

Merton Council

Council

23 November 2016

Supplementary agenda

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Public Questions to Council 23 November 2016

From David Gaillard

To the Cabinet Member for Street Cleanliness and Parking

When will the Council deal with the perennial litter and leaves situation in Alexandra Road outside the whole length of Wimbledon Magistrates Court and the Network Rail fence void that has for years been a litter dumping ground? The continued lack of care is an affront to the local community.

Reply

Alexandra Road is scheduled to be cleaned weekly however during the leaf fall season the normal cleaning schedule is suspended so that resources can be targeted to deal with those roads heavy with leaf fall. Our Enforcement team have made contact with the Wimbledon Magistrates Court to deal with the litter within their grounds and will also make contact with Network Rail to clean their area. We will not rule out using enforcement action should it be required.

From Sofia Parente

To the Cabinet Member for Community and Culture

I wish to congratulate the Council for changing to healthy vending in Morden Park Pools. Can you confirm there will be healthier catering in the new pools?

What else are you doing to protect Merton young people and residents from high fat, sugar and salt foods and sugary drinks?

Reply

Could I firstly thank you for your support for the changes to the vending machines at Morden Park Pools. It's always good to get positive feedback from residents and I really appreciate you taking the time to respond to the changes.

Greenwich Leisure Limited have been working with the council and their supply chain to bring healthier offers through the leisure centres vending machines and we are pleased that the public are welcoming this improved service. The new Morden Leisure Centre will be operated by Greenwich Leisure Limited and therefore we are pleased to confirm that healthy catering will be part of the new leisure centre offer.

Childhood obesity is a key priority for the council and is one of the priority outcomes of the Health and Well-being Strategy. We have undertaken a Childhood Obesity Pan London Peer review on our local work and are now developing a 3 year Merton Child Healthy Weight action plan. Some of the actions planned for implementation relate to promoting healthy diets and physical environments that promote healthy diets, including:

- Work towards signing up to the new Local Government Declaration on Healthier Food and Sugar Reduction
- Promotion of and signing up businesses, community and voluntary organisations to the Healthier Catering Commitment

- Takeaway fast food project work focussing on reducing the portion sizes and improving the quality of chips, and reducing sales of sugary drinks, linking in with Change 4 Life messaging
- All school food catering to adhere to the School Food Plan
- Registering and achieving Healthy Schools London bronze, silver and gold awards

We will continue to review our plans and ensure they are relevant to new and emerging guidance and best practice.

**From Robert Pedzinski
To the Cabinet Member for Street Cleanliness and Parking**

Why have you decided, without proper consultation of your council tax payers, to introduce bi-weekly rubbish, collections, wheelie-bins and reintroduce separation of recycling? Merton is moving backwards. Some residents do not have the space for this multitude of receptacles or they have irresponsible neighbours who will cause health risks.

Reply

It is not usual to consult on this type of service before the specification is formed as there are often so many different opinions from a wide variety of stakeholders that it makes it very difficult to put a specification that satisfies everyone. The specification itself has developed throughout the competitive dialogue with bidders and this has necessarily been a commercially sensitive process.

Cabinet approved the procurement strategy in November 2014, following a great deal of discussion at the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel. Clear objectives were set at the commencement of the project and these were to ensure the following outcomes:

- a) Value for money / cost effectiveness in light of the financial challenge
- b) High quality services that maintain good levels of resident satisfaction
- c) Environmental sustainability.
- d) Ensuring the community remain engaged and involved in management/maintenance and oversight of parks, cemeteries and open spaces etc.

The solution offered by the Preferred Bidder represents their optimal solution and following a robust evaluation clearly met the council's and South London Waste Partnership objectives.

**From Bridgett Walker
To the Cabinet Member for Education**

I frequently see students commuting to Rutlish school throw rubbish on the street and in resident's gardens. They do this seemingly without any concern or respect for the local residents. What would the council propose the leadership of Rutlish School do, to take responsibility and change this?

Reply

Rutlish is a well-managed school with good procedures for behaviour management and the council has every confidence in the school. The school leadership make great strides to teach its pupils to respect the local environment in assemblies and speaking to pupils at an individual level when they are made aware of any incidences. However, clearly the school cannot prevent every occurrence outside the school gates and if a resident is aware of any specific incident the Headteacher has advised that where a boy is identifiable they should contact the school police officer so that they can deal with it accordingly.

**From Julie Gould
To the Cabinet Member for Environment, Regeneration and Housing**

Is the Council going to install traffic calming measures in South Park Rd and Bridges Rd as requested in our Petition submitted in November 2014? Nearly every household in South Park Rd signed. We await an official response.

Reply

The Council takes road safety very seriously and we have an annual local safety programme. Rat running, perceived danger and excessive speed / volume of traffic are problems in a number of residential roads throughout the borough and regrettably due to insufficient funds and resource it is not possible to address them all.

Due to limited available resource and funding and the demand for action that outweigh the available funding, it is necessary to prioritise by giving first consideration to those areas with recorded personal injury [PI] accidents and areas outside schools. I also understand that South Park Rd (between Trinity Road and Haydon's Rd) is already traffic calmed.

According to our latest speed data, 85 percent of traffic travelled at 23 mph or slower along Bridges Road; 27mph or slower along South Park Rd (between Trinity Road and Queens Rd) and 25mph or slower along South Park Rd (between Trinity Road and Haydon's Rd) However, it should be noted that enforcement of speed falls under the jurisdiction of the Police and the Council has no legal power to enforce speed / dangerous driving. Speeding concerns will be referred to the Police for their attention.

With the above said, the situation will be monitored and the Council will take the appropriate action when necessary subject to available funding and other priorities.

