

Merton Council Council

6 April 2016

Supplementary agenda

5	Public questions to Cabinet Members Questions and replies Supplementary questions and replies	1 - 12
6	Councillors' ordinary priority questions to cabinet members Questions and replies Supplementary questions and replies	13 - 22
7a	Strategic theme: Councillors' questions to cabinet members Questions and replies Supplementary questions and replies	23 - 32

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PUBLIC QUESTIONS RECEIVED FOR COUNCIL 6 APRIL 2016

From: Matteo Baccaglini
To the Cabinet Member for Finance

Question: The Merton Youth Parliament aims to represent views of young people in Merton – one of the largest politically-unrepresented groups. It recently held elections and is looking to become a self-sufficient campaigning organisation; will the Council consider supplying it its own space within the Civic Centre for its operations?”

Reply: Council officers have already begun and are committed to continuing a dialogue with the task group from the youth parliament to clarify what their needs are and how the council might be able to meet them. Due to reductions in our funding from central government the council has had to maximise its use of office space, with staff from a number of outlying buildings being re-located to the Civic Centre in order to save money. Any un-used space is expected to bring in a commercial income to contribute to the council's budget gap. However we are keen to look at solutions that might assist the youth parliament in reaching their potential as a campaigning organisation for all young people, not just those who are already politically active. We will continue discussions, bearing in mind both the limitations and possibilities available and I am hopeful that a solution can be reached.

Supplementary Question: I would like to ask the Council would they be willing to cooperate with the Merton's Youth Parliament on some of its upcoming campaigns and meet with Youth Parliament regularly to help to make Merton one of the best Borough for Youths this side of the Thames?

Reply: Thank you for the question and of course we would be happy to work with the Parliament and Young people, as there is clearly a serious under representation of young people in politics, especially with many young people having been removed of the electoral roll recently. The Council is very limited financially on what it can do but obviously we on either side of the chamber support young people enter politics and having their voice heard.

From: Diane Kathryn Neil Mills
To the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration

Question: With regards to right of light, with whom does the responsibility lie in terms of assessing compliance with the council's policy on this matter?

Reply: There is often some confusion regarding the term 'rights of light'. There is the civil matter of 'rights of light' between building owners and is not a matter governed by the Council. There is also the Town Planning assessment of the impacts of development on daylight and sunlight which is sometimes referred to as 'rights of light' but should not be confused with the civil version mentioned above. Planning officers are trained to assess such impacts and there is a tool officer's use called the 'aspect value test' to consider mainly small scale relationships with neighbours. For larger schemes, developer will often commission an independent expert to submit an assessment (based on Building Research Establishment tests) which can aid officers who make conclusions based on consideration of the relative

impacts. Like most Local Plans, Merton's statutory development plan contains a policy addressing daylight and sunlight for all development: DM.D2 Design considerations in all development in Merton's Sites and Policies Plan 2014, (v) Ensure provision of appropriate levels of sunlight and daylight, quality of living conditions, amenity space and privacy, to both proposed and adjoining buildings and gardens; www.merton.gov.uk/merton_sites_and_policies_part_1_policies_jul14.pdf

From: Sandra Vogel

To the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration

Question: Regarding the Mitcham Fair Green bus street - will Merton Council commit to a) start monitoring air quality at Fair Green asap and before the bus street is in place b) publish results at its web site in real time c) commit to taking mitigating action if air quality degrades.

Reply: The London Road bus lane is part of a wider strategic project across Mitcham. We do not, as a matter of course monitor air quality when new schemes are implemented.

To accurately monitor in 'real-time' air pollution requires very specialist and expensive equipment. This normally comprises of a fixed monitoring station. The Council only has two of these monitoring stations and these are currently situated in areas of strategic importance to the air quality network across the whole of the borough.

A more efficient alternative which the Council will consider will be the installation of chemical diffusion tubes to carry out monitoring of an area. It should be noted however that the data collected will be 'long term' and will need to be 'averaged' over a one year period.

This year Merton will be reviewing its air quality action plan (AQAP) which will cover the steps the Council intends taking to address poor air quality in the borough.

The Council will consider mitigating action if deemed appropriate.

From: Giles Bailey

To the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration

Question: With pending CIL funds being released by developments in Raynes Park, will funds be used to provide proper cycle facilities and trees along Kingston Road from RP station to the pathway to Wimbledon at Lower Downs Road. This includes improved safety at the Kingston Road / Lower Downs Road junction.

Reply: Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) can be used to fund a wide range of infrastructure across the borough including school places, health facilities, parks and open spaces, public realm improvements and cycle lanes. 15% of CIL funding is available to local communities to suggest projects that can be used in the five local areas of Colliers Wood, Mitcham, Morden, Raynes Park and Wimbledon but this depends on development starting in their neighbourhood. As CIL is relatively new and funding is only payable when development has started (not when planning permission is granted) only £4,000 CIL funding has been received to date for local

projects in Raynes Park. While we will be carrying out more consultation this year as to what this could be spent on, it is unlikely to cover infrastructure at present.

In 2013, driven from requests by local businesses and local ward councillors, sections of cycle lane on the south side of Kingston Road (between RP station and the junction with Lower Downs Road) were removed to accommodate half footway 'pay and display' bays to allow car parking outside local shops..

It was felt justified to removed sections of cycle lane on Kingston Road because there is a fully segregated cycle facility in the adjacent Bushy Road and a cycle lane on the north side of Kingston Road.

Unfortunately, whether or not more funding becomes available, it will not be possible to reinstate the sections of removed cycle lane on Kingston Road without removing the shoppers' car parking from outside the businesses. If removing the car parking and reinstating the cycle lane is raised by the local community as a priority for future CIL neighbourhood funding spending in Raynes Park, we will consider this again.

From: Derek Manning

To the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration

Question: Does the council agree the importance of local businesses behaving as responsible neighbours and respecting the rights of local residents to enjoy their homes in peace and quiet? If so, will it take enforcement action to ensure this will be the case with the Nelson Trading Estate in South Wimbledon?

Reply: The Council's Pollution Team has formal powers to regulate businesses and their impact on residents through the use of statutory nuisance legislation. A statutory nuisance is determined by a number of factors including the time of day, the frequency of noise, its duration and its impact.

I can confirm that pollution officers are currently investigating complaints from local residents about noise from late night vehicle deliveries and refuse collections and I understand that local councillors and residents have been kept up to date with developments by the investigating officer.

With regards to taking formal enforcement action, pollution officers can only take formal action if the noise is so bad that it amounts to a statutory nuisance. The current position is that officers take the view that they do not yet have sufficient evidence to take formal action and amongst other matters they are considering installing noise recording equipment in resident's properties to gather evidence.

The investigation of noise complaints is a complex matter and often circumstances change over a period of time i.e. complaints can be infrequent, noise can be intermittent and sound levels can go up and down. We are trying hard to resolve residents' complaints and negotiations are still continuing with local businesses. It is hoped that the matter can be resolved informally and to the mutual satisfaction of both the businesses and residents. If that does not happen and evidence is obtained that amounts to a continuing nuisance then I shall be pressing for enforcement action to be taken.

Supplementary Question: My supplementary question relates to the questions raised over the Nelson Trading Estate in South Wimbledon and how over the last 10 months residents in the area have been kept awake a night by refuse lorries, picking up and emptying bins etc. Residents have been alerting the council over this both officers in Environmental Health and Councillors including the ward Councillors.

My question is how long to residents have to wait before the Council starts to take their concerns seriously?

