

COUNCIL ASSEMBLY

(COUNCIL TAX SETTING)

WEDNESDAY 29 FEBRUARY 2012

QUESTIONS ON THE REPORT

ITEM 2.1: POLICY AND RESOURCES STRATEGY - 2012/13-2014/15 - REVENUE BUDGET

1. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR FINANCE, RESOURCES AND COMMUNITY SAFETY FROM COUNCILLOR ANOOD AL-SAMERAI

How much is this budget spending on free lunches for children who live outside of Southwark or for those parents that earn more than £25,000?

RESPONSE

The data requested is not held.

2. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR FINANCE, RESOURCES AND COMMUNITY SAFETY FROM COUNCILLOR TIM MCNALLY

Given that bringing the call centre in house would save the council £4.5 million, will he join me in calling for officers to pursue this as a matter of urgency following Vangent's failure to deliver £1.3 million of savings and being taken over by an American arms dealer?

RESPONSE

Following a change in ownership, the council is continuing discussions with Vangent UK. These discussions are contractually and commercially confidential. We are seeking to resolve the position, in a manner which best protects the interests of the council and its council tax payers, as quickly as practicably possible.

3. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR FINANCE, RESOURCES AND COMMUNITY SAFETY FROM COUNCILLOR CATHERINE BOWMAN

Given the budget cuts made to the noise team, how many visits have the noise team made, in response to calls, on Saturday nights, after 1.00am, since March 2011? Please provide a monthly breakdown?

RESPONSE

The noise team received 301 calls on Saturday nights between 01.00 and 07.00, between March 2011 and January 2012. The noise team makes visits when the noise is ongoing at the time of the response. On this basis 79 visits were made during the period of March 2011 and January 2011.

The breakdown by month is as follows:-

Year	Month	Calls received past 01:00hrs-07:00hrs	No of visits made *visits only necessary when noise ongoing at time of response
2011	March* still 24hrs	34	9
2011	April * still 24hrs	25	9
2011	May *still 24hrs	16	5
2011	June	23	8
2011	July *5 Saturdays in month	27	7
2011	August	24	2
2011	September	27	11
2011	October *5 Saturdays in month	34	7
2011	November	21	6
2011	December *5 Saturdays in month	23	3
2012	January	32	12
2012	February	15	2

4. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR FINANCE, RESOURCES AND COMMUNITY SAFETY FROM COUNCILLOR JONATHAN MITCHELL

What has been the total cost of the Democracy Commission? What has been the total cost of council assembly for 2011/12 and how does this compare to the savings made to community councils for 2012/13? Please include the cost of hall hire, officer time, and any other miscellaneous expenditure.

RESPONSE

The costs of the Democracy Commission have been covered within existing resources, primarily officer time.

Retaining council assembly meetings at the town hall would have meant retaining the town hall building almost exclusively for that purpose. In contrast, the disposal of a long lease on the Town Hall will release revenue currently put towards its maintenance and security. The 2011/12 budget for the property is £627,000. It is estimated that not less than £420,000 per year would be required to keep the town hall open as a stand-alone facility, not including the cost of any refurbishment or improvement works that were needed. Revenue costs around £67,000 per year would be needed to maintain the chamber and ancillary facilities alone. This is significantly higher than the costs of the current arrangements for council assembly at a variety of venues across the borough.

In relation to costs attaching to the current arrangements for council assembly happening in other venues for 2011/2012 these are as follows:

- venue hire - £6,757
- public address and sound system – £11,500.

This does not include staffing and other costs for example transport that are no greater than holding meetings at the town hall. It should also be noted that costs vary slightly depending on the venue.

The community council saving is £344,000 by contrast with £18,257 for council assembly.

5. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR FINANCE, RESOURCES AND COMMUNITY SAFETY FROM COUNCILLOR LISA RAJAN

The leader announced an additional £4 million for improving cycling facilities, please can you provide a breakdown of what the £4 million is being spent on? How much of this £4 million has been newly assigned to creating segregated cycle lanes?

