

**SOUTHWARK COUNCIL**

**COUNCIL ASSEMBLY**

**(ORDINARY MEETING)**

**WEDNESDAY 20 MARCH 2024**

**MEMBERS' QUESTIONS WITH RESPONSES**

**1. QUESTION TO THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL FROM COUNCILLOR JANE SALMON**

I'm grateful that the Mayor has agreed to facilitate a meeting between the whips and group leaders to agree a way forward for better conduct in Council Assemblies. What further assurances can the leader give that our public meetings are conducted with the respect and tone that residents expect from us?

**RESPONSE**

I expect all members to uphold the Council's Code of Conduct and to treat each other with respect and courtesy. I welcome any suggestion on how we can improve local democracy in the borough to make it as welcoming and as accessible as we possibly can.

**2. QUESTION TO THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL FROM COUNCILLOR YUCEF HASSAINE**

How many other local authorities took part in the recent Southwark-led Future of Council Housing summit?

**RESPONSE**

Officers from 20 of the largest council landlords in England attended our Future of Council Housing Summit on 12 March 2024. Attendees included Directors for Finance, Housing, Planning and Neighbourhoods, representing Labour, Liberal Democrat and Conservative-led councils from across England – covering a real breadth of expertise and a good representation of the country.

The Summit's workshops and feedback sessions will inform a major report to be published in June, which will be agreed and signed by attendees from the conference. It will set out a comprehensive, cross-party plan to fix a broken financial model and enable councils to play their part in addressing the national housing crisis.

**3. QUESTION TO THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL FROM COUNCILLOR EMILY TESTER**

The repairs improvement plan published in September 2023 included a variety of commitments timetabled for 2023. Have those commitments been kept? In particular, are all calls and emails responded to within 5 minutes and 48 hours respectively?

**RESPONSE**

The service has made significant progress implementing the repairs improvement plan set out by Cabinet, with continued works coming this year. Satisfaction has improved and is now at 90%, far out performing the London average of 69%. Another example of this is our call response time, where in the year 2023-24 the average response time was 3 minutes and 51 seconds – below our target of 5 minutes. For emails, since September almost 75% of emails were responded to within 48 hours and we are working hard to improve this further.

**4. QUESTION TO THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL FROM COUNCILLOR BETHAN ROBERTS**

What services are available for residents at the new Una Marson Library?

**RESPONSE**

The new Una Marson Library hosts an extensive offer of services available for residents:

- Over 25,000 book collection
- 16 free internet computers and free wi-fi
- Study spaces
- Printing, photocopying and scanning facilities
- Bookable meeting rooms
- Community space for hire
- Baby and Toddlers Session (Ages 0 to 4), and Chatterbooks (Ages 7 to 11)
- Dedicated children's area and teenage zone
- One-to-one IT sessions for adults
- Regular events and activities
- Self-service health check kiosk

**5. QUESTION TO THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL FROM COUNCILLOR RACHEL BENTLEY**

Occupational therapy is a vital part of supporting residents to live their life to the full and stay in their homes comfortably, but often face serious backlogs when applying for an assessment of their needs. Please could the Leader provide an update on the waiting list, including total number of people on the list and waiting times?

## **RESPONSE**

Thanks to increased staff capacity, our overall waiting time for community assessment has greatly improved. There are currently 155 residents waiting for non-urgent community Occupational Therapy. I am happy to report that waiting times have more than halved since early 2020, and the average wait is now around 70 days.

### **6. QUESTION TO THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL FROM COUNCILLOR ESME HICKS**

Given what we learned in the recent budget from the Conservative Chancellor, how is the council stepping in to provide the support that our residents need through the cost of living crisis and the current UK recession?

## **RESPONSE**

The Chancellor's decision to halve the Household Support Fund grant for 2024/25 will cut the safety net from under thousands of families who are only just getting by. Therefore we will continue to press for full funding to be restored. For too many of our residents, the Cost of Living Crisis is far from over. That's why we will continue to provide extra support for those on low incomes and most vulnerable to its impact. During the Easter holidays, we will deliver Holiday Free School Meals to more than fifteen thousand eligible children attending Southwark schools. Later in the spring, we will bring forward more detailed plans for other cost-of-living support that will be available for residents next year.

### **7. QUESTION TO THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL FROM COUNCILLOR DAVID WATSON**

When does the Leader expect neighbours, community groups and members of the public to be able to access the Finches Grotto park on Sawyer Street, in line with the planning permission granted in November 2018?

## **RESPONSE**

We anticipate that the Finches Grotto Park will open to the public in the summer once parties have finalised the Service Level Agreement and the Community Management Plan.

