

SOUTHWARK COUNCIL

COUNCIL ASSEMBLY

(ORDINARY MEETING)

WEDNESDAY 22 MARCH 2023

MEMBERS' QUESTIONS WITH RESPONSES

1. QUESTION TO THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL FROM COUNCILLOR SABINA EMMANUEL

Can the Leader of the Council please tell us more about the Southwark 2030 listening events that have been taking place since the start of the year?

RESPONSE

Since January, the Council has been talking to people who live, work, study and visit the borough to build a renewed vision for what they want Southwark to look and feel like in 2030.

As part of these discussions we have been exploring what roles residents, business, the voluntary sector, Council and other key partners, such as the NHS and TfL, should play to achieve that vision.

Working together with residents, partners and community groups, the Council has developed different ways to get involved and ensure all voices are heard. The following has taken place:

- 8 conversation events – 6 in-person events at Peckham Levels, Tate Modern, Inspire at St. Peter's, Dulwich Library, Camberwell Library and Southwark Park Gallery. 2 online events have also been held. More than 300 people have attended these events.
- Over 30 listening events – smaller conversations at existing forums or meetings, including Southwark Pensioners, Pecan Food Bank, Bede House, Southwark Muslim Forum, Black Parents Forum, Tenants Residents Associations and Multi-Ward Forums to name a few. More than 500 people have taken part in these events.
- Children and Young People – conversations led by young people in schools, colleges and with Bubble Theatre, the London Communication College and Southwark Council's Youth Service
- Survey – an online survey to which over 750 people have responded so far.

Engagement activity continues until the end of March 2023 and people can still get involved in listening events or by answering the survey. Details are available at www.southwark.gov.uk/southwark2030

2. QUESTION TO THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL FROM COUNCILLOR EMILY TESTER

Southwark Council has taken an unacceptable amount of time to make a decision on the future of Maydew House. It has been empty for over seven years, leaving the residents of Abbeyfield Estate living on a building site. The estate has become less safe and a far less pleasant place to live as a direct result of Southwark's failures. Can the council outline how it will ensure residents are never left waiting this long for a vital decision again? What lessons has the council learned from this failure?

RESPONSE

In 2010 the Labour administration inherited an entirely unacceptable position from the previous Liberal Democrat coalition, in which the Cabinet had previously approved their "favoured option" to "empty and sell Maydew House so that it can be refurbished by a potential commercial developer for 100% private homes".

This decision was overturned by Labour following the 2010 local election and progress was made on a scheme where the site could be retained for council housing. Our initial plans included the refurbishment of the block and increasing the number of council homes on the site.

However, the reality is that the past seven years have been a time of enormous change, prompted in no small part by the tragedy of the Grenfell Tower disaster.

In response, regulation has changed repeatedly in the way high rise blocks are refurbished and managed. Building control changes, regulation, legislation and the understanding of risk (for example in relation to wind loading expectations arising from climate change) meant a rapidly changing landscape over the period. As a result, plans for the building's future have been subject to reassessment and change over the last seven years.

Recent reports to the cabinet meeting on 6 February 2023 and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting on 1 March 2023 explain in more detail why the development of the proposals for Maydew House have needed to take account of changing building safety standards, a complex building structure and rising construction costs caused in part by the recent inflationary crisis.

The detailed assessment of the proposal through a number of specialist surveys has enabled the council to avoid embarking on a contract where costs and risks could not be controlled. This assessment has shown that the original proposal of refurbishment and a rooftop extension to provide additional homes is not viable in terms of both cost and the structure of the building. It has also become clear that refurbishment alone would involve an unacceptable financial risk to the council.

In considering options, the council has needed to balance the impact of the environment with investment and safety requirements. Ultimately it also became clear that if the council were to embark on a refurbishment scheme there is no guarantee of an acceptable additional lifespan for the building or a reasonable level of safety and value for money.

The creation of a dedicated team of project managers in Southwark Construction will improve delivery of future projects. The experience of developing proposals for Tustin and Ledbury Estates shows that the council can work successfully with the community to tight timescales. On the Abbeyfield as a whole we will be equally committed to involving residents to decide the future of their estate going forward.

3. QUESTION TO THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL FROM COUNCILLOR KETZIA HARPER

How will the Land Commission change the way we think how we use land for the benefit of local people?

RESPONSE

The Southwark Land Commission (SLC) is the first commission of its kind in London, and a key commitment being realised as a result of our Council Delivery Plan.

The Commission brings together a panel of experts, community groups and major landowners. Together they are working to free up more of Southwark's land, for the benefit of local people.

The Commission will consider current land use across Southwark and look for more potential opportunities. The aim is to help change how we all think about land use in the city for evermore.