RESPONSE

Neither the leader nor the council announced an additional £4 million for improving cycle facilities. £3.4 million of the money the council will spend on cycling in the next four years is capital and therefore not relevant to a debate on the revenue budget. The breakdown of revenue spending is as follows:

	2011/12 £	2012/13 £	2013/14 £	Total £
Cycle training	163,000	156,000	134,000	453,000
Travel awareness	15,000	15,000	15,000	45,000
Road safety, education training and publicity	10,000	10,000	10,000	30,000
Sustainable modes of travel strategy implementation	5,000	15,500	15,000	35,500
Cycle parking in schools	54,000	5,000	5,000	64,000
Total £	247,000	201,500	179,000	627,500

6. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR FINANCE, RESOURCES AND COMMUNITY SAFETY FROM COUNCILLOR GEOFFREY THORNTON

Why has Southwark Council cut its bike to work scheme but retained an officer to arrange leased cars for staff? How much does the council spend on the provision of leased cars?

RESPONSE

The Bikes 4 Work scheme has not been pursued since the government made retrograde changes to the national rules governing the scheme, which gives a worse deal for cyclists and opens the council up to risks. As an alternative we now offer an interest free loan scheme for those members of staff who want to

purchase a bike. We will of course keep all incentives for cycling under review should the attractiveness of the scheme change.

The council does not retain an officer solely to arrange lease cars. Where a member of staff receives a lease car then it is in place of another benefit or allowance. There is, therefore, no real additional cost.

7. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR FINANCE, RESOURCES AND COMMUNITY SAFETY FROM COUNCILLOR PAUL KYRIAKOU

Please can the cabinet member provide a break down by current community council areas, of how many hanging baskets were there on Southwark's streets in 2010/11 and 2011/12 and what is the projected number for 2012/13?

RESPONSE

This question relates to capital expenditure rather than revenue, as these baskets (including associated revenue costs) have been funded through cleaner, greener, safer capital money devolved to community councils.

As this question does not relate to the budget report, we will provide the member with an answer to his query in writing in due course.

8. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR FINANCE, RESOURCES AND COMMUNITY SAFETY FROM COUNCILLOR COLUMBA BLANGO

In preparation for the council assembly meeting on 6 July 2011, the cabinet member for culture, leisure, sports and the Olympics wrote to all members asking for suggestions on how to improve sporting opportunities for young people in which the Liberal Democrat group tabled a number of suggestions. Please can the cabinet member outline what has been included in this year's (2012/13) revenue budget that was not included in the previous year's budget as a result of that meeting?

RESPONSE

The following proposals related to capital expenditure or the housing revenue account and are not therefore relevant:

- The motion entitled "Homes for Families"
- Items related to the Elephant and Castle Leisure Centre
- Seven Islands Leisure Centre
- A capital Olympic legacy.

The following proposals did not have any financial implication and are not therefore relevant:

- The nature of themed debates
- Proposals to join the charter to tackle homophobia and transphobia in sport.

The proposals concerning revenue were as follows:

- The proposal to scrap free, healthy school meals

- The proposal to reinstate funding for Community Games.

We remain absolutely committed to free, healthy school meals. It was one of this administration's election promises and as such there is no question of us reversing our decision.

We are unable due to the scale of government cuts to continue to directly fund the Community Games from next year. However, the council will continue to support sport in the community through an investment of £300,000 per annum in Community Sport delivery and support.

