

APPENDIX 3

**COUNCIL ASSEMBLY
(ORDINARY MEETING)**

WEDNESDAY OCTOBER 20, 2004

MEMBERS QUESTION TIME

**1. QUESTION TO THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL FROM COUNCILLOR
PETER JOHN**

Can the leader give a categorical assurance to council assembly that no council officer was involved in the production or distribution of the Liberal Democrat group document "News from the Group Room", as reported in Southwark News on 23 September?

RESPONSE

The political assistants for the both groups are involved in the production and distribution of publications. Guidance has been made available in the past to political assistants on their role and responsibilities. This is a matter, which will be kept under review.

SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR PETER JOHN

Can I have an answer to the question, which I put please?

RESPONSE

I think the answer is self-explanatory.

2. QUESTION TO THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL FROM COUNCILLOR ROBERT SMEATH

How much has the council spent on the last two CPA assessments?

RESPONSE

The comprehensive performance assessment (CPA) is a mechanism for assessing how well the council delivers services and the extent to which it has the capacity to deliver improvement. The council has used the CPA assessments constructively and successfully in support of its commitment to drive up the quality of services. However, the approach to improvement has not been driven by the CPA. The Audit Commission has been content for the council to work to existing plans (consolidated in a CPA improvement plan) to achieve its success and the council has not redirected resources for CPA purposes. As a result there are no service related costs specifically associated with the CPA assessment.

The costs associated with the CPA assessment fall into two broad categories (i) the charge levied by the Audit Commission for undertaking the assessment and (ii) additional costs incurred by the council to comply with the requirements of the assessments and to support the assessment teams. The Audit Commission does not disaggregate the annual cost of inspections to provide information on the specific cost of the CPA element. The additional cost to the council associated with the CPA corporate assessments is around £6,000—this does not include any costs to departments in preparing for the assessments.

3. QUESTION TO THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL FROM COUNCILLOR MICK BARNARD

Can the leader of the council say which of the following statements are incorrect and if any are, can he please explain why:

1. Local councillors are not Southwark council.
2. Advice given by officers can be rejected by any member receiving it.
3. All officers without exception should adhere to the 10 working day deadline for responses to e-mails and letters”.

RESPONSE

Having considered Councillor Barnard's question I would agree with the statements to some degree but would like to make the following additional points:

1. Members are representatives of Southwark council and to that end must bear responsibility for decisions or actions taken by the council and must adhere to the members' code of conduct in representing the authority;
2. It is prudent for members to have due regard to advice given by officers and, again, members should always adhere to the members' code of conduct. It is of course the prerogative of members to reject officer advice so long as they are prepared to justify any action they take which contradicts officer advice.
4. All officers should adhere to the 10-day rule though it should be acknowledged that sometimes a full reply may not be possible in this time-frame if there is a sensitive or complex matter at hand. Similarly, there will be occasions where staff illness or absence may prevent a response. I would expect a holding reply at least to be issued in any circumstance.

SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR MICK BARNARD

Before I get into my question I would just like to point out that the answer to the first part of my first question quite clearly is another red herring supplied by the officers and I would like all members to receive a clarification of that brief first question if possible, Madam Mayor.

If the role of a councillor is to represent the community instead of wasting time, points scoring and wittering in this chamber and instead of relying on the same old rhetoric and hyped claim of success to get re-elected, we do so because our real commitment is to prove to the community we serve. An officer's role according to council's officer protocol, is to support. Would the leader agree we should put aside in the case of councillors our political differences and the in the cases of officers their culture and work together for the benefit of all. Failure to do so would result in this merry-go-round achieving little but promising much?

RESPONSE

Yes I think so.

5. QUESTION TO THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL FROM COUNCILLOR FIONA COLLEY

I welcome your commitment to the Southwark Tenant Conference to return to the old neighbourhood housing structures if the new area structures don't work. Please could you clarify how you will measure the success or otherwise of the structures and when this review will take place?

RESPONSE

I am confident that the move to area management will deliver the expected outcomes identified in the implementation plan following the best value review of housing management. Whilst any new structure will need an initial period to bed down, these changes, in conjunction with the improvements to the council's face-to-face services and the introduction of the customer services centre from April 2005 will improve the quality of service provision to tenants and leaseholders. The executive will continue to receive a range of data in its performance monitors to track these improvements and the executive member for housing management and community safety will be regularly reviewing performance with the strategic director of housing.

I have every confidence that the performance reviews will show an improvement in the quality of our housing service after decades of neglect by the previous administration.

SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR FIONA COLLEY

I would like to thank the leader for sort of answering my question. I only wish I could share his confidence that the review will result in improvement. I would just like to ask him approximately how long he expects this bedding down period to be and when he expects to start seeing some of the much needed improvement in housing services?

RESPONSE

Madam Mayor I am delighted to be able to point out to a large number of improvements already, rent collection is up, the number of people contacting the council to request repairs and having repairs done is up since we introduced the housing repair call centre last year. As Councillor Colley presumably knows from her former portfolio there is any number of key performance indicators collated by the housing department which showed performance is improving over the lamentable record of housing under the previous Labour administration and we are confident it will continue to do so.

