

Merton Council Council

6 February 2019

Supplementary agenda

20 Councillor Non-priority Questions and Replies

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Ordinary council questions

From Councillor David Williams to the Leader of the Council:

Would the Leader please list the meetings and correspondence he has had since the last ordinary meeting of the Council on 21st November 2018 to save St Helier Hospital?

Reply

Since the last ordinary meeting of council on 21 November, I have continued to engage with the Improving Healthcare Together process, alongside my Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health, to make clear the Council's position in regards to St Helier Hospital.

I have also worked with officers from our public health team who have engaged with the process and provided information as part of the assessments that are being undertaken.

From Councillor Eloise Bailey to the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Housing and Transport

Is the cabinet member aware of the new situation for tenants at Raynesfield, and if so, what assistance is LB Merton giving? And is he willing to meet with the West Barnes councillors to discuss how we can support them further?

Reply

As you will be aware Raynesfield in Grand Drive, comprising 28 properties, was acquired by Crown Simmons Housing from the Mayor's Office of Policing and Crime (MOPAC) IN 2017

These properties were traditionally used to house police staff and latterly key workers. I have met with Crown Simmons representatives when they explained their proposals for the future, including major investment in the properties and a review of rents and tenancy agreements. These initiatives are to be welcomed given that there has been little investment in the stock and a disparity over rents

I understand that Crown Simmons have conducted meetings with all residents and the matter has been taken to their board

I would of course be willing to meet with West Barnes Councillors to discuss how best to work with Crown Simmons and their tenants to progress this matter

From Councillor Nick McLean to the Cabinet Member for Community and Culture:

Can the Cabinet Member please confirm where the funds that were received from last year's Eastern Electrics Festival was allocated to, and also confirm who will be paying for the emergency services to cover this year's festival?

Reply

The event hosting fee received for both the 2017 and 2018 Eastern Electrics Festivals were allocated to the Council's Greenspaces service and form part of the core budget for the maintenance and development of its parks and green spaces.

The event organisers liaise extensively with all the emergency services during the planning phases of the festival, including the police and London Fire Brigade and are able to call upon the LFB and off-site emergency medical services as and when required during the event.

Extensive front-line medical and welfare support provisions are deployed and paid for by the event organisers during the festival.

The police have confirmed that they are unable to accept payment to support the 2019 event [If this is licensed and proceeds] despite the fact that the event organisers have paid the police for such services in the past and have expressed a willingness to do so again this year. That being the case, police support will need to be funded from their own existing internal resources.

From Councillor Paul Kohler to the Cabinet Member for Environment and Street Cleanliness

What was the annual gross cost and gross income (with appropriate breakdowns where appropriate) directly attributable to the contract with Kingdom providing Enforcement Officers in respect of the issue of FPNs and any associated prosecutions for litter and fly tipping in Merton over each of the last 5 financial years?

Reply

Our contract with Kingdom Security was awarded in April 2016 and will expire in March next year. The business model within the contract is designed to ensure that the service provided by Kingdom is cost neutral. Within the model the full operational cost of the service is met by the contractor who receives a % of the income received from the payment of the Fix Penalty Notice. The council covers the cost of all legal prosecutions and any internal enforcement administrative cost

Over the first 3 years of the contract we have generated c£208k in additional revenue from the issuing of FPNs and from prosecutions which has been re invested into the wider Public Spaces services. This excludes any additional revenue received from the payment of prosecutions .

In 2016 /17 we received a total of £82k

In 2017/18 we received a total of £70k

Between April – Nov 2018 we have received £56k

From Councillor Janice Howard to the Cabinet Member for Environment and Street Cleanliness:

Why does Merton Council not have recycling bins in Committee Rooms B,C,D and E, and what steps are being taken to enable staff to recycle more?

Reply

The absence of recycling bins in Committee Rooms was an oversight that has now been remedied.

