

**LONDON BOROUGH OF SUTTON
COUNCIL MEETING: 3 MARCH 2008
QUESTIONS: STANDING ORDER 8.6
QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS**

1. Question asked by Councillor David Pickles of the Chair of The Executive

Given the continuing threat to the future of Malvern Ward at Sutton Hospital, what steps are the council taking to ensure it remains open, and if by any unfortunate act it *does* close, what responsibilities do Sutton council have to the relatives of the patients there to ensure that they are treated fairly with courtesy and respect?

Reply by Councillor Colin Stears, Executive Councillor for Adult Social Services and Housing

The Council has worked closely with Sutton & Merton Primary Care Trust and other local stakeholders, including voluntary sector partners and service users and carers' representatives, to develop proposals to modernise local services for people with dementia. Agreement has been reached on a new model of care, based on national best practice guidelines. These include the re-provision of continuing care beds, currently provided at Malvern Ward, commissioned by the PCT. Malvern Ward provides an out-dated, ward based environment that does not meet current standards for the care of people with dementia.

Sutton and Merton PCT is currently consulting on proposals to re-provide this service. The findings will be presented at the PCT Board on 22nd May to inform the decision of the future of Malvern Ward.

The Council supports the development of good quality services for older people with dementia, both for current service users and also for those who will need services in the future. Council officers will contribute to the discussions about potential alternatives to Malvern Ward, to facilitate the integrated and holistic development of services for people with dementia.

We have no reason to believe that relatives will not be treated fairly, with courtesy and respect. These services are not directly commissioned by Sutton Council, so there is no direct responsibility aside from the health scrutiny role of the Health & Well Being Scrutiny Committee which is monitoring the process of these changes in health provision.

Supplementary Question asked by Councillor Stuart Gordon-Bullock

Will the Lead Councillor agree that it would be helpful if Councillor Pickles knew that the Health and Well Being Scrutiny Committee has looked at the issue of Malvern Ward at its meetings in November 2007 and January 2008 and that it is scheduled to take a paper from the South West London and St George's Mental Health Trust at its meeting this Thursday 6th March, which will report progress on its consultation process involving Mental Health and Malvern Ward? Would he also agree with me, in welcoming Councillor Pickle's newfound interest in the matter, and join me in welcoming his attendance at the meeting on 6th March and any further meetings where this matter will be scrutinised? Will he also agree that the Health and Well Being Scrutiny Committee has neither the legal nor professional competencies to deal with the care of patients, but it can and should scrutinise the trust's consultation arrangements to ensure that they are real and meaningful, and to comment on the trust proposals for Malvern Wards, in the light of their consultation exercise where any changes in services proposed that may constitute a substantial variation?

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Reply by Councillor Colin Stears

Thank you Councillor Gordon-Bullock. I think you have done a very good job of inviting Councillor Pickles to your committee yourself. I hope that all Councillors understand the role and functions of scrutiny within this Council and endorse the process. I urge them to read all appropriate papers and attend the meetings that they feel will most benefit them and their constituents.

2. Question asked by Councillor Jayne McCoy of the Chair of The Executive

With the implementation of the new Local Area Agreement what is being done to ensure that services for carers will not be eroded by these new funding arrangements?

Reply by Councillor Colin Stears, Executive Councillor for Adult Social Services and Housing

Whilst acknowledging the advent of the Local Area Agreement and the new funding arrangements, this Council has continued to express its commitment to support carers by allocating specific funding for carer services.

Supplementary Question asked by Councillor Jayne McCoy

I'm pleased to hear of the Council's commitments. Can I ask how this compares to the carers' grant in previous years in terms of resources?

Reply by Councillor Colin Stears

The Council has committed a further £85,000 to be targeted for short-term emergency respite care in the year 08-09.

3. Question asked Councillor David Callaghan of the Chair of The Executive

Is it correct that council tenants' rents are having to be increased from April by an average of 5.8% because the government is increasing the amount it is creaming off the Housing Revenue Account by 24% to £9.7m?