The community sport team are also delivering a comprehensive programme of Olympic and Paralympic themed projects from the core budget provided to secure an Olympic legacy in terms of involvement in sport, these include:

1. 10 Olympic and Paralympic Themed Events:
 - 2 Borough-wide Events and 8 Mini Olympic/Paralympic Themed Events.
2. The London Youth Games programme:
 - Team Southwark finished 18th in 2011, won women's basketball, fastest school child in London, won mixed U11 football.
 - 1,700 young people took part and 10,200 attendances at trials, training and competition.
3. Teaching Values Through Leadership Resource Certificate with Sports Leaders UK:
 - Schools Programme delivered by Community Games Coaches which will engage with 2,012 young people by end of the Paralympics
4. Volunteers Programme:
 - Training, deployment and engagement with volunteers. Southwark Community Games' Volunteers programme was awarded the London 2012 "Inspired By" mark in 2012.
5. Paralympic and Disability Sport:
 - *Inclusive & Active 2* Disability Access Strategy for London– Adopted by Southwark in July 2011, Councillor Ward is Southwark's *Inclusive & Active 2* Champion.
 - Disability Sports Programme has targets of 700 individuals and 3,500 attendances in 2011/12, on target.
6. Women and Girls:
 - The highest uptake nationally against the *Us Girls* Sport England programme in Southwark with 550+ young women taking part in Southwark, won national recognition for its success.
7. Sportivate Funding:
 - Table below of funding provided through Community Sport Team from Sport England in 2011 for community sport sessions.

Sport	Project Name	Deliverer Organisation	Total
Judo	British Judo Association's Sportivate Challenge	British Judo Association	£2,111.00
Football	Sportivate 16+ Football	Kickstart	£623.00
Football	Sportivate Girls Football Competition	London Active Communities	£3,772.00
Basketball	Sportivate MacPro Basketball	MACPro	£1,195.95
Boxing	Sportivate Fight For Change Boxing	Fight for Change	£1,410.00
Table Tennis	Sportivate Outdoor Gyms	Dulwich Table Tennis Club	£1,432.00
Roller Skating	Sportivate Roller Skating	Our Voice	£3,726.00
Multi-Sport	Sportivate Millwall Summer Football Tournaments	Millwall Community Scheme	£1,925.00
Netball	Sportivate Elephant & Castle Leisure Centre	Fusion Lifestyle	£829.43
Handball	Sportivate Handball	LBS/ London Youth	£2,446.00
Martial Arts	Sportivate Jiu Jitsu club	Jiu Jitsu Club	£924.00
American Football	Sportivate American Football	Gridiron	£3,108.00
Boxing	Kings College ABC	Kings College ABC	£2,012.00
			£25,514.38

9. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR FINANCE, RESOURCES AND COMMUNITY SAFETY FROM COUNCILLOR WILMA NELSON

Following the 'Colour Thief' debacle, have you yet learnt the lesson that events budgets should be devolved to community councils in order to get the right event wanted by the local community?

RESPONSE

The challenge with this suggestion is that with the current model of three clusters of events these do not fit neatly into community council boundaries.

For example, of the £170,000 given to events in the borough, £50,000 is spent in Rotherhithe ward, on the Bermondsey Carnival and the Rotherhithe Festival. If we were to implement your suggestion, it would mean reducing the pot available for these events in the Rotherhithe community council area to £20,238 making these much loved events unviable.

I am sure that Councillor Nelson would agree with me that losing these events would be a tragedy to the community in her ward.

10. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR FINANCE, RESOURCES AND COMMUNITY SAFETY FROM COUNCILLOR PODDY CLARK

Is it fair that councillors are receiving increases of inflation in their allowances while council staff face pay freezes?

RESPONSE

Councillors' allowances do not go up in line with inflation. I refer Councillor Clark to paragraph 35 of the member allowances scheme:

“Basic allowance and travel, subsistence and carers allowances are adjusted in accordance with the national local government pay settlement and allowances for officers. SRA levels are set by council assembly and are not subject to inflationary adjustments.”

11. WITHDRAWN

12. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR FINANCE, RESOURCES AND COMMUNITY SAFETY FROM COUNCILLOR NICK STANTON

Will he support the Liberal Democrat proposal to fund the Southwark Mediation Centre? If not, will he ensure that the Southwark Mediation Centre will be named in contracts to be used in all future disputes for every new external contract the council makes?

