

COUNCIL ASSEMBLY

(ORDINARY)

WEDNESDAY 1 DECEMBER 2010

MEMBERS' QUESTION TIME

1. QUESTION TO THE LEADER FROM COUNCILLOR GAVIN EDWARDS

Following the article in The Observer on Sunday 7 November which painted a bleak picture of how the coalition government cuts will affect one London borough, will the leader provide an update of how he thinks the council's role will change over the next four years?

RESPONSE

The picture painted in the Observer article was very bleak. In Southwark we are working with the community, stakeholders and officers to map out how the council's spending and role will change in line with our budget principles. This is genuine consultation and represents a different way of doing things in Southwark; it will inform the choices that we make in the budget and this level of cooperation will be the standard for this administration.

We are being forced to rethink the role of the council in the immediate future and for a generation to come and do not take this duty lightly. We have to look rigorously for alternatives before deciding to cut any service, whilst recognising as simply untrue the idea that making efficiency savings alone will cover the scale of the cuts. It is vital for our residents that we get this right and that is why we will not make any premature announcements about the future of individual services.

We are not making nor would we make these changes by choice. We recognise that the coming years are going to be difficult for our residents, partners and staff, but this strengthens our resolve to meet the challenge.

SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR GAVIN EDWARDS

Thank you Mr Mayor, and I thank the leader for his response; is the leader concerned by the civil unrest seen in Lewisham earlier this week?

RESPONSE

I want to thank Councillor Edwards for his supplementary question. Yes, I was concerned about what we saw in Lewisham.

People obviously have a right to protest but do not have a right to violent protest and I think that we would all deprecate that sort of behaviour. I hope that what we have done as an administration in approaching the changes and challenges which we are facing as a council and as an administration and the way in which we are explaining that to the people of Southwark will mean that we are not going to face similar sorts of protests in our borough and that is something that I am working very hard to ensure. Any group knows that it has an opportunity to come and speak to myself or cabinet colleagues or cabinet or this council assembly and the door is always open to them to make formal

representations to us in a lawful and law abiding way and I hope that that will continue into the future in this borough.

2. QUESTION TO THE LEADER FROM COUNCILLOR ANOOD AL-SAMERAI

How much has the Labour administration spent on Southwark Life since being elected in May?

RESPONSE

The council has spent £99,335 on Southwark Life since May, in line with the amount budgeted for by the previous administration. We will be reviewing the amount spent on council publicity as part of the budgeting process.

SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR ANOOD AL-SAMERAI

Thank you Mr Mayor, and thank you to the leader for his answer. I am concerned that Southwark Life seems to be used in an unprecedented way for spin and propaganda. I just wonder if you could tell me whether this cost includes the time of cabinet members and quotes and photographs and the promotion of cabinet members and their time?

RESPONSE

Can I thank Councillor Al-Samerai for her supplemental question. The cost is the cost and that is the figure that I can give her. You know I think it's always the case when you are in opposition you see the political in a council publication which the administration does not see. I know I saw it every time I read the Southwark Life and it made me furious and you know; and people say 'calm down, calm down, it's just talking about recycling collection times' or something like that, so I am sure that Councillor Al-Samerai is going through a bit of sort of post administration blues and some difficulty with Southwark Life. Southwark Life itself is something which we are looking at as part of the budget process, I am not going to make any announcement this evening; it would be quite wrong for me to pre-empt anything about any budget decision this evening ahead of more formal documentation and proposals, but I think it is important and even Eric Pickles I think recognises it's important that councils do maintain some form of communication line with their residents and I do hope that Southwark Life performs that function.

3. QUESTION TO THE LEADER FROM COUNCILLOR ANDY SIMMONS

Can the leader please provide an update on the fairer future budget consultation?

RESPONSE

Before the election we promised that we would move from a closed and secretive budgeting process to one that is honest and open. It is deeply regretful that we are making this positive step at exactly the same time as the council's budget is being slashed, but we believe that the budget situation also makes it more important than ever.

Since August we have visited every community council area twice. The Chief Executive and I have spoken to over 500 members of staff. We have received over 100 responses to our innovation challenge and have visited community groups from across the borough.

SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM ANDY SIMMONS

I would like thank the leader for his answer. Could I please ask how the responses from the community council consultation events, the web site etc, are being fed through into decision making on the budget please?

RESPONSE

Can I thank Councillor Simmons for his supplemental question. Every response which we received is going to be collated on a community council basis, I know that Councillor Barber raised this with me at Dulwich Community Council. All responses are being collated so there will be valuable feedback. Individual ideas are going to be looked at, and I am quite confident actually that residents of the borough have come up with some good ideas which we can include in our budget proposals to take forward. That's what this process is all about; it is not just a bit of window dressing it is about actually talking to people and seeing if there are any innovative and good ideas out there that we can use. I am confident there are some, I can think of a couple already that I think 'well maybe we can look at that as a proposal to take forward' and hopefully in the feedback that we give to community councils people will see that in due course it has been a valuable process.

4. QUESTION TO THE LEADER FROM COUNCILLOR LINDA MANCHESTER

Did the leader know about charges against Councillor Rhoden before the May elections and did he tell her not to worry?

REPNSE

No and no.

SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR LINDA MANCHESTER

Thank you Mr Mayor, I thank the leader for his reply. Could I ask if you could please confirm to us whether Councillor Rhoden is still a member of the Labour Party and that when she told the local press "they told me not to worry they said it would be ok and that I should continue to put myself forward", that she was lying to the press?

RESPONSE

I think that's a safe conclusion for Councillor Manchester to reach in respect of what Councillor Rhoden said and, you know, contrast what I am telling her with what somebody who has been convicted for benefit fraud is saying to a newspaper.

She is a member of the Labour Party still, there is an internal Labour Party procedure that has to be gone through, party structures have to be gone through, people have a right to put their case, but its certainly our representations she should not continue to be a member of the Labour Party because of this conviction and I hope we will hear some news on that in due course.

5. QUESTION TO THE LEADER FROM COUNCILLOR CLAIRE HICKSON

How does the leader believe Southwark, particularly areas like Chaucer, will be affected by the proposed changes to housing benefits?

RESPONSE

The coalition government's cuts to housing benefit are made up of a combination of measures including cuts to the Local Housing Allowance; breaking the link with market rent increases by tying benefit increases to general consumer inflation, which is normally lower, leading to an increasing divergence between rents and housing benefit; the penalisation of those in long-term unemployment; the penalisation of under-occupiers and the penalisation of those with non-dependent co-habitants.

The changes will be painful in the short-term for those of our residents who lose out and it would be wrong of us to underestimate how difficult that will make their financial situation. But the changes are also likely to have a profound long-term impact upon our local community. That impact will mix personal upheaval as some residents are forced to leave homes and communities that they have lived in for many years, with a change to the make-up of those communities as sections are priced-out of the local market. Those parts of the borough that remain affordable for people on housing benefit could come under increasing pressure and demand as people move there from other, more expensive parts of the borough or even other parts of inner London. The result will likely be increasing polarisation and separation in our communities, and a move away from mixed communities.

SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR CLAIRE HICKSON

Thank you Mr. Mayor and thank you to the leader for his response. Is the leader concerned about the impact that the change will have on the local community?