Reply by Councillor Colin Stears, Executive Councillor for Adult Social Services and Housing

Yes, there is a clear link between the rent increase and the amount that is charged to the HRA in negative subsidy. The actual rent increase is based on the Government's policy of harmonising all social housing rents by 2016-17. In relation to the negative subsidy payment for 08-09 this will be pooled nationally and reallocated to authorities that score more highly against the range of criteria, such as property type, location, deprivation and crime. Assuming a weekly rent of £76 per week in Sutton, approximately £28 is passed back to us as a negative subsidy. In effect Madam Mayor, every tenant in this borough of SHP gives £1,480 back to the Government that we could spend on our homes.

Supplementary Question asked by Councillor David Callaghan

I will be joining Councillor Stears and other Liberal Democrat colleagues on the Sutton tenants' protest at Downing Street this week. Will he join me in calling for support for that protest from all the parties on this Council?

Reply by Councillor Colin Stears

I would ask all Members of all political parties and Independents within this Council Chamber to support the tenants of the Sutton Housing Partnership. I'm sure that if they have a word with the Tenants Federation in Sutton Gate, there are still places on the coach for Wednesday. So I would like to see as many Councillors there as possible.

Supplementary Question asked by Councillor Barry Russell

As Councillor Stears knows, I was the Councillor in this Chamber who suggested cross party agreement and support against this appalling negative housing subsidy. I also suggested that the two Parliamentary candidates from the Conservative party for these two constituencies accompany the MP's. This was fully agreed by the Tenants Association until they had to, in a rather embarrassed way, contact me to say the invitation had been withdrawn. I have, of course, subsequently met with the Chair of the Tenants Association. As a group we have offered our complete and full support for this and I think we have an unfortunate range of circumstances which unfortunately the ruling group were aware of. If they wish to comment on that, that is my question.

Reply by Councillor Colin Stears

The reason is that there is a limited amount of people allowed into Downing Street, for security reasons I understand. That is beyond all our controls here. We are reliant on the security services in London to nominate numbers to Downing Street. I fully accept what Councillor Russell says that he did and has done in that the Strategic Housing Group endorsed cross party working on this particular case. I do endorse that.

4. Question asked by Councillor Terry Faulds of the Chair of The Executive

During the renegotiation of the leisure contract, it emerged that SCL had not paid any of the heating charges in respect of the Phoenix Centre since opening some two years earlier. The amount outstanding then was £108,000. Can the Executive Councillor explain why this was subsequently reduced to £36,000 and what effect this reduction had on the other users through the district heating account?

Reply by Councillor Colin Stears, Executive Councillor for Adult Social Services and Housing

I understand the invoice amount was reduced after negotiation between SCL and officers. This was the result of lower levels of usage in the Phoenix Centre. I can assure Councillor Faulds that there was no negative financial impact on other users of the district heating account. The Council's General Fund bore the negotiated reduction on that invoice. So Council tenants in Roundshaw did not suffer any financial hardship from this reduction in this invoice.

Supplementary Question asked by Councillor Terry Faulds

I just wanted to know if it is standard negotiating practice then to reduce by one third any disputed bill and when it is further disputed to reduce it by a further one third? The reduction here was from £108,000 to £36,000. That is massive in anyone's book. Sutton Leisure did not pay a single heating bill for two years on the Phoenix Centre and finally they are getting it for what, less than £1,500 a month? It doesn't stack up compared to normal household bills. I think it is disgraceful. I don't care where the money has come from. I cannot believe that £36,000 has

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been a fair bill for the heating of the Phoenix Centre. My question is Councillor Stears, do you agree with that?

