

Council

11th April 2022

Questions from Members of the Public for Oral Reply

1. From Freddie Price to the Portfolio Holder for Children, Education and Families

What is the percentage change on funding for youth centres & services in Bromley since 2010 and how many new youth centres and programs have been opened and how many have been closed during this period?

Reply:

The reduction of youth services over the past 10 years has been seen across all Local Authorities across England. Nationally this reduction in provision has been 70%. The reduction in funding in Bromley over this period in question has been 42%. This is significantly less than the 70% national average.

During this period Bromley has closed 5 youth Hubs, with 4 Hubs remaining open and active.

Plus, we have a mobile unit which can be quickly deployed to any part of the Borough where we might identify an issue or emerging need.

Supplementary Question:

What plans are now in place for the next four years to expand youth work?

Reply:

If you can find me a magic money tree I will happily look into plans to expand services.

2. From Alisa Igoe to the Leader of the Council

Reference: The Local Government Association - Impact of in-person council meetings survey: October – November 2021 - "Almost three quarters of respondents (73%) thought that attendance by members of the public is lower since returning to in-person council meetings."

As a regular attendee in the public gallery, I've always been surprised at how few residents attend to watch Council committee meetings. Would you agree that providing live streamed meetings to enable residents, including carers and those unable to access the chamber, to watch from home, would be a logical and excellent improvement?

Reply:

As I advised Cllr Allen on the 19th April 2021 in answer to a very similar question, it is not in my gift to set rules for Council, PDS or other general Council Committees. That decision falls to the general membership.

The question is therefore best directed to the General Purposes & Licensing Committee for dutiful consideration.

I should imagine that the answer will boil down to evidenced public demand versus the cost of providing the additional service, but that would be to second guess the Committee's thoughts and eventual recommendation.

Supplementary Question:

At the last full Council there was quite a lot of noise on social media afterwards because a lot of people had to go into rooms within the campus of the Council. I would have thought that this would show there was public demand for streamed meetings – would you not agree?

Reply:

During the pandemic, when public viewing was available there was no evidence whatsoever that there was keen public demand from the viewing figures and it might be helpful for Ms Igoe if they were published and affixed to this evening's minutes as an appendix. (See Appendix 1.)

Additional supplementary comment from Cllr Vanessa Allen:

We did discuss this at General Purposes and Licensing Committee and there is going to be some guidance forthcoming. Hybrid meetings have been agreed for Councillors and we were all emailed about that on Friday.

Additional Supplementary question from Cllr Simon Jeal

As Cllr Allen mentions, we have had an email to say that future meetings will be streamed to allow Members and officers to participate remotely. Does the Council Leader agree that, given this streaming is already taking place the cost of extending this to the public would seem limited, to allow them to ask questions as well?

Reply:

I simply do not know – I have not seen the statistics or the figures. If you look at the figures the decision should follow that. That is for General Purposes and Licensing Committee.

3. From Tony McPartlan to the Portfolio Holder for Public Protection and Enforcement

I welcome the introduction of the Enviro-crime reward against fly tipping (https://www.bromley.gov.uk/news/article/2847/enviro-crime_reward_against_fly_tipping) but why should residents have any confidence that their information about fly-tips will lead to a prosecution when there was only one fly-tipping prosecution in the whole of 2021/22?

Reply:

Any investigation to determine who has fly-tipped waste materials, requires good evidence to enable fixed penalty notices to be issued and this is not always available.

If Bromley residents can provide information that may assist with investigations, this will be welcomed and they can be confident that it will be used to build a case for successful prosecutions wherever possible.

Supplementary question:

If the Council had a genuine aim to increase the number of fly-tipping prosecutions surely they would need to search through fly-tipped waste and possibly install cameras in hot-spots. Is there any commitment to do that?

Reply:

There has been an appointment of a new Environmental Investigation Manager in the last few months, it is anticipated that warnings and fixed penalty notices will increase in the future. There has been a report which went to the Public Protection & Enforcement PDS and the Environment and Community Services PDS that set out the strategy going forward.

Additional Supplementary Question from Cllr Simon Fawthrop:

Would the Portfolio Holder agree that if residents do not report these events it will be so much harder for the Council to convict people?

Reply:

Yes, I agree,

Additional Supplementary Question from Cllr Angela Wilkins:

How many enforcement officers do we have on the team, and would it more likely that we would have successful prosecutions if we increased the number?

Reply:

I do not know the exact amount as there has been the change around with the new Environmental Investigation Manager coming into the role. There has been some movement in the Team. I can check that and get back to you.

4. From Jessica Arnold to the Portfolio Holder for Renewal, Recreation and Housing

Empty shop units are a blight on high streets and local parades - as well as being unsightly and causing building problems if left long term, they are an opportunity wasted towards creating vibrant local areas with shopping and eateries of choice.

