



Questions from the Opposition and Other Non-Cabinet Members

Full Council – 21 November 2022

1. Question from Councillor Fraser to Councillor Nerva, Cabinet Member for Public Health & Adult Social Care

The cumulative economic, health and social impact of Covid-19 will continue to be felt long into the future here in Brent, with many families still mourning the loss of a loved one, taken too soon. For many others that have experienced Covid-19, perhaps several times over, the consequences continue to live with them. The impact of Long-Covid is still poorly understood, with new research showing that one in five people with coronavirus develop longer term symptoms. Around 186,000 people suffer problems for up to 12 weeks, the Office for National Statistics found.

Will the Cabinet Member set out what support or sign-posting the council and its health partners are able to offer to residents still experiencing the impact of Long-Covid?

Response:

The most recent publication from ONS estimated that nationally 3.3% of the population are experiencing self reported symptoms of Long COVID at the beginning of October. For 73% of these, activities of daily living were affected. These estimates are derived from the ONS community survey not from the NHS and it should be noted that ONS do not ask whether those reporting Long COVID have contacted their GP.

The NHS has established a new service for **Post-COVID-19 syndrome**, which is defined as signs and symptoms of infection consistent with COVID-19, lasting longer than 12 weeks. GPs in Brent can refer to a NWL clinical triage service. Appropriate cases will be triaged to the NWL Post Acute Covid Services. The service is provided by a multidisciplinary team of a Consultant, therapists and psychologist. In Brent the service is based at Central Middlesex Hospital. The service received 54 referrals from Brent in Sept and 53 in October. The waiting time is currently 6 to 8 weeks

In addition, many residents have been affected by the social, emotional and financial legacy of “long covid”, including those who have experienced bereavement and would like support, IaPT services (talking therapies) are a useful first point of call and are open to self-referrals.

2. Question from Councillor Gbajumo to Councillor Grahl, Cabinet Member for Children, Young People & Schools:

Every elected member and employee of Brent Council – along with our partner agencies, is a corporate parent to the children in our care. Our young people in care or who have left care have the right to expect everything from a corporate parent that would be expected from a responsible and good parent.

Will the Cabinet Member set out what support our looked after children receive from Brent Council; and how many young people the council is currently supporting?

Secondly, will the Cabinet Member join me in calling upon the Independent Review of Children's Social Care to reimagine what support looks like for care-experienced young adults; and end the expectation of 'independence' asked of young people as they approach 18.

Response:

Looked After Children in Brent are supported in a variety of ways, including:

- Every Looked After Child has a dedicated social worker who is qualified and registered with Social Work England.
- Every Looked After Child has a dedicated Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) whose role is to scrutinise and ensure that care plans for children are in their best interests.
- Every Looked After Child is visited and seen on their own at least every 6 weeks, some children are visited more often depending on their individual needs
- Every Looked After Child has a dedicated Virtual School Officer to support their education and ensure they receive the best education possible as well as identifying any additional educational needs which they may have
- Every Looked After Child receive regular medical, dental and optical checks.
- Looked After Child live in a variety of placement settings such as foster care, with extended family, in residential or semi-independent accommodation. All placement settings are quality assured to ensure they are suitable for children's individual needs.

Looked After Children are entitled to a range of services including:

- ✓ Ensuring that their care, health, social and education needs are met by relevant professionals.
- ✓ Helping to remain in regular contact with family and friends.
- ✓ Being listened to so that their views, wishes and feelings are obtained and taking into account in care planning for them.
- ✓ Informing their parents as to what is happening and their progress in care.
- ✓ Ensuring the child/young person's cultural, religious and language needs are respected and promoted.

- ✓ Helping the child/young person prepare for adult life and independence at a time that is best suited to their needs and development.

As at 31st October 2022 Brent was responsible for 331 Looked After Children.

3. Question from Councillor Akram to Councillor Mili Patel, Deputy Leader & Cabinet Member for Finance Resources and Reform:

Inflation is the cruellest tax of all and disproportionately impacts residents on the lowest incomes in our borough.

Under the current government, runaway inflation has hit a 40-year high and punishing interest rate rises (as result of the mini-budget) are increasing mortgage payments across Brent.

Will the Deputy Leader set out what impact higher interest and inflation rates is having on Brent Council services; and what the increases will do to our budget gap?

Response:

The Council published its draft budget for 2023/24 on Friday 4 November for the 14 November Cabinet meeting. As part of this report a detailed analysis was presented on the impact of high inflation on various Council services, in particular social care. The direct impact of inflation (for example on services, contracts and pay) is that growth in the budget is required to manage these higher costs. Coupled with increased demand for services, the budget gap for 2023/24 is estimated at £18m. The report therefore brings forward a series of new proposals which, if approved following consultation and scrutiny, would be implemented in 2023/24 in order to deliver a legally required balanced budget.

Rising interest are having a significant impact on the capital programme in terms of higher borrowing costs. Coupled with the rising construction costs from high inflation are making the viability of capital projects extremely challenging. For schemes within the Council's existing programme, work is ongoing to identify mitigations to allow delivery to continue; however, this may result in a scope reduction or pausing delivery for a further evaluation at a later date.

4. Question from Councillor Mistry to Councillor Krupa Sheth, Cabinet Member for Environment, Infrastructure & Climate Action:

On Kingsbury Road motorists flout the cycle lane. Vehicles are constantly parking across the cycle lanes which were created on the wide footpath causing nuisance to cyclists and pedestrians. We believe there is total lack of enforcement.

