

**COUNCIL ASSEMBLY
(ORDINARY)**

WEDNESDAY JULY 9 2008

MEMBERS' QUESTION TIME

1. QUESTION TO THE LEADER FROM COUNCILLOR PETER JOHN

What change has there been in the number of people receiving meals on wheels in the last month compared to the same period last year? What change has there been in the number of meals that the council has distributed through the scheme in the last month compared to the same period last year?

RESPONSE

The number of meals delivered in a 5 week period, which includes May and the first week of June, are as follows:

| Meal | 2007 | 2008 | Change |
|-------------------------------|-------------|-------------|---------------|
| Hot | 1107 | 996 | -111 |
| Frozen | 12387 | 11731 | -656 |
| Lunch Club & Day centre meals | 4665 | 3872 | -793 |

The number of service users on June 1 2007 was 733 and on June 1 2008 was 714. The number of service users who have declined the service as a result of increases in charging is 32. These service users have made alternative arrangements with friends and family. Over time there continues to be a gradual decline in the number of people using welfare catering services, with some peaks and troughs. Welfare catering is becoming a less popular service in terms of take up than previously. In addition, one day centre no longer uses the service as food is prepared on site.

2. QUESTION TO THE LEADER FROM COUNCILLOR JAMES GURLING

Will the leader explain what action the council is taking to tackle benefit fraud?

RESPONSES

The council aims to create a balance between ensuring that those needing help paying their rent and council tax get that assistance promptly, and taking all reasonable steps to secure the system against fraud.

Southwark Council's benefit service continues to take steps to ensure that robust prevention and detection measures are firmly embedded, thereby striking the right balance; mitigating risk of fraud entering the system, detecting fraud where it does occur and seeking to punish those who are caught. The measures are:-

Prevention

- Unlike most local authorities, Southwark Council's benefit service thoroughly check the circumstances of all those seeking to enter the benefit system

- The council's benefit service raises awareness of benefit fraud amongst staff, stakeholders and the public through
 - Providing regular fraud awareness training to staff/stakeholders
 - Quarterly fraud and security newsletters circulated to benefit staff and stakeholders e.g. housing associations
 - Ongoing publicity on The Source (intranet) and Southwark Council's website
 - Promoting our benefit fraud hotline number and email address for the reporting of fraud
- In addition the council regularly places anti benefit fraud publicity across the borough in one stop shops, libraries and bus shelters. Benefit Cheats Have Their Hand In Your Pocket was the strap-line for one, recent, fraud publicity campaign in Southwark. In 2008-09 the council is running a joint anti-benefit fraud publicity campaign with the Department for Work & Pensions under the heading, 'Risking It All In Southwark'.

Detection

The council has in place a specialist team of accredited investigators who:

- investigate instances of suspected fraud
- Proactively target groups among whom the risk of fraud is judged to be greatest for example e.g. particularly high levels of benefit fraud are found among those working in certain industries or occupations
- Utilise the electronic methods offered by housing benefit matching service, national fraud initiative and other forms of cross-departmental data matching
- Participate in joint cross agency projects to tackle wider incidents of fraud
- Utilize powers granted by the Secretary of State to request information from employers, banks and other organisations
- Interview those suspected of fraud under caution using powers comparable to those of the police
- Refer cases for a lesser sanction or prosecution to the council's sanction panel.

Punishment

Those who have been caught defrauding the council are punished either by local authority sanctions or prosecution. Achievements in 2007-08 include:

- Over 600 people were investigated for benefit fraud
- A total of 171 were found to have actually committed fraud and received a sanction. Of these 74 were prosecuted in court (sanctions ranged from a caution in the less serious cases, to a prison sentence in the most serious cases)
- A recent benchmarking survey indicated that Southwark achieved the highest number of prosecutions for benefit fraud among London councils last year
- The amount of overpaid benefit due to fraud was £1m. To put that in context Southwark Council's total expenditure on housing benefit and council tax benefit in 2007-08 was £188m. Expenditure attributable to proven fraud was just over half of one percent of our total benefit spend – demonstrating that the majority of our benefit claimants are honest and simply claiming their rightful entitlement.

3. QUESTION TO THE LEADER FROM COUNCILLOR MARK GLOVER

What representation has the leader of the council made to the new Mayor of London in support of the proposed Cross River Tram? Can he guarantee that all his executive colleagues remain committed to the scheme?

RESPONSE

Due to the central importance of the Cross River Tram to the council's regeneration of the Elephant and Castle and Aylesbury areas, I have asked the executive member for regeneration to take a lead on representations to the Mayor of London.

In addition I have invited the mayor's planning advisor, Sir Simon Milton to discuss how the Mayor's office can support and facilitate regeneration in Southwark and will naturally be lobbying for the Cross River Tram in that discussion.

The executive member currently holds the chair of the Cross River Partnership and last week, he wrote a letter, signed by myself, the deputy leader and the leader of the opposition. This letter urges the Mayor to "go ahead with this project and to secure the appropriate funding as a policy priority".

I can confirm that this administration and the entire executive are absolutely committed to the scheme.

4. QUESTION TO THE LEADER FROM COUNCILLOR JAMES BARBER

Could the leader explain what impact increased wholesale gas prices is likely to have on those Southwark council tenants whose estates are heated through district heating?

RESPONSE

In the current year we have already agreed wholesale gas prices with contractors. We believe that these prices are competitive as we negotiated at a time when wholesale prices were falling. These contracts are due to be renegotiated during 2008 and we would expect the increase in wholesale to be reflected in new contract rates. However, we intend to use our position as a major user to negotiate favourable rates.

The cost of gas supplied to the council's district heating schemes are settled through three contracts (arranged according to level of consumption). Prices on each of these contracts were fixed for two years and were agreed when gas prices were low. The smallest value contract is due for renewal in October 2008, whereas the other two contracts have prices fixed in place until February and July 2009. The council will be moving to different energy procurement approach this year where we will be able to minimise the risk of exposure to the highly volatile gas market.

