

Council

12th July 2021

Questions from Members of the Council for Oral Reply

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

You have stated more than once that “Yes, there are needs in this Borough, but they are all met by this Council.” Do you stand by that statement?

Reply:

I stand by fact that Bromley Council will always fulfil its statutory duties in full. Also, that it will always be there to provide help and assistance to those in need for whom it holds a responsibility to do so.

Supplementary Question:

Does that really mean that the wording of your mission statement is slightly inaccurate and misleading?

Reply:

No, it does not.

2. From Cllr Kathy Bance MBE to the Portfolio Holder for Adult Care & Health

Can you give an update on the services offered from the Kentwood Centre for Adults with Learning Difficulties?

Reply:

The Kentwood Centre now forms part of the Council’s new service offer for people with a learning disability. Other centres, with activities, are now available at -

- Regency Court,
- Cotmandene
- Norman Park Lodge (Bromley Mencap)
- West Wickham Methodist Church (Bromley Mencap)
- The Shaw Trust (Scadbury Park)
- Jubilee Day Centre (Choice Support), Beckenham
- ‘Livability’ Nash College in Coney Hall

There is a new focus on residents choosing the activities they want and providers developing activities that will be popular. Developing life skills and access to employment are key parts of this offer.

Government Covid restrictions meant that day centres had to be closed during the pandemic lockdown. As part of the Council’s recommissioning of learning disability day schemes, the Kentwood Centre reopened on 14 June with Millsted Care now running services out of the centre.

Millsted Care’s sessions include:

- Cooking skills

- Dance & movement
- Digital technology skills
- Exercise
- Sensory – hand & foot massages, foot spas and guided relaxation
- Group discussions to help problem solving and self-advocacy
- Acting and music
- Learning Makaton
- Retirement age focussed sessions such as tea dances

Supplementary Question:

Can you email me that list of services at Kentwood so that we can make more use of them in our ward?

These services were already in difficulty before corona because of a lack of adequate funding. Will this Council be increasing the funding and/or services to support this vulnerable group of people?

Reply:

Bromley Mencap has a very comprehensive catalogue/brochure of events that are going on for people with learning disabilities across the whole of the borough. I would refer Members to that particular document which is on the Bromley Mencap website with details of all the activities available at the different schemes. It is really good because it gives details of how to get to there by bus, or the parking arrangements.

From the point of view of funding, this is a service-user led activity programme, so we will be looking at the eligible needs of service users, and no-one will be precluded from joining any of the activities if they are eligible.

3. From Cllr Ian Dunn to the Portfolio Holder for Adult Care & Health

What staffing shortages have been experienced in your Portfolio since the beginning of 2021? Please include both directly employed staff and contractors.

Reply:

The Director of Adult Social Care has advised that the Council and its contractors have experienced no adult care staff shortages since the beginning of the year that have impacted on the ability to maintain service levels.

Supplementary Question:

In that case, can you explain why in the Provisional Final Accounts later on in this agenda there are references to underspends in staffing budgets and vacancies, and what the impact of these were?

Reply:

I would need to see the actual detail that you are referring to so that I can make an informed decision and consult about it.

4. From Cllr Ryan Thomson to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Community Services

Please explain the rationale for the selection of sites for air quality monitoring and the removal of equipment from others across the borough?

Reply:

When selecting sites for air quality monitoring, including the addition or removal of sites, Bromley adheres to the requirements within the London Local Air Quality Management Policy -

https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/llaqm_policy_guidance_2019.pdf

Supplementary Question:

Can air quality monitoring equipment be re-installed across Crystal Palace ward – the exact locations would be determined with the support of officers, but I am keen for such a key metric for gauging public health and wellbeing to be returned to the ward, and I do feel that, provided they are properly located, they will serve a dual benefit of providing a reliable baseline for air quality should Croydon Council's proposed ANPR scheme go forward.

