

Merton Council

Council

9 September 2015

Supplementary agenda

15 Non Priority Questions and Responses (Complete)

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Non Priority Questions

1) From Councillor Russell Makin to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration

Over the last twelve months there have been three Road Traffic Accidents (at least one fatal) along Carshalton Road at the junction with the Goat Public House on the boundary of Merton. The introduction of pedestrian traffic lights by the Bus Stop would help the situation. Would the Cabinet member join with me in lobbying Sutton Borough for something to be done regarding safety along this stretch of the road ?

Reply

The Council is aware of 2 accidents at this location, one of which falls on Sutton Boundary. One was a slight accident caused by driver error and the other involved the tragic death of a young girl who stepped off the bus and out into the path of a large vehicle. My sympathies go out to her family.

Officers have met with Police and Sutton officers regarding the safety of this section of carriageway. We await the police report on the latest incident and if there are any recommendations on road design, the Council will assess solutions and identify funding for future year's investment programme.

It is true that improvements can be made, however, it is important to note that some land may be required to incorporate footway improvements and will require support from Mitcham Common Conservators.

Merton will be liaising with Common Conservators and Sutton officers regarding the necessary improvements in terms of crossing point and creation of a footpath. Possible Goat Rd / Carshalton junction improvement, however, would be a major task with funding and land implications to be resolved.

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

Will the Cabinet Member agree with me that cycling is a sustainable mode of transport and good for public health; as such can he tell me why it's taking such a long time to put in place cycling-friendly measures here in Merton?

Reply

The council has a healthy annual cycle programme that includes the introduction of appropriate infrastructure, cycle parking facilities and cycle training. This includes on and off public highway project. Some engineering works include new cycle lanes; cycle, parking, route permeability – such as the revised fire gates schemes in Merton High Street, Colliers Wood and Mitcham Park and the larger Quietways project in partnership with TFL. We are also delivering a cycle by-pass at Priory Road junction to increase cycle safety as part of our Colliers Wood public realm project.

The Council remains disappointed in not securing 'Mini Holland' funding for cycling infrastructure or the significant sums promised following the decision not to make Merton a 'Mini Holland' borough.

Where possible schemes undertaken across the various LBM and TFL capital programmes have a cycling element. It is important to note that not all proposed improvements can be introduced as swiftly as we'd like due to site constraints and 3rd party land issues etc.

An excellent example of the Council's perseverance include the proposed introduction of a segregated cycle lane along Croydon Road in partnership with Mitcham Common Conservators; working with Kingston to introduce the extension of cycle route connecting Merton (New Malden / Raynes Park) to Kingston; other routes also include connecting Wimbledon to Raynes Park working in partnership with NetworkRail and Wandle Valley Regional Park.

3) 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 8th July 2015 to save St Helier Hospital?

Reply

Since the last meeting on 8th July I have:

- Met the new Chief Executive of Merton CCG and made clear our continued opposition to any reduction in services at St Helier hospital. I am pleased to report that this was a very productive meeting and I am looking forward to working with Mr Doyle.
- Met again with the Chair of Merton CCG, Dr Andrew Murray, impressing on him the council's continued opposition to any reduction in services at St Helier. This was another productive meeting and I continue to work closely with Dr Murray.

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

Further to my questions on this at the last Full Council meeting, can the Cabinet Member please tell me when he expects to make a final decision on how many and which of Merton's bowling greens the administration plans to close as well as what his intention would be for the future use of those bowling greens which are allocated for closure?

Reply

ANSWERED BY THE CABINET MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY AND REGENERATION

Council members and officers met with representatives of all of the borough's six bowling clubs last month as part of its on-going discussions within them over the future of bowls provision in Merton.

Morden Bowls Club has agreed that due to very low membership numbers, the prospects for that club are very bleak and, that being the case, the club has confirmed their proposal from earlier in the year that the bowling green at Morden Rec will not reopen for the 2016 season.

The Council is anticipating that one additional bowling green will close over the coming winter period as a result of two clubs agreeing to share a venue, but the negotiations over that decision remain on-going with the clubs.

5) From Councillor Abdul Latif to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Cleanliness and Parking:

Merton Council has recently agreed to re-align the street cleaning schedules in Trinity Ward. Consequently the roads in the area will be scheduled to be cleaned weekly, the day after the waste collections have been completed, and monitored closely to ensure the required standard of cleaning is being maintained.