### **8. QUESTION TO THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL FROM COUNCILLOR JOHN BATTESON**

How many different organisations will benefit from the Positive Futures Fund for Young People in the next two years?

## **RESPONSE**

20 organisations will benefit from the Positive Futures for Young People Fund, of which 19 of these have been agreed. A further organisation will deliver LGBTQ+ provision. This will mean a further £1m invested in the futures of hundreds of young people over the next two years.

### **9. QUESTION TO THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL FROM COUNCILLOR GRAHAM NEALE**

Last year the council published its sustainable food strategy, with section 4b committing to promote plant-based diets as a sustainable way forward, including within its procurement. Will the Leader commit to working towards being a plant-based council?

## **RESPONSE**

As part of our priority actions for 2024, the council will ask food businesses to promote plant-based menu choices, new curriculum resources will be shared with all schools to inspire pupils to embrace a healthy plant-powered diet, and schools will be supported to better procure plant-based food.

### **10. QUESTION TO THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL FROM COUNCILLOR JOSEPH VAMBE**

How does the Residential Care Charter benefit our residents?

## **RESPONSE**

The Charter ensures that residents receive safe, high quality and ethical care by guaranteeing fair pay and proper training for care workers, leading to better quality of care for the most vulnerable residents in our community. Six residential care homes have signed up, driving up employment standards for approximately 500 staff, who care for over 400 residents. We were pleased to receive an award from Unison earlier this month, celebrating the charter as the first of its kind in the UK.

### **11. QUESTION TO THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL FROM COUNCILLOR NICK JOHNSON**

The last time we asked about local community infrastructure levy (CIL), we were told a review was due in spring. It is now by most definitions spring, and residents are still none the wiser about when they will see the benefit of the huge amount of development happening across the borough. Can we get a commitment that we will receive a timetable as soon as possible and before 31 May 2024, of when communities can expect to be able to see the benefit of the more than £15 million currently sat in the bank?

## **RESPONSE**

A report will be presented to July 2024 Cabinet setting out the priorities, process and mechanism for community engagement around the Local Community Infrastructure Levy.

### **12. QUESTION TO THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL FROM COUNCILLOR DORA DIXON-FYLE**

How many automated external defibrillators (AED) have now been installed in our libraries and leisure centres?

## **RESPONSE**

We have successfully installed defibrillators in all twelve libraries in Southwark. Seven of these are external and accessible 24hrs a day and they are available in all eight leisure centres in the borough. They have also been offered to all schools and TfL has placed them in every station, supporting an important, comprehensive network of living-saving devices. This marks the delivery of yet another council delivery plan commitment.

### **13. QUESTION TO THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL FROM COUNCILLOR MARIA LINFORTH-HALL**

Despite committing to improving damp and mould services last year, residents still are experiencing unacceptable damp and mould conditions, and poor service when they attempt to resolve with the council. Can the leader commit to ensuring that all residents receive swift and adequate action to resolve damp and mould issues in line with Awaab's Law?

## **RESPONSE**

Southwark Repairs have had a specialist damp and mould team in place since November 2022. Residents can contact officers by phone or through our dedicated online service. Since the introduction of our new team, we have reacted to demand and recorded approximately 6,500 work orders. The service will review and support the requirements under Awaab's Law once the legislation is finalised. We will continue do everything in our power to ensure residents' homes are safe, dry and warm.

### **14. QUESTION TO THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL FROM COUNCILLOR MAGGIE BROWNING**

How much money has been raised via the Southwark Green investment?

## **RESPONSE**

The Southwark Green Investment Fund, launched on 26 February, presents the opportunity for residents and businesses to contribute to a sustainable future by investing in green projects while earning a low-risk, fixed return.

Three weeks after the fund's launch date, we have already raised £446,126 towards the target of £1m, and it continues to grow. The investment period is still live and we invite anyone interested to take part in this investment towards tackling the climate emergency. Please see the link below to see the latest investment amount:

[Southwark Green Investment 1 — Abundance \(abundanceinvestment.com\)](https://abundanceinvestment.com)

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

The external auditor has formally raised concerns with the state of the housing revenue account (HRA) in its audit of the 2021/22 accounts, including raising the fact that weaknesses could have been acted upon sooner to prevent the cliff-edge the council now faces. In addition to the HRA recovery plan, how will the council ensure that it never has to choose between building more homes and keeping existing homes safe again?

