

**COUNCIL ASSEMBLY  
(ORDINARY)**

**WEDNESDAY NOVEMBER 4 2009**

**MEMBERS' QUESTION TIME**

**1. QUESTION TO THE LEADER FROM COUNCILLOR JENNY JONES**

What progress has been made on working with the Mayor of London to make Southwark 20mph default borough?

**RESPONSE**

We were pleased to be invited to participate in the Transport for London (TfL) 20mph speed limits pilot following our participation in the London Assembly's review of 20mph speed limits across London.

However, it is disappointing that the pilot scheme comes without additional funding, and will be paid for out of our existing local implementation plan (LIP) allocation from TfL.

Over the previous seven years we have received £4m from TfL to deliver 20mph zones. By the end of 2009-10 86% of the borough will be included within either a 20mph zone or 20mph speed limit. Additionally, we have committed £1m to improve the effectiveness of our existing 20mph zones. We will also use the £100,000 discretionary component of our 2010-11 LIP funding to invest in further 20mph speeds limits.

We estimate that it would cost approximately £2.4m to make Southwark a completely 20mph borough. However, this amounts to approximately 72% of the council LIP allocation for next year. This sum does not take into account the costs of implementing a 20mph limit on our strategic road network or on TfL's road network.

We consider that this pilot should be funded in addition to the LIP allocation to enable the borough to progress this worthwhile initiative so that lessons can be learnt to enable other boroughs to take forward similar initiatives in the future.

**SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR JENNY JONES**

Thanks for your answer on this. At the meeting we had with Boris Johnson the idea was that Southwark would take back a proposal to him, because I had heard from various people at TfL that there would be extra money for Southwark to go ahead with this, did that proposal get taken back to the Mayor?

**RESPONSE**

I thought the position we had reached with the Mayor of London in that very helpful meeting was there wasn't any extra specific money about this but if we could use our funding bid to try and address this issue as much as possible then they in turn would try to use the little [LIP?] funding they gave us to help address those issues. I think by and large we have been successful with that, although I think there has been a particular issue in Borough and Bankside where a particular speed limiting proposal didn't meet their criteria and I want to try and raise that with him to see whether there's a bit more elasticity we can inject into the system for next time. I thought he prefaced everything by saying

there is no extra money for this but I am always one to try and get any extra money for Southwark I can off anyone.

## **2. QUESTION TO THE LEADER FROM COUNCILLOR ANOOD AL SAMERAI**

Does the leader of the council agree with the Minister of State for Housing's view that 'The resources local authorities receive for management and maintenance and major repairs should enable them to implement necessary fire safety measures in council housing.'?

### **RESPONSE**

I do not agree that Southwark is adequately funded to meet all the landlord obligations placed on it. We are responding robustly to the current consultation on housing finance to make clear the inadequacies of the funding regime for housing authorities where the profile and nature of the stock creates a high investment need, and a greater need for ongoing maintenance. Currently, the major repairs allowance (MRA) does not accurately reflect need because:

- As a result of the decent homes programme, homes now have more 'kit' in them which require replacement when it breaks.
- It does not include components such as lifts and environmental works.
- The useful life of components is inconsistent with a decent homes definition, especially in relation to bathrooms and kitchens.

Independent research suggests that the MRA should be uplifted by 24% to £825 per unit per year over 30 years. In addition, it is estimated that £116 per unit is required to tackle the backlog of components requiring replacement in 2010 and £91 per unit to cover statutory compliance with disabled adaptations and asbestos.

In response to the consultation paper, Southwark is asking that the funding shortfalls identified be corrected by uplifting management and maintenance funding by 10 per cent and major repairs funding by 43%. The council is waiting to see the outcome of this request.

We are investing approximately £4m in Marie Curie, Castlemead and Perronet House, all blocks with Enforcement Notices from the LFEPA. The works we are carrying out includes repair or renewal of communal fire doors, renewal of front entrance doors and escape doors, installation of heat and smoke detectors (plus new riser and lateral electrical supply). The first phases of this work have already been completed to timescale and work continues to make Southwark homes a safer environment. In addition, we are carrying out further fire work on a number of other blocks within the borough based on our risk assessments and are communicating with the residents locally. This demonstrates our commitment to ensuring we have a comprehensive approach to fire safety work across our housing stock.

### **SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR ANOOD AL SAMERAI**

Thank you Mr Mayor and thank you to the leader for his answer. In view of the Labour government investing yet more in banks yesterday I just wondered if he realistically seriously expects that they are going to invest any money in council homes?

### **RESPONSE**

Mr Mayor, yes it is clear that we have a government which can find billions of pounds at the drop of a hat to bail out banks but can't find the investment that is needed to bring the social housing in this country up to scratch. There is a serious problem with the standard of social housing stock in this borough, not just the council's but also with registered social landlords. There is a real issue now as we face up all of us across the country to health and safety issues post-Lakanal about where the money is coming from and the fire safety improvements that we need to make. It is clear that at the moment what the government is saying is that it's covered by the major repairs allowance. Well, if we are using major repairs allowance to do fire safety works that's less money available for us to do decent homes work with.

I don't particularly like calling on the government ritually just to give us back big bags of money because I think it is perfectly clear that this government has no intention of giving councils big bags of money to tackle council housing with. They have had 13 years to do it – they haven't done it yet. I understand that under this government they built 20 times more million pounds mansions have been built than council homes, which I think is a fairly astonishing statistic.

What I think we need to do is to work out ways in which we can free up the money that we need to invest in our housing stock, to be the kind of landlord that we would all aspire to be, from existing resources. For example at the moment we repay something like £50 million a year on our historic housing debt – that's £50 million a year which could be going into a housing investment programme, which would provide decent quality construction jobs for local people where we could run apprenticeship schemes, which would give people better homes as a result and it does seem to me that we should be talking to the government – this is the proposal we will be going to them with – about having a debt holiday to try and allow us to catch up with investments to our housing needs.

I also think that we should have the flexibility to talk with local developers about using section 106 contributions to pay towards refurbishment of council estates. It always struck me as odd that when you go to some of the meetings that we have, particularly in our part of the borough, we have big developments going on – you say to local people 'what would you most like', they say 'we would like our lifts sorted and our roofs sorted' and you have to tell them 'sorry that doesn't count under Section 106, you can't get that'. And again, that's a fairly easy way in which the government could free up the resources that we need for our housing stock.

### **3. QUESTION TO THE LEADER FROM COUNCILLOR PETER JOHN**

For what reason were the estimated figures for the costs of bringing Southwark's local authority housing stock up to the government's decent homes standard and to the Southwark decent homes standard removed from the final version of the 2009-16 housing strategy?

#### **RESPONSE**

The estimated costs for bringing homes up to the government's decent homes standard contained in a draft version of the 2009-16 housing strategy were based on the preliminary figures from the stock condition survey which has not yet been completed. Therefore, they were not included in the final version of the document that was agreed by the executive.

### **SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR PETER JOHN**

I thank the executive member for his answer. Of course the figure of £700 million pounds which appeared in the original version of the housing strategy was a politically

embarrassing figure so I am sure that wouldn't be the reason why it was taken out of the final published version. He says that has not been included, that figure has not been included, because the stock condition survey had not yet been completed. When does he think, or can you tell us when the stock condition survey will be completed and when that figure will be published, bearing in mind that the strategic director informed myself and my colleague, Councillor Wingfield, only a few a weeks ago that he expected the stock condition survey to be completed by the end of October. So can we look forward to the publication of this missing figure in the next couple of weeks?

## **RESPONSE**

Mr Mayor, I agree this is politically embarrassing for the Labour government that after 13 years of a Labour government, this country still has the deficits on its housing investment programme that it has. I am afraid I am not one to spare the Labour government's blushes. We will publish the stock condition survey when it is completed – I think we are currently anticipating that publication to be in January. We are double checking the stock condition survey in the light of the Lakeland fire and the various health and safety issues that that has raised and I would be surprised if every authority in the country isn't doing that too. I am determined to go into bat for Southwark to get a fair deal from this government for the money it needs. I would prefer to do that on the basis of one figure which is auditable, which has been triple checked and that's why we held off the publication of £700 million figure because when we finish the work it could be a bit less than that, it could be a bit more than that – I don't want to get in a confusion about which figure is right. We will be publishing the stock condition survey in January and then we are going to bat for the money that Southwark needs. I hope he will support us in getting that money off his government, which after all his local MPs constantly promised at election time they are going to deliver and then forget to in between elections.

## **4. QUESTION TO THE LEADER FROM COUNCILLOR RICHARD THOMAS**

Remembrance Sunday is just four days away when we remember the millions of UK and Commonwealth citizens who died to protect our right to vote. What steps is the council taking to encourage people to register to vote?

## **RESPONSE**

Each and every year the council assists the electoral registration officer in the compilation of the register of electors. This is done by sending out canvass forms to every property in the borough, requesting residents to confirm or fill in their details. Canvassers visit those properties which fail to respond to the request for information. Various publicity vehicles are used to make residents aware of the need to register in order to vote, these include the use of council publications (Southwark Life) as well as publications such as Primary Times (reaching a wide audience through schools).

