

Merton Council

Council

14 September 2016

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1. From Mark Gale

To the Cabinet Member for Finance

Why does Merton Council allow and even promote illegal fly posters in particular Circus & Fairs? For example the recent Mitcham Status Fair which last year was more flytipping of posters than flyposting but again this year they flypost Council branded posters on phone boxes, empty shop fronts, charity collection boxes.

Reply: TO BE ANSWERED BY THE CABINET MEMBER FOR STREET CLEANLINESS AND PARKING

Merton Council does not allow or promote illegal fly posting within the borough. Whenever possible the council will take action against fly posting using the “Unauthorized display of advertisements (flyposting) Contrary to Section 224(3) Town and Country planning Act 1990 I Section 43(1) Antisocial Behaviour Act 2003’.

We are currently undertaking investigations with respect to the Mitcham Status Fair whose poster campaign was not carried out with council approval.

Supplementary

Why can't you address the problem? You allow these known fly posts every year, every month. Is this allowed, as I'd like to advertise my business across the borough?

Reply

I apologise for the experience you've had with fly posting. It isn't council policy to allow it and the Mitcham Status Fair that we're discussing, we are investigating the fly posting they've done this year. If you see fly posting, please let me know and we will continue to investigate and prosecute.

2. From N R Davis

To the Cabinet Member for Finance

Please will the Council advise what budget is allocated for administrative staff training? Further, will they advise Borough residents and taxpayers, what level of responsibility is expected from Director employees, with regard to monitoring junior staffs' written and oral communication?

Reply

The Council has centralised its budget for learning and development (with the exception of social workers which is held in Children Schools and Families). The budget is allocated based on individual needs identified through appraisals and one to ones; service development, organisational development and development as a result of the Target Operating Models of each the departments.

The Council has standards in relation to communication that all staff need to adhere to.

Directors and managers will sign off some letters, however templates are available to ensure there is consistency and structure to letters sent out to the residents and customers.

3. From Sandra Vogel

To the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Environment and Housing

When will Merton Council fulfil the commitment made by the Head of futureMerton to replace the chalk stick bollards installed on Cricket Green in June 2015 as a "temporary measure" with more sensitive measures suitable for the Conservation Area?

Reply

The chalk-stick bollards in Mitcham Cricket Green were a measure installed quickly to deter travellers. Whilst we agree that a more sensitive long-term solution, such as timber bollards, would be better, aesthetically, for the Conservation Area, implementation is dependent on funding and prioritisation within the Council's highway programme. It was anticipated that resources could have come from a Townscape Heritage Lottery bid which was unsuccessful, or from planning contributions from developments in the area. However such schemes have yet to commence development. At present there is no available resource in the current programme.

4. From Tony Burton

To the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Environment and Housing

Will Merton Council publish the pre-application advice it provides to applicants as part of the information on planning applications provided on Planning Explorer as a matter of routine or will it continue to require this information to be obtained only by separate Freedom of Information requests?

Reply

The Council is currently considering its position on planning application information that it has previously treated as confidential and a report is currently being drafted for consideration. Developers often request that pre- application information is not released for financial confidentiality reasons, however, the council recognises that there can be public interest at that early stage. The public's views are only sought through consultation at the formal application stage when the decision is ultimately made. It is also relevant that there is a significant amount of pre-application requests that amount to nothing, as developers are often seeking advice prior to considering the potential purchase of a site. The pre-application process is not part of the formal application process so for the time being such information may only be released under a freedom of information request.

5. From John Davis

To the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Environment and Housing

Following life-threatening damage to tree roots at Three Kings Piece Mitcham when grass was tarmacked, will Merton Council

- a) publish its policy on tree root protection for highway schemes and planning applications,
- b) explain how a) was implemented in this particular case,
- c) detail actions taken against policy breaches?

Reply

The reported damage to the tree at Three Kings Piece is evident from 2014 and does not appear to be related to the recent footpath / bus stop accessibility works.

- a) The Council's policies relate to planning applications and development proposals this does not apply to works undertaken under the Highways Act but the Council as landowner does undertake consultation between teams and public notices where appropriate.
- b) The root protection zone for the tree at Three Kings Piece included a substantial amount of the existing highway, for which the tree has survived. It was considered that the footpath, with its shallow sub-base, would not be detrimental to the root structure considering the presence of the existing road in the same zone, the Council will monitor the situation.
- c) Enforcement of tree legislation is undertaken in relation to the Town & Country Planning Act 1990 as per a) not relevant to highway matters.

6. From Andrew Morgan

To the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Environment and Housing

Does Merton Council have any plans to tarmac or build or otherwise remove grass on any of the registered town greens or other green spaces in Mitcham Cricket Green Conservation Area, following the tarmacking without public consultation of Three Kings Piece and Cranmer Green?

Reply

No, there are no further works planned for the area.

7. From Joan Keddie

To the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Environment and Housing

Which, if any, of the registered town greens in the Borough are controlled by a scheme of registration made under either the Metropolitan Commons Act 1886-1898, or the Commons Act 1899? Will Merton Council publish the scheme?

Reply

The Registers and Maps of Common Land and Town/Village Green (showing registered land) are public registers under the Commons Registration Act 1965 and are available for inspection free of charge via the Local Land Charges section – a list is provided below. You asked if these are controlled by a scheme of registration made under either the Metropolitan Commons Act 1886-1898 and probably meant

the 'scheme of regulation'. The borough does not hold this information; the management and maintenance of these spaces are covered by the Council's overall greenspaces management and maintenance regime.

The following are registered as Town or Village Greens within Merton:

VG4 – Three King's Piece
VG5 – Canons Piece
VG6 – Figges Marsh
VG7 – Upper Green
VG8 – Lower and Cricket Green

8. From Maryrose Greenhough

To the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Environment and Housing

Please would the Council act to prevent a road traffic accident by installing traffic calming measures and pavement barrier on Wellington Road, thereby reducing the speed of commercial vehicles associated with Wellington Works industrial estate which pose a daily threat to hundreds of children using the school, nursery and park?

Reply

The council receives a number of requests for traffic calming measures and we have to assess and prioritise schemes based on existing safety data. As part of our safety programme we do pay especial attention to areas outside of schools. We will add Wellington Road to our programme for an initial investigation. Local ward Members will be contacted as soon as the issue has been assessed.

Supplementary

Why does Wellington Road have absolutely no traffic calming measures, or safety measures whatsoever, and yet the Priory Primary School has every traffic calming measure available, e.g. barriers, 20 mph speed limit, road signs, speed bumps, digital speed readers and they don't have a commercial industrial estate at the end of the road?

Reply

In terms of street management we get a number of requests across the borough, especially outside schools and I do take these things extremely seriously. The Council has embarked on a number of traffic calming schemes outside schools. We will take away the question and look at this further and respond further on addressing the issue. Please rest assured we take this seriously but do get a number of requests across Merton.

9. From Sara Sharp

To the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Environment and Housing

Can the Council please explain why its planning committee set a dangerous precedent in choosing to ignore the views of over 100 residents and associations, and the organisation charged with business improvement – Love Wimbledon – by

recently approving the metal clad design of the Premier Inn development on Wimbledon Broadway?

Reply

The application was approved by the Planning Committee following consultation and a redesign to reduce the amount of the proposed metal cladding. All of the material considerations were considered by members of the committee and contained within the report including responses from residents. It is not possible to provide individual members' views on why they voted the way they did on the matter, as it is a collective vote when the decision is made

Supplementary

My question is about the Premier Inn. I would like to ask the Cabinet Member why the Development Control Team didn't take up the developer's suggestion or proposal to put brick on the side, fully on the side, as requested by the more than 100 residents and resident associations who objected to the application.

Reply

Planning Officers have to consider a wide range of different issues and consider each application on its merits. I understand Ms Sharp has already been given a response on these issues in relation to brickwork. The Planning Committee must consider all issues and come to a decision. I am happy they did, and I respect the work they undertake in the borough and they must make decisions in line with the Planning Framework.

10. From Dan Goode

To the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Environment and Housing

What progress has been made in preparing the long term strategy for keeping Mitcham clean and tidy, promised by Mike Brunt as part of his election campaign earlier this year?

