

From Councillor Stan Anderson to the Cabinet Member for Women and Equalities

Can the cabinet member provide information on how representative the elected members are of Merton's population in terms of gender and ethnicity?

Reply

The council and local political parties are committed to attracting prospective councillors who are as representative of the local population as possible. Merton's councillors are a diverse group, including many younger councillors who work full time, those with caring responsibilities, a wide age range, 37% women and approximately 25% from visible BAME communities. The council doesn't currently collect data on gender and ethnicities and therefore I have instructed the Head of Democracy Services to collect this data from elected members as soon as possible.

Supplementary

Thank you Madam Mayor and thanks to the Cabinet Member for her response. What does the Cabinet Member believe would be the best ways to attract and retain more diverse Councillor population?

Reply

Thank you Madam Mayor and I'd like to thank the Councillor for his supplementary. I think it is incredibly important that the people of Merton see themselves properly represented in this Chamber. We know that it is a country-wide issue with the age-average of Councillors as well as gender, race, disability and sexuality not fully representing the population they're elected to represent. Here in Merton I am making it a priority to ensure that we can offer support for Councillors; I believe that by making members feel that their caring duties, parental duties, physical, mental health are supported, they're more likely to feel able to stay on as elected representatives or indeed to attract a wider group to consider it in the first place. I'm currently undertaking this work to strengthen the support and guidance that we give to Councillors.

From Councillor Nick McLean to the Leader of the Council

What discussions has the Leader of the Council had with the Local Borough Commander and MOPAC to save Wimbledon Police Station since the last ordinary meeting of the council on 3rd April?

Reply

The BCU Commander Sally Benatar addressed the Scrutiny Commission on the 24th April and said the following

Police stations

Sally Benatar read out a prepared statement:

“ The intention set out in our consultation document in 2017 was for Mitcham Police Station to be the 24/7 front counter location and Response parade site for Merton Borough, with Earlsfield Police Station remaining the Response parade site for Wandsworth Borough and with Wimbledon Police Station to be sold.

After eleven months’ experience of working at greater scale across the boroughs, it has been identified that there is a need to review the operational implications of continuing to operate with two separate Response parade sites for Merton and Wandsworth, as opposed to having a shared parade site covering both boroughs. This internal review is now taking place.”

In response to concerns raised by members of the Commission, Sally Benatar said that she had requested this review to investigate the most efficient way of using police resources now that these were deployed at greater scale within the BCU. She stressed that this was a separate matter to the location of the 24/7 front office (police station) and that there would continue to be one of these in each borough, the location of which would be a matter for MOPAC.

The Commission and the Cabinet Member for Community Safety, Engagement and Equalities requested further detail of the review to be made available in a briefing to councillors. Members of the Commission said they wished to be fully sighted on decisions that would have an impact on policing in Merton and that there should be a public consultation. Sally Benatar said that there had not been a public consultation when the Kingston and Richmond Response parade sites were merged and there was no plan to have a public consultation on how Response policing is delivered as this is an operational policing decision. The public consultation on front counters was a separate issue. Sally Benatar undertook to take the Commission’s concerns back and said that she would share a briefing note with them as soon as she could.

RESOLVED: the Commission agreed to invite the BCU Commander to a future meeting for an update on police estate matters as well as crime statistics and other policing issues.

Supplementary

Thank you Madam Mayor and I’d like to thank the Leader of the Council for his response. Will the Leader agree to a future report to Council on his discussions to save Wimbledon Police Station?