Can we have an assurance from the Cabinet Member that enforcement action will be taken?

If the Council is serious about our environment and promoting safe cycling will the Cabinet Member ensure Enforcement Officers are present to issue penalty charge notices to deter vehicles parking across the cycle lanes and to enable safe passage to cyclists?

Furthermore, what other measures will the Council take to ensure that these cycle lanes are protected in order to ensure they meet their intended purpose and remain clear of vehicle obstructions?

In spite of residents constantly reporting when vehicles break the law and are parked on the pavements along Kingsbury Road, blocking these cycle lanes, we do not see any enforcement action taken or any penalty charge notices issued. As a result, there is considerable frustration from residents.

Response:

We are aware of recurring issues with vehicles blocking the cycle lane and pavement on Kingsbury Road shopping area, particularly on Sundays, and in the evenings. In recent months we have provided additional cycle symbols on the cycle lane and additional signs to help improve compliance. We also arranged more frequent Civil Enforcement Officer (CEO) visits as part of the enforcement plans for the area.

The issue has been raised with Serco, our Parking Enforcement contractor and arrangements have been made to include Kingsbury Town Centre in our late enforcement plans over the coming weeks. Civil Enforcement Officers will attend in the evenings during busier weekdays and late evenings on Fridays and Saturdays (operating to 1 am the following morning).

To improve efficiency we are also using our CCTV control room to identify when these contraventions are taking place and will align our planned enforcement visits accordingly.

5. Question from Councillor Lorber to Councillor Krupa Sheth, Cabinet Member for Environment, Infrastructure & Climate Action:

Proposals to change the way recycling is collected in Brent and plans to scrap regular street cleaning on local roads have left many residents confused and angry.

Whilst a trial period is ongoing in selected parts of the borough for a new recycling system, the original borough-wide consultation failed to reach enough people to collect meaningful data on how people really feel about the changes. We also believe it was also a false 'public consultation' as only one option was provided, because Veolia continue to have a total monopoly on the waste industry.

Can the Cabinet Member therefore confirm:

- (a) What was the general feedback from residents received by the Council, during the consultation period?
- (b) Specifically, what did residents make of scrapping of weekly street cleaning?
- (c) How often will local roads be cleaned, under this new arrangement?

In addition, can the Cabinet Member please detail how you see '*intelligence lead*' street cleaning working? Many residents believe these plans will lead to even dirtier local streets.

Many feel that the consultation was simply a tick box exercise. I understand that a new contract with Veolia has already been agreed. Can the Cabinet Member therefore also confirm:

- (d) If this is true, and if so when was the contract awarded?

Additionally:

- (e) How many suitable contractors were approached?
- (f) How many were invited to tender?
- (g) What date did the tender start?

Response:

- (a) What was the general feedback from residents received by the Council, during the consultation period?**

The results of the recent public consultation on future street cleansing and waste collections services will be made public in a report to Scrutiny later this year, together with the results of the recycling trial taking place this autumn.

(b) Specifically, what did residents make of scrapping of weekly street cleaning?

As above.

(c) How often will local roads be cleaned, under this new arrangement?

Cleansing frequencies remain subject to the procurement process for the new services. The outcome of this procurement, together with details of any proposed changes to services, will be included in a report to Cabinet early next year.

In addition, can the Cabinet Member please detail how you see '*intelligence lead*' street cleaning working? Many residents believe these plans will lead to even dirtier local streets.

Six rapid response teams – made up of one vehicle and two staff each – will be based in each Brent Connect area (two in the Wembley Connect area). They will plan their cleaning around reports from the Council's Neighbourhood Managers, councillors and residents. This will allow the service to be tailored to meet the particular needs of each neighbourhood and to be flexible enough to respond to changing demands as these arise.

It is important to note that scheduled street cleaning will still take place in order to maintain a good standard of cleanliness which would be supplemented by the intelligence-led approach.

Data management will be improved within the new contract with a new dedicated Digital Manager post sitting with the contractor and a live dashboard shared with the Council's contract monitoring team. This would be jointly monitored on a daily basis and would be used by the council to spot trends to determine locations which require changing levels of resource.

Joint regular inspections on street cleanliness standards (NI 195) between contractor and client staff would also continue in line with the current service.

Many feel that the consultation was simply a tick box exercise. I understand that a new contract with Veolia has already been agreed. Can the Cabinet Member therefore also confirm:

(d) If this is true, and if so when was the contract awarded?

The consultation was carried out while solutions remained at a formative stage as part of the procurement process for the new services.

This procurement process is still ongoing and the contract has yet to be awarded.

As aforementioned, the outcome of this procurement process will be included in a report to Cabinet early next year.

Additionally:

(e) How many suitable contractors were approached?

The Contract was advertised by publication of a Contract Notice in the Find a Tender Service and Contracts Finder as required by the Public Contracts Regulations 2015. Accordingly, it was open for all contractors to request to participate in the procurement in response to the Contract Notice by submitting a completed Selection Questionnaire.

(f) How many were invited to tender?

This information relates to an ongoing procurement process and therefore cannot be shared at this stage on the grounds of commercial sensitivity.

(g) What date did the tender start?

3rd November 2021.