

COUNCIL MEETING – 20 JULY 2022

WRITTEN REPLIES

Responses to questions put during the Council Meeting are available as part of the webcast on the Council's website.

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

3. From local resident Stuart Mackenzie to Councillor David Leaf, Cabinet Member for Resources:

As the Bexley Councillor attending the Joint Crematorium Committee meetings, could Councillor David Leaf please tell me how much Bexley Council contributes towards the costs of administering the joint meetings with Greenwich and Dartford Councils (including the costs of venue hire and the Council officer time to produce agendas and record minutes)?

Reply

I am grateful for your question and for your interest in the operation and governance of the Eltham Crematorium Joint Committee.

By way of background, the Eltham Crematorium is owned by the London Borough of Bexley, Royal Borough of Greenwich and Dartford Borough Council. It was established by Agreement in 1954 by the then respective local authorities to undertake the responsibilities in the Cremation Act 1902, as subsequently amended, and similar such legislation. The Crematorium opened in 1956 and is located within the grounds of the Eltham Cemetery, which is owned by the Royal Borough of Greenwich. A new Agreement between the respective authorities was put in place in May 1997 and was subsequently revised to reflect the respective Councils changing their executive arrangements in the early part of this century.

The current governance of the Crematorium is overseen through a Joint Committee established under the provisions of the Local Government Act 1972 and the memberships of the Joint Committee is constituted as 2 representatives from the London Borough of Bexley - Cllr Peter Craske and myself, 2 representatives from RBG, and 1 representative from Dartford BC. In accordance with the provisions of Article 10 of the 1997 Agreement, all staff at the Crematorium are employed by and under the terms of RBG. All staffing costs are met through the income that is received by the Crematorium.

With regard to the Administration of the Joint Committee, these costs are also met by the income generated by the Crematorium and as such do not require separate contributions to be made by the respective constituent councils. This is because the Crematorium generates a surplus. However, should the Crematorium operate a deficit, then the costs would be split between the constituent councils in proportion to their representation on the Joint Committee. RBG committee services administer the Joint Committee and the costs are £2,390 for the 2022/23 financial year. This forms part of an overall central establishment recharge to RBG of £69,300 which covers, HR, legal, finance, Head of service and other overheads.

In respect of changing the arrangements for the responsibility and administration of the Joint Committee, depending on the nature of the change required, this would require either the agreement of the Joint Committee, or changes to Agreement between the constituent councils. In any case, it would not impact significantly on the financial positions of the respective constituent councils as the costs for administering the Joint Committee are met through the

income that the Crematorium generates and the costs incurred should correlate to the actual costs met.

4. From local resident Stuart Mackenzie to Councillor David Leaf, Cabinet Member for Resources:

As the Bexley Councillor attending the Joint Crematorium Committee meetings, could Councillor David Leaf please tell me whether, given the financial pressures facing all Councils today, he feels it would be fairer for all three Councils to rotate the responsibility for administering the meetings in future?

Please see reply to Question 3

5. From local resident Paul McQuillen to Councillor Peter Craske, Cabinet Member for Places:

As a statutory Consultee, will Bexley Council robustly object to proposals by London City Airport to extend operating hours given the high levels of noise pollution and visual intrusion frequently imposed on thousands of residents in the south of the borough by the very low-altitude over-flying by aircraft preparing for the westerly approach to the airport?

Reply

The Council will be taking into account all aspects of this proposal and will submit a response to the consultation in due course. I cannot say what this will cover as yet, as we are still looking at the issues it raises. We have previously expressed concerns about potential noise and air pollution. We understand the airport believes it can increase the number of passengers without any additional flights or changes to the current night-time curfew.

6. From local resident Paul McQuillen to Councillor Peter Craske, Cabinet Member for Places:

Will the Council advise residents of the current London City Airport consultation through communications such as Bexley Bulletin and Bexley Magazine and will the Council's representative on the London City Airport Consultative Committee also accept feedback from residents?

Reply

The Council has now appointed its representative to the London City Airport Consultative Committee and as such, I am sure they will be happy to receive any comments on the consultation. While communications does not fall within my remit, I am sure we will want to highlight this consultation to residents through all our channels of communication.

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

4. From Councillor Mabel Ogundayo to Councillor Teresa O'Neill OBE, Leader of the Council:

Could the Leader confirm which Cabinet Member is responsible for coordinating climate actions across different departments and functions, after the Council declared a climate emergency in April 2022?

Reply

I would draw Councillor Ogundayo's notice to the motion that was passed at the April Council which did **not** declare a climate emergency but did highlight some of the ways in which this Council has been innovative in delivering change whilst taking residents with us. In fact, we have been so successful in doing so that neighbouring Labour Councils are following our lead.

Of course, we want to go further and many of our manifesto commitments across various parts of the Council have climate implications including that of objecting to the Mayor of London's proposal to extend the ULEZ to Bexley as we believe there are better ways of addressing air pollution without impacting employment, businesses or those who can least afford it.

5. From Councillor Rags Sandhu to Councillor Cafer Munur, Cabinet Member for Growth:

Could the Cabinet Member for Growth update me on the recent night market in Bexleyheath?

Reply

The first event was successful in drawing residents to Bexleyheath Broadway who wouldn't have normally visited after 6pm. 3,000 people registered an interest in attending although the actual number of visitors was estimated to be in the hundreds.

27 Traders were in attendance, 6 locally based. Existing businesses in the Broadway reported up-tick of trade between 20-50% during the Friday evening. Key learnings from the event will be put into further develop future night markets, particularly ensuring an improved range of market stalls to meet the profile of Bexley residents.

6. From Councillor Bola Carew to Councillor Peter Craske, Cabinet Member for Places:

As one of the Bexleyheath Ward Councillors I'd be grateful if the Cabinet Member for Places can give us an update on the sinkhole in Martens Avenue?

Reply

On 21st June 2022 a sink hole opened up in Martens Avenue, Crayford. The concrete slab road (with asphalt surface) collapsed due to a void in the sand-based sub-layers; the hole was approximately 7.5m wide x 6m long x 5m deep. The Thames Water surface/rainwater sewer and foul water sewer were severely damaged, as was the fresh water connection to a few properties. No other underground services were affected.

The Council and Thames Water attended on the night and commenced work to by-pass the affected sewers and protect the highway and adjacent properties.

The Council organised for the road slab either side to be cut back to form a stepped access into the site and commenced investigations and filling in the hole within a few days.

A ground penetrating radar survey has been done, which shows no particular cause for concern, just one or two minor spots of potential soft areas (which could be less compacted ground or abandoned chambers).

Thames Water are to repair their sewers and pipes in the open trench and then Bexley will re-instate the road fully (complete c. 5th August)

7. From Councillor Anna Day to Councillor Teresa O'Neill OBE, Leader of the Council:

What steps is the Government taking to help residents of Bexley deal with the cost-of-living crisis?

Reply

Details of the Government's support to help households in the cost of living crisis can be found on the HM Treasury website at the following web address:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/government-support-for-the-cost-of-living-factsheet>

As well as likely higher inflation, household budgets may be squeezed by increases to income tax and National Insurance Contributions, higher interest rates, and changes to Universal Credit. Measures to support households were announced by the Chancellor in February, March and May 2022. The support is estimated at £37 billion, includes:

- £400 grant for all households which will be taken off energy bills in autumn 2022. Unlike the £200 'rebate', that this replaces, households will not have to make repayments;
- £650 payments for households receiving means-tested benefits, for most the first payment will be made in July 2022 and the second in autumn 2022;
- £300 for pensioners who are in receipt of the Winter Fuel Payment;
- £150 for people receiving disability payments;
- £500m for the Household Support Fund and an extended scheme for October 2022 to March 2023;
- a £150 non repayable council tax rebate for households in Council Tax band A-D;
- a temporary 5p per litre cut to fuel duty; and
- an increase in the threshold at which National Insurance Contributions (NICs) begins to be charged on earnings.

8. From Councillor Stefano Borella to Councillor David Leaf, Cabinet Member for Resources:

Following the LGA's recent analysis regarding unfunded National Living Wage increases, what is the Cabinet Member's analysis of the costs to the Council of ensuring all staff and contractors receive these increases over the next two years?

Reply

I refer Councillor Borella to the responses I have given to his questions and comments on this matter at the Finance and Corporate Services OSC on 11 July 2022, Public Cabinet on 12 July 2022, and Full Council on 20 July 2022. We keep all assumptions over the budget and MTFS under regular review and the impact of pay increases will be reported accordingly in Budget Monitoring Reports and in the next MTFS update.

9. From Councillor Christine Catterall to Councillor Melvin Seymour, Cabinet Member for Adults' Services and Health:

Would the Cabinet Member provide an update on the recent carers' week culminating in the event at the Holiday Inn?

Reply

The Local Care Partnership Engagement team organised the Carers' Week event in close collaboration with Carers' Partnership, held on 10th July at the Holiday Inn, Bexley.

The event was designed based on feedback from Carers' Partnership organisations from their members about what would be valuable and what they have appreciated in the past – the last event of this type was in 2019 at the Civic Offices.

Carers were able to take part in activities such as Reiki, Tai Chi or even get a massage or a sound bath. They were also treated to lunch and given a gift bag.

Some feedback from attendees –

"The event was well organised and organisations were all eager to give advice and guidance. The venue would be hard to be bettered and food was plentiful and fresh"

"So helpful, really made me feel valued as a carer"

The event was also a good opportunity for local organisations to network and get back to working together face to face.

10. From Councillor Cheryl Bacon to Councillor Peter Craske, Cabinet Member for Places:

Could the Cabinet Member update Members on how the grounds maintenance contract is working following additional investment in the service?

Reply

We made a manifesto commitment to increase investment in this service, and its benefits are many. For example, old and outdated machinery replaced with new, modern equipment; 61,000 daffodils planted earlier this year which have bloomed and made the Borough look really great; staff now paid London Living Wage which has made recruitment easier – and 70% of the staff are Bexley residents too.

11. From Councillor Sally Hinkley to Councillor Peter Craske, Cabinet Member for Places:

Could the Cabinet Member confirm the timeframe in which residents should expect their reports to Fix my Street on fly tipping to be dealt with?

Reply

All non-hazardous fly tipping reports will be investigated within 5 working days, every effort is made to provide an update to FMS also within 5 working days (resources permitting). If fly tipping has met the criteria for removal, such as being on public maintainable land or is harbourous to vermin, it will then be cleared within a further 5 days.

12. From Councillor Zainab Asunramu to Councillor Richard Diment, Cabinet Member for Education:

Could the Cabinet Member outline the support that will be provided to Welling School in order to address the concerns from the recent Ofsted report, in particular around bullying, and to ensure pupils are able to flourish within the educational environment?

Reply

Following the Ofsted inspection and prior to the publication of the report, Officers from the Councils School Improvement, Community Safety, Inclusion, Education Welfare and Early Intervention teams held a 'Team Around the School' meeting with the school's leadership team. During this meeting offers of support were provided to the school which have been reiterated to both the school and the Academy Trust.

13. From Councillor Andy Dourmough to Councillor David Leaf, Cabinet Member for Resources:

Can the Cabinet Member for Resources give an update on the rollout of the various grants received from the government?

Reply

I am grateful to Councillor Dourmough for his question and his interest in this matter. Details of a number of grants and payments made to support residents and businesses were provided by me in my written answer to question 20 from the 13 April 2022 Council meeting. Since then, a decision has been taken on the use of the second round of the Household Support Fund and the Energy Rebate Discretionary Fund. I welcomed the opportunity to discuss these matters during the recent meeting of the Finance and Corporate Services OSC on 11 July 2022 and further welcome the interest and contributions he and other Members have made to the discussions on how to support and help those affected by inflationary pressures and the recovery from the pandemic.

14. From Councillor Zainab Asunramu to Councillor Philip Read, Cabinet Member for Children's Services:

Following news that Calcote Services for Children, which were due to be commissioned by this Council, have been found to have children in their care who were groomed and sexually assaulted, will there be a re-assessment of due diligence practices when making appointments?

Reply

We have no children placed here; we were looking at this provider when this report came out. Before making placements we always request reports, including those of Ofsted, and carry out online searches followed by a visit to the establishment.

15. From Councillor Esther Amaning to Councillor Peter Craske, Cabinet Member for Places:

Could the Cabinet Member tell us the number of missed bin collections that have been reported each month since November 2021?

Reply

Month/Year	Missed bin collections per 100,000 bins	% per 100,00 bins
November 21	304	0.30%
December 21	392	0.39%
January 22	331	0.33%
February 22	246	0.25%
March 22	237	0.24%
April 22	269	0.27%
May 22	267	0.26%

16. From Councillor Stefano Borella to Councillor Teresa O'Neill OBE, Leader of the Council:

What partnership work has been undertaken with stakeholders and neighbouring Boroughs to assess bringing the DLR into Belvedere?

Reply

The Council undertook some initial investigation into the potential for a DLR extension into Bexley in partnership with TfL, the Royal Borough of Greenwich and Peabody as part of the development of the Thamesmead and Abbey Wood Opportunity Area Planning Framework. A DLR link was also an early option investigated as part of the C2E SOBC as an alternative to a Crossrail extension. The Council is aware of the current feasibility work being undertaken to extend the line into Thamesmead and, although the project does not currently include any interventions within Bexley, there has been some engagement at Member and officer level with the study partners. The Council has confirmed support for the scheme subject to the design not precluding onward extension east of Thamesmead to Belvedere.

17. From Councillor Stefano Borella to Councillor Melvin Seymour, Cabinet Member for Adults' Services and Health:

Could you state how many yearly carer assessments are outstanding?

Reply

We have 82 people this year waiting for a carer's review. It's not possible to identify the number of people on our waiting list that may need a carer's assessment, as in the main we receive referrals for people who need care and support, and it is at the time of the assessment for the cared for person that we discuss and identify the need for a carer's assessment. We are working with the Carers Partnership Board to develop a carers action plan to improve the identification of carers and the response we give including support available. Last year we completed 2138 carers' assessments including the assessments we complete in Adult Social Care and the assessments completed by our voluntary sector through our grant funded and commissioned support.

18. From Councillor Stefano Borella to Councillor Teresa O'Neill OBE, Leader of the Council:

Is it acceptable that Bexley residents are having to wait 12 hours to be seen in Accident and Emergency departments in hospital?

Reply

Councillor Borella will be aware that we don't have an A&E department in-borough and that we are not responsible for health services but, as we know there is huge pressure on our health services, we are working with local health partners to try to ensure that all residents are aware of the pathways to ensure all health front doors are utilised as effectively as possible. We have also agreed to help communicate that to our residents.

Another way of helping is with ensuring Bexley residents are discharged in a timely and safe way and I know Councillor Borella will be pleased to hear that the Lewisham and Greenwich Trust Senior Leadership Team has gone on record to thank our Adult Social Care teams for the support they have given and for working collaboratively to solve problems; and recently, in a conference call with Darent Valley Hospital leadership team, they were effusive about our team's support and engagement – so we're definitely doing everything we can to support our hospitals.

We know there is more we can do – that is why I have asked local NHS leaders to come together with us to create a vision for health and care in Bexley so that our residents can get the right care, in the right place, at the right time. And if we get that right – we can be sure that our residents are turning up at the A&E because that is where they need to be.

19. From Councillor Daniel Francis to Councillor David Leaf, Cabinet Member for Resources:

Could the Cabinet Member confirm, based on the information currently available to him, whether he believes the collection fund will be in deficit or surplus at the end of the current financial year?

Reply

Councillor Francis will be aware that updates on the Collection Fund position and forecasts are reported regularly to Members in the Budget Monitoring Reports and in the MTFS updates.

20. From Councillor Daniel Francis to Councillor Peter Craske, Cabinet Member for Places:

Could the Cabinet Member confirm whether he supports Scope's "Let's Play Fair" campaign and if so, what measures he plans to ensure greater accessibility is introduced to playgrounds across the Borough in addition to what is already available, over the lifetime of this administration?

Reply

We have created new playgrounds with features to make them accessible to all, just as Scope are calling for. The Belvedere Beach playground has proven highly successful, and instead of a playground that was inaccessible to everyone for at least nine months of the year, it's a facility open all year and open to everyone.

In Sidcup, the new playground on the new Old Farm Park again has features designed into it to ensure it is accessible to everyone. Like the Belvedere Beach, that new playground has proven to be a huge hit, with families coming to the park while their young children enjoy the playground, a playground that compliments the playground on the other side of the railway tracks.

I doubt Scope will be happy when they learn that Labour Councillors and candidates campaigned against our new playgrounds. In 2018, Labour candidates all stood on a platform

to “reverse” and “cancel” the accessible playground proposed for Old Farm Park. Thank goodness voters chose to invest in new playgrounds, rather than supporting Labour candidates who pledged to cancel and reverse new accessible to all playgrounds.

I also note that we have increase funding in our playgrounds by 30%, an increase in funding which all Labour Councillors voted against.

The Councillor needs to explain why he wants to see more accessible playgrounds while at the same time standing for election on a pledge to cancel and reverse them.

21. From Councillor Larry Ferguson to Councillor Peter Craske, Cabinet Member for Places:

Could the Cabinet Member outline the recycling options available to the residents in tower blocks in Thamesmead East that have been without access to recycling bins for 3 years and the present efforts being made to restore these services to them?

Reply

The recycling facilities that previously served the tower blocks on Kale Road and Wolvercote Road were removed by Peabody Housing Association several years ago. Peabody took this action as a result of severe issues with contamination, abuse of the facilities and anti-social behaviour including fly-tipping and arson.

The bins were contaminated with household waste on a regular basis which meant we were unable to collect any recycling from them and all waste collected was treated as residual waste. Peabody were continually removing waste that was dumped around the bins and we regularly had to replace bins which were deliberately set alight.

The arson issue escalated to the point where it was considered a serious threat to health and safety and the cost of continual removal of fly-tipping, replacement of fire damaged bins and disposal of contaminated recycling meant that the recycling facilities were no longer financially viable. Since the bins have been removed there has been a substantial reduction in these problems and a very noticeable improvement in the quality of the street scene.

The Environmental Services team worked with Peabody to examine various options for the re-introduction of recycling services to this area but none of them have been considered to be financially or practically viable. A large part of this area ‘The Lesnes Estate’ is currently subject to an outline planning application for the wholesale demolition of all houses and flats and a phased redevelopment of the area. The team is working with the developer and the Planning department to ensure that there will be adequate waste and recycling facilities in-place for the new development.

In the meantime, residents are able to use alternative recycling facilities in Maran Way, Hartslock Drive & Lime Row.

22. From Councillor Wendy Perfect to Councillor Philip Read, Cabinet Member or Children’s Services:

Following the long delays in direct payments being provided to families with children with disabilities at the end of 2021 and the start of 2022, is the Cabinet Member now satisfied that there are no outstanding complaints with either Children’s Services or Inspire Community Trust regarding these payments?

Reply

The purpose of Direct Payments is to provide the opportunity for children and young people with additional needs(disabilities) to experience something outside of their normal day to day lives, which also offers the parents/carers respite from caring responsibilities. Those experiences are varied, agreed between the social worker and family, and can be anything from a single activity such as horse riding to a break away from home for few nights. Direct payments are made to families who then make their own arrangements as agreed with the service.

There are currently a very small number of families still waiting for direct payments to be set up. In some cases, these are in relation to the need to set up bank accounts in the name of the child or young person and the fact that the Council is awaiting confirmation of bank details from the family. There has also been an additional issue with staff capacity, and this was recently discussed at a parental engagement meeting held on July 14th.

I am pleased to say that we have successfully interviewed a candidate to provide the necessary additional capacity and, and once in post, our Children with Disabilities Service will then have a dedicated short break coordinator who will work closely to resolve these issues and assist in ensuring these payments are efficiently processed in the future.

In the interim, we are confident that there are no gaps in short break support to families and, to mitigate the effect on families, we are paying activity providers directly, hiring personal advisors to take children out on activities, involving agency support, and assisting in the availing by children of The Anchor Sensory SEND Friendly Centre.

If Councillor Perfect is aware of any issues relating to specific cases, I ask her to notify me of the details so that I can have them investigated.

23. From Councillor Anna Day to Councillor Sue Gower MBE, Cabinet Member for Communities and Housing:

Could the Cabinet Member provide clarity on the percentage of homeless, due to domestic abuse, applications which have progressed into prevention/ relief where domestic abuse is recorded in 2020, 2021 and 2022?

Reply

Relief Cases	
2020	8%
2021	12%
2022	13%

Prevention Cases	
2020	2%
2021	4%
2022	3%

24. From Councillor Sally Hinkley to Councillor Sue Gower MBE, Cabinet Member for Communities and Housing:

Could we have a breakdown of the last 3 years for housing outcomes for young care leavers following the end of placements?

Reply

Please see table at the end of this document.

25. From Councillor Zainab Asunramu to Councillor Philip Read, Cabinet Member for Children's Services:

Could the Cabinet Member detail plans in place to improve retention of Social Workers and encourage more people within the Borough to consider becoming a Social Worker?

Reply

Currently there are significant challenges in both the national and local recruitment and retention of suitably qualified social workers of which there is a national shortage.

The latest information I have relates to 2020 and showed that 4300 qualified children's social workers left the profession nationally and that new entrants totalled just 2800. The majority of the 4300 departing the profession will be experienced whereas of course the new entrants are not.

Bexley of course is not immune to that and at the same time we are faced with increasing pressure on the service, due in large part, to the effects of the pandemic.

Additionally, we face considerable staff pressures because of our high-performance levels and our staff are in considerable demand and so we are often victims of poaching by other authorities.

Interestingly however, many of the staff who leave us often return within a relatively short period of time saying that the staff conditions and career development support they receive in Bexley are superior to those in other authorities.

Overall Bexley's Children's Service permanent staff constitute between 80% and 90% of our workforce and we have been particularly successful in the recruitment of managers and assistant team managers of which over 95% of these roles are held by permanent employees.

We recognise the importance of retaining staff and have a very considerable number of initiatives designed to help in their retention. These involve a combination of options geared around support and career progression.

Examples of these, and they are only examples and by no means the complete list:

A Learning & Development offer involving a range of in-house and commissioned training, including Trauma Informed Practice, MA modules, Leadership training
Practice support and career development with a 1:1 coaching and mentoring offer
Monthly career progression clinics
Specialist training/support and development in particular practice areas of interest
Weekly staff well-being sessions and similar monthly managers' sessions
Both online and physical suggestion boxes

As a demonstration of our continuing commitment to equality of opportunity to we have also embarked, as referenced in the Leader's Report, in Children's Services on the Workforce Race Equality Standard (WRES) a national programme of 18 pilot authorities to address racial inequality within the workplace. This is working across both Children's and Adults Directorates.

In all these ways and more we seek to make Bexley an attractive place to work and in so doing help us to both retain staff and mitigate the impact of the national shortage of qualified social workers.

26. From Councillor Mabel Ogundayo to Councillor Peter Craske, Cabinet Member for Places:

Could the Cabinet Member confirm how much the Council has generated in fines from litter enforcement fines in the last 12 months?

Reply

The contribution to the Council after deducting service delivery cost for the last 12 months is £73,287.

27. From Councillor Mabel Ogundayo to Councillor Peter Craske, Cabinet Member for Places:

Could the Cabinet Member outline steps that are being taken to encourage residents to use more sustainable forms of transport?

Reply

The Council recognises the benefits of sustainable travel, policies supporting which are in the Council's 2019 Local Implementation Plan (LIP3) as well as the emerging Local Plan.

Despite an absence of TfL funding since the outbreak of the Covid pandemic, the Council has maintained an effective cycle training programme, for which it was independently commended by Bikeability UK earlier this year. Bexley was also one of the boroughs who were awarded Bus Priority funding in 2021/22 to identify locations where bus services were facing additional delays, and to consider possible solutions.

It is, further, intended to develop and adopt both an Active Travel Strategy and Electric Vehicle Charging Strategy to complement the LIP3, with action plans to deliver effective initiatives and interventions once funding again becomes available.

28. From Councillor Esther Amaning to Councillor Richard Diment, Cabinet Member for Education:

Could the Cabinet Member inform us of any additional support for families where there are two or more children on the spectrum identified from recent autism assessments?

Reply

The Children with Disabilities Team as part of the wider Social Care Services supports a number of families where two children have a diagnosis of ASD or other SEN needs. The children and their family will have one social worker supporting them whilst each child's needs are assessed on an individual basis. Each child would be provided with their own package of support if required whilst the agreed support packages complement each other.

In addition, all parents/ carers of children with a diagnosis of ASD are able to access support from the Bexley Early Autism Service (BEAS) and ASD Advisory Team.

When supporting children and young people with ASD the teams very much treat each young person individually to identify support appropriate to their unique set of strengths and needs. For families where there are two or more children with a diagnosis of ASD the teams would work closely with parents/ carers to ensure any strategies used at home were consistent and appropriate for all children.

29. From Councillor Esther Amaning to Councillor Sue Gower MBE, Cabinet Member for Communities and Housing:

Could you please state how many citizens from Ukraine and Afghanistan have resettled or presented as homeless in Bexley?

Reply

Ukraine – We have not recorded any Ukrainian approaches

Afghanistan – We have not recorded any Afghanistan approaches

30. From Councillor Anna Day to Councillor Sue Gower MBE, Cabinet Member for Communities and Housing:

Could the Cabinet Member confirm that Bexley Council and our housing providers are DAHA accredited?

Reply

The London Borough of Bexley is keen to seek DAHA accreditation and had in fact bid to the GLA for some capacity to support this process.

However, we have postponed the accreditation process as the Housing Team is first undergoing a restructure to put in place a specialist Domestic Abuse triage officer, a Domestic Abuse data officer and DA housing options development and partnership officer (amongst other posts).

Once these posts are recruited to, the Housing Team will be well placed to seek DAHA accreditation, which relies heavily on workforce development.

Our focus in 22/23 is putting in place the foundations and in 23/24 we will start the DAHA accreditation process which will take 18 months to two years to complete.

Not all of our registered providers are DAHA accredited, but some are. A list of the organisations that are DAHA accredited can be found here:

<https://www.dahalliance.org.uk/what-we-do/accreditation-for-housing-providers/our-housing-providers/>

31. From Councillor Esther Amaning to Councillor Sue Gower MBE, Cabinet Member for Communities and Housing:

Could the Cabinet Member please provide reassurances that ongoing discussions are taking place with Bexley's Chief Superintendent to address concerns and increase public confidence after recent revelations and scandals involving conduct of officers at Bexleyheath police station?

Reply

London-wide, a series of incidents have exposed organisational and cultural shortcomings within the Met. There is no doubt these have contributed to a lack of trust and confidence in London's police service.

Locally, we have sought assurances at every level that the Police are seeking to restore trust and confidence. There is a London wide plan in place and some really good work being undertaken locally – including:

- engagement with Safer Neighbourhoods Board
- the development of the Independent Advisory Group
- the Met's Ride along scheme

<https://www.met.police.uk/advice/advice-and-information/st-s/stop-and-search/ras/met/ride-along-scheme/>

- excellent work being undertaken by a specialist youth engagement unit
- We also hold cross borough meetings with the BCU at a strategic level weekly to ensure the best possible communication with the public and stakeholders on 'live' issues.

Regionally, we welcome the appointment of Sir Mark Rowley.

Nationally, we welcome the record sums of investment by this government into policing, including supporting the recruitment of 20,000 additional police officers across England and Wales.

There is no doubt, the new Commissioner and local leaders like Chief Superintendent Trevor Lawry will be focussing on rebuilding public trust and delivering on crime reduction as a priority. We as a Council will continue to work in partnership with them to do so.

Care Leaver Accommodation/CLACeased	Cl Cease dFor Any Other	Independen tLiving Arrangeme ntwith no suppor t	Independen tLiving Arrangeme ntwith support	Living with family, relatives with no PR	Living with family, relatives with PR	Remaine dwith current carers	Residenti alCare (ASC)	Gran d Total
B - With Parents or relatives	1	2	8		1	5		17
C - Community home or other form ofresidential care	1			1		2	3	7
D - Semi-independent, transitionalaccommodation	8		27			20		55
E - Supported Lodgings			2			3		5
R - Residence not known	1							1
S - No fixed abode / homeless			1					1
T - Foyers and similar supported accommodation which combines the accommodation with opportunities for education, training or employment	1					1		2

Care Leaver Accommodation/CLACeased	Cla Cease dFor Any Other	Independen tLiving Arrangeme nt with no suppor t	Independen tLiving Arrangeme ntwith support	Living with family, relatives with no PR	Living with family, relatives with PR	Remaine dwith current carers	Residenti alCare (ASC)	Gran d Total
U - Independent Living	8	4	26			2		40
V - Emergency Accommodation (like anight shelter, direct access or emergency hostel)	1							1
X - In custody	1		1			1		3
Y - Other accommodation	2							2
Z - With Former Foster Carers	1	1	5			17		24
Not Recorded	1		2			2		5
Grand Total	26	7	72	1	1	53	3	163

COUNCIL MEETING – 2 NOVEMBER 2022

WRITTEN REPLIES

Responses to questions put during the Council Meeting are available as part of the webcast on the Council's website.

5. From Councillor Anna Day to Councillor Peter Craske, Cabinet Member for Places:

What representations have the Council made to the Secretary of State for Transport and Southeastern regarding the December timetable changes?

Reply

We have written to and been in contact with the Secretary of State for Transport and the senior management of Southeastern Trains. Our Councillors have taken part in "Meet The Manager" sessions at stations, and we arranged for SE Trains to appear before the Transport Users Sub-Committee

6. From Councillor Zainab Asunramu to Councillor Sue Gower MBE, Cabinet Member for Communities and Housing:

Would the Cabinet Member join me in congratulating the BAME Staff Network on the success of events they have held in October in celebrating Black History Month?

Reply

I am very happy to add my congratulations to our staff group for their time, commitment and superb organisation of an impressive variety of information sessions and events to raise awareness of Black History Month. And I'd like to offer my sincere thanks to each and every one of them – as well as to everyone who took time to attend these important and very interesting sessions that were held on at least 3 days every week in October.

