

**COUNCIL MEETING**

**24<sup>th</sup> February 2020**

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

**1. From Cllr Kieran Terry to the Portfolio Holder for Resources, Commissioning and Contract Management**

How much debt interest did the London Borough of Bromley pay during 2019? In answering please indicate how much debt the London Borough of Bromley carries and a comparison to other neighbouring local authorities.

**Reply:**

No debt interest was paid by Bromley Council in the year 2019. The Council remains debt-free and has retained an adequate level of reserves and provisions to allow for any unforeseen costs and risks. This contrasts with neighbouring Councils who have spent over £40m in the year to service their debts, which are now running at one and a third billion pounds. So the legacy that we will leave our children is debt-free status and a prudent and well-run Council; they will be leaving their young people coming along after them debts of over a billion pounds. I think we have probably got it right. (Appendix 1)

**Supplementary question:**

Will the Portfolio Holder join me in expressing absolute horror around the sheer levels of debt some of these other authorities carry. Debt levels generations of people will be paying back, and huge debt interest payments these Councils are paying which are being diverted from vital frontline services. Debt levels of one and a third billion pounds are clearly unacceptable. Will he also join me in welcoming the zero interest payments, congratulating the staff and Members involved in maintaining this record given Bromley is one of the lowest funded Councils in London?

**Reply:**

The answer is yes, but I would like to add that, yes, we are not paying £50m interest, but we are also receiving, in the year, according to the forecast, £14.9m interest received. I can now announce that is actually going to be £15.5m.

**2. From Cllr Angela Wilkins to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Community Services**

Is he confident that the provision of £875k in 2020-21 (with no funding provision for future years) is adequate to deliver this Council's target of its direct activities being carbon neutral by 2029?

**Reply:**

The Council's Carbon Neutral by 2029 Policy is now considered business as usual for Council activities. At the current time, I am satisfied that this revenue budget heading will provide sufficient pump priming. For further detail I refer you to the 2029

Net Zero Carbon Strategy report presented to the Environment and Community Services PDS Committee in January.

**3. From Cllr Josh King to the Portfolio Holder for Renewal, Recreation and Housing**

The Library Service recently had an issue with online renewals where items were not renewed for the expected period. Can the Portfolio Holder give dates when GLL were aware of the issue and when Library Contract managers were informed.

**Reply:**

When did I know about this? The answer is when I had your question. The same applies to GLL - there have been no issues or system faults relating to online renewals for items issued to borrowers, therefore no problems were reported either to GLL from customers or from GLL to us.

**Supplementary Question:**

If such an incident did occur, would you expect a penalty to be levied, and at what level would you expect?

**Reply:**

I am sure that if something like this did happen we would look at the contract and do whatever the contract tells us. Your question may have been promoted by the annual membership renewal process, which is a GDPR requirement. A lot of people had to renew their library membership, and some of them did not do it on time and therefore their renewal process was delayed.

**4. From Cllr Kathy Bance MBE to the Portfolio Holder for Renewal, Recreation and Housing:**

Can the Portfolio Holder explain why councillors are not invited to the Tackling Homelessness meeting or Forum on 11 March 2020?

**Reply:**

The Homelessness Forum is an open multi-agency forum to take forward the key priorities set out in the homelessness strategy. The forums are advertised on the Council's website as well as notifications being sent to all agencies who have expressed an interest in attending. Councillors are very welcome to attend the Forum meetings.

**Supplementary Question:**

Is there a list of such forums and meetings that Councillors might find of interest and want to attend. I did get an invite to this particular forum, but that was through a third party, and it would have been nice if all councillors were aware of it.

**Reply:** I do not disagree - It is on the website.

**5. From Cllr Simon Jeal to the Portfolio Holder for Resources, Commissioning and Contract Management**

How many freedom passes issued to Bromley residents have been deactivated since the start of the year, and why was this done ahead of their stated expiry date in March?

**Reply:**

In total, 2,330 disabled Freedom Pass holders were written to by Bromley, ahead of the expiry of their current passes in March 2020. This is normal practise and is directed by London Councils and happened right across London.

The purpose of the letter was to re-confirm continued residency in the borough, and ongoing eligibility to the scheme ahead of new passes being sent out which run until March 2025. Pass holders were given 4 weeks to respond with the necessary evidence, and advised that if the information was not supplied then the pass would be stopped.

