

NON-PRIORITY

ENVIRONMENT AND REGENERATION

1) From Councillor Karin Forbes to the Cabinet Member for Community Safety, Engagement and Equalities

The proposed Borough wide CDZ will allow the police wide ranging discretion on enforcement. How will they be held accountable for exercising these powers and what arrangements will be put in place to monitor the operation of the CDZ?

Reply

These are police powers and therefore the police are held accountable by their internal structures for the use of these and there is no mechanism to look at individual usage. If an individual is unhappy with their contact in regards to this then they can use the police complaints system. However the overall usage of these powers will be reported to the licencing committee on a 6 monthly basis and they can question the police in regards to their usage.

2) From Councillor Mary-Jane Jeanes to the Cabinet Member for Environment and Regeneration (ST)

How many residents have signed up to the Big London Energy Switch and how is Merton promoting it?

Reply

As of 20th March, 15,000 residents have signed up to the Big London Energy Switch scheme across London.

Within Merton 369 residents have registered their interest in the scheme; approx. 58% of which are comprised of more vulnerable residents targeted by direct mail.

Merton is promoting the scheme through a range of methods, including:

- Direct mail-out in association with London Councils to local residents registered under the Taxicard scheme
- Door-step engagement by Sustainable Merton in Cricket Green, Colliers Wood, Figges Marsh and Lavender Fields wards.
- Sustainable Merton have distributed 3000 promotional leaflets to households in the aforementioned wards with further distribution to follow
- Bus advertising (internal and rear) on 45 routes across Merton from 4th-31st March
- Pan London press release on the scheme from London Councils
- Local press release and social media notifications by LBM communications team
- Information included on LBM website and Big London Energy Switch website where residents can register directly:
www.biglondonenergyswitch.org.uk
- Posters, flyers and pop-up stands to be positioned in Merton libraries from w/c 25th March with another located in the atrium of the Civic Centre throughout the end of March/early April

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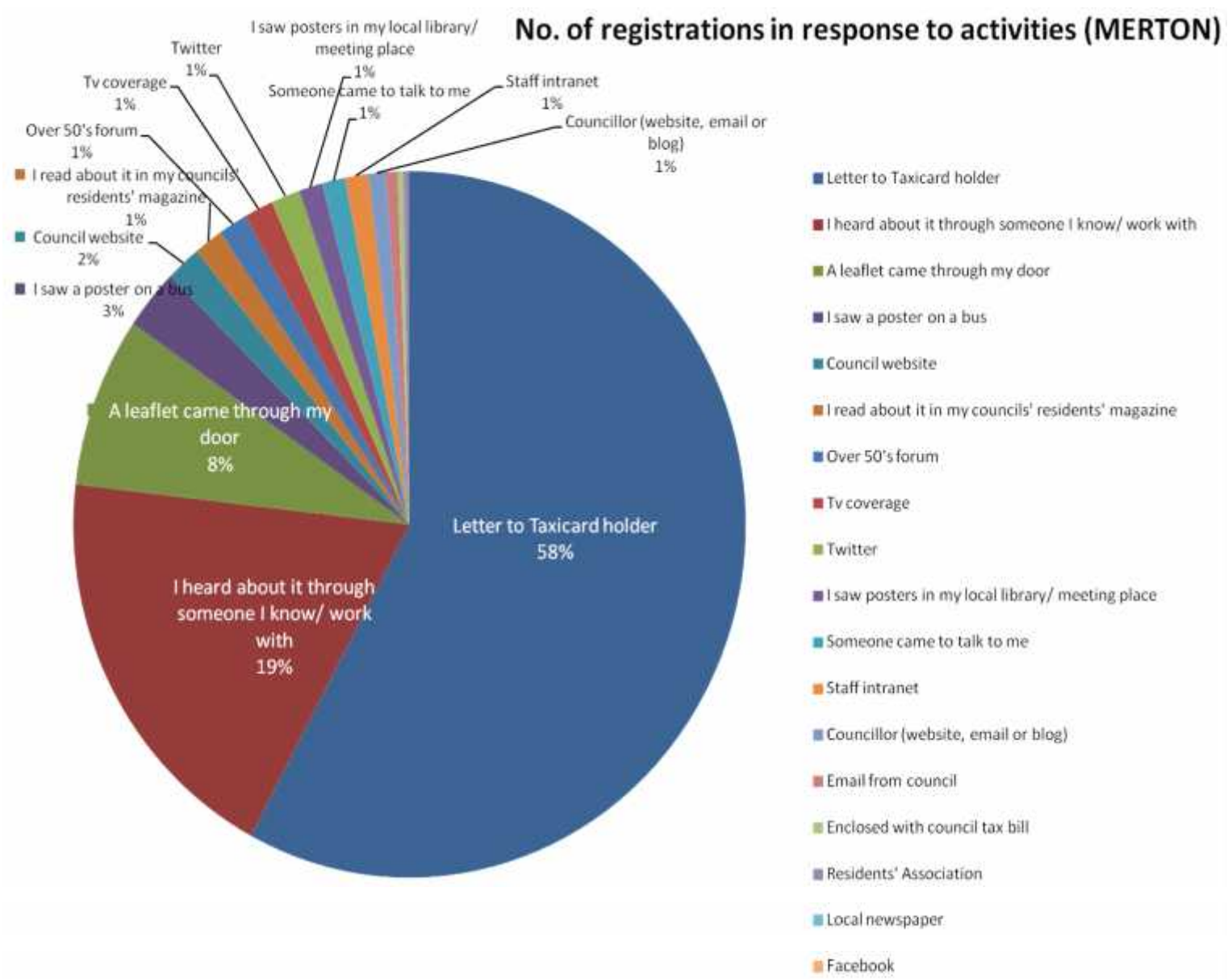
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- Local partners approached to disseminate information on the scheme including: Merton CAB, Merton Age UK, Merton Seniors' Forum and Merton Voluntary Service Council to distribute information on our behalf
- Email to all Councillors via the group secretaries
- LBM staff promotions including information included on LBM intranet, the display screens in the lift lobby, the staff e-newsletter and Chris Lee's blog.

