

SOUTHWARK COUNCIL

COUNCIL ASSEMBLY

(ORDINARY MEETING)

WEDNESDAY 22 JANUARY 2014

URGENT QUESTION

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

Who was on the panel which made the final decision about the name of the new leisure centre at Elephant & Castle? For what reason was 'The Castle' chosen as the new name for the centre over other names receiving more votes in the public poll asking residents what they wanted it to be called?

RESPONSE

I am thrilled that after years of dither and delay from the Liberal Democrats, building at the Elephant and Castle is now underway and at the heart of this is a new state of the art leisure centre. The panel members were:

- Councillor Peter John – Leader of the Council
- Councillor Fiona Colley – Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Corporate Strategy
- Councillor Veronica Ward – Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure, Sport, and Volunteering.

There were a number of officers at the meeting who also provided advice.

The panel considered the results of an online poll which invited members of the public to give their suggestions for the name of the new leisure centre – the details of this were clearly explained at the time that "All the preferences received by the deadline will then be put forward to a panel at Southwark Council for a final decision." The top three shortlisted names and votes were:

- Circuit – 68 votes
- Chaplin – 51 votes
- Castle – 49 votes.

Most of the votes for 'Circuit' came from the same Hackney registered IP address which:

- Voted 7 times in a 10 minute period on 2 December 2013
- Voted 46 times over 45 minutes and a further 4 times later in the day on 3 December 2013
- Voted 5 times in a 5 minute period on 4 December 2013.

We considered that it would not be democratic for this to win as it was clearly one person voting numerous times.

As 'Chaplin' and 'Castle' were two votes apart we considered both. In addition to 49 votes for the castle there were many other votes for names which included reference to the name "Elephant and Castle". We therefore chose 'The Castle' in line with what the poll showed us and to ensure the castle element of the name remained prominent alongside 1 The Elephant. There are also many other places in the borough with 'Chaplin' in the title.

I am surprised that a party which purports to be democratic think that one person voting lots of time should determine the outcome of an election. It is also shameful to then compare a decision to discount one person voting numerous times as 'North Korean'. North Korea is one of the most violent and brutal dictatorships in the world and I would ask the leader of the opposition to apologise for this misjudged comparison.

People at the Elephant and Castle are excited about a new leisure centre which simply would not have happened had the Liberal Democrats been allowed to carry on with their dither and delay. I am sure that like me, they will be shocked that rather than getting behind improvements to local leisure facilities, the Liberal Democrats are arguing for the council to rename a centre based on the views of one person sitting at a computer in Hackney!

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

Thank you Mr Mayor yes I do, I wonder if the leader could tell me what conversations he had with the developers about the name of the leisure centre and what their preference was?

RESPONSE

Absolutely none. I have no idea what their preference was. Mr Mayor can I just say, I mean I do think this is quite a surprising topic to be put forward as an urgent motion and I do think the Liberal Democrats press release on this matter was in poor taste. I think it does diminish the suffering of people in North Korea who during the 1990s lost up to three and half million lives because of the false policies of their regime and it is a despotic regime; and to liken this authority to the North Korean regime, really as I said, diminishes the suffering of the North Korean people.

If this is the most urgent issue which Councillor Al-Samerai wants to bring forward at this time, four months before a local election, she is very welcome to bring it forward; I do question her judgement.

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

Thank you Mr Mayor. I mean it strikes me there is quite a lot of waffle and fake offence taken to an issue which actually is important because it is about how this borough is run. You say you are going to have a poll, you say you are going to have a public vote – you have an all Labour panel, and lo and behold, you make the decision. So actually it is exactly what has happened in this borough over the last four years, centralisation of power and taking away genuine decision making from local people, and if the leader doesn't think what is happening at the Elephant and Castle is an important issue to talk about and if he doesn't think that people there are happy with the way they have been

completely ignored when it comes to issues around affordable housing, then actually he is wrong and out of touch.

I would like to know at what point did he think that having a public vote and then going for the thing that came in third place was the right or honourable thing to do?

RESPONSE

Thank you very much Mr Mayor, it was made clear in the invitation to people to indicate their preference that ultimately this would be a decision taken by a panel of councillors. I do have to say, the first place – you referred to the third place names chosen the first place name had how many votes over fifty votes from one address now if that is the choice of people I don't think it is because it clearly is not the first choice, in terms of the second choice we weighed it up very carefully. When you took into account the number of votes and suggestions that also had been put forward which related to the name of the area, the Elephant and Castle, then that was in a clear majority and that is why we chose the Castle.

I think we should be celebrating the fact that we are having a new leisure centre at the Elephant and Castle, brought to the people of Southwark by this Labour administration. I recall the debates we had prior to 2010 when the Liberal Democrats did not even include any mention of a leisure centre in the heads of terms which they signed with Lend Lease. There is only a leisure centre at the Elephant and Castle being delivered because we as the Labour administration have got on and delivered this regeneration which is important for the people of Southwark and will continue to be important, and we will not be put off by the fake moans and groans from the Liberal Democrats. And if the worst they can throw at us about the Elephant and Castle regeneration is a choice of name, then I say it is pathetic. We will see you on May 22, and I am sure we will not be seeing lots of you on May 23.