

Council

27 February 2023

Questions from Members of the Public for Oral Reply

1. From Thomas Murphy to the Chairman of General Purposes and Licensing Committee

What specific steps are the Council taking to raise awareness of the new voter ID laws for elections? And would it be possible to have a page on Bromley Council's website outlining the new requirements, with a link to the Voter Authority Certificate application page on gov.uk?

Reply:

As there are no scheduled elections in Bromley this year (our next scheduled elections are the GLA elections on 2 May 2024), we are taking a 'soft touch' approach to raise awareness of the new Voter ID requirements.

We are in the process of creating new pages on the Council website outlining the new provisions of the Elections Act 2022 (including the requirement to produce photographic ID at polling stations). This will include a link to the Voter Authority Certificate application page on the new Government online service.

In the meantime, the Electoral Commission launched its public awareness campaign in January 2023 across England (not just in election areas) to ensure voters understand the changes. This includes adverts on national television and radio.

Next year here in Bromley we will undertake an extensive and targeted local awareness raising campaign – this will include updating the Council website, distributing posters and leaflets in prime locations and to local community organisations, using social media (Facebook and Twitter) and issuing timely local press releases.

In addition to these awareness activities, details of the new voter ID requirements will also be included on the poll cards which will be sent to every (eligible) voter in Bromley towards the end of March next year.

2. From Susan Moore to the Chairman of General Purposes and Licensing Committee

The Council will be aware that the new voter ID laws will disproportionately affect young people and ethnic minority voters, who are less likely to have photo ID, what steps are the Council taking to ensure that these specific groups are not disenfranchised during elections?

Reply:

Where an individual does not have one of the accepted forms of photographic ID, they can apply for free for a Voter Authority Certificate from Bromley or their local authority.

We are in the process of creating new pages on the Council website outlining the new provisions of the Elections Act 2022 which I referred to in the previous reply, and this will include the requirement to produce photographic ID at a polling station. This will include a link to the Voter Authority Certificate application page on the new Government online service.

We here in Bromley will be undertaking an Equalities Impact Screening and full Assessment on the new measures being introduced through the Elections Act 2022 (including Voter ID) and the impact on any group of voters with one of the nine protected characteristics. This should ensure that any barriers to participation are identified (and where possible, removed) and voters are not disenfranchised or put off voting, whilst ensuring the effective implementation of the changes and maintaining the integrity of the elections.

Bromley was one of five local authorities along with Gosport, Swindon, Watford and Woking selected by the Cabinet Office to conduct Voter ID pilots at the Local elections on 3 May 2018. Following the election, both the Returning Officer's findings and the Electoral Commissions' evaluation indicated that there was no evidence any specific group of people who struggled with the ID requirement or that ID requirements significantly deterred voters from voting.

Supplementary Question:

Some other local councils have done calculations on how long it will take to put together all the resources and the time and capacity it will take to produce the ID that people will need. Have Bromley started to do any calculations or started to think about the amount of work and person hours that it will take to deliver ID for people who currently don't have it?

Reply:

I don't specifically know the answer to your question but I have every confidence in Carol Ling who is responsible for this part of the Council, and her team, to ensure that this will happen. If you have any further queries or would like some further information I will be happy to email Mrs Ling tomorrow.

Additional Supplementary Question from Cllr Simon Fawthrop:

Is Cllr Tunnicliffe aware that during the trials that took place in 2018 the turnout was not affected at all by Voter ID, and one of the most remarkable things was that more people spoilt their ballot papers than were turned away and deprived of a vote?

Reply:

Yes, I am aware of that and there were very few issues, a matter of a handful. Those voters returned and voted, as far as I am aware.

Additional Supplementary Question from Cllr Graeme Casey:

Are we aware of how many incidences of voter fraud we have had in Bromley previously, just in the local elections?

Reply:

I cannot answer that specifically this evening, but I am happy to come back to you with an answer.

Additional Supplementary Question from Cllr Simon Jeal:

Is Cllr Tunncliffe aware of any incidence of voter fraud in the London Borough of Bromley?

Reply:

I am not.

3. From Angela Wilkins to the Leader of the Council

Please provide full details of consultations that the Council has undertaken with BVST (as leaseholder), and with other tenants or organisations who currently rent office or other space in Community House, regarding the sale of this building.

Reply:

I am advised that the Assistant Director for Integrated Commissioning discussed the plans with two of the key service providers located there on the 29th November and 8th December.

The Chief Executive and I met with BVST's Chief Executive on 19th January and I am advised that conversations remain ongoing.

Supplementary Question:

The decision in principle to sell this building was made in December – on the basis of that I would like to ask if it would have been better if Members had been aware that the tenants in Community House do not wish to move to the Direct Line premises. Would it not have been better to have an informed decision made by this Council – Councillors would have been aware in advance, had there been consultation, that the tenants were not prepared to move.

Reply:

We had two informed debates, one at the Executive and one at full Council. Members were fully aware of the decision that was being taken and I would remind all concerned that it is not as if the charities that are based there will not have a home – they will stay there as protected tenants if they wish to, even if and when the building is sold. They have a two and a half year protection over the fact that they are trying to turn it into an asset of community value which we wish them the best of luck over. That featured in the conversation with the Chief Executive and I. So, no, apart from the fact that the process was speedy it formed part of the operational

property review – it was a decision taken around many Council properties. Ultimately, as I told the last full Council anyone that wants to move to better, more modern offices will be very welcome if they wish to, but there is no compulsion

4. From Richard Honess to the Portfolio Holder for Transport, Highways and Road Safety

What is the criteria for a pothole to be fixed on a residential street?

