

Greenwich Citizens come together to share their concerns with councillors and get concrete pledges for the future

Halley Academy saw the gathering of around 100 citizens of Greenwich on Tuesday evening to hold local councillors to account on a number of local concerns ahead of the local elections in May. At the dawn of a new political term, citizens express their hopes and projects to make Greenwich a better place for all and having the current candidates commitments to take action if they were to be re-elected.

On the panel was leader of the opposition Matt Hartley, and candidate for Labour and current Cabinet Member for Health David Gardner. Facilitating the discussion was Reverend Kim Hitch from St James Church, interactive artist Kat Hornstein and Kim Sullivan from Trinity Vineyard.

Throughout the evening over 30 citizens from all backgrounds, faiths and professions had the opportunity to share their personal stories and ask for the councillors' commitment to act on the issues closest to them and to our borough. Powerful stories on the struggle of working for minimum wage as a young person, incidents of knife crime, the challenges of being a migrant in Greenwich and stories from brave young girls that have experienced violence.

Three concerns were voted by Greenwich Citizens as priority matters to be addressed with commitments from the councillors:

- **Safer neighbourhoods:** demonstrated by the recent knife attack in Woolwich Arsenal, community leaders need to better understand the paths, alleys and streets that make our youth feel unsafe. Only then can we put in place actions that make our neighbourhoods safer.
 - Commitment: Both Gardner and Hartley would take part in a community walk to understand the unsafe areas of the local area. Following this, both will work with Greenwich Citizens to form an action plan to make the areas safer.
- **Violence towards women and girls:** to appoint someone to sit in the newly-created Greenwich Commission for Women and Girls, and attend the launch event in six months time. Sophie Smith from Halley Academy bravely kicked off the section on Violence Towards Women and Girls;

Good evening everyone, my name is Sophie Smith and I have a dream.

I have a dream that one day no female will feel unsafe because of their gender.

I have a dream my daughters and my sisters can wear what they want without being objectified.

I have a dream we will live in a community where sexual assault is a scary story of the past.

I have a dream where my female friends are not always at a disadvantage.

I have a dream I will one day not be scared to walk alone.

Ladies and gentlemen, I have a dream...

- Commitment: If Labour were to be re-elected, Gardner is supportive of sending cabinet minister Jackie Smith to join this commission. Both candidates will meet with members of the commission and attend the launch in six months time.
- **Cultivating Greenwich as a welcoming borough for all:** to restate their commitment to welcome 20 refugee families and commit to bringing five of these families before the end of 2018. Create a strategy for refugees, asylum seekers and migrants to better integrate into the fabric of society.
 - Commitment: Both Gardner and Hartley would do everything in their power to help this process along, forming a strategy to make Greenwich a more welcoming borough for refugees, asylum seekers and migrants.

The evening marked the beginning of an open dialog with our local councillors as we enter a new political term. To support this aim, our councillors pledged to actively and consistently listen to the citizens' voice and meet with Greenwich Citizens at least once a quarter.

Despite the weight of some of the topics discussed, the evening carried a light-hearted and celebratory tone, as the citizens thanked councillors for their dedication to implement the London Living Wage incentive scheme for all organisations in Greenwich which has seen pay rises for over 700 people in our borough.

There was a showcase of local talent too including performances from students performing Emeli Sande's Read All About It and a dance duo encapsulating domestic violence through the art of dance.

***Editors notes:

Greenwich Citizens, part of the charity Citizens UK, aims to build the capacity of people to participate in public life, to act together for the common good, to win change and to strengthen civic institutions in the process.
