



Questions from the Opposition and other Non-Cabinet Members

Full Council – 23 January 2017

1. Question from Cllr Ms Shaw to Cllr Southwood, Lead Member for Environment:

Could the lead member clarify how ignoring the overwhelming results of a public consultation against hiking the costs of visitor parking by 200 per cent can benefit Brent residents particularly the elderly and infirm who are likely as a result to become isolated and could the lead member at least give concessions to this vulnerable group?

Response:

Almost 3,300 consultation responses were received during the public consultation, which covered not only visitor permit pricing but a range of issues related to how we manage the limited spaces we have. After considering the views expressed, Cabinet agreed to freeze the price of visitor permits for visits of less than 2 hours at the existing price of £1.50. The cost of visitor permits has increased only for visitors who wish to stay for longer than 2 hours.

Consultation respondents did express a majority view against increasing the price of visitor permits, although over a quarter supported the proposals (67% opposed; 26% in favour). The qualitative feedback we received through discussion with residents at workshops and community meetings also pointed to increasing concerns about poor air quality, frustration at not being able to find a parking space easily and concerns about commuters using visitor permits and making it even harder for local residents to park.

On balance, Cabinet felt that bringing the cost of parking for a whole day in Brent in line with that of neighbouring boroughs (i.e. Ealing) would make a positive contribution to these issues whilst still keeping the cost of parking lower than our inner London neighbours (i.e. It costs £6.49 to park for the day in Camden).

When reaching a decision on the correct level of pricing for visitor permits, Cabinet was anxious that elderly and disabled people should not be disproportionately affected. For that reason we decided that the Visitor Household Permit should continue to be offered, providing an easy and affordable way for residents who need care and support to ensure that their visitors can park nearby. We also ensured that the price increase applied to the Visitor Household Permit was lower than that applied to visitor vouchers for visits of more than 2 hours. Blue Badge holders are exempt from visitor parking charges and, in addition, health and social care staff visiting clients in their homes are issued with Essential User parking permits guaranteeing them access to resident bays within all of Brent's CPZs.

2. Question from Cllr Crane to Cllr Southwood, Lead Member for Environment:

At its meeting on 13th January 2014 the Executive endorsed a number of recommendations of the Planning committee on a Placemaking Plan for Colindale and The Hyde in Fryent and Queensbury ward. Can the relevant Lead member advise the Council on the progress of 3 specific items that were specifically highlighted by residents at the consultation stage as high priority since the Executive meeting:

1. The junction improvements of the A5 Edgware Road and Wakemans Hill Ave and difficulty crossing the A5 arising from the death of an elderly resident trying to cross at this busy junction.
2. Uncontrolled parking along the length of shops in the Hyde from Wakemans Hill to Hay lane.
3. The alleyway upgrade behind the A5 at Springfield Mount junction and the progress on the Council attempting to adopt the alley so that it can be maintained in future at Council expense.

Response:

1. Officers in Regeneration and Environment are liaising with Barnet on improvement plans for the A5 corridor taking into consideration major regeneration in the area.

The A5 is an important strategic route and officers have also been in discussions with TfL's growth team on scoping and commissioning a study to improve public transport accessibility and provision for pedestrians and cyclists along this corridor to ensure it meets future needs. Councillors will be engaged in determining the scope of the study. The Highways and infrastructure service have commissioned S106 funding to progress with improvements identified in the Burnt Oak Colindale Place Making guide, this includes improving pedestrian safety at the Wakemans Hill Avenue junction. Improvements will be developed in consideration of longer term plans along the corridor. We anticipate that preliminary design will commence in the spring with consultation and implementation in 2017/18.

2. Joint working between Regenerations Transportation and High Streets Teams and Highways and Infrastructure has commenced to ensure benefits from investment into the area are maximised to revitalise and improve the commercial area of the Hyde from Wakeman's Hill to Hay Lane. Engagement with the local businesses was completed along with a parking beat survey to assist in forming options to be considered. Three options were presented to the business community who failed to endorse or support any of them at meetings that were arranged last year. S106 funding

has been commissioned for the area and further design work is currently being completed in line with our parking strategy to design a scheme for public consultation and, if supported, implementation in 2017/18.

