

From Sarmad Gassoub

To the Cabinet Member for Street Cleanliness and Parking

How can the Council possibly justify operating a noise abatement service in Merton that is restricted to summer weekends when its cash reserves run into millions of pounds and when neighbouring boroughs like Wandsworth are able to offer a daily service?

Reply

We currently provide a noise pollution service Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm and every Saturday night from 11pm to 4am. During the busy summer months of June, July and August we also provide an additional Friday night service 11pm to 4am.

The provision of any service is determined by a number of factors, including; cost, resourcing, demand and priority. The council has looked at various service level options including the provision of a full night duty service as well as a 24/7 service. These options have been presented to Cabinet, where the decision was taken to maintain the existing level of service provision.

We now share our noise services with a partner borough. As part of this sharing of services we are committed to maintaining the service provision that we currently have, but there is limited demand for an extended service which would be unaffordable in the current financial climate.

From Diane Neil Mills

To the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Environment and Housing

What were the costs associated with the recent resurfacing works undertaken in July through September 2016 of Courthope Road SW19, broken down by category of expenditure (e.g. contractor labour, contractor equipment/overheads, materials, council supervision/overhead)?

Reply

The total cost associated with the footpath reconstruction works within Courthope Road, SW19 was £52,562.03 and the total cost of the carriageway resurfacing that was undertaken shortly after was £20,136.01. Therefore a total cost of all £72,698.04 for the renewal of the public street scene. This work included more intricate works to re-set the edging cobbles in the carriageway.

I'm unable to give you a breakdown of expenditure for contractor labour, contractor equipment/overheads, materials, council supervision/overheads within this total cost as each individual rate within the Highways Works and Service Contract 2012-17 is already inclusive of these elements.

**From Debra Earl
To the Cabinet Member for Finance**

Why not increase the rates by at least 10% a property to improve the services offered by the council? I seem to have paid £1,300 for a number of years now.

Reply

Whilst the level of council tax is determined by the local authority, the government sets a limit each year by which it can increase, without the need for a referendum. This level is currently 2%, in place from 2013/14 to 2017/18. Prior to this In 2011/12 to 2012/13, the limit was 3.5%.

Just as importantly, it needs to be remembered that council tax is a regressive form of taxation. In other words, people with lower incomes tend to pay a higher proportion of their income on council tax than those who are richer. That is one reason why in Merton we have maintained council tax rebates for the very lowest earners, but we also have a duty to consider the cost of living of those who are just about managing.

Particularly at a time when millionaires have received income tax cuts and there is a widespread problem with tax avoidance and evasion, we do not think that the government should be forcing councils to increase council tax, by cutting grants that fund services, or by introducing their council tax levy (the so-called "precept"). The government needs to get to grips with the national crisis in adult social care that has emerged under their watch, properly fund councils for the services its citizens require, and ensure that the costs are spread fairly and do not fall on those who are struggling to make ends meet.

**From Geraldine Kirby
To the Cabinet Member for Street Cleanliness and Parking**

I am very concerned about fortnightly refuse collection, I have indoor cats, as do many residents and their waste is deposited in my domestic waste. I believe constitutes a severe public health hazard and I would like to know what the council are going to do to mitigate this risk?

Reply

The changes in waste collection and introduction of wheelie bins is scheduled to be implemented in October 2018.

Animal faeces, similar to nappies, providing that they are appropriately wrapped present no health issues with this waste being collected on alternate weeks.

As with current collections it will be the responsibility of the resident to ensure that this waste is effectively wrapped before depositing into the wheelie bin.

The major contributor to the 'smelly waste' is food and as this is collected weekly there are no health concerns with moving to an alternate week collection for the general waste

From Terry Sullivan

To the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Environment and Housing

Rediscovering Mitcham project in Mitcham town centre. This is scheduled for completion January 2018--18 months after start. Why is this minor project taking so long-is it to justify the obscene price-tag?

Reply

Rediscover Mitcham is a 3 year major project representing £6m investment in Mitcham town centre, with the majority of the funding from TfL.

The programme of works has already delivered the new Market Square, re-paving of Majestic Way, creation of the Clock Tower Gardens, restoration of the Clock Tower itself (supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund) and the cleaning and general improvements to Three Kings Pond.

The current phase of works involves changes to the road layout and creation of the bus street. The project programme was publicised via our website and Mitcham Community Forum mid-2016. The current phase of works are running to schedule and on-track for completion in December 2017.

Major town centre projects are by their nature, complex, particularly when keeping the town centre active and traffic flowing during the works. We do not consider the project to be 'taking so long'.

