

Councillor Morris' Written Answers

(1) What percentage of Southwark Council staff have completed Equalities & Diversity Training?

As Executive Member for Citizenship, Equalities and Communities I consider that the most important issue for Council staff is their understanding of equalities and human rights and how they apply it to their work.

To date 36% of all employees have received equality and diversity training through a range of learning and development interventions. A large percentage of these are managers, staff in front line services and new starters.

In addition the e-learning approach was used between 2005 – 2006 and covered the Race Relations Amendment Act. This was made available to all employees and 2810 people participated in this programme.

(2) What work is the Council currently undertaking to promote equalities and diversity in the community?

The Council undertakes a wide range of activities and events that aim to promote equalities and diversity and this involves working across Council departments, and through the voluntary sector. This includes:

- Activities funded through the main voluntary sector grants programme, working with our partners in the community and voluntary sector that bring our communities together.
- Working with the Active Citizens' Hub, who bring people together to learn how to understand the system and be better able to access Council and other services.
- Activities aimed at financial inclusion work that provide advice services, support with debt etc.
- Work with communities of interest groups to capacity build them, so that they are able to respond to the needs of the communities they serve in a sustainable way.
- Support for events and activities that are about celebrating identities and understanding other cultures.
- Action Research training for local communities to identify their own needs.
- Working with faith communities to help them to understand the planning agenda and requirements – working with the planning department to help them to understand diversity of faith communities and their needs.
- Facilitating people's engagement with the following funds:
 - Cleaner Greener Safer
 - Community Council Fund
 - Youth Opportunities Fund
 - Youth Capital Fund
 - Tenants' Fund
 - Joint Security Initiative
- Working with Minority Ethnic groups to increase their attendance at Community Councils.
- Community Council Funded projects such as St George's Day, intergenerational projects, inter-ability fishing, gardening and sailing.
- A programme of activities targeted at Preventing Violent Extremism (Safer Communities).

- London's Week of Peace, and faith awareness tours for 20 Safer Neighbourhood Officers which toured three mosques in the borough.
- Face To Faith on Oct 29, 2008, at St. Ethelburga's Centre for Reconciliation and Peace, London, gathered over 100 Muslim and non-Muslim residents for an evening of interfaith dialogue and intercultural music, storytelling & food.
- Commissioned South City Radio as part of supporting vulnerable young people against radicalisation which involved young Muslims talking about issues relating to religious extremism.
- Commissioned - Understanding Islam Training; for LBS staff and partners
- Area based working that targets particular communities for example working class communities in Bermondsey and Rotherhithe.
- Working in partnership with the police to train new recruits on equality and diversity. Although this is not direct work with the community it supports cohesion efforts within the communities of Southwark.
- Training teachers and school governors in equality and diversity issues to help them understand the communities of Southwark and their needs.
- Equality and diversity training for voluntary and community sector organisations, both through CAS and directly to staff and board members of individual organisations. We hope to continue this by supporting CAS to develop their capacity to take on the training role.
- The Equality and Diversity Panel (EDP), which is comprised of representatives from each of the equality strands, comments on and suggests improvements to all new equality impact assessments.

These activities are constantly under review to make sure they are effective and make a difference to our communities.

(3) Are you satisfied with the nature and scope of Equalities Impact Assessments undertaken by the council before it takes major decisions?

The main aim of carrying out equality impact assessments (EqIAs) is to improve service delivery so as to meet the needs of Southwark's diverse communities. The equalities scheme 2005-2008 set out a programme of equality impact assessments to be carried out over that three year period. Evaluation of the scheme demonstrated that 41 EqIAs had been completed, with a further 28 ongoing at the end of March 2008.

A new equalities and human rights scheme was agreed by the Council's Executive for 2008-11. Under the new scheme, EqIAs continue to be undertaken on all new and existing policies, strategies, plans, functions and services on a three yearly rolling programme. The scope of each impact assessment is to consider the impact on six areas of potential inequality: race, disability and gender (in order to comply with our statutory duties) and, in addition, age, belief or no belief and sexual orientation.

EqIAs have been undertaken by the Council since 2003. Most major impacts have already been identified and change implemented. Current EqIAs continue to deliver incremental improvements and respond pro-actively to demographic and other external changes.

