

MEETING

26th MARCH 2012

ORAL QUESTIONS BY MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

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

Why are Bromley residents allowed to register to go on the housing list in Sevenoaks but not in Bromley?

Reply:

The Portfolio Holder advised that the current Sevenoaks allocations scheme was introduced in 2008 prior to the latest guidance on housing allocations. Whilst Sevenoaks operated an open allocation scheme preference for rehousing was given to those applicants with a proven local connection to the area. In addition the Scheme clearly stated that some specific properties would only be allocated to those with a local connection effectively excluding out of Borough applicants from certain properties and local lettings criteria. This meant that whilst applicants from other local authority areas such as Bromley might be able to register on the Sevenoaks list in reality they probably had very little chance of receiving an offer of accommodation essentially giving a false hope of rehousing.

Councillor Evans emphasised that the demand for social housing in Bromley far outstripped the supply and it was therefore essential to manage expectations by focussing on those applicants that had a realistic chance of receiving an offer of accommodation from the housing register rather than giving false hope by registering applicants who were unlikely to resolve their housing need through this route. This meant that for out of borough applicants we would only consider those with a very high level of housing need and proven necessity to live within the Borough. Applicants with lower levels of housing need or where there were alternative options to resolve their housing situation would be supported to pursue a range of housing options to resolve the difficulties they may be facing. The aim was to offer a more comprehensive service which better informed applicants of the options that may be available to them to offer a realistic and achievable resolution to their housing problem.

Supplementary Question:

Councillor Fookes asked the Portfolio Holder to say how many people had been registered by the Council as a result of the 'cull' taken last year?

Reply:

Councillor Evans responded that before the new register was established there were 8000 households listed. This was an inordinate number given the current situation and many of those 8000 would realistically have no chance at all of being offered accommodation. One figure that had been quoted to the Portfolio Holder was that in terms of the wait for a three bedroom house for everyone on the list who wanted that size accommodation, and with no further additions to the register, it would take 25 years to get to the bottom of the list. Currently there were about 1700 applications that had now been made to the register some of which were still being processed because more information was required. Out of that 1700 625 had not been accepted. However there were now 654 in the top 3 bands with a realistic chance of being offered accommodation.

2. From Councillor Nicholas Bennett JP of the Portfolio Holder for the Environment - *In the absence of the Portfolio Holder the Executive Assistant for the Environment will respond*

- i) What is the estimated frequency of repair and the cost of each repair where asphalt is used to patch a concrete road surface;
- ii) What is the estimated frequency of repair and the cost of each repair where concrete is used to patch a concrete road?

Reply:

The Executive Assistant explained that:

- i) Asphalt was not ordinarily used to patch a concrete road surface and therefore was not frequently carried out. Where there were multiple defects and whole carriageway widths needed to be done these would be surfaced in asphalt materials. An average cost of this would be estimated as £10 per square metre.
- ii) Ordinarily we would not carry out a concrete patch repair. If the road required a full depth reconstruction in concrete this was estimated at £45 per square metre.

Supplementary Question:

Councillor Bennett said that he had not received an answer about the frequency as it was his experience that the frequency increased from looking at roads in his Ward (Surrey Road, Kent Road and Sussex Road) which were concrete and where asphalt was used to patch part of them. The frequency when this had to be done was fairly often because asphalt on concrete was not a good mix and was also not aesthetic. He requested that Councillor Fortune look again at the questions he had asked and come back with an answer given the real frequency of repair.

Reply:

Councillor Fortune responded that speaking to officers he had been informed that concrete roads did not fail that often and when work was done on the roads it was usually because of utility companies who were tasked to return the road to its original state. However, if there were specific roads causing concern then he was happy to take the details back to the Department to investigate further.

3. From Councillor Tony Owen of the Portfolio Holder for Renewal and Recreation

Have you visited Orpington High Street during or immediately after heavy rain?'

Reply:

The Portfolio Holder commented that whenever he went to Orpington it was never raining.

Supplementary Question:

Councillor Owen responded that if Councillor Morgan did visit Orpington High Street after heavy rain he would observe the subsidence that had occurred since the refurbishment. He asked when remedial action could be expected.

Reply:

Councillor Morgan replied that the project was still under guarantee and would not cost Council tax payers anything. The contractor was currently investigating the cause of any defects and the repairs would be organised during the school /college holiday period to cause minimum disruption.