The council is also exploring the option for further promotions via the Wimbledon Guardian in the week preceding the auction date of 9th April.

All residents can also register directly via: www.biglondonenergyswitch.org.uk

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3) From Councillor Mary-Jane Jeanes to the Cabinet Member for

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Environment and Regeneration (ST)

Given that the footbridge in Westway Close, Raynes Park and possibly the footbridge by the West Barnes Lane level crossing are likely to be used more by school children and their parents en route to the school playing fields (former Sun Alliance Playing Fields) later this year, what proactive arrangements will be put in place to ensure that both are regularly swept and cleared of rubbish/debris?

Reply

The Council's street cleansing team have cleaned the bridge as an interim measure. The Bridge itself is the responsibility of Network Rail and our Enforcement section are liaising with Network Rail over the regular cleaning of the Bridge and we will be submitting a bill for the recent cleaning undertaken.

4) From Councillor Iain Dysart to the Cabinet Member for Environment and Regeneration (ST)

Whilst we know from its closure of the Weir Road facility, that the administration does not wish to encourage recycling in that part of the borough, could he tell us what impact, if any, he judges this to have had on a) the Garth Road facility b) local fly-tipping?

Reply

Your assertion that the Administration does not wish to encourage recycling in Wimbledon is nonsense. Both recycling and resident satisfaction with recycling are higher than any previous year. In 2011/12 the council reluctantly closed Weir Road reuse and recycling centre. As a package of agreed financial savings, the council needed to prioritise how its money is spent. The cost of keeping the Weir Road centre open would be several times higher per tonne of waste than the Garth Road centre, however in terms of productivity the Weir Road reuse and recycling centre only accounted for 10% of that of Garth Road.

In the year following the closure of the Weir Road facility, Garth Road experienced a 12% increase in recyclate tonnage.

Between the years 11/12 and 12/13, the reported level of fly tips in the wards surrounding the Weir Road Site, that of Village and Wimbledon Park, showed a negligible increase of 25 fly tips for the 12 months.

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5) From Councillor Richard Williams to the Cabinet Member for Environment and Regeneration (ST)

The issue of street lighting has been raised by many residents in my ward, can the cabinet member outline what is being done to improve street lighting across the borough?