Reply: TO BE ANSWERED BY THE CABINET MEMBER FOR REGENERATION AND STREET CLEANLINESS

The council has developed an integrated approach to tackling litter that encompasses cleansing operations, enforcement and education. The street cleaning team work closely with our in house enforcement team to deal with fly tipping and littering. Evidence for fly tips is gathered and passed through to the Enforcement team for further action. So far this year our in-house enforcement team has issued 162 FPNs for small fly tips using the littering regulations. This is double the amount of FPNs issued throughout the whole of last year. Over 100 fixed penalty notices having been issued over the last four months in the Mitcham area.

We have increased the frequency of visits by our enforcement contractor Kingdom to deal with littering in the town centre. This is being supported by a greater educational presence from our Engagement team. Our in house enforcement officers carry out regular monitoring of the area to ensure that Commercial businesses are complying

with legislation and have collection contracts in place as well as dealing with abandoned vehicles.

Residents are regularly reminded of the Councils bulky waste service through leafleting in areas where there is a high turnover.

There has been increased collaborative working with Circle Homes in relation to enforcement dealing with fly tipping activity on their estates.

I would like to thank newly elected Councillor for Figges Marsh ward, Cllr Mike Brunt, for already taking a key role in these matters. Cllr Brunt sat on the Scrutiny committee which undertook pre-decision scrutiny of the proposed new contract and he subsequently sat on the "call-in" that agreed to take this process to the next stage. I am confident this new long term strategy will result in a cleaner Merton that remains affordable to local council tax payers and I would like to thank all Councillors for the involvement to date.

**11. From Jacqueline Robinson
To the Cabinet Member for Education**

Why is a Harris free school replacing the day care centre for disabled people and taking Abbey Primary school's playing field for themselves? Likewise, why is High Path Estate targeted for a high crime rate though average?

Reply: TO BE ANSWERED BY THE DEPUTY LEADER

In early 2015 the Secretary of State for Education gave 'pre-opening' approval to the Harris Federation for the establishment of a new secondary school in the Wimbledon area. Although not the decision maker on the matter, the council recognised that there is a 'basic need' for secondary places in the borough, including in the Wimbledon area where we expect significant increased demand for secondary school places.

While the administration does not support the government's free school policy, we recognise that the government has a mandate to decide on these issues, and we have focused on ensuring that the provider is suitable for the borough, and that any new school is located in an area of the borough where there is demand for school places that cannot be satisfied in other ways, and will not lead to a harmful impact on other schools. The council has, therefore, been supporting the Department for Education (and its agency the EFA) to find a suitable site for the new school, while, separately, commissioning work to expand at least one existing secondary school in the east of the borough.

The council and EFA have undertaken extensive site searches for the new school and a preferred site has been identified. This includes a number of separate plots, including plots that would need to be purchased from owners not in the public sector. Because negotiations with those third parties have not yet been completed, the council is not in a position to confirm details of the site because of the need for commercial confidentiality. This response provides as much detail as is considered prudent at this stage, therefore, although the council intends to provide fuller detail as soon as possible.

In terms of the approach we would take if a site required by the EFA included an existing council facility, our starting point would be that the existing facility should be fully re-provided on an alternative local site and continue to provide the range of services as is currently the case. The council has given a commitment to fully involve current service users and carers in any re-provision exercise.

In respect of Merton Abbey we would like to offer reassurance that there is no proposal for Harris Wimbledon to 'take over the field'. The council has approached the governors of Merton Abbey Primary School regarding whether there could be an agreement for part of the grassed area of the school playing field to be converted to a good quality synthetic surface and used by Harris Wimbledon at set times of the school day, with the details to be negotiated. We are also looking more widely at off-site playing field use for the pupils at Harris Wimbledon School, as has frequently happened elsewhere when new schools have been built in London.

Merton Abbey's school governors have raised some concerns regarding the proposal and council school organisation and school improvement officers are working with the school to work through both the challenges and potential benefits that will arise should a school provider with a good reputation for improving educational outcomes such as the Harris Federation (which already has two high schools in Merton, both of which have just reported record exam results) open a new school in the heart of our borough.

Supplementary

Why is High Path estate targeted as having a high crime rate, although average, which is given as a reason for regeneration?

Reply

The question that we had originally been asked was regarding the high school on the High Path estate. I know that residents have expressed concerns about crime and antisocial behaviour, and one of the advantages of having a really good school in the area is to educate people and ensure good discipline to improve the quality of life of residents in that area. The third question was about the wider regeneration and not really within my remit. The Council will be working with Affinity and Circle to ensure that any regeneration will be right for the area, offers people a better environment for their families to live, enjoy and grow up. We have to make a determination on planning matters.

12. From Nicole Mckenzie

To the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Environment and Housing

Why are Merton Council not looking after the high street and allowing one type of service to dominate it (i.e. multiple solicitors with garish signage)? Especially as these services are not benefiting the local residents.

Reply

The council has made significant investments in high streets across the borough. Examples include the refurbishment of Leopold Road that the council secured as part of a planning legal agreement; providing shopfront improvement grants to support shopkeepers and other small businesses in making their premises – and thereby their street - more attractive; working with the Mayor of London's team on the recent revitalisation of the street scene and public realms in Mitcham and Colliers Wood, and the forthcoming investment in more than 35 shops and businesses in London Road, Morden, which will restore an Art Deco shopping parade to its former glory.

The council's planning policies encourage a mix of shops, restaurants, cafes and other services in all of our town centres and major high streets where this is allowed by the planning system. For example, one of our planning policies prevents too many new hot food takeaways opening up on high streets where there are already several takeaways to choose from because of the harm that could be caused to public health. However these shops and other buildings are privately owned and, like people's homes, it is the decision of whoever owns the building as to which brand of supermarket or brand of coffee shop or solicitor will rent a particular shop; it is not controlled by the planning system. We would encourage local residents to support the shops and services that they like to see on their high street by shopping local, thereby allowing these businesses to thrive and compete for space.

13. From Laura Hepburn Murray To the Cabinet Member for Education

Why have Merton Council not consulted all Wimbledon residents about the proposed high school on the High Path Estate? Discussions are to take land from a primary school, demolish a recreation centre, and church – whilst being significantly smaller than recommended guidelines, coupled with a greater need in the Mitcham area?

Reply: TO BE ANSWERED BY THE DEPUTY LEADER

Please see the response to q 11. Additionally:

In respect of consultation referenced in the above question, the decision to open a new school has already been taken by the government, after appropriate consultation. The issue of the borough's requirement for a new school has been widely debated for a number of years, and there have been many opportunities to make comments. However, the need for commercial confidentiality has inevitably restricted the amount of consultation specifically about the site. Limited consultation with key stakeholders has been undertaken to date, but fuller consultation will be undertaken in due course.

The Harris Federation has already carried out consultation in advance of submitting their application to the government for a new school, and will undertake statutory consultation in respect to the proposed opening of the school, not possible to date in the absence of a named site. There will also be statutory consultation during the planning application process. These consultation processes will enable local residents to put forward their views. As noted above, users of the day centre and

their carers will be fully consulted on its re-provision. The council has no plans to consult 'all Wimbledon residents' over and above the consultations noted above.

In respect of the proposed new school being 'significantly smaller than recommended guidelines', a high level feasibility study has confirmed that all the internal spaces that any new school is entitled to under government design guidance can fit on the site. However, there is a challenge with regard to outside space.

Many schools in urban areas cannot meet the DfE guidance for external space hence we are working with the governors of Merton Abbey Primary School (see question 11 above) and looking at playing fields in close proximity to the new school. It should further be noted that there are many schools rated 'good' or 'outstanding' which operate successfully on constrained sites, including schools already operated by the Harris Federation, and the EFA, who are ultimately responsible for this matter, are satisfied that a good education can be provided to children. Given the high quality of the Harris Federation as a provider, and our faith in the abilities of the governors at Merton Abbey, the administration agrees.

With regard to the location, the proposed site is in the ideal general location for a new school, being accessible to Wimbledon, Colliers Wood and to the north of Mitcham. It is essential to have additional places to serve Wimbledon residents as there is no expansion of existing secondary schools in this area, where there has been the highest need to expand our primary schools to meet demand.

14. From Jane Lewis To the Cabinet Member for Education

Some Rutlish students have a long standing reputation within the local community of persistent antisocial behaviour. Please comment on how the closure of the John Innes Park pathway will affect already strained relationships between Rutlish School and the community of which it is a part?

Reply

Rutlish is a popular school rated as Good by Ofsted and it continues to deliver good results at GCSE and A level as well as providing well for young people's well being and development as young citizens. The council would challenge the allegation of persistent antisocial behaviour by Rutlish students.

