

# Merton Council

## Council

**8 July 2015**

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**Council 26 June 2015**

**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.

**1) From David Steer  
To the Cabinet Member for Finance**

**Question**

“Councillors have received £700,000 this year in allowances with some Councillors receiving amounts which appear excessive. 11 councillors received in excess of £17,000 and one – Councillor Alambritis received £41,467. How can such sums be justified and surely some of this money would be better spent on services?”

**Reply**

The Council is required by the Local Authorities (Members' Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003 to adopt a scheme of member allowances each year. In doing so, Council is required to give due regard to the recommendations made by the Independent Panel on the Remuneration of Councillors in London. The Independent Panel's latest report in 2014 did not recommend any significant changes to the scheme of allowances which it approved in its report in 2006 and again in 2010. It recommended that members' allowances continue to be pegged to the annual local government pay settlement, as is already the case in Merton, except that the recent increase was not implemented in Merton where allowances have remained frozen.

The principle behind Councillors receiving allowances is to compensate for the loss of income as a result of their civic duties. Many Councillors have to cut down on employment as a result of the hours they put into serving the community, and allowances ensure that the opportunity to be a Councillor is not closed to people who do not have private wealth. The level of allowance does, however, reflect an expectation that much of the work of Councillors is done on a voluntary basis.

When the Conservatives were last in charge at Merton Council increased Councillor allowances, including in 2008 attempting to increase the payments made to Cabinet Members by a whopping 28%. However, since Labour has been in control of the council in 2010 there has been no increase in Members Allowances. Indeed the total spend on Councillor allowances has fallen since 2010, due to Labour's decision to abolish of Assistant Cabinet Member posts. There has also been a fall in the spend on Councillor allowances since 2014, due to a reduction in the number of political groups on the Council, after UKIP-aligned Councillors lost their seats.

Merton has the 4th lowest basic allowance in London.

The report of the Independent Panel on the Remuneration of Councillors in London sets out the range of responsibilities for which a special responsibility allowance may be paid:

[http://www.merton.gov.uk/indep\\_panel\\_report\\_2014.pdf](http://www.merton.gov.uk/indep_panel_report_2014.pdf)[http://www.merton.gov.uk/indep\\_panel\\_report\\_2014.pdf](http://www.merton.gov.uk/indep_panel_report_2014.pdf)

The Council, at its meeting on 4 February 2015, confirmed its existing scheme of Member Allowances for 2015/16 and to retain the same level of allowances for 2015/16, thereby agreeing to not apply the local government pay settlement. The scheme was published on the council's website and in a notice in the Wimbledon Guardian.

The amounts paid to individual councillors each year are published on the council's website: <http://www.merton.gov.uk/council/councillors/councillors-payments.htm>

**2) From Diane Neil Mills  
To the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration**

**Question**

What are the legislative requirements and Merton Council's approach to the implementation and enforcement of 20 mph zones and limits? (Please provide references to the relevant legislation.)

**Reply**

The present legislation regarding maximum speed limits is contained in sections 81-88 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984, as amended.

Council's must 'have regard' to the Government's guidance in devising speed limits, contained in the Department for Transport circular, 01/2013, Setting Local Speed Limits.

The Council's approach to 20mph Zones and 20mph Limits applies to urban streets that are primarily residential or in town centres, when pedestrian and cycle movements are high, such as near schools, shopping parades, playgrounds where motor vehicle movement is not the priority function of the road (e.g. compared to trunk roads, local distributor roads)

For a 20mph zone, traffic calming features in the form of road humps; speed cushions; road closures; one way systems; pedestrian refuge islands and road narrowing's would have to be introduced at the appropriate distance to achieve a legal and self-enforceable zone. (For example, Hillcross Avenue)

A 20mph limit does not require any traffic calming features as part of the legal requirements except for the introduction of the appropriate signs and road markings which will be located at all the entry points into the area. (For Example, Cecil Road)

The Council also takes into account, reported accident statistics in considering traffic calming or limiting interventions.

The Council has already set up information online for residents regarding 20mph zones and limits. See [www.merton.gov.uk/20mph-limits-zones](http://www.merton.gov.uk/20mph-limits-zones)

Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel received a report in November 2014 which set out research and analysis on this matter. The report is available on the Council website:

<http://democracy.merton.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CIId=157&MIId=1957&Ver=4>

**3) From Sandra Vogel  
To the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration**

**Question**

Merton Council's swift action to deter caravans along Cricket Green has resulted in wholly inappropriate bollards and metal posts unsuited to the Conservation Area. When will they be replaced by something appropriate and consistent with the

Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan and will the local community be consulted?

**Reply**

The bollards were installed quickly as a deterrent to caravans but are not the final solution.

It is worth noting that there are more than 10 styles of bollard in the vicinity as they have been put in over decades and manufacturers discontinue certain styles.

We will secure a more sensitive design for the conservation area in consultation with design officers and community groups. This will inevitably cost more money and take a bit more time. Please bear with the chalk posts in the meantime.

**4) From Paul Carter  
To the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration**

**Question**

In the light of a notice on the Burn Bullock pub door asking two car sales firms to 'drop post at the back office' (photographed and reported to Planning applications Committee on 18 June 2015) when will the enforcement notice which came into effect on 20 August 2014 be implemented?

**Reply**

The site has been monitored and the cars associated with the unauthorised sales use in the car park were being removed albeit quite slowly. Given that progress, it was not considered enforcement prosecution action would be expedient at the time, however, in the light of recent developments, the matter is being investigated once again with a view to instigate such action. The council's legal section will be provided with any evidence and prosecution pursued unless advised legal advice suggests otherwise. The planning enforcement team will continue to try and work with the owner to negotiate the cessation of any unauthorised use.

**5) From Brett Hollins  
To the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration**

**Question**

Traffic is unnecessarily caused by Burlington Road train crossing (Motspur Park) where tailbacks run down Burlington Road into Shannon Corner - and continues down Burlington Road!

