

WEDNESDAY 17th SEPTEMBER 2003

COUNCIL ASSEMBLY
(ORDINARY)

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MEMBERS IN ACCORDANCE WITH COUNCIL
ASSEMBLY PROCEDURE RULE 3.10 (3)

1. **QUESTIONS RECEIVED IN RESPECT OF ITEM 6.2 (REPORT FOR**
INFORMATION FROM THE EXECUTIVE : MOTION FROM MEMBERS IN
ACCORDANCE WITH COUNCIL ASSEMBLY PROCEDURE RULE 3.9 –
EAST DULWICH ESTATE (see page 89 to 90)

(i) **QUESTION TO THE LEADER FROM COUNCILLOR PETER JOHN**

Can the Leader confirm whether a budget has yet been established for the East Dulwich Estate Regeneration Project Team, and whether this has been passed to the control of East Dulwich Estate Regeneration Project Team?

RESPONSE

Yes the East Dulwich Estate Regeneration Project Team have been given an agreed budget and it has been paid to them.

SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR PETER JOHN

I have been copied into letter after letter over recent weeks saying the budget hadn't arrived yet, it had not come - what was going on so I hope you understand why I put the question. I understand even yesterday the Treasurer had not received the money, but it had been dispatched from Southwark to the project team for their use. As a matter of interest, does he know what the budget is; how much the budget is that the project team is to receive for this work?

RESPONSE

I don't know the precise figure – I know it is in the region of slightly above £1,400.

(ii) **QUESTION TO THE LEADER FROM COUNCILLOR VERONICA WARD**

Can the Leader confirm whether or not the comments of Councillor Bowman made at the Executive on 8th July 2003 concerning a 'like for like' decant of those who would otherwise be forced to move to smaller accommodation will form part of the decant policy applied to the East Dulwich Estate?

RESPONSE

Due to timescales, the properties becoming available at Goldwell House on East Dulwich Estate will be allocated to those tenants affected by the proposals to demolish blocks on the estate on the basis of assessed housing need. The wider decant policy will be reviewed as part of the Allocations Review.

SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR VERONICA WARD

Would the Leader not agree that the indications made at the Executive Committee refer to, that in view of the circumstances of people having their homes demolished and being offered other homes, that they should be offered, if at all possible, accommodation which is equivalent to the accommodation they have at present even if under a needs assessment they perhaps would not qualify. I believe there was a discussion which was indicated to tenants that that would be considered.

RESPONSE

This is a very difficult issue because I find that at each one of my surgeries one of the recurrent themes is people who have more than one child, who are living in two bedroom properties, who desperately want and need a bigger property but are on a waiting list - you have to look them in the eye and say it is going to take years if ever before they get that property. It can't be in our interest as a landlord of the entire stock to have people who may be single occupants living in 2 or 3 bed flats which are desperately needed by families elsewhere. Which is why I think it is right that we should have a look at the implications for the stock as a whole for coming up with that kind of policy specifically on the East Dulwich Estate. I understand the sensitivity on that particular estate but I think we have to be aware of always having a special policy on individual estates which ends up having the kind of impact that I am sure we all get in our surgeries on a weekly basis.

2. QUESTION RECEIVED IN RESPECT OF ITEM 7.1 – INDIVIDUAL DECISION MAKING (see pages 91 to 152)

QUESTION TO THE VICE-CHAIR OF STANDARDS COMMITTEE FROM COUNCILLOR DAVID BRADBURY

Will the presenter of the item please specify, in relation to paragraph 16 on page 93, how individual decision making would increase transparency in decision making compared with a system in which decisions are made in meetings open to the public?

RESPONSE

The guidance from the Secretary of State on New Council Constitutions states that the principal aim of executive arrangements is to make decision making more efficient, transparent and accountable so that local authorities are more open and responsive to the needs and aspirations of the communities they serve. The guidance recognises that there will be different forms of executive decision making, for example, the full executive, executive committees, individual members or officers.

One of the key elements of good decision making is that it is transparent and to achieve this there should be effective access. Guidance states that this should include the following:

- It is publicly known who is responsible for decisions
- It is publicly known what decisions are to be taken
- People know how they can have an input
- People have access to information on decisions

In the case of individual executive decision-making, this will provide increased transparency because the public will be more aware of who is responsible for taking these decisions. The proposed scheme of delegation sets out in detail what decisions can be taken and by whom.

The same principles of transparency and openness that apply to other forms of decision making will also apply to decision making by individual members of the executive. These are as follows: there must be notice of forthcoming decisions in the forward plan, a report will be prepared by officers and available 5 clear days to the public prior to the decision being taken, individuals can make representations to a named decision maker, decisions are published and are subject to call-in.

SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR DAVID BRADURY

Does the Vice-Chair not agree that the answer confuses transparency and accountability. While it might be accountable for one individual who is clearly identifiable to making a decision it is in no way more transparent for one individual to be making that decision presumably in private on receipt of papers from officers as oppose to an open meeting of a group of Councillors, open to the public and on which all the papers are available to the public in advance for consultation.

RESPONSE

I should explain why I am answering this: obviously the Chair of Standards being an independent member is not a member of the Council and therefore is unable to be here so I am charged with responding on his behalf. I think there is not a great deal I can add to the original answer save to say that the same safeguards will apply to individual decision-making, as I understand it, as apply to decisions made by the Executive. In other words the same call in procedure and same notice of forthcoming decisions being in the Forward Plan. As for the precise definition of accountability and transparency, I perhaps would have to consult the same documents as consulted by my colleague, Councillor Gurling earlier on, as I say this matter actually originated, I believe, in the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and has been backwards and forward between them and Executive Committee. I am surprised that Councillor Bradbury's colleague did not say anything at all at the Standards Committee when it was discussed.