

**London Borough of Sutton
Council Questions
Standing Order 8.13**

Question asked by Councillor Jane Pascoe to Councillor Simon Wales, Vice Chair of the Strategy and Resources Committee

I was very pleased to note the willingness of the administration at last night's Council meeting, to review the decision taken at Strategy and Resources not to take social value into account when evaluating the use of Quarry Cottage.

This is a significant deviation in policy that charges commercial rent for all properties no matter.

In the light of this decision, could you please list the properties that you will be reviewing, and when this will happen?

I am particularly interested in the two Elderly Day Care Centres, both run by Volunteers (not 'The Voluntary Sector'), who have had their grant funding removed, which is/will result in far fewer members being able to join, because of prohibitive daily charges.

I would like to know the methodology that will be used to assess this in the light of the Prevention Agenda that Councillor Wales referred to last night, and the impact these Voluntary sector services have on reducing pressure on the Adult Social Services and Health budget.

Reply by Councillor Simon Wales

The Council's existing policies and procedures recognise the role of social value in making decisions. The Council has developed standard templates for when tenders and similar offers are submitted to the Council. The decision at Council to reconsider Quarry Cottage is therefore not in itself a deviation from policy, rather it is being used in this instance to provide additional information to support a decision to be made on the preferred option for the future use of Quarry Cottage using the Council's Buildings Utilisation Options Appraisal Framework. It should be noted that the Buildings Utilisation Framework already takes into consideration non-financial factors, which in fact account for 60% of the weighting in the model used with financial factors accounting for 40%.

The proposal to take into consideration the additional information provided by a social value analysis should consequently not be seen as deviation from the Council's policy of charging market rent for all property lettings. The charging of market rent is an approach based on best practice guidance from central Government for asset management as well as statutory duties and there is no intention to change.

It is important however to separate the charging of market rent from how the Council chooses to support the funding of the accommodation costs of voluntary and community service organisations. This is set out in the Council's existing policy on Accommodation Funding for Voluntary and Community Sector organisations (see <https://modern.gov.sutton.gov.uk/mgAi.aspx?ID=21688#mgDocuments>) which in certain circumstances enables the Council to expressly choose to meet the rental payment of community organisation itself. To ensure transparency of the decision and provide a rationale for such support, it is required that the decision is taken by the Council Committee responsible for the service budget from where the organisation will be funded. It is therefore unnecessary to carry out a wholesale review of current lease arrangements, as existing Council processes allow for individual circumstances to be considered when necessary.

With regard to the two day care centres for the elderly, their circumstances are quite different. The South Carshalton Day Care Centre, Oaks Way is let to the Trustees on a ground lease which expires in 28 April 2018. Consequently, the Council charges only a minimal rent, with all responsibility for repairs, maintenance and other occupation costs resting with the Trustees. The land and buildings will revert to the Council in 2018 on expiration of the current lease. Officers intend to commence negotiation of a new lease next year.

The lease for Sutton Lodge is held by the Trustees of the Sutton Old People's Welfare Committee, and discussions have been ongoing since 2014 to agree a new lease. The intention is to bring the current lease in line with other similar Council leases so that in addition to responsibility for paying an appropriate market rent, responsibility for repairs and maintenance of the building will also transfer from the Council to the tenant.

There is no doubt that with personalised budgets and cessation of the block grant to the two associations for running these Day Centres for the elderly, the ability of the Trustees of both organisations to fund rent and other outgoings will become more uncertain. As stated above, the Council can provide accommodation support on a case by case basis if a clear rationale for the support can be established and is supported by the responsible service committee which in this case would be the

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Adult Social Care and Health Committee. It would seem sensible that this is a matter that should first be reviewed by officers in line with existing Council policy with recommendations brought to Members on how best to proceed.

**Question asked by Councillor Patrick McManus to Councillor Simon Wales,
Deputy Leader**

I have recently stopped using the Council's clunky voicemail system, advertising my personal mobile number instead. As a consequence, I am now getting frustrated calls from LibDem majority wards even. The reason I was given, when I asked IT, was that the option to alert councillors of a new message was an extra cost that the Council refused to pay for many years ago. In my view this is an essential feature in order to serve residents' needs as quickly as possible.

Why has Sutton Council once again made such a short-sighted saving detrimental to residents?

Reply by Councillor Councillor Simon Wales, Deputy Leader

The decision taken not to implement email notifications with the telephony system was only partially as a result of cost. The project board felt that for the majority of users of the system adding e-mail notifications to the red light (message waiting indicator) on the phones within council offices would be more of a nuisance than an aid. The cost element came from the requirement for engineering needed to provide the software connector to enable it. This was not originally in scope of the telephony replacement project.

