

**COUNCIL MEETING**

**15<sup>th</sup> July 2019**

**QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL FOR ORAL REPLY**

**1. From Cllr Angela Wilkins to the Leader of the Council**

Your statement at last full Council confirming that LBB has withdrawn from the London Councils' agreement to accept 0.07% lone refugee children (UASC) seems to have been contradicted by comments in subsequent media coverage.

Please clarify your position: are you or are you not complying with your original promise to London Councils?

**Reply:**

I believe the stated position is crystal clear already. The transcript from the meeting reads:

“...Regarding the UASC, it is a very serious issue across London. There is a requirement to meet 0.07 target which Bromley has honoured/will honour.”

No ifs. No buts. Promise and commitment honoured in full.

**Supplementary Question:**

We have information from the Department of Health and Public Health statisticians that 0.07% is actually 56 children, so we are currently in a position where we are not accommodating the amount we agreed to. Will the Leader of the Council agree to check this information tomorrow?

**Reply:**

As I explained at the previous meeting, there are a large number of other Councils, including Labour Councils, similarly concerned about the exponential growth in UASC numbers across London, the funding difficulties that responsibility brings in its wake for other Council services and the failure of the current system to resettle UASC more widely across Country as the original agreement foresaw.

As you might have seen from the recent report to the London Council Leaders meeting earlier this month, it would appear that Bromley's stance on the matter has finally prompted some firm and positive action to be taken at London Councils level, and about time too.

I have attached the link of LCs summary here:

<https://www.londoncouncils.gov.uk/our-key-themes/asylum-migration-and-refugees/unaccompanied-asylum-seeking-children-uasc>

I have requested a copy of the report be attached to the minutes of this meeting in the form of an appendix for wider digestion ([Appendix 1](#)). If there is any query of the numbers Mr Adetosoye can follow that up.

**2. From Cllr Marina Ahmad to the Portfolio Holder for Children, Education & Families**

Could the Portfolio Holder report on the lobbying meeting he has had with local head-teachers and Damian Hinds, the Secretary of State for Education, about the need for higher levels of funding for SEND provision in Bromley?

**Reply:**

We had a question on the Education PDS last week. The question asks about a meeting with Damien Hinds, but we met with Nick Gibb, the Schools Minister.

It was a very positive meeting - it was around the idea of LAG funding which is the particular issue we have in Bromley as it effectively reduces our ability to fund schools because of the way the funding is calculated. We did also bring up the issue of the high needs funding. The Minister was receptive to the delegation and officers had subsequent correspondence with the Department for Education. We will continue to lobby on behalf of Bromley pupils.

**Supplementary Question:**

Can you also explain how you think these meetings will help our present situation and prevent last November's situation re-occurring?

**Reply:**

The situation last November was around the deficit in the High Needs block. There will still be a deficit in the High Needs block unless that deficit is met. It is only by the piloting that needs to be done around High Needs, which we are doing along with a number of other local authorities, and by working with the Schools Forum to find a way through - that is the only way to find appropriate funding.

Your question is how can we avoid what happened last year, but unless we get a bucket full of cash to the tune of £3m, we are going to have some conversations about how we go forward, and those conversations are happening with the Schools Forum. You may not be aware that there was a letter sent home to Bromley parents last week from the secondary schools, which highlighted the fact that we are having positive conversations. We will lobby and we will keep banging the drum for the borough and we will keep working for the schools to achieve the appropriate fair funding for the borough.

**3. From Cllr Josh King to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Community Services**

At Full Council on 10th December 2018 I asked the Portfolio Holder about the recycling of material collected in Bromley. He answered that all material collected is initially processed in UK. I note from a recent press article that Veolia sends material abroad. Can the Portfolio Holder clarify if this is a change since December?

**Reply:**

Yes, but only for paper and card. A full verbal update was provided to the last Environment PDS. After initial processing Bromley's materials are sent to the most environmentally and economically sustainable outlets that are compliant with relevant legislation.

**Supplementary Question:**

The contractor issued invitations to its recycling site. Has any detail of these visits been provided, and can it be made public?

