

SOUTHWARK COUNCIL

COUNCIL ASSEMBLY

(ORDINARY MEETING)

WEDNESDAY 23 JANUARY 2013

URGENT QUESTION

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

In light of the publication of the Mayor's draft Police and Crime Plan for London on 9 January and the leader of the council's subsequent statement that the council is "working with the Met and MOPAC" to find alternative police front counter facilities to replace those affected in the plan, what is the leader doing to work creatively with the Metropolitan Police in identifying alternative premises?

RESPONSE

Southwark has been actively working with the Metropolitan Police to find alternative counter facilities. Most recently, Councillor Livingstone and I have met with Stephen Greenhalgh, the Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime on 21 December 2012. In that meeting we made clear our commitment to work with the Mayor to find alternative premises in Southwark including suggesting a range of premises. The discussion included some ideas from Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) about sharing facilities with the council. We have asked officers to look at the practicalities of those suggestions.

To pay for premises, particularly ones not shared with the council, the Borough Commander will need to receive adequate funding from the Metropolitan Police. At the 9 January consultation meeting at City Hall, the Borough Commander stated that he would not be receiving a budget to do so.

This is the funding which has been slashed by this Tory/Liberal Democrat government and which local MP, Simon Hughes failed to vote against. While Simon Hughes and the Liberal Democrats believe that it's "wrong to say that more police equals less crime", Labour is getting on with finding solutions with the Metropolitan Police to keep people in Southwark safe.

SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR ANOOD AL-SAMERAI

I do Madam Mayor, thank you very much, although the answer has broken Councillor Stanton's new rule of saying 'If you were not going to cut this, what would you have cut?', so it is already failing there, Councillor John.

My supplemental is really, you say that you want to work with the police to find alternative premises and then when you are asked what you have done you just say 'We have asked officers to look at it', so I am not actually sure what the officers have done. I visited the new One Stop Shop in the Blue the other day and asked whether they had explored at all with the police about sharing those premises and was met with blank looks, so clearly the officers you asked have not got very far.

RESPONSE

It has been the community safety team leading on this as well as property. I think it is important to know when Councillor Livingstone and I met with the Deputy Mayor on 21 December, actually before the Deputy Mayor arrived, in the hour before he arrived – he was very late for the meeting – we had a very constructive discussion with Helen Bailey, who is his senior officer, and another officer from the Met Police and together we went through a whole list of potential premises in the borough; and Jonathon Toy who heads up the community safety department was there, and we have been working on that since.

The real difficulty in this, I am going to have to emphasise, is that the neither MOPAC or the police will give us any indication of what budget they might have to spend on premises that they will be located at with us.

We can find as a council a whole list of potential premises, some of which might require some capital expenditure to get them going, some of which will undoubtedly need some revenue to keep them going. We can find a whole host of premises, whether it be co-locating in libraries or One Stop Shops or whatever. But the Met Police and MOPAC will not tell us what funds they have available, or what their budget is so I have no idea what we are working towards.

For instance Councillor Crookshank Hilton has been doing some great work trying to find somewhere in East Dulwich where the police might be located with a revenue cost, she tells us, of £24,000. Now the indication from the Met Police and MOPAC is well that might be okay if that was the whole solution for all your front counters in Southwark but we can't pay that on one location if you want other places, but they have not told us what the total budget will be.

I am rambling on but it is important that you understand that, you know, without something from them as to what budget we are working from, it is very difficult for us to actually identify a solution, so I think we are probably going to come to a situation, we are probably having to go back to them with a whole list of central premises and what the costs are and see what their reaction is, whether they like some or they don't.

There does seem to be a real degree of confusion, I think both the Met Police and MOPAC about what they are doing here and I think that was evident at the public meeting at City Hall, where of course, the big slide on the screen said that Peckham would be a 24 hour police station of Southwark; where the Borough Commander was briefing at the end of the meeting it was going to be Walworth is the 24 hour police station of the borough. So there is a lot of confusion and a lack of information, but we are positive working as a council and I welcome all members' ideas where an appropriate place might be for co-location of premises, so do come forward with your ideas and send them to Councillor Livingstone as a first instance as this is his role. But we are trying to do as much as we can to work with MOPAC and the Met to sort this out, but as I say it is very difficult when you don't know what they are asking for or what the budget is.

SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR ANOOD AL-SAMERAI

Thanks Madam Mayor and I thank the leader for a surprisingly constructive answer; I am a bit thrown now. What I was going to suggest is that we follow Councillor Crookshank-Hilton's model of trying to do things on a cross party level and clearly the leader has indicated he would be up for that. Can I dare to suggest and to see

whether he is still constructive, that we involve the borough MPs as well, all three of them, and have some sort of cross party meeting with the Borough Commander and the Commissioner, and make sure we all actually sit round and talk to try and get some of the answers you are asking for, but also put forward ward councillors' suggestions as well and would he agree to that this evening?

RESPONSE

Absolutely, I think if we can get the Met Police in a room and discuss it this would be fantastic. I mean, clearly all the MPs are concerned; I know Tessa Jowell is particularly concerned because of the impact on the Dulwich area, I know all the Dulwich councillors are concerned about this, right across the parties. All are concerned that there will be a complete lack of police presence south of Peckham under the current proposals. It is important that everybody who is available comes forward with their ideas. I am willing to work with anyone; as I say, what we really need is some information from the Met Police and MOPAC as to what their budget might be to make this happen.