



BROMLEY CIVIC CENTRE, STOCKWELL CLOSE, BROMLEY BRI 3UH

TELEPHONE: 020 8464 3333

CONTACT: Graham Walton  
[graham.walton@bromley.gov.uk](mailto:graham.walton@bromley.gov.uk)

DIRECT LINE: 020 8461 7743

FAX: 020 8290 0608

DATE: 23 December 2022

## COUNCIL

**Monday 12 December 2022**

### **4 QUESTIONS AND REPLIES (Pages 3 - 28)**

The questions submitted and the replies provided are summarised in the attached appendices –

- (a) Questions from members of the public for oral reply.
- (b) Questions from members of the public for written reply.
- (c) Questions from members of the Council for oral reply.
- (d) Questions from members of the Council for written reply.

***Copies of the documents referred to above can be obtained from***  
***<http://cds.bromley.gov.uk/>***

This page is left intentionally blank

## Appendix A

### Council

12 December 2022

#### **Questions from Members of the Public for Oral Reply**

(Note: Two questions were withdrawn)

#### **1. From Ju Owens to the Portfolio Holder for Resources, Commissioning and Contract Management**

With the World Cup shining a spotlight on the human rights abuses and the criminalisation and abuse of LGBT+ people in Qatar, will Bromley Council reconsider investing Bromley tax payers money with Qatar's National Bank?

#### **Reply:**

The Council currently has £15m invested with Qatar National Bank, with £5m due to mature in June 2023 and a further £10m maturing in December 2023. The Council's investment decisions are informed by its Treasury Management Strategy which is updated annually in line with guidance from our professional Treasury Management Advisors. The Strategy sets out appropriate counter-parties on the basis of various risk parameters, including minimum credit ratings and limits. These parameters determined that Qatar National Bank was an appropriate counter-party for the Council to invest funds with at the time that investments were made, and that a favourable rate of return was available.

#### **Supplementary Question:**

From what you have responded, that Bromley's decisions on where to invest council tax payer's money is decided purely on financial strategy and on the basis of return, where is the line drawn? If the Bank of China offered the Council a decent rate of return would tax-payer's money be invested there despite the well-documented human rights abuses of the Uyghur Moslems?

#### **Reply:**

Again, the Council will make any investment after considering first whether it is compatible with the Treasury Management Strategy and the criteria set out therein.

#### **Additional Supplementary Question from Cllr Simon Jeal:**

Does the Treasury Management Strategy currently include any language around human rights or other ESG matters.

#### **Reply:**

I do not believe it does, but I also do not recall any Labour members proposing that such language be added.

This page is left intentionally blank

**Council**

**12 December 2022**

**Questions from Members of the Public for Written Reply**

**1. From Dermot Mckibbin to the Portfolio Holder for Renewal, Recreation and Housing**

How many times and by how much has the budget for temporary accommodation for homeless households been exceeded in the last 4 years and which committee has authorized the extra spending? What public scrutiny at committee has taken place of this budget and if not why?

**Reply:**

The budget has been exceeded, in order to meet our statutory duties in respect of homelessness, in 3 out of the last 4 years as detailed below:

2018/19 - £46k overspend

2019/20 - £271k overspend

2020/21 - £234k overspend

2021/22 - £22k underspend

The draft budget is scrutinised by the Renewal Recreation and Housing PDS Committee in January of each year prior to agreement by the Executive and Full Council, and during the year there are quarterly budget monitoring reports to the Renewal Recreation and Housing PDS Committee and the Executive.

Questions received from members of the public and their answers are included within the published minutes of individual committee meetings. However these are not available in a reportable format.

**2. From Dermot Mckibbin to the Portfolio Holder for Renewal, Recreation and Housing**

What is the budget forecast for temporary accommodation for the next four years and what the demand for homeless accommodation for the same period? What representation has the Council made to central government on this issue?

**Reply:**

The net budget forecast for TA would is:

2022/23 - £3,825k

2023/24 - £3,280k

2024/25 - £3,799k

2025/26 - £4,271k

2026/27 – not yet available

Please note that these budgets reflect an expected mitigation of TA growth from new housing supply schemes including Meadowship Homes acquisition scheme and Affordable Housing Development schemes.

The Council has raised the pressures regarding homelessness and temporary accommodation regularly with central government through a variety of channels including regular liaison meetings held with the GLA and DLUHC, direct visits and discussions with representatives and pan- London groups for housing and finance. The Council has also made representation as part of pan-London representations to central government through London Councils.

**3. From Ric Piper to the Portfolio Holder for Transport, Highways and Road Safety**

Would the Portfolio Holder consider free parking on Weekdays for those who satisfy *all* the conditions of:

- Resident in London Borough of Bromley
- Elderly
  - 70 & over - based on no longer eligible to be a Magistrate; or
  - 75 & over - based on no longer eligible to be a Juror
- Driving Licence

Valid for one car registration number.

**Reply:**

No.

Management of scarce road space requires charges in busy locations.

**4. From Helen Alsworth to the Portfolio Holder for Transport, Highways and Road Safety**

I would like the Council to consider taking action to calm and reduce traffic in Foxcroft Road now that Westgate Bridge is remaining one way access. Residents in Foxgrove Road cannot help but be concerned about the volume and speed of traffic in what was once a fairly quiet road. At school arrival and pick up times parking in the road and adjacent streets exacerbates the situation, with road rage incidents and worse. Pedestrians and cyclists are also at risk. I hope the Council will act in the interests of safety rather than prioritizing the convenience of motorists.

