

**COUNCIL ASSEMBLY**

**(ORDINARY MEETING)**

**WEDNESDAY 10 JULY 2013**

**QUESTIONS ON REPORTS**

**ITEM 7.1: FAIRER FUTURE ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT 2012/13**

**1. QUESTION TO THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL FROM COUNCILLOR ROSIE SHIMELL**

The council has an objective to increase the percentage of children getting one of their preferences for a primary school. Why does the council not have a similar objective for secondary school children given that its performance in offering children their first preference is among the worst in the country?

**RESPONSE**

The highest ever number of Southwark secondary school pupils have received a place in one of their preferred choices for September 2013, with 93 per cent of pupils offered a place in one of their six preferred schools. Of these, 85 per cent received a place in one of their top three choices with 58.7 per cent getting their top choice.

Once again, all 2,500 pupils that applied have been allocated a school place.

Though primary preference is a priority in terms of children living less than two miles from their primary school, at secondary school age distance becomes a less critical issue for many families with older children who are better able to travel and cover longer journeys.

Even where a target is included within the council plan to increase the proportion of pupils obtaining their preference of secondary school, it would be extremely difficult to directly influence this measure in the short term. It is not possible for the council to expand oversubscribed secondary schools, as no secondary schools are controlled by the local authority. This would make the issue of target setting and performance management of the target a risk area.

It should also be noted in this context that many children's secondary choices are for out of borough schools, and, many out of borough children also apply for Southwark schools, further reducing local authority influence on this measure.

**SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION TO THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL FROM COUNCILLOR ROSIE SHIMELL**

Thank you Mr Mayor; I would like to thank the Leader for his answer. Only slightly over 50% of Southwark children receive their first choice of secondary school, which is the fifth worst in the country to be specific. Could the Leader explain why

Southwark children and parents have to accept fourth, fifth or even sixth choice schools in September?

**RESPONSE**

I thank Councillor Shimell for her question. Obviously we are working very hard to ensure that every child gets their choice of primary school and secondary school place. It is more difficult where the secondary schools are out of borough and further away to control that admission system, but I think it is an encouraging percentage of children who were offered a place at one of their six preferred schools. I think what we should recognise is that schooling and education not only in Southwark but in London as a whole is improving and London has a great advantage over the rest of the country in terms of our GCSE performance. I think that is something we should celebrate in London and I don't think we recognise the fact that every child who goes, whatever your background, if you go to school in London, to a state school in London, you are going to out-perform a child from in a similar background going to school in any other part of the country. So I think we should celebrate the fact that Southwark schools and London schools are getting better and the children who go to whichever school in London are going to get a better education, a better start in life, than schools elsewhere in the country.

I do hear what she says in terms of the thrust of her question, as I say we will continue to work on it to try and improve that in time.

**2. QUESTION TO THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL FROM COUNCILLOR GRAHAM NEALE**

Can the Leader provide a breakdown of the assessment of public satisfaction with leisure centres by leisure centre and by satisfaction rating? How many users were surveyed at each of the leisure centres?

**RESPONSE**

Public satisfaction with the borough's leisure centres is measured through the Council's reputation tracker survey by asking the people who were surveyed who said that they were users of our leisure centres.

The tracker survey does not ask for the specific facilities used, so there is no means of splitting results in this way

**SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION TO THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL FROM COUNCILLOR GRAHAM NEALE**

Thank you Mr Mayor and can I thank the Leader for the answer that is given on page 2 of the green paper here. Of course we are disappointed that the tracker survey does not ask the specific facilities so in that sense the responses given by members of the public and users of the leisure centres is of little use to any of us.

That notwithstanding, could I ask – I don't expect it now verbally, but can I have a written response as to what is going on with the condensation problems at Camberwell Baths? Thank you.

**RESPONSE**

Yes.

**3. QUESTION TO THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL FROM COUNCILLOR PODDY CLARK**

How many residents from each community council area were sent satisfaction surveys in 2012/13? What were the criteria for selecting the residents to be surveyed? What satisfaction results were recorded in each community council area?

**RESPONSE**

The numbers sent questionnaires were as follows:

Bermondsey & Rotherhithe	550
Borough Bankside & Walworth	900
Peckham & Nunhead	550
Camberwell	236
Dulwich	470

Questionnaires were sent to all residents who had given council officers their contact details in each community council area and consented to us sending them further information about community councils. There was no selection applied to this; they all received a copy.

