

Merton Council Council

18 September 2024

Supplementary Agenda 3 - Amendments

17 Amendments

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Liberal Democrat Amendment 1 to Labour Motion **Council 18 September 2024**

Delete the words:

“The former anonymous online account @HammondWatch on the social media platform X”

So that the Motion now reads:

Council notes:

- Honesty in politics is critical to maintaining public trust in democracy, and in today’s digital age, social media platforms have become key in public discourse and political engagement.
- Social media has facilitated a new method of communicating with residents, allowing information to be disseminated rapidly and to broad audiences.
- Social media is also a powerful and influential tool for local community engagement to and from elected members.
- Councillors and social media companies must do all they can to prevent the spread of misinformation and protect residents and Councillors from exposure to harassment, abuse or personal attacks online.
- Social media content posted or reposted by Councillors should be free from defamatory or discriminatory language and avoid any form of harassment or bullying of residents and Councillors.
- The detrimental effect of a locally toxic social media environment on the willingness of talented, qualified and committed individuals to stand for election.
- The responsibility of all Councillors to lead by example in their usage of social media.

Council condemns:

- The use of anonymous online social media accounts by Councillors or potential Councillor candidates to specifically target other Councillors or other elected members in public office.
- The sharing or resharing of social media posts from unaccountable, anonymous online accounts, which may target local people or locally elected members.

Council resolves to:

- Advocate for greater accountability and transparency from social media companies in addressing the spread of harmful content and abuse.
- Hold to the highest professional standard when using social media.
- Avoid promoting anonymous social media accounts without a clear or identifiable link to an organisation or individual.
- Avoid sharing social media content that may toxify or undermine the integrity of the local political climate in Merton.
- Uphold the ‘Social Media Guidance for Councillors’ based on the Nolan Principles of Public Life, first resolved by Council in 2020, and to introduce training for councillors in accordance with this guidance.

Liberal Democrat Amendment 2 to Labour Motion
Council 18 September 2024

After 'Council condemns' add:

- “The taking of photographs or video of political campaigners to be published on social media as a form of intimidation or harassment.”
- “Engagement from politicians and campaigners on social media that is belittling, demeaning, or gaslighting and is not linked to matters or issues of policy nor a candidate or elected member’s record in office.”

So that the Motion now reads:

Council notes:

- Honesty in politics is critical to maintaining public trust in democracy, and in today’s digital age, social media platforms have become key in public discourse and political engagement.
- Social media has facilitated a new method of communicating with residents, allowing information to be disseminated rapidly and to broad audiences.
- Social media is also a powerful and influential tool for local community engagement to and from elected members.
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- The use of anonymous online social media accounts by Councillors or potential Councillor candidates to specifically target other Councillors or other elected members in public office.
- The sharing or resharing of social media posts from unaccountable, anonymous online accounts, which may target local people or locally elected members.
- The taking of photographs or video of political campaigners to be published on social media as a form of intimidation or harassment.
- Engagement from politicians and campaigners on social media that is belittling, demeaning, or gaslighting and is not linked to matters or issues of policy nor a candidate or elected member’s record in office.
- The former anonymous online account @HammondWatch on the social media platform X

Council resolves to:

- Advocate for greater accountability and transparency from social media companies in addressing the spread of harmful content and abuse.

- Hold to the highest professional standard when using social media.
- Avoid promoting anonymous social media accounts without a clear or identifiable link to an organisation or individual.
- Avoid sharing social media content that may toxify or undermine the integrity of the local political climate in Merton.
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**Merton Park Ward Independent Group – Amendment to the Conservative
Motion**

Full council 18th September 2024

Changes to the Winter Fuel Allowance and protecting pensioners from fuel poverty

Council Notes:

- The Labour Government's recent decision to restrict the Winter Fuel Payment to only pensioners in receipt of means-tested benefits like Pension Credit, as announced by Chancellor Rachel Reeves.
- The estimated impact of this decision, which Age UK says will mean 2 million pensioners who badly need the money to stay warm this winter will not receive it.
- The significant role that Winter Fuel Payments play in helping older residents of Merton and across the UK afford heating during the coldest months, thereby preventing 'heat or eat' dilemmas and safeguarding health.
- The criticism from Age UK, the Countryside Alliance and other charities, highlighting the social injustice and potential health risks posed by this sudden policy change.
- The additional strain this decision will place on vulnerable pensioners, many of whom do not claim Pension Credit despite being eligible, further exacerbating their financial hardship.

Council believes:

- That the Winter Fuel Payment has been a lifeline for many older people across the UK and that restricting its availability solely to those on Pension Credit risks leaving many pensioners in financial hardship.
- While some pensioners currently in receipt of the Winter Fuel Payment may not require it, many thousands across Merton sit just above the cut-off for Pension Credit and will now lose their allowance.
- The decision to means-test Winter Fuel Payments, especially with such short notice and without adequate compensatory measures, is deeply unfair and will disproportionately affect the health and well-being of our poorest older residents.
- The government's approach fails to consider the administrative barriers and stigma that prevent eligible pensioners from claiming Pension Credit, leaving many without the support they desperately need.

Council resolves to:

- Request Cabinet to consider bringing forward a Council-led local awareness campaign to alert those eligible of Pension Credit which in some respects will help access to the Winter Fuel Payment for those most in need.
- ~~• Request that the Council Leader write to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, urging a review of the decision to means-test the Winter Fuel Payment and asking the government to ensure that vulnerable pensioners, particularly those who do not claim Pension Credit, are protected from fuel poverty.~~
- ~~• Commit the Council to signing the 'Save the Winter Fuel Payment for Struggling Pensioners' petition being run by Age UK and write to all members offering them the opportunity to sign the petition themselves.~~
- Encourage local efforts to promote Pension Credit uptake through council services and partnerships with local charities and community organisations to ensure that all eligible pensioners in Merton are supported in claiming their entitlement.
- ~~• Request Cabinet to consider bringing forward proposals for providing financial support to ensure that no pensioners are worse off due to the decision of the Labour Government.~~