

Merton Council

Council

2 April 2014

Councillors Priority Questions

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1. From Councillor Janice Howard to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration

I see that the Department for Transport is to undertake research into the effectiveness of 20mph limits. Can the Cabinet Member update us on the progress of the council's own local research into this matter following the motion passed by Council back in November 2012?

Reply

The Department for Transport has recognised the growing trend of 20mph limit and zones being implemented across the country and is undertaking research. Unfortunately the report will not be ready until 2017 reflecting the difficulties of research in this area of work and the delays in getting reliable evidence showing the impact of traffic interventions. Locally we have obtained pan London support for a piece of work to look at published evidence from existing trials and schemes across the country.

We are also undertaking speed and volume surveys at all of our existing 20mph sites across the borough over the next few months.

As reported to Scrutiny Members recently, this will be available to report in autumn 2014.

Supplementary

Would the cabinet member agree that pushing speed limits down is like pushing water uphill in terms of this Labour council rolling out 'Twenty is Plenty' schemes where residents actually want them?

Reply

What we have introduced are twenty miles per hour zones and some very effective ones actually, such as the one in Pollards Hill which was introduced, I think, in the first year of this council. We have also examined all existing schemes and some of them are effective and some of them are not. I would suggest that they tend to be ineffective unless there are physical constraints on vehicle speed because we as a council, like every council, do not have the power to enforce against excessive speed. The police have the power in London but they will not use it except where there are real concentrations of accidents in a few locations across the capital. So I would suggest what we ought to do is have councils campaign jointly to have the power to enforce twenty mile per hour speed limits and to implement them where we think it is appropriate so where we think across the council we think they are appropriate in Merton.

2. From Councillor Laxmi Attawar to the Cabinet Member for Finance

What would be the impact on the council's finances of reducing council tax by 10%?

Reply

The Revenue Estimates for 2014/15 include £75.049 million income from Council Tax for Merton usage. A 10% reduction in this figure would result in a loss of income

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of £7.5 million per year. This would be in addition to the savings already identified as part of the Business Planning Process for 2014-18. Over 4 years, that amounts to £30m that might have been available for expenditure on Council services.

Supplementary

I understand that the Tories, who raised council tax when they were last in power want to make this £7.5 million cut. Could you give me examples of the sort of cuts to services this might mean?

Reply

It's true, if the council lost an extra £30 million during the course of the next administration it would have a devastating impact on many of our services. £30 million would pay for the expansion of five good primary schools. Three years ago we looked at what the council might look like if it lost that money, and while we have protected services like libraries and the weekly rubbish collection, it is hard to see how they could be kept going with £30 million less, and yet this is precisely what the Tories promised. So while we've looked after the money well, planned for the medium term and invested in making savings, protecting services and keeping council tax down, the future under the Conservatives means just one thing, cuts, cuts cuts.

3. From Councillor Oonagh Moulton to the Leader of the Council

Can the Leader tell me how many councillor questions have been submitted in total at each of the Full Council meetings over the last two years?

Reply

Number of councillor questions at Council meetings, February 2012-February 2014

	TOTAL Priority questions	TOTAL Non priority questions	Non Priority questions by political group					Total council questions
			Labour	Con	Merton Coalition	MPWIR	Lib Dems	
Feb-14	21	77	1	41	31	0	4	98
Nov-13	20	44	3	22	13	0	6	64
Sep-13	20	59	0	37	19	0	3	79
Jul-13	20	82	16	51	10	0	5	102
Mar-13	19	21	4	11	-	2	4	40
Feb-13	18	49	1	43	-	0	5	67
Nov-12	18	41	4	33	-	0	4	59
Sep-12	18	37	2	31	-	0	4	55
Jul-12	18	42	4	33	-	0	5	60

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Mar-12	18	20	2	17	-	0	1		38
Feb-12	18	28	2	22	-	0	4		46

Supplementary

I hope the Leader is aware that as of 2pm on 27th March over half the council questions submitted by my Conservative colleagues for the 5th February council meeting remain unanswered by his cabinet. Will he apologise to those members affected on all sides of the chamber along with residents who have had to wait over seven weeks for an answer. And since councillor questions is supposed to be a key way of holding the administration to account, does he believe this huge delay in answering is not only discourteous to councillors, but actually more importantly, an affront to the democratic process in Merton?

