

NON-PRIORITY QUESTIONS 20 NOVEMBER 2013

2. From Councillor Suzanne Evans to The Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health

The National Institute for Clinical Excellence recently recommended that those suffering from Tuberculosis should go straight to the top of social housing lists. Does she intend to implement this idea?

Reply

I was unable to locate the specific NICE guidance the Councillor refers to.

It would be unlawful for the Council to have a blanket policy saying that all TB patients will go to the top of the waiting list and this is not our policy.

I'm not quite sure why UKIP Cllrs are so interested in Tuberculosis. Merton is not considered a high TB area – with a rate of 36.6/100,000 (40/100,000 = high TB area), lower than London (around 42/100,000).

But perhaps Cllr Evans agrees with her fellow UKIP member, David Waller, a UKIP candidate in Malling, Kent, who stated “I would suggest not going to London after January 2014 unless you absolutely have to and if you do, adopt the Japanese practice of wearing a face mask.”

I'm not sure whether Councillor Evans is planning to pop on a mask but if we do see her wearing one, this could be the reason.”

3. From Councillor Richard Hilton to the Cabinet Member for Environment and Regeneration

What is the current residency period before people can get access to social housing in Merton?

Does he feel social housing is allocated fairly in Merton?

Reply

THIS QUESTION WILL BE ANSWERED BY THE CABINET MEMBER FOR COMMUNITY AND CULTURE

Currently people who do not live in Merton are denied access to the housing register and those who have not lived in Merton for at least one year are not considered for an offer of a social housing tenancy.

The council's approach to the selection of prospective tenants for vacant housing association homes is considered fair and realistic. By fair, it is meant an accessible approach that does not discriminate against a particular need or equality group, by realistic an approach that is based on the real world and housing choices that are available to people. It does of course take regard of relevant legislation and the associated code of guidance. It should be noted

that Merton's past and current record for housing tenants in temporary accommodation is by a long measure the best in London.

20. From Councillor Samantha George to the Cabinet Member for Community and Culture

Could the Cabinet Member update me on the number of our ex-armed forces personnel who have been housed by Merton since the Conservatives gained cross party support to put our veterans higher up the housing list?

Reply

The council has made 4 offers of housing association tenancies to ex armed forces personnel. This included 2x 2 bedroom homes and 2x 3 bedroom homes. Three of these offers have been refused. The remaining offer of a three bed house is unresolved as the prospective tenant is yet to reach a decision as to whether he considers this house a suitable response to his need for a home.

21. From Councillor Gilli Lewis-Lavender to the Cabinet Member for Community and Culture:

Will the Cabinet Member explain his welcome U-turn in restoring staffing to Donald Hope and West Barnes libraries on the days his predecessor previously chopped from them?

Reply

The decision to extend opening hours is no U-turn. Due to our success in recruiting volunteers and to our dynamic and intelligent use of all available paid staff it has been possible to extend hours at both Donald Hope and West Barnes at no extra cost to the Council. The result of this proposal will mean that we have increased opening hours at all of our libraries in the last 3 years whilst delivering efficiencies: a net increase in opening hours of 37.5 in the last 3 years under this administration when many neighbouring authorities have decided to close libraries or reduce opening hours. Satisfaction with the library service and its opening hours also increased significantly during this time with general customer satisfaction up 6% and satisfaction with opening hours up 9%. These are some of the highest satisfaction levels in London and show a clear commitment to improve libraries and make them more accessible for our customers.

22. From Councillor Iain Dysart to the Cabinet Member for Community and Culture

Please could he update me on how the Council is meeting Coalition Government housing targets, and what is being done to foster an equitable distribution across our densely populated Borough?

Reply

The council has met the Mayor of London's housing targets (currently 320 new homes per year) every year for the last 10 years, although in recent years the current incumbent Mayor has fallen behind on his own targets. The Coalition government has introduced several fiscal and policy measures to prioritise the delivery of new homes. Under the government's National Planning Policy Framework 2012, all councils are now required to meet "objectively assessed need" for new homes. The Deputy Mayor of London for Planning has stated that London's housing targets will rise by about 30% to meet this need. It is expected that the Mayor will publish his new targets in January 2014 as part of a revised London Plan. Officers have been working with Greater London Authority officers to try to ensure that Merton's share of London's target will be fair but realistic in recognition of the existing quality of residential environment, regeneration opportunity areas and to protect Merton's parks and open spaces.

Development and supply of new homes will be dependent upon site availability which may not be evenly distributed. Equally some parts of the borough particularly close to transport nodes will be able to accommodate more homes at higher density.

4. From Councillor Suzanne Evans to The Cabinet Member for Performance and Implementation.

Has the Council had to pay out for any compensation claims made against the Council to date this year? If so please give details of the claim and the amounts paid or instructed to be paid.

Reply

THIS QUESTION WILL BE ANSWERED BY THE CABINET MEMBER FOR FINANCE

Our records show that we have made the following payments of compensation since 01 April 2013 to date:

Members of the public (public liability claims) £218,371

Employees (employers liability claim) £81,298

Third party motorists (motor claims) £98,016

This includes schools.

5. From Councillor Suzanne Evans to The Cabinet Member for Performance and Implementation.

What is the current amount the Council is spending on translation services?

