

Merton Council Council

18 November 2015

Supplementary agenda

27 Non Priority Questions and Responses

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Non Priority Questions

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

How much income did the Council receive from moving traffic and parking offences in 2013-14 and 2014-15 and what is the expected income for this current financial year?

Reply

Traffic congestion is one of our residents' top concerns and we work hard to keep our highways clear of inconsiderate drivers and inconsiderately parked cars that clog up the roads for residents trying to get to work, drop the kids to school or just pop to the shop. Where drivers contravene the rules they pay a penalty charge and the amount collected in the years requested is listed below. This contributes towards the cost of providing the Freedom Pass which costs the council around £9m every year.

	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16 (projected)
Moving traffic (incl bus lane) enforcement	£1,761,450	£1,952,820	£1,816,700
Parking Offences	£3,169,670	£3,051,570	£3,093,300
TOTAL	£4,931,120	£5,004,390	£4,910,000

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

Given that it is reasonable to assume that some moving traffic and parking offences are a result of ignorance of the law (for example there may be uncertainty over what exactly is classed as permissible loading), could the Cabinet Member commit to an educational piece in a forthcoming issue of My Merton on this?

Reply

The information is available in the Highways Code, which all drivers are required to have a knowledge of in order to pass their test. Nonetheless, we have regularly run articles in My Merton about parking and moving traffic offences and will continue to do this where appropriate.

3). From Councillor David Dean to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration:

Back in January Cllr Andrew Judge promised to consult and involve the very important Friends of Parks groups in his plans to transfer parks maintenance in Merton to a third party organisation. They tell me he hasn't. I asked on their behalf again 3 weeks ago and was promised feedback within 2 weeks. Nothing has been received. This was expected. When will the Cabinet Member engage with residents?

Reply

The procurement of the Parks and open space maintenance services is progressing well and to timetable. This procurement is utilising the competitive dialogue process which uses extensive discussions and dialogue with bidders to develop the detailed approach and solutions that will ultimately be adopted in delivering the services.

The process begins with a high level "output based specification" which is then developed and amended through lengthy dialogue sessions with bidders. It was hoped that this high level output based specification could have been shared with Friends of Parks and Trade Unions already, however, legal advice has suggested that there is a risk to the procurement process in doing so and since Merton Council is only one party to the procurement process it has not been possible so far to release the document in the way first envisaged.

This is disappointing, however we continue to discuss this with the legal advisers and the other Councils involved in order to identify a way in which we can provide the appropriate level of transparency.

I hope to meet with the Friends of Parks Groups again soon to update them on the procurement so far and share with them what documents we are able to.

4). From Councillor Jill West to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Cleanliness and Parking:

Can the Cabinet Member guarantee that this administration's plan is not to change refuse collections from weekly to fortnightly (or even worse) in the future?

Reply

At the 2014 election Labour promised our residents that if elected for another term in office we would keep a weekly refuse collection. This is despite the fact that the government has withdrawn financial support for councils who want to maintain a weekly collection.

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

What is the Council doing to ensure traffic keeps flowing through Merton?

Reply

The Council undertakes a range of measures to ensure traffic flows effectively.

This includes work to maintain our highways to a high standard, traffic scheme work to ensure the best arrangements for roads and junctions together with signals and crossing points.

In addition we enforce parking and moving traffic regulations to ensure that public and private vehicles can move freely and safely in May 2016 the council is introducing a new method of CCTV enforcement of moving traffic contraventions using ANPR technology.

We work closely with Transport for London to ensure that Merton's roads are safe and that congestion is reduced as far as possible.

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

What discussions has the Cabinet Member or Council had with utility companies to ensure works are carried out as promptly as possible to ensure busy roads (such as Worple Road) are reopened quickly and buses are not diverted for too long?

Reply

The Council, through the Street Works team, work very closely with all utility companies to minimise disruption on the highway network. This includes co-ordinating planned works through the Quarterly Liaison meetings and discussing traffic management with TfL, London Buses and emergency services to agree the most expedient diversion routes. These are discussed well in advance to ensure that London Buses are able to publicise changes to their routes and inform customers of the alternatives available.

With respect to Worple Road, this was an Emergency Permit to repair a collapsed sewer that was causing flooding to many residential properties. When Thames Water notified the Council of this emergency, they stated that this would take a minimum of six weeks to fix due to the depth of the excavation. Once works commenced, it became apparent that the extent of the damage was far greater than previously anticipated. We therefore agreed to an extended works duration to ensure that the repair was carried out correctly and to reduce the risk of Thames Water returning to the same location in the near future. We expect these works to be completed by 7 December.