RESPONSE

As members will be aware, Southwark Mediation Centre was not previously funded through the general revenue budget, but was instead funded through neighbourhood renewal fund money (now abolished by government) and the housing revenue account.

I have met with Southwark Mediation Centre on a number of occasions over the last year to discuss this organisation's funding challenges and council officers have also been meeting with their trustees to support their plans for diversifying their income. The council has also given the organisation £17,140 from the voluntary sector transition fund to assist them in this transformation.

I am happy to discuss your suggestion involving contracts with officers to see whether this is a further practical step that we can take to support the work of Southwark Mediation Centre.

13. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR FINANCE, RESOURCES AND COMMUNITY SAFETY FROM COUNCILLOR DENISE CAPSTICK

How many people attended day care centres for each month in 2009/10 and 2010/11 and for each month since your 100% cut to their funding?

RESPONSE

The average daily attendance at voluntary sector day centres and lunch clubs is as follows:

Year	Average Daily Attendance
2009/10	342
2010/11	288
(current)	218

The council has been working intensively with 11 older people's day centres and luncheon clubs in the voluntary sector to find new ways of working to support

independent living. While block funding of the centres has ceased, as part of the move towards personal budgets, all groups have continued to operate, and each organisation has been finding more cost effective ways of meeting the needs of their clients, including sharing premises and other means of reducing costs.

14. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR FINANCE, RESOURCES AND COMMUNITY SAFETY FROM COUNCILLOR GRAHAM NEALE

The cabinet have taken the decision for SASBU to only deal with 'critical cases'. Please can the cabinet member list a) the types of cases it will now deal with, b) the types of cases it will no longer deal with, and c) how much do you anticipate to save?

RESPONSE

Southwark anti social behaviour unit (SASBU) will focus its resources on cases of anti social behaviour where there is serious anti social behaviour which affects and individual, family or community and where other types of interventions have not achieved a reduction for those affected.

The types of cases that the team will continue to deal with include cases where there is a serious risk to the safety of an individual or family, gang related cases or cases where there is a serious risk of gang related violence, anti social behaviour cases where legal action is required, hate crime cases, domestic violence cases, cases which require closure orders on an address, cases where anti social behaviour is affecting a whole area and require significant partnership resources to resolve.

SASBU will no longer deal with anti social behaviour cases such as neighbour conflict, nuisance behaviour on estates or single issue street based anti social behaviour, which can be managed by other services. SASBU will however continue to work with housing, housing providers and other services to provide assistance, support and training to officers as required.

The savings are as set out in the budget papers: £90,000 covering three posts.

15. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR FINANCE, RESOURCES AND COMMUNITY SAFETY FROM COUNCILLOR LINDA MANCHESTER

After the meeting of Bermondsey community council which you attended, will you now listen to the democratic views expressed, retain the current boundaries and allow each community council to manage its own budget?

RESPONSE

It is ironic that Councillor Manchester talks of the "democratic views expressed" after she tried to block any discussion of the council's budget at Bermondsey community council. The fact that local residents had to fight tooth and nail with the chair for the budget even to be an item on the agenda suggests that for Bermondsey's Liberal Democrat councillors there is quite a significant gap between their rhetoric and reality on local democracy.

While I understand the desire to maintain the existing community councils structure, this is simply not possible given the scale of the reductions in funding we are facing from the government. As Councillor Manchester and her

colleagues will be aware, the funding cuts from their government are enormous and will impact on every service the council offers. At a time when we are making really tough spending decisions regarding frontline services, Southwark residents simply would not accept if we could not find the necessary £344,000 of savings from the community councils' budget.

Furthermore the Liberal Democrats had representation on the Democracy Commission which looked a large number of suggestions including this one of devolving the budgets and knew that this was impractical as the staff and the spend on items was shared across community council areas. It is important to note that in the end the Liberal Democrats choose not to register any recommendations formally with the Democracy Commission although they were signed up and contributing to it from the beginning.

