

COUNCIL MEETING

25TH FEBRUARY 2019

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL FOR ORAL REPLY

1. From Cllr Tony Owen to the Environment & Community Services Portfolio Holder

The report recommending cycle lanes between Orpington station and Crofton Lane mini roundabout reported that 91 cycle journeys were made along this stretch of Crofton Road during a 12 hour period on a sunny summer day.

TfL reported that they have identified 21,000 potential journeys that could be made if there were cycle lanes.

How many journeys need to be made for you to consider the scheme a success and worthwhile spending of £673,000 taxpayers' money?

Reply:

TfL have identified 21,000 potentially cycle-able journeys to/from Orpington Station and Town Centre from all directions, not just on that road, if the facilities are improved. This scheme represents part of the improvements. The project you refer to both offers improved cycling and walking facilities, including improved crossings and will link up with the cycle hub at Orpington Station. Here in Bromley we have always looked at providing residents with travel options rather than compulsion. The improvements will also address an accident history at the Crofton Lane/Road roundabout.

How should we measure the success of a walking and cycle route? Reduced or no further increase in congestion past Orpington Station as our population grows? Reduced peak hour congestion around the Darrick Wood schools? Reduced on street parking and resident dissatisfaction around destinations in the area? Whilst speaking with residents regarding cycling they have commented that narrow painted lanes on busy roads are not conducive to them taking up cycling. Aspects of this scheme are therefore more of a trial to assess the degree that quality of cycle routes is limiting residents' travel options. I therefore do not, at the current time, have a precise number in mind; I would expect numbers to increase over time, particularly as these cycle lanes here become a cycle route. We will monitor the progress of this scheme.

Supplementary Question:

I am surprised that I cannot be told what constitutes success. I have also had an answer to my first written question, from which I learn that there is going to be a consultation and an exhibition on this scheme. Will that be telling the emergency services and the public what is going to happen, or will it be a genuine consultation with the possible cancellation of this folly?

Reply:

Two aspects to that. In the first case, it will be an exhibition in terms of the intention of the scheme. As with all works, when they are advertised, that is the point for the emergency services to respond with their concerns, and for the scheme to be

updated to address those concerns that the emergency services and other statutory consultees might have.

Additional supplementary question from Cllr Simon Fawthrop

Given that we are not entirely sure what success looks like, can he tell us what failure looks like?

Reply:

I thought that I did indicate what success looks like. Success looks like not seeing gridlock around Orpington Station, looking to see reduced peak hour congestion around the schools and other issues regarding on-street parking as more people cycle. We are not like central London, imposing things like the Ultra-Low Emission Zone that might be designed to compel people to do certain things; we are giving residents the options. We do need to give residents options as they pay their Council taxes.

Additional supplementary question from Cllr Robert Mcilveen

Would the Portfolio Holder agree that it is very important to give people options to cycle where there is good potential for greater journeys, but also that failure would look like a badly delivered cycle path, and I am thinking here particularly of Bromley Common on the A21, which is, I think, the worst designed cycle path that I have ever seen. If he ever has any moneys going for it I would very much appreciate it.

Reply:

The A21 is a TfL road and therefore TfL are responsible for the cycle lane along there. Speaking to residents and asking what they see as the barriers to them cycling, that is, those who own a bike and would like to cycle, it is in terms of the quality of the infrastructure that we offer to our residents to make an informed choice about what they want to do. Although we seem to be focussed on cycling, walking is obviously a key component here and is also part of the scheme. Obviously, active lifestyles starting at school is something we should be encouraging.

2. From Cllr Josh King to the Portfolio Holder for Renewal, Recreation & Housing (to be answered by the Leader)

Many of us will have seen the plight of residents and leaseholders in the Northpoint block recently on national TV news. What is the Council doing to resolve the situation given the announced by the Secretary of State for Housing the Communities and Local Government in November last year?

Reply:

The Council remains in an position of advanced lobbying with the Minister of State and his team, along with and supporting Bob Neill MP and the three local Ward Councillors, each of whom have expended a significant amount of time and effort seeking to move this matter forward for their residents over a number of months.

