

WRITTEN QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS

The following questions listed on pages 41 – 44 of the agenda have been received from Councillors and will be taken as read along with the written answer detailed below. The Councillor asking the question may then ask one relevant supplementary question which shall be put and answered without discussion. A second supplementary question may be asked by any other Member of the Council which shall also be put and answered without discussion:

(a) Councillor Morgan

"Can the Cabinet member for Housing say on what dates numbers 68 and 74 Manor Way became vacant, when repair work to return them to use will begin, and how long it will be before new tenants will be able to move in?"

Reply from Councillor Caulfield, Cabinet Member for Housing.

"68 Manor Way is a 3-bedroom house which became empty on 23 December 2007. The previous tenant carried out some DIY alterations to the loft which has rendered the roof structure unstable, and the property unfit for occupation.

74 Manor Way is a 2-bedroom house which became empty on 7 October 2007. The previous tenant undertook unauthorised alterations to amend the internal layout of the property. Walls have been removed in the kitchen and living room to enlarge those areas and the main bedroom has been divided to form an extra bedroom. There have been associated electrical DIY with these alterations, and as a result the mid-floor and staircase have been destabilised.

A programme has now commenced to bring these properties back into use. A structural report on the properties and a subsequent specification and pricing of works is currently being prepared. Following this, work to both these properties will be procured with a view to the properties being brought back into use early in the new financial year."

(b) Councillor Marsh

"Would the Cabinet member for Environment describe what he is doing to promote and ensure that cycle lanes and routes are safe to use throughout the city and especially in my ward?"

Reply from Councillor Theobald, Cabinet Member for Environment.

- "The city council has been awarded Cycling Town status for the second time, which means continued funding for cycle promotion, training and infrastructure over the next three years.

- In terms of safety, officers are working proactively with Sussex Road Traffic Police strategically to tackle cycling safety issues, including where cycle facilities are compromised by other road users. The council is seeking to widen the remit of this partnership to cover the city as a whole.
- **The city council has also trained over 1200 school children this year, through Bikeability cycle training, giving children the experience and the skills they need to cycle responsibly and safely. As of 2009, all cycle training courses delivered in our schools will be to this new national standard.**
- **Officers are developing Travel Plans with both Brighton and Sussex Universities and Southern Water for their students and staff."**

(c) Councillor Alford

"How many of our primary phase schools are now rated as good or outstanding by Ofsted?"

Reply from Councillor Mrs Brown, Cabinet Member for Children & Young People.

"43 of our primary phase schools (76%) are rated as good or outstanding by Ofsted. (Two of these are maintained nursery schools).

13 were judged to be outstanding (23%)

30 were judged to be good (53%)

14 were judged to be satisfactory (24%)

We have no schools in an Ofsted 'category' (0%)"

(d) Councillor Kitcat

"Can Councillor Theobald confirm the timetable for the introduction of communal bins into the city centre and provide details on: The procurement of new bins, including how they will meet accessibility requirements for our older residents; and on preparations for methods to measure and improve recycling rates in bin areas, as agreed at the Environment Committee on 13 September 2007 (recommendation 2.5, as amended)?"

Reply from Councillor Theobald, Cabinet Member for Environment.

"I cannot, at this stage, confirm a timetable, but it is anticipated that a phased roll out will commence in January. I have asked that Ward Councillors are informed of these plans as soon as they have been finalised.

As you know we already have over 200 communal bins in the city and over 90% of residents have found the bins easy to use. For those residents who cannot take their rubbish to a communal bin we offer to collect the refuse from their home.

In February we will be writing to all residents about their new recycling collection days and issuing a calendar of the new dates.

In the early summer we plan to implement a new recycling communications campaign targeting the city centre. This is likely to involve door knocking. Again, Councillors will be informed of the details nearer the time."

(e) Councillor Morgan

"Can the Cabinet Member for Environment reassure the council that there have been no redundancies, and no reduction in crews or rounds, which have contributed to the appalling list of missed refuse collections that residents of my ward and others have had to experience over the past month?"

