

MINUTES OF THE BLACKHEATH ASSEMBLY

Tuesday, 29 October 2019 at 7.30 pm

PRESENT: Councillors

ALSO PRESENT:

Apologies for absence were received from

1. Welcome from the Chair

2. Councillor and Community updates

Belmont Park Telephone Box Micro-Library – This funding has now come through with the Blackheath Society now the owner, it should be a community library within the new year.

Blackheath Fireworks – Taking place on 2nd November, will cost over £100,000. We are trying to crowdfund so please help us to donate or volunteer as it really does showcase Blackheath ward and the borough.

3. Mayor's Question Time

Mayor Damian Egan told the assembly that Blackheath ward is the last ward to host a Mayor's Question Time.

He then provided an update.

I was elected as Mayor 18 months ago, before this I was a Lewisham Councillor and led on the Lewisham Social Housing programme. We made over 100 commitments and promises as part of our manifesto and here are the updates.

Austerity is impacting on all service area. Since 2010 our funding from central government has been cut by £165m. This means that were we funded at 2010 levels our budget would be over £400m instead of £243m

Tomorrow we will be taking to M&C another 10 million cuts and then potentially another 12 million.

In Local Government austerity is not over. At the same time Lewisham is one of the fastest growing boroughs in London.

Housing - We now have 10,000 families on housing waiting list.

Two years ago there would be 450 families sleeping tonight in bed and breakfasts or temporary hostels. This number has now risen to 700. There is a similar story throughout London.

We need to build more homes that residents can afford, we are building or buying off the open market 1000 new homes.

Each of the 700 families we have to pay for every single night that they are in bed and breakfast or temporary accommodation. This is not just financially draining for the Council, but socially it is the worst type of housing that people can be in.

We are applying to government to introduce a Full Landlord Licence, this will mean that anybody who rents out a property in the borough will need to have a landlord licence, it also means that during the course of the licence the properties will be inspected.

The majority of Landlords are very good, but there are too many who are not. The housing tenure with the worst conditions is the private rented sector. Most Lewisham residents under the age of 40 are now in private rented accommodation. It is therefore critical that we provide licensing and ensure that people have safe and secure housing.

Planning - This is another area where I know that there are questions. We have had a focus during the last 18 months over how we get private developers to pay their fair share. I have been very frustrated over the very low levels of affordable housing in Lewisham Central.

A number of steps have been taken to address this, we have been a great deal clearer with Developers about what our targets are.

Our target is to try to get 50% of new homes built by private developers to be affordable. The Mayor of London's minimum is 35%.

We have seen a dramatic increase over the last year with the number of new homes that have been approved in terms of social housing and affordable housing. This is very good news, but clearly these schemes do take a long time to build out.

If you look at Lewisham Gateway which was first given planning permission in 2009, now 10 years on the development is still going taking place.

Our Planning Team has looked at Islington who have had a great deal of success with challenging developers, including through the courts.

We have a test case for Lewisham coming up and we are expecting the result imminently, this is at Connington Road. This is a 34 storey development on the Tesco Car Park in Lewisham. We feel that there is too low a level of affordable housing. We appealed to the Planning Inspectorate alongside the GLA and we have had fantastic support from the Planning Team, we will be getting a result anytime soon. Win or lose this it is really important that Lewisham is seen to be trying to get the best for its residents and even if we are not successful it sends a clear message to the developing community.

One of the worries that some people have had is that it will put off developers from developing in Lewisham, but the developers have welcomed the clarity.

The Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and the Neighbourhood Community Structure Levy (NCIL) is something that you will hear a great deal about. We are completely devolving the Neighbourhood element and we are the first local authority to do this. Local Assemblies will now decide how this is spent as we think local residents are best placed rather than officers for NCIL as you know the things that work in your local area and what is needed.

Clean Air and the Environment – In Lewisham we are the second lowest in England in terms of CO2 emissions per capita. I strongly recommend that as an assembly you invite people from a Climate Action Team as Lewisham is emerging as the lead borough when it comes to putting an action plan into action and working with the community to tackle this issue.

We are also rolling out electric charging points and safe cycle storage so that people can store their bikes in the street if they do not have room at home.

We have launched the new Greening Fund, local community groups can make applications to this fund for greening projects within their community.

We are supporting the work of Transport for London to campaign for the Bakerloo Line, the consultation is currently open and they have had many responses, we want to demonstrate that there is community support to bring the Bakerloo Line not just to Lewisham, but beyond to Catford and into Bromley.

