

Council Meeting – 6 April 2017 Opposition Priority Business

“The Council’s Labour administration simply isn't listening”

We have chosen this subject for our OPB paper and debate because we have been collectively struck by the volume and force of email and other communications complaining about the fact that “no one in the council listens or wants to know”. Moreover, while as an Opposition we do not expect the implementation of Conservative policies, we can and do point out failings in the administration which have consequences, but here again, these are dismissed on a wave of party political bias - i.e. everything the opposition says must be wrong and is thus to be ignored! And the irony is that "listening" as often as not has very little cost!

Leaving aside the fact that it is still very difficult to communicate with the council as an organisation – yes, residents, businesses, would be developers, and others all still have great difficulty in getting through to anyone, and if they do, they all say the same. The reality, as we shall demonstrate is that despite all the claims and protestations by Labour councillors to the contrary, on the issues that matter, the Labour administration is simply ignoring the views of the people it represents.

1. Cycle Enfield.

I'm not proposing to rehearse the many arguments much deployed on this subject, which are well known to all members. Suffice to say that the A105 and A1010 schemes provide ample evidence of the Labour administration's failure to listen to the concerns of local residents and local businesses whose lives and livelihoods were likely to be affected by the proposed schemes, neither of which secured majority support in the consultations. In the case of Enfield Town, while with obvious great reluctance and only after the intervention of TfL, the fact remains that the alternative proposals have never had a proper public airing despite the many concerns that have been expressed.

So much for the merits, the implementation of the A105 has led to severe inconvenience to residents and motorists alike, but the real losers in all of this are, as was predicted, the numerous businesses operating along the route. Many of the business proprietors have pleaded for a meeting with Councillor Anderson but he has failed to meet them, preferring instead it seems, to display (and in writing) an arrogance better suited to the former Soviet Regime. Indeed one business went so far as to send Councillor Anderson copies of the firm's accounts showing a c30% reduction in sales, only to be met by a patronising and almost insulting response. Councillor Anderson's grasp of facts as used in his public pronouncements (e.g. Evening Standard) is poor - or is he just economical with the truth. Either way it does not suggest that he is a listening Cabinet Member - more worryingly that he simply doesn't care.

2. Highway Maintenance.

Members' mailboxes on both sides, are I'm sure peppered with complaints about the state of the borough's roads and pavements. Similar complaints appear from time to

time in the local newspapers. It was something of a surprise then, at the budget meeting in February that Councillor Anderson and the Labour Cabinet had failed to include any money for highway maintenance in the capital programme for 2017/18. I raised this during the debate and there was some muttering to the effect that this would be picked up at the March Cabinet. It wasn't! Further enquiries revealed an even more shocking revelation - that the £7.2million allocated for the year just ended was some 27% underspent! Could that be because having employed the main highways contractor (without undertaking a separate tendering process) to undertake the Cycle Enfield works, the contractor was overloaded and couldn't complete the much reduced highway maintenance programme? Whatever the reason, (and it certainly wasn't government cuts) the underspend was fortuitous and could now be used to tide them over until Councillor Anderson got both his and the Cabinet's act together!

3. Parks

The Friends of the Parks pleas and views have also been falling on deaf ears! They, on whom frankly the council depends for support both political and physical to ensure that our parks are maintained to a reasonable level, have regularly been treated with arrogance and indifference. By way of example the first draft of the Friends Agreement was approved by the Cabinet Member without the draft document being consulted upon with the Friends of the Parks Groups. The Groups were basically expected to sign up! The only reason that didn't happen and that there is now a revised agreed version is because it was called in by the Opposition Lead Member for Environment, which allowed Friends of the Parks Groups to voice their concerns at the OSC.

4. Controlled Parking Zone Residents' Permits

In July 2016, a decision was made to reform the basis for calculating the charge for Residents Parking Permits. There was a public consultation on the proposed changes, which included axing the 50% discount for over 65's, and moving to an engine based charging model rather than the CO2 one. The result of the consultation on whether people wanted the council to move to an engine based charging method was a clear majority against - 58% disagreed. Only 31% agreed, and 9% wanted neither and 2% didn't know or were unsure. However, this did not stop the Cabinet Member for Environment pushing the decision through regardless. This is another perfect example of failing to listen. The council in this instance lost the consultation, the people overwhelmingly rejected the proposal to change to an engine based model, but instead of conscientiously reflecting on the responses from residents as the law requires, the decision was made to implement the proposal come what may and in contradiction to the outcome of the consultation.

5. Housing Board

The Customer Voice, which sends representatives to the Housing Board chaired by Cllr.Oykener, and Senate were established by the council as part of the review of

housing governance following the decision to reintegrate Enfield Homes arm's length company back into the council in April 2015. This provides a very interesting example of the council **not wanting to listen**. It is the overarching housing representative body for tenants and leaseholders for the Borough of Enfield and has 15 members. While the Conservative Group strongly supported the establishment of tenant and leaseholder led bodies, we remain concerned that members of these two bodies are appointed rather than elected. Labour argued that appointed representatives would be collectively competent and that they should therefore be selected on the basis of skills and commitment. This however completely overlooks democratic principles and more importantly creates the perception (and the reality) that Labour councillors are not actually interested in hearing the views of residents who don't happen to share the same views as them. Again shades of a Soviet regime.

6. The Public Transport Consultative Group

The Public Transport Consultative Group (PTCG) had its membership and remit reformed earlier in this municipal year. The rationale was to broaden the membership of the PTCG so it was more reflective of the diverse nature of our borough. Whilst no one would disagree that the objective was a good one, the decision was used as a smoke screen to remove certain residents' associations/groups from serving on the panel many of whom had voiced disappointment at some of the Administration's transport policies, in particular Cycle Enfield.

It was decided that representatives from the voluntary sector can serve on the panel but only if approved by the Cabinet Member for Environment, while other groups needed the sanction of the Chairman of the PTGC. Membership of the PTCG, apart from the councillors, is therefore down to the chosen and select few who in practice are unlikely to 'rock the Labour Boat'. The Conservative Group opposed the decision because it believes that the Administration deliberately chose to exclude hard working community groups from the PTCG in order to create a more amenable panel for its transport policies. Hand picking groups to make the PTCG more reflective of the Administration's views on transport is not an example of a listening council, it is more an example of one that is so wrapped up in itself that it does not care about those stakeholder groups who have genuine concerns about the effects that policies have on local residents.

7. Federation of Enfield Community Associations

Recognising that the court case on possession is now at an end, I cannot leave a paper on the subject of failing to listen without including a paragraph on this topic. Members are aware that a petition was submitted by residents calling on the council to renew the Federation of Enfield Community Associations' (FECA) lease on 11 Mottingham Road Edmonton N9 8DX. The petition was signed by thousands of people across the borough. The Labour administration failed to acknowledge the strength of feeling within the community on this issue, ignored the wishes of residents and at considerable public expense, continued to pursue its political

agenda to remove FECA from the shop unit in Mottingham Road which it had used to provide much needed advice to council tenants that is otherwise unavailable.

Recommendations

- 1. That the Labour administration undertakes that in future it will, in line with the Code of Conduct, and recognising its representative role in local democracy, listen and respond courteously and conscientiously to the views of residents and businesses generally.**
- 2. On those issues that affect residents' quality of life, and businesses' economic and general wellbeing, the Labour administration will respond wherever practicable by giving effect to their views, particularly where such views are widely held or supported.**

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For and on behalf of the Conservative Group**