

MEETING

25th OCTOBER 2010

ORAL QUESTIONS BY MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

1. From Councillor Nicholas Bennett JP of the Leader of the Council

What plans the Council has to support and encourage local residents groups, schools and other organisations to celebrate Her Majesty the Queen's Diamond Jubilee in 2012?

Reply:

Councillor Carr thanked the member for his question and advised that at this stage the Council had no plans to support and encourage schools, local groups or organisations to celebrate Her Majesty the Queen's Diamond Jubilee in 2012. However, as had been shown this year for the 70th Anniversary of the Battle of Britain arrangements were made for various appropriate events to mark the occasion that were well supported by local residents. The Leader had spoken to Officers and was sure that there would be suitable arrangements made to celebrate the Diamond Jubilee at that time.

Supplementary Question:

Councillor Nicholas Bennett commented that it was only 14 months from the start of the Diamond Jubilee year and it would be the first time for 115 years that the nation would have celebrated such an occasion. The local residents association in his own ward had set up a committee to organise local events and he felt it was important for the Council to act in a co-ordinating role across the Borough to ensure events did not clash. He suggested some form of co-ordinating committee be set up to ensure this was the case.

Reply:

The Leader of the Council agreed with Councillor Bennett and said that in his conversations with Officers on this issue arrangements would commence over the forthcoming months to deal with this.

2. From Councillor Julian Grainger of the Chairman of the Environment PDS Committee

Displacement by parking schemes

In the last 12 months, for traffic or parking schemes considered by the PDS, please can the Chairman list those schemes that have:

- a) addressed the issue of displacement of vehicles
- b) provided an estimate of the number of cars to be displaced.

Reply:

All traffic and parking schemes consider the possible displacement of vehicles. Even the loss a few parking places to allow the introduction of a traffic calming feature can have a detrimental effect on residents which must be weighed against the increase in their quality of life from slower traffic. This was one of the purposes of the consultation process. Typically the consultation would include properties, in the same road, a short distance from the changes to capture comments which could include issues such as displacement.

Parking schemes may also displace commonly used traffic routes, increasing the flow of traffic along the road concerned. Whilst this can reduce congestion it may have other detrimental environmental effects. The consultation would also hope to address this issue.

Where this feedback was received, officers used this information in the design of the scheme, and a summary of significant residents' comments was presented to the PDS alongside the officer's response. This had been the procedure adopted over many years.

Over the past decade the majority of parking schemes had been small in scale and the expected displacement had been small. Schemes were designed to minimise inconvenience for residents whilst also avoiding displacing commuters etc. further than was necessary. Typically the result was to spread the concentration of parking over a wider area, to relieve the pressure on residents living nearest to the destination.

With any scheme it was never an exact science as to where displaced vehicles would move to. The cost of detailed parking and traffic surveys, which established where people were travelling from, was very high and often did not help with the design process, as the surveys did not establish where drivers would re-locate their parking or traffic route to.

It had, therefore, been common practice to revisit schemes to determine and address unacceptable aspects which could include unacceptable displacement and other unintended consequences.

Supplementary Question:

Councillor Grainger asked whether the Chairman was aware that 9 schemes during the past 12 months referred to displacement but only one quantified that displacement in reference to the 61 bus route. He quoted various figures and said that the scheme element for these displaced cars was then dropped. Given that the Orpington Area Parking Scheme seemed likely to displace over 200 cars, he asked if the Chairman agreed that the PDS Committee should have been provided with displacement numbers and also options for managing this. He also commented that the decision of the PDS Committee to defer a displacement scheme was understandable but would the Chairman agree that there was too great a number involved just to wait and see.

Reply:

Councillor William Huntington-Thresher replied that as he had already indicated assessment of the displacement was not an exact science as to where the displaced cars would move to or where they came from and it was also an expensive exercise. It may involve a variety of factors which he briefly referred to. However, there had been examples in the past where reassessment of a traffic scheme had involved the removal of yellow lines and the addition of extra bays if that was considered appropriate. There was obviously a need to start the scheme in the first place and to delay was not he felt necessarily the best route when reassessment could bring about changes if needed.

3. From Councillor Tom Papworth of the Chairman of the Development Control Committee

1. How much was spent providing lunch to members and officers participating in the tour of the Bromley and Orpington town centres on Saturday 16 October 2010?
2. To provide an itemised bill for the lunch provided to members and officers.

Reply:

The Chairman advised that the cost of the lunch was £77.50 in total. This would be covered as Members expenses. An itemised breakdown of the bill had been circulated to all members and individuals bought their own liquid refreshments. Councillor Michael commented for his information that £8.30 of that was paid for by her personally.

Councillor Papworth did not have a supplementary question.

4. From Councillor Peter Fookes of the Leader of the Council

What monies have the Council lost this year due to the actions of the ConDem government?

Reply:

Councillor Carr replied – nothing and that perhaps the Councillor would like to rephrase his question to reflect what loses the Council had made this year due to the actions of the previous government.