What measures is the council taking to ensure that local residents in my ward are fully informed about these 're-aligned' cleaning schedules?

Reply

The Council's Street Cleaning team have, following the introduction of the new Glutton electric sweepers, been reviewing the cleaning arrangements in some parts of the borough where there are waste presentation issues. This includes some roads within the Trinity Ward. As part of this review we are undertaking trials to ensure the best outcomes in terms of cleanliness. We do ask that residents present their waste in line with the Council's waste presentation policy and we will be writing to all relevant households over the next few weeks to inform them of the policy.

It is important to note that during the leaf fall season October to December, resources may be diverted to deal with areas of the borough which are affected by high levels of leaf fall and normal street cleaning schedules are realigned accordingly.

6) From Councillor Oonagh Moulton to the Cabinet Member for Finance:

As part of the council's efforts to increase the commercialisation of the Environment and Regeneration department, what consideration is being given to more flexible options for the collection of garden waste given that some residents in Merton, including a significant number of pensioners, don't require a fortnightly collection and therefore would appreciate paying a reduced rate for less frequent collections?

Reply

The collection of garden waste is a discretionary service. In common with many other councils Merton offers a chargeable garden waste collection service, with an annual subscription of £65. We provide a reduced rate of £50 for pensioners and for residents on Income support or Disability Living allowance.

Garden waste can also be disposed of free of charge at our Civic Amenity site in Garth Rd.

Due to operational and financial restraints we are unable to provide a tailored service where the frequency of collection changes by household.

7) From Councillor Stephen Crowe to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Cleanliness and Parking:

Waste Crime costs the UK economy £568 million per annum according to the Environmental Services Association Education Trust. Can the Cabinet Member tell me what figures the Council has on compliance with relevant Duty of Care legislation by businesses here in Merton? What is the Council doing to ensure local businesses are managing their waste properly and fulfilling their Duty of Care obligations?

Reply

As part of the Street Scene and Waste service the council provides a commercial waste service to local business within the borough. Under current legislation we are able to impose a 'Reasonable Charge' to cover the full collection and disposal cost. Currently the service has 25% market share and ensures that these businesses all comply with their duty of care regulations and are managing their waste appropriately.

Both our commercial waste sales team and our internal enforcement team undertake spot checks with local business to ensure that they have adequate arrangements in place to dispose of their waste and are in receipt of a Duty of Care notice. Since January this year we have issued 16 fixed penalty notices to businesses for failing to comply with regulations. The FPN charge is £300 which is reduced to £180 if paid within 14 days.

We remain vigilant and determined to ensure businesses have proper arrangements to dispose of waste properly either via the Council commercial waste service or a private operator.

No current data is available confirming the level of business within the borough which are not complying with regulations.

8) From Councillor David Simpson to the Leader of the Council:

Given that he likes to shout about Merton as a 'business-friendly borough', what was the Leader's reaction to news that Lidl - one of the most high profile companies based here - is moving its British HQ from Wimbledon to Tolworth where Kingston Council have recently given planning permission for a purpose built build? What, if anything, did he do to try to persuade them to stay?

Reply

Merton was voted and is officially London's best small business friendly borough by the Federation of Small Businesses and London Councils for our achievements in supporting small businesses and high growth employers.

Merton is one of the few London boroughs who invests in this area through our Economic Development Strategy and Inward Investment Strategy. Our Merton Business Support Service, delivered in partnership by Merton Chamber of Commerce, delivers practical business advice and support, networking and collaboration opportunities and a range of financial support packages from business loans to business rate relief. Our MBSS programme is on track to achieve 300 new businesses and 500 additional jobs in Merton.

With regard to Lidl, the company has undergone a phenomenal growth in the past few years. FutureMerton, our regeneration team, have met with Lidl regularly over the past 18 months to identify opportunities to accommodate Lidl in Wimbledon. This included identifying development opportunities including the use of LBM owned sites. LBM also engaged with a series of neighbouring land owners in central Wimbledon to facilitate a land pooling strategy to accommodate larger floorplate offices. Through this process, Lidl's growth requirements exceeded 200,000 sqft and would need room for future expansion. To put this into perspective, it's about half the area of Merton Civic Centre tower; which would be a challenge to deliver in Wimbledon where we have limited land ownership and there is a lack of private land available.

