

## **WESTMINSTER SCRUTINY COMMISSION**

### **ITEM 5 – LEADER OF THE COUNCIL QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION**

#### **Councillor Tim Mitchell (Question submitted by a member of the public)**

“My partner saw a rat in broad daylight in our street yesterday. A neighbour of mine has said that she has seen them all the time. Do you feel that it is acceptable that we see rats in our streets and conditions akin to Dickensian London in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.”

I was interested in this question because in my ward there have been regular sightings of rats within the Strutton Ground area, Abbey Orchard Street area, and I know there has been ongoing issue with Thames Water and rather nearer home for the Council, behind City Hall. I regularly spot rats behind City Hall and it shows that this is not an isolated problem in a particular street but it is more general. I understand from speaking to my colleagues before this meeting that they also have issues in their ward and Simon, could you please comment?

#### **Councillor Sir Simon Milton**

Of course I don't think it's acceptable for people to be sighting rats on the streets of London but unfortunately it is a fact of life and it's been increasing in recent years. There are various reasons for that but both the Chartered Institute for Environmental Health and the commercial pest control industry are reporting an increase in sightings, possibly to do with climate change, to do with changing lifestyles, more people eating on the streets, leaving food out, dispensing of litter in an inappropriate way, that had happened in the past and also of course there are major works going on at the moment to London's Victorian sewer system which are dislodging rats and wherever you have a lot of construction and development activity that leads to an increase in sightings. I did actually ask for the figures for Westminster from our Pest Control and interestingly, although London wide, there has been quite a steep increase in sightings of rats, that hasn't been the case in Westminster. In the last year there were 320 rat infestations reported. The previous year 302, before that 269, before that 327, before that 385 and going back to the year 2001/2, it was 538 so actually it's been stable, it's been dipping, it's now coming up again slightly. What do we do about it? Well, we do proactive baiting in streets which are under our control and on CityWest estates. We are also de-baiting our sewers and gulleys where things are reported to us and we also pass our sightings to Thames Water who also have some responsibilities in this and I've recently given approval to increase the number of staff in the Pest Control department because clearly this is something that we want to keep on top of. Pest control obviously doesn't just deal with rats, it deals with other pest issues like bed bugs which is also another thing which is on the increase sadly again, climate related. So we are going to increase the amount of resources we put into this as a Council but unfortunately some of those issues are to do with London, the infrastructure of London and the fact that London has never been able to eradicate rats on a permanent basis so by being proactive, by putting down bait, we are keeping it more or less stable in Westminster against a rising tide elsewhere but clearly there are going to be instances where people report,

and we encourage people to report, because the more we know about where these infestations are, the more targeted our activities on baiting can be.

**Councillor Tim Mitchell**

Just by way of supplementary. In addition to the additional funding for Environmental Health, is there going to be any additional funding for improved gulleys?

**Councillor Sir Simon Milton**

I don't know the answer to the technical type of gulleys we are using at the moment but there is an upward trend in our investment in the Highways generally, including gulleys so I will take that back and will get you a more detailed answer.

**Councillor Mark Page**

I think the first question I would like to ask Simon is concerning the leadership of the Council where two things have happened. First of all, we've got Peter Rogers who has announced his departure and secondly your elevation at the LGA which helps on Westminster's profile but probably adds to your time pressure. This is obviously creating a certain amount of speculation, perhaps a time of uncertainty which can't be good, and is there any reassurance that you can give us?

