

Council

7 November 2007

Questions

Note: All accepted Questions are listed. Answers are provided for the first thirty questions.

1. **By: Councillor Jeremy Clyne (17.10.07)**

To: Councillor John Kazantzis – Cabinet Member Housing

Housing management costs

Under the Liberal Democrat-led administration the cost of housing management was about the inner London average. You have axed housing offices and slashed front line services and at the same time raised the management cost to over £40 per property, creating the most expensive service in London. How do you account for this most remarkable achievement?

Party: Liberal Democrat

Answer:

The calculation of the average weekly management cost follows precise guidance. It includes the direct costs of running and maintaining the estates, as well as some of the costs of heating and lighting communal areas etc. During the last financial year the council made contributions to the balance sheet for uncollected rent in a way it had not previously and was required by the auditors to treat revenue expenditure as capital to a degree it had not done so before. There were also overspends in areas such as cleaning that have contributed to the rise in the weekly indicator.

The re-organisation it carried out in 2006/07 produced real savings, the full year effect of which were only felt in this financial year. It has also put in place measures to reverse a cost base and rent collection service that meant it had been living beyond its means for many years.

2. **By: Councillor John Whelan (16.10.07)**

To: Councillor John Kazantzis - Cabinet Member for Housing

Decent Housing Programme Contracts

What percentage of council properties currently meets the Government's Decent Homes Standard and what is the estimated cost of financing the remedial work for properties that fail to meet the standard by 2010? Can the administration outline the detailed timetable to upgrade the deficient properties and provide ongoing maintenance, given that prospective contractors have already been pre-qualified for work that is estimated to cost £600 million over seven to eight years?

Party: Conservative

Answer:

As of October 2007 the percentage of non-decency is 32%. Based on Lambeth Living going live and gaining a successful inspection rating to draw down the additional funding between now and 2010 we would therefore expect to spend in the region of £56m on decent homes, this is based on all the assumptions on income including £30m of funding through the ALMO route in year 2009-10 which includes 5% sustainability. To complete the programme of decent homes work will take us to end of 2013-14 based on resource assumptions.

Officers are tendering for a comprehensive programme of service and works package(s) under partnership framework agreements to ensure value for money and improved services. As we are in the process of procurement currently there is an element of commercial sensitivity on detailed costings, but the OJEU issued earlier in the year stating an overall level of £120m per annum, is based on maximum income streams for capital and revenue being available. The tender includes decent homes capital delivery works and day to day works/services (including -repairs, planned maintenance, grounds maintenance, cleaning etc). Officers expect this method to produce service efficiency and cost savings from our shared learning from other authorities who have already gone to modern bulk purchase contracting rather than individual scheme traditional historic methods of tendering.

3. **By: Councillor Florence Nosegbe (16.10.07)**

To: Councillor Roger Giess – Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Lambeth Youth Mayor

Can you explain why you referred to the introduction of the Lambeth Youth Mayor as a "gimmick"? Are you aware that the President of your party, Simon Hughes, welcomed the suggestion of a Youth Mayor for London? Will you apologise to the young people involved in this initiative for belittling their efforts to engage in local democracy?

Party: Labour

Answer:

1. Because it clearly is a gimmick. If you intended for the Youth Mayor to mean something then you would give them a proper budget to spend on their priorities, rather than let over 80% of the Youth Mayor budget be spent on administration of the scheme.
2. The GLA operates an Executive Mayor model so a London "Youth Mayor" to shadow the Mayor is sensible. Lambeth Council does not have a directly elected Executive Mayor so the whole concept of a Lambeth Youth Mayor is misconceived. I would prefer to continue to strengthen the existing highly successful Youth Council.
3. No, because I have not done so. I wish all the young people involved well. But as a matter of public policy I think the proposal is a poor way to strengthen the involvement of young people in decision making. It is your refusal to recognise that legitimate argument, engage in a sensible discussion on this point and stop this kind of silly attack that "belittles" young people.

4. By: Councillor Ashley Lumsden (17.10.07)

To: Councillor Steve Reed – Leader of the Council

Adjustment A

Will the Leader of the Council make a statement on the use he intends to make of the £23M windfall that comes from a favourable treatment of "Adjustment 'A.'

Party: Liberal Democrat

Answer:

I am very grateful for indications from the Minister for Local Government that he intends to lay regulations before Parliament that should have the effect of cancelling the requirement on the Council to pay £23.25m out of reserves in respect of Adjustment A. We await confirmation about the detail of the secondary legislation that will be used for this purpose. Assuming a successful outcome, this would not be a 'windfall', as you describe it, as the Council would not receive any additional funding. It would however mean that services will not have to be cut by millions of pounds to replenish reserves to the level required by the District Auditor. That would be a significant benefit for residents who use and rely on Council services and I hope you will join me in welcoming the progress I have made.

5. **By: Councillor Clare Whelan(16.10.07)**

To: Councillor Lib Peck - Cabinet Member for Environment and Culture

Allotments in Lambeth

As members will know allotments are in very short supply in the Borough. Can the Cabinet Member for Environment explain what is being done to increase the number of allotments in the borough? Can she also confirm that she is committed to the preservation of all allotments in Lambeth in general and the Windmill allotments in particular and that she will not support their appropriation for other purposes?

Party: Conservative

Answer:

Allotments are indeed in short supply in Lambeth - with a population of over 275,000 the borough has around 650 allotment spaces in total, which equates to about 0.0024 allotments per head of population, certainly far lower than anyone wishes. Lambeth Council is committed to trying to address this issue, and raise both the overall number of both allotment sites and individual plots to address this situation and existing demand. Whilst opportunities for creating new allotment space in parks, commons and public greenspace is always considered but often difficult to achieve in practice, potential does exist on other parcels of privately or publicly managed sites for this to be achieved. Where appropriate, the council includes options for creating new (or improving existing) allotments on land subject to redevelopment, whether private or public, as part of its obligations and commitment to seek the best outcome for residents of the borough in terms of increasing allotment provision through planning gain.