I am particularly proud, and we are indeed fortunate, to have so many people willing to contribute and generously share their insight and lived experience with us – and I am delighted that Members from both sides of the chamber are included in this number. The Chief Executive and members of the Corporate Leadership Team also attended events to show their support and appreciation for the work of the staff group specifically and Black History month generally. Whilst Black History Month is a celebration of the achievements of our Black community it's also a reminder of the struggles that many colleagues sadly encounter on a day-to-day basis as a result of racism and of the racial trauma they suffer. If we are to be more inclusive, more sensitive and more responsive to the real challenges they face, it's important that we all continue to listen, learn and understand – and that's why the events that were organised are so valuable.

History tells us of the lost opportunities and appalling behaviour based on fear and ignorance. and across Bexley we should strive to unlock potential in everything we do, but most importantly within our people.

We are proud of the diverse community in Bexley and Black History Month provides us with a welcome opportunity to come together and celebrate the positive role of Black people in shaping our communities and to promote knowledge and understanding of Black history and its culture in our borough.

The success of this year's Black History month events is to be celebrated and applauded. And again, my sincere thanks to all concerned.

7. From Councillor Andy Dourmough to Councillor David Leaf, Cabinet Member for Resources:

What action is being taken to support households with costs of living pressures?

Reply

I am very grateful to Councillor Dourmough for his question and his and other Members' ongoing interest in this issue. We are currently in the process of considering how to deploy the funding we have received from the third round of the Household Support Fund, however, we have already decided to use some of these funds to support households with pupils in Bexley schools in receipt of free school meals with vouchers covering the October 2022 half term and the forthcoming Christmas period. I have provided details below on the expenditure through the Household Support Fund second round and the Energy Rebate Discretionary Fund. This is in addition to the help provided through CTRS and other support given, which I have previously discussed at Council meetings and at the Finance and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Household Support Grant Round 2 - £1.542m:

- Free School Meals Cohort - £0.720m - 7,948 vouchers were issued in May with a further 8,184 vouchers in July and the entire allocation has been spent.
- Council Tax Reduction Scheme - £0.511m - 4,363 residents received a credit of £117 each
- Energy Café - £0.030m – grant allocated to SELCE.
- Foodbank Grant - £0.050m
- SOLACE Womens Aid - £0.035m – grant allocated to Solace. As at 21st October 38 households had been supported by this grant
- Citizens Advice Bexley - £0.030m
- Adult carers - £0.050m - As at 21st October 25 households have benefited from this grant
- Grant to Imago Young Carers - £0.030m - 92 households have benefited from this grant

Council Tax Energy Rebate Discretionary Scheme (after the spend of £150 payments for CTRS Bands E to H) - £0.524m

- Cost of living payment to 360 care leavers - £0.090m
- Cost of living payment to 36 Shared Lives carers - £0.009m
- Cost of living payment to 99 in-house foster carers - £0.025m
- Council Tax Accounts with Disability Reductions - £0.217m
- 274 households received a payment of £400 for those households in bands E to H.
428 households received a payment of £250 for those households in bands A to D.

8. From Councillor June Slaughter to Councillor Peter Craske, Cabinet Member for Places:

Would the Cabinet Member for Places set out the details of the new textile recycling scheme which has recently launched?

Reply

Our new partnership with TRAIID will mean residents who wish to dispose of old clothes can now do so through home collections; residents can book a collections slot directly with TRAIID, at no cost to them, or taxpayers. I'm pleased we have delivered this manifesto commitment.

9. From Councillor Anna Day to Councillor Baroness O'Neill of Bexley OBE, Leader of the Council:

Could the Leader of the Council confirm her intention to remain as Leader of the Council for the rest of the Municipal Year 2022/23?

Reply

I refer the Member to the minutes of the Annual Council meeting 25th May 2022 that were agreed at the Council meeting on 20th July 2022.

10. From Councillor Larry Ferguson to Councillor Cafer Munur, Cabinet Member for Growth:

Could the Cabinet Member confirm the percentage of planning applications that hit the affordable housing requirements, as outlined in the Local Plan, which were approved in 2021/22?

Reply

In the period 1st April 2021 to 31st March 2022, four relevant applications were approved. 50% of those met or exceeded the affordable housing policy requirement.

11. From Councillor Caroline Newton to Councillor Richard Diment, Cabinet Member for Education:

Can the Cabinet Member for Education tell me what is the current performance level by the Council in completing Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) assessments within the target of 20 weeks?

Reply

In September 2022 Bexley's compliance rate for completing an EHC Needs Assessment/Plan within the statutory deadline of 20 weeks continues to be over 90% compared to the national average of 54%.

12. From Councillor Janice Ward-Wilson to Councillor Philip Read, Cabinet Member for Children's Services:

Will the Cabinet Member for Children's Services please update us on the current position regarding availability and costs of residential placements?

Reply

Our Contracts Commissioning Officer is currently visiting services to monitor the care and support our young people are receiving and also is working alongside allocated social workers to monitor and ensure the correct level of support is received. Additional support is reviewed regularly and reduced as the young person settles.

Our in-house systemic practitioners are supporting allocated social workers and key workers as well as undertaking direct work with young people to ensure that the young people's needs are addressed and that they are stepped down to foster care or family placements in a timely manner.

We have weekly high-cost meetings chaired by a Head of Service to monitor the progress of our children in residential placements, review the support package and costs and identify children whose packages can be reduced and those who can be stepped down to foster care/family placements at the right time for them. In addition, there are regular high-cost placement meetings chaired by the Deputy Director to review our children in residential placements.

13. From Councillor Daniel Francis to Councillor David Leaf, Cabinet Member for Resources:

Given the current Prime Minister's statement on 14th October 2022 that "spending will grow less rapidly than previously planned", what is the Cabinet Member's estimate of the impact on the Council's future spending ability if this were to be seen in the grants which the Council receives?

Reply

I am grateful for the question, although Councillor Francis has referred to a statement made by a previous Prime Minister. As Councillor Francis will know, we keep our financial planning and assumptions under regular review and are awaiting details in the forthcoming Autumn Statement on 17 November 2022 and the draft local government settlement expected in December 2022. Following those announcements our MTFS will be updated accordingly. I have commented extensively on the Council's fiscal position, the impact of global pressures and the impact of Government decisions at Council, Public Cabinet, Finance and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and General Purposes and Audit Committee meetings, and will continue to comment on these matters at those meetings. Councillor Francis will also know that the approach taken by Labour towards the Council's finances is reckless and irresponsible.

14. From Councillor Daniel Francis to Councillor Peter Craske, Cabinet Member for Places:

Could the Cabinet Member confirm in which month of this Municipal Year he believes consultation will be undertaken with residents regarding the introduction of a Belvedere Controlled Parking Zone?

Reply

Work on this will begin once the plans for the area around Abbey Wood have been addressed. As the Councillor will know, because the delays to the opening of the Elizabeth Line after the Mayor of London took office in 2016, various works associated with that have inevitably had to wait.

15. From Councillor Chris Taylor to Councillor Peter Craske, Cabinet Member for Places:

Will the Cabinet Member for Places join me in congratulating and thanking our Parks team and the Friends groups and volunteers whose work has resulted in Danson Park and Lesnes Abbey being voted as among the very best parks in London?

Reply

I am very proud of our team, who work closely with teams of volunteers to make our parks and open spaces the pride of London.

16. From Councillor Caroline Newton to Councillor Philip Read, Cabinet Member for Children's Services:

Following Black History Month, will the Cabinet Member please update us on the progress of the Workforce Race Equality Standard (WRES) Action Plan within the service?

Reply

Black History Month was ongoing till the end October 2022. A full program of events could be seen on the website. It was a truly enlightening and positive event with very good attendance and fantastic coordination from a range of colleagues.

All development opportunities in social care are advertised and B.A.M.E. colleagues are supported to apply for them. All managers are expected to ensure that interview panels are diverse and the process is widely understood by all staff.

Interview panels are representative of B.A.M.E colleagues and applicants are provided with feedback.

Recruitment processes are quality assured by Human Resources, including diverse shortlisting and interviewing panels.

There has been a review of the process and criteria for applying for paid training to ensure decisions are made transparently and equitably. All opportunities are now promoted and advertised and shared via B.A.M.E group and representatives.

B.A.M.E. mentors and coaching is available and there is accredited coaching training for B.A.M.E coaches. B.A.M.E Colleagues are aware that we have this level of support within the Council and this has been raised at senior leadership meetings, included in 'conversations about race' forums and at the monthly B.A.M.E group. Aspiring leaders programme is being developed for more junior staff from a B.A.M.E. background.

B:Hive (staff intranet) including resources for B.A.M.E staff is in progress.

There has been follow up on social media to increase awareness of Bexley and it's changing ethnicity and increase B.A.M.E representation on Bexley's website, Bexley Magazine, Facebook and Twitter.

Exit Interviews: There has been a review of the exit interview process to ensure reasons for leaving are collated and staff are provided with opportunity to fully express themselves. Communications to all staff making processes clear is to be circulated as part of regular bulletins and shared via B.A.M.E representative.

This area of work is also due to be reviewed in November 2022.

17. From Councillor Nicola Taylor to Councillor Cafer Munur, Cabinet Member for Growth:

Could the Cabinet Member give an assurance that despite the high tender costs of Erith Riverside Gardens which is under review, the much-needed play equipment will remain part of the project?

Reply

There is no intention to remove the playground from the project. An appraisal of further cost saving options is underway. A number of high-cost elements, including the playground, are under scrutiny. Considerations are informed by factors such as the cost of different elements, their deliverability within the budget and their likelihood to attract additional external funding and their importance to the overall project objectives as agreed with funders.

18. From Councillor Daniel Francis to Councillor Peter Craske, Cabinet Member for Places:

Could the Cabinet Member confirm in which month of this Municipal Year he believes consultation will be undertaken with residents regarding potential changes to the operation of the current Abbey Wood Controlled Parking Zone?

Reply

Please see the answer to question 14.

19. From Councillor James Hunt to Councillor Melvin Seymour, Cabinet Member for Adults' Services and Health:

Would the Cabinet Member agree that the new enhanced access to GP's will deliver better service for residents?

Reply

Enhanced Access to primary care will deliver a better service for residents. Enhanced Access provides access to a range of primary care appointments across a Primary Care Network footprint and outside of traditional GP Practice hours – thereby improving choice and access.

The Bexley Wellbeing Partnership conducted an engagement programme on behalf of the Primary Care Networks in Bexley. In direct response to feedback from nearly 14,000 local residents the Bexley Enhanced Access will provide the following:

- Up to 2/3rds of appointments during the Network Standard Hours will be offered as same day urgent appointments.
- Face to Face will be the first offer to patients in Bexley. With 75% of appointments being made available as Face to Face, along with telephone and digital options available for those who prefer.
- All 4 Primary Care Networks sought agreement from commissioners to deliver a proportion of the Network Standard Hours during the early mornings (07:00am – 08:00am), in line with residents' preferences.
- All GP practices will be supported to improve access via telephone and online solutions.

The Bexley Enhanced Access service will provide better access to core primary care services in the mornings, evenings and weekends including, for example: same day urgent care, minor illnesses, Chronic Disease Management e.g., hypertension, diabetes, asthma, and Chronic Pulmonary Disease (COPD), medication reviews, wound care, NHS Health Checks, blood tests and referral to other health and care services.

There will also be access to multi-disciplinary primary care teams including GPs, Nurses, Health Care Assistants and Pharmacists.

20. From Councillor Bola Carew to Councillor Melvin Seymour, Cabinet Member for Adults' Services and Health:

Is the Cabinet Member committed to supporting the Obesity Strategy?

Reply

I am committed to reducing obesity in the borough as this remains a priority in Bexley and the rates have significantly increased during the pandemic.

The Obesity action plan will be reviewed and rewritten by public health and held by the Bexley Wellbeing Partnership Executive Leadership meeting and reviewed on a quarterly basis for progress. This is a group that brings together many relevant partners across Bexley and Public Health will, in addition, work with other partners to try to change the narrative. Some examples of the work that is planned are as follows:-

- Improved relationship with schools, community groups and with wider Council teams as part of School Super zone work
- Opportunity to create healthy streets and spaces and improve social connectivity within Super zones
- Partnership working with Primary Care and SEL ICS to improve access to national weight management programmes and identify needs
- Addresses emerging challenge around food poverty

21. From Councillor Nicola Taylor to Councillor David Leaf, Cabinet Member for Resources:

Could the Cabinet Member please update Members on the impact of rising building costs, rising inflation, housing market slowdown on the projected dividend from BexleyCo post 2024/25?

Reply

I am grateful for the question and the opportunity to update Councillor Taylor on BexleyCo. As Councillor Taylor will be aware, the Cabinet Committee meeting of 7 November 2022 reviewed the updated Business Plan from BexleyCo and this contained details of planned developments

and potential and forecast financial returns to the Council as well as the impact of global inflationary pressures. We do not include in our MTFs forecasts on dividends until we have greater detail about the returns coming in from developments and Councillor Taylor will recall that was the approach we took with Old Farm Place. Councillor Taylor will also recall that she and her Labour colleagues oppose BexleyCo, oppose the development of new housing of all tenure mixes in the Borough, and oppose the dividend that the Council receives from BexleyCo. We would have less housing and less financial resources had we followed the approach that Labour advocated.

22. From Councillor Anna Day to Councillor Melvin Seymour, Cabinet Member for Adults' Services and Health:

Could the Cabinet Member detail plans on how the Council will narrow the unacceptable gap and improve public health outcomes for people in the North of the Borough?

1) Health intelligence

Health inequalities have been highlighted in the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment. Public health have now drafted the first draft of a Local Care Partnership Health Profile. This is hugely significant as it clearly points out where the inequalities are and will allow the LCN and wider NHS/Council to commission services appropriately to address the inequality.

2) Public health is committed to review all its commissioned mandated and non-mandated services to assess whether individuals from the north of the borough are accessing prevention services such as NHS Health Checks and smoking cessation services. These services are currently being reviewed to see if outreach services could be added to better engage with communities. The Community Champions Programme provides another opportunity to work much closer with the community in the north of the borough.

3) Health and Wellbeing Strategy – this is currently being worked on with a view to publication in March 2023. This will highlight the disparities and be used as a vehicle of tackling those inequalities.

4) Influencing wider partners. Not everything is within the gift of Public Health, and it is important that we take a MECC (Making Every Contact Count) approach to working with individual whether that is through pharmacy, primary care or voluntary sector contacts.

23. From Councillor Christine Catterall to Councillor Richard Diment, Cabinet Member for Education:

Can I ask the Cabinet Member for Education for an update on the Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) Programme organised by the London Borough of Bexley during the school summer holidays 2022?

Reply

During the 2022 summer school holidays Bexley's Holiday Activities and Food Programme delivered 12,769 sessions for our young residents in 28 schemes spread across the Borough. Each of these schemes which were delivered by 23 providers provided a nutritional meal, enrichment opportunities, physical activities and education. The aim of the programme is to deliver healthy food and enriching activities during the school holidays to children who receive benefits-related free school meals.

24. From Councillor Andy Dourmough to Councillor David Leaf, Cabinet Member for Resources:

What is the Cabinet Member's assessment of the impact on local government finances caused by global economic pressures?

Reply

I am grateful for the question. Local government faces increased pressures and risks caused by global economic pressures. We are monitoring those risks closely and I welcome the discussion that Councillor Dourmough facilitated at the recent meeting of the Finance and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee on this matter under the agenda item on the Council's borrowing strategy. I will continue to keep the Council updated through the MTFS on the risks and challenges we face and look forward to further discussions on this matter with Councillor Dourmough and his Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

25. From Councillor Zainab Asunramu to Councillor Philip Read, Cabinet Member for Children's Services:

Could the Cabinet Member for Children's Services please outline what the Council is doing to support care leavers during this cost-of-living crisis?

Reply

The Council supports young adults to access external services and prepare young adults to live independently through pathway planning and providing independent living skills, which includes providing financial support in specific circumstances.

We also provide them with advice and guidance on how to minimise their energy consumption and conserve energy within their homes.

The Council made sure that our young adults received the £250 governmental grant (Household Fund) and supported young adults to ensure that they used the fund to pay their bills and any outstanding arrears. The Council continues to pay council tax for young adults leaving our care until they are 25 years old.

At the end of March 2022, some young adults, who are living in their permanent accommodation, received £25 toward their bills and the other young adults who do not live independently received a £25 voucher in September 2022 to support them towards the cost of living. Young adults can access financial support, which is assessed on individual basis and in accordance to the young adult's circumstances. The assessment is undertaken by the Personal Advisors in the Leaving Care Service.

Young adults are also supported with their education, training and employment by accessing opportunities with their job coach. Bexley Leaving Care Service works closely with a link worker at the Department of Work and Pension and the Shaw Trust to support young adults access employment and training. This is undertaken via the bi-monthly Not in Education, Employment and Training (NEET) Panel. This panel supports young adults to increase opportunities and their income.

Those who are in part time work or education are supported and advised to work so that they increase their income. Their Universal Credit will not be affected if they work less than 12 hours a week, therefore, young adults are encouraged to work and increase opportunities

26. From Councillor Anna Day to Councillor Melvin Seymour, Cabinet Member for Adults' Services and Health:

Could the Cabinet Member detail how the mental health needs of residents will be met over the coming months, with the knowledge that there is already an increased waiting time for support and a cost-of-living crisis which is further impacting our residents' mental health?

Reply

Across health and social care, all partners recognise the increasing impact of the cost of living crisis on the mental health of our residents. Due to recent investment through the Mental Health Transformation Plan there are improvements in accessibility of services and partners are committed to working together to maximise use of resources.

Mental Health Hub:

In line with the NHS Long Term Plan for mental health Increased investment in the Community Mental Health Transformation Programme has supported the integration of local mental health services. Mind in Bexley and Oxleas are working together on the delivery of a Mental Health Hub comprising a primary care mental health service which will integrate many professionals from Oxleas and Mind to deliver a holistic assessment and interventions.

The additional funding has allowed for the refurbishment of Hub office space and facilitates the recruitment of staff with specialist knowledge in areas such as housing, welfare benefits and employment. As well as this, the recruitment of additional clinical staff has been possible, including nurses, doctors and psychologists to support this new primary care service which will provide assessment and brief intervention for people's mental health needs

Waiting times for referrals to PCP which has merged into the Hub in July **have reduced from an average of 54 days to 17 days**. This has been achieved due to increased clinical staffing, improved leadership resource and MH and wellbeing practitioners as a direct result of additional funding from the Mental Health Transformation Programme.

This service will be working towards the national target of receiving assessment and interventions within 4 weeks of their referral.

Recovery and Wellbeing

The Mind in Bexley Recovery College delivers learning and tools to support wellbeing and self-management for residents experiencing mental health difficulties.

The college is based on a learning and strength-based model rather than a clinical approach and has an array of resources which are developed, shaped and co-delivered with residents who have lived experience.

The service also provides peer to peer goal orientated mentoring and has recently received additional funding to increase the local IPS offer (Individual Placement and Support). This area of service supports people with severe mental health difficulties into employment.

The Recovery College offers welfare benefit support for residents and has adapted to develop and provide a range of innovative initiatives as a result of the Covid pandemic This includes an IT access HUB for those who are digitally excluded and a community pantry scheme. Mind have applied for additional funding to extend the community pantry opening hours, enabling them to support an additional 70 families per month during the current cost of living crisis.

Talking Therapies (IAPT)

Additional resources have also been provided to improve residents access to talking therapies (IAPT) which is delivered by Mind in Bexley. The Covid-19 pandemic brought significant changes to IAPT. The service now offers one-to-one interventions virtually as well as face to face. Group interventions are also blended, and Mind offer a portfolio of groups running online.

Crisis Café

The Mind Crisis Café provides a safe and welcoming place where residents can go for support outside of normal working hours, instead of A&E or other urgent services, if they are feeling emotionally distressed or are in a 'mental health crisis'. The café is open every evening from 18.00 – 22.00hrs, offers face to face support and works with over 700 individuals per year. The Café is a crucial link with Oxleas, the IAPT service and Transformation Hub developments.

Walk Leaders will be present throughout the Borough promoting residents to engage in outdoor activities and access mental health support In September.

The overriding sentiment is that it is the contribution that these services make together is what matters and not just the single organisation or sector working alone.

27. From Councillor Peter Reader to Councillor David Leaf, Cabinet Member for Resources:

Can the Cabinet Member for Resources give an update on the rollout of the Council Tax Energy Rebate?

Reply

I am grateful for the question from Councillor Reader. We have provided the £150 payments to around 74,000 households in the Borough, including those in Bands A to D and those in Bands E to H who are eligible for CTRS. For those households who we could not provide a payment to through BACS or who did not cash the cheque sent to them, they have had their Council Tax accounts credited with this £150.

28. From Councillor Lisa Moore to Councillor Philip Read, Cabinet Member for Children's Services:

Will the Cabinet Member for Children's Services please tell us what percentage of care leavers are in suitable accommodation?

Reply

We currently have 15 young adults considered to be in unsuitable accommodation, representing 4% of all young adults leaving our care.

Of these:

- 9 young adults are in prison
- 2 young adults whose immigration status has not been regularised and have now exhausted all rights to appeal. They have refused to disclose their address to us.
- 1 young adult living between Manchester and Leeds as he has casual work and stays with friends where he works.
- 3 young adults are living in a partner's accommodation family. Of these, 1 declined accommodation from the local authority as she wants to remain with her partner.

29. From Councillor Stefano Borella to Councillor Baroness O'Neill of Bexley OBE, Leader of the Council:

Could the Leader update Members on how the fair funding review is going?

Reply

Not as quickly as I'd like but I can assure Councillor Borella I raise it at every opportunity.

30. From Councillor Stefano Borella to Councillor Peter Craske, Cabinet Member for Places:

Could the Cabinet Member outline what arrangements were put in place to protect library staff and users during the recent disgraceful demonstrations organised by the far-right group 'patriotic alternative' against the well-supported drag queen story?

Reply

- Staff undertook detailed planning for the events that incorporated learning from the experiences of other authorities who had previously hosted the events.
- We benefitted from a well-resourced police presence that delivered a flexible and effective approach to the policing of the protests outside of libraries.
- Staff had support inside libraries from two security guards as part of the event plan. Community safety team colleagues also attended and provided advice and support to staff throughout the day.
- Senior library staff took the lead on the day and took a dynamic approach to managing the risks as they emerged – for example relocating the events to take place in meeting rooms instead of in public areas

31. From Councillor Rags Sandhu to Councillor Cafer Munur, Cabinet Member for Growth:

Can the Cabinet Member for Growth update us on the success of the Night Markets in Bexleyheath?

Reply

The first market, on 24 June, although well attended, with 3,000 people registering, received a mixed reception as the food and artisan offer did not meet the demographic of those who visited the market. Adjustments were made by the market operator which significantly improved the offer, resulting in the Broadway being very busy at the July and August events. The September event suffered from poor weather with heavy rain throughout the evening which really limited the attendance with the traders facing reduced revenues. The event as a whole was saved in many ways due to the young people talent show, held undercover, where a gathering of around 30-50 people enjoyed the live acts.

Due to the overall success of the Night-markets, plans are underway to deliver a further event in Nov/early Dec with a focus on Christmas theme. This will be arranged directly between the BID and the market operator who have delivered the previous events. Further markets from Spring 2023 are also planned which will be organised by the BID working directly with the operator.

32. From Councillor Mabel Ogundayo to Councillor Baroness O'Neill of Bexley OBE, Leader of the Council:

Could the Leader please outline where in Bexley's budget "there is fat to be trimmed", as stated by Paul Scully MP, the government minister for Local Government?

Reply

I had the opportunity to speak to Paul at Conference and his comment appeared to have been taken out of context – he made the point that local government are always looking for efficiencies and better ways of delivering services, and we can certainly identify with that in Bexley.

33. From Councillor Mabel Ogundayo to Councillor Peter Craske, Cabinet Member for Places:

Could the Cabinet Member explain why there is yet another delay to Thamesmead Library opening, whilst the rest of the building is fully functional?

Reply

- The final works have been impacted by production delays due to mechanical breakdown of a key sub-contractors plant in Holland. This is now resolved and the final major installations are now being carried out on site. We expect the building works to finish soon.
- The Libraries team are coordinating the delivery and installation of new furniture and equipment by our suppliers. They are also liaising with the Council's network provider to plan for the move of the IT networks. These elements have been held up pending the delayed final fit out works and we are working to secure installation dates that will allow us to finalise the programme for opening.

34. From Councillor Esther Amaning to Councillor Richard Diment, Cabinet Member for Education:

Can the Cabinet Member confirm that ECHPs have been assessed on time, that other means to identify children with autism are highlighted in schools, so that there is no delay in having ECHPs completed?

Reply

The compliance rate for EHC Needs Assessments and completing EHCP's is very high in Bexley with over 90% completed within the statutory timetable of 20 weeks compared to the national average of 54%.

Schools are supported by a range of teams and tools to identify special educational needs and meet the needs of the pupils at the earliest possible opportunity. The completion of an EHC Needs Assessment and issuing an EHCP is not dependent on an ASD diagnosis having been given. The legislation focuses on 'presentation of needs' rather than 'medical labels'.

35. From Councillor Esther Amaning to Councillor Melvin Seymour, Cabinet Member for Adults' Services and Health:

Could the Cabinet Member please evidence the support voluntary services are being given by the Local Authority to continue providing the mental health support to vulnerable residents of Bexley?

Reply

Voluntary sector organisations are key partners in the delivery of mental health services for Bexley residents. Working alongside both the Local Authority and the health service our

voluntary sector colleagues work tirelessly and innovatively to support vulnerable residents at every level of need from prevention and early intervention to crisis and recovery.

Bexley Voluntary Service Council (BVSC) are our infrastructure organisation, commissioned, among other key roles to support the VCS and help local charities, both commissioned and non-commissioned, to sustain themselves through the challenges they may face. This includes support and advice on grant seeking and fund raising.

A key route for Bexley people to get access to the VCS support they need is through our Social Prescribing service. Social Prescribing recognises that a substantial proportion of people accessing primary health care are actually in need of a social intervention and the service aims to help people to identify and access appropriate services in the voluntary and leisure sectors.

We have therefore recently recommissioned our Social Prescribing Service 'Community Connect' for a further two years, and expanded the age range from 18+ to 10+, which ensures the service is now available to children and young people enabling better emotional health and wellbeing as they transition into adulthood.

Significant additional funding (£1.4 million in 2022/23) has been made available to the Bexley Wellbeing Partnership to progress the transformation of community mental health services in line with the national framework.

Amongst the priorities locally were:

- The establishment of an integrated triage and access 'hub' for community mental health services, including co-location of Oxleas/LBB and Mind in Bexley staff. This is located at Mind in Bexley's offices at 2a Devonshire Road, Bexleyheath. The 2nd floor of the building has been refurbished to accommodate the new team and the hub soft-launched in July 2022
- Within that setting, to expand and develop the scope for psychological support and brief interventions, advice, and guidance, without the need for a formal referral to secondary care.

Therefore partners across health, social care and the voluntary sector have worked collaboratively to agree fundamental principles to inform an operating model which meets our local aspirations of multi-disciplinary working and collaboration. Through co-location of staff from health and social care with those from the VCS our much valued voluntary organisations are supported to augment their innovative work.

In addition to the role of the voluntary sector in the direct delivery of mental health services the Local Authority commissions an array of provision and support from members of the One Bexley consortia which support the mental health of residents and carers. Tailor made befriending, workshops, telephone and digital support and other well-being initiatives are established by Carers Support, BVSC, Age UK, Crossroads Care and Mencap amongst others which provide additional much valued support to residents. This is a mutually supportive arrangement which ensures that the Council is in close contact with the sector and able to work together to problem solve and respond to changing needs.

36. From Councillor Larry Ferguson to Peter Craske, Cabinet Member for Places:

Could the Cabinet Member assure me that cleaning schedules and resources to deal with rubbish and fly tipping are spread evenly across the whole of the Borough?

Reply

Yes and it's absurd to suggest otherwise.

37. From Councillor Zainab Asunramu to Councillor Richard Diment, Cabinet Member for Education:

Will the Cabinet Member for Education update us on the way that the Council decides school transport applications for children with disabilities since the 2019 Ombudsman criticism?

Reply

All applications for travel assistance for children with an EHCP are awarded in line with the Home to School travel and transport guidance which outlines the authorities' statutory duties for children between the ages of 5 to 16yrs old and the Post 16 transport travel support to education and training for children and young persons aged 16 -25yrs old. Since 2018/19 there have been no LGO SEN related cases.

38. From Councillor Esther Amaning to Councillor Richard Diment, Cabinet Member for Education:

Could the Cabinet Member please outline learnings the Council will be taking forward amidst complaints from parents of SEN children within schools, to ensure that parents' concerns are being addressed, in a timely and respectful manner?

Reply

The Council takes all complaints seriously and in cases where fault has been found seek to learn from this with any learning regularly discussed with officers in order to inform practice accordingly ensuring that it feeds back to partners as required so that there is an opportunity to learn and improve practice, where required, across the entire local area including our Bexley Parent/Carer.

39. From Councillor Zainab Asunramu to Councillor Richard Diment, Cabinet Member for Education:

Will the Cabinet Member for Education, tell us what assurances he gave to parents of King Henry School amidst the school's inadequate Ofsted ruling, and provide an update on the conversations he has had with Leigh Academies Trust with regards to a strategy for improvement?

Reply

Following the recent Ofsted Inspection of King Henry School the Council has been working closely with the School, Odyssey Trust which currently manages them and the Department for Education on a range of activities with the sole purpose of improving the performance of the school. A key step has been an agreement for the school to be temporarily managed by the Leigh Academies Trust prior to what the Council hopes will be a permanent transfer of the school between the two Academy Trusts.

Whilst the school is an Academy and therefore not under the auspices of the Council, officers and Members have met with the Chief Executive of the Leigh Academy Trust to understand and be reassured of its plans and are due to meet with again in November in order that we can be updated on the progress that the school is making.

40. From Councillor Wendy Perfect to Councillor Philip Read, Cabinet Member for Children's Services:

Could the Cabinet Member for Children's Services please outline the Council's process for ensuring the relevant agencies are notified when children in our care are reported missing?