**Reply:**

If you would please contact Officers in the Traffic team ([traffic@bromley.gov.uk](mailto:traffic@bromley.gov.uk)) with any specific suggestions you might have, they will be very happy to look into the matter for us.

**5. From Susan Sulis to the Portfolio Holder for Transport, Highways and Road Safety**

*Environment and Community Services Portfolio 2022/23 Priority 4(61): Implement a Flood Risk and Resilience Plan*

The Assistant Director Highways has a wide remit, and multiple responsibilities. (a) How many professional staff are employed in the Flood Team to fulfil the Council's statutory duties regarding Flood Management? (b) What are their job titles, qualifications and responsibilities? (c) In view of the increasing threats of Climate Change, is this enough?

**Reply:**

The Council does not have a dedicated Flood Team, functions relating to flooding are shared between officers in the Highways and Neighbourhood Management teams.

**6. From Susan Sulis to the Portfolio Holder for Transport, Highways and Road Safety**

How have the Flood Team: (a) "Increased Flood Risk awareness"? (b) "Developed Resilience"? (c) "Implemented the Flood Plan"? (d) Which "other flood risk areas in the Borough have they identified"? (e) What is the definition of "serious flooding"? (f) In Seymour Drive, how many properties were flooded internally? (g) What improvements were implemented?

**Reply:**

The Council does not have a dedicated Flood Team

- (a) No direct action has been taken by the Council to increase flood risk awareness, a task undertaken by Thames Water and the Environment Agency
- (b) No direct action has been taken to develop flood resistance
- (c) Bromley have implemented their Flood Risk Management Plan
- (d) All flood risks areas are included in the Flood Risk Management Plan
- (e) From the local flood risk management strategy Bromley will adopt the South East London Boroughs Partnership common standard to trigger a formal flood investigation. The trigger levels are set as one or more of the following;
  - (i) 5 properties (residential or commercial) internally flooding in any one event
  - (ii) 1 or more properties flooded internally more than 3 times in a 5 year period
  - (iii) 5 gardens or more flooded with risk of internal property flooding which was only prevented by active intervention (e.g. pumps or other measures).
  - (iv) Any property flooded within a Critical Drainage Area (CDA), recognised catchment or recognised flow path
- (f) No reports were received of internal flooding
- (g) Working with local landowners the Council arranged for the Ordinary Water Course to be improved

**Council**

**12 December 2022**

**Questions from Members of the Council for Oral Reply**

**1. From Cllr Mark Smith to the Portfolio Holder for Resources, Commissioning and Contract Management**

Could he please outline the checks that are made to ensure people virtually attending Part 2 discussions at committee meetings are entitled to?

**Reply:**

With hybrid meetings the numbers of people invited to join online are generally small, and they can easily be monitored by officers.

The main check is that the clerk for the meeting will monitor who is in the meeting, and when a meeting moves into part 2 they can request the chairman to pause until anyone not entitled to remain leaves.

If a member or officer has a conflict of interest it is their responsibility to declare that interest and remove themselves from the meeting at the appropriate point. It is also the responsibility of members and officers who join online to ensure that they are in a suitable location where part 2 proceedings cannot be overheard or seen by third parties.

**Supplementary Question:**

The Portfolio Holder and I were both at the ERC Scrutiny Committee on the 23rd of November when there were various issues regarding people attending the meeting remotely, particularly when the meeting went into Part 2. Given the issues that came up at that meeting and the legal issues that arose and the legal problems we had, is this not something that perhaps should be reviewed, maybe by the Constitution Working Party?

**Reply:**

It is not for me to determine the agenda of the Constitution Working Group, but I am sure it is something that they would consider. What I would say is that if you have more specific concerns then you can always raise them with the Monitoring Officer.

**2. From Cllr Tony McPartlan to the Portfolio Holder for Resources, Commissioning and Contract Management**

An eye-watering £164.4m is required to refurbish our operational property portfolio to a minimum standard. Whilst I appreciate there has been external cost factors at play, could we have avoided getting into this situation if we had undertaken smaller but more regular maintenance work across the portfolio in the past?

**Reply:**

Much of the portfolio is over 40 years old and whilst smaller and regular works would have in part alleviated the position, we now find ourselves in the natural cycle in buildings which in any case would have required major works at significant expense to maintain their functionality. It is also worth pointing out that there have been numerous legislative changes to both building regulations and other areas, such as environmental requirements and access arrangements, which mean that the cost to bring the portfolio up to standard is prohibitive, whereas refurbishment and relocation provides the opportunity to address these issues at a lower cost to the London Borough of Bromley and its residents.

**Supplementary Question:**

I understand this is quite a complex issue, but there does seem to be a bit of a pattern of neglect that has possibly led to this. I think it is also important to note that this is our operational property and not our investment property portfolio, so could I therefore get your commitment today that decisions around property disposals will not just be made on financial grounds but also look at the social value properties provide?

**Reply:**

Whilst we do have a duty to consider all aspects of the buildings that we have in our care and those we choose to dispose of, we do have statutory obligations to obtain best value for our residents when any disposals do take place. That is a statutory requirement.

**Additional Supplementary Question from Cllr Simon Jeal:**

Could the Portfolio Holder comment on whether the Council makes repairs when issues are reported in properties that arise, and how quickly the Council endeavours to make those repairs?

**Reply:**

I believe there is a process of preventative and reactive maintenance but I cannot give a more detailed answer than that at present.