Reply

The Council has a yearly scheduled maintenance programme where lamps are changed on average every 3 years in rotation. In addition, evening inspections are carried out to detect out of light street lights which are then reported to the contractor for repairs. Over the last 3 years the council has replaced approximately 1500 old Sodium (Orange Glow type) lanterns with brighter "white light" lanterns in the Mitcham area.

In the current year 130 concrete lamp columns which have reached the end of their useful life and which are no longer recommended for use have been replaced. As part of this replacement programme approximately 70 of these have been updated with more efficient LED lanterns (white light) mostly on the Pollards Hill estate. New lighting, where none existed before, has been installed in 2 Public Rights of Way.

There are 1000 concrete lamp columns to be replaced over the next 5 years, subject to funding. 10,000 lamp columns have been structurally tested in the current year to determine remaining useful life and develop a priority replacement programme for future years. As part of this programme the opportunity will be taken to replace old sodium lights with more energy efficient lights.

Lighting upgrades were undertaken at the following locations:

- Around in Raynes Park station including installation of new feature lighting in the pedestrian tunnel,
- Wimbledon Bridge and Wimbledon Hill Road
- Lighting improvement as part of the Destination Wimbledon Project including feature lighting on Wimbledon Station forecourt.

A new Central Management System is being trialled in Merton High Street. This will allow the council to remotely monitor faults and control lighting levels and make more efficient use of these lanterns. In addition approximately 50 Lamp columns have been replaced and the lantern upgrade to "white light" in this road and at the side road junctions.

As part of the work to re-open Willow Lane all lighting columns in this road have been upgraded.

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6) From Councillor Linda Taylor to the Cabinet Member for Performance and Implementation: (ST)

What is being done to address the growing amounts of rubbish in the streets immediately after bins have been collected? Why is there no follow up clean?

Reply

Keeping our borough's streets clean is a priority for the council and we continue to seek ways to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of this service. This is especially important given the reductions in central government funding and consequent financial challenges facing Merton.

As part of this work in April 2011 the council adopted a modernised street cleansing strategy in order to improve efficiency and the overall standards of street cleaning in the borough. A key driver of this strategy was the focusing of resources in areas of most need. In addition to regular weekly street cleaning new mobile street cleaning teams were introduced so that if residents see a problem that requires action they can request a further clean to their street. This targeting of resources replaced the previous costly and inefficient mechanism of additional litter picking.

The latest Annual Resident's Survey shows Merton is out-performing the London average in the quality of its services in these areas with 71% of Merton's residents rating our refuse collection as good, 5% above the London average. The survey also shows that 57% of Merton's residents rate our street cleaning as good, 4% above the London average.

Residents can report any incidents of littering that require attention by calling the council on 020 8274 4902 or by completing an online enquiry form, which can be found at www.merton.gov.uk.

7) From Councillor Linda Taylor to the Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration:(ST)

How often are 'dog bins' in parks emptied? There are increasing reports and photos being sent in of overflowing bins in our parks. These are both a health hazard and eyesore. When will the Labour administration sort out this blight in our beautiful parks?

Reply

The dog bins in parks are scheduled to be emptied weekly. There have been a few reports of bins overflowing which has now been resolved. We have found that some bins were not being used correctly with waste being placed on the lids when the bin itself is empty.

8) From Councillor Maurice Groves to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration:

How many young people in Merton will have cycling proficiency training this year?

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Reply

Merton sets aside funding via the annual LIP settlement from Transport for London in order to offer free adult and child cycle training from March to November.

Cycle training was offered to all schools in the borough last year, with 86% participating. A total of 1,763 children took part in on or off road cycle training.

The budget for cycle training has been maintained at 2012 levels for this year, so an objective will be to exceed the number of children trained during the previous year.

9) From Councillor Maurice Groves to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration:

Will the Council have any representation at the excellent RideLondon event to emphasise Road Safety in the borough?

Reply

Officers are in the process of preparing for the RideLondon event, and as part of this work will be considering the possibility of complimentary initiatives to encourage cycling and promote road safety in the borough.

10) From Councillor Maurice Groves to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration:

Can the Cabinet Member tell me what training there is for older drivers to enable them to retain their independence?

Reply

Merton sets aside funding via the annual LIP settlement from Transport for London in order to offer a free older drivers training programme called Drive4Life. While accident figures show that elderly drivers are generally safer than younger drivers, the reduction in serious accidents has fallen more slowly among the elderly in recent years.

