

Responses: Full Council questions (18 March 2021)

Written Questions

1. Cllr Morris to the Cabinet Member for Finance and Strategic Regeneration

Labour Councillors have said that the Civic Centre will create a 'dynamic civic hub'. However, in the 2019 options appraisal for 'creating a new civic hub for Haringey', the Civic Centre scored 0/20 for 'supporting the vitality of the town centre'. This score was mostly due to the centre's location. Could you confirm what fresh research and evidence has come to light since then to suggest this would become a beneficial community asset given the location hasn't changed?

Answer from Cllr Adje, Cabinet Member for Finance and Strategic Regeneration

Two major things have changed since 2019 – which have changed the nature of this decision. The first is that in February 2020 serious leaks started coming through the Civic Centre roof, requiring repairs in the region of £12m that the council is legally obliged to undertake.

The second of course is the coronavirus pandemic. Remote working has been normalised over the last twelve months and some, if not all, council workers will continue to work remotely for at least some of their week. This is very likely to reduce the council's need for desk and office space in future.

We cannot ignore these changes in deciding where to locate our civic hub. While we clearly wish to drive footfall to Wood Green town centre – and locating council offices on the high street can help do this – investment in repairs have to be made at the Civic Centre and it would be futile to do so and then not use the building. The Civic Centre will not provide all of the council's office space and further work is still to be done to identify the best location for our remaining accommodation needs.

2. Cllr Barnes to The Leader of the Council

In 2015 you were part of a small working group that investigated bringing Homes for Haringey in house, and resolved unanimously to retain the ALMO, as it was in the best interests of the Council and residents. What has made you change your mind since then, and what is the evidence that bringing Homes for Haringey in house will improve things in concrete ways for tenants when the previous report stated this would not be the case?

Answer from Cllr Ejiofor, the Leader of the Council

No process will begin until the Cabinet have made a formal decision to begin consultation. This will include residents and leaseholders.

We are constantly reviewing how we can best deliver on our responsibilities. Now more than ever we believe it is essential that we look for ways to strengthen resident voice, improve accountability, and ensure that we join up services in a way that supports our residents to thrive. There are therefore several reasons for considering bringing HfH back into the Council:

- Bringing together more clearly the accountability for safety and consumer standards in our social housing stock and the responsibility for delivery of those standards.
- Potential to better join up for residents of our social housing stock the support that we provide to them as a Council across housing, children's and adults services, and better integration of homelessness services.
- Enabling more direct resident engagement.

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3. Cllr Connor to the Cabinet Member for Finance and Strategic Regeneration

Scrutiny recommendations raised concern about the extent of the increase in borrowing costs the Council will take on over coming years, and there was clearly a severe lack of detail about the projects this money is being spent on in the budget. In response to our questions at Cabinet, you said that Cabinet members had been presented with exactly the same evidence as the scrutiny panel. Do you not see this as a problem in itself, and can you reassure members by setting out when the detail will be published?

Answer from Cllr Adje, Cabinet Member for Finance and Strategic Regeneration

The Council's capital strategy is a key part of the budget, this was backed up by detail on each new addition to the programme, and the full breakdown of each line in the capital programme. Both the capital strategy and capital programme detail were published in the cabinet reports, and this same information was shared with overview and scrutiny. The capital programme is a framework setting out our best assessment of our capital spending plans, however it does not constitute authority to spend on any individual project. Authority to spend is normally granted by Cabinet decision making for significant schemes, and these decisions are subject to the Council's usual scrutiny procedures.

4. Cllr Ross to the Cabinet Member for Finance and Strategic Regeneration

The huge increases in borrowing on the HRA and capital account mean increased financing costs in the Revenue Budget, which pays for day-to-day Council services. Given the increased costs, can you confirm how you will be paying for this debt, and guarantee that Haringey will not be faced with deeper cuts to the revenue budget down the line to pay for the works being proposed now?

Answer from Cllr Adje, Cabinet Member for Finance and Strategic Regeneration

Under accounting regulations, all spending on social housing is charged to the HRA, including the costs of any borrowing which is done to finance capital expenditure. The increases in borrowing in the HRA will therefore only translate into increased revenue costs within the HRA, not the General Fund. The HRA business plan approved as part of the budget takes account of all revenue and capital costs over a 10 year period, and sets a balanced budget for the HRA each year.

