

COUNCIL MEETING

14th April 2014

WRITTEN QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

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

If he will set out the main points of his proposed programme for the next four years for the Council to be elected on May 22nd 2014?

Reply:

As Council knows the country is only now turning the corner after a catastrophic period of mismanagement by the Labour Government, thankfully ending in 2010, leading to a period of austerity which Councils such as Bromley have had to bear the brunt.

The first major priority will be to finish the intensive work to keep our Authority on a sound financial footing. Much has been achieved already but we will continue to deliver on our pledge for further efficiency to ensure high quality key frontline services can be maintained. It is in our nature to insist on efficiency and we are instinctively an Administration of low taxation. That will not change.

This will involve support for our local economy to enable significant private investment creating jobs and a positive future, particularly for our young people. Growth in retail and business is crucial if we are going to be able to benefit from the Government's incentive to Local Authorities to keep part of any business rate growth. We are working with the private sector and the GLA to deliver retail and leisure schemes in Crystal Palace, Orpington, Biggin Hill, Bromley and Beckenham and would expect to deliver huge investment into our Borough for the benefit of all residents. This also includes the considerable lobbying we are undertaking to improve much needed upgrades in the Boroughs infrastructure both road and rail.

Success in our Borough can only be achieved if we have a high quality well motivated workforce, so we will be doing further work to ensure we have the highest quality and choice of Education for our young people. We will work with Government and indeed the schools and Further Education Colleges to provide the skills and training required.

Very much related to this is the environment we currently enjoy in our Borough. Bromley is seen as a clean and relatively safe place to live and work encouraging business to locate so will be renewing our pledge to residents and the business community that we keep the Borough Clean and Green. We will support local people through our friends Groups and hold our contractors to account, ensuring our roads and footways are kept as tidy as is possible.

We will protect our cherished Green Belt Land and seek to further improve our waste and recycling services, invest in the quality of our highways and pathways and replace fallen trees.

The current and any future Conservative Administration will also be committed to supporting the voluntary sector and our frail and vulnerable residents. We will continue to explore ways of delivering sustainable high quality services reaching those most in need.

We are committed to working with partners and particularly the Bromley Clinical Commission Group to secure the future of Orpington Hospital and a new Health and Wellbeing Centre in Orpington Town Centre.

Finally, we will be lobbying the Mayor's Office for our fair share of Police resources and working with our new Borough Commander to ensure the residents of the LBB (London's Best Borough) remain safe and do not live under the fear of crime.

2. From Councillor Nicholas Bennett to the Environment Portfolio Holder

If he will make a statement on the flooding in West Wickham in 2014 and the actions taken by the Council to assist local residents?

Reply:

Following a period of heavy rainfall, groundwater rose to levels not seen since 2001 resulting in flooding of gardens and sub-floor voids to properties in Courtfield Rise, together with the gardens of properties in Corkscrew Hill and Addington Road. The initial response was to involve London Fire Brigade to pump water from the affected premises in Courtfield Rise across the A232 Glebe Way to an open section of watercourse behind properties in Addington Road. This operation commenced on Wednesday 19th February.

Due to the heavy commitment required from LFB to sustain this operation (up to 6 fire tenders working in 6hr shifts), the Council hired in a high volume pump which has been in situ since 25th February, which has been supplemented when required by further LFB pumping.

This operation has successfully protected the properties in Courtfield Rise, however the increased groundwater level has also flooded the playing fields at Sparrows Den, where a dam has been installed to prevent flooding of Corkscrew Hill and Addington Road.

The Environment Agency have also commissioned contractors to clear both the watercourse into which LFB were originally discharging, and the culvert running underneath the gardens of properties between there and Sparrows Den. It should be noted that the condition of this culvert & watercourse are not the cause of this flooding, although their condition does influence our ability to discharge groundwater into them.

Thames Water have also been pumping 13 million litres per day from a groundwater abstraction facility higher up the valley from Sparrows Den which has helped reduce levels in Courtfield Rise.

Predictions from the Environment Agency suggest groundwater will remain at higher than normal levels until at least the end of April, so we will continue our pumping operation until levels subside using the £100k fund set aside for this purpose by the Executive committee.

A full review of the flooding we have experienced this winter will be undertaken and reported to the Environment PDS in July.

3. From Councillor Nicholas Bennett to the Public Protection and Safety Portfolio Holder

What action he is taking to detect and combat fly-tipping in West Wickham?

Reply:

During the fifteen months from January 2013 to date, there were 4,451 incidents of fly tipping in the Borough. In West Wickham there were 84 cases reported, being 2% of all fly tips in the borough and the fourth lowest incidence within Bromley Wards.

As there is no single site in West Wickham Ward that has a particularly high incidence of tipping, there are no special projects nor CCTV surveillance operations currently running within the Ward and fly tipping is currently being tackled in the same way as all twenty-two Wards in the Borough.