Representatives from across Southwark have been invited to join the commission to help shape recommendations for improvements. Future uses could include quality green space, food growing, active travel, community wealth building, and genuinely affordable housing.

The impacts of the land commission could be fundamentally transformative in terms of how the borough does business between various stakeholders and landowners. Rather than competing, bidding and hoarding space, partners could explore where they have joint ambitions and the means to achieve them together. It is an ambitious vision which seeks to alter the very fabric of the local land economy; the costs, savings and income of which could be significant if landowners approach the recommendations with an open mind and a willingness to explore a new way forward, together.

The first meeting of the SLC took place in March 2023. The Commission will continue to meet between now and through the spring to consider key issues around land and asset ownership, use and securing benefits for all our communities.

Alongside the formal commission meeting, a series of community led stakeholder events are taking place across the borough to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to have their say.

The commission is expected to make recommendations in the Summer.

Key issues for the SLC may want to consider include:

- Use of land: The Council has an important leadership role to play but the SLC will also need to influence wider change amongst key landowners.
- Relationship between land and deprivation distribution: Council-owned land falls within areas facing higher levels of deprivation than for other land across the borough.
- Land in relation to genuinely affordable housing: The housing crisis is being felt in Southwark like everywhere else, with London particularly polarised, how do we do more with what we can control and lobby for what we can't change but need to?
- Access to services: Many Southwark residents face challenges in accessing affordable housing and services, compounding the inequalities they face.
- Land in relation to sustainable / active travel: In Southwark's Climate Action Plan, one of the key focus themes is on active and sustainable travel. The Council wants all residents to have greener ways of getting around the borough.
- Land, assets and community uses: Southwark is one of the stronger-performing boroughs within the London Civic Strength index, indicating relatively high overall levels of 'democratic engagement'.
- Food: Accessibility to cheap, healthy and sustainable sources of food is not consistent across the borough.
- Green Spaces: The Land Commission could consider the use of land with regard to both the climate challenge and also to fair access to green space for residents.
- Local Economy: The Land Commission could consider how land use can help support a more inclusive economy across Southwark, particularly given how different demographics have experienced economic changes due to Covid-19.

4. QUESTION TO THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL FROM COUNCILLOR IRINA VON WIESE

Southwark's small local businesses suffer from the double whammy of lower demand due to the cost of living crisis and higher costs due to increased rents and higher utility bills. I therefore welcome the intention of the Council to 'nurture our home-grown businesses as much as possible, especially those headed up by people from underrepresented groups'. Can the leader of the council please explain, in this context, how it was possible that virtually all local providers of tennis coaching – all of them experienced, highly skilled and well loved by local communities for many years – have been excluded from a recent license renewal

in favour of one large, corporate provider – the National Tennis Association, based in Norfolk – with no connection to Southwark?

RESPONSE

I am confident that the council followed the relevant procurement procedures to run a fair and transparent process to identify coaching providers that can deliver the best community outcomes through tennis.

We anticipate that there will be an opportunity for local coaches, with their wealth of knowledge of the area, to join the provider's team of coaches.

5. QUESTION TO THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL FROM COUNCILLOR JOSEPH VAMBE

Can the leader of the council outline what Southwark Council will be doing to mark Hate Crime Awareness Week?

RESPONSE

As a council, we are fully committed to taking a zero tolerance approach to hate-crimes, making it clear that there is no place for hate in Southwark.

The council annually marks National Hate Crime Awareness Week through the delivery of a coordinated programme of events and awareness sessions. We also use this focus as a platform in October each year to work with council staff to further champion the council's zero tolerance approach to all forms of hate crime. The weeklong schedule is developed alongside the dedicated police lead for hate crime, key partners, including the Community and Voluntary Sector and Stop Hate UK.

This year, we will be working with the Southwark Hate Crime Steering Group, which the council is a key part of, to develop and deliver an integrated programme. Ahead of the Hate Crime Awareness week in October 2023, this group is organising session across the calendar year, including a LGBTQ+ and Hate Crime event in March and a Hate Crime Conference planned for April 2023.

6. QUESTION TO THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL FROM COUNCILLOR ADAM HOOD

Voter ID requirements brought in by the Elections Bill 2022 will act as a barrier to political participation for many, especially some of the most vulnerable groups. Will the council commit to lobbying central government to scrap voter-ID requirements ahead of the next elections? Will the council then go further in showing its commitment to democratic representation by lobbying for a proportionally representative voting system in UK general elections?

RESPONSE

The introduction of Voter ID is a fundamentally discriminatory policy which will, as it is intended, disenfranchise hundreds of thousands of voters. It will amount

to a form of voter suppression and the government should abandon these plans immediately.