There are difficult decisions to make and one of these is around parking charges and we are making changes to the resident parking permits and people will pay more or less depending on how polluting their vehicle is.

Sanctuary Borough - A huge thank you to anyone who has been involved with refugee resettlement. As part of our manifesto commitment we aim to welcome 100 refugee families into Lewisham, we have already welcomed 17 families from Syria and Iraq. We have only been able to do this because of community support. Lewisham will be London's lead borough when it comes to refugee resettlement.

Education – Lewisham Learning Partnership, this is a partnership between local schools and the Council which centres around sharing best practice and focusses on how we can improve performance. We have had some fantastic news from St Matthews Academy, with a big increase relating to their GCSE results, they have had their OFSTED and we are hopeful that we will see an improvement. They have benefitted a great deal from Lewisham Learning.

Last year for the first time we were off the bottom of the league tables when it comes to GCSE results and we had been there for a decade. It is therefore crucial that the investment into Lewisham Learning continues.

London Borough of Culture – We are bidding to be the next London Borough of Culture, the first and current borough is Waltham Forest and next year it goes to Brent. The Mayor and the GLA are now looking at 2021. We have a very strong bid, but we need to demonstrate community support, so please do visit iamlewisham.uk, we have 5,500 already signed, but we want to get this closer to 10,000. This will be a multi-million pound investment for the borough.

Mayors Questions

Q Why does the Council not campaign as vigorously and publicly for a major upgrade of Lewisham station, which is already seriously overcrowded and congested at peak times, no longer fit for purpose and getting busier, as it does for the Bakerloo Line Extension, which is at least 10 years away not yet approved or funded, and will massively further increase user numbers at the station?

A We are talking with Network Rail, we all recognise including NR that we need a major overhaul of the station. I don't think it is a case of campaigning for one or the other and I think if we get the Bakerloo Line it allows us to look at exactly what we need at Lewisham Station. Clearly around the Station we have a great deal of development, we want private developers to play their part and contribute. One of the developments on the Carpet Right site includes an entrance that will allow for the Bakerloo Line.

Q This relates to air pollution and the impact on health. There has been a significant loss of trees and in particular the new developments like Tidemill are not seeing many new plantings. How are you going to resolve the loss of trees which are known to have positive effects on air pollution?

A The council is planting thousands of trees, we have had major investment in the south of the borough in Beckenham Place Park and we work with community groups where we will fund half the cost of the tree, there are schemes across the borough doing this. With Tidemill 85% of the new development retains green space.

We are revising Lewisham's Local plan and building into this the concept of what 'Place' looks like. This includes green space, vibrant shopfronts with independents business not just chains, offices and employment opportunities.

We are supporting the Greening Fund and Climate Action and this demonstrates our commitment to tackling these issues.

Q On behalf of Blackheath Bumps, a local group comprising 149 women what plans does the council have to progress the redevelopment of Talbot Place following the initial consultation, based on Ian Chalk's Talbot Place: feasibility sketchbook, and recent community interest as evidenced by the common place survey?

A I know that this is something that your Councillors support and I too fully support the idea of getting play space up on Blackheath, so this is definitely something that we will be behind.

Q How are you dealing with the level of cuts and where will you find the savings over the next few years?

A I have been so impressed with just how much work the staff do, the pressure that they are under and what they still manage to achieve. However, the impact of austerity is felt in every single service. We try to protect frontline services, but we are now getting to the point where we have to make difficult decisions in these areas as well. I feel really strongly about youth provision, Lewisham is a young borough and if we look at the increase in youth violence these issues can be dealt with so much better with proper investment in our young people. We have seen a year on year onslaught of cuts where all across London youth centres have closed. We invest over £2 million per year in keeping a youth service and Youth First is our provider.

The Council is doing some pioneering things and we are always looking at new ways of working, but the reality is that we cannot perform in the same way with a budget cut of £420 million to £230 million. We have real concerns over government funding and the impact on Lewisham.

Q We have been raising ongoing issues relating to drug dealing on Lawn Terrace for some time now, it is happening day and night on a regular basis and nothing appears to be being done about it. Previously a lady was found dead there and we have yet to hear anything about this, people are very concerned. The lighting is poor as well.