Supplementary Question:

Given that the statement I referred to in the question stated that (talking about the financial support) this would include financial support where this is necessary for local authorities to carry out emergency remedial work, how is this stopping the Council from proceeding?

Reply:

I can confirm that the Council has had no promise of financial assistance to take the works forward and be refunded.

3. From Cllr Kathy Bance MBE to the Portfolio Holder for Renewal, Recreation & Housing

Is there a process for identifying and mapping historic signage or cultural artefacts in Bromley?

Reply:

Cultural artefacts that are identified as meeting Bromley Historic Collection's collecting policy are accessioned and recorded on CALM, which is an online catalogue.

Supplementary Question:

Can you send that information to me?

Reply:

I shall be delighted.

4. From Cllr Ian Dunn to the Portfolio Holder for Public Protection & Enforcement

The minutes of the November meeting of the Safer Bromley Partnership state that you would be meeting with the Leader & Deputy Chief Executive to discuss the Home Office Locality Review on Serious Violence & Gangs in Bromley. Can you please inform us of the actions which came out of that meeting.

Reply:

Following the numerous meetings that I have had with the Leader, the Chief Executive and the Cabinet, the Chief Executive chaired a round table discussion regarding gangs on Friday, 8th February 2019.

Key actions from the meeting were as follows:

- A Strategic multi-disciplinary group similar to MEGA to be set up to consider gang and serious youth violence related issues for residents above the age of 18. Terms of reference for this new group are to be drafted and, additionally, an information sharing protocol is to be drafted and signed by all agencies.
- The new group will report directly to the Bromley Safer Partnership Board, and the Executive Director will brief the Executive Portfolio Holder with updates.
- The new group will also undertake resource mapping and a local authority single point of contact will be identified for gangs and serious youth violence.
- The Chief Executive will update the Leader on all the above actions.

Supplementary Question:

The original report into serious violence and gangs in Bromley stated that there was a perceived lack of governance and over-arching strategy. Could you explain where the over-arching governance and strategy will come from? Will it come from this Council?

Reply:

The over-arching governance is the Safer Bromley Partnership Board, which I am the chairman of, and we are in the process of identifying a single point of contact at officer level, so that they will be the go-to person or officer at the Council to hold all the different strands and all the different things we do here at the Council and with our third parties and residents. So, we will have a strategic officer in place and that officer and the rest of the MEGA type panel which is lots of agencies will report into the Safer Bromley partnership.

Additional supplementary question from Cllr Kevin Brooks

It is very welcoming to hear that there have been some meetings. However, over here we represent some of the wards which are most affected by gangs and I would like to ask what meetings has the Portfolio Holder had, or is planning to have, with the local MP in Lewisham West and Penge, considering that there is a problem with Lewisham and Bromley. Can she update us on any meetings that have been held or are coming up?

Reply:

I have not had any meetings with Ellie Reeves, and she has not requested one with me either. I am very happy to meet with her. We are still in the process of trying to arrange a Safer Neighbourhood Board meeting in the Penge, Anerley and Crystal Palace area. We were hoping to twin-up with the Safer Neighbourhood Panel who have got one at the St Hugh's Community Hall on Thursday this week, but after several weeks of going round in circles they have decided that it was not appropriate. Unfortunately that has not been organised yet, but we will be organising one of our Safer Neighbourhood Board Panel meetings in your area.

5. From Cllr Angela Wilkins to the Portfolio Holder for Environment & Community Services

Is it correct that the fees charged for events on Bromley's parks and open spaces have been/will be increased by 20% this year?

Reply:

The fees and charges for events in Bromley's parks and open spaces have not increased by 20%.

Subject to the size and type of event, fees in 2019/20 have increased an average of 5% factoring in little change the previous year with administration fees associated with event activities remaining unchanged. Some fees have in fact been reduced due to a simplification of the fees process. As an example, market traders have had the fee structure removed completely and now only pay a basic fee and not a fee on the amount of stalls. There is a biannual meeting with all other London Boroughs, "The Events Forum", which looks at pricing mechanisms, along with other aspects of enabling events and activities in parks, as well as how improvements in the service and quality for organisers and the public can be achieved. Idverde represents the Council as a member of the Forum. Pricing for events is benchmarked against other outer London Boroughs that include Bexley, Croydon, Hounslow and Barnet. The

Council's fees generally continue to be substantially in the lower quartile than the surrounding boroughs that can be up to 20% higher.

