

COUNCIL ASSEMBLY

(ORDINARY)

WEDNESDAY 6 APRIL 2011

PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

1. QUESTION FROM TONY OSBORNE TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR FINANCE, RESOURCES AND COMMUNITY SAFETY

Should all the contents of a stage 1 complaint letter when escalated to stage 2 be responded to by the stage 2 investigator in accordance with council procedures? If they are not and there is no supporting statement for the stage 1 responses is the investigation considered to be completed?

RESPONSE

When a stage 1 complaint is escalated to stage 2, it is allocated to a complaints investigator. They will look into the details of that particular case, including speaking to officers involved, reviewing the correspondence and speaking/corresponding with the complainant. They will then produce a stage 2 outcome which is sent to the complainant, indicating if the complaint is upheld/not upheld or partially upheld. The letter will also cover if compensation is payable and if further actions are required, for example repairs to be completed.

The stage 2 investigator will normally respond to the issues from the stage 1 complaint, plus any further issues that the customer raises when requesting a stage 2 complaint. However each complaint is different and it may be that the investigator does not cover all the issues from the stage 1 complaint because they have already been resolved, or the customer wishes the investigator to concentrate on a particular area.

If the complainant does not agree with the stage 2 outcome they can escalate to stage 3, and eventually to the Local Government Ombudsman who are independent of the council.

2. QUESTION FROM MICK BARNARD TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR FINANCE, RESOURCES AND COMMUNITY SAFETY

If an offer of half the market rent for a monthly renewable lease was made on a commercial property, unoccupied for 2 years, with a view to full market rent lease within 18 months would Southwark Property be justified in refusing the offer given the requirements of "best consideration"?

RESPONSE

Any offer received for a council commercial property to let is based on the prospective tenant being willing and able to meet their obligations under a lease. In the hypothetical question posed we would look at the prospective tenant and their abilities to meet obligations elsewhere. Typically a bank reference and other landlords' reference would be helpful. Where this could not be satisfactorily demonstrated we would decline the offer.

3. QUESTION FROM COLIN HARTRIDGE-PRICE TO THE LEADER

There has been considerable opposition from local residents to a 9/11 memorial (its correct description) in the Potters Fields Park. How will you make sure the council does not ignore the views of local residents?

RESPONSE

The 9/11 London project proposed to install a work of public art on Potters Fields Park, to act as a focus for an educational programme to educate young people about the events of 9/11, not a memorial.

The council has facilitated a consultation on this proposal so that local residents have the opportunity to make their feelings and opinions clear. Following this consultation the 9/11 London project has agreed to hold further consultation.

SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM COLIN HARTRIDGE-PRICE TO THE LEADER

My supplemental is that there's an internal guidance document; it's headed 'Internal Guidance Note for Commemorative Donations to Parks and Open Spaces', and it refers to requests for commemorative benches, trees and memorials. My supplemental is, when will that document be completed and adopted?

As far as the actual response to my question, item 3 here, it's not a response at all. The question was 'How will you make sure the council does not ignore the views of local residents?'; that's not covered in the response, and also I find it playing with words that you're referring to this as a 'public work of art'; it's a memorial. New York is only making the steel girders from the Twin Towers available for memorials. So don't let's get carried away with saying that this is a public work of art; if you're using the twisted girders from the Twin Towers, it's a memorial because they're only being released for that purpose. What I would like is a written response in due course to the actual question, which was 'how will you ensure the views of local residents are not ignored?' Thank you.

SUPPLEMENTAL RESPONSE

Well, I want to thank Mr Hartridge-Price for coming this evening and raising the issue. I know it's an issue which has concerned some local residents greatly, and obviously the council does listen to what local people say on these issues. I think it was important that the council helped facilitate a meeting where members of the local community would come and talk to those who are behind this project – which I believe is motivated only through good aspirations and good motives; and I think it was important that the council played a role in facilitating that meeting. With regard to the first part of his question, I don't know the answer to that, and I'll have to come back to him on that.

On the second part of the question; with the greatest respect, I do think I have given an answer to you. We can disagree – and I think half the problems behind some of the very entrenched positions on this issue arise out of whether people consider this to be a memorial or whether they consider it a public work of art, which is what the 9-11 Project describe it as; so I do think I've given as full an answer as I can. This is a council which is committed to openness,

which is committed to consultation; and the issues he has raised tonight and others have raised in this process will be listened to.