**From Helen Alexander-Allen
To the Cabinet Member for Street Cleanliness and Parking**

Will the council make public, a cost-comparison between the proposed wheelie bin invasion, and the following alternative:

- a) Continued use of privately-owned dustbins,
- b) Supplying standard dustbins for containment of bagged waste & to increase capacity where necessary,
- c) Supplying dustbin-sized, wheel-free recycling bins,
- d) Wheelies only for blocks of flats?

Reply

There are currently no plans to undertake any additional procurement costs in looking at alternative solutions. Nor are there any plans to make public the commercially sensitive details that underpinned the decisions thus far.

We have been through a detailed competitive dialogue process which included a cost-comparison exercise as part of the lengthy procurement project and the competitive process has driven value for money and delivered significant future savings to the service. The optimum solution has been driven by the bidders.

Supplementary

Can the Councillor please explain the legal position in relation to any resident or groups of residents who refuse to have a wheelie bin situated on their property, in terms of whether the Council would refuse to take their refuse away, whether things could be returned.

Reply

As part of the approach to the Phase C procurement it is a condition that the norm would be to provide a wheelie bin to every resident. Where it is not practical and where it is not possible, we will endeavour to work with residents to make sure that this works for all residents.

**From Sara Sharp
To the Cabinet Member for Environment, Regeneration and Housing**

Can the Council please explain why it has not formally adopted its excellent existing Borough Character Studies as supplementary planning documents which could save the Council huge costs and time?

Reply

Firstly; thank you for your kind comment about the studies that have been undertaken so-far.

The Borough Character Study (BCS) is a rolling programme of assessing the characteristics of Merton's neighbourhoods; for the purposes of determining planning applications.

The Borough Character Study covers 36 neighbourhoods and is intended to be adopted as a single SPD (Supplementary Planning Document) to Merton's Local Plan.

We recognise that residents appreciate the value of the BCS in planning and this is why we have already made public, the draft assessments of the 22 neighbourhoods that we have completed.

These are regularly used by applicants, officers and have been useful in planning decisions. Despite not being formally adopted; they are a clear statement of the quality and character of an area.

As and when new neighbourhoods are assessed; the chapter is made available online at www.merton.gov.uk/bcs

If residents have any local information that you think may be helpful to the Council in the completion of the final drafts, please do get in touch.

The process of adopting an SPD, set out by government involves 6 weeks of public consultation; seeking views of the Borough Plan Advisory Committee and then onto Cabinet for a decision. To adopt one SPD can take up to 4 months and is time consuming for officers and the community who get involved.

It is not possible to adopt the document chapter-by-chapter; or in batches due to the consultation process involved. Our resources are best targeted at completing the remaining 14 neighbourhoods; of which Wimbledon Town is a particular priority for the team in 2016/17 due to the rise in planning applications.

Supplementary

Could the Cabinet Member please tell me the number of applications where the borough character study has actually been taken into consideration as a material part of the application?

Reply

I haven't got those figures at hand but we can supply them, but rest assured that we do take this extremely seriously and protecting the character of our borough is something that, as Cabinet Member, I give great importance to. I would also like to say that our borough as a whole as high quality planning standard and we will continue to uphold those high standards, but will also value the contribution of residents like yourself going forward.

From Andrew Boyce

To the Cabinet Member for Community Safety, Engagement and Equalities

What is the purpose of Wimbledon Community Forum when:

1. The agenda is dictated by Council, not the community;
2. Officers and Councillors do not follow up points raised;
3. Despite three months' notice, you would rather promote your own self-interests rather than discuss those issues requested by attendees?

Reply

TO BE ANSWERED BY THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

The best way of ensuring everyone in our community is listened to is by knocking on doors and talking to residents directly about their concerns on their own doorstep, which I do most weeks. However the Community Forums are an important way of the council supplementing our formal consultations on a variety of issues. The Community Forums are an opportunity for residents, businesses and local groups interested in their local area to come together and discuss issues of interest or concern. Nonetheless we acknowledge that they often appeal to those who are already most engaged in the community and cannot replace the hard work of speaking to people individually in their own communities, including those whose lives are too busy or stressful to attend long meetings.

Each forum is chaired by a local councillor and they set the agenda for the meeting with support from officers. Anyone is welcome to suggest an issue for discussion and at every meeting there is an open or soapbox item when attendees can raise a local issue they are concerned about. Setting the agendas involves balancing the different areas of interest with the availability of guest speakers and a number of regular agenda items that reoccur because they have proved popular with attendees. These regular items include updates from local police teams, local planning issues and once a year an opportunity to question the Leader or Deputy Leader of the Council. In Wimbledon there have been a number of issues that have been of great interest to the local community and have become regular items for discussion, in particular Crossrail 2 and the development of a Masterplan for Wimbledon Town Centre. Due to the popularity of these items they have on occasion taken priority over other issues but that does not mean that there will not be an opportunity to discuss those other matters another time. Where questions are raised at meetings that cannot be answered on the night officers will endeavour to include an answer in the Chairs report of the meeting or provide an update at a future meeting.

Supplementary

Could the Leader tell us why he personally decided to undermine an official council consultation on increases to council tax which has come back with a unanimous verdict that this council should increase council tax to protect the vulnerable, and also to address the problem of litter on our streets, of which a great percentage of our residents are in favour of you addressing.

Reply

I acknowledge the supplementary questions. I thought that he was here to ask whether I was intending to meet him, I have met him on a number of occasions and I will always be keen to meet activists like Andrew Boyce.

From B Strickland To the Cabinet Member for Community and Culture

Why are Merton Council Adult Education Commissioning Team offering the Level 2 Child Dare course at the MAE campus of South Thames College for twice the fee as the same course as the Wandsworth campus of South Thames College? This does not encourage enrolments with MAE.