**RESPONSE**

These two ambitions are not mutually exclusive. Our existing plans will deliver improved services, including repairs, and will deliver new homes. Indeed there are currently 3,000 council homes either completed or in site through our current pipeline. As the council navigates the significant converging external pressures of inflation, interest rates, rent capping and increased regulatory standards, we are looking to the medium term to re-build reserve levels to ensure the council is able to continue to keep residents safe, dry and warm and build more council homes.

**16. QUESTION TO THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL FROM COUNCILLOR ANDY SIMMONS**

Could the Leader please provide an update on the council's support for tenants to mutually exchange their homes?

**RESPONSE**

The council subscribes to two popular mutual exchange platforms where our tenants can easily register and search for potential mutual exchange partners. Mutual exchanges are also promoted at TRA meetings, and officers are on hand to identify and advise households who may need to move. There are currently 460 Southwark tenants registered on the House Exchange platform and there has been 10 successful exchanges so far in this financial year. There are also 759 registered tenants/accounts on the Home Swapper platform and 26 swaps recorded so far this financial year.

**17. QUESTION TO THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL FROM COUNCILLOR ADAM HOOD**

Will the council consider bringing forward plans to reverse the flow of Cope Street and change parking restrictions in order to alleviate the congestion

currently experienced on Lower Road, which persists even after the cycle way roadworks have been removed?

## **RESPONSE**

Following the opening of Cycleway 4, traffic flows along the route and surrounding areas are being closely monitored. It has been noted that uncontrolled parking and loading along Lower Road from Redriff Road to Plough Way is exacerbating the traffic congestion. To address this, we will be remarking the parking and loading restrictions and this will be enforced by our parking contractor. There is still a desire to improve the current Surrey Quays Gyratory with a two way running scheme which would include the reversing of the traffic flow along Cope Street. This could be considered once the scheme has had time to bed in following the intelligent operation of the traffic signals, and the above enforcement taking effect.

### **18. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR JOBS, SKILLS AND BUSINESS FROM COUNCILLOR VICTOR CHAMBERLAIN**

Southwark's nightlife plan is welcome, but has numerous issues including lack of measurable impact and engagement with communities, especially with the LGBTQ+ community. With that in mind, how would the cabinet member assess the current state of the night time economy in Southwark, and is the night time plan sufficient?

## **RESPONSE**

The council's Night Time Plan allows us to work in partnership with businesses and networks across our key town centres, resulting in genuine support for growing and improving Southwark's night time economy. Recently, we worked with Elephant and Castle & Walworth's Business Forum on ideas for night time economic outlets that have the additional benefit of tackling anti-social behaviour. We will also be meeting with business forums in Canada Water and Peckham over the next month to progress this work. We will look to embed these learnings in the Town Centre plans and future neighbourhood plans.

As a busy zone 1 and 2 London borough, Southwark has a large and vibrant evening-centred and nightlife cultural scene. Our LGBTQ+ venues and businesses play a key role in attracting local and out of borough visitors to Southwark at night. We are continuing to provide support for these fantastic services, including developing an LGBTQ+ cultural space in the two historic railway arches at Bankside Yards.

Through all this work, we will move forward as a borough and show Southwark is once again open for business, day and night.

**19. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR JOBS, SKILLS AND BUSINESS FROM COUNCILLOR IRINA VON WIESE**

Can the cabinet member please provide an update on the the glasshouse in Courage Yard, and when the council will be able to collect rent on this valuable commercial property?

**RESPONSE**

Since the Pavilion was returned back to the council, we decided to offer the space for community use and re-brand it as The Green House. This initiative has the support of local residents. The space was unfinished and very difficult to use so we have undertaken a fit out to make it usable, including installing a disabled toilet, ensuring the space is fully accessible and installing heating. It is available to book by the hour, half day or day and any multiples of these. It is also now a designated polling station. Thus far we have gained £3,000 income from a variety of uses, including Pilates, contemporary art exhibition, filming base and resident's photographic competition. We also work with the local cultural producers Ugly Duck. Local resident groups have been offered a number of days' free use.

**20. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR JOBS, SKILLS AND BUSINESS FROM COUNCILLOR SUZANNE ABACHOR**

How many Living Wage employers are now operating in Southwark?

**RESPONSE**

There are currently 339 accredited Living Wage Employers based in Southwark, which is on its way to surpass our Council Delivery Plan commitment of 500 Living Wage Employers by March 2026. In February 2024, 12 businesses became Living Wage accredited employers, one of the highest month on month increases. Southwark continues to be recognised as a "Living Wage Place," one of only three London Boroughs to hold this accreditation.

**21. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR JOBS, SKILLS AND BUSINESS FROM COUNCILLOR CASSANDRA BROWN**

Since its launch how many local business have so far benefitted from the Thriving High Streets Fund?

