

Council

Date of Meeting: 13 July 2016

Questions from Councillors

Wards: All

Report Authorised by: Strategic Director Corporate Resources: Jackie Belton

Contact for enquiries: Wayne Chandai, Democratic Services Manager, Corporate Affairs,
020 7926 0029,
wchandai@lambeth.gov.uk

Report summary

Questions and answers submitted by Councillors, in accordance with Council and Committee Rule 12, are set out below.

1. Councillor Tim Briggs

To: Cabinet Member for Housing – Councillor Matthew Bennett

Last year residents on the Oaklands Estate in Clapham Common ward rejected money from mobile phone companies for the installation of mobile phone masts. A number of years before that the Notre Dame Estate in Clapham Common also rejected money for the installation of mobile phone masts.

The Labour 'co-operative council' has now installed mobile phone masts on the roofs of buildings in both estates without any consultation, to the huge fury of residents, who feel disrespected and ignored.

Can the Cabinet member for Housing clarify whether he has deliberately ignored residents, or is he just incompetent and unaware of what his own housing department is doing.

Party: Conservative

Answer:

We recognise that the lack of a formal policy to consult in this area is not acceptable to residents and we are now reviewing the policy in relation to how requests for mobile phone installations are managed and information to residents. This will ensure that affected residents have greater opportunity to comment on installation proposals and raise any concerns prior to works taking place.

The mast installations were agreed in January 2016 as part of list of 16 new installations across the Borough. The area housing manager wrote to Cllr Briggs earlier in June and accepted that there are lessons to learn from this process particularly in respect of the communications and liaison with residents. As a result of the concerns, contractors have been asked to delay installation of the aerial at Notre Dame and other planned installations to allow time to write to residents on the affected estates to offer reassurances about the safety of the masts. All affected residents have now received a letter confirming these installations conform to all relevant planning and other legislative requirements. The letters also contained detailed information reassuring residents that the masts provide no health and safety risks.

An informal consultation exercise did take place on these two estates in June last year when housing management first received a request to consider the two estates for mobile phone masts. The Estate Housing Officer for Clapham distributed a questionnaire for both Eastman House (Oaklands – 1 returned form objecting to the mast) and Bourne House (Notre Dame – seven forms returned - 3 opposed and 4 residents in favour).

2. Councillor Scott Ainslie

To: Cabinet Member for Environment & Transport – Councillor Jennifer Brathwaite

Waste separation

Waste separation occurs at events such as the Lambeth Country show and in refuse bins on streets throughout the country, as well as in a few bins in Lambeth. What plans does the Council have for the introduction of waste separation for recycling of waste left by park users in Lambeth's parks on a daily basis, and why do the new bins introduced on Lambeth's streets in the last few months not allow for waste separation?

Party: Green

Answer:

Since the management of Lambeth's parks was brought back in-house in April, officers have been working on a new plan to improve recycling in our parks. This will necessitate behavioural change and nudge tactics to encourage residents to take their rubbish home (where it is more likely to be recycled), as well as trialling mixed recycling bins at larger parks. It is anticipated that the branded bins will be installed in autumn 2016. They will be trialled at Brockwell Park and discussions are underway with another park management group about the location of further trial bins. It is hoped that people will take the time to separate their waste and this will increase our already good recycling rates.

Where possible, litter bins have been put in places to encourage waste to be separated. This is largely where the bins can be serviced regularly and not left to over fill. The bins that have been placed across the borough in less high foot fall places are designed to prevent dumping and allow people to dispose of litter in a responsible way.

3. Councillor Rezina Chowdhury

To: Deputy Leader, Investment and Partnerships – Councillor Paul McGlone

Council Tax Support

Could the cabinet member given us an update on how he expects Lambeth's council tax support scheme to benefit vulnerable residents in Lambeth in the year ahead?

Party: Labour

Answer:

Despite the cut in funding when the former universal Council Tax Benefit was transferred to councils in 2013/14, Lambeth council has continued to protect and support the most vulnerable residents through our own Council Tax Support scheme.

To date for 2016/17, the scheme has helped 28,586 people. Of those, 9,611 are pensioners. The remaining 18,975 are 'working age', of which 6,827 or 36% fall into Lambeth's exempted 'Protected' categories (Disabled, Carers, those subject to the Benefits Cap, and War Widows

and Widowers). Lambeth therefore has fully protected just over 16,000 households or 56% of those eligible for CTS. For 2016/17 the CTS scheme remains unchanged, as agreed at full council in January 2016.

