

# **Merton Council Council**

**18 September 2024**

## **Supplementary agenda 5 - Councillor Priority Questions to Cabinet Members**

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### **From Cllr Kirby to the Cabinet Member for Housing and Sustainable Development**

What steps is the Cabinet Member taking to raise standards in the Private Rented Sector, and ensure all residents have a safe and secure home?

#### **Reply**

The Council is committed to increasing standards in the private sector. As a part of that commitment, in September 2023 it introduced selective licencing in four wards, and additional licencing in 7 wards following a period of consultation. This is a key strand in the strategic approach to improving conditions in private rented tenancies which requires a licence to operate in these wards. Conditions of the licence require compliance with health and safety and other property management standards.

If Landlords fail to licence properties the council can take a number of actions, including prosecution. Recently, the Council obtained an Interim Management Order (IMO) on 18 properties owned by a Landlord that had failed to licence them. This means that the Council has taken over the day to day running of the properties including rent collection and repairs.

Whilst many Landlords operate within guidelines, there are others that do not and this action sends a clear message to Landlords that if you do not licence your property or act in a way that the property cannot be licenced, the Council can and will use its powers to take action.

### **From Cllr McGrath to the Cabinet Member for Housing and Sustainable Development**

Can the Cabinet Member update the Council on the Memorandum of Understanding being negotiated with Clarion in relation to the Mitcham town centre redevelopment?

#### **Reply**

Clarion Housing Group signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Council in March 2024. The MOU was part of the process of the Council relinquishing its leasehold interest in St Mark's Multi-Storey Car Park; enabling the site to come forward for regeneration following the closure of the Morrisons store.

The MOU is being enacted and guides the pre-planning application process between Clarion and the Council to meet our Local Plan objectives for the development, including a commitment by Clarion to undertake community engagement and a co-design process on proposals at pre-application stage to ensure that our communities are involved at an early stage to shape what is a major regeneration opportunity for Mitcham Town Centre.

### **From Cllr McLean to the Leader**

Does the Leader agree with me that the councillor code of conduct should not be used to try and silence councillors?

## Reply

The code of conduct is an important document that guides members clearly in their roles and responsibilities, and what is expected of us in public office. As such, it is vital that the code of conduct sits above party politics. Therefore, it should not be used by members to attempt to shut down healthy debate or discussion in order to avoid something which might be politically inconvenient, rather than inappropriate.

## From Cllr Henry to the Cabinet Member for Sport and Heritage

How has the Council ensured the Big Sports Day encouraged residents in all parts of the borough to take up a new sport or physical activity?

## Reply

Despite the weather forecast, our 2<sup>nd</sup> Big Sports Day was a huge success with huge crowds in attendance throughout the day.

A total of 70 organisations, most of which are based in Merton, took part in the day, offering activities, information and inspiring words for attendees.

The Communications team ran a three-month pan-borough promotional and marketing campaign to encourage residents from every part of Merton to attend and take part.

This campaign, called 'See you at Big Sports Day', included:

- An all-resident mailout with an invite from the Leader of the council.
- Schoolbag leaflets to Merton schools and a headteachers' newsletter item
- Regular stories in council-owned e-newsletter.
- Railing banners across the borough.
- Creatives on all JCD digital boards – situated in town centers and key locations across the borough.
- Promotional reel with footage from 2023.
- A paid-for digital advertising campaign that has reached more than 140,000 residents.
- Promotion at high-profile sporting events including AFC Wimbledon and London Broncos home games.

To ensure residents from across the borough were able to easily attend, we put on free shuttle buses from Morden, Pollards Hill and Mitcham; we commissioned additional free use times for the borough's Forest bikes stock; offered dedicated cycle parking at Wimbledon Park - alongside promotion of existing public transport routes.

The day itself offered a huge range of sporting activities, including BMXing; a climbing wall; volleyball; touch rugby; tennis, squash, hockey and cricket; dance sessions; spin classes; Our Parks and Park Play sessions; walking tennis and disability-inclusive activities – plus much more. And to encourage activity beyond the event, the local sports clubs and community organisations were actively signing attendees up for further sessions and their newsletters.

Big Sports Day is a peripatetic event - hosted at different park venues across the borough each year so all our communities can feel connected to it. Last year, it was in Mitcham; this year, Wimbledon Park.

**From Cllr Wilson to the Cabinet Member for Housing and Sustainable Development**

Regarding housing operated by Clarion, can the Cabinet Member outline (a) the average service charge estimate given to residents at the beginning of the 2023/24 financial year, broken down by estate, (b) the average final service charge bill given to residents at the end of the 2023/24 financial year, broken down by estate, and (c) the largest difference between the estimate and the final bill given to any single household.

**Reply**

We have contacted Clarion who have asked their service charge analyst team to review this information for the 9000+ homes in Merton. The details for the 23/24 financial year will not be available until October 24 but will be shared with the council as soon as possible.

**From Cllr Howard to the Cabinet Member for Local Environment, Green Spaces and Climate Change**

On 30<sup>th</sup> August the BBC reported that a Merton resident had been issued a £150 fixed penalty notice for feeding the ducks in Morden Hall Park. Does the Cabinet Member agree with me that this disgraceful incident should never have occurred, and what steps will they now take to ensure that Kingdom staff do not inappropriately fine more members of the public?

