

From Councillor David Chung to Cabinet Member for Education

Given coverage of the national issue of racist bullying in schools, can the Cabinet Member tell us to what extent is this the case in our schools in Merton?

Reply

Merton schools continue to run a voluntary scheme to report racist incidents. Not all of these will be racist bullying. Data up to 2016 – 17 is available and shows an overall flat position from 2015 – 2016 with a rise in primary schools.

Number of Racist Incidents	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17
Primary Schools (including academies)	101	94	70	120	73	89
Secondary Schools (including academies)	68	41	32	51	53	46
Special Schools, Pupil Referral Unit & Virtual School	14	27	10	12	22	21
Total Racist Incidents in Merton Schools	183	162	112	183	148	156

(Results from 77% of schools in 2016-17)

The majority of incidents were of the types 'Racist comments and ridicule of culture' (74%). There were 2 incidents in the new reporting category of "Racist abuse online or by text"

Outcomes of racist bullying are monitored by School Improvement and schools are given advice as to what and where they could seek preventative workshops for pupils/students e.g. Show Racism the Red card, Equaliteach. The team also deliver CPD for teaching staff on challenging derogatory language which includes racist language.

Safer Merton have recently funded an " Agents for change" project , delivered by Equaliteach and the "Muslim Women of Merton" to combat Islamaphobia. This project involves 6 schools and 24 pupils/students who attended a workshop day with

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their teachers last week at Abbotsbury school. They have an action plan to take back to school and will be supported to complete their actions by Equaliteach and MWM over the coming Spring and Summer terms.

In relation to our general work to support schools to deal with bullying appropriately there is an anti-bullying operational group which has led on:

- Model policy to schools based on latest research and guidance including feedback from young people.
- Model incident form which supports the analysis of bullying incidents
- Promotion of the All Together programme – DfE funded programme to ensure effective whole school anti-bullying practice – this will be offered again this academic year.

Ten schools have so far successfully completed their quality mark with the All Together Program which looks at good practise in anti bullying.

Holy Trinity C of E Primary School	Gold
Links Primary School	Gold
St Mark's Primary School	Gold
The Priory C of E Primary School	Gold
Haslemere Primary School	Gold
Lonesome Primary	Gold
St John Fisher RC Primary	Gold
Melrose School	Silver
The Sherwood School	Silver
Aragon Primary School	Gold

From Councillor Thomas Barlow to the Cabinet Member for Community Safety Engagement and Equalities:

Can the Cabinet Member provide an update on what steps have been taken since the council adopted the Social Mobility pledge?.

Reply

The Workforce Strategy board has agreed to support work experience which will be offered to all Merton schools and young people who are residents in Merton.

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As part of the Council's apprenticeship scheme there is a criteria for entry level apprenticeships:

Eligibility criteria.

To be eligible to apply for the scheme candidates must be

- Aged 16-24
- Eligible to work in the UK
- Without a degree or professional qualification
- Willing to undertake an NVQ level 2 or 3

Priority (but not exclusivity) will be given to Merton residents to support local economic development. A Merton resident is defined as

- Any person currently residing within the Local Authority area.
- Any person who is or was previously looked after by the Local Authority or who was subject to supervision, care order or child protection plan regardless of their current place of residence.

Non-residents who have a link to the borough would also be considered next.

- Any person who has previously resided within the Local Authority area and still has family links within the Local Authority.
- Any person who resides in a neighbouring Local Authority and completed their education within the London Borough of Merton.

The next priority would be given to people in neighbouring Local Authorities to support local economic development and finally anyone else provided they can travel to and from the borough to complete the apprenticeship

In relation to social mobility of older people in the community, the recruitment service in the Council will

- seek to withhold protected characteristics, name and educational establishments to ensure the potential bias from the process, and determining age of candidates .
- introduce diversity in panel representation for senior appointments and this can be done by panel participation or introducing stakeholders' panels.
- sample checks will be introduced to ensure all shortlisting and interview panel members have up-to-date recruitment and selection training

Many of these actions are already in place, particularly in CSF, but need to be incorporated into an overall action plan.

From Councillor Ben Butler to Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Housing and Transport

Can the Cabinet Member update us on the High Path regeneration?

Reply

The regeneration of High Path, Ravensbury and Eastfields will deliver 2,550 homes over 10-15 years, approximately half of which will be replacement homes for existing residents. This represents a very significant investment in improving homes, providing new parks and green spaces, business and community space and improving the quality of life for existing and new residents in Merton. High Path in particular will create an extra +600 additional homes, provide a new public park and space for small shops, workshops, offices and other businesses.

