

Council

11 December 2023

Questions from Members of the Council for Oral Reply

1. From Cllr Chloe-Jane Ross to the Portfolio Holder for Environment

What action is the Council taking to reduce light pollution and promote dark skies (is there a policy) and what enforcement occurs to deal with excessive light complaints?

Reply:

The Council does not have a Dark Skies Policy however Light pollution (excessive glare) may, under some circumstances, be assessed as a statutory nuisance and thus resolved using shielding, timers, negotiation, or enforcement using S.79 & 80 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

Supplementary Question:

Cllr Ross asked whether, in view of the large proportion of the borough that was rural in nature, the Council could consider developing a policy?

Reply:

Cllr Rowlands responded that the Council did have relevant policies – he read an extract from Policy 122 Light Pollution in the Local Plan. The issue could be looked at, but there was also a balance to be found with safety requirements relating to the prevention of crime and road safety.

Cllr Simon Jeal added a comment agreeing that the desire for dark skies did need to be balanced with the need for safety.

Supplementary Question from Cllr Graeme Casey:

Cllr Casey asked about enforcement in relation to a tennis club's floodlights in his ward.

Reply:

Cllr Rowlands asked that the specific details be passed to him. Some of the issues related to planning restrictions – he gave the example of the Lidl supermarket in his ward.

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

What plans do we have to bid for funding from the Mayor of London's new Council Homes Acquisition Programme?

Reply:

Officers have already met with the GLA to discuss the programme and ensure a full understanding of how it might help Bromley. Officers are now assessing the merits

further of how this funding could support Bromley's plans with a view to being ready to progress a submission when the CHAPs programme opens to bids.

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

Reference: Environment PDS Committee 16 November, Item 13, page 221: "The first part of 2023 has not been good in terms of serious collisions".

The paper and Appendix show a high projection of 122 KSIs (People Killed & Seriously Injured in Road Traffic Collisions) against a "target" of 79 KSIs on Bromley roads, for 2023/24.

Previous years:

Actual	Target	Year
103	79	2022/23
109	86	2021/22
77	92	2020/21 Pandemic year

Of the actual 61 KSIs so far this year up to June 2023, how many of the drivers involved in these collisions were aged 17-24 years old?

Reply:
Nine.

Supplementary Question from Cllr Simon Jeal:

Cllr Jeal asked about the road safety scheme for young drivers.

Reply:

Cllr Bennett confirmed that this was the Driven by Consequences event held at Langley Park on 7th July. The event had been very successful and he hoped that it could be repeated next year.

Cllr Webber thanked the Portfolio Holder for his engagement with road safety issues in Holmesdale Road. Traffic and pedestrian surveys were underway, and he hoped these would lead to further road safety improvements.

4. From Cllr Julie Ireland to the Leader of the Council

Residents across Bromley Borough and particularly some in Bromley Town are reporting receiving post only two or three times a month. This is particularly important as Christmas approaches but also affects official time critical correspondence, such as parking tickets that arrive too late to qualify for the discounted period. What steps has the Council Leader taken to liaise with Royal Mail to highlight the particular problems in Bromley and what mitigation can he put in place for people who suffer a financial penalty caused by post arriving late?

Reply:

As I advised Cllr Casey in response to a similar question in this Chamber on the 17th July, when I believe you were present too.

“I can do better than that for you. Having written to the CEO of the Royal Mail on two occasions myself as long ago as January 2021, only to be completely ignored, enquiries of this nature for Bromley & Chislehurst residents were streamlined and are being pursued directly by Sir Bob Neill and his team at Westminster. Sir Bob is in regular correspondence with Royal Mail as delays are reported, has visited Sherman Road sorting office and held talks on site there with senior Royal Mail Managers, as well as meeting local postmen and women and Trade Union representatives, explaining directly the impacts that these delays have on local residents and businesses. With that in mind, you might find it helpful to steer any of your constituents who approach you complaining of delays directly to his office.”

There is unfortunately no mitigation that I can think of in general terms that the Council can put in place to compensate for the Post Office's ongoing inability to do their job properly.

In the specific instance of a Parking Ticket, I would suggest without prejudice that appealing to the Council's parking team on that basis might be considered sympathetically, certainly for a first-time offender.

In summary. Sir Bob Neill remains in correspondence with both the Secretary of State for Business and Trade and Ofcom on related matters, in an effort to improve the situation for all concerned.

Supplementary Question:

Cllr Ireland stated that she was grateful to Sir Bob Neill MP for his efforts on this issue; there had been some improvements, but performance had slipped again. She was aware that this was not within the Council's control, but she urged that the matter be raised again.

Reply:

Cllr Smith assured Members that the issue was being pursued through Sir Bob Neill, who had referred the matter to Ofcom.

Supplementary Question from Cllr Tony McPartlan:

Cllr Tony McPartlan urged that a cross party letter from all Members be drawn up to put pressure on Royal Mail.

Reply:

Cllr Smith stated that he would be happy to support a letter from all group leaders.

Supplementary Question from Cllr Mike Jack:

Cllr Mike Jack commented that residents and businesses were going to the depot at Sherman Road to collect their mail. However, the opening hours had now been reduced. He asked the Leader if there was anything that the Council could do to encourage them to stay open longer?

Reply:

Cllr Smith responded that if fellow group leaders wanted to send a letter this issue could be included.

Cllr Graeme Casey added that the letter would need to be hand-delivered.