Any fly tipping incidents reported in the West Wickham Ward would result in the following actions:-

- Immediately remove any rubbish that is blocking the Highway and arrange removal of any that is found to be on Council owned land
- Check the rubbish for any identifiers that might lead us to the origin of the rubbish
- Serve formal Notice on the owner of the land, where it is private land and arrange its removal
- Use all available intelligence e.g witnesses, photos, paperwork etc., to identify the perpetrators
- interview any persons identified as being involved with the incident
- Serve appropriate FPN's, Warnings and enforcement Notices and instigate legal proceedings if the evidence supports this.
- Charge our costs back to all such offenders that we take through the legal process.

4. From Councillor Russell Mellor to the Resources Portfolio Holder

Further to my question placed before Council on the 24th February 2014 can the Portfolio Holder provide the salary scales for the staff grades BR and MG together with the number of staff within the relevant grades in each department as listed in the Appendix 1 in reply to my question of the 24th February 2014 for the years 31/03/2011, 31/03/2012, 31/03/2013 and up to the 31/03/2014

Reply:

See [appendix 1 attached](#).

For the BR grades there are salary scales for 1 April 2009, 1 April 2013 and 1 April 2014, for the Management Grades there are salary scales for 1 April 2009, 1 April 2012, 1 April 2013 and 1 April 2014. There was no pay award in the other years.

5. From Councillor David McBride to the Chairman of General Purposes and Licensing Committee

Could he list the yearly attendance figures of each Councillor from the 2010/11 municipal year, including the figure so far for the current year?

Reply:

The latest attendance figures for the current year to date are attached as [Appendix 2](#). The final figures will be available for the annual meeting of the Council on 4th June. The figures for the Council years 2010/11, 2011/12 and 2012/13 have already been published at the end of each year, and are available on the Council website via the following link –

[Useful resources - Councillor Attendance](#)

6. From Councillor David McBride to the Renewal and Recreation Portfolio Holder

Could he list the shop unit vacancy rates for Bromley, Beckenham and Orpington town centres from May 2010 up to the latest available figures?

Reply:

See [Appendix 3](#) attached.

7. From Councillor David McBride to the Renewal and Recreation Portfolio Holder

Could he itemise the financial support from the Council given to areas for their Christmas lights since 2010 and tell me how much those areas can expect in support from the Council this coming Christmas?

Reply:

Between 2010 and 2013, the Council has directly commissioned lights for the 4 main town centres and the costs are as follows:

Expenditure by the Council on Christmas lights

Summary by town centre	2010	2011	2012	2013	Totals
Bromley	41,180	8,000	13,435	13,435	76,050
Orpington	10,770	2,500	5,485	5,485	24,240
Beckenham	10,220	4,700	6,580	6,000	27,500
Penge	4,770	0	4,035	4,035	12,840
Totals	66,940	15,200	29,535	28,955	140,630

NB Excludes costs covered by external funding (e.g. Mayor of London's Outer London Fund)

In the smaller town centres and parades, the Council has encouraged local groups to organise funds for Christmas lights schemes, with the Council offering a small donation towards the overall cost. The amount of the donation has been variable between years and it is not always the same areas obtaining this support. The table below provides a useful summary.

Smaller town centre Christmas lights donations

Year	2010	2011	2012	2013
Total donations	£7,720	£6,000	£3,500	£4,000
Number of areas	8	6	7	8
Average donation	£965	£1,000	£500	£500

Due to the necessary cuts in expenditure which have affected all areas of Council spending, particularly areas which are non-statutory such as Christmas lights, we are only able to devote a maximum of £25k to Christmas lights schemes in 2014. This funding will be focussed on keeping the lights on within 3 main town centres – Bromley, Beckenham and Penge – noting that the lights scheme in Orpington will be paid for by the Orpington 1st BID. The available level of funding means that smaller town centres and other parades will not receive any donations in support of Christmas lights in 2014. This withdrawal of subsidy will apply equally to all areas which previously received support.

8. From Councillor Peter Fookes to the Resources Portfolio Holder

What are the latest statistics for electoral registration in the borough, please list by ward in percentage terms?

Reply:

See [Appendix 4](#) attached.

9. From Councillor Peter Fookes to the Environment Portfolio Holder

What has been the cost to date for the Council and the other agencies involved of clearing up after the floods in Sparrows Den and Courtfield Rise?

Reply:

The Council's costs to date have been £80,000 including sand bags, plant hire, fuel, contractors and officer time. We do not have information on costs incurred by other agencies.

10. From Councillor Peter Fookes to the Environment Portfolio Holder

Why are Friends Groups being denied access to basic information about the contracts for their local park?

Reply:

Your question is based on a false premise because it isn't true.

11. From Councillor Katherine Bance MBE to the Resources Portfolio Holder

For cases of overdue Council Tax is there a case to answer that Bromley Council resorts to bailiffs too early in the process? What are the conciliation procedures?

