



Council

Thursday 30 November 2023

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LONDON BOROUGH OF HARROW

COUNCIL MEETING

-

30 November 2023

QUESTION WITH NOTICE

A period of up to 15 minutes is allowed for the asking of written questions by Members of Council or a Member of the Executive or the Chair of any Committee.

Questioner: Cllr Shahania Choudhury

Asked of: Councillor Anjana Patel, Portfolio Holder for Highways, Infrastructure and Community Safety

Question 1:

“I have had many residents over a long period complaining about anti-social behaviour and fly tipping in Wealdstone. Many have been reporting the fly tipping issues via the website but this is now becoming an ongoing issue and raising concerns for residents as they are noticing rats and foxes in the area.

Regarding anti-social behaviour, residents have been contacting the police, however many are concerned about their safety when reporting anti-social behaviour. How will you help residents feel safe and comfortable in Wealdstone and what will you do to prevent fly tipping occurring on a regular basis?”

Questioner: Councillor Antonio Weiss

Asked of: Councillor Anjana Patel, Portfolio Holder for Highways, Infrastructure and Community Safety

Question 2:

“Please could the Portfolio Holder update on the current situation regarding the goodwill to all junction improvements and the proposed timeline of the works involved?”

Questioner: Councillor Simon Brown

Asked of: Councillor Pritesh Patel, Portfolio Holder for Adult Services and Public Health

Question 3:

“Given the lack of announcements in the Chancellors recent Autumn Statement regarding funding support to local councils for adult social care, what implications does the Portfolio Holder think this will have on next year’s budget given the increased cost pressures and what mitigations will be put in place?”

Questioner: Councillor Graham Henson

Asked of: Councillor Anjana Patel, Portfolio Holder for Highways, Infrastructure and Community Safety

Question 4:

“In Roxbourne and across the Borough residents are complaining about the lack of clearing of the fallen leaves from trees and also overflowing bins in our district and town centres. What is the Portfolio Holder doing to address these concerns?”

Tamil Heritage Month Motion – Labour Group Amendment (30th November 2023)

To be moved by Cllr. Krishna Suresh and seconded by Cllr. David Perry

“This Council notes:

- that January 2024 will be Tamil Heritage Month.
- *That Harrow Council was the first ever council in the country in 2020 to recognise celebration of Tamil Heritage Month in January.*
- The tremendous contributions that Tamils make to Harrow’s diverse community.
- The richness of Tamil culture and the positive difference it has made to our society locally.
- January is an important month for Tamils as it marks Thai Pongal, the Tamil Harvest Festival *which we are proud to be celebrating in Harrow since 2011.*
- The importance of increasing awareness about the accomplishments of the Tamil diaspora.

This Council resolves to:

- Reaffirm our strong commitment to *continue to* support Tamil Heritage Month events in Harrow.
- Continue to work with and *provide* support ~~*the local Tamil community*~~ *the local Tamil community to tackle the cost of living crisis and all such challenges faced by vulnerable members of Tamil community.*”

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Voter ID - Labour Group Amendment – Full Council Thursday 30th November 2023

To be moved by Councillor Eden Kulig and seconded by Councillor Asif Hussein:

“The London Borough of Harrow recognises the importance of public trust in the security of the electoral process.

This Council notes:

- The ~~threats to the~~ democratic process must be ~~combated to~~ protect ~~the integrity of~~ **in** our democracy.
- That the independent electoral Commission has called for a resolution to issues relating to voter ID in the UK.
- The recent law change allows for the provision of free voter ID cards (Voter Authority Certificates) which are issued by local authorities. This means financial hardship will not be a barrier to a voter's ability to get an ID and cast their ballot. **The estimated costs to this proposal is £140m over 10 years and this funding could be allocated to helping voters through the current cost of living crisis.**
- **Information provided by The House of Commons Library based on police reports collated by the Electoral Commission concludes that there is no evidence of large-scale electoral fraud and none of the investigated cases in Harrow involved “personation” – using someone else’s vote by pretending to be them in the polling station.**
- **There were only four convictions resulting from the allegations of in-person voter fraud during the 2019 General Election across the entire of the UK.**
- **There is expected to be a substantial additional ongoing strain on staff and financial resources administering Voter ID changes which could be spent on increasing the turnout at elections.**
- **Analysis by the Electoral Commission earlier this year shows that awareness of Voter Authority Certificates was low.**

This Council believes:

- Considering how frequently residents now require ID in their day to-day lives, the new requirement for voters to have ID to vote is a reasonable approach to reducing **any** ~~the threat of~~ voter fraud. ~~and ensures that there are still not significant barriers to voting.~~
- ~~That the system for applying for voter ID for those without a valid voter ID is simple and has ensured that all can access the electoral process.~~
- **The introduction of mandatory Voter ID may undermine the democratic process and may make this process more difficult to exercise the right to vote and may , disproportionately affecting; ethnic minority, low income, transient and living in temporary accommodation, homeless, elderly, disabled and young people.**
- **The Government should be trying to increase engagement in democracy, not hinder it. The Government should be urgently acting to increase voter registration and turnout.**

This Council resolves:

- To fulfil its duty to properly inform residents about the latest change in voting requirements.
- To commit to continuing to use its communication channels to **encourage voter registration and** notify residents about the need for voter ID in next year's Mayoral, GLA and parliamentary elections.

