

Council

11 March 2024

Questions from Members of the Council for Oral Reply

1. From Councillor Tony McPartlan to the Portfolio Holder for Transport, Highways and Road Safety

There is an increasing problem of inconsiderately parked vehicles in areas where pavement parking is permitted. This can lead to the pavements being partially or fully blocked, causing difficulty and danger for pedestrians, especially disabled and elderly people. What can we do to encourage residents who legally park on pavements to do so considerately?

Reply:

The Council addresses these issues, when they arise, on a case-by-case basis, as improvements will vary in nature according to the particular problem and the design of the footway. If Cllr McPartlan can let me know the locations he is concerned about then Officers will be asked to investigate and suggest suitable improvements.

I do share his concern – this inconsiderate behaviour is also causing problems for parents with young children.

Supplementary Question:

Can the Council use its enforcement officers to put warning letters on vehicles that are parked inconsiderately?

Reply:

That is an interesting suggestion – we can look at this and raise it with our contractor.

2. From Councillor Mark Brock to the Portfolio Holder for Portfolio Holder for Transport, Highways and Road Safety

To ask the Portfolio Holder what was the outcome of the trial of the Pothole Pro machine and whether he has any other plans to review new technology to improve efficiency?

Reply:

I was impressed by the efficiency with which the machine dug the trench saving considerable time and money compared with manual excavation. I am also exploring

the market for machines which repair small areas of road surface. Officers are in discussion with our contractor, and it will also play a part in how we frame our next contract.

3. From Councillor Alexa Michael to the Portfolio Holder for Transport, Highways and Road Safety

Will the Executive Member for Transport Highways and Road Safety make a statement as to how the allocation by His Majesty's Government of £455,000 for potholes is to be spent?

Reply:

The use of this capital funding to resurface roads is on the agenda for Wednesday's PDS meeting. In the longer term I am exploring how we can use some of the money to invest in new technology to improve efficiency, effectiveness and economy.

Supplementary question:

It is great to have this additional funding, but we want it spent in the best possible way. For example, when a pothole is filled can the contractor also repair any nearby potholes at the same time?

Reply:

If the contractor spends more time at one location there is a danger that repairs to much worse potholes elsewhere will be delayed. We have to leave it to the contractor.

The additional funding is not revenue – it has to be invested in equipment or upgrading roads rather than on isolated repairs. Cllr Igoe has pressed for College Road in Bromley to be resurfaced – it has been in our programme for three years, but we have not had the funding through from TfL.

The machines we have for resurfacing are not always suitable for smaller rural roads, so we need to look into this.

4. From Councillor Graeme Casey to the Portfolio Holder for Children, Education and Families

What investigations have been made to consider the potential financial savings that could be made for children's services by investing in a Council run children's home?

Reply:

I can confirm that we are actively exploring a number of options. Given the current budget pressures both nationally and locally it is now absolutely right that we seek to enter this market as a way of reducing costs, as well as potentially being able to place children more locally. I will update the Children's PDS Committee once we have some concrete proposals and costings to share.

Supplementary question:

Do you agree that these investigations should include services for adults?

Reply:

That is not my portfolio, but I understand that these issues are being looked at.

Additional supplementary question from Cllr Simon Fawthrop:

The Government has announced additional funding in the budget – will the Council be applying for this?

Reply:

Yes, we will.

5. From Councillor Chris Price to the Leader of the Council

What plans do the Council have for celebrating Gypsy Roma Traveller Month this year?

Reply:

There are no such plans.

Supplementary question:

The events held last year were very effective, why can't they be repeated?

Reply:

The Chief Executive is here, and, subject to budgets being available, this might be considered.

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

Reference: Full Council 11 December 2023 - the Portfolio Holder's response to Cllr Bance "that reports should be made to the Council's rough sleeper team, who could then refer to other agencies as appropriate."

On my 16 January 2024 Teams call with the Council's Rough Sleeper Coordinator I was advised to initially report rough sleepers to Streetlink, an outside agency, who the Coordinator said would then report to the Council. Which advice is correct, that given to me, or that given to Cllr Bance?

Reply:

The answer is that both are correct. A councillor may raise an alert about a rough sleeper via the council Rough Sleeper Coordinator, Alexander Olayiwola. The public may raise concerns directly to Streetlink(<https://thestreetlink.org.uk/>). Streetlink will in turn contact ThamesReach's Rapid Response Team and they will make visits to the area of the reported sightings. If anyone is found they will provide verification and refer them to the local authority with whom they have a local connection for a housing support and advice. If they do not locate the person, this information will be

passed over to South East Region Outreach Team (SEROT), who will continue the search.

