

Council

10 October 2022

Questions from Members of the Council for Written Reply

1. From Cllr Mike Jack to the Portfolio Holder for Transport, Highways and Road Safety

Like a lot of areas in our Borough Chislehurst has a number of residents with mobility issues, which can make getting around a huge challenge. The main reasons are that lack of drop kerbs, positioning of street furniture, uneven surfaces, and steep cambers. In a lot of cases these obstacles put our vulnerable residents in high-risk situations, such as having to use the road or worse not being able to go out at all. I have been told these problems will only be addressed when footpaths are reconstructed and that currently there is no budget available to address these issues

In light of Bromley's Corporate plan where our vision is to make Bromley a fantastic place to live and work, where everyone can lead healthy, safe, and independent lives can you let me know if/when there are plans to make money available across the borough so issues like this can be resolved, giving residents with mobility issues – their own independence and keeping them safe.

Reply:

Cases are assessed on a case by case basis.

2. From Cllr Tony McPartlan to the Portfolio Holder for Renewal Recreation and Housing

Despite the issues with the Zed Pods in Plaistow, it is good to see the Council building and delivering their own affordable homes in Plaistow, Chislehurst and Anerley. The Local Plan 2019 and other subsequent documents highlighted multiple other sites that could be used for this purpose. Please provide an update on all of the proposed sites, detailing what role (if any) each site will play in the future delivery of affordable housing.

Reply:

The feasibility of sites in Council ownership continues to be reviewed. Where self-delivery of more housing seems viable, reports will be brought forward to committee.

Table 4 of the latest Bromley Housing Trajectory (available here: <https://www.bromley.gov.uk/downloads/file/669/bromley-housing-trajectory>) sets out the number of residential units expected to be delivered by Local Plan site allocations and indicates a projected delivery period for these units.

As part of the Local Plan review, the Council will investigate the potential for new or updated housing site allocations, to help meet the Borough's housing target.

3. From Cllr Alisa Igoe to the Portfolio Holder for Transport, Highways and Road Safety

Cycle to School Week was 3–7 October. Our excellent cycle training team teach school children Bikeability Levels 1, 2 and 3, with the latter covering road conditions, responding to hazards and challenging traffic scenarios. Could you please list by location both the non-segregated and segregated cycle lanes that have been installed directly linking to Bromley school sites, since beginning of 2018?

Reply:

1. The new Kent House to Lower Sydenham segregated cycle route links directly to Harris Bromley secondary school.
2. A non-segregated cycle route links Bishop Challoner School to Shortlands and to Beckenham.

4. From Cllr Mark Smith to the Portfolio Holder for Transport, Highways and Road Safety

Utility companies are routinely fined if their roadworks overrun without a valid extension. Residents of Chislehurst Ward has been particularly inconvenienced by series of water leaks, have resulted in Thames Water digging up many roads to carry out repairs.

Could he therefore confirm:

How much the Council have received from utility companies in fines in the last twelve months?

How this money will be allocated for the benefit of Chislehurst residents to compensate for the inconvenience of blocked roads and reduced water supplies?

Reply:

During the last financial year, the Council issues charges of £142k to utility companies for over-running streetworks across the borough. These charges are part of the Council's overall income budgets and are not hypothecated to any specific service or area.

5. From Cllr Chloe-Jane Ross to the Portfolio Holder for Renewal, Recreation and Housing

Has the government contacted Bromley Council regarding hosting one of the new Investment Zones, and if not is this something the Council is looking to pursue?

Reply:

There has been a general call for local authorities to suggest potential areas to be considered for investment zones. We are aware of the proposals and are considering the potential benefits and implications.

6. From Cllr Chloe-Jane Ross to the Portfolio Holder for Transport, Highways and Road Safety

Is Bromley Council planning to reduce the availability of car park ticketing machines in favour of the Ringo app? If so what provisions are being made for the digitally excluded, and what % reduction of machines is anticipated?

Reply:

A report will be made to the Environment and Community Services PDS Committee in November, it will include a Equality Impact Assessment.

A decision in principle to move to a cashless system has been council policy since November 2019.

7. From Cllr Kathy Bance to the Portfolio Holder for Children, Education and Families

Please provide statistics for Bromley pupil exclusions for the past 5 years per ward and school order.

Reply:

(Information was supplied to Councillor Bance after the meeting.)

8. From Cllr Simon Jeal to the Portfolio Holder for Public Protection and Enforcement

In each of the past four years, could you please provide data for how many complaints or reports of unsatisfactory living conditions has the Council received from Bromley residents placed into Housing Association and private accommodation, broken down by the Housing Association or private landlord/lettings company they relate to?

Reply:

Public Protection & Enforcement keep some data in relation to those making queries about housing disrepair. Prior to 2022 (this year) this information was recorded as absolute totals, but not by occupancy type. Owner Occupiers, Residential Social Landlords and Private Rented Property are now coded for recording purposes moving forward.

Those reporting disrepair may own, rent privately, rent privately on housing benefit, or rent socially. Unfortunately, the data currently collected does not allow the Service to identify how the occupier/tenant came to be at a property in disrepair. In relation to

the latter two categories the tenant may have been placed by LB Bromley, another authority, or another organisation. So, unfortunately it is not possible to answer this question in the detail requested.

The housing enforcement team's disrepair case numbers, by fiscal year, are available and can be seen below:

17/18	18/19	19/20	20/21	21/22
391	357	405	767	598

9. From Cllr Simon Jeal to the Portfolio Holder for Renewal, Recreation and Housing

How many residents have presented to the Council as homeless each month since the moratorium on evictions implemented by the Government during the pandemic ended, and of these, how many became homeless as a result of receiving a 'section 21' eviction?