(4) Can the executive member outline her thoughts on how she thinks community councils should develop in the future, in terms of roles, responsibilities and operation?

The Community Councils are a vital part of the Council's response to the principles of devolved decision making and community engagement and the new challenges of our duty to involve.

In terms of the operation of the Community Councils there is a clear commitment to maintain the distinct nature of each community council as a reflection of their local communities. The recently agreed community council protocol restates the flexibility needed and the key roles of members in making community councils meaningful in their areas.

Work has continued to identify links with the Youth Participation Framework and the need to have a working relationship with the Youth Community Councils.

Changes in the management arrangements within the Communities, Law & Governance department will provide an opportunity to better support engagement at community council level. We have recently seen the introduction of community council decision making over highways repair and street lighting in addition to the on-going CGS capital programme and the Community Council Fund revenue programme.

Roles and responsibilities are to an extent governed by the legislative framework (for example we have seen the necessary withdrawal of the licensing function from community councils) and the capacity to engage in other business. Community councils should continue to be a focal point for community consultation on matters that are relevant locally - the new protocol goes some way to making this clearer.

Each Community Council has drafted an Improvement Plan and these have been discussed at individual meetings with Chairs and Vice Chairs. Examples of improvements include better formats such as workshops; others have themed meetings; and some have a specific meeting on issues to attract younger people. Cleaner, Greener, Safer project reports were trialled in Dulwich and are being rolled out to all community councils. Additional information on agreed schemes is now provided on our website including before and after stories. A workshop for Chairs and Vice Chairs was held to discuss community leadership. These discussions identified both short and longer term opportunities for improvement and some Community Councils have introduced a Forward Plan.

The Executive recently discussed the new duty to involve and ideas for improving Community Councils that were proposed included an annual review highlighting some of the achievements; greater time for community groups who have been awarded funds from Community Council to report back to meetings; more informality and changes to venues within areas that reflect the various neighbourhoods in a Community Council area.

(5) Given the relatively low level of attendance of the public at community council meetings and the high number of council officers who attend them, how can the council redress this balance to get better value for money?

Council Officers often attend Community Councils at the request of the Chair to respond to questions raised by the Community or by members of the Community Council.

One of the key aims of the reorganisation of the Communities, Law & Governance department is to improve the support that Community Councils receive and to provide the capacity to begin to engage more people with the Community Councils both through the meetings and by widening their reach into the community beyond the meetings.

We have been working with the Community Council Chairs on forward plans and better co-ordination of agenda planning which will assist in providing the right officers at the right meetings.

Value would improve with increased attendance and this has to be addressed through community engagement channels within the Communities, Law & Governance department. Themed meetings, joint meetings and the use of community driven working groups provide greater opportunity for real public involvement.

Value is also to an extent hidden by only considering meetings - equally important is the work of both members and officers outside of meetings in addressing local issues. We are also piloting more detailed briefings for ward Councillors in two Community Council areas to improve their capacity to consider issues of local relevance and make better use of officer time.

(6) For Cleaner Greener Safer money, some proposals in the last round were put forward to a number of community councils for a proportion of the funds required for a project, potentially creating issues for those projects going ahead where some community councils agreed and others rejected the bid. How can we better co-ordinate processes between community councils around such proposals?

Over the lifetime of CGS a number of projects have arisen where contributions have been sought from all or a combination of Community Councils, for example investment in sporting facilities in parks which support a wider area. Generally officers will raise such projects at an early stage with the Chairs of Community Councils to ensure a coordinated approach. However, I believe it should remain at the discretion of the individual Community Council chairs as to whether or not they wish to use their funding in this way.

(7) In her recent interview with the Southwark News, she said that she was proud of the introduction this year of the Highways and Lighting Budget at community councils. How well has this operated in its first year?

The Highways Capital Scheme was run for the first time this year in each Community Council area. The proposal was taken to ward Councillors and the Community Councils in June/ July, feasibility was completed at the end of August/ early September for all areas and the majority of decisions have been announced in September's round of Community Council meetings as anticipated. Further decisions will be made in October.

Each Community Council followed their own process with guidance from the Chair and the appropriate officers. Suggestions were collected in a workshop format from attendees at the Community Council and also through written suggestions to the highways and lighting team. The process and how it operated in its first year will be evaluated across the eight Community Council areas to inform and improve on the process next year. Overall the scheme ran well in its first year and will, with the evaluation, lead to a further improvement in how the scheme operates next year.

