

8 September 2011

Dear Councillor,

Themed Debate: State of the Borough

On 8 August this year, London suffered the worst disturbances that our city had seen for decades. When the State of the Borough theme was chosen, by the Council Assembly Business Panel, for our October meeting, no one could have predicted the outbreak of that disorder and looting or the way that it spread across the city into the heart of Southwark's communities. Nor could anyone have predicted the community's response to those despicable acts, which was to come together and show Southwark at its best.

The enduring image of that week – the one that most sums up the state of our borough and our city – I believe, is not of a burning furniture shop in Croydon, but of a wall filled with individual messages of peace in Peckham.

But we cannot ignore the disturbances themselves, nor shy away from the task of learning from them. That is why over this month the cabinet and I are leading a community conversation, asking local people what went wrong, and what we can all do to make a bigger commitment to our community.

We would like our State of the Borough council assembly meeting to form a part of that community conversation, both celebrating Southwark's rich civil society and asking the tough questions about what more we have to do.

We would like members to consider before and at the meeting:

- What caused the outbreak of disturbances and looting in Southwark?*
- What caused the community to respond in the positive way that it did?*
- What can we all do to continue to build our civil society in Southwark?*

I am clear that that the reaction of local residents to come together as communities following 8 August was not an isolated incident or one-off event. There are people up and down our borough who, week in and week out, give themselves to public service, who volunteer or who just go out of their way to help improve and enrich the lives others. The big question, the one we all have a role in answering, is how we can harness and enrich this community spirit.

I would like to encourage all councillors to speak in the debate and hope that we will be able find answers to these questions together.

Yours faithfully



Cllr Peter John
Leader of Southwark Council