



Questions from the Opposition and other Non-Cabinet Members Full Council – 21 November 2016

1. Question from Cllr Shaw to Cllr Miller, Cabinet Member for Stronger Communities:

The numerous residents of Donnington Road that abuts the car park of Willesden Sports Centre have and are continuing to suffer a long standing statutory noise nuisance due to the anti-social behaviour of persons racing vehicles and congregating to play loud music within the car park during night time (usually between 12.30am to 3.30am) when the Willesden Sports Centre is closed.

The affected residents of Donnington Road have previously made several complaints to the management of the Willesden Sports Centre and Brent Council concerning this anti-social behaviour - nothing is being done.

The car park is ultimately owned by Brent Council and is within a “private finance initiative” arrangement for Willesden Sports Centre. The car park is required by Brent Council to be open to the public 24hrs/7 days.

The car park is in complete darkness with no illuminations within the car park outside the operating hours of the sports centre – 11.30pm to 6 am weekdays and 10pm onwards at weekends.

The car park has no security barrier or ticket device/vehicle identification apparatus at the entrance to the car park.

The car park’s two security cameras that monitor the car park location are not infrared capable and therefore cannot capture any images during the hours of darkness nor are the security cameras of the required CCTV specifications to allow evidential admissible details of the anti-

social culprit identification, vehicle registration numbers and the anti-social behaviour to be captured (whether during daylight or night time hours)

What is Brent Council going to do to ensure Brent Council's:

(a) compliance with its statutory obligation to ensure proper health & safety provisions within the car park for genuine, authentic car park users and to investigate, put in place appropriate security & deterrent measures and serve an abatement notice in relation to the anti-social noise nuisance pursuant to the Environmental Act and other relevant legislation; and

(b) close working with the Neighbourhood Police to aid and assist the police to enforce the appropriate measures of the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 and other relevant legislation in relation to the anti-social culprits.

Response:

The council has proactively visited the site this last week (5th/6th Nov 2016) following receipt of a complaint but no noise nuisance was evident at the time of this visit. Prior to this the last complaint received was investigated in April 2016 and no further action was taken in the absence of evidence of the alleged problem or additional complaints. Similarly, Willesden Sports Centre contractor, 1Life has advised that prior to October 2016, no complaints have been received from neighbours on Donnington Road with regards to night time incidences of nuisance behaviour in the sports centre car park.

In order to progress this the council would need is a clear understanding of who is affected by the noise, when and how in order to gather evidence for enforcement.

The council can use Community Protection Notices under the ASB Crime and Policing Act 2014 for Nuisance and ASB behaviour on mopeds and vehicles where we have met the evidential threshold. We would need to identify those responsible in order to take this action. The most effective way of establishing this is to determine a pattern of when these events occur so that we have the best chance of observing these activities at their worst. As a result the council is reliant on those affected by noise and ASB reporting incidents to the council as and when they are happening so that action can be taken. The council can liaise with the Police to ensure any appropriate enforcement is coordinated.

There is no evidence of a nuisance issue to date (i.e. the council has not observed any issues associated with the site and requiring intervention) so the council is limited in the action that can currently be taken.

Moving forward, the council can begin planning for action as by initiating multiagency planning at our Local Joint Action Group with Policing partners and other partners in terms of collating an evidence base. The management responsibility of the car park sits with the PFI consortium Linteum (Willesden) Limited within a PFI arrangement for 25 years from 1 November 2006 until 2031. The custom and practice of the leisure centre management team is to switch off the car park lighting each evening to suitably manage energy. The Council can propose the contractor to keep the lights on in the evening for security measures and better recording of the CCTV cameras but the Council will need to accept additional revenue costs and increased electricity consumption. Furthermore, the Council can propose a change order to Linteum (Willesden) Limited to put access restrictions and fund the maintenance of new security assets and manage a call out service to release vehicles in the car park out of centre opening hours. This could be an action to restrict access to the car park at night rather than rely on officer intervention for what could be an ongoing issue but the Council needs to note that the costs associated with the barriers access could be quite significant.

I would be pleased to join Councillor Shaw to meet with the residents concerned, make sure that their concerns are heard, and that appropriate action continues.

2. Question from Cllr Nerva to Cllr Hirani, Cabinet Member for Community Wellbeing:

The Government announced £170 million cut in the funding of community pharmacies in England this year which would lead to closure of a quarter of our local pharmacies. Please can the lead member tell us what the Council is planning to do to force the Government to re-think this plan and to ensure that the people of Brent do not lose the vital access to medicines, healthcare advice, Public Health input and employment that these pharmacies are providing?

Response:

Community pharmacists play a crucial role in the delivery of Health and Care services in Brent. Many rely on them to receive much needed medication and advice. Unfortunately the Government has chosen to make these cuts to community pharmacies in Brent. I am concerned with the impact this cut will have on small independent pharmacists in particular as some of the larger dispensers such as those located in Supermarkets will be able to absorb these cuts due to their other income streams. We are not in a position to pick up the hole that will be lost in local services as a Council but I have written to our three Members of Parliament to ensure that our concerns are represented in Parliament where these decisions are being made.