It should be highlighted that those with individual gas heating systems will be exposed to the predicted rise in gas prices and will have limited options to mitigate this. While domestic customers may switch suppliers companies operating in this market typically change prices at times close to each other (they are all affected by the same volatility in the underlying wholesale market for gas).

5. QUESTION TO THE LEADER FROM COUNCILLOR ANOOD AL-SAMERAI

Will the leader explain what level of community engagement there has been in the area surrounding Potters Field since the appointment of Squire and Partners as the architects?

RESPONSE

I am pleased to report the excellent engagement that is taking place in the community which is being led by the architects, Squire and Partners. Squire and Partners were appointed in May by Berkeley Homes and their senior partner, Michael Squire, places great emphasis on community engagement, putting it at the heart of the development of their plans for the site. Berkeley Homes and the council have agreed the consultation process and events will be taking place over the coming months to engage with the community on the development of the designs.

There has already been consultation with key council officers, ward councillors and the local member of parliament at a presentation on the June 9. On June 23, the architects met with the Shad Thames Residents Association and the feed back from this meeting was powerful and strongly supportive. Future events that are planned include meetings with other local groups such as the Fair Street TMO; Tooley Street T&RA and the Riverside Parents and Carers group which are scheduled throughout July. Additionally, key local stakeholders and business groups such as the Potters Fields Park Management Trust, London Bridge BID, Southbank and Bankside Cultural Quarter Group and Southbank Employers Group are being invited to an additional event in July. Following this first round of meetings, local residents and businesses will be kept informed of progress. There will then be an additional round of events to gain further input for the designs as they progress. There will also be an exhibition for all councillors.

6. QUESTION TO THE LEADER FROM COUNCILLOR RICHARD THOMAS

How much money was spent in the last financial year on advertising, providing a breakdown of different types, in a) Southwark News and b) South London Press. What proposals will he bring forward to reduce this total?

RESPONSE

In 2007-08 the council spent the following amount on advertising relating to recruitment and planning.

In 2007-08, Southwark Council spent £57,000 on recruitment advertising in local papers, of which £36,000 was with the South London Press and £21,000 with Southwark News. The council have now stopped using the South London Press (no recruitment adverts since January) and curtailed Southwark News use to just periodic coupon adverts.

Last year development control spent £15,952 on the weekly planning press notice in Southwark News. This is on the basis of a special rate which has not increased in the last three years. The council does not use the South London Press for planning notices, apart from one press notice costing £392 related to an increase of fees in the building control service.

The recent review and resulting reorganisation of the communications function for the council is already saving £1.5million for local taxpayers in the current financial year. We are determined to continue making efficiency savings wherever we can in order to protect front line services during the worst financial settlement for councils in a decade.

We will work closely with our local newspapers to get the best deal we can regarding advertising in these publications and explore how we can maximise advertising in our own publications.

7. QUESTION TO THE LEADER FROM COUNCILLOR DAVID HUBBER

What was the result of the district auditor's investigation into the formal complaint made about the information distributed with Southwark's council tax bills earlier this year?

RESPONSE

The District Auditor was requested to investigate a potential misuse of public money in respect of council expenditure on a graph printed on the envelope containing council tax bills for 2008-09. After consideration of the issues, the District Auditor has concluded that that there is no action required of her.

8. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR HEALTH AND ADULT CARE FROM COUNCILLOR BARRIE HARGROVE

Could the executive member for health and adult care confirm that Southwark Carers are facing a shortfall in funding of £25,000 from Southwark Council for this current financial year and is he aware that one of the implications of this cut is that Carers in Southwark on the "Fix Yourself a Break" Scheme will now get a maximum of £250 whereas before they received a maximum of £300?

RESPONSE

To Follow

9. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR HEALTH AND ADULT CARE FROM COUNCILLOR SANDRA RHULE

How many Freedom passes were issued at Southwark's one stop shops in the first two week in June 2008? How many passes were issued at the one stop shops to individuals had been refused a pass earlier in the renewal process? What is the total number of Southwark residents previously holding Freedom passes who have been refused renewal in 2008?

RESPONSE

In the first two weeks of June 2008, approximately 450 Freedom Passes were issued. None of these passes should have been issued to applicants who had previously been refused.

The total number of applicants who were unsuccessful in renewing their Freedom Pass was 738. The unsuccessful applications were as a result of clients not meeting the medical criteria set out in the Transport Act 2000.

10. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR HEALTH AND ADULT CARE FROM COUNCILLOR CHRIS PAGE

To which other councils was the executive member referring to when he informed the public that ten other London councils had missed the May 31 deadline for disabled Freedom pass renewals? Does the executive member agree that by informing a member or members of the public he was putting this information into the public domain? Does he regret his decision to

do so given that London Councils are of the opinion that only two other councils were in this position?

RESPONSE

I do not agree that by having a private conversation with a constituent, I was seeking to put information into the public domain.

My statements in that conversation were based on anecdotal evidence concerning the situation in other boroughs. In my private conversation, I made it clear that the source of the information was not fully verified.

I welcome the full review to be undertaken by the overview and scrutiny committee, who are free to examine any information available from other councils and the role of London Councils should they feel that this is appropriate.

11. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR HEALTH AND ADULT CARE FROM COUNCILLOR ANDREW PAKES

How many entitled Southwark residents had not received their renewed disabled Freedom pass when the deadline passed on May 31? On what date was the executive member first made aware that council officers expected to miss the deadline? How many applications for compensation had the council received as of July 1?

RESPONSE

To Follow

12. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR HEALTH AND ADULT CARE FROM COUNCILLOR MARTIN SEATON

How many Southwark residents were issued with disabled Freedom passes which could only be used in the greater London area? Will all of these have been changed for nationwide passes by July 9? When did the last applicant for a disabled Freedom pass renewal receive their full, nationwide pass?

RESPONSE

To Follow

13. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR HEALTH AND ADULT CARE FROM COUNCILLOR ALTHEA SMITH

How many social workers in Southwark have taken stress related leave or sickness in the last year? What proportion of the total number of social workers in the borough does that represent? How many social workers were on long-term stress related leave or sickness as of July 1?