5. Cllr Dennison to the Cabinet Member for Finance and Strategic Regeneration

The budget report makes clear further savings of £20 million a year will need to be found in the coming years to cover this year's borrowing. Can you confirm that you haven't set a boom before bust budget that will set the Council back in coming years by stifling future capital projects and investment, and lead to a deterioration of services in future due to the size of repayments?

Answer from Cllr Adje, Cabinet Member for Finance and Strategic Regeneration

The Council's MTFS shows a multi year forecast of our best understanding of our future financial position at the time of budget setting. Our current budget is balanced for the year 1, and shows a gap of £12m for year 2, rising to £19m by year 5. The Council's budget and MTFS recognises how significant this is. It of course should be noted that large future year's funding challenges have been a factor in the Council's planning since the beginning of public spending austerity implemented by the Coalition Government from 2010.

One of the biggest impacting factors in the increase in our budget gap projected within the MTFS is the step up in capital spend. The general fund revenue impact of capital spend increases by a net £17m in our current MTFS over the five year period.

It should be noted however that £5m of this increase relates to historic spend on capital, £12m is therefore attributable to the new MTFS.

The capital programme is increasingly moving to only investing in projects which are self financing or funded by external sources as these projects do not impact on revenue budgets: within the new MTFS 70% of the Council's general fund capital programme is in these categories. For the remaining capital spend which does impact on revenue budgets, these projects are largely those where the Council has limited choice but to incur expenditure e.g. vital works to schools and roads.

6. Cllr Dixon to the Cabinet Member for Finance and Strategic Regeneration

The Council has not updated its accommodation strategy but has already made the decision to spend millions of pounds upgrading the Civic Centre. Has the Council decided what it is doing with buildings such as River Park House, Alexandra House and Wood Green Library?

Answer from Cllr Adje, Cabinet Member for Finance and Strategic Regeneration

A Cabinet decision will be made about River Park House and other council buildings in Wood Green during 2021/22. Decisions about these buildings will not alter our legal obligations to invest £12m in repairs to the Grade 2 listed Civic Centre.

7. Cllr Hare to the Cabinet Member for Housing and Estate Renewal

What are the Council's contingency plans should the residents on the High Road West scheme oppose the project in the upcoming ballot?

Answer from Cllr Adje, Cabinet Member for Finance and Strategic Regeneration

The High Road West proposals meet the aspirations of residents including the delivery of a substantial number of new council homes.

These 500 council homes will be available to existing tenants on the Love Lane estate including all the eligible temporary tenants; as well as families on the waiting list. We have secured £90m in funding for the High Road West scheme from the Mayor of London, to enable this to happen.

The Council will be working closely with residents, businesses and the wider community to set out these benefits and address any questions and issues that they may have.

However, the decision regarding whether the scheme progresses, will be made by residents because, we are committed to ensuring that residents should be part of the decision making that affects their homes and neighbourhoods.

Should residents not vote for a positive ballot outcome, we will need to review our options at that time. The council has invested a great deal into the scheme, over a number of years and to not proceed would have substantial implications, including losing the opportunity to build 500 council homes and generate thousands of jobs. There are no alternative options that will be better, all would take considerable time and require further funding to be secured.

8. Cllr Hinchcliffe to the Cabinet Member for Housing and Estate Renewal

Haringey now has 1,355 homes sitting empty, an increase of over 35% on last year. What is the Council doing to remedy this situation?

Answer from Cllr Emine Ibrahim, Cabinet Member for Housing and Estate Renewal

Haringey currently has 928 properties on its council tax listing, as of March 2021, that have been empty for more than 6 months.

A source is not provided for the figure of 1,355 quoted in the question, but homes empty for around 6 months include the general churn of homes being bought and sold – and the pandemic will have had an impact on the number of properties empty for more than 6 months since 2019.

In June 2020, the Council strengthened its empty homes policy and has been targeting homes that have been empty long-term. Our focus has been to:

- Prioritise action for homes that have been left empty for 2 or more years – with particular priority for those 5 years or more.
- All owners of property vacant for more than 5 years have been contacted. (Those which are legally exempt will not be pursued, informal action is being used to encourage some owners to bring their empty homes back into use voluntarily).

