

# Merton Council

## Council

**20 November 2013**

### **Supplementary information – public and councillor questions**

5	Public questions to cabinet members	1 - 6
6	Councillors ordinary priority questions to cabinet members This includes a question that was asked under the urgency provisions.	7 - 16
6a	Councillors non-priority questions and responses	17 - 40
7a	Strategic Theme: Councillors' priority questions to cabinet members	41 - 48

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# Agenda Item 5

COUNCIL 20 NOVEMBER

## PUBLIC QUESTIONS

### Procedure

- The Mayor will call your name and ask if you have a supplementary question arising from the answer you have received.
- If you do not have a supplementary question then simply respond thank you, no.
- If you do have a supplementary question respond thank you, yes. You will be shown to a seat in the chamber where you will ask your supplementary question. Make sure you use the microphone.
- Having put your question, please be seated whilst the Cabinet member responds.
- Once the response has been given, please return to your seat in the public gallery.
- The questions and answers and all supplementary questions and replies will be published on Merton's website after the meeting.

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### Questions

1. From Anthony Fairclough

To the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration

#### Question

I understand that around 17,000 households across London benefitted from savings of £108 a year (on average) in their energy bills thanks to the first round of the Big London Energy Switch. How many of those were in Merton?

#### Reply

The Big London Energy Switch's first energy auction was held on 9 April 2013. Throughout the whole of London, 19,705 households registered to take part in the auction, with another c7,000 households expressing an interest. A total of 1,861 households across London switched (around 9% of those registered) saving on average £114 on their annual bill.

Within Merton, 538 residents fully registered for the April auction. A total of 43 residents switched (around 8% of those registered), saving on average £115 per year.

A second Big London Energy Switch auction was held in June 2013. 113 Merton residents registered and four residents switched; these residents saved on average £157. A third auction is due to be held on 19th November 2013.

Supplementary

I wondered if you might outline the advertising and promotion of the Big London Energy Switch in Merton and can you tell me what success for the third auction might look like.

Reply

Without notice, no I can't go into detail about the advertising but it has been successful to the extent of 538 residents registering for the April auction and 43 residents switching; 8% which is I believe on a par with other areas. Then again 113 residents registering for the second auction and 4 switching and now we're moving to a third auction, which will involve a significant number of residents switching to obtain lower energy prices. We're very keen on residents obtaining low energy prices in this borough, as is the Labour Party nationally and I look forward to the next Labour Government imposing an energy price freeze before it reforms the market entirely.

2. From Diana Coman

To the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration

Question

Can the Cabinet Member outline the administration's policy with regards to planning applications for tall buildings? Are there any designated areas in the borough where such applications are encouraged/accepted? And does the administration have any plans to review any such policies?

Reply

The council does not encourage tall buildings, nor does it encourage people to submit planning applications for tall buildings. The council's Core Planning Strategy 2011 states that tall buildings are generally not appropriate within the borough due to its predominately suburban low rise character and that tall buildings will be resisted in all areas of the borough where they will be detrimental to this valued character. In the case of Wimbledon Broadway, which has recently been highlighted in the press, Merton's Core Planning Strategy states that areas near to the edge of the town centre may be sensitive to tall buildings due to the close proximity of low scale, high quality residential development. There are no plans at present to renew our policies on this matter.

Supplementary

It would seem to me that it's not an issue about whether or not the Council encourages planning applications for tall buildings, rather whether it has robust planning policies. Given that the YMCA proposal may be followed by proposals from other developers does he feel confident that the policies as drafted are strong enough to withstand pressure from this sort of development?

Reply

Absolutely. We have a great deal of confidence in our policies which have been developed over the last three years. They are now in the public domain. We do not encourage tall buildings and in respect of the YMCA, I think it's very clear that they've withdrawn their proposal and quite right they do. We are not encouraging tall buildings anywhere.

3. From Keith Walton

To the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration

Question

In the report entitled '20 mph speed limits / zones update' of 16 October 2013, it is stated that 'Reducing speed remains the most effective way of reducing the severity and number road casualties the outcome of the Audit does not support a borough-wide approach to the introduction of 20mph limit in Merton'. Can we please have a copy of all the data on which this conclusion is based?

Reply

The interim report is still work in progress but can be found at <http://www.merton.gov.uk/transport-streets/trafficmanagement/20mph-limits-zones.htm> . There will be a report back to Scrutiny in February.

4. From Jill West

To the Cabinet Member for Environmental Cleanliness and Parking

Question

How much of revenue from parking is used to support front line services in Merton.

Reply

The surplus of £7.1 million from payment of fines for contravention of our parking regulations has been applied to expenditure on Concessionary Fares i.e. Freedom Passes.

Supplementary

Could someone explain to me how other London Boroughs, such as Wandsworth, Hammersmith & Fulham, Kensington & Chelsea, Camden, Lambeth, Westminster and City of London all manage to finance their services without charging to park after 6.30 pm on weekdays or at all on Sundays. This Administration seems to penalise residents by charging to park till 11 pm Monday to Saturday and all day on Sundays in Wimbledon.

Reply

We do review our charging policies, we always look at timings. We can't compare ourselves with other boroughs, we have to look at our borough and look at Mitcham, Morden, Raynes Park, Wimbledon. Just to follow on what other boroughs are doing is not the way we look at that.

5. From Ray Leyden

To the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration

Question

Please can the Council review the policy of off street parking as it leads to catastrophic loss of front gardens causing irreversible environmental damage with loss of visual amenity, loss of habitat, drying out of foundations, additional surface water, loss of privacy and increased danger to pedestrians.

Reply

Residential property owners are allowed to provide hard standings for parking in their front gardens as a result of Government legislation in the form of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order. There are rules to ensure any new hard standings are either porous or have rain runoff into the existing garden. There are exceptions, such as in conservation areas or on classified roads where planning permission is normally required and therefore Council's do have control. In those circumstances, each case is dealt with on its merits with visual impact, habitat protection, water runoff and traffic safety the key considerations.

Since this is government and not local policy permitting this development it is not for renewal by the Council.

6. From Susan Buckmaster

To the Cabinet Member for Environmental Cleanliness and Parking

Question

Will the Cabinet Member advise the scope and timing of street sweeping arrangements for Tabor Grove, St. George's Road, Alt Grove and Francis Grove and confirm he does not accept that ad hoc cleaning, based on a 'drive by' assessment of need or complaints, is suitable in town centre streets?

Reply

Roads in Merton are allocated specific zones under the Environment Protection Act, Litter Code of Practice. Both St. George's Road and Francis Grove are zone 1 roads and are included in the cleaning of Wimbledon Town Centre and are attended to on a daily basis. Tabor Grove and Alt Grove are Zone 3 roads and are swept in line with other Zone 3 residential roads on a weekly basis, however, in line with our intelligence led approach we undertake further sweeps as and when residents alert us to additional need and we ensure all roads are regularly monitored to ensure standards are being maintained. I am pleased to say that this administration has protected the weekly street sweep from cuts, despite reductions in our funding from central government, and I would also like to pay tribute to our residents and our street champions who work in partnership with us to report any build-up of litter.

Supplementary

I am a little taken aback because what has been responded is not what is happening but perhaps this is not the forum to discuss it further. I would like to ask if she agrees that the Council should return to the principle of sweeping all streets weekly after the collection of refuse and recycling.

Reply

I know the area you're talking about. I think some roads are swept to the same schedule as the town centre and others are outside of that. I've heard what you've said and I'm happy to look at it with officers and review if need be. I'm quite happy to come down with you and look at it and a chat with you.

7. From David Armer

To the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration

Question

The number of killed and seriously injured on Merton's roads has increased from 39 in 2010 to 46 in 2011 and 65 in 2012. Could you please comment on this increase, and say what Merton Council is doing to reverse this appalling and worrying trend?

Reply

Merton has achieved significant reductions in the numbers 'killed and seriously injured' (KSI's) on our roads over the last 15 years. Between 1998 and 2009 the borough achieved a 58% reduction in the number of KSI's, compared to a London-wide average of 52%.

Improving road safety remains a key council priority, and the borough continues to employ a comprehensive programme of engineering measures

and road safety education initiatives. Projects being delivered this year include town centre improvement projects, new pedestrian crossing points, junction improvements, school safety schemes, homezone measures, cycle training, motorcycle safety courses and road safety presentations at schools.

The increase in KSI's in 2012 has been in issue that the council has been monitoring closely. However, provisional statistics for January – July 2013 indicate that 22 KSI's occurred during this period, which is comparable to the results from 2010 and 2011 and in line with the council's long term target in it's Local Implementation Plan to reduce KSI's to an average of 45 per year by 2020.



## **Agenda Item 6 – Questions from Councillors**

### **1. From Councillor Linda Taylor to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration**

What has the administration done to fully consult with the residents of Wimbledon Park to seek their views on the well-publicised sport intensification plans for the Wimbledon Greyhound Stadium site?

#### **Reply**

The council's proposal for this site is "sporting intensification" as identified in the sites and policies planning document. Since 2012 we have undertaken more than nine months of public consultation in four stages on Merton's plans. To let people know about the consultation stages we have:

- Leafleted more than 4,500 residential and business addresses in Merton and Wandsworth within 500m of the site to let them know about the consultations and ask for their views
- Held meetings with local community groups, including the Wimbledon Park Residents Association and the Wimbledon Society
- Engaged with local press and media, including the local Guardian, SW19, Time and Leisure, to assist with media articles that might help let people know about the consultations.

We have received a wide variety of views on the site. The council remains committed to supporting sports intensification and will continue to work hard with interested parties to make the most of the opportunities that this site presents.

#### **Supplementary**

I would like the Cabinet Member to assure me and our Wimbledon Park residents that the residents' view will be taken into account when the final decision is taken as to which sport will take over the site. Can he do that, and if he can, can he tell me how.

#### **Reply**

Absolutely residents' views will be taken into account. I think as a Council, we always commit to taking account of residents' views. That doesn't mean necessarily that we agree with those views, but we receive them, we must listen to them and we must respond. Framing our policies that is absolutely right, but I think the critical decisions over this site are going to result from Planning applications. That will be a quasi-judicial process and will ultimately be members of PAC that determine the results of those applications. If there is a substantial planning application for that site, there must necessarily be, as part of the process, consultation with all residents who may be affected. What the application will be depends on the applicant.