Reply from Councillor Theobald, Cabinet Member for Environment.

"The reason for the refuse changes as we all know is because the new waste transfer station has opened and our crews no longer need to travel to Beddingham to tip. This saves time and means that we have reduced the number of crews. So, to be clear of the order of this – the waste transfer station was agreed and built and opened – then rounds needed to be changed, then crews were reduced and voluntary redundancies offered.

We have been working very well with the GMB, and agreed a voluntary redundancy package. The officer report published in August that you will have read is a public document which explains all this."

(f) Councillor Morgan

"Will the Cabinet Member for Communities explain what she means when she says that future funding to tackle deprivation and social exclusion will go to "people not places"?"

Reply from Councillor Simson, Cabinet Member for Community Affairs.

"Councillor Morgan is of course referring to the article in the Argus on 21 October reporting on hidden poverty in the city. Using evidence from the Reducing Inequality Review the article presents information that no party can deny – that inequality is spread throughout the city:

- Of the 25,000 people of working-age receiving benefits across the city 16,000 (64%) do not live in the most deprived 20% areas

- Of the 4,000 children living in low income or out of work families across the city nearly 60% do not live in the most deprived areas
- Of the 41,000 adults with no qualification across the city, 75% do not live in the most deprived areas

With this evidence it would be irresponsible of the Administration to continue to maintain a focus solely on place. Otherwise there is a significant risk that some households, families and children will not receive the support they need to improve their opportunities and meet their aspirations – simply for not living in the right area.

Using this evidence I am working hard with all the Directors to look out how we can improve services that support people across the city both in areas where evidence shows that people are experiencing multiple disadvantage but also those in the smaller pockets of deprivation throughout the city.

The future is about ensuring that households and individuals experiencing inequality, wherever they may be in the city, have access to appropriate services and opportunities. This is even more important in the current economic climate.

In this time of financial difficulty this is not an easy task and I urge my colleagues of all parties to work with me and my Cabinet Members on ensuring that services are reaching all those who need them.

This Administration is committed to helping both people and places.”

(g) Councillor Carden

“Would the Cabinet Member for Environment say what this council is doing to stop the abuse of fraudulent blue badge users from parking in disabled bays in Brighton and Hove?”

Reply from Councillor Theobald, Cabinet Member for Environment.

“The city council's Parking Enforcement Team is working with Sussex Police to tackle blue badge abuse in the streets of Brighton & Hove as part of 'Operation Bluebird'.

Operation Bluebird is an ongoing joint exercise, which has resulted in the confiscation of about 40 blue badges so far this year. The council has a good record of prosecuting offenders with fines and costs averaging £600 per offence. Only police officers can legally confiscate a blue badge, which is why we have adopted this joint approach.

Since November 2007 the council's Parking Attendants, now called Civil Enforcement Officers, have used new legal powers to inspect blue badges, and police officers and Civil Enforcement Officers now check blue badges as part of their routine patrols.”

(h) Councillor Meadows

“Could the Cabinet Member for Central Services say what actions the council is undertaking to find a more suitable location for Kingsplan Limited, who have been seeking a more appropriate site?”

Reply from Councillor Fallon-Khan, Cabinet Member for Central Services.

“The city council have provided information on potential sites that could accommodate this business operation together with providing information with regards to the Commercial Property Database that the city council provides in partnership with the local commercial agents.”

(i) Councillor Hamilton

“The Conservative Administration has pledged to keep council tax increases in line with or below inflation, and is working towards a 3.5% increase for 2009-10. If, as now seems possible, inflation drops below 3.5% by the end of the council's financial year, could the Cabinet Member for Finance promise to reduce the council tax increase accordingly?”

Reply from Councillor Young, Cabinet Member for Finance.

“The administration’s budget is being prepared in an unprecedented financial climate which changes daily and is hitting the city and its people hard. Our approach to this budget is based on getting basic services right and improving value for money.

With inflation at 5% in September and 4.2% in October, the council tax rise of 3.5% for next year does meet our pledge. Inflation may go down but it may then also go back up again particularly in such volatile times.