RESPONSE

Sickness absence for 'stress' are not recorded separately from other 'neuro psychological' conditions and therefore include illness such as anxiety, depression and bereavement.

During the period April 1 2007 to March 31 2008, 34 social workers were recorded as being absent for neuro psychological reasons. This equates to 46 days (8.6%) out of the total of

535 days lost to illness by social workers. The number of social workers on long term illness for 'neuro psychological' reasons on July 1 is zero.

14. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR HEALTH AND ADULT CARE FROM COUNCILLOR ADE LASAKI

Could the executive member outline what action he took on learning of the problems with the distribution of Freedom passes on June 2 onwards?

RESPONSE

To Follow

15. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR HEALTH AND ADULT CARE FROM COUNCILLOR LINDA MANCHESTER

What are the plans for the consultation around changes to social care eligibility arising from the budget agreed in February?

RESPONSE

Southwark is one of only eight London Boroughs that provide adult social care services for people assessed as having moderate needs according to the government's eligibility criteria.

As a result of a poor local government financial settlement, the council must find £2-3 million of savings from the adult social care budget for the next three years. One way of achieving this is through providing services to those whose needs and risks to independence are assessed as substantial or critical.

A wide and detailed consultation on all issues will be taking place from June 30 to September 26 2008.

The consultation process will involve:

- All older people, adults with physical or learning disabilities, adults with mental health needs, health and social care partnership boards, representative organisations for elderly and disabled users and carers who receive these services will be sent the consultation document.
- A free reply paid envelope has been included in the consultation pack and feedback can also be given online at www.southwark.gov.uk/eligibilityconsult. There is also a telephone hotline so people can express their views and to answer any queries.
- Social care and health organisations in Southwark will also be encouraged to provide feedback.
- There will be face to face presentation for groups.

The feedback received through the consultation will be reported to Southwark Council's executive on October 21 2008. No changes will happen unless and until a final decision is made in October 2008. All councillors have received the consultation pack.

16. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR HEALTH AND ADULT CARE FROM COUNCILLOR HELEN JARDINE-BROWN

Could he provide an update on the consultation around the merger of two day care centres announced in the budget?

RESPONSE

The proposal is to merge the two older people's day centres in the north of the borough. We intend to cease to provide services from the Evelyn Cole site and transfer services to a merged centre at the Southwark Park site without any loss of service for users who currently attend either centre. The proposal came about because there was unused capacity in both centres and the need to make savings as a result of the Council's poor financial settlement. In addition, there was the added challenge of the impending regeneration of the Bermondsey Spa area which meant the Evelyn Cole day centre would have been demolished.

Adult Social Care has consulted widely on this proposal:

- Staff, users and carers were written to on February 11 2008.
- Service users, staff, carers, health organisations and other stakeholders were formally consulted between April and June. The consultation was conducted through face to face meetings, letters and a consultation document was sent to all those potentially affected by the change.
- It is important to note that during the consultation not one objection was received. However, there were a range of suggestions and anxieties expressed that have informed the implementation plan.

As a result of the consultation the following actions are taking place:

- Services at Southwark Park have been temporarily relocated to the Blue Square Tenants Association Hall, 5 minutes from the centre. This is to allow maintenance and minor building works to be completed. There will be minimal disruption to services for users.
- The works to Southwark Park day centre includes a new rehabilitation kitchen which will add a new dimension to services in the area of activities for daily living (ADL). This will help build confidence for users discharged from hospital so they are more able remain in their own home. It will allow different types of activity addressing different needs to take place at the same time.
- There will now be a 7 day service in the north of the borough as there is in the south. This has been accepted warmly and builds our capacity to support more high needs users and their carers in the community.

The new service is due to commence on August 4 2008.

17. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR HEALTH AND ADULT CARE FROM COUNCILLOR COLUMBA BLANGO

Could the executive member give us an update on the selection of a host to support the new LINKs?

RESPONSE

The selection process for the host organisation to support Southwark's new Local Involvement Networks (LINK) is currently in its final stages. The LINK is an independent network of local people and organisations with an interest in local health and care services.

The LINK will improve the health and social care services through a strengthened system of user involvement and the promotion of public accountability in health and social care.

The tender evaluation panel for the host organisation comprises both officers and, importantly, community representatives. It is due to make its recommendation to the deputy chief executive this week in order for the host organisation to commence in August. Therefore, I am unable to announce the successful host at this stage.

18. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR HEALTH AND ADULT CARE FROM COUNCILLOR MACKIE SHEIK

Could the executive member provide an update on the outcome of the social care funding summit?

RESPONSE

Southwark Council alongside other boroughs and London Councils has raised concerns that the relative needs formula is flawed and should not be used in its current form to determine need and therefore funding for social care services in areas like Southwark.

Expenditure and activity on the ground in Southwark shows strongly that the younger adults' and children's social care formulae significantly understates real need in the borough and similar kinds of authority.

There are some clear and obvious flaws in both the younger adults' and children's social care formulae. We do not believe that these were fully explored when the department of health introduced the formulae 3 years ago.

Criticisms and contradictory evidence was not taken into account by officials at the time. The formula was devised using information from a very small sample size of councils across the country and uses the disability living allowance as the main driver of need which does not reflect the true level of care needed in Southwark. We want the formulae back on the table so that these issues can be fully explored.

The continued use of the formula means the council will not be funded for the level of care it needs to provide for residents in the future. We estimate we would have to make savings in future years in the amount of money we spend on services of:

- Between £4.9m and £8.8m in physical disabilities
- Between £3.9m and £7.7m in learning disabilities
- Between £4.2m and £4.9m in mental health
- Between £0.8m and £0.9m in other social services

We held a summit on May 13 2008 to examine the issue and publish our evidence. We have written to John Healey, Minister for Local Government, to request a meeting to discuss this and the flawed population estimates for Southwark. We are meeting national bodies such as MENCAP, Local Government Association, London Councils and the Learning Disabilities Coalition to brief them of the issues around the relative needs formula for Southwark. Some local organisations have also requested more information on the issue and we will be contacting them to offer briefings as well.

19. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR HEALTH AND ADULT CARE FROM COUNCILLOR ANNE YATES

Could the executive member inform full council about the newly trained lay inspectors for care homes in Southwark?

RESPONSE

The lay inspector scheme was originally initiated by a user representative of the older persons partnership board (OPPB) to improve the monitoring of quality in care homes in Southwark by providing a voice to residents that use the service.

Lay inspectors are volunteers who live and/or work in Southwark and who accompany council officers when they visit homes to carry out monitoring visits. They engage with residents to discuss and discover their experience in the home. All volunteers have undergone a training plan including safeguarding and understanding dementia. Lay inspectors create their own reports on their visits to accompany council officers reports.

The project will be reviewed after 6 months and a report will go to OPPB for them to consider outcomes and determine whether to make the scheme a permanent one.

20. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR HEALTH AND ADULT CARE FROM COUNCILLOR SUSAN ELAN JONES

Will the executive member for health and adult care provide details of the outcome of the council's consultations on increasing the calculation basis for client contribution levels for social care to 80% of surplus income by 2010-11? Can he provide details of the estimated increase in the average weekly client contributions between 2007-08 and 2010-11? Can he provide the council's estimate of how many individuals are expected to be affected by the removal of the £200 ceiling for weekly contribution levels?

RESPONSE

To Follow

21. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR REGENERATION FROM COUNCILLOR ABDUL MOHAMED

Does the executive member intend to make a compulsory purchase order (CPO) on the Elephant and Castle shopping centre site from St Modwen? If so, when? When does he anticipate work on the demolition of the centre will begin?

RESPONSE

On July 30 2007 the council's major projects board resolved to exercise compulsory purchase powers to acquire land buildings and other interests necessary to deliver the Elephant and Castle regeneration which includes the shopping centre currently owned by St Modwen plc. However, this process cannot start until the council has completed the regeneration agreement with Lend Lease Europe, and they have submitted an outline planning application. The current development timetable anticipates that the agreement will be completed by December 2008. However both parties ability to reach final agreed terms depends on discussions with Transport for London and London Underground on the levels of funding required for highways and public transport interchange improvements at the Elephant and Castle.

The timetable to resolve these matters means that the shopping centre is unlikely to be demolished before December 2012 and the council informed traders of this at a recent meeting at the shopping centre on June 25.

22. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR REGENERATION FROM COUNCILLOR MARY FOULKES

Please detail the dates and agendas of every meeting that a) the executive member for regeneration and b) strategic director of major projects had with traders at the Elephant and Castle since January 1 2008? Please include information on meetings with traders operating inside the shopping centre and those who operate immediately outside.

RESPONSE

Since January 1 2008 the council have held two public meetings (February 13 and June 25) to which all traders (including market stall holders) were invited. On both occasions the purpose of these meetings were to provide traders with an update on the Elephant and Castle regeneration and the anticipated development timetable including the demolition of the shopping centre. On both occasions the leader of the council attended the meetings as did the Elephant and Castle project director. I attended the second meeting in March following my election to the post of executive member for regeneration. The strategic director of major projects has not been directly involved in these meetings as the lead officer is the Elephant and Castle project director.

In addition, the council has appointed two business support officers to improve communication with traders. Both of these officers are based within the shopping centre for two days a week and are in regular contact with traders.

23. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR REGENERATION FROM COUNCILLOR JANE SALMON

Could the executive member update us on any plans he is aware of for the use of the remaining New Deal for Communities (NDC) funding held by the Creation Trust?

RESPONSE

The funding referred to is held by the Aylesbury NDC and amounts to £13.7 million allocated for 2008-09 and £14.8 million for 2009-10.

This funding is committed to a number of items over the next two financial years:

- Amersham development - £14.5m
- Social and economic projects - £7m
- Management/administration - £0.8m
- Michael Faraday community learning centre - £1.6m
- Walworth School - £400,000
- Burgess Park - £400,000
- William IV youth training centre - £1.3m
- Southwark Council delivery support - £2.4m.

24. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR REGENERATION FROM COUNCILLOR BOB SKELLY

Could the executive member give an update on progress at the Bermondsey Spa development?

RESPONSE

There have already been significant improvements to the public realm within Bermondsey Spa including the completion of the refurbishment of Bermondsey Spa Gardens. The redevelopment of a number of key sites is also progressing well.

The new developments will provide over 1000 new homes by 2011. The Artesian Building and Site T are now completed providing a total of 123 new homes and Sites J and E-H both adjoining St James Church will complete within the next few months providing a further 200 new homes. The redevelopment of the Old Chocolate Factory (Site D) is also proceeding with completion due summer 2009.

25. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR REGENERATION FROM COUNCILLOR CAROLINE PIDGEON

Can he provide an update on the latest meeting of the Cross River Partnership?

RESPONSE

The last Cross River Partnership on June 11 constructively discussed a range of issues including a review of current partners and partner boroughs and featured a presentation from Southwark Council officers about the retail investment programme. Following the meeting the Cross River Tram Board met with each of the partners and partner boroughs reaffirming their commitment to the CRT project and to lobbying the new Mayor of London for its early implementation.

26. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR REGENERATION FROM COUNCILLOR JELIL LADIPO

Can he give a progress report on the Elephant and Castle regeneration project?

RESPONSE

The council continues to make considerable progress towards the implementation of the Elephant and Castle regeneration. In May 2008 the St. Mary's churchyard was successfully reopened following its £1.3m refurbishment. Work has recently commenced to redevelop the former Printworks site on Amelia Street in the form of a mixed tenure building including 67 affordable units and 15,000sq ft of employment space. Work is expected to start on the redevelopment of the former London Park Hotel site towards the end of 2008. The building, designed by Richard Rogers, includes over 400 new units (40% of which are affordable), a new home for Southwark Playhouse and the refurbishment of Churchyard row. The redevelopment of Castle House is continuing and the core of the 43 storey tower is increasingly visible. All this activity demonstrates the council's successful delivery of its vision for a mixed tenure mixed use town centre at the Elephant and Castle and the continued market confidence in its plan for the area.