We have managed to achieve these savings while still retaining five community council areas with formal decision making powers, something other councils, including Waltham Forest - which Southwark used as a template for community councils – have not done. We are also giving community councils cleaner, greener, safer revenue budgets for the first time. Something the last administration failed to do.

It is also worth noting that many Southwark residents actually welcome the merger. In Peckham and Peckham Rye, for example, there was broad support as it will bring Peckham under one community council. Similarly residents in Borough and Bankside will be able to have more of a say on the regeneration of Elephant and Castle.

16. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR FINANCE, RESOURCES AND COMMUNITY SAFETY FROM COUNCILLOR JEFF HOOK

When will you present any concrete evidence to council assembly that spending £8 million on free lunches has resulted in a reduction in obesity levels in Southwark? Have you received any evidence from the universal programme in Islington that there has been a reduction in obesity?

RESPONSE

There will be an annual evaluation of the programme. The evaluation of the initial development phase already shows the programme is positively influencing children's eating habits.

Data on the obesity levels of pupils from the government's national weighing programme will be available when the current year 1 pupils reach year 6. The universal programme in Islington did not measure direct impact on obesity.

17. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR FINANCE, RESOURCES AND COMMUNITY SAFETY FROM COUNCILLOR ELIZA MANN

Given the budget cuts made to cash limit the fostering rates, how many adoptions were made in 2011/12? How does this compare to the number of adoptions made in 2009/10 and 2010/11?

RESPONSE

There is no relationship between the rates we pay foster carers and the numbers of adoptions. These are two separate but overlapping services. Foster care allowances were frozen for 2010/11. However this did not have an impact either on retention rates or our ability to recruit new carers. Indeed we anticipate an increase in prospective carers being taken to panel in 2012/13 because of our new recruitment strategy.

We have undertaken a comprehensive review of payments to ensure we remain competitive. This has been subject to wide consultation, including Southwark's foster carers association and is expected to come into place from 1 April 2012. As a result of the review, Southwark will now adopt the national fostering network rate as the "basic rate" for all carers. Each year the national fostering rate is reviewed independently and increased with inflation. Southwark will therefore increase its "basic rate" for all carers in line with the national fostering rate.

Southwark's independently chaired adoption panel approves children as suitable for adoption.

Numbers of children adopted through Southwark Council:

- 2009/10 – 22
- 2010/11 – 17
- 2011/12 – 21 (projected).

Ofsted inspected Southwark's fostering service in December 2011 and judged the service to be good with outstanding features.

Ofsted inspected Southwark's adoption service in January 2012 and judged the service as overall good with some outstanding features. The inspectors noted that we have sufficient adopters to meet the needs of children in Southwark. Adopters were very positive about the process and the support they received and praised the adoption team highly.

18. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR FINANCE, RESOURCES AND COMMUNITY SAFETY FROM COUNCILLOR ROBIN CROOKSHANK HILTON

Are you telling the people of Dulwich that the only way they can have safe roads for their children is for the community council to spend its devolved revenue budget for lollipop patrol officers rather than using the money to introduce new services as community councils in other areas will be able to do?

RESPONSE

A road safety risk assessment was carried out at the school crossing patrols and recommended that the school crossing patrol at Dulwich Village/Turney Road be retained. We have followed this recommendation. However, the safety risk assessment made no such recommendation for any other crossing patrol.

Cleaner, greener, safer revenue funding will be available for community councils to spend on local priorities. This applies to all community council areas. If

Dulwich members choose to continue to support school crossing patrols they will still have £15,000 remaining for spending on other priorities.

19. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR FINANCE, RESOURCES AND COMMUNITY SAFETY FROM COUNCILLOR ROSIE SHIMELL

Given the budget cuts made to after school clubs, what are the projected attendance figures for 2011/12? How many children attended Southwark Council run after-school clubs in 2009/10 and 2010/11?