**Reply:**

I personally have not received any of those. I imagine my officers have double-checked that Veolia have actually completed what they said they would do. In terms of anything that can be made public I will seek to make it public.

**4. From Cllr Simon Jeal to the Leader of the Council**

Many councils across the country recently flew Pride flags at their town halls/civic centres, to mark Pride month and as a visible show of support for their LGBT+ residents, is there anything that prevents Bromley Council from doing the same?

**Reply:**

I would offer the view that practice and tradition have formed over the years, that the Union Flag (or indeed on special event days the Cross of St George or the Armed Forces) best serves the choice of flag to be flown over the Civic Centre, given its over-arching symbolism for all Bromley Residents.

**Supplementary Question:**

Flags of course are important symbols, and the Pride flag is an important symbol for Bromley's LGBT community. Does he not feel that, if the Council were not to pay anything toward the cost, it would be appropriate for that flag to be flown during Pride at some point as an event, as mentioned for the armed forces, to show our pride in our LGBT community?

**Reply:**

On a personal note, I think that the Union Flag is the correct flag to fly over the Civic Centre, I would not change the current process for choice, I think it is important that we always represent all residents of the borough and our representation and commitment to the LGBT+Q community is absolutely encapsulated in every policy and every action that we take through the committees of this Council. I think that is where the evidence is, my personal view is that equality is best demonstrated by what joins us and brings us together rather, perhaps, than what divides us.

**5. From Cllr Ian Dunn to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Community Services**

A recent FOI request has revealed that a number of 20 mph zones became operational in Bromley in 2009 and earlier, with very few new 20 mph limits implemented in the last 10 years. Can the Portfolio Holder please explain why there have been so few new 20 mph speed limits implemented since 2010?

**Reply:**

Bromley has an objective to reduce the most serious accidents on our roads. Bromley has a good record of reducing KSIs using an evidence-led approach to prioritise spend. The approach has now been codified in the Borough's LIP3. We choose the most relevant measure to achieve this outcome, including improved cycling and walking facilities, islands, revised junction layouts as well as advisory 20mph and 20mph limits. We continually review past performance of measures to guide future schemes.

**Supplementary Question:**

The LIP talks about 20mph zones being introduced on a reasonable basis. How many 20mph zones are being considered since the LIP was approved earlier this year?

**Reply:**

As I said, we will continually look at the most relevant scheme to deal with the accidents we have seen at that location. In a good number of cases that will include 20mph limits but that does not mean that that turns out to be the scheme that we bring forward as being the most appropriate for that location. Therefore, I do not feel that it is appropriate to share specific numbers because in a good number of those it will be found that a different intervention will be more relevant to reducing incidents than a 20mph limit.

**Additional supplementary question from Cllr Michael Tickner:**

Is the Portfolio Holder aware that driving at 20mph increases air pollution - does he want to see pollution increase around our schools?

**Reply:**

No, I would not like to see pollution increase around schools.

**Additional supplementary question from Cllr Marina Ahmad:**

NICE has said that 20mph is actually the best way of reducing pollution.

**Additional supplementary question from Cllr Kieran Terry:**

Is the Portfolio Holder aware of a report from the London Borough of Lewisham which showed that their 20mph borough-wide speed limit, which cost them £1.23m, reduced speed by an average of just half a mph and an increase in the first full year,

2017 of KSI's of 4%. Does the Portfolio Holder agree with me that instead of wasting Council tax-payers money on a scheme such as this, we should invest scarce public resources into road traffic schemes that will have a genuinely positive effect on our KSI figures and the well-being of residents here in Bromley?

**Reply:**

Whilst I would not say that I have complete familiarity with the figures provided, and our LIP 3 does indeed codify an approach to deliver the most cost-effective way of reducing the most serious accidents in our borough, so we can reduce the most accidents and have the most impact and therefore have the fewest people dying and suffering life-changing accidents on our roads as possible.

**Additional supplementary question from Cllr Kathy Bance:**

If someone is hit by a car at 30mph they are far more likely to sustain serious or fatal injuries than if they were hit at 20mph. No amount of money could make up for the loss of one life.