Lend Lease have reconfirmed their commitment to the Elephant and Castle project and have board approval to proceed with the master planning and legal work necessary to complete the regeneration agreement with the council, which we anticipate will be by December.

27. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR REGENERATION FROM COUNCILLOR JOHN FRIARY

Is the executive member aware of any moves made by Lend Lease to subcontract the development of any of the Elephant and Castle regeneration project? How would the executive member characterise Lend Lease's current relationship with the council? Does he think that it would be fair to say they are growing 'impatient' with the council?

RESPONSE

The council's relationship with Lend Lease is extremely strong. There are very regular meetings between officers and their development team and members of the executive. There is no indication that Lend Lease is growing impatient with the council. Indeed both parties are working towards the completion of the regeneration agreement by December 2008. Lend Lease Europe and Southwark have recently completed an exclusivity agreement which requires both parties to "negotiate in good faith and use all reasonable endeavours" to achieve this objective.

The council selected Lend Lease Europe as its preferred master development partner in July 2007. In this capacity Lend Lease will be responsible for the preparation of a major planning application, supporting a compulsory purchase order, and the acquisition of land needed to implement a consented scheme. Lend Lease will also have a major development role particularly in regard to the commercial and retail aspects of the development, however they may contract with other parties, such as First Base, to develop the residential element of the scheme. This is entirely consistent with their bid submitted to the council.

28. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR REGENERATION FROM COUNCILLOR LORRAINE ZULETA

Could the executive member set out the planning department performance in each of the following the categories: major developments; minor developments; and all other developments for the financial year closing March 31 2008?

RESPONSE

During the year ended March 31 2008, 64% of major applications decided were decided within the 13 week target. The national target is 60%. 69% of minor applications were decided within the 8 week target. The national target is 65% and the council's own local target is 69%. 81% of other applications were decided within the 8 week target. The national target is 80%. This was the first time that all three national targets have been met.

These results represent a massive increase in performance overall, and I would like to thank officers in development control for their hard work in achieving this.

29. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND EDUCATION FROM COUNCILLOR VERONICA WARD

Will the executive member give her assurances that Phase 2 of the children centre capital programme will go ahead as agreed at the executive meeting on May 15 2007?

RESPONSE

In May 2007, the executive agreed a programme to achieve the Southwark target of having 21 children's centres designated by the Department for Children Schools and Families (DCSF then DfES) by March 2008. This target has been achieved, with the DCSF agreeing to designate new centres on the basis of there being plans in place to deliver the required range of services for children under five and their families across Southwark. The aim of the capital programme is to enhance this provision by improving facilities in children's centres, most of which are based on primary schools in this phase of the programme.

Progress with capital projects in Phase 2 is as follows:

- Rye Oak Primary School - currently on site and nearing completion. (Phase 1 & 2)
- Crawford Primary School - scheme in contract and on target
- Victory Primary School - contract let and work commencing on July 14 2008
- Ivydale Primary School - contract let and work commencing on July 14 2008
- Pilgrim's Way Primary School - contract let and work commencing on July 21 2008
- Gumboots Community Nursery - final issues to be resolved around possible need for temporary relocation. Due to start on site in December 2008
- Redriff Primary School - final contract approvals being sought. Due to start on site in September 2008
- Heber Primary School (alternative site to Dulwich Village CE Infants School) - final plans being agreed with new head teacher to ensure on-going suitability. Due to start on site in December 2008
- Rotherhithe Primary School (alternative site to Riverside Primary School) - no capital works needed to function as a children's centre
- Bessemer Grange Primary School - project is proceeding. Awaiting final approval from Department for Children Schools and Families for aspects of the scheme which require secretary of state approval. Start date is dependent on the final approvals being granted.

30. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND EDUCATION FROM COUNCILLOR DANNY MCCARTHY

Recent news stories have highlighted the concerns about children missing from school whose current whereabouts are not accounted for. How serious is this issue in Southwark ? What procedures and policies are now in place to ensure that the situation of children missing from school without a known reason is monitored. Do all schools presently have a child protection coordinator?

RESPONSE

Southwark has a robust process for tracking children reported out of school (children missing education - CME), including a centrally employed team of three staff. Clear procedures and policies have been agreed with the schools to ensure consistent information sharing about children who go missing. In addition a mid-year fair access protocol for admissions outside of the normal transition arrangements has been implemented and has had a major impact on the numbers of children without a school place. In 2005 there were 300 children missing from education. In April 2008 this had been reduced to 9. Where there are discrepancies between school audit returns and the education management system (EMS) data base the CME team track children in cooperation with other council departments - in particular housing. Most children are located at another school or there is evidence that they have left the country.

Schools are required to have named child protection officers, ('designated persons'), typically senior staff, with several actually creating small teams to support this area. Good links also exist with a wide range of statutory and voluntary agencies. This network, supported by centrally employed staff, has traditionally proven highly effective in locating children.

The council has a legal obligation to ensure that governing bodies are complying with Department for Children Schools and Families (DCSF) expectations pertaining to safeguarding and this is monitored through a regular audit visit by the schools safeguarding coordinator and support for self-evaluation. A parallel audit is applied to supplementary schools and education other than at school (EOTAS) providers that are supported or commissioned by the council and this is also offered to non-maintained schools within the borough, on a voluntary basis, on behalf of the Southwark safeguarding children board. We also have a clear and widely disseminated policy on CME.

31. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND EDUCATION FROM COUNCILLOR DENISE CAPSTICK

Could the executive member explain the likely impact on schools in Southwark of the announcement made by the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families about school performance?