Traffic is congesting A3 off/on ramps and for those not using the crossing but wanting to go straight on. Road layout needs changing desperately?

**Reply**

Unfortunately the operation of the railway level crossing has a bearing on the free-flow of traffic in the West Barnes & Motspur Park areas and causes some localised queuing. This is inevitable at any level crossing and its operation is not something the Council has direct control over.

Our Highway team are investigating the issues raised by Mr Hollins. The Burlington Road area does not feature significantly in our accident or safety statistics as a problem junction. However congestion and ensuring our roads are safe is a matter of concern for the council; both in terms of the impact on residents and on local air quality. We will be investigating potential solutions to congestion and any air quality issues found in the Burlington Road area as part of our 2015/16 programme and in partnership with TFL 's roads task force (who are responsible for the Shannon Corner A3 slip roads)

**6) From Martin Burrell.**

**To the Cabinet Member for Community Engagement and Safety:**

**Question**

Following numerous media reports of crimes committed by foreign offenders in Merton and comments by the Metropolitan Police Commissioner on the impact on policing, can she set out the level of crime committed by foreign offenders in Merton? In particular the levels of robbery, assault and sexual assault since 2010.

**Reply**

The council is unable to respond to this request as the information is not held. A request has been made to the local police but the information is not available at a local level within the timescale available for this meeting.

**7) From Giles Bailey**

**To the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration**

**Question**

“I understand that TfL will be closing the section of Tramlink between Wimbledon Stn and Dundonald Rd from mid July to October. Will Merton Council be increasing litter collection along Dundonald Road and Hartfield Crescent as a result of the hundreds of additional expected pedestrians?”

**Reply**

We will ensure that we monitor the situation and take appropriate remedial action to maintain high standards during this period.

**8) From Echo Chong**

**To the Cabinet Member for Education**

**Question**

How will the council ensure the additional spaces made available by the Dundonald expansion will enable more local non-sibling child to attend rather than siblings who have moved out of area?

**Reply**

The offer day statistics show that last year, with 30 places offered, the council provided only 9 places to non-siblings to a maximum distance of 106 metres. This year, with 60 places offered, the council provided 47 places to non-siblings to a distance of 452 metres.

The expansion has therefore ensured there are additional places to local non-sibling children, offered to a much more reasonable distance.

### **Supplementary**

How would the council monitor the ratio of siblings of those who move out of the catchment area and those who are still in the catchment area to ensure local children go to local schools?

### **Reply**

Each year we consult about our admissions procedure. This year alone, we have been able to offer significantly more places at Dundonald School. In terms of the sibling rules there are various views, some people support the sibling rule, and some people don't. We understand that Wandsworth have changed the rules. We will shortly be consulting on the admissions criteria for 2017, but on balance I think the present system works best in this borough and that the sibling rule should remain in place.

### **9) From David Bell To the Cabinet Member for Community and Culture**

#### **Question**

Will the Council congratulate Mitcham Cricket Green Community & Heritage for securing Mitcham cricket pavilion as Merton's first Asset of Community Value, and does the Council agree that the pavilion should remain as an important part of the heritage scene in its current location?

#### **Reply**

The Council is of course proud to be home to arguably the world's oldest cricket ground, and the Mitcham Cricket Pavilion is an important part of our heritage. Congratulations to Mitcham Cricket Green Community and Heritage for their pioneering work on this. I would also like to thank the Council Officers who assessed the bid and also recommended that the Mitcham Cricket Pavilion be listed as an asset of community value.

The Council understands the private land-ownership issues restricting the Cricket Pavilion at present, but will do what is in its power, and within its budgets, to ensure the future of the asset.

### **10) From Tony Burton To the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration**

#### **Question**

"When did Council officers last visit the Burn Bullock to assess compliance with (a) enforcement notice dated 20 August 2014 to stop car sales and (b) the listed building repair notice, and did they go inside?"

#### **Reply**

Enforcement and conservation officers visited the Burn Bullock on Friday 15/5/15 and met with the owner. We inspected the building and assessed what had been done so far, advising on some of the work that needed clarification.



I can advise that most of the rubbish and clearing work have been done within the building on the ground and other floors of the building in preparation for subsequent repair works.

We were also informed that window frames and broken glass had been measured and an order had been placed to repair or replace. The owner was advised that any new window or framework needs to be approved by the council first and was asked to provide samples of the timber and material for approval before the replacement can go ahead.

The owner requested for a meeting for officers to inspect and approve samples for window replacements this is expected to take place in the next week and will involve another site inspection.

**11) From Andrew Boyce  
To the Cabinet Member for Environmental Cleanliness and Parking**

**Question**

What progress she has made on the issues we discussed at our meeting on 17 January this year?

**Reply**

The Council has recently purchased five new pedestrianised mechanical sweeping machines called "The Mac Vax Glutton". This is an electric street sweeping vehicle. It can sweep large outdoor areas and pedestrian zones without obstructing pedestrian traffic. There is no noise pollution, it produces zero Co2 emissions and complies with health and safety standards. This machine collects all debris and litter (including cigarette butts) and is able to reach under street furniture, eliminating the additional need for a hand held broom and they are being utilized in high footfall areas including South Wimbledon.

We have completed the process to extend the existing waste collection time banding area of Wimbledon to include Merton High Street between Merton Road and Haydon's Road which includes the station area, this will ensure that waste sacks are presented on the highway within a time band and are collected swiftly; this will be implemented by August 2015. We continue to work with a specialist environmental enforcement officers who provide additional enforcement capacity concentrating on litter in the town centre areas.

**12) From Maurice Groves  
To the Leader of the Council**

**Question**

You have authorised payments for the benefit of Trade Unions of £93,000 in 2013/14 and increased to £97,610 in 2014/15. Trade Unions require their members to pay subscriptions. You have cut All Saints, High Path and M A E., services depriving poor and vulnerable residents of Mitcham and Morden. Why?

