

Merton Council

Council

19 November 2014

29	Non Priority Councillor Questions to Cabinet Members and the Responses	1 - 10
30	Further Non Priority Councillor Questions to Cabinet Members and the Responses	11 - 14

This page is intentionally left blank

NON- PRIORITY QUESTIONS

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

Have Merton council or its partners applied to the Mayor's Care and Support Specialist Housing Fund designed to help older and disabled residents to move to well-designed, accessible homes with an appropriate level of care to ensure life is as independent as possible? If not, why not?

Reply

The Care and Support Specialised Housing Fund, which is managed by the GLA, is split into two phases, one is for affordable housing and one for private market housing.

The programme aims to support and enable independent living and therefore schemes aimed at assisting people who require a high level of care and support or who cannot live independently are not eligible.

The funding does not meet 100% of a total schemes costs and the GLA would expect providers to contribute towards the total scheme costs with a mixture of their own resources, which for a stock owning housing providers could include borrowing from the rental stream and other forms of subsidy including free land.

As a non stock owning housing authority the council cannot bid directly to the GLA for funding for new affordable homes and instead works with registered providers to develop new homes. During this bidding round our developing partners have chosen not to make a bid on the grounds that currently developing supported specialised housing does not meet their current business plans priorities. That said the council is working with Ability housing association to progress the Mansell project for Adults with Learning Difficulties. Funding for this was secured through the GLA on 2015/18 national housing programme.

2. From Councillor Gilli Lewis-Lavender to the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health

I have recently visited the Dementia Hub in Mitcham. This is a service that is much needed in Merton.

a) What steps are being taken to offer the services to residents across the whole of Merton?

b) I am also aware of an organisation called Home Instead which has recently opened a Dementia Café run on a voluntary basis. This is a much need facility to cater for the large number of our residents in Merton who are desperate for support (figures suggest that 1 in 4 residents over the age of 85 will develop dementia and 1 in 14 over the age of 65). Will the Council

recognise its responsibility to these people and consider offering financial and other support to the organisers of the café?

Reply

- a) The Dementia Hub and its associated services are open to all residents of Merton. We have recently invited Members on guided tours and plan to offer further tours in the near future. In addition, next year we will be actively encouraging residents to visit the Dementia Hub and become Dementia Friends.
- b) The council already offers support for people with dementia and their carers, through its contract with organisations such as the Alzheimer's Society and Carers Support Merton, and this includes dementia cafés. The council welcomes Home Instead as a member of its Dementia Action Alliance, and their initiative in establishing additional channels of support, but being a member of the Alliance does not necessarily lead to council funding, particularly in the light of reduced council resources due to government cuts to our funding.

3. From Councillor Daniel Holden to the Cabinet Member for Finance:

Will the council follow George Osborne's lead by issuing a detailed breakdown to residents of how their council tax is spent, thus showing that the council is more transparent in how it spends taxpayers' own money?

Reply

The council has for many years published details of its spending. At a summary level the Council Tax leaflet (distributed both as paper and electronically) outlines this.

[http://www.merton.gov.uk/guide to council taxweb revised.pdf](http://www.merton.gov.uk/guide%20to%20council%20taxweb%20revised.pdf)

At a more detailed level the council also publishes its budget book/business plan every year: [http://www.merton.gov.uk/9a. business plan complete - internet version v2 - after narrative changes to i t plan v2.pdf](http://www.merton.gov.uk/9a.%20business%20plan%20complete%20-%20internet%20version%20v2%20-%20after%20narrative%20changes%20to%20i%20t%20plan%20v2.pdf)

At the end of the financial year the council publishes audited accounts that explain spending in considerable detail. In addition, a summarised version of these is produced.

[http://www.merton.gov.uk/statement of accounts 2013-15.pdf](http://www.merton.gov.uk/statement%20of%20accounts%202013-15.pdf)

[http://www.merton.gov.uk/merton summary accounts 2013-15.pdf](http://www.merton.gov.uk/merton%20summary%20accounts%202013-15.pdf)

I believe these are considerably more helpful than the superficial, politicised document I received from Mr Osborne.