Reply

I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his supplementary and I’m sure he’s pleased with the information in the written answer in particular the resolve ‘the Commission agree to invite the BCU Commander to a future meeting for an update on police estate matters as well as crime statistics and other policing issues’, but I would like to point the Leader of the Opposition to a newspaper that’s nicknamed “The Thunderer”; it’s the Times. Now in a letter to The Times, we had last Friday five former police chiefs have warned that resources have been drained to dangerously low levels in Policing. The former Commissioners have united to condemn the emasculation of British Policing under Theresa May and urge her successor to make law and order a priority. So when we’re talking about resourcing and about the state, the Mayor of London’s been forced to look at the state because of this emasculation

of the resources to Policing, not just in this Borough but throughout the country. So I would bounce back his supplementary question and say would he have a meeting with the next Prime Minister at his earliest opportunity to repay and to refund back the £1billion in cuts to Met Police that's forcing the Mayor of London to make drastic cuts to the state, but we as a party in the London Borough of Merton want a presence for the Police in Mitcham and in Wimbledon and will continue to argue for that.

From Councillor Rebecca Lanning to the Cabinet Member for Voluntary Sector, Partnerships and Community Safety

Since being the first borough to work with the Met on rolling out the Ask for Angela campaign in 2016, can the cabinet member update on statistics of gender-based hate crime in Merton?

Reply

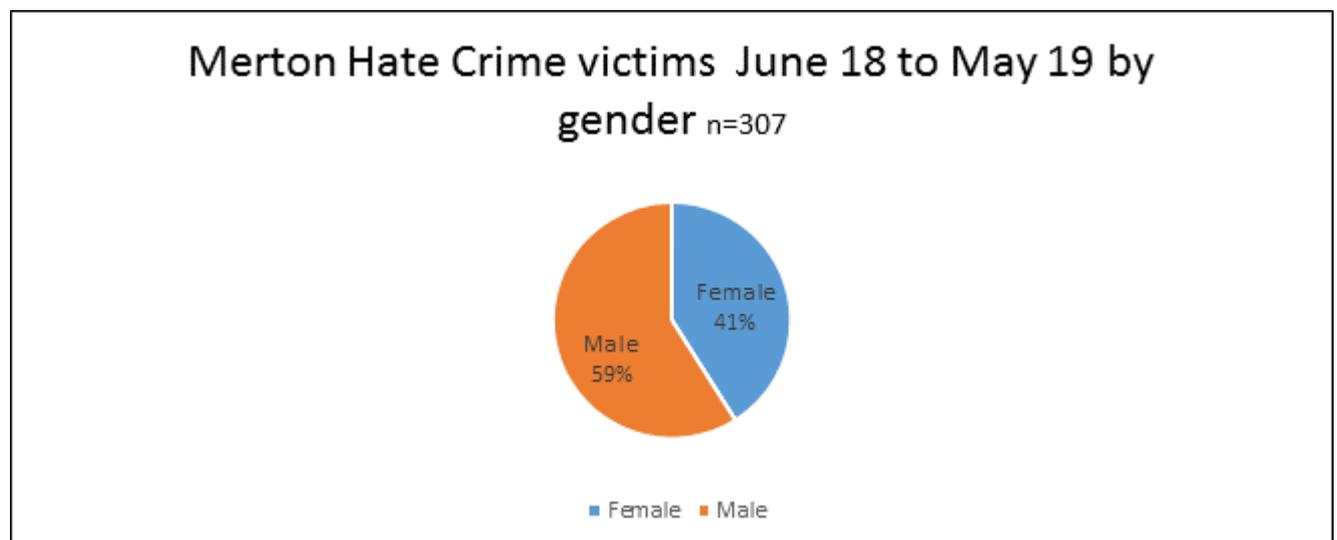
Nationally and in the MPS the five monitored strands of hate crime are:

- Race;
- Religion/faith;
- Sexual orientation; (Gay/lesbian)
- Disability;
- Gender-identity (Transgender)

Details of hate crime victims and offences for each of the above strands are publically available via

<https://www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/mayors-office-policing-and-crime-mopac/data-and-statistics/hate-crime-dashboard>

Work undertaken locally as part of the 2nd hate crime profile to be published later this month shows that the gender split for Merton victims of the above hate crime stands in the last 12 months is :-



When this exercise was first completed the previous year (aug 17 to Jul 18) the relative proportions were 60% male and 40% female.

