

COUNCIL ASSEMBLY

(ANNUAL MEETING)

WEDNESDAY 22 MAY 2013

QUESTIONS ON REPORTS

ITEM 3.2 – ESTABLISHMENT OF COMMITTEES, COMMUNITY COUNCILS, PANELS AND RELATED MATTERS – 2013/14

1. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR ROSIE SHIMELL

What work has the council done to measure satisfaction levels with the current community council system?

RESPONSE

At each community council meeting, those attending are encouraged to complete an evaluation form which asks them how satisfied they are and elicits suggestions for improvement. After the meeting, this is collated and fed back to the chair and vice chair. In addition to this an annual review is produced and in order to assist in this process, officers are currently undertaking a questionnaire to all attendees and the results of this will be presented to the chairs and vice chairs of community councils meeting scheduled for 3 July 2013.

This feedback is used to make improvements to meetings. Examples of changes implemented from residents' feedback have been to hold meeting on Saturdays and rotating venues on a regular basis. All community council areas have developed forward plans to deliver more themed meetings and are taking residents views into account when setting agendas.

SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR ROSIE SHIMELL TO THE LEADER

Yes thank you; I would like to thank the Leader for his answer. I would just like to ask, you mention in your answer that the officers are currently undertaking a review of resident satisfaction, and I wonder how you can claim that the new community council approach has been successful if that satisfaction survey has not yet been undertaken?

RESPONSE

Thank you Mr Mayor, and I thank Councillor Shimell for her supplemental question. I think we can look at the attendance figures which are published in the subsequent answer to Councillor Clark's question to see that more, or at least the same number of, people are attending community councils going forward and I think that says that people continue to be satisfied and engaged with the community council process, and I think people welcome, as they welcome the opportunity to help influence decisions on Cleaner Greener Safer capital spend, also welcome the opportunity to influence decisions about how we spend money at a ward level through the Cleaner Greener Safer revenue fund.

Do not forget there was no revenue spending of that nature decided by community councils under the previous Liberal Democrat administration who now claim to be the absolute champions of community councils. They weren't, they weren't. They only gave out CGS capital. And also Youth Fund spending is decided at a local level by community councils; we have done more to empower community councils and that leads, I believe to resident satisfaction with the whole process.

2. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR PODDY CLARK

Please list the attendance for each community council area for each meeting in the last two years?

RESPONSE

Attendance details for the last two years is set out in the following two tables:

Table 1: Data for 2011-2012 year (x 8 community councils)

Community Council	Meeting Date	Headcount
Bermondsey	24 January 2011	73
Bermondsey	9 March 2011	53
Bermondsey	3 May 2011	68
Bermondsey	9 June 2011	54
Bermondsey	13 September 2011	54
Bermondsey	10 November 2011	104
Rotherhithe	20 January 2011	31
Rotherhithe	3 March 2011	48
Rotherhithe	27 April 2011	56
Rotherhithe	15 June 2011	42
Rotherhithe	14 September 2011	70
Rotherhithe	2 November 2011	55
Borough and Bankside	03 February 2013	41
Borough and Bankside	09 March 2013	54
Borough and Bankside	03 May 2013	49
Borough and Bankside	15 June 2013	38
Borough and Bankside	13 September 2013	23
Borough and Bankside	07 November 2013	55
Walworth	24 January 2013	75
Walworth	01 March 2013	58
Walworth	03 May 2013	97
Walworth	02 July 2013	150
Walworth	14 September 2013	54
Walworth	02 November 2013	93
Camberwell	02 February 2011	38
Camberwell	20 April 2011	40
Camberwell	22 June 2011	98
Camberwell	22 September 2011	41
Camberwell	31 October 2011	86
Dulwich	24 January 2011	40
Dulwich	08 March 2011	41
Dulwich	28 April 2011	52
Dulwich	08 June 2011	44

Community Council	Meeting Date	Headcount
Dulwich	15 September 2011	79
Dulwich	07 November 2011	163
Nunhead and Peckham Rye	20 January 2011	30
Nunhead and Peckham Rye	03 March 2011	71
Nunhead and Peckham Rye	11 May 2011	30
Nunhead and Peckham Rye	22 June 2011	103
Nunhead and Peckham Rye	19 September 2011	73
Nunhead and Peckham Rye	10 November 2011	47
Nunhead and Peckham Rye	12 January 2012	44
Peckham	05 February 2011	104
Peckham	02 March 2011	34
Peckham	12 May 2011	150+
Peckham	12 July 2011	63
Peckham	21 September 2011	46
Peckham	31 October 2011	63
Peckham	10 January 2012	67

Table 2: Data for 2012-2013 meeting cycle (x5 meetings)

