

COUNCIL ASSEMBLY

(ORDINARY)

WEDNESDAY 20 OCTOBER 2010

MEMBERS' QUESTION TIME

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

Given the new leader of the opposition Ed Milliband has said that the previous Labour government was wrong on Iraq, wrong on civil liberties and wrong on immigration, does he have any regrets about the pledges in the manifesto of the current council administration and how can he reassure council assembly that his successor in four years time won't be apologising on his behalf?

RESPONSE

I am proud of every pledge in our election manifesto and believe that Southwark Labour will not need to apologise as it delivers on those pledges, which were resoundingly endorsed by the electors in May.

2. QUESTION TO THE LEADER FROM COUNCILLOR VIKKI MILLS

What work has been done in preparation for the comprehensive spending review?

RESPONSE

We have taken a structured approach, which has combined making clear our opposition to the scale and speed of the cuts and taking the necessary measures to ensure that we as a council are able carry on delivering for our residents should we be forced by government to implement them.

We have looked and continue to look for savings. Some of these savings have been achieved by cutting down on the excesses of the past, by introducing tough new rules on consultants and cutting members' allowances, for example. Other developing savings are more innovative and will be secured by transforming the way we work as a council. We are continuing to explore how we can cooperate with other boroughs to make savings by working more closely together.

But we know that tough decisions are inevitable and that we are going to be forced to make cuts to services that are doing a good job, despite any savings we make through innovation or cutting waste. That is why we have also set out the principles that are going to direct us through the coming budgeting process, so that our residents, partners, stakeholders and staff can understand the reasons behind our decision-making and the way those decisions will be made.

We know that the period ahead will be challenging, unsettling and painful, but I believe we have prepared in the right way to take the council and the borough through the cuts, to work towards a fairer future.

3. QUESTION TO THE LEADER FROM COUNCILLOR ROSIE SHIMELL

How many children are educated at Southwark primary schools whose home address is in:

- a) Lambeth?
- b) Lewisham?

RESPONSE

The headcount of children on roll at Southwark local authority maintained primary schools (excluding academies) was 22,385 in January 2010, including those children in nursery classes at primary school.

Of those children, 22,099 were matched to their borough of residence. The home boroughs with over 100 pupils are:

Home LA	Number of pupils	Percentage
Southwark	19904	90.1%
Lewisham	1070	4.8%
Lambeth	886	4.0%
Other	239	1.1%

4. QUESTION TO THE LEADER FROM COUNCILLOR MARK GLOVER

Has the leader yet received a response from Eric Pickles to his offer to visit him and make Southwark's case?

RESPONSE

Yes I have. On 15 September, two months after inviting the secretary of state to visit Southwark to see the impact that significant cuts would have, he replied to say that "diary pressures" meant that he could not attend. The day before he attended a meeting with the Mayor of London at City Hall. On 20 September I sent a letter to Mr Pickles asking if he is willing to accept a delegation from Southwark, so that we can go to him to make our case, but he has not yet responded.

5. QUESTION TO THE LEADER FROM COUNCILLOR TIM MCNALLY

On 1 September he wrote on his blog about Ed Miliband that "his time has not yet arrived". What does it say about his judgement as leader of the council?

RESPONSE

Nothing. I publicly endorsed David Miliband's campaign because I thought he was the best of the candidates. I support Ed Miliband's leadership completely because I believe in our shared Labour values and believe that he will do an excellent job.

6. QUESTION TO THE LEADER FROM COUNCILLOR HELEN HAYES

In the Labour local election manifesto the leader committed to opening up the budget making process. What has he done to meet this pledge?

RESPONSE

We have opened up the budgeting process by both publishing more information and by launching a full consultation on next years budget challenge.

In terms of publishing information, we were one of the first councils in London to publish all spending over £500. And we have made a full, formal and public cabinet decision on the seven principles that will guide our actions through the budgeting process.

Since September, members of the cabinet have been attending community council meetings, community groups and stakeholder organisation to explain the budget challenge that lies ahead and discuss our approach to the government's cuts. The second stage of this consultation will take place in November, when cabinet members will return to those meetings to discuss local residents' and groups' priorities. The third and final round of consultation will take place in the new year.

7. QUESTION TO THE LEADER FROM COUNCILLOR GRAHAM NEALE

Will he commit to ring-fencing the money repatriated from the London Council's grant committee for the voluntary sector in Southwark?

RESPONSE

The London Councils grant scheme is currently under review and the outcome will not be known until November. I am currently seeking ways to ensure we can ring-fence for the voluntary sector any money that the council saves as a result of reduced contributions to the scheme.

8. QUESTION TO THE LEADER FROM COUNCILLOR SUNIL CHOPRA

What representations has the Leader made over the proposals to construct long term worksites at the Druid Street playground and King's Stairs gardens?

RESPONSE

The cabinet member for regeneration and corporate strategy and I have both met with Thames Water and made several direct representations to them expressing our profound disagreement with the sites they have chosen as part of the project.

