

Merton Council Council

19 November 2014

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Council 19 November 2014

**Public questions
Procedure**

The Mayor will call your name and ask if you have a supplementary question arising from the answer you have received.

If you do not have a supplementary question then simply respond thank you, no. If you do have a supplementary question respond thank you, yes. You will be shown to a seat in the chamber where you will ask your supplementary question. Make sure you use the microphone.

Having put your question, please be seated whilst the Cabinet member responds. Once the response has been given, please return to your seat in the public gallery. The questions and answers and all supplementary questions and replies will be published on Merton's website after the meeting.

**1) From Paul Carter
To the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration**

Question

Our car will fit into our garden. We are not allowed a vehicle crossover because our garden is fractionally smaller than the specified size. Parking in Langdale Avenue is becoming impossible. Could the rules revert to when permission was granted if the car would not encroach on to the pavement?

Reply

The most common reason for the refusal for a vehicle crossover is due to insufficient depth of forecourt / front garden. The current criteria for the provision of vehicle crossovers was reviewed and adopted in 2007. The criteria has been established for community and highway safety reasons to ensure that the space is suitable for most vehicles not just the current vehicle of the current property owner. An application will be refused if the measurement from the property façade to the public highway is less than 4.0m.

Supplementary

I see no reason why the criteria cannot revert to the pre-2007 criteria. That if one's vehicle can fit in the garden without encroaching onto the highway, one could have a vehicle crossover. Why must other vehicles be taken into consideration? If someone with a bigger car bought our house, they would have to sell the car and buy a smaller one, or withdraw their offer to purchase. I have observed in Dundonald Road that some gardens are smaller than ours, and cars fit easily. I feel the answer I have been given has been dismissive, without taking into consideration the massive parking problems experienced by us and other residents of the borough. I call upon the councillor to treat the problem with compassion and common sense.

Reply

The matter is treated with compassion and common sense and a great deal of experience. If the crossover was dependent on the size of a particular vehicle it would be very difficult for the council to enforce against any vehicles that then started overhanging onto the pavements, when a new vehicle was bought, or when a new householder came with a new vehicle and for practical reasons it is necessary and appropriate to have the same measure that applies to everyone. Therefore in 2007 we agreed the 4m distance which will remain.

**2) From Julie Gould
To the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration**

Question

If plans for the regeneration/redevelopment of Wimbledon Town Centre include pedestrianisation of The Broadway, where will the through traffic go? The Broadway/Hartfield Rd/Trinity Rd/ Kingston Rd are already gridlocked.

Reply

It is premature to discuss in detail plans for Wimbledon at they are in their infancy. The Council bid for TfL major scheme funding was only submitted in September. If funding is confirmed from TfL then officers will assess the traffic impacts of any emerging design proposals. Where possible we will look at alternative approaches and will of course consult the community thoroughly on any proposals before any decisions are made.

Supplementary

None

3) From Gay Bennet-Powell To the Cabinet Member for Education

Question

How much is the Council spending on its adult education provision for the current year 2014-2015 and how much is it looking to save after it has reviewed provision?

Reply

Due to reductions in our funding from central government, the council is facing £32m of cuts over the coming years. All areas of council services will be affected, but as in previous years the Cabinet have agreed that children's services and adult social care should take less of a share of the cuts.

The council budgeted for £2.676m to be spent on Adult Education in 2014-15 although the service is currently forecasting an overspend of £159k. The council also provides a significant subsidy in kind through the provision of premises. The amount of saving required will depend on funding reductions from the Skills Funding Agency and the ambition is to move to a model that is both financially sustainable and flexible enough to adjust to an uncertain funding environment whilst protecting learning opportunities for residents.

Supplementary

May I ask how much of the £2.676m budgeted for Adult Education in the current academic year came from the Skills Funding Agency?

Response

I believe that figure is £759,000.

4) From Tony Burton To the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration

Question

Merton Council has publicly said it lacks the resources to monitor school travel plans adequately. How will it (a) address this issue when they are relied upon in planning conditions (which have to be enforceable) and (b) will it require travel plans above bronze standard in conservation areas?

Reply

The council has a dedicated School Travel Plan officer and commits a considerable amount of time and effort working with individual schools to develop their travel plans and engaging new schools in the travel planning process. Officers also undertake a certain level of travel plan monitoring, but given the number of schools in the borough it is necessary to undertake a targeted approach.

In terms of travel plan related planning conditions, the onus is on individual schools to implement the measures in the travel plan that have been agreed as part of the process of discharging the planning condition. In situations where a school experiences difficulties fulfilling a core travel plan commitment, officers would look to work with school to address such issues.

As School Travel Plans are voluntary, apart from where they have been secured by way of a planning condition, it is not possible to require a bronze standard in conservation areas.

Supplementary

None

5) From John O'Sullivan To the Cabinet Member for Environmental Cleanliness and Parking

Question

Merton Council committed to removing the inappropriately located recycling facility behind the Vestry Hall, on Lower Green West in July 2014, it has not yet been removed. When will it be removed?

Reply

Waste services are working closely with the management of Vestry Hall in order to identify a suitable location for the recycling facility.

This is to ensure that the 40,000 people per year that pass through the hall are able to dispose of their waste appropriately.

Waste services will continue to liaise with ward councillors and ensure an engagement process is undertaken prior to redesigning/relocating the recycling facility.

Please note that work has begun in removing the current bin shed adjacent to the recycling facility.

Supplementary

None

6) From Richard Guassardo To the Cabinet Member for Community and Culture

Question

To ask Council which members are in dialogue with SCOLA, South London College and Wandsworth in regard to 'Soft Federation' options to deliver AE in Merton, and how long this group has been in contact, to make an informed decision about AE delivery by mid January 2015?