Reply

As part of the transfer of provision to South Thames College from the London Borough of Merton all course fees have remained at the previous year's prices including the Level 2 Child Day Care course. Upon review we cannot find a comparative course running at the Wandsworth campus but will liaise with South Thames College if there are any discrepancies.

Many learners who attend this course will not need to pay fee due to the concessionary arrangements in place. For example, if this is their first full Level 2 qualification or if they are unemployed. All of last year's concessionary rates also remain in place.

From NT Hales To the Cabinet Member for Community and Culture

Why are Merton Council Adult Education Commissioning Team not following the Council's commissioning principles of developing skills and boosting employment prospects? They are not offering courses / apprenticeships in health and social care, business administration and beauty that are often the first job for a young person.

Reply

Cabinet agreed the strategic aims for the new commissioned service on 19 September 2016 and there is a strong emphasis on developing skills and boosting employment in keeping with the government skills agenda. As part of our commissioning aims the council has set out its expectations that the majority of our investment will go to those most in need to improve life chances. A range of indicators have been set to measure the impact of these changes.

The skills agenda is being implemented throughout the commissioning of courses provided by both South Thames College and Groundwork London. Employability courses are offered by both providers, as well as vocational courses at South Thames College in Early Years, supporting teaching and learning, haircutting,

barbering, counselling, digital marketing, starting a small business, bookkeeping and accounting, interpreting, British Sign Language, as well as IT courses. Courses will also be provided in community venues to try and attract take up from those most in need.

The integration of employability skills is being introduced in all courses along with the embedding of maths and English; fundamentals for improving our resident's skills and employment opportunities.

Merton Adult Education is primarily an education service for 19+ adults and commissioning to South Thames College's means that there are greater synergies between the adult learning offer and the further education offer already offered by the college, which includes apprenticeships.

A new apprenticeship contract is in the process of being finalised and we have already stated within the Cabinet paper that the provision will start from January 2017 to ensure that our offer is strategically aligned to the wider Merton offer.

**From R Hussain
To the Cabinet Member for Community and Culture**

Can Merton Council Adult Education Commissioning Team provide comparative figures for the average costs, without concessions and total enrolments in 2014/15, 2015/16 and to date in 2016/17 for adult education courses in computing, pottery, childcare, clothes making, health and social care, upholstery, beauty, drawing, work skills and yoga.

Reply

There is a wide range of factors to consider when looking at the fees and costs applied to Adult Learning courses. Some courses are able to be fully funded by the Skills Funding Agency, some co-funded, some are funded by a 24+ Advanced Learner Loan, or have an element of learner contribution depending on their personal circumstances. There are also considerations for the level of the course and the duration. All of these elements make providing comparative data and average costs difficult to present. However we can confirm that fees have not been increased by South Thames College. Fees were increased in 2015/16 (the last year of direct delivery) by 8%. Groundwork London are not providing courses that incur any fees to learners.

The table below shows the enrolments on the requested courses for 2014/15 and 2015/16. As we have just started the new academic year we are unable to supply verified data for the first term of 2016/17 and this will be made available to the Sustainable Communities Overview & Scrutiny Panel in January 2017.

Subject	Enrolments 14/15	Enrolments 15/16
Clothes making	91	77
Computing	174	79
Drawing	229	224

Pottery	291	288
Work skills	433	341
Upholstery	349	337
Childcare	30	26
Yoga	109	39
Beauty	30	10
H&SC apprenticeships	11	0
H&SC	20	2
TOTAL	1,767	1,423

**From Penny Walton
To the Cabinet Member for Education**

Please comment on how the safety and security of the Rutlish School site has improved since the daytime closure of John Innes pathway and also on the progress that the school has made on implementing the additional measures that were to be made to improve its security?

Reply

The school Headteacher and police officer have reported a significant improvement in the security of the school following daytime closure of John Innes pathway. The closure of the gates adjacent to the path has significantly reduced the casual trespassing onto the school site. As is implied in the question the additional security measures to the two main entrances to Rutlish School need to be undertaken to ensure the school is satisfactorily secure. The package of works is out to quotation and a planning application has been submitted for the works for the alternative path impacting on the frontage of the school. We expect to appoint a contractor by the end of this month so that materials can be ordered and work can start in January, with the works requiring planning permission completed in February, subject to timely agreement to planning permission.

Supplementary

Does the Cabinet Member consider that continuing to allow gates and doorways along the John Innes pathway to stand open after it has re-opened between about five and seven o'clock with no security measures or signage continues to compromise the security of the school site, and is there anything to be done about that?

Reply

As far as I am concerned, there is signage in the area, so I will look into this to find out if additional signage is needed.

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From Councillor Abigail Jones to the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health

Can the Cabinet Member give an update on day centre services in the borough?

Reply

Merton provides four in-house day centres; High Path, the JMC, which both cater for people with a learning disability, All Saints, which provides services for people with a learning disability and people with physical disabilities, and Eastway, which supports older people.

Our learning disability services have seen changes in the past two years, with some staffing reductions leading to a focus on the services providing safe and secure day time respite. Numbers attending the services have remained constant, which has led to some community activities being reduced. In the past few months we have worked closely with MVSC to recruit volunteers to work in our services, and now have eleven volunteers across the centres. Staff work hard to provide arrange of stimulating activities in the centres, and many are also involved with collecting people from home to help reduce transport costs.

The Healthier Communities and Older People's Scrutiny panel are currently looking at these services, and will report in February.

At Eastway the staff team is supporting a group of people who have much more complex support needs than we have worked with in the past but the team has responded well to this challenge and continues to provide a good service. All Saints continues to provide a valued day time service to people with a physical disability.

Supplementary

Given that the Government has given the go-ahead for a new secondary school in South Wimbledon, can he confirm that the High Path Day Centre will be relocated to an equivalent local site?