Reply

When a Social Worker is informed that a child is missing from care, the Social Worker immediately informs the parents, all professionals and agencies involved; if the child is subject to Court Care Proceedings, legal and all parties are informed.

When the child is found, they are offered an independent return home interview by a member of our Targeted Youth Service to better understand the reasons for them going missing and any risk factors to help manage and support.

41. From Councillor Zainab Asunramu to Councillor Philip Read, Cabinet Member for Children's Services:

Could the Cabinet Member for Children's Services please update Members on the Council's approach to preventing young people in the Borough being groomed for County lines?

Reply

The child exploitation strategy is being finalised to ensure a robust approach to preventing children and young people from being groomed for county lines. The aim is to ensure a whole community approach in understanding, identifying, and tackling exploitation and developing services. We are in the process of developing an up-to-date map of all services involved in assessing or providing support and raising awareness across all agencies/professionals.

The Family Wellbeing Service have been expanded with a fourth team to work with children and young people aged 11 plus who are at risk of child sexual exploitation (CSE) and respond early in partnership with health and education colleagues to prevent children and young people from being exploited and concerns escalating to require statutory interventions.

We are also providing a range of training and workshops across multi-agency partners to increase awareness and improve joined up response to child exploitation.

COUNCIL MEETING – 26 APRIL 2023

WRITTEN REPLIES TO QUESTIONS

Responses to questions put during the Council Meeting are available as part of the webcast on the Council's website.

4. From Councillor Anna Day to Councillor Melvin Seymour, Cabinet Member for Adults' Services and Health:

Could the Cabinet Member please update Members on the present and future impact on residents placed in care and respite care due to the tragic Parkview Care home fire?

Reply

The fire at our residential care home was traumatic and I would like to thank all involved in the rescue effort – care home staff, London fire brigade, neighbours, family members of the residents, GP, London ambulance service, the Bexleyheath academy, Council staff and care homes across the Borough – without their support we would not have been able to manage the situation so quickly and with so few people needing medical attention.

Due to the fire the home is currently closed whilst essential repairs are made to the home. We are working closely with the owners, Avante, to ensure the home is repaired, made safe and re-opened as quickly as possible and our priority will be to support the residents placed in alternative care homes to move back to their home. In the meantime we are working with Avante to make sure all displaced residents are supported and family members kept informed. Staff from Park View are working in those care homes to support the residents along with the care homes usual staff to offer continuity of care and we are making sure that residents are reunited with their belongings where possible. Health care professionals including GPs and district nurses are also assisting the residents in the usual care plan in the new care homes.

Parkview is a 69 bedded capacity care home for people who have dementia. At the time of the fire they had 62 residents they were caring for – all of whom have needed to move to alternative care homes in the Borough. This has severely depleted our care home availability in the Borough particularly for those who need residential care for dementia. We do have some availability in the Borough and care homes have been very accommodating in working with us to find appropriate care for residents who need residential care. Some of this capacity is more expensive than we would usually pay for. We also have some availability in neighbouring boroughs who have been supportive in offering mutual support during this time.

At present we have been able to source appropriate care home support for people who are needing to move into a care home from their own home or to support a hospital discharge. We will continue to monitor the situation and appreciate how supportive care homes are in making their capacity available for us.

5. From Councillor Rags Sandhu to Councillor Melvin Seymour, Cabinet Member for Adults' Services and Health:

Will the Cabinet Member for Adults' Services and Health join me in thanking all those involved in the evacuation of vulnerable residents from the Parkview Care Home recently?

Reply

I would very much like to join you in thanking all involved in supporting the incident. The response from the community, emergency services, Council and private services in the Borough was overwhelming and what makes us proud to be Bexley.

I would like to record my thanks to some specific people and organisations

- The London Fire Brigade and the London Ambulance Service who supported with the emergency response, evacuating residents and giving them medical attention
- The staff at Parkview – many of them who stayed on to the late hours after long shifts to ensure their residents were safely moved to alternative care homes and who supported the transition into the new care homes in the following weeks.
- The response from individuals including a neighbour who brought residents blankets and a Transport for London driver who supported residents to move to a temporary welfare centre
- The Bexleyheath academy who gave accommodation to set up a temporary rest centre for residents who were evacuated, provided food, drinks and even entertainment to support residents that were clearly distressed about the events and for staying open beyond hours.
- Family members, many of whom dropped everything to support their loved ones on the day and for their understanding and patience whilst we arranged for alternative care homes to care for their loved ones
- Council staff from emergency planning. Adult Social Care, Bexley Integrated Transport Unit and Education many of whom worked at the home, rest centre and behind the scenes at the office to ensure residents were safe, supported and transferred to alternative care homes and followed up welfare checks and assistance in the days after the incident.
- Services supporting the Council including Bexley Assisted Transport services who put on transport to transfer residents to new care homes and the care homes in the Borough who bent over backwards to ensure they could receive residents that evening - Northborne court, Puddingstone, Riverdale, Weybourne, Adelaide, Maples, Malborough Court, Shaftsbury court, Signature , Smyth lodge .
- Wider health services – local hospitals (Queen Elizabeth Hospital and Darent Valley Hospital) who were ready to receive some residents and staff who needed hospital treatment; district nurses who were available to assist on the day and support people following the incident in their new care homes and the GP who attended the care home on the day and has coordinated continuation of GP services to people in their new care homes.

This was truly a joint effort to support this traumatic incident and we are grateful for the assistance of all involved and who continue to be involved.

6. From Councillor Lisa Moore to Councillor Richard Diment, Cabinet Member for Education:

Can the Cabinet Member for Education update Council on the Holiday Food & Activity programme during the Easter holidays?

Reply

The Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme was once again successfully run within Bexley during the Easter holidays which consisted of 26 schemes providing 3,700 sessions across the Borough. This programme aims to provide a healthy meal, enriching and physical activities for benefits-related free school meals and builds on the successful delivery of this

programme during 2022/23 which resulted in 3,307 pupils attending 18,215 sessions this programme.

7. From Councillor Daniel Francis to Councillor Baroness O'Neill of Bexley OBE, Leader of the Council:

Given that the Public Cabinet Papers of 15 November 2022 outlined the budget assumptions for 2023/24 including the Deep Dives and stated, "No public consultation is currently required on the current plans as there is no impact on residents", does the Leader believe that statement was correct?

Reply

The Deep Dive schemes are subject to individual consultations under the Member approval or design development process.

8. From Councillor Zainab Asunramu to Councillor Richard Diment, Cabinet Member for Education:

Could the Cabinet Member outline the conditions attached to the DfE Dedicated Schools Grant settlement?

Reply

The conditions that are attached to the £29.9m Dedicated Schools Grant 'Safety Valve' Agreement between Bexley and the DfE covering the financial years from 2022-23 to 2028-29 are:

- The authority undertakes to reach a positive in-year balance on its Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) account by the end of 2027-28 and in each subsequent year and the authority undertakes to control and reduce the cumulative deficit as follows, not including any contribution made by the department through this agreement.
- The authority agrees to implement the DSG management plan that it has set out including for example to expand special school provision for children and young people with severe learning difficulties, autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and social, emotional, and mental health (SEMH) needs, ensuring a local offer for Bexley learners so that fewer placements are required in out of borough independent specialist provision.
- Ongoing monitoring of its performance in fulfilling this agreement.
- Inform the DfE of any unforeseen difficulties or impacts of carrying out the agreement, or any significant risks to reaching the agreed financial position as soon as they arise.
- Meet with the DfE at any time when they deem it necessary to discuss progress towards the agreement.
- A separate and additional bid for £9.5m capital is currently being assessed by the DfE. The DfE will assess and review this proposal and will consider making a capital contribution to these plans in 2023-24 as a top-up to the local authority's High Needs Provision Capital Allocation (HNPCA), which will be announced in Spring. Progress against delivery of those capital plans should then be integrated into the reporting to the DfE as part of the monitoring of this agreement.
- This agreement is subject to review at any time, for example as a result of the following events; Higher or lower DSG formula funding levels for the authority in future financial years than those the authority has assumed; significant changes to national SEND policy, which impact on elements of the plan; Insufficient progress being made towards the authority reaching and sustaining an in-year balance on its DSG account as set out in the plan.

- The review process will include an assessment of the impact of the change in circumstances.
9. From Councillor Steven Hall to Councillor Baroness O'Neill of Bexley OBE, Leader of the Council:

Can the Leader of the Council give us an update on the current position regarding the Mayor of London's plans to extend ULEZ to Bexley?

Reply

We continue to 'encourage' the Mayor of London to drop the scheme to extend the ULEZ as, although we absolutely believe in cleaner air quality, the evidence shows that extending the ULEZ is not the best way of achieving that. The Judge accepted that two of the criteria put forward for Judicial Review tabled by the four London Boroughs (Bexley, Bromley, Harrow & Hillingdon) together with Surrey CC should be heard, and that should be heard in the week beginning 3rd July. In addition to that an Application to Review has been submitted and there will be an oral hearing before the main hearing on the same day to review all except one (4) of the criteria that were not given permission to proceed.

10. From Councillor Howard Jackson to Councillor David Leaf, Cabinet Member for Resources:

Could the Cabinet Member for Resources provide an update on the Household Support Fund?

Reply

I am grateful to Councillor Jackson and other colleagues for their interest in the Household Support Fund. In addition to my comments at the 26 April 2023 and at recent meetings of the Finance and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee I will be announcing the details of the allocations of the fourth round of the HSF shortly in a formal decision.

As well as supporting households with children in Bexley schools eligible for Free School Meals with food costs during the school holidays, I am looking to use HSF4 to provide support for families with the costs of white goods, housing costs, funding for foodbanks, funding to support those affected by domestic abuse, and funding for debt advice services. I also expect to make support available to carers and care leavers. We will work with partners in the voluntary and community sector to deliver this support.

Some funds will be held back for use later in the financial year as we keep need and costs of living pressures and need under review, including energy costs.

I will continue to keep members updated and expect to report back to the Finance and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee during the next municipal year.

11. From Councillor Mabel Ogundayo to Councillor Peter Craske, Cabinet Member for Places:

Could the Cabinet Member for Places please update Members if Bexley is still the top London Borough for recycling?

Reply

Following the industrial action by a minority of crews in the summer of 2021 - action Labour Councillors backed wholeheartedly, with one Labour Councillor boasting on Facebook about how much they loved seeing refuse trucks being blocked from leaving the depot - it has not

been possible to make it to 18 years. Given Labour claim to support recycling, it is baffling how they supported action which has led to a direct reduction in recycling levels.

12. From Councillor Mabel Ogundayo to Councillor Peter Craske, Cabinet Member for Places:

Could the Cabinet Member update Members on the Council's response to the latest City Airport expansion planning submission?

Reply

Bexley has written to the London Borough of Newham asking for clarification and further information in relation to a number of matters. Newham has provided a holding response as they are seeking additional information from Transport for London in turn. Upon receipt of the additional information Bexley will finalise its response to the planning application.

The Council's representative on the London City Airport Consultative Committee is Councillor Dourmough. There has been a single meeting of the Committee for which Councillor Dourmough was otherwise engaged.

It is for Newham to appropriately communicate with those affected by the proposals. We are mindful of the significant publicity in the news and print media that this proposal has engendered.

13. From Councillor Mrs June Slaughter to Councillor Peter Craske, Cabinet Member for Places:

Would the Cabinet Member for Places agree with me that it's unfortunate that Bexley lost its place as the top recycler in London last year after holding for 17 years and what plans are in place to ensure we regain the title next year?

Reply

It's very upsetting to see this happen, and of course if it had not been for the very long industrial action in 2021, Bexley would have retained our position by a long way. It's also worth noting that this action was entirely supported by Labour Councillors.

14. From Councillor Steven Hall to Councillor Peter Craske, Cabinet Member for Places:

Can the Cabinet Member for Places update us on the number of street parties planned for the King's Coronation next month?

Reply

There are going to be just under 100 street parties across Bexley to mark this historic occasion.

15. From Councillor Anna Day to Councillor Baroness O'Neill of Bexley OBE, Leader of the Council:

Given that as Councillors, we are expected to hold ourselves to a high standard and apologise and undertake training when we fall short of that standard, could you please share what further action you believe should be taken when a Councillor continuously receives public complaints regarding their behaviour?

Reply

The Council's Code of Conduct will cover this and, as a member of the Members' Code of Conduct Committee, Councillor Day will be aware of the conversations at the Committee.

16. From Councillor Esther Amaning to Councillor Melvin Seymour, Cabinet Member for Adults' Services and Health:

Following the tragic death of the mother and her sons in Belvedere, could the Cabinet Member please share how the Council is ensuring details of mental health support and services are visible and readily available to all residents?

Reply

The situation that occurred in Belvedere a few weeks ago was terrible and an absolute tragedy. We do have support available for anyone who is struggling with their mental health or feels in crisis and we would encourage people to access the support around who are there to help.

We have a number of services available to Bexley residents that need support with their mental health needs in the Borough. These include a range of prevention services we jointly commission with the ICB run by MIND and other voluntary services in addition to our secondary mental health services which is an integrated service between Oxleas and LBB.

These services are advertised and accessible to people via the GP services and in some cases via self referral.

Recently we have improved our accessibility of these services and the joint working between our secondary mental health services, primary care and GPs and MIND through a number of developments including

- mental health practitioners working directly with local GP practices
- Mind in Bexley run talking therapies for depression and anxiety which take self referrals and can be accessed online or by telephone
- Mind in Bexley support – to which people can make a self referral and can be accessed online or by telephone. They provide services for social and peer and carers support, welfare rights and employment support for those with mental health conditions
- The development of a Mental Health Hub which will shortly be launching a website with more self help and guidance this summer and self referrals will follow
- there is also the crisis line which is available 24 hours a day and a crisis café available for people in the evenings should they need to speak to someone urgently about a mental health crisis.

17. From Councillor Janice Ward-Wilson to Councillor Philip Read, Cabinet Member for Children's Services:

Would the Cabinet Member for Children's Services confirm how many other Councils have received consecutive Ofsted Outstanding judgements for their Children's Service since the present Children's Service inspection framework was introduced in 2018?

Reply

Bexley is unique in London, for we are currently the only authority to have been judged within this inspection framework as outstanding in two successive inspections. Indeed, across the country there is just one other authority that can boast a similar achievement.

Ofsted's judgement recognises that in Bexley we have "invested in the service and implemented a coherent strategy to help children at the earliest opportunity, preventing difficulties escalating to a level where more intrusive support is required". They go on to state that, in Bexley, there is "clear strategic direction, strong partnerships and good political and corporate support for children's services" all of which makes a significant difference to children's lives.

Since our last inspection in 2018 we have been faced with challenges that did not exist at that time, in particular of course due to Covid, and it is to the credit of all staff throughout the service that Ofsted recognised that, stating we have continued to "maintain very effective support for children despite increasing demand following the pandemic."

The Ofsted inspectors also met with what they describe as "an impressive group of children in care and care leavers, who spoke positively about the care and support they have received". That view of those in our care is considered by many to be the most satisfying judgment of all.

Council staff frequently receive a lot of very often ill-informed criticism, and Ofsted's objective judgment demonstrates that there is another side to that. Genuine, unprejudiced observers will recognise that this is a wonderful judgment brought about by our staff at all levels and in all teams within our Children's Service.

18. From Councillor Peter Reader to Councillor Melvin Seymour, Cabinet Member for Adults' Services and Health:

Would the Cabinet Member for Adults' Services and Health update us on our Health and Wellbeing Strategy and Vision for Health?

Reply

The Bexley Health and Wellbeing Board has a statutory duty to produce a Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy (JLHWS). The new five-year strategy builds on previous work completed in 2019. System pressures due to the COVID-19 response meant that the publication of a new strategy was postponed.

There are four priority areas in the new JLHWS: obesity, mental health, children and young people, and ageing well (with a focus on frailty and dementia). These priorities were chosen following wide stakeholder engagement led by local data and need.

A series of engagement events are planned or have already taken place in November 2022 and May 2023, including with residents, and a wide range of professionals and partners.

The final strategy will be presented at the Bexley Health and Wellbeing Board in June 2023.

The JLHWS has helped shape and has been informed by the regional NHS South East London Integrated Care System Strategy – which is currently in draft.

Alongside this work, the Bexley Health and Wellbeing Partnership, which brings together all organisations from health, social care and the voluntary sector, has been developing a Vision for working together to provide a roadmap to improve health outcomes for Bexley residents. This is currently in draft form and engagement events are planned to ensure everyone has a say. A priority in the Vision is to ensure our residents know how to get the right care, at the right time, in the right place so that everyone can get appropriate access to health and care services at the point that it is needed.

A single joint integrated action plan will be developed to deliver both the JLHWS and Bexley Wellbeing Partnership's Vision for Health and Care. There is continued close partnership working between the Health and Wellbeing Board and the Bexley Wellbeing Partnership.

19. From Councillor Esther Amaning to Councillor Sue Gower MBE, Cabinet Member for Communities and Housing:

Following the release of the Casey report, which cited that racism, homophobia and misogyny are rife within the police force, could the Cabinet Member please detail actions Bexley police have shared with the Cabinet Member as to how they will address these issues going forward?

Reply

The MET police have recently been consulting on their 'Turnaround Plan' which is the blueprint for how the MET plans to not only reduce crime but also raise standards and increase confidence across all communities over the coming two years. Our local police partners have been engaging with us and our partners about what this looks like. They have been clear that the MET have a mission to raise standards, embed 'respect' as a core value and to create a new 'Anti-corruption and abuse command'. They have expressed a significant commitment to dealing with bad officers directly and swiftly and to ensuring that they are challenging their own organisational culture as part of their transformation plans.

20. From Councillor Esther Amaning to Councillor Sue Gower MBE, Cabinet Member for Communities and Housing:

Can the Cabinet Member give us an update of work which has been undertaken with charitable organisations such as Mind, Food Banks, and the Samaritans to support communities in this desperate time?

Reply

Councillor Leaf hosted a Cost of Living Workshop in October 2022, where a range of local voluntary and community organisations were invited to share and discuss how best everyone could work together to help residents manage the increased cost of living. Over 30 organisations participated in this event including Mind in Bexley, AgeUK, Mencap and the Bexley Voluntary Service Council.

In the last few months, the Council has worked with the following community and charitable organisations to distribute approximately £400,000 of the Household Support Fund grant to residents who needed additional support relating to the rising cost of living:

- Active Horizons
- Bexley Women's Aid
- Central Eltham Youth Project
- Citizens Advice Bureau
- Crossroads
- Irish Community Services
- Love Bexley
- Mind in Bexley
- Redeemed Christian Church of God
- Slade Green Foodbank (Howbury Friends)
- Solace
- St Johns Church Sidcup
- St Lawrence Trust
- Bexley Foodbank (Trussell Trust)

In addition to the distribution of the Household Support Fund, we also arranged an event at the Job Centre Plus site on The Broadway where a range of organisations ran 'stalls' for the day to provide advice and support to local residents. Those participating included:

- Citizens Advice Bureau
- Mind in Bexley
- LECB
- Bexley Community and Voluntary Council
- Bexley Energy Café (which runs each Monday in the Central Library)
- Debt Free London

The Council's Cost of Living webpages advertise local, community and Council-run warm spaces across the Borough, as well as signposting to other advice and support that is available for residents.

21. From Councillor Christine Catterall to Councillor Richard Diment, Cabinet Member for Education:

Can the Cabinet Member for Education tell us what is in place to support opportunities for people in Bexley to undertake apprenticeships?

Reply

The most visible support is the yearly Apprenticeship & Participation Event provided by the Council's Education Services. The event attracts hundreds of attendees each year and offers direct access to employers and apprenticeship training providers to discuss and register and apply for apprenticeship opportunities.

The Council can offer transfer of its apprenticeship levy to businesses recruiting a Bexley resident into an apprenticeship role. This can cover up to 100% of the apprenticeship training costs where full funding is not available directly from central Government.

The Council itself continues to offer apprenticeships, both for recruitment and as a means of developing the skills of its workforce.

At the start of this academic year the Apprenticeship Strategy Group was subsumed into Bexley's Careers Adviser network to provide secondary school careers services direct access to apprenticeship training providers. The rationale for the decision was to support schools and sixth forms in meeting new statutory requirements which require settings to provide their students with encounters with technical education and apprenticeship training providers.

Bexley Youth Advice, the commissioned service to support Bexley young people of academic year 12 and 13 ages who are not in education, employment, or training, provides advice, guidance and assistance with applications to help young people secure an apprenticeship.

Prior to April 2022, apprentices could be paid 32p per hour less than 16-17-year-olds in regular employment. This changed in April 2022 where the minimum wage rates were aligned at £4.81 per hour (£5.28 from April 2023). This has predominantly benefitted school leavers, who no longer have to decide between earning less in order to access an apprenticeship or earning more but possibly not receiving accredited training to improve future prospects and not meeting the duty to participate.

This support enables residents to undertake apprenticeships, particularly Bexley's young people who are more likely to be participating through an apprenticeship than their peers in other London Boroughs.

22. From Councillor Andy Dourmough to Councillor David Leaf, Cabinet Member for Resources:

Can the Cabinet Member for Resources update Council on the annual council tax billing process?

Reply

101,001 bills were issued for the 2023/24 billing year, with bills being dispatched electronically (where resident had signed up for ebilling) or by post on 17th March 2023. A total of 27,969 residents received ebills. 74,836 residents (74.09%) currently pay their bill by Direct Debit.

In respect of the Government's new Energy Support scheme for 2023/24 (awards of up to £25 for all residents in receipt of a Council Tax Reduction Scheme award that does not cover their full bill), 10,053 awards were made during the annual billing process which accounted for 69% of the funding made available to Bexley (£110k remaining). It has been agreed that to ensure fairness, all new Council Tax Reduction Scheme claimants that have a new claim commence during the 2023/24 billing year will also be granted an award of up to £25 at the point their claim is awarded. The expenditure will be monitored monthly, and a review will be undertaken mid-year to establish whether there is likely to be sufficient funding available to bring any other cohort of residents into scope of an award.

23. From Councillor Stefano Borella to Councillor Baroness O'Neill of Bexley OBE, Leader of the Council:

Are the present Code of Conduct sanctions as determined by the Localism Act 2011, robust enough to deal with Member indiscretions?

Reply

The Code of Conduct sanctions determined by the Localism Act 2011 are set in statute and we have to follow them.

24. From Councillor Sally Hinkley to Councillor Baroness O'Neill of Bexley OBE, Leader of the Council:

With the first 'call-in' of an executive decision in 11 years, by Conservative Members of the Places OSC regarding the fair charging policy at reuse and recycling centres, is it time to change the 'call in' threshold, to allow more effective scrutiny of executive decisions?

Reply

The call-in threshold is determined by proportionality which in turn is determined by the outcome of the elections and the wishes of the electorate.

25. From Councillor Chris Taylor to Councillor Richard Diment, Cabinet Member for Education:

Would the Cabinet Member for Education update Members on developments at the Learning & Enterprise College Bexley?

Reply

During 2022/23 there have been several positive developments at the Learning and Enterprise College Bexley (LECB). These have included:

- There has been a 5% growth in enrolments for this academic year. This will equate to a positive overachievement of GLA & ESFA funding of around £170k.
- The college has a settled and stable management team who are all working towards the growth and opportunities and preparing for its imminent Ofsted Inspection. Retention and predicted achievement are on track to remain as a Good College with some outstanding features.
- The new curriculum for 2023/24 is currently being developed and will be live from May 2023 and starting in September 2023. This will include newly developed well-being and confidence building courses in addition to the academic and formal qualifications courses.
- Following a £430k deficit outturn for 21/22 and an expected predicted £200k deficit for 22/23 due to the good work undertaken by the college it is likely that the final accounts will show a much-improved outturn than the predicted outturn.

26. From Councillor Andy Dourmough to Councillor Peter Craske, Cabinet Member for Places:

Could the Cabinet Member for Places update the meeting on the latest developments with our Libraries?

Reply

In the last few months we have opened two new Libraries, one in Sidcup and then at the start of April, a second one in Thamesmead. Both new libraries have proven to be big hits, welcoming old and new members. There are hardly any other Councils in the country that have opened just one library, and there are none which have opened two! It's lucky we did not listen to Bexley's Labour Councillors as they voted against funding both of these new libraries.

27. From Councillor Stefano Borella to Councillor Baroness O'Neill of Bexley OBE, Leader of the Council:

Why are there a large number of Cabinet Member decisions in the Places directorate still in the forward plan that would normally require public consultations through the budget process, as agreed at the Budget Council on 8 March 2023?

Reply

Where appropriate, public consultations will be carried out as part of scheme approval process.

28. From Councillor Anna Day to Councillor Sue Gower MBE, Cabinet Member for Communities and Housing:

Could the Cabinet Member confirm whether Mental Health and Suicide Prevention training is mandatory for Housing Officers or could be implemented to ensure the best support is provided to homelessness applicants approaching with mental health issues?

Reply

Housing staff undertake the corporate modules on awareness. Applicants are signposted to mental health services, 999, Samaritans or to attend A&E services at the local hospitals where there are qualified professionals available and better placed to assess and to assist if needed.

29. From Councillor Andrew Curtis to Councillor Cafer Munur, Cabinet Member for Growth:

Could the Cabinet Member for Growth update us on the activity of Bexley Business and Employment working with Council tax Reduction scheme claimants?

Reply

During the last 6 months, the Bexley Business & Employment team has worked with Capita to understand the profile of those claiming council tax benefit and work has been ongoing to contact claimants with an offer of employment support where it is felt most relevant and appropriate. The focus has been on those of working age and living in the most deprived wards in the Borough, particularly those in the DA8 postcode which has the highest claimant numbers.

Claimants are being contacted by phone (where known), and a follow up email, although only a total of 2,892 email addresses are held on record. In addition to phone calls, a hard copy mailshot has also been trialled (within existing postal comms generated by Capita).

Outcomes so far:

- 1,082 telephone contacts have been made
- 463 calls answered
- 204 responded that they are not interested/ not looking for work
- 141 are in-work
- 87 indicating that they have been signed off with disability or health issues
- 31 people have expressed an interest in the service, with an appointment booked to meet an advisor and sign up for support. Of these:
 - 13 enrolled onto the London Works programme (3 have since moved into employment and one into education)
 - 4 were referred to other programmes (2 of whom have moved into employment)
 - 14 failed to attend their introductory appointment

30. From Councillor Daniel Francis to Councillor David Leaf, Cabinet Member for Resources:

Can the Cabinet Member provide an update on the provision of services to Bexley residents following the cyber-attack on Capita on 31 March 2023?

Reply

Cyber attacks are appalling ways in which criminals and those wishing to do our country harm seek to disrupt our way of life through damaging our IT systems.

On Friday 31st March, Capita experienced a cyber incident which impacted access to their internal Microsoft Office 365 applications across all areas of their business. As you expect, we have been in contact with Capita over this incident, including in the immediate aftermath to ensure we could respond and provide communications on the impact this was having and since then to understand what happened.

On the incident itself, Capita have advised that their IT security monitoring capabilities swiftly alerted them to the incident, and as part of standard protocols for such an issue, all Capita hosted systems were shut down at approximately 7am that day to ensure security whilst steps were taken to successfully isolate and contain the issue. The issue was limited to parts of the Capita network and there is no evidence of client, customer or colleague data having been compromised. Capita have been fully briefing the Information Commissioner's Officer

throughout the process in line with good practice. Capita have also been in regular contact with the Cabinet Office throughout this period and continue to keep them updated with the progress that's been made to date.

This incident resulted in our Revenues and Benefits systems (Housing Benefit/Council Tax Reduction Scheme, Council Tax, Business Rates) being unavailable all day on Friday 31st March, and access was restored mid-afternoon Monday 3rd April with services resuming as normal from then. Unfortunately due to the lack of systems access for staff, this meant that we could not provide the usual call centre service to our residents during this period so messaging was added to the phonenumber to advise residents of the systems unavailability. Messaging was also added to the main Council phonenumber to advise that these services were currently unavailable, and updates were posted on the Council's social media channels by our Communications Team. The outage did not impact on any Housing Benefit payment runs, nor any Direct Debit collection runs for Council Tax or Business Rates. Our Payables, Receivables and Cashiering teams were able to continue their services as our finance system and cashiering system are not hosted by Capita and therefore were not affected by this incident.

We will continue to engage with Capita over this matter and learning from this incident will inform our ongoing approach to cyber security and business continuity.

31. From Councillor Daniel Francis to Councillor David Leaf, Cabinet Member for Resources:

Could the Cabinet Member provide a statement of the arrangements for the auditing of the expenditure of the Household Support Fund (Round 3)?

Reply

We are required to follow the guidance produced by the Department for Work and Pensions in distributing the Household Support Fund.

In round 3 this funding was used to provide financial support to help households with food costs during the school holidays where those households include children eligible for Free School Meals attending Bexley schools; support with housing; and a range of cost of living support through local voluntary organisations, as detailed in the decision which I signed off on this and in the various discussions I have had with Members on the HSF at the Finance and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings.

For the voluntary organisations that worked with us to distribute Round 3 funding we set out guidance on how the money should be used, the timeframe for this and the reporting requirements. Each organisation was asked to sign an acceptance form confirming their understanding and willingness to do this. No money was transferred to them until this paperwork was received.

Each distributor of the fund was required to provide a return setting out the distribution and these are currently being collated to prepare the full Bexley return for the Department for Work and Pensions, in line with the guidance. The DWP complete a review of the spend to ensure it is in line with the guidance for the Household Support Fund. The information we receive will also inform our ongoing response to support the Borough with costs of living pressures.

32. From Councillor Sally Hinkley to Councillor Peter Craske, Cabinet Member for Places:

Could the Cabinet Member for Places please update the progress of locations and implementation of the yellow box junction review?

Reply

The review is currently being conducted. I note that Labour Councillors have requested locations be considered for new yellow box enforcement, so we will look at those locations as well.

33. From Councillor Wendy Perfect to Councillor Peter Craske, Cabinet Member for Places:

Could the Cabinet Member for Places please update the progress of locations and implementation of the limited parking bay review?

Reply

This work is being progressed.