Reply: Thank you for the question and I am pleased to say we have three excellent ward Councillors in Abbey where this was taking place. I understand there is to be a meeting taking place in April to hear the issues and hopefully address them, by getting a balance for the residents and the businesses. We as councillors care about our wards and getting that balance is very important and tricky to ensure all that live and work in the borough are happy with their surroundings.

From: Joan Keddie
To the Cabinet Member for Environmental Cleanliness and Parking

Question: Will Merton Council undertake a review of the visual impact on the street scene consequent upon Borough-wide installation of wheelie bins, with particular reference to Conservation Areas? Subsequently publishing the result together with an assessment of costs and benefits of alternative options.

Reply: At present no decision has been made regarding any changes to the current waste collection service. As part of the South London Waste Partnership, waste services are currently in the process of jointly procuring a range of environmental services including waste collection. Recommendations of preferred bidder are due to be presented to Cabinet for consideration in July 2016.

From: Tony Burton
To the Cabinet Member for Finance

Question:

Please list for each of the last five years, by year (a) all issues reviewed by overview and scrutiny panels; (b) all the public suggestions submitted to the Scrutiny Team as issues to be reviewed and (c) the issues suggested by the public which were taken forward for review.

Reply: Overview and Scrutiny is independent of the council's Cabinet and sets its own work programme. Each year the scrutiny team undertake a campaign to gather suggestions for issues to scrutinise either as agenda items or task group reviews.

Overview and scrutiny cannot deal with individual complaints or look at issues dealt with by another council committee (for example Planning/Licensing), unless the issue deals with procedure.

The agenda papers for the first meeting of Panel and the Overview and Scrutiny Commission and each Panel in June/July each year contain the full description of suggestions plus a note from the workshop setting out the decision taken on each of

the suggestions. The Commission and each Panel review these and take a formal decision on their work programme for the year ahead.

The scrutiny team writes to all the people who sent in suggestions to inform them of the Commission or Panel's decision on the suggestion.

The lists below set out all issues reviewed by the Overview and Scrutiny Commission and Panels in the municipal year 2015/16, including information on who suggested the issue for scrutiny. At the end of the list there are details of suggestions for 2015/16 that were received by the public and not prioritised for inclusion in the work programme, including the reason why they were not prioritised.

As all the information that has been requested is already in the public domain, the lists prior to 2015/16 have not been produced in response to this question. The source information can be accessed through published agendas on the council's website: <http://democracy.merton.gov.uk/mgListCommittees.aspx?bcr=1&simple=1>

Overview and scrutiny work programme for the 2015/16 municipal year

Panel/Commission and date	Suggested by:
Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel	
1 July 2015	
Elected Member & Departmental Portfolio Priorities	Scrutiny Panel
Agreeing the Work Programme 2015/16	Scrutiny Panel
Draft Final Report – Online Strategies in Schools Task Group	Scrutiny Panel
Performance Report	Management Team (DMT)
21 October 2015	
Looked after children and corporate parenting report	Panel & DMT
Annual report and business plan of Merton's Safeguarding Children Board	Panel & DMT
Update Report	Scrutiny Panel
Performance Report	Scrutiny Panel
Housing and employment offer for care leavers task group	DMT + Chair
Educational attainment of disabled children and young people task group	Merton CIL
3 November 2015	
CSF Budget Proposals (Round 1)	Constitution
Executive Response and Action Plan – Online Strategies in Schools Task Group	Scrutiny Panel
Performance Report	DMT
Transfer of public health functions to the local authority and broader engagement of health in service provision - task group	DMT
13 January 2016	
CSF Budget Proposals (Round 2)	Constitution
Transforming families	Scrutiny Panel
Merton youth justice service	Scrutiny Panel

Update Report	Scrutiny Panel
Performance Report	DMT
10 February 2015	
School Standards	Scrutiny Panel
Briefing- School Standards Committee	Scrutiny Panel
Progress Update - School leadership succession planning task group	Scrutiny Panel
Progress Update – online strategies in schools task group	Scrutiny Panel
Update Report	Scrutiny Panel
Performance Report	DMT
22 March 2016	
Looked after children and corporate parenting report	Merton CIL, Panel and DMT
Task group update – focus on vulnerable groups	Scrutiny Panel
Update Report	Scrutiny Panel
Performance Report	DMT
Topic Suggestions for 2016/17	Scrutiny Panel
Healthier Communities and Older People Overview and Scrutiny Panel	
2 July 2015	
Epsom and St Helier University NHS Trust – update on current priorities	Scrutiny Panel
Merton mental health step down accommodation	Local resident
Work Programme	
3 September 2015	
Healthy Child 0-5 Transfer	DMT
Preventing incontinence task group update report	Scrutiny Panel
Work Programme	
22 October 2015	
Adult Social Care Savings	Local residents/ Merton CIL
Use of Volunteers in day centres	Local resident
Preventing ill health	Scrutiny Panel
10 November 2015	
Update on the Care Act	Scrutiny Panel
Budget	Constitution
12 January 2015	
Budget	Constitution
9 February 2016	
St Georges report on substantial variation to a local Urogynaecology clinic.	Local resident
Physical activity for the fifty five plus	Scrutiny Panel
17 March 2016	
Update from Epsom and St Helier Hospital on Estates Strategy Community Consultation	Scrutiny Panel
Making Merton a Dementia Friendly Borough	Scrutiny Panel
Work Programme	
Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel	
11 June 2015	

Priorities for 2014/15 – Cabinet Member/Director presentation	Scrutiny Panel
Agreeing the 2014/15 work programme	Scrutiny Panel
Morden Leisure Centre Update	Scrutiny Panel
Circle Housing Merton Priory (Performance Monitoring)	Councillors
Performance Reporting(including focus on waste management and street scene)	Residents and Scrutiny Panel
2 September 2015	
Creating a Tourist Industry in Merton	Cabinet Member
Merton Adult Education	Resident
Draft Final Report – Housing Supply Task Group Report	Residents and Scrutiny Panel
Commercial Services - opportunities to maximise resources	DMT
Climate Change and Green Deal Task Group Progress Report	Scrutiny Panel
Performance Reporting(including focus on waste management and street scene)	Residents and Scrutiny Panel
11 November	
Budget/Business Plan Scrutiny (round 1)	Constitution
Results of the wheeled bin pilot	Residents and councillors
Morden Leisure Centre Verbal Update	Scrutiny Panel
Performance Reporting(including focus on waste management and street scene)	Residents and Scrutiny Panel
January 2016	
Budget and business plan scrutiny (round 2)	Constitution
Scoping Report – Commercial Services Task Group	DMT
Circle Housing Merton Priory – performance monitoring	Councillors
Executive Response and Action Plan – Housing Supply Task Group	Residents and Scrutiny Panel
Performance Reporting (including focus on waste management and street scene)	Residents and Scrutiny Panel
February 2016	
Morden Leisure Centre	Scrutiny Panel
Cycle Routes	Residents
Phase C Procurement programme (including parks, grounds, maintenance and waste)	Residents and DMT
Town Centre Regeneration Update (including updates on developments re: developing cycling provision)	Resident
Libraries Annual Report	Scrutiny Panel
Performance Reporting: environment and regeneration (including focus on waste management and street scene)	Residents and Scrutiny Panel
March 2016	
Morden Leisure Centre Verbal update	Scrutiny Panel
Climate Change and Green Deal Task Group	Wimbledon Society, Scrutiny Panel
Shared Services	DMT
Adult Skills and Employability Task Group – Progress on implementation of action plan	Scrutiny Panel

