

Agenda item 6– Questions from Councillors

1. From Councillor Suzanne Evans to the Cabinet Member for Performance and Implementation

My correspondence with the Environment & Regeneration department has shown that the working conditions of street cleaners in Merton are much poorer than those of traffic wardens, particularly in cold weather. While traffic wardens benefit from transport facilities to town centres, rest rooms, hot drinks, lavatories, and warm weather clothing, street cleaners do not. When will the Cabinet Member right this wrong and ensure that all our outdoor workers get equal treatment and so not put their health and wellbeing at risk because of their vital jobs?

Reply

There are a number of the council's operational staff who, due to the nature of their work, are contracted to work outside in all weathers. These include staff collecting waste, undertaking sweeping duties or gritting of the highway or pavements during severe weather. Also included in this category are our Civil Enforcement Officers. There are a number of toilet facilities available, in addition to those owned by the Council, where we have secured arrangements for our staff to use and we have recently added to and updated the list provided to our staff. There are also such provisions at the main depot.

Where required, street cleaning staff are driven to and from their location of work but it is usually more efficient and convenient for staff to go directly to the area they cover and the majority of our staff prefer to do so. We also have a number of mobile teams and staff who are able to provide transport if required at other times when necessary.

Street Cleansing staff are provided with a full uniform including wet weather clothing, jackets and jumpers and woolly hats for the winter months.

Supplementary

I happen to believe that street cleaners are among the most important people in our borough and I am very concerned that they do not seem to be as well treated as other people, for instance, traffic wardens. When are we going to offer them the same facility, somewhere warm to go in the day to heat up some food, to go to the loo, to relax, to dry out and warm up? When are they going to get the same treatment as traffic wardens? I think it's long overdue.

Reply

I believe that the supplementary is largely those questions asked in the original question. As you'll see from the reply, we do take our duty of care for our street cleaners with great seriousness, in the same way we do with our civil enforcement officers. As the answer quite rightly indicates, the street cleansing staff are out in all weathers. It is a difficult job and I'm pleased that she shares my concern about the welfare of our staff. I know that when this subject comes up, some members have raised the question of sick leave, particularly with regard to street cleaners and the amount of sick leave they have to take. Of course, they're out in all weathers and we take our duty of care seriously, we do provide facilities. I think we are a good employer in this respect. As you can see from the answer, full uniform is provided, with wet weather clothing. There are facilities for toilets. The councillor may have

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close contact with the trade unions, I can't comment. We haven't received any major representations to say they're unhappy with conditions the staff are working under.

2. From Councillor Stan Anderson to the Leader of the Council

Can the Leader tell us how the gritting process went during the very heavy snow fall recently.

Reply

I am pleased to confirm that the Council coped extremely well during the recent snow fall. The Precautionary Footway and Carriageway Networks were treated in advance of the snow and once it had fallen the Council's gritting crews continued to treat both the Primary and Secondary Carriageway Networks, along with clearing and treating key footways around the borough. Once these key routes were clear, it was possible for the Council to begin treating other roads away from the main network in order to facilitate refuse collection and deal with ad hoc requests for gritting as well as assisting a number of schools and the Emergency Services.

The Council was once again well prepared for this years winter season, ensuring that everything was in place, to enable the Council to deal with the inclement weather.

We were particularly pleased with the very positive feedback from the public who sent many messages of thanks.

Supplementary

Could the Cabinet Member join me in thanking all staff for the great work they did in keeping the roads clear of snow and our day centres, schools and other facilities open.

Reply

Wholeheartedly I join with him in expressing a great deal of thanks to our staff for what they do during these winter months, during the extreme cold and snow fall, not only for our day centres, children's centres, hospital entrances, Police and Fire stations for priority roads. I think they did an excellent job. I know the Director of Environment and Regeneration is here and I know that both he and a number of councillors received a number of thanks for all their efforts and we need to completely and utterly thank staff when they go out of their way to ensure residents are warm and safe.

3. From Councillor Krystal Miller to the Cabinet Member for Community Safety, Engagement and Equalities

In light of announcements by the Government late last year, can the Cabinet Member tell me when Merton plans to stop producing equality impact assessments for every decision the Council takes, and can she outline how she is ensuring Merton takes full advantage of this opportunity to cut bureaucracy in this area whilst also guaranteeing that the borough continues to meet its obligations under the equalities duty?

