

SOUTHWARK COUNCIL

COUNCIL ASSEMBLY

(ORDINARY MEETING)

WEDNESDAY 24 MARCH 2010

MEMBERS' QUESTION TIME

1. QUESTION TO THE LEADER FROM COUNCILLOR JONATHAN MITCHELL

In 1995 Tony Blair said "If the Labour government has not raised the living standards of the poorest by the end of its time in office, it will have failed." Given the report of the National Equality Panel (January 2010) states "inequality in any dimension is wider in London than in any other region, and inequality in earnings and income has increased faster in London over the last decade than anywhere else" would it be fair to say that Labour have failed? And given that Southwark has a wide gap between rich and poor would it be fair to say Labour has particularly failed the people of Southwark?

RESPONSE

Yes and yes. It's a damning indictment of 13 years of Labour government that the gap between rich and poor has widened.

SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR JONATHAN MITCHELL

I would like to thank the leader for his response and I do have a supplementary question. Labour today in the budget missed a golden opportunity once again to do something radical about poverty; they could have taken the first £10,000 of people's earnings out of tax altogether as suggested by Vince Cable and the Liberal Democrats. Instead of helping the poor and giving them a greater equality with the better off, Labour has deserted them. Does the leader agree with Nick Clegg that today's budget was not a manifesto but more of an obituary?

RESPONSE

Mr Mayor, yes I do. I have to confess that I am not surprised that the Labour government has not followed our policy of abolishing income tax on the first £10,000 that people earn because of course the Labour government voted to double the amount of income tax that was charged on the people who earned £10,000 or below; an interesting example of the Sheriff of Nottingham school of redistribution which the Labour Party follows these days.

Yesterday we were given a copy of the Southwark NHS's 5-year commissioning plan which tells us that they are £95 million short of the money that they need to provide health care in Southwark because they are having to bail out PCTs in areas like Bexley with, of course, much better health outcomes than Southwark. I think it is a damning indictment after 13 years of a Labour government that the poor in Southwark are having to suffer to bail out the rich elsewhere.

2. QUESTION TO THE LEADER FROM COUNCILLOR PETER JOHN

Will the leader publish a list of all of the council tower blocks and estates that he would be willing to sell to private developers in exactly the same way he intends to sell Maydew House?

RESPONSE

There has been no decision on Maydew House. We are currently sharing with tenants and leaseholders the information on which the council will have to make any decision about its future.

SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR PETER JOHN

Yes, it was appalling that there was a public meeting with the residents of Maydew House, I think, on 21 January and then 19 days later the executive proposed taking a substantive decision on whether those people should be allowed to continue living in their homes; and it is good that the executive recognised that was an appalling way to behave, but will the leader accept that whereas the Liberal Democrats are always making up ludicrous stories about Labour's secret plans for privatising housing or selling off housing, the truth of the matter is that the Liberal Democrats have quite open plans which they are executing of selling housing which belongs to this council to private developers right across this borough right now?

RESPONSE

No Mr Mayor; and shouting does not make it any better. I was interested today to see the press release that Councillor Reed and Councillor John had issued promising that they were going to be sharing services in the nightmare scenario that either of them gets returned to power in May – they are going to share services so of course we now have the Labour ALMO running council housing in Southwark with the 16% rent rises and the complete lack of any repair service, because despite a 16% rent rise they still haven't got the money to do any repairs. I think given a straight choice between a Liberal Democrat commitment to council tenants to be able to retain their rights to be council tenants and Labour's privatisation by stealth, I think I know which way people are going to vote.

3. QUESTION TO THE LEADER FROM COUNCILLOR COLUMBA BLANGO

In 2006 the Liberal Democrats pledge to open three new secondary schools, in the north, centre and south of the borough – how has that commitment been fulfilled?

RESPONSE

I am very pleased to say that we have opened the three new secondary schools we pledged to in 2006.

- Harris Girls Academy Bermondsey opened in September 2006 and its 6th form started in September 2009.
- Walworth Academy was opened in September 2007 and moved into new accommodation this January.
- Harris Boys Academy East Dulwich opened in temporary accommodation in September 2009, and is due to move into its brand new building next to Peckham Rye for the start of the new academic year in September.

SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR COLUMBA BLANGO

Thank you Mayor – I would like to thank the leader for his comprehensive answer and I have a supplemental.

Given Labour's record on schools was so bad that the government had to privatise the education department, does this not show that only the Liberal Democrats can be trusted with our children's education?

RESPONSE

Mr Mayor, I was puzzled by a lot of Councillor Hargrove's speech when he was moving his amendment on cycling, and I now understand why I was puzzled, because he clearly thought he was talking about something else completely. But during the course of that really rather rambling dissertation, he did say that Southwark had benefitted from central government intervention with children and young people – I am not entirely sure that those who remembered the halcyon days of WS Atkins, the famous road traffic engineers who were parachuted in to run Southwark's schools, will recognise that description. I am very pleased that we had a record number of applications to Southwark secondary schools, that we have been able to offer secondary school places to all parents in Southwark for their children who want them; that results in Southwark are getting better, that Ofsted results are getting better. Kingsdale has just had a fantastic Ofsted inspection – who would have believed that the leader of the council would have been able to get up a few years ago and say that Kingsdale School has had an outstanding Ofsted inspection? It is an absolute tribute to the work that this authority has been able to put in since we regained local democratic control over education authority after Labour's abortive privatisation which served only to line the pockets of their consultant friends.

4. QUESTION TO THE LEADER FROM COUNCILLOR VERONICA WARD

Why has the executive member not yet produced his plans for the allocation of money from the government to build new school classrooms?

RESPONSE

Our plans for investing the £12 million were clearly set out in the capital refresh report agreed by the executive in February. We have allocated £5 million to Lyndhurst School to expand to two forms of entry, £2 million to cover the cost of bulge classes, and we will be investing the remaining £5 million in expanding another local school. I am very pleased that Dulwich Village Infant School has agreed to provide a bulge class subject to planning permission.

St Anthony's have informed the council that they are willing to expand and we are currently assessing how this would help address the shortage of community places in the surrounding area.

SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR VERONICA WARD

Thank you Mr Mayor. We can note that the government did put £12 million towards the need for extra places. Can I ask if the other local school is towards the south of the borough and will there be an adequate capacity to take expected primary admissions in September in the area?

RESPONSE

Mr Mayor, St Anthony's is in the south of the borough; it is in East Dulwich Ward. There isn't only a shortage of primary school places in the south of the borough. I would have to remind

Councillor Ward that Crampton School this year kindly agreed to take on an extra bulge class due to pressure in the Walworth area, and Councillor Ward may remember that we are following the recommendations of the overview and scrutiny committee. We are looking at the primary schools applications that we have received this year; we are doing our level best to understand where the pressures are and where the money needs to be directed and there clearly is, I have to say, evidence that the sort of numbers that we have seen last year do seem to be repeating themselves but hopefully without the added complication we had last year of a lot of very late applications coming in and that should enable us to make some strategic plans.