**Reply**

No doubt the former Conservative Councillor will be relieved to learn that in fact this figure has reduced under Labour, compared to the £112,700 spent last time he and his Conservative colleagues were in charge at Merton Council.

The figure he quotes is not a payment for the benefit of trades unions, but is in fact the cost of trades union secondees' time and the facilities provided. Such secondments help ensure good relations between staff and management and therefore represent good value.

Based on data provided by London Councils Merton provides a level of support in line with the mid-point of other London Boroughs. The increase between years was primarily the result of the nationally agreed pay award for staff and allowed for in corporate pay and inflation budgets.

The [ACAS code of practice on time off for trade union duties and activities](#), which is a code issued under s.199 of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992 (TULR(C)A) sets out the statutory framework for time off for trade union duties.

Whilst within the statutory framework, there is no requirement for provision of paid full time release, historically in the London Borough of Merton, there has been an arrangement to allow facility time equivalent to 2.5 X FTEs for release to the respective Branch Secretaries (GMB and Unison) as the number of trade union members at Merton is relatively higher than some neighbouring boroughs.

The rationale for allowing time off is to enable a point of contact for management through which to conduct employee relations. This has benefits in facilitating consultation and communication on change particularly where there are statutory and/or common law requirements to consult, such as redundancy, reorganisation of which there are many in response to savings or service redesign (involving contract change) and TUPE transfers, particularly in response to Shared Services. Having a trade union representative whose release is not affected by operational requirements can speed up such processes, including resolving or completing grievance and discipline procedures.

This service is within Corporate Services and savings have been put forward according to the targets set and agreed by Council in accordance with the July principles.

### **13) From Cypren Edmunds To the Cabinet Member for Community and Culture**

#### **Question**

In view of the investigation of Circle Anglia by the HCA. Why hasn't the Council not taken Islington Council's lead by issuing statutory notices on a company intent on performing disingenuously?

#### **Reply**

The Council takes its relationship management role with housing associations seriously and works closely with CHMP to safeguard the needs of residents on Merton's Housing Estates. However, unlike the HCA, the Council does not have regulatory powers over CHMP. Notwithstanding this the Council has , since

September 2014 , worked with 14 CHMP tenants regarding disrepair and through its interventions with CHMP has been successful in achieving 8 cases of repairs being completed. The remaining 6 cases remain open and continue to be progressed with CHMP.

### **Supplementary**

While we can understand the need for the council to have a serious relationship with housing associations such as Circle Homes Merton Priory, residents are still waiting 10 months for their repair issues to be resolved, even with the intervention of the council. How seriously is the council taking its relationship with its residents, please disclose the remit of your actions, powers and safeguards and how you go about protecting them.

### **Reply**

The situation with Circle and with other housing associations is that we deal with every complaint that we get as councillors on a one by one basis and we as a council take further, certain cases that are seen to be sticking. You will see from my response that last year we had 14 cases that we took to CHMP of which now there are still 6 cases remaining, which is not acceptable. In addition to these cases, I have been involved with cases that have gone on for a year or more. I can tell you that by comparison to housing associations elsewhere in London, and in comparison to our own record as a housing provider, those statistics are relatively good, hard though this is to believe, and this is not acceptable. What we are doing about it apart from continuously keeping up the pressure, I do it as Cabinet Member case by case, and we are taking it to every appropriate scrutiny panel and will keep doing that until Circle get it right. We will make it happen.

### **14) From Lauren Walker To the Cabinet Member for Education**

#### **Question**

Considering the recent Wandsworth sibling 800m limit ruling, what criteria would Merton council require be satisfied to adopt a similar measure to ensure the local children attend their local school?"

#### **Reply**

This year, thanks to its extensive school expansion programme, the council offered a school place to all children, with the first preference offers for primary school up by 4% from the previous year to 81.4%, and 91.4% of parents receiving a top 3 preference for their children. The vast majority of parents therefore receive their first choice school, and over 90% received offers within their top three preferences. It should be acknowledged that the policy adopted by LB Wandsworth will cause problems to some families. Sending young children to two separate primary schools is logistically very challenging for a parent and a siblings policy therefore provides important assistance to prevent this.

Nevertheless, the council is aware that there are issues due to the very narrow distances offered in a small number of schools and will be undertaking a review of its admissions policy for 2017 entry this autumn prior to the annual admissions consultation which takes place in early 2016.

### **Supplementary**

What is the criteria that the Council use in assessing the hardship children and families face in small catchment areas when they cannot attend the local school verses that of siblings who have moved out of area and can therefore attend their new local school with their sibling and thus have both children in the same new local school in their new area.

### **Reply**

The answer is to provide additional school places, and Dundonald School was a very popular school where we only had nine non-sibling children get in in the past, but 47 get in this year, a massive increase providing those much needed school places. In terms of the sibling for people who have moved outside the catchment area it is actually a very small number, which I don't have with me, but it certainly wouldn't have had that much impact in terms of the catchment area for a school. I think the sibling rule is very important in keeping families together and we know people's circumstances do change, they do move out of the area. There is a wide range of views on it, and it is important to listen to their views before coming to any conclusions about the 2017 admissions criteria.

### **15) From Maggie Heaney To the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration**

#### **Question**

For over 10 years Merton has been trying to appease a small minority of residents demanding traffic calming measures in the Belvederes. This costly ongoing debacle flouts the democratic process, creates discord with neighbours and hardship to traders. What has this cost both Merton/3rd Parties, how can it be justified?