The current position is as follows:

Community Council	Amount Allocated		% agreed to date		Roads receiving surface treatment	Roads receiving lighting improvements
	(£k's)		Surfacing	Lighting		
	Surfacing	Lighting	Surfacing	Lighting		
Bermondsey	100	75	100	100	1	3
Borough & Bankside	100	75	100	100	2	8
Camberwell	100	75	100	100	2	4
Dulwich	100	75	33	66	13	2
Nunhead & Peckham Rye	100	75	100	100	2	3
Peckham	100	75	0	0	0	0
Rotherhithe	100	75	100	100	2	11
Walworth	100	75	100	33	1	1
Total	800	600	79%	75%	23	32

(9) Southwark spends about 50 percent of grant to SHRREB. Can you describe their role in Southwark? What are the strengths, weaknesses and challenges facing this organisation.

(10) For a considerable period of time you were engaged in auditing community halls in the borough. What is the current position on that?

Regeneration and Neighbourhoods department has undertaken an extensive review of Voluntary & Community Sector (VCS) premises in its ownership. This covered a portfolio of 70+ assets which included:

- Properties whose use is restricted to community use through legal implements such as covenants;
- Properties which the council has historically reserved for use by the VCS which are let to a single VCS tenant;
- Properties which the council has historically reserved of use by the VCS which are divided into units let to multiple tenants;
- Properties held in the commercial estate which have been let to VCS tenants.

The starting point for the review was a thorough audit of information about the buildings concerned to establish the baseline position. This looked at occupation arrangements, landlord and tenant obligations, building condition, and compliance with legislation.

The culmination of this initial phase of work has been the production of a management strategy for VCS assets, which Executive approved in May 2009. The strategy sets a framework for the future approach to the management of the VCS estate, and is now being implemented through:

- consolidation of properties and budgets in to a single centrally managed portfolio under the management of a VCS Portfolio Manager (now in post);
- formulation of an affordable and sustainable asset investment plan for the portfolio. This will be formalised in a detailed asset management plan for VCS premises once the centralisation is fully completed and interactions with other asset-significant strategies (localities, tenants' and residents' halls, etc.) have been quantified;
- a programme to ensure that all occupiers are complying with the terms of occupation agreements, all occupations are regularised, and rent reviews, lease renewals etc are undertaken;
- reinforcing communication and information arrangements concerning the VCS estate and matters relevant to its effective management; and,
- putting in place a performance management system for the estate and its management linked back to the corporate asset .

The consolidation of properties into one portfolio means that the Property section acts as management agent and Community Engagement as the client. Property now has a VCS portfolio manager working and the Community Engagement reorganisation within the Communities, Law & Governance department will create a VCS property liaison officer to act as the client officer for this arrangement.

(11) How can larger communities like the Sierra Leone and Latin American Communities benefit in future of having a community centre.

We recognise and value the contribution made to Southwark by all our different communities. However, as illustrated above, we now have a transparent system for allocating buildings to community groups and we would welcome an approach from either of these communities if they have identified a suitable property on our property list which they're interested in renting from us. That said, in Southwark we are particularly keen to maximise both the use of the limited facilities that are available and the opportunity for groups to learn from each other through partnership working.

(12) What plans do you have for ensuring that youth community councils link in with the main community councils?

The Chairs of the Community Councils have been asked to consider how the relationship between Community Councils and Youth Community Councils will develop to give a formal voice to young people in influencing the decisions of the Community Councils. Options presented to the Chairs at their recent joint meeting by Cllr Rajan included for example:

- Community Councils to nominate a member and resident 'young person' champion to go to meetings of their respective Youth Community Councils to discuss with them for example how the Cleaner, Greener, Safer budget is spent which affects young people as well as promoting inter-generational projects.
- Members to be involved in the training of young people elected to Southwark Youth Council and the 8 Youth Community Councils in terms of Members roles and functions and how the elected young people can work with them.

Borough and Bankside Community Council has already hosted a youth themed event, which included exploring how they could best work with their respective Youth Community Council, and Bermondsey Community Council have rearranged their youth focused meeting in December to allow newly elected members of Bermondsey Youth Community Council to come and speak.

