

**COUNCIL – 20 SEPTEMBER 2018
QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC**

Agenda item 6 refers

1. Mr David Forman to Councillor Mark Ingall, Leader of the Council

- a) Will Harlow District Council adopt the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance Working Definition of Antisemitism and its accompanying 11 examples of contemporary antisemitism in society without addition or deletion, especially given the fact that the United Kingdom government adopted it in December 2016, in order to build further confidence within the Jewish community in Harlow that antisemitism will not be tolerated?

- b) If the desire to be free to criticise the actions of the Israeli government unencumbered by allegations of antisemitism delays your adoption of the HRA definition in full, will the Labour administration accept the explanation offered by the experts of the UK delegation to the IHRA Working Definition of Antisemitism issued in a press release on 7 August 2018: *“Any ‘modified’ version of the IHRA definition that does not include all of its 11 examples is no longer the IHRA Definition. Adding or removing language undermines the months of international diplomacy and academic rigour that enabled this definition to exist. If one organisation or institution can amend the wording to suit its own need, then logically anyone else could do the same. We would once again revert to a world where antisemitism goes unaddressed simply because different entities cannot agree on what it is”*?

Response from Councillor Mark Ingall, Leader of the Council

There have been some concerns amongst some people interested in international affairs that accepting the IHRA definition of anti-Semitism, together with the 11 examples, would prevent them from ever criticising the actions of the Israeli State, without being themselves labelled as being anti-Semitic. Hence, they have been worried about accepting it without deletions or additions.

However proper reading of the text shows these fears are unfounded. The IHRA definition explicitly accepts that criticism of actions taken by the State of Israel can be made; as long as those criticisms are not used as a vehicle to deny the right of the State of Israel to exist, as long as those criticisms are of the actions of the state and not of the Jewish religion, as long as the State of Israel is not singled out for criticism and as long as comparisons are not made with the Holocaust.

Thus I feel confident that I could, if I wanted, speak out about the treatment of Palestinians by the State of Israel, just as I could, if I wanted, speak out about

the actions of the Saudi Arabian regime in Yemen, the appalling human tragedy unfolding for the Rohingya people in Myanmar and countless other examples of Governments acting in ways that are unacceptable. All very different issues, but all deeply troubling to people interested in international affairs.

Given this freedom, as the definition allows, I am happy to align myself fully with the IHRA definition and, via a motion that we will present to Council at the earliest opportunity, we will incorporate the definition into any relevant Council procedures.

But, I want to go further than that. Countering anti-Semitism and racism in all its forms is an issue I am certain members from both sides of this chamber feel passionate about. Therefore I propose that the Portfolio Holder for Equality and Diversity sets up a working group, to include Councillors from the opposition and leading figures in the Jewish community, to see what other measures we can take to build confidence within the Jewish Community, that this Council as a whole, condemns anti-Semitism, will not tolerate it and will take active steps to ensure that the Jewish community feel welcome and included as a valuable and intrinsic part of this religiously and ethnically diverse town.

2. Mr John Wake to Councillor Mark Ingall, Leader of the Council

Given that Harlow District Council had a budget surplus of one and a quarter million pounds for the last financial year, why has the Council not revised the Harlow Council Tax Support Scheme so that jobless householders in Harlow do not bear the full burden of the central government cut in funding for this benefit?

Response from Councillor Mark Ingall, Leader of the Council

The Council achieved a surplus for the 2017/18 year which was one off in nature. The Council would be committing to ongoing costs if any revision to the Local Council Tax Support Scheme were made such that a lower contribution was made by claimants. It is not the Council's policy to use one off resources to meet costs of ongoing commitments and would not demonstrate good financial management to do so.

Further, although Harlow have the duty to collect Council tax, the component kept by Harlow is just under 16 pence in every pound. Most of the money goes to Essex County Council and the Essex Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner. They will not accept a reduction in the component that they take, so for every pound Harlow reduces Council Tax for the jobless, it would cost the Council £6.37.

3. Mr Hugh Hoad to Councillor Mark Ingall, Leader of the Council

At the Full Council meeting on 29 March, a motion was moved that in view of the poor state of repair of the highways of Harlow, the Essex County Council Portfolio Holder for Highways would meet with Harlow County and District Councillors, the public and other interested parties to discuss. This meeting has not taken place. Was there ever any intention to hold this meeting?

Response from Councillor Mark Ingall, Leader of the Council

Following the Full Council meeting on 29 March a letter was sent to the Leader of the County Council. The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Infrastructure of the County Council, Councillor Kevin Bentley, then met with a residents' association to discuss their concerns.

I, together with a small group of Residents from the Waterhouse Moor Residents' Association, have since met with Councillor Bentley, and in August he joined me in a tour of Harlow to view some of the worst potholes within the town. Last week I received an email from the County Council stating that although the County Council prioritises main roads, rather than estate roads, permanent repairs were taking place on the following estate roads:

- a) Northbrooks – week commencing 13 September 2018
- b) Maddox Road – week commencing 17 September 2018
- c) Momples Road – week commencing 17 September 2018
- d) Church Leys – week commencing 25 September 2018

Although I'm under no illusions that there are a large number of issues outside of these four roads that need urgent attention, it is a promising start. I am thankful that Councillor Bentley came to Harlow to listen to our concerns and will continue to work with him to ensure that our town's potholes are prioritised.