6. QUESTION TO THE DEPUTY LEADER FROM COUNCILLOR BILLY KAYADA

What assurances will the deputy leader give that the planned Peckham children's centre on the Ann Bernadt site currently budgeted at £1.2 million will be delivered by March 2006 and that the services will include up to 60 places, a parent and toddlers room, crèche, community room for training and meetings, and space for health, family support and other complementary services?

RESPONSE

The plan for a Peckham children's centre involves building an extension to Ann Bernadt early years centre and nursery school on vacant land in Chandler Way. The extension, and the re-ordering of space within the current buildings, is expected to create up to 60 full day education and childcare places (12 under 2s, 12 2-3s, 24 wraparound places for 3-4s, 12 integrated childminding places), along with space for health, family support and other services to be provided by partner agencies. Upon completion of the capital project, Ann Bernadt will be relaunched as an expanded children's centre in partnership with sure start west Peckham, with a clear local community focus and strong parent involvement.

The capital development is currently being led by Southwark primary care trust, as the accountable body for Sure Start West Peckham, the major funder of this project. Southwark primary care trust (PCT) has appointed architects, Walters and Cohen, to develop a design for a building. Initial options have been presented to the project team, consisting of officers from Southwark education and Southwark primary care trust. The architects have put forward a programme based upon completion by March 2006, with a budget of approximately £1.4 million, inclusive of professional fees. The programme requires the submission of a planning application in November 2004. The plans will also need to be approved by the sure start unit the Department for Education and Skills (DfES). Subject to planning and DfES approval, there is every reason to expect that the Peckham children's centre at Ann Bernadt will be open by March 2006.

SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR BILLY KAYADA

Thank you for your response you mentioned about an application in November 2004 but there is no reference to any sort of planned communication with the community as such, so could you provide details of this?

RESPONSE

I thank Councillor Kayada for his supplementary and obviously this is a scheme to which this council is very committed along with Sure Start who co-deliver it. Yes officers expect that the application will go on and clearly there will have to be a proper consultation programme beyond that time. If you are concerned that there is not time to do that I would very happily discuss it with officers because I am conscious now that we have just passed the middle of October, so I take the point that for a scheme with such wide interest we want to make sure that we consult using best

practice and that we consult as widely and expansively as we can, so I will follow that up and I will communicate a response to you about that.

7. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR RESOURCES FROM COUNCILLOR VICKY NAISH

In 2002/2003 the funding of sheltered housing units (SHUs) was transferred by the executive from the housing revenue account (HRA) to the new supporting people fund leaving a recurring £4million annual windfall for the HRA.

Given that this transfer of funding was made with the knowledge that supporting people would not cover the full costs of the SHUs in the future, could the executive member please explain how much money was set aside in the 2004/05 HRA budget from the £4million windfall to finance the housing management costs of the sheltered housing units for the current financial year?

RESPONSE

The government cut the supporting people programme grant by 2.5% with no inflation uplift for the 2004/05 financial year. This was an effective reduction of £1.4 million.

An internal review of all former HRA funded services was commenced September 2003, along with an independent Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) review into the supporting people programme. These reviews recommended changes to the service in order to bring service costs in line with the new funding profiles and with the costs of other local service providers.

Prior to the changes of 2004, the supporting people arrangements provided funding for £2.9 million of Southwark's sheltered housing costs and £0.7 million of other support services. Transfer of these services from the housing revenue account (HRA) to the general fund, to match the funding, created a £3.6m recurring windfall for the HRA. Therefore in 2003/04 the sheltered housing units (SHU's) were fully funded by the supporting people grant.

£0.4m of the £3.6m windfall in 2004/05 was already committed for supporting people transitional cases –those supported since before April 2003 but not in receipt of rent rebates. The remaining £3.2million was earmarked to contribute to the governments decent homes target as part of the capital programme. However, in 2004/05 this has not been fully committed pending the outcome of the review of the sheltered housing service.

The resulting new SHU cost of £2.1 million p.a. is met through £1.3 million from the supporting people grant, through the £40 per person per week funding, and £0.8 million, now identified as landlord functions chargeable to the HRA, from the windfall.

However, despite the reduction of government funding we believe that this new method of delivery will provide a more effective service to those residents who rely upon the sheltered housing units.

8. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR RESOURCES FROM COUNCILLOR CHARLIE SMITH

A constituent of mine recently received 23 letters from the council tax and housing benefit department over a period of one week. The letters contained different information and amounts and my constituent, being an elderly woman, was very upset and confused. The reason given by Housing Benefit and council tax was that there had been a problem with the information system at the time and that it had now been rectified.

Could the executive member set out how many other people since 1 April 2004 have been affected by similar circumstances and does each person receive a written apology and an explanation as to why it happened?

RESPONSE

Previous concerns about this issue led to a change in the process to prevent the mailing of separate notices relating to differing periods of a claim.

Unfortunately the required intervention did not happen on the batch including your constituent, and as stated the claimant received 23 items of correspondence. There were another 27 cases out of 2365 cases that had 10 letters or above; of the remainder of claimants the majority received 1 or 2 letters. Liberata have apologised to complainants, as have I.

