

From Councillor Dennis Pearce to the Cabinet Member for Education

With the recent news that Harris Academy Morden has become the latest in a long line of schools in Morden being rated Outstanding by Ofsted, can the Cabinet member guarantee that this focus on improving the borough's schools will be maintained?

Reply

The Local Authority continues its rigorous and relentless focus to ensure that the Borough's schools continue to improve. The ambition is for all schools to be good or better and to increase the proportion judged to be outstanding. The Education Division has plans and mechanisms in place to enable this to happen, including its refreshed School Improvement Strategy and 'Support and Challenge' groups for schools where matters are of concern.

The capacity for school improvement is limited, as it is in all local authorities. This in the context of national policy, whereby resources for this function are no longer directed to the same extent towards local authorities.

Supplementary

Thank you Madam Mayor. I'd like to thank the Cabinet Member for her reply. Now that the term is started, is the Cabinet Member able to update us on the new intake at Harris Wimbledon at Whatley Avenue?

Reply

Thank you very much Councillor Pearce. I am delighted to report that 128 children were admitted into Harris Wimbledon and their first day was last week Thursday. I called and congratulated them on opening and since then I think in fact today an officer actually visited the School and reported back that they are all settling in well, so we're very pleased we're very delighted and parents are all very delighted as well. Whilst I am on the topic of Harris, can I also use this opportunity to congratulate Harris Morden for being Ofsted inspected and being outstanding. Thank you.

From Councillor Nick McLean to the Cabinet Member for Finance

How would the Cabinet Member for Finance rate the Council's ability to collect Council Tax from residents?

Reply

The Council tax team have had continued improvements over the last 5 years or more and at the end of 2017-2018 we achieved our highest ever rate of collection for Council tax, collecting 97.69%.

At the end of July, 4 months into the financial year we collected 39.91% of the Council tax due. If we continue at this rate, we are forecast to exceed our target the rate we achieved last year. I am confident in our ability to collect the majority of council tax due to the authority.

Supplementary

Thank you Madam Mayor and may I also thank the Cabinet Member for his response. Over the last five financial years over £5.6 million in Council Tax has not been collected. Will he accept this is not good enough and what actions will he take to improve the performance of this department in the future?

Reply

I'd like to thank the member for his follow up but he may have missed the written response which outlined that the collection rates in Merton over the last few years have been a record high for this borough, considerably better than they were when the Conservatives were running the Council and it's very important to stress that a lot of hard work has gone in by our staff to make it easier for people to pay their Council Tax and to improve the rates of collection and I think we should all in here applaud them for achieving a record level of collection of 97.69%, a collection rate that is the best on record ever in Merton under Labour.

From Councillor Russell Makin to Cabinet member for Children's Services

How is the council meeting the increase in demand for Early Years childcare in the borough?

Reply

There have been recent, new duties to secure sufficient childcare/early education for eligible families for 30 hours of funded (free) childcare and education. To date there appears to be sufficient provision across the borough for Merton families to access this new entitlement. 962 children took up a 30 hour funded place in the summer term.

Between March 2016 and March 2018 there has been an increase of 100 Ofsted registered childcare places (Ofsted published data). The estimated under 5s population during this period has been stable and predicted to slightly decrease over the next 5 years.

No Supplementary Question.

From Councillor Andrew Howard to the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Housing and Transport

Does the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Housing and Transport believe that Merton Council treats motorists fairly?

Reply

Yes, I do. Firstly, we maintain our highways excellently and in comparison with the rest of London our highway condition and levels of investment compare well ensuring motorists can move safely and smoothly through the borough. Secondly, we manage congestion hot spots and enforce against those who breach moving traffic regulations thereby keeping traffic moving. Thirdly, we manage parking providing an efficient controlled parking zone service and the efficient enforcement of

highway and off street parking. Our parking charges are fair, transparent and reasonable and in comparison with the rest of London below average.

Supplementary

Thank you Madam Mayor. Thank you to the Cabinet Member for his reply, I do have a supplementary, which is; since June 2016, Merton Council has installed 44 ANPR and Bus Lane cameras which have issued over 180,000 tickets, costing motorists over £12 million. Will he accept that the lack of clear signage has caused unsuspecting motorists to be hit by the fines and will he apologise for this?

Reply

I'd like to thank Councillor Howard for his supplementary, no I won't apologise for that factor. If anyone is dissatisfied with being issued with a fine, they do have the right to appeal and there is also an independent appeal available as well. In terms of traffic enforcement and ANPR, it is right that we do enforce people going into bus lanes or taking illegal turns or traffic movements, that is correct and I believe that Merton Council is doing this in the right and correct way, thank you.