Reply:

A defect measuring 40mm is the level at which we repair, but in the case of, say, a pedestrian crossing, we look at a lower one for pedestrian safety.

Supplementary Question:

I have been monitoring a street in my area in St Mary Cray called Elizabeth Way, which has been suffering severe deterioration of the road surface for a while - I think my first report was in July 2021. I have subsequently re-reported that particular street on numerous occasions – at least three or four times since then as the road surface has deteriorated – on Fix My Street. Every time I report it I get the reply that the deterioration does not meet the criteria for fixing. I looked at it today and it certainly has met that criteria on a number of occasions when I have been told it did not. I have also heard rumours that there are plans for that street to be resurfaced – can you confirm whether that street is due for resurfacing and if not, if I put another report on will it be fixed?

Reply:

I understand from your ward member that it is on the list. There are thirteen teams out repairing streets – they are doing about seventy a day. This is not quite the time to do most of them because once we get to April and the weather improves the repairs will stay in place. We do have 537 miles of road in Bromley – we are the biggest London Borough, and that would stretch from here to Zurich. It does take some time – this is a national, and an international problem – but I can reassure you that your road is one of the thirty four planned for resurfacing in the coming financial year.

5. From Ju Owens to the Portfolio Holder for Public Protection and Enforcement

Could you please outline how much the Council have spent in the past four years, and on what, funding actions to make Bromley streets safer for women?

Reply:

There are a wide range of actions either fully or part-funded by the authority such as our CCTV network and street lighting. Regarding specific projects to make Bromley's streets safer for women, this spend is spread over several service areas and is mainly officer time spent working with partners. Therefore there is no specific budget but it is estimated at about £100,000. Such projects include the Licensing Team

carrying out anti-drink spiking publicity, and publicising Ask Angela and the Community Safety Officers working with churches and Street Pastors and encouraging licensed premises to sign up to the Night Safety Charter.

Supplementary Question:

Can you advise whether these measures have been successful and how such success has been measured?

Reply:

When we do put in for funding from the Mayor's Office or elsewhere we do not have much feedback because we are considered to have a very safe borough.

Additional Supplementary Question from Cllr Simon Jeal:

Is that £100,00 per year or over four years?

Reply:

That is per year.

6. From Angela Wilkins to the Leader of the Council

In deciding to put Community House up for sale immediately, what is the Council most interested in:

- a. Obtaining the maximum capital receipt; or
- b. Finding tenants to subsidise the costs of running its new, very large Council offices; or
- c. Ensuring that the social, health, economic and community benefits that are the outputs from Community House can continue and thereby support local residents.

Reply:

The answer is A and C in equal measure.

The Council will not be able to continue funding 'C' to the extent we would all prefer to see and do so in future, unless it takes numerous very difficult decisions such as 'A'. Both are inextricably linked.

Thus the decision to do so in December.

Supplementary Question:

Given that the decision to sell was made in the context of an assumption that the tenants would move, and given that Cllr Smith has just confirmed that obtaining the maximum capital receipt is one of the priorities of the Council, can he explain why the decision has been made in such a hurry to sell this property with sitting tenants?

Reply:

It achieves best value, it helps us to achieve capital income which we need for other projects such as housing. It is an investment property and we deem it the correct

thing to do to sell it now. It is not as if the current tenants are going to be homeless. All that will happen, if and when it is sold, is that it will have different landlords and protected tenancy under the Tenancy Act.

Additional Supplementary Question from Ms Wilkins:

My point was that the property is being sold with sitting tenants, which in general lowers the value, so I do not believe my question was properly answered.

Reply:

I believe it was clear – I am happy with the answer given.

7. From Richard Honess to the Portfolio Holder for Sustainability, Green Services and Open Spaces

18 months ago, I asked a question about the upkeep of the Rookery Gardens Estate and was assured by the then RRH Portfolio Holder that the matter would be discussed and actioned. What discussions and actions have subsequently taken place?

Reply:

I'm pleased to say that we've taken action since your question in October 2021.

We have reviewed the ownership records to establish the green spaces that we own and officers have made several monitoring visits over and above what is normal for the Council's contract monitoring to ensure our land is being maintained.

Officers continue to work with the housing association that owns the estate, Clarion, to come up with a solution for maintenance on their land.

We are absolutely clear that when it comes to bulky waste for example, that is the responsibility of Clarion and as a responsible social landlord they should accept that responsibility.

Supplementary Question:

Yes, it is the bulk waste collection that continues to plague that estate with overflowing rubbish bins and bins that are not big enough. Do you know how long it will take Clarion to resolve these issues and what it is that they are planning to do?

Reply:

I cannot answer that today but if you do write to me I will take that up with some of the senior leadership team at Clarion.

8. From Ju Owens to the Portfolio Holder for Public Protection and Enforcement

When launching their £200 million fund for active travel schemes (<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/200-million-to-improve-walking-and-cycling-routes-and-boost-local-economies>) the Government acknowledged that 1 in 2

women feel unsafe walking after dark in a quiet street near their home, and that all proposals must take this into account. How much of the fund will Bromley Council be applying for and how will you be ensuring women's safety is considered?

Reply:

This fund is only provided to local transport authorities outside of London, so unfortunately Bromley is not eligible for it.

Supplementary Question:

What plans do you have to both increase active travel in the area of Bromley while taking women's safety into consideration?

Reply:

Active travel does not come under my portfolio, but on anything concerning women's safety we will be working cross-portfolio - my fellow portfolio holder is agreeing.