At the moment, my understanding is in any event that the 9-11 London Project have decided to postpone any implementation of bringing forward the statue or work of art at Potter's Field for the time being. So to that extent, I suppose the 9-11 London project have been listening to your views also.

4. QUESTION FROM BARRY MASON TO THE LEADER

The Southwark Connect 2 project to turn the disused railway bridge by South Bermondsey station into an east-west walking/cycling route that will help regenerate the area, is now formally "at risk". The £600,000 Big Lottery grant will be lost. What is the council doing to ensure this project proceeds?

RESPONSE FROM THE CABINET MEMBER FOR TRANSPORT, ENVIRONMENT AND RECYCLING

The council is not responsible for this delay. The facts are that the land ownership is not with the council and negotiating with land owners for them to give up rights and allow people to pass over their land is a complex negotiation, especially when there is no possibility of purchasing that land. Our officers have sought to get resolution of the issues over access with Network Rail and the other private land owners. This land is either side of a redundant railway bridge over Rotherhithe New Road.

Officers and the Connect 2 Steering Group are working hard to deliver the Connect2 project. The key issues for resolution are negotiation over access to Network Rail and other private land either side of the redundant railway bridge over Rotherhithe New Road.

Officers continue to negotiate with Network Rail in conjunction with partners, Sustrans. We still await formal confirmation by Network Rail of their acceptance of our land take requirements, which will enable legal agreements to be signed. It is disappointing that this has taken so long and risks delaying the project.

We believe we are very close to signing an agreement if the partners in this agreement hold to their intentions; and we believe that they will.

Renewal, the development company responsible for the Millwall Football Ground area regeneration, are also keen on a possible extension of the scheme to include a South Bermondsey Station cycle link to Bolina Road. To explore more fully this exciting proposal, I am attending a meeting at the Sustrans office with representatives from Renewal on 14 April 2011.

Meanwhile Network Rail has approved access to their site to enable the preliminary works (land/ecological surveys and due-diligence investigation), which will inform the detail design. These works are due to be completed by Monday 11 April 2011.

On the western side of the bridge, the Directors of Gainsborough Court who own the land have agreed in principle to the project and associated proposals. In the meantime further negotiations are on hold pending formal confirmation from Network Rail that their part of the land will be released to the Council.

All other parts of the project are progressing according to the agreed project timetable.

Those who are coming forward to campaign with the council should also be encouraged to talk to their local MP about Network Rail's role.

SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM BARRY MASON TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR TRANSPORT, ENVIRONMENT AND RECYCLING

One of the many regeneration effects of this simple project will be to add £15,000 to the value of each of the 700 flats west of the bridge. That's £10.5 million worth of better access to South Bermondsey Station in an area that has yet to see the new Southwark money. What financial benefit does Southwark Council put on this huge-value project that's still officially at risk?

SUPPLEMENTAL RESPONSE

Thank you Madam Deputy Mayor, and thank you to Mr Mason for coming along and showing your commitment to this project.

We have been working together as part of the Connect 2 Steering Group, and we know that at the moment the entrenched position is from Network Rail, who own the land to the site which we wish to connect to. I'm reliably informed by officers that Network Rail are telling us that they will be prepared to sign this piece of land off to us so we can work together with Sustrans so we can complete Connect 2.

I think clearly the project is very valuable to everybody – it's valuable to cyclists, it's valuable to this council and it's valuable to Renew, who are building that area and who have been very supportive of this and wish to actually add to the project. I think that is a real testament to the value of this project. We have committed officer time, member time; we've worked very closely with various members of the steering group and members of the public to deliver this project. It's been very frustrating, the time it's taken. But I'm very optimistic that we may have some good news soon.

5. QUESTION FROM PETER SALTER TO THE LEADER

The "Southwark Connect 2" project to bring a railway bridge into use as a walking and cycling route is "at risk". This project would provide valuable amenity. If the Big Lottery grant is lost, can Southwark Council ensure the project proceeds?

RESPONSE

Please see the answer to question 4 above.

6. QUESTION FROM JOHN FRANKS TO THE LEADER

Due to lack of progress of the Southwark Connect 2 scheme this has been identified as 'at risk' by Sustrans. This means that the £600,000 this Big Lottery grant could be lost. What is the council doing to ensure that the scheme goes ahead?

