

SOUTHWARK COUNCIL

COUNCIL ASSEMBLY

(ORDINARY MEETING)

WEDNESDAY 22 JANUARY 2014

URGENT QUESTION

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

Who was on the panel which made the final decision about the name of the new leisure centre at Elephant & Castle? For what reason was 'The Castle' chosen as the new name for the centre over other names receiving more votes in the public poll asking residents what they wanted it to be called?

RESPONSE

I am thrilled that after years of dither and delay from the Liberal Democrats, building at the Elephant and Castle is now underway and at the heart of this is a new state of the art leisure centre. The panel members were:

- Councillor Peter John – Leader of the Council
- Councillor Fiona Colley – Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Corporate Strategy
- Councillor Veronica Ward – Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure, Sport, and Volunteering.

There were a number of officers at the meeting who also provided advice.

The panel considered the results of an online poll which invited members of the public to give their suggestions for the name of the new leisure centre – the details of this were clearly explained at the time that "All the preferences received by the deadline will then be put forward to a panel at Southwark Council for a final decision." The top three shortlisted names and votes were:

- Circuit – 68 votes
- Chaplin – 51 votes
- Castle – 49 votes.

Most of the votes for 'Circuit' came from the same Hackney registered IP address which:

- Voted 7 times in a 10 minute period on 2 December 2013
- Voted 46 times over 45 minutes and a further 4 times later in the day on 3 December 2013
- Voted 5 times in a 5 minute period on 4 December 2013.

We considered that it would not be democratic for this to win as it was clearly one person voting numerous times.

As 'Chaplin' and 'Castle' were two votes apart we considered both. In addition to 49 votes for the castle there were many other votes for names which included reference to the name "Elephant and Castle". We therefore chose 'The Castle' in line with what the poll showed us and to ensure the castle element of the name remained prominent alongside 1 The Elephant. There are also many other places in the borough with 'Chaplin' in the title.

I am surprised that a party which purports to be democratic think that one person voting lots of time should determine the outcome of an election. It is also shameful to then compare a decision to discount one person voting numerous times as 'North Korean'. North Korea is one of the most violent and brutal dictatorships in the world and I would ask the leader of the opposition to apologise for this misjudged comparison.

People at the Elephant and Castle are excited about a new leisure centre which simply would not have happened had the Liberal Democrats been allowed to carry on with their dither and delay. I am sure that like me, they will be shocked that rather than getting behind improvements to local leisure facilities, the Liberal Democrats are arguing for the council to rename a centre based on the views of one person sitting at a computer in Hackney!