

COUNCIL

THURSDAY 24 SEPTEMBER 2015

COUNCILLOR QUESTIONS WRITTEN RESPONSES

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LONDON BOROUGH OF HARROW

COUNCIL MEETING

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24 SEPTEMBER 2015

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 Chairman of any Committee.

Questioner: Councillor Barry Macleod-Cullinane

Asked of: Councillor Glen Hearnden (Portfolio Holder for Housing)

Question 1:

“How many in-fill developments has the Council built in Harrow in the last year?”

Q1 response:

The Council has not completed any infill developments in the last year. We received planning permission for the first 8 family homes and are in the process of appointing a contractor. We are currently consulting with local residents on a number of other schemes prior to submitting planning applications.

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Asked of: Councillor Glen Hearnden (Portfolio Holder for Housing)

Question 2:

“What are you doing to inform Council tenants about the opportunities for home ownership and their qualification for Right to Buy?”

Q2 response:

Information on the Right to Buy is available on the Council's website and via personal enquiry to the Leasehold Team. There is information on the Communities and Local Government website and the gov.uk websites. The government has also run extensive publicity campaigns recently. Since the increase in the RTB discount sales of Harrow council properties have risen significantly, from 0 in 2011/2012 to 14 in 2012/2013, 36 in 2013/2014 and 37 in 2014/2015.

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Asked of: Councillor Glen Hearnden (Portfolio Holder for Housing)

Question 3:

“How many families has the Council re-housed outside the borough in the last year?”

Q3 response:

Estimate of 110 families housed outside Harrow in the last year. 24 in Q1 of 2015-16.

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Questioner: Councillor Susan Hall

Asked of: Councillor Graham Henson (Portfolio Holder for Environment, Crime and Community Safety)

Question 4:

“Have any estimates for the in-year replacement of damaged food waste bins been included in the business case for the separate collection system?”

Q4 response:

Yes. The number purchased includes a contingency for replacement.

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Asked of: Councillor Simon Brown (Portfolio Holder for Children, Schools and Young People)

Question 5:

“Can you outline how the Youth Justice Plan will work alongside the Domestic Violence Strategy, given the recognised links between the two areas of crime?”

Q5 response:

Multi agency Youth Offending Teams (YOT) were established in 2000 with the intention of reducing the risk of young people offending and re-offending, and to provide counsel and rehabilitation to those who do offend.

The Youth Justice Plan 2015-2018 sets out achievements and plans for the future delivery of the Youth Offending Team. That plan includes some information regarding the complexity of the young people known to YOT. The complexity includes young people who are looked after, mental health needs, experience of loss and complex family histories.

The Youth Offending Partnership has identified that a key priority is for the Youth Offending Team to assist in the delivery of the Troubled Families (TF) programme in Harrow. The TF programme includes working with families where there is domestic violence.

A key role of the Youth Offending Team is to challenge attitudes and behaviours to offending behaviour. All young people known to the Youth Offending Team have an assessment undertaken which includes an

assessment of their personal and family circumstances. The Youth Offending Team make referrals as appropriate to the MASH for safeguarding issues, including young people witnessing domestic violence.

All young people who have been assessed by the Youth Offending Team have a personalised intervention plan which addresses their assessed need. The intervention plan is reviewed on a regular basis and the young person is re-assessed at the conclusion of their order.

In 2014/15 in response to an increase in the numbers of young people involved in abusive behaviours in the family home a Domestic Violence programme was delivered by YUVA. The numbers of young people who have been involved in abusive behaviours in the home has subsequently reduced. The work described above undertaken by the Youth Offending Team with their cohort and under the auspices of the Troubled Families Programme complements the ambitions of Domestic and Sexual Violence Strategy in two ways: first in relation to young people as victims or perpetrators and, secondly, regarding young people living in households where domestic or sexual violence is occurring.

In the first instance, the Strategy highlights the need for developing a clear concept of what constitutes a healthy relationship and that violence of any sort: physical, emotional, financial, or sexual as well as a pattern of coercive control is wrong. The Strategy draws attention to the work undertaken by The WISH Centre under the banner of Harrow Shield that is providing this education in schools throughout the Borough. The individualised work with young people supported by the YOT cements this understanding for these young people.

