

1. From Councillor Janice Howard to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration

I see that the Department for Transport is to undertake research into the effectiveness of 20mph limits. Can the Cabinet Member update us on the progress of the council's own local research into this matter following the motion passed by Council back in November 2012?

Reply

The Department for Transport has recognised the growing trend of 20mph limit and zones being implemented across the country and is undertaking research. Unfortunately the report will not be ready until 2017 reflecting the difficulties of research in this area of work and the delays in getting reliable evidence showing the impact of traffic interventions. Locally we have obtained pan London support for a piece of work to look at published evidence from existing trials and schemes across the country.

We are also undertaking speed and volume surveys at all of our existing 20mph sites across the borough over the next few months.

As reported to Scrutiny Members recently, this will be available to report in autumn 2014.

2. From Councillor Laxmi Attawar to the Cabinet Member for Finance

What would be the impact on the council's finances of reducing council tax by 10%?

Reply

The Revenue Estimates for 2014/15 include £75.049 million income from Council Tax for Merton usage. A 10% reduction in this figure would result in a loss of income of £7.5 million per year. This would be in addition to the savings already identified as part of the Business Planning Process for 2014-18. Over 4 years, that amounts to £30m that might have been available for expenditure on Council services.

3. From Councillor Oonagh Moulton to the Leader of the Council

Can the Leader tell me how many councillor questions have been submitted in total at each of the Full Council meetings over the last two years?

Reply

Number of councillor questions at Council meetings, February 2012-February 2014

	TOTAL Priority questions	TOTAL Non priority questions		Total council questions
			Non Priority questions by political group	

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				Labour	Con	Merton Coalition	MPWIR	Lib Dems		
Feb-14	21	77		1	41	31	0	4		98
Nov-13	20	44		3	22	13	0	6		64
Sep-13	20	59		0	37	19	0	3		79
Jul-13	20	82		16	51	10	0	5		102
Mar-13	19	21		4	11	-	2	4		40
Feb-13	18	49		1	43	-	0	5		67
Nov-12	18	41		4	33	-	0	4		59
Sep-12	18	37		2	31	-	0	4		55
Jul-12	18	42		4	33	-	0	5		60
Mar-12	18	20		2	17	-	0	1		38
Feb-12	18	28		2	22	-	0	4		46

4. From Councillor Iain Dysart to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration

Further to the outcome of the Council's Mini-Holland bid, resulting in the receipt of less money than hoped, by when does he intend to progress to take forward the specific agreement of this Council to approach the Mayor's office regarding the extension of the cycle hire scheme to Merton, or would he rather I forgot about it?

Reply

Although Merton didn't achieve full mini-Holland borough status, our bid was highly commended by the Mayor's team and we've been told we will receive at least £10m over possibly 3 years. This compares with a usual spend on cycling of about £300k pa.

I have been in touch with the Mayor's cycling commissioner, Andrew Gilligan, who tells me that he is writing to me with a view to our meeting soon to discuss Merton's funding and to agree which projects within our bid will go forward. What we are proposing is our own cycle hire scheme, to invest in Brompton Docks, of which there are numerous working examples in South West London and Surrey, as part of a partnership with Southwest Trains, rather than an immediate extension on the central London scheme which does not currently run to Merton's border. There are logistical difficulties in extending the existing Barclays Cycle Hire to outer London.

In addition to Brompton Docks, the Council is also collaborating with South London Partnership to determine whether the HourBike hire system might be a suitable alternative for Outer London. We are currently exploring this in partnership with Kingston, Sutton, Croydon, and Richmond.

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5. From Councillor Miles Windsor to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration

To be answered by the Cabinet Member for Environmental Cleanliness and Parking

Noise pollution and noise aggravation can have a serious and adverse effect on the lives of residents in Merton. Can the Cabinet Member update me on the council's current noise nuisance enforcement pilot?

Reply

The Environmental Health Service has been providing an Out of Hours Noise enforcement service on Friday nights since the beginning of the calendar year. This service complements the long-standing Saturday night service but is supported by officers from both Croydon and Richmond Councils with whom we are working on a shared Regulatory Services.