The Electoral Reform Society, Open Britain, Fair Vote, and Unlock Democracy have said the new laws could lead to chaos at polling stations as many people do not have a valid ID and are not aware of the changes.

Following the legislation passed in 2022, all voters will be required to show photo ID from a prescribed list before they are handed a ballot paper. The Returning Officer is therefore required to introduce procedures in all the polling stations, to enable the checking of such documentation before the elector receives the ballot papers to which they are entitled. The provisions of the legislation will not apply to any general election held before 5 October 2023, but will apply to by-elections and local elections from May this year.

The impact of the introduction of this legislation will be assessed, in accordance with section 59A of the Representation of People Act 1983. The Secretary of State will publish reports after the first two parliamentary general elections held after this date.

The government has no intention of delivering reform to our electoral system, but Labour have made it clear through the Brown Report that once in government we will look at the very fundamentals of how our democracy works. A combination of lower voter age requirements, automatic voter registration and a new elected upper house of the nations and regions would all help us to ensure that power resides with local communities, not hoarded away in Whitehall.

7. QUESTION TO THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL FROM COUNCILLOR ANDY SIMMONS

Would the Leader be able to give an update on the Dulwich Upper Wood retaining wall?

RESPONSE

We are excited that the Dulwich Upper Wood retaining wall has been built and the accompanying carriageway resurfacing completed. The works have ensured that the trees in the woodland area have been protected, with the cycle lane, carriageway and pavement realigned to protect them.

Additional works restricting traffic turning out of Jasper Road at the junction with Farquhar Road, along with speed cushions, have also been completed this month. Preparation of the area for the sowing of wildflower seeds between the two walls is to be completed at a ceremony on 30 March 2023.

8. QUESTION TO THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL FROM COUNCILLOR MARIA LINFORTH-HALL

Fly-tipping on our streets and estates has huge negative social, environmental and economic impacts on communities in Southwark. Councillors receive countless reports of illegal dumped waste every day from exasperated residents. Despite this, the amount of fines given for fly-tipping offenses has actually

decreased since 2018. Does the council agree that it must increase enforcement of these fines in order to act as an effective deterrent to fly-tipping? How does the council plan to increase enforcement of fly-tipping offenses?

RESPONSE

The council and the Environmental Enforcement Team take fly-tipping incredibly seriously. We are proactive in ensuring that businesses are fulfilling their Duty of Care obligations with regards to waste, and investigate incidents where controlled waste has been dumped and/or illegally deposited on the highway. The number of fines in 2022 stood at 495, a slight increase on the figure of 476 from 2018. The service was interrupted during the pandemic, leading to lower figures for those years, however the council's commitment to enforcement on fly-tipping has not waned.

As part of our day-to-day work on fly-tipping, officers from across the council meet regularly to discuss new and emerging areas of concern so that focussed activity can be undertaken. This group is attended by officers from departments including Housing, Waste and Cleansing Services, Environmental Enforcement Team, Community Warden, Markets and CCTV. Additionally, the council has seven deployable CCTV cameras to support enforcement activities in areas of concern for fly-tipping.

Enforcement action where evidence is found will continue. Where evidence is found that is linked to a commercial premises or individual a fixed penalty notice of £400 is issued, and education in responsible waste disposal is a key activity for 2023/24 following agreement of a Waste Strategy by Cabinet this month.

9. QUESTION TO THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL FROM COUNCILLOR JON HARTLEY

What were the key topics discussed at the recent Climate Conference?

RESPONSE

After two years of online conferences, this year it was great to meet in person for the borough's Climate Change Day on 11 March 2023. We had a fantastic event at London South Bank University (LSBU), bringing together local charities, organisations and residents for people to learn more about climate change, share ideas and take part in workshops on what more we can all do together to tackle climate change in Southwark. We were really grateful to LSBU for hosting the event. This builds on the partnership we have with them to deliver the Green Homes Advice Service which is now up and running and delivering quality advice to residents on changes they can make to green their homes.

The theme was "From Southwark to the South Pacific – can local solutions in Southwark help the climate frontline". We were honoured to be joined by His Excellency, Mr Jitoko Tikolevu, Fiji's High Commissioner to the UK who talked about the real impact that climate change is having in Fiji and other Pacific islands and how the work we are doing in the UK and Southwark is so urgently needed to protect countries like Fiji.

I was pleased to update the conference on much of the action we are already taking in Southwark, including accelerating the roll out of LED street lights; installing heat pumps on the Newington, Consort and Wyndham estates providing clean energy to over 2,000 residents; streamlining the process for planning applications to speed up decisions on greening your home, including solar panels and heat pumps; and further steps to decarbonise our pension fund. And this all came just days after we planted a new mini-forest in Peckham.

