

Full Council – 19 January 2016

PUBLIC QUESTIONS

This document sets out details of the questions submitted and the replies from the Mayor.

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QUESTION PQ 01

Subject: Action re: asylum seekers / refugees

Question submitted by: Ruth Pickersgill

Whilst we welcome the fact that the Council is planning imminently to resettle 3 Syrians families, refugee organisations in the city are overstretched supporting several hundred asylum seekers and refugees every week. On 6th March 2015, you signed a Joint Commitment to Action by Councils and Citizens towards Ending the Destitution of Asylum Seekers. Bristol Refugee Rights has written and emailed to ask for an update on each of its 12 points, and has not had a reply. In addition, the current Immigration Bill proposes withdrawing 'Section 95 support' for refused asylum seekers and their children, forcing them into destitution and giving the Council significant additional duties to carry out under the Children Act, with no extra resources.

Please could you give us a full written update on the progress on each of the pledges (which can also be presented at the next BASRIG refugee agencies' meeting) and tell us how the authority has responded to the consultation on the Bill?

Reply from the Mayor:

1. Thank you for this – as you know, I am deeply concerned that Bristol plays its full part in helping with this human tragedy. I am very sorry to hear that you have not had a reply to your concerns. I am setting out here a full written response as the answer is too long to fit in the prescribed 2 minutes at the meeting.
2. There is tremendous work being done each and every day in Bristol to support refugees and asylum seekers. We continue to work hard and lobby for the rights of all people in Bristol and recognise that the Syrian Resettlement Programme is a unique scheme with a unique funding package aimed at a specific group of the most vulnerable people. I am sorry other people, such as the refugees and asylum seekers already residing in Bristol, cannot be directly included in this scheme. However, I do believe that getting the approach right for this Syrian Resettlement programme will bring benefits for all in the long term.
3. When I signed the Joint Commitment to Action by Councils and Citizens towards Ending the Destitution of Asylum Seekers in March 2015, we developed an action plan to deliver it – I am pleased to say that we are delivering in a number of areas in liaison with colleagues from partner organisations.
4. Bristol CCG commissions a specialist primary and community care service, the Haven, to provide primary care services to asylum seekers, refugees and other migrants. We believe that this dedicated service is responsive and of good quality, however we constantly review the effectiveness and accessibility of our services and would be happy to listen and act on feedback that helps us improve outcomes for asylum seekers and refugees that use the service.

5. Bristol CCG also commissions a broad range of mental health services which are accessible to destitute asylum seekers, including Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) and the very proactive Assertive Contact and Engagement (ACE) Service whose role it is to work with complex and hard to reach groups. We also commission a broad range of voluntary organisations that can support asylum seekers and refugees with specific needs. Again we would be happy to listen to any feedback or suggestions as to how we can make these services better and more accessible to our users.
6. Specifically through the work of our Asylum team, we are delivering services to asylum seekers and refugees as follows:
 - a. All children of parents with no access to public funds will continue to be provided with financial support to access free school meals.
 - b. Working with teams across the city to ensure as far as possible that rights, needs, services and entitlement are applied appropriately.
 - c. Facilitating access to English speaking for other languages classes and volunteering projects.
 - d. Also, by default, the Asylum Team is in regular contact with voluntary sector groups, and are currently seeking to meet more regularly with non-governmental organisations
7. Now that we have a strategic lead for asylum seekers and refugees in the Council, we will ensure that priority is given to provide a full response to each of the 12 pledges in the Joint Commitment to Action, ready for the next BASRIG (refugee multi-agencies) meeting.
8. I have personally written to the government on a number of occasions – specifically on Syrian refugees – outlining our political will as a city to do our bit. The Council has not yet however proactively lobbied the government with regards to the Immigration Bill. The Asylum Team within the Council however is proactively working with the border agency to resolve outstanding applications. The team will continue to fulfil the Council's statutory responsibilities to continue supporting families with children, who are refusing to return to their country of origin - this ensures that families do not become destitute. The Asylum Team will also give practical assistance to individuals wishing to return to their country of origin voluntarily. The Home Office/Border Agency have responsibility to assist families who have been refused asylum to return to their country of origin - this would of course reduce some destitution /homelessness but this would necessitate, in most cases, cooperation from the family themselves.

