

Merton Council Council

3 April 2019

Supplementary Agenda 5

22 Public and Councillor Supplementary Questions and Replies

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1. From: Tony Burton

To the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Housing and Transport

To ask for details of all bids made to the Neighbourhood Fund under the 2018 ward pilot project, including naming the councillor making each bid, their ward, the value of bid(s), whether bid(s) were successful and whether all monies for the pilot were allocated or what amount was left unallocated.

Reply

This is a large body of work and the answer will not fit into the space for councillor questions. However we commit to publishing this within the next month. The pilot has led to the Ward Allocation Scheme; from 01 April 2019 each ward in Merton has £15,000 per ward to be delivered on small scale public realm projects over the next three years led by Merton's ward councillors:

<https://democracy.merton.gov.uk/documents/s26249/2019-01-14%20Cabinet%20Report%20Neighbourhood%20CIL%20Ward%20Allocation%20v7.pdf>

2. From: Sandra Vogel

To the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance

Your web site says you spend £3820 to distribute 85,000 copies of My Merton. My home has not received the last two issues. How do you check delivery is made to all homes, how many homes miss out like mine, and how is it possible that non delivery happens?

Reply

A delivery report is sent to Merton Council following completion of each distribution of My Merton. This contains information about any properties missed and the reasons why. The reasons for non-delivery are mainly due to access issues, for example the entry phone not answering in blocks of flats, blocked letterboxes or empty properties. Any complaints of non-delivery received by the council are sent to the distribution contractor, an investigation takes place and the outcomes are reported back to the council. On average each edition of My Merton is successfully delivered to 92% of homes in the borough. Any household not receiving their copy of My Merton should contact communications@merton.gov.uk or telephone 020 8545 3827.

3. From: Tom Killick

To the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Housing and Transport

What does the Council estimate would be the cost of introducing 20mph speed limits on all residential roads in the borough in one go rather than piecemeal as is currently planned?

Reply

The Council is introducing the borough wide 20mph speed limit in phases as this is normal practice when dealing with such a vast area. This is due to a number of factors and constraints but primarily due to the work involved – site assessment, statutory consultation, ordering and storing of all the required signs, consultation with external bodies such as TfL and neighbouring boroughs that will impact some areas but not all; contractor's availability and ability to erect all the necessary signs; officer's time etc.

Rolling it out in phases also allows the Council to deal with objections specific for the area. For example, objections from one area that would not relate to other areas but it would cause unnecessary delay to implementation.

The roll out started in November 2018 and it is envisaged that it would be completed by October 2019 subject to not receiving any objections from any given area.

Supplementary

I thank the Councillor for his reply. Would he please arrange for a schedule to be published on the Council's website showing which roads will be made 20mph and when because I couldn't find that information on the website. Thank you.

Reply

I'd like to thank Mr Killick for his supplementary question. We hope to have rolled out 20mph zones by the end of this year. At the moment we can't give the exact timetable of roads but we are looking at having a series of three further consultations in the Borough, so I'm pretty confident that by the end of 2019 they will be in place. This is something that has been delivered by a Labour administration and the website will be updated as and when. Thank you.

4. From: Stephanie Upton-Prowse To the Cabinet Member for Environment and Street Cleanliness

I'd like to know what you're doing in the borough to promote No littering. We have an epidemic locally and the council needs to make it clear that it's not acceptable to litter. Are you going to put in more bins? What are your ideas to make Wimbledon Litter Free?

Reply

We currently have Enforcement officers covering all town centres and known hot spot areas. These enforcement officers patrol and issue Fixed Penalty Notices to those that drop litter. We carry out engagement around the same areas raising awareness of the consequences of dropping litter. As part of this engagement we offer stubbi pouches which are small portable disposal ashtrays as quite a lot of our litter issues around the town centres are cigarette related. The ashtrays also double up as chewing gum pouches we advertises the no butt litter fixed penalty information on the back of the

ashtray.. In addition our staff visit schools on a regular basis giving no littering messages to children.

We offer equipment for local residents to assist in our combat to keep the streets clean by involving themselves in a community clean up. For more information on community clean ups residents can contact Principal Engagement Officer John Ball on 020-545-3173 or at john.ball@merton.gov.uk

Litter Bins are normally placed if there is enough evidence that a bin is required, the bins are carefully placed in order not to encourage miss use of the bin and where the bin can be easily emptied. Unfortunately Bins often attract fly tipping and the quantity and location of bins is carefully considered so as to strike the right balance.

**5. From: Joyce Pountain
To the Cabinet Member for Environment and Street Cleanliness**

With reference to the answer to question 6 in Feb 2019 Questions to Council, please outline the exceptional circumstances in which herbicides are used in parks and green spaces and what was the outcome of the investigation into Hammersmith & Fulham's use of steam foam?

Reply

Our contractor is using lawfully permitted weedkillers including glyphosate, Chikara, Crossbar and Greenor in the parks to control weeds where it is cost prohibitive to use other, manual methods.

We are aware that Idverde are using 'steamfoam' on some of their other contracts but at a higher contract fee .There is an additional cost for this method as it is more labour intensive and it can only reach areas accessible by a van & long hose.

**6. From: Nicola Thompson
To the Cabinet Member for Community and Culture**

Does the council have an official response and reporting procedure to follow when it is alerted to an environmental incident? If so, could you please outline what it is? If there is no such procedure, please explain why?

Reply

The Council is a Category 1 responder in relation to emergency planning under the UK's civil contingencies procedures. This would be appropriate for the Council's approach to any significant incident requiring a multi-agency response.

In relation to less significant environmental incident, the Council's Environmental Health service would respond for any incident relative to its regulatory powers. The Council may create its own processes for dealing with specific types of incident but all

processes would require to meet that set out in any statute used or guidance thereunder. Some pollution incidents, e.g. waste operations, complex flood risk activities and complex water discharges and groundwater activities, like large sewage treatment plants, are regulated by the Environment Agency.

**7. From: Phil Ling
To the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance**

How many schools in Merton took up the council's offer of solar panels for their roofs and on average how much were these schools projected to save in electricity bills?

Reply

28 schools have received free solar panels from the installation scheme at a cost to the Council of £1.93 million since 2011, resulting in income of £110,000 per annum through the FIT.

2 Schools were unable to receive panels due to technical issues.

The average saving across the 28 schools is £3,374 per annum. However panel system sizes range from 10 kWp (roughly the size of 3 domestic installations) to 150 kWp (roughly the size of 50 domestic systems). For example, one secondary school has 3 large systems whereas another primary school only has panels on one small roof. The difference in sizing is due to the nature of the sites and the availability of suitable roofs.

As such the range of savings provided by the panels goes from £761 up to £11,139 per annum.

Furthermore, the business case for solar panels allowed for the creation of a Power Purchase Agreement (PPA) allowing the council to charge (at below national grid rate) for the generated electricity used by schools on site. This means that each site has two annual savings figures to allow for a PPA to be used. The above figures are provided without PPA. Once a PPA is put in place the saving to the school will be reduced, with the council using the income to re-pay the initial investment and ensure the panels continue optimal production for their full lifespan.