(13) Given the current state of the nation's economy and the inevitable spending restrictions to come, what work are you undertaking to prepare the voluntary sector?

There are a number of approaches being taken in partnership with the voluntary sector in the current recession. These relate not only to how the VCS organisations maximise their own potential but also ways in which local residents can access support, advice and information which will enable them, as individuals, to cope in the recession.

The voluntary sector operates consistently in a climate of scarce resources and are accustomed to dealing with spending restrictions or possible reductions year on year. The council is committed to supporting a thriving third sector whilst also ensuring value for money for Southwark residents and maximising use of our scarce resources in order to achieve the best possible outcomes. This has to be delivered within the context of the current global economic crisis and will require an understanding on the part of all partners of the need for greater co-operation and collaboration.

At a Recession workshop in Spring 2009 hosted by Community Action Southwark the council was invited to address the VCS and emphasised that VCS organisations should consider the following:

- New ways of working – reassessing their function and viability and looking at ways to produce efficiencies e.g. shared premises, shared back office costs
- That the current economic situation affects all partners and sectors
- There will be a need for greater co-operation and agreement amongst former competitors
- Scope for mergers and consortia development
- How to keep abreast of Govt funding for new initiatives and for hardship
- Taking advantage of lower operating costs, the potential for cheaper premises as more property becomes vacant, cheaper contracts as providers bid for cash flow rather than profit, cheaper commodities because of increased competition etc.
- Taking advantage of the growing volunteer environment – more unemployed and under-employed involved in volunteering and voluntary sector activity.

Working in partnership with the council there are also a number of initiatives which Community Action Southwark is taking forward. These include:

- New employment and skills forum for VCS training providers, called Southwark Skills
- An increase in the number of training events, especially fundraising, collaboration training (CAS and Blackfriars) and commissioning training for VCS groups

- CAS has obtained capacity builders resilience funding to report on strengthening local infrastructure and new forums and Southwark Voice to help coordinate the sector.
- Support to groups to apply for hardship funds
- Momentum for a VCS resource centre – consortium formed looking for appropriate buildings.
- Southwark Infrastructure Group maturing its collaboration, and the compact refresh. Priority being given to creating a sustainable VCS.

A raft of developments are also taking place within Advice & Legal Services VCS provision including:

- The establishment of the Southwark Financial Inclusion Forum which brings together key partners - advice agencies, the FSA, Credit Union and council service departments
- The development of a joint website by Southwark Legal Advice Network which provides information on local advice services in one place, and a link to national self-help resources.
- The Credit Union, Income Management and Revenues and Benefits are making information available to tenants and leaseholders about the affordable credit and banking services available.
- The Legal Advice Network and council service providers including Revenues and Benefits, Rent Income Management, One Stop Shops are collaborating, identifying what information needs to be available through the website, that it is the right information and that it ensures that avoidable contact is reduced.

The sector is fully aware, through continuous dialogue with the council and it's participation at a strategic level in a number of joint initiatives, of the impact of the recession on the VCS, the council and the community. The council will continue to work with the sector to deliver services in the context of the current economic and financial constraints.

(14) Can you give us an update on the restructure of your departments?

1. In 2008 the Chief Executive commissioned a review of the management structures for regeneration work across the Council. Among its objectives were:

- To group together services which steer and deliver the large scale regeneration of Southwark;
- To clarify the role of community engagement and how it is best located to support service delivery;
- To ensure that the review supports the corporate agenda of modernising services and ensuring value for money.

2 The review proposed that the current Social Inclusion (from Regeneration and Neighbourhoods) and Area Management (from Deputy Chief Executive) teams be relocated to work with Legal and Democratic Services (title subsequently changed to Communities, Law and Governance to more fully reflect the directorate's responsibilities) from 1st January, 2009. Followed by a second phase of changes in which:

- The Area Management and Social Inclusion teams be combined to include both borough wide and local functions;
- The policy function for diversity be transferred to the Deputy Chief Executive to link with the corporate policy role;
- Responsibility for physical works (e.g. environmental improvement schemes, private sector housing renewal), be transferred to existing complementary teams in the Environment and Housing and Regeneration and Neighbourhoods departments.

3 The review outcomes recognised that Community Engagement is integral to all service delivery and that the Community Councils had a key role in this. It recommended the establishment of a single centre of excellence to develop and take forward this work through the formation of the Community Engagement division.