Does Bromley Council have any incentive schemes to avoid persistent empty shop units? If so, what are these and where can more information for businesses be found? And if not, is Bromley Council willing to scope and consider introducing such measures to help reduce empty units by retaining and attracting local businesses?

Reply:

Yes, because the Government very kindly shook the magic money tree earlier and gave us some money precisely to enable businesses to recover. So, recently businesses had the opportunity to apply for a grant of up to £50k each to support them with costs associated with opening and occupying vacant units. Within the scheme, we paid out just over a million pounds to 22 businesses including businesses that were looking to move into the borough from elsewhere. We will continue to work with these businesses.

Supplementary Question:

That sounds quite time limited – if central funding is taken away there would be nothing within Bromley Council to keep that going. Are there any plans to create our own scheme for Bromley?

Reply:

It would be very nice to do so, but it is back to money. If we had the money it would be nice to continue such a scheme, but we do not at the moment. There is a lot more interest in empty shops, particularly in Bromley. Even without the money things are improving which is encouraging. I would love to have the money to give them, but I would not like to encourage you to believe that we are going to get any.

5. From Helen Brookfield to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Community Services

Does Bromley Council have an Officer responsible for ensuring that there are safe walking routes to schools, shops and local amenities that meet the needs of all pedestrians including those with sight/hearing loss, people with mobility issues/slower walking speeds, wheelchair users, carers with young children and children?

Reply: (Sent as a written reply)

The Council has a School Travel Plans and Road Safety team who liaise with schools across the Borough to develop plans to improve safety around schools and for the pupils in terms of training and road safety education. School Streets have been used to assist with walking outside a number of schools.

The Borough has also introduced new 10 new formal pedestrian crossings in the last couple of years, to improve walking opportunities for pedestrians near to stations, schools and parks.

- Homesdale Road - 1x Zebra
- Kent House Road - 1x Zebra
- Kings Hall Road - 1x Tiger Crossing (Parallel Zebra)
- Crystal Palace Park Road - 1x Toucan Crossing
- Crofton Road – 3x Zebra
- Crofton Lane – 1x Zebra
- Beckenham Lane – 1x Zebra
- Bromley Road – 1x Tiger Crossing (Parallel Zebra)
- (*Southend Road – Informal crossing*)

6. From Jeremy Adams to the Portfolio Holder for Resources, Commissioning and Contract Management

Will Bromley Council commit to remaining debt free for the 2022-2026 term? Or would borrowing become necessary?

Reply:

The Council has no plans to borrow during this period.

7. From Freddie Price to the Portfolio Holder for Children, Education and Families

What is the Council doing to provide preschool and school aged children with activities outside of the home and school curriculum to help progress childhood development and to tackle the current rise in anti-social behaviour in the Borough?

Reply:

There is not a current rise in anti-social behaviour in the Borough. If you look at MOPAC's crime dashboard online, you will see that ASB has been reducing in Bromley month on month for quite some time, including a reduction of 38% over the last 12 month rolling period.

It is also important to highlight that incidents of ASB are not exclusive to young people. ASB incidents relate to all ages.

However, the Council continues to provide a full programme of services to pre-school children and parents via independent Nursery provision as well our own Children and Family Centres.

Our Youth Centres have continued to provide a range of positive activities for young people. These activities focus on access to training and employment, promoting participation in sports activities, IT and a range of arts related events.

All of our libraries run a selection of free activities and workshops on a weekly basis, suitable for babies upwards - to sessions for teenagers.

We also run the Holiday Activities Programme funded by the government in the school holidays, and last summer we provided meals and activities for 10,382 individual places.

Supplementary Question:

With ASB, how come, if it is reducing, it still accounts for 22% of crimes in the borough?

Reply:

I am not a crime analyst, but I can go to the Police for their opinion on that matter and get back to you.

8. From Alisa Igoe to the Portfolio Holder for Renewal, Recreation & Housing

Reference: Gov.uk Spring Statement 2022 - "To help the most vulnerable households with the cost of essentials such as food, clothing and utilities, the government is also providing an additional £500 million for the Household Support Fund from April, on top of the £500 million already provided since October 2021, bringing total funding to £1 billion."

During their first £1.8million tranche, Bromley experienced high demand, adjusting its response time from 5 days to 3 weeks, then to 6 weeks. I believe extra staff were enlisted to

operate it midway through. Does the Council have the appropriate number of staff to work on this second tranche from April and what will be the guaranteed response time?

Reply:

I am pleased that we have been able to offer support to these households. I am not sure that demand was high in relation to the 140,000+ households that we have in the borough. Your question is a little hypothetical - the numbers of staff needed will only be known once the Council has received all the Government guidance. At that point, the Council will be in a place to make a decision and we will have the staff in place to do what we have to do.

Supplementary Question:

The first tranche of fund was due to run until 31st March and you closed it on 25th January, which is very early, because you had such a response. Do you not feel that this shows that you may need to consider how many staff you have before the new tranche starts?