Lidl have stated:

"I wanted to confirm that regretfully despite exhausted efforts we have been unable to conclude a position here in Wimbledon as we preferred. We see this as a huge disappointment, our timescales for requiring a relocation though could not be stretched further and our hand therefore has been forced I'm afraid.

Please accept our sincere thanks for the manner in which you dealt with our interest and the respect you offered Lidl to the confidentiality of our discussions. We appreciate your help and wish you all the very best with your proposed plans for the wider redevelopment of the area in the future"

Lidl will remain in Wimbledon till 2018 and we are already working with Lidl on the inward investment opportunities of their holdings in Wimbledon as part of their exit strategy.

Lidl will move 400 jobs to Tolworth; however, this month, we've just welcomed Close Brothers to Wimbledon Bridge House, who have brought 600 merchant banking jobs, from... Tolworth!

It is disappointing that Lidl are leaving the borough and we understand that Wimbledon is still their preferred location, but the lack of available land and grade A office space is a serious challenge for Merton, not helped by the Tory government's disastrous decision to allow office space to be converted to residential without planning permission, and is one of the key drivers for our FutureWimbledon project. In the past decade, there has been little new office space developed in Wimbledon. This administration is trying to turn the tap back on – to deliver more office floorspace and have in the past few years delivered schemes at Mansel Court, supported 80 start-ups at Wimbletech utilising space in the Library and we are progressing a major office scheme through planning for Pinnacle House expansion and new business workspaces at Rainbow and Manoplastics Raynes Park.

9) From Councillor Janice Howard to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Cleanliness and Parking:

Several residents in Wimbledon Park have contacted me complaining that they have not received or not seen the email reminder to renew their parking permit and have then been issued with a parking ticket by the council as a result.

Can the Cabinet Member possibly advise what has been the percentage increase in relevant fines issued to residents following the introduction of email reminders for the renewal of parking permits?

Reply

Permit renewal reminders are sent on a monthly basis by post to current permit holders. Since May 2012, as an additional service, emailed reminders have also been sent. Parking Services are not aware of issues relating to renewal notices sent to permit holders residing in the Wimbledon Park area. If the relevant details such as the Penalty Charge Notice number can be provided then Parking Services will investigate this issue, although residents should be aware they are responsible for renewing their permits and for responding to the reminder that is sent in the post.

We have not experienced any correlation between the number of fines and the introduction of e permits.

10) From Councillor Oonagh Moulton to the Leader of the Council:

Given that the 'Merton 2015' programme formally comes to an end this month (September 2015), can the Leader clarify by what specific criteria the success, or otherwise, of this programme is being measured by his administration?

Reply

Our Merton2015 programme aimed to reshape the council to take account of reduced local government funding. Our aim has been to re-engineer our processes and our services so that we can continue to provide quality services to those most in need and keeping council tax affordable, despite the challenging financial situation for local government. Notwithstanding the pressures we faced in redesigning our services, I am pleased to report that we managed to improve residents satisfaction with the council on a number of measures. We've had record levels of satisfaction in our annual residents survey; record levels of achievement in our schools; and we've won a number of awards including the Best Achieving Council award. In addition, the local elections in May 2014 underlined the public's support for our business-like approach to running the council.

The Merton2015 programme has now drawn to a close, however, the funding situation for local government has in fact worsened and the challenges for local councils remain. Nonetheless we continue to set ourselves challenging targets and our aim is to become the best borough in London by 2020. This will take hard work and difficult choices in light of government funding cuts but I would very much welcome the Opposition's support in continuing our drive to ensure we do the best we can for our residents even under a government intent on slashing funding for local services.

11) From Councillor Oonagh Moulton to the Leader of the Council:

Please can the Leader update the Council on the outcome of the "prawn cocktail" offensive he has been conducting over the summer months?

Reply

Merton has been keen to see local people having a greater say over the decisions that affect them. Local people have real concerns about health services, about crime, about employment opportunities and about housing.

Too many decisions about these matters are made by people who have little or no connection with the local area. They lack a proper understanding of the real problems that local people face and they are not fully aware of what will work well in the local area.

