

# Agenda Item 5

COUNCIL 20 NOVEMBER

## PUBLIC QUESTIONS

### Procedure

- The Mayor will call your name and ask if you have a supplementary question arising from the answer you have received.
- If you do not have a supplementary question then simply respond thank you, no.
- If you do have a supplementary question respond thank you, yes. You will be shown to a seat in the chamber where you will ask your supplementary question. Make sure you use the microphone.
- Having put your question, please be seated whilst the Cabinet member responds.
- Once the response has been given, please return to your seat in the public gallery.
- The questions and answers and all supplementary questions and replies will be published on Merton's website after the meeting.

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### Questions

1. From Anthony Fairclough

To the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration

#### Question

I understand that around 17,000 households across London benefitted from savings of £108 a year (on average) in their energy bills thanks to the first round of the Big London Energy Switch. How many of those were in Merton?

#### Reply

The Big London Energy Switch's first energy auction was held on 9 April 2013. Throughout the whole of London, 19,705 households registered to take part in the auction, with another c7,000 households expressing an interest. A total of 1,861 households across London switched (around 9% of those registered) saving on average £114 on their annual bill.

Within Merton, 538 residents fully registered for the April auction. A total of 43 residents switched (around 8% of those registered), saving on average £115 per year.

A second Big London Energy Switch auction was held in June 2013. 113 Merton residents registered and four residents switched; these residents saved on average £157. A third auction is due to be held on 19th November 2013.

Supplementary

I wondered if you might outline the advertising and promotion of the Big London Energy Switch in Merton and can you tell me what success for the third auction might look like.

Reply

Without notice, no I can't go into detail about the advertising but it has been successful to the extent of 538 residents registering for the April auction and 43 residents switching; 8% which is I believe on a par with other areas. Then again 113 residents registering for the second auction and 4 switching and now we're moving to a third auction, which will involve a significant number of residents switching to obtain lower energy prices. We're very keen on residents obtaining low energy prices in this borough, as is the Labour Party nationally and I look forward to the next Labour Government imposing an energy price freeze before it reforms the market entirely.

2. From Diana Coman

To the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration

Question

Can the Cabinet Member outline the administration's policy with regards to planning applications for tall buildings? Are there any designated areas in the borough where such applications are encouraged/accepted? And does the administration have any plans to review any such policies?

Reply

The council does not encourage tall buildings, nor does it encourage people to submit planning applications for tall buildings. The council's Core Planning Strategy 2011 states that tall buildings are generally not appropriate within the borough due to its predominately suburban low rise character and that tall buildings will be resisted in all areas of the borough where they will be detrimental to this valued character. In the case of Wimbledon Broadway, which has recently been highlighted in the press, Merton's Core Planning Strategy states that areas near to the edge of the town centre may be sensitive to tall buildings due to the close proximity of low scale, high quality residential development. There are no plans at present to renew our policies on this matter.

Supplementary

It would seem to me that it's not an issue about whether or not the Council encourages planning applications for tall buildings, rather whether it has robust planning policies. Given that the YMCA proposal may be followed by proposals from other developers does he feel confident that the policies as drafted are strong enough to withstand pressure from this sort of development?

Reply

Absolutely. We have a great deal of confidence in our policies which have been developed over the last three years. They are now in the public domain. We do not encourage tall buildings and in respect of the YMCA, I think it's very clear that they've withdrawn their proposal and quite right they do. We are not encouraging tall buildings anywhere.

3. From Keith Walton

To the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration

Question

In the report entitled '20 mph speed limits / zones update' of 16 October 2013, it is stated that 'Reducing speed remains the most effective way of reducing the severity and number road casualties the outcome of the Audit does not support a borough-wide approach to the introduction of 20mph limit in Merton'. Can we please have a copy of all the data on which this conclusion is based?

Reply

The interim report is still work in progress but can be found at <http://www.merton.gov.uk/transport-streets/trafficmanagement/20mph-limits-zones.htm> . There will be a report back to Scrutiny in February.

4. From Jill West

To the Cabinet Member for Environmental Cleanliness and Parking

Question

How much of revenue from parking is used to support front line services in Merton.

