

COUNCIL ASSEMBLY

WEDNESDAY 10 JULY 2013

Including themed debate on welfare reform

SOME COMMUNITY VIEWS

- I am a taxpayer and council tax payer living in SE1.

I support the coalition government's reforms of welfare – but these reforms barely scratch the surface of the welfare monster originally intended as a safety net for working people. Not a way of living. Work already done to lift the tax threshold eventually to £10k is progress.

The London living wage should also be introduced in tandem with these reforms to make business share some of the burden from the taxpayer. HMRC also needs to toughen up on some cosy relationships with big business to make them pay their tax.

- The British State has created an entire class of people who are utterly dependent upon the state – the incentives to compel people to work and pay their way in society are not strong enough. Southwark Council's own data shows us that the majority of residents in social housing are out of work. As long as their rent is paid for by the Council via housing benefit, this situation will not change. It's called human nature.
- Southwark also has one of the UK's worst and shameful records of Council Tax collection - I would suggest that as a Council you focus your efforts on improving this dire record. Recently, the BBC reported that four Southwark councillors had received summons for late payment of Southwark Council tax.
- Welfare also means that money is diverted from productive, wealth-creating, growth-creating activities such as building housing, schools and transport improvements. Such projects will help people back into work – a virtuous circle. Housing benefit also ends up in the pockets of private landlords, when the state should be spending this money on housing – a crazy situation.
- The way in which Council Housing is allocated also distorts the socio-economic make-up of this borough into two extremes – the very rich who can afford to live in luxury riverside developments granted consent by Southwark council with zero on-site affordable housing – contrasting with Council housing which is only allocated to the poorest. There is no space for anyone in the middle.
- There aren't enough jobs.

Jobs don't pay enough to afford living costs in the UK – that goes double for London.

There is a national housing crisis caused by chronic undersupply and multiple housing booms, happily stoked by governments of all stripes.

The social security spend always goes up in a recession, and Conservative governments always try to use these figure as normative to build sympathy for their argument – i.e. the infantile Shirkers vs. Strivers talking point.

While I salute those who are trying to engage with these issues, these questions in my opinion go far beyond the scope of local councillors. If I have a point of view to feed into the meeting, it's that our local councillors should do what they can to ensure the public is informed. Otherwise you just get the same recycled ignorance that passes for debate on this issue.

- ... As for local communities, I would like to see the Council document the real day-to-day impact of "benefit reform" on the lives of people in Southwark and report that back to Government.
- I work with people who have physical and mental health disabilities including older people and fear for their future where they do not have income other than benefits to rely on. Accurate and timely information rather than propaganda is needed for these and other affected groups and their carers so they can respond – so my question is what efforts are being made by central and local government to access people wherever they are and who maybe can't for example, get out to meetings? What follow up will there be of isolated people who may not now be able to pay for essential services like home care to at least check if they are alive? What efforts are being made to maintain supportive communities and for vulnerable people as cuts close centres and neighbourhoods in SE1 change.
- Good luck Southwark council, please do focus your attention on the people in need, supporting them as best as possible and highlighting their plight with Government and the media.
- Given the demographics of the country and the borough the issue is what is affordable. I have sympathies with both sides of the arguments but what is debatable is what is affordable – except within a small band – and that is where the subsidy comes from...quite simply local council gets money from central government... that is subsidy in any form and how it is shared out is definitely up for discussion...but it is limited to what it is and no more.

We could discuss the merits of contribution from different (income) groups ad infinitum but it is what we have to spend that is finite and needs to be understood better by all...unless we want to dismantle the whole social system we currently have?

Regarding information on the reform of welfare assistance:

- If you mean information on the impact these cuts are having then all I can say is that without my addiction to talk radio, i.e. LBC radio 5 etc, I wouldn't have a clue about the plight of those undergoing these reforms, you get to listen to some very upsetting calls and suicidal callers.
- Strangely just hearing that Moneybox Live is going to be about Welfare Benefit changes (cuts) today!