As regards the preservation of existing allotments, Policy 50 of the Lambeth Unitary Development Plan (revised and adopted August 2007) states that the council will protect open space in the borough, as identified on the UDP Proposals Map, from inappropriate built development. As well as such 'inappropriate built development' including those that result in the loss of or damage to open space, it also includes developments affecting allotments: the same Policy in the UDP makes clear that the loss of statutory or non-statutory allotments is not permitted, whether or not currently in use as an allotment.

Whilst the general rule should be to resist development on any allotment site which results in their loss or prevents proper use, Policy 50 in the UDP does make provision for some developments on open space sites, including allotments, provided any such development makes compensatory provision in the vicinity of the affected site, and for replacement open space of equal or better quality and size.

6. **By: Councillor Liz Atkinson (16.10.07)**

To: Councillor Mark Bennett, Cabinet Member for Safer Communities

Pilot Civic Assemblies

Can the Cabinet Member for Safer Communities update Council on the progress in establishing pilot Civic Assemblies and join me in welcoming the development of genuine local involvement in Lambeth?

Party: Labour

Answer:

The original dates have been subject to negotiations with local partners, also we have worked with Lambeth First (as requested by the Cabinet). These are the proposed dates:

North Lambeth: 19th or 26th January 2008
Norwood: 9th February 2008

These two Assemblies will form the basis for an evaluation report, which will determine how Assemblies are rolled out in the future. Initial discussions and plans are currently being developed for:

Streatham
Brixton
Clapham
Stockwell

I am of course happy to join you in welcoming the development of genuine local involvement in Lambeth, which will build on existing best practice in areas such as Herne Hill and Norwood. My recent visit to the Herne Hill Forum showed me that where residents have opportunities to have a genuine say in the future of their area, those meetings flourish. I do not believe the councillor-oriented Area Committees encouraged such opportunities.

I am confident that Civic Assemblies will boost resident participation and encourage more residents – of all ages and backgrounds - to become involved in the improvement of the environment and services their neighbourhoods. The Assemblies will also provide a place to learn more about becoming school governors, Safer Neighbourhood Panel members, special constables or magistrates, amongst numerous active voluntary roles which promote stronger and safer communities. There will also be an opportunity for residents to put formal questions to the council, police, PCT, TfL and other strategic partners, which is a feature of the Area Committees I have sought to preserve.

7. **By: Councillor Roger Giess (17.10.07)**
To: Councillor Florence Nosegbe – Deputy Cabinet Member for Young People (in absence of Councillor Sally Prentice – Cabinet Member for Children and Young People)

Streatham Vale Park Adventure Playground

Will the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People outline the steps - including a timeline - that she and her department have taken to secure the reopening of the adventure playground in Streatham Vale Park.

Party: Liberal Democrat

Answer:

Streatham Vale Adventure Playground has been operating targeted hours in recent months following a serious assault on staff and vandalism to the site. Improvements to the site have been put in place with additional security supporting the playground. Services will be fully operational from 5th November with an adjustment in opening hours to reflect seasonal park opening hours.

The hours of opening will be 12-3pm for one o clock club activities for parents and pre-school age children, with the adventure playground operating 3-5pm weekdays, and 11-4pm on Saturdays. During school holidays the playground is open all day weekdays and Saturdays.

8. **By: Councillor Suzanne Poole (16.10.07)**
To: Councillor Florence Nosegbe – Deputy Cabinet Member for Young People

Youth Mayor Ballot

How will the Council ensure that all young people are given the chance to vote in the Youth Mayor elections including those who live in Lambeth, but attend school in another borough and those who are in employment? What will be the cost of these elections (including prior publicity, training, and officer time) given that the Youth Mayor will only have £25, 000 to spend on chosen projects?

Party: Conservative

Answer:

The council is committed to giving a real voice to the young people of Lambeth, and to letting them know that we are on their side. The youth mayor project will give young people the opportunity to make a real difference to the community in which they live and to see for themselves the positive difference their involvement will make. The new young mayor will be the official voice for young people in Lambeth, and will have responsibilities which include a budget of £25,000 to spend on projects that he or she feels are important to young people in Lambeth. She or he

will have access to senior council officers to advise them on issues that are of concern to young people.

The young person that is elected as the Youth Mayor will work with the Youth Council Executive Committee to allocate the budget toward projects that will help progress the lives of young people in Lambeth. The post is open to anyone between the ages of 11 and 21 who lives, works or studies in Lambeth.

The Youth Mayor election is open for voting to all 11-21 year olds who live, work, study or socialize in the borough. Young people who are not in school in Lambeth will be able to vote online for the week leading up to polling day, which is 15 November. The voting website has been publicized in articles and being spread by 'Street Teams' who are traveling to all town centres across the borough to distribute publicity widely and talk to people about the initiative. Youth clubs have been visited to explain how voting and registration will work.

There are links to the voting website from the Lambeth Youth Mayor webpages at www.lambeth.gov.uk/youthmayor4lambeth and a video has been published on the Lambeth Youth Mayor myspace page. The off-line publicity campaign includes brochures, bus stop JCDecaux posters, stands at events and in public buildings, Customer Centre plasma screen adverts, a Town Hall banner and radio advertisements on Choice FM.

The cost of supporting the Youth Mayor project 2007/08 to end March 2008 is £50,000, made up of £20,000 project staff costs, £9,000 for printing and publicity, £8,000 for training and polling stations, £8,000 for online voting and count, and £5,000 contingency. This represents extremely good value for money for a borough wide initiative open to all young people aged 11-21.

9. By: Councillor Peter Robbins(16.10.07)

To: Councillor Steve Reed, Leader of the Council

Adjustment A

Can the Leader of the Council provide an update on the work that you have been doing to progress Council's position on Adjustment A?

Party: Labour

Answer:

I have held a series of meetings and discussions with the Secretary of State for Communities Hazel Blears MP and with her predecessor Ruth Kelly MP, and with the Minister of State for Local Government John Healey MP and with his predecessor Phil Woolas MP over the past twelve months. In all of those discussions I made the case that the District Auditor's requirement that the Council should repay £23.25m was unfair because:

- Had the calculations for the repayments been made correctly 16 years ago, the Council would have received grant funding equal to the level of repayment and so the debt would never have arisen;

- Nobody knew the debt existed until 3 years ago when technical accounting errors were discovered by auditors working at a different council;
- The financial effects on the Council of making this adjustment were unintended when the Government introduced the Prudential System in 2004.

