

## **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 3<sup>rd</sup> 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.