Please be aware that there are several caveats to the saving figures provided;

- 1) Savings are based on a figure of 60% on-site usage for the majority of systems. Changes to this usage figure have been applied for large systems and for very small systems to provide a more realistic saving calculation
- 2) Savings are calculated using a nominal electricity rate of 12p per kWh, which is based on current corporate utility contract prices inclusive of non-commodity costs. As such annual saving figures may go up or down depending on the cost of the imported power that PV generation is offsetting.

**8. From: Luke Taylor
To the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health**

What process does the council have to monitor air quality at school sites across the borough and how does this fit in to the council's air quality improvement plan?

Reply

The Council's Air Quality Action Plan 2018 has a section dedicated to action around our schools. A copy of this can be found on the Council's web-site. The Council has committed to auditing air quality at schools in the most polluted areas and providing a scheme of mitigation at each including introducing schools into the monitoring regime where these are in areas of poor air quality.

During audits, pollutant levels inside playgrounds and in school buildings have always been within the UK guidance levels. The main challenge in protecting children from poorer air quality relates to the way in which they travel to and from school and Merton's Air Quality Action Plan includes a commitment to school travel plans.

**9. From: Tamara Kohler
To the Cabinet Member for Education**

What measures does the council have in place to assist schools with careers advice and building relationships with businesses for things like inspirational visits to schools, work experience and apprenticeships?

Reply

All Merton secondary schools are using the recognised Gatsby criteria to assess practice with regards to careers advice, information and guidance (information about the criteria can be found here <https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/schools-colleges/understand-gatsby-benchmarks>). A representative from the London Enterprise Adviser Network has presented to heads of sixth form meeting. This organisation will support all schools, including how they can be linked to a business adviser who will support a range of activities in schools.

**10. From: Samantha MacArthur
To the Cabinet Member for Education**

How many schools in Merton set deficit budgets in 2018-19 and how many are likely to set deficit budgets in 2019-20. How many of these are primary vs secondary?

Reply

In 2018/19 fourteen schools set deficit budgets. Schools are required to submit their final budgets to Merton by the first of June as year-end balances are included as part of budget setting. We will therefore not be able to confirm the number of schools in deficit for 2019/20 until then, but we would expect the number to be similar to 2018/19.

**11. From: Emily Robertson
To the Cabinet Member for Children's Services**

How many requests for statutory assessment have been made in Merton in the past five years and what percentage of these requests have resulted in Merton issuing an EHCP?

Reply

- Number of referrals 2015 – 2019 (present day): 1200
- Number of EHCPs issues 2015 – 2019 (present day): 967
- Percentage: 81%

**12. From: Pippa Maslin
To the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health**

On 6th February I asked the council to declare a Climate Emergency and review its current carbon reduction plans in order to become carbon neutral by 2030 and thereby help to limit global warming to 1.5°C. The answer received was encouraging but non-committal. Has there been any progress?

Reply

From innovations such as the Merton Rule in 2003 to maximising solar panel coverage across most of Merton Council's primary schools, four secondary schools, leisure centres and other council buildings, Merton Council has long been a leader in taking action to reduce carbon and tackle climate change. We are very supportive of the principle of what declaring a climate emergency seeks to achieve, and have been closely following what other Councils which have declared an emergency have done. However, it is our view that to succeed in limiting global warming, declaring a climate emergency must be backed up by a comprehensive strategy and deliverable action plan that will demonstrate how carbon reductions will be achieved, otherwise it remains simply a declaration without any real action. We are presently considering our next Climate Change Strategy, which will be discussed by Cabinet in the coming months. This will include some detail on the proposed next steps to continue to reduce carbon in the borough backed up by actions we can take to deliver on our promise. As part of this work we will consider whether we can commit to becoming carbon neutral by 2030, and will use that Cabinet paper to declare a climate emergency if we believe this is feasible. We would welcome the involvement of the community at this stage in establishing a working group to help deliver the strategy.

Supplementary

Thank you for your encouraging response, I'm sure that the Shadow Environment Secretary would welcome it. I was just wondering if anybody could provide any more detail about the community involvement and working group that you talk of in your answer?

Reply

I thank her for her question and her supplementary. My understanding is that when declaring a Climate Emergency, one of the actions is to declare a working group that includes members of the community. So if we were to declare a Climate Emergency, in that Cabinet paper that the answer refers to, we would then look to establish a working group which would include members of the community and you would be very welcome to be involved in that process.

13. From: Shipra Gupta To the Cabinet Member for Education

How many schools in Merton will be receiving less funding in the 2019-20 financial year due to funding formula changes? How many of these are primary vs secondary?

Reply

Merton's funding formula was set in such a way that no school would receive less funding per pupil in 2019/20 than what was received in 2018/19. This is a "per pupil" safeguard and would mean that if the number of pupils in a school reduced, the overall funding could reduce.

14. From: Kevin Clarke To the Cabinet Member for Education

Ricards Lodge and Rutlish recently implemented a shared sibling policy in recognition of their close links. Given the schools are not on a shared site does the education dept. have other plans to reduce the effects of sexual discrimination in admission policies?

Reply

Ricards Lodge and Rutlish are separate single sex schools with admissions policies primarily based on siblings and then distance from the school. Due to their locations some 1.5 miles apart, it is accurate that girls to the north of Wimbledon will get a better chance of getting a place at the Ricards Lodge, and boys to the south of Wimbledon will get a better chance of getting into Rutlish. While there may be more choice of school depending on your residency and sex of child, this is not sexual discrimination. The council did review the position with the schools relatively recently and due to the close working between the schools e.g. a shared sixth form it was agreed, as stated by Mr Clarke, to have a shared siblings policy so that families can be together in the schools. However, it was agreed that the schools did not wish to stop prioritising places for their traditional catchment e.g. Rutlish providing places for Morden boys. There are therefore no further plans.

The current school admissions round for 2019 entry shows that, with the addition of the new Harris Academy Wimbledon School and current preference patterns, all families in Wimbledon have an accessible Good or Outstanding school.

**15. From: Klaartje Dresselaers
To the Cabinet Member for Children's Services**

What are the Mean and median processing times for EHCP applications in each of last 5 years?

Reply

Mean:

- 2015 – 25 Weeks
- 2016 – 27 Weeks
- 2017 – 24 Weeks
- 2018 – 20 Weeks
- 2019 - 0 EHCP's referred in 2019 finalised to date

Median

- 2015 – 22
- 2016 – 25
- 2017 – 23
- 2018 – 19
- 2019 - 0 EHCP's referred in 2019 finalised to date

**16. From: Barry Smith
To the Cabinet Member for Education**

Why has the number of Children Missing Education in Merton increased for the third year running?

Reply

Children are legally counted as children missing education (CME) when they are off roll of a school. The number of children missing education off roll has been at the same level for the last 3 years (128, 129, 125) against an overall increasing school population (3% rise across the 3 years) In summary: The overall number of CME has not increased despite the rise in the number of pupils.

The number of children identified as vulnerable to missing school has increased over the last 3 years (123, 131, 175) however these children are still on roll which shows improved targeting and identification of children to support them to prevent them becoming CME off roll.