Reply:

Between the 31/5/21-29/9/22 there were 4,231 approaches to the Council's Housing Options Service. Of these 1,421 indicated that they were being evicted / asked to leave where they were staying (this will include parental / relative evictions as well as evictions from rented accommodation). Of these 72 households were assessed as being homeless or threatened with homelessness due to the service of a valid s21 notice.

10. From Cllr Rebecca Wiffen to the Portfolio Holder for Resources, Commissioning and Contract Management

The government's Energy Bill Relief Scheme is likely to fall short of enabling charities and local community organisations to pay rising bills over the coming weeks. As a result, not-for-profit local hubs that provide invaluable services to the communities they serve will have to close their doors. What support can Bromley Council provide organisations that find themselves in these circumstances, such as the Sanderson Hall in St Paul's Cray?

Reply:

The energy bill relief scheme provides support to organisations (non-domestic), which aims to match household support, and the commitment is made until the end of March 2023.

This effectively provides a cap on energy prices where the Government will fund energy suppliers directly which will assist towards reducing bills.

There continue to be various discussions taking place within the Council and with partners to determine support that may be available. Detailed information has been

made available via a joined up approach with the voluntary sector and other partners and useful information has been posted on the website:

<https://www.bromley.gov.uk/supportingresidents>.

Within the ever-changing climate it will be important that we continue to adapt to respond to the evolving policy direction at a national level and we will continue to promote opportunities to obtain support as these become available.

11. From Cllr Ruth McGregor to the Portfolio Holder for Resources, Commissioning and Contract Management

Could you please advise the number of cases of council tax debt referred to external enforcement agents for recovery, and the recovery rates for these, and what proactive steps are taken to facilitate payment of the debt before proceeding with court hearings. Also do you have figures for the number of complaints made against enforcement agents?

Reply:

The number of cases referred to the Enforcement Agents for the current financial year is shown in the table below.

Council Tax cases referred to the Enforcement Agents (EA)

Financial Year 2022/23	Number of cases	Value of cases	Collection rate
01/04/22 - 31/08/22	4,653	£4,513,132	8%
01/09/22 - 30/09/22	40	£222,979	Not available
Total cases referred to the EA	4,693	£4,736,111	

Prior to issuing a summons and proceeding with a court hearing to obtain a Liability Order the following steps are taken to facilitate payment:

- The initial annual bill details the instalment amounts, the dates they are due and the options for making payment.
- If an instalment is not paid, the reminder letter provides further opportunity for the taxpayer to bring the account up to date and advises them to contact the council if they are facing financial difficulties or are struggling to pay. It also provides a link to allow them to reschedule their payments using an online payment arrangement tool.

The reminder also informs the taxpayer that failure to bring the account up to date could result in losing their right to pay by instalments with a summons being issued for the full balance plus court costs.

- If the taxpayer brings the account up to date but then misses another instalment, they are sent another reminder letter giving them a further opportunity to bring the account up to date or contact the Council if they are experiencing financial difficulties.

The same warning is included regarding losing the right to pay by instalments and the issuing of a summons.

- Where an account remains in arrears, a Final Notice is issued saying that the taxpayer has lost the right to pay by instalments and must pay the full balance due on the account. The letter advises that unless they pay this balance by the date specified, they will receive a summons which will incur legal costs.
- If the full balance remains unpaid then a summons is issued. Included with the summons is information for the online portal which can be used to make a payment arrangement. The taxpayer is also given the dates and times for the summons surgery where they can discuss the debt and any financial difficulties they may be experiencing. The contact details for Benefits/Council Tax Support is provided as well as Citizens Advice Bromley should they wish to speak to an independent party about their debt.
- If the debt remains outstanding, the Liability Order is obtained. At this point we can still agree to a discretionary payment arrangement if the taxpayer contacts us to advise of financial difficulty. If no contact is made the case is passed to the Enforcement Agent to collect the debt.

Throughout the recovery process taxpayers are encouraged to contact the Council if they are struggling to make payment. This allows them to discuss their financial situation and agree on a revised payment plan. The Council website also includes advice on the Council Tax Payment page for how to contact the Council if the taxpayer is experiencing financial difficulties. There are also links to independent organisations who can provide additional support and information such as Citizens Advice Bureau, National Debtline, Stepchange Debt Charity, Money Advice Service and Debt Advice Foundation.

During 2022/23 six complaints have been referred to the Enforcement Agents for investigation.

12. From Cllr Mark Smith to the Leader of the Council

What steps has the borough taken in the last 12 months to fulfil its obligations in respect of the Armed Forces Covenant it signed up to in April 2013?

Reply:

My advice from Officers is that we are continuing to:

- Build relations with local and regional organisations working with members of the armed forces and their families
- Bring information together on organisations, advice and support agencies (there is a dedicated page on contacts on our website but we have been looking to source additional contacts eg: charities who work specifically with members of the armed forces)
- Promote and support national events such as armed forces day and working with local organisations, the BIDS and so forth to support and celebrate these days
- Signposting to skills, education, training and employment activities
- Ensure that armed forces members and their families are supported and recognised in a number of key areas including, housing allocation policies, school admissions and access to health, advice and support services.
- Pursue a date for a representative from MOD to visit to produce a first draft for consideration by end of calendar year with a view to the adoption and re-signing of our covenant in the new year.

Everyone involved aspire to move all related matters forward at the earliest possible opportunity