

# COUNCIL

15 DECEMBER 2021

## PUBLIC QUESTIONS

### I **Question from Kate Jaconello, SE10, to Councillor Danny Thorpe, Leader of the Council**

Can the Leader of the Council provide a response to the joint letter sent in October from the Greenwich Society, Greenwich Hospital Estates and Greenwich Market Traders urging Council support for pavement widening in Greenwich Town Centre?

#### **Reply -**

I thank Kate Jaconello for her question.

The Royal Borough previously submitted a bid to TfL for a more limited pavement widening scheme, of the type described in your letter. This scheme was not considered transformational enough to secure funding from TfL and this led to the broader proposals currently being developed, which include removing the gyratory (one-way) system. Funding was secured for the project from TfL's Liveable Neighbourhoods programme - for developing the broader proposals.

Since the Covid-19 pandemic significantly reduced its income, TfL reduced and then paused funding for the whole Liveable Neighbourhoods programme. TfL has stated its desire to re-start the programme when it is able and has worked with us to maintain some level of progress on some of the technical work, indicating its continued support for the project. However, like all TfL funding, the funding remains uncertain at present.

Whilst likely to be less expensive, the cost of pavement widening would still be considerable: the 2016 bid estimated the more limited option would cost around £4.2 million, compared to the current wider proposal which is estimated at around £6 million. It would require funding from the same source(s) and would be assessed against the same criteria as the broader scheme. Since the previous submission, standards for schemes of this type have increased and there is increased pressure on TfL funding. Therefore, a more limited scheme is likely to be even less successful in attracting funding now.

The broader proposals being developed offer both the best chances of securing the significant funding required - and the greatest benefit for Royal Greenwich.

As you will be aware, a meeting has been arranged for 21st January with you and other key stakeholders to discuss the pavement widening programme proposed.

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**2 Question from Deborah O'Boyle, SE18, to Councillor Sarah Merrill, Cabinet Member for Environment, Sustainability and Transport**

My understanding is that Lateral Flow testing cassettes are (a) recyclable and (b) not considered biohazardous and are required to be single-wrapped and placed in black bins and therefore end up in landfill. This must mean a very considerable increase in dumped plastic.

It is possible for members of the public to arrange recycling privately. But at a cost of £50 per box and its return, this is prohibitive for most.

Is RBG investigating how it could facilitate, presumably in partnership with Veola, recycling of these cassettes?

### **Reply -**

I thank Deborah O'Boyle for her question.

As you outline above, it is the case that the current government guidance (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-disposing-of-waste>) states that the Lateral Flow Cassettes from home, work and school settings should be disposed of via 'black bag' waste collections. In Greenwich, this waste is incinerated with energy recovery (electricity generation and district heating) and does not go to landfill. There are currently no plans to deviate from government guidance in terms of COVID-related waste disposal, however, the service will would be happy to review this as and when the guidance changes.

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## PUBLIC QUESTIONS

### 3 Question from Maria Freeman, SE18, to Councillor Denise Scott-McDonald, Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Good Growth

In March 2018, Greenwich Council [announced](#) £5.2m of improvements for Plumstead High Street. In July 2021 planning permission for new shop fronts and other improvements were [announced](#). Improvements to White Hart Road have been noted, and, in December 2021, the arrival of over 30 new shop fronts by Spring 2022 were [highlighted](#).

What other progress has been made so far in spending the £5.2m on improving our High Street, for example the “greener makeover” mentioned in July 2021? Will this include a deep clean of the High Street, as part of the improvement programme? We last saw the [jet washer in 2017](#) and the High Street could do with some intensive cleaning to complement the new shop fronts.

#### Reply -

I thank Maria Freeman for her question.

The Plumstead Good Growth Fund is a £5.2m programme of two distinct phases - Plumstead High Street and the Power Station. Some works have been hampered by the national shortage of materials and the impact of Covid. To date £2,157,266 has been spent.

Notwithstanding the challenges, works to Plumstead High Street the public realm and shop frontages are continuing:

- The shop frontage work has recently started and is broken into three phases - phases 1 on site, phase 2 secured planning and now awaiting mobilisation following progress on phase 1, phase 3 involves further consultation with potential shop owners.
- Works on White Hart Road are well advanced with the junction works anticipated to start in February 2022 (subject to availability of materials).

- The 'Green Makeover' planning application has very recently been submitted and we await determination. This work will include landscaping and seating at Gavin House, Lakedale Road and Hartville Orchard

Street Services no longer provide a pavement washing service (using the jet washing equipment) for Town Centres or Plumstead High Street. This service was withdrawn in April 2020 as part of MTFs. If and when a deep clean is required for any part of the Borough it would need to be commissioned accordingly.

