

COUNCIL ASSEMBLY

WEDNESDAY 4 JULY 2012

Themed debate: Health in Southwark

SOME COMMUNITY VIEWS

Resident 1

We need to do much more as a community to address the spread of HIV. Southwark is the second highest borough in London with people living with the disease.

Resident 2

I like football and going to the gym. I also believe in the importance of eating at the right times and getting enough sleep. I also try to avoid getting too upset or putting myself under too much pressure. All this improves my health.

Having a clean house, wearing clean shoes and clothes, and getting rid of rubbish properly improves the community's health and well-being.

Resident 3

I could do with having a more active lifestyle by walking, exercising, managing my anger, and believing positively in myself. We as a community should come together more in unity to discuss and talk about how we can improve our health and well-being.

Resident 4

I try and eat healthy. I cook and take regular exercise. As a community, we could set up a Neighbourhood Watch scheme, giving us a sense of added security and peace of mind.

Resident 5

I'm Somali and we eat too much fatty food and meat. We consume too much sugar in our tea at cafes - it's not healthy.

The climate in this country doesn't really allow us to burn off the amount we eat and drink as quickly as if we were in a hot weather country.

We need somewhere where we can go and get exercise at local leisure centres, and advice. We feel we don't have anywhere to go. Community leaders should talk about the real meaning of community, and give advice on healthy living.

Resident 6

I exercise, eat healthily, and avoid substances like alcohol and drugs. I also maintain a positive outlook on life by being optimistic on the subject of change. I'm very much a 'life is half full rather than half empty' kind of person.

We as a community should help people, especially the elderly. There are lots of other things we need to address too such as community safety and over-crowded housing. This can often impact on people's mental health.

We need to support young people by having more community centres where they can hang out, to prevent young people congregating on estates. We could manage these activities and programmes, with the financial support of the council.

Resident 7

We need to place more emphasis on a child's psychological development, covering practical help, education, home life, play areas, better health services, mentoring services, and schools.

Minimise fast food outlets in poor areas by teaching people how to climb out of poverty. Address housing issues and create hope!

Put in place mental health programmes that appreciate people's different cultures, and tackle the underlying issues of a person's mental health e.g. drug misuse, homelessness, lack of finance, etc.

Promote healthy eating and provide more sports and exercise areas that are free for residents. Those outdoor gyms are a great idea!

Resident 8

The things I could you do to improve my personal health and well-being are less smoking and drinking, and improve my diet. I'm trying to make a difference each day by walking as much as possible and not using the bus for short journeys.

Resident 9

I'm happy with our local GP service. I have a good doctor and the surgery staff are very helpful. There needs to be greater awareness of the affects and consequences of eating fast and non nutritional food.

Being in my fifties I need to watch what I eat carefully on a daily basis. I'm amazed to see how many young people eat fast food after school. There are far too many fast food restaurants and shops in my area.

Resident 10

I'll tell you the one thing I could do to improve my personal health and well-being – change my career as I work and teach children and young people, and relocate out of London!

Our services and GP provision are good. We have good referral pathways to Kings College Hospital.

Community cohesion on our estate has improved over the last few years. But we need more NHS dental practices nearby and better visible signposting for early years, as well as a better transport system for local elderly people to access health centres.

The main roads & roundabout intersecting the area near our estate can be improved to make it safer for mothers and elders to get to local services.

Resident 11

We need more drop-in health centres for young or teenage mums as well as more information for them. Information sharing and signposting of health services needs to become better and more easily accessible.

We use a good pharmacy service but it's in Lambeth. We can't walk to the nearest Southwark pharmacy due to the distance.

Resident 12

I'm currently in a fit and healthy state. I walk daily and Peckham Rye is a nice big open space to walk with friends and family. We're very fortunate in Southwark to have so many green spaces.

My local health services are good and they seem to cover a broad range of provision adequately. I have a good relationship with my GP and I know she will provide me with information when I need it.

It's important to have a good GP who cares and pays full attention to your needs. Some of my friends tell me they don't have a good relationship with their GP. They are reluctant to visit their GP as they have a lack of confidence he/she will take their condition seriously. Or else they'll rush the appointment and their expectations are not met.