You asked a supplementary question more specifically about what the Council is doing to prepare for and mitigate the impact of the Immigration Bill.

We are working very closely with Bristol CCG and health about commissioning a broad range of health services, which are accessible to destitute asylum seekers, including improving access to psychological therapies and the very pro-active contact and engagement service, whose role it is to work with complex and hard to reach groups.

QUESTION PQ 02

Subject: Services for deaf people

Question submitted by: Ruth Pickersgill

On 21st November, deaf people marched through the city to protest at the lack of services and facilities available to them since the closure of the Centre for Deaf People. The Council used to be a beacon of good practice in Deaf Equality, and was one of the first cities to sign the BSL Charter in 2005. Now we no longer have the Centre for Deaf People, nor a Deaf Development Worker, nor a BSL Forum or even BSL videos on the website and are in breach of the Charter we signed. The community feel isolated and ignored and would like the Council to work with them in collaboration to restore some of the key services that enable them to socialise and to have their voices heard.

Please can you tell us what steps you are taking to support the deaf community to get back some equality and a new centre in the city?

Reply from the Mayor:

1. The Centre for the Deaf-Bristol continues to be funded by the Council to provide the deaf equipment service in Bristol, which enables people to live more independently at home, and which supports our aim of helping people be as independent as possible, ensuring more choice and control over their lives. I have very close contact with deaf people and I do know the enormous challenges that they face in terms of fitting into the community sometimes. To support this ambition, the Council's Sensory Impairment team held two direct payment awareness raising events in October 2015 with the deaf community.

2. The Council is committed to working collaboratively with the deaf community to ensure equality. The Sensory Impairment team is helping to implement the Deaf Health Promotion project to improve access to health services. Our sensory impairment services offer drop-in sessions in the community providing information and staff that run these are either deaf or trained in BSL. I am pleased to say that work is in progress to update the information on the Bristol City Council website and to make it more accessible to deaf citizens.

In a supplementary question, you drew attention to the difficulty faced by the deaf community in dealing with the Council's switchboard, and you asked whether the Council could be more creative, e.g. by looking to introduce a text facility to enable deaf people to more easily access Council services.

I think that is a very helpful and practical suggestion. I shall take this suggestion back and see how it can be implemented.

QUESTION PQ 03

Subject: Bristol 2015 Ltd, Bristol Waste Company Ltd and Bristol Energy Company

Question submitted by: Christian Martin

1. Even though Bristol 2015 Ltd is wholly owned by Bristol City Council (on behalf of the Bristol taxpayer and received £8.3m of public funds) the company structured itself with membership that included non-Bristol City Council employees thus excluding it from having to comply with the FOI Act which has resulted in all FOI requests being rejected. The section of the act that is often quoted is as follows:

Where a company receives its funding from, does not of itself determine ownership of the company.

S.6(2)(b) FOIA states 'a company is wholly owned by the wider public sector if, and only if, every member is a person falling within sub-paragraph (i) or (ii) –

(i) a relevant public authority or a company wholly owned by the wider public sector, or

(ii) a person acting on behalf of a relevant public authority or of a company wholly owned by the wider public sector

One of the most recent examples of this being requests for full transparency and detailed breakdown of the line by line expenditure of the £8.3m public monies received by Green Capital.

Why was the company structured this way enabling it to avoid answering FOI submissions and providing line by line detailed accounts of expenditure of the public money amounting to £8.3m?

2. Can you confirm that the Bristol Waste Company Ltd and The Bristol Energy Company (which are both companies owned and controlled by Bristol City Council) have NOT had their membership structured in the same way as Bristol 2015 Ltd and therefore will be subject to full transparency and accountability from any FOI requests made in relation to them?

Reply from the Mayor:

1. Firstly, Bristol 2015 is not a wholly owned company of Bristol City Council.
2. At the time of Bristol 2015 conception, we wished for it to be an independent entity, so that it could raise funding support, through the work of the initial commercial fund raising team, supported by me, which attracted public and private funding.
3. With regards to Bristol Waste and Bristol Energy, both these companies are wholly owned by Bristol City Council and will be subject to the normal regulations around FOI requests.

