

MEETING

4<sup>th</sup> JULY 2011

ORAL QUESTIONS BY MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

**1. From Councillor Ruth Bennett of the Leader of the Council**

To ask the Leader of the Council what progress has been made in the preparations for Her Majesty's Diamond Jubilee celebration celebrations in 2012?

**Reply:**

Councillor Carr replied that significant progress had been made with regard to Her Majesty's Diamond Jubilee celebrations in 2012. Meetings have been held with the representatives from the Royal Household and a small officer project team has been established to work up the details of a proposed royal visit to the borough in 2012 as well as to coordinate the broader Borough wide celebrations. It was envisaged that a report would be going to the Renewal and Recreation PDS/PH on the 11<sup>th</sup> October 2011 setting out in more detail the arrangements and details around the royal visit once final confirmation had been received from the Royal Household.

The 'Diamond Jubilee Celebration' tool kit was now complete and would be made available to groups and other organisations within the borough to aid their own event planning. Further advice would be made available via the Mayor of London's events team on various events and activities connected to the Diamond Jubilee. Information from the Mayors office would be added to the tool kit and advice circulated via the Council's website. Officers would work with local event organisers and the Mayor of London to make certain that events were coordinated where ever possible to ensure that they did not clash.

**Supplementary question:**

Councillor Ruth Bennett spoke of the importance of keeping everybody aware of what was being planned, particularly Ward Councillors and local organisations. The Town Twinning Association, for example, did not know anything was being planned. She hoped that over such a special 4 day weekend there would be lots of functions, street parties etc and a special event arranged in the Town Centre which could involve local groups and schools.

**Reply:**

The Leader explained that although events were being planned confirmation was still awaited on the royal visit but as soon as this was agreed then details

would be widely publicised. He agreed that officers would look at possible ways to mark the occasion as suggested including involving local organisations and schools. Councillor Carr said that with all the arrangements being made he looked forward to what he was sure would be a splendid occasion in the Borough.

## **2. From Councillor Nicholas Bennett JP of the Leader of the Council**

To ask the Leader of the Council what progress has been made in establishing:

1. Stand alone companies
2. Social enterprise to market discrete areas of council services?

### **Reply:**

Councillor Carr replied that he was pleased to respond by saying that there had been good progress in this area as a major part of our budget strategy would be to look at the option to commission more of our services. For this reason a training course had recently been run for interested groups to raise awareness of the options available to them and this programme would be repeated.

Having said that, Councillor Carr wanted to make it clear that we should be seeking to take this agenda forward, only in the knowledge that it was in the best interest of the tax payers of our Borough and would represent best value in any particular area, and not because it was the preferred model for those in a different place.

**Councillor Nicholas Bennett did not have a supplementary question.**

## **3. From Councillor Peter Fookes of the Portfolio Holder for the Environment**

How often are the drains supposed to be cleaned?

### **Reply:**

Councillor Colin Smith advised that the frequency with which drains were cleaned varied, dependent upon their location. Areas more prone to flooding formed part of a special cleaning beat involving a regime of cleaning 2 to 4 times per year, sometimes more, dependent upon the volume of silt accumulated within them.

All drains in the Borough were scheduled to be cleaned at least once a year.

### **Supplementary Question:**

Councillor Fookes countered that they were not cleaned once a year based on complaints he had received from local residents.

**Reply:**

The Portfolio Holder advised that if the Councillor had specific details to let him know. He suggested that it would be better to advise residents to telephone and report the situation direct to the Council officers, rather than to local Ward Councillors to prevent any delays.

**4. From Councillor John Getgood of the Portfolio Holder Resources**

How many Bromley residents have had their Housing Benefit reduced following the introduction of new rates of benefit by the coalition government?

**Reply:**

The Portfolio Holder advised that as at the 30<sup>th</sup> June 2011, entitlement to Housing Benefit had reduced for 187 Bromley households. Their entitlement had reduced as they were no longer able to receive Housing Benefit in excess of their contractual rent. Depending on the legislative change, the Housing Benefit reforms affecting Bromley households took affect from the annual review of their claim, or 9 months after the date of that review. Should their circumstances remain the same, based on the first quarter figures an estimated additional 1309 households would see their entitlement reduced. For 716 households the reduction would be a result of them no longer being able to receive Housing Benefit in excess of their contractual rent.

**Supplementary Question:**

Councillor Getgood raised concerns at an increase in the number of vulnerable single people being adversely affected by these arrangements and ending up staying in inappropriate accommodation. He asked whether the Portfolio Holder knew the cost of this and what action he could take.

**Reply:**

Councillor Arthur responded that he did not have that information but would be happy to have a look into the impact perhaps by setting up a Working Party of members to examine the facts. He also commented that part of the affect was caused by unrealistic rents being charged by private Landlords.

**5. From Councillor Kathy Bance of the Portfolio Holder for Adult and Community Services**

What is the Portfolio Holder doing to ensure that care placement and provision are appropriately reviewed, complaints are properly investigated and that the council accepts responsibility for any shortfall in care standards?

**Reply:**

The Portfolio Holder explained that all people placed by the Council in care homes had their care reviewed by the Care Management staff. The standard

was that reviews should take place initially after 4 weeks, followed up at 6 months and then annually. Where someone was placed in a home which received a poor or adequate rating from the Care Quality Commission, the frequency of care management reviews was increased to 6 monthly. In addition, contract monitoring staff reviewed performance against contract conditions on a minimum of an annual basis.

Where issues arose with a placement or where information came to hand about the performance of a particular care home, additional reviews took place.

Complaints were investigated by Managers in accordance with the Social Care complaints procedures and within set timeframes. The Annual Report of Complaints which was reported to the ACS PDS committee in June noted that in 2010/11 74% of formal complaints were responded to within 20 working days.