Research from Loughborough University indicates that a practical 'tailored' course which addresses the needs of the older driver is more beneficial than a lecture / presentation format. Subsequently, the council's Drive4Life programme offers a 1-2-1 assessment in the driver's car with an Advanced Driving Instructor.

11) From Councillor Krystal Miller to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration:

Can the Cabinet Member tell me when we will see the work programme for traffic works in the borough? I asked for a project in my ward to be included last June. I was told there was no budget in 2012-13 and am now advised it is under consideration for 2013-14 but when will a decision actually be taken?

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Reply

The traffic work programme is currently being developed. I believe the issue you are referring to was the request for removal of a vertical deflection measure in Ashcombe Road. The current measure predates nearby housing and the professional view is that it is needed to maintain road safety at the junction with Queens Road. I have already met with officers and discussed the issue of alleged noise disturbance from large vehicles hitting the speed table. I have asked that the location be prioritised for camera enforcement of vehicles exceeding 7.5 tonnes.

12) From Councillor Oonagh Moulton to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration:

I note car free day is on the 22nd September each year. I understand that Merton does not participate owing to a lack of funding. However can the Cabinet Member confirm what initiatives this Council does do with the borough's schools to encourage walking or cycling to school and which private schools are included?

Reply

The council employs a School Travel Plan Officer, currently funded via the annual LIP settlement from Transport for London, who seeks to work with all schools in the borough (including private schools) in order to encourage walking and cycling, reduce car use and positively influence associated road safety issues. Examples of initiatives include:

- Working closely with all schools to try to ensure that they have an active and up-to-date travel plan
- On and off road cycle training (1,763 children trained in 2012)
- Scooter Training
- Walking Buses
- Walk to School Week
- Kerb skills training for younger children
- 'Theatre in Education' initiatives to highlight the benefits of safe and sustainable travel
- Changes to the highway infrastructure to improve key walking routes

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CORPORATE SERVICES

13) From Councillor Iain Dysart to the Cabinet Member for Community Safety and Equalities

In February, Merton Council recently issued a business rates demand to South Wimbledon Community Association in respect of its use of Merton Hall. I understand, given the Association's charitable status, that negotiations for a concession are ongoing. However, since the demand arrived unexpectedly and at a late stage in the financial year, could she tell me how she believes the principles of openness and transparency inherent in the Compact with the voluntary sector have been followed here?

Reply

I can confirm that the Council were only advised on 7 February 2013 that the Association had occupied the property in April 2012. As a result a business rates bill was issued without any mandatory rate relief. An enquiry was received from MVSC on the 14 February regarding the mandatory relief. Once the Council were advised of their Charity Registration number the mandatory relief was immediately granted.

A revised business rates bill reflecting this change was sent on the 20 February. An application for discretionary rate relief was sent on the 27 February and as yet this has not been returned.

I can confirm that the bill they have received for 2013/14 also reflects mandatory relief being granted.

14) From Councillor David Chung to the Cabinet Member for Finance

The government has introduced the Access to Elected Office Fund which is designed to help disabled people meet the additional needs that are associated with their disability and their intention to stand for elected office. The Access to Elected Office Fund aims to provide additional support to tackle the particular obstacles faced by disabled people who want to become MPs, councillors or other elected officials.

Given the need to see disabled people represented on the Council what publicity and support is being provided by the Council to assist disabled people to take advantage of the Access to Elected Office Fund to consider becoming councillors.

Reply

The Returning Officer will be reminding political party organisers of the Access to Elected Office Fund when he contacts them about arrangements for the elections in 2014.

In terms of disabled people who are considering becoming a councillor the relevant political group should publicise that they welcome candidates from diverse backgrounds and with a range of different abilities and support will be

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available to assist them if appropriate. Once candidates are identified there should be an assessment of need to arrange individual support.

15) From Councillor John Dehaney to the Cabinet Member for Finance

Can the cabinet member give the average ward electorate for Merton Council ward? The individual ward electorate as of March 2013 for each Merton ward, along with the variation from the average ward electorate?
What is being done to address these imbalances?