RESPONSE

Yes I am. I have mentioned in this chamber before, Councillor Hickson, the concerns that I have on how this may affect Southwark in particular. I think we are a borough which prides itself on our diversity, on the mix of communities that we have and I think all of us regard it as a truly regressive step if we thought that we were becoming a borough which was exclusively a professional borough or exclusively middle class. I feel that might be the consequence of the changes to housing benefit, I fear it may be the consequence of changes to social housing market rent rates. Whilst I have heard some sort of explanations about how it may be introduced, these changes to social housing rents, none of it has convinced me yet, that what I fear may not come true. I think you have to be absolutely vigilant to the impact that these cuts are going to have. We are in an extraordinary position here in Southwark; we have great wealth sitting alongside great poverty and that great wealth can really work against us I think in terms of how that has an impact on market rents and how market rents are perceived and how they are set in the future and the impact that has on our social housing.

We will do everything we can as an administration to maintain the diversity of this borough and I am sure the members opposite would absolutely support us in that, I do not think any of us would wish to see the fundamental shape and face of Southwark change.

6. QUESTION TO THE LEADER FROM COUNCILLOR GRAHAM NEALE

Will the leader and his councillors in Southwark be campaigning for fairer votes next year?

RESPONSE

The way Labour members choose to vote in the national referendum on the voting system will not be whipped.

SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR GRAHAM NEALE

Mr Mayor; frankly I am a little disappointed I ask a reasonable question which still remains unanswered. I do not think it is unreasonable to ask a straight question and get a straight answer. Perhaps I could just ask again, because I think you will be coming out and campaigning for fairer votes and I have prepared a pledge for you to sign so that you can sign the pledge. I have brought the pledge with me, sorry – this is the wrong one, sorry, sorry Mr Mayor this is the wrong pledge; this is the one that says ‘an ethical content to foreign policy’ from Robin Cook, is it this one? No this is the one; referendum on voting systems from the Labour manifesto 1997, or is it this one here – I have a pledge ‘I support the fairer votes campaign’. Would you be able to sign it?

RESPONSE

Boris Johnson explains there are three levels of political pledge; there is an aspiration, a commitment and a pledge and you know it is interesting here the Liberal Democrats talk about pledges because of course the pledges are the most serious of all on that level of political pledge and it is very interesting to see so many Liberal Democrats breaking sincere pledges which they made to the electorate before the general election and, you know, Nick Clegg before the general election talked about restoring public confidence in politics.

You know, I cannot think of anything actually which is more damaging to public confidence in politics than breaking a pledge which you are photographed signing and which you have all your candidates photographed signing; you know what a terrible thing and how undermining that is, how cynical it makes you appear as a politician. So I am not going to take any lessons from Councillor Neale on pledges and the importance of pledges. The answer which I have given him is a genuine answer. My mind actually is not preoccupied with fairer votes at the moment, my mind is preoccupied with how Southwark is going to find £18 million worth of saving over the next four years because of the 28% of cuts which his government is introducing. That’s what is preoccupying my mind and in due course I might make up my mind about whether I support this incidental fairer votes referendum or not, or whether I could even be bothered to vote in it because in my mind, what I will be doing is going to be much more important I think over the next couple of months.

7. QUESTION TO THE LEADER FROM COUNCILLOR NEIL COYLE

Can the leader provide an update on the council’s response to the proposed changes to the National Health Service?

RESPONSE

The cabinet passed a report at its November meeting which set out our approach to the changes that the coalition government are making to the NHS, including the decision to undertake a full due diligence exercise with the primary care trust (PCT) of all current joint and shared arrangements. Since then, in line with the cabinet recommendations, the council has actively supported an application by the Southwark GP consortium for pathfinder status.

The proposals that the coalition government made for changes to the health service earlier in the year were, in my opinion, unclear and incomplete and spread uncertainty throughout the health sector. A further Health White Paper is expected in early December and will hopefully bring clarity and stability for future health planning.

SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR NEIL COYLE

Thank you Mr Mayor and thank you to the leader for the response. Given that the government's proposed changes represent the most drastic changes to the NHS for decades and do not appear to have support of patients or service providers, does the leader believe that the government has approached these proposals in an appropriate manner and can he say more about the implications for Southwark?

RESPONSE

I want to thank Councillor Coyle for his supplemental question. I think it is a great worry actually, the government's approach to the health service and the PCT, it rather seems that they are throwing everything up in the air without any clear idea where the pieces may land or what the implications may be, and of course the difficulty for anyone in the health service is that that could have a real dramatic impact on the services which are currently being provided to some of our most vulnerable residents in the borough.

In terms of what we are doing in Southwark, obviously we know we are going to get some public health role – we don't know what it is precisely, we don't know what the extent of it is going to be, how it may be divided with the Mayor and the Greater London Authority, we don't know whether its going to be any additional funding for that public health role but we know we have got that and we are preparing for it, we are talking to GPs in Southwark. My colleague Councillor Dixon-Fyle together with officers is leading that conversation and I hope that we will be in a position as a council to be more prepared perhaps than others may be to deal with the changes that are coming. But I really do feel that it has been a chaotic approach without any clear guidance or direction from the Health Department, without any clear guidance or direction from the Secretary of State and that continues and, you know, again you're talking about people's services, about people's jobs, and I think it is a very unfortunate, to say the least, way of approaching the most significant change to the health service since 1948.

8. QUESTION TO THE LEADER FROM COUNCILLOR TIM MCNALLY

Do you still agree with your quote about outsourcing in Southwark News on 21 October 2010 that 'We've had some pretty crappy failures'. Please can you identify which outsourced services you think are failures and which are not?

RESPONSE

It is right to acknowledge that there have been problems with some of our major contracts. Sometimes those problems have been inherent in the terms of the contracts themselves and there is a risk with all contracts that circumstances can change and that the terms of the contract are not able to move with them.

We campaigned in opposition for council tax collection to be brought back in-house due to the failure of the Liberata contract to continue to deliver improved council tax collection after initial success. We are now looking to see how we can work with Vangent to rework their contract to improve service for Southwark residents. Even the Veolia waste contract puts an effective glass ceiling on improvements to the borough's recycling rate.

SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR TIM MCNALLY

I would like to thank the leader for his answer and ask that given that the examples of 'crappy failures' that he cites, which were Liberata and WS Atkins, I could for that matter

add SITA or Street Cleaning or EGO Lab for pest control, all outsourced during the previous Labour administration and all decided to be brought back in house by the Liberal Democrat administration, would you give a commitment not to outsource the jobs of any other of Southwark's current staff?

RESPONSE

I want to thank Councillor McNally. I am not going to make that blanket commitment because I think as part of the budget challenge and process that we face over the next three years we are going to have to look at all possible options, and there are sort of innovative ways in which you can work which involve outsourcing in some degree or other, so I think it would be very unwise of me to make some blanket promise now.

I think we had difficulties in the council as a procurer of outsourced services, I think it is something that he would agree with on reflection from his time as executive member. I don't think we have been the best at procuring, at getting the best contract, at getting the best clauses in contracts and I hope that the experiences which we had corporately as a council will better equip us for any decision or enquiry or investigation which we might make about outsourcing in the future.