**17. From: Emma Maddison
To the Cabinet Members for Regeneration Housing and Transport**

How does the council monitor and evaluate the quality and value for money of work carried out to schools that is managed and procured by the council? What feedback does the council ask schools for in relation to this work and what's the average timeframe for resolving issues that arise?

Reply

The council manages building works with technical staff either in the Corporate Facilities Management team or, for major projects, outside design consultants. To ensure best value, works are procured according to the council's standing orders that ensures the market is properly tested for value for money and for major projects a design team regularly monitors the projects with a professional Quantity Surveyor to monitor value for money. Prior to the procurement of a major project a strategic review is undertaken to agree the most appropriate procurement approach for the market at that time.

For major projects school are regularly involved throughout the design and construction phases of a project so feedback is an iterative process. We do not record the average timeframe for resolving an issue, and it will vary according to the complexity of the issue and the contractor involved.

18. From: John Braithwaite To the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance

What have the revenue implications been for the council of putting solar panels on school roofs? Has the council made money from this, if so then how much?

Reply

28 schools have received free solar panels from the installation scheme at a cost to the Council of £1.93 million since 2011, resulting in income of £110,000 per annum through the FIT.

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The average saving across the 28 schools is £3,374 per annum. However panel system sizes range from 10 kWp (roughly the size of 3 domestic installations) to 150 kWp (roughly the size of 50 domestic systems). For example, one secondary school has 3 large systems whereas another primary school only has panels on one small roof. The difference in sizing is due to the nature of the sites and the availability of suitable roofs.

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provided without PPA. Once a PPA is put in place the saving to the school will be reduced, with the council using the income to re-pay the initial investment and ensure the panels continue optimal production for their full lifespan.

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**19. From: Hugo Forshaw
To the Cabinet Member for Education**

What does the council do to monitor and encourage the provision of age appropriate LGBT+ inclusive sex and relationships education in schools across the borough? Have any schools experienced resistance to such classes, and if so how is the council engaging with local communities on this issue?

Reply

As a Stonewall Education Champion, Merton Local Authority encourages schools to use age appropriate resources to provide Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) sessions which are inclusive of same sex relationships. A small 'Equalities' group of senior leaders in Primary and Secondary schools meet to discuss issues including inclusive RSE curriculum resources. Student groups at Ricards have provided sessions for local primary school pupils through this network. The equalities adviser provides CPD for primary and secondary schools, showcasing appropriate resources and strategies. School Leaders have received advice on working with parents on these issues from various speakers including Andrew Moffatt, (No Outsiders), Stonewall and Equaliteach. Schools who have experienced resistance to their inclusive approach to RSE have sought advice from colleagues and experts in the field.

**20. From: Jack Rawden
To the Cabinet Member for Regeneration Housing and Transport**

With the traffic on Gap road worse than ever, and the prospect of 600 new flats and a predicted increase of traffic to the area. Isn't it time to start considering parking restrictions on Gap road to ease traffic and make the lives of its residents bearable?

Reply

We only introduce a CPZ in roads where there is majority support from the residents. When the CPZ was introduced in the area in 2003, Gap Rd residents opted against

the CPZ and therefore it was not introduced and other than a few compliant since then, there has not been any demand for intervention other than yellow lines to prevent obstructive parking.

The Council will consider consulting on a CPZ upon receiving a petition from Gap Rd residents demonstrating their support for a CPZ. However, if the residents do not want a CPZ but feel that there is a need for more yellow line restrictions, the Council would be happy to investigate and take the appropriate action.

**21. From: Vincent Bolt
To the Cabinet Member for Children's Services**

What are the number and % of EHCP applications conceded by council on appeal for each of last 5 years?

Reply

In the time available to me, I was able to review data from the last 2 years, however further time is required to analyse information held elsewhere. We have not had any EHC needs assessment applications (I.e. No to assess) lodged with the First Tier Tribunal and therefore the council has not conceded requests for an assessment as part of a registered appeal. I will follow up with detail when records further back have been gone through.

**22. From: Chris Stanton
To the Cabinet Member for Community and Culture**

Will the Council be reinstalling bins in Wandle Park following their 'trial' removal? If reinstallation is on the cards, when will this happen and how many bins will there be?

Reply

Yes, there will be some bins reinstalled in specific places, where it has been deemed most suitable, given the litter in those locations. These bins should be reinstated within the next few weeks.

Supplementary

Apologies Madam Mayor, Chris Stanton couldn't make it today so I'm standing in for him. For the record my name is Dr Stephen McKeever. In response to the question, if you conduct, as a researcher and a academic, as you conduct a trial what you have is a null hypothesis and an alternative hypothesis. In this conducting of the trial of removal of bins in Wandle Park, what we have is a..

The question is, you have said that you will return some of the bins, but it makes no logical sense that you're not going to return all of the bins or none of the bins.

The question is, in the response you've said that you are going to return some of the bins to the park, why are you not going to return all the bins or none of the bins?

Reply

I'd like to thank you very much indeed for your supplementary question. The bins are being returned because as far as the experiment is concerned, it was a curate's egg. There was substantially less rubbish picked up from the park over the period, but the rubbish that was picked up was obviously picked up from the ground rather than in bins. We decided, I decided, that some of the bins would be returned and their placing has been very carefully worked out in consultation not only with me but with the ward councillors. The reason that not all of them are going back is because a lot of the bins remain empty at any stage when they were there. In fact, I could point you to various bins within the park where one bin was overflowing and the next bin was completely empty within 10-15 yards of it. There were quite frankly too many bins and I can't see how putting, laugh if you like, but I can't see how putting more and more and more bins will actually make a vast amount of difference to the rubbish that's collected. I hope that answers your question. Thank you.

23. From: Jil Hall To the Cabinet Member for Children's Services

How many EHCP applications have been made in each of the previous 5 years?

Reply

- 2015 – 180
- 2016 – 214
- 2017 – 316
- 2018 – 387
- 2019 (to date) – 103

24. From: Viv Vella To the Cabinet Member for Education

What support do schools get from the council to manage projects partly or wholly funded by the council and how much of school leaderships teams' time is spent managing such projects?

Reply

I am presuming this question refers to building projects. Building projects funded by the council are generally managed by the council rather than the school. School leaderships teams will still be involved as projects need to meet the needs of the school, but the technical elements are undertaken by the council and/or appointed technical design consultants. No record is kept of the specific time spent by the school leadership teams.

From Cllr Agatha Akyigyina to the Cabinet Member for Environment and Street Cleanliness

Could the Cabinet Member please give up the latest update on recycling targets and actual figures since the introduction of the new waste collection service?

Reply

Over the first 5 month of the new service we have seen a significant reduction (-11%) in the overall volume of general waste being collected. This equates to a monthly reduction of 400 tonnes to landfill. The main contributor to this success is the increase in food waste participation which has seen an increase of 64% or 176 tonnes per month and continues to increase.

The Garden waste service remains popular with our residents and our customer base continues to grow. We currently have 9,100 customers compared to 7,500 last year. Over the last 5 months, following the introduction of the new service, we have collected an average of an additional 59 tonnes per month (36%) compared to the same period last year.