Lambeth's local CTS scheme has become a key element of the council's financial resilience strategy. This brings together all available help for vulnerable residents in one place as well as providing financial advice to help residents better manage their finances and avoid debt. Unfortunately, funding has continued to decline for Council Tax Support in line with overall local government funding settlement cuts. Therefore the 'gap' between what we spend in Council Tax Support (CTS) and what the government gave us funding for is projected to be £4.8m by 2017/18. This is a pattern we have seen repeated in many areas under this government: they claim to believe in devolving powers and responsibilities to local councils but do so in a way that places extra burdens on us without the appropriate funding to cover them.

4. Councillor Andy Wilson

To: Leader of the Opposition, Councillor Tim Briggs

Housing Bill

The government is proposing that its new starter homes – a so called flagship policy to solve the housing crisis - will force Lambeth to replace affordable homes with those that will cost £450,000. Will the leader of the opposition end his lack of leadership on housing and take a stand on a policy that will do nothing to put local housing in the grasp of our residents?

Party: Labour

Answer:

Councillor Wilson is either trying to mislead or being mischievous in suggesting that the Conservative government's policy of starter homes 'will force Lambeth to replace affordable homes with those that will cost £450,000'.

It is not clear to what homes he is referring. The Conservatives are building 200,000 starter homes across the country for first time buyers under the age of 40, with a 20% discount off market price, with a price cap in London of £450,000. Is he talking about this price cap which is designed to ensure that hard-working Lambeth residents can benefit from the scheme, and not just high-earning Labour supporters?

If Councillor Wilson wants to help Lambeth residents he might do better to challenge his own party's opposition to right-to-buy, given that 82% of people living in council homes approve of being able to buy their own home, and ask whether he would not be better off getting on the right side of history and the 82% of residents, rather than spouting the usual spin and trying to suggest that there is a Conservative 'enemy' from whom residents need to be protected.

5. Councillor Michelle Agdomar

To: Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care - Councillor Jackie Meldrum

Vulnerable people living in Lambeth Housing.

We know many of our tenants are vulnerable and elderly people. Of our adults eligible for social care, how many are living in Lambeth Housing as tenants or leaseholders? Are similar figures available from our registered social landlords?

Party: Labour

Answer:

Providing adult social care for older and disabled residents in Lambeth is one of the council's key statutory responsibilities – these services account for more than a quarter of our net expenditure every year and we provide packages of care for between 4,000 and 5,000 residents each year. People want to live in their own homes and play a part in the Lambeth community. To reduce the number of people living in institutions making sure that suitable housing is available is vital. The data and information collated by Lambeth's Housing Management shows us how many tenants identify themselves as 'vulnerable', however, this does not tell us whether they would meet the threshold to be eligible for social care services. Out of 23,422 Lambeth council tenants, 1,807 (8%) have told us that they have some form of vulnerability or disability. For 5,057 of tenancies (22%), the main tenant is over 65 years old. Of tenants reporting a disability over 60% have physical disabilities.

There is a great deal more to be done to integrate this information from Housing Management with the data we hold on adults receiving social care services, as there are separate data recording systems. These are being upgraded and an integrated approach will help the council identify and support vulnerable residents better. In November 2015 Cabinet agreed a Task Force to look at this issues. Further work will be needed with our Housing Association partners.

6. Councillor Danny Adilypour

To: Leader of the Opposition, Councillor Tim Briggs

Environment

After eight years of inaction by the last Tory Mayor, it is good to see that our new Mayor Sadiq Khan has enacted new clean air controls that will help to improve the environment for our residents. Can I ask the Tory Group to welcome this new measure and ask what Lambeth Conservatives are doing to change their national party's appalling record on the environment?

Party: Labour

Answer:

The Conservative Group welcomes more effective clean air controls, and wishes the new Mayor well in improving London's environment, which is estimated to cause or speed up the deaths of some 4,000 residents a year.

One of the many achievements of Boris Johnson as Mayor of London was that the air in the capital became cleaner than it was under Ken Livingstone. More trees were planted, cycling was encouraged, buses created less pollution, and taxis became cleaner. Emissions of PM10s and PM2.5 were cut by 15 per cent, and emissions of nitrous oxides were cut by 20%. The number of Londoners living in areas exceeding legal limits was halved from 3.6 million to 1.7 million. We hope the new Mayor will be as successful on environmental issues, but since he shamelessly broke his promise to freeze transport fares as soon as he got into office, doubts have begun.