Reply

The councillor knows the number of questions that have been asked has risen inexorably over the last couple of years, more than doubled, but I want to reassure her that this is a hard working administration that will answer the questions that the people of Merton want to know the answers to. We are the best achieving council in the country and the question the residents want to know the answer to is who has protected low paid families against the government cuts to council tax? Who has frozen council tax every single year? Who has built 2000 extra school places? Who has introduced a free bulky waste collection scheme and who is the best council in the country? It's Labour on this side, not the Conservatives.

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

Further to the outcome of the Council's Mini-Holland bid, resulting in the receipt of less money than hoped, by when does he intend to progress to take forward the specific agreement of this Council to approach the Mayor's office regarding the extension of the cycle hire scheme to Merton, or would he rather I forgot about it?

Reply

Although Merton didn't achieve full mini-Holland borough status, our bid was highly commended by the Mayor's team and we've been told we will receive at least £10m over possibly 3 years. This compares with a usual spend on cycling of about £300k pa.

I have been in touch with the Mayor's cycling commissioner, Andrew Gilligan, who tells me that he is writing to me with a view to our meeting soon to discuss Merton's funding and to agree which projects within our bid will go forward. What we are proposing is our own cycle hire scheme, to invest in Brompton Docks, of which there are numerous working examples in South West London and Surrey, as part of a partnership with Southwest Trains, rather than an immediate extension on the central London scheme which does not currently run to Merton's border. There are logistical difficulties in extending the existing Barclays Cycle Hire to outer London.

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In addition to Brompton Docks, the Council is also collaborating with South London Partnership to determine whether the HourBike hire system might be a suitable alternative for Outer London. We are currently exploring this in partnership with Kingston, Sutton, Croydon, and Richmond.

Supplementary

It is disappointing that would be hirers in Merton will not be able to take advantage of the scheme which the mayor was hoping to roll out across London, however, to evidence Merton's commitment to the new scheme of which he speaks, will he and other officers engage with counterparts at City Hall to assist in its planning and implementation and also what timescale is he envisioning?

Reply

Well, we will certainly be engaging with Andrew Gilligan and his team with Transport for London and the bid as a whole and an important element of that bid is the cycle hire scheme, particularly in the Wimbledon area and I spoke to Andrew Gilligan last on Friday and he said he was writing to me with a suggestion for an early meeting. So we anticipate early engagement on the between 10 and 20 million pounds that we believe that we will receive and we will be discussing with Andrew Gilligan's team which parts of the project we think we can deliver effectively in the next two to three years and no doubt he will have his own views because he's been quite diligent – I believe he has cycled many of the routes in each borough.

5. From Councillor Miles Windsor to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration

To be answered by the Cabinet Member for Environmental Cleanliness and Parking

Noise pollution and noise aggravation can have a serious and adverse effect on the lives of residents in Merton. Can the Cabinet Member update me on the council's current noise nuisance enforcement pilot?

Reply

The Environmental Health Service has been providing an Out of Hours Noise enforcement service on Friday nights since the beginning of the calendar year. This service complements the long-standing Saturday night service but is supported by officers from both Croydon and Richmond Councils with whom we are working on a shared Regulatory Services.

Despite local publicity and changes to the Council's website, take up of the pilot service was originally limited but now mirrors the level of demand being experienced on the Saturday night service. A more detailed analysis of the demand for the service and enforcement action required will take place at the end of the 6 month trial period.

Supplementary

Will the cabinet member commit to an all year round noise enforcement service as recommended by the Overview and Scrutiny Commission and if not, what does he have to say to those residents suffering sleep deprivation due to inconsiderate

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neighbours or drinking establishments outside of those few weeks in the summer when the current service operates?

Reply

We are concerned to base our policies on evidence and not on slogans. 24/7 is a nice slogan but if you are employing officers for much of that time for no purpose when there are no complaints, when there are no issues arising it is a waste of public money – so we have extended the current service that was Saturdays to Fridays for a period and we will be looking at the evidence to support the continuation of that service. We will be looking to work with other neighbouring boroughs but we are not going to go for slogans. If there should be a sudden growth of noise disturbance outside Fridays and Saturdays, we will certainly look into it.

