

06: Non ST Questions

**From Councillor Peter McCabe to the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Housing and Transport**

Could the Cabinet member please provide a progress report following the collapse of Bishopsford Road Bridge?

**Reply**

Since the partial collapse of one of the three arches on Bishopsford Road bridge in June, the council has been working with FM Conway, the Environment Agency, Thames Water and others to stabilise the bridge and to improve pedestrian safety for people crossing the bridge and using the surrounding footpaths. This includes installing CCTV, signage and ANPR cameras to deter motorcyclists from using the pedestrian and cyclists' footbridge. Transport for London have arranged for the 280 bus route to serve Bishopsford Road, Wandle Road and Morden Road and have added a temporary bus stop on London Road at the junction of Mitcham Park. There was a drop in coffee morning on Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> September between 10am and 1pm on the Tooting and Mitcham Hub side of the bridge where council officers and local councillors were available to update residents and answer questions. For updates, please see the council's webpage:

<https://www.merton.gov.uk/streets-parking-transport/roadworks/bishopsford-bridge>

**From Councillor Edward Gretton to the Cabinet Member for Finance:**

Could the Cabinet Member kindly confirm with regard to the end of year 2018/2019 financial accounts, what surplus was shown at year-end when the Council closed its books?

**Reply**

In the face of years of damaging cuts to council funding, officers have taken a businesslike approach to finances in order to protect services for the most vulnerable. This meticulous approach to budgeting is commendable and vital in these continuing years of government austerity.

In the financial statements for the year ended 31 March 2019 the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure statement (page 11) shows a deficit of £7,187k which is the accounting cost of providing services in accordance with accounting practices.

As reported to Cabinet, Financial Monitoring Task Group (FMTG) and Standards and General Purpose Committee(SGPC) the underspend on the general fund was £7,656k. In addition to this there was a surplus on business rates of £3,852k.

Our analysis of the underspend shows that the circumstances surrounding it may not arise again. It follows several years of overspends, and comes in spite of overspends in several departments. After more than nine years of austerity, coinciding with an increase in demands on our services, the financial pressures on the council continue

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to be very great, and regrettably it will be necessary to make considerable further budget savings in future years.

### **From Councillor Stan Anderson to the Cabinet Member for Finance**

Does the Cabinet member for finance believe that the government should fully fund the trades unions' latest pay claim?

### **Reply**

Between 2010 and 2020, councils have lost 60p out of every £1 they have received from government. The 2019 LGA survey of council finances found that 1 in 3 councils fear they will run out of funding to provide even their statutory, legal duties by 2022/23, and the LGA estimates councils will face a funding gap of £8 billion by 2025.

The local government workforce has endured years of pay restraint with the majority of pay points losing 22% of their value.

In this light, the National Joint Council local government unions have submitted a pay claim for a £10 per hour minimum wage and a 10% uplift across all other paypoints in 2020/21.

I support the trade unions' campaign for a proper pay rise for local government workers. I believe the government needs to take responsibility and fully fund increases in pay for our hardworking staff, those who are working tirelessly to protect our residents from the worst excesses in Tory funding cuts chipping away at services.

### **From Councillor Paul Kohler to the Cabinet Member for Finance**

The Council currently has a tender out for Cleaning Services. What conditions are there in the Contract for potential suppliers to have to meet in respect of a) adherence to the London Living Wage b) Other conditions of employment such as sick pay, holiday and the use of zero hours contracts?

### **Reply**

The council pays all its staff and agency workers the London Living Wage despite cuts in government funding and the absence of financial support in meeting this commitment to our staff and to those who provide services to the borough. That is why we are calling on the Government to end austerity in more than just name, and ensure our staff's trades unions' pay claim is met, and that funding is provided for all our services. If we do not receive this funding then we are put in the invidious position of having to cut services if we want to increase salaries.

With regards to the payment of London Living Wage (LLW), London Borough of Merton treats each contract on a case-by-case basis. In the instance of the Cleaning

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Services contract, it is not a requirement of the contract for the provider to pay LLW, however bidders may chose to submit a price which does include LLW. It is nonetheless a requirement of the contract for bidders to comply with statutory government requirements (i.e.) National Living Wage; for which bidders must ensure that they incorporate any future projected NLW rises within their tender price.