- Others are to be subject to a more formal enforcement route due to the history of the case or previous enforcement proceedings which have failed to gain the desired outcome.
 - All owners who we have engaged with have been informed of the proposed introduction of council tax premiums due to commence in April 2021. It is envisaged that this will be a deterrent and incentive for current empty homeowners to bring their property back into use.
 - The borough's empty homes will be continuously reviewed and monitored to help us understand any trends and to take appropriate action.
 - We will consider the use of Empty Dwelling Management Orders for long-term empty homes to bring these back into use.
 - We have increased our capital budget provision for Compulsory Purchase Orders for empty homes by £5m – and already four more long-term empty homes are now being considered for CPO.
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9. Cllr Emery to the Cabinet Member for Climate Change, Equalities and Leisure

You recently circulated a list of sites where the Council is proposing to start monitoring air quality. Sites included a quiet residential road in Highgate, but ignored areas such as the Muswell Hill roundabout, where air quality is likely to be much worse. Can you attempt to reassure residents that this isn't an attempt to not monitor areas which the Council knows is failing to meet legal limits?

Answer from Cllr Hearn, Cabinet Member for Climate Change, Equalities and Leisure

The Council has a mixture of locations of air quality monitoring across the borough. These include locations like hospitals, health centres, or schools where adverse impacts of pollution disproportionately affect these groups, these can be on busy and quiet roads. We monitor on quieter roads to give a background reading for the borough picture. We also have monitoring sites on busy roads such as Crouch End Broadway, Wood Green High Road, and Tottenham High Road. As of this month for the first time ever the Council now has monitoring locations in every ward, enabling us all to monitor our local air quality at the local level. The Council measures the levels of air pollutants, and every year we publish the results in the Council's Annual Air Quality report.

10. Cllr Palmer to the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children, Education and Families

Haringey has an unenviable record on Children's services, and another damning case regarding a baby's death from 2018 was in the media last month, as the coroner delivered her ruling, which called decisions made by Haringey social workers 'utterly bewildering'. We are told again and again that lessons are being learned by Haringey but are not seeing the evidence of this. So, will you release the review of the service that was undertaken by Islington Borough Council last year, and confirm what further work is being undertaken following the coroner, Mary Hassell's, comments?

Answer from Cllr Kaushika Amin, Cabinet Member for Children, Education and Families

The Findings from the Partners in Practice Learning Review by LB of Islington was referred to and considered by the Haringey Safeguarding Children Partnership (HSCP) as the body best placed to ensure learning is embedded across Haringey's safeguarding partners. The HSCP will be holding a learning event. As part of this process, Cllr Amin, Cabinet Member for Children, Education and Families will co-chair, with the independent chair of the HSCP, a dedicated feedback event for elected members as part of the assurance programme indicated to members in June 2020. Last year, we published the first Annual Social Care Performance report. Following publication of this year's performance report we will hold the first members briefing event on the report so that members can ask the service appropriate questions about its safeguarding performance.

Regarding the Coroner Mary Hassell's comments, this case, from 2018, is the subject of an ongoing Serious Case Review (SCR) by the HSCP. The Coroner's comments and findings are being considered as part of the SCR. The outcome of the SCR will include lessons learnt and actions for all stakeholders to continue to improve safeguarding practice in the borough. The SCR will be published on the HSCP website in due course.

Finally, last week children's services received a focussed visit from Ofsted which, when the report is published, will give a more up-to-date overview of practice in Children Services. The Ofsted report will be published in due course.

11. Cllr Rossetti to the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services and Planning

Trees are an important part of the borough's streetscape and help combat air pollution and climate change. The Government have further highlighted this through proposed amendments by MHCLG to the National Planning Policy Framework in support of retaining existing trees. In order to protect Haringey's dwindling number of trees, will the Council look to put a blanket TPO on all trees across the borough?

Answer from Cllr Matt White, Cabinet Member for Corporate Services and Planning

Haringey already has strong borough-wide protection of trees in its existing statutory Local Plan. For example, Policy SP13 states "All development shall protect and improve sites of biodiversity and nature conservation... through its... Protection, management and maintenance of existing trees and the planting of new trees where appropriate". Policy DM1 states "The Council will expect development proposals to respond to... trees on and close to the site".

The Council has started the process to bring forward a New Local Plan which can further strengthen the planning policy protections. The New Local Plan First Steps consultation document states the Council will be able to set a "local Urban Greening Factor, which will apply to new developments and will be achieved through measures such as high quality landscaping (including trees)...".