The net impact of these changes has resulted in a current recycling rate of 40%. Taking into account the full year impact of the service change we are confident that next year we will achieve our stretch target of 45% recycling performance and position us in the top quartile of all London boroughs.

Supplementary

Thank you Madam Mayor. I'd like to thank the Cabinet Member for his response and I'd like to ask, following the rollout of the new system, what briefly are the Council's priorities now regarding waste and recycling?

Reply

I'd like to thank Councillor Akyigyina for her question and supplementary. People will know that I can talk at length about litter and rubbish but I will save you too much tonight, but my priorities are and the Council's priorities are; to further increase the level of recycling; the Government is setting out a challenging target and we are wholeheartedly behind that, I want us to exceed the 45% target we have and get better on that. I also think we need to work to improve the quality of what's given in recycling and therefore that means working with community groups, the public to actually make sure that we have less contamination in some of our recycling and that the quality that comes through is good, because that is in the end reducing what we send to energy exchange is the only answer to making the environment better.

From Councillor David Dean to the Cabinet Member for Community and Culture

At the last full council, Cllr Draper stated that street trees were a problem because of their high cost of purchase and maintenance. At the Raynes Park Community Forum on 26th March, Cllr Brunt said that he just found out that the leaves fall off trees, and a "balanced debate" is required to see if street trees are welcome.

06: Non ST Questions

Bearing in mind the Labour so-called “action plan” said more trees should be planted, will Labour confirm if the cabinet want more or less street trees to improve air quality?

Reply

Unfortunately, most of the wording in the question is inaccurate reporting or untrue. Nevertheless, trees improve the liveability of towns and cities and reduce costs in a number of ways including reducing storm water runoff, improving air quality, storing carbon, providing shade, and reducing urban heat-island effects. They also enhance bio-diversity by providing food, habitat and landscape connectivity for urban fauna. Merton has a very high number of trees across the borough, not just on streets but in parks, recreation grounds, and public and privately owned property.

Despite identifying potential problems such as leaf litter, tree debris and possible infrastructure damage, residents’ attitudes to street trees remain positive. The aesthetic and practical attributes of street trees such as beautification, shade provision, increased property values, added privacy and noise reduction are rated highly by most city residents.

Traffic emissions and other fine particulate air pollution can cause serious health effects, including premature mortality, pulmonary inflammation, and altered cardiac functions. However, trees can be particularly effective at capturing airborne pollutants in urban areas if they are located in appropriate positions. These do not need to be on the street, and some of the pollutants removed by trees include ozone, nitrogen oxides, sulphur oxides, sulphur dioxides, carbon monoxide, carbon dioxide (CO₂). It has been estimated that large healthy trees can remove between 60 and 70 times more air pollution than smaller trees. Street trees are an effective tool in reducing air pollution and creating healthier urban environments, if they are located suitably.

For the reasons outlined above the administration supports the planting of trees in the borough, both on and off street, and will consider the appropriateness of locations, the benefits that they will bring and balance against the costs of implementation and maintenance.

Supplementary

Yes I have a supplementary, thank you Madam Mayor. I thank the Cabinet Member for, I could call it an answer, a very vague response, which clearly the officers have put together, to teach the cabinet member about his job. But what I would like to do is, first of all look at Merton TV and you can see that the reporting is valid. Well you shouldn’t criticise residents Council Leader, I know you’d like to. Secondly, if you really wanted more trees, because in the action plan, and this is the question Madam Mayor, in the action plan there is no planting of trees, but last Council meeting I think

the Conservatives put forward a motion to plant 350 trees. Why is it, if the Cabinet Member really cares about trees, why didn't he support our motion?

Reply

I'm grateful to the Councillor for his supplementary question because it gives me a chance, in answering it, to also refer to the original question where he created a slur against my colleague Councillor Brunt, saying that he just found out that leaves fell off trees, this is of course, totally utterly untrue. But more to the point, more to the point Councillor Dean, it's just plain rude. It's not funny, it's not clever, it's an attempt to demean and to bully a fellow Councillor. It's a disgusting thing to do and quite honestly, it would be disgusting if it was done to anybody here. Now I know that people on this side and people on your side find this kind of behaviour execrable. I think it's appalling that councillors refer to each other like this and I will be talking to your leader to see what he will be doing to make sure it doesn't happen again. Of course I'll answer the question. The answer to the question is, we do plant trees, we have planted trees, we will carry on planting trees. We will plant trees where they are useful, we are not going to plant trees willy-nilly, we are going to think about where we plant them before we do so. It's exactly what I said at the last meeting, and I'll say it again if you ask me the same question again at the next one, but I hope Councillor Dean that when you ask me that question you will do so with politeness and I hope you do so with politeness towards all my fellow Councillors and towards your own councillors as well, thank you very much.

From Cllr Sally Kenny to the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Housing and Transport

Where is the Council up to with its roll out of 20mph zones and what is the plan up to the end of 2020?

Reply

Merton is committed to road safety and we have a number of initiatives that promotes road safety. One initiative is the introduction of a borough wide 20mph speed limit. To improve the general road safety environment and in line with the Mayor of London's transport priorities which has been adopted within the Borough's Local Implementation Plan, we are now introducing a borough wide 20mph speed limit.

The objective is to change behaviour – that is to say to encourage drivers to travel at a consistent lower speed not just throughout the borough but from borough to borough. The borough limit will work alongside neighbouring borough's 20mph speed limits. This is expected to bring about a culture change so that it is socially unacceptable to drive over 20mph in London.

The Council has started its programme for rolling out a borough wide 20mph speed limit and we have provisionally secured funding through our Local Implementation

06: Non ST Questions

Plan for next financial year which will be utilised to continue the roll out of the borough wide 20mph speed limit. Given the limited available funding this financial year, the Council has started from the borough boundaries where neighbouring boroughs have already introduced a lower speed limit.

We have started the roll-out in the East of the borough where a number of streets linking to Lambeth and Croydon were 20mph as part of the neighbouring borough roll-outs. In 2018, we extended 20mph limits from Wandsworth into Wimbledon village. The borough-wide roll-out will be implemented from East to West, subject to formal consultation and sign off. We plan to complete the borough-wide 20mph project over the next 12 months by Spring 2020.

In terms of benefits, it is considered that with a change in behaviour, there will be less aggressive driver behaviour; less likelihood of accidents; improved perception of safety; safer highway environment / experience for all vulnerable road users. Studies show that compared to 30mph, not only are the number of accidents reduced in 20mph roads, but also their severity. For instance, a pedestrian sustaining a fatal injury from a collision decreases from approximately 55% at an impact speed of 30mph to 17% at an impact speed on 20mph. There are also health benefits, as lower speeds help improve physical and mental health. As roads become safer so people are more inclined to walk and cycle more, providing regular exercise and enabling healthier lifestyles. Air and noise pollution are also reduced at 20mph and these measures support sustainable transport options and encourage modal shift.