34. From Councillor Baljeet Singh Gill to Councillor Peter Craske, Cabinet Member for Places:

Could the Cabinet Member for Places please update the progress and impact of the drainage cleaning and gritting service review?

Reply

This work is being progressed, I note that Labour Councillors voted against the additional funding we have put into this service.

35. From Councillor Larry Ferguson to Councillor David Leaf, Cabinet Member for Resources:

Could the Cabinet Member provide the financial comparison between the agreed Highways capital programme for the 2022/23 financial year against the actual spending for 22/23?

Reply

Details on expenditure incurred by the Council in the 2022/23 financial year and the outturn position will be published in due course and included in the papers for the July 2023 Public Cabinet meeting.

COUNCIL MEETING – 19 JULY 2023

WRITTEN REPLIES TO COUNCIL QUESTIONS

Responses to questions put during the Council Meeting are available as part of the webcast on the Council's website.

7. From Councillor Curtois to Councillor Leaf, Cabinet Member for Resources:

Would the Cabinet Member for Resources give us his assessment of the inflationary pressures on the Council and impacts on the MTFS?

Reply

I am grateful for the question and welcome the interest that Councillor Curtois has shown on this issue. Inflation, caused predominantly, by global economic factors, continues to be a significant financial risk for the Council to monitor and manage. The papers for the Public Cabinet meeting of 13 July 2023:

(<http://democracy.bexley.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=149&MId=29904&Ver=4>)

contained our latest assessment of the impact of inflation on our forecasting for the current 2023/24 financial year, as well as over the medium term. The papers also gave details of the impact of inflation on the outturn position for 2022/23.

We will continue to monitor, assess and review the impact of inflation on our financial position and budget and MTFS planning and will report back to future Public Cabinet meetings. I also welcome opportunities to discuss this matter at meetings of the Finance and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee and at the General Purposes and Audit Committee.

8. From Councillor Moore to Councillor Newton, Cabinet Member for Education:

Could the Cabinet Member for Education give an update on progress on the Safety Valve agreement?

Reply

Following the publishing of Bexley's Safety Valve Agreement, progress has been made as follows:

The initial instalment of £11.96m was received from the DfE (on 31 March) with the condition that this funding must be put towards reducing the authority's cumulative DSG deficit. On 16 May the DfE confirmed that Bexley's application for £9.5m High Needs Capital, aligned with the Safety Valve Programme, had also been approved. This funding has been agreed following a proposal to expand special school places that enable Shenstone to become an all through school to year 14.

Bexley's Safety Valve Agreement is in the very early stages of delivery and therefore it is expected that the first 6 months will be primarily dedicated to recruitment, planning the implementation of proposals, and establishing processes for monitoring and reporting progress. However, considerable progress has been made with the implementation of our proposals with the Council successfully submitting its first monitoring report to the DfE which highlighted the following progress:

- Work to deliver additional local places through the expansion of Shenstone Specialist School, which is being funded through the £9.5m DfE capital grant allocation, is progressing well. Planning permission has been secured and the contract to secure the construction contractor is currently out to tender.

- Work is progressing on identifying and delivering additional options to expand our local provision for those with a higher level of need. The first phase of this is expanding the number of specialist places at Parkway School by 30, by August 2024, with the first cohort due to start in October 2023.

- Successful recruitment to posts to support a range of early interventions. This includes 12 assistant psychologists, 4 speech and language specialist assistants, 1 SEMH partner and 1 SEND strategic partner who have accepted job offers with a view to starting on 4 September. All appointees have good and relevant experience.

- A SEND Employment Forum has been established to take forward the proposal to expand Supported Internships. As part of this work a 'Bexley SEND Preparing for Adulthood' event took place on 29 June, to show the opportunities and support on offer for young people with an EHCP, who are due to either start or finish post-16 education. The Local Education College Bexley (LECB) and Shaw Trust are currently developing a programme for 2 levels of Supported Internships and several employers have shown an interest in offering placements.

In addition to this, we have successfully recruited a permanent Head of Service for SEND due to start in September and a Strategic Implementation Manager (Safety Valve) to monitor the programme going forward.

9. From Councillor Ball to Councillor Baroness O'Neill of Bexley OBE, Leader of the Council:

Would the Leader of the Council join me in calling for a plaque or similar permanent marker that acknowledges the role in slavery associated with Danson House?

Reply

We agree that it is important to understand, acknowledge and learn from historical events and I'm sure Councillor Ball will know that visitors to Danson House, which is the Borough's register office, are already able to read about its history on the information banners on display inside. A wealth of information about Danson and the Borough's history can also be found at the Local Studies and Archives Centre.

10. From Councillor Francis to Councillor Baroness O'Neill of Bexley OBE, Leader of the Council:

According to the latest census data, how many Bexley households have a mortgage?

Reply

According to the latest census data (March 2021), 34,207 – around a third of Bexley households, own their home with a mortgage or loan. A further 1,263 households have shared ownership which combines part-rent and part-buy. Usually, but not always, the share purchased would involve a mortgage. Including these households, gives a total of 35,470.

11. From Councillor Chris Taylor to Councillor Newton, Cabinet Member for Education:

Will the Cabinet Member for Education update Members on the SEND Peer Review which took place in April?

Reply

As part of our preparation readiness for Bexley's local area SEND inspection a Peer Review was organised through the Local Government Association, between 25 and 28 April. Led by the DCS from Cornwall, the experienced external team consisted of representatives from health, SEND, preparing for adulthood and a former specialist head teacher.

During the Peer Review the team met with well over 100 individual people from across the

whole area, including parents/carers and our pupils. They looked at a full range of issues including our commissioning arrangements, alternative provision for children and young people with SEND, whether their needs are identified accurately and assessed in a timely and effective way, our arrangements to support young people into adulthood and arrangements that are in place to gather feedback from our pupils and their families about their lived experiences.

The Peer Review identified several cross-cutting key strengths including values that are strong and evident, child centred and committed workforce with an effective senior leadership team, good practitioner relationships and joint working, strong relationships with our schools. The review could also see that plans were in place to address areas for development including strengthening the strategic overview and governance across the entire local area and the use of data and lived experience to inform strategic joint commissioning and priority setting.

12. From Councillor Sandhu to Councillor Munur, Cabinet Member for Growth:

Would the Cabinet Member for Growth join me in congratulating all those involved and the winners of the 2023 Bexleyheath business awards?

Reply

Yes, I agree, the event was a huge success with 24 awards presented during the evening with the venue sold out. The awards really serve to recognise the great efforts made by our local businesses to provide a welcoming shopping and leisure environment in Bexleyheath. We are very grateful for the marvellous organisation of the event by the BID team, particularly Caron Linyard and Angie Wisdom.

13. From Councillor Borella to Councillor Diment, Cabinet Member for Places:

Does the Cabinet Member support the recent progress in the building of the DLR extension to Thamesmead, meaning a future extension to Belvedere is more likely?

Reply

No, we do not support the conclusions of the recent DLR business case as they do not propose the extension of DLR to Belvedere as a preferred option which is a clear aspiration of the Council's adopted Growth Strategy and new Local Plan.

14. From Councillor Day to Councillor Gower MBE, Cabinet Member for Communities and Housing:

What effect does the Cabinet Member think that the removal of the Selective Licensing scheme next month will have on residents in Slade Green and Northend who live in private-rented accommodation, such as in Manor Rd and on Frobisher Estate?

Reply

The Selective Licensing scheme can only apply to areas that meet strict criteria set out in Statute. The evidence does not support the Slade Green and Northend Ward being designated. We have taken Counsel advice which confirms the same. We will keep the evidence under review and if circumstances change we can revisit that decision. The Council retains its usual Environmental Health and Anti-Social Behaviour powers to deal with issues in privately rented properties such as disrepair or anti-social behaviour, including through the use of Improvement Notices and Prohibition Orders.

15. From Councillor Hall to Councillor Baroness O'Neill of Bexley OBE, Leader of the Council:

Could the Leader of the Council advise Members of the outcome of the Judicial Review of the Mayor of London's plans to expand ULEZ to Bexley (& Outer London)?

Reply

The legal challenge brought by the coalition of Councils opposed to the expansion of the ULEZ ended after a two day hearing on 4 and 5 July. A ruling from the judge is expected to follow at an unconfirmed date but is expected ahead of the courts' break for summer on or before 28 July 2023.

16. From Councillor Christoforides to Councillor Diment, Cabinet Member for Places:

Can I ask the Cabinet Member for Places what public transport investment the Council believes that TfL should be making in Bexley?

Reply

As well as increasing the frequency, reliability, affordability, accessibility, comfort and convenience of existing bus and rail services, new strategic public transport infrastructure is sought to enhance connectivity and development potential in key growth areas. Priority schemes in this regard include the finishing of the Elizabeth Line so that it serves all stations on the north Kent Line to Ebbsfleet/Northfleet, the extension of the DLR to Belvedere and the creation of a bus rapid transit route between Woolwich and Slade Green, connecting to Dartford Fastrack to the east and to the proposed orbital Superloop bus service to the south.

17. From Councillor Ferguson to Councillor Diment, Cabinet Member for Places:

Does the Cabinet Member agree with and fully support Newham Council's decision regarding London City Airport proposed expansion plan, as all neighbouring boroughs have an interest in the operations at the airport?

Reply

The proposals to intensify the use of London City Airport will cause further harm to those Bexley residents under the flight path, particularly through noise and disturbance. We oppose London City Airport's plans and we objected to the planning application by way of written representation, as have other neighbouring boroughs. Newham Council's Planning Committee unanimously resolved to refuse the application on 11th July 2023.

18. From Councillor Borella to Councillor Gower MBE, Cabinet Member for Communities and Housing:

Why has the implementation of the new selective licensing area been delayed from its original inception date of December 2023 to the new date of April 2024?

Reply

As with the previous timetable there is a hiatus between when the current scheme ends and the new one is scheduled to start. The Council retains its usual Environmental Health and Anti-Social Behaviour powers to deal with issues in privately rented properties such as disrepair or anti-social behaviour, including through the use of Improvement Notices and Prohibition Orders.

19. From Councillor Christoforides to Councillor Diment, Cabinet Member for Places:

Will the Cabinet Member for Places update Members on actions to reduce/combat fly-tipping?

Reply

Our Enforcement Team works closely with the Metropolitan Police and takes part in regular patrols for enforcement against unlicensed waste carriers. In the past 12 months they issued 19 Fixed Penalty Notices and seized 2 vehicles, one of which was crushed.

Since March 2023 our Enforcement Team have been working with Peabody Trust who have delegated authority to issue FPNs for fly-tipping offences, and Community Protection Warnings to their residents on behalf of the local authority.

20. From Councillor Reader to Councillor Seymour, Cabinet Member for Adults' Services:

Can the Cabinet Member for Adults' Services update us on the new Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy?

Reply

The process for developing the new five-year strategy for Bexley began in November 2022 kick starting a series of engagement events with residents and partners to inform the strategic actions under the four priority areas:

- Children and Young People
- Ageing Well (including frailty and dementia)
- Mental Health and Wellbeing
- Obesity

Workshops on each one of the four priority areas took place at the beginning of 2023 and Healthwatch completed further resident engagement over the period, speaking in-depth to over 1200 residents on their experiences related to the priority areas through focus group and one-to-one sessions. This research was qualitative, intended to explore attitudes, experiences, and perceptions.

A [report](#) on the [final draft of the strategy](#) was presented to and endorsed by the Health and Wellbeing Board on 15th June 2023 and the Bexley Wellbeing Partnership on 22nd June 2023.

The strategy is currently being converted to a series of webpages to be hosted on Bexley Council's website with an anticipated completion date of 7th August 2023.

The next phase – which has started – is to work with partners across the local public sector partnership to define the key actions to be taken forward in year one.

21. From Councillor Asunramu to Councillor Newton, Cabinet Member for Education:

Could the Cabinet Member for Education please outline the work that is being done within schools across Bexley to explore the concept of consent and preventing sexual assault and abuse in schools?

Reply

From September 2022 the education team has increased the frequency with which it meets with our schools Designated Safeguarding Leads (DSLs) from once per term to half termly. A constant theme throughout the last academic year has been a focus on behaviour and safety post pandemic which includes a focus on consent, sexual assault and abuse in schools.

Working with both internal and external stakeholders we have provided training and signposting to services throughout the year. This includes but is not limited to:

- In October DSLs were advised regarding the Child Q review led by Jim Gamble. At the same meeting the DSL network reflected on research from the NSPCC published in September 2022 on teachers' views of preparedness to teach these sensitive issues (specifically Sex and Relationships Education) and the implications of this research for schools in Bexley. This theme has also been discussed throughout the year at the regular school Head of Department meetings for PSHCE leads.
- A special session for DSLs on Andrew Tate and how staff in schools can challenge toxic masculinity with a focus across all phases of education in February 2023.
- In April the DSL network heard from speakers from Shout Out UK and heard from social care staff regarding abuse more widely in the Borough.
- Resources and training from 'Healthy London, Healthy Relationship' was signposted and a guest speaker from AVA (Against Violence & Abuse Charity) spoke to the DSL network in June 2023. School leaders will also be contacted in the new academic year by Councillors Gower, Leaf and Newton regarding those resources from MOPAC to encourage greater take up of the 'Healthy London, Healthy Relationships' programme.

The Education Improvement team offer safeguarding training and safeguarding audits to schools in the Borough. Over the course of 2022/23 academic year child on child abuse training has been a 'popular' choice from schools but increasingly schools are interested in the field of contextual safeguarding. The request from schools to officers for Safeguarding audits over the last academic year have increased exponentially. In addition, schools have asked for further training and signposting throughout the next academic year including 10% of schools within the first week of term.

22. From Councillor Asunramu to Councillor Newton, Cabinet Member for Education:

Can the Cabinet Member for Education outline the outreach work completed to ensure organisations catering to over 14-year-olds in the Borough can benefit from the HAFs programmes over summer 2023?

Reply

As part of the management of the HAF programme Bexley has appointed a HAF Community Co-ordinator post from amongst our existing partner organisations to work alongside Bexley officers to improve and develop the programme. Since the appointment in April 2023, the post holder has been working closely with our schools and wider community groups with a view to ensuring that our families, including those over the age of 14, maximise the take up of places that will be provided through our summer programme.

We have made the increase in engagement and uptake of secondary school age children a focussed target in the service delivery specification for the HAF Community Co-ordinator post, with the expectation that they work with local and national organisations with expertise in delivery to the secondary age range. We recognise from the programme thus far, that a HAF offer that is appealing and has high engagement levels with the secondary school age range can be challenging. Provision for this age range will often look different to that aimed at primary age children. There will be flexibility in the programme and consideration given to a different delivery models such as pop-up activities, trips, accredited programmes and life skills activities.

23. From Councillor Catterall to Councillor Seymour, Cabinet Member for Adults' Services:

Can the Cabinet Member for Adults' Services update us on development of the Adult Social Care Vision?

Reply

Why a Vision for Adult Social Care

Articulating a 'Vision' for Adult Social Care, co-created with our residents and other key stakeholders, is important to provide clarity and coherence to what it is that we are trying to achieve for those of our residents and their families who will come into contact with Adult Social Care. It sends a strong message to our residents and our staff about our priorities and our ambition.

How we went about creating a vision for adult social care

The change lead for ASC has held engagement events and discussions with local people in receipt of care and support, partners across health and the community and voluntary sector and Adult Social Care staff. This has included:

- Attending a variety of community groups and events with people in receipt of care and support and prevention services.
- Engaging with staff across the London Borough of Bexley including the staff disability network, BAME staff network and the LGBTQ+ workers group.
- Undertaking workshops with people in receipt of care and support and prevention services, carers and staff to:
 - Discuss the vision statement
 - Discuss and agree principles that sit under the vision

The feedback from the various engagements is currently being summarised to develop the 'final product' ASC vision statement and supporting principles, standards and quality measures.

Next steps:

The draft Vision statement will be presented to the Health and Wellbeing Board for formal adoption.

24. From Councillor Bacon to Councillor Diment, Cabinet Member for Places:

Can I ask the Cabinet Member for Places for an update on progress with the Council's road maintenance programme for 2023/24?

Reply

The approved programme for 23/24 consists of 2 footway schemes and 28 carriageway schemes. There are also areas of larger patching works taking place on an ad-hoc basis when sections deteriorate during the year. 8 of the carriageway schemes have been completed, with 9 more programmed for Quarter 2. The remaining roads are to be programmed for later in the year once street works permit access can be agreed and avoid conflict with other works. Some locations may not be progressed due to utility works expected in these locations, and so avoid new surfacing being dug up when it has just been laid.

25. From Councillor Francis to Councillor Leaf, Cabinet Member for Resources:

How many voter authority certificates has the Council issued to electors?

Reply

I am grateful for the question and recognise the importance of Voter Authority Certificates being provided to enable people to vote since the introduction of Voter ID requirements. By July 2023 we had issued 120 Voter Authority Certificates.

As discussed at the 5 July 2023 meeting of the Finance and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee I am liaising with officers over how we can do more to raise awareness of this issue and ensure that people that do not have photo ID are able to apply for a Voter Authority Certificate.

26. From Councillor Francis to Councillor Leaf, Cabinet Member for Resources:

How many complaints has the Council received from residents regarding the text message reminder sent on 29 June 2023 regarding council tax payments?

Reply

I welcome the question on this matter and the communications to residents regarding Council Tax. At the 5 July 2023 meeting of the Finance and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee this matter was discussed, including communications around Council Tax and changes being made. With regard to the text message reminder Councillor Francis references, there has been one formal complaint received.

However, I recognise that there have been enquiries raised about this issue by Members and there have also been comments and concerns expressed on social media. As discussed at the FCSOSC meetings, our communications are kept under review and we will consider the effectiveness of these communications in assisting residents and I therefore continue to welcome feedback on this matter.

27. From Councillor Chris Taylor to Councillor Munur, Cabinet Member for Growth:

Could the Cabinet Member for Growth update us on our performance for new job starts and sustainment?

Reply

Q1 Reporting							
Project	Aim4Work	LBB	JETS	Work & Health	Restart	London Works	Total for quarter
Sustainment	26 weeks	26 weeks	Income threshold	Income Threshold	Income Threshold	26 weeks	
Q4 Job starts	9	0	6	23	91	19	148
Q1 Job starts	0	1	0	11	94	26	132
Expected to sustain in Q1	0	0	0	19	85	20	124
Actual Sustained Q1	0	0	0	12	52	2	66
% Sustainment	0.00	0.00	0.00	63.16	61.18	10.00	53.23

28. From Councillor Ward-Wilson to Councillor Seymour, Cabinet Member for Adults' Services:

Can the Cabinet Member for Adults' Services update us on the recent Carers Event held in Bexley?

Reply

On 9 June 2023, a special, free event, organised by Bexley Carers Partnership and Bexley Wellbeing Partnership, was held at the Holiday Inn in Bexley to say thank you to unpaid carers. At least 120 carers attended the event on the day. I attended along with The Mayor and Mayoress of Bexley, Councillor Ahmet Dourmouh and Mrs Elmaz Dourmouh. The event included support and information from local providers, pampering and relaxation such as massage and reiki, taster activity sessions and informative interactive talks. Carers also had the opportunity to meet some therapy dogs.

At the event, we received feedback from carers on our ASC Vision and One Bexley, our third sector trusted partners, were offering and receiving referrals for Care Act Carers Assessments. This included the option of having a Carers Assessment completed on the day at the event. In addition, Bexley Mencap hosted a workshop to support carers in completing Emergency Care Plans so that in the event of a crisis, services could be clear on what should be done. All carers attending the event received a thank you goodie bag on arrival and a buffet lunch and refreshments. The event took place as part of Carers Week (5-11 June) and was about recognising and supporting unpaid carers in the community. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all our unpaid carers for everything they continue to do for their loved ones.

29. From Councillor Hinkley to Councillor Baroness O'Neill of Bexley OBE, Leader of the Council:

Following changes brought about by a rare Call-in meeting relating to waste amenity sites, would the Leader consider convening the Constitution Review Panel to look collaboratively at how scrutiny and back bench Councillors from both parties can more effectively support policy formulation?

Reply

The Council's overview and scrutiny arrangements are in accordance with statutory requirements, in particular the Local Government Act 2000, section 21 which enables Councils to have one or more Overview and Scrutiny Committees. Our call-in process is determined by the political make up of the Council as determined by the electorate. The fact that there has been a call-in presumably shows that the current Constitution works.

30. From Councillor Amaning to Councillor Newton, Cabinet Member for Education:

Is the Council aware or has identified any reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete (RAAC) in our schools and educational institutions and have they sought any specialist advice or management plans to deal with this?

Reply

Bexley, like all local authorities, has been asked by the DfE to provide answers on whether certain school that fall into scope on the identification of reinforced aerated concrete in our schools have used this construction method. For 8 of these schools where there was an element of uncertainty the Council commissioned independent specialist surveys with the 6 that have been completed, to date, confirming that this material is not present. The remaining 2 surveys are due to be finalised shortly.

31. From Councillor O'Hare to Councillor Gower MBE, Cabinet Member for Communities and Housing:

Could the Cabinet Member for Communities and Housing confirm what the Council is doing to help residents seeking support with housing?

Reply

The Housing Department has recently updated its housing website. The website now has all the information a resident would require assisting them with different housing options depending on their individual circumstances. It will also signpost a resident to other resources that are available to assist them.

32. From Councillor Curtois to Councillor Gower MBE, Cabinet Member for Communities and Housing:

Could the Cabinet Member for Communities and Housing clarify what is being done to prevent homelessness?

Reply

The housing service identifies prevention as a key strategic aim. The Triage & Prevention Team work to identify which groups might be at risk of homelessness to ensure they are aware of rights, options and services and seek assistance at the earliest possible stage. In many cases early, effective intervention can prevent homelessness occurring. This can take the form of advice services and proactive intervention such as negotiation with landlords to enable people to retain their current tenancies. Such intervention is important even if it only allows time to plan and manage a move to alternative accommodation.

The Council has two main pots of discretionary funding to help people with their housing costs to prevent homelessness. These are discretionary housing payment and the Hardship Living Fund. The Homelessness Prevention Grant can also be used to help people at risk of homelessness or to establish local schemes to prevent homelessness. In addition, a lot of work has been undertaken to update the website and ensure that seeking assistance can be done on line, avoiding any need to attend Civic Offices

33. From Councillor Francis to Councillor Munur, Cabinet Member for Growth:

How many schools, church/community halls and/or places suitable to hold a consultation event are located within a mile of the BexleyCo development site at Bursteds Woods?

Reply

The Council is unable to identify how many schools, church/community halls and/or places suitable to hold a consultation event are located within a mile of the BexleyCo development site at Bursteds Woods as the Council does not hold this level of detail.

34. From Councillor Ball to Councillor Diment, Cabinet Member for Places:

Can the Cabinet Member confirm the capital programme underspend from 22/23 on repairs to Bexley's roads and pavements?

Reply

At the start of 22/23, Capital Programme for 22/23 resurfacing schemes was £3.620m, with the final outturn spend being £3.395m (effective underspend of £0.225m: 6% of budget). However, in-year the allocation was reduced to allow for funding to be slipped into 23/24, to respond to delivery delays to some schemes due to utility works planned for a number of locations).

35. From Councillor Moore to Councillor Read, Cabinet Member for Children's Services:

Will the Cabinet Member for Children's Services please update us on recruitment of new foster carers?

Reply

We are fortunate to have over 200 in-house foster carers who provide excellent care for some of our most vulnerable children. Prior to October 2022, we had a Fostering Recruitment and Assessment Team which was responsible for the recruitment and assessment of foster carer applicants. In addition, this team also completed Special Guardianship assessments. In October 2022, we restructured the fostering service to create a Fostering Recruitment Team dedicated at driving the marketing and recruitment of in-house carers. Since the creation of this team, there has been a significant improvement in the quality and timeliness of assessments of applicants. In addition, the timeliness of responding to initial inquiries about becoming a Bexley foster carer has improved - we are meeting our target of responding to all inquiries within 2 working days.

We have enhanced our marketing strategy and we are now more visible digitally and in the community, we run various campaigns and have garnered the support of some of the local businesses to raise awareness about fostering and to drive the marketing campaign. In 2022/23, we recruited 19 new foster carers - 9 Fostering Households and 10 Host and Support providers, we had 5 resignations. The reasons for resignations were 3 households returning to work due to the cost of living, with another having commitments to care for extended family. The last one discontinued their approval, they had not cared for any children.

By September we will have recruited 8 Fostering households and 6 Host and Support providers. We are on track for our target for end of March 2024 to recruit 15 Fostering households and 10 Host and Support providers. Since 1st April 2023, we have had one

resignation, the carer who resigned felt this was not the right time for them to foster and took no children. Given the current economic climate, we are in the process of reviewing the financial support provided to carers to mitigate the high cost of living.

36. From Councillor Ward-Wilson to Councillor Read, Cabinet Member for Children's Services:

Will the Cabinet Member for Children's Services please update us on the progress of the SHiFT initiative?

Reply

13 of the 14 children offered SHiFT have engaged and are around halfway through the 18 month programme. The team has had significant and unforeseen staffing challenges, including the sudden death of its lead guide. Despite this, we are starting to see a positive impact for the children engaged with the programme such as:

- Reduction in missing episodes
- Reduction in offending
- Prevention of entry into the criminal justice system
- Prevention of care episodes
- Improvements in engagement with education/training/employment

37. From Councillor Perfect to Councillor Newton, Cabinet Member for Education:

Could the Cabinet Member outline how the Council assists Year 6s with their transition to secondary school?

Reply

To ensure that that our primary pupils are prepared for the transition to their secondary schools the Council provides a range of programmes to assist transition. This programme, which has been running for the past year, has been led by our Strategic Education Partnership working with a group of year 6 (primary) and year 7 (secondary) teachers. This transition system consists of a common transition day which has been established with all Bexley Secondary schools agreeing that the transition day is the first Tuesday in July. This reduces the disruption to learning for year 6 pupils (historically transition took place on different days for different schools).

On transition day, pupils provide their new secondary school with a sample of work. Secondary schools share these with teachers so that they are aware of the level pupils are working at. There is an SEN transition day where SENCOs from secondary and primary schools meet to share information about children with our SEN team. Schools provide bespoke transition packages for children with additional needs who may require additional transition support – including additional visits and tours. The outreach team at the Alternative Provision also offer transition support packages to schools. Last year 17 primary schools accessed this support.

In addition Bexley Youth Council produced a supportive video, which was launched to all Year 6 pupils in class after the Easter break which was accompanied by an information flyer and our Targeted Youth Service run transition groups which 65 of its members are attending.

38. From Councillor Perfect to Councillor Newton, Cabinet Member for Education:

Could the Cabinet Member provide an update on how many SEND children in the Borough are being home-schooled, expanding on how the Council ensures that they have the right access to health services that they would have otherwise received at a school?

Reply

There are 36 children or young people who have a EHCP and are currently receiving tuition at home for example those that are currently unable to access an education provision due to social, emotional and mental health difficulties. The health provision for these learners e.g., speech and language therapy are provided through a personal budget and their provision is monitored by their SEN case officer.

39. From Councillor Catterall to Councillor Read, Cabinet Member for Children's Services:

Will the Cabinet Member for Children's Services please tell us how Bexley matches the current aspirations of the Care Leaver Covenant?

Reply

We are proud of the work of our leaving care service which was recently the first to be awarded an 'Outstanding' judgement from Ofsted as part of our ILACS inspection in February 2023. Although we recognise there is always more that we can do, we believe that we are meeting the Care Leaver Covenant and are working as part of a pan London team to learn and share good practice. The following information gives a brief overview of how we believe we are achieving this and match the aspirations of the five care leaver outcomes identified in the Care Leaver Covenant.

We promote independence skills from as early an age as possible and have trained our social workers, personal advisors and foster carers to support this. We have a range of wraparound services and work with partners to ensure all young people leaving our care are supported for the wider world.

We have a high number of young people, in Education Training and Employment (ETE) compared to other local authorities, currently at over 70%. Our Personal Advisor Team as well as dedicated ETE workers support our young adults in achieving their aspirations.

Children who come into our care have in many cases suffered a range of adverse childhood experiences. We support our care leavers through a range of therapeutic support services, including through forming good trusting relationships with their carers, social workers and personal advisors. We have also developed an internal therapeutic support service to assist our young adults leaving care with a prompt, flexible response to need as it arises.

We work alongside our young adults leaving care to be financially independent and secure. As Corporate Parents we assist on this journey with financial support for university studies, our rent guarantor scheme and financial support to moving to and equipping their first home. There is also a wider range of financial support for bespoke needs and requirements.

40. From Councillor Hall to Councillor Leaf, Cabinet Member for Resources:

Would the Cabinet Member for Resources provide an update on the distribution and use of funds from the fourth round of the Household Support Fund?

Reply

I am grateful to Councillor Hall for the question and for the interest that he and other Members have taken on the use and distribution of the Household Support Fund. The discussions and engagement with Members has been helpful in deciding how to distribute the funds available.

I was pleased to update the Finance and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the Household Support Fund at its meeting on 5 July 2023. I have given assurances to the FCSOSC to continue to keep it updated throughout the year and look forward to doing so at the next meeting. I am happy to receive any specific inquiries or comments about the HSF at any time as well.

41. From Councillor Francis to Councillor Leaf, Cabinet Member for Resources:

Could the Cabinet Member please outline the protocols for the LBOB Twitter account?

Reply

I am grateful for the question. Social media including Twitter is an effective way to communicate important messages quickly to residents, businesses and community groups in the Borough and to convey our messages and information to large audiences.

Our Communications Team work within the guidelines of the Government Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity. The Code is taken into consideration regardless of the media used. The Code is based around seven principles to ensure that all communications activity:

- is lawful
- is cost effective
- is objective
- is even-handed
- is appropriate
- has regard to equality and diversity
- is issued with care during periods of heightened sensitivity.

If Councillor Francis or any other Member has a query about specific communications issued, then they are welcome to contact me with the details.

42. From Councillor Francis to Councillor Baroness O'Neill of Bexley OBE, Leader of the Council:

Would the Leader of the Council confirm when Issue 2 of the Member Enquiries Monthly Update Report will be issued, following the very useful Issue 1 which was sent to Council Members in November 2022?