4. From Councillor David Williams to the Leader of the Council:

Would the Leader please list the meetings and correspondence he has had since the last meeting of the Council on 10th September 2014 to save St Helier Hospital?

Reply

I thank the Member for regularly allowing me the opportunity to update him on the work I continue to do in order to safeguard the future of our local hospital.

Since 10 September I have written a number of letters to Assembly Members, local MPs and TfL regarding the TramLink extension proposal in support of Merton's preferred route which would include a stop at St Helier hospital, thus ensuring commitment to the hospital's future.

I also chaired a meeting of the South London Partnership on 13 October where I initiated discussion on the Tramlink extension with other South London Leaders, including the need for a stop at St Helier hospital.

Since we were successful in our campaign to stop the previous proposals to cut services at St Helier, we have had no new concrete proposals from the CCG. However we remain vigilant and if and when new proposals come forward we will continue to stand up for local residents and our local hospital. I would be delighted – as no doubt would local residents – if Conservative colleagues would join me in this.

5. Cllr Joan Henry to the Leader of the Council

Can the Leader update me on how Merton celebrated Black History month this year?

Reply

This year the borough's libraries celebrated BHM with an extensive programme of activities including:

- Story time - African story telling (in full African dress)
- Children's craft making African masks
- Display of artwork by local artists
- Seminar on "Knuw Black History"
- Book/DVD displays with titles such as; Mandela a long walk to freedom – DVD, 12 years a slave – DVD, "The Zong " by James Malvin, "What the music said" by Mark Anthony Neal and "A prisoner in the garden" by Nelson Mandela
- A presentation on 'African Migration to Merton' by the African Cultural Educational Welfare organisation

Our schools also celebrated BHM with a range of activities.

- Holding drama based workshops based on Black History - often these used the Windrush as a basis for the drama lesson or Aesop's fables - depending on the age range.
- Having an 'international week' which had elements of black history within it. Classes researched an area e.g. Food, art, traditional clothing from the countries of origin of all the children in the class. Two weeks later an international welcome evening was held for parents and children where they shared the work that the children had done. Each family brought a dish of food to share.
- A question and answer session was held with a goddaughter of Nelson Mandela
- Caribbean storytelling working with all year groups doing storytelling, rhyme and song
- Having a Black History Week where each class learnt about famous people in Black History and including a Diwali assembly.
- Using curriculum lessons to draw attention to important contributions made by Black British, African Americans and other Black people from around the world.
- Holding an assembly for Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 children to explain the importance of Black History month.
- Holding assemblies on key black figures and a competition running for children to bring in some information on a figure who inspires them.
- One school has a Values Curriculum and the value for October was 'Freedom'. Through this value the school covered Black History Month and the story of Nelson Mandela. Lessons and assemblies also took place on this theme.

6. From Councillor Stephen Crowe to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Cleanliness and Parking:

Could the Cabinet Member please tell me how many 'school parking permits' have been issued to staff working in schools in a) Raynes Park ward; b) the constituency of Wimbledon; and c) the constituency of Mitcham and Morden?

Reply

The information requested by the Councillor is not available on a ward or constituency basis as controlled parking zones are often cross ward and cross constituency. However this information can be provide by school and is set out in the table below:

School	Amount of permits issued	Zone
Donhead Prep School Teacher Permit	2	W6
Dundonald Primary School Teacher Permit	11	5F
Garfield Road Primary School	3	H2

Hall School Teacher Permit	8	W7
Holy Trinity teacher permits	22	W3
Links Primary School Teacher Permit	12	GC
Merton Park Primary School Teacher Permit	6	MP1
The Norwegian School Teacher Permit	15	RPE
The Study Prep School teacher permit	22	VN
Ursuline High School Teacher Permit	21	W7
Ursuline Prep School Teacher Permit	17	W7
Wimbledon College Teacher Permit	39	W6

7. From Councillor Adam Bush to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Cleanliness and Parking:

Further to her response to me at the last Full Council meeting back in September promising a report on this in the autumn, can the Cabinet Member tell me when the consultation report detailing proposals to assist medical practitioners in Merton who have trouble parking on home visits to their patients will in fact be ready?

