

Appendix K

THE 'INDEPENDENT LABOUR GROUP', 2013-2014

Background

In September 2012 the Leader of the Labour Group (and Leader of Harrow Council), Cllr. Bill Stephenson, announced that, due to health problems, he was stepping down from the role. The Labour Group met on 23 October to elect a new leader. Cllr. Thaya Idaikkadar was chosen from a field of five candidates by a preferential ballot. He was subsequently confirmed as the new Leader of Harrow Council when it next met on 8 November 2012. Idaikkadar's nomination was supported by Independent councillor Cllr. James Bond (Headstone North) and Conservative councillor Cllr. Husain Akhtar (Canons); the latter left the Conservative Group at this time.

The Labour Group held its 2013 Annual General Meeting on 15 April; as usual, elections were held for all positions in the group, including that of Group Leader. At the meeting Cllr. Idaikkadar and Cllr. David Perry were both proposed for the position, so a ballot was held to choose between them. Cllr. Perry won the ballot and became Leader of the Labour Group. It was anticipated that Cllr. Perry would be confirmed as the Leader of Harrow Council at the Council's Annual Meeting in May 2013.

Formation

On 8 May 2013 Cllr. Husain Akhtar issued a press release that announced the formation of an 'Independent Labour Group' ('ILG') consisting of nine members, detailed below. Later that day, Cllr. Idaikkadar, who was still the Leader of the Council (pending the Council's Annual Meeting) dismissed all members of the Council's Cabinet.

Councillor	Ward	Comment
Husain Akhtar	Canons	Originally elected as a Conservative, and had only joined the Labour Group in March 2013. Chosen as Secretary of the ILG. Resigned from the ILG 15 July.
Nana Asante	Edgware	Deputy Mayor, 2012-13.
Asad Omar	Headstone South	Chosen as Deputy Leader of the ILG.
Krishna James	Marlborough	Chosen as Chair of the ILG.
Nizam Ismail	Queensbury	Mayor, 2012-13.
Zarina Khalid	Queensbury	ILG Secretary following Akhtar's resignation.
Thaya Idaikkadar	Roxeth	Leader of Harrow Council from November 2012. Became Leader of the ILG.
Raj Ray	Roxeth	Remained in official Labour Group, see below.
Mano Dharmarajah	Roxbourne	
Will Stoodley	West Harrow	Joined the ILG 10 May, see below.

Subsequent Events

Cllr. Ray quickly made clear on the 8 May that he had no intention of joining the ILG. He later told the press, "They [the ILG] misrepresented me. I do not recognise this Independent Labour Group. At Harrow Council, and in this country, we are one Labour. I never considered [joining]."

It is believed the eight remaining members of the ILG were suspended by the Labour Party on 9 May. The BBC, on 10 May, quoted an ILG source that Cllr. Stoodley had joined them and this was confirmed on 13 May when Cllr. Idaikkadar announced his new Cabinet, consisting of himself with Cllrs. Omar, James, Khalid

and Stoodley together with two non-voting Conservative members, viz. Cllr. Susan Hall (Leader of the Conservative Group) and Cllr. Barry Macleod-Cullinane (Deputy Leader). The two Conservatives were not given any portfolio and there was a certain amount of 'doubling-up' of roles amongst the other members. For example, Cllr. Idaikkadar, as well as being Leader of the Council, held the combined Business Transformation and Communications, Finance, Performance, Customer Services and Corporate Services, Property and Major Contracts portfolios.

Election of Mayor for 2013-14

Before the formation of the ILG, Cllr. Asante had been chosen by the Labour Group as their nominee for Mayor for the 2013-14 municipal year. The Council meeting to elect the Mayor was held on 21 May and Cllr. Asante was appointed; Cllr. Camilla Bath (Conservative, Stanmore Park ward) was the only nominee for the post of Deputy Mayor.

Confirmation of Leader and Cabinet

At an Extraordinary Meeting of the Council on 23 May Cllr. Idaikkadar was confirmed as Leader of the Council. Additionally, the composition of the Cabinet was approved (with Cllr. Ismail, the retiring Mayor, an additional member). The Labour Group proposed a motion to remove Cllr. Idaikkadar: this was opposed by the Independent Labour Group, the Conservative Group and Independent Cllr. Gawn. Liberal Democrat Cllr. Noyce and Independent Cllrs. Bond and Sheinwald abstained.

