

## WRITTEN REPLIES TO COUNCIL QUESTIONS – 17 JULY 2024

### A. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBER OF THE PUBLIC

1. From local resident Dimitri Shvorob to Councillor Baroness O'Neill of Bexley OBE, Leader of the Council:

Why does a Bexley household in council tax band D pay over £200 more than a similar household in Greenwich or Bromley?

Reply

Council tax is only one source of income that finances how we pay for all our services – the others being business rates, fees and charges, and Government grants.

Bexley's grant from Government is much lower than that of many others (including Greenwich) based on an out-dated formula that was set in 2010. Since then the need and demographic make-up of our residents has changed dramatically but we have the same responsibilities and pressures, which is why we've regularly 'encouraged' Government to revisit the distribution leading to a fairer funding formula and a level playing field. That has meant that council tax has had to be raised to cover some of the gap. In fact, as I've quoted before, if we had the same Government grant as some of the Inner London Boroughs we probably wouldn't need to collect any council tax from our residents.

It is true that Bexley's band D charge at £2,115.04 pa is more expensive than Bromley and Greenwich but less expensive than Sutton (£2,166.18), Havering (£2,207.92), Richmond (£2,263.66) and Kingston (£2,413.47).

It is interesting that the gap between us and the other boroughs was actually established/created when Labour were last in control in Bexley as we were below the outer London average in 2002 but, by 2006, we were above. That was caused by the increase to council tax during that period. Since 2006, in cash terms and excluding the GLA precept, our Band D CT has risen by 64% in 18 years whereas it increased by 34% in 4 years under Labour.

2. From local resident Dimitri Shvorob to Councillor Diment, Cabinet Member for Neighbourhoods:

Can you please explain the absence of enforcement action against Sidcup's Khazana restaurant for breaching a retroactively granted planning permission with an advertising sign, after a year of complaints to the Council and local Councillors?

Reply

The Council has not taken formal enforcement action against the unauthorised display of this advertisement because a breach of the Advertisement Regulations or a breach of condition 2 of Advertisement Consent 23/01671/ADV has not been established. This is despite multiple visits to the premises. The case remains under investigation.

The Council is unable to disclose what action is, or is not, proposed at this time as it may prejudice any future legal action that may be considered should there be a breach that the premises owner chooses not to resolve. However, officers will seek a negotiated solution if a breach of Condition 2 is found and prior to the consideration of any future action.

Once a decision has been made, the complainant will be updated on any action that the Council may or may not take on the reported issue.

## **B. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL**

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

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

Can the Cabinet Member for Adults' Services and Health update us on the recent event held in Bexley to support carers?

Reply

This year the event was held on 11<sup>th</sup> June at the Holiday Inn and almost 150 carers attended. Some 22 partner organisations offered advice and support with informative talks on direct payments, mental health support and other issues held throughout the day. A team of trusted assessors from One Bexley were also on hand to help attendees to complete carers' assessments.

The event was a chance for us to provide wellbeing support to carers, with massage, Reiki and Tai Chi organised for attendees, and therapy dogs also on hand to meet them. Private space was arranged for carers to talk to counsellors on the day.

Bexley's new Mayor, Councillor Sue Gower joined the event, spending time with partner organisations to understand the support they provide to unpaid carers living across the borough.

The event was organised by the Bexley Carers Partnership with input from carers and building on feedback from previous events.

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

Can you outline the support that the Council is providing to the four schools in Bexley that currently have deficit budgets?

Reply

Officers have regular meetings with schools in deficit to review their financial monitoring and to discuss budget risks and opportunities. These meetings aim to provide holistic support to schools, and include the Head Teacher, Governors, School Business Manager and/or external Bursar and colleagues from Bexley finance, schools HR, governor support and school improvement.

All deficit schools have participated in the DfE Schools Resource Management Advisor review, which looks at the historic outturns, current and future budgets, staffing, benchmarking and other metrics to identify what the school is already doing well and if there are any opportunities to improve budget efficiency. Although the schools have found it useful to have an independent review, it remains challenging to find ways to eliminate deficits.