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

Would the Leader provide an update on the future of Morden Park swimming pool?

### **Reply**

We will be replacing Morden Park Swimming Pool with a new family friendly leisure centre that will include a new swimming pool. We have been able to do this because of our robust approach to the council's finances. Despite being faced with the need to make £70m of savings when we first took control of the council, our business-like approach has ensured that we are now in a position to replace the pool. We will be carrying out formal consultation with local residents and drawing up realistic and deliverable plans and proposals in the coming year to help us determine the details.

### **Supplementary**

Can the Leader tell me has he spoken to any users of the swimming pool following his update, and what has their response been?

### **Reply**

Merton Pisces Swimming Club has been going for 40 years; 1973 to 2013. I had a conversation with Harry Green who is the Head Coach of the club. He's been there for 40 years. He loves Morden Park pool; he's excited about our plans and is very much looking forward to the consultation process.

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

Can the Cabinet Member outline the council's processes for monitoring and enforcing the legal protections in place on land and property in Merton?

### **Reply**

When a breach of planning control is identified / brought to the Council's attention. The Council's planning enforcement team respond with whatever action/s are appropriate, proportionate and expedient in each particular case.

Where unauthorised development has taken place, enforcement action could be taken by serving an enforcement notice to require remedial action to remedy the breach or, if a breach of planning control is considered to be so serious, a Stop Notice could be issued requiring the immediate cessation of the breach of planning control.

In some cases it is also possible to apply for an injunction to restrain a threatened or actual breach of planning control before an Enforcement or Stop Notice is issued and served.

However, injunctions are not given lightly by the Courts. The Council must demonstrate that it was expedient for the promotion and protection of the interest of the inhabitants of the Council's area, and the owner of the land had ignored the Council's warnings and the breach would occur if not restrained by an injunction. Once a breach has been established and appropriate action decided, the enforcement team have a monitoring report system in place whereby sites are checked to ensure appropriate actions have been

undertaken. It is recognised that this is a relatively small team compared to other London Boroughs, so some prioritisation of cases is inevitable.

Covenants that are agreed during the sale of land are not monitored by the Council as they are private matters between landowners. They are not governed by planning legislation so that would be an entirely separate legal consideration. However, if there are historic legal agreements securing planning gains, (Section 106) and the Council is a beneficiary, then they would be enforced on a case by case basis with consideration of any harm being the driving factor behind any legal action proposed

### **Supplementary**

Can the Cabinet Member reassure me and my local residents in West Barnes that these legal protections will be robustly enforced when officers consider the planning application for the land at the end of Rookwood Avenue, which has a protective covenant on it which states that the land was bequeathed to the people of Merton and is only to be used as an amenity space, not for storing cars or building houses. Will he guarantee that this Labour run Council will keep to the terms of the covenant and won't be a soft touch when faced with a determined developer?

### **Reply**

I can assure Councillor Lewis-Lavender that this Labour run Council will be doing its utmost to ensure that Rookwood Avenue remains an amenity space. The proposed developer has already received a strong warning from the Council not to act without any kind of planning permission. I have been concerned about reports of gravel being unloaded on the site, which I would not consider to be a good basis for recreation space and I've asked the officers concerned in Enforcement to look at every possible way we can act against inappropriate actions taken by the developer.

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

Regrettably, at the last full Council meeting, his Administration chose to water down the Liberal Democrat motion seeking an investigation into, and action regarding, over-restrictive barriers which prevent easy access to cyclists, mobility scooter users and pedestrians with small children. How does he believe that making necessary adjustments contingent upon the receipt of Mayoral funding, rather than allocating money now to address these issues, discharges the Council's current, as well as future, responsibilities to these users?

### **Reply**

The Council is committed to improving the conditions for cyclists throughout the borough via a combination of route improvements and safety education measures. A key element of this work is to tackle severance issues and review the public right of way network to improve access for cyclists, mobility scooter users and pedestrians with small children, where possible. The council is already addressing these issues but, due to funding constraints, it is necessary to adopt an incremental approach. However, if the council is

successful in its bid for 'Mini-Hollands' funding, it will substantially increase the council's scope to comprehensively address such issues throughout the borough.

### **Supplementary**

Stated commitments is one thing, action is another. This is a laissez-faire approach that even Margaret Thatcher would have been proud of. Even if he sees these adjustments as unnecessary or unaffordable now, unlike the West Barnes and, I suspect, wider community, doesn't he remember that next May there are elections at which these communities will have votes?

### **Reply**

I think we're doing more for cycling now than we've ever done in the past; you only have to go down Merton High Street and see the new cycling facilities that are going in. I don't know if Cllr Dysart had time to see the traffic engineer plans for the 'Mini Hollands' bid before this meeting. They demonstrate very substantial work and the commitment of this Council first of all to ensure that we have a very strong bid and then to realise the vision and objectives behind that bid.

I hope we can unite on a cross-party basis behind our approach to cycling and our Mini-Hollands bid without making petty party political points to seek some minor party advantage, and I use those words advisedly.

Cycling is very important, we've got about 1.3% of all journeys in the borough are by bicycle and we ought be looking at a tenfold increase of that, and doing everything possible to secure that advantage and we can only do it with goodwill and by acting on a cross-party basis.

## **5. From Councillor Samantha George to the Leader of the Council**

When will the council announce its plans for the commemoration of World War 1, the 100th anniversary of which falls next year?

### **Reply**

Work is well advanced on a programme of events to properly commemorate the centenary of World War 1. This will be consistent with national activities. We anticipate being able to announce these in early 2014.

### **Supplementary**

I regret I find this answer disappointing, as an announcement of WWI commemorations in 2014 seems to be leaving it a little late. I asked the Leader whether the Council has applied for Heritage Lottery Funding available for community education projects to conserve and share the local heritage of WWI. Whether Merton, like the Government, will be creating an enduring legacy for generations to come, as it announced in October last year when I asked a question about this. whether it might, like the Isle of Man, set up a special webpage which announces exhibitions, educational programmes and community events, and whether it will indeed honour the debt that we owe, and hold a series of commemorative events in 2014, as the majority of the

population want, in honour of those who have served and in memory of those who have died.

### **Reply**

An officer working group has held a number of meetings chaired by Chris Lee, Director of Environment and Regeneration and supported by Councillor Maxi Martin, in order to scope out what is possible locally and to determine what's being proposed on a national level. On 11 November this year we launched Europeana Day, and that is where we're encouraging children, families, working with public records and memories of the war, passed down through generations to collect the archives. You will be aware that Councillor David Williams is involved with 'Fly a Flag for the Commonwealth' which we're linking in with. If Councillor Samantha George would like to join the working group, she'd be most welcome.

### **6. From Councillor Agatha Akyigyina to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration**

What is he doing to help residents keep their energy bills down through the Big London Energy Switch?

### **Reply**

The Big London Energy Switch helps Merton's and London residents find cheaper electricity and gas options by collectively negotiating a better deal with energy providers. A large group of people willing to change energy supplier means that they have more bargaining power to negotiate the best possible deal with energy firms.

I am helping residents keep their energy bills down by encouraging them to take part in the scheme through:

- Direct promotions to residents in receipt of housing and welfare benefits via benefits letters/correspondence
- Information distribution and presentations to local partners, including Merton Seniors' forum, Merton Citizen's Advice Bureau and Merton Voluntary Service Council
- Drop-in registration sessions for residents at the Civic Centre
- Tube and overland advertising across London - funded centrally by Big London Energy Switch /iChoosr (November auction only)
- Direct mail-out to local Merton residents registered under the Taxicard scheme - funded by and in association with London Councils (April auction only)
- Door-step engagement and distribution of 3000 leaflets by Sustainable Merton (April auction only)
- Bus advertising on 45 routes (April auction only)
- Local & regional press release and social media notifications – including an article in the Wimbledon Guardian (23/10/2013) -

[http://www.wimbledonguardian.co.uk/news/10755199.Council\\_backed\\_scheme\\_pledges\\_to\\_help\\_bring\\_energy\\_bills\\_down\\_at\\_home/](http://www.wimbledonguardian.co.uk/news/10755199.Council_backed_scheme_pledges_to_help_bring_energy_bills_down_at_home/)

- Information on LBM website and social media promotions
- Posters, flyers and pop-up stands located in all Merton libraries
- Internal promotions to council staff
- Briefings to all Councillors via the group secretaries

These activities will seek to increase the 650+ Merton households that have already taken part in the two previous auctions held in April and June 2013, and seek to improve on the 46 Merton households that have already saved on average £130 each per year through the scheme

### **Supplementary**

Could the Cabinet Member comment more on how important low cost energy is to residents in Merton.

### **Reply**

Energy prices are a crucial component of the cost of living pressures facing local residents and we will do our utmost to support residents in switching to lower prices and supporting the next Labour Government in freezing those prices as we reform the market.

## **7. From Councillor Chris Edge to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Cleanliness and Parking**

Would the Cabinet member please explain why after I suggested adopting the London Councils' agreed mobile phone payment for parking we are still waiting 6 years later for LB Merton to determine which system it will adopt?

Given most drivers these days have a mobile 'phone isn't it time the Council stopped wasting expenditure of £3,000 for each cash payment machine to be installed and reach an equitable parking policy to encourage visitors to visit the Borough to invigorate the local economy with a fair charging basis?

### **Reply**

Subject to satisfying the procurement process which is currently on-going, by April 2014 we intend to introduce a service whereby users of the council's pay and display parking spaces will have the ability to pay for parking using their mobile phone. It is not the intention to remove all Pay and Display machines as we believe there will still be a need to cater for the users who still wish to pay by cash. We will monitor the take up of this service and if the demand is sufficient we will look at reducing the number of pay and display machines particularly in car parks where we can still provide the ability to pay by cash but with fewer machines.