Reply:

I do not feel that is necessary at the current time. As you will see from some of the written questions, that considering we have some of the cleanest air in London, the reviewing of our policy has shown that our monitoring points completed with modelling shows that we are very accurate in our measurements of air quality across the borough and therefore we can concentrate more on modelling the data rather than additional sampling points.

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

What actions did the Council take to mark Clean Air Day on 17th June?

Reply:

The Council is not in the business of marking a single day on such an important topic but instead firmly focusses on delivering continuing improvements in air quality which has been achieved every year since 2010. Bromley has a very good record here and meets all national air quality objectives for particulate matter and all the national air quality objectives for hourly and 24 hour concentrations, but there is always more to do as our Air Quality Action Plan outlines. This plan, which is published on our website, will be reviewed later this year, in line with our commitment, where I am hopeful of seeing progress, including by TfL, where we continue to call for electric buses, which will help tackle pollution, not just on TfL roads, which are the most polluted in the Borough.

Supplementary Question:

Do you not accept that days such as this can help promote the topic of clean air and by not doing anything residents may perceive that it is not the Council's priority?

Reply:

I do not agree with that at all. Obviously, many groups may choose to do outreach or other actions. There is a huge amount of other publicity for various days throughout the year, any of which would look to achieve beneficial outcomes for this borough and to select one day, considering how many action days there are, I do not think is beneficial as opposed to year-round improvement in performance.

6. From Cllr Kevin Brooks to the Portfolio Holder for Adult Care & Health

Will the Portfolio Holder please give an update on the current effectiveness of Respite Services in Bromley?

Reply:

Effective respite services in Bromley remain responsive to both service users and their carers whenever possible.

Council funded planned respite services began reopening in May and are now scaling up. With the lifting of lockdown restrictions now confirmed a complete, comprehensive and effective service offer will shortly be restored.

Supplementary Question:

Having spoken to the manager they say the waiting list is ten to twelve weeks. Mycare themselves say that when it comes to them a minimum of four weeks, and this is just for three hours of respite per week. Will the Portfolio Holder agree that, especially with the encouragement for more elderly residents to receive care from home, a faster, more funded service is needed to ensure that those needing respite receive it in a timely manner?

Reply:

I think we need to pay homage to the officers who are working really hard at the moment to build up and build better our respite for people within Bromley. This is not only, as I have alluded to with regard to the learning disability cohort of people that I mentioned in the question from Councillor Bance, but also for our older people. We are looking at a more community based offer, a different model, and there will be a paper coming to the PDS probably in the autumn to identify what the new model of care may look like.

7. From Cllr Vanessa Allen to the Portfolio Holder for Renewal, Recreation & Housing (answered by the Leader)

Where in this Council's Constitution and other procedures does it say that a councillor can call in a planning application to a specific planning committee?

Reply:

There is no provision for a Councillor to 'call in' an application to a specific planning committee, however the Chairman of Development Control Committee does decide, in discussion with officers, which cases are to be considered at Development Control Committee as opposed to Plans Sub Committee. This procedure is set out in the Local Planning Protocol which forms part of the Council's Constitution.

8. From Cllr Nicholas Bennett MA JP to the Portfolio Holder for Renewal, Recreation and Housing (answered by the Leader)

What is the estimated cost of the repairs to the West Wickham Leisure Centre and what is the latest estimate for the replacement of the Centre by a new facility?

Reply:

With regard to the estimated cost of repairs, this information is not quite yet available. Condition surveys have been instructed and are in progress across all operational Council property. Draft reports that will include West Wickham Leisure Centre are scheduled for receipt by 14th July at which point costs can be determined with some accuracy. On behalf of Councillor Morgan, I will ensure that this information is passed to Councillor Bennett.

9. From Cllr Simon Jeal to the Portfolio Holder for Children, Education and Families

What definition does the Council use to define poverty and based upon this definition, how many children are growing up in poverty within the borough of Bromley?