Reply

The surplus of £7.1 million from payment of fines for contravention of our parking regulations has been applied to expenditure on Concessionary Fares i.e. Freedom Passes.

Supplementary

Could someone explain to me how other London Boroughs, such as Wandsworth, Hammersmith & Fulham, Kensington & Chelsea, Camden, Lambeth, Westminster and City of London all manage to finance their services without charging to park after 6.30 pm on weekdays or at all on Sundays. This Administration seems to penalise residents by charging to park till 11 pm Monday to Saturday and all day on Sundays in Wimbledon.

Reply

We do review our charging policies, we always look at timings. We can't compare ourselves with other boroughs, we have to look at our borough and look at Mitcham, Morden, Raynes Park, Wimbledon. Just to follow on what other boroughs are doing is not the way we look at that.

5. From Ray Leyden

To the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration

Question

Please can the Council review the policy of off street parking as it leads to catastrophic loss of front gardens causing irreversible environmental damage with loss of visual amenity, loss of habitat, drying out of foundations, additional surface water, loss of privacy and increased danger to pedestrians.

Reply

Residential property owners are allowed to provide hard standings for parking in their front gardens as a result of Government legislation in the form of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order. There are rules to ensure any new hard standings are either porous or have rain runoff into the existing garden. There are exceptions, such as in conservation areas or on classified roads where planning permission is normally required and therefore Council's do have control. In those circumstances, each case is dealt with on its merits with visual impact, habitat protection, water runoff and traffic safety the key considerations.

Since this is government and not local policy permitting this development it is not for renewal by the Council.

6. From Susan Buckmaster

To the Cabinet Member for Environmental Cleanliness and Parking

Question

Will the Cabinet Member advise the scope and timing of street sweeping arrangements for Tabor Grove, St. George's Road, Alt Grove and Francis Grove and confirm he does not accept that ad hoc cleaning, based on a 'drive by' assessment of need or complaints, is suitable in town centre streets?

Reply

Roads in Merton are allocated specific zones under the Environment Protection Act, Litter Code of Practice. Both St. George's Road and Francis Grove are zone 1 roads and are included in the cleaning of Wimbledon Town Centre and are attended to on a daily basis. Tabor Grove and Alt Grove are Zone 3 roads and are swept in line with other Zone 3 residential roads on a weekly basis, however, in line with our intelligence led approach we undertake further sweeps as and when residents alert us to additional need and we ensure all roads are regularly monitored to ensure standards are being maintained. I am pleased to say that this administration has protected the weekly street sweep from cuts, despite reductions in our funding from central government, and I would also like to pay tribute to our residents and our street champions who work in partnership with us to report any build-up of litter.

Supplementary

I am a little taken aback because what has been responded is not what is happening but perhaps this is not the forum to discuss it further. I would like to ask if she agrees that the Council should return to the principle of sweeping all streets weekly after the collection of refuse and recycling.

Reply

I know the area you're talking about. I think some roads are swept to the same schedule as the town centre and others are outside of that. I've heard what you've said and I'm happy to look at it with officers and review if need be. I'm quite happy to come down with you and look at it and a chat with you.

7. From David Armer

To the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration

Question

The number of killed and seriously injured on Merton's roads has increased from 39 in 2010 to 46 in 2011 and 65 in 2012. Could you please comment on this increase, and say what Merton Council is doing to reverse this appalling and worrying trend?

Reply

Merton has achieved significant reductions in the numbers 'killed and seriously injured' (KSI's) on our roads over the last 15 years. Between 1998 and 2009 the borough achieved a 58% reduction in the number of KSI's, compared to a London-wide average of 52%.

Improving road safety remains a key council priority, and the borough continues to employ a comprehensive programme of engineering measures

and road safety education initiatives. Projects being delivered this year include town centre improvement projects, new pedestrian crossing points, junction improvements, school safety schemes, homezone measures, cycle training, motorcycle safety courses and road safety presentations at schools.

The increase in KSI's in 2012 has been in issue that the council has been monitoring closely. However, provisional statistics for January – July 2013 indicate that 22 KSI's occurred during this period, which is comparable to the results from 2010 and 2011 and in line with the council's long term target in it's Local Implementation Plan to reduce KSI's to an average of 45 per year by 2020.