

## **Agenda item 8a – Councillors strategic theme priority questions and answers**

### **1. From Councillor Tobin Byers to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Cleanliness and Parking**

Could the Cabinet Member update us the action she is taking to combat the problem of people dropping litter in our streets.

#### **Reply**

Merton continues to run litter awareness road shows throughout the year. In addition to our education and engagement programmes, Merton has adopted a zero tolerance approach to environmental crime such as fly-tipping, graffiti and littering by dealing with it promptly and effectively. Merton has recently started a pilot of enhanced enforcement, through the use of enviro-crime enforcement specialists who patrol our town centres and approach individuals that deposit litter on the highway. In adopting the zero tolerance approach, Merton, as with a number of other councils, will issue a Fixed Penalty Charge without further warning. We are a clean borough and we want to send out a clear message that anyone caught littering will be fined.

#### **Supplementary Question**

As she will be aware in 2009 under the Conservative administration a survey showed that Merton had the filthiest streets in the whole of the country. Thankfully we have improved the situation since then, but can she tell me more about what she can do to move to a zero tolerance approach to littering in the borough?

#### **Reply**

There are 101 things we could do, currently though there is a lot of education and publicity going on, we are doing what we can with that, especially with schools. However, what we have done is adopt a pilot scheme giving out fines for littering. Now, ultimately we don't want to give out fines to people for littering, but we wanted it to be an education effect. The more of those fines are given then the more people will become compliant in not littering and then the fewer fines will be required. So that's our situation at the moment, but it only a pilot scheme at the moment.

### **2. From Councillor David Simpson to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Cleanliness and Parking**

What has the additional private littering enforcement brought in by the Labour administration shortly before the election cost so far? How much income has it raised?

#### **Reply**

As part of an enhanced enforcement programme to tackle the problem identified by residents of people dropping litter on our streets, Merton is piloting working with specialist litter and waste enforcement officers in Mitcham, Morden and Wimbledon town centres. There has been “start-up” costs associated with the pilot, which are approximately £12k. So far officers have levied fines of £6,525 on people dropping litter which I believe will act as a deterrent and will make it clear that we have a zero tolerance approach to littering.

### **Supplementary Question**

What does the administration intend to do with the income you raise from the extra enforcement and are you planning to roll out these private enforcement officers beyond our town centres into the boroughs to our litter strewn residential streets? Finally, having levied £6000 fines, which is great, how many have actually been paid?

### **Reply**

There are a lot of questions in there, and I’m not sure I can remember all of them. I did say it was a pilot scheme and it has just started. We have to look at this, we have to look at policy and cost implications, whether funding comes in that could fund more officers, we need to look at this, and we are looking at it over the next couple of weeks. How it has played out in the last few weeks it’s been operating. It is a new project, it is a pilot, we don’t know at this moment in time as to what the implications will be but certainly I hear at the moment it is working well, and if we can roll that out to other parts of the borough then I’d be quite happy to do that.

### **3. From Councillor Katy Neep to the Leader of the Council**

Can the Leader update me on progress in relation to the proposals to redevelop the High Path Estate in my ward?

### **Reply**

Cabinet resolved on 30<sup>th</sup> June 2014 to recommend that 9<sup>th</sup> June Council (today) note the significant opportunity this project represents to improve housing conditions for tenants, leaseholders and freeholders and the potential contribution to addressing wider housing provision pressures in Merton and London and to agree to proceed with the exploration of estates regeneration schemes for High Path, Eastfields and Ravensbury estates, via the preparation in partnership with Circle Housing Merton Priority (CHMP) of a statutory Estates Regeneration Local Plan. This Plan will set out the strategic planning framework to guide any estates regeneration proposals for High Path, Eastfields and Ravensbury estates.

Cabinet also resolved to recommend that Council, suspend the obligation in the Stock Transfer Agreement dated 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2010 to carry out Qualifying

Works as defined in the Transfer Agreement, at High Path, Eastfields and Ravensbury estates for a period of 18 months from 9<sup>th</sup> July 2014 to enable this regeneration exploration. The timetable proposed for the preparation of the proposed Local Plan is as follows:

- Autumn 2014 / Winter 2014 - First Consultation Stage - Issues and Options
- Winter 2014/Spring 2015 - Second Consultation Stage – Preferred Options
- Winter / Spring 2015 - Third Consultation stage – Preferred Option
- Summer / Autumn 2015 – Submission Stage sign-off by Council
- Summer / Autumn 2015 – Pre-Submission Publication
- Autumn / Winter 2015 – Submission to the Secretary of State who appoints an independent planning inspector to examine the Local Plan
- Autumn / Winter – 2015 – Examination of Local Plan, including public hearings (timetable set by the planning inspector)
- Winter 2015 / Spring 2016 – Subject to passing the independent examination, Council can adopt Estates Regeneration Local Plan

### **Supplementary Question**

I understand that the Leader has asked Circle for a series of commitments to residents before they start on the redevelopment. Could he outline the commitments to residents that he has got from Circle and in particular, could he confirm whether he has managed to get them to commit to sorting out their repairs service, which has been under-performing for a number of months?