Reply

We have undertaken an initial appraisal of the six identified options for adult learning in the borough which was designed to understand which of these options were feasible. As such all contact so far has been at officer level.

7) From Nicolas O'Gorman To the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration

Question

Regarding the Gypsies on Cannon Hill Common, how did this happen and what is being done to prevent it happening again?

Reply

The incursion on the Common occurred as a result of the removal of some of the protective perimeter measures (logs) by members of the group concerned. These measures certainly slowed their access compared to previous incursions and their actions were spotted by some local residents who contacted the police and the local authority immediately but, regrettably, not soon enough to allow the incursion to be prevented.

The logs concerned have been replaced with even more substantial timber material immediately following the groups' departure.

Local ward members are organising a meeting of local residents later this month to consider and discuss this matter in more detail and we will consider the issues raised to see how we can further improve security.

8) From Richard Hilton To the Cabinet Member for Community Safety, Engagement and Equalities

Question

There are reports in the press that for 1 in 10 police incidents in Scotland the perpetrator is a foreign national. What is the figure for Merton by Constituency? Please break down the answer to include figures for assault, sexual assault, rape, burglary, theft from the vehicle and vehicle theft.

Reply

Unfortunately the police have confirmed that this information is not held or readily accessible from the Police systems. As a proud British citizen who was born in Sierra Leone, I am very concerned that Mr Hilton appears more worried about the

background of criminals than in what can be done to be tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime. There is no evidence to suggest that ethnic background causes crime.

**9) From Bob Grahame
To the Cabinet Member for Community Safety, Engagement and Equalities**

Question

What is thought to be the cause (or causes) of the recent spate of stabbings across Mitcham & Morden and what is the Council doing, or intending to do, about it?

Reply

I urge our police force to concentrate appropriate resources to tackling knife crime in those communities where it arises. However, whilst any one crime, particularly of this type, is one too many, it is worth noting that the numbers of knife incidents of this type in Merton are reducing.

Over the last 6 months the number of recorded GBH incidents where a knife was used was 14 compared to 17 in the same period in 2013. Most of these incidents have been committed by members of criminal groups against members of a differing criminal group, and a number of the people concerned are also involved in the supply of drugs.

The Police inform me that they treat this crime very seriously and have been working closely with officers from Trident Command (Gang and gun crime) to ensure a joined up and cohesive response is in place. A number of key arrests have been made and some of these investigations continue. I acknowledge it is not always easy to take forward effective prosecutions of these offences as it is not uncommon for the victims to be unwilling to help police with their enquiries. However, for the sake of the communities most affected, I urge the police to do all they can and the police inform me that operational deployments are being made to locations where these suspects tend to congregate or operate on a regular basis. Some of these deployments will be in plain clothes as well as uniformed officers.

Those suspects where there is intelligence to suggest they are actively involved in the supply of drugs will be vigorously pursued and we would encourage members of the public to come forward and provide more information to help us in this or call crime stoppers on 0800 555111

The Council is working closely in partnership with the Police wherever appropriate to support the reduction in this crime. This includes through the use of CCTV and support from Youth Services.

**10) From Dominic Moass
To the Cabinet Member for Community Safety, Engagement and Equalities**

Question

As a resident of the London Borough of Merton I am very concerned about the recent stabbings. What is the cause of the recent spate of stabbings across Mitcham & Morden and what is the Council doing about it? This is a very serious issue and demands a very serious response.

Reply

I urge our police force to concentrate appropriate resources to tackling knife crime in those communities where it arises. However, whilst any one crime, particularly of this type, is one too many, it is worth noting that the numbers of knife incidents of this type in Merton are reducing.

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11) From Carlyne Price To the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration

Question

Following unfortunate and no doubt costly incidences over recent months, can you give details of what extra measures are now being taken by the council to forestall any person who may be thinking of taking up residence within any of Merton's parks?

Reply

Given that the spaces concerned are accessible to the general public, the Council cannot completely predict or prevent entry to its parks and open spaces by illicit campers and vagrants.

Our approach is one of vigilance together with boundary security where practicable and upon encountering or being notified of any such incidences we routinely notify and involve the relevant welfare and other agencies, including the police, immigration officers and the Safer Merton team, as appropriate, and support such organisations to expedite the removal and/or repatriation of any campers as soon as practically possible.

A common approach is that the Greenspaces team places notices on any unoccupied tents advising that camping is not permitted and ultimately the team has and does remove and dispose of any tents and other paraphernalia associated with any illicit encampments unless the relevant agencies advise otherwise.

**12) From Lorraine Maries
To the Cabinet Member for Finance**

Question

I have made a complaint regarding a Cabinet member but the Legal Department says the matter "does not require investigation". They have misunderstood my complaint - presumably Cabinet members do not have immunity - so how do I get this complaint investigated?

Reply

The Council takes very seriously the complaints it periodically receives concerning the conduct of councillors. All complaints are raised with the councillor concerned and the complainant is contacted for further relevant details. The complaint is considered by an Independent Person appointed in accordance with the regulations and the Council's Monitoring Officer who jointly determine if the complaint merits formal investigation. If investigated the complaint is heard before the Council's Standards Committee.

I am not party to these decisions but on this occasion the complaint clearly did not merit investigation.

**13) From Miss Nicola Reade-Lyons
To the Cabinet Member for Finance**

Question

What does the children's services department have in place to ensure private and confidential information is handled and stored correctly? This is my question for the council meeting.