Reply

THIS QUESTION WILL BE ANSWERED BY THE CABINET MEMBER FOR FINANCE

The amount spent internally is £59,231 for the current financial year April - October 2013. The service continues to post an annual surplus and has done for the past 5 years as a result of the supply of services to external parties. This also allows for a lower charge to internal customers.

6. From Councillor Richard Hilton to the Leader of the Council

Has Merton made any estimate of the number of immigrants from Romania and Bulgari expected to arrive in 2014? What impact does he expect this to have on local services?

Reply

The Council uses the GLA population projections for forecasting purposes. This is not broken down by country of origin. At the moment their forecast is that levels of net migration will remain relatively low for Merton. It is extremely difficult to forecast the impact of the changes to EU working restrictions for Romania and Bulgaria at a local authority level, however, the Council will monitor carefully the impact of these changes in terms of demand for Council services.

23. From Councillor Miles Windsor to the Cabinet Member for Finance:

With the roll out of Wyse terminals across the council, can the Cabinet Member tell me what's happening to all the hundreds of PCs that have been replaced? How much money is being recouped from these PCs and to what extent is that offsetting the considerable costs of introducing the new technology?

Reply

The Councils PC's are normally replaced as part of a five year rolling programme of works, but in reality a large proportion of the desk top equipment that was being used within the Council was significantly older than this and beyond its normal operational life expectancy.

Old PC's have been withdrawn from service and where possible replaced with new Wyse terminals which are significantly cheaper to purchase and maintain, which should generate some financial savings for the Council in future years.

The disposal of redundant computer equipment is covered under the Waste Electronic and Electrical Equipment Regulations 2006 (WEEE) which were bought in by the government to reduce the amount of untreated electrical and electronic waste that was going to landfill.

Ordinarily this would require the Council to pay a third party supplier to collect the waste, but we have negotiated a zero cost contract with a specialist computer recycling company, who collect the equipment free of charge and break it down into its component parts either to be reused or recycled, and provide certificated evidence of the secure destruction.

24. From Councillor Suzanne Grocott to the Cabinet Member for Finance

How much money has been returned to residents by way of overpaid Council Tax in each of the last 4 years? How much officer time could be saved if claim details for Council Tax rebates were obtained via automated means rather than by telephone, as happens in neighbouring Wandsworth?

Reply

2010/11 - £1,265,501

2011/12 - £1,368,882

2012/13 - £1,232,135

2013/14 - £683,511 (up to the end of October 13)

The most common cause of a refund is when a resident pays their council tax over 10 instalments and they move out of the property.

Having investigated the process at Wandsworth it would appear that Merton's refund process is more efficient for direct debit payers (62% of residents that have a charge to pay, pay by direct debit). The process for Wandsworth is partly automated, the resident has to telephone an automated line but there is still officer involvement in checking the refund before authorisation. Merton will continue to seek and adopt best practice and this will be reviewed as part of the Customer Contact program.

25. From Councillor Linda Taylor to the Cabinet Member for Finance:

How many apprenticeships is Merton planning to offer to young people aged 20 and under in 2014?

Reply

30 placements, however the target is covering those aged 16-24

26. From Councillor Iain Dysart to the Leader of the Council

Given the recent spat between Cllrs Grocott and Evans regarding the Council's pension investments in tobacco funds, which I initially raised in September 2010 and then again in April this year, please could he update me on what if anything is being done to address this dependency. Has Merton instituted any co-operation with other Councils to identify possible common solutions, and if so what and with whom?

Reply

THIS QUESTION WILL BE ANSWERED BY THE CABINET MEMBER FOR FINANCE

The Pension Fund is legally separate from the council and hence monies it holds are not council investments. The Fund's assets are held by them for the benefit of future and existing pensioners. There are a number of factors that must by law be taken into account in Pension Fund decision making, as well as limits on the inclusion of ethical matters in such decision making.

These are outlined in a report on ethical investment issues, including investment in tobacco, that was received by the Pension Fund Advisory Panel of 17th April 2013. This is available at the link below

http://www.merton.gov.uk/council/decision-making/committee/pfac/meeting_of_17_april_2013_-_agenda_item_5_ethical_investment_and_legal_advice.pdf

27. From Cllr Richard Hilton to the Cabinet Member for Community Safety, Engagement and Equalities

Does the Cabinet Member believe that if a panel where a special responsibility allowance is paid does not meet, if the panel doesn't meet then the allowance should be reduced on a pro rata basis?

Reply

The Constitution provides for a Special Responsibility Allowance to be paid in full unless the recipient requests otherwise.

The scheme of allowances contains a Special Responsibility Allowance for the Adoption and Fostering Panel. However, at the Annual Council meeting in May 2013, no member appointment was made to the Panel as it is no longer a statutory requirement. The SRA has therefore not been paid from that date. No member appointment at Annual Council meeting is necessary in the case of group leaders, which explains why SRA has been available to the Leader of the Merton Coalition, even though no such group was elected by the voters of Merton or was even in existence at the time of the May 2013 meeting. Such anomalies can, however, only be altered by a change to the Constitution.

