



Questions from the Opposition and Other Non-Cabinet Members

Full Council – 18 September 2017

1. Question from Councillor Chan to Councillor M Patel, Lead Member for Children and Young People:

Could the Cabinet lead for Children and Young People please give an update on this year's performance by Brent's GCSE and A-Level students and would she comment on that performance in the context of successive Tory governments' underfunding of state education?

Response:

The Department for Education (DfE) changed the headline measures of school GCSE performance in 2016. These headline measures are based upon student progress and attainment in eight GCSE subjects, and will be published in January 2018. To enable comparisons with previous years, this summer, Brent Council has collected the provisional proportion of Brent students attaining five GCSE A*-C equivalent grades including English and mathematics. The provisional average for all Brent schools is 66 per cent, an increase of three percentage points compared to the August 2016 average of 63 per cent. This is the first year that students have taken the new style, more challenging GCSE qualifications in English and mathematics, which the government introduced to ensure that young people are better prepared for further study and employment. As a consequence there has been a decrease in the national average for the proportion of young people attaining equivalent A*-C grades (or 9-4 grades under the new system) in the more demanding English Literature and mathematics examinations.

The provisional 2017 A Level results were the first awarded following significant reform to 13 A Level subject qualifications in 2015. The reformed A Levels contain new content, introduced to meet the requirements of higher education, and less non-examination assessment. Examinations for these subjects now take place at the end of the two year course (the results of AS qualifications no longer contribute towards the final results). Brent's pass rate has increased to 99 per cent from 98 per cent in 2016, which is one percentage point above the national pass rate (98 per cent), and the proportion of examination entries awarded A* increased to 11 per cent which is three percentage points above the national average. Brent's proportion of A*-B grades has increased to 57 per cent,

also a three percentage point increase compared to last year, which is four percentage points above the national average of 53 per cent.

With improved outcomes at A Level and at GCSE (against the previous headline measure) it is not possible to draw conclusions about the impact of school funding on results. However, I would like to congratulate school staff and students on the improved outcomes at both A Level and GCSE at a time when there is increased pressure on resources.

2. Question from Councillor Crane to Councillor Farah, Lead Member for Housing and Welfare Reform:

Could the Cabinet lead for Housing give an update on the homelessness support and temporary accommodation situations in this borough, please?

Response:

Homelessness applications and acceptances have increased across London but the local position has improved, with implementation of the Temporary Accommodation Reform Plan having a significant impact. In April 2014 the total of 3,300 households in temporary accommodation was the highest in England and included 300 households in bed & breakfast. The current total is just over 2,500, with bed and breakfast occupancy fluctuating but averaging no more than 30 households at any one time.

The Homelessness Reduction Act will come into effect from April 2018 and recent work has focussed on preparing for this change, which will impose new duties on councils to offer homelessness prevention advice and support to any homeless person, whether or not they have a priority need for housing. Invest 4 Brent is buying a substantial number of properties that will allow the council to meet its rehousing duties through the private rented sector, while plans for the upgrade of Knowles House to provide much better facilities for more homeless families are well underway,. The new £1.8m Single PASS outcomes-based homelessness prevention programme for single homeless people, jointly funded by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) and the council following a successful bid to the DCLG Trailblazer Fund will go live in mid-September and the wider Single Homeless Pathway programme will follow later in the year. The first homelessness prevention Social Impact Bond to be implemented in the UK is also due to go live by the end of the month.

Brent's good practice on homelessness has featured in the new LGA report "Housing our Homeless Households", available at <https://www.local.gov.uk/housing-our-homeless-households-full-report>.

3. Question from Councillor Harrison to Councillor Hirani, Lead Member for Community Wellbeing:

In light of recent reports on the government's failure to adequately recruit and retain medical professionals across the UK, can the Cabinet lead for Community Wellbeing give an update on the situation in Brent and, if relevant, neighbouring boroughs in which our residents might access health and care services?

