

COUNCIL

18 DECEMBER 2019

MEMBERS QUESTIONS

I Question from Councillor Matt Hartley, to Councillor Danny Thorpe, Leader of the Council

Did the Leader of the Council receive a reply to his recent letter to the Mayor of London regarding the Silvertown Tunnel, if so on what date, and what was his reply?

Reply -

I thank Councillor Matt Hartley for his question.

I wrote to the Mayor of London, asking him to pause work on the Silvertown Tunnel, whilst a full review of alternative options to reduce congestion and pollution around the Blackwall Tunnel was undertaken.

The Mayor wrote back on 21st November, explaining the range of road-user charging, public transport and other options appraised to identify the best solution for issues around Blackwall Tunnel. He reiterated his view that the Silvertown tunnel is the best option to address significant existing disruption, congestion and associated environmental impacts in the area.

His response also highlighted the range of modelling, monitoring and mitigation requirements placed on Transport for London in the Development Consent Order that allows it to develop the Tunnel.

Unfortunately, Transport for London has since* completed its contract with the RiverLinx consortium, to build the Silvertown Tunnel.

The Royal Borough has been – and will continue to be – a leading voice in calling for Transport for London to minimise any negative impacts of the Silvertown Tunnel as it is developed.

(* On 25th November 2019.)

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2 Question from Councillor Matt Hartley, to Councillor Christine Grice, Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources

Following the consultation on the Council Tax Support Scheme, currently taking place, can the Cabinet Member confirm when a policy decision on any resulting changes will be made? Is she prepared to consider moving to an up-to-100% scheme for all working age adults as the administration has previously promised?

Reply -

I thank Councillor Matt Hartley for his question.

The consultation period ends on 20 December 2019, after which we will consider any responses and comments from residents and organisations operating in the Borough. Any policy decisions on resulting changes which may include increasing support for all working age claimants up to a maximum of 100% will go to Full Council on 29 January 2020.

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3 Question from Councillor Matt Hartley, to Councillor Denise Scott-McDonald, Cabinet Member for Air Quality, Sustainability and Transport

Can the Cabinet Member provide an update on the preparation of the Greenwich Carbon Neutral Plan?

Reply -

I thank Councillor Matt Hartley for his question.

The evidence base for the Carbon Neutral Plan is in the final stages of completion and will be presented for consideration by Cabinet and Council in January.

In preparing this evidence base the consultant has:

- completed a policy review;
- established baseline emissions for Royal Greenwich;
- developed a maximum ambition pathway towards being carbon neutral in 2030;
- completed an appraisal of available policy options; and
- proposed priority actions.

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4 Question from Councillor Matt Hartley, to Councillor Averil Lekau, Cabinet Member for Adult's Social Care and Health

Can the Cabinet Member provide an update on outcomes of this year's flu vaccinations programme for adult social care staff? How do these outcomes compare to last year?

Reply -

I thank Councillor Matt Hartley for his question.

Update on outcomes of this year's Flu vaccination programme for Adult social care staff:

- The staff Flu Vaccination programme began in November 2019 and will end March 2020
- All Council staff are able to obtain a Flu Vaccination voucher to redeem at Tesco Woolwich Pharmacy or Morrisons Pharmacy Thamesmead
- To date, 150 Flu Vouchers have been issued to staff in Health and Adult Services. So far, 86 (57%) have redeemed their voucher and have received the vaccination
- This is a significant improvement on last year when a total of 71 Health and Adult Services staff were vaccinated between November 2018 and March 2019.

Activities being undertaken to promote staff Flu uptake include:

- An email cascaded to all directorates about the Flu vaccination offer and how to obtain a voucher.
- Flu cafés held in the Woolwich and Birchmere centres about Flu and the vaccination programme.
- Information on the protective benefits of vaccination and the staff Flu offer uploaded on the intranet and published in Talk Greenwich.
- In addition, a drop in Flu clinic will be held on 17th December in the Woolwich Centre in Health and Adult Services (2nd Floor), providing staff directly with the vaccination.

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5 Question from Councillor Pat Greenwell, to Councillor Jackie Smith, Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Community Safety

I know of one rough sleeper in my ward who has refused help on many occasions. This is very worrying as he is extremely vulnerable. At what stage is it deemed appropriate for the Council to intervene ?

Reply -

I thank Councillor Greenwell for her question.