8. From Councillor Ball to Councillor Leaf, Cabinet Member for Resources:

How many Member enquiries have been submitted each month for the last year, broken down by service area?

Reply

The table below contains data we hold on Member Enquiries in each month from June 2023 up to and including June 2024. If Councillor Ball requires further information about a particular service area or enquiry, he is welcome to contact the relevant Cabinet Member or me.

**Member Enquiries submitted each month for the last year – July 2023 – June 2024 broken down by service area:**

Service Area	Jul 23	Aug 23	Sep 23	Oct 23	Nov 23	Dec 23	Jan 24	Feb 24	Mar 24	Apr 24	May 24	Jun 24
Adult Social Care & Health	6	8	2	5	5	7	3	2	6	5	4	4
Children's Social Care	1	3	1	2	1	0	0	1	1	5	2	3
Corporate Services	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	2	2	0	2	0
Educational Achievement & Inclusion	4	4	4	7	8	8	6	3	1	5	5	2
Finance and Property	10	3	3	7	7	2	5	16	7	9	4	4
Legal & Democratic Service	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Place	187	139	156	145	129	113	125	145	91	107	112	92
<b>Total Received</b>	209	157	166	167	152	130	140	169	108	131	129	105
<b>Overall Total for period Jul 23-Jun 24</b>	<b>1763</b>											

9. From Councillor O'Hare to Councillor Diment, Cabinet Member for Neighbourhoods:

Will the Cabinet Member for Neighbourhoods update Council on measures being taken by the Council to further reduce littering and fly-tipping across Bexley?

Reply

On 1<sup>st</sup> July 2024 the Council introduced higher thresholds for Fixed Penalty Notices issued for littering and fly-tipping offences. FPNs for littering have now been set at £300 reduced to £150 for early payment, and new FPNs for fly-tipping have been introduced at various levels up to a maximum of £1000.

Alongside these increases, we have also re-tendered our Environmental Enforcement contract, with the new contractor starting on 1<sup>st</sup> July 2024. The contractor will be introducing new evidence-gathering procedures including conducting doorstep interviews under caution with members of the public to establish where waste deposits have come from and take enforcement action against the offenders.

We have recently procured new CCTV equipment which will be installed in some of the worst affected areas in the borough and will hopefully aid our enforcement team in identifying offenders and pursuing enforcement action.

We are also in the process of setting up a working group with neighbouring boroughs to enable sharing of intelligence in relation to the most serious waste crime offences which are carried out across SE London and North Kent.

Finally, we undertake regular partnership operations with the Metropolitan Police, Environment Agency and others to ensure that waste carriers are compliant with regulations and have the correct permits in place for collection and transfer of waste.

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

Given reported falling school rolls across London, can the Cabinet Member for Education, provide an assessment of the likely impact in Bexley?

Reply

In line with most London Boroughs, Bexley is expecting to see a decline in mainstream pupil numbers over the coming years and to address this we are, through the Strategic Education Partnership, undertaking work which will look at ways to minimise this. This includes a series of discussions with the Department for Education's Regional Schools Group and every primary school on the current and projected situation regarding future pupil numbers.

This initiative will identify potential and sustainable options to reduce the number of mainstream primary places over the next two academic years.

In tandem to this exercise, we are also looking at opportunities to utilise any surplus space within our mainstream schools to increase the number of SEND specialist places.

Officers have also started to have similar conversations with our secondary schools.

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

Will the Leader join in me in thanking the police for their work on polling day?

Reply

Absolutely I, like most Bexley residents, always welcome seeing the Police around and about the Borough which is why, when congratulating the Mayor on his re-election, we once again made the case for borough based policing and more police in Bexley.

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

Can you give us an update on the safety valve and that we are still on target to meet the budgetary requirements of this programme?

