

Agenda Item 5

Council 4 February 2015

Public questions

Procedure

The Mayor will call your name and ask if you have a supplementary question arising from the answer you have received.

If you do not have a supplementary question then simply respond thank you, no. If you do have a supplementary question respond thank you, yes. You will be shown to a seat in the chamber where you will ask your supplementary question. Make sure you use the microphone.

Having put your question, please be seated whilst the Cabinet member responds. Once the response has been given, please return to your seat in the public gallery. The questions and answers and all supplementary questions and replies will be published on Merton's website after the meeting.

**1. From Beth Morrison
To the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration**

Question

When will Merton Council publish the full results of Transport for London's survey of the implications of the Rediscover Mitcham proposals for traffic flows through Mitcham Town Centre?

Reply

The traffic modelling for the Rediscover Mitcham project is now substantially complete and TfL will shortly be concluding the model auditing process and commencing the design work for the new traffic signals. This work will feed into the business case that is due to be finalised with Transport for London by Summer 2015. A summary of the business case will be published upon completion of the Business Case.

In the meantime, works to improve Fair Green have now started and are due to be completed by September 2015. This will be followed by further phases on Majestic Way and at Three Kings Pond.

**2. From Gordon Lawson
To the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration**

Question

What was the daily volume of vehicles on Woodside and Alwyne Road prior to the introduction of their preventative measures?

Reply

The measures in these roads were introduced more than 10 years ago and the Council no longer has records of the traffic data recorded at the time. In any case the flow would have substantially changed since.

**3. From Andrew Gould
To the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration**

Question

What are you doing to control the number of foxes in the borough? I am concerned they appear prevalent and increasingly confident around adults and children as well as causing a lot of additional mess which has to be cleared.

Reply

Foxes are an increasingly urban phenomenon and Merton deals with them in exactly the same way as all other London boroughs. Our website provides details regarding ways in which residents can deter foxes, this includes :

- If there is a fox living in a garden in your street some simple steps can help to encourage them to move on:
- Keep all domestic waste in a wheeled bin or closed containers, not plastic bags and use the council's brown bin food waste containers.
- Only put your waste out on the morning of collection by 6am.
- Do not leave food out for other animals. Be extremely careful where you put food to feed birds, this should be in suitable containers.
- Make sure there are no areas where foxes can shelter. This may be an overgrown or neglected area or a void beneath a building. Voids can be protected using heavy-duty mesh, making sure that it is securely fixed to any building and buried to a depth of 12" (30 cm) into the soil to prevent the fox burrowing under the mesh.

There is little that can be done to control the number of foxes since they are territorial and any efforts to reduce the population in one area would lead to relocation of other foxes into the area vacated.

4. From Simon Joseph To the Cabinet Member for Environmental Cleanliness and Parking

Question

Following no waste food collection during Christmas week, I had no collection the following week, despite two telephone promises, with ultimately five bags and two weeks of rotting food outside. Why did this happen and what will prevent this health and safety issue from recurring? Apologies are not enough.

Reply

During Week beginning 29 December 2014 our Waste collection teams experienced unprecedented volumes of waste presented for collection. Where missed collections were reported as a result of the additional workload, we endeavoured to clear these within our 24 hour target. On the occasion that Dr Joseph has referred to, we were unable to collect until the following Monday.

Our waste section apologises for the inconvenience caused to Dr Joseph and we are taking steps to ensure this is not repeated.

**5. From Mr and Mrs Matthews
To the Cabinet Member for Environmental Cleanliness and Parking**

Question

Before introducing the costly wheelie bin scheme in Lavender Fields has the council followed up the residents survey to find out what is causing the 'dirty streets' is this confirmed as household waste and not just abandoned by pedestrians and passing vehicles?

Reply

Although a high percentage of residents said they were satisfied with how the council deals with litter, the results of the residents' survey identified that Lavender Ward was one of three wards where respondents mentioned people littering as one of their top concerns.