<b>Community council</b>	<b>Number of responses</b>
Camberwell	34
Borough, Bankside and Walworth	39
Dulwich	51
Peckham and Nunhead	24
Bermondsey and Rotherhithe	42

## Community council 2012-13 Survey Summary

<b>Q2. Please tell us how much you think the Community Councils are fulfilling the following roles:</b>	<b>Extent of agreement</b>	<b>C %</b>	<b>BBW %</b>	<b>D %</b>	<b>PN %</b>	<b>BR %</b>
To promote the involvement of local people in the democratic process and to bring decision making closer to local people	<b>Definitely</b>	44%	15%	41%	25%	57%
	<b>Mainly</b>	18%	44%	35%	54%	19%
	<b>A little</b>	15%	26%	22%	21%	14%
	<b>Not at all</b>	18%	5%	0%	0%	10%
	<b>No response</b>	6%	10%	2%	0%	0%
To take decisions about local matters e.g. the cleaner, greener, safer capital and revenue programmes, community council fund, traffic management and community project banks.	<b>Definitely</b>	32%	31%	41%	54%	55%
	<b>Mainly</b>	32%	31%	35%	42%	26%
	<b>A little</b>	21%	18%	16%	4%	14%
	<b>Not at all</b>	9%	5%	6%	0%	5%
	<b>No response</b>	6%	15%	2%	0%	0%
To act as a formal consultation mechanism on council wide policies and strategies.	<b>Definitely</b>	21%	28%	29%	33%	31%
	<b>Mainly</b>	35%	21%	47%	29%	36%
	<b>A little</b>	21%	28%	22%	33%	19%
	<b>Not at all</b>	15%	10%	2%	4%	14%
	<b>No response</b>	9%	13%	0%	0%	0%
To be a focal point for discussion and consultation on matters that affect the area.	<b>Definitely</b>	21%	26%	45%	42%	45%
	<b>Mainly</b>	35%	23%	39%	38%	29%
	<b>A little</b>	21%	31%	10%	17%	14%
	<b>Not at all</b>	15%	8%	4%	4%	12%
	<b>No response</b>	9%	13%	2%	0%	0%
<b>Q3. Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements:</b>	<b>Extent of agreement</b>	<b>C %</b>	<b>BBW %</b>	<b>D %</b>	<b>PN %</b>	<b>BR %</b>
I feel that, through the Community Council, I am able to influence decisions made about my area	<b>Definitely</b>	11.76%	10%	12%	8%	26%
	<b>Mainly</b>	8.82%	18%	16%	33%	21%
	<b>A little</b>	38.2%	36%	57%	38%	29%
	<b>Not at all</b>	32.35%	21%	14%	8%	14%
	<b>No response</b>	8.82%	15%	2%	13%	10%
The Community Council allows me to learn more about my area	<b>Definitely</b>	38.2%	31%	45%	42%	60%

	<b>Mainly</b>	23.5%	31%	29%	42%	17%
	<b>A little</b>	29.4%	26%	20%	4%	7%
	<b>Not at all</b>	2.94%	0%	2%	0%	7%
	<b>No response</b>	5.88%	13%	4%	13%	10%
The Community Council allows me to learn more about what the council is doing in my area	<b>Definitely</b>	29.4%	28%	41%	42%	50%
	<b>Mainly</b>	26.47%	44%	35%	38%	17%
	<b>A little</b>	29.4%	13%	18%	13%	19%
	<b>Not at all</b>	8.82%	0%	2%	0%	5%
The Community Council helps the local area to be a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together	<b>No response</b>	5.88%	15%	4%	8%	10%
	<b>Definitely</b>	11.76%	18%	14%	21%	21%
	<b>Mainly</b>	29.4%	26%	25%	38%	29%
	<b>A little</b>	26.47%	33%	45%	29%	26%
	<b>Not at all</b>	23.5%	3%	10%	4%	12%
	<b>No response</b>	8.82	21%	6%	8%	12%
	<b>Q4. Please indicate what you most value about Community Councils by ticking below as appropriate:</b>	<b>C %</b>	<b>BBW %</b>	<b>D %</b>	<b>PN %</b>	<b>BR %</b>
	<b>Finding out what happens in my area</b>	65%	56%	73%	79%	74%
<b>Contact with councillors</b>	68%	44%	63%	54%	45%	
<b>Contact with officers</b>	38%	28%	35%	46%	26%	
<b>Contact with other residents</b>	47%	41%	24%	25%	40%	
<b>Influencing decisions</b>	24%	33%	39%	25%	24%	
<b>Consultations</b>	32%	36%	25%	29%	12%	

## **SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION TO THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL FROM COUNCILLOR PODDY CLARK**

Thank you Mr Mayor and I would like to thank the leader for his answer.