I think that is a responsible way forward and I am sorry I can't give him the commitment he wants but as I say I think this is a responsible way forward to keep all options open as we deal with these unprecedented cuts.

9. QUESTION TO THE LEADER FROM COUNCILLOR CLEO SOANES

Is the leader concerned that the proposals to increase tuition fees to up to £9,000 a year will affect the aspirations of children and young people in Southwark?

RESPONSE

Yes. The decision to introduce tuition fees was a difficult one to make, but was essential in order to allow for the number of places at universities across the country to be dramatically increased and make a university education a genuine possibility for young people across Southwark. The decision by this coalition government, however, to cut funding for university teaching by 79% and effectively triple the cost of university tuition for students is motivated by no such desire to expand educational opportunities and will only serve to limit them.

This is a retrograde step, and in the context of reduced budgets, we will continue to work to provide a range of targeted opportunities so that Southwark young people can access higher education. For example, the council has already started to sponsor suitably qualified apprentices on part time degree courses.

10. QUESTION TO THE LEADER FROM COUNCILLOR PAUL NOBLET

Will the leader update the council on the progress in adopting shared services with Lambeth and Lewisham?

RESPONSE

Work between Lambeth, Lewisham and Southwark on sharing services remains a high priority for Sir Steve Bullock, Steve Reed and me moving through the budget process. We will be meeting early in the new year to receive an update on shared services and I

hope to be able to tell members at that time which services we are working towards sharing and what the process and timescales will be.

We are already jointly procuring a shared barristers framework with Lambeth and hope to save £150,000 a year.

11. QUESTION TO THE LEADER FROM COUNCILLOR ALTHEA SMITH

How many young people in Southwark are in receipt of the educational maintenance allowance?

RESPONSE

3,729 young people in Southwark currently claim for the EMA.

12. QUESTION TO THE LEADER FROM COUNCILLOR ADELE MORRIS

Who should decide the agendas of community councils?

RESPONSE

Community councils are free to determine their own agenda within the demands of council business and scope of the constitution.

13. QUESTION TO THE LEADER FROM COUNCILLOR STEPHEN GOVIER

Westminster, Hammersmith and Fulham and Kensington and Chelsea have spoken about merging into a 'super council'. Is the leader of the council pursuing merging with any other council?

RESPONSE

No. We are pursuing shared services with Lambeth and Lewisham in order to make savings, but will not water down the political accountability within our borough for our services.

14. QUESTION TO THE LEADER FROM COUNCILLOR DAVID NOAKES

Following on from the cabinet's adoption of its seven agreed budget principles including the statement "we will do all that we can to protect our front-line services and support our most vulnerable residents" can he tell me as leader what additional commitments and guarantees he is prepared to make to deliver on this principle and protect vulnerable service users who receive services from adult social care?

RESPONSE

If by 'commitments' the member means additional spending then his conception of the scale of the financial situation and mine differ. The coalition government's determination to cut local government finance so much and so rapidly means that we are being forced to cut all local budgets, including health and adult social care.

If by 'guarantees' he means to protect spending from cuts then I don't believe that making premature announcements about the future of individual services before we have finished the budget consultation or rigorous analysis of existing council spending is the best way forward.

15. QUESTION TO THE LEADER FROM COUNCILLOR MARK GLOVER

The leader has been meeting staff to discuss the challenge of the budget cuts. Can he provide a summary of what he has told them about potential staff cuts and redundancies?

RESPONSE

I have met almost 1,000 of our staff over the last few weeks in offices around the borough to listen to their concerns, discuss their ideas and to tell them about what we are doing as an administration. The overwhelming impression that I have received from those conversations is that they are clear about the challenge that lies ahead and concerned about the threat that the coalition's cuts pose to the community they serve. However, they are obviously also concerned about the potential of job losses. I have been clear with them that we are doing everything we can as an administration to avoid compulsory redundancies and are exploring all avenues of enquiry, but that some job losses are inevitable given the scale of the financial challenge.

16. QUESTION TO THE LEADER FROM COUNCILLOR JONATHAN MITCHELL

Will the leader please list the cabinet members who work part time?

RESPONSE

The following members do not take their full SRA for working part-time elsewhere:

- John Friary
- Ian Wingfield

17. QUESTION TO THE LEADER FROM COUNCILLOR NICK DOLEZAL

What does the leader believe has been achieved in the administration's first six months?

RESPONSE

We have already delivered on the following manifesto pledges:

- Set up a commission to work with the community to reduce teen pregnancy
- Cut councillors' special responsibility allowances by the same amount the pot was increased by the last administration
- Delivered the most open budget-making process to date
- Made every fire risk assessment of a council block available for local residents to access
- Hired a new Director of Housing to head our dedicated housing department
- Secured a minimum level of affordable housing at Elephant and Castle and made progress on the leisure centre and shopping centre
- Increased CCTV coverage in areas where it's needed
- Reopened the air quality monitoring stations
- Saved Nursery Row Park and Brayards Green from being built on in line with our commitment to value green space
- Consulted with the community on our charter of rights for social care.

We have also made progress on other commitments by:

- Committing to pilot free school meals next year
- Piloting a single phone number for social care enquiries
- Piloting food waste recycling
- Making significant progress against the pledge to cut agency staff numbers and consultancy spend as detailed in the Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources scrutiny interview
- Making significant progress on Southwark's first violent crime strategy.

18. QUESTION TO THE LEADER FROM COUNCILLOR MICHAEL SITU

Can the leader please detail the next stages of the budget consultation?

RESPONSE

We have now finished the second stage of the budget consultation. The third and final stage will begin in the new year and will involve feedback on the input that has been received so far and a clearer indication of the administration's budget proposals. This will be followed by the publication of the cabinet's budget proposals and first ever pre-scrutiny of those proposals by the overview and scrutiny committee on 31 January 2011.

19. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR REGENERATION AND CORPORATE STRATEGY FROM COUNCILLOR GEOFFREY THORNTON

Please could the cabinet member provide an update on any progress made in relation to the provision of a new leisure centre at the Elephant and Castle?

RESPONSE

As cabinet member for regeneration I am very pleased with the progress that has made in the last 6 months towards the provision of a new leisure centre at the Elephant and Castle.

The cabinet has agreed that the site of the existing leisure centre will be the location for the new facility. We have carried out a very successful consultation exercise. Over 1,316 responses were received – a 16% response rate compared to an anticipated rate of just 5%. As we expected what people really want is a new swimming pool. The next most popular facilities were a gym, exercise studio and sports hall.

Of course these are financially challenging times and therefore we need to make our assets work hard to ensure we deliver our priorities. Part of the site will therefore be sold to raise funding for the new facility and the reduced site means that we must make a choice between the new swimming pool or a double size sports hall.

In the light of the consultation results the cabinet therefore agreed on the 23 November to progress with a scheme for a new 6 lane, 25 metre swimming pool, a learner pool, a 4 court sports hall, a gym, an exercise studio, a crèche and a café.

SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR GEOFFREY THORNTON

Thank you Mr Mayor, can I thank the cabinet member for her answer and for confirmation of the news that the Elephant and Castle leisure centre will benefit from the a new 25 metre swimming pool and I thank her and her officers for the work they have put into that project. Can I also add a note of concern of the proposed loss of the 2 sports hall courts and indeed the only public squash courts in the borough, and could I say I don't think it is, as her answer states, an either/or choice between a new swimming

pool or a decent sized sports hall and in light of the comments that she has received from the Planning Manager of Sports England and the Director of the Pro Active Central London Organisation, can she confirm that she will look in detail at any forthcoming plans to ensure that they represent the absolute best use of space, including the possibility of maximising the available sporting space by housing proposed non-sporting facilities on perhaps a mezzanine level or a third storey or a terrace?

RESPONSE

Thank you, I could not hear all of your question perfectly, but I think you are asking 'can we look for more funding from variety of other sources and if so enhance the sports offer?'. I get the gist of it but it was a very long question.

The answer is yes, we will be trying to find more additional funding; we are obviously in a position where there is not a lot of funding around, I am not sure if there will be additional funding coming from other sources in the way there has been in the past. We don't have unlimited space or unlimited money. It would be nice to be providing like for like as well as the swimming pool which people have been too long without and we are not willing to wait more than a decade to produce a new swimming pool if that was the proposal coming from the other side of the chamber, and yes, if we can find more money to provide better services that would be great; but I am not very hopeful that that will be the case.

20. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR REGENERATION AND CORPORATE STRATEGY FROM COUNCILLOR JEFF HOOK

Rotherhithe Community Council committed £80,000 of cleaner greener safer (CGS) funding last year to the clearance of the area known as the old fish farms between Seven Islands leisure centre and Southwark Park. The list of public realm projects for the area confirms there has been no progress in clearing this and converting it to a useable area tied into the park. Can she confirm that she has no other plans for the fish farms area that contradict the commitment by Rotherhithe Community Council?

RESPONSE

Yes, I can confirm that I have no other plans for the fish farm that contradict the commitment by Rotherhithe Community Council.

SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR JEFF HOOK

I thank Councillor Colley for her answer. So can she confirm then, if you have no plans to sell the grounds off you will press forward with the clearance of that site so that we can bring that old fish farm as part of Southwark park nursery back into the use of the public rather than laying idly redundant behind the sports centre.

RESPONSE FROM CABINET MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND RECYCLING, COUNCILLOR BARRIE HARGROVE

Thank you Mr. Mayor. There are no clear plans for the fish farm at the moment; it is acknowledged that Rotherhithe Community Council has committed £80,000 towards the fish farm and it is hoped that, well, it is expected that it will be used in a way in accordance with what Rotherhithe Community Council want. However, I would have to remind Councillor Hook that we are going through a very difficult budgetary process at the moment and we have to think very carefully about any commitment which has revenue implications. I know in the past there has been talk about having a nature

reserve which would mean having quite a low level of maintenance commitment, and that does have some attraction. I also know that other interested parties have had other suggestions around how the fish farm could operate. I have spoken to officers very recently and asked them to arrange for me to go to Rotherhithe Community Council so that I can listen to what the people in Rotherhithe Community Council have to say and what ideas they have for the fish farm. I do want to get this site active as soon as possible but there are some uncertainties at the moment, but I am looking forward to coming along to Rotherhithe Community Council and speaking with you and your colleagues.

21. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR REGENERATION AND CORPORATE STRATEGY FROM COUNCILLOR JAMES BARBER

Can the cabinet member please tell me how many building certificates are issued by Southwark every year and the average number of calendar days from the last visit of a building site to certificate's issue and the average for the slowest quartile to be issued?

RESPONSE

A completion certificate is issued to the property owner following a satisfactory final inspection by a building inspector. The certificate confirms compliance under the building regulations for the work applied for originally.

We rely on the owner/builder to inform us when work is complete and ready for final inspection. Completion certificates have to be issued if a full plans application is deposited. It is not a statutory requirement to issue a certificate following submission of a building notice, however it is our practice to do this as the customers prefer to receive a certificate. We are sometimes asked to issue completion certificates for work carried out many years previously but they can only be issued for work that has been carried out since November 1985. Prior to that, completion certificates were not provided for in the legislation.

We monitor the time between the final inspection and the issuing of a certificate and the target is to do this within 10 days but following a final completion inspection information is sometimes required to be submitted (e.g. an electrical test certificate) before a completion certificate can be issued. We rely on the builder/owner to provide this information and it can take some time for this information to be submitted. This is normally the reason why some certificates are issued many days, and in some cases years, after the final inspection.

Year	No. certificates issued	Average number of days from last visit	Average no days to issue certificate for slowest quartile	% certificates issued within 10 days(local target)
2005-2006	632	59	193	41
2006-2007	502	49	233	22
2007-2008	877	35	335	43
2008-2009	907	41	301	43
2009-2010	598	36	324	39
2010-2011	512	42	283	37

SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR JAMES BARBER

I would like to thank Councillor Colley for her answer. Would you agree with me that for many years it appears the building control have been providing a very poor service? It

looks like a hundred and fifty families typically every year are having to wait two thirds of the year for a building certificate and before receiving such a building certificate it must be a great concern to those families. What you plan to do to turn this service around?

RESPONSE

I would like to thank Councillor Barber for his question, actually very sincerely, this is not an issue I had previously looked at closely and I was quite surprised with the figures myself and did ask for an additional briefing on this subject. I have to say that I am not entirely convinced that the statistics do show that the service is particularly failing, it perhaps in fact shows that we are not really measuring performance in quite the right way. The situation as they explain it to me is that the surveyor goes out, surveyor does their inspection; but a lot of things that need to be certified are certified not by the council any more but by the installers – the electrics, the windows, the boilers – and very often the surveyors will very often need to have further information from the contractors or the agent before they can provide the certificate, and in many cases this seems to be why the certificate is not then issued because although the contractors are told 'you need to provide this, that and the other' they don't then do so. We can't provide the certificate until that information is provided and if it is not provided, that's how it is.

I think we need to look at it. I have to say that what we could do, I suppose, is pursue the additional information; though I think that could incur some significant additional costs to us and we at the time do not have a lot of money to go around. The onus is on the people seeking the certificate to provide the information much as a car owner it's your responsibility to get an MOT, it's your responsibility as a house holder to get a certificate; and house holders should be chasing the contractors to find out why they have not got it. But I certainly recognise that if I had an extension built, I probably would not realise I need this certificate so I might not pursue my contractor because they have not provided the certificate. In most cases people only realise that they were meant to have this certificate when they try to sell their house and the solicitor says 'where is your certificate?'. I know there is a case at the moment, which I think Councillor Eckersley has been working on which Tessa Jowell's offices has been working on, where the house had been inspected in 2004 and they never received their certificate but it turned out that that was because they were asked for, let me see what it was, 'a structural engineering calculations' from the contractors and that was never supplied. Since the case has been raised through Councillor Eckersley new inspections has been made and the certificate has been issued within 10 working days.

So yes, I think it is worth looking at. I particularly want to look at how we can provide better information on our website and through other communication methods to make sure that households do understand they do need the certificate; if their contractors do not provide the certificate, chase them. But I don't think necessarily that the council should go into the business of chasing up unless we can find some way of making sure that we can keep the costs of doing that down.

22. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR REGENERATION AND CORPORATE STRATEGY FROM COUNCILLOR MICHAEL BUKOLA

Can the cabinet member assure me that Section 106 created assets such as new health centres are owned by Southwark Council and where appropriate leased to others?

