

**EXECUTIVE**

**10<sup>th</sup> January 2018**

**QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC**

**(A) Questions for oral reply**

**1. From Jane Ward to the Care Services Portfolio Holder**

Will the Council be reflecting on the new legislation on Homeless reduction coming into use in April 2018 when considering changes to their Homeless strategy?

**Reply:**

The Council already has and will continue to reflect on the new legislation that you refer to.

**Supplementary Question:**

Ms Ward asked for a more specific response.

**Reply:**

The draft Homelessness Strategy which is currently published for formal consultation already reflects the key changes and requirements coming into force under the Homelessness Reduction Act in April 2018.

The outcome of the consultation will directly feed into and closely influence Bromley's overarching and evolving Housing Strategy which is due to come to Members for discussion and approval during Q2 2018.

The early intervention initiative is part of the range of activities being undertaken to prepare for the requirements of the Homeless Reduction Act and to address the current cost pressures in relation to temporary accommodation provision.

**2. From Diana Evans to the Care Services Portfolio Holder**

How many homeless households have been rehoused outside of the borough in the last four years and why?

**Reply:**

The total number over the last four years is 2,904.

The reasons include personal choice, safety concerns, access to specialist medical, family or employment support or outright necessity in cases where no suitable local housing exists to meet an individual client's needs.

I would add that the situation is not being helped in any way by better funded neighbouring London Boroughs, who can afford to do so, paying higher private landlord rates than Bromley can afford, forcing rent levels higher whilst at the same time reducing the available housing stock for Bromley residents more locally.

This marks yet another reason for us all, as to why the ongoing discussions for 'Fairer Funding' for Bromley Council must be heard and fully responded to.

**Supplementary Question:**

Mrs Evans asked whether the Portfolio Holder considered this to be a failure of the system.

**Reply:**

The Portfolio Holder responded that, like other Councils pan-London, the Council was acting out of necessity at the current time.

**3. From Stephen Evans to the Leader of the Council**

Will the Leader invite the Secretary of State of the Department for Communities and Local Government (now Housing, Communities and Local Government) to attend a public meeting in the borough to explain how the Government's housing policies will benefit the people of Bromley?

**Reply:**

Were a genuine wider local interest to do so demonstrate itself by all means, although being somewhat presumptuous, I suspect were he to do so or be here today, he would point to measures and facts as he has recently done elsewhere, which include:

- The number of new homes in England has increased by more than 217,000 last year, the highest level of net additions since the depths of the recession and the first time in almost a decade that the 200,000 milestone has been reached.
- Allowing housing associations to be reclassified as private sector organisations, freeing them from the shackles of public sector bureaucracy, enabling them to concentrate on their core, crucial mission which is building homes and providing them with £2bn to do so.
- A year on year rise in 2017 of 27% in the number of new affordable homes over the year before.
- £9 billion being invested in affordable housing.

- A doubling of the housing budget to deliver a million more homes, including hundreds of thousands of affordable homes.
- Reformed planning rules, leading to record levels of planning permissions being granted.
- The freeing up of unprecedented levels of public sector land to build on.
- The provision of hundreds of millions of pounds of finance for small and innovative builders to accelerate construction speeds.
- Tens of thousands of derelict homes being brought back into use
- The ongoing need to identify more suitable Brownfield sites
- The need to scope new Garden Cities, which is clearly going to be a very serious discussion.

I believe that he would also claim that this has only proved possible because this is a government of deeds, not words. A government that is getting things done, whilst at the same time acknowledging there is still much work still to be done in terms of building more homes.

**Supplementary Question:**

Mr Evans asked if the Leader would condemn the management of public sector housing?

**Reply:**

The Leader stated that he would condemn nothing, but that there was a pan-London housing crisis and it was up to all Councils to meet their current housing targets. Bromley achieved its targets, but not all other Councils did. The market was the market – unfortunately Bromley did not have the money to provide housing that other boroughs did, and this was forcing up rents.

**4. From Jane Ward to the Resources Portfolio Holder**

How do the Council see the proposed cuts to housing benefit for vulnerable tenants in supported housing, and its proposed replacement with ring fenced funding, affecting the support and housing contribution costs that are currently being provided in the borough to vulnerable tenants?

**Reply:**

The latest consultation on funding for supported housing only recently closed. This included the current proposals which would come into effect in 2020. As we have not yet received the final proposals we are unable to say exactly what impact there may be. However, overall the government has undertaken that the changes should not result in any reduction to funding. The Director of Housing has indicated that the latest consultation proposed that sheltered, extra care housing and long-term supported housing continue to be funded through the welfare system, as such a grant would not replace existing arrangements. The key issue here will be to provide sufficient detail to ensure that rental levels able to be paid through the welfare system are reflective of the true costs. The government has indicated that they will consult extensively before setting maximum levels payable.

For short term supported housing a ring fenced grant will be introduced. The government has stated that this will be reflective of costs, take into account current and future needs and give greater security to providers. As no detail has as yet been provided on how this will be administered or likely levels of funding it is not possible to assess the overall impact, but we continue to work closely with government to try and develop a funding formula which achieves these goals ensuring there is no reduction to the housing and support contributions.

**Supplementary Question:**

Ms Ward asked whether the Council would be lobbying the Government for full consultation to protect vulnerable tenants, and what form the consultation would take?

**Reply:**

The Portfolio Holder responded that the Council regularly lobbied Ministers – leading members had met with two Ministers in the previous month to explain the implications for Bromley people of the Government's policies.

**5. From Jane Ward to the Resources Portfolio Holder**

What is the expectation of Bromley Council as Universal Credit continues to be rolled out this year of the impact on homelessness in the borough, and will the Council make representations to the government to halt these measures and prevent the escalation of homelessness for families on lower incomes and pressure on local council funding and housing services?

**Reply:**

The Leader wrote to the Secretary of State about the changes needed to Universal Credit on 20<sup>th</sup> November 2017 and I am pleased that many positive changes have been made to reduce the impact on homelessness (the response will be circulated with the minutes). The Council will continue to endeavour to seek the best funding settlement possible towards supporting people on universal credit to prevent homelessness. It is not possible to identify the full impact on homelessness of the roll out of Universal Credit but some of the recent changes already made by the Government made have been helpful.

The Council will also continue to use its Discretionary Housing Fund which is available to support people on low incomes who need support with housing costs.