

COUNCIL ASSEMBLY

(ORDINARY MEETING)

TUESDAY 29 NOVEMBER 2011

PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

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

How do you justify an SEN transport policy that prevents disabled children attending after school clubs when the savings made using the services of a charity status organisation rather than home carers will more than offset any additional cost of transporting them from school to the club of their choice.

RESPONSE

Southwark has a duty to provide travel assistance for eligible children to enable them to get to and from school during term time to access their curriculum activity. This duty does not automatically extend to after school provision. Neither the current school travel policy 2011 nor the previous home to school travel policy made provision for transport to and from after school activities - any request for this type of journey would be considered as an exception at the council's discretion.

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. These costs would remain high wherever the children were being provided with support. There would therefore be no obvious savings arising from using a voluntary sector provider as these children are assessed as having high 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. This includes the cost of transporting children where needed.

2. QUESTION FROM VICKY NAISH TO THE LEADER

Could you list the grounds on which a deputation request can be rejected in addition to those listed under council assembly procedure rules page 119 paragraph 4 of the constitution and indicate in which council document each of the reasons for rejection can be found.

RESPONSE

There are no grounds other than those listed in rule 2.6 on deputations.

SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM VICKY NAISH

Thank you Madam Mayor. I'd just like to say a few words before I ask my supplementary, concerning myself. Some of you may know me, some of you may not know me. My name is Vicky Naish and I have been on the council for 16 years from 1990 to 2006 and I was deputy leader for 8 years and on my last year I became Mayor of this borough and I have lived in this borough for 68 years.

Given that the recent investigation based its report on the hard evidence when all was required was the balance of probability, and on the grounds it would lead to the leader considering rejecting the following deputation request, can the community be confident that the information contained within the constitution and other council policies is not meaningless and that those who are charged with ensuring that the integrity of such documents do so in the best interest of the residents of Southwark; and could I also ask the leader please if he would have a cross party meeting with me as you well know that my case has been going on for five years and I would like to put it to bed in the New Year. Thank you.

RESPONSE

Thank you Madam Mayor, I would like to thank Vicky for her question. I think she can be assured that the integrity of the council and the way it works is secure. She has raised issues and complaints with regards to specific matters which have been investigated under the council's complaints procedure by independent investigators and I think the fact that she has come along here this evening and is able raise public questions and continue to quiz myself and others within the administration, demonstrates the integrity of what we are seeking to do in this council. At a time when we are facing huge and unprecedented government cuts and trying to put budgets together which meet the challenges which we face as a community and as a administration, sometimes some issues take priority and precedence over others but she will always have my attention. I hope she knows that and believes that and accepts that, and I will continue always to listen to her and if she needs to meet with me further I will be delighted to.

3. QUESTION FROM MS K SMART TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Can the cabinet member for equalities please me inform if there were community consultations prior to Southwark Human Right Equality Bureau (S.H.R.E.B) being reconstructed by Southwark Law Centre and Southwark Citizen Advice Centre?

RESPONSE

The council carried out a mapping exercise of existing services and produced a consultation document for the future delivery of equalities and human rights services in the borough. The document contained a consultation timetable. The council invited the community's preferred options for the delivery of these services; as well as calling for initial proposals for how they might best be delivered. The council's communications office announced the consultation through a press release on 16 March 2010 and the document was posted on the council's website.

Following the press release the consultation document was extensively presented at a number of voluntary and community sector forums and also comprehensively distributed through community networks. A number of community organisations formally responded to the consultation. Their views were taken into account in the development of the specification for the new service.