QUESTION PQ 04

Subject: Residents parking – Cotham and Kingsdown

Question submitted by: Miles Taylor

It was good to hear on the radio that the Mayor would not introduce any more residents parking schemes without consultation and agreement of local residents - in the spirit of this does the Mayor know when the Cotham and Kingsdown Residents Parking Scheme review findings will be implemented?

Reply from the Mayor:

The most recent review changes in Cotham and Kingsdown were implemented in the summer of 2015; the next review is scheduled to commence in the summer of 2016.

The reviews of these schemes to date have shown that they are generally popular in those areas and provide significant benefits to local residents. It is not therefore currently expected that significant changes will be needed at subsequent reviews but we will see how things pan out.

In a supplementary question, you drew attention to (as part of the Cotham North and Redland reviews), the proposal that Redland Road become a second dual permit road in Bristol (after Woodland Road), and you asked whether there are any plans to increase the number of dual permit roads (you quoted the example of Cotham Brow being split between the Cotham and Kingsdown zones).

I think the introduction of dual permits has resulted from a very creative bit of thinking. I am grateful to the parking team for having implemented (in Woodland Road) what is a very good test bed for such schemes. I think perhaps we need to just give that a bit more time to “bed in” and then see whether it can be implemented in other areas – but I am listening.

QUESTION PQ 05

Subject: Prince Street bridge

Question submitted by: Miles Taylor

Does the Mayor have any further update yet on when the Prince Street bridge will re-open or if it will be open to vehicles when it is re-opened?

Reply from the Mayor:

Unfortunately, the condition of the listed Prince Street Bridge is much worse than was previously apparent. That has become apparent because the contractors have been able to take away everything that was covering the structure. As the cost and timescale for repair have increased considerably, a Cabinet report is being prepared for consideration on the 1st March when a decision will be made on how best to proceed.

In a supplementary question, you stated your view that the closure of Prince Street bridge and the current MetroBus works were creating added congestion and air pollution in the city centre, and you asked whether I support a low emission zone.

As I said earlier at this meeting (see response to GRN Question 1 from Cllr Thomas), I am strongly in support of a low emission zone. I hope that we will be able to move towards a low emission zone over the next 4-5 years. We need to find funding for it.

As it happens, I don't believe that the Prince Street bridge closure is contributing to poorer air quality. You may remember also that when I came into office, I refused to allow the MetroBus to go over Prince Street bridge. If I had allowed that - if I had not fought that battle, which was fought against extreme opposition, some of it within this Council - we would now be in a fine pickle with the MetroBus scheme.

QUESTION PQ 06

Subject: Recognising the International Decade for people of African descent

Question submitted by: Ade Olaiya

Bristol's rich cultural and socioeconomic history includes the contribution made by both past and present African descendant minorities and migrant communities.

My question therefore is, what action plan does the Council have in place to recognise the International Decade, and its objectives of recognition, justice and development for people of African descent?

See <http://www.un.org/en/events/africandescentdecade/>

Reply from the Mayor:

The UN International Decade for People of African descent commenced on 1 January 2015 and ends on 31 December 2024. The theme is 'People of African descent: recognition, justice and development. We are in the second year of the UN's international decade.

The Council has celebrated the significant contribution of people of African descent annually with our focus on Black History Month (BHM). In planning this year's event, officers will discuss how the International Decade can be promoted and if it could be a key theme for 2016, which is also our Year of Learning. Officers invite you to attend the meeting and to speak about the opportunities the International Decade.

In a supplementary question you referred to what you described as "cuts" to black led NGOs and in particular the situations regarding the Malcolm X community centre and St Pauls Carnival. You asked whether the Council has a responsibility to meeting its legal obligations to people of African descent, as opposed to implementing "cuts and closures".

I have to say that what you refer to as a "cut" in management is actually a strengthening of management, in both of those cases. The whole point of what is being done is to enable a proper, healthy future for the St Pauls Carnival and a sustained Malcolm X centre. There is no other purpose for the action being taken. This is about boosting the community, not in any way undermining it.

QUESTION PQ 07

Subject: Social housing development / rents

Question submitted by: Robert Massey

The Labour party in Southville has carried out a survey of residents in the area, finding overwhelming support for the construction by the council of new social housing (82% in favour), and the development of existing brownfield sites (91% in favour). A substantial majority (84%) of homeowners say that they would not be able to buy the house they live in today. Similarly a large proportion of residents (82%) support restrictions on rent rises, and 88% support more regulation of the private rented sector.