Reply by Councillor Colin Stears

As you well know Councillor Faulds, your main question was about the effect it had on the heating and the cost charges for housing. Housing is my portfolio. If you had asked that question within the first question, I might have given the answer today. But I will find out from officers and fellow Executive Members an answer. Not the answer, because it will never be the right answer for you, but I will find an answer and will get back to you. I do understand though that Councillor Tope has answered questions on this before and we do seem to be going round in circles flogging the same dead horse about the same thing, Councillor Faulds. So if you had asked the right question to start you might have got the same answer as you got from Councillor Tope.

5. Question asked by Councillor Barry Russell of the Chair of The Executive

The Decent Homes standard is a national measure to which all Councils are subject on a comparable basis. Can the Executive Councillor confirm the following: -

- That 75% of Councils have 30% or fewer homes failing to reach this standard?
- And that Sutton Council is within the worst 25% of Councils in England and Wales when it comes to the quality of its Council housing stock, and that it has over 60% of homes failing to reach the required standard?

Reply by Councillor Colin Stears, Executive Councillor for Adult Social Services and Housing

As at 1 April 2007, this Council reported that non-decent homes were at 56%. However, national figures have not been published yet, so we can't confirm where we are in the quartile. Work has continued to update our stock condition information since the last survey, which was carried out in 2004. This should mean we are in a much improved position at 1 April 2008. Whereas many other authorities have been receiving large amounts of ALMO funding to allow significant investment in improving their housing stock to decent homes level, Sutton has yet to receive any funding from the Government. I'm pleased, however, as part of our budget this year, that the Council is investing two million pounds in renovations and repairs to our housing stock, so more details later. So, we are 56% and we hope to be much higher in 2008 but we are not certain of the quartile.

Supplementary Question asked by Councillor Barry Russell

Poor Councillor Stears is up on his feet all the time. I apologise Councillor Stears. So, the only figures we actually have unfortunately show 56% substandard housing but at least £2 million from this budget is going towards the general estimate of £130-150 million we need. So I suppose the question is, Councillor Stears, is it a step in the right direction?

Reply by Councillor Colin Stears

Any money this Council and this Administration allocates to housing for the tenants of London Borough of Sutton must be a step in the right direction. I will come on later to the details regarding that expenditure and how it will affect certain areas of the targets we have to reach.

Supplementary Question asked by Councillor Tony Shields

Just really I wasn't going to do a supplementary on this one, it's not my portfolio. I've got a question. I've been listening to Councillor Stears with great interest perhaps I will come on to housing, I think I might fancy a bit of that committee in the future. You quoted £76 as an average; we give £28 to the Government that leaves £48 as an average. There's 6670 properties in Council control, given an average of three hundred and twenty thousand a week in rent and you can't make ends meet, why?

Reply by Councillor Colin Stears

Could I possibly check the maths on that and get back to you with a written answer?

6. Question asked by Councillor Stuart Gordon-Bullock of the Chair of The Executive

When did TfL give authority to buy the Air Monitoring Station for Worcester Park and will the Executive Councillor inform the Council when it will be installed, and up and running?"

Reply by Councillor Colin Hall, Executive Councillor for the Environment

Transport for London gave Sutton Council authority to buy an air quality monitoring station for Worcester Park in December 2006. Following a feasibility siting report by the Environmental Research Group at Kings College, London a number of sites were identified as suitable and work was undertaken to negotiate proceeding with installation of the station. However, following objections from residents and Councillor Stuart Gordon-Bullock on two sites, it has been necessary to commission a further siting report which was received in January this year and is still under consideration, I think with you, as well, Councillor Gordon-Bullock. I'm hopeful therefore that these extensive discussions will, with the co-operation of Ward Councillors, lead to the installation happening very soon.

Supplementary Question asked by Councillor Stuart Gordon-Bullock

Yes, actually I think I need to make a point of clarification. My understanding actually is the reason why it wasn't installed was that the plans had been to install it on a piece of private land, which the Council had been maintaining at tax payers' expense for the last twenty years. The supplementary question is, what lessons are going to be learnt from this and how are they going to be applied in future?