Supplementary Question:

Councillor Fookes said he would answer for him it was £4.6m. He asked whether the Leader would be making his annual pilgrimage to Whitehall this year to complain about the lack of government funding.

Reply:

Councillor Carr replied that the figure was wrong, although Councillor Fookes seemed to think he knew better. The answer to his second question was - yes he had already spoken to several Ministers and the Mayor of London on a fair settlement for not just this Borough but the London region as a whole under the Comprehensive Spending Settlement, and would await with interest more details in December.

5. From Councillor Nicholas Bennett JP of the Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People

What are the main criteria the council uses for deciding whether local residents should be eligible to adopt children?

Reply:

The Portfolio Holder advised that the reply was complicated because of the serious nature of the matter.

The eligibility criteria for local people to be assessed as foster carers was set out in the eligibility criteria updated in February 2009 entitled 'Bromley Adoption Service – Eligibility for Service'.

An Adoption Panel supported and advised the Local Authority in identifying prospective children for adoption, prospective adoptive parents and appropriately matching between the two. The Panel had an independent chairman and vice chairman and sat as an independent Committee of the Council. The Panel consisted of legal and medical advisers, local authority officers, three elected Members (currently Cllrs Smith, Arthur and Evans) an adult who was adopted as a child and an adoptive parent. The Panel when approving prospective adopters also advised on the suitability of different types of children to be adopted by them.

The service accepted applications from all Bromley residents who wished to adopt as long as they met the basic minimum criteria to be considered which were as follows.

Prospective adopters must be over the age of 21. They could be single or in a stable and permanent relationship with another person, whether married, in a civil partnership or cohabiting.

There was no upper age limit but potential carers must be able to demonstrate that they possess the health and vigour to meet the many and varied needs of children throughout their childhood. Various vetting checks were made to ensure that the applicants were of good character and had nothing in their backgrounds that would make them unsuitable as adoptive parents.

The Service also accepted applications from people who lived outside of the Borough where this met the needs of specific children.

Currently, the Service was targeting recruitment to meet a shortfall in the number of prospective adopters for children in sibling groups, children with disabilities, children over the age of 6 years and those from black and ethnic minority groups. This did not preclude applications from prospective adopters for white children under the age of six years however they may have to wait longer to be matched with a child.

Bromley Council was part of a consortium with Brighton and Hove, Kent, East Sussex, Bexley and Medway local authorities and was able to offer assessed adoptive carers to these agencies to be matched with children requiring a placement.

Supplementary question:

Councillor Bennett asked whether prospective parents could adopt across racial groups.

Reply:

The Portfolio Holder responded that it was his understanding that in the first place adoptive parents were sought with similar cultural or ethnic backgrounds to the children being considered for adoption. However, where this was not possible then suitable parents were sought who had an understanding of these needs. As part of the assessment process the type of child the prospective adopters wished to be matched with would be explored and that would include white adopters for mixed race and black children.

6. From Councillor Julian Grainger of the Portfolio Holder for the Environment

Orpington Area Parking Scheme

On the 26th July, the PDS voted to defer the proposed restrictions until displacement of over 230 cars had been considered. Why did the Portfolio Holder decide to proceed?

Reply:

The Portfolio Holder stated that it was because he thought the PDS Committee's decision was wrong and he noted that his decision had not been called in.

Supplementary reply:

Councillor Grainger asked if the Portfolio Holder was fully aware of the situation and the affect of over 200 cars being displaced. Would he agree that contrary to the answer given by the PDS Committee Chairman it was a simply

task to visit a place intended for yellow lines and count the number of cars parked there.

Reply:

Councillor Smith replied that 'no he did not agree' – and those colleagues in Farnborough and Crofton and Orpington and Petts Wood and Knoll Wards would attest that full consultation was undertaken. Controlled Parking Zones were not a science and there might be some displacement and if there was it would have to be managed. The reason that the parking review in Orpington was undertaken was because of a promise to the people of Orpington at the time of the Tesco development. The Portfolio Holder considered it was the right thing to do to press ahead and as Councillor Grainger had already been assured on several occasions if there was any displacement affecting his Ward it would be proactively addressed by the department.

7. From Councillor Fookes of the Portfolio Holder for Adult and Community Services

What action is being taken to merge Health services and the Council services to provide a seamless service for residents?

Reply:

The Portfolio Holder drew attention to The Government's White Paper; "Equity & Excellence - Liberating the NHS" which set out an exciting/radical agenda for the future of health and social care services in England.

As well as proposing a significant shift in favour of the clinicians, with GP consortia taking over the responsibility for health care commissioning, it also mapped out an enhanced set of duties and responsibilities for local government in relation to health improvement and commissioning. The White Paper also announced the abolition of both PCTs and Strategic Health Authorities.

Whilst the detail was still to emerge, the current proposal would see Public Health and Health Improvement functions transferring from the PCTs to the Council by 2013.

In addition the White Paper talks about the Council's responsibility for "joining up the commissioning of local NHS services, social care and health improvement" and specifically for "promoting integration and partnership working between the NHS, social care, public health and other local services and strategies."