Southwark has a long-term engagement strategy, which sees councillors visit secondary schools in the borough as part of the schools outreach programme, explaining the role and function of local government. I am grateful to all councillors who take part in this very useful programme.

Southwark has also taken the lead in a cross-borough campaign of advertising on buses, partly funded by the Ministry of Justice. This is the third year that this campaign has been run. Reference was made in the advert to the forthcoming elections, both borough council and general, which will be held within the life of the next register.

The response rate for the annual canvass has increased steadily over the past few years, from 75.5% in 2004 to 91.4% in 2009. This is a clear indication that the council is serious about its responsibility for ensuring that all eligible residents are on the register.

#### **SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR RICHARD THOMAS**

Thank you Mr Mayor. I am sure all councillors will join me in welcoming the astonishing rate of progress that has been made since 2004 in ensuring that people are registered to vote. It is worth reflecting that only a few years ago a quarter of people were not registered to vote so that is brilliant progress – I think that is really good news. Given that the impact of the census, which is coming up again in a couple of years' time, has on population figures and with it funding for local government has he got any advice for the government in terms of how they can also try and improve the success rate and the response rate that they have to that national census?

#### **RESPONSE**

Mr Mayor, I would like to thank Councillor Thomas for his question. I am very concerned about the 2011 census, which is why I asked the overview and scrutiny committee to conduct a review of our preparations for it. The census is absolutely vital in determining all sorts of central government allocations of funding to Southwark and it is essential that it is accurate as possible and reflects our actual population. The problem is that in 2011 the government is intending to conduct a census survey by post and we know from all sorts of different experiences in Southwark that there is a very very low response rate to official postal surveys of that kind in Southwark. Indeed one of the lessons we have learnt about the registration to vote campaign is that it is not enough to send people registration to vote forms, you also have to knock on people's doors, sometimes 2 or 3 times until you catch them and help them fill it in on the door step. It is absolutely crucial that everyone in Southwark plays a part in trying to make sure that people understand the importance to Southwark of a 100%, or as close as we can get it, census response rate because I am sure that Southwark is losing out on millions of pounds year-on-year because of the flawed statistics we are currently operating under and I think the next census is going to make that position even worse.

#### **5. QUESTION TO THE LEADER FROM COUNCILLOR ROBERT SMEATH**

For what reason did the council decide to move the offer date for primary school places back to May 10 2010? Does he accept that this looks suspiciously like an attempt to keep this issue out of the spotlight until after the elections, given that other London boroughs, including neighbouring Lambeth, have stuck with the date of April 24?

#### **RESPONSE**

Following the unexpected increase in applications to primary schools in the south of the borough this year, we are proposing to wait for the outcome of the 2010 admissions round before making decisions about the need for additional reception classes.

A desktop allocation process will be run in February 2010 to see where the pressure for places might be, based on 'on-time' applications. It will then be necessary throughout March/April to negotiate with schools to open additional reception classes as necessary and to run the allocation process again to see if we have enough places.

We will use the additional time gained by moving the offer date to ensure that this process can take place, and that we are able to take account of any late applications. This change is absolutely necessary to ensure that all applicants have a suitable place for September 2010.

## **SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR ROBERT SMEATH**

Can I thank the leader for his response – at least to part 1 of my question, I am not sure part 2 has been answered. I am pleased to see that action is being taken to look into this and to find more places than we had this year. Presumably the leader can take action before March and April to identify schools provisionally that would be able to provide extra classes and I would be grateful for his comments on what action has been taken so far and how many places he thinks we might be able to find if necessary?

### **RESPONSE**

Just so that everyone understands the issue here, Mr Mayor; what we are doing at the moment is consulting with as many schools in the south of the borough as we can about the possibility of them taking on an extra class in September 2010, if we ask them to. So we are trying to establish how many schools would be willing to volunteer if we ask them to. When we close the applications round in January 2010 for places in September 2010, based on where parents have actually applied to schools, based on where we see any evidence of shortages of places, we would then ask the schools – which would then give most parents their best chance of getting one of their first preferences – to expand. So we take that pool of 8 or 9 schools, and probably only need to ask 2 or 3 of them to expand or we will be able to do that on the basis of the actual applications we receive.

If we announce now that school X is going to have an extra class all we do is massively increase the amount of applications for school X, which would result in lots of parents being disappointed, who thought they were playing a game to try to get their child into that school but ended up in some cases doing a disservice. I think that that has got to be the right way to do it. I think that is the proposition that is coming to executive in November – but the more I think about it the more I think that's the right way to do it even though that does then slow down the process of actually then doing the admissions through February and March, as you have to first work out which school to expand and then put that back into the system and model it through to see who gets which place. But I think that's the approach which is guaranteed to get us the highest number of children getting into the school that they would actually really prefer to go to.

## **6. QUESTION TO THE LEADER FROM COUNCILLOR JAMES BARBER**

The council has recently signed up to the 10:10 carbon reduction pledge. How does it intend to do this?

### **RESPONSE**

The 10:10 pledge requires us to cut our carbon emissions by 10% by 2010. The biggest contributor to our carbon emissions is our property estate. By moving 2100 staff into 160 Tooley Street, we are already making huge reductions in our carbon emissions, and it is unlikely we could meet this challenging 10% target without having done so.

In addition to moving to Tooley Street, we have a number of plans aimed at achieving a 10% reduction:

- We have also replaced standard PCs with thin client (Citrix) systems which will bring a 20 tonne reduction in carbon emissions per year.
- A council-wide (internal) communications programme will run until April 2010 to raise staff awareness of the role they are expected to play in reducing emissions. This is likely to contribute to a 5% reduction in energy consumption across our office buildings.

- Additional on-site support will be provided at 20 key office sites. This will deliver low level audits, measures and staff engagement workshops and should contribute an additional 5% reduction at these sites
- We will seek to dispose of buildings that do not meet current energy efficiency standards, and where bringing them up to standard would not be cost effective.
- A two year invest-to-save programme will begin in January 2010 which will improve energy efficiency in buildings which we do not intend to be dispose of.

Above and beyond the 10:10 work, we are working with the Carbon Trust to identify and develop projects to cut operational emissions significantly from now until 2016.

Although the 10:10 reduction does not include school emissions, we are working with schools on methods to monitor and reduce school emissions. There is also further work being done on environmental education programmes which we hope will lead to an increase in the number of eco-schools in Southwark from the current total of 103.

### **SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR JAMES BARBER**

Thank you Mayor. Two weeks ago Simon Hughes and the Liberal Democrats proposed a motion in parliament for the government and the bodies it controls to sign up to the 10/10 pledge. This was unfortunately not supported by Harriett Harman and Tessa Jowell. What do you think this says about the Labour government's true environmental credentials? I would bookend that by saying on the night they proposed £20 million toward carbon reduction for the whole country, which seems ludicrous.

### **RESPONSE**

Mr Mayor, I am tempted to simply say "by their actions they shall be judged". It is clear that in order to create the kind of cuts in carbon emissions which we all need – and anyone who has seen the environmental agency's forecast of what would happened to Southwark in the event of the London flood barrier failing will know how much of a real issue this is for us in Southwark – but the government has got to take strong and decisive action itself over its carbon emissions as well as facilitating others to do so. I was very, very surprised and saddened that the government failed to follow the example of many local authorities, including Southwark, of signing up to the 10/10 pledge.

### **7. QUESTION LEADER FROM COUNCILLOR VERONICA WARD**

How confident is the leader about the forecast of primary school applications in Dulwich for next year's intake? How confident was he at this time last year about the forecast for this year's intake?

### **RESPONSE**

As councillors will be aware, local authorities across London have been affected by unexpected changes to their projected school age population as a result of the current economic slowdown. In addition to a rising birth rate, there has been the lowest outflow of population from London since 1999 and the highest gross inflow from the rest of the UK since 1984.

Much of this is a direct result of the current recession. Many Londoners who would normally have moved to adjacent regions are remaining due to the unfavourable housing market. In turn they are looking for places for their children at local schools. Additionally, many parents who would have looked for places in the independent sector are applying for places at primary schools in the maintained sector.

This has made it extremely difficult to gather realistic projections of primary applications. To deal with this uncertainty, we have taken action to plan for additional nursery classes next year, and we will be negotiating with primary schools next year to ensure that every applicant has a suitable place for September 2010.

There will be a report reviewing primary places at executive on November 24 2009.

#### **8. QUESTION TO THE LEADER FROM COUNCILLOR HELEN JARDINE-BROWN**

How does the council support and encourage young single parents back into employment and/or education?