Resident 13

I'm in good health. No recent visits to my doctor thankfully.

The local women's health clinic seems to only cater for young people, especially women with sexually transmitted diseases. Lots of young women and teenage mums have other issues and the clinic should extend their services to meet those other needs.

Being the mother of teenage boys I can safely say that more needs to be done to encourage teenage boys and young men to use the health services. There's still a big stigma attached for teenage boys and young men to visit their GP.

Resident 14

I'm in good health and I use the local gym. That's how I take care of my personal health and well-being.

My local GP is good and my wife and children feel welcomed when they visit him. I feel that people need to exercise more, play sports and get on with people at work and in their local area. Being happy is everything. It's all about a healthy mind in a healthy body!

Resident 15

To improve personal health and well-being we need effective access to leisure facilities that takes into consideration culture and cost as barriers. For cultural or religious reasons, some women can only take part in 'women only' sessions at leisure centres but we have very few of these available. Women from our group have tried to join three leisure centres but none have 'women only' sessions.

We also need to highlight safe areas to promote walking as a natural form of exercise.

Resident 16

At community level, we need occasional workshops on healthy cooking and eating, including ethnic dishes (especially prior to Ramadan).

Let's all campaign to reduce the number of cheap fried food shops permitted to open near schools and colleges to tackle obesity.

Resident 17

A number of Bengali people drink alcohol but it's frowned on in our culture and in the Muslim religion, so it's hidden and difficult to quantify. Some of the younger generation are more into drugs, similar to other communities, but drinking alcohol is not such a major issue.

Resident 18

I speak as a Bengali and more work needs to be done to break down barriers about mental health within our community. Also to help identify troubled children and young people, who suffer in silence, are excluded at school, and later end up as part of the prison population.

Cultural, religious (especially Islamic), and language barriers need to be acknowledged.

There's a great lack of facilities and spaces where young people can 'hang out' and enjoy themselves after school or at weekends.

Resident 19

Large numbers of people still live on housing estates in overcrowded conditions, with little or no outside access. Gangs and a culture of group violence, as well as the expense of joining leisure centres, mean that people lack social outlets. That all impacts on health and well-being.

Resident 20

To improve health and well-being, let's have more organised sports for local young people – which is meant to be the legacy of 2012. I'd also like to see better provision of 'women only' sessions at leisure centres and the promotion of 'rambler walking' locally for all the local residents.

Let's also have regular MOT health checks and the promotion of physical exercise for people with chronic illnesses.

Resident 21

Please acknowledge language and culture as barriers to individuals and community members finding appropriate routes to improving their health. Especially when it comes to the talking therapies, it will be more effective to have greater provision of Bengali trained counsellors. The same goes for other cultures and ethnic groups.

Resident 22

I know what I need to do – quit smoking. That's the one thing that would improve my personal health. I also need to cut down on the amount of meat and dairy products I consume and eat more veg.

Resident 23

A better night's sleep would make a big difference to improving my health. I might just achieve that if there was less noise at night, including helicopters.

Resident 24

There needs to be greater emphasis on helping children with parents who are mentally ill - especially as they may not be known to any authority and therefore slip through the net.

Resident 25

It's probably not possible with current budgets, but I'd like to see more exercise classes delivered in the community, to help people work out. Lots of people won't go to gyms so we need to try other ways to get them to exercise.

If you aren't very fit, it's difficult to start exercising and those held in gyms are aimed at those who are already fit. We need activities that are suitable for a much lower level of fitness.

Resident 26

The mental health services have taken a real hit over the past few years, and as a service user I am afraid for the future. I used to be on an enhanced care programme and while my mental health hasn't improved at all, the input I get now is minimal, and time-limited. There used to be therapy groups (art, pottery, crafts) and one could be a day-patient but the psychiatric wards I knew at Guys have closed and moved to The Maudsley.

The current mental health provisions are totally inadequate and centre around crisis management for the most acutely ill, and the rest get a time-limited 'staying well' programme at the end of which you are discharged back to your GP, who may not have the time to give you enough attention.

