



Questions from the Opposition and Other Non-Cabinet Members

Full Council – 20 September 2021

1. Question from Councillor Jumbo Chan to Councillor Tom Stephen, Lead Member for Schools, Employment & Skills:

Could the Cabinet Member for Schools, Employment & Skills provide the Council with an update on how this borough's Year 11 and Year 13 students have fared in terms of attainment in lieu of normal exams?

Moreover, could he comment on how Brent's schools and colleges – run by our dedicated, hardworking teaching and support staff – can be best supported to ensure that all our pupils are able to realise their future potential?

Response:

Due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, for the second year, the government confirmed that in summer 2021, students taking GCSE, AS and A levels and vocational, technical and other general qualifications should be awarded grades based on an assessment by their teachers. The government also announced that it would not publish school or college level results data in autumn 2021, and that this data would not be used to hold schools and colleges to account.

Brent schools have worked tirelessly throughout the pandemic in the most challenging of circumstances to support Brent pupils' achievement. Whilst published data is not available I have been pleased to see the positive news shared by schools as to our young people's success.

I would like to share my heartfelt congratulations to all Brent pupils who received results this summer. I am deeply proud of all Brent pupils, and of the outstanding support Brent's schools and colleges have provided to ensure that all our young people have every opportunity to succeed.

I am grateful for Councillor Chan highlighting the importance of our schools and colleges receiving support. I have been pleased to receive feedback from our schools and trade union representatives on the support provided by the Council, particularly over the past year. As a Council, we are supporting schools and colleges in their education and wellbeing recovery work with pupils and I have been pleased to see the positive impact of our summer holiday activities and Food programme in supporting recovery. Councillors too can support their local schools. Get in touch with them, find out what help you can provide and offer your support to their efforts. I remain keen on more councillors putting

themselves forward to support schools. School governors and interested councillors should contact the Governor Support Service to see how they can apply.

2. Question from Councillor Mary Daly to Councillor Neil Nerva, Lead Member for Public Health, Culture & Leisure:

Seasonal influenza and Covid 19 viruses have the potential to add substantially to the winter pressures usually faced by the NHS, particularly if infection waves from both viruses coincide.

Can the Cabinet Member for Public Health, Culture & Leisure explain what steps Brent council has taken to plan for the upcoming flu season?

Response:

The Council is working closely with the NHS, who will be delivering Flu vaccination. This year we will be building on our joint work on COVID to address vaccine equity. The Brent Health Matters Teams will outreach to address community concerns and provide factual information. Flu vaccination is recommended for those over 50, with a long term health condition, people living in residential care, informal carers and those living with someone who is more susceptible to infection, pregnant women and health and care workers. The majority of vaccination will happen in community pharmacies and GP practices but should it be required to promote uptake, the Council is ready to support the NHS with pop up or mobile vaccination as we have done with COVID vaccination. This year flu vaccination is recommended for all children from age 2 to year 11 in secondary school.

At the time of writing a decision from JCVI on the COVID “booster” was awaited as is a view from the Chief Medical Officers on vaccinating healthy 12 to 15 year olds. However the Council is supporting the NHS and engaging with local schools on phase 3 of COVID vaccination

More generally, adult social care is working closely with health partners to prepare for winter, and a number of schemes have been discussed to support with the flow of patients from hospital and to avoid unnecessary hospital admissions. The deadline for completing winter plans and accessing funding for ASC is likely to be 31 October, although this date has not yet been confirmed by NHS England. The schemes, as with previous years, will focus on providing additional bedded capacity in the community, additional support (including housing and reablement) to ensure timely and safe discharges home as well as additional support for more complex discharges.

3. Question from Councillor Ernest Ezeajughi to Councillor Eleanor Southwood, Lead Member for Housing & Welfare Reform:

In light of substantial financial pressure and regulatory change, can the Cabinet Member for Housing reaffirm this council's commitment to ensuring that the homes and housing services it provides are of the highest possible standards, and that, in undertaking any and all regenerative improvements, we continue to do so in genuine partnership with the communities involved?