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Reply

The Council does not routinely undertake equality impact assessments. The Equality Act 2010 introduced the concept of Equality Analysis to support the decision making process and to contribute to meeting the Public Sector Equality Duty.

At the point of making decisions on significant changes to service, for example service reductions, Members should be confident that the impact on different 'Protected Characteristics' has been considered. Merton's Equality Analysis process was revised in 2011 to assist officers and Members to assess the implication of service changes on different members of our community.

The process that is currently used is proportionate and enables officers to use information that is readily available to them. Equality Analysis is a means of assessing and managing potential risk to the Council's reputation.

However, in light of recent Government announcements a further review of the Equality Analysis process is to be undertaken by the Director of Children Schools and Families (CMT Equalities Lead), the Equality and Community Cohesion Officer, the Head of Policy, Strategy and Partnerships and the Head of Shared Legal Services. The review will seek to ensure proportionality is maintained.

Supplementary

I am slightly filled with horror at the suggestion of another review, so I'd just be grateful for her reassurance that this isn't a question of kicking the matter into the long grass and that it will be a short, sharp review and we can hear the outcome very soon in order to help us cut waste and bureaucracy in the Council.

Reply

I think we as a local authority have to be challenging ourselves to make sure that we keep in line with the Equality Act 2010 and as you can see, we have an Equality Strategy which has been refreshed and we are working in line with the needs of the borough as a whole.

4. From Councillor Iain Dysart to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration

The standard 21 day consultation period for planning applications is often undermined over public holidays such as Christmas and Easter, so that notifications are issued and displayed late, giving less time to respond. How does he propose to address this anomaly, which takes up much resident, Member and officer time when time extension allowances need to be sought?

Reply

The 21 day consultation period is set by the regulations and was established to allow for holiday breaks. However, in the case of larger scale developments, officers always request submissions are not made just prior to standard holiday periods and applicants are also asked to consult with the local area prior to submission of a formal application. Whist neighbours and statutory consultees are asked to respond within that time period, in practice any responses received after that period are also considered providing they

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arrive before the actual decision date. As the determination of applications tend to work to an 8 week timetable, and the consultation are sent nearer the start of that process, in reality, in the vast majority of cases, responses are accepted well after the 21 day period.

Supplementary

If the Cabinet Member insists that the anomaly can't be addressed, can I at least suggest that he urges officers to tell developers that they need to exercise some patience in the event that they insist on lodging an application just before a holiday period begins.

Reply

I'm not sure that there is a problem that needs addressing here, because as the answer indicates, notwithstanding the holiday periods, planning applications are usually dealt with over an 8 week period. In reality, right before the publication of the document for the Planning Committee, officers will take into account objections and representations that people make, even though it's outside a three week period. If there is a real problem that's affecting actual applications than I'd be very glad to look at with Councillor Dysart and talk to officers about it, but I'm not clear that there is a problem.

5. From Councillor Diane Neil Mills to the Cabinet Member for Finance

It has recently been revealed that the 2011/12 budget savings "CS2 – Corporate Services and Chief Exec's Staffing", which was described as a staffing restructure, actually included termination of the LGIU subscription, saving £16,500. Was it not disingenuous to describe the savings in this manner?

Reply

This saving was included as part of the radical restructuring of the Corporate Services Department that generated a saving of £2.166m: CS2 in the 2011/12 Budget papers. This saving was the subject of long discussions at scrutiny, including an Agenda Item on the Corporate Capacity Panel. Within this overall saving, around 1% referred to a small element to trial replacing the LGIU subscription with an in house internet based search to provide updates for officers and members. Subsequent to this, Members were also consulted about their use of the LGIU subscription. With hindsight it may have been clearer if every single element of the saving had been itemised to the lowest possible level in order to show how the saving coming from supplies and services had been identified, but that would not have been very practical, and the approach we took was considered more appropriate at the time.

Supplementary

Unfortunately the answers fails to address the fundamental point, that the description and the categorisation of the savings for CS2 is actually inaccurate. The Cabinet Member may consider £16.5k to be inconsequential but as he's well aware, there are individual savings proposals in the budget for far lower amounts. My question is will the decision to terminate the LGIU subscription result in a comprehensive review of all the Council's

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subscriptions, identifying duplication and other sources of publicly available information?