With regard to the impact of the closure of the John Innes pathway, given that the council intends to replace the existing path, we cannot see any potential greater negative impact from Rutlish students around John Innes Park and Rec. In fact, the closure of the gates during extended school hours, as well as protecting the school from potential intruders, will help to ensure students remain on the school site.

Supplementary

I would like the council to further comment on the position of the leadership at Rutlish School and their ability to promote a pivotal and positive role, with regard to the closure of the pathway.

Reply

We have confidence in the leadership at the school. For the safety of the children, the best thing to do is close the path while the school is in session.

15. From Penny Walton To the Cabinet Member for Education

What measures has the school put in place previously to secure the two sites separately and why have these not been effective? Other schools that are located across multiple sites are able to implement satisfactory measures, why has this not been possible at Rutlish School?

Reply

The position is relatively unique for Rutlish School in that to operate the school it is unavoidable for the majority of its 1,300 students to regularly pass through the path at all lesson changeovers and lunchtimes, with the main playground and dining hall being on opposite sides of the path.

Other 'split school schools' we found in our research only had some accommodation on another site and therefore it was possible for students to move across the sites at set times in a safe, organised way.

The only effective measure other than to close the path is to improve the CCTV, which only provides a measure of additional security and has already been undertaken, or to employ full time security staff at the path gates. However, this would involve the cost of employing at least two staff throughout the school day, and would still not guarantee safety as it would remain difficult to ensure no unauthorised person 'slipping through' at times when several hundred students pass over the path at lesson changeover.

Supplementary

I am still not clear what measures have already been put in place before this step was taken. Why were obvious and inexpensive measures not taken, e.g. signage on the path to indicate no access via the path, and why do the school gates frequently stand open and unattended when not in use between lessons. Can you explain that?

Reply

We are still working on signs. I'm sure there will be something there soon. There was a full consultation on the closure of the footpath. We have to move forward.

16. From Julie White To the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Environment and Housing

Affinity Sutton is shortly taking over CHMP. What due diligence has Council carried out to ensure that the governance of CHMP will honour High Path's Residents Offer and the '91 Promises' and is Council permitting CHMP's planning application to be purposely delayed so this transaction can be completed?

Reply

Ever since stock transfer took place, the council has met with CHMP on a quarterly basis to review progress against the promises made at the time of transfer. These meetings have involved senior officers and the Cabinet member. There are also regular reports by CHMP to the relevant scrutiny panel.

The council is in discussion with CHMP and the Circle group more widely about their proposed changes to governance arrangements. These discussions are seeking to maximise local accountability and decision making within any new arrangements.

The council's understanding is that that CHMP's planning application stands whatever the governance arrangements are within CHMP/Circle/Affinity Sutton at the time.

17. From Anthony Fairclough To the Cabinet Member for Education

What measures will be put in place to ensure that the construction of the new Harris Academy Wimbledon school doesn't significantly impact the pupils and staff at Merton Abbey Primary, further to Merton's letter to parents on 16.08?

Reply

Please see the response to q11 from my colleague Councillor Allison who is the lead Cabinet member on assets. In relation to the issues you raise under my portfolio:

Subject to the proposed scheme going ahead, the construction of the new school will be project managed by EFA staff. During the construction phase, it would be common project management practice to ensure that risks and other disruption to neighbouring accommodation, in this case Merton Abbey Primary School and the local community, would be carefully managed through close liaison with all stakeholders. As well as careful management of the challenges we would hope that the primary pupils could benefit through cross curricular projects as a number of our expanded primary schools have done in recent years.

18. From Carl Quilliam To the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health

What impact assessment has been done for the users of the High Path Community Centre for the moving of the centre and its services to a new site?

Reply

The social care staff involved with High Path know the people who use the service very well and many have experience of supporting people through other moves when centres have closed or been re-furnished. We are therefore in a good position to understand the potential impact of a move to another site. Other staff from across the service and from the Learning Disabilities team will be available to support the service users if needed.

19. From Vincent Bolt

To the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health

Will the council take into account views of residents or the outcome of any impact assessment when making a final decision on the future of the High Path Community Centre?

Reply

In coming to a view on the school site the Council and its partners, the government's Education Funding Agency (EFA) and Harris, have taken into consideration a range of factors including the need to ensure all our young people have access to a school place at a good local school and the impact on current users of High Path. Due to the nature of the process which includes sensitive commercial negotiations, it was not feasible to undertake full consultation in advance of site purchase agreements being finalised but users will be fully involved in consultation on how services at the new centre will look.

20. From Emily Robertson

To the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health

What measures are the council putting in place to support users of the High Path Community Centre who may now have to travel further to the centre?

Reply

Most people who attend High Path are taken to and from the Centre by our transport services, and these arrangements will continue once the new centre opens. There are a handful of people who currently make their own way to High Path, and they will be supported to learn the route to the new centre, or be offered transport if they prefer.

21. From Ian Veacock

To the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Environment and Housing

For ex-council estates proposed for regeneration, how will the council ensure demolition is not permitted unless a replacement property has at least the same usable space as the existing residence? (Floor to ceiling height, wall & door total running length including outbuildings, roofspace, gardens, garages, used for their present purpose).

Reply

Should regeneration of estates go ahead, demolition would not be permitted without a planning consent for new replacement homes. The design detail and standards for new homes would be in line with current design policies established in Merton's Local Plan and the London Plan, in particular, the Mayor's Housing Supplementary Planning Document.

22. From Rachel Waitt**To the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health**

What measures will the council put in place to support users of the High Path Community Centre during the transition period?

Reply

Staff will support users who, along with carers and other stakeholders, will be involved in designing the new service. Day service staff have experience in moving centres and will if needed call on support from the Learning Disability Team which comprises Social Workers and health professionals. We will ensure that service users are reassured that the move will involve their friends and staff so that consistency is maintained.

Supplementary

My question concerns the closure of High Path Day Centre and plans to support the users in this change. Are there plans to use the social care mitigation fund for this, or is there budget provision in place?

Reply

The mitigation fund was put in place to mitigate savings marked against this year's budget and their potential deliverability. No funds have been drawn down yet. We will be assessing it in the next few years to see if there is a need to take money from the fund for this purpose.

23. From Philip Ling**To the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health**

Will there be any further investment in the services at the High Path Community Centre as compensation for the move?

Reply

We have no plans to increase or decrease the level of support or activities provided at the centre purely as a result of the move.

24. From Cypren Edmunds**To the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Environment and Housing**

Confusion is rife among residents of Merton as to the allocation of homes to the homeless. Please outline the procedure between Council and CHMP as we have a number of properties which have been vacant for many months and at a time when we are supposedly in a housing crisis.

Reply

The Council works in partnership with CHMP and other registered providers to meet housing need, the most acute form of which is homelessness. The Council receives a % of nomination rights to vacant registered provider homes. For CHMP and in

accordance with the stock transfer agreement the Council has nomination rights to 100% of true voids.

The Council nominates to these properties in accordance with its published Housing Register and Nominations which can be found at <http://www.merton.gov.uk/housing/housingpolicy/housing-register-nominations-policy.htm>

The average time it takes the Council to nominate to a registered provider is 4.9 days.

The author of this question may be referring to properties that are being purchased by CMP in accordance with their "Buy Back" arrangements. The Council and CHMP are committed in increasing housing options for Merton residents and have agreed a process for the Council to nominate to the dwelling purchased by CHMP under the Buy Back arrangements. This is a completely separate arrangement to the legal stock transfer agreement and sits outside any legal relationship with CHMP.

These properties are relet on Assured Shorthold Tenancies and assists the Council in meeting its statutory housing functions and importantly brings to an end homeless episodes for many vulnerable households who need suitable and affordable accommodation. To date 18 properties have been offered for nomination of which 16 have been relet. CHMP have advised that there are additional "Buy Back" properties to be provided, but have assured officers that there are no general needs voids being withheld (to which the Council has an agreed nomination right).

**25. From Hafsa Chowdhury
To the Cabinet Member for Education**

Is it wise for the Council and Harris Academy to consider planning and building a High School on a site in Merantun Way, South Wimbledon, which potentially sits across from a probation office that deals with youth and adult offenders, some of whom who could be repeat or sex offenders?

