

Council

12 December 2022

Questions from Members of the Council for Written Reply

1. From Cllr Alison Stammers to the Portfolio Holder for Transport, Highways and Road Safety

Can you please advise:-

- a. What the Council's policy is on public consultations?
- b. What criteria are used to decide whether a matter should go out to public consultation?
- c. Why the proposal to remove Pay and Display machines across the Borough did not go out to public consultation?

Reply:

The Council does not have a policy on public consultations.

Consultation is appropriate where the Council is considering a scheme for a particular road or group of roads and there is a choice to be made. The start of the removal of all P&D machines was approved three years ago. It is a Borough-wide issue which is not suitable for consultation, as one of the objectives is to reduce overhead costs by not replacing, at a cost of £800,000, obsolete machines.

2. From Cllr Alison Stammers to the Portfolio Holder for Transport, Highways and Road Safety

Will you please:-

- a. provide a timetable - fully accessible to the public - detailing exactly when Pay and Display Machines are to be removed from each car park;
- b. advise how residents will be able to report any issues with using RinGo; will a facility be added to Fix My Street to report RinGo issues;
- c. advise what measures are going to be put in place to monitor the impact on residents and businesses of the removal of cash Pay and Display machines and how and when that will be reported back to Councillors.

Reply:

Information regarding the change to RingGo will be provided at every location where there are machines, but it will not be practical to give a timetable as this will vary from day to day according to the contractor's work programme.

Residents who have questions about the use of RingGo or who wish to report any issues can use the general parking enquiry form [General parking enquiry | Instructions – London Borough of Bromley](#) (not Fix My Street which is for reporting highway maintenance issues). We are investigating the practicality of an exclusive report form for RinGo.

The Council has access to the full range of reports that the cashless system provides, therefore officers will continue to monitor the usage and income of all parking locations, including how the payment sessions are being purchased (via a phone app or a phone call) and if there were any recorded outages or down time. Any enquires or formal complaints will be logged and investigated as well as analysed to establish if any trends are forming that requires Officers' attention. New performance measures will be reported to ECS PDS regarding the usage of cashless parking payments.

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

There are currently over 1,500 Bromley households in temporary accommodation, a figure which is increasing by around 21 per month. I commend the work done to build and acquire properties to date, but how can we accelerate builds and acquisitions to bring this number down?

Reply:

As at the end of October 2022 there were 1577 households residing in temporary accommodation however 599 of these are residing in accommodation owned or leased by housing associations on our behalf offering a longer term suitable settled accommodation offer. The remaining 1058 were residing in accommodation secured on a nightly rate basis which whilst suitable accommodation can only be procured at a significant cost and on less settled terms. Despite the continued high level of housing need presenting, the work undertaken to increase supply has seen a steady reduction in numbers from 1626 at the start of the year. The workstreams to increase supply are already proceeding as quickly as possible with the beehive acquisition completed, phase one of Meadowship Homes due to complete by May 2022, phase 2 commencing this month. The Council has also now completed its first 3 self-delivery schemes, with 2 further schemes in development and one progressing to planning application stage – totalling 648 new affordable homes which equates to a saving of more than £3.7m per year. Appraisals are also underway on a number of additional sites which could secure up to a further 200 affordable homes. The Council also continues to actively seek additional schemes and work with housing association partners to facilitate new developments and regeneration of sites.

4. From Cllr Will Connolly to the Portfolio Holder for Transport, Highways and Road Safety

Will the Portfolio Holder please update Members on the average speed of vehicles on Bromley's roads, after more incidents and damage from collisions such as in Beckenham Town?

Reply:

There is no measure of average speed across the Borough, but speed surveys are undertaken, where necessary, at individual locations. Cllr Connolly should approach Officers in the Traffic team to find out if information is available for specific locations.

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

Can the Portfolio Holder give a list of open posts across the Council broken down by department/job function and indicate the posts that have been open during the last six months?

Reply:

Section	No. of Vacancies	No. of Posts vacant 6 months
Adult Services	34	24
Chief Executive's Office	2	1
Children's Services	66	46
Corporate Services	5	3
Environment & Public Protection	16	11
Finance	5	2
Housing, Planning & Regeneration	17	10
HR, Customer Services & Public Affairs	1	0
Public Health	3	2
Total	149	99

6. From Cllr Josh King to the Portfolio Holder for Transport, Highways and Road Safety

Can the Portfolio Holder indicate how many PCNs have been appealed over the last year and what were the outcome of these appeals? How many of these were subsequently taken to the London Tribunal and what were the outcomes of these?

Reply:

Appeals Received between 01.04.21 and 31.03.22 for all PCNs (including CCTV):

Challenges (first stage appeal)
Challenges received - 16,661
Challenged refused – 7,832 (47%)
Challenges accepted – 8,829 (53%)

Formal Representation (second stage appeal)
Representations received - 5,414
Representations refused – 2,308 (43%)
Representations accepted – 3,106 (57%)

Cases sent to the adjudicator
Number of cases sent – 240
Number of cases refused – 200 (83%)
Number of cases accepted – 40 (17%)

7. From Cllr Chloe-Jane Ross to the Portfolio Holder for Resources, Commissioning and Contract Management

Many people continue to experience problems with the usability of the new bromley.gov.uk website, this includes broken links, poor search engine optimisation, and information which is not intuitive to find. Does the Portfolio Holder agree that it must be a priority to improve the website further to ensure the people of Bromley can easily access information, and to that end what is being proposed?

