

**SOUTHWARK COUNCIL**

**COUNCIL ASSEMBLY**

**(ORDINARY MEETING)**

**WEDNESDAY 25 JANUARY 2012**

**URGENT QUESTION**

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

Given the strength of feeling expressed at recent community council meetings will he look again at the proposed mergers, and abolition of community council planning committees?

**RESPONSE**

At a time when the government is cutting our budget by tens of millions of pounds every year, when we are having to make tough choices about environment, children's services, adult care and every area of council spending, I think it's absolutely right that we set the target of £344,000 savings from community council meetings. Councillor Al-Samerai and her colleagues had an opportunity to influence how these savings were made through the Democracy Commission, but as a group they only bothered to turn up to a third of the meetings. She and her colleagues had the opportunity to propose an alternative way to make the savings, but unlike the Conservative and Labour representatives, they chose not to do that. Finally, if she and her colleagues did not like the Labour proposal they had the opportunity to vote for that alternative Conservative proposal, but they chose instead to withdraw from the process in a political stunt. Given all of this, I find it difficult to see why we should overrule the democratically agreed recommendations of the Democracy Commission and to take seriously Councillor Al-Samerai's objections.

She might also want to note two further facts:

When the Liberal Democrats proposed community councils in 2003, they did not originally want a separate Bermondsey community council. It was Labour that proposed the community council area.

This year community councils will be given a cleaner, greener, safer revenue fund, giving them power over revenue funding for the first time. This represents a major development in terms of community council powers that her own group could have introduced when they were in power, but chose not to. This demonstrates our commitment as an administration to enhancing community councils, whilst having to find necessary savings, and further goes to show the strangeness of Councillor Al-Samerai's position.