

COUNCIL

3 NOVEMBER 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)

Question: "Does the portfolio holder agree with me that Harrow's community should be supported, by supporting Harrow's services, by supporting Harrow's economy and most importantly, supporting the people of Harrow?"

Answer: The answer is most certainly yes. Supporting the local community and the people of Harrow is the driving force of this administration and the basis for our Corporate Priorities and Action Plans, which are built upon the long term spatial plan for the borough that will deliver economic growth and prosperity to residents and businesses for the next 15 years and beyond.

(answered by Cllr Keith Ferry)

We will soon adopt the Local Development Framework (LDF) Core Strategy and are well advanced in our plans for the Heart of Harrow Area Action Plan (AAP). These important documents reflect the feedback from our partners, local businesses and the wider community, in response to active and continuous community engagement.

Through the LDF and the AAP, Harrow residents will benefit from

- in excess of £1bn of inward investment;
- access to more than 6,000 new homes offering a greater mix of housing and more housing choice;
- the creation of at least 3,000 new job opportunities;

- rejuvenated town centres, especially Harrow town centre and Wealdstone;
- a vibrant new community in central Harrow;
- new social and community infrastructure, including a new school, health care, leisure and cultural facilities;
- more sustainable transport options and better access to transport facilities;
- greater protection for the Green Belt, Metropolitan Open Land and open spaces;
- and to safeguard the suburban character of Harrow's residential areas.

We will continue to work with our strategic partners to support Harrow's residents and businesses. This includes the Enterprising Harrow Group, responsible for delivering the council's Enterprising Harrow Action Plan and including Harrow College, Stanmore College, Brent and Harrow Education Business Services, Harrow in Business, West London Business, North West London Chamber of Commerce and Jobcentreplus. In addition, we have maintained and promoted the cross directorate Recession Busting Group, co-ordinating activity across our services. We are working with business support agencies and major developers because we believe that supporting local businesses will safeguard existing jobs and help create new jobs.

In the last two years we have supported over 1,000 residents into training and employment. In this financial year the following has been delivered by the Council and its partners.

- the Xcite Work Club has held 24 workshops and supported 35 residents into work;
- we have co-hosted the Construction Futures Fair on 21 September (which was my 65th birthday, by the way) with Brent and Harrow Education Business Services, promoting construction to young people and adults;
- we have hosted a Job Fair on 11 October 2011 at the Civic Centre, attended by a number of notable employers including McVities, Debenhams, Wickes, Wenzels, Wilkinsons, Harrisons, Gentle Care, Care UK, Cross Roads and Gentle Mark.

550 people attended the Job Fair. Of the 403 who completed an evaluation form, 401 were very positive about the event;

- Harrow and Stanmore colleges are running courses on volunteering including for Bridging the Gap, a project which trains people for work at the Olympic Games;
- Harrow Council is working with Stanmore College to promote its new apprenticeships for healthcare organisations and administration:
 - its vocational courses for adult learners including Childcare, social care, information technology, accounting, beauty therapy and computer maintenance;
 - to promote its courses for jobseekers referred to them by Jobcentreplus, including Sage accounting, IT, web design, security, and childcare, which will also include care, retail, hospitality, IT/admin, financial services, ESOL and volunteering in Quarter 3;
- Harrow Council is working with Harrow College to promote its pre-apprenticeship programme and apprenticeships programmes and Teaching for Adults, Business IT, and English for Speakers of Other Languages;
- District Centre investment profiles have been prepared for North Harrow and Rayners Lane. The vacancy rate for shops in North Harrow has decreased in the last 12 months;
- Harrow was successful in its bid for the Outer London Fund (totalling almost £860,000) in Round One for Harrow Town Centre and North Harrow;
- proposals for Round Two are currently being developed. They will be sent in on 14 November for three areas – Harrow Town Centre, Wealdstone Centre and North Harrow Shopping Centre.

As far as Business Support development goes:

- in October the Sustainable Procurement policy went to Cabinet, and this will support local businesses to access tender opportunities and

create employment and training opportunities for residents;

- we produced the second edition of the Harrow Business Directory, promoting over 1,000 Harrow businesses through the Directory, which is now hosted on the Council website;
- we have supported local businesses to access the growing Indian and Chinese markets through Gateway Asia: Four events have been held in Harrow, generating participation from about 65 local Harrow businesses;
- we organised an event called “Countdown to 2012: Wider Business Opportunities” supporting local companies seeking opportunities through Competefor at the 2012 Games;
- and Harrow Council has promoted the extension for one year of the Business Rate Relief for businesses in Harrow;
- Harrow Council is match funding the access to finance programme Investing for Success which is delivered by Harrow in Business.

Supplemental Question: Does the Portfolio Holder also agree with me that we should defend our services from the ideology of cuts to services today and tax cuts to rich Conservative backers tomorrow?

Supplemental Answer: I believe I am supported by my Party in saying a very certain yes to that.