

COUNCIL MEETING

24th February 2014

WRITTEN QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

1. From Councillor Russell Mellor to the Resources Portfolio Holder

Can the Portfolio Holder provide the Staff numbers for the past 4 years 2010/2011, 2011/2012, 2012/2013 and 2013/2014 to date, showing the totals of the whole and also by Department in a tabulated form?

Reply:

(See Appendix 1)

2. From Cllr Nicholas Bennett JP to the Renewal and Recreation Portfolio Holder

What actions have been taken since 2010 to improve sporting and leisure facilities in Bromley?

Reply:

The Council has since 2010 undertaken a number of capital schemes to improve sporting and leisure facilities across the borough. In particular, the Council:

Major projects:

- Invested £5.5m in a new 25 metre swimming pool and library at Biggin Hill which was opened in the Spring of 2010
- Invested £1.5m in a new town centre library at Orpington which opened in May 2011
- Invested £5.5m in conjunction with Mytime Active to refurbish the Pavilion Leisure Centre with the inclusion of a new 10 pin bowling alley, this facility opened in May 2012.
- Contributed £150,000 match funding to a Football Foundation Community Development scheme at the Priory Dual use Centre, which was completed in 2012

Ongoing Investment in conjunction with Mytime Active

- £96k into new fitness equipment and upgrades at West Wickham in 2012
- £45k in upgrades to Walnuts Leisure Centre pool and lighting in 2012
- £50k in upgrades and improvements at Beckenham Spar 2012

3. From Councillor Nicholas Bennett JP to the Environment Portfolio Holder

In the current municipal year to date how many;

- i. Flooding incidents
- ii. Fallen trees have been dealt with by his department?

Reply:

We have received 1,166 service requests relating to flooding matters involving the public highway.

The current figure stands at 716 trees in total over the period in question, although following the storm over the weekend of 14/15th February additional trees are still being attended to or removed and this figure will therefore increase. I hope to announce later in this evening's meeting my plan and intention to set about replacing those lost to us in recent times.

4. From Councillor Nicholas Bennett to the Leader of the Council

If he will make a statement on the Council's policy on supporting voluntary service in the Borough and the action taken by the Council to encourage such service?

Reply:

The following information concerning Streetscene & Greenspace Volunteer Support underlines the strength of our support for voluntary service in the borough -

Street Friends

LBB provides the 3700 volunteers with

- A dedicated Officer to administer the scheme
- 6 Street Environment Officers who arrange regular community cleanup days working with volunteers
- Free provision of graffiti kits, litter picking sticks and bin liners.
- Free collection of litter via the Purple Sack Scheme
- Leaflets and E-correspondence

Snow Friends

LBB provides the 380 plus groups, who support over 4000 snow friends, with

- A dedicated Officer to administer the scheme
- An annual Snow Conference
- Free shovels, salt and leaflets. Last year 630 scoops and 2500 salt bags were delivered to residents homes
- Regular snow reports and E-correspondence

Park & Countryside Friends

LBB provides the 56 groups with:

- Dedicated Officers who work side-by-side with groups
- Tools and personal protective clothing
- Insurance cover & risk assessments
- Training
- Organised work days which supports 45000 volunteer man hours per year
- Officer/s support at volunteer community events
- Officer attendance at Friends meetings and AGM's
- Two social events per annum paid for by the Council
- Support and advice with grant securement – the Friends secured an additional £401K external grants securement and £175k of sponsorship and partnership funding for betterment of parks 2012/13

- Direct links to the Ranger Team and Ward Security services. Rangers assisted with 160 Friends activities last year (386 staff hours)
- Officers provide a 'Responsible Dog Ownership' campaign to reduce dog fouling within Friends parks
- The Brook Lane Community Plants Nursery and Leaves Green Tree Nursery provide free training and plants to volunteers to repopulate community greenspace
- Officers encourage groups to be nationally recognised – Friends of Chislehurst and Walden Rec received the 'Team London Achievement award and Southill Woods and Kingswood Glen LEAF Tree and Woodland awards from the Mayor of London
- Bromley funds the Friends Forum website and provides a small annual grant of £2K for the Forum to cover their costs
- Bromley provides each Friends Group with £100 p/a to cover their basic running costs

Additionally

All volunteers have full support from Ward Councillors & senior officers who attend various work days, committee meetings and events

All volunteering is promoted on the LBB website and in the local press

A budget of £60K is provided to accommodate this service

The Council celebrates volunteers achievement with the Mayors Awards and the Parks Unsung Heroes campaign – both held annually

All Parks & Greenspace officer phone numbers and e-mail addresses are shared with volunteers making it a very direct and personalised service

5. From Councillor Richard Scoates to the Resources Portfolio Holder

- What was the Mayoral precept for the years 2001-2002 to 2008-2009;
- What was the Mayoral precept for the years 2009-2010 to 2014-2015?