		2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19*
Homelessness Acceptances	RBG	364	450	546	562	551
	England	54,430	57,730	59,110	56,600	30,020
Temporary Accommodation	RBG	397	443	520	655	1,030
	England	64,710	71,670	77,220	80,720	85,040

* Introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act

Since November 2018, the Safer Spaces Team have been delivering a trauma-informed 'STREET POP' project that provides supportive intervention to rough sleepers across the borough with the aim to support them back into housing.

The Safer Spaces Team has worked with a number of rough sleepers including those in the New Eltham area, but any form of intervention is dependent on the individual's willingness to work with outreach workers to address their issues. There are high-refusal rates amongst entrenched rough sleepers and people struggling with addiction. In the case you may be referring to, the individual has repeatedly refused support. I understand you have had contact with officers regarding this already.

As part of our 'STREET POP' project, as soon as a rough sleeper is referred to the numerous teams delivering outreach, work begins to identify what their needs and vulnerabilities are, and what support the rough sleeper may be eligible to receive.

Our 'STREET POP' pilot was so successful during 2018/19, it was re-funded by the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government to extend borough-wide for a further 12 months. The Housing Inclusion Team & Safer Spaces team have submitted another bid to extend the project for an additional 12 months.

To give a sense of work that has been done on this issue since the project began:

- Our Street Pop Outreach worker currently has 23 cases, a mix of low-need and high need.
- 43 individuals have engaged with the Outreach Team.
- 15 individuals have been referred for Drug & Alcohol treatment
- 16 individuals have been successfully placed into accommodation.
- 2 individuals have been rescued from Modern Slavery and were referred via the National Referral Mechanism.

Should anyone be concerned about a person sleeping rough, they should refer to streetlink.org.uk . This will alert outreach workers to their location so that services can begin intervention work and support individuals to secure accommodation.

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6 Question from Councillor Pat Greenwell, to Councillor Jackie Smith, Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Community Safety

Shop lifting is on the increase in Eltham High Street. Some stores have dropped out of the Town Watch scheme. Is there more that the Council can do to help the shops and local residents to combat this?

Reply -

I thank Councillor Pat Greenwell for her question.

Based on data obtained from the Metropolitan Police dashboard, there has been an increase in recorded offences of shoplifting in Eltham North & Eltham South during the period of August – October 2019.

Shoplifting is primarily a matter for the Police, but we would also expect retailers to take reasonable steps to prevent their own losses. The Royal Borough will however always try to provide guidance and broader community safety support where our resources allow.

In support of safer town centres, the Council launched its 'Town Watch' Scheme earlier this year, prioritising Eltham initially. A presentation and demonstration of the scheme was provided to businesses at the meeting of the Eltham Traders' and Business Forum on the 2nd May 2019.

Members of Town Watch can share any relevant information on the digital platform with other users, like Royal Greenwich or the Safer Neighbourhood (police) team, in a GDPR compliant environment. Town Watch Scheme members can report any community safety incidents on the app and this information could be the missing link to identify and prosecute offenders; this is particularly useful for the Safer Neighbourhood Police team. Town Watch can also enable a 'ban from one, ban from all' policy for persistent offenders in our town centres. This can be further supported by partnership working between retail premises, the local SNT and Safer Spaces Community Safety Enforcement Officers.

Safer Spaces, working with the DRES Town Centre Management Team, will be looking to reinvigorate the Town Watch scheme early next year. This will include signage and window stickers for businesses to promote the scheme and increase uptake and participation. We will be rolling the scheme out to other town centres, not just within Eltham. A presentation and demonstration of the scheme was provided to businesses at the meeting of the Eltham Traders' and Business Forum on 2 May 2019.

We also hope to encourage local retailers to feel confident in pursuing civil recovery against known shoplifters and also share information appropriately to prevent crime being simply displaced to other shops or localities.

Under Integrated Enforcement, the Safer Spaces team along with other departments and partners will continue to work together to improve community safety in Eltham and across the borough.

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7 Question from Councillor Pat Greenwell, to Councillor Denise Hyland, Cabinet Member for Economy, Skills and Apprenticeship

As a Councillor and resident I am extremely concerned about the ever changing Eltham High Street retail scene. Can more be done to help prevent more losses which will be disastrous to the local economy and community?

Reply -

I thank Councillor Pat Greenwell for her question.

As Cabinet Lead, Councillor and resident, I share your interest in the health of Eltham High Street.