Reply

I'm told it was the original intention to provide an ME update each month to show the most regular subjects raised by residents. However, during the winter months, after the first ME update had been circulated, there were several matters already being covered in the Members' regular weekly email and this update provided exactly the same information (with the exception of any performance data) as the information intended for inclusion into a monthly report. The weekly emails provided more timely information as it was current news rather than up to a month old, eg waste collection arrangements due to bad weather, the new Housing website etc. However, a quarterly report has been prepared to cover the April – June period to include data on enquiries by Ward, category, volume etc and this will be circulated to all Members shortly.

43. From Councillor Hinkley to Councillor Diment, Cabinet Member for Places:

What representations is the Cabinet Member making regarding the proposed ticket office closures at Erith, Slade Green, Belvedere, Barnehurst, Welling, Bexleyheath, Falconwood and Albany Park?

Reply

We have raised concerns at the closure of ticket offices at most stations operated by Southeastern given that not all customers will feel able or confident in using the machines and not all types of tickets are currently available from ticket machines or on-line booking.

Although Southeastern has assured the Council that staff will be available to assist customers and all types of tickets will become available from machines, I have asked that the new arrangements be monitored and customer feedback sought to identify any remaining issues.

COUNCIL MEETING – 8 NOVEMBER 2023

WRITTEN REPLIES TO COUNCIL QUESTIONS

Responses to questions put during the Council Meeting are available as part of the webcast on the Council's website.

Questions from members of the public

3. From Local resident Robert Bearsby to Councillor Caroline Newton, Cabinet Member for Education:

As parents of a year 6 child at Shenstone School, can you advise us if either planning permission is not granted for the proposed temporary accommodation for our children or works are not finished in time for September 2024 for the current year 6's, what are your plans for the education of our children?

Reply

The decision to install temporary accommodation for pupils that will be moving into Year 7 at Shenstone in September 2024 has had to be taken following a recent unsuccessful tender exercise to appoint a building contractor that would deliver the permanent buildings for this expansion. We are working in partnership with TKAT, the Academy Trust which manages and oversees Shenstone School, on a temporary solution.

Our initial enquiry with the Planners regarding this solution has been positive and there are no obvious concerns for a temporary accommodation. However, like all planning applications, until this planning application is submitted there is no guarantee on approval. Bexley Council holds the statutory responsibility to provide a school place for all of our pupils and if this temporary planning approval could not be secured the Council would work with the school and Trust to look at all options including alternative schools or alternative temporary sites ensuring that working with our partners, the delivery of the provision within their EHCPs is met.

4. From local resident John Browning to Councillor Baroness O'Neill of Bexley OBE, Leader of the Council:

How many of the photographs used in the Conservative political leaflet distributed last August and September were the property of the Council?

Reply – given during the Council Meeting

5. From local resident Pat Styles to Councillor Diment, Cabinet Member for Places:

Why is it that street cleaning is regularly not taking place and why is it public money is being spent on a service that is not being provided or adequately monitored by Bexley Council?

Reply

Street Cleansing is contracted to be carried out at set frequencies:

- Residential Street Cleansing - 3 weekly
- Major Shopping Areas (Bexleyheath, Sidcup, Welling & Erith Town Centres) - continuous daily presence
- Local Shopping Areas - 2 to 6 times per week depending on the classification

- Alleyways and Footpaths - 3 weekly
- Car Parks - weekly

The monitoring of street cleansing is carried out by Highways Technicians on a small number of roads either randomly or where there are known issues. Street cleansing completion confirmations are received 3 times a day from the contractor and sample inspections are carried out as soon as possible after this has been completed.

Where cleansing is found to be below the required standard a rejection will be issued for the contractor to reattend; this will be reinspected and if not carried out or not to the correct standard, a financial penalty will be issued in the form of a contract default.

Cleansing issues are also brought to the attention of the contractor through the weekly contract meeting to raise with the crews, and supervisor / chargehand attendance is often requested to monitor and confirm completion of the works.

Questions from Members of the Council:

4. From Councillor Francis to Councillor Baroness O'Neill of Bexley OBE, Leader of the Council:

Will the Leader of the Council confirm that she is part of the LGA Conservative Group Executive that published the LGA Conservative Group manifesto in September 2023 which calls on the Government to remove caps on Council Tax?

Reply

Yes, but I've always been clear that removal of the cap comes hand in hand with a level playing field and we would have no problem at all if we got the same level of grant funding as neighbouring Labour Councils.

5. From Councillor Ward-Wilson to Councillor Leaf, Cabinet Member for Resources:

Can the Cabinet Member for Resources provide an update on the support being provided to residents with costs of living pressures?

Reply

I am grateful to Councillor Ward-Wilson and other Members for their interest in the Household Support Fund and wider activities that the Council is involved in to help and signpost to help households affected by costs of living pressures.

In line with commitments I have given, at every meeting of the FCS OSC I provide an update on costs of living activities and I know that Councillor Ward-Wilson and other Members have engaged with me on these issues on a more frequent basis. I welcome those discussions and input into decision making over the use of the funds we have available.

On 30 October 2023 I emailed to Members and Substitute Members of FCS OSC an update on the use of funds in Round 4 of the Household Support Fund during the first six months of the financial year and we are currently deciding how to deploy the remaining funds we have any adjustments we need to make.

6. From Councillor Hall to Councillor Leaf, Cabinet Member for Resources:

Can the Cabinet Member for Resources give us the details of action taken to survey for RAAC on properties owned by the Council and the outcome of those surveys?

Reply

There is public interest in the issue of RAAC in public buildings following the issues involving schools and reported on in the summer. At the recent meeting of the FCS OSC on 18 October 2023, an update was provided in the papers, which can be found at the weblink:

<https://democracy.bexley.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=155&MId=29963&Ver=4>

Visual surveys were undertaken on ten properties fitting the RAAC profile. A further intrusive survey was carried out on four of the properties. Seven are clear of RAAC. Two are deemed unlikely to have RAAC, but the presence of asbestos has prevented the certification of being clear of RAAC. This will need specialist attendance with an asbestos contractor to clear this off and this is being organised. One property identified with RAAC, in situ at roof level, but not dangerous. Further assessments are being undertaken to ascertain any remedial works that may be required on this site.

7. From Councillor Ogundayo to Councillor Diment, Cabinet Member for Places:

Could the Cabinet Member state how many tonnes of waste are collected from our streets, from kerbside collection, from Bexley litter bins, from fly tipping and from litter picked from the roads and pavements?

Reply

2022/23 tonnages:

Kerbside Residual Waste Collections 37,485.56 tonnes

Street Cleansing Overall Tonnages 1,383.22 tonnes of which 721.5 tonnes is litter generated from scheduled cleansing activities and litter bins.

Remaining 661.72 tonnes is street cleansing detritus.

Flytipping 335.10 tonnes (56 tonne of which via tipper)

8. From Councillor Hinkley to Councillor Diment, Cabinet Member for Places:

Could the Cabinet Member confirm if we have made representations to Kent County Council in relation to the potential closure of the Civic Amenity site at Dartford Heath?

Reply

The Council has not made representations to KCC about this matter.

9. From Councillor Curtois to Councillor Munur, Cabinet Member for Growth:

Can the Cabinet Member for Growth update us on the progress of the Welling Banking Hub?

Reply

Good progress has been made since the Hub was announced and premises secured. Planning permission was required at the premises (the former Barclays Bank branch) to enable relocation of external air conditioning units. Some final technical detail is being provided and The Banking Hub hope to open before Christmas.

10. From Councillor Carew to Councillor Seymour, Cabinet Member for Adults' Services:

Could the Cabinet Member for Adults' Services outline the aims of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy?

Reply

The overall aim of delivering the strategy is to improve the health and wellbeing of all Bexley residents, with a clear focus on reducing local health inequalities.

Determined by local need and data, the four key health and wellbeing priorities that the strategy focuses on are:

- **Priority 1:** Ageing Well (including frailty and dementia)
- **Priority 2:** Mental Health and Wellbeing
- **Priority 3:** Obesity
- **Priority 4:** Children and Young People

Under each priority area there are specific strategic aims, and an action plan is being developed with partners from across the local public sector partnership to put words into action.

11. From Councillor Asunramu to Councillor Newton, Cabinet Member for Education:

Could you please update us on when we will receive the results of the outstanding schools Council commissioned surveys of which schools have RAAC present?

Reply

The Leader of the Council, within her report to the Council Meeting on 8 November 2023 has confirmed that no RAAC has been found in any of the education establishments where the Council undertook independent specialist surveys.

This announcement has been made following the recent completion of the surveys that the Council undertook on 17 of our maintained and voluntary aided schools together with the Learning and Enterprise College Bexley (LECB)

For all other schools, as these are academies, any survey work has and is falling to the DfE who we are closely liaising with to understand any concerns that have or may arise on this matter. Currently the only school or public building within Bexley where there is a confirmed case of RAAC is Cleeve Park School which has resulted in them having to close a small part of their school. The school is receiving support from the DfE on the temporary classrooms and safety work required.

12. From Councillor Ferguson to Councillor Diment, Cabinet Member for Places:

Considering Bexley's fly-tipping and litter problem, will the Council return all bins removed from areas around the Borough for non-financial reasons separate to the funding received for a new allocation of bins?

Reply

There are currently 680 street litter bins across the Borough in town centres and on residential streets. The Council is making a capital investment of £232K in the Borough's litter bin infrastructure as part of a forthcoming litter bin refresh and modernisation project.

New locations for litter bins are being determined based on new criteria developed in partnership with the street cleansing contractor and other stakeholders. Litter bins will be sited in areas where they will be most effective such as high pedestrian footfall areas and litter hot spots. We have asked elected Members to provide suggested sites in their wards and we will consider these locations together with those that will be determined by officers and the contractor.

13. From Councillor Bacon to Councillor Diment, Cabinet Member for Places:

Can the Cabinet Member for Places advise the levels of funding received for transport schemes from the Mayor of London?

Reply

The Council has secured £1.644m of transport funding from the Mayor of London in the current financial year (2023/2024).

14. From Councillor O'Hare to Councillor Gower MBE, Cabinet Member for Communities and Housing:

Could the Cabinet Member update us on the action the Council and partners have taken to address crime and disorder issues around Abbey Wood station?

Reply

The Council's Community Safety Team led a co-ordinated response to address the complex issues and allow highways surveys to be undertaken sooner than planned. Cross-council and partner working included:

- work with the individuals to move on and seek housing support
- drug and alcohol intervention work
- Police 'Design Out Crime' advice
- Use of Anti-Social Behaviour laws to seek a Closure Order
- A clean-up operation of the site
- Police engagement and enforcement

The people that were rough sleeping were moved on, at the time, without a need for enforcement. However, a closure notice was issued on 20th September and within 48 hours legal and community safety presented at Bromley magistrates court and were successful in obtaining a 3-month closure order. This ensured the location was protected whilst work was carried out.

Whilst the closure was implemented, the Council and associated contractors carried out a mass clean-up of the area and made environmental changes to the location. Long term plans for the location are being informed by this experience.

Support services were offered to the individuals frequenting the location for substance misuse and housing advice throughout. The outcome was a cleaner, safer neighbourhood and reports were received from residents thanking the Council for the work and stating the difference it has made to their quality of life.

15. From Councillor Day to Councillor Seymour, Cabinet Member for Adults' Services:

Could the Cabinet Member advise how sure he is that the Government will provide further funding to Bexley in November once our discharge funds are exhausted?

Reply

- To date, there has been no announcement from the Department for Health and Social Care as to any additional funding to support safe discharge from hospital over the winter period.
- For the financial year 2023/24 Bexley Council has received £1.9m in discharge funding grant from DHSC. An additional £1.4m workforce grant was received in August of this year, which included support for discharge as one of the purposes of the funding and we have allocated £700k of the grant to that purpose, bringing the 23/24 total to £2.6m. In the financial year 2022/23 the Council received £4.2m in Discharge Funding from DHSC including a contribution from the South East London Integrated Care Board as supplementary funding to support discharge. The SEL ICB has so far not offered any funding for 2023/24. Consequently, the total available funding for 2023/24 is lower by £1.6m therefore significantly lower than the available funding for 2022/23.
- Discharge demand, however, has not abated and we continue to see all of our local hospitals facing high levels of activity at A&E departments, leading to many needing to be admitted for treatment and a consequent pressure to discharge to ensure bed spaces are available. This has been exacerbated by Industrial Action by medics and other health professionals.
- I am pleased to be able to report that our hospitals have praised our social care teams for their fantastic response and support, ensuring that our residents are discharged timely and safely to appropriate accommodation, usually back to their own home with a package of care. But of course, quicker discharge from hospital means that people move more quickly to social care support and inevitably are discharged with higher support needs, leading to cost pressures
- We have undertaken careful analysis of the discharge grant allocation against the actual cost of additional discharge activity and it is clear that the funding received does not cover the projected costs over the whole year. Indeed, our projections show that the funding will have been depleted by the end of November. Through the good offices of the Leader of the Council, we have been able to make direct representation to Helen Whately, the Care Minister and her senior civil servants and we have pressed the case for additional winter funding, both for Bexley and more generally for adult social care. We await the outcome of those representations.
- In addition our officers, along with their counterparts in the other South East London boroughs, have provided a similar analysis to South East London ICB to seek financial support similar to the support provided last year, whilst recognising that the ICB is itself facing financial challenges. The Chief Finance Officer of the ICB has agreed to meet with our officers to consider options in the round.
- Given the likelihood that we will run out of discharge grant, we have had to take immediate actions to manage the money we have. This has included standing down the most expensive pathways, such as 24hr 1:1 enhanced support to discharge home and reducing the number of contracted 'discharge-to-assess' beds in nursing homes from 15 at the beginning of the year to 7 currently. Beyond that, if the money runs out, we will have to return to pre-discharge funding levels of activity, which will inevitably mean a slowdown in discharges. Already we have reverted to assessing people in hospital if their long-term care needs are likely to mean permanent residential care. As a financially responsible Council, we cannot spend money we do not have.
- Our Director for Adult Social Care, Mr Rowbotham, has written to the Chief Executives of Valley Hospital and Lewisham and Greenwich NHS Trust to advise that current discharge levels are unlikely to be sustained without further funding.

16. From Councillor Day to Councillor Diment, Cabinet Member for Places:

Could the Cabinet Member please provide an update on the steps being taken by the Council with key stakeholders, to address the disgraceful illegal fly tipping at Ray Lamb Way?

Reply

Council officers have been working on solutions to this issue in collaboration with the landowners and local stakeholders. Numerous options including installation of a gatehouse were not considered to be viable, and therefore we are currently working on a solution involving CCTV and natural barriers.

We have recently received proposals for installation and maintenance of high-quality numberplate recognition CCTV cameras and are currently assessing the viability of this option. Alongside this proposal, we are also supporting the landowners with a bid for funding from Defra for improvements to the infrastructure of the area. Letters of support for this application have been provided by local businesses and the Leader of the Council.

If this funding bid is successful, the current plans are for realignment of the ditches and installation of a natural barrier such as an established hedgerow to prevent access by fly-tippers. New culverts have also been proposed to improve the flow of water.

17. From Councillor Chris Taylor to Councillor Seymour, Cabinet Member for Adults' Services:

Would the Cabinet Member for Adults' Services update us on the recent 'Bexley on your Radar Event'?

Reply

28th September 2023 saw our second 'Radar' event for those aged 16 years to 25 years. 35 providers of supported living, day opportunities, residential care, employment support, health and education and college courses were represented. Young people and their parents and carers could visit eye catching stalls and talk to the friendly staff. This year the event took place at Danson Youth Centre. The event was hosted by ASC who were on hand to provide personal advice to individuals and their families. We still are in the process of evaluating the event but these are some of the comments received from the 40 – 50 attendees -

- *Excellent event*
- *Very helpful, before visiting the event I always felt overwhelmed but I now have clarity*
- *I enjoyed the information and also experience for help, for my son*
- *Good Information and more helpful things that I am taking home*
- *Very useful information and friendly desk staff*

18. From Councillor Reader to Councillor Munur, Cabinet Member for Growth:

Can the Cabinet Member for Growth lay out the plans for the £1.3m secured from the UKSPF to support local businesses?

Reply

The table below describes the expenditure of the Supporting Local Business element of the UKSPF

Supporting Local Business (SLB) Project Name	Overall Project Budget
Business support delivered on group basis via webinars and face to face	£100,000
Match funded grants for licensing/qualification to upskill staff	£25,000
Employed Business Advisor to provide bespoke 121 advice	£115,000
Retail & Hospitality sector advice service	£75,000
Start-up support programme within incubator space	£25,000
Business Survey	£8,287
TOTAL	£348,287

19. From Councillor Francis to Councillor Baroness O'Neill of Bexley OBE, Leader of the Council:

Will the Leader of the Council tell us whether she believes the Council should ask the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities to commission an update of their "Local Government Finance Review – London Borough of Bexley" report of December 2021, to allow independent assessment on whether the Council has successfully implemented the recommendations within the report?

Reply

Given the first key finding of the report states 'The political leadership of the Council has demonstrated that it understands the financial challenges facing the organisation and their commitment to managing the medium-term financial resilience of the organisation' I am sure that Members will be well placed to review progress and, in addition to our own General Purposes/Audit team, we know that our external auditors will also be tracking our delivery.

20. From Councillor Gill to Councillor Diment, Cabinet Member for Places:

Could the Cabinet Member please state the progress to introducing a trial of 1-hour free parking in Mill Road Car Park, Northumberland Heath?

Reply

Officers are in the process of reviewing all parking tariffs to ensure the correct tariff and tariff sets are in place.

Officers are also considering the impact any changes would have on the local area and any possible displacement issues. Considerations include why a car park might be recommended for 1 hour's free parking over others within the Borough, would there be displacement issues from other car parks or on street parking to the free car park, causing a problem with demand on the number of parking spaces at this facility.

The final factor to consider is the income generated from parking in car parks and the running costs that need to be covered. Although car parks generate an income to the Council from which any profit is invested back into the road network, there are running costs that need to be covered. Costs such as electricity rates, signs and lines maintenance and business rates would also still need to be covered with the reduced income to the Council.

21. From Councillor Slaughter to Councillor Diment, Cabinet Member for Places:

Would the Cabinet Member for Places tell us what happens to each of the recycling waste streams collected from homes in Bexley?

Reply

1. Non-recyclable waste collected in the green bins is taken to the incinerator in Belvedere for disposal. The incinerator turns the Borough's waste into energy to generate electricity and recovers the by-products from the energy from waste process to produce aggregate and construction materials. It also diverts waste from landfill (saving c.200kg of carbon dioxide equivalent per tonne of waste diverted).
2. Food Waste is processed at a Biogen anaerobic digestion plant in Hertfordshire. The material is broken down in the absence of oxygen in a sealed, oxygen-free tank called an anaerobic digester. The biogas naturally created in the sealed tanks is used as a fuel in a CHP (combined heat and power) unit to generate renewable energy i.e. electricity and heat. What's left from the process is a nutrient rich biofertiliser which is pasteurised to kill any pathogens and then stored in large covered tanks ready to be applied twice a year on farmland in place of fossil fuel derived fertilisers.
3. Paper/cardboard – This material is taken to Palm Paper Recycling Ltd in Norfolk for processing and is recycled into different paper products such as newsprint and corrugated paper and other packaging products.
4. Plastic/Cans/Glass- This material up until recently was being taken to a materials recycling facility (MRF) in Hertfordshire. A MRF is a specialized plant that receives, separates and prepares recyclable materials for marketing to end-user manufacturers. On 1st September the Council started a contract with a MRF within the Boundary of Bexley Borough. The N+P contract will bring reductions in transport costs and carbon emissions and enable the Council to receive higher prices for the different types of plastic which will reduce the overall cost per tonne of the material going forward.
5. Garden Waste – This material is taken to a Biogen composting site in Swanley and is delivered directly by the Council's fleet of collection vehicles. The material is recycled through windrow composting where the material can break down in the presence of oxygen. The end product is compost that can be applied in a range of end uses, within gardens, on brownfield sites, landscaping and full scale agriculture.

22. From Councillor Reader to Councillor Diment, Cabinet Member for Places:

Can the Cabinet Member for Places update Members on progress with the 2023/24 road maintenance programme?

Reply

Bexley has set aside £3.9m Capital Funding for the rolling programme of road and footway resurfacing and officers have been working through the priority list of roads needing treatment.

So far 19 roads have already been treated (£1,27m), 4 roads are being treated (£250k), and 5 more are already programmed to be treated this year (£430k). In addition, large patches of road have been treated to resolve very localised issues, with £489k worth of work to date and an additional £750k expected to be completed by the end of the year. (Total: £3.19m)

There are a few schemes on hold (£473k) pending utility works to be done before the new surface is laid, and a reserve list is held to the value of around £1.45m which will start to be

drawn down to treat as many roads as possible.

23. From Councillor Hinkley to Councillor Baroness O'Neill of Bexley OBE, Leader of the Council:

Will the Leader of the Council confirm how many individuals elected as a London Borough of Bexley Councillor since May 2018 does she believe have been issued a fixed penalty notice for breaches of Covid-19 regulations?

Reply

I would not have that information.

24. From Councillor Francis to Councillor Leaf, Cabinet Member for Resources:

Will the Cabinet Member confirm which schemes within the current capital programme are anticipated to experience overspends?

Reply

Details of the Capital Programme and expenditure on schemes are published as part of the Budget Monitoring, which is regularly circulated to Members and available for debate and discussion at Public Cabinet. As colleagues know, scrutiny is something that should happen 24/7 and if Councillor Francis or other Members have questions or enquiries about specific schemes and projects in the Capital Programme they are welcome to contact me and the relevant Cabinet Member.

On the wider issue of Budget Monitoring, I am taking an interest in the ongoing work of the FCS OSC Sub-Group on this and looking forward to their report and recommendations.

25. From Councillor Jackson to Councillor Diment, Cabinet Member for Places:

Will the Cabinet Member for Places update Members on the latest performance of the waste collection service?

Reply

Total number of missed collections:

The overall number of missed bins has decreased by over 50% since the beginning of the contract and is currently at 144 per 100,000 collections in September 23. The monthly target for missed bins for 2023 is 70 per 100,000 collections.

Bin placement:

A bin placement service standard document with visuals has been issued to Countrystyle and they have circulated to staff. The new service standard document will provide more clarity on the standards expected from Countrystyle's staff.

26. From Councillor Jackson to Councillor Diment, Cabinet Member for Places:

Can the Cabinet Member for Places tell us what progress is being made in the roll-out programme for new street waste bins?

Reply

The Environmental Services Team are in a process of procuring the litter bins for this project. The full implementation of the project from the delivery to the installation will be delivered in stages and will take up to 18 months.

27. From Councillor Borella to Councillor Baroness O'Neill of Bexley OBE, Leader of the Council:

Will the Leader of the Council confirm which schemes within the current capital programme have experienced tender processes where a contractor was unable to be appointed and the reasons for this?

Reply

The Riverside Gardens project was procured during 2022 and we were unable to award as all bids were over budget. However, this project was re-procured on a modified specification this year and we are currently on the cusp of awarding contract.

28. From Councillor Francis to Councillor Leaf, Cabinet Member for Resources:

Will the Cabinet Member confirm how many residents have requested to opt out of Council Tax reminders received by text message and email?

Reply

I am grateful for the question, which follows discussions on this matter at recent FCS OSC meetings. The reminders have been introduced in an attempt to reduce the risk of direct debit failures and this is a process that is used by other organisations.

There has been a small reduction in the monthly DD failure rate since implementation, which suggests the messaging is likely having some impact. August DD failure rate was 1.13% (compared to 1.30% in 2022) and September failure rate was 1.26% (compared to 1.39% in 2022). Although the change looks relatively small, the additional postage costs involved when a DD fails (letter must be issued to residents to advise of the rejection) and the associated manual administrative tasks needed on a failed DD mean that any improvement is welcomed. This messaging service is being provided at no additional cost to the Council.

Up to 31st October 2023, 9 residents have contacted to request they no longer receive these messages. To put this into context, in October 2023, a total of 51,740 residents received an email or text, which represents 68% of the total residents who pay by Direct Debit. Less than 0.02% of residents have requested that the messages be stopped for their account. We continue to keep this measure under review and I welcome feedback on it.

29. From Councillor Moore to Councillor Read, Cabinet Member for Children's Services:

Will the Cabinet Member for Children's Services please update us on Bexley's recent Corporate Parenting Week?

Reply

This year the Council marked its 6th annual corporate parenting week from 9th October to 13th October. The launch and activities that followed continue to demonstrate the Council's deep commitment to children in our care, and young adults leaving our care.

As Corporate Parents, it is the collective responsibility of Bexley and its partner agencies to provide support, care and protection for children who are in our care as well as those young adults leaving our care. The week aimed to raise awareness of this, and created opportunities for officers, Councillors, partner agencies and local business to work together to raise awareness and gather additional support.

Each year, Children's Services aim to develop Corporate Parenting Week in new and meaningful ways with our support. Some of the achievements from this year's week include:

- Launching the week with a newly appointed Young Director, Helal Alkozai, who is a Bexley young adult leaving our care, and in keeping with our drive to promote equality and diversity – also represents our community of young people seeking asylum in the UK following experience of war and trauma in their home countries. Helal is our first male appointee, with previous young directors having been predominantly female or non-binary. Helal is proving to be a great role model for our young people, and he has represented Bexley throughout corporate parenting week in a range of activities.
- Targeted Youth provided additional support this year to help deliver a football event with a difference, bringing together young people in our care with key adults from social care, targeted youth and key workers from some of our residential care providers. This was about promoting positive relationships between young people and adults who support them, developed on pitch in an inclusive 5-a-side match, and followed with a special bubble football activity which created lots of laughter, and shaped positive memories. The player of the match, Joanne Jobson was superb, playing a quick, fearless and defensive game amidst predominantly male players.
- I was pleased to see the annual awards event for children in our care take place with a great turn out of children and their carers, as well as good attendance from officers and Councillors. The virtual school were challenged to deliver a cost neutral event, and this meant significant networking with sponsors and a range of companies who offered services for free or donated goods, with some of these donations facilitated by Councillors. This has been a real success, with the event costs (£6,750) fully covered by sponsorship, donations and in-kind support, and a small contribution of £150 met through Pupil Premium Plus Grant funding.

The various events, and daily stall in the Atrium has helped widely promote our corporate parenting priorities and gathered pledges of support in relation to fostering, participation activities, independent visiting and raised awareness of needs during the Christmas season which will soon be upon us, and where we want our children in care and young adults leaving our care to benefit from additional support.

30. From Councillor Moore to Councillor Read, Cabinet Member for Children's Services:

Will the Cabinet Member for Children's Services please tell us the latest situation regarding foster carer recruitment?

Reply

We currently have 73 fostering households, many of whom will be caring for more than one young person and 23 Host and Support households. Our Host and Support carers provide support to our young people aged 16 to 25 with developing independence skills to prepare them for the transition to independent living. This is a preferred provision given that our young people can remain in a family home environment, and we are able to maintain oversight of these placements.

Since the establishment of a dedicated Fostering Recruitment and Assessment Team in October 2021, there has been a notable improvement in the recruitment of foster carers. There is a streamlined process in place to ensure enquiries are responded to efficiently, that the assessment process is seamless and that all applicants from enquiry to approval are kept within a 6-month timeframe. The quality and timeliness of the assessments has significantly improved.

Our Fostering Together initiative has proved a real asset in both recruitment and retention by demonstrating our continued commitment to wrap around support for our foster carers.

Since 1 April 2023, we have recruited 5 fostering households and 7 Host and Support providers. By end of year (March 2024) we are expecting to have recruited a further 7 fostering households and 3 Host and Support Providers. I am pleased to say that this is an improvement to the previous two years when Covid negatively impacted recruitment.

But, we are determined to increase further our in-house provision and are currently undertaking an extensive recruitment campaign to ensure that we continue to increase the number of our inhouse foster carers. The recruitment activities we are undertaking include the increased use of social media and our monthly fostering newsletter which is reaching approximately 700 people.

Our hard working and dedicated Fostering Recruitment team has also been spending a vast amount of time out in the community, building relationships and ensuring that Bexley Fostering is very visible, and they have developed very positive relationships with church communities who are supporting us with their own advertising activities and are allowing us to use their venues for information events, coffee mornings and other recruitment events.

Finally, we are currently undertaking a review of the Fostering allowances with a view of ensuring we are in line with other Local Authorities. This will not only ensure that we continue to retain our foster carers but will also attract new ones.

31. From Councillor Ball to Councillor Diment, Cabinet Member for Places:

Could the Cabinet Member update us on the spending this financial year 23/24 on pothole repairs?

Reply

Potholes are not recorded separately from other highway defects, but they are the most common form of minor repair to our carriageways.

If we look at these data for minor carriageway repairs between April and September, we have made 263 repairs (up 83 repairs / up 46% on the same period last year) either as an individual repair or as a larger area picking up a cluster of defects. Including all the traffic controls required to facilitate these works, we have spent £448k (down £130k / down 23% on the same period last year).

32. From Councillor Ball to Councillor Diment, Cabinet Member for Places:

Could the Cabinet Member outline the monitoring of the weed spraying schedule for the Borough?

Reply

Weed spraying is carried out as 3 applications per year (usually commencing in April, June and September).

Completions are received when each of the 18 cells has been attended to which are forwarded to Highways Technicians to monitor the effectiveness of the weed spraying whilst carrying out

their other duties. Weeds should show evidence of dieback 7-14 days following application with dead weed being removed on the next scheduled 3 weekly cleansing cycle. For areas not showing dieback the contractor is reinstructed to re-attend up to 4 weeks after application.

33. From Councillor O'Hare to Councillor Read, Cabinet Member for Children's Services:

Will the Cabinet Member for Children's Services please tell us how the current number of children in the care of Bexley compares with this time last year?