Clearly also the planning application that Dulwich Village Infant School have got in to convert the caretaker's house, or school premises officer's house as it is probably now called, so that they could use that as a temporary bulge class is also very welcome as is the commitment from Dulwich Hamlet Junior School that in the event that Dulwich Village Infants were to expand then they would also take on that extra bulge class through their school two years later; so I am hopeful that the strategy which we set out of seeking to extend schools one year at a time – Goodrich has this year, we may be asking Heber to this year, maybe Dulwich Village Infants, that will also help to deal with the problem and I think it is important that we invest the money clearly on an evidential base about where it is going to help most where the real shortages are.

5. QUESTION TO THE LEADER FROM COUNCILLOR RICHARD THOMAS

Does the leader agree that it is indefensible that after 13 years of Labour government more than 20,000 children in Southwark are still living in poverty – enough to fill 66 primary schools?

RESPONSE

Yes. I'd remind council assembly of Labour's promise all those years ago: "Ours is the first generation to end child poverty for ever, poverty should not be a birthright. Being poor should not be a life sentence."

Well for too many in Labour Britain it sadly still is.

SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR RICHARD THOMAS

Thank you Mr Mayor – does he agree with me that if after three terms of the Labour government, if they failed to tackle poverty then they must have failed on their own terms, and failed to meet the historic aim that we always thought of Labour to tackle poverty. Does he agree with me that if it was not a lack of a majority and if it was not a lack of money then it must have been a lack of political will; and if the government has that lack of political will, I am sure this administration does not – what is the one thing that he would like central government, the one power that he would like central government to hand over to us so that we can get on with the task in hand?

RESPONSE

Mr Mayor, Harold Wilson once said that the Labour Party was a moral crusader or it was nothing and those of us who watched the Dispatches programme on Monday will think it is certainly not a moral crusade. The one power that I would like is a power for Southwark Council to be able to borrow money at the same rate as everybody else – to be freed from these ridiculous restrictions that we have. Why can't we make greater progress about tackling decent homes? We are entirely reliant on the amount of money the government chooses to give us – £50 million a year. We will be paying interest on the debt that we incurred in building wretched estates which we subsequently demolished, at a ridiculous rate

of 9% a year. If you got one advantage out of having to nationalise the banks and bring interest rates down at least let us take this opportunity to raise the money that we need to invest in our infrastructure to give everyone a decent home, a decent school, a decent – we need £20 million just to bring our roads up to scratch. We need hundred of millions of pounds to do what we need to with housing. It is absolutely ridiculous that we have a central government which is so suspicious of any form of local government or local ability to raise money. And the one thing I hope that we will get out of any incoming government is a releasing of the shackles and the realisation that actually local people on the ground know what they need, they are able to design the best solutions and people in Whitehall simply don't get it.

6. QUESTION TO THE LEADER FROM COUNCILLOR OLAJUMOKE OYEWUNMI

How has his administration fulfilled its pledge to give more powers to wardens to crack down on anti-social behaviour and street drinking? And what benefits are there for residents and businesses through a reduction in anti-social behaviour?

RESPONSE

Southwark community wardens were accredited by the Metropolitan Police Service in April 2009 giving them additional powers to tackle anti social behaviour and street drinking.

Since the adoption of these powers the warden service has carried out 429 confiscations of alcohol, 17 confiscations of tobacco products from under 16's and exercised legal powers to obtain names and addresses 146 times. They have also provided 11,500 intelligence reports to other enforcement services, many of which have contributed to civil and criminal prosecutions.

I'd also like to highlight the work of the wardens in tackling serious anti social behaviour and violence in the Peckham Town Centre in co-operation with police. This resulted in a successful application for seven anti social behaviour orders in summer 2009, resulting in a significant reduction in crime, shop theft and an increase in confidence amongst residents and businesses.

7. QUESTION TO THE LEADER FROM COUNCILLOR HELEN JARDINE-BROWN

According to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation there are now more households in significant poverty (where household incomes were below 40% of median income) than had ever been recorded in history. How does this square with Labour's pledges to raise living standards for the poorest?

RESPONSE

This is one of Labour's many broken promises. They said they would abolish child poverty and failed. They said they would save Guy's Accident and Emergency – then closed it. They said they wouldn't introduce tuition fees – and did the opposite on day one.

Labour's record is a litany of broken promises and failure. For Southwark, as one of the country's most deprived boroughs, their failure to tackle poverty has a significant effect on the life chances of many of our residents. If the government had put a fraction of what they are paying in bankers' bonuses into local small businesses then everyone in Southwark would be better off.

8. QUESTION TO THE LEADER FROM COUNCILLOR JAMES BARBER

In 2006 the Liberal Democrats pledged to double recycling – has this been achieved and what plans are there for further improvements to recycling over the next four years?

RESPONSE

In 2002, Southwark's recycling performance was woeful when just 3.6% of Southwark's waste was recycled. By 2006 we had increased recycling rates more than four times to 15%.

Veolia Environmental Services are contracted to achieve a rate of 30% in 2010-11, delivering our commitment to double recycling.

By 2014, the recycling rate will be more than ten times the rate delivered under the previous Labour administration.

SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR JAMES BARBER

Thank you for your response leader; so that is another promise delivered of doubling recycling. What would he say about Labour's recent commitment given about recycling, when they had the chance when they were in power it failed and was pitifully low, the unswept streets and unmodernised street lighting; for example East Dulwich is nearly all modernised and people used to be afraid to go out?

RESPONSE

Mr Mayor there is no doubt at all that decent, clean, well-lit streets are absolutely important to people's sense of safety and well-being, and that is why this administration will continue to invest in the street cleaning service which has given Southwark the third cleanest streets in London, unlike the Labour group who in their budget unveiled plans to sack Southwark's street cleaners by reducing the level of agency spend to fund school meals for Gordon Nardell's children.

9. QUESTION TO THE LEADER FROM COUNCILLOR BOB SKELLY

It's been estimated Labour's failed Metronet public/private partnership schemes, has cost the taxpayer more than £400 million. What would this money have been better spent on?

RESPONSE

The public accounts committee estimate the Metronet public/private partnership that was forced on Londoners by Gordon Brown has cost in excess of £400 million.

Its chair, Edward Leigh MP, said: "The taxpayer has lost up to £410m as a result of the Department for Transport's inadequate management of the risks arising from the Metronet contracts for upgrading the infrastructure of the underground.

"This committee finds it unacceptable that the department ignored the warning by the National Audit Office in 2004 to avoid a hands-off approach to overseeing the upgrades."

This £400 million would have paid for the cross river tram.

SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR BOB SKELLY

I thank the leader for his answer. The £400 million would indeed pay for the cross river tram but it would also go a long way to providing higher standards of homes for tenants in Southwark; but what response has he had from the government to the council's positive proposals to free up restrictions on the council and allow it to borrow to improve homes?

