

**City of Westminster
Written Council Question
Standing Order 9(c)**

The following sets out a question from Cllr Alan Mendoza asked, in accordance with Standing Order 9(c) of Councillor Nafsika Butler-Thalassis, Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care, Public Health and Voluntary Sector who is responding on behalf of the Cabinet Member for Resident Participation, Consultation Reform and Leisure (currently on maternity leave).

Councillor Alan Mendoza

Given that it is the role of elected local Councillors to represent their residents, and help determine local priorities for their wards from their local engagements, why is the current Administration wasting hundreds of thousands of pounds on establishing Local Area Forums to replicate this work? Does the Cabinet believe Elected Members are not doing their jobs properly or is it the case that the Administration is choosing to prioritise this duplication of work over the many other areas of Council activity that her own colleague the Lead Member of Finance told Full Council only last week could use more funding?

Councillor Butler-Thalassis

Local Area Panels do not and cannot replace the role of democratically elected members. All ward councillors in the areas of the Local Area Panels have been invited to join the Local Area Panels to share their insights gained from their local engagements. There is no duplication of the work of a councillor and the work of a Local Area Panel member.

Local Area Panels form part of the Community Priorities Programme, a participatory budget programme where panels of local residents are engaged to decide the community priorities for their area. They will then discuss and make decisions on which community activities to fund through the Community Priorities grants over the next two years. This is one of many opportunities the council provides for residents to be more engaged with council activities, bringing the council closer to local communities.

In addition to the residents who have volunteered to join the panels, a wider survey is conducted with residents about what they consider to be the priorities locally, as well as focus group sessions held in each of the 11 wards that will form part of the Community Priorities Programme. These priorities are then used to shape decisions around which activities to support with grants.

We have heard consistently from residents, grassroots community groups, Amenity societies, Neighbourhood forums, and the Voluntary and Community Sector that greater involvement of citizens in decision making is needed, and this is one of the ways we can ensure this takes place.

It is interesting that the Conservative Party Councillor regards the involvement of his residents in decision making a waste of money and it would be good to know if his disapproval extends to all areas of public consultation, including public realm,

highways etc. I look forward to debating this in Full Council as befits our role as elected representatives.