6. From Councillor Brenda Fraser to the Cabinet Member for Community and Culture

Could he estimate how much a new performing arts centre for Wimbledon might cost?

Reply

Two examples of performing arts centres recently built are the Curve Theatre in Leicester, planned in 2000, at a cost of £61m - which was £35m over budget - whilst the more recently refurbished Midlands Arts Centre was refurbished in 2010 at a cost of £15m. A new performing arts centre for Wimbledon would require £20m as a minimum in construction alone, before running costs were factored in.

Merton, including Wimbledon, is however already blessed with 5 permanent performing arts venues of various sizes which, together with occasional performing areas including our parks, leisure centres and of course our libraries, makes our borough an excellent venue for providing sustainable performing arts for the long term.

Supplementary

Would the cabinet member tell the council where this money would come from to do what I think is suggested and would any capital projects have to be scrapped to pay for this?

Reply

You've heard it from Councillor Allison there will be things like get rid of the pool for a start, they would need to stop school expansion, they would need to stop all that sort of thing because we haven't got the money for that – it would take £60 million quid to pay for this sort of facility. What worries me actually as well is what happens if you build it, how are you going to staff it, what happens – it is ridiculous. I would point out though considering the Conservatives demolished the original Wimbledon Civic Hall in 1990, considering they broke their promise to replace that hall, I really don't expect the Tories to be believed when they say they are going to build another one.

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7. From Councillor Richard Hilton to the Cabinet Member for Finance

Is the Annual Mayor's Ball, to be held this year on April 26th an official Council event supported by Council staff or a private event run by you/the Mayor?

Reply

The mayor's charity, an independent charitable trust, runs events such as this as fundraising events to raise money for charitable giving. A small amount of council officer time is used to support the mayor's charity. It is important that the dignity of the Mayor and the Mayor's charitable work is maintained. This administration does not propose to interfere in the Mayor's running of the Annual Ball, including decisions about who is invited and what standards of behaviour are required from guests, although of course in extreme circumstances instances of unacceptable behaviour can be investigated by the Standards Committee or other authorities if required.

Supplementary

I note the answer mentions maintaining the dignity of the office of the mayor which I read with interest. It is disappointing that councillors are excluded from that event and that's all I want to say.

(The mayor decided this was not a question and moved on)

8. From Councillor Suzanne Grocott to the Cabinet Member for Finance

How much did it cost to design, print, distribute and display the posters stating that "council tax has been frozen"? How many posters were printed, how many sites used and was there any foregone revenue from a commercial alternative?

Reply

The frozen council tax posters are currently displayed on the 48 advertising boards across the borough at the cost of £649.50. This covers all design, print and display costs, and works out at £13 per unit. No commercial revenue was lost as a result of the frozen council tax campaign.

Supplementary

Given the low cost and all the prime locations I can really see why on advertising a £150,000 budget was missed. Does the cabinet member agree this is exactly one of the reasons why this council will never be able to cut council tax, only freeze it?

Reply

I'm not sure I follow what the point was being made. However, the thing for us to recall is that this is a very cheap campaign – it is approximately one millionth of the council's budget on informing the residents of Merton something very important that they should know. Perhaps the reason that she is so exercised about the cost of informing people about four consecutive years of council tax freezes is what happened under her administration when council tax went up by £100 and they left us with a gaping hole of £70 million to clear.

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9. From Councillor Sam Thomas to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Cleanliness and Parking

How much would it cost to re-open the Weir Road recycling centre in terms of both capital and revenue?

Reply

Firstly there is no suitable site available, the previous site is currently being leased to another company, the length of the lease being until 2036. Therefore the Weir Road site will not be available before then. The council's estates section have confirmed that there is no available land to accommodate a similar sized plot, which therefore leaves the options to privately rent or purchase land with suitable planning permission.

If a site were rented the additional revenue cost would, we estimate, be approximately £28,000 per calendar month, £336,000 each year. In addition the cost of management of the site would need to be added. These would be approximately £200k per annum which doesn't include haulage costs.