The overwhelming demand for housing has driven both rents (now at an average of £980 per month in BS3, having risen by 18% over the last 12 months) and purchase prices (now at an average of more than £290,000 in the same area) to record levels.

At the same time we have seen property developers apparently 'land banking', with sites on streets like Lydstep Terrace and Luckwell Road left vacant, despite the owners having planning permission to build much needed housing in these locations.

Can the Mayor indicate what he is doing to tackle the shortage of housing and the soaring level of prices and rents, including the following:

1. The number of social housing properties constructed during each year of his administration, and the projected number for each of the next three years to 2018?
2. What if any action he has taken or proposes to take to ensure that brownfield and other sites granted planning permission are developed?

Reply from the Mayor:

Firstly, I support your survey and its findings which provide absolutely no surprises to me.

Secondly I have no more power than previous administrations had to prevent land banking, which is the result of weak planning laws that mean that developers can sit on their planning permissions with no sanctions. I am seeking sanctions in a devolution deal as I believe that it is quite unacceptable that developers should operate in this way and that local authorities have no powers to require them to build out the projects for which they have planning permission.

The other city outside of London with the largest level of market rent rises is incidentally Brighton – you might wish to talk to their administration – who also find they are not able to buck the market – so I would be careful how you use that bit of point scoring!

In my answer to Cllr Holland's question earlier (LAB Question 1), I set out the position with regard to core cities and the statistical data you seek. I would refer you to that.

In a supplementary question, you asked what confidence people could have that I will deliver on pledges to achieve more council homes in the city.

I believe you heard my answer to an earlier question on this. I have great ambition for the delivery of both social and affordable housing in this city. But it is most definitely undermined by some of the measures that the government has brought in that have made it absolutely impossible to meet some of those ambitions - but it doesn't reduce my determination to do so in the long term.

QUESTION PQ 08

Subject: Implementation of residents parking scheme in Southville

Question submitted by: Fred Jerrome

The implementation of the Residential Parking Scheme (RPS) outside Holy Cross School in Southville has led to the removal of yellow lines, allowing dangerous parking when parents are dropping off and picking up children. The scheme has also introduced an unnecessary school bus place - for a school that doesn't have a bus - and both changes were made without consultation with staff or governors.

The result has been a significant deterioration in road safety for children, parents and residents in general, on what is a busy road, leading to for example a serious accident involving a cyclist last week.

Residents have been told that no changes to the RPS are possible during the six month trial period, and yet the Mayor appears to have instructed officers to do just that by relaxing the parking restrictions outside the Fiddlers Club in Bedminster.

Will he now, this time in full consultation with the school, ask officers to make much needed and urgent changes to Dean Lane outside Holy Cross School to help ensure that children have a safer journey to and from school each day?

Reply from the Mayor:

1. I am pleased to be able to confirm that amendments to the road markings were made at the end of last week. As with any scheme, amendments have to be carried out by our contractors, so it is unlikely that they can be done immediately. I am sorry that there was that delay.

2. Whilst we do allow six months for parking schemes to settle down before formally inviting feedback and drawing up improvements to them, we can and do address urgent issues faster than this where required. The issues brought to our attention by Holy Cross School and Fiddlers nightclub are excellent examples of our responsive approach.

In a supplementary question, you asked whether I would commit to a comprehensive traffic management scheme around the Holy Cross site to deal with the "vicious double bend" there, to improve the safety situation.

I will commit to further investigations as to how and whether the situation can be improved. You can absolutely rest assured that my priority is to see that we have safe streets and safe routes to school, and I am very aware of the situation at Holy Cross. I have visited the school and talked to people there – they have been great supporters incidentally of the 20 mph scheme - and I will do everything I can to ensure that we are meeting our obligations there and looking after the health and safety of pupils at the school.