Community council	Meeting Date	Headcount
Bermondsey and Rotherhithe	12 July 2012	80
Bermondsey and Rotherhithe	10 October 2012	90
Bermondsey and Rotherhithe	30 January 2013	86
Bermondsey and Rotherhithe	12 March 2013	76
Bermondsey and Rotherhithe	29 April 2013	71
Camberwell	20 June 2012	85
Camberwell	24 September 2012	65
Camberwell	21 November 2012	78
Camberwell	13 February 2013	84
Camberwell	17 April 2013	69
Dulwich	26 June 2012	42
Dulwich	18 September 2012	82
Dulwich	27 November 2012	73
Dulwich	30 January 2013	51
Dulwich	22 April 2013	53
Peckham & Nunhead	20 June 2012	50
Peckham & Nunhead	24 September 2013	110
Peckham & Nunhead	21 November 2013	110
Peckham & Nunhead	02 March 2013	95
Peckham & Nunhead	17 April 2013	90
Walworth, Borough & Bankside	02-Jul-12	107
Walworth, Borough & Bankside	10 January 2012	94
Walworth, Borough & Bankside	08/12/2012	71
Walworth, Borough & Bankside	26 February 2013	135
Walworth, Borough & Bankside	22 April 2013	86

The democracy commission meeting held in September 2011 received a report on attendance at community councils. This showed areas of overlap of attendance between Bermondsey and Rotherhithe (20 people on average) and

to a lesser extent between Peckham and Nunhead and Peckham Rye (three people on average). If these are taken into account the numbers attending have remained constant after the change.

SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR PODDY CLARK TO THE LEADER

Thank you Mr Mayor, I thank the Leader for his reply and I can't claim my mental arithmetic is utterly brilliant, but I would like to question the fact that he says that the attendance has been increasing in these community councils, because to my mind that is not the case it is decreasing and in fact I believe I am right in saying that my own community council, which is Borough and Bankside and Walworth, has actually witnessed a fall of some 12%. And I would like to ask him if he feels he can come up with any particular answers on how we can stave this decrease, and I would like to say that I think it is partly because the meetings are so long because we have to have such packed agendas, and is there something that he could intend to do to help us in that respect? Thank you.

RESPONSE

I think it is bound on all community councils and all community council members to see and think of ways in which meetings can be made lively and involve the community. And I know that is what exactly happens in Walworth, Borough and Bankside; that the chair is keen to hear – you might laugh but at least the chair involves residents in discussions and decision making, at least the chair takes items which affect the lives of many residents, unlike the Bermondsey and Rotherhithe Chair who refused to have a discussion on the housing commission at his meeting. One of the biggest issues facing the borough at this time – they want a serious and sensible debate, yet they don't want to have that serious and sensible debate in Rotherhithe, I think not. So I don't except the premise of your question Councillor Clark as to falling numbers. This administration remains committed to community councils and that is why we have given them additional powers; that is why we encourage lively resident debate and participation at our community council meetings.

3. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR JAMES BARBER

Will the leader consider returning to eight community council areas and allowing chairs to manage the existing budget more efficiently?

RESPONSE

The cost of returning to eight community councils with their previous functions will cost £344,000 per year. At a time when we have to make savings due to massive cuts from the Tory/Liberal Democrat government, I cannot support the Liberal Democrats' call to hike spending on community councils to over £1.3 million per year.

As Councillor Barber knows, we consulted extensively on this when making this budget decision and people told us that all areas including the budget for meetings like community councils had to take their fair share of the reductions necessary to meet these cuts. The 25% saving we made was in line with other budgets. Despite this we have been able to devolve more funding than ever before to community councils to give local people more say on local spending. This includes the new cleaner greener safer revenue fund that the current

administration introduced. Any further devolution of the existing community council budgets for local management would be minimal, for example negotiating room hire costs for meetings, and so I would not accept that this will make budget management more efficient.

SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR JAMES BARBER TO THE LEADER

Thank you Mr Mayor, I thank Councillor John for his response, in 2011-12 the £1.3 million budget supported 52 community council meetings each year, and 61 community council planning meetings, so they cost on average £12,000 each. This financial year the £901,000 budget will support 25 meetings an average cost of £35,500 each.

Does he think that community councils could manage a devolved budget, retaining the 25% saving at an average cost of £8,000 per community council meeting, and return to the previous structure?

RESPONSE

The reality of the situation was that savings needed to be made in the community council budget as they were right across all the departments of this council.

I don't think it was right that community councils, our democracy, should be exempted from having to deliver savings when we are asking people who are facing welfare benefits cuts and other similar sanctions from central government, of which Councillor Barber's party is a central supporting element, that we should be asking them to bear the brunt, if we as councillors are not bearing the brunt also. I hear what he says about the community council meetings; of course we could have lots more community council meetings if we want to pay for them, and if the Liberal Democrat members turn up.

The scandalous record of attendance of some Liberal Democrat councillors at community council meetings in the past would seem to demonstrate that they are not really interested in having meetings. They are interested in having arguments about having meetings; they are not actually interested in going to the meetings themselves. So maybe if he comes forward with some serious proposals with serious support from his side, and if they win the next election of course, which I think highly unlikely, they can have as many meetings as they want with as few councillors as they wish.

4. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR ADELE MORRIS

What percentage of planning applications has been decided by planning sub-committees in 2012/13? How does this compare to the percentage decided by community councils in 2011/12?

RESPONSE

In 2012/13 1.92% of planning applications were decided by planning sub-committee, with 1.35% decided by planning committee.

In 2011/12 5.56% of planning applications were decided by community councils, with 2.64% decided by planning committee.

The principle reason for this change is the change in the delegation authority to officers which changed at the same time as the change from community councils to planning sub-committees.