

COUNCIL
2 FEBRUARY 2011

TIME: 7.15pm – 9.43pm

PRESENT: The Mayor, Councillor Oonagh Moulton
The Deputy Mayor, Councillor Margaret Brierly
Councillors Lord Tariq Ahmad, Agatha Akyigyina, Stephen Alambritis, Mark Allison, Stan Anderson, Laxmi Attawar, Mark Betteridge, John Bowcott, Richard Chellew, David Chung, David Dean, John Dehaney, Nick Draper, Iain Dysart, Chris Edge, Suzanne Evans, Karin Forbes, Brenda Fraser, Samantha George, Suzanne Grocott, Maurice Groves, Gam Gurung, Jeff Hanna, Richard Hilton, James Holmes, Janice Howard, Mary-Jane Jeanes, Philip Jones, Andrew Judge, Linda Kirby, Gilli Lewis-Lavender, Logie Lohendran, Edith Macauley, Russell Makin, Maxi Martin, Peter McCabe, Krystal Miller, Ian Munn, Diane Neil Mills, Henry Nelles, Dennis Pearce, John Sargeant, Judy Saunders, Linda Scott, Rod Scott, Debbie Shears, David Simpson, Peter Southgate, Geraldine Stanford, Sam Thomas, Ray Tindle, Gregory Udeh, Peter Walker, Martin Whelton, David Williams, Richard Williams, Miles Windsor and Simon Withey.

Apologies for lateness were received from Councillor Peter McCabe

1 DECLARATIONS

The following declarations were advised:

Agenda Item 7 – Motion 2

Councillor Stephen Alambritis declared a personal interest on the basis of his being a guest of AFC Wimbledon at a recent match; provided an article in the official AFC Wimbledon programme; and officiated at an AFC match.

Councillor Richard Williams declared a personal interest on the basis of his being a guest of AFC Wimbledon at a recent match.

Councillor Martin Whelton declared a personal interest on the basis of his being a guest at recent AFC Wimbledon matches.

Councillor Diane Neil Mills declared a personal interest on the basis of her being a sponsor of the away kit for the AFC Wimbledon goalkeeper amounting to £200 per year; and

Councillor Simon Withey declared a prejudicial interest on the basis of his having shares in AFC Wimbledon. He stated his intention to leave the meeting during consideration of this item.

Councillor David Williams declared a personal interest on the basis of his being in receipt of hospitality courtesy of AFC Wimbledon (he confirmed that he had

COUNCIL
2 FEBRUARY 2011

previously registered the interest on the gifts and hospitality register).

The Mayor declared a personal interest on the basis of her attending various functions associated with AFC Wimbledon.

2 MINUTES (Agenda Item 3)

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 24 November 2011 are agreed as a correct record.

Order of Business

The Mayor sought the approval of Council to the re-ordering of the business detailed on the agenda to allow for the taking of agenda item 17 after agenda item 6.

3 ANNOUNCEMENTS (Agenda Item 4)

The Mayor

I would like to welcome everyone back and wish everyone a happy new year. I am hopeful that council will continue in its good humour and behaviour and we have good, robust debate, at all times in the manner which should promote the dignity and uphold the esteem of the council.

I welcome members of the public sitting at the back. Thank you for joining us and for your questions.

This is the first meeting at which we're graced by Councillor Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon.

With regards to my past events over the last period, I won't go into all the different school plays, concerts and carol concerts that we attended because I'd be keeping you for some time. I would though like to say that it's been wonderful to attend so much in and out of the borough. To give a short flavour, from switching on lights with Haydon the Womble, to Wimbledon Wonderland, the Wimbledon Stables Carol event, and on Christmas Day, the Sacred Heart lunch was a moving event.

We also had a number of awards evenings, not least was the Merton Staff Excellence Awards. We have some great officers, not just in the chamber, and it's great to recognise those. At the other end of the scale, the Merton Adult Education awards for those with learning disabilities springs to mind and that was particularly moving.

There has been a number of good dinners and, not least, the Wimbledon Civic Theatre event at the AELTC which raised a substantial sum of money for that charity, which is a mayoral charity and does an enormous amount of work within the borough, particularly in helping those with disabilities in our secondary schools.

There was also the Polka Theatre Gala and Wimbledon Theatre pantomime and so forth. All of these events, although they sound glamorous, they're very important to raise funds and the establishments with which we're involved.

With regards to our own events, the Christmas dinner raised some good funds for the

COUNCIL
2 FEBRUARY 2011

mayoral charities and also our carol service at St Mary's Church. The Holocaust Memorial Ceremony was held here last week was a very moving occasion, at which we were hearing untold stories, and those should continue and long may they do so.

4 QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC (Agenda Item 5)

The written questions and answers and oral supplementary questions and answers can be found at the appendix to these minutes.

5 QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS (Agenda Item 6)

The written questions and answers and oral supplementary questions and answers can be found at the appendix to these minutes.

6 SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES WITH AN EMPHASIS ON CULTURE AND SPORT (**Agenda Item 17 of the supplementary agenda**)

The written questions and answers and oral supplementary questions and answers can be found at the appendix to these minutes.

Councillor Martin Whelton introduced the report and formally moved, duly seconded by Councillor Andrew Judge, its receipt.

Report received.

Motion 1 detailed on the second supplementary agenda (Labour)

Pursuant to Part 4A Paragraph 8.7 of the Council's constitution, Councillor Stephen Alambritis sought the consent of the meeting, duly given, to alteration of the motion by the deletion of paragraph 6 i.e. "This Council notes the Leader of the Council recently appeared in the AFC v Southport day programme, pledging his support for the club return to Merton."

It was moved by Councillor Stephen Alambritis and seconded by Councillor Mark Betteridge:

This Council acknowledges the importance of sport to the well being of Merton residents. In particular, this Council notes the importance of football to the social, cultural and sporting life of this country.

In addition to the sporting impact, football teams can help to regenerate areas of social and economic deprivation. Football teams can have a huge impact on health and wellbeing through job creation and investment in youth teams and in other local community programmes.

Merton currently has one semi-professional football team within its boundary – Tooting and Mitcham United FC. The club is an important part of the football legacy of Merton but it is in its contribution to the local community that it is most notable. Tooting and Mitcham have created a sustainable, multi-activity environment within an area of social, sport and health deprivation at the Hub. This community sports facility is a centre of excellence for sport, leisure and health. The hub involves the whole community - regardless of background or fitness level - in a healthy, fun and active

COUNCIL
2 FEBRUARY 2011

lifestyle.

This council resolves to continue to work with Tooting and Mitcham football club to maximise the benefits the club can bring to the local community.

This council also acknowledges the borough's long association with Wimbledon football club. The Wimbledon patrimony was returned to its spiritual home in Merton in 2007 and it remains on show in Morden library. However, AFC Wimbledon, the inheritors of the Wimbledon mantle, remain in exile in Kingston. Despite not having a stadium of their own, AFC, a club owned by its fans, have gone from strength to strength and are a credit to the huge community effort behind the club. This council congratulates the club on its excellent performance to date and on its continued role in working with the local community through the Dons Trust and the club's youth academy, which works closely with Merton College.

This council believes it is time for AFC to return home and, in order to maximise the health and wellbeing of local people and to build on our historic footballing legacy, this council agrees to do everything in its power to facilitate AFC Wimbledon in returning to the borough of Merton.

The Mayor put the motion to the meeting and it was

RESOLVED: That

This Council acknowledges the importance of sport to the well being of Merton residents. In particular, this Council notes the importance of football to the social, cultural and sporting life of this country.

In addition to the sporting impact, football teams can help to regenerate areas of social and economic deprivation. Football teams can have a huge impact on health and wellbeing through job creation and investment in youth teams and in other local community programmes.

Merton currently has one semi-professional football team within its boundary – Tooting and Mitcham United FC. The club is an important part of the football legacy of Merton but it is in its contribution to the local community that it is most notable. Tooting and Mitcham have created a sustainable, multi-activity environment within an area of social, sport and health deprivation at the Hub. This community sports facility is a centre of excellence for sport, leisure and health. The hub involves the whole community - regardless of background or fitness level - in a healthy, fun and active lifestyle.

This council resolves to continue to work with Tooting and Mitcham football club to maximise the benefits the club can bring to the local community.

This council also acknowledges the borough's long association with Wimbledon football club. The Wimbledon patrimony was returned to its spiritual home in Merton in 2007 and it remains on show in Morden library. However, AFC Wimbledon, the inheritors of the Wimbledon mantle, remain in exile in Kingston. Despite not having a stadium of their own, AFC, a club owned by its fans, have gone from strength to

COUNCIL
2 FEBRUARY 2011

strength and are a credit to the huge community effort behind the club. This council congratulates the club on its excellent performance to date and on its continued role in working with the local community through the Dons Trust and the club's youth academy, which works closely with Merton College.

This council believes it is time for AFC to return home and, in order to maximise the health and wellbeing of local people and to build on our historic footballing legacy, this council agrees to do everything in its power to facilitate AFC Wimbledon in returning to the borough of Merton.

Motion 2 detailed on the second supplementary agenda (Conservative)

It was moved by Councillor Janice Howard, seconded by Councillor Maurice Groves and, upon the Mayor putting the motion to the meeting

RESOLVED: That

This Council believes that access to sport and culture plays an important role in providing a good quality of life for Merton residents and therefore supports increasing participation in sports across the borough.

This Council recognises the valuable work undertaken in Merton by AFC Wimbledon to promote sport at grassroots level and affirms its continuing support for the principle of AFC Wimbledon finding a permanent base in the borough, its spiritual home.

The Council believes that the advantages conferred by such a move would include:

- A further increase in sports being played locally;
- A swelling of civic pride;
- The ability to make the most of the current community involvement with AFC Wimbledon;
- The potential to help the regeneration of the area;
- The opportunity to bring additional business and income into Merton;
- and
- The increase of the profile of the borough.

This Council therefore resolves to work closely with AFC Wimbledon and its supporters in pursuit of the club's return to its roots here in Merton.

7 REPORTS OF COMMUNITY FORUMS (Agenda Item 8)

The Mayor confirmed the advice found on the agenda that both the Mitcham and Wimbledon Community Forums had been cancelled.

Reports otherwise received.

8 NOTICES OF MOTION (Agenda Item 9)

The Mayor apprised the meeting of the following advice given by the Chief Executive:

"Members may be aware that the London Councils' Leaders committee decision in relation to the grants review was recently challenged in the High Court. The judgment and its impact upon the grants categorisation is in the process of being

COUNCIL
2 FEBRUARY 2011

evaluated and will be considered by an upcoming meeting of the Leaders committee.”

Motion 1 (Conservative)

Pursuant to Part 4A Paragraph 8.7 of the Council’s constitution, Councillor James Holmes sought the consent of the meeting, duly given, to alteration of the motion by the inclusion of the following phrase at the end of the 3rd bullet point – “subject to further development resulting from the outcome of the Judicial Review of 28 January 2011.”

It was moved by Councillor James Holmes and seconded by Councillor Chris Edge
Merton Council notes that:

- following the recent review of the future role and scope of the London Boroughs Grants Scheme, the London Councils Leaders’ Committee agreed in December 2010 to an overall level of expenditure of £17.691 million for the Grants Scheme in 2011/12;
- net borough contributions for 2011/12 are due to be £13.241 million in total which represents a reduction of 49.7% on the 2010/11 subscription;
- Merton’s own contribution towards the London Boroughs Grants Scheme is therefore set to reduce from £695,932 in 2010/11 to £352,492 in 2011/12 – a total reduction of £343,440 - subject to further development resulting from the outcome of the Judicial Review of 28 January 2011.

This Council appreciates the considerable economic and social value of Merton’s diverse network of charities, social enterprises and voluntary organisations and applauds the extraordinary work they do every day to support the most vulnerable in our community and improve the lives of Merton residents from all backgrounds.

This Council also recognises that these are financially difficult times for government at every level but believes that financial pressures should not lead to unnecessary cuts in the services delivered by voluntary and community organisations in Merton, and is therefore concerned about the current administration’s proposals to withdraw funding in 2011/12 from some of these local groups.