Reply

Merton Council takes very seriously the correct handling and storage of confidential information, particularly personal data and has a number of policies related to how

information is handled and stored correctly, that staff must comply with – the Data Protection Policy, Retention and Disposal Policy and Information Security Policy.

The security controls on the council's IT network meet central governments strict requirements.

All Merton staff are required to complete, and achieve a pass, on the Data Protection and Information Security on-line training. They are also required to repeat the training every eighteen months. All professional social workers receive training in confidentiality and Data Protection as part of their professional qualification. Regular training is provided to Children's Services staff on how to share information securely and information security is included in induction sessions for all new staff.

Comprehensive guidance on information security is available to all staff on the council's intranet and teams who regularly handle personal data discuss issues at their team meetings. Weekly staff bulletins include reminders about information security.

All case files held by Children's Services are held on an IT system where the access is strictly controlled and restricted to only those officers who have a legitimate need to access those files.

All portable devices (including laptops and also mobile storage devices such as memory sticks) used by social workers, when working in clients home or at home, are encrypted, so if they were lost or stolen the data on them would not be at risk. When transporting paper documents social workers use sealed document wallets.

Children's Services operate a clear desk policy and all paper documents are never left unattended on desks and are securely stored in locked filing cabinets at the end of each day.

If there is an information security incident, it is fully investigated and every effort made to contain the incident. Where an incident meets a certain threshold, it is self reported to the Information Commissioners Office, who are the UK's independent authority set up to uphold information rights in the public interest. This also applies to potential information security breaches, which are also fully investigated and where appropriate, self reported to the Information Commissioners Office. The council also ensure that they identify how the incident happened so that measures can be put in place to prevent a similar incident from happening in the future.

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Councillor Priority Ordinary Questions to Cabinet Members

1. Cllr Tobin Byers to the Cabinet Member for Community and Culture

Can the Cabinet Member update me on progress towards delivering the new Morden Leisure Centre?

Reply

I am pleased to be able to report that Cabinet recently agreed the project scope and the preferred site for the new Morden Leisure Centre. It will be located close to the access road to Morden Park Car Park on the frontage with the main arterial A24, London Road; the site known as MLC3

Cabinet also agreed that the range and mix of facilities to be included with the new centre would be prioritised in line with the recent public consultation findings so far as the budget set aside will allow.

Already various surveys have been commissioned regarding the ecological, landscape and ground conditions of the site and so local people will see those investigations taking place in the coming weeks.

Cabinet also accepted that in the delivery of this new leisure centre the existing Morden Park Pools would be demolished after the new one is open and the site would be reinstated to for of the heritage landscape.

Although they have not requested pre-decision scrutiny of this matter since it commenced last year, I am delighted that the Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Panel have advised that they would wish to play a role in this project as it evolves and as such will receive regular updates on progress being made at their meetings.

Supplementary

Can the cabinet member assure me that it is his firm intention that the pool will remain open while the new one is built?

Reply

Yes indeed I can confirm that. When we were first planning this, I was insistent we should keep the current leisure centre open for as long as we possibly could, while the new one is being built. This wasn't just for sound business reasons but because we wanted the people who use the leisure centre currently should be able to continue to do so, in particular the children who swim there need to do so without interruption. It looks like this is what we will be able to do.

2. From Councillor Michael Bull to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration:

Does the Cabinet Member believe that green spaces should be protected?

Reply

National, London and Merton Planning policies offer strong protection for our parks and open spaces and we operate within these guidelines at all times.

Merton enjoys a large number and a diverse range of different types of open space from sports grounds and play parks to gardens of horticultural excellence, urban nature reserves and large wilderness areas such as Wimbledon and Mitcham Commons.

Nonetheless, there will be times when we will make careful changes to open spaces to benefit the community as a whole, for example we have taken advantage of the need to expand Dundonald Primary School to ensure that we obtain the best new investment in the Recreation Ground for a generation, with new changing rooms, a new community room, an expanded play area, an additional tennis court at the same time as increasing the amount of real open space, readily accessible by the general public. We have achieved this partly by replacing the footprint of old buildings with more appropriate new facilities with benefits for both children and their parents and park users. Similarly, in Morden Park we intend to move the new leisure centre to an area that is currently green space but we will again retain the open space footprint by returning the old site to landscaped green space.

Supplementary

Cllr Judge promised residents of Dundonald back in 2010 that he would replace the covenant on Dundonald Rec that was modified by the council. Will he now honour that promise and put the recreation ground land back into trust for the residents?

Reply

I am very pleased with the scheme we have put forward for Dundonald Recreation Ground, which continues to have all the protection of our excellent planning policy, and it also has the protection of a restrictive covenant. In respect of trusts generally, for parks, we have been open to the idea of trusts. These have to be transparent, in the public interest and financially sustainable. When I have consulted with friends' groups in the past it has become apparent that it is very difficult to achieve those objectives in relation to an individual park or open space. In the future, we will be open as an administration to the possibility of a trust for all our parks and open spaces, but those conditions have to be satisfied.

3. Cllr Russell Makin to the Leader of the Council

Can the Leader outline how Merton will be supporting Small Business Saturday?

Reply

Merton Council strongly support the Small Business Saturday initiative. It is one of Merton's strategies for promoting and supporting the borough small businesses. Merton Council's support for small businesses recently led to the borough being named the 2014 Best All Round Small Business Friendly Borough by the Federation of Small Business and London Councils.

Winning the prize for Best All-Round Small Business Friendly Borough, Merton was recognised for successfully implementing a wide range of initiatives to support and develop the local small business community. By working with partners including Merton Chamber of Commerce, the council has invested over £2 million in high-quality support programmes including the Merton Business Support Service (MBSS), Merton Business Loan Funds and Wimbletech as well as developing industrial estates and creating the Merton Business Directory.