A Clearly there is anti-social behaviour and criminal behaviour and this must be reported to the police and the ward panel. The police have also faced massive cuts over the last decade and so they will be prioritising the criminal gangs over the street based activity. But if you do have documented evidence then as it is a Lewisham Homes property it does make things easier and if you have any particular evidence about a particular property then please do share this with the Councillors or myself.

Q The list of things that you cannot take to the recycling centre is ridiculous, I was only taking decking but it was refused and I was told to hire a skip, what are we supposed to do with our rubbish if they will not accept it?

A I will take this back and see what other Councils are doing as we have seen an increase in fly-tipping. We need to make it easier for people to do the right thing.

Q Is the council satisfied with the effectiveness of the 20mph limit?

A There has been a reduction in speeds and the 20mph has had an impact, but clearly there is not the enforcement at present. We are working with TfL to encourage them to reduce their speeds to 20mph in the borough. We are satisfied that speeds are slowly reducing, but work still needs to be done to reduce the speed.

Q The Lewisham Gateway junction attracts hundreds of negative comments, it's a hostile environment for everyone, but particularly cyclists. It is just not fulfilling its function.

A I have my disappointments with Gateway, but it is not yet finished with two thirds to come through. It will look and feel different when it is finished in a few years. The idea has always been that it brings the town centre to the station. It is a successful town centre with few vacant units, but it does not necessarily work in terms of the environment and making it easier for pedestrians. I do acknowledge complaints that Lewisham Cyclists have and we want to improve cycling across the borough.

Q Is it a logical position to be going for cultural awards and funding £100,000 of fireworks for Blackheath when you are having to cut frontline services.

A We have tried with Blackheath Fireworks to find other ways to fund it, this includes £15,000 from Greenwich, crowdfunding and to get sponsorship. The Fire Brigade would much prefer one big Fireworks display rather than everyone doing it in their gardens, it is more manageable and safer. We get 80,000 - 100,000 people attend every year so in terms of value it is probably good value. Every year with more cuts things get more tricky, we have reduced Peoples Day to every other year and there is so much more that we would like to do

4. Commonplace - NCIL Priority Setting

Chris Frazer explained that The Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) is a levy that local authorities can choose to charge on certain new development. CIL must be spent on infrastructure to support the development of an area, such as for schools, hospitals, roads, open space, and leisure facilities. Lewisham has been collecting CIL since 2015:

2015/16: £1,440,463.66

2016/17: £4,487,774.86

2017/18: £3,359,091.04

The CIL Regulations enable the Council to set aside 15% of CIL receipts (25% in areas with an adopted neighbourhood plan) to spend on priorities that should be agreed with the local community in areas where development is taking place (NCIL). Mayor & Cabinet agreed to allocate 25% of CIL to NCIL in all wards.

Agreed NCIL Process (Mayor & Cabinet 2019) for the borough is:

Stage 1: Priority setting workshop with ward assemblies (four year cycle)

Stage 2: 'Open call' for projects to all Lewisham residents (biennial or annual process)

Stage 3: Evaluate projects and publish long-list (biennial or annual process)

Stage 4: Develop 'project bank' by public vote (biennial or annual process)

Stage 5: Allocate and delivery through RCDB and M&C (annual process)

Stage 6: Monitoring, evaluation and reporting (annual process)

Chris then took the assembly through a presentation of the Blackheath NCIL a copy of which is available from paul.gale@lewisham.gov.uk

The current NCIL pot for Blackheath is £76,263.56

The five priorities as identified by Commonplace are:

- Transport and Streets
- Open/Green space and nature
- Children's services
- Community facilities
- Air Quality

The assembly was then split into small groups to discuss and agree these priorities with the option to add a further priority for Blackheath ward.

The assembly agreed with the 5 priorities but wanted to see a definition beside each priority for example, 'Air Quality' to include Climate Change and 'Transport and Streets' to include Streetscape and Children's Services to include children of all ages and youth.

The assembly agreed to add Community Safety as a 6th priority with a broader definition supplied.

Therefore the 6 priorities for Blackheath will be:

- Transport and Streets
- Open/Green space and nature
- Children's services
- Community facilities
- Air Quality
- Community Safety

Chris then explained that the next stage will be that the council will publish the list of agreed priorities via the council website and the ward specific commonplace site

- An open call for projects will be launched that will run for 8 weeks
- Workshops will be run to help develop project ideas
- Long list of projects to be published
- Local assemblies to agree and prioritise project bank

There being no other business the meeting closed at 9.40pm, no declarations of interest were declared at the meeting.