Misogyny

While some police forces are trialling, the recording of Misogynistic incidents it is not currently a criminal offence and the MPS are not participating in the trials.

So for London there are no figures for gender based hate crimes

For Sexual offences (rape and other sexual offences) the majority of victims (89%) are female.

Supplementary

Thank you Madam Mayor and can I thank the Cabinet Member for her response, particularly for highlighting the gender disparity with regard to sexual violence, with 89% of victims being women. Could the Cabinet Member update us on what the Council is doing to tackle this gender disparity?

Reply

I thank Councillor Lanning for her supplementary question and I confirm that we are very concerned as a Council that 89% of women suffer from sexual violence and we're monitoring the position to ensure that we prosecute the perpetrators of this crime and we keep a good eye on this to make sure they are brought to justice.

From Councillor Eloise Bailey to the Cabinet Member for Woman and Equalities

What will the cabinet member's role overseeing equality impact assessments (EIA) involve on a day-to-day level? And how will she seek to improve the EIA carried out by the Council, and their ability to change Council policy?

Reply

The Equality Analysis (EA) process is well embedded in the council's day-to-day business. The Equality and Community Cohesion Officer supports the process by regularly briefing the Senior Leadership team, Departmental Management Teams and supporting individual managers to conduct EAs and consider the equalities implications of proposed changes to policy and service delivery.

Managers have the tools to robustly conduct EAs for policy changes and service reviews. A framework is in place that ensures that the basket of saving proposals put up to Cabinet are accompanied by EAs that have considered the effect that the proposed changes will have on the Protected Characteristics.

The EA is constantly under review to reflect any changes in legislation, guidance and case law. The EA process is overseen by the Cabinet Member for Women and Equalities and this is discussed on a regular basis with the Head of Policy, Strategy and Partnerships.

Supplementary

Thank you Madam Mayor and thank you to the Cabinet Member for your answer. I'd just like to know, what improvements would you like to see to the process and what do you feel like could be better?

Reply

I am currently working on that and I'd like to see a better tolerance of everybody in this society across the Borough so that there is no people understand the different and diverse communities that live here and there's more acceptance and I will talk about that later in my strategic theme.

From Councillor Russell Makin to the Cabinet Member for Women and Equalities

Can the cabinet member outline the reasons for the inequalities in life expectancy between the east and the west of the borough, and the work being done to address this?

Reply

The reasons for the inequalities in life expectancy between the East and West of the borough are multi-factorial and span the whole life course from before birth until old age.

The Annual Report of the Director of Public Health in 2018 (<https://www2.merton.gov.uk/Annual-Health-Report2018.pdf>) described these factors, the current situation in Merton and the range of work in short, medium and long-term which could be done to address them. One of the goals of the current strategy of the Health and Wellbeing Board has been to reduce the gap between East and West. Examples are the work to develop the Wilson Hospital for health and wellbeing and the implementation of social prescribing in GP practices in the East. The recently refreshed Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2019-2024 "A healthy place for healthy lives" has built on this, with a set of principles and ways of working, the first of which is to tackle health inequalities.

Complementing the work of the Health and Wellbeing Board, many other council services and functions contribute to a reduction in inequalities. Corporate capacity to bridge the gap was the main strategic theme of the November 2017 council; a summary paper (<https://democracy.merton.gov.uk/documents/s20179/Strategic%20Theme%20Nov%2017%20final.pdf>) summarised the work which continues.

Supplementary

Thank you Madam Mayor. Can the Cabinet Member reassure us that her role will mean that she plays a key part in addressing ongoing inequalities between the East and West of the Borough? Thank you.

Reply

I'd like to thank the Councillor for his supplementary question. My role underpins work that is carried out across all portfolios, so in your original question we looked at work being done in Health and Social Care but inequalities arise in all areas and I look forward to working with colleagues to address the needs of residents across the Borough.

From Councillor Brenda Fraser to the Cabinet Member for Voluntary Sector, Partnerships and Community Safety

I'd like to congratulate the cabinet member on a wonderful Windrush Day 2019 celebration. Can she tell me how the council will continue to support the Windrush generation?

