

## **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 15<sup>th</sup> June 2023 and the Bexley Wellbeing Partnership on 22<sup>nd</sup> 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 7<sup>th</sup> 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.