I have also spoken to Simon Hughes MP and asked him to use his influence as deputy leader of the Liberal Democrats to persuade ministers that these sites are not appropriate.

9. QUESTION TO THE LEADER FROM COUNCILLOR WILMA NELSON

Does the leader think it is appropriate for members of the cabinet to have other responsibilities either within or outside the council?

RESPONSE

Every member of the cabinet has other responsibilities, not least as ward councillors. This is as true in this administration as it was in the last. Some cabinet members are also parents, grandparents, school governors, charity trustees, carers, and some have other part-time jobs. I think the diversity of the individuals who make up the cabinet, our experience and our backgrounds, is one of our strengths and reflects the diversity of the people we represent.

10. QUESTION TO THE LEADER FROM COUNCILLOR STEPHEN GOVIER

What innovative proposals is the leader making in order to plug the housing funding gap which was allowed to open up under the last administration?

RESPONSE

When we took office in May we discovered a £300 million funding gap and an indeterminate timetable for the decent homes programme. Even by scaling back the level of decent homes works we will continue to have a funding gap of approximately £50 million. In the circumstances we have been looking at all possible options, including a proposal to fund the

gap by taking a commuted sum in lieu of on-site or off-site affordable housing at some of our prime development sites in the borough. With this premium we would have the option of meeting our commitment to make every council home warm, dry and safe, as well as building at least as much new social housing as would be provided by developers on site. This exciting proposal is potentially a unique solution to Southwark's unique housing problems. We are still at an early stage in terms of taking this proposal forward and are in discussion with the Mayor and the Greater London Authority (GLA). I hope to be able to provide members with more detailed information on this proposal shortly.

11. QUESTION TO THE LEADER FROM COUNCILLOR RENATA HAMVAS

What are the plans in terms of implementing free primary school meals for all, particularly in light of this week's announcement at the which will mean some Southwark families will lose their child benefit which may be 7 percent of their household income or more?

RESPONSE

Several decisions by the coalition government which will hit Southwark's families hard have made the introduction of free, healthy school meals in Southwark more important than ever, namely:

- Their decision to reverse the extension of free school meals to those on income support
- Their decision to freeze child benefit for all
- Their decision to cut child tax credits
- Their decision to cut Health in Pregnancy Grants
- Their decision to restrict the Sure Start Maternity Grant to firstborn children
- Their decision to scrap Child Trust Funds
- A host of other decisions that will impact on families indirectly
- And their decision to end universal child benefits

As a result we intend to introduce free healthy school meals for all primary schools in September 2011.

12. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR HEALTH AND ADULT SOCIAL CARE FROM COUNCILLOR HELEN MORRISSEY

What impact does the cabinet member believe the government's decision to abolish the NHS Direct will have on local people?

RESPONSE

Although the health secretary, Andrew Lansley, appears to have made a u-turn on the future of NHS Direct, there are still serious concerns about what may happen to the service. The service's current effectiveness is due in part to the 1,400 fully-trained nurses who work there, and the government has not yet confirmed that all of those staff will be retained, despite their pledge to protect the NHS.

If those nurses are not retained, I would be seriously concerned that the service would deteriorate for people in the borough. As well as having a direct impact on the service for users, however, there may also be longer-term financial implications as the service is designed to cut costs for the NHS overall by reducing the burden of queries concerning minor injuries or health complaints that would otherwise fall on our GPs and hospitals.

13. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR HEALTH AND ADULT SOCIAL CARE FROM COUNCILLOR NEIL COYLE

What effect does the cabinet member anticipate the government's emergency budget will have on adult social services in Southwark and how will the council be assessing the impact of any changes?

RESPONSE

The immediate effect of the coalition government's emergency budget in June was to make £245,000 of in-year cuts to the supporting people administration grant, which the council has been forced to find.

However, the scale of this cut is nothing in comparison to the scale of the cuts in future years called for in the budget by the chancellor, George Osborne, and which will have been detailed further in today's Comprehensive Spending Review (this answer was written before the CSR announcement). If the council is forced to make a 25% or greater cut to its overall spending then there is no way that the budget of any service, including adult social care, will be entirely protected. We are still in no position to speculate about what adult social care in Southwark will look like after the cuts, but we are committed as one of our seven budget principles to protecting the most vulnerable in our community.

A further budget principle is that we will equality impact assess all budget changes despite indications from the coalition government that councils may not be duty-bound to carry out equality impact assessments in the future.

14. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR HEALTH AND ADULT SOCIAL CARE FROM COUNCILLOR MARTIN SEATON

Please provide an update on progress against the cabinet members' manifesto commitments to introduce a social care telephone helpline and a new charter of rights for those in need of social care.

RESPONSE

We are currently rolling out a single pilot phone-line to deal with all adult social care queries in the south of the borough. Once this pilot is complete we plan to extend it to older people's services in the north and to disabled people's services. See question 19 for more detail

We are working with the community to compose a charter of rights for people in Southwark who may need social care support. We have been consulting on the charter since mid September and welcome feedback to help us shape the final version by 30 October.

15. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR HEALTH AND ADULT SOCIAL CARE FROM COUNCILLOR DAN GARFIELD

What feedback has the cabinet member received on the recent visit by the Care Quality Commission (CQC)?

RESPONSE

The review of performance meeting with CQC was held on 10 August. The outcome from this year's performance assessment will be announced on 25 November 2010.

16. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR HEALTH AND ADULT SOCIAL CARE FROM COUNCILLOR PATRICK DIAMOND

What impact does the cabinet member believe the abolition of primary care trusts will have on the provision of health services in Southwark? How does she believe the council's role will change following their abolition? Is she optimistic about that change?

RESPONSE

It is too early to tell what the impact of the changes to health that the coalition government are currently consulting on will be. However, my impression of the proposals in the white paper is that they are not yet fully-formed and filled with uncertainty. Whilst we welcome any democratisation in health delivery and strengthening the role of local government in health provision, I am concerned that these proposals will not necessarily deliver either. Whilst we welcome the opportunity to build a closer working relationship with GPs and other health providers, we definitely don't want to overburden frontline health staff with unnecessary red-tape.

I am working and will continue to work with senior members of the PCT (NHS Southwark), officers, GPs and other stakeholders to attempt to influence and shape the proposals and their implications on local health provision. I have mixed feelings about the changes, and feel that they carry with them a considerable risk, but I am confident that the council is doing all that it can to get the best outcome for Southwark residents.

17. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR HEALTH AND ADULT SOCIAL CARE FROM COUNCILLOR DAVID NOAKES

How long does it take to review meals on wheels charges? And when will local people see the review's recommendations on how she proposes to meet Labour's commitment to halve charges for both fresh and frozen meals on wheels and what is the cost to the authority?

RESPONSE

We have a manifesto commitment to halving the price of meals on wheels. Details around the implementation of that commitment are dependent upon the outcome of the coalition government's spending review and will be made public as part of the budget process.

18. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR HEALTH AND ADULT SOCIAL CARE FROM COUNCILLOR PODDY CLARK

Who did you work with to develop the charter of rights for people with social care needs?

RESPONSE

We are currently consulting with the community on the charter of rights and we are inviting feedback to help shape the charter by 30 October 2010. The consultation has been promoted through Community Action Southwark, the patient and public involvement network and our provider e-newsletter. It has been published on the Southwark Council website and through the local media. Staff have also been invited to give comments. We welcome feedback from local people, staff and voluntary and community groups as well as provider organisations.

19. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR HEALTH AND ADULT SOCIAL CARE FROM COUNCILLOR DENISE CAPSTICK

When will the dedicated care line for older and vulnerable people be set up, how much will it cost and who will run it?

RESPONSE

We are currently piloting a single phone-line to deal with all adult social care queries in the south of the borough. Once the pilot is complete a decision will be made about exactly where in the council's structure the phone line will sit. The introduction of the phone line will

form part of the council's broader personalisation transformation and as a result it is not anticipated that there will be any additional costs.

20. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR HEALTH AND ADULT SOCIAL CARE FROM COUNCILLOR LINDA MANCHESTER

Does she plan to review the eligibility criteria for adult social care?

RESPONSE

There are no current plans to review the criteria.

21. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR HEALTH AND ADULT SOCIAL CARE FROM COUNCILLOR JONATHAN MITCHELL

Will she explain to council assembly what she is doing as part of Lambeth/Southwark joint working to ensure local people in Dulwich have services left at their local hospital for them to use given the last Labour government allowed Dulwich Hospital to fall into decay and ruin, with main services such as intermediate care taken away altogether and other outpatient services seriously reduced, blood testing withdrawn and in addition the main lift is still out of use despite a promise in November 2009 that this was only temporary?

RESPONSE

I refer the member to my response to his question at the last assembly. I am working with the primary care trust (PCT), the hospitals, local MP and other stakeholders to ensure that the Dulwich hospital site is brought back into use to assist in the medical wellbeing of local people.

I have asked the PCT to look into the problems with the lift and hope to have more information soon.

22. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR REGENERATION AND CORPORATE STRATEGY FROM COUNCILLOR LORRAINE LAUDER

Can the cabinet member please provide an update on progress to regenerate the Aylesbury estate?

RESPONSE

The Aylesbury Regeneration project is making good progress on a number of fronts.

Phase 1a

Building works are well underway on Phase 1a of the Aylesbury Regeneration Programme with L & Q (the developer). The first of the four sites comprising this phase, i.e. site A, will be ready for occupation early next year. The numbers and types of homes comprising the four sites are set out below:

- Site A total 52 units – 37 social rent, 15 intermediate and new Aylesbury Resource Centre - January 2011
- Site B total 131 units - 36 social rent, 12 shared ownership, sale 83 - May 2012
- Site C total 18 units - 15 social rent, 3 shared ownership - May 2012
- Site D total 60 units -13 social rent, 3 shared ownership, 44 sale - late 2012

The existing buildings (Little Bradenham and the Westmoreland Road shops) known as sites B & C have now been demolished and the developer is preparing the sites for

construction, which is due to commence early 2011. Construction of the last site, D, which is where the current Aylesbury Day Centre is located will begin next spring.

