

Merton Council

Council

15 April 2015

Supplementary agenda

20 Non Priority Questions to Cabinet Members and Responses

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NON PRIORITY COUNCIL QUESTIONS & RESPONSES

Ordinary council questions from Conservative Group members:

From **Councillor Daniel Holden** to the **Cabinet Member for Environmental Cleanliness and Parking**:

Does the Cabinet Member agree with me that a pleasant public urban realm is desirable for both residents and local businesses?

Reply

Public space is all around us, a vital part of everyday urban life: the streets we pass through on the way to school or work, the places where children play, or where we encounter nature and wildlife; the local parks in which we enjoy sports, walk the dog and sit at lunchtime; or simply somewhere quiet to get away for a moment from the bustle of a busy daily life.

In other words, public space is our open-air living room, our outdoor leisure centre and a pleasant urban realm is important to the success of our borough both in terms of neighbourhoods and our town and local centres.

We have invested in improving our public realm, from small interventions at a local level, such as de-cluttering our streets of excessive posts, signs and railings, to larger scale improvements such as Destination Wimbledon, Raynes Park Enhancement Plan, Rediscover Mitcham and Connecting Colliers Wood – with plans now emerging for Morden.

A pleasant urban realm creates the right environment for businesses to thrive and for people to dwell and therefore spend more money in our town centres. As demonstrated in Wimbledon and Raynes Park 2 years after our investment. However it's not all about the design. Great spaces need to be animated with people in them and looked after. Events such as markets, art festivals and fairs all enliven our public spaces.

We also need to ensure that spaces are well maintained and kept clean. This isn't all down to the Council, we also expect our residents and businesses to respect their urban realm. As part of our planned major public realm investments, and our economic development work, we'll be encouraging businesses in town centres to sign up to our Love Your Street campaign.

From **Councillor Daniel Holden** to the **Cabinet Member for Environmental Cleanliness and Parking**:

Why was the entire Wimbledon town centre awash with rubbish on Sunday 29th March? Is this anything to do with her decision to remove Sunday street sweeping?

Reply

It is regrettable that a small minority of residents persist in littering our streets. The council spends £5m every year keeping the borough clean and the recent annual residents' survey shows that most residents give our street cleaning work a positive rating. We are always looking for ways of being more efficient, especially in light of government cuts to our funding. We focus much of our resources on cleaning up on

Friday and Saturday nights, through to the early Sunday morning, in town centres where the need is greatest and on Sunday daytimes we operate an on-demand litter-picking and bin emptying service.

From Councillor Daniel Holden to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Cleanliness and Parking:

Can you please release the street cleaning schedule for each ward or will the Council only do this via a Freedom of Information request?

Reply

All residential roads in Merton are scheduled to be cleaned at least weekly. We are currently reviewing the order in which roads are swept to reflect the imminent arrival of five gluttons, which we anticipate will improve the efficiency and reduce the cost of street cleaning.

From Councillor Daniel Holden to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Cleanliness and Parking:

Can you tell me how many people the Council is expecting to prosecute for fly tipping this year?

Reply

It is of course impossible to predict how many people we will prosecute this financial year (2015/16) as we are only three weeks into the financial year and it will depend on how many actual fly tips take place, whether there are witnesses, etc. However so far, from 1st April 2015 to date, 3 people have been prosecuted with 1 home office caution.

We will continue to work with our partners such as the Met Police where we have been involved in attending joint automated number plate reading (ANPR) operations to stop and inspect anyone carrying waste and ensuring they are registered as a waste carrier and requesting weighbridge receipts of where they have tipped or about to tip their waste.

From Councillor Daniel Holden to the Cabinet Member for Finance:

Would you agree with me that George Osborne's Council Tax Freeze Grant has been beneficial for Merton residents who now worry less about council tax?

Reply

I am glad that Cllr Holden recognises that Merton residents worry less about council tax under this Labour administration than they did under the previous Conservative administration who hiked up council tax by £100.

It is Labour in Merton – and no one else – who have delivered this historic five year council tax freeze. The Conservative's refused to support the freeze and at the special council meeting that set council tax rates just two months ago every single Merton Conservative, including Cllr Holden, voted against Labour's council tax freeze.