Trees in Conservation Areas are already protected, in effect, by the same protections as Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs) so there is no need to undertake a blanket TPO across the borough.

New TPOs can only be made where they satisfy the legal test of them being "expedient in the interests of amenity" and it is unlikely that a blanket borough-wide TPO would meet this test. Assessing trees for a TPO requires a site visit to check on condition, life expectancy, relative public visibility and any other notable features. Local authorities are considered responsible managers of trees and it is very rare for them to TPO trees on their own land.

The Council seeks no net loss of trees and also has its own ambitious tree planting programme.

The Council seeks no net loss of trees in the borough by limiting the circumstances where it agrees to remove trees (circa 300 per annum) and by having its own ambitious tree planting programme that will plant over a total of a thousand trees over the next two years. The Council has made an ongoing commitment to tree planting through its agreed capital programme and has allocated funding from Neighbourhood Community Infrastructure Levy to plant even more trees. Tree planting in the borough isn't limited to just those planted directly by the Council. Through the Council's partnership with groups such as The Conservation Volunteers, Friends of Parks and through the permissions given as part of the planning process many hundreds of additional trees are planted each year. In May this year the Council will launch a new online platform for residents to be able to sponsor a tree outside their home or on their way to work or school. This will further

increase the number of trees planted in the borough and engage people in helping to water the new trees they have sponsored.

12. Cllr Chenot to the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services and Planning

At Cabinet in November you promised that the borough's first 20 school streets would be completed by the end of March. Will this be achieved?

Answer from Cllr Hearn, Cabinet Member for Climate Change, Equalities and Leisure

The School Streets Plan is to deliver active transport spaces outside the school gates. During the last 6 months the Council has been working with our schools even though they have been under tremendous pressure teaching remotely, and as a Council we have had to respect their capacity to work with us.

The geography around every school is unique and therefore the plan for each requires a bespoke solution.

The Council has designed and worked on a total of 24 school streets, alongside supporting measures outside many other schools in the borough. Due to local circumstances, we are delivering 12 after Easter and a further four very shortly after. Four more then expected to be delivered in the Autumn Term.

Some schools have withdrawn or asked for a delay due to the capacity of staff and concerns over staff driving to work, which cannot be addressed at this time. We have also had to work around a shortage of enforcement cameras which are needed for the School Streets to be successful of which there are pressures across London.

The 12 school streets that will be delivered are:

- Chestnuts Primary School
- Campsbourne Primary School
- Coldfall Primary School
- Earlsmead Primary School
- Harris Academy Coleraine Park
- Highgate Junior School (independent school)
- Highgate Primary School
- Holy Trinity Primary School
- Rokesly Primary School
- St Pauls Catholic Primary School, Wood Green
- Tiverton Primary School

- Welbourne Primary School

Some schools have withdrawn and / or asked for more time to consult with staff and parents, which the Council respects. These have been replaced with four more. These are:

- Coleridge Primary School
- Earlham Primary School
- Mulberry Primary School
- Belmont Junior School and The Vale

Finally, 4 school streets will be delivered in the Autumn Term are:

- Harris Academy Tottenham Hale.
- Bruce Grove Primary School.
- St Ann's Church of England Primary School.
- West Green Primary School.

The final 3 school streets of this group have been paused to enable full consultation on the Low Traffic Neighbourhoods to occur which is the wider community aspiration.

13. Cllr Ogiehor to Cabinet Member for Local Investment and Economic Growth

Reports claim that the High Road West regeneration will create 500 jobs. What are these jobs, how many of the existing jobs on the site will be lost, and what is the net change?

Answer from Cllr Bull, Cabinet Member for Local Investment and Economic Growth

The council places a high priority in job creation through the High Road West scheme, with the need for employment opportunities being particularly high at the current time in the wake of the Covid crisis. Northumberland Park has the highest number of people claiming Universal Credit, Jobseekers Allowance and other job-related benefit allowances in Haringey and the highest level of people not in employment, education or training.

There will be more than 3,000 construction jobs arising from the development of the scheme. The council is determined to ensure that people on the estate and living

locally in North Tottenham are given opportunities to training and employment so that they can be at the heart of building their new neighbourhood.

In addition, the plan will provide a range of opportunities including:

- a jobs brokerage and employment support programme;
- the business development spaces at the Library and Learning Centre, supporting hundreds of local people into work; and
- a community digital hub, supported by HALS and providing 1:1 support to residents.

