

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](http://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.

<b>Subject</b>	<b>Enrolments 14/15</b>	<b>Enrolments 15/16</b>
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
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1,767</b>	<b>1,423</b>

**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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