#### **Reply**

The question includes an incorrect assumption and analysis. The Council has not sought to appease anyone, but instead apply sound street management principles. Nor have democratic principles been flouted as all scheme proposals have been subject to extensive consultation. Conflict is inherent in many schemes between the views of those who suffer from particular traffic conditions and what often constitutes a wider group who are not subjected to a particular problem, but apprehend that their interests may be affected, sometimes to a minor degree. At no time have traffic issues in the Belvederes been considered in isolation, but always as part of a series of interventions in the Village and Hillside based on a borough-wide approach.

Since 2009 the Council has spent approximately £700k on traffic issues in the wider Village and Hillside area including the most recent works.

This includes consultations, staff costs, scheme design and engineering, and construction works in locations such as Wimbledon Hill Road/ Mansell Road - Burghley Road, Ridgway Place - as well as the most recent Belvederes experimental scheme as part of the Wimbledon Area Traffic Study projects.

The Council regularly receives requests and complaints from residents concerned about through-traffic and rat-running in the Wimbledon Area.

As mentioned the programme of measures has been widely consulted on and approved by the then Street Management Committee, Ward Councillors and Cabinet Member. <http://www.merton.gov.uk/watm>



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## ITEM 6 COUNCILLORS' ORDINARY PRIORITY QUESTIONS TO CABINET MEMBERS AND THE RESPONSES

### 1) From Councillor Peter McCabe to the Leader of the Council

Given the Leader's commitment to retaining services at St Helier Hospital, does he welcome the appointment of a new Chair of the CCG.

#### Reply

Having publicly called for the previous CCG Chair to stand down due to his support for the downgrading of St Helier Hospital, I welcome the appointment of a new chair. I have already met with Dr Murray and have made clear our continued opposition to any closure or downgrading of our local hospital. He is fully aware of the strength of feeling from local people and the council on this issue and I look forward to an approach where the health needs of local people are prioritised.

#### Supplementary

I recall that just before the general election the Secretary of State for Health announced to the press that he would keep St Helier Hospital open. I know that the Leader agreed at the last Council meeting to write to the Secretary of State asking for full disclosure of the secret plans to close of St Helier Hospital, has he had a response?

#### Reply

Yes I have had a response, but it is not from Jeremy Hunt, but from the Parliamentary Under Secretary for State for Health and she completely contradicts his statements before the election. Her first line after thanking me for the letter to Jeremy Hunt reads as follows: As I am sure you will appreciate decisions about local NHS services are a matter for the NHS locally

I have written to the Secretary of State on the following lines: and Miss Ellison's response stands in contrast to your statement prior to the election where you said the conservative party does not support these plans and wouldn't implement them in government.

I await another response from the Secretary of State.

### 2) From Councillor Daniel Holden to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration:

What action is the council taking to alleviate the taxi situation at Wimbledon station?

#### Reply

There have been reported problems with Taxis queuing at Wimbledon Station (Orinoco Lane) and spilling out onto Alexandra Road, occasionally blocking the bus lane.

One of the contributing factors is that the number of taxi rank licences issued by TFL exceeds the capacity of the Orinoco Lane queue. There is often a high turnover at the rank, but occasionally bottlenecks happen.

The Council has worked with Southwest Trains and Network Rail and secured an agreement that taxis could, at peak times, also queue in the network rail yard at the north end of Orinoco Lane. However, in the past 3 weeks, the yard was closed for resurfacing and maintenance works by Network Rail. This brought the queuing problems back, however the yard is now operational again for taxis.

The Council offered a solution of providing new taxi rank facilities on Queens Road, but this was un-popular with taxi drivers who prefer the station forecourt rank.

Wimbledon Station also has a new manager who we've been liaising with to monitor the situation. We shall continue to do this and take appropriate action where we can to improve the situation.

### **Supplementary**

Given the Council's public health remit why has the Council not been able to deal with this matter which is causing residents to claim more ill health rather than better health, which is the aim of the Council.

### **Reply**

It would appear that the reason for the difficulties is that the overflow goods yard was out of use and what happened was due to works going on there, but those works have now finished and the taxi drivers now have access to that so there should be no difficulties from this point forward. Traffic congestion is always a problem and obviously it is an everyday problem in London. If the problems continue, so will the council's application to resolve this issue. I will be very glad to go with Councillor Holden to view the issues down there if it continues to cause concern.

### **3) From Councillor Sally Kenny to the Cabinet Member for Finance**

Could he update us on progress to date on implementing some of savings agreed at the council's budget meeting in March?

### **Reply**

Initial estimates of progress in delivering savings were made in the first financial monitoring report of the year which went to the cabinet meeting of 29th of July. This was based on initial data. A more comprehensive update will be put to the Financial monitoring task group of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission on the 22nd July.



## **Supplementary**

One of the biggest pressures on the council budget at present is from people on low incomes, managing their low incomes and struggling to get by. They are increasingly at risk of needing help from social services. How does he think today's announcement of £12 billion cuts will help?

## **Reply**

Clearly massive reductions in payments for things like tax credits are bound to have an impact on the life chances of many families and to increase child poverty. Perhaps it is a good thing for the conservatives that they are no longer going to be measuring child poverty but it is a bad thing for the families themselves and it will be up to people such as ourselves to support them.

## **4) From Councillor Suzanne Grocott to the Cabinet Member for Finance:**

What steps will need to be taken in respect of HR systems to "de-couple" Merton from Sutton?

## **Reply**

We are working closely with the London Borough of Sutton to understand the detailed contractual and staff implications of the "de-coupling". From a staff perspective we will need to ensure that we comply with TUPE regulations and from the contractual side we are working to understand which contracts can be continued with post the de-coupling and which will need to be retendered, novated or varied in some way. The central IT system within the HR service is ITrent and this is a contract signed individually by Merton; we are currently investigating all potential options for how to provide HR and payroll systems to the council.

Alongside this work we are working closely with the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames and Wandsworth Borough Council to pursue the potential development of a new shared HR service between the three boroughs. Assuming this goes ahead we will be working with staff to design and implement this model.

