

1. From: Shipra Gupta

To the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance

What steps is Merton council taking to reduce the gender pay gap amongst its employees and how long does the council expect these measures to take to achieve gender pay equality?

Reply

The gender pay gap at Merton depends mainly on which services are provided in-house, shared with other Local Authorities or by external contractors rather than any intrinsic pay inequality. For example, prior to the transfer out of predominantly male and relatively lower-paid staff in Waste and Street Scene services, there was a gender pay gap in favour of women.

The Council uses job evaluation to ensure jobs are equally and fairly graded, and all managers involved in recruitment and selection are required to attend training. Where possible interview panels are required to be diverse. We regularly review our terms and conditions to ensure there are not equal pay biases in the design and operation of our pay and rewards structures.

2. From: Tamara Kohler

To the Cabinet Member for Schools and Adult Education

What has the 1 in 75 to 1 in 40 rule change meant for funding at Merton schools?

Reply

It appears that the questioner may be referring to a local authority decision in Gloucestershire about SEN Top Up funding for schools. This would be entirely a local decision and a matter for Gloucestershire only. It doesn't have any impact on funding at Merton schools.

3. From: Tom Killick

To the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care, Health and the Environment

Further to the answer to question 12 on 12 September 2018, what is the Council's position on Heathrow expansion in light of the current consultation?

Reply

I can confirm that officers from Merton are active participants throughout every consultation phase, and will continue to do so.

Our main cause of concern relates to the future possibility of noise from aircraft, and the potential impact on residents and quiet spaces, such as our parks.

Although so far the consultation doesn't provide the necessary clarity for officers to provide a detailed response, the consultation process will be developing over a period of time and that more detailed information will emerge as the process matures.

We will strongly urge residents and businesses to play an active role in the consultation process and make their voices heard.

As information becomes clearer Merton will adjust its stance to ensure that local residents and the borough is protected as far as possible.

**4. From: Samantha MacArthur
To the Cabinet Member for Commerce, Leisure and Culture**

Who is expected to be most adversely impacted by the introduction of tennis court charges?

Reply

For clarity, charges for tennis court use are not being introduced as this activity has been "pay to play" continuously for many years in Merton.

The technology based booking system being adopted at four venues soon will simply ensure that existing fees and charges are more efficiently and effectively applied.

There is currently a standard hourly rate of £8 per court per hour for adults, £6.20 for concessions that applies to all users at all of our courts with the exception of Wimbledon Park where the fees are greater: £12 for adults at peak times; £9.20 for adults at off-peak times; and £8.20 for concessions at off-peak times.

Merton Council continues to support enterprises such as "Tennis for Free" at two locations (Tamworth Rec, Mitcham and Joseph Hood Rec, Morden) as it has done for many years.

**5. From: Jil Hall
To the Cabinet Member for Schools and Adult Education**

How many children with an EHCP in Merton do not currently have a school place?

Reply

There are currently 16 children with an EHCP who are currently off roll (Children missing education). All of the cases are tracked at the Children Missing Education Panel.

**6. From: Hugo Forshaw
To the Cabinet Member for Schools and Adult Education**

How many Merton schools do not receive the minimum funding guarantee and where does Merton rank against national indices of deprivation?

Reply

Funding for all schools, academies and free schools is calculated through Merton's Schools Funding Formula. For the 2019/20 financial year £29,681 was allocated through the minimum funding guarantee to 4 of the 53 institutions.

7. From: Tony Burton To the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Housing and Transport

To ask for details of how the historic significance of the late 18th century Bishopsford Road bridge and its heritage features will be assessed and retained in the restoration work following its unfortunate collapse?

Reply

The Council understands the heritage value of Bishopsford Bridge as well as recognising its location within the Wandle Valley Conservation Area.

The collapse was an unprecedented and unfortunate event. The Council's priority over the past few weeks has been to address the immediate emergency situation with regard to utilities, flooding and supporting vulnerable members of our community.

Regarding the bridge structure itself. Our priority is to stabilise the bridge to create a safe environment for our engineers to assess the structural condition of what remains of the bridge. This work will take up until the end of July.

Parallel to the structural assessment, there is an independent investigation underway to look into the cause and impact of the collapse.

