

**Appendix E to Council:  
Questions under Standing Order 8.13  
25 April 2016**

**LONDON BOROUGH OF SUTTON  
QUESTIONS: STANDING ORDER 8.13**

**Question asked by Councillor Neil Garratt to Councillor Jill Whitehead, Chair of the Environment and Neighbourhoods Committee**

I note that the Sutton Life Centre is set to continue to receive substantial council funding, ahead of those other services or parts of services which the administration has chosen to stop funding. Could I ask, is this because the services offered by the Life Centre are judged to be more important than those services no longer being funded? Or is it because the council has no choice but to continue to fund the Sutton Life Centre, because of the terms of the myplace funding agreement? In other words, does the Sutton Life Centre justify its continuing funding on merit, or are we compelled to fund it whether we like it or not?

**Reply by Councillor Jill Whitehead**

The Sutton Life Centre underwent a detailed review and evaluation through external consultants that informed a report to the September 2015 Environment and Neighbourhoods committee.

The committee undertook detailed discussion and considered a range of options including the complete closure of the centre, which was presented as a costed option.

The committee voted unanimously, and across parties, to keep the Sutton Life Centre open but with the very clear expectation that operating costs would be significantly reduced and income generated would increase.

An ambitious savings and income target for the Sutton Life Centre of an additional £112k per annum was set for 2016/17 which will be achieved.

The Sutton Life Centre provides a wide range of valuable services:

- Since opening in September 2010 the Life Centre has welcomed just under 600,000 visitors through its doors and a further 24,000 children on school tours, through over 500 organised visits.
- Feedback from teachers about their visits to the Life Centre remains incredibly positive, with 60% of visitors in the 13/14 academic year rebooking for the 14/15 academic year. Thirty percent of bookings for 14/15 academic year were from new customers.

There are also numerous projects that are or have been run at the Life Centre that directly benefit young people. A few examples are as follows:

- Crystal Palace Football Club Foundation's Kickz programme engaging with up to 30 young people each week.
- Barclays Premier League Works (a 16-week employability programme offering accredited training).

**Appendix E to Council:  
Questions under Standing Order 8.13  
25 April 2016**

- The Media Club where young people learn skills and create film, music and photography.
- Time Out Youth Club sessions engaging over 50 young people a week in an educational and creative programme.
- Presto Performing Arts engaging young people in dance and drama.
- My Life, My Future, which is an 18 month programme for young people aged between 10-18 who are either in care or are care leavers.

All these programmes are well attended and successful schemes that are enjoyed tremendously by local young people.

In addition the Life Centre fulfils a prominent role as a valuable community asset, operating a vibrant volunteering programme that has recently received two awards and delivers a job club, IT classes, reading group, French speaking group and Library assistance amongst other activities.

The 'Friends of Sutton Life Centre' is formed of members of the local community who want to engage and deliver services from the centre, including monthly film club and history of art talks, and support the centre on the community fun days that attract over 1,000 people without fail to the centre each time.

The Life Centre also hosts regular community bookings from church groups, local training providers and health professionals.

Each year the Life Centre has been open the operating costs of the centre have been reduced. Like other Council Services, the Life Centre will need to continue to demonstrate genuine value to our communities and the members that are elected to represent them.

**Question asked by Councillor Neil Garratt to Councillor Jill Whitehead, Chair of the Environment and Neighbourhoods Committee**

In July 2000 Tom Brake MP told the House of Commons "During 1999–2000, Sutton recycled 34.7 per cent of its household waste...Sutton has set itself the target of recycling 80 per cent of household waste by 2005 and believes that it is on track to achieve that target." But by 2005 we were actually only recycling 29% of household waste.

By 2009 Sutton's recycling rate was 37.5%, when the One Planet Sutton initiative was launched. This set a target to increase household recycling to 60% by 2020. But the latest data shows we're still only recycling 37.6%.

The revised One Planet Sutton household recycling target is now just 40%. This does not seem ambitious, given that it is lower than the recycling rate already being achieved by our neighbouring boroughs of Croydon and Kingston.

**Appendix E to Council:  
Questions under Standing Order 8.13  
25 April 2016**

So over the last 15 years, Sutton's dismal household recycling progress can be summarised as:

- Target: cut from 80%, to 60%, now just 40%.
- Performance: increased marginally from 34.7% to 37.6%

Since 2009, our recycling rate has flat-lined while neighbouring boroughs have improved and overtaken us. For several years, Sutton has had the lowest recycling rate of the 4 boroughs in the South London Waste Partnership (SLWP).

Could I ask:

- a) Why, over 15 years and despite an ambitious initial target, has so little progress been made on our household recycling rate? Both in absolute terms, and relative to our SLWP neighbours.
- b) If it was previously agreed that an 80% target was correct, why was this reduced to 60%?
- c) If it was previously agreed that a 60% target was correct, why was this reduced to 40%?
- d) When the 80% and 60% targets were set, were they believed to be realistic?
- e) What are believed to be the main reasons why Sutton's household recycling is unable to move beyond the 37% ceiling?
- f) Compared to its own targets and to neighbouring boroughs, does the administration consider that Sutton is doing well or doing badly, when it comes to household recycling?
- g) What actions have been taken by members to address this long term under-performance?
- h) What member involvement has there been in investigating the causes of this under-performance and identifying solutions?
- i) What is the explanation for neighbouring boroughs overtaking us, during this period when Sutton's recycling performance was flat-lining and our targets were being reduced?