#### **RESPONSE**

The council has a wide range of services and programmes, many delivered in cooperation with partners such as Job Centre Plus and voluntary sector organisations, aimed at helping young single parents back into employment or education:

- We have a young parents learning centre that works in collaboration with the Activity Agreement Programme (AAP). The activity agreement is a 20 weeks programme aimed at 16-17 year olds and is a personally negotiated contract between a personal adviser (PA) and the young person, identifying specific steps they should take to move into education, training or employment (preferably with learning). This approach aims to set a clear expectation for young people to progress into learning or work, preferably with training, and to reach their full potential.
- The 'Mums To Be' programme (delivered via the learning centre) is a flexible approach, accredited programme. Duration 24 weeks.
- Prospects (careers company) provides careers, education and guidance (CEG). They also provide specific opportunities, awareness events aimed at bringing together colleges and training opportunities providers to raise aspirations.
- All young parents accessing learning may be eligible for a 'Care to Learn' grant to support their child care needs. We also work very closely with the local childminder coordinator to ensure that the young parent's child care needs are met.
- Teenage parents are allocated to personal advisers for case work and to broker services on behalf of the clients. Personal advisers meet with the clients at least once a week to plan and review needs and determine action plans for achieving the desired goals.
- Clients meet with personal advisers within a multi-agency setting such as one stop shops at Prospects building in Rye Lane and Faces in Focus, Harper Road (in Elephant and Castle.) Drop-in sessions are available at these one stop shops and various access points across the borough. Appointments are also available on request.

The following support are offered on daily basis at the one stop shops centres:

- Support with completing benefits forms, following up benefit/housing queries, completing college/Care to learn applications, submissions to job/training opportunities, counselling, drug advice and some offer free condom service.

These centres operate flexible working hours including one late night per week.

#### **SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR HELEN JARDINE-BROWN**

Would the member agree with me that the suggestion by the Prime Minister included in his speech at the Labour conference on September 29, written by Councillor McNeill



opposite, that from now on all 16 and 17 year old parents who get support from the taxpayer will be placed in a network of supervised homes is a reactionary and knee jerk response from a government that is out of ideas, out of time and should be out of office.

## **RESPONSES**

Mr Mayor, I don't think workhouses were local governments' finest hour in Victorian times and I am shocked that anyone would suggest we introduce them in this day and age.

### **9. QUESTION TO THE LEADER FROM COUNCILLOR DORA DIXON-FYLE**

Since becoming leader, how many letters have you received from Southwark's MPs and London assembly members and how many, broken down by sender, have you replied to?

#### **RESPONSE**

I am currently in the process of responding to two items of casework from Simon Hughes MP. I am not aware of any other outstanding correspondence to MPs or assembly members.

Given that I have received in the region of 17,000 items of post, in addition to between 50 and 100 emails each day, since becoming leader in 2002, the resources necessary to answer the first element of the question would be excessive.

### **SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR DORA DIXON-FYLE**

Thank you, Mr Mayor. Does the leader feel ashamed that he is unable to quantify how many enquiries he receives from members of parliament and does he agree with me that he sets a very bad example to officers of the council who sometimes takes over 15 days to reply to council enquiries, if at all?

#### **RESPONSE**

No Mr Mayor, I think it is clear from answers I have already given about council housing, about public transport investment in London, answers to questions I am sure will be coming about the regeneration scheme in Elephant & Castle and Aylesbury – I really do have better things to do with my time than count through 17,000 letters.

### **10. QUESTION TO THE LEADER FROM COUNCILLOR MACKIE SHEIK**

What continuing steps are the council taking to promote the Cross River Tram?

#### **RESPONSE**

The council is lobbying Transport for London (TfL) to understand the outcomes from the Cross River Tram alternatives study. A meeting is scheduled between TfL and the executive member for regeneration in early December to discuss the study recommendations.

The Mayor of London has recently released his transport strategy for consultation. A response is currently being prepared and will be considered by the executive in December and provides a further opportunity to promote the Cross River Tram.

### **SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR MACKIE SHEIK**

I thank the leader for his answer but however does he share with me and the local people their total disappointment in seeing the tram's removal from the Mayor's transport strategy and would he confirm his and the council's continued commitment to the project?

**RESPONSE**

Mr Mayor, I was in a meeting with Transport for London this morning and made the point very strongly that for years the council has promoted the cross river tram as a way of improving public transport connections, particularly between the centre of the borough where there is a very high levels of worklessness, and the job opportunities that exist in central London.

On the face of the transport strategy, not only do we lose that aspiration of getting the tram but a different bit of the public transport family, it's not TfL, it's more a Network Rail issue, but at the same time we are faced with losing the South London line, which is a public transport link at the moment between the centre of the borough and the job opportunities that exist further north. So it's a double whammy on the face of it. We are not getting one thing and we are losing another thing that we currently have. I think it is clear from the amendments to the core strategy and the motions that have been moved tonight that we will do what we can to retain our commitment to the Cross River Tram and to facilitate that and to fight for the retention of the South London rail.

I think we would all welcome from all sides of this chamber the suggestion in the transport strategy about the extension of the Bakerloo Line. I think it's Councillor Wingfield who reminded us about the promise that was originally made in 1910 – so we are near the centenary – it is only right that somebody somewhere renews the promise. But again I think that there is a real opportunity to have a conversation with TfL. If you were going to extend the Bakerloo Line you'd presumably want it to go through areas like the Elephant & Castle, through the Aylesbury down into Camberwell, which are the big points where we are going to be doing lots of physical regeneration work over the next few years. What opportunities are there through that to do any safeguarding work and preparatory works that would be needed to extend the Bakerloo Line.

**11. QUESTION TO THE LEADER FROM COUNCILLOR AUBYN GRAHAM**

My colleagues and I have a number of corporate complaints on housing matters that we have still not received a 'full response' for, despite repeated missed deadlines for those full responses. Some have been outstanding for as much as six months or more. Do you agree with me that six months is too long to wait for a complaint to be answered, let alone fully resolved? How would you rate your satisfaction with the system at the moment? How do you intend to improve the service that Southwark residents receive from the council's corporate complaints?

**RESPONSE**

I accept that the corporate response targets on complaints are not being met and that performance needs to improve further. Performance has however improved significantly over the last year as shown by the table below.

<b>Complaint Stage</b>	<b>Timescale</b>	<b>Target</b>	<b>Apr-Jun 2008</b>	<b>Apr-Jun 2009</b>
1	15 working days	80%	33%	62%
2	20 working days	75%	16%	61%

<b>Complaint Stage</b>	<b>Timescale</b>	<b>Target</b>	<b>Apr-Jun 2008</b>	<b>Apr-Jun 2009</b>
3	25 working days	75%	36%	48%

Since the introduction of iCasework, the council's new complaints management system, the accuracy of recording has improved and therefore the number of complaints being recorded has risen significantly.

Whilst this has put pressure on resources in the corporate complaint unit it is good news for our customers. They no longer have to 'jump through hoops' to get their complaints investigated independently and the council has an opportunity to learn from the complaints received. Last year the number of complainants going to the ombudsman reduced from 283 in 2007-08 to 143 in 2008-09. We want this trend to continue by dealing with problems quickly and effectively in house.

The corporate complaints unit (CCU) has recently recruited 4 temporary investigators to clear cases that are more than 4 weeks old. The unit aims to have closed all outstanding cases by March 2010. In the meantime cases are being prioritised according to the vulnerability of the complainant and the urgency of the issue being raised.

In the six months between April and Sept 2009 the CCU closed 463 stage two complaints. Of these, 43 cases took more than 6 months to investigate. 29 of these cases (6%) relate to housing management issues.

There are currently 17 open housing management stage 2 & 3 member complaints, of which:

- 5 are still within target
- The average number of days open is 102 (14 weeks)

The CCU is prioritising all member complaints and have committed to clear these within the next 4 weeks.

## **12. QUESTION TO THE LEADER FROM COUNCILLOR BOB SKELLY**

Why does Labour's Education and Inspection Act give priority to anyone else to build and run a new school rather than the council?

### **RESPONSE**

Under the Education and Inspections Act 2006, when a council wishes to open a new school it must:

1. invite proposals for the new school (this route is known as the competition route and is expected by government to be the route by which the vast majority of new schools will be established); or
2. work with the Secretary of State and sponsors to establish an academy; or
3. apply to the Secretary of State for consent to publish proposals for a new school, without running a competition

Officers have advised that for any new school the council would be expected to first run a competition because without one it would fly in the face of the government's wish to secure what it sees as "diversity in the provision of schools".

This is backed up by the experience of other boroughs who need to open schools quickly to satisfy demand, as the competition route is extremely time consuming. Only yesterday Councillor Jason Stacey, leader of Ealing, shared with me the impossibility of responding to urgent demand for places because of the necessity to follow a competition route.

This act was designed by the bureaucratic and centralising Labour government to reduce the power of local councillors and parents. It passed in the dying days of Tony Blair and saw the biggest ever Labour rebellion. It only got through because the Conservatives voted with the Labour Leadership including Harriet Harman and Tessa Jowell.

Sarah Teather, the then Liberal Democrat education spokesperson, said in parliament at the time, "At the end of his premiership Tony Blair is hell-bent on forcing this bill through to prove he is still in charge. It is a pitiful legacy and a wasted opportunity". I agree.