Only after this assessment is complete, will we be able to understand the options open to us for repairing or replacing the bridge.

8. From: Pippa Maslin To the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care, Health and the Environment

Part of the justification for outsourcing waste management to Veolia was that it will improve recycling rates, yet there is no discernible hyperlink to any concrete evidence when one visits the council's website. How about a clear hyperlink to a regularly updated dashboard on the home page?

Reply

Following the introduction of the new containerised collection service in October 2018, I am pleased to advise that we are continuing to experience an increase in our recycling performance.

The net impact of these changes has resulted in a current recycling rate of 44% compared to a historic average of approximately 36%. Taking into account the full year impact of the service change we are confident that this year we will achieve our stretch

target of 45% recycling performance and position us in the top quartile of all London boroughs.

The annual recycling rates for all UK councils can be found on the [Let's Recycle website](#) and on the [GOV.UK website](#). The Council has not historically published this information on its own website, however, as it was a stated priority of the rationale for the new service I agree it is something that Council should be making more easily accessible for residents to view.

I am working closely with officers and our colleagues in the South London Waste Partnership to provide links to monthly dashboards and performance reports on all areas of contractual performance to better inform residents, and we will ensure that recycling performance forms part of this.

**9. From: Sandra Vogel
To the Cabinet Member for Voluntary Sector, Partnerships and Community Safety**

What provision is being made to support the relocation or retention of voluntary and community organisations based at Worsfold House in plans for disposal and/or redevelopment of the site?

Reply

In May 2013 The Council let Wandle Valley Resource Centre, (previously known as Worsfold House) Church Road, Mitcham to Grenfell Housing under a Tenancy of Will to be used for B1 Offices and D1 non-residential institutions such as school or training centre purposes. At that time the site was vacant and was listed in Merton's Local Plan Sites and Policies Development Plan Document (Adopted July 2014) as Site Proposal 17. Grenfell Housing merged with Evolve Housing 1st April 2017 and they continued to occupy the site as a temporary pop-up resource centre.

Evolve formally notified the Council that they would be ending their tenancy of the site on 30 November 2019 and provided a list of their 12 tenants. Evolve confirmed on 19 June 2019 that they would write to their tenants of the building, giving them notice on their facilities sharing agreements, to end on the same date. Under the agreement with the Council they were required to give one month's notice, but have provided six months for their tenants to find suitable accommodation. Some of the tenants have already made contact with the Economic Development Officer in future Merton seeking advice regarding other suitable space to relocate. The Council have been advised today (2nd July) that tenants have been formally given notice and so the officers will contact all of the tenants in writing offering support in seeking alternative accommodation but the Council property opportunities are limited as most of these are currently occupied.

**10. From: John Braithwaite
To the Cabinet Member for Commerce, Leisure and Culture**

What is/was the average usage, by season, of each of the tennis courts where charges are being introduced this year (Joseph Hood, Dundonald Rec, John Innes) prior to the introduction of these charges?

Reply

We have no data on the usage of these locations in recent years as these sites are no longer staffed on a routine basis.

By introducing new court-side technology, as currently proposed, we fully expect to have full, accurate and thorough data in the future and by remote means.

Only the charging mechanism is changing as a result of current proposals, changing to one that is more efficient and reliable. Each of these courts is already a “pay to play” facility, even if collecting fees has not always been applied consistently on these sites.

**11. From: Philip Ling
To the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care, Health and the Environment**

What is the current status of the redevelopment of the Wilson Health Centre and when is the new centre expected to open?

Reply

The redevelopment of the Wilson Hospital is an NHS project, led by the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG), on NHS Property Land. The Council has been working closely with the CCG as the aspiration is to create a holistic health and wellbeing campus. However, the Council has no direct control over the timescales or delivery of the redevelopment.

The typical NHS financing route for a scheme such as the Wilson is via a LIFT Company programme. In the summer of 2018, there was a national change affecting how a rise in interest rates (until the point of construction) would be managed between the NHS and LIFT companies. This created delays across the country, and whilst this remains a national issue the CCG is actively exploring alternative methods of funding and remains committed to the delivery the scheme.

