

**COUNCIL ASSEMBLY**

**(ORDINARY)**

**WEDNESDAY 8 JULY 2015**

**PUBLIC QUESTIONS**

**1. QUESTION FROM MR KELLAND TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR FINANCE, MODERNISATION AND PERFORMANCE**

How many cases are outstanding on refunding a deceased estate's claim for a refund of overpaid council tax?

**RESPONSE**

The council recognises the distress caused following the loss of a loved one and that having to make arrangements and notify a number of organisations can make it more difficult for people coping with bereavement. Therefore the council offers a bereavement support service for individuals registering the death of a Southwark resident, where the council can provide notification to a number of services within local and central government, as well as advice on counselling and accessing additional benefits, free of charge.

When the council is notified of the death of a resident from either the family or Southwark's Registrars department, the Council Tax team will immediately amend the account as appropriate and, if there is a refund due, a statement of the account will be sent to the executors of the family member at the last known address. The majority of council tax refund requests are processed and repaid within 10 working days.

Whilst every effort is made to refund the overpaid amounts in respect of deceased estates, in some cases the refund is never claimed following notification of the overpayment and in a number of cases it is not possible to obtain sufficient information to be able issue a refund. There are currently 204 overpaid council tax accounts for deceased estates, totalling £37,187.19.

**2. QUESTION FROM MR BLAMEY TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT AND THE PUBLIC REALM**

As the proposed £5.1 million to develop the cemeteries is effectively a subsidy from Southwark tax payers to a burial service which could be provided more cheaply to bereaved families and Southwark tax payers only a few miles away, does the councillor believe he has fulfilled Promise 1 "Value for Money" of "Fairer Future Promises"?

**RESPONSE**

The £5.1m referred to in the question is the total investment across all of the cemeteries over the next 10 years. This includes work to buildings and the replacement of cremators, as well as the proposed developments in Camberwell Old and New Cemeteries. The council believes it is important to

provide a service for local residents that gives them the choice to be buried alongside their loved ones. Residents can choose to be buried outside the borough should they wish, but forcing them to do so would push the cost onto the bereaved, as out of borough and private burials often cost more. It would also have a negative impact on those residents who for financial reasons would struggle to travel to visit a cemetery outside the borough.

**3. QUESTION FROM MS SCARLETT TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT AND THE PUBLIC REALM**

In regards to the development of the cemeteries in Southwark, why has the council not commissioned an i-tree survey or even a Capital Assets Valuation of Amenity Trees (CAVAT) survey to ascertain project parameters?

**RESPONSE**

The council has commissioned all ecological surveys required for planning purposes: full habitat surveys at both sites, bat surveys at both sites, a reptile survey at Camberwell Old Cemetery and a tree survey at Camberwell Old Cemetery. The surveys carried out to date provide no ecological reason why the proposed works should not take place. The council continues to work closely with London Wildlife Trust, following its recommendations to ensure that our plans increase biodiversity in the cemeteries, provide a habitat for wildlife and a space for local people to enjoy.

**SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION FROM MS SCARLETT TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT AND THE PUBLIC REALM**

The public question relates to something that's coming up in a second to do with the "Save Southwark Woods Cemeteries" issue though the question is 'why has the council not commissioned a tree survey or even a capital assets valuation of the amenity i-tree survey to ascertain project parameters for the cemetery's development', and the response was 'that all ecological surveys had been carried out', but that doesn't answer the question about capital asset value of amenity trees, which was the question and the question asked is 'why have you not valued the amenity value including air quality, urban cooling, storm water management, health and amenity benefits that have a financial value each year to the council and to citizens of the council'?

**RESPONSE**

Thank you for your supplementary on that. Actually what you're asking for isn't standard procedure on Southwark's own land. We are doing all the surveys that are needed for the development and we are in talks with people to make sure that whatever we do increases the biodiversity and increases the tree division in that area of the cemetery.