Reply

Bexley has a lower rate of children in our care than both England and statutory neighbours, this remains the case despite increasing pressures on Children's Social Care following the Covid pandemic. Our Children's Services have a relentless focus on prevention and ensuring that families are supported to be able to care for their children. Where this is not possible within the immediate family to look at support within their extended family. Of course, this is not always possible and in such circumstances we have a strong community of dedicated foster carers who are our first call for support to allow children to remain in their local community and in a family environment. In saying this we still need more foster carers and are actively recruiting. As at October 2022 there were 263 children and as at 1st November 2023 there were 277 children in our care.

34. From Councillor Chris Taylor to Councillor Gower MBE, Cabinet Member for Communities and Housing:

Given the events in Israel and Gaza, can the Cabinet Member reassure residents of the Council's support at this time - both in terms of community cohesion and reporting of Hate Crimes?

Reply

Nationally there has been and increase in antisemitism and Islamophobia over the last three weeks. The Community Security Trust has recorded the highest ever number of antisemitic incidents across this 17-day period. However, locally in Bexley we have not experienced the same significant rise in hate crime reports * or any concerning events. We have engaged with faith leaders and the Council has sent communications offering reassurance and information about specific support available in the event of Islamophobic and anti-Semitic abuse. Information about supporting victims of hate crime has been dispersed to the Bexley Hate Crime Working Group and faith groups, namely Tell MAMA (leading anti-Muslim hate charity) and Community Security Trust (leading anti-Semitic hate charity), as well as an offer of resources. The Bexley Community Safety Partnership has shared on social media a message signposting specialist support services for victims of anti-faith hate crimes.

The Council has also sent a reminder of Stop Hate UK service to internal staff and members. The service Stop Hate UK has been recommissioned by the Council for a second year and is available 24/7 to support victims of hate and hate crime, and Stop Hate UK have established connections with local services so they are able to directly refer to further support, such as the Victim Support Bobby Van for home security improvements. Our Community Safety Team is also regularly in touch with the interfaith forum offering training and guidance on reporting and tackling Hate Crime. The Interfaith Forum held its awards ceremony on 15th November. I thank the forum for their work on this and this was a great occasion to celebrate our community togetherness in Bexley.

*As at 27 October 2023

35. From Councillor Perfect to Councillor Leaf, Cabinet Member for Resources:

Could you outline what surveys have been undertaken to determine if any of the buildings owned by the Council have been affected by RAAC?

Reply

There is public interest in the issue of RAAC in public buildings following the issues involving schools and reported on in the summer. At the recent meeting of the FCS OSC on 18 October 2023 an update was provided in the papers, which can be found at the weblink:

<https://democracy.bexley.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=155&MId=29963&Ver=4>

Visual surveys were undertaken on ten properties fitting the RAAC profile. A further intrusive survey was carried out on four of the properties. Seven are clear of RAAC.

Two are deemed unlikely to have RAAC, but the presence of asbestos has prevented the certification of being clear of RAAC. This will need specialist attendance with an asbestos contractor to clear this off and this is being organised.

One property identified with RAAC, in situ at roof level, but not dangerous. Further assessments are being undertaken to ascertain any remedial works that may be required on this site.

36. From Councillor Asunramu to Councillor Newton, Cabinet Member for Education:

Could the Cabinet Member tell us the latest figures we have for attendance across the Borough for each level of education (primary, secondary)?

Reply

The latest available figures are for the 22/23 academic year.

Bexley – Secondary – 91.6%, Primary – 93.7%, Special – 87.2%, PRU – 69.8%

National – Secondary – 93.7%, Primary – 91.2%, Special – 86.6%, PRU – 60.2%

We are engaging with DfE attendance lead. Education Welfare Service are working directly with schools providing advice to schools and following legal routes where necessary to ensure attendance rates are improved. Four Secondary Schools, which are all Academies, do not commission the Bexley Education Welfare Service therefore it can be challenging for the Council to have an impact on the attendance rates in these schools.

The Council continues to look at ways to strengthen this area of work and these include a new subgroup within the Strategic Education Partnership looking at behaviour, safeguarding and attendance issues and a re-structure within the Education Service which will further ensure closer and rigorous working within the team on this matter.

37. From Councillor Amaning to Councillor Newton, Cabinet Member for Education:

Could you please outline what the Council is doing to support teachers and ensure that there is no child with undiagnosed SEN within our schools?

Reply

To support our schools, we have rolled out the Quality First Teaching (QFT) and SEN support Toolkit, with the three toolkits, that our schools and settings have received training on, targeting our Early Years, School Age and Post 16 pupils. The toolkit is designed to guide teachers and support staff to meet the needs of the children within their class/school. It is broken down into

different areas of SEND need and lists strategies that may be used to meet these needs taking class teachers through a process of applying strategies to meet the needs of the child or young person, to completing an early identification of need to start discussions with the SENCo and through to completing an SEN Support plan involving parent/carer, the child and key school staff. Schools have also been provided with pre-recorded training on the use of the toolkit, to share with any new staff as they start, with additional training opportunities provided periodically to our schools.

In addition to the toolkit, officers have regular early intervention planning meetings with schools where a multi-disciplinary team works with them to problem solve, look at strategies and advise on the next steps they should take to assist their pupils, with recommendations for next steps. Further work also takes place to upskill SENCo's to allow them to take these skills back into the school and disseminate to staff. This includes a SENCo mentoring programme, termly SENCo forums and other specific training opportunities.

38. From Councillor Asunramu to Councillor Read, Cabinet Member for Children's Services:

Could the Cabinet Member state the number of care experienced children and young people we currently have in the Criminal Justice System?

Reply

The Youth Justice Service currently works with 5 children who are in our care as well as one care leaver. In addition, the service supports 2 children who are in the care of other local authorities placed in Bexley.

39. From Councillor Perfect to Councillor Newton, Cabinet Member for Education:

Could you please update us on the current exclusion rates within the Borough and outline the work the Council is doing to eradicate those numbers and move towards becoming a no exclusions Borough?

Reply

There have been 19 permanent exclusions so far this academic year with the main reason being continuous disruptive behaviour. There have been 474 suspensions (305 -Secondary, 36- Primary, 33 – Special /PRU). The main reason for suspension is also continuous disruptive behaviour. The Local Authority have restructured the inclusion team to build capacity so that more direct support can be provided to schools. A meeting is due to be convened with secondary head teachers to address challenges and focus on approaches to continue to deliver the work towards the no need to exclude ambition.

40. From Councillor Asunramu to Councillor Read, Cabinet Member for Children's Services:

Can we get an update on how the Council is implementing the recommendations and initiatives in the Government's latest Children's Social Care Implementation Strategy?

Reply

As yet there have been no recommendations made by the Government. However, we are following the progress of the Implementation Group and will review any recommendations and apply them when made.

41. From Councillor Ferguson to Councillor Leaf, Cabinet Member for Resources:

As Bexley already has a £7m overspend which looks set to continue rising, what is the projected figure by the end of the financial year and how will it be addressed?

Reply

I am grateful for the question and welcome the interest taken in the Budget Monitoring Reports. Budget Monitoring Reports are circulated to Members regularly and are also available for debate and discussion at Public Cabinet. Moreover, in line with our 24/7 approach to scrutiny, Members are welcome to contact me and the relevant Cabinet Member at any time about respective budget lines and services. These reports analyse current and expected spend in the respective service areas along with other assumptions, and the report presents a forecast position based on this. Forecasts do vary throughout the year for various reasons, which are covered in the reports. Many other local authorities in London and across the country are also forecasting overspend positions for the current financial year.

On the wider issue of Budget Monitoring, I am taking an interest in the ongoing work of the FCS OSC Sub-Group on this and looking forward to their report and recommendations.

42. From Councillor Ferguson to Councillor Diment, Cabinet Member for Places:

With Climate Change having more of an effect, what measures does Bexley have in place for dealing with extreme weather conditions and how they affect residents?

Reply

To address the issues the Council has in place the following:

Flood Plan: This highlights all of the at risk areas within the Borough and sets out response procedures.

Severe Weather Plan: This plan covers extreme weather conditions, and the Council's operational response.

We also have a communications strategy which responds to the different levels of alert, thereby warning and informing our residents of any potential issues and provides advice as required.

We also have a 24 hour rota to respond to any operational emergencies should they occur without prior warning.

43. From Councillor Day to Councillor Gower MBE, Cabinet Member for Communities and Housing:

Please confirm whether Bexley Council Homeless Service has already or will be imminently taking part in this year's rough sleeper count which is carried out by Councils across London to collect an annual picture of rough sleeping in each borough?

Reply

Yes, Bexley Council will take part in this year's rough sleeper count from the night of 23rd November to the morning of 24th November. That is the date agreed with DLUHC and Homeless Link for the street count to take place on a single night in south-east London.

44. From Councillor Day to Councillor Gower MBE, Cabinet Member for Communities and Housing:

Could the Cabinet Member join me in placing on the record the dissatisfaction at the length of time taken by some of the Borough's largest housing providers to respond to enquiries or respond to residents' urgent housing issues?

Reply

Along with all Members, I expect our local housing providers to deal promptly and efficiently with issues raised by their tenants and I regularly highlight cases of concern to them in my capacity as Cabinet Member. Performance is also discussed at the Strategic Housing Board which meets four times a year. Tenant satisfaction should be at the heart of all they do and I am pleased the government has taken new legislative action to hold them to account.

45. From Councillor Borella to Councillor Baroness O'Neill of Bexley OBE, Leader of the Council:

What assessment has been made on the Council's financial position if Kent County Council use a Sec114 notice which will effectively be declaring municipal bankruptcy?

Reply

I am not aware that Kent CC have issued a S114 notice.

46. From Councillor Borella to Councillor Leaf, Cabinet Member for Resources:

With the latest budget monitoring report showing that £2.4m of the expected £5.5m from the 2022 deep dive mitigations will not be delivered, what is the impact on the Council's financial position?

Reply

I am grateful for the question and welcome the interest taken in the Budget Monitoring Reports. Councillor Borella is aware that the financial position we are in and our reserves position is stronger than it would be under Labour, for all the reasons I have given in previous exchanges.

Details of the variations in forecast from budget are presented in the Budget Monitoring Reports. As Councillor Borella is aware, there are processes in place to monitor spending and the cumulative impacts of overspends and underspends across various budget lines are considered corporately and the net position is resolved in accordance with our financial procedures. We set aside corporate contingency to be utilised if necessary and we also hold reserves should they be required to cover overspends. This is detailed in the Budget Monitoring Reports and Councillor Borella or any other Member is welcome to raise queries directly with me and the relevant Cabinet Member if there are specific questions about budget lines and deep dive mitigations, in line with our 24/7 approach to scrutiny.

On the wider issue of Budget Monitoring, I am taking an interest in the ongoing work of the FCS OSC Sub-Group on this and looking forward to their report and recommendations.

47. From Councillor Borella to Councillor Gower MBE, Cabinet Member for Communities and Housing:

With the existing selective licensing area expiring on 31 August, what is the reason for the for much delayed selective licensing consultation process?

Reply

The selective licensing scheme documents have been drafted and checked over by legal. They were also reviewed by counsel to ensure that they could stand up to scrutiny and any challenge. The consultation documents will be available on the website for people to review. Before they can be added to the website the documents need to be made accessible and this has taken longer than expected. We anticipate that the consultation will start at some point this month or early December and will run for a minimum of 10 weeks.

48. From Councillor Amaning to Councillor Seymour, Cabinet Member for Adults' Services:

Could the Cabinet Member comment if there is a considered and sensitive way that data on people taking their life could be reported to the relevant authorities to aid a reduction in suicide and self-harm?

Reply

Thrive LDN is the regional lead for suicide prevention in London on behalf of NHS England. They have developed a real-time surveillance system which the Council, Police, and other public services update to identify and track suspected and confirmed suicides. The Bexley Public Health Team access and use this information to inform local suicide audits and to monitor trends over time. This information is shared in an appropriate way at the Bexley Suicide Prevention Partnership.

The Public Health Team also monitor safeguarding adult referrals and local intelligence from partners to ensure there is a full picture on the number of suicides in the Borough.

49. From Councillor Amaning to Councillor Gower MBE, Cabinet Member for Communities and Housing:

Could the Cabinet Member confirm what discussions have been had with the Bexley Borough Superintendent on practicing effective stop and search in Bexley that does not discriminate unfairly against young black boys?

Reply

The Council is in continuous discussions with the Bexley Borough Superintendent and his senior management team about practicing effective 'Stop and Search' in Bexley that does not discriminate.

We have discussed Baroness Casey's call for a 'fundamental reset' of the use of Stop and Search and the subsequent actions set out in the New Met for London plan; including the development of a Stop and Search Charter.

Whilst the consultation phase of the Charter has now concluded, Superintendent Corbin has informed me that there will be further opportunities for engagement and approval by community representatives before it is formally adopted.

One of the themes coming out of this consultation has been the disproportionate use of 'Stop and Search' directed at people who are Black and Asian. In fact, the Met's statistics for Bexley confirm that you are three times more likely to be stopped and searched if you are Black (2.9 times)* or Asian (3.1)*. Superintendent Corbin has informed us that he expects the new Charter to focus heavily on disproportionate use of 'Stop and Search' being directed at individuals who are Black and Asian.

There has been some good work achieved by the Overview and Community Sub Group looking into disproportionality in the Youth Justice System, but it is also a topic for discussion with Police colleagues at Youth Justice Board and the Community Safety Partnership. Performance relating

to 'Stop and Search' is continually monitored and shared at the Community Safety Partnership quarterly, for which I am Chairman. This includes issues relating to disproportionality.

A key priority locally for Superintendent Corbin is to make sure young people are better represented at the local Stop and Search Panel.

The other priority, given that Bexley's positive outcome rate is at 24.9%*, is to improve Bexley Police's precision. Superintendent Corbin is very clear that supervisors have a duty under the Codes of Practice to ensure that officers conduct 'Stop and Search' lawfully and fairly.

On a positive note, the Southeast BCU has a very effective Stop and Search workshop that we as a partnership offer to local youth settings. We have most recently had interest from Christ the King college. The workshop has two key outcomes, to inform young people of their rights and also, to help them better understand police decision making and consequences in real time.

We continue to liaise regularly about the issue and the development of the Stop and Search Charter.

**Met Data as of August 2023*

50. From Councillor Amaning to Councillor Seymour, Cabinet Member for Adults' Services:

Has the Council made an assessment on the effect that the closure of the BCU life skills centre in Bexleyheath will have on residents with mental health issues?

Reply

A Mental Health Commissioner met with a representative from BCU shortly after receiving this information to discuss the situation and gather information to understand the impact of closure and any associated risks. It was established that an intended closure date for the service had been set for 31st August 2023, subject to a final decision from their board members. At that time approximately 20 clients were in receipt of longer-term 1-2-1 counselling from BCU. The reason for closure was financially driven relating to reduced fundraising capacity and the general tightening of eligibility criteria being applied to their main recent funder, 'Trust for London'. BCU were no longer able to meet their funding criteria and had last received a grant from TFL in January 2020. In addition to this, the church that they operated from had started to charge rent in the region of £400 per month, which was unaffordable and two long-standing and experienced volunteers had stepped down.

This situation was discussed at the Bexley Mental Health and Wellbeing Partnership Board with the outcome being that Mind in Bexley (current NHS contracted Talking Therapies and Mental Health Recovery and Employment Service provider) would offer an assessment of need to all current BCU clients. Following assessment and subject to eligibility, an offer of Talking Therapy (counselling / CBT etc), Recovery College/Employment/IPS support, or a combination options, could be offered. This offer was communicated to BCU on 11th August along with contact details for Mind in Bexley and confirmation that LBB/ICB could not offer any financial support.

REPLIES TO COUNCIL QUESTIONS – 24 APRIL 2024

Responses to questions put during the Council Meeting are available as part of the webcast on the Council's website.

A. QUESTION FROM MEMBER OF THE PUBLIC

1. From local resident Matthew Chapman to Councillor Leaf, Cabinet Member for Resources:

What is the estimate of Council officers' time and therefore the cost to Bexley's tax-paying residents in answering the numerous questions, freedom of information requests and complaints Mr Dimitri Shrovob has lodged since 2018?

Reply

Raising enquiries, making complaints and freedom of information requests can play an important role in the democratic process. As a local authority, we endeavour to learn from our interactions with residents and these can help us to improve the services we provide, and we have this year launched our new customer experience strategy.

There are, however, some individuals who make persistent and serial enquiries to the Council, which takes up a considerable and disproportionate level of resources and officer time to respond to. In some cases, even when their enquiries or freedom of information requests are responded to fully and substantially, they continue to make enquiries and complaints, including escalating their issues to external bodies such as the Information Commissioners Office and the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman. This means that considerable sums of taxpayers' money are being spent dealing with responding to many enquiries, complaints and information requests from a small number of individuals.

I will make no comment on the motives or intentions behind their activities, but would point out that a disproportionate level of resources is spent dealing with these persistent interactions which could be deployed on frontline services or engaging with other residents.

In terms of the costs to the taxpayers, it would take up time and resources to ascertain a precise cost. However, I would estimate that the persistent enquiries, complaints and information requests of one individual could run into thousands of pounds.

We may never know the full impact of those costs, but officer time and taxpayer resources could have been utilised on other work supporting and helping residents and delivering frontline services.

B. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

7. From Councillor Smith to Councillor Diment, Cabinet Member for Places:

Will the Cabinet Member for Places tell us what is being done by the Council to encourage TfL to introduce electric buses to more of their routes in Bexley?

Reply

The Council supports the introduction of electric buses where practical and will continue to engage with TfL on the roll out of electric buses in our Borough, through engagement at the Transport Users Sub-Committee and monthly officer liaison meetings with TfL Buses.

Route testing by TfL has identified the need to provide remedial works to accommodate electric buses at some locations due to their requirement for more manoeuvring space than conventional buses. The Council will provide assistance in the delivery of these works.

8. From Councillor Brooks to Councillor Munur, Cabinet Member for Growth:

Could the Cabinet Member for Growth please update us on the work being carried out from the secured £1.3 million from the UKSPF (UK Shared Prosperity Fund) by Economic Development?

Reply

Community & Place

An investment plan was produced to enable the following developments in Erith to be progressed. These were:

1. Bringing the vacant and undeveloped site of 68 Pier Road into use as a community hub, including event and room hire workspace, café and toilets. (£258,000)
2. Mixed use development of the vacant local listed building space at 70 Pier Road into commercial premises on the ground floor and 19 residential units (£654,000)
3. Modernisation of Riverside Gardens to make it a more attractive green space. (£163,000)

The following describes the current status of the projects:

68 Pier Road - Planning permission (with conditions) granted mid March 2024.

Tender period June-July 2024. Construction August-October 2024.

70 Pier Road - Design team remobilised January 2024. Planning submission mid-May 2024.


On site surveys have commenced. Tender period is expected to take place in the autumn with construction commencing early in 2025.




Riverside Gardens – Council has entered into contract with main contractor for the works.

Construction is expected to commence in the summer and complete before the end of the year.

Supporting Local Business

The table below describes the nature of support, allocated expenditure, output target and the current (RAG) status of this element of the plan.

Supporting Local Business (SLB) Project Name	Overall Project Budget	Output target (non financial supported businesses / grants)	Status (31/3/24)
Business support delivered on group basis via webinars and face to face	£100,000	100	

Match funded grants for licensing/qualification to upskill staff	£25,000	50	
Employed Business Advisor to provide bespoke 121 advice	£115,000	150	
Retail & Hospitality sector advice service	£75,000	200	
Start-up support programme within incubator space	£25,000	30	Commencing Apr 2024
Business Survey	£8,287		
TOTAL	£348,287		

9. From Councillor Hinkley to Councillor Diment, Cabinet Member for Places:

Can the Cabinet Member confirm whether he anticipates the Public Cabinet papers in July 2024 will propose any reductions to school crossing patrol posts?

Reply

There are no plans to reduce the School Crossing Patrol Service.

10. From Councillor Day to Councillor Diment, Cabinet Member for Places:

Could the Cabinet Member provide an update following the response given at the November Council meeting on the solution to the disgraceful fly tipping at Ray Lamb Way involving CCTV, natural barriers, and the outcome of the viability assessment regarding the installation of high-quality numberplate recognition CCTV cameras?

Reply

Over the past year we have been working with Berkeley Group to evaluate possible solutions to the fly-tipping offences, and it was identified that the most practical solution would be to install AI monitored ANPR CCTV cameras, which should serve to deter fly-tipping offences and provide enforcement officers with evidence to support prosecution.

Berkeley Group agreed to provide a financial contribution to cover the costs of these cameras. The funds have now been received and officers are in the process of ordering and arranging for installation of the equipment. We expect to have the new facilities in place within the next few weeks, then will be working on plans to arrange removal of a large quantity of waste material.

11. From Councillor O'Hare to Councillor Leaf, Cabinet Member for Resources:

Can the Cabinet Member for Resources give an update on the Household Support Fund following the extension to the funding announced in the Budget on 6 March 2024 by the Chancellor of the Exchequer?

Reply

I am grateful for the question and the interest that Councillor O'Hare and other Members of the Council have taken in the Household Support Fund and our plans to utilise the £1.5m allocated by the Government.

A decision will be taken shortly on the distribution of those funds and will include support for low income families and resources for local charities to distribute to those in need.

12. From Councillor Carew to Councillor Seymour, Cabinet Member for Adults' Services and Health:

Can the Cabinet Member for Adults' Services and Health outline the aims and his hopes for Adult Social Care Vision which has recently been adopted?

Reply

The vision "**Your life, your choice, working together towards the life you want**" provides a unifying vision so that aims, objectives and priorities for Adult Social Care are clear for people who use services, our own workforce and other stakeholders.

- **Life you want**

People described wanting to be seen as unique individuals with aspirations, ideas, values. They wanted ASC to see them as a whole person, not just their needs.

These principles will be embedded in our commitments to how we will deliver and monitor the quality of the support we provide to local people.

- **Choice**

People described the challenges experienced due to the limited variety of options perceived to be available in Bexley for care and support.

We will explore how we can develop a range of different care and support offers enabling choice and variety in care offers.

- **Together**

People described the importance of the social care workforce working together in partnership with local people and their loved ones, and wider partners and the community. This includes working with people in regard to the process of assessment and support planning and being informed about peoples' assessed needs.

We will be committed to good communication and engagement with local people and their families and continuing the development of partnerships with local communities and partners across the health and care system.

The ASC vision describes commitments in how we work towards this vision. The vision inspires and motivates staff, gives focus for strategic development and provides a statement to align all activity and service developments.

13. From Councillor Borella to Councillor Diment, Cabinet Member for Places:

Can the Cabinet Member update Members on the Council response to the recent TfL consultation on the proposed DLR extension to Thamesmead?

Reply

In its response the Council supported the DLR extension to Thamesmead by 2034 in principle but confirmed that it should be designed to enable a further extension to major growth areas in the Borough including Belvedere. It also challenged the reasons for not proposing an extension into Bexley as part of the first phase.

The response further stated that the Council believes that the related bus transit should link to the key growth area of Belvedere and will need to be provided in advance of the delivery of the

DLR extension. The Council welcomed continued engagement with its officers in developing this bus transit scheme.

The Council's response also sought clarification on TfL's current position regarding future river crossings of the Thames in the context of the DLR proposals.

TfL is hoping to publish the outcome of their consultation by the end of June 2024.

14. From Councillor Asunramu to Councillor Diment, Cabinet Member for Places:

Can the Cabinet Member please outline the Council's plan to ensure the safety of residents and visitors to Bexley, around the lakes, ponds, canals, and Thames paths that exist across the Borough?

Reply

Thames Path works relates to keeping the paths passable and safe.

Where we have watercourses running through the Borough (River Cray, River Shuttle, Wyncham Stream), during the growing season, we allow the banks of the rivers to grow, reducing flooding, creating wildlife corridors and buffer zones along the watercourses. The majority of these are cut and cleared once a year in the autumn.

Lakes and ponds within our Parks & Open Spaces are included in our Off Highway Winter Maintenance Procedure and following sub-zero temperatures, they are inspected and if necessary, ice is broken around the perimeter. (these are Danson Lake & ponds, Foots Cray Meadows Lake & ponds, Lesnes Abbey ponds, Parish Wood pond, Lamorbey Park lake & Rutland Shaw pond).

Danson Park lake

Seasonal Weekly water testing, regular lake inspections (water quality, health and safety and safe flow of water course)

- Regular weed cutting to ensure if anyone does enter the lake, they do not become tangled and get stuck in the lake.
- Blue green algae monitored and if present signage introduced and public informed comms sent out.
- Anglers told not to enter the lake while fishing.
- Participants briefing before each session about water safety before activities.
- Safety boat, buoyancy aids when activities are operating
- Debris removed from the lake to prevent entrapments.
- Life ring float available when water sports centre is open
- Winter ice breaking

Lesnes Abbey

- There are danger deep water signs at most of the ponds except for the shallow Fountain Pond.
- Most ponds have a degree of fencing, again except for the shallow Fountain Pond.
- There is a throw line which is used when volunteers work on the ponds

Footscray Meadows

In collaboration with Emergancy Services and Sidcup Partners a throw line was installed just over 12 months ago – it has been vandalised twice and removed once in 12 months.

15. From Councillor Ward-Wilson to Councillor Newton, Cabinet Member for Education:

Will the Cabinet Member for Education give an update on progress around the Shenstone Secondary School expansion?

Reply

In January 2024, following a successful procurement exercise the London Borough of Bexley appointed Apex Ltd as the contractor for the Shenstone Secondary School expansion project with the works due to be completed by the start of the school year in September. The Council is working in partnership with TKAT (The Kemnal Academies Trust) and Apex Ltd, to achieve this expansion project.

As the school expanded to an 'all through' in September 2022 its first 2 secondary year groups have been based in temporary accommodation adjacent to St Augustine's School. To provide the additional space for the new year 7 cohort of pupils moving to the Shenstone Secondary element in September, Officers have been discussing with both the school and TKAT a range of possible temporary options for the 2024/25 academic year. Following these discussions, a new temporary location will be created within the Jubilee Primary School site. Shenstone School will jointly occupy the school within a separate and designated space. This arrangement will allow all the secondary students to be together on one ground floor site with sufficient classroom and outdoor space together with the additional requirements that were requested by the school for the students and agreed by the Council. Parents and carers have been advised of this.

16. From Councillor Brooks to Councillor Baroness O'Neill of Bexley OBE, Leader of the Council:

Can the Leader of the Council give her assessment of the impact of the expanded ULEZ on Bexley since 29 August 2023?

Reply

There have been many anecdotal impacts/stories brought to our attention since last September – including shops moving from Bexley, people no longer shopping in our high streets, residents (especially elderly) not able to afford to visit family and friends or to drive to health appointments or do shopping but, perhaps the starkest numbers are the following, which is the number of PCN's issued for Bexley from Sept 2023 to Jan 2024 (£90 if paid within 14 days or £180 if after that period);

<u>Borough</u>	<u>Aug-23</u>	<u>Sep-23</u>	<u>Oct-23</u>	<u>Nov-23</u>	<u>Dec-23</u>	<u>Jan-24</u>	<u>Grand Total</u>
Bexley	0	97	2,625	3,050	2,803	3,291	11,994

The numbers above/attached (including the incorrect summation to 11,994 instead of 11,866) were provided by TfL and, if you apply the reduced sum of £90 (paid within 14 days) the amount due from Bexley for the 5 months would over £1m. Given the majority of those people will be owners who can't afford to change their vehicles to be compliant, that means that TfL are taking £1m from people who can least afford it.

17. From Councillor Day to Councillor Gower MBE, Cabinet Member for Communities and Housing:

Please could the Cabinet Member join me in thanking the emergency services, Orbit staff, Council staff and the community spirit and patience of Slade Green residents on the morning of Saturday 16th when a fire broke out at an Orbit property, Grange House, in Slade Green?

Reply

I am very happy to add my thanks to the emergency services, and both Orbit and Council staff for the effective help and support they provided when a fire broke out at an Orbit property, Grange House, in Slade Green on the morning of Saturday 16th April. I would also like to commend the community spirit and patience of those Slade Green residents who were affected and also to thank them for the way in which they dealt with a very difficult situation.

18. From Councillor Hinkley to Councillor Diment, Cabinet Member for Places:

Can the Cabinet Member confirm whether he anticipates the Public Cabinet papers in July 2024 will propose any reductions to the frequency of household refuse collections?

Reply

No reductions to the frequency of household refuse collections will be proposed in July 2024.

19. From Councillor Reader to Councillor Leaf, Cabinet Member for Resources:

What is the Cabinet Member for Resources assessment of the proposed course of action by the Government to address the backlogs, delays and other problems identified with the external auditing of local authority accounts?

Reply

I am grateful to Councillor Reader in his role as Chairman of GPAC and to his Vice Chairman, Councillor Mrs Slaughter, for their interest in this issue. In addition to my comments made during the Leader's Report item at the 24 April 2024 Council meeting, Councillor Reader will be aware that with his and Councillor Mrs Slaughter's assistance we responded to the Government's consultation on the future of local authority external audits.

It agreed in our response that the first phase was required to facilitate progress on the 2023/24 audit. However, given the likelihood of audit opinions on the 2022/23 accounts being disclaimed, the response made it clear that measures will need to be in place to ensure that audit reports are transparent and fairly reflect the reasons for these opinions being issued, to provide assurance to the general public and users of the accounts.

The response agreed that the use of statutory 'backstop' dates for future audited accounts is necessary to bring audit timescales back into line over a period of time and restore confidence in the process. There was an acknowledgement that this phase places emphasis on the audit of opening balances in 2023/24, which effectively becomes an additional area of audit work which is likely to place additional time and resource pressures on audit firms. The completion of audit work in line with these dates will greatly depend on how efficiently this work is carried out and how this is factored into planning procedures.

The response also endorsed the need for further longer term work to address the systemic issues that have resulted in the current backlog.

We remain frustrated that progress on the external audit of our 2022/23 accounts has paused and welcome the discussions that Councillor Reader has facilitated on this issue at GPAC meetings. I continue to keep track of the activity around this issue and welcome the ongoing interest of GPAC and will update GPAC in due course.

20. From Councillor Adams to Councillor Baroness O'Neill of Bexley OBE, Leader of the Council:

Can the Leader of the Council advise the financial and resource implications of continuous questions/ complaints and FOIs from some residents?