Reply

The Local Authority has reviewed its 2024/25 high needs budget to take account of the trends identified in financial monitoring last year. On the basis of the revised budget the authority is forecasting that its accumulated deficit at the end of 2024/25 will be £6.957m. The original Safety Valve profile envisaged that the deficit at this stage would be £7.641m. This indicates that we are currently on track to eliminate the deficit by the end of the Safety Valve programme in 2028-29. Officers will continue to closely monitor the numbers and costs of EHCPs to ensure the programme stays on track.

For 2023-2024, the Council submitted reports to the DfE in June, September and December successfully gaining all three instalments of the agreed funding totalling £2.56m, following satisfactory progress against the conditions in the Safety Valve Agreement. For 2024/2025 the Council submitted the first of three update reports to the DfE in June and received an instalment of £0.543m at the end of the month. The three instalments for 2024-2025 have been reprofiled following an advance payment of £0.930 in March, leaving a total of £1.63m expected for the year (for a total of £2.56m) as per the Safety Valve Agreement. The second and third reports are due in August and November.

The implementation of Safety Valve interventions has been rolled out in two phases. Phase 1 started in the Autumn term 2023 and Phase 2 started in the Spring and Summer terms of 2024. Some of the highlights at the end of the first year of the Safety Valve Programme include: data collated so far evidence positive impact for children and young people who have taken part in early intervention initiatives, which have been offered to every school in Bexley. At the end of the Supported Internship Programme 14 young people are expected to gain paid employment. An additional 30 specialist places have been created and filled at Parkway School and 19 young people have returned to Bexley provision from out of borough independent schools.

13. From Councillor Jackson to Councillor Bishop, Cabinet Member for Communities and Housing:

Could the Cabinet Member for Communities and Housing say what benefit a Borough based policing structure would be to Bexley?

Reply

The Borough moved to a Tri Borough Basic Command Unit in 2018 under the current Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan who is the Police & Crime Commissioner for London. Prior to that we had borough-based policing in London.

Susan Hall, the Conservative candidate in May, recognised that police need to be based in the communities they serve and she was committed to bringing back borough based policing if she was elected.

It's clear that Bexley residents get less resource compared with Greenwich and Lewisham in the tri-borough model. It appears that the current model puts far too much pressure on the Safer Neighbourhood Teams to respond to all crime types.

It would also benefit our residents if the Mayor delegated the full London Crime Prevention Fund and Violence Reduction Unit funding to local Community Safety Partnership as this would mean Bexley received a fair share of this fund thereby allowing us to address issues such as violence and exploitation at a grassroots level.

We welcome the recent investment in the front desk at Bexleyheath Police Station to ensure that face to face contact with residents can be maintained. There-establishment of a borough-based management team for 'Neighbourhood Policing' and partnerships is also welcomed.

However, a return to borough-based policing would go even further in addressing public concerns around confidence in policing and provide a better service for our residents. It would enable us to have direct contact with local Neighbourhood Teams leading to more efficient response to local intelligence and responding to community priorities. It would also mean a Borough Commander who allocates resources based on Bexley's needs rather than the needs across South East London and local proactive specialist teams are better placed to tackle Drug Supply, Burglary and Violence. Borough based policing would create stronger local partnerships to investigate and reduce Domestic Abuse.

This Council has once again asked the Mayor of London to reconsider his position on this issue and revert to borough based policing.

14. From Councillor Perfect to Councillor Chris Taylor, Cabinet Member for Children's Services:

Does the Cabinet Member believe that the Council has acted reasonably during the 2024/25 financial year in relation to the payment of Direct Payments made by the Children with Disabilities Service?

Reply

In short yes.

A review of our payments was initiated in 2024 in an attempt to harmonise both processes and payments to both Adults' and Children's Services; this review is ongoing, but to ensure that children with disabilities were not disadvantaged by inflation we have increased rates pending further review and these are being backdated to 1st April 2024.

15. From Councillor Ball to Councillor Diment, Cabinet Member for Neighbourhoods:

How many tonnes of litter have been picked up from the roads and pavements in the last year?