### **Supplementary**

It's certainly good news that we're getting something ready in April, but I do wonder why it's taken six years, when London Councils had a system available. Is it because we have a lack of vision or is it bureaucracy that's dragged us through a procurement process? More especially, what about a

more equitable way of people paying for parking and getting refunds if they leave the space at an earlier time, so we can encourage more people to come to town centres and spend money on shopping?

**Reply**

I'm with you on this, I'm not sure about the refund scheme, but paying with mobile phones is something we need to do. If we looked at it six years ago, that was three years of your Administration and three years of mine, so we're on par with that. We are looking at this and due to roll it out in April 2014. It's happening.

**8. From Councillor Simon Withey to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Cleanliness and Parking**

Can the Cabinet member provide me with the latest customer satisfaction figures she has in relation to the council's recycling and waste collection facilities?

**Reply**

The most recent survey results are for 2012. There was a significant increase in satisfaction up 7% to 74% compared to the previous year in performance of recycling among respondents who use this service, and in respect to refuse collection satisfaction was up 1% to 71%.

Respondents rated recycling facilities and refuse collection above the London average score.

**Supplementary**

Can the Cabinet Member tell me what she's doing about the lack of staffing and direction at Garth Road Recycling Depot. I've had a number of complaints from elderly residents in Trinity who have travelled to Garth Road, since the Council closed Weir Road. They've found no-one on hand to help them. When I was there three weeks ago on a Saturday afternoon, there was nobody on the entrance, and just one very harassed employee on the whole site. Why is the Administration cutting staff in this way and does the situation not demonstrate Labour's lack of foresight in closing the Weir Road site?

**Reply**

Clearly this is something that I'll have to go away and look at because this is the first time I've heard this. I will talk to officers about this and respond to you then. Thank you for raising this.

**9. From Councillor Richard Williams to the Leader of the Council**

What recent assessments have been made of the performance of the Council against that of other councils?

**Reply**

With the ending of the Comprehensive Performance Assessment there is far less data collected that allows rigorous assessment of comparative performance by councils. There is limited data collected by CIPFA and the

Audit Commission but this focuses on financial issues not necessarily performance. As a result it has been difficult to carry out the levels of benchmarking that were undertaken in the past. Under the last CPA assessment the Council was rated as a 'four star authority, improving strongly' – the top category. The Council was recently awarded Best Achieving Council 2013 by the Municipal Journal. The Merton Partnership was shortlisted in all six categories of the Compact Voice awards 2013 and won two awards. In addition, Christine Parsloe is The Guardian's Public Servant of the Year 2013.

#### **10. From Councillor Richard Hilton to the Leader of the Council**

Can the leader provide a list of those Councillors who are members of the Trade Union? Can he set out how much London Borough of Merton has spent on Trade union activity?

#### **Reply**

#### **The Cabinet Member for Finance will answer this question**

We do not hold information on whether any of our councillors are members of a trade union as trade union membership is not a pecuniary interest as per the localism act. The London Borough of Merton has spent £57k year to date on trade union duties from the General Fund and the forecast for the year end is £95k. This excludes the time spent by employees who are union representatives/ stewards. This also excludes the sum saved by employees who are representatives or stewards not being required to act due to the presence of trade union staff. It also excludes the sum saved by helping to maintain good relations with staff, and by enabling the authority to become aware of and act on issues at an early stage before any costs are incurred. These sums are difficult to calculate, but indicate that working closely with trade unions is good business practice and represents value for money.

#### **Supplementary**

Can the Cabinet Member confirm if it is true, as set out in a statement that's been sent to the trade unions of Merton Council and to all councillors that there are five consultants that have been employed by his department on double the going rate since 2011, whilst ordinary staff are being made redundant.

#### **Reply**

No reply as does not relate to original question and is covered in question 11.

#### **11. From Councillor David Williams to the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance**

*Urgent question asked in accordance with the provisions of Merton Council's Constitution Section 4 (A) Para 12.4 (b).*

*Reason for Urgency:*



*Whistleblowing allegations regarding the use of consultants received after the deadline for asking questions under Section 4 (A) Para 12.4 (a) of the Constitution.*

In each of the financial years 2010/11, 2011/12, and 2012/13, what was the reported and audited expenditure (excluding schools) on:

- Payroll
- Agency staff (including in Payroll and/or under a separate budget heading)
- Consultants.

Please also advise what steps are taken routinely to verify that payments to suppliers have been correctly coded, to ensure that expenditure on staff covering temporary or permanent post vacancies, which are not fulfilled by employees on permanent contracts (full or part time), can be reported correctly.

### **Reply**

No written answer available but the Cabinet Member, when asked to comment, gave the following statement:

Only to say that my intention is to reply in full later in the week, in line with the deadline for non-priority questions. The question came far too late and is far too detailed for us to be able to reply at this meeting.

### **Supplementary**

I think it's disappointing that the Cabinet Member didn't offer any comment whatsoever, whilst I do understand that numbers are difficult to produce in short order.

Does the Cabinet Member recall that at General Purposes Committee on 23 June 2011, the Administration rejected a recommendation from the Standards Committee to invite an independent, non-voting co-optee with relevant financial experience to attend the meetings of their committee to advise them on financial and audit matters?

As the Cabinet Member has not attended a meeting of the General Purposes Committee since it took on Audit responsibilities in January 2011, does this send the right signal about the Administration's interest in governance of its finances.

### **Reply**

I will have to apologise; my memory of meetings over two years ago is not as clear as his is. I am sure that when he was Leader, he had his fair share of anonymous allegations to deal with, but on this occasion, for very obvious legal reasons, we have to be very careful how we comment, other than to repeat the statement already provided: the Council has a robust whistleblowing policy to ensure transparency, and that we are aware of allegations, and have instructed external auditors to conduct an investigation. I don't think any of us should, or would want to pre-judge the outcome of that.



## NON-PRIORITY QUESTIONS 20 NOVEMBER 2013

### **2. From Councillor Suzanne Evans to The Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health**

The National Institute for Clinical Excellence recently recommended that those suffering from Tuberculosis should go straight to the top of social housing lists. Does she intend to implement this idea?

#### **Reply**

I was unable to locate the specific NICE guidance the Councillor refers to.

It would be unlawful for the Council to have a blanket policy saying that all TB patients will go to the top of the waiting list and this is not our policy.

I'm not quite sure why UKIP Cllrs are so interested in Tuberculosis. Merton is not considered a high TB area – with a rate of 36.6/100,000 (40/100,000 = high TB area), lower than London (around 42/100,000).

But perhaps Cllr Evans agrees with her fellow UKIP member, David Waller, a UKIP candidate in Malling, Kent, who stated “I would suggest not going to London after January 2014 unless you absolutely have to and if you do, adopt the Japanese practice of wearing a face mask.”

I'm not sure whether Councillor Evans is planning to pop on a mask but if we do see her wearing one, this could be the reason.”

### **3. From Councillor Richard Hilton to the Cabinet Member for Environment and Regeneration**

What is the current residency period before people can get access to social housing in Merton?

Does he feel social housing is allocated fairly in Merton?

#### **Reply**

**THIS QUESTION WILL BE ANSWERED BY THE CABINET MEMBER FOR COMMUNITY AND CULTURE**

Currently people who do not live in Merton are denied access to the housing register and those who have not lived in Merton for at least one year are not considered for an offer of a social housing tenancy.

The council's approach to the selection of prospective tenants for vacant housing association homes is considered fair and realistic. By fair, it is meant an accessible approach that does not discriminate against a particular need or equality group, by realistic an approach that is based on the real world and housing choices that are available to people. It does of course take regard of relevant legislation and the associated code of guidance. It should be noted

that Merton's past and current record for housing tenants in temporary accommodation is by a long measure the best in London.

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

Could the Cabinet Member update me on the number of our ex-armed forces personnel who have been housed by Merton since the Conservatives gained cross party support to put our veterans higher up the housing list?

**Reply**

The council has made 4 offers of housing association tenancies to ex armed forces personnel. This included 2x 2 bedroom homes and 2x 3 bedroom homes. Three of these offers have been refused. The remaining offer of a three bed house is unresolved as the prospective tenant is yet to reach a decision as to whether he considers this house a suitable response to his need for a home.

**21. From Councillor Gilli Lewis-Lavender to the Cabinet Member for Community and Culture:**

Will the Cabinet Member explain his welcome U-turn in restoring staffing to Donald Hope and West Barnes libraries on the days his predecessor previously chopped from them?

**Reply**

The decision to extend opening hours is no U-turn. Due to our success in recruiting volunteers and to our dynamic and intelligent use of all available paid staff it has been possible to extend hours at both Donald Hope and West Barnes at no extra cost to the Council. The result of this proposal will mean that we have increased opening hours at all of our libraries in the last 3 years whilst delivering efficiencies: a net increase in opening hours of 37.5 in the last 3 years under this administration when many neighbouring authorities have decided to close libraries or reduce opening hours. Satisfaction with the library service and its opening hours also increased significantly during this time with general customer satisfaction up 6% and satisfaction with opening hours up 9%. These are some of the highest satisfaction levels in London and show a clear commitment to improve libraries and make them more accessible for our customers.

**22. From Councillor Iain Dysart to the Cabinet Member for Community and Culture**

Please could he update me on how the Council is meeting Coalition Government housing targets, and what is being done to foster an equitable distribution across our densely populated Borough?

**Reply**

The council has met the Mayor of London's housing targets (currently 320 new homes per year) every year for the last 10 years, although in recent years the current incumbent Mayor has fallen behind on his own targets. The Coalition government has introduced several fiscal and policy measures to prioritise the delivery of new homes. Under the government's National Planning Policy Framework 2012, all councils are now required to meet "objectively assessed need" for new homes. The Deputy Mayor of London for Planning has stated that London's housing targets will rise by about 30% to meet this need. It is expected that the Mayor will publish his new targets in January 2014 as part of a revised London Plan. Officers have been working with Greater London Authority officers to try to ensure that Merton's share of London's target will be fair but realistic in recognition of the existing quality of residential environment, regeneration opportunity areas and to protect Merton's parks and open spaces.