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

Is the Council aware of any plans to roll out 5G across part or all of the Borough in the next 5 years? Would the Portfolio Holder comment on various concerns about the safety of 5G and how the Council will respond to those concerns?

**Reply:**

I understand that 5G is being rolled out in Central London at the present time, but there is no timescale for the rollout in Bromley. On safety, the government is adamant that 5G is safe and every healthcare body, regulator and otherwise officially accountable organisation agrees.

**Supplementary Question:**

My inbox says that residents do not believe that 5G is safe. I am no expert, but can I ask that if there is a forthcoming decision that we will roll it out in Bromley that we are transparent about it and the public get to know about it?

**Reply:**

Absolutely, I can make that assurance.

(Councillor Simon Fawthrop declared an interest as an employee of BT in relation to this question.)

**7. From Cllr Kevin Brooks to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Community Services**

Cigarette butts are a plague on our streets. Will the Portfolio Holder commit to dramatically increasing the number of bins in the borough which include a section to safely dispose of cigarette butts?

**Reply:**

I do not believe this will be cost effective. We will continue to combine anti-litter campaigns and enforcement action to target behavioural/habitual change on the part of the litterer.

**Supplementary Question:**

This point came from the frustration that many of us have when we are going round our wards doing litter picks. You can spend an hour around one bin due to the amount of cigarette butts due to the fact that the majority of our bins are not conducive to taking cigarette butts. Whether it is through the Council itself or the Council putting pressure on this is really important. Is there any way the Portfolio Holder can put pressure on outside bodies to gain some more money?

**Reply:**

I do not believe that I can put pressure on particular outside bodies. If there are companies that are using the public highway for their smoking areas and not providing a suitable receptacle I will certainly make sure that we can do things. Like you, I do litter picks; my litter picks are typically along the High Street which does have bins with facilities to accommodate cigarette butts. I agree that I probably see as many cigarette butts there as anywhere else, or more, given the increased footfall. I do believe it is going to be much more on the educational aspects and increasing the enforcement side so that people understand that there is a good change that they will receive a significant fine.

**Additional supplementary question from Cllr Simon Fawthrop:**

Does the Portfolio Holder agree that the best way to deal with this issue is to encourage people to give up this filthy habit?

**Reply:**

There are many reasons why people smoke, but I certainly consider that the air pollution and financial aspects as well as the health aspects are very good reasons for people to be encouraged to give up smoking or move to more environmentally sustainable alternatives such as e-cigarettes.

**Additional supplementary question from Cllr Ian Dunn:**

What has this Council done to its budget for stopping smoking over the last five years?

## **8. From Cllr Angela Wilkins to the Leader of the Council**

At the Council meeting on 8 May 2019 you listed your priorities for the year ahead. Knife crime and youth violence was not included. Why not?

### **Reply:**

In paragraph one of the minutes in question you can see I detailed my key priorities over the course of the coming year, where I believe the Council can strive to take a significant steps forward in areas such as Housing, Homelessness, care for the vulnerable elderly, the closer integration of Health and Social and a wider based approached to reduce loneliness across our Borough.

All very good news in waiting where we can take our agenda forward with firm initiatives as the principle lead authority.

At the head of paragraph two I said “briefly mentioned a number of other issues, such as the large number of people interested in public protection issues,” which very much includes knife crime and youth violence, albeit we can only play a supporting role to our principle partners, the Police, in such matters as always.

As Members in this Chamber this evening have been briefed previously on more than one occasion, the Council will continue to do its bit wherever it can to support the Police, as has been demonstrated recently by the appointment of a senior Gangs and Serious Youth Violence Officer to assist them with their difficult duties.

In addition to this, we have developed with the police and other partners a Knife and Serious Violence Plan which is regularly reviewed by Bromley Safer Partnership Board, a clear commitment to working with the Police to reduce the scourge of knife-crime across the borough.

