

WEDNESDAY 17th SEPTEMBER 2003

COUNCIL ASSEMBLY
(ORDINARY)

PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED IN ACCORDANCE WITH COUNCIL PROCEDURE
RULE 3.6

1. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORT FROM MR PATRICK YORKE

Will the Council liaise with the Government and GLA -under Transport for London (TfL)- supporting the implementation of the Tram Link to Peckham so as to boost the socio-economic agenda for the area? Is there any willingness to offer Peckham as a depot for the tram if Kings Cross depot is dropped?

RESPONSE

The Council is committed to the physical, social and economic regeneration of Peckham. The Peckham Partnership initiative invested some £250m in new housing, infrastructure, parks, and public facilities as well as social and educational projects. The achievements secured through this programme continue to be advanced through the work of both the Peckham Programme and the Greater Peckham Alliance.

The Council recognises that improving accessibility for residents to the wider London economy is one of the issues that need to be addressed if sustainable regeneration is to be achieved. Residents' perception of the disconnection of Peckham from the centre of London was strongly reflected in the early Peckham Partnership area analyses.

The Council therefore strongly supports the proposals for the Tram Link from Kings Cross via Aldwych, Waterloo, Elephant & Castle and Walworth to central Peckham. We are working closely with the Transport for London (TfL) team and the other Boroughs through which the system will run to develop the proposals in more detail and to advance the project generally.

The improved accessibility offered by the tram will boost confidence and generate increased investment and economic activity in Peckham Town centre. The project will significantly reduce journey times between Peckham and Central London, improving access to jobs, education and training, and encourage further inward investment. There is already considerable market interest in Peckham based on the tram proposal and strong reason to believe that investment levels will rise if the route is achieved.

The search for a tram depot site has narrowed to a small number of locations. The system performs most efficiently if the facility is at one of its extremities. Kings Cross was the originally preferred location but complexities of land

ownership and the scale of infrastructure works already underway on that site may make the published tram programme unachievable. Sites in central Peckham are being actively considered including proposals to secure additional development within, over or adjoining a depot building. This could be of particular benefit if the route can be sufficiently extended to provide a terminus facility on Rye Lane itself. The depot search work is being undertaken by consultants appointed by TfL working with the assistance of officers from the Cross River boroughs, and will be reported upon to Executive once complete.

Supplemental question and answer not available owing to technical difficulties with the sound system

2. **QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR SERVICE DELIVERY FROM MR JOHN D BEASLEY**

Southwark has a low literacy rate so the Council should set a high standard of English in all its publications and not put e.g. 'july', 'august', 'irish', and 'southwark'. Can the public be promised that lower case letters will never again be used where upper case letters are obviously needed?

RESPONSE

The Council has a plain language guide which was designed to help staff get rid of jargon and make their communications with the public clear and easy to understand. This was designed as a tool to promote plain language, rather than as a written style guide and does not therefore specify the council approach to the use of capitalisation.

The rules the communications team uses for capitalisation for council publications are similar to those generally used by national broadsheet newspapers where the general rule is that capitals are used for names only - not nouns.

So 'Southwark Council' should be capitalised, 'the council' should not. 'Bob Coomber' should be capitalised, 'chief executive' should not.

However It is quite common that design requires a more stylistic approach. So, for example, all letters irrespective of whether the word is a name or a noun may be in a range of styles, of which lower case is just one. This is done deliberately to draw the eye of the reader to the subject in question and get the message across. For example, a well designed communication targeted at encouraging adults to return to education may succeed where an incorrectly capitalised one may not.

However as one of the chief offenders, it would be wrong of me not to recognise that it is a common mistake for people to misuse capitals, particularly in words like 'council' or job titles (including the author of the minutes you sent me!)

Ultimately, over time, written styles, practices and spellings change and adapt. We will review the plain language guide to add a section on written style, and will make sure that capitalisation is addressed.

SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM MR JOHN BEASLEY

As an unsatisfactory answer has been given can you promise that in all future publications uppercase letters will always be used for words in the Oxford dictionary that begin with capital letters.

RESPONSE FROM COUNCILLOR JAMES GURLING

It will come as no surprise to you that I consider my answer is quite fair, very full and founded in the realities of modern communication with a very dynamic audience. I understand that you have serious literary considerations about some of the things that the council may, or may not do in terms of the use of

grammar. And we would wish to use the best use of grammar wherever we can. Indeed my colleague, Councillor Thomas, looking at a sign the other day sent it back to the department for signage precisely because it was using capitals incorrectly. These things councillors pick up when they possibly can. It doesn't make us peasants. But it does mean we do have these things foremost in our consideration. When I looked at this answer, I did take advice on style from sources as diverse as the Financial Times and the Economist. The FT, for example, in their style guide, started by referring us to the world of E. E. Cummins. Those of you who know and are familiar with him he wrote entirely in lower case. I think he wrote some fairly readable stuff, but that is your decision. He is certainly someone you would not want to fault entirely for the lack of use of capital letters. Similarly, many of the communications that this council does, I think, is to grab peoples attention and if we can grab peoples attention in order to perhaps to take up a course which will lead them to have a better understanding of grammar or English and perhaps take up higher or further education that is not directly related to the use of grammar, than I think sometimes we are right to do so. My final source, and this does not affect you at all; the Economist guide goes onto four pages on how to use capitals and in what circumstances to use them, so it is a very serious issue. But in the conclusion in the first paragraph they quote to their journalists Emerson and ask their journalists to remember that the foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds. People in this borough do not have little minds, they have far reaching minds that need prompting and require stimulation and that is entirely what council communications are intended to do.