Reply

Please see the response to q11 from my colleague Cllr Allison who is the lead Cabinet Member on assets. Additionally:

Council officers, the government's Education Funding Agency and the Harris Federation have no specific concerns as noted in this question. The questioner will be aware that an existing school and daycare provision for adults have already been operating safely in the area for many years and there is no reason to suggest that the establishment of a new school will introduce any additional risks to children or vulnerable adults. The new school will, as a matter of course, have safeguarding children procedures in place before it begins operation.

26. From Andrew Boyce
To the Cabinet Member for Education

Assuming the Council will actually consult local residents, will it press ahead with its plans to build a new high school on High Path in South Wimbledon if the outcome of that consultation is that a majority of local residents are not in favour of such a proposal?

Reply

Please see the response to q11 and q13. Additionally:

The government's Education Funding Agency (EFA) has already decided that a new Free School will be established in the Wimbledon area. The provider of the new school will consult as is required by statute, as will the council during the statutory planning process. There will not be a local referendum on the issue, as the free school policy is a government policy, and while this administration does not support that policy, the government has a mandate to deliver their policies within the law.

27. From Christopher Holt
To the Cabinet Member for Finance

Can Merton Council confirm that their Property Management and Review Manager is in charge of reviewing Asset of Community Value applications and also involved in sale of land to potential developers for regeneration and similar? Does this represent a potential conflict of interests?

Reply

The Property Management and Review Manager is responsible for the marketing of property owned by the Council and in making recommendations regarding the terms of the individual sales.

For applications to the Council to list property assets as being of Community Value Cabinet decided on 10 December 2012 that Property Management and Review (Environment and Regeneration Department) manage the applications for listing and claims for compensation.

In addition Cabinet agreed:

1. That for property that is nominated which is not in Council ownership the decision on whether a nominated property is included on the list of community assets is delegated to the Chair of the Strategic Property Asset Group (the Property Management and Review Manager) in consultation with that group and the relevant Cabinet Member and Members.
2. That for property that is nominated which is in Council ownership the decision on whether a nominated property is included on the list of community assets is delegated to the Chair of the Capital Programme Board (the Director of Corporate Services) in consultation with that group and the relevant Cabinet Member and Members.

The Property Management and Review Manager is responsible for managing applications and the decision making process (subject to consultation) to list a property as an asset of community value for properties not within the council's ownership . Applications for council owned properties are decided by the Director of Corporate Services (subject to consultation). The separation removes any potential conflict of interest on the part of the Property Management and Review Manager.

28. From Simon McGrath

To the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health

In the event that the High Path Community Centre is moved, does the council commit to fully retain all aspects of the existing service at the centre?

Reply

As with all services that the council provides, the Council needs to regularly review all of its services but there are no plans to change the services provided from the centre as a result of the move.

Supplementary

If there is a need to reduce the services, at what point will consultation on that start?

Reply

We're not looking to reduce services, we're looking to replace on a like for like basis. We do intend to ensure that users and carers are fully involved in the process. What we can't do at the moment is talk about the location of the new centre as it's subject to commercial discussions but we intend to involve users and carers in the discussions and I'll be working with Cabinet and Ward Members to ensure that involvement.

29. From Omer Ali

To the Cabinet Member for Education

Does the Council realise that building a high school in Merantun Way opposite potential new homes on High Path belonging to older generation tenants and leaseholders (who seek peace and quiet) is now likely to have a detrimental effect on people's decisions to live there or even want regeneration?

Reply: TO BE ANSWERED BY THE DEPUTY LEADER

Please see the response to q11. Additionally:

The council considers that the proposed site for the new school is the best possible option available to the government's Education Funding Authority who are responsible for finding sites for new schools. We are mindful of the interests of local residents including both prospective pupils of the new school and their parents but also those of residents including the 'older generation'. Officers will work with the EFA and Harris Federation to minimise any negative impact the proposed new

school could have on the local community but we also recognise this is a great opportunity for an excellent new school to bring significant benefits for the local community, local children and their parents.

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Council 14 September
06_Councillor Priority Questions

Councillor Marsie Skeete
To the Leader of the Council

Can the council outline how he will be making good on his promise to consult residents on the level of council tax?

Reply

As promised I have ensured residents have the opportunity to let the council know their feelings about the level of the council tax they pay in the light of our budget challenges. The current edition of My Merton, which is being distributed as we speak, includes a centre spread with a questionnaire on the budget and council tax. The text makes clear that we made a promise to residents on the level of council tax, however we are facing significant budget pressures with a £20m estimated budget gap over the next few years, an amount which could be reduced if council tax was increased, although significant cuts would still be required. Residents are asked to give their views by 4 November and our officers have ensured the questionnaire is unbiased and does not try to sway residents in terms of the level of council tax, trusting the people who pay the tax to make up their own minds. We have used My Merton so that every household in the borough has the chance to respond to the consultation, however an online version is also available. We want this to be as full a consultation as possible with the voices of the people who actually pay council tax being heard. We historically have a low response from the east of the borough to consultations such as this and I know Cllr Skeete will join me in trying to ensure that her residents respond to this consultation so that the people who actually pay council tax – and particularly those who struggle the most with it – get the opportunity to make their voices heard.

Supplementary

I understand that local NHS managers have threatened to reduce our funding which amounts to several million pounds per year if we cannot implement the government's policy of increased council tax by 2%. Irrespective of the arguments for or against increasing council tax, what does he think of this government's interference in council tax setting? Does he find this as appalling as I do?

Reply

Yes I agree with her, that I'm equally appalled at the interference of central government in the affairs of local government. I am equally appalled by the level of the government's swingeing cuts from the party opposite. It is a good job that Merton is Labour. It is one of the few councils that both freezes the council tax and provides and maintains support for families on low pay. We have protected adult social care, it's one of the few services that has been provided with growth. The July Principles mean that this department will continue to have less cuts than other services.

Can I say, Madam Mayor, that the party opposite has opposed all of these initiatives. When they are in Opposition they promise council tax cuts, but when they are in power, they swing them up.

**From Councillor Linda Taylor
To the Cabinet Member for Community and Culture**

What was the final cost - both in monetary terms and staff time - of cancelling the Live at Wimbledon Park event, and what was done in terms of research and marketing to assess how popular the acts, event and date chosen would be?

Reply

The estimated cost of cancelling the event is £30,000.

The event was part of the council's response to the significant cuts to our funding from central government since 2010. In order to try to reduce the impact of these government cuts on vital council services we have sought to increase our income where possible and we are constantly looking at entrepreneurial ways of developing new income streams. The event was a development of "Classics in the Park" held in 2015 and was informed by a very constructive marketing exercise conducted at that time and by the positive feedback and appetite for further outdoor musical events that emerged from that exercise.

The event was expanded in 2016 to cover a wider range of cultural audiences and musical genres, with some of the chosen performers already successful acts or shows in London's West End and/or with an established London fan-base.

Research suggested that the August Bank Holiday Weekend was a relatively good option, with relatively little competition in the outdoor events field in the relevant market in the South London area at that time, combined with a reasonable prospect of favourable weather at that time of year. Nonetheless advance ticket sales were disappointing and it was felt prudent to protect the council from further losses by cancelling the event. Our experience highlights how difficult it is for councils to plug the hole left by the government's withdrawal of funds for vital council services and the lack of easy solutions to the consequences of the government's relentless austerity programme.

Council should be aware that our small Green Spaces events team ran park events creating a surplus of over £250,000 this year, and that, in common with Boroughs all over London, they are always looking for new ways to make money. I would invite all Councillors with money-making ideas for their wards to contact me as my mind is always open.

Supplementary

Given what we know now, is the Cabinet Member concerned that Scrutiny members were misled about plans that had been made. What lessons have been learned from this whole experience? Will he be seeking to do something similar in 2017?

Reply

I don't believe that Scrutiny were misled whatsoever. We believed at the time that we were going to break even at that stage. It was very shortly after that we realised that the sales weren't going as well as they could have been, and I'm sure you'd have made the same decision in the same situation. Lessons I've learnt is that we need as a council to be entrepreneurial. We also need to know when to cut our losses. We need to give credit where it's due. We have a tiny events team, who have achieved extraordinary things and made about £1m per year for this Council. If we don't allow that team to make those decisions, then we'll eventually be shooting ourselves in the foot.

I don't think we'll do anything similar next year. I personally believe that going for a younger age group has more potential for raising money. I would ask you to watch this space and see what's going to happen. I believe we have a great future and will do great things.

Councillor Mike Brunt To the Cabinet Member for Education

Can she update us on the performance of our young people in this year's A Level and GCSE exams?

