

COUNCIL

5 JULY 2012

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: Fateema Nighat

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

Question: "With regards to on-going issues in the borough of Harrow & Edgware, can the Portfolio Holder for Community Safety use his good offices to encourage police to do their job and protect residents around Chandos Recreational Ground who are living in fear because children & Adults have been threatened, beaten up, a bicycle has been taken at knife point, a gun being has been pulled, without charges being brought against perpetrators?"

Answer: Obviously, it would be highly inappropriate of me at this public meeting to speak about individuals in the community who could be identified by the response. The Council is aware of anti-social behaviour and criminal issues in the localities in and around Chandos Recreation Ground that have been going on for some time.

We have been working collaboratively with the Metropolitan Police Service and other public agencies to deal with these issues using the powers and resources available to us and our partners. Where it has been possible to identify individuals who have been responsible for crime or anti-social behaviour and gather appropriate evidence relating to these matters, firm action has been taken including criminal proceedings and actions under Anti Social Behaviour and Housing legislations. We have also worked to support victims of crime and to offer them support in providing evidence against identified perpetrators. I can assure that we will continue to do this until this issue has been resolved.

Supplemental Question: My question is why is it that there has been nothing done about it? You are saying you are doing something about it but nothing is happening because people are still being attacked.

Supplemental Answer: Obviously this is a very pressing need and I will take it up with the Metropolitan Police Service as soon as possible.

2.

Questioner: Matthew Lloyd

Asked of: Councillor David Perry (Portfolio Holder for Community and Cultural Services)

Question: As a young person, I watch in horror as the community I know comes under attack. The Harrow Conservative Party seems to be only concerned for the short term wealth in society and not for the long term community cohesion. Does the portfolio holder agree with me that we need a council that will stand tall and protect our community services such as our libraries, schools and health care and not gamble them on the short term, opportunistic values that the opposition holds?

Answer: As the Portfolio Holder for Community and Culture and I am happy to, on behalf of the Labour administration to completely agree with you and we are doing exactly as you say in your question. We are protecting frontline services, not only within libraries as you have mentioned but also you refer to schools which Councillor Brian Gate is doing his utmost to protect and also you have mentioned healthcare as well which Councillor Margaret Davine is doing. We are happy to agree with you on that point.

Supplemental Question: So, does the Portfolio Holder, David Perry, also agree with me that it is strong leadership that will allow us to stand tall and if the opposition want to catch up, need to call a leadership election now?

Supplemental Answer: Again, that is an easy question to answer because yes, this Labour administration is showing strong leadership in all areas across this Council. I have recently read your letter about some of the childish behaviour that we have at Cabinet and if that is what the public is seeing from the opposition and seeing that as leadership then I am glad to say that we are different to them to them and we are happy to stand tall for the residents of the borough.

3.

Questioner: Sophie Lloyd

Asked of: Councillor Bob Currie (Portfolio Holder for Housing)
To be responded to by Councillor Brian Gate (Portfolio Holder for Children, Schools and Families)

Question: Does the portfolio holder believe that Harrow needs more facilities for young people?

Written Answer: *Sophie Lloyd did not attend and so a written answer was provided.*

If the question relates to the availability of 'places to go to' for young people, so that they can participate in positive activities, it is important to note that the Council has a wide range of facilities, well spread across the borough.

The Council has sixteen Children's Centres, from Pinner Hill to South Harrow and from Rayners Lane to Edgware. These facilities provide activities for parents and pre-school children during the day and a range of opportunities for adult learning and youth programmes after school and in the evenings.

As part of the new hub and spoke model, discussed in detail at the December Cabinet, they are now being considered for potential use as community resource centres. Each centre publishes its own programme, individually devised to meet local needs.

The Council also runs a range of youth orientated events and activities targeting young people at the Wealdstone Centre, the Harrow Arts Centre, the Beacon Centre and in partnership with Watford Football Club at the newly opened Cedars Youth and Community Centre.

We are also fortunate in Harrow to have a large number of primary and secondary schools with excellent sports, arts and drama facilities, running activities for their own pupils, and the local community, many of these facilities also being available for private hire to outside organisations working with young people. The Council is likely to be supporting programmes running at amongst others, Whitmore, Woodlands, Shaftesbury and Alexander schools during the forthcoming summer holidays.

It is important also not to forget the parks and open spaces across the borough, many of which have good sports and leisure facilities including tennis and basketball courts, and pitches marked out for football, cricket and athletics. During the summer holidays there will be organised activities at the Leisure

Centre, Roger Bannister Sports track and in Harrow Recreation Ground.

The Council is also committed to working closely with local voluntary sector groups, with the aim of encouraging and supporting them to run programmes from their own facilities, these include faith, cultural and locality based organisations, their events and activities being publicised and promoted in the buildings themselves and via the local press.

4.

Questioner: Edward Hughes

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

Question: Will the councillor assure me, they will show strong leadership and endeavour to protect the services for the elderly and vulnerable in Harrow?