As such, this Council believes it is important that the monies repatriated to Merton through the reduction in its contribution to the London Boroughs Grants Scheme are spent locally to support the valuable work undertaken by voluntary and community organisations in the Borough, and therefore resolves to invite Cabinet at its meeting on 14th February 2011 to consider options which:

- 1) provide for all monies repatriated from the London-wide Grants Scheme to be used to fund local voluntary sector activities here in Merton;
- 2) ensure that these repatriated funds are in addition to what Merton Council already spends on the voluntary sector and are not simply absorbed into the wider General Fund Revenue Budget of the Council.

COUNCIL
2 FEBRUARY 2011

Labour Amendment

It was moved by Councillor Edith Macauley and seconded by Councillor Mark Betteridge that Motion 1 is amended by the deletion from the 3rd paragraph of the phrase “,and is therefore concerned about the current administration’s proposals to withdraw funding in 2011/12 from some of these local groups”

The Mayor put the amendment to the meeting and it was declared to be carried on a vote of 33 for the amendment and 26 against.

The Mayor put the amended motion to the meeting and it was

RESOLVED: That

Merton Council notes that:

- following the recent review of the future role and scope of the London Boroughs Grants Scheme, the London Councils Leaders’ Committee agreed in December 2010 to an overall level of expenditure of £17.691 million for the Grants Scheme in 2011/12;
- net borough contributions for 2011/12 are due to be £13.241 million in total which represents a reduction of 49.7% on the 2010/11 subscription;
- Merton’s own contribution towards the London Boroughs Grants Scheme is therefore set to reduce from £695,932 in 2010/11 to £352,492 in 2011/12 – a total reduction of £343,440 - subject to further development resulting from the outcome of the Judicial Review of 28 January 2011.

This Council appreciates the considerable economic and social value of Merton’s diverse network of charities, social enterprises and voluntary organisations and applauds the extraordinary work they do every day to support the most vulnerable in our community and improve the lives of Merton residents from all backgrounds.

This Council also recognises that these are financially difficult times for government at every level but believes that financial pressures should not lead to unnecessary cuts in the services delivered by voluntary and community organisations in Merton.

As such, this Council believes it is important that the monies repatriated to Merton through the reduction in its contribution to the London Boroughs Grants Scheme are spent locally to support the valuable work undertaken by voluntary and community organisations in the Borough, and therefore resolves to invite Cabinet at its meeting on 14th February 2011 to consider options which:

- 3) provide for all monies repatriated from the London-wide Grants Scheme to be used to fund local voluntary sector activities here in Merton;
- 4) ensure that these repatriated funds are in addition to what Merton Council already spends on the voluntary sector and are not simply absorbed into the wider General Fund Revenue Budget of the Council.

COUNCIL
2 FEBRUARY 2011

Motion 2 (Labour/MPWIR)

It was moved by Councillor Edith Macauley and seconded by Councillor John Sargeant that

This council notes that the 2010 Residents Survey highlighted crime as the number one area of concern for Merton residents. However, Council further notes that the survey has also shown that the fear of crime has been reducing since the introduction of Safer Neighbourhood Teams.

Merton has consistently been one of the lowest crime boroughs in London, largely due to the dedication and hard work of our ward-based Safer Neighbourhood Teams.

Council is aware that the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) is currently carrying out a review of Safer Neighbourhood Teams and has produced a consultation document which presents generalised options for the restructuring of Safer Neighbourhood Teams in Merton.

Council notes that while the consultation identifies the current level of resources allocated to Merton as comprising 21 Sergeants, 46 Police Constables and 63 Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs), it does not make clear the resources we can expect in the future under any of the new options it presents.

This lack of clarity has caused concern amongst residents who are keen to protect their dedicated local Safer Neighbourhood Teams.

Council notes that Met Commissioner Sir Paul Stephenson recently told the London Assembly: "After seven years it's right that we look at this model to make sure what we've got fits the needs and desires of London. I have yet to be convinced any changes should be made to the model. Safer Neighbourhoods has brought us huge benefits and increased confidence."

Council believes that the importance our residents place on crime needs to be reflected in the MPS consultation. This council therefore calls for transparency from the MPS on the policing resources Merton's residents can expect to see over the coming years, and calls on the Leader and Cabinet to seek a pledge from the MPS not to reduce frontline policing in Merton.

Conservative Amendment

It was moved by Councillor David Simpson and seconded by Councillor Logie Lohendran that the motion is amended by the insertion of the underlined words as follows:

This council notes that the 2010 Residents Survey highlighted crime as the number one area of concern for Merton residents. However, Council further notes that the survey has also shown that the fear of crime has been reducing since the

COUNCIL
2 FEBRUARY 2011

introduction of Safer Neighbourhood Teams.

Merton has consistently been one of the lowest crime boroughs in London, largely due to the dedication and hard work of our ward-based Safer Neighbourhoods Teams.

Council is aware that the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) is currently carrying out a review of Safer Neighbourhood Teams and has produced a consultation document which presents generalised options for the restructuring of Safer Neighbourhood Teams in Merton.

Council notes that while the consultation identifies the current level of resources allocated to Merton as comprising 21 Sergeants, 46 Police

Constables and 63 Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs), it does not make clear the resources we can expect in the future under any of the new options it presents.

This lack of clarity has caused concern amongst residents who are keen to protect their dedicated local Safer Neighbourhood Teams.

Council however acknowledges that, whilst London had 31,395 police officers in April 2008, the latest end of year figures for 2011/12 estimate a total of 32,510 police officers in London – an increase of 1,115.

Council **further** notes that Met Commissioner Sir Paul Stephenson recently told the London Assembly: "After seven years it's right that we look at this model to make sure what we've got fits the needs and desires of London. I have yet to be convinced any changes should be made to the model. Safer Neighbourhoods has brought us huge benefits and increased confidence."

Council believes that the importance our residents place on crime needs to be reflected in the MPS consultation. This council therefore calls for transparency from the MPS on the policing resources Merton's residents can expect to see over the coming years, and calls on the Leader and Cabinet to seek a pledge from the MPS not to reduce frontline policing in Merton, **and to continue to work closely with our MPS partner in seeking to improve further the effectiveness of frontline policing in Merton, thus addressing the concerns of residents as expressed in the Annual Residents Survey.**

The Mayor put the amendment to the meeting and it was declared to be carried.

The Mayor put the motion as amended to the meeting and it was declared to be carried.

It was, therefore, RESOLVED: That

This council notes that the 2010 Residents Survey highlighted crime as the number one area of concern for Merton residents. However, Council further notes that the

COUNCIL
2 FEBRUARY 2011

survey has also shown that the fear of crime has been reducing since the introduction of Safer Neighbourhood Teams.

Merton has consistently been one of the lowest crime boroughs in London, largely due to the dedication and hard work of our ward-based Safer Neighbourhood Teams.

Council is aware that the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) is currently carrying out a review of Safer Neighbourhood Teams and has produced a consultation document which presents generalised options for the restructuring of Safer Neighbourhood Teams in Merton.

Council notes that while the consultation identifies the current level of resources allocated to Merton as comprising 21 Sergeants, 46 Police

Constables and 63 Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs), it does not make clear the resources we can expect in the future under any of the new options it presents.

This lack of clarity has caused concern amongst residents who are keen to protect their dedicated local Safer Neighbourhood Teams.

Council however acknowledges that, whilst London had 31,395 police officers in April 2008, the latest end of year figures for 2011/12 estimate a total of 32,510 police officers in London – an increase of 1,115.

Council further notes that Met Commissioner Sir Paul Stephenson recently told the London Assembly: "After seven years it's right that we look at this model to make sure what we've got fits the needs and desires of London. I have yet to be convinced any changes should be made to the model. Safer Neighbourhoods has brought us huge benefits and increased confidence."

Council believes that the importance our residents place on crime needs to be reflected in the MPS consultation. This council therefore calls for transparency from the MPS on the policing resources Merton's residents can expect to see over the coming years, and calls on the Leader and Cabinet to seek a pledge from the MPS not to reduce frontline policing in Merton, and to continue to work closely with our MPS partner in seeking to improve further the effectiveness of frontline policing in Merton, thus addressing the concerns of residents as expressed in the Annual Residents Survey.

9 STATUTORY DUTY TO APPOINT A SCRUTINY OFFICER (Agenda Item 10)

It was moved by Councillor Stephen Alambritis, seconded and, upon the Mayor putting the recommendations to the meeting

RESOLVED: That

(1) the Scrutiny Manager is appointed as the designated 'Scrutiny Officer' for the Council and that this post be added to the list of Proper Officers in the

COUNCIL
2 FEBRUARY 2011

Scheme of Delegation (section 3F-E of the Council's Constitution);

(2) the Chief Executive is given delegated authority to appoint the designated Scrutiny Officer in the event of a change to the post of Scrutiny Manager as a result of reorganisation; and

(3) the proposed revision to the constitution as set out in Appendix A to the submitted report is adopted.

10 CALENDAR OF MEETINGS (Agenda Item 11)

It was moved by Councillor Philip Jones and seconded that the recommendation in the submitted report is approved.

During discussion Councillor Chris Edge raised an objection to the proposed holding of a meeting of the full Council on 11 September 2013.

Amendment

It was moved by Councillor Simon Withey, seconded by Councillor Peter Southgate and agreed that the Annual Council meeting to be held in 2014 is brought forward to Wednesday 21 May in that year.

RESOLVED: That, subject to the Annual Council meeting proposed for 2014 being brought forward to Wednesday 21 May of that year, approval is given to the calendar of meetings set out at Appendix 1 to the submitted report.

11 CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2010/15 (Agenda Item 12)

It was moved by Councillor Mark Allison, seconded by Councillor Mark Betteridge and upon the Mayor putting the recommendation to the meeting

RESOLVED: That approval is given to the additional funding for the Sure Start Children's Centres scheme, estimated to be £0.612m, into the Capital Programme, and approval is given to a new capital scheme relating to the technical costs of joining the London Libraries Consortium estimated to cost £45,000.

12 CALL-IN AND URGENCY (Agenda Item 13)

It was moved by Councillor Stephen Alambritis, seconded by Councillor Mark Betteridge and, upon the Mayor putting the recommendation to the meeting

RESOLVED: That the taking of an urgent key decision requiring the waiving of the call-in procedure is noted.

13 CHANGES TO MEMBERSHIP OF COMMITTEES AND RELATED MATTERS (Agenda Item 14)

It was moved by Councillor Stephen Alambritis, seconded by Councillor Mark Betteridge and, upon the Mayor putting the recommendation to the meeting

RESOLVED: That

COUNCIL
2 FEBRUARY 2011

- A. Councillor Agatha Akyigyina is appointed as a member of the Adoption and Permanency Panel; and
 - B. The changes to the membership of the committees approved under delegated powers since the last report to the Council are noted.
- 14 PETITIONS (Agenda Item 15)

There not being any petitions presented on this occasion it moved by Councillor Stephen Alambritis second by Councillor Mark Betteridge and

RESOLVED: That the advice provided on those petitions presented to the 24 November 2010 Council is noted.

15 BUSINESS FOR THE NEXT ORDINARY MEETING (Agenda Item 16)

Councillor Debbie Shears confirmed the business for the next ordinary meeting as being 'Strategic Objective Review – Corporate Capacity'.

COUNCIL 2 FEBRUARY 2011

PUBLIC QUESTIONS

1. From: Mr Ross Stevenson

To: Councillor Andrew Judge, Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration

Question:

“Why are the borough’s civil enforcement officers (CEOs) permitted to travel around the borough in cars? In other boroughs, such as Wandsworth, CEOs get around by bicycle. Why can Merton, which purports to be Green, not emulate this and have its CEOs use bicycles?”

Reply

CEOs are required to be transported to and from various areas of the Borough throughout the day and evening.

Due to the number of officers employed, the area, the types of restrictions they are required to cover and to maintain a reasonable level of response time the use of vehicles is the most appropriate method of transport.

2. From: Jill Smith (Friends of Cottenham Park)

To: Councillor Andrew Judge, Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration

Question:

“How can the Council justify the non-closure of Cottenham Park thus leaving it open to vandalism and Health and Safety issues, when CP Friends have contributed £95,000 in 2010/2011 for fencing, railings and playground equipment plus, over the past 6 years, at least £15,000 to enhance the park?”

Reply

We are, of course, very grateful for the support and good work of the Friends of Cottenham Park and recognise their significant contribution to securing additional capital for investment in the site.