Making a payment on that scale would have the effect of wiping millions of pounds from frontline services, causing damage to those service users who rely on the services being provided. The Minister has now advised me that he intends to lay regulations before Parliament during the current financial year to modify the provisions on Adjustment A. He clarified that he expects this to have the effect of cancelling the requirement for the Council to make the adjustment. I am delighted to report such positive progress, although until the regulations are formally agreed we cannot make any assumptions in the finances.

10. By: Councillor Gavin Dodsworth (17.10.07)

To: Councillor Lib Peck – Cabinet Member for Environment and Culture

Noise and pollution Service

Lambeth operates a noise and pollution service for residents between 10pm and 3am, Sunday to Thursday, and 10pm to 5am Friday and Saturday. Residents in Bishops Ward have noted that our neighbours in Southwark operate a 24 hours a day, 7 days a week service.

In the next financial review, will the current administration look positively on extending these hours so that Lambeth residents get a standard and availability of service equal to those in the next borough?

Party: Liberal Democrat

Answer:

The Council operates a very cost effective night patrol service timed to be available when the majority of the calls from the public are made to the council. The team has service standards to attend to 80% of calls within an hour and this target was achieved over the last summer peak period.

Over the last year, the Council introduced a dedicated anti social behaviour team this year to deal with problems being caused to residents, including noise. As well as extra people there is money being made available to improve the IT systems so that the Council is able to record and share evidence about anti social behaviour gathered from a number of sources including the environmental enforcement teams and the police.

In addition, we are currently developing a plan to increase the noise service over the two years. In the first, we intend to increase the weekend hours of operation. In the second, we hope to expand the service more comprehensively

11. By: Councillor Graham Pycock (16.10.07)

To: Councillor Jim Dickson - Cabinet Member for Finance

Comprehensive Spending Review – Lambeth Council

How does the administration plan to mitigate the impact of the recent Comprehensive Spending Review on the Council's finances and in particular to ensure that home care charges for the elderly and disabled are not once again threatened with large increases as happened at the budget setting last February?

Party: Conservative

Answer:

The CSR07 was announced on 9 October 2007. At a national level local government funding will increase by just over 11% over the three-year period to 2010/11. The government's inflation forecasts show this as real terms increases of 1.5%, 0.8% and 0.7% in each of the three years in question. This allocation, viewed alongside the significant above inflation increases in funding for education and health, contrasts favourably with the real terms cuts in funding received by local government in many of the 18 years of the last Conservative government. At the present time local government as a whole is not in a position to translate this into the actual increase at a local level, and we will not know the detail until the local government finance settlement is announced some time early in December. However, by building in prudent assumptions about the settlement the council has been able to make plans to ensure that financial stability is maintained and robust budgets are set.

The draft budget for 2008/09 will be presented to Cabinet on 26 November 2007, to allow for a full and robust scrutiny process and for detailed public consultation. It will then be refined in the light of those comments and the settlement before Cabinet makes its final recommendation to Council. It would therefore be inappropriate at the present time to comment on the detail of the budget as currently drafted. However, through the budget process we have sought to maximise savings taken from overheads and to find more efficient ways of delivering better services, and have already identified savings of more than £15m that can be taken from the centre of the organisation without impacting services. At present I do not anticipate any additional increases in home care charges over and above those agreed in the budget set by full council in February.

12. By: Councillor Neil Sabharwal (16.10.07)

To: Councillor Jackie Meldrum, Deputy Leader of the Council

New Customer Centre

Can the Deputy Leader of the Council explain to Council the benefits to Lambeth residents of the new Customer Centre on Brixton Hill?

Party: Labour

Answer:

The Customer Centre on Brixton Hill provides residents with a single point of contact for a wide range of council services including benefits, housing, council tax & parking. Olive Morris House was formerly the site of Revenues and Benefits' customer service office. Now, Olive Morris House deals with the Benefits customers as well as customers with other council enquiries – the Centre now deals with more than 3 times the number of visitors each day than when it handled Benefits alone.

The Centre is welcoming and attractive, ensuring that users are no longer expected to wait in sometimes cramped, inaccessible spaces with few facilities. The Centre is designed to be fully accessible and features DDA compliant furniture and architecture to ensure all of our residents benefit from these improvements. Staff members wear a distinctive uniform and name badges. Staff in the Centre have been fully trained in all of the major council services, and so can perform multiple transactions in one intervention (known as 'service bundling'). This means that in most cases customers need queue only once to deal with all of their enquiries.

Overall waiting times have been reduced significantly. Although there are still peak periods, the average waiting time for all services the month of October is just 15 minutes, with 73% of all of our customers being seen within 20 minutes. Some services within the Centre perform even better than this. For instance, the average wait to obtain a new parking permit or pay a parking fine is less than 9 minutes. In all cases, the average waiting times within the Centre are significantly lower than in most of the preceding divisional customer service offices.

The Centre also provides customers with free internet and telephone access to council services. It is known that a significant proportion of Lambeth residents do not have home access to the internet, and so have fewer opportunities to benefit from the online services we deliver. By providing this service, free of charge to the customers, we help customers to become familiarised with these on-line services. The centre also has meeting room facilities which can be used by council departments and partners to engage in community activity such as consultation and focus groups.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the staff, Eric Bohl, Allan Drew, Mary Cotterell, Matt Cooper and many others, who have worked very hard and with great enthusiasm to make this challenging project happen.

13. By: Councillor Julian Heather (17.10.07)

To: Councillor Mark Bennett – Cabinet Member for Safer Communities

Crime Wardens in Bishops Ward

Why has the Council abolished crime warden schemes covering Bishop's Ward, Prince's Ward and the wards in Streatham

Party: Liberal Democrat

Answer:

You seem to have forgotten to ask me about the Norwood wardens, as well as apparently having forgotten the frequently discussed rationale for ceasing wardens in favour of 22 Police Community Support Officers with enforcement powers, who operate as part of the police 'family', allowing also for the sharing of sensitive information which wardens were never privy to. Equally a victim of selective memory seems to be the petition your party was apparently collecting in Streatham - perhaps you could explain what you have done with (however many) signatures from residents who seem to have trusted you with their personal details, and whether your party has used those signatures for any other purpose. The expensive £3m botch that the Liberal Democrats threw together would have been unsustainable, particularly if you remember – you may have forgotten this also – the financial devastation your party left the borough in.

