

Lambeth Council Lib Dem Group report

For the Annual General Meeting – Sunday, 17 November

Overview

We find ourselves at the end of another busy year for the Council Group – superbly led by our Group Leader, Councillor Donna Harris and supported by Councillor Matthew Bryant, Councillor Ben Curtis – and our new Group Support Officer, Paul Bowers.

Over the course of this year, Lambeth Labour have staggered from fault to fault – be that on housing, social care, the use of our public spaces or the rate of crime in our borough. Whilst the Labour group shuffle around their Cabinet Members, residents have seen little in the way of change in our Borough – and we have been at the forefront of exposing Lambeth Labour’s failings.

As previous reports have outlined, there are a variety of roles and activities that we undertake as councillors – both in our wards and in the council itself. As we are the majority opposition group, we are statutorily required to be on several committees, as well as contribute regularly to reports brought before Full Council (meetings of all councillors).

We hope you enjoy reading the update, and please do not hesitate to get in touch with us via councillors@lambethlibdems.org.uk if you have any questions about any aspect of the report.

Cllr Donna Harris

Group Leader

Cllr Matthew Bryant

Deputy Group Leader

Cllr Ben Curtis

Group Whip

Appointments

We were sad to lose Josh Price, our former Group Support Officer, to the Borough of Merton – where he now works with our fantastic, and slightly larger, group of councillors – and our newly elected Member of Parliament for Wimbledon, Paul Kohler.

However, we have been delighted to have appointed Paul Bowers, formerly of the London Assembly and the House of Commons Library to replace him. Paul brings with him a wealth of experience in national and local government and has fast become an indispensable member of our team.

Full Council

Between the last Annual General Meeting in 2023 and this one, we have had four full council meetings – including Budget Council (at which our amendments to the administration’s budget are proposed) and Annual Council (at which appointments of the Mayor and Committees are made). At Full Council, we as the Majority Opposition, have the ability to propose, and debate, one motion – and we are then invited to debate and vote on a motion brought forward by the Labour administration.

Below is a list of the motions we put forward this year:

Date	Motion title	Motion asks	Result
January 2024	Maternal and Neonatal Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater understanding of ethnic disparities in maternal health outcomes • For better support for those suffering miscarriages • For implementation of a set of recommendations from Sands and Tommy’s Joint Policy Unit (whom the motion was developed with) 	<p>Passed, with Green and Labour amendments</p> <p>(this was subsequently brought before, and passed by, Liberal Democrat Federal Conference)</p>
February 2024	The Liberal Democrat Alternative Budget	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Efficiency savings of £2.75 million to allow targeted spending without impacting frontline services • Devolving more decision making to local communities and ensuring a councillors’ fund can help fund local projects • Targeted action to reduce transport emissions by incentivising behaviour changes • Investing in improving energy efficiency in homes • Tackling the continuing problem of violence against women and girls 	Failed
July 2024	A Fair Deal on Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual targets for new housebuilding in the Borough • Increasing the proportion of affordable building to 40%, rather than the 35% Mayoral target, and a refined definition of ‘affordable’ • Targets for a date by which 50% of vacant properties owned by Lambeth would be brought into use • Ensuring the hiring of a dedicated Urgent Case Officer for the most serious housing repairs with a 48-hour turnaround for inspections and 10 days for commencement of works • Called for an end to costly Non-Disclosure Agreements with leaseholders • Called for Lambeth to self-refer to the Regulator of Social Housing 	Failed

October 2024	Winter Fuel Payments for Lambeth Residents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Called on Lambeth to use the Household Support Fund to create a local Winter Fuel Payment scheme, similar to those in Lib Dem Councils like Sutton, Richmond and Dorset • Called for greater action to encourage take up of pension credits (the gateway to Winter Fuel Payments) • For Lambeth to write to the Chancellor calling for the policy to be abandoned 	Failed
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Full Council also gives councillors the opportunity to ask formal questions of the Cabinet Members, of which we normally get three answers (written) and the opportunity to respond to two with supplementary questions.

Question topics this year have included:

- The usage and availability of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) money
- Fire safety inspections in Lambeth’s housing blocks following the Grenfell Report
- Planning enforcement for the Ruach City Church on Streatham Hill
- Reviewing the funfair safety procedures in the wake of the fairground accident in Brockwell Park
- Unjustified energy price rises for blocks of flats with communal heating systems
- Proposals for 24 hour electric vehicle charging points
- The transition to Active Lambeth from Better Leisure Centres

Committees

We have continued to sit on our committees – with some requiring more time and attention than others. Below is a breakdown of each committee that we have sat on, and what has been discussed through the year.