**3. From Cllr Josh King to the Portfolio Holder for Resources, Commissioning and Contract Management**

Beckenham Public Halls are an important and much loved community asset, used by a large number of groups. What is the Council doing to ensure it remains available to the public?

**Reply:**

The Executive decision to market the Halls is on the basis that it will be made clear in the marketing particulars that the Council would welcome offers from those organisations who would ensure public access is maintained, however once marketed the Council will also receive other offers for the asset. The outcome of the marketing exercise will then be reported to the Executive.

**Supplementary Question:**

Does the Portfolio Holder agree that the unsuccessful attempt to lease the building and require the lease-holder to repair the building was not the right approach and the Council should have invested before maintenance costs increased greatly when there would have been the opportunity to apply for external funding, for example, lottery funding, as suggested by many residents?

**Reply:**

No, I do not. I support the decision taken at Executive with respect to this building.

**Additional Supplementary Question from Cllr Chloe-Jane Ross**

Are the respective Portfolio Holders aware of the demand for the halls by the community? I have personally been contacted by a dance school, an SEN education provider and a church all looking for regular space in the halls. I spoke to Mytime just this Friday and they told me they are receiving enquiries for the site and are continuing to operate the site as a community asset. I understand that they have a twelve month contract and they will be working for the next twelve months to build up the halls. I hope the Council won't be still selling it off if the halls are doing well?

**Reply:**

The Executive has agreed its approach; however, I will emphasise that we are open to all bidders of all different natures.

**Additional supplementary question from Cllr Michael Tickner:**

Is the Portfolio Holder aware that another Council property that was disposed of a few years ago at 28 Beckenham Road, the former Adult Education Centre and, for a while, "The Studio," was disposed of requiring full repairs to the listed building, and a buyer was found who successfully renovated the building?

**Reply:**

I was not aware, and I appreciate your perspective, and I hope that we will be similarly successful.

**Additional supplementary question from Cllr Simon Jeal:**

Is Beckenham Public Halls an Asset of Community Value and how many other Assets of Community Value are within those the Council is currently looking at disposing of?

**Reply:**

I will give you a written response.

**4. From Cllr Kevin Kennedy-Brooks to the Portfolio Holder for Adult Care and Health (reply given by the Leader of the Council)**

Bromley Healthcare was last year inspected by the CQC and rated as requiring improvement. An action plan was subsequently put in place to address this. Will the Portfolio Holder please comment on how she feels the progress is going and how confident should residents currently feel in the Care they are receiving?

**Reply:**

I am pleased to advise that Bromley Healthcare is making good progress. The regular ICB and Council assurance meeting that Bromley Healthcare reports to shows that their Action Plan is on track with many of the targets now achieved. CQC Inspectors share this view and have reduced their engagement with Bromley Healthcare. Residents should also feel assured that the faults found by the CQC are far more concerned with business and assurance systems, such as record-keeping, audit and procedures for reporting death rather than the quality of their service to patients.

**Supplementary Question:**

I would like to be re-assured myself, however, recently my Dad came out of hospital and his package of care was due to have District Nurses give him injections of the medication he had. They failed to do so two days in a row and these injections were to prevent clots which could be life-threatening. He also requested a special hospital cushion which he needed for his condition – this did not arrive. Luckily I have a sister who is an ex-GP who was able, legally, to have these. However, Bromley Healthcare and District Nurses were not aware of this, so they did not do it because she was there. Also, when we managed to track them down, they had missed that his referral was urgent. We were told problems were due to staff and the communication was not what it should be. Bromley Healthcare fills its update with positive quotes but this is from extremely minimal feedback of about 5-7%. So, that positive-ness that comes back that we read and ingest, and feel that everything is going fine, when you have a personal experience like this it really feels different. I want to know, what action will the Portfolio Holder or the Leader take to ensure that Bromley Healthcare actually is improving at the rate it should be so that other residents who may not have the support system that my Dad did, would be able to help them and not face threats to their lives?

**Reply:**

May I first hope that Cllr Kennedy-Brooks' father makes a full recovery, and I am sorry to hear about that. Clearly, I cannot comment on individual cases even if I knew them. All I would say is that the regular reports between the Council, the CQC and the ICB are making positive sounds around the improvement in Bromley Healthcare. What I would respectfully suggest is that the Council's oversight and view of this process is controlled by the Health Scrutiny Sub-Committee and I think that is probably where, if you wish to share the details, will be a good place to pick it up.

Speaking more widely, we have all had examples of where loved ones have gone into hospital, perhaps using a subsidiary, such as Bromley Healthcare, where we have perhaps left feeling unsure about the care, but if there is anything to be done you should pursue it because that is the only way we will get improvements.

**5. From Cllr Ruth McGregor to the Portfolio Holder for Resources, Commissioning and Contract Management**

Small businesses including nurseries and pre-schools are struggling due to the covid pandemic and the cost of living crisis, with some being forced to close. In light of this do you consider it is fair or reasonable to impose backdated rent increases on

small business owners such as pre-schools who are providing services to local residents, and who will find it hard to pay an increase backdated to 2019?

**Reply:**

The Council leases numerous properties to small businesses, the revenue from such properties supports the delivery of Council services across the Borough. The tenants in such properties are therefore in occupation on commercial leases, which typically include provision that rents are reviewed at regular intervals to ensure the passing rent is in keeping with the open market as the Council has a fiduciary and statutory duty to ensure best value in relation to such matters. Rent reviews regrettably sometimes do take years to conclude but it is standard practice that once rent is agreed the uplift is backdated to the review/renewal date as per the terms of the Lease Agreement. This is standard commercial practice.