PFI phases – sites 1b, 1c, 8 & 9

Following submission of the interim outline business case (IOBC) to the Homes & Communities Agency (HCA) at the end of July, the Aylesbury Regeneration Programme Team has been in discussions with HCA representatives concerning several issues raised by the HCA. A meeting took place last week with HCA representatives to resolve these issues; as a result, what is expected to be the final version of the IOBC will be submitted to the HCA later this month.

Rehousing Residents:

Aylesbury re-housing timeline (November 2010)

This timeline is based on the Aylesbury Action Plan and reflects the progress the council has made in securing funding and developers. These changes arise from recent council decisions, which have taken account of the resident consultation in July and also changes in national economic conditions.

Site, Block and Project Details	Tenant Re-Housing/ Leaseholder Buyback Start	Tenant Re-Housing/ Leaseholder Buyback Finish
Site 1A – Red Lion Close (1-12), Little Bradenham (1-41) Re-housing complete, demolition and building works under way		
Sites 7 and 10 - Missenden (300-313), Wolverton (1-59) Most tenants and leaseholders have moved, and the council is currently in discussion with the remaining tenants and leaseholders about future moves.	Started	2011
These sites are part of a PFI proposal to the government Site 1b - Bradenham (42-256), Chartridge (1-105)	Started	2012
Site 1c - Arklow House (1-28), Chartridge (106-149), Chiltern (1-172)	2011	2012
Sites 8 and 9 - Taplow (1-215), Northchurch (1-76), East Street (184-218)	2012	2013
Sites 4a, 4b, 5, 6 These dates are indicative at this stage and the council are working towards securing the funding for these sites. When we have more definite block timetables we will update residents. The blocks involved on these sites are: Wendover (1-36, 73-116, 157-200), Wolverton (60-125), Brockley House (1-14), Wendover (37-72, 117-156, 201-240), Wolverton (126-151), Wolverton (152-192), Wendover (241-471), Ravenstone (1-81), Albany Road (140), Foxcote (1-30), Padbury (1-25), Winslow (1-30)	2014	2018

Site, Block and Project Details	Tenant Re-Housing/ Leaseholder Buyback Start	Tenant Re-Housing/ Leaseholder Buyback Finish
Sites 2a, 2b, 3a, 3b, 11, 12, 13, 14 These dates are indicative at this stage and the council are working towards securing the funding for these sites. When we have more definite block timetables we will update residents. The blocks involved on these sites are: Lees House (1-12), Soane House (1-35), Missenden (1-299), Michael Faraday House (1-105) Inville Road (51-67), Chadwell House (1-8), Darvel House (1-8), Calverton (1-31), Danesfield (1-31), Emberton (1-35), Gaitskill House (1-66), Gayhurst (1-162), Hambledon (1-20), Latimer (1-141), Albany Road (198-202)	2019	2024

Reasonable progress is being made on the active (started) blocks (sites 1b, 7 & 10). The vast majority of tenants on these sites are registered and bidding for alternative accommodation. There are several leaseholders who have applied for rehousing assistance and the remainder are in the process of negotiating with the council's property team to sell their properties back to the council.

As of 20 September 2010 the remaining residents are broken down as follows:

Site	Block Name	Block Numbers	Total Units	Secure Tenants	Leaseholders
10	Missenden	300-313	14	7	1
Sub Total			14		
7	Wolverton	1-27	27	5	12
7	Wolverton	28-59	32	13	5
Sub Total			59		
1b	Bradenham	42-256	215	113	12
1b	Chartridge	1-68	68	44	9
1b	Chartridge	69-76	8	8	0
1b	Chartridge	77-105	29	15	7
Sub Total			320		

23. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR REGENERATION AND CORPORATE STRATEGY FROM COUNCILLOR CLAIRE HICKSON

How many affordable homes does the cabinet member believe would have been delivered as part of the Elephant and Castle regeneration agreement if she had not secured a minimum guarantee for affordable homes?

RESPONSE

It is impossible to predict with certainty how many affordable units would have been delivered without the guaranteed minimum as the number would have been determined through the Three Dragons Viability Test as part of the statutory planning process. The Three Dragons Viability Test demonstrates how much affordable housing a development can be affordable before the development becomes unviable and does not proceed.

Affordable housing within private developments at Steadmen Street and Crampton Street only achieved 22% and 24% respectively and these units were predominantly shared ownership. These were developed prior to the property crash and included only minimal contributions to local infrastructure including transport.

Lend Lease's financial model demonstrated that under the original heads of terms agreed by the previous Executive in November/December 2009, the scheme could afford approximately 10 – 15% affordable housing on its base assumptions, that is between 298 and 447 affordable homes. However this assumed Social Housing Grant (SHG) to assist delivery and in the current finance climate the availability of SHG in the future is uncertain.

The 25% minimum we have secured is not dependant on SHG and at least 50% will be for rent, this will mean at least 744 affordable homes (372 social rent). If the economic situation improves and SHG is available we would expect the planning process to deliver 35% affordable housing, 1042 affordable homes.

