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COUNCIL

9 SEPTEMBER 2015

(19.15 - 21.06)

PRESENT

The Mayor of Merton, Councillor David Chung
The Deputy Mayor of Merton, Councillor Pauline Cowper

Councillors: Agatha Mary Akyigyina, Stephen Alambritis, Mark Allison, Stan Anderson, Laxmi Attawar, Hamish Badenoch, John Bowcott, Michael Bull, Adam Bush, Tobin Byers, Charlie Chirico, Caroline Cooper-Marbiah, Stephen Crowe, Mary Curtin, David Dean, John Dehaney, Nick Draper, Edward Foley, Brenda Fraser, Fidelis Gadzama, Ross Garrod, Suzanne Grocott, Jeff Hanna, Joan Henry, Daniel Holden, James Holmes, Janice Howard, Mary-Jane Jeanes, Abigail Jones, Philip Jones, Andrew Judge, Sally Kenny, Linda Kirby, Abdul Latif, Najeeb Latif, Brian Lewis-Lavender, Gilli Lewis-Lavender, Edith Macauley, Russell Makin, Maxi Martin, Peter McCabe, Oonagh Moulton, Ian Munn, Katy Neep, Dennis Pearce, John Sargeant, Judy Saunders, David Simpson, Marsie Skeete, Peter Southgate, Geraldine Stanford, Linda Taylor, Imran Uddin, Gregory Udeh, Peter Walker, Jill West, Martin Whelton and David Williams

1 CELEBRATION OF THE LONG REIGN OF HER MAJESTY THE QUEEN (Agenda Item 1)

The Mayor invited Reverent Andrew Wakefield to lead the Council in the official prayer to mark Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II becoming our longest reigning monarch.

Councillors Stephen Alambritis, Oonagh Moulton and Peter Southgate all spoke on this historic event.

2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 2)

No apologies were made.

3 DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY INTEREST (Agenda Item 3)

No pecuniary declarations of interests were made.

4 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (Agenda Item 4)

The Minutes of the meeting held on 8 July 2015 were agreed as a correct record.

5 ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE MAYOR, LEADER OF THE COUNCIL AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE (Agenda Item 5)

The Mayor provided the Council with a brief update on his recent Mayoral duties including that unfortunately the Mayor's summer Cricket event in Mitcham had to be cancelled due to bad weather, but it would be rescheduled in 2016. The Mayor also promoted the 'Silver Sunday' afternoon tea event being held on 4 October 2015.

The Leader addressed the Council and read out a cross party statement on the refugee crisis. A copy of the statement is attached as Appendix A to the minutes.

6 PUBLIC QUESTIONS TO CABINET MEMBERS (Agenda Item 6)

The responses to the written public questions were circulated prior to the meeting. The Mayor then invited each of the questioners in turn to ask (if they wished) a supplementary question to the appropriate Cabinet Member.

A copy of the supplementary questions and the responses will be included within the 'Public questions to Cabinet Members' published document.

7 COUNCILLORS' ORDINARY PRIORITY QUESTIONS TO CABINET MEMBERS (Agenda Item 7)

The responses to the Members' ordinary priority questions were circulated prior to the meeting. The Mayor then invited each of those Councillors in turn to ask (if they wished) a further supplementary question to the Cabinet Member.

A copy of the supplementary questions and the responses will be included within the 'Councillors' ordinary priority questions' to cabinet members published document.

8a STRATEGIC THEME: COUNCILLORS' QUESTIONS TO CABINET MEMBERS (Agenda Item 8a)

The responses to the Members' strategic theme priority questions were circulated prior to the meeting. The Mayor then invited each of those Councillors in turn to ask (if they wished) a further supplementary question to the Cabinet Member.

A copy of the supplementary questions and the responses will be included within the 'Strategic theme: Councillors' questions to Cabinet Members' published document.

8b STRATEGIC THEME: MAIN REPORT (Agenda Item 8b)

The report was moved by Councillor Maxi Martin and seconded by Councillor Martin Whelton.

Councillor Charlie Chirico also spoke on this item.

RESOLVED

That the Strategic Theme report is agreed.

8c STRATEGIC THEME MOTION - CONSERVATIVE 1 (Agenda Item 8c)

The motion was moved by Councillor James Holmes and seconded by Councillor Linda Taylor.

The Labour amendment, as set out in agenda item 16 was moved by Councillor Ross Garrod and seconded by Councillor Judy Saunders.

The Labour amendment was then put to the vote and was carried – votes in favour 39, and votes against 20 with 1 abstention.

The substantive resolution was then agreed.

RESOLVED

This Council recognises, given the urgent and projected demand for more secondary school places in Merton, that there is still not a suitable site agreed with the Department for Education (DFE) who are responsible, via the Education Funding (EFA) Agency, for identifying such a site. Furthermore, even if the process can shortly be concluded, Council is concerned about the time it has taken for the EFA to identify a site for a new secondary free school in the borough that fully meets the needs of parents and pupils across the whole of Merton but acknowledges the unavoidable difficulties facing the EFA.