Reply

Merton can celebrate another excellent year for A-Level results. Although figures are not yet validated, some 86% of students in Merton maintained secondary schools achieved at least three A-Level passes, above last year's national average of 78.7% and Merton's own performance last year of 71.2%. The percentage of students passing at grades A* - C increased this year to 83.4% against a national average of 77.6%. More Merton students achieved top grades than in previous years, increasing their opportunities to access good quality higher education. Although we will not have detailed results until later in the year, Harris academy 6th Forms are also reporting some excellent results.

Our GCSE results have also been very pleasing, bucking national trends with Merton pupils achieving improved A*-C grades in English and maths from last year against a significant fall nationally. 81% of pupils achieved A* - C in English, 21% above the national average (60%) and 77% of pupils achieved A* -C in maths, 16% above the national average (61%). The old key performance indicator "Percentage of pupils achieving five GCSEs (A* to C) including English and Maths" is no longer calculated

nationally and has instead been replaced by a new accountability system at the end of Key Stage 4, namely Attainment 8 and Progress 8 - these KPIs will be published by the DfE in December/January. Again, although we will not have detailed results until later in the year, our academies are also reporting improved results with St Mark's and the Harris Academies in Merton and Morden all reporting improved results.

Supplementary

Given the excellent results of our young people, can she outline whether she thinks Merton will benefit from the introduction of grammar schools?

Reply

I offer congratulations to all our young people for the excellent results we've seen in Merton. My appreciation also goes to our hardworking headteachers, teachers and staff for the fantastic results. Also our appreciation goes to our hardworking officers and my predecessor, Councillor Whelton for his strong leadership.

I think grammar schools tend to be very selective. They tend to select the children from more affluent backgrounds whose parents can afford tuition for the 11 Plus. I have been told that 3% of kids in grammar schools are on free school meals. The Government have not thought this through properly. As an Administration we are not in favour of this. In fact, our Leader has written to Justine Greening to express our dissatisfaction about it.

From Councillor David Williams To the Leader of the Council

At the Budget Council Meeting in March and at the Overview and Scrutiny Commission in July you implied that Officers would arrange a public consultation on the level of Council Tax for 2017/18.

At the time of raising this question, information about the consultation is incomplete but it is apparent that the text was not discussed at Cabinet and that a decision to proceed has been made by Officers under delegated powers.

Can you therefore please tell me:

- Which members of the Cabinet were involved in deciding the scope of the questions?
- When the scope of the consultation was first discussed and which Officers and Members were involved in the sign off arrangements and when?
- What changes to the text were agreed after taking advice from Counsel on 18 August 2016?

Reply

The council carries out numerous consultations every year on issues as diverse as changes to services, regeneration proposals, the introduction of controlled parking zones, library satisfaction, priorities for community safety and the introduction of double yellow lines, to name just a few. It is not the council's practice to have the detail of consultation questionnaires agreed by Cabinet as this is not a key decision but is delegated to officers in our professional Consultation & Community Engagement team who are experienced in carrying out fair and un-biased consultations on which the council can base its decisions. The questionnaire was drafted by officers. There were no changes to the consultation questionnaire as a result of counsel's advice, however the text of the introductory article in My Merton was added to make clear the council was already using its reserves to bridge the budget gap and that we have also raised fees and charges where we can.

Supplementary

I did not ask the Leader if it was the Council's practice to agree consultation in Cabinet, but by who, what and when it was agreed.

In his answer he says that with reference to the reserves, counsel's opinion said that if there were a reference to use of reserves, the level of reserves should be included in the factual opening statement of the consultation and it has not been. The first draft of the consultation was sent to Jonathan Auburn, a specialist in public law, 11 Kings Bench Walk on 12 August.

My question is this. When did the Leader show the consultation document to his own group?

Reply

His estimation of what happened goes to the heart of this, which is the Leader said there would be a consultation on the level of the council tax, that we will consult residents and members handed it all over, in the way they should, at arm's length to ensure unbiased consultation, in keeping with Cabinet Office criteria on consultation. That's exactly what I have done. So I have said, it is written in My Merton. It's at huge odds to the way he consulted Cannon Hill residents on the future of Morden Park, when he said to them "get over it".

Councillor Jerome Neil

To the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health

Can he update us on progress with the local NHS's STP and what impact this might have on local hospital services?

Reply

STP and timelines

The draft South West London STP was submitted to NHS England by the five Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) for South London who led its development for the 30th June deadline. I provided some comment on the draft and held discussions with Merton

CCG. Its narrative reflects a strong focus on prevention, self-care and integrated health and social care out of hospital. The question of how many future acute sites to plan for in the sub-region was flagged but not concluded. NHS England has now published a summary slide pack of the joint CCGs June submission on their website and given feedback on the draft plan. This includes the need for more details about closing the financial gap, an expectation to progress acute configuration plans, and a wish to see good engagement with local stakeholders.

By 21 October, a further draft of the STP will be required, with implementation plans. The final STP will be the vehicle for securing future NHS transformation funding and form the basis for 2 year operating plans between CCGs and NHS England. The NHS is seeking as much endorsement as possible from the six boroughs. However, as with the June submission, information will not be available for public consideration and hence there can be no formal borough response. At the time of writing I have not yet seen a draft but I will provide comments if given the opportunity.

Local acute hospital services

The two main providers of acute hospital care for local residents are St George's Hospital in Tooting and St. Helier's Hospital in Sutton. Both trusts have challenges with delivering good quality care. The recent CQC report (March 16) from the inspection of Epsom and St Helier's Hospital Trust gives an overall assessment of 'requires improvement', with the perennial threat of closure no doubt contributing to this, and a CQC inspection is currently underway at St Georges. In addition, St Georges is facing particularly severe financial challenges. There are significant issues at St Georges and St Helier about the quality of the built estate, and the £219m promised by the previous Labour government for St Helier was reneged on by the Conservative Chancellor.

Across South West London there are two other hospitals, Kingston Hospital and Croydon University Hospital. Croydon Hospital recently has been put in financial turnaround (together with Croydon CCG).

The specific problems of St George's and Croydon Hospitals, combined with growing financial pressures in most of the SWL CCGs and renewed central guidance on financial management and savings, and combined with a continuing wish within the NHS to achieve the London Quality Standards in acute care, are all contributing to the decision to review acute configuration. A review of specialist commissioning is underway across the whole of South London (SW and SE) to look at options for location of specialist services, together with an audit of the usage of acute beds earlier in the year, and this may potentially impact on bed numbers in SWL. Initial outputs of this work are expected in the autumn, with conclusions forming in December. This will be a key driver in terms of the STP process.

Supplementary

I was very worried to see the local NHS's summary of the STP recommends, and I quote, "make best of acute hospital staff in clinical networking and / or consolidating activity on a small number of sites. Is the Cabinet Member concerned that the Government is once again proposing the possibility of closing vital services at St Helier Hospital, like its Accident and Emergency Unit, and what should we do about it?

Reply

I know how important St Helier is to residents in his ward as well as my own. When I spoke on the STP at the last meeting of Council I said that there was much we should be welcoming, and there was much that we sought to achieve, which remains the case.

What I would say is that the STP will include recommendations on acute services and the next iteration of the STP, to be submitted to NHS England in October, is likely to include some specific proposals around acute configuration. I can assure him that in the feedback I provided to the first iteration, and in the regular meetings that the Leader and I have with the Chair and Chief Officer at the CCG, I have made absolutely clear that St Helier is a red line for this Administration, is something that we will fight hard to keep and I will continue to give this message when I meet with the CCG next week, and in my comments on the next iteration of the STP given the opportunity. I welcome his support and that of colleagues across the chamber, as well as our MP for Mitcham and Morden. We will do all we can to fight for St Helier for our residents.

From Councillor Peter Southgate To the Leader of the Council

Could the Leader please update council on his plans to consult with residents this autumn on the level of council tax in Merton?

Reply

As promised I have ensured residents have the opportunity to let the council know their feelings about the level of the council tax they pay in the light of our budget challenges. The current edition of My Merton, which is being distributed as we speak, includes a centre spread with a questionnaire on the budget and council tax. The text makes clear that we made a promise to residents on the level of council tax, however we are facing significant budget pressures with a £20m estimated budget gap over the next few years, an amount which could be reduced if council tax was increased, although significant cuts would still be required. Residents are asked to give their views by 4 November and our officers have ensured the questionnaire is unbiased and does not try to sway residents in terms of the level of council tax, trusting the people who pay the tax to make up their own minds. We have used My Merton so that every household in the borough has the chance to respond to the consultation, however an online version is also available. We want this to be as full a consultation as possible with the voices of the people who actually pay council tax being heard. I know that Cllr Southgate works very hard to ensure his residents' interests are listened to by this

council and I hope he will encourage Merton Park residents to respond to the consultation.

