

**COUNCIL ASSEMBLY
(ORDINARY)**

WEDNESDAY OCTOBER 20, 2004

PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

**1. QUESTION FROM MR. PATRICK YORKE TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER
FOR COMMUNICATION & PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT**

Why is the council adamant that it will not fully supply draft or agreed full council meeting minutes on demand and send them through the post to residents before the next meeting?

RESPONSE

The council makes all its reports, minutes and background papers publicly available. This is a right enshrined in the council's constitution and in accordance with the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985, which gives the public a right to look at, and copy, reports and background papers.

There is no requirement on the council to provide hard copies. In fact, I am informed by the council's constitutional services that the Act also allows local authorities to charge for such a service and for any copies that are requested.

However, the widespread provision of all council paperwork is labour intensive and costly to both the council and the environment.

Therefore, as part of a commitment to both access to information and to the environment, all committee agendas and minutes should be available on Southwark council's website, where individuals, officers and councillors alike may choose which specific papers they wish to review and either read them on-line or print them locally. In addition, hard copies of executive and council assembly agendas are available for inspection to anyone who requests them at libraries and the town hall. Taken together this ensures that people are able to identify and read only those papers most relevant to them without having to wade through reams of papers to find the right item.

Requests may still be made for hard copies of council papers to be sent to a resident who is unable to access agenda papers via the website at their local library, possibly due to a disability, or who has requested them in an otherwise more accessible format.

Finally, constitutional services inform me that, as a recipient of the summary notifications, in September you brought to the council's attention the fact that draft council assembly minutes were not in fact available on the website prior to their agreement. This oversight was immediately rectified and your diligence appreciated.

SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM MR PATRICK YORKE

Thank you Madam Mayor for granting me an audience in this chamber and I would also thank the councillor for his response.

The flow of information to the community is a prerequisite in any form of association but where it is labelled with some restrictions and access then we are restricted in the freedom of knowing what is going on. The response comes on with these questions I am going to ask. The first paragraph said there is no requirement. I wanted to know what this requirement is and who gave the authority for this procedure. The second question also follow up with the third paragraph regarding the requisition that the cost being cost effective. May I know the savings being done as a regard when people demand for the hard copies and thirdly what savings are we going to ensure that the people who have not got internet access or e-mail access may come by hard copies their only source of information.

RESPONSE

Can I thank you Mr Yorke for that supplemental and for raising this issue.

Perhaps I might have misphrased the response I have written down here. The issue about not being required is a simple statement of fact in that the constitution says that we must make these things available for people to review and that sort of stuff. The Local Government Act does not specifically interfere with that other than making sure that we provide things as a matter of course. There has been as you rightly pointed out the concern about cost also about environments. If you look at the number of papers that we have had circulated this evening and this is quite a light evening when constitutional services went through and looked at this the average cost for an executive bundle is something in the region of £10 - £15 and the average cost of a full council bundle is something in the region of £5 - £10 per bundle and that includes everything that is in there. The reason why it is difficult to give a precise price is because that depends on how many motions and how many issues there are raised. What we have therefore done is decided to make available what is on the agenda so that people can choose better without having to receive everything that they have. For those people who do not have access or for example need large copies and so on we will respond to that and make those available, as it is our need to do it. But you are right it is an issue about cost. It is also an issue about environment as I have said. In terms of hard copies they can be made available but by far and in the most efficient ways people are able to choose which items they want from an agenda to have those as well. If there is anything else that you think that we could usefully be doing I would be more than happy to talk to you about that afterwards in a way in which we make these things available.

2. QUESTION FROM MR. TOM LARKIN CHAIR OF BROOKSTONE T&RA TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR HOUSING

Can the member provide the relevant council document that refers to the voting age limit of local residents?

RESPONSE

It is a condition of recognition and funding that a tenants and residents association operates under the terms of a recognised constitution. This is set out in the tenants fund application pack.

The constitutions of all recognised tenants and residents associations sets out who are eligible to be members and therefore entitled to vote at meetings. In the case of Brookstone and Nunhead TRA this specifies that membership is open to all tenants living within the relevant area. A secure tenancy cannot be entered into by anybody under 18 years of age so membership is limited within the constitution to persons over 18.

This is the position currently supported by the tenant fund management committee.

The Brookstone & Nunhead T&RA constitution and the tenant fund application pack are available on the Southwark website with the other council assembly papers at the following internet address:

<http://www.southwark.gov.uk/YourCouncil/AgendasMinutes/AssembMeet/AMCouncilAssembly.html>

SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM MR TOM LARKIN

First I would like to thank Councillors Simmons, Barnard and Colley for their support in this matter which you have all got paperwork about.

You have all the subject matter of this particular question. Lindsay herself would like to ask the question, Madam Mayor, if that is possible.

On behalf of Lindsay who is a resident as there is no age limit contained within the constitution what action will the executive member take to ensure officers apologise and then recognise the AGM - I am a resident. Now you must refer yourselves to Councillor Stanton's comments at tenants conference and all the other Government enthusiasm for youth involvement.

RESPONSE

I would like to thank Mr Larkin for his supplemental question. In terms of what Officers proposed to do they are going to be working with you to ensure that the AGM will be held and it will be quorate. Mr Larkin a secured tenancy agreement can only be entered into with the person of the age of 18 or over. Officers will be reviewing whether teenagers can indeed take part in AGMs and they will be working with tenants including tenants council to review the situation.