Supplementary

Thank you Madam Mayor. To the Cabinet Member, people are asking me about the 20mph zone limit in various roads in Lower Morden, especially where certain roads are used as rat-runs. Can the Cabinet Member please confirm when it will be rolled out in Lower Morden? Thank you.

Reply

I'd like to thank Councillor Sally Kenny for her supplementary question, it's great news that a 20mph zone is being rolled out across the Borough and I'm pleased to also tell her as well that the consultation on Lower Morden area is just about to start so it will hopefully be implemented sometime in June or July. Thank you.

From Councillor Thomas Barlow to the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Housing and Transport

What was the total cost of the tickets, flights, hotels, and travel expenses to send the Leader of the Council, the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Housing and Transport and two officers to the MIPIM conference in Cannes?

Reply

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MIPIIM (Marché International des Professionnels de L'immobilier) is the world's largest international trade show for the development and property investment industry. Attendance provides Local Authorities an opportunity to meet the most influential players from all sectors of the international property industry and enables delegate's access to the greatest number of development projects and sources of capital worldwide. Given the challenges facing our borough as a result of the impact of Brexit and the need for significant additional housing, it was felt important to attend in order to promote the borough at this prestigious event.

The event is recognised as the leading real estate exhibition and networking platform to forge deals, build relationships and networks to attract inward investment. Officers also attended seminars at the event including topics such as over-station redevelopment, the future of high streets, London developer's briefings as well as a series of 1:1 meetings with private sector developers, housing associations, investors, pension funds and professional counterparts from other London authorities. As Merton will soon be seeking an investment partner to deliver Morden Regeneration, it is right that Merton has a presence on this stage and actively promotes the borough.

Merton Council attended MIPIIM as part of the London stand delegation, which also included representatives from numerous other London councils, including neighbours from LB Wandsworth, including the Leader of the Council there. The event costs were managed on behalf of the Council by 3FoxInternational. This offered a discounted rate on the conference tickets of £1360 each. The council's costs were offset through commercial sponsorship obtained by 3FoxInternational. £6000 worth of sponsorship was achieved.

Cost Breakdown:

MIPIIM event ticket (£1360 each) x 4	£5440.00
Flights (£294.54 each) x 4	£1178.35
Accommodation in Nice (£101.41 per person per night) x 4 rooms	£1217.00
Travel Expenses	
Train (am): Nice > Cannes (£7.20 pp x 4 people) x 3 journeys	
£86.40	
Taxi (pm): Cannes > Nice (£90 for 4 people x 3 journeys)	£270.00
Total Cost (before sponsorship)	
£8191.75	
(£2047.93 per person)	

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Sponsorship achieved

£6000.00

Total cost to LBM after sponsorship

£2191.75

(£547.93 per person)

Supplementary

Thank you Madam Mayor. Thank you to the Cabinet Member for his answer, we're pleased to have him and the Leader back in the Country. Whilst we are glad the Council is finally taking a cannes-do attitude on Morden regeneration perhaps he could go into more detail about those developers and investors who don't have a base in London that he met whilst in France.

Reply

Well actually we did actually meet people who were based in Wimbledon during our MIPIIM trip because it's important to talk to as many people as possible. What's crucial is actually promoting this Borough but actually getting people to invest in this Borough. But also as well in terms of the Morden regeneration we will be going to market later this year so it's important to build relationships across the board, obviously here as well we do regularly meet with developers and businesses from across the Borough including Wimbledon and it's important that we do engage with them and actually it was amazing the people who were based in Wimbledon who were actually at MIPIIM and we had many very useful conversations with them as well. I found the trip to be excellent and I believe it's worthwhile because it will bring extra investment into this Borough. Thank you.

From Cllr Simon McGrath to the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance

How many council employees have a parking permit issued by LB Merton?

Reply

As at week commencing 18th March 2019 = 882

Supplementary

Thank you Madam Mayor. It beggars belief that at a time when Merton is planning huge tax increases on people in some parts of the Borough who own cars that it positively encourages own staff to drive to work. These figures are no surprise, we've done a survey in the Peel House Car Park on a number of occasions and between a third and a half of all the cars on the upper level are Merton employees. Of course some Merton employees need cars for their work, access to cars for their

work but not half of them. Will Councillor Allison instigate an urgent review of the need for free parking for our employees as a contribution to reducing air pollution?

Reply

I'd like to thank him for his follow up question to us. Point out that we do think it's very important that everybody living in Merton thinks about alternative ways of getting to and from work but nevertheless there are a number of our staff who do need to be able to move around the Borough in order to do their work effectively, quickly and efficiently; as social workers and in other types of roles. We don't want to stop them from doing their work which is vital within our community and it's reassuring that despite the tone of the question, you did actually concede that it was important that staff should continue to do their job in that way. However I would like to just add that, first of all it is a contractual right of their employment for many of these staff to use those vehicles anyway, but we are looking at alternative ways to enable them to get around whether that's by electric vehicles, car sharing and so on and hopefully progress over the coming months and years can be made because we do want to keep the most polluting vehicles off our roads whilst at the same time helping our residents with the very real needs that they have for help from our staff. Thank you.

From Councillor Najeeb Latif to the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Housing and Transport:

It has taken the council 16 months to bulldoze the former Virgin Active Battle Close gym; at the July council meeting this council voted to 'continually review options for short term use'. Why did the Cabinet Member fail so badly to be business-like and find a temporary operator, how many discussions did he have, and how many bids did he receive to take on the site on, and what was the total cost in terms of security and loss of business rates to Merton taxpayers?

Reply from the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance

The options for short term use were limited by the need to find a use that would both minimise disturbance to local residents and be viable for a short timescale so that the council's long term ambition for residential development was not frustrated. Negotiations have been delegated to officers. Only one offer was received but this was not sustainable unless the council could confirm a minimum period for this use of three years. This the council could not do as it would frustrate our long term ambition for the site and reduce the site's value to local taxpayers. The total cost of security since the council purchased the lease to Virgin is £257,818.67, and the Business Rates £241,110 for which there was a 100% retention scheme, the council retaining 64% and the GLA 36%. Both liabilities will end following demolition which is underway currently. It is not yet possible to say with accuracy what the net benefit to Merton taxpayers will be, as the site has yet to achieve planning permission, but it is likely to far outweigh those liabilities.

Supplementary

Thank you Madam Mayor and thank you Cabinet Member Finance for his response. My supplementary question is really directed towards the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and the Leader; how many discussions for developing the Battle Close site did the administration Councillors have during their taxpayer-funded jolly to MIPIM and if they did, can they please share the business cards collected with the rest of the Council?

Reply

We're very happy to work collaboratively with the Leader of Wandsworth, the Conservative Leader of Wandsworth who was also at the same event and again the tone and the insinuation of the follow-up is very regrettable given the circumstance of all that is going on in politics at the moment. The key thing for us at the moment is that we haven't yet reached a full and final decision as to what's to happen with this site because it's still going through the Local Plan. At the appropriate stage, quite rightly we will be seeking to develop it. We have been very open that our long term aspiration is that this should become housing because there is a great need for housing. There's been unfortunately over the last few years an increased need for housing an increased amount of homelessness because of, we believe policies that the Government has been carrying out over the last few years and we would like to have more housing in an area here since the gym is no longer required. Once that happens, we'd like to invite you to the opening, to welcome the new residents there and then you will be able to explain what a good job you as a ward councillor and the Council have done in order to ensure that people get the homes that they rightly deserve. Thank you.