3. Question from Cllr Ezeajughi to Cllr Miller, Cabinet Member for Stronger Communities

Residents across Brent have been as concerned - as I am sure we all have - by the recent shootings in Stonebridge and Harlesden. Can I ask what the Council are doing to work with our police service and local community to ensure that Brent continues to be a place where residents feel safe?"

Response:

There are estimated to be over 1,000 individuals involved with gang criminality in Brent, some on a nationally organised scale. Since March 2016, there had been a rise in gang related intelligence and incidents occurring. As well as neighbourhood policing and dedicated ward officers, special Policing units were dispatched across Brent for operating specific operations for several months earlier in the year and throughout the summer to help prevent further serious incidents and ultimately to prevent further loss of life. The operation resulted in many top gang nominals being arrested and brought to justice, many of which were known to the Harlesden and Stonebridge areas. Dedicated Ward Officers are still very much focused on any gang hotspot areas and targeted intelligence gathering.

Due to increased levels of violence in known gang hotspots in Brent, the Community Protection Service implemented a 12 week evening and weekend operation with other department partners as a direct response, to support ongoing Police operations. The aims of the operations were to increase public reassurance in hotspot areas by providing a visible presence of uniformed (high visibility vests) council officers and branded vehicles during peak gang activity times, and also engage in a 12 week consultation in the hot spot areas with residents who are affected. A large volume of actionable intelligence around the gangs and their activity was captured during the operation. During the operation we carried out short surveys with members of the community to create conversation opportunities to increase communications about neighbourhood issues and general community feedback. 80% of those surveyed in and around gang hotspot locations believed that the council's engagement in the area was helpful, and 60% believed it to be very helpful. All residents' concerns were responded to and/or appropriate sign posting occurred.

Long-term partnership interventions, coordinated by the council community protection service, have since been reviewed and implemented from late April 2016 to focus on certain gang hotspot areas in terms of preventative and deterrent interventions. Many of these interventions

have inhibited recent serious gang related offending and injury, albeit it has not eliminated all issues and there is still a lot of work to be done between the partnership.

Unfortunately there are not the same amount of resources made available across London to aid this prevention work, as previous years have seen, therefore the partnership are working with what resources they have to make the biggest difference possible. Earlier in the year we had a community led conference to ensure we involved as many partners from all sectors, as well as community members, as possible. We are currently working with a small number of community members around this issue ensuring we take forward their advice and thoughts on the issues we face. We have seen however that community members are sometimes reluctant to come forward and speak out against gangs, therefore we work with who we can. We have scheduled a further conference with our Partnership colleagues in January 2017 as a follow up platform.

Our focused work is largely set by progressive analytical capabilities through detailed analytical work in conjunction with targeted CCTV operations to ensure wider focused work, via our Focused Gang Deterrent Group meetings and the fortnightly partnership gang intelligence meetings. The community protection service commission external voluntary sector organisations to complete gang mentoring schemes, as well as mentoring through sports interventions and music programmes, all of which are commissioned by the council with resources available. Police are also key to these interventions and forums and information sharing between all statutory and non-statutory partners ensure focused intervention takes place in areas where focused attention is needed. Such operational forums are overseen by a senior governance group who report up to the Safer Brent Partnership board.

Moving forward, we have just heard about the MOPAC London Crime Prevention Fund. Thanks to a change in the Mayor's formula, which has benefited Brent, we now in a position where some limited additional resources will be made available to help respond to this issue further, and ultimately help ensure and reassure safety for our residents. I will be having conversations with officers in the coming days in order to decide how we can get the best value possible for our increase.

4. Question from Cllr Collier to Cllr McLennan, Deputy Leader

What does Brent Council believe will be the effect on businesses in Brent of the revaluation of business rates? What strategic actions are the Council going to take to mitigate these effects?"

Response:

The headline figure is that Brent's businesses have been revalued upwards, before appeals, by almost 12%, against a national average of 9% and a London average of 23%. Based on current information from the valuation office the tax rate will drop slightly, by less than 2p in the pound.

So, the revaluation will result in Brent's businesses paying more, although we expect that there will be some transitional protections. However, this won't increase Brent council's overall income, because the government guidance suggest that our grant income will be cut by the amount of extra business rates income raised - on top of all the other cuts to government funding.

Of course, Brent also pays business rates over to government for the buildings we own ourselves, and that will rise too, but we aren't expecting any additional government funding to compensate us for that.

The increases are less in Brent than elsewhere in London, which should increase our attractiveness as a business location, and we want to attract more businesses into the borough. We are also lobbying, through London Councils, for London to retain all of these extra business rates being generated, rather than having them distributed across the country and having our grant cut, so that we can fund additional services.

5. Question from Cllr Krupa Sheth to Cllr Farah, Cabinet Member for Housing and Welfare Reform

Housing continues to be the number one issue affecting residents in Brent, and across London. We were recently visited by the Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, and Deputy Mayor for Housing, James Murray, to see the developments taking place in Kilburn. Can I ask how the Council plan to help tackle the housing crisis here in Brent, and make buying or renting a home in our borough more affordable?"