RESPONSE

In 2009/10 and 2010/11 1,510 places were offered across the council-run after school clubs. In 2011/12 the total number of places offered remained the same.

20. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR FINANCE, RESOURCES AND COMMUNITY SAFETY FROM COUNCILLOR ADELE MORRIS

Given that you now support giving additional revenue money to community councils, will you now go one step further and support the Liberal Democrat's community chest proposal?

RESPONSE

The Liberal Democrats had eight years in power, whilst government funding was increasing, to implement such a proposal if they had really thought that this was a practicable idea.

Despite the severe cuts being imposed on this council by the coalition government, this administration is going further than the Liberal Democrats did, when they were in power, to devolve revenue decisions to a local level.

There are real challenges with extending it further at this stage. We need to learn the lessons from this initiative in 2012/13 to be able to assess the strengths and weaknesses of this localised approach.

Devolving more money to a local level may lead to duplication of roles where one person is able to cover the borough or at least a number of community council areas. It also diminishes the purchasing power of the council: our ability to use the scale of the council to get the best value for money from contractors and for purchasing goods and services.

The Liberal Democrat amendment is also incorrect in suggesting that cleaner, greener, safer (CGS) capital has been cut: in fact we have increased the total budget by £670,000 over the next ten year period. The proposals we inherited would have resulted in CGS coming to an end in 2015/16, whilst the capital programme agreed by council assembly in July enable this programme to continue until at least 2021.

21. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR FINANCE, RESOURCES AND COMMUNITY SAFETY FROM COUNCILLOR JAMES BARBER

In 2010 Southwark had the 3rd cleanest streets in London. How is this currently being measured? Where does Southwark currently stand in the league tables and will you reverse the cuts to the night cleaning and street cleaning teams?

RESPONSE

The current government abolished almost all national indicators, including the one that related to street cleaning (NI195). Despite this, we have continued to measure the cleanliness of our streets utilising the same methodology as that in place for NI195 to ensure we continue to receive truly comparable data. The inspections are done in collaboration with Lewisham, Lambeth and Greenwich with officers from each authority inspecting a number of sites on behalf of the others.

Under the inspection regime, both litter and detritus is assessed and 300 streets are inspected during each inspection.

Results so far this year are as follows:

- Litter - 6% of roads inspected found to be unacceptable
- Detritus - 9% of roads inspected found to be unacceptable.

As the national indicator that measured street cleanliness was scrapped by the current government, we are unable to compare our results with those of other boroughs across London as they are no longer published.

Considering the scale of the budget reductions we have been forced to implement, these results compare quite favourably with our previous results with litter showing just a two percentage point fall in standards and detritus holding at last year's level.

Whilst we do not take fall in standards lightly, we believe that the street cleaning team has risen to the challenge admirably and helped minimise the impact of the regrettable but unavoidable reduction in funds for this service area.

We will of course keep cleanliness standards under close scrutiny.

22. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR FINANCE, RESOURCES AND COMMUNITY SAFETY FROM COUNCILLOR DAVID HUBBER

What will the grades be of the new 21 director posts that the leader is currently proposing? How will this impact on the budget?

RESPONSE

The net impact of these changes will be to reduce the council's expenditure on its senior staff by £1 million. This is the key driver of the proposals that the leader has proposed and is consulting on.

Those proposals identify a tier of senior officers below the level of strategic directors, equivalent to the current heads of divisions. The proposal is that these second tier posts would remain at the current grades.

The suggested title for these posts at the moment is 'director' but the decision on whether this should be the final nomenclature will be an outcome of the consultation process.

Our top priority in this reorganisation is to ensure that it realises the proposed £1 million saving.

23. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR FINANCE, RESOURCES AND COMMUNITY SAFETY FROM COUNCILLOR DAVID NOAKES

Can the cabinet member for resources confirm that "merge management and redesign two council run day centres for older people" is not code for closing one or more of the remaining 2 council run day centres for older people?