We have appointed a project manager to lead this work and are working to ensure continuity of service and at the minimum of disruption whilst also delivering an improved HR service for the borough within the same cost envelope as set out in the MTFS.

## **Supplementary**

Given that we have been asking for at least five years for accurate head count and position information where I feel we are slowly getting to that point, will the cabinet member assure us that any new arrangements with regard to HR will include a prerequisite that this will be provided?

## **Reply**

Our aim in providing a new shared service with a new provider is clearly to provide an efficient and effective service. I can assure her that we will not be spending the earth on the new back office system but will try to provide as good a system as we can.

### **5) From Councillor Agatha Akyigyina to the Cabinet Member for Children's Services**

There have been a number of changes to care proceedings and adoption, could she outline how Merton has responded to these changes?

## **Reply**

Taking a child into care is obviously done in exceptional circumstances and when we have worked with the family and exhausted all the alternatives. Once a child enters care we absolutely want to achieve permanency for them with pace. It is right therefore that in recent years, both nationally and locally, higher expectations have been set to speed up care proceedings and to achieve permanency sooner. An ambitious target of reducing care proceedings from 72 weeks in 2011/12 to a nationally set target of 26 weeks has been set and councils have been challenged to increase the number of adoptions whilst reducing timescales for completion of the adoption process.

These higher expectations have challenged not only children's social care but the courts and we have been working in partnership with all the relevant agencies to streamline processes. Courts now expect assessments on parents and the wider family to be carried out much more speedily and are less inclined to commission "external experts" in addition to the social work assessment. This means we have had to work even harder to ensure our social work assessments are comprehensive and, in relation to care proceedings, that parental assessments have been robust and purposeful. This has meant extra training and development for our lawyers and social workers as well as significant streamlining of processes, careful planning and robust management oversight of both care and permanency proceedings.

### **6) From Councillor John Sargeant to the Leader of the Council:**

Following announcements in the press that a joint committee has been formed, comprising the leaders of five London boroughs and with the Leader of Merton Council as its Chairman, could he tell members of the council what commitments have been made on behalf of Merton, including financial commitments and our ability to remove Merton from the group at any time in the future if the group decides on any course of action which Merton would not support?

## **Reply**

This Council like our neighbouring boroughs in the South West of London believes in sustainable growth and in driving forward our ambition. Collectively we are stronger and for this reason we have formed a Joint Committee to clarify and deliver our shared objectives. No additional resources outside of those agreed in existing budgets are required. I believe that this is an investment in the economic prosperity of our borough and we are fully committed.

The joint committee deals with matters of common agreement. As Merton chairs the Group, it is highly unlikely that the objectives of the joint committee would not align with our own.

## **Supplementary**

Given the apparently exciting transformational and far reaching impact of the five borough proposals when will he get all members of the council to contribute to the process or at least hear an interim report or is it just to be a fait accompli next month?

## **Reply**

The joint committee that was signed up was agreed by this full council previously and all other four boroughs that engage in the South London Joint Committee did likewise, so it has gone through the process, but I take his point about going forward and the chief executives have been mandated to work up streams where we as a grouping can put up our hand up and seek more devolved powers and seek more funding so that by getting together we can be stronger with boroughs from all political parties, including conservative and liberal democrat along with the labour councils within this five borough grouping. The other way forward of course is to make you aware that each council's scrutiny can look at the work of the joint committee and the joint committee allows local authorities to put their hand up to the Treasury and to the powers that be in seeking more devolved powers and more funding so that we can do things together on jobs and housing rather like the combined effort of the Manchester local authorities.

## **7) From Councillor Linda Taylor to the Cabinet Member for Education:**

I was recently reviewing a copy of the Capita Symonds report on potential school sites. On first glance at the cover I thought we were just looking at a site for a single sex boys' school. I counted 12 boys on the cover and one blurred girl. Visual image is very important in matters of promoting equality of the sexes. What message to girls is the administration trying to project with this cover?

## **Reply**

This report was undertaken by an independent consultant and is not a council document. It was initially produced for council officers and was never intended to be a public document. Following an external request for the report, it was released in the spirit of openness and transparency. Colleagues should be reassured that officers are extremely mindful of the importance of imagery and ensure that council publications appropriately reflect the diversity of Merton's population.

### **Supplementary**

I am not very reassured because the Merton logo appears on the cover, so it's a Merton document. My question was about girls and I really want the cabinet member to tell me what his administration are doing about raising the academic achievement and career aspirations for girls in our secondary schools as covers with all boys on is not very reassuring.

### **Reply**

I think it is important that we have a diverse range of people on our publications. Clearly this was an external publication commissioned by the council and not by the council itself. I agree it is important to raise aspirations for girls and I agree that we value the work done in the area of careers. We do have to be mindful of these things but we do note your comments.

### **8) From Councillor Tobin Byers to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Cleanliness and Waste**

Could she update me on how many enforcement notices we have issued to people who litter our streets?

### **Reply**

Between 2 June 2014 and 1 July 2015, the council has issued a total of 7176 enforcement notices with respect to litter and waste offences.

### **Supplementary**

I welcome the zero tolerance on street littering. Could the cabinet member give any further plans on developing our enforcement further?

### **Reply**

We have had a lot of success with our enforcement in the town centres over the past year and we are looking to move to other areas with that and the prime candidate will be parks. I have been talking to officers about that, we have to look at where we are targeting, but we will be looking at parks.

### **9) From Councillor Michael Bull to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration:**

Can the Cabinet Member please confirm what the increase in air pollution in Merton will be as a result of the proposed Viridor incinerator on Beddington Lane?

### **Reply**

The Energy Recovery Facility (ERF) in Beddington Lane was considered very carefully as part of Sutton Councils planning regime. As part of the planning process there were some very detailed scientific reports submitted surrounding the potential impact upon air quality and health, these included our borough. These reports and submissions were considered very carefully and were also challenged at a number of stages as part of this process.