We also held a panel discussion with speakers from Extinction Rebellion, Ashden, Hope for the Future and our local MP to answer questions from residents about climate change and our response.

Alongside these issues, there were a range of workshops covering issues such as air quality, energy efficiency, fashion and climate, and creating wild spaces. As a council we have a crucial role leading the borough's response to the climate emergency. Events like this help people to share ideas, build support and increase education and learning in the borough. We have started receiving very positive feedback from those who attended, and look to build on this at our next climate day.

10. QUESTION TO THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL FROM COUNCILLOR RACHEL BENTLEY

In July last year, Southwark voted to approve the Councils for Fair Tax Declaration and join other boroughs in standing up for responsible tax conduct. What tangible steps has the council made towards ensuring Southwark is a fair tax borough? What steps will the council be taking to ensure Southwark is a fair tax borough?

RESPONSE

The council's Fairer Futures Procurement Framework (FFPF) was updated in December 2022 to reflect the commitment that the council made to become a Fair Tax supporting council.

We are working closely with the Fair Tax Mark campaign to agree a consistent approach with other councils and are part of a national officer-working group which is currently drawing up proposals on how to jointly require corporations to reveal their tax arrangements and abide by Fair Tax Mark requirements.

11. QUESTION TO THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL FROM COUNCILLOR ESME HICKS

Can the Leader tell us about the cultural together fund, which was open for application in January and February this year, and how this grant will support Southwark's arts and culture organisation?

RESPONSE

Southwark Council launched the new Culture Together Grant Fund at the start of this year. The aim of the fund is to support Southwark's arts and culture

organisations to become more inclusive and more representative of our borough's communities.

Southwark is one of London's most vibrant and innovative locations for the arts and culture and we want to ensure that Southwark's rich diversity is reflected. A review of the council's funding for culture was a key recommendation coming out of the Southwark Stands Together programme. These findings together with information gathered in previous culture funding review consultation events have informed this new fund.

The fund will help organisations make the changes they need to achieve more equitable representation in their workforces, governing bodies, audiences and artists. It will also help organisations who are already representative of their communities to celebrate their best practice and amplify the excellent work they are already doing.

The council is intending to award approximately £144,000 in funding for 2023/24 via 'Small Grants' (applications from £5,000 to £10,000) and 'Big Grants' (applications from £10,001 to £25,000).

The fund opened on 11 January 2023, and closed for applications at 9am on 7 February 2023. Funding recommendations are due to be published in April 2023 and decisions will be communicated to all applicants by the end of that month.

12. QUESTION TO THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL FROM COUNCILLOR JANE SALMON

Tenants and residents' associations throughout Southwark have raised serious concerns about anti-social behaviour and publicly criticised the response from the Southwark Anti-Social Behaviour Unit (SASBU). How is the council going to ensure that residents feel safe on our streets and our estates? Can the council provide an update on the recruitment of community wardens, including how many have been recruited so far and how many will be recruited by the end of this year?

RESPONSE

This administration is resolute in its commitment to support residents by creating safer communities and driving out anti-social behaviour.

Our £2m anti-social behaviour task force was developed in April 2022 and continues to make a significant contribution, including the recruitment of community wardens who are now in place and hitting the streets – it will be fully staffed by the end of April 2023, comprised of a team of twenty-two.

The task force has undertaken proactive and reactive patrols in addressing concerns for crime, environmental crime and anti-social behaviour. Whilst we are committed to tackling anti-social behaviour in the borough, we are also listening to the concerns raised by residents across Southwark.

The Southwark Anti-Social Behaviour Unit is a highly valued service with an excellent track record of providing support to our vulnerable communities. It

continues to work in partnership with internal and external agencies and it will take necessary legal action to protect our communities.

Legal action taken by the service has included community protection warnings and notices to injunctions, closure orders, tenancy possession and support applications for criminal behaviour orders.

Moving forward, we are reviewing Tenant Management Organisations' anti-social behaviour processes, aligning area based working with the Metropolitan Police Service, recruiting mental health workers to support vulnerable residents and growing the team to extend the service to the private rented sector to support private sector property licensing across Southwark.

13. QUESTION TO THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL FROM COUNCILLOR GAVIN EDWARDS

On 14 July 2021, responding to a question at council assembly, Nunhead and Queen's Road Ward Councillors asked about a crossing at over Evelina Road (near Kimberley Avenue).