Development and supply of new homes will be dependent upon site availability which may not be evenly distributed. Equally some parts of the borough particularly close to transport nodes will be able to accommodate more homes at higher density.

**4. From Councillor Suzanne Evans to The Cabinet Member for Performance and Implementation.**

Has the Council had to pay out for any compensation claims made against the Council to date this year? If so please give details of the claim and the amounts paid or instructed to be paid.

**Reply**

**THIS QUESTION WILL BE ANSWERED BY THE CABINET MEMBER FOR FINANCE**

Our records show that we have made the following payments of compensation since 01 April 2013 to date:

Members of the public (public liability claims) £218,371

Employees (employers liability claim) £81,298

Third party motorists (motor claims) £98,016

This includes schools.

**5. From Councillor Suzanne Evans to The Cabinet Member for Performance and Implementation.**

What is the current amount the Council is spending on translation services?

**Reply**

**THIS QUESTION WILL BE ANSWERED BY THE CABINET MEMBER FOR FINANCE**

The amount spent internally is £59,231 for the current financial year April - October 2013. The service continues to post an annual surplus and has done for the past 5 years as a result of the supply of services to external parties. This also allows for a lower charge to internal customers.

## **6. From Councillor Richard Hilton to the Leader of the Council**

Has Merton made any estimate of the number of immigrants from Romania and Bulgari expected to arrive in 2014? What impact does he expect this to have on local services?

### **Reply**

The Council uses the GLA population projections for forecasting purposes. This is not broken down by country of origin. At the moment their forecast is that levels of net migration will remain relatively low for Merton. It is extremely difficult to forecast the impact of the changes to EU working restrictions for Romania and Bulgaria at a local authority level, however, the Council will monitor carefully the impact of these changes in terms of demand for Council services.

## **23. From Councillor Miles Windsor to the Cabinet Member for Finance:**

With the roll out of Wyse terminals across the council, can the Cabinet Member tell me what's happening to all the hundreds of PCs that have been replaced? How much money is being recouped from these PCs and to what extent is that offsetting the considerable costs of introducing the new technology?

### **Reply**

The Councils PC's are normally replaced as part of a five year rolling programme of works, but in reality a large proportion of the desk top equipment that was being used within the Council was significantly older than this and beyond its normal operational life expectancy.

Old PC's have been withdrawn from service and where possible replaced with new Wyse terminals which are significantly cheaper to purchase and maintain, which should generate some financial savings for the Council in future years.

The disposal of redundant computer equipment is covered under the Waste Electronic and Electrical Equipment Regulations 2006 (WEEE) which were bought in by the government to reduce the amount of untreated electrical and electronic waste that was going to landfill.

Ordinarily this would require the Council to pay a third party supplier to collect the waste, but we have negotiated a zero cost contract with a specialist computer recycling company, who collect the equipment free of charge and break it down into its component parts either to be reused or recycled, and provide certificated evidence of the secure destruction.

**24. From Councillor Suzanne Grocott to the Cabinet Member for Finance**

How much money has been returned to residents by way of overpaid Council Tax in each of the last 4 years? How much officer time could be saved if claim details for Council Tax rebates were obtained via automated means rather than by telephone, as happens in neighbouring Wandsworth?

**Reply**

2010/11 - £1,265,501

2011/12 - £1,368,882

2012/13 - £1,232,135

2013/14 - £683,511 (up to the end of October 13)

The most common cause of a refund is when a resident pays their council tax over 10 instalments and they move out of the property.

Having investigated the process at Wandsworth it would appear that Merton's refund process is more efficient for direct debit payers (62% of residents that have a charge to pay, pay by direct debit). The process for Wandsworth is partly automated, the resident has to telephone an automated line but there is still officer involvement in checking the refund before authorisation. Merton will continue to seek and adopt best practice and this will be reviewed as part of the Customer Contact program.

**25. From Councillor Linda Taylor to the Cabinet Member for Finance:**

How many apprenticeships is Merton planning to offer to young people aged 20 and under in 2014?

**Reply**

30 placements, however the target is covering those aged 16-24

**26. From Councillor Iain Dysart to the Leader of the Council**

Given the recent spat between Cllrs Grocott and Evans regarding the Council's pension investments in tobacco funds, which I initially raised in September 2010 and then again in April this year, please could he update me on what if anything is being done to address this dependency. Has Merton instituted any co-operation with other Councils to identify possible common solutions, and if so what and with whom?

**Reply**

**THIS QUESTION WILL BE ANSWERED BY THE CABINET MEMBER FOR FINANCE**

The Pension Fund is legally separate from the council and hence monies it holds are not council investments. The Fund's assets are held by them for the benefit of future and existing pensioners. There are a number of factors that must by law be taken into account in Pension Fund decision making, as well as limits on the inclusion of ethical matters in such decision making.

These are outlined in a report on ethical investment issues, including investment in tobacco, that was received by the Pension Fund Advisory Panel of 17th April 2013. This is available at the link below

[http://www.merton.gov.uk/council/decision-making/committee/pfac/meeting\\_of\\_17\\_april\\_2013\\_-\\_agenda\\_item\\_5\\_ethical\\_investment\\_and\\_legal\\_advice.pdf](http://www.merton.gov.uk/council/decision-making/committee/pfac/meeting_of_17_april_2013_-_agenda_item_5_ethical_investment_and_legal_advice.pdf)

**27. From Cllr Richard Hilton to the Cabinet Member for Community Safety, Engagement and Equalities**

Does the Cabinet Member believe that if a panel where a special responsibility allowance is paid does not meet, if the panel doesn't meet then the allowance should be reduced on a pro rata basis?

**Reply**

The Constitution provides for a Special Responsibility Allowance to be paid in full unless the recipient requests otherwise.

The scheme of allowances contains a Special Responsibility Allowance for the Adoption and Fostering Panel. However, at the Annual Council meeting in May 2013, no member appointment was made to the Panel as it is no longer a statutory requirement. The SRA has therefore not been paid from that date. No member appointment at Annual Council meeting is necessary in the case of group leaders, which explains why SRA has been available to the Leader of the Merton Coalition, even though no such group was elected by the voters of Merton or was even in existence at the time of the May 2013 meeting. Such anomalies can, however, only be altered by a change to the Constitution.

**7. From Councillor Suzanne Evans to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration:**

Bus lanes in Liverpool are to be scrapped as part of a nine-month trial which aims to reduce traffic congestion. Will the Cabinet Member please consider doing the same here in Merton, in particular with regard to the Controversial Hartfield Road bus lane?

**Reply**

The Council fully supports the use of sustainable modes of transport and encourage more people to walk, cycle and use buses to reduce congestion on the road network. Bus Lanes gives buses priority particularly on approaches to junctions and also improve reliability. There is currently no evidence that bus lanes contribute to congestion and we will await with interest the results of the trials in Liverpool and any lessons learnt.

**8. From Councillor Suzanne Evans to The Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure:**

On 12th September 2012, Council resolved:

1. That the borough, in partnership with all primary schools in Merton, initiates an annual competitive sporting event for 8-11 year olds;



2. That the sport or sports played as part of the tournament should be agreed by all participating schools;
  3. That Merton should use this as an opportunity to celebrate the fantastic achievement of our own local Olympic champion, Sophie Hosking, by requesting the Mayor of Merton to write and ask on behalf of the Council to name the competition after her and to produce a trophy in her name; and
  4. The opportunity is taken to ensure that every Merton resident is able to experience the benefit of sports in first-class facilities, thus helping to lay the foundations for future generations to embrace a healthier lifestyle.
- Further questions have been asked since in the Council Chamber about this resolution, yet over a year has passed with no news: Has anything at all been done on pursuing it?

## **Reply**

### **TO BE ANSWERED BY THE CABINET MEMBER FOR COMMUNITY AND CULTURE**

Following the Council's resolution of 12th September 2012 the matter of an annual competitive sporting event for 8 – 11 year olds was discussed with the School Sports Partnership and they advised that they already had a full competitive sporting programme for 8 – 11 year olds and that they could not accommodate another event.

Alternative proposals were put forward to the Leader and the Leader of the Opposition and it was agreed that Sophie Hoskings would be invited to put her name to an award for 'most improved young persons' engaged at our Olympic legacy BMX Track. The Leader wrote to Sophie and Sophie replied agreeing to the proposals.

The intention was that from June to September 2013 coaches would consider all participants using our BMX track who are of the right age and who live or go to school in Merton, with the award being made at the Southern Regional BMX event at the track on Sunday 29th September 2013 and Sophie was to be invited to join us to present the trophies on the day. Two young people have been selected from the Merton BMX Club, however the awarding of this has not taken place as the event on the 29th September was called off by the organisers. Officers have been trying to contact Sophie to get her availability for an alternative date but Sophie has not yet responded. Officers also organised training sessions for 9 primary schools to each have 6 weeks of BMX activity and from this four schools competed in a small local competition and some of these young people are now members of the Merton Saints BMX Club.

The opportunity to have Sophie present the trophies at a BMX event has now passed for 2013, however Officers are still trying to find a suitable time and occasion for Sophie to present this award and when this is possible Councillors will be invited.

**28. Cllr Richard Williams to the Cabinet Member for Community and Culture**

What is the cost of the current refurbishment of Wimbledon library?

**Reply**

£156,500 will be invested in Wimbledon Library this financial year to improve the building: this was decided during the budget process in spring this year. The library will be redecorated throughout with additional study space, more space for lap top users to take advantage of the free wi-fi, extra computers for customers to use and a relaxing seating area at the front of the library. The children's section will be treated to a makeover too. There will also be heating and lighting upgrades to the building making it more energy efficient whilst providing a more comfortable environment for customers.

**29. From Councillor Oonagh Moulton to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration**

Why does Merton council refuse to prune back the low hanging trees on its side of Revelstoke Road despite residents, who are concerned about potential damage to power lines or injury to passers by, asking for this to be done? Is the Cabinet Member not embarrassed by the clear disparity in service provided to residents when compared to the regular pruning that occurs on the Wandsworth side of the street?