Supplementary

Given that a number of people expected to be informed of the consultation in advance but were not, how does he plan to rebuild confidence in this consultation amongst those who are most critically affected, such as those represented by groups such as the Centre for Independent Living?

Reply

Just to remind him that this consultation is for council tax payers. The council tax payers who have shown they have every confidence in us in 2010, 2014 and I'm sure they'll have every confidence in this consultation and in us in 2018.

From Councillor Daniel Holden To the Cabinet Member for Street Cleanliness and Parking

How does the percentage of enforcement cases (including fixed penalty notices) brought by the council against fly-tippers compare to the total number of fly tips reported?

Reply

The number of fly tips reported so far this year is approximately 1602 based on the first quarter figures. It is only possible to take enforcement action where there is evidence of the perpetrator, such as proof of name and address found in the dumped rubbish, or a witness statement. The number of enforcement cases so far this year brought by the Council (including fixed penalty notices) is 165, reflecting the difficulty of taking these cases.

In 2016 new legislation came into force which gave local authorities powers to issue fixed penalties up to £400 for smaller fly tips in order to give the offender the opportunity to pay an FPN rather than risk a court fine and a criminal record and reduce the costs to local authorities and the difficulties inherent in taking cases to court. From April 2016 to August 2016 we have issued 3 of these new FPNs.

We also have a number of cases for fly tipping currently being investigated with a view to commencing prosecution proceedings.

I should add that investigating fly tips is becoming even more difficult due to an increase in items being dumped such as builders' rubble/waste where no evidence of name and address can be obtained. Although we do encourage residents to report fly tips, particularly if they have witnessed the fly tip being placed, more often than not they are reluctant to involve themselves and provide witness statements for fear of reprisal.

We are utilising overt CCTV to obtain evidence where possible.

Supplementary

Given the new national policy that allows councils to issue fines of up to £400 for fly tipping since 9 May, does the Cabinet Member think that bringing three such enforcement cases in Merton is acceptable? Can he also explain why the council has failed to recoup over 50% of the fines it issued for fly-tipping in the year 2014-15 and why the number of people taken to court is just six per year?

Reply

I think Councillor Holden's supplementary question was missing a congratulations to this Administration for prosecuting a business in Figges Marsh for large scale fly-tipping and being awarded a £400 fine. As you will be aware, the government guidance on FPNs leaves it up to each individual council to decide what level they put them at and we make sure we put it at the highest level of £400. We will continue to punish those who make our streets untidy. If I may, we've got organisations such as Kingdom Security working for us, targeting those that drop litter in town centres, parks and areas of high footfall. Between January and July, 3000 FPNs were issued to individuals who litter our streets. We take it really seriously and will continue to do all in our power to fine those who don't treat our environment with the respect it deserves. As our residents will appreciate, we want to work together to keep a cleaner environment.

Councillor John Dehaney

To the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance

Can he update us on the council's plans to balance the budget for future years given the level of government cuts and increasing demands we are facing?

Reply

The Council has for some years planned its finances on a multiyear basis. This is an approach that has served us well and one that we intend to continue. We will carry on seeking to maximise efficiency savings and protect frontline services. Given the scale of spending reductions that have already been made the council is going to face some tough choices about the level of service provision that can be afforded.

Supplementary

Can the Cabinet Member confirm that Council will be applying to the government for the new four year financial settlement which I understand is on offer?

Reply

We have taken an approach in this Administration which is a bit different from previous administrations. We plan ahead, years ahead in order to make the right decisions over the medium term rather than the short term. A very good effect on the approach that we've been able to take, we've been able to deliver six years of council tax freezes and protect services for our most vulnerable people and that is in contrast to the previous

administration. However, one of the biggest challenges that we have had to face in the medium term is that the government constantly changes the rules for, even more than we could have possibly predicted. That's happened recently with the cuts in government grants, and also where they've recalculated so they're effectively saying to councils, if you don't put up council tax by 3.5%, we will take away the equivalent of 3.5% from your funding and we know that's not fair. So, what we would like to do is to have more certainty over the medium term as to what we are going to get from the government. We are an efficient council, so they say they will allow us to have four year planning for efficient councils, that will be us, so we will be looking forward to applying for the four year funding.

From Councillor Gilli Lewis-Lavender
To the Cabinet Member for Street Cleanliness and Parking

In view of the recent national report on contaminated recyclables, could the Cabinet Member please tell me what percentage of the recyclable material currently collected in Merton is contaminated and can therefore not be recycled, and how this compares to each of the last 5 years?

Reply

The following figures relate to the percentage of waste collected and processed for recycling but subsequently rejected and sent for further processing or landfilled.

The main area of contamination continues to be wet paper. With the implementation of wheeled bins which will ensure paper is protected from rain it is expected that the amount of paper and card recyclates rejected is significantly reduced, saving council taxpayers money.

2011/12	1.7%
2012/13	3.1%
2013/14	2.5%
2014/15	3.4%
2015/16	7.0%

There has been a recent increase due to the Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) (Amendment) Regulations 2014 which apply the Materials Recycling Facility Code of Practice. This statutory code introduced new requirements which have required improved sorting technology that can result in equipment capturing more unacceptable items than under previously used technologies.

Supplementary

Given the figures he has provided, can the Cabinet Member explain why this Administration is abandoning co-mingling recyclable materials as part of various changes to Merton's waste collection. With up to five containers, the chances of recycling being contaminated will surely be considerably higher, plus if residents miss a collection, they will have to wait a whole month for it to be collected. Can you therefore

reassure me that the council communication and engagement strategy will include hands-on training for residents rather than just relying on the odd leaflet through the door.

Reply

In terms of the figures that she alludes to, I think it's been explained because of the current facilities we use for recycling it exposes some materials, particularly paper and card to rain and when it's wet, it becomes contaminated and cannot be recycled. With the introduction of wheelie bins for paper and card, the rain will not be able to get to it and we'll see a higher rate in terms of recycling.

As part of the roll-out, there will be full communications with residents and there will be a hands-on approach from the provider, Veolia. They will have in-house officers who will go out and visit residents if there is a reason for them not to recycle and dispose of their waste correctly. They will see what the issue is at the household and what's causing it.

Councillor Imran Uddin

To the Cabinet Member for Street Cleaning and Parking

Can he update us on the fine-tuning process with Veolia who have been confirmed as the new provider for the joint South London Waste Partnership contracts for waste services and parks management?

Reply

Following Cabinet approval Veolia has been appointed as preferred bidder for waste collection and street cleaning (LOT 1) and The Landscape Group has been appointed as preferred bidder for grounds maintenance (LOT 2).

Fine tuning started in September with both of the respective bidders and is focused on 3 main work streams: financial, legal and technical. We are on schedule to conclude fine tuning in November

Supplementary

I would like to ask the Cabinet Member to outline how we have included local residents in plans for new waste services.

Reply

I would like to thank Councillor Uddin for his hard work on the Sustainable Communities Panel, scrutinising the detail of this proposal which I think was done thoroughly, and judging by the outcome of that meeting, I am sure that the borough and the residents will be delighted when they start seeing wheelie bins. In terms of the consultation we ran an extensive consultation of 1000 properties in Lavender which showed overwhelming support for wheelie bins, a decrease in litter in residential roads. And of course, as we get to the crux of the fine tuning and the potential signing and award of the contract, that isn't something we can publicise because of commercial sensitivity, so

the consultation, we get criticisms when we don't consult and when we do, we get criticised again. As an authority we have consulted across all different households in Lavender Fields and I am confident that those residents are representative of the borough and they will be equally pleased when the new service comes in.

Council 14 September
07a_Councillor Priority Strategic Theme Questions

Councillor Judy Saunders

To the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Environment and Housing

Could he outline how the Housing and Planning Act will impact on Merton residents?

Reply

We have been preparing for the Housing and Planning Act for some time so that we can seek the opportunities it presents and minimise the challenges that may arise from it. A report under the Sustainable Communities and Transport strategic theme to February's full council summarised the wide range of Housing and Planning Act provisions. Most of the major changes require secondary legislation or further government guidance before they come into place, including the introduction of Starter Homes (homes for sale costing up to £450,000) as part of affordable housing. Officers are liaising with other London boroughs, the Greater London Authority and with government to keep track of the key matters and will keep councillors informed.