Reply

Day centres play a very important role in the borough and are a hugely valued service for a number of residents. We have committed from the outset to deliver an equivalent centre as good as the current one. A building has been identified in Leyton Road which is approximately ten minutes away from the current centre and we are in the early stages of developing proposals for that. We had an initial meeting with users and carers on Tuesday morning. We will ensure it is ready in time for the move from High Path and we are absolutely committed to delivering it.

From Councillor Suzanne Grocott to the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Environment and Housing

Given that the council has an on-going responsibility to represent all Circle Housing tenants, leaseholders and freeholders, can the Cabinet Member tell me what the council is doing to publicise and contribute to the current consultation on the proposed changes to Circle Housing Merton Priory and the collapse of the Circle group structure?

Reply

As cabinet member I have expressed concerns about the proposed changes to Circle Merton as it's important that tenants, leaseholders and freeholders voice is heard loud and clearly in any new governance arrangements. We remain in continuing dialogue with Circle over the implications of these changes as it's essential that local accountability remains a key part of any new structure. The consultation ends in December, following which the next meeting of the Council on 1 February will be asked to take a view, as a shareholder, on these changes, including the measures designed to ensure ongoing local engagement and accountability.

Supplementary

The premise of the stock transfer in 2010 was that there was going to be accountability for residents and for the council, with a governance and budget overseen by a locally appointed board. The residents have understandably expressed concerns about the proposed replacement of the board with a community panel with no decision making powers. I am glad that the Cabinet Member has recognised that this is his responsibility but could he tell me how he will instruct the Council, as shareholder, to vote when the final decisions is made in the Spring, given that the current proposal does not provide sufficient accountability as originally envisaged.

Reply

Before any sign-off, it's important that accountability remains in place, and we'll discuss that later this evening the Estates Plan. It's important that residents' voices are actually heard in any new structure, it's essential that it continues to remain part of it. I don't know if she's aware of the Housing Bill that's currently going through Parliament, which takes away the Council's right to be represented on bodies like this. As she has condemned these proposals I think it's essential that the Council does have input but as well that residents do too. We are in continuing negotiations in terms of these arrangements and please rest assured that we have not agreed to the changes and we have asked that they come back with further proposals, about which I hope to update Council at its next meeting.

From Councillor Pauline Cowper to the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Environment and Housing

Can he update me on the consultation process for Crossrail 2?

Reply

The latest Crossrail2 consultation, originally scheduled for this month, has been postponed until at least the second quarter of 2017. A summary of the +20,000 views that Crossrail2 received at the most recent consultation (January 2016) are available on Crossrail2's website <http://crossrail2.co.uk/consultation/>

Merton Council is continuing to work closely with Crossrail2 to secure the best outcome for the borough with minimal impact from construction. In the meantime the council will go ahead with developing its own masterplan for Wimbledon town centre with residents which will start in advance of Crossrail2's consultation. This will help

identify the most beneficial ways of planning for how Crossrail2 would best fit in with Wimbledon town centre and we will actively work with residents and businesses on developing the masterplan.

There is cross-party support in Merton for Crossrail2, but we have we have been clear that it does not come at any cost. The proposals published last year were unacceptable in terms of its impact on business and retail in the town centre. Our cross-party position is available at www.merton.gov.uk/crossrail2

Supplementary

Can the Cabinet Member update me on the consultation process for Crossrail2. Will he ensure that TfL don't backtrack on their agreement to consult with residents and will he particularly ensure that the address the concerns arising from the first consultation?

Reply

It is quite right that residents are actively engaged in the process. I think one of the failings of the first consultation was the lack of resident involvement until the late stage. We have been quite clear in our dealings with Crossrail2 that this does need to take place, and as a Council we have also been clear that we support Crossrail2 but not at any cost. Clearly, if it does happen, and that's a big "if", it will have a major impact on Wimbledon Town Centre. As we go forward it's important that we collectively, in all parts of the chamber, work together to ensure that the centre of Wimbledon is protected, recognising the important role it plays in terms of being the retail centre of the borough, the number of businesses but also its residents as well and I look forward to having that continuing dialogue as we go forward. If further proposals for Crossrail2 are released next year, there will be extensive dialogue as was planned if proposals had been published in November, which has been delayed to Spring next year.

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

How many of Merton's residents (in numerical terms and as a percentage) do not currently recycle on a regular basis?

Reply

Current information indicates that only 20.4% of households do NOT participate in the kerbside recycling service. This equates to 16,827 properties based on a total of 82,490 households.

In addition to the dry recycling, 48% of residents do NOT participate in the kerbside food waste service which equates to 39,595 households.

We expect the new waste collection service will help increase recycling in the borough.

Supplementary

I would like to ask the Cabinet Member, given the flat lining of recycling rates in the borough, when is the Council going to improve recycling rates, as per its stated aim and what is the Cabinet Member actually going to do to get persistent non-recyclers to recycle more, and correctly, if a new, more complex system comes in?

Reply

Overall in terms of recycling, the long term plan is Phase C, where we'll be expecting an increase in recycling delivered by the contractors. In the short term we are having an education process. You'll have seen in 'My Merton' there are articles about improving on recycling, and what can be recycled. We are also going into schools to educate students about how and what to recycle.

From Councillor John Dehaney to the Cabinet Member for Street Cleanliness and Parking

Could he outline his approach to people who fly tip in our borough?