RESPONSE

Please see the answer to question 4 above.

7. QUESTION FROM STEPHEN HILL TO THE LEADER

The Southwark Connect 2 project to turn the disused railway bridge by South Bermondsey station into an east-west walking/cycling route that will help regenerate the area, is now formally "at risk". The £600,000 Big Lottery grant will be lost. What is the council doing to ensure this project proceeds?

RESPONSE

Please see the answer to question 4 above.

8. QUESTION FROM ANN WARREN TO THE LEADER

The very popular Southwark Connect 2 project to turn the disused railway bridge by South Bermondsey station into a walking and cycling route is now formally "at risk". The £600,000 Big Lottery grant will be lost. Will the council ensure this project goes ahead?

RESPONSE

Please see the answer to question 4 above.

9. QUESTION FROM IAN MCPHERSON TO THE LEADER

The 'Connect 2' project converting a disused railway bridge at South Bermondsey into a walking and cycling route is now reportedly 'at risk'. How will the council ensure that this project goes ahead, as it would be a travesty if the £600,000 Big Lottery grant for this scheme was lost?

RESPONSE

Please see the answer to question 4 above.

10. QUESTION FROM SALLY EVA TO THE LEADER

There is £600,000 of Lottery funding to be spent on the Southwark Connect-2 project. This could soon be lost. What is being done to spend this urgently? The scheme is to turn the unused railway bridge by South Bermondsey Station into a walking and cycling route.

RESPONSE

Please see the answer to question 4 above.

11. QUESTION FROM JULIAN GRIFFITHS-SEARLE TO THE LEADER

By her direct interventions to assist the 9-11 London Project Team achieve their goal to install a memorial on Potters Field Park, did the Chief Executive of Southwark act in an appropriate way?

RESPONSE

Yes. The chief executive consulted with both Councillor Stanton when he was the leader and with me when I became leader. The 9/11 London project

proposed to install a work of public art on Potters Fields Park, to act as a focus for an educational programme to educate young people about the events of 9/11, not a memorial. We facilitated a consultation on this proposal, following which the 9/11 London project has agreed to hold further consultation.

SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM JULIAN GRIFFITHS-SEARLE TO THE LEADER

First of all, I'm pleased to discover that the chief executive consulted with both lead councillors, that's Nick Stanton and yourself. The only thing is, from the correspondence which I have seen, it seems to me that this was a done deal in terms that Southwark Council had already made a commitment to supporting the installation of this – and we'll call it a monument or memorial, because memorial involves a memory of an event or a person – so that's the definition of 'memorial'; and this represents 9-11 itself, so I also support my colleague in saying that this is a memorial.

One of the things that has disappointed me, I suppose, was that with this going forward and with full support of the council, was that obviously we did have a consultation with the residents, but it was quite late in the day, and that was a disappointment. The only thing is that, when you talk about residents, that basically, this united lots of residents in the area. This was from Bermondsey East, from Jacob's Island, from the Shad Thames Residents' Association, from Fair Street, and also had support from Bankside. So these are the residents – and I think they should have been consulted earlier. That's all I have to say.

SUPPLEMENTAL RESPONSE

I want to thank Mr Griffiths-Searle again for coming, raising these issues – it is important that we have this dialogue. I think it's important to recognise as well as the discussions that may have taken place between the chief executive and Councillor Stanton and myself, as leaders of the council; the council at the end of the day was only one stakeholder in this project. The proposal came from the 9-11 London Project group. They would have to have sought permission from the Potter's Field Park Trust, and part of that process obviously the council played a role in.

It came to planning committee at the end of the December, and I think one of the recommendations that planning committee asked, that Councillor Al-Samerai made representations, that there should be some further consultation in response to local concern.

So I think maybe it hasn't gone in the way in which one would like in terms of the greater public consultation before coming to planning etc, but the council can't direct everything in every scheme such as this; where it's only a stakeholder and not absolutely in charge of everything. Some responsibility must lay with other people who also want to see this happen or who also have a vested interest in it.

So I hear what you say and take it on board – I do think that, as I said, that the consultation event did play an important part in the decision which the 9-11 London Project have now taken to postpone going forward with this piece of art; which I'll stick with – public work of art – at this time. I'm sure you know how to get in touch with me in the future if concerns raise again on this or any other subject.