Written Answer: *Mr Hughes did not attend and so a written answer will be provided.*

I am committed to protecting the services for the elderly and vulnerable people in Harrow. We have a stable and strong leadership team in Harrow who, whilst they have to make some difficult financial decisions in a time of severe budgetary constraint, are committed to continue to both fund and develop provision that is focused on protecting the most vulnerable of Harrow's residents.

Not only will we protect services as far as possible but we will also continue to provide innovative developments and enhance existing services. A good example is our Helpline and Telecare service, which is currently provided to 8960 people. This year we are extending our Helpline service offer to an increased number of our most vulnerable residents over the age of 75 years, in Harrow.

This follows on from the excellent work on Reablement over the last 18 months. Evidence of the high quality of this service is demonstrated by outcomes including 80% of service users requiring no further intervention following Reablement and a 98% satisfaction rate with the service received.

In addition we continue to extend personalisation, improving choice and control for people in the borough with a social care need. 80% of our clients over the age of 65 years currently have a Personal Budget.

5.

Questioner: Chris Lloyd

Asked of: Councillor Sachin Shah (Portfolio Holder for Finance)

Question: Does the councillor agree with me that it is essential, with rising mortgage rates, rising prices and a rise in VAT, that every other option is explored before raising council tax?

Written Answer: *Mr Lloyd did not attend and so a written answer was provided.*

Thank you for your question. The people of Harrow are hurting due to the double dip recession caused by the policies of this Government. The increase in VAT, which you mention in your question, means that on average every family in Harrow is paying an extra £450 a year in tax. This tax increase is taking money away from some of the poorest people in Harrow.

We must do everything we can to mitigate the government's tax increase on families. That is why this Labour administration has frozen council tax for 2 years.

However times are getting tough for the council. The Government is cutting our grants, which is where we get most of our money from. We have already identified £48m of savings from the council's budget. This is still not enough to fund the shortfall left by the government's unnecessary cuts to local government.

Because of those budget cuts, I can't promise you that we won't increase council tax next year. I can promise, however, that this administration will first make sure we cut out any waste in the council's spending before looking to increase council tax.

6.

Questioner: David Byrne

Asked of: Councillor Bill Stephenson (Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Business Transformation and Communications)
To be responded to by Councillor Bob Currie (Portfolio Holder for Housing)

Question: Does the Councillor agree with me that the direct result of recent Tory policies is an increase on the number of homeless people around Harrow Town centre?

Written Answer: *Mr Byrne did not attend and so a written answer was provided.*

Our last Rough Sleeper count 2 years ago showed no rough

sleepers, but that has changed and there are now often one or two people sleeping rough for a night before we find out and can help them. Rough sleepers are not usually in the Town Centre, so the people you see are probably not homeless. More generally homelessness has risen, and we are assisting about 20% more statutory homeless households than a year ago. Our use of Bed & Breakfast has also gone up from zero about two years ago to 65 households today. This is because of the double dip recession and the overheated housing market. The welfare reform changes are also making it harder to find affordable accommodation in Harrow, and the overall benefit cap will particularly affect large families who are not in employment, from next April. We are increasing the help we offer and the council has been successful in creating housing solutions for single homeless households using DCLG grant as well as developing our well regarded Help2Let scheme for families.

7

Questioner: J Pais

Asked of: Councillor Bill Stephenson (Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Business Transformation and Communications)
To be responded to by Councillor Thaya Idaikkadar (Portfolio Holder for Property and Major Contracts)

Question: The pavilion (Whitchurch Playing Fields and Pavilion) will generate consistent and incessant noise from activities, religious chanting and party music from early morning till late at night, every day without respite only a few meters from the back of our houses. This surely will destroy our sanity, well-being and mental health. Have you even considered what this will do to the immediate neighbours? What binding guarantees will the Council give us that this will not happen?

Answer: I am not quite sure where you getting the religious chanting from. It is not in the application, it was never discussed. Anyway, whilst there is strong interest from user groups and individuals generally within the Borough, the Council has acknowledged that immediately adjacent local residents have understandably raised reasonable concerns regarding the potential impact on their locality.

We are hearing concerns which are acknowledged. Assuming a commercial agreement can be negotiated, a detailed planning application will be required to be submitted. This will need to set out details of the range of uses proposed and measures to mitigate the potential impacts. The Planning Authority will also need to have regard to any conditions or limitations that it may wish to impose in the event that it considers the proposals to be

acceptable.

Consents will also be required for any licensed activities with a decision made by a Licensing Panel in public.

Additionally, the Council as Landlord will be in a position to enforce all relevant conditions through lease covenants.

Just to expand a little bit. The hall you are referring to could only accommodate between 200 and 300 people. The applicants have requested the public use for the hall is up to only 10 o'clock from Sunday to Thursday and 11 o'clock Friday and Saturday. The planning stage of the consultation, the Planning Committee may very well reduce the hours.

The same way when it goes to Licensing Panel, they will determine independently how many hours they are going to be open. At that time on both occasions, you have the right to represent, and they are both independent bodies which I have nothing to do with and they will decide what is appropriate.