Therefore current revenue costs would approximately be in the region of over £500k annually, which equates to an increase in Council Tax of approximately 0.7%.

This does not include the Capital costs required to set up a new site including provision of bins, equipment and signage.

As an alternative the average purchase price for low grade industrial use site in the Wimbledon area would be approximately £3m, or the equivalent of approximately half of the cost of the Pelham Primary School expansion, for example.

Supplementary

Can the cabinet member explain how the level of costs involved will impact on services to residents?

Reply

I think this is regarding if there was to be a reopening of Weir Road or another site that I think is being proposed by the Conservatives in their manifesto. If we look at the financial impact we are looking at an effect on the schools expansion, the Morden Pools, the fortnightly rubbish collections, the list is endless. I don't believe this has been fully costed out, they are making promises to the electorate that I don't believe they can carry out. Other than that, I don't know where those costs are going to come from because you're not saying.

10. From Councillor Richard Hilton to the Cabinet Member for Finance

Can the Cabinet Member please give me a list of:

- (a) The total expenditure on corporate cards by department within the last financial year and
- (b) All individual spending totalling over £500 by staff or Councillors within the last financial year.

Reply

The Table below summarises spend by department using "purchasing cards" for the financial year 2012/13:

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Department	2012/13
	£
Corporate Services	97,596.75
Children Schools & Families	190,443.98
Community & Housing	119,983.71
Environment & Regeneration	105,007.23
Mitcham Common Conservators	4,310.67
Merton and Sutton Joint Cemetery Board	7,222.12
Total for Merton	524,564.46

N.B. No Councillor has a purchasing card.

All individual spending totalling over £500 up to 31st December within the last financial year are shown on the hyperlink below: This will be updated to 31st March as part of the process of closing of accounts

<http://www.merton.gov.uk/council/dp-foi/opendata/spending.htm>

Supplementary

I read with interest that over half a million pounds of our residents' money has been spent on corporate spending cards by officers. Given the previous issues we've had repeatedly over the past four years when I've raised it in this council and in the local press, what assurances can he give to me that there is no abuse possible of the corporate card system?

Reply

The council's use of credit cards is audited and that is obviously very important but there is nothing wrong with the use of cards to pay for council services. Anyone with any measure of financial competence, I don't know whether that includes UKIP, would understand that sometimes, it is cheaper, easier and more efficient to use cards than to pay remotely with invoice and so on. It's all very well for him to speak of abuse, but more money has been wasted in this administration by the setting up of the UKIP group than has been abused by anyone using the cards. We have been good with money, we have been sensible with money. We have turned around the capital that had £70 million gap, we have had council tax freezes for four years – if we had not been good with money we would not have been named the best council.

Agenda item 7 – Councillors strategic theme priority questions and answers

1. From Councillor Gilli Lewis-Lavender to the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health

Does the Cabinet Member agree that we can expect to see the number of residents with dementia increasing in the future as more residents and carers seek help and advice?

Reply

Our Joint Strategic Needs Assessment states: "Based on current trends Merton's population would increase by 16,000 people between 2011 and 2017. A significant feature of Merton's population in 2017 is the changing age profile of the borough's residents, with the most notable growth in those under the age of 9 yrs. and 65+.

In Merton it is estimated that 7.2% of women and 5.3% of men aged over 65 have dementia (2007), by 2021 this is predicted to reduce to 6.7% for women and increase to 5.6% for men.

With the potential increase in the numbers of people aged over 65, if nothing else changes (i.e. proportionally the prevalence of current long-term conditions doesn't change), then there will be a significant increase in the absolute numbers of people with dementia."

In order to address this we have undertaken the following actions:

- The council has added £1m in growth each year to the social care budget recognising the demographic pressures caused by an increase in numbers of older people and those of working age with disabilities
- We have launched our Dementia Action Alliance for Merton whereby the council and its partner agencies commit to 3 actions to improve the lives of people with dementia and their carers
- We have produced a strategy for dementia in Merton, overseen by a multi-agency steering group

We successfully bid for £350,000 from the Department of Health to improve the building in Mitcham used for day support, have added council capital, and are re launching this Dementia Hub in June 2014. This is run by the Alzheimer's Society and the service is already reaching over 300 people

Supplementary Question

Does Councillor Kirby support the drive by one of the most enterprising councillors London has had in recent times, conservative Merrick Cockerell in his campaign to get training for a whole raft of 'dementia friends' and would she consider setting up training for councillors and staff for those interested in becoming dementia friends?