Reply by Councillor Colin Hall

That's not entirely correct; the subsoil is privately owned as I think you know. The issue therefore is finding a new site because it wasn't appropriate to put it into that site and I believe you objected to the second site. We need to find a way of speeding Ward Councillors up in making their decisions.

7. Question asked by Councillor Tim Crowley of the Chair of The Executive

Does this Liberal Democrat Council support plans to introduce a 24/7 Greater London Congestion Zone for non-Londoners?

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Reply by Councillor Colin Hall, Executive Councillor for the Environment

Through the Smarter Travel Sutton project the Council, supported by the Conservative Group for which I am grateful, has shown its commitment to reducing the negative impacts of traffic congestion and the associated effects. The Council will continue to encourage the use of public transport and other sustainable options to reduce dependency on the private car and to improve health and local air quality.

With regard to the 24/7 Greater London Congestion Zone proposals by Brian Paddick, the Council would need to examine the detail of those proposals further to ensure a balance is achieved between reducing unnecessary through traffic and providing essential links between Sutton and its neighbours in Surrey.

Supplementary Question asked by Councillor Tim Crowley

It's been one of my privileges in the last two years to actually serve on the Economic Development Strategy Committee Advisory Group under the auspices of Councillor Lyn Gleeson, and I think that we've made a lot of progress in regards to businesses in Sutton and trying to get them on board with what we, as a total, are doing as a Council here. One of the things that worries me about this is how these businesses are going to react if Mr Paddick's suggestion is actually put into place. I would like to know how it squares with the Liberal Democrats' 2006 election manifesto which I have here, which is required reading for anyone who enjoys a bit of a laugh? You make the pledge to ensure that Sutton remains a suitable environment for small and medium size businesses to operate and expand. What will you say and what will we say to small and medium size businesses that will suffer as a result of consumers from Epsom, Ewell, Reigate, Banstead, Dorking and other surrounding areas choosing not to come to Sutton in order to avoid the punitive £10 charge from Mr Paddick? Will you be campaigning for Mr Paddick on the basis of his £10 charge in the Mayoral elections that are coming up in May?

Reply by Councillor Colin Hall

Two points really. I think your first point was about the economic disbenefit potentially of this on places like Cheam. I think that might be one of the ones you have in mind. And, Brian Paddick has looked at the policy and I understand has looked at ways in which neighbouring areas can have a dispensation so therefore there will be a dispensation from towns that do their shopping in the edges of the zone. But the second point that I think is important in his policy is one about changing things like the western extension of the Congestion Zone. In actual fact, I have spoken to inner London Councillors who have found it very difficult having that part of the zone included because it has actually increased traffic for them that had reduced previously. So I think that is a positive move, supported by actually a lot of your colleagues as well. The third point of my two is really that I was fascinated to hear that your candidate for the Mayoral elections invited Leaders of London Councils to talk to him about transport policy because, as he said, he hadn't got a clue.

Supplementary Question asked by Councillor Peter Geiringer

I'm concerned about the shopkeepers in Belmont. It's all very well for Colin Hall to say what he did but quite frankly we are about a month away from the London elections starting and for him not to know what the policies are of his own candidate is absolutely disgraceful. A total and utter disgrace. I am concerned about the businesses in Belmont, in my ward, where people have to come shopping from Banstead and from thereabouts. Are they going to have to pay £10 just to get into the London Borough of Sutton, plus parking charges anywhere else,

or are you saying you still don't know how much it is going to be? You're talking about transitional charge, I'm not quite sure there maybe something. But we are a month away. Mr Paddick made it quite clear on the television that he wants to introduce a £10 Greater London charge. You haven't said anything solid about businesses on the fringe of the borough not suffering financially.

Reply by Councillor Colin Hall

I'll be very quick but I'll try to speak slowly for the benefit of Councillor Geiringer. I did say that Brian Paddick's position on this is clear and I didn't think that I said that I didn't understand what his position was. His position is that there would be a dispensation for those on the periphery of the zone, such that they wouldn't pay the £10 charge.

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