

## COUNCIL MEETING

15<sup>th</sup> February 2010

### ORAL QUESTIONS BY MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

#### 1. From Councillor Willetts of the Portfolio Holder for the Environment

Having directly overseen LBB ownership arrangements in Longbury Close (on site -17 years ago) with Mr Eric Lett former Head of Committee Services I am perfectly aware of the ownership responsibilities without the aid of the diagram (received on the 27/10/09), since the Director of Environment stated (16/7/09) that I had approached weed control contractors to carry out weed spraying on a private road, followed by an apology at Full Council 29/6/09 by Cllr Carr ' there had been a typing error & it should have referred to a private area & not a private road which sat immediately "adjacent" to Longbury Drive'. i) Why couldn't you pinpoint on the diagram where I requested weed spraying to be carried out and forwarded this to me prior to the 15/12/09 so I could refer to it in my supplementary question at FC 15/12/09? ii) could you supply this information for FC 15/2/2010?

#### **Reply:**

The Portfolio Holder replied:

i/ Officers advise that the weed spraying sub-contractor for Kier (ESS) made contact with the weed spraying operative who worked around Longbury Close on the 30th June 2009 for the second application. Unfortunately the operative could not remember this particular incident or the specific location several months after the event.

ii/ No

#### **Supplementary question:**

Councillor Willetts said he was referring to an email sent by the Director of Environment and bearing in mind the Portfolio Holder's last response to Council which was negative, he suggested that the car park area in question did belong to LBB and was not a private road as indicated by the Director. Therefore he felt his original request for weed spraying was legitimate and asked if Councillor Smith was covering up for the Director's incompetence regarding the original email on this matter.

#### **Reply:**

Councillor Smith considered that it was a silly question and the answer was no.

## **2. From Councillor Fookes of the Portfolio Holder for Public Protection and Safety**

How many police officers will be lost in Bromley as a result of the budget of the Mayor of London?

### **Reply:**

The Portfolio Holder stated that he recognised the importance of Policing numbers to members and welcomed the robust scrutiny of both his Portfolio and the Safer Bromley Partnership. He asked for it to be noted that under Mayor Livingstone Bromley had just 467 Police Officers on its payroll whereas today under Mayor Johnson there were 510, an increase of nearly 10%. This was in no small part due to the intensive work done by this administration to secure more resources for our Borough. We want more and we think we deserve more, but although a lot had been achieved and there was still a lot more to do. However, when the polling data tells us that the fear of crime is falling and that our residents' confidence in Bromley being a safe place to be is rising, Members on this side of the chamber will take no lessons from members on that side about Police numbers.

Councillor Bloom reiterated Councillor Fookes' question and commented that it did not come as a surprise as it was exactly the same question that had been asked of colleagues in Bexley, Croydon, Wandsworth, Barnet, Ealing, Havering and in fact every other Conservative controlled London Borough by a Labour Member.

He explained that it was not a straightforward answer – it was complicated. At best we would either have more police officers on the street and perhaps at the worse it would be the same.

### **Supplementary question:**

Councillor Fookes asserted that across London the actual loss would be 455 police officers. He asked whether the Portfolio Holder did not feel let down by Mayor Johnson over this matter because only a few years ago you were all out there petitioning in Bromley for an increase in police numbers.

### **Reply:**

Councillor Bloom felt it was a pity that Councillor Fookes had tried to trip us up, rather than take the time to congratulate all the good work that had happened in his own ward of Penge. He had all the details to hand such as a 31% drop in certain crimes but would not go into detail as he was conscious of the time.

The Mayor of London's budget was approved, without amendment, by the London Assembly on Wednesday 27 the January. Over 70% of the £0.9 billion raised by the precept will go to the Metropolitan Police Service. Alongside that the Police Authority's budget requirement for 2010-11 is £2,673.3m, some £33m higher than that for 2009-10. There was no evidence to suggest that if Mayor Livingstone was still in City Hall, that he would have provided more money than that.

However, tough decisions have needed to be made across all public services resulting from the recession which would mean the loss of some 14 police officers over the coming three year period in our Borough. However, at the same time, and this was why it was complicated, the local service would drive forward a policy to provide more effective and efficient custody suite staffing regimes. The effect of this action would mean that more than 33 non uniformed staff members would be performing back office type functions which would release uniformed police officers to patrol the streets.

Therefore, as a result of these budget decisions and the management actions that have been made, it was possible that there might be more Police on the streets in Bromley than previously.

He commented that perhaps the member would like to take the opportunity to join in thanking Boris Johnson for the 10% increase in Police that we have had already; acknowledge the amazing work done by the Safer Bromley Partnership and his own Safer Neighbourhood Team in Penge, and congratulate the Borough Police Commander for reorganising his back-office functions to free up even more police to get out onto the front line.