Supplementary Question:

Can you clarify please where the final decision is made on increase - whether it is made by idverde or whether it is made by the Council?

Reply:

I am not completely sure whether this is part of the delegated authority to idverde or it is between idverde and council officers. It does not at the moment come to me, but I can get more information to clarify that. Obviously there is an agreed structure to how we go about setting fees.

6. From Cllr Kevin Brooks to the Portfolio Holder for Renewal, Recreation & Housing

How much did the Council spend on external advisers for the various Bullers Wood School planning appeals?

Reply:

The Council spent £49,825 on external Transport consultants; that does not include the legal costs which are subject to a confidentiality agreement.

Supplementary Question:

Considering the budget cuts we are asked to consider tonight, do you believe that the money that has been spent (both what you are able to tell us and what you are not able to tell us) has been the best use of Bromley taxpayers' money?

Reply:

I am sure that everybody in this room can think of a better way to spend this money than on consultants, but nevertheless these planning appeals have to be faced and we have to use the best advice we can get in every particular occasion in order to either defend or propose our cause whatever it is, so we have little choice.

7. From Cllr Nicholas Bennett JP to the Leader of the Council

What has been the increase or decrease in the London Mayoral precept in the following Mayoralties?

Ken Livingstone 2000-8

Boris Johnson 2008-16

Sadiq Khan 2016-

Reply:

During his period in charge, if that is the right term, of London, Mayor Livingstone increased by 152%; during his time in charge, Boris Johnson reduced his cumulative increase by 10% and thus far during his term in charge Mr Khan has increased his precept by 16%.

Supplementary Question:

What conclusions does the Leader draw from that question and answer?

Reply:

I wish very strongly to include TfL in this response, who are responsible for a good tranche of this. I think it proves, as conclusively as numbers ever can, that whether it is at government level, council level or mayoral London level, that if you want good value for money, high quality low cost services you would be better off supporting the Conservatives.

Additional Supplementary Question from Cllr Angela Wilkins:

Does the Leader remember how much Boris Johnson spent when he was Mayor on (a) the water cannon and (b) the garden bridge?

Reply:

No, I have no idea whatsoever, but I do know that he save Council Tax payers across London 11% during his time in charge, that Mayor Livingstone increased costs by 152% and thus far Sadiq Khan has increased his by 16% and he appears to have some way to go to fix his budget deficit.

Additional Supplementary Question from Cllr Simon Fawthrop:

Is Cllr Smith aware that Sadiq Khan continues to spend money on his Press Office and in-house stuff rather than on front line policing, and that had he supported the Conservative budget at the GLA we would now be having more police officers on our streets.

Reply:

I am aware of that, and it is very regrettable in my view that the Conservative Group on the GLA did not have their budget amendments taken seriously because it would, as Cllr Fawthrop correctly says, have resulted in more police on the street in short order, which has already been mentioned in this evening's debate and may very well be mentioned again as a pressing priority for this borough.

8. From Cllr Tony Owen to the Chairman of Development Control Committee

What progress has been made in attempting to have a meeting and discussion with a member of the planning inspectorate to consider a common approach to determining planning decisions in the Petts Wood Area of Special Residential Character? (question 11 - last Council meeting.)

Planning appeal verdicts have been so inconsistent that it is impossible for planning sub-committees to make logical and informed decisions.

Reply:

I am very much aware of your concerns about a series of inconsistent and illogical planning appeal decisions that have been taken on several Petts Wood appeals, including those relating to the Area of Special Residential Character. To this end, I have now written to Phil Hammond, the Director of Casework at the Planning Inspectorate to ask him to consider the matter and to come up with a more sensible and consistent method of decision making on local appeals in your ward. I have also requested that he comes to pay a visit to Petts Wood in person to meet you and your ward colleagues to discuss a better way forward. I await his reply with interest.

Supplementary Question:

No further question, but I have seen a copy of Cllr Michael's letter and I thank her for what she has done so far.