**Supplementary Question:**

I understand it is the commercial rent, but was any support offered to small business or charities renting property from the Council during the lockdown – did they get any concessions on rent?

**Reply:**

I do not believe there is a council-specific scheme but the Council did administer a huge volume of grants during Covid. In fact, it amounted to more than double the Council's annual spending at one stage and small businesses were included in that.

**Additional Supplementary Question from Cllr Simon Jeal:**

A number of Council tenants have reported to me that the Council has been seeking increases of twenty percent on their rent and also that they take on maintenance of the properties themselves. Could you explain how the Council feels this is justified particularly in the current climate when many tenants are already seeing huge increases in energy bills?

**Reply:**

I cannot comment on any individual negotiation as that would be against the interests of the Council and its residents. However, I would be grateful if you could share written correspondence of these examples and I will take it up with our Property Department.

**Additional Supplementary Question from Cllr Kevin Kennedy-Brooks:**

There is a community centre in my ward where I know the rent review is coming up, so I know it has not been set yet. I know there has not been any correspondence between the Council and the Centre, but I know it will be in the next few months. Is it worth the Centre at this point getting in touch with yourself to try to see if they can get a good deal on the rent because it carries out many services voluntarily which otherwise this Council would have to carry out itself, so it would make financial sense in the long term?

**Reply:**

I urge you in this case to recommend that they contact Mike Watkins and Amy Milton in the Property Department for consideration.

**6. From Cllr Graeme Casey to the Portfolio Holder for Resources, Commissioning and Contract Management (as Cllr Casey was not present a written reply was provided.)**

Would the Portfolio Holder agree that the Council can do no better with its money than to invest in the people and infrastructure of Bromley?

**Reply:**

I agree. The Council, through its Capital Programme invests millions of pounds annually to fund new and improved infrastructure in Borough, including for example, Housing, Libraries, Leisure Centres, Roads, Parks, Schools and Day Centres. Capital Expenditure during 2021/22 amounted to £19.3. The Capital Strategy for 2023/24 to 2026/27 which will set out the Council's medium-term plans will be presented to Executive in January 2023.

**7. From Cllr Julie Ireland to the Portfolio Holder for Adult Care and Health (reply given by the Leader of the Council)**

Does the Portfolio Holder agree that in the current extraordinary cost of living crisis we are fortunate in Bromley to have wonderful volunteer and community groups who we can call on, and that we should give them all our full support?

**Reply:**

I fully agree that Bromley is exceptionally fortunate to have an such an outstanding Voluntary and Community Group network locally, and we have repeatedly said so over many years.

As well, that the Council should continue to support that network as generously as it can wherever possible.

**Supplementary Question:**

I just want to know how the decision to sell off Community House shows that support for the voluntary sector. Fourteen charities and voluntary groups use the premises including Bromley Well, Age UK, Citizens Advice, Deaf Plus and others. It played a vital role during the pandemic; it continues to do so during this unprecedented cost of living crisis. How does the Leader's refusal to meet with organisations that form part of the Trust that occupies Community House match with his appreciation of the voluntary sector? I gather that he has told the voluntary groups that they move into the new HQ when their lease runs out, which is hardly what Community House represents – it is an open door for people of need and people willing to volunteer across the community.

**Reply:**

First of all, I did not refuse to meet organisations, I refused to meet an organisation in the singular. The reason for that is that they are not the landlord that we hold the contract with to discuss the terms and conditions. I also refused because certain people, one of them in this chamber, were spreading false scare-stories that the Council were going to do the dirty on the charities and leave them at the behest of a potential new owner and put them out on the street. I made the point at the Executive

last week when Cllr Jeal very kindly raised it that nothing could be further from the truth and people who spread stories like that cause a lot of upset, Cllr Ireland. I would encourage you to be more judicious in future.

Regarding the future of the charities and the organisations currently at Community House, they have a two and a half year protected lease at the same terms and conditions and rents, after that, or even before if they are released from their lease, they are very welcome to set up their new home either at the Civic Centre, if we're still here, if the deal elsewhere fails, or at Direct Line which, for those of you who have not seen it is a fantastically spacious place where any of the organisations will be able to do effectively much more, much more easily than they are doing at Community House at the moment, which is not the most easily accessible building in Bromley. I cannot say too much as I would be getting too close to the wind in terms of conversations with the contract holders, with the lessees, but the Chief Executive and I did meet with the current leaseholders of Community House during the summer when we were discussing their rent and their future requirements. We know there is a potential need for change there in terms of virtual working. All work patterns are changing and nothing lasts forever. I am sure that Community House has been a loved home for those that have used it. The same is true for us at the Civic Centre, especially for the older amongst us, but time and necessity moves on. It is part of a huge effort to keep this Council financially stable in four or five years' time. Even Bromley, in four or five years' time on current projections, runs out of money. We go bankrupt as others already have unless we make some difficult decisions, and this is one of them, because nobody wants to close down Community House, who would, but it is the right thing to do for the long term future of this borough and it is the right thing to do for the organisations that are in it, even if some of them, and I know some are very keen on the proposals because they have written to me to tell me now that they fully understand what is proposed. I know that one or two do not, and I understand that as well. This is what transformation is all about. This is what dealing with local government in 2022 is all about. This is what avoiding bankruptcy is all about – that is why I am absolutely firmly in support of that scheme, sorry as I am to upset a few people along the way.

**Additional Supplementary Question from Cllr Mark Smith:**

Her mentioned a two and a half year protected lease – can you confirm when that protection started from?