Cllr Holmes (Member Champion) To performance monitor delivery of the action plan resulting from the task groups review of adult skills and employability.	Scrutiny Panel
Commercialisation task group Update	DMT
Topic Suggestions 2016/17	Scrutiny Panel
Overview and Scrutiny Commission	
14 July 2015	
Borough Commander	Commission
Stop and Search	Councillor
Ensuring Council has positive impact on public health	Director Public Health
Report of the Immunisation Scrutiny Task Group	Healthier Communities O&S Panel
Report of the Shared Services Scrutiny Task Group	Commission
Analysis of Members' annual scrutiny survey 2015	Commission
Overview and Scrutiny Commission work programme 2015/16	Commission
Financial monitoring task group	Commission
15 September 2015	
Leader and Chief Executive – vision, key priorities & challenges for 2015/16	Commission
Customer contact programme	Commission
Overview of enforcement	Residents and councillor
Financial monitoring task group	Commission
24 November 2015	
Business Plan 2016/20 -information pertaining to round one of budget scrutiny	Constitution
Violence against women and girls	Commission
Travellers unauthorised encampment protocol	DMT
Financial monitoring task group	Commission
Health & Wellbeing Board response to recommendations of the Immunisation task group	Commission
28 January 2016	
Business Plan 2016/20	Constitution
Discussion of questions for the Borough Commander	Commission
23 March 2016	
Borough Commander	Commission
ASB Police and Crime Act	Resident and DMT
Volunteering	Commission
Funding the voluntary sector	MVSC
Financial monitoring task group	Commission
5 April 2016	
Scrutiny of the departmental savings weightings	Council
Monitoring the Council's equalities commitments	Commission
Customer contact programme	Commission
Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report	Commission
Review of arrangements for co-opted members	Commission

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Topic suggestions for 2015/16 municipal year from public that were not included in the work programme, with an explanation from the committee clerk where available:

Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel

School Run and Travel Plans

Suggested by the Mitcham Cricket Green Community and Heritage. Scrutiny Panel decided to not take this forward for scrutiny due to the limited influence that scrutiny could have on traffic congestion via schools and parents.

Transition between child and adult social care and health services

Suggested by Merton Centre for Independent Living. Scrutiny Panel noted that this would be a big issue to scrutinise in full. Panel agreed to use the themed meeting on corporate parenting to examine issues around the transition of looked after children between child and adult social care and health services. It also agreed to use the themed meeting on improving health outcomes to consider transition between child and adult health services.

Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Public Toilets

Suggested by a resident. Panel agreed to include it in the work programme but it was subsequently dropped.

20 mph Zones/Limits

Suggested by a resident. Panel agreed to not include because it had previously considered this issue as part of its 2013/14 and 2014/15 work programmes.

Fox control

Suggested by residents. Panel decided not to scrutinise because it is the council's policy to not take any action on urban foxes. The council does not carry out a treatment or service for foxes. This policy has been in place for many years and is in line with neighbouring local authorities in that it follows the guidance laid out by central government.

Planning

A number of topic suggestions have been received in relation to planning processes and planning law. Further topic suggestions have also been received in relation to planning and enforcement.

The Panel was mindful that some of the issues raised fall within the remit of the Planning Committee and therefore it may not be appropriate for the Panel to undertake a Scrutiny Review in this area. It therefore agreed that the issues raised should be forwarded to the department to respond to.

Public Transport

A number of topic suggestions were received in relation to public transport. The panel agreed to refer these issues to the Public Transport Liaison Committee to respond to as they fall within the remit of that Committee and may be more effectively dealt with in this forum, in discussion with Transport for London.

Basement conversions/dwellings

Suggested by members of the Wimbledon Society. Agreed not to scrutinise because this is a planning issue.

Converting commercial buildings to residential properties

Suggested by members of the Wimbledon Society. The Panel agreed to not review this item again as any applications for conversion would be considered by officers and the Planning Committee, if appropriate

Community Facilities

Suggested by members of the Wimbledon Society. The panel agreed that this was not a priority for inclusion in its work programme.

Overview and Scrutiny Commission

Equality Impact Assessments

Merton Centre for Independent Living raised concerns about a lack of consistency in the equality impact assessments that were provided as part of the budget process last year. The Commission asked the Head of Democracy Services and the Interim Head of Policy, Strategy and Partnerships to work together to review how equality impact assessments are prepared for the budget process and report to the Director of Corporate Services on proposals for improvement.

Consultation – accessibility to disabled people

Merton Centre for Independent Living raised concerns about the accessibility of the council's consultations to disabled people. The Commission agreed to await the outcome of the Judicial Review and take no further action at present.

Procurement

Suggested by Mitcham Cricket Green Community and Heritage. The Commission noted that the particular issue raised would be addressed through pre-decision scrutiny of such decisions in future and therefore agreed to not take forward for further scrutiny at that time.

Healthier Communities and Older People

The Panel aimed to incorporate all the topic suggestions into the work programme. However a significant number of issues arose during the year that had to be considered as a matter of urgency. As a result the following items were not considered due to insufficient space on the agenda:

Adult Safeguarding processes – Merton Centre for Independent Living

How do we support older people with physical and mental disabilities in the community – Suggested by Merton Centre for Independent Living.

From Mike Circelli

To the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration

Question: Why, over 10 months since the issue was first raised with the Council and site owners (Segro), are residents and children of The Path in Wimbledon being deprived of sleep on a nightly basis because of the poor management of noise and anti-social behaviour on the Nelson Trading Estate?

Reply: This relates to Question 4 and the ongoing case of noise from the Trading Estate.

The Council's Pollution Team has formal powers to regulate businesses and their impact on residents through the use of statutory nuisance legislation. A statutory nuisance is determined by a number of factors including the time of day, the frequency of noise, its duration and its impact.

I can confirm that pollution officers are currently investigating complaints from local residents about noise from late night vehicle deliveries and refuse collections and I understand that local councillors and residents have been kept up to date with developments by the investigating officer.

With regards to taking formal enforcement action, pollution officers can only take formal action if the noise is so bad that it amounts to a statutory nuisance. The current position is that officers take the view that they do not yet have sufficient evidence to take formal action and amongst other matters they are considering installing noise recording equipment in resident's properties to gather evidence.

The investigation of noise complaints is a complex matter and often circumstances change over a period of time i.e. complaints can be infrequent, noise can be intermittent and sound levels can go up and down. We are trying hard to resolve residents' complaints and negotiations are still continuing with local businesses. It is hoped that the matter can be resolved informally and to the mutual satisfaction of both the businesses and residents. If that does not happen and evidence is obtained that amounts to a continuing nuisance then I shall be pressing for enforcement action to be taken.

From Andrew Boyce

To Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance

Question: Does Council agree the importance of ward councillors, Cabinet members and Council officers listening to residents' concerns and requests, and acting on those in a timely, meaningful and effective manner?

Reply: Without doubt, Merton's 60 elected ward councillors, its cabinet members who look after specific portfolios and council officers play a critical role in listening to residents' concerns and requests and in responding to the issues they raise in a timely manner. The council has already set out its commitment to doing this in its engagement strategy in which it acknowledges the importance of connecting decision makers at the council with the communities it serves. Engagement with residents increases the council's understanding of their needs and helps to better shape the decisions of councillors and officers.

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PRIORITY COUNCILLOR QUESTIONS FOR COUNCIL 6 APRIL 2016

Councillor Linda Kirby to the Cabinet Member for Education

Could the Cabinet Member update me on the performance of our primary schools?

Reply: As at March 2016, 85% of our primary aged pupils are attending good or outstanding provision as designated by Ofsted. This compares to 84% nationally and 88% in London. Our headline Key Stage 2 performance (pupils reaching level 4+ in reading writing and maths) has risen from 78% in 2013 to 82% in 2015. This is currently above the national average (80%) but slightly below the London average (84%). Our recently published Standards Report (February 2016) provides more extensive details on the performance of our schools as well as on our work both to raise standards and narrow the gap in outcomes between our most advantaged pupils and some of the groups which have historically done less well, nationally and locally.