Whilst the improvements in question are all either completed or at an advanced state of progress, the monies for these schemes were applied for in 2009 some considerable time before the current budgetary pressures which have forced the Council to

reconsider its gate locking arrangements. The grant awards were not conditional upon the site being locked and there is no specific reason to assume that some or even all of these improvements will necessarily be undermined by the deletion of our gate locking procedures, assuming that this occurs.

The vast majority of Merton's park and open spaces are not locked at night and, although such sites are not immune to vandalism, we have adopted procedures, on playgrounds for example, that adequately deal with the any problems that do arise, including liaison with the local police and Safer Neighbourhoods Teams if required.

The locking of parks has, in itself, some obvious disadvantages including:

- Does not keep out those who are determined to get into them
- Increases damage to fences and gates due to forced entry
- Reduces passive security benefits offered by law-abiding users
- Restricts use by those not able to visit during core hours (e.g. shift workers)
- Restricts use for dog walking early in the day and late in the evening
- Limits use of short cuts to and from local shopping areas, railway stations, schools and between residential areas – Parks provide the most direct route between many points in the borough and are generally safer being free from traffic
- There is a greater risk of assault to parks staff trying to evict people at closing times
- Presents a negative message about the use of parks, that is, they are not free to use when the user wants to"

We are undertaking risk assessments of affected parks and we have consulted with the Police. There is a mixture of professional opinions regarding the efficacy of locking parks. We will be looking to mitigate any significant risks identified.

Supplementary

I would like to question all on the list of disadvantages of leaving the parks unlocked but I will just address one or two. We would like to know what procedures you will be putting in place to protect our recent investment of £95k in Cottenham Park, which includes £45k of new play equipment. We're wondering what is so special about the 25 key parks that we understand will be locked across the borough, and wonder if there's been the same level of investment as there has in Cottenham Park. You say that you will be looking to mitigate any risks in leaving the parks unlocked. We'd like to know how you will do this when there is no money for staff in our parks. Have you money set aside as a contingency for dealing with vandalism and anti-social behaviour?

Reply

Only five parks will be locked. 20 are locked at the moment. This is done in the main

by a mobile team that costs £57k per year in overtime and because of the massive cuts imposed on the council by the government, we're having to take over £400k from the parks budget this year. This is necessarily a damaging and deleterious cut. The Friends of Cottenham Park have done excellent work and I intend to meet them in March, along with other Friends groups, to look at the issues that are particular to their site, work through those issues, seek to assess the risk of vandalism and anti-social behaviour, and if the Council is clear that there is a real risk, and it's not necessarily the case at every park, then we'll see what we can do to work with the Friends to minimise the risk.

One of the proposals I have had in a recent email from a local resident is to ask if local residents could participate, by rota, in the locking and unlocking of Cottenham Park and that is something we will look at. The final decisions on budgets are not yet made. Because of the loss of funding we are not in a position to save the £400k that is likely to go from the parks budget this year.

Unfortunately that's not the end of it. Because of the cuts announced by central government, we're anticipating possibly having to lose a further £1m from the Greenspaces budget over the following two years. The result is that parks and open spaces in this borough are not going to be as they have been since the foundation of the borough in 1965. We're going to have to work with Friends groups, collectively and individually, to look at a whole range of issues, including governance, local volunteering and donations, and the identity of the parks as a whole.

3. From: Jan Bailey Co-Hon Secretary, Raynes Park & West Barnes Residents Association

To: Councillor Mark Allison, Cabinet Member for Finance

Question:

"The Localism and Decentralisation Bill, currently making its way through parliament, puts strong emphasis on the need for Local Authorities to engage and consult more actively with Local Communities. In the light of this, how can the Council possibly justify the proposal to restrict Community Forums to only one meeting for each area per year. Would it not render them effectively meaningless as a consultation tool?"

Reply

The council is having to review all of its services and make a number of very difficult decisions over the coming months in order to find savings of £26million for the next financial year. In line with the localism agenda, we also need to consider our local experience of the most effective ways of communicating with local residents, and whether there are better ways of engaging with and consulting residents than our current methods.

The level of overall attendance at community forums in the borough does not justify the current level of expenditure, especially at this time when Merton is experiencing substantial cuts to our funding. The 5 area-based Community Forums are proving to be a very poor means of engaging with residents, attracting fewer than 30 residents per

meeting, at a cost of more than £80 per attendee. This is a cause of concern, as many of these attendees go to multiple meetings, and are already actively engaged with in other ways, for instance through membership of political parties or residents associations. As more than 99% of residents choose not to attend such meetings even though they are paying for them through their Council Tax, this gives the Council a clear understanding that we will need to look at the future of the Community Forums very carefully, and at least make them considerably more efficient and cost-effective, and more representative of the wider community.

Recent examples show that alternatives to Community Forums can attract far better attendance and a higher level of engagement from residents. For example, the public meetings held on 18 January at West Barnes Library and 19 January at Donald Hope Library were attended by more than 250 people who were able to express their views on proposed changes to the library service very clearly and positively with the cabinet member and head of service.

Within our communities, there are already better means of meeting with and consulting residents than Community Forums. For example, many Residents Associations already offer the Council tremendous opportunities to consult with and listen to the views of local residents. The community forums as they currently exist also arguably duplicate some of the excellent work undertaken by residents associations and other groups, whose meetings are often better attended than Community Forums, and whose attendees are frequently more representative of residents. We therefore hope to reduce duplication and find a simpler way to gather and use this information to influence local services.

The new proposal would reduce the meetings from four per year per area, to one annual meeting in each different locality. This will save £45,000 in 2011/12 alone.

Although the detail for this change still needs to be considered, our expectation is that the annual meeting would look and feel very different to the current format. They would become more substantive events taking place in the autumn and directly related to our wider consultation activities, such as setting budgets, and developing the community plan and business plan. We also plan to include an opportunity to hold local public services to account in the form of a question time session for key local decision makers.

We remain committed to ensuring that local people are able to keep up to date with developments in council services, share their views on how services are designed and delivered, and raise issues of local concern. Making this change will offer an opportunity to review how we engage local neighbourhoods and make sure the views of our residents are heard in the most efficient and effective way possible.

To do this, we will be carrying out a piece of work over the next few months to explore how we can improve cost-effective forms of engagement to support this commitment. This will include online engagement – which is increasingly popular with groups who do not traditionally take part in public meetings – and working with those who do an important job in capturing the concerns of local residents, for example residents associations and ward councillors.

Supplementary

I have read the answer. You bring up a couple of meetings which bear directly on my next question. The council, the Wimbledon Guardian and the Evening Standard are relying evermore on internet communication in this area. Poorer members of society, including the 20% of recent graduates who are unemployed, however intelligent and concerned about local issues, may not be able to afford a new computer, or maintenance costs about an existing one. If the council cuts ultimately result in free use of computers in libraries being curtailed, community forum meetings will be their main point of contact for information and expression of views on general matters. How are poorer members of society to avoid being disenfranchised if these meetings are reduced?

Reply

Can I thank this lady and everyone who contributes to all our residents' associations for making them such positive organisations in the borough. Together they contribute greatly to Merton and help the council to engage effectively with residents. I'm afraid that they are much more successful at engaging with our residents than community forums are.

In the position we're in, with the size of cuts to be made, I can't justify spending £45k on meetings that cost £80 per attendee. That is not an appropriate use of our money. We have to look at alternatives, and there are many other than brand new computers. There are many ways that we as councillors and as a council can engage with local residents, including through the very good work of residents' associations like yours.

4. From: Mr Anthony Fairclough

To: Councillor Mark Allison, Cabinet Member for Finance

Question

"Do you agree that taking specific action to engage with and involve Merton's residents in budget decisions will increase the understanding of potential difficulties - and lead to decisions that better reflect the public's priorities? If so, what specific actions will be taken?"

Reply

My experience is that residents are reasonably well informed about the cuts that have been made to local authorities by the Conservative-led Government, and do appreciate that the administration is therefore having to make some very difficult decisions.

There are several ways in which residents are engaged with directly when developing the Council's policies, and that their views are taken into consideration. This is especially true for the Budget.

Firstly, the views expressed by residents in the local and national elections need to be uppermost in the administration's minds. The policy commitments made by parties at these elections helped residents make informed choices about the Council's priorities at this time. It is true to say that the allocation of resources between services is extremely

difficult, particularly in times such as these when resources are finite and competing demands are high, but residents who voted at the election voted more than any other for a Party that prioritised low Council Tax rises, improved streetscene and protection of front-line services, particularly for the most vulnerable.

The annual borough survey enables residents to express their ongoing priorities and there is a residents' panel which has a similar role. These too help influence Councillors in their decision-making. Recent results from the Annual Residents Survey suggest that the Council is getting better at targeting its resources to those services and priorities that the public most want, and we will continue to try to improve performance despite the difficult times we are in. For instance, in line with the election results, the most recent survey found a relatively high level of concern about Council Tax, crime and the street scene.

The Council's use of media and communications also helps us engage with residents, inform them of progress with the budget, and give a better understanding of the problems we are facing this year. For instance, there have been numerous budget-related stories in local newspapers, and My Merton has focused on budgetary pressures. Unfortunately, the use of advertising to consult about the budget would be controversial; other Boroughs that have sought to use advertising to obtain residents' views about budget priorities in the light of Government cuts have been criticised by Ministers.

In addition to this, we carry out service specific consultations to garner opinion on particular proposals for changes to services. Recent examples of this include the public meetings held on 18 January at West Barnes Library and 19 January at Donald Hope Library, where more than 250 people attended to share their views on proposed changes to the library service with the cabinet member and head of service.

Well established engagement with the voluntary and community sector has meant that departments involve voluntary sector representatives to consider the impact of service changes, and indeed to develop new ways of working. For example the Community and Housing department worked with voluntary and community sector on a new commissioning strategy for adult social care to ensure that the new strategy took into account their needs.

There are also 5 area-based Community Forums, each meeting four times a year, but these are proving to be a very poor means of engaging with residents, attracting fewer than 30 residents per meeting, at a cost of more than £80 per attendee. This is a cause of concern, as many of these attendees go to multiple meetings, and are already actively engaged with in other ways, for instance through membership of political parties. As more than 99% of residents choose not to attend such meetings even though they are paying for them through their Council Tax, this gives the Council a clear understanding that we will need to look at the future of the Community Forums very carefully, and at least make them considerably more efficient and cost-effective, and more representative of the wider community.

Merton has a Community Engagement Strategy "Get Involved", which sets out how partners will work together to improve the way in which local communities are involved in the decisions that affect their lives. Merton also has a Consultation and Community

Engagement Team which is developing a new Framework for consultation and community engagement. For example, a group of young people in Merton have been empowered to decide how funding from the Youth Opportunities Fund is spent. This group must judge competing applications for funding to assess the best projects to support.

Finally, it is important to remember the key role of Councillors themselves in acting as an intermediary between residents and decision-makers. Merton has many very fine Councillors, and in my view Members of the Council have the single most important role in ensuring that residents' views are taken into account. They have a leadership role within their communities and are better able than any Council institution to reflect residents' views, and to inform residents about difficult decisions that might have to be made. I can think of numerous examples from within my own party where such consultation has been helpful in gaining residents' support and in campaigning for residents' priorities. However, I also note the active role of the Liberal Democrats in West Barnes in ensuring the council was made aware of the level of local support for West Barnes library and campaigning to protect services for vulnerable people in that ward.

If I could suggest one way that we could better involve Merton's residents in budget decisions, increase their understanding of potential difficulties, and lead to decisions that better reflect the public's priorities, it would be for all Councillors to prioritise being active on their residents' doorsteps, as West Barnes Liberal Democrats and many other Councillors clearly already are.

5. From: Mr Aaron Wood

To: Councillor Martin Whelton, Cabinet Member for Community and Culture

Question

"The council is planning to extend opening hours at various libraries in the borough, a laudable effort which has been made possible by the previous Conservative administration's investment in self service technology. At the same time it is planning to close Donald Hope library for a day and will not commit to say that it will remain open. In light of these inconsistent moves, will the Cabinet member now come clean and admit that these cuts are a decision by the Cabinet to turn their back on the people of Colliers Wood?"