**Councillor Sir Simon Milton**

Well I can't give you any reassurance about Peter Rogers because he's handed in his resignation and he will be leaving next Spring. We have a process underway, I think some people might have seen an advertisement that appeared in the Sunday Times two Sundays ago advertising the vacancy and we've got recruitment consultants who have been on the case even before that advert came out and we are getting quite a lot of interest both from other existing Council Chief Execs but also from some people who are running councils overseas who are interested in the Westminster job and we are going to obviously soon be in a position to start the long listing down to a position whereby, I would hope, by Christmas, we would be in a position to make an offer to somebody to take on the role, hopefully starting not too long after Peter has left. My own position is, as you say, I've been elected Chairman of the Local Government Association. I made it very clear to my colleagues in the political groups to whom I am accountable, that I believe I can do both jobs, I intend to do both jobs until such time as my colleagues tell me that they don't want me to or until I feel that I've reached a position where it's not a good idea to do both jobs. So I don't know if that gives you the reassurance you need?

**Councillor Mark Page**

So in terms of the time pressure that you get from fulfilling the two roles, you find that fine at the moment?

### **Councillor Sir Simon Milton**

At the moment I'm able to cope. I did have other responsibilities previously of a private nature, I was still a Consultant to my former business so I've now ceased to do that so I don't have any other call on my time other than Westminster and the LGA.

### **Councillor Judith Warner**

I'd just like to pick up on the "Go Green" theme again. I understand that the Audit Commission have made it clear that, amongst some of the topics they intend to look at in the future, are obesity, reducing the carbon footprint and obviously how local authorities build their localities and their neighbourhoods. Moving in on the reduction of the carbon footprint, that's an extremely big project and obviously various councils are tackling it in different ways. Do you agree that incrementally, perhaps not even in five years but in ten years, this topic won't go away and local authorities will be judged by how close to their own creation of waste they will either dispose of it, sort it or prepare it for on markets and I wonder whether or not there were any ideas in looking at possibly, and this is just an idea, some of our garages as possible locations for a One Stop, thoroughly new, thoroughly modern, state-of-the-art, waste, sort, management centre in a manner that at the moment we don't currently see in England. I ask that question because I think we will be judged by whether or not we are putting vehicles on roads and taking any form of waste to any part of the country and I wonder whether any big vision ideas were forthcoming on this one?

### **Councillor Sir Simon Milton**

Ok, well, I have to say, I doubt very much that any of our car parks would make suitable sites for ultimate disposal and treatment facilities if that's what you are talking about. If you look at the waste stream, what happens after waste is collected, either from domestic or commercial premises or from street waste, it is then taken to be sorted at sorting centres and from there the recyclable materials go to various plants which recycle. Now, what I suspect you are alluding to is the fact that some of that ultimate recycling is done a very long way away, in fact a lot of it is done outside this country because this country has been quite slow in developing facilities to recycle plastics, for example, and other types of materials, which means that the market has not been there to develop it and therefore we are sending out stuff overseas which does seem to defeat the object. So, whilst we are telling people to recycle, that very recycling, in many cases, is leading to an extended carbon footprint as those goods are ultimately taken for processing in places as far away as Germany, The Far East and other parts of Europe. So that is certainly an issue now. Most of these plants have to be of a pretty industrial scale and size to deliver value for money and to handle waste not just from a single authority but from lots and lots of authorities. So there is apparently a new plant that's due to open in London which is going to deal with plastic bottles which I'm told is going to be open in the next few months and we will obviously seek to use that. But I really don't think that central London, with some of the highest land values in the world is the place where you are going to site an industrial scale recycling processing plant, it just doesn't make sense.

### **Councillor Judith Warner**

Can I ask a supplementary Chairman? I wasn't actually seeing it as a recycling plant in the manner that you've described. The reason why I asked the question is because local authorities are judged by the amount of tonnage they are able to produce in recycling. West Sussex County Council has got a number of collection points and they are not actually doing the sort of sort that you are talking about of a very limited range of materials. The tonnage will go up on lots of different authorities because they've got the small sites whereby they are disassembling radios, they are collecting computers, they are collecting garden tools and equipment, now that's something we are not actually doing ourselves and also we are limited because we don't have a site for the collection irrespective of the lack of markets for some of the materials. Our limitation in the materials we collect is going to be a problem for us when other authorities are organising their collection sites as mini-disassembly organisations in a highly professional manner and I wondered whether we were going to look at moving from just collecting the newspapers, the plastic bottles. It needs a re-think, it's not about what we are doing today, it's about 20 years' time.

