

**Appendix A to Council:
Public Questions
7 March 2016**

**London Borough of Sutton
Council: 7 March 2016
Questions under Standing Order 8.7
From Members of the Public**

1. Question asked by Ethan Smith, Youth Parliament, to Councillor Wendy Mathys, Chair of the Children, Family and Education Committee

Why did you bother spending £9000 on the youth service consultation when you didn't take any notice of the outcome and cut youth services anyway?

Reply by Councillor Wendy Mathys

Thank you Mr Mayor. Good evening, Ethan, thank you for your question. The Youth Parliament, including yourself of course, were consulted in advance of commissioning a specialist provider to consult young people. As a result two representatives of the Youth Parliament worked alongside officers to develop the specification for the commissioned service and indeed within the specification document there was a specific section on what the Youth Parliament representatives wanted from any provider. The views of the Youth Parliament, of yourself and colleagues, very effectively capture why the Council felt it imperative to secure a specialist provider to engage with young people - they felt the consultation needed to: consider young people who would not engage well with written or read consultation methods which is the standard approach; support those who might be less comfortable in a large group; use facilitators used to working with young people; and avoid Council managers or members being involved in the consultation sessions that might have made some young people perhaps less likely to participate.

We believe that the consultation did all this and that using a specialist provider has clearly worked. Over 500 young people took part, and there were over 20 one to one interviews with some of the most vulnerable and at risk young people who would not have found it easy to engage in general consultation exercises or indeed in focus groups. Those numbers are in stark contrast to the number of young people who engage in other Council-led consultations. In the excellent consultations on other topics such as library changes, theatre changes and using Children's Centres, on average there are only 20 respondents aged 14-24, so they make up less than 3% of all those responding to Council consultations. However, in this young people's consultation, as a result of the Council decision to commission a specialist provider, the number of young people involved was twenty five times higher than the consultation average to date and young people made up 84% of all respondents compared to the 3% in other consultations.

The consultation clearly reached a lot of young people and many, many more than are usually engaged in these activities. While the Council did not agree with every aspect of the feedback, it is incorrect to say no account was taken of the consultation. In the feedback young people told us that overall they placed least

importance on universal sessions, youth engagement and Duke of Edinburgh and were more likely to prioritise targeted youth work. This preference and priority was reflected in the Council decisions. Young people were also asked what option they would choose if they were the decision maker on budget cuts. While the Council cannot afford to retain their most preferred option of keeping all our youth services as they currently are, the Council is exploring their second highest preference which was to reduce the services available and target what funding remained to focus on supporting the most vulnerable. Young people also made a series of recommendations and these are listed in different parts of the consultation report. There are 15 of these recommendations in total. The Council has agreed to implement, or is now looking at how best to implement, 11 of the 15 recommendations.

So this was a very effective consultation, reaching many more young people than ever before and as a result the Council is looking to implement a revised youth service which takes notice of a significant amount of young people's feedback. But this piece of work is still a work in progress, Mr Mayor. We're still looking at a business case for the remodelled youth service which will come to our next meeting in June. Thank you.

Supplementary Question asked by Ethan Smith

Can I just say, I didn't really understand your answer, but I'm going to go ahead and say my second question anyway. Which is, so for my opinion, and call me stupid if I think this, but I genuinely do think this, is I went to the meeting last week where you were deciding to cut the youth services and it came across to me like you were going to go ahead and do what you planned to do before the consultation anyway. So my feeling is, why did you bother spending £9000 in the first place when you knew what you was going to do. My supplementary question to that though, is what do you expect young people to do now you've cut their universal services? What do you think the impact is going to be on their lives as a child?

Reply by Councillor Wendy Mathys

Ok thank you Ethan, well I think you've jumped the gun. What you call the supplementary question is actually your question two which I'll deal with in a minute. I'm not sure if it was really a question but I'll try and answer it. You felt that the results of the consultation were not reflected in the decision, that we'd made the decision beforehand. I would strongly refute that. We hadn't decided what we were going to do and I think I made it very clear if you perhaps have a look at the detail of my previous answer, perhaps outside this meeting, that we did take into account what was said. We hadn't had a clear idea of what would happen, and as I should be saying later on this evening, we have come up with some new ideas as a result of the consultation which we are taking forward for our future business plan and I think you might want to listen to that later on. I won't go into it now or I'll be duplicating.

