

COUNCIL MEETING

26th SEPTEMBER 2016

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

(a) QUESTIONS FOR ORAL REPLY

1. From Sam Webber to the Environment Portfolio Holder

What progress has been made to improve disabled access at railway stations in Bromley such as St Mary Cray and Petts Wood, as announced by the Government in 2014? Has the Council had contact with Network Rail or other agencies to ensure these improvements are completed promptly?

Reply:

Bromley officers have met with representatives from Network Rail on several occasions following the announcement of Access for All funding for St Mary Cray, Petts Wood and Shortlands Stations.

We are however aware that Network Rail are experiencing challenges delivering their full complement of schemes allocated to this spending period (2014-2019), as well that their Chairman, Sir Peter Hendy, formerly of TfL, has recommended a revaluation of all planned schemes, including the potential deferral of Access for All schemes until after 2019.

I am advised that a final decision as to which, if any, stations from the Access for All programme might be deferred is likely to be taken by the Government before the end of this year.

Supplementary Question:

Can the Portfolio Holder ensure that the vital improvements to these stations, including ramps, tactile paving and, especially lifts, proceed, and reiterate the former Government's commitment to this scheme and particularly to these stations – our residents depend on these improvements.

Reply:

Of course we want to see these schemes go ahead and we are urging that the Government moves in that direction. Funding is an issue, but we shall be pushing to ensure that they continue to deliver on what has been promised.

2. From Richard Wilsher to the Care Services Portfolio Holder

On what date did the Council know the Director of Children's Services position would become vacant, and when will the post be filled on a permanent basis?

Reply:

Children's services are part of an integrated department comprising care, education, health and housing services under the leadership of an Executive Director. Following the departure of the Executive Director in May 2015, the Chief Executive oversaw the department but day to day leadership and management of Children's services including the statutory DCS role was allocated to the Assistant Director for Children's services on an interim basis and thus assuming the new title of Interim Director of Services. However, this arrangement was criticised by Ofsted and I am happy to advise that the Council has now appointed an outstanding candidate on a permanent basis for the wider Executive Director role and his start date is currently being finalised – we hope that this will be in November.

Supplementary Question:

Why did it take so long to make the appointment when there was clearly money available in the care services budget? This smacks of austerity. Why was this not undertaken sooner and why was a Director not put in place immediately?

Reply:

Local authorities are changing all the time, both in terms of their organisation and officer arrangements. When Mr Parkin left we considered very carefully how to reconfigure the department. We decided on a particular set up which we thought would work. I think the Chief Executive and myself would say that was probably a mistake and that now we have rectified that mistake and we now have a full Director in post.

3. From Julie Ireland to the Leader of the Council

In June Councillor Terry Nathan made some inflammatory public comments on Facebook about killing referendum Remain supporters until Article 50 was invoked. At the time the Council and Police indicated they were investigating these comments. What were the results of the Council's investigation and has any action been taken?

Reply:

Thank you for your question. The Council's Democratic Services Manager wrote to you on 11th August 2016 setting out the Council's position. As comments were made by Cllr. Nathan in a private capacity rather than through his position as a Councillor, the Council's Code of Conduct cannot be applied. I am sure I do not need to emphasise that the Council does not condone such comments. However, we are not able to take action and, where a democratically elected representative chooses not to resign or is not disciplined by his political party in these circumstances the only way for the public to hold him to account will be through the ballot box. You also refer to the Police – it is my understanding that they did look into this, but this is a matter for them and Councillor Nathan.

Supplementary Question:

Ms Ireland stated that she had not received the response – this would be looked into. Would the Leader of the Council back me up in condemning unequivocally the comments made by Cllr Nathan.

Reply:

The Leader confirmed that he personally did not condone the comments, but that he was satisfied with the response made by the Council.

(b) QUESTIONS FOR WRITTEN REPLY

1. From Susan Sulis, Secretary, Community Care Protection Group, to the Leader of the Council

In the interests of transparency, scrutiny, public accountability and value for money, since 2012/13, Bromley has been required to publish an annual “Pay Policy Statement” (PPS) which can easily be found by a simple search on the Council’s website. Why is only the 2016/17 PPS accessible in this way?

Reply:

In accordance with the Localism Act 2011 we publish our pay policy statement or any amendment on our website as soon as is reasonably practicable to do. There is no requirement to publish previous pay policy statements which have been replaced or amended and in accordance with good data publication principles we endeavour to remove out of date documents from our website.

2. From Susan Sulis, Secretary, Community Care Protection Group, to the Leader of the Council

The remuneration of the previous Director of Children and Care Services, Terry Parkin, in 2015/16 included in the Statement of Accounts, totals £133,087. This includes a salary figure for April and May, when he left, of £33,052. Why is this £7,150 higher than his monthly pro-rata salary for 2015/14?

Reply:

The difference in the pay for 15/16 related largely to a payment for untaken annual leave payable to Mr Parkin when he left the Council and the April 2016 cost of living pay rise of 1.2% paid to all staff employed by the Council.

3. From Susan Sulis, Secretary, Community Care Protection Group, to the Leader of the Council

Where can the annual payments made to the Chief Executive for his electoral duties since 2009/10 be viewed?

Reply:

Fees paid to the Returning Officer are in accordance with the appropriate Statutory Fees and Charges Order and they reflect his personal statutory responsibilities; the fees can be calculated in accordance with that Order.