Clearly, the Council Tax freeze grant is not the key factor in determining the level of Council Tax, as has been demonstrated by the fact that more than a third of Councils have chosen not to accept it, as it is not sufficient in itself to justify a freeze. This is because the Government has chosen not to recompense Councils the full cost of a freeze.

Could I also add that council tax is a regressive tax with the poorest in society paying a greater proportion of their income than the very richest pay. I am therefore appalled that this Conservative government has cut the council tax support grant which has meant that those residents on the very lowest income have had to pay more council tax. However, in Merton we have a Labour run council and we took the right decision which was to protect low income families from this nasty Conservative cut.

We have used our good financial management to ensure that no-one in Merton will pay any more in council tax than they did last year. We are the only borough in South West London and Surrey to do this. Neighbouring Conservative and Liberal Democrat authorities have all raised council tax for some residents so I am proud that Labour is making a clear difference here in Merton.

From Councillor David Williams to the Leader of the Council:

Would the Leader please list the meetings and correspondence he has had since the last ordinary meeting of the Council on 4th February 2015 to save St Helier Hospital?

Reply

Since I last answered this question in February, can I reassure him that I have done the following:

- Following my public call for Dr Freeman to resign as Chair of the CCG due to his role in bringing forward the plans to close services at St Helier Hospital, I welcomed his dignified exit in March and I hope this change of personnel at the top will draw a line under these proposals.
- Welcomed the appointment of the new Chair of the CCG, Dr Andrew Murray, and arranged to meet with him. I am hopeful this new appointment will herald a change of direction by the CCG and will ensure the new Chair is fully aware of how much local people value St Helier Hospital.
- Worked hard for the re-election of our local MP for Mitcham & Morden, Siobhain McDonagh, who has been a tireless campaigner for St Helier Hospital and who I hope and believe will continue to be the voice of local people in the House of Commons, supporting our local hospital where other local MPs from other parties have seemed content to let it close.
- Ensured our "Support St Helier Hospital" banners continued to fly outside the Civic Centre up to the pre-election period, in recognition of the huge public support there continues to be for this campaign.

On 13 April I was shocked to learn via a leak to the BBC that secret plans are being drawn up to close St Helier Hospital, despite the Trust's Chief Executive only recently confirming our hospital was safe. As a result I ensured a Labour motion calling for the plans to be released and making clear our absolute opposition to this plan was debated at full council on Wednesday. I moved the motion on behalf of the Labour Group and was delighted that it was passed, despite Conservative efforts to dilute the motion. I have also publicly called for the Secretary of State and health bosses to

make clear what they know of the plans and why they have been kept secret from local people.

I intend to send another letter to health bosses now Council has ratified Labour's motion to Council, and I look forward to his support for that approach.

Can I take this opportunity to thank Cllr Williams for asking this same question at each council meeting. My responses place on the public record the strong commitment this Labour administration has to St Helier Hospital and our absolute refusal to allow his Conservative colleagues in government to close it.

From Councillor Abdul Latif to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration:

In light of the various recent unauthorised traveller encampments in the borough, can the Cabinet Member provide a breakdown of costs to the council (incurred from tax payers' money) in obtaining Welfare Assessment Reports, Court Orders / Injunctions, subsequent clean up operations and the securing of sites that have previously been occupied by travellers?

Reply

Officers are gathering this information in response to a Member Enquiry from Councillor Moulton (deadline 30th April 2015). The reply requires information from officers throughout the Council and while officers are doing their best full information may not be available for this meeting. The information will be provided to members as soon as it is available.

From Councillor Oonagh Moulton to the Cabinet Member for Finance:

What is the council's policy on offering incentives based on the number of enforcement notices/fines/penalty charge notices issued? Do any Merton employees or contractors operate in this manner? If so, which ones?

Reply

There are no employees who operate on an incentive basis linked to the number of fines/penalty charge notices issued.

From Councillor Adam Bush to the Cabinet Member for Finance:

Can the Cabinet Member please tell me:

1. Which level 1, 2, 3 or 4 manager posts are currently filled in this way i.e. with temporary/acting/interim staff and the comparable daily rate at which each one is being remunerated?
2. What the total additional cost is to the Council of temporary and agency staff filling these posts rather than permanent staff members?