Reply

This saving, CS2, is a £2m saving. It's the largest single saving under this Administration. It's a huge saving and it had more scrutiny than perhaps any single item that we've had, with a whole meeting of the Corporate Capacity Panel being given to it. The LGIU subscription amounts to 1/100th of that. What she needs to ask is how it took a Labour Council to bring in an efficiency saving of £2m within months of her leaving office. Has she got an answer to that?

6. From Councillor David Dean to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration

Can the Cabinet Member tell me why Merton didn't bid for any trees in the latest round of the Mayor of London's successful street trees scheme when there are various local neighbourhoods which are still in need of street scene improvements and would benefit greatly from the planting of extra trees?

Reply

There are 3 bidding rounds and I can confirm that the London Borough of Merton will be bidding for the 2nd and latest round of the Mayor of London's Street Tree Scheme funding when applications are invited in the spring of this year. We are working with Sustainable Merton to develop this bid and to tap into community involvement ideally to support the future maintenance. It should be noted that the guidance on the scheme requires that we provide a minimum contribution of 50% towards the cost of the programme". As a result it will be necessary for the London Borough of Merton to contribute Capital money in order to secure this match funding.

Supplementary

It's a question of English, Mr Mayor. The latest round, is the 2nd round which is from 21 March onwards. A Mitcham resident complained this week that Wimbledon councillors take no notice of Mitcham and I now understand that she meant this particular Cabinet Member. I really do want to ask why did you not ask for trees the first time round? The Mayor of London started this campaign in 2008 and each year we asked for trees. Why have you stopped all of a sudden? Is it incompetence, is it laziness or is there anything else you can tell us that nobody else knows about?

Reply

I don't think it's right to concede that we can take part in every bidding round. We have to take things when we can. One of the issues certainly that we all have to consider is what we're doing in terms of other things, where is officer time and capacity being used? Trees are very important not only to this Administration. I think across the Council and we'd all pay tribute to the good and useful work of Councillor Miles Windsor, and we're going to follow through on that work. We're also working on a range of voluntary and public sector groups to look at community gardening and food growing projects within that context. We will be encouraging the much wider planting of trees in open

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spaces in the borough so that we're a green canopy. We are a borough with a large amount of open space and want trees to become associated with Merton. I don't accept the suggestion but we do take trees seriously and will be bidding in the next round.

7. From Councillor Jeff Hanna to the Cabinet Member for Community Safety, Engagement and Equalities

Following MOPAC's publication of its draft Police and Crime Plan on 9 January 2013, the Cabinet Member will note that it claims that the number of officers in Merton will rise from 344 in October 2011 to a planned 356 by 2015, and that there will be an increase of 49 SNT Officers.

These claims contrast with the report provided to this Council's Overview and Scrutiny Commission by the Borough Commander on 28 November 2012, and with MOPAC's own projections for Safer Neighbourhood Teams.

On overall officer numbers, the Borough Commander's data states that there were 361 officers in Merton in November 2011, which does not tally with MOPAC's claim of 344 the previous month, and which, if accurate, implies a loss of 6 officers by 2015.

On officers in Safer Neighbourhood Teams, the Borough Commander's data shows the original target strength to have been 20 Sergeants and 40 Constables, totalling 60 officers, in contrast with the MOPAC plan for wards to share Sergeants and have only one dedicated Constable, totalling some 30 officers, implying a loss of 30 officers, yet MOPAC claims to be increasing SNTs by 49 officers, whilst failing to project the number of PCSOs.

In view of the import of accurate information, would the Cabinet Member please establish and tabulate the actual figures for Merton for November 2009, and November 2011, MOPAC's projections for 2015, and the consequent increase or decrease, from November 2009 and also from November 2011, to 2015 as projected, for each of the following:

- Police Officers serving on Safer Neighbourhood Teams
- Police Officers assigned to other duties in Merton
- Total Police Officers in Merton
- PCSOs serving in Merton

In doing so would the Cabinet Member please state the basis on which the data that she provides is known to be accurate.