Whilst it is not possible to be precise about the numbers, what is clearly the case is that without a significant improvement in the economy the Heads of Terms agreed by our predecessors – which guaranteed profits rather than affordable homes – would have delivered significantly less affordable housing.

24. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR REGENERATION AND CORPORATE STRATEGY FROM COUNCILLOR NICK DOLEZAL

Does the cabinet member think the decision to 'call-in' the implementation of the Tory/Liberal Democrat government's in-year spending cuts to the working neighbourhoods fund was in the public interest?

RESPONSE

Whilst respecting the right of members of overview and scrutiny committee (OSC) to call-in decisions, I do believe the call-in of the implementation of the in-year government cuts to our working neighbourhoods fund was not in the public interest.

These unprecedented cuts imposed on us by the Tory-Liberal Democrat government did mean that difficult decisions had to be taken. Whilst we were able to find more than half the money from within council resources, unfortunately some grants to voluntary and community sector (VCS) groups had to be cut.

At the call-in meeting OSC resolved that my initial decision was not referred back to me and was implementable from 26 August.

As a consequence of the call-in there was a delay in implementing the decision and the required one month termination notice was given following OSC, issuing a termination date of 15 October 2010. The projected cost of the additional two weeks into the third quarter of the contract period is £14,117.73 in additional payments to projects. This figure is still potentially subject to change following the end of contract monitoring process.

25. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR REGENERATION AND CORPORATE STRATEGY FROM COUNCILLOR GEOFFREY THORNTON

How much did it cost to carry out the consultation on the leisure options for the Elephant and Castle?

RESPONSE

The total cost was £12,525.85 which included stakeholder and resident communications, a public consultation event, postal charges, advertisement and direct mailing services. The consultation was well received, with well over 1300 responses being received. The responses demonstrate that local people are keen to support a new leisure centre at the Elephant and Castle as well as having ideas as to what they would like contained within it.

26. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR REGENERATION AND CORPORATE STRATEGY FROM COUNCILLOR CATHERINE BOWMAN

How will the Newington Reference Library be retained and improved if Walworth Town Hall is sold off?

RESPONSE

The council has made no formal decision to sell Walworth Town Hall. In the eventuality that it is sold or leased this will have no direct impact on Newington Library as they are two totally separate buildings. Investment in our libraries will be considered by council assembly as part of the capital programme.

27. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR REGENERATION AND CORPORATE STRATEGY FROM COUNCILLOR MICHAEL BUKOLA

Where will Bermondsey one stop shop be located if Bermondsey Town Hall is sold off?

RESPONSE

As part of the customer service strategy the council is considering options for provision of customer Services once the Bermondsey one stop shop is closed. It would not be appropriate to pre-determine the outcome of that review which is considering a number of options. However this council is committed to improving the customer experience to all our communities.

28. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR REGENERATION AND CORPORATE STRATEGY FROM COUNCILLOR ADELE MORRIS

Could the cabinet member reassure council assembly that the adopted Bankside, Borough and London Bridge supplementary planning document (SPD) – which is out for re-consultation with the public at the moment – will clearly reflect the views and aspirations of the local communities, what confidence does she have in the consultation process and how will associated policies will be strengthened to reflect those views?

RESPONSE

The draft Bankside Borough and London Bridge SPD is currently out to consultation for a second time until 29 October 2010 following some dissatisfaction among residents in the Bermondsey area about the effectiveness of the consultation carried out earlier this year. We are, at this stage, consulting on the same draft document as before but we intend to produce a new draft and carry out a further stage of consultation next year following the adoption of the core strategy.

We are looking at ways in which the involvement of the community in the preparation of a revised document can be strengthened further so that when it is finally adopted it will have the greatest possible support from local residential and business communities. We are also continuing to work closely with the Mayor so that the SPD can receive his full support and can operate as his Opportunity Area Development Framework as well.

I would be happy to meet with Councillor Morris if there are any particular policy issues she would like to raise or if she has any proposals for improved community involvement.

29. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR REGENERATION AND CORPORATE STRATEGY FROM COUNCILLOR JEFF HOOK

Does she think it appropriate to make jokes on Twitter about Thames Water's plans to concrete over King's Stairs gardens and the Alfred Slater playground?

RESPONSE

Myself and my cabinet colleagues are extremely concerned about Thames Water's proposals to use King's Stairs gardens and the Alfred Salter playground as construction sites for the Thames Tunnel super sewer.

Since the announcement Councillor Hargrove and I have been in regular contact with local residents, have discussed the issue at length with council officers and met with Thames Water along with local ward councillors. We will provide as much support as possible to the community, united in our aim to save our park and playground.

I don't believe that Councillor Hook is a regular user of social networks, so perhaps he has not read my twitter comment first hand. If he had he would know that my pun was directed at myself and the inherently amusing concept of being made "cabinet member for sewers" and was not in the least inappropriate.

For those who have not seen it I wrote:

"I've been assigned Southwark cabinet responsibility for Thames sewer. Rats."