Reply

2022/23 tonnages:

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

Remaining 661.72 tonnes is street cleansing detritus.

Data for 2023/24 not yet available.

16. From Councillor Ball to Councillor Diment, Cabinet Member for Neighbourhoods:

What steps do we take to avoid fly tipping in the Borough?

Reply

The Council's Environmental Crime team liaise with residents, businesses and other members of the public in relation to evidence obtained in connection with fly-tipping offences. We utilise CCTV and intelligence to investigate waste crimes and will take statements and other forms of evidence from witnesses. Once clear evidence is obtained, a decision will be made on whether to pursue the matter through the courts or through issuance of Fixed Penalty Notices.

On 1<sup>st</sup> July 2024 the Council introduced higher thresholds for Fixed Penalty Notices issued for littering and fly-tipping offences. FPNs for littering have now been set at £300 reduced to £150 for early payment, and new FPNs for fly-tipping have been introduced at various levels up to a maximum of £1000.

Alongside these increases, we have also re-tendered our Environmental Enforcement contract, with the new contractor starting on 1<sup>st</sup> July 2024. The contractor will be introducing new evidence-gathering procedures including conducting doorstep interviews under caution with members of the public to establish where waste deposits have come from and take enforcement action against the offenders.

We have recently procured new CCTV equipment which will be installed in some of the worst affected areas in the borough and will hopefully aid our enforcement team in identifying offenders and pursuing enforcement action.

We are also in the process of setting up a working group with neighbouring boroughs to enable sharing of intelligence in relation to the most serious waste crime offences which are carried out across SE London and North Kent.

Finally, we undertake regular partnership operations with the Metropolitan Police, Environment Agency and others to ensure that waste carriers are compliant with regulations and have the correct permits in place for collection and transfer of waste.

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

How are we progressing in making sure EHC plans are completed and issued in a timely way to better reflect the needs and provision for the child or young person across health, education and social care?

Reply

The Local Area Partnership is working with urgency to address the quality of Education, Health and Care Plans and the annual review process identified by the inspectors during the Local Area SEND and Alternative Provision Inspection in December 2023. The first Deep Dive Monitoring Meeting with the Department of Health and NHS England took place on 17 July 2024. This meeting looked at/will look at this Priority Area for Improvement in depth.

To date, the Local Area Partnership is on track with the actions we have detailed in the Priority Action Plan. It is too early to see the full impact of these improvement actions, however, the achievements to date are:-

1. In Bexley, 84% of new Education, Health and Care Plan Assessments are issued within the required 20 weeks. This compares favourably with the national figure of 50%.
2. In June 2024, 64% of children and young people had had a review of their EHCP in the last 12 months. This is an improvement from January 2024, when only 49% of annual reviews had been completed. We are aiming for 85% to be completed annually by June 2025.
3. Approval has been given for the recruitment of two EHCP Reviewing Officers. Their role will be to ensure all education providers and partner agencies receive a termly report detailing the EHCP annual reviews due to be completed that term, to receive, log and process the annual review paperwork; to send out the decision letters to parents/carers following annual reviews and to complete less complex amendments of EHCPs following review.
4. A series of refresher training, starting on 22 March 2024, has been provided to SEN Case Officers and EHCP Advice Training was provided to health and social care advice givers by Debbie Orton, DfE Advisor on 24 May 2024.
5. A EHCP Quality Assurance Framework has been approved by the SEND Improvement and Assurance Board. This sets out six levels of quality audits of EHCPs to identify areas for improvement and audit the impact of the improvements. 33% of the EHCPs audited in June 2024 were outstanding for their outcomes. This is a significant improvement and an impact of the revised SEN Case Officer training.
6. A Designated Social Care Officer post has been approved. This post will have a key role in improving and monitoring the timeliness and quality of social care advice for EHCPs.