It is generally accepted that emissions from the chimney stacks, because of controls and filtration, would have a minimal detrimental impact upon air quality. There were concerns surrounding the number and impact of HGV movements during the construction phase which although unavoidable, can be controlled by good construction logistics planning.

Merton will continue in its commitment to monitor and manage air quality within the borough

### **Supplementary**

A recent meeting of the Apostles Residents' Association it was revealed that recent recordings of air pollution showed air quality and pollution levels three times higher than that permitted by European regulations. On that basis can I ask what Merton Labour are doing about air quality in Merton particularly in view of the Viridor incinerator on Beddington Lane.

### **Reply**

The Viridor incinerator will have no noticeable effect on air quality in the borough. We have ample expert reports and technical reports through our partnership with Sutton that proves that is the case. This is going to be the best possible technology available similar to those in Sweden which has a very good environmental record. With respect to vehicles, which is a completely different issue we have already been investigating first of all increasing street trees and providing a shield between pedestrians/residents and vehicles and increasing street trees at points where vehicles are queuing in congestion ie South Wimbledon and Merton High Street, and it is important that we take action, and it is also important that we consider other possible responses including referencing those of the Central London Low Emissions Zone which I think will come into effect in 2018. We will be looking at best practice possible. Pollution from diesel vehicles is a significant problem across London causing tens of thousands of premature deaths and we are determined to deal with it in Merton.

### **10) From Councillor Marsie Skeete to the Cabinet Member for Education**

Could the Cabinet Member update me on our primary school expansions?

## **Reply**

The primary school expansions are running very well, with all the schemes therefore running to the critical programme timescales and to the allocated budget.

Poplar and St. Mary's RC were recently successfully completed, and Hillcross is on track to be completed during the summer holidays. Pelham is also on track for the building to be completed during the summer holidays with the external works following in the early autumn. The adaptation to the former Jamia school building has now been completed for the benefit of Singlegate Primary School and by re-tendering we have contracted the final extension phase to budget. Lastly, Dundonald Primary School is progressing well but is not due for completion until next summer. However, the school is providing for the extra reception year pupils this September.

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## ITEM 7 COUNCILLORS' STRATEGIC THEME (SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES WITH A FOCUS ON LEISURE AND SPORT) QUESTIONS TO CABINET MEMBERS AND THE RESPONSES

### 1) From Councillor Fidelis Gadzama to the Leader of the Council

As a former football referee could he update me on how the council is promoting sporting activities for our young people over the summer months?

#### Reply

We are delivering the annual children's holiday programme Merton Active Plus including football camp, badminton, horse riding, tennis, multisports, etc. A range of activities for all. We are delivering a 3 year externally funded programme – Sports Blast in the east of the borough targeting 14-25 year olds and family activities – this is free to all who access it and is delivered with a range of partners. Tennis Blast took place just last weekend with two days of free tennis coaching at Wimbledon Park. The watersports and outdoor education centre offers a range of activities for all. The strategic themed report gives much greater detail and I would encourage you to look at the leisure and culture pages on the council's website for regular updates of all that is available and also read the recently published My Merton

#### Supplementary

Will the Leader join me in congratulating the English Women's Football Team on getting to the semi-final of the World Cup and providing such an excellent role model for our local young people?

#### Reply

I would like to remind everyone of the excellent role model Councillor Gadzama plays as a gold medal winner in the Sydney 2000 Olympics 4x400m. I do want to join him in congratulating the team on beating Germany 1-0 for a third place play off, an extra time penalty, after 120 minutes they had 40% possession, they had 18 shots on goal, they had 10 corners and they did us proud.

### 2) From Councillor David Simpson to the Cabinet Member for Community and Culture:

Given the importance of sport and leisure for maintaining a healthy lifestyle, can the Cabinet Member explain why the transfer of responsibility for Merton's parks and open spaces to a third party organisation means that some of the borough's much valued facilities, such as bowling greens, are now under threat?

#### Reply

I like bowls. It's an intergenerational sport that demands the brain more than it does the body, and as such it can be practised from early youth through to extreme old

age. It is expensive to maintain, however, and in our busy capital it has lost popularity for reasons beyond politicians' control. Both Council and private clubs throughout the capital are reviewing whether, and how, they can keep their greens open.

Despite two years of the Council actively promoting bowls in the borough in 2013 and 2014, club membership in Merton has continued to decline overall. It is not cost-effective for Merton Council to be managing 6 separate bowling greens that support low numbers of bowlers when there is playing capacity at each and every club. Such threats pre-dated and are unrelated to the current service re-procurement exercise and discussions with the bowling clubs in relation to the future of their sport have been underway for more than 2.5 years. I have been chairing regular negotiating meetings with the clubs for the past 2.5 years – from long before the current service re-procurement exercise began – and our relationship is realistic and open.

The premise of the question is therefore incorrect. Proposals to out-source the parks and open spaces management are part and parcel of the budget savings exercise in Greenspaces, and experience elsewhere has demonstrated that external contractors can often deliver high quality services at a lesser cost overall through economies of scale : but outsourcing management does not predicate which sports we, as a Council, should or should not support. I want this Council to carry on supporting bowls as practically as it can for as long as it can.

### **Supplementary**

Given the apparently exciting transformational and far reaching impact of the five borough proposals when will he get all members of the council to contribute to the process or at least hear an interim report or is it just to be a fait-a-complis next month?