RESPONSE

Mr Mayor I have had no response – am I surprised, no I am not. Last year we agreed some submissions to make under the Sustainable Communities Act. This is a procedure under which councils were invited to go to central government with suggestions of extra powers or things they could do locally that make a real positive difference to people's lives. We put forward ideas about a voluntary sinking fund for leaseholders, we put forward ideas about bans on plastic bags, about improved co-operation from the railway authorities and so on and we have had no replies to any of those proposals afterwards. This is a dead government floating in the water waiting to be put out of its misery, there is nothing going in, there is nothing coming out – they are counting down the days and we could see from the Dispatches programme on Monday, they are more interested in their retirement packages than they are in actually doing anything to help the people of this country that they were elected to serve.

10. QUESTION TO THE LEADER FROM COUNCILLOR DENISE CAPSTICK

How much so far has been raised by the Mayor's charity for Help for Heroes?

RESPONSE

Traditionally the Mayor announces the total raised from the charity appeal as part of his end of office outgoing speech. I certainly don't want to steal his thunder! However the Mayor tells me he has been very busy and things are progressing well.

Help for Heroes is clearly a splendid cause and I would encourage all members to support all of the Mayor's efforts to raise funds.

SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR DENISE CAPSTICK

Thank you Mr Mayor. I would like to thank the leader for his answer and my supplemental is would the leader agree with me that it is important not only to raise vital funds for such a worthwhile charity but for us all to continue to remember those that actually gave their lives in battle such as Albert McKenzie VC, who we are naming a new block of flats after in Bermondsey?

RESPONSE

Mr Mayor, I spoke I think in a recently council assembly about the importance of commemorating the seventieth anniversary of the start of the Blitz this year. Albert McKenzie was a very young lad from Southwark at the age of 19 who took part in the raid on Zeebrugge towards the end of the First World War. He was chosen by ballot of his ship mates to receive the Victoria Cross, he died before the end of the First World War not because of the wounds that he received in this action but as part of the influenza epidemic that swept Europe towards the end of 1918. I think it would be extremely fitting if we named the new block of flats in Spa Road after him, and I think for many of us and I know particularly you, Denise, and those of us who went to the service medal ceremony at Kensington Town Hall for you and your unit, that the thoughts and prayers of many of us are with our troops abroad; particularly in Afghanistan at the moment, and I think that would be a

very fitting way for us to remember Albert McKenzie and also to lead into the commemoration of the Blitz this year.

11. QUESTION TO THE LEADER FROM COUNCILLOR MACKIE SHEIK

On Monday 1 March, Nick Clegg spoke to the Salvation Army at their HQ on Newington Causeway in the inaugural Social Justice Lecture. What lessons were there for Southwark?

RESPONSE

There were three important lessons:

Firstly that Labour have failed. Nick Clegg said: "In 1997, when New Labour was first elected, no one would have believed it would end like this. But Labour's bright, shiny promise of a fair society has faded away. And all that remains is disappointment, hardship, and – worst of all – hopelessness." I agree.

Secondly our tax system is grossly unfair with the poorest 20% of people in the country still losing a bigger chunk of their incomes to the tax man than the richest 20% and a millionaire still pays a lower rate of tax on capital gains than their cleaner does on their wages.

Thirdly Nick Clegg highlighted the importance of a good education in lifting people out of poverty and improving their life chances and I'm delighted he came to Southwark where under the current administration education results have dramatically improved with record GCSE and primary school results.

SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR MACKIE SHEIK

I would like to thank the leader for his answer – my supplementary is, I am glad the leader has highlighted the recent dramatic improvements in schools under the Liberal Democrat administration. Will he guarantee that under his leadership we will never go back, I mean will never go back to the days when our schools were so bad they had to be privatised by a Labour government?

RESPONSE

Mr Mayor, there is no doubt that the money that was wasted by the government on privatising our education department, like the money they wasted on privatising the Tube, is money that would have been much better spent particularly on children under the age of 5 – the amount of evidence now about the importance of early years development, about the fact that children born into the poorest families struggle for the rest of their lives to make up for the educational disadvantage that being born into poverty causes, is absolutely overwhelming; and as we face up to the fact that we need to repay a quite astonishing debt that this country has incurred in trying to preserve what is left of Gordon Brown's economic boom and his mates in the city and his mates like Steven Byers, Patricia Hewitt and Geoff Hoon and their ability is outlined in the Dispatches programme on Monday to charge £3,000 a day for lobbying their mates and the government; it is absolutely important that we rededicate our efforts to make sure that all our children and young people in Southwark get the best start in life, a decent free education from the state is the passport out of poverty and it is absolutely crucial that we help all our children and young people to take advantage of it.

12. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR CULTURE, LEISURE AND SPORT FROM COUNCILLOR ALTHEA SMITH

What assurances can the executive member give that Seven Islands Leisure Centre will be able to provide a full service for its users throughout 2010?

RESPONSE

I am grateful for this very timely question as only last week we announced the first phase of refurbishment works to Seven Islands Leisure Centre, an investment of £250,000 into modernising the gym facilities. Plans for the next phase, bringing the children's swimming pool back into use and improving the changing rooms are well underway and we are awaiting the outcome of a bid to the government's free swimming capital fund, which will be match funded by the council. Over the last two years we have made real progress in modernising our leisure centres at Dulwich, Camberwell, Surrey Docks and now Seven Islands.

Thanks to excellent contract negotiations by our leisure & wellbeing team, Fusion Lifestyle, which operates the leisure centre for Southwark Council, is funding the first phase investment at Seven Islands. The gym closed temporarily on 17 March for the works to take place. The refurbished gym will feature a range of top specification equipment for cardiovascular and resistance exercise programmes. As well as treadmills with MP3 docks and Freeview television, there are cardiovascular machines suitable for disabled users, bikes, cross training, rowing machines and a free weights area.

During the brief closure members of the Seven Islands Centre will be able to use all of the other Southwark leisure facilities. The closest is the new gym at Surrey Docks Watersports Centre which is approximately eight minutes walk from Seven Islands and has recently been transformed following a £2.39 million investment by Southwark Council.

The new facilities will bring Seven Islands gym firmly into the 21st century. We aim to be open on Thursday 1 April, ready for the Easter weekend and I hope to begin work on the wet side later this year.

13. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR CULTURE, LEISURE AND SPORT FROM JANE SALMON

Could the executive member outline the progress made towards refurbishing or replacing all of Southwark's leisure centres and upgrade them to 21st century standards.

RESPONSE

The £2.39 million refurbishment of Surrey Docks Watersports Centre was completed in February and the centre officially re-opened on the 11th of that month. The building is completely transformed and now offers standards comparable with the best in the private sector. The centre boasts state of the art changing facilities for all users as well as a new sixty station gym, dance and spin studios and a club room for training and relaxation.

The watersports programme is thriving and a whole new group of customers have been introduced to the centre. In the first month of operation, about four hundred people have joined up. Anecdotal reports suggest that a high proportion of these new customers, who were first interested in conventional leisure activities such as the gym, dance and spin classes or yoga are now also considering involvement in watersports at the centre, either for themselves or their children.