### **Reply**

I can confirm that I have been in discussion with Circle Housing Merton Priory with a view to working on, and we are working on, ten commitments that they will sign to, that I will sign to and will be for our residents. I can confirm that I will talk about these in greater detail when we come to the substantive debate, but I can confirm to Cllr Neep that one of those commitments will be to make sure that Circle Housing continues to maintain residences on these estates and to our planning processes until the redevelopment starts, including ensuring a high quality repairs service.

### **4. From Councillor Abdul Latif to the Cabinet Member for Sustainability and Environmental Regeneration**

Will the Cabinet Member confirm the sum available from the Mayor of London to promote safe cycling in and around Wimbledon i.e. the sum to be made available subsequent to Merton's failed bid for the Mini Holland initiative?

## **Reply**

The council's Mini Hollands submission is a borough-wide bid to improve cycling in Merton. In a public meeting at City Hall, the Mayor's Cycling Commissioner said that shortlisted Boroughs like Merton would receive between £10 and £20m, though as yet this has not been confirmed in writing. I am meeting with the Cycling Commissioner next week and hope to obtain greater clarity then.

## **Supplementary Question**

Will the Cabinet Member give a timetable for when the associated engineering works will be completed, and does the Cabinet Member plan to include safer and quieter cycling routes along the side streets and filtered permeability routes for cyclists and pedestrians? Will he commit to keeping residents and councillors in Trinity ward and other town centre wards fully informed?

## **Reply**

We don't have any certainty around the timetable for the Merton as yet. Andrew Gilligan said at a meeting held in City Hall at a public meeting that we should be receiving between with £10 – 20 million. I certainly hope that will be the case. Rumours suggest that other boroughs had received significantly less. Nonetheless, I am still hopeful we are going to get £10 – 20 million and the whole programme includes town centres, major routes, local and neighbourhood routes to enable children to cycle to school, local residents to cycle to shopping parades. We want a full range of cycling innovations as our ambition is to raise cycling in the borough by many fold and to bring far more people into cycling in the forthcoming years. You also asked about keeping ward councillor informed, yes we will be consulting with councillors and that is how we hope to handle this. On all these questions there should be substantial consistent consultation with ward councillors and, through them, with residents over the next four years.

## **5. From Councillor Pauline Cowper to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration**

Could the Cabinet Member comment on the impact the new green gyms are having in our parks?

## **Reply**

There are a total of seven green gyms in the borough located at:

- Donnelly Green
- Figge's Marsh
- King George's Playing Fields
- Morden Park
- Mostyn Gardens
- Oakleigh Way Recreation Ground

- Pollards Hill Recreation Ground

These facilities are designed to be accessible and cater for a wide range of age groups and abilities and enable park users to enjoy the pleasant surroundings of our green spaces whilst improving their fitness and health at the same time.

The local community has been involved in the design of several of our green gyms providing an opportunity for each to satisfy local needs.

We have received very positive feedback from users about our green gyms and, whilst we have no hard data on user numbers, it is clear that most have proven to be incredibly popular based upon the field observations of the Greenspaces team.

### **Supplementary Question**

Are there any plans to extend the green gym scheme, for example, to include our local park, Joseph Hood recreation ground?

### **Reply**

There are no plans to extend the green gyms. But what a good idea, thank you very much for raising it and I would be pleased to work with you and the other Cannon Hill councillors to deliver the scheme to the suggested recreation ground.

### **6. From Councillor David Dean to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration**

What were Merton's overall recycling rates in each of the last 4 years?

### **Reply**

Under the previous Conservative administration Merton had a 33% recycling rate and I am pleased to report that this has increased to almost 40% under Labour.

However more recently recycling has plateaued nationally, with some councils even seeing levels of recycling falling, in part due to factors related to the recession. Merton has maintained levels of recycling despite these national pressures and we have recently won significant investment to increase our recycling further with our innovative Mega Recycle campaign which incentivises residents to recycle more.

Merton's recycling performance since 2009/10 is listed below.

13/14 - 38.9%

12/13 - 38.9%

11/12 - 37.3%

10/11 – 36.4%

09/10 – 33.6%

### **Supplementary Question**

In the written response you went back 5 years rather than the requested 4 years and as you did 5 years why not 10 years? Anyway by 2020 recycling needs to be 50%. I want to know what the objective was for this year and a clear plan on how they're going to get to 50%, So what was the precise percentage required for this year?

### **Reply**

I think at the moment we are looking to try to achieve around 40% or thereabouts. We had 24% ten years ago, approaching the 25% that Westminster has today, ten years later. I think our record is actually pretty good and we work in close co-operation with our partners, in the South London Waste Partnership. For instance, over the last four years we've introduced other things like tin foil, mixed plastic recycling and the kitchen waste recycling. We've introduced a free bulky waste collection services and we've introduced recycling on the streets. We've actually done a great deal. We maintain we are going to meet the objectives.

