

**WRITTEN QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS**

The following questions listed on pages 69-72 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 Kitcat**

“Can Cllr Theobald detail in what circumstances residents or their landlords are charged by CityClean for the provision of receptacles for:

1. Waste collection,
2. Recycling collection?”

**Reply from Councillor Theobald, Cabinet Member for Environment**

“They are not charged unless they are private landlords or managing agents operating businesses and they then pay for their refuse and recycling containers.”

**(b) Councillor Kitcat**

“Can Cllr Theobald detail the total amount spent by his department on purchases of communal bins in the financial year 2008/9 and also provide the per unit cost paid by the council for each type of model of bin including those with and without foot pedals?”

**Reply from Councillor Theobald, Cabinet Member for Environment**

“The overall figure is £398,096 to date and I can tell you that both types of bin cost the same, both types cost £819 each.”

**(c) Councillor Steedman**

“The Valley Gardens, stretching from the Level to the Old Steine, are a much-loved leisure resource for residents and the gateway to the city for many visitors, yet they are in a poor state of repair, isolated and divided by heavy traffic flows, inaccessible to pedestrians and choked by air and noise pollution. Fortunately the Council’s Local Transport Plan outlines a programme of works to transform the Valley Gardens into a fantastic new public space. A revitalised Valley Gardens would reconnect the islands of green space to create a new, accessible public park flowing down to the sea, and prioritise coherent pedestrian and cycling routes, as well as bus transport. It could integrate playgrounds, informal recreation, wildlife gardens and urban food growing. Can the Cabinet Member for the Environment reconfirm that they are committed to delivering this programme, with works beginning in this electoral term?”

### **Reply from Councillor Theobald, Cabinet Member for Environment**

I entirely agree that the condition and quality of the buildings and public space in this area have been deteriorating over many years and are in great need of improvement. However, how this can be achieved, in terms of creating an acceptable and workable balance of all the demands for movement and access that there is, has yet to be defined and would also need to be rigorously tested to ensure that it would work. This administration is aware of the issues, and will need to consider the Valley Gardens as part of the development of future programmes of investment for the whole of the city.

#### **(d) Councillor Davey**

“Would the Cabinet Member for Environment agree that it is vital that the local authority lead the way and make every effort to encourage its staff to travel by sustainable means such as walking, cycling and by public transport both to work and during the working day wherever possible?”

### **Reply from Councillor Theobald, Cabinet Member for Environment**

We are very much committed to supporting and encouraging staff to travel sustainably, both for commuting and during the working day. The Council’s Staff Travel Plan offers many initiatives which are having a positive impact across all sections of the Council. These include:

- Interest free loans for bus and train season tickets;
- Discounted bus tickets;
- A corporate contract with City Car Club offering discounted rates;
- A tax-free bike scheme and interest-free bike loan scheme;
- Greatly improved facilities for cyclists (including additional cycle parking and showers) together with beginner, refresher and cycle maintenance training sessions;
- Real-time travel information display screens are soon to be installed at Hove Town Hall and King’s House.

As well as working with Council staff, officers run the Travel Plan Partnership which is working with local employers to support them in implementing their own Travel Plans. Officers are already working with 32 of the largest employers in Brighton and Hove and hope to expand this initiative further over the coming months.

**(e) Councillor Davis**

“Can the Cabinet Member for Culture, Recreation and Tourism outline what steps are being taken to address the gaps identified in the recent Brighton and Hove Sports audit namely that Swimming, Indoor sports i.e. Badminton, Basketball, Volley ball, Indoor Bowls, and public access fitness activities are all lagging behind when compared to other Local Authorities’ provision.”