Reply

Having spoken to the borough commander he assures me that the policing numbers he provided late last year were correct and he is currently in consultation with MOPAC in regards to the figures that they have quoted. The figures provided below are provided by Merton Police, with MOPAC figures taken from Page 16 of the draft plan.

Actual Police Officer Strengths							
	2009	2011	2012	MOPAC Planned Number	MOPAC Stated change	Actual change 2011-	Actual Change 2009-

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				By 2015	2011 - 2015	2015	2015
SNT	59	46	49	107	58	61	48
Other Duties	330	315	295	249	N/K	-66	-81
Total	389	361	344	356	12	-5	-33
Actual PCSO Strengths							
	67	52	49	N/K	N/K	N/K	N/K

Supplementary

Does the Cabinet Member share my concern that the MOPAC projection of an increase in Police officers in Merton by 2015 is not supported by the actual data from Merton Police, and that the planned so-called increase in SNT officers disguises an overall cut in the number of Police in the borough, a cut of 33 officers since 2009?

Reply

I want to assure Councillor Hanna that I share his concern and the Borough Commander and officers are working tirelessly to ensure that we have the correct figures and we will deliver that information after the consultation period.

8. From Councillor Gilli Lewis-Lavender to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration

What incentives will the Council offer businesses in West Barnes to encourage them to open up their facilities to the public as part of the Community Toilet scheme?

Reply

The aim of the Merton Community Toilet Scheme is to improve the provision of toilet facilities available to the public within the boroughs town centres and areas of particular high footfall. With this in mind the scheme would not include West Barnes in its current format because it is not designated as a town centre.

Businesses that wish to participate in the scheme will be agreed based upon the criteria regarding location - i.e. town centre / high footfall - being met; however, the budget being used for this is limited and is allocated on a first come first serve basis according to the above criteria.

Supplementary

I would like to know when Motspur Park has a railway station, a library and a large number of shops, why it can't be considered for the community toilet scheme. I wonder if he would like to reconsider this question and allow the businesses in Motspur Park to receive the remuneration they're entitled to in my view.

Reply

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I think community toilets are an important issue and I can understand Councillor Lewis-Lavender's point. Clearly we have a limited resource to spend and it's been determined that the policy will be to spend it in town centres. I think there is a case for showing that Motspur Park station and surrounds gets the sort of footfall you get in a town centre, and Councillor Lewis-Lavender has that information, and I would be very glad to look into this issue with her, and consider whether some of that very limited resource could be spread there. I don't want to say absolutely not, but it is a limited fund and we've got to concentrate the resource to make the most beneficial impact.

9. From Councillor Agatha Akygyina to the Cabinet Member for Children's Services

Could the Cabinet Member outline how much we will receive this year in Early Intervention Grant compared to previous years?

Reply

The EIG grant received in the current financial year 2012/13 is £8.392k compared to £7.675m in 2011/12. However, the 2012/13 figure now includes new responsibilities in relation to 2 year olds. If funding for these new responsibilities is removed from the calculation, a true comparison between 2011/12 levels of EIG funding and 2012/13 levels would show a significant reduction.

Furthermore, for 2013/14 the EIG grant will cease. Instead £1.159 million will be allocated to the Dedicated Schools Grant and £6.188 allocated to the overall council Formula Grant. This represents a further £1.045 million reduction from the 2012-13 EIG allocation and this funding will no longer be ringfenced for early intervention work.

Supplementary

I'm sure like me the Cabinet Member is appalled by this Government's funding cuts to our young people. Could she tell me whether she has made any representations about the funding cuts.

Reply

Yes I have been making representations and I do thank you for bringing this to the Council. It's all smoke and mirrors and there's a two year plan but it's a little bit of robbing Peter to pay Paul I'm afraid. I am working with Graham Allen as a member of the steering group, prior to yesterday's launch of the Early Intervention Foundation. That is a charity being established to champion a move to a greater use of early intervention. As we all will be aware, it's vital to have early intervention in all of our services and we need to spend to save. It enhances the life chances of our young children and particularly vulnerable youngsters.

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1. From Councillor Samantha George to the Cabinet Member for Community and Culture

Why has it taken the Cabinet Member 3 years to agree to the roll out of Wi-Fi to the borough's libraries?