What this administration is absolutely clear about is that the council’s finances are planned sensibly. This means formulating a budget well in advance of the next financial year and taking a view on inflation around this time. The government itself does this for a number of purposes, taking inflation into account in September, which as I have said stood at 5%.

Once we have formulated our budget there is a proper democratic process within the council including the Overview and Scrutiny Commission in February – open and transparent government is something this administration values. Councillors will also be aware that we are consulting with stakeholders about the budget. The administration also needs to give clear political leadership so that officers can prepare in advance for the changes arising from the budget.

For all these reasons it is neither sensible nor practical to keep changing the budget right up to the statutory deadline of 10 March.”

(j) Councillor Simpson

“Could the Cabinet Member for Housing please reconfirm her public commitment to not cut frontline services, especially day centres across the city?”

Reply from Councillor Caulfield, Cabinet Member for Housing.

“As stated at the last Cabinet Member Meeting for Housing, this Administration is absolutely committed to supporting front line services. As a council we have to constantly look at how we use our resources to ensure that we are providing the best possible services for residents in this city and this may mean changes to the way we provide our services but it does not mean cuts.

If you look at the learning disability services we provide you can see that we are actually looking to increase and expand our day services by introducing the day options team while still retaining our day centres.”

(k) Councillor Mitchell

“Following the inspection that was made in East Brighton Park, could the Cabinet Member for Environment tell us what were the results of the inspection and the costs of damage to the cricket pitch?”

Reply from Councillor Theobald, Cabinet Member for Environment.

“Fortunately on this occasion the damage is superficial and out of the cricket season so there are no direct costs. We have, however, reinforced the bunds around the cricket pitch which cost approximately £50.”

(l) Councillor Hawkes

“Could the Cabinet Member for Children & Young People update us on the Council’s progress on the “Adding Up” campaign which agreed to look into ways of easing the impact of school costs on low income families?”

Reply from Councillor Mrs Brown, Cabinet Member for Children & Young People.

“The council is aware of the Citizen’s Advice Bureau campaign which aims to get schools to adopt best practice with regard to supporting needy families with the cost of school trips, uniform, specialist equipment etc. The campaign is also trying to make it compulsory in law for all LA’s to provide uniform grants.

At present the council does not provide funding to support parents with school uniforms or other potential pupil costs. Funding is available in the city to needy families through some charities.

All schools are encouraged to make uniforms as accessible as possible to all families by identifying uniform items that can be purchased cheaply through

supermarkets and their own school shops. Many schools provide second-hand uniform shops. Schools also fulfil the strict criteria related to school trips ensuring that compulsory and essential educational visits are made available to all students regardless of their ability to pay.

I have asked officers to prepare a paper for my Cabinet Member Meeting in the New Year which outlines the potential costs and practicalities of adopting the aims of the CAB Adding Up Campaign.”

(m) Councillor Wells

“Can the Cabinet Member for Central Services tell me what the council is doing to tackle benefit fraud in Brighton & Hove?”

Reply from Councillor Fallon-Khan, Cabinet Member for Central Services.

“The council only administer housing benefit (HB) and council tax benefit (CTB). However, the council’s benefit service acts in conjunction with the Internal Audit section, Job Centre Plus, the Pension Service, the Police and other agencies to tackle fraud across the welfare benefit system and sometimes beyond.

There are two main elements to dealing with benefit fraud; prevention and detection.

In terms of prevention our benefit service adheres to a strict series of guidelines to check the validity of benefit claims, both when a claim is first made and during the lifetime of a claim. Both HB and CTB are means tested benefits so these checks necessarily mean looking closely at proofs of income/capital as well as the validity of tenancies and occupation. This work is done efficiently so genuine claimants are paid promptly. Most customers with fraudulent intent are stopped at this stage without any payment being made.