From Cllr Rebecca Lanning to the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Housing and Transport

Can the Cabinet member please update on plans for the regeneration of Morden Town Centre?

Reply

The Council continues to work with Transport for London and the GLA in securing funding to enable us to bring the regeneration of Morden town centre forward for delivery. We hope to be announcing the launch of a procurement process for a third party development partner this year.

Supplementary

Thank you Madam Mayor. I'd like to thank the Cabinet Member for his response, particularly around the launch of the process for a development partner for the Morden regeneration. Could he give me an update on the selection of this development partner and also on the deliverability of affordable housing?

Reply

I'd like to thank Councillor Lanning for her supplementary. We hope to go to market later this year in terms of the selection of a development partner for Morden, it's a very exciting project in terms of delivering more homes and it's crucial obviously that we work alongside the GLA and TfL and Clarion in terms of the delivery of this regeneration given that Clarion have part of the area. In terms of affordable housing we have been clear with all developers, housing associations and other interested parties we met that has to be policy compliant and at least 40% has to be affordable housing and we think that is actually crucial given that it is public land. Thank you.

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From Cllr Stan Anderson to the Cabinet Member for Education

Further to the last Council meeting, can the Cabinet Member please give an update on the new Harris Wimbledon?

Reply

The council has now successfully completed the complex exercise of ensuring the entire site for the permanent school is vacant and it has been passed to the Department for Education (DfE) on a 125 year lease to build the school. Demolition work is progressing well, and the DfE's contractor is on course for August 2020 completion.

Harris Wimbledon opened in a temporary site provided by the council at Whatley Avenue, SW20 (former Adult Education building) in September 2018 and has proved popular with parents, being fully subscribed in its first year and for September 2019.

Since rolls at the other state funded schools have either remained stable or grown in this period the new Harris Academy Wimbledon School is currently meeting the council's objective of providing additional basic need places, increasing choice, and not adversely impacting on existing schools.

Supplementary

Thank you Madam Mayor. I thank the cabinet member for her reply. Can the cabinet member tell me what is the amount of capital grant from the Department for Education?

Reply

I'd like to thank Councillor Anderson for his supplementary question. We received £5.6million for the 125 years lease from the Department for Education and that money went towards the total cost, reduced the cost of the Council's funding towards the project which means that the Council paid less than £10million for a brand new school and I think that's worth for that. Thank you very much.

From Councillor Oonagh Moulton to the Cabinet Member for Education

Could the Cabinet Member for Education confirm the current proportion of schools rated **Ofsted** Good or Outstanding in our Borough?

Reply

Currently 91% of Merton schools are judged to be good or better by Ofsted. This includes all Merton secondary and special schools. Whilst 30% of all Merton schools are outstanding (above the national average of 21%, and just below the London average of 32%), 63% of secondary schools are outstanding which very much higher than the national average for this educational phase.

Supplementary

Thank you Madam Mayor. I thank the Cabinet Member for her response but can she provide us with the information on the steps she's taken to help improve the results of Merton Abbey Primary, Stanford, Benedict and Beecholme in Mitcham and also West Wimbledon Primary. These are five schools in our Borough which still have the Ofsted rating of either requiring improvement or inadequate and can she confirm when these five schools will reach an Ofsted rating of good or outstanding? Thank you.

Reply

I'd like to thank Councillor Moulton for her supplementary question. We have a priority to make sure that all of our schools are at least good so that is a top priority of ours and we are working very hard to improve the standards of those schools so we have our School Improvement Team who are working intensively with those schools trying to work with the school leadership, making sure they're looking at the Ofsted inspection, the last Ofsted inspection report and making sure that the next time they are inspected that they will reach that standard but we are working very hard with them, thank you.

From Cllr Dave Ward to the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Housing and Transport

Can the Cabinet Member please explain the safer school zones and what the plan is to introduce them?

Reply

Through implementing the Mayor's Transport Strategy over recent years, the Council has been implementing prioritised road safety measures as part of a rolling programme of investment outside schools. Schemes thus far have included localised 20mph speed limits, traffic calming features / informal crossing provisions such as speed tables; school keep clear zig zag markings; school flashing beacons; road safety training; drop off zones; drive and stride etc.

As part of Council's objectives to reduce congestion, pollution, risk of collisions, promote sustainable and active transport and provide a safe environment within the vicinity of schools, the Council has given an undertaking to introduce part time road closures that will prevent non-resident traffic during the school morning and afternoon traffic peaks.

It is the council's intention to purchase the camera equipment and IT software needed to administer and enforce the zones over the coming months. The planned go live date is September 2019 to coincide with the new school year.

Supplementary

Thank you Madam Mayor and thank you to Councillor Whelton for his response. You asked that we keep our questions brief, so my question is which schools might be affected?

Reply

I'd like to thank Councillor Ward for his supplementary. The Schools we're currently looking at in the Borough is Harris Primary Academy over in Pollards Hill, St Thomas of Canterbury in Cricket Green and Links Primary in Graveney. Of course there may be other schools that do come forward I believe this is an excellent initiative it has been extremely successful in other Boroughs where they have restricted vehicle movement, but also as well in terms of improvement of air quality outside of schools. So we're very excited that we've received funding from the GLA to allow us to undertake the first tranche of schools and hopefully we can work to implement it and then on to further schools in the Borough but if there's other schools that members here think should be considered, please let me know and obviously we will look into it further, thank you.

From Councillor David Simpson to the Cabinet Member for Education:

What are the Cabinet Member's stated priorities for Early Years education in our Borough?

Reply

The priorities for EY education in the borough are:

To support EY education providers to achieve good or above in Ofsted inspections

To commission quality, flexible and sufficient places so that families have choice as to where, and in what patterns they take up their free early education entitlements across the mixed market of providers.

To support EY practitioners CPD through the new Firm Foundations and schools training programme, focusing on Peer led improvement, SEND and how young children learn

To work in partnership with the range of partners and families so that children's SEN support needs are identified, assessed and supported as soon possible so that EYFS outcomes for SEN support are in line with London average.

To further improve the proportion of children achieving the Good Level of Development so that Merton's performance is stronger in relation to Outer London and statistical neighbours and to narrow the gap at the end of the EYFS, securing good outcomes for all young children so they are ready for statutory education

To work with strong local providers (including the English hub) to support schools to improve early language development.

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To support the sector in responding to the proposed new Ofsted Inspection framework from September 2019

To roll out the Healthy Early Years Programme, improving practice and outcomes within EY education

To increase the take up of funded early education places for vulnerable 2 year olds

To work collaboratively across the wider multi agency network and Children's Centres so families and their children have access to learning environments from birth, preparing them for formal early education

Supplementary

Thank you Madam Mayor and I thank the Cabinet Member for her fulsome response. Will the Cabinet Member agree to undertake an immediate review to improve the current scoring of the Borough's early years provision? She will know I'm sure that in terms of the percentage of early years pupils reaching a good level of development in our Borough, we are now below the London average. So therefore will she agree to putting on an immediate plan in place to improve the Boroughs Early Years provision so that our results improve from below to above the London average?