I would commend colleagues to read the detailed report, to acknowledge the good work being done locally by the very strong partnership which exists between the local authority and primary schools, a partnership we all hold dear. I am sure my Labour colleagues, and indeed I know some of my opposition colleagues, believe that whilst there should be diversity of provision the LA should hold a role as the democratically elected accountable local body in leading the standards agenda locally as well as advocating for the needs of all pupils and in particular the most vulnerable pupils.

Supplementary

Sadly it seems the Government are determined to force all schools to become Academies, something not in their manifesto and insulting to local government.. Can I ask what impact you think this undemocratic proposal will have on our young people.

Reply

It does greatly concern me that the Government are seeking to make all schools Academies. This will cost over £1B and there will be no additional funding provided to local authorities for conversion of schools. I am also concerned that Regional Commissioners are remote. If our schools don't do well, you can hold me to account and ask me questions. The loss of accountability does actually concern me. I think we should put standards above tinkering with structures. This will take a huge amount of school time for what I believe is an unnecessary change. I believe it's an unnecessary change as our schools in Merton have a good track record. I am delighted that 100% of our secondary schools are now rated Outstanding or Good, as are 85% of our primary schools. Local Government has a good record in terms of schools and I hope the Government reconsiders and that the Conservative Opposition join us in opposing us, like 5m of their colleague have in the Local Government Association.

Councillor Suzanne Grocott to the Cabinet Member for Finance:

When is the Council's new website expected to be launched?

Reply: Our current website is fit for purpose and has frequently been judged one of the best local government websites, including being judged the top London borough website for customer satisfaction last year. We are therefore determined not to rush into implementing a new system before we are ready and intend to take a careful approach to implementing a replacement system to ensure it provides lasting benefits to residents and the council.

Officers are currently working with General Dynamics IT Ltd (the contractor delivering the new website and associated technology to support the Customer Contact programme) to establish a launch date for the new website.

The website itself as a set of designed pages within an agreed structure is virtually complete. We took the decision, however, that to launch it without some of the associated functionality that made it possible for customers to complete new end-to-end transactions would be of little benefit to our residents.

For this reason we've delayed the release of the new site until the automation of processes within the waste service is complete so that the new site can be tested and used with some meaningful transactions.

General Dynamics have encountered a number of unanticipated connectivity issues in developing the technology which have delayed the programme generally. The automation of waste processes has also taken longer than expected by General Dynamics – this is because we took the decision to move all the processes and data into the new contact management solution so a greater degree of rework was needed. We believe this will be of benefit to residents (through smoother and more transparent transactions) and the council (through reduced system integrations) in the longer term but it has had a short term impact on timescales. We are using the levers within our contract with General Dynamics to ensure that these delays are corrected and the council is not financially disadvantaged.

Taking all this into account, we are currently working towards a tentative soft launch in April. But this is subject to user testing and relies upon there being no further connectivity or technology issues.

Supplementary

This is one of a number of projects running behind budget. Given the importance of this and other infrastructure projects, would the Cabinet Member admit to the inclusion of a project update report within the monthly monitoring report, with the inclusion of projected completion dates and status updates?

Reply

We have a very good website that we are very proud of. The reason for updating it is to create greater functionality so people can carry on doing transactions. It would not be right to change a very good website.

This is a simple question about the website and when it is ready it will go live. It will improve services to residents.

Councillor Sally Kenny to the Leader of the Council

Could he update me on how the council as a whole is responding to the public health agenda?

Reply: The Council has responded positively and comprehensively to the opportunities that have arisen since many aspects of public health transferred to local authorities in April 2013.

The main statutory duties for public health that were conferred on local authorities by the Health and Social Care Act 2012 include the following:

1. Strategic leadership and advocacy for health and wellbeing
2. Commissioners of services including sexual health, substance misuse and NHS Health Checks
3. Commissioning support to the local NHS
4. Oversight for health protection
5. Production of an independent Annual Public Health Report (APHR) and membership of the Health and Wellbeing Board

Merton's second Annual Public Health Report was published in autumn 2015, titled 'The Time for Prevention is Now: Keeping People Healthy Reduces Health Inequalities'. It celebrates the progress made in improving public health since the transition of public health from the NHS to local government, as well as the challenges that remain to embed prevention across the business of the council and partners in order to reduce health inequalities.

The council with its partners established the Health and Wellbeing Board, and took the opportunity to have a peer review of this function in the autumn of 2013, with a positive outcome. This Board has published two Health and Wellbeing strategies (2013 and 2015) since then, and at the heart of these strategies has been a determination to use all parts of the council and the wider Merton Partnership to have a positive impact on people's health, increasing life expectancy and reducing health inequalities. The refreshed 2015 strategy was entitled Merton the Place for a Good Life, and had a strong emphasis on all determinants of health. Examples of how the council is playing a leading role include:

- Public health working with planning and licensing officers to shape the availability of healthy options on our high streets
- Work across parts of the council on a whole systems approach to obesity, with support from public health across London

- Public health working with early years officers to reshape our pre-school offer and ensure a co-ordinated approach between the council and the NHS.
- Using the opportunity of the commissioning model for adult education to ensure that this model can increase access to learning for more disadvantaged people and thus reduce health inequalities in the longer term
- Working with officers in Future Merton to ensure that regeneration opportunities are health enhancing
- Work on volunteering with pilots such as the Good Neighbour Scheme

The council has been positively supporting the emerging east Merton model of health and wellbeing. Whilst this has been largely led and resourced by the CCG, there is a shared understanding that improving health and wellbeing requires much more than an NHS reactive response, and therefore the council with other partners has been engaged in shaping these broader interventions. This is now a key area of focus for the health and wellbeing board.

The council has taken on responsibility for commissioning a range of mandated services including sexual health, drug and alcohol services, smoking cessation, and children's services. The public health team has worked with officers across the council to ensure effectiveness and value for money in these services, with some active re-commissioning having taken place.

Specifically from 1st October 2015, the council took on commissioning of the Healthy Child 0-5 services, which includes health visiting and Family Nurse Partnership (more intensive support for young parents aged 19 and under), which provides an opportunity for closer working with our children's centres, and development of an integrated 0-19 pathway across the local authority and NHS. This has been taking place at the same time as the commissioning of a new provider of NHS community services for Merton (Central London Community Healthcare), where the council has worked closely with the CCG to ensure that this can lead to improvements in effectiveness for local residents.

The Director of Public Health maintains oversight for health protection, for instance assurance of cancer screening programmes, and development of an action plan to improve immunisation services in the borough which was recently reviewed at Scrutiny. This responsibility is exercised in close conjunction with officers with civil contingencies responsibilities and with the Local Resilience Forum.

Supplementary

Can I ask the Leader to outline how we will carry the One You Programme forward, and can I also ask how his own health drive is progressing.

Reply

Thank you for a timely supplementary question. Today, we hear the WHO reported throughout the media that there is an unprecedented march of diabetes throughout the world with nearly 1 in 11 adults suffering. With regard to the One You programme, adults are being encouraged to take a new online quiz that asks "how are you" and gives personalised recommendations based on the results and gives

help on taking action. More than half of 40 – 60 year olds taking the quiz have said they would like to change their lifestyle because of the advice it gave.

I have undertaken a fitness regime, including taking the stairs, using the Step Jockey programme, which all staff are encouraged to do here in the civic centre. I've gone from 102 to 93 kilogrammes.