Reply:

Bromley Council's website currently receives an average of over 600,000 visits each month. Between them, these visitors view around 2 million pages. There is very little negative feedback from users reporting problems using the website or reporting difficulties finding information. When feedback or suggestions for improvements are received, the web team take it very seriously and investigate the issue and endeavour to find a solution.

To limit the impact of broken links the web team use a tool called Siteimprove, which monitors all links on the website and identifies any issues. This enables the web team to immediately resolve any issues. We encourage anyone discovering a broken link to alert info@bromley.gov.uk

With the Bromley website offering information on such a diverse range of subjects, we try to offer a range of options to assist people easily finding what they want. These tools include an internal search, an A to Z of services, key homepage service buttons, a navigational hierarchy plus in-page promotions and links to related pages.

More than 53% of visitors arrive at the website from search engines. We improve external search engine results for users by reviewing content on our pages and adding information to the page metadata to include potential alternative search terms or synonyms that, might be used by users.

The new website now engages with Google's search engine in a different way, and we have plans to run a more focussed project, to further optimise the use of this. We also have some control over the internal site search, and do override the ranking of some results by utilising a promotions tool.

Finally, we run a rolling programme of reviewing content of every page on the website every six months engaging with the content owners in the various service departments. This gives an opportunity to improve and challenge each page twice a year.

8. From Cllr Sam Webber to the Portfolio Holder for Resources, Commissioning and Contract Management

Could the relevant Portfolio Holder and LBB officers inform me about two pieces of 'orphan land' or unadopted land in Beadon Road? LBB currently maintains two pieces of grassland on the corner of Beadon & Cameron Roads and at the other end of Beadon Road. Are these owned by the Council and would it consider selling the land to the local Residents Association?

Reply:

The land in question does not belong to the Council and is unregistered. It is, however, maintained by Highways. Consequently, as the Council does not own the land it cannot sell it.

9. From Cllr Sam Webber to the Portfolio Holder for Resources, Commissioning and Contract Management

Would the Portfolio Holder list all of Bromley Council's current investments in Qatar following media reports that the Council has over £20m invested in the country; more than any other London borough. Are there any plans to move these investments elsewhere, given this country's record on minority rights and migrant worker deaths highlighted by the ongoing FIFA World Cup?

<https://www.theguardian.com/business/2022/nov/12/uk-local-councils-deposit-taxpayer-cash-qatar-bank-lgbt-rights#:~:text=Councils%20that%20still%20had%20millions,as%20Qatar%2C%E2%80%9D%20said%20Tatchell>

Reply:

The Council has two fixed interest investments with Qatar National Bank as detailed below:

£5M @ 2.335% from 6/6/22 to 6/6/23

£10M @ 4.98% from 2/12/22 to 1/12/23

The Council plans to hold these investments to maturity.

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

Please provide a breakdown of the headcount and cost of staff employed within the Planning Service during each the last four 12 month periods, the number of planning applications, pre application service enquiries received and the income received by the Council for these applications.

Reply:

Number of planning applications received (figures used for government returns) and income:

FY2018/19 – 2976 - £1,624,748

FY2019/20 – 2950 - £1,550,596

FY2020/21 – 2871 - £1,480,025

FY2021/22 – 3009 - £1,594,474

FY2022/23 (to 30/09/22) – 1345 - £627,911

Number of preapplication advice requests received:

FY2018/19 – 284 - £109,583

FY2019/20 – 294 - £116,968

FY2020/21 – 247 - £131,208

FY2021/22 – 244 - £146,128

FY2022/23 (up to 30/11/2022) – 28 completed / 36 pending - £75,750

The Planning Authority (Head of Planning, Development Management, Planning Policy & Strategy, Planning Enforcement and Planning Appeals) salary costs are as follows:

FY2018/19 - £2,567,735

FY2019/20 - £2,535,603

FY2020/21 - £2,661,942

FY2021/22 - £2,897,138

11. From Cllr Chris Price to the Portfolio Holder for Renewal Recreation and Housing

Following the devastating case of Awaab Ishak, how many families in Bromley are currently living in overcrowded accommodation where there is significant mould or damp?

Reply:

We do not have these figures available, not all households will approach the local authority for housing assistance and those with low levels of overcrowding are not currently included on the Housing Register.

We recognise the devastating impact that poor housing conditions can have on occupants, and we do all that we can to ensure that the accommodation we utilise is hazard free and that where problems are identified that they are swiftly dealt with.

The new stock that has been developed by the Council have been designed and built to a high standard. We're satisfied that these homes are hazard free and will be subject to inspections / cyclical maintenance in order to ensure that this remains the case. However, beyond the stock we own there are a significant number of properties that we utilise both as settled and temporary accommodation and we recognise that we have a responsibility to ensure that these homes meet the necessary standards and do not put our customers at risk.

We have service level agreements in place with all our providers which ensure that they take responsibility for the conditions within their accommodation and that we have the necessary safeguards in place to enforce the standards that are set.

Officers within Housing, in conjunction with colleagues in Environmental Services, often review our practices and procedures to ensure that they allow us to best identify, assess and respond to any cases of this nature moving forward.

The social housing regulator has also contacted all registered providers requiring analysis and reassurance of the work they are undertaking to ensure properties meet decent homes standards and are free of mould and damp. The Council has written to Housing associations requesting a copy of these responses for added local reassurance.