Our Highways permit scheme, like other London boroughs allows utility companies to work on the highway. We impose fixed penalty notices and financial charges where utility companies exceed the permitted period and this is effective in minimising disruption to road user.

7). From Councillor Michael Bull to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration:

Can the Cabinet Member outline what impact Crossrail 2 will have on the proposed development of the Rainbow industrial estate and what discussions the Council has had with the Crossrail 2 team about this specific issue?

Reply

Discussions between the council and Crossrail2 have not yet defined what impact Crossrail2 will have on the proposed Rainbow industrial estate. Network Rail (one of the Government's partners in Crossrail2) are both a landowner and a statutory consultee of part of the site involved in the Rainbow Estate planning brief 2013 and the subsequent planning application. As such Network Rail have been closely involved and consulted on all stages of Rainbow development by the council and also by the applicant and community representatives. Network Rail commented on the planning application in March 2015 stating that Crossrail2 will be routed through Raynes Park, that additional infrastructure will be required, and stating "We currently believe that the majority of additional infrastructure required in this area [Raynes Park] will be contained within the existing railway boundary however we are still only in the early stages of development" The most recent Crossrail2 public consultation (October 2015 – January 2016) www.crossrail2.co.uk/consultation/ has a factsheet on Raynes Park and New Malden which states that infrastructure improvements could include changes to stations, platforms, track and other matters. As stated in their factsheet, Crossrail2 plans are still at an early stage of development and Crossrail2 will consult on further details as the scheme develops.

8) Councillor Oonagh Moulton to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Cleanliness and Parking:

I am sure the Cabinet Member will agree that cases when treasured pets, such as a cat or dog, go missing can be extremely stressful for the owner's whole family. I have been dealing with one such case recently whereby a considerable fine was levied by the council for the return of a lost pet despite a number of failings being identified in the way in which this was handled by Merton. Can the Cabinet Member reassure me that a review will be undertaken and any necessary changes made so that, as and when dogs or cats go missing in the future and are retrieved by the council, Merton has the appropriate processes in place to return them as quickly as possible to their owner?

Reply

I believe this case relates to a dog that was collected by our "out of hour's service" and the owner lived in Wandsworth Borough.

The dog was chipped with a foreign chip registered in Australia, which was checked by the database that our contractors for stray and lost dogs (Noah's Ark) use. Unbeknown to them at the time the dog had been re-registered to a London address in Wandsworth.

There are at least seven databases in operation by operators and 'Petrac', which had this information, has now been added to Noah's Ark contact list. We had waived the kennel cost as a good will gesture, but the collection and return fee was levied as we would have charged the owner this cost as her dog was collected as a stray.

The charge was not a fine as such but was reasonable recovery of costs for the service provided. It is hoped that systems to track pets will be improved as databases develop and I am sure that this case has assisted.

9). From Councillor Janice Howard to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration:

Can the Cabinet Member tell me when the bollard on the width restriction outside Wimbledon Park tube station will be replaced? Large lorries are currently going through on the wrong side of the road to get past and this could cause a serious accident.

Reply

The damage caused to this lockable bollard, due to inconsiderate driver behaviour, is a recurring problem and it has been replaced approximately four times this year. The bollard is not as sturdy as the others in place as it has to be removable to allow access for the Fire Brigade in an emergency.

As this is a recurring problem, we are currently looking at alternatives to replace this with a more robust bollard that can still be removed, which will require a deeper socket. However, this may not be possible due to construction restrictions and may also cause manual handling issues for the Fire Brigade. In the interim, we will shortly replace it with a standard lockable bollard.

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

Does the Cabinet Member accept that her decision to cease funding for the services provided by Home-Start Merton's trained volunteers at the end of this financial year is likely to lead to more families turning to the council for assistance in future and therefore increased cost pressures for Merton taxpayers over the longer term? If so, what does she plan to do to mitigate this?

Reply

The current 3-year contract with Home-Start Merton for the provision of a parenting support service expires on 31st March 2016. As a result of savings targets set for the Children, Schools and Families Department, we have reviewed our commissioning priorities for future years and concluded that we need to target our remaining commissioning budgets on services for the most vulnerable children and young people in the borough. Very regrettably, therefore, the Home-start service, and a number of other existing services provided by our community and voluntary organisation partners, will not be re-commissioned after March 2016.

These services have been part of Merton's 'early help' offer for some years and the reduced funding available will inevitably result in a reduction in service delivery. Families currently receiving services from Home-start and other providers will be reviewed on a 'case by case' basis towards the end of the current contracts to ensure either that work has been completed with families or that the impact of service closure is mitigated as much as possible.

