

SOUTHWARK COUNCIL

COUNCIL ASSEMBLY

(ORDINARY)

WEDNESDAY 27 JANUARY 2010

MEMBERS' QUESTION TIME

1. QUESTION TO THE LEADER FROM COUNCILLOR BOB SKELLY

How do the results of the key stage 2 tests for 11 year olds compare with other areas and what is their impact on the borough in terms of future pupil numbers and people's decisions in where to raise their families?

RESPONSE

This summer for the first time, Southwark outperformed the group of similar boroughs determined by central government statisticians. This group includes the boroughs of Lambeth, Lewisham, Hackney and Islington.

In the key indicator of percentage of pupils achieving a level 4 in both literacy and numeracy, Southwark was the only one of its benchmark group to exceed the national average, sitting securely in the second quartile for performance.

For achievement at level 4 in literacy, mathematics and science Southwark now sits at the top of its benchmark group in each individual indicator and is at or above the national average for each. Over the last three years, the numbers of Southwark schools identified as good or outstanding by Ofsted has doubled, suggesting that the improvements in standards has been matched by improvements across our schools in areas such as care, attendance and behaviour, where Southwark's permanent exclusions were the lowest in the country last year.

Southwark schools have struggled over the years to attract local parents, particularly in the south of the borough where the most successful schools were often seen as being in either Lambeth or Lewisham. Our schools in the south of the borough saw unprecedented demand for places last year, with reports from the independent sector that their applications held-up, it seems likely that parents are beginning to recognise the improvements in our primary schools which have resulted in Southwark having some of the very best schools in the country. Eight such schools have recently been acknowledged by Ofsted, with Her Majesty's Chief Inspector inviting eight of our head teachers to lunch with her to celebrate their achievements, an unprecedented number.

SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR BOB SKELLY

I thank the leader for his answer which I think is one of the most gratifying answers we have had to a question in a very long time and I hope everyone reads it. The question is this – in the unlikely event of the party opposite regaining power do you think that Southwark's head teachers would feature strongly in the chief inspector's lunch parties?

RESPONSE

Councillor Skelly would know as well as I do the problem that we inherited in 2002 from the administration which had simply not prioritised the problems with education in this borough

sufficiently seriously and which ended with the debacle of a Labour government privatising the Labour councils' education department which turned out, unsurprisingly to those of us who objected at the time, not to be the answer either. I am delighted about the results, I am delighted about the performance of Southwark's schools. I am delighted also that on places like the Aylesbury estate, the investments that is going into buildings like Michael Faraday primary school and the Walworth Academy are a demonstration about the importance to this council of fit for purpose 21st century education buildings and I am delighted that once again it looks as though we are getting a large number of applications from people who live in Southwark who want to send their children to schools in Southwark because they realise that they are going to get a decent quality education in this borough.

2. QUESTION TO THE LEADER FROM COUNCILLOR PETER JOHN

Following the fires on Sumner Road and Camberwell Station Road, what action has the council taken to seek an improvement of security and fire safety on building sites in the borough?

RESPONSE

The council, Metropolitan Police Service and fire service met the day after the Sumner Road fire. The council is working with partner agencies to identify other construction sites in the borough which include a timber framed design. Three sites were identified and recommendations were made to the contractors. This included the site at Camberwell Station Road and resulted in a security guard being employed. Additionally the police, working with the local fire service established contingency plans for each of the sites in the borough and police were briefed regarding those priority premises which would require evacuation in the event of a fire. These arrangements were put into practice at Camberwell Station Road, ensuring a swift response from the emergency services in the protection of the public.

The police and council are working in partnership to ensure that regular patrols of these sites take place every day both during the day and at night time.

In addition the strategic director of regeneration and neighbourhoods has written to developers and building site contractors, currently operating in the borough, providing advice for site safety and advising extra vigilance.

3. QUESTION TO THE LEADER FROM COUNCILLOR CAROLINE PIDGEON

How many 16 year olds got five good GCSE passes last year, how has this improved compared to the previous Labour administration and how will it affect the borough's economic prospects to have much better qualified 16 years olds?

RESPONSE

Last year, 67.5% of Southwark students gained five good GCSEs (grades A* - C). This represents a fantastic increase of 11% from 2008. In 2002, the figure was only 36%.

Evidence is emerging to show that Southwark has weathered the recession better than other parts of the country, with smaller increases in unemployment levels. Some of this can be attributed the vastly improved performance of our young people at GCSE level. Not only has this led to more of them having the qualifications necessary to get a job, it has also led to significantly higher levels of people from Southwark going on to complete A-levels and then attend university.

SUPPLEMENTAL FROM COUNCILLOR CAROLINE PIDGEON

I would like to thank the leader for his answer. I am absolutely thrilled by the improvements from 36% in 2002 under the then Labour council, under the privatised local education authority, to approaching 70% last year. Are there any threats you see to our young people's progress?

RESPONSE

Mr Mayor, the problem that I think haunts all of us at the moment is the prospect of another generation leaving school with good qualifications that in the past would have been good enough to get a job but being unable to find a job and having the kind of youth unemployment problem for the next 4 or 5 years that this country had in the early 1980s. There is a degree of evidence now about the costs to the public purse that that lost generation of people who left school in the early '80s, did not have a job to go to, got lost to the system, with results of poor public health and problems with the criminal justice system and so on. I think the problem that we are all wrestling with now is here we are with schools producing good results, people leaving schools ready for work, fit for work with qualifications which should enable them to get a job but a real problem about finding jobs in places like London. We are doing our best through schemes like the local apprenticeship scheme to help them but it is a real problem for all of us in London at the moment.

4. QUESTION TO THE LEADER FROM COUNCILLOR ANDREW PAKES

How is the council using this Holocaust Memorial Day, the 65th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, as an opportunity to raise awareness of the Holocaust across the borough and educate young people about the terrible atrocities during the Holocaust and subsequent genocides?

RESPONSE

The council is supporting a number of events to commemorate this important anniversary. The Mayor attended a short Act of Remembrance this morning at Geraldine Mary Harmsworth Park and led a Wreath Laying Ceremony at the Soviet Memorial. The theme for 2010 is 'The Legacy of Hope' and the Mayor was asked to give a short speech reflecting on the Holocaust and what it means for us today. At 3:30pm the Deputy Mayor attended the 2010 Holocaust Memorial Day National Commemoration at The Guildhall.

Obviously, lessons about the Holocaust are included in the school curriculum across the country, and I hope that schools in Southwark will use this anniversary to further promote the understanding of our young people of the terrible events of Holocaust and all subsequent genocides.

SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR ANDREW PAKES

Thank you very much Mr Mayor. Can I thank the leader for his answer and can I just ask a supplementary question – I know as we get closer to elections it is very easy for us to go into our party political point scoring and very often this chamber does not do itself justice for the people of this borough. I think sometimes there is a bigger picture and I think it is very telling today in all our debates that 65 years ago today the gates of Auschwitz-Birkenau were being broken down by liberating soldiers to greet the survivors that were there. I have had the privilege today and over the last week to look after some of the 200 survivors that are in London today as part of that commemoration and those surviving holocaust and genocides such as in Rwanda.

I am very pleased that the deputy Mayor was present at that event today alongside other Mayors. Could I just ask then the leader to perhaps reflect and ask officers to look through

what we have done this year and whether in future years we can do even more because 65 years on there's not many survivors left but that legacy of hope is a message that Southwark should encapsulate as all our migrant communities have a long proud history on this.

RESPONSE

Mr Mayor, certainly the most moving meeting of the community council that I have attended in the last seven years was the meeting of Bermondsey community council where young people from the Salmon youth centre in a joint project with Cambridge House, had been on a visit to Auschwitz-Birkenau and the before and after of taking a gang of teenagers from Bermondsey on a jolly foreign trip – for many of them the first time ever – to actually go into Auschwitz-Birkenau seeing at first hand the memorial exhibit there, the glasses and so on and realising quite what had happened and realising that it had happened to people of their own age was an absolutely telling video that we showed at the community council. I think the impact that it had on everyone who was watching was absolutely hair raising and it is that kind of thing I think which we need to bring home to people. It is very easy to watch black and white footage and think this is all something that happened in a far away place a long, long time ago. You are right; it still happens in places today and it is really important for all of us that we continue that on, which is why we should also remember things like the Blitz and it is very easy to sit at home and watch war films and war games on DVDs and Wiis and things like that – I am not for a moment trying to say that we should ban this but there is a real horror actually being on the receiving end of that which we should also remember and inform young people about.