When we consider community council and the way the agendas and so forth are brought forward, I thought it would be interesting to ask all of the chairs of community council to look up question 3 where it says "Please indicate where you strongly agree or disagree with the following statements" and if they feel that it is only quite concerning that 32.35% of people that replied said that they did not think they could have any influence on the community council decisions at all, so I think we should be looking at that and reviewing it?

### **RESPONSE**

That is actually Camberwell, that percentage, because people are incredibly satisfied with the work that their councillors are doing and decisions that are being taken, so they do not need to be influenced. No, I am being facetious.

Again there is always work to do, but I think what is telling is that some of the most positive responses in this survey came from people who attended Bermondsey and Rotherhithe Community Council, where we are told that the world is in a decline and a despair and nobody has any idea of what is going on or feels able to influence decisions. That is obviously not what residents are telling us through this survey; they have a different view to the benches opposite on that one.

## **4. QUESTION TO THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL FROM COUNCILLOR MICHAEL BUKOLA**

Why did the 2012/13 target for warm, dry and safe change from the £68m predicted in the council's annual performance report in 2011/12 to £61.8m in the latest council's annual performance report?

### **RESPONSE**

The £68 million from the council plan annual performance report 2011/12 was a provisional target (provisional as 2011/12 spend was being finalised). The target was set at £63 million (£61.8 million excluding Leathermarket).

## **SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION TO THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL FROM COUNCILLOR MICHAEL BUKOLA**

Thank you Mr Mayor I am grateful to the Leader for his answer.

The answer however does not actually say why the money from warm dry and safe will be reduced. It says in his answer that £68 million was provisional, so can I ask the Leader why was this money reduced and what impact will this have on people's homes?

### **RESPONSE**

I want to thank Councillor Bukola for his supplementary question, I don't think it has any impact on the amount of work we have been able to do in the past year, it means in some cases we are driving actually more value for money out of the work we are doing and a full plan of work is delivered on time and for a slightly smaller price. What we do see is a target for £80 million next year and what I can guarantee to him and residents in

the borough is that we will deliver on our commitment to make every home warm and dry and safe by 2015/16. That is an absolute commitment which we are absolutely confident we will deliver, and I think what we have seen from last year to this year and beyond is that this work is stepping up and the pace of it is stepping up and I believe we are delivering good quality improvements to people's homes which has got to be welcome to him and all councillors who have too much case work concerning the issues of damp, warmth and safety of people's homes.

**5. QUESTION TO THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL FROM COUNCILLOR WILMA NELSON**

How many complaints have been received about leaseholder billing in 2012/13?

**RESPONSE**

It can be challenging to categorise complaints as leaseholders will often complain about several matters, which may be unrelated. However of the 195 complaints received by Specialist Housing Services, around 126 were about billing. The Revenue & Income and Service Charge Construction teams are responsible for major works and service charges and this is the main subject of the complaints they receive, often combined with service delivery issues.

<b>Specialist Housing Services</b>	<b>Apr '12</b>	<b>May '12</b>	<b>Jun '12</b>	<b>Jul '12</b>	<b>Aug '12</b>	<b>Sep '12</b>	<b>Oct '12</b>	<b>Nov '12</b>	<b>Dec '12</b>	<b>Jan '13</b>	<b>Feb '13</b>	<b>Mar '13</b>	<b>Total</b>
Home Ownership & TMI	1	1						1			1	3	7
Revenue & Income	13	11	2	5	8	2	23	14	12	19	7	9	125
Sales and Acquisitions			1	1	2		1					2	7
Service Charge Construction	5	3	4	5	3	3	6	6	3	4	2	4	48
Tenant Management Initiatives	1	2	1	1	1						1	1	8
	20	17	8	12	14	5	30	21	15	23	11	19	195

**SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION TO THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL FROM COUNCILLOR WILMA NELSON**

Leaseholders are facing a large major works invoice going into 2013 and 2014. Given the chaos in the major works programme in 2013 and 2014, how can the leaseholders of Grange, who have been paying an average of £11,000 and those in South Bermondsey who are on average paying £9,000, also those in Rotherhithe who are paying an amount of £43,000, how can they be convinced that they are getting value for money and what more than the council can do to inspire more confidence and fairness of leaseholder charges?