Reply:

Mayoral (GLA) Precept 2001/02 to 2008/09			Mayoral (GLA) Precept 2009/10 to 2014/15		
Financial Year	Total Precept £'000	Band 'D' Equivalent £	Financial Year	Total Precept £'000	Band 'D' Equivalent £
2001/02	19,511	150.88	2009/10	41,045	309.82
2002/03	22,548	173.88	2010/11	41,153	309.82
2003/04	29,187	224.40	2011/12	41,308	309.82
2004/05	31,425	241.33	2012/13	41,119	306.72
2005/06	33,442	254.62	2013/14	37,008	303.00
2006/07 *	38,110	288.61	2014/15	37,133	299.00
2007/08	40,240	303.88			
2008/09	41,036	309.82			
Total Precept 2001/02 to 2008/09	<u>255,499</u>		Total Precept 2009/10 to 2014/15	<u>238,766</u>	

* 2006/07 was the first year Council tax payers were required to make a contribution to the Olympics @ £20 per Band D equivalent.

6. From Councillor Peter Fookes to the Resources Portfolio Holder

How many people in this borough are entitled to a freedom pass but are not claiming it?

Reply:

There are 65,353 older person pass holders currently in Bromley, this would need to be compared to the Census data to ascertain the number of non-pass holders.

7. From Councillor Peter Fookes to the Renewal and Recreation Portfolio Holder

What was the cost of employing a tree consultant re the TPO for 10 Crab Hill, Beckenham?

Reply:

The cost of employing the tree consultant for advice to the Council on the 10 Crab Hill Beckenham TPO was £1075 excluding VAT.'

8. From Councillor Peter Fookes to the Care Services Portfolio Holder

What financial checks are carried out on care agencies during the period that they have been awarded a contract by the London Borough of Bromley?

Reply:

Current Domiciliary Care contracts were awarded in August 2012. Comprehensive credit checks were undertaken on agencies as part of the initial procurement procedures. The Contract Compliance officers undertake an annual credit check for providers of each contract.

The Council uses the Company Searches Made Simple tool which alerts the Council to any changes in the company. Any alerts are then investigated further.

There are 23 Domiciliary Care providers on the framework, so if any concerns are raised about a provider's viability we can offer the work to other providers.

9. From Councillor Katherine Bance MBE to the Environment Portfolio Holder

Can the Council review the lack of facilities for household refuse storage on High Street, Penge? At present the Council's plan for the tax payer to continue picking up other people's waste is a waste of money and effort.

Reply:

The Council is currently reviewing the provision of waste containment on High Street, Penge. Officers are considering the most practical and economic option, and will consult with Members before implementing any scheme.

10. From Councillor Katherine Bance to the Care Services Portfolio Holder

The number of street sleepers in the borough is increasing. Is there money in a budget to support voluntary run night shelters?

Reply:

Data is contradictory on this matter. We see 30 identified cases in LBB this year against 21 for the previous year. However the annual headcount carried out in November which uses all sources to estimate the number actually bedded down on the street on any one night was slightly lower at 5 than in the previous few years (4 of these 5 currently known but refusing to engage). This suggests that whilst the number of people faced with sleeping rough may be increasing the services are working effectively to provide increased options to come off of the streets.

In addition to the few who are sleeping rough but refuse to engage there is also a number of people in the borough who whilst they have accommodation are perceived as sleeping rough because they continue pursue a visible street lifestyle which makes the numbers appear higher than they really are.

There are a number of services funded centrally, sub-regionally and locally to assist rough sleepers in Bromley:

No Second Night Out: Focuses on helping those who find themselves sleeping on the streets for the first time. The service aims to provide a rapid response to new rough sleepers and provide an offer that means they do not have to sleep out for a second night.