Reply

I'd like to thank Councillor Simpson for his supplementary question. It is proven that the early years of a child's life are the most important and we are working very hard to make sure that we can provide for children of all ages basically, but as you know funding is an issue so you know we have to work within our means, but we are providing for those children and will continue to do the best that we can to make sure that it's not just only about bringing the records up but we need to support them give them whatever support they need so that they can achieve the best that they can and also to prepare to build that foundation for when they reach forward so they are able to achieve best, thank you.

From Cllr Hina Bokhari to the Cabinet Member for Education

It is pleasing to see that there have been no permanent exclusions from primary or special schools in Merton in 2017-18. How many permanent exclusions were there in secondary schools and how many managed moves have taken place in primary, secondary and special schools in the last two years?

Reply

In 2017/ 18 Permanent Exclusion In secondary schools in Merton fell significantly to 8.

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Managed moves are not used in special schools. If a placement can no longer meet a child's needs in a special school an interim review is undertaken and the child may then move school.

Between September 2017 and June 2018 there were 13 Secondary school managed moves.

Between September 2017 and June 2018 there were 4 Primary school managed moves.

Supplementary

Thank you Madam Mayor and thank you Cabinet Member for your answer. Whilst recognising the hard work and often impressive results of parents choosing to home educate their children, recent research undertaken by the DfE points towards worrying trends of children being withdrawn from mainstream education for reasons that raise safeguarding concerns. Could the Cabinet Member set out her plans for reviewing the reasons for the 19% increase in electively home educated children in Merton and how she will respond to the DfE consultation on proposals for new legislation announced this week?

Reply

Well I'd like to thank Councillor Bokhari for her supplementary question. If it was just produced this week I wouldn't be able to tell you how we'll respond to that but we'll be looking at it and will make the appropriate response. Thank you very much.

From Cllr Marsie Skeete to the Cabinet Member for Children's Services

In what ways does the Council work with schools to tackle issues in children's mental health?

Reply

The Mental Health of our children is vitally important. Schools have been supported in a number of ways to develop a range of approaches to support good mental health and where there are issues to help the child. We have worked with schools over a long period to develop effective support for children. Many schools Commission a Targeted Mental Health in Schools (TAMHS) service with skilled therapists working in schools. A group of schools in Mitcham have been working with Place to Be to develop provision and a whole school approach. The Behaviour Service also runs training for school to develop their own interventions - for example in 2018 we have been rolling out work on Theraplay and Attachment-Friendly schools.

The CAMHs improvement board commissioned Wishmore Academy to run training for schools on understanding mental health and develop individual school based plans. In 2018 the majority of schools participated in 2 days of workshops run by the

Anna Freud centre where schools and mental health workers worked together on ensuring the systems to support children are in place. The Camhs partnership runs regular Mental Health Networking events – these are themed i.e. Girls and Autism, ADHD etc. and are open to any agency including schools.

A group of schools are piloting a whole school approach to Mental Health supported by the Clinical Commissioning Group and the Council. We were successful in securing the Government's Trail Blazer bid for Mental Health in schools. This will include piloting a team of mental health workers supporting children and parents, as well as a whole school approach.

Supplementary

Thank you Madam Mayor. I notice that in your initial reply it refers to the mental health Trail Blazer supporting parents as well as children to the whole school approach. I would like to ask the Cabinet Member how will this work and what benefit do you think it will have? Thank you.

Reply

I'd like to thank Councillor Skeete for her supplementary question. In Merton we have a think family approach and we want to make sure that we support parents and carers to support the children who might be experiencing or could be prone to experiencing mental health issues, so the mental health Trail Blazer will be supporting those parents by providing things like there's an, encouraging parents and encouraging communities, training and support that we put in place and then there's also going to be things like informal groups for raising awareness about exam stress, about how to be safe and happy online and all of these should work through to helping our parents and carers support those children. We also want to make sure that parents are aware of the mental health issues that are prevalent in the Borough because we know that the impact of parental mental health on young people as well can be one of the most critical issues in making a child vulnerable.

From Councillor Janice Howard to the Cabinet Member for Education:

What are the Cabinet Member's stated priorities for **Primary School** education in our Borough?

Reply

The priorities for primary school education are as follows:

- a) To continue to ensure all schools are judged to be at least good when inspected by Ofsted, through the effective use of the Merton School Improvement Strategy, including Support and Challenge groups.
- b) To ensure all schools currently judged to be outstanding achieve outstanding outcomes in their next Ofsted inspections (in light of the raised standards of the

Ofsted Framework for Inspection). To continue to support schools to use maths mastery strategies to develop practice and building on existing strengths, including through liaison with the South West London maths hub.

c) To continue to improve writing so that attainment at the expected standard is more in line with Outer London and statistical neighbour averages, including through liaison with the South West London English hub.

d) To further improve outcome in reading by ensuring that schools' approaches are finely planned to meet the needs of all pupils and provide pupils with meaningful experiences to develop reading for pleasure, including through a focus on the development of whole class guided reading.

e) To ensure that outcomes for Pupil Premium eligible pupils continue to improve, through the provision of targeted support for schools, and central training.

f) To continue to improve provision and outcomes of pupils in receipt of SEN support through work with school leaders (including SENCOs and subject leaders) and teachers, so that they are correctly identified (avoiding over identification of some groups of pupils), their needs are met, and outcomes improve in relation to Outer London and statistical neighbours. To develop an assessment approach for this group of pupils.

g) To support schools to develop their wider curriculum and their offer for pupils' personal development in light of Ofsted changes so that there is a clear idea of progression in all subjects; manageable assessment; a clear rationale for their curriculum meeting the needs of their pupils; and a strong offer of broader experiences (for example through educational visits).

Supplementary

Thank you Madam Mayor I do have a supplementary question. Though I thank the Cabinet Member for the response, will the cabinet member undertake an immediate review to improve the current scoring of the Borough's Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 provision in Merton primary schools so that the percentage of pupils reaching the expected standard in writing and mathematics is raised. Currently the Borough scoring is below the London average, Merton needs to achieve above the London average which is where it deserves to be. Thank you.

Reply

I'd like to thank the Councillor for her response and it's very similar to what I've just said; we are working with all schools and especially those schools that need extra help so we have the school improvement team that work within the schools to make sure that we are providing all the support that they need and even when the school is doing well we still work with the school to maintain that high standard. When the school is not doing well we have extra support for them and so yes I agree with you

and we are going to make sure that all of our schools not just a few but we want to make sure that all of our schools are at least good. Thank you.

From Cllr Russell Makin to the Cabinet Member for Education

What recognition has Merton Council recently had from the Department for Education regarding its schools?

Reply

Four congratulatory letters have recently been sent to Merton Primary Schools by the Secretary of State for Education, recognising the very high levels of progress their pupils made in reading, writing and mathematics in the 2018 Key Stage 2 assessments. These performances place these schools (Wimbledon Park, Harris Primary, St Mark's Primary and Joseph Hood Primary) amongst the top 3% of primary schools in the country.