Staff are encouraged to use the following recycling arrangements within the Civic Centre:-

- Blue (Paper& Card) recycling bins can be found on every floor of the Civic Centre.
- Green (Plastic, Cans, Cartons) recycling bins are located within the kitchenettes on each floor of the Civic Centre. The Cleaning Contractor Birkin provide green bin liners within the bins to identify the recycled contents.
- Battery recycling boxes are located in the kitchenettes on each floor of the Civic Centre <https://erp-recycling.org/uk/batteries/>

Potential improvements to arrangements and additional recycling streams within Merton Civic Centre are through discussion with E&R's Public Space, Waste Services Recycling team. The potential to organise a Food Waste recycling collection service at the Civic Centre is currently being explored.

From Councillor Ed Gretton to the Cabinet Member for Education:

Can the Council clarify the date of the last meeting of the School Standards Panel and explain why it has not met for many months, particularly in the context of the recent OFSTED inspection of a primary school in Raynes Park which moved recently from Outstanding down to Requires Improvement without the knowledge of the Council's Cabinet?

Reply

The most recent meeting of the School Standards Panel was under a month ago. Prior to that meeting there was an unfortunate delay in organising meetings of the group after the local elections in May, a delay in appointing members to the group, the intervention of the school summer holidays (during which time visits to schools, or school attendance at a meeting could not be facilitated) and then by changes to business support within Children Schools and Families.

In the interim there were meetings between the Assistant Director (Education) and the chair of the group (Cllr Akigyina) ensuring that actions being taken to continue to improve Merton schools were communicated. There have also been (and continue to be) regular meetings between the Cabinet Member for Education and the Assistant Director (Education) and other senior officers in that division where school matters are discussed in detail.

The Cabinet Member for Education had been aware of officers' concerns about the school where a requires improvement judgement was made in September 2018, since September 2017, and was updated regularly through these meetings.

A 'Support and Challenge Group' had been put in place for the school since September 2017, and this was accompanied by a significant amount of support from school improvement advisers. The group focused on improving the leadership, outcomes and teaching in the school, and although there were good improvements in outcomes in the July exams, these were not enough to secure the good outcome that was wished for, particularly since the school had had a change in headteacher, chair of governors, and had also lost one of its deputy headteachers in the summer term.

At the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee when Cllr Gretton raised the outcome of the inspection, it was unfortunate that this was before the official publication of the inspection report on Ofsted's website. A school's report should not be discussed before official publication.

Support for the school continues, with the appointment of a strong Executive Headteacher at West Wimbledon, and the school has moved forward significantly since the inspection.

From Councillor David Williams to the Leader of the Council:

Given the Leader's claims to be 'business-like', why is he allowing community assets like pubs to fail and close at one of the highest rates in all London, and what does he intend to do to save local pubs?

Reply

We do not have any pubs listed as assets of Community value. Please see current list:

<https://www.merton.gov.uk/assets/Documents/Assets%20of%20Community%20Value%20-%20Listed%20Sites.pdf>

Pubs are businesses and any listing would not stop them closing, only allow for bids on disposal. We have no powers over closure, and there is also a limit to our powers in change of use.

Council questions under the strategic theme (Sustainable Communities)

From Councillor Hayley Ormrod to the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Housing and Transport:

What plans does the Council have to encourage residents to switch away from diesel to electric vehicles, such as:

- I Electric charging points in every street?
- II Electric charge points in public carparks?
- III Full parking permit exemptions for electric vehicles?
- IV Grants to residents to encourage them to buy electric cars?

Reply

The recent Public health, air quality and sustainable transport-a strategic approach to parking charges 2 report which was discussed at Scrutiny recently set out a range of measures the council is using to achieve a switch away from diesel and more polluting vehicles as well as encouraging active transport and the use of public transport.

Examples include:

Reply to 1,

Para 2.2.14 reads Merton's ambition (by 2021/22) is to facilitate 125 electric charge vehicle points across the borough, including fast, rapid and residential charge points.

Reply to 2

Para 2.4 Car Park management and standards to achieve policy aims

Para 2.4.6 Electric vehicle charging points (EVCP's) - Car parks lend themselves as logical places to locate EVCP's, as they are designed for, and traditionally used by 'longer stay' customers. Charging times required for electric vehicles are often 2 hours plus (in most cases) for a reasonable charge, albeit quicker charging technologies are being developed. Parking Services are working with colleges with a view to introducing electric charging bays in our car parks in early 2019. It is anticipated 1 or 2 bays may be installed initially with provision for this number to increase in the future.