RESPONSE

There is no requirement in central government guidelines or the local authority Section 106 Supplementary Policy Document (SPD) that states or implies that S106 funds must

to be linked to the physical ownership of any particular assets. For example the local authority have in the past given grants to various bodies for improving or expanding services where the underlying assets were not under the ownership or control of the Council.

For health services it must be demonstrated that the use of the funds is to mitigate the impact of a consented development in terms of increasing the capacity of health service provision in the local area to satisfy the tests for expenditure.

NHS Southwark currently own or have head leases for health centres in Southwark. Health Centres are not routinely owned by Southwark Council, though the council are occasionally the primary care trust (PCT) landlords such as at Aylesbury Health Centre.

NHS Southwark lease (or sub-lease) parts of health centres and similar properties to clinical service providers where this is not the PCT itself. From 1 April 2011 this will increase significantly as the provider arm of the PCT is due to transfer to Guys and St Thomas' Foundation NHS Trust (GSTT). GSTT will lease the parts of community health care sites they occupy from NHS Southwark for the period of their clinical contract. Ownership / head leases, and capital investment will remain with NHS Southwark.

NHS Southwark is responsible for capital investment and expansion decisions for primary care (GP) and the community estate, and for strategic planning of the development of the estate to meet changing service requirements and population growth. The use of S106 health funds by the PCT is to directly fund expansion in primary / community healthcare capacity in Southwark. For example, we are applying for £119,833 health S106 monies to purchase equipment and furniture for the new health centre in Bermondsey Spa. The PCT has just signed a 25 year head lease on this building to secure NHS primary care service for this area.

SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR MICHAEL BUKOLA

I would like to thank the cabinet member for her answer. Currently Southwark NHS are given the freehold and other ownerships of assets created for health under section 106 agreements, this amounts to £3.2 million as presented to health scrutiny this week. To protect those assets would the cabinet member agree that Southwark Council should hold such assets in the future?

RESPONSE

Thank you; I'm afraid I have not seen that report and it would have been helpful if in your question you might have given me a bit more information to go on as I am very keen to answer questions as much as I can. I think the important thing with section 106 is to appreciate that those assets and the money we get in is there to benefit the community and not to benefit the council so I am not sure that I necessarily see a problem with the assets that were created being owned by the NHS or being owned by perhaps a community group for instance, I know we have got an agreement on the Aylesbury estate for a number of community facilities that would be provided on the Aylesbury estate to go into the ownership of Creation Trust for instance. So I am happy to discuss it further with you but I am not sure I quite understand the issue; I don't see that it is necessarily a difficulty with the NHS owning health assets rather than the council but I am happy to discuss it further with you.

23. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR REGENERATION AND CORPORATE STRATEGY FROM COUNCILLOR ELIZA MANN

Has the council now notified those tenants whose water rates are paid through their rent to the council about Thames Water's consultation?

RESPONSE

It is, of course, the responsibility of Thames Water, not Southwark Council, to notify tenants of the consultation – and to bear the cost of doing so.

Following the councillor briefing given by Thames Water on 15 October 2010, council officers sent a list of addresses to Thames Water on 28 October 2010 to be included on an additional mail out. Thames Water have since confirmed that an additional 9,000 letters have been sent out to addresses across London, including the additional addresses provided by Southwark Council, informing residents of the project and inviting them to additional exhibitions that have been arranged.

SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR ELIZA MANN

Thank you Mr Mayor; I thank the cabinet member for her answer, however as landlord don't you think you have a duty to notify tenants of these issues of Thames Water Project since the tenants pay their water rates directly to the council?

RESPONSE

No, I think Thames Water has a duty to inform our tenants and local residents and carry out this consultation, if we went down the road where the council provided, paid for the consultation of Thames Water our budget would not be going very far, so no I think it is right that we have provided the addresses to Thames Water and for them to pay for their own consultation.

24. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR REGENERATION AND CORPORATE STRATEGY FROM COUNCILLOR HELEN MORRISSEY

With cuts to the working neighbourhoods fund (WNF), future jobs fund (FJF) and other council funding, what is the council going to be able to do in practice next year for Southwark residents who are looking for employment?

RESPONSE

The council has just adopted a new economic strategy that brings together local partners and providers.

2010/11 pledges include:

- More than a thousand people back to work through employment services (Southwark Council)
- More than a hundred young people into work (Southwark Council)
- Careers advisor for Rotherhithe schools (Southwark Families and Children's Trust)
- 165 jobs in Livesey (Jobcentre Plus)
- 143 into 12 month sustainable employment (Childcare Affordability Programme)
- 60 part-time work placements for young people (Foot in the Door)
- 22 council apprenticeships (Council Apprenticeship Programme)
- Jobs fairs held with developers and contractors (Better Bankside)
- Regeneration partners to secure employment, training and skills and apprenticeship opportunities for Southwark residents (including Canada Water, Tate, Neo Bankside)

- Developing additional provision for ESOL and learners with learning difficulties and disabilities to support their progress along a vocational pathway (Southwark College).

The council's funding for directly commissioned employment and enterprise support will be greatly reduced from 2011/12 due to the loss of WNF, but the council is currently reviewing how best to maximise the value of remaining funding and the impact of its core support programme, Southwark Works. We are also working with the voluntary and community sector (V&CS) and other partners to identify priorities and review options for locally commissioned service delivery.

The government's principal response to reducing unemployment is the introduction of welfare to work schemes through the Single Work Programme (SWP), aligned to forthcoming welfare reforms and incentivisation of work. Implementation of the programme so far shows an expectation by government that resources from this programme are not primarily intended for use by local authorities and their local specialist employment support providers, but gaps in this mainstream provision will remain (such as for workless people with health/disability conditions claiming invalidity benefit, and lone parents); the council will therefore want to ensure that it maintains its commitment and support to those most in need of support to enter the labour market and who are not adequately supported by mainstream, national programmes.

We are exploring how the impact of core local funding can be maximised as start-up finance to support Southwark Works and other employment support providers in the borough to enable them to become SWP suppliers and therefore also access SWP funding. We will also consider what pre-employment support and/or training may still be needed, particularly where support through the SWP is either inappropriate or simply not available to some of our residents who want to find work.

We wish to ensure that existing good, local services are not lost in the new system of provision, which will operate under three providers competitively covering the eastern half of London and operating under contracts that operate at a regional scale and have to manage the risk of a payment by results regime.

Meanwhile the council will be doing everything it can to help the V&CS and other small providers to access the programme as suppliers to the new prime contractors. We will be offering brokerage support between the prime contractors and our local providers once we know (early next month) which of the current long list of providers are shortlisted on the SWP framework.

SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR HELEN MORRISSEY

I would like to thank the cabinet member for her reply, and to ask as a supplementary do you believe that the voluntary and community sector is ready for the scale of the cuts that are coming in government funding and the upturn in demands? Thank you.