RESPONSE

The £100,000 savings in 2012/13 are being delivered in a way as to protect front line service provision at both centres. There is a further commitment to work with the users of the projects, who now primarily are older people living with dementia, along with their carers to modernise day opportunities and respite support.

24. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR FINANCE, RESOURCES AND COMMUNITY SAFETY FROM COUNCILLOR MARK GETTLESON

Will the cabinet member spend £8,000 on a lollipop person instead of deputy cabinet members?

RESPONSE

Under the Liberal Democrats' administration, this council's special responsibility allowance budget for councillors went up every year. In contrast, we have cut £100,000 from this allowances bill since coming to office. This has included cutting the size of the cabinet – a step never taken by the last administration.

Furthermore, we have introduced a new cleaner, greener, safer revenue fund, expanding the powers of community councils well-beyond those that they held under the previous administration, which local communities would be able to choose to spend on school crossing patrols.

25. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR FINANCE, RESOURCES AND COMMUNITY SAFETY FROM COUNCILLOR PAUL NOBLET

How much revenue funding for community councils has been provided for community councils for 2012/13? How much was allocated in 2009/10 and 2010/11? Please include the community fund as part of your answer.

RESPONSE

Until we brought our proposal to introduce a cleaner, greener, safer revenue fund this year, which will be allocated to community councils depending on their size at a rate of £10,000 per ward, the only revenue spending that community councils had power to commit was the community fund, which is worth £15,000 per community council.

Community Council	2009/10	2010/11	2012/13
Bermondsey	£15,000	£15,000	£45,000
Borough & Bankside	£15,000	£15,000	£35,000
Camberwell	£15,000	£15,000	£45,000
Dulwich	£15,000	£15,000	£45,000
Nunhead & Peckham Rye	£15,000	£15,000	£45,000
Peckham	£15,000	£15,000	£30,000
Rotherhithe	£15,000	£15,000	£40,000
Walworth	£15,000	£15,000	£45,000

26. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR FINANCE, RESOURCES AND COMMUNITY SAFETY FROM COUNCILLOR LEWIS ROBINSON

In the light of the proposal to use £4.4 million of balances to support the 2012/13 revenue budget (up from £3.4 million in 2011/12 and up from £2.8 million in the indicative 2012/13 budget approved by council assembly on 22 February 2011) would the cabinet member for resources and community safety explain why the cabinet has not followed the advice of the finance director set out in paragraphs 39 ("the finance director recommends the retention of contingency and maintenance of balances,,") and 194 of the report to cabinet, and what assurances can he provide to council assembly that the cabinet's budget proposal is prudent and robust?

RESPONSE

Paragraph 39 states:

"The finance director recommends the retention of contingency and maintenance of balances to mitigate these funding risks in addition to risks inherent in achieving such high savings targets."

Paragraph 194 states:

"As a result of the unprecedented reductions in government grant for 2011/12, and the short notice given by the government to identify savings, reserves were used to support the 2011/12 budget setting process. Given the unprecedented nature of the circumstances facing the council, the finance director recognises the need to use limited balances while strategies and plans are put in place to deliver service changes that match resources available. He also recognises that the contributions from balances must be limited as the use of balances cannot be sustainable in the long term as they become exhausted."

The budget proposed is consistent with both of these statements: it uses reserves in a limited and sustainable way and retains contingency at the current level. I can confirm I have checked with the finance director that he agrees this is the case.

Given that this is highly unlikely to be the last year that our budget will be cut by government and given the pressures already emerging for 2013/14 including the

localisation of council tax benefits, it is important that we take a balanced view on the use of reserves and this we have done. We must use them sensibly and not seek use them to make up in the short term for government cuts, simply delaying the inevitable and leaving the council extremely exposed to further cuts in the future. At the same time contingency provides us with a cushion as we carry out the most significant cost reduction and efficiency programmes that the council has ever undertaken in the light of the net decreases in our grants from central government in these and future years. As in 2010/11, unused contingency can always be returned to reserves where it can support valued front line services and help mitigate risks contained within the cost reduction programmes.