Unfortunately, the record number of closures of major high street retailers has inevitably led to a change in the retail scene – locally and nationally. The closures of Debenhams, Mothercare and the imminent closure of Bon Marche are all cases in point.

Councils up and down the country have recognised the impact of the structural changes in the retail sector on town centres and are supporting a range of measures to help town centres diversify and adapt to new uses.

Officers have confirmed that at the most recent town centre vacancy audit, conducted in October, there were only 4 vacant units out of the 118 units on Eltham High Street. One of these is currently under offer therefore the vacancy rate is 2.54% well below the National average. I am pleased to say that Eltham Town centre has been successful in attracting new businesses into vacant units, adapting to new uses and ensuring the high street remains buoyant.

Officers continue to work with landlord, agents and retailer to ensure vacant units are actively marketed to new potential new tenants and all properties are listed on the Council's premises search facility.

You asked what more can be done. The Council would welcome powers to ensure vacant properties are not left vacant on a long-term basis. However, current government policy does not allow for this.

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8 Question from Councillor Matt Clare, to Councillor Denise Scott-McDonald, Cabinet Member for Air Quality, Sustainability and Transport

There are regularly cases of hedgerow and green infrastructure removal on private land across the borough. This negatively counterbalances the Council and volunteer efforts to significantly green our borough.

While no one wishes to add costs/bureaucracy in new monitoring or question landowner rights there is an undeniable impact on our environment as more domestic and commercial landowners turn green to grey.

- A) What can the council do to accelerate CPZs which will reduce the need for some offstreet Parking and therefore help reduce gardens being paved/tarmacked over?
- B) Is there any way in which the council can develop policies to protect existing mature hedgerows, particularly in highly polluted or flood prone areas ?
- C) Can we request that all councillor colleagues encourage businesses and homeowners in the wards they represent to communicate the councils 'pay for a street tree' policy ?

Reply -

I thank Councillor Matt Clare for his question.

I strongly agree that we want to maintain and enhance hedgerow and green infrastructure in the borough as they contribute to many of our policy objectives, including air quality, climate change and biodiversity, as well as providing a more pleasant environment for our residents.

A - Increased resources are being allocated to accelerate review and delivery of CPZs. Requests for new off-street parking are constrained by our crossover policy and also require planning permission if in a conservation area or on a classified road.

B - Hedgerows are protected by the Hedgerow Regulations 1997 but this only controls Countryside hedgerows and their removal. This does not relate to urban hedgerows.

Policies can be developed to enhance and protect greening (which may include an urban hedgerow) in the borough but we cannot specifically control its removal unless attached to a redevelopment for example. If an owner chooses to change their greening on a site unless it is a protected tree (TPO or conservation area) the local planning authority does not have any control over its removal.

C – I would strongly encourage colleagues to promote the Council's 'Pay for a street tree' policy to businesses and residents.

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9 Question from Councillor Matt Clare, to Councillor Denise Scott-McDonald, Cabinet Member for Air Quality, Sustainability and Transport

As we enter another cold winter we are acutely reminded of the fuel poverty some of our fellow residents unfortunately suffer as well as the pollution caused by fossil fuel domestic heating.

The Council and council associated businesses own or have a long term lease on buildings representing significant roof area in the borough, statistically of which over half should be north/south facing or flat with scope for viable solar generation. Many buildings such as schools will be largely surrounded by green space or will have high roofs so relatively uninterrupted solar gain while the sun shines.

The leasing of several school roofs to SELCE is a promising start. However would the Council consider a blanket policy of enabling the 'free lease for solar' of all Council owned and long term leased roof space to SELCE where possible and viable ?

Reply -

I thank Councillor Matt Clare for his question.

The Council is developing a Carbon Neutral Action Plan and, in that context, will be considering the further expansion of solar energy on Council-owned properties.

In order to fully consider the proposed initiative, there are many considerations that would need to be addressed and worked through to assess its merits.

For example, the scope of properties would need to be defined based upon the property type, any existing lease conditions, roof design, structural capability and orientation.

Further cost/benefit analysis would need to be undertaken together with an assessment of the resourcing implications for staff, legal implications (including Procurement and Leasing) and the overall impact on Council resources.

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10 Question from Councillor Matt Clare, to Councillor Denise Scott-McDonald, Cabinet Member for Air Quality, Sustainability and Transport

Will the Cabinet Member please outline what representations the Council has made to Southeastern in regards to the closure of the Bexleyheath line for 9 days during February and the insufficient contingency (i.e. shuttle train services as far as e.g. Falconwood or Bexley not just Kidbrooke) and blanket availability of TfL bus routes free of charge for residents within e.g. a 2km radius of the closed stations with a “London terminals“ or non TfL season ticket ?