Reply

The following level 2, 3 and 4 posts are filled in this way:

- Head of Policy Strategy and Partnership – Secondment

- Service Support Manager - SS&T – Acting up
- Service Manager CSF Commissioning – Acting up
- Performance Manager - Secondment
- Mascot Manager – Acting up
- Miles Access & Assessment Service – Acting up
- PCP Project Worker – Acting up
- Head of Programme Office – Agency worker
- Assistant Director of Education– Agency Worker
- Head of Commercial Services – Agency Worker
- Service Manager Children's Central Social Work – Agency Worker
- Community Care Dev Officer– Agency Worker
- Capital Project Manager – Agency
- Youth Service Manager – Agency
- Team Manager – Agency
- Network Asset Maintenance Manager– Agency
- Street & Network Co-ordinator Manager - Agency
- Treasury and Insurance) – Agency
- Service Financial Adviser C&H– Agency

Unfortunately, we are not able to give the daily rate at which each one is being remunerated due to an Information Commissioner Officer decision on this (FS50468276).

It is not possible to assess the comparative additional costs to the Council in 2014/15 of employing these temporary and agency staff because officers are unable to monetise the benefits of employing them and the costs that the Council would incur of not employing them, although leaving service critical posts unfilled could clearly cost the Council significantly more. That is why the decision has been made to fill these posts on a temporary basis in line with long-standing Council practice, as has been the case in previous administrations.

Strategic theme (Older People) from Conservative Group members:

From **Councillor James Holmes** to the **Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health**:

Can the Cabinet Member set out in detail the services for older people that are now being provided by the brand new Nelson local care centre?

Reply

A comprehensive list of services available to older people at the excellent new Nelson Health Centre is available at www.mertonccg.nhs.uk/Local-Services/the-nelson/Pages/default.aspx. I was delighted at the recent opening of the new facility which marks the culmination of a process which included significant contribution from council officers, including in Planning, working with our colleagues in Health. I am hopeful that we will soon have progress on the Mitcham Care Centre which has now been earmarked for the Wilson site. However, local care centres are not a substitute for hospitals, they cannot provide the specialist and emergency services that older residents often need. That is why I am appalled to hear about the leaked plans to close St Helier Hospital which I know older people in Merton will be very worried about. I echo the Leader of the Council's questions that need to be answered: Why was this plan kept secret from local people? Who in the government knew about the plans? And were they intending to keep this secret until after the general election?

From **Councillor David Simpson** to the **Cabinet Member for Education**:

How many older people in Merton will be affected by the administration's decision to shut down the Whatley Avenue Adult Education Centre?

Reply

No decision has yet been made on the future of the Whatley Avenue site. However, for this academic year (2014/15) there are there are 350 older learners (defined as those over 65) taking 770 courses at MAE. We intend to maintain provision for those learners in line with the commissioning principles adopted by cabinet on 16 February.

From **Councillor Charlie Chirico** to the **Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health**:

How is the Council using data to predict where the most isolated and lonely older people in Merton live so as to be able to offer support to those who need it most? What measures are in place in order to counteract the factors that may lead to loneliness among older people? I would like to know what the Council will be doing over the next few years to tackle this growing problem.

Reply

Older people are vulnerable to social isolation and loneliness from loss of family, friends, mobility and income. This impacts on an individual's quality of life, having a negative impact on their health and increasing their use of health and social care.

Public Health data about the profile of Merton's older population which is contained in the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment highlights key risk factors and enables better understanding of the nature of the problem which informs commissioning decisions. The JSNA is available on Merton's website and is regularly updated. Other sources of data include community and faith groups who are in touch with many older and

vulnerable people, and what we have within social care including for example all those known to MASCOT.

The main focus is on connecting individuals to their communities by building on the award winning partnership work with the voluntary sector in Merton through such programmes as Ageing Well, Making Merton Dementia Friendly, the Befriending project sponsored by Public Health, and harnessing voluntary effort through the Volunteering Strategy. Alongside this we are also looking at new ways for older people to stay in touch with family and close friends wherever they live, for example through using new technologies which have already been successfully piloted within Merton. We are also continuing to support ways for older people to remain physically active and mobile and be less at risk of falls, and we have supported a specific incontinence advisory service managed by Age UK as part of Ageing Well, since these factors also have an impact on isolation.

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