Over the past 12 months, work has continued on the technical aspects of service design, and local engagement has been undertaken through the Wilson Community Reference Group. More recently, the CCG announced the establishment of a Steering Group to oversee the redevelopment, which will include local residents and community representatives.

A comprehensive update was provided to the Health and Wellbeing Board in March 2019. That can be viewed here:

<https://democracy.merton.gov.uk/documents/s27218/Report%20Wilson%20Update.pdf>

In that paper, the CCG confirmed the intention to open the Wilson by the end of 2022.

**12. From: Richard Hackforth-Jones
To the Cabinet Member for Schools and Adult Education**

What percentage of children were offered a space at a school listed on their application form, even if the full 6 spaces on the form were not filled in, for primary and secondary school in each of the last five years?

Reply

The following percentage of Merton resident applicants received a preference school offer on national offer day (whether they used all their 6 preferences possible or not)

Primary school reception year:

2019 – 94.83%

2018 – 95.18%

2017 – 94.10%

2016 – 93.67%

2015 – 94.23%

Secondary school year 7

2019 – 92.84%

2018 – 91.01%

2017 – 94.61%

2016 – 95.42%

2015 – 94.30%

Please note that all applicants received a reasonable offer of a school place, although for a small number this was after offer day

**13. From: Sara Sharp
To the Cabinet Member for Regeneration Housing and Transport**

What is the procedure and process for the selection and appointment of panel members to the Design Review Panel; and who appoints them, how long for, on what terms, and what evidence of experience is required?

Reply

When Merton's Design Review Panel (DRP) was first started in 2007, the procedure was to have a long list and short list of panel members, the short list consisted of members who would attend DRP meetings. After a period of a few years, they would be 'rotated off' the shortlist onto the long list, which was essentially a list of 'members in waiting'. At this time new members would be rotated onto the short list from the long list.

This procedure worked for a few years until all those still available on the long list had served time on the short list. Following this a different procedure has been used. There are about 20 members on the panel, who attend from 1 to 3 meetings a year. As vacancies have arisen, the panel membership has been refreshed by appointing new members and rotating some members off the panel. This has been done a number of times during the life of the panel.

The way this is done is to advertise predominantly through relevant professional bodies such as Urban Design London and the Urban Design Group. Individuals also become aware of the panel and can independently express a desire to join the panel. When a refresh takes place, these are also taken into account.

The panel is set up and run by Merton Council and reviews proposals only within the council's Local Planning Authority boundary. The panel is run and managed by the future Merton team in the council and it is this team that appoints panel members. New panel members sign a code of conduct and declaration of interest form. There is no set period for serving on the panel. The process has not yet seen all original members replaced by newer members, though this process is ongoing.

To serve on the panel, members must have relevant experience in professions relating to the built environment, and must demonstrate, by means of a CV, e-mail and telephone conversation, that they are suitable candidates. This will include amount of expertise, a proven track record and ability to work as part of a panel. Skill gaps on the panel are also taken into account. The majority of members are from the private sector and the purpose of design review panels is to bring together individual professionals to provide a collective critique of development proposals, independent from (but not instead of) the council's own design, conservation and planning officers.

**14. From: Viv Vella
To the Cabinet Members for Adult Social Care, Health and the Environment
and Women and Equalities**

What is the council doing to promote mental health support services to BAME communities that currently have a low uptake of these services?

Reply

The majority of mental health services are commissioned and provided by the NHS. We work closely with our partners in health to try to ensure that services are accessible to all parts of our community.

The Council's social care duties in relation to adult mental health are fulfilled by South West London & St Georges Mental Health NHS Trust through integrated health and care teams. These arrangements are currently being renewed and access issues will be part of the new performance monitoring arrangements. As at June 2019, 35% of adult mental health social care service users were recorded as being from BAME communities.

Within the integrated mental health services provided by the Trust, the BAME proportion of patients is 42% for adult secondary care, 29.9% for CAMHS and 26% for older people services. These are broadly in line with the make-up of our community.

One of the challenges is to ensure that BAME communities have access to the full range of mental health services, including preventative and early intervention services and are not only seeking help at the point of crisis. For example, people from BAME communities are over-represented in those detained under the Mental Health Act but under-represented in accessing psychological therapies. This is a national trend. In Merton BAME communities make up 19.8% of patients in primary mental health services.