The White paper also outlined the requirement for each Council to establish a Health & Well-Being Board (by April 2012) charged with joining up commissioning of local health social care services.

In Bromley we have a long tradition of working in close partnership with our health colleagues, and there were many examples of integrated commissioning and delivery of services for both adults and children. We were therefore starting from a good place in our discussions with our PCT partners around how we plan for the future.

Already we have agreed to establish a Shadow Health & Well-being Board made up of Executive members of the Council, Board members of the PCT as well as a number of our local GPs who would be leading on the establishment of Bromley's GP consortia.

Through the work of this Board we would be preparing the ground for the transfer of Public Health and health improvement functions – as soon as the Government sets out the terms and conditions for that transfer. The Board would also be exploring how our substantial experience of joined up commissioning of health and social care services could be built upon as the new GP consortia emerged.

At the same time the moves to establish Bromley PCT's provider arm as a Social Enterprise under the Bromley HealthCare banner proceeded with the PCT Board endorsing the Integrated Business Care last month. We were in discussions with Bromley Healthcare around options for joining up the delivery of a range of services in the future, again building upon our existing experience of delivering joined up services particularly in the fields of disabilities – for both children and adults and intermediate care for frail older people.

In all of these discussions the test would be whether proposals furthered the overall objectives of our Building a Better Bromley vision – in that they promoted the health and well-being of Bromley residents by promoting their independence and ensuring that children and young people were supported to get the best start in life.

Supplementary Question:

Councillor Fookes asked whether the Portfolio Holder was aware that Blackburn and Herefordshire had already merged services and not waited for the government.

Reply:

Councillor Arthur said that that was just one example as there were several others who had progressed that far. There were also quite a number that had not progressed as far as we had. Working with other Boroughs across London Councils he could advise that those in the first tranche of this were in many cases regretting the fact that they were and wished that they had held back and do what we were doing i.e. laying proper foundations. This meant not rushing in to take on all sorts of uncostered services on behalf of residents of the Borough without any idea of how they would be financed, or the need

for a consistent approach and accountability through the democratic process. He stated that we would not rush in but take our time and do the job properly.

8. From Councillor Nicholas Bennett JP of the Portfolio Holder for Public Protection and Safety

How many members of staff have been appointed Special Constables under the 'Borough Beat' scheme?

Reply:

The Portfolio Holder confirmed that there were three staff.

Supplementary Question:

Councillor Bennett congratulated the three members of staff concerned. However, he understood that when the scheme was originally suggested it was estimated that between 8 - 12 members of staff would be involved. He asked what steps had been taken to encourage other staff to take part in what was a part of the big society initiative.

Reply:

Councillor Morgan advised that currently there were 116 special constables working in the Borough which was above the target the Police had of 111. In January of this year there was only 48 so there had been a 141% increase already and others in the pipe line. As there was such limited space for special constables it was not the intention to reintroduce a drive to encourage the Borough Beat scheme within the Council. The idea at the time had been to act as a catalyst for others which seemed to have worked very well.

9. From Councillor Julian Grainger of the Portfolio Holder for the Environment

Amendments to Proposed Orpington Area Parking Restrictions

On 5th August, the Portfolio Holder agreed (amongst others) Resolution 2) that:

- "*further flank wall parking might be added*"

and added Resolution 3 that:

- "*free spaces be found which might...*":

- "*increase the available parking stock*"

- "*... assist in speed management,*"

Did he make these resolutions in order to address concerns about displacement caused by the proposed restrictions and because the absence of parked cars can allow increased speeds?

Reply:

No, I made the decision to mitigate concerns about *possible* displacement but also to address traffic speeds which were more common in roads with no parking.

Supplementary Question:

Councillor Grainger asked whether the Portfolio Holder was aware that the latest published drawings fell short of the aims he articulated. Specifically was he aware that restrictions along flank walls were still included; that the parking stock would be reduced whether by the displacement of over 200 cars already identified but also by the deletion of 110 marked bays; and as the yellow lines along the entire length of long side roads would remain this negated any speed management by parked cars. Could the Portfolio Holder explain why there appeared to be continual denial of such a huge displacement.

Reply:

The Portfolio Holder stated that as the member concerned had been advised on many occasions if he wanted or thought any of the aspects of the Scheme should be changed he should consult with the local Ward Councillors to ensure that at the relevant 6 month review stage these would be taken into account. He also pointed out that there had been ample opportunity for anyone to engage in the consultation exercise around Orpington and most Ward Colleagues had done so but some had not.

10. From Councillor Peter Fookes of the Portfolio Holder for Resources

What Equality Impact Assessments have been carried out on proposed service changes?

Reply:

The Portfolio Holder stated that the local authority sought to be an Excellent Council in the eyes of local residents and provide quality services. In that vein we would continue to monitor and assess the impact of all service changes on Bromley residents, although to what extent that objective was served or hindered by Equality Impact Assessments was open to some question. However, we would comply with the law and already had a framework in place to ensure that this happened.

Councillor Fookes did not have a supplementary question.