Reply:

Poverty is an emotive word, so areas of deprivation is widely used by us in Bromley. I am also not sure that many of our residents would welcome being identified as living in poverty either.

Free School Meals eligibility is most commonly used to identify a level of deprivation. As of January 2021, 7170 children within Bromley maintained schools were eligible for Free School Meals, which is 14%.

Supplementary Question:

What does she regard as the Council's responsibility with regards to reducing poverty or deprivation if that is the term that would be preferred within Bromley?

Reply:

The Council's responsibility is to offer support to any child in need and we will offer them support either to the family or the child through our early intervention service or referral to children's social care if the threshold is met, where we could help or signpost them to the voluntary sector, and holistic offers are available through our early intervention services and support is also offered through Children's Centres.

Additional supplementary question:

Councillor Angela Wilkins asked a further question to ask for clarification, as the question was what was the Portfolio Holder doing to reduce poverty, and this was not the answer given – the answer mentioned the services that the Council provided, which were not related to poverty.

Reply:

I have already commented that we do not refer to the word poverty in Bromley, it is to do with areas of deprivation. We have a statutory duty to give help to those children if they are in need. I do not know what more I can add to that.

10. From Cllr Angela Wilkins to the Portfolio Holder for Resources, Commissioning and Contract Management

When did the Council last receive value for money certificates from our external auditors?

Reply:

The Council last received a Value for Money Conclusion from its external auditor for the year ended 31st March 2018. The external auditor has stated that it is unable to issue a value for money for the years ended 31st March 2019 and 2020 until it has completed the work necessary on an objection to the accounts.

Supplementary Question:

Is he able to give a brief synopsis of the reasons why those certificates have not been issued for those years?

Reply:

There are two fundamental answers to that. The first one is because there is a very detailed and lengthy objection that has been lodged to the accounts. There is nothing unusual in that and it takes a long time to go through a very long objection like that. That is being worked on as we speak. The second element is an interesting one and it is partly because of the change of auditors. When we had KPMJ up until last year they had provided a certificate before they had actually finalised the answers to all the objections. When EY were appointed they took a different view. It does not make us unusual amongst the Councils that EY are auditing - they are holding back on value for money certification pending any formal objections that may have been lodged. That is why there is a delay.

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

How much is it costing to have a man sleeping in a van in the car park so that if there is a power cut, he can turn the generators on?

Reply:

The costs submitted by Amey and including all fees are in the order of £7,200 per month. This is in place to ensure uninterrupted power to the data centre and to the NHS facility. Site investigations to confirm the extent of the works required to the UPS and switchgear have been completed and the final specification will be agreed between the consultant, IT and BT. The date to complete the works, including allowing for complete electrical shutdown, will be confirmed very soon.

Supplementary Question:

Who decided it was appropriate to have a lone person sleeping in a van in the Civic Centre car park and did you, the Portfolio Holder, support that decision?

Reply:

Did I as Portfolio Holder - no, I did not. Was I informed it was happening – yes, I was. I would expect the people running this site to run it in a safe way. If it is their judgement, which it was, to have 24/7 cover in order that we can continue our work within the health service as well as within the Council then I support that judgement as being absolutely correct. It is not a long-term solution, it is a short-term fix. We will now have a long-term solution probably in a month or two's time. But certainly, the priority was to keep the health people supplied and to keep the Council going and that is what we are doing. The idea that that we have a man sleeping in a van is a rather quaint notion and perhaps a follow-up to an Alan Bennett story. What it is about is that we give 24/7 cover during the course of the day when the Civic Centre is open and that individual has access to the facilities of the Civic Centre. At night-time we have to have someone on site just in case things go wrong – that is why he is there, and I have no problem with that at all.

Additional supplementary Question:

Councillor Simon Jeal asked that, as the cost was £7,200 per month, how many months had this arrangement been in place for?

Reply:

The arrangement has been for about nine or ten months.