From Andrew Boyce

To the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Environment and Housing

What progress has he made in bringing before full Council, for its decision, the application to include the 1820s cottages at 34-40 Morden Road in South Wimbledon on the Council's local list of heritage assets?

Reply

I have been very supportive of the efforts of my colleague Cllr Andrew Judge to get these added to the local list of heritage assets and recognise the value of our existing 1820 cottages, which any future development should improve, not demolish. Any recommendations on their inclusion will be made by officers to the Borough Plan Advisory committee on 8th March and then to the subsequent Full Council meeting for a decision, but I do hope that the cottages are added to the council's local list of heritage assets.

**From David Anderson
To the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Environment and Housing**

What actions are the council taking to ease the impact of a significant increase to traffic and pollution on residents in close proximity to the Durnsford Road, Plough Lane, Gap Road, Haydons Road junction?

Reply

In terms of traffic, TfL's annual monitoring report (Traffic in London) suggests that traffic has been broadly stable in Merton over the last 4/5 years. However, there appears to be an increase on light commercial traffic along major roads with particular area of growth being home deliveries etc.

It should, however, be noted that Haydons Rd, Plough Lane, Gap Rd and Durnsford Road are all London Distributor Roads forming part of the borough's key strategic network i.e., these roads are key thoroughfares and they accommodate commercial units / industrial estates. In terms of overall action, the Council has a number of initiatives that is aimed at promoting public transport, sustainable modes of transport such as cycling, pedestrians facilities, car clubs, electric vehicle charging points and we support business and new developments with sustainable travel plans, the overall aim is to reduce the need for vehicular trips.

In terms of air quality, the council has a number of initiatives that are aimed at reducing pollution by promoting public transport, sustainable modes of transport such as cycling, pedestrians facilities, car clubs, electric vehicle charging points, travel plans etc.

**From Nicola Thompson
To the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Environment and Housing**

I note that air quality monitoring has been suspended in Plough Lane since 2014. When will it be reinstated, and could similar monitoring could be installed in the heavy traffic area of north Haydons Road which is a popular walking route for parents and children of nearby primary schools?

Reply

The diffusion tube network used to help monitor Nitrogen Dioxide in the borough changes from time to time and these 'tubes' are sometimes located in different places to provide additional information or focus on a particular problem area. I am pleased to say that Plough Lane has been reinstated. I note from discussions with officers that diffusion tubes placed at this site have been removed or tampered with in the past, which hasn't helped with the data collection. The whole issue of monitoring and site selection is currently being discussed by the council's Sustainable Communities Scrutiny and Overview Panel. One potential outcome from this dialogue is likely to be an enhanced and more robust monitoring network in the future.

**From Garry E Hunt
To the Cabinet Member for Street Cleanliness and Parking**

What is the justification for Merton Council to introduce quickly in April 2017 a very high parking levy, purporting to improve Merton's air quality, specifically for owners of diesel vehicles in CPZ areas and without warning to the residents' concerned?

Reply

Air Pollution in London has been described as a 'Public Health emergency' in the House of Commons. Locally this has been debated at Scrutiny and Cabinet and we consider that the health problems caused by air pollution and in particular diesel vehicles to be so significant and important that we must take steps now to help address the 9,000 deaths associated with poor air quality in London. A consultation process regarding the diesel surcharge is currently underway and residents can make their opinions known through this process.

**From Anthony Fairclough
To the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Environment and Housing**

As there are about 25,000 households in rented accommodation in the borough, has the council actively considered introducing selective licensing in the borough or any parts of it, and what research was undertaken?

Reply

The Council is awaiting feedback on central governments recent consultation on the licencing of HMO and related reforms before carrying out research into selective licencing.

**From Gemma Illsley
To the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Environment and Housing**

How is the council planning to resolve the congestion at the Haydons Road/Plough Lane junction and impact on the side roads; namely Haydon Park Road?

Reply

Annually the Council nominates key signalised junctions to TfL for review to optimise efficiency and reduce congestion (where possible). Last financial year, the Haydons Road/Plough Lane junction was reviewed by TfL and the appropriate changes within the phasing were made to maximise the capacity and operation of the junction.

To address the reported problems within the adjacent side roads as caused by the various banned movements at the Haydons/Plough junction, Merton worked with TfL to remove the banned turns thereby removing the need for motorists to use the residential side roads.

From Antony Buckle

To the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Environment and Housing

Does Council share the view of the Planning Inspectorate who, in 2015, deemed the 1820s cottages at 34-40 Morden Road in South Wimbledon heritage assets, which positively contribute to the character of the area? If so, will it endorse that view by adding the cottages to its local list?