### **Supplementary Question:**

I am sure that you remember the Home Office peer review group which said that this Council was failing to recognise that there was a gangs problem and a knife problem. Would you not accept that if you talk specifically about a commitment to fighting gangs and youth violence, serious violence and knife-crime it would be far more reassuring to people than the reply you have just given?

### **Reply:**

No, I would not. Our commitment is unabashed and any suggestion to the contrary is scurrilous. As recently as March 12<sup>th</sup>, I believe it was at the Penge Forum, it was reported that gang problems are under control to a greater extent in Penge than hitherto, and as recently as this morning the Portfolio Holder for Public Protection and Enforcement met with the senior policeman in the borough, who, whilst making no guarantees, currently reported that things were far calmer than they were this time last year. So, we do what we can, we cannot do everything, within the limited resource packet we have, but the news looks good, the projections are moving in the right direction.

**Additional supplementary question from Cllr Kathy Bance:**

I was at the Penge Forum meeting, as was Councillor Brooks, and I do not recall that statement at all. Have you seen that noted in the minutes of that meeting?

**Reply:**

Yes, I have.

**9. From Cllr Marina Ahmad to the Portfolio Holder for Children, Education & Families**

How many of permanent school exclusions in the borough are of children who have SEND?

**Reply:**

Two.

**Supplementary Question:**

Is he aware of the exclusions that have taken place because of children who have SEND being placed inappropriately in provision that does not suit their needs? They actually need provision for a higher need but there has been no place because of lack of provision.

**Reply:**

No, I am not aware of any specific cases - if there are any specific cases, as we talked about at the Education PDS Committee last week do let us know as we will follow it up. It is the commitment of this borough that we will ensure that there is adequate provision for these children.

**10. From Cllr Josh King to the Portfolio Holder for Resources, Commissioning and Contract Management**

The Council has boasted that its withdrawal from national pay negotiations has led to better pay awards to staff. Can the Portfolio Holder explain why there are still a number of staff who are paid below or near to the London Living Wage and what efforts have there been to raise them above this?

**Reply:**

We moved to local pay and conditions in 2012. 98% of our workforce signed the amended contracts. In the past seven years we have twice matched the national award and we have in four years bettered it. We still believe that it is right and proper for democratically elected councillors to manage the local pay award process rather than the outdated regional and national negotiating frameworks.

We are able to flex our pay and reward arrangements to reflect our local issues and circumstances. We recognise and reward exceptional performances by individuals and teams. Every year these awards have been paid on time in April, unlike the national award which has dragged on until the autumn. Every year the Council also provides £200k to fund the merited reward voucher scheme and since it was



implemented in 2014 more than 1,000 awards totalling £1m have been awarded for excellence.

The local pay arrangements have also helped us to build a better relationship with staff and their departmental representatives. As a result of their excellent work and ideas including plastic recycling, staff wellbeing initiatives, mental health awareness campaigns, just to mention a few examples, we have released a further £200k to address a few “hygiene factors” as requested by departmental representatives. We will continue to fully reward excellence and harness the considerable talents of our staff.

**Supplementary Question:**

What efforts have you made with the Trades Unions to assist those staff who are paid less than the London Living Wage?

**Reply:**

Trade Union representatives have met through the Local Joint Consultative Committee. Some 20% of our workforce have decided that they would like to become a member of a trade union, some 80% have decided that they would rather not. You may well know that it was the Labour Group that wrote to every single member of staff encouraging them, seven years ago, not to enter into local pay and conditions. 98% of the staff decided to trust us, because you said we would give them awards that were less than the national agreement. We have not once done so. You said we would erode their conditions - we have not once done so. Then when we said we wished to distribute merit pay of £200k per year you voted against it. We believe that our workforce is worth the extra money; we will put our extra money into our workforce and that is how we will run this Council.

**Additional supplementary question from Councillor Angela Wilkins:**

Can I ask the Portfolio Holder how confident he can be about that 20% trade union membership figure, given that a number of members pay on direct debit? In fact, the Council is not aware, and there is no longer the opt-in/opt-out that there was.

**Reply:**

Entirely.