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### **PUBLIC QUESTIONS**

**4 Question from Shaun Slator, SE18, to Councillor Danny Thorpe, Leader of the Council**

When contacting their elected Councillor, how long should residents expect to wait for a reply?

**Reply -**

I thank Shaun Slator for his question.

When a casework enquiry is received by an elected Councillor it is assigned to a Directorate to be investigated so that the matter can be looked into and a response can be provided.

Directorates have 10 working days to provide a response back to the Councillor from the point of receipt of the enquiry.

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### **PUBLIC QUESTIONS**

**5 Question from Shaun Slator, SE18, to Councillor Danny Thorpe, Leader of the Council**

What is the escalation/complaint procedure if the timescale for Councillors to reply to residents is not adhered to?

**Reply -**

I thank Shaun Slator for his question.

If 10 working days has elapsed since the resident has received acknowledgement that their enquiry has been logged then they should contact the Councillor to ask for an update.

If they remain unsatisfied with the response from the Councillor then they should escalate the matter to the Group Leader of the political party that Councillor is a member of.

The complaints procedure is available on the Council website and complaints can be submitted via the online form.

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### **PUBLIC QUESTIONS**

**6 Question from Fiona Moore, SE3, to Councillor Sarah Merrill, Cabinet Member for Environment, Sustainability and Transport**

This may be the Council's last chance to state your opposition to the Silvertown Tunnel, which would lock us in to decades of high carbon emissions (incompatible with your Carbon Neutral Plan) and devastating air pollution. Will you take it?

**Reply -**

I thank Fiona Moore for her question.

As you are aware, the Development Consent Order that allows Transport for London (TfL) to develop and operate the Silvertown Tunnel was made by the Secretary of State for Transport. There is no legal avenue for the Council to oppose the Tunnel at this stage.

You will also know that the decision to continue the development of the Tunnel does not lie with us. The Leader wrote to the Mayor of London, asking him to pause work on the Silvertown Tunnel, and review the alternative options to reduce congestion and pollution around the Blackwall Tunnel. The Mayor did not agree.

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### PUBLIC QUESTIONS

**7 Question from Fiona Moore, SE3, to Councillor Jackie Smith, Cabinet Member for Community Safety and Enforcement**

The Council [website's page on air quality](#) states: "[we introduced] a lorry ban (over 7.5 tonne) on Romney Road in Greenwich Town Centre to help reduce pollutant concentrations in one of the busiest areas of the borough." That ban is being constantly flouted. Congestion on Romney and Trafalgar Road is getting worse and worse. What is the Council doing to enforce the ban?

[It was put in place in the 1990s because of pressure from parents whose children were getting asthma.]

**Reply -**

I thank Fiona Moore for her question.

The weight limit on Romney Road is enforced by CCTV traffic enforcement cameras, with Penalty Charge Notices issued when the restriction is contravened.

There is more information on CCTV traffic enforcement in Greenwich on the Council's website:

[https://www.royalgreenwich.gov.uk/info/200259/transport\\_and\\_travel/2239/cctv\\_traffic\\_enforcement](https://www.royalgreenwich.gov.uk/info/200259/transport_and_travel/2239/cctv_traffic_enforcement)

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### **PUBLIC QUESTIONS**

**8 Question from Paul Billington, SE18, to Councillor Danny Thorpe, Leader of the Council**

Before the long overdue update of the council website, residents and the wider public were able to see each councillors attendance for all council meetings in total number and percentage form. After the website was updated this information and for some inexplicable reason completely disappeared and not returned since.

In a tweet dated 31 January 2020, the Council stated that "...we are working on making (this) accessible in the future."

In a further tweet of 4 March 2020, the Council replied, "we are currently working on this and hope to have this completed within a few months."

It is now December 2021 and the promised reinstatement of this information on the council website still remains absent.

Greenwich Council appear to be one of a very small number of the 32 London councils - possibly the only London council - to not make this information freely available and accessible to their residents via their website.

With that in mind and in the interests of full transparency, will the council now provide a cast iron date of when this information will be reinstated to the council website - ideally by the end of this month and certainly in advance of the forthcoming local elections - as the residents of our borough have a right to know this information?

**Reply -**

I thank Paul Billington for his question.

I would like to apologise for the delay in getting this matter resolved.

In November 2019 the Council switched Committee Management System providers. The system we selected is used by many other councils and has

delivered many benefits but it didn't automatically display attendance statistics unlike the old system.

Officers have met with our current provider and have got them to add this feature to their system.

As such a software update is scheduled to take place in early January 2022. Officers expect that by the end of January 2022 attendance statistics will be accessible via the Council's website once again.

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## PUBLIC QUESTIONS

**9 Question from Stewart Christie, SE18, to Councillor Miranda Williams, Cabinet Member for Health and Adult's Social Care**

On November 10th, following a meeting of London Councils Health and Wellbeing Network, the Leader of the Council tweeted figures from the NHS South East London CCG

(<https://twitter.com/DanLThorpe/status/1458391746757398544>) showing the borough breakdown for GP numbers and patient ratios.