7. From Councillor Suzanne Evans to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration:

Bus lanes in Liverpool are to be scrapped as part of a nine-month trial which aims to reduce traffic congestion. Will the Cabinet Member please consider doing the same here in Merton, in particular with regard to the Controversial Hartfield Road bus lane?

Reply

The Council fully supports the use of sustainable modes of transport and encourage more people to walk, cycle and use buses to reduce congestion on the road network. Bus Lanes gives buses priority particularly on approaches to junctions and also improve reliability. There is currently no evidence that bus lanes contribute to congestion and we will await with interest the results of the trials in Liverpool and any lessons learnt.

8. From Councillor Suzanne Evans to The Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure:

On 12th September 2012, Council resolved:

1. That the borough, in partnership with all primary schools in Merton, initiates an annual competitive sporting event for 8-11 year olds;

2. That the sport or sports played as part of the tournament should be agreed by all participating schools;
 3. That Merton should use this as an opportunity to celebrate the fantastic achievement of our own local Olympic champion, Sophie Hosking, by requesting the Mayor of Merton to write and ask on behalf of the Council to name the competition after her and to produce a trophy in her name; and
 4. The opportunity is taken to ensure that every Merton resident is able to experience the benefit of sports in first-class facilities, thus helping to lay the foundations for future generations to embrace a healthier lifestyle.
- Further questions have been asked since in the Council Chamber about this resolution, yet over a year has passed with no news: Has anything at all been done on pursuing it?

Reply

TO BE ANSWERED BY THE CABINET MEMBER FOR COMMUNITY AND CULTURE

Following the Council's resolution of 12th September 2012 the matter of an annual competitive sporting event for 8 – 11 year olds was discussed with the School Sports Partnership and they advised that they already had a full competitive sporting programme for 8 – 11 year olds and that they could not accommodate another event.

Alternative proposals were put forward to the Leader and the Leader of the Opposition and it was agreed that Sophie Hoskings would be invited to put her name to an award for 'most improved young persons' engaged at our Olympic legacy BMX Track. The Leader wrote to Sophie and Sophie replied agreeing to the proposals.

The intention was that from June to September 2013 coaches would consider all participants using our BMX track who are of the right age and who live or go to school in Merton, with the award being made at the Southern Regional BMX event at the track on Sunday 29th September 2013 and Sophie was to be invited to join us to present the trophies on the day. Two young people have been selected from the Merton BMX Club, however the awarding of this has not taken place as the event on the 29th September was called off by the organisers. Officers have been trying to contact Sophie to get her availability for an alternative date but Sophie has not yet responded. Officers also organised training sessions for 9 primary schools to each have 6 weeks of BMX activity and from this four schools competed in a small local competition and some of these young people are now members of the Merton Saints BMX Club.

The opportunity to have Sophie present the trophies at a BMX event has now passed for 2013, however Officers are still trying to find a suitable time and occasion for Sophie to present this award and when this is possible Councillors will be invited.

28. Cllr Richard Williams to the Cabinet Member for Community and Culture

What is the cost of the current refurbishment of Wimbledon library?

Reply

£156,500 will be invested in Wimbledon Library this financial year to improve the building: this was decided during the budget process in spring this year. The library will be redecorated throughout with additional study space, more space for lap top users to take advantage of the free wi-fi, extra computers for customers to use and a relaxing seating area at the front of the library. The children's section will be treated to a makeover too. There will also be heating and lighting upgrades to the building making it more energy efficient whilst providing a more comfortable environment for customers.

29. From Councillor Oonagh Moulton to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration

Why does Merton council refuse to prune back the low hanging trees on its side of Revelstoke Road despite residents, who are concerned about potential damage to power lines or injury to passers by, asking for this to be done? Is the Cabinet Member not embarrassed by the clear disparity in service provided to residents when compared to the regular pruning that occurs on the Wandsworth side of the street?

Reply

The Council will inspect its tree stock and ensure that any essential works are undertaken as and when required. The trees in Revelstoke Road do not lend themselves for inclusion in the annual, biennial, or triennial pollarding programme and as such are pruned on an ad-hoc basis.

Trees will not be cut back due to telegraph wires, unless damage is clearly imminent, however the crown of a tree will be lifted to agreed heights if and when they interfere with the passage along a road or footway.

The Council is keen to promote canopy cover with all of the benefits that this provides and will, depending upon the species of the tree, only undertake essential works in the best interest of the tree.

30. From Councillor Maurice Groves to the Cabinet Member for Community and Culture

Can the Cabinet Member tell me whether his party are really committed to building a new Morden Park Pool?

Reply

We will be replacing Morden Park Swimming Pool with a new family friendly leisure centre that will include a new swimming pool. We have been able to do this because of our robust approach to the council's finances. Despite being faced with the need to make £70m of savings when we first took control

of the council, our business-like approach has ensured that we are now in a position to replace the pool. We will be carrying out formal consultation with local residents and drawing up realistic and deliverable plans and proposals in the coming year to help us determine the details.

31. From Councillor Samantha George to the Cabinet Member for Community and Culture

What has happened to the proposed report on Housing, which we were told would come to this November's full council meeting?

Reply

If the Councillor is referring to a report on Merton Priory Homes' proposed regeneration plans then a report is expected in 2014 once MPH have concrete proposals to put forward.