Member	Committee	Function	Topics discussed
Donna Harris	Adult Social Care and Health Scrutiny sub-committee	To review the planning, provision and operation of adult social care and health care services in the borough	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age Friendly Lambeth Strategy • Carers strategy implementation • The Adult Social Care Performance Report • Transitioning from Children’s Services to Adult Social Care in Lambeth
	Health and Wellbeing Board	To set the strategic direction for action to improve and protect health and wellbeing and reduce inequalities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The LEAP annual learning report • Lambeth Family Hubs programme • Childhood Immunisation Strategy • Reviewing the Strategy to support communities to flourish and build resilience

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reviewing the Safeguarding Adults Board annual report • Reviewing the Healthy Homes Partnership Pledge
Matthew Bryant	Corporate Committee	To provide oversight for the Council's governance, risk and control arrangements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Updates on internal audits and counter fraud activities • Receiving reports of the council's external auditors • Reviewing the key risk registers and the Risk Management Strategy and Policy • Set the Council Tax and Business Rates bases for the following financial year • Reviewing and approving the statement of accounts for the Council and Pension Fund • Reviewing the performance of the Council's Treasury Management team • Review of polling districts across the borough • Financial implications of transferring Homes for Lambeth back into the Council • Empty Homes within Lambeth • The Council's Disaster and Emergency Plan • Receiving updates on complaints, members' enquiries and Freedom of Information requests
	Children's Services Scrutiny sub-committee	To scrutinise the provision, planning and management of children and young people's services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council's Action Plan in response to the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse • Ofsted updates • School achievement and improvement at Key Stage 4

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support to sanctuary-seeking children in families with no recourse to public funds • Child Friendly Lambeth accreditation • Youth Justice Plan • Children’s Social Care Workforce Strategy
	Corporate Parenting Board	To assist the Council in continuing to fulfil its legal obligations and responsibilities as corporate parent to looked after children and care leavers up to the age of 25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Updates from the Children in Care Council • Updates from the Lambeth Foster Carers’ Association • Payment arrangements for foster carers • Review the performance of the Local Authority Designated Officer Service (LADO)
	Pensions Board	To ensure the effective and efficient governance and administration of the Council’s pension scheme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reviewing performance regarding the administration of the scheme • Reviewing the Pension Fund’s funding strategy • Reviewing the performance of the Pension Fund’s investments • Reviewing the performance of investment managers
Ben Curtis	Overview and Scrutiny Committee	To scrutinise major projects and schemes being run by the council and other local agencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The performance of the Metropolitan Police, Fire Service and Parole Board • The performance of Thames Water • Increases in energy costs for residents • Support for Town Centres in Lambeth • Value for money of agencies

			<p>commissioned by the Council</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Events in Parks • Skills and Employment in the borough • Medium term financial strategy scrutiny • Recycling, waste collection and street cleansing • Various other topics
	Licensing Committee	To review licensing applications across the borough	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reviewing various applications across a number of wards
	Standards Committee	To review the standards of councillors and other public officials in the borough	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reviewing the members' onboarding and training scheme

Issues

Housing

As it was last year, and likely will remain for a very long time – both the creation of new property, and the maintenance of existing housing stock continues to plague residents in Lambeth. Our borough continues to break records on its ever lengthening social housing waiting list – which is now London's longest, and its inability to add to this stock. The continuing problem of Homes for Lambeth's dying remnants has slowed new projects getting underway – and we continue to hold the administration to account on both of these issues.

What we've done this year:

- Proposed a motion on housing, to help both elements of the strain on services and material improve the circumstances for our residents
- Donna has met with the Regulator of Social Housing over Lambeth's failures to self-refer to them on a number of major failings
- Called for a ban on no-fault evictions after Lambeth revealed that 113 families were at risk of being removed from their homes over the Christmas period
- Questioned the Cabinet Member responsible on the usage of Section 21 notices on Homes for Lambeth estates
- Asked a multitude of Members Enquiries questions (questions submitted directly to the officer in question which are statutorily required to be responded to) on fire safety and housing standards after the final Grenfell Report.

Open spaces

This administration has shown their disregard for our open spaces repeatedly throughout the course of this term – causing chaos on Brockwell Park and Clapham Common in particular, on some of the busiest weekends of the year. Whilst there needs to be a balance struck on usage of these spaces, we have ensured that our voice is heard on these matters.

What we've done this year:

- Donna has written to the Cabinet Member responsible on the Brockwell Park situation – both on the state of biodiversity and grassland, but also the excessive noise and scale of the events taking place on the space
- Benny has sat on the Clapham Common Management Advisory Committee, helping to strike the right balance between events that enhance our area and community and those which do more harm than good.

Crime and Public Safety

Public order and crime continues to be an issue that blights our borough – with petty theft often left without investigation, anti-social behaviour rates up and hate crime statistics not reducing in number. The council group has made a concerted effort to hold Lambeth, and the local Police service, to account and to ensure that residents in our borough feel that their public protection services work.

What we've done this year:

- Convened regular meetings with our Safer Neighbourhood Team (SNT) Police teams in Clapham Common & Abbeville and Streatham Hill West & Thornton, in contrast to many other wards
- Questioned the Borough Commander on overall crime rates, knife crime and antisocial behaviour increases
- Worked with residents to quash almost all illegally run events on Clapham Common – for the first time since COVID.

Casework

All three of us have also worked on thousands of pieces of casework for residents – helping to improve the state of affairs for residents in our wards, and across the borough. These cases have ranged from severe housing maladministration cases to school closures to adequate road safety measures.