RESPONSE

Much hard work has been undertaken by Southwark schools to address issues of achievement in the last few years, not just those highlighted in the announcement. This has resulted in a number of our schools being identified by the Department of Children, Families and Schools as some of the most improved in the country. The timing of the policy change is unhelpful as resources in schools have to be diverted to respond to it. The three schools identified in this announcement have shown good improvement over the past three years across a wide range of indicators, including achievement. We share the belief with the head teachers of those schools that there is more to do however; and we are not complacent.

Our local response is made more complicated as we understand that the programme will not actually include Geoffrey Chaucer as announced, as the school closes this summer to be reopened as the Globe Academy, nor the Academy @ Peckham, which Ministers believe to be making good progress. The Minister's letter to Kingsdale, which identified it as a rapidly improving school, adds further to the confusion around this announcement.

Nonetheless, any additional resources that are brought to bear by central government to some of the most deprived communities and hardest working schools in the country must be welcomed.

32. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND EDUCATION FROM COUNCILLOR JONATHAN MITCHELL

Could the executive member provide a progress report on plans for the new Harris Academy in East Dulwich?

RESPONSE

I am delighted to announce that Harris's planning application for the new academy in East Dulwich was approved by the planning committee on July 2 2008. I am very pleased that this new school, which will accommodate 950 boys including a sixth form federated with Harris Girls Academy East Dulwich, is a huge step closer to becoming a reality. I sat on the scrutiny committee of five years ago, when parents and residents started the EDEN campaign, and brought their case for the provision of a new boys school for this area so that their sons could be educated locally. This planning decision means that we can now move forward in accommodating this need and delivering high-quality education to the many families who want a place at a boys-only school for their sons. There is still a lot of work to be done to get the school ready to open on a temporary site in September 2009 and I look forward to continuing to work closely with the Harris Federation and the Department for Children Schools and Families (DCSF). The Harris Federation has proved itself a good partner to the borough and I am confident the new boys' school in East Dulwich will continue Harris' strong track record of delivering excellent quality schools in Southwark.

33. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT FROM COUNCILLOR ROBERT SMEATH

How many cars have been removed or clamped by the council parking enforcement contractors this year? When vehicles have been removed or clamped what was the average length of time that elapsed between issuing a parking ticket and removing the vehicle? What is the council's policy on the minimum period that should elapse?

RESPONSE

The council scrapped the policy of vehicle clamping on the public highway at the end of last year (March 31 2008) and clamps are now only used on the Southwark housing estates.

Vehicle removals totalled 705 from April 1 2008 until June 22 2008. It is not possible to give an average time lapse overall because there are 18 different offence codes where vehicles are removed after a given period.

The removal of the actual vehicles will depend on the availability of resources at the time. The policy which is used in Southwark is a combination of the Traffic Management Act and the London Councils code of practice.

34. QUESTION TO THE DEPUTY LEADER AND EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR HOUSING FROM COUNCILLOR PAUL BATES

How many unannounced tenancy and resident checks were carried out in the year 2007, by housing area?

RESPONSE

Prior to the transfer of this function to housing management 991 proactive visits were made to tenants by the housing investigation team. 253 tenancies were fully verified.

The new area management service formally took on this service in December 2007, a major tenet of the new structure being to increase the level of contact between housing officers and tenants. So far, housing officers have visited more than 80% of residents unannounced and made direct contact with 37% of tenants as a result, or just under 15 000 households. We are aiming to complete 100% of unannounced visits by September 2008. Formal tenancy checks will start in August 2008 with a view to achieving 50% per annum on a rolling programme. I would like to thank you for the opportunity to highlight the significant improvement in performance due to the new structure.

35. QUESTION TO THE DEPUTY LEADER AND EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR HOUSING FROM COUNCILLOR KIRSTY MCNEILL

Can the executive member for housing update council assembly on the progress of the Heygate new-build housing sites? Which sites have been identified and how far has development progressed on each individually?

RESPONSE

There are two packages of Elephant and Castle housing sites which are identified below. Package A is being delivered by Urban Choice, comprising of Affinity Sutton & Family Mosaic, and Package B is delivered by Wandle, Guinness & L&Q.

In the case of Package A, architects have been appointed to design each scheme, pre-planning application meetings are in the process of being held with planning officers and applications are expected to be submitted in autumn (subject to scheme viability) following further pre-planning consultation with local residents who live in the vicinity of the sites.

In the case of Package B, one application for the site at Bolton Crescent / Camberwell New Road has been submitted. The remaining schemes are likely to be submitted in September subject to scheme viability. Pre-planning consultation has been carried out for all sites however further events are planned for Leroy Street and the Stead Street sites (including Crown Terrace).

Package A:

- Manna Ash House, Pocock Street (Site 8P)
- LBS Social Services, Harper Rd (Site 10P)
- 153 – 163 Harper Road (42P)
- Welsford Street garages (54P)
- Royal Road (55P)

Package B

- Library Street (9P)
- Prospect House (38P)
- Albert Barnes House, New Kent Road (40P)
- Comus Place, Townsend Street (43P)
- Leroy Street (44P)
- Brandon Street (50P)
- Stead Street Car Park (51P, 52P & 53P)
- Bolton Crescent / Camberwell New Road (58P)

36. QUESTION TO THE DEPUTY LEADER AND EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR HOUSING FROM COUNCILLOR OLAJUMOKE OYEWUNMI

What was the total number of stage 2 and stage 3 complaints on housing matters (including repairs delays, customer service complaints etc.) made in the municipal year 2007-08 (May 2007 - May 2008)? What was the number for the preceding year (May 2006 - May 2007)?

RESPONSE

The statistics below show an encouraging reduction in both stage 2 and stage 3 complaints in the past two years, reflecting greater confidence in managing complaints at stage 1 of the process.

| Complaints | Stage 2 | Stage 3 |
|----------------------------|----------------|----------------|
| May 1 2006 – April 30 2007 | 479 | 154 |
| May 1 2007 – April 30 2008 | 366 | 92 |

There has been a 23% reduction in stage 2 complaints and a 40% reduction in stage 3 complaints when comparing 2007-08 figures with the previous year.