33. From Councillor Suzanne Grocott to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Cleanliness and Parking

How many different CPZs are there in Merton? What percentage of roads are now covered by a CPZ and how has this increased over the last 4 years?

Reply

There are 37 CPZs in operation.

17 New CPZs and extensions were introduced over the last 4 years.

Approximately 25% of roads are subject to a CPZ.

CPZs are introduced only where residents have asked for them and there has been full consultation with all residents in the affected roads.

35. From Councillor Henry Nelles to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration

Mayor of London Boris Johnson is calling on Londoners to roll up their sleeves and help plant 12,000 trees across the capital, as part of his efforts to green the city and inspire more volunteering. What is the council doing to promote the Mayor's scheme here in Merton and help ensure the borough takes full advantage of his offer of additional tree planting?

Reply

As part of the Mayors Street Tree Initiative 2012-2015 we have been successful in applying for match funding towards the planting of 234 new trees in the planting season 2013-2014.

37. From Councillor Margaret Brierly to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration:

Can the Cabinet Member explain why street lighting works undertaken recently in one area of Raynes Park were carried out not only without any consultation with the residents affected, but without them even being notified by the council? Will he commit to ensuring that in future the views of local residents are sought before changes are made to street lighting?

Reply

As part of a recent concrete column replacement programme, designed to remove a number of concrete columns that have reached the end of their useful life, the Council has taken the opportunity to replace the existing 35w SOX lighting in a number of roads and replace it with modern LED lanterns to help drive down energy and maintenance costs.

Residents were informed of these works in advance, however the Authority is not consulting residents on the type of lighting, as the new LED lanterns and white light lamps are now common place and enable the Authority to light individual roads to the required lighting class while continuing to drive down costs and improve the efficiency of the Council's lighting stock.

38. From Councillor Logie Lohendran to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration:

Noise nuisance is clearly a growing problem for residents in Merton. When will the six month pilot proposed by Scrutiny for an increased out of hours noise enforcement service commence and will this be a 24/7 service?

Reply

The Environmental Health Service is currently assessing if the proposed pilot scheme can be delivered by using existing staff resources. Current out of hours noise provision is based upon voluntary arrangements with relevant members of staff. The pilot scheme and associated additional funding is only to extend the Friday night service for 6 months and not to provide a 24/7 service.

39. From Councillor Janice Howard to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration:

Back in November 2012, Full Council agreed that a report on 20mph schemes in Merton would be 'presented to both Cabinet and Scrutiny with balanced recommendations for future policy including practical measures to maximise road safety for all road users' and that this work would be 'completed with due urgency as a priority.' Does the Cabinet Member share my disappointment that the report which did eventually come to Scrutiny last month seemed to disregard what had been agreed by the 60 councillors in this Chamber and that any further update on this work has now been delayed until February next year?

Reply

The report to Scrutiny in October made clear that this is a policy area which is in a state of flux and where other highway and traffic authorities are testing and trialling different ways of controlling vehicle speeds. The Council is committed to improving road safety and reducing inappropriate and excessive speeds in residential roads. The Council has introduced a number of 20mph zones and limits across the borough in support of this commitment. Speed

reducing measures are costly to introduce and often when implemented receive mixed support from the community. It was therefore very important to fully understand the effectiveness of these measures together with reviewing schemes already in operation in other parts of the country to assist in formulating future speed management policy in Merton.

Reducing the number and severity of road casualties remains a key priority for the Council. A robust speed management strategy will not only consider the impact of physical measures but also include enforcement and road safety education as well as working closely with the Police.

The impact of the introduction of a borough wide 20mph limit in the London Borough of Islington is not yet available to assist with the development of future policy.

40. From Councillor Debbie Shears to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration:

Would the Cabinet Member agree with me that a child's education is more than what is taught in the classroom? With the borough's push to be included in the Mayor of London's Mini Holland scheme, would he agree with me that cycling proficiency is a key part of a child's education? Can he therefore tell me how many cycling proficiency courses are run each year for the borough's young people; how many children participate each year; and what the average age of participation is?

Reply

Cycle proficiency courses, commonly referred to as 'bikeability training' is considered to be an integral part of a child's education. The courses are designed to give children the necessary skills and confidence to ride their bikes safely on today's roads.

Schools in the borough are offered cycle training twice each year - in January for Spring / Summer term and in July for the Autumn term. In 2012, 21 schools requested off road cycle training (playground based training sessions for year 5 children), each session comprising of 4 hours of training, and a total of 717 children were trained. On road cycle training was provided for 24 schools (actual on road training experience for year 6 children), comprising of 5 x 2 hour sessions with a total of 561 children trained. Officers also provide cycle & scooter safety sessions as an integral part of all school road safety presentations for years 1 – 6.

The council has bid for additional funding from TfL for the period 2014/15 – 2016/17 to increase it's cycle training offer for children and adults.

41. From Councillor Ray Tindle to the Cabinet Member for Community and Culture:

Back in September 2012, Full Council agreed that Merton would initiate an annual competitive sporting event for 8-11 year olds in partnership with all of the borough's primary schools. The aim would be to build on the legacy of the

Olympic and Paralympic Games in London by promoting competitive sport here in Merton as well as providing an opportunity to celebrate the achievements of local Olympic champion, Sophie Hosking. More than a year has now passed and nothing has happened. Can the Cabinet Member tell me when the inaugural event for this new sporting competition will take place?

