

**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.

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.

### **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.

This page is intentionally left blank