London Street Rescue/Thames Reach: Provide outreach and support services to rough sleepers. They seek to find rough sleepers and engage them to assist them to move away from the street and access accommodation.

Both services work at a pan London level but provide local provision within Bromley. They also operate on a 24 hour basis and have telephone and website facilities where any suspected rough sleeping can be reported to enable them to provide a rapid response verifying contacting the rough sleeper.

The Council's Options & Assessment Service provides a range of housing advice and assistance to rough sleepers. They will assess whether there is a statutory duty to provide accommodation and make the appropriate arrangements and can also refer to a number of accommodation schemes. These include hostels, the sub-regionally funded staging post accommodation which provides short term shelter accommodation pending longer term resettlement plans to be put in place and 2 private rented schemes assisting rough sleepers to access and sustain private rented accommodation..

In addition Bromley currently provides financial assistance through its allocated DCLG homeless prevention grant funding to the annual winter shelter. The shelter operates as part of the cold weather provision between December and March.

The homelessness prevention grant is fully utilised across the priority and statutory housing duties and at present there is no available additional funding to increase the level of services currently provided to rough sleepers. Funding for the staging posts shelter and private rented sector housing schemes however has been secured across the sub-region and contracts extended accordingly.

11. From Councillor Katherine Bance to the Care Services Portfolio Holder

With the number of residents in high priority bands often with severe disabilities and / or mental health issues is it right that they need to actively continue to bid for properties? Can they not be

offered more support rather than being advised to seriously consider widening their areas of choice and considering the private sector?

Reply:

The Council operates a choice based lettings (CBL) scheme which effectively allows housing register applicants to bid on available accommodation. In brief, properties are then allocated to the applicant bidding with the highest housing priority and longest waiting time for that type of accommodation. The scheme only applies to general needs housing stock for those applicants assessed as able to live independently. It does not apply to supported or specialist housing schemes or extra care housing, where they might be assessed through a single panel process.

Extensive consultation was undertaken before the launch of the scheme and the feedback provided overwhelming support for the choice based lettings system being open to all applicants for general needs stock including adapted properties. In particular service users and support groups were keen that no client groups were excluded from the ability to exercise choice.

The CBL scheme does seek to ensure that all applicants are supported and empowered to fully utilise the system and that safeguards are in place should any user experience difficulties in being able to use the system. This includes:

- Training for support workers and a range of agencies to enable them to actively support and guide their clients to use the system
- Support and assistance to bid from the housing allocations team. This includes a dedicated worker where necessary who can assist in identifying potential suitable properties and make bids on the applicants behalf.
- Monitoring of access and bidding patterns to identify those applicants who may require additional advice or support to bid.
- Ring-fencing of adapted/specific properties to ensure only those applicants requiring this type of accommodation are allocated to those vacancies.
- Automated bidding where an applicant is unable to access or actively bid on the system either independently or with support.

The scheme has now been in operation for nearly 5 years and to date the above mechanisms have enabled the vast majority of applicants to make full use of the system without difficulties. Only a very small number of clients have required automated bidding or for someone to bid on their behalf.

The purpose of advising applicants to be flexible about location and to consider private rented sector accommodation are options presented to all applicants due to the limited supply of accommodation which becomes available through choice based lettings. The purpose is to ensure that applicants understand the limitations on supply of accommodation and are able to make informed choices about the housing options available to them. Where appropriate exercising flexibility about the location of accommodation or considering private rented accommodation will effectively widen the pool of potential properties and reduce the waiting time for a suitable property to become available.

12. From Councillor John Getgood to the Environment Portfolio Holder

When will the new park in Kings Hall Road be ready for public use?

Reply:

Cyphers Gate will be opened in the late spring/early summer of 2014.

13. From Councillor Simon Fawthrop to 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:

Between 3rd December 2013 and 19th February 2014 the Major Developments Team have had 5 non-householder pre-application meetings.

Between 3rd December 2013 and 19th February 2014 the Non-Major Developments Team have had 35 householder pre-application meetings and 26 non-householder pre-application meetings.

Details of the individual applicants and sites at present is exempt information and not disclosable in respect to a Council Question.