**Reply by Councillor Jill Whitehead**

**a) Why, over 15 years and despite an ambitious initial target, has so little progress been made on our household recycling rate? Both in absolute terms, and relative to our SLWP neighbours.**

Sutton's audited annual data produced by DeFRA shows the recycling rate has increased from 28% in 05/06 to 38% in 14/15, above average for a London borough. The table below provides a comparison of our 14/15 recycling rate against our neighbouring local authorities in the SLWP.

**Appendix E to Council:  
Questions under Standing Order 8.13  
25 April 2016**

<b>Authority</b>	<b>Dry Recycling</b>	<b>Composting</b>	<b>Total Recycling Rate</b>
RB Kingston	30%	16%	46%
Sutton LB	28%	10%	38%
Merton LB	27%	10%	37%
Croydon LB	21%	19%	40%

Since 09/10, Merton, Kingston and Croydon have all introduced food waste collections. In addition, Kingston and Croydon changed to a fortnightly residual waste service. From 09/10 to 15/16 Croydon also offered an unlimited and free garden collection service.

**b) If it was previously agreed that an 80% target was correct, why was this reduced to 60%?**

Officers in the One Planet Sutton and the Waste Management Teams have not been able to locate any information relating to an 80% recycling rate target for 2005 or any documentation around a review of these targets.

**c) If it was previously agreed than a 60% target was correct, why was this reduced to 40%?**

In 2009, Sutton committed to becoming a One Planet Borough. To help achieve the ambition, the Council adopted a series of OPS targets. The original 2009 target relating to the household recycling rate was:

- Increase the borough wide recycling rate to 60% by 2020, and 70% by 2025.

A review of the OPS targets took place in 2013 to ensure they were still ambitious and realistic. There was extensive consultation as part of this review with residents and stakeholders across Sutton. Following the review, the OPS recycling targets were amended to the following:

- Increase the household recycling rate to 40% by 2017.
- Increase the household recycling rate to 55% by 2025, with an aspiration to achieve 70%.
- Increase the household recycling rate to 100% by 2050.

The targets were changed to ensure they were realistic, based on services currently provided, the infrastructure available, contracts we are able to access, available resources and medium term plans. The amendments also incorporated carbon targets which measure the reduction in carbon as a result of our waste activities and focus on moving material up the waste hierarchy.

**d) When the 80% and 60% targets were set, were they believed to be realistic?**

**Appendix E to Council:  
Questions under Standing Order 8.13  
25 April 2016**

The original targets for 2020 and 2030 were aspirational.

**e) What are believed to be the main reasons why Sutton's household recycling is unable to move beyond the 37% ceiling?**

In 14/15 there was a small decrease in the average recycling rate across London, whilst Sutton experienced a small increase. Waste Management budgets have been significantly reduced over the past 6 years and changes to services would be required to move significantly beyond 37%. Potential areas for consideration in increasing the rate would be:

- Weekly collections of food waste
- Enhanced recycling capacity
- Fortnightly collection of residual waste
- Funding to support behaviour change

**f) Compared to its own targets and to neighbouring boroughs, does the administration consider that Sutton is doing well or doing badly, when it comes to household recycling?**

Sutton's performance remains comparable to our SLWP neighbours (see above) and we remain on target to achieve our target of recycling 40% in 2017.

**g) What actions have been taken by members to address this long term under-performance?**

Performance remains comparable to our SLWP neighbours (see above), is in line with outer London boroughs and has consistently been better than inner London Boroughs. Authorities with higher recycling rates have introduced food waste collections, which Sutton has been unable to afford. However, this may be a possible outcome of the SLWP procurement.

**h) What member involvement has there been in investigating the causes of this under-performance and identifying solutions?**

See (g) above

**i) What is the explanation for neighbouring boroughs overtaking us, during this period when Sutton's recycling performance was flat-lining and our targets were being reduced?**

See (a) above.

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

**Appendix E to Council:  
Questions under Standing Order 8.13  
25 April 2016**

What is "the Sutton Way"? How does it differ from other councils? What are the pros and cons of doing things the Sutton Way?

**Reply by the Leader**

The "Sutton Way" is an informal shorthand term that has been used for some years to describe the way in which this Council tends to operate and conduct its business.

The "Sutton Way" may be characterised as an approach to decision-making which seeks to engage staff, residents and others in developing solutions through discussion, consultation and review. The move to charging for Green Garden Waste and the development of the Sutton Theatres Trust are both good examples of how this approach can help co-produce solutions to difficult problems.

Each council tends to have its own way of doing business and it is difficult to comment from the outside on how their ways may be different from Sutton's. It could be said, however, that those councils with an elected Executive Mayor or Strong Leader model, for example, would probably tend to operate differently from Sutton and would have a much stronger, centrally driven and controlled approach.

The benefits are as suggested above i.e. that a process of consultation and engagement can build a wider sense of support for and ownership of solutions. Taking time to reach the right decision is valuable and allows for a wide ranging discussion about the pros and cons. The potential disbenefits are that it may at times slow down the decision making process, which may not always be appropriate. The Peer Challenge report reflects on this issue and challenges us as a Council to consider whether we need to review and speed up our decision-making processes, for example in relation to property and commercial decisions.