Reply to 3

Para 2.6.16 It is recommended the principle of a significant reduced charge (£20 total fee) in our car parks is also offered to 'fully electric vehicles' for season ticket sales as a direct incentive to change the nature of vehicle ownership. This offer could give a saving of up to approx. £1,300 per year.

Reply to 4.

The council has no plans to offer grants to residents and an incentive to purchase electric cars.

From Councillor Simon McGrath Strategic to the Cabinet Member for Environment and Street Cleanliness:

Does he support the London Assembly Environment Committee's call for action? Namely:

- The Independent Commission on Civil Aviation Noise should regulate noise disturbance more stringently, using lower thresholds for disturbance (taking into account WHO guidelines and the need for residents to keep windows open) and mapping the combined effect of all London's airports, especially Heathrow and City. The Mayor should support this work.
- Air traffic using Heathrow and City airports should not increase, and the proposed third runway at Heathrow should not go ahead.
- Flight paths should be rotated to give respite for those living under concentrated flight paths. Flight paths should be designed to minimise noise impacts: stacking, low-level overflying, and overlapping flight paths should be minimised.
- There should be no night flights, and limits on early morning flights should be retained, and preferably strengthened.
- The severe levels of noise disruption now being experienced by some of London's residents are not acceptable, and urgent, decisive action is needed across the board to alleviate it.

Reply

We recognise the opportunities that this presents as well as the potential environmental impact that comes with it. We are engaging in the consultation on flight paths to better understand what the impact might be and we urge residents to do likewise. The Council has publicised the details on our website. We shall consider our response based on the evidence presented and will want to look at how best the plans

for Heathrow can ensure that residents continue to have quiet enjoyment of their homes.

From Councillor Hayley Ormrod to the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Housing and Transport:

Given the Council's introduction of the Diesel Tax in April 2017, what future plans does the Council have to review permit charges for diesel and petrol cars, and if both will be taxed, what type of cars would the Council suggest residents buy?

Reply

A report is going to the Scrutiny Panel on the 25th February 2019. The report will sets out the Terms of Reference for a full review of the Diesel levy and also include Emission based charging. The council would always support active transport, walking and cycling, followed by greater use of Public transport. The council would before the purchase of Electric Vehicle or ultra-low emission vehicles and already have in place a reduced charge for Permits of Electric Vehicles.

From Councillor Hayley Ormrod to the Cabinet Member for Environment and Street Cleanliness:

As the Council is concerned by air quality, what plans does the cabinet member have to "green" up the borough and will he consider the following:

- a) Street Tree planting program?
- b) Ideas to promote gardens instead of paving?
- c) Providing advice to residents on what plants to grow which will help reduce air pollution?

Reply

a) The Council has enjoyed a street tree planting programme for many years. In a typical year some 250-300 new or replacement street trees are planted and maintained during their establishment phase.

b) With regard to planning policy the council is required to operate within the relevant national planning legislation which does allow for permitted development rights to create sustainable paving to gardens. Any breaches of those controls can be investigated by the planning enforcement team. In addition, the Council will always negotiate appropriate planting and natural landscaping as part of any new development scheme with paving only being allowed in appropriate locations.

Regarding the Council's highways since the 4th June 2018 Merton Council (following May 2018 cabinet meeting where the new crossover policy was approved) have been assessing applicants for crossovers using its new policy criteria which can be found on this web link <https://www.merton.gov.uk/streets-parking-transport/streets-and-pavements/dropped-kerbs>

As part of its criteria Amenity areas such as Grass verges, areas of shrubbery or hedging that are council owned and are more than 2.0m in depth the crossover application will be refused. In addition, crossovers requiring potential removal of a tree where the tree is still staked will be considered at the occupants full cost for tree

removal plus the cost for two new trees to be planted. These trees may not be planted in the same street but will be planted in the same Ward. Trees no longer staked will not be removed unless diseased or in a state of decline

When property owners undertake works to their front garden to accommodate a new crossover, they will need to consider looking at materials that are either permeable or semi-permeable. If the surface to be covered is more than 5sqm than planning permission will be required where laying traditional, impermeable driveways that don't provide water to run to a permeable area. This is outlined as part of Merton's Crossover criteria as outlined under section C – Guidance for converting front gardens (see above link).