The Labour Cabinet decided on 8 January 2007 to support the introduction of additional PCSOs instead of the existing warden schemes because this provides a stronger response for crime reduction in Lambeth, which is our top priority. The PCSOs are in place and providing a visible street presence and reassurance for the public in all three police sub-commands in Lambeth. The Streatham Rangers scheme funded by the Housing Revenue Account was ceased following consultation on its cost effectiveness with tenants. The South Bank Wardens scheme was ceased following discussions with the South Bank Partnership (which I understand includes Bishops ward Liberal Democrat councillors in its membership) in favour of a security patrolling service that would operate over a greatly expanded time covering 7 days a week and late into the night. The South Bank Employers Group have led on the procurement of this project and they are discussing the funding arrangements with the partners.

14. By: Councillor Irene Kimm (16.10.07)

To: Councillor John Kazantzis - Cabinet Member Housing

Housing Revenue Account Overspend

What steps is the administration taking to resolve the overspend on the Housing

Revenue Account, cuts to front line staff in the housing service, which has resulted in no contract monitoring, and shorter office hours all because of the administration's campaign in support of the ALMO? Why is there one Local Service Team Manager for Norwood and Streatham housing areas respectively when there are 22 estates in Norwood and only a handful in Streatham?

Party: Conservative

Answer:

This administration has put in place a comprehensive package of savings, cost control measures and plans to improve income collection. These measures debated and agreed by cabinet in July have been examined and tested at successive scrutiny committees. They cover reduction in some staff groups, control of repairs expenditure and savings in back office expense and overheads. This package is robust, monitored closely and delivering demonstrable efficiencies to reverse an historical trend of high cost and low rent collection that ate away at accumulated reserves.

The proposal to reduce the number of handypersons to bring costs in line with workload will result in one Local Service Team Manager for each of the 6 Area. In addition to one Senior Caretaker/Handyperson there will be from 4 to 7 Caretaker/Handypersons based on the number of dwellings managed in each Area. This gives an average of 500 dwellings per team member which is similar to other authorities.

15. By: Councillor Imogen Walker (16.10.07)

To: Councillor Rachel Heywood – Deputy Cabinet Member for Enterprise

Worklessness

Worklessness is an area that previous administrations have failed to address and yet is of critical importance in Lambeth – can you assure Council that work is being done around this issue?

Party: Labour

Answer:

Tackling worklessness is a priority for Lambeth and we know that by acting against worklessness we will improve the quality of life and well being of our residents in a way that is not possible through other measures. This administration has set the challenging target of achieving a 70% employment rate in the borough and to achieve this by tapping into the creativity and diversity of Lambeth's communities.

Together with our partners in the Local Strategic Partnership we have put in place a 3 year Economic Development Strategy for the borough which acknowledges the need to dramatically increase the number of people finding work and also recognises that for this to happen there is a need to increase basic and lower level skills, provide training and support for those on 'inactive benefits' and crucially remove the multiple barriers to employment such as inaccessibility of childcare

provision. The strategy seeks to promote new business growth, support residents in developing their skills and increase employment opportunities.

As part of the Economic Development Strategy the Council is:

- Working with the London Development Agency to ensure that the Childcare Affordability Programme delivers more affordable childcare in Lambeth and allows parents, particularly lone parents, to access employment;
- Developing initiatives with employers and Job Centre Plus to tackle racial discrimination and increase the effectiveness of equal opportunities policies through the Gain Employment Programme;
- Championing entrepreneurship and new business through initiatives such as the Business Support Network, and the first ever Lambeth Business Awards to be held next spring;
- Increasing the number of apprenticeships and Train to Gain options taken up in Lambeth;
- Supporting those who are most excluded from the job market to gain new and valuable skills, as well as the confidence to enter it;
- Promoting learning and development amongst the Council's own staff, and creating new opportunities for residents to access training and employment within the council;
- Building productive and creative relationships with partners in the voluntary and private sectors to make new and better chances for everyone; ;
- Working to introduce neighbourhood learning which will provide learning opportunities for employment, for volunteering and to aid capacity building in voluntary sector partners

I'm sure that all Councillors will support the administration in its commitment to tackle worklessness in Lambeth.

16. By: Councillor Darren Sanders (17.10.07)

To: Councillor Nigel Haselden – Deputy Cabinet Member for Parking and Transport

Clapham L subzone

Is the Deputy Cabinet Member aware of the real parking problems faced by the people in Hazelbourne and Englewood Roads, due to increased traffic from Tesco's and the Gigalum nightclub?

Will he agree to consult people on the creation of a subzone of the Clapham L parking zone to deal with their problems?

Party: Liberal Democrat

Answer:

Yes, I am aware of these problems and I am committed to resolving them. I am happy to work with all ward councillors to achieve a satisfactory outcome for Clapham residents.

17. **By: Councillor John Whelan (16.10.07)**
To: Councillor Lib Peck - Cabinet Member for Environment and Culture
Farmers Market in West Norwood

Local residents have made it clear to the Council that they value having a regular Farmers' Market in West Norwood. What is being done to encourage the survival of the Farmers' Market in Norwood and to mitigate against the effects of the uncertainty over pitch fees which is deterring stallholders from come to Norwood and developing a regular customer base?

Party: Conservative

Answer:

The decision to cancel the farmers' market on 6th October was taken by the providers, City & Country Farmers Market Ltd, not by the Council. The Council's support for the market was guaranteed until November by which time it was expected that the market would be sustainable. However, despite the declared public support through petition and campaign, the providers made a business decision to cancel the market because of low footfall.

In an effort to sustain the market due to its obvious popularity with residents the Market Office has given permission for Sandra Woodfall to operate a farmers' market this Saturday under the same agreement as the previous farmers market until November 2007.