**RESPONSE**

The Thriving High Streets Fund (THSF) supports projects to keep our high streets thriving in Southwark by attracting more people to our high streets and town centres, and to increase the amount of money spent in the area. Round One of the THSF awarded eleven grants to projects across the borough, at a total of £244,684. Details of the eleven funded projects can be found here: <https://www.southwark.gov.uk/business/support-for-high-streets?chapter=3>

**22. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR JOBS, SKILLS AND BUSINESS FROM COUNCILLOR DARREN MERRILL**

How many apprenticeship opportunities have been created?

**RESPONSE**

To date the council has supported the creation of 1,019 apprenticeships. This consists of a range of work-streams across the Council, including:

- Southwark Council's own internal apprenticeship scheme
- Apprenticeship levy transfer with local employers
- Southwark Construction Skills Centre and Southwark Works
- Section 106 construction apprenticeships
- Ongoing work in partnership with the Passmore Centre at London South Bank University

**23. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR JOBS, SKILLS AND BUSINESS FROM COUNCILLOR BARRIE HARGROVE**

How many businesses have received a grant via the Southwark Pioneers Fund?

**RESPONSE**

Since its launch in 2022, 29 businesses have been supported with grants, totalling £147,000, from the Southwark Pioneers Fund (SPF).

**24. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR JOBS, SKILLS AND BUSINESS FROM COUNCILLOR GAVIN EDWARDS**

Given the UK is in recession what additional support do you think is needed to protect London and Southwark's local economy?

**RESPONSE**

Southwark's ambitious economic strategy, adopted in November 2023, aims to deliver a high growth, low emission economy. By working in close partnership with local communities and businesses, we are working towards a strong and genuinely inclusive local economy. As Southwark pushes ahead with our strategy, our local businesses need assurances that the Government will put economic stability first, and never allow a repeat of the devastation of Liz Truss and the Conservatives' mini-budget that crashed the economy.

First, the next Government should restore local government spending power to 2010 levels within two Parliaments to deliver a high growth local economy. Next, the government should embrace employment and skills devolution so councils can apply for the right amount of funding to deliver the right services that can support their residents into work. And thirdly, we need to make sure

work pays, and introduce a new deal for working people and delivering a genuine living wage.

This can be achieved by incentivising and rewarding local businesses for good practice and delivering a long-term funding solution for adult social care which improves the pay and conditions for the workforce. Creating well-paid jobs across all parts of our country will ensure working people are better off and more secure, which helps Southwark's local economy and our residents in the long term.

**25. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR THE CLIMATE EMERGENCY, CLEAN AIR AND STREETS FROM COUNCILLOR MARGY NEWENS**

How many people have responded to the Streets for People engagement exercise?

**RESPONSE**

The Streets for People consultation exercise started in August 2023 and is due to end at the end of March 2024. So far we have had 6,450 responses to the consultation. This is the second largest response rate of any consultation exercise carried out by the Council.

**26. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR THE CLIMATE EMERGENCY, CLEAN AIR AND STREETS FROM COUNCILLOR RENATA HAMVAS**

What is the expected time line for the implementation of the new controlled parking zone (CPZ) roll out?

**RESPONSE**

In March 2024, the council published new people powered CPZ proposals that reflect the views of local people and deal with hyper local issues in the three areas. The timeline below is subject to the outcome of the statutory consultation and decision:

**For Queen's Road, Nunhead and Dulwich Village:**

Statutory Consultation – May 2024

Decision making following statutory consultation – July 2024

On-site for implementation (subject to consultation outcome) – August to November 2024

Go-live – November 2024

**For Rotherhithe:**

Decision making following consultation – June 2024

Statutory Consultation – July 2024

Decision making following statutory consultation – August 2024

On-site for implementation (subject to consultation outcome) – October to January 2025

Go-live – March 2025

**27. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR THE CLIMATE EMERGENCY,  
CLEAN AIR AND STREETS FROM COUNCILLOR RICHARD LEEMING**

How will the newly completed 'Cycle Super Highway 4' support cycling in Southwark?

**RESPONSE**

Cycleway 4 is an integral link within the continuous segregated cycle route between Tower Bridge and Greenwich that also provides improved public spaces and facilities for people who are walking. This cycleway creates a clear and safe route for cycling on roads in Bermondsey and Rotherhithe, with new pedestrian crossings and improved public spaces making these areas more pleasant to live, work, shop and spend time in. This will also allow for the area's future growth, in particular the developments around Canada Water, as the cycleway will help connect communities along the route by linking important amenities and facilities.