**Reply**

This was a disproportionate response by a Kingdom warden, and the council has apologised both privately to the lady, and publicly, for what happened. And we have, of course, cancelled the fine.

Council staff have met with the Kingdom Team and an instruction has been issued to Kingdom that no FPNs are to be issued for feeding animals, such as ducks.

However, there have been instances in the past where people leave large deposits of food for animal feeding, this can include intentionally leaving food for foxes. In instances such as these, fines have been issued and paid as it is quite rightly littering.

Kingdom officers do approach individuals who have deposited large deposits of food and give them the opportunity to remove such item. However, on this occasion this wasn't the case and there should have been an element of proportionality applied given the fact that food deposits were not left outside of the water and should not be categorised as littering.

**From Cllr Attawar to the Cabinet Member for Transport**

Could the Cabinet Member provide an update on the work and campaigns to secure step-free access at Motspur Park and Tooting Stations?

### **Reply**

For many public transport users, transport accessibility, such as step free access, makes the difference between going out or staying in. Step-free access isn't just about improved accessibility for wheelchair users, but also those with limited mobility, people with pushchairs, and those carrying heavy luggage. Step-free access is vital to ensuring all residents can travel safely, comfortably, and with dignity – and that is why it is a priority of this administration to introduce across Merton.

Motspur Park and Tooting Rail Stations have secured significant investment from Network Rail to deliver step-free access schemes, and I am pleased to report that both schemes are nearing completion and are due to be fully operational within the coming months. The Council is planning to implement complementary works within this financial year to further improve the street environment and pedestrian access routes in the vicinity of both stations to make sure they are accessible for users who might now be more likely to use these stations.

### **From Cllr Willis to the Cabinet Member for Housing and Sustainable Development**

Can the Cabinet Member confirm when the design codes for each neighbourhood in the emerging local plan, as called for in each site allocation, will be drafted and published and whether they will they go in front of the Development and Planning Applications Committee for discussion?

### **Reply**

The new government is revising the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (consultation ending 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2024). One of the revisions is to focus local authority's efforts and resources on considering localised design codes for areas of most change and most potential for new homes, including regeneration sites. This is similar to what we have already achieved as a council for Merton's Estates Local Plan and the FutureWimbledon SPD. The new NPPF also proposes to delete the requirement for all authorities to have district-wide design codes covering every neighbourhood. Once the council's new Local Plan is adopted and the draft NPPF has been finalised, I will consider the most efficient and effective approach to additional design coding in Merton. Future design codes would be shared with the Development and Planning Applications Committee for their advice during production.

### **From Cllr Paterson to the Cabinet Member for Transport**

What are the criteria for the council to install zebra crossings in Merton?

### **Reply**

There is no singular criteria for the introduction of Zebra crossings as the council considers a wide variety of factors in making a decision on the appropriateness of a Zebra crossing or any other type of crossing in a certain area. The main factors would relate to the number and severity of pedestrian injury collisions and the contributory

reasons; traffic volume and speed; the level of both existing and future demand; characteristics and layout of the road; and buildability within design standards.

### **From Cllr Syeda to the Cabinet Member for Health and Social Care**

What was the outcome of the Local Government Association Peer Challenge of Adult Social Care?

#### **Reply**

The Adult Social Care Preparation for Assurance Peer Challenge took place over three days (5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, and 7<sup>th</sup> of June 2024). The eight experienced LGA team members considered 144 documents and interviewed at least 158 people, spending over 250 hours with LBM's Adult Social Care department, the equivalent of 35 working days.

The review was undertaken using a similar methodology as the new CQC assurance process, including detailed scrutiny of an Information Return, Case file audits, and interviews of staff, partners, and members.

The overall feedback was very positive, and this has provided us with the confidence that our direction of travel is good. The Report from the Peer Review will be presented at the Healthier Communities and Older People Overview and Scrutiny Panel on the 21 November.

#### **Some highlights of the feedback received from the LGA Peer review team were:**

- The staff we met are a real asset for Merton. They were typically experienced, committed, hardworking, supportive who demonstrate a strong culture of caring for people.
- Strong and engaged political leadership with clear corporate support for adult social care.
- Positive relationships between members and officers.
- The Executive Director (DASS) demonstrates strong leadership and is a very visible presence for staff.
- The Principal Social Worker (PSW) is highly respected by the staff, who value her direction.
- Frontline staff see their Team managers as very supportive.
- There is a strong and effective strategic safeguarding partnership and Safeguarding Adults Board.
- Well managed adult social care finances, validated by the recent Grant Thornton Review.
- Adult social care has good relationships with Health colleagues/the Integrated Care Board
- Positive and effective relationships with providers
- An extensive community offer provided by the Council and VCS, linked to prevention
- The learning disability team is well integrated with numerous examples of positive outcomes for people.

## Councillor Priority Questions to Cabinet Members

- The reduction in the Deprivation of Liberty Standards (DoLS) waiting list is a success story.
- The Public Health and Learning Disability health promotion work was fantastic.