Reply

Merton council have a zero tolerance towards anyone that fly tips in the borough. We come down heavily on all perpetrators who irresponsibly dump their waste. Our enforcement team will investigate with a view to gaining any evidence of the person/s who may have dumped the waste, we are able to issue £400 fixed penalty notices due to new legislation that was introduced in May this year and this is aimed for the smaller fly tips along with taking people to court for prosecution of the more larger fly tips. We have recently carried out an awareness campaign in the borough working with a number of agencies to combat this type of behaviour, we have:

- Placed an Advert in My Merton for residents to be aware of who they give their waste to, for disposal
- J C Deaux advertising our campaign poster re Fly tipping
- Posters on the side of our cage vehicles who collect the fly tipped waste.
- We have issued 12 fixed penalties notices of £400 for fly tipping since the change of legislation in May 2016, (3,835 Fixed Penalties of £80 have been issued for littering offences since April 2016 to present date),
- ANPR (Auto number plate recognition) exercise with the police stopping all vehicles carrying waste and asking for their waste carrier licences along with all proof of where their waste on board is to be dumped
- Working alongside RPs (Registered Providers) e.g. Merton Priory Homes
- Communicating with residents re the presentation of household waste for collection
- Publicising offenders who have been caught fly tipping in the local guardian

Supplementary

Can I congratulate the Cabinet Member on taking a zero tolerance approach to fly-tipping in the borough. Does he think that the new £400 fine will deter people from dumping rubbish on our streets?

Reply

In terms of our approach to fly-tipping, Councillor Dehaney is correct, it is zero tolerance. In October alone, we issued seven fines of £400 to people who litter and fly-tip on our streets. We will continue to take that approach where and when we can. It isn't the only avenue available to us, as mentioned in my previous question, we will also be educating residents of all ages about their responsibility. We have

also awarded the contract to Kingdom outside major town centres and residential roads who are also fining residents. I think that holistic approach will be beneficial to the cleanliness of the borough.

From Councillor Michael Bull to the Cabinet Member for Street Cleanliness and Parking

Detailed arrangements for larger families and households in the borough do not seem to have been factored into the 'one size fits all' bins being proposed by the administration. In the summer months would the council consider doing weekly collections from families to avoid decaying and foul smells from overflowing bins on public health grounds?

Reply

There are currently no plans to increase the level of frequency during the summer months. It is important to note that the smelly food waste will continue to be collected weekly from all households and so should not need to be disposed of in the residual waste bin. This method of collection proposed is the optimal method for improving recycling and reducing cost.

The proposed service is not a "one size fits all" service. Our preferred bidder acknowledges that they may need to provide larger or additional bins for larger families of 6 or more people or for families with two or more small children in nappies.

Supplementary

I understand that it is a statutory requirement for the Director of Public Health to provide a professional assessment of Merton's proposal to end the weekly rubbish collection and roll out multiple wheelie bins. When will this assessment be published and why has this not already happened to inform the decision making process?

Reply

The changes that are happening in the borough are not unusual. Wheelie bins are used by two-thirds of the local authorities across Britain already. In terms of alternate weekly collections, even Conservative Bromley have introduced alternate weekly collections and separate dual recycling boxes. So perhaps you'll be able to liaise with colleagues in Bromley to discuss how it's affected them.

From Councillor Dennis Pearce to the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Environment and Housing

Can he update us on the merger between Circle Housing and Affinity Sutton?

Reply

Circle report that information has been provided to, and consultation on merger has taken place with, all Circle and Affinity Sutton residents. The consultation was carried out in accordance with HCA guidelines.

The HCA have approved the merger in principle and Circle continue to discuss final stages with lenders. At this stage, a date for final merger is not known but is likely to be before year end.

The new Group will be called Clarion and the commercial arm, which will focus on development, growth and social value will be called Latimer.

Supplementary

How does the Cabinet Member feel that this merger will help Circle improve their services to tenants and residents? I have been to The Grange so often to talk to their officers about complaints that I think they're about to start charging me rent.

Reply

Councillor Pearce, along with many other councillors, has been rightly vocal about the unsatisfactory nature of Circle Housing's repairs service and responsiveness. I am glad there has been some improvements of late and I hope that now we are in a merged group, we will see further improvements take place. Affinity Sutton have got a good track record. I believe this new merged group will be a stronger group and will be more responsive to residents' needs in Merton. Let me reassure Council that we will continue to keep a close watch in terms of service repairs and delivery. There have been improvements but there is a lot more to do and rest assured that I will be continuing to be on their case and make sure that this does happen.

From Councillor John Sargeant to the Cabinet Member for Community and Culture

The opening of Crown House Creative in Morden Town Centre, utilising vacant retail space and providing a temporary venue for the arts, music and social events of many kinds is a very welcome innovation. Beyond its press release on the subject, what publicity has Merton council issued to promote the venue? What further publicity is planned and what opportunities does the member foresee the venue providing in the coming months?

Reply

Following the successful launch on October 26th, the Crown House Creative will provide a monthly bulletin, sent to all staff via the Intranet. This bulletin will also be promoted via the Merton Council website, the official Merton Council social media platforms, and forwarded to the local newspaper. The bulletin will also be sent to all Third Sector (voluntary) providers in the borough and local businesses (via the Merton Chamber of Commerce), as we seek to maximise the usage of the space, inviting local stakeholders to utilise the space to deliver activities.

The following programme takes place throughout November and December:

African Street Style Fashion Shoot (took place Sat 12th Nov)

Beat Motel – DJ collective who use artistic spaces (Thursday 17th Nov)

Self-Organise – Exhibition of works, talks, debates and workshops, highlighting the current and critical discourse on community, space and participation. The exhibition will explore how modes of self-organisation and communitarianism operate within public space, collectives and communities. (From Thurs 24th November)

Objects – Installation from student of University of Strasbourg (From Friday 25th November)

Light Up Morden – An evening of entertainment, to compliment the Christmas lights in Morden (Thurs 1st Dec)

Small Business Saturday – Saturday 3rd December

06_Councillor ordinary priority questions

BFI Screening: Saturday 3rd December

BFI Screening: Saturday 10th December

We are also working with local businesses, providing free public surgeries re Dental care, and improving health and well-being, through Yoga and Shiatsu classes throughout November and December.