Councillor John Bowcott to the Leader of the Council:

What is the difference between Merton 'taxing' local people to provide Council services and the Government 'taxing' local people to provide Council services when there is a national need to repair finances?

Reply by the Cabinet Member for Finance

Councillor Bowcott raises an interesting question about the most appropriate form of taxation for local expenditure. Under the current government, there has been a significant withdrawal of funding for councils from the government, which is now encouraging councils to raise council tax. Our primary concern is that council tax is a relatively regressive tax, compared to other alternatives, and we are one of only 8 councils in the country to have frozen our council tax under George Osborne's "precept".

We feel council tax should be set at a level that is fair, and represents the high cost of living under both the current government and the previous coalition government. We also note that these governments have sought to offer tax cuts to millionaires, have agreed paltry tax settlements from wealthy corporations such as Google and have done little to discourage tax avoidance by wealthy individuals, as exposed in the "Panama papers", while at the same time introducing measures like the bedroom tax for relatively less well off families, cutting benefits to people with disabilities, reducing local housing allowances, and so on.

Our concerns about the government's unfairness are shared by many others, including his Conservative colleague Ian Duncan Smith who acknowledged that the government's proposed cuts to disabled people's benefits are "not defensible in the way they were placed within a Budget that benefits higher earning taxpayers."

This government's ideological tax policies which benefit the rich while punishing disabled people, contrast with Merton's approach. We have kept council tax, a regressive tax which hits the poorest hardest, low and have protected those on the lowest income from the government's cuts to council tax benefit.

Supplementary

Would the Leader explain to this Chamber and to residents why he did not accept the opportunity presented by Boris that would allow an unchanged council tax and some extra funding for the truly needy. If he feels that he has already answered that question, as I suspect he might, could he also explain how he proposes to consult with residents about future levels of council tax as he suggested in the budget speech.

Reply

I think it's a bit rich to be lectured by a party that allows tax evasion and gives tax cuts to millionaires. It's rich to be lectured about fairness in taxation by a party that introduces the bedroom tax and tried to introduce extra charges for the disabled so bad that the quiet man spoke up and said "no, that's too much for me".

Councillor Fidelis Gadzama to the Cabinet Member for Community and Culture

Could he update me on the new arts space in Wimbledon library?

Reply: Arts Council England has awarded Merton Council a £62,000 grant which will be spent on refurbishing the back of Wimbledon Library to create a flexible out-of-hours performance and exhibition space. The award of the grant follows a successful bid from the council's libraries and heritage service.

The space will enrich the cultural offer to the people of Merton who will benefit from a broad arts programme. The project, led by Merton Council, is working in partnership with Wimbledon College of Art, Wimbletech, Attic Theatre Company, Wimbledon Bookfest, Merton Music Foundation and a range of other community organisations.

The refurbished space will be open this summer with a programme of events expected to be published in early June.

Supplementary

Can the Cabinet Member comment on how we have managed to keep all of our libraries open and can I congratulate him.

Reply

Thank you for congratulating me, but actually the success is down to hundreds of people working together in partnership. It started with the political will of this group, to make this initiative work, and the officers who created and manage the initiative, and the trade unions who helped to formulate a supportive role for our volunteers, and Merton Volunteer Centre, now part of MVSC who attracted and trained the volunteers and of course the army of volunteers from all over Merton, who work in our libraries every day, and our wonderful front line staff who organise them to best effect.

That's why we have the best regarded, most successful and cheapest libraries in London. That's why the Government task force has complimented us and actively sought our advice, included it in its reporting. That's why our service has won awards and why we may be up for some more in the future.

Councillor Janice Howard to the Cabinet Member for Finance:

Will the Cabinet Member confirm how many posts and in which Departments have been filled by non-permanent staff for a) more than 12 months and b) more than 24 months (i.e. 12 to 24 months and more than 24) and at what total cost for those

posts still filled on a temporary basis as at 31 March 2016 which have not been filled on a permanent basis for at least 12 months over the last two years?

Reply: Although, in most posts, staff will be recruited on a permanent basis, non-permanent staff may be appointed to fill roles in certain circumstances. For instance, non-permanent staff may be used to fill roles that need to be recruited quickly while a longer term appointment is made, roles for time-limited projects where a permanent post is not appropriate, roles that are business critical where applicants cannot be found to work on a permanent basis, and so on. Service Directors may also recruit temporary staff in the knowledge of a future restructure, in order to provide the same continuity of service while minimising redundancy costs to the council. There are also areas within the council where there are difficulties in recruiting to certain professional positions eg lawyers, engineers and Children's social workers.

The process for recruitment, as well as for any extensions, is managed by HR, which demonstrates the need for the post, and a decision to recruit is authorised by finance, HR and the service Director.

The data below is based on agency staff, through our main contracts or other agreed HR recruitment arrangements on or over £30 per hour as at end February 2016. The estimated gross cost of these posts for the financial year 2015/16 is £1.9M, or approximately £55k per post (including employer costs), which reflects the specialist and highly qualified nature of many of the posts. Costs are met from a range of sources including contributions from schools, external organisations and external grant funding.

Department	12 months	24 months	Total (placements 12 months and above)	Note
Number of posts				
Corporate Services	8	4	12	1
Children, Schools and Families	8	5	13	2
Community and Housing	2	0	2	3
Environment and Regeneration	7	0	7	4
Total	25	9	34	

Notes

1. Includes 10 lawyers for which we have had 3 unsuccessful recruitment campaigns.

2. Social care staff, as need to maintain safe caseloads for staff, whilst undertaking rolling permanent recruitment. Working with the recruitment team in HR, there has been a successful rolling campaign in Children's Social Care to recruit permanent social workers with a dedicated micro site, golden hellos, exploring overseas appointments etc. but a number of social workers do not want to become permanent members of staff, so we work with them to ensure they are on the best contract arrangements for us. There are additional pressures because neighbouring boroughs pay more than us for permanent and agency staff.
3. No permanent recruitment as restructure planned to reduce redundancies.
4. 6 are covering engineers positions.

Supplementary

The Administration committed itself publicly to reduce the number of consultants in our employ and yet we see it has spent £1.9m on temporary staff in the last year alone. How exactly does that square with the business plan?

Reply

Obviously we've tried to reduce the number of temporary staff where appropriate. There are times when it is not, for example when working on short projects where the cost of full time employment would not be appropriate.

Because of the very high cost of living in London, a number of highly qualified people prefer to work as a agency staff. We have to ask ourselves if we want lawyers, and children's social worker posts that are vital to safeguarding the vulnerable, to up sticks and leave and those posts not to be filled? Where we seek to reduce the numbers of people who don't work permanently for us, we have to balance the issues. It's not straightforward. You can see we have some very highly qualified, specialist people whom we need working for the council.

Councillor Marsie Skeete to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration

Could he update me on how the council dealt with the aftermath of Storm Katie?

Reply: The greatest material environmental impact of Storm Katie was in relation to the borough's street trees. Our arboriculture contractors were on the ground dealing with tree issues from around 3am on Easter Monday, soon after the first reports of issues were received from the Council's Highways Street Inspectors, the police and members of the public via the Council's out-of-hours emergency contact centre.

Some 20 fallen, damaged or dangerous trees were dealt with during the following 12 hours, representing the most urgent needs on the highway. Less urgent needs were processed during the following 48 hours. Some 60 trees were recorded as sufficiently affected by the storm to require professional intervention, with damage ranging from fallen trees to large fallen branches.

The Highways team received over 50 out-of-hours call outs for assistance, 26 of which related to trees on the Highway and footway. All calls were responded to by 8pm on Easter Monday. We had cleared all trees causing any obstructions on the

highway and footways. The clearing of the cut trees followed on Tuesday and where arrangements for footway repairs were needed should have been completed by our highways contractor by 1st April.