Specialist markets such as the Norwood Farmers market are an obvious way of encouraging additional foot fall in some of our Town Centres. The general feed back for the stake holders associated with the markets is that the ones we are currently running are valued by the community and help to develop the economic improvement. To support this Street Care are currently undertaking a benchmarking exercise to find out how neighbouring authorities are engaging with the Specialist Markets and will develop a report that will clarify how we will engage with specialist markets in the future, the benefits we can expect to achieve from the engagement and a pricing structure that will encourage the appropriate types of markets to our borough.

The time scale for this will be linked to the Fees and Charges report due for consultation later this year ready for the 1st of April 08. Until this strategy has been drafted and agreed we will continue to work with the existing specialist markets to ensure all possible arrangements are in place to sustain their delivery.

18. **By: Councillor Marcia Cameron (17.10.07)**
To: Councillor Lorna Campbell – Deputy Cabinet Member for Community Cohesion

Equality Standard for Local Government

What progress is the Council making to obtain level 3 of the Equality Standard for Local Government and ensure that the Council continues to take a lead in the community to tackle inequality?

Party: Labour

Answer:

The Council self assessed as reaching Level 3 of the Equality Standard for Local Government in March 2007. New rules introduced mean that this standard has to be externally verified, we await this process. Our formal self assessment is being prepared. Initially, this will be assessed through a peer review by colleagues from Lewisham Council, followed by external verification from the IDeA accreditation team. Work has additionally continued in relation to the achievement of Level 4 of the Equalities Standard, with a high level gap analysis of our performance now against the standard. This will be developed into a detailed action plan, setting out how we intend to work to reach level 4 during 2008.

In order to ensure the council continues to take a lead in the community to tackle inequality there are several measures in place. One of the council's priority outcomes, set out in the corporate plan remains "to tackle inequality and social exclusion". This is used to help make decisions about what activities take place, where resources are focused and how the council prioritises its projects. The service and financial planning process for 2008/09 and beyond is using this priority as a key tool to enable decision making. In addition to this council focus, the council is working with partners strategically in Lambeth First to develop the new Sustainable Community Strategy. Related to this will be the development of an equalities strategy and single equality scheme, bringing together activity across the partnership to maximise impact and ensure a difference is felt in the communities of the borough.

This strategic activity is supported by the high levels of activity which continue on a day to day basis in the council and include projects such as the BME capacity building project, focusing on support provided for BME organisations in the 3rd sector operating in the borough; the cohesion forum and related policy developments; the family house project, building intergenerational solutions to complex issues of social isolation; and the women's forum, building network for women throughout the borough. The implementation of the Communities First delivery plan, which includes engagement with a wide range of community groups and organisations is a comprehensive approach to the way in which the council and our partners engage and supports the priority outcome of tackling inequality and social exclusion.

19. By: Councillor Clive Bennett (17.10.07)

To: Councillor Donatus Anyanwu – Cabinet Member for Health and Adult Services

Care Charges

How does the Cabinet Member justify the decision to increase care charges whilst awarding bonuses for achieving the dubious recognition as the poorest performing

council in London. Would he agree that immediate and serious reflection is now needed on both, in the best interests of taxpayers and the most vulnerable members of our community?

Party: Liberal Democrat

Answer:

The increases in charges reflect the actual cost of delivering the service and there had not been any significant increase since September 2003. A full financial assessment is undertaken before charges are made to ensure that only those who have sufficient income to pay do so and vulnerable members of the community are protected.

I do agree with Councillor Clive Bennett that the Council's performance throughout the 4 years of the Lib-Dem led administration was not to the standard that residents deserve and the one star CPA rating is an indication of their mismanagement of the Council. Under this Labour administration the Council is making progress and Councillor Bennett will be able to judge for himself the difference when the next CPA report is completed.

I would remind Councillor Bennett that bonuses for Executive Directors were introduced in 2003/04 by the previous Lib-Dem administration. Councillor Bennett will be aware that given the financial situation that the previous administration left behind after residents wisely removed them from office this administration is committed to providing sound financial management and will continue to examine all aspects of the Council's budget to deliver high quality services to residents.

20. By: Councillor Clare Whelan (16.10.07)

To: Councillor Lib Peck - Cabinet Member for Environment and Culture

Decline in trees in Lambeth since May 2006

At present, the Council has no trees officers in post. What is being done to recruit and retain well qualified tree officers to Lambeth and given the decline in the number of trees in the Borough since May 2006 with only 138 planted and 298 felled in 2006-2007 does the administration have any plans to reverse the decline in the number of trees since it took office?

Party: Conservative

Answer:

There are two vacancies for tree officers and a full recruitment process is underway to fill these posts. Market testing has shown that the rates of pay and Terms and Conditions offered by Lambeth are consistent with other London Boroughs. Thanks to the hard work of existing staff, there has been no disruption to the service provided to Borough residents.

As regards to tree planting, Councillor Whelan will be aware that the borough

benefited from the capital investment which came through from the Lambeth Opportunities Fund windfall. This allowed for an increase in the tree planting to 200 additional new trees. This one-off capital investment was not matched by any increase in the amount of revenue allocated to tree planting over the last four years. To increase the tree stock any further would require increased costs for maintenance purposes so the amount of new tree planting has to be constantly managed according to the ability to actually maintain the trees once they have been planted.

The amount of trees being removed is down to a variety of reasons. Firstly it has to be stressed that the Council does not remove trees without a good and just reason. The trees that are removed are felled due to them being subject to disease or damage, and as a result are a danger to public safety, or are trees that have 'outgrown' the environment and have become a 'nuisance tree', or are simply now too big for the area where they have grown. In addition, many of the trees planted in the Borough previously are not appropriate species for the location – e.g. they are forestry grade trees in an urban environment. As a result they are causing severe subsidence issues to local houses or property and have to be removed to mitigate against increasing insurance risk against the Authority.

At present there is a limited amount of core budget funds available to plant trees and the list of prospective sites by far outstrips the ability to satisfy the demand for tree planting requests. However, recent meetings have taken place with Trees For Cities with regard to them extending their remit beyond Brixton to undertake, in partnership with the Council, a structured tree planting programme that will include:- tree sponsorship; tree champions; education through schools; and fund raising for increased tree planting schemes.

