

QUESTIONS TO THE ENVIRONMENT PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR ORAL REPLY

1. Questions from Mr Richard Gibbons

a) Improving public health is a key element of the Council's work, states EPP 2015/18. How has the Portfolio Holder used recognised triggers such as health (e.g. rising levels of diabetes and obesity), congestion, and poor air quality in the past six months to achieve behaviour change to active and sustainable travel advocated by the BMA, PHE, TfL, and DfT?

Reply

Over the last year alone, the Council has initiated a number of projects including:

- Releasing our Cycling Strategy for consultation
- Use of Norman Park Lodge as a cycle hub and café,
- Submitted plans for cycling to TfL as part of wider Beckenham Town Centre regeneration plans
- a feasibility study for a new pedestrian and cycle bridge at Petts Wood,
- a corridor study for the A21 including substantial improvements for cycling,
- over 240 new cycle parking spaces
- studies of locations for introducing contra-flow cycle lanes on one-way streets.

Alongside this, we continue to run our highly successful cycle training programme which sees Bromley ranked 7th out of all London boroughs for number of children trained.

As a result, Bromley has seen the mode share of cycling increase from 0.8% in 2013/14 to 1.3% in 2014/15, higher than neighbouring boroughs Croydon and Bexley, which each have a 0.8% cycling mode share. In Bromley schools, this is higher at just under 2% of trips made by cycling. The average for outer London boroughs is 1.7%.

You may be aware that Bromley enjoys the best air quality in London.

Supplementary Question

Mr Gibbons requested details of the numbers of cyclists on the ground rather than as a percentage.

Reply

The Portfolio Holder advised that he would ask officers to arrange for any such information to be made available, were same held.

b) PS Paul Law states most frequent complaint by residents is about poor driving and parking during school run. From (a) 90 school travel plans submitted to TfL and, (b) 779 children and 367 adults trained, how many children/adults have switched mode to cycle to school/shops/stations in past six months.

Reply

The most frequent complaint by residents concerns missed bin collections. It is a police function to deal with poor driving at any time of day. Parking is an acknowledged problem during the school run, a situation just made worse due to recent legislative changes in the Deregulation Bill which have rendered the Council's Mobile CCTV fleet economically unviable. The data you request is not measured on a six monthly basis.

The Portfolio Holder advised Mr Gibbons that he could however have whatever statistics might become available as and when they became so.

Supplementary Question

Mr Gibbons felt that the training of children and adults is not the same as having cyclists on the road; he indicated that training information was therefore superfluous. Mr Gibbons also suggested that in Chelsfield and Pratts Bottom ward there was concern for local residents and a contradiction in who deals with traffic around schools.

Reply

The Portfolio Holder explained that the police deal with poor driving and that the Council deal with parking problems associated with cars being driven to schools. There was no such problem outside of term time when the roads were clearer of parked traffic.

Concerning the comment from Mr Gibbons about superfluous information, the Portfolio Holder suggested that a clearer explanation as to precisely what was sought would be helpful. Mr Gibbons acknowledged that he had used a poor choice of word, conveying that training was only half the story.

c) Bromley's parks and greenspaces contain significant heritage and archaeological assets. How has the Portfolio Holder ensured and monitored that all workers employed by TLG are aware of and trained in the

management and care of these assets prior to working on any site in the borough since being commissioned in June?

Reply

The Landscape Group (TLG) have spent the time since the June 2015 transfer in largely reorganising and recruiting an entirely new establishment and since November integrating that with the manual workforce. In addition there has been a commitment to produce a Parks, greenspace and countryside strategy. This document, which has received wide consultation including heritage interest groups, makes reference to the value of such assets and their protection. The Strategy also refers to training requirements to both its own workforce and also stakeholder groups. Whilst the transfer is only relatively recent TLG has liaised with L B Bromley's Heritage and Urban Design team to facilitate appropriate training opportunities in the near future. Similarly the Orpington and District Archaeological Society had offered to mentor key staff in principal aspects. Finally, several staff that had transferred to TLG from LBB, are organising mentoring sessions with other employees to ensure a universal base understanding amongst all partners.

LBB will monitor the delivery of all of the above through the regular contract monitoring meetings with TLG and via any reports received from interested parties or members of the public. The Portfolio Holder added that there had been a first meeting the previous week of the Group and referred to the future offering promise. Finally, that there remained a strong willingness on all sides to make the new arrangements work.

Supplementary Question

Mr Gibbons felt that the draft strategy wording was weak and implied that there should be more reference to training.

Mr Gibbons enquired whether the Portfolio Holder would consider whether volunteers etc fit into the training programme for heritage objects.

Reply

The Portfolio Holder referred to his belief in achieving results.

He advised that the changeover had been fine and if the Panel considered that additional training was important, that was also fine – at the end of the day outcomes were the most important thing.

2. Question from Mr Spencer Harradine

Given the possible further shortfall of £50m highlighted by the Council, does the Portfolio Holder regret not bidding for £30m mini-Holland funding which

given the DFT formula would have given a significant return through improved health, wellbeing and a much needed reduction in obesity and congestion.

Reply

No I don't. Not for a moment.

All available public funding should be spent on proven priorities for society as a whole, especially at times of pressing economic need and 'mini Hollands' do not fulfil that vital criteria in my opinion.

As we have touched upon previously, there are far easier and cheaper ways for individuals and society alike to improve health and wellbeing, likewise reduce obesity, rather than spending untold millions of pounds on cycling infrastructure which could potentially only be used by a small minority of the general public thereafter.