This will enable local people to take advantage of jobs and develop businesses across the region that they might previously not have had the opportunity to access.

This is in addition to the 130,000ft² of new commercial, retail and leisure space that will provide over 500 jobs across a range of sectors and skills levels and with commitments to deliver jobs for local people, and sections of the community such as people who have been long term unemployed, women and people with disabilities.

The council is committed to working with existing businesses, with the aim that they are supported and given the opportunity to grow and be successful, so that the existing jobs (the number estimated to be up to 350) in the area will be protected. This includes supporting businesses that need to be relocated, by relocating them where possible within the High Road West Scheme, or as nearby as possible.

A series of funds from the scheme includes £500k for supporting businesses in their moves, whether this is as part of the scheme or elsewhere, and a further £500k for business support for businesses in the area, aimed at promoting the town centre and commercial areas.

14. Cllr Cawley-Harrison to Cabinet Member for Housing and Estate Renewal

As you know, a number of leaseholders were invoiced in 2019 by Homes for Haringey for new fire doors, as their current ones were unsafe. Two years later they still don't have the doors, their money is being withheld from them, they have not received any communication on what's happening, and they have no timetable or schedule of work. Do you consider this acceptable, given other boroughs or tradesmen don't seem to face similar challenges in installing new doors?

Answer from Cabinet Member for Housing and Estate Renewal

The priority for the Council and Homes for Haringey is the safety of our tenants. The reason for the delay in fitting front doors is because of the difficulty Homes for Haringey (and all other landlords replacing front entrance doors) have experienced in establishing that the doors on the market are certified as safe.

The specific problem for Haringey is that, following post-Grenfell guidance by MHCLG, we believed that doors that had been procured and in some cases fitted by

contractors carrying out our substantial programme of renewal work might not be compliant. It then proved impossible to settle this by simply checking the certification.

Therefore, we took the unusual step of commissioning our own burn tests on front entrance doors. These tests commenced last September. Previously it was not realistic to book tests at any certified testing centre because of the post-Grenfell demand from the industry itself. It was also not possible for us to plan a way forward without knowing whether the doors that were fitted and in the contractors' stock were acceptable.

Once the full situation with the doors is understood, a revised communication strategy for residents will be developed and implemented. Specifically, within this strategy there needs to be an agreed way forward regarding our leaseholders and the recovery of costs, which will need to be signed off by the Council. The strategy for each block will depend on the door archetypes within the individual blocks and the contract delivery to date.

Our over-riding priority is to ensure that residents are safe. We are working closely with the local Fire Brigade on this issue, and constantly challenging industry certifications.

We are sorry this has taken longer to resolve than our residents would like, but it was important that we identify which doors are compliant before we purchase replacements. We have only been able to move as quickly as the testing facilities have allowed. At all points in the process it has been very difficult to predict when we will have a clear enough picture to be able to make concrete plans and report back to residents, because we have been unwilling to take any short cuts where safety is concerned. This means some of the anticipated dates for further information, which were given in good faith, could not always be met.

15. Cllr da Costa to the Cabinet Member for Finance and Strategic Regeneration

It is understood that Lendlease have agreed a lease with Haringey Council to secure the land for the High Road West scheme, including Council land, for 250 years. Could you confirm what the agreed transaction value for the land is?

Answer from Cabinet Member for Finance and Strategic Regeneration

The High Road West Scheme was signed between Lendlease and the Council in 2017. It will happen in phases over a number of years. The council will always hold

the freehold for the scheme and is not selling it any time soon. In addition, to the overall freehold, the Council will have ownership and control of the council homes and other community facilities like the library.

A land premium will be calculated and agreed with the council once the conditions for Lendlease to draw down each phase lease have been met (such as securing vacant possession and securing planning permission). The amount paid to the Council for each phase lease will not be known until such time that the scheme has reached this point and sum calculated.

The method for calculating the land value calculation was agreed within the Development Agreement in 2017. The Development Agreement is structured on an open book basis, so the Council will have full visibility of all of the costs and assumptions within the financial model and will be able to test and challenge their robustness.

The Council does have a fixed minimum Land Premium that will be paid for the first phase of the Scheme.

It is important to note that this is separate from the land assembly reimbursement figure, which Lendlease is obligated to pay the Council, to ensure the Council is fully reimbursed for the land assembly costs as reflected in its capital budget.

Ends