The benefit system will be replaced in the next two years and we will be making it a key requirement that any letters produced by the system are in a format acceptable to our customers, whilst still being compliant with legislation.

SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR CHARLIE SMITH

Can I tell her that a couple of months ago I actually received a threatening letter from council tax myself and when I got on the phone, actually 19 minutes on the phone waiting for someone to get through to, eventually I was told that it was an error, but nevertheless I received a threatening letter which a lot of people in this borough seem to be. Can I therefore then ask the executive member can she ensure that the telephone answering system time that people wait is cut a lot lower than what it is now because people are getting really fed up with this?

RESPONSE

I would like to thank you for your question. I think that is a very good question and I know that the telephone answering system has been deplorable. I have had a number of meetings with senior people from Liberator and complained about it and I understand from what they are now telling me, I can't say I have been on the phone myself many times directly to them to test out how bad it is, but I understand that the waiting times have come down and the rate of people abandoning calls as a result of the waiting time has come down. I do meet with them on a monthly basis and when I am made aware of what is happening I certainly do give them an ear full – not pleasant at times and when I hear about

cases I have personally complained to people that have routed letters through me including letters from members of your side of the chamber. I think Councillor Colley can say that I have dealt with complaints and I have made Liberator apologise and have done so myself. I think it is unreasonable that people receive threatening letters and it is not altogether Liberator's fault since when they took the contract, as they were CSL, they took the software that actually belongs to the council and the software was poor unfortunately and Anite, previously CSL, who developed it is now no longer servicing the software so this is why we are going through a complete new system change. I am sure there will probably be some hiccups with that and I hope that if there are any we will hear about it and be able to manage problems in a constructive way. I am sorry that you personally received a threatening letter and I hope that if you hear of constituents that received threatening letters, confusing letters and that they are distressed they will let me know and I will promise to get through the client unit to Liberator. Every month I do get a list of complaints that have been handled and I would like to ensure all of you that your constituent will get an apology.

9. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR HEALTH & ADULT CARE FROM COUNCILLOR SARAH WELFARE

What funds have been identified to augment the community alarm scheme so that it can cope with the extra demand from the sheltered housing units?

RESPONSE

The sheltered housing element of the community alarm service is a fixed fee contribution. Budget provision for the next financial year is to be maintained at the same level £42,000. The supporting people recommendation following the review of the service in 2003 was to reduce the gross cost of the alarm scheme from £7 per alarm call to £2 per alarm call. We expect to achieve these savings through constructing a more widely used and efficient alarm scheme. This will be achieved by increasing the marketing of the scheme, improving and updating the service level to sheltered housing residents and taking advantage of upgrades and improvements in technology.

SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR SARAH WELFARE

I would like to thank the executive member for her answer, but then I would like to ask why has an improvement to the alarm technology which I understand was due to be implemented in April 2004 and which would actually save the service money been indefinitely delayed? To me it is as if the service is being run down but it is going to have to deal with more calls very shortly.

RESPONSE

Certainly I was not aware of any change in technology which was due back in April 2004, obviously it was not my portfolio then so I am not 100% sure and I can check on that. However basically there is a quite a lot of work to be done and to actually make this whole sheltered scheme work we need a very very robust alarm scheme that can actually answer calls as soon as possible and actually respond to those calls and to do that it is about improving technology about staff training – there is lots of issues involved in that and I do not want to bring in any sort of changes earlier when they are not fully addressed. I want that scheme to be up and running on April 1 as well as we can make it. Certainly in my own experience as a nursing professional I have worked with a very robust and absolute superb scheme in Greenwich and my vision myself is actually to aim for something like that because that does work. It works very very well and the user satisfaction with that scheme is absolutely superb and I would actually like to see something like that happening in Southwark and that is what I am aiming to actually ensure that we get in Southwark for our residents.

10. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR HOUSING & COMMUNITY SAFETY FROM COUNCILLOR KIM HUMPHREYS

Would the executive member publish a table of the number of anti-social behaviour orders (ASBOs) issued in Southwark for each year on a ward by ward basis since legislation came into effect?

RESPONSE

ASBOs are part of the toolkit which the safer Southwark partnership (SSP) uses to intervene with perpetrators of anti-social behaviour. Other legal sanctions used by Southwark anti-social behaviour unit (SASBU) include injunctions, legal action under the council's tenancy agreement and the new closure orders to close down crack houses.

The SSP have recently revised the borough's ASBO protocol to incorporate the new power of for registered social landlords (RSLs/Housing Associations) to obtain ASBOs in consultation with the local authority and police.

Ward	Number of ASBO's	Year Obtained
Surrey Docks	1	2003
South Bermondsey	8	2003
Peckham Rye	2	2004
The Lane	2	2004
College/Peckham *	1	2004
Riverside	3	2004

* ASBO covers two main areas

SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR KIM HUMPHREYS

I would like to thank the executive member for housing & community safety for his answer. I note that there are 17 ASBOs that are being issued since 2003. I understand the leader of the council told us that was third best in London. A pretty lamentable show quite frankly but what I would like to ask the executive member for housing and community safety is he concerned that of those 17 ASBOs, 12 have come in North Southwark and Bermondsey, 4½ have come in Camberwell and Peckham, only ½ has come in Dulwich and is he concerned that ASBOs are not being able to deal with problems of anti-social behaviour in the south of the borough?