Responses included:

"sounds like a draining task"

"I can see why the Thames Sewer will give you some extra work, but surely the rats will be pretty self-governing?"

"very good" from the Chair of Friends of Southwark Park

And on Facebook:

Elephant Lane resident: "We need to talk about the Thames Sewer Fiona. We are up in arms by King's Stairs Gardens."

Fiona Colley: "Me too, suspect that why I am now cabinet member for sewers."

Elephant Lane resident: "Great!"

30. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR REGENERATION AND CORPORATE STRATEGY FROM COUNCILLOR PAUL NOBLET

Can she tell me how much money has currently been set aside through section 106 agreements, the local implementation plan (LIP) and other funding streams to tackle traffic congestion on Lower Road and Jamaica Road, and to increase road capacity ahead of future regeneration schemes in both Southwark and North Lewisham?

RESPONSE

The Lower Road scheme has been set aside as a major scheme which will be indicated in the transport plan (LIP2) delivery plan to seek funding in 2012/13 with the objective of having funding available for 2013/14. Lower Road is part of the secondary Olympic route network so it is unlikely we would be able to commence work in 2012 and the timetable

reflects this. This has not changed since May 2010 and has always been the council's strategy. Between £6.5 and £7 million section 106 funding has been agreed through the planning process but as yet none of this has been received.

In the 2010/11/12 LIP programme £170,000 has been allocated over two years to allow the straight across movement from Plough Way to Rotherhithe New Road.

Myself and Councillor Hargrove are holding regular meetings with Councillor Alan Smith from Lewisham Council regarding measures to tackle transport needs in the Rotherhithe, Bermondsey and Deptford area.

31. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR REGENERATION AND CORPORATE STRATEGY FROM COUNCILLOR DARREN MERRILL

How committed is the cabinet member to providing a pool at the Elephant and Castle? What is her opinion of the Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group's suggestion that the leisure centre ought to be paid for by guaranteeing profits instead of affordable housing?

RESPONSE

I am 100% committed to building a new leisure centre and swimming pool at Elephant and Castle. The administration has already taken a clear decision on the site and the consultation was an important step towards making this a reality and enabling residents and stakeholders to have a say in the vision.

Over 1,300 people responded to the consultation and I was delighted to receive a 200 name petition from children from a local school, Crampton, in favour of a new swimming pool.

Responses to the consultation will be analysed and the priorities of the local community will be used to draw up more detailed plans as well as exploring further funding options in the hope of being able to afford a larger sports hall as well as the much needed swimming pool.

I am truly astonished by the Leader of the Liberal Democrats' suggestion that the new leisure centre should be paid for by guaranteeing profits rather than affordable homes at Elephant and Castle. Not only would this mean giving up the certainty of at least 25% of the new homes on the Heygate being affordable, but furthermore, any profits from the redevelopment of the Heygate would not be received for many more years to come. Perhaps the Liberal Democrats believe Elephant and Castle residents can do without a pool for another decade, but I certainly don't!

32. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES FROM COUNCILLOR CLEO SOANES

Does the cabinet member believe that the coalition government's emergency budget will have a disproportionate impact on children and young people in Southwark? What steps is she taking to mitigate this impact?

RESPONSE

The coalition government's budget will have a disproportionate impact on children and young people in Southwark. The Institute for Fiscal Studies found that the measures introduced in the emergency budget were regressive. It said "they hit the poorest households more than those in the upper-middle of the income distribution in cash, let alone percentage, terms" and "families with children lose out the most within each tenth of the income distribution as they are the group that is worst affected by the benefit cuts announced in the June 2010 budget."

Southwark has a disproportionately high level of children living in poverty, at just over one third of the under 16 population. This means that the coalition government's budget cuts will hit Southwark families hard.

Our manifesto commitment to bring in free healthy school meals for primary school children will ensure that these children get at least one healthy meal a day during term time. Another manifesto commitment will ensure childcare help is targeted at the most disadvantaged groups. These steps are in addition to other activities already supporting children.

Note: This answer was written before the government's spending review announcement.

33. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES FROM COUNCILLOR ANDY SIMMONS

Is the cabinet member concerned that changes to child benefit might have a harmful impact on parents in Southwark?

RESPONSE

I am very concerned about the impact the Conservative-Liberal Democrat government's changes to child benefit will have on parents and children in Southwark. 34,000 families in Southwark claim child benefit for at least one child. The changes the government is making are unfair and hit families with children in Southwark hard.

The government is taking away child benefit for households containing a higher rate tax payer – meaning, for example a family with three children, with a stay-at-home parent and a parent earning say £45,000 lose £2,449 a year. Whereas a couple with one child each earning £43,000 (so with a combined income of £86,000) will still receive the benefit.

Even those families who will still receive child benefit will suffer from the freeze announced by the government in the budget - meaning they will lose on average around £130 a year in real terms.

The Institute for Fiscal studies already found that the coalition government's Budget hit low income families with children hardest. The recent child benefit announcement is yet another coalition government attack on families and children.