**RESPONSE**

I want to thank Councillor Nelson for her question.

I think with the work that Councillor Wingfield is doing with the home owners councils, we are exploring constantly issues of value for money and in particular leaseholder issues and I think one thing that has come out absolutely clearly from the housing commission report and the community consultation conversation, from that is that residents, particularly leaseholders, want a greater say and a different form of management. They want to feel greater control over what's going on with

their leasehold properties because we are now seeing many more second and third generation leasehold owners of properties in the borough.

Having said that, we as a council do more to offer our leaseholders alternative options, easier ways to pay, than any other council I think across the country; and I think particularly in the Four Squares where we have extended the period beyond our previous policy, to allow people greater time to pay some of these bills. But she is absolutely right to concentrate on value for money, and we as an administration are not complacent on this. It is really important that leaseholders see that the works being done to their properties are providing true value for money. Because they think "I can go out and get a private builder in to have the works done at half or three quarters of the price", and we have got to be satisfying them absolutely that actually what they are getting is work that is value for money, and it is worth the money they are being asked to pay for it.

**6. QUESTION TO THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL FROM COUNCILLOR TIM MCNALLY**

Why has the council reduced the target for the number of empty private homes brought back into use from 135 in 2012/13 to 100 in 2013/14?

**RESPONSE**

The cost of doing extensive improvements to private empty homes is becoming too expensive for independent freeholders to do.

Whilst the council provides grants, there is a ceiling on the maximum amount that an owner can apply for, and with the rises in building materials and associated charges outstripping the grants available.

As a result it is proving much harder to bring empty homes back into serviceable use. As a result the target was reduced to a more realistic level to reflect these pressures

**SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION TO THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL FROM COUNCILLOR TIM MCNALLY**

Thank you Mr Mayor and I would like to thank the Leader for his answer.

Given that he has reduced the target of empty homes being brought back into use by the freeholders, what plans does he have to use council's powers to purchase homes to bring them back into use, given the scandalous number of empty homes there are in the borough?

**RESPONSE**

I want to thank Councillor McNally for his supplementary question. I mean he will have seen from my answer, this is a really difficult and thorny issue to crack and whilst this is one target which has reduced slightly, I think what I am really pleased about is the target that I was talking about earlier on where we have increased the number of our council homes which we are bringing back for council tenants from 300 to 500 over the next year. We are always looking at ways in which we can bring empty homes back into use, but it is a very slow and cumbersome process and sometimes I think we are better diverting our resources where we have easier and quicker control where we can deliver homes for Southwark residents.



## 7. QUESTION TO THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL FROM COUNCILLOR ANOOD AL-SAMERAI

Please provide a full breakdown of results from the council's reputation tracker on satisfaction among residents regarding ability to influence decisions affecting their local area.