The meeting also ratified arrangements for committees, panels and forums. Conservative councillors were appointed to chair three of the five committees of the Council, with members of the Independent Labour Group chairing the other two. Further, Conservative councillors were appointed to chair eight of the nine 'Cabinet Advisory Panels', both 'Consultative Forums' and the 'Constitution Review Working Group' (an informal body). Finally, Cllr. Christine Bednell (Conservative) was appointed the sole member of a number of 'Social Services Executive Bodies'.

Further Developments

The ILG held a press conference on 28 May during which the Labour Group was accused of "institutional racism". In reply, Cllr. Perry stated: "The Labour Group categorically denies and would challenge the negative unfounded accusations of discrimination made against our decisions and processes, and our proven record in this area supports this." The local press confirmed on 28 May that the nine members of the ILG had received warning letters from the Labour Party that stated that their actions were contrary to Party rules.

An unexpected development was reported by the local press on 30 May, namely that the Independent Labour Group members had asked to rejoin the Labour Group, under certain conditions, only days before the press conference. However, on 31 May it was confirmed that the nine members of the ILG had been expelled from the national Labour Party, whose rules state that councillors cannot be a member of another political party or be a member of another group on a council whilst at the same time remaining a member of the Labour Party or Labour Group. Their term of exclusion from the Labour Party was reported to be a minimum of five years.

The composition of Harrow Council therefore became: Conservative 25, Labour 25, Independent Labour 9, Liberal Democrat 1 and Independent 3. Early in June Cllr. Sheinwald joined the UK Independence Party, making the composition of the Council: Conservative 25, Labour 25, Independent Labour 9, Liberal Democrat 1, UKIP 1 and Independent 2.

Early in July 2013 the *Harrow Observer* carried a story that, six to eight weeks previously, Cllr. Akhtar had approached a number of UKIP members with a view to joining, but had been rebuffed. Akhtar strongly denied the claims. However, on 15 July Akhtar announced that he had resigned from the ILG and would sit on the Council as an Independent. He told the *Harrow Times* that the breakaway Independent Labour Group "perhaps means well but lacks confidence, courage and experience to make difficult but right decisions, and is therefore Tory driven...." He added: "I tried but found it almost impossible to stand on the platform of justice and truth under the oppressive political regimes." Akhtar further commented to the *Harrow Observer* that the ILG was "dominated" by the Conservatives and lived in "constant fear" of them. The composition of the Council therefore became: Conservative 25, Labour 25, Independent Labour 8, Liberal Democrat 1, UKIP 1 and Independent 3.

Registration as a Political Party

On 16 August the ILG registered as a political party with the Electoral Commission. In the opinion of the Commission “the name ‘Independent Labour Group’ would be sufficiently distinguishable from the ‘Labour Party’ (were both names to appear on the same ballot paper) to allow registration of the party” [*]. Four additional descriptions were registered for electoral purposes: ‘Democratic Socialist Party’, ‘The People’s Party’, ‘Independent Socialist Group’ and ‘Harrow First’. The last of these was used by the ILG as the ballot paper description of their candidate in the Harrow on the Hill ward by-election (7 November 2013).

Two emblems — photographic images of roses — were also registered by the ILG with the Electoral Commission. The Commission “consider the registration of emblems on the basis of their visual appearance in comparison to those previously registered” and “do not take into account how the image might be interpreted by the voter” [*]. Although it could be argued that there was an obvious similarity to the previously registered ‘rose’ emblem of the Labour Party, the Commission took the view that “the image of the rose registered by the [ILG] is sufficiently different visually to the emblems of any existing registered party” [*].

End of the Independent Labour Administration

On 3 September Cllr. Susan Hall, the Conservative Group leader, contacted the local newspapers and media to state that the Conservative Group were going to request an extraordinary meeting of the Council in order that a fresh vote on the question of Council Leader could be considered. Cllr. Hall said her Group were “concerned that Independent Labour cannot function as an effective administration” and said the remedy was a “new crew and a new captain” for the Council.

In view of the fact that the question of Council Leader had been considered as recently as 23 May, the Mayor made a statement to the local media as follows: “Cllr. Susan Hall has, with four other councillors, asked for a Special Meeting to discuss the leadership of the Council. The Council’s Constitution makes it clear that the same matter should not be discussed again until six months have elapsed and [in this case] the six months elapse on 23 November. Cllr. Hall’s request for a Special Council meeting can be heard after or on 23 November. I hope you agree that in the interests of residents, we cannot encourage instability by raising items outside due process at our whim and fancy.” However, three days later an agenda for an Extraordinary Meeting to consider the question of Council Leader was issued, the meeting to take place on the rising of another Extraordinary Meeting of the Council (already called to conduct other business) on 16 September.