### **13. QUESTION TO THE LEADER FROM COUNCILLOR WILMA NELSON**

Given the troubles facing the ALMO in Lambeth, does the leader think that tenants in Southwark are right to continue to oppose these schemes and right to seek proper investment in their homes as tenants of the council?

#### **RESPONSE**

I will, of course continue to lobby government for fairer funding of Southwark's council housing.

### **14. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR CITIZENSHIP, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITIES FROM COUNCILLOR LORRAINE ZULETA**

Will the council sign up to the London Citizens' 'Strangers into Citizens' campaign for the one-off regularisation of long term irregular migrants?

#### **RESPONSE**

Yes, I support the Strangers into Citizens proposals and will be asking officers to make the necessary arrangements to support their campaign.

The Strangers into Citizens proposal is for a one-off, selective regularisation measure, that would allow 450,000 of the 750,000 undocumented migrants in the UK to be given an "earned amnesty" or "pathway into citizenship", open to those with at least six years in the UK, who present employer and character references, a clean criminal record, and proficiency in English.

By not regularising, the UK is permitting a substantial sub-class of citizen to exist outside the law. This is bad for them, and bad for the UK. Regularising allows more people to obey the law and to contribute financially and in other ways.

Failure to regularise allows for the existence of a shadow or parallel economy, outside the law, in which exploitation and people-trafficking thrive. Regularising, conversely, shrinks the shadow economy, and therefore discourages illegal immigration. This was the experience of Spain when it regularised in 2005. Not only were there substantial fiscal and economic benefits, but levels of immigration declined.

The London School of Economics estimates that regularising according to the Strangers into Citizens proposal would add approximately £3bn to the UK economy. And the Greater London Authority economics reported in May 2009 that the tax/insurance revenue from a regularised population could increase by some £846 million per annum.

Regularising would ensure that the UK Border Authority's resources – personnel, detention centres, etc. – are concentrated on the removal of people-traffickers and criminals, rather than innocent migrants and their families.

The alternative has failed to work. Immigration Minister Liam Byrne said: "I believe those here illegally should go home, not go to the front of the queue for jobs and benefits. That's why we're now deporting someone every eight minutes and doubling our frontline enforcement resources" (Source: Commons July 9 2007). At this rate the Home Office removes between 11,000 and 25,000 undocumented migrants a year, at an estimated cost of £11,000 per removal. Therefore it would take at least 30 years and cost £8.25 billion to remove every undocumented migrant in the UK.

#### **SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR LORRAINE ZULETA**

Thank you Mr Mayor. I would like to thank the executive member for her answer and would ask her would she agree with me that this campaign could be of great benefit to the large, very hardworking Latin American communities living in and around Borough and Bankside?

#### **RESPONSE**

Thank you Mr Mayor. I would like to thank the member for her question. Yes, I think it could be of huge benefit to that particular community. I have attended a number of events recently with that community where there is a lot of concern about the fact that there are a huge number of people here than are on record. That obviously impacts on the services that they get and also impacts on the cost for the council of having to provide services for them when they are not actually registered, so absolutely, I think they would definitely benefit from signing up to this campaign.

#### **15. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR CITIZENSHIP, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITIES FROM COUNCILLOR DAVID HUBBER**

What impact is the Equalities Bill likely to have on tackling homophobic harassment?

#### **RESPONSE**

The Equalities Bill sadly sums up the outdated and cynical way in which Labour, and particularly Harriet Harman, treat equalities issues. Some serious questions have been raised about the Bill and how it proposes to deal with homophobic harassment, including former Labour member Peter Tatchell of Outrage who told the Guardian on 14 July that:

"The so-called equality bill denies protection against homophobic harassment by school authorities, by the owners and managers of properties and by the providers of services," "Such harassment is outlawed on the grounds of age, disability, gender reassignment, race and sex but not on the grounds of sexual orientation, which means that a Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual or Transgendered (LGBT) person will not be able to bring an anti-harassment claim on these grounds under the Equality Bill. Harassment is different from discrimination and it requires separate legislative provision, as the government has recognised by giving explicit protection against harassment to women, black and disabled people, but not to LGBTs."

In contrast Southwark council's approach is designed to ensure that LGBT people are protected from homophobic harassment and enjoy positive and peaceful lives as an integral part of our community.

The police and voluntary sector have done very good partnership work with the LGBT community which has ensured an increase in referrals to Bede House LGBT project, which supports LGBT victims of domestic violence and hate crime. This means that the Council has been well placed to deal with the more victims resulting from the increase in homophobic crime. In addition to this Southwark benefits from a lively LGBT forum which advises the Council and partners on how to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations in our community.

To be effective in tackling homophobic harassment, the Council has to address broader issues including supporting LGBT people in creating cohesive, healthy communities who are able to report crime, and in supporting the victims of crime, as well as dealing directly with CJS. The Council is doing work in all these areas – Dax Ashworth, the LGBT co-ordinator, has done an outstanding job in community building, and Roger Moore the LGBT worker at Bede House is also doing valuable work in LGBT hate crime victims.

We are not aware of national rankings for work in this area but the partnership enjoys an excellent reputation for its work in this area which was a key factor in the Council gaining Beacon status for our work around cohesive and resilient communities. The Beacon assessment team visited Bede House LGBT project in November 2008 and were impressed with their partnership work and their service to LGBT community.

#### **SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR DAVID HUBBER**

Thank you, Mr Mayor. I would like to welcome the very positive things which are set out in the executive member's reply, but is she aware that Southwark, in common with a number of other London boroughs, no longer has a full time police LGBT liaison officer and if she agrees that in a time when homophobic crime is increasing, it is a regrettable and retrograde step and would she press the Borough Commander to reinstate this post as soon as possible?

#### **RESPONSE**

Thank you Mr Mayor. I would like to thank Councillor Hubber for his supplemental question. I am now aware that the Borough Commander here has taken that decision. I do find it very concerning and I will be not only writing to him but I would like to arrange a meeting with him to discuss whether or not there is a possibility of reinstating that post particularly in the circumstances that you just mentioned, and also to understand in the meantime how he had proposed that that area of work was going to be delivered.

#### **16. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR CITIZENSHIP, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITIES FROM COUNCILLOR COLUMBA BLANGO**

In 'Building Britain's Future' the Prime Minister repeats the claim that immigrants and asylum seekers get priority for council housing, what effect does this sort of misinformation have on community relations in this borough?

#### **RESPONSE**

It is deeply worrying that the Prime Minister, advised by members of this council assembly opposite, is perpetuating the myth that immigrants and asylum seekers get priority for council housing. It is misinformation of this kind that can appear to give legitimacy to the views of the BNP and should have no place in a multicultural and multiracial borough like Southwark. The claims of preferential treatment have been comprehensively debunked by leading think tank the IPPR whose report 'Social housing allocation and immigrant communities' published by the Equalities and Human Rights Commission in the spring showed that only 1.8% of social tenants are immigrants who had moved to the UK in the

past five years. Those born in the UK made up 87.8% and foreigners living in Britain for more than five years made up 10%.

In Southwark we are proud to have a significant amount of both council and RSL accommodation in which to house those vulnerable and disadvantaged members of our community who are most in need.

#### **SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM COLUMBA BLANGO**

Thank you Mr Mayor. I was really not going to ask a question or I did not have a supplementary but having read the executive member's answer which is very good and very exciting I think I should ask this question.

Thank you very much for your answer, which I think is very appropriate and up to the point. On to the point does it not go to show that in private the government's agenda is not very different from that of the BNP? And when it comes to multicultural and multiracial boroughs like Southwark is it not a double standard they are playing?

#### **RESPONSE**

Thank you Mr Mayor, and I would like to thank Councillor Blango for his supplementary question. And I would be inclined to agree with him, I think it does show a misunderstanding. It does show a complete lack of understanding of the way that real communities work and in particular about the way myths are spread and the kind of hatred that that creates in boroughs like this, and absolutely I agree with him.

#### **17. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR CITIZENSHIP, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITIES FROM COUNCILLOR ELIZA MANN**

Will the executive member tell the council assembly what evidence she gave, on behalf of the council, to the parliamentary joint committee on human rights investigation into the human rights duties relating to local authorities as set out in the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Bill?

#### **RESPONSE**

I was invited to an informal meeting with the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights to discuss Southwark's views and some of the work we have been involved in. The request came as a result of a recommendation from Baroness Andrews, who had responded to a letter from Andrew Dismore MP, chair of the above committee, asking about equalities and human rights duties placed on local authorities. In the context of the committee's suggestion that there should be "an express positive duty on local authorities to promote respect for human rights...", Southwark was cited as an example of good practice as an authority who has taken "proactive steps in relation to its human rights obligations"

Topics under discussion included:

- a) The difference in healthcare in Southwark as a result of Southwark Primary Care Trust being involved in the Department of Health pilot on human rights in the NHS, and joint equalities and human rights training. There is evidence of tangible change to the provision of care and improved outcomes in some instances.
- b) The fact that we have been proactive under existing legislation and have integrated human rights into our decision making processes

- c) The outcomes and the changes that resulted in practice from the housing and social services departments audits conducted in 2003 and 2004, the purpose of which was to review the policies and procedures of the (then) housing department and to assess awareness/familiarity among officers with the provisions of the Human Rights Act.
- d) The importance of tailor made training – we recognize the importance of ensuring that our staff have a clear understanding of how a human rights framework could have an impact on the way they carry out their day to day work. Using a human rights framework effectively can improve the quality of decision making and ultimately the services we provide. We have received positive feedback on the format and the effectiveness of our training.