Reply

The Raynes Park CPZ extension is not due to go live until the new year. Given that this will only be operational for one hour per day we want to assess the impact and capacity before considering further permits for GPs especially as this may have implications for other parts of the borough. There are already a range of permits available including Business and Trade permits and we will ensure that this matter is concluded as soon as possible after the zone becomes operational

8. From Councillor Daniel Holden to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration:

Will the council proactively engage with Transport for London to alleviate the concerns of residents in my ward who are suffering as a result of taxis polluting them and their families by idling outside their homes every night? When will the council give my residents some respite?

Reply

Transport for London have carried out a number of initiatives to try and reduce taxis from unnecessary idling on public roads, which have included deploying taxi marshals in some parts of London to improve management of the taxi ranks and discourage unnecessary engine idling. TFL can also influence taxi and private hire vehicle emissions through licensing arrangements (which state limits on Euro standards and vehicle age).

Merton's Pollution team are liaising with TFL to see what measures can be taken to try and reduce unnecessary idling of taxis in Wimbledon.

9. From Councillor Daniel Holden to the Cabinet Member for Finance:

Why is it still taking so long to get an answer to Member Enquiries relating to street scene and street cleaning matters?

Reply

We have received 120 Member enquires in the first two quarters of this year and our performance figures show that we have responded to 95% of these enquires within our target of 10 working days. Unfortunately because of complexity or officer availability to date 6 enquiries (just 5%) have fallen outside of the prescribed timescale, however we do always endeavour to respond as soon as possible and will continue to do so.

10. From Cllr Laxmi Attawar to the Cabinet Member for Community Safety, Engagement and Equalities

I understand a series of hoax letters purporting to come from the council have been circulated in parts of the borough. Could the cabinet member update me on what we have been able to do about this?

Reply

Yes, I can advise that there have been two hoax letters sent purporting to be from the Council with information about regeneration and planning matters. We have contacted the Police who have briefed their Safer Neighbourhood Teams to keep an eye out on people posting flyers and letters as well as encouraging residents or businesses who see anyone suspiciously hand delivering material to get in touch with them. We have also put information on our website and social media channels advising residents to watch out for these hoax letters and to contact us through the normal channels if any correspondence seems irregular or suspicious. We will continue to be vigilant and to deal with any further occurrences.

11. From Councillor Abdul Latif to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Cleanliness and Parking:

Now that the 6 months of the pilot scheme are up, does the administration plan to continue with the private enforcement of littering and fly tipping in the borough that it conveniently instigated shortly before the election earlier this year? If so, for how long?

Reply

I'm unclear from the question whether or not the Councillor supports this worthwhile initiative which seeks to keep our streets clean. I would certainly welcome any constructive feedback he would be willing to offer. As a new Councillor he may not recall that under the Conservative administration

Merton was officially the dirtiest borough in London. I'm pleased to say that this administration has introduced a comprehensive series of measures over the last four years to clean up our streets, including:

- Introduced a free bulky waste collection across the borough to combat fly-tipping
- New solar powered smart bins in our parks
- Introduced almost 200 new butt and gum bins across the borough
- Introduced a smartphone app lovecleanstreets to make it easier for people report litter and fly tipping
- Rolled out the food waste collection borough-wide to reduce the problem of foxes attacking black sacks
- Introduced the mega recycle programme, encouraging residents to recycle more of their waste

In terms of the current pilot of litter enforcement in our town centres, the Council committed to a 6 month pilot programme of enforcement through Kingdom Security. The presence and action of these officers has ensured that people know that Merton takes littering seriously and that we have a zero tolerance approach to those that drop litter. Our streets are cleaner as a consequence and we have noted the increase in use of the Council's chewing gum/butt bins as well as a positive change in behaviour from those who have previously littered. We are currently evaluating the pilot which is coming to the end of its 6 month period and we will decide on the way forward in the near future.