### **Councillor Sir Simon Milton**

I understand that but I don't think you should compare West Sussex, a county, with a single London borough because I think you've got to view London as a whole and it doesn't make sense for every London borough to have its own specific facilities when boundaries are so close. Our equivalent points are in Battersea, Wandsworth, and there is a new one which has been designated in Brent. Now those are all very close to get to. If you are in the North of Westminster it actually makes more sense to take the stuff to Brent than to get it down to South Westminster quite often. So I think we have to view London as a region and then break it down into sub-regions which is, in effect, what's happening and work in partnership with all the boroughs to make sure that we have as many facilities as we need located in the right place. I honestly don't see many of those facilities being in Westminster for the reason that it would be economic madness for that to happen and the costs of running that would be such that other boroughs wouldn't want to put their waste there because it would cost them too much.

### **Councillor Barrie Taylor**

My question is about youth and sport really Simon. I was reading the transfer of the Sports Unit to Environment and Leisure report and we did take out some of these issues inside the Scrutiny Committee that we had the other night. But I think there are slightly more wider issues which I don't think have been addressed by this review at the moment that I would like to raise with you and a couple of minor ones as well if you don't mind? The first one is about the strategic link between the schools and sports development and how that links into the extended schools programme and whether or not we, as a Council, could not consider doing some partnership investment with the schools on that programme. Now I know that we've already got the Sports Unit currently working together with them and actually promoting some of those things but I don't think what we've done yet is go forward and say ok, we are going to develop this, and we have got some serious things, aims related to exercise particularly, and I believe Judith was saying earlier about the obesity target will

become the Audit Commission's inspection of the Council in a couple of years. What I'm hoping we can do is show willingness inside the extended schools with some direct investment. So that's one point. The second point I've got with that is one other thing that becomes obvious when you look at this report is I think the under-investment that there is in facilitating promotion of voluntary sports clubs and seriously, I've learned this from working with youth and with the Sports Unit as well, is that, certainly in the north, to my knowledge, we are lacking in the number of voluntary sports clubs and in order to do that we need some facilitation. Again, the role that the Council could play and I would welcome your views on both of those. Do you want the detailed bits as well? There is a simple thing which is disappointing to read in here which is about Moberley Sports Hall and its floor. What you will see in reading this report is that it's been out of commission really since April 2007. You can't do sports without proper floors. Now I know that's an issue because I spoke to the relevant officer, but it's desperate to have that in place in order that you can actually have a programme that works on that. That's my detail.

### **Councillor Sir Simon Milton**

I obviously would welcome partnership with schools and extended schools on sport. I mean, I think we should be careful with the extended schools to realise that simply designating something as an extended school is one thing, paying for it is another. With my Local Government Association hat on, we've calculated that the cost to councils of extended schools is £9m a day and unless the Government funds that it isn't really going to happen so there is a national funding issue here and obviously we've had the Comprehensive Spending Review today and I would expect given the priority which the Prime Minister has announced for Children and Young People that there ought to be something in that and clearly if there is then we will make good use of it. You are correct in saying that schools are an important part of us meeting our own targets on keeping young people active. Unfortunately, I think we are right in saying that we narrowly missed one of our targets last year which was about the percentage of children involved in two hours sporting activity a week and that was substantially because of one school which happened to be Pimlico School who did very badly... figures just below achieving the target rather than achieving it. So schools are important and we have to make sure that schools are prepared to work with us, not least the Academies, because they now make up a substantial proportion of our school population and certainly in the case of the Westminster Academy they've got fantastic facilities due to open shortly which I hope will be of great use not just to the school but to the wider community so I'm very happy to, in principle, support your idea of a partnership. Your second point was about supporting voluntary sports clubs and again, who would be against that? That is a very sensible thing to do. Interesting of course, if you look at our youth provision, of I think 29 youth projects that we support, 17 are in the voluntary sector so the bulk of our funding on youth is going through voluntary provision rather than through Council employees. All of these things are subject to competitiveness within budgets. The grants round is always over-subscribed. I think that, you know, certainly you can always make the case to my colleague, Councillor Adams, who leads on grants, that you should re-weight more grants going into sporting activity but then it comes out of some other pot but, in principle, we support voluntary sports activities, clubs and would like to see more of them and accept that part of getting more is the Council, being able to support them but within constrained budgets we do the best we can.