Meanwhile, on 6 September, the *Harrow Observer* carried a story speculating on the possibility of a Labour ‘reunion’ in light of recent developments. The paper claimed Cllr. Idaikkadar might be willing to put “personal differences” to one side should he receive a call from Labour leader David Perry ahead of a potential vote, and quoted Idaikkadar as saying: “I’m always willing to talk to anybody in a sensible and civilised manner. If it is right for the residents of this borough, I will work with anybody.”

On the morning of 12 September a statement issued under the name of the ILG secretary, Cllr. Zarina Khalid, was reproduced verbatim on a Harrow-based internet site. In the statement the ILG said it was “wholly inappropriate for the Director of Legal Services to undermine the Mayor’s ruling by circulating an invalid agenda.” It went on to accuse Legal Services of “institutional racism” and added that the “ILG and the Mayor have lost confidence in the Director of Legal Services and will therefore seek independent legal advice before Monday 16 September.” By mid-afternoon of 12 September the statement could no longer be accessed but reappeared later with some portions redacted by the internet site’s owner because of the statement’s inflammatory nature.

It would appear that the Director of Legal Services, in allowing the meeting to take place, was acting under Schedule 12 section 3 (2) of the Local Government Act 1972, which states:

If the chairman refuses to call an extraordinary meeting of a principal council after a requisition for that purpose, signed by five members of the council, has been presented to him, or if, without so refusing, the chairman does not call an extraordinary meeting within seven days after the requisition has been presented to him, then any five members of the council, on that refusal or on the expiration of those seven days, as the case may be, may forthwith call an extraordinary meeting of the council.

(In a story that appeared in November the *Harrow Observer* suggested that the Council had spent £30,000 in fees for legal advice associated with this issue.)

The Extraordinary Meeting was held on 16 September; Cllrs. Ashton, Gate and O’Dell sent apologies. The Mayor restated her belief that the meeting was unconstitutional and moved a motion that the meeting be

adjourned, but this was lost by 47 votes to 13. The Labour Group proposed a procedural motion, supported by the Conservatives, to suspend many of the Mayor's powers for the duration of the meeting. The motion *inter alia* stripped the Mayor of her power to suspend the meeting and to suspend debate on a motion.

After debate, a motion of no confidence in Cllr. Thaya Idaikkadar's leadership was passed by 47 votes to 10, with 3 abstentions. Councillors then chose between Cllr. Susan Hall (Conservative) and Cllr. David Perry (Labour) as to who should be Leader of the Council. Cllr. Perry received 24 votes, including that of Cllr. James Bond. Cllr. Hall received 31 votes, supported by the ILG (except for Cllr. Krishna James, who abstained). Cllrs. Akhtar, Gawn, Noyce and Sheinwald also abstained. Cllr. Hall therefore became Leader of the Council, heading up a minority Conservative administration.

Other Events, September 2013 onwards

In a move sanctioned by the new Leader of the Council, on 21 October Chief Executive Michael Lockwood wrote to the Mayor to tell her that an independent investigation was to be conducted into the various accusations of racism that had plagued the authority. The *Harrow Observer* reported that it was likely the investigation would be conducted by an equalities lawyer. Eventually, in March 2014, it was announced that a former borough commander of the Metropolitan Police, Dal Babu, would lead the investigation. The appointment was criticised by the ILG who considered that Babu was not qualified to head the inquiry and additionally had worked for an organisation found (by the Macpherson report into the murder of Stephen Lawrence) to be "institutionally racist". On 4 April the ILG announced they would not participate in the investigation. Babu's report was published on 11 April: he found no evidence of institutional racism in Harrow Council.

On 24 October a further Extraordinary Meeting of the Council took place following a requisition signed by five members. The only agenda item was "The Constitution". During the course of the meeting ILG councillors deplored the suspension of 18 clauses of the Council's Constitution at the Extraordinary Meeting of 16 September and called for a judicial review of the legality or otherwise of the meeting. In a speech Conservative councillor Paul Osborn said that the decision to suspend portions of the constitution was a regular practice during debates on the budget and therefore was not unprecedented. Liberal Democrat member Cllr. Chris Noyce received cross-party condemnation for likening the suspension of clauses of the Constitution to "Nazi Germany burning books."

In early November there was speculation about the relationship between Cllr. David Gawn and the Independent Labour Group, following the publication on the internet of a photograph showing him attending the ILG's manifesto conference on 7 September. The ILG accused the internet site's owner of "distasteful smear journalism" and added that Gawn had "not applied to join Independent Labour. Independent Labour will very carefully consider his application should he apply in [the] future." Gawn did not join the ILG and contested the May 2014 election as an Independent.

