

**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 have 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.

SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION TO THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL FROM COUNCILLOR ANOOD AL-SAMERAI

Yes I do, thank you Madam Mayor. And thank you to the leader for his answer, which does not really address the point of the question about whether he is ignoring the

strength of feeling of the community council meetings in Bermondsey, Rotherhithe and Borough and Bankside recently.

I get what he is sort of trying to get at, with his point about us withdrawing from the Democracy Commission. I suppose from our point of view if we were being listened to in the Democracy Commission, how was it that the outcome could be announced in advance of the Democracy Commission actually deciding that outcome?

RESPONSE

Well I think it is right that it was not announced before the end of the work of the Democracy Commission. Individual councillors may have expressed their own views or opinions about what the outcome should be, but it was for the Democracy Commission itself to determine what the outcomes of the Democracy Commission can be.

As for the strength of feeling which she reiterated in her supplemental question, well I have had no formal representations from any community council meeting although I am happy to listen. I follow closely the SE1 forum to see what is going on in this part of the borough and I am very grateful for what we see there and the strength of feeling here was represented by two people in favour of the reduction of community councils meetings to five, and two people against, including Councillor Al-Samerai being one of them. That is the same number of replies on the forum as there had been to an item about a lost Yorkshire terrier and five and a half times the number of replies to an item about a stray cat, so I don't see a great community ground swell rising up in respect of community councils at this time.

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

That is incredibly offensive to the people who I was at Bermondsey community council with last week. I am sure your colleague can tell you about the strength of feeling there and certainly my understanding from the other community councils. But I am very happy to go back and report to those residents how you feel about what they expressed at those meetings. Just going back to the point about it was not announced in advance of the Democracy Commission, how it is then that Councillor Seaton's prophetic predictions turned out to be correct?

RESPONSE

As we know Councillor Seaton is a very wise man and the people of East Walworth are very lucky to have him as a councillor for nearly six years and I am sure they will elect him for another four years when he stands in 2014.

As for her point about offence to the people of Bermondsey, what I said made quite clear that I had no further representation from Bermondsey community council on what happened at their meeting. I am happy to listen and to respond to any representations which are brought forward in due course but I think it is right that that should come in a formal way so it can be considered by the cabinet in a formal way and council assembly in a formal way in due course.