Alexander's contact numbers are: 02084617500 / 07850921628
Email: alexander.olayiwola@bromley.gov.uk

Supplementary question:

Do we have a shortage of staff in this department?

Reply:

No, but historically, there have been some gaps in staffing.

7. From Councillor Simon Jeal to the Portfolio Holder for Renewal, Recreation and Housing

Could you please outline the purpose of the Bromley Homelessness Forum, led by Bromley Council's Housing division?

Reply:

The Bromley Homeless Forum is a partnership meeting which has been set up as a way for the Council's frontline Housing Services to share and update relevant information with partners involved in housing, including representatives from the Local Authority (employees and Cllrs), NHS, Schools, DWP, Thamesreach, Housing Associations, CAB, Bromley Homeless, our Housing Management partners, Bromley Foodbank, BCWA and Living. Whilst policy changes and consultation opportunities may be discussed at the forum it is not the mechanism for introducing policy change. There was an open invitation extended to all Councillors at the Members' Induction inviting them to attend as observers and this invitation remains open. Anyone wishing to attend should contact the Assistant Director for Housing, Lynnette Chamielec, and she will let you have dates and detailed contact information.

Supplementary question:

So, the Forum is primarily for talking?

Reply:

Yes, if anything comes out of the discussions reports can come forward via the PDS Committee.

8. From Councillor Jeremy Adams to the Leader of the Council

Bromley depends on charities and voluntary organisations, but many, especially smaller, local organisations, are facing ever greater financial pressures and reduced income. What measures can or will the Council take to support local charities and voluntary organisations in our borough?

Reply:

I do agree with your broad description – Bromley is fortunate to have such a thriving voluntary sector, led by an outstanding organisation in Community Links Bromley. We are happy to assist them and provide training, but it is no secret that the harsh

reality is that we cannot be as generous as we would like. We may have to help in ways that they may not have wanted to be helped in the past. Some organisations might need to merge to reduce costs, or improve their working practices, and we will encourage this. We will try to stagger rent rises, help them benchmark their services and encourage them to charge them at sustainable rates. We will work together, but we are not in a position to provide lots of funding – the Council will run out of money in three and a half years. This is due to all parties at central level – local government is at the bottom of all their lists. The situation for Council funding is dire, and we will soon have to prioritise statutory services over what we want to do.

Supplementary question:

Cllr Adams stated that while larger charities could scale their costs, this was often not possible for smaller charities. Could the Leader look at the role of smaller charities in particular.

Reply:

In principle, yes, on a case-by-case basis, but the Council could not write cheques. The Leader suggested that Cllr Adams should contact the Head of Children's Services with any suggestions.

Additional supplementary question from Cllr Tony Owen:

What expectations has the Council of the London Councils Grants Committee?

Reply:

There was a meeting of the Committee in a week's time. Leaving London Councils had been suggested, and Bromley's contribution might be better spent locally.

9. From Councillor Simon Jeal to the Portfolio Holder for Children, Education and Families

Since Harris Federation withdraw their application to the Department for Education to open a free school a year ago, has the Council continued working on plans for a secondary school on the Kentwood site?

Reply:

The Kentwood site remains allocated within the Local Plan for educational use. This status could only be changed in the next Local Plan, which is at the early stages of development. As such, future development of the site to provide additional school places is still possible.

There are no current discussions being held between the Education Directorate and the DfE, however Colonel Bob Stewart attempted to ask a question on this matter to the Secretary of State for Education last year in Parliament, but unfortunately wasn't called. And more recently, just last week in fact, the Conservative Candidate for Beckenham & Penge, Cllr Hannah Gray, was at Downing Street where she met the current Secretary of State for Education Gillian Keegan, and where she was able to discuss the issue with her in person.

We remain committed to working with the Government to secure a new school in the North West of the borough.

Supplementary question:

Can the Portfolio Holder confirm that the Department for Education has raised concerns about the viability of the site, so there is no feasibility of a school being established at this site?

Reply:

There were concerns, but there could be imaginative ways to address these.

Additional supplementary question from Cllr Kevin Kennedy-Brooks:

Was it acceptable for a candidate for MP to raise this issue with the Minister without informing ward councillors?

Reply:

This was not a planned meeting on this subject – it was a fortuitous opportunity.