I really fear that someone is going to slip through the net and end up dead, because they don't fit the criteria - which seem to change without telling anyone.

As for health and fitness, there used to be a 'gym on prescription' deal, where your GP could refer you to Southwark's swimming pools and gyms. Does that still exist?

Resident 27

I completely agree with tackling public disorder - if that's what we mean by alcohol misuse - and helping those with mental health issues, but I don't think it's the council's role to make people slimmer and healthier.

We have so much of this stuff from central government already. There's only so many times you can tell people to stop eating burgers and take exercise, the ultimate choice rests with them.

Resident 28

I believe that the council now leads on public health, with the abolition of the PCT, so they are responsible for the major health challenges and obesity is one of the major ones - plus mental health. I don't think the council has any money for this new role, so it's more of an honorary position.

Resident 29

The council can make a big difference by encouraging walking and cycling over motorised means of transport. The great thing about walking and cycling is that they're easy to integrate into every-day life - you don't need to make a special effort to go to a gym or exercise class. It can even help save money and time.

Walking or cycling doesn't create noise and pollution, so there's the extra health benefit to everyone of living in a calmer and more pleasant area. So anything the council invests in helping people to choose walking or cycling over driving is money very well spent.

I suggest cycle training. According to the council's website cycle training is already delivered at every school, which is great.

To get the best outcome (i.e. most people actually cycling, safely, in the long term) the training should be done over an extended period of time, and should also involve the parents as much as possible. Reaching out to parents and offering to train them as well, perhaps at a different time of day, ensures that families can take up cycling together, and that parents who currently chose to drive their child to school might opt to accompany them on a bike instead.

The council also offers a free 2-hour cycle training session to any adult who lives, works, or studies in the borough. Again, I think this is excellent and I hope it continues to get funding.

I feel the council could do even more to promote this - by actively encouraging its own staff to get trained, by reaching out to parents via schools, by working with businesses, residents' organisations, doctor's surgeries.

Wherever the council has influence on the design of streets or public spaces, the aim should be to make them pleasant and convenient for walking or cycling first and foremost. Look into all one-way roads: could they allow counter-flow cycling? This helps traffic calming and creates shortcuts for cycling. Bermondsey Street is a good example.

Are walking routes direct, fast, and feel pleasant and safe? Railings that kettle people in or prevent them from using the natural line should be removed. Pedestrian traffic flow should have priority over motor traffic flow.

Dimly-lit, smelly, cumbersome and unsafe underpasses should be replaced by level crossings.

Resident 30

To combat alcohol misuse we should educate people that there are other alternatives – it takes a lot of money though, and if people want to drink, they will.

Resident 31

In the work place, managers can be made more aware of how to spot the signs of mental illnesses, and to give support. Again, this takes a lot of money.

Resident 33

I'm very conscious that everything is in my hands, and that my routine now will have an impact on the later life stages. I want to be able to move independently and to prepare for having children.

Resident 34

Your diet now can affect what you do later in life. Illnesses like hypertension and diabetes could be avoided. Many people from my Latin American background have problems such as high cholesterol, hypertension, high blood pressure, from diets which include too many fried foods.

Resident 35

Many supermarkets only sell pre-packaged fruit and vegetables, which can't be examined closely. We need more markets selling organic produce.

Restaurants and supermarkets should vary their produce and menus to include food for the health conscious eater, alongside traditional dishes.

Also, more parks should provide outdoor gym facilities. People could improve their health in outdoor 'boot camps' and group activities such as roller skating in the parks.

Resident 36

I used to work in a drug rehabilitation charity, so I've seen what addiction to drugs and alcohol can do. I'm from Colombia which has a history of drug production. We know how devastating the impact is on society. If people here knew how bad it is, that would change their opinions about using drugs.

Resident 37

We have to be more proactive about recognising early signs of mental distress and combating it. There is not the understanding in the immigrant community of mental health problems - there is a stigma attached.

Resident 38

I have been working long hours and I want to organise my time better, so that I work only the hours required and have more time for myself. My work-life balance needs to improve.

Resident 39

To improve health and well-being in the community it is very important to have access to information, particularly for people with language barriers, or people arriving recently in London. They postpone looking for doctors and health workers because of this.