Reply

I have been very supportive of the efforts of my colleague Cllr Andrew Judge to get these added to the local list of heritage assets and recognise the value of our existing 1820 cottages, which any future development should improve, not demolish. Any recommendations on their inclusion will be made by officers to the Borough Plan Advisory committee on 8th March and then to the subsequent Full Council meeting for a decision, but I do hope that the cottages are added to the council's local list of heritage assets.

From Joanna Durrans

To the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Environment and Housing

Does Council recognise the positive benefits, both to it and the local community, which could be realised were it to agree to add the 1820s cottages at 34-40 Morden Road, South Wimbledon to its local list of heritage assets?

Reply

I have been very supportive of the efforts of my colleague Cllr Andrew Judge to get these added to the local list of heritage assets and recognise the value of our existing 1820 cottages, which any future development should improve, not demolish. Any recommendations on their inclusion will be made by officers to the Borough Plan Advisory committee on 8th March and then to the subsequent Full Council meeting for a decision, but I do hope that the cottages are added to the council's local list of heritage assets.

From Simon McGrath

To the Cabinet Member for Street Cleanliness and Parking

Given the short timescale for implementing new parking charges for diesel cars, what is the council's objective in introducing the charge? For example, what percentage reduction in diesel vehicles registered to park in the borough over what period of time would be considered a success for the policy?

Reply

I refer you to my answer outlined in question 9 with regards to the urgency of implementing this policy.

We are proposing a two year review of this project to evaluate its success. Encouraging vehicle owners to move away from diesel cars is essential to reducing poor air quality in our borough and in London as a whole. A recent study shows that a modern diesel car emits more toxic pollution than a bus or heavy truck, this is something we cannot ignore and where we can take steps to change behaviour of owners, we should. I would consider any shift away from polluting vehicles as a success.

**From John Tippett-Cooper
To the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care & Health**

Given continued funding cuts, is the council confident it will continue to meet its statutory duties in relation to adult social care and has the council sought legal advice in relation to its statutory duties in the last 12 months?

Reply

The Council is committed to continuing to meet its statutory duties for adult social care. This is why it is considering putting significant extra funding into this budget for 17/18. Officers of the council are fully aware of the relevant statutory duties, but do from time to time take legal advice on specific matters of interpretation.

**From Sandra Vogel
To the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Environment and Housing**

Will Merton Council a) update its Nitrogen Dioxide monitoring figures last posted online in 2013 b) explain its commitment to improving air quality across the borough c) clearly and precisely describe how that commitment is reflected in practice d) commit to encourage citizens to engage in air quality monitoring.

Reply

Merton Council has set up a website called "Love Clean Air" <http://lovecleanair.org/> which outlines air pollution within Merton and the surrounding boroughs. All boroughs are now coordinating their monitoring and annual reports through this website and I would urge colleagues and members of the public to visit it as it is very informative and user friendly.

**From Vincent Bolt
To the Cabinet Member for Finance**

Has the council made an assessment of the initial impact of the Brexit vote on 24 June on council investments, including the impact on the council's pension scheme? If so, what was the impact?

Reply

The Director of Corporate Services presented a Briefing Paper on the short and medium to long-term impact of Brexit on the Council's Pension Fund, the Local

Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) and UK and wider global economy to the Pension Fund Advisory Panel (PFAC) at its meeting on Wednesday 29 June 2016.

In summary, the Briefing Paper discussed:

- The extreme volatility in the immediate aftermath of the Referendum result including falls in UK domestic and foreign markets equity prices, rise in Credit Default Swaps pricing and sharp decline in the value of Sterling
- Review and downgrade of the UK economic outlook by the major ratings agencies; and
- Yield compression due to uncertainty and increased demand for Government bonds and index-linked bonds

As for the implications for the L.B Merton Pension Fund and the LGPS, the Paper sounded a note of caution:

- Merton Pension Fund is a long-term investor with well-diversified investment portfolio. The Fund is cashflow positive with no need to dispose assets to pay pensions
- Brexit could pose significant political and economic challenge in the near term. However, it could deliver real opportunity from a global investments perspective in the medium to long-term
- Equity markets have demonstrated some resilience, rebounding strongly since the lows following the Referendum result. The value of the Pension Fund assets appreciated from £533m at the end of May 2016 to £588m at the end of July 2016 reflecting the post-Brexit rally in equity markets and currency gain from weak Sterling. The market value of the Pension Fund was £623m at 31 December 2016. To put this into context, the FTSE 100 index was 6,230 at 31 May 2016, 5,982 at 27 June and 6,724 at 29 July. The index of the top 100 UK companies closed at 7,183 on Friday 27 January 2017.
- Review of the Pension Fund investment strategy is in progress. The review will seek an appropriate balance between growth and matching assets, taking account of the Fund's financial circumstance, global economic, financial and markets forecasts, the Council's risk appetite and current Government regulations and pooling agenda
- Pension Fund accounting deficits fluctuate with bond yields
- Need to avoid knee-jerk reaction to market volatility. The Pension Fund assets are managed by external fund managers with full discretion and expertise to act appropriately when threats and opportunities are perceived.
- Weak Sterling has been beneficial to the Pension Fund performance by virtue of its un-hedged overseas exposure
- Upcoming crystallisation events such as South London Waste Partnership transaction will be negotiated carefully by Council officers and the Fund actuary

At the time of writing, it remains unclear how Brexit and the evolving UK and global political and economic landscape would impact the Pension Fund long-term save that there is the view that:

- Brexit is a risk to UK domestic exposures with perhaps some long-term opportunities (although it will never be known if those opportunities would

have been greater than the opportunities arising from remaining within the EU).

- The global economy is heating up. The US economy could overheat by 2019
- European political risks may be overstated
- The new US administration is changing the distribution of growth forecasts
- Inflation and interest rate will rise

In conclusion, a better cyclical picture is emerging but policy uncertainty and complexity remains, from a pension fund perspective, largely due to Brexit.

From Dr Amal Hassan

To the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Environment and Housing

Will the planned diesel levy be means-tested? If not, has an assessment been undertaken on the impact of the levy increase on residents on lower-incomes?

Reply

No, tax and vehicle emissions are not normally 'means tested' I do not consider the parking surcharge to be disproportionately high and it is still lower than that levied by some other London boroughs. Merton' resident parking permits are amongst the lowest in London.

From Viv Vella/MacVeigh

To the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Environment and Housing

Will the council be supporting the Homelessness Reduction Bill currently passing through parliament that promotes best practice in reducing homelessness?

Reply

The Council welcomes the principle behind the Homeless Reduction Bill that would see the homelessness prevention activity starting earlier. We are however concerned that if the bill is approved and becomes law, it is critical that we are provided with appropriate levels of central government funding to meet the costs of resourcing.

From Myriam Bertero

To the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Environment and Housing

Does the council have estimates of the total increase in annual revenue from the new parking charges for diesel vehicles?

Reply

The aim of introducing a Diesel levy is to reduce the number of diesel vehicles within Controlled Parking Zones requiring a parking permit. It is expected that over a 1 to 3 year period a reduction in the demand for parking permits for diesel vehicles in controlled parking zones will occur thus justifying this method of managing demand.

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The table below shows the total number of parking permits issued and the number that are diesel and the revenue estimates for the 3 year phased introduction of this surcharge.

Revenue raised must lawfully be used on transport purposes including the cost of the Freedom Pass as well as traffic schemes that will assist in reducing congestion and air pollution.

| Permit Type | Number of permits currently issued | Number of Diesel vehicles | Current first permit charges PA | Surcharge 2017/18 £90 | Surcharge 2018/19 £115 | Surcharge 2019/20 £150 |
|-------------------------|---|----------------------------------|--|------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Resident Parking Permit | 16,136 | 5,486 | £65 | £493,740 | £630,890 | £822,900 |
| Business Parking Permit | 523 | 182 | £752 inner zones £662 outer zones | £16,380 | £20,930 | £27,300 |
| Trades Permit | 211 | 73 | £900 (Full Year) £600 (6mnths) £375 (3mnths) £150 (1mnth) £50 (1 wk) | £6,570 | £8,395 | £10,950 |
| Total | 16,870 | 5,741 | | £516,690 | £660,215 | £861,150 |

The above table is based upon the numbers of diesel vehicles, However we expect this figure to decline as the surcharge starts to impact upon ownership.

**From Carl Quilliam
To the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Environment and Housing**

Has the council made an initial assessment of what changes and additional investment would be needed to implement the requirements of the Homelessness Reduction Bill? If not when will you be doing so?

Reply

The Council takes the view that until the Bill is passed and the detail becomes clearer it would not be necessary or appropriate to develop a funding and capacity assessment . Any such assessment would need to be considered alongside any government formula for investment.

**From Rachel Waitt
To the Cabinet Member for Education**

What assessment has the council made of the impact of cuts to school budgets on the numbers of teachers and teaching assistants in Merton?