Note: This answer was written before the government's spending review announcement.

34. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES FROM COUNCILLOR LISA RAJAN

In June's Southwark Life, Councillor Peter John said, 'We've made a commitment to introduce free, healthy school meals for primary children over the next four years. I hope we can roll it out for year one from September' – what happened?

RESPONSE

We are piloting free healthy school meals in a small number of primary schools this academic year. We intend to roll out free healthy school meals to all schools from September 2011.

35. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES FROM COUNCILLOR DAVID HUBBER

How is help being targeted at disadvantaged groups to increase take up of childcare and early years services?

RESPONSE

We pledged in our manifesto to target childcare help at the most disadvantaged groups, to increase take-up of childcare and early years services. This follows the previous Lib Dem-Conservative council administration's decision to put up the cost of council childcare by up to £60 a week.

Work is already underway to target help in this way, including:

- reviewing existing programmes and services to ensure there is a specific focus on disadvantaged families
- increasing the number of outreach workers supporting disadvantaged families to access services
- introducing a brokerage service to help parents to secure appropriate childcare.

We are also:

- looking at the admission criteria for school nursery classes to ensure children from disadvantaged families are supported
- looking at the policy on commissioning places amongst early years settings to ensure support is available to the most disadvantaged.

36. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES FROM COUNCILLOR NICK STANTON

How many spare places are there in reception classes?

RESPONSE

As at Friday, 15 October 2010 the current total is 94 reception vacancies.

37. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND RECYCLING FROM COUNCILLOR ROBIN CROOKSHANK HILTON

Could the cabinet member please update the council assembly on the current status of the Dulwich Village 20mph zone signal junction redesign (Scheme B) at Dulwich Village and Turney Roads and, given 61% of local people backed the junction improvements when consulted, what steps is he taking to progress the remaining improvement works?

RESPONSE

The 2008/09 20mph zones programme was consulted on in 2008. The administration at that time provided the residents with a list of options, which if implemented amounted in cost to considerably more than the £900,000 allocated to the project. A decision was then taken by the executive member in early 2009 that officers work their way down a prioritised list until the funding was exhausted.

There is no funding available for this scheme. However, council officers have recently consulted ward members on an alternative proposal that offers some but not all of the same benefits and is within the remaining budget available for the 20mph zone.

The schemes are complementary so if funding were to become available in the future, scheme B could still be progressed.

38. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND RECYCLING FROM COUNCILLOR JAMES BARBER

What lessons have been learnt, so far, from the kitchen leftover recycling pilot?

RESPONSE

Of course the questioner will recognise it is still very early days for this pilot and so consequently there is still much more information to be collected. What does seem to be emerging that we need to consider for the future primarily revolves around space and containers. In particular, we have identified pressures in multiple occupancy properties. As a result we are making available on request blue wheely bins for co-mingled recycling for these residents with necessary storage space. Equally, we have received feedback that perhaps we may need to do more to reduce waste bin clutter. In particular, there could well be some more work for us to do to engage with residents who have limited storage space to discuss opportunities to share bins with their neighbours if they so wish. It is also true to say that we didn't fully anticipate the popular demand for the small brown kitchen cadies, which 40% of residents have now requested. I am looking forward to further feedback as this pilot progresses as we continually seek to improve the recycling service we provide.

39. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND RECYCLING FROM COUNCILLOR ELIZA MANN

How much will Southwark Council earn from selling renewable energy back to the grid following the lifting of restrictions by Rt Hon Chris Huhne MP, Secretary of State for Climate Change?

RESPONSE

The lifting of this restriction applies to local authorities eligibility to take advantage of Feed In Tariffs (FITs), for renewable energy provision.

Prior to the restriction being lifted in April 2010, eligibility depended on the specific type of renewable energy infrastructure and it having been installed before July 2009.

Southwark Council has not currently invested in any renewable energy infrastructure that qualifies under the FITs scheme (solar PV panels, wind turbines, etc), and is therefore currently unable to take advantage of the lifting of this restriction, or sell any renewable energy back to the grid.

However, installation of renewable energy infrastructure from now on should be considered against this scheme's financial benefits.

40. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT FROM COUNCILLOR ALTHEA SMITH

How will the council ensure that changes to services and funding are assessed to ensure minimal impact on locally disadvantaged people in light of the new government's lack of attention to the area in the budget and current attempts to water down duties to equality assess proposals?

RESPONSE

We have pledged to under take the Fairer Futures for All in Southwark's consultation exercise on the budget. This will ensure the most comprehensive consultation exercise ever carried out in budgeting in this borough. We are also planning to ensure that all decisions are fed back to those consulted for views further refining the decisions. The budgeting is

also being carried out under the agreed seven budgeting principles which include a guarantee to have an equality impact assessment for all decisions. We will work actively to ensure that there is no unfair effect on any group in the borough as far as can be reasonably avoided. We will have an overview from the overview and scrutiny committee to ensure monitoring of the effect of the budgeting exercise.