In 2014 the council will continue to support Small Businesses Saturday by talking directly to businesses across the borough and encouraging them to promote and engage with the event. For example, the Mitcham Business Taskforce will be supplying its businesses members with promotional material to display across the town centre. Businesses can also access material independently at <https://smallbusinessaturdayuk.com/>

I will be visiting small businesses in all five of the borough's town centres as I did for the inaugural Small Business Saturday last year, when I went out to "Serve the People". I am a passionate supporter of small businesses and the value they bring to local economies, and this is one way in which I want to show my support and get involved in the work they do. As well as the Leader visiting small businesses, the council publicises small businesses in the run up to the event, encouraging people to shop locally.

Supplementary

As part of his commitment to business, can I congratulate him on our FSB business award, can I congratulate him again on free parking at Christmas, and how does he see this helping local businesses?

Reply

We are delighted to be in a position to support 'Small Business Saturday'. I shall be doing a tour of small businesses, throughout all our town centres on Saturday 6 December. On 5 December we shall be having the Morden Light Up event. I can confirm that free parking for Christmas will be available on 29 and 30 November, 6, 7, 13, 14, 20, 21, 24 and 25 December and this will be a great boost to small businesses here in Merton.

4. From Councillor Suzanne Grocott to the Cabinet Member for Finance:

Does the council have a good relationship with Agilisys?

Reply

The Council does not have a direct relationship with Agilisys as the only services provided are through the shared HR Service which is led by the London Borough of Sutton. However, it is felt that that relationship with Agilisys Payroll Services is positive and responsive. The Team in Rochdale, Greater Manchester is knowledgeable, professional and customer-focused. A robust and constructive client/contractor relationship is tightly managed, by both parties, with the best interests of the four partner boroughs involved in the joint payroll service being the common prime objective.

Supplementary

If they are so responsive, how come after three years they still can't give me a figure for the vacant positions in the council and how many of these are not filled by agency staff. I asked a question at the last council meeting, can the cabinet member provide me with a) a full list of currently vacant positions in the council and b) the current actual employee full time equivalent and head count figures broken down for teaching staff, i.e. teachers/assistants/managers and separately broken down for permanent staff, temporary staff and agency staff, for which I got no response whatever?

Reply

Sharing services like HR with other boroughs and agencies has enabled us to make savings without having to take money out of front line services. This does mean that we have to make compromises in back office services and it does mean that not all the information is always available to us. I have to warn her that while we constantly strive to make improvements if she wants the 'bells and whistles' service she will have to pay for it. We face enormous cuts from government, we have a budget gap of £32m and one of the reasons they lost the election was that no one felt they had a grasp of the money. You can't promise tax cuts of 10% and increases on spending on services – people just don't buy it. So when she is spending more on back office functions to get the information she wants, she has to bear that in mind. She's not fit to run the council.

5. Cllr Sally Kenny to the Cabinet Member for Education

Can the Cabinet Member update me on plans for adult education services in the borough?

Reply

Due to cuts in our funding from central government, the council is facing £32m of cuts over the coming years. This will mean all areas of council services will need to be looked at to see if we can provide services in a more efficient way. We will have to make some very difficult decisions but Cabinet have agreed, as in previous years, that children's services and adult social care should take a lower share of the cuts.

As part of this difficulty process of finding savings, we are looking at how we provide adult education services in the borough. Despite the difficult financial situation, the Cabinet has ruled out ceasing to offer adult education series in the borough. However we do need to make savings or other vital council services will be affected.

Following Cabinet discussion on the 10th November we have launched a consultation with residents as to how we can continue to run the service in a way that offers value for money for tax payers. Five options will be consulted on. Cabinet has ruled out the sixth option, to cease offering adult learning in the borough, and this option will therefore not be consulted on. After considering the evidence, the Cabinet identified a commissioning model as their preferred option. This option, if chosen, would see the council agreeing a contract with other education providers to offer adult learning services in the borough on the council's behalf.

This is recommended because the model would move financial risk away from the council, make the best use of the local providers in Merton and maximise the benefits to the service users by reducing the amount spent on non-teaching activities. This option is also the most likely to provide long term cost certainty and stability to adult education provision in Merton.

Whilst Cabinet has expressed this preference, we are consulting on all the options presented within the Cabinet report except for the one which completely ends the council's involvement in adult education. We are asking residents and other interested stakeholders to consider, and comment on, the five remaining options. The consultation is not a referendum but is an opportunity for evidence to be provided in support of the various options.

The consultation will be live until the 4th January, including a survey and public meetings. No decision will be made until the consultation has concluded and we have considered the strength of the evidence provided by the respondents. A report summarising the consultation results will come to Cabinet in January.

Supplementary

I very much appreciate the difficulties the council is facing and congratulate Cllr Whelton on seeking a way forward that would allow us to continue to offer adult education in the borough. Can he clarify how he intends to ensure any new way of working that focusses on bring the educational attainment and the employment gap between the more and less affluent areas of the borough?

Reply

I assure council that we will continue to offer adult education in this borough. In terms of bridging the gap, we find that extremely important. Currently 80% of the courses take place in the west of the borough. If we take our ESOL 70% of our users are in the more affluent west. This gap has to be addressed. Focussing on employability, focussing on basic skills, and focussing on the needs of the most deprived people in this borough, should be the focus of Merton Adult Education going forward and this is something I believe will happen and should happen.

6. From Councillor Charlie Chirico to the Cabinet Member for Education:

What alternative funding options and income generation strategies is Merton Council considering in order to avoid the closure of the Merton Adult Education centre and protect services for five and a half thousand people across the borough?