REPONSE

I would like to thank Councillor Humphreys for his supplemental, obviously I do share his concerns that the south of borough may not be performing as well and I would be more than happy to have a meeting with him if he feels it would be of benefit to resolve some of the problems he may have.

11. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR HOUSING & COMMUNITY SAFETY FROM COUNCILLOR TONY RITCHIE

Will the executive member ensure that there is an independent review into the role of officers in the following areas?

- degree of impartiality of officers in dealing with organisations on the Grosvenor Estate.
- undermining the tenants & residents association and the local ward councillors.

RESPONSE

Grosvenor estate tenants and residents' association has had its recognition suspended by the council following a number of serious allegations and complaints regarding possible breaches of their constitution and a failure by the T & RA to respond adequately.

This matter was referred to the West Camberwell neighbourhood forum as per the council's procedure, who asked that the council consider carrying out an independent review of the matter. After careful consideration of this request the strategic director of housing has decided to establish an independent review and officers are currently setting this up.

The remit of the review will include the circumstances that led to the suspension of the tenants and residents association and consideration of the action the council has taken to date.

SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR TONY RITCHIE

I hope Councillor Humphreys gets his meeting with you quicker than Councillor Friary and I got our meeting with you. Can I just say that I am not suggesting to you that the problems on the Grosvenor are easy to resolve but I want you to acknowledge this evening that firstly the West Camberwell neighbourhood housing forum did vote against the suspension and therefore that resolution was not fully implemented? I would also ask you to in actual fact note from that and agree with me that there is nothing in the procedures for suspension of the recognition of the tenants association and ask you why the matter has not been referred to tenants council? Can I also ask you what action you propose to take in relation to the widespread feeling that some members of staff on the council had interfered in this operation? For instance the then chair of the association being locked in a room in a council housing office for 20 minutes with his 8½ months pregnant partner; the fact that the people on the Grosvenor T&RA have been sending e-mails to each other both undermining the work of the councillors and the T&RA and suggesting that the community support are supporting them.

RESPONSE

I would like to thank the member for his many supplemental questions and I will endeavour to answer them. I think the whole process has been regretful that led to the suspension. Whilst there are no specific

guidelines for suspension to have taken place, I hope that members will acknowledge there is now a move for a formal independent review to be done by the Ombudsman and that has been agreed to so whilst the T&RA is not currently recognised the council have agreed to meet with the new chair, that I believe was elected last week, so there is some recognition. Although I would say that was not formal, but that we are going to meet. With regards to locking someone in a room for 20 minutes I am not aware of that specific case, I mean that would be fairly deplorable if indeed that took place so I will look into the matter. In general terms there will be an independent review. There is a period of reflection on all sides councillors, officers and members of the Grosvenor T&RA and hopefully it will be resolved. If I have not met with you personally I hope that you are aware that I have been involved in the background to try and resolve this.

12. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR HOUSING & COMMUNITY SAFETY FROM COUNCILLOR ALFRED BANYA

How long has it been since plans were first laid to cut the 24 hour sheltered housing warden service?

RESPONSE

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) announced the supporting people settlement in December 2003. This confirmed that a reduction in the overall pot for supporting people would be made in 2004/2005, comprising a savings target of £813,542, plus no inflationary uplift for 2004/05. This totals a reduction in supporting people grant of £1.4 million.

The decision to recommend reduced supporting people funding to the sheltered housing service was made by the supporting people commissioning body in March 2004. This followed the review of the service conducted by the supporting people team that began in September 2003. The review was conducted in line with the criteria contained in the supporting people shadow strategy.

This current sheltered housing model provides 22-hour sleep in cover, with a two-hour break covered by the community alarm scheme. During sleep in periods no proactive services are offered to residents. The new service will provide a 24-hour floating warden service linked to the schemes by the community alarm service. It will provide both a proactive visiting service and a responsive service handling call outs referred by the alarm service. We believe the new service, whilst meeting supporting people requirements will provide an enhanced and more efficient service to sheltered housing residents.

SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR ALFRED BANYA

I note the executive member's answer but I am concerned about its accuracy. I hope the executive member is not deliberately trying to mislead members and tenants. My supplemental question is, was the best value review for sheltered housing not carried out in September 2002 and was this not part of a process by which the sheltered housing wardens service was actually reviewed?

RESPONSE

I would like to thank the member for his supplemental and I can confirm that the best value review did indeed take place in 2002 but the actual decision for the changes to the service is actually correct as outlined in the answer and the decision was then taken on the outcome of the supporting people review.

13. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR HOUSING & COMMUNITY SAFETY FROM COUNCILLOR AUBYN GRAHAM

Can the executive member please explain why leaseholders have still yet to receive their bills for the heating works on the Consort Estate?

RESPONSE

The charges to leaseholders for the Consort estate heating works are currently under review in an effort to resolve the long standing disputes. The outcome of the review is expected to result in reduced costs for the overwhelming majority of leaseholders, as compared to the original estimates. Where the recalculation does not result in a reduction, the original estimated cost will be charged and under no circumstances will any leaseholder be asked to pay more than the original estimate. It is expected that the review will be completed within the next four weeks, and leaseholders will be notified of any recalculated charges as soon as possible thereafter.

SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR AUBYN GRAHAM

Can I thank the member for his response and I must say the people in my constituency suffer a great deal when this work was being done and it appears they will be experiencing another bit of inconvenience largely just before Christmas. Can you give us some assurance to give the constituents in my ward that steps have been taken, as far as possible, and what steps have been taken to ensure that these bills go out within 4 weeks as he said and also can he let me know whether the council will be asking for immediate payments of the outstanding amount from each leaseholder?

RESPONSE

I thank the member for his supplemental and obviously apologise for any inconvenience that his constituents have suffered. I did not quite catch the second part of your question, but in terms of when the bills go out obviously I will make sure that full explanation of the options if any of them are suffering any financial difficulties as a result of the delay are made available to them and I will have to come back to you with regards to the second point of your supplemental.

14. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR HOUSING & COMMUNITY SAFETY FROM COUNCILLOR MARK GLOVER

Can the executive member for housing please explain why the relevant housing office managers did not attend the first Nunhead and Peckham Rye area housing forum on Tuesday October 5, 2004 nor send apologies or a deputy despite clear assurances from the executive that they would?

RESPONSE

An undertaking was given that all area forums will be covered by their new area managers where they are in post but clearly that is not the case in Rotherhithe - currently being readvertised - nor Nunhead & Peckham Rye - where an external appointee will be joining us in mid-November. In those areas an undertaking was given that headquarters senior managers would cover until those posts were filled. The Bermondsey area manager (currently based at headquarters) attended the Nunhead & Peckham Rye area forum along with the current Parkside & Pelican neighbourhood managers. I believe this fulfilled the commitment given.

SUPPLEMENTAL QUESATION FROM COUNCILLOR MARK GLOVER

Thank you to the executive member for his comments.

It is my understanding that the executive and housing managers had agreed that existing housing neighbourhood managers would attend all area forums within Nunhead and Peckham Rye that will cover Crown, Parkside, Pelican and Acorn. It is my understanding that at the last meeting the Acorn and Crown housing area managers did not only not attend but did not send a deputy or give their apologies and I understand from my neighbouring colleague here that that happens in East Camberwell as well. I would like for you to comment on that situation.

RESPONSE

Thank you for your supplemental if that is a true reflection of the current situation then clearly that is not acceptable and I will take the matter up with officers first thing tomorrow.

15. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR COMMUNICATION & PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT FROM COUNCILLOR DORA DIXON-FYLE

Can the executive member please comment on the poor provision of education information on the council's website?

RESPONSE

Increasing the access of the Borough's citizens to useful services and essential information is a prime motivation behind the modernisation process. The particular circumstances of Southwark's education service in the recent past have required different working practices from other departments. This means that the huge wealth of education information has been provided via the CEA website, and users of the Southwark council website have been provided direct links to the CEA site.

As a product of recent reorganisation there is now much closer working practices between the Southwark communications team and the education department, and together they have taken action to deliver current improvements and future enhancements.

For instance information previously available on the CEA website has now been updated, improved and incorporated into the Southwark website. Furthermore if you look under 'Your Services' you will see that the communications team has added 10 new pages to the section called 'Education and Lifelong Learning' which went live on October 13. These new pages focus on primary and secondary schools including: searchable details of all Southwark schools; application forms and appeals forms for all schools; details on support available for school uniforms, travel and school meals; information about child welfare and attendance; educational psychology; employment rights for children; term dates and special education needs.

16. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR EDUCATION FROM COUNCILLOR LEWIS ROBINSON

In light of the government's laudable desire that all secondary school pupils should wear a uniform to school (Department for Education and Skills five year strategy), and recent reports that the cost to parents/carers is an average of £185.00 a year (Citizen's Advice Bureau), could the executive member inform us (a) what grants for pupils from low income backgrounds are available from the authority, (b) what assessment criteria apply and (c) the take up rate?

RESPONSE

Southwark local education authority currently allocates an amount of £45,000 for clothing grants. Clothing grants are for children aged 11 years, who are moving from primary school to secondary community or voluntary –aided school. The grant is £45.00 per pupil. To claim a clothing grant parents/carers must be receiving one of the following state benefits:

- Income support
- Jobseekers allowance (Income based)
- Child tax credit – but not working tax credit with an income of less than £13,480.00 per annum (this figure is subject to change)
- Widowed mother allowance
- Incapacity benefit
- State pension

The last three benefits should be the sole source of income.

To date in this financial year a total of £21,555.00 has been allocated for 479 pupils.

CEA@Southwark are currently reviewing the level of the grant to ascertain whether the amount should be increased to reflect the cost of a full uniform.

SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR LEWIS ROBINSON

Would he agree with me that this paltry payment is rather embarrassing considering the low income background of many of the children in this borough? And would he also agree with me that considering £21,000 is currently unallocated in this financial year, there must be some mechanism of reallocating money to children to provided them with a full school uniform, if that is possible?