**Reply:**

I believe it starts from when notice is given, and I believe that will be scheduled from October 2025 on current projections, and if I'm out on that date then I apologise, but it is two and a half years from when the notice is given so that would be about October 2025.

**Additional Supplementary Question from Cllr Simon Jeal:**

Can I ask how much income the Council receives from rent from Community Houses a year?

**Reply:**

I will send a written response in the morning.

## **8. From Cllr Alisa Igoe to the Leader of the Council**

Today, 28 November, Bexley, Lewisham and Southwark councils have a direct link on the front page of their website where residents are “one click” away from lists of advice on where they can access help with the cost of living crisis. Advice on food, energy debts, childcare, warm spaces, etc. Would the Leader agree with me Bromley should also have services in our borough highlighted clearly on our website front page?

### **Reply:**

I personally believe that we already do, the button in question being ‘Advice and benefits’ so personally I think the home-page is fine as it is. I respectfully understand that Cllr Igoe disagrees and I understand that she has been in contact with Mr Rogers on the subject. My view on this is that I am easy either way – I do not profess to be the world’s authority on anything IT. Web-pages, home-pages, to some extent I do not mind, but I do believe ultimately that what we are doing at the moment is fully conversant with good practice and represents the interests of our borough and that they can find what they are looking for very easily. I am also mindful that only 20% of people who access the Council’s website look at the home-page – I am told that 80% go directly to what they are looking for so would potentially skirt around the home-page anyway.

As I say, I am happy with the home-page, happy with what it offers, but ultimately if Members decide they want to do other things with it then have a discussion with the relevant Committee.

### **Supplementary Question:**

It is quite cheerful news, because since we had our discussions on email with Mr Rogers there is a simpler click-through to the warm places, which is fantastic, and also the link to Bromley Well was not working and it is now working. I would say that other boroughs, such as Lewisham, Southwark and Bexley have, on their front-page, a cost of living button and I am wondering why would we not put it on the front-page to make it so much easier for our residents?

### **Reply:**

I follow the Advice from the PR professionals, that is why we employ them. They have explained on email to all of us, or certainly some of us, that they believe it works and why they believe it works, but if there is a balance of views among Members that they would like to see changes on it I am sure that can be accommodated.

### **Additional Supplementary Question from Cllr Colin Hitchins:**

Would it be possible to have the analytics distributed around that area to make sure that the public are getting easy access to what they need?

### **Reply:**

If analytics can be analysed and spread to Members that is fine by me as well.

**9. From Cllr Simon Jeal to the Portfolio Holder for Transport, Highways and Road Safety**

Following two incidents of cars hitting the same building in a two-year period, could you please provide an update on what action has been taken by council officers to address road safety issues at the junction of Maple Road and Penge High Street?

**Reply:**

An initial investigation of this location by Officers from the Traffic Team took place earlier in 2022. The possible improvements mentioned in their assessment will be further developed once a speed survey has been undertaken in the new year.

**Supplementary Question:**

I requested that a speed survey be conducted on the junction on 23<sup>rd</sup> January this year – it is almost an entire year since I made the request. Could I ask why no speed survey has been conducted yet.

**Reply:**

I think the problem has been that we have not had the money. Now we have the LIP funding we are in a position to advance some of the schemes.

**Additional Supplementary Question from Cllr Kathy Bance:**

The building that was hit by these two vehicles was a listed building and the insurers are refusing to insure the building any further until some mitigation against vehicles ploughing into the building is carried out, so that needs to be soon as the building will not be insured.

**Reply:**

Councillor Bance raised this with me on the ward visit and I am very keen to progress matters quickly.

**10. From Cllr Jeremy Adams to the Portfolio Holder for Resources, Commissioning and Contract Management.**

The timing of the operational property review combined with a crippling refurbishment bill is leaving the Council preparing to sell key assets at a time of falling asset prices. How will the Council avoid a fire sale - and could holding these assets be more beneficial in the long term?

**Reply:**

A number of the assets identified for disposal are not subject to short-term market influences and whilst there is a degree of national economic uncertainty, land values have not currently been negatively impacted due to the combination of a lack of housing supply and market views as to stabilisation of interest rates and build costs. The current disposal strategy is to market the properties in question and then report the outcome of that exercise to the Executive.

**Supplementary Question:**

I wanted to follow up on your point about the characteristics which mean that they are not subject to market fluctuations. I wonder if you can expand on that point as to what characteristics they are.

**Reply:**

I think we need to distinguish first of all between house prices and land prices, rather than conflate them, which some will want to do. Just to emphasise that the Executive has mandated to market these properties – clearly we are not going to dispose of any asset at less than what we feel to be its fair value, and we would not be able to under our statutory obligations in any case.

*(At this point, the Mayor informed members that the 30 minutes allowed for questions had expired, but it was agreed that the remaining questions should be taken)*

**11. From Cllr Chris Price to the Portfolio Holder for Transport, Highways and Road Safety**

What action is Bromley taking to reduce pollution from motor vehicles?

**Reply:**

The Council has a programme to promote active travel and modal shift towards public transport, where that is suitable for residents. This programme includes the introduction of new walking and cycling facilities, improvements to bus routes and bus stops, and the promotion of walking to school through the development of good quality School Travel Plans.

Bromley is also running an anti-idling campaign outside schools and is rolling out a residential EV charging trial.

**Supplementary Question:**

It will be great if Bromley can push that a little bit further and ensure that active travel becomes something that is constantly talked about in the borough and into all policies that we are writing.