On 7 November the Harrow on the Hill ward by-election took place. The ILG's candidate (standing as 'Harrow First') was Dr. Gajan Idaikkadar, son of Cllr. Thaya Idaikkadar. In a field of six candidates he came fourth, securing 173 votes (6.8% of the poll). During the course of polling there were allegations of intimidation of voters at one of the Polling Stations. The intervention of the Police was required.

On 8 November a rumour was posted on the internet by a supporter of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) that the ILG had approached TUSC, presumably with a view to reaching an arrangement between the two bodies. (TUSC is a socialist electoral alliance negotiated between groups who had taken part in the 'No2EU' coalition that had fought the June 2009 European Parliament elections. Prominent participating groups included the Socialist Party, the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) and Solidarity.) Nothing further was heard of a possible link between the two groups until February 2014 when the Mayor, Cllr. Nana Asante, speaking in a personal capacity, addressed the TUSC Local Elections Conference that was held in London on 1 February. Further, at the February 2014 meeting of the TUSC steering committee, Clive Heemskerk (TUSC Nominating Officer) reported that he had met with two of the Harrow ILG councillors. Arising from this it was agreed that, before TUSC approved applications to be a candidate in Harrow in the May elections, they would discuss with the ILG what their intentions were in the ward. Heemskerk added that TUSC would "look to continue the dialogue with [the] ILG after May." Upon close of nominations for the May 2014 election it was confirmed that no TUSC candidates had been nominated in the Borough.

Harrow Council held its Budget and Council Tax setting meeting on 27 February 2014. Budgets presented by the Conservative, Labour and Independent Labour groups all failed to command a majority. After protracted negotiations the ILG supported an amended version of the Conservative's budget that included the reinstatement of the 'Under One Sky' community festival.

The 2014 Borough Election

The ILG fielded a total of 47 candidates at the 2014 election. All eight ILG councillors sought re-election, although not necessarily in the wards they represented prior to the election. Apart from the sitting councillors most ILG candidates were seeking election for the first time. The two exceptions were Shivakuru Selvathurai (Harrow on the Hill ward) who had contested Roxbourne ward for the Conservatives in 2010 and Trevor James (Queensbury ward and husband of Krishna James) who had been a Labour Party candidate in Stanmore Park ward, also in 2010.

All the ILG's candidates at the election were unsuccessful. The Group's highest votes were recorded by former councillors Thaya Idaikkadar (in Roxeth ward, 791 votes) and Mano Dharmarajah (in Roxbourne ward, 778 votes).

Events After May 2014

In December 2014 an announcement was made that Nana Asante was to be a candidate for TUSC at the 2015 General Election in the Harrow East constituency. Her nomination paper was lodged in April 2015; she had been proposed by her ex-ILG councillor colleague, Krishna James. The paper was also signed by two 2014 ILG candidates: Trevor James and Savitri Panwar. Nana Asante appointed as her election agent Deborah Revill, the wife of Terry Revill (who contested Edgware ward with Ms. Asante as an ILG candidate).

Meanwhile, in the Harrow West constituency, former ILG councillor Mano Dharmarajah was one of the signatories of Liberal Democrat Chris Noyce's nomination paper.

Four weeks after the election of Jeremy Corbyn as leader of the national Labour Party in September 2015, a left-wing grassroots organisation — 'Momentum' — was founded by Jon Lansman. The purpose of Momentum was to be supportive of Corbyn and the Labour Party. Nana Asante joined the new organisation and became chair of a grouping called 'Africans for Momentum' (AFM). (In January 2017 Momentum introduced a new constitution requiring new members to also be members of the Labour Party and giving existing members until July to join.)

Only one of the ILG's 47 candidates who stood in May 2014 sought election at the May 2018 Borough Election. A candidate in Queensbury ward in 2014, Sanjay Karia, sought election as a Liberal Democrat in Harrow Weald ward in 2018. In October 2021 Karia contested a by-election in Pinner South ward and went on to contest the same ward at the 2022 Borough Election, on each occasion as a Liberal Democrat.

In May 2021 Thaya Idaikkadar, the former Leader of the ILG, joined the Conservative Party. At the May 2022 Borough Election, he was nominated as a candidate in the Rayners Lane ward and was elected to the Council after securing 977 votes. Two weeks after the election, he was appointed as a non-executive member of the new Conservative administration's Cabinet.

[*] Andrew Whyte (Guidance and Registration Adviser), The Electoral Commission: Letter to C.J. Gray, 16 October 2013.