

BROMLEY LABOUR GROUP NEWS

NEWSLETTER OF THE LABOUR MEMBERS OF BROMLEY COUNCIL

CRAY VALLEY WEST WARD:

SUE GIBBENS, JOHN HOLBROOK & COLIN WILLETTS

PENGE & CATOR WARD:

PETER FOOKES, JOHN GETGOOD & KAREN ROBERTS

NOVEMBER - DECEMBER 2004 EDITION

ONE STAR RATING FOR SOCIAL SERVICES AT LAST

Bromley has finally gained a star from the Government's Commission for Social Care Inspection for Social Services. The CSCI rating is based on both adult and children's services. The Inspectorate assesses how well the Council is serving users of social services and its capacity for improvement before giving a star rating of 0 to 3. This improvement is mainly thanks to the leadership from Director; Terry Rich and the hard work and professionalism of staff rather than the penny-pinching attitude of Bromley Tories. John Getgood pointed out that if we are to go further and give Bromley residents the social services that they deserve, they need better support from the ruling Tories. Even getting this far, Social Services has overspend its budget considerably, mainly because as we argued previously, the budget was just not large enough. As a result, we have seen reductions in care services and the closure of the Rachel Notley Centre in Beckenham. Next year, the Tories are threatening to cut support for the voluntary sector, who take on a huge burden of responsibility in this borough by £200,000. Most of this support comes via Service Level Agreements (SLA). Vacancy rates across the Social Services and Housing Department remain very high at nearly 25% with a very high turnover of staff. We cannot carry on relying on agency/locum staff, although there is a general problem with the recruitment of social work staff. The full rating for Bromley and other boroughs will be published in Mid December. Bromley could not have been graded previously any better than "weak" due to the Social Services situation but prospects are now much improved after this step in the right direction.

BROMLEY TORIES GAG OPPOSITION

The Tories in Bromley have not allowed opposition councillors to sit on panels at a series of public meetings which were held in November across the borough to discuss the budget for the 2005/06 financial year.

The meetings entitled "Building a Better Bromley" were held in Penge, Orpington, Chislehurst, and at the Civic Centre. They did not even permit ward councillors from their own party to be on the panel if the meeting was held in their patch. This is disgraceful behaviour and certainly never occurred when we were jointly running the borough between 1998 and 2001. What are they frightened of? This decision was made by the new Tory Leader; Stephen Carr and his cohorts and is one in a series designed to reduce opposition influence following the decision last year not to allow opposition members to chair scrutiny panels. Last year, the Tories only allowed one opposition member to be on the panel at the public debates. What will they think of next to abuse their power?

EXTRA RESOURCES TO HELP PLANNING DIVISION

A Labour motion moved by Councillors Fookes and Holbrook has led to increased resources in the Planning Division to deal with the problem of enforcement. A small but growing number of instances where developers flout planning law has led to this difficulty. Officers tell us that Bromley do more enforcement than many other boroughs but it is the kind of thing that you either do properly or don't do at all. Why should developers be able to get away with abusing the system?

TESCO SCHEME APPROVED

Planning permission has been granted to Tesco for the redevelopment of Station Road Car Park in Orpington. The Council's Development Control Committee considered the revised application which was agreed on a cross-party basis. This is subject to the agreement of the Mayor of London and of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, and finalisation of the legal agreement and planning conditions. The scheme comprises a store of nearly 4,000 sq metres sales area, 30 affordable flats, 43 private flats with a total of 950 parking spaces and a medical facility. There will also be enhanced landscaping along the Orchard Grove frontage and new planting in front of the building. Tesco have agreed that use of the car park will continue unchanged until work on the site begins, which is unlikely to be before the latter part of 2005. Alternative parking arrangements will be developed in the next few months, which will balance the need for short and long term parking for businesses and visitors to the town during the construction period.

BIGGIN HILL HOUSING SCHEME ALSO APPROVED

An application to build 139 dwellings on the site of the former RAF married quarters off Main Rd in Biggin Hill was agreed at the late October meeting of the Development Control Committee. As part of the agreement, the Taylor Woodrow and Artesian Property Partnership will provide a minimum of 26 affordable units and a financial contribution and transfer of land for a new Heritage Centre. It is envisaged that the centre would allow for an establishment of a museum as a mark of remembrance to the role played by Biggin Hill during the Battle of Britain in World War Two. There would also be an endowment for the maintenance of the area of open space within the proposed new development.

RAVENSBOURNE COLLEGE PROPOSAL RECEIVED

A proposal for 251 units on the Ravensbourne College of Design and Communication site in Chislehurst has been received by the Council. The Walden Rd site is 7.4 hectares and the land is designated as Metropolitan Open Land (MOL). A report will be going to the December meeting of Development Control but a final decision is not expected until well into the new year.

SEASONS GREETINGS/BIRTH/ELECTORAL REGISTER

We would like to take the opportunity of wishing you the compliments of the season and all the best for 2005. Congratulations are also due to Councillor Karen Roberts on the birth of her daughter, Kate. Don't forget to make sure that you are on the electoral register as there may well be a very important event on the first Thursday of May next year!!!!

CONTACTING BROMLEY LABOUR GROUP/SCHOOL GOVERNORS

We are always happy to take up issues that you raise with us. One of the best ways of doing that is on e mail or through the council website (www.bromley.gov.uk). You can contact councillors by using the same format e.g. Peter.Fookes@bromley.gov.uk This is the same for members and officers of the authority as well. You can also use the old snail mail and write to us c/o Bromley Civic Centre, Stockwell Close, Bromley BR1 3UH.

We also need to have more school governors. If you are interested, please contact one of us, or Janet Heathcote at Bromley Council (Janet.Heathcote@bromley.gov.uk or 020 8464 3333).