The meeting went well and was a further opportunity to share what I believe is good practice and debate the way forward with regard to human rights legislation.

#### **SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR ELIZA MANN**

Thank you Mr Mayor. I thank the executive member for her answer. I understand that a night club ID scheme in Southwark in Riverside ward was raised at the meeting. Could she comment on this please?

#### **RESPONSE**

Thank you Mr Mayor, and I thank you, Councillor Mann for your supplementary question. Yes it is true that there was a question raised about the ID scheme of a nightclub in your ward. I checked the facts relating to that and it would appear that we do not have a policy on ID in nightclubs, but that it is only introduced in such circumstances where the prevention of crime and disorder – as a means of controlling an identified problem has been recommended. It is not something that's taken lightly, it is not something that we would do because as you know the Liberal Democrats don't really believe in ID systems as such and only believe it should be used in such extreme cases.

#### **18. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR CITIZENSHIP, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITIES FROM COUNCILLOR TOBY ECKERSLEY**

Would the executive member outline what steps are being taken to make better use of Southwark Life in publicising the existence, meeting dates and activities of the community councils?

#### **RESPONSE**

Community councils are an important part of the council's interaction with the community it serves, and it is essential that publicity about both the meeting dates and the outcomes of the meetings reaches as wide an audience as possible.

Southwark Life is one of the most important communications tools for residents to receive information about the council. It's distributed ten times per year to 120,000 households and has a reach that is approximately ten times greater than the local press.

There is currently space available in each edition to promote community councils. However, coverage will improve as officers are working with community councils on forward plans and the increasingly popular themed meetings. This will allow for more effective planning, so that they can be promoted well ahead of time, not just in Southwark Life, but also in other forms of council communications, such as the website. Southwark Life is important, but is only one of a number of ways that we are working to encourage broader involvement in community councils.



## **SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR TOBY ECKERSLEY**

Thanking Councillor Morris for your answer. You indicated that there will be improved coverage of publicity for community councils but you don't indicate any timescale. Can you assist us further?

### **RESPONSE**

Thank you Mr Mayor, and I thank Councillor Eckersley for his supplemental question. Unfortunately I cannot give you a timescale at the moment because; but I would like to hope that it is from the next edition of Southwark Life and I certainly will be pressing for it to be from the next edition of Southwark Life.

## **19. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR COMMUNITY SAFETY FROM COUNCILLOR JONATHAN MITCHELL**

What representations will she make to the government and Metropolitan Police to secure the pensions for retiring police officers injured in the line of duty?

### **RESPONSE**

Police authorities review police injury pension awards periodically to assess the amount based on loss of earning capacity, which understandably may change over time. The Police Pensions Regulations stated that these reviews should take place at 'intervals as may be suitable'. However, Home Office Circular 46/2004 issued more specific guidance on these reviews, instructing police authorities that reviews should be undertaken at (a) the compulsory retirement age for the rank in which the officer retired from service at, and (b) the state retirement age of sixty-five.

Once the compulsory retirement age is reached, the guidance states that it is no longer appropriate to use the former officer's police pay scale as the basis for his or her pre-injury earning, and instead, the national average earnings at the time should be used. At the point which the state retirement age is reached, the circular advises that in the absence of a cogent reason otherwise, the former officer should be placed in the lowest band of degree of disablement.

As a result, many retired police officers are seeing substantial reductions in their pension income once they reach, in particular, sixty-five. At the time that many of these officers had retired due to ill health, this guidance was not in place, and the retired officers could expect to maintain a similar level of injury pension award income for the remainder of their life. As such, the unexpected nature of these cuts in the levels of awards has resulted in many ex-police officers finding themselves facing a very uncertain future, often with serious financial concerns.

I am concerned that officers injured in the line of duty continue to have their injury pension awards reduced at retirement age as a result of recommendations by the Labour government outlined in Home Office Circular 46/2004. It is unfair to promise police officers an injury compensation for life (as many were) and then to start reviewing that offer when they reach retirement age. I will write to the borough's MPs to urge them to put pressure on the government to give a fair deal in retirement for some of our bravest police officers.

## **SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR JONATHAN MITCHELL**

Thank you for your answer. So this means that Labour's promise of tough on crime has now become tough on the poor retired coppers who got injured when they had to deal with it and it does mean that while brave front line bobbies who have been shot or stabbed in the line of duty are having their pension entitlement slashed by Labour while cabinet ministers pension pots have risen from £6.9 million in 2007-08 to £8.9 million in 2008-09. This means locally that as of March 31 2009, Tessa Jowell has seen an increase in her pension pot of £25,000 and Harriet Harman an even bigger one of £37,000. Do you agree that this is outrageous?

#### **RESPONSE**

I have to say that I do agree with my colleague and on top of that I have to say that when the police go out there in ones and twos, unlike when the local councillor for Peckham walked the street with the local MP I should say, with a flak jacket, she was also surrounded by about 10 policemen, so I can't really equate her pension with the police.

#### **20. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR COMMUNITY SAFETY FROM COUNCILLOR ALISON MCGOVERN**

Could the executive member confirm that no fire risk assessments had been carried out on local authority owned tower blocks in Southwark before April 24 this year? Can she provide a reason why this was the case?

#### **RESPONSE**

As we are London's largest social landlord, with over 50,000 properties and over 300 high rise blocks, we take our responsibilities seriously. The responsibility to do fire risk assessments was transferred to local councils in 2006.

We asked the London Fire Brigade (LFB) to train our staff to conduct fire risk assessments and they trained 140 Southwark housing officers. Following the training programme a number of follow up sessions were run to support staff. Sixty fire risk assessments of blocks over six storeys were completed by the end of the first quarter of 2009-10.

A £4 million programme of works on Marie Curie, Perronet House and Castlemead House has been instigated, with works scheduled for completion by the end of the year. In addition, we are rolling out a £30 million programme of additional investment in fire safety over the next four years, to bring all of our blocks up to modern standards.

#### **SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR ALISON MCGOVERN**

Thank you Mr Mayor – well, in that case I hope Councillor Humphreys will be able to actually answer the question. I asked whether it happened before April 24 this year. Excuse me, I am still just in a bit of shock that apparently my government's policy is the same as the BNP's, that's ridiculous.

I asked whether it happened before April 24 of this year and the answer was it had happened before the end of the first quarter of 2009-10. I assume we are talking about the financial year here, maybe, I don't know. In which case I calculate the answer as saying that they had happened by maybe July 1 after the start of that financial year but my supplementary question is – please can you answer the question that we asked?

#### **RESPONSE FROM DEPUTY LEADER AND EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR HOUSING**

I thank Councillor McGovern for her answer. I am not entirely clear what that actually was but to just to try and answer: the figure that we have given is the figure at the end of June which I think gives the greatest clarity in terms of determining progress that have been made by this local authority in terms of carrying out fire risks assessments before the unfortunate events at Lakanal. Prior to that date we have started an extensive programme of consultation and an extensive programme of training approved by the London Fire Brigade and carried out by the London Fire Brigade of our housing officers and a number of those assessments had already been undertaken as well as quality checks in terms of training for that date. We have given the figure, as I said, in the answer, because we think that best reflects the situation in terms of what was the situation as and when the fire occurred.

**21. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR COMMUNITY SAFETY FROM COUNCILLOR FIONA COLLEY**

Despite a third of Nunhead Green being a dedicated dog exercise area, a number of owners are exercising their dogs off the lead in the other area and often not "scooping" up. This behaviour is putting many parents off using the Green and the brand new childrens' play area. What enforcement action is being taken to ensure owners control their dogs on Nunhead Green?

**RESPONSE**

Wardens have been making regular visits to the area, and have been actively speaking to dog users to remind them of their responsibility to pick up after their dog.

In August the council team carried out a "flag the poo" educational event around Barton Close (next to Nunhead Green) as a result of concerns raised by local residents around dog fouling. The team also delivered educational leaflets in the area and handed dog bags out to local residents.

Arrangements are being made for both a "flag the poo" educational event within the park as well as dog operations in the area to see if we can improve the environmental quality of the area as well as the perception of local residents.

**SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR FIONA COLLEY**

I would like to thank the executive member for her answer. I have seen sharp rise in complaints about dogs in Nunhead, particularly aggressive dogs as well as owners not scooping, most recently from a resident whose cat was savagely killed in her own front garden. Will you consider further dog control order similar to the one on the Aylesbury Estate for Nunhead?

**RESPONSE**

I thank the member for her question. When we brought in the dog control thing on the Aylesbury Estate I think I did say at the time that we would see how that worked and if it was successful, which it has been, we would look at expanding it through the rest of the borough. I don't have a time frame at the moment but I can let you know as soon as I know.