9. From Cllr Josh King to the Portfolio Holder for Environment & Community

Will the portfolio holder please supply the numbers of vehicles owned and leased by the Council, including those allocated to car clubs, in the following categories: petrol, diesel, hybrid and electric only?

Reply:

Under the lease car scheme, there are 147 vehicles, none of which are owned by the Council; 83 are petrol, 44 are diesel, 19 are hybrid and 1 is electric. The allocated commercial fleet, which includes car, vans, gritters, school minibuses etc, 12 vehicles are leased, 40 vehicles are owned by the Council; there are no petrol vehicles, 50 are diesel, 1 is hybrid with 4 hybrid vehicles on order to replace diesel vehicles, and there is 1 electric vehicle, which is a works truck.

Supplementary Question:

Given that a recent report has shown that electric and hybrid vehicles are now cheaper to run and own than fossil fuel powered vehicles, what is the Council's policy on moving towards these cheaper and more environmentally friendly vehicles?

Reply:

In summary, the policy was consulted on in our LIP, which is a progressive move towards electric and hybrid vehicles. As with all environmental aspects it is also worthwhile considering the remaining economic life, rather than jumping to a particular aspect. Whilst running costs is a considerable element, there is also the environmental cost of building the battery and mining the battery that needs to be considered. We are taking a cost-based approach in terms of running out the remaining life in vehicles rather than just looking at the current cost. We have also got to include the capital cost and assessing when it is best to update those vehicles, and the regulatory costs as well.

10. From Cllr Kathy Bance MBE to the Leader of the Council

Given that many of the reports for PDS Meetings are appropriately very detailed but very lengthy, would it be helpful to Councillors to include an Executive Summary at the beginning of each report?

Reply:

Although it is only a matter of personal opinion, I tend to respectfully take a different point of view on this particular question.

Whilst an Executive Summary at the head of a report would clearly offer both a firm steer and the conclusion which any report's author could choose to present 'differently', there surely has to be a danger that it would also reduce the amount of highly necessary in depth scrutiny and challenge required by Members into the grinding points of detail which sit below, particularly in cases where an Executive Summary broadly reaffirms a Member's own views and preferred way forward on a given subject.

In addition, I am reminded by officers that the Council's report template starts with a section titled "Reason for Report," the recommendations and then a page where various implications can be summarised – financial, legal, staffing implications etc.

Although anything can of course be changed and challenged in terms of format, their suggestion is that this lead-in already acts as something of an executive summary in

itself, as well, that if officers are not providing the summary information Members require in the “Reason for Report” section, that we as Members need to make Officers aware of that fact.

For historic context for those colleagues in the Chamber not here at the time and others who were who might perhaps have forgotten, I am further reminded that the current report template was designed by a Member Working Group approximately ten years ago, although it has been updated as necessary since that time.

The aim of Members at that time was for the first two pages of any report to contain enough summary information for them to know whether they needed to read the whole report.

Committee Services did briefly print these first pages on blue paper just to make them stand out, and some Members opted to receive just these “blue sheets” rather than whole reports and it is over this last point in particular, that I personally hold the concern I raised above, which is why I tend to believe that what we have today continues to adequately serve the purpose it is intended to.

Supplementary Question:

I believe it is every Councillor’s duty to read the whole of every report that they receive. Do you not agree that having an executive summary may have flagged up the problem that we had with the Schools Forum recently?

Reply:

I see no reason why it should have.

11. From Cllr Ian Dunn to the Leader of the Council

The report from the House of Commons Public Accounts Committee into Local Government Spending dated 6 February 2019 states that “there is still no sign that the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government has a clear plan to secure the financial stability of Local Government in the long term”. How is the Leader ensuring that this uncertainty from Central Government is fully taken into account in the Transformation Programme?

Reply:

The Council produces a four year financial forecast which is included within the 2019/20 Council tax report sitting before Members this evening. Against the backdrop of future uncertainty, medium term financial planning becomes even more important. The 2019/20 Council Tax report refers to measures in place to deal with the medium term financial position between 2020/21 and 2022/23.