Complaints were investigated by managers who had not been involved in the particular case, and training was given to ensure both compliance with the procedures and objectivity in their approach to an investigation.

Formal responsibility for the standard of care provided by a care home provider rested with the owners and the registered manager of the home. The Care Quality Commission had the statutory duty to inspect and ensure compliance with national minimum standards.

**Supplementary Question:**

Councillor Bance commented that the Council's behaviour in the recent case reported by the Ombudsman had caused distress and injustice to the family concerned and the Council was required to pay compensation. One of the most worrying aspects was the finding that the Council refused to accept its responsibility, which was unacceptable. Pressure on the Adult Care budgets had increased and she asked if the Portfolio Holder had the resources available to ensure that the actions he outlined could be put into effect.

**Reply:**

Councillor Evans responded that yes there were the resources available to put into effect the situations described in his answer. Regarding the Ombudsman's case this would be dealt with in the following question and answer. However, he was certainly assured that with changes effected with regard to review and the servicing of complaints, that the procedures were properly followed and that a careful 'eye' was kept on Bromley residents in care homes.

**6. From Councillor Nicholas Bennett JP of the Portfolio Holder for Adult and Community Services**

To ask the Portfolio Holder what response will be made to Ombudsman' Report published on June 17<sup>th</sup> 2011?

**Reply:**

The Portfolio Holder advised that the Council had complied with the publication duties and a report would be brought before the Executive for it to formulate the Council's response. That report was likely to be considered later this month and the Portfolio Holder felt it would be wrong to anticipate that decision. However he pointed out that much of that report concerned issues which arose between 2006-2008 and Council procedures had been reviewed and improved since then.

**Supplementary Question:**

Councillor Bennett asked whether the Portfolio Holder would agree that it was very important to make sure that people who went in to care homes and those who received social care in the home that value for money meant, first of all and integral to that, high quality services and was he convinced that in every case we were doing that.

**Reply:**

Councillor Evans responded that it would be difficult for him to say that he was absolutely convinced in every case. Although he and the department did everything they could to make sure that people placed in care homes had their cases properly reviewed. Also if there were complaints that they were dealt with properly.

**7. From Councillor Peter Fookes of the Portfolio Holder for the Environment**

What is the budget for cleaning street furniture?

**Reply:**

The Portfolio Holder advised that this function was contained within the Street Cleaning budget, set at £3.9m for 2011/12.

**Supplementary Question:**

Councillor Fookes drew attention to a situation that had happened in Penge, and he suspected across the Borough, where the 'sails' in the Blenheim Centre Square had not been cleaned and as a result further repairs had had to be made to the display costing more money. He asked the Portfolio Holder to look into this or possibly ask the 'street friends' to help out in such situations.

**Reply:**

Councillor Colin Smith agreed and asked Councillor Fookes and his ward colleagues to encourage 'street friends' to join in to protect their local neighbourhood as residents were doing across the rest of the borough.

**8. From Councillor Nicholas Bennett JP of the Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People Services**

To ask the Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People whether in the light of the report that the Government is prepared to allow selective schools to expand he will encourage Newstead Wood Academy and St Olave's Academy to consider expanding their rolls?

**Reply:**

The Portfolio Holder said he acknowledged the value of the outstanding education these schools provided and there was nothing to prevent either of the schools from considering expansion. Their current published admissions numbers were 135 for Newstead Wood Academy and 112 for St Olave's Voluntary Aided School, with each school admitting additional pupils into the sixth forms. As their own admission authorities, it was a matter for the Governors to consider whether they wished to expand. The limiting factor would be the ability of the schools to accommodate additional pupils. Any capital that may be required to expand any academy would need to be found by the Department for Education through the Partnership for Schools Division who were responsible for capital for academies and free schools.

**Supplementary Question:**

Councillor Bennett commented that the Portfolio Holder did not actually say he would encourage the schools. He asked if Councillor Noad would agree that we ought to do everything we can to encourage these excellent schools to expand their rolls in view of the demand for places there as well as pressing the Department for Education to allow new selective schools to be built.

**Reply:**

The Portfolio Holder fully agreed with Councillor Bennett's comments and said that he had for some years behind the scenes been encouraging both Head Teachers to expand their schools. He considered that the value of Grammar Schools had been proven and many young people with social mobility problems would he felt be assisted by grammar schools. Many young people from a poorer background had already benefited from a grammar school education. Councillor Noad said it was a mystery why the government since the 1980s had resisted the creation of more grammar schools and he would be prepared to campaign to that effect.

**9. From Councillor Peter Fookes of the Portfolio Holder for Renewal and Recreation**

Why has a charge of £20 been imposed on those adults with learning disabilities attending Adult Education courses?

**Reply:**

The Portfolio Holder confirmed that there was no registration fee charged for attending Bromley Adult Education Course specialist provision for adults with learning disabilities. However, in common with many other providers and

sanctioned by the Skills Funding Agency we do ask learners to pay an hourly fee of £2.90 per hour. Courses in this area fall under the Foundation Learning curriculum. I was informed that you were sent a brochure of current and future activities and invited to the Poverest Centre to see for yourself the breadth and quality of the work they do there.

**Supplementary Question:**

Councillor Fookes thought it was outrageous that these adults were forced to look elsewhere to Bexley for a service. He asked if the Portfolio Holder would look at the situation again.

**Reply:**

Councillor Morgan agreed to do that. He had been informed that in order to get this benefit for nothing they must be actively seeking work. The Portfolio Holder had attended the Poverest Centre earlier in the day and had sat in one of the classes with people with severe learning disabilities and there was no way that they would be able to get work and therefore would not be able to access that benefit. He thought it was a nonsense and he would be taking it up with the government.

---