Reply

Absolutely

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

What has the Leader done to support the campaign to save St Helier Hospital?

Reply

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Over the last 12 months I have undertaken the following in support of the Save St Helier Hospital campaign:

- Written to the Secretary of State for Health asking for clarification on who makes the final decision on St Helier. The Secretary of State confirmed that he makes the final decision.
- Encouraged all Labour Councillors to write to GPs in their ward to urge support for St Helier hospital and written myself to the GPs in my own ward of Ravensbury.
- Commissioned an investigation from independent healthcare experts into the BSBV business case.
- Spoken to countless local residents encouraging them to sign petitions in support of the hospital and to put a “Save St Helier” poster in their window
- Attended meetings of a number of local Save St Helier groups and facilitated the use of the council chamber and the Civic Centre foyer for meetings and stalls organised by local residents groups
- Ordered banners for the front of the Civic Centre to encourage local people to support the St Helier campaign.
- Written to the Secretary of State to ask for the re-instatement of the £219m investment in St Helier Hospital and to seek clarification of comments from NHS England which suggest the local NHS is “planning for failure” of local hospitals.

Attended the recent handing over to the Chief Executive of the CCG of 13,000 signatures from local people in support of maintaining services at St Helier hospital.

Supplementary

Can the Leader tell me what resources the council has been able to commit to the fight to save St Helier Hospital?

Reply

I am delighted and proud of the steps this council has taken, and this administration in particular, to campaign for St Helier Hospital. We have commissioned an investigation from an independent health care experts into BSBV (Better Services Better Value) business case, and found there was no business case and that was at a cost of £13000 that is money that shows we walk the walk and talk the talk. We also put in place some banners so that the residents can see that this council supports St Helier Hospital. These cost £266 you can see them as you walk into this best achieving council and in fact the Leader of the London Borough of Sutton, Cllr Ruth Dombey, is also copying us and also has those banners outside the London Borough of Sutton. Money well spent Madam Mayor.

3. From Councillor David Williams to the Leader of the Council

On 6 March 2003 Cllr Alambritis was elected in the Ravensbury by-election styling himself as the Labour Party Save St Helier Hospital Candidate. 11 years on how does he rate the success of his campaign in terms of improvements to the services there compared with the other General Hospitals serving Merton residents (Mayday, St George's and Kingston), which have all seen major investment programmes in the interim?

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Reply

I'm glad Councillor Williams remembers so vividly my by-election win in Ravensbury 11 years ago. I'm sure he will also recall that on being elected I worked closely with Siobhain McDonagh and together we persuaded the then Labour government to invest £219m in re-developing St Helier hospital. However, since that time his own party have taken power nationally and, as has only recently been confirmed, the £219m earmarked for the re-development of St Helier hospital now no longer features in the local NHS's long term strategic plan. I have written to the Secretary of State, Jeremy Hunt, to object to this and to ask that his government re-instate this investment.

Supplementary

I am sure Councillor Alambritis will also recall the launch party for Labour's 2006 election campaign inviting Patricia Hewitt to come and be thanked for saving St Helier. There was a full seven years from 2003 – 2010 when Labour did nothing for St Helier, unlike elsewhere. So here's my question, isn't it time for the Labour Party to apologise for their failure, to stop using St Helier as a party political football and to campaign with the rest of the community for first class services there which to play to their strengths as it's not Labour's hospital, it belongs to all of us.

Reply

If there is one person in Merton who is to apologise, it is the MP for Wimbledon, Stephen Hammond, for voting for clause 119 Madam Mayor.

4. From Councillor Iain Dysart to the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health

How does she consider the promotion of health and well-being in Merton to have been served by savings decisions made or reaffirmed at the recent Budget meeting?

Reply

In setting its budget and medium term financial strategy, the council has sought throughout to protect front line services as far as possible, and it has protected the public health grant. Whilst there have been difficult decisions to make in the detail, the councils overall strategy has been supported if we look at the evidence of resident satisfaction and the peer review of Health and Wellbeing.