In the Cabinet Member's answer, we were informed 'Our top priority is to work swiftly in relation to improving safety at this junction and ensure there are safe crossing points along Evelina Road. As a result, our Highways team recently arranged for traffic, pedestrian and junction counts to be conducted at the junction of Kimberley Avenue and Evelina Road. The Highways team are in the process of producing a full technical note with recommendations to improve safety. This is likely to include a proposal for a pedestrian crossing near the new Co-op on Evelina Road, as well as additional traffic calming measures in response to complaints of speeding along this specific stretch of road.'

This crossing has yet to be implemented. This continues to be a place in desperate need of this crossing. Can we have a date for the implementation of this crossing?

RESPONSE

As a result of COVID and restricted funding from Transport for London (TfL), the council was very constrained on what we could bid for in 2022/23 and therefore was unable to bid for the Evelina Road.

However, following the announcement of increased certainty in TfL funding for London Boroughs, I am pleased to confirm that the council has submitted a bid to TfL for £60,000 funding for design work for 2023/24, for which a decision from TfL is still awaited.

Upon the success of the bid for design, it is planned that a further £350,000 bid to be submitted to TfL for construction in 2024/25.

I look forward to providing a further update on developments.

14. QUESTION TO THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL FROM COUNCILLOR NICK JOHNSON

The Thames Footpath by Odessa Wharf has been closed for many years. Cabinet had approved the budget to re-open the path but have since not commissioned any work on the site. Access to the Thames is a fundamental right of all citizens and its loss is sorely missed.

Can the Leader reaffirm the council's commitment to re-opening the Thames Footpath by Odessa Wharf in SE16 and commit to a timeframe for its re-opening?

RESPONSE

The council supports the delivery of the Thames Path.

We would like to see this part of the river walk reopened to our residents so they can enjoy our wonderful riverside and views, and we have commissioned studies to replace the wooden structure which was closed over 20 years ago as it was dangerous.

These have concluded that the replacement scheme would cost at least twice as much as the agreed budget. Furthermore the council's investment would only be of benefit if the river walk which runs in front of residential properties at New Caledonia Wharf is also reopened. The council has contacted these residents to discuss the potential to reopen this section of the river walk and is awaiting a response.

15. QUESTION TO THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL FROM COUNCILLOR HAMISH MCCALLUM

Free activities for babies, toddlers and children across Bermondsey and Rotherhithe have become massively over-subscribed, resulting in numerous parents being turned away every session. How does the council plan to increase capacity for these popular activities? Will the council establish a Family Hub in or around Southwark Park as called for by the local online community of parents 'Chatty Dads and Chatty Mums'? Will the council expand Rotherhithe Children's Centre to provide additional activities sessions?

RESPONSE

Bermondsey and Rotherhithe Children & Family Centre (CFC) have responded to the increase in usage at some of their sessions by providing separate sessions for babies and toddlers since mid-February. This change maximises the space available within the venue at Southwark Park playroom.

The CFC runs a wide variety of sessions across the week that parents can choose from [timetable – www.br-cc.org.uk](http://www.br-cc.org.uk) and at different venues. They also link families to other local provision.

The CFC is also recruiting additional Early Years staff to increase the number of free sessions across the Bermondsey and Rotherhithe hub sites.

Families across Southwark will be engaged in the development of our Family Hubs and Start for Life provision. We would welcome contact with the Chatty Dads and Chatty Mums group to discuss the Family Hubs and Start for Life development and also how they could be supported to facilitate additional sessions at the Southwark Park venue.

In addition to Family Hubs, the Libraries Service offers the following regular activities in the Rotherhithe and Bermondsey areas:

Canada Water Library:

- [Bookstart](#) (ages 0 to 4) - every Monday during term time, 10am to 11.30am
- [Chatterbooks](#) (ages 7 to 11) - last Monday of every month during term time, 4pm to 5pm.
- [Rhymetime](#) (ages 0 to 4) - every Tuesday during term time, 2.15pm to 2.45pm
- Picture This (ages 8+) - alternate Tuesdays, 4pm to 5.30pm
- [Baby and Toddler session](#) (ages 0 to 4) - every Thursday, 11am to 11.45am
- Colour Me Happy (ages 5+) - every Friday during term time, 4pm to 5pm
- Saturday Craft Club (ages 5+) - every Saturday, 2.15pm to 3.45pm.

At Blue Anchor Library:

- [Bookstart](#) (ages 0 to 4) - every Monday during term time, 10am to 11am.

The Youth and Play service delivers Adventure Play in the area from the Ellen Brown site, for 8 to 15 years old:

- Monday to Friday 3.30pm to 6.30pm term time
- Monday - Friday 12pm to 5pm, half term, excluding Bank Holidays

16. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR COMMUNITIES, EQUALITIES AND FINANCE FROM COUNCILLOR SAM FOSTER

How much support has been issued to residents via the community referral service?