Reply

As my fellow councillors will be aware from national press coverage and from campaigns being led by London Councils, teacher unions and headteachers professional associations, there are considerable concerns about the changes being made to school funding for April 2017. The fairer funding formula is deeply worrying as, even for Councils like Merton, who may slightly gain from the process, that there will be less money for London schools and schools overall at a time when pupil numbers are at their highest. The government is redistributing money from areas with higher levels of deprivation as well as delivering savings for the Treasury. With increases in staffing costs; inflation on non staffing costs; and the application of the apprenticeship levy on schools' budgets, the actual position is that many schools will have a reduced amount of money to spend per child. The Council works with all its maintained schools to ensure that any budget pressures or issues are addressed promptly but a few schools have had to make difficult decisions and restructure staffing leading to redundancies or vacant posts. When maintained schools make these decisions they always discuss them with the Council. Although the impact to date has been limited we will continue to work with schools to keep the situation under review.

**From Giorgia Gamba
To the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care & Health**

What representations has the council made to Merton CCG in relation to the closure of the Wilson GP surgery and drop-in centre?

Reply

The council shares the concerns of residents about these changes and the manner in which they have been communicated and is working closely with the CCG to clarify the situation for patients and residents who currently use the Wilson.

The CCG have informed us that the contract for the practice was coming to an end and the walk-in centre did not comply with the latest standards for integrated urgent care. Given the planned re-development of the Wilson site, the CCG made a decision not to renew the contract or continue to provide the walk-in centre. As such, the CCG have informed us that patients are being asked to transfer to one of several practices within 1.5 miles of the site. The CCG have given assurances that a support package has been agreed for both the patients and the GPs to assist in the transfer and all vulnerable patients have been identified, supported and tracked to ensure smooth hand-over.

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The council welcomes these measures to ensure continuity of access to care, but will be monitoring this closely to ensure all patients are able to register at a suitable alternative practice.

In addition, the CCG have informed us that an analysis of users of the walk-in centre has shown that a majority of patients would ordinarily have been seen by GPs, but could not get appointments. As such, the CCG has agreed that a primary care hub open 8am-8pm, seven days a week, will be set up in one of the practices in Mitcham until the Wilson site is developed, which will allow better access to all GPs with additional and flexible appointments and integrated with existing out-of-hours GP services.

In the longer term, the CCG and the council have been working on ambitious plans to redevelop the Wilson site as part of the East Merton Model of Health and Wellbeing, which aims to address the greater health needs in the east of the borough. The plan is to co-create a new Health and Wellbeing Centre on the Wilson Hospital site to enable easier access to primary care, investigations and treatment as well as wellbeing services led by the local community for the people of east Merton. Following extensive discussions with local people over the summer, the service model is being finalised. Proposals seek to integrate one of the two borough primary care hubs for provision of extended primary care - 8am-8pm 7 days a week - on the Wilson site.

From Christopher Holt
To the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Environment and Housing

After beginning the third stage Local Plan Estates Plan consultation on the run up to Christmas, will the council be able to accept responses from the public past 3rd February 2017? Why weren't residents given more time & publicity for this also?

Reply

There has been extensive promotion of the estates Local Plan consultation through the council's website, mail outs and community forums. We have already allowed for an extra two weeks for this consultation to take account of the holiday period. This final stage of pre-submission publication of the council's Estates Local Plan started on 8th December 2016 and will end on 3rd February 2017; eight weeks long when government have advised it should be six weeks. Even prior to this stage, we have already undertaken more than four and a half months of consultation on the council's Estates Local Plan since 2014. It is also normal practice for Planning Inspectors to require additional consultation as part of examining the plan later in 2017. Following all the feedback from everybody, we are now keen to give residents the certainty of a final plan and make progress towards submitting the Plan to the Secretary of State by the end of March.

From Cypren Edmunds
To the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Environment and Housing

Social tenant buildings in the borough are either initiated by the local authority and delivered by a resident provider, much to the dissatisfaction of all who dwell in it. Can

the Council take Lewisham council's lead and propose bigger initiatives in Merton?
How widespread does Merton Council promote Self Building?

Reply

Affordable homes in Merton are managed by Registered Providers, either by the Registered Provider buying land and building homes themselves or buying homes directly from the developer or via the planning system which requires up to 40% of major residential developments to be affordable where this is viable. Merton Council does not own or build social housing since transferring its stock to a Registered Provider in 2010. Merton Council has a self build register and already has 194 people interested in self build in Merton: www.merton.gov.uk/self-build-register.

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