Reply

The Electoral Registration Officer has supplied the local government electorate for each ward, in order of the electoral registers, as at the monthly alterations date of 1 March 2013. The total local government electorate on that date was 149,666. This gives an average ward electorate of 7,483.3. The percentage variation for each ward is shown against the electorate:

Ward	Electorate	Percentage variation
Lower Morden	7,072	-5.50%
St Helier	7,650	+2.23%
Colliers Wood	8,059	+7.69%
Lavender Fields	7,502	+0.25%
Cricket Green	8,110	+8.37%
Ravensbury	7,436	-0.63%
Graveney	7,481	-0.03%
Figge's Marsh	8,265	+10.45%
Longthornton	7,501	+0.24%
Pollards Hill	7,786	+4.05%
Village	6,412	-14.32%
Raynes Park	7,524	+0.54%
Hillside	6,819	-8.88%
Wimbledon Park	8,207	+9.67%
Trinity	7,445	-0.51%
Dundonald	6,945	-7.19%
Abbey	7,697	+2.86%
Merton Park	7,090	-5.26%
Cannon Hill	7,223	-3.48%
West Barnes	7,442	-0.55%

The electorate for each ward depends on relative registration levels, the number and type of residential units, the quantity and size of new developments, and the number of non-eligible residents. The Electoral Registration Officer bases his registration activities on what is required by law, and then focuses on the areas where registration levels are below average. It would not be appropriate for the Electoral Registration Officer's registration activities to be influenced by consideration of electoral imbalances.

The Local Government Boundary Commission for England has responsibility for undertaking electoral reviews. They monitor the levels of electoral imbalance in wards annually. Their criteria for initiating a review is if:

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- More than 30% of a council's wards have an electoral imbalance of more than 10% from the average ratio for that authority; and/or
- One of more wards have an electoral imbalance of more than 30%.

Clearly, Merton does not currently meet these criteria.

16) From Councillor Diane Neil Mills to the Cabinet Member for Finance:

What limitation is the council under regarding 'cost recovery only' on certain services (i.e. which services are restricted and what are the terms of cost recovery with respect to depreciation, cost of capital and G&A)? Does the council charge VAT on these services?

Reply

Whether or not there is a power to charge limited to cost recovery only will depend upon the specific service being considered, whether there is a statutory power to provide the service and what the scope and limits of the charging powers are in relation to that service. The scope of local authority powers to charge on a cost recovery basis only has been expanded by the existence of the discretionary charging power under s93 Local Government Act 2003 and the charging power under section 3 Localism Act 2011.

Any decision to exercise a power to charge would also have to take account of public law principles, the Council's fiduciary duty to Council Tax payers and complying with its value for money obligations.

The Council charges VAT on these services where required by law.

17) From Councillor Suzanne Evans to the Leader of the Council:

As you may know the Leader of the Opposition and I made the winning bid at the Mayor of Merton's Charity Ball for lunch with Siobhain McDonagh at the House of Commons. Is she looking forward to discussing important Merton issues with us?

Reply

I congratulate the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Opposition for their excellent taste in lunch dates. I am sure Siobhain McDonagh is counting the days.

18) From Councillor Diane Neil Mills to the Cabinet Member for Finance:

What is the business rate yield in Merton by geographic area (ward or other geographic sub-division) for each of the past five years?

Reply

Post code	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
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	£ m	£ m	£ m	£ m	£ m
CR4	10.4	10.1	10.7	11.3	11.8
KT3	5.2	5.4	5.7	6	6.2
SM4	3.8	3.8	4.2	4.4	4.6
SW16	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.6	0.6
SW17	1.2	1.2	1.3	1.6	1.7
SW18	0.2	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.3
SW19	46.1	48.8	51.4	55	57.1
SW20	3.9	3.7	4.1	4.1	4.6
SM3	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.06	0.06
Total	71.35	73.85	78.25	83.36	86.96

These figures exclude the Business Rate Supplement Charge.

19) From Councillor Linda Taylor to the Cabinet Member for Finance:

Can the Cabinet Member explain the relationship between departmental service plans and the setting and achievement of the personal objectives of individual members of staff in relation to those plans?

Additionally could he explain how the council ensures transparency, clarity and accountability in ensuring managers and leaders monitor, at the end of the financial year, any targets/actions that are set at the beginning of that year? What happens if milestones and targets are missed both for departments and individuals?