The Conservative Group acts independently from central government, but we are happy to add our support to submissions made to central government or the Mayor by Lambeth Council on issues that will improve the quality of life and health of our residents, when those submissions can be agreed on a cross-party basis.

7. Councillor Marcia Cameron

To: Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing - Councillor Jim Dickson

Youth Crime

Can I ask the cabinet member what Lambeth is doing to address youth crime in the borough?

Party: Labour

Answer:

We recognise that youth crime, particularly young victims of crime, is a priority in Lambeth. That is why I recently wrote to London's new Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime Sophie Linden, along with Chuka Umunna MP, youth groups, police representatives and faith leaders to urge MOPAC to make 'reducing youth violence' one of their key crime reduction targets. Councillor Peck has already met with the Deputy Mayor in both her capacity as Leader and as London Councils executive member for Crime and Public Protection to discuss these issues.

Despite a long term trend of youth crime falling in Lambeth, we know that we still have more to do to tackle this issue. That's why the Safer Lambeth partnership has recently agreed to make Serious Youth Violence one of our four key priorities for the next three years. As a partnership, we are committed to addressing this issue – by working better with our partners

and the third sector, by sharing information to schools and parents and by making sure that young people in Lambeth have the best possible opportunities. The approach to youth violence is based on both prevention and enforcement - working with the community to stop young people being caught up in the first place.

The Council, Lambeth Safer Neighbourhood Board and health services fund a number of school based programme to help young people avoid becoming perpetrators and victims of crime, including "Growing Against violence" and the "Healthy Lifestyles" programmes. The Council has a specific gangs unit that works to support the top gang offenders in the borough to exit the gang lifestyle, and that team works with the community and the third sector to ensure the best outcomes for young people. In addition, our Youth Offending Service (YOS) continues to build on its work to help support young offenders from committing crime. This includes a greater focus on restorative justice, and working with young people to stop crime. Finally, the Young Lambeth Co-operative directly funds programmes to help reduce youth crime and support young victims of crime – such as a specialist young girl's worker at the GAIA centre, to support girls who experience domestic abuse and other forms of violence against women and girls.

8. Councillor Bernard Gentry

To: Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport – Councillor Jennifer Brathwaite

When will the council carry out the improvement works to the Paddocks on Clapham Common Southside including:

- 1) Removing dumped rubbish and litter
- 2) Resiting bins off the grassed areas
- 3) Regulating parking in between the grassed areas
- 4) Breaking out the encroachment of Tarmac on the grassed areas.
- 5) Completing reinstatement of wooden posts?

Party: Conservative

Answer:

Officers have started the process to implement a traffic management order to enable the enforcement of parking in between the Paddocks. As this process involves a statutory consultation with residents, it is envisaged that this will be completed by March 2017, subject to no major objections being raised during the consultation process. Once the Council has the ability to enforce parking we will be able to re-site the waste containers to ensure they are not blocked in and causing additional problems.

In the mean-time collection frequency has been increased to twice a week to ensure the area is maintained to an acceptable standard.

Plans are being developed to install 'knee rail' post and rail fencing around that area of The Paddocks; and break up the hardstanding in order to return the area to grass.

All this activity will be co-ordinated to ensure the waste containers are sited appropriately and without causing an obstruction, particularly if a temporary location is required.

I will be able to confirm further details about the installation of the knee rail and the relocation of the bins following the discussion with officers at the next Clapham Common Management Advisory Committee meeting on 7 July. It is important that we continue to work with residents to resolve any issues they have regarding these improvements.

9. Councillor Christopher Wellbelove

To: Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing – Councillor Jim Dickson

Sexual Health Services

Can I ask the cabinet member what impact will be of the Tory government's huge cuts of 56% to Lambeth's budget on sexual health services in Lambeth and what further cuts are expected in the future?

Party: Labour

Answer:

In addition to the 56% cuts to the council's overall funding, the specific Public Health grant that pays for the council to provide sexual health services has been cut by 10%. Between 2015/16 and 2016/17, the grant was reduced by £2.671m and it is due to fall as shown below every year between now and 2020.