Additional supplementary Question:

Councillor Nicholas Bennett asked why the empty property at the entrance to the Council car park, rather than asking someone to sit in a van?

Reply:

I understand the question, but the answer eludes me.

The Leader asked whether Councillor Bennett was referring to the zed-pod in the car park. It was clarified that the building in question was at the Rochester Avenue entrance, and the Leader offered to provide further information to Councillor Bennett.

Additional supplementary Question:

Councillor Simon Fawthrop commented that UPSs were easy to source, and asked why it had taken ten months to get a quote when he could probably get three quotes tomorrow?

Reply:

It has not taken anything like that time to get a quote. The problem is that you have to shut down the system entirely. That is the problem, and we cannot do that currently as the health service are using it on a daily basis. When we can shut it down, probably in a month or two's time, we will shut it down. But it was not to obtain a quote. A full report on this has gone to the Audit Sub-Committee so I know that Councillors who have been asking these questions would have been informed that this was the case. The discussion at the last Audit Sub-Committee centred particularly around whether something should be taken in part two or part one, and the decision was that it be taken in part two. I will not make any reference to anything that appeared in that paper.

(At this point the time allowed for questions expired - the remaining questions received written replies).

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

Building a Better Bromley was not on the agenda for the June Executive Meeting, in spite it being on the Forward Plan for decision at this meeting. When will this document come to Members for decision?

Reply:

Although it is clearly not for me to dictate their agenda, I understand that it is earmarked to be considered at the September Executive, Resources and Contracts PDS Committee meeting.

13. From Cllr Josh King to the Leader of the Council

Is it acceptable for Members of this Council, particularly Members of the Executive, to use private e-mails for Council Business?

Reply:

Yes, of course it is acceptable. If it wasn't acceptable, the practice wouldn't be permitted.

In the words of the Council's Chief Legal Officer:

"Bromley.gov email addresses are provided for member convenience. Because of the way we work and make decisions there isn't a practical difference between a Member using a private address as long as sound data protection practices are followed."

14. From Cllr Nicholas Bennett MA JP to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Community Services

If he will list the locations where -

- i. the Council
- ii. TfL

have narrowed the roadway to create 'safe spaces' for pedestrians and if he will indicate which ones will be removed once the current Covid-19 restrictions are lifted on July 19th.

Reply:

During the pandemic, in order to create social distancing space to accommodate queues, the passage of large numbers of pedestrians (in places such as town centres and outside schools), or to facilitate outside dining on footways, the Council narrowed the carriageway in the following locations:

1. Penge High Street
2. Beckenham High Street
3. Bromley High Street and East Street
4. Orpington High Street
5. Langley Schools (Hawksbrook Lane)
6. Crofton Infant School (Towncourt Lane)
7. Perry Hall Primary School (Perry Hall Road)
8. Marian Vian Primary School (Shirley Crescent)
9. Farnborough Primary School (Farnborough Hill)
10. Wickham Common Primary School (Gates Green Road)

In a number of these locations the social distancing measures have already been reduced. The barriers in Penge High Street have been completely removed. In locations where the barriers (attractive planters) are in place to support local businesses and outside dining areas, these are likely to remain in place until the Autumn, in line with their pavement licenses. This will be the subject of ongoing review. Most of the other barriers that remain will be considered for removal in the coming months after the 19th of July, depending on the consultation with the schools or BIDS in question.

TfL installed various social distancing measures in West Wickham High Street which has been reviewed and are now being removed. None of these were in support of outside dining.

15. From Cllr Simon Jeal to the Portfolio Holder for Children, Education and Families

How does the department plan to make use of the recently issued Youth Endowment Fund toolkit?

Reply:

The toolkit was only launched on 28th June, but we intend to use it locally to identify activities and target our resources in a way that makes a difference to children's lives. Our local approach is focused on diversion and prevention of offending and we would want to use this toolkit to improve our offer to children in the borough

alongside the knowledge and intelligence that we already have in the borough and beyond.