### **3. From Councillor Nicholas Bennett JP of the Portfolio Holder for the Environment**

What is the result of his investigations into the possibility of providing 'continental' style dog waste litter bins which have a lid to prevent the escape of noxious smells?

#### **Reply:**

Research had indicated that there were a number of manufacturers that supplied dog waste litter bins with either a chute depositing system or a basic lid operation that allowed the user to deposit waste easily and cleanly. It was claimed that the chute operating system also minimised odours from inside the bin escaping into the air outside.

Whilst provision was made within the Borough's parks and amenity areas for dog waste bins, it was not current policy to install such bins on the highway for general use. In moving forward, a Member Working Party would be established to review the provision of the street cleansing contract and consideration would also be given to the feasibility of installing dog waste bins on the highway. It would need to take into account the expense of additional emptying, the provision of new bins and the associated environmental hazards as well as the views of residents.

Councillor Nicholas Bennett indicated he did not have a supplementary question.

#### **4. From Councillor Willetts of the Portfolio Holder for the Environment**

Could you tell me why Affinity Sutton/BHA operatives are removing fly tipped rubbish from LBB footways/highways on the Leasons Estate- Robin Way, Hawkinge Walk, Farrington Avenue, Wynford Grove & Selwyn Place?

##### **Reply:**

Councillor Smith advised that he could not tell the member why Affinity Sutton may have been removing fly tipped rubbish. Officers had spoken to Affinity Sutton and they agreed that their operatives should not be removing fly-tipped rubbish from LBB footways or highways, also that they had not been doing so (nor were they placing it there awaiting collection if that was the suggestion).

The Portfolio Holder said he would be extremely interested in seeing any evidence which the member or anyone else might have to support what was being suggested.

##### **Supplementary question:**

Councillor Willetts said he was surprised to be told by a Keir operative not to remove dumped rubbish on Council footways on the estate. He commented that tenants were being 'double whammied' by being charged by Broomleigh for the removal and also paying for it in their Council tax. He asked what advice Councillor Smith would give to those tenants and residents.

##### **Reply:**

Councillor Smith responded that the advice he would give to both the member and his local residents was to follow the excellent example set in Cray Valley East where community leaders were undertaking a huge programme around civic pride and self help that was an inspiration to other parts of the Borough. He encouraged 'taking pride in your area and not being afraid of getting "stuck in" and help' which he felt was very much the future way forward.

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

When will ward statistics be available for street cleanliness?

##### **Reply:**

The Portfolio Holder reminded the member that as mentioned in January 2009, when he asked a very similar question, there were no plans to do so at present. The software research and officer time it would take to manage in such micro level of detail being loosely estimated to cost somewhere in the region of £30,000 - £40,000 to set up and maintain.

**Supplementary question:**

Councillor Fookes said he was disappointed with the response because as the Portfolio Holder was aware ward members in Penge did regularly receive complaints about the level of street cleanliness. He noticed that new websites were being set up - which would hopefully address some of these issues and asked whether Bromley might consider joining that particular scheme.

**Reply:**

Councillor Smith drew attention to Bromley's street cleansing record which was going from strength to strength as assessed through official inspections. The records spoke for themselves streets were getting cleaner and as he had previously said that areas such as the member's ward with a higher proportion of tightly parked streets received a higher proportion of available cleansing costs than other areas with less parking. Rather than complaining he urged moving forward together with the new contract due to be signed in the next few months.

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

Which body is responsible for the repairs and maintenance of drains and gullies and the road surface of Rays Road, West Wickham and what action is being taken to deal with the regular flooding in the road particularly in the vicinity of the 'down' side entrance to the railway station?

**Reply:**

Councillor Smith explained that Rays Road was owned by LBB but on a 99 year lease to Wolseley Centers Limited (WCL) for a term of 99 years from 1st February 1979.

Responsibility for maintenance rested with Wolseley Centers Limited (WCL). The Road was not an adopted LBB highway.

The flooding had been brought to the company's attention and we (Robert Norris, V&E) had been advised that remedial action was in hand.

**Supplementary question:**

Councillor Bennett noted that there was no mention of gullies and drains and assumed they were also the responsibility of the Company referred to. He asked if the Portfolio Holder agreed that this had been a serious problem in this road which had been going on for many years and the Residents Association had made many protests. Would Councillor Smith redouble his efforts to ensure the company who were responsible for this actually carried out the work because the road was still in a very bad state.

**Reply:**

Councillor Smith said he would have a fresh look at the situation.