4. From Councillor John Getgood of the Portfolio Holder for the Environment – *In the absence of the Portfolio Holder the Executive Assistant for the Environment will respond*

What was the arrangement for the recent hand delivery of Environment Matters? Why were election leaflets for Boris Johnson included in the same delivery? Were any special arrangements involved?

Reply:

The Executive Assistant advised on the situation which was not the fault of the Council:

There was an 'arrangement' with an external company that was used to deliver service information to residents across the Borough. The company took it upon themselves to deliver both our information and information from another job. This was their decision and had nothing to do with the Council.

After realising their mistake they are going to make a contribution to the Mayor's fund which he thought all would support.

Supplementary Question:

Councillor Getgood responded that he had had many emails about this situation which had caused considerable consternation. Many residents were shocked to find the two leaflets in the same mailing and questioned the connection between operational matters in the Council and political campaigning. He accepted the answer that had been given but felt damage had been done to the Council's reputation. He considered that a public statement distancing the Council from the false impression given should be made and asked if the Executive Assistant could arrange for that to happen.

Reply:

Councillor Fortune replied that he was glad the situation had been clarified and that it was completely the fault of an external company. He was surprised to hear it had caused such complaints and alluded to the previous Mayor who had funded the Londoner newspaper delivered across London with no regard for whether or not it was wanted by residents.

5. From Councillor Peter Fookes of the Portfolio Holder for the Environment - *In the absence the Portfolio Holder the Executive Assistant for the Environment will respond*

What is the policy of his party towards the Freedom Pass?

Reply:

The Executive Assistant stated that Council had always and was fully in support of the Freedom Pass as it currently stood.

Supplementary Question:

Councillor Fookes commented that he recalled at the public meetings held last year looking at the Council finances for this year and beyond, the Portfolio Holder for the Environment was looking at the idea of charging residents £25 for Freedom Passes.

The Mayor commented that this was not a question but more of a statement and that Councillor Fortune did not need to respond. He also reminded Members to ensure their supplementary questions were just that and not lengthy statements.

Reply:

Councillor Fortune said he was happy to respond as he was aware of the public consultation and that there was a vote and many residents supported contributing to a very worthwhile cause. He reemphasised that Bromley remained committed to the Freedom Pass.

6. From Councillor Nicholas Bennett JP of the Chairman of the General Purposes and Licensing Committee

- i) How many members of staff are given time off for trades union and related activities (including Staff Side representation);
- ii) What is the cost of the salary (including National Insurance and pension contributions) of each member of staff for that proportion of time spent on union activity;
- ii) What is the cost of benefits in kind including office facilities, equipment, stationery etc provided to the union representatives?

Reply:

The Chairman replied as follows:

- i) 2
- ii) In response to the first part of the question he did not consider it appropriate to give individual salaries but he could advise that including on costs the total costs came to £57,500; and in respect of the second part of this question including central recharges £6,600.

Supplementary Question:

Councillor Bennett asked why the taxpayer was paying over £63,000 for union representatives and asked rather should it not be the Unions paying for this.

Reply:

Councillor Owen said that it was a matter that could be considered. He had read the tax payers alliance on this matter and certainly agreements were in place that would need to be looked at. However, any expenditure by the Council was open to scrutiny,

7. From Councillor John Getgood of the Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People Services

How many full time staff are employed on School Improvement. How many were employed two years ago?

Reply:

The Portfolio Holder replied that the CYP School Improvement Service had been the subject of restructuring and downsizing over the past 2 years or so. The first reason was as a consequence of the withdrawal of an area based grant from the DfE in 2010/11, totalling £1.4m of which £580k was attributable to School Improvement Services. Secondly as a part of the Council's own Budget Reductions to reduce service costs as part of the Council's financial

strategy 2011/12 – 2014/15 a further £410k savings to the school improvement services were currently being made.

The original school improvement service in 2010/11 had a staffing compliment of 59.2 Full Time Equivalents (FTEs) and this had been reduced to 33.5 FTEs as of April 2011. This level would reduce still further to 18 FTEs in 2012/13, subject to the ongoing staff and user consultations to restructure this service.