RESPONSE

I thank the member for his supplemental. I entirely agree with him and I shall see what I can do about it as quickly as possible.

17. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR EDUCATION FROM COUNCILLOR ANDY SIMMONS

Could the executive member please give the number of fixed term exclusions and permanent exclusions for each school in the borough for 2001/02, 2002/03 and 2003/04 with the schools grouped by pupil referral unit, primary, secondary and special schools?

RESPONSE

Comparative data on fixed term exclusions cannot be reported reliably or consistently. This is because the statutory reporting framework does not require schools to report all fixed term exclusions. Good practice suggests that schools should report all fixed term exclusions but this advice is not consistently followed in most local education authorities.

Data on permanent exclusions is collected as they occur and is reported, on a school by school basis, to the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) on a termly basis.

Permanent Exclusions Summary 2001-2004
(*n.b. those schools which are **not** listed have had **no** permanent exclusions for this period*)

PRIMARY SCHOOLS

SCHOOLS	2001-2002	2002-2003	2003-2004	TOTALS 2001-04
Bessemer	0	0	1	1
Camelot	1	0	0	1
Charles Dickens	1 (reinstated on appeal)	0	0	0
Charlotte Sharman	0	1	0	1
Cobourg	0	2 (1 reinstated on appeal)	0	1
Crampton	0	0	1	1
Crawford	1	0	0	1
Dulwich Hamlet	1	0	0	1
English Martyrs	1	0	0	1
Galleywall	1	2	0	3
Gloucester	0	1	0	1
Goose Green	0	1	1	2
Grange	0	1	1	2
Ivydale	0	1	0	1
John Donne	0	2	0	2
Joseph Lancaster	1 (reinstated on appeal)	0	0	0
Langbourne	1	0	0	1
Oliver Goldsmiths	0	0	1	1
Peckham Rye	0	1	0	1
Pilgrims Way	1	0	0	1
Rotherhithe	1	0	0	1
Snowsfields	1	0	1	2

St Francesca Cabrini	0	0	1	1
St George's Cath	0	0	1	1
St John's Walworth	1	0	0	1
St Josephs RC 026	1	0	0	1
Surrey square Jun	1	0	0	1
Townsend	1	1 (reinstated on appeal)	0	1
Victory	1	0	0	1
TOTALS	14	11	8	33

SECONDARY SCHOOLS

SCHOOLS	2001-2002	2002-2003	2003-2004	TOTALS 2001-04
Archbishop MR	3 (1 reinstated on appeal)	2	4	8
Aylwin	3 (1 reinstated on appeal)	4	2	8
The Charter	1 (1 reinstated on appeal)	1	8	9
City of London Academy	N/a	N/a	1	1
Geoffrey Chaucer	7 (3 reinstated on appeal)	2	7	13
Kingsdale	5	5 (1 reinstated on appeal)	3	12
Sacred Heart	2 (1 reinstated on appeal)	0	0	1
St Michaels	0	2	2	4
St Saviours & St Olaves	0	1	1	2
St Thomas Apostle	0	3	1	4
Walworth	7	6 (1 reinstated on appeal)	11	23
Warwick Park/ Acad at Peckham	10 (2 reinstated on appeal)	5 (1 reinstated on appeal)	8	20
Waverley	7	3	10	20
TOTALS	36	31	58	125

SPECIAL SCHOOLS

SCHOOLS	2001-2002	2002-2003	2003-2004	TOTALS 2001-04
Beormund	0	1	1	2
Bredinghurst	2	4	5	11
Cherry gardens	1	0	0	1
Highshore	2	0	3	5
Tuke	1 (reinstated on appeal)	0	0	0

TOTALS	5	5	9	19
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PUPIL REFERRAL UNITS

(n.b. the legislation changed to allow PRUs to permanently exclude in Jan 2003)

PRU	2001-2002	2002-2003	2003-2004	TOTALS 2001-04
Willowbank	N/a	N/a	2	2
TOTALS	N/a	N/a	2	2

SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR ANDY SIMMONS

I would like to thank the executive member for his answer on exclusions. Members of the education scrutiny committee considered this issue and there were cross party concerns raised by myself, I believe it was Kenny Mizzi and also the vice-chair Councillor Graham Neale about the lack of clarity around the number of BME students who are permanently excluded compared with the number of BME students in the borough. From the list of the secondary schools can he highlight any schools, which he considers are excluding too many BME pupils and highlight what he is doing about this.

RESPONSE

No I won't make any comment on individual schools because I don't think it is the right thing to do in this chamber it can be very discouraging and demeaning for schools. There is an inquiry going on at the moment into various issues – I have talked about this before, it is a national issue as well as a local issue. It is a local issue, it is a London issue and it is a national issue and authorities are working together and trying to put together the best practice from various areas to try and address it but no I am adamant I will not make any comment about individual schools.

18. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT & TRANSPORT FROM COUNCILLOR WILLIAM ROWE

Could the executive member outline what action has been taken to establish a public transport liaison committee since the relevant motion was referred to the executive by council assembly on April 28 2004?