The refurbishment of Dulwich Leisure Centre has a budget of £6.4 million and is on target for delivery. The first phase (the new entrance, pool, wet-change, cafe and exercise/dance studios) will open to the public in the summer of this year. The second phase will commence immediately afterwards and the whole building will be re-commissioned by early 2011.

The refurbishment works at Camberwell Leisure Centre has a budget of £4.4 million. Works to the centre have now commenced and is on target for completion towards the end of this

year. In addition to a new entrance, pool, gym, cafe and changing rooms the centre will also host a facility specifically for young people for recreation and training.

Both Dulwich and Camberwell will have their historical features restored as part of the investment programme and Southwark will be one of the few boroughs in the country to have two thriving Victorian swimming pools.

The first phase of investment in Seven Islands Leisure Centre commenced on 17 March, with £250,000 invested in refurbishing the gym. We are awaiting the outcome of a bid to the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, Free Swimming Capital Fund for £500,000. If this is successful then a £650,000 project (including match funding from Southwark) will commence to re-open the training pool and refurbish the wet side changing rooms.

Finally, planning permission has now been obtained for the refurbishment of the Southwark Park Athletics Complex. We are now in the process of making external funding bids to match the council's contribution of £1.1 million. The whole project will have a budget in excess of £5 million and will include a new track suitable for able bodied and wheel chair athletes as well as offering a pavilion and gym that complies with the Disability Discrimination Act. New games pitches and areas for field athletics will also be included at the site. If successful it will form part of Southwark's 2012 legacy along with all the other projects listed above.

The council is committed to providing a new leisure centre at the Elephant and Castle and proposals will be brought to the Executive in June.

SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR JANE SALMON

Thank you – I would like to thank the executive member for his reply and just to say that I welcome this investment and look forward to a new leisure centre at the Elephant & Castle.

RESPONSE

I thank Councillor Salmon for her supplemental question. I was beginning to wonder whether the opposition had given up scrutinising me, and they clearly have, I'm doing so well; because in two years I have been holding this post, we have not only sorted out Dulwich and Surrey Docks which is what was being done when I took over but we've got Camberwell sorted and we are now sorting out Seven Islands and I think that just compares very favourably with Lambeth where they are all shut; and I certainly have no plans to share services with Councillor Haywood.

14. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR RESOURCES FROM COUNCILLOR RICHARD LIVINGSTONE

How much has the council paid out in "performance related pay for senior managers at the top two tiers" (written response to members question 17, council assembly 27/01/2010) since 2006?

RESPONSE

Figures below are for three years; 1 April 2006 to 31 March 2009. As performance related pay (PRP) is paid a year in arrears, figures for 2009-10 are unavailable.

2006-07	£81,742
2007-08	£111,786
2008-09	£79,049
Total PRP paid	£272,578

As a member of, and previous chair of the audit and governance committee, Councillor Livingstone has had numerous opportunities to look at this scheme, set up by the previous Labour administration in 1999.

15. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR RESOURCES FROM COUNCILLOR MARK GLOVER

What ratio of members of staff to desks does the council require on each floor of the Tooley Street building to secure the efficiency savings that the executive have promised year after year? What are the current ratios of desk occupancy by floor?

RESPONSE

The ratio assumed for the Tooley Street business case, and for subsequent efficiency planning, was an average of 8 desks to 10 staff.

Experience of occupying Tooley Street has shown that lower desk to staff ratios than 8:10 can be achieved comfortably. Therefore, we are now identifying additional teams to move into Tooley Street which will allow us to reduce costs even further.

SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR MARK GLOVER

I would like to thank the member for his response. I would just like to ask, anyone who goes into Tooley Street and walks through the floors quite often sees large number of desks that are unoccupied; can I ask how many desks are unoccupied? The answer seems to suggest that there are quite a number, and what is the cost of those desks remaining unoccupied?

RESPONSE

Thank you Mr Mayor – I would like to thank Councillor Glover for his supplemental. When we moved into Tooley Street we took an average of 8:10 people to desks, because we were unsure about how people would adapt to hot desking. What's proved clear is that on some floors, particularly areas like finance where most of the officers spend their day at their desks, the ratio of 8 is about right, but clearly there are some areas where more officers could be fitted in, and indeed we have subsequently fitted in the information systems division into Tooley Street and I was very pleased to announce this at a previous council assembly. The new 25 benefits trainee apprentices are going to be moving into Tooley Street from April as we begin to take our revenues and benefits collection service back in house. Probably the reason that Councillor Glover sees so many empty desks is that the ground floor is designated for overflow space so if any villages upstairs do get full, staff can go and hot desk and work down there or if they are working on a report. Perhaps if Councillor Glover made it up to the upper floors of Tooley Street he might see a much denser situation.

16. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR RESOURCES FROM COUNCILLOR LORRAINE ZULETA

In 2006 the Liberal Democrats promised to 'Keep council tax low – less than the London average' – how has he fulfilled that manifesto commitment?

RESPONSE

Southwark's council tax has moved from being one of the highest, to one of the lowest in London during the last eight years. Since 2006, we have kept council tax increases below the rate of inflation, and we have frozen council tax on three occasions. I believe that council tax is an unfair and regressive tax, not based on the ability to pay, and particularly in times of

economic hardship it is vital that we keep increases to a minimum to protect the most vulnerable people in our community.

SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR LORRAINE ZULETA

Thank you Mr Mayor – I would like to thank the executive member for his answer and I do have a supplementary. I would ask if he can confirm that there would be no going back to the bad old Labour days of 95% council tax rises in Southwark or 222% GLA precept rises supported by Val Shawcross and that, unlike Labour, Liberal Democrats understand that council tax is a highly regressive tax and hits the poorest hardest?

RESPONSE

Thank you Mr Mayor – I would like to thank Councillor Zuleta for her supplemental. It has been clear since we took control of this council and set the 2003 budget that keeping council tax low has been one of our priorities. From being in the top 25% and in fact being the seventh highest council tax in London we are now the seventh lowest in London and the lowest in south east London. Across those 8 years we have put council tax up by 12½ per cent, which compares to the 92½ per cent increases imposed on us by Labour in their last 8 years in office; and as Councillor Zuleta rightly points out, over 200% increase in the GLA precept under Ken Livingstone compared to Mayor Johnson who has frozen it 2 years running and where the Liberal Democrat GLA members in fact even proposed a cut this year, so I can continue to confirm that under this administration we are committed to keeping council tax low; unlike the party opposite.

17. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR RESOURCES FROM COUNCILLOR ANOOD AL-SAMERAI

By how much did tenants' rents and service charges rise in Southwark this year and how does this compare with Lambeth?

RESPONSE

Rent will go up by 1.33%, about £1.00 a week for most tenants, the minimum allowed by the government. Service charges have been frozen.