Reply

Due to cuts in our funding from central government, the council is facing £32m of cuts over the coming years. This will mean all areas of council services will need to be looked at to see if we can provide services in a more efficient way. We will have to make some very difficult decisions but Cabinet have agrees, as in previous years, that children's services and adult social care should take a lower share of the cuts.

As part of this difficulty process of finding savings, we are looking at how we provide adult education services in the borough. Despite the difficult financial situation, the Cabinet has ruled out ceasing to offer adult education series in the borough. However we do need to make savings or other vital council services will be affected.

Due to the volatile funding environment adult education operates in, income generation has been a key part of MAE's efforts to protect teaching even as funding has reduced. Over the past few years MAE have:

Adopted a fee policy aimed at maximising fees from courses within the creative areas generating over £250,000 in income each year.

A new strategy to increase room lettings has resulted in generating increased revenue from events and room bookings

We have held Art and Craft fairs that have generated additional income

Won contracts from the Job Centre Plus to help long-term unemployed people get back into work

Developed a commercial course strategy that has resulted in our securing accreditation from Cambridge and ABE to run specialist courses a new marketing strategy is under development.

Commenced discussions with Kingston University regarding delivering a foundation degree as part of a franchise arrangement with the university which would result in increased income.

However, none of these innovations has protected the service from the funding reductions and the service is still financially vulnerable.

As such we are currently looking at alternative models for adult education and how these could enable us to protect the services we provide to learners. We are currently consulting on five options for the future of Adult Education in Merton.

Each of these options is designed to ensure that we can protect services for Merton's adult learners without impacting negatively on the budget of other council services. Cabinet has explicitly ruled out any option that would involve ceasing to offer adult education in the borough.

The Cabinet, after considering the evidence, has identified a commissioning model as their preferred option at this point. However no decision will be made until the consultation has concluded and deliverable alternatives to the five options proposed will be considered. The consultation will be live until the 4th January, including online and paper forms and public meetings. No decision will be made until the consultation has concluded and we have considered the strength of the evidence provided by the respondents. A report summarising the consultation results will come to Cabinet in January.

7. Cllr Pauline Cowper to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Cleanliness and Parking

Can the Cabinet Member update me on plans to save £1m by seeking a combined waste and greenspaces contract through the South London Waste Partnership?

Reply

THIS QUESTION WILL BE ANSWERED BY THE CABINET MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY AND REGENERATION

Due to cuts to our funding from central government, the council is facing having to make £32m of savings over the next few years. We will need to look at all of our services to see if there are ways of doing them more efficiently or in a different way if we are to protect the most vital services that people rely on and keep council tax affordable for our residents.

Due to the level of the cuts required, every area of the council's services will be affected but as in previous years Cabinet have agreed that children's services and adult social care should take less of a share of the cuts.

We currently spend about £9m each year on waste collection, street cleaning and greenspaces. In the context of the cuts required we need to look at how we

deliver these services in a more value for money way, whilst protecting the things that matter to residents such as a weekly waste collection, the weekly street sweep and keeping all our parks open and well cared for. By working with our three neighbouring boroughs we have identified that we could save around £1m a year by jointly contracting a provider to deliver these services on our behalf. The new provider would be able to offer greater efficiency and economies of scale, working across two, three or four boroughs, that we cannot deliver on our own.

However, Merton will retain the management of our parks and of our waste services, specifying the level of service we expect but with day to day work being carried out by the provider.

Staff have been fully informed and full consultation will take place. Affected staff would be transferred to a new provider, maintaining their current employment rights under TUPE.

The four boroughs are each going through their own decision making processes at the moment and it is envisaged that this process will be completed by mid-January. Subject to approval across all four boroughs an OJEU Notice for the procurement will be published in late January to early February 2015.

Supplementary

Can you reassure me that residents will continue to have a weekly refuse collection and the weekly street sweep and that we will continue to work closely with our friends' groups including Friends of Canon Hill Common and other friends' groups?

Reply

Yes, we will definitely continue with the weekly street sweep and refuse collection. In terms of the friends' groups we will retain, as the council, the responsibility for every park and open space. We anticipate friends' groups continuing to operate in the future through any tender of the contract as they do today and that we as the council should continue to respond to the friends' groups exactly in the future as we do today. The only potential difference is that the staff employed to maintain the parks and open spaces may end up being employed by a private company rather than directly by the council.

8. From Councillor David Dean to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Cleanliness and Parking:

Is the administration planning any changes to the street cleaning service in Merton?

Reply

Due to cuts to our funding from central government, the council is facing having to make £32m of savings over the next few years. We will need to look at all of our services to see if there are ways of doing them more efficiently or in a

different way if we are to protect the most vital services that people rely on and keep council tax affordable for our residents.

Due to the level of the cuts required, every area of the council's services will be affected but as in previous years Cabinet have agreed that children's services and adult social care should take less of a share of the cuts.

We currently spend about £9m each year on waste collection, street cleaning and greenspaces. In the context of the cuts required we need to look at how we deliver these services in a more value for money way, whilst protecting the things that matter to residents such as a weekly waste collection, the weekly street sweep and keeping all our parks open and well cared for. By working with our three neighbouring boroughs we have identified that we could save £1m a year by jointly contracting a provider to deliver these services on our behalf. The new provider would be able to offer greater efficiency and economies of scale, working across two, three or four boroughs, that we cannot deliver on our own.

However, Merton will retain the management of our parks and of our waste services, specifying the level of service we expect but with day to day work being carried out by the provider.

Staff have been fully informed and full consultation will take place. Affected staff would be transferred to a new provider, maintaining their current employment rights under TUPE.