Supplementary

I am very concerned about this myself. Is the Cabinet Member as worried as I am that the Act will result in families being forced out of their homes and having to move miles away from their children's schools, and the impact this will have on children and families? Should he, as I am, be ashamed of this government and their actions?

Reply

The Housing and Planning Act is absolutely appalling in terms of social engineering and also the impact it will have on people living in this borough. We have already seen the bedroom tax, rising rents, unaffordable rents and we're seeing a diminishing supply of affordable homes which will be a consequence of this Act, with the right to buy for housing associations. This is increasing demand in terms of people having to be housed outside the borough, breaking families and communities apart. The government should be completely ashamed of itself for this Act and I do share the concerns of Councillor Saunders.

From Councillor Suzanne Grocott

To the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Environment and Housing

In light of the recommendations produced by last year's cross-party task group, can the Cabinet Member update me on how the council is now using the various powers it has at its disposal to challenge developers to ensure the provision of more affordable housing?

Reply

The council carefully reviews planning applications to ensure that we get the most affordable housing we can within government's national policies and consistent with our own planning policies locally. As a council we carefully scrutinise the viability assessments developers submit with their planning applications and employ independent consultants to review these where necessary as we are committed to providing 40% in line with our planning policy. We are also working closely with the new Mayor of London who is putting together a team of experts to scrutinise developer's submissions even further.

Following the Housing Task Group's recommendations, I am now taking a paper to Cabinet to propose even greater robustness in the way that the council deals with planning applications, including publishing developer's viability submissions for greater scrutiny by councillors and the public.

Supplementary

The Mayor Sadiq Khan pledged 50% of all homes to be affordable. He has just enabled Galliard Homes to get away with just 9.6% of affordable housing on the Wimbledon Stadium site. It is a measly proportion of one of the largest developments in Merton for years. Can the Cabinet Member tell me why the new Mayor has failed one of the first big tests of his mayoralty and also why Merton Council and Steve Clarke have failed future generations of Merton residents by letting large developers behave in this way.

Reply

I am slightly surprised by the supplementary. There was a full viability assessment carried out in terms of the stadium and the level of affordable homes being provided for. The Planning Committee, which includes Conservative Members, approved the application for AFC unanimously. Can I say Madam Mayor, I am absolutely shocked by Councillor Grocott, because judging by that answer, she is against the AFC Wimbledon Stadium, and is probably working hand in glove with Wandsworth Council.

Councillor Dennis Pearce To the Leader of the Council

What contact has the Leader had with the Mayor of London's office regarding sustainable communities and housing issues?

Reply

Since Sadiq Khan so convincingly won the recent election for Mayor of London I have spoken to the Mayor and his office on a number of occasions on these issues. In particular I have had discussions with the Deputy Mayor for Housing James Murray on how Merton can help deliver on the Mayor's commitment to increasing the supply of affordable housing, which Merton is well qualified to do having met our affordable housing targets. I have also discussed Crossrail2 with the Mayor's office and expressed our strong wish to see alternative proposals put forward that will safeguard existing businesses and reduce the impact on local residents. I also wrote to the Mayor in relation to his consultation on the AFC Wimbledon stadium application which the Mayor has now agreed to hand back to Merton.

Supplementary

What will the Cabinet Member do with the Mayor of London to ensure the total number of homes built across our borough increases, in order to tackle the shortage caused by the previous Mayor, Boris Johnson and his mean minded Conservative

pals in government, and that the amount of affordable homes, which we also desperately need, increases as soon as is possible?

Reply

I will work exceedingly hard to gauge with the Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, who has a land base bigger than any other individual politician ever, and who will work with me to make sure that we have the level of housing that this borough deserves. We have a friend in thought. We have someone who doesn't make mistakes unlike the last Mayor who made a huge mistake in calling in the AFC Wimbledon application. Did you know Councillor Grocott, the stadium size alone, with 60 affordable homes, will amount to nearly half the affordable homes built in the whole borough of Wandsworth in the whole year 2014/15.

**From Councillor Najeeb Latif
To the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Environment and Housing**

For how long is the legal obligation to bring homes at High Path, Eastfields and Ravensbury up to the Decent Homes Standard going to be suspended so that Circle Housing can fulfil their contractual requirements?

Reply

Compliance with the Decent Homes Standard for High Path, Eastfields and Ravensbury estates are not currently suspended. The latest data from CHMP shows 0.24% of housing stock across all estates in Merton (not exclusively High Path, Eastfields and Ravensbury) remain outstanding. This is equal to 14 properties. In 6 cases the tenants have declined the works and the remaining 8 have plans in place to meet the standard. Only 1 home on the High Path Estate is non compliant with the Decent Homes Standard and the property is included in CHMP plans to make this compliant. Circle have told us they are committed to ensuring that properties on these three estates are still kept in good repair whilst waiting for the regeneration plans to be approved and hopefully implemented.

Supplementary

Can the Cabinet Member confirm what requirements and obligations there are for Circle or the new Circle / Affinity Group to bring housing on these estates up to standard as soon as possible, should the regeneration not go ahead for any reason? Also what guarantees are there that the upgrade of the Eastfields estate will definitely happen, even when High Path and Ravensbury have been revamped?

Reply

As a council we have been actively working with Circle Merton, in terms of actually addressing the obligations they have in terms of improving homes in the borough. I will say in terms of Eastfields, we are committed that it will actually go ahead and happen. It's important that the rights of residents are respected and that it does happen because it will improve the quality and standard of housing which we have on those estates which is not actually up to scratch. Of course, Circle Merton will have to address those issues if it doesn't go ahead but we are seeing this as a top priority for all three estates; High Path, Ravensbury and Eastfields, because this will immeasurably improve the quality of homes and the communities.

Councillor Laxmi Attawar

To the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Environment and Housing

What progress has been made since 2010 on developing the Colliers Wood Tower, which was voted the ugliest building in London in 2006?

Reply

Colliers Wood tower is now unrecognisable compared to what it was in 2010.

For over a decade the former Brown & Root tower stood derelict whilst various planning applications were made, and withdrawn.

Since 2010, the Council's regeneration team has worked closely with the land owner / developer to unlock the development. This included bringing the design up to date (the new glass is a step change in quality from the 2003 permission to simply paint it white) and re-assessing the development viability and phasing, to ensure that regenerating the existing tower was a priority over and above any future phases.

Work has progressed at a pace since construction started in early 2015. Much of the work was behind the scenes in terms of stripping out the remains of the Brown & Root tower and installing new infrastructure.

Since early 2016, the glass cladding has been installed and is now largely complete, which has utterly transformed the look of not only the tower, but has brightened up the centre of Colliers Wood. Shaking off its carbuncle tag has attracted more investment in the area and is a key component of our strategic vision for Colliers Wood town centre.

Over the next six months, works will continue to fit out the inside of the building which will provide 150 apartments for rent.

The area has also benefited from a significant investment in the street scene and public realm funded by the Mayor of London, Merton Council and TfL. Baltic Close in particular, has undergone an incredible transformation in the past year. The plaza at the base of the tower will be the main focus of the public space improvements and should be complete early 2017.

Supplementary

Will the Cabinet Member please pass on the thanks of the Colliers Wood community to the staff of the council for the amazing job they have done on the tower and the surrounding area, and will they help us remind people of Colliers Wood and South Wimbledon of the transformation that has taken place.

Reply

Can I thank the work of all the Colliers Wood councillors in terms of the Brown & Root Tower. It's true to say that this has been a long-running issue over many years and it took the active involvement of the Labour Administration to actually start to

address the issue and get things moving. Every time I go past the tower it's really welcoming it being regenerated, being improved. I would also like to thank the work of Siobhain McDonagh, the Labour MP who has been working with the council to ensure that things actually got moving. This will make Colliers Wood a better place and will be even better once the tower is completed, which I understand is not too far off now.

**From Councillor Gilli Lewis-Lavender
To the Cabinet Member for Community and Culture**

In view of the fact that dog walkers must now either place their dog's excrement in the ordinary litter bins or take it home with them, is the Cabinet Member aware that there has been an increase in the number of owners who are not scooping up the dog waste? Is he not concerned about the increased danger of Toxocariasis that presents severe risks particularly to young children?