By the deadline set by London Councils of 24<sup>th</sup> January, the passes belonging to anyone who didn't respond, and a number of letters returned by Royal Mail as 'gone away,' were ceased. In total 1,345 were deactivated, as we had received responses from 985 pass holders.

London Councils requires the deactivation process to happen by a deadline in January, in order to ensure new 5 year passes are produced and received before the March 2020 expiry of current passes, and are not sent to people who are no longer eligible for the scheme, or have moved boroughs or out of London.

**Supplementary Question:**

I have received quite a few contacts from residents who have either been given incorrect information by Liberata, have not received the forms to renew their passes or for other reasons are still awaiting renewal of their pass. Will he agree to review these cases with a view to understanding what has gone wrong and why it appears that some Bromley residents had their passes deactivated wrongly.

**Reply:**

I am clearly concerned by what you are saying, and I will undertake to look into that. If you let me have any information you can I will come back to you.

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

When were you first aware that the Supplementary Planning Guidance for the Elm Road Conservation Area, where Beckenham Library stands includes the following words:-

*“All the principle buildings are deemed to make a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area and therefore the Council will resist demolition of any building”.*

**Reply:**

This document to which you refer dates from 2005 and has been in the public domain since this time. The wording in relation to demolition is standard for these documents. It is worth noting however that, as per committee report no. ELS0509, Historic England, then English Heritage, were of the opinion that the area was not worthy of conservation area designation.

**Supplementary Question:**

Can you tell me why there was no mention of this paragraph from the Supplementary Planning Guidance in the Executive paper on Beckenham Library in November, given that it is a document that has been in the public domain for fifteen years?

**Reply:**

Frankly I have no idea, I did not write the report and I was not aware that it was a conservation area until this came up. I will make sure that, in future, it is very much up front and centre.

**7. From Cllr Vanessa Allen to the Chairman of General Purposes and Licensing Committee**

The report on Members' Allowances states “the allowance for Leader of the Council should be increased to £40,000 to reflect the extent of the responsibility, the pressures and the competencies required for the role”. Please would the Chairman of General Purposes and Licensing Committee describe the competencies required?

**Reply:**

The competencies required are the knowledge, skills and abilities to perform the job successfully and would include the following -

To show leadership, to be a competent decision maker, to have responsibility for decisions made, and also to have communication skills, to be trustworthy, to work as part of a team, to have commercial awareness, to be results orientated, to have emotional intelligence, to be able to resolve conflicts, to show initiative, to be a great negotiator, to be motivated and to be able to delegate successfully, and finally to show adaptability in any given situation.

In short competency is defined as -

“The quality of being competent having the possession of the skill, knowledge, qualification and capacity to perform the job.”

**Supplementary Question:**

Given that these skills are also needed by the Portfolio Holders and, to some extent, the chairs of committees, should the increase not have been applied to them as well?

**Reply:**

While our portfolio holder allowances are currently much in line with most other London boroughs, the Leader's allowance has dropped substantially behind. I would point out that the recommendation to increase the payment to £40,000 is still £17,000 below the London Councils recommendation of £57,000.

**8. From Councillor Kevin Brooks to the Portfolio Holder Adult Care and Health**

Will the Portfolio Holder please provide an update on how far Penge residents will have to travel to see a G.P if the Trinity Medical Centre in Croydon Road closes?

**Reply:**

The CCG's response is as follows -

"Bromley CCG's plans do not and never have expected Trinity patients to travel outside the Penge or Anerley areas to access a GP practice. We would not expect patients to travel into Beckenham or outside the borough of Bromley. Of course, patients are welcome to travel further afield if they choose this for themselves, or if there is a practice closer to where they live. A number of Penge residents are already registered with Cator Medical Centre at Beckenham Beacon instead of a Penge practice.

If dispersal of patients of Trinity becomes necessary, we know that there is adequate space within the remaining four GP practices in Penge and Anerley to register all the Trinity patients. We would naturally support those practices to manage both a short and long term influx of patients onto their lists, by helping to fund additional clinical and administrative staff. These practices are Robin Hood Surgery, Anerley Surgery, Oakfield Surgery and Park Practice. Our first choice remains to keep Trinity Medical Centre open as long as it can provide safe, high quality and accessible care to its patients. If the location of Trinity does change and patients are unable to manage the additional distance, say from one side of Penge to the other, the GP contract that is put into place mandatorily includes an obligation to provide patients with home visits where clinically appropriate. "

**Supplementary Question:**

I do welcome what the CCG says, but Yeoman House, which sits right next to Trinity Medical Centre, has had a series of plans in the past for use as a site for residents. At the moment, the four practices that you mention are extremely full - I know people who go to Beckenham Beacon because it is easier to find an appointment than in Penge. How are you going to ensure that in future there are enough places in practices in the area?