Reply

Following the Council's resolution of 12th September 2012 the matter of an annual competitive sporting event for 8 – 11 year olds was discussed with the School Sports Partnership and they advised that they already had a full competitive sporting programme for 8 – 11 year olds and that they could not accommodate another event.

Alternative proposals were put forward to the Leader and the Leader of the Opposition and it was agreed that Sophie Hoskings would be invited to put her name to an award for 'most improved young persons' engaged at our Olympic legacy BMX Track. The Leader wrote to Sophie and Sophie replied agreeing to the proposals.

The intention was that from June to September 2013 coaches would consider all participants using our BMX track who are of the right age and who live or go to school in Merton, with the award being made at the Southern Regional BMX event at the track on Sunday 29th September 2013 and Sophie was to be invited to join us to present the trophies on the day. Two young people have been selected from the Merton BMX Club, however the awarding of this has not taken place as the event on the 29th September was called off by the organisers. Officers have been trying to contact Sophie to get her availability for an alternative date but Sophie has not yet responded. Officers also organised training sessions for 9 primary schools to each have 6 weeks of BMX activity and from this four schools competed in a small local competition and some of these young people are now members of the Merton Saints BMX Club.

The opportunity to have Sophie present the trophies at a BMX event has now passed for 2013, however Officers are still trying to find a suitable time and occasion for Sophie to present this award and when this is possible Councillors will be invited.

42. From Councillor Iain Dysart to the Cabinet Member for Environment and Regeneration

Please could he explain why the weekly food waste collection service has not, of late, been regularly maintained in parts of Raynes Park including Beaufort Court, Lower Downs Road, and what he is doing to correct this?

Reply

THIS QUESTION WILL BE ANSWERED BY THE CABINET MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENTAL CLEANLINES AND PARKING

There is no evidence of the food waste collection service not being maintained in Raynes Park . Our records show that the number of requests for service from residents received from the Rayne's Park area for the period 7 October 2013 and 15 November 2013 was 23, an average of 4 per week out of many thousands of collections. Where the Council receives reports of missed collections then arrangements are made to collect within 24 hours. If there is an on-going issue the address would be added for monitoring to ensure the service is provided as scheduled. We shall keep an eye on this and ensure that our service standard is maintained.

43. From Cllr Richard Hilton to the Cabinet Member for Community Safety, Engagement and Equalities

What has the Cabinet Member done to secure Cannon Hill Common following the influx of travellers during the Summer months?

Reply

Following the traveller incursions in 2012, a local consultation meeting was convened with local residents in the Cannon Hill Common area to consider a range of options in respect of securing the site from travellers. The outcome of that consultation was a commitment to invest in log barriers along the vulnerable Cannon Hill Lane boundary. These were installed around this time last year.

The incursion that occurred in the spring of this year occurred as a result of the travellers removing one of the smallest logs in the new barrier sequence. This was remedied immediately upon the travellers departure however, and replaced with more substantial material. The travellers did not subsequently return to this location.

The recent storm event has produced a quantity of new logs and tree trunks locally and these will be used to reinforce the protective measures on the Cannon Hill Common boundary over the coming weeks.

44. From Cllr Suzanne Evans to the Cabinet Member for Community Engagement

Has the Council carried out a consultation exercise with Wimbledon Park residents on the proposed Plough Lane development (Site 37) for a new football stadium and housing development? If so, what approach was used and how many households responded?

Reply

THIS QUESTION WILL BE ANSWERED BY THE CABINET MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY AND REGENERATION

The council's proposals for "sporting intensification" for this key site have remained the same since January 2012. The council does not propose a football stadium or housing development.

Since January 2012, we have undertaken more than nine months of public consultation in four stages on Merton's plans, which includes Site 37. To let people know about the consultation stages we have:

- Leafleted more than 4,500 residential and business addresses in Merton (mainly Wimbledon Park ward) and Wandsworth (Earlsfield ward and Tooting ward) within 500m of the site to let them know specifically about Site 37 Wimbledon Greyhound Stadium and ask for their views
- Held meetings with local community groups, including the Wimbledon Park Residents Association and the Wimbledon Society.
- Engaged with local press and media, including the local Guardian, SW19, Time and Leisure, to assist with media articles that might help let people know about the consultations.

The council has received four comprehensive responses from the Wimbledon Park residents association and a number of letters and e-mails from households and businesses that have given verifiable addresses in the area (Wimbledon Park, Earlsfield and Tooting). However we have also received several responses by e-mail or from a place of work who do not give their home address. In addition, the council has received three petitions relating to the site, totalling over 10,000 signatures, some of which may be from people living in the area. All responses received at each of the consultation stages are available online via:

www.merton.gov.uk/environment/planning/sites_policies_plan

We have received a wide variety of views on the site. The council remains committed to supporting sports intensification and will continue to work hard with interested parties to make the most of the opportunities that this site presents. Any planning application for the site would also be subject to further consultation.