And your specific point was about Moberley and I have been made aware of this and as you know there was a problem with the floor. It has been the subject of protracted debate with the insurance assessors. We've now gone out to tender, the tenders have been received and evaluated but we need to wait for sign-off from the insurance company before awarding the tender which hopefully won't take too long with a view to the work now being done over the winter and the full centre re-opening at Easter or in April 2008. Clearly, as you are aware, other parts of Moberley are continuing to function and are open and are providing facilities but that one facility has been closed and is in the process of being sorted out.

### **Councillor Barrie Taylor**

Can I just follow that, a couple of bits through that. I'm interested in your reference to Pimlico, especially as they are playing home to the Academy next week on football so I look forward to the result. In respect of money that is available. Inside this report that was done on the bringing together, one of the issues about that is about the way in which the monies that come through the contractor works and what you are seeing there is the service now operates with a substantial operating surplus which is directed to other desirable service deliverables and I hope that that mechanism, forget the grants for a minute, because I think that's important. I do also think that there is a need for infrastructure debate as to how you support the sports clubs. But I think that the revenue side could easily be assisted through some of the re-direction out of the mainstream budgets. If someone could look at that, that would be helpful.

### **Councillor Louise Hyams**

This one has come straight from my postbag today actually so it's a convenient opportunity. Apparently we've recently introduced car parking charges for motorbikes and a resident has written in saying that in K&C a resident's permit for a motorbike is only £18 but we have introduced one at £80 a year and she is saying is this not an unfair differential? £80 seems quite close to what we are charging for a permit for a year.

### **Councillor Sir Simon Milton**

Let's be clear. Our policy on charging for motorcycle parking is to charge people whether they be residents or not to use motorcycle parking bays. I suspect the figure you are talking about refers to residents' permits. I'm not aware of that differential between our residents' permits. I thought you were wanting to ask, I had assumed the complaints were about the fact that we were introducing parking on street, charges for parking on street or would you clarify which is the issue you want to ask about.

### **Councillor Louise Hyams**

Well the question is that we are going to give a residents' permit for people that ride bikes but we are going to charge them £80 a year. The resident is saying K&C have been charging motorbike riders but they are only charging £18 a year, so £80 seems rather stiff.

### **Councillor Simon Milton**

Well, you know, I will take that back, I wasn't aware of that differential. I don't feel apologetic or defensive about charging £80 for a motorcycle parking permit. It's a lot more to park a car and we, you know, we are also, at the same time, as charging for motorcycles for the first time, we are using the money that we gain from that to invest in two things. First of all, increasing significantly the number of motorcycle parking bays which is a real problem because as the number of motorcyclists has increased the number of bays has stayed static so we are converting some resident's car parking bays to motorcycle parking bays and the second thing we are doing is introducing lockable security mechanisms on-street which is a real gain because of the amount of motorcycle theft. So, not only will you be able to have more places to park in Westminster if you are a motorcyclist but your bike will also be secure. For that we are making a charge which I think is a fair and reasonable charge. If other people charge less, good for them.

### **Councillor Mark Page**

Simon, the application for Pimlico School is now in and I gather it's not going to be going to the Planning and City Development Committee but going to a separate BSF Committee. Could you tell us the logic behind that please?