Response:

The demand for social housing far outstrips supply, leading to a major housing crisis in the country. This is particularly worse in London and we are not spared in Brent. We currently have over 23,000 households on the Housing Register and around 6,000 households approach us for homelessness assistance every year, with about 900 going into temporary accommodation. Before 2020, we were letting about 600 social properties every year, which explains why many households sometimes have to wait for decades to get social housing.

We are however doing everything we can to respond. First, recognising that people flourish in good quality permanent homes, we have worked very hard to reduce the number of households in temporary accommodation from about 6,000 six years ago to about 1,500 today. We are also investing in our own temporary accommodation and before the end of this year, our newly built temporary accommodation will be ready for occupation, which will mean the cessation of using B&B.

We are also currently investing £400m into building 1,000 new Council homes by 2024 and by the end of this year, we would have already delivered more than half of this target. In addition, we have recently been awarded over £111m GLA grant, which will facilitate the building of an additional 700 homes by 2029. At present, no London borough is building more Council homes than Brent.

Although we are building as much and as fast as we can, we recognise that we can't solve the problem on our own. We are therefore working with key Housing Associations, encouraging, facilitating and supporting them to invest in Brent. As a result, there has been more supply of affordable homes in Brent in the last two years than any other borough in London. The outcome of this is that, for the first time in many years, we were able to let 725 social homes last year, 125 more than previous years. We expect to let even more this year.

To ensure no one is left behind, we are investing an average of £20m a year into existing Council homes. We are carrying out refurbishments to both internal and external areas in both street properties and blocks. For many properties, we have replaced roofs, installed modern windows, new kitchens and bathrooms and decorated internal and external communal areas. Something that hadn't happened for decades. We have also invested significant funds to ensure fire safety in all the properties we own and manage.

We recognise that the private sector contribute significantly to the supply of accommodation. As such, we have licensing schemes, both for HMOs and singly rented accommodation, that enables us to enforce standards. Our primary objective is to work with private landlords to deliver good quality homes, which is why we have a thriving Landlords' Forum, where we provide support and advice to landlords on how to ensure they provide good quality accommodation to residents. However, we recognise that not all landlords will voluntarily comply, which is why we do not shy away from enforcement and prosecution, when necessary.

4. Question from Councillor Suresh Kansagra to Councillor Muhammed Butt, Leader of the Council:

Brent Council comes down extremely hard on pubs, clubs and restaurants where illegal activities like drug dealing, alcohol consumption and other public order issues cause a nuisance. This can, quite rightly, often result in these premises losing their licences to trade.

We have seen the media reports and disturbing clips on social media of the events that took place around Wembley Stadium in the build up to the England v Italy UEFA 2020 European Championship final back in July. In light of this public order disaster and bearing in mind that Brent Council is the relevant Licencing authority, what investigations has the Council carried out to find what went wrong and lessons learnt to avoid such incidents in the future?

Response:

As has been reported, the events that took place before and during the Euro 2020 final, held at Wembley on July 11 2021, are the subject of an independent review to be led by Baroness Casey of Blackstock.

The Council has committed to participating in this review in order to identify what occurred and what lessons could be learnt for the future.

The Council has undertaken to carry out two reviews following the Euro 2020 tournament; one into an incident that occurred inside the ground prior to the England v Croatia match which left an individual supporter with serious injuries and a review of licensing arrangements.

With specific regard to Alcohol Licensing, this has been identified as one of the areas of concern, given the large amount of apparent drunkenness and also the number of cans and bottles that were left on the streets following the event.

As a result, the Council will be working with relevant partners to undertake a high level review of licensing arrangements on event days with the objective of identifying key considerations and recommendations to form part of the submission to the Casey review.

The Council will consider the recommendations of the Baroness Casey of Blackstock review prior to implementing any changes to the licensing regime that are considered necessary.