The council is about to upgrade its telephone system to the latest version of software and it is planned that enhancements to the voicemail system will be done soon afterwards. This work will include email notifications for voicemail, and a streamlining of the user interface has already been designed which will improve the user experience. Hopefully this will change your opinion of the "clunkiness" of the system.

**Question asked by Councillor Patrick McManus to Councillor Jill Whitehead,
Chair of the Environment and Neighbourhood Committee**

The complex and undemocratic new refuse collection scheme is due to start next April we are told but families of four, for example, are already having their extra bins removed. I recently received a complaint from such a family which has no longer

enough bin space. Why do you believe that this family no longer needs the extra bin at this present time?

Reply by Councillor Jill Whitehead

The updated Recycling and Waste Policies were agreed at the Environment and Neighbourhoods Committee on 26 November 2015. Our recycling and waste policies were updated following a review by the London Waste and Recycling Board (LWARB), which indicated that updated policies would lead to efficiencies in the service, potential savings and contribute to elevating material up the waste hierarchy. One of these policies sets the standard container for the recycling and waste service where all houses should have one small (140 litre) brown waste bin.

We accept more materials through our recycling collection scheme now than we have in the past. This means that providing that a household is recycling all of their recyclable materials there is no reason that they should need a second brown bin.

There are a number of other local authorities across the country that operate a one bin policy including the London Borough of Lambeth, Reigate and Banstead Borough Council and Elmbridge Borough Council.

Communication is targeted towards those households that have additional brown bins. During the implementation of the policy residents are given the opportunity to apply for additional recycling bins and if they have a medical need or are a household of more than five people, they will also be able to apply for a large (240 litre) brown bin.

In relation to the family who contacted Cllr McManus I am unable to comment but would urge Cllr McManus to pass the details on to officers to enable them to make contact with them regarding their specific circumstances.

**Question asked by Councillor Patrick McManus to Councillor Jill Whitehead,
Chair of the Environment and Neighbourhood Committee**

During the 2016 tree pruning schedule there are an incredible number of trees disappearing from Sutton, 47 in fact. It seems unprecedented. Why are so many trees disappearing this time around without efforts to rescue or replace, leading to Sutton slowly losing its local character and important contribution to the biosphere?

Reply by Councillor Jill Whitehead

In accordance with the Council's Tree Strategy and Action Plan our priority is to protect and enhance the tree stock through appropriate management. Trees that are identified for removal during the routine cyclical inspections are either dead or dangerous, and are an unacceptable risk to people and property due to their condition.

Over the past three years the Council has planted more trees (819) across the borough compared to those that have been removed (263).

Question asked by Councillor David Hicks to Councillor Colin Stears, Chair of the Adult Social Services and Health Committee

As part of the 4 year budget settlement, the Government recognised that more funding was needed for adult social care and allowed authorities to make an additional 2% increase on council tax (for authorities with social care responsibilities) in each of the spending review years. The Council took advantage of that opportunity and raised an additional £1.6 million pounds of revenue for 2016/17, but that money was not immediately allocated to an increase in the budget for adult social care.

Local Authorities are being accused of hoarding the money for other purposes. The chairman of the House of Commons Health Committee has said "It's shocking if councils aren't passing this on. The whole point is it should be passed on to homes to employ more staff. The leader of the Liberal Democrat Party has been quoted as saying "We have a social care crisis, the system is on the brink and every penny counts. Councils need to stop hoarding this cash."

I am sure that the Leader of the Council wishes to follow the example of the leader of her national party. So will she please respond to the following:

Will she provide the detail of where the extra 2% (£1.6 million) social care precept in Sutton has fed through directly to an equivalent additional spending on adult social care, care facilities and care staff etc.?

Will she also confirm that Sutton is not hoarding the money for other purposes and that the expenditure on adult social care is planned to increase in 2016/17 by the amount of the additional precept for that year?

Reply by Councillor Colin Stears

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As I am sure Councillor Hicks is very aware, Government funding to councils has been reduced by £16.4 bn since 2010 – representing a 63% total reduction - and is expected to fall by a further £3.4bn to £6.2bn by 2019/20. For Sutton this has meant we have had to find £48m in savings since 2010 with a further £34m by the end of the decade totalling £82m of savings over ten years – which is equivalent to 56% of our total 2016/17 budget.

The Government did not increase funding to councils for social care rather it gave councils 'access' to additional funding by charging residents more council tax. In 2016/17 this was 'accessed' by 93% of councils and raised an extra £382m. This is less than 3% of the total they have budgeted to spend on social care this year and is wholly inadequate to cover the £1.1bn needed to maintain social care at its current level.

