

COUNCIL ASSEMBLY

(COUNCIL TAX SETTING MEETING)

WEDNESDAY 25 FEBRUARY 2015

QUESTIONS ON REPORTS: 2.1 – COUNCIL PLAN 2014/2015 – 2017/2018

**1. QUESTION TO THE LEADER FROM COUNCILLOR HELEN HAYES**

Is the leader confident that the council will be able to deliver on the commitments set out in the council plan in the context of a £20.4m government cut to the council's spending power this year, with further cuts likely in future years?

**RESPONSE**

Yes, I am confident that we will deliver our plans. We knew the Conservative/Liberal Democrat government would continue to disproportionately hit the councils with the highest need and this was detailed in our manifesto. From this we developed the council plan so that the commitments that the Labour councillors made to residents in the election now become the policy of this council, and are policies that we are confident that we can deliver.

We also know that while a future Labour government will continue to make cuts to public spending, they will look again at the funding formula which has seen an increase in spending in the affluent towns of the home counties, whilst taking an axe to the areas most in need.

I had hoped that having a government Minister as a local MP, would mean that we had someone in government fighting for a fair deal for Southwark. Sadly, he has systematically failed to stand up for Southwark. The only way to make sure that people in Southwark get a fairer deal from government is to elect three MPs who will stand up for local people: Harriet Harman, Helen Hayes and Neil Coyle.

Despite this, we have not let Liberal Democrat/Conservative cuts, cut our ambition. We are presenting a council plan which is the most bold and radical in London. It will make us the first council in the country to offer free swimming and gyms to all residents, to build 11,000 new council homes and achieve some of the best school results in the country.

**SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION TO THE LEADER FROM COUNCILLOR HELEN HAYES**

Thank you Mr Mayor. I would like to thank the leader for his answer and I welcome the leader's assurance that the council will continue to deliver on its ambitious commitments despite the government's cuts to our budget. Unlike this government, Labour has pledged to ensure that local government funding is distributed fairly on the basis of need. Does the leader agree that a fairer funding settlement would enable Southwark to do even more to deliver for our residents?

## **RESPONSE**

I want to thank Councillor Hayes for her supplemental question. Yes I do agree. I think it's quite frankly outrageous that Southwark has lost something like £155 per household this year from government funding whereas other Tory boroughs in Surrey are net gainers per household in terms of the amount of money received from government. I can't see any sense in that and I can't see there's any fairness in that and I really am amazed when one of the local MPs argues that it is fair that Southwark should lose when rich boroughs and rich districts and rich counties should receive more. I don't know what planet he's living on but it won't be as MP for Bermondsey and old Southwark after May 7.

## **2. QUESTION TO THE LEADER FROM COUNCILLOR NEIL COYLE**

Can the leader give an update on the council's campaign to extend the Bakerloo line to Camberwell and the Old Kent Road?

## **RESPONSE**

Two years ago, I got agreement from the Mayor of London to recognise the potential for the Bakerloo Line Extension to deliver real growth in homes and jobs in Southwark. Since then it has become a political priority for the Mayor and last week, the Chancellor also joined in his support.

Last week the Chancellor and the Mayor set out the "Long Term Economic Plan for London". The Bakerloo Line extension has now become one of the government's top two priorities for potential major capital infrastructure spending together with Crossrail 2. The Chancellor challenged the Mayor and TfL to bring back detailed costings and proposals for the BLE ahead of the next Comprehensive Spending Review which will take place after the election. We already know that some major work has already been undertaken in this regard, so it really looks as if the Bakerloo Line Extension has now found its way into longer-term treasury thinking.

We will continue to make the case for the Bakerloo line to run along a dual line in Southwark – along the Old Kent Road and through Camberwell and Peckham. I am confident that we can demonstrate the overwhelming case for both of these routes as well as a commitment to find a funding solution for their delivery.

This is great news for Southwark and our campaign, alongside the community to extend the Bakerloo line.

## **SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION TO THE LEADER FROM COUNCILLOR NEIL COYLE**

Thank you Mr Mayor and I thank the leader for the answer. Just a quick follow-up question Mr Mayor. What does the latest announcement mean for Southwark Labour's campaign to extend the Bakerloo line and how does the leader intend to keep putting pressure on the Mayor and the government for the Bakerloo line extension?