**7. From Councillor Willetts of the Portfolio Holder for the Environment**

With regard to the ladies public toilets adjacent Sainsburys in Orpington, following a complaint(s) from Mrs Mason of St Pauls Wood Hill (amongst others) that on Saturday 6/2/2010 at approx 1pm states the ladies toilets were in a filthy & disgusting state i.e. 2 toilet bowls full of faeces- are the flushes working?, floor swimming with water, no toilet rolls & no drying facilities- are hand dryers working? & why no hand towels?, concluding, can you include both these toilets (as it appears that the gents was in the same state) as part of the Orpington High Street Public Realm Improvements to include a 'good' standard of daily cleansing throughout the week?

**Reply:**

Yes.

Yes.

Because a person or persons unknown appears to be either stealing them or using them in great quantities to block the otherwise functioning toilets.

No these toilets would not be added to the Orpington High Street Public Realm Improvement works as there was nothing wrong with them.

In an effort to maintain the already satisfactory level of the cleansing schedule at these facilities (providing they were not routinely abused) a female attendant had been allocated to them for a trial period in an effort to address the problem.

**Supplementary question:**

Councillor Willetts replied that it was the best answer he had ever heard from the Portfolio Holder.

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

Why have we only got one operational town centre manager at present in the borough?

**Reply:**

The current establishment for Town Centre Managers was four. At present one was in post, one was on maternity leave (to return by July 2010), one was on long term sickness and one post was vacant (recruitment to this post was currently taking place). Due to these temporary staffing difficulties other staff within the Department, headed by Mr Colin Brand, had been involved in

supporting town centre initiatives to ensure continuity of support and assistance.

**Supplementary question:**

Councillor Fookes asked whether it would be possible to use peripatetic staff to cover some of these posts because he felt the Borough's economy was suffering as a result of having only one TC Manager.

**Reply:**

Councillor Benington did not agree the Borough was suffering particularly although there were obvious difficulties. However, in respect of Town Centre Managers part of the difficulty was that you could not easily ring up an Agency and ask to recruit such staff on a short term basis – they were trained professionals. He also advised that there had been a review of the responsibilities of the Town Centre Managers and the funding for Town Centres which had been considered at the last meeting of the R&R PDS Committee as a result of which the advertisement was now being placed. He hoped there would be a fuller complement of such staff in the near future.

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

What is the number and percentage of the total school population in each year since 1998 who do not have English as their first language?

**Reply:**

The Portfolio Holder advised that all primary, secondary and special schools were required to undertake a pupil census in January of each academic year. Part of this census included the identification of whether a pupil's first language was English or not. Between the academic years 1998/1999 and 2008/2009 the number of pupils whose first language has been identified as other than English has increased from 1,234 (2.8% of the school population) in 1999 to 3172 (6.8% of the school population) in 2009. This represented an increase of more than 150% in the number of pupils whose first language was not English over the last 10 years. It should also be noted that a number of these children were from outside of the Borough. A separate table had been circulated which set out the increases year by year (attached as an appendix to these Minutes).

**Supplementary question:**

Councillor Bennett asked whether the grants the Council received from central government reflected the pressure these figures showed were being exerted on our schools (with a 150% increase). Also was he aware that this raised wider issues about the 2001 Census on which the Government based its grants allocation when quite clearly there had been a big demographic change in the population in this Borough.

**Reply:**

Councillor Noad confirmed that Bromley received £640,000 through Standards Funds for ethnic minority achievement grant which was aimed at ethnic and black pupils to fund additional support to meet a specific need for bilingual learners. In addition to this schools received funding in their schools budget although it was not specifically identified in the DSG. There was about £184,000 delegated to primary and £55,000 to secondary schools to assist pupils with English as an additional language and for refugees as identified with English as an additional language. Whether this was sufficient funding for over 3000 young people in this Borough he doubted given the increase in numbers and certainly he was of the view that the 2001 Census could not be accurate given the bulge in demand and obvious change in demographics.



## **Appendix**

### **(Background information to Question 9)**

The total number and equivalent percentages of pupils recorded as having a first language other than English from 1999 to 2009 are as follows:

<b>Year</b>	<b>Number of pupils having a first language other than English in Primary, Secondary and Special Schools</b>	<b>% pupils having a first language other than English in Primary, Secondary and Special Schools</b>
<b>1999</b>	1234	2.8%
<b>2000</b>	1458	3.5%
<b>2001</b>	1773	3.8%
<b>2002</b>	1933	4.1%
<b>2003</b>	2748	5.9%
<b>2004</b>	2545	5.4%
<b>2005</b>	2459	5.2%
<b>2006</b>	2558	5.5%
<b>2007</b>	2708	5.9%
<b>2008</b>	2965	6.4%
<b>2009</b>	3172	6.8%