

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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