

PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

LONDON BOROUGH OF HAMMERSMITH & FULHAM

COUNCIL MEETING – 25 FEBRUARY 2015

Question by: Mary Smith

To: Cabinet Member for Finance

QUESTION

“Has the Council made any cuts to the street cleaning and environmental budget in the last 18 months?”

ANSWER

Thank you for your question Mrs Smith. In short, the current administration has made no cuts at all to the street cleaning service. Unfortunately however the previous administration made cuts of £465K in November 2013. As a result the new administration has literally been cleaning up the previous administration’s mess.

I will explain in more detail. H&F street cleaning was outsourced by the last administration to SERCO in 2008. It was originally a 7 year contract which would have expired in June 2015 with an option for a further 7 years. However a few years before that SERCO approached the former administration complaining that the contract wasn’t working for SERCO. They asked for the contract to be renegotiated. I am told the basis of the negotiations was to see if efficiencies could be achieved that would benefit both parties.

As reported to the Cabinet in November 2013 a new contract was awarded to SERCO that would run to 2021. The context of this renegotiation was steadily worsening litter and fly tipping scores being achieved by the Council in 2013 and in early 2014. This decline in service standards was measured both through its internal survey and an external independent survey. I’ll give an example of the scores. They do 3 tests in the year, and for litter, the external survey, lower is better, higher is worse, was 2.14 in early 13/14 that went up to 5.45, much worse, the in-house survey went up from 1.94 up to 2.56.

You would think the reaction to the steadily worsening standards being achieved by SERCO would have been either to invest in the services and improve it or to find a new supplier that would provide better results expected by residents.

However we learn from the exempt Cabinet report for November 2013 that the opposite was done. The former administration's Cabinet voted to make cuts of £440K per year in the SERCO contract and to reduce the quality of the service being provided. This increased to a £465K reduction in the final signed agreement. In order to make these savings the former administration agreed that SERCO would, and I quote, discuss and agree reduced response times for restoring cleaning grade, so for the red and blue roads, the most popular roads, the response time went up from 2 hours to 4 hours under the agreement they signed. For all other roads the response times went up from 12 to 24 hours for some, 6 to 12 for others and 3 hours to 4 hours for others. This is the sorry situation that we inherited and which my colleague Councillor Harcourt is busy putting right.

A street cleansing emergency response team has been created but we have chosen not to make the street cleansing staff reductions the former administration had planned in the contract provision. As a result because of our interventions, SERCO have reduced their staffing by 3 less posts than would have been done by those sitting opposite. Four new street cleaning machines have been brought into service. The Cabinet Member does a walkabouts on a monthly basis with streets chosen to him on the morning after studying reports from residents of litter and fly tipping. As a result scores are once again improving but there is still much more to do to repair the damaging cuts made by former administration.