7. A new SEN Hub portal has been developed and is to be piloted with the aim that this will be rolled out to all schools by December 2024, and it will use this to streamline, monitor and improve the annual review process.
8. Survey questions to ensure we receive regular and robust feedback from parents/carers, young people and SENCos have been co-developed, and surveys are ready to be commenced.

18. From Councillor Gill to Councillor Diment, Cabinet Member for Neighbourhoods:

Has the Cabinet Member yet found time to consider free parking for an hour in targeted car parks to help promote local high streets and small businesses?

Reply

Within the Council fees and charges, all car park tariffs were reviewed, and a new tariff was approved, these new tariffs went live on the 1<sup>st</sup> July 2024. There are no plans to consider free parking in any of the car parks at this time.

19. From Councillor Asunramu to Councillor Bishop, Cabinet Member for Communities and Housing:

Could the Cabinet Member provide the latest figures for empty homes in the Borough?

Reply

As at 30<sup>th</sup> June 2024 there were 879 empty properties in the Borough. Of these 243 have been empty and unfurnished for 2 years or more and therefore attract a long-term empty premium.

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

What is being done to ensure that more Bexley children are accepted into the grammar schools that are based in Bexley?

Reply

For a pupil to be considered for one of the 800 places within one of Bexley's four grammar schools, they must first achieve the selective standard in the selection test held at the beginning of Year 6. Places are then allocated through the Pan London co-ordinated admissions process in accordance with each of the schools' published admissions policy which ensures a transparent, equitable and legal approach.

The test is open to all children regardless of where they live, but places at the grammar schools are allocated in accordance with the schools' oversubscription criteria which form part of their published admissions policy, and achieving the selective standard does not guarantee the offer of a place at a grammar school, unless a child is one of the 180 highest scorers. Most places are offered in order of home to school distance.

Advice is provided to our parents and carers through information that is provided to all Bexley schools to ensure that they are aware of the key steps and dates associated with the Bexley selection test. In recent years, apart from individual and isolated cases all Bexley pupils who have been deemed selective in the Bexley test and have expressed a first preference for a Bexley Grammar School have been allocated a place. With the individual and isolated cases, had they also stated a preference for more than one Bexley Grammar Schools, they would have been offered a place at one of our Grammar Schools.



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

What is being done to ensure that we reduce the rate of permanent exclusions for young people in our Borough to zero?

Reply

A small rise in the number of permanent exclusions has been seen this year with the final decision on whether to permanently exclude a pupil sitting with head teachers. The main reason for permanent exclusion is continuous disruptive behaviour which has been consistent over the past three academic years. Whilst there has been a reduction in the number of permanent exclusions for physical assault on pupils, there has been an increase in 2023/24 in cases of drug abuse with an emerging theme around suspensions linked to the use of vapes. This is a national theme and in Bexley a working group has been established, working with school leaders to address this emerging challenge.

Schools are encouraged to put in a range of measures to prevent exclusions including early intervention, managed moves, referrals for outreach support from the Alternative Provision and short stay placements at the Alternative Provision. We also run a behaviour network to support teachers, and schools also have allocated officers to support where students are deemed at risk of exclusion.

Exclusion data is shared with the Strategic Education Partnership through the behaviour, safeguarding and attendance sub-group and at the termly head teacher forum.

22. From Councillor Borella to Councillor Leaf, Cabinet Member for Resources:

Since the law changed regarding overseas voters, what is the cost to the Council of receiving postal votes from abroad?

Reply

Since the law changed regarding overseas voters, the cost to the Council of receiving postal votes from abroad was absorbed within the existing budget for Electoral Services. Councillor Borella will be interested to know that as at 1 July 2024, there were a total of 395 overseas voters, who chose the following means to vote:

Postal votes from overseas

Overseas proxies

Overseas postal proxies (where the proxy elected a postal vote)

Overseas voters who have not elected to vote by postal or proxy

I know that Councillor Borella will want to join me in thanking our Elections Team for their work implemented these and other change.