**Reply from Councillor Smith, Cabinet Member for Culture, Recreation and Tourism**

“Thank you for your question on the Sports Facilities Audit. Completion of the Audit should be seen as the first positive step to improving the sports facilities in the city. The audit did highlight that the distribution of the facilities is good across the city compared with other cities where facilities are concentrated in the city centre. The council has already given a commitment to keeping the King Alfred Leisure Centre open and work has already commenced to secure greater planning contributions for new facilities. The council will also develop partnerships with sports clubs, schools and other organisations to increase access to existing facilities as well as developing new facilities. “

**(f) Councillor Marsh**

“Would the Cabinet Member for Children’s’ Services agree with me that the identification of Government resources to be used in improving the fabric of our schools and helping the local economy is always welcome?”

**Reply from Councillor Mrs Brown, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People**

“Resources for improving the fabric of our schools are always welcome and that is why we have developed a clear and strategic capital programme to enhance and improve our school provision.

The development of the Academy is on schedule and we have submitted a revised Expression of Interest for Building Schools for the Future.

We are taking a planned and strategic position to ensure capital funds are spent sensibly within the timeframe given but allowing flexibility to support our ambitions for Building Schools for the Future and the Primary Capital Programme.”

**(g) Councillor Kitcat**

“Could Cllr Geoffrey Theobald clarify that in his response to my question on communal bin fire safety of 29th January 2009 he does indeed say that the Fire

Authority has told the council through cabinet member Cllr Kemble that it has no concerns over the communal bins?"

**Reply from Councillor Theobald, Cabinet Member for Environment**

"I said in response to your question at the January Council Meeting that Cllr Ted Kemble as the Vice Chairman of the Authority discussed the communal bin scheme with the Chief Fire Officer sometime ago and they are satisfied that they do not pose an additional fire risk.

The specific locations of communal bins have been determined with Highways and Traffic engineers who fully consider road safety issues as well as access for emergency services and delivery vehicles. We have not asked the ambulance service, the fire or police authorities to also view the location of each bin."

**(h) Councillor Kitcat**

"Can Cllr Geoffrey Theobald provide a list of the type and models of communal bins used by CityClean in the city and any other local authorities which use those types and models?"

**Reply from Councillor Theobald, Cabinet Member for Environment**

"We use model OMB 1800 litre and 3200 litre, and model Spider 1700 litre and 3200 litre."

**(i) Councillor Kitcat**

"Could Cllr Geoffrey Theobald detail how many streets or parts of streets have been switched from weekly to fortnightly recycling collections? Could details of how these and other waste collection and recycling changes were planned be detailed?"

**Reply from Councillor Theobald, Cabinet Member for Environment**

"None.

Regarding the details of how changes were planned for our 121,000 homes across 3,000 streets, I would recommend, once again, that you meet with the Assistant Director of City Clean who will explain the planning process in detail to you."

**(j) Councillor McCaffery**

"I am sure all Councillors appreciate the weekly information on English Gypsy, Irish Travellers and New Age Travellers in the city, but we lack information on progress on the establishment of 14 pitches, the number identified by SEERA

and progress in East and West Sussex who already have 6 sites and 32 pitches and 10 sites and 106 pitches respectively. Both councils are required to add additional sites and pitches.

Would Cllr Mears please inform the council what consultation has taken place with Travellers and their support organisations on size and location of the pitches, what consultation has taken or will take place with residents and what information is being given to all Councillors and whether any additional information will be given to the Planning Committee?"

**Reply from Councillor Mears, Leader of the Council**

Thank you for your question and I am glad to note that the weekly update on current Traveller issues is appreciated.

Part of your question relates to East and West Sussex and whilst Cllr McCaffery will be aware that B&H worked with E. Sussex as part of the regional exercise to determine Gypsy and Traveller accommodation need across the south east I am sure she will appreciate that this council cannot answer any question relating to how they take this work forward on their behalf.

Regarding our work in Brighton and Hove - it is still early days for this stage of the establishment of a site and we have yet to finally confirm the details and arrangements for the consultations that will be undertaken. I can confirm however that consultations will include Travellers and their representative groups as well as local residents and all will be informed of the process and how any views can be included.