Reply

The Library Service has delivered a number of high profile technology projects over the last 3 years, including:

- Embedding self-service technology at all libraries
- Transferring its library management system to a shared system across the London Libraries Consortium (LLC)
- Launching a new libraries web presence
- Introducing a 24/7 renewal and enquiry line
- Launching a new e-books and e-magazines service

It has always been the intention of the Council to provide Wi-Fi, and work has been progressing on the project since before I became Cabinet Member 8 months ago. There have been technical difficulties which our IT department has been addressing as a priority, and I expect to see Wi-Fi in all our libraries in the very near future.

Supplementary

Merton's libraries are important to the community, that's why the previous Conservative Administration installed self-service technology before 2010 and planned to roll out Wi-Fi after 2010. Does the Cabinet Member regret allowing his group to spend Labour's first year focusing on closing libraries instead of making investments in them?

Reply

I'd like to ask what libraries we closed. We avoided closing libraries and we've increased the number of hours per week they're open. We have been working on Wi-Fi. I have to say I was a little bit taken aback when I saw the original question because I've only been in post for 8 months, so how I could have spent three years not agreeing to the roll-out of Wi-Fi I'm not absolutely sure. I know that work has been going on with Wi-Fi for a considerable amount of time. It's a complicated process. I'm not an IT specialist but I can assure you that Wi-Fi will be in our libraries very soon.

2. From Councillor Agatha Akyigyina to the Cabinet Member for Community and Culture

How are we working with other authorities to assist them in achieving similar levels of volunteering in our libraries as we have achieved in Merton?

Reply

Merton has project led the 'Love Libraries Love Volunteering' project on behalf of ALCL (Association of Chief Librarians) and CLOA (Chief Cultural and Leisure Officers Association). It is based on the successful Merton model of volunteering and has been funded by Team London. The project aim was to

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develop library volunteering across London based on the Merton model, where a formal arrangement is in place between the library service and local volunteer centre. The 13 pilot boroughs have recruited over 3,000 volunteers in less than eight months, exceeding recruitment targets set for the project by over 1,000. Key outcomes from the project include:

- 95% of volunteers think that volunteering in libraries makes the local community better for people;
- 92% of volunteers were either satisfied or very satisfied with the support from library staff and the new skills they had learnt;
- 84% felt that volunteering got local people more involved in the way that library services are delivered;
- 75% would recommend volunteering to others;
- 68% felt that volunteering in libraries had helped them to meet people from different backgrounds.

The support that has been provided by Merton to other boroughs has included best practice training along with advice and guidance on developing policies and procedures. A toolkit to support all London boroughs in their recruitment of volunteers will shortly be published on the London Councils website. I'm immensely proud and grateful to be part of this groundbreaking project.

Supplementary

Will the Cabinet Member be working with other boroughs to help them to save libraries from the Government's cuts like we have in Merton?

Reply

Yes we will and yes we are. I have to say that as well as being a good thing in its own right, I'm pleased to say that this Council is actually earning money from that process. We're acting as a consultant to other boroughs and I'm glad to say that Donald Hope Library in my ward benefitted from that money during the course of last year, and was repainted.

3. From Councillor Debbie Shears to the Cabinet Member for Community and Culture

Can the Cabinet Member update me on the Council's progress in establishing the Sophie Hosking Challenge Cup as an annual competitive sporting event for 8-11 year olds in Merton?

Reply

Limited progress on this has been made as yet due to changes in officer personnel and other work priorities in the Leisure & Culture Development Team who will be leading on this initiative. During the coming months discussion will be held with the primary schools, the school sports partnership and the watersports centre as well as having a conversation with Sophie Hosking to ensure that she is happy and supportive of the proposals.

Supplementary

I have to say that I'm very disappointed with this answer. I'm disappointed with his approach to the legacy that Merton could offer to children following on

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from the successful Olympics. In September we passed a motion promoting a lasting legacy of the Sophie Hosking Challenge Cup for children in the borough. To see that we have really progressed no further after six months I think is disgusting. I think it's really disappointing. Can I ask, are we going to have a Sophie Hosking Challenge Cup before the Summer?