Reply

The extra hours of opening are for the benefit of all residents in Merton, in that no libraries are currently open on Wednesday afternoons but, from April, the three town centre libraries will be open till 7pm. Comments have been received over the years from Donald Hope Library users asking that lunch-time closures be reviewed: this has been done. It is unfortunate that there is a net loss of four and a half hours at Donald Hope, but given the cut in our government grant and the budget gap of £26 million, difficult decisions have had to be taken in terms of opening hours.

6. From: Mr Gary Watkinson

To: Councillor Maxi Martin, Cabinet Member for Children's Services

I understand that in the run up to the elections in May, the St Helier ward councillors were promising support for an Armed Forces Day event to be held in Morden Park this June, but that since then, no such support has been forthcoming.

I am interested in seeing some solid support from the Council for the event to mark the Armed Forces Day. Can the Cabinet member explain why there was no support given to retain the planned event in Morden Park which would have ensured it was kept inside the borough?

Instead I have learnt that the event has been forced outside the borough and is now to be held at the Arena area in Sutton.

Reply

Some of the assertions in this question are incorrect.

There has been an Armed Forces Day event in Merton since 2009 when the then Mayor, Cllr Nick Draper, introduced this event to the council calendar for the first time. It is not the case that the event has now moved to Sutton. Building on both the 2009 and 2010 events, Merton will make the 2011 event, to be held on Armed Forces Day on 25th June, bigger and better than previous years. Sutton Council is holding its own event on 12th June which is unconnected with Merton's event.

However, it is indeed the case that a group of local residents wanted to hold an Armed Forces event in Morden Park on 25th June, which is during Wimbledon Tennis fortnight. It was explained to these residents that this was not possible as Morden Park is used as an integral part of the planning and delivery arrangements for this major international sporting event that brings many benefits to the borough as a whole. Running a significant public event immediately alongside the existing park-and-ride scheme for The Championships would have imposed some very significant logistical headaches for the local authority and the emergency services and caused considerable further disruption to local people and users of the park and nearby public facilities. The Council was very prepared to consider alternative dates for Morden Park to host an event but alas the residents concerned were not prepared to look at alternative dates to 25th June. I understand they have since decided not to support the Merton Council event and to instead attend Sutton's event which will be held on 12th June.

The council is continuing with its own now annual event on Armed Forces Day on 25th June, which will include a flag raising ceremony at the Civic Centre and a parade along London Road in Morden, followed by a civic service at St. Lawrence's Church. Preparations are well underway and the involvement of local uniformed groups and veterans has been very encouraging. It is expected the event will be well supported by residents.

Supplementary

How many people do the council expect to attend the Armed Forces Day event on 25 June? How many people attended last year?

Reply

We still haven't completed our list. At this minute, I have over 200 people in the parade.

Last year we didn't have a parade, but I think we had about 20 people last year and the year before. I said to the Leader last June that I didn't think this was very good, particularly since I have so many of my residents in Haig Homes, so the Leader suggested I organise it this year. It's all going very well. Loads of people are coming on board and I hope you will all join us.

AGENDA ITEM 6 – MEMBER QUESTIONS

1 From Councillor Suzanne Grocott to the Cabinet Member for Children’s Services:

I know that the Cabinet member will agree with me that for children placed for adoption, the stability of a permanent loving home is key in ensuring the best life chances for them. I was therefore disappointed to learn that a Merton couple in my ward has waited 13 months to be re-approved for adoption by the Adoption and Permanency Panel because of administrative errors by Merton Council and a lack of co-operation between the varying Health Professionals involved. Would the Cabinet Member agree that delays of this kind are unacceptable?

Reply

The stability of a permanent loving home for Merton’s children in care is key to securing the best life chances for them and Merton is committed to ensuring that as many children in care as possible can achieve this. We currently have 7 children placed for adoption or special guardianship order and have already had 5 children adopted or made the subject of guardianship orders in 2010-11. Carers seeking approval for adoption do have to go through an intensive best practice process to maintain the safety and integrity of permanent outcomes for children in care which is overseen by an Independent Adoption Panel. Whilst we cannot comment on the detail of this particular case we can confirm that administrative delays early in the process were acted upon to prevent their reoccurrence for the future. There are however, on occasions, families where delay to the approval process is unavoidable due to the complexity of the family history and situation. This is because the primary purpose of the process is to ensure that any adoptive placements made will meet the needs of children and are very carefully considered including information from different sources to avoid the possibility of breakdown in future years which causes immense distress to both children and their adoptive carers.

Supplementary

Could the Cabinet Member advise me if she thinks that GP commissioning may have assisted in expediting cases such as this in the future.

Reply

No, I don't think GP Commissioning would have made any difference in this particular case and I am very disappointed that the Member would try to make a political point out of a child's life.

2 From Councillor Iain Dysart to the Cabinet member for Communities and Culture

The administration is presenting proposals to drastically reduce the number of community forums. Whilst attendances have been variable and less than fully representative of our different communities how does he believe that such a move would contribute to community engagement?

Reply

The Cabinet member for Finance has been asked to respond to this question

In light of the financial circumstances the council is facing, we have to make a number of difficult decisions by examining current ways of working and assessing whether we are getting value for money. It is clear from this analysis that the level of overall attendance and breadth of representation at community forums in the borough does not justify the current level of expenditure, particularly at this time when Merton is experiencing significant budgetary challenges.

The 5 area-based Community Forums are proving to be a very poor means of engaging with residents, attracting fewer than 30 residents per meeting, at a cost of more than £80 per attendee. This is a cause of concern, as many of these attendees go to multiple meetings, and are already actively engaged with in other ways, for instance through membership of political parties or residents associations. As more than 99% of residents choose not to attend such meetings even though they are paying for them through their Council Tax, this gives the Council a clear understanding that we will need to look at the future of the Community Forums very carefully, and at least make them considerably more efficient and cost-effective, and more representative of the wider community.

Recent examples show that alternatives to Community Forums can attract far better attendance and a higher level of engagement from residents. For example, the public meetings held on 18 January at West Barnes Library and 19 January at Donald Hope Library were attended by more than 250 people who were able to express their views on proposed changes to the library service very clearly and positively with the cabinet member and head of service.

The proposal for community forums is to reduce the meetings from four per year per area, to one annual meeting in each different locality. Details for the format of the new meetings have yet to be finalised, but the expectation is that the annual meetings would take place in the autumn and would link in with our wider consultation activities, such as the development of the business plan and budget. We also plan to include an opportunity to hold local public services to account in the form of a question time session for key local decision makers. The changes to the frequency of community forum meetings will save the council £45,000 in 2011/12.

We remain committed to ensuring that local people are able to keep up to date with developments in council services, share their views on how services are designed and delivered, and raise issues of local concern. We will be carrying out a piece of work over the next few months to explore how we can improve cost-effective forms of engagement to support this commitment. This will include online engagement – which is increasingly popular with groups who do not traditionally take part in public meetings – and working with those who do an important job in capturing the concerns of local residents, for example residents associations and ward councillors.

In particular, it is important to remember the key role of Councillors themselves in acting as an intermediary between residents and decision-makers. In my view Members of the Council have the single most important role in ensuring that residents' views are taken into account. They have a leadership role within their communities and are better able than any Council institution to reflect residents' views, and to inform residents about difficult decisions that might have to be made. In note in particular the active role of the Liberal Democrats in West Barnes in campaigning to protect services for vulnerable

people in that ward. In order to better involve Merton's residents and ensure decisions better reflect the public's priorities, I should like to see all Councillors being as active within their communities as West Barnes Liberal Democrats (and many other Councillors) clearly already are.

Supplementary

One meeting per year is derisory and barely qualifies as window dressing. Wouldn't he agree that now more than ever, community forums provide a prime opportunity for residents to highlight their priorities, and should therefore be enhanced and not undermined?

Reply

These are tumultuous times in politics and many people involved in politics are having to make decisions that, not long ago, they would have regarded as wicked. But enough about the LibDems. I genuinely feel that they joined the Conservative government for the noblest of reasons. But I also feel that if they have a problem with the scale of the cuts that are coming to this council, then perhaps they are in a better position to do something about it than we are. So I would ask him for his assistance in enabling us to have the budget that is required in order to do what we need to for our local residents. I would also say that of all the things we are proposing to do, the reduction in community forums is not the worst. I cannot justify to myself or to anyone here that it currently costs £80 per attendee at a community forum, and for those people to be quite unrepresentative of the community. We have to look at better ways of engaging with our residents. I praise the West Barnes Liberal Democrats because they have done outstanding work in reaching out to their community and have reached many more than 30 people at a time when they've tried to. My response is that I can't justify, in current circumstances, that level of expenditure on engaging with residents, when councillors like Councillor Dysart, and all the other councillors here do a far better job at far better cost.

3 From Councillor Brenda Fraser to the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health

Following the publication of the Health and Social Care Bill with its wide sweeping reform of the NHS, what strategies is Merton putting in place to ensure that local residents are being kept informed?

Reply

At this stage, while the local implications are being worked out, Merton is relying on the broader communications about these changes from central government, the local NHS and from the media.

The council is already working closely with its partners in the NHS, voluntary sector and elsewhere to look at the local implications of these changes. As these become clearer then it is our intention to communicate pro-actively with our residents to ensure that they are kept up to date. We expect to be able to do this within the next two months.

Supplementary

Are there any national pilots that Merton can effectively demonstrate the effectiveness of the proposed NHS cuts and changes?

Reply

Sadly, no there aren't. This is staggering and in addition, there is £20b in cuts going on at the same time. There are no pilots.

4 From Councillor Rod Scott to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration:

Are the Cabinet Member and the administration prepared to accept the damage to Merton's reputation, including among potential donors to our parks, arising from his ill-judged decision to leave open council parks and gardens overnight thus inviting vandalism, theft and anti-social behaviour, when diverting only the equivalent of one percent of the monies proposed for the wheelie bin scheme would avoid this cut?

Reply

At this stage it is not possible to predict what the negative effects of not locking some parks that are currently locked up may be. All sites, including those that are currently locked, and the vast majority that remain unlocked or not possible to secure, are subject to vandalism, theft and anti-social behaviour to some degree. There is no reason to assume that leaving some additional parks open will result in a significant increase in such problems overall, nor that any problems that do arise cannot be addressed either by preventive measures (e.g. overhead barriers to prevent fly-tipping) or remedial action by the authority, its partners and stakeholders. The police, who have been consulted on the matter, are not unduly concerned by this proposal. Indeed in respect of anti-social behaviour they have in the past indicated that locking parks does not resolve problems of groups of people meeting up and can push anti-social behaviour problems onto nearby residential streets or other areas that cannot be secured. A risk assessment is being completed on the affected parks and we shall be seeking to mitigate any impact if this saving is agreed.

The majority of the cost for wheeled bins is a capital as opposed to revenue which is the area of cost for parks locking.

Supplementary

The Cabinet Member will have seen the communication from the Marathon Trust which paid £90k to refurbish the Holland Gardens tennis courts, saying that the terms of their grant require the facility to be properly cared for, and expressing concern over the reckless proposal to leave the park unlocked overnight. Has he taken legal advice on our obligation to this particular donor and if so, what is that advice?

Reply

I personally haven't asked for advice on this particular donor. Every site will have its own issues. Some will be issues put forward because they're matters of local concern but on inspection, perhaps, we will find that those concerns are not substantiated. When Kingston decided not to lock their parks some years ago, I am told there were widespread objections. They were told there would be vandalism within the parks. In fact the outcome has been very little in terms of damage or detriment. I acknowledge

that there are going to be concerns and if we had the money we should be getting from government we would not be taking this decision. But we are losing so much money that we've got to take difficult decisions. Of the £400k we have to cut this year this is a very obvious budget cut to take at this stage. I will be very glad to meet with the Friend of Holland Gardens. If the Marathon Trust has ongoing concerns I would be very glad to meet with them and look at any particular issues.

5 From Councillor Iain Dysart to the Cabinet member for Education

Could the Cabinet member update us on the proposals being formulated to ensure that his administration pledge to leave South Wimbledon Community Association with facilities at least as good as the existing ones is honoured.

Reply

My colleague is referring to the Cabinet decision in December 2010 to expand All Saints Primary School by establishing a split site at the current South Wimbledon Community Centre. An initial feasibility study of the existing buildings has been conducted and the Association will be able to retain sole use of the 'annexe' building on the existing site and out of school hours use of space to be occupied by the school including a large hall. Additionally, the council has proposed that the Association receive a lease on a local building, Merton Hall, to enable relocation of some of the Association's activities. Council officers have also bid for capital funding to enable some improvement works to be undertaken at the request of the Association.

