

MINUTES OF THE BLACKHEATH ASSEMBLY

Tuesday, 6 November 2018 at 7.30 pm

PRESENT: Councillors Kevin Bonavia, Juliet Campbell and Amanda De Ryk

1. Welcome from the Chair

Cllr Juliet Campbell welcomed everyone to the Blackheath Assembly and introduced Cllr Kevin Bonavia and Cllr Amanda De Ryk.

2. Local Democracy Review

Cllr Kevin Bonavia introduced the Local Democracy Review. In May 2018 - as part of his election campaign, the new Mayor Damien Egan promised to launch a review that will make Lewisham 'even more democratic, open and transparent'.

This is being carried out because the same system has been in place for 16 years and during this time there have been significant changes. The Council has reduced in size and function due to Government cuts over the past eight years and in addition there has been new legislation introduced and new responsibilities during this time. There is also an increasing demand for services and a growing population increasing from 250,000 in 2001 to 301,000 today.

Cllr Bonavia then took the assembly through a presentation explaining what the council does. The presentation is available on the Lewisham Council website <http://www.lewishamdemocracy.com/> or from the Local Assembly Manager Paul Gale paul.gale@lewisham.gov.uk

After the presentation people were given the opportunity to ask questions.

Q Do you have any data regarding people moving in and out of the borough?

A I do not have migration figures, but we do know that more people are coming in than leaving. There is a real issue regarding affordability which is why we need to deal with the housing crisis and provide more homes. The other issue is with our schools. The Primary Schools have been rated excellent, but this is not so with the Secondary Schools, albeit they are improving.

Q When will the results of this consultation be included and implemented and how will you engage with people who are difficult to reach?

A We have to report to full Council with our recommendations in April 2019. Some of the implementation will not happen overnight and can take up to a year.

We are trying to get out of our comfort zone and away from the Council offices, by attending assembly meetings and other community events. We have put notices around the borough and on social media. Part of this exercise is about education, before people can give their ideas they need to know about what we do. As part of

this we are visiting schools with a much more interactive presentation as we are very keen to engage our young people.

Q Do you have the capacity to manage expectations as there is so little money available to implement changes and recommendations?

A We have to get the balance right, but the question is what can we do, what works elsewhere and how can we resource it.

Q How much real effect do you have on the budget as most of the money is committed before it comes in, so what real impact can you make?

A There is some discretion, but not much. Lots of the money comes through the council, but we cannot touch it such as money for schools.

Q How many people want to interact with the Council, as I suspect that most people don't.

A We need to engage with people earlier on, at the last Council elections Blackheath had the highest turnout, but the least issues with the Council. Areas with the lowest turnout such as Bellingham recorded the most complaints / issues with the Council. We really do need to get the community more involved during the early stages.

Cllr De Ryk – We do publish impact assessments for most of the major work we do, particularly when we need to make cuts. It is important to remember that the Council needs to be able to ensure that it can be effectively engaged with, irrespective of whether people want to engage us.

3. Blackheath Assembly Fund

Each of the below projects was required to provide the assembly with a 5 minute presentation explaining why their project needs the money and the benefits to Blackheath ward. With enough money to fund all the projects, voting was simply via a show of hands. For more information regarding these applications contact Paul Gale

- Blackheath Halls – Festive Family Day £1,915
- Age Exchange - Dementia Cinema Club £2,790
- Age Exchange - Virtual Dementia Tour £1,360
- Quaggy Development Trust - Older Peoples Lunch Club £2,000
- Church of Ascension - English for Speakers of Other Languages £3,000
- St Margaret's Lee "Darby and Joan Club" – Seaside outing £1,600
- Belmont Park Telephone Box Micro-Library £1,000
- Wash House Youth Project – 2019 Football Programme and Holiday / half-term outings £3,000

The assembly agreed to fund all of the above projects.

4. Councillor and Community information

Local Assembly Funding – The Council considering its budget and is looking for 30 million pounds of savings. There is a proposal to cut all the Local Assembly Funds, but this has met with a lot of resistance to this so we are looking at further options. These include working with Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Funding. This is a charge that local authorities can set on new development in order to raise funds to help fund the infrastructure, facilities and services A further option is a small grant pot for small projects such as some of the ones bidding for assembly funds. We do not know what the decision will be, but it will not be the same as it is now and there will be less funding available.

Q How about a referendum to raise Council Tax so that we can improve local services and provision?

A This has been discussed by some Councils, but no Council has done it yet. In Lewisham we are very aware of the impact of the Council Tax on many of our residents and therefore there is a reluctance to increase it. In addition, the referendum will cost about £100,000. However, if you want to start a petition for us to do this, then you can.

Every council has the same issues and there is a petition called Breaking Point which you can take part in: www.councilsatbreakingpoint.com

We also urge our residents to support our local organisations, many of whom you can donate to via just giving.

Blackheath Fireworks – The cost is no longer shared with Greenwich and we as a Council organise it. There is a cuts proposal to end this as it costs about £100k. We have got the net cost for the Council down to about £40k. But if they are going to survive we need to raise even more money.

Lewisham Refugees Programme – Passed a resolution through Cabinet bring in 100 families, we can do this by the national scheme that reimburses us if we can find accommodation. There is still a shortfall, but with willing landlords and a supportive community we can do this and become London's leading borough for looking after refugees.

Lewisham Station Users Group – There was the public meeting on 25 October which was well attended, but need to get word out, please visit lewishamstation.wordpress.com for more information about what we are doing to pressure Network Rail into making improvements.

Living wage week – We are encouraging our businesses to do this. As a Council we are a Living Wage employer.

8 the Glebe – This is a partial victory for council, please do have a look at this as it is important to keep abreast of local developments and what developers want to do.

There being no other business the meeting finished at 21.30, no declarations of interest were declared.