Reply:

We are thinking about that already. Until we know the actual circumstances and the rules we cannot firm up on that, but we have people that are doing other things that we will transfer from their present duties to these duties. What we cannot do is have people twiddling their thumbs waiting for things to happen. Staff will be taken off other duties to attend to this.

9. From Tony McPartlan to the Portfolio Holder for Resources, Commissioning and Contract Management

Rising household bills are likely to hit millions of people hard, none more so than care leavers. In light of this, will the Council reconsider its decision not to exempt care leavers from paying council tax?

Reply:

Bromley Council provides additional support to those who need it. To that end, we have a hardship fund to which care leavers can apply. The fund remains at £200k for 2022/23. I have spoken to the relevant Director and have been advised that care leavers are made aware of this fund as part of the process of leaving care.

Care leavers' plans are reviewed in supervision monthly and a review of their pathway plan is performed yearly to see if there are any changes. Through our Care Leavers' Forum and Active Involvement Officers, we have confidence that care leavers' needs are at the forefront of our minds. I hope this helps and gives reassurance that as corporate parents our children are ensured, as established by Ofsted, very good life chances and we are ambitious about "going the extra mile" for them.

I would suggest to the Labour candidate for Plaistow Ward that the appropriate time for this question would have been at the budget setting meeting on February 28th when the Labour Group, of which he fully supports, failed in their Civic duty to move an alternative budget to the Administration's.

Supplementary Question:

This has been raised several times before, rather than just at the last budget meeting as I am sure the Portfolio Holder is well aware. Following the campaign from The Children's Society, 29 of London's 32 local authorities have some form of policy in place to exempt care leavers. Are we not ashamed that Bromley is not one of those 29?

Reply:

We are certainly pleased to provide support as and when it is needed.

Additional Supplementary Question from Councillor Simon Jeal

He mentioned the Care Leaver's Forum. Has he engaged with that Forum and has he discussed whether they believe that care leavers should be exempt from Council Tax?

Reply:

I have not discussed it with them personally, but my understanding is that items of that nature have been discussed.

Additional Supplementary Questions from Councillor Simon Fawthrop

Would the Portfolio Holder agree that the best way to protect young people in care and people who are suffering from the cost of living across the borough is to keep the council tax low with a 1% increase across the board compared with an 8.85 increase by Sadiq Khan?

Reply:

I would agree, and I would also point out that young people across the borough benefit from a substantially cheaper council tax than our neighbours in Croydon as well.

10. From Helen Brookfield to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Community Services

Having recently read Bromley's Council's 3-year Local Implementation Plan for the period from 2019-2022, I was very disappointed to note that very few, if any, of the stated objectives and plans to improve conditions for pedestrians and cyclists and reduce car journeys have yet been met or carried out in the Beckenham area, where I live. What actions will the Council now be taking to ensure that they meet their own objectives and aims?

Reply: (Sent as a written reply)

A large number of improvements for pedestrians and cyclists have been implemented in the Beckenham area in recent years. Additional crossings were added when the town centre was improved, and more recently new zebra crossings in Bromley Road. Also, to help pedestrians, School Streets have been introduced outside two Beckenham schools. Cycle routes have been introduced around Beckenham, with a high-quality cycleway being completed to run from Kent House station to Lower Sydenham. Cycle routes from Beckenham towards Bromley and vice-versa have also been improved and work is ongoing to look to develop this route more over coming years. As I'm sure you're aware not all suggestions turn out to be viable solutions. Consultation is also underway to help the Council determine resident's views on suggested safety improvements at the Southend Road junction with Park Road.

Virtual Meetings Statistics
May 2020 – May 2021

Meeting	No. of Meetings*	Average Viewers per meeting
Council	5 (1)	47
Executive	4 (1)	9
Adult Care & Health PDS	4 (1)	9
Children, Education & Families PDS	4 (0)	23
Environment & Community Services PDS	6 (1)	44
Executive, Resources & Contracts PDS	4(4)	9
Public Protection & Enforcement PDS	3 (0)	13
Renewal, Recreation & Housing PDS	7 (1)	31
Health & Wellbeing Board	4 (1)	8
Standards	2 (0)	7
General Purposes and Licensing	4 (5)	8
Development Control	5 (2)	92
Plans Sub-Committees	14 (12)	29
Other Sub-Committees	13 (9)	10
Other Meetings	8 (6)	9
TOTAL	87 (44)	23

* *Figures in brackets are for meetings where we hold no statistics*

Notes

- *The figures represent total views per meeting via the internet livestream on YouTube – this can include Council members, officers and contractors as well as members of the public, and can include multiple “hits” from the same person joining the meeting more than once.*
- *The figures do not distinguish between someone who watches a whole meeting, and someone who logs in for a few seconds.*