3. No work has been undertaken to upgrade the alleyway behind the A5 at Springfield Mount as it is not adopted and is not therefore the responsibility of the Council to maintain. The Council cleared the alleyway as a 'one-off' in the autumn of 2016 on the condition that the resident's/businesses continued to maintain it to manage the pest problem as a result of the fly-tipping. The dumping of rubbish has been reported as coming from the shops themselves but this has not been proven. For the Council to adopt the alleyway as public highway it will involve a legal process and it would need to be brought up to an adoptable standard by the landowners, which includes not only the surface but also drainage and lighting and demonstrate that the proposed route will offer benefits to the greater public in being maintainable at public expense. This requires all the landowners to agree to fund the necessary works which to date has not happened and is likely to be a considerable cost considering its existing condition.

I am working with cabinet colleagues for regeneration and stronger Communities to identify more effective ways for the council to work with residents and traders to clean up alleyways and service roads. They blight the borough in being unsightly, attracting anti-social behaviour and often creating a genuine public health concern. Officers are exploring options but in the meantime I can commit to targeted education visits from officers to residential and commercial properties to ensure the correct disposal arrangements are in place, with follow up visits to check compliance. The outcome of these visits will be shared with local Councillors.

3. Question from Cllr Colwill to Cllr Butt, Leader of the Council:

Will the Labour Group join the Conservative Group in condemning the action taken by the rail unions to strike during the Christmas period, causing inconvenience to our residents and passengers across the country?

Response:

Industrial action is a deeply regrettable consequence of all concerned parties' failure to find amicable, sustainable resolution. London is utterly dependent upon its transport infrastructure and needs all aspects functioning effectively in order to thrive. I urge all sides in such workplace disputes to give their fullest consideration to the hugely detrimental impact that service disruptions have on the capital's commuters, its economy, and its reputation as a world class global city.

4. Question from Cllr Long to Cllr W Mitchell Murray, Lead Member for Children and Young People:

Many people go into debt because of Funeral poverty, i.e. having to deal with an often unexpected death with no plans for the funeral. What help and advice does Brent currently provide and plan to provide for dealing with funeral costs, particularly for the deaths of young children?

Response:

Children and Young People's Services do not provide financial support to families to pay for children's funeral costs. Exceptions would relate to children who are in the care of the Local Authority and, as the Corporate Parent, responsibility is retained in order to ensure funeral arrangements are progressed.

Families in need of financial support in circumstances such as these may apply to the Council's Local Welfare Assistance (LWA) scheme. This is a discretionary support scheme with the primary objectives to:

- Support people in short-term need because of a crisis or emergency;
- Support vulnerable people in the community;
- Ease exceptional pressure on families.

5. Question from Cllr Chan to Cllr W Mitchell Murray, Lead Member for Children and Young People:

Education is key to ensuring that the children and young people of this borough have the opportunity to build successful and stable lives. Can the Cabinet Member set out how a Labour-led Brent has worked toward this essential priority?

Response:

The local authority continues to have statutory duties to ensure sufficient numbers of school places and “to promote high standards and fulfilment of potential in schools so that all children and young people benefit from at least a good education” (The Education Act 2011).

We continue to provide sufficient school places, working in partnership with the Regional Schools Commissioner and the Education Funding Agency to secure sufficient school places through school expansions and the opening of new academies.

The Strategic Framework for School Effectiveness in Brent 2014-2017 sets out Brent Council’s role, working in partnership with local schools and other maintained settings, to ensure that all schools in the borough are judged as good or better within three years. With 96% of Brent schools now good or better, we are well on the way to achieving our goal. Over 96% of pupils now attend good or understanding schools.

Schools must develop their own capacity for improvement. The Strategic Framework for School Effectiveness in Brent 2014-17 embraces this principle. The aim is for all schools in Brent to be part of a school to school partnership securing ongoing improvement with limited support and intervention from the local authority. The framework stresses the importance of school-led and collaborative solutions alongside the statutory role of the local authority in relation to monitoring, challenge, support and intervention.

6. Question from Cllr M Patel to Cllr McLennan, Deputy Leader of the Council:

The future of local government finance may very well involve the complete devolution of responsibility for and retention of respective boroughs' business rates. Can the Cabinet Member comment on the various risks and opportunities that such financial independence might present?

Response:

Local government as a sector has consistently argued for the return of control of business rates. The proposed devolution is therefore welcome although it doesn't go so far as giving us the local power to set the actual tax rate.

You rightly identify that this brings with it risks and opportunities, and the work of the Scrutiny task force on this was most helpful. Post 2020 we will bear the risk of reductions to the total business rate base in the borough, but conversely if we can help to grow the number and value of businesses in the borough then our revenues will grow. Aside from the simple financial consequences I think this also gives us the opportunity to work more closely with colleagues in the business sector, and the Council has established a Business Board precisely to strengthen such links.