RESPONSE

Thank you, I would like to thank Councillor Morrissey for her question and this is an issue that is of great deal of concern to me; how the voluntary and community sector working in the employment and enterprise sector will be prepared for the scale of the cuts and quite likely the increase for the demand for their services because we are expecting sadly more people to be out of work. In my portfolio the loss of Working Neighbourhoods Fund means that our budget for employment and enterprise is being reduced by over £3 million next year, quite aside from what impact the overall cuts of the

government's grant to the council, leaving us with perhaps with only £800,000 which is what the council currently puts into that programme. I think that some in the voluntary sector are more prepared than others, is the short answer. I think for some they have got the potential to be able to bid in to the single work programme, which is where the government is redirecting its welfare to work budget, but that programme is very different to Working Neighbourhoods Fund, it is on a 'payment by results' kind of model, and for some larger voluntary community sector organisations that would be possible with them to work with, they will have some capital, they will have the capacity to be able to deal with that – but for many that would be impossible.

What we are doing is working very closely with Community Action Southwark to do everything we can to help the voluntary and community sector organisations to bid in for single work programme and other funding sources. We will know early next year who the contractors in the single work programme will be covering our area, and we are looking to work as a sort of brokerage with the Community Action Southwark to help our voluntary sector and organisations to understand what they will need to do to have a chance to gain business and to work through the single work programme.

We are also looking at a new transition fund which has been announced by the government which will be administered by the Big Fund part of the lottery which may assist sponsoring community sector organisations as they transition from having a large amount of funding from the public sector to adjusting to the new Big Society world. We will do every thing we can to help the voluntary and community sector in any way we can – it is something that concerns me greatly. I am very grateful to the help of Community Action Southwark on this issue, the other thing I am worried about is that there is going to be a gap – Working Neighbourhoods Fund money runs out in March and the single work programme does not start till September, so I think there are going to be incredible challenges for the voluntary and community sector and it's only really by working together with them, being honest and upfront, making sure that people understand what's coming and do not expect just the grant they receive from the council to keep on coming; only by doing that that those voluntary and community sector organisations have a chance and most importantly keep on delivering for the residents in this borough who really need their help to get into work and sustain work.

25. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR REGENERATION AND CORPORATE STRATEGY FROM COUNCILLOR DAN GARFIELD

Can the cabinet member provide an insight into what will replace the London Development Agency (LDA)?

RESPONSE

The Mayor of London currently proposes that the LDA will be abolished by 2012. As the LDA was established by statute, this will require use of the Localism & Decentralisation Bill, due for publication this month. This will enable the Mayor to complete plans to “fold” residual LDA functions and budgets into the GLA group, and the bill is expected to lead to additional devolution of powers and responsibilities from the government to the Mayor.

The implications of this move remain unclear at this stage. Nationally, Regional Development Agency (RDA) functions have largely been earmarked for transfer to newly emerging Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs). Guidance for London has been different. Early signals from government invited bids for London LEPs, and at this stage a number of local organisations explored how they could play a part in putting forward proposals; including the Southwark Business Improvement Districts, Southwark Chamber of Commerce, the Cross River Partnership and Central London Forward.

Guidance was delayed, submission deadlines were extended and negotiations continued between the Mayor of London, London Councils and central government. The Mayor of London favours one LEP for London, and currently the position in London appears likely to result in one London-wide LEP; the GLA group is currently preparing a bid for this purpose, due for submission on 3 December 2010.

While the contents of this bid cannot be verified at this point, the following indications have been given by the GLA group:

- There will be one LEP for London, not for sub-regions nor only for Thames Gateway.
- No funding is yet associated with the LEP, though negotiations still have to be completed on GLA/LDA future resources.
- The LEP will be expected to work within the statutory London-wide strategies, including the Mayor's economic development, transport and housing strategies.

The GLA have indicated that they will provide administrative support for the London LEP which would meet three to four times a year, with a membership to be determined but probably chaired by the Mayor with representation from businesses and boroughs. The LEP would not be a delivery body but provide a more strategic vision for business development to help ensure that London maximises its position as the country's economic driver.

The context for the LEP is not straightforward. There are a number of related changes such as the proposed LDA/HCA (Homes and Communities Agency) regeneration organisation to be set up within the GLA (depending on the abolition of the freestanding LDA and the devolution of the HCA London functions to the Mayor), and the setting up of the new Promote London body (to include inward investment and business support) which are not yet settled. Similarly the detailed operation of skills programmes and the precise role of the London Skills and Employment Board need to be confirmed.

Additional Information

It is possible that the outcome here could include some funding for the London LEP. It may well bid for Regional Growth Fund (RGF) and other funding streams as they arise or are devolved. Access to the RGF is not exclusive to LEPs and so there could be a number of bodies in London who are promoting innovation and business growth bidding for RGF and other Department of Business, Innovation and Skills funding.

26. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR REGENERATION AND CORPORATE STRATEGY FROM COUNCILLOR MARTIN SEATON

What would the implications be of social rents moving to 80% of market rates on Southwark's regeneration schemes?

RESPONSE

The announcement in the Comprehensive Spending Review of new flexibilities in social rents was followed up by with the publication of 'Local decisions: a fairer future for social housing' a consultation document released by Communities and Local Government on 22 November. The proposals are being framed in the context of localism.

The government has proposed that new fixed term tenancies as short as two years at 'affordable rents' could be offered by housing associations to new tenants of social housing from April 2011, initially on a proportion of re-lets and in new stock in 'due course'. The affordable rent will be at a maximum of 80% of market rent but the

consultation paper does not provide a definition on how market rents would be determined. The consultation is on whether to introduce legislation to enable local authorities to do the same.

Also, the document states that the proposal is for new lettings; there is recognition in the paper that tenants would be unlikely to move on less favourable terms, and therefore landlords should be required to offer existing secure or assured tenants who move to another social rented property a further lifelong tenancy.

The proposals will create significant difficulties in delivering regeneration schemes. The 80% market rent regime is proposed to generate development finance to make up for the 50% reductions in the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) funding for new homes. However, tenants being rehoused would expect to be moving on comparable rent levels, not rents two or three times their current rent levels. An 80% of market level rent on a new home is neither affordable nor acceptable for tenants moving as part of regeneration schemes like the Aylesbury or Elmington.

Thus allowing housing associations to charge 80% of market rent is not an option for new "affordable homes" in regeneration areas and will not provide the support needed to regeneration scheme viability to make up for the savage 50% cuts to HCA funding.

27. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR REGENERATION AND CORPORATE STRATEGY FROM COUNCILLOR TOBY ECKERSLEY

What steps is the council taking to secure the preservation of the architectural and heritage features of the remaining buildings on the Dulwich Hospital site?

RESPONSE

The main hospital building and its associated ward blocks are not listed but are currently included on the council's draft local list and as such, the main hospital building is considered to be a heritage asset. The draft local list has no weight in planning terms until we have received the Inspector's report on the council's core strategy and we have been able to consult on the proposal to adopt the list and the criteria for selection of properties suitable for local listing.

Further, a planning brief was prepared by the council in July 2005. This notes that the "Southwark primary care trust does not consider that the existing buildings are suitable to deliver modern health care services". It goes on to state that any "proposals for the redevelopment of the site should ensure, where feasible, the sensitive adaptation of existing buildings and new buildings should be of a design that respects the character of the surrounding area and any structures retained on site." Further, that "sustainable design and construction methods should be incorporated into any new development or redevelopment of existing buildings." As such, the presumption in the planning brief is that the existing hospital buildings make a positive contribution and could be preserved and adapted and not demolished.

28. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES FROM COUNCILLOR ROSIE SHIMELL

Will the cabinet member provide the percentage of eligible primary school children who took up their entitled free school meal for 2009/10?

RESPONSE

Based on the information schools provided for the schools' food trust survey on the number of free meals served and the percentage of pupils who are eligible and have applied for a free school meal, 87.5% of eligible Southwark primary school children took up their free school meal in 2009/10.

29. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES FROM COUNCILLOR CATHERINE BOWMAN

What evidence does the cabinet member have to demonstrate that free school meals tackles obesity?

RESPONSE

The National Child Measurement Programme measures children at reception age and at year 6. According to the latest available data for the 2008/09 academic year, Southwark had the following levels of childhood obesity:

- 1) 26.7% obesity among year 6 pupils, ranking us top nationally.
- 2) 14.2% obesity among reception pupils, making us third highest nationally.

When this administration came in, using the latest data for 2008/09, an average of 36% of reception children and 50% of year 6 children were obese.

The relevant point for this question about our free healthy school meals is that they are not just free but they are also healthy; because research shows that children eating healthy meals are less likely to be obese. The School Food Trust also noted in a 2009 report that: "Findings from initiatives involving the provision of universal free school meals suggest that having a healthy meal at lunchtime may offer benefits linked to behaviour and other learning outcomes, and may impact on children's eating habits away from school."

Southwark Public Health reviewed the literature and research relating to the impact of free school meals and obesity, finding positive impact when they are implemented as part of a whole-school approach. This whole-school approach underpins our delivery of free healthy school meals.

30. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES FROM COUNCILLOR PODDY CLARK

Please could the cabinet member define what a 'healthy' free school meal will be and what measures she will introduce to ensure that each meal reaches this standard?

RESPONSE

Southwark school meals meet the statutory 14 national nutrient-based standards and 11 food-based standards. These ensure that school meals include a variety of foods containing all the nutrients a growing child needs. Healthy school meals should help children to achieve a balanced diet by including plenty of fruit and vegetables, starchy foods, some protein rich foods, some milk and dairy foods and only small amounts of foods high in fat, salt and sugar. Training has been provided for school meals providers and catering staff on the nutrient and food based standards.

It is the duty of schools' governing bodies to ensure that meals in their school meet these statutory standards, a function generally discharged through the contract agreed

with the caterer. The effectiveness of the monitoring processes will be looked at through the evaluation of the free, healthy school meals pilot.

The council continues to provide support to schools in promoting healthy eating, for example through the Healthy Schools programme. All our schools are on track to achieve that status, for which they have to at least meet the government's nutrient and food-based standards.

As part of the free healthy school meals programme, the council is developing and implementing a framework to support schools and governing bodies to quality assure their meal provision, as well as an evaluation framework which will include a nutritional assessment of school menus and a sampling of meals. With the primary care trust, we will also ensure that school meals meet the standards by ensuring that each food/drink used in school lunch recipes is supported by a full nutrient specification.

31. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES FROM COUNCILLOR NICK STANTON

Will the cabinet member outline how much the universal free school meal programme will cost per annum? Please could she provide a breakdown by revenue and capital costs?

RESPONSE

Work is being carried out to fully cost this commitment. The most important component of that work is piloting free healthy school meals in ten primary schools, with a variety of characteristics, this academic year. The pilot will run from January to July 2011 with reception and year 1 pupils. The pilot will help determine precise revenue and capital costs.

The intention is to begin rolling out the programme next academic year. The programme will be offered to all schools to start in September 2011 – initially to specific year groups and thereafter to all year groups in all Southwark primary schools.

32. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES FROM COUNCILLOR DAVID HUBBER

In light of the horrific child abuse case in the Plymouth private nursery, is the cabinet member satisfied with the inspection process and management of all nurseries in Southwark?

RESPONSE

The Plymouth case was indeed horrific. In Southwark our approach to nursery inspections and management is robust. All providers must meet the welfare requirements as set out in our guidance on conditions for inclusion in the directory of early years providers. We have an explicit condition related to safeguarding which includes the undertaking of an annual safeguarding audit (this latter helps us produce the section 11 statement to the Southwark Safeguarding Children Board). All settings are offered support in meeting the standards as set out.

The Department for Children, Schools and Families rated our work on safeguarding in the early years as best practice when they did a visit early in 2010. In addition, Southwark is pioneering in that for the past two years we have carried out annual safeguarding audits of all settings. This is not a requirement either of Ofsted inspections

or the Early Years Foundation Stage but we have seen this as important and the Plymouth Serious Case Review is recommending that this should happen in all authorities.

33. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES FROM COUNCILLOR PAUL KYRIACOU

In these tough economical times caused by the previous government, what is the cabinet member doing to protect the youth service?

RESPONSE

I remind the questioner that the tough economical times were not caused by the previous government but were caused by the worst global recession in over 60 years which started due to the over-heating of the sub-prime mortgage market in the USA.

I also remind the questioner that the actions of the previous government meant that the effects of that recession in the UK and in boroughs like Southwark were substantially mitigated – with, for example, much lower unemployment across the country than in previous recessions.

As a council we are facing severe cuts to our budget due to the unnecessary depth, speed and unfairness of the government's cuts.

We are currently in the process of a large-scale public consultation on how to implement the cuts across all our services – to ensure the decisions that we make are as fair, transparent and good value for money as possible.

Along with a range of other services we have to look at what the youth service delivers for young people across the borough and how much we spend on it. We need to be flexible in our approach with regard to delivering youth work and ensure we work closely alongside the voluntary sector so that we provide a robust and comprehensive offer which all young people can access.

34. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES FROM COUNCILLOR LISA RAJAN

What new actions does she propose the teenage pregnancy commission will take to further reduce the number of teenage conceptions in Southwark?

RESPONSE

The Teenage Pregnancy Commission was launched last month. It is made up of representatives from across Southwark's communities, led by an independent chair, and will produce a series of recommendations in a report in the spring. It would be inappropriate for me to pre-empt or second-guess the course of their investigations or their recommendations.

35. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES FROM COUNCILLOR LORRAINE LAUDER

How have the coalition government's cuts – including those announced in the spending review – affected funding coming from central government to children's services?

RESPONSE

As a council we are facing severe cuts to our budget due to the unnecessary depth, speed and unfairness of the government's cuts. As part of this, children's services is facing cuts.

In 2010/11 children's services has already suffered cuts of £2.7m revenue and £3.5m capital in-year.

For future years, the full detail of the spending review cuts by central government that affect children's services is not yet known.

36. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES FROM COUNCILLOR VIKKI MILLS

What progress has been made to bring in free healthy school meals?

RESPONSE

Free healthy school meals will be piloted in 10 schools this academic year. The pilot will run from January to July 2011 with reception and year 1 pupils. The intention is to begin rolling out the programme next academic year. The programme will be offered to all schools to start in September 2011, and initially to specific year groups. Thereafter the programme will be rolled out to all year groups in all Southwark primary schools.

37. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES FROM COUNCILLOR SUNIL CHOPRA

What progress has been made on the teenage pregnancy commission?