Reply

I didn't hear exactly what you had to say. I did speak to Sophie Hosking last year when she came to visit the borough and I have to say that she didn't show a vast amount of enthusiasm about this, but that's no excuse. What I will offer to you is that you, me and Chris Parsloe sit down together to try and work out precisely what we are going to do on this one. I have to be sure before we go about it that Sophie Hosking actually wants to be involved in it.

4. From Councillor Iain Dysart to the Cabinet Member for Communities and Culture

Please could he clarify the Council's future approach to library outreach activity, thus providing certainty to the Friends of West Barnes library who are currently unclear as to what is expected regarding this vital means of increasing interest and securing longer-term viability?

Reply

The Council is extremely grateful to all its library volunteers who continue to provide essential support for library services and in particular to the Friends of West Barnes Library. Outreach continues to remain a key service objective with the view to increasing library usage. The Friends Group continue to be informed of progress with outreach and are aware that the key focus for the service at present is in delivering the universal library membership scheme for school children. The scheme will make Merton only the second borough in the whole of the United Kingdom to issue every Merton school child with a library membership form and will drastically increase usage across all libraries. For West Barnes Library a dedicated outreach plan is in place and regular monthly outreach visits have been arranged to a range of different venues and the Friends have been essential in supporting these activities. A usage campaign entitled 'Always With You' will shortly be run and new outreach materials will also be produced. A revised training programme for outreach volunteers will also shortly be rolled out, which Friends volunteers will be a part of.

Supplementary

By when is it expected in his estimation that the revised framework to which he's alluded in this answer will be operational and can he clarify whether there will be scope for each library to progress at its own pace.

Reply

It's already starting. I would expect the whole programme will be up and running within the next year. It's quite a big programme, we'll have to get an awful lot of young people, up to college age, with automatic membership. One of the things that you need to take on board is that if you're giving universal library membership to young children, you're also encouraging their

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parents to become members as well because they have to get them to and from the libraries. It's quite a clever way of increasing membership of our libraries and I thoroughly recommend it.

5. From Councillor Henry Nelles to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration

Given that you are further reducing expenditure on parks, including in the latest budget papers which forecast that the proposed Public Value Review will deliver nearly a 20% decrease in expenditure before the review's even taken place, doesn't this reflect the fact that Merton's parks are simply no longer a priority for this administration?

Reply

The ongoing commitment of the administration to its parks can be evidenced by the level of investment and development work that it has delivered in recent years and it will continue to do so in the future despite the current economic circumstances.

The administration has no intention of pre-empting the findings of the Public Value Review (PVR) but in the context of the savings needs projected across the Environment and Regeneration Department as a whole then it has assumed, quite reasonably, that the boroughs parks, might make a contribution to the overall savings target in relative terms. The outcomes of the PVR will, of course, affect any actual decrease in expenditure and any figure currently being proposed is therefore simply indicative of the level of saving that might reasonably be anticipated at this stage given the financial constraints that we face.

Supplementary

Perhaps the Cabinet Member could say in clear and no uncertain terms when he expects the Public Value Review to be completed and whether he will be sharing the outcomes of that with the Council.

Reply

I don't have the date, and when I do I will be very willing to share it with him. I would anticipate consultation across the chamber, particularly with ward councillors, on the changes that we will have to make in a period of huge financial constraint to parks and open spaces. We have a very positive agenda at the moment to change the maintenance regimes in parks, so we're looking at less grass-cutting, more natural meadows and wild flowers for the parks and greenspaces.

6. From Councillor Linda Taylor to the Leader of the Council

Could the Leader tell me what negotiations he has had with the Mayor of London's office and neighbouring boroughs since May 2012 regarding Merton ceasing payments for the Lee Valley precept and instead committing the same level of funding for regeneration of the Wandle Valley?

Reply

Merton is a contributing and key member of the wider Wandle Valley partnership initiative and two of its members serve on Board of the recently

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established Wandle Valley Regional Park Trust. Members of the Trust's Board are drawn from a range of organisations within the Valley, including the London Boroughs of Merton, Sutton, Wandsworth and Croydon, and some with wider strategic interests, including two official London Mayor's Observers. The latter raised the matter of the Lee Valley precept at the Mayor's Question Time in November 2012.