Supplementary

Thank you Madam Mayor. Thank you for the answer to the question. As a supplementary I'd like to say I understand April 16th is Primary School offer day and hopefully the majority of children will be placed in schools near to them. Would you agree that there are good primary schools across our Borough?

Reply

Thank you Councillor Makin for your supplementary question. Yes I agree that we have very good schools across the Borough, however as I just said earlier, we want all of our schools to be at least good and we will continue to work hard to make sure that all of them are at least good and to support those children in the schools to achieve the best that they can. Thank you.

From Councillor Andrew Howard to the Cabinet Member for Education:

What are the Cabinet Member's stated priorities for Post-16 provision in our Borough?

Reply

The priorities for post 16 provision are as follows:

- a) To ensure all Merton secondary schools remain good or outstanding
- b) To improve outcomes for the most able pupils post 16 so that the proportions achieving the higher A level outcomes improve, and the gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers narrow at this key stage.

Supplementary

Thank you Madam Mayor yes I do have a supplementary. First I'd like to thank the Cabinet Member for her reply and I certainly welcome an increased focus on improving outcomes regarding higher A level grades. As you may know currently in Merton only 17% of students are achieving A/B combinations at A Level in Merton. 17% which compares very poorly with the London average of 30% and this seems to be something of a repeating trend across all the stages of Education so far I've heard this evening. So the priority on improving these grades is certainly welcome. Can the Cabinet Member commit to when she will be putting forward a plan of action?

Reply

Put in a plan of action, well we are working with our schools as I said earlier and this school referred to post-16 and we are working to make sure that I mean not every 16 or post-16 wants to continue in academic studies and so we are making sure that we work with businesses so for those who want to do apprenticeships they will be able to go there and make sure that they again are in the right places and doing what they want to do, what they enjoy doing and that's the only way they will be able to achieve the best they can and so when it comes to academic we are doing the best that we can and when it comes to those who don't want to take that route we also try the best we can to support them but we are looking at every area and I will take that on board. Thank you.

From Cllr Paul Kohler to the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance

A number of other councils have set up voluntary council tax donation schemes. Will the Cabinet member look into establishing such a scheme here in Merton, for the use of particular projects such as an Education Innovation Fund, to help educational groups develop new services in the borough?

Reply

We have begun to explore the possibility of introducing a voluntary scheme in Merton by investigating the approach of other councils. The Council can, if it wishes, establish such a scheme, but it would need to be purely voluntary and must be administered outside our Council Tax System via separate payments. Payments could be enhanced via Gift Aid if channelled through a Charitable Trust.

In Westminster, for example, their scheme, has targeted residents predominantly living in Band H properties. Westminster initially embarked on a consultation with the Councils Band H residents seeking support and also views on where the money should be spent, but not on ongoing expenditure. The Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea have also just announced that they will be launching consultation for a similar scheme.

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It should be noted, however, that Westminster has 15,600 Band H properties and that, due to the unfairness and regressive nature of the council tax system, their council tax is only around £800.00 (excluding the GLA precept).

In contrast, Merton has just 1,740 band H properties who pay £2,338 council tax.

Westminster received payments from 540 residents (3.4%) and on average they contributed £1101.

Using Westminster's average payment the total payment to the council of those who made payments (including council tax) is less than £2000. For information, if Merton received 3.4% payments that would be just 59 donors. In addition, this may be an optimistic estimate as Merton's Band H residents already pay more than the total average payment of Westminster donors (donation plus council tax).

To deliver the scheme, Westminster created a trust, undertook consultation exercise and set up a small team to develop and implement. They also determined the priorities for the monies, in line with resident views gained from the consultation, so the impact of the scheme could be assessed. It is not clear at this stage what the cost of this exercise was, but it is clear that it was a significant exercise.

We are therefore sceptical about whether the business case for such a fund would prove to be good value for money in Merton. We also would not want a fund to pay for important or strategic services that should be paid for as a matter of course out of council budgets. As a result, Council may wish instead to draw residents' attention to alternative existing ways of donating to good causes in the borough, for instance through the Mayor's charitable efforts or our amazing local voluntary sector.

Supplementary

Thank you Madam Mayor. I'd like to thank Councillor Allison for his detailed and constructive response, I think you make a good point that no two Boroughs are the same, but even on your figures I suspect we could make a six-figure sum from a voluntary council tax donation scheme and I'm just asking, can you pledge to work with us to fashion a scheme that will work for Merton, perhaps extending beyond Band H? Thank you.

Reply

Well I thank you very much for your reply and we are trying to be constructive it's something that we've thought about, obviously this reply has been drafted before we were aware that you were going to be bringing a motion so there'll be a chance to talk about that at a later stage. Obviously it's very difficult to extend beyond Band H because Band H is obviously the highest, oh you want poorer people to, ok, well I mean the only thing I would say is there is reason for us to be sceptical because even in Westminster where you would expect really quite rich people to be living in Band H, only 3% of Band H property owners in Westminster actually contribute

towards the scheme and in total all that they pay with donation plus council tax is less than £2,000. In Merton, Band H people who are probably not as well off as Band H people in Westminster, already paying Council Tax £2,300. So based on markets and what you would suggest, it's not clear as to whether we would actually make any money at all by extending this. In Westminster the amount they raise is also a six-figure sum, it's very hard to see that how we would get to that level but it is something that we, as we'll explain later, are happy to explore but bear with us if we're a little bit nervous or tentative about it at this stage, but thank you for bringing it to us this evening.

From Cllr Brenda Fraser to the Cabinet Member for Education

What are the current figures for children in pupil referral units in the borough?

Reply

As at end March 2019, 136 children are currently supported in alternative provision, of which:

- 38 Smart Centre
- 18 Alternative Education placements
- 19 Medical on site groups
- 19 Medicals off site tuition
- 29 Smart Choice – newly arrived year 11s
- 8 Progress Academy – transition group to schools
- <5 Induction
- <5 Dual Reg

The reasons for use of alternative provision are:

- 69 Behaviour
- 38 Medical
- 29 Year 11 new arrivals

Supplementary

Thank you Madam Mayor. This is to Councillor Caroline Cooper-Marbiah. Thank you for your response and just to ask can the Cabinet Member now explain how some children and young people come to be in Pupil Referral Units?

Reply

I'd like to thank Councillor Fraser for her supplementary question. In some cases, mainstream education may not always be the best place for a child and maybe at a particular time, but the one thing I know is that we have our officers are professional and they you know will be able to assess and to know we have schools that they

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work with to try to determine the best place for the school, the best place for the child at the time and so sometimes children are in these schools because at a particular time that's what's best for them. It may not necessarily be that they will stay there forever, but at that particular time that would be the best place for them and I think as I said previously, we're always working to make sure we're doing the best for each child for their own particular situation and that's why sometimes we find children in those Pupil Referral Units. But I'll just let you know that our Pupil Referral Unit has been Ofsted inspected and is good and I've visited there and I think the staff are doing an exceptional job with our young people there. Thank you very much.