Response:

The reported recruitment and retention concerns are a real issue in Brent. It impacts on London in particular when you think about the cost of living and housing which inevitably has an impact on being able to afford to live and work in London. We are continually pushing for key worker housing and our biggest local acute Provider London North West Hospital Trust has been awarded University Hospital status after being granted membership of the Association of UK University Hospitals which will increase the attractiveness for younger medics to work in our local health economy. However, fundamental change is needed in the Government's approach in developing our own as the current high tuition fees and the changes to Bursaries will and are already having an impact on finding the doctors and nurses of the future.

Finally, it is also worth turning our attention to non-medical staff as well and I am proud of the work my colleague and Deputy Leader Cllr Margaret McLennan has been doing and her hard work has resulted in London North West Hospital Trust adopting the London Living Wage.

4. Question from Councillor Colacicco to Councillor Hirani, Lead Member for Community Wellbeing:

In light of recent reports as to the volume of mental health related incidents being referred to the Metropolitan police, could the Cabinet lead for Community Wellbeing set out how Brent's ability to proactively manage and effectively support those of our residents in need of some form of help has been impacted by government cuts to funding?

Response:

The number of calls handled by the London Metropolitan police in which someone was concerned about a person's mental health is hitting record levels. On average 315 a day, or about 13 an hour calls are raised across London. We work closely with the Police and the NHS mental health teams to ensure we coordinate responses between us. Housing play a crucial role too. When people experience crisis, we have effective wrap around services to ensure we prevent additional crisis and people are supported to live independently in the community afterwards. Proactively managing and preventing crisis is where the real difficulty lies. It is also a very challenging environment. Government policy changes on Welfare, Housing, Employment and Disability benefits has an inevitable impact on people's mental health. When people are being impacted by Government policies to an extent where it impacts on basic essentials, such as being able to afford to eat have a roof over their heads and play an active role in society, it is no wonder that people are being driven into desperation. Government policy needs to change to stop having such a detrimental impact on people's mental wellbeing.

5. Question from Councillor A Choudry to Councillor Tatler, Lead Member for Regeneration, Growth, Employment and Skills:

Would the Cabinet lead for Regeneration, Growth, Employment and Skills set out what has been achieved as a result of Brent's various partnerships with private sector developers, please?

Response:

The simple answer is that we've been able to build thousands of new homes – much needed new homes of all tenure that we would not otherwise have been able to build.

Private sector investment and development is delivering a significant amount of the regeneration needed to achieve the spatial vision for the borough set out in the adopted Local Plan. Private sector developers are instrumental in delivering new homes, employment opportunities and infrastructure, particularly in the borough's identified growth areas.

Wembley is the borough's largest growth area and Quintain Estates & Development have invested over £1bn and committed to spending a further £2bn to develop the area around Wembley Stadium. Quintain have delivered the Wembley Arena refurbishment with a new public square, new 361-bed Hilton Hotel, the London Designer Outlet with 80 retail stores, 20 restaurants and coffee shops, and 9-screen cinema, community facilities, plus 1,000 new homes and 660 student accommodation rooms. Quintain are accelerating development with the next phase planned to include a 3 form primary school to cater for up to 630 pupils, 1.5 million square feet of commercial space supporting 7,200 jobs, 7 acre public park with two multi-use games areas and a lake, improvements to public transport, pedestrian crossings and cycle routes, plus 4,000 much needed new homes. Other private developments in the Wembley area have and are delivering new homes, hotels, student accommodation, retail and commercial spaces, plus a 6 lane 25m swimming pool available at local authority facility rates.

South Kilburn is home to the South Kilburn Estate, where the Council is approximately half way through a large scale 10-15 year regeneration programme. Transformational change is being successfully delivered in the area, including 2,400 new homes (with around 1,200 made available to existing South Kilburn residents), new larger high quality urban park, new local primary school, new health facilities, an improved public realm and a site-wide energy solution. Whilst the Council owns much of the land in South Kilburn and has to date taken a master developer lead in shaping and driving the programme forward, it is private developers and registered provider partners with their investment, commercial skills and appetite for risk, who have been instrumental in delivering the new built environment on the ground to date.