Beyond the requirement for suppliers to comply with all current relevant legislation, the Council does not specify conditions of employment for the resources that are deployed on its commercial contracts.

Again, we would call on the government to provide sufficient funding to ensure at least the LLW was paid by all providers, and regret that it does not.

### **From Councillor Agatha Akyigyina to the Cabinet Member for Schools and Adult Education**

How is the funding crisis in Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) services affecting schools in Merton and what is being done to mitigate it?

#### **Reply**

At this stage the funding crisis in SEND is not directly affecting schools as the overspend is contained in the 'High Needs' block of the Dedicated School Grant, rather than the general 'School Block' that funds mainstream schools. At the end of June the council submitted to the DfE a 'Deficit Recovery Plan' with regard to the 'High Needs' block that set out the issues in Merton and we expect a dialogue with the DfE in the coming months on how the funding deficit can be resolved. Like many councils, SEND costs are outstripping any increase in funding from government, and we are waiting to understand how extra money announced in the Spending Review will assist Merton.

### **From Councillor Nick McLean to the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Housing and Transport:**

Can the Cabinet Member give an update on the progress of Morden regeneration talks, in light of the comments made by the Leader of the Council at the 4<sup>th</sup> July Overview and Scrutiny Meeting that the search for a development partner will likely be completed by Christmas?

#### **Reply**

The council is working in partnership with Transport for London and Mayor of London in bringing forward the regeneration plans. We will shortly be launching the procurement to select a development partner to work alongside us in working up the detailed plans for the town centre which will include decisions by cabinet and full council at its November meeting. Over the past year, a number of engagement meetings have taken place with potential development partners which has

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demonstrated that there is strong demand from the market for the regeneration opportunity in Morden town centre.

### **From Councillor Owen Pritchard to Cabinet member for Regeneration, Housing and Transport**

Can the Cabinet Member provide an update on progress of the new AFC Wimbledon stadium?

#### **Reply**

Work continues on the construction of the new stadium and over 700 new residential units including 30% affordable which is currently the largest redevelopment site in Merton. A monthly construction co-ordination meeting is hosted at the site to help co-ordinate issues within and adjacent the site.

The developers are making +£10million in contributions to support local infrastructure including for Transport for London's bus services, provision of local parking controls and towards streetscene and highways improvements along Plough Lane and Haydon's Road. More information, including update photos, can be found online via:

<https://www.ploughlanestadium.co.uk/>

### **From Councillor Anthony Fairclough to the Cabinet Member for Women and Equalities**

Can you outline the training officers and cabinet members receive in the Public Sector Equality Duty and (the Council's) Equality Impact Assessment process?

#### **Reply**

The Equality and Community Cohesion Officer regularly briefs the Senior Leadership team on the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) and supports managers by briefing them on the EA process and the importance of conducting EAs to consider the equalities implications of proposed changes to policy and service delivery. The officer also regularly attends the Department Management Team meetings to discuss the EA process.

As part of the New Manager's Induction the Equality and Community Cohesion Officer will be briefing the managers on the (PSED) and the EA process on a quarterly basis.

Additionally comprehensive guidance is available to managers on the intranet and the Equality and Community Cohesion Officer also provides one to one support on equality issues including EAs.

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

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put up to Cabinet are accompanied by EAs that have considered the effect that the proposed changes will have on the Protected Characteristics.

In the past Equality training has been provided for Members. This training included the awareness of the PSED and the importance of EAs supporting the decision-making process. However, it is recognised that since the last training was delivered, members who have since joined may not have received this. A full Members Training Plan is currently being developed. Equality training for Members has been incorporated into this plan, and enquires are underway for this training to be commissioned and delivered later in the 2019/20 financial year.

### **From Councillor Brenda Fraser to the Cabinet Member for Schools and Adult Education**

Can the Cabinet Member update Council on progress of the Harris Wimbledon school build?

### **Reply**

The council put in extensive work to enable the clear site for the permanent building for Harris Academy Wimbledon, and so to allow the building to be completed for September 2020. The responsibility for managing the build and associated risks now rest with the government's ESFA (Education and Skills Funding Agency) but we understand the build has progressed well and is currently scheduled to be completed on time. Visitors to the area can see the progress with the building's steel frame visible.

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