These measures combined should ensure that all existing activities of the Association can be maintained in good quality accommodation and I very much hope that ongoing negotiations over the next few weeks will allow the Association to agree with the council's proposals.

Supplementary

Will the Cabinet Member undertake to meet with trustees if and when requested at agreed intervals, so we can review progress together?

Reply

We have made a good offer. Officers have met with officers of the South Wimbledon Community Association, and as I understand it, they are content with the offer of alternative accommodation. On Monday 24 January we had an excellent and well attended meeting of parents in this area, to discuss the use of the centre, which was broadly in agreement with that proposal. I have also had the amusing experience of reading a leaflet put out in West Barnes by Councillor Dysart and his colleagues, in the topic of education and in particular, referring to this scheme, where on the one hand he supports my scheme for expanding existing schools as being cost effective, but on the other hand supports the Tory plans for a new school. Typically of his party's position, he sits on both sides of the equation. I have to warn this council that, having been to visit the Minister of Education, with, to his eternal credit, the MP for Wimbledon, I received a very clear indication that the capital sums we need to effectively expand education for primary children in this borough are unlikely to be met by this government, despite the assurances of the Secretary of State.

We as a council, and I call on councillors, need to join together to try and persuade this government we have a 30% growth in children, we cannot play party politics on how to expand. We need to expand the South Wimbledon Community Centre, we need to expand Dundonald. We need to expand other schools in Wimbledon that colleagues are campaigning against. If we don't do that, we'll be in a worse position financially and will have a major question to answer from the parents in this borough.

6 From Councillor Agatha Akyigyina to the Cabinet Member for Children's Services
Could the Cabinet Member outline the impact of the government's cuts to grants for specific work focusing on children and young people on Children's Services in Merton?

Reply

In summary a broad range of grants which support the work of the CSF Department have been swept up into the Early Intervention Grant which covers diverse functions including children's social care, youth inclusion, early years and education functions. The total reduction across the grants in this new pot is 18%.

An estimated £2.4m of other grants have ceased split roughly (although it is not an exact science) equally between school improvement /education and functions across the rest of the CSF department and commissioned services.

£1m of grants have yet to be announced including the grant for our Youth Justice Service.

Supplementary

Could the Cabinet Member tell me when we might hear about whether the remaining £1m grant will be cut. How does this uncertainty affect our planning in Children's Services?

Reply

I don't know when we'll find out. We're still waiting and it's very difficult. The government has created such uncertainty. I can say that this Administration is committed to protecting front line services for vulnerable young people and that's what we'll do.

7 From Councillor Gilli Lewis-Lavender to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration:

Does the Cabinet Member recognise the clear importance of resident participation in the deployment of Section 106 monies for the benefit of local communities such as mine in West Barnes?

Reply

The council has been working with local residents and councillors to develop a systematic approach to involving residents in deciding how Section 106 funding is spent. A focus group of representatives from the community forums propose that local 'Ideas Groups' would put forward ideas to officers who would then explore whether project ideas are feasible and in accordance with any agreed parameters for projects in the local area involved. If they are a bid for Section 106 monies to be allocated would be

made. Officers with delegated authority – or Cabinet for bids for £50k or more – will consider the project bids and allocate funding. This process will enable local communities to contribute ideas for how development in their area could lead to funding for projects to improve the local area.

The Localism Bill currently being considered by Parliament could have a considerable impact in this area so we will need to consider our plans in the light of any changes to the planning system as a result of new legislation.

Supplementary

I am particularly concerned about a planning application in my ward which is about a proposal for 72 houses on the AELTC playing fields. At the recent public meeting, residents and one residents' association were pressing for assurances that if any development went ahead, the S106 money would be spent within our community rather than, as is rumoured, across the other side of the borough, on a project that would be unlikely to have a positive impact on my residents' quality of life. Can the Cabinet Member therefore guarantee to meet with residents in the local area to discuss the use of S106 funds in our local community?

Reply

I've had no involvement in discussing the S106 negotiations in respect of this application. Were officers to recommend approval, and I don't know if that is the case, clearly they ought to have discussions with the proposed developers. I would anticipate that, certainly from the perspective of the Executive, we would want an apt proportion to go to affordable housing, and an apt proportion to go to local education, because if the application results in additional housing there will be an increased need for school places. It's going to be vital to support that. One of the principles we're seeking to adopt is for children to walk to their local school. I'm sure there will be aspects in relation to the application that are about that particular site and its environs, where we would be seeking improvements associated with the development. There are different aspects and I can't give a hard and fast reply now. I will be glad to liaise with you and other ward councillors as we move forward.

8 From Councillor Sam Thomas to the Cabinet Member for Environment and Sustainability

Can the Cabinet Member comment on the council's preparedness for snow and ice over the winter period?

Reply

The Council was fully prepared for this year's Winter season. In June 2010 we placed an order for 2,000 tonnes of rock salt to replenish our salt barn. This was delivered in October, as requested, and ensured that the barn was at full capacity, with 2,400 tonnes in stock, at the start of the season. Since the initial delivery, the Council has recently ordered an additional 300 tonnes of salt to ensure the Council is well placed to continue to provide this essential service.

Winter Maintenance Duty Officers have been on call 24 hours a day, 7 days a week since October 2010. They make decisions on gritting activity based on detailed Met

Office forecast. These Officers are Met Office trained and will remain on call until the end of April 2011.

The Council has a modern fleet of gritting vehicles, with snow ploughing capabilities, and has recently invested in new footway gritting equipment to assist operatives with footway gritting operations.

Officers from the Winter Maintenance Team are actively involved in the Winter Maintenance Practitioners Group, where best practise is shared between all of the London Boroughs.

9 From Councillor Maurice Groves to the Leader of the Council:

Will the Leader please explain why one of his Cabinet members asked for and removed from Council control the petition handed in by Councillor Ray Tindle on 24th November 2010? Why was this petition, and possibly others, not available on 14th December when I chased officers for a response?

Reply

I am not aware of any constitutional or legal impediment to a Cabinet Member wishing to see petitions to the council and indeed it is only right that Cabinet Members take an interest in the concerns raised by local people.

In this case the Cabinet Member was unaware he had been sent the originals and that copies had not yet been sent to the relevant Departments. In future it has been agreed that the originals will go to the relevant Departments from whence copies can be sought where required.

10 From Councillor Russell Makin to the Cabinet Member for Finance

Can the Cabinet Member comment on Merton's local government settlement allocation?

Reply

Merton has found the Local Government Finance Settlement for 2011/12 and 2012/13 extremely challenging and we are still struggling to find ongoing savings to enable us to set a balanced budget for 2011/12. At the outset of this years' budget process we were faced with a shortfall in funding of over £70million over the next four years.

Merton's formula grant is being cut by 13.3% in 2011/12 and 9.4% in 2012/13 and being a "floor" authority, our funding has been at the lowest level possible for over five years.

As you will appreciate, these funding levels also need to be seen in the context of increasing levels of inflation. There is, therefore, a significant real terms reduction in funding for at least the next two years.

This has been exacerbated by the front-loading of cuts, and the impact of significant cost pressures and reduction in income as a result of the economic recession. The front loading of cuts has resulted in the need to accelerate budget reductions which is a less efficient way of approaching the problem.

The way that the information contained in the Provisional Settlement has been presented was not ideal and there could have been far more clarity about which grants were being-rolled-in, which were ending, which were under review and so on.

The current formula grant funding methodology is far from transparent and not easy to understand.

Top-slicing of Formula Grant

Merton's Formula Grant has been top-sliced by £0.543m to enable Central Government to fund new initiatives, particularly new academies. Regarding funding for Academies, it was extremely disappointing that there was no consultation on the method used to top-slice Local Authority Central Spend Equivalent Grant from formula grant. We agree with London Councils that "the transfer of funding does not reflect the changes in service costs facing local authorities.....the top-slice unfairly penalises local authorities as their actual savings will be much smaller than the funding being transferred to academies.....and...it results in an incorrect baseline adjustment, as even though authorities' functions may change their overall costs do not. Reducing the baseline in this way therefore underestimates the formula grant cuts facing each local authority in 2011-12 and 2012-13, and reduces the protection they receive in the form of floors (and possibly Transition Grant).

NHS funding to Support Social Care and Benefit Health Grant

There is also the issue of the NHS funding to Support Social Care and Benefit Health grant which has been within all boroughs newly defined "Spending Power" but the NHS has a veto over how we spend the money.

11 From Councillor David Dean to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration:

Can the Cabinet member tell me why it is that in Fairlawn Road, when virtually the whole road and the nearby nursery petitioned to keep the safe single yellow line, he wants to replace them with 4 pay and display bays?

Reply

There are currently parking provisions for the residents but no legal parking provisions to cater for visitors to the nursery or the church. Over the years parents have had to park on yellow line restrictions and run the risk of getting a Penalty Charge Notice. Additionally, the nursery operates a minibus for outings and they are often at risk of obtaining parking fines due to the lack of parking provisions. Although single yellow line restrictions often work for loading and unloading, they are not suitable for the parking needs of the nursery and other local businesses. It is believed that the proposed short term parking bays would benefit the local businesses during the CPZ hours of operation and can be utilised by residents after the hours of operation (Mon-Sat 8.30-6.30). The Council will be undertaking the appropriate statutory consultation and a final decision will be made after this consultation. All Ward Councillors will be advised of the statutory consultation in due course.

12 From Councillor Sam Thomas to the Cabinet Member for Community Safety, Engagement and Equalities

Can the Cabinet Member comment on the future of ward policing in Longthornton?

Reply

The future of ward policing in Longthornton is no different from the future of ward policing across the borough (and to some extent across the Metropolitan police area) as central government cuts mean a reduction in police spending. At this stage a number of options have been put forward to MPS central and we are awaiting confirmation of which option they go for. Unfortunately the consultation document does not outline the level of resources each option would entail and in this context it is impossible to say which option would be preferred. Although I understand that the police are under significant pressure to find savings, the key issue for Longthornton and for Merton as a whole has to be maintaining our current level of bobbies on the beat.

13 From Councillor James Holmes to the Cabinet Member for Community Safety, Engagement and Equalities:

How does this Labour administration see the reduction in community forum meetings to just one a year as assisting in community engagement with Merton residents, particularly in light of the fact that community fora have recently been considering the role they can play in determining the use of section 106 money, and also in light of the localism agenda being pursued by the Coalition Government?

Reply

The Cabinet member for Finance has been asked to respond to this question

The difficult financial situation the council is facing means that we need to ensure we are achieving attendance and value for money for the services we fund.

The 5 area-based Community Forums are proving to be a very poor means of engaging with residents, attracting fewer than 30 residents per meeting, at a cost of more than £80 per attendee. We therefore need to look at the future of the Community Forums very carefully, and at least make them considerably more efficient and cost-effective, and more representative of the wider community.

It is proposed that community forum meetings reduce from four per year per area, to one annual meeting in each different locality. Details for the format of the new community forum meetings have yet to be finalised, but the expectation is that the annual meetings would take place in the autumn. They would link in with our wider consultation activities, such as the development of the business plan and budget, and would include opportunities for local people to hold Merton's key local decision makers to account in the form of a question time session. The changes to the frequency of community forum meetings will save the council £45,000 in 2011/12.

The proposed approach to engaging residents in Section 106 funding is not dependent on quarterly community forum meetings as our aim is to bring councillors and residents together outside of the community forums to look at ideas for determining how these funds should be allocated. Work to develop an approach has involved a focus group of representatives from all the community forums and their proposal is that local 'Ideas Groups' would put forward ideas to officers who would explore whether project ideas are feasible and in accordance with any agreed parameters for projects in the local area involved. If they are a bid for Section 106 monies to be allocated would be made. Officers with delegated authority – or Cabinet for bids for £50k or more – will consider

the project bids and allocate funding.

Whilst we welcome those aspects of the Localism Bill which will support involving residents in decision making there does not appear to be any aspect of the Bill as it stands that would be reliant on community forum meetings taking place as frequently as they currently do.