**Reply**

The Council will inspect its tree stock and ensure that any essential works are undertaken as and when required. The trees in Revelstoke Road do not lend themselves for inclusion in the annual, biennial, or triennial pollarding programme and as such are pruned on an ad-hoc basis.

Trees will not be cut back due to telegraph wires, unless damage is clearly imminent, however the crown of a tree will be lifted to agreed heights if and when they interfere with the passage along a road or footway.

The Council is keen to promote canopy cover with all of the benefits that this provides and will, depending upon the species of the tree, only undertake essential works in the best interest of the tree.

**30. From Councillor Maurice Groves to the Cabinet Member for Community and Culture**

Can the Cabinet Member tell me whether his party are really committed to building a new Morden Park Pool?

**Reply**

We will be replacing Morden Park Swimming Pool with a new family friendly leisure centre that will include a new swimming pool. We have been able to do this because of our robust approach to the council's finances. Despite being faced with the need to make £70m of savings when we first took control

of the council, our business-like approach has ensured that we are now in a position to replace the pool. We will be carrying out formal consultation with local residents and drawing up realistic and deliverable plans and proposals in the coming year to help us determine the details.

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

What has happened to the proposed report on Housing, which we were told would come to this November's full council meeting?

**Reply**

If the Councillor is referring to a report on Merton Priory Homes' proposed regeneration plans then a report is expected in 2014 once MPH have concrete proposals to put forward.

**33. From Councillor Suzanne Grocott to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Cleanliness and Parking**

How many different CPZs are there in Merton? What percentage of roads are now covered by a CPZ and how has this increased over the last 4 years?

**Reply**

There are 37 CPZs in operation.

17 New CPZs and extensions were introduced over the last 4 years.

Approximately 25% of roads are subject to a CPZ.

CPZs are introduced only where residents have asked for them and there has been full consultation with all residents in the affected roads.

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

Mayor of London Boris Johnson is calling on Londoners to roll up their sleeves and help plant 12,000 trees across the capital, as part of his efforts to green the city and inspire more volunteering. What is the council doing to promote the Mayor's scheme here in Merton and help ensure the borough takes full advantage of his offer of additional tree planting?

**Reply**

As part of the Mayors Street Tree Initiative 2012-2015 we have been successful in applying for match funding towards the planting of 234 new trees in the planting season 2013-2014.

**37. From Councillor Margaret Brierly to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration:**

Can the Cabinet Member explain why street lighting works undertaken recently in one area of Raynes Park were carried out not only without any consultation with the residents affected, but without them even being notified by the council? Will he commit to ensuring that in future the views of local residents are sought before changes are made to street lighting?

## Reply

As part of a recent concrete column replacement programme, designed to remove a number of concrete columns that have reached the end of their useful life, the Council has taken the opportunity to replace the existing 35w SOX lighting in a number of roads and replace it with modern LED lanterns to help drive down energy and maintenance costs.

Residents were informed of these works in advance, however the Authority is not consulting residents on the type of lighting, as the new LED lanterns and white light lamps are now common place and enable the Authority to light individual roads to the required lighting class while continuing to drive down costs and improve the efficiency of the Council's lighting stock.

### **38. From Councillor Logie Lohendran to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration:**

Noise nuisance is clearly a growing problem for residents in Merton. When will the six month pilot proposed by Scrutiny for an increased out of hours noise enforcement service commence and will this be a 24/7 service?

## Reply

The Environmental Health Service is currently assessing if the proposed pilot scheme can be delivered by using existing staff resources. Current out of hours noise provision is based upon voluntary arrangements with relevant members of staff. The pilot scheme and associated additional funding is only to extend the Friday night service for 6 months and not to provide a 24/7 service.

### **39. From Councillor Janice Howard to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration:**

Back in November 2012, Full Council agreed that a report on 20mph schemes in Merton would be 'presented to both Cabinet and Scrutiny with balanced recommendations for future policy including practical measures to maximise road safety for all road users' and that this work would be 'completed with due urgency as a priority.' Does the Cabinet Member share my disappointment that the report which did eventually come to Scrutiny last month seemed to disregard what had been agreed by the 60 councillors in this Chamber and that any further update on this work has now been delayed until February next year?

## Reply

The report to Scrutiny in October made clear that this is a policy area which is in a state of flux and where other highway and traffic authorities are testing and trialling different ways of controlling vehicle speeds. The Council is committed to improving road safety and reducing inappropriate and excessive speeds in residential roads. The Council has introduced a number of 20mph zones and limits across the borough in support of this commitment. Speed

reducing measures are costly to introduce and often when implemented receive mixed support from the community. It was therefore very important to fully understand the effectiveness of these measures together with reviewing schemes already in operation in other parts of the country to assist in formulating future speed management policy in Merton.

Reducing the number and severity of road casualties remains a key priority for the Council. A robust speed management strategy will not only consider the impact of physical measures but also include enforcement and road safety education as well as working closely with the Police.

The impact of the introduction of a borough wide 20mph limit in the London Borough of Islington is not yet available to assist with the development of future policy.

**40. From Councillor Debbie Shears to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration:**

Would the Cabinet Member agree with me that a child's education is more than what is taught in the classroom? With the borough's push to be included in the Mayor of London's Mini Holland scheme, would he agree with me that cycling proficiency is a key part of a child's education? Can he therefore tell me how many cycling proficiency courses are run each year for the borough's young people; how many children participate each year; and what the average age of participation is?

**Reply**

Cycle proficiency courses, commonly referred to as 'bikeability training' is considered to be an integral part of a child's education. The courses are designed to give children the necessary skills and confidence to ride their bikes safely on today's roads.

Schools in the borough are offered cycle training twice each year - in January for Spring / Summer term and in July for the Autumn term. In 2012, 21 schools requested off road cycle training (playground based training sessions for year 5 children), each session comprising of 4 hours of training, and a total of 717 children were trained. On road cycle training was provided for 24 schools (actual on road training experience for year 6 children), comprising of 5 x 2 hour sessions with a total of 561 children trained. Officers also provide cycle & scooter safety sessions as an integral part of all school road safety presentations for years 1 – 6.

The council has bid for additional funding from TfL for the period 2014/15 – 2016/17 to increase it's cycle training offer for children and adults.

**41. From Councillor Ray Tindle to the Cabinet Member for Community and Culture:**

Back in September 2012, Full Council agreed that Merton would initiate an annual competitive sporting event for 8-11 year olds in partnership with all of the borough's primary schools. The aim would be to build on the legacy of the

Olympic and Paralympic Games in London by promoting competitive sport here in Merton as well as providing an opportunity to celebrate the achievements of local Olympic champion, Sophie Hosking. More than a year has now passed and nothing has happened. Can the Cabinet Member tell me when the inaugural event for this new sporting competition will take place?

### **Reply**

Following the Council's resolution of 12th September 2012 the matter of an annual competitive sporting event for 8 – 11 year olds was discussed with the School Sports Partnership and they advised that they already had a full competitive sporting programme for 8 – 11 year olds and that they could not accommodate another event.

Alternative proposals were put forward to the Leader and the Leader of the Opposition and it was agreed that Sophie Hoskings would be invited to put her name to an award for 'most improved young persons' engaged at our Olympic legacy BMX Track. The Leader wrote to Sophie and Sophie replied agreeing to the proposals.

The intention was that from June to September 2013 coaches would consider all participants using our BMX track who are of the right age and who live or go to school in Merton, with the award being made at the Southern Regional BMX event at the track on Sunday 29th September 2013 and Sophie was to be invited to join us to present the trophies on the day. Two young people have been selected from the Merton BMX Club, however the awarding of this has not taken place as the event on the 29th September was called off by the organisers. Officers have been trying to contact Sophie to get her availability for an alternative date but Sophie has not yet responded. Officers also organised training sessions for 9 primary schools to each have 6 weeks of BMX activity and from this four schools competed in a small local competition and some of these young people are now members of the Merton Saints BMX Club.

The opportunity to have Sophie present the trophies at a BMX event has now passed for 2013, however Officers are still trying to find a suitable time and occasion for Sophie to present this award and when this is possible Councillors will be invited.

### **42. From Councillor Iain Dysart to the Cabinet Member for Environment and Regeneration**

Please could he explain why the weekly food waste collection service has not, of late, been regularly maintained in parts of Raynes Park including Beaufort Court, Lower Downs Road, and what he is doing to correct this?

### **Reply**

**THIS QUESTION WILL BE ANSWERED BY THE CABINET MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENTAL CLEANLINES AND PARKING**

There is no evidence of the food waste collection service not being maintained in Raynes Park . Our records show that the number of requests for service from residents received from the Rayne's Park area for the period 7 October 2013 and 15 November 2013 was 23, an average of 4 per week out of many thousands of collections. Where the Council receives reports of missed collections then arrangements are made to collect within 24 hours. If there is an on-going issue the address would be added for monitoring to ensure the service is provided as scheduled. We shall keep an eye on this and ensure that our service standard is maintained.

**43. From Cllr Richard Hilton to the Cabinet Member for Community Safety, Engagement and Equalities**

What has the Cabinet Member done to secure Cannon Hill Common following the influx of travellers during the Summer months?

**Reply**

Following the traveller incursions in 2012, a local consultation meeting was convened with local residents in the Cannon Hill Common area to consider a range of options in respect of securing the site from travellers. The outcome of that consultation was a commitment to invest in log barriers along the vulnerable Cannon Hill Lane boundary. These were installed around this time last year.

The incursion that occurred in the spring of this year occurred as a result of the travellers removing one of the smallest logs in the new barrier sequence. This was remedied immediately upon the travellers departure however, and replaced with more substantial material. The travellers did not subsequently return to this location.

The recent storm event has produced a quantity of new logs and tree trunks locally and these will be used to reinforce the protective measures on the Cannon Hill Common boundary over the coming weeks.

**44. From Cllr Suzanne Evans to the Cabinet Member for Community Engagement**

Has the Council carried out a consultation exercise with Wimbledon Park residents on the proposed Plough Lane development (Site 37) for a new football stadium and housing development? If so, what approach was used and how many households responded?