### **Reply**

We are not intending to close down all the bowling greens. We are intending, in consultation with the bowling clubs themselves, to reduce the number of bowling greens that we have because those bowling greens are massively underused and costing us a lot of money. When I was down on the Isle of Wight just recently, I met a bowling club captain who was telling me that his club has 120 members with a waiting list of 40. Our largest club, Merton Park, has 55 members, our second largest, Wimbledon Park, has 50 members, it goes down after that. Our smallest club has 15 members. The clubs themselves know they have a problem. We need to do things to make those clubs survive, in merger for instance, in working with other clubs. We are constantly looking for other ways to to make those clubs survive. One thing I hope will come out of the junior tournaments will be to get those children to become regular bowlers and getting their parents to bring money. I hope we can save those bowling clubs, keep things going and have a prosperous future. I fully intend to take up bowls when I am old enough, I will challenge you on one of those greens councillor.

**3) From Councillor Stan Anderson to the Cabinet Member for Community and Culture**

Could the Cabinet Member update us on progress in relation to replacing Morden Pool?

**Reply**

The project management company and lawyers have been appointed and the procurement of the design and technical team is imminent. Site surveys and investigations have been undertaken and some ecological surveys are underway. The project plan is still progressing well with a planning application being targeted for the end of this year with construction being on-site this time next year and looking to be in a position to have the doors open for 1st January 2018.

**Supplementary**

I look forward to the new leisure centre opening. As I walk around in my ward, I am constantly asked how the return to green space is going to be managed. Can the cabinet member explain?

**Reply**

Clearly we won't start doing anything until after the new centre is opened. We want to make sure that the people are currently using our leisure centre right up to the point where the new one is ready. Probably the next day after the new centre is opened, we will be looking to clear the old centre very thoroughly, which is a difficult job due to asbestos etc. We know how much it will cost, and intend to do it within budget. Once that is done, the site will be returned to parkland. It won't just be returned to grass, it will be done in consultation with local residents. We hope to have their active involvement. It will take a long time, but will be worth

**4) From Councillor Janice Howard to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration:**

Can the Cabinet Member update me on progress with regard to the Wandle Valley Regional Park?

**Reply**

The Wandle Valley Regional Park Trust Board which oversees the work and development of the Regional Park, continues to meet on a regular basis, the most recent meeting of the Board of Trustees occurring on the 3rd June 2015.

Progress continues on a number of fronts including the Regional Park's governance arrangements, its funding and in the investment and development of the physical assets of, access to, and awareness of the Wandle Valley.

A number of investment projects are currently underway or have recently been completed within the river corridor, including within Merton borough. These include the Big Green Fund project, valued at over £1 million, which has delivered a number of improvements, principally access improvements to the riverside environment on the Merton-Sutton border in the Watermeads and Poulter Park area, completed in late May.

A number of funding bids have recently been submitted or are currently in the pipeline for the Wandle Valley, including a bid to Sport England for a health initiative aimed at increasing participation by those not currently actively engaged in sport or physical activity. This project is valued at £240,000 overall with match funding already secured from partners.

Other current work priorities at the present time include:

- Additional development of the WVRP website
- Installation of WVRP branding elements in Wandle Park
- New Regional Park "Gateways" in the Colliers Wood area and elsewhere within the river corridor
- Development of a new business plan & strategy document

### **Supplementary**

Given the length of time the subsidy of the Lee Valley Park has been in place and the distance from LBM, what is the cabinet member doing to ensure our contribution is reduced or cancelled going forward?

### **Reply**

I might invite Councillor Howard to access my 38 Degrees petition, 'Stop the Lee Valley Tax' because there is no moral case for residents in Merton or Wandsworth, Sutton or Croydon to be funding the Rolls Royce, Gold Plated park authority in North East London and actually out into the counties that very few residents actually visit. £1.2 million comes from residents in these four boroughs, how beneficial it would be if we could establish through primary legislation our own park authority. We desperately need the support of all the local MPS, the London Mayor and the government, but I think it is a just case and you were right to raise it.

### **5) From Councillor Laxmi Attawar to the Cabinet Member for Community and Culture**

Could he update us on plans to replace Colliers Wood library?

### **Reply**

Donald Hope Library is scheduled to close for redevelopment on 28 July 2015. In a new chapter for the much-loved library, the current 1970s building on High Street, Colliers Wood, will be replaced with a high quality building constructed from Portland stone, reflecting the stone used for the historically significant Charles Holden Colliers

Wood tube station. The new library will open in two years' time and will be spread over three floors. Visitors are set to benefit from more space given over to books, a coffee shop, community meeting rooms, special activity zones and a larger children's area. This has all been enabled through a deal with a developer and provides both significant value for money and real potential for savings whilst ensuring the sustainability of services in the Colliers Wood area.

During the closure period a temporary library will be open in MertonVision at the Guardian Centre, Clarendon Road, Colliers Wood. The temporary facilities will be open from 30 July 2015 and library users will be able to enjoy all the facilities provided in Donald Hope Library but in a slightly reduced format. The temporary facilities will maintain the same opening hours currently available at Donald Hope, and will be run within existing budgets.

### **Supplementary**

I congratulate the cabinet member on ensuring local residents will have a brand new and affordable local library. Can he update us on arrangements for residents while the new library is being built.

### **Reply**

Donald Hope Library is closing on 29<sup>th</sup> July and the temporary library is opening on 30<sup>th</sup> July. We don't close the old facility before opening the new one. We will be having a celebration on 1<sup>st</sup> August. I hope that fellow councillors represented by the library will attend. There will be a reduced service while the new library is being built, but it will cover all our needs in Colliers Wood. The really big celebration will come 18 months later when we open the new library that will be so much better and I hope to see you all there.

### **6) From Councillor Brian Lewis-Lavender to the Cabinet Member for Community and Culture:**

Please can the Cabinet Member provide the latest figures on the uptake of competitive sport among young people in Merton following the success of the 2012 London Olympics and Paralympics?