**Reply:**

I am sure we would all like to see as many people walking when it is an area they can walk in rather than using cars, but also I should point out that we have a very good public transport system in Bromley and we encourage people to use that as well.

**Additional Supplementary Question from Cllr Colin Hitchins:**

Will the Portfolio Holder also agree that we should be encouraging the transport we have got provided not to be cut, as services have been challenged on our network rail at the moment, and some of our bus routes, I noticed during the snow, they weren't even getting half-way to their destination before being turned around. I am talking about a certain area to the south of the borough.

**Reply:**

They are matters for TfL and I suggest that he talks to Peter Fortune at the GLA.

**Additional Supplementary Question from Cllr Chloe-Jane Ross:**

In line with what you said about the Council promoting active travel, do you think that it was right that at the Development Control Committee it was agreed to remove the term active travel from the Supplementary Planning Guidance?

**Reply:**

I gather it is back in.

**12. From Cllr Alisa Igoe to the Portfolio Holder for Transport, Highways & Road Safety:**

I believe you have disbanded Bromley's Road Safety Panel, consisting of police, Council traffic officers, other professionals and residents. You have said the Panel, which highlighted safety issues across the borough, will be replaced by reports to Fix-My-Street and your one-off visits to wards. Could you please tell me why you have disbanded it and why ward councillors were not informed?

**Reply:**

The Panel last met in 2019 and the Police have not attended for many years, ward councillors were never members of these panels. The cost of running the Panel in officer time and resources cannot be sustained when the Council faces a growing budget deficit. Your reported quote is inaccurate. What I said was that in addition to Fix My Street and the knowledge of our professional staff, I have 57 colleagues to notify me of any road safety problems in their wards.

**Supplementary Question:**

At Environment we saw on the Environment Portfolio Performance Monitoring Report that there were 106 KSIs in 2019/20. The target was 92, so it seems a little premature to get rid of the Road Safety Panel. It was quite a large Panel – I appreciate that ward councillors were not on it, but if you are relying on us as ward councillors to report to you on road safety I have no professional qualifications in road safety and I find that quite worrying that it is left to me to decide what is safe in Plaistow. Can I ask you, is it really a good idea to disband this when, for 21/22 we have KSIs currently showing at 109?

**Reply:**

First of all, you cannot take one year's KSIs in isolation. It happens to have a bulge this year but it has been reducing over the years. Secondly, the Committee had not met for three years and nobody had noticed. The reality is that the Committee was made up of resident's associations who are not experts any more than Cllr Igoe. I have great confidence in my 57 colleagues that if there is a problem in any part of their ward on road safety matters they will raise it with me.

**13. From Cllr Simon Jeal to the Portfolio Holder for Renewal, Recreation and Housing**

At the time of writing, the Council's pre-application advice scheme has been suspended for non-major enquiries due to 'high caseloads and short-term resourcing problems'. How many enquiries for the service have been rejected, and how much do you estimate the Council has lost in fees, as a result of the suspension?

**Reply:**

We do not have a record of how many enquiries were rejected during the period of suspension. However, as a comparator last year the Council completed 244 pre-applications which generated an income of £146,128. I do have the figures for the last three years but in the interests of time I will not read them out.

FY2018/19 – 284 - £109,583

FY2019/20 – 294 - £116,968

FY2020/21 – 247 - £131,208

This year, up to 30<sup>th</sup> November 2022, 28 pre-applications have been completed, and a further 36 are in progress. Income for the year to date is £75,750.

Please note that major pre-application advice was never suspended, and this makes up a large proportion of the income. With full re-instatement of the service for non-majors this week, it is likely that the full year 2022/23 income will be just over £110,000, which means a projected drop in income of between zero and £35,000 compared to last year.

**Supplementary Question:**

It is great to hear that the service is being re-instated. Do you agree with me that, as Cllr Smith and others have said, in the current climate where the Council is facing huge cost pressures that we should do everything possible to avoid stopping income generating services and what action will be taken to ensure that we do not have to suspend this service again?

**Reply:**

The issue was a build-up of applications during the Covid period. That backlog has now been ring-fenced and is being tackled separately. I can reassure you that all existing new applications coming in now are being dealt with within the target times and it is hoped that the full backlog will have been cleared by very early in the new year. This was a very extraordinary set of circumstances; we do not expect that to happen again and traditionally we have always been within determination timescales.

**Additional Supplementary Question from Cllr Alisa Igoe:**

You have said that some have been ring-fenced. I have got residents who have been waiting for word on their applications. Have they been told that theirs are ring-fenced because they seem to have no communication at all at the moment?

**Reply:**

Every one would have an identified person, a Planner who is looking at them, so they can always make contact if they want to know what the status is. If you have got a specific case by all means let me know and I will make sure that the right contacts are made.

**Council**

**12 December 2022**

**Questions from Members of the Council for Written Reply**

**1. From Cllr Alison Stammers to the Portfolio Holder for Transport, Highways and Road Safety**

Can you please advise:-

- a. What the Council's policy is on public consultations?
- b. What criteria are used to decide whether a matter should go out to public consultation?
- c. Why the proposal to remove Pay and Display machines across the Borough did not go out to public consultation?

**Reply:**

The Council does not have a policy on public consultations.

Consultation is appropriate where the Council is considering a scheme for a particular road or group of roads and there is a choice to be made. The start of the removal of all P&D machines was approved three years ago. It is a Borough-wide issue which is not suitable for consultation, as one of the objectives is to reduce overhead costs by not replacing, at a cost of £800,000, obsolete machines.