Lastly, Illegally crossing the footway, or crossing over footway adjacent to an existing crossover are now be dealt with through an enforcement element within the policy/criteria that allows for the use of restrictive measures (installing bollards at the back of path). This is to protect Merton Council assets and stop continual damage occurring due to unauthorised vehicle crossovers.

c) This is not a service that the Council is able to offer directly, unfortunately. There are a number of existing resources available and the Royal Horticultural Society, amongst others, provides useful advice and information via various media, including on-line, on this topic.

From Councillor Janice Howard to the Cabinet Member for Environment and Street Cleanliness:

Why are the streets not being swept to the correct standard and at what point does the Cabinet Member expect that:

- a) Autumn leaf fall will finally be cleared?
- b) All Christmas trees removed that are still there post his own deadline?

Reply

A) Our contract with Veolia provides for additional capacity to collect and dispose of leaves during the Autumn/early winter. This 'leafing season' runs for ten weeks starting at an agreed point between October and November and finishing in December/January. Exact dates are flexible due to the seasonal factors that can affect leaf fall.

Given the relatively mild weather we experienced this autumn we delayed the start of the service until the middle of November.

Our leafing plan document lists those roads that historically have experienced heavy leaf fall or have been prone to flooding in adverse weather conditions. The plan allows for two visits across the ten week period by the leafing resource to each of the roads listed in the plan. The leafing schedule is neither exclusive nor exhaustive and other locations are cleared as required.

All roads continue to be cleansed on the normal cleansing schedule.

All roads should be to the required standard, If you have any areas/ location which you believe need further attention please report this on line and a service request will be created for the contractor to investigate and respond.

B) Our contractor deployed additional garden crews for the collection of Christmas tree from the kerbside for a 2 week period following 12th night. This has now been completed and all trees which were presented correctly and on time should have been collected and recycled. We are aware that there are isolated incidents where Christmas trees are still being presented on the kerbside. As these locations are identified our response crews are continuing to collect these trees.

From Councillor Daniel Holden to the Cabinet Member for Environment and Street Cleanliness:

When will the Council and Veolia finally deliver the correct bins to households across Merton, many of whom are either

- a) still waiting for their actual original wheelie bins,
- b) still waiting for larger bins and/or more boxes and food caddies they have requested many months ago,
- c) sort and resolve the many bin problems relating to blocks of flats and
- d) streets with no suitable storage resulting in wheelie bins blocking pavements

Reply

Disappointingly the delivery of the new containers was not fully completed in advance of the launch of the new service. A number of properties had not received their wheelie bins. The impact of this was that a sizeable minority of residents had not received their new bins or as importantly the information pack which advised them of the changes to the service and if appropriate the new day of collection. This resulted in waste being presented incorrectly but at no fault of the resident

Following the changes in waste collection and the frequency of collection we have been pleased to see a significant increase in the number of requests for new containers (recycling box and food caddies). Although this has been anticipated and the contractor had increased supplies the level of demand exceeded expectations and created a back log in deliveries at times which is being resolved..

The demand for additional recycling boxes and food caddies, although welcome, has put additional strain on the service as the level of request has been far greater than we anticipated.. The numbers of requests since July 2018 - when 'Leaflet 1' started to be delivered - totals 31,582. This amounts to nearly 50% the kerbside service requesting boxes and caddies in 6 months.

As of today we believe the bulk of these requests have been completed, however, we are aware that there are a number of discrepancies and data issues which suggest that not all container deliveries have been completed. We continue to apply pressure on our contractor to ensure that all requests are undertaken and orders fulfilled as quickly as possible.