

**COUNCIL ASSEMBLY
(ORDINARY MEETING)**

WEDNESDAY 26th NOVEMBER 2003

**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**

Is the Leader aware that the contractual terms of the Unified Cleansing Contract are currently not being met with respect to leaf clearance and roads are not being swept when they should be? Given that the contract is costing council tax payers an additional £3m a year, why has he not ensured that there are sufficient staff and vehicles available to cope with this predictable seasonal phenomenon?

RESPONSE

Additional resources for the clearance of leaves were planned for in the original budget and have been utilised.

Southwark Cleaning have deployed an additional 20 staff since the end of September and will continue to do so until the end of the leafing period. Two additional refuse freighters have been deployed around the borough to support the additional staffing compliment.

Additionally, four leaf clearance machines have been in use across the borough since September. These machines work in a similar way to vacuum cleaners and are towed behind tipper vehicles into which they deposit the leaves collected.

In terms of the issue of cleaning frequencies, certain parts of the borough, which suffer from heavy leaf fall, have had cleaning frequencies modified to better suit leaf clearance. Single sweepers have been put into teams and these teams have been cleaning a number of roads each day. Whilst this is a good way of dealing with heavy leaf fall, it does mean that some roads are swept less frequently than usual.

Monitoring suggests that although most areas of the borough have been cleared of leaves quite efficiently, some areas have experienced some problems.

You will appreciate that Southwark Cleaning is in its first year of operation and as such the leafing programme is being used as a learning experience for all concerned. However, I have been assured that the lessons learned this year would be acted upon next autumn.

As leaf fall is now drawing to a close, the single beats and normal frequencies are being re-established which have during the first six months of operation delivered a significant increase in the cleanliness of the borough.

Finally I would like to point out that Southwark Cleaning has, for the first time, managed to recycle many of the leaves collected over the last 6 weeks resulting in approximately 10 tonnes of leaves each day being sent for recycling instead of landfill.

SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR IAN WINGFIELD

I would like to ask Councillor Stanton that even in Dulwich Village which we know has a heavy leaf fall, was left for a number of days and systematic cleansing did not commence until three days after a Labour colleague of mine actually brought this to the attention of the Council. If it had rained during that period there would have been a repeat of the flooding which had occurred last year because of the clogged drains. Therefore would he agree that inadequate staff were deployed despite the fact that we all know that leaf fall is a perennial event and will he undertake to ensure that adequate resources are in place for next year?

RESPONSE

No Mr Mayor I would not agree that inadequate staffing resources were deployed for the reasons set out in the answer. The streets are cleaner both now and for the last six months than they ever were under the benighted late and unlamented Labour Administration. In fact under Labour about, I think, a maximum of, I think, 70% of streets were cleaned to an acceptable standard and in the last six months since we introduced the integrated cleaning contract that figure has risen to 85% which I think is a considerable achievement for a new management team in just six months. Of course I would hope that the cleaning contract can be properly resourced next year, that is ultimately a matter for Council Assembly when it passes the budget and I hope that this year the Labour Group will have the good sense to vote with the Liberal Democrats and not cavil and moan as they did in last year's debate and of course it has to be pointed out that once again we have been shortchanged by the government. For some bizarre reason the London Borough of Southwark is now having to subsidise the deprived Boroughs of Kensington & Chelsea and Westminster. When we Liberal Democrats called for the Government to be more redistributed we meant it top down and not the other way up, but will continue to make the point and will see what Labour do on the budget next year.