Reply

Most residents contact Councillors appropriately when they have an enquiry or an issue to resolve and we are happy to respond or help. We're a public body and we're here to provide services to residents so it is important that residents are able to contact us when they need to. However, unfortunately a small number of residents do contact us repeatedly – either about the same or similar issues, even once that issue has been resolved – or occasionally about a very wide range of different issues.

Clearly it takes us time to reply to every enquiry we receive – and, as our time and funds are limited, inevitably this time is diverted away from other work which could be done. It is difficult to quantify this precisely as obviously the implications depend on the nature of the enquiries. But, to take an example, we have received 115 separate requests from one single resident over an 18-month period, many of which resulted in a number of further, follow up questions. Another resident sent 14 long emails to a wide range of officers and Members about a matter which had already been resolved, over the course of a single weekend.

In terms of the cost of this work, the Council budgets £190k to employ a small team of three people to deal directly with Complaints and Freedom of Information requests, but complaints and enquiries are handled by staff right across the Council and involve staff at all levels of the organisation up to the Chief Executive. The corresponding Councillor time is not included in those numbers.

21. From Councillor Nicola Taylor to Councillor Seymour, Cabinet Member for Adults' Services and Health:

Could the Cabinet Member outline what discussions with NHS are being undertaken to improve healthcare capacity, in particular Erith Hospital to meet present and future healthcare demands across the Borough?

Reply

The Bexley Wellbeing Partnership together with partners Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust – a major local service provider, are currently in the process of developing a Strategic Outline Case (SOC) for potential investment into Erith Hospital.

To enable development of the SOC, the Bexley Wellbeing Partnership commissioned Healthwatch Bexley to conduct a resident engagement programme in North Bexley. The objective was to better understand the needs and aspirations of the local community who access services at the site for their health and wellbeing. In parallel, engagement with local system stakeholders in North Bexley has been undertaken to understand how services should respond to local health demands.

A new *Health & Wellbeing Roadmap* and service model is currently being finalised setting out how the local system proposes to respond to the findings of the engagement.

A demand and capacity modelling exercise is now underway to project the future demand for services over the next twenty years. The outputs will support scoping the space requirements and estates plans for the site.

The *Demand and Capacity* modelling exercise will project capacity requirements for these services together with any new services identified. The significant increase of the population due to local housing development in the North of the Borough has been factored in, together with organic population growth for the area.

This programme is expected to be completed in June 2024, which will then feed into the development of estates plans for Erith Hospital.

22. From Councillor Borella to Councillor Gower MBE, Cabinet Member for Communities and Housing:

Can the Cabinet Member confirm the new arrangements for the management of Hurst Community Centre?

Reply

Following the departure of YADT in December 2023, the Council has assumed the day to day management of Hurst Community Centre.

The Library Service is managing community bookings and the management of the building. We are pleased that the Council has been able to keep this important community asset from closing after it was handed back.

Whilst the short timeframe for the handover provided logistical challenges, I am pleased to report that almost all of the hirers have kept their bookings and we have since taken on new hirers too. I am pleased to report that the centre continues to thrive as a place for all sorts of groups, classes, events and activities.

Residents can enquire about making a booking via email to a dedicated mailbox which is looked after by the libraries business team.

23. From Councillor Curtois to Councillor Munur, Cabinet Member for Growth:

Would the Cabinet Member for Growth join me in congratulating Bexleyheath BID on reintroducing the Bexleyheath night markets?

Reply

Councillor Curtois' comments are noted and will be sure to be passed on to the team at Bexleyheath BID.

It is hoped the events will continue to be a success and under the BIDs leadership, night markets can become a mainstay of Bexleyheath's evening economy.

24. From Councillor Brooks to Councillor Diment, Cabinet Member for Places:

Would the Cabinet Member for Places tell us what is being done to target fly-tipping in Bexley?

Reply

Between 1st April 2023 and 31st March 2024, 1885 Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs) were issued for fly-tipping offences, with a further 21 FPNs issued to waste carriers who failed to provide the correct documentation for transfer of waste.

We are in the process of tendering a new Environmental Enforcement contract, which will introduce new powers to the new supplier, including business and householder duty of care, issues relating to waste receptacles, and powers to issue higher FPNs for fly-tipping offences. Officers will also soon be authorised to conduct doorstep interviews under caution, which will simplify the enforcement process and support officers in gathering evidence for prosecution. We are also planning to increase the working hours of the enforcement officers to cover Mon-Fri 7am-7pm, and Sat-Sun 7am-3pm.

We have also recently introduced higher penalties for fly-tipping offences, with FPNs now being set at levels of £200, £500 and £1000 depending on the severity of the offence. This replaces the previous levels of £150 for small offences and £400 for all other offences.

25. From Councillor Day to Councillor Gower MBE, Cabinet Member for Communities and Housing:

Could the Cabinet Member please provide an update on the number identified and assistance given from the rough sleeper count on the 23-24 November?

Reply

11 people were found Rough Sleeping on the night.

2 of RS had social housing tenancy and advised to return to their accommodation.

2 accessed homeless shelter and they were reconnected to their local authority.

1 reconnected with family and no longer rough sleeping.

3 were supported into PRS accommodation with support from the RSI team.

3 of the RS are long term non-engagers and are still rough sleeping.

RS sleepers were provided with information pack on warm spaces, and housing options available to them in Bexley.

26. From Councillor Borella to Councillor Diment, Cabinet Member for Places:

Will Cabinet Member join me in congratulating the Mayor of London on introducing the SL3 Super Loop bus route through Bexley?

Reply

Improvements to public transport are always welcome. I am particularly pleased that the Mayor of London and TfL recognised that their original proposal to terminate the SL3 Superloop at Bexleyheath would have been shortsighted and accepted Bexley Council's call to extend the northern end of the route to serve Abbey Wood Station and Thamesmead. It was disappointing that our representations to use electric buses on the SL3, to stop in Bexley Village and provide links to the Erith and Slade Green were ignored.

27. From Councillor Slaughter to Councillor Diment, Cabinet Member for Places:

Can the Cabinet Member for Places explain what is being done to improve the appearance of the roundabouts outside the Civic Centre and at the junctions of Albion Road with Gravel Hill, Highland Road and Townley Road?

Reply

It is unfortunate that the originally planted wildflowers have not successfully taken, and that impatient drivers are riding over the kerbs, which impacts on the appearance and planting. We already plan to improve the situation through increasing the kerb heights around these locations, and to replace the planting with grass and bulbs. This work is subject to street works permits, especially given the proximity to the town centre and level traffic use but is expected to be carried out in the summer. Spring flowering bulbs will be planted in the Autumn planting season, ready for the new year.

28. From Councillor Chris Taylor to Councillor Newton, Cabinet Member for Education:

Can the Cabinet Member for Education provide an update on the Safety Valve programme?

Reply

In the first year of the Safety Valve Programme Bexley received £11.96m towards the DSG deficit and £9.5m High Needs Capital. A further £2.56m, of agreed funding, has been received following satisfactory progress against the conditions in the Safety Valve Agreement. Bexley is currently on track to eliminate the deficit by the end of the Safety Valve programme in 2028-29. However, the programme is complex and not without risk, so it will be important to monitor this closely.

The implementation of Safety Valve interventions is being rolled out in 2 phases. In Phase 1, 6 interventions successfully launched in the Autumn term 2023. For Phase 2, a further 5 interventions will launch in the Summer and Autumn terms of 2024. The first cohort of young people have completed their interventions and the impact of this is currently being analysed.

I would like to thank Council officers and wider stakeholders who have worked hard to turn our Safety Valve Agreement into a reality, for the benefit of the Council and our children and young people.

29. From Councillor Ferguson to Councillor Leaf, Cabinet Member for Resources:

Can the Cabinet Member confirm how many Bexley residents have applied for a Voter Authority Certificate?

Reply

As Councillor Ferguson will be aware, this issue has been discussed at meetings of the Finance and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee. It has also been discussed at the General Purposes and Audit Committee and there has been an All Member Briefing covering elections, including this issue. 295 Voter Authority Certificates have been issued and we have been proactive in communicating to residents the importance of bringing Voter ID to polling stations to vote and also to check their ID in advance and apply for a Voter Authority Certificate if needed.

30. From Councillor Francis to Councillor Leaf, Cabinet Member for Resources:

Can the Cabinet Member confirm how many Overseas Voters have been added to Bexley's electoral register since 16 January 2024?

Reply

As Councillor Francis will be aware, matters relating to the administration of elections and recent legislative changes have been discussed at meetings of the Finance and Corporate

Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the General Purposes and Audit Committee. There has also been an All Member Briefing covering elections, including this issue.

Since 16 January 2024, 109 new overseas electors have been registered, and there are 269 overseas electors in total registered to vote in the London Borough of Bexley.

31. From Councillor Moore to Councillor Newton, Cabinet Member for Education:

Will the Cabinet Member for Education provide some details on the Winter and Easter Holiday Activity and Food programmes in the Borough?

Reply

The Government's Holiday Activities and Food Programme was delivered in Bexley over both the Christmas and Easter School Holidays to great success. The scheme provided enjoyable activities and healthy food for school-aged children between Reception and Year 11. During the Christmas holidays 21 providers ran 26 schemes offering 3,518 spaces/sessions, whilst during the Easter holidays 23 providers ran 26 schemes offering 3,650 spaces.

Activities included sports sessions, food-making, arts and crafts, computer coding, and CV writing workshops. Places on the Programme were free to any children who are eligible for Free School Meals.

The attendance data for the HAF Programme that took place during the Easter holidays is currently being collated and will be available in May.

32. From Councillor Ward-Wilson to Councillor Leaf, Cabinet Member for Resources:

Can the Cabinet Member for Resources provide an update on his assessment of the Council's financial position and the steps being taken over the medium term?

Reply

Our latest update on the Council's financial position was provided in the MTFS published with the 22 February 2024 Public Cabinet papers and an update for the 2023/24 budget monitoring position was provided in the 16 April 2024 Public Cabinet papers.

The next update of the MTFS, 2023/24 Outturn position, and 2024/25 in-year Budget Monitoring is scheduled to be reported on at the next Public Cabinet meeting, provisionally scheduled for 11 July 2024.

33. From Councillor Francis to Councillor Leaf, Cabinet Member for Resources:

Can the Cabinet Member confirm how much of the discretionary support element of the Government's 2023/24 Council Tax Support Fund has been administered since 1st March 2024 and how many households have received this?

Reply

The Government announced £100m of additional funding for local authorities to support the most vulnerable households in England with their 2023/24 Council Tax bills. This funding allowed for an award of up to £25 per Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTRS) recipient (based on their outstanding bill after the main CTRS award and any other discounts), whilst also allowing Councils to determine discretionary awards for their area should the funding available exceed that required to support the core scheme eligible households in the 2023/24 billing year. The core scheme awards were granted to all those already in receipt of CTRS on 01 April

2023, and all new claimants who started to receive a CTRS award (where weekly entitlement was less than 100% of liability) during the 2023/24 billing year.

In Bexley, it was decided to use the remaining funding following the granting of the above noted core scheme awards, to grant one off credits of up to £100 to all recipients of a Care Leaver discount (i.e., those not fully exempt from Council Tax) or a Disabled Band Reduction on their Council Tax account. These discretionary scheme awards were applied to qualifying Council Tax accounts in March 2024 (based on the position of the outstanding bill as at 30 November 2023). A total of £56,558 was awarded in discretionary scheme payments, to a total of 602 households.

34. From Councillor Amaning to Councillor Diment, Cabinet Member for Places:

How is the Council managing the considerable number of emergency works from private utility companies which are causing excessive traffic and disruption across the Borough?

Reply

The Council's Street Works Team has a duty to co-ordinate works but cannot refuse utility companies from maintaining their equipment or installing new services. Planned works can be co-ordinated, but obviously emergency works (such as gas or water leaks) cannot. The utilities can commence emergency works without prior approval, but do need to register them with the Council within 2 hours. Once aware of the unplanned works taking place, the Council considers this for any planned works permits being applied for, and seeks to liaise with utilities at other works nearby to see if traffic controls can be changed to reduce the impact on the area; although this is often difficult as the road has already been dug up and cannot be reopened for traffic use.

35. From Councillor Bishop to Councillor Read, Cabinet Member for Children's Services:

Will the Cabinet Member for Children's Services please update us on foster care recruitment?

Reply

As of 15/04/24 Fostering data as follows:

226 carers in total = (143 Households)

Foster Carers – 141 (81 households)

Connected Carers – 29 (23 households)

Host and Support – 32 (24 households)

Regulation 24 – 20 (15 households)

Our fostering recruitment continues to make good progress and we have an ambitious 5 year plan which aims to increase the volume of in-house carers year on year.

Recruitment and Assessment:

We currently hold information events twice a month – these are offered as both face to face and virtual events. They mainly occur in the evenings as per the need of the applicants.

Current Recruitment Data

Data to date from 1st April 2024:

Fostering households in assessment – 16

Host and Support Households in assessment – 5

Initial enquires – 4

Initial visits - 6

36. From Councillor Jackson to Councillor Leaf, Cabinet Member for Resources:

Will the Cabinet Member for Resources give us his estimate of the number of businesses that have benefited from the freeze in the business rates multiplier for small businesses in the Borough?

Reply

The small business multiplier has remained frozen at 0.499 for the last 5 years and has therefore not risen with inflation. This action taken by the Conservative Government has benefited small businesses across the Borough by keeping their business rates liabilities down.

From the annual billing data, there are 4,677 business hereditaments that are charged the small business multiplier. Many rate reliefs, including 100% reliefs, reducing their bills. The freeze therefore directly benefits 2,738 businesses in the Borough.

37. From Councillor Ball to Councillor Gower MBE, Cabinet Member for Communities and Housing:

While levels of crime in Bexley remain historically low, why then is recorded rate of Domestic Abuse in Bexley much higher than many other boroughs?

Reply

Domestic Abuse is a key strategic priority for the Community Safety Partnership in 2024/2025. Whilst reports of other types of crimes in Bexley remain low in comparison to other boroughs – it is clear that Bexley's residents are frequently reporting Domestic Abuse.

The reasons for this are largely unknown and are complex but two key points require consideration:

- Firstly, in general terms domestic abuse is a crime that is often under reported. With this in mind, the Community Safety Partnership has done a lot of work to promote the reporting of domestic abuse in Bexley. It has also got a very active Domestic Abuse Strategic Partnership which has made significant progress in training the partnership workforce to 'identify' domestic abuse.
- That said, you cannot 'identify' incidences if they do not exist. We know the prevalence of domestic abuse within Bexley is significant enough for the Borough to be ranking 20th across London and for Bexley to have a current rate of 9.3 per 1000 population. This concerns our partnership deeply.

The data referred to (the recorded crime rate) is based on reports to the Police. We as a partnership have also reviewed other local data as part of our serious violence needs

assessment and recent Joint Strategic Assessment which also indicate that domestic abuse is prevalent in Bexley.

Other crime types have stronger correlations with socio-economic factors and so Bexley is considered comparatively safer than most other London Boroughs. Domestic abuse does not share that same correlation so strongly – it exists in all walks of life.

As set out in our Domestic Abuse Strategy, our partnership is wholly committed to prevention, quality provision, protecting victims and continually improving our response - taking local and national learning to continue to improve outcomes for victims, perpetrators and children and reduce the incidence of abuse.

It is with this local context, we encourage all employers in Bexley to work towards White Ribbon Accreditation. [Working with organisations to end VAWG — White Ribbon UK](#)

38. From Councillor Ferguson to Councillor Baroness O'Neill of Bexley OBE, Leader of the Council:

What timescale does the Leader think reasonable for the BexleyCo development in Lesney Park to be initiated?

Reply

Council officers are in negotiations with NHS England for the settlement of an existing capital grant agreement and its reversion against the land to be retained for learning disability accommodation.

Once valuations are agreed, a new capital grant agreement will be entered into and officers have been advised to allow up to six months.

Once the capital grant agreement is in place, the Council will be free to simultaneously exchange and complete the sale to BexleyCo. Following transfer, BexleyCo will need to procure its main contractor and there will be a mobilisation period. We are advised that, typically, this can take 12 months.

39. From Councillor Chris Taylor to Councillor Read, Cabinet Member for Children's Services:

Will the Cabinet Member for Children's Services please tell us how many children are in the care of Bexley?

Reply

At the end of March 2024, 304 children and young people were looked after in Bexley. This is an increase from the 265 children and young people reported in March 2023. Our numbers reflect that in Bexley we continue to have a lower rate than the National and Statistical Neighbour averages.

2022/23 per 10k

Bexley – 46

Statistical Neighbours – 60.4

National - 71

The number of children coming into the care of Local Authorities, continues to be a rising trend nationally.

40. From Councillor Slaughter to Councillor Diment, Cabinet Member for Places:

Could the Cabinet Member for Places provide an update on progress with the partnership between the Council and the Lawn Tennis Association to improve public tennis courts in Bexley?

Reply

- Construction work has now started
- Works are due to be completed June 2024
- An operator is being sought to manage the courts and deliver a range of community tennis activities
- A court booking system will be introduced and a charge to use the courts brought back (we don't yet have the charging details as this is something the tennis operator would need to be involved in when appointed)

41. From Councillor Ball to Councillor Gower MBE, Cabinet Member for Communities and Housing:

Could the Cabinet Member update Members on what is the relationship like between Bexley Council and the key local residential house building companies?

Reply

I would say very positive. We all know the challenges facing the sector but officers remain encouraging of the right type of quality development with the right combination of home size and tenure the Borough needs.

42. From Councillor Day to Councillor Diment, Cabinet Member for Places:

Do we have an outcome for the bid for funding from Defra which would provide funds for realignment of the ditches and installation of a natural barrier to prevent access by fly-tippers, and new culverts on Ray Lamb Way?

Reply

The Council understands that the bid to DeFRA was unsuccessful, but that the feedback on this being provided directly to Berkeley Homes. We will be seeking to understand the nature of the rejection, and whether we would be able to support a revised bid.

43. From Councillor Ward-Wilson to Councillor Seymour, Cabinet Member for Adults' Services and Health:

Can the Cabinet Member for Adults' Services and Health update us on the new community hubs for service users with a physical disability?

Reply

Initially it was hoped that LECB would form part of the Hub offer, unfortunately following guest visits by clients it was felt that the access was not to required standards. In conjunction with families and those using the service, Wolsley House and a further library were acceptable. For a small proportion of those using the service a changing place is required and the intention is to use the former wheelchair centre at 10D Whitehall Lane whilst a venue with a CP is sought. Inspire are discussing with our projects teams the possibility of space in the community building being refurbished (with CP installed) at Pier Road Erith, which is expected to be complete September/October 2024.

All users have been consulted with and we are now awaiting the final refurbishment of disabled toilets at the library and the transition will take place. This is an exciting opportunity to transform a traditional service and ASC look forward to presenting the evaluation to Members.

44. From Councillor Chris Taylor to Councillor Seymour, Cabinet Member for Adults' Services and Health:

Can the Cabinet Member for Adults' Services and Health provide some detail on the recently launched Bexley Barbershop Project?

Reply

The Barbershop Project in Bexley launched in October 2023. We currently have 12 barbershops who have signed up to take part. 8 barbers have taken part in the training programme with a further 6 to undertake training soon. 52 mental health discussions with clients have taken place, and 78 leaflets about local services have been taken. Recent social media promotion has attracted significant interest with 13,000 views. A formal evaluation of the project will be undertaken, and this will determine any future investment beyond the current pilot. In the meantime, we are in early-stage discussions with Mind in Bexley to consider the feasibility of broadening the project into other venues such as hairdressers and nail bars.

45. From Councillor Amaning to Councillor Newton, Cabinet Member for Education:

Could the Cabinet Member confirm that assessments for children with autism are being made in the recommended timeframes?

Reply

In Bexley, Oxleas Specialist Children's Services leads on the Autism Assessment Pathway for children with the Council's Educational Psychologists contributing to this multi-disciplinary process. Information is also gathered from the school, SENCo, parents/carers and the child as part of a diagnostic assessment.

295 children were seen for Autism Diagnostic Assessment March 2023-February 2024. Between March 2023 and January 2024 an average of 24 children's diagnostic assessments were completed per month. Each diagnostic assessment has preliminary work including a developmental assessment with a paediatrician.

The average waiting time for first appointment in the Autism Diagnostic Assessment Pathway for a child or young person was 43 weeks in February 2024, an increase since February 2023. The pathway is a paediatric-led pathway and considers the holistic needs of each child, therefore multiple assessments may be indicated as part of this pathway and waiting times will differ for each individual based on this holistic approach.

Oxleas NHS Trust have increased capacity for Bexley children's Autism diagnostic assessments from March 2024. The impact on the waiting time will be known in the reporting period March 2024-August 2024, and is expected to reduce the waiting time for children and young people.

While waiting, all children on the Autism Diagnostic Pathway can access support such as:

- Autism Advisory Teacher advice to schools
- SEN Toolkit of approaches in every school and nursery
- Speech and Language advice
- Social Prescribing

- Voluntary sector support and activities such as Act for Change; Galaxy Club

46. From Councillor Chris Taylor to Councillor Seymour, Cabinet Member for Adults' Services and Health:

Can the Cabinet Member for Adults' Services and Health provide some detail on the Shared Lives Scheme which provides support for young adults?

Reply

The Bexley Shared Lives scheme provides care in family homes across Bexley for adults with a learning disability, physical disability, mental health, or other sensory needs.

Shared Lives is a social care model whereby a vulnerable adult with care and support needs, who is unable to live independently, is matched to a Shared Lives Carer, sharing their home and family life with the individual.

Shared Lives promotes independence, supporting vulnerable adults to learn through experiential experiences and routine family life.

Shared Lives can be a least restrictive approach to care and support, providing people the opportunity to live in a family support network, rather than more formal care arrangements such as supported living.

The Shared Lives team match carers who are willing to share their homes, lives, interests, experiences and skills with adults who need support to live to the fullest.

47. From Councillor Ward-Wilson to Councillor Seymour, Cabinet Member for Adults' Services and Health:

Does the Cabinet Member for Adults' Services and Health welcome the recent 6 month update on ASC Direct Payments?

Reply

The recommendations provided by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in regard to improve the uptake of direct payments was welcomed by Adult Services and has shaped the service development programme currently underway.

The 6 month update demonstrated the range of actions being taken to improve the direct payment uptake including:

- The development of guidance regarding direct payments
- Allocating resources to develop a Personal Assistant Register and direct payment support service.
- Digital developments to support people to find care and support offers.
- Training and development within adult social care.

Work continues in relation to this change programme which is underpinned by the aspirations within the Adult Social Care vision.

48. From Councillor Brooks to Councillor Diment, Cabinet Member for Places:

Will the Cabinet Member for Places update Members on the performance of the waste collection service in Bexley?

Reply

Total number of missed collections – the overall number of missed bins has increased slightly from 130 in November 23 to 143 per 100,000 collections in December 23. The performance is similar to October's performance where we've had 142 missed bins per 100,000. However, if we compare the contractor's performance with the same period last year (246 per 100,000), we can see that the total number of missed collections has reduced by approximately 40%.

Number of assisted missed collections – the number of missed assisted collections has remained stable at 133 per 100,000 collections in November and December. If we compare the total number of assisted missed to the same period last year, we can see a decrease of approximately 64%. The number of properties remaining on our hot spot list has also decreased.

The total number of missed collections per 100,000 for February 2024 was 119 which indicates that the service is performing well. Please note that the monthly target for missed bins for 2023/24 is 70 per 100,000 collections, so there is work to be done to reduce the figure even further.

49. From Councillor Bacon to Councillor Diment, Cabinet Member for Places:

Can the Cabinet Member for Places update the Council on the progress with installing EV charging points across Bexley?

Reply

Bexley has provided 109 electric vehicle charge points on-street and in our car parks, which will increase to 170 by the end of May. The most recent 100 sites within street lighting columns have deliberately been spread across all areas of the Borough, so that residents are never too far from a charge point.

Officers have been successful in a bid to government funding to introduce further on-street units and are currently working on a combined bid with 3 other boroughs for other grant funding.

The current focus is to continue to roll out more on-street charge points across the Borough, to provide greater access to EV charging for all.

50. From Councillor Chris Taylor to Councillor Read, Cabinet Member for Children's Services:

Will the Cabinet Member for Children's Services tell us what percentage of the Children's Services staff are permanently employed, as distinct from being agency workers?

Reply

91.57% of Children's Services staff (including Learning Enterprise College Bexley) are filled by permanent staff with a further 1.99% of positions filled by secondees. These secondees are from Bexley substantive posts. The remaining 6.44% of posts are filled by agency staff with 0.37% of these positions filled by off contract staff.

51. From Councillor Jackson to Councillor Newton, Cabinet Member for Education:

Will the Cabinet Member for Education join me in congratulating the team which put on the Bexley Apprenticeship and Participation event held during Apprenticeship Week?

Reply

I would be delighted to add my congratulations to the team who worked diligently, with our partners and stakeholders, to put on our annual Bexley Apprenticeship and Participation event which took part on Monday 5 February 2024, at the Civic Offices.

The event caters specifically to young individuals aged 16 to 24 and their parents or carers. This year, the nearly 900 young people who registered to attend the event were able to engage with the 40 employers, training providers, and support organisations that were present providing them with the opportunity to explore apprenticeships and training opportunities, as well as receive guidance to navigate the path towards their desired courses or jobs. There was a genuine excitement and enthusiasm from those that attended, and it was also great to see a number of our staff present with both their own children, but also there to support the young people that they work with.

52. From Councillor Moore to Councillor Read, Cabinet Member for Children's Services:

Will the Cabinet Member for Children's Services please provide us with information on progress in the reorganisation of Bexley's Children's Centres?

Reply

The reconfigured Children's Centre offer went live in November 2021 with the aim of focusing on the first 1001 days of life from the antenatal period until a child's third birthday. That is in line with guidance within 'The Best Start for Life, A vision for the First 1001 Critical Days,' published by Government in 2021. That recognised this is a critical time for development when babies and young children are at their most vulnerable. It also sets the foundations for an individual's cognitive, emotional, and physical development.

The data shows that the majority of registrations are within most deprived areas of the borough, indicating that the targeted services and areas correlate with need in the community as intended by the reorganisation.

Our Children Centre Offer has a main hub situated in Erith, West Street with 4 more buildings situated in Slade Green (Northend Children's Centre), Northumberland Heath (Northumberland Health Children Centre), St Mary's & St James (North Cray Children Centre) and Crook Log (Danson Children Centre) plus our SEND hub in Barnehurst at the Normandy Children Centre.

But, in addition to that there are also groups and activities delivered by the Children Centre staff, in two Thamesmead East locations (Greenmead & The Nest), and at East Wickham School. Crayford Library offer their own stay and play groups as well as toddler singing groups where the Children Centre practitioners attend as part of their outreach work.

Most importantly the Children Centre practitioners undertake that outreach to community groups and activities once a month, keeping up to date with changing trends and needs in the community. Thamesmead remains an area of need alongside Belvedere, Erith, Slade Green and Northend and the South of St Mary's & St James, where North Cray Children Centre is located.

There is a Partnership Board which meets quarterly with community members and tracks the changing needs of families in Bexley in order to ensure that the programmes delivered within the Children Centre are responding to the need in the community.

Finally, there are currently 1056 children attending services, with some attending groups regularly, and this equates to 3739 attendances overall.

53. From Councillor Ward-Wilson to Councillor Read, Cabinet Member for Children's Services:

Will the Cabinet Member for Children's Services please update us on the number of children and young people being supported by the Children with Disabilities team?

Reply

To be offered a service by the specialist Disabled Children's Service the child or young person must have a disability that has been formerly diagnosed and be permanent or long term. For example:

- a severe or profound learning disability.
- a severe or profound physical disability.
- significant or profound sensory disability.
- complex medical needs or long-term condition expected to disable the child for more than one year.
- life threatening illness.
- severe communication disabilities or behavioural difficulties related to the child's disability (e.g. autism).
- severe development delay.

These criteria are based on the definition of disability set out in the Children Act 1989. The criteria does **not** include :

- children with mental health disorders unless in conjunction with a learning, physical or communication disability
- a disability or disabilities that are not severe
- behavioural problems due to social/environmental factors (i.e. not associated to a disability)
- a diagnosis of ADHD or ADD unless in conjunction with a learning, physical or communication disability

All referrals to the Children with Disabilities Service are followed up with a "registration visit", this visit is used in determining whether or not threshold is met for a service. To establish if the child/young person meets the threshold of severe and profound needs the Children with Disabilities Matrix of need is applied. This is an in-house assessment tool that ensures there is equity in our assessment as terms such as 'severe' and 'profound' do not carry the same meaning across professional disciplines.

All children open to the service have an annual updating child and family assessment to review their needs. Social workers must attend all annual reviews of the Education Health and Social Care Plan.

If parents do not agree with the outcome of the threshold decision, an assessment will still be offered to fully explore the child and family's support needs. Alternatively the following actions are taken:

- Signposting to the local offer and community services
- Social workers ensure that the family have adequate support from Universal services

- Social workers will also consider any safeguarding issues and support needs and this may result in a referral to MASH

WRITTEN REPLIES TO COUNCIL QUESTIONS – 17 JULY 2024

A. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBER OF THE PUBLIC

1. From local resident Dimitri Shvorob to Councillor Baroness O'Neill of Bexley OBE, Leader of the Council:

Why does a Bexley household in council tax band D pay over £200 more than a similar household in Greenwich or Bromley?

Reply

Council tax is only one source of income that finances how we pay for all our services – the others being business rates, fees and charges, and Government grants.

Bexley's grant from Government is much lower than that of many others (including Greenwich) based on an out-dated formula that was set in 2010. Since then the need and demographic make-up of our residents has changed dramatically but we have the same responsibilities and pressures, which is why we've regularly 'encouraged' Government to revisit the distribution leading to a fairer funding formula and a level playing field. That has meant that council tax has had to be raised to cover some of the gap. In fact, as I've quoted before, if we had the same Government grant as some of the Inner London Boroughs we probably wouldn't need to collect any council tax from our residents.