**Reply:**

The provision of GP services is down to the CCG, and not the Council. Obviously, we will do everything that we can to support them if they need to identify further sites, and I have already suggested to them that if they want to have our input they need to get us on board in good time.

**9. From Cllr Kieran Terry to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Community Services**

How much waste did Bromley Council send to landfill during the period September-December 2019?

**Reply:**

In September, October and November 2019, no waste was sent from Bromley to landfill for disposal. In December 2019, 0.3%, or 20 tonnes, was sent to landfill from a total of 6,985 tonnes of non-recyclable waste.

**Supplementary Question:**

I welcome the steps that the Council is taking to reduce its landfill waste, including removing plastic bottles from Council meetings. Can the Portfolio Holder please provide an update around the amount of waste Bromley is recycling and how we compare to other boroughs?

**Reply:**

(The Mayor suggested that the Portfolio Holder send the information to Councillor Terry.)

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

Indoor bowling facilities at the Cyphers Club in Penge have ceased and Crystal Palace Indoor Bowls Club (CPIB) are facing the prospect of closing within the next two years because of increasing costs. Both clubs provide valuable social and health benefits for our Borough, and in particular for our older residents.

The CPIB own their own site, one that has the potential to provide in excess of 50 new housing units which, if 'affordable', could assist the Council in meeting the policy requirement of the Mayor of London in relation to housing development proposed by LBB for Crystal Palace Park.

Is he prepared to give his assurance that he will undertake to explore the range of options available to both retain indoor bowling facilities in the Crystal Palace / Penge area and to think imaginatively about how the potential of much needed housing provision can be simultaneously delivered?

**Reply:**

The Indoor Bowls Club has already liaised with the Regeneration Team to see if there are any opportunities for collaboration on that site. This conversation is ongoing.

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

A recent report (<https://brave.com/ukcouncilsreport/>) has shown that some councils' website allow firms to track user information when users seek assistance. When did the Portfolio Holder become aware of this and what is being done to rectify this?

**Reply:**

The Council does not “allow firms to track user information when users seek assistance.” We do however, use several embedded Google products to help us deliver the wider website functionality across the board. By necessity these collect data and statistics in order to function. Some place cookies on users' browsers, and these are fully and openly listed and associated with our cookie banner, so that users are aware of their presence, and importantly, have the choice not to set them.

The report surmises that we have five Google products, it does not define what these are, but it does refer to one Google product as being classed as “Other Adtech” which possibly is referring to Google AdSense, which was embedded in the website as part of the old advertising banner product. This was removed some time ago, as part of a wider technical update, so depending on at which point in time the research was undertaken, this is probably what is being referred to.

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

The new LBB Housing IT system demands that everyone on the Housing Register must reapply via the new portal. Why haven't we been able to exclude people with severe mobility issues in this reapplication?

**Reply:**

It is not possible to transfer data from the old housing IT system, and as such all residents have to re-register onto the new system. Officers are available to assist all applicants to complete the registration and to ensure that everyone is registered. Where required, home visits can also be made to assist. Applicants do not lose their priority through this process.

**Supplementary Question:**

Is there a deadline for this?

**Reply:**

I do not believe that there is a deadline. Clearly, it is best if everyone does it as quickly as possible.

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

What has been the annual cost of the Council's Carbon Monitoring Unit from its inception to the end of this financial year?

**Reply:**

As even an occasional attendee, of the Environmental Services PDS will know the Council does not have a Carbon Monitoring Unit. As I have previously briefed, the Council has been successfully delivering meaningful change to our Carbon emissions through Carbon Management Programmes since 2007.

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

How did the Council respond to the recent public consultation on the Bakerloo Line Extension?

**Reply:**

I have circulated the letter sent by the Leader of the Council in response to that consultation. ([Appendix 2](#))

**Supplementary Question:**

Why was this response not sent to the Environment and Community Services PDS Committee for scrutiny prior to being sent?