Reply

We are proud of the borough's Windrush Day 2019 celebrations and are grateful for the support received from the West Indian Friends and Families Association and Black and Minority Ethnic Voice, (particularly with the heritage and thanksgiving service) that made the events so successful. We will look to see how we can celebrate Windrush Day annually.

We will continue to work with these organisations and will be guided by them to try to meet the needs of the Windrush Generation, many of whom are now elderly and may require support from our Adult Social Care provision as well as sign posting to the support available in the voluntary sector.

Additionally, the council has recently promoted the Windrush Compensation scheme to local residents by including an article in My Merton.

Supplementary

Thank you Madam Mayor and I thank the Cabinet Member for her answer. I would like to pose this supplementary question; would the Cabinet Member agree that the Government has created a hostile environment for the Windrush Generation especially as they were not immigrants but British subjects and that this concern this hostile environment concerns friends and relatives for the EU with regards to Brexit?

Reply

I thank the Councillor for her supplementary question and I agree with her a hundred percent that when we had the celebrations here on the first Saturday of the Windrush Generation we had stories from people who had lived and worked here for many years and they suffered from hostile environment. We're going to make sure that because of Brexit and in view of hate crime we're going to monitor the position to ensure that people who have worked and lived here all their lives are treated equally as everyone.

From Councillor Mary Curtin to the Cabinet Member for Women and Equalities

Can the cabinet member outline what work is being done by the council to better understand 'hidden' disabilities, and therefore provide more appropriate services to them?

Reply

The Department for Transport has recently published new guidance which aims to extend access to Blue Badge parking permits to people with 'hidden' disabilities. This is aimed at people with conditions such as dementia, autism, anxiety disorders or reduced mobility who can experience significant difficulties and stress in finding a parking space. Problems with transport for people with hidden disabilities is often an underlying factor in isolation and loneliness which can exacerbate their condition. These changes should help combat the negative impact of road travel difficulties for people with these types of condition.

The new guidance is due to come into effect on 31 August. Officers who administer the Blue Badge scheme in Merton are working closely with colleagues from across the council to operationalise these changes. The Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) provides a detailed assessment of health needs for the borough and this has recently been supplemented by a disability health and care profile and a severe mental illness profile published in 2018.

The council published a revised Autism Strategy in 2018 along with an autism profile. The strategy and action plan take a whole life course approach, encompassing children, young people and adults with autism and taking into consideration the needs of families and carers. An Autism Partnership Steering group has been established to support the implementation and monitoring of the plan.

As part of the newly expanded Strategic Partner Grants programme we launched a new peer support and wellbeing programme with Imagine Independence in July which supports people with a range of mental health issues including Depression, Anxiety, Bipolar and Agoraphobia. We have just launched a new service for adults with Autism with Merton Mencap as part of the grants program for people that need support but would not normally have eligible needs via the care act.

The council has contributed funding and is working with partners across London to promote www.good-thinking.uk which is a London Digital well-being service. This has been created in response to the most common mental health issues experienced in London for which early intervention and pro-active self-management of wellbeing can have a positive impact (anxiety, sleep deprivation, stress and low mood). As part of the work of the Health and Wellbeing Board we are working with colleagues in Thrive London to develop a series of community conversations in Merton to understand what matters to residents around mental health and wellbeing, to campaign against stigma and to identify areas of improvement in mental health and wellbeing in Merton. These will take place in September and October 2019.

Supplementary

Thank you Madam Mayor. I note with interest that there will be a series of community conversations in Merton September and October about mental health and wellbeing. Can I please request the Cabinet Member reports back to Council on the findings of this vital issue later in the year?

Reply

I'd like to thank Councillor Curtin for her supplementary question. Absolutely, it is imperative that we start to better understand hidden disabilities in order to be able to ensure that the Council services are tailored for everyone and it's through conversation in the communities at a local level that we can really start to refine the understanding.