Supplementary

This budget included decisions which penalised sections of society we should be protecting; youngsters, those at risk of homelessness, older people, those with mental health conditions etc. Does she really believe that such short term decisions, that would stoke up future and more costly problems, constitute good management of council finances now or later?

Reply

I would say it's your government that made the decisions about the funding to local government and the money isn't there and when we look at the funding for the care bill coming through there's a big shortfall. So we cannot perform miracles and there will be things that happen that we won't be happy with. That is going to be life and it's probably going to get worse.

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5. From Councillor Debbie Shears to the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health

Is the Cabinet Member aware of any firm proposals made by the CCG to close any services at St Helier hospital now that the Better Services Better Value review is off the table?

Reply

Although the six south west London CCGs and NHS England (who commission specialised services in south west London) have just begun working on their new strategy for local health services, in their most recent public statement in February they stated the following:

- “We recognise that the status quo is even less of an option now than it was when the BSBV programme started.”
- “We unanimously support the clinical case for change set out as part of the BSBV programme.”
- “We will use the detailed and thorough analysis developed through the BSBV programme, setting out expected future patient need and provider trust staffing and finances, to develop our future commissioning strategies.”

In addition, NHS England has written to say that the local NHS is “preparing for clinical and financial failure” and that local hospitals will not be granted Foundation Trust status “since the provider landscape is unsustainable”.

In light of the above, it is clear that the assumptions behind the discredited BSBV proposals remain at the heart of the CCGs’ future strategy. Added to this, the recent removal of the sign heralding the promised £219m investment in St Helier has made residents all the more suspicious that services at St Helier remain at risk.

Supplementary

The Director of Community and Housing and at the most recent Scrutiny Panel, Dr Howard Freeman, the chair of the CCG, have both stated there are no proposals on the table to close any services at St Helier. Does the cabinet member agree there are no proposals on the table, yes or no?

Reply

I think the answer is in the paper.

6. From Councillor Agatha Akyigyina to the Cabinet Member for Community and Culture

Does he believe the new Morden Park Leisure Centre will contribute to health outcomes in Morden and could he update us on progress with replacing it?

Reply

Yes, the new Morden Park Leisure Centre will contribute to health outcomes in the Morden area as it will give families, school children and local people many and varied sports and leisure opportunities to take part in and improve their physical and mental well-being. The first stage consultation is taking place at this time and local people are being asked what they would like to see in such a facility. We look forward to receiving the findings of this work in due course to inform the next stages of this development.

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Supplementary

Can the cabinet member clarify how we have been able to replace the pool at this time?

Reply

We have been very careful with our reserves as you know, we have been very careful with the money we have in the capital budget. The question should really be, 'Why didn't we do it earlier?'. We wanted to make sure that our children were accommodated in our schools. When I came in as a cabinet member, I wanted to make sure that our programme for primary schools was properly funded, properly in place before we went on to this. I was very, very pleased to be told last year that we did actually now have enough money to build the pool, particularly as there are new construction techniques and I am really utterly delighted that this pool will, at long last, after many years from both sides of not being built, be built. I am so looking forward to seeing that happen.

7. From Councillor Richard Hilton to the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health

What, if any, enforcement action has the Cabinet Member pushed for with regard to the continued breach of planning rules by Rapid Ready Mix in Lower Morden ward which threatens the health of residents in the area by subjecting them to poor air quality?

Reply

Cllr Andrew Judge is the Cabinet Member responsible for this area and I know he is fully aware of the importance of taking health concerns into account where they are relevant. The Council has invested significant resources in purchasing specialist air quality monitoring equipment and using it to monitor air quality in the area around Rapid Ready Mix. To date this has failed to identify any health concerns regarding air quality.

We recently met with residents and assured them of this and we are arranging a full briefing for residents by the laboratory responsible for the testing. We will be keeping this matter under review.

Quite separately, and unrelated to air quality issues, we are taking enforcement action against this landowner for breach of planning conditions.

Supplementary

I did actually raise this at Planning Applications Committee that no enforcement action had been taken against the landowners of Rapid Readymix for a number of breaches actually, so I am pleased to see that the cabinet member is saying that enforcement action is being taken. Would you please explain exactly what action is now being taken?