It is true that Bexley's band D charge at £2,115.04 pa is more expensive than Bromley and Greenwich but less expensive than Sutton (£2,166.18), Havering (£2,207.92), Richmond (£2,263.66) and Kingston (£2,413.47).

It is interesting that the gap between us and the other boroughs was actually established/created when Labour were last in control in Bexley as we were below the outer London average in 2002 but, by 2006, we were above. That was caused by the increase to council tax during that period. Since 2006, in cash terms and excluding the GLA precept, our Band D CT has risen by 64% in 18 years whereas it increased by 34% in 4 years under Labour.

2. From local resident Dimitri Shvorob to Councillor Diment, Cabinet Member for Neighbourhoods:

Can you please explain the absence of enforcement action against Sidcup's Khazana restaurant for breaching a retroactively granted planning permission with an advertising sign, after a year of complaints to the Council and local Councillors?

Reply

The Council has not taken formal enforcement action against the unauthorised display of this advertisement because a breach of the Advertisement Regulations or a breach of condition 2 of Advertisement Consent 23/01671/ADV has not been established. This is despite multiple visits to the premises. The case remains under investigation.

The Council is unable to disclose what action is, or is not, proposed at this time as it may prejudice any future legal action that may be considered should there be a breach that the premises owner chooses not to resolve. However, officers will seek a negotiated solution if a breach of Condition 2 is found and prior to the consideration of any future action.

Once a decision has been made, the complainant will be updated on any action that the Council may or may not take on the reported issue.

B. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

Responses to questions put during the Council Meeting are available as part of the webcast on the Council's website.

6. From Councillor Ward-Wilson to Councillor Seymour, Cabinet Member for Adults' Services and Health:

Can the Cabinet Member for Adults' Services and Health update us on the recent event held in Bexley to support carers?

Reply

This year the event was held on 11th June at the Holiday Inn and almost 150 carers attended. Some 22 partner organisations offered advice and support with informative talks on direct payments, mental health support and other issues held throughout the day. A team of trusted assessors from One Bexley were also on hand to help attendees to complete carers' assessments.

The event was a chance for us to provide wellbeing support to carers, with massage, Reiki and Tai Chi organised for attendees, and therapy dogs also on hand to meet them. Private space was arranged for carers to talk to counsellors on the day.

Bexley's new Mayor, Councillor Sue Gower joined the event, spending time with partner organisations to understand the support they provide to unpaid carers living across the borough.

The event was organised by the Bexley Carers Partnership with input from carers and building on feedback from previous events.

7. From Councillor Asunramu to Councillor Newton, Cabinet Member for Education:

Can you outline the support that the Council is providing to the four schools in Bexley that currently have deficit budgets?

Reply

Officers have regular meetings with schools in deficit to review their financial monitoring and to discuss budget risks and opportunities. These meetings aim to provide holistic support to schools, and include the Head Teacher, Governors, School Business Manager and/or external Bursar and colleagues from Bexley finance, schools HR, governor support and school improvement.

All deficit schools have participated in the DfE Schools Resource Management Advisor review, which looks at the historic outturns, current and future budgets, staffing, benchmarking and other metrics to identify what the school is already doing well and if there are any opportunities to improve budget efficiency. Although the schools have found it useful to have an independent review, it remains challenging to find ways to eliminate deficits.

8. From Councillor Ball to Councillor Leaf, Cabinet Member for Resources:

How many Member enquiries have been submitted each month for the last year, broken down by service area?

Reply

The table below contains data we hold on Member Enquiries in each month from June 2023 up to and including June 2024. If Councillor Ball requires further information about a particular service area or enquiry, he is welcome to contact the relevant Cabinet Member or me.

Member Enquiries submitted each month for the last year – July 2023 – June 2024 broken down by service area:

Service Area	Jul 23	Aug 23	Sep 23	Oct 23	Nov 23	Dec 23	Jan 24	Feb 24	Mar 24	Apr 24	May 24	Jun 24
Adult Social Care & Health	6	8	2	5	5	7	3	2	6	5	4	4
Children's Social Care	1	3	1	2	1	0	0	1	1	5	2	3
Corporate Services	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	2	2	0	2	0
Educational Achievement & Inclusion	4	4	4	7	8	8	6	3	1	5	5	2
Finance and Property	10	3	3	7	7	2	5	16	7	9	4	4
Legal & Democratic Service	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Place	187	139	156	145	129	113	125	145	91	107	112	92
Total Received	209	157	166	167	152	130	140	169	108	131	129	105
Overall Total for period Jul 23-Jun 24	1763											

9. From Councillor O'Hare to Councillor Diment, Cabinet Member for Neighbourhoods:

Will the Cabinet Member for Neighbourhoods update Council on measures being taken by the Council to further reduce littering and fly-tipping across Bexley?

Reply

On 1st July 2024 the Council introduced higher thresholds for Fixed Penalty Notices issued for littering and fly-tipping offences. FPNs for littering have now been set at £300 reduced to £150 for early payment, and new FPNs for fly-tipping have been introduced at various levels up to a maximum of £1000.

Alongside these increases, we have also re-tendered our Environmental Enforcement contract, with the new contractor starting on 1st July 2024. The contractor will be introducing new evidence-gathering procedures including conducting doorstep interviews under caution with members of the public to establish where waste deposits have come from and take enforcement action against the offenders.

We have recently procured new CCTV equipment which will be installed in some of the worst affected areas in the borough and will hopefully aid our enforcement team in identifying offenders and pursuing enforcement action.

We are also in the process of setting up a working group with neighbouring boroughs to enable sharing of intelligence in relation to the most serious waste crime offences which are carried out across SE London and North Kent.

Finally, we undertake regular partnership operations with the Metropolitan Police, Environment Agency and others to ensure that waste carriers are compliant with regulations and have the correct permits in place for collection and transfer of waste.

10. From Councillor Moore to Councillor Newton, Cabinet Member for Education:

Given reported falling school rolls across London, can the Cabinet Member for Education, provide an assessment of the likely impact in Bexley?

Reply

In line with most London Boroughs, Bexley is expecting to see a decline in mainstream pupil numbers over the coming years and to address this we are, through the Strategic Education Partnership, undertaking work which will look at ways to minimise this. This includes a series of discussions with the Department for Education's Regional Schools Group and every primary school on the current and projected situation regarding future pupil numbers.

This initiative will identify potential and sustainable options to reduce the number of mainstream primary places over the next two academic years.

In tandem to this exercise, we are also looking at opportunities to utilise any surplus space within our mainstream schools to increase the number of SEND specialist places.

Officers have also started to have similar conversations with our secondary schools.

11. From Councillor Borella to Councillor Baroness O'Neill of Bexley OBE, Leader of the Council:

Will the Leader join in me in thanking the police for their work on polling day?

Reply

Absolutely I, like most Bexley residents, always welcome seeing the Police around and about the Borough which is why, when congratulating the Mayor on his re-election, we once again made the case for borough based policing and more police in Bexley.

12. From Councillor Asunramu to Councillor Newton, Cabinet Member for Education:

Can you give us an update on the safety valve and that we are still on target to meet the budgetary requirements of this programme?

Reply

The Local Authority has reviewed its 2024/25 high needs budget to take account of the trends identified in financial monitoring last year. On the basis of the revised budget the authority is forecasting that its accumulated deficit at the end of 2024/25 will be £6.957m. The original Safety Valve profile envisaged that the deficit at this stage would be £7.641m. This indicates that we are currently on track to eliminate the deficit by the end of the Safety Valve programme in 2028-29. Officers will continue to closely monitor the numbers and costs of EHCPs to ensure the programme stays on track.

For 2023-2024, the Council submitted reports to the DfE in June, September and December successfully gaining all three instalments of the agreed funding totalling £2.56m, following satisfactory progress against the conditions in the Safety Valve Agreement. For 2024/2025 the Council submitted the first of three update reports to the DfE in June and received an instalment of £0.543m at the end of the month. The three instalments for 2024-2025 have been reprofiled following an advance payment of £0.930 in March, leaving a total of £1.63m expected for the year (for a total of £2.56m) as per the Safety Valve Agreement. The second and third reports are due in August and November.

The implementation of Safety Valve interventions has been rolled out in two phases. Phase 1 started in the Autumn term 2023 and Phase 2 started in the Spring and Summer terms of 2024. Some of the highlights at the end of the first year of the Safety Valve Programme include: data collated so far evidence positive impact for children and young people who have taken part in early intervention initiatives, which have been offered to every school in Bexley. At the end of the Supported Internship Programme 14 young people are expected to gain paid employment. An additional 30 specialist places have been created and filled at Parkway School and 19 young people have returned to Bexley provision from out of borough independent schools.

13. From Councillor Jackson to Councillor Bishop, Cabinet Member for Communities and Housing:

Could the Cabinet Member for Communities and Housing say what benefit a Borough based policing structure would be to Bexley?

Reply

The Borough moved to a Tri Borough Basic Command Unit in 2018 under the current Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan who is the Police & Crime Commissioner for London. Prior to that we had borough-based policing in London.

Susan Hall, the Conservative candidate in May, recognised that police need to be based in the communities they serve and she was committed to bringing back borough based policing if she was elected.

It's clear that Bexley residents get less resource compared with Greenwich and Lewisham in the tri-borough model. It appears that the current model puts far too much pressure on the Safer Neighbourhood Teams to respond to all crime types.

It would also benefit our residents if the Mayor delegated the full London Crime Prevention Fund and Violence Reduction Unit funding to local Community Safety Partnership as this would mean Bexley received a fair share of this fund thereby allowing us to address issues such as violence and exploitation at a grassroots level.

We welcome the recent investment in the front desk at Bexleyheath Police Station to ensure that face to face contact with residents can be maintained. There-establishment of a borough-based management team for 'Neighbourhood Policing' and partnerships is also welcomed.

However, a return to borough-based policing would go even further in addressing public concerns around confidence in policing and provide a better service for our residents. It would enable us to have direct contact with local Neighbourhood Teams leading to more efficient response to local intelligence and responding to community priorities. It would also mean a Borough Commander who allocates resources based on Bexley's needs rather than the needs across South East London and local proactive specialist teams are better placed to tackle Drug Supply, Burglary and Violence. Borough based policing would create stronger local partnerships to investigate and reduce Domestic Abuse.

This Council has once again asked the Mayor of London to reconsider his position on this issue and revert to borough based policing.

14. From Councillor Perfect to Councillor Chris Taylor, Cabinet Member for Children's Services:

Does the Cabinet Member believe that the Council has acted reasonably during the 2024/25 financial year in relation to the payment of Direct Payments made by the Children with Disabilities Service?

Reply

In short yes.

A review of our payments was initiated in 2024 in an attempt to harmonise both processes and payments to both Adults' and Children's Services; this review is ongoing, but to ensure that children with disabilities were not disadvantaged by inflation we have increased rates pending further review and these are being backdated to 1st April 2024.

15. From Councillor Ball to Councillor Diment, Cabinet Member for Neighbourhoods:

How many tonnes of litter have been picked up from the roads and pavements in the last year?

Reply

2022/23 tonnages:

Street Cleansing Overall Tonnages 1,383.22 tonnes of which 721.5 tonnes is litter generated from scheduled cleansing activities and litter bins.

Remaining 661.72 tonnes is street cleansing detritus.

Data for 2023/24 not yet available.

16. From Councillor Ball to Councillor Diment, Cabinet Member for Neighbourhoods:

What steps do we take to avoid fly tipping in the Borough?

Reply

The Council's Environmental Crime team liaise with residents, businesses and other members of the public in relation to evidence obtained in connection with fly-tipping offences. We utilise CCTV and intelligence to investigate waste crimes and will take statements and other forms of evidence from witnesses. Once clear evidence is obtained, a decision will be made on whether to pursue the matter through the courts or through issuance of Fixed Penalty Notices.

On 1st July 2024 the Council introduced higher thresholds for Fixed Penalty Notices issued for littering and fly-tipping offences. FPNs for littering have now been set at £300 reduced to £150 for early payment, and new FPNs for fly-tipping have been introduced at various levels up to a maximum of £1000.

Alongside these increases, we have also re-tendered our Environmental Enforcement contract, with the new contractor starting on 1st July 2024. The contractor will be introducing new evidence-gathering procedures including conducting doorstep interviews under caution with members of the public to establish where waste deposits have come from and take enforcement action against the offenders.

We have recently procured new CCTV equipment which will be installed in some of the worst affected areas in the borough and will hopefully aid our enforcement team in identifying offenders and pursuing enforcement action.

We are also in the process of setting up a working group with neighbouring boroughs to enable sharing of intelligence in relation to the most serious waste crime offences which are carried out across SE London and North Kent.

Finally, we undertake regular partnership operations with the Metropolitan Police, Environment Agency and others to ensure that waste carriers are compliant with regulations and have the correct permits in place for collection and transfer of waste.

17. From Councillor Perfect to Councillor Newton, Cabinet Member for Education:

How are we progressing in making sure EHC plans are completed and issued in a timely way to better reflect the needs and provision for the child or young person across health, education and social care?

Reply

The Local Area Partnership is working with urgency to address the quality of Education, Health and Care Plans and the annual review process identified by the inspectors during the Local Area SEND and Alternative Provision Inspection in December 2023. The first Deep Dive Monitoring Meeting with the Department of Health and NHS England took place on 17 July 2024. This meeting looked at/will look at this Priority Area for Improvement in depth.

To date, the Local Area Partnership is on track with the actions we have detailed in the Priority Action Plan. It is too early to see the full impact of these improvement actions, however, the achievements to date are:-

1. In Bexley, 84% of new Education, Health and Care Plan Assessments are issued within the required 20 weeks. This compares favourably with the national figure of 50%.
2. In June 2024, 64% of children and young people had had a review of their EHCP in the last 12 months. This is an improvement from January 2024, when only 49% of annual reviews had been completed. We are aiming for 85% to be completed annually by June 2025.
3. Approval has been given for the recruitment of two EHCP Reviewing Officers. Their role will be to ensure all education providers and partner agencies receive a termly report detailing the EHCP annual reviews due to be completed that term, to receive, log and process the annual review paperwork; to send out the decision letters to parents/carers following annual reviews and to complete less complex amendments of EHCPs following review.
4. A series of refresher training, starting on 22 March 2024, has been provided to SEN Case Officers and EHCP Advice Training was provided to health and social care advice givers by Debbie Orton, DfE Advisor on 24 May 2024.
5. A EHCP Quality Assurance Framework has been approved by the SEND Improvement and Assurance Board. This sets out six levels of quality audits of EHCPs to identify areas for improvement and audit the impact of the improvements. 33% of the EHCPs audited in June 2024 were outstanding for their outcomes. This is a significant improvement and an impact of the revised SEN Case Officer training.
6. A Designated Social Care Officer post has been approved. This post will have a key role in improving and monitoring the timeliness and quality of social care advice for EHCPs.

7. A new SEN Hub portal has been developed and is to be piloted with the aim that this will be rolled out to all schools by December 2024, and it will use this to streamline, monitor and improve the annual review process.
8. Survey questions to ensure we receive regular and robust feedback from parents/carers, young people and SENCos have been co-developed, and surveys are ready to be commenced.

18. From Councillor Gill to Councillor Diment, Cabinet Member for Neighbourhoods:

Has the Cabinet Member yet found time to consider free parking for an hour in targeted car parks to help promote local high streets and small businesses?

Reply

Within the Council fees and charges, all car park tariffs were reviewed, and a new tariff was approved, these new tariffs went live on the 1st July 2024. There are no plans to consider free parking in any of the car parks at this time.

19. From Councillor Asunramu to Councillor Bishop, Cabinet Member for Communities and Housing:

Could the Cabinet Member provide the latest figures for empty homes in the Borough?

Reply

As at 30th June 2024 there were 879 empty properties in the Borough. Of these 243 have been empty and unfurnished for 2 years or more and therefore attract a long-term empty premium.

20. From Councillor Perfect to Councillor Newton, Cabinet Member for Education:

What is being done to ensure that more Bexley children are accepted into the grammar schools that are based in Bexley?

Reply

For a pupil to be considered for one of the 800 places within one of Bexley's four grammar schools, they must first achieve the selective standard in the selection test held at the beginning of Year 6. Places are then allocated through the Pan London co-ordinated admissions process in accordance with each of the schools' published admissions policy which ensures a transparent, equitable and legal approach.

The test is open to all children regardless of where they live, but places at the grammar schools are allocated in accordance with the schools' oversubscription criteria which form part of their published admissions policy, and achieving the selective standard does not guarantee the offer of a place at a grammar school, unless a child is one of the 180 highest scorers. Most places are offered in order of home to school distance.

Advice is provided to our parents and carers through information that is provided to all Bexley schools to ensure that they are aware of the key steps and dates associated with the Bexley selection test. In recent years, apart from individual and isolated cases all Bexley pupils who have been deemed selective in the Bexley test and have expressed a first preference for a Bexley Grammar School have been allocated a place. With the individual and isolated cases, had they also stated a preference for more than one Bexley Grammar Schools, they would have been offered a place at one of our Grammar Schools.

21. From Councillor Amaning to Councillor Newton, Cabinet Member for Education:

What is being done to ensure that we reduce the rate of permanent exclusions for young people in our Borough to zero?

Reply

A small rise in the number of permanent exclusions has been seen this year with the final decision on whether to permanently exclude a pupil sitting with head teachers. The main reason for permanent exclusion is continuous disruptive behaviour which has been consistent over the past three academic years. Whilst there has been a reduction in the number of permanent exclusions for physical assault on pupils, there has been an increase in 2023/24 in cases of drug abuse with an emerging theme around suspensions linked to the use of vapes. This is a national theme and in Bexley a working group has been established, working with school leaders to address this emerging challenge.

Schools are encouraged to put in a range of measures to prevent exclusions including early intervention, managed moves, referrals for outreach support from the Alternative Provision and short stay placements at the Alternative Provision. We also run a behaviour network to support teachers, and schools also have allocated officers to support where students are deemed at risk of exclusion.

Exclusion data is shared with the Strategic Education Partnership through the behaviour, safeguarding and attendance sub-group and at the termly head teacher forum.

22. From Councillor Borella to Councillor Leaf, Cabinet Member for Resources:

Since the law changed regarding overseas voters, what is the cost to the Council of receiving postal votes from abroad?

Reply

Since the law changed regarding overseas voters, the cost to the Council of receiving postal votes from abroad was absorbed within the existing budget for Electoral Services. Councillor Borella will be interested to know that as at 1 July 2024, there were a total of 395 overseas voters, who chose the following means to vote:

Postal votes from overseas

Overseas proxies

Overseas postal proxies (where the proxy elected a postal vote)

Overseas voters who have not elected to vote by postal or proxy

I know that Councillor Borella will want to join me in thanking our Elections Team for their work implemented these and other change.

23. From Councillor Asunramu to Councillor Chris Taylor, Cabinet Member for Children's Services:

What work is being done to support young adult care leavers to secure suitable and affordable accommodation and prevent homelessness?

Reply

Bexley Leaving Care Service works closely with our colleagues in housing to support our young adults leaving our care to seek suitable and affordable accommodation. Department of Levelling Up Communities have funded two Homeless Prevention Officer posts; one of our

Homeless Prevention Officers has been in post since June 2023 and works across both Children's Services and Housing; the second joined us in April 2024. There is a joint Children's Services and Housing protocol in place and training across the Children's Services Directorate and Housing has been undertaken.

All children in our care have allocated social workers, at the age of 16 Personal Advisors are co-allocated. Accommodation pathways are discussed as part of the pathway planning process which starts when young people in our care are 16 years old. Social workers and Personal Advisors work jointly to support the young people not only to understand the accommodation pathways post 18 but also to manage expectations. Personal Advisors encourage young people to place bids on Home Choice. Private renting might also offer more geographical flexibility for the young person.

The Personal Advisors in the Leaving Care Service support our young adults leaving our care with their home choice [social housing] registration following them turning 18. Each young person in our care aged 16 and 17 and young adults leaving our care [18-25] are supported by their Social Worker, Keyworker, Foster Carer and Personal Advisor to ensure they complete their Independence Tool Kits which is shared with Housing when their housing application is made. In Bexley, we have developed our own Independence Tool Kit which is started with our young people when they are 16. This is an assessment tool which allows us to work collaboratively with our young people in our care and young adults leaving our care to ensure a robust assessment of their independent living skills; keyworkers/carers also support with this.

In Bexley, we have developed a detailed 'Welcome to your Home Pack' for our young adults leaving our care when they are given their permanent home.

All young people in our care are reviewed regularly at the 16+ panel which is chaired by the Leaving Care Service Manager to ensure that they are in appropriate placements that are supporting their needs, preparing them for independent living and that they have access to appropriate ID such as passports, bank accounts etc for when they turn 18.

Housing and Personal Advisors undertake financial assessments with all young adults leaving our care who make Home Choice Applications so that we know their tenancy can be sustained over time and it is clear to the young adult leaving our care what is affordable to them. Our Homeless Prevention Officers also work closely with Housing Associations who house our young adults leaving our care and they meet monthly to review the progress of our young adults leaving our care; this means that we are able to identify early if there are any tenancy issues, rent arrears and or Anti-Social Behaviour that we need to support with, thus promoting sustainable tenancies for our young adults leaving our care.

Our Homeless Prevention Officers support our young adults leaving our care when they turn 18 to apply for appropriate benefits such as Universal Credit and Housing Benefit, or PIP (Personal Independent Payment) where appropriate. The Homeless Prevention Officers support young adults leaving our care with accessing the appropriate benefits along with advice and support. If a young adult leaving our care has their benefits stopped for any reason, Bexley Social Care will support financially with subsistence payments whilst the application is re-submitted.

There are monthly meetings held between the Leaving Care Service Manager and colleagues in housing to address any issues identified. Our colleagues in Housing also provide monthly reports on the young adults leaving our care who have been socially housed and those bidding so we can monitor and review on an individual basis.

The Homeless Prevention Officers and the Careers Advisor in the Leaving Care Service also attend the 18+ panel chaired by the Service Manager for Leaving Care to ensure that we identify those young adults leaving our care who may require more support around budgeting,

money management and education, training and employment. For any young adults leaving our care who require additional support, bespoke packages of support such as outreach work is agreed and then reviewed.

24. From Councillor Nicola Taylor to Councillor Leaf, Cabinet Member for Resources:

When will the future plans for the now vacant Inspire Centre be shared with Members?

Reply

The site at 20 Whitehall Lane, Slade Green, DA8 2HD is now vacant as Inspire Community Trust (ICT) vacated at the end of May. We are reviewing potential options for the future of the site and Members will be updated in due course.

25. From Councillor Asunramu to Councillor Chris Taylor, Cabinet Member for Children's Services:

What work is being done to support unaccompanied children in our care?

Reply

Young people in our care who are identified as unaccompanied are immediately cared for by the Local Authority under section 20, Children Act 1989 arrangements. We identify suitable placements for the children either in foster care or semi-independent provision based on their age and assessed needs at the time they are referred to us. In addition to meeting their basic needs, the carers also support the unaccompanied children in our care to ensure that their cultural and religious needs are met.

Each child/young person in our care is allocated a social worker and an Independent Reviewing Officer; both continue to support the child/young person to make sure they have a clear and needs led care plan which is in line with their assessed needs and wishes and feelings. This is then regularly reviewed through the Children Looked After Review meetings, with the young person and professionals and people around that child/young person who are important to them.

Social workers identify appropriate community resources for unaccompanied children in our care to ensure that their cultural, linguistic and religious needs are promoted; this includes linking them with various community groups from their countries of origin and also places of worship.

Young people in our care are supported with their applications to the Home Office for leave to remain.

Young people in our care are referred to organisations such as the Red Cross who support with tracing and locating their families in their home countries, social workers support young people in maintaining links with their families.

Children and young people in our care are also supported by Virtual School to ensure they are accessing education and training that meets their needs as set out in their Personal Education Plan (PEP). Unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people are offered bespoke social and educational support in a range of ways which includes access to study resources, tuition, English language study group, Conversation Club and access to the wider participation activities programme. The activities programme incorporates local provisions for cultural celebrations, educational trips and Bike-ability training, as well as Pan-London events like a recent South London sports day hosted by Charlton Athletic Community Trust. The Virtual School and Participation service provide a range of targeted activities for unaccompanied

young people as well as promoting their participation in wider inclusive group activity to promote understanding about life in the UK and community cohesion.

Children and young people in our care who are unaccompanied are supported to prepare for independent living as any other child in our care is; this means co-allocation to a Personal Advisor at the age of 16 who will work jointly with the allocated social worker, review of their permanency plans via the Permanency Panels chaired by the Service Manager for Children in our Care and review of those over 16 at the 16+ panel chaired by the Service Manager for Leaving Care.

26. From Councillor Amaning to Councillor Chris Taylor, Cabinet Member for Children's Services:

What work is being done by the Council to support and champion our Special Guardianships?

Reply

In Bexley our vision is to keep families together where possible and a variety of support is in place to promote this. Where children cannot live with their birth parents we always explore extended family and kinship networks in an attempt to allow the child to remain within their community.

When a Special Guardianship Order (SGO) is made, the specific support for each child is detailed in the Special Guardianship support plan which includes any contact arrangements for the child with birth family and significant people in their life, any financial support available, practical support and contact details of support services the family can access such as Kinship and Family Action.

As a service we have a dedicated SGO team. There is a duty line that can offer advice and support as requested. We send out Newsletters to all Special Guardians, sharing useful information such as upcoming events, training and community events that may interest families. We offer online and face to face training such as Reflective Parenting, Trauma and KEEP.

We hold bi-monthly coffee mornings where Special Guardians can meet and spend time with other Special Guardians and also arrange social events throughout the year such as Easter, summer events, Halloween and Christmas.

We can also apply via the Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund (ASGSF) to pay for therapeutic services for children.

27. From Councillor Gill to Councillor Jackson, Chairman of the Pensions Committee:

Can you provide an update on the human rights analysis used when selecting which pension pots to invest in?

Reply

The Bexley Fund's Policies

The Bexley Fund has an approved [Investment Strategy Statement \(ISS\)](#) and [Responsible Investment \(RI\) Policy](#) which outlines the Fund's approach to ESG (which includes human rights) and therefore its guidelines when selecting external investment managers. Key points are:

- The Fund expects all of its managers to have signed up to “The UK Stewardship Code” and to report regularly on their compliance with the Code and other relevant ESG principles.
- The Fund is a member of the Local Authority Pension Fund Forum (LAPFF) and in this way collaborates with other LGPS Funds to magnify its voice and maximise the influence of investors as asset owners.

London Collective Investment Vehicle (LCIV)

The Fund also runs many of its investments through its LGPS pool, the London CIV. LCIV maintains a thorough due diligence process which screens fund managers through their numerous policies ([Responsible Investment](#), [Stewardship](#), [Climate](#)).

The LCIV also integrates ESG policies throughout its investment manager selection and monitoring processes which are conducted on a regular basis.

Investment Consultant: Redington

The Fund utilises its investment consultant to source fund managers. Redington runs searches for managers that comply with the fund’s ESG expectations and uses its own due diligence process when selecting potential fund managers to present to committee.

This was recently demonstrated with presentations at the [02 November 2023](#) Pensions committee, where Redington demonstrated its fund selection process, which included ESG criteria.

28.From Councillor Day to Councillor Diment, Cabinet Member for Neighbourhoods

What representations did the Council make to JSM the contractor doing the cabling works along the Northend Road, which have caused massive disruption to residents and businesses?

Reply

JSM are working on behalf of Cory on their incinerator project. Cory have obtained a Development Consent Order which allows them to deliver their nationally significant infrastructure project with reduced consents. They do still need to apply for street works permits, but these can only be rejected on the grounds of safety or conflict with other works.

The Council’s engineers and street works team have been meeting with JSM at least once a week to set the programme and routing, as well as agree the method for passing through six of our highway structures. It was the street works team that encouraged them to set up a webpage for the project, which provides details of the works in progress, traffic implications, and their programme.

Laying the new high-power cables was always expected to take up to 2 years to complete, and the JSM work has actually progressed slightly ahead of schedule. The expected end date is January/February.

29.From Councillor Hinkley to Councillor Diment, Cabinet Member for Neighbourhoods:

Will the Cabinet Member join me in congratulating the Mayor of London for introducing the fully electric 132 bus route into Bexley?

Reply

The conversion of the 132 bus to electric operation took place two years ago. It is unfortunate that in the period since then, while over 1000 new electric buses have been put onto the streets of London, only four of those, on the B13 route, are being used in Bexley. I am aware that over the last year a number of new contracts have been awarded by TfL for bus routes in Bexley with the promise that they will, in time, be converted to electric operation. None of those conversions have yet been made. I look forward to that promise being met. However I am also aware that new contracts have been awarded recently in Bexley, for example the 422 bus, which specify diesel operation for at least the next five years.

30.From Councillor Ogundayo to Councillor Diment, Cabinet Member for Neighbourhoods:

Why do we have 36 vacant school crossing patrol sites in the Borough, putting at risk the safety of schoolchildren?

Reply

Bexley has 36 identified sites where a School Crossing Patrol service could prove useful, and currently we have 8 sites in operation. This level of vacant sites is due to a number of factors, the main ones being the extreme difficulty in recruiting to this low-hours role, working two shifts per day, every day of the school week, come rain or shine, as well as the reduction and now withdrawal of funding from TfL in recent years.

The fact that we have 36 identified sites does not mean that school children are at risk of a collision, it is that the Council is not providing an attendant to help them cross at these locations, and the parents need to make their own decisions on whether to allow their children to walk to/from school unattended. Bexley is one of the top performing boroughs for having low levels of road casualties, and there are no collision problems currently at the vacant sites.

Given the recruitment and funding difficulties mentioned, officers are already working on a programme for introducing physical pedestrian crossings across the Borough, which will provide a crossing function 24/7, rather than just at the school opening and closing times. The School Crossing Patrol sites along with a few additional requested locations were all re-assessed against a criterion for numbers crossing, volumes of traffic, difficulty in crossing, and road collision record, to identify priorities. I have recently approved two zebra crossings to be installed (near Old Bexley and Belmont Schools), and am awaiting a report on two further locations soon (near St Fidelis and Northumberland Heath schools).