21. By: Councillor Dave Malley (17.10.07)

To: Councillor Paul McGlone – Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Enterprise

Streatham Hub

Can you advise what action you have taken to ensure that the Streatham hub ice rink and swimming pool development is successfully delivered within a reasonable timeframe.

Party: Labour

Answer:

Whilst responsibility for the Streatham Hub Scheme delivery rests with Tesco, the Council retains the right to closely monitor the scheme. As a result, the scheme's contract will be actively managed by the Physical Regeneration Team, which will report to the Future Lambeth Programme Board on a monthly basis as well as oversight by the relevant Cabinet members. The Physical Regeneration Team is currently mobilising a team for this project and together with Leisure Services is currently working with Tesco to progress the final stages of design development of the leisure centre and ice rink.

By way of background, on 11th October 2007, Tesco and the Council agreed the Section 106 and the Development Agreement. The Section 106 defines the benefit to be derived from the Streatham Hub scheme, whereas the Development Agreement defines how and when the benefits will be delivered. The two documents sit alongside each other.

Once planning permission has been granted, the Development Agreement's commencement is triggered. From this date there is up to 12 months of activities before we will see works on site. The developer has six months within which it can determine the agreement (i.e. to proceed or not). This six month period is referred to as the feasibility review period, and allows Tesco to review the scheme's design and costs and finalise all outstanding land issues. Following the six month period, there is a further 30 week period before an "unconditional date" is reached. This period is to allow final tenders to be reviewed and for the final development costs to be determined. Both the Council and Tesco can determine the scheme by the unconditional date. The Council could decide to not proceed with the development with no liability for abortive costs.

The construction period, capped at 130 weeks, commences on the "unconditional date". The order of development is clearly outlined in the Development Agreement as follows:

- New bus terminal (to be completed within 18 months of the unconditional date)
- Phase 1 Ice & Leisure Centre (this stage could be combined with the building of the bus terminal)
- Phase 2 Ice & Leisure Centre / preparation works for underground car parks and foundations.
- Phase 1 Housing (rear of the site) / Public Square
- Store and Phase 2 Housing.

Clearer dates cannot be provided until the planning permission is issued, as the date of issue sets the base date, but following planning permission, the completion of the scheme will be no longer than 187 weeks (Up to 57 for feasibility review and determination of final development costs and up to 130 for construction). If approval is issued shortly, as hoped, and the scheme progresses to plan then the Leisure Centre will open in 2010, 12 months before the overall scheme completion.

22. By: Councillor Andrew Sawdon (17.10.07)

To: Councillor Kirsty McHugh – Deputy Cabinet Member for Decent Homes

Bed bug infestation

Is the Deputy Cabinet Member for Decent Homes aware of the re-newed problem of bed-bugs in the UK after many decades in which bedbugs appeared to have been largely eradicated? What is the Council, which has the statutory duties to enforce against insect infestations, doing to support and advise landlords, private and social, in dealing with this?

Party: Liberal Democrat

Answer:

I am aware that there has been an increase in reported infestations by bedbugs, including the SLP headline article regarding the problem in a neighbouring borough. Bedbugs are not known to be carriers of any human disease although the reaction to bites can lead to swelling and serve irritation in those individuals who are susceptible.

Therefore, the advice given by Private Sector EH Team is generally in relation to sources of infestation and to sign post or direct them to Pest Control Services. Any other intervention would be to substantiate if other Statutory Nuisance or Public health action should be taken.

23. By: Councillor Graham Pycock (16.10.07)

To: Councillor Paul McGlone - Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Enterprise

Coin Street Social Housing

What enforcement action is the administration taking to ensure that Coin Street Builders meet their commitment to provide their promised number of social housing units?

Party: Conservative

Answer:

All the sites developed so far by Coin Street Community Builders have delivered the amount of affordable housing required by the legal agreements attached to each planning permission. There has therefore been no need to take any enforcement action against CSCB. Their current application for the Doon Street site does not include any affordable housing but instead would provide a publicly accessible leisure centre financed from the sale of the 329 private flats. The Council's UDP policy requires the provision of 50% affordable housing with housing subsidy or 40% without. However, the Council's planning applications committee considered that the provision of a public leisure centre which is revenue funded and guaranteed for 50 years through the Section 106 agreement justified the lack of affordable housing provision. A viability appraisal commissioned by officers concluded that the scheme could not afford to provide both. The Coin Street Developers proposals were seven years in development and have enjoyed massive local support for these much needed leisure facilities.

The application has since been called in by the Secretary of State and a public inquiry will be held in due course. A date for the inquiry has not as yet been set. However, Lambeth Council has shown that it can be bold in using its Planning powers to promote well designed tall buildings to add to London's sky line which will allow the funding of schemes that provide public services that contribute to sustainable communities.

24. By: Councillor Daniel Fitzpatrick (17.10.07)

**To: Councillor Lib Peck – Cabinet Member for Environment and Culture
Upper Norwood Joint Library**

Can the Cabinet Member for Environment and Culture give Council an update on the joint financing of Upper Norwood Joint Library?

Party: Labour

Answer:

Lambeth Council values the work of the independent Upper Norwood Joint Library. In the current financial year Lambeth is providing funding of £211,186 to Upper Norwood Joint Library. Croydon has confirmed funding of £156, 288 as in the previous 3 years.

Lambeth has increased its funding of Upper Norwood Joint Library by approximately 35% since 2003/2004 and is currently committed to the same level of funding in 2008/2009.

25. By: Councillor Brian Palmer (17.10.07)

To: Councillor Steve Reed – Leader of the Council

Streatham Post Office Closure

Does the Leader of the Council share the concerns expressed by the 5,000 people who signed my petition about the closure of Streatham Post Office? Will he join with me in condemning this move?

Party: Liberal Democrat

Answer:

Yes I do share concerns, and I have already made public statements as part of a cross-party initiative before the council elections opposing the closure of post offices without adequate replacements in Lambeth.

26. By: Councillor Diana Morris (17.10.07)

To: Councillor Nigel Haselden – Deputy Cabinet Member for Parking and Transport

Sustainable Transport

This Council is committed to promoting sustainable transport – can the Deputy Cabinet Member for Parking and Transport update us as to what has been done in this area?

