

**WEDNESDAY 23rd JULY 2003**

**COUNCIL ASSEMBLY**  
**(ORDINARY)**

**URGENT QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY GROUP LEADERS IN ACCORDANCE**  
**WITH COUNCIL ASSEMBLY PROCEDURE RULE 3.11**

**1. QUESTION TO THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL FROM COUNCILLOR IAN WINGFIELD**

In recent months the Leader and members of his Executive have repeatedly claimed that no decisions have been made regarding the number of Housing Management Areas and their boundaries, except that their will be 6, 7 or 8 areas. Furthermore at Council Assembly in June regarding the Housing Areas he said "I don't mind whether the number is 6, 7, 8, 10,12, 16."

However, the recently circulated notes of the Best Value Review of Housing Management Extended Project Board on Monday 17<sup>th</sup> June 2002 record the Leader stating his aim to "Re-shape Housing Management arrangements around 7 new local Community Councils ... to be on line by 2003/04, all council boundaries should fit into the Community Councils."

In the light of this could the Leader please explain whether he has misled tenants and the Chamber?

**RESPONSE**

No decision was taken last summer about the number of housing management areas. The point I was making last summer was that it was clearly desirable for the boundaries of housing management areas to fit in with the boundaries of community council areas to avoid waste and inefficiency.

Councillor Wingfield may recall I made the point when talking to the Southwark Pensioners Forum AGM last summer.

The recommendation that we should reduce the number of housing management areas is based on solid research which shows that this will result in a better service for our tenants.

It is absolutely the case that no decision has been made about the number of areas: that will be taken at the Executive meeting on 29 July.

## **SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR IAN WINGFIELD**

I would like to thank the Leader for his response, but I wonder if he could tell us how this equates with Councillor Bassom's statement to this Council Assembly last month when she said and I quote "the only decision that has been taken is that we are supporting Option 4 and that was to move to sixteen neighbourhoods to a smaller number of areas and I am trying and have tried to engage with forums to ask them how many areas they think there should be and how that fits with the report from June 2002 of the Best Value Review Panel which clearly shows the Executive Members decided a year ago that they wanted to fit such housing neighbourhoods with the Community Councils as agreed".

## **RESPONSE**

I'll have another go but I thought this was covered by the response. What I said last summer to the project review board was essentially this: we were trying to introduce Community Councils and there was a debate about the boundaries of those. It seem to us on the Executive that it was sensible at the time that we were fixing the boundaries for Community Councils and deciding what they were, that as much as possible of other administrative boundaries within the Council control and indeed other ones such as police sector boundaries were also arranged to fit in with the Community Council boundaries and since one of the things that the Housing Management Best Value Review was looking at was the Housing of Management Areas, we thought it would be desirable for Housing Management Areas to fit in with the Community Council boundaries whatever they were. Now if the result of the Best Value Review would have been a recommendation that we should stick with sixteen neighbourhoods, it would have been perfectly possible to stick to sixteen housing areas, but to arrange the boundaries of those within the Community Council boundaries, what I was anxious to avoid was a position where Housing Management Area would fall between two different Community Council boundaries. I remain absolutely uncommitted to any particular Holy Grail number of Housing Management Areas. What the Best Value Review concluded having looked at Best Practice elsewhere, is that having sixteen Neighbourhood Housing Areas is too many and, the smaller number six, seven or eight is more likely to deliver the improvement in service which certainly we on this side of the Chamber and, I believe all Members believe is desirable, because I am sure that all of us are sick to death of the amount of housing related case work we get, a great majority of which could be avoided if only tenants received a better service in the first place and that is what the Housing Management Best Value Review is trying to deliver, so no decisions were taken last summer about the number of Housing Management Areas; no decisions could have been taken last summer, that's not how Best Value works. What I was giving was a view as part of a general review of the Councils boundaries we thought it was desirable for the Housing Management Areas to fit in within the new Community Council boundaries and I made exactly the same point in public at the Southwark Pensioners Forum AGM which I seemed to remember Councillor Wingfield and I think Councillor Pearce was also present at it, it was one of my little hobby horses at the time that there were all these overlapping different boundaries Area Forum boundaries, Housing Management boundaries, Ward boundaries and so on and that it was time to tidy it all up.