It is important that we make sure any inconvenience caused to you is minimal. Every protection will be there for you and we will very carefully consider all your proposals and make sure any inconvenience is brought down close to zero.

Supplemental Question: How can you claim that there will be robust guarantees written into the contract while at the same time passively allowing the development to take place and you have not stopped to consider the consequences of your decision on the residents' sanity, well-being and mental health?

Surely we would not accept this sort of thing from a noisy neighbour day in, day out with non-stop ... right, can you tell us what proportion of the 1265 supporting signatures you claim to have received in what I believe is a sham consultation, as a proportion of the doors knocked on? Is it only a tiny minority and how many objections have you received in the separate petitions that you have received, which you do not seem to have advertised at all, or you do not seem to mention, who I know are overwhelmingly against this proposal? What significance have you attached to this overwhelming objection to this project?

Supplemental Answer: There was a petition containing 1265 signatures. All those people live close to the field, not very immediately to the field and we did say at Cabinet there was only 17 or 19 people living just around the fields supporting it.

We are very aware of the concerns of all the neighbours and that is why I keep saying, at least three or four times in different committee meetings what measures we are going to take to

protect you.

That is a designated playing field. The whole idea of having a playing field is to have sports. Now, any activity there is going to be ancillary to it. It is not going to be a nightclub. It is not going to be open until 2 o'clock in the morning. It is all sorts of small things. The capacity is going to be between 200 and 300 people and you know very well, any Asian weddings cannot take place with such a small place. Once they have done the traditional declarations it will not even seat 150 people and I have never known an Asian wedding taking place for less than 150 people. Christian weddings take place if it is designated as a place of marriage, would be smaller and quieter.

The Licensing Panel could determine only one or two days a week, any function or they could say 30 functions a year. They are completely independent. They will independently decide how many hours they can open, how many days they can open. That is a protection for you. You can object at that stage. You have the right to bring your solicitor if you want to or a barrister and fight your case and also, once it is agreed, even a day later if the applicants breach the conditions, you have the right to bring them back to the Council. The Council has the right to suspend them for a period of time or enforce penalties or put conditions. There are all sorts of conditions.

8.

Questioner: Stephen Lewis

Asked of: Councillor Thaya Idaikkadar (Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Property and Major Contracts)

Question: In the paper that went to the November 2011 Cabinet, the council's officers identified a significant weakness in the Whitchurch Consortium's "Potential over reliance on hiring out pavilion for social functions such as private parties / wedding receptions" (p. 303) and "for a development of the playing fields to be sustainable in the future there will have to be a greater reliance on income generation from the pavilion. The hiring of sports fields does not alone raise substantial income – Parks advise that it currently raises approximately £15,000 from admittedly a currently limited usage base however this sum is unlikely to be doubled even with the possible installation of G3 artificial pitch."(p. 304) Do you agree with your own officers' assessment that "it is therefore anticipated that more than 75% of the income will need to be generated from activities within the Pavilion including bar profits hiring out of the hall, meeting rooms and function rooms for private parties and weddings" (p. 304) rather than from community sports use and what steps are you taking to ensure the balance of use of the Pavilion and

playing fields is shifted away from weddings and other events and back to community sports?

Answer: *Mr Lewis did not attend and so a written answer was provided.*

Any development of Whitchurch Playing Fields must be ancillary to its current planning use as sports playing fields. The proposals are for a sports leisure and community facility. There will be a Service Level Agreement providing free access for school use of the playing fields and new changing and shower facilities. It is therefore inevitable that there has to be some commercial element of income generation to repay the estimated initial £3M expenditure.

It is inevitable that the pavilion will form the main basis for revenue generation however it is anticipated that this will be through several educational /leisure /charitable /voluntary and additional uses not related to late night occupation or dependant upon the sale of alcohol.

Whilst the Licensing and Planning authorities will determine what is in the public interest in terms of hours of operation it is clearly the Council's intention that the facility be used primarily for sport leisure and community uses rather than for late night events / private parties and or weddings which would be contrary to its primary planning status hence breach one of the Council's intended lease covenants.

9.

Questioner: Melanie Lewis

Asked of: Councillor Thaya Idaikkadar (Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Property and Major Contracts)

Question: Can you provide an update of how and when the Council has consulted with the Environment Agency with regard the proposals for tendering, leasing and redeveloping the Whitchurch Playing Fields and Pavilion site?

Answer: *Ms Lewis did not attend and so a written answer was provided.*

The Corporate Estate team has not been in contact with the EA as part of this process. The tender documentation makes it clear that the interested parties should make their own investigations and approaches to the EA.

Part of the site falls within Flood Zone 3a on the strategic flood risk assessment for the area. The consideration of the impact of any proposal on flood risk is a matter for the planning process. The Council as Planning Authority has consulted, as required,

with the Environment Agency on its emerging LDF policies.

The Local Planning Authority would expect to follow national planning policy and the findings of its own flood assessments in the considering the potential effects of any proposals on flood risk. This process would include full consultation with the environment agency.