Supplementary (from Councillor Peter Southgate)

I wonder if the Cabinet Member could tell me what plans there are perhaps to scale up publicity for the Crown House Creative. Are you sure that “Morden’s most exciting arts opportunity” does not become its best kept secret? Further, can he promise us that the Council will retain the use of Crown House Creative to allow it to become more widely appreciated by the public and local organisations as a venue of choice.

Reply

Answering the second point first, I’d love to be able to do that, I’d really love to promise to use a council asset. Unfortunately, finances being what they are, if a better offer for that building is made, then we will take up that offer.

In terms of what we do in the meantime, I thank you for your kind words and I want to see what we can do to make it more popular. Like any venue it depends entirely on the goodwill of the public, what people think when they go into the building. I think everyone here will join me in congratulating the futureMerton team in achieving a very great thing out of very little at all. I would like to take this opportunity to ask you to join me in thanking officers for showing that kind of care and interest in making our borough as good as it can be.

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

Given the clear strength of feeling among many residents around the borough, why does the Cabinet Member like multiple wheelie bins so much more than standard dustbins and is this why the council won’t even create a discreet bin store at its own civic centre?

Reply

Prior to undertaking the procurement for a new waste collection service there was no preference put forward by the council for or against wheelie bins. In effect the procurement was solution-neutral.

The proposed bidder’s solution represents their optimal solution and was not designed by the council. This has been determined by the market and waste management experts. This has been a competitive process and a robust evaluation was undertaken prior to appointing the preferred bidder status to Veolia.

Wheelie bins have a distinct advantage over standard dustbins in that they can be wheeled and mechanically lifted onto the back of the waste trucks in the collection / disposal process. This has been proven to reduce injuries and sickness amongst waste staff.

The Civic centre uses Eurobins for storage which can be stored outside without the need for a bin store.

Supplementary

Can the Cabinet Member tell me what the cost to the Council will be in terms of wasted man hours and disposal costs of removing all the existing bins if the wheelie bins replace them. Given the spiralling capital costs, how can he justify this huge expenditure to Merton's taxpayers?

Reply

I find it quite rich to say the "spiralling costs" considering we heard last year that it was supposedly going to cost £7m, then we heard it would be £5m, and as you'll hear later tonight, it isn't actually that high at all. In terms of the other information he has requested, I will consult with officers and try to get that to him.

From Councillor Greg Udeh to the Cabinet Member for Street Cleanliness and Parking

Could he outline his response to residents who request a controlled parking zone in their area to deal with the issue of commuter parking?

Reply

For a CPZ to be considered a petition must be collated and presented to the Council to show support for such a change. An informal consultation with residents then takes place and, if there is majority support to proceed, the next step is a statutory consultation.

My cabinet role is primarily in then enforcing controlled parking zones once they have been agreed and implemented. We take a firm but fair approach, using our parking charter which is available online, and our main aims are to make our roads safe and to ensure residents who have paid for a parking permit are not impeded from parking on their street by motorists parking without a permit.

Supplementary

I understand the Cabinet Member is looking at introducing a new emissions levy for diesel cars. How will this work and is there a London wide need for such initiatives?

Reply

I am unapologetic about this policy, I think it is important and we need to do it in the interests of the health of our residents and I would like to thank him for raising such an important issue. I understand that the London Labour Mayor, Sadiq Khan also sees this as a high priority and I hope that a much needed London wide plan can be implemented.

From Councillor Imran Uddin to the Cabinet Member for Finance

Could he update us on progress towards agreeing a balanced budget for 2017/18?

Reply

The council has a statutory duty to set a balanced budget for the following year. Proposals will be brought to Cabinet over the next few months in accordance with our Business Planning timetable, outlining measures to achieve this.

Supplementary

Can the Cabinet Member give us his reaction to the Chancellor's Autumn Statement and how this may impact on Merton.

Reply

My first impressions were nothing very much for the JAMS and nothing to help councils like ours get out of a jam. There was nothing about the £350m per week for our country's NHS services but of course the problem with Autumn Statements is that the devil is usually in the detail and the details are not usually known for some days after the Chancellor has sat down. The impact on residents that I can foresee within Merton, particularly with the most vulnerable, is that the Conservative party does not treat that as a priority, they are not interested in the JAMS and it will be tight times in Merton for most.

From Councillor Hamish Badenoch to the Cabinet Member for Finance

Can the Cabinet Member update me on the council's plans for engaging with residents and their concerns via Twitter?

Reply

Twitter is often an inadequate means for communicating with the public. Access to Twitter is not equal, and some users are particularly fixated, and this can lead to problems ranging from misinformation to personal abuse to presidents-elect abusing their powers to call for failed politicians to become ambassadors. There will be circumstances when it will be appropriate for the council, through its communications team, or even through individual councillors, to communicate on Twitter. However residents have a wide range of other channels to communicate with the council about their concerns more effectively, and we encourage them to use the most appropriate one in each case.

Supplementary

Given the Cabinet Member's persistent views on the inadequacy of Twitter as a communications tool, can he explain why the Information Governance Team is now working with the Communications and Business Improvement Team, as well as the Contact Centre to roll out responding to people by Twitter, can he confirm what the scope of that initiative is, and is perhaps possible that officers see the value of Twitter where he doesn't?

Reply

Nobody has said that Twitter should not be used at all. However, it is important to remember that Twitter is only one function of a communications system and it's very important to remember that Twitter is not accessed equally by all people within our community. It's overused by Trots and Anti-Semites and I'm delighted that they use Twitter because we can get rid of them. But it is under-used by the people who most

need our services and they're the ones we most need to listen to, and he should remember that on the day that his Government have failed the JAMS.