The Government has been open to views about these matters but has made it clear that it will only listen to proposals from groups of councils. Accordingly Merton has worked with the other London Boroughs to make the "London Proposition". This is a detailed submission to the Government about devolving control of issues that local people care most about. I have also worked with local leaders in South West London to create a new sub regional committee that will be able to implement the new powers when and if they are granted.

This has put South West London in a much stronger position than many other parts of London.

12) From Councillor Linda Taylor to the Cabinet Member for Community and Culture:

Can the Cabinet Member confirm that up to 70 families from Tower Hamlets are in the process of moving into Wimbledon Park ward? Can he clarify what the status is of these families and what the council is doing to ensure that our already stretched schools, nurseries and other services in the ward are able to cope with their arrival given that I understand many of the families include young children?

Reply

ANSWERED BY THE CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES

We can confirm that Tower Hamlets have entered into an arrangement to purchase temporary housing for their residents who would otherwise be in bed and breakfast. They intend to place up to 70 families and so far 40+ families have been relocated. Tower Hamlets have been requested by the Director of CSF to undertake assessments of the families needs and these are taking place. We are liaising with them closely. Merton's Early Years and Health services have visited the site and school admissions are finding school places where necessary.

The majority of the mums are pregnant and/or have a small child, several of school age who will now need a local school place. There are significant numbers of children who are eligible for children centre services and/or 2 or 3 year old provision. We anticipate that the building will quickly generate substantial numbers of additional children and parents requiring local services. Discussions will need to be held with Tower Hamlets regarding how the needs of families are met but there are no existing protocols for such a situation.

This situation has of course come about due to the government and the Mayor of London's failure to address the acute housing crisis we are facing in London. Cuts to benefits, to tax credits and the benefits cap have exacerbated the situation and resulted in a London-wide situation of increasing homelessness that requires strong political leadership from the Mayor of London which I'm afraid is sadly lacking.

13) From Councillor Linda Taylor to the Cabinet Member for Children's Services:

Can the Cabinet Member for Children's Services tell the council what action has been taken to reduce the cost of school transport in the current financial year?

Reply

The SEN transport budget is under considerable pressure due to demographic pressures. A 39% increase in birth rate has impacted on children with complex needs as well as their peers. The Children and Families Act further requires

consideration of young people's needs up to 25. Whilst we support these initiatives, there is no additional funding from government to deliver on them. The Director of Environment and Regeneration has been chairing a board looking at the costs of transport. The E&R department has also led on the retendering of the taxi contract.

CSF department has reviewed the eligibility criteria which has to reflect national statutory requirements. The DfE has recently issues new statutory guidance which further sets out children's entitlement as well as working on a range of initiatives to ensure we are promoting independence for older children as well as enabling parents to take up personal budgets to enable them to more flexibly meet the needs of their children. This will continue to be an area of focus in 15/16 as we endeavour to balance the needs of growing numbers of children with the financial resources available.

14) From Councillor Charlie Chirico to the Cabinet Member for Children's Services:

Can the Cabinet Member outline what Merton is doing to ensure that young offenders in the borough are getting enough support from the Youth Offending Team to prevent them from re-offending?

Reply

Merton has a good track record in preventing reoffending our current rate is 26.8% which compares favourably to the national (36.5%) and London (42.2%) averages. All young people who are open to the Youth Offending Team are provided with robust, multi-agency interventions – including education support, mentoring, support with substance misuse, sexual health and emotional difficulties – in order to help them stay on the right path. They are allocated an experienced worker within the team who supervises them for the duration of their order.

When the young person's order expires, there are other teams including Transforming Families and My Futures ETE (also part of the Family and Adolescent Service) who can offer similar support to the young person.

15) From Councillor Charlie Chirico to the Cabinet Member for Children's Services:

Can the Cabinet Member explain what out of court disposal options are being considered prior to a young offender in Merton actually getting to court so that this remains the last resort option?

Reply

The Youth Offending Team work with the Police to ensure that diversionary options are used with young people so that a court appearance and conviction is indeed a last resort. This is predominately overseen with the Police via the Triage system which may impose a Caution or Reprimand on a young person. For those young

people who have significant needs, a Prevention Worker from Transforming Families will also offer a brief support package alongside the delivery of the out of court disposal. This is reflected in our low rates of custody. In quarter one of 15/16, we have only had one young person sentenced to a custodial disposal which is indicative of us ensuring that such options are only used for our young people in exceptional circumstances.