

**COUNCIL ASSEMBLY**

**(ORDINARY)**

**WEDNESDAY 12 OCTOBER 2011**

**PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

**1. QUESTION FROM PATRICK YORKE TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR FINANCE, RESOURCES AND COMMUNITY SAFETY**

What is the net gain received from our disposable assets i.e. buildings, stocks up to date? And what are the purposed secured funds being used for?

**RESPONSE**

The net capital receipts received over the past five years amounts to £192.3 million. These funds have been used to contribute to funding the council's capital programme, which over the past five years has amounted to £850.4 million.

Future net receipts will be used to contribute to the funding of the 10-year capital programme, which was agreed at council assembly on 6 July 2011 and which amounts to expenditure of £351 million over the next 10 years.

Last 5 years net receipts and actual capital expenditure:

<b>Year</b>	<b>Net Capital Receipts</b>	<b>Capital Expenditure</b>
	£000's	£000's
<b>2006/07</b>	28,194	147,456
<b>2007/08</b>	35,400	140,227
<b>2008/09</b>	30,093	185,935
<b>2009/10</b>	53,127	202,419
<b>2010/11</b>	45,479	174,381
<b>Total</b>	<b>192,293</b>	<b>850,418</b>

Current agreed 10 year capital programme:

<b>Year</b>	<b>Capital Programme</b>
	£000's
<b>2011/12</b>	226,470
<b>2012/13</b>	209,191
<b>2013/14</b>	119,422
<b>2014/15</b>	98,061
<b>2015/16</b>	110,791
<b>2016/17</b>	10,325
<b>2017/18</b>	6,930
<b>2018/19</b>	7,195
<b>2019/20</b>	7,195
<b>2020/21</b>	7,245
<b>Total</b>	<b>802,824</b>

**2. QUESTION FROM DORCAS FAYEMI TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES**

In these times of financial restraint how does Southwark Council justify paying up to £63 daily for carers to supervise disabled children at home after school when there are organisation that can provide the desired level of care and more for a number of these children at £10 per day?

**RESPONSE**

The council buys and directly provides a range of services to meet the needs of disabled children and support their parents and carers. This includes a variety of types of short break (formerly known as "respite care").

The cost of short breaks provision varies because of a number of variables, including the child's needs, the facility used, and the skills and experience of the carer. The average hourly cost of a carer in the family home is around £15.50. The hourly cost of an after school or holiday provision for a group of children with mild or moderate disabilities can be as low as £10 per hour. Some children have high cost daily packages because they have high assessed needs. By supporting these children with more complex needs in the community, we can prevent them entering care which is more expensive than supporting them at home with their families.

We seek to deliver best value for money, and must always balance cost with quality. We pay no more than market prices for the required type and quality of provision that children with complex needs require.

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

Can you provide the response times for responding to emails, letters and phone calls from the public and explain what action can be taken in the case of either a councillor or officer should they fail to comply with that requirement?

**RESPONSE**

Southwark's response times are 3 days for acknowledging correspondence and 10 days to answer emails and letters, and generally within 24 hours for returning phone calls. Depending on the issues raised a response may take longer, however an update should be provided to customers if this is likely to be the case.

If an officer fails to respond to correspondence or phone calls it may be an oversight on their part and we would encourage customers to contact the person again. The complaint process would be the appropriate process to use if an officer still fails to respond. If it is identified that a specific officer is failing to respond to correspondence or telephone calls then advice and guidance would be offered, combined with training if appropriate. Disciplinary action may be considered if the circumstances warrant this.

Councillors are not covered by the council's correspondence standards, and the national councillor code of conduct places no obligation on councillors to answer correspondence. Councillors' accountability is through the ballot box.

**4. QUESTION FROM JEFF KELLAND TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR FINANCE, RESOURCES AND COMMUNITY SAFETY**

The council on 1 August 2011 ended the lease on the first floor of Nutmeg House, Gainsford Street community space. What consultation took place with Tooley Street tenants and residents, how have the assets been disposed of and what compensation will be available for the loss of this community asset?

**RESPONSE**

The premises on the first floor of Nutmeg House, 60 Gainsford Street, SE1 was leased by the council from Dorrington Properties PLC for the use of Tooley Street TRA. The lease was set to expire in December 2014.

On 1 August 2011, the council terminated the lease. The tenants and residents association (TRA) had become defunct in 2009, and there had been no use of the property since then. Under the terms of the lease, it could only be used to hold meetings, and not for other activities, so without a TRA its purpose had ended.

The council had continued to pay for the upkeep of the hall since the demise of the association, but it was considered poor value for money to continue to pay for a property that was no longer being used. The council received a settlement of £11,200 for the early surrender of the lease and is now making a saving of £14,375 per year in running costs that would have been payable had the lease not been surrendered.

In 2009, the council worked for several months to try to either bring the residents' association back together or to help it dissolve. It was not possible to do either. Before ending this lease, we spoke about our intentions with Fair Community Housing, the tenant management organisation which manages the properties where the TRA had operated. They had no interest in using the property. The contents of the property were given to Fair Community Housing.

Nutmeg House also contains a nursery facility on the ground floor. This will continue to operate with the support of the council.

**5. QUESTION FROM SUE WHITEHEAD TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR TRANSPORT, ENVIRONMENT AND RECYCLING**

Was an assessment made of the impact on the visual environment – particularly in streets of terraced houses – prior to introducing bright blue recycling bins rather than bins of a less obtrusive dark blue as used in other areas, and was the Southwark Streetscape team consulted?

**RESPONSE**

We did not carry out a specific assessment, however we have been using blue containers, currently boxes and bags, for our recycling collections for several years and we believe it is important to keep the colour theme consistent. Many of our residents know that green is for rubbish, brown is for garden (and now food waste) and blue is for recyclable materials.

To maximise recycling it is vital that contamination, where the wrong materials end up in the containers, is minimised. We believe that changing the colour

scheme that has been in use in Southwark since 2001 would lead to confusion and an increase in contamination levels.

During the food waste pilot that we carried out last year, a number of residents and ward councillors specifically requested that the blue boxes were replaced with blue bins as they wanted additional storage capacity. The provision of these bins is in direct response to resident feedback.

With respect to consultation with the Streetscape team, this team is represented in all senior decision making around this project, but also as bins are generally contained within the property boundary consideration of their design is not what we have envisaged to be the purpose of the streetscene design manual. The design manual is intended to relate to the design of fixed physical assets on the highway such as lamp columns, benches, guard rails etc.

We do of course understand that the new blue bins won't be suitable for everybody, which is why we are still offering the old blue boxes as an alternative. This can be requested via the council's customer contact centre on 020 7525 2000.

## **6. QUESTION FROM CHRIS COOPER TO THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL**

Re: Agenda item 6.4 – The government's pension proposals for the LGPS include pay more, work longer get less. This will have detrimental impact upon the workforce, older members and younger members of our community. Could this item not be changed to state that the council fully support the TUC day of action?

### **RESPONSE**

I have considerable sympathy for the way workers from across the public sector, including all of our staff, face the prospect of larger pension contributions for a smaller return. This government has treated public sector staff and the trade unions who represent them with contempt. This is particularly the case for members of the local government pension scheme, which the government itself has recognised as fully-funded, and yet it still refuses to rule out making punitive changes to it.

I would like to assure all our staff and trade unionists that if the ballot supports a day of action, I will not cross a picket line.