

RENEWAL, RECREATION AND HOUSING PDS COMMITTEE
31 JANUARY 2024

QUESTIONS FOR ORAL REPLY

1. From Councillor Will Connolly to the Portfolio Holder for Renewal, Recreation and Housing

Following the Mayor of London's activation of the Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) in January 2024, what actions are being taken to protect vulnerable people sleeping rough through additional emergency accommodation and how is it planned to spend the £89k Homelessness Reduction Grant (carried forward) for services for young people?

Reply:

The Council provides a robust response to SWEP through our Single Homelessness Pathway. Emergency cover is provided outside of office hours by our Housing Team.

Each individual supported during the SWEP period is provided with emergency accommodation. Where appropriate those placed will either go on to have a full homelessness assessment or be signposted to a relevant agency for support. We work with a number of partner agencies across the borough and commission ThamesReach to provide outreach services; responding to sightings of rough sleepers and supporting them into accommodation and linking them with services.

With regard to the £89k Homelessness Reduction Grant for young people, we are exploring a number of options which are yet to be finalised. These include the delivery of tailored training and information sessions to schools and workshops for young people including our Care Leavers. Plans are being explored with Bromley and Croydon Women's Aid, LBB Community Safety, Health and other partners working with young people. A proposal will be coming forward in March.

Supplementary Question:

Can the Portfolio Holder guarantee that the Homelessness Reduction Grant will be spent within the 2023/24 financial year?

Reply:

This grant will be spent before expiry. The Local Authority has no intention of returning any grant funding.

QUESTIONS FOR WRITTEN REPLY

1. From Stuart Mayer to the Portfolio Holder for Renewal, Recreation and Housing

Orpington is classified as a Major Centre in the London Plan - yet the current provision of goods and services doesn't fulfil this designation.

What measures are being put in place to improve the town's ability to adequately serve those living within its catchment, and ensure that provision isn't further eroded?

Reply:

Planning policy provides a framework for assessing planning applications that are submitted to the Council, but it cannot force applications to be submitted, nor dictate what types of retail or services are provided. Applications for new retail, commercial and leisure uses in Orpington Town Centre would be supported in principle, in line with policy objectives and the overarching Major centre designation. Conversely, proposals involving a loss of retail, leisure or commercial provision would need to justify loss against policy requirements, including demonstrating that this loss does not harm the function of the town centre.

The Council is currently reviewing the Local Plan and will be updating evidence on local needs to inform the policies of the new plan.

2. From Councillor Alisa Igoe to the Portfolio Holder for Renewal, Recreation and Housing

DWP allocated £3,735,765 to Bromley's Household Support Fund (closes March 2024). Council papers show £1,320,639 was spent by end-September 2023. At this rate of use, with £2,412,126 for October to March, an underspend is possible. Was this reviewed in October, as stated in Item 11, Executive 29/03/23, and what was the decision?

Reply:

The scheme opened to applications from targeted groups referred by a set group of partners in June 2023. During the period June to September 2023 applications were only accepted from referrals made by the set group of partners. The October return represents these applications processed and the free school meals holiday vouchers. The scheme opened to applications from those who met the eligibility criteria on the first of October and the return for the period 1st October to 31st December 2023 (which includes applications from targeted groups as well as all other applications) shows that 81% of the total budget has now been spent. We are consequently on target to spend the whole of the allocation.