The other principal opportunity is that with the devolution of business rates we will also acquire responsibility to finance services currently run within central government. In theory this should be fiscally neutral – more money but more responsibilities – but of course we await the detail on this. Provided that it is fiscally neutral then there is the opportunity to integrate those services much better with other services that we currently run, provided of course that government devolves services that can sensibly be integrated with our existing offer. We are working through London Councils and the LGA to put our case on this.

7. Question from Cllr Nerva to Cllr Hirani, Lead Member for Community Wellbeing:

With Theresa May's government apparently indifferent to the perilous condition of health and social care services across the country, can the Cabinet Member explain what efforts Labour-led Brent are making to protect and sustain services in this Borough?

Response:

The Tory governments of May and Cameron, and their Lib Dem-backed coalition before them, are all responsible for exacerbating and compounding the Health and Social Care crisis unfolding across the country. They have devastated preventative services such as Public Health (Brent's Public Health grant has been cut by £2.4m from 15/16 to 17/18 – a 10% cut) and have slashed the funding with which councils can commission services, massively increasing pressure on far more expensive hospital care.

In Brent we are doing as much as we can to protect our residents and deliver a positive model of Adult Social Care by placing housing at the heart of our service. We have developed our Extra Care and Supported Living Housing offer meaning that people have a real alternative to expensive nursing and residential care while still having their needs met. We have implemented the Integrated Rehabilitation and Reablement Service to provide better short term care to help people live independently and we are also investing in home adaptations so people can, for example, have the support to shower independently rather than relying on us to arrange for someone to come around to help. We have taken the opportunity to use the Adult Social Care precept powers.

However, the way the Government has sold this to the public is completely misleading. Although the 2% precept raises roughly £2 million, there's no getting away from the fact that, since 2010, government cuts have taken hundreds of millions of pounds out of public services in Brent. Nevertheless, as a Labour-led council, we are determined to provide our residents with the levels of care and support they deserve.

8. Question from Cllr J Mitchell Murray to Cllr Miller, Lead Member for Stronger Communities:

Can the Cabinet Member explain: what is being done in Brent to protect children and young people from being drawn into or exploited by gangs; what we are doing to better understand what draws young people towards gangs; what can be done to help those who want to escape; and, what more we can do to pursue, catch and prosecute those who are wilfully engaged in gang-related crime?

Response:

Based on the Metropolitan Police's gangs matrix there are currently 21 gangs in Brent. Gangs and gang related offending continues to remain a concern and a priority for Brent, with links between Child Sexual Exploitation and County Lines emerging. There are estimated to be over 1,000 individuals involved with gang criminality in Brent, whilst the current Metropolitan Police Gangs matrix for Brent has 282 identified gang members. The Brent gangs' cohort is over 90% male, 80% black, and has an average age of 24 years old. The long standing gang issues in Brent have created a cohort which is older than most London boroughs. Currently only 6% of the cohort are 17 years old or under, compared to the London average of 20%.

The current rise in knife injury victims (under 25 year's old - non domestic abuse), with 16 year old victims and 23 year old victims overrepresented, suggests gangs are a continuing issue in Brent's youth population. The figures contradict the below average number of youths on the gangs matrix. Multi agency Work is currently being developed to better identify our youth gang associates, including our enhanced partnership intelligence meetings and focused deterrence forums. Police operations continue to enforce ongoing gang activity, with Dedicated Ward Officers still very much having focus on any gang hotspot areas and targeted intelligence gathering to aid enforcement. Other partners also feed into this intelligence gathering exercise.

Such partnership interventions are coordinated by the council Community Protection service, to focus on certain gang hotspot areas, as well as certain gang associates including Young People on the fringes of gang activity in terms of preventative and deterrent interventions; as well as any possible links to child exploitation. All partnership interventions link in with missing and child sexual exploitation panels to ensure all intelligence links to create a clear valid picture of the issues we face.

Unfortunately there has not been the same amount of resources made available across London to aid this prevention work as previous years have seen, therefore the partnership have been working with what resources they have to make the biggest difference possible. Our focused work is largely set by progressive analytical capabilities through detailed analytical work to ensure wider focused work, via our Focused Gang Deterrent Group meetings and the fortnightly partnership gang intelligence meetings. All partners feed into this analysis, including Police, children's services, Youth offending, family solutions, specialist CSE workers and voluntary sector organisations.

