

COUNCIL ASSEMBLY

(COUNCIL TAX SETTING)

WEDNESDAY 27 FEBRUARY 2013

QUESTIONS ON THE REPORT

ITEM 2.1: POLICY AND RESOURCES STRATEGY – 2013/14-2015/16 – REVENUE BUDGET

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

Would the cabinet member for finance, resources and community safety indicate what steps the council is taking to reduce the unfair burden on Southwark of the current arrangements for the Lea Valley Regional Park levy, noting the recent initiative by Greater London Authority member Richard Tracey on this matter?

RESPONSE

The funding arrangements for the Lee Valley Regional Park were first established by the Lee Valley Regional Park Act 1966, and the current arrangements for borough contributions were established when the Greater London Council was abolished in 1986. The current arrangements are therefore a legacy of decisions made by the Conservative government of the 1980s and revising these arrangements would require parliament to amend the Act.

According to the Lee Valley Regional Park Authority, 67% of its funding comes from councils in London, Essex and Hertfordshire. Around 24,410 visits a year to the Regional Park are made by Southwark residents.

Whilst the majority of visits to the park are made by residents of the adjacent boroughs, it is important to recognise that, as a result of the Olympics, the park includes the only world class facilities in London, east and south east for a number of sports. These include the regional ice centre, the Olympic velodrome, the white water centre, the regional athletics centre and the hockey and tennis centre. We would therefore anticipate that Southwark residents will make greater use of these facilities in the future.

Given the scale of funding by local authorities at the moment, Richard Tracey's proposal to end all public funding in five years is likely to result in the loss of these world-class facilities to London, which is frankly an irresponsible waste of the public money already invested in creating them and would wreck the Olympic legacy that all parties, and the Mayor for London himself, are keen to see flourish.

That is not to say that we would not support a review of arrangements to see if a more balanced approach can be adopted, based on usage of the facilities by boroughs and including other regional sports facilities, such as those at Crystal Palace.

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

Just a quick one Madam Mayor, thank you, thanks for the answer Councillor Livingstone. Just in relation to your – may I ask the cabinet member, in the second to last paragraph the cabinet member was rather scarifying about the loss of the facilities used for the Olympics. Could I ask whether he has any direct evidence for that or is it in a web site link or something could he provide it to me?

RESPONSE

I would like to thank Councillor Eckersley for his supplemental question. The information about some of those facilities is within the last report I have seen from the Lee Valley Regional Authority. I know my colleague Councillor Ward can provide a bit more information. The point that I made was the more general one that at the moment two thirds of the money to the Lee Valley Regional Authority comes from public funds and the suggestion made by the GLA member was to remove, in their entirety, those public funds after five years. I think it is very clear that sounds to me that is something that is unsustainable and would certainly run the risk of losing some world class facilities there.

It is interesting that this suggestion is coming up now and you will see from here that this is a situation that has really been going since the GLC was abolished, so of course this is Margaret Thatcher's legacy to us that we have this slightly anachronistic position of funding this. But of course it probably has more relevance now than it has done in any of that time since the regional authority has been established because of those world class facilities there and I am sure Councillor Eckersley, like me, would not want to be robbing any future Bradley Wiggins or anybody else of that calibre that might come from Southwark, from those, the ability use those facilities.

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

The budget report identifies savings of £750,000 arising from the acquisition of the council's Tooley Street offices. Can the cabinet member confirm if there are any plans to use this money in the near future?

RESPONSE

On 12 February, the cabinet made the decision to set aside these 2012/13 savings arising from the Tooley Street acquisition for additional investment in community safety schemes in the borough.

The first port of call for this money will be to offer to assist the police in establishing contact points and safer neighbourhood teams base buildings to both maintain face-to-face contact with the police, particularly in Dulwich and Rotherhithe, and ensure adequate safer neighbourhood team capacity. We are doing this in response to the Mayor of London's proposals to otherwise cut these.

We hope that the police will be able to make use of this offer and we believe that we are the first council in London to make such a proposal.

The intention is to use the remaining money for other one-off schemes and we are considering a range of proposals, such as:

- establishing victim contact centres with victim support
- work with the community to tackle crime
- property-marking schemes
- thermal imaging cameras to identify beds-in-sheds and cannabis factories
- targeted work to tackle mobile phone theft.

SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR FINANCE, RESOURCES AND COMMUNITY SAFETY FROM COUNCILLOR ANDY SIMMONS

I would like to thank the cabinet member very much for his response, I just wondered if the cabinet member had any idea about the possible time scale within which the police might get back to us?

RESPONSE

Thank you Councillor Simmons, I am meeting with the police tomorrow to have a chat about some of this. We have a little bit of difficulty getting them into the same room as us, so I am going to have a chat tomorrow. How conclusive that will be, I don't know, but I will hopefully have a clearer idea from then.

We are making a very serious commitment here; we are the first authority in London to do so, to say "We understand the difficulties the police authority has." Despite the fact that our money is very tight, we are going to be using that money that we are saving from having bought this building, the money we saved this year, to put that into some one off funding and try and help the police as well as have other community safety measures in patches; and that is a genuine offer and we hope we can work constructively with the police to look at replacement facilities, particularly in Dulwich and Rotherhithe which I think are the two areas which are clearly most affected by the proposed closures of police stations.