A small number of damaged trees in parks were identified by Greenspaces staff. Those that were considered to pose an elevated risk to park users were made safe swiftly by our contractors. The parks staff themselves removed a number of large branches that were affecting boundary fences and footpaths.

Damage was reported to the roofs of two parks buildings as a consequence of the storm. In one case, Sherwood Recreation Ground, the park was closed pending the structure being made safe. Both locations have subsequently been inspected by Corporate Facilities to assess what remedial action is appropriate

Supplementary

Can I ask the Cabinet Member how we prepare for such eventualities.

Reply

The key is to be prepared for a rapid response to these events, particularly with fallen trees or damaged trees, to be able to deal with them quickly.

Councillor Linda Taylor to the Cabinet Member for Finance:

What plans does the Cabinet Member have for the Council to hold a financial interest in the new Wimbledon Stadium should the application be agreed by the Mayor of London?

Reply: The Council has no plans to hold a financial interest in the stadium

Supplementary

The response very interesting, given that council officers tell me that an options appraisal is being prepared about whether the ownership of the site is in the interests of this Council. Can he explain how the Council can possibly afford to consider entering into this financial commitment but at the same time make swingeing cuts to adult services. How does the options appraisal tally with the Administration's complete refusal to consider retaining the freehold of sites already owned such as P4?

Reply

We look at things on a case by case basis. We're a business-like Council and look at what's best for council tax payers. We take a pragmatic approach. If there's something we can do to help AFC Wimbledon we would consider it. In this case there are no plans to hold a financial interest but if they want to talk to us in future, I would welcome that.

Councillor Peter McCabe to the Leader

Could he update me on what he has done to assist leaseholders on the Watermeads estate in Ravensbury?

Reply: I have worked with leaseholders and Circle Housing Merton Priory in order to address the leaseholders concerns regarding the potential costs of the planned works on their homes and the Watermeads Estate.

Following a request by myself and ward councillors, Circle have commissioned an independent report on the replacement of the roofs and communal electrics.

Remedial works will now go ahead on the roofs rather than a full replacement

Where leaseholders have previously replaced their own windows, and where those windows have the necessary certificates and approvals, those leaseholders will not now have to have their windows replaced again and will not be charged for the costs of the glazing in their neighbour's homes (however they will still be required to pay a contribution towards all frames and to the glazing in the communal areas). A final decision has still to be reached on the extent of the works on the communal electrics

I have agreed with Circle that the Section 20 Consultation process will not be finalised until the various leaseholder queries have been addressed.

Once the works and costs have been agreed, the invoicing to leaseholders will be delayed until April 2017.

Circle have agreed to continue the promise made at transfer to offer leaseholders an interest free two year period in which to pay the invoice for works. Further payment options are being explored with Circle, especially with regards to vulnerable leaseholders.

Supplementary

Does the Leader agree that the credibility of Circle Housing has been undermined by their disgraceful treatment of leaseholders, presented with a bill for £22,000 which has been stopped by residents and councillors working together?

Reply

We are very disappointed with regard to their approach to proposals about improvements to their properties and taking advantage of their legal ability to charge. I want to thank my ward councillor colleagues and the MP for Mitcham and Morden for their hard work, in engaging with the Leasehold Advisory Service, and giving some advice to residents. We will continue to hold Circle to account not only on these issues, but across the borough, and the regeneration of three estates. They have paused their approach and they are much better, and now know they must get it right from day one when engaging with residents.

STRATEGIC THEME PRIORITY COUNCILLOR QUESTIONS FOR COUNCIL 6 APRIL 2016

Councillor Tobin Byers to the Cabinet Member for Finance

Could the Cabinet Member update me on what analysis the council has carried out of the impact of the government's bedroom tax and benefits cap on our most vulnerable residents?

Reply: We are very concerned about the additional hardship that many of our residents may face as a result of reductions in their income.

The council's welfare reform and financial resilience group, chaired by Simon Williams, regularly considers the impact of welfare reform upon our residents in conjunction with voluntary sector organisations. We have looked at the impact of different welfare reforms and how we can work together to support residents. One initiative of the group is a joint arrangement with the council and CAB to pilot an additional Welfare Disability Benefits officer to support residents with advice and applications for welfare benefits, this initiative alone will see an estimated £267,000 per year in additional income for 97 customers interviewed and helped between July 2015 and December 2015.

We have been supporting residents affected by both the benefit cap and under occupation (bedroom tax) charge through additional payments of Discretionary Housing Payments. In 2015/16 we paid just under £257,000 to affected residents. 88 families affected by the benefit cap have been helped and 272 affected by under occupation (bedroom tax).

Supplementary

As the Cabinet Member will be aware, even though George Osborne has backed down on one of the more callous cuts in the budget, the Government is going ahead with other reductions to payments to thousands of disabled people. How would he characterise the Government's approach to disabled people who are out of work?

Reply

Not just disabled people who are out of work but in work also. I think the approach has been awful. We have seen six years of cuts to services for people with disabilities. It says something when Conservatives bring forward proposals that even Ian Duncan Smith cannot stomach any more, but we couldn't stomach them in the first place.

Councillor Charlie Chirico to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration:

Can the Cabinet Member tell me what assessment was made of the impact on local community safety of the dimming of street lights after 8pm in Trinity ward? Given I

have had residents in Trinity Road complain that their street is now considerably darker in the evenings and they feel less safe, what communication did the Council have with affected residents prior to this change?

Reply: A full impact assessment was made on local community safety and reported to the Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Panel before we started to roll-out LED street lighting in the Borough, which incorporated a dimming regime after the peak hours. This is in-line with the Council's policy to improve road safety, crime & the fear of crime and to increase the feeling of security during the night-time environment.

Our capital relighting programme is now solely focussed on replacing existing lighting with white LED (Light Emitting Diodes) which is more energy efficient than the current type of lighting used and virtually maintenance-free. This will significantly reduce future energy, carbon tax and maintenance costs to help meet the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy saving targets, Merton's Community Plan objectives and the Council's Carbon Reduction Commitment & Local Climate Commitment targets to reduce CO2 emissions. All new lighting is designed and installed to meet the current BS requirements and we have installed nearly 4,000 across the borough with minimal complaints. We have in fact received a number of compliments on the new LED lights, with requests for further roll-outs.

The new LED lighting in Trinity Road has a very good colour rendition, which will allow drivers and pedestrians to see objects and hazards in their true form and colour. (For example, the old orange lights mean that you see objects in greyscale). The White LEDs provide a clearer spectrum of light. It also has reduced glare as the light is directed downwards onto the road and pavement where it's required. The previous lighting had wasted light (light pollution) and directed light upwards giving the perception that the road was brighter but this is not energy efficient.

There is no statutory requirement to consult with residents on new lighting, but as with the other roads where new LED lighting has been installed, a night-time visit to Trinity Road was done at the beginning of February and our informed opinion is that it is very well lit.

Supplementary

My question is about the dimming of lights in Trinity and residents not being consulted by the Council beforehand. A number of residents of Trinity Road do not agree with the Council's idea of an informed opinion that that their road is well lit and when I raised this with officers, the fact that none of the ward councillors or resident had been consulted, I was told it would be an "administrative nightmare" to consult with residents no this. Does the Cabinet Member agree with the officer's view on the value of consultation with local residents? If not, would he at least agree to ensure that residents and councillors will receive at least advance notice of major changes to street lights in future?

Reply

In fact, we are talking about replacing street lights across the whole borough and the roll-out of LED lighting is not happening just in Merton, but happening across the country. People often don't like change and think it's a bad thing. But with the new LED lighting, natural colours and definition are observed by the person subject to the street lighting, rather than things being in a greyscale, which is what we have with the previous lighting.