The Council already focuses closely on reducing congestion at hot spots across the Borough and also remains committed to working with Bromley Cyclists along routes such as the A21 (which sits under TfL's control as you know and which could clearly host dedicated cycle paths), developing a state of the art BMX facility at Norman Park, and strenuously investigating 'Quietways' to facilitate better quality journeys for both cyclists as well as other road users.

Supplementary Question

Does the Portfolio Holder agree that cycling provides part of the answer to obesity, health and the financial problem?

Reply

The Portfolio Holder indicated that cycling played an important part as a mode of transport and it was important to promote cycling for those who wish to do so.

Unfortunately, the Mayor for London's cycling tsar had not stepped up with funding or further assistance for a BMX track/park. The Portfolio Holder would nevertheless be pressing emphatically for cycling facilities along the A21 and had also been frustrated with progress.

There was a problem with by-laws around parks and the Portfolio Holder referred to people being able to cycle off-road with cycling in parks and country parks for recreation an area worthy of further investigation too.

QUESTIONS TO THE ENVIRONMENT PDS COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN FROM MR SPENCER HARRADINE FOR ORAL REPLY

a) How much does the Committee think the proposed strategy will save the Borough using the benefit to cost ratio formula set out by the Department for Transport? Given that across a town of 150,000 people, if everyone walked an extra 10 minutes a day the HEAT model estimates: 31 lives saved, current value of £30m per year that's the budget deficit solved. Bromley pop approx 300k.

Source: Increasing walking and cycling briefing for Local Authority Elected Members http://www.noo.org.uk/slide_sets/activity

Reply

The cycling strategy is just one element of increasing physical activity within the borough. Whilst I don't doubt the figures you quote, the ability for the Council to realise the cost savings in its activities is limited. Trying to calculate a figure for the saving of this strategy in isolation is fraught with difficulty, not least because I would expect that the return on investment is skewed in favour of the most sedentary residents. Our strategies are aimed at all residents. Your example highlights that in terms of increased life expectancy there are benefits to the residents who live longer as well as the reduced need to call on Council Services. In terms of a return on investment, I would particularly like to highlight our over 10,000 Friends of Parks, Street friends, Snow Friends and Tree Friends. These residents combine increased physical activity with more easily measureable outputs in terms of improvements in our green environment, plus providing a further beneficial return of a more pleasant green environment which more residents can enjoy thus increasing their physical activity.

b) Bromley has the 3rd highest level of obesity in London. Could the Committee tell me why there is little reference to the Health and Wellbeing Board and joint projects in the strategy given the suggestion by PHE in: 'Making the case for tackling obesity - why invest?'

Link to presentation: https://www.noo.org.uk/slide_sets

Reply

The Health and Wellbeing Board is tackling obesity according to its priorities and Councillor Page (on this Committee) is leading that Task & Finish Group. In particular they have focused on diet. Looking at the website you reference, the figures seem different to yours. It suggests that for obesity 4-5 year old children are 11th lowest in London, 10-11 year old children are 3rd lowest in London and adults are 6th highest in London and below the England average in all these groups. Obviously we can't be complacent. In my experience there is rarely a magic solution to any issue and for physical exercise there are a

myriad of solutions. Our percentage of residents classed as inactive at 24% is the 6th lowest in London. This would suggest that we are doing fairly well with our many strategies, from road and pavement condition for our cyclists and pedestrians including dog walkers, to our green environment strategy including our exemplary Friends movement aimed at increasing the use of our parks and green spaces. Whilst each area of Local and National Government should be cognisant of the other issues relevant to residents, a clarity of focus on individual strategies should aid their delivery.

Supplementary Question

Mr Harradine indicated that he was looking to see an acceptance that cycling and walking could save a lot of money and have health benefits and that working with the Health and Wellbeing Board would help people become more active.

Reply

The Chairman agreed that more people becoming active was good. The Chairman indicated that he would like to see physical activity and cycling reduce congestion and cycling was part of a wider transport strategy.

He suggested that there might be an element of tension between what new and committed cyclists might like; it was important that the strategy balanced the competing desires to gain the desired benefits.

QUESTIONS TO THE ENVIRONMENT PORTFOLIO HOLDER FROM MR JOHN WOOD FOR WRITTEN REPLY

a) Given the known health, environmental and financial benefits of cycling, would the Portfolio Holder agree that part of his role is leadership and thereby to encourage his constituents to accept less attractive lifestyle changes (e.g. reduced domestic waste collections) which they might otherwise reject.

Reply

Not particularly in the context that you set; whilst I will obviously continue to encourage people who might wish to do so to cycle, it is certainly not for me or anybody else come to that, to instruct people that they should be doing so.

I have to say that I am rather surprised to see you allude to cycling being a "less attractive lifestyle" to other forms of transport as well. I certainly don't see it as such, rather more so a different option, matter of opinion and choice.

With regards to the example of waste which you highlight, I would say that whilst the Council has clear statutory duties to collect waste and wherever possible recycle it, it certainly doesn't however instruct residents what

products to purchase, nor when to use them.

b) Having regard to his previous answer would the Portfolio Holder now say what in this document encourages constituents to shift from car to bicycle?

Reply

The Cycle Strategy includes a wide range of initiatives which aim to encourage uptake of cycling. These include cycle parking at stations, on-street and in residential areas; a highly successful cycle training programme for school children and adults; and studies for the A21 and A233 corridors to improve facilities for cycling. Bromley will also receive two Quietway routes as part of the Mayor of London's Cycling Vision. This year has also seen work begin on the cycle hubs at Norman Park Lodge and Bromley South Station. We will also be looking at cost-effectively widening the cycle network via contra-flow in one-way streets.

Bromley has seen the mode share of cycling increase from 0.8% in 2013/14 to 1.3% in 2014/15.