QUESTION PQ 09

Subject: Recycling facilities for apartment blocks

Question submitted by: Fred Jerrome

Bristol's Green Capital status is lauded on billboards and banners across the city. Indeed I am treated to a full-frontal view of one from my living room window in St Catherine's place, on the junction of East Street and Malago Road. Unfortunately, like many other Bristol residents, I am unable to partake in the ideals of the Green Capital due to a total lack of recycling facilities in my block. While I and the other residents of St Catherine's place would like to recycle, not least as it would reduce our overflowing communal rubbish area, between Bloq, our building management, and the council's waste service, we are prevented from doing so.

I would like to ask the Mayor what, if any, measure is kept of availability of recycling facilities for residents of apartment blocks in the city, and what steps are being taken to ensure the firms that own the buildings are fulfilling their responsibilities in terms of waste management?

Reply from the Mayor:

For residents of apartment blocks in the city, we currently provide recycling facilities to 95% of the blocks. For the remaining 5% they are either being reviewed to see if they can be put in place, or facilities have been removed due to operational difficulties.

When planning permission is given on new apartment blocks, planning provide specific requirements for the owner of the building in relation to waste and recycling. However, buildings which were in existence prior to this requirement have not had to meet those requirements. We do not therefore have enforcement powers to ensure that building management companies provide recycling facilities in these situations.

However, despite not having those formal powers, we do still try to work with the building management companies to see if we can agree to put in place recycling which will work for residents. Conversations have previously taken place with your current building management, Bloq, and we know that they are trying to get a recycling service in. We will follow up with them to find out the latest position on this. Thank you for prompting me.

In a supplementary question, you asked whether I thought that this was an issue which was emblematic of what you described as "inequality in the provision of access to green schemes in the city."

I don't think it is emblematic. I think we can improve, we should improve, and that we must improve our recycling rates. I went out with one of our recycling teams last week – I was impressed with the handling of recycling by the 4 operatives that I went out with and so I will defend them in terms of the quality of their approach and work. I think the Bristol Waste Company is doing a good job. But there is always room for improvement when you are taking over from a previous operator and I will make quite sure that we do everything we can to help those in the blocks that you referred to as well.

QUESTION PQ 10

Subject: Bristol East swimming pool

Question submitted by: Ian Townsend

1. Further to the response to Q49(1) at Full Council on 15 Dec 2015, why would the Council not formally take into account important non-financial benefits - such as addressing health inequalities - into account in its decision-making on the East Bristol Pool?

Q2: What specific factors are responsible for the apparent reduction in expected demand between the 2013 Resources Scrutiny Commission report and the findings cited in the response to Q49(2) to Full Council on 15 Dec 2015, and what mode(s) of transport does the 20 minute catchment refer to?

Reply from the Mayor:

Q1 RESPONSE:

- I absolutely value reducing health inequalities but building an East Bristol Pool will not specifically reduce health inequalities due to the accessibility of other pools in the area. East Bristol is within a 20 minute driving time of 20-25 pools. Some areas of East Bristol are within a 20 minute walking time of 1 pool.
- Kingswood Leisure Centre is 1.2 miles by road and 1 mile as the crow flies (roughly north east). Longwell Green Leisure Centre and Pool is 3.9 miles by road and 1.75 miles as the crow flies (roughly south east), from the proposed site for an East Bristol pool

I think we have to broaden our minds to sharing these facilities with our fellow authorities rather than being too territorial about it.

Q2 RESPONSE:

- Officers have considered the strategic need for a new East Bristol Pool and whether the capacity of existing pools are capable of meeting demand for swimming, taking into account how far people are prepared to travel to a facility.
- In order to estimate the level of pool provision in an area, the Sport England Facility Planning Model (FPM) has been used, which compares the number of pools (supply), by the local demand for that pool. The FPM mapping uses a catchment area of 20 minutes for each mode of travel; driving, public transport & foot.
- The original figures were based on an East Bristol Pool existing and other pools closing. The current figures reflect the status quo and therefore provide a more accurate picture of the situation.
- The findings show that by 2026 East Bristol is projected to have a shortage of pool space equivalent to approx. a 1 x 25 meter pool lane. This along with

other pools being within close proximity does not warrant the provision of a new pool according to the Sport England formulae.

In a supplementary question, you asked when I would be publishing the report upon which this decision has been made, so that this can be scrutinised by local councillors and residents.

It is a published report, as far as I know. You can certainly have access to it; that's not a problem.

