

24th OCTOBER 2011

WRITTEN QUESTIONS BY MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

1. From Councillor Russell Mellor of the Portfolio Holder for Resources

The Invest to Save scheme was a policy established in the Civic year 2003 – 2004, can the Portfolio Holder advise me as to the number of schemes, which have been commissioned since the commencement of the scheme in detailed form by the number per year, the total amount/s invested together with the financial returns on each scheme. The figures to be those of an audited nature.

Reply:

The table attached (Appendix) provides an analysis of invest to save schemes approved to date, both through the annual capital review process and those funded by the LPSA reward grant. In each year, a number of Invest to Save proposals have been put forward, many of which have not been approved because of failure to meet one or more of the criteria. Additionally, invest to save schemes have been approved which have either not yet been commissioned, are awaiting a detailed business case, or did not proceed. These have been excluded from the table. In all cases, the revenue saving shown is the full-year saving and the estimated payback period, in many cases, reflects the fact that savings were phased incrementally over a number of years.

2. From Councillor Russell Mellor of the Leader of the Council

Can the Leader inform me as to the payment amounts made during the last Civic year under the Performance Related Pay scheme for Senior Officers. The amounts to be individually expressed together with total amount.

Reply:

Nil.

3. From Councillor Russell Mellor of the Leader of the Council

Can the Leader advise me as to the number of appeals lodged by Members of staff as a result of incorrect or subsequent upgrading on the implementation of the Single Status. The number of appeals to be shown by Department/Sections together with the amounts of wages/salaries coupled to the appeals.

Reply:

Department	Number of appeals*	Number that resulted in a grade change	Decision Pending
Children and Young People	3	0	1
Adult and Community Services	5	0	3
Renewal & Recreation	1	0	0
Environmental Services	3	1	0
Resources	1	0	0
Chief Executives	1	1	0

The cost of the 2 successful appeals is £23,206 one off costs and £6,555 going forward costs.

*Please note this figure relates to the number of posts not post holders.

4. From Councillor Nicholas Bennett JP of the Portfolio Holder for the Environment

To ask the Portfolio Holder if he will set out the criteria for deciding any future Public Transport Strategy.

Reply:

The Council's strategic aspirations for public transport are included in the Local Implementation Plan.

It is intended that the Council's overall transport policies, very much including policies relating to public transport, will be reviewed in the new year, with the intention of capturing them all in a single up-to-date statement.

Although my firm belief remains that linking Bromley North (and possibly even Bromley South) to Lewisham and East London beyond by an extension of the DLR in whatever format is the Borough's number one priority, others will I am sure hold competing views regarding the possible extension of Tramlink to Crystal Palace and/or Bromley South.

The criteria for assessing the order in which any or all of these aspirations are achieved should, in my opinion, be their detailed business cases which very much include the benefits they offer to Bromley residents, commuters and employers.

5. From Councillor Nicholas Bennett JP of the Portfolio Holder for the Environment

To ask the Portfolio Holder if he will make a statement on the petition circulated in Shortlands Ward regarding 'Lollipop' crossing patrols.

Reply:

To maintain the dignity of this chamber, I shall be succinct.

Politics at any level really ought to have a strand of common decency running through it, below which no-one should ever fall.

I would strongly contend that deliberately conflating the tragic death of a secondary school aged child, on the A20 in the Borough of Bexley, on a Sunday, some two miles away from his school, with the ongoing review of Bromley's weekday lollipop service for junior and primary school aged children falls woefully short of that simple, basic requirement.

As well as being thoroughly ashamed of themselves for doing so, my only hope is that on reflection, those responsible for that decision come to see that such behaviour does no-one, least of all themselves, any favours whatsoever in the eyes of the wider public, when such irregularities are drawn to their attention. Ideally they should also resolve never to plumb such depths again moving to the future.

We live in hope.

6. From Councillor Nicholas Bennett JP of the Leader of the Council

To ask the Leader what progress is being made in:

- i. The provision of shared services with other authorities;
- ii. Outsourcing to commercial organisations;
- iii. Establishing 'stand alone' employee operations, which can subsequently floated off;
- iv. Discontinuing specific services?