What are the reasons for Greenwich suffering the worst decrease in GP numbers when other boroughs inside the CCG - like Bromley - have seen slight increases, and why is Greenwich at the top of the league table for patients to GPs in the entire country when compared against the latest data by CCG (Source: [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk) - GP numbers, registered patients and population estimates in England, October 2021)?

### Reply -

I thank Stewart Christie for his question.

The decrease in GP numbers has been a long standing issue and existed well before the pandemic. Nationally there are declining GP numbers, rising demand, struggles to recruit and retain staff and this has knock-on effects for patients. In addition, GP practices have been at the forefront of the NHS' response to the COVID-19 outbreak, delivering vaccine appointments whilst maintaining non-COVID care for patients.

Nationally, there has been little workforce growth since 2015, with the number of GP partners significantly declining over that time. The main reasons for this include:-

- a move from full time to part time hours for better work / life balance and to reduce burn out
- reluctance to take on responsibilities that come with being a partner
- preference for locum or portfolio styles of working
- retirement (often earlier than may have previously been intended)
- general practice no longer being seen as an attractive career option

- smaller numbers of students enrolling into medical training courses

The decline in numbers of GPs in Greenwich mirrors the national picture and the reasons cited above. In particular retirement of an ageing workforce which has resulted in a number of practice mergers over the years and closures of some sites. In recognition of this and that population health and social needs are changing, NHSE has made significant investment into Primary Care Networks (PCNs) for additional workforce roles such as Advanced Practitioners, Clinical Pharmacists and Social Prescribing Link Workers to support GP colleagues and wider practice team. These roles provide a multi-disciplinary approach to care and offer a wider range of services often delivered in the patient's own home. These additional roles are already in place across each of the 6 PCNs within Greenwich and will continue to be grown over the next 2 years.

South East London Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) has, and continues, to actively work with PCNs and education and training colleagues within the Borough to offer training places, develop initiatives for attracting and retaining GPs as well as other healthcare professionals. Given the changing needs of the population, work is also underway locally to empower residents and develop community based assets that can be leveraged to develop effective solutions to promote social inclusion and improve the health and well-being of citizens.

Building a resilient and sustainable workforce model is already one of the key CCG workstreams and will continue to be an area of great focus going as the Integrated Care System (ICS) develops.

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## PUBLIC QUESTIONS

**10 Question from Stewart Christie, SE18, to Councillor Sarah Merrill, Cabinet Member for Environment, Sustainability and Transport**

What criteria are the Council using to judge abandonment of vehicles in our streets, how many have been removed by Ward over the previous years, and at what cost to local residents?

**Reply -**

I thank Stewart Christie for his question.

The Act under which the Council removes vehicles is the Refuse Disposal (Amenity) Act 1978. Under this act the Local Authority is under a duty to remove motor vehicles unlawfully abandoned on any land in the open air.

RBG Officers must consider all ancillary evidence before deciding whether or not a vehicle is abandoned. Officers use a detailed check list when carrying out assessment such as, on an external visual inspection, internal visual inspection, and tax/MOT.

We have the power to remove when we reasonably consider the vehicle appears to be abandoned.

If the keeper comes forward later to claim the vehicle, they must nevertheless pay to have it returned. The Act presumes anything looking as though it is abandoned to be abandoned until proven to the contrary.

We use the following detailed assessment (Defra Guidance).

- vehicle is just a shell
- burnt out
- doors open, doors missing, bonnet open
- seats and inside fittings missing
- windows and or windscreen broken or missing,
- wheels missing, flats tyres, rusty brake discs
- signs of vandalism

- evidence of vehicle having been stripped for parts, for example bumpers and tyres missing
- vehicle full of rubbish
- signs of a tow rope having been used
- missing registration plates
- evidence of vehicle not having moved such as birds mess, dust, weeds, no windscreen wiper marks
- evidence of neglect and poor condition, for example rust, very dirty, scratched or dented
- vehicle has never been seen in the location previously but appears to have been unattended for 10 days or more
- Persistent complaints

The figures shown below relate to abandoned vehicles and not untaxed vehicles. We do not record them by ward.

- Number of abandoned vehicles removed for 19/20 (April 2019 to March 2020) - 66 Abandoned Vehicles
- Number of abandoned vehicles removed for 20/21 (April 2020 to March 2021) - 32 Abandoned Vehicles (DVLA halted enforcement due to Pandemic)
- Number of abandoned vehicles removed for 21/22 (April 2021 to Oct 2021) - 109 Abandoned Vehicles

In response to the financial implications to the residents, the Local Authority have a cost neutral contract with the removal company.