The community protection service commission external voluntary sector organisations to complete gang mentoring schemes, and many referrals for this mentoring come from Brent Social workers, Police Safer School Officers and other education placements. We advocate, through our partnership forums, that information sharing is key to help prevent gang recruitment, as well as ensuring we make an offer of support and exit options for anyone wishing to exit gang life. We have also utilised some MOPAC grant funding to fund a specialist gang mentor within the Youth Offending Service to offer more immediate focused support for those young people a little more entrenched in offending and gang life. In the first six months of 2015/16, 31 young people assessed as being significantly less gang affected after engaging with this specific intervention. Other interventions which we offer to young people identified as having possible gang affiliation include mentoring through sports interventions and music programmes, all of which are commissioned by the council with resources available. The Safer Neighbourhood Board have also commissioned some specific mentoring and education programmes to aid better awareness of gang issues in Brent for individuals in our PRUs. Police are key to these interventions and forums and information sharing between all statutory and non-statutory partners to ensure focused intervention takes place for any young person identified or referred.

Moving forward, we know that we need to continue our focused work, and especially more so on identifying young people associated with gang activity. Current partnership structures will aid this and although we don't currently have a deployable resource available for emergency cases or enough resource to tackle the current scale of the issue we face, thankfully the MOPAC London Crime Prevention Fund reallocated funds for Brent 2017-2019 projects, which resulted in a slight uplift of allocated funds. In December 2016 we put a proposal forward requesting to utilise some of these additional funds to help us better respond to our gang issue in Brent.

The proposal included two gang mentors, one mentor will be a specialist young person's mentor. Each mentor will support 20-30 gang affected people in Brent through targeted referral routes, as well as linking in with the wider partnership offender management programme proposed which will commission further sports mentoring and housing support. A third gang mentor will also be located within the Civic Centre with specialist onsite support for Youth Offending Service, Children's Social Care including Early Help. As part of this new approach, we hope these posts will better align itself with those teams supporting Brent's wider gang nominals, and work across all age groups in order to secure the best possible outcomes for young people. The programme will also provide a minimum of five education projects throughout the year in targeted schools, totalling to 10 as well as look to provide peer training for those who have engaged significantly.

Aims for the new proposed programmes include:

1. Target number of referrals per quarter (specific number set for each programme).
2. 70% of those referrals that engaged will take positive action to address primary pathway/need.
3. 15% reduction in re-offending committed by the cohort in 6 months following engagement with programme, in comparison to offending rate 6 months prior to the programme.
4. 70% of those referrals that engaged will significantly be less gang affected (Gang programmes)
5. 70% Improved understanding and awareness of the impact of gangs and gang offending (education sessions).

We also see the huge importance of involving our communities to help tackle these community based issues facing our young people of Brent. Last 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 have seen however that community members including young people are sometimes reluctant to come forward and speak out against gangs. We have scheduled a further community event with our Partnership colleagues in January 2017 as a follow up platform, namely the 'It's Time to Talk about Gangs' event. The event will take the form of 'Question Time' where all members of Brent's community are invited to come along and take part in a panel discussion followed by workshops to develop real, community-led solutions to the issues raised.

Brent Youth Offending Service (YOS) also provides a range of specific support and interventions which I have provided some examples of below:

- The Youth Support Programme is a Brent Youth Offending Service intervention programme that works with gang affected young people. Since its establishment in 2013 the 1.0 FTE Youth Support Worker has supported young people to exit gangs, develop greater empathy, access mentoring provision and diversionary activities, and obtain formally accredited achievements. Twenty one gang affected young people were referred to the programme from the Youth Offending Service, and a further 15 accessed services from multi-agency panels and the community between July and September 2016. In the first six months of 2015/16, 31 young people were assessed as being significantly less gang affected.
- Young people subject to court orders supervised by the YOS, who have been assessed using the YOS statutory Asset Plus assessment as being at risk of gang affectedness, are offered support and advice during supervision sessions, and are where appropriate required to attend interventions that will help them to desist from gang related activities. This includes attending the YOS delivered Weapons Awareness group work programme.
- Young people are also referred to other statutory and community services including Family Solutions, Plias mentoring, business mentoring, Safer London Pan London Gangs Provision, and the St. Giles Trust.
- As a regular contributor, Brent YOS shares and acts upon information gathered at the Brent Gangs Intelligence Hub. This includes the provision of information such as Court Order details and conditions, compliance, and gang associations.

9. None