Lack of information about mental health prevents access to assistance, and the problems get worse. Many people are also ashamed of mental health issues, and feel they may be shunned.

Resident 40

Parents are often in denial that their children suffer with obesity. Others don't seem to realize that their children have an unhealthy diet, and sometimes they don't stop to think of the consequences of eating junk food. Parents need to realise and accept that there is a problem.

Resident 41

The Lesbian community, more than other women, have problems of low self-esteem, leading to depression, drinking too much, misusing drugs, and obesity.

We can help ourselves by exercising more, smoking less, drinking less, eating less; but people need encouragement, and the Gay community - especially Lesbians - find it hard to talk to professionals, or anyone, because they fear discrimination. They feel ill at ease.

For the LGBT community, we need targeted services to tackle alcohol misuse or depression. In the case of more acute mental health issues that require hospitalization, we need to listen to patients.

Resident 42

LGBT people with mental health issues often suffer double discrimination, because of their illness and their sexual orientation. It's a basic requirement that health professionals be entirely free from any prejudice against their service users. This has to be addressed!

Resident 43

There's a higher than average incidence of self-harm, injury and suicide amongst young LGBT people. They get bullied about their sexuality, and they internalise it, thinking that there's something horribly wrong with them. It's the way they're being treated that's horribly wrong.

When there's a crisis and young people are hospitalised, it's often the first time they will disclose their sexuality to an adult. This is completely unacceptable. All health professionals have to make it clear that they can be talked to, before the child is dead.

Resident 44

As an LGBT person with a disability, my personal difficulty is access to consultants. I know there are lots of services out there but it's gaining access that's the problem. The use of social media has helped me a lot with finding out about services which can help me.

Resident 45

Awareness of alcohol misuse should be taught in schools – people don't relate to all this talk about 'units'. In France the culture teaches about alcohol consumption as an accompaniment to food – in this country, we only know about alcohol consumption. It's not so cool to sit in a Starbucks that closes at eight o'clock in the evening! I for one am quite happy to sit in a coffee house which closes later. The industry has to take some responsibility as well.

Resident 46

There seems to be a sedentary lifestyle inbred in our culture. We need to change our attitude towards food, and social media should be used a lot more. That way the message will get viral and begin trending. We also need education in schools.

Resident 47

Stopping smoking would most improve my health. It's just willpower. But at the moment I'm just not interested to stop. It helps me cope.

Resident 48

I lost weight as I became more confident. Respect for your body leads you to want to improve it. I have worked with people who were sufferers who subsequently lost weight. Body dysmorphia (including anorexia as well as obesity) is about not liking yourself – they must make the decision for themselves.

Resident 49

Getting up and moving about if your job involves sitting down at a desk all day would help people's health. It's just so bad for you. There's also too much fast food - cheap fast food that's seriously bad for you.

Smoking - that's another one. I was a heavy smoker and then I quit. I got sick of waking up in the morning and coughing like I was an old man.

Resident 50

For my own health and wellbeing, getting regular sleep throughout the night would help. As would consistent hours of work. I do sporadic work. I might work for 24 hours, then go home to sleep, or take another job on if I need the money.

Resident 51

I think obesity and people's diet is a problem in this area. Maybe it's the culture - they don't look after themselves when they are younger and it gets progressively worse. Then by the time they realize, it's too far gone.

Resident 52

Some people think a healthy breakfast is a heart-attack on a plate. You've got to ask yourself if fried bread, fried eggs, bacon and sausage is a healthy breakfast? Then again, if you're in a lower income area, you're going to see more fast food places survive.

Resident 53

A lot of people don't eat a balanced diet. Many people don't know how to cook for themselves. And they're not teaching their kids how to cook at home.

Resident 54

Nowadays when you have a problem in the house the council doesn't want to know. We pay rent and council tax. I'm not on benefits - I'm in full-time work. How can you have good health living in such an environment? The rents are too high, and they keep on going up.

Resident 55

When I go to my local GP they say they can only deal with one issue at a time. If you've got a headache and a bad knee for example, you have to come back the next day to get treatment for the knee. The service is not good. What's going on?