23. From Councillor Asunramu to Councillor Chris Taylor, Cabinet Member for Children's Services:

What work is being done to support young adult care leavers to secure suitable and affordable accommodation and prevent homelessness?

Reply

Bexley Leaving Care Service works closely with our colleagues in housing to support our young adults leaving our care to seek suitable and affordable accommodation. Department of Levelling Up Communities have funded two Homeless Prevention Officer posts; one of our

Homeless Prevention Officers has been in post since June 2023 and works across both Children's Services and Housing; the second joined us in April 2024. There is a joint Children's Services and Housing protocol in place and training across the Children's Services Directorate and Housing has been undertaken.

All children in our care have allocated social workers, at the age of 16 Personal Advisors are co-allocated. Accommodation pathways are discussed as part of the pathway planning process which starts when young people in our care are 16 years old. Social workers and Personal Advisors work jointly to support the young people not only to understand the accommodation pathways post 18 but also to manage expectations. Personal Advisors encourage young people to place bids on Home Choice. Private renting might also offer more geographical flexibility for the young person.

The Personal Advisors in the Leaving Care Service support our young adults leaving our care with their home choice [social housing] registration following them turning 18. Each young person in our care aged 16 and 17 and young adults leaving our care [18-25] are supported by their Social Worker, Keyworker, Foster Carer and Personal Advisor to ensure they complete their Independence Tool Kits which is shared with Housing when their housing application is made. In Bexley, we have developed our own Independence Tool Kit which is started with our young people when they are 16. This is an assessment tool which allows us to work collaboratively with our young people in our care and young adults leaving our care to ensure a robust assessment of their independent living skills; keyworkers/carers also support with this.

In Bexley, we have developed a detailed 'Welcome to your Home Pack' for our young adults leaving our care when they are given their permanent home.

All young people in our care are reviewed regularly at the 16+ panel which is chaired by the Leaving Care Service Manager to ensure that they are in appropriate placements that are supporting their needs, preparing them for independent living and that they have access to appropriate ID such as passports, bank accounts etc for when they turn 18.

Housing and Personal Advisors undertake financial assessments with all young adults leaving our care who make Home Choice Applications so that we know their tenancy can be sustained over time and it is clear to the young adult leaving our care what is affordable to them. Our Homeless Prevention Officers also work closely with Housing Associations who home our young adults leaving our care and they meet monthly to review the progress of our young adults leaving our care; this means that we are able to identify early if there are any tenancy issues, rent arrears and or Anti-Social Behaviour that we need to support with, thus promoting sustainable tenancies for our young adults leaving our care.

Our Homeless Prevention Officers support our young adults leaving our care when they turn 18 to apply for appropriate benefits such as Universal Credit and Housing Benefit, or PIP (Personal Independent Payment) where appropriate. The Homeless Prevention Officers support young adults leaving our care with accessing the appropriate benefits along with advice and support. If a young adult leaving our care has their benefits stopped for any reason, Bexley Social Care will support financially with subsistence payments whilst the application is re-submitted.

There are monthly meetings held between the Leaving Care Service Manager and colleagues in housing to address any issues identified. Our colleagues in Housing also provide monthly reports on the young adults leaving our care who have been socially housed and those bidding so we can monitor and review on an individual basis.

The Homeless Prevention Officers and the Careers Advisor in the Leaving Care Service also attend the 18+ panel chaired by the Service Manager for Leaving Care to ensure that we identify those young adults leaving our care who may require more support around budgeting,

money management and education, training and employment. For any young adults leaving our care who require additional support, bespoke packages of support such as outreach work is agreed and then reviewed.

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

When will the future plans for the now vacant Inspire Centre be shared with Members?

Reply

The site at 20 Whitehall Lane, Slade Green, DA8 2HD is now vacant as Inspire Community Trust (ICT) vacated at the end of May. We are reviewing potential options for the future of the site and Members will be updated in due course.