**(k) Councillor Mitchell**

"Can the Cabinet Member set out the spending in the current financial year and for the financial years 2009/2010 and 2010/11 on the maintenance for sports changing rooms at council run and managed recreation grounds (i.e. Victoria Park Portslade, Patcham Place, Horsdean, Old Boat Corner, East Brighton Park, Waterhall, Braypool) where both football and cricket are played."

**Reply from Councillor Smith, Cabinet Member for Culture, Recreation and Tourism**

"We can breakdown the costs of cleaning the changing rooms but I will need to ask officers to gather information about building maintenance costs.

We have not planned an increase in expenditure on sports changing rooms for the coming budget year and as yet we have not drafted proposals for 2010/11 budget year. We will, of course, keep the matter under review.

**(l) Councillor Mitchell**

“Can the Cabinet Member set out the spending plans for the maintenance and improvement of cricket pitches at council run and managed facilities over the last financial year and the next two years and what plans have the administration got to improve changing room facilities over the next two years.”

**Reply from Councillor Smith, Cabinet Member for Culture, Recreation and Tourism**

“Thank you for the question. I will need to ask officers to do some work for you to get the information you require.

By way of explanation, our in house grounds maintenance teams work in areas across a range of sites such as cricket pitches, other sport pitches, parks and other green spaces – so it is difficult to break down the cost of maintaining just one type of site or a site and thus provide the figures you request.

We have not planned an increase in expenditure on cricket pitches or changing room facilities for the coming budget year and as yet we have not drafted proposals for 2010/11 budget year. We will, of course, keep the matter under review.”

**(m) Councillor Fryer**

“What percentage of eligible residents have taken up the Warm Front scheme and what percentage of the population of Brighton & Hove does this represent?”

**Reply from Councillor Caulfield, Cabinet Member for Housing**

“Whilst a precise figure for the percentage of Brighton and Hove’s residents who are eligible for Warm Front is not readily available, it is possible to use data from various sources to produce an estimate. However before considering the numbers who have taken up Warm Front it is important to bear in mind the fact that changes in circumstances of individual households and changes to properties leads to ongoing changes in the pool of eligible households.

To date it is estimated that the number of households in Brighton and Hove who are eligible for one or more of the main Warm front measures (loft/cavity wall insulation, central heating, boiler replacement and heating repair) is currently in the region of 4,000.

In addition to this a recent extension of this scheme to include families with children under 16 is expected to reach around another 3,500 families with the new Family Insulation Grant. The grant will initially be available to families living in two-bedroom homes, with a view to extending it to more households as the scheme progresses. The new scheme, operated in partnership with Climate Energy, is part of a local grants programme of more than £1 million a year.”

**(n) Councillor Hawkes**

“Would the Cabinet member for Children’s services explain why on 4th March, when the Government published the list of Local Authorities that had received Myplace funding, Brighton and Hove was not listed. This is a grant which was earmarked as a 100% funded grant to improve the 67 Centre in Moulsecoomb. Did this Conservative led council miss out on much needed government funding for local youth services because the administration deviated from the government guidelines when applying for the bid?”

**Reply from Councillor Mrs Brown, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People**

“The Government announced funding in May 2008 for the Myplace Strategy which is to provide capital funding to build world class youth facilities. A detailed bid was developed in Brighton and Hove through a thorough needs analysis and extensive consultation with partners and young people. The bid fully met the government’s guidelines for applications and was agreed at both the Youth and Connexions Board and the Children and Young People’s Trust Board in September 2008.

We understand the bidding process was heavily over subscribed and unfortunately the Brighton and Hove bid was not successful in this round. There is to be another tranche of funding available this year and it is the intention of the CYPT to make another application, having taken whatever feedback is available from the Big Lottery (that organised the application and selection process) in order to make any necessary refinements to the bid.”

**(o) Councillor Wakefield-Jarrett**

“Could the cabinet member for Central Services tell me what proportion of suspected benefit fraud cases are pursued in ways other than through the courts and how this compares to national trends for action by local authorities where benefit fraud is suspected?”