Reply

There has certainly been an increase in the number of reported incidents of residents not scooping up their dog mess in parks recently, but whether that is a genuine effect, or the result of an increased awareness of the problem arising from the change of policy is unclear. Certainly there appears to be some discontent amongst some dog walkers at the change, but since there are in excess of 400 litter bins in parks, including additional ones added following the withdrawal of dog waste bins, it is the Council's view that there is more than sufficient provision of waste bins overall, provided that dog walkers are prepared to behave responsibly and respectfully to the environment and other park users. Individuals who fail to clean up after their dog are committing an offence under pre-existing Dog Control Orders and are at risk of being issued with a Fixed Penalty Notice and a hefty fine.

Supplementary

At the last meeting, the Cabinet Member invited councillors to tell him where more bins are needed across the borough so they can be provided. Yet when I requested a new bin I was told by officers, and I quote "it is not our policy to replace and move dog bins with litter bins. This was a savings exercise in the Greenspaces and there are not additional resources to buy additional bins or staff to service them".

Therefore isn't it the case, that far from improving the service to residents, this was a cost cutting measure and an excuse to issue more penalty notices?

Reply

Last week I was walking in Mostyn Garden and I put my foot into what the councillor was talking about. I thought is this the council's fault? Is it the dog's fault? Whose fault is it really? It's the owner's fault. Nobody forced that owner to get a dog. The owner allowed the dog to defecate freely on Mostyn Gardens which is how it ended up on my shoe. It is the owner who bears the responsibility. We, as a council, and we do this as a Labour Administration and you as a Conservative Administration. We provide litter bins for the benefit of decent public citizens and work on the basis that people will use those bins responsibly. If they choose not to use the litter bins, regardless of how many there are, and you know, we all know, that we can travel the length and breadth of this country and not see a single litter bin for miles. It's not the

answer, the answer is for individuals to take responsibility for their actions. If they don't, what we do is fine them.

Councillor Mary Curtin

To the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Environment and Housing

The housing crisis is one of the biggest challenges we currently face in Merton; what will your priorities be as cabinet member for housing?

Reply

My top priority is to address the housing crisis we face as a borough to ensure that we build more affordable homes that ordinary people can genuinely afford and that we maximise the supply of affordable homes in the borough.

That is why we are committed to working with the Mayor of London and Transport for London on building more than 1,000 new homes as part of Morden's Housing Zone and on ensuring that the major regeneration opportunities are maximised and delivered.

The rebuilding of High Path, Ravensbury and Eastfields estates is also a priority and we are working closely with Circle Merton to transform these communities by rebuilding the estates and providing the additional homes we so desperately need.

Later this year I hope that the council will support setting up a development company which could develop sites (on its own or with partners) to provide new homes for sale or rent and generate a revenue stream for future investment and increase our local housing supply.

Supplementary

Could the Cabinet Member tell me the number of people Merton has in temporary accommodation compared to other London boroughs, and how the council is addressing their housing needs.

Reply

In terms of people living in temporary housing, Merton continues to have the lowest number in London, which is testament to the work of Steve Langley and his Housing Needs Team which do an exemplary job. When we compare it to other boroughs, we look at Kingston, where our figure is 200, they are nearly 600. Wandsworth is 1100, Sutton is 372, Richmond which is a much more affluent borough than Merton is 241.

Clearly, this is more and more of a challenge because the number living in temporary accommodation has actually doubled in the past four years, which is extremely regrettable. Our Housing Needs Team is giving them advice in terms of housing options. It's getting more and more difficult in terms of social housing, so it does mean some people will have to unfortunately go outside of the borough. It's also as well, accessing private housing which is no easy thing because rents are rising as a consequence and housing allowances are being capped. It is a big challenge we

face but I am confident our team here in Merton will address the issues, but it's not easy dealing with some of the policies at present.

From Councillor Charlie Chirico
To the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Environment and Housing

Can the Cabinet Member please update me on whether confirmation has yet been received from Transport for London and the GLA on funding for the Wimbledon master plan?

Reply

Crossrail 2 and our Future Wimbledon project are a priority not only for unlocking economic growth, but for managing change strategically for the next 15 years. The Council is working in close partnership with TfL on alternative options for Crossrail, however, to date there has been no financial commitment from the GLA or TfL to support the Council's regeneration team in this project. There is a commitment to share data and studies that have been undertaken for Crossrail, which is positive, but a financial contribution has, as yet, not been forthcoming.

We recognise that there is considerable local interest in the masterplan and as cabinet member I have already met with residents' groups, businesses and attended forums to start this dialogue. I will continue to do this in advance of its publication as it's important to work with them in shaping our communities and listening to their viewpoints on creating a vision for Wimbledon.

Whilst the Council is funding the project at present, we will continue to pursue other sources of funding, including TfL and the GLA, for this vital project to ensure we not only create a great plan for our town, but ensure that it's also the best value for our residents.

Supplementary

Crossrail2 are due to hold their next consultation in the Autumn. Given the intense interest and concern about this issue from many residents in Wimbledon, will the Cabinet Member give a public commitment that this council will do all it can proactively to engage with residents this time round, including publicising the consultation by every means possible, and encouraging as many people as possible to respond?

Reply

Just last week, I was attending a meeting chaired by Councillor Dean on Crossrail2, I understand you couldn't be there, but I know Councillor Grocott was there as were other councillors as well. We are actively engaging with residents in terms of Crossrail2. We actively support Crossrail2 but not at any cost. I am also in the process of meeting with the Friends of Wimbledon Town Centre. I have met Leigh Terrafranca from the Wimbledon Hillside Residents Association to talk about this. I have also spoken with the Wimbledon Society about Crossrail2. Clearly the options will be published later on this year. When that happens it's important that residents are engaged and we are working with Crossrail2 in terms of having those opportunities for people to come along and have their say about whatever option is

proposed. It is my belief that Crossrail2 will benefit Wimbledon in terms of jobs and the local economy but also in relieving transport congestion which we know all too well we suffer from greatly, given the capacity issues at Waterloo. I look forward to working with Councillor Chirico and councillors from all sides in terms of Crossrail2. It is a big issue we face and we will be on the case to ensure that we have a solution.

Councillor Abigail Jones

To the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Environment and Housing

Would the cabinet member update council on the estates plan and the liaison he has had with Circle Merton in improving housing and building additional homes?

Reply

The council is finalising the Estates Local Plan (ELP) which will provide strategic planning guidance for any regeneration proposals for High Path, Eastfield's and Ravensbury estates which will increase the supply of new housing in Merton over the next 8-10 years.

The council consulted extensively with local residents in February and March 2016. All responses to the consultation are now online (anonymised, with personal details removed) at www.merton.gov.uk/estatesplan.

We'd also like to thank all residents who took the time to attend the consultation events and those who submitted responses to us.

Officers have been working through the feedback and making amendments to the Estates Local Plan (where relevant) with a view to taking the ELP through the Council's decision making process this autumn.

The feedback from the consultation and the revised Local Plan will be considered by the cross-party Borough Plan Advisory Committee (November) as well as Cabinet (November) and Full Council (November).

There is regular and ongoing liaison with Circle Housing Merton Priory on a number of matters including housing supply, maintenance, delivery on the promises of the Stock Transfer Agreement and the proposed merger with Affinity Sutton and ensuring Merton's residents (tenants, leaseholders and freeholders) benefit from better services as a result.

Supplementary

Irrespective of the merits or otherwise of the Estates Plan can he reassure me that councillors will do all they can to ensure that Circle continues manage repairs and improvements on our estates in the meantime.

Reply

The councillor brings out genuine concerns about performance of Circle Merton because it has been a cause for concern for this council, and I know councillors from across the chamber have had to deal with casework relating to Circle Merton and that has not been actively addressed. We also have issues in terms of the repairs service and improvements on the estates. I hope that things get better after the

merger with Affinity Sutton who I understand have a better reputation than Circle Merton. It is important that residents do have confidence in Circle Merton. That has a knock on impact in terms of their confidence in Circle Merton / Affinity to deliver regeneration for those areas. I will say to the councillors here this evening, this is something that I have actively said to Circle Merton, when I have met with them. We will not give them an easy ride on this. They need to address the issues. There are signs that it is happening but service improvement must be continuous. There has to be clear action to address the issues and it's something we've also communicated to the new Chief Executive, as the Leader recently had a meeting with him. These issues must be addressed in the new organisation going forward. We want to improve our estates but it's also important that our major social housing provider gets things right.

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