**Reply**

**THIS QUESTION WILL BE ANSWERED BY THE CABINET MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY AND REGENERATION**

The council's proposals for "sporting intensification" for this key site have remained the same since January 2012. The council does not propose a football stadium or housing development.

Since January 2012, we have undertaken more than nine months of public consultation in four stages on Merton's plans, which includes Site 37. To let people know about the consultation stages we have:

- Leafleted more than 4,500 residential and business addresses in Merton (mainly Wimbledon Park ward) and Wandsworth (Earlsfield ward and Tooting ward) within 500m of the site to let them know specifically about Site 37 Wimbledon Greyhound Stadium and ask for their views
- Held meetings with local community groups, including the Wimbledon Park Residents Association and the Wimbledon Society.
- Engaged with local press and media, including the local Guardian, SW19, Time and Leisure, to assist with media articles that might help let people know about the consultations.

The council has received four comprehensive responses from the Wimbledon Park residents association and a number of letters and e-mails from households and businesses that have given verifiable addresses in the area (Wimbledon Park, Earlsfield and Tooting). However we have also received several responses by e-mail or from a place of work who do not give their home address. In addition, the council has received three petitions relating to the site, totalling over 10,000 signatures, some of which may be from people living in the area. All responses received at each of the consultation stages are available online via:

[www.merton.gov.uk/environment/planning/sites\\_policies\\_plan](http://www.merton.gov.uk/environment/planning/sites_policies_plan)

We have received a wide variety of views on the site. The council remains committed to supporting sports intensification and will continue to work hard with interested parties to make the most of the opportunities that this site presents. Any planning application for the site would also be subject to further consultation.

#### **45. From Cllr Suzanne Evans to the Cabinet Member for Community Engagement**

Can you confirm that the council commissioned a transport study c.1997, which concluded that Site 37 was unsuitable for a large stadium? If so, please provide full details.

#### **Reply**

**THIS QUESTION WILL BE ANSWERED BY THE CABINET MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY AND REGENERATION**

This inquiry is the same as four identical FOI requests the Council has received from residents in Wimbledon Park; and two separate member enquiries which officers are dealing with.

The Council is unaware of a specific transport study. However, I believe that the Council & and GRA Ltd (not the same GRA that own the track today but



the previous owners) commissioned consultants to prepare a study that was published in about 1998 on the possibility of the greyhound stadium site being reconstructed for use for both football and greyhound racing, with a spectator capacity of approximately 23,000. From memory, this was demonstrated to be a feasible proposition, albeit the football pitch would have been placed within an oval track, so that spectators at each end of the ground would have been further from the pitch and one of the stands would have included a glass wall behind which greyhound patrons would have enjoyed their customary hospitality. From memory this was rejected by the owners of Wimbledon Football Club (as it then was) as a potential location for that Club, because: (i) they envisaged a much larger crowd capacity, (ii) thought the number of car parking spaces offered by the proposal (about 50) was in their view too few and (iii) the site did not have motorway access, which they desired.

At the present time, having searched storage files, council officers have only found part of the study and are hopeful of finding the rest (there are a couple of appendices in different volumes, we've only found 2 out of 3 volumes so far).

The study only exists in paper form. As we've been asked for a copy of this study as part of several Freedom of Information requests recently, we are hoping to scan it in and put it on the council's website once we are sure we have found all parts of it.

Colleagues in the council's printing service have advised that the volumes they have will take over a week to scan in due to the length and the different map sizes. We are hopeful of sourcing the whole study and either scanning it in or photocopying it next week or so. We will ensure that copies of the study are made available to councillors as soon as practically possible.

### **9. From Councillor Richard Hilton to the Cabinet Member for Community Safety, Engagement and Equalities**

What is the annual rate of theft from the person across each of the Borough's Town Centres? What is she doing about it?

#### **Reply**

Our local crime figures are not broken down into town centre areas (they are only available for the borough as a whole or on a ward basis. Unfortunately, town centres overlap ward boundaries so these figures would not be useful in this case).

Theft from the Person is the only one of the "MOPAC 7" offences which is currently experiencing an increase in Merton. For the borough as a whole, according to the current rolling 12 month figure compared to the previous 12 month rolling figure, Theft from the Person is showing an increase of 86 offences (385 up from 299, or +28.8%). It should be noted however that this figure is now on a downwards trend and improving in performance. This is in a context of an increase also being seen overall in MPS, with Theft from the Person offences experiencing an increase of over 1,150 offences or 2.5% when compared to the previous 12 month period. Please note that some

caution should be used when comparing percentages based on small versus large sample sizes. All figures as at 20/11/2013.

One strand of tackling the increase is through crime prevention. Regular messages have gone out to the public via communication channels including My Merton, the @MPSMerton twitter account and also in the weekly newsletter produced by the Borough Commander. The subject was most recently mentioned on 15th November and said the following:

“I will touch very quickly on Theft (person) which has seen an increase so far this year. Since the introduction of the high visibility T-shirts worn by staff in pubs in Wimbledon Town Centre, warning customers to be vigilant of pickpockets there has been a drop in theft offences.”

This initiative may be responsible (in part) for the downwards trend and recent improving performance in regards to offences of this nature.

Further details on the T-shirt initiative can be found in the following Wimbledon Guardian article from May 2013:

[http://www.wimbledonguardian.co.uk/news/10448533.Wimbledon\\_bar\\_staff\\_join\\_anti\\_theft\\_campaign/](http://www.wimbledonguardian.co.uk/news/10448533.Wimbledon_bar_staff_join_anti_theft_campaign/)

### **32. From Councillor Suzanne Grocott to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Cleanliness and Parking:**

What is the average amount of cash collected per parking machine? Which are the top 5 machines in terms of revenue raised and which are the bottom five? Please provide locations and amount collected per year.

#### **Reply**

The council offers car parking facilities, including car parks and on-street parking bays, to motorists across the borough, particularly in our town centres, in order to manage parking demand, reduce traffic congestion, support vibrant town centres and to allow motorists a safe and convenient place to park.

Naturally, some pay and display machines will be used more than others, where they are in popular town centre car parks or close to shopping areas. We regularly monitor usage and where it is deemed that a machine is no longer required as there are other machines within easy reach, we remove the unnecessary machine.

From early next year we will be allowing motorists to pay using their mobile phones which will mean that we should be able to rationalise our pay and display machines still further, thus saving the council – and council taxpayers – money. However we will continue to retain some pay and display machines for residents who do not wish to pay by mobile phone.

Average collection for financial year 2012/13: there were 361 pay and display machines collecting an average of £11,026 per machine (including VAT in off-street car parks).

Top 5:

<b>Machine number</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Revenue</b>
501	Hartfield Road car park	£166,819
500	Hartfield Road car park	£145,168
515	Broadway car park	£131,754
503	Hartfield Road car park	£125,457
502	Hartfield Road car park	£118,766

Bottom 5:

<b>Machine number</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Revenue</b>
538	St Marks car park	£37.85
537	St Marks car park	£43.90
465	Park Road, Colliers Wood	£140.10
608	Church Path, Merton Park	£264.10
652	Mitcham Park	£270.05

#### **34. From Councillor Suzanne Grocott to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Cleanliness and Parking**

I read with interest that some councils produce a "parking services annual report" to reassure residents that parking is not being used just to raise revenue from them? Does the Cabinet Member think this is a good idea or would she be concerned about what it would highlight in Merton?

#### **Reply**

We all want to be able to travel around Merton safely, with ease and to see our roads less congested. Enforcing traffic regulations fairly is one way we do this. Any surplus from fines related to parking contraventions is ring-fenced to be used for transport related expenditure, including the Freedom Pass.

I agree that an annual parking report is a good idea and this is something that officers have already been looking into.

However this is only one part of our approach to ensuring fairness and transparency in our parking services. As part of our "firm but fair" approach, we have published our parking enforcement manual online to help road users gain a clearer understanding of how our traffic enforcement policy works. We have also launched a parking charter so that both the council and motorists know what is expected of them.

**36. From Councillor Janice Howard to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Cleanliness and Parking:**

The Weir Road Recycling centre (No 36) was closed by Labour. Can the Cabinet Member tell me what plans the current administration has for this site?

**Reply**

**TO BE ANSWERED BY THE CABINET MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY AND REGENERATION**

A lease has been completed with a private tenant who intends to use the property for the processing and recovery of waste such as demolition and construction waste materials.

**1. From Councillor Richard Hilton to the Cabinet Member for Education**

Following recent industrial action in Merton Schools, can he explain how attendance by teachers is recorded across the borough? Will he join me in expressing disappointment that teachers went on strike, causing disruption to the education of Merton children and to the lives of their parents?

**Reply**

During periods of industrial action, all schools notify the council of the non attendance of individual teachers and data is passed to Payroll services to make adjustments to salary payments. The DfE is also notified in relation to which schools remain open and which close.

**10. From Councillor Richard Williams to the Cabinet Member for Education**

What does Merton do to ensure former 'looked after children' are given the support and encouragement to succeed in post-18 education or training?

**Reply**

**TO BE ANSWERED BY THE CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES**

Merton ensures that all young people aged 18 years and over who have been 'looked after' have an allocated worker based in CSF Department's 14+ Team. All young people discuss education and career planning with their social worker as an integral part of the statutory Pathway Planning process. Many young people access further and higher education courses and CSF Department has a specialist Employment, Education and Training Service where specific support is provided to young people including those previously 'looked after' who need additional support to access post 18 opportunities.

Merton is developing apprenticeships for young people and links are being built with local community organisations in order to create opportunities. Merton also has access to health services to address emotional and physical needs of young people as health can also impact on young people accessing education, employment and training.

#### **11. From Councillor Richard Williams to the Cabinet Member for Education**

What steps does Merton take to ensure that teaching staff in local schools share best practice and expertise?

##### **Reply**

The Merton Education Partnership has the sharing of good practice as one of its key aims as this has been central to the success of our schools. Our training programme maximises any opportunities for schools to share their strengths and there are many formal and informal examples of peer to peer support between and within schools. Our School Improvement Team also brokers support between schools at all levels including Governance. We have expert teachers who are deployed with the agreement of heads and our Merton Leaders of Education support improvement work in a number of our schools.