5. From Cllr Jeremy Adams to the Portfolio holder for Renewal, Recreation and Housing

The Chancellor announced in the Autumn Statement that local authorities will be able to claim back the costs of processing major business planning applications on the condition they meet faster timelines. Based on current planning application flows and staffing, how well-equipped is Bromley Council to meet accelerated timelines and regain costs?

Reply:

At present the Local Planning Authority is performing well and meeting all of its statutory performance targets so is well placed with regards to the upcoming changes. The resourcing requirements of any enhanced service together with the ability of third-party consultees to respond in reduced timescales will need to be assessed to determine whether any increased fees are achievable and economically viable.

6. From Cllr Kathy Bance MBE to the Portfolio Holder for Public Protection and Enforcement

Can the Portfolio Holder request an update from the Metropolitan Gangs Unit on its work and achievements in Bromley?

Reply:

In direct response to your question, the Gangs Unit has not been active in Bromley due to there being no identified gangs at the current time.

However, what has happened is that the South Area Gangs Unit was replaced on the 4th December by an Offender Management Team which is part of the move to put more resource under local rather than Met wide control.

Supplementary Question:

Councillor Bance commented that there appeared to be less violent crime in Penge, but that there were still issues further out in Beckenham and Bromley.

Reply:

Cllr Page re-stated that there were no gangs operating in the borough, but there were sometimes problems stemming from the surrounding areas. She would be happy to provide the information she had to Cllr Bance.

Supplementary Question from Cllr Kevin Kennedy-Brooks:

Councillor Kevin Kennedy-Brooks asked what had suddenly changed, that there were no longer any gangs operating in Bromley?

Reply:

Cllr Page responded that she would ask the Police for information on this.

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

The introduction of the Mayor of London's Free School Meals for primary schools this term has helped many families during the cost-of-living crisis. Please can you update the chamber on the take up rate in schools and of the actions that Bromley has taken to promote the scheme.

Reply:

Under the GLA's scheme, the Council does not receive details of uptake. The Department has sent all GLA communications of the scheme on to schools. It is for schools to administer and share details of the scheme as they see fit.

Supplementary Question:

Cllr Price asked whether it would be possible for the Council to obtain the figures from the GLA? He believed that this was a great scheme, and he asked what the Council was doing to promote it – there appeared to be nothing on the Council's website?

Reply:

Cllr Lymer stated that she would pass on take-up rate if she could obtain it. Officers had been instructed not to spend time and money on behalf of the Mayor of London.

Supplementary Question from Cllr Alisa Igoe:

Cllr Alisa Igoe referred to comments in the press that the scheme might be ending – she asked whether the Portfolio Holder had any information on this?

Reply:

Cllr Lymer responded that she would ask.

Supplementary Question from Cllr Kevin Kennedy-Brooks:

Cllr Kennedy-Brooks asked whether the scheme had been promoted on the Council website, and if the Council did not have authority for this scheme, what was commonly done to promote free school meals?

Reply:

Cllr Lymer responded that there was information about free school meals on the website.

Comment from Cllr Michael Tickner:

Cllr Tickner commented that there was no such thing as a free school meal – other taxpayers were subsidising this. This was taxpayers money that some could ill-afford.

Comment from Cllr Colin Smith:

Cllr Smith commented that when the scheme had been debated previously there had been genuine views expressed by members on both sides. He asked whether the

Portfolio Holder agreed that it was not fair that parents from poorer areas to be funding meals for children from wealthier areas?

The Portfolio Holder confirmed that she did not think that the programme was fair.

Supplementary Question from Cllr Tony Owen:

Cllr Owen asked whether the Portfolio Holder had any information about how long the scheme would last?

Reply:

Cllr Lymer responded that free school meals were just funded for this year to align with the GLA election in 2024.

8. From Cllr Julie Ireland to the Portfolio Holder for Transport, Highways and Road Safety

Does the Portfolio Holder expect The Hill Car Park to re-open and if so when? What efforts have been made to let visitors know about alternative late night parking locations in this important trading period for the entertainment and hospitality sector?

Reply:

Posters have been placed at The Hill site to direct customers to other nearby carparks, and there is information on the Council's website. I am delighted to announce that we should be able to re-open The Hill next week.

Supplementary Question from Cllr Alisa Igoe:

Cllr Igoe reported that one lane had been closed going into the Stockwell car park.

Reply:

The Portfolio Holder replied that he would look into this.

9. From Cllr Chris Price to the Leader of the Council

Does the Leader agree that following the Home Secretary allegedly using derogatory language about an area in another MP's Constituency, that members of this chamber should not use derogatory language when referring to areas of this Borough, when in the chamber?

Reply:

I understand that the Home Secretary subsequently apologised for using derogatory language about a Labour MP.

I hope that elected Members in Bromley try and talk our Borough up at all times, whether inside this Chamber or otherwise.

Supplementary Question:

Cllr Price asked what action the Leader would take if a Member behaved like this?

Reply:

The Leader stated that he would ask to see the evidence, then make a proportionate judgement based on the facts.

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

Did Bromley send any personnel to The Transport & Energy Forum held in Birmingham 16/11/23? The theme - the need to accelerate the transition to decarbonisation. Invitees included transport planners, technology innovators for EV charging, and local authorities were offered fully funded places. Sessions included the Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (LEVI) Fund, from which London has received a total of £35million in capital funding plus £3million in capability funding, and insight on collaborating with charge point operators.

Reply:

No.

Supplementary Question:

Cllr Igoe asked whether this approach was ambitious enough to hit the Council's net zero targets?

Reply:

The Portfolio Holder responded that it would have cost £1,100 to send someone, when they could connect online over Teams with little cost. With a budget deficit projected it was not right to suggest spending more money.