### **Councillor Sir Simon Milton**

Yes. One of the most important things in delivering BSF is to make sure that all planning goes through smoothly and we are able to treat all of the applications on a par and that's why we are keen that they should all go to one Planning Committee. It's not a special Planning Committee, it's simply one of the Sub-committees who will handle all of the plans that join the BSF.

### **Councillor Mark Page**

I understand that it's a separate from to Committee. It says Sub-Committee but if my understanding is right you are going to have the Cabinet Member for Planning on there, the Chairman of Planning and City Development, Chairman of a Sub-Committee and Councillor Mothersdale so it looks like its one that's specifically formed for it.

### **Councillor Sir Simon Milton**

I was simply under the impression it was going to Councillor Davis's committee? Is that allowed?

### **Councillor Davis**

*(inaudible, not speaking into a microphone) Cllr Davis explained that BSF applications would be going to his Planning Sub-Committee but with a revised membership.*

### **Councillor Mark Page**

My natural take on it is that it should go to the Planning and City Development but I understand the reasons why not. My second point on this is, if I look at the application date, it was 9<sup>th</sup> September and I gather a committee is being formed on 17<sup>th</sup> October so it's a pretty fast timetable and reading the Council's website it says application invalid on receipt. Now, I've tried to phone the South area team today but they are all moving offices. I presume that's because not all the documentation is in yet? The point I'm making is the application is not actually valid yet until all the relevant information is received and we seem to be having a committee already formed, already in place before the application is actually valid.

### **Councillor Sir Simon Milton**

Well, no, hang on a minute. We are making sure that the infrastructure is there in governance terms to handle the BSF process smoothly so there is a Planning Committee which will have strong expertise to handle the applications when they come. There is absolutely no question whatsoever of the applications being treated in any kind of more favourable way than any normal planning application so all of the information will have to be received, it was subject to all of the same guidelines and strictures that govern any planning application and it will be handled in the appropriate way in public with the public able to make any replies they want to the consultation. I don't want anyone to get the impression that this is somehow being handled in a way in which other planning applications would not receive.

### **Councillor Mark Page**

I take that on board. The point is, looking at it from outside, you see an application that is being fast tracked and I just ring those warning bells, but I take on board the points you make.

### **Councillor Tim Mitchell**

Can I add as a supplementary? Somebody has spent about an hour on the phone with a resident on this very issue this morning, that if the applications had not been fully validated by next Wednesday and the Committee decides to defer consideration for further information. Probably, it might be through the BSF mechanism as opposed to the Planning mechanism that we communicate with local residents exactly what is happening because there is concern on a school-by-school basis about some of the details of the BSF.

### **Councillor Sir Simon Milton**

Well, I'm very pleased to report that the feedback from residents, particularly those living near Pimlico School, has been that they have been very happy with the consultation process so far and I hope that continues and clearly it's in everyone's interest that communication remains good. What is also important is that we make sure that the BSF programme is delivered on time and on budget because it's in everyone's interests for those works to be done in order that education in Westminster can improve. I think as far as Pimlico is concerned the most significant



issue at the moment is not, frankly, whether all of the documents are in for their planning application because that will have to happen in order for that application to be considered and by the way, as I think you heard just now from Councillor Davis, there is no sense that decisions are going to be taken. There is a process whereby steers will be given by the Planning Committee as happens with all major applications on the way to a decision being taken. But the most significant thing is the fact that we have published who the sponsor will be for the Pimlico Academy and that I think is a major step forward and assuming the Cabinet endorses that when it meets next week, that is something that I think, you know, we should all take some comfort from, that we've moved that process along successfully because ultimately that's going to have as big an impact on the outcomes for children attending Pimlico School as anything else.

**Councillor Barrie Taylor**

Mine is also related to Pimlico School. It's about sponsors really and perhaps you could let us know whether any of the potential sponsors have declared if they have made contributions to political parties?

