

COUNCIL ASSEMBLY

(ORDINARY MEETING)

WEDNESDAY 16 OCTOBER

QUESTIONS ON REPORTS

ITEM 8.2: CONSTITUTIONAL REVIEW 2013/14

1. QUESTION TO THE LEADER FROM COUNCILLOR TIM McNALLY

Has any review of the value for money that the deputy cabinet members provide for their allowances taken place since the posts were introduced? In the past month, how many hours have each of the deputy cabinet members spent on duties relating to their respective portfolios, and on what specifically was this time spent?

RESPONSE

Our deputy cabinet members (DCMs) are doing important work for the council. Councillor Williams is currently reviewing how we can improve the standard of private rented housing in the borough, Councillor Merrill has been working closely with officers to ensure that residents receive the best levels of customer service from our new in-house contact centre, and Councillor the Rt Revd Oyewole has been further strengthening the council's links with faith communities in the borough. As a point of comparison, DCMs receive a band 1a special responsibility allowance (SRA). This is the same band as, for example, the opposition whip or the deputy leader of the opposition.

It is right that we should scrutinise DCMs and that members be satisfied that they are delivering for the borough in the same way that any members with an SRA should. We therefore proposed this year that the overview and scrutiny committee should be able to interview deputy cabinet members in the same way as cabinet members. I understand that OSC are currently considering how they want to do this. This will give members an opportunity to question them about their work and the value they bring.

SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION TO THE LEADER FROM COUNCILLOR TIM McNALLY

Thank you Mr Mayor, I would like to thank the leader for his response, and I must call it a response because it really is not an answer, is it? He was asked to quantify how many hours these deputy cabinet members have spent in the past month and what a surprise; he can't actually put a figure on it or actually quantify it because these are after all just back benchers.

I welcome the first stage of his answer though that says the deputy cabinet members would be able to be called before OSC because then finally they might be upping their game. But we are still unable to ask them a council assembly question, so I would like to ask the leader when we will be able to scrutinise and hold to account at council assembly and at scrutiny all councillors who are in receipt of extra special responsibility allowances?

RESPONSE

Well I want to thank Councillor McNally for his supplementary question, his question would mean we will be able to scrutinise the leader of the opposition and anyone who had an SRA, and of course if we added questions to deputy cabinet members onto the agenda that would just be another set of questions that were answered to which there were no follows ups and which we would not get to for the second meeting in the last few.

You know I haven't detailed all the hours that deputy cabinet members have been working, although they have all been working in the last month on issues, partly for the reason, this is one of those old issues frothing at the mouth. The Liberal Democrats come forward each year pledging to, you know, bring the axe to the deputy cabinet members – and it is only going to be a matter of days presumably before the word will go out that deputy cabinet members are secure under a Liberal Democrat administration through to 2018. I have bad news for him though. Even if you cut deputy cabinet members' allowances, that is not going to fill the £25 million funding gap that your government is passing to us next year, nor will it fill the funding gap of £40 million in the year after. So carry on, it's a great old laugh, we will no doubt see this in the budget next year as well and we look forward to that. It is going to presumably pay for improvements to roads, for community wardens, for reinstating community council meetings including planning meetings; it is amazing what he can do with about £9,000 when there is a political imagination which has absolutely no basis in reality.

So I thank Councillor McNally for the opportunity to talk about deputy cabinet members, the work that they are seriously doing. Each of them carry out important work and Councillor Williams is particularly working on the private rented sector at this minute and we wish him well, I am sure, whilst he is on his honeymoon. And I do thank Councillor McNally for giving me the opportunity to, as I say, underline the importance of the role which each of these deputy cabinet members are performing at the present time.