In addition to the ongoing preventative work the Benefit Service has a team of ten that concentrates solely on fraud detection. As well as investigating tip-offs from the public, staff, Councillors, an increasing proportion of their work follows up on sophisticated computer sweeps that identify potential problems. In conducting their investigations and in conducting visits, surveillances and interviews officers adhere to similar guidelines to the police.

In 2007/2008 the council successfully prosecuted 34 customers and applied 107 other sanctions. These are a very positive set of results that compare well with other councils.”

(n) Councillor Mitchell

"Will Councillor Fallon-Khan please say how much the renting of the 52 concrete blocks placed at the foot of the historic Kemp Town Slopes alongside the existing barrier of wooden posts has cost the council to date?"

Reply from Councillor Fallon-Khan, Cabinet Member for Central Services.

“Concrete barriers were placed alongside the wooden posts to fortify the existing barrier at the Kemp Town slopes to stop illegal incursions that had been previously experienced. The barriers have cost £5,545 to date and this cost includes the installation and the eventual removal of the barriers.

The council was made aware that travellers who were being moved on from other sites in the city might attempt to access the Kemp Town slopes which had been used previously on a number of occasions by travellers. The council took action by laying the barriers which allow for public access to the area whilst also potentially saving on the expenses associated with moving travellers and clearing up the site.

The council is currently investigating a more permanent and appropriately designed solution in the form of iron bollards that match the existing bollards in the area. The estimated cost of this will be in the region of £20,000 to £30,000 and a bid has been made to secure funding for next year.”

(o) Councillor Mitchell

"Will Councillor Geoffrey Theobald please state the cost of the additional crews brought in to remove uncollected refuse since October 6th during the current service disruption."

Reply from Councillor Theobald, Cabinet Member for Environment.

“There is no additional cost on the service budget because it does not include for the reduction in crews in this financial year on the basis that the savings, that have been made thus far, would be needed in the short term to settle in the changes. In the next financial year the savings from these changes (including recycling and communal bins) will be just under £1m per annum.”

(p) Councillor Barnett

“What action is the council and its partners taking to tackle the problem of drugs in our city?”

Reply from Councillor Simson, Cabinet Member for Community Affairs.

“Thank you very much for this question as it is an opportunity to confirm the positive work that is underway across the city led by the council and it’s partners.

Reducing and preventing drug related harm remains both a national and local priority and tackling illicit drugs misuse is one of the priorities identified in the Brighton and Hove Community Safety, Crime Reduction and Drugs Strategy.

As well as the national focus on reducing both the supply of and the demand for illicit drugs, we and our partners have work underway to address the challenges

of protecting communities through robust enforcement; preventing harm to children young people and families; delivering new approaches to drug treatment and social reintegration; and public information campaigns, communication and community engagement.

Whilst all the key actions are detailed in our Strategy, which is extremely comprehensive, I can pick out some areas of focus and challenge for the next three years.

For young people and families there will be a continuing focus on supporting the children of drug misusing parents and carers. We will continue to work with communities through local audits aiming at both assisting local populations to reduce local concerns and providing targeted support.

Partners are reviewing treatment services in order to deliver more effective and economical treatment and we will be sustaining enforcement activity, looking to make further improvements in intelligence and reporting in local communities.

Illicit drug misuse has a direct impact on the lives of those who use drugs, their families and local communities and we all remain committed to tackling its impact.”

(q) Councillor Steedman

“Earlier this year, Councillor Mears signed up to the Eastern Road Area Charter, personally committing the Administration to working with local councillors, the police, the PCT and local residents to meet certain service standards and to deliver a better quality of life for all, through partnership working. Could Councillor Mears confirm that she and her Administration are still fully committed to meeting the commitments, standards and actions agreed in the Charter?”

Reply from Councillor Mears, Leader of the Council.

“Yes.”

(r) Councillor Steedman

“Could Councillor Geoffrey Theobald confirm that a scheme for a new cycle route between the Pier and the Marina will be put in place at the soonest possible opportunity?”

Reply from Councillor Theobald, Cabinet Member for Environment.

“Yes, subject to consultation with the public, including the cycle forum and cycle groups.”