#### **12. From Councillor Linda Taylor to the Cabinet Member for Children's Services**

What action is the Cabinet taking to ensure that the serious abuse of children in the form of Female Genital Mutilation is eradicated in Merton?

##### **Reply**

While we have no evidence that the prevalence of Female Genital Mutilation is high in Merton it is clear from evidence that this practice is an area for concern for some children within the community and it has been reviewed by Merton Safeguarding Children Board (MSCB).

The MSCB has identified this as a main topic for awareness raising and identification progressing into 2014. The Board follows the LSCB guidance on prevention and identification through raising awareness via posters and leaflets generally with the provision of resource packs for professionals. This is supported by twice yearly multi-agency training sessions. The course is health based and ensures practitioners are aware of signs and symptoms. Alongside this, recognition and consideration of the impact of FGC on females and the dominance of this practice in particular cultures is a specific focus. The training ensures the legislative framework alongside national and local guidance is understood. Evaluation of training is always undertaken and we

are currently piloting the LSCB training evaluation tool which will later be rolled out for all multi-agency training.

### **13. From Councillor James Holmes to the Cabinet Member for Children's Services**

How many children who rely on the borough to provide for their care needs, are currently accommodated outside of the borough? In what parts of the country have these children been placed?

#### **Reply**

The table below shows that of Merton's 165 current looked after children (LAC), 120 are placed outside Merton. Children placed outside of Merton are in a variety of locations. The range of these locations is outlined below. Most of the children and young people placed away from Merton are in specialist placements connected with their specific needs. This will include children with disabilities who require a specialist provision that may be only available in specific locations or children with particular behavioural problems who require specialist input. This cohort of children and young people will also include children who have been placed with carers outside of London who will be their long term adoptive or fostering placement.

#### **Merton's Looked After Children - Placement location outside of Merton**

(At 30th September 2013)

<b>Local Authority</b>	<b>Number of Children placed</b>
Bedfordshire	1
Bexley	3
Bromley	10
Croydon	26
Derbyshire	1
Essex	4
Greenwich	2
Haringey	1
Hounslow	2
Kensington & Chelsea	1
Kent	6
Kingston Upon Thames	2
Lambeth	8
Lewisham	5
Medway	1
Northamptonshire	1
Oxfordshire	1
Redbridge	1
Richmond Upon Thames	2

Southwark	1
Surrey	11
Sutton	16
Thurrock	1
Waltham Forest	1
Wandsworth	9
West Sussex	3
<b>Total Placements outside of Merton</b>	<b>120</b>

#### **14. From Councillor James Holmes to the Cabinet Member for Children's Services**

What is the current age profile of Merton's looked after children? How has this changed in the past 5 years?

#### **Reply**

The current age profile of children looked after is provided in the table below. There have been some variations in children being looked after within particular age groups. These variations will to some extent be accounted for by the data being a snapshot of the looked after population at the end of the financial year. Within the year one might expect to see fluctuations as children of different ages enter and leave care. There have been no major or marked trends for children under the age of 16. The most significant trend has been the increase in the number of 16/17 year olds in care from 30 in 2009 to a current figure of 64.

The number of 16/17 year olds entering care is a direct consequence of the Southwark Judgement. This requires local authorities to consider whether young people presenting as homeless should become looked after by local authorities. Some young people who have become looked after have subsequently indicated that they would prefer to be in supported housing but not necessarily in care to Merton. With colleagues in the Housing Department we are exploring if a more robust joint approach across the department would be a better way for tackling this issue. The purpose of this would be to assist young people to remain at home with more intensive support or to provide housing support through the homelessness route where there is no evident need for the young person to become looked after. We are hoping to implement this new approach in early 2014.

#### **Age Profile of Merton's Looked After Children**

Number of children Looked After	Age (in years)																	
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
September 2013	12	8	7	4	1	7	3	0	8	4	4	8	2	9	11	13	34	30
March 2013	6	7	5	1	5	4	2	2	7	5	5	6	2	8	9	17	24	25
March 2012	7	4	3	4	4	1	3	7	5	2	7	2	9	8	15	13	16	19

March 2011	4	5	7	9	6	3	3	3	4	4	3	11	6	12	9	9	14	20
March 2010	8	10	9	4	2	5	3	2	3	2	8	3	7	8	7	10	21	25
March 2009	10	10	5	3	4	3	1	3	1	5	3	5	8	4	8	13	17	13

Source: March - DfE SSDA 903; September - local monitoring

Notes: Number of children Looked After at the end of the reported month, age as at 31st March for March reporting; age as at 30th September for September reporting

### **15. From Councillor Suzanne Grocott to the Cabinet Member for Education**

Given the increased demand for school places, can the Cabinet Member confirm whether the council has now entered into discussions with the owner of the former Manuplastics site in Kingston Road? Is the administration willing to consider a new school on this site and what impact would that have on the council's capital budget?

#### **Reply**

Council officers have been in discussion with the agent representing the owners of the former Manuplastics site for some time, as part of our search for suitable sites for expanding our school provision. Unfortunately the current owners already have planning permission for a scheme which they wish to implement themselves.

We were interested to read a suggestion in the local newspaper last week suggesting that the owners had written an open letter to Merton council offering the land for a new primary school so we contacted the agent again this week. This contact confirmed that the owners had not, in fact, written any open letter nor had they ever taken such an approach to these matters. They confirmed their intention is to build the scheme for which they have planning permission, with work starting on site early in the new year.

### **16. From Councillor Iain Dysart to the Cabinet Member for Education**

How, if at all, does he believe that grammar schools in Merton would contribute to the Coalition Government's stated aim of increasing social mobility?

#### **Reply**

There are no plans to consider Grammar Schools as part of our expansion programme. Choice and diversity in the school offer are important and a good mix of schools is already available in Merton. Our comprehensive schools provide a very good education and we support fully the work they do.

### **17. From Councillor Iain Dysart to the Cabinet Member for Education**

Please could he provide a breakdown of the legal costs incurred by the Council to date in pursuing the aim of expanding Dundonald Primary School



and a projection of likely future costs according to its current timetable for achieving this goal.

### **Reply**

The legal costs incurred to date amount to approximately £30,000 for in-house legal activity and £9,000 for counsel advice. We are not able to predict the final sum at this stage.

### **18. From Councillor Iain Dysart to the Cabinet Member for Education**

West Barnes residents often ask why the Council has not seriously investigated the possibility of a new primary school locally to help meet demand. Given the plans of the Chapel Street consortium for a new school upon the Merton/Kingston border, as well as the distances existing local children often have to travel, why hasn't the Council acted? Hasn't an opportunity been missed?

### **Reply**

West Barnes residents have benefitted from the LB Merton school expansions, and the expansion of Burlington Infant/Junior School which is just inside RB Kingston. Therefore, like all other residents, they have to date been given a reasonable offer of a school place. LB Merton has undertaken two substantial site searches for new school sites which has clarified that there are no straightforward options for new school sites to the far west of the borough, in or adjacent to West Barnes ward. We are working with the Chapel Street consortium and the Department for Education (DfE) following the DfE's first stage approval of their Free School bid. The DfE's agent, following similar site searches, has confirmed what the council already knew about the lack of availability of suitable sites in this part of the borough and are currently pursuing a site within the boundaries of RB Kingston rather than LB Merton. LB Merton are continuing to work in partnership on this project given that LB Merton residents should still benefit from the additional school provision even if it is not physically located within LB Merton and Councillor Dysart's ward.

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## **Agenda Item 7a – Strategic Theme**

### **1. From Councillor James Holmes to the Cabinet Member for Education**

Will the Cabinet Member join me in welcoming the introduction by the Mayor of London of the new London Schools Atlas, which means that for the first time there will be a range of information and data about school numbers, location, catchment areas and attainment publicly available in a way that is easy to use and to interpret?

#### **Reply**

I am happy to welcome this initiative. The council has worked in partnership with the GLA for many years to aid its planning of school places and the publication of data in a mapping format is helpful. I was also reassured to see that the London School Atlas reaffirms our approach to expanding more primary schools in the areas where they are most needed around the town centres of Wimbledon, Colliers Wood and Mitcham. Colliers Wood is identified as one of the highest growth areas, which is why we bought the adjacent Jamia School building so that Singlegate school could increase from 210 to 630 places. Merton's Director of Children's Services in fact acted as an expert witness to the Mayor's Education Committee which informed the production of the Atlas.

#### **Supplementary**

Would the Cabinet Member join me in welcoming this report which means that anyone who is interested in opening a free school in the borough will have the information that they need to know where the principle demand is, and in particular the views of the Shadow Education Secretary that parents are now welcome to open schools, would that not encourage him to endorse that as well.

#### **Reply**

We already publish comprehensive data about school places in this borough; about where there is demand for places. This Administration has delivered an additional 21 forms of entry over the last few years in our schools. Clearly free schools came forward but I'm in favour of local authority schools.

### **2. From Councillor Jeff Hanna to the Cabinet Member for Education**

What analysis has the Cabinet Member made of the impact of grammar schools on social mobility and the extent to which the social background of young people affects their experience of this two-tier education system?

#### **Reply**

There has been no work carried out locally to analyse the impact of Grammar Schools on social mobility as the current Administration will not be putting forward a Grammar School option as part of expanding our secondary school offer. There are Grammar Schools in neighbouring boroughs and there is choice and diversity within Merton.

The most comprehensive analysis of grammar schools was commissioned in 1959 by the then Conservative government when the grammar school system was in place. It found that of the entire national cohort of 16 year olds in the late '50s only 9% achieved 5 or more O levels. That figure today is around 70%. Moreover 38% of grammar school pupils failed to achieve more than 3 O levels. In terms of more recent analysis on areas where grammar school remain, a report for the Sutton Trust found that children from families that can afford private tutoring dominate grammar school places.

### **Supplementary**

Will the Cabinet Member be supporting the motion on grammar schools and if not, why not?