Party: Labour

Answer:

The Council's commitment to sustainable transport has been shown by winning the London Borough's Sustainable Transport Award in 2006 and hosting the Pan London Travel Awareness Team (Good Going). We are also working closely with TfL to improve public transport integration and usage. This will embrace physical improvements and better information provision. The following is an indication of the extensive work that is being carried out in promoting sustainable transport and particularly in educating residents in alternative ways of travelling:

- Cycle Training – Lambeth offers subsidised cycle training for those who live, work or study in the borough. Lessons are available from Cycle Training UK on 020 7231 6005 or see more information at www.cycletraining.co.uk. The instructors can come to you and the training is tailored to your needs and ability. There is a booking fee of £8 but this will cover up to 4 hours training.
- Bike Maintenance Courses for residents. These are organised on a regular basis and are free of charge. Such courses provide people with the practical skills to look after their bicycles and undertake minor repairs such as changing brake blocks, adjusting gears, fixing punctures etc
- Working with schools- all schools must have a school travel plan in place by 2009. Lambeth has 3 officers who work closely with schools promoting walking, cycling and public transport use. This includes campaigns such as WOW (Walk on Wednesdays), Walk to School Week, Cycle Training and also works with schools to improve the physical environment outside of schools. Eg. Introduction of traffic calming etc.
- Sustainable transport events. Lambeth has 2 Sustainable Transport Officers who attend and organise events throughout the year. These include, Lambeth Country Show, Hovis Freewheel, Kennington Sports Centre Open Day etc. At these events practical advice is offered on changing mode of transport. This includes handing out cycle and public transport maps, information on Oyster cards, cycle training, local walking guides etc etc. We also run more specific events including Cyclists' Breakfasts, Winter Wheelin' (offering advice on how to keep cycling through the colder months), Led Walks to places of interest.
- Lambeth Business Travel Network – this is a business organisation set up to work with businesses to implement travel plans. Businesses are invited to join the network to discuss issues relating to transport that affect them. Practical advice is given, along with help on funding to implement things like cycle parking, setting up car share databases. Meetings are held quarterly with a monthly newsletter sent out to businesses keeping them up to date of relevant issues.
- Faith Based Travel Plans – we are working with places of worship to encourage their visitors to travel their in a sustainable manner. Practical advice on how to do this is given.
- Wheels for Wellbeing – a cycle project working with people with mental disabilities providing them cycle training and bicycles to improve their mobility and accessibility of services.
- Car Clubs – Lambeth is working with 4 Car Club operators within the borough providing car clubs to residents. There are currently 15 car club bays in the borough with a further 48 being implemented by March 2008. A number of promotions on car clubs are also carried out at events.
- Council Travel Plan – numerous promotions are carried out to encourage staff to switch mode – these include regular cyclist and walking breakfasts,

Dr Bike, Bike Maintenance Classes, competitions, installing cycle parking and showers in Council buildings. A staff travel survey is carried out every two years to assess the modal shift.

27. By: Councillor Peter Truesdale (17.10.07)

To: Councillor Lorna Campbell – Deputy Cabinet Member for Community Cohesion

Workforce profile

How many staff does the Council employ from the following ethnic minority groups whose numbers have increased very significantly in Lambeth over the past 20 years but who appear to be inadequately represented within its workforce:

Portuguese, Somali, Ethiopian, Eritrean, Latin American? Does the Deputy Cabinet Member not agree that the Council should be taking positive actions to attract, train and employ more staff from these groups, both in order to meet Equalities obligations and in order to improve its rapport with Lambeth residents from those backgrounds whose understanding of our language and institutions is still imperfect? What actions, if any, has the present administration initiated in this respect? And what new actions are planned, within what time frame?

Party: Liberal Democrat

Answer:

I am pleased that Councillor Truesdale is showing interest in making the workplace accessible to employees from ethnic minority groups as I was concerned by the Liberal Democrat's lack of interest when they were running the council as they failed to address or even attempt to address this issue. I am delighted to report the following actions that the Labour administration has made since May 2006.

Ethnic monitoring of staff is currently undertaken using the Office National Statistics (ONS) categories. These currently focus on broad ethnic groups, and allow us to compare the workforce with the census information and with other authorities.

There is a need to maintain consistency in the way we measure the profile of the workforce to allow us to make comparisons over time and to help us measure our performance improvement. The categorisation does allow for staff to present further information, however, there is no compulsion and as such the information is incomplete. As one of the most diverse boroughs in London, we recognise the need to develop greater sophistication in relation to understanding both our community and to put measures in place to help ensure that our workforce reflects the local community as closely as possible, and we are starting, through the equalities unit to look at ways in which this information can be obtained.

The Race Equality Scheme action plan for 2007 - 2008, contains specific actions which are being delivered through the Strategy and Corporate Service's department to help further improve the workforce profile. These include providing training for all staff involved in recruitment processes, development centres and careers conferences targeted to increase the proportion of BME staff in senior posts, and to implement ethnic monitoring data of staff receiving training (this

extends to gender and disability).

Additionally, we have a BME capacity building agency being developed to increase the involvement of BME citizens in public life, are currently reviewing the use of equality impact assessments to address the impact of new policy development on all ethnic groups (as well as other groups at risk of disadvantage), and are developing better ways to monitor our success in relation to equalities, with the support of Capital Ambition. These activities are contained within the 2007 – 2008 Race Equality Scheme Action Plan, and as such should be complete within the current financial year.

28. By: Councillor Adedamola Aminu (17.10.07)

To: Councillor Lib Peck – Cabinet Member for Environment and Culture
Brixton Recreation Centre

Can the Cabinet Member for Environment and Culture describe the benefits for Lambeth residents as a result of the investment into the Brixton Recreation Centre?

Party: Labour

Answer:

I know that you, like me, visited the Brixton Rec over the weekend of 21-22 October and could see at first hand the differences that the £2.85m investment in the Centre is already making. Over 1500 people also visited the centre over the weekend to sample the activities. In the five hours that I was there I heard nothing but praise for the refurbishments.