5. QUESTION TO THE LEADER FROM COUNCILLOR RICHARD THOMAS

Last summer local residents around Lordship Lane were consulted about a new zebra crossing on Lordship Lane outside Somerfield. Over 80% of respondents wanted it. Can the leader please tell me when it will happen?

RESPONSE

I am delighted to announce that a report will be brought to the Dulwich Community Council meeting in March to update members on the programme for implementing a pelican crossing in this location using funding from the local implementation plan, 2010-13.

SUPPLEMENTAL FROM COUNCILLOR RICHARD THOMAS

Can I thank the leader for that answer. I am sure the people of East Dulwich will be delighted. I think one of the great problems with high streets is to address road safety and as a parent of young children I know that it can actually be quite terrifying walking up and down a high street rather than the safe – in inverted commas – environment that you get in purpose-built shopping mall. So I am delighted that he has given that commitment and the people of East Dulwich will get that long awaited crossing on Lordship Lane.

RESPONSE

Mr Mayor I am pleased about that and I am also pleased that members who live in Walworth receive the notification that the preparatory work to move that dreadful southern roundabout at the top of Walworth Road is shortly to begin. Over the course of this year we should see that roundabout going and street level crossings being reinstated at that junction so people do not have to go through those dreadful underpasses to get to where they want to at the Elephant and Castle and to reassert that the pedestrians have a proper place to play at street level at the Elephant & Castle as well. I think it is really important.

6. QUESTION TO THE LEADER FROM COUNCILLOR JAMES BARBER

Would the leader comment on Labour run Lambeth's plans to aim for a minimal recycling, high incineration policy to deal with household waste?

RESPONSE

Lambeth's recycling record under Labour is typical of the priority Labour gives to the environment. In 2006 when Labour regained control of the borough 22.2% of household waste was recycled. Under their brave new regime they managed to boost the recycling rate by a mammoth 3.3% to 25.5% by 2009 (the latest year DEFRA has figures for).

So given the proximity of the election and their lack of progress it was hardly surprising that in the summer of last year Lambeth Council launched a consultation on their MWMS - Municipal Waste Management Strategy including looking at 'whether Lambeth should aim for a minimal recycling, high incineration policy.'

It is clear from Labour's record on recycling in both Lambeth and Southwark – where after 40 years of Labour control the council's recycling rate was just 3.6% – that in office their actions speak louder than their words in opposition.

SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR JAMES BARBER

Thank you Mr Mayor. Would the leader make it clear that the Liberal Democrats in Southwark will completely reject any attempt to use incineration as a way of bypassing recycling targets and continue to make it easier for local people to maximise their recycling?

RESPONSE

Mr Mayor, yes – the whole point of the contract that we entered into earlier, the whole point of the PFI scheme for the waste transfer station on the Old Kent Road was to massively increase our capacity to collect recycling, to be able to collect different kinds of recycling and also to be able to take whatever rubbish remains to SELCHP and to make SELCHP what it was always designed to be, a giant combined heat power unit, so that the rubbish that gets burnt in SELCHP will produce the heating and then get connected up to the estates in Rotherhithe and Bermondsey to produce much more carbon friendly, much cheaper, much more reliable heating than they get at the moment. I think it is a totally virtuous circle and I think it is the kind of far sighted investment which this council needs to make because it needs to take responsibility for its waste; it needs to take responsibility for trying to increase the amount that we recycle. I think this is going to be a visionary scheme which will green Southwark, help us to meet the carbon reduction pledges, things like that and the MUSCo I think will transform Southwark as a place to live.

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

Given in 2006 Labour run Lambeth sold off their council housing without telling tenants and Labour run Lewisham is now selling many of its homes to London and Quadrant, what assurances will the leader give to Southwark tenants that their homes will not be privatised against their wishes?

RESPONSE

I'm happy to reassure Southwark tenants that the Liberal Democrats will maintain their pledge of not privatising council homes against their wishes.

I would also like to take this opportunity to disassociate myself and the Liberal Democrats from Cllr John's view, expressed at the last council assembly that the executive's decision

in 2005 to retain all stock “terrible” and “an awful con-trick”. Doing what tenants want is not “terrible” – it is the right thing to do.

SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR ANOON AL-SALMERAI

Thank you Mr Mayor and thank you to the leader for his answer. I was concerned to read that the privatised housing company in Lambeth is proposing a 5% rent rise and an 8% service charge rise. Does he agree with the Labour MP for Vauxhall who told the SLP that the rent should not be going up in Lambeth more than any other London council? A 5% increase in rent is not acceptable and an 8% increase for service charges would be outrageous because of the reality of poor services that tenants are getting in Lambeth. Can he also confirm that Southwark tenants will not face those sorts of increase?

RESPONSE

Mr Mayor, almost by definition council tenants in Southwark are some of the poorest people in the country and it is right that we should be responsible in any rent rises that we seek to impose. This year I think we are virtually mandated by the government to raise rents by just over 1%, that is below the current rate of RPI. I am delighted that the government listened to the representations we made last year when we were faced with having to impose on tenants a 6% rent increase and if we did not we were faced with losing a subsidy which would have had the equivalent effect to the HRA. But I do think it is wrong that council have to set rents according to a national scheme. I cannot understand why the government would want to nationalise rent setting but I think it is then incumbent on those of us who have far greater powers over local revenues to exercise that responsibly. I think at the moment to try and put up rent charges, as I say, on the poorest people in the society, cannot be the right thing to do.

QUESTION TO THE LEADER FROM COUNCILLOR JANE SALMON

How many complaints has he received in the last 12 months about the standard of social care in the borough and what information has been published by local MPs about their casework on this topic?

RESPONSE

In the last year, I have received seven pieces of correspondence related to social care. One of these was a complaint. From their recent annual reports, I am aware that social care issues accounted for 1.5% of casework enquiries for Harriet Harman MP, and 2% for Simon Hughes MP.

SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR JANE SALMON

Thank you Mr Mayor – I would like to thank the leader for his answer and ask that if the CQC report into adult social care really reflected the council service would you not have expected many more letters and complaints, including the local MPs and the Labour members opposite, but I wonder now if the members opposite are simply playing politics with elderly and vulnerable people in our borough?

RESPONSE

Mr Mayor, the reality is that if we are to accept all the verdicts of the independent inspectorates then the picture in social services in the last year is that we have gone from having one of the best social services departments in the country to one of the worst in the space of twelve months. I would be expecting not just members in this chamber to be raising queries about a sharp deterioration in services and not just local members of parliament to raise concerns about the sharp deterioration in social services but for service

users to be raising concerns about the sharp deterioration in social services. In addition to not having received complaints from members, and in addition to not having received complaints from MPs I have not been receiving complaints and neither, as far as I can tell, has Councillor Noakes or the department. We have not actually been receiving complaints from real people complaining about the deterioration in services. I do not think that the report from the CQC reflects the reality on the ground, I have never been shy in the past about accepting a report which is critical of council services, that have a valuable part to play in helping us to challenge ourselves and challenging our officers and seek to put right what is going wrong. We have learnt valuable lessons from inspections in the past but I think the CQC methodology was flawed, I think the evidence that they present was wrong, I think the report is bad and I do not accept this conclusion because I cannot see any independent corroboration for it. There are some valuable things I think in the CQC report which is so unbalanced and it is so hard to accept the central thrust of its conclusions, that it is hard to know what is good and reliable and requires action and what is not.

8. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR COMMUNITY SAFETY FROM COUNCILLOR BARRIE HARGROVE

What was the average response time from the council following reports of a) abandoned vehicles; b) graffiti; c) fly-tipping, broken down by month for the last twelve months?

RESPONSE

The tables give details of the average response time from the council for abandoned vehicles, graffiti and fly tipping.

For abandoned vehicles the nuisance vehicle unit has a target response of 24 hours.

Please find below a table showing responses within target and the number of vehicles dealt with over the last 12 months.

Month – 2009	No. of vehicles	Percentage responses within target
January	21	95.24
February	14	100
March	48	100
April	15	100
May	15	100
June	16	100
July	15	86.67
August	16	100
September	21	90.48
October	17	100
November	11	90.91
December	9	100

Target times for fly-tipping and graffiti removal is from 24 hours. The table below shows the percentage response times within target. Details are provided by our cleaning contractor for the period from April – November 2009.

Month – 2009	Percentage responses within target (Fly-tipping)	Percentage responses within target (Graffiti)
April	99	85
May	98	82
June	91.5	87
July	98	93
August	98	94

September	99	98
October	98.6	98
November	99	98.4

SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR BARRIE HARGROVE

Thank you Mr Mayor. Is the executive member concerned that the decision to increase the tonnage charge for commercial organisations to use Manor Place waste disposal depot by 8.3% during an economic downturn will increase the incidence of flytipping?

RESPONSE

I don't have the answer to that question but I will find out for you.

9. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR COMMUNITY SAFETY FROM COUNCILLOR MARK GLOVER

Can the executive member provide details of how many fixed penalty notices for environmental crime were issued in each of the past five years, broken down by type of offence? Can the executive member provide details of how many individuals and businesses have been prosecuted by the council for environmental crime in each of the past five years, broken down by type of offence?

RESPONSE

The following table provides details of the number of fixed penalty notices for environmental crime issued in each of the past five years by offence.

2005:		1725
E01	Littering s88(1) EPA 1990	1713
EXX	Historic FPN Code – Archive	12

2006:		3589
E01	Littering s88(1) EPA 1990	3351
E03	Non-compliance litter clearing notice s94B EPA 199	135
E04	Non-production of registration s5B CPAA 1989	50
EXX	Historic FPN Code – Archive	48
E06	Exposing/repairing vehicles on road a6 CNEA 2005	2
E12	Refuse & Disposal Amenity Act s24	2
E10	Unauthorised advertisements s43(1)ASBA 2003	1

2007:		3880
E01	Littering s88(1) EPA 1990	3067
E13	Depositing Litter S87/88	487
E16	Failure to produce waste transfer documents S34(5) 34(6)	101
E03	Non-compliance litter clearing notice s94B EPA 199	94
E04	Non-production of registration s5B CPAA 1989	36
EXX	Historic FPN Code – Archive	29
E25	Dog fouling	26
E22	Unauthorised marks on the highway (Graffiti) S132(1)	13
E10	Unauthorised advertisements s43(1)ASBA 2003	11
E24	Unauthorised display of advertising (fly posting) S224(3)	5
E12	Refuse & Disposal Amenity Act s24	4
E26	Smoking in a smoke free place S7(2) Health Act 2006	2

2007:		3880
E18	Unauthorised distribution of free printed matter S3A	1
E20	Exposing vehicles for sale on a road S3/6(1)	1
E14	Failure to comply with a street litter control notice S94/94A	1
E17	Failure to produce authority to transport waste S5/5B	1
E05	Non-compliance with receptacle notice s47ZA(2) EPA	1

2008:		5355
E13	Depositing Litter S87/88	4147
E01	Littering s88(1) EPA 1990	333
E26	Smoking in a smoke free place S7(2) Health Act 2006	188
E22	Unauthorised marks on the highway (Graffiti) S132(1)	170
E16	Failure to produce waste transfer documents S34(5) 34(6)	151
E25	Dog fouling	118
E35	Highway Obstruction	63
E17	Failure to produce authority to transport waste S5/5B	51
E24	Unauthorised display of advertising (fly posting) S224(3)	48
E36	Illegal Street Trading	31
E12	Refuse & Disposal Amenity Act s24	20
E39	Breach of an abatement - S80(4)	8
E33	Fly Posting	6
E10	Unauthorised advertisements s43(1)ASBA 2003	5
E23	Destroying or damaging property (Graffiti and flyposting) S1(1)	4
E20	Exposing vehicles for sale on a road S3/6(1)	3
E27	Failing to display required no-smoking signs S6(5) Health Act 2006	2
E19	Failure to comply with a waste receptacles notice S46/47/47ZA/47ZB	1
E06	Exposing/repairing vehicles on road a6 CNEA 2005	1
E03	Non-compliance litter clearing notice s94B EPA 199	1
E04	Non-production of registration s5B CPAA 1989	1
E34	Nuisance Vehicle	1
E21	Repairing vehicles on a road S4/6(1)	1
E18	Unauthorised distribution of free printed matter S3A	1

2009:		4298
E13	Depositing Litter S87/88	2708
E01	Littering s88(1) EPA 1990	722
E16	Failure to produce waste transfer documents S34(5) 34(6)	184
E26	Smoking in a smoke free place S7(2) Health Act 2006	163
E22	Unauthorised marks on the highway (Graffiti) S132(1)	145
E36	Illegal Street Trading	129
E24	Unauthorised display of advertising (flyposting) S224(3)	89
E17	Failure to produce authority to transport waste S5/5B	56
E25	Dog fouling	54
E39	Breach of an abatement - S80(4)	26
E21	Repairing vehicles on a road S4/6(1)	7
E10	Unauthorised advertisements s43(1)ASBA 2003	7
E12	Refuse & Disposal Amenity Act s24	4
E15	Failure to comply with a litter clearing notice S92C/94A	2
E19	Failure to comply with a waste receptacles notice S46/47/47ZA/47ZB	1
E05	Non-compliance with receptacle notice s47ZA(2) EPA	1

The number of businesses and individuals that have been prosecuted for environmental crime over the past five years is being collated and will be provided to members in due course.

SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR MARK GLOVER

I would like to thank the member for her answer and look forward to receiving the rest of it in due course. Does the executive member believe that the expansion of fixed penalty notices for environmental crime under Labour's Clean Neighbourhoods Environment Act 2005 – does she see that as a success and would she like to see the use of fixed penalty notices extended further?

RESPONSE

As far as I can see at the moment we are covering every aspect that is required by the residents of the borough and within the legislation. If the member has a specific thing in mind please let me know.

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

Southwark appears to be experiencing a worryingly sharp rise in incidents of homophobic hate crime, there was an increase of 58% between September 2008 and September 2009. What discussions has the executive member had with the Borough Commander and other senior police officers about the likely causes and most effective methods to reverse this trend?

RESPONSE

Earlier this year Southwark Metropolitan Police Service (MPS Southwark) carried out a review of how homophobic and hate crimes were being recorded in 2008-09. The recording required a police officer to place a marker, known as a flag, on the crime report, showing the incident to be a homophobic or hate crime.

The review highlighted that a number of crimes in 2008-09 had not been properly recorded. Senior police officers in MPS Southwark have acknowledged the importance of recording both homophobic and hate crime. As a result this process has been revised and senior police officers have stated to the executive member for community safety that the figures that are now being seen in 2009-10 are at the same level as 2008-09 had proper recording been in place.

Further analysis of both homophobic crime and hate crime has taken place this year and this has not shown any significant hotspots.

Lead officers for MPS Southwark, the council and community representatives are working closely together to identify initiatives to support victims of homophobic and hate crime to generate community intelligence and tackle the problem through a strengthened partnership focus on the borough. This focus will be included in the Safer Southwark Partnership Rolling Plan for 2010-12 which will be published later this year.

The London gay, bisexual and transgender co-ordinator within Southwark Council has been transferred to the community safety and enforcement division within environment & housing with a remit to widen hate crime coverage. The move has been taken in recognition of a greater emphasis in supporting victims of both homophobic and hate crime and this will be a feature of our future plans.

SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR JOHN FRIARY

Thank you Mr Mayor. I thank the executive member for her reply. She would be aware that Nick Clegg recently described David Cameron as being very difficult to trust on the issue of gay rights. I wonder if she agrees with the leader's comment and I also wonder if she is concerned as to what a Conservative government in such a nightmare scenario would do in terms of resourcing homophobic crime.

RESPONSE

Thank you – I can't speak on behalf of the Conservative government unfortunately.

11. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR COMMUNITY SAFETY FROM COUNCILLOR ALTHEA SMITH

Will the executive member welcome the recent proposals from the Secretary of State for Justice to increase the minimum sentence for those convicted of knife crime?

RESPONSE

Tackling knife crime remains a priority for our community and is reflected in the work of the council and its partners in tackling serious violent crime. We welcome the proposals from the Secretary of State which will send out a clear message that those committed of knife crime will receive a lengthy custodial sentence. However, we will seek assurances from the National Offender Management Service that structured rehabilitations programmes are included for those convicted of knife crime, to minimise the likelihood to reoffending.

We also have to ensure that our focus of increased sentencing is balanced by sufficient preventative measures which deter knife crime in the first instance and ones that support victims and their families. It is clear from our research and evidence that, in many cases, there is a close association between the victims and offenders of knife crime. To prevent the cycle of knife crime we need to ensure that programmes are in place to work with individuals and families most at risk of becoming involved in serious violence and support them away from that lifestyle. Southwark Council has a long track history of working with our communities to develop such programmes and we are committed to continuing that work in the future.

SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR ALTHEA SMITH

I would like to thank the executive member for her answer and I would like to ask her – I am as concerned as her over the increase in knife crime in the borough. Could she also tell us what discussion she has had with the Borough Commander on this issue and whether the council has any initiative of its own and when it is intended to be brought forward?

RESPONSE

Actually I am quite pleased with the work that we are doing regarding knife crime within the borough with various agencies and with Pathways specifically. I think we are getting on top of it with some of the youths and you know that we took out the anti-social behaviour against, I think it was 7 youths in the middle of Peckham this year which has also caused the number of crimes to drop dramatically.

12. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR COMMUNITY SAFETY FROM COUNCILLOR ALISON MCGOVERN

Have the council wardens undergone any training in recognising fire risks following the fire at Lakanal House and the fire in Peckham last year? What other work is the member planning with partner organisations to prevent major fires in the borough?

RESPONSE

The council wardens undergo fire safety training as part of the health and safety element of their core training programme. They also receive specific training on risk assessment which also incorporates elements of fire safety. Warden team leaders undergo more detail risk assessment training and fire marshal training.

In addition wardens' briefings were carried out alongside fire officers to identify visible fire risks inside similar blocks, immediately following the Lakanal fire.

We are in the process of developing additional fire safety training for wardens. This is being undertaken with a recognised fire safety expert with a view to be delivered across the service during this year.

Wardens and housing officers have been carrying out estate visits alongside local fire officers to other blocks in the Borough providing advice to residents and home fire safety information.

The council, police and London Fire Brigade have worked together to identify construction sites where timber framed construction is being used. We have worked closely with our partners to provide advice to the contractors on safety and security and Council officers and Police carry out regular patrols of these sites.

We have also provided additional advice through our planning department to contractors on appropriate building safety measures and how to obtain additional advice.

We have started work on revising the tenant's handbook to provide tenants with clear information on fire safety and to highlight their responsibility. This has been supported by the fire service.

Environmental enforcement officers have been working alongside housing officers on specific blocks, taking action against residents who block fire escape routes.

The council is responsible for inspecting and requesting adequate fire safety arrangements in privately rented multiply occupied dwellings. Following the Lakanal fire, environmental health officers had agreed with the fire service a process of increased referrals and joint inspections of high risk cases which has resulted in increased enforcement action.

The council has supported the fire service in the development of the Life Programme. The programme is delivered over one week to young people identified by the youth offending service and anti social behaviour unit as either known to have been or been at risk of fire setting. In 2009-10, 75 Southwark young people will have attended the programme and a total of 300 have been through the life programme over the past four years.

The council is working closely with the police and the National Offender Management Service to identify offenders in the borough who have previously been convicted of arson. We will be working with these partner agencies to identify the current history of these clients and identify further action on a case by case basis.

SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR ALISON McGOVERN

Thank you Mayor – I would like to thank the executive member for her answer.

I am sure I speak for all of us in thinking that fire safety is an absolute priority for the borough and unfortunately there was another fire very recently in Camberwell, last weekend, but luckily no one was hurt. Unfortunately one of my constituents came to me concerned because post the fire at Lakanal it's taken six months for him to receive fire safety advice from the council. I wondered if the executive member was aware of such delays and whether she can confirm to me what action the council is taking to make sure that all those residents who do contact the council are receiving excellent fire safety advice?

RESPONSE

I have no knowledge of any tenant not being given the appropriate advice. I am not sure if Councillor Humphreys can expand on that.

RESPONSE FROM COUNCILLOR KIM HUMPHREYS

Yes, in response to that I am surprised and disappointed to hear about that but if Councillor McGovern would like to give me the details, we will address the matter with the relevant office and find out why that has not been done.

13. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR COMMUNITY SAFETY FROM COUNCILLOR DAVID HUBBER

Just before Christmas she wrote to the Home Office and the Department for Communities and Local Government, among others, calling on them to support the council's initiatives to reduce violent crime. What has been the result?

RESPONSE

I have received responses from the Home Office, the Department for Communities and Local Government, Caroline Pigeon AM, Chris Grayling MP and Chris Huhne MP. And as a result further meetings are likely to be held with the Greater London Authority and Liberal Democrat and Conservative home office teams.

SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR DAVID HUBBER

Thank you Mr Mayor – I thank the executive member for her answer. Whilst I am very pleased with the GLA and the opposition front benchers are keen to hear more about this very important initiative, could I ask whether either Ministry has offered a similar meeting.

RESPONSE

I have actually received replies as I stated. I also received a letter from the Department for Communities and Local Government and I quote: "I have contacted the Home Office and they have agreed to accept responsibility for this correspondence. I have therefore transferred your letter to them and they will respond to you directly". That was on 2 December and on 9 December I received a letter from the Home Office saying: "I would like to advise you that the matters raised are the responsibility for the Communities and Local Government. I have therefore transferred your letter and its enclosures to that department". If it wasn't so serious it would be funny and the sooner that we rid of these idiots in May the better.

14. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR COMMUNITY SAFETY FROM COUNCILLOR HELEN JARDINE-BROWN

In December the Transport Research Laboratory produced its fourth annual survey of mobile phone and seat belt usage rates in London which showed the illegal use of hand

held mobile phones on the rise. Given this was a London-wide survey with a single sampling point in Southwark (Wyndham Road/Camberwell Road), will she look at commissioning a local survey to get a more detailed picture of what position is in Southwark?

RESPONSE

Intelligence gathering of this nature may assist us in targeting road safety resources to achieve road casualty reductions in line with the council's road safety plan and community safety strategy. I will discuss this issue with officers and look at current priorities and funding availability.

Note: The response to this question was provided by the executive member for environment, who answered any supplementary question.

SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR HELEN JARDINE-BROWN

I would like to thank the executive member for her answer and as a supplementary. The Transport Research Laboratory found that if you drive while using a mobile phone you are 4 times more likely to be involved in an accident and your reaction time is 3 times slower than drink drivers and twice as slow as those driving while under the influence of cannabis. Given the seriousness of this offence does she think that the local drivers should receive an automatic ban if prosecuted?

RESPONSE FROM EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT, COUNCILLOR PAUL KYRIACOU

Thank you Mr Mayor. I am not convinced that automatic bans are the answer. It is a longstanding principle of English justice that cases should be tried on their merits. But having said that I cannot help comment that Harriett Harman got off lightly. Here we have a serial offender with annual road traffic offences to her name over the last 3 years receiving a small fine and 3 points on her licence for an offence that experts consider more dangerous than being drunk at the wheel. I can't imagine that the court would be so lenient with the vast majority of her residents.

15. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR CULTURE, LEISURE AND SPORT FROM COUNCILLOR MACKIE SHEIK

Could he indicate the number of users of the John Harvard Library before and after its refurbishment?

RESPONSE

Since John Harvard Library reopened on 16 November 2009, December will be the first complete reporting calendar period. As the library was closed in December 2008 for the refurbishment, the comparison below is against the same period in December 2007.

December 2009		December 2007	
Items issued	11,276	Items issued	7115
Visitors	15,316	Visitors	13,750
New borrowers	772	New borrowers	239

The comparative data shows that item issues have increased 58%; visitors to the library have increased by 11% and new borrowers are up by a tremendous 223%.

I am very pleased with the refurbishment works and the new and improved features of the library, which include extended opening hours, increased study space and more public access PCs, an improved stock collection, blu-ray films and a vibrant refreshment area.

At the launch of her consultation on the future of library services, the Culture Minister, Margaret Hodge, even went on to praise the refurbished library as a “stunning exemplar” for the rest of the country. I am pleased to report that Ed Vaizey, who will hopefully be the next Culture Minister, also attended and was equally impressed.

I believe the refurbishment carried out at John Harvard Library represents a successful model for future improvements to other libraries in the borough.

SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR MACKIE SHEIK

I want to thank the executive member for his answer and for highlighting some of the improvements in this fantastic refurbished library. May I ask this supplemental question – how does Southwark’s capital spending on leisure facilities compare with other London boroughs?

RESPONSE

I thank you for the supplementary. I think whilst I don’t have any exact figures to hand, I think it is fair to say that our capital investment over the past 4 years is something that we should be absolutely proud of and we probably are the highest in London. We are probably the only borough that saved two Victorian baths and refurbishing them. We are also reopening the Surrey Docks Water Sports Centre on 10 February. We delivered the John Harvard Library, which I think is a model for refurbishments for other libraries throughout the borough and certainly I feel that whilst I have been managing this service we have invested in the services that people care about and I hope that we will continue to do so.

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

Can the executive member provide details of bonus payments made by the council to officers in the last financial year, broken down by the size and number awarded to officers on each pay scale?

RESPONSE

The council does not make bonus payments; these were eliminated as part of the council’s remuneration strategy (single status implementation) in 2000 under the previous administration.

The council does however provide performance related pay for senior managers at the top two tiers. This was introduced in 2000 by Labour, replacing the previous scheme and was introduced to reflect the fact that Southwark paid at the lower end of the related market and in order to incentivise top manager performance.

SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR RICHARD LIVINGSTONE

Thank you Mr Mayor, and thanks to the executive member for responding. Given the Audit Commission’s views that Southwark is the worst performing council in inner London, do you think this should be reflected in the performance related pay awards given to senior staff?

RESPONSE

I think it is excellent that unlike some other authorities that Southwark does have an element of performance related pay in the salaries of senior officers, especially given the salaries that we pay on the third quartile anyway. One only has to look at other authorities such as Westminster who have got twice as many staff earning six figure salaries as we have and with the highest salary bands in the range of £240,000; or Camden with 26 members of staff receiving over £100,000 and a high salary band of £330,000 – it makes Southwark's pay settlement look very small in comparison. I do completely agree that senior officers should be rewarded based on performance and from the most senior officer herself – the chief executive – there are annual targets set, the officers are monitored against those targets and are rewarded accordingly.

17. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR RESOURCES FROM COUNCILLOR FIONA COLLEY

The executive member said he was unable to answer questions about the contents of the borough's refreshed capital programme at the beginning of the month. Given the importance of the programme can he assure members of his full involvement in drawing up the programme?

RESPONSE

I have been very involved in the refresh of the council's capital programme. Since the agreement of the 2007-16 programme by the executive in February 2007 new bids have been received and new resources identified.

Much work has been, and continues to be done on closing the gap between the new commitments and the available resources. Progress will be reported to the executive at its February meeting.

SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR FIONA COLLEY

Thank you Mr Mayor. I would like to thank the executive member for his answers. He would recall that members of overview and scrutiny were disappointed that they were unable to see any sort of information about what is coming forward in the capital programme at our scrutiny meeting earlier in the month. Will there be an opportunity for community councils to have their say on what projects go into the capital programme before the refreshed plans are finalised?

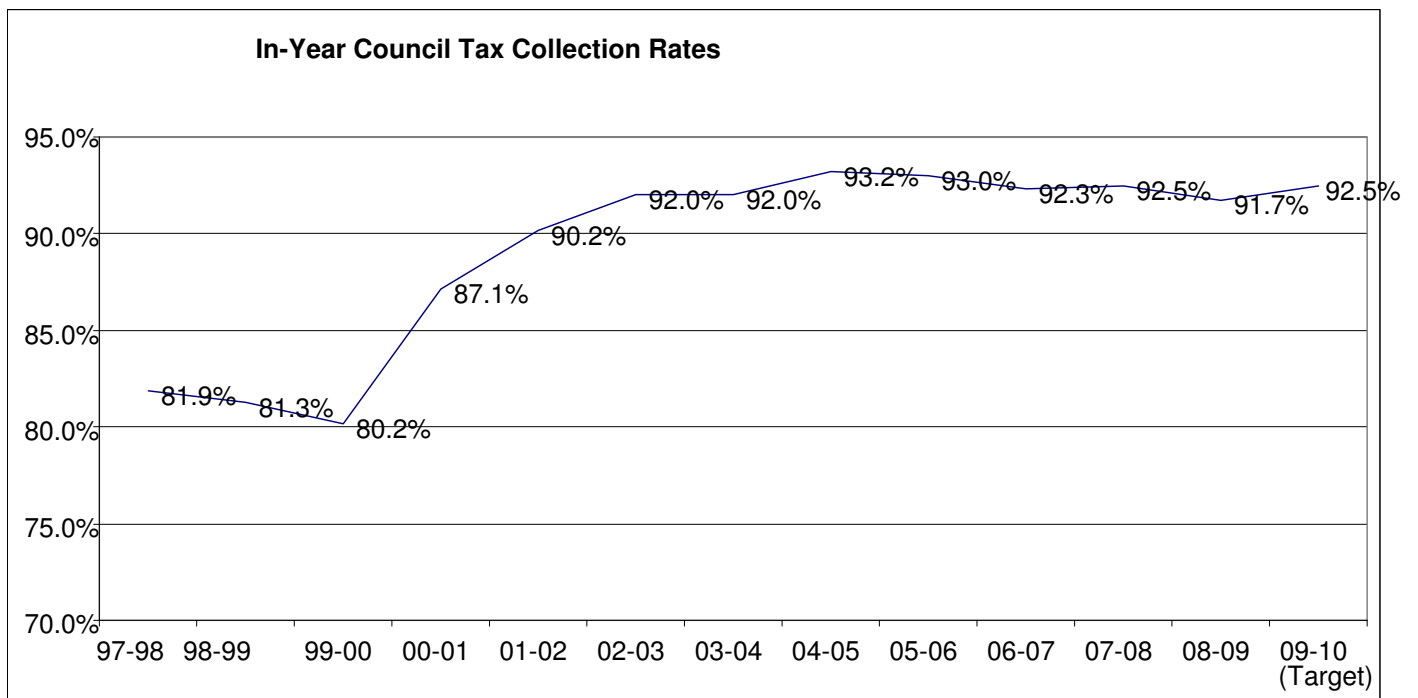
RESPONSE

Thank you Mr Mayor – I would like to thank Councillor Colley for her supplemental. At the overview and scrutiny committee we weren't able to go into specifics because the report was still being drafted. The report will be coming to the executive on 9 February and is a matter reserved for the executive. It is obviously going to be subject to scrutiny and that committee can obviously call us in should she choose. At the moment the capital programme is not a matter for community council or for council assembly but obviously there is the report of the scrutiny sub-committee C suggesting that the matter could be considered by council assembly and it has therefore been referred by the executive to the constitutional steering panel.

18. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR RESOURCES FROM COUNCILLOR LORRAINE ZULETA

What is the current council tax collection rate and how does this compare with each year from 1994?

RESPONSE



It is not possible to provide data prior to 1997-98 due to the lack of proper financial records under the previous administration.

SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR LORRAINE ZULETA

Thank you Mr Mayor. I would like to thank the executive member for his answer. It seems to me that the first time the in-year collection rate ever exceeded 90% by more than a whisker was when I was the executive member for resources. Moreover, the best year for council tax collection under a Labour administration is still worst than the worst year under a Liberal Democrat administration. What does that say about Labour's financial competence in reality?

RESPONSE

Thank you Mr Mayor – thank you to Councillor Zuleta for her supplemental. Yes it is clear isn't it, and the graphs provided to help those members opposite, that the worst year of collection under the Liberal Democrats is about 2% higher than the best ever achieved by Labour. I think that now that we are taking council tax collection back in-house, let's remember that it was Labour who privatised it in the first place back at the end of the 1990s, we are now going to be looking at a much higher percentage than they would ever be able to achieve. Let's remember we entered in 2000 with 80.2% collection rates and six months delays in giving people their council tax benefits. We are now up to projecting a 92.5% outturn and it is taking 16 days to process people's council tax benefit. I think it is clear that the public are better off under Liberal Democrats.

19. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR RESOURCES FROM COUNCILLOR COLUMBA BLANGO

Can he give the figures for the Southwark element of council tax each year from its introduction in 1993-94 to the present and the cash and percentage increase from year to year?

RESPONSE

Year	Southwark		Cash difference
	£	%	£
1993-94	460.13	-	-
1994-95	397.13	-13.7%	-63
1995-96	504.00	26.9%	+106.87
1996-97	641.86	27.4%	+137.86
1997-98	646.97	0.8%	+5.11
1998-99	672.97	4.0%	+26.00
1999-00	688.41	2.3%	+15.44
2000-01	705.62	2.5%	+17.21
2001-02	748.62	6.1%	+43.00
2002-03	776.10	3.7%	+27.48
2003-04	809.78	4.3%	+33.68
2004-05	829.21	2.4%	+19.43
2005-06	844.14	1.8%	+14.93
2006-07	844.14	0.0%	-
2007-08	877.06	3.9%	+32.92
2008-09	912.14	4.0%	+35.08
2009-10	912.14	0.0%	-

SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR COLUMBA BLANGO

Thank you very much Mr Mayor. I would like to thank the executive member for his comprehensive answer. However, given Labour's record and their uncostly spending pledges over the last four years, what is the likely impact on council tax if in the unlikely event they are returned to power in 99 days time?

RESPONSE

Thank you Mr Mayor. I would like to thank Councillor Blango for his supplemental. In the past four years we have introduced over £40 million worth of savings to this council. Labour in their budget each year keep rolling out the same trite suggestions and unrealistic estimates for savings year-on-year – they put the same thing in year after year – whilst we have the reality of government here in Southwark and we have to come up with new efficiency savings year-on-year, unlike them. So the effect of each of those £1 million that we have saved – those £40 million – is 1.2% for each million pounds. So I would estimate we would probably have a council tax increase of 15-20% each year if we were to implement a budget under Labour now.

20. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR RESOURCES FROM COUNCILLOR WILMA NELSON

Can the executive member update the council on the cost savings associated with the move of back office staff to Tooley Street, the environmental benefits and income realised from the disposal of former offices?

RESPONSE

Moving to Tooley Street is enabling us to save £35m and has given our staff a vastly improved working environment, leading to increases in morale and productivity.

On top of the savings that we will make on our energy bills, the building provides a number of environmental benefits including solar thermal heating, rainwater harvesting, automatic

lighting control and a free flow air system, which helps to make it one of the greenest buildings in London.

In addition, we estimate that £39.5m will be raised from sales of former offices - £3.5m more than originally estimated.

21. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR RESOURCES FROM COUNCILLOR JONATHAN MITCHELL

What would be the impact on the council tax if the council hadn't taken tough spending decisions over the past four years?

RESPONSE

The council has taken tough and prudent spending decisions balancing priorities and investment at the frontline whilst achieving efficiencies in back office functions. The Audit Commission assess the council as providing good value for money.

Over the four years from 2006-07 to 2009-10, we have budgeted to make savings totalling £48.4m, representing 4.2% of the net revenue budget. Over the same period additional unavoidable service pressures of £42.1m or 3.6% of the budget were funded.

Of course, for every £1m increase in council spending, the council tax would have had to increase by £10.80 per band D property.

SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR JONATHAN MITCHELL

I would like to thank the executive member for his response. Given that Labour has opposed every efficiency saving made by the council over the last eight years, including the move to Tooley Street, does he agree that we can safely assume a Labour administration would reverse these decisions meaning a rise of more than £500 under Labour? Either that or they have been hypocritical about their budget proposals. Which is it?

RESPONSE

Thank you Mr Mayor. I would like to thank Councillor Mitchell for his supplemental. He is completely right. The move to Tooley Street has saved us a lot of money and has put in place the mechanisms that will allow us to continue to save money going into the future. Labour consistently opposed that and if it had not been for the move to Tooley Street we would be in a much worse position now than we are. If we do have a change of government in May and the spending cuts that are being talked about are implemented, it is likely that we will be able to survive much better than neighbouring boroughs because we have made the move to Tooley Street and because we have put in place the modernisation plan and because we are years into it already. Under Labour I think they would be in the same sort of situation as Lambeth now, who has shown their financial disasters by having to put up rent by dramatic levels; running out of money to do repairs. Again I think residents in Southwark have been much safer under Liberal Democrats.

22. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR RESOURCES FROM COUNCILLOR JAMES GURLING

Since 2000 by how much has the Greater London Authority precept increased?

RESPONSE

Since the formation of the Greater London Authority, its band D precept has risen from £120.19 to £309.82, an increase of £189.63 or 157.8%. From 2000 to 2008 Mayor

Livingstone imposed these year-on-year rises. This is in stark contrast to the 17.5% increase of Southwark's council tax rate, between 2002 and 2010.

GLA precept comparisons – Band D households

Year	Southwark		Precept	
	£		£	
1999-00	688.41	-	120.19	-
2000-01	705.62	2.50%	139.82	16.30%
2001-02	748.62	6.10%	150.88	7.90%
2002-03	776.1	3.70%	173.88	15.20%
2003-04	809.78	4.30%	224.4	29.10%
2004-05	829.21	2.40%	241.33	7.50%
2005-06	844.14	1.80%	254.62	5.50%
2006-07	844.14	0.00%	288.61	13.30%
2007-08	877.06	3.90%	303.88	5.30%
2008-09	912.14	4.00%	309.82	2.00%
2009-10	912.14	0.00%	309.82	0.00%
	32.50%		157.80%	

SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR JAMES GURLING

I thank you Mr Mayor and can I thank the executive for his answer. Is he aware, and I have this on extremely good authority, that today the Liberal Democrat group on the GLA have voted for a 2.6% reduction in the GLA precept and could he confirm whether or not the Labour GLA member representing Lambeth and Southwark has voted for every one of these 158% increases in precept?

RESPONSE

Thank you Mr Mayor. I would like to thank Councillor Gurling for his supplemental. Yes, under the first eight years of Ken Livingstone, Val Shawcross voted each time for the increases which have resulted in 157.8% increase across those eight years. That is in contrast to – let's look at Labour under their last eight years in power in Southwark – an increase of 95.2%, or eight years under the Liberal Democrats: 17.5%, which drops to 12.6% if you take into account the fact the 2002 figure was set by Labour before they exited from office. So actually it is only gone up by 12.6%; a stark contrast to what the GLA have been doing and I am really pleased to hear that Councillor Pidgeon has been voting for a cut in the precept. It is about time this huge bill to fund the GLA comes down.

23. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR HEALTH & ADULT CARE FROM COUNCILLOR DORA DIXON-FYLE

The leader and other executive members have spent much time over the past few years rubbishing questions from Labour members about the effectiveness of the council's call centre. How does he react to the findings of the Care Quality Commission (CQC) inspection that older people, carers and support organisations have reservations about the performance of the call centre and are, in some cases, refraining from using it?

RESPONSE

The customer service centre (CSC) receives 150,000 calls a month of which 1% (1,500) are in relation to health and social care. We understand that the CQC based their findings on a sample of 2 cold calls, which as a percentage of 1,500 calls a month is statistically insignificant in terms of coming to any judgement about the centre's effectiveness.

Adult social care calls are also dealt with outside the CSC. This was not considered by the CQC when they formalised their judgement. For example, the inspection did not look at the council's SMART service which deals with out-of-hours calls nor consider the dedicated calls that are made to the most vulnerable as part of the standard service offer.

More broadly, the council's regular and statistically significant customer satisfaction research shows increasing satisfaction with the CSC.

SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR DORA DIXON-FYLE

Thank you Mr Mayor – I would like to thank the executive member for his answer which clearly shows he is still in denial of the conclusion of the CQC report as is Councillor Stanton as well. Can I remind the executive member that one of the direct quotes in the report was from a resident who had a less than glowing report of the call centre; so is he saying that he actually believes the council figures as statistics, over the actual real life experiences of real service users?

RESPONSE

Thank you, I would like to thank Councillor Dora Dixon-Fyle for her supplementary question. I am not going to deny what an individual person has stated about their experiences of the call centre but it is really not realistic for Councillor Dora Dixon-Fyle to rely on one or two examples. The council, as we have indicated in our response, measures much larger numbers of calls and satisfaction rates with those calls. Any centre that is dealing with 150,000 calls a month will have one or two poor experiences. The cold calling that was done by CQC, or what we believe was the cold calling as they won't actually tell us, was based on two calls.

Now I can assure you that we have forums in place, a lot of calls are not centred through the call centre but those that are, are a small percentage of the total number and we also have forums and boards that members of the community, older people, carers and support organisations sit on and this is not an issue that is constantly coming up around the call centre's performances. I as an executive member also attend a number of meetings of the community and bodies in the voluntary sector and I can honestly say to you that I am not getting residents and service users coming up to me and telling me that their main concern is around the call centre and the call centre's performance. So while I would accept of course occasionally the call centre may not provide exactly the service that every single resident wants, the fact is that the monitoring that we are doing is positive and the results we are getting back are positive.

24. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR HEALTH & ADULT CARE FROM COUNCILLOR AUBYN GRAHAM

What monitoring is there of home visits provided by the council to older people? How many home visits have been planned and carried out in 2009-10 to date compared with 2008-09 (please break down your answer by month)?

RESPONSE

Home care packages are regularly and robustly monitored by the council's health and social care commissioning team. This enables the council to quickly identify and act on issues of concern in relation to quality and / or performance.

Where issues of concern are raised directly by service users or social workers, a quality alert will be raised which will be investigated and monitored.

The projected figures for 2009-10 are that the council will commission home care packages for 2,518 clients, providing 989,062 hours of home care overall.

In 2008-09 the council commissioned home care packages for 2,850 clients, totalling 1,075,627 hours of home care. It is not possible to break these figures into months although the pattern is fairly even over the year.

It is not possible to break these figures into months although the pattern is fairly even over the year.

25. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR HEALTH & ADULT CARE FROM COUNCILLOR ADE LASAKI

How many members' questions has he (or his predecessor) dealt with concerning the quality of social care in the last two years?

RESPONSE

In the last 2 years (January 2008-December 2009) I have been asked 21 members' questions. The questions are detailed below:

When?	Number of questions	Focus of questions
30 January 2008	1	Extra funding to Southwark Pensioners' Centre
9 July 2008	13	Changes in funding to Southwark Carers
		Freedom passes
		Comparing the boroughs for renewing freedom passes
		Applicants not receiving freedom pass renewals
		Issuing of freedom passes for use only in Greater London
		Stress-related sickness absence of social workers
		Action taken to deal with freedom passes
		Consultation on changes to social care eligibility
		Consultation on the merger of day centres
		Host for the LINKs
		Outcomes from the social care funding summit
		Lay inspectors for Southwark care homes
		Changes to client contributions to social care
5 November 2008	2	Changes in numbers to meals-on-wheels users
		Average wait for the installation of minor home aid equipment
28 January 2009	1	Quality of Southwark's Homecare services and the impact on the voluntary sector of contracting out services
23 February 2009	1	Use of improved resources and efficiencies in eligibility for social care
8 April 2009	1	Average charge to residents for adult care services
8 July 2009	2	Work between the Council and voluntary sector
		Discussions on the Aylesbury health centre

An analysis of the quantity and content of the questions I have received from members over the last 2 years does not reflect high levels of concern or dissatisfaction about the quality of adult social services in Southwark.

26. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR HEALTH & ADULT CARE FROM COUNCILLOR ELIZA MANN

Can he tell the council what assumptions about social care spending in Southwark are made by the Care Quality Commission (CQC), the Audit Commission and are included in the council's local government settlement?

RESPONSE

The CQC assumptions are that Southwark is a low spending authority on adult social care.

The Audit Commission judgement is that Southwark is in the highest quartile nationally for adult social care, on the basis of spend per head of adult population.

And the social care component of the council's formula grant as calculated by the Department of Communities and Local Government leaves the council with a potential shortfall in funding of up to £22m.

27. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR HEALTH & ADULT CARE FROM COUNCILLOR JELIL LADIPO

Does he agree with the government minister, Phil Hope, in his letter of December 2 2009 that the recent Care Quality Commission (CQC) report on adult social care "does not mean that these councils are poor performers"?

RESPONSE

I am compelled to say "Yes Minister".

I would also make the point that the rating that Southwark received for safeguarding in the Independence, Wellbeing and Choice Inspection is the same rating that 60% of councils have received who have been inspected.

Furthermore, in the Annual Performance Assessment (APA) Southwark did not receive any poor ratings across the 7 outcomes, and received an overall rating of adequate.

28. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR REGENERATION FROM COUNCILLOR VERONICA WARD

In April 2008 Camberwell Community Council was allocated money under the improving retail environments programme to improve Crossthwaite Avenue, a row of shops in South Camberwell. Different officers and consultants have spoken to the traders, but the council still appears to have made no progress with the project. Could the executive member provide an update and details of when work will begin?

RESPONSE

Crossthwaite Avenue has been allocated £81,840 from the Improving Local Retail Environments (ILRE) programme. Initial trader engagement took place in May 2009. The planned completion date for all works is June 2010.

A design consultancy for the site was appointed in October 2009. Consultation on designs was completed in mid-December and the ILRE project co-ordinator has personally visited traders to ensure that they are happy with the work carried out by the designers.

Contractors will be appointed by the end of January 2010, with works starting in February.

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

Do the heads of terms agreement signed with Lend Lease meet all the aspirations of the executive member for the regeneration of Elephant & Castle as well as the requirements of the master-plan?

RESPONSE

Yes. And in tandem with the release of the revised masterplan, the council will be publishing proposals for improvements to the current leisure and cultural facilities in Elephant and Castle.

30. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR REGENERATION FROM COUNCILLOR KIRSTY MCNEILL

What is the executive member's reaction to the Mayor of London's statement earlier this month that there is no money available from Transport for London (TfL) towards the rebuilding of the Northern Line Underground station at Elephant & Castle?

RESPONSE

After the failure of the former Labour Mayor of London to follow through on pledges to invest in public transport in Southwark, I'm disappointed, but not surprised that Boris Johnson is not able to make money available for the Northern Line station.

However, the executive and council officers are working hard with Lendlease, Greater London Authority (GLA) and Transport for London (TfL) officers to ensure the successful regeneration of the Elephant & Castle for existing and new residents.

31. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR REGENERATION FROM COUNCILLOR MARY FOULKES

Will the executive member condemn the decision by the Mayor of London to hike bus fares by 20% this year, during a period where inflation rates are negative? Does he agree that this will have a particularly heavy impact on the many areas of the borough where bus is the primary or only means of public transport?

RESPONSE

If I were to condemn Boris Johnson's 20% bus fare hike this year then I would also have to condemn Ken Livingstone's cash bus fare hikes of 185% (from 70p to £2.00) between 2004 and 2008 and his 28.6% (from 70p to 90p) hike in Oyster single fares in the same period. And I imagine Councillor Foulkes wouldn't want me to do that.

Within Southwark there is a high reliance on the bus network particularly within the core areas of the borough. The underground rail network currently only reaches the north of the borough and, although the second phase of the East London line extension has recently received funding, the majority of our communities are and will remain dependent on the bus network.

In light of this reliance on buses any increases in fares will have a disproportionate impact on poorer communities where people are more likely to use the bus even when underground services are available.

32. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES FROM COUNCILLOR GORDON NARDELL

In the article about shamefully high rates of child poverty in this borough in the Southwark News on January 4 2010, a council spokesperson picked out Sure Start centres, Job Centre Plus and Building Schools for the Future as the initiatives that the administration is taking to tackle child poverty. These are all government initiatives. Does the executive member agree that this council has woefully failed to bring forward any measures of its own to assess and tackle child poverty?

RESPONSE

I do not agree at all. The council has a strong record of anti-poverty initiatives, going back several years.

Tackling child poverty requires effective joint working by a wide range of agencies. Jobcentre Plus is a lead partner in the development of the Southwark Alliance employment strategy, which has the objectives of removing barriers to work, support sustained entry into the labour market, promoting progression to more skilled and better paid jobs and preventing long term unemployment, all of which contribute to the maximisation of household income.

In 2008, Southwark Council was one of the first London boroughs to develop a Child Poverty Pledge Action Plan.

Standards in both primary and secondary schools have never been higher with our primary schools now above national averages and performing well ahead of our statistical neighbours. Our secondary system has also been identified in the top ten most improved nationally over five years. Over the last decade we have seen a doubling of the numbers of students locally taking A levels (193 to over 400), opening access to university to many more young people.

The development of the new children and young people's plan (CYPP) has taken into consideration through its development, the strategic aim of reducing child poverty by improving life chances for children and young people.

During 2010, the reduction of child poverty will feature prominently in our new children and young people's plan and our new employment strategy. In addition, child poverty is one of the priority actions in the Southwark Alliance work plan agreed last November.

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

Please set out what incentives the parking contractor APCOA receives for issuing parking tickets?

RESPONSE

No incentive exists within the current on-street parking enforcement contract for the number of penalty charge notices issued. Performance payments are based upon a range of other indicators such as the deployment of staff and the quality of the tickets issued.

34. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT FROM COUNCILLOR ABDUL MOHAMED

How many cars and motor bikes have been given parking tickets which were vehicles abandoned because of bad weather? Do you consider this fair and will the council be responding positively to appeals from those who were forced to abandon their vehicles?

RESPONSE

The civil enforcement officers (CEO) will not necessary know why any particular vehicle is illegally parked. However, where street furniture (yellow lines, signs or bay markings) are not visible the CEOs have been instructed not to issue penalty charge notices (PCN) (commonly referred to as parking tickets). It is therefore unlikely that any enforcement action has been taken against a large number of vehicles left abandoned due to the bad weather.

If however any cases come to light, the parking team will consider any representations and appeals. All vehicles issued with PCNs are photographed at the time and where there are clear mitigating circumstances a sympathetic approach will be taken.

35. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT FROM COUNCILLOR SANDRA RHULE

Last February the council ran out of grit following heavy snow. This year the council was reduced to gritting arterial roots after only a few days. What lessons did the council learn after its failure to store adequate grit supplies in February 2009?

RESPONSE

During the snowfall in February 2009 the council did not run out of grit.

Following advice from central government we did limit our gritting services to priority roads. During this period the council maintained critical and essential services including social care, meals on wheels and other support to vulnerable residents.

Lessons learned from the February 2009 event included:-

- That in the event of snowfall affecting most of the country replenishing stocks may become difficult due to government / salt cell intervention and directives. With this in mind a decision was made to be more selective regarding routes treated and spread rates.
- That the amount of salt stocked on housing estates needed to be doubled. Stocks were increased from 2,000 to 4,000 tons.
- That schools needed ready access to grit supplies for their premises. All schools were offered such supplies.
- That more hand spreaders were required for footway gritting. The numbers were doubled.
- Early implementation of borough emergency planning procedures would enable better coordination and communication.

During the most recent snowfall, the council once again had sufficient grit to maintain its primary network and other key commercial areas. We were also able to provide supplies to schools in order to keep them open during a key exam period and to housing estate roads where refuse vehicles needed access.

We also received directives from the government and Transport for London regarding the conserving of grit as part of a pan London strategy to conserve stocks across all councils.

36. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT FROM COUNCILLOR NICK VINEALL

Please can the executive member for environment publish the number of grit boxes in Southwark and the figures for neighbouring boroughs of Lambeth, Lewisham, Greenwich and Bromley?

RESPONSE

Southwark hold 65 salt boxes in addition to a borough salt store, which is held outside London by our suppliers. Bromley, which is a considerably larger borough, have approximately 400 salt boxes.

Lambeth also has 400 salt boxes, however, they do not have any additional in-borough salt storage, hence the high number. Lewisham in contrast, do not hold any salt boxes due to a fear over vandalism and Greenwich have 63 boxes.

The winter service team are currently reviewing the use of salt bins including the use on dedicated sites such as schools, fire and ambulance stations and housing estates.

Salt bins proved to be a useful asset during the recent snow falls and extension of the service is being investigated.

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

The council has agreed to continue to pay vast sums to top corporate manslaughter lawyers BCL Burton Copeland for advice on the Lakanal fire. How much has the council spent in total on training housing staff to carry out fire risk assessments since 2006 broken down by year?

RESPONSE

The total cost of training housing staff in carrying out fire risk assessments is £74,000.

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

How many lifts are currently awaiting repair and not currently in use, as of January 1 2010? What is the timescale for these repairs? Please break down by ward.

RESPONSE

There are currently four lifts that are still out of service from 1 January 2010; the wards that are affected are:

One in Chaucer

Albert Barnes

The lift car doors and the 4th floor landing doors have been vandalised. These are currently being manufactured by our suppliers. Residents have been notified in writing. However there are two lifts within this block so residents have access to a lift until these doors are repaired.

One in Faraday

Chiltern House

Water has penetrated the lift shaft causing a failure in the electrics. However upon attempting repairs it was noted that the asbestos within the shaft was in a poor condition. We have now obtained costs for removing the asbestos and this work is to start once leasehold notification and a project plan has been completed. Residents have been notified in writing. There is another lift within the block that residents can use.

One in Riverside

Casby House

The existing drive unit has failed and needs to be replaced. However, this part is obsolete. We are currently sourcing another drive unit that can be adapted to fit. There are two lifts within the block so residents still have access to a lift.

One in East Walworth

Marston House

The motor needs to be re-wound which will be costly. This block is due to be demolished as part of the Heygate project. There are five residents left above the fourth floor. The motor is currently awaiting specialist works to be completed.

There is no alternative lift within this block and the housing office has been notified that this lift is shutdown.

All of these repairs should be complete within a month except Chiltern House where the repair will need to follow the removal of asbestos.

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

Over the festive period, a number of residents on the Aylesbury and Portland estates had problems with loss of heating and hot water. This is now an annual occurrence. What compensation has the council arranged for these outages?

RESPONSE

Every year between 1 October to 1 April all heating repairs where there is a complete loss of service are treated as an emergency and if the whole block is affected this will be responded to within 4 hours. We are aware of no heating or hot water outages on Aylesbury estate or Portland estate over the period from Christmas to New Year.

If residents had individual heating or hot water issues during this period and feel dissatisfied with the service provided, we would expect this to be dealt with under the council's complaints process.