Supplementary Question asked by Councillor Jane Pascoe

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Thank you Mr Mayor. If you don't have young people to represent their views, how can you possibly make decisions that affect young people? The Youth Parliament is very unique young people to have a say in issues that directly include them. To take that away would send a message that what young people have to say is not important. At the end of January I was delighted to attend the Youth Parliament election, little realising that in this perverse move that one democracy was about to remove another. At a time when the secondary schools have removed themselves from the local authority and this administration has effectively closed down the very services young people say they want and need. How is this council going to ensure that the voice of young people is heard?

Reply by Councillor Wendy Mathys

Thank you Councillor Pascoe, because actually you reflect my own views, my own concerns and I shall make sure we do listen to young people. The first point I would make is that we are hoping that one of the schools, or the schools as a partnership will take on the Youth Parliament and that is being explored as you probably know. But what I would also remind you is that young people are also involved in many other ways. We already have young commissioners, we have young people interviewing potential foster carers, we have young people who regularly attend the corporate parent's forum which I've chaired for many years and we've always had young people. I was speaking only this week to representatives from Sutton Housing Partnership who are doing consultancy work with young people and we shall be talking to other agencies including the voluntary sector about how else we can do that. We do get the views of young people. The Healthwatch recently produced a survey which was from young people asking about health issues and things that mattered to them, and we do in fact get young people's views for very different areas quite apart from any work done in the schools so I can assure you we will continue to do that. Thank you.

2. Question asked by Ethan Smith, Youth Parliament, to Councillor Wendy Mathys, Chair of the Children, Family and Education Committee

What do you expect young people to do now?

Reply by Councillor Wendy Mathys

Well you asked me what we expect young people to do now Ethan. In shifting from universal open access services to more targeted work we know we will still look to support those who need it most. However that will not be all young people. We will therefore seek to support others to identify other areas to identify and access opportunities and services provided such as the enormous number of universal services available in Sutton both inside and outside schools, for example, sports, drama and music. We will support the Youth Parliament and Youth MP's anyway until the current terms of office close and as I've already said we will be looking to work with others to provide opportunities. Duke of Edinburgh access will continue to be available through schools and other organisations and we will continue to

work with other agencies to secure ways to deliver the Duke of Edinburgh in the future.

So I would just actually add to that that of the universal services at the moment, only a very small number of children access them. It's under 200 attend the regular youth clubs and that type of service and there are a large number of other opportunities in the borough for them, thank you.

Supplementary Question asked by Ethan Smith

I'd like to kind of finish quickly just by saying, I don't have another question, but I just want to conclude by saying I think it's fair enough to say that you're trying to apprehend the problem with the cuts and that's fair enough, but I think it's the wrong decision to cut youth services. There's going to be an increase in Youth Offending Team stuff due to it because if you're not providing youth clubs and things for young people what are you going to do when you leave work and find out you've got graffiti all over your car and I don't really think and of you thought about that. Nothing personal, but actually all the volunteering and work I've done for your council in the past and all the support I've given you, I think it's quite wrong that you've done this to me as a young person and do you think me, and other young people when they reach 18 are going to vote Liberal in the next general election? Thank you.

Reply by Councillor Wendy Mathys

Mr Mayor, I'm quite prepared to answer the question about the voting. The voting isn't our prime area of concern when we're looking at youth services. Our primary concern when we're looking at youth services, and any children's services, is to do our best for children in this borough and that is the only motivation for dealing with children's services. I don't think this should actually be political anyway.

Supplementary Question asked by Councillor Nick Matthey

I think I'd like to ask this, the thing is that the council spent about £6 million plus of other people's money with the Life Centre. If I'm not mistaken, the Life Centre is for young people and the question is, is that £6 million of tax payers money was taken from various sources to, my question is, is that this young gentleman has said that there was predetermination and there was no consultation and this is the same criticism that was levelled at the Life Centre where we now have a white elephant that nobody goes to. My question is, is this council going to be financially prudent and at the same time listen to people rather than deciding what people really want, whether it's an incinerator, a Life Centre or anything else?

Reply by Councillor Wendy Mathys

My answer to Councillor Matthey is yes.