The new Equalities Act came into force on the 1 October 2010; I am working to ensure that Southwark sets up robust systems to monitor the implementation of the act in Southwark in the light of the abolition of the Audit Commission and the watering down of this requirement by the government.

41. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT FROM COUNCILLOR COLUMBA BLANGO

How much has been spent on the Democracy Commission, including the conference and staff time in supporting its deliberations?

RESPONSE

We wanted to ensure that the Democracy Commission did not cost any more than was reasonable.

It was our objective to utilise our in-house resources and keep costs to a minimum. Costs have been incurred in postage and venue hire which amount to less than £4,000.

42. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT FROM COUNCILLOR MARK GETTLESON

Why did he cancel the meeting of the Democracy Commission on 1 October and did it have anything to do with Labour representatives not being able to attend and therefore unable to force through his personal proposals and does he feel this is a democratic way to run the commission?

RESPONSE

The meeting on the 1 October was arranged without adequate discussion and consultation; this resulted in members from two political groups being unable to attend.

It later became clear that we did not have the reports and other materials required to have the discussions. The next time suitable was the 8 October, when we met.

43. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR CULTURE, LEISURE & SPORT AND THE OLYMPICS FROM COUNCILLOR GAVIN EDWARDS

What progress has been made on delivering Southwark Labour's manifesto commitment to turn the plans for a new One O'Clock Club and changing rooms and pitches for local sports teams into reality?

RESPONSE

A development plan for Peckham Rye was completed earlier this year defining sporting facilities and the future development of the cafe area of Peckham Rye Common. This plan has support from the community. The total estimated cost to realise this plan for the Homestall Road Sports Facilities and the Park Central Area Development Plan is £2.1m. This is broken down into the following:

Homestall Road Sports Facilities and works to park pitches	£1,100,000
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New one o'clock club buildings	£500,000
Replacing the temporary changing rooms with a permanent facility on the maintenance area	£100,000
New play area including water play	£100,000
Landscaping and relocating car park to Peckham Rye Common	£300,000
Total	£2,100,000

To date £209,000 has been secured from the cleaner greener safer capital programme. The council has also sought a further £300,000 from Sure Start and £100,000 from the play builder programme. However since the election of the coalition government the Sure Start programme has been cancelled and play builder has been suspended and is unlikely to be available.

Over the last few months officers have been negotiating with the Harris Boys Academy which is willing to invest £400,000 to improve drainage and refurbish the grasses pitches in exchange for exclusive use of the Homestall Road site at specific times. A meeting is being held on 20 October to confirm details. This funding would also be able the council to apply for Football Association (FA) funding in the region of £250,000.

Possible funding for this project is therefore as follows;

Homestall Road Sports Facilities	
Harris Boys Academy contribution	£400,000
FA contribution	£250,000
Peckham Rye Park and Common	
Current CGS funding	£209,000
Total identified funding	£959,000

If FA funding and Harris Academy funding is granted, the project is still left with a shortfall of £1,141,000 to complete the entire project. Officers have submitted a bid for a further capital funding for this amount and this will be considered by the cabinet in November as part of the wider council capital programme.

44. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR CULTURE, LEISURE & SPORT AND THE OLYMPICS FROM COUNCILLOR NORMA GIBBES

Could you outline what further work will be carried out with the extra funding raised for the refurbishment of Camberwell Leisure Centre? When will the centre re-open for residents to enjoy the new facilities? What plans are in place to secure the final phases of refurbishment?

RESPONSE

It is excellent news that extra funding has been secured to complete more of the work than intended in the current planned phase. Additional work that can now be carried out is:

- Upgrade of the dry side changing rooms to match the standard on the wet side
- Expansion and refurbishment of existing gym area
- Works to Warwick Hall flooring to bring it up to a good standard
- Re tiling of the pool tank and surrounding walkways
- Structural improvements to ensure the long term future of the sports hall.

This means that the present contractors can extend their work programme while they are still on site. The new completion date is set for February 2011.

To date £4.1m has been raised for the refurbishment. A further capital bid of £1.8m has been proposed to complete the sports hall and public realm works. This will be considered by cabinet when revising the 10 year capital programme in November, going to council assembly in December.

45. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR FINANCE AND RESOURCES FROM COUNCILLOR MICHAEL SITU

How will the cabinet member implement the decision taken at the last council assembly meeting to publish all council expenditure over £500?

RESPONSE

I am glad to be able to report that Southwark has now published all its expenditure over £500 for August and will continue to do so each month for the previous month. From next month, this will be published on the 8th of the month or the next working day.

This makes us one of the first 20% of councils in England to do so – the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government revealed earlier this month that Southwark is one of less than seventy English councils to make this information publicly available to date.

All councils are expected to make this data available to the public from January 2011.

So far, only two other Inner London councils publish this data on a monthly basis: Islington and Wandsworth. Hammersmith & Fulham and Kensington & Chelsea are also publishing this data, but only on a quarterly basis.

Members will have seen the local press interest in the first publication of this information. I believe that this level of scrutiny is helpful in both assisting this authority to be more accountable to local residents and in ensuring that we identify and drive out wasteful expenditure.