

**Appendix C to Council:
Questions During Debates
18 January 2016**

**LONDON BOROUGH OF SUTTON
COUNCIL MEETING: 18 JANUARY 2016
QUESTIONS: STANDING ORDER 8.1
QUESTIONS DURING DEBATES**

Item 6a – Motion

1. Question asked by Councillor Neil Garratt to Councillor Ruth Dombey, Leader of the Council

Does the motion's call for "true devolution of powers and responsibilities" include the removal of the 2% referendum cap on Council Tax rises?

Reply by Councillor Ruth Dombey, Leader of the Council

Thank you Mr Mayor. Councillor Garratt, coincidentally David Hodge, the Conservative leader of Surrey County Council was recently asked exactly the same question and he replied, I'm going to quote him: "What I'd like to see is central government letting local government and councils manage their own budgets and manage their affairs as I believe we are best placed to manage those affairs." And he's right. There may be some parts of the country where residents would prefer to pay a higher increase in council tax in order to maintain vital council services, the point is, that's up to them.

Supplementary question asked by Councillor Neil Garratt

Sorry, I'm not sure that really answers the question. The question is, the wording in the motion, does that refer to Councillor Dombey asking for that freedom here or does she think that it's not necessary. I mean I appreciate that circumstances may be different in Councillor Hodges patch.

Reply by Councillor Dombey

What I'm saying is that local councils should be free to make that decision for themselves. As things stand at the moment we can't.

2. Question asked by Councillor Neil Garratt to Councillor Ruth Dombey, Leader of the Council

What is the difference between the "Draconian" funding cuts which this motion condemns, and the council's funding cuts from 2010-2015 which the Liberal Democrats supported as a difficult but important step to restore public finances to a sound footing?

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Reply by Councillor Ruth Dombey, Leader of the Council

Thank you Mr Mayor. The difference, Councillor Garratt, is that having already found millions of pounds worth of savings, it makes it very difficult to find more without starting to cut important council services. The difference is that now we have in year funding cuts like the cut to Public Health, which makes it very difficult to budget properly. And the difference is what's happening, what's happened since 2010. Hospitals increasingly unable to cope with growing need, particularly the elderly, putting growing pressure on adult social services. Plus the financial implications of the Care Act, plus the financial implications of the new Deprivation of Liberties legislation, not to mention the rise in the numbers of children needing care. Where have you been since 2010, Councillor?

Supplementary question asked by Councillor Neil Garratt

So is Councillor Dombey saying that the level of funding across government departments for the 2014 period, the budget agreed by the coalition government, that's the level of funding that she would like to see continue onwards? In other words up to that point things were basically fine and it's only subsequently that there's a problem?

Reply by Councillor Dombey

That's not what I've said at all and you know perfectly well that's not what I've said at all. What I'm saying is that the world is changing year on year, no government is making eight, 10, 15, 20 year predictions, we're lucky if we get a year on year prediction. The world is changing, demographics are changing, the cuts are far more serious than they ever were before and as a result councils all across the country are lobbying central government because it isn't fair.

Supplementary question asked by Councillor Manuel Abellan

Thank you Mr Mayor. Wouldn't the leader agree with me that the reality, and to put it simply, is that the Conservatives use the austerity as an end to itself and they see these deep cuts not as an economic necessity but as an ideological obsession to reduce the size of the state?

Reply by Councillor Dombey

Yes I would agree with you. I really do worry about the impact that these cuts are having on some of the most vulnerable people in our society. If you look at the proposed welfare changes, if you look at what they're proposing to do with universal credit it is quite shocking what will be happening to some of the people in this country who are struggling and I think it's a disgrace.

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Item 7 – School Places Update

1. Question asked by Councillor David Hicks to Councillor Wendy Mathys, Chair of Children, Family and Education Committee

Section 7.10 of the Report to Children Families and Education Committee (19th December) requested the following:

"The Committee are asked to agree for officers to work up proposals for a secondary school on the hospital site in advance of wave 11 free school applications being determined in order to keep a 2018 opening for the first school a possibility. The anticipation is that we would work closely with the EFA in this endeavour including on the procurement strategy for the project. In order to achieve this, the Committee is asked to approve an initial sum of £950k to get the project to planning (inclusive of all surveys, professional fees etc.). The Council would expect planning costs to be met by the Education Funding Agency should a Free School be approved however no formal agreements on this can be reached at this stage."

Subsequently, on 13th January 2016 an email was sent by the Council to headteachers and chairs of governors giving an Update on the Secondary School - Sutton Hospital Site containing the following:

"Because of the way that the EFA frameworks work, we cannot 'hand over' the project post planning so the Borough will also appoint the contractor to build the school as well. This would require approval of a business case from the EFA and the provider."

Considering the financial and operational risks involved will you please answer the following question:

Does this mean the Council will be responsible for managing and delivering the project within a cost package and time scale agreed with the EFA and it may be possible that financial penalties may be incurred if the Council does not deliver the school on time and within costs?

Reply by Councillor Wendy Mathys

Thank you Mr Mayor. In principle, this proposal does mean that the Council would be responsible for delivering the project and there are a number of advantages to this as set out in the email you refer to, Councillor Hicks. There are also risks but the Council does not believe that there would be any specific financial penalties to the Council that the Government could levy

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should it not deliver the school on time. A further update on these issues will be provided at the next CFE meeting in February.

Supplementary question asked by Councillor David Hicks

Mr Mayor, thank you. No, Councillor Mathys has answered the question. When were you intending to tell us of this situation? It's all well informing the head teachers and governors but shouldn't councillors be informed? Thank you.

Reply by Councillor Mathys

We did cover quite a lot of the issues at the last Children, Family & Education (CFE) meeting. Ongoing discussions have been taking place throughout December and this month with our officers and it would come, as I say, it will come to the next CFE, there hasn't been a meeting since the email, as you know. Thank you.