

**COUNCIL ASSEMBLY
(ORDINARY)
TUESDAY 26 JANUARY 2016
LATE QUESTION**

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

Can the Leader update members on the recent tragic case of pensioner and council tenant, Kingsley Idahosa, who was found to have been dead in his home for over a month, despite several calls from neighbours to the Council?

RESPONSE

I am sure that all members will want to pass on their condolences to the family and friends of Mr Idahosa who sadly passed away recently.

We have reviewed the actions of officers at the time and are reassured that the right steps were taken to locate Mr Idahosa as soon as concerns were raised about his whereabouts.

At the beginning of December Mr Idahosa's neighbour contacted the Area Housing team to raise concerns. The team responded within 24 hours, by visiting the address and then conducting a further follow up visit.

Mr Idahosa's neighbour was present at both visits, and there were no signs of an emergency on either visit. The neighbour advised the team that Mr Idahosa's car was missing so it was highly likely that he was therefore away with family or friends for the Christmas period.

A friend of Mr Idahosa's reported him missing to the police after he did not show up to a pre-arranged visit at Christmas. We therefore conducted a welfare visit with the police on 7 January 2016 when Mr Idahosa was discovered.

As a responsible landlord, we take the welfare of our residents very seriously and do our best to balance engagement with local people, particularly the most vulnerable, without intruding on their private lives.

SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION 1 TO THE LEADER FROM COUNCILLOR ANOOD AL-SAMERAI

Thank you Madam Mayor and thank you to the Leader for his answer and I think we all echo the condolences and how tragic this case is and I have to say I am a bit concerned by the response being a bit glib or not taking it quite seriously or maybe being a bit complacent. I mean was he known to Social Services? Was he on the list that housing officers have of pensioners they visit? Is there any more information because I am sure every councillor in this room is really concerned and just would like to hear a bit more about how seriously he is personally taking it.

RESPONSE

Thank you Madam Mayor, I thank Councillor Al-Samerai and I repeat what I said at the start of my answer, this is obviously a very sad case and I am sure all of our thoughts are with Mr Idahosa's family. My understanding and I have looked into this case, my understanding is that he had had some medical history which was known to us and given his age, I think he was also on our list of people we had to keep an eye on. Unfortunately in this case the visit before Christmas which was made by our officers and where this tenants car was missing, gave, I suppose false hope to everyone concerned, including his neighbour, that he was away and had gone away because his car wasn't parked in its usual position and it was only after Christmas when another friend of his contacted him and he normally makes contact over the Christmas period and he hadn't heard from him that the investigation was made. I don't regard any case like this in a glib manner, of course I don't and I have asked the Chief Executive and Strategic Director of Housing for us to review what we do in cases where older people, for whatever reason, haven't been seen or where behaviour in respect of their rent account or whatever might give some cause for concern or where previous patterns of interaction with either the community or officers has been disrupted. In this case clearly there was a neighbour who was looking out and who was raising concerns and I do say to everybody here and anyone who obviously has elderly neighbours to keep an eye out for them, an eye out for any strange disruption to their usual patterns of behaviour and don't be afraid to go and knock on the door. Sometimes we are afraid to go and knock on the door because we think it is an invasion of people's privacy but in this case of course, very sad consequences, we didn't find this tenant sooner, so in terms of what we are doing with this, we are reviewing what we can do to tighten up these procedures, to tighten up contact that we make with potentially vulnerable tenants and any lessons that can be learned from this very sad case and any others that might occur, will be.

SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION 2 TO THE LEADER FROM COUNCILLOR ANOOD AL-SAMERAI

Thanks Madam Mayor. I do feel a bit reassured that you are actually reviewing processes and if you like cross party involvement in that, I think that is really important and that certainly is better than the original written answer response. It doesn't entirely add up though because, I mean talking about the visit at the beginning of December and then Christmas, it just feels a long period and my slight concern is maybe because of the Christmas period and officers being on leave, that was an issue and that is something I would hope to be taking part in the review. Also, I don't know if you remember the case in 2008 of Mrs Lambert where you had actually called an extraordinary council meeting and had a vote of no confidence in Councillor Noakes who was the cabinet member at the time and frankly tried to score political points out of it and I am not suggesting that we do that, I am not calling for no confidence votes, so the point I was making is I am not suggesting that he calls an extraordinary council meeting and does votes of no confidence, I think tragedies happen. What happened at that time that the administration did initiate was an independent investigation and so that is my request tonight that there is actually an independent investigator that isn't the strategic director, that there is an external investigation into what happened here so that I think we can all be confident, we are not calling to blame individuals,

either councillors or officers but actually I don't feel comfortable that this review that has happened has really been that robust.

RESPONSE

Well as I say, this has all been fairly recent; there are clearly lessons that can be learnt. I think we should look at what any review that we can do internally can throw up. I mean if I remember rightly, the circumstances of the case you are talking about in 2008 was different, that was the lady who had much more direct involvement with social services, if I remember rightly, I will look back at Southwark News and remind myself what we were saying at the time, but we will look at what we can learn out of this case. I am not sure – you know the sad reality is that people will die who are living alone in our properties, that is the sad reality of the case, the particular sadness in cases like this is when someone is not noticed or their absence is noticed and nothing is done to pick it up and as I say we will look at how we can do that better and at the moment I feel confident that we don't need someone from outside to tell us how we can do this but in the first instance we can look ourselves and if it is something which Scrutiny wants to look at in due course, then I think that that would be something very worthwhile for Scrutiny to look at because there might be a process we can put in place where somebody is potentially on an at risk category but not considered particularly vulnerable but because of their age are at risk, that we can do something better and I think if you are not satisfied with what that throws up, then I think come back and ask me if we should have an independent investigation to look into it but as I say, the learning is still very fresh in this and we are looking at how we can tighten things up. As I said, there are all sorts of things that you can do - reviewing somebody's rent account and their statement and how they pay and where they pay and people are listened to. I kind of take exception because once they encounter somebody throwing doubt on the good intentions of officers who didn't put the phone down and do nothing, it is really not good enough for her to keep coming along, she does it not just on this but on other issues where she criticises council officers and I just think that is unacceptable. People are doing hard work and hard jobs and what we saw in this case was not an officer who put the phone down and did nothing, they went round and knocked on the door and visited the neighbour. Now that is the appropriate action for them to have done at that stage and it was the conclusion of everyone including the neighbour that he was probably away because his car was not there. Now I think the reasonable thing to do and I don't criticise any officer for what they did for doing it. If she wants to go and criticise officers, so be it but I'm not going to join her in doing that.