

CABINET – PUBLIC QUESTIONS

7 April 2020

1. Public Question from Toby O'Connor

What are the main challenges and opportunities for public engagement in planning processes in the coronavirus situation for example with the current consultations on the statement of community involvement, regeneration charters, the local plan EIP and planning committee meetings?

Response

We are reviewing the democratic processes in light of the seriousness of the coronavirus pandemic. The current unprecedented situation will mean that some decisions and progress on adopting planning policies will be delayed. At the moment it is too early to give details but in the main we are working solely on supporting our residents through this crisis.

LATE PUBLIC QUESTIONS

2. Public Question from Aysen, Wendover TRA

I would like to know, what is the council's intention or plan to keep estates clean & hygienic. As I live on Aylesbury/ Wendover block there is no cleaning already. Are they going to deep clean each estate, where lots of people are living, which makes us more exposed?

Response for questions 2 – 7

Following the postponement of this cabinet meeting as a result of COVID-19 and in response to these questions the cabinet member arranged a meeting with Southwark Group of Tenant Organisation (SGTO) in which he answered these questions – you can find a recording of the meeting here:

https://soundcloud.com/user-762195973?fbclid=IwAR0PXFfVuQYkLIA4J2yao_YwueAlv270goV-4EVyhe3B5zg7WdF548CAFd4

Information on coronavirus, including the impact on council services and housing advice, is also available on the council's website here: <https://www.southwark.gov.uk/health-and-wellbeing/public-health/for-the-public/coronavirus>

The cabinet member thanks you for your questions and will continue to engage with you throughout this process.

3. Public Question from Danielle, Lindley Estate

What happens with urgent repairs for council properties, things like broken boilers, electricity outages, uncontrollable leaks. Will the repairs service continue operating? Do we continue ringing the call centre in the usual way? How can households/tradespeople ensure they stay safe whilst social distancing measures are in place?

4. Public Question from June, Brandon Estate

Are there any plans for a council tax amnesty? There is talk of mortgage and rent amnesty done by the Government. A service charge 3 month relief holiday for leaseholders would help. A 3 month amnesty for charges for major works/heating again would be a big help to leaseholders.

5. Public Question from Chinelo, Bell Gardens Estate

I have questions around cleaning communal spaces, in particular places that aren't often cleaned, if at all. For example, "outdoor" corridors guarded by balconies/hand railings. Will cleaning protocols be updated to be more inclusive and thorough?

6. Public Question from Grace, Southampton Way

Is the council planning for when the situation gets worse and more staff go off sick? We will definitely need more care workers, street cleaners, meals delivery, childcare for key workers, housing for homeless - can the council recruit now to speed up DBS checks and training etc where needed?

7. Public Question from Bryan and Lea, Caroline Gardens

For council tenants who lose their employment due to Covid-19, are plans in place to help with rent and council tax? If so, what are the plans; and how do you access that help?

8. Public Question from Harpreet Aujla

Will you suspend all decisions on the Elephant and Castle shopping centre due to the Covid 19 pandemic and the economic uncertainty raised by this crisis period we have entered? The Chancellor has announced help for workers and small businesses; will you protect business owners, traders and workers likewise?

Response

The redevelopment of the shopping centre is a long term project that is embedded in both London and Southwark planning policies. In December the High Court dismissed a claim for a judicial review of the decision to grant planning permission for the redevelopment. On 15 January the developer announced its intention to close the centre at the end of July and the next day it formally wrote to all businesses to inform them of this decision.

It is important to recognise that the decision to close the Shopping Centre was a decision taken by the Centre's owner, not Southwark Council. The decision by the owner predates the current health emergency. The owner has confirmed that traders rent and service charges have been reduced to zero to help them during this period and will be monitoring Government advice in the coming weeks to guide next steps.

Today, 7 April, cabinet is being asked to make public powers available to facilitate the delivery of this long terms project which will deliver an extensive package of public benefits that are detailed in the report. These decisions will neither hasten nor delay the closure of the centre. Rather the proposed decisions are a sensible and pragmatic approach which will help bring certainty for our residents and businesses who live and work in the area.

The council remains strongly committed to supporting small independent traders and their employees located at the centre. We have successfully pressed the developer to bring forward a comprehensive package to assist traders to relocate and continue to trade in the

area. Temporary accommodation is being provided for traders at Castle Square, and Elephant Arcade. Subject to the health emergency we expect independent traders to be able to relocate to these locations before the end of July and to begin trading from their new premises soon after that. Permanent locations have also been secured for some traders through S106 agreements at Elephant Park, and One Elephant. A relocation fund comprising a minimum of £635,000 and tailored business advice and support has also been established.

Following a deputation of traders on 28 January 2020 we announced the setting aside of an additional £200,000 for trader support from the council. This transition grant is part of a package of additional support. In addition to the funds, traders will be given access to Southwark Works, who can offer career advice to those traders looking to change their work or upskill.

The implementation of this package is the best way in which we can help support traders to speedily resume economic activity. Delaying decisions would only increase uncertainty for them and jeopardise the viability of their businesses and the jobs they provide.

Support to help deal with the impact of the coronavirus outbreak continues to be offered through the business support desk and through the council's business rates team. Advice and guidance on any available financial assistance, business rates relief and other support can be accessed by emailing SouthwarkBusinessDesk@southwark.gov.uk. In addition, the council's COVID-19 support for businesses and employers webpage (<https://www.southwark.gov.uk/health-and-wellbeing/public-health/for-the-public/coronavirus/covid-19-support-and-information-for-businesses-and-employers>) is kept up to date with the latest information and guidance on the support available to Southwark businesses.

9. Public question from Mr Santiago Peluffo Soneyra

Will you commit within the next 10 days to make use of funding streams to support the thousands of sole traders and micro-businesses who do not qualify for the grants for small businesses and are in desperate need of cash coming into their pockets while they are out of business?

Response

Southwark was one of the first councils to ensure businesses received their grant funding immediately. As at today 1,490 businesses will have had their grants issued to a value of £26m. We have also ensured that all recovery and enforcement action in relation to rates has been suspended for *all* businesses. Where businesses have been struggling financially they have been encouraged to contact us to make alternative payment arrangements including payments delayed until June.

While we welcome the support for businesses that has been announced by government, particularly in terms of business grants, we also recognise the gaps in this support that mean many of the businesses most affected by the coronavirus outbreak will not be eligible. These include small businesses with rateable values of above £51k, as well as huge numbers of businesses who do not pay business rates, for example those in workspaces and other multi let premises.

In response, the council is proposing a Business Hardship Fund specifically targeted at those businesses who are ineligible for other forms of support. These unprecedented times for the local economy has led us to repurpose the Southwark Pioneers Fund for this

purpose. The Pioneers Fund was set up to support local enterprises to start and grow, and promote social value.

Grants of up to £10,000 will be made available for small businesses that cannot access other forms of support and can demonstrate hardship as a result of covid-19. The council has committed in excess of £2m to this fund to support small Southwark business experiencing hardship. Small businesses who are not eligible for either of the two government grant funds or self-employment income support may apply if they satisfy the following criteria:

- Is registered and trades in the London Borough of Southwark
- has fewer than 10 full time equivalent employees; *and*
- is facing financial hardship as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic that affects its ability to continue to trade and threatens permanent closure.

We recognise the extreme difficulties that many businesses are currently facing. We hope that the Business Hardship Fund will enable many more Southwark businesses to weather the storm than may otherwise be the case.