12. From Councillor Brian Lewis-Lavender to the Cabinet Member for Community and Culture:

Given the difficulties that residents living around Cannon Hill Common have had in recent years with unauthorised traveller encampments (as well as in various other locations around the borough), will the Cabinet Member reassure them that Merton is making full use of the new rules introduced by the Government to help councils deal with such encampments?

Reply

There are no new rules or legislation introduced by this government to help councils deal with such encampments.

The Councillor may be thinking of the options within the document "Dealing with illegal and unauthorised encampments: a summary of available powers" issued by the Department for Communities and Local Government in August 2013. However there are no new powers outlined in this document, it simply reminds local authorities of existing powers rather than making new rules. The Council is also aware of the consultation on "Proposed changes to national planning policy and Planning Policy for Traveller Sites" which closed on 24th November 2014.

The Council uses the most effective powers available to remove unauthorised encampments as soon as possible, although human rights legislation also requires us to consider the individual circumstances in each case prior to taking action. In most circumstances this lies under the Criminal Justice Act and Public Order Act 1994 which we operate in partnership with the police under our Joint Protocol.

We will continue to monitor the situation and if changes in the law do come forward at some stage we will of course ensure that any additional powers that become available are used wherever appropriate. However no new powers have been introduced to date.

13. From Councillor Linda Taylor to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration:

What steps will the Cabinet Member be taking to ensure new developments in the Gap Road/Plough Lane area (potentially up to 1000 homes) have the urgently needed infrastructure facilities such as schools, health provision, parking and improved roads and traffic flow plans to ensure that existing residents do not suffer adversely from the arrival of a large number of new inhabitants in the area?

Reply

I am not aware of any practicable proposals that are likely to lead to new housing in Gap Road.

The Council has prepared two development plans with its partners to set out the number of homes and the associated infrastructure needed in Merton (known as Merton's Core Planning Strategy 2011 and Sites and Policies Plan 2014) Merton is also one of the first council's in London to adopt a Community Infrastructure Levy charge on new homes since April 2014 which specifically help to fund new infrastructure such as schools and healthcare. The Council's extensive school expansion plans are well documented and we work closely with other partners such as NHS England and Transport for London to deliver the necessary healthcare, road safety and other improvements.

Specifically in the north of the borough, Merton and Wandsworth officers work together to assess the potential opportunities for infrastructure improvement.

14. From Councillor Oonagh Moulton to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Cleanliness and Parking:

Can the Cabinet Member explain why a number of residents in Wimbledon Park, who now have to pay for this service, have not been having their garden waste collected? How long will it be before the council agrees to compensate these residents for a service which is clearly not up to scratch?

Reply

We have experienced operational difficulties due to some vehicle reliability and repair problems recently which has unfortunately impacted on our ability to deliver the garden waste service on the scheduled day. Where this is the case we ask residents to leave their waste out for collection as we will collect by the following day. Where we receive reports about a missed collection we will normally collect with 24 hours. We will consider any request for compensation on an individual basis.

This page is intentionally left blank

FURTHER NON- PRIORITY QUESTIONS

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

In light of the serious accident involving a jogger at the junction of Durnsford Road and Arthur Road in the last few days, will the Cabinet Member now listen to the concerns of local residents and agree to introduce a 'Green man phase' at this junction to allow pedestrians to cross the street safely on Arthur Road?

Reply

The Council does not have details but was contacted by a resident saying there was an accident. We contacted the police, however they advised that they only have information on fatalities and they were not aware of any accidents.

