

7a) Strategic Theme: Councillors questions

Councillor Marsie Skeete to the Cabinet Member for Community Safety, Engagement and Equalities

Given recent press coverage of increases in violent crime in London, could the Cabinet Member clarify whether crime overall has gone up in Merton over the last 12 months?

Reply

Crime as recorded by Total Notifiable Offences reported to the Police has increased in Merton over the last 12 months. However, there has been a larger increase in reported crime across London so that compared to the level of the London wide rise Merton remains one of the safest boroughs in the capital.

Councillor John Bowcott to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration:

I and many Village residents are certain that people live permanently in vehicles parked on the Causeway. What rights do they have to do this and what is the Council's attitude towards it?

Reply

No one has the right to live within a vehicle parked on the public highway. We are working with the Metropolitan Police to agree the best course of action to remove any vehicles that are being used in this way. We shall be taking appropriate legal action once satisfied that we have the evidence and we have completed the appropriate checks as per the protocol.

An intervention that the Council is currently investigating is the introduction of the appropriate parking management which will address this problem on a more permanent basis at this location as well as addressing the needs of visitors and ensuring access at all times.

Councillor Brenda Fraser to the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance

Could she outline the work Merton does with the police and other partners to ensure that residents are kept safe in the event of a terrorist attack or public order and other emergencies?

Reply

Local planning and co-ordination is developed and tested through the Borough Resilience Forum (BRF) which is a statutory body under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004. All local emergency services partners along with health, transport and Merton emergency planning representatives meet regularly to review and assess both London and local risks and ensure we understand and have the ability to co-ordinate our response to any local incidents. Local hazards and risk are also exercised and tested with BRF members and council staff.

The BRF has recently completed an assurance assessment for all partners against all the London plans and frameworks.

In addition as part of the sub-regional planning programme the BRF and council staff participate in testing London plans three times a year to ensure a broader understanding of and co-ordination requirements for the London wide plans. The last workshop on 5th November in fact tested the London Marauding Firearms Attack (MFA) scenario with council and emergency services colleagues from the five south west boroughs.

Merton also participates in the two annual Pan London exercises: Exercise Preparer and Exercise Safer City, the latter of which includes activation of the Borough Emergency Control Centre and co-ordination of council responses to requests for assistance from emergency services.

Also, the council's statutory Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership (Safer Merton) works with public, voluntary and community and business organisations to develop crime and disorder audits and implement strategies to reduce crime and disorder.

Annually Safer Merton undertakes a Strategic Assessment to identify and interpret the summary findings of intelligence analysis and assist the partnership in identifying the major issues within the local area, to allow resources to be allocated and activities prioritised in a safety plan for the borough.

The council works with partners (particularly the Police) to assess potential risks to the borough's residents and through the Safer and Stronger Thematic partnerships has implemented plans for numerous matters including; Counter Terrorism, Domestic Violence and Abuse, Sexual Violence, Hate Crime, Reducing Re-Offending and Anti-Social Behaviour.

The partnership has worked with the Faith and Belief Forum to identify potential rest places and given the representatives counter-terrorism awareness training. Proposals are also being developed to provide counter- terrorism awareness to front-line staff.

Councillor David Simpson to the Cabinet Member for Community Safety, Engagement and Equalities:

In just one year the new London only approach for recruitment into the Met Police has seen the number of recruits from minority ethnic backgrounds more than double across London and female recruits increase from a quarter to a third. Can the Cabinet Member tell me the number of new recruits that have come to Merton as a result of the Mayor of London's successful, new recruitment policy?

Reply

New recruits are defined by the Met as probationary officers in their first two years of service. Merton has 108 probationary officers who started in the last two years. Of

these probationary officers, 13 are from ethnic minority backgrounds. This brings the level of BAME officers in Merton to just under 12% of the total number of officers, compared to the Merton population which is 37% BAME.

Unfortunately, the Mayor's plans to cut neighbourhood policing across London, including in Merton, demonstrate that recruitment campaigns will have little impact in making residents feel safer if there are actually less frontline neighbourhood based police officers in place.

Councillor Abigail Jones to the Cabinet Member for Community Safety, Engagement and Equalities

Could she outline the number of Safer Neighbourhood ward specific officers in place in Merton in January 2010 compared to the number in place in January 2015.

Reply

It is my understanding that in 2010 each of the borough's 20 wards had 1 Police Sergeant, 2 Police Constables and 3 PCSOs ie 120 officers in total. Currently, the allocation in 2015 is 20 Police Constables and 20 PCSOs acting as Dedicated Ward Officers, ie 40 officers in total. Further additional officers can be deployed to wards when required although they are not dedicated ward officers as was the case in 2010.

Councillor Oonagh Moulton to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration:

What is the administration's current policy on introducing and expanding 20's Plenty schemes in Merton in order to improve road safety, particularly in residential areas?