4 The key drivers for the proposed changes are:

- The need to make community engagement an integral element in the Council's approach to delivering modernised services;
- To eliminate existing and potential overlaps in the provision of physical regeneration schemes and between Area Management and Social Inclusion on the development of community engagement;
- To contribute to the delivery of central government's efficiency savings requirement and to prepare for anticipated tighter budgetary controls.

5 The aim of the proposed merger and restructure is to create a Community Engagement division which is fit for purpose and which will provide advancement, training and development opportunities for its staff. This ensures that the Council's "Employer of Choice" vision is embedded within the new structure.

6. The current spread of community engagement activity across Area Management and Social Inclusion led to confusion about the functions and purpose of the two divisions across the Council, some overlap of activities and the potential for considerable duplication and a lack of focus on the Council's changing agenda, particularly the

strategic commitment to extending the role of the Community Councils, empowering the ward member and engaging local people in the decisions that affect the places where they live.

7. Staffing structures have evolved over time, often in response to the availability of external funding for specific activities and initiatives. Consequently they are currently better suited to project working rather than to delivering the key tasks identified for the new Community Engagement division. There is an over reliance on short term funding streams such as the Working Neighbourhoods Fund to provide revenue to fund established posts and services.

8. The proposed structure is based on the forecast service demands on the new division in particular the ambition for it to be a single centre of excellence in community engagement practice within the Council which supports the greater participation of people in democracy and adds value to service delivery. This means that it will be participating both in the delivery of community engagement services and in the development of capability across the authority and its partners.

9. Implementing the proposed structure will allow full year savings to be made in accordance with budgetary support requirements and required departmental efficiency savings. Undertaking the merger and restructure at this time means that the cost effectiveness of the Community Engagement division is ensured for the foreseeable future.

10. The proposed structure takes into account, as far as is possible, the impact of the Council's other major projects, such as the relocation to Tooley Street, the Shared Services' project and the Modernise programme, on the new division. It is anticipated that staff in the new Neighbourhood team, the South Bermondsey Neighbourhood Pathfinder project and others with a specific community remit will be based in one of the local hubs, and that those staff with cross Borough responsibilities will be based at Tooley Street.

11. The anticipated benefits of this reorganisation will include the following:

- A team that is focused on adding value to the Council's service delivery, supporting greater participation of local people in local democracy.
- A team of community involvement and development workers who will broaden the range of communities that the Council works with and focuses on building the capacity within groups to reduce their dependence on the Council and its support.
- A single centre of excellence within the Council that works across the Council to make community engagement an integral part of the Council's approach to delivering modernised services.
- Elimination of duplication, overlaps and confusion over roles and responsibilities.
- A dedicated team of two officers supporting two Community Councils (in addition to the clerks). An important element in their role will be to improve communication between Council and other public service teams working in each Community Council area to ensure that the services delivered meet the needs of the community.
- A single approach to regeneration and environmental improvements in the borough and access to central funding streams rather than small, localised budgets.

- A greater focus on engaging local people and businesses with the work of the Council to improve the places where they live and work.

12. These new arrangements will continue to support current activities. This support will be provided either by the Community Engagement Team or other teams elsewhere in the Council with the expertise to deliver physical regeneration projects such as those in Public Realm in the Environment & Housing Department or the Renewal teams based in Regeneration & Neighbourhoods.

13. Consultation with staff and Trade Unions commenced on 20 August 2009 and ran to the 2nd October 2009 with further consultation with staff on Phase 2 taking place until 23rd October 2009. However given the complexities staff have been consulted since April 2009 and had the opportunity to feed into the proposed functions of the new division.

14. It is anticipated that implementation will be complete by 1 January 2010.

15. In parallel with the review, work was undertaken to identify and clarify the supporting roles for community councils within Area Management and Democratic Services to strengthen both the community engagement functions and the constitutional responsibilities. This resulted in a separation of roles between the constitutional function of clerking the meetings and the community involvement function. A further consequence of this separation has been a review of the Democratic Services management arrangements for community councils which is nearing completion and will see the integration of the community council team within the constitutional team. This will provide greater resilience for the direct clerking support and a more rigorous approach to constitutional matters at community council meetings.