

**SOUTHWARK COUNCIL**

**COUNCIL ASSEMBLY**

**(ORDINARY MEETING)**

**WEDNESDAY 28 MARCH 2012**

**URGENT QUESTION**

**1. URGENT QUESTION TO THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL FROM COUNCILLOR ANOOD AL-SAMERAI**

What consultation took place with parents before the decision to withdraw childcare from Tenda Road and Bishop's House?

**RESPONSE**

Parents were sent a letter on 9 March 2012 advising of the council's decision to phase out over time only the childcare service provided at Bishop's House Children's Centre, but all other services are unaffected. Parents were advised that from September 2012 there will be no new enrolments for childcare at the two children's centres.

A further letter was sent to parents on 26 March 2012 to clarify that no child who is currently enrolled in childcare, or who has been allocated a place for the future, will be affected. The childcare service will stop when the last child leaves childcare to enter school or nursery provision. All other services at the two children's centres are unaffected.

Parents have been invited to attend drop-in sessions to discuss any specific issues about childcare at Bishop's House Children's Centre on Thursday 29 March 4.00-6.00pm and South Bermondsey Children and Parents' Centre on Friday 30 March 4.00pm-6.00pm. These sessions will be held in addition to the planned meeting with parents and carers in early April.

**SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION TO THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL FROM COUNCILLOR ANOOD AL-SAMERAI**

Yes, thank you very much Madam Mayor, and thank you to the leader for his answer, however it does not actually answer the question. Could he tell me what consultation with parents took place before the decision was made?

**RESPONSE**

Thank you very much, and thank you very much to Councillor Al-Samerai for raising her supplemental question. My understanding is there has been no consultation prior to the letter being sent out on 9 March 2012 but as you can see from the answer which given, there are going to be drop in sessions for parents to discuss any specific issues on 29 March between 4-6pm for Bishop's House, and for South Bermondsey Children and Parents' Centre on 30 March between 4-6pm and there will also be other planned meetings in early April.

The advice I have received is that there is no statutory obligation to consult with parents on this. I believe that staff at both centres were aware of what the council's intentions were. It is important to point out that these centres are not closing; this is the removal of the very discrete element of the service which is used or provided, rather, at the centre and used by a very modest number of people at the centre. I think for instance at South Bermondsey and Bishop's House there are around 700 children who use the centre during the course of a week, and in respect of this particular child care service I think there are 67 children at South Bermondsey and 42 at Bishop's House. None of those or the service which they receive will be affected. They will continue to receive child care right through to the time when it is anticipated they will go on to school. The only change is that no new children will be taken for child care but in respect of all other services which those centres provide, they will continue and in fact in some respects will be enhanced.

There are sufficient, as I understand the whole way through this process when we have been considering this, there are sufficient child care places at alternative locations geographically close to both these centres which will provide equal and in some respect more affordable child care provision for parents who need it in future. I hope that gives some reassurance. I know that people get exercised when they see something like this sort of as a head line, but it is not a closure of a children's centre, the children's centres remain. It is one discrete element and we will ensure and have ensured that there is alternative provision elsewhere for children in the future; but current children are not affected.

#### **SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION TO THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL FROM COUNCILLOR ANOOD AL-SAMERAI**

Thanks Madam Mayor yes I do. Child care is provided to parents who go out to work and is an incredibly important element of a nursery, I would have thought. Given the leader has admitted that there was no consultation and nobody bothered to ask parents about this before they decided to stop doing the child care, would he now reconsider in the light that there are going to be some conversations after pressure from ward councillors; would he now please commit to council assembly that he will look at this decision again in light of what those parents come back with?

#### **RESPONSE**

Well of course, we will look at what specific issues parents raise, but again I do have to say – you don't like me saying it, but it is a fact; when you take £90 million out of our budget over a period of three years, some services will be affected in some way. Now you know no local authority is under a duty to provide child care; we have to ensure child care is provided, we are ensuring that that happens. Of course we will talk to parents and we will explain that alternative provision is available close by. I believe and I am quite convinced that this will be a satisfactory outcome for them and for us at a time where we are still having to make savings right across the council's budget.