

OPPOSITION PRIORITY BUSINESS - THE RESPONSE TO THE CHANGING SOCIAL PROFILE IN THE BOROUGH

Council – 31.3.2010 Report of the Labour Group

At the Council Meeting on 11 November 2009, the Labour group put forward as “Opposition Priority Business, a paper which highlighted the need for the Council to examine what is done to reduce inequality in the Borough. The paper is reproduced here as Appendix 1 to this item and what follows here demonstrates how much is being invested in the Borough’s infrastructure as a result of decisions taken by the current Labour Government, gives as an example what Enfield can do to help and requests the next Council to make the action to deal with these issues a top priority.

The true test of an effective Council is the extent to which it rises to the challenge of changing circumstances, works with residents and businesses and organisations, uses its resources and those of Government to tackle problems and does not wait until a problem has reached critical proportions before acting.

It is important that all members of the Council are aware of what is happening in the Borough. The appendix sets out some of the facts, and this is worth both repeating and adding to. In Enfield:

- There is rising inequality and we are now the Borough with the second highest level of inequality in London
- The Borough has the highest level of unemployment in a “Super Output Area” in the whole of North London at 51%
- There are many other indicators that show deteriorating trends for the poorer parts of the Borough, some of which are highlighted in the appendix

However, in addition to the above, the perceptions of the community about Enfield as shown by surveys are worrying. These show that Enfield compared to all 33 London boroughs is 28th for “feeling satisfied”, 22nd for “getting on well together” and 27th for feeling that decisions can be influenced. It is our view that the style of the Council is remote and not engaging. It does not proactively engage with key sectors, after all it took almost 8 years for the administration to have the first real meeting with business even though Enfield has the 2nd largest area of Industrial Land in London and even now it has no economic development/inward investment strategy.

If it were not for the assistance given to the Borough by the decisions of the Labour Government, the position would be far worse. Enfield received £331million in external grants and the area based grant for 2009/10, and will receive £345 million, in 2010/11. The Borough will receive £85 million for “Building Schools for the Future, and £137 million, to invest in our public housing stock under the “Decent Homes Programme”, plus an investment of £90 million in total for housing along the A406 (£54 million from the Government and £36million from Notting Hill Housing Trust). That in total is almost £1billion

of monies coming into the Borough as a result of Labour government activity, much of which will be invested in rebuilding the social infrastructure of the Area, creating jobs and wealth locally in the process.

If it weren't for the Labour government targeting and supplying resources, then there is little evidence that the ruling group on this Council would have put forward or sought other sources of money to meet the issues that face the Borough. There are many examples of Labour Government initiatives that have had a beneficial effect, including "Sure Start", "Youth Opportunities Fund", "Ethnic Minorities Achievement grant", "free Swimming", "homelessness grant", funding staff costs for "Place shaping", PFI Grant for street lighting .

Meanwhile the priority of the Tory administration in Enfield has not been on the real problems faced by the most disadvantaged in the Borough. The Library strategy has absorbed £ millions of capital at a time when there are massive needs to help residents overcome disadvantage. Their actions have not addressed the gross inequalities that have grown over the last eight years. This is a legacy that fails to demonstrate that the Tories have the understanding that can enable them to address the issue of managing a changing Borough. The current administration relies upon a Labour Government and its policies and resources to meet the needs of the Boroughs' residents and then fails to use those resources effectively or add to them with the Council's own money, or substantially bid for European or other funds to meet the obvious need.

Where has the real leadership come from? The Labour Group has used Opposition Business to raise several matters and from time to time has met with a positive response. The young peoples commission was set up as a result of an Opposition initiative and the work it has carried out will have a positive effect on the prospects of young people in Enfield. The Opposition paper on inequality which is appended here has not resulted in action and the recommendation contained in it about "free school meals" has not only been ignored, but the Tories have refused to match fund a government programme to provide free school meals on a wider basis.

Unless the next Council focuses on the major issues of inequality and economic and social growth, Enfield's future will indeed be bleak, too many of our neighbourhoods become run - down, the opportunities for residents and businesses restricted and the Borough a divided place.

It is therefore important that the next Council's number 1 priority is tackling growing inequality in the Borough, and that it does not waste money on grandiose schemes. As a start this Council resolves to abandon its plan to relocate Palmers Green Library, but instead instructs the Chief executive to set up a project Team to turn the former Marks and Spencer premises in Green lanes into retail units and workshop space to be made available at on a subsidised basis to new local businesses that employ and train local unemployed. This project Team will complete its work within 3 months from today.