

SOUTHWARK COUNCIL

COUNCIL ASSEMBLY

(EXTRAORDINARY)

WEDNESDAY NOVEMBER 4 2009

QUESTIONS ON ITEM 2.1

1. QUESTION TO THE LEADER FROM COUNCILLOR PETER JOHN

At the annual meeting, council assembly agreed to carry out a 12 week consultation on the changes to executive arrangements over the web and through Southwark Life Magazine. How many responses did the council receive to this consultation?

RESPONSE

As stated in the report there were no responses to the consultation. The consultation was conducted over a 12 week period through the website, and ended on September 21 2009. I am advised by officers that they did not place an advert in Southwark Life.

SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR PETER JOHN

The point being is this really adequate consultation. A 12 week piece on the website where nobody responds to, which was on a fairly inaccessible part of the website - in any event you have to follow the link after link to get to it - is it really in the spirit of the act and the level of consultation which is required and if the leader doesn't know the answer perhaps the head of legal and democratic services/strategic director could advise us on that point.

RESPONSE

Yes Mr Mayor I believe it was - this authority held at considerable expense, at the insistence of the Labour government, a referendum on the proposition that we should have an elected Mayor in January 2002. As I recalled the vast majority of people in Southwark sat at home and did not go and vote, of those who did two thirds resoundingly rejected the proposition. The proposition this time is people either have an elected Mayor or they have a strong leader model. We know they don't want an elected Mayor because they told us that in the referendum which we held in January 2002. Therefore by default not my choice this is the way the government tells us we have to run our constitution. The only other option is a strong leader model. The fact that we probably have in this room the 60 odd most politically engaged, most sad nerds, most interested in local and civic issues in this authority and not a single person in this room replied to the consultation. This has not given me any hope that had we plastered Tooley Street or the Town Hall in banners and flashing lights then we would have achieved even the sum of one response. In fact I am told that one London council did strewn the town hall banners and got precisely five responses. I would rather spend the money on things that matter to people like decent homes for example.

2. QUESTION TO THE LEADER FROM COUNCILLOR FIONA COLLEY

At the annual meeting, council assembly agreed to carry out a 12 week consultation on the changes to executive arrangements over the web and through Southwark Life magazine. What were the results of the consultation?

RESPONSE

As stated in the report, there were no responses to the consultation.

SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR FIONA COLLEY

I would like to thank the leader for his frankly shocking answer but would he not agree that the lamentable failure of this consultation really does not meet the council's duty to involve and that he should take this opportunity to take this back and just try a little harder to actually let people have their say.

RESPONSE

Mr Mayor, in January 2002 at considerable expense forced upon it by the Labour government this council held a referendum on the proposition that we should have an elected Mayor. As I recalled turnout was a pitiful low 11%, I think only Sunderland has managed to achieve a lower turnout in the Mayoral referendum. By a stonking two thirds to one third the public of Southwark decided that they did want an elected Mayor model in this authority. Given the subsequent events in places like Doncaster ooh!, Stoke-on-Trent ooh! and a range of others, I don't believe that they would have changed their minds. The fact that not a single person responded to the consultation even out of the political and civically engaged worthies in this room tends to me to suggest that once again in an attempt to whip up public enthusiasm in an intensely sterile debate about which precise constitution model this council should adopt is not at the forefront of people's needs whereas things like decent homes, decent leisure centres, improved public transport, being able to send your kids to a school that you want to rather than ones that the government says you have to, things like public health issues, things like the minimum wage in London, still not having a London weighting do matter to people. Those are the kind of things that voters on the doorstep engage with me about. Not should we have an elected Mayor or a strong leader.

3. QUESTION TO THE LEADER FROM COUNCILLOR DORA DIXON-FYLE

At the annual meeting, council assembly agreed to carry out a 12 week consultation on the changes to executive arrangements over the web and through Southwark Life Magazine. How much did the consultation process cost in total?

RESPONSE

Apart from officer time, there was no cost to the consultation.