When I last went to the GP I was explaining my symptoms to my doctor in detail and she said, "Sorry, I don't have much time. I've got 50 people to see".

Resident 56

The environment in this country is not good. That's why people are sick and stressed. We have to stand up and say something - otherwise nothing will change.

Resident 57

I went into the Accident and Emergency Department at King's College Hospital on a Friday at 9 o'clock at night, and came out at 5 o'clock in the morning. So, for A&E to have a turnaround time in about four to five hours would be good.

Resident 58

I just lost my husband. He had a horrible neurological illness. I'm now challenging having to pay his medical fees because his illness was so terrible.

I feel he was entitled to the NHS continuing healthcare. I could do with more support to help me with my claim and I think other people would also benefit from this.

Resident 59

A lot of people I know are stressed. London is a depression city. If your neighbours don't talk to you, it has an affect. You feel isolated. Everybody just gets up, goes to work, comes home and goes to bed. Day in - day out. The same cycle.

And being broke and all that, it gets you down. It's just bills, bills, and bills. It's like there's nothing to look forward to. If the postman delivers a letter you don't want to open it in case it's a bill. All this affects people's health.

Resident 60

The one thing that would improve my health is exercise and better food. I don't have time to do enough exercise and I need to eat more protein. The problem is lunch time. If you're working you end up just getting snacks, chocolates, or rubbish food, and that doesn't help.

Resident 61

I'm perfectly capable of helping myself with my health. I have a bad back at the moment and I'm doing lots of exercise to make that better. I walk everywhere as I don't have a car, and I don't eat rubbishy food, so I wouldn't call upon the council to help my health.

I might call upon the NHS - but not the council. I know how to look after myself. You've got to. I think a lot of people do abuse their bodies and then expect miracles to put it right. But the council is very good in other ways.

Resident 62

I could improve my health if the council would give us somewhere we can exercise for free. I've considered using the free gym in the parks, but they don't have one around here.

Resident 63

I'm losing trust in the NHS. I've gone to my GP and they make it difficult to make an appointment. I struggled with back pain for a year before going for help. I feel they're ignoring me, and now I've suffered pain for 2 years. I'm planning on going to Singapore or India - maybe I will have to spend lots of money.

Resident 64

I'm nearly seventy and I feel healthy. I carefully choose the type of food that I eat. I read books about diets and healthy eating - that sort of thing.

GROUP SUBMISSIONS

We have also received responses from some community groups with a particular interest in health issues:

1. Southwark Cyclists

A community group 'committed to encouraging cycling'.

The following are a set of notes and facts about health and active travel drawn together by **Southwark Living Streets** and **Southwark Cyclists**. They are intended to draw attention to the link between the long-term health benefits of walking and cycling and the importance of creating a borough that supports these activities through:

- Land use and planning policies which encourage local journeys on foot and by bicycle with communities having viable local shops and services within walking distance and town centres within cycling distance.
- Transport policies which encourage walking and cycling and discourage domination by motor vehicles. Key policies include:
 - Borough 20mph speed limit which is enforced.
 - Segregated cycle lanes for cyclists on main roads.
 - Removal of major barriers to movement (i.e. motorway-like places such as E&C northern roundabout, OKR, NKR, Newington Causeway and Bricklayers Arms Flyover).