Reply -

I thank Councillor Matt Clare for his question.

Officers have been actively engaged with Southeastern Trains and Network Rail to minimise the inconvenience caused by the planned nine-day closure of a section of the Bexleyheath Line in February.

From the start we have made the case for services to extend further east on the line, to Falconwood or Bexley. Unfortunately, we have been informed that for safety and operational reason the closure must be for the whole stretch between Kidbrooke, Crayford Creek and Slade Green junctions.

We are working with Southeastern Trains and Network Rail to maximise awareness of the closure among our residents. We will push them to utilise all of their communication channels - in tandem with the Council's own plans to raise awareness of the closure.

We will continue working with Southeastern and Network Rail to encourage TfL buses (including the new 335 service to North Greenwich) to be available free of charge to rail ticket holders during the closure.

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11 **Question from Councillor Matt Clare, to Councillor Denise Scott-McDonald, Cabinet Member for Air Quality, Sustainability and Transport**

The campaign to secure the much needed Falconwood CPZ has been going on for 20 years. In this time air quality and the volume of commuters has increased relentlessly.

The closure of the Bexleyheath Line in February is perhaps a one off live opportunity to demonstrate to TfL and Bexley where the cars are coming from by observing changes in passenger movements vs a normal week.

Will the Council work with TfL and South Eastern to see what opportunities there are to mine the data while fully respecting data protection/privacy to show changes in passenger movements in tandem with the reduction in commuter parking (during the landslip normally full roads were empty of parking)? A strongly and widely held belief is that many of the commuter cars come from Bexley borough itself so the argument about overspill Parking does not stand.

Reply -

I thank Councillor Matt Clare for his question.

As you know we have been trying to introduce a Controlled Parking Zone in this area for many years but our efforts have been thwarted by Bexley Council's continuing objections and the matter has been passed to the Mayor of London to resolve. Before making his decision the Mayor has asked that current parking data is collected to indicate what the current parking demands are. To this end the Royal Borough has commissioned a parking survey.

It may be the case that some of the vehicles parking on the Royal Borough's roads around Falconwood Station are from Bexley residents, although this is difficult to confirm without assistance from the Department for Transport (DfT). Nevertheless any observed reduction in parking pressure during the planned closure of the Bexleyheath line in February gives a clear

indication of commuter parking and further strengthens the need for controlled parking in this area.

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12 Question from Councillor Matt Clare, to Councillor Chris Kirby, Cabinet Member for Housing

While the building of new Council homes is to be applauded the Council remains the owner of several properties bought at market value in more expensive areas, representing very poor value for taxpayers and more importantly lost opportunity in terms of maximising the number of people housed.

Will the Cabinet Member consider an automatic sale of these properties (subject to the point in the housing market cycle) on them becoming vacant. Also would he please confirm that the Council will cease buying properties on the public market unless they clearly represent better value for money than newbuilds on available land already owned by the Council?

Reply -

I thank Councillor Matt Clare for his question.

This Council's priority is to build as many general purpose Council houses for local people as possible and our ambitious programme of developing new Council homes has begun. There are four developments on site and ten planning applications for new Council homes will have been submitted by Christmas. We are able to do this as a result of successfully lobbying Government in 2018 to raise the HRA borrowing cap, which for many years had been restricted.

Despite this ambitious programme many people in the Borough remain in housing need. The most pressing cases require temporary and emergency accommodation. We have seen the number of temporary accommodation needs rise considerably over the years of austerity and changes to benefit rules and this now stands at over 1000 per night.

As a response to this we have set about acquiring properties to ensure that as many people in need can be assured of a good quality home. It is wrong to suggest this does not offer the tax payer value for money as the borrowing costs are met by the Government grant for assisting people in

temporary accommodation needs and it is more cost effective than having to house people in bed and breakfast type accommodation. In addition, the Council has been investing Right to Buy receipts (RTB) into the purchases and in doing so have ensured that the proceeds from the right to buy are not lost to the borough and given back to government but go to help those in most need within Greenwich. The borrowing used to match the RTB money is from the General Fund so in no way takes money away from investing in new Council housing which is funded from Housing Revenue Account borrowing.

On that basis I will not be proposing the Council stops the acquisition programme.