Reply

During 2014 the Council together with most other London boroughs as part of the London Environment Directors Network commissioned a review of policy and practice with regard to 20 mph speed limits and zones. In addition we looked at all existing 20 mph speed limit locations within the borough. The report also considered evidence and information drawn from across London and beyond. This was reported to the Scrutiny Commission and is included in the minutes of 11th November 2014: <http://democracy.merton.gov.uk/documents/s5967/20%20Mph%20Zones%20and%20limits.pdf>

The report concluded that 20 mph limits (ie 20 mph signs) have very limited impact on speed reduction. In fact it is only where physical interventions (humps, chicanes, etc) are implemented that driver behaviour changes significantly.

Excess speed is enforced by the police and we work closely with them to identify those locations where evidence supports the need for intervention. Road safety and the reduction of serious and fatal accidents is a priority and our scarce resources are applied to those locations where we identify the opportunity to reduce accidents with particular attention to those immediately outside schools.

Further detailed research into this whole subject is being undertaken by the Department for Transport however this is not expected to report for at least another 2 years.

Councillor Agatha Akyigyina to the Cabinet Member for Children's Services

Is the Cabinet Member concerned about increasing levels of knife crime amongst young people in London?

Reply

Whilst Merton continues to be one of the safest London borough's we are, of course, concerned about levels of knife crime in the capital. 14 young men have died this year as a result of knife crime in the capital and each one is someone's son, brother and friend. We are fortunate that the few knife related incidents we have had in the borough this year have not involved very serious injury. In a significant number of them the perpetrators and/or victims were not Merton residents. This is why we have been working closely with our Police and council colleagues in our neighbouring boroughs to tackle the issue together. In Merton our safer Schools officers, youth workers, gangs worker and wider CSF colleagues are working hard together to divert and deter young people from carrying knives. We believe that by working together we are making a difference and this is evidenced by our very low rate of young people entering the criminal justice system, and relatively low rates of serious youth crime. We will continue to work hard together to keep the borough safe for our young people.

Councillor Michael Bull to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration:

Can the Cabinet Member detail what investigations have been made into road safety in Dundonald ward following the serious road accident involving an 11-year old boy on Dundonald Road on Wednesday 30 September?

Reply

Council officers have kept in contact with the police regarding their on-going investigations, although the investigating team are unable to release any information at this time regarding the accident.

A council officer and the Traffic Management Police Officer carried out a site investigation on 9th October 2015 and it was observed that vehicles did travel at slow speed on approach / exit at the roundabout; pedestrians were confident in crossing the road (at the roundabout at various arms); the road markings and signs are fully visible; our observations were between 3.00 and 4.30pm and there was no obstructive parking. The site assessment of the roundabout and the arms feeding into the roundabout concluded that there were no obvious physical improvements (in engineering terms) that could be applied. However, notwithstanding this, officers will be looking at any recommendations that the Investigating Police Officer may make following the completion of their investigation.

A *Theatre in Education* session was carried out at the school on 6th November 2015 regarding road safety and distraction on the road. It was well received by the pupils and the teachers. A council officer is liaising with the school, PCSOs and Year 6 tutors to undertake further targeted work on road safety which will include cycling.

Councillor Mary Curtin to the Cabinet Member for Community Safety, Engagement and Equalities

Could she outline some of the work our Interfaith Forum undertakes to ensure people of all faiths and none in the borough work together to build a safer stronger Merton?

Reply

The forum's membership is diverse and includes representatives from the Muslim, Christian, Jewish, Buddhist and Hindu faiths. It also includes a representative of the British Association of Humanists. To reflect this, the forum is now known as the Faith and Belief Forum.

The forum and individual faith and belief organisations participate in numerous charitable acts including supporting the winter night shelter project for homeless people. Different venues host the shelter with faith groups taking turns to help out – Wimbledon Mosque organises food and volunteers when the Salvation Army Hall is used. Faith and Belief groups have also supported Food Banks, with the Morden Islamic Community Centre recently opening a new food bank open to all residents in the borough who are in need.

An important part of the Forum's calendar is the annual civic event to mark Holocaust Memorial Day on 27 January, which has included speakers from all faiths, as well as Holocaust survivors. It is an attempt to remember this terrible period in history, and other acts of genocide across the world, and make a stand against prejudice and discrimination today.

This year to mark Inter Faith Week 15-21 November the forum has arranged a Faith in the Media seminar (17 November), activities in the libraries and a community cohesion event called Diversi-tea (21 November). The latter event is being hosted by the Morden Islamic Centre and participants will be treated to different teas from across the globe and given an opportunity to meet people from different backgrounds. The Muslim Women of Morden are to be particularly commended for their efforts in working with council staff to organise these events.

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