

**SOUTHWARK COUNCIL**

**COUNCIL ASSEMBLY**

**(ORDINARY MEETING)**

**WEDNESDAY 26 MARCH 2014**

**URGENT QUESTION**

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

What is the total budget for the Childcare Commission launched on 25 March, and how will the costs be split between Lambeth and Southwark councils?

**RESPONSE**

Dame Tessa Jowell MP, the Leader of Lambeth Council, Councillor Lib Peck and myself launched the Southwark and Lambeth Childcare Commission on Tuesday.

The commission will review existing policy and practice in childcare provision, with particular reference to the experience of parents, children and childcare providers in the central London boroughs of Southwark and Lambeth. The aim of the commission will be to examine the challenges and opportunities in this area and to make recommendations for changes to policy and practice at a national, regional and local level in order to secure childcare provision that:

- is accessible and affordable to parents
- supports parents to be economically active
- is flexible enough for the 24 hour economy and working patterns of parents
- delivers quality education and development for children in the early years
- delivers an appropriate offer for older children.

The cost of the commission will be split equally between Southwark and Lambeth. We are yet to agree a budget, but this will depend upon factors such as the scope of the commission, secretariat required and whether research support is provided within the councils or through an outside agency such as a think tank. We are currently discussing these with Dame Tessa as the chair of the commission.

Officers are currently looking at the process of joint decision making between Southwark and Lambeth when we will agree issues such as budget and the full scope of the commission.

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

I would like to remind the chamber that Labour councillors chose to hear that deputation over a council homes deputation; interesting choices being made across the borough this evening. They are really scared about talking about selling off council homes, aren't they?

Anyway my question, to be fair thank you for your leniency Mr Mayor, was around the new all-singing, all-dancing Childcare Commission to be chaired by a Labour MP looking for another job. I asked specifically about the cost of this Childcare Commission and although he waffles a bit, the answer seems to be he does not know, hence my earlier concerns about how anything in their manifesto is costed. The Housing Commission, if you remember that commission, cost about £100,000 and the Labour party completely ignored their recommendations, so my follow up question is does he have any rough idea how much this Childcare Commission might cost?

## **RESPONSE**

I would like to thank Councillor Al-Samerai for her question which touched on various subjects. I will happily talk about council housing. I will happily talk about the 9,000 council homes that were sold or demolished by the Liberal Democrats when they ran this administration.

I will happily defend the fact that we have only sold seven homes in the last year; seven compared to their 9,000. So when it comes to rank hypocrisy I will happily have that discussion. I will have that debate and she can ask as many urgent questions – she might not be here after 22 May to ask any though – but in respect of the Childcare Commission the answer is as set out on the paper.

We have agreed with Lambeth Council to establish a Childcare Commission to look at all of the issues, not just an issue of adding eight hours a month but looking at wrap around child care, looking at the flexible sort of child care that people who work in our borough need and the deficiencies in the market at the moment and how we can make that work for our residents in a real and meaningful way. That is why it is right to have a commission of experts lead by Tessa Jowell, who does have expertise in this area in any event, with other experts assisting her and she will report, we hope, by December. For the benefit of Lambeth and Southwark residents this is the right thing to do.

We do not have a cost at this present time because there is no report that has gone before either cabinet or for individual decision making yet but when it will, members will be able to look at it and scrutinise it. The problem is of course is they do not like that answer because again they might not be around to scrutinise it after 22 May.

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

The reason I do not like the answer is because I do not think it is very good value for money not to know how much something you are announcing costs and actually I do not think it is going to help any parent now struggling with the cost of child care. Labour councillors are a bit confused about this issue, Mr Mayor, and bear with me a moment because they are just a bit confused about which way they voted on amendment D. Let me remind them what amendment D said, which is 'council assembly calls on cabinet to help local parents by funding additional childcare hours on top of those already offered by government.' Now Labour councillors just voted for that. Can he explain what additional childcare hours on top of those already offered by government he will be funding and when?

## **RESPONSE**

We absolutely agree that childcare and affordable childcare and quality affordable childcare is one of the most important issues facing residents of our borough. There are probably two issues in London which concern people above all others; childcare

and housing. We are on top of both. We have committed to building more council houses. We have consented more housing over the past four years than many administrations across London and on childcare we are looking not just at that simple issue but wrap around childcare as well and yes, when the commission reports, we will look how best to implement that commitment that we have, that absolute commitment that we have to provide quality affordable childcare across our borough. I think that is the right thing to do.

I think it is right actually to look at this across two boroughs which face the same issues but which are struggling to find answers which are meaningful, meaningful for residents, that is what people want. That is what the discussions we have had on the doorstep with people have led us to conclude. It is the right thing to do. This is a commission which I absolutely commend to this council and to this borough because it will look in-depth at the issues and provide long term solutions; just as we did with housing, which they said "you do not need a housing commission, we have all the answers". Their answers were selling off 9,000 council homes; our answer is building 11,000 more.