## **RESPONSE**

I want to thank Councillor Coyle for his supplemental question and of course whereas Simon Hughes will cease being MP on May 7, I am confident that Neil

Coyle will start serving our community as Member of Parliament for Bermondsey and Old Southwark on that day, and I'm sure one of the first issues that he will take into government with him is our proposals to have the Bakerloo line extended further through Southwark both along the Old Kent Road and through Camberwell and Peckham, and I think what I really want to draw to his attention is the fact that when Labour and when this administration run a campaign, we deliver on it, we keep our pledges and we deliver on it and we can date back the current Chancellor's commitment to the Bakerloo line extension back to the conversation I had with Boris Johnson two years ago. That is where this became a political priority for London and now it is a political priority for our country in the Treasury and that is good news for Southwark. We will carry on doing exactly what we have been doing delivering on our promises for the people of our borough, delivering a Bakerloo line extension which will mean completely new transport solutions and a completely changed public transport atmosphere to people of our borough and I hope and I'm confident that he will be part of the government delivering that for us.

### **3. QUESTION TO THE LEADER FROM COUNCILLOR PAUL FLEMING**

How will the leader ensure that the council's ambitious house building programme enables communities to stay together and that local people benefit from regeneration of their local area?

#### **RESPONSE**

The council has committed to build 1,500 new council homes by 2018. Many of these homes will be built on underutilised land on housing estates. In order for local residents to directly benefit from these new homes the council introduced a local lettings policy which will allocate 50% of these new homes to those with a housing need on that estate. This will enable the elderly to downsize into a brand new home which meets their need as well as freeing up their existing home for reallocation. Others with a housing need like over crowding will also be a priority when allocating these high quality new homes. This will help give an additional housing option for those wishing to stay within their local community. Contractors working on the delivery of new homes will also have to provide local labour opportunities to enable local people to benefit from apprenticeships and construction jobs.

Regeneration provides a broad spectrum of benefits to all local residents existing and new. These include jobs, new homes, investment in public facilities like leisure centres, libraries, schools and public spaces as well as new homes and public transport improvements.

#### **SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION TO THE LEADER FROM COUNCILLOR PAUL FLEMING**

Thank you Mr Mayor. The Thatcherite coalition government of which local MP Simon Hughes is an unfortunate member has introduced an exemption for housing developers reducing affordable housing contributions which will mean that new developments in Southwark could offer only a fraction of potential affordable housing which has been usually required to this point. Does the leader agree that this policy will have a devastating impact on affordable housing in Southwark if we are unable to do anything about it as a Council?

## **RESPONSE**

I want to thank Councillor Fleming for his supplemental question. I do agree with him. I think Southwark has an incredibly proud record in recent years of delivering the most affordable housing in our borough, of any borough bar-none in London, and we have the most ambitious plan to deliver council housing in our borough over the next four years and beyond when we deliver 11,000 new council homes but I think it would be ridiculous actually if this government proposal went ahead. It would really stand in the way of us delivering homes for people from all backgrounds in our community; if we're going to keep our communities together we need housing of all tenure, of all costs, of all variety and you can only do that if affordable housing is part of that mix and part of that delivery, so I think the government have got it wrong on this, they are a government that's running out of ideas, running out of steam, making the wrong decisions and we look forward to booting them out on May 7.

### **4. QUESTION TO THE LEADER FROM COUNCILLOR CHRIS GONDE**

The Liberal Democrats have suggested that the council's free swimming and gyms policy should not be a priority for public health, just as they did with free healthy school meals. Can the leader assure me that free swimming and gym use will remain a top priority for this administration?

## **RESPONSE**

Councillor Gonde is quite right to highlight the Liberal Democrats' consistent opposition to Free Healthy School Meals. However, when they saw what a success it was, and when their own national party was about to adopt a similar policy to the one they had so vehemently opposed, they performed a u-turn and claimed to back it.

With free swimming and gyms we can expect more of the same. Liberal Democrat Councillors oppose a policy and then when we make it a success claim that they support it.

I am happy to assure Councillor Gonde that free swim and gyms remains a top priority for this administration. This is a phased process, and we are starting off by targeting particular groups, before rolling out a universal offer. As a first step, cabinet agreed to begin a pilot offer in spring this year. We have agreed:

- 18s and under free swim – all day Friday; afternoons from 2pm until 6pm on Saturday and Sunday
- 16 to 18 years free gym – all day Friday; afternoons from 2pm until 6pm on Saturday and Sunday
- 14 to 16 years free youth gym sessions – at selected times on Friday evenings, Saturday and Sunday afternoons
- Free 'Silver Sessions' – access to the 60+ sessions all week
- Free access to The Castle for those with disabilities (from Summer 2015) – all day Friday, afternoons from 2pm until close on Saturday and Sunday
- Free gym and swim for referrals to key healthy lifestyle schemes (from April 2016)
  - o MEND family weight management programmed
  - o GP physical activity referral scheme including Kickstart
  - o NHS Health Checks fitness passport scheme.