Secondly, the Strategy seeks the earliest possible reporting and intervention to support families where domestic or sexual violence is occurring. Again, the YOT's targeted work to address behaviour that might have origins in witnessing domestic violence is entirely congruent with the aspiration to minimise the damage to victims through early reporting and equipping front line staff with the knowledge to recognise and the confidence to refer victims and those where there are suspicions of violence to specialised services.

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Asked of: Councillor Kiran Ramchandani (Portfolio Holder for Performance, Corporate Resources and Policy Development)

Question 6:

“Following the recent report on consultation standards which went to Cabinet, in which areas do you think the Council can improve when it comes to consultations?”

Q6 response:

Firstly, can I thank Councillor Hall, for raising the fact that this Administration has sought to bring about a greater consistency in the way we consult and engage with our residents. Within the Cabinet report we also set out a clear set of rights for residents which cover what they can expect from the Council through our consultations; a clear commitment to having residents' views being at the heart of our decisions.

The last time Cabinet agreed a set of consultation standards was in 2008, so we also felt as an Administration that it was very timely that we refreshed these standards to ensure consistency and to reflect current best practice.

It was also timely to review and agree a new set of consultation standards given the view residents had of this council when we were elected in May 2014. For example in March 2014, only 24% of residents felt that the Council took account of their views when making decisions, only 22% of resident felt they could influence decisions and just 30% felt that the Council acted on the concerns of local residents. This therefore set out a clear need for us to change the way we did things and refresh our approach, and we know already for example that 37% residents in March 2015 now feel they can influence decisions.

As part of the improvements we are making, we are working on a more accessible and transparent online consultation system that will be able to meet the requirements of the standards far better than our current system, and also take advantage of the fact that an ever increasing proportion of our residents deal with the Council online. This is an example of an area where the standards are effecting change right now.

Similarly, we have identified areas that we can work together much better across the council on consultation. We have already had several cross-council workshops where we are sharing expertise and tips – and we expect this way of working to increase efficiency and save time as well as making our consultations better meet the standards.

An area where we think we can make improvements is how the Council consistently responds back to residents on both the results and decisions following consultations. In some instances we do this exceptionally well, but in others we know we can engage residents better on why we have made the decisions that we have. We will also look to use 'plain English' in our consultations more where in some cases they may have been too 'legalistic' or the use of jargon.

As a Council that is open and transparent, we think that effective consultation and engagement with our residents is essential and we're happy to be held accountable on this. At the same time, we're happy to work with all Members to ensure we continue to meet these standards, so if you are aware of areas where we can improve, I'm very happy that we discuss these so that residents feel the benefit.

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Questioner: Councillor Barry Macleod-Cullinane

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

Question 7:

“What provisions are the Council making for the expected reduction in the benefit cap to £23,000 from next April?”

Q7 response:

We have created a fund to help pay for the costs of the homeless caused by this cap. The Housing Needs Service will be contacting all the families the service believe will be newly affected by the reduction in the cap.

The service will offer Housing Options Advice, budgeting advice and assistance with seeking employment. The service was very successful with this approach when the original cap came in, but it requires a lot of staff resource to achieve

The Council continues to support work people into work and those on low incomes to improve their career prospects. The Council's Excite programme comprises of 4 employment support projects and, along with partners, aims at getting Harrow residents into employment, skills training and apprenticeships. In the seven month period up to August 2015, 76 residents have been supported into work.

We have reformed the welfare reform board, which the Tories in administration in Harrow abolished, to coordinate the response to the cap and other welfare cuts. Finally the council (sadly not cross party) passed a motion at full council opposing the imposition of the benefits cap.

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

Question 8:

“What is the Council doing to promote public awareness of the expected benefit cap reduction from £26,000 to £23,000 from next April?”

Q8 response:

Data from Housing, Benefits and Adult Services is being jointly analysed to identify those households who will be affected by multiple benefit reforms. The changes will be published generally.