**Councillor Sir Simon Milton**

No, I neither know nor care whether the sponsors have made contributions to the political parties. I see it as totally irrelevant to whether or not they would be good sponsors so I've not asked them, I've not been told.

**Councillor Barrie Taylor**

I raise that point because I think there is some concern that's been raised, certainly with me about that relationship and whether or not it's appropriate in the case of academies. As you know, I'm a sort of a, what do you call it? Critical friend of academies, I'm even on one of their governing bodies. I will support academies but setting them in the right tone is absolutely correct. I think the two we've already set up, the third one that's now just starting, I think we have gone about it in the right way. I'm worried that this one kicks in the wrong direction and I'm making that point to you, what you do with it .....

**Councillor Sir Simon Milton**

Well, I have to say, I'm not worried. Clearly, Pimlico is different from the first three academies because unlike the first three academies, the National Union of Teachers has run a highly political campaign against the academy. They can do that, I understand why they've done that because they were running Pimlico School and now they are not going to be so clearly there is a sense of grievance on their part. But that doesn't change our decision. We approached the DfES, as it then was, it's now DCSF, to say that we believe that Pimlico was right for an academy. They provided a number of names of sponsors who they felt would be appropriate. We've interviewed them, we've come up with one who we think would be right. If they are good enough for Labour Ministers, they are good enough for me.

### **Councillor Mitchell**

Could I now turn, this is a joint question from myself and Councillor Page regarding the CPA Action Plan. There were two areas which were highlighted in the CPA. One relating to ICT which had a positive write-up from one angle but from other angles it was found wanting and as Members and Officers will know we've had two major outages of email for example in the last nine months or so. Are we confident that we have the right partners on board to ensure that this isn't happening again?

### **Councillor Sir Simon Milton**

Well the CPA Inspectors, as you say, said there were some cutting-edge IT applications being used in the Council but they didn't see an overall strategy for IT. So what have we done since they have left? Well, we have had Officers and Members looking at drawing up this strategy, it was actually already starting to be drawn up. That's now, I am pleased to say, being signed off at the end of September by the Corporate Management Board with a series of actions which focus on Governance, Service Changes and Technical Requirements. The Strategy also recommended that the Chief Information Officer be appointed responsible for all of IT and a board to work to that Chief Information Officer has been established. There is also a new Service Manager for Vertex appointed and work is going on to ensure that all of the specifications and the outsourcing contracts are fully operational and up to speed so a lot of work has already been done since the CPA Inspectors left and I think, you know, we are well on the way to having the kind of strategy and systems in place that we need.

### **Councillor Mark Page**

Can I just follow up on that one? How confident are you with the way ICT is going? As confident as you can be?

### **Councillor Sir Simon Milton**

Well, yes, I'm not an ICT expert and so I have to rely on the advice of senior officers, the Chief Executive, the Director of Finance and Resources, Director of Change Management, Director of Customer Services, all of whom have an input into this. Clearly, IT is extremely important to Westminster in the future because of the whole of our WorkSmart programme depends in various ways on IT which is why it's so central that we get this right. We've identified it as something that we have to make progress on and we are making progress so how confident am I? Well, you might as well say how confident am I in Mr Bell and Mr Rogers and Mr Ellis and of course I have every confidence in them, if they tell me that they are going to do it, I believe them.

### **Councillor Mark Page**

Just looking at it I think there is a risk on this as one would expect and perhaps something that I'd be picking up on the Resources Work Programme a bit more than the Efficiency Task Group.

### **Councillor Sir Simon Milton**

I would agree. There is always risk in any change management programme. If you are keen and if the Audit Committee wants to follow this up, I think that would be extremely helpful because it will add an additional layer of, sort of governance and oversight to the process.

### **Councillor Mark Page**

The other key area of improvement in the CPA Inspection was providing clarity on the strategic direction for Human Resources and communicating this to staff and partners including the production of a Workforce plan. If you would like to just comment around that?