In all the other growth areas of Alperton, Burnt Oak/Colindale and Church End, and elsewhere in the borough, we see regeneration coming forward to meet the housing, employment and infrastructure needs of a growing population. Regeneration only happens through the efforts of both the public and the private sector in planning, investing and delivering the development that can accommodate growth. All development is also required to provide contributions to the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) in Brent, with circa £20m CIL collected to date, part of which will be dedicated to neighbourhood projects, and the remainder invested in the strategic infrastructure needed to support growth across the borough.

Latest GLA figures show that housing supply in LB Brent increased by 6,800 homes over the 6 years since the Local Plan Core Strategy adoption, marginally above the GLA target of 6,700 homes over that same period. With LB Brent's population projected to continue to grow in the short, medium and long term, and increasing housing needs and targets, private sector investment and development will continue to be critical to ensuring that sufficient new housing, employment floor-space and supporting infrastructure is built, to ensure growth is sustainably accommodated in the borough moving forward.

6. **Question from Councillor Kelcher to Councillor Miller, Lead Member for Stronger Communities:**

What steps is the Cabinet Member taking to crack down on late night noise nuisance and pollution in the south of the borough, and what assurances can he give to local residents that when they report these problems their concerns will be listened too and acted upon?

Response:

(a) Steps taken to crack down on late night noise nuisance:

The Nuisance Control Team is responsible for regulation and enforcement of all types of nuisance including noise, smoke, odour and light. The majority of complaints received at night relate to neighbour noise and the council effectively responds to late night noise by operating a reactive service from 6pm to 2am every night of the week. A single patrol consisting of two officers responds to the complaints which are forwarded to the council via an out-of-hours call centre or by emails sent directly to the team or via an online form. The team have developed the online service request over the last 3 months to increase options for reporting as well as responding to requests for this as a preferred reporting route for residents. Furthermore, if the call centre experiences a high call volume, this will ensure residents can log a nuisance in minimal time.

Many of the calls received by the council are reported as occurring in the south of the borough with reactive responses operating in such areas for a significant proportion of any shift. The council will prioritise calls on a 'first come, first served basis' unless calls relate to a significant issue (such as a rave or loud party affecting a number of households), or are identified as a priority by the council or the police. Ideally we aim to respond to, and investigate calls within 1 hour of reporting and will often contact the caller after the initial report to ensure that the problem initially reported is ongoing at the time we are ready to visit. At times of heightened need the service may not always be able to respond within the preferred timeframe or for that occurring evening. Offering assurance to this, it is not always necessary however to address noise nuisance on the night it is reported. In such circumstances, the council will always follow up, and look to investigate as soon as possible the next day during the day shift. We will decide appropriate steps to take and where possible issue warnings and advise of the consequences if further complaints are received. This is most effective in dealing with isolated events such as one-off family parties or if we are just logging calls to build an evidence base for ongoing investigations.

Our focus is always to offer relief to as many callers as we can. We do operate until 2am, however the council may suspend the service for a short while to deal with a backlog of cases to ensure residents are most effectively responded to. As a result we do not take or log calls:

- Which are anonymous or where insufficient detail of the problem is provided to enable us to investigate;
 - That are outside our remit – councils do not take action to address noise nuisance from ordinary domestic activities or poor sound insulation;
 - Unless we have a realistic chance of being able to investigate the complaint and feedback to complainants regarding the action taken.
- (b) Assurances for Brent residents suffering noise that when they report these problems their concerns will be listened to and acted upon?

In terms of work undertaken, cases investigated, resolved and enforcement action taken we compare favourably than with other local authorities. We offer a service for 15 hours a day from Monday to Friday and 8 hours on both Saturday and Sunday. Many other local authorities have deleted night services completely or only operate for 8 hours per day.