QUESTION PQ 11

Subject: Information about public objections to traffic management and parking schemes

Question submitted by: Michael Owen

In March 2015, I submitted a FOI request (CRN00007146) for a copy of the redacted Appendix 3 (this included public objections with annotated responses from BCC) for the Montpelier RPZ scheme, and was subsequently informed that the request was refused on 11th May on grounds of cost and data privacy.

In December 2015, Bristol City Council released copies of redacted Appendix 3 for The Downs Parking Scheme which included a **larger** number of public objections with annotated comments from the Traffic Department.

Could the Mayor please explain the Council's inconsistent policy on the release of public objections to traffic management and parking schemes?

Reply from the Mayor:

1. The Residents' Parking Scheme proposals have generated strong emotive responses, not least from you, and have been the subject of numerous high-profile media articles and other campaigns.
2. Whilst our information about the legal process does ask people to consider that their objections may become available to the public, it is clear from the manner of their submission that people are sending us their views without seeing this guidance.
3. Their objections cannot be effectively redacted as they contain information about people's personal circumstances which could lead to them being identified, particularly in close communities. We do need to make sure that people feel able to express their views to us without fear of identification.
4. This does not apply to all traffic schemes and we will continue to release information as appropriate depending on the nature of the scheme.

QUESTION PQ 12

Subject: Residents parking permits for changed vehicles

Question submitted by: Michael Owen

What is the current time taken for processing permits for changed vehicles, and how many appeals against fines have there been from residents waiting for these RPZ permits?

Reply from the Mayor:

1. The current position, with regard to processing changes to vehicle details associated with a Resident's Parking Scheme (RPS) permit, is 2 to 3 working days. This would be subject to the correct information and evidence being supplied when requesting the change of vehicle (further information can be found on the council's website at <https://www.bristol.gov.uk/parking/change-your-vehicle>).
2. It is not possible to supply a figure for the number of fines (penalty charge notices (PCN) that have been issued where a resident is awaiting a change to the vehicle registration number on a permit. This is because the reason for an appeal is not recorded.

QUESTION PQ 13

Subject: Care / support for disabled children

Question submitted by: Ornella Saibene

On October 1st 2014 and on October 1st 2015, how many disabled children received respite at the Bush and Belbrook centres, and how many received foster care, direct payments and any other short break provision? Please itemise.

Reply from the Mayor:

1. 195 in 2015 and 204 in 2014. These figures are inclusive of short breaks and residential holiday breaks. We do not have a separate figure from the standard fostering statistics on foster care for disabled children.
2. 176 families received Direct Payments in 2014, 206 families in 2015.
3. Targeted Short Breaks: In 2014/15 an estimated 850 families in total will access these. The services are commissioned and do not require access through BCC, so the following are estimates, and some families may access more than one service:

Residential holidays:

Oct 14 48 children

Oct 15 58 children

Special Schools based holiday schemes:

2014/ 15 104 children

2015/16 170 children

Bristol Autism project:

2014/ 15 220 plus siblings

Oct 2015 260 plus siblings have accessed

QUESTION PQ 14

Subject: Malcolm X community centre

Question submitted by: Pat Usherwood

1. Regarding the Malcolm X Community Centre - at the last Full Council (15th Dec), Mayor Ferguson stated that the Malcolm X Community Centre would stay "exactly the same as the current arrangement". This statement implies that on the whole the Centre is doing most things right. Rather than serving notice wouldn't the public be better served if BCC empowered the management committee members who are members of the community to facilitate the centre to move forward to continue and improve its services to ensure that the Malcolm X Community centre continues to be led and run by the community?
2. Tender process to support Malcolm X Community Centre - the Mayor has publicly stated that Malcolm X Community Centre Ltd will not be evicted and that a group/organisation will be brought in to work with the current management team. What was the process used by BCC to identify the group/organisation that you say will be brought into the Malcolm X Community Centre to support the management team?