RESPONSE

The first meeting of a newly formed transport consultative forum took place on September 30 with 12 representatives of organisations representing pensioners, disabled people, carers, pedestrians, cyclists and others present. It was agreed that the forum would meet every two months and the next meeting is to be on December 9. It was agreed that representatives of public transport operators would be invited to future meetings of the forum. In this way, the consultative forum would also act as the public transport liaison committee requested by members.

SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR WILLIAM ROWE

I would like to thank the executive member for environment and transport who has just woken up for his answer and to say I hope you will confirm that his intention for the public transport liaison committee is the same as ours - that the representatives of the public transport operators should be there regularly at every meeting so they have to report back and achieve some progress rather than just turning up occasionally to give a power-point presentation go away and take no notice?

RESPONSE

Madam Mayor I think it would be a quite a good start if we ban all power-point presentation from the new transport forum. The transport forum is intended to address a number of member concerns – there have been request for a statutory panel that can look at disability issues for example. We need a transport forum because Transport for London say we need to have a transport forum. There has also been this request for public transport forum a public transport liaison committee. I suggest the best way forward is to try and bring all those ideas together in a transport forum that meets every couple of months. We could certainly agree and indeed the transport forum did discuss this and agree this that we should ask the public transport operators to come along perhaps to two or three meetings a year. I have to say we can ask but we cannot force them to attend. I know there are member/officers who would have had massive influence with Transport for London, the Labour controlled Transport for London, I am sure they will make sure that Transport for London will be regular attendees at all future transport forums.

19. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT & TRANSPORT FROM COUNCILLOR BARRIE HARGROVE

Can the executive member please comment on the council's arrangements for ensuring the security of its vehicles overnight and whether the police have provided advice to the council on keeping vehicles at Chumleigh Gardens safe?

RESPONSE

The theft of vehicles from Chumleigh Gardens was, in the opinion of the police, a carefully planned, professional and highly determined act and was one of a series of well-planned thefts which occurred in the vicinity of the park. In this case a vehicle was used to ram the locked gates open, buildings were broken into and the keys taken from a locked key cabinet. Police suspect, but cannot be sure, that the thieves may have known where to find the keys. All the vehicles have, however, been found undamaged. It is the opinion of police that the thieves realised they could not sell the vehicles on quickly and simply abandoned them. This again suggests a professional gang rather than opportunistic thieves or joy riders.

We have asked the police if they have any specific recommendations in relation to additional security and whether the current measures were inadequate. We have been reassured on both points. It is difficult to take practical, cost-effective measures to deter people who are so determined. The warden vehicles (the ones that were stolen) will shortly, however, be moved to a secured compound in Southwark park. The parks service and the community wardens are also looking into the cost/benefit implications of the installation of vehicle trackers and additional deadlocks for their vehicles.

20. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT & TRANSPORT FROM COUNCILLOR MICHELLE PEARCE

Doctors at the Elm Lodge Surgery in my ward are finding it very expensive for the practice to have to fund three business parking permits. Would the executive member be willing to review the present policy on business parking permits in controlled parking zone areas in order to consider whether doctors could be exempt from payment or have a discount on the full rate?

RESPONSE

The doctors in operation should apply for a doctors parking bay to be installed at the location. Once a bay is installed doctors can then apply for a doctors parking permit. This permit costs £72 per year which is much less than the £255 for business permits.

Another option would be for the doctor to make an application to the parking shop for a group 1 medical support permit at the cost of £10 per year. This permit allows vehicles to park on a yellow lines or parking metres and pay and display machines for a maximum of 2 hours; or free of charge in council operated car parks.

21. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT & TRANSPORT FROM COUNCILLOR PAUL BATES

Would the executive member join me in welcoming the £4.35 million grant provided to Southwark by the government to begin work on a combined heating and power system for the Aylesbury estate, and can he outline what steps he intends to take to attract further funding so that the system can be ready as quickly as possible?

RESPONSE

Yes. I am very pleased that Southwark has secured £4.35m - around 25 % of the total available in this tranche - by Department for Environment, Farming and Rural Affairs from the government's community energy programme. In the comment issued to the press at the time I said: "*This is a cutting edge example of how communities, councils and the government can work together in helping to prevent the apocalyptic scenario of climate change that the prime minister highlighted this week.*"

This grant will be used to develop an energy centre, renew district heating infrastructure and provide combined heat and power on the Aylesbury estate and the surrounding area. Tenants will benefit from lower heating and electricity costs and a more reliable and controllable heating system. Substantial additional finance will be required to develop this scheme and officers are working on a number of options to bridge the gap including consideration of the establishment of a not-for-profit energy services company to oversee the project and operate the scheme including ensuring adequate funding. It is envisaged that the programme of works will be completed by February 2007. The works will be carried out in parallel with the improvements to the estate, which will start in the South West corner.

SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR PAUL BATES

Can I thank the executive member for his answer and also can I warmly welcome his endorsement to the Prime Minister. It is very good to hear him supporting Tony Blair.

Can the executive member reassure myself and all tenants on the Aylesbury estate that the updating to the heating will benefit everybody across the entire Aylesbury estate and not just those tenants and residents in the south-west corner?