Reply

There is planning enforcement action being taken and I know there were some court dates earlier this week. I haven't had the results of that court date yet and I will get back to him with the answer.

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8. From Councillor Maurice Groves to the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health

Could the Cabinet Member tell me if she is supportive of the building of the helipad at St George's hospital?

Reply

I welcome proposals that will lead to better health outcomes for Merton residents, and would like to thank the charity responsible for the £1m donation towards it, the County Air Ambulance Trust HELP appeal. I hope the helipad will speed up the time it takes to transfer major trauma patients, such as road traffic accidents, shootings and stabbings, to St George's. Nonetheless there will still be a vital need for local A&E departments such as that at St Helier hospital and I think local people are very disappointed that due to Clause 119 of the Care Bill, well run hospitals like St George's (or indeed St Helier) can be closed by a Minister. If St George's has a helipad that should not be seen as an excuse to argue that St Helier no longer needs an A&E.

Supplementary

Undoubtedly I would like to see St Helier stay open and I am sure it will do and if the cabinet member had been at the last scrutiny meeting she would have heard Dr Freeman say exactly that. But, the bit that worries me with the government cutting VAT on fuel for helicopters that are used in emergency services and in fact supplying a new helicopter for south west London, why was the Labour group critical of this particular item in the last scrutiny meeting? Why have they got no confidence about the 'criticalness of this particular, excellent, service'?

Reply

I missed the Healthier Communities meeting due to a family commitment. It's not often I miss a meeting, but that was my priority. I can't comment on what scrutiny members have said, I support the helicopter.

9. From Councillor Sam Thomas to the Cabinet Member for Health and Adult Social Care

Could she update us on the next steps for St Helier hospital?

Reply

The South West London Collaborative Commissioning partnership is required to produce a high level five year strategy by June. It has not yet been announced how this will impact on services at St Helier but it has been confirmed by the CCG that the hospital's £219m redevelopment agreed in March 2010 is no longer part of the Trust's proposed Long Term Financial Model, and that the banner stating that this redevelopment was "coming soon" has consequently been taken down.

Supplementary

Bearing in mind support for St Helier Hospital is ostensibly an issue of cross party consensus, does the cabinet member find it odd that the Merton Conservative Party manifesto doesn't include a single mention of St Helier?

Reply

Agenda item 7 – Councillors strategic theme priority questions and answers

I do, I am shocked about that, but I'm even more shocked at Stephen Hammond's involvement with clause 119. I think we have been campaigning for St Helier for an enormous amount of time and to see that 219 banner come down was a disgrace, so for me, the battle is still on.

10. From Councillor Suzanne Evans to the Cabinet Member for Health

Since its first meeting in shadow form to the last meeting held to date, how many pages in total have the combined full Agendas for the Health and Wellbeing Board, together with attachments, reports, appendices, etc. run to? Please also break down the information by number of pages per meeting.

Reply

Shadow HWBB

Date	No. of Pages
14-Jun-11	81
09-Aug-11	124
25-Oct-11	42
13-Dec-11	62
14-Feb-12	75
10-Apr-12	114
29-May-12	89
10-Jul-12	63
11-Sep-12	117
13-Nov-12	169
05-Feb-12	233

Health and Wellbeing Board

Date	No. of Pages
23-Apr-13	139
04-Jun-13	95
01-Oct-13	155
28-Jan-14	454
25-Mar-14	390

TOTAL **2321**

Supplementary

It seems to me from the figures that the Health and Wellbeing Board is simply drowning in paperwork and certainly that was my recollection of my short time on it. It was almost impossible to read everything and get your head around it fully. Does the cabinet member feel that the health of residents is any better since the coalition ordered this top down reorganisation of the NHS which brought the Health and Wellbeing Board into introduction?

Agenda item 7 – Councillors strategic theme priority questions and answers

Reply

I think the Health and Wellbeing Board is doing very well actually, and our peer review seems to suggest it, so I'm not sure why you would waste time on this question which would take an enormous amount of energy to put together, which I feel is fairly pointless. The Health and Wellbeing Board is in good shape.