Response:

Consultation on a revised Housing Strategy will begin in November. The Strategy will set out the council's objectives on a range of issues, including the delivery of new affordable housing across tenures.

At present, there is a lot of uncertainty about the direction of national housing policy and how future funding will be used as the government is yet to publish many details about the programme set out in the Housing and Planning Act 2016. In addition, the Mayor of London is still in discussions with government about proposals for further devolution, leading to uncertainty about how programmes will work in London.

Having said this, the council has clear objectives that the Strategy will set out.

Our planning policy seeks 50% affordable housing on new sites in line with the London Plan and the London Housing Strategy and the Mayor has indicated that he will retain this policy.

Our approach to new supply will include delivery of homes at social and affordable rents, as well as intermediate and sub-market options. For example, this will include private rented housing let below market rents and at Local Housing Allowance rates, as well as low-cost home ownership options. As well as continuing to work with our Registered Provider partners, the council has implemented its own development programme and a new Investment Vehicle aims to expand the scale of investment in new homes. We have also initiated a programme through which the council is purchasing homes in the private sector that will be let at Local Housing Allowance rates, primarily for use as temporary accommodation at this stage.

Achieving our targets will require innovative approaches to investment and partnership as well as exploring new approaches, such as the use of modular construction. Consultation on the

revised strategy will enable us to develop these approaches in the run up to consideration of the strategy by Cabinet in 2017.

6. Question from Cllr Colwill to Cllr Hirani, Cabinet Member for Community Wellbeing:

We are all aware of the national pressures being faced by the health service. Can the Lead Member for Community and Wellbeing confirm that Brent will be in a strong position to be able to provide a good reliable and supportive health service for all of our residents? Can Brent ensure that there is ample respite care available so that carers, who save a fortune for the Council by looking after their loved ones, are able to have a break to enable them to continue their valuable work? Please can assurance be given that hospitals and hubs will be fully funded?

Response:

I cannot provide assurances that hospitals and hubs will be fully funded as funding for NHS is sourced from the Department of Health. We will always strive for our local services to be properly funded. However, I fundamentally disagree with the Government's entire approach to Health and Social Care funding. In the last six years, the Government has been cutting Public Health funds and the money that Brent Council has to provide social care when we know that investing in these services will actually save the NHS money by preventing people from getting worse in the first place.

We can provide assurances that we will provide much needed support for Carers who are eligible for support in Brent and we will signpost those who might not be eligible for support from the Council to alternative support.

7. Question from Cllr Colacicco to Cllr W Mitchell Murray, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People:

Like many of our residents, I have been saddened to see the plight of tens of thousands of refugees and asylum-seekers, fleeing conflicts around the world. In particular, those young children who have found themselves separated from family and loved ones, thousands of miles from home and in desperate need of support. Could I ask what Brent Council has done to help these young people rebuild their lives after such tragedy?

Response:

Brent Council is helping children and young people from the refugee camp in Calais. Since the process to demolish the Calais camps was announced, eight requests from the Home Office to assess family arrangements in Brent for children from northern France have been received. These eight requests have all been swiftly completed by our social workers. Five children have moved to live with family, two have been referred to other local authorities due to inaccurate information being provided about the family's UK location and one young person entered another Local Authority's care. The council currently supports 150 unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and former unaccompanied asylum seeking children (as care leavers) – one of the highest number in London. These are children who have made their own way to the UK and presented at our Council offices over the last few months and years. Despite the ongoing cuts to local government funding, we in Brent hope that other local authorities will follow our example and make further provision to support these unaccompanied children. I am extremely proud that here in Brent we are continuing to play our part, providing support for those most in need. Our borough - the most culturally diverse in the country - has always welcomed people from across the world. As a council, we will continue to work closely with the Home Office to ensure that we are doing all we can to help those affected by this crisis.

8. Question from Cllr Bradley to Cllr Butt, Leader of the Council:

So far this year, Brent Council has helped facilitate a number of excellent events, completely free of charge, for local residents. In particular, I was delighted to see the Council step in at the eleventh hour to ensure that one of our biggest family festivals – the London Mela – was able to go ahead here in Brent. Tens of thousands of local residents were joined by visitors from across London – including the Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, who seems to be making Brent his second home! – for a fantastic day of family fun. More recently, I'm sure many of us enjoyed the amazing fireworks display that took place just outside this building, attended by more than 18,000 local residents. Can I ask what Brent Council will do to ensure that - despite cuts of more than £119m to our budget by this Conservative government – events like these will continue to take place, free of charge to our residents?

Response:

Many thanks for your question Cllr Bradley.

I too was delighted to see so many local people, of all ages and backgrounds, enjoying both the fabulous free fireworks display earlier this month and also the wonderful London Mela in September.

Our vision is to make Brent a great place to live, work and visit and this includes encouraging free or sponsored cultural activities which help to bring communities together.

The significant budget cuts which all public services have endured over the past decade means that Brent is no longer in a position to directly pay for events like these but by working in partnership with local businesses to secure sponsorship we have been able to deliver these two fantastic free events for local people to enjoy nonetheless. We will continue to work innovatively and build on this success by seeking new opportunities for free cultural events while minimising the cost to local taxpayers.

9. Not used.