**22. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR COMMUNITY SAFETY FROM COUNCILLOR JOHN FRIARY**

Before the last election, the leader of the council said that he didn't like ASBOs and Southwark has been less eager to use them than other London boroughs in the past.

Does the executive member now accept that these tools have helped make Southwark a safer place?

## **RESPONSE**

The leader has never said that he doesn't like ASBOs. We both regard them as regrettable necessities. I believe that their use is not something to be proud of, but instead represents a failure of the system in some way. On July 27 2007 Children's Secretary Ed Balls agreed and admitted that: "It's a failure every time a young person gets an ASBO" (Source: The Daily Mirror).

We use various tools to prevent anti social behaviour and to intervene swiftly when it arises. It is clear from the council residents' survey that the range of interventions is having an impact with anti social behaviour being perceived as less of a problem compared to two years ago.

We issue acceptable behaviour contracts (ABCs) in cases where individuals or groups are identified as becoming involved in nuisance behaviour. Since 2006-07 Southwark's anti social behaviour Unit (SASBU) has issued over 500 ABC's with 130 issued in 2009-10 to date. The breach rate of ABCs last year was just 11%. ABCs have proved a very effective tool to prevent anti social behaviour from escalating.

The council has been at the forefront of improving the ability of front line officers to intervene before nuisance behaviour increases. This includes the introduction of accredited powers for the wardens to confiscate alcohol in situations where street drinking is perceived to cause a nuisance. The wardens service has undertaken over 350 confiscations since the powers came into effect in April 2009.

The council also uses parenting orders as part of its work to address nuisance caused by young people. In 2009-10 there were 10 parenting orders given from the youth court from April 1 2009 to date.

In addition the council uses a wide range of other interventions including mediation services to find swift remedies to nuisance issues. The council regularly refers over 180 mediation cases to Southwark Mediation as part of our preventative approach.

## **SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR JOHN FRIARY**

Thank you Mr Mayor. Can I thank the executive member for her answer which is a good old fashioned Liberal Democrat answer, in part yes and in part no, so just for clarity the follow-up question is – does the member agree with her own statement that the government anti-social behaviour legislation has proved a very effective tool to prevent anti-social behaviour from escalating?

## **RESPONSE**

I am not sure really that it has proved completely effective. I find it very sad that it is necessary to use any form of constraint against children but I am afraid that it is something that this government has not done anything to help us eradicate on our streets. We use ASBOs etc. which I think are working quite well in this area in the borough. Perhaps next time you are talking to your ministers you could sort of perhaps get them to give us more money to deal with this problem.

## **23. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR RESOURCES FROM COUNCILLOR JELIL LADIPO**

Can the executive member outline the savings associated with the move of the council's back office function to Tooley Street?

## **RESPONSE**

The move to Tooley Street is motivated by our desire to increase our capacity to deliver top-quality services for local people, to save the council more than £20m and for staff to work in a modernised and professional environment. This will be achieved by:

- a) Making operational savings and improving the efficiency of back-office functions
- b) Improving cross-departmental working, allowing us to improve the quality and efficiency of our services
- c) Improving working conditions for staff, saving more than £1m per annum that is currently spent on recruitment and retention, thus improving the efficiency of our officers. This will also remove the need to employ expensive agency staff
- d) Saving the money we would need to invest to bring our current offices up to modern standards. Decades of underinvestment in the council's office property stock have left it unfit for use.

The council currently has over 100 offices across the borough which causes problems in terms of travel between offices and the duplication of back office services. By moving to new offices, we can secure significant efficiencies by reducing duplication of back-office functions, cutting back on travel times and introducing modern ways of working. For example, in 2009-10 we are seeking to make £3m of savings from shared services. An additional £2m savings are to be generated by reducing budgets that departments will no longer need because a large number of their staff will be in one place. This totals £5m and over the medium term it is expected that it will be possible to make further shared services savings.

The move will achieve a significant impact in furthering the council's "green" priorities. It would cost £20m to green all our office buildings and make them more sustainable.

If the council had decided not to move to Tooley Street, there would still be the need to replace buildings due to be lost to regeneration and to lease expiry. If the council had decided to build its own office to replace the lost accommodation (approximately 200,000 square feet like-for-like replacement accommodation) the estimated cost, at £155 per square foot, would be in the region of £31m, plus the actual or opportunity cost for an appropriate site.

## **SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR JELIL LADIPO**

Thank you Mr Mayor. I would like to thank the executive member for his response. To be very clear, the cost of getting rid of Tooley Street, as members opposite propose, would it be prohibitive in both monetary costs and in terms of environment?

## **RESPONSE**

Thank you Mr Mayor. I would like to thank Councillor Ladipo for his supplemental. Yes I am indeed nonplussed by the approach being taken by members opposite. If we hadn't moved to Tooley Street we would have been facing repair bills of some £20 million on our existing properties. To have done the works to bring properties such as Chaplin and Chiltern up to modern green standards would have been another £40 odd million and because of leases coming to an end we would have been facing a need to procure other offices, and even if we had built them that would be another £31 million and with 1% on council tax only bringing in £800,000, it would seem therefore that the members opposite are proposing a drastic increase in council tax for our residents.

**24. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR RESOURCES FROM COUNCILLOR CAROLINE PIDGEON**

For the financial years 2006-07 to 2009-10 could the executive member please advise the council assembly how many Southwark residents had an arrangement or formal payment plan to pay their council tax monthly in cash on a date other than the first day of the month?

**RESPONSE**

We have five available payment dates for direct debit payers: the 1<sup>st</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> of each month. For cash payers, there is just one payment date that is generally available, the 1<sup>st</sup> of each month. Although not actively encouraged as it impinges on the recovery process, we do in exceptional circumstances allow an alternative cash payment date.

We currently have 1,575 cash payers with instalment dates other than the 1<sup>st</sup> of the month.

The figures for previous years are:

2006-07: Figures not available  
2007-08: 1,305  
2008-09: 1,127  
2009-10: 1,575.

**SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR CAROLINE PIDGEON**

Thank you very much. I would like to thank the executive member for his answer and it is very interesting that we are seeing about 1,500 residents pay by cash on other days in the month and this often reflects when people's pension or other income comes through. Now once this arrangement has been made what I would like to know is will you guarantee that such arrangements are carried forward into subsequent years and if not, will you ensure that the council undertakes to contact the individuals and make similar arrangements as I have recently had casework where a constituent actually ended up with court costs because she thought the arrangement carried forward and clearly the council did not.

**RESPONSE**

Thank you Mr Mayor. I would like to thank Councillor Pidgeon for her supplemental. The council policy is to promote regular payment by direct debit because it is both convenient for the resident and easier for the council to collect. Cash payments are really due by the first of the month and it is only really in exceptional circumstances that we should make arrangements to pay after the due date because the council's computer systems automatically start to believe that the resident is in arrears. I am advised that the cost of making changes to the computer system to allow this on a regular basis would be quite considerable and therefore it is not our current plan.

**25. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR RESOURCES FROM COUNCILLOR RICHARD LIVINGSTONE**

The executive member is on record as saying that he thinks Liberata have performed poorly in fulfilling the council tax collection contract. Given that this was clear in early 2008, why did he and his colleagues decide to reappoint them at that time?

## **RESPONSE**

The council has been in a contractual relationship with Liberata since 1998, when Labour let the contract to them. A full review of the contract was completed in 2002-03. In 2005-06 Liberata introduced their shared service centre in Barrow as part of their promised improvement plan. As a consequence the contract was further reviewed and a two year rolling contract model was introduced. The contract renewal was considered annually.

When I took over the Resources portfolio on May 21 2008, the next date for the review of the contract was March 31 2009.

It was evident that Liberata were failing to deliver promised improvements in 2008-09 and therefore I announced our intention to retender the contract at council assembly on January 28 2009.

At the Partnership Board on March 31 2009 we gave notice to Liberata, as this was the first contractual date available to me. The poor council tax collection performance contributed to the decision not to extend the contract.

### **26. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR RESOURCES FROM COUNCILLOR MARK GLOVER**

Could the executive member please provide details of the cost of installing plasma TV screens across the Tooley Street building. They appear to show BBC television news. Does the executive member believe this is an appropriate use of council resources?

## **RESPONSE**

The total cost of installation of the TV and digital signage system and AV screens at Tooley Street has been £35,000.

Where possible screens used at Tooley Street have been relocated from buildings which are to be disposed of and the provision is standard office practice for any modern organisation. Screens located on the upper floors are for AV use replacing the need for projectors; additionally there are screens that support communications and emergency planning activities. The screens on the ground floor directly support our training activities and general communication to staff and visitors.

The council is reusing existing equipment where possible to provide mobile facilities for other meeting rooms and training rooms.

### **27. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR RESOURCES FROM COUNCILLOR JANE SALMON**

What is the likely cost of Gordon Brown's proposal to force all 16 and 17 year old single mums into a network of supervised homes?