This is of course in contrast to the Liberal Democrat proposal this evening to reduce the contingency budget. This might just about be sustainable in 2012/13, but would result in having to make larger savings in services in future years whilst whittling down reserves to a dangerously low level.

27. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR FINANCE, RESOURCES AND COMMUNITY SAFETY FROM COUNCILLOR TOBY ECKERSLEY

With reference to the proposed saving of £50,000 on school crossing patrols (p60, council assembly agenda) would the cabinet member for resources and community safety refer to:

- (a) the letter dated 13 January 2012 from the cabinet member for transport, environment and recycling to Councillor Lewis Robinson in which:
 - (1) it is stated: "The £50,000 reduction in the school crossing patrol service budget at light controlled crossings in 2012/13 will be confirmed and the crossings affected are set out in the attached schedule"; and
 - (2) the attached schedule includes "Dulwich Hamlet: Dulwich Village/Turney Rd"; and
- (b) the letter dated 27 February 2012 from the head of community engagement to Councillor Lewis Robinson in which it is stated: "The crossing patrol at Dulwich Village/Turney Rd will continue and Councillor Hargrove has also confirmed that this was his understanding";

and would he therefore explain why, and under what powers, there was between 13 January and 27 February a decision to depart from the policy on light-controlled crossings in respect of Dulwich Village/Turney Rd, and not in respect of the two other Dulwich crossings mentioned in the schedule to the 13 January letter, namely "Alleyns/JAGS: East Dulwich Grove/Townley Rd" and " Dulwich Village: Dulwich Village/Village Way"?

RESPONSE

The inclusion of "Dulwich Hamlet: Dulwich Village/Turney Rd" was an administrative error, arising from its inclusion in the proposed list before a road safety risk assessment was carried out. The decision to reinstate the crossing patrol to the Dulwich Village/Turney Rd crossing was made after a site visit by the cabinet member for transport, environment and recycling and a request which was supported by the recommendation of that road safety risk assessment to do so. The road safety risk assessment did not make any such

recommendation for either East Dulwich Grove/Townley Rd or Dulwich Village/Village Way.

28. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR FINANCE, RESOURCES AND COMMUNITY SAFETY FROM COUNCILLOR MICHAEL MITCHELL

With reference to the proposed growth (p52, council assembly agenda) of £210,000 for a Cleaner Greener Safer (CGS) revenue fund and to the proposed saving of £50,000 on school crossing patrols (p60, council assembly agenda) would the cabinet member for resources and community safety refer to:

1. The letter dated 5 December 2011 from the leader of the council, which stated: "There is no reason why the patrols should be subject to an annual bidding process - Dulwich councillors would be entitled to make a spending commitment through to 2014 if they so desire";
2. the leader's e-mail dated 27 January 2012 which has had wide public circulation and which refers to a "guarantee" of CGS revenue funding until "at least 2014"; and
3. the letter dated 27 February 2012 from the head of community engagement to Councillor Lewis Robinson in which it is stated: "It is therefore the intention that the funding carries on for more than one year. This is of course subject to the annual decision-making process on CGS revenue that each community council will carry out....";

and would he therefore explain why the wordings of (1) and (2) above have not been reflected in the definitive guidance on CGS revenue procedures?

RESPONSE

Councillor Mitchell will be aware that all funding is subject to the annual decision of council assembly at its budget meeting. As a result community councils will, as a point of process, need to confirm their cleaner, greener, safer revenue fund on an annual basis. However, just as the cabinet has the strongest possible political commitment to the fund in future years and has demonstrated as such by making it part of the base budget, community councils are able to make a similarly strong political commitment to funding items of spending in future years.