RESPONSE

The Southwark community referral service provides a vital pillar of support for vulnerable people in our community. Since its launch in October, 92 organisations have signed up to the scheme. This has enabled the council from October 2022 to March 2023 to provide £1.29m of support to 12,971 households referred through the pathway.

The scheme has allowed community partners including churches, foodbanks, tenant and resident associations and advice providers to identify vulnerable households in need and refer them to the council quickly and easily, ensuring that as a community we are all looking out for the most vulnerable people in our borough.

17. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR COMMUNITIES, EQUALITIES AND FINANCE FROM COUNCILLOR ELLIE CUMBO

What support is the council giving to residents given the expected rise in the energy price cap?

RESPONSE

Last week we welcomed the news that the Chancellor had heeded the Labour Party's calls to continue the energy price guarantee, capping average household energy bill at £2,500 per year. The Chancellor announced that the scheme will be extended for three months to the end of June 2023, at which point energy bills are projected to fall, easing the burden on households.

By the end of the spring, the council will have distributed more than £30m of additional support to residents, and this summer we will set out more details of our plans to support residents through the cost of living crisis.

18. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR COMMUNITIES, EQUALITIES AND FINANCE FROM COUNCILLOR NAIMA ALI

Can the cabinet member outline what preparation we are making for the new Voter ID requirements?

RESPONSE

The introduction of Voter ID is a fundamentally discriminatory policy which will, as it is intended, disenfranchise hundreds of thousands of voters. It will amount to a form of voter suppression and the government should abandon these plans immediately.

The Electoral Reform Society, Open Britain, Fair Vote, and Unlock Democracy have said the new laws could lead to chaos at polling stations as many people do not have a valid ID and are not aware of the changes.

Following the legislation passed in 2022 all voters will be required to show photo ID from a prescribed list before they are handed a ballot paper. The Returning Officer is therefore required to introduce procedures in all the polling stations, to enable the checking of such documentation before the elector receives the ballot papers to which they are entitled. The provisions of the legislation will not apply to any general election held before 5 October 2023, but will apply to by-elections and local elections from May this year.

Initial discussions have been held between the relevant council officers and cabinet member, so that a co-ordinated response can be developed and delivered. Some resources have been identified, including an active communications campaign through all of our corporate channels such as Southwark Life and online, to ensure that all residents are aware of the need to take permitted photo ID to the polling station when they go to vote.

19. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR COMMUNITIES, EQUALITIES AND FINANCE FROM COUNCILLOR VICTOR CHAMBERLAIN

Every year, LGBTQ+ charity Stonewall publishes a list of the [top 100 employers for LGBTQ+ inclusivity in the workplace](#). Last month, the 2023 top 100 was published and Southwark Council, despite representing the fourth largest LGBTQ+ population in the UK, was not on it. Southwark Liberal Democrats have asked numerous times for Southwark to aim to be on this list and been given assurances by cabinet members that this was a shared aim. Why, despite these assurances, has Southwark failed to be included in the top 100 employers for LGBTQ+ inclusivity? How is Southwark going to improve sufficiently to ensure that it is included in the top 100 for 2024?

RESPONSE

Our borough has a proud history of LGBTQ+ allyship, reflected in the fact that we have the fourth largest lesbian, gay and bisexual community in the country, and the fifth largest trans community. The recent census revealed that, in a neighbourhood in the centre of the borough, we now have the largest trans community in the country.

We are also home to the London LGBTQ+ Community Centre which we have supported in finding a new permanent base of operations, and built a crucial and treasured relationship, delivering real support to residents from across the borough and the capital.

Internally, our LGBTQ+ staff network is a fantastic group of officers that the council has been an active and consistent supporter of, including through just last month's LGBTQ+ History month. Various awareness raising events have been promoted over this last year displaying the council's ongoing commitment to provide a supportive and inclusive working environment within the council for members of the LGBTQ+ community. Furthermore, the council continues to provide resources for the LGBTQ+ community available to our staff via our internal learning portal.

The Stonewall 'top 100 employers' is drawn from a self-selecting group of applicants which means that to be part of this Index the council would need to submit its own Workplace Equality Index (WEI) report. We have not before committed to do so because this could involve a significant resource, including officer time, to put together a cross-departmental evaluation exercise in order to be listed. There is a trade-off to be recognised between expending effort either seeking this award in particular or delivering real change and this administration will always focus on the needs of our LGBTQ+ staff and residents on the ground.

Regardless of whether the council chose to submit a WEI, we will continue to support our staff and our residents on the ground to overcome adversity, prejudice and discrimination however it may present itself.

20. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR COMMUNITIES, EQUALITIES AND FINANCE FROM COUNCILLOR GRAHAM NEALE

Southwark produces a large volume of written materials for internal and external communications. Much of this material does not meet the standards set by the [dyslexia friendly style guide](#) produced by the Dyslexia Society and, therefore,

potentially excludes people with dyslexia. Does the council agree that Southwark must endeavour to be inclusive to all groups, including those with dyslexia? Will the council commit to producing a house-style that conforms to the dyslexia friendly style guide from the dyslexia society?

RESPONSE

Accessibility of communication is a key concern of all public sector organisations and this is certainly true at Southwark Council. The council endeavours to be inclusive to all groups in its communications, including those with dyslexia. We are striving for our residents to have equality of access to all of our communications and information across digital and non-digital channels.

As part of our drive for inclusivity and accessibility, we offer easy-read and translated versions of key communications, subtitle all videos on social media and other channels, use Microsoft Assist to ensure PDFs on the website are accessible and have specific guidance for staff about the use of plain English. We have also recently begun the process to update our corporate templates so that they better meet accessibility requirements. A number of these changes overlap with the requirements found in the dyslexia-friendly guide, such as those around font, layout and writing style.

However, we are aware there is still more we can do on accessibility and we endeavour to be inclusive to all groups. Although some of our written material may not currently meet all the standards set out dyslexia-friendly guide, we regularly review our guidelines and, in doing so, we will consider where existing guidelines and new templates can easily be adapted to meet the requirements in the dyslexia guide (and other such guides pertaining to different groups).

21. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR COMMUNITIES, EQUALITIES AND FINANCE FROM COUNCILLOR SAM DALTON

What is the council doing to promote digital inclusion in the borough, including to improve digital infrastructure, and what is it doing to ensure that residents can fully access opportunities and services provided by the council if they are not online?

RESPONSE

Digital inclusion is high on the council's agenda as we continue to improve accessibility for our residents and support them in getting online.

In January 2022, Southwark Cabinet agreed the Southwark Council Technology and Digital Inclusion Strategy for 2022 to 2025, committing that every Southwark resident should have access to a fast and stable internet connection, a device and the skills needed to participate in society and the digital economy by 2025.

Our vision is for Southwark to be recognised as one of the best-connected and leading digital boroughs in London – a borough that is digitally inclusive where no-one is left offline.

We are taking a digital-first approach, ensuring that residents, businesses and staff are supported with digital skills, connectivity and devices, empowering them to participate in the online world.

Our key digital inclusion pillars set out how Southwark will do this. They include affordable broadband, access to devices and jobs and training, as well as skills, resilience and education. We have delivered 400 digital skills sessions to residents to date, distributing 1,500 digital skills guides in the process.

Our current programmes include our free connection hubs, providing residents with free gigabit broadband connections across 103 buildings in Southwark, including a number of libraries, community centres and sheltered housing.

We are also highlighting affordable broadband schemes such as social tariffs, which has so far provided 54 families with free broadband connections to date, and are working with Community Fibre, Hyperoptic and Openreach to roll out full-fibre broadband across the borough, particularly to those residents who are not online. Around 40,000 properties in the borough now have gigabit broadband, and we have distributed 500 mobile sim cards to help residents to get online.

Council departments work together including through regular meetings on projects that cut across different services to improve the digital offer to residents. The council is also working with a partnership of local organisations that have an interest in working together to improve outcomes for Southwark residents who are digitally excluded and/or lack digital skills.

22. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR COMMUNITIES, EQUALITIES AND FINANCE FROM COUNCILLOR DAVID WATSON

How much has Southwark council spent on 'Southwark 2030' so far? Specifically, how much has been spent on consultancy staff and communications (including graphic design and branding) in relation to 'Southwark 2030' and how much is projected to be spent over the course of the consultation?

RESPONSE

In July 2022, the cabinet agreed to the development of a new Borough Plan for Southwark working with residents, the local voluntary sector, business and the wider public sector. The Borough Plan work is strategic and involves a co-design process with the community to develop a shared vision for the entire place, something which is new in its development, design and future delivery.

The work involves a number of strands, including engagement with residents and partners. To support this, the council is working with an external partner who brings expertise in co-design, strategic planning and community engagement and who is supporting the 'Southwark 2030' engagement activity as well as working with our teams to build local capacity to more deeply engage with residents and partners. We have branded the engagement exercise 'Southwark 2030' to reflect that this is about hearing from our residents and partners on what they want to borough to look and feel like by the end of the decade.

'Southwark 2030' has involved in depth conversation events directly with residents, alongside listening events plus the opportunity to complete an online survey. The work has involved and continues to involve council staff and wherever possible is being met from within existing resources.