Reply:

i) Bromley's Chief Executive, Director of Resources and Assistant Director for Organisational Improvement sit on a Shared Services Board with their counterparts from Bexley and Croydon and meet every 2-3 months. A project tracking document ensures that all projects are being monitored and that each is assigned an owner. By January 2012, Bexley and Bromley will have successfully delivered £300k back-office savings in the Libraries service through a major restructure and rationalisation of their book stack. Other areas that are currently being prioritised include a shared Occupational Health service across the three boroughs; areas of Children's Services such as SEN placements and sold services to schools; regulatory services; and a shared asset team across the three boroughs. Once full business cases have been produced, they will be presented to Members.

ii) Suitable services for market testing and opportunities for outsourcing have been identified at the request the Chief Executive. In addition, the recent Aligning Policy and Finance reviews carried out by the Organisational Improvement Team and the Future Leaders' Cohort have identified savings that could be achieved through outsourcing. These reviews are being presented, confidentially, to Improvement & Efficiency Sub-Committee on 26/10 and 2/11.

iii) One of the projects arising from the Shared Services Board is Regulatory Services. The scoping work was carried out by lead officers in each of the three boroughs which concluded that there was potential for a commissioner/provider model to deliver these services. Work is now underway to determine whether a shared in-house model would work best or whether the provider should be 'floated off' with the other two boroughs buying in as necessary.

iv) The seventeen Aligning Policy & Finance reviews that have been carried out over the past 6 months identified significant new savings options. Their purpose was to set out which elements of a service, if any, were statutory and which were not as well as highlighting the associated risks and impacts of each of these options. The reports are being presented, in confidence, to Improvement & Efficiency Sub-Committee on 26/10 and 2/11. The reviews together with the zero-based budgeting work carried out between Finance and individual services, should position Members to make decisions regarding the discontinuation of any services.

7. From Councillor Simon Fawthrop JP of the Leader of the Council

In relation to page 36 of the report to Council and the first bullet point, can he confirm whether this is a statutory requirement (No polling place should be shared by two wards) and if so could the statute, statutory instrument or other specific legal requirement be recorded in the minutes.

If it is not statutory can the identity of the policy and the relevant Council/Committee minute which created this requirement be identified and be recorded as part of the answer to this question.

Reply:

Sections 18B of the Representation of the People Act 1983 provides that the polling place for a polling district must be an area in that district, unless special circumstances make it desirable to designate an area outside the polling district.

This was reiterated by the Electoral Commission in their Guidance (Numbered EC 19(2010) and dated 30 July 2010), in relation to carrying out a Review of Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations,

The Electoral Commission has further advised that:

If 'special circumstances' led to a polling place for one ward being the same polling place as for another ward, there would be a risk to the election in that ballot papers for the two different ward elections could get placed in the wrong ballot boxes. As they are different elections, it would then not be possible to retrieve these papers and could be a risk to the results of the elections.

(A polling district is defined as a geographical area created by the sub-division of a constituency, ward or division into smaller parts).

8. From Councillor John Getgood of the Portfolio Holder for Adult and Community Services

Will the Portfolio Holder please identify for each of the last 12 months:

1. The number of instances of individuals and families approaching the council claiming homelessness.
2. The number of individuals and families who have been re-housed following homelessness
3. The number of individuals and families who have been refused help by the council and those who have received a Section 184 letter.

Reply:

1. The table below shows total approaches to the service claiming to be threatened with homelessness. Work is undertaken to prevent homelessness and thus results in a lower number of actual homeless applications.

	2010/11	2011/12 to end September
Total Cases	3,816	1633
Actual formal Homeless Applications	1704	909

2. Many of the prevention cases are effectively forms of rehousing - e.g. private rented sector (570 in 2010/11 and 222 so far during 2011/12).

A number of more vulnerable people go into supported housing and then move on from there. Adding these to lettings of social rented housing for emergency, prevention or accepted cases the numbers are - 439 in 2010/11 and 109 so far during 2011/12. Note, some households will be accepted in one year but not be re housed until the following year.

3. No household is refused help. Even those to whom there is no homeless duty - e.g. intentional, no local connection, non priority - the Council still fulfils its statutory duty to provide advice and, in some instances, emergency temporary accommodation for a short period whilst the household secures its own accommodation.

Note:

The ACS PDS/Portfolio meeting on 27th September 2011 received a report which included more detail on current housing, homeless and temporary accommodation numbers and pressures.

Regular information is collated and reported quarterly to the Department for Communities and Local Government and published on their website (P1e returns).

9. From Councillor Kathy Bance of the Portfolio Holder for the Environment

If the Portfolio Holder will please answer the following questions:

How is roadside air quality measured in Bromley?

What results have been recorded over the last 12 months?

Reply:

a) It is measured by a continuous roadside air quality monitoring station at Harwood Avenue and by ten other diffusion tube sites spread across the Borough.

b) The data has yet to be analysed, but I shall be very pleased to make the raw data available to any Member who wishes to see it.

10. From Councillor Peter Fookes of the Portfolio Holder for Resources

What is the council policy on ensuring that a named individual is indicated on letters sent out by the borough?

Reply:

The following guidance is given in the Council's Customer Service Staff Handbook, which will be applicable in most circumstances –

“The person writing a letter should sign it. Use your first name and surname and add your job title and email address below. We do not include any academic or professional qualifications as part of this. Your telephone number should go at the top of the letter.”