From Councillor Marsie Skeete to the Cabinet Member for Children's Services

Could she update us on the funding pressures she foresees in her department over the period of the MTFS?

Reply

Colleagues will be aware of the pressures on council budgets generally. In respect of children's services, I am being kept well informed of specific pressures in the department's budget both in the current year and also in the context of the MTFS. In 2016-17, these include predicted overspends on staffing; placement costs for looked after children, SEN Transport and costs associated with our response to unaccompanied asylum seeking young people.

The main pressure on staffing budgets results from the need to employ more expensive agency staff to fill key social worker vacancies. As a result of the implementation of specific recruitment and retention strategies, officers have made significant progress in employing more permanent social work staff – in the current year our agency rate for this group of staff stands at 20%, its lowest for many years. To September 2016, we had spent £178,000 less on agency social workers compared to the same period in the last financial year. However, because of the nature of the employment market for social work staff it is likely that budget pressures will continue to occur during the term of the MTFS.

As at end September 2016, LAC placement budgets are projected to overspend by £1.46 million in 2016-17. Placement costs vary significantly depending on the needs of children coming into care and the types of placements required to meet those needs. Officers in the department's Access to Resources service routinely seek best value for the council when seeking placements for children. At a strategic level we continue to recruit more affordable in house foster carers in order to minimise use of more expensive independent sector providers. The council makes use of regional and sub-regional placement 'framework' agreements and consortia arrangements designed to drive down costs. Officers are also currently engaged in developing strategies to reduce the need to use more expensive residential placements. Although I anticipate limited growth will be provided in the MTFS for placement costs, this area will continue to face budget pressures going forward.

SEN Transport costs have increased in recent years, largely because of demographic reasons. In the current year officers have undertaken specific work to reduce pressures on this budget. Through more robust implementation of eligibility criteria, encouraging the use of Personal Budgets and obtaining lower costs for taxi journeys, we are spending some £188k less on these costs than in the same period last year. Additional developments are planned for next year – including the transfer of taxi procurement to CSF department – in order to further reduce pressure on this budget.

In 2016-17, spending on UASCs is increasing. While the council receives some central government grant aid it falls short of actual spend and our work with this group has become, effectively, an underfunded 'burden'. Due to international factors, numbers of UASC are likely to continue to grow nationally and across London particularly. Merton's Director of Children's Services is playing a lead role in the London-wide response to the most recent increase in UASCs and in the lobbying of

government in respect of cost pressures arising. Officers are monitoring the implications on the council's budgets carefully and will continue to do so in the medium term.

Supplementary

Can she clarify the difference between the money we spend on looking after unaccompanied children, child asylum seekers and the funding we receive from Central Government for this. How are we managing to cover any shortfall?

Reply

We do quite rightly provide this support. I have already highlighted the Council receives some grant aid for unaccompanied asylum seekers up to the age of 18 but no grant funding to meet the costs associated with working with young people over that age. In 2016/17 our expenditure is expected to exceed income grants by £568K. This adds to the pressure of our department's overall revenue budget and I'm working hard with officers to ensure we manage that through management action, but the reality is this is the right spend, it's a spend we're not getting support from Government for.

From Councillor David Williams to the Cabinet Member for Finance

With reference to the Financial Monitoring Report for September 2016 - showing a projected year end overspend by service departments of £9.979million - and the recommendation of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission to Cabinet regarding the draft Business Plan 2017-21 (in respect of meeting the Council's statutory duties in relation to adult social care), what assurance can he give the Council that the latest projected Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) can be balanced in the next three years without an increase in Council Tax in 2017/18 or 2018/19?

Reply

Members will need to consider all options in relation to the statutory requirements for adults and indeed children's social care to balance the budget. We will need to consider the impact of the Autumn Statement today on our MTFS and await details of other information in order to be able to update it sufficiently. No options can be ruled in or ruled out until proposals are presented to cabinet for Council later in the year in accordance with the Business Planning timetable. It is quite clear that the government wants our Just About Managing residents to pay for its failure to tackle the social care challenge by introducing a so-called "levy" and by allowing its NHS to threaten to withdraw funding to councils that don't increase council tax. In contrast, residents can be assured we will be on their side and will be demanding our share of the £350m a week promised by members of the government for our health services, which was strangely absent from the Autumn Statement earlier today.

Supplementary

Not for the first time, does Councillor Allison refer to the impact of Brexit, which our parties were divided over, and as a strong Remainer, I have to say to him, I wish that the Remain vote in Labour held wards in Merton was as strong as it was in wards in Wimbledon, including Hillside. However, he hasn't mentioned in his reply the Council's consultation on council tax, probably because he and the Mitcham and Morden Labour Party attempted to undermine it, with their own bogus questionnaire

which also had a reply paid service licence. Who does he think paid for that business reply service licence?

Reply

Before I answer, it's really not my place on this night to go straight into the politics without expressing some tribute to Councillor Williams on his longevity in his position. I've been here for less than half the time he has, and hats off, because it's not the easiest or most fun job, and he's done a great job. One of the things I have always admired about him is that he's enjoyed the politics of the situation, so when we talk about consultation I think it is important for members on that side to remember that when the public was consulted about, say, what should happen to the deficit in 2010, they voted for a party that was going to eradicate the deficit by 2015. How do they feel about that consultation? And how do they feel about the consultation in June when, and I agree with him, I wish that 70% of the country voted for Remain, when people were promised on the side of a bus, £350m per week extra for their health service, how do you think those people feel about the way they were consulted by his Ministers, in his Government, when today they have ignored them. You should remember those issues when talking about consultation.