Cabinet also agreed for the next stage of the roll out to be in June next year. We have asked officers to explore free access to gym and swimming for all residents – all day Friday; afternoons on Saturday and Sunday. We will continue to be ambitious to roll this out as far and as fast as we can to give people access to gyms and swimming improving health in our borough.

**SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION TO THE LEADER FROM COUNCILLOR CHRIS GONDE**

Thank you very much Mr Mayor and thank you Leader for your answer. In previous years the Liberal Democrats have always proposed savings to the budget by cutting funding for free school meals until their party nationally decided to do a u-turn on this. Now does the Leader agree that despite government cuts to Southwark's budget it is important that the council invests in giving residents an opportunity to lead healthy and active lives?

**RESPONSE**

I want to thank Councillor Gonde for his supplemental question. He is absolutely right, we have the ridiculous position of the Liberal Democrats complaining actively across Southwark against free healthy school meals until Nick Clegg decided that actually its quite a good idea and can make a real difference, probably the most embarrassing u-turn that an opposition has had to make in recent times and in fairness they've been a bit more cautious about free swimming and gym use, they haven't vehemently opposed it yet just for fear that Nick Clegg will decide actually its a really really good idea but you know its reassuring, if the Liberal Democrats normally oppose something, its normally because you're doing the right thing and you're improving the lives of our community and our residents so we'll carry on, we'll deliver this free swimming and gym pledge Mr Mayor and I'm very proud of it being an absolute centrepiece of our council plan going forward.

**5. QUESTION TO THE LEADER FROM COUNCILLOR JAMES OKOSUN**

Can the leader update us on progress with the council's Childcare Commission and when the outcomes will be published?

**RESPONSE**

The report has now been completed and is due to be published next week.

**SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION TO THE LEADER FROM COUNCILLOR JAMES OKOSUN**

Thank you Mr Mayor and I thank the Leader for his answer to my question. I would like to ask a supplementary question as well. Could the leader please explain why the council plan makes no mention of how or when any recommendations from the Childcare Commission will be implemented or how they will be funded in the budget?

**RESPONSE**

I want to thank Councillor Okosun for his supplemental question. Well until the Commission presents its report, we don't know what's going to be in it and we don't know what funding might be required, it's as simple as that so it would be a

bit premature to put into a council plan proposals we don't know what exactly they will be or what funding will be required, so I think it really is a question of you commission a report, you wait for a commission to report and then you act on the recommendations of that commission. You don't commission a report, make up its findings including the council plan and then wait for the commission to report its findings, that would be completely the wrong way round so I think it would be a question of wait and see what the Commission says next week and responding then.

## **6. QUESTION TO THE LEADER FROM COUNCILLOR ADELE MORRIS**

Can the leader update us on work identifying site options for a new secondary school in the north of the borough, as mentioned in the Quarter 2 2014/2015 commentary on BSL7?

### **RESPONSE**

The council has made clear that it wishes to see a new secondary school on the Dulwich Hospital site. Officers now believe that the site has space for up to 8FE (1200 plus a 400 place sixth form). In October 2014, the cabinet agreed that the site should be included in the new Southwark Plan as the council's priority for providing secondary school places. The site is a short walk from East Dulwich Station and offers excellent transport links throughout the borough.

The council expects to hear the results of the Education Funding Agency (EFA) interviews with potential sponsors in March. We also understand that heads of terms have been agreed with NHS Property to sell the site, alongside the re-provision of new health facilities on the same site.

In terms of sites to the north of the borough, the Mayor of London has recently indicated that the Fire Training site on Southwark Bridge Road should be sold to the EFA for a new school. I strongly support using this site for a school.

There is one other potential site, which is currently the subject of confidential commercial discussions with the EFA. Officers are also opening discussions with all borough secondary schools to explore opportunities for expansion. I have asked officers to prepare a comprehensive report on secondary school places for consideration by cabinet in July 2015, so I will be able to give a further update in the summer.