## **RESPONSE**

Supervised homes in Southwark are a measure of last resort, and there are other support services to young parents available in the community. In general, the council would support 16 and 17 year olds with their own families rather than offer them separate accommodation where they could become more isolated and more vulnerable.

The position as of October 28 2009 is that the housing assessment and support services (HASS) is providing ongoing assistance to eight 16/17 year old parents of which, six are in supported accommodation. The average cost per annum of each of these placements is £8,797.

The council does not keep data on all 16-17 year old mothers, if they are living at home with their parents and doing well, the council would not come into contact with them, nor keep information as to whether they have a partner or not. However, the latest data that we hold shows that around 100 young females in Southwark have conceived under the age of 18 and go on to have the baby.

If 100 of our young mothers had to leave home and were placed in supervised housing, this would cost us £879,700 a year.

**28. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR RESOURCES FROM COUNCILLOR ALTHEA SMITH**

The executive member has previously said that much of the furniture which had been in use at council premises around the borough would be re-used at Tooley Street. How many items, broken down by type, have been transferred to Tooley Street? Does the executive member have any idea of the value of the furniture dumped by the council?

**RESPONSE**

We have reused as much furniture as possible in our relocation to Tooley Street, principally in meeting rooms and individual offices. The following items are been reused at Tooley Street:-

- 103 specialist task chairs (where the chair has previously been supplied due to specific employee needs)
- 21 task chairs
- 204 meeting room chairs
- 7 low meeting chairs
- 4 sofas
  
- 28 meeting tables (4 people)
- 10 meeting tables (6 people)
- 16 meeting tables (8 people)
- 5 low tables
- 31 desks
  
- 5 shelf units
- 26 cupboards (tall and low)
- 19 pedestals

Some additional small safes, plan chests and racks to meet unique requirements.

The council has not “dumped” any furniture. Broken furniture has been recycled and the remaining furniture is to be disposed of in accordance with a comprehensive furniture strategy which fully incorporates re-use within the estate, distribution to Southwark based charitable organisations and sustainable disposal of obsolete furniture.

**29. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR RESOURCES FROM COUNCILLOR TAYO SITU**



Further to council assembly motion 8.2 on November 5 2008, can the executive member tell me what review has been carried out of Southwark Council's procurement, contract and best value policies; what measures he has put in place to ensure Southwark's partners in the local strategic partnership pay no less than the London Living Wage and, how he is promoting the London living wage and London Citizens' Living Wage Employer Award to the private sector in Southwark?

## **RESPONSE**

We have reviewed our procurement contract and best value policies to ensure that all staff working directly for the council are paid at or above the London living wage.

Though the council support the payment of the London living wage, legal advice is that adoption of the London Living Wage cannot be made legally binding on suppliers. Present European Union case law also suggests that any such contract would be unenforceable as it would contravene the posted workers directive and Article 49 of the European Community treaty.

In procurement terms, the adoption or otherwise of the London Living Wage by an organisation cannot be used as a material consideration in determining the award of a contract, although it could be used as part of a wider evaluation of tenderers' good employment practices.

We will continue to work with partners in the public, private and voluntary sector to promote the payment of a fair wage to all staff. The simplest way to ensure all workers in London receive the London living wage would be for government to legislate to that effect.

### **30. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR RESOURCES FROM COUNCILLOR KIM HUMPHREYS**

To ask the executive member for resources to provide details of the number of enquiries received by officers and members over the past 12 months and the cost, both monetary and in officer time, including the cost of any external advice required dealing with those individuals whom the council is considering classifying as unreasonable and persistent complainants under the council's habitual complainants policy?

## **RESPONSE**

The council's habitual complainant policy allows officers to classify a complainant as unreasonably persistent, for example, where they:

1. Have an excessive number of contacts with the council placing unreasonable demands on staff.
2. Harass or are personally abusive or verbally aggressive on more than one occasion towards staff dealing with their complaint.
3. Display unreasonable demands or expectations and fails to accept that these may be unreasonable once a clear explanation has been given (e.g. insisting on the response to a complaint or enquiry being provided more urgently than is reasonable or recognised practice).
4. Display attention seeking behaviour, threatening to involve the Secretary of State, the Prime Minister, the Queen etc.
5. Persists in pursuing a complaint where the council's complaints procedure has been fully implemented and exhausted.

The council currently has one individual who is classified as habitual and officers are considering applying the policy on three further individuals.

It is very difficult to provide precise details of the cost in monetary terms/officer time of dealing with these individuals, however it is clear that the cost of dealing with such individuals is very high and takes away valuable resources. Due to the nature of their contact with the council, habitual complainants tend to contact numerous officers, often at a senior management level and not all of this contact is recorded centrally.

However, set out below are estimates of time and costs associated with these types of cases:

#### **Example A – Persistent contact over 12 months**

	<b>Estimated cost</b>	<b>Estimated no received</b>	<b>Cost</b>
<b>Cost of phone calls</b>	£3.22	2,000	£6,440.00
<b>Logging enquiry and seeking officer response</b>	£11.88	40	£475.20
<b>Cost for investigation and providing response</b>	£50.00	2,000	£100,000.00
<b>Total</b>			<b>£106,915.20</b>

The call price is based on 2009 customer service centre costs

The admin cost per complaints is based on 2009 customer service centre costs

Cost per written response provided is based on average cost of a stage 1 complaint response

Please note that this estimate is based on the number of calls and emails received over a 2 week period in October 2009. The costing estimate above is associated with one complainant that is currently being considered as being classified as a habitual complainant. These interactions were then extrapolated in order to estimate the total numbers received over a 12 month period. This is a conservative estimate and it is likely that the actual figures are significantly higher. It should also be noted that as senior managers are involved in dealing with this complainant these costs are likely to be significantly higher in reality.

#### **Example B – Single issues**

	<b>Estimated cost</b>	<b>Estimated no received</b>	<b>costs</b>
<b>Stage one complaint</b>	£50.00	1	£50.00
<b>Stage two complaint</b>	£250.00	1	£250.00
<b>Stage three complaint</b>	£500.00	1	£500.00
<b>LGO complaint</b>	£1,000.00	1	£1,000.00
<b>Meetings held with complainant</b>	£100.00	3	£300.00
<b>Emails received</b>	£50.00	80	£4,000.00
<b>Total</b>			<b>£6,100.00</b>

Please note that this complaint relates to a single issue which has been investigated at all three stages of the complaint process. The case was also reviewed by the Ombudsman who declined to investigate citing that the case was outside of his jurisdiction. The complainant has met with senior officers on three separate occasions' and a resolution to date has not been reached.

**31. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR RESOURCES FROM COUNCILLOR NICK VINEALL**

Gordon Brown has announced an asset sale of some £16 billion last week. How much of this is targeted at local authority assets, what difference would it make to the government's record debts, and could this force the sell off of vital amenities to meet his arbitrary targets?

**RESPONSE**

We would, of course, be against any proposal by government to force us to dispose of assets that we do not intend to, or that any profits from sales would not be used to benefit the local community.

The detailed proposals have not yet been fully explained, however, the council has one of the strongest track records of asset sales of any local authority in the country raising £175,516,398 over the last 5 years. This has enabled us to deliver an ambitious capital investment programme which has enabled us to make major investments in schools, parks, leisure centres and supporting cleaner, greener, safer and infrastructure improvements. It has also allowed us to invest significant resources in our housing investment programme.

As public finances tighten, and access to capital resources remains limited, the council's disposal programme is critical in providing much needed investment in local communities.

**32. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR REGENERATION FROM COUNCILLOR CHRIS PAGE**

When does the executive member expect the Heygate estate demolition and rebuild to be fully completed? How has this deadline changed since the demolition was formally and finally agreed by the council?

**RESPONSE**

Demolition is planned to start early in the new year. Our estimate continues to be that the redevelopment will take approximately 12 years to complete from the first phase of demolition. Market conditions will inevitably influence the pace of development.

**33. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR REGENERATION FROM COUNCILLOR DOMINIC THORNCROFT**

In 2006 the council allocated a five year budget of £14.5 million for the Nunhead and East Peckham renewal area. Six months ago, local councillors met with senior officers to seek an update, but despite officers indicating that a progress review was in hand, no further information has yet been forthcoming:

- a) Please provide an itemised breakdown of spending that has been made from the allocated budget;
- b) Please provide an itemised breakdown of spending that is committed to be made from the allocated budget;
- c) How much money remains in this specific budget for allocation on this renewal area?

**RESPONSE**

- a) A total of £933,268 has been spent to date, against the following heads of expenditure:
- Nunhead environmental £95,899
  - East Peckham environmental £192,151
  - East Peckham & Nunhead lighting £645,218
- b) Remaining commitments are £2,837,687 against the following heads of expenditure:
- Nunhead and Evelina Road £739,000
  - Meeting House Lane £487,997
  - East Peckham & Nunhead lighting £366,645
  - Queens Road £1,244,045
- c) There is a remaining balance of £979,045.

The uncommitted sum will be reviewed as part of the capital programme refresh being submitted to executive early in the New Year.