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

Potential fraud in the housing and Council Tax Benefit system.

There are two aspects to dealing with fraud; Prevention and detection.

**Prevention**

“As a service recently rated at the maximum 4 out of 4 by the Audit Commission in the recent CPA assessment the Council can take assurance that all the correct measures are in place to deter and prevent fraud before it even occurs. This maybe reflected in national statistics. The Department of Work and Pensions operates sophisticated data matching exercises to identify potential fraud discrepancies within welfare benefits, tax and banking records. The ‘hits’ from these exercises are sent to the Council to investigate. While not all ‘hits’ result in the identification of fraud the ratio is a reasonable indicator of potential

fraud activity and the effectiveness of fraud preventative work. In Brighton & Hove 2007/2008 the number of 'hits' was 36 per 1000 benefit cases, nationally the average was 50. From these figures it may be that Housing Benefit / Council Tax Benefit fraud activity is less than the national average. However, the service does not rest on this statistic and all efforts are made and will continue to be made to prevent fraud.

### **Detection**

The Audit Commission rating also gives assurance that the Benefit Service is conducting its fraud investigation to a high standard. The Service applies strict guidelines to make sure that sanction is only sought where it is fair and proportionate. Where high level fraud abuse is clear we do not hesitate to pursue court decisions that we can then publicise as a deterrent to others.

In comparison with the national average, the last figures we have are for 2007/2008:

(Although two of the three statistics show the authority as being below the national average, this is to be expected given that Housing Benefit/Council Tax Benefit fraud activity is assumed to be 28% less than the national average).

We cautioned 61 customers, 2.07 customers per 1000 benefit cases (national average 2.53)

We issued 47 administrative penalties, 1.6 customers per 1000 benefit cases (national average 1.75)

We went to court for 47 cases, 1.6 customers per 1000 benefit cases (national average 1.55)"

(All figures from CIPFA benchmarking 2007/2008)

### **(p) Councillor Morgan**

"Can the Cabinet member for Environment confirm that staff employed in council-owned car parks are to be sacked and that in future the car parks will have no staff on duty to deal with equipment breakdowns, problems with passes and the safety of car park users?"

### **Reply from Councillor Theobald, Cabinet Member for Environment**

"I would like to assure you that there was full consultation with staff and unions regarding the current improvements to The Lanes and London Road car parks.

Staff have been supportive of these changes, which will create more local jobs and new opportunities through the introduction of an in-house dedicated Maintenance Team, in addition to the new Control Centre operation. There has been no decision to sack staff.



The new Traffic Control Centre will provide 24/7 customer service to all linked car parks. The Maintenance Team will be well equipped to respond and attend as required.

The new access control, CCTV, improved lighting and general upgrading of The Lanes are specifically designed to make the car parks both safe and secure for all customers.”

**(q) Councillor Morgan**

“Can the Cabinet member for Housing confirm that, despite her promise at Council on the 4th December last year that two vacant council properties would be returned to use “early in the new financial year”, these family homes in the Manor Farm area of my ward remain empty and are still awaiting repair?”

**Reply from Councillor Caulfield, Cabinet Member for Housing**

“Since my response to Cllr Morgan’s previous question on this matter, further detailed assessments of the works required on both of these properties have taken place. This includes structural surveys, and independent survey to establish the possible levels of recharging that could be applied due to damage by previous tenants. Following these a full specification and an estimation of the cost of the works has been drawn up.

68 Manor Way is estimated to require £32,000 of works, of which £5577 is estimated to be due to damage by tenants, and as such will be considered for recharge.

74 Manor Way is estimated to require £35,000 of works, of which £4850 is estimated to be due to damage by tenants, and as such will be considered for recharge.

The specification of works on these properties has now been completed and it is planned to engage with contractors to progress these works in as timely a fashion as possible, whilst having regard for the lead-in time required for ordering materials and other preliminary works.

It is still expected that these properties will be brought back into use early in the new financial year.”