The four boroughs are each going through their own decision making processes at the moment and it is envisaged that this process will be completed by mid-January. Subject to approval across all four boroughs an OJEU Notice for the procurement will be published in late January to early February 2015.

In the short term we will continue to expand the use of technology to improve this service. Shortly, a number of 'Glutton' machines will be used borough wide to improve cleanliness and we will be rolling out a bespoke version of the Love Clean Streets 'app' to improve customer contact and speed up the responsiveness of the service.

Supplementary

Can the cabinet member confirm the cuts are more to do with Labour's bizarre obsession with the introduction of wheelie bins. Can she confirm that the cuts in parks maintenance is so that you can introduce these huge bins that nobody wants into this borough?

Reply

Whether we want wheelie bins or not is something to discuss in the future. We are making cuts because the government we have at the moment is enforcing these cuts. We have got to find these savings across our services and you know as well as I do that's not easy, and I don't like that you're calling our streets dirty, and I won't have you standing up in this chamber condemning our staff.

9.

Cllr Marsie Skeete to the

Cabinet Member for Education

Can I ask how the council has celebrated the achievements of our young people in this year's GCSE exams.

Reply

I attended the celebrating success event at the Chaucer Centre in early September when high achieving Young People from all of our schools were congratulated on their achievements and photographed with the Mayor, Cabinet Members and Officers. On November 13th there was an evening of celebration at Perseid School where nominated students from all our schools received certificates and a gift voucher. There were guest speakers and entertainment provided by musicians from Merton Schools.

Supplementary

How did the council celebrate the achievements of young people in this year's GCSE exams, and will the councillor join me in congratulating our young people, parents, teachers, governors and school support staff, in being the only borough in London, and only one of six in the country to have again improved the GCSE results.

Reply

I attended a celebration of success earlier this week and it is great to celebrate all the success in the borough. We have had improved GCSE results over the past five years, are above the national average and the only borough in London to have improved the GCSE results this year. I would like to congratulate all our young people on their magnificent achievement in (lists all secondary schools), in allowing us to have this success. As an administration we are committed to raising standards in this borough and improving our GCSE results. This is a great achievement and hopefully it will improve again this academic year.

Councillor Priority Strategic Theme Questions to Cabinet Members

1. Cllr Russell Makin to the Leader of the Council

Can the Leader estimate how many people attended Remembrance Day ceremonies in the borough?

Reply

Across the five Remembrance Day Civic ceremonies held across the borough, there were over 4500 people in attendance.

Supplementary

Will the Leader to commit to continue to have Remembrance Day ceremonies in the borough?

Reply

Yes I can commit today to this council to continue with Remembrance Services, as we did this year, on Sunday 9 November in Mitcham. The Rev Nigel Stone, vicar of St Mark's, Mitcham, co-ordinated that one. I want to thank Wimbledon and Wandle District and the First Wallington Scout Band and the choir from St Mark's Church. We will also continue with our service at Wimbledon and there the Revd. Mary Bide officiated and I want to thank the Merton Concert Band. We will continue to have the service; next year we'll be back to the Nelson and on the day itself we'll be at the Civic Centre and in Mitcham. I want to thank the Mayor's Office, Carol and Carl, for their diligence, and the attendance of the Mayor and Deputy Mayor.

2. From Councillor David Williams to the Cabinet Member for Community Safety, Engagement and Equalities:

Does the Cabinet Member agree with me that wherever possible the diversity of the Council's staff should be reflective of the population it serves in Merton? Please provide a table of information, using appropriate banding, to illustrate the ethnic and gender mix of the Council's staff and its age profile.

Reply

TO BE ANSWERED BY THE CABINET MEMBER FOR FINANCE

The Council seeks to employ a workforce that is representative of the community it serves and uses regular workforce data to monitor the profile of the workforce and take positive action where lawful and possible.

In terms of the profile of the non-schools workforce for October 2014 is as follows:

25% of the workforce self-identifies as being from black minority ethnic background (6% Asian, 16% Black British, African and Caribbean, and 3% mixed

race and other). According to the census, it is estimated that there is 65% White and 35% BME (Asian 18%), Black British, African and Caribbean (11%) and 6% other in the community.

4.9% of the workforce self-identifies as being disabled. According to the statistics, 13% of the community identifies as disabled. However, this figure includes people who are not of working age, for instance people who are disabled as a result of being elderly, and includes people who are disabled and registered as unfit for work.

The gender profile of the workforce is 40% male 60% female (compared to the community 49% male and 51% female)

Age bands are shown below:

	Age Band			
	16-24	25-44	45-64	65+
Workforce	3.62%	35.55%	57.50%	3.33%
Borough	12.88%	45.72%	27.02%	14.38%

Notes:

The information provided for this question is based on the workforce data that the Council has and this is based on starters' information as well as staff declaration via iTrent. The census data is based on ONS who had a response from 94% of the households in the borough but then used the data and other techniques to create an estimate for the whole borough. The figures they provide are an estimate for all households in March 2011.

The ethnic origin question used by the Council is based on the same format as that used for the community census information and both follow EHRC guidelines. The BME representation percentage for the Council workforce is 25% and for the whole community 35% so is broadly comparable.

In terms of the representation of disabled people this is assembled in the same ways as set out in 1 for the Council's workforce above and uses the definition from the Equality Act 2010 (previously the Disability Discrimination Act). The published census does not distinguish whether residents are economically active or their age group. The census question is in relation to health, not disability which is addressed to the whole community and slightly different from the DWP definition of who is fit for work and the Equalities Act 2010.