RESPONSE

The Teenage Pregnancy Commission was launched last month, and has already had its first full session. It has an independent chair and is made up of representatives from across Southwark's communities. It will report, with recommendations, in the spring.

38. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND RECYCLING FROM COUNCILLOR ROBIN CROOKSHANK-HILTON

Will the cabinet member outline how he is implementing scrutiny's recommendations about new and replacement trees in the recent tree strategy?

RESPONSE

Being appointed Cabinet Member for Environment, Transport & Recycling earlier this year, subsequent to my being Chair of the Environment and Community Support Scrutiny Sub-Committee at the time of the Tree Strategy Review, has afforded me a great opportunity to follow up on the sub-committee's recommendations with a good number of practical measures. The principal actions I have initiated which arose from the Southwark Tree Review were provided at Appendix 1 of the recent Tree Management Strategy individual decision making (IDM) report. This included the following scrutiny recommendation:

Recommendation 9: That a dedicated tree (planting) budget is identified.

The Tree Section's budget has been restructured, including the separation of works budgets from overheads (salaries and section running costs). The Tree Section prioritises spend in accordance with available budgets including the budget provided by the Housing Revenue Account. Details on work prioritisation are included within the Tree Management Strategy.

The extent to which a tree planting budget can be established is constrained by existing budgets and priorities. However the council is committed to a replacement planting programme to maintain existing stock wherever possible.

New planting distinct from replacement planting is not covered by existing revenue budgets. The council will consider carefully where, using the principle of 'right place, right tree' and when to plant new trees in order to manage the financial implications appropriately. Guidance for planting new trees, including the criteria for selecting the right location, is contained in the Tree Management Strategy.

Where capital funding is made available for new planting schemes, the schemes will be assessed using the Tree Management Strategy and a minimum 3 year maintenance and defects liability period is required. Existing capital schemes include the Mayor's priority tree programme and the Cleaner Greener Safer programme.

In addition to the above, all tree planting (both new and replacement) now require a minimum 3 year maintenance and defects liability period. The 3 year maintenance costs are now included within the cost of planting to ensure these trees have the best chance of establishing.

The council is also proposing to introduce a 'tree sponsorship' scheme for tree planting. These schemes would be for replacement planting.

39. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND RECYCLING FROM COUNCILLOR MICHAEL MITCHELL

Would the cabinet member for transport, environment and recycling confirm that he is aware of the resolution concerning Red Post Hill of the Dulwich Community Council on 10 November 2010 which calls for changes to the "self-enforcing measures" currently in place there in respect of the North Dulwich 20 mph zone, and would he outline future steps and timescales to put the requested changes into effect?

RESPONSE

I am aware of and have authorised officers to proceed with the necessary steps to implement the resolution of the Dulwich Community Council, subject to (a) the necessary funding being available, (b) the outcome of re-consultation with residents, businesses and any statutory consultees and (c) TfL's consent to changes to the original agreed and implemented scheme. To complete the scheme in its entirety is likely to take a minimum of 5 months.

40. QUESTION TO THE DEPUTY LEADER AND CABINET MEMBER FOR HOUSING MANAGEMENT FROM COUNCILLOR COLUMBA BLANGO

Will the cabinet member list which properties in Southwark are not warm, dry and safe?

RESPONSE

The stock condition survey found from a sample of 10% of the borough that approximately 35% of the council's housing stock was left by the previous administration falling short of the decent homes standard. This represents an indication of those homes which were left not warm, dry or safe. In making the borough's homes warm, dry and safe each estate will be assessed in turn as work on that estate begins. Our full approach to improving council homes for our tenants is currently under an extensive and necessary review, due to short-sighted policies of the previous administration, and will be set out in a cabinet report early next year.

41. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR COMMUNITY SAFETY FROM COUNCILLOR WILMA NELSON

Will the cabinet member outline the current patrolling regime of the community warden service? Please could he outline how this may change as a result of the mess that the previous government left this country?

RESPONSE

The wardens service reorganisation commenced in October 2009, following a policy review of the service. As a result, the current wardens service patrolling comprises the following:

- Wardens cover five town centre areas – Bermondsey, Elephant & Castle, Camberwell, Peckham and Central Dulwich. In addition we have a Parks Services with a dedicated warden based in each of the four major parks. The Parks Liaison Officers can also draw on colleagues from the wider service.
- We also have a borough-wide response team of 12 wardens, to cover crime hotspots and emergency incidents. The latter includes critical incidents such as fires, floods, power outages, and serious crime issues.
- We have one wardens team which is funded by Better Bankside and covers the business area between Blackfriars Bridge and London Bridge.
- Patrol timings in each area are 0930-2230 Monday to Friday and 1200-2000 Saturday and Sunday (0930-1730 in the winter) albeit the service is extremely flexible and times can be adjusted as required, for specific operations or in response to emergency incidents. From next month the response team will be covering occasional Friday and Saturday nights until the early hours as part of a wider police-council initiative to police the night time economy.

Regarding your last comment, it is the coalition government's unparalleled cuts in public services spending, depriving Southwark of more than £80m that will lead to severe cuts in community safety spending within this authority and the Metropolitan Police. This will rather seriously put at risk all of the positive work that we have developed over the last decade and perhaps Councillor Nelson and her Liberal Democrat colleagues could better spend their time defending local residents from brutal cuts.

42. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR FINANCE AND RESOURCES FROM COUNCILLOR MARK GETTLESON

Please can the cabinet member provide the number of vacant posts that exist within the council at present?

RESPONSE

The council's official establishment shows 1002 vacant posts. These posts are not all full time vacancies and many posts are now being held for deletion to achieve savings.

43. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR FINANCE AND RESOURCES FROM COUNCILLOR DENISE CAPSTICK

How many members of staff have retired in the last five years? Please can you provide a breakdown by year?

RESPONSE

Over five years 433 people have retired.

2009/10	110
2008/09	82
2007/08	103
2006/07	74
2005/06	64

44. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR HEALTH AND ADULT SOCIAL CARE FROM COUNCILLOR LEWIS ROBINSON

What steps will be taken with GP practices in the borough that are continuing to score negatively on quality of achievement and access following the publication of the disappointing GP performance indicators scorecard?

RESPONSE

Improving access to patients

I have raised this issue with the primary care trust (PCT). They encourage all practices to engage with their own patients to discuss ways that they can improve access to patients by encouraging patients to provide feedback on services they receive.

In addition the PCT monitors access through the national patient survey but is aware that the survey is based on a relatively small number of patients when broken down to practice level.

Contractual sanctions

The PCT has and will make use of the contractual levers it has at its disposal. As part of the recent performance framework policy they have been concentrating on the bottom five practices on the balanced scorecard and they are all subject to the development of an action plan to improve services.

All five practices have implemented their action plans and are at various stages of completion. As part of the action plan there has been key performance targets attached to the action plan to demonstrate improvement.

Since the balanced scorecard has been refreshed with the latest available data this has had the impact of moving practices up or down on the scorecard.

The PCT are now working with eight practices. They will continue to work with the practices until they have completed the action plan and achieved the desired outcomes

and improved the provision of services to patients. Alternatively, if the practice fails in some or all of the requirements, contractual sanctions are applied.

Overall, the scorecard has been a success – it lets patients see how practices are doing.