Despite local publicity and changes to the Council's website, take up of the pilot service was originally limited but now mirrors the level of demand being experienced on the Saturday night service. A more detailed analysis of the demand for the service and enforcement action required will take place at the end of the 6 month trial period.

6. From Councillor Brenda Fraser to the Cabinet Member for Community and Culture

Could he estimate how much a new performing arts centre for Wimbledon might cost?

Reply

Two examples of performing arts centres recently built are the Curve Theatre in Leicester, planned in 2000, at a cost of £61m - which was £35m over budget - whilst the more recently refurbished Midlands Arts Centre was refurbished in 2010 at a cost of £15m. A new performing arts centre for Wimbledon would require £20m as a minimum in construction alone, before running costs were factored in.

Merton, including Wimbledon, is however already blessed with 5 permanent performing arts venues of various sizes which, together with occasional performing areas including our parks, leisure centres and of course our libraries, makes our borough an excellent venue for providing sustainable performing arts for the long term.

7. From Councillor Richard Hilton to the Cabinet Member for Finance

Is the Annual Mayor's Ball, to be held this year on April 26th an official Council event supported by Council staff or a private event run by you/the Mayor?

Reply

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The mayor's charity, an independent charitable trust, runs events such as this as fundraising events to raise money for charitable giving. A small amount of council officer time is used to support the mayor's charity. It is important that the dignity of the Mayor and the Mayor's charitable work is maintained. This administration does not propose to interfere in the Mayor's running of the Annual Ball, including decisions about who is invited and what standards of behaviour are required from guests, although of course in extreme circumstances instances of unacceptable behaviour can be investigated by the Standards Committee or other authorities if required.

8. From Councillor Suzanne Grocott to the Cabinet Member for Finance

How much did it cost to design, print, distribute and display the posters stating that "council tax has been frozen"? How many posters were printed, how many sites used and was there any foregone revenue from a commercial alternative?

Reply

The frozen council tax posters are currently displayed on the 48 advertising boards across the borough at the cost of £649.50. This covers all design, print and display costs, and works out at £13 per unit. No commercial revenue was lost as a result of the frozen council tax campaign.

9. From Councillor Sam Thomas to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Cleanliness and Parking

How much would it cost to re-open the Weir Road recycling centre in terms of both capital and revenue?

Reply

Firstly there is no suitable site available, the previous site is currently being leased to another company, the length of the lease being until 2036. Therefore the Weir Road site will not be available before then. The council's estates section have confirmed that there is no available land to accommodate a similar sized plot, which therefore leaves the options to privately rent or purchase land with suitable planning permission.

If a site were rented the additional revenue cost would, we estimate, be approximately £28,000 per calendar month, £336,000 each year. In addition the cost of management of the site would need to be added. These would be approximately £200k per annum which doesn't include haulage costs.

Therefore current revenue costs would approximately be in the region of over £500k annually, which equates to an increase in Council Tax of approximately 0.7%.

This does not include the Capital costs required to set up a new site including provision of bins, equipment and signage.

As an alternative the average purchase price for low grade industrial use site in the Wimbledon area would be approximately £3m, or the equivalent of approximately half of the cost of the Pelham Primary School expansion, for example.

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10. From Councillor Richard Hilton to the Cabinet Member for Finance

Can the Cabinet Member please give me a list of:

- (a) The total expenditure on corporate cards by department within the last financial year and
- (b) All individual spending totalling over £500 by staff or Councillors within the last financial year.

Reply

The Table below summarises spend by department using “purchasing cards” for the financial year 2012/13:

Department	2012/13
	£
Corporate Services	97,596.75
Children Schools & Families	190,443.98
Community & Housing	119,983.71
Environment & Regeneration	105,007.23
Mitcham Common Conservators	4,310.67
Merton and Sutton Joint Cemetery Board	7,222.12
Total for Merton	524,564.46

N.B. No Councillor has a purchasing card.

All individual spending totalling over £500 up to 31st December within the last financial year are shown on the hyperlink below: This will be updated to 31st March as part of the process of closing of accounts

<http://www.merton.gov.uk/council/dp-foi/opendata/spending.htm>

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