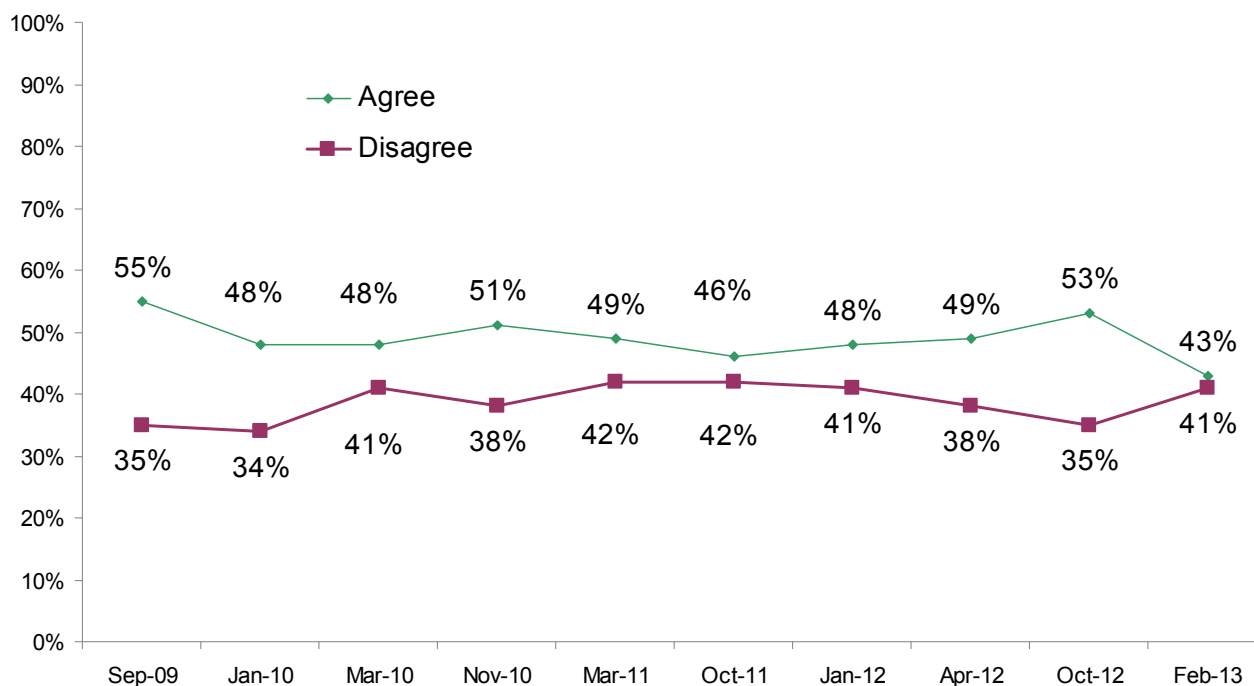
### RESPONSE

The graph below shows those who agree or disagree that they can influence decisions affecting their local area.

As the graph shows, the proportion of residents agreeing that they can influence decisions has been broadly consistent over time at around the 50% mark. The most recent result in February 2013 saw a lower proportion of residents agreeing and so we are awaiting the next tracker result to see if this is part of a new pattern or a one off set against the overall trend.

It is possible that residents' views may have been influenced by the headline changes to welfare that were prevalent in the media at the time of the survey – namely those about or affecting: bedroom tax, council tax benefit passing to local control, the scrapping of Disability Living Allowance and the welfare benefit cap

## Agreement that can influence decisions affecting local area



**Question:** Q4. Do you agree or disagree that you can influence decisions affecting your local area?

**Source:** c.400 Southwark residents, aged 16 +, interviewed face to face, between September 2009 – February 2013

## **SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR AL-SAMERAI TO THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL**

Thanks Mr Mayor, and thank you to the leader for your answer. You can blame the government and we can blame you I suppose about why satisfaction, or why residents feeling they can influence decisions has declined gradually. I would hope that all of us in this chamber would want that figure to be higher whether it had gone up or down but actually but it would be really good if we could be aiming towards 100% of residents of this borough feeling like they can influence the decision that affect their lives.

One of the problems it seems to me might be that your fairer future principles don't actually cover anything around that; so they have some laudable aims, but nothing in there is about actually giving people a say over the decisions that the council makes. So I wonder if the Leader might commit to spending a bit of time thinking about how we could as a council do that better, whether there is central decision making that could be devolved – we can argue about community councils till kingdom come – but whether there are other ways where we are making decisions at the centre that could actually be devolved to the communities that they really affect?

### **RESPONSE**

I would like to thank Councillor Al-Samerai for her supplementary question.

She raises some very important issues there; I would be amazed if we ever got to 100%, that would be back to the good old days of the Liberal Democrats and satisfaction with repairs, which would be pretty unreliable, but she raises an important issue.

I think a really good example of community engagement and influencing decision making we have seen through the community conversations on the housing commission and where that has gone, and actually rather than standing and forcing people to come to meetings, going to where people are and talking to them in their communities, at their shopping centres, in their parks, in their squares, about the issues that affect them. That is a record response that we have had, and we have seen that in the past. Where we involve people in budget making back in 2011 and went out to the community and spoke to people at that time 2010/11, we saw a spike in people's appreciation of their ability to influence decisions. So this does go in spikes in particular times and I would not be surprised if we do see an improvement on the back of the community conversations.

We have really improved community engagement, I think as a council, over the last twelve months and I think with rolling out community conversations, not just on the housing commission but on other issues as well, we are setting again a national bench mark on how this things should be done. And really, I hope, empowering people to feel that their views have been taken on board. And certainly residents' views are going to be reflected when cabinet considers the Housing Commission report next week, one of the most important reports and decisions that we as an administration will be taking during our four years in office.