Reply:

The Authority makes a considerable effort to collect a households Council Tax liability prior to their case being referred to bailiffs. Unfortunately, on some occasions it is only once a bailiff letter is received or visit undertaken that the charge payer is willing to engage and/or make payments. For the Authority to maintain service provision and ensure equality with fellow residents it is necessary for all appropriate means of recovery to be considered.

For information I have detailed the recovery process which I believe demonstrates the opportunities afforded to the charge payer prior to the employment of bailiffs.

- Statutory bill issued – advises as to charge payers liability and instalment dates for the financial year
- Reminder issued – Issued 10 days after the instalment date should the full amount not have been paid. Reminder requests payment within 7 days of date on the letter
- Final Notice issued – Issued 9 days after date of reminder should full payment not have been received. Notice advises instalment arrangement have been cancelled and full payment required within 7 days of date on the letter
- Summons Notice issued – Issued no sooner than 5 days after the date by which the final notice required payment. A minimum of 14 days' notice of hearing is provided. The summons notice advises of a "drop-in summons surgery" and direct line telephone numbers for residents to make arrangements or raise any queries.
- Liability hearing
- 14 day notice issued – Once a Liability Order has been obtained the Bailiffs forward a letter on the Authority's behalf. The communication advises that a liability order has been obtained and they have 14 days to contact them to arrange payment or discuss the account. A financial enquiry form is enclosed for completion in order for alternative recovery methods to be considered, which might include agreeing an extended recovery period.
- Where there is no contact made after 14 days then the 'enforcement' process will commence with the Enforcement Agents.

It is important to note that at any stage in the process identified above an individual debtor can arrange to pay outstanding monies. Even prior to a summons there are three separate letters/statements issued to an individual giving sufficient time to make reasonable arrangements for payment. The majority of our residents pay their council tax on time and would expect us to ensure that council tax is collected from all council tax payers which helps keep the council tax low.

12. From Councillor Katherine Bance MBE to the Renewal and Recreation Portfolio Holder

Is the underpinning work at Anerley Town Hall scheduled to go ahead and if so when is the expected start date?

Reply:

Unfortunately the underpinning works at Anerley Town Hall did not proceed as planned in January. The decision to postpone the works followed the receipt of tenders which were significantly at variance with the budget allocated for the works and therefore the Council could not proceed at that time.

Consultant engineers have since reported that there are no immediate stability issues with the building, and, subject to continued monitoring, the underpinning can be postponed until at least next year. Given that there is now more time to carry out further investigation work on the building, a full condition survey of the whole building is being commissioned to update and properly inform Members about its existing condition and the extent of the maintenance back log. Once this report is received and evaluated, a decision can be taken on the underpinning works, although it has been noted that the Crystal Palace Community Development Trust would prefer the works to be undertaken in January and February 2015.

13. From Councillor Katherine Bance to the Environment Portfolio Holder

Will the Council help to resolve the daily fly-tipping on High Street, Penge by use of temporary CCTV. The Council has said this is not their preferred solution, if that is so, do they have a workable solution?

Reply:

Just to be clear, CCTV IS the Council's preferred solution.

Unfortunately my advice remains that we are prohibited from using technology in situations like this due to overbearing and frankly, certainly in my opinion, borderline illogical RIPA constraints.

Consideration remains ongoing as to how we might better improve the situation locally, including greater use of the Council's littering enforcement officers and/or alternative household waste receptacles and I undertake to update you on any development at the earliest possible opportunity.

14. From Councillor Simon Fawthrop to the Renewal and Recreation Portfolio Holder

How many food recycle bags (bundles) were sold in Bromley's libraries in the last 12 months?

Can these be shown by Library?

Reply:

Food recycle bags sold by library – 2013/14

Library	Number of packs
Central	19,950
Anerley	980
Beckenham	9,205
Biggin Hill	4,795
Burnt Ash	1,295
Chislehurst	4,550
Hayes	1,785
Mottingham	1,400
Orpington	18,690
Penge	2,240
Petts Wood	7,665
Shortlands	2,660
Southborough	5,460
St Paul's Cray	2,800
West Wickham	10,535
Total:	94,010

15. From Councillor Simon Fawthrop to the Renewal and Recreation Portfolio Holder

How many visits were there to Bromley's libraries in the last 12 months compared with the previous 12 months?

Can these be shown by Library?

Reply:

Visits to Libraries –

Library	2012	2013
Anerley	54,107	54,095
Beckenham	177,477	165,241
Biggin Hill	247,462	222,528
Burnt Ash	28,221	28,332
Central	475,447	468,096
Chislehurst	88,440	84,450
Hayes	33,236	31,650
Mobile Library	20,561	16,566
Mottingham	41,870	41,752
Orpington	319,180	308,966

Penge	81,902	80,989
Petts Wood	102,727	103,309
Shortlands	34,706	32,971
Southborough	33,662	31,454
St Pauls Cray	44,121	41,089
West Wickham	130,344	122,026
Total	1,913,463	1,833,514

16. 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 24th February and 7th April 2014 the Development Control Teams have had 19 householder pre-application meetings and 22 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.