



Questions from Members of the Public

Full Council – 18 September 2017

1. Question from Mr Wadhvani to Councillor Tatler, Lead Member for Regeneration, Growth, Employment and Skills:

My question is specifically around Wembley Park and the regeneration currently on where lots of old buildings are coming down to create new buildings and flats.

I would like to know how the Council is preparing to serve all the thousands of residents that will be living in these flats by 2020 and the pressure on local services that this will put, i.e. Transport, healthcare, schooling, police, welfare etc.

What are the strategies in place or planned so along with Wembley Stadium, Arena, London Designer Outlet (LDO) and Brent Civic Centre, the authorities are able to cope with the pressure expected on them?

Response:

The Council takes a plan-led approach to the regeneration of the borough, in order to prevent development schemes coming forward in an ad hoc, unplanned fashion. Wembley has a comprehensive planning framework, including the dedicated Wembley Area Action Plan (adopted 2015), which sets out how development of the area will progress. The ongoing regeneration provides and plans for infrastructure and facilities to support current and future residents across the Wembley area, including:

- 7 hectare public park
- New 3 form entry primary school, including a 2 form entry nursery school, plus 2 additional forms of nursery provision
- Primary health care facility (1500m minimum)
- Contributions towards secondary education in the wider area
- 6-lane 25m swimming pool available at local authority facility rates
- Significant investment in and improvement to the main rail and underground stations to improve capacity and the environment
- Community facility fund of £1.4m plus to spend on community projects

- Physical transport improvements e.g. the Triangle, Wembley High Road and elsewhere, together with significant developer contributions to Transport for London (TfL) for public transport, including buses

Developers have additionally contributed a significant cash sum of Community Infrastructure Levy, part of which will be spent on neighbourhood projects, and the remainder on strategic infrastructure needs to support growth in the immediate Wembley area and wider Brent Borough.

The Local Plan and in particular the Wembley Area Action Plan sets out the regeneration and development strategy for the Wembley area. The Local Plan is now to be refreshed and to examine how the whole Borough will develop over the next 15-20 years. Everyone is invited to get involved in this exercise and various public sessions are being held across the Borough throughout September for people to come along and contribute.

2. Question from Ms Dowell to Councillor Southwood, Lead Member for Environment:

I am concerned about the increase of systematic fly tipping in and around Selwyn Avenue, Bruce and Alric Avenue.

Although this is removed by the contractors it defeats the object. I am told by other residents that they see vans dumping their rubbish.

We have a high volume of rental properties which has also caused a problem.

I would like to know how much does it cost to send the contractors out to collect and why doesn't the council look at prevention?

I was told by the environment team last year that would look into it.

I am fed up with the dumping environment as I pay council tax and expect more.

Response:

The removal of illegally dumped rubbish is covered by the cleansing service specification within the Council's Public Realm Contract. The cost of this service is included in the overall circa £17m annual cost for the Contract; this is a fixed cost and not a variable charge dependent on the number of incidents the contractor responds to.

The Council takes illegal rubbish dumping very seriously and through a combination of enforcement, education and community engagement, we continue to work hard to make an impact on this problem.

Colleagues from Veolia (Brent's Public Realm contractor) inspect illegally dumped waste for direct evidence and refer their findings onto the enviro-crime enforcement team. This evidence, together with evidence obtained through other direct referrals to the council and investigations by the enviro-crime enforcement team, has resulted in hundreds of fines being issued and a large number of successful prosecutions. In 2016/17, there were 629 cases which led to these such sanctions being imposed, and following a change in penalty level in 2016, Brent issued the second highest number of fixed penalty notices in the country for illegal rubbish dumping.

The Council uses a range of tactics to assist in combating illegal rubbish dumping, including deployment of surveillance utilising our new in-house environment patrol team to carry out high visibility patrols and conducting out of hours in areas known to be environmental crime and antisocial behaviour hotspots in the borough.

These operations include CCTV officers in the Brent Control Room, who monitor and support the patrols on the ground. We do not advertise when, where or how we conduct this surveillance, to ensure it is as effective as possible.