Supplementary

The Cabinet Member's reply on page 20, the paragraph beneath the table says that the information "*is based on starters' information as well as staff declaration via iTrent*". It is the case, is it not, that all personal data was lost when the HR system migrated to iTrent and is only drawn from those staff who have declared their ethnicity and so on. So what steps is he taking to get a greater level of confidence in these figures?

Reply

I can assure him that I have every confidence that our staff are recruited fairly from across our community to reflect our community. If he has a problem or believes that we have not recruited fairly or appropriately, considering our community, then I think that he is wrong.

3. Cllr Jeff Hanna to the Cabinet Member for Community Safety, Engagement and Equalities

What proportion of recorded crime takes place in each of Merton's three sectors?

Reply

The proportion of Total Notifiable Crime reported in the three Neighbourhood areas in the 12 months from November 2013 to October 2014 is as follows [% of Total Notifiable Offences]

Morden - 28%
Mitcham - 41%
Wimbledon - 31%

Supplementary

Given the Metropolitan Police Commissioner's confirmation at the public meeting in this chamber last week that individual borough commanders are free to deploy police between sectors as they see fit, will the Cabinet Member join me in calling on Chief Superintendent McLeod to increase the provision in Mitcham sector in line with the need for additional policing in that sector, as demonstrated by these statistics, and properly tackle the issues such as street drinking, drug dealing and violent crime that so concern the vast majority of law-abiding residents in the Mitcham area.

Reply

I would like to thank you for the support on the issue of policing. I agree with the comments you have made. I support the action of getting the borough

commander to increase the police presence in the Mitcham area, and I hope that this will be taken into account when we look at the issue of policing across the borough as a whole.

4. From Councillor Hamish Badenoch to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration:

Does the Cabinet Member believe it is important that there is proper enforcement action taken against anyone using a mobile phone whilst driving in order to ensure Merton's streets are safe for pedestrians, motorists and cyclists?

Reply

The council does not have any powers to enforce the law around driving whilst on a mobile phone as this is a matter for the police. I agree it is important that the police properly investigate and enforce where contraventions have taken place.

Supplementary

Does the Cabinet Member agree with self-declared prospective Labour Party council candidate Michael Baltrop, that 20 mph zones should be rolled out on a blanket basis across the borough, and can he confirm what progress has been made on the review of 20 mph zones since the last council meeting, and when it will be published.

Reply

I always think it's unattractive to make political capital out of a case affecting a political opponent, whatever the merits. In respect of the 20 mph review, that has been published in the scrutiny papers and I attended discussion in the Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Panel of the 20 mph approach. There was general approval in the committee of our current approach in Merton which is to seek 20 mph zones where practical and appropriate, and where we're seeking to reduce speeds in residential areas, but to express scepticism that 20 mph limits, which use just signs without enforcement, are worth taking forward, because they can bring the speeding laws into disrepute. I would personally be in favour of us lobbying government to enable local authorities to enforce 20 mph speed limits as a civil rather than criminal matter. Only by being able to enforce properly with fixed penalty notices, can we hope to reduce speeds by 20 mph in the absence of vertical measures such as speed humps, tables and cushions.

5. Cllr Tobin Byers to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Cleanliness and Parking

Can the cabinet member update me on what measures she is taking to improve safety on our roads?

Reply

The Council's priority in this area continues to be reducing the number of road traffic casualties on our roads, in particular vulnerable road users such as pedestrians, cyclists and motorcyclists. Residents are also concerned at excessive and inappropriate speed in their roads. We have recently completed a review of the effectiveness of all our 20mph zones and limits in the borough and gathered intelligence on the effectiveness of borough wide 20mph zones/limits in London and nationally. These findings were reported to Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Panel on 11th November 2014 and will inform future decision on speed management policy.

We are continuing our work in introducing Home Zones Lite (the type of measures recently introduced along the A288 corridor, Kingston Road and Merton High Street) consisting of junction entry treatment, street trees, and planters to highlight to drivers that they are entering a residential area and should therefore adjust their driving behaviour, and we will monitor the effectiveness of these schemes.

In recognition of public concern, we will implement traffic enforcement measures in order to improve pedestrian and highway safety. This includes the use of automatic number plate recognition technology to enforce moving traffic offences that increase congestion and contribute to road accidents.

In addition to our own Capital the Council also receives funding from Transport for London through the annual LIP Process to introduce a range of road safety schemes, including Traffic Calming Schemes with physical measures, aimed at reducing the number and severity of collisions on our road network.

Merton continues to employ a comprehensive road safety education programme to encourage safe and sustainable travel behaviour, with a particular focus on children, cyclists, motorcyclists and pedestrians. Given the recent pattern of increasing casualty rates across London, the programmes are being tailored to target the most vulnerable groups. Key projects include cycle training in all schools in the borough, 'Be a Brighter Bike' motorcycle safety training and a number of discrete projects to address issues associated with HGV / cycle conflict.

Supplementary

Can I congratulate the Cabinet Member on the initiatives that she is taking. In light of it being National Road Safety Week, can she elaborate on some of the steps she is taking to ensure motorists comply with the rules of the road.

Reply

This is one of the top priorities for our residents and later on the agenda you'll see there are proposals for Automatic Number Plate Recognition which will bring new technology into the area, and improve road safety. I want to emphasise that

it's not all about enforcement, but it is our residents' top priority and our top priority to ease traffic congestion and to increase road safety.

6. From Councillor David Simpson to the Cabinet Member for Community Safety, Engagement and Equalities:

As of last month, the council has gained wide ranging new powers to tackle anti-social behaviour. How is Merton planning to use these and what consultation will there be with residents?

Reply

The Anti- Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act has made a number of changes to the powers available to the Police and the Council affecting the way we deal with ASB. Most of the powers come into effect from October 2014 although powers in relation to Civil Injunction are delayed until March 2015.