**2. From Cllr Alison Stammers to the Portfolio Holder for Transport, Highways and Road Safety**

Will you please:-

- a. provide a timetable - fully accessible to the public - detailing exactly when Pay and Display Machines are to be removed from each car park;
- b. advise how residents will be able to report any issues with using RinGo; will a facility be added to Fix My Street to report RinGo issues;
- c. advise what measures are going to be put in place to monitor the impact on residents and businesses of the removal of cash Pay and Display machines and how and when that will be reported back to Councillors.

**Reply:**

Information regarding the change to RingGo will be provided at every location where there are machines, but it will not be practical to give a timetable as this will vary from day to day according to the contractor's work programme.

Residents who have questions about the use of RingGo or who wish to report any issues can use the general parking enquiry form [General parking enquiry | Instructions – London Borough of Bromley](#) (not Fix My Street which is for reporting highway maintenance issues). We are investigating the practicality of an exclusive report form for RinGo.

The Council has access to the full range of reports that the cashless system provides, therefore officers will continue to monitor the usage and income of all parking locations, including how the payment sessions are being purchased (via a phone app or a phone call) and if there were any recorded outages or down time. Any enquires or formal complaints will be logged and investigated as well as analysed to establish if any trends are forming that requires Officers' attention. New performance measures will be reported to ECS PDS regarding the usage of cashless parking payments.

### **3. From Cllr Tony McPartlan to the Portfolio Holder for Renewal, Recreation and Housing**

There are currently over 1,500 Bromley households in temporary accommodation, a figure which is increasing by around 21 per month. I commend the work done to build and acquire properties to date, but how can we accelerate builds and acquisitions to bring this number down?

#### **Reply:**

As at the end of October 2022 there were 1577 households residing in temporary accommodation however 599 of these are residing in accommodation owned or leased by housing associations on our behalf offering a longer term suitable settled accommodation offer. The remaining 1058 were residing in accommodation secured on a nightly rate basis which whilst suitable accommodation can only be procured at a significant cost and on less settled terms. Despite the continued high level of housing need presenting, the work undertaken to increase supply has seen a steady reduction in numbers from 1626 at the start of the year. The workstreams to increase supply are already proceeding as quickly as possible with the beehive acquisition completed, phase one of Meadowship Homes due to complete by May 2022, phase 2 commencing this month. The Council has also now completed its first 3 self-delivery schemes, with 2 further schemes in development and one progressing to planning application stage – totalling 648 new affordable homes which equates to a saving of more than £3.7m per year. Appraisals are also underway on a number of additional sites which could secure up to a further 200 affordable homes. The Council also continues to actively seek additional schemes and work with housing association partners to facilitate new developments and regeneration of sites.

### **4. From Cllr Will Connolly to the Portfolio Holder for Transport, Highways and Road Safety**

Will the Portfolio Holder please update Members on the average speed of vehicles on Bromley's roads, after more incidents and damage from collisions such as in Beckenham Town?

#### **Reply:**

There is no measure of average speed across the Borough, but speed surveys are undertaken, where necessary, at individual locations. Cllr Connolly should approach Officers in the Traffic team to find out if information is available for specific locations.

**5. From Cllr Josh King to the Portfolio Holder for Resources, Commissioning and Contract Management**

Can the Portfolio Holder give a list of open posts across the Council broken down by department/job function and indicate the posts that have been open during the last six months?

**Reply:**

| <b>Section</b>                         | <b>No. of Vacancies</b> | <b>No. of Posts vacant 6 months</b> |
|--|-------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Adult Services                         | 34                      | 24                                  |
| Chief Executive's Office               | 2                       | 1                                   |
| Children's Services                    | 66                      | 46                                  |
| Corporate Services                     | 5                       | 3                                   |
| Environment & Public Protection        | 16                      | 11                                  |
| Finance                                | 5                       | 2                                   |
| Housing, Planning & Regeneration       | 17                      | 10                                  |
| HR, Customer Services & Public Affairs | 1                       | 0                                   |
| Public Health                          | 3                       | 2                                   |
| <b>Total</b>                           | <b>149</b>              | <b>99</b>                           |

**6. From Cllr Josh King to the Portfolio Holder for Transport, Highways and Road Safety**

Can the Portfolio Holder indicate how many PCNs have been appealed over the last year and what were the outcome of these appeals? How many of these were subsequently taken to the London Tribunal and what were the outcomes of these?

**Reply:**

Appeals Received between 01.04.21 and 31.03.22 for all PCNs (including CCTV):

Challenges (first stage appeal)  
Challenges received - 16,661  
Challenged refused – 7,832 (47%)  
Challenges accepted – 8,829 (53%)

Formal Representation (second stage appeal)  
Representations received - 5,414  
Representations refused – 2,308 (43%)  
Representations accepted – 3,106 (57%)

Cases sent to the adjudicator  
Number of cases sent – 240  
Number of cases refused – 200 (83%)  
Number of cases accepted – 40 (17%)

**7. From Cllr Chloe-Jane Ross to the Portfolio Holder for Resources, Commissioning and Contract Management**

Many people continue to experience problems with the usability of the new bromley.gov.uk website, this includes broken links, poor search engine optimisation, and information which is not intuitive to find. Does the Portfolio Holder agree that it must be a priority to improve the website further to ensure the people of Bromley can easily access information, and to that end what is being proposed?