The amount of detritus on Merton's streets has fallen since 2009/10 when the then Tory council was revealed as having the filthiest streets in the country. The Council has previously worked with the Tidy Britain Group and their review of the Street Cleansing service identified that a high proportion of litter was generated due to the method of waste collection, black sacks and boxes.

Our research also shows that more fly tipping is being generated in Merton, in London and in fact nationally. This is a source of litter and we take enforcement action wherever we can gather evidence to do so. Furthermore, we are taking action to change the behaviour and culture of those who thoughtlessly drop litter in the streets. So far this financial year we have fined over 4000 members of the public who carelessly drop litter.

Wheeled bins are being piloted to test how effective they are at dealing with a part of this problem, they will not solve all of the issues but we are working hard to address the issue of those who litter our streets.

**6. From Derek Ross
To the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration**

Question

A developer has purchased a property on Denmark Road in the conservation area. He plans to remove the entire, small front garden and replace it with a hard standing for a car, against the wishes of other residents. Why is the council unable or disinterested in preventing this from happening?

Reply

The Council has received an application to remove a small cherry tree but there are no further applications at this time. The Council works within its statutory and

regulatory powers. In this particular case, if there are any demonstrable breaches of planning control identified, the council will investigate accordingly and take any appropriate enforceable action.

**7. From Anthony Fairclough
To the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration**

Question

Please could the Cabinet Member confirm whether there are any plans currently under consideration to introduce two-way traffic on Sir Cyril Black Way and Hartfield Road? Similarly, are there plans under consideration to stop traffic turning left from Hartfield Road onto Kingston Road?

Reply

Merton has successfully secured £200,000 from Transport for London (TfL) to help develop future plans for the public realm and road network in Wimbledon Town Centre, which includes the possibility of two way working in Sir Cyril Black Way and Hartfield Road. This funding will be used to develop and refine proposals for the town centre previously put forward in the Council's Mini Holland bid to TfL in early 2014. The intention is to develop practicable options to put out to consultations with residents and businesses. The funding will be made available from April 2015 and engagement and public consultation will be a fundamental element of the scheme development process.

The Council has been approached by Tramlink to consider banning the left turn from Hartfield Road into Kingston Road to mitigate delays on Kingston Road resulting from the impact of an increase in tram frequencies (50% increase in both directions). The Council is awaiting the results of traffic modelling from Tramlink before considering this proposal.

**8. From Dominic Moass
To the Cabinet Member for Community and Culture**

Question

Please break down the allocation of social housing in Merton by nationality. What is the current priority criteria for social housing in Merton and any minimum residency period?

Reply

We do not record housing allocations by nationality and this is not a requirement of housing authorities. However in Merton we have agreed as a condition of our allocations policy that we will only allocate housing to people who have lived in the borough for a year or more as we think it is important to help local people to find an affordable place to live in the borough where we can. Unfortunately this government's shocking lack of investment in affordable house building, their recent

decision to allow big developers to get away with not contributing to affordable housing, and their plans to deplete housing associations' stock of affordable homes, makes this increasingly difficult.

The rules governing the allocation of housing association homes in the borough are set out in the Housing Register and Nominations Policy which is a public document which the public can access via the internet.

**9. From Tony Burton
To the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration**

Question

The Heritage and Design Working Group agreed a number of additions to the local list last year. When will the council adopt these additions and update the local list?

Reply

The Council have agreed to proceed with the proposed additions to the Local List and have prepared reports for the Council's internal processes. We will be completing this work during February and hope to formalise the listings in March. 2015.

**10. From Richard Hilton
To the Cabinet Member for Community Engagement, Safety and Equalities**

Question

Following the recent and horrific attacks in Paris, what action is the Council taking in conjunction with Merton MPS (police) both in schools and within the wider community to safeguard local residents and combat extremism?

Reply

Merton is a place where people from different backgrounds have lived and worked together harmoniously for many years. We continue to work in partnership to maintain good community relations and enjoy the benefits of being a cohesive borough.

