

Councillor Abdul Mohamed

Cabinet Member for Equalities and Community
Engagement

Southwark Council

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Dear Councillor,

The future for Southwark- rising to the community challenge

Last year, in line with our commitment to make the council more open and transparent, the council set up a democracy commission. The commission was tasked with finding ways to bring the council closer to local residents, make the council more accountable to local people and more connected with their concerns.

The first phase considered the council's primary decision-making forum: council assembly. The commission found, through consultation with local residents, experts and councillors, that council assembly should have a more consensual atmosphere and should spend more time discussing the local issues that matter to residents. One of the recommendations it made to bring this about was to change the way assembly meetings work to allow time for themed debates on issues of local concern.

I am pleased to formally announce that the first themed debate will take place as part of the next Council Assembly meeting **on Wednesday 6 April 2011 at 7pm in Southwark Town Hall**. The first theme is "the future for Southwark - rising to the community challenge".

We know that the council's role will have to change over the coming years, due to spending cuts and changing resident expectations and needs. We know that if the council is to change successfully local communities must have a greater say in and control over the future of the borough. We want to hear councillors' ideas on how we can get local people more directly involved in shaping their borough over the coming years.

Specifically, we would like councillors to bring ideas to the meeting on:

- *How can we give residents, or businesses, more control over services?*
- *What role could the community play in helping to develop and deliver services?*
- *How should we measure success and how should we communicate our progress with residents?*

Discussions through the budget consultation demonstrated that there are opportunities for communities to rise to the challenge of looking at alternative forms of service delivery across a range of areas. This included library provision, play provision, youth activities, initiatives to tackle and prevent anti-social behaviour and cross-agency activities (e.g. health). Southwark also has a vibrant voluntary and community sector and proud history of community involvement, through such bodies as tenants and residents associations, for example. Harnessing our borough's social capital will be key to getting through the challenges that lie ahead and building a fairer future for all.

I would like to encourage all councillors to:

- Speak in the debate
- Submit a motion
- Ask a question

When planning your contribution for the evening, please remember that the council's budget and administration's commitments are now fixed. This debate is an opportunity to be forward-looking and help shape the council's future plans.

Ahead of the meeting, we will also be asking residents and community groups to:

- Keep an eye on the website where they will be able to post their views, or even submit a question or raise a deputation at the April meeting from mid-March: www.southwark.gov.uk/democracy
- Attend Council Assembly on 6 April from 7pm at the Town Hall to hear the debate
- Submit a council question – Deadline: Midnight, Thursday 31 March 2011.

This is a first for the council and I think a really exciting opportunity for you to have your say and directly influence the issues at one of our most important meetings. I look forward to your involvement in this important community debate. Please don't hesitate to get in touch with me if you have any questions or suggestions.

Yours faithfully

Abdul Mohamed

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