence to Council's policy."

Answer: Thank you for your question Mr Brewster. The event in question was a Traditional Hindu wedding celebration. The main activities were held within a marquee. Although a wedding celebration would normally fall outside the licensing controls, a Temporary Events Notice (TEN) was issued to the Council for the event under s100 of the Licensing Act 2003 for the live music at the event. No alcohol was served at this event. Also, I wish to point out the holding of temporary events in parks and open spaces is not prevented by the UDP Plan or the 1906 Act.

Supplemental Question: I have looked at all the legislation.gov.uk legislation and there is no indication that a licence should have been granted for this Green Chain. What it has done is, it has resulted in the effect of creating atmosphere of animosity and distrust within the micro community where none existed before.

So we want to know why was a licence granted because we have not got that explanation yet.

Supplemental Answer: The issuing of a Temporary Events Notice is to Harrow Council. The only responsible authority that can object to the issuing of that licence is the Police Authority. Harrow Council did not receive any objection by the Police so therefore the law, under the Licensing Act 2003, presumes granting of that. So therefore the licence was granted.

7. Mr Pravin Seedher was not in attendance and it was agreed that the written answer set out below be circulated after the Council meeting.

Questioner: Pravin Seedher

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

Question "Will the Leader agree to passing on my congratulations to the Executive and staff of Harrow Council in winning the MJ Award for the Best Achieving Council and to what does the leader attribute the reasons for Harrow winning this award?"

Answer: I very much appreciate your congratulations which I know are sincere, and of course I will pass them on to all concerned.

I think I have really answered your question in my statement to Council. I can only repeat what the eminent MJ judges said:

'Harrow delivered sustained and embedded change using a modern approach to doing business but never losing sight of its priorities, namely its residents.'

'Harrow's political and managerial leaders showed both maturity and professionalism, and their sense of passion and pride for Harrow is tangible.'

There are, of course, so many different successes achieved over the last year it is difficult to put them in one single category. As our motion 3 later on indicates this was very much a collective effort between staff, councillors, partners and local residents all 'working together.'

8. Questioner: Donald Kerr

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

Question "I would like to know why this wedding event was allowed to take place in Yeading Walk for some 400 people when officers advise us we have to respect the privacy of the event which is a little difficult to do with the marquees and pavilions being right up against the path through the park. This alone would surely have been enough reason together with absolutely no facilities in Yeading walkway for the event to be redirected to a much more suitable park venue with facilities. Residents have seen the officers' excuses and they are not adequate for professional staff".

Answer: In addition to the response I provided to the answer in Question 6, I would like to add that events involving a number of people are not unusual in our parks and open spaces, although there has not been one at this location previously. Our response to the notice for the event followed our standard consideration at any event application and while I accept that a number of residents were unhappy about the event, the Council did not consider that the event should be prevented from taking place. Although the event was a private function, the park was not closed to the public and access was retained for

passage through the park. However officers did reasonably ask the public to respect the privacy of the function.

Supplemental Question: As the site appears to be referred to as a Nature Conservation Area in Council plans, will outside professionals be employed to do a damage assessment to the flora and fauna disturbed by the event under the 1981 Wildlife Act with a view to prosecution of those responsible?

Supplemental Answer: I would suggest that the Council has already made an initial examination to see if the area which you relate to has been damaged and if it has, I am sure the department concerned will take necessary action to restore that park's open space.