Reply from the Mayor:

1. The Malcolm X Community Centre will be providing the same services and facilities to the local community; it is the management arrangements for the centre that are changing. The new arrangements will include ensuring that the current management committee members are able to shadow the organisation that will be providing the interim management of the centre, it will protect space for MXCC Ltd in the centre, and the Council will ensure that organisation development takes place with the existing management committee so that they can develop the skills needed to run a community centre efficiently and effectively.
2. Malcolm X Community Centre Ltd will have office space provided within the building when the new organisation takes over the management of the building from the end of February 2016, and they will hand over possession of the building and management of the building to the new organisation on this date. Currently, the procurement process is underway for establishing who the new organisation is going to be to run the centre. This process has involved approaching three organisations which have a track record of running community buildings with involvement of the local community and inviting them to put a bid in for running the centre as an interim arrangement. The new organisation will be appointed at the beginning of February, and a meeting will be set up between the new organisation and the current management committee of MXCC Ltd in mid-February to discuss the handover of the management of the buildings. The shadowing arrangement will also be discussed. In terms of supporting the development of the MXCC

Ltd management team, provision has been made for this and officers are arranging to meet with the current chair and vice-chair to discuss arrangements.

QUESTION PQ 15

Subject: Bush centre

Question submitted by: Dawn Jones

Will the Council confirm reports from parents that they have been offered 4 hours direct payments per week in lieu of an overnight stay at the Bush since the reduction in the beds from 10-5? If so, does the Council accept that their alternative provision in these cases is woefully insufficient and, again, represents a functional cut to the families of disabled children ?

Reply from the Mayor:

We are unable to identify a family where the proposal from BCC was to end an overnight at The Bush and replace on a permanent basis with a Direct Payment of only 4 hours a week and no other provision. Where Direct Payments have been used specifically to replace an overnight provision, where there is an assessed need for an overnight stay, Direct Payments have generally been a part of a plan, alongside family based and other provision. The Direct Payments have ranged, depending on personal circumstances, and the highest amount has been 20 hours per week for an individual child, and 29 for a family.

QUESTION PQ 16

Subject: Bush centre / children with autism

Question submitted by: Caroline Stevenson

1. Children with autism often require structured respite stays in a familiar setting with familiar carers. The Council's alternative provision (namely the use of short breaks in other families' homes) will mean that children with autism are forced to have short breaks in unfamiliar settings with unfamiliar carers in a far less structured way than at the Bush. Does the Council accept that children with autism are adversely affected by the cuts to the provision offered at the Bush. If so, what will the Council do to remedy this oversight?

2. Has the Council considered putting the money for the Bush Centre into the 'Baseline' budget of Children's Services so that the funding is 'Ringfenced'?

Reply from the Mayor:

1. The Council, through the service provided by the 0-25 teams, are aware of the needs of children and young people on the autistic spectrum. We agree that familiarity is important and as a consequence any alternative provision will take this into account. Short break carers for children and young people on the autistic spectrum are identified by their capacity to meet the needs of that child/young person and the carer for the young person will be the same carer for each short break required - to allow a relationship to develop, and familiarity and predictability to be an essential part of the short break experience.
2. The budget for The Bush is part of the wider budget for the short breaks service. The Council's current plan for the service is to provide a total of 10 respite beds at the Bush and Bellbrook. The need to have flexibility in the budget to meet changing need would not allow for a ring-fenced budget.

QUESTION PQ 17

Subject: Downs parking restrictions

Question submitted by: Edward Bowditch

Why has the Downs parking press release stated the scheme is live and implemented when no enforcement is occurring, and why are there still no signs on the Downs a month later?

Reply from the Mayor:

Neither of these claims is true. Enforcement is taking place where lines and signs are present. The remaining signage will be installed by the end of this week, after which full enforcement will take place on a daily basis.

QUESTION PQ 18

Subject: Impact of MetroBus

Question submitted by: Edward Bowditch

What strategy has been taken to mitigate the traffic congestion impact of MetroBus?

Reply from the Mayor:

MetroBus, when complete, will have a significant, positive effect on traffic flow in the city. However, I share your concern regarding any disruption during construction, of which there has inevitably been some.

The Council's network management officers are working closely with the MetroBus project managers and contractors to ensure that the works are carried out with the minimum possible disruption to traffic flow. In addition, the planning of the work has been undertaken to avoid clashes with other highway and utility maintenance programmes/works. The Council's transport management team receives regular updates/briefings on the MetroBus programme to ensure co-ordination remains effective throughout the construction programme, and swift action is taken where this is deemed necessary.