Of course, preventing illegal rubbish dumping also requires assistance and cooperation from local residents, as they can help us by reporting and identifying people who they see illegally dumping waste. We encourage residents to report any incidents of illegal rubbish dumping in as much detail as possible online via the council's website. All reports are logged, and as mentioned above, waste is searched for evidence before being cleared to enable us to take enforcement action wherever possible. Data on all reports received is collated to enable the council to build a full picture of the problem 'hot spots' across the borough, so we can properly prioritise the deployment of our officers.

In terms of the specific areas highlighted in the question above, the enviro-crime enforcement team have conducted a site visit to inspect the problem and developed an appropriate action plan for the locations to include visits by our environmental patrol team, surveillance of the area and our contractor, Veolia, carrying out door knocking in the area to provide information on how waste should be disposed of and how instances of illegally dumped waste can be reported.

3. Question from Mr Adow & Mrs Macolin to Councillor Farah, Lead Member for Housing and Welfare Reform:

We have been on the social housing waiting list over 20yrs for a 4 bed property. Even though we been living in a 3 bed flat for the last 7yrs we are not allowed to bid for a 3 bed house and we have seen people joining the list and without waiting a year being found permanent housing.

We can understand if that family has very specific needs like illness or disability, but all the others we cannot understand why they can't be placed in temporary accommodation at least 5yrs. What is wrong with a first joined first housed system as it is now a local system many feel is open for abuse? Please see our bidding for the last 5 years to understand why we have pointed this out to you.

All we are asking is for a place we can call home. Our children question this all the time and we apologise in advance if we have expressed our feelings wrongly.

Response:

First of all, there is no need to apologise for asking a reasonable question about the long wait for a home. It is not always easy to understand the way the housing system works but we hope this brief explanation will help.

To be able to bid, applicants must fall into one of three priority bands on the system – A, B or C, with Band A representing the highest priority, including the kinds of medical priority mentioned in the question. Households to whom a full homelessness duty has been accepted, as in this case, are placed in Band C. Households within each band are then given priority based on the date they first applied (the “priority date”). To this extent, the system is “first come, first served” and those waiting longest in each band have the greatest priority. In most circumstances, the household in the highest band with the earliest priority date making a bid will be accepted first. In practice, the highest priority households will not always bid and the opportunity to do so will fall to the next in line. There may also be cases where a property does not become available through Locata because the council makes a direct offer, usually to meet an urgent need. However, it should not be the case that applicants are advised they cannot bid, unless there is a particular restriction on a property, for example because it is only available to a household with a wheelchair user.

There is a severe shortage of larger affordable homes. In the five years since 2012, 122 four bedroom homes have been let, 71 of them to households in Band C. The current shortest waiting time for 4 bedroom homes is 11 years and the longest 24 years, although it should be stressed that the upper figure is distorted by the number of households who do not bid for a range of reasons.

Officers would be happy to meet with Mrs Malcolin and Mr Addow to discuss their situation and advise them how they can make best use of Locata.

4. Question from Mr Grigg to Councillor M Patel, Lead Member for Children and Young People:

When a young person turns 18 and leaves care, they find themselves suddenly grappling with many challenges of living independently, including managing household budgets and paying bills. All too often there has not been the appropriate financial education to support this transition and they can rapidly fall into dangerous cycles of debt. Care leavers have described that they didn't know what council tax was or that they needed to pay it and what a frightening experience it can be to receive letters and visits from bailiffs,

As the corporate parent to approximately 400 care leavers in Brent, will Brent Council follow the 25 councils across the country who have adopted a council tax exemption for care leavers up to the age of 25? This is a relatively low-cost policy that will have great benefit to vulnerable care leavers and also save the council from the future ramifications of problem debt for residents and the costs of debt collection.

Response:

Brent Council is committed to providing an effective support package to all of our young people that have left care - ensuring young people are able to manage their finances effectively is an important part of that work. As an example, in January 2017 our staffing arrangements were realigned in response to our growing numbers of care leavers and also to enhance the quality of our support. The Children and Social Work Act 2017 requires Local Authorities to publish a Local Offer for care leavers and the Council anticipates completing this piece of work before the end of the calendar year. Contained within our Local Offer we plan to seek Cabinet's approval to exempt our care leavers from the requirement to pay Council Tax.