

SOUTHWARK COUNCIL

COUNCIL ASSEMBLY

(ORDINARY MEETING)

WEDNESDAY 6 JULY 2011

URGENT QUESTION

1. URGENT QUESTION TO THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL FROM COUNCILLOR ANOOD AL-SAMERAI

Could the Leader please give an update on the serious fire at Lupin Point?

RESPONSE

Around 40 fire fighters attended Lupin Point on Thursday 28 June to tackle a significant fire on the seventeenth floor. The London Ambulance Service were also in attendance and treated one woman for smoke inhalation on the scene. There were no other casualties. The block has recently had substantial fire safety works carried out, including new front entrance doors, screens fitted to each landing and ventilation works. The building's fire safety measures appear to have worked as they should.

The immediate response to the fire included setting up a rest centre at the Beormund Centre, staffed by officers from the housing, children's services and community safety and the Tenant Management Organisation, Two Towers, who are responsible for the day to day management of the block. The Red Cross provided food for those residents who needed it. In the late afternoon, after the fire had been extinguished, residents of Lupin Point began to be allowed back into their homes. All but residents from two flats were allowed back into the block by the end of the day. The council found alternative accommodation for the residents from those two flats that evening.

The resident of the property affected by the fire remains in temporary accommodation whilst work is carried out to repair her property.

I would like to thank all of those who were involved in the emergency response to the fire for the professionalism and bravery that they displayed, and all of those who helped the residents through what must have been a deeply worrying experience, for their commitment and compassion.

While the cause of the fire was initially reported as a lightning strike, we now understand that this was not the case. It is thought that a Beko fridge freezer may have been the cause of the fire. Beko have since issued a national statement and pledged to replace the faulty part on all affected fridge freezers. The council is writing to all residents to inform them to get in touch with Beko directly if their fridge is one of the models affected, and a notice has been posted on the council's website.

SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR ANOOD AL-SAMERAI

Thanks very much Madam Mayor and thank you to the leader for his answer and to all the emergency services and council staff and to my ward colleague Councillor Mann,

who was fantastic and who spent hours helping residents in very distressing circumstances.

I just wondered whether the leader was aware that one of the residents had actually made a complaint of a burning smell before the fire, made a complaint to the council's call centre and I wonder if he was aware of this and what he was doing about it?

RESPONSE

No, I was not aware of that, Madam Mayor. I have had a briefing on it today but I have not looked into any other matters. There are certain aspects of this which are continuing to be investigated and having raised this, this will be one aspect that will be investigated. I know Councillor Wingfield and Gerri Scott are taking this extremely seriously; obviously because we know that there are Beko appliances in homes right across the borough so this is something we are taking very seriously. Obviously if there was an alert which was missed earlier on then obviously we need to look into that; but we will take that on board.

SECOND SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR ANOOD AL-SAMERAI

I am really quite troubled that you are not aware of this complaint. Certainly I had a call from the press about it this week and they told me the council had given them a statement saying it was being investigated, so I am really troubled if the leader of the council has not been aware of that. I wondered whether he really does have confidence in the cabinet member for housing and the way he has been shoving around housing management over the last year, and whether this is really showing that it is really dangerous to start getting rid of area housing officers and area housing office managers?

RESPONSE

Well I don't think it gives rise to that debate or any questions of confidence in anyone. I think as I have indicated all these aspects are being investigated. I think that Councillor Wingfield was aware of these calls; and calls are being tracked. When she asked me if I was aware, no, I was not aware.

I don't think that the supplemental question in fairness to her is particularly helpful in moving this debate on or moving this investigation on. I have told her that we are looking in to this, I have told her that we are taking this seriously; of course we do. Nobody takes a fire of this seriousness lightly, and she will know that we were both in Birmingham at the LGA conference last week when news of this came through and it really did preoccupy us for a couple of hours whilst we looked into what was going on. It was very worrying and it is not something that we take lightly.

The wider housing management changes are probably for another debate but I have absolute confidence and faith in both members and officers who are looking into this matter. I will ensure and make sure, together with Councillor Wingfield, that all residents and the public know what the outcomes of this investigation are in due course.