	16/17	17/18	18/19	19/20
Public Health Grant	33,070,00	32,243,00	31,402,00	30,585,00
	0	0	0	0

These cuts to the Public Health grant have a direct impact on service delivery as 93% of the spend within Public Health is on contracted services either provided by Hospital Trusts, voluntary sector providers, other providers or primary care and 34% of the total grant is spent on sexual health services.

The sexual health services that will be affected by the cuts in the public health grant include: testing and treatment of sexually transmitted infections, contraceptive services, sexual health prevention/promotion, young people's sexual health services and HIV care and support services. We are working closely with the providers of these services and other stakeholders to minimise the negative impact of any service reductions given their importance in reducing onward transmission of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections, reducing unwanted pregnancies and abortions and enabling people living with HIV to get the support they need.

In particular, we are making changes to HIV Care and Support Services following the comprehensive 2012 NHS-led review across Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham. The result identified that the nature of HIV treatment had changed significantly as people with HIV were living longer and healthier lives and that people with HIV are best served by ensuring they have better access to mainstream health and social care services rather than being directed down a specialist pathway for all their health and social care needs.

10. Councillor Louise Nathanson

To: Cabinet Member for Children and Schools – Councillor Jane Edbrooke

Can the Labour administration please clarify why only 57.8% of children got their first preference for secondary school within Lambeth last year? The average is 84.1% which has been recently held up in the national press as extremely low - however is still vastly better than the rates in Lambeth.

Party: Conservative

Answer:

I am pleased that for the fourth year running, every child in Lambeth whose application was on time has received an offer of a secondary school place. 82% of those were offered their first or second-choice school. This is in stark contrast to the 500 children who found themselves without an offer of a school place when a Tory-Lib Dem coalition ran Lambeth. These figures are a testament to the hard work of Lambeth's education services in making sure as many children as possible can go to the schools of their choice in September.

Due to the huge popularity of our schools, all of which are good or outstanding rated, Lambeth receives a large number of in borough and out of borough applications. These figures fails to compare the number of applications received with other councils and this accounts for the differential between the national figures. Lambeth's results for first preference of secondary schools are also in line with other neighbouring inner-London boroughs.

In many other places in the UK, parents do not have such a choice of good or outstanding schools. Unfortunately, if the education cuts and obsession with structures supported by Councillor Gentry's party go ahead, this may be true for Lambeth parents as well.

11. Councillor Guilherme Rosa

To: Deputy Leader of the Council (Investment and Partnerships) – Councillor Paul McGlone

Portuguese representation on Council workforce

Can I ask what the council is doing to improve the current worrying under representation of residents of Portuguese origin in council employment at all levels, and can I get an

assurance that correcting this is a top priority for the council in the years ahead? It is vital that we have a council workforce that reflects the population it serves.

Party: Labour

Answer:

The Council recognises and is proud to have the largest Portuguese population in the UK in Lambeth. This shows the borough's commitment to welcoming, encouraging and celebrating diversity. My fellow councillor is right to highlight that the workforce of the council may not reflect the Portuguese community and this is work that we will have to continue addressing as we seek to have a workforce that comprises all aspects of Lambeth's communities.

As our equalities statement states, Lambeth employees value diversity; and we employ a diverse workforce. This means reflecting the borough's diverse communities at all levels throughout our organisation, and removing barriers which prevent the existence and promotion of equality of opportunity. We are committed to transparency in all our workforce practices. We have the same expectations of the organisations we work with.

In accordance with this commitment, we carefully gather equalities data and report annually on the diversity of our workforce. This information is shared with councillors and subject to scrutiny through the Equalities Impact Assessment Panel. As we recently discussed with that panel, of which Cllr Rosa is a member, although we have good data on ethnicity, we do not currently have accurate data on the number of Portuguese staff or those speaking Portuguese.

As a Council that strives for excellence in this area, we will certainly review our approach to staff data collection in order to be able to report more accurately on the proportion of our staff who are Portuguese or Portuguese speaking in future. It is worth pointing out that of course this data is shared by staff on a voluntary basis, although we do all we can to encourage it.

12. Councillor Malcolm Clark

To: Cabinet Member for Housing – Councillor Matthew Bennett

Secured communal entrances

What steps is the Council making to ensure that Lambeth Housing blocks which want them, have secure communal entrances / front doors? There are several blocks in Streatham Wells - including Belenoyd Court and on Hopton Road - where residents are experiencing repeated anti-social behaviour incidents and are worried about their safety because their communal entrance door has no lock?