To recap, these improvements, to date, include:

- The remodelling of the entrance/reception area to create a welcoming, safe environment and improvements to customer queuing system.
- Improved crèche facilities and children's party rooms
- The creation of one of the largest children & young people's activity areas in the UK. The activity zone comprise of:
 - Improved Soft Play area for 2 – 5 year olds
 - The Energy Zone with a range of interactive games for 5-15 year olds
 - Fitness Zone with the latest SHOKK fitness equipment designed for under 16s, funky interactive dance mats in an aerobics studio with a virtual instructor
 - Team Zone with the latest 3rd Generation artificial indoor grass pitch ideal for football coaching

In addition, there will be

- The creation of a modern fitness gym with over 100 stations of state of art fitness equipment (due to be completed Jan 08).
- The relocation of sauna & steam on poolside (due to be completed December 07)

All these changes together will transform the centre into a modern, vibrant and safe facility catering for the sport and physical activity needs of the local community. It is anticipated that the refurbished facility along with the new partnership with GLL for the management of the Lambeth's leisure facilities will drive improvements in services for the community and attract a broad range of people to use the centre.

It will also help Lambeth sustain the position of the 4th highest sport & physical activity participation level out of the 33 London local authorities and in the top quartile nationally (Sport England Active People's Survey)

29. By: Councillor Jeremy Clyne (17.10.07)

To: Councillor Peter Bowyer – Chair of Housing Scrutiny sub-committee

Since your appointment as Chair of Housing Scrutiny sub-committee what meetings have you attended of the following bodies:

- Tenants Council
- Leaseholders Council
- Leaseholders Council Executive
- Brixton Area Housing Forum
- North Lambeth Area Housing Forum
- Clapham Area Housing Forum
- Stockwell and Vassall Area Housing Forum
- Norwood Area Housing Forum
- Streatham Area Housing Forum
- Brixton Leaseholders Forum
- North Lambeth Leaseholders Forum
- Clapham Leaseholders Forum
- Stockwell and Vassall Leaseholders Forum
- Norwood Leaseholders Forum
- Streatham Leaseholders Forum
- Housing Finance Group
- Housing Maintenance, Repairs and Investment Panel
- Housing Strategy and Investment Group
- Housing Service Improvement Forum
- Tenants' and Residents' Diversity Action Group
- TMO Liaison Committee
- TRAs and TMOs
- Cabinet

Apart from chairing two meetings of the Housing scrutiny sub committee what other duties have you undertaken and do you think your activities justify your special responsibilities allowance?

Party: Liberal Democrat

Answer:

Since becoming chair of the Housing Scrutiny sub-committee, I have attended numerous meetings on housing related issues with tenants and leaseholders, council officers and Cabinet Members. I have worked hard with other members of the sub-committee, including the vice-chair, to make the committee function

effectively at discharging its duty of helping to improve the Council's housing service by scrutinising decisions of the department and assisting in the enhancement of the policy making process.

30. By: Councillor Lorna Campbell (17.10.07)

To: Councillor Lib Peck – Cabinet Member for Environment and Culture

Recycling

The league table for recycling has recently been published and Lambeth was at the bottom in London. What is being done to improve our position?

Party: Labour

Department / Member asked to provide answer (and date sent):
Councillor Lib Peck, Caroline Arding, Robert Overall, Richard Godfrey

Answer:

Thank you for your question. It is good to be able to set the record straight. The information which was recently published in the London Evening Standard was completely inaccurate. The paper later had to publish an apology for their mistake and the Council has put out a correction on the Lambeth website.

On Friday 19 October the Standard published an article concentrating on the use of mountain bikes by Lambeth Parking wardens as an example of Lambeth's commitment to reducing carbon emissions. This article included a statement that the Council had boosted its recycling rates over the past year and was exceeding government targets.

In its original article the paper had, incorrectly, interpreted CPA rating as recycling performance. In the last published, audited Best Value Performance Indicator information (BVPI) Lambeth is not 'bottom' in any sense. We were showing at around 13th in London on recycling performance. The audit of the BVPIs for 2006/7 has not yet been completed so there are no finalised figures for last year.

As regards what we are doing to improve our recycling we are increasing engagement with the public to raise awareness of the current service. We have set aside separate facilities at Vale Street for recovery of electrical equipment. We have extended our recycling scheme to include cardboard drinks containers (eg Tetrapak). We plan to extend the range of plastics collected when the new Multi Recycling Facility comes on line. We are continuing to promote real nappies and subsidise and promote home composters. We collect cans, paper, cardboard, plastic bottles, glass jars and bottles weekly from households.

We are about to complete the review of the Council's Waste Action Plan which will include a range of new initiatives.

Note – A written answer is not required for questions 31 – 35 listed below

31. By: Councillor Ashley Lumsden (17.10.07)

To: Councillor Steve Reed – Leader of the Council

Government Spending

How does the Leader of the Council react to news that the Government is ending the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund, abolishing the Respect Taskforce and cancelling the Local Enterprise Growth Initiative? Does he think that these changes along with the poor Comprehensive Spending Review settlement for Local Government mean that Gordon Brown has correctly de-prioritised Government spending in Lambeth? If not, what contact has the Leader of the Council had with Government to argue the case for greater investment in the Borough?

Party: Liberal Democrat

32. By: Councillor Christopher Wellbelove (17.10.07)

To: Councillor Lib Peck – Cabinet Member for Environment and Culture

Public Conveniences

What progress has been made in providing late night toilet facilities in Clapham?

Party: Labour

33. By: Councillor Roger Giess (17.10.07)

To: Councillor Sally Prentice – Cabinet Member for Children and Young People

Park Campus Pupil Referral Unit

What discussions were had with the Tenant Management Organisation for the Magdalen Estate before the decision was taken to site the “Park Campus” Pupil Referral Unit in the empty school building in the middle of the estate?

Party: Liberal Democrat

34. By: Councillor Peter Robbins (17.10.07)

To: Councillor John Kazantzis – Cabinet Member Housing

Voids

With social housing in short supply across the borough it is vital that voids are kept to a minimum. What efforts have been made to both reduce the total number of voids across Lambeth, and the time taken to return voids to use?

Party: Labour

35. By: **Councillor Christopher Wellbelove (17.10.07)**

To: **Councillor Mark Bennett – Cabinet Member for Safer Communities**

Hate Crime Strategy

What is the current status of the hate crime strategy?

Party: Labour

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