45. From Cllr Suzanne Evans to the Cabinet Member for Community Engagement

Can you confirm that the council commissioned a transport study c.1997, which concluded that Site 37 was unsuitable for a large stadium? If so, please provide full details.

Reply

THIS QUESTION WILL BE ANSWERED BY THE CABINET MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY AND REGENERATION

This inquiry is the same as four identical FOI requests the Council has received from residents in Wimbledon Park; and two separate member enquiries which officers are dealing with.

The Council is unaware of a specific transport study. However, I believe that the Council & and GRA Ltd (not the same GRA that own the track today but

the previous owners) commissioned consultants to prepare a study that was published in about 1998 on the possibility of the greyhound stadium site being reconstructed for use for both football and greyhound racing, with a spectator capacity of approximately 23,000. From memory, this was demonstrated to be a feasible proposition, albeit the football pitch would have been placed within an oval track, so that spectators at each end of the ground would have been further from the pitch and one of the stands would have included a glass wall behind which greyhound patrons would have enjoyed their customary hospitality. From memory this was rejected by the owners of Wimbledon Football Club (as it then was) as a potential location for that Club, because: (i) they envisaged a much larger crowd capacity, (ii) thought the number of car parking spaces offered by the proposal (about 50) was in their view too few and (iii) the site did not have motorway access, which they desired.

At the present time, having searched storage files, council officers have only found part of the study and are hopeful of finding the rest (there are a couple of appendices in different volumes, we've only found 2 out of 3 volumes so far).

The study only exists in paper form. As we've been asked for a copy of this study as part of several Freedom of Information requests recently, we are hoping to scan it in and put it on the council's website once we are sure we have found all parts of it.

Colleagues in the council's printing service have advised that the volumes they have will take over a week to scan in due to the length and the different map sizes. We are hopeful of sourcing the whole study and either scanning it in or photocopying it next week or so. We will ensure that copies of the study are made available to councillors as soon as practically possible.

9. From Councillor Richard Hilton to the Cabinet Member for Community Safety, Engagement and Equalities

What is the annual rate of theft from the person across each of the Borough's Town Centres? What is she doing about it?

Reply

Our local crime figures are not broken down into town centre areas (they are only available for the borough as a whole or on a ward basis. Unfortunately, town centres overlap ward boundaries so these figures would not be useful in this case).

Theft from the Person is the only one of the "MOPAC 7" offences which is currently experiencing an increase in Merton. For the borough as a whole, according to the current rolling 12 month figure compared to the previous 12 month rolling figure, Theft from the Person is showing an increase of 86 offences (385 up from 299, or +28.8%). It should be noted however that this figure is now on a downwards trend and improving in performance. This is in a context of an increase also being seen overall in MPS, with Theft from the Person offences experiencing an increase of over 1,150 offences or 2.5% when compared to the previous 12 month period. Please note that some

caution should be used when comparing percentages based on small versus large sample sizes. All figures as at 20/11/2013.

One strand of tackling the increase is through crime prevention. Regular messages have gone out to the public via communication channels including My Merton, the @MPSMerton twitter account and also in the weekly newsletter produced by the Borough Commander. The subject was most recently mentioned on 15th November and said the following:

“I will touch very quickly on Theft (person) which has seen an increase so far this year. Since the introduction of the high visibility T-shirts worn by staff in pubs in Wimbledon Town Centre, warning customers to be vigilant of pickpockets there has been a drop in theft offences.”

This initiative may be responsible (in part) for the downwards trend and recent improving performance in regards to offences of this nature.

Further details on the T-shirt initiative can be found in the following Wimbledon Guardian article from May 2013:

http://www.wimbledonguardian.co.uk/news/10448533.Wimbledon_bar_staff_join_anti_theft_campaign/

32. From Councillor Suzanne Grocott to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Cleanliness and Parking:

What is the average amount of cash collected per parking machine? Which are the top 5 machines in terms of revenue raised and which are the bottom five? Please provide locations and amount collected per year.

Reply

The council offers car parking facilities, including car parks and on-street parking bays, to motorists across the borough, particularly in our town centres, in order to manage parking demand, reduce traffic congestion, support vibrant town centres and to allow motorists a safe and convenient place to park.

Naturally, some pay and display machines will be used more than others, where they are in popular town centre car parks or close to shopping areas. We regularly monitor usage and where it is deemed that a machine is no longer required as there are other machines within easy reach, we remove the unnecessary machine.

From early next year we will be allowing motorists to pay using their mobile phones which will mean that we should be able to rationalise our pay and display machines still further, thus saving the council – and council taxpayers – money. However we will continue to retain some pay and display machines for residents who do not wish to pay by mobile phone.

Average collection for financial year 2012/13: there were 361 pay and display machines collecting an average of £11,026 per machine (including VAT in off-street car parks).

Top 5:

Machine number	Location	Revenue
501	Hartfield Road car park	£166,819
500	Hartfield Road car park	£145,168
515	Broadway car park	£131,754
503	Hartfield Road car park	£125,457
502	Hartfield Road car park	£118,766

Bottom 5:

Machine number	Location	Revenue
538	St Marks car park	£37.85
537	St Marks car park	£43.90
465	Park Road, Colliers Wood	£140.10
608	Church Path, Merton Park	£264.10
652	Mitcham Park	£270.05

34. From Councillor Suzanne Grocott to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Cleanliness and Parking

I read with interest that some councils produce a "parking services annual report" to reassure residents that parking is not being used just to raise revenue from them? Does the Cabinet Member think this is a good idea or would she be concerned about what it would highlight in Merton?