For this reason, the recommissioned Primary Care Mental Health Services service, Merton Uplift (which includes access to psychological therapies), has a focus on access by BAME service users, including incentive targets for BAME access. The new provider, South West London & St Georges Mental Health NHS Trust, is linking with local BAME and faith groups to improve access. It is too early to judge whether they are making progress against this target.

Merton Uplift allows for self-referral and supports self-help, peer support, a wellbeing strategy, triage and face-to-face therapy. The Council is also supporting and promoting London-wide initiatives that support good mental health, such as Good Thinking self-help tools. The Council has also been working with the voluntary sector to improve the adult mental health offer. This includes supporting Imagine Independence to move to a self-referral model for peer support. These approaches help reduce barriers to access and sit alongside the targeted work of the Trust.

**15. From: Daniel Weir
To the Cabinet Member for Commerce, Leisure and Culture**

How much money was secured by Merton from Crest Nicolson on the handover of Rowan Park and please can the Longthornton residents have confirmation that this money is ringfenced to be spent on the park only and brought up to standard agreed in planning?

Reply

Under the S.106 agreement secured with the planning permission for the development £95,000 was secured towards the ongoing management and grounds maintenance of the Public Park and £20,000 for the future repair and maintenance of the Local Play Area and is ring-fenced for Rowan Park only. In addition, approximately £35,000 was secured as part of the transfer of the park to the Council and is ring-fenced for park improvements.

**16. From: Nicola Thompson
To the Cabinet Member for Regeneration Housing and Transport**

The question of step-free access at Haydons Road Station has been asked repeatedly. The council claims it "continues to lobby Network Rail for station improvements". When did officers last raise the accessibility issue for this site with Network Rail? How hard are you actually trying to make this station accessible?

Reply

Accessibility improvements to both stations and bus stops are raised regularly with Network Rail and with the GLA. On improving accessibility to Haydon's Road station, most recently the council raised detailed issues with Network Rail in September – October 2018 relating to additional gates and ramp access as part of enforcing a nearby development site. There is an opportunity now for residents to influence how funding is spent on improvements to Haydon's Road station specifically. Govia Thameslink Railway (GTR) are currently asking passengers and stakeholders across the GTR network to submit and rank their ideas to influence how the £15 million Passenger Benefit Fund is spent. All the Thameslink stations on the Wimbledon Loop in Merton have been allocated funding, including £80,000 for Haydon's Road Station. There is also potential to pool funding pots from several stations to deliver larger schemes. Details and survey link can be found on the GTR website at www.passengerbenefitfund.co.uk/the-fund. The consultation closes at the end of July. This consultation provides the ideal opportunity for the local community to press GTR to bring forward proposals for a step free access to the westbound platform. Selected proposals have to be delivered by Sept 2021 and we would strongly encourage all residents interested in improvements to Haydon's Road station to respond to this consultation.

17. From: Mark Gale
To the Cabinet Members for Leisure, Commerce and Culture and Women and Equalities

Has the discriminating policy that this council and GLL (Greenwich Leisure Ltd) ironically trading as "Better", enforced upon Morden Leisure Centre without any accurate recording of local residents refusal data broken any Equality Act legislation and/or public sector Equality Duty?

Reply

The Council and GLL (Greenwich Leisure Ltd) operate the leisure facilities in Merton in accordance with the Equality Act Legislation and Public Sector Equality Duty.

18. From: Gail Morrison
To the Cabinet Member for Regeneration Housing and Transport

Research shows people are reluctant to buy electric vehicles if there's a scarcity of charging posts. The only way to overcome this is by offering mass lamp-post charging, as in Wandsworth. Does the Council plan to install charging points via the streetlamp system and when this will be implemented?

Reply

The council is working with Source London and Transport for London to deliver a mix of fast(7kw) and rapid (22kw and 50kw) publically accessible electric vehicle charging points across the borough. To date 105 EVCP have been installed or are in the process of being installed with another 37 charge points expected to be delivered by the end of 2019. The council remains interested in testing lamp column chargers (3kw), but with the rapid development of battery and alternative kerbside based charging solutions they may not necessarily represent the best approach.