We are implementing these powers consistent with guidance and a London wide approach where appropriate, including for example with regard to the 'Community Trigger' adopting the same threshold and test as recommended by MOPAC following research in Richmond. We will follow the statutory Guidance for the use of these powers and consult residents where required in the use of them.

Supplementary

Can she explain why the Labour Administration was caught on the hop by this legislation which was trailed for months and months and months beforehand and the Council paid for a consultation on measures to tackle multiple dog walking in 2012, only for Labour to sit on the report for two years, by which time the legislation was out of date. So will she now apologise to council tax payers who are paying for this shambles and to all residents who are still waiting for some action to make their local parks safer and cleaner places?

Reply (from the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration)

We were given little or no notice that the government was about to move the goalposts. We were about to introduce the particular dog control orders that are sought, and on the very day of the Cabinet meeting, we were surprised to find that the government, without notice, changed the legislation. I think it behoves the government to have a little more care for consistency in its approach. We will seek to work with the new regulations to introduce dog control orders as a priority.

7. Cllr Joan Henry to the Cabinet Member for Community Safety, Engagement and Equalities

Does she share my deep concern about the recent spate of stabbings in Pollards Hill?

Reply

Yes I do, and I urge our police force to concentrate appropriate resources to tackling knife crime in those communities where it arises. However, whilst any one crime, particularly of this type, is one too many, it is worth noting that the numbers of knife incidents of this type in Merton are reducing.

Over the last 6 months the number of recorded GBH incidents where a knife was used was 14 compared to 17 in the same period in 2013. Most of these incidents have been committed by members of criminal groups against members of a differing criminal group, and a number of the people concerned are also involved in the supply of drugs.

The Police inform me that they treat this crime very seriously and have been working closely with officers from Trident Command (Gang and gun crime) to ensure a joined up and cohesive response is in place. A number of key arrests have been made and some of these investigations continue. I acknowledge it is not always easy to take forward effective prosecutions of these offences as it is not uncommon for the victims to be unwilling to help police with their enquiries. However, for the sake of the communities most affected, I urge the police to do all they can and the police inform me that operational deployments are being made to locations where these suspects tend to congregate or operate on a regular basis. Some of these deployments will be in plain clothes as well as uniformed officers.

Those suspects where there is intelligence to suggest they are actively involved in the supply of drugs will be vigorously pursued and we would encourage members of the public to come forward and provide more information to help us in this or call crime stoppers on 0800 555111.

The Council is working closely in partnership with the Police wherever appropriate to support the reduction in this crime. This includes through the use of CCTV and support from Youth Services.

Supplementary

Will the Cabinet Member join me in condemning Boris' cut to neighbourhood policing, with Pollards Hill reduced to one PC and one shared sergeant, and in calling for more police in the area.

Reply

I share the sentiments expressed by my colleague and I support more policing in the Pollards Hill area.

8. From Councillor Oonagh Moulton to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration:

Now that the long awaited pilot has finished and the service has reverted to operating on Saturday nights only, when will the administration finally make a

decision on the permanent expansion of Merton's out of hours noise-nuisance enforcement service?

Reply

THIS QUESTION WILL BE ANSWERED BY THE CABINET MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENTAL CLEANLINESS AND PARKING

The pilot ran from January to May this year providing an additional out of hours noise service between 11pm each Friday evening through to 4am the following Saturday morning. From June onwards the out of hours service was provided as usual on Friday and Saturday evenings until the end of September when it reverted to the previous standard Saturday night service 11pm – 4am. Officers are currently in the process of finalising the analysis of evidence gathered in respect of service demand during the period January to September and this will form the basis of a report to Cabinet detailing the findings in the near future. Key to any consideration of whether to invest additional resources into this extra service will be whether it offers value for money for council tax payers, particularly in the context of the £32m cuts to the council's services we are facing due to reductions in our funding from central government.

Supplementary

In the light of the recent late night noisy parties held in my ward and with the forthcoming festive season, would the Cabinet Member join me in supporting a permanent out of hours Friday night service, all year round to help protect residents whose lives can be plagued by late night noise nuisance.

Reply

If we had the money, I'd love to do that, but I don't. I have discussed this service with officers and I know that the call for this service is higher on Saturday evenings than Friday evenings. It was a pilot to do it on a Friday evening. We have to analyse it to see if it's cost effective. I understand that there are activities other nights of the week and we have to liaise with police on that matter. So, yes, I would love to do it but we haven't got the money, but we are continually looking at the service.

9. Cllr Katy Neep to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration

I recall that we offered the Met Police a free lease of Pincott Road at the start of the year on the condition that they re-open the police office. Can he update me as to whether they have accepted our offer?

Reply

We contacted the Metropolitan Police Service earlier in the year to offer them the use of the building for a police base. However they have confirmed they do not intend to reopen a police office in Pincott Road.

Supplementary

Does the Cabinet Member agree that this is extremely disappointing news for the residents of South Wimbledon who supported our campaign? We continue to hear complaints that they no longer see bobbies on the beat. Wouldn't you agree that the Metropolitan Police should reconsider our exceptionally generous offer.

Reply

I do agree that this is a very disappointing response. The closure of this and other police bases reflects the abolition of neighbourhood policing under the current Mayor of London. Neighbourhood policing was a significant achievement of the last Labour Government, of this council and of Siobhain McDonagh, who lobbied for it directly, and of Ken Livingstone when he was Mayor. What we see now is the absolute disintegration of neighbourhood policing across London. I do think the police should review their approach locally, and in particular, support the re-opening of the Pincott Road base.

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