Councillor Hicks is clearly fond of a quote from parliamentary colleagues so I will furnish him with one from one of his Conservative MPs on social care funding (Dr Dan Poulter MP)

“Over the past six months there has been a growing feeling among Conservative colleagues that...as the reality of an ageing population being cared for by a social care system that has seen a reduction in funding over the past five or six years begins to bite there is going to be an urgent need for the government to take action and not just look at providing a one- or two-year bung of extra money but providing a long-term funding solution for maintaining a health and care system that is free at the point of need”

Having ignored social care in the Autumn Statement, the collective cross party criticism has pushed the Government to extend its meagre offer to councils by allowing us to levy a total precept of 6% over two years instead of three and taking away funding to councils in the form of New Homes Bonus grant to put back into council budgets via a one year only social care grant. In fact for many councils the switching of NHB grant money to social care will mean a net loss in funding - Sutton being one of those councils with a reduction by £1.5m in our NHB and a gain £0.7m in social care grant - a net loss of £800k.

Even the proverbial Peter and Paul are shocked at this disingenuous taking from councils' funding to give it back with a different name.

The Government well recognises that such is the level of cuts to local government funding the precept is in no way sufficient to deliver enhanced services, and is actually about protecting services from deeper cuts, stating: “We know that

protecting services whilst delivering necessary efficiencies is challenging, which is why we are working with the local government and ADASS to support councils to make savings.”

With a reduction in revenue support grant of £9.1m for 2016/17 and an overall budget gap of £14m by 2018/19, Full Council agreed in March to take up the option of a 2% addition to council tax to help to meet social care cost pressures. This raised approximately £1.6m.

The base budget for 2016/17 for Adult Social Care is £52m – which is 36% of the council’s total net budget. Costs in social care also increased from the previous year by more than £2.3m – over £1.2m of which was due to increasing costs of care and over half a million pounds due to meeting growing need for care.

It is also true to say that the overall adult social care budget increased by over half a million pounds in 2016/17.

This Liberal Democrat administration is committed to protecting services for our most vulnerable residents and we have worked hard as a council to ensure that the savings identified in this year’s budget are not reducing the level of care. All of the money raised through the 2% ‘precept’ for adult social care will be spent during the year on adult social care services and none of this will be set aside in any reserves for any future time or other purpose.

Given Councillor Hicks’ concern for social care services to be maintained I would urge him to write to the Prime Minister and his other Government colleagues, supporting the points made by Dr Poulter MP and impressing upon them the urgent need for a long term, wholesale solution to the national crisis in caring for our most vulnerable residents.

**Question asked by Councillor Patrick McManus to Councillor Jayne McCoy,
Chair of the Housing, Economy and Business Committee**

Is it not usually the case that green energy can be much more expensive than traditional sources for reasons of economy of scale etc? I often think of green energy, so far, as a luxury product of conscience for those who can afford it, rather like organic meat. However unlike organic meat it's not any better for you. In the case of district heating from an incinerator, as intended to be provided by SDEN, there will already typically be a carbon debt to clear of hundreds of thousands of tons of CO2 per annum emanating from the incinerator chimney. That’s before one's

conscience can be sufficiently clear as a provider or consumer and without adding the reality of other gases and toxins emitted from the chimney as well as the extra pollution contribution (including CO₂ and NO_x) from the endless trucks chugging waste into the Borough from other parts of London from 2018 and into the future.

How much of the CO₂ emanating from the incinerator do you believe can be offset by SDEN as an energy provider? I'm referring to carbon offsetting as a notion here.

Suggested Reply by Councillor Jayne McCoy

Thank you for your question.

I must contest your assertion that green energy is a luxury and would highlight the critical role it has to play in our drive to reduce reliance on the earth's scarce resources (and in particular fossil fuels) and as a result, create a low carbon sustainable future that will improve the quality of life for our communities for future generations.

I can confirm that pollution from the Energy Recovery Facility (ERF) will be minimal and far less polluting than what is currently emanating from the landfill site or from comparable industrial applications. In comparison to burying waste in landfill, the ERF is expected to save 128,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide entering the atmosphere each year of the contract and will reduce the carbon footprint of managing waste in each of the South London Waste Partnership boroughs. Waste disposed of in landfill generates methane gas, which is 24 times stronger as a greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide (CO₂). Energy recovery facilities generate CO₂ rather than methane. As a result, it is widely recognised that sending waste to energy recovery has a much lower impact on climate change than sending it to landfill.

I can also confirm that there will be no increase in traffic as a result of the day to day operation of the Energy Recovery Facility as vehicles already transport waste from the four boroughs to the landfill site.

I disagree that green energy is necessarily more expensive as Decentralised Energy Networks have to be competitive and to this end are already competing in the energy marketplace. Our modelling for SDEN has shown that we can offer a competitive price that will also generate profits that can be reinvested in local services for our residents.

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It should also be noted that Barratt Homes, when marketing and selling their new homes at Felnax, will want to secure the best energy deal for their customers who are able to compare energy costs.

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