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## PUBLIC QUESTIONS

### 11 Question from Jenny Hurst (on behalf of Greenwich Disabled People Against Cuts), to Councillor Linda Perks, Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources

There have been three concerns raised in the last few weeks about lack of transparency of Greenwich's use of funds. The three concerns are:

1. a call-in by councillors regarding business support funds,
2. concerns about higher cost of Woolwich Works that was initially, allegedly, referred to as "fake news", and
3. an article by an investigative journalist in [853.london](https://www.853.london) about auditors being called in about the council's spending / accounting of £21m of Better Care Fund in 2015-16.

Will the Council commit to an independent public investigation into allegations about the Better Care Fund and other spending concerns?

#### Reply -

I thank Jenny Hurst for her question.

The Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Scrutiny Panels engage across a wide range of topics and have covered both business support and the new award winning Woolwich Works development.

The Council has already responded to queries in relation to the Better Care Fund. Figures quoted within the article were generated in 2015 as part of an Adults Transformation Programme, which was before the creation of the improved Better Care Fund (iBCF). In subsequent years, work was to be undertaken to transform the existing service (the aim was to provide a more efficient service to customers and would also see spend taken back to levels from a few years previous to that).

Subsequent to the creation of that programme, new resources in the form of iBCF were then received to account for factors such as:

- meeting adult social care needs
- reducing pressures on the NHS, including supporting more people to be discharged from hospital when they are ready
- ensuring that the local social care provider market is supported.

While adult social care funding is spent from the general fund, both BCF and iBCF funding are applied to adults' resources for use on adult social care. Use of funding grants are signed off jointly, with integrated commissioning across the council and the CCG. The Royal Borough of Greenwich and Greenwich CCG have worked and continue to work closely together in the delivery of services to Royal Greenwich residents. The CCG is content with arrangements and the council's accounts are signed off by the independent external auditor.

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### **PUBLIC QUESTIONS**

**12 Question from Jenny Hurst (on behalf of Greenwich Disabled People Against Cuts), to Councillor Linda Perks, Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources**

Following the article about the Auditors and the Better Care Fund in 853.london, Greenwich Disabled People Against Cuts (Greenwich DPAC) received a public interest disclosure that concerns about Better Care Fund spending had been raised at the time by Councillors and senior council officers. Please would you confirm whether this was shared with all Councillors at the time, and subsequently, and what action was taken?

**Reply -**

I thank Jenny Hurst for her question.

Owing to an ongoing employment tribunal case, it would not be appropriate for the Council to comment on this matter.

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### **PUBLIC QUESTIONS**

**13 Question from Maria Freeman, SE18, to Councillor Sarah Merrill, Cabinet Member for Environment, Sustainability and Transport**

While acknowledging the hard work done by bin crews under difficult circumstances, what more is being done to improve household recycling rates e.g. for HMOs, flats and persistent non compliance ie red ticketed bins?

**Reply -**

I thank Maria Freeman for her question.

In September 2020, Greenwich approved the Towards Zero Waste Strategy Update which included a number of policies designed to increase the quality and quantity of recycling, including alternate weekly collections of general waste, a no side waste policy (i.e. general waste must be contained within the bin) and the introduction of a stricter contamination policy (whereby contaminated bins will no longer be emptied and will need to be sorted by the occupier or have their recycling bin removed). These measures will be supported by a programme of communication, which will include engagement with residents that are not presenting the correct materials in their recycling bins. Communication with residents in respect of the contamination policy will commence prior to the introduction of the alternate weekly collections and no side waste policy which are due in February 2023.

We currently raise awareness of recycling using online channels, such as the council's website and regular posts on social media; printed materials including leaflets, bin stickers and posters; seasonal articles in Greenwich Info at Easter and Christmas; via our Environment Champions' network and by supporting national Recycle Week every September. The Waste and Street Advisor team incorporate advice on recycling in our day-to-day engagement activities with residents, dealing with over 100 enquiries per month. We engage with primary schools and other children-centred organisations via our Junior Environment Champions educational programme. New residents receive a leaflet about our services when there is a change in council tax holder. At the start of 2021, we launched the

'Let's Sort It' recycling campaign where all households in the borough received a new leaflet and we have a series of animations on the council's website. This information is relevant for kerbside properties, HMO's and also for flats.

Contamination is presently tackled on a responsive basis when issues are brought to the attention of the advisor team, and we will write or door-knock to offer residents guidance on how to recycle properly. Bins that are tagged regularly can be removed as a last resort. We carry out door-knocking programmes when there are substantial changes to facilities or persistent issues, but this yields a low contact rate so most communication is in writing. The Waste and Streets Advisor Team assess the waste and recycling facilities at HMOs as part of the licencing process and provide information about recycling so that collections can be maintained and improvements can be made.