Previously, meetings have been held between Wandle Valley representatives and senior officials of the Lee Valley Regional Park and as a result of these (and possibly representations from other local authorities), the precept was reduced by 2% in the financial year 2012/13. All four Wandle Valley boroughs committed to ring-fence this saving to the Wandle Valley last year. A further reduction in the precept is currently anticipated in 2013/14.

The repatriation of the Lee Valley precept remains a high priority for the members of the Trust who regard these contributions as important to the success and sustainability of the Wandle Valley Regional Park project.

Merton representatives will continue to play an active part in those efforts, working in partnership with the other stakeholders. The current approach being pursued is the promotion of a Private Bill owing to the statutory basis upon which the Lee Valley was established and is funded.

Supplementary

I did specifically ask the Leader what he had done himself in terms of negotiating with the Mayor's Office and our neighbouring boroughs regarding ceasing the Lee Valley payments and making sure that Merton's contributions meet local needs in the Wandle Valley. It doesn't appear from the reply that you've done anything specifically. Is this the case?

Reply

Councillors may be aware that I am also the Chair of the South London Partnership which comprises Croydon, Sutton, Richmond and Kingston. As Chair, I did meet with the Mayor and the Deputy Mayor and with Sir Edward Lister, former Leader of Wandsworth Council. I raised the issue, it's a hot topic for all of us and it's something that the South London Partnership and the London Borough of Merton and the Wandle Trust are constantly lobbying on. It's grossly unfair to us, we want money for Wandle Valley not Lee Valley. I'll redouble my efforts both as Leader of the Council and as Chair of the South London Partnership.

7. From Councillor Geraldine Stanford to the Cabinet Member for Community and Culture

Can the Cabinet Member outline his hopes for arts development in Merton?

Reply

Arts Development will deliver projects across the Community Plan Themes achieving wide ranging outcomes through various art forms, whether that be improving people's mental health and well-being, or generating growth in the creative economy, or increasing people's active engagement in positive activities or learning & training through the arts or just using arts to develop and deliver community cohesion.

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Arts Development will work with local artists and art organisations to continue to increase the range and diversity of art within the borough and across the borough. They will build on the borough's strengths and divert and build capacity with partners in the east of the borough. They will seek out external funding and partner bodies in pursuit of increasing participation in the arts through activities, events and programmes whilst delivering key social and service outcomes for local people.

8. From Councillor Ray Tindle to the Cabinet Member for Community and Culture

Can the Cabinet Member tell me what the latest plans are for Colliers Wood library, and particularly for when the council's lease on the current building comes to an end?

Reply

The lease on Donald Hope Library expires in May 2017.

We are currently exploring remaining at the current site post-2017 and negotiations are ongoing about remaining at the site as part of a library / medical practice redevelopment.

However, I am also aware of other possibilities, including the draft Sites & Policies Development Plan option to relocate the library to the Community Centre site as part of a shared development and an alternative option to relocate the library to the Brown & Root Tower development in phase 2 (£550,000 of capital funding has also been assigned for 2017/18).

All options are still being explored and no definitive decisions have been made on location but the Council remains committed to providing a library service in Colliers Wood and in finding the best sustainable solution for its residents. All options will continue to be vigorously explored before recommendations are made.

9. From Councillor Ian Munn to the Cabinet Member for Community and Culture

Can the Cabinet Member update me on our Heritage Strategy and how it is progressing?

Reply

The paper produced for this meeting on Libraries and Culture has more detail on progress on the Heritage Strategy but generally progress has been steady and a few key projects are shortly to come to fruition.

The Heritage and Design Working Group was formed following sign off of the Strategy in 2011 and continues to remain the key communication tool for heritage stakeholders in Merton. Merton could still improve in the level of funding it receives from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) and work will continue to progress through the Heritage & Design Working Group to support stakeholder groups to apply for more funding. One project that has received HLF funding is the 'Merton Memories' project. 'Merton Memories' will digitally preserve over 15,000 photographic images of the borough through the ages and make many of these photos freely available for the first time. Working with heritage stakeholders the Heritage Service is creating a dedicated web

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resource, which will not only make the images available but also enable other people to load their images of Merton onto the site and to add comments to photos to improve the historical recording of each image. The finalised website will go live in January 2014.