Reply

We all want to be able to travel around Merton safely, with ease and to see our roads less congested. Enforcing traffic regulations fairly is one way we do this. Any surplus from fines related to parking contraventions is ring-fenced to be used for transport related expenditure, including the Freedom Pass.

I agree that an annual parking report is a good idea and this is something that officers have already been looking into.

However this is only one part of our approach to ensuring fairness and transparency in our parking services. As part of our "firm but fair" approach, we have published our parking enforcement manual online to help road users gain a clearer understanding of how our traffic enforcement policy works. We have also launched a parking charter so that both the council and motorists know what is expected of them.

36. From Councillor Janice Howard to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Cleanliness and Parking:

The Weir Road Recycling centre (No 36) was closed by Labour. Can the Cabinet Member tell me what plans the current administration has for this site?

Reply

TO BE ANSWERED BY THE CABINET MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY AND REGENERATION

A lease has been completed with a private tenant who intends to use the property for the processing and recovery of waste such as demolition and construction waste materials.

1. From Councillor Richard Hilton to the Cabinet Member for Education

Following recent industrial action in Merton Schools, can he explain how attendance by teachers is recorded across the borough? Will he join me in expressing disappointment that teachers went on strike, causing disruption to the education of Merton children and to the lives of their parents?

Reply

During periods of industrial action, all schools notify the council of the non attendance of individual teachers and data is passed to Payroll services to make adjustments to salary payments. The DfE is also notified in relation to which schools remain open and which close.

10. From Councillor Richard Williams to the Cabinet Member for Education

What does Merton do to ensure former 'looked after children' are given the support and encouragement to succeed in post-18 education or training?

Reply

TO BE ANSWERED BY THE CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Merton ensures that all young people aged 18 years and over who have been 'looked after' have an allocated worker based in CSF Department's 14+ Team. All young people discuss education and career planning with their social worker as an integral part of the statutory Pathway Planning process. Many young people access further and higher education courses and CSF Department has a specialist Employment, Education and Training Service where specific support is provided to young people including those previously 'looked after' who need additional support to access post 18 opportunities.

Merton is developing apprenticeships for young people and links are being built with local community organisations in order to create opportunities. Merton also has access to health services to address emotional and physical needs of young people as health can also impact on young people accessing education, employment and training.

11. From Councillor Richard Williams to the Cabinet Member for Education

What steps does Merton take to ensure that teaching staff in local schools share best practice and expertise?

Reply

The Merton Education Partnership has the sharing of good practice as one of its key aims as this has been central to the success of our schools. Our training programme maximises any opportunities for schools to share their strengths and there are many formal and informal examples of peer to peer support between and within schools. Our School Improvement Team also brokers support between schools at all levels including Governance. We have expert teachers who are deployed with the agreement of heads and our Merton Leaders of Education support improvement work in a number of our schools.

12. From Councillor Linda Taylor to the Cabinet Member for Children's Services

What action is the Cabinet taking to ensure that the serious abuse of children in the form of Female Genital Mutilation is eradicated in Merton?

Reply

While we have no evidence that the prevalence of Female Genital Mutilation is high in Merton it is clear from evidence that this practice is an area for concern for some children within the community and it has been reviewed by Merton Safeguarding Children Board (MSCB).

The MSCB has identified this as a main topic for awareness raising and identification progressing into 2014. The Board follows the LSCB guidance on prevention and identification through raising awareness via posters and leaflets generally with the provision of resource packs for professionals. This is supported by twice yearly multi-agency training sessions. The course is health based and ensures practitioners are aware of signs and symptoms. Alongside this, recognition and consideration of the impact of FGC on females and the dominance of this practice in particular cultures is a specific focus. The training ensures the legislative framework alongside national and local guidance is understood. Evaluation of training is always undertaken and we

are currently piloting the LSCB training evaluation tool which will later be rolled out for all multi-agency training.

13. From Councillor James Holmes to the Cabinet Member for Children's Services

How many children who rely on the borough to provide for their care needs, are currently accommodated outside of the borough? In what parts of the country have these children been placed?

Reply

The table below shows that of Merton's 165 current looked after children (LAC), 120 are placed outside Merton. Children placed outside of Merton are in a variety of locations. The range of these locations is outlined below. Most of the children and young people placed away from Merton are in specialist placements connected with their specific needs. This will include children with disabilities who require a specialist provision that may be only available in specific locations or children with particular behavioural problems who require specialist input. This cohort of children and young people will also include children who have been placed with carers outside of London who will be their long term adoptive or fostering placement.