Taking the engagement process together, the council has spent £11,000 on 'Southwark 2030' to date. This includes:

- Consultancy staff support for facilitation and running of events (£4,000)
- Design, branding and print of promotional and event materials (£3,000)
- Venue hire costs and refreshments (£2,600)
- Translation services (£600)
- Support to voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations to organise/host/promote events (£800)

In addition, £20 vouchers were offered to residents for attending the conversation events with 259 vouchers issued at a cost of £5,180. The conversation events are now complete, therefore there are no further anticipated costs beyond officer time at multi-ward forums plus a staff-based listening exercise which will complete by early April 2023.

23. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR HEALTH AND WELLBEING FROM COUNCILLOR LAURA JOHNSON

Can the cabinet member let us know how many residents used the warm hubs and what lessons were learned from the delivery of this service?

RESPONSE

We have seen an incredible response to the cost of living crisis in Southwark, with the council, voluntary and community sector (VCS), NHS, tenants and residents associations, and cultural and private sector organisations all contributing to our Warm Spaces programme in Southwark. We opened more than 40 warm spaces across the borough – in community halls, libraries, galleries and children’s centres – and supported a wide range of residents in need of a warm space, as we saw heating bills soar this winter.

Although we are still evaluating the programme, which continues to support residents through the ongoing cold weather, initial data shows that in both November and December, around 500 local people accessed our Warm Spaces each month, and well over a thousand residents visited a Warm Space in January and February.

We are holding a ‘lessons learned’ session with partners in April, but our initial findings are that the benefits of the Warm Spaces went well beyond the original intention of keeping warm. Partners have told us that many people have sought out Warm Spaces to help tackle loneliness; that more men and people with learning disabilities have come along than we normally see at other local events; that there is huge demand for the kind of advice around financial support that we have been offering at our Cost of Living roadshows; and that there has also been high demand for hot food which was offered in many of the Warm Spaces.

All of this learning will feed into an evaluation report which will inform our plans for next winter.

24. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR HEALTH AND WELLBEING FROM COUNCILLOR BARRIE HARGROVE

Food insecurity is shamefully an ever increasing problem in Tory Britain. What work has been done with the voluntary sector to tackle food insecurity in Southwark?

RESPONSE

I absolutely agree that it is shameful that we are now seeing food insecurity on the rise, but this is down to the lack of action and intervention from this Conservative government in tackling the cost of living crisis, coupled with a decade of austerity.

We are fortunate to have a strong and committed voluntary and community sector (VCS) in Southwark. The Council is working closely with the VCS to tackle food insecurity in Southwark in the following ways:

- An additional £500,000 has been invested in supporting VCS approaches to food insecurity, including connecting food organisations in local neighbourhoods, redistributing surplus food through setting up distribution hubs and outlets, investing in essential equipment such as fridges, cargo bikes and electric vans and training for frontline staff in VCS organisations
- Over £100k has been invested in projects to support vulnerable residents, including piloting a food delivery and welfare check model for older residents unable to access food and using surplus food to provide pre-prepared meals for vulnerable residents
- £1.3million per annum from the Department for Education has been invested in over 50 VCS groups to deliver Easter, summer and winter holiday food activity and fun programmes in Southwark
- Working with Impact on Urban Health and Alexander Rose Vouchers so that a family on low income receives £4 of Rose Vouchers for each child, every week, or £6 if the child is under one years old for fresh fruit and veg at their local market or greengrocer
- Working with children's centres and VCS organisations to increase uptake of Healthy Start vouchers, to provide healthy food and milk to pregnant women and families with children under four who receive certain benefits.

As the responsible cabinet member, I will continue to voice my concerns to central government and campaign for national action to end food poverty for good.

25. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR HEALTH AND WELLBEING FROM COUNCILLOR ESME DOBSON

The council has recently implemented the residential care charter; can you update us on how many residential homes have signed up?

RESPONSE

I am delighted that so far, six homes out of 16 are signed up to Southwark's Residential Care Charter. Five of the six homes are amongst our biggest care home employers in the borough and employ just over 400 people – many of whom are local residents, women and from ethnic minority communities.

For the seventh home, we are in discussions about how the Southwark Supplement will help them to move towards full compliance.

From May, 218 service users of the 314 that we fund will be living in a Charter compliant home.

In terms of staff, over 450 people (nearly 70%) will be working in homes that are fully compliant with the Charter.

Officers are continuing to roll out the Charter and make it part of any new contracting arrangements. As the roll out starts to make a difference to the experience of employers, employees and ultimately service users, officers will work with Unison and other partners to promote the Charter and the benefits it brings for everyone.