Reply

Service plans are devised and implemented on an annual basis to support the overall delivery of the Council's strategic objectives. Team and individual employee objectives are directly aligned to the service plans in a 'golden thread' of accountability and the overall delivery is monitored and measured through monthly performance indicators and scrutiny by departmental management teams and corporate management team.

In the case of senior managers progression through salary scales is dependent upon meeting annual appraisal targets and satisfaction of performance targets. For other staff there is not a system of performance-related pay at present. By exception increments can be withheld and poor performance is dealt with through the Council's capability procedure.

Where departmental targets are missed this would be the subject of review by the departmental director, corporate management team and ultimately Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny Commission.

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CHILDREN, SCHOOLS AND FAMILIES

20) From Councillor Jeff Hanna to the Cabinet Member for Children's Services

Could she outline the steps she has taken to ensure take up of free school meals in the borough and could she clarify whether there is anything further we can do given the criteria for free school meals, set by central government, bar many low income families from eligibility?

Response

Towards the end of 2012, DfE produced a national report on take up of Free School Meals (FSMs). The Children's Society, with a number of other charitable organisations and Trades Unions, has subsequently launched a campaign – 'Fair and Square' – aimed at increasing both eligibility for and take up of FSMs. The DfE report showed that 22% of Merton pupils were entitled to FSMs but only 16% were taking FSMs. There were some 1400 children entitled pupils not taking up FSMs which represented a 27% under-registration rate. This compared with an outer London average under-registration rate of 17%, an inner London rate of 9% and a national under-registration rate of 14%. Examination of data on eligibility and take up in Merton's schools on 'School Census' days shows, further, that although take up in primary and secondary schools has increased, the gap between eligibility and take up has risen from a baseline in 2009.

Current steps to maximise the numbers of eligible pupils applying for and taking FSMs include providing leaflets and information in a wide variety of settings; providing these materials to all applicants for school places on a routine basis; ongoing training for outreach staff working with 0 - 5s to ensure maximum uptake of benefits and therefore possible eligibility for FSM to encourage parents/carers to apply for their children at an early stage of their school careers and awareness raising and information giving at Headteacher meetings, EYFS co-ordinator meetings and PVI manager meetings. Increasing numbers of schools operate cashless systems which are designed to minimise the potential stigma which pupils taking FSMs can experience.

Merton's school admissions team use the DfE eligibility checking system for free school meals, which offers an easy and quick service to determine applicants' eligibility for FSM. Officers are keeping closely in touch with the DfE for information on changes related to the introduction of the new universal credit system.

Officers recognise that more needs to be done to increase FSM awareness, applications and take up. To this end within the corporate anti-poverty strategy we have set a target of increasing registration for FSMs by a minimum 5% year on year in 2013-14 and 2014-15 to match outer London levels. General information giving and encouragement needs to be supported by more targeted approaches and data analysis will be undertaken to support this targeting to, for example, particular pupil groups, schools, and areas in the borough.

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COMMUNITY AND HOUSING

21) From Councillor Iain Dysart to the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care

How does she believe that recent cuts to well-respected voluntary organisations such as Merton Mind and the Friends Of St Helier, undermining their ability to help their clients, assist the Council's stated aim of working in partnership with the voluntary sector to provide essential tailor-made services?

Reply

The Council has been working closely with the voluntary sector for over two years in designing a prevention programme which is fit for purpose. This collaboration included meetings with local older people and others to hear their views, sharing evidence on what actually makes a difference in delaying the need to use statutory services, designing a prospectus for the voluntary sector against which to bid, agreeing the desired outcomes, and agreeing the process for bids and decision making. The quality of this partnership work has won national awards.

Once the prospectus was launched in September 2012, all local voluntary organisations were offered dedicated support in drawing up their bids, and some chose to take advantage of this.

Any bidding process has to allow for potential gainers and losers. It is part of the conditions of funding that there should be no break in support for those using services. For those organisations who are losing funding, most of them have applied for and been given transition funding for the next six months, with ongoing discussions regarding further funding.

I am committed to continuing to work in close partnership with the local voluntary sector, and to having an excellent preventive programme in place which takes into account the wishes of local residents and which is based on those factors which make a difference in providing an alternative to statutory services.