The council can provide guidance or advice to callers during the day time and every weekday the council has at least one duty officer and routinely 2-3 duty officers to respond to complaints, answer queries and undertake follow-up work and enforcement during our day time service. We also undertake work to address noise issues at source before it becomes a problem by preventing noise issues arising from industrial plants, pubs, clubs and construction sites via licensing controls and planning controls.

The council will deal with many types of cases proactively during day shifts and may issue verbal or written warnings via informal or formal means, issue noise abatement notices to prevent future occurrences, contact and warn landlords or registered property owners about noise problems reported and seek their assistance in resolving issues associated with their tenants.

For residents suffering noise we offer feedback on the night unless they specify they do not want the council to call them back. When reporting noise nuisance we request callers advise us of the latest time to call back and endeavour to do so. The council aims to update callers by email, text message, letter or call back the next working day wherever possible. When issues are reported to the council, a case file provides a reference number to simplify future reporting.

The Nuisance Control Team continues to work with wider department services to develop and improve shared working where issues have persisted and/or cross over into other service areas. Development of the Enforcement Practitioners Group has progressed this process where an increased partnership response has helped to develop positive outcomes for residents which may have taken more time to overcome if we had been working in isolation. We hope this partnership response will soon develop further via the proposed new department Neighbourhood Managers. This extra resource will benefit the team not only to

better progress outcomes for more long-term issues but also to help increase capacity to respond to residents where priority issues surface via increased 'on the ground' support for assessment and partnership response.

The below captures the recent service developments we have progressed to try and ensure optimum customer service for our residents moving forward. We anticipate that the below will improve the caller experience regarding our service and will continue to identify other improvements where we can:

- Undertaken a further review of the guidance we provide to our daytime and night time call centres to make sure they are providing the correct advice to callers;
- Conducted weekly briefing and updates with our night time call service providers to improve customer service, the quality of responses and call response rates;
- Undertaken a review of our web pages for the same above reason;
- Progressed improvement work on our online form which will include additional information to advise callers of further actions, provide a better option for them to track progress with their case and provide additional guidance regarding nuisance;

We will consider other practical suggestions from members for improving the service if they meet budgetary constraints.

7. Question from Councillor Shaw to Councillor Farah, Lead Member for Housing and Welfare Reform:

BHP are proposing to build flats on a small area within the perimeter of Frontenac, Donnington Road, NW10. At present this area is full of washing lines, and residents want to keep it that way.

Residents are understandably furious that BHP can even contemplate this project with the obvious resulting loss of light, loss of space, loss of privacy and the significant fire access problems that would result.

Will you urge BHP to withdraw these proposals? If not, will you as a first act of the new in-house arrangements for Brent Council inform residents that this project will not proceed?

Response:

The development proposals at Frontenac are part of the Brent Housing Partnership's Infill Development Programme, and will provide 3x3bed and 1x2bed homes. The Infill programme is a relatively small part of the Council's broader ambition to mitigate the worst impact of the housing crisis by making 1000 new affordable homes available each year. Subject to planning permission, the homes will provide much needed family accommodation for the borough.

Further to the resident consultation event in May 2017, BHP is in the process of revising the proposals by taking residents' feedback on board and they will contact residents with an update before submission of the scheme for planning. BHP are doing what they can to respond to residents issues, for example:

- There will be a new drying area for all residents in the revised plan as a direct response to the issues raised in this question and at the consultation;
- BHP are developing a new landscaping plan, again as a result of the consultation, with the aim of mitigating the loss of amenity space (because of the new building) by increasing the usefulness of the remaining space;

The proposals comply with The London Plan, national & local planning guidelines and will be subject to scrutiny on the issues of loss of daylight/sunlight, amenity space, overlooking & access to emergency services as part of the planning process.