We remain committed to ensuring that local people are able to keep up to date with developments in council services, share their views on how services are designed and delivered, and raise issues of local concern. We will be carrying out a piece of work over the next few months to explore how we can improve cost-effective forms of engagement to support this commitment. This will include online engagement – which is increasingly popular with groups who do not traditionally take part in public meetings – and working with those who do an important job in capturing the concerns of local residents, for example residents associations and ward councillors.

14 From Councillor Agatha Akyigyina to the Cabinet Member for Community and Culture

In terms of homelessness spending, how much does Merton spend and how does this compare to neighbouring boroughs?

Reply

The Council continues to have the lowest numbers of households in temporary accommodation in London, save the City of London and takes a proactive approach in the prevention of homelessness with 500 homelessness preventions taking place last year. A central plank to the council's homelessness prevention strategy is the use of the private rented sector the supply of which may be affected by the forthcoming housing benefit changes.

The audit commissions value for money website currently provides an analysis on expenditure per head of population on providing temporary accommodation and administering the councils homelessness functions, including the prevention of homelessness. This demonstrates that Merton's spend is the lowest at £6.03 per head of the population when compared to Sutton, Kingston, Wandsworth, Richmond and Lambeth and Croydon.

15 From Councillor Logie Lohendran to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration:

With regard to his plans to cut the footway and highway maintenance budgets, can the Cabinet Member tell me what work has been carried out to ensure that the impact of increases in compensation claims does not outweigh the proposed saving?

Reply

The Council has a Statutory Duty to maintain the Public Highway. The proposed budget cuts to Highway Maintenance predominantly affect planned maintenance work, which will impact on the Council's ability to respond to non urgent or safety related maintenance works.

The Council will continue to repair dangerous defects to ensure it meets its statutory

duty, however it is recognised that a reduced planned maintenance budget will impact on the volume of emergency repair works and associated spend.

It is important that any cuts in planned and reactive maintenance funding does not lead to increases in claims against the Council for failure to meet its statutory duties. This will need to be closely monitored once the full effects of the proposed cuts have been realised.

16 From Councillor Gregory Udeh to the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health.

The extent of the Government cuts on social care funding is now estimated at £3billion across the country. This huge funding shortfall will force most local authorities to abandon home help for elderly and disabled people, resulting in a denial of vital social care services to those who need them most.

The Government's requirements from local authorities to find huge savings in the areas of adult social services and health would severely affect quality standards and service delivery targets.

Can the Cabinet Member provide an update on the effects of these cuts to social care funding; and the strategies being put in place to address the problems?

Reply

I very much regret that our funding as a local authority has been cut to such an extent. Many years of efficiency savings in Merton mean that there is little "fat" we can shave off and as a result any cuts will inevitably impact on service delivery. Our strategy as an administration has been to try to minimise the effect of the government's cuts on the most vulnerable people we serve and as a result Adult and Children's Social Services have had a lower savings target than other areas. However, we have still had to make some very difficult decisions. Nonetheless, I believe that we have seen some success with this strategy of endeavouring to protect those most in need.

17 From Councillor Ray Tindle to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration:

Can the Cabinet member outline what work has been undertaken into the impact of increased traffic pressures on the area around Garth Road in light of the proposed closure of the Borough's other reuse and recycling centre in Weir Road?

Reply

Given that the Weir Road Household Reuse & Recycling Centre (HRRC) handles around 10% of the existing tonnage of the HRRC waste stream, we do not anticipate significantly increased pressure on the area around Garth Road as a result of the proposed closure of the Weir Road. We will however monitor the position and work with our contractor to ensure the maximum possible timely throughput of vehicles. Effectively, with any closure of Weir Road, the situation reverts back to that prior to September 2005 when Merton had only one HRRC located at Garth Road.

In addition since the new South London Waste Partnership contracts were agreed in 2008, there has been a significant reduction in the Council's collected residual waste

being tipped at Garth Road and most is now taken direct to the Viridor site at Beddington. The replacement of the Toploader recycling vehicles with modern compacting waste collection vehicles during 2010 has further lowered vehicle movements and the proposed closure of the Garth Road waste transfer station and direct delivery of dry recyclables would reduce this movement element still further.

Residents' increased use of the new free bulky waste collection service, introduced in November last year, may also lead to a reduction in cars visiting the Garth Road HRRC.

18 From Councillor Sam Thomas to the Cabinet Member for Finance

What is A) the current local government electorate for each Merton ward, B) the average ward electorate for Merton, and C) the percentage variation from the average ward electorate for each Merton ward?

Reply

The Electoral Registration Officer has supplied the local government electorate for each ward, in order of the electoral registers, as at the monthly alterations date of 4 January 2011. The total local government electorate on that date was 146,358. This gives an average electorate of 7,318. The percentage variation for each ward is shown against the electorate:

Ward	Electorate	Percentage variation
Lower Morden	6,950	-5.03%
St Helier	7,330	+0.16%
Colliers Wood	7,904	+8.01%
Lavender Fields	7,357	+0.53%
Cricket Green	7,925	+8.29%
Ravensbury	7,331	+0.18%
Graveney	7,229	-1.22%
Figge's Marsh	7,922	+8.25%
Longthornton	7,332	+0.19%
Pollards Hill	7,457	+1.90%
Village	6,455	-11.79%
Raynes Park	7,299	-0.26%
Hillside	6,665	-8.92%
Wimbledon Park	8,043	+9.91%
Trinity	7,301	-0.23%
Dundonald	7,018	-4.10%
Abbey	7,458	+1.91%
Merton Park	7,009	-4.22%
Cannon Hill	7,178	-1.91%
West Barnes	7,195	-1.68%

19 From Councillor Miles Windsor to the Cabinet Member for Education:

In light of the Coalition Government's new pupil premium designed to raise achievement among disadvantaged children, can the Cabinet Member tell me how much funding he estimates that we as a borough will get through the pupil premium in 2011?

Reply

The Pupil premium is to be provided to pupils eligible for Free School Meals. I hope colleagues will have seen coverage in local media encouraging parents to apply for Free School Meals to enable the pupil premium to be claimed. There will be strong ongoing efforts made to maximise the amount of pupil premium payable to the borough's schools.

While this premium is likely to give education in Merton schools around £1.3M in 2011-2012 it is more than offset by the £4,199,560 loss in grants that the Children's budget for Merton will lose in 2011-2012.

20 From Councillor Brenda Fraser to the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health

Can the Cabinet Member confirm the future of Taylor Road Centre and if the proposed closure does go ahead, what plans have been put in place for those groups currently using the facility?

Reply

Taylor Road is included in the budget savings proposals for 11/12. Council officers have held consultation meetings under the Compact with:

Groups delivering services from Taylor Road (9th December 2010)

BME Forum (26th January 2011)

The wider voluntary sector through Involve (9th December 2010).

The options currently being discussed with the groups are that either organisations take on the leasing, management and other associated costs of Taylor Road building, or operate their services from alternative premises. MVSC have already started to research alternative premises for groups to consider.

We are working with groups throughout the process to ensure services continue to be delivered effectively.

21 From Councillor Henry Nelles to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration:

Would the Cabinet Member please confirm that any new plans for either 165-169 Merton Road or Ravensbury Garages will undergo full and proper consultation with residents before they are brought to Cabinet for consideration?

Reply

Any formal planning application submitted for either site would be subject to full consultation with residents, Ward Councillor and statutory consultees. There would not normally be consultation prior to the formal submission of the planning application. Any such planning application would be considered by the Planning Applications Committee as opposed to Cabinet. As far as the disposal of the site is concerned, there are no requirements to consult residents. Where a disposal is likely to be of wider interest, Ward Councillors would usually be consulted.

22 From Councillor Diane Neil Mills to the Cabinet Member for Finance:

Could the Cabinet Member for Finance please confirm which services that were formally

financed by ring-fenced grants will still be provided through alternative means and which services will be terminated?

Reply

The analysis of grants as a result of the Settlement and Central Government's decision to reduce the level of ring-fenced grants has been complex and is still not completely resolved. The current position is that some formerly ring-fenced grants have been rolled into Dedicated Schools Grant which remains ring-fenced, some have been ended and some are still under review.

Details of all savings proposals and equalities impact assessments agreed by Cabinet to date have been provided to Scrutiny Panels and the Overview and Scrutiny Commission. Further information will be included in the report to Cabinet on 14 February, including the latest available information on all government grants.

23 From Councillor Henry Nelless to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration:

Can the Cabinet member tell me which parks and open spaces will lose out as a result of the administration's proposal to focus on 25 key ones?

Reply

This matter is currently under discussion as part of the current Greenspaces transformation process. The current list of our 25 key parks is merely provisional at this stage and is not yet confirmed. The provisional list is as follows:

1. Abbey Rec.
2. Cannizaro Park
3. Cannons Rec. complex
4. Colliers Wood Rec.
5. Commons Extension
6. Cottenham Park
7. Dundonald Rec.
8. Figges Marsh
9. Haydons Road Rec.
10. Holland Garden
11. John Innes Park
12. Joseph Hood Rec.
13. King George's PF
14. Lavender Rec.
15. Morden Park & Playing Fields

16. Morden Rec.
17. Mitcham Common
18. Nursery Road PF
19. Raynes Park Sport Ground
20. Sir Joseph Hood MPF
21. South Park Gardens
22. Tamworth Rec.
23. Three Kings Piece
24. Wimbledon Park
25. Wandle Valley sites (various, including Ravensbury Park)

24 From Councillor Richard Hilton to the Cabinet Member for Education:

Can the Cabinet Member give me an update on the progress with regard to a new primary school in the Borough following the consideration of this matter by the Overview and Scrutiny Commission on 21st December 2010?

Reply

Colleagues will be aware that Cabinet on 6th December 2010 agreed plans to expand a number of schools to meet the significant increased demand for primary school places in the borough. Additional forms of entry will be established in the following schools:

- Gorringe Park
- Liberty
- Morden
- St Mary's
- Singlegate
- William Morris
- All Saints (through establishing a split site at the South Wimbledon Community Centre)
- Dundonald
- Wimbledon Park (subject to an application to the Schools Adjudicator for an Admissions Priority Area)

The previous administration had been seeking to build a new primary school in the North Wimbledon Area. This option was not agreed due to the significant additional cost compared to the expansion of existing schools, the fact that the purchase of the identified site could not be guaranteed, and the proposed scheme could not be

delivered in time to accommodate the projected additional places required.

Nevertheless, the council will keep under review the possibility of building a new primary school should a suitable site become available and subject to the availability of sufficient capital funding from central government.

25 From Councillor Diane Neil Mills to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration:

Would the Cabinet Member please explain the reason for not progressing the sale of 165-169 Merton Road, complete with planning permission for five high quality townhouses, which effectively replicate the original homes on the site that were destroyed by bombing and those still remaining on both sides of the site?

Reply

Following the collapse of the property market the disposal of 165-169 Merton Road was held until market conditions would support best consideration. This has enabled the council to consider disposing of the property to a housing association to provide a development for re-housing 8 supported people with learning difficulties, thereby supporting the PCT who we have a duty to support.

26 From Councillor Debbie Shears to the Leader of the Council:

I am sure we would all agree that it is important to support both our current and former servicemen and women and their families.

Like me, the Leader will have received a recent letter from the Royal British Legion emphasising the crucial role that home adaptations play in enabling independent living for many veterans. Can he therefore tell me how his administration is responding to the Royal British Legion's call for Merton Council to ensure that, during the budget setting process, Disabled Facilities Grants funding is protected and that sufficient resources are made available to provide essential facilities for those disabled veterans in our Borough that need them?

Reply

On the 25th January the Department for Communities and Local Government wrote to all Local Authority Chief Executives announcing a small change to the allocation methodology for the Disabled Facilities Grant for the financial year 2011/12. In 2011/12 there is £180m available to be distributed as Disabled Facilities Grant to local authorities – an extra £11m more than was available in 2010/11. Under the proposed new methodology all Local Authorities will, as a minimum, receive what they were allocated in 2010/11. The extra £11m will be shared between the Local Authorities using a relative needs weighted index developed by the Building Research Establishment. This index will be used to give additional money to those Local Authorities who would have gained additional resources had the relative needs formula been used to distribute the entire £180m. Those Local Authorities who would have received less on this basis will receive what they were allocated in 2010/11. Merton's allocation in 2010/11 was £444,000. In addition the Council has historically contributed significantly to the DFG programme and will be adding a further £280,000 to the total sum available, making a minimum of £724,000, as was the case in 2010/11. Some slipped and uncommitted capital from

previous years has been offered as a saving to the capital programme, however the 2011/12 programme is unaffected.