From Councillor Russell Makin to the Cabinet Member for Finance

Could he update us on our approach to sharing our services with other boroughs to save money in a time of government cuts?

Reply

Merton has been at the forefront of sharing services. In particular we have shared legal services, regulatory services, debt recovery services, internal audit, pensions administration. We are currently close to finalising the award of 2 tenders as part of a shared arrangement with three other neighbouring boroughs for our refuse collection, street cleansing and parks maintenance.

Supplementary

Could the Cabinet Member update us further on how the shared legal service has saved money for council tax payers.

Reply

We have been able to save a significant amount because of the shared services. No matter how much people in this chamber have been involved in deciding those sorts of things, it is down to staff and managers and I pay tribute to them because savings, big or small through efficiencies like these make life a lot easier for all the other services we have to manage through these difficult times.

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

Can the Cabinet Member tell me:

- a) When the council will commence its consultation on how the Neighbourhood Proportion of the CIL contributions should be spent?
- b) What criteria it will use to determine where and how this money is spent?

Reply

- a) we are due to commence the Neighbourhood CIL Fund consultation on or around the 28th of November this year. We plan for it to run until the 19th of January next year.
- b) The government has rules setting out how the neighbourhood CIL must be applied locally. The Council will confirm assessment criteria for the allocation of the money in accordance with the government's rules following the conclusion of the consultation which will be published. Please refer to www.merton.gov.uk/cil for consultation and details.

Supplementary

Does the Cabinet Member agree that, given this neighbourhood funding is designed to ensure that residents benefit from developments in their own area, that it's crucial that residents have a say on how it's spent on improving local infrastructure. Could he therefore give assurances that local residents will be given the opportunity to be involved in the funding allocation process through the community forums and their local councillors, rather than allowing unelected officers to determine where their funds are going to be spent.

Reply

I think it's quite clear that there should be engagement in terms of how those resources are distributed throughout the borough. We have set out here how we intend to go forward and I look forward to having that dialogue.

From Councillor Mary Curtin to the Cabinet Member for Finance

Could he comment on the pressures on this year's budget and the financial challenge we make in relation to overspending services?

Reply

The problems mainly arise from Adult Services from increases complexity of care and increase in provider prices. This is common across many authorities with this responsibility. An action plan is in place working on mitigation measures and alternative options for dealing with the issues.

Supplementary

Could the Cabinet Member comment on the level of spending in adult social care and how this compares to other boroughs in London. Does he think this is symptomatic of a national crisis in social care?

Reply

We have had an opportunity over the last few months to look back over our spending figures over the previous years and compare them with spending in the other outer London boroughs. What we can tell in 2009/10, we spent roughly 15% less on adult social care than the average outer London borough. By 2014/15, we were spending slightly more than the average outer London boroughs. I don't pretend for a moment that there haven't been difficult choices to make here but that rather indicates that the choices have been even harder in other boroughs similar to us. I do think that it shows a need for the Government to grasp the issue of the crisis in adult social care that's taking place, and to take it seriously, not just to say it's somebody else's

problem. It's a national problem, it needs to be solved nationally and the Government needs to take responsibility for their work.

From Councillor Hamish Badenoch to the Cabinet Member for Street Cleanliness and Parking

Can the Cabinet Member please update the Council on details of progress made as part of the Phase C 'fine tuning' process for the waste services contract?

Reply

We are making good progress and ensuring the contract documents are clear and understood by all and that assumptions made as part of the final tender process are being firmed up.

We are still on target to conclude within agreed timescale leading to contract award in Mid December.

Supplementary

Given that Lot2 savings in the MTFs have reduced by 40% since the business case was approved by Cabinet, for Lot1, can he please confirm what the percentage movement has been in capital costs since it was presented to Cabinet, and can he explain why that is the case. Can he also explain any percentage movements in savings as presented to Cabinet.

Reply

As the councillor will be aware, in terms of fine tuning there is a lot of commercial sensitivity surrounding that area. What I will say is that I share his desire for openness and transparency which is why these plans have gone through Scrutiny and have been through a call-in process, and I have been happy to give evidence there as well as meeting individual residents, going to coffee mornings and meeting with Opposition councillors to discuss this proposal. Perhaps he could, in the interests of openness and transparency, speak to the Prime Minister in terms of what her plan is for Brexit because quite honestly, nobody else is aware of what her plan is. This authority has a direction. We know where we are going.

From Councillor Agatha Akyigyina to the Cabinet Member for Finance

Can he update us on our collection rates in relation to Business Rates?

Reply

As at the end of October we have collected 65.49% of the business rates charged for 2016/17. The total net debt collectable for the year is £89.2 million and so far we have collected £58.4 million. In addition we have collected £1.9 million of outstanding debt relating to previous years business rates.

Supplementary

Can the Cabinet Member tell us if the new approach to business rates will improve the Council's financial position.

Reply

I think there's a lot more questions than there are answers at the moment. Her question is a very good one. The move of business rates to local councils is a very big challenge. In theory it's not a bad idea, it gives us a stake in ensuring that we

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have thriving business communities. It's not necessarily the best way for areas where business is not the priority and where residential communities might be better.

As far as we're concerned, on the one hand, being a London borough, we potentially get a lot of business rates. But on the other, we know full well we won't be able to keep all of that, at least with no strings attached. What we need to do is find out what the strings will be. For instance, something as important to the public as Crossrail2, if Crossrail2 goes ahead there will be a very big impact on our businesses, and we'll do our best to protect them as much as possible, but whilst the work on Crossrail is going on, would it be fair for our business community to move out temporarily and for us to lose the funding that comes from business rates, which may mean we cannot provide services for our local people. That would be wrong and that needs to be sorted out and the Government needs to get its act together, stop thinking about Brexit. We would like some answers on Crossrail.

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