REPONSE

Can I first say this in referring to what the Prime Minister said I was congratulating him for acknowledging the problems. He of course acknowledge the problem in his environmental speech every 2 years and I know he will go on to actually address the problem. I think it is a crying shame that carbon dioxide emission has gone up in 3 of the last 4 years under the labour government and that they are doing even worse than the Tories did and I never thought I would say that.

I can't give him the categorical assurance that he seeks. At the moment the plans are as announced and we want to expand the scheme as far as we can but obviously we will have to raise the revenue in order to be able to do that and theoretically we could expand the CHP system to serve new blocks or indeed old blocks around the Elephant and Castle as well but we have not got the cash or the finance in place to do that but we will certainly look at doing that much sooner I hope in our aspirations.

22. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT & TRANSPORT FROM COUNCILLOR TAYO SITU

According to a senior council officer in the transport group, approximately 80% of blue badges are not really correctly issued. Why is this?

RESPONSE

It is not the case that 80% of blue badges are not correctly issued; on receipt of applications confirmation of the nature and extent of disability are sought from the applicant's GP or consultant. This medical information is checked against the detail on the application form and the decision on whether the applicant meets the eligibility criteria for issue of a blue badge is made by a senior social worker in the physical disabilities service. This is a national scheme which also operates across all of the European Union countries. It is acknowledged that once issued, badges can be abused / misused and measures to address this are outlined below.

It is also acknowledged that the framework of controls of the scheme need to be strengthened. Officers within the council, including social services, environment and transport have addressed these issues and an action plan is in place to proactively reduce these problems the main points of which are:

Short Term

That supplementary disabled parking permits be issued to blue badge holders who have a bay outside their homes and are car owners;

That a Southwark-specific disabled parking information leaflet be prepared and distributed with the issue of each existing and new disabled badge holder and on request;

That the call centre staff be provided with a contact for out-of-hours enforcement requests. In addition, that officers investigate other ways of integrating parking enforcement with the call centre;

That the social services department be requested to review the systems used for issue of blue badges, with a view to further restricting abuse of badges.

Medium / Long Term

That staffing and funding resources are made available to undertake a comprehensive disabled parking audit as part of the future parking and enforcement plan;

That any extension of the hours of enforcement, or increase in staffing levels be deferred until the completion of the parking and enforcement plan.

SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR TAYO SITU

I would like to thank the executive member for environment and transport for the answer that the council parking manager has stated in writing that, "approximately 80% of the blue badges are not really correctly issued. Given your reply councillor could you please explain these comments?"

RESPONSE

I don't know who made that statement but I have spoken to senior officers and they assure me that it is not correct. There is a huge perception in the community and it is probably based on fact that there is abuse of blue badges. I don't think anyone questions that but the problem is not the way the badges are issued the problem is the misuse of badges that have been issued to people and they are being used by people when they should not be used or they belong to deceased relatives or Auntie Mabel who actually lives 50 miles away or whatever the problem is the abuse of the system not the actual issuing of the badge. The badges are being issued to the right people, but as I say this is a national problem and we need to work through the ALG and all the rest of it and with the government to try and put right some of the faults in the system.

23. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT & TRANSPORT FROM COUNCILLOR VERONICA WARD

All credit and congratulations should go to the Bromar Road/Grove Hill Road Community Association and all their supporters for achieving Transport for London (TfL) agreement to re route the P13 away from the twists and turns of Bromar and Malfort Roads to Pychley Road. What is the timetable for completing the works to enable the re-routing to take place?

RESPONSE

There is no funding specifically allocated for the works as yet but the council is hopeful that funding will be made available by Transport for London to carry out design and consultation work on the proposed modifications before the end of the financial year (i.e. between January and March 2005). It is expected that funding will be available in the 2005/2006 borough spending plan (BSP) to carry out the modifications between April and September 2005. The BSP bid was submitted to TfL in July before this decision was made. The outcome of Southwark's BSP bid should be known by the end of November.

The re-routing will require major physical modifications and changes to signal phasing at the existing junction of Dog Kennel Hill /Edgar Cail Way and Pytchley Road. This will involve engaging a number of third party agencies and may require approximately 4- 6 months to implement.

SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR VERONICA WARD

I hope very much that the road will be realigned to take the new P13 route as speedily as possible. Given that this re-route is now in the planning line so to speak, what is now being put in place to begin putting together the introduction of a home zone which as you know this set of road is particularly suited for that development?

RESPONSE

As Councillor Ward will know the main pot of money from which we draw down for doing transport stuff comes from Transport for London. We put in our bid document unfortunately before we heard the very good news about the P13. I joined with her and residents in congratulating everyone involved and I am glad that ward councillors and the council were able to work together across party lines on that. We therefore need to get the money from TfL hopefully to carry out the consultation process in the New Year and then will be looking to TfL again to give us the money for the physical work. I have to say in relation to home zones, although Mayor Livingstone gave assurances to local residents that he would make money available for home zones, there is no funding stream in the TfL/BSP process whatsoever for home zones. We have nevertheless bid for home zones through various other streams but until Transport for London say here is a pot of money for home zones and please bid for them then there is not a huge amount that we can do. We are pressing them very very hard to do that and I know that since Ken Livingstone

supports home zones at least in word that hopefully she and others will be able to join me in calling for him to amend his funding arrangements.