With regard to the specific case of the Royal British Legion; Disabled Facilities Grants are means tested in accordance with Government regulations, everyone has to go through the same process and the limited discretion that exists sits with the Director but only in relation to work required which exceeds the maximum mandatory grant of £30000 and that could only be undertaken on a case by case base that could not in all fairness be limited to any particular group such as the Royal British Legion.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE QUESTIONS

27 From Councillor Gilli Lewis-Lavender to the Cabinet Member for Community and Culture:

I recently attended a meeting regarding the one day closure of the West Barnes Library. Would the cabinet member agree that, although savings need to be made, we as councillors have a moral responsibility to protect areas that provide community services to the residents of Merton and that we should seek ways and means to provide services in a more efficient way? Will he also listen to the 240 residents of West Barnes who turned up with me to oppose this closure?

Reply

As the Member will be aware, Merton Council has made £18m of efficiency savings over the last three years. As a result the council is actually very efficient in its delivery of services so cuts of the level we are being forced by central government to find will inevitably impact on service delivery. Nonetheless, if the Member would like to join me in writing to the prime minister to explain this reality to him I am more than happy to do so.

As discussed at the public meeting at West Barnes Library the Cabinet Member is open to suggestions on how it can extend the community usage of its library facilities and to get residents more involved in the running of them. The cabinet member remains committed to finding alternatives to make efficiencies whilst retaining public services.

Supplementary

Can the Cabinet Member please tell me if he will be investigating the Localism Bill, which allows local communities to control local assets such as our library?

Reply

Clearly we have to examine the full content of the bill. Obviously we have the Big Society as well so if people of West Barnes want to run the library as part of the Big Society then we'll also be willing to consider those proposals.

28 From Councillor Iain Dysart to the Cabinet member for Community and Culture

The Cabinet member recently attended a public meeting at West Barnes library with 242 residents. Given the evident value attached to this facility, which raw data alone cannot show, how does he now propose to proceed and demonstrate that the Council in turn values the West Barnes community as highly as those communities who returned Labour councillors last May?

Reply

The revised opening hours proposal for libraries will extend the opening hours available to customers across the borough and takes on board previous consultation comments. The reduction in opening hours at West Barnes Library equates to only 4.5 hours per week and in a time when other authorities are closing their smallest and least used

libraries this shows a commitment to try and retain services whilst achieving significant savings. The Cabinet member is open to suggestions on how we can mobilise the community to make more use of the space at West Barnes Library for other community events and to get volunteers more involved in supporting the library.

Donald Hope, which returned three Labour Councillors, will also close for an extra day a week (4.5hours) as the decisions on opening hours have been based on library usage levels and not on political considerations.

Supplementary

Does the Cabinet Member accept that if the council ultimately pulls the plug on West Barnes Library, even if the efforts to increase usage and community involvement lead to an improved position, which I believe they will, it will constitute a betrayal of our community?

Reply

Can I start by thanking the work of Councillor Dysart and Councillor Jeanes and Councillor Lewis-Lavender on West Barnes Library. I do like to give credit to both parties. In relation to West Barnes Library, clearly we've had to consider many difficult decisions over the past few months. I am pleased to say that West Barnes Library will be remaining open. Going forward we have many difficult decisions given that we have to save £70m over the next four years. We are willing to look at solutions in increasing usage, and working closely with local councillors and the community, who came out in droves at the recent meeting.

29 From Councillor Agatha Akyigyina to Cabinet Member for Community and Culture

Can the Cabinet Member confirm that all Merton Libraries will be remaining open next year and how does this compare to our neighbouring boroughs?

Reply

There are no proposals to close any of Merton's libraries and they will remain open throughout the 2011/12 financial year. Library closures are being felt all across the country and there are currently proposals underway to close libraries in three of our neighbouring boroughs. In difficult financial circumstances Merton remains committed to trying to retain its current library sites for residents.

Supplementary

Could the Cabinet Member tell me if there's been any further update. I've been advised by friends that the libraries will be closing in our neighbouring boroughs of Wandsworth and Croydon.

Reply

Yes, one of the libraries near my ward, in Norbury is being closed. Their justification was that Pollards Hill Library is nearby. I don't think it's any coincidence that both

Wandsworth and Croydon are Conservative controlled. None of the LibDem or Labour boroughs are proposing to close libraries. It's interesting that Councillor Cooper at Wandsworth turned up at the Colliers Wood meeting the other week, whilst at the same time, his borough is slashing half his libraries.

30 From Councillor Samantha George to the Cabinet Member for Community and Culture:

Can the Cabinet member tell me why a decision on options for the replacement of Morden Park Pools has now been further delayed until the Cabinet meeting in March?

Reply

It was important for us to firstly secure a company to operate all of our leisure centres in the long-term so that they too could be involved in the future options for the replacement of Morden Park Pools. At the same time as concluding this we have sought some demand / needs analysis on the borough and surrounds in relation to a replacement Morden Park Pool. Although we commissioned this work from Sport England and Edinburgh University early in the autumn the earliest they were able to produce their findings was late January. We have now received the first draft and officers are reviewing the findings in order to produce the report. With such a significant financial investment needed the administration must ensure that such facilities are most appropriate for the next 50 years. A report will be going to scrutiny in March for pre-decision scrutiny, followed by Cabinet in June.

Supplementary

I am disappointed to note the further delay in a decision until June. However I see the Business Plan that went to Scrutiny last week refers to having three leisure centres in the borough. Does that mean that the Labour Administration are committed to replacing Morden Park pool, particularly given the previous Conservative Administration left £11m in the budget to do so?

Reply

In relation to Morden Park pool, we are in very different financial circumstances now. We have to consider each and every decision given the constraints on the capital budget, given the expenditure going forward. I would like to be able to announce the replacement of Morden Park pool. I cannot be in that position and it would be irresponsible of me to promise that now. The Cabinet is considering all the options and engaging with the relevant scrutiny panel who will undertake pre-decision scrutiny of all proposals for Morden Park pool at the March meeting. We recognise that Morden Park pool plays a vital role in the local community, but I can't give any promises to council tonight.

31 From Councillor Sam Thomas to Cabinet Member for Community and Culture
What is the cost per user of each Merton library?

Reply

The cost per visit for libraries for the last full financial year (2009/10) is £2.13. The cost per visit for libraries is the lowest in comparison to any of our neighbouring authorities.

Cost per visit for each library without including corporate overheads for 2009/10 is:

Wimbledon Library - £1.07

Morden Library - £1.04

Mitcham Library - £1.57

Pollards Hill Library - £1.41* (library closed for 4 months, figure based on 8-month opening)

Raynes Park Library - £0.97

Donald Hope Library - £1.92

West Barnes Library - £1.73

Supplementary

Can the Cabinet Member tell me how we go about reducing these costs against the backdrop of cuts from central government.

Reply

Obviously we have to consider the opening costs of libraries and the costs are laid out for us here this evening. We are restructuring the library service to make it more efficient to save £120k next year. We are also proposing to increase library hours overall in Merton, and hopefully council will approve that proposal.

32 From Councillor Suzanne Grocott to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration:

Could the Cabinet Member confirm that the Dundonald Park changing and toilet facilities will not be closed for any period of time given the popularity of sporting events taking place and their importance in this respect?

Reply

Currently the changing rooms and public toilets at Dundonald Recreation Ground are opened when there is a member of staff on duty in the park. There is currently a member of staff stationed there during the day, Monday to Friday, and again on Saturdays and Sundays in winter and summer when we provide personnel support for booked sports lettings at the site, principally football and cricket. There are no plans to amend these arrangements at this time.

Supplementary

I understand that Dundonald Park is applying for Green Flag status. Would the loss of current amenities have a detrimental effect on that application?

Reply

If the amenities were lost, inevitably it would, but there's no plans to lose the amenities. If the reference is to the primary school expansion, I'm not clear whether you're referring to plans to replace the current rather scruffy changing rooms and pavilion, with an architecturally designed extension to the existing school using the same footprint as the existing premises, but with sports and changing rooms on the ground floor and classrooms above. If that's what you're thinking, I would have thought it could only enhance an application for Green Flag status as it would add a building of character and note in place of the rather run-down facilities at present. If your concern is about the current budget, there are no plans to close the current changing rooms and toilets at Dundonald Park.

33 From Councillor Sam Thomas to Cabinet Member for Education

What will be the impact to the borough in terms of the end of Schools Sports Partnerships?

Reply

After the spending review Richard Hayward the Partnership Development Manager of Merton School Sport Partnership wrote to members of this authority as follows:

"The decision made by the coalition government is at best misguided, myself and my team of dedicated sports development professionals and schools are left puzzled and de-motivated by the clear lack of understanding of what is needed for young people by central government."

"I have been working very hard with the Local Education authority to salvage some of the fantastic structure we have in Merton. The fact is that the team of 60 people working diligently to provide opportunities will be cut to 3 people. The money that was going towards P.E. and sport will not be identifiable and schools will choose against extra provision as funds will be very tight across the board."

I can put the effect of these reckless cuts no better myself.

34 From Councillor Janice Howard to the Cabinet Member for Community and Culture:

I understand that a repeat of the extravaganza that took place in Wimbledon Park in 2006 was scheduled for 2011. Can the Cabinet member tell me whether this is going ahead?

Reply

The Wimbledon Park extravaganza was in 2008 to launch the cultural Olympiad at the handover from Beijing to London. This was one of many events that took place in that year to celebrate the special handover time. Since then officers have been working annually with local community groups to celebrate the cultural Olympiad across Merton. In 2009 the event was at Colliers Wood, in 2010 it was in Raynes Park and in 2011 it will be in Pollards Hill. The 2008 event was made possible due to some external funding which is not available now.

35 From Councillor Geraldine Stanford to Cabinet Member for Community and Culture

Can the Cabinet Member confirm that the Mitcham Carnival will be taking place this summer?

Reply

Yes, I can confirm that the Mitcham Carnival will be taking place this summer on Saturday 11 June 2011. In 2012, it will also be taking place on Saturday 2 June as part of the Diamond Jubilee celebrations. The Carnival is a not for profit event and has become an annual tradition for Merton. It involves many local groups and charities and also has a parade, which last year included 23 floats. Although the Mayor's Office facilitates many of the arrangements, the organisation of the Carnival is carried out by an independent community committee, which includes councillors and past mayors.

Supplementary

In spite of all the doom and gloom, Mitcham is determined not to be downhearted so the theme for the carnival is Strictly Mitcham. I am aware that the Leader is currently visiting local businesses and I was wondering if he would be visiting the ballroom gown dress manufacturers to invite them to participate in the carnival.

Reply

Obviously Mitcham Carnival plays an important role in the local community. I am delighted that it will be part of our Diamond Jubilee celebrations next year. I am working closely with the Leader to drum up support for the carnival this year.

36 From Councillor John Bowcott to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration:

The Olympics authorities are planning their own traffic flows in relation to the 2012 Olympics tennis event here in Wimbledon. Can the Cabinet member confirm whether consultation has taken place with:

- a) The local authority
- b) The AELTC
- c) Ward councillors
- d) Local residents
- e) Local businesses

Reply

Consultation is ongoing with ourselves, AELTC, residents, ward councillors and businesses.

Supplementary

I do have to say that as a councillor of Village Ward I have not yet been involved in the

ongoing consultation. Would the Cabinet Member assure the council that councillors will be invited to discuss the possibly competing issues of the Olympic authorities, local residents and the businesses that we seek to represent.

Reply

Street management issues are so numerous that I do depend on the initiative of ward councillors to contact the responsible officer and I have no problem with that. The Olympic Delivery Authority are taking a very cautious approach to any roads that may affect the tennis event and Marriott Road would be one such. I would be glad to speak to Councillor Bowcott in relation to any information that comes to me, but also contact Mario Lecordier.

37 From Councillor Laxmi Attawar to Cabinet Member for Community and Culture
Can the Cabinet Member detail the proposed library hours for 2011/12 in comparison to 2010/11?

