

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.

**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.

**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 6<sup>th</sup> 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.

**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.

**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.

**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.

**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.

**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

**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.

**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

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