Supplementary Question:

Councillor Getgood asked the Portfolio Holder to pass on to the remaining members of the school improvement team grateful thanks for the highly regarded work they did in helping schools, especially those that had fallen into special measures. He asked whether the Portfolio Holder shared his concern that with the new tougher Ofsted regime more schools would be harshly judged by Ofsted and that these schools were likely to be those already teaching in the most challenging circumstances. He asked if the Portfolio Holder also shared his concern that the school improvement team had been left weakened numerically and did not have the resources to work on the preventative measures needed to stop these schools becoming the focus of Ofsted attention. Was there anything that the Portfolio Holder could do about that before the Council was identified as having an increasing number of schools causing concern.

Reply:

Councillor Noad responded that he would pass on the good wishes to the school improvement team. Concerning Councillor Getgood's other questions the Portfolio Holder commented that the member would be well aware from the CYP PDS Committee agenda over the past two years that the service had been subject to great change much of it very complex. It was an ongoing journey probably for the next 2 – 4 years. At this stage it was not known the extent of the Academy proposals that schools would embark on in the future. He thought Bromley had the highest number of Academies probably than anywhere in London and likely anywhere in England. As the member was aware Academies were independent schools not controlled by the local education authority. However, the Portfolio Holder accepted that there were still a number of schools that would remain under local authority control at the moment as was the case particularly in the primary sector. He was concerned about the level of the school improvement teams but the situation was in a period of flux and reorganisation. Councillor Noad was monitoring the situation and in touch with officers to ensure that Bromley could deliver a satisfactory service to the remaining schools under the control of this Council.

8. From Councillor Peter Fookes of the Portfolio Holder for the Environment – *In the absence of the Portfolio Holder the Executive Assistant for the Environment will respond*

What is the backlog of trees needing pruning in the borough?

Reply:

The Executive Assistant advised that all tree pruning was done based on a cyclical annual survey. All Tree work relating to health and safety from the 2011/12 Annual Survey would be completed within the next 2 weeks. Tree pruning was an ongoing cyclical undertaking with orders continually being raised, works undertaken and more orders coming in.

Supplementary Question:

Councillor Fookes said that the situation as he understood it was that 2 years ago half the trees in the Borough still needed pruning and he suspected the situation had got far worse. He asked what plans there were for further pruning in 2012/13.

Reply:

Councillor Fortune responded that as he had already stated pruning was carried out on a cyclical basis of surveying certain sections of the Borough and then regulating them into an order of priority. He asked that if there were any particular trees that the Councillor wished looked at he would take that back to the Department and if he wanted a fuller answer he could provide that as well.

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

- i) What was the Mayoral precept and percentage rise in each year since 2000;
- ii) What was the cumulative increase in the precept and percentage rise in the following periods;
 - 2000-2004
 - 2004-2008
 - 2000-2008
 - 2008-2012?

Reply:

The Leader of the Council explained he had a list of figures and he would give Councillor Bennett a copy immediately after the meeting. Councillor Carr only read out the Annual increase for each of the years requested but had the full details in response to the question below:

i)

Mayoral Precept			
Financial Year	Band 'D' Equivalent £	Annual Increase £	Annual Increase %
2000/01	122.98	17.97	17.11
2001/02	150.88	27.90	22.69
2002/03	173.88	23.00	15.24
2003/04	224.40	50.52	29.05
2004/05	241.33	16.93	7.54
2005/06	254.62	13.29	5.51
2006/07	288.61	33.99	13.35
2007/08	303.88	15.27	5.29
2008/09	309.82	5.94	1.95
2009/10	309.82	0.00	0.00
2010/11	309.82	0.00	0.00
2011/12	309.82	0.00	0.00
2012/13	306.72	-3.10	-1.00

ii)

	Cumulative Increase £	Cumulative Increase %
2000/01 - 2003/04	£119.39	113.69%
2004/05 - 2007/08	£79.48	35.42%
2008/09 - 2012/13	£2.84	0.93%

Supplementary Question:

Councillor Bennett asked if the Leader could give the figure for 2000-2008 cumulatively and what conclusions he would draw from these figures?

Reply:

Councillor Carr replied that in money terms the increase was £198.87p which was a cumulative increase of 139.11%. What he thought this demonstrated was that since 2008 the taxpayers of the Greater London area had had a considerable better deal than they had previously.