Reply

The council will be increasing the opening hours of its libraries by 19 hours per week across the borough. Following previous consultations around opening hours with residents there has been a consistent message round ending lunch-time closures and opening on a Wednesday. As a result, Wimbledon, Morden and Mitcham libraries will remain open on a Wednesday afternoon and the other branch libraries will no longer close at lunchtimes. The one trade off in this new opening hours package is that West Barnes and Donald Hope libraries (currently the two least used libraries) will be closed an additional day per week (net four and a half hours loss) but overall the new opening hours package will give residents more access to libraries.

38 From Councillor Suzanne Evans to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration:

I was surprised to read recently that Wimbledon will be one of two major congestion points during the 2012 Olympics. What alleviation measures is the Council planning to help visitors as well as local residents and businesses?

Reply

The ODA have consultants who are working on this project and we are expecting to see their plans in March.

39 From Councillor Russell Makin to Cabinet Member for Community and Culture
What representations have been made by the administration about the future use of the Olympic Stadium in Stratford?

Reply

The Leader last week sent a letter signed by a by a number of Leaders in London supporting West Ham's bid for the Olympic Stadium.

40 From Councillor Richard Chellev to the Cabinet Member for Community and Culture:

Can the Cabinet member please give me an update on progress with regard to the Wimbledon Way - the proposed walking route from town to the tennis?

Reply

Merton Chamber of Commerce is leading on the Wimbledon Way under their 'Going for Gold' initiative. A working party of key decision makers has been established to steer the project and this includes the Leader of the Council and the opposition spokesperson for Culture and Communities. To date two meetings have been held and a prospectus has been developed setting out a project timetable and implementation plan so that it can be in place for 2012. The prospectus includes ideas for different zones, the physical needs, technological opportunities, as well as marketing and financial plans. A copy is available from Merton Chamber of Commerce.

41 From Councillor Geraldine Stanford to Cabinet Member for Community and Culture

What preparations been made for hosting the tennis at the 2012 Olympics?

Reply

The London Organising Committee of the Olympic (& Paralympic) Games (LOCOG) are organising all London 2012 Games events including the tennis. The area surrounding the venue and the Olympic Route Network comes under the jurisdiction of the ODA and the security measures under the London Fire & Defence Authority. As such council officers are providing the knowledge, support and infrastructure in order to ensure that each organisation is able to deliver successfully in Merton. This will include similar levels of support that are provided to the regular All England Tennis Championships enhanced by the specialist nature of the 2012 Games.

In addition the Council is acting as sub regional lead in forming a Borough Group Support unit to ensure that day to day services are maintained throughout the games period

42 From Councillor Maurice Groves to the Cabinet Member for Community and Culture:

I see from the latest Annual Residents Survey that there was a 5% increase in the number of people rating our leisure and sports facilities good in 2010. Would the Cabinet member agree with me that residents are benefitting from the considerable capital investment put into the Borough's leisure facilities by the previous Conservative administration?

Reply

The residents are clearly benefiting from investment put in over a number of years by both parties and also investment by the leisure contractor. This is set to continue to

ensure that our leisure facilities are fit for purpose. However, we should recognise that the resident's satisfaction is more likely to be attributed to the service provided by our leisure contractor Greenwich Leisure Limited, who we have just awarded the new long-term contract to, aiming to keep our residents satisfied for many years to come.

43 From Councillor Laxmi Attawar to Cabinet Member for Community and Culture

Would the cabinet member outline the benefits of the 15 year leisure contract with Greenwich Leisure?

Reply

The benefits from the new 15 year leisure contract with Greenwich Leisure include:-

- Capital investment for a new Youth Zone at the Canons Leisure Centre and Health & Fitness Spa at Wimbledon Leisure Centre.
- Requirement to achieve & maintain Inclusive Fitness Initiative accreditation on the gyms, thus ensuring disabled people can access and be fully integrated into those environments
- To increase participation by those target groups who are less likely to engage in sport and physical activity
- Offering Gym London & Swim London – GLL own programmes, to increase participation by using differential pricing policies
- To benchmark biennially using the National Benchmarking Service and improve performance against these standards
- To maintain Quest quality assurance standards biennially and improve performance in the quality standards
- Delivery of the Council's key outcomes identified in the LAA and Community Plan
- Range of initiatives including Physical Activity Referral Scheme, Volunteering and Routes to Employment
- GLL Sport Foundation
- Social Pricing Policy

44 From Councillor Samantha George to the Leader of the Council:

I've heard from Councillor David Williams about the recent working party meeting on plans to mark the Queen's Diamond Jubilee in 2012. Could the Leader share some of the interesting ideas coming out of the group?

Reply

I am delighted that Cllr Draper has already taken the lead, on behalf of the council, in establishing a cross party working group, which has now had its first meeting.

The Queen has made it known that she does not want public money spent on her

Diamond Jubilee. The working party are bearing this in mind as they plan for Merton's celebrations. The group have already secured the promise of 5 Black Poplar trees (one for each area of the borough) from a benefactor – this is the Queen's favourite tree! The Mitcham Carnival Committee have agreed to change the date of the 2012 event to Saturday June 2nd to kick off the Queen's Diamond Jubilee and launch the borough into the events and festivities leading up to and through the London 2012 Games. The group are working with the Lord Lieutenant's Office and LOCOG to try to produce approved floral displays, whether that be hanging baskets, window boxes, garden and park displays. Our Queen's representative, Sir John Wheeler is in discussions with the Royal Household to see if the Queen will choose to visit Merton on her day visit in 2012 to South London, beyond this there are ideas for school and community involvement that will aim to have a seamless range of celebrations starting with the Queen's Diamond Jubilee and moving into the annual tennis championships and onto the London 2012 torch relay and tennis event in the borough.

45 From Councillor Suzanne Grocott to the Cabinet Member for Community and Culture:

The Corporate Capacity Panel heard recently that key capital projects have been reprofiled to next year yet at the same time are 100% on track to be delivered. Can the Cabinet member explain how both things can be true?

Reply

The Cabinet member for Finance will respond to this question

It may help to clarify the position if a definition of "on track" is provided. The definition of "on track" is that the project is on course to be completed within the timetable set for the project when it was approved.

Some reprofiling of budget within this timetable for some key projects has taken place and we may need to reprofile again but this does not mean that the project will not be on track to be delivered to the existing timetable which can be over a number of years.

It may also be useful to update Members on the position on the authority's key capital projects which is as follows:

Highway Maintenance Planned Programme – Completed

Footway Maintenance Planned Programme - Completed

Transport for London Schemes - Spending is behind profile but the department confirms that all schemes are currently on schedule to complete to timetable.

Purchase of Waste Collection Vehicles - All vehicles have been delivered within the timetable set.

SEN Centre of Excellence - Spending may fall behind the current profile but the centre remains on schedule for occupation in spring 2011 with school using the building for

additional pupils from September 2011 which is consistent with the timescale previously set .

6th forms - All of the schools were completed for occupation by the schools for September which is consistent with the timescale previously set.

Primary School expansion most significant projects - Spending has fallen behind profile in some instances but all schemes are on schedule for providing the new places as they are required.

The "New School in North Wimbledon" is no longer classed as a key capital project as on 6 December Cabinet agreed expansion of existing schools is to be a greater funding priority.

It may also help to clarify how well advanced capital expenditure is in 2010/11 compared to previous years. At the end of December 2010, 51% (£34m) of the total budgeted capital expenditure had been spent compared to 44% (£31.7m) at the same point (December 2009) in 2009/10. It is expected that this improvement will be maintained for the remainder of the year and historically a large element of the capital programme is spent in the last quarter.

Slippage in the capital programme has been an issue in recent years. Most local authorities have slippage in their capital programmes. In previous financial years there has been a high level of slippage in Merton.

At the end of 2009/10, slippage carried forward into 2010/11 was £22.182m out of a total budget of £78.159m. i.e. 28.4%

Slippage into 2009/10 was £18.679m out of a total budget of £58.756m. i.e. 31.8%

Slippage into 2008/09 was £12.045m out of a total budget of £43.749m i.e. 27.5%

Slippage into 2007/08 was £9.597m out of a total budget of £39.215m. i.e. 24.5%

The Council is continually aiming to improve its monitoring procedures. The programme was reviewed during the year and it is expected that slippage to be carried forward at 31 March 2011 will be less than last year, despite the impact of the difficult weather conditions; thanks to the hard work of our staff, I am hopeful that we have weathered the storm.

46 From Councillor Janice Howard to the Cabinet Member for Community and Culture:

I was interested to read of Merton's consultation on its Heritage and Culture strategy. Can the Cabinet member please give me a flavour of the responses and tell me what happens next with this?

Reply

In general respondees were in favour of some partnership working and exchange of information as well as organising an event to showcase heritage in Merton. A number of specific suggestions were put forward to add to or amend the consultation draft and

these will be posted on the website as well as assessed in finalising the strategy.

The next stages would be to (a) finalise the strategy, (b) organise the showcase event, (c) assess what form the forum should take to ensure it can work effectively.

However, in the context of the cuts we are facing from central government, we will need to ensure our aspirations for cultural services fit with the very much reduced level of funding that will be available for this non statutory service in future years.

47 From Councillor Maurice Groves to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration:

Can the Cabinet member outline what we are doing here in Merton to promote the Year of Walking?

Reply

The Mayor of London has declared his intention to make 2011 the 'Year of Walking'. In response to this the London Assembly launched their 'Walk This Way' report at the end of October 2010. It contained 9 recommendations for Transport for London to consider for the 'Year of Walking'.

Transport for London has indicated that further information on the potential funding opportunities for boroughs to support additional walking initiatives will be provided in March 2011. In the meantime officers will continue their programme to promote safe and sustainable travel behaviour through transport projects and smarter travel initiatives.

48 From Councillor Henry Nelles to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration:

Can the Cabinet member please give me an update on the future of the P4 site?

Reply

The future of the P4 site is being considered within a comprehensive review of all disposal opportunities to ensure that both value is maximised and opportunities for providing quality redevelopment are considered.

49 From Councillor Chris Edge to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration:

Can the Cabinet member please give me an update on the future of the P3 site and the possible need for a hotel to accommodate London 2012 visitors?

Reply

The future of the P3 site is being considered within the same comprehensive review of all disposal opportunities as P4 to ensure that both value is maximised and opportunities for providing quality redevelopment are considered. P3 does not offer an opportunity for other than a budget hotel and redevelopment is highly unlikely before 2012 for any scheme.

50 From Councillor Maurice Groves to the Cabinet Member for Community and Culture:

Can the Cabinet member tell me whether we are entering Merton teams in the London Youth Games this year?

Reply

Yes. In fact, we have already had the first competitions for the year and I am pleased to report that competitors have already been involved in the cross-country and we have boys and girls cricket teams competing in February. Trials and training are underway for other sports and competitions will take place throughout the year leading up to the grand finals on 2nd and 3rd July.

51 From Councillor Suzanne Grocott to the Cabinet Member for Community and Culture:

I see from the latest dashboard that the percentage of people aged over 50 attending sports sessions is well below target. Can the Cabinet member tell me why this is and what action is proposed to remedy this?

Reply

Free swimming for Over 60's was a key contributor to the over 50's sports participation. This programme was cut earlier in the year and the numbers reduced. The targets were set with an expectation that Free Swimming would continue until March 2011. There is no intended action to remedy the shortfall as we do not have the funds to offer such an initiative ourselves.

52 From Councillor Margaret Brierly to the Cabinet Member for Community and Culture:

Can the Cabinet member tell me of any plans to promote the disabled access to the 2012 Olympics tennis event?

Reply

The London Organising Committee of the Olympic (& Paralympic) Games (LOCOG) are organising all London 2012 Games events including the tennis. It will be their responsibility under the Equalities Act (2010) to ensure that disabled people are able to access the tennis event.

53 From Councillor Maurice Groves to the Cabinet Member for Community and Culture:

I understand Merton has been able to join the London Library Consortium this year. Can the Cabinet member tell me how this has been possible?

Reply

Officers have been looking into options for reducing procurement costs linked to stock purchasing and the computerised library management system used by the service. The

London Libraries Consortium provides the best option available for reducing operating costs linked to these systems by using shared procurement systems with other authorities. To support the implementation of the libraries management system a small proportion of the stock fund will be used but there will be a significant return on investment in future years on subscription costs by being part of the consortium. Being part of the consortium also enables the authority to be part of a bigger purchasing network and to continue to drive down costs in other areas.

This page is intentionally blank