The search for suitable sites for a new secondary school commenced in 2012 but it was immediately clear from the results of the Capita Simmonds report which the council commissioned that unfortunately there are very few sites in the borough that are suitable for a school, given the lack of significant land availability, the requirements for sufficient space and outside play areas and the government funding available for building new schools. The government's EFA have now undertaken their own site search and have confirmed the difficulty in finding a suitable site in Merton. Nonetheless, the council has assisted the EFA in identifying a potential site in South Wimbledon which is the administration's preferred option although it cannot currently be named for reasons of commercial confidentiality. This Council acknowledges that:

- If, due to lack of a suitable site and insufficient funding from central government, a viable secondary school site cannot be identified by the government's EFA within the timescale required to meet future need then this administration will work with the government's EFA and with Harris where appropriate to reassess the current secondary school strategy and look at the various contingency plans

in place for such an eventuality, including looking at alternative options for secondary school expansion which are cost effective and value for money and which meet our statutory responsibilities so we do not run the serious risk of not having enough provision in place, with inadequate funding from the Department for Education for the construction of a new school potentially requiring us to look at more cost effective and value for money options.

- Notwithstanding the difficulty in finding a site, this administration has focused on finding a good quality provider with a track record of achievement in the borough by writing to the Regional Schools Commissioner expressing a clear preference for a provider with a track record of offering good quality education to young people in Merton over an untested provider, Chapel Street, which was proposing a split site school across three unidentified sites, which was approved and selected by the DFE but which later withdrew. The process undertaken by the government's EFA, assisted by the council, in finding a suitable site, close to where pupil numbers will be highest in the west of the borough, is unavoidable in order to ensure the suitability of the site in terms of space and environmental requirements and the affordability of the site in the light of government cuts to the funding for new school construction.

This Council notes that many parents, teachers and children don't want split site secondary schools for a variety of reasons, such as safety, travel issues and lack of flexibility, and congratulates the council on making clear to the Secretary of State our preference for a tested provider with a good track record over the Chapel Street three site proposal. Nor do they want to see popular primary schools, such as Joseph Hood and Wimbledon Chase, adversely impacted by proposals for a new secondary school on their existing sites. The lack of a suitable site for a new secondary school is regrettable but the EFA and the council's focus is on ensuring the right site and to ensure our residents' children can access a high quality school close to their home.

This Council therefore urges the government's EFA, working where appropriate with Harris and the council and Cabinet, to continue to do all they can to identify a site and to rapidly progress a single site location where at all possible for a new secondary free school in the west of the borough, as close as possible to the area of greatest need that a) would not adversely affect existing schools in Merton and b) could accommodate a new secondary school on a single site thereby avoiding the need for a split site, bearing in mind the land availability constraints and the inadequate government funding for the construction of new schools.

9 REPORT FROM RAYNES PARK COMMUNITY FORUM (Agenda Item 9)

Councillor Michael Bull presented the report, which was received by the Council.

10 NOTICE OF MOTION - CONSERVATIVE 1 (Agenda Item 10)

The motion was moved by Councillor Daniel Holden and seconded by Councillor David Dean. It was noted as part of moving the motion a minor oral amendment (as published in advance of the meeting) was made.

The Labour amendment, as set out in agenda item 17 was moved by Councillor Andrew Judge and seconded by Councillor Tobin Byers.

Councillor Mary Jane Jeanes also spoke on the item.

The Labour amendment was then put to the vote and was carried – votes in favour 36, and votes against 20 with 4 abstentions.

The substantive resolution was then agreed.

RESOLVED

This council notes the importance of good quality public transport systems to support Merton's economy. Tens of thousands of Merton residents use tube, train and bus services to get to work each day and investment in transport is key to the sustainable economic growth of our borough. Council therefore welcomes the plans for Crossrail 2, with a proposed key station in Wimbledon.

Council acknowledges that the construction period will inevitably cause some disruption to the town centre and welcomes the consultation with local people on how this is managed which is planned by Crossrail.

Wimbledon is the economic hub of the borough, with half of Merton's jobs and nearly all the borough's office based employment. It is therefore imperative that the construction is phased in such a way that the existing businesses in the town centre are retained and that the impact on local people and businesses is minimised as far as possible.