We continue to lobby hard to secure a fair deal for Bromley and recent successes include the removal of the negative revenue support grant in 2019/20 (benefitting the borough to the tune of £2.3m) and receiving one of the highest levels of transitional fund in 2016/17 and 2017/18 of an additional £4m. I readily recognise, as will every other Council leader of any political hue, presenting this year’s budget, that the long awaited Spending Review, Fair Funding Review, devolution of business rates and the emerging Green Paper on Adult Social Care, whenever that might eventually surface, adds to the extremely difficult and complicated financial uncertainty that we do currently face.

However, thanks in large part to this Council's strong financial management since 2001, as well as remaining the only debt free Council in London whilst maintaining adequate levels of reserves meaning that we don't have debts or interest payments to make to lenders and can instead benefit from revenue income from our assets, we remain relatively well placed to face the threatened financial challenges which unquestionably lie ahead.

All of these factors feed in to the Council's evolving Transformation Programme as will become ever clearer to Members over coming months as policies are honed and papers appear before the relevant Committees.

Supplementary Question:

Yes, I agree about the amount of uncertainty about what lies ahead, and it is cross party. I would like to repeat the last sentence of my question, which is how is the Leader ensuring that this uncertainty from Central Government is fully taken into account in the Transformation Programme and the various work-streams within it?

Reply:

I can understand why Cllr Dunn would probably like me to tell him how we are going about forming and drawing together the Transformation projects. I am not going to do that at this point in time, because it is work in progress but what Members on all sides of the chamber will see over the course of the coming months is how these policies are being drawn together and how they are capturing all the various aspects of current service and current spend versus projected income and projected reduced income. It is at that point that there will be a big debate to be had and there will be some very difficult decisions made.

12. From Cllr Angela Wilkins to the Portfolio Holder for Renewal, Recreation & Housing

On what terms were Bromley's housing stocks handed over to housing associations?

Reply:

The ownership of Bromley's social housing stock was transferred in full to Broomleigh Housing Association (now Clarion Housing) in 1992 in compliance with the terms of a large scale voluntary stock transfer (LSVT). The Legal documents setting out the full terms and conditions run to many hundreds of pages. If Councillor Wilkins has a specific question I will instruct the legal officers to get the documents out of the Archive and clarify for you.

Supplementary Question:

My concern arises from whether or not extremely large maintenance costs, such as the replacement of a roof, should be passed on to tenants? It is pretty much unaffordable for some of them.

Reply:

I understand that concern - I will look into that for you.

13. From Cllr Nicholas Bennett JP to the Portfolio Holder for Renewal, Recreation and Housing

How many lockers there are in the wet changing area of the Spa Leisure Centre and how many are available for customer use?

Reply:

There are apparently 406 lockers (I have not counted them myself, but that is what I am assured) in the wet changing area of the Spa, out of this currently approximately 151 are out of operation.

Supplementary Question:

Unfortunately, this is not accurate. I did a survey last night when I was at the pool. There are 140 lockers which are broken, there are 19 that do not have a door on them, and there are 74 that do not have a key. As I did the survey after the last member of the public had left I think we can be sure that the keys were there. That is 233 lockers, which is 57% of all the lockers in the changing room. Given that he gave me an answer on 16th July last year, when he told me that there were something like 60 lockers that were broken, and that Mytime were working on it, can he tell me why, today, they have a notice on the lockers saying that they are working on solutions? Either they have locks or they have new lockers. It is not Brexit, and they are not looking at the Irish backstop.

Reply:

This is a mystery, isn't it? I am advised that an order has been placed to replace lockers. It was placed on 5th February, with a five week delivery time. We shall see whether that is met and I shall certainly speak with the Managing Director of Mytime about this on a personal basis to find out what is going on. Apparently a contributory factor to the current high incidence of faulty lockers is due to break-ins and vandalism, and although CCTV is available I don't know if they spotted you there, Councillor Bennett and what you were wearing at the time, but apparently it appears not to be a deterrent. There are people in Beckenham who like performing before the cameras and breaking into lockers. In all seriousness, it is a serious problem and I will speak to Mytime about it to see if we can rectify it.

14. From Cllr Nicholas Bennett JP to the Portfolio Holder for Renewal, Recreation and Housing

Whether Bromley will be participating in the Open House weekend in 2019?

Reply:

Yes.

Supplementary Question:

Thank you.