On every ground, safety, environmental, reduction of use of energy and cost, LED lighting is a good thing. It has been a subject to a full report on local community safety to the Sustainable Communities O&S Panel which is our means of addressing these technical issues, of informing councillors. I wouldn't accept we have been poor on consultation. We're doing it across the borough. We've been in the public domain and everyone's doing it.

Councillor Katy Neep to the Cabinet Member for Education

In terms of the diversity of schools governing bodies, could the Cabinet member update us on the re-constitution of school governing bodies in line with the government's decision to reduce local authority representation.

Reply: All Merton maintained schools have reconstituted and each continues to have a Local Authority nominated governor representative. Following the recent announcement from central government of the proposed academisation of all schools, officers have begun to work through details of the implications for school governance and the future of Local Authority representation on governing bodies.

Supplementary

Given that LA representation on governing bodies has already been reduced could the Cabinet Member comment on the Government's recent decision to axe parent governor membership and how it will further reduce diversity on school governing bodies.

Reply

This causes me considerable concern in terms of accountability, because parents know their schools and are committed to them and give great time to them. I am concerned about diversity of school governing bodies and this change will not address that. It's important to keep parent governors on school governing bodies and this is a wrong decision by the Government. It seems that remoteness and lack of accountability is the order of the day for this Government.

Councillor Adam Bush to the Cabinet Member for Community Safety, Engagement and Equalities:

Can the Cabinet Member tell me what the Council is doing to respond to the Government's recent announcement about tackling inequalities across the public sector, in particular with regard to the recommendations from the Bridge Group on

socio-economic diversity in the civil service and the introduction of an 'inequality index' and name blind recruitment?

Reply by the Cabinet Member for Finance

The Bridge Group report (commissioned by the Cabinet Office and published in Feb 2016) entitled 'Socio-economic diversity in the Fast Stream' looked into social mobility in the Civil Service in relation to graduate recruitment.

A number of measures were announced by Matt Hancock, Minister for the Cabinet Office in response to the report, including:

- Rolling out name-blind recruitment across the public sector to make sure that jobs are awarded on merit alone – the NHS and Civil Service will roll out name-blind recruitment (i.e. names of candidates redacted) by 2020
- Publishing the pay ratio of the salaries between the median and highest paid employees – this 'inequality index' will allow taxpayers to hold the government to account
- Creating over 200,000 apprenticeships in the public sector by 2020, of which over 30,000 will be in the Civil Service
- Taking graduate recruitment outside of London by establishing regional assessment centres
- Urging Britain's major employers to take a similar approach to inequality

The current position at Merton is:

- The Council doesn't undertake a name-blind recruitment process at present. There is the opportunity to include such a process in a new recruitment system currently being procured.
- Pay ratios are already published on the internet via the Council's annual Pay Policy Statement, approved by full Council each year. Merton's current information is:
 - o Pay ratio of 1:11 between highest and lowest paid. Sadly the government have not yet made the civil service pay ratio public.
 - o Median pay ratio of 1:7
 - o Gender gap ratio is -2% or £539 (i.e. females earn on average more than men)
- The Council already operates an apprenticeship scheme. As part of the scheme priority is given to Merton's Looked After young people and young people that reside in the borough. We are reviewing recently announced legislative changes including an apprentice levy and apprenticeship targets for public sector bodies, to see how Merton might best respond.
- The taking of graduate recruitment outside of London is to address specific issues within the Civil Service who have working locations across the UK. Merton currently sources its graduate recruitment via the National Graduate Programme.
- Merton currently pays its staff the London Living Wage of £9.40 an hour
- The Council's recruitment process is designed to be non-discriminatory.

Supplementary

Can the Cabinet Member explain to me how the Council is currently monitoring levels of community cohesion here in Merton; given there has been no annual residents' survey since 2014. What is the Cabinet Member for Community Safety and Engagement doing to ensure how well people from different backgrounds are settling in Merton?

Reply by the Cabinet Member for Finance

Unfortunately the company who normally conducts the Annual Residents Survey was not able to do it last year, so we're actively pursuing a new way to engage in that information. Purely coincidentally, a few of us on both sides of the Chamber have been doing a little bit of research on community cohesion on doorsteps. The reality is that we live in a community that really gets on well with each other. We don't have major problems or tensions between different communities. Most people I speak to in all parts of the borough think that Merton is really a fantastic place to live, and one of the things they like about it is being in a mixed community that gets on well with each other.

Councillor Laxmi Attawar to the Interim Cabinet Member for Children's Services

Could the Cabinet Member update me on how she has been ensuring we continue to focus on delivering quality children's services those of our children most in need?

Reply: Merton's Safeguarding and Looked After Children Services were last inspected in January 2012. The overall effectiveness of these services and our capacity for improvement were both graded Good by Ofsted. Since 2012 our own local expectations and those of the government and our regulators have risen. In a challenging contextual environment over the last 4 years Merton's Safeguarding Board (MSCB) partners and the council have remained committed to our continuous improvement journey to ensure we are making the most difference for the most vulnerable children and young people.

Over the last 4 years we have made a number of significant changes to deliver performance and practice improvements and to ensure that we remain fit for purpose. Our continuous improvement achievements include:

- Strengthening MSCB governance with a stronger focus on driving improvement with more robust challenge to all agencies, to provide an increased focus on delivery, performance and impact.
- Refreshing our Children and Young People's Plan with continued prioritisation of improving outcomes for Merton's most vulnerable groups of children and young people.
- Establishing a Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) with key partner agencies.
- Delivering an effective Transforming Families programme which is successfully 'turning around' families with multiple challenges.

- Achieving strong partner and parent/carer engagement in delivering wide-ranging Children and Families Act reforms.
- Maintaining a strong relationship with Merton's CCG including jointly re-commissioning community health services for children with NHS and Public Health colleagues, strengthening the service offer for more vulnerable children and young people.
- Undertaking a Child Sexual Exploitation peer review, refreshing our CSE strategy, guidance and support tools and implementing our improvement action plan.
- Achieving strong partnership engagement with the 'Prevent' agenda involving key partners including police, schools, early years settings and faith communities.
- Maintaining our strong focus on children and young people: informing case work, practice and strategic planning through our User Voice Strategy.

Over the last 4 years we have worked hard to establish the prerequisites to deliver good social work practice. We have evolved our structures to deliver to larger numbers of children and families and meet the challenges of a range of public policy initiatives. In a difficult regional recruitment context, we have increased our number of social workers, provided reasonable caseloads and continue to focus on reducing agency rates. We will maintain our sharp focus on this going forward.

This significant change programme has led to improvements in key performance indicators:

- The majority of Single Assessments are completed in 31 - 40 days (42%) with 90% completed with the statutory 45 days. Merton has the third highest completion rate in 45 days amongst its statistical neighbours and 6th highest in London.
- 100% of Merton's Troubled Families were 'turned around' in phase one.
- Merton had improved court proceeding timeliness from 72 weeks in 2011/12 to 24 weeks in Quarter 4 2013/14.
- 95% of all LAC were placed in good or better placements (March 2015) and none where in inadequate
- 75% of all LAC are placed within 10 miles of their home (2014/15).
- Since the establishment of a dedicated Access to Resources team in October 2011 we have approved 39 new in house foster carers (December 2015).
- Year on year we have improved the average time from receiving court authority to place a child and matching them with an adoptive family (Scorecard indicator A2) Merton's three year rolling average for this indicator is 193 (2012/15) - this is better than the national average of 217 days (2011/14).
- Merton has reduced First Time entrants from 188 (2009/10) to 88 (2013/14) and only 60 (2014/15)
- 96% of Merton's Youth Justice clients are in Education, Training or Employment (March 2015)

We continue to be ambitious to do better and have a continuous improvement approach as a department and partnership. We will continue to provide leadership and governance through our MSCB partnership identifying and addressing our shared priorities for improvement to maintain our ambitions for all our services to be good or better.

