



Questions from the Opposition and Other Non-Cabinet Members

Full Council – 17 September 2018

1. Question from Cllr Neil Nerva to Cllr Margaret McLennan, Deputy Leader of the Council:

Can the Cabinet Member update Council on action being taken to tackle Blue Badge fraud?

Response:

Background

The Audit and Investigations team are responsible for investigating all allegations of Blue Badge fraud and misuse. This has been achieved through close liaison with the Independent Travel Team (who administer Blue Badges), the Parking Contract Monitoring team and the parking contractor, Serco, (who assist with obtaining relevant evidence).

Detail

The Audit and Investigations team lead on on-street proactive drives and retain the responsibility for investigating Blue Badge fraud through to prosecution where appropriate. The most recent proactive exercise was undertaken in June 2018 which had the following outcomes:

- 62 Blue Badges checked.
- Six Blue Badges seized due to fraudulent use which includes one vehicle that was lifted;
- 11 Penalty Charge Notices (PCNs) issued for various parking contraventions

(Each PCN carries a £80 fine at discount stage, and the removal charge for the lifted vehicle is £200. This does not include any additional sanctions and/or costs arising from further investigation by the Counter Fraud team.)

Serco has in place a system for checking, seizing and referring Blue Badge fraud. The Parking Monitoring team have developed an intelligence database to help them manage reports of misuse, identify hotspots to assist with tasking on-street parking enforcement and also to identify more serious cases for referral to Audit and Investigations.

The Council's webpages have information that help ensure that members of the public can report Blue Badge fraud and in a consistent manner.

The National Fraud Initiative is a national data matching exercise which provides a useful source of intelligence on Blue Badge fraud. The most recent set of data matches produced the following results matching Blue Badge data to data on deceased persons - 447 matches were reviewed with 304 fraud/errors found resulting in live badges being cancelled.

2. Question from Cllr Lia Colacicco to Cllr Shama Tatler, Lead Member for Regeneration, Highways and Planning:

Can the Cabinet Member for Regeneration Highways and Planning comment on the council's objection to the Cricklewood Waste Depot?

Response:

The Council has been lobbying Barnet to protect the interest of Brent residents. We were consulted on the application and subsequent changes and on both occasions sent strong objections back. These objections were on the grounds of additional traffic on the public highway and the environmental impact – combined we are concerned about how this will impact on our residents in Dollis Hill. The latest objection sent set out our concerns over 7 pages.

3. Question from Cllr Fleur Donnelly-Jackson to Councillor Eleanor Southwood, Lead Member for Housing and Welfare Reform

Can the Cabinet Member for Housing & Welfare Reform clarify how prevalent the usage of out-of-borough placements is within this authority?

Response:

Placing people outside Brent who would rather stay here is not something we ever want to do. However, unfortunately it isn't always possible to find accommodation in the borough. Usually, this is because of the increasingly sky high rents being charged in the private sector, which is a particular problem for people who are subject to the benefit cap. Sometimes, it is because of the shortage of larger family homes that we have in the borough. Those that we do have are often completely unaffordable for people, even with housing benefit support.

As a result, like many councils we find ourselves having to place people in cheaper parts of London or – in the worst case scenarios - out of London entirely. I am pleased though that we have one of the lowest rates of out of borough placement for temporary accommodation amongst London Boroughs but we are far from complacent. In terms of private rented sector placements, we work hard to find placements that are at least within London, if not in Brent. Between 2015 and 2018, 42% of these were in Brent, with a further 36% in London. So only 22% of private sector placements were out of borough. This is still too high and I will continue to work relentlessly with officers to bring this number down.

4. Question from Cllr Michael Maurice to Cllr Krupa Sheth, Lead Member for Environment:

Why does Wembley Park Drive enjoy 2 hours of free parking where everywhere else has to pay to park? When Preston Road and Bridge Road became pay to park, we were told it was for 'uniformity' by your predecessor Jim Moher. On this basis will you either give Preston Road & Bridge Road (Wembley Park) free parking for a period of time, or make Wembley Park Drive, pay and display?

Response:

The Council considers all responses to public and statutory consultation in deciding whether to make changes to on-street parking management arrangements.

In recognition of an increase in public demand for parking management changes in the borough, with the aim of introducing on-street parking controls that meet local needs and will benefit our residents and businesses, Cabinet approved the approach to reviewing on street parking management on 15th November 2016.

Schemes are included in our programme where we receive numerous requests for changes, there is evidence of on-street parking pressures, and there is also a high level of public support. In late 2017, we consulted on introducing pay and display parking outside the all the shops on Wembley Park Drive. This was to prevent long stay and commuter parking and provide short stay parking opportunities for visitors to the local shops. This was not progressed as the proposal was not supported at consultation stage, (15% of respondents were in favour and 85% of respondents were not in favour).

We are not currently aware of a significant number of requests for changes to parking management on Bridge Road or on Preston Road and therefore there are currently no plans to consult on any changes at these locations.