- Traffic-free residential streets to encourage children to play outside.
 - Green/traffic-lite routes to encourage walking and cycling to local parks and open spaces, local amenities and town centres.
 - Town centres designed as places for people rather than principally to facilitate vehicle movement.
 - Safe routes that encourage children to walk and cycle to school.
- Overall we would like to see the conversation about health also focus on the enormous preventative public health benefits that active forms of travel can offer Southwark. Investment in cycling infrastructure and encouraging walking journeys offers fantastic pay-offs for Southwark. Please do consider these as low-cost remedies for many of Southwark's big health problems such as obesity and heart disease. They are also free or nearly free forms of movement/transport in areas of high deprivation.
 - Our Top 10 Health & Active Travel Facts:
 1. **Active Travel Keeps You Healthy.** Countries with the highest rates of driving have the highest levels of obesity; countries with higher levels of use of public transport and active forms of travel such as walking and cycling tend to have lower levels of obesity. For example, in the US where 34.3% of adults are obese, just 5% of all journeys are made on foot, by bicycle or by public transport; in Holland, 11.2% of adults are obese but 50% of journeys are made by non-driving modes.
 2. **Walking is Good for You.** A Harvard study found that those who walk for 30 minutes a day for 5 days a week cut the risk of death by a half.
 3. **Walking Keeps You Happy.** There are strong links between even moderate levels of walking and increased scores for happiness and a lower incidence of mental degeneration. Walking also has benefits in the treatment of mental health problems.
 4. **Cycling is Good for You.** People who cycle live longer and lead healthier lives. Those who cycle three hours or more per week have a 39% lower risk of early death than those who do not.

5. **Cycling Keeps You Happy.** People who cycle lead happier lives. Cycling has been shown to improve mental health and happiness significantly.
6. **Many More People in Southwark Want To Cycle.** 40% of adults in Southwark would like to cycle or to cycle more than they currently do. The biggest barriers stopping them are road safety fears and a lack of safe cycle routes.
7. **Many More Journeys Could Be Cycled.** 45% of all trips by vehicles could be made by bicycle in Southwark; just 8% of these trips are in fact cycled.
8. **Children in Southwark Don't Cycle to School But Want To.** Under 5% of Southwark's primary schoolchildren currently cycle to school. Almost a third (30%) say that they would like to cycle to school.
9. **Southwark Has LOW Levels of Walking.** Southwark has the (equal) lowest modal share for walking of the Inner London boroughs (30% of journeys on foot). This compares with the Inner London borough average of 37% and highs of 44% in Kensington & Chelsea and 42% in Camden.
10. **Southwark Has LOW Level of Cycling.** Just 3% of all journeys in Southwark are by bicycle. This compares with 8% in Hackney and 28% in Cambridge.

References for the facts:

1. <http://policy.rutgers.edu/faculty/pucher/jpah08.pdf>
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3. <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1755296612000099>
4. Cycling England, 2007, Cycling and Health: What's the evidence?, London: Cycling England, (p26)
5. Ohta, M, Mizoue, T., Mishima, N. and Ikeda, M., 2007, "Effect of the Physical Activities in Leisure Time and Commuting to Work on Mental Health". Journal of Occupational Health, 49, p46-52
6. <http://southwarklivingstreets.files.wordpress.com/2008/07/peckham-lcz-report-12jul10.pdf>
7. TfL - Analysis of Cycling Potential Policy Analysis Research Report December 2010

8. Southwark Council Transport Plan – July 2011
9. <http://www.tfl.gov.uk/assets/downloads/corporate/travel-in-london-report-3.pdf>
10. <http://www.tfl.gov.uk/assets/downloads/corporate/Travel-in-London-report-1.pdf>

2. CoolTan Arts

A mental health and arts charity that believes 'mental well-being is enhanced by the power of creativity'.

As a community based organisation and user led mental health charity (run by and for people with mental distress) we see the huge and often life changing benefits for people with mental distress in taking part in structured arts projects with a high public profile. We feel it is imperative that a culture exists where mental health is de-stigmatised and that people are given true choice and control over the services they receive.

CoolTan Arts significantly improves the lives of up to 800 people with mental distress per year through a range of strategies and interventions including de-stigmatising volunteer led mental health walks, health & wellbeing workshop programmes, volunteer services and a Self Advocacy Training programme. We find this inclusive approach to the mental health and wellbeing of participants means that people choose to use CoolTan Arts services time and time again and we have a very strong reputation within the borough and beyond for our approach.

We feel very strongly that organisations such as ours should be recognised for the front line services we can offer that compliment statutory services. We would like to see clearer routes to signpost people with mental distress to the relevant services they need with greater involvement by local authorities to support this; and that our value as a frontline service when responding to people in crisis be recognised as we are often the first point of contact for many. We would like to see services such as ours funded to deliver a range of services to people with mental distress in a structure and at times to suit them.