In contrast, in Lambeth, rent will increase by 3.14% (about £2.60 per week) to pay for the disastrous performance of Lambeth Homes, their privatised housing service. In addition, I am appalled to say that service charges have soared by 8% on average, nearly three times the rate of inflation.

SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR ANOOD AL-SAMERAI

Thank you Mr Mayor, and thank you to the executive member for his answer. I was just wondering if it is therefore fair to say that Labour's secret privatisation of council housing in Lambeth has not been a success?

RESPONSE

Thank you Mr Mayor, and thank you to Councillor Al-Samerai for her supplemental. I think it has been clear, and one of the Liberal Democrat councillors over in Lambeth when asked by us if there were any press releases or press cuttings they could send us about the number of Labour failures in housing over the last 4 years in Lambeth so we could do a compare and contrast, actually overflowed our mailbox because there were so many of them. The rent rises they were given last year 16%; 5% increase in service charges, were dramatically higher than those given in Southwark and again it shows that their privatisation that they

thought were going to bring in £200 million has failed completely, whereas Southwark's Liberal Democrat and Conservative administration has been committed to retaining the stock under the council.

18. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR RESOURCES FROM COUNCILLOR DAVID HUBBER

Given that more than half of all low income households are now paying full council tax, much higher than a decade ago, what measures is the council taking to make sure the tax burden doesn't hit those least able to pay?

RESPONSE

Since the beginning of this administration, we have kept council tax increases below inflation, and have indeed frozen it on three occasions in order to protect those least able to pay.

SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR DAVID HUBBER

Thank you Mr Mayor and I thank the executive member for his reply and congratulate him on the achievements which he's outlined. Would he agree with me that council tax is an unfair, inequitable tax and one which hits the poorest hardest; and will he do his best after the general election, whichever government happens to be in power, to pursue replacement of council tax by another fairer tax?

RESPONSE

Thank you Mr Mayor, and I would like to thank Councillor Hubber for his supplemental. It is clear that council tax is one of the most unfairest taxes; it is very regressive, it hits the old people most, it does not reflect the ability to pay, whereas our proposed policy of local income tax does actually address people who can pay will pay; people who can't afford to pay won't pay, and pensioners who don't have an income will not have to pay local income tax so it's a much fairer tax. Our policy to take people earning under £10,000 out of the tax system would also help people on low incomes avoid paying tax; unlike the situation we have got now where actually the millionaires in this country pay less tax proportionally than people earning under £10,000; which is a total travesty, and 13 years into a Labour government really is just a testament to their failure.

19. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR HEALTH & ADULT CARE FROM COUNCILLOR DORA DIXON-FYLE

The Care Quality Commission's Independence, Wellbeing and Choice Report makes 18 recommendations for Southwark's adult social care services. Which of these does the executive member not intend to take action on?

RESPONSE

I would like to make it clear that although we were not able to agree the report with the Care Quality Commission, and we continue to disagree with some of the content, assertions and judgements in the report, that has not stopped us working hard to progress the recommendations identified in the report.

To that end an action plan was drawn up following the inspection and we have made significant progress delivering against these recommendations. I have received appropriate briefings from senior officers regarding our progress against these recommendations.

The council has sought independent professional evaluation of the Care Quality Commission's findings regarding the performance and judgements of Southwark Health and Social Care and is undertaking an assessment and improvement programme to look at how best to develop future service provision and provide services that are tailored to people's needs.

Some examples of the progress we have made include:

- Making safeguarding training part of the induction programme for all council staff
- Resolving safeguarding cases more quickly
- Issuing personal budgets, with 508 people taking the chance to control their own care funds and design the service right for them. We expect to meet the government target on this by the end of the year with 17% of people with personal budgets or direct payments
- Appointing an independent chair of the Safeguarding Adults Partnership Board

We are also in dialogue and working with CQC and the Department of Health on the next annual performance assessment (APA).

SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR DORA DIXON-FYLE

Thank you Mr Mayor. I would like to thank the executive member for his reply to my question. I would like to ask a supplementary question around the issue of the next annual performance assessment, and I want to find out from the executive member what arrangements he has put in place to ensure that our staff will be working very closely with the CQC this time round, to avoid the same fiasco that happened last time when we had this council standing on the sidelines and name calling at an independent organisation like the CQC?

RESPONSE

Thank you. I would like to thank Councillor Dixon-Fyle for her supplementary question. The answer is that we are doing an awful lot, Councillor Dixon-Fyle. Lead members on the other side continue, I am afraid, to show very little understanding either about the performance of health and adult care, or more shockingly actually what we are doing to sort out health and adult care. At the full council in January, Labour members put down a motion asking us to adopt an action plan when actually, despite the fact that the leader of the opposition and the shadow executive member for health and adult care have been briefed by the director of adult care. Now they appear to finally realised that we do have an action plan, and actually since the inspection we have been working hard to deliver against the recommendations in that action plan.

This administration, unlike the opposition, will not agree a report that we disagree with, which fails to recognise the performance and hard work and innovation of our staff and partner organisations. Furthermore, as already suggested in my answer, we have also got a pilot reablement service up and running which receives 118 referrals with 94 people having completed reablement. We are also on target to deliver against individual budgets and direct payments of 520 individuals. We have also recruited two senior posts in adult social services including a new deputy. The fact is that this administration is getting on with delivering and continuing to build on the work we have been delivering for a long time to improve adult care and transform our services for the new personalisation agenda and I am confident that the direction of health and adult care is building on both the good work and the innovation of this directorate and I remain optimistic that this work will be recognised in future APAs.

20. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR HEALTH & ADULT CARE FROM COUNCILLOR ADE LASAKI

With the proportion of people living in relative poverty in the UK almost twice that of the Netherlands, and one-and-half times that of France, what challenges does this bring to the provision of health and social care?

RESPONSE

As a former chair of the Health and Social Care Scrutiny committee I am sure you will have read NHS Southwark's 5 year Strategic Plan which was published yesterday.

The plan notes that in Southwark, "There is a high level of ethnic diversity with 63% percent of people being white, 26% black (of which 16% are of African origin). Amongst younger people, 68% of school pupils are from ethnic minority backgrounds. The black population is more concentrated in Peckham, Camberwell Green, Faraday and Chaucer wards of the borough, which are also amongst the most deprived.

"Southwark's level of deprivation has improved in recent years but still remains the 9th most deprived London Borough (26th nationally). .. The Index of Well Being for children in Southwark is amongst the worst in the country - 348th out of 354 local authorities. .. there is a higher prevalence of hypertension and diabetes in populations of African origin, resulting in a higher risk of developing chronic kidney disease, a significant element of the Southwark population ... "

Alarminglly however, I note from page 22 of the report that Southwark NHS say, "Our income and expenditure are both £493m in 2009/10. Expenditure is forecast to increase to £653m by 2013/14 due to increases in activity and costs. We expect expenditure will increase as a result of the following:

- Population increases
- Underlying acute activity growth
- Implementation of Health Care for London Strategic Pathways
- Revenue costs of Polysystems
- Creation of Risk Reserve (1%)
- Contractual Commitments

Our anticipated allocation will be £558m by 2013/14. A gross funding gap of £95m. "

So there we have it. In one of the poorest places in the country with poor health outcomes that adversely impact upon our BME communities, our local NHS is faced with cutting nearly £100 million over the next 4 years.

SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR ADE LASAKI

Thank you Mr Mayor. I thank the executive member for his answer. Before I ask a supplemental question I would like to say the report of my death is grossly exaggerated. I am still very much around.

Is the executive member concerned about the budget cut feared of more £100 million under a Tory government? You have said that you feared the £100 million cut in the next 4 years; so I am saying if we have a Tory government and they are talking about cuts everywhere, would it not be more than £100 million?

RESPONSE

Can I thank Councillor Lasaki for his supplemental. I think I am more interested in talking about the records of this government and the failures of this government in the 26th most deprived borough, in a borough where we know the impact that deprivation has on health outcomes. Can I remind members opposite of the fact that £20 million has been top sliced off NHS Southwark's budget over the last 4 years; with this money going to PCTs and hospital trusts in less deprived boroughs. Can I also remind members opposite of the failure of this government to respond to Southwark Social Care campaign, which has the support of London councils, to look again at the flawed funding formulas that they have adopted for children and adult social care budget allocations.

Can I remind members opposite that NHS Southwark strategic 5-year plan does indeed despite all of the investments that this government is supposedly put into health is looking at a forecast for NHS London funding gap of between £810 million and £1090 million by 2016-27 that NHS Southwark is indeed predicting a gross funding gap of £995 million; that this government has adopted a last gasp measure of introducing a free personal care bill, which is meant to be paid for by further efficiency savings in adult social services at a time of reducing budgets and increasing demands – something even their Labour lead members opposed; and all this in the 26th most deprived borough in England and Wales. I must ask Councillor Lasaki if he is proud of the record of his new party.

21. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR HEALTH & ADULT CARE FROM COUNCILLOR JAMES GURLING

Given the high numbers of Southwark residents in low paid employment, how did the withdrawal of the 10p tax rate impact on those with very low incomes and what impact does poverty have on local peoples' health?

RESPONSE

The Labour-dominated Treasury Committee said that households without children or anyone over the age of 65 on under £18,500 a year would lose out if the 10p tax rate was withdrawn, leaving those on low incomes on average £120 worse off. This shocking decision was made despite the fact that links between poverty and ill health are well documented.

There is noticeably higher ill health (for example diseases affecting the heart and circulatory diseases, some cancers and accidents) in deprived areas. Poverty and low income can also lead to reduced access to services, narrower economic and social expectations, disempowerment and social exclusion.

Poorer people tend to live in poorer quality housing and may experience ill health such as asthma and other respiratory conditions associated with poor ventilation, damp and mould; fuel poverty may lead to inadequate heating and increased circulatory problems and potential hypothermia; overcrowded housing is associated with increased risks of home accidents and poorer environments for infants.

Families on low incomes have more limited access to good quality food and generally have poorer eating habits. There are fewer fruit and vegetables in the adult diet and less food rich in dietary fibre. The diet of children from low income families often has less fruit and cereals and more inappropriate weaning foods such as crisps, sweets and soft drinks. Poor nutrition is associated with adult and childhood obesity and with poor dental health amongst children. Obesity is a risk factor for circulatory diseases, type 2 diabetes and some cancers. Poor maternal nutrition is associated with lower birth weight babies and higher infant mortality.

Unemployment and poor working conditions have been clearly linked to poor physical and mental health. Socio-economic disadvantage is also a significant risk factor in the probability of a child developing a mental health problem.

On this basis the impact of the withdrawal of the 10p tax rate will have a disproportionate impact on residents in a borough like Southwark and Labour has shown that despite their rhetoric they have failed to protect and stand up for the poorest members of our community.

In contrast the Liberal Democrats are committed to changing the tax system so no one pays any income tax on the first £10,000 they earn cutting most people's tax by £700.

SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR JAMES GURLING

Can I thank the executive member for his answer which very starkly draws a contrast between Labour's abortive plans to abolish the 10p tax rate which would make the poorest section of society £120 worse off, with the Liberal Democrat proposals and which would make the poorest section £700 better off each year. Is he also aware that the poorest 10% of society are one and a half times, for example, more likely to suffer from infant death and far more likely to be at low birth weight in terms of average health. Does he not believe in a government that has claimed to be redistributive in wealth, that the impact on redistribution in health needs also to be addressed and will he guarantee that this administration will always seek to do what central government can't do in terms of the benefit of income and health for the people of Southwark?

RESPONSE

Thank you, and can I thank Councillor Gurling for his supplementary question. The shocking decision of the government to withdraw the 10p tax rate; a decision that is estimated to have had an impact on 5.3 million people on lower incomes who would be worse off; and including women who retire at 60 but do not get the higher pensions tax until they are 65, other groups including single workers who earn under £18,000 and families earning under £8,000. The recent Marmot Review which carried out a strategic review of health and equalities in England, showed that the lower one's social and economic status, the poorer one's health is likely to be; and even more shocking and further, that health and equalities are largely preventable. So despite the attempts of the government to offset this disastrous decision by increasing the personal tax allowance, that over 1 million people still remain worse off as a result of that policy decision to abolish the 10p tax.

In Southwark we are seeking to address in our own health and equality strategy to reduce the life expectancy gap between the most deprived 20% and the least deprived of the population by 20%. It is now clear from this government's record that the poorest in our society in Southwark will not be helped by the re-election of a Labour government nor a Labour council and that only the Liberal Democrats have the policies that will both reduce the tax burden and poverty, and therefore positively support the aims of this administration to reduce health and equalities in Southwark.

22. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR HEALTH & ADULT CARE FROM COUNCILLOR ALISON McGOVERN

How many people does the executive member anticipate will not have been given the Freedom Pass they are entitled to by the deadline at the end of March?

RESPONSE

As I am sure Councillor McGovern is aware, the council is not responsible for issuing Freedom Passes, London Councils is.

People entitled to Freedom Passes have to apply through the Post Office, if they are over sixty years of age. Only people who are under sixty apply to the council. We then issue a letter of authorisation that they take to the Post Office to file their application. 3200 people are automatically eligible.

A further 2400 people require an assessment to judge their eligibility for a pass. To date, 1,900 of these have applied to us for their letter of authorisation, leaving around 500 people yet to apply. We have sent at least three reminders to each of these people, and every day we are receiving more applications.

SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR ALISON McGOVERN

Thank you Mr Mayor and I would like to thank the executive member for his answer. I think I am a little confused about what the answer exactly is though. Passing over the first remark, it concludes that to date there are around 500 people yet to apply. We have sent at least 3 reminders to each of these people and every day we are receiving more applications. Is the answer therefore 500?