From Cllr Hina Bokhari to the Leader

In the last month we have seen some shockingly Islamophobic and Antisemitic statements made by leading politicians that have worried many people. Will the Leader of the Council take this opportunity to make a clear statement to reassure all Merton residents that as a Council we will stand firmly against Antisemitism and Islamophobia and work for a more open and inclusive borough?

Reply

Merton is a proudly diverse borough. Many people are uncertain about their place in society after the United Kingdom's decision to leave the European Union. Ethnic and faith communities have reported anxiety about a climate of hostility targeted at them. Hate crime has no place in our communities, in our society, in Merton. Our borough succeeds and thrives when the community is united, and it's a big part of what makes Merton a wonderful place to call home, and we should continue to strive to make the borough welcoming to all.

Our Hate Crime Strategy sets out our zero tolerance approach to Islamophobia, Antisemitism and any other hate crime, and ensures that it underpins all the work of the council. As Leader of Merton, I reaffirm my commitment to ensuring the council looks after everyone, and that we all work together for an open and inclusive borough.

Supplementary

Thank you Madam Mayor and thank you for the reply from the Leader of the Council. Whilst recognising Merton's decision, people locally are concerned about the recent decision of Wimbledon Labour Party not to back the full IHRA definition of antisemitism which brings a national issue firmly to our doorstep. What is the

Leader's response to this and the abuse that some of Merton's Councillors have received on Twitter over this issue?

Reply

I thank Councillor Bokhari for her supplementary. As I state in my written response and as we'll be discussing the IHRA definition and its adoption by this Council, we as Merton Council we as the Labour group in Merton Council are completely utterly committed to a zero tolerance approach to Islamophobia to antisemitism and it is important not to politicise this issue but to remain strong, to remain united against any kind of tolerance to Islamophobia or antisemitism so that we remain a Borough that is completely and utterly against all forms of discrimination.

From Councillor Pauline Cowper to the Cabinet member for Community Safety, Engagement and Equalities

Merton is leading the way in London for Community Sponsorship – what are the ambitions of the Council to expand the programme?

Reply

Merton is proud that through the work of the Faith and Belief Forum the Raynes Park Salvation Army successfully sponsored a Syrian refugee family in February 2017. After the arrival of the family the Salvation Army held a workshop to share their experience of Community Sponsorship with other Faith and Belief and Voluntary organisations. As a result the Wimbledon Synagogue successfully pursued an application to the Home Office to participate in the scheme and will shortly welcome another refugee family into the borough.

The scheme is dependent upon voluntary organisations committing to sponsoring a refugee family and the council aims to continue to encourage local groups to consider Community Sponsorship.

Supplementary

Thank you Madam Mayor. How does the Council ensure any special needs of the families in the Community Sponsorship Programmes are met?

Reply

I thank you Councillor Cowper for your supplementary question. I'd like to reassure you that the Council work very closely with schools and hospitals to ensure that we meet the needs and requirements on the Community Sponsorship and we are endeavouring to achieve this all the time. Thank you.

From Councillor David Simpson to the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Housing and Transport

Will the Cabinet Member please explain why opposite South Merton Station vehicles are allowed unrestricted parking right up to the bollards on the bridge, thus causing extreme difficulties for buses and the many large lorries travelling from Morden to Bushey Road?

Reply

The Council relies on road users to report obstructive parking. Upon receiving a complaint, the Council investigates and undertakes the statutory consultation for the introduction of the appropriate waiting and loading restrictions if deemed necessary. We recently received one complaint regarding this location and a consultation is programmed. Although it is suggested that at times buses cannot pass due to obstructive parking, London Buses have not raised this point with us and thus far we have only received one complaint which we are acting upon.

Residents can also now report illegal parking via <https://www2.merton.gov.uk/transport-streets/parking/illegal-parking.htm>

Supplementary

Thank you Madam Mayor I do have a supplementary and I thank the Cabinet Member for his response but if I am the first complainant, I would be rather surprised, if you're saying there's only been one thus far. I certainly won't be the last I can assure you. So, would the Cabinet Member please explain why under this Labour administration continue to be fined and restrict parking in highly residential roads but take little or no action on roads designated for buses and heavy lorries like Martin Way which have more and more heavy traffic?

Reply

I'd like to thank Councillor Simpson for his supplementary question in relation to obstructive parking and enforcement. This Council is very diligent in terms of our enforcement and where a traffic offence has arisen we will actually take the necessary action that is needed though obviously Councillor Howard earlier thought that we are too severe but I can say to you as a Council we do take action with those issues of obstructive parking, we look into it and have the necessary consultations about further controls that we can actually put in place. We do want to keep our roads flowing freely and we will undertake the action which is needed. Thank you.

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