25. From Councillor Asunramu to Councillor Chris Taylor, Cabinet Member for Children's Services:

What work is being done to support unaccompanied children in our care?

Reply

Young people in our care who are identified as unaccompanied are immediately cared for by the Local Authority under section 20, Children Act 1989 arrangements. We identify suitable placements for the children either in foster care or semi-independent provision based on their age and assessed needs at the time they are referred to us. In addition to meeting their basic needs, the carers also support the unaccompanied children in our care to ensure that their cultural and religious needs are met.

Each child/young person in our care is allocated a social worker and an Independent Reviewing Officer; both continue to support the child/young person to make sure they have a clear and needs led care plan which is in line with their assessed needs and wishes and feelings. This is then regularly reviewed through the Children Looked After Review meetings, with the young person and professionals and people around that child/young person who are important to them.

Social workers identify appropriate community resources for unaccompanied children in our care to ensure that their cultural, linguistic and religious needs are promoted; this includes linking them with various community groups from their countries of origin and also places of worship.

Young people in our care are supported with their applications to the Home Office for leave to remain.

Young people in our care are referred to organisations such as the Red Cross who support with tracing and locating their families in their home countries, social workers support young people in maintaining links with their families.

Children and young people in our care are also supported by Virtual School to ensure they are accessing education and training that meets their needs as set out in their Personal Education Plan (PEP). Unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people are offered bespoke social and educational support in a range of ways which includes access to study resources, tuition, English language study group, Conversation Club and access to the wider participation activities programme. The activities programme incorporates local provisions for cultural celebrations, educational trips and Bike-ability training, as well as Pan-London events like a recent South London sports day hosted by Charlton Athletic Community Trust. The Virtual School and Participation service provide a range of targeted activities for unaccompanied

young people as well as promoting their participation in wider inclusive group activity to promote understanding about life in the UK and community cohesion.

Children and young people in our care who are unaccompanied are supported to prepare for independent living as any other child in our care is; this means co-allocation to a Personal Advisor at the age of 16 who will work jointly with the allocated social worker, review of their permanency plans via the Permanency Panels chaired by the Service Manager for Children in our Care and review of those over 16 at the 16+ panel chaired by the Service Manager for Leaving Care.

26. From Councillor Amaning to Councillor Chris Taylor, Cabinet Member for Children's Services:

What work is being done by the Council to support and champion our Special Guardianships?

Reply

In Bexley our vision is to keep families together where possible and a variety of support is in place to promote this. Where children cannot live with their birth parents we always explore extended family and kinship networks in an attempt to allow the child to remain within their community.

When a Special Guardianship Order (SGO) is made, the specific support for each child is detailed in the Special Guardianship support plan which includes any contact arrangements for the child with birth family and significant people in their life, any financial support available, practical support and contact details of support services the family can access such as Kinship and Family Action.

As a service we have a dedicated SGO team. There is a duty line that can offer advice and support as requested. We send out Newsletters to all Special Guardians, sharing useful information such as upcoming events, training and community events that may interest families. We offer online and face to face training such as Reflective Parenting, Trauma and KEEP.

We hold bi-monthly coffee mornings where Special Guardians can meet and spend time with other Special Guardians and also arrange social events throughout the year such as Easter, summer events, Halloween and Christmas.

We can also apply via the Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund (ASGSF) to pay for therapeutic services for children.

27. From Councillor Gill to Councillor Jackson, Chairman of the Pensions Committee:

Can you provide an update on the human rights analysis used when selecting which pension pots to invest in?

Reply

### **The Bexley Fund's Policies**

The Bexley Fund has an approved [Investment Strategy Statement \(ISS\)](#) and [Responsible Investment \(RI\) Policy](#) which outlines the Fund's approach to ESG (which includes human rights) and therefore its guidelines when selecting external investment managers. Key points are:

- The Fund expects all of its managers to have signed up to “The UK Stewardship Code” and to report regularly on their compliance with the Code and other relevant ESG principles.
- The Fund is a member of the Local Authority Pension Fund Forum (LAPFF) and in this way collaborates with other LGPS Funds to magnify its voice and maximise the influence of investors as asset owners.