Phase 1 of High Path (134 new homes fronting High Path) already has planning permission. Following a thorough investigation guided by archaeologists from Historic England, work is starting on site and it is expected that these homes will be built in the next 18 months, so that existing residents can move into them. Later in 2019 Clarion Housing Group are due to submit planning applications for phase 2 for public consultation.

From Councillor Hina Bokhari to the Cabinet Member for Community Safety, Engagement and Equalities

Does the Cabinet Member agree that the Cabinet should adopt the All Party Parliamentary Group on British Muslims working definition of Islamophobia in the UK ("Islamophobia is rooted in racism and is a type of racism that targets expressions of Muslimness or perceived Muslimness")? If so, how will the Cabinet Member ensure it is adopted and used in appropriate Council policies?

Reply

The All Party Parliamentary Group on British Muslims working definition of Islamophobia was released in November 2018. It has not yet been formally adopted by the Government and to date has only been adopted by one local authority in the UK. Given that Merton has a significant Muslim population and there are heightened risks around hate crime related to the UK's departure from the EU the Council welcomes the work of the All Parliamentary Group and is currently considering the merits of formally adopting the working definition.

It should be noted that the Council already has in place robust policies on discriminatory and racist behaviour and takes a zero tolerance stance against all forms of hate, including Islamophobia. Merton's Equality and Community Cohesion strategy outlines our commitment to prevent discrimination in line with the Public Sector Equality Duty set out in the Equality Act 2010 and provides protection against race and religious discrimination. Additionally Merton's Hate Crime strategy aims to develop a victim-oriented, multi-agency approach to tackling all forms of hate crime across the borough. The council will come together with partners including the Metropolitan Police and groups representing the local community to foster a strong approach to tackling hate crime and supporting its victims.

From Councillor Sally Kenny to Cabinet Member for Children's Services

I welcome the decision to offer care leavers in the borough a council tax exemption up to the age of 25. Can the Cabinet member outline the other ways the council supports care leavers into independence?

Reply

- The Local Authority provides a ring fenced number of social housing for care leavers – number 15
- We have staying put arrangements and are developing the supported lodgings so that young people can remain with carers longer to develop their skills
- Provide £2000 leaving care grant to support with setting up a permanent home
- We provide £500 bursary per term to support with university
- Workshops from an income maximisation officer, independence and emotional well being workshops
- Link in with the DWP to support care leavers with employment and benefits
- Offer a PA up to the age of 25 if required to support with matters that may arise and ETE
- Link in with local gyms to try and secure reduction in gym memberships
- Advocate support Jigsaw for you up to age of 24

From Councillor Ed Gretton to the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Housing and Transport:

The Council offered £5,000 to every ward in January 2018 to spend on local neighbourhood improvements. Can the Council confirm the monies were properly allocated and spent?

Reply

Every ward councillor was offered the opportunity to say how their ward would best benefit from £5,000 worth of Neighbourhood Community Infrastructure Levy. The potential expenditure of the £5k for each ward covered a wide range of different issues which included highway repairs, environmental spending, new benches, plants and money passed on to community groups to spend.

Based on this pilot, later in 2019 councillors will be asked to select projects within their wards up to a total value of £15,000. More information on the Ward Allocation Scheme was reported to Cabinet on 14 January 2019. The report and minutes from the meeting are available online

<https://democracy.merton.gov.uk/documents/s26249/2019-01-14%20Cabinet%20Report%20Neighbourhood%20CIL%20Ward%20Allocation%20v7.pdf>

For more information about Neighbourhood Community Infrastructure Levy visit

<https://www.merton.gov.uk/planning-and-buildings/planning/community-infrastructure-levy/spending-the-levy#allocation>.

From Councillor Aidan Mundy to the Cabinet Member for Education

Can the Cabinet member update us on progress of the Wimbledon Harris Academy school?

Reply

Harris Wimbledon opened in a temporary site provided by the council at Whatley Avenue, SW20 in September 2018. The new school has proved popular with parents, being fully subscribed for its first entry and based on preferences for September 2019 it is fully expected to fill. Based on numbers in September 2018 and admissions preferences for September 2019, rolls at the existing state funded schools in Merton have either remained stable or grown in this period and so the new Harris Wimbledon is meeting the council's objective of providing additional basic need places, increasing choice, and not adversely impacting on existing schools.

Working closely with government colleagues in the ESFA (Education and Skills Funding Agency) the permanent school building at High Path is on schedule to be completed for September 2020 as planned. With planning permission in place, the handover of the High Path site (excluding the Elim land) has now passed to the ESFA to commence demolition works, with arrangements in place for Elim to make a temporary move in March to enable the contractor to keep to programme for the September 2020 completion.