### **Reply**

No national data is collected with regards to uptake of competitive sport for young people, however the Merton School Sports Partnership annual report notes a record number of schools entering the Primary Borough Athletics (28 in total), the introduction of new events for young people with competitions in Handball and Ultimate Frisbee. Merton's Leisure & Culture Development Team provide wider borough representative competitive opportunities in the London Mini Marathon and the London Youth Games which includes the Mini Games, delivered by the Merton School Sports Partnership. Local sports clubs, schools and individuals work with the team to enter as many events as possible as far as resources allow. This year's

finals concluded this last weekend, but as we went into the finals weekend Merton had already achieved:-

Judo	- Samuel Petgrav	- Gold
BMX (Junior Female)	- Mia Jacobs	- Gold
Kayak Slalom (Senior Female)	- Phoebe Walder	- Silver
BMX (Senior Male)	- Nico Satchell	- Bronze
Water Polo (U16 Female)	- Merton Team	- Silver
Water Polo (U19 Male)	- Merton Team	- Bronze
Schools:		
Best Football	- Bishop Gilpin	- Gold
Football Y5/6 Open	- Merton Team	- Gold
Mini Tennis	- Bishop Gilpin	- Gold
Badminton Y9 (Boys)	- Hall	- Silver

### **Supplementary**

I am encouraged by the response to see that the number of schools entering the primary borough athletics was a record this year, I am not sure by how much it increased, 28 schools entered. It is also good to hear that Merton school children have won lots of medals in events, I congratulate them. However, I would like to ask the cabinet member what happened to the *Sophie Hoskins* Challenge Cup? This was an issue in 2012, and the winners announced in February 2014, and things have gone very quiet since then. Has this trophy been forgotten, or will it be resurrected as an encouragement to school children in the future?

### **Reply**

I agree with you that what has been achieved has been fantastic. The Sophie Hoskins Challenge Cup has not been forgotten. It has been given as part of BMX, but there have been new arrangements around the track, so we have been moving from controlling it as a council to getting the sport to look after it. There has been some slippage, but I do expect it to be awarded and will come back to you about it.

### **7) From Councillor Russell Makin to the Leader of the Council**

With the football season now over, would he join me in hoping that it will be one of AFC's last seasons outside of Merton?

### **Reply**

I know AFC Wimbledon and their supporters very much hope that the club can return to their roots and origin in the borough. We welcome and support this ambition. The planning application for the redevelopment of the Greyhound stadium into a football ground and housing is due to be considered by the Planning Committee after the summer break. We wish AFC Wimbledon well both on and off the pitch and look forward to them returning to the borough one day soon.

## **Supplementary**

Could the cabinet member update us on his efforts to get AFC Wimbledon back to Merton?

## **Reply**

I want to remind everyone that the party leaders had an all party consensus on encouraging them back into the borough, whether they do is up to them and subject to normal planning process. The club is progressing well, but needs to ensure it gets everything right and is consulting with residents, the borough and other boroughs and the Environment Agency. I know that we all want the club to return to the borough.

## **8) From Councillor Daniel Holden to the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health:**

Can the Cabinet Member tell me how many people the council has signed up for its latest healthy living initiative, "Merton on the Move", as part of Public Health England's 'Everybody active, every day' campaign?

## **Reply**

Merton on The Move was launched at Mitcham Carnival on the 13th June and aims to build collective growth in physical activity levels in the borough through encouraging, supporting and raising awareness of active travel (walking, running and cycling) and the role that it can have in good physical and mental health.

Increasing physical activity levels, and reducing inactivity, is an important component of Merton's Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2015-2018. Although only recently launched, Merton on The Move already

Has 81 users registered; 46 female and 35 male; 30 teams taking part including GP practices, MVSC, Age UK Merton, Merton CCG, Love Wimbledon and teams from Merton Council; and logged 1,078 activities by users, which equates to 3,200 miles of the way to the moon.

Future plans include engaging businesses through the Merton Chamber of Commerce, working with schools in Merton to support their staff and families to take part and perhaps councillors would join me in a team of elected members?

## **Supplementary**

I welcome this initiative to improve public health. With the health gap between the east and west of the borough- how will these schemes be targeted to those who actually need it to improve their health rather than actually those who are normally not inclined to do physical activity.

## **Reply**

The initiative is ensuring everyone gets involved, ie you don't have to have a smart phone to participate. It is across the board, this is not a competition, you don't have to be fit to take part, so everyone can be more active and help prevent some of the illnesses we are trying to focus on. I hope everyone here will encourage people in their wards to take part.

## **9) From Councillor Katy Neep to the Cabinet Member for Community and Culture**

Given that it's Wimbledon fortnight, could the Cabinet member outline how the council is working to increase participation in tennis?

## **Reply**

We continue to work with both the All England Lawn Tennis Club and the Lawn Tennis Association to increase tennis participation in the borough. We have the Tennis Blast annual event in Wimbledon Park linked to The Championships – two free days of tennis coaching and activities with some of the professionals from The Championships dropping in to show off their skills. We have holiday programmes and an annual all-year round coaching programme for youngsters. The Wimbledon Junior tennis Initiative visits a school in Merton every week of term time working with pupils and teachers to develop tennis and selects some of the most talented to join their tennis development programmes. Sports Blast includes the development of Family Tennis at St Mark's School, where we have just refurbished and floodlit the courts with LED lighting.

A women's only tennis Tuesdays takes place in Wimbledon Park getting women back into sport through tennis. We also have a good number of Tennis Clubs in the borough and 'Tennis for Free' at Tamworth Recreation Ground, and Joseph Hood in Morden. Merton does have a range of tennis opportunities borough-wide.

## **Supplementary**

Given our work to increase participation in tennis, could the cabinet member update me on the new facilities available at Dundonald Recreation Ground.

## **Reply**

The facilities effectively replace and renew those previously available as part of the school expansion. One visitor who has been lately is Roger Federer and his family. I would like to draw attention to the new tennis courts at St Marks through a £50,000 grant we received. It is part of a project to get young mothers back into exercise. It is a new project, I believe it will be very popular.