The Housing Needs Service will be contacting all the families the service believe will be newly affected by the reduction in the cap. The service will offer Housing Options Advice, budgeting advice and assistance with seeking employment. The service was very successful with this approach when the original cap came in, but it requires a lot of staff resource to achieve

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Asked of: Councillor Graham Henson (Portfolio Holder for Environment, Crime and Community Safety)

Question 9:

“The literature on the changes to garden and food waste collections mentions ‘flexible collection options’, and you provided some information on these at Cabinet. Could you provide more detail on which options will be available to residents, and how these will be communicated?”

Q9 response:

Using feedback from residents we are working through a number of different flexible options. We will be widely publicising the available options once they have been costed and evaluated.

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Question 10:

“Could you also confirm whether these flexible collection options were taken into account in the business case and, if so, what impact any take-up of these options could have on savings projections?”

Q10 response:

I am looking at a range of flexible options that will meet residents' needs alongside a chargeable fortnightly service. These flexible options were not part of the original business case and they are being costed and evaluated so that we can make a decision on which of the flexible collection options will be implemented.

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Questioner: Councillor Barry Macleod-Cullinane

Asked of: Councillor David Perry (Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Strategy, Partnerships and Corporate Leadership)

Question 11:

“Do you think that the proposed 51 College Road development qualifies as an example of “world class” architecture?”

Q11 Response

The design merits of the proposal are assessed in full in the officers’ report to Planning Committee of 24th June and, following rigorous debate of the issue at that meeting, the Planning Committee voted to accept the officers’ recommendation to grant planning permission.

It is notable that the proposal was subject to a prolonged period of pre-application discussions with Council officers during the second half of 2014 and with GLA officers in January 2015, as a result of which officers of both organisations felt able to conclude that the proposal would be of the highest architectural quality/standard, which is the test set out in Policy AAP 6 D(b) of Harrow’s Area Action Plan and Policy 7.7 C(e) of the London Plan.

On 11th August Sir Edward Lister, the deputy Mayor and on behalf of the Mayor of London, confirmed that he was content to allow Harrow Council to determine the application itself and that he did not therefore wish to direct refusal. Accordingly it may be construed that the Deputy Mayor, on behalf of the Mayor of London, is also content that the proposal would be of the highest architectural standard.

In the above circumstances I am content that the proposal has been objectively assessed and has been found to meet the policy requirements on design quality.

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Questioner: Councillor Barry Macleod-Cullinane

Asked of: Councillor Simon Brown (Portfolio Holder for Children, Schools and Young People)

Question 12:

“Could you give an explanation for the various delays and slippages reported in the School Expansion Programme, according to the latest Capital monitoring information?”

Q12 response:

The delays and slippage have occurred because the SEP2 contractor has experienced difficulties in securing appropriate sub-contractors and managing a high staff turnover. These delays have been reported to Members in Cabinet reports.

To put the position in context, the capital programme had 29 projects at schools over the summer period. The majority of these projects were delivered on time. An additional complication was the heavy rain at the end of August that caused difficulties for some schools at the start of term.

Despite the delays, focus has been maintained on providing sufficient accommodation for the pupils in September. Through the determination and commitment of the school staff, including Headteachers and site supervisors, the contractor and Schools Capital Team, the majority of schools opened during the first week of September for the new academic year. The opening of four schools was deferred because of building works until Monday 7 September.

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Question 13:

“What provision has the Council made to accommodate pupils in the event of delays and slippages causing construction work to run over the start of the next school year?”

Q13 response:

It is anticipated that the Phase 3 construction projects will not be fully completed by the start of the next school year and there will be phased occupation up to the October half term. The Council is procuring contractors through a robust contractual framework that sets out from the outset that appropriate interim accommodation for pupils will be provided at the start of the next school year.

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Question 14:

“Can you confirm that no pupil will be accommodated in temporary classrooms as a result of these delays and slippages?”

Q14 response:

Phase 2 As part of the planning for the delays temporary classrooms have been provided at the following schools: Norbury and Newton Farm It is anticipated that these will be removed by mid – January and the end of October respectively.

Phase 3 There will be full planning to ensure the optimum interim arrangements to accommodate pupils at the start of next term. Use of temporary units to accommodate children cannot be ruled out and may be used if this is the optimum arrangement. If so, it is expected that this would be for a short period only up to the October half term