**Reply:**

Bromley Council's website currently receives an average of over 600,000 visits each month. Between them, these visitors view around 2 million pages. There is very little negative feedback from users reporting problems using the website or reporting difficulties finding information. When feedback or suggestions for improvements are received, the web team take it very seriously and investigate the issue and endeavour to find a solution.

To limit the impact of broken links the web team use a tool called Siteimprove, which monitors all links on the website and identifies any issues. This enables the web team to immediately resolve any issues. We encourage anyone discovering a broken link to alert [info@bromley.gov.uk](mailto:info@bromley.gov.uk)

With the Bromley website offering information on such a diverse range of subjects, we try to offer a range of options to assist people easily finding what they want. These tools include an internal search, an A to Z of services, key homepage service buttons, a navigational hierarchy plus in-page promotions and links to related pages.

More than 53% of visitors arrive at the website from search engines. We improve external search engine results for users by reviewing content on our pages and adding information to the page metadata to include potential alternative search terms or synonyms that, might be used by users.

The new website now engages with Google's search engine in a different way, and we have plans to run a more focussed project, to further optimise the use of this. We also have some control over the internal site search, and do override the ranking of some results by utilising a promotions tool.

Finally, we run a rolling programme of reviewing content of every page on the website every six months engaging with the content owners in the various service departments. This gives an opportunity to improve and challenge each page twice a year.

#### **8. From Cllr Sam Webber to the Portfolio Holder for Resources, Commissioning and Contract Management**

Could the relevant Portfolio Holder and LBB officers inform me about two pieces of 'orphan land' or unadopted land in Beadon Road? LBB currently maintains two pieces of grassland on the corner of Beadon & Cameron Roads and at the other end of Beadon Road. Are these owned by the Council and would it consider selling the land to the local Residents Association?

#### **Reply:**

The land in question does not belong to the Council and is unregistered. It is, however, maintained by Highways. Consequently, as the Council does not own the land it cannot sell it.

#### **9. From Cllr Sam Webber to the Portfolio Holder for Resources, Commissioning and Contract Management**

Would the Portfolio Holder list all of Bromley Council's current investments in Qatar following media reports that the Council has over £20m invested in the country; more than any other London borough. Are there any plans to move these investments elsewhere, given this country's record on minority rights and migrant worker deaths highlighted by the ongoing FIFA World Cup?

<https://www.theguardian.com/business/2022/nov/12/uk-local-councils-deposit-taxpayer-cash-qatar-bank-lgbt-rights#:~:text=Councils%20that%20still%20had%20millions,as%20Qatar%2C%E2%80%9D%20said%20Tatchell>

#### **Reply:**

The Council has two fixed interest investments with Qatar National Bank as detailed below:

£5M @ 2.335% from 6/6/22 to 6/6/23

£10M @ 4.98% from 2/12/22 to 1/12/23

The Council plans to hold these investments to maturity.

## **10. From Cllr Simon Jeal to the Portfolio Holder for Renewal, Recreation and Housing**

Please provide a breakdown of the headcount and cost of staff employed within the Planning Service during each the last four 12 month periods, the number of planning applications, pre application service enquiries received and the income received by the Council for these applications.

### **Reply:**

Number of planning applications received (figures used for government returns) and income:

FY2018/19 – 2976 - £1,624,748

FY2019/20 – 2950 - £1,550,596

FY2020/21 – 2871 - £1,480,025

FY2021/22 – 3009 - £1,594,474

FY2022/23 (to 30/09/22) – 1345 - £627,911

Number of preapplication advice requests received:

FY2018/19 – 284 - £109,583

FY2019/20 – 294 - £116,968

FY2020/21 – 247 - £131,208

FY2021/22 – 244 - £146,128

FY2022/23 (up to 30/11/2022) – 28 completed / 36 pending - £75,750

The Planning Authority (Head of Planning, Development Management, Planning Policy & Strategy, Planning Enforcement and Planning Appeals) salary costs are as follows:

FY2018/19 - £2,567,735

FY2019/20 - £2,535,603

FY2020/21 - £2,661,942

FY2021/22 - £2,897,138

## **11. From Cllr Chris Price to the Portfolio Holder for Renewal Recreation and Housing**

Following the devastating case of Awaab Ishak, how many families in Bromley are currently living in overcrowded accommodation where there is significant mould or damp?

### **Reply:**

We do not have these figures available, not all households will approach the local authority for housing assistance and those with low levels of overcrowding are not currently included on the Housing Register.

We recognise the devastating impact that poor housing conditions can have on occupants, and we do all that we can to ensure that the accommodation we utilise is hazard free and that where problems are identified that they are swiftly dealt with.

The new stock that has been developed by the Council have been designed and built to a high standard. We're satisfied that these homes are hazard free and will be subject to inspections / cyclical maintenance in order to ensure that this remains the case. However, beyond the stock we own there are a significant number of properties that we utilise both as settled and temporary accommodation and we recognise that we have a responsibility to ensure that these homes meet the necessary standards and do not put our customers at risk.

We have service level agreements in place with all our providers which ensure that they take responsibility for the conditions within their accommodation and that we have the necessary safeguards in place to enforce the standards that are set.

Officers within Housing, in conjunction with colleagues in Environmental Services, often review our practices and procedures to ensure that they allow us to best identify, assess and respond to any cases of this nature moving forward.

The social housing regulator has also contacted all registered providers requiring analysis and reassurance of the work they are undertaking to ensure properties meet decent homes standards and are free of mould and damp. The Council has written to Housing associations requesting a copy of these responses for added local reassurance.

This page is left intentionally blank