Supplementary

Could the Cabinet Member outline our approach in our safeguarding of all of Merton's children.

Reply

As you saw earlier, yes we've received an award but that was in partnership with lots of other agencies, and that's certainly the way we'll be moving in future when safeguarding our children, including those with disabilities. We have some fantastic partnership working going on, as I've seen in the last few weeks. This includes Public Health, the NHS, and the voluntary sector. Where appropriate, as we move forward, we'll look at the private sector as well because that's the way the Government is moving. We need to look at if our ambitions are achievable and ensure our outcomes are measurable. We also need to focus on training and retention of social workers.

I would like to thank Councillor Katy Neep for the initiative that she took at the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Panel in getting us to go into groups and look at our role as corporate parents. That's probably the most important way forward for all of us to remember that our role is one of corporate parent.

Councillor Michael Bull to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Cleanliness and Parking:

How much parking revenue has been lost as a result of the recent spate of thefts from parking meters in the borough?

Reply: In the period 24 August 2015 to 13 January 2016 a total of £22k has been stolen from parking pay and display (P&D) machines. The thefts occurred due to criminal damage caused by the use of electric drills used to drill into the P&D machines leading to small amounts of coins being stolen from each machine.

As a counter measure we have introduced reinforcing measures to the P&D machines which have stopped the criminals from being able gain access to the P&D machines. We have also increased the frequency of cash collections from P&D machines, so reducing the amount of monies in each machine should thieves manage to gain access.

These measures have greatly reduced the thefts and no losses have been reported since mid January.

Supplementary

£22,000 is a huge amount of revenue to have lost in a matter of a few months. Given the expense to the tax payer, what efforts is the Council making to try and claw back this money from the thieves and how confident is she that Merton will be able to protect against this crime in the future?

Reply

This is something that's happening in other boroughs as well. I don't know if the thieves have been caught although this certainly went to the Police. The moves that we are making, obviously you know that we have cashless parking in car parks. I think it's important that people do still have choice about how they pay. We are monitoring this, we haven't had any more thefts since January and there are more people collecting cash more frequently, which has a cost. I'm glad to say at the moment that it's not necessarily stopped but we are keeping a close eye on it.

Councillor John Dehaney to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Services and Parking

Could the Cabinet Member comment on what she is doing on ensuring that parked cars do not impede disabled residents access to pavements in the borough?

Reply: Having received a number of concerns from Merton's residents and pedestrians regarding vehicles obstructing pedestrian access on the pavement, the footway parking policy has been revised and the changes will be implemented from 4 April 2016.

From 4 April 2016 footway parking will only be allowed at certain locations and then only if a minimum gap of one metre has been left on the pavement for wheel chair users and pedestrians to pass the vehicle. Vehicles parked inconsiderately by not leaving a minimum gap of one metre on the footway, will be issued with a PCN.

Vehicles are not permitted to park on grass verges and as such will be issued with a PCN if parked on a grass verge.

There are 50 roads within the borough where it has been decided we will not enforce this policy because the narrowness of the road, coupled with the narrowness of the footway makes it impossible to force vehicles to leave a 1m gap between the vehicle and the property boundaries, without impeding the flow of traffic.

Supplementary

Could the Cabinet Member advise how this will be enforced across the borough.

Reply

This is something that's being just introduced now and we have a bedding in process. I know that there are some concerns that people have raised about wheelchairs passing through, people pushing buggies for some example. We are not enforcing for the next few weeks, we're looking at people's concerns and putting a note on windscreens to let people know that it will be enforced in future. Some people have contacted me, but I will be having meetings with officers from next week to look at concerns raised. If you have any, please contact me or the Head of Parking.

Councillor Stephen Crowe to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration:

Could the Cabinet Member please provide a ward by ward breakdown of serious accidents in Merton that involve cyclists for the most recent year for which figures are available?

Reply: Accident records are released to the Council up to four months after any reported accidents.

Our latest data for the most recent annual period covers 1st November 2014 – 31st October 2015.

In this period, there were 6 serious accidents involving cyclists. Thankfully none were fatal.

Of these 6 accidents, 4 occurred in Colliers Wood ward, 1 in West Barnes ward and 1 in Ravensbury ward.

There were no other reported serious accidents involving cyclists for the rest of Merton.

Officers will assess the incidents reports to determine the cause of such accidents and where appropriate, recommend improvements to the cycle network as part of the borough's cycle infrastructure investment.

The Council also has an excellent programme of road safety education in schools, training for cyclists and specialist cycle awareness training for HGV drivers to ensure that Merton is as safe a place as possible to encourage cycling as a sustainable transport choice in Merton.

Supplementary

Thankfully there were no cycling fatalities but I see that there have been six serious accidents and we're all agreed that it's six too many. Could the Cabinet Member outline plans for 16/17 for new cycle quietways and similar facilities, and for improvements to existing facilities.

Reply

The main cycle quietway we'll be working on in the next year is the one from Clapham Junction to Wimbledon Town Centre, and the significant works along the Wandle Way, then coming out through the Poets Roads to cross Haydons Road. There will be some junction changes at Haydons Road which will have to be consulted upon with local residents. Then it's anticipated the quietway will go up South Park Road and part of the issue there is how we allow access to residents whilst reducing some of the through traffic, making it safer for cyclists to use that road as well as local residents. These are particular issues that we must get right, and consult with residents.

There is a quietway, mainly funded by Kingston, that will be coming into Raynes Park and we're just consulting with local residents about the alterations needed there. But that will end before it reaches Coombe Lane. To take that on, we would have to seek to prioritise future cycle expenditure to be able to link it with our other quietway that goes from Raynes Park to Wimbledon Town Centre.

There are also extensive works continuing to put in a new cycle way at Croydon Road from Croydon into Mitcham. This has been agreed by the Mitcham Common Conservators. This should make cycling and walking along Croydon Road safer than it has been in the past, in an area where there have been significant accidents in the past.

Councillor Dennis Pearce to the Cabinet Member for Community Safety, Engagement and Equalities

Could the Cabinet Member update me on the work of the council-backed interfaith forum and how the different communities in Merton work together for the good of all residents?

Reply: Merton has a diverse religious and cultural mix and the Faith and Belief forum brings together people from different religious backgrounds to celebrate this diversity, promote understanding and join together to tackle issues of mutual concern.

The borough marked Interfaith Week in November 2015 with a number of different events. There was a discussion about 'Faith in the Media' held in the Council Chamber with guest speakers including Dr Chris Allen from the University of Birmingham and Helen Freeman, Principal Rabbi from West London Synagogue. There was also a very popular afternoon tea event organised by the Muslim Women of Merton and held at the Islamic Community Centre where attendees sampled different teas from around the world.

The Faith and Belief Forum has also worked with Faith in Action and the YMCA to support homeless people in Merton by providing venues and volunteers. It has also coordinated support to the Food Banks in the borough. Merton's religious communities have also come together as part of the borough's offer of support to refugees from the conflict in Syria.

Supplementary

Will the Cabinet Member join with me in extending our sympathies to the Ahmadiyya community based in St Helier ward on the recent tragic killing of one of their community last week.

Reply

I would like to express my sincere sympathy on behalf of all members of the Council, from all parties, to the Ahmadiyya community.