11. From Councillor Peter Fookes of the Portfolio Holder for Adult and Community Services

Will people who attend day centres be charged for attendance when they are ill?

Reply:

Service users are advised in writing of their day care charges. We inform service users that their place is kept open at the day centre for up to four weeks if they are unable to attend, with charges applying for this period, and that they do have a right to appeal if they do not agree with the amount they are being asked to pay.

When people contact us about their charges we consider their individual circumstances.

12. From Councillor Peter Fookes of the Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People

Who is eligible for clothing grants in the borough and how many people have applied over the last academic year?

Reply:

The discretionary award of clothing grant ceased with effect from 1 September 2011, following the decision of Council on 28 February 2011.

For the last Academic year 2010/11 any parent in receipt of one of the following benefits was eligible for the grant.

- Income Support
- Income-based Job Seeker's Allowance
- Income-based Employment & Support Allowance
- Working Tax Credit
- Child Tax Credit - with a gross income assessed by the Inland Revenue of £16190 or less
- Pension Credit
- Housing Benefit
- Asylum Support

The number of successful clothing grants applications in 2010/11 was 6794.

13. From Councillor Julian Grainger of the Leader of the Council

Noting that the report (*to Council*) records the following question about the Polling Station for CB5 (Green Street Green);

"Has any consideration been given to using St Mary's Church Worlds End Lane?",

and noting that many parents find school closures for voting inconvenient, why does the response make no comment on the suitability of St Mary's Church, instead appearing to rest solely on the conclusion that *"the present Polling Place has good facilities"*.

In summary, why is there no comparison of the two places?

Reply:

Consideration has been given to using St Mary's Church. However the Returning Officer can only requisition using schools as polling stations. There is therefore greater risk when using alternative premises, that such premises may not be available for use as a polling station – especially at short notice (for example if a by election is called), as previous (regular) bookings (such as Nursery groups) may be given preference.

In this instance the Returning Officer is of the opinion that the current polling place is in a good location, is easily accessible, has good facilities for staff and electors (including the disabled), is available for use at all times, and that the current arrangements should continue.

The school was notified several years ago of all scheduled elections to be held in the Borough for the next 20 years, enabling ample time for appropriate arrangements to be put in place so as to minimise disruption to the children's education.

14. From Councillor Fawthrop of the Chairman of the Development Control Committee (to be asked at every Council Meeting)

What pre-application meetings have taken place since the last full Council Meeting between Council Officers and potential planning applicants? Can these be listed as follows:-

The name of the potential applicant, the site address being considered.

Reply:

There have been 28 non-major pre-application meetings between 2nd July and 19th October 2011. These were all non-householder enquiries. There have also been 6 pre-application meetings for major developments during this period.

As you are aware details of individual applicants and sites at present is exempt information and not disclosable in response to a Council Question.

Appendix

	Financial Year Scheme Approved					Total Amount Invested	Annual Revenue Saving (full year)	Estimated Payback Period
	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2010/11			
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£000	Years
Adult Placement Scheme & Independence of People with Learning Difficulties	1,092					1,092	1,400	3
Environmental Improvements (note 1)	250					250	*	*
BEECHE Centre, High Elms & Care Leavers into Employment (note 2)	560					560	*	*
SEN Reprovision (Riverside Special School)	5,274					5,274	2,263	4
Library Technology Systems Upgrade		200				200	26	7.7
Common Housing Allocation System & Choice Based Lettings		143				143	18	8
Library Self-service & RFID Technology		360				360	91	5
Customer Access Programme		607				607	175	3.5
Carbon Management Programme (note3)								
Convert Street Lighting from 24 hours to dusk-to dawn Setting (phase 1)			44			44	18	2.37
Convert Street Lighting from 24 hours to dusk-to dawn Setting (phase 2)			49			49	14	3.42
Voltage Optimisation (Civic Centre)			90			90	31	2.93
Centre Island Column Project			18			18	7	2.49
SQL Cluster Projects			160			160	30	5.3
Server Virtualisation			300			300	130	3.5
One Way Programme			651	111		762	240	3.2
Joint Web Platform				142		142	20	7
Waste Collection Trial Extensions & Waste Pilot Scheme				538	920	1,458	180	8.1
Total Investment/Annual Revenue Savings	7,176	1,310	1,312	791	920	11,509	4,643	

Note (1): The original bid referred to efficiency savings that would be realised in Street Services and Cleansing budgets in the future that were difficult to quantify although it is likely some savings were achieved.

Note (2): The original bid referred to cashable savings of £39k in the delivery of services to Care Leavers and an anticipated reduction in energy costs which could not be quantified. It is unlikely that these savings were realised.

Note (3): Savings relating to the Carbon Management Programme schemes are estimated based on the latest available information.