### **London Collective Investment Vehicle (LCIV)**

The Fund also runs many of its investments through its LGPS pool, the London CIV. LCIV maintains a thorough due diligence process which screens fund managers through their numerous policies ([Responsible Investment](#), [Stewardship](#), [Climate](#)).

The LCIV also integrates ESG policies throughout its investment manager selection and monitoring processes which are conducted on a regular basis.

### **Investment Consultant: Redington**

The Fund utilises its investment consultant to source fund managers. Redington runs searches for managers that comply with the fund’s ESG expectations and uses its own due diligence process when selecting potential fund managers to present to committee.

This was recently demonstrated with presentations at the [02 November 2023](#) Pensions committee, where Redington demonstrated its fund selection process, which included ESG criteria.

28.From Councillor Day to Councillor Diment, Cabinet Member for Neighbourhoods

What representations did the Council make to JSM the contractor doing the cabling works along the Northend Road, which have caused massive disruption to residents and businesses?

Reply

JSM are working on behalf of Cory on their incinerator project. Cory have obtained a Development Consent Order which allows them to deliver their nationally significant infrastructure project with reduced consents. They do still need to apply for street works permits, but these can only be rejected on the grounds of safety or conflict with other works.

The Council’s engineers and street works team have been meeting with JSM at least once a week to set the programme and routing, as well as agree the method for passing through six of our highway structures. It was the street works team that encouraged them to set up a webpage for the project, which provides details of the works in progress, traffic implications, and their programme.

Laying the new high-power cables was always expected to take up to 2 years to complete, and the JSM work has actually progressed slightly ahead of schedule. The expected end date is January/February.

29.From Councillor Hinkley to Councillor Diment, Cabinet Member for Neighbourhoods:

Will the Cabinet Member join me in congratulating the Mayor of London for introducing the fully electric 132 bus route into Bexley?

Reply

The conversion of the 132 bus to electric operation took place two years ago. It is unfortunate that in the period since then, while over 1000 new electric buses have been put onto the streets of London, only four of those, on the B13 route, are being used in Bexley. I am aware that over the last year a number of new contracts have been awarded by TfL for bus routes in Bexley with the promise that they will, in time, be converted to electric operation. None of those conversions have yet been made. I look forward to that promise being met. However I am also aware that new contracts have been awarded recently in Bexley, for example the 422 bus, which specify diesel operation for at least the next five years.

30.From Councillor Ogundayo to Councillor Diment, Cabinet Member for Neighbourhoods:

Why do we have 36 vacant school crossing patrol sites in the Borough, putting at risk the safety of schoolchildren?

Reply

Bexley has 36 identified sites where a School Crossing Patrol service could prove useful, and currently we have 8 sites in operation. This level of vacant sites is due to a number of factors, the main ones being the extreme difficulty in recruiting to this low-hours role, working two shifts per day, every day of the school week, come rain or shine, as well as the reduction and now withdrawal of funding from TfL in recent years.

The fact that we have 36 identified sites does not mean that school children are at risk of a collision, it is that the Council is not providing an attendant to help them cross at these locations, and the parents need to make their own decisions on whether to allow their children to walk to/from school unattended. Bexley is one of the top performing boroughs for having low levels of road casualties, and there are no collision problems currently at the vacant sites.

Given the recruitment and funding difficulties mentioned, officers are already working on a programme for introducing physical pedestrian crossings across the Borough, which will provide a crossing function 24/7, rather than just at the school opening and closing times. The School Crossing Patrol sites along with a few additional requested locations were all re-assessed against a criterion for numbers crossing, volumes of traffic, difficulty in crossing, and road collision record, to identify priorities. I have recently approved two zebra crossings to be installed (near Old Bexley and Belmont Schools), and am awaiting a report on two further locations soon (near St Fidelis and Northumberland Heath schools).