Merton and its partners will continue to provide family support services albeit to those families with particular vulnerabilities or risks. Targeted family support will continue to be available through our Children Centre services. Parenting programmes will also continue to be offered. We will continue to commission the Family Nurse Partnership that provides an enhanced Health Visiting offer to young first time mothers from early pregnancy to two years. We have recently re-commissioned young people's substance misuse and sexual health services to ensure a more focused preventive approach. Furthermore, our core social work teams will continue to undertake casework with significant numbers of children in need and their families.

Officers and myself have engaged with our local community and voluntary sector providers in connection with the savings required from commissioning budgets and I have asked officers to work closely with those providers which will lose council funding to support alternative funding bids, partnering arrangements across organisations and any other support to promote resilience in the sector in these difficult times.

11). From Councillor Charlie Chirico to the Cabinet Member for Education:

How will the bidding process for Merton Adult Education be scrutinised by the Council to ensure that the services provided are best suited to the needs of residents and adult learners?

Reply

The specifications for each aspect of the service have been drawn up to reflect the Commissioning Principles set out by the Council. Bids will be rigorously scored against a comprehensive evaluation framework. For the Main Lot and the Learning Difficulties and Disabilities (LDD) Lot, the scoring will also be supplemented by site visits to, and presentations from, the 3 highest scoring bids for each lot. The

proceeds of the bidding and evaluation process will be reported to Cabinet with recommendations for preferred bidders.

12) From Councillor Charlie Chirico to the Cabinet Member for Education:

Will the Council ensure that the five core services that Merton Adult Education provides are tendered for together rather than split?

Reply

The Commissioning Principles set out by Council have been reflected in the Service Specifications such that we are seeking to procure a similar width and depth of provision. The Service will be procured across 5 lots namely 1) a substantial large lot covering main provision with an indicative value of approx. £800,000, 2) a lot covering specialist LDD services 3) a lot covering Family Learning 4) a lot covering Adult Apprenticeships and 5) a lot covering Employability. Lots 2 to 5 have a collective indicative value of approximately £200,000. The lots have been structured to ensure that only larger organisations with the necessary scale, experience and infrastructure can bid for Lot 1 to minimise risks for the Council but also enable smaller providers who may have more specialised skills to bid for smaller lots. It should be noted that the final shape of the budgets, and therefore the provision, will not be known until 16/17 funding has been awarded by the Skills Funding Agency in February/March next year.

13). From Councillor Charlie Chirico to the Cabinet Member for Community and Culture:

In light of the extreme difficulties young people have in purchasing property in Merton due to the expense and scarcity, what is Merton Council doing to encourage shared ownership providers to set up camp in Merton? What plans does the Council have in place over the next 12 months to address the deficit in shared ownership properties in Merton or to encourage Circle Housing Merton Priory to assist in doing so?

Reply

The Council has enjoyed a successful working relationship with registered providers to increase housing supply and since 2003, 725 homes for low cost home ownership have been delivered. The Council continues to work with partners to deliver suitable homes for its residents and is in discussion with registered providers on how the Starter Homes initiative for first time buyers as defined in the Housing and Planning Bill can be delivered.

The Council is nevertheless aware that under current conditions starter homes as defined in the bill are almost certain to be outside the price range of all but the richest of Merton's young people, and in fact of most people of all ages in the Borough who are not already homeowners. We are deeply concerned that hardworking people, and hardworking families in particular, will find themselves

pushed into poverty by this and other equally ill-conceived housing measures put forward by the government, and be forced to move themselves far from overpriced London, taking their valuable skills with them.

We are aware that, even before the bill takes effect, it is becoming increasingly difficult to fill teaching and medical jobs in our region, and we have been listening to the warnings of local businesses. Merton and its neighbouring councils, as part of the South London Partnership, have no intention of allowing the Housing and Planning Bill to further blight the future of our hardworking residents, and cross-boundary work is already being undertaken in this respect. I would urge all members to join us in condemning the proposed legislation and calling for long-lasting sustainable solutions to London's housing crisis.

14). 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 9th September 2015 to save St Helier Hospital?

Reply

Since the last meeting I have:

- Helped organise and attended a packed out meeting of local residents on 17 October at Lower Morden Baptist Church where we heard from the Chief Executive of Epsom and St Helier Hospital Trust, David Elkeles. Siobhain McDonagh, who has been key to the campaign to save the hospital, also spoke to residents.
- Met with Anne Rainsberry of NHS England and underlined the case for retaining A&E and maternity at St Helier and for keeping the hospital open beyond the 5 year commitment we have achieved so far. The Leader of Sutton Council, Cllr Ruth Dombey, also attended the meeting.