### **7. From Councillor Imran Uddin to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Cleanliness and Parking**

Would the Cabinet Member join me in congratulating our Trading Standards team who recently succeeded in gaining a £6.1m confiscation order against internet investment fraudsters.

### **Reply**

Yes, and whilst we are so far uncertain how much of this order will be available to the Council this is a tremendous achievement and an example of excellent partnership work with the justice agencies to tackle crime and particularly those who prey on vulnerable citizens.

### **Supplementary Question**

Clearly the information provided shows a good improvement in the enforcement regime we have here in Merton, and staff should be congratulated on that. Can the cabinet member provide some further details on the increased effectiveness and efficiency of Trading Standards and on the general regulatory regime that we have brought about as a result of the joint initiative with the London Borough of Richmond please?

## Reply

It is interesting that we are not being webcast because John Hillarby who leads the team also says this team never gets a mention and with the webcast being down they are not able to see themselves getting a mention. They are doing brilliant work, fantastic work. We are now doing joint regulatory services with Richmond. We are the host borough for that and for the joint regulatory standards committee. We are going to share the expertise from both Boroughs, see what each other are doing and learn from one another. A lot of people are watching this because it is the first time that there have been shared regulatory services in local authorities.

## 8. From Councillor Linda Taylor to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Cleanliness and Parking

We are to understand from the Council that Merton is regarded as a clean borough. What is the justification for this?

## Reply

The following table provides official government performance figures with respect to street cleanliness for the past five years. It shows the percentage of locations failing to meet the required standard in each year (i.e. lower is better).

	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
<b>Litter</b>	<b>14.74%</b>	<b>6.02%</b>	<b>5.91%</b>	<b>7.97%</b>	<b>6.49%</b>
<b>Detritus</b>	<b>31%</b>	<b>9.47%</b>	<b>6.97%</b>	<b>11.8%</b>	<b>6.92</b>

As is clear for these official government figures, in 2009/2010 when the previous Conservative administration was in power Merton was the dirtiest borough in the country with 31% of the borough covered by detritus. However under the current administration there has been a step change in the cleanliness of the borough, as is evidenced by the government data.

Under the current administration Merton council has worked hard to keep the borough clean by:

- adopting a “zero tolerance” approach to littering
- targeting “known” hotspots for litter and fly-tipping
- providing bins for smoking and gum related litter
- increasing the number of litter bins in all of our town centres
- introducing new “smart” bins
- increasing our enforcement capacity
- running publicity/awareness campaigns to educate and advise residents and visitors to the borough to dispose of their litter and waste responsibly
- launching the “big Merton Spring Clean” to enable borough-wide cleaning events

- making it easier for residents to report litter and fly tipping through the free Love Clean Streets smartphone app

It is heartening that the government's official figures recognise how much the cleanliness of the borough has improved under the current administration.

### **Supplementary Question**

I appreciated the detailed response which looks good on paper but I'm not sure how it will translate into practice. I'd like to know that only at my insistence that a full 3.5 tonne bag of flytipping was removed from the top of Haydons Road on 20 June. Yet by the following evening more flytipped rubbish had been dumped in that spot. I would like to know what she will do in terms of enforcement to improve the dire record in this ward.

### **Reply**

I think this question has partly been answered earlier over our increased littering enforcement, and we are seeing how that works. On the issue of flytipping, it might be worth you as the Ward Councillor, talking to your residents about our free bulky waste collection service, as they may not know about it.

I'm not going to pretend everything is perfect, but we have introduced some positive initiatives into the Borough, not only in the last six months I've been cabinet member but in the last four years when my predecessor was in post. So, there's a lot going on. I'm happy to come to any of your wards to see what's going on. There are particular hot spots, by all means do invite me. I hope to get to every ward through the summer, and I am happy for you to show me where your hot spots are.

### **9. From Councillor Abigail Jones to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Cleanliness and Parking**

Can the Cabinet Member update us on our efforts to persuade residents to recycle more?

### **Reply**

Along with the long running "Love Food, Hate Waste" campaign, Merton successfully bid for funding for a recycling incentivisation programme. Known as Merton's Mega Recycle, the campaign aims to raise awareness and encourage increased recycling by individuals, households, and schools across the borough. One of the key aspects of the Mega recycle, will be the opportunity for participants to win cash prizes if through a monthly prize draw.

A further aspect of the programme, includes a team of "door stoppers" visiting households across the borough, canvassing to encourage residents to recycle, and arrange for new or replacement recycling containers to be



delivered. The campaign is programmed to run for 18 months with the aim to improve our already good recycling rates

### **Supplementary Question**

In my ward, Abbey, many of my residents live in flats. Can the cabinet member comment on how we are encouraging people in flats to recycle?

### **Reply**

Yes, there is the mega recycle business going on at the moment across the borough and we are going round knocking on doors to encourage people to recycle – and we are giving out bags and encouraging them to leave them out for recycling. There are cash incentives, for schools as well, and blocks of flats and estates to improve their recycling.

Councillors who have many blocks of flats in your wards, such as yourself, I would encourage you all to speak to your residents about this, get them look at the website, find out more about it and do encourage people, as we need to encourage people to recycle.

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