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Motion – Mortgages and Rent in Harrow

To be moved by Councillor Antonio Weiss and seconded by Councillor David Perry:

Council recognises that people across our borough are struggling to make ends meet and are in urgent need of support.

- A few surveys were conducted during 2021/2022 and the data analysis suggested that ~~One~~ in five adults in the UK has less than £100 in savings.
- In 2021/22 Child Poverty Action Group asserted that ~~N~~nearly four million children in Britain live in poverty.
- Two LSOAs (Lower Layer Super Output Areas)~~Areas of~~ within Harrow are ~~the~~ most in England's most ~~deprived~~ 20% in the country, with many and some residents are living in overcrowded accommodation.
- According to the 2019 English Indices of Deprivation Index, published by the previous administration on the 26 September 2019, Harrow ranks 207 out of 317 (where 1 is the most deprived out of 317 local authorities in England) and 27 out of 33 London Boroughs (including City of London).

High inflation and borrowing rates have hit lower-income households hardest, mostly because of the sharp increases in mortgage rates and rent caused by the global Covid pandemic and the war in Ukraine.

Council notes that:-

- The Resolution Foundation estimate that about 21% of the 7.586m households with mortgages or loans (around 1.6 million households) will see their fixed-rate mortgage deal expire between Q1 2023 to Q1 2024, and are set to face an average increase in their annual mortgage bill of around £2,300 if they refix. <https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/publications/macroeconomic-policyoutlook-q2-2023/> In Harrow, that is the equivalent of 5771 households paying a combined £13,273,806.
- For a typical mortgage couple in their 30s that would translate into a fall in disposable income of around 11%.
- The Bank of England Bank Rate was 5.5% in 2008 before the global financial crisis before falling to just 0.25% in August 2016 where it held steady until ~~at~~ the beginning of February 2022, and although the Bank of England kept interest rates at 5.25% in November 2023, analysts expect more pain to come with some predicting rates will go as high as 5.75% and remaining above 5% until the summer of 2024 before starting to fall towards 3.6% in five years' time.
- Mortgage stress levels are set to hit heights not seen since Gordon Brown was Chancellor of the Exchequer~~the 1980s.~~
- Under both the Coalition and Conservative government's interest rates averaged at 1.18%, this compares with an average of 4.82% under the last Labour government (1997-2010).
- Private landlords may~~will~~ also be looking to pass this increased costs onto their tenants through increased rents.
- The current mechanism of 'no-fault evictions', also known as Section 21 notices, has existed since the Housing Act 1988.
- Between April 2019 and September 2023 there were 753 no-fault evictions in Harrow.

- ‘No-fault evictions’, ~~also known as Section 21 notices~~, allow landlords to order tenants to leave with a minimum of two months’ warning - without having to prove that the tenant is at fault in any way.
- The figure of 753 is based on the number of no-fault eviction letters that have been followed up with a possession claim in the courts. The true scale of the problem in Harrow could be worse, as not all Section 21 notices will necessarily reach this stage.
- According to the latest Government data, in 2021 there were:-
 - 22,629 households privately renting in Harrow.
 - 9,234 properties were let at social rent.
- According to the latest Bank of England data, 43% families are struggling to pay their rent – 13,700 households in Harrow.
- ~~Due to the lack of leadership in government from successive Conservative Prime Ministers and Chancellor’s, the economy has suffered from bad policy to bad decisions, thus negatively impacting mortgage payers and renters in Harrow.~~

Council resolves: -

- To use all available routes to urge central government to continue to take a ~~more~~ proactive approach in supporting Harrow residents through the ongoing cost of living crisis and high inflation, in particular: -
 - Continue the Household Support Fund for an additional year.
 - Raising the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates to the 30th percentile of local market rents from April 2024.
 - ~~to immediately adopt~~Continue the measures the Chancellor has agreed with lenders in the mortgage charter which will help to ease the mortgage crisis and will help halt repossessions and evictions ~~by guaranteeing support from lenders for struggling mortgage borrowers.~~
 - ~~Mandatory mortgage flexibility and support from lenders, not voluntary.~~
 - recognise the pressures that high inflation is placing on local government finances and provide ~~fairer~~proper funding to councils to support residents to remain living locally in Harrow; like through Discretionary Housing Payments that allow councils to support those in the greatest need.
- To continue~~early to~~ signpost the support, networks and guidance that is available in Harrow, and promote through appropriate channels to our residents and businesses.
- ~~To ensure our local voices are heard, the Leader of the Council and Leader of the Opposition will form a delegation with all Harrow MP’s and request a meeting with the Chancellor of the Exchequer. The Council must stand up for our local residents and aim for the above positive changes to alleviate the pressure on mortgage and rent payers.~~

Amendment:

Proposed by Cllr Paul Osborn

Seconded by Cllr Marilyn Ashton