### **Reply**

No, I won't be. I am concerned about what grammar schools do for social mobility. I came across some information from Sutton Council today about free school meals at grammar schools. One grammar school, had a paltry 14 pupils on free school meals out of 1240. No school had more than 3%. Clearly, whilst some parents find them popular, I don't think they cover a wide range of people and are taking from the higher strata, and children who have been tutored through the 11+ and not local people. I understand this is the case in Sutton where people are coming from 25 miles away. I don't want to see that here in Merton.

### **3. From Councillor Oonagh Moulton to the Cabinet Member for Children's Services**

Can the Cabinet Member provide figures or the number of children in care in Merton in each of the last 5 years?

### **Reply**

Numbers of children looked after by LB Merton aged under 18 years, as at 31 March (statutory 903 return to DfE) were as follows:

120 in 2008/09

140 in 2009/10

135 in 2010/11

130 in 2011/12

140 in 2012/13

### **Supplementary**

We know that the life chances of children in care are well below the national average. What are you doing to reduce and prevent the number of LAC in the borough and place them in more stable families through adoption?

### **Reply**

You're well aware that we have enormous family support for all the children who come to our attention, for one reason and another. We hesitate to bring our children into care, we are aware that it's not the best way to start a young

life, and chances are perhaps reduced a little when you get into the care system. Looking at the raw figures, the numbers of LAC has increased from 106 in 2008. We have a lower than average 0 – 9 age in Merton, but a higher than average 16+. We've had a 65% increase in 16 and 17 year olds to be looked after in the last couple of years. 38% of our looked after population are 16+. Some of these young people come into care as a result of the Southwark Judgement which I'm sure you're aware of, and some of those children are unaccompanied asylum seekers. We're working with Housing to ensure that youngsters are given the help they need, many don't need the full care package, they just need housing. We are looking to work with a local university to study the cohort and develop a strategy to improve practice in this area.

#### **4. From Councillor Iain Dysart to the Cabinet Member for Education**

Those of all parties and none will welcome the Council's advance strategy to address the issue of securing sufficient secondary school places. Does he share my regret that, due to short-term considerations, previous administrations failed to plan adequately for the sharp rise in demand for primary school places, which has caused many of today's parents considerable worry and uncertainty?

#### **Reply**

I cannot agree that Merton's approach to meeting increasing demand for primary school places has been led by short-term considerations of previous administrations. As the strategic objective report on council's agenda this evening demonstrates, the administration has put in place plans which have enabled the council to fulfil its statutory responsibility to provide sufficient and suitable places for those families wanting to secure places in Merton's primary schools.

I would add, however, that the approach taken by the current administration to expand, wherever possible, schools which are popular and successful and agreeing expansion plans which are as close to the areas of growing demand as possible has resulted in increasing access for Merton's children to high quality educational provision and more children being educated in their preference schools than in 2011. I am not aware of another council which has planned better for what has been an unprecedented increase in demand and I am proud of this administration's achievement.

#### **Supplementary**

It's no secret that other authorities face the same difficulties, yet some, like LibDem controlled Sutton did help themselves with longer term planning in preference to the shorter term planning in Merton, placing great urgency on this Administration to act. Could I ask you how realistic you think the target date of September 2014 is for the expansion of Dundonald Primary School.

#### **Reply**

As Councillor Dysart knows, it's going through the appropriate procedure. We do hope work to get underway and this Administration is fully committed. On his point, since this Administration was formed, we've planned 13 out of the

24 forms of entry, and I'm pleased to say this year we've had no bulge classes which I think is a contrast to Sutton Council which does. That's been done though very careful planning and I'd like to thank officers as well. We're not complacent.

#### **5. From Councillor Suzanne Grocott to the Cabinet Member for Children's Services**

What was the average time it took for a child to be adopted in Merton in each of the last 3 years?

##### **Reply**

The average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family in days (source: Adoption Scorecard indicator A1) was as follows:

681 in 2010/11 (number of adoptions 5)

807 in 2011/12 (number of adoptions 9)

467 in 2012/13 (number of adoptions 5)

##### **Supplementary**

Education Secretary Michael Gove has spoken eloquently of his own experiences of adoption in the last week or so. What are Merton doing to speed up the process to at least the time shown on the website, so children can benefit from a stable family environment by the time Merton thinks they should, but are failing at the moment.

##### **Reply**

I can't give an easy one line answer and I wouldn't even if I could. You'll appreciate that the scorecard is a really blunt instrument in assessing what our children are doing and how quickly they're being assessed for adoption. Our position within the national scorecard shows a continued improvement over the measured 3 year rolling average. For 2011-13 our average was 684 against national average of 636 days so we are improving there. Our Ofsted inspection this year showed that Merton Adoption Service was overall good, but, and it is a big but, many factors come into play to ensure that our children are placed in a forever home. Matching children with complex needs is a lengthy one, and during this period health conditions can change, then further medical assessments can cause delay in concluding the court process, even though the child may have been living with the adoptive parents for a considerable length of time. The child is not left drifting in the system, the child is living with the parents whilst the court proceedings are concluded. We have three children with very complex needs and the adoption process is likely to take in excess of 1500 days. We are monitoring, tracking and wherever possible speeding the process and working to ensure all partners are taking necessary steps. We never take our eye off these children and want them in steady homes.

#### **6. From Councillor Laxmi Attawar to the Cabinet Member for Education**

Would the Cabinet Member comment on the importance of the role that Teaching Assistants have in our classrooms?

**Reply**

Teaching Assistants play very important roles in schools. They support individual pupils and groups of pupils in a wide range of learning activities working alongside teachers in carefully planned and targeted ways. They also provide significant support on some pupil welfare issues and engage in many pastoral activities both during and beyond the school day.

**Supplementary**

I would like to ask what the impact would be if teaching assistants were to be lost from our schools.

**Reply**

I think it would be huge. As I go around the borough, Headteacher greatly value the work that they undertake, especially with many SEN children within our schools. I am also concerned that there have been certain comments made by Michael Gove, calling them 'Mums Army'. I think that's derogatory. Teaching assistants were brought in by the Labour Government and have supported schools in driving up standards, and I would fight tooth and nail if there were plans to get rid of them.

**7. From Councillor Richard Hilton to the Cabinet Member for Education**

The report we will be asked to consider later on this evening (Nov 20th) regarding primary school expansions says "this major programme of expansions has been undertaken effectively." Does the Cabinet Member stand by that statement?

**Reply**

I do, indeed, consider that the major expansion of primary school provision in Merton over the course of this administration has been undertaken effectively. The policy position taken – to focus on expanding popular and successful schools as close to the increasing demand as possible – has enabled the council to place every child in a local school, to place more children in good or outstanding provision, and to place a higher percentage of children in their preference schools this year than in 2011. I believe our policy and approach to expansion of existing provision has also been affordable and financially prudent. The work of officers to project demand accurately, maximise capital income from central government and deliver expansion projects efficiently has also effectively supported the delivery of the administration's strategy.

**Supplementary**

Can the Cabinet Member confirm that there are not one but three schools where the costs of the developments have spiralled out of control.

**Reply**

I don't share the view that costs are spiralling out of control. Clearly we have to manage budget very closely. Building costs are rising at the moment. At this time we are going through the contract to get value for money and keep

within our financial remit. We are committed to these expansions, they are the right expansions.

**8. From Councillor Linda Taylor to the Cabinet Member for Community Safety, Engagement and Equalities**

What are the statistics for the last three years in terms of the number of young people who are in the Youth Justice system here in Merton?

**Reply**

From an analysis of full-year data from 2010-11 to 2012-13, Merton's Youth Justice Service worked with a total of 986 young offenders in the three year period (378 in 2010-11; 361 in 2011-12 and 247 in 2012-13). These figures relate to both statutory interventions and preventive activity, both of these elements being critical to the remit of the service. The significant reduction seen in 2012-13 resulted largely from fewer reprimands and final warnings and fewer orders handed down by courts to young offenders. Monitoring of current year data shows this reduction is being sustained.

**Supplementary**

I note the point about fewer reprimands and final warnings but please could he provide me with some practical examples of schemes that have been implemented in the last few years that have helped to reduce the numbers.

**Reply**

I think you can see from the answer that the reduction has played a pivotal role in terms of what Probation officers have been doing in this borough. Thanks to all of your councillors; Councillor David Williams has sat on the youth courts for 25 years played a pivotal role. The Courts, in terms of the magistrates play a very good role in terms of taking into consideration the reports that are made from the Probation officers and this has caused the reduction which will continue in the borough.

**9. From Councillor Brenda Fraser to the Cabinet Member for Education**

Will the Cabinet Member update the Chamber on the efforts being made to accommodate the increase in the need for Primary Schools places in this Borough and the projection for ensuring that all Merton's children have access to education within their locality?

**Reply**

From a baseline position in 2007/08, Merton is committed to providing 21 additional forms of entry in the borough's primary schools in permanent accommodation, which will provide an extra 4,410 permanent primary school places. 13 of these projects are largely completed, and we are on track to ensure the remaining will contract shortly.

We are monitoring the position very closely in relation to any further expansion that may be required. We again ensured that all children were placed this year, and we have increased the percentage of children obtaining places at preference schools. We are now managing the increase in demand



that will flow into secondary schools from 2015/16, and our strategy was approved by Cabinet last week.

### **Supplementary**

I'd like to congratulate the Cabinet Member in planning so well for our primary aged children. How does he intend to cater for the secondary aged children as the birth rate increase starts to take effect.

### **Reply**

I was very pleased last week that Cabinet endorsed the Secondary School Strategy. This is essential because we do have to plan in advance; that is vitally important. Firstly we need to fill the surplus places in our schools, then look at expanding existing sites, working closely with those schools; and then new provision from 2018. As an Administration we realise the figures are going up and it's important that we start that planning process and are not caught short.

### **10. From Councillor Linda Scott to the Cabinet Member for Education**

Following recent industrial action in Merton Schools, can he explain how attendance by teachers is recorded across the borough? Will he join me in expressing disappointment that teachers went on strike, causing disruption to the education of Merton children and to the lives of their parents?

### **Reply**

All schools notified the Local Authority of the non-attendance of teachers and those figures were passed to Payroll for appropriate salary deduction. The DfE were also notified in relation to schools which remained open and which closed.

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