The housing services complaints comprise of housing management, community housing, leasehold management unit and repairs. In 2007-08, 40% of the complaints at stage 2 were related to repairs and 37% were related to other housing management services. The same year, 47% of stage 3 complaints were related to housing management services of which 32%

were repairs related. Housing complaints also include those relating to leasehold issues and community housing.

I would like to thank you for allowing me to share these impressive reductions with members.

37. QUESTION TO THE DEPUTY LEADER AND EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR HOUSING FROM COUNCILLOR LORRAINE LAUDER

Where do the lift contractors source their 'spare parts' from when residential lifts break down? How much would it cost to hold a 'spare part' for every part of the residential lifts? What's the average amount of time it takes to fix a lift that requires 'spare parts' to be sourced externally?

RESPONSE

The lift contractors have an impressive stock of spare parts which they are able carry with them to carry out day to day lift repairs and which will cover most standard problems they encounter. Both lift contractors also have the ability to source parts from the original manufacturer or an approved supplier. In the case of Apex Lifts Ltd, they have the ability to manufacture spare parts in their own factory.

However due to the vast and varying lift equipment in the borough (there are well over 10,000 different parts that would be required), and the age and obsolescence of lift equipment, some parts need to be sourced externally. On average these parts would take between two and three days to be fitted. In some exceptional circumstances, due to the scale or complexity of the equipment that needs to be replaced, this period may be longer.

It would be extremely expensive to hold spare parts for all our lift equipment due to the extent of the spare parts that would be required for contractors to hold. It is not the industry standard for managing a lift service, and is unlikely to see any service improvements upon the present arrangements. Performance figures for the end of June indicated 97% of lifts in use and working.

38. QUESTION TO THE DEPUTY LEADER AND EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR HOUSING FROM COUNCILLOR FIONA COLLEY

How many council houses were empty in Southwark as of July 1 2008? How many have been empty for longer than six months? What has been the average turnaround time for council housing voids to be brought back into use in each year since 2001-02? Please itemise by year.

RESPONSE

The number of empty council houses at June 29 2008 is 671. Of these properties, 209 will be brought back into the lettings pool within the month, another 180 require major works but will be returned to use within a maximum of three months.

278 properties have been empty for more than six months. Most of these properties, some 200 are voids arising in regeneration estates such as the Heygate. Whilst some will be returned to use as temporary accommodation pending the completion of the regeneration programmes some, such as those on the Heygate, will never be let. Of the remaining 78 longer term voids, 35 are in the major works contract being brought up to the decent homes standard, and the rest are pending investment decisions.

Comparing void turnaround year on year is difficult due to various changes in the definition and its application since 2001-02. Void turnaround time per annum is as follows:

| | |
|---------|--|
| 2001-02 | 39 days (minor voids only) |
| 2002-03 | Performance not measured – due to change in national target regime. |
| 2003-04 | Performance not measured – due to change in national target regime. |
| 2004-05 | 63 days (minor voids only) |
| 2005-06 | 41 days (new definition partially applied e.g to minor voids) |
| 2006-07 | 111 days (definition clarified by Audit Commission to include major voids) |
| 2007-08 | 85 days including major voids. |

Performance on turnaround is improving steadily, but has been affected by the number of longer term void properties now being brought back into use.

39. QUESTION TO THE DEPUTY LEADER AND EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR HOUSING FROM COUNCILLOR GORDON NARDELL

How many recorded missed repairs appointments have there been in the last 12 months? How many individual compensation payments were awarded for missed appointments in the same period? Please itemise each figure by month. How confident is the executive member that the recorded number of missed appointments reflects the actual number of missed appointments?

RESPONSE

There were 749 missed appointments identified and awarded compensation during the last financial year and we are confident that all missed appointment claims that have been verified, were paid.

We are unable to identify the number of missed appointments by month for the whole of the last financial year but have now altered our reporting methods and are able to show monthly data since April 2008. We previously relied upon the customer to contact the council to report such instances but no longer do this. This means that residents will receive compensation payments when appointments are missed when they have not necessarily complained or requested payment.

The monthly figures for missed appointments are April - 404, May - 94 and June - 38. The missed appointment level this financial year is running at 2.55% of all repairs appointments (this includes appointments not kept as result of the emergency planning and disaster recovery from the Tooley Street incident).

During the 2007-08 financial year 225,700 works orders to individual dwellings were raised across all housing repair contracts (repair & maintenance, heating, emergencies, door entry, asbestos, lifts, TV Aerials, pest control etc).

40. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR CITIZENSHIP, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITIES FROM COUNCILLOR TAYO SITU

How much has been paid as compensation or out of court settlement by the council to members of staff past or present in the last 24 months, not including redundancy packages? Please itemise by loose category of what the payment was for (e.g. accidents or injuries, sexual harassment, racial discrimination)

RESPONSE

In the financial year to March 31 2007, 25 payments were made totalling £229,334. In the financial year to March 31 2008, 6 payments were made totalling £119, 464, representing a reduction of 76% in the number of payments made and a reduction of 48% in the amount paid compared to the previous year.

In 2006-07, there were two awards against the council at the Employment Tribunal, for breach of contract. In both cases the breach of contract related to the non payment of notice pay to which, in the view of the Tribunal, the claimants were entitled. There were no awards against the council at County Court.

In 2007-08, there were no awards against the council at the Employment Tribunal. There was one award against the council at County Court, for breach of contract, in respect of pay to which, in the view of the court, the claimant was entitled.

Each of the other 23 payments in 2006-07 and 5 payments in 2007-08 were made by the council as part of a settlement agreement, such as a compromise or conciliated agreement. It is not possible to categorise what these payments were for, as each agreement responds to a variety of allegations that are not discretely isolated at the point of settlement, and there is no admission of any fault or liability on behalf of the council.

41. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR CULTURE, LEISURE AND SPORT FROM COUNCILLOR ALISON MCGOVERN

Why does the council's tourism website www.visitsouthwark.com contain separate sections for the comparatively small areas of Bankside, London Bridge, Bermondsey, Rotherhithe and Dulwich, yet place the majority of the borough in terms of population into a single catch-all section entitled 'Peckham and Elephant & Castle'? Is this a further example of the couldn't-care-less attitude that the Liberal Democrat/Conservative coalition has so frequently shown towards the central areas of the borough?

RESPONSE

The website www.visitsouthwark.com was set up in partnership with Better Bankside and London Bridge Bid, and some of the content reflects their involvement in the project. The site is designed for use by those who might visit the borough, and headings have been used that are more easily recognised by a tourist than electoral ward boundaries.

As part of the reorganisation of communications, it is intended to develop a marketing campaign to promote the whole of the borough as a tourist destination. In light of this I have expressed the view that in consultation with partners, the effectiveness of this site in achieving that aim should be reviewed.

42. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR RESOURCES FROM COUNCILLOR DORA DIXON-FYLE

How many incorrect council tax bills have been sent out in the last year? Is this an improvement on the previous year? How many times in the last year has the council or its contractors sent bailiffs to collect council tax arrears which were not actually owed?

RESPONSE

This information is not currently captured within the revenues and benefits system. Any incidents relating to incorrect billing whether customer or council error, are responded to on a

case by case basis. Overall revenue and benefits complaints at stage 1 have reduced by 51% in the period 2006-07 to 2007-08.

Any bills sent in error are included within the number of revised bills that are sent during the financial year as a result in changes of circumstances.

43. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR RESOURCES FROM COUNCILLOR RICHARD LIVINGSTONE

We received the keys to the new Tooley Street building on 11 June. I understand that the original landlord, UBS, has now passed on ownership. Who is the new landlord? What assurances can the executive member give that the council's new landlord meets the ethical standards that Southwark residents might expect?

RESPONSE

The council's landlord for 160 Tooley Street is UBS Global Asset Management (UK) Ltd, however it is understood that the freehold interest in the property is under offer to Tooley Street Investments. The ownership of the building has no impact on the occupation of the building by the council

44. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR RESOURCES FROM COUNCILLOR DOMINIC THORNCROFT

How many instances of double charging of council tax, where a council tax payer pays for a single instalment of the tax more than once, have there been in the last 24 months? How many of those instances have been refunded? What checks does the council have in place to make sure that where double charging occurs it is refunded?

RESPONSE

Direct debit is the only form of payment where the council has direct control over the frequency of payments taken from residents' bank. 49% of residents who are liable for council tax choose to use this method.

The council does not record the number of double charging incidents because instalment plans are set up automatically by the council tax system at the beginning of each financial year or at the time a new account is created. 10 instalments are set up to take payments on the 1st of the month, therefore double charging cannot occur.

Therefore, for an instalment to be paid twice, the payment must have been made by the customer. In these circumstances the council would not necessarily know that customer has paid an instalment twice.

There is one instance where a customer may possibly be requested to make a duplicated payment. This can occur as a consequence of a customer moving address within the borough. In these circumstances a new bill and a new instalment plan is created.

It is normal practice in these scenarios for any credit existing on the "old" account to be transferred to the new account. The service provider runs regular reports to identify accounts in credit particularly to try and identify any which need to be transferred to new accounts. Whilst these do occur from time to time they are rare and data is not held on the number of such cases.

45. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR RESOURCES FROM COUNCILLOR NICK VINEALL

Would the executive for resources please outline his position on the:

- (a) Desirability and
- (b) Feasibility

of providing voluntary bodies in receipt of grant funding from the council with 3 year settlements and, if he agrees that to do would be desirable, would he please say what steps he has taken or proposes to take to introduce either indicative or binding 3 year funding of voluntary bodies.

RESPONSE

The provision of longer term funding arrangements whether through grant aid or contract are both desirable and feasible and enable voluntary sector organisations to plan and deliver services more effectively. Since 1991 the council funding has included 3 year service agreements and contracts or varying terms including 3 years.

In 2007 following completion of a strategic review of its relationship with the voluntary and community sector, the council adopted the voluntary sector framework, which sets out the policy and principles governing the council's arrangements for partnership with, support to and resourcing of Southwark's voluntary and community sector (VCS).

In relation to commissioning and funding the VCS, the framework sets out that the council will operate a mixed economy of grant aid and contracts and will normally operate on a three-year cycle. Service agreements are to be phased out and the new borough council for voluntary sector, Community Action Southwark is now in a 3 year contract (2008-11) subject to review after one year, given that it is a new organisation. This is jointly managed by health and social care, children's services and community support. There will be further moves to 3 year commissioning across all council departments from 2009-10 onwards.

There will be circumstances where it may not be feasible or appropriate to provide terms of 3 year funding and where such terms are offered, whether in contract or grant aid, continuation of funding year on year will depend on a number of factors. These include the performance of the organisation, evidence of value for money, the funding stream which supports particular types of service delivery and the council's overall budgetary position and review processes.

46. QUESTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR RESOURCES FROM COUNCILLOR EVRIM LAWS

How much has the publicity (including advertisements in the press) for the 'No More Reminders' campaign cost since it began? How much have council tax collection rates increased over that period? How much extra revenue does that increase in collection rate represent in monetary terms?

RESPONSE

The No More Reminders campaign cost £105,000, which was met by the council's service provider, Liberata. This is a sign of their continued commitment and investment into the contract and of their commitment to improving council tax collection performance.

The campaign has contributed to the following results:

- In 2006-07 council tax in year performance was 92.3%. Cash collection amounted to £75.4m
- In 2007-08 council tax in year performance was 92.5%. Cash collection amounted to £80.6m, an increase in £5.2m compared to 2006/7.
- In 2006-07 council tax arrears collection amounted to £2.6m
- In 2007-08 council tax arrears collection amounted to £3.8m, a 33% increase in arrears from the previous financial year.

The campaign has therefore contributed to an addition £6.4m in council tax revenue.