

## **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 25<sup>th</sup> May 2022 that were agreed at the Council meeting on 20<sup>th</sup> 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 14<sup>th</sup> 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.