This Council regrets the Mayor of London's loss of control over industrial relations at Transport for London, for which he is responsible, and condemns the considerable inconvenience caused to residents in Merton by the series of Tube and rail strikes that took place over the summer as a result of his failure. Unnecessary strike action that could have been averted by the Mayor by all four unions representing tube workers, namely ASLEF (representing mainly train drivers), TSSA (representing mainly ticket office staff), Unite and the Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) has caused huge travel disruption for the thousands of Merton residents who rely daily on services such as the Northern and District lines to commute into central London from our borough. This council condemns the Mayor of London for his inability to address the safety concerns of Tube workers and notes that that despite being elected on a pledge to "deal once and for all with endless Tube strikes" in the capital, strikes have actually increased under his administration. This Council pays tribute to all those people in Merton affected by the strikes, including many council employees, for their resilience and determination to get to work using alternative methods of travel. This Council remains concerned however about the significant cost to the local economy of the Mayor's failure to manage industrial relations and recognises the considerable

frustration felt not only by commuters but also by the borough's businesses as a result of lost revenue.

This Council also notes that the planned new Night Tube service is well supported by residents and businesses across Merton as part of London Underground's work to modernise transport in the capital, although residents want to be assured that the service will be safe and secure, with sufficient staff presence to deal with any concerns late at night. Journey times are due to be reduced by an average of 20 minutes, with some journeys cut by more than an hour whilst the Night Tube is set to support around 2,000 permanent jobs and boost the London economy by £360 million. Council therefore regrets that the Mayor of London has failed to introduce the service this month – including on the Northern line -which has been delayed due to his failure to manage industrial relations.

Whilst welcoming the ongoing talks aimed at resolving the disputes, this Council regrets that the Mayor of London has failed to take action to ensure no further Tube and rail strikes which would cause further disruption to the borough's residents and businesses. Council therefore resolves to urge the Mayor of London to focus on the safety concerns of residents and workers and ensure safe and secure night tube services can be implemented as soon as possible, and notes the Government's undemocratic Trade Union Bill which bars working people from exercising their human right to withdraw their labour in exceptional circumstances, without achieving a mandate far in excess of the mandate given to most Councillors and MPs and whilst also not allowing the use of electronic voting which would increase democratic participation. The Bill also allows employers to bring in agency workers to cover striking workers' jobs, potentially impacting on the safety and quality of services normally provided by trained and qualified staff.

Council also calls on Crossrail to ensure that the economic sustainability of Wimbledon as the borough's economic hub is maintained over the period of Crossrail 2's construction and that the inconvenience to residents is minimised. Council resolves to ask the Leader and the Cabinet Member to seek to ensure the Crossrail team are fully aware of the council's position on the importance of this issue and of Wimbledon's contribution to the economy of South West London.

11 USE OF SPECIAL URGENCY FOR A KEY DECISION (Agenda Item 11)

The report was moved by Councillor Stephen Alambritis and seconded by Councillor Mark Allison.

RESOLVED

That the Council notes the taking of an urgent key decision and the waiving of the Call-in procedure.

12 CHANGES TO MEMBERSHIP OF COMMITTEES AND RELATED MATTERS (Agenda Item 12)

The report was moved by Councillor Stephen Alambritis and seconded by Councillor Mark Allison.

RESOLVED

That Council notes the changes to the membership of Committees that were approved under delegated powers since the last meeting of the Council.

13 PETITIONS (Agenda Item 13)

The report was moved by Councillor Stephen Alambritis and seconded by Councillor Mark Allison.

RESOLVED

That Council

1. notes the update on the petition received at the last meeting,
2. accepts receipt of a petition presented by Councillor Abdul Latif called 'On the noise nuisance from the Garden Shed Public House'

14 BUSINESS FOR THE NEXT ORDINARY MEETING OF THE COUNCIL (Agenda Item 14)

That the Strategic Theme for the next ordinary meeting of the Council to be held on 18 November 2015 shall be Safer and Stronger with a focus on Policing.

CROSS PARTY STATEMENT ON THE REFUGEE CRISIS FROM THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL AT THE LONDON BOROUGH OF MERTON TO THE COUNCIL MEETING ON WEDNESDAY 09 SEPTEMBER 2015 IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER

Mr Mayor

I would like to make a cross party statement as Leader of the Council on behalf of all the party leaders and all councillors. I know that I have the support of the whole chamber for this statement

You would need to have a heart of stone not to be moved by the scenes that we have witnessed recently across Europe. Men, women, children and whole families in desperate plight are being uprooted from their homes by war and turmoil. The horror of the situation has been brought home to us all by tragic pictures beamed throughout the world of poor Aylan Kurdi, the little boy whose body was washed up on a beach

We have all been contacted by residents keen to provide whatever help they can. Merton Council, which has been working with refugees for many years, is helping to co-ordinate these efforts. We have been speaking with Merton's faith communities and voluntary sector agencies and they are working with us to assist

Mr Mayor

Merton is on standby and ready to help. We will take our fair allocation of refugees by working with London Councils. The recent announcement by the Government has indicated that financial support and additional powers are to be made available to councils. We welcome that and look forward to receiving more detailed information in the coming days

Merton has a proud tradition of helping those in need. With the support of all sides of the chamber we must, can and will fulfil the trust our residents place in us to do the right thing in a time of crisis

Thank you Mr Mayor