**34. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR REGENERATION FROM COUNCILLOR MICHELLE HOLFORD**

Would the executive member for regeneration please advise on progress towards persuading, in conjunction with Lambeth Council, TfL/London Buses to improve bus services in the middle and south of the borough with particular reference to:

- a) Inadequate provision of public transport southwesterly from Peckham through Dulwich towards the Gypsy Hill/Tulse hill area; and
- b) The proposed actions arising from the joint meeting of Southwark and Lambeth members and officers held on June 17 2009 at which the above matter, and others, was addressed.

Would the executive member please also provide an up-date on progress towards extending the route 42 bus from North Dulwich to East Dulwich as supported by resolution of council assembly on July 8 2009.

**RESPONSE**

In April officers responded to Transport for London's (TfL) spring bus services review consultation and raised the concerns submitted by members around the lack of bus services in these areas. Feedback is usually received as part of the next round of route specific consultations. A similar consultation for the autumn review is due at the end of October and these concerns will be reiterated.

Further to the meeting in June, Lambeth and Southwark officers are working together to arrange a meeting between neighbouring councillors to discuss cross borough bus needs and services. This meeting is currently being scheduled by Lambeth officers and is anticipated to be held by December.

Officers met TfL in early September to press for a review of the business case for the 42 extension. TfL are currently updating this and have agreed to release it on completion. I will continue to push for this business case to be reviewed and completed as soon as possible. The primary care trust (PCT) has been contacted regarding their projections for increased use of the service due to their plans for Dulwich Hospital. They have agreed to

attend a future meeting with TfL but would prefer this to happen after November when their plans will be more developed.

Officers are waiting to hear back from TfL after requesting that a meeting be arranged with ward members.

**35. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT FROM COUNCILLOR BARRIE HARGROVE**

Could the executive member confirm that there are currently no air quality monitoring stations operational in the borough? Can he provide the dates of each monitoring station closure since 2002?

**RESPONSE**

The two council air quality monitoring stations are being relocated due to changes in the council's estate.

We are in the process of identifying sites for the currently closed stations, as well as potential sites for additional stations. We intend to have the first two stations fully operational in the first half of 2010.

We temporarily closed one station in 2007 and the second in 2009. The one presently situated at the Livesey museum will be resituated on the Old Kent Road subject to planning permission being granted. Sites are still being considered for the Larcom Street station.

Having our own data assists the council to more accurately assess its air pollution and its effects on the local population. However, there are other data sources on which Southwark can model its air quality.

**36. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT FROM COUNCILLOR GORDON NARDELL**

In November 2007, the then executive member for environment told council assembly that the executive intended to make Southwark a completely 20mph zone by 2010. Leaving aside the special case of TfL roads and other major routes, does he expect to meet that target?

**RESPONSE**

The borough has been implementing 20mph zones as part of its transport improvement programme for six years. 69% of Southwark's roads are now within a 20mph zone and once the 2009-10 programme of works has been implemented this total should rise to 86% of the Southwark area.

**Summary of roads programmed for 20mph zones in Southwark (see figure 1)**

Measure	Current zones	Zones for delivery in 2009-10	Limits for delivery in 2009-10	TOTAL 20mph zones and limits by 2009-10
By area*	69%	5%	12%	86%
By km length#	198.5km	11.5km	30km	240km

\* Please note that the land area calculated does not include open space

# Please note that this does not include Strategic Road Network or Transport for London Road Network roads

The cost of completing the remaining zones is £2.4m, which far exceeds the available resources as TfL provide limited funding for the delivery of between 2-4 zones each year. Local residents have also expressed concerns about some of the zones, and want a higher quality specification at a greater cost than originally anticipated.

We have submitted a proposal as part of Sustainable Communities Act, to relax the current legal requirement of having to install traffic calming measures to make 20 mph zones 'self enforcing' – i.e. without traffic calming measures. I believe that with this local discretion which would be at a much lower cost, we can better decide whether such traffic calming measures should be self enforcing. We look forward to hearing whether the proposal is shortlisted by the government for final implementation.

**37. QUESTION TO THE DEPUTY LEADER AND EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR HOUSING FROM COUNCILLOR IAN WINGFIELD**

The housing strategy 2009-16 suggests that the executive is not intending to bring any homes to the Southwark decent homes standard after 2010-11. Are the executive member and his colleagues abandoning their aspiration to bring all the council's stock to this higher standard?

**RESPONSE**

The housing strategy 2009-16 contains a clear commitment to carry out works to bring 2000 council homes a year up to the Southwark decent homes standard over the next 5 years, and to continue to explore a comprehensive range of options to secure the required investment in the council's housing stock.

**38. QUESTION TO THE DEPUTY LEADER AND EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR HOUSING FROM COUNCILLOR JAMES GURLING**

Could he explain what is happening with council funding for Walworth Garden Farm?

**RESPONSE**

Walworth Garden Farm is currently in a contractual relationship with the council to deliver a community gardening service to older and vulnerable people in the borough. Last year, the council decided to review expenditure on this contract, to make sure that outcomes were being effectively monitored and tracked, and that value for money was being achieved. A saving to the council's housing revenue account is proposed, but has not been implemented in the current financial year so that further discussions can take place over the impact of this saving on the viability of the farm's operation.

The council has contacted the farm to meet to discuss the potential impact on the business of a reduction in contractual commitment, and to offer assistance to find other funding sources before any savings are taken from the community gardening scheme.

**39. QUESTION TO THE DEPUTY LEADER AND EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR HOUSING FROM COUNCILLOR PAUL BATES**

Can the executive member please detail the number of recorded lift outages in Faraday ward since July 1 2008 to date and detail the reason for the outage and the length of time taken to put the lifts back into working order?

**RESPONSE**

There are 56 lifts in the Faraday ward. Whilst lift reliability across the borough runs at around 95% availability, the reliability of lifts in Faraday is lower, at 90.88%. The number of repairs call outs is correspondingly higher, at nearly 1500 since July 2008, 10.3% of all lift call outs in the borough. We do not believe this level of reliability is acceptable, it reflects the condition of the lifts particularly on the Aylesbury Estate on which major regeneration has started. We are considering a number of measures to address this, including a new estate based team who will take responsibility for all aspects of local estate management. Major investment is planned in the boroughs lifts, with 53 replacements planned next year. £8 million has been committed to this programme to run for a two year period from January.

**40. QUESTION TO THE DEPUTY LEADER AND EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR HOUSING FROM COUNCILLOR LORRAINE LAUDER**

Councillors represent their constituents seven days a week and I often get calls from residents about urgent housing casework at the weekend. Why is the members line at the call centre not open at the weekend?

**RESPONSE**

The council offers a direct priority members' service from 9.00am until 10pm weekdays and from 9am to 1pm on Saturdays.

The service offers members the ability to speak to a trained member of staff and have their casework, logged & managed during these times. If there is an emergency, outside these hours, then the council's emergency duty officer, based at the CSC will be available to deal with emergency issues within the borough. At all times during the day or night, there is the ability to escalate emergency situations within the council.

A customer satisfaction survey last month revealed 90.69% of residents were happy with the quality of repairs and 92.59% of repairs were completed on time. The council has to consider the cost implications of providing members this service based on this.

**41. QUESTION TO THE DEPUTY LEADER AND EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR HOUSING FROM COUNCILLOR KIRSTY MCNEILL**

The housing strategy 2009-16 contains no significant proposals to improve the quality and responsiveness of the housing repairs service, yet along with all of my Labour group colleagues I continue to receive significant quantities of casework arising from the shortcomings of this service. Why is there such a significant omission from the strategy?

**RESPONSE**

The housing strategy 2009-2016 is a high level strategic document, covering all housing tenures. It deals with issues such as new housing supply, investment in all forms of housing to improve stock condition, and addressing the borough's housing needs. As a strategic document it would not cover operational areas such as the responsive repairs service for Southwark council tenants.

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Our aspirations for the repairs service remain to deliver an excellent service to all residents, and we believe the service is changing for the better. 91% of customers are satisfied or very satisfied with the service. Over 99% of appointments made are kept, and call waiting times have been kept within the 60 second target all year. In fact the number of complaints has reduced this year, and our performance in turning them around has received the UK Housing Award for Customer Service last financial year, a reflection of the speed of change and the real improvements made to the service. Obviously given the volume of the service some clients remain dissatisfied but we are working tirelessly to push our performance levels even higher.

**42. QUESTION TO THE DEPUTY LEADER AND EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR HOUSING FROM COUNCILLOR MARTIN SEATON**

Of those leaseholders whose homes have been subject to compulsory purchase or otherwise bought by the council on the Heygate estate as part of the regeneration, how many has the council re-housed as tenants? Does the executive member know how many of those who the council has not re-housed have left Southwark to find new housing elsewhere?

**RESPONSE**

Eight leaseholders have so far been rehoused as council tenants. One leaseholder recommended for council tenancy following assessment decided not to take up the offer of council tenancy and found their own accommodation subsequent to repurchase.

There are two cases which have been recommended for council tenancy but have not yet successfully bid or accepted a property on the Homesearch system.