### **SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION TO THE LEADER FROM COUNCILLOR ADELE MORRIS**

Thank you Mr Mayor. I have to say I thought perhaps the Leader had got a little bit confused when I started reading his answer about a new secondary school in the north of the borough and he talked about Dulwich but he does go on to talk about the others. In terms of the fire station and the on-going question about whether or not that could become a secondary school, I just wonder if you could tell us what your thoughts are on the dispute that's going on obviously with the Labour members on LFEPA at the moment who are suggesting that it's not possible to do this and it seems to be that we've got you very helpfully supporting the school and them very unhelpfully not, so how do you think you can help to resolve that?

## **RESPONSE**

I want to thank Councillor Morris for her supplemental question. I have been absolutely clear since I was first asked about this whether this is an appropriate place for a school but it is an absolutely appropriate place for a school and I think it could be a fantastic location with a fantastic educational offer for residents of North West Southwark. I've had conversations with local members of LFEPA, I'm told and I think they're simply wrong on this and they need really to square the circle to make sure that this works. I think that the EFA, let me just say this the EFA are getting closer I think to making an offer which LFEPA doesn't believe in any event would put them in an invidious position of having to accept a much lower offer so I think the figures are coming closer together. I think it always has been about the figures quite frankly, the Labour members of LFEPA wanting to protect the fire authority and the fire authority's budget quite rightly at a time of cuts by the Mayor but at the end of the day it is for the Mayor to justify the cuts he's making to LFEPA and other public services in London, its for the Mayor to make sure its his budget which adds up and is not necessarily for Labour LFEPA members to worry too much about that. This is the Mayor's responsibility at the end of the day and nobody should forget it's the Mayor's responsibility to make sure that there is sufficient capital and revenue in the fire service budget to make things work but I am absolutely clear and this administration is absolutely clear - we want to see a secondary school on this site, we welcome these proposals and I hope there will be an announcement shortly that a school will come to that site.

### **7. QUESTION TO THE LEADER FROM COUNCILLOR DAVID NOAKES**

Can the leader explain why there are no commitments or milestones in the council plan on reducing health inequalities caused by air pollution, obesity, consumption of alcohol/illegal drugs, or sexually transmitted infections?

## **RESPONSE**

The Council Plan does not contain all the business of the council. Measuring impact on health inequalities is the responsibility of the Health and Wellbeing Board as success in this area requires a multi-agency approach and not just Southwark Council working in isolation. As Chair of the Health and Wellbeing Board, I have focused the work into a few areas to ensure that in those, all agencies are working together to achieve real outcomes for people in the borough.

Tackling health inequalities is the responsibility of almost every part of the council. Health and wellbeing are influenced by social and environmental determinants, income, employment, health behaviour and health services. The Council Plan reflects the approach taken in the Health and Wellbeing Strategy which is to develop a public health perspective to mainstreaming services so that within the broader headings of the Council Plan there will be specific public health outcomes.

### **SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION TO THE LEADER FROM COUNCILLOR DAVID NOAKES**

I thank the leader for the council for his response but can I press him again if he really does feel that public health and health inequalities has the priority and weight that it should have in the council plan bearing in mind that the council does have the lead responsibility in this important area.

## **RESPONSE**

I want to thank Council Noakes for his supplemental question. I think it's there, I think it's absolutely clearly there, I think we have been absolutely serious in saying that public health, since it came back to us nearly two years ago, is an integral part of what we do and I think it does absolutely ring out through the pledges that we have made and the plan that is set out within our council plan. I mean if you just think about housing, so many of the health inequality issues in our borough come about because of poor quality housing and poor housing conditions, both in the private rented sector and within our own stock so what we're doing to tackle rogue private sector landlords, what we're doing to make every council home warm, dry and safe and then following on with new kitchens and bathrooms for our tenanted properties, that will have as big an impact I think on improving the public health of the residents of our borough as anything as any particular drug or medical step that could be taken.

Now I don't lose sight of what he says in his question about other indicators and those other indicators continue to be reported to council, continue to be reported in to the health and wellbeing board but I think that this is a council plan where public health and the importance of public health really rings out and is front and centre and we will never lose sight of that. We will never lose sight of the other health indicators that he has questioned about, they are picked up elsewhere within the council's business, we will acknowledge the importance and their seriousness but as I say, I think this is a council which has demonstrated time and time again over the last two years how important, the importance to give to public health.