**Reply:**

The response is just a re-statement of a past response, already detailed in our LIP, and our LIP did go through the PDS and indeed public scrutiny in the borough. The response is entirely consistent with our LIP policy which was fully scrutinised, and with past responses.

**Comment by the Leader of the Council:**

The reason that there was no need for this to go to the Environment PDS is that it is this Administration's policy, as TfL have been told twice previously, that we do not want a replacement for the perfectly adequate Hayes Line, we want additional functionality into Bromley town centre, and ideally Bromley South, to provide extra, new infrastructure to support new housing in the town centre and to assist Bromley town centre in becoming a back-office hub of excellence.

**Additional Supplementary Question from Councillor Vanessa Allen:**

Why does the Leader ignore the feedback from residents in Bromley, most of whom supported the Bakerloo Line extension to Hayes?

**Reply:**

You will recall that we had this question about four years ago, the last time this show rolled into town. The answer then, as now, is that if you ask a question in a certain way, promising fantastic new services, you will get the answer you want to the question. As I explained last time, you can factor the question depending on the answer you want. I know what the residents of Hayes, West Wickham, Eden Park and Elmers End want. I am a Hayes resident, and I have actually asked real people in the real world, not people on the end of a TfL consultation.



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

Will the Portfolio Holder be able to ensure idverde provide the necessary repairs to Alexandra Recreation Ground's paddling pool in time for summer?

**Reply:**

The Council has been working with the service provider, Amey FM, to provide a cost effective permanent repair and associated pump works. These repairs do not fall within the scope of the parks and grounds maintenance contract with idverde. Amey have identified a solution and arrangements will be made for the repairs to be completed for the summer season.

**Supplementary Question:**

So I can confirm that those repairs will be fully made for the start of the summer, because it was only open for five days last year?

**Reply:**

That is the plan. If there are any issues with the re-instatement there may be some delays, but that is the plan.

**16. From Cllr Vanessa Allen to the Portfolio Holder for Renewal, Recreation & Housing**

LBB adopted its Local Plan a year ago, and has an agreed 5 Year Housing Land Supply. Please will the Portfolio Holder outline what he is doing to encourage and enable housebuilding on the sites identified in these documents?

**Reply:**

Many of the sites identified in the Local Plan have been discussed with developers and housing associations to encourage the development of those sites. The Council is also currently reviewing all of the identified sites which it owns to seek to progress development. Current examples include the development of Anerley town hall overflow car park, Bushell Way in Chislehurst, York Rise in Orpington and Burnt Ash Lane in my own ward.

**Appendix 1** (Question 1)

<b>Outstanding Borrowing by Local Authority as at 30 September 2019</b>			
<b>(Source: MHCLG Quarterly Borrowing &amp; Investment Statistics)</b>			
<b>London Borough</b>	<b>Short Term £'000</b>	<b>Longer Term £'000</b>	<b>Total Borrowing £'000</b>
Barking & Dagenham	111,000	804,281	915,281
Barnet	20,000	384,080	404,080
Bexley	0	223,487	223,487
Brent	0	394,122	394,122
<b>Bromley</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
Camden	0	329,436	329,436
Croydon	267,315	1,088,001	1,355,316
Ealing	10,000	621,404	631,404
Enfield	103,000	812,541	915,541
Greenwich	0	382,945	382,945
Hackney	77,000	67,600	144,600
Hammersmith & Fulham	0	212,841	212,841
Haringey	0	415,762	415,762
Harrow	0	402,261	402,261
Havering	16,151	210,234	226,385
Hillingdon	10,000	248,699	258,699
Hounslow	46,500	206,304	252,804
Islington	44,000	297,665	341,665
Kensington & Chelsea	0	268,841	268,841
Kingston upon Thames	0	308,150	308,150
Lambeth	0	541,658	541,658
Lewisham	0	217,148	217,148
Merton	0	113,010	113,010
Newham	30,000	803,867	833,867
Redbridge	0	298,252	298,252
Richmond upon Thames	1,628	120,275	121,903
Southwark	89,500	585,134	674,634
Sutton	22,000	309,521	331,521
Tower Hamlets	0	73,293	73,293
Waltham Forest	20,000	233,737	253,737
Wandsworth	970	77,408	78,378
Westminster	0	221,209	221,209