

APPENDIX 2

SOUTHWARK COUNCIL

COUNCIL ASSEMBLY

(ORDINARY MEETING)

WEDNESDAY 16 JULY 2014

URGENT QUESTION

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

Will he confirm that he will be agreeing an increase in the minimum value for which council homes are considered for sale from £300,000 up to £500,000?

RESPONSE

Cabinet will be reviewing our void disposal strategy on 22 July 2014.

The report recommends that this threshold is increased from £300,000 to £500,000 to reflect that change in property values and the requirements of the housing investment programme.

Whilst I cannot predetermine the decision that cabinet will make, I very much welcome the report and the recommendations within it.

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

Yes I do thank you very much Mr Mayor and thank you to the leader for his answer and thank you very much to the leader for actually looking at this. I can't say how delighted I am that you're talking about increasing the threshold. As you know it's something we've gone on about a lot but personally it has - now I'm being serious and genuine here - personally it has been something that really has frustrated me; you might have been able to tell; over the years when I have seen homes in Lorimore Road or Chatham Street auctioned off and there are families next door desperate and overcrowded, so I just want to thank the leader very much for looking at increasing the threshold and I hope it goes through next week. One of the other things that was in our manifesto around the same issue was about, and I'm just going to read it, looking at the possibility of offering people on the list the opportunity to invest in some of those homes to do them up rather than sell them off, so the same sort of homes we're talking about, the same sort of voids. If there are ones where people could actually do them up, maybe for a reduction in rent rather than auction those off to developers, is that something that could also be considered as part of that cabinet report next week please?

RESPONSE

Well I will thank Councillor Al-Samerai for her supplemental question welcoming the recommendations in the report. I can't pre-determine what the cabinet will decide next week but you can see the recommendation for my great aspirations. I hear what she

says on that, I think it's wrong to characterise it in every case properties that are sold at auction by the council are simply sold to developers and investors; they can be sold as family homes and they are providing family homes. I think it's an interesting proposition that she put forward. I think we do have to look at it in every way which we can ensure that there is a full range of housing for people of all incomes and all backgrounds in our borough – that is, I'm sure, everybody's aspiration in this chamber. So it's certainly something we will take away and look at. It can't be in next week's report because the report is written but we will look at all options going forward.

Can I just also take this opportunity to mention a great officer and servant of this council who is leaving – retiring; Maurice Soden who has been responsible for a lot of the work that we have done developing our proposed housing commission proposals and working on 'warm, dry and safe' and many members will be familiar with his work. And Maurice is a great loss to this council but he has been great servant over 22 years in total to this council and I want to pass on my good wishes to him for his retirement and I'm sure the council assembly will join me also.

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

Thanks Mr Mayor, I would also echo that about Maurice actually; the way he always gives completely up to date facts and figures about council house figures and all of the stuff that we have debated at length has been really helpful on both sides of the chamber. We probably ought to thank Romi Bowen who is also retiring and having had the debate about children and young people this evening I think from all sides of the chamber and I know my colleagues who served on the cabinet particularly appreciated working with her.

I suppose the other supplemental that I wanted to ask which probably is a bit more controversial and party political but ties in a bit with what we talked about, about the housing commission earlier – just to remind you really that the housing commission never mentioned 11,000 council homes and that's why we thought it was such a waste of money because you cannot get recommendations but it didn't – so the 11,000 council homes figure is still a bit of a mystery and today, interestingly, is the year's anniversary for when 10,000 homes were announced over 25 years. That was a cabinet announcement on the 16 July 2013. The very same day there was a press release at which 10,000 council homes over 30 years in announced. So even on that day we didn't know whether it was 25 or 30 years. Then the report talked about over 25 years but then an appendix talked about 11,000 homes over 30 years. Just last week one of the councillors tweeted that it was always what we stated about 2043. It just seems to me that they have got themselves in a real muddle about these figures. When was it decided that it went from 10,000 to 11,000 and when was it decided that it went from 25 to 30 years and I think it is important Mr Mayor because there was an election based on a promise and actually that seems to have changed within weeks – we are now talking about 2043 so when was that decided Mr Mayor?

RESPONSE

Can I echo everything that Councillor Al-Samerai said about Romi Bowen who also was one of the very best officers to serve this council as a senior officer and she will be sorely, sorely missed. Now let me just go through the chronology. In 2012 the cabinet committed to building 1,000 new council homes. At that time that was the largest commitment any council had made to council house building in this country, 1,000 and that was funded through a method which is still opposed, I think, by the Liberal Democrats which is taking in-lieu payments from developments in the north of the

borough largely. In 2013, this time last year, having received the housing commission report, having gone out to consult and talk to the public about the recommendations of the housing commission report, the cabinet took the decision to commit to a further 10,000 – so there were 1,000 homes to be delivered between 2012 and 2020, that's 1,000, and then you add 10,000 to 1,000 and you come to 11,000 and Councillor Al-Samerai is absolutely right that the housing commission didn't talk about 11,000 or even 10,000, I think they spoke about 9,000. They were slightly less ambitious than our ultimate objective but they demonstrated through their report that it was possible for us as a council - we had the financial wherewithal if we retained our stock - to build more homes. So therefore 1,000 plus 10,000 over a 30 year period from 2013 takes us to 2043. So I don't think there is any difficulty or uncertainty in that: 2043, 11,000 homes delivered. But I think more importantly, and people press us on the milestones for this, we will deliver 1,500 new council homes during the course of this administration and will be judged absolutely on that. So I don't think there is any equivocation, I don't think there is any uncertainty: 11,000 council homes. As I have said before in this chamber, it is the largest commitment; 1,000 is big, 11,000 is huge. The largest commitment of any council in this country. If it was easy, everyone would have made the same commitment; they have not. It is only Southwark. So come on Liberal Democrats, start applauding what we're doing in our borough for council housing and stop talking it down.