RESPONSE

I would like to thank Councillor McGovern for her supplemental question and I would also like to take this opportunity to actually just lay out some of the work that has been going on as a result of the scrutiny recommendations that were made by the scrutiny committee chaired by Councillor Eckersley and his members. We have actually been having meetings and preparations since late 2008 to prepare for the renewal of the Freedom Passes. That has included putting out newsletters for those involved and for partner organisations; also putting articles about the renewal process in Southwark Life and a briefing was sent to all councillors. We have also had regular meetings and feedback with the post office and London Councils.

Of the passes that have been issued, as I've indicated in the response, we are currently around 71% of Freedom Passes in Southwark have been issued and that, members may be interested, is higher than Labour Barking and Dagenham, Labour Hackney, Labour Haringey, Labour Lambeth and Labour Tower Hamlets. We have sent, as we have indicated since October, over three letters to residents who are interested in getting Freedom Passes to remind them to send in their application forms. That has been done – what we cannot do is authorise letters of authorisation until we have received the renewal forms, so I hope that answers the member's question.

23. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR REGENERATION FROM COUNCILLOR ABDUL MOHAMED

When will a steering group consisting of residents (similar to the Aylesbury Regeneration Group – and as promised by Councillor Stanton at the last Walworth Community Council meeting) be set up to work on the regeneration of the Elephant and Castle?

RESPONSE

As part of the ambitious regeneration of the area it is vital that the council establishes a body which can both help feed in local ideas and provide up to date information for local people.

As both the leader and I told Walworth community council last month, before a group is established the regeneration agreement needs to be fully completed with Lend Lease – which will happen in June this year – and the masterplan for the area, including a site for the new leisure centre will need to be published.

Once both of these have happened I am committed to working with local councillors, local groups and local residents to agree the most effective forum for these issues to be discussed, based on the excellent examples already established as part of the regeneration schemes at Canada Water and on the Aylesbury Estate.

24. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR REGENERATION FROM COUNCILLOR MARTIN SEATON

It appears that Southwark failed to renew its registration of the website designed to provide information to local residents and others about the Elephant and Castle regeneration (www.elephantandcastle.org.uk), meaning that it ceased to exist in February. What does say about the council's commitment to keeping the public informed about this regeneration?

RESPONSE

Councillor Seaton has been misinformed as a quick web search would show. The website he mentioned is up and running.

25. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR REGENERATION FROM COUNCILLOR CAROLINE PIDGEON

Transport for London are planning up to 82 weekend and early evening closures for the Northern Line. What impact will these have on businesses and residents who live near the Northern Line tube stations in Southwark?

RESPONSE

If the botched upgrade of the Jubilee Line is any indication of what is in store for residents and businesses who rely on the Northern Line then they could well be in for 18 months of frustration and anger.

The local business community has already raised concerns over the impact of these works in a number of forums and the council is working with them to lobby Transport for London for appropriate minimisation of works and mitigation of impacts.

26. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR REGENERATION FROM COUNCILLOR WILMA NELSON

How many new affordable homes have been built or made available over the last four years?

RESPONSE

The provision of more affordable housing, especially properties with 3 or more bedrooms is crucial to this administration's vision for improving housing for Southwark residents. The number of new affordable homes completed in Southwark in the last four complete years and the most recent projection for the current year are laid out in the table below. The affordable total for each year is made up of rented properties and intermediate properties. The intermediate category includes the homes delivered through the range of low cost home ownership products available e.g. shared ownership, and also properties built for intermediate rent.

Number of new homes completed			
Year	Rented	Intermediate	Total
2005-06	412	129	541
2006-07	445	417	862
2007-08	397	378	775
2008-09	232	247	479
2009-10	412	238	650
Total	1898	1409	3307

As part of our commitment, in the four full years since 2005 there have therefore been 2657 new affordable homes built in the borough, with a further 650 projected for this year.

In addition, since April 2005 a further 64 major voids (void properties requiring more than £10,000 of works - generally long term) have been repaired and brought back into use under the major voids programme. There have also been 44 major voids converted back into 4 bed plus family homes, and 3 extensions to the properties of existing council tenants who have been overcrowded.

Over the period 2005-06 – 2008-09, 461 family sized council properties were released through under-occupiers moving to smaller homes through the 'small is beautiful' campaign.

27. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR REGENERATION FROM COUNCILLOR JELIL LADIPO

What are the next steps on the Elephant and Castle regeneration?

RESPONSE

I'm very pleased to report the significant progress on the commercial terms of the regeneration agreement with Lend Lease. It is now 95% completed, and although we would have wanted to have the agreement signed this month it is essential that we get the fine detail right on such a long term agreement, and ensure value for money for Southwark's council tax payers.

All documentation will be completed in good time for the executive to consider and agree the regeneration agreement in early June – the earliest date for a meeting of the council's executive.

Ongoing discussions between the council, Lend Lease and St Modwen regarding the shopping centre have also been positive, and if an agreement can be reached by June on the shopping centre then this issue can also be considered by the executive alongside the main regeneration agreement.

However, if no agreement with St Modwen can be reached by the beginning of June, the executive is clear that the regeneration agreement will still be brought to the June meeting of the executive for consideration.

28. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR REGENERATION FROM COUNCILLOR ROBERT SMEATH

Could the executive member give details of precisely what development will take place in the Peckham Rye Central Area in 2010-11 according to the current plans of the Liberal Democrat and Conservative administration, and how the council plans to pay for this development?

RESPONSE

The proposed development within the Peckham Rye Park Central Area is the building of a new One O'clock Club and play area. As agreed at the Nunhead & Peckham Rye community council meeting of 22 July 2009 CGS funding of £215,000 plus £100,000 of playbuilder funding will be used to:

- Build a new One O'clock club
- Develop a new children's play area
- Develop a longer term plan for the central area and the Homestall Road site.

Children's Services have applied for a further £300,000 Sure Start funding to supplement funding for the One O'clock club and we will know by the end of April 2010 if this is successful. Either way the new One O'Clock club will be delivered by March 2011. The new play area will be completed by November 2010 with consultation due to begin in April 2010.

29. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES FROM COUNCILLOR ELIZA MANN

In 1999 the then Prime Minister, Tony Blair said in a speech at the Toynbee Hall "And I will set out our historic aim that ours is the first generation to end child poverty for ever, and it will take a generation, poverty should not be a birthright. Being poor should not be a life sentence. We need to break the cycle of disadvantage so that children born into poverty are not condemned to social exclusion and deprivation. It is a 20 year mission but I believe it can be done." He also pledged to halve child poverty by 2010 as an interim measure. How successful has Labour been in achieving this and what impact has it had on Southwark?

RESPONSE

As can be gathered from the report of Harriet Harman's own National Equality Panel Labour has failed dismally to meet the former PM's grandiloquent vision. Labour hasn't halved child poverty by 2010, nor ended the cycle of disadvantage and as many children are living in poverty now as there were in 1997.

The impact of this failure on Southwark, as one of the country's most deprived boroughs, has been huge. Labour's command and control of local spending has driven out local initiative and their ludicrous restrictions on what the council can spend on housing has meant many more children growing up in poor housing than is either desirable or necessary. The council's report, Once and For All, written by the LGIU, shows how the council – at no cost to the exchequer – could refinance its debt and provide the quality of homes Southwark tenants deserve. I hope the new government will look at it more sympathetically than the old one.

30. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT FROM COUNCILLOR BARRIE HARGROVE

Could the executive member for environment confirm that there currently is a three week waiting time for cremations? If this is the case could he please confirm how this situation arose which is forcing bereaved families to arrange services in other boroughs so that their loved ones can be laid to rest?

RESPONSE

I am happy to put Councillor Hargrove's mind at rest; there is currently no waiting list for the crematoria.

31. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT FROM COUNCILLOR GORDON NARDELL

2010 has so far seen two cyclists fatally injured in collisions with lorries on Southwark's roads, highlighting the threat that HGVs pose to cyclists. What measures does the executive member for environment propose to take to improve the safety of cyclists on those roads under Southwark Council's control?

RESPONSE

The council very much regrets the deaths of the cyclists. We work very hard to ensure the safety of cyclists on Southwark roads.

The council currently undertakes training and advice programmes focussed on cyclist safety and a number particularly aimed at HGV drivers on cyclist awareness. For example, our road safety team have also recently rolled out a new programme of training to refuse vehicle drivers and bus drivers which aims to increase their awareness of cyclists on the road.

32. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT FROM COUNCILLOR LORRAINE LAUDER

The road surface on East Street is still a hazard for stall holders on the market and shoppers, despite repeated assurances that it will be properly improved. When will East Street be resurfaced?

RESPONSE

I am pleased to let you know that a further £250,000 of funding has been allocated to East Street from the local implementation plan in addition to the £100,000 already allocated from the councils' highways improvement scheme.

Walworth community council has a budget of £100,000 for road repairs and £350,000 for cleaner, greener, safer projects and there is money available from Transport for London. East Street will be resurfaced when the local community council makes it a priority.

33. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT FROM COUNCILLOR TOBY ECKERSLEY

Would the executive member for the environment please outline the steps he, or other executive members, have taken to make common cause with other London boroughs concerned about the threat to through running northwards beyond Blackfriars of trains using the Thameslink Wimbledon loop; and would he give his views about the detriment to passengers using this service from Herne Hill and Elephant and Castle that termination at Blackfriars would cause, with particular reference to Crossrail.

RESPONSE

Following the consideration by the executive on 23 March of January's council assembly motion on this issue the council will contact other interested London boroughs to discuss how we can influence the drawing up of future timetables to ensure that residents across Southwark benefit from both changes to Thameslink and the construction of Crossrail.

34. QUESTION TO THE DEPUTY LEADER AND EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR HOUSING FROM COUNCILLOR IAN WINGFIELD

A scrutiny sub-committee recently heard shocking evidence from tenants of the continued failings of the dysfunctional repairs service. These include homes left without power for four weeks, prospective tenants being asked to take possession of flats which are in unsanitary condition, workmen regularly turning up without tools and contractors over specifying for simple repairs. Is the executive member for housing prepared to continue to assert that the repairs service is providing an acceptable service to Southwark residents?

RESPONSE

The repairs service in Southwark has significantly improved in the last 4 years. In particular, tenants can now order repairs and book an appointment. The response times for repairs are in the top quartile for London as measured by Homemark. There are over 200,000 repairs carried out every year and although we do not always get every repair right, the performance indicators show significant improvement. In fact, satisfaction with our repairs service is now over 90%. There are no records of properties with a loss of power for over four weeks and we treat all such situations with the highest priority.

35. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR CITIZENSHIP, EQUALITIES & COMMUNITIES FROM COUNCILLOR TAYO SITU

Will the executive member for citizenship, equalities and communities join me in condemning the decision by Conservative Mayor Boris Johnson to cut funding for Black History Month events from £132,000 to just £10,000? Will she commit to continued funding from Southwark Council for Black History Month?

RESPONSE

The Mayor of London reassures me that he values the vast wealth of cultural, religious and ethnic richness that Londoners of African-Caribbean descent bring to our cosmopolitan city, and is unequivocal in his commitment to ensuring BME communities are able to fully participate in and contribute to life in the capital.

Supporters of the previous Mayor have made a number of inaccurate statements about the budget for Black History Month. The London Mayor will continue to support the month and will hold a large annual event in City Hall. However City Hall have decided not to hold a series of workshops throughout the month as they believe they competed rather than complemented events and campaigns held at the borough level and elsewhere.

Whilst Black History Month is a significant event, the Greater London Authority and local authorities recognise that Black History and the contribution of BME communities to London life needs to be recognised all year round and through all cultural and community services. This is a key principle of Southwark's equalities and diversity policy and is integral to our cultural and community services. Similarly, the Mayor of London is committing funding to a broad range of new initiatives which are inclusive of and feature Black History and BME communities, such as the Story of London, and financial support to the development of the Black Cultural Archives, which represent a fantastic opportunity to celebrate the role of the BME community in London's history.

Through efficient management of resources in my department the commitment to funding for Southwark's Black History Month will remain at the same level as previously - £30,000. This is the highest level of funding that any London borough commits to Black History Month. This contrasts with Lambeth where Black History Month has no dedicated budget attached to it and no grants or other funding are available to voluntary organisations.

36. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR COMMUNITY SAFETY FROM COUNCILLOR PAUL BATES

Can the executive member detail the funding arrangements of the Aylesbury Community Reassurance project over the last year and then explain the funding arrangements for 2010-11 and 2011-12?

RESPONSE

The funding for the community reassurance project in 2009-10 is £300,000 from the Aylesbury Creation Trust. In addition the Police funding for dedicated Police officers and PCSO's is £400,000. The National Offender Management Service funds a dedicated Probation Officer which amounts to £50,000. The funding for the Police, Probation and elements of the project team such as the dedicated resettlement workers will continue in 2010-11 and will remain under the title of the Southwark Diamond Initiative.

We are currently in dialogue with the London Criminal Justice Partnership to negotiate 2011-12 and beyond. An evaluation of the first year of the Diamond Team will be published by the London Criminal Justice Partnership in April 2010.

Housing management and community safety and enforcement are working together to establish a dedicated Aylesbury management team. The team will provide a number of officers with generic skills, with specialist services brought in to focus on key issues as they arise. In addition the team will be supported by visible reassurance patrols by warden's officers in the late evening and weekends. These officers will be dedicated to the estate. Recruitment for the manager of the team is currently underway.

37. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR COMMUNITY SAFETY FROM COUNCILLOR JOHN FRIARY

Recent statistics show that violent crime in Southwark is back on the rise. Is the executive member concerned that police cuts and CCTV cuts will only add to this trend and the fear of violent crime?

RESPONSE

I have been assured by the Borough Commander that none of the Mayor of London's policing cuts will see a reduction in police officers in Southwark. I am also pleased that the CCTV Strategy recently adopted will help us to make the best possible use of the borough's CCTV to reduce crime and fear of crime.