There is merit in introducing a pedestrian phase and it is something that has been refused by TfL in previous years. However, at a meeting with TfL just before Christmas we advised them of Merton's intention to introduce a pedestrian phase and it was agreed that it would be considered subject to the basic modelling and design approval etc. It has been added to next year's programme (TfL funded) for investigation.

2. From Councillor Gilli Lewis-Lavender to the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health

Many residents are understandably upset that funding is being cut to support much needed in house day care services at the High Path and All Saints centres for residents with learning and physical disabilities?

This service brings much joy to the people who visit on a regular basis. It also gives much needed respite for relatives and carers.

I was most surprised to see this cut on the Cabinet agenda of 10th November yet it was not included on the agenda of the 12th November's Healthier Communities and Older People O&S Panel. I am now told that this item will not be considered until the next O & S Panel meeting on 16th January.

Given the council's duty under equalities legislation to ensure that Merton's disabled residents are able to play a full part in our local community, how does the Cabinet Member justify her proposed cuts? Does she recognise that these facilities are essential both to the users and their carers and will she agree to withdraw her proposals and reinstate this much need service? What other cuts is she planning to try and slip through in this manner?

Reply

As the Councillor will be aware, the council is facing a £32m funding gap due to unprecedented cuts in our funding from central government. These government cuts are affecting all councils across the country with many being faced with difficult choices such as closing libraries, day centres, children's centres and other valued services and facilities.

Government policy is also affecting the services we can continue to afford to provide in Merton. I agree that many residents will understandably be very upset at the impact these government cuts are having. Any assistance Cllr Lewis-Lavender can give in lobbying her Conservative colleagues in government to put a stop to these damaging government cuts to council funding would be greatly appreciated.

However, despite consistent cuts to our funding from central government over the last four years in Merton we have worked hard to reduce the impact on the most vulnerable residents. As in previous years Cabinet have agreed that Children's Services and Adult Social Care should take less of a share of the cuts compared to other departments. However, due to the severity of government cuts no area can be entirely protected from cuts and we need to look at every aspect of council services to see where we can make savings. As a business-like council we have increased efficiency and invested in new ways of working that have reduced costs. However the severity of these government cuts means that services will inevitably be affected.

I am aware of the importance of day opportunities for our service users and carers, and we will continue to provide them. However we think it's right when money is tight to review what everyone gets and ensure we are focussing on our core priorities.

We have provided a wide range of in-house day services in Merton for a number of years, including 'Outreach' activities which take place in the evenings and at weekends. One of the ways we will achieve savings will be to work with our customers and their families to agree their priorities for this type of support. Originally Outreach was supposed to be an alternative to organised day time activities, but over time many people have taken up these trips as well as attending centres during the day. If someone is content to swap a day at the centre for an evening activity this will be part of their new package. No-one will be asked to reduce their core day time package except in these circumstances. We understand that day time respite is valuable to carers and will seek to preserve this. A consequence of these changes will be that over time there will be less choice of activities at the centres, but we will ensure that customers will be safe, stimulated and provided with support for personal care needs.

Increasingly we will also be working more with volunteers to provide additional activities, and we are currently working with Merton MENCAP to investigate sharing resources to benefit our day service customers.

We have worked hard over the past few years to reduce the cost of our day services by deploying our staff more flexibly, reducing management and administrative costs and providing transport in different ways. We will continue to explore all of these options to make savings, but are confident that we can continue to offer a safe range of day services in Merton for everyone who currently attends an in-house service.

As the Councillor will be aware, this year's budget process has followed the same process as in previous years. Scrutiny is currently assessing all savings put forward and will report back to Cabinet in the usual manner. The final decision on the budget proposals is not taken until the council meeting on 4 March. We very much value the input of Scrutiny and we continue to operate in a transparent manner and in partnership with our Scrutiny colleagues.

This page is intentionally left blank