### **Councillor Sir Simon Milton**

Yes, again our HR strategy was already shown to the CPA Inspectors before they left. Since then, it's been taken forward, I believe it's gone to the Audit and Performance Committee on 3 October which would have been last week and it's being considered by the Scrutiny Commission and a series of consultations on the strategy with Managers is in process to help get the Action Plan underway. So again, it's work in progress, but I would welcome the ongoing involvement of your board and Audit and Performance to make sure that we keep on track.

### **Councillor Warner**

Yes, I have a question which relates to the development of the Neighbourhood Agenda. We've got a number of very good policies but most of them are corporate and the knowledge base at a local level is under developed. I say that because the Health and Community Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee are engaged in reviewing all of the services which covers that particular Committee by Area Forum and at the moment nearly all of our contracts are obviously centrally managed but we still have a very corporate focus whereas we are looking for a community understanding from people within our communities. I will give you an example. We've got an excellent policy, "Every Older Person Matters". For the success of that obviously certain exercise classes are needed in various parts of the city but we don't seem to have got the capability at the moment to know what's going on from the ground up, rather than what the corporate view is out and I wondered whether you had any views about that because I know we are looking towards the budgets but it seems to me that unless we look at going for directories of provision, (a) we don't get the best out of our Procurement policies and (b) we don't actually get the best out of our voluntary organisations and partners either.

### **Councillor Sir Simon Milton**

Well I think I would agree with you. My vision is that wherever you live in Westminster, you should be able to go onto the website and see for your area where you live, all of the performance data of the Council, of the Police, of local health service provision and a directory of services available to you for your neighbourhood. That is my vision. It's going to take some time to get there. Particularly it's going to

take some time to get other public agencies to provide the data that they hold but that must be where we ultimately end up, so that you, as a citizen, will be able to see very quickly how well services are being provided in your area and where you need to go to if you want a particular type of service. So I would agree with you with that. I think it's a bold vision, its going to take a little while for us to get there but I think that is the future for all councils.

### **Councillor Warner**

Can I please just ask a supplementary? I mean the model that we are looking at is the mother who might have got a 14 or 13 year old child, summer holidays coming up, wants to know what they can do with the children in their area. Or a mother who may have got, or parents who have got younger children, don't want them going too far away, but need to know that there is something and it doesn't necessarily have to be provided by us but we know who the organisation is, who do provide those things. It's not so much corporate performance but services availability enabling and us helping people to navigate their way through the wide range of choices that exist.

### **Councillor Sir Simon Milton**

You know, again, I repeat, you are absolutely right. These things are not impossible to do. They require extremely good knowledge management systems, back to IT. It also requires all partners and providers in an area to be prepared to provide their information so that it can be shared but you are talking about the future, a future that I think works.

### **Councillor Warner**

In conclusion Simon, there has, over recent months, been consultation by the Roberts Commission over the role of Councillors. We now see on our own side more initiatives for a neighbourhood approach to enable Backbench Members, not Cabinet Members, to be more involved in decision taking. How do you see the role of Councillors in 12 months, 18 months time, bearing in mind also that we are receiving a new Local Government Act as it soon will be with community calls for action and various other new mechanisms for engagement with the public?

### **Councillor Sir Simon Milton**

I think that, if I was to try to project what life will be like in 12 or 18 months time for a Non-executive Councillor it will be that your focus of time and activity will have shifted even more from meetings that happen at Westminster City Council to meetings that happen in your ward, with residents, with officers. The focus will be more on community leadership. Now, that's something that some Councillors I know will embrace, others will actually find that not to their liking. There is a certain comfort, I think, in being a Councillor and thinking that if you come to your Scrutiny Committees you are doing your job but actually increasingly that's not going to be the job and I think that those people who join the Council relatively recently are kind of possibly culturally more open to that different way of working than people who may have been around for a very long time like me and Councillor Taylor who it's very hard to teach new tricks to.