**11. From Cllr Simon Jeal to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Community Services**

As part of the Mayor of London’s car free day on 22<sup>nd</sup> September, many London boroughs will be allowing residents to request road closures for ‘play streets’ schemes, to allow children to play outside safely on their streets. Will the Council be allowing Bromley residents to do so?

**Reply:**

The Council continues to focus its effort and funding on work and projects to facilitate residents and visitors to make a permanent shift to more active choices in their mode of travel.

The Council considers that this is a more efficient use of its funds than a one off, more virtue signalling, event or set of events. If any Friends or resident groupings do wish to apply for a road closure we continue to accept applications in the usual way.

**Supplementary Question:**

The Council's current road closure scheme costs more than £500 per time. I hope that you can agree that for local residents wanting to run play streets on a regular basis that is incredibly expensive. If local residents and local residents groups show support for play streets would the Portfolio Holder consider a reduced or no-cost scheme to allow on-going play-streets to be run on some roads across the borough?

**Reply:**

We continue to believe that the approach we have is the most appropriate method. If there are ways to effectively streamline applications for road closures such that the fees, which I do not recognise, for individual roads, as opposed to a high street, we can explore those, but we are focussing on a permanent change and on schemes that are going to affect the most residents rather than a one-off individual road.

**Additional supplementary question from Councillor Simon Fawthrop:**

Residents are happy to pay for the closure of roads during the Petts Woodstock event.

**12. From Cllr Ian Dunn to the Portfolio Holder for Renewal, Recreation and Housing**

Please provide the number of lockers operational and the percentage of the total this represents in the male and female dry side changing rooms in the Beckenham Spa.

**Reply:**

There are 730 lockers in total at Beckenham Spa of which there are 106 in the female dry side and 128 in the male dry side, that gives a total of 234 dry side lockers. Presently, there are 9 lockers out of service, which is less than 4% of the overall total.

**13. From Cllr Kathy Bance MBE to the Portfolio Holder for Resources, Commissioning and Contract Management**

Given that Parliament will be asked to give debtors a 60-day lifeline of protection against enforcement action early in 2021, will LBB offer this lifeline, which could save lives, to our residents before 2021?

**Reply:**

The 60 day period referred to is part of the government's 'breathing space' proposal which is designed to allow an individual in problem debt sufficient time to seek debt advice and enter into an appropriate solution. Although the government has stated that they would like to introduce this policy as early as 2021 the detail of the policy is

still to be finalised. As such it would not be advisable to implement this in advance of the policy being agreed and fully understood.

I know that you are genuinely concerned about this. Councillor Dunn and I met with officers to discuss this sometime previously. You are absolutely right, it is something that we need to keep closely on the radar. In the meantime, the Council has already utilised a number of initiatives that are designed to help those debtors who may be struggling to meet their debt commitments and we have circulated separately the examples of those - they are quite comprehensive. Clearly, if there is anything that you think we should be doing in addition to that please let me know. In advance of anything the government is doing, we are doing quite a considerable amount as you can see from the papers circulated.

**Supplementary Question:**

People come to us when they are in crisis and those that come to us can get some help, because I find the officers very helpful and sympathetic, and do plans and accept small payments to pay off large debts which people with mental health or other troubles seem to ignore until the debt becomes too big. My concern is those people who do not have a Councillor to come to do not know that is an avenue. I know that we are one of the Councils that do bring the bailiffs in early - could we just not lengthen the time before we bring in bailiffs that just adds to the debt of these vulnerable people, and offer them some financial support?

**Reply:**

Somebody in personal debt is a complete tragedy, and it is very rarely one thing. By the time they finally present very often there is a whole range of debts that they have got into and it is much harder to get out if they do not flag it earlier. What we are forever trying to do is to get people to flag up earlier if they have issues because things can be done and help can be given. Specifically with the bailiffs, that is last resort and it is quite horrendous to have to send in the bailiffs to some of the individuals that we are dealing with. Our collection rate at 98% is about average - good, but not outstandingly good. You are quite right, it is something we do look at periodically and I will undertake to do a fresh review of how we are operating the bailiff system to see if there is anything we can do to improve that.