Merton's Looked After Children - Placement location outside of Merton

(At 30th September 2013)

Local Authority	Number of Children placed
Bedfordshire	1
Bexley	3
Bromley	10
Croydon	26
Derbyshire	1
Essex	4
Greenwich	2
Haringey	1
Hounslow	2
Kensington & Chelsea	1
Kent	6
Kingston Upon Thames	2
Lambeth	8
Lewisham	5
Medway	1
Northamptonshire	1
Oxfordshire	1
Redbridge	1
Richmond Upon Thames	2

Southwark	1
Surrey	11
Sutton	16
Thurrock	1
Waltham Forest	1
Wandsworth	9
West Sussex	3
Total Placements outside of Merton	120

14. From Councillor James Holmes to the Cabinet Member for Children's Services

What is the current age profile of Merton's looked after children? How has this changed in the past 5 years?

Reply

The current age profile of children looked after is provided in the table below. There have been some variations in children being looked after within particular age groups. These variations will to some extent be accounted for by the data being a snapshot of the looked after population at the end of the financial year. Within the year one might expect to see fluctuations as children of different ages enter and leave care. There have been no major or marked trends for children under the age of 16. The most significant trend has been the increase in the number of 16/17 year olds in care from 30 in 2009 to a current figure of 64.

The number of 16/17 year olds entering care is a direct consequence of the Southwark Judgement. This requires local authorities to consider whether young people presenting as homeless should become looked after by local authorities. Some young people who have become looked after have subsequently indicated that they would prefer to be in supported housing but not necessarily in care to Merton. With colleagues in the Housing Department we are exploring if a more robust joint approach across the department would be a better way for tackling this issue. The purpose of this would be to assist young people to remain at home with more intensive support or to provide housing support through the homelessness route where there is no evident need for the young person to become looked after. We are hoping to implement this new approach in early 2014.

Age Profile of Merton's Looked After Children

Number of children Looked After	Age (in years)																	
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
September 2013	12	8	7	4	1	7	3	0	8	4	4	8	2	9	11	13	34	30
March 2013	6	7	5	1	5	4	2	2	7	5	5	6	2	8	9	17	24	25
March 2012	7	4	3	4	4	1	3	7	5	2	7	2	9	8	15	13	16	19

March 2011	4	5	7	9	6	3	3	3	4	4	3	11	6	12	9	9	14	20
March 2010	8	10	9	4	2	5	3	2	3	2	8	3	7	8	7	10	21	25
March 2009	10	10	5	3	4	3	1	3	1	5	3	5	8	4	8	13	17	13

Source: March - DfE SSDA 903; September - local monitoring

Notes: Number of children Looked After at the end of the reported month, age as at 31st March for March reporting; age as at 30th September for September reporting

15. From Councillor Suzanne Grocott to the Cabinet Member for Education

Given the increased demand for school places, can the Cabinet Member confirm whether the council has now entered into discussions with the owner of the former Manuplastics site in Kingston Road? Is the administration willing to consider a new school on this site and what impact would that have on the council's capital budget?

Reply

Council officers have been in discussion with the agent representing the owners of the former Manuplastics site for some time, as part of our search for suitable sites for expanding our school provision. Unfortunately the current owners already have planning permission for a scheme which they wish to implement themselves.

We were interested to read a suggestion in the local newspaper last week suggesting that the owners had written an open letter to Merton council offering the land for a new primary school so we contacted the agent again this week. This contact confirmed that the owners had not, in fact, written any open letter nor had they ever taken such an approach to these matters. They confirmed their intention is to build the scheme for which they have planning permission, with work starting on site early in the new year.

16. From Councillor Iain Dysart to the Cabinet Member for Education

How, if at all, does he believe that grammar schools in Merton would contribute to the Coalition Government's stated aim of increasing social mobility?

Reply

There are no plans to consider Grammar Schools as part of our expansion programme. Choice and diversity in the school offer are important and a good mix of schools is already available in Merton. Our comprehensive schools provide a very good education and we support fully the work they do.

17. From Councillor Iain Dysart to the Cabinet Member for Education

Please could he provide a breakdown of the legal costs incurred by the Council to date in pursuing the aim of expanding Dundonald Primary School

and a projection of likely future costs according to its current timetable for achieving this goal.

Reply

The legal costs incurred to date amount to approximately £30,000 for in-house legal activity and £9,000 for counsel advice. We are not able to predict the final sum at this stage.

18. From Councillor Iain Dysart to the Cabinet Member for Education

West Barnes residents often ask why the Council has not seriously investigated the possibility of a new primary school locally to help meet demand. Given the plans of the Chapel Street consortium for a new school upon the Merton/Kingston border, as well as the distances existing local children often have to travel, why hasn't the Council acted? Hasn't an opportunity been missed?

Reply

West Barnes residents have benefitted from the LB Merton school expansions, and the expansion of Burlington Infant/Junior School which is just inside RB Kingston. Therefore, like all other residents, they have to date been given a reasonable offer of a school place. LB Merton has undertaken two substantial site searches for new school sites which has clarified that there are no straightforward options for new school sites to the far west of the borough, in or adjacent to West Barnes ward. We are working with the Chapel Street consortium and the Department for Education (DfE) following the DfE's first stage approval of their Free School bid. The DfE's agent, following similar site searches, has confirmed what the council already knew about the lack of availability of suitable sites in this part of the borough and are currently pursuing a site within the boundaries of RB Kingston rather than LB Merton. LB Merton are continuing to work in partnership on this project given that LB Merton residents should still benefit from the additional school provision even if it is not physically located within LB Merton and Councillor Dysart's ward.

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