Party: Labour

Answer:

Lambeth Housing continues to work closely with local residents and the community police to identify blocks experiencing anti-social behaviour and poor security. There is however no separate budget to install new or additional security and so each case is assessed on its individual merits and then we seek to obtain funding. There are also additional issues to consider as residents have to agree to the additional service charges which will be added to their rents or for leaseholders to services charge bills.

With regards to the concerns about antisocial behaviour at Belenoyd Court and on Hopton Road, the South Area Housing Office work in partnership with the police to tackle nuisance and antisocial behaviour from communal area in council estates. In this particular instance the South Area Team has confirmed that there are no concerns about repeated anti-social behaviour at these blocks. I am told that Hopton Road has lockable communal entry doors, which are in good working order. I have been advised, however, that the resident of 2a Hopton Road has expressed an interest in having a fob operated entry door system, but has been advised that there are no current plans to do this. In 2015 some complaints were received about nuisance in the communal areas of Belenoyd Court, this was discussed with the police, but no action was taken as we were unable to identify the culprits and no further complaints have been received for over six months.

13. Councillor Sonia Winifred

To: Leader of the Opposition, Councillor Tim Briggs

Academisation

Following his government's u-turn on forced academisation of our local schools, can I ask the Tory leader to endorse Lambeth Labour's successful campaign on this issue and make it clear that Lambeth Tories will oppose any future attempt to resurrect this disastrous, ideologically driven policy?

Party: Labour

Answer:

Academies were started by Labour in 2002, so Councillor Winifred might want to be careful which party's policies she calls 'disastrous' and 'ideological'.

The point of academies is to give more freedom to education professionals to do what they do best – to teach children, thereby avoiding ideological local authorities imposing their own misguided and dysfunctional management on schools, as has happened so disastrously in the past.

The great improvements in Lambeth schools are mostly as a result of Lambeth education officers allowing schools the same freedom as academies: to innovate around process, to share good practice and focus on outcomes. The Conservative Group pays a warm and heartfelt tribute to these achievements, and urges all educational professionals to keep working relentlessly on improving standards for our children.

But if the Labour establishment in Lambeth wants to start to 'own' the success achieved by its officers, it really needs to stop moaning about the improved outcomes achieved elsewhere as a result of academies being given the freedom to focus on the same sorts of priorities.

14. Councillor Luke Murphy

To: Deputy Leader of the Council (Investment and Partnerships) – Councillor Paul McGlone

Refugees

I would like to applaud Lambeth's positive approach to welcoming refugees fleeing conflict in Syria and other parts of the Middle East. Can the cabinet member give more details of how they will be cared for in our borough?

Party: Labour

Answer:

The Council has committed to taking 20 refugee families over the lifetime of the parliament and we are proud that Lambeth is living up to its historic reputation as a borough that is welcoming to all.

So far we have welcomed three families and all has worked well. All families now have access to the benefit system and health service. Children have been found appropriate school placements, and are settling into their local communities well. We have uncovered some minor gaps in provision and have been fortunate in having the support of a range of voluntary and community organisations who have generously offered to supplement our efforts. We are particularly grateful to Citizens UK/Lambeth Welcomes Refugees who have offered families a range of support (e.g. furniture/prams etc.) and have sought to find local properties from among their members, which owners are willing to rent to us at LHA rates. Our fourth family due early September will be housed in a property secured through Citizens UK's good offices.

We have formed a project team which includes representatives from the DWP, the borough's education department, the health inclusion team, SHP, a senior social worker from the NRPF team, and our housing manager. This group meets prior to any family arriving and makes preparation ensuring the families' pressing needs are met in a timely way that is consistent with the statement of requirements.

We have also worked with the Home Office and Lambeth Palace to support the Archbishop's undertaking to house a family within the grounds of Lambeth Palace. This family is due to arrive next month and the cooperation between Lambeth Palace and ourselves will be the highlighted example of the first round of 'pilot' schemes.

Following the government's recent and welcome U-turn on unaccompanied child refugees, the Council has also contacted the Home Office to signal that the borough is ready to look after unaccompanied young asylum-seekers who come to the UK from camps in Europe.