The Merton Partnership Community Tension Monitoring group meets to assess potential community tension in the borough and where necessary puts action in place to mitigate any issues identified. The group brings together partners such as the Police, Council staff and the main Registered Provider in the borough

Additionally there are a number of activities that the council is committed to on an on-going basis that contribute to promoting community cohesion. These include:

- being a signatory of the Armed Forces Community Covenant,
- commemorating Holocaust Memorial Day

- celebrating Black History Month, Lesbian, Gay, Bi-Sexual and Transgender (LGBT)History Month
- supporting the Celebrating Age Festival

These events are an opportunity for people of different back grounds to come together to celebrate and get a better understanding of others.

The council also facilitates the Inter Faith Forum, LGBT Forum and Joint Consultative Committee with Ethnic Minorities. Thus good relationships have been established with community representatives who may be called upon when a community impact assessment is required. These forums also give the wider community an opportunity to inform policy and practise and feed into the community tension monitoring process.

**11. From Nick O’Gorman
To the Cabinet Member for Education**

Question

What plans if any does the council have for a new secondary school? Has a site been identified and will the Council support a new Grammar School?

Reply

The administration is clear that a new secondary school is required to meet the rising demand for places that will flow from the borough’s already expanded primary school sector. It also considers that facilitating a secondary school established by a high quality education provider with a proven track record, funded by central government, is the most effective and affordable way to do this within the current context. The council’s administration has, therefore, encouraged the Harris Federation to submit a bid through the government’s Free School programme and we are optimistic that it will be successful when the next round of schools are announced for ‘pre-opening’ before the end of March.

The application process is that the Department for Education first considers ‘pre-opening’ approval and, subsequently, works with the approved provider and local authority to identify potential sites. The position on a site will, therefore, not be clear until later in the year. However, the council will use its best endeavours to assist this process to ensure the school can open.

The new school will not be a Grammar School. Even if it were legal to do so, the current administration would not support such a school as we wish to ensure local schools are open to pupils of all backgrounds and abilities. Harris Wimbledon would provide stretching targets and expectations of high achievement for all pupils, including implementation of the Harris Federation’s established gifted and talented programme.

**12. From Sandra Vogel
To the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration**

Question

Identically worded reports to Planning Committees on 13/11/2014, 11/12/2014 and 15/01 2015 said an enforcement notice gave the Burn Bullock owner two weeks to remove cars from the pub's rear car park. The cars are still there. When was the deadline and when will the council take action?

Reply

This was an oversight and the report should have been updated. We have been informed that the individual selling the cars has been on hospital admission for some time and that is why the cars have not been removed from the car park. The option left to the Council is to prosecute the landlords and or/ occupier for non-compliance as they are in control of the land to be able to carry out the required works. Prosecution will now be pursued subject legal advice confirming that such action would satisfy the public interest requirement.

**13. From John Davis
To the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration**

Question

What was the financial value - in total, and broken-down by individual open spaces - to Merton Council of the volunteer contribution made by Friends and other community groups in the assisted maintenance of green spaces for the 2013/14 and 2012/13 financial years?

Reply

The Council does not record volunteer input information as, with some 34 recognised friends groups with a total membership measured in thousands, this would be a major task to coordinate.

Volunteers make valuable contributions in a number of ways to the management of parks and open spaces, some through means that we are aware of, such as gate locking and one-off practical events, but our friends groups work independently of the Council and do not necessarily require the assistance of, or notify Council officers of all of their activities and inputs. Some indeed, simply contribute on their daily visits to their local park by collecting litter, for example; watering young trees in high summer; managing information boards, removing fly-posters and the like.

Whereas there is no compulsion to do so, it would be possible for friends groups to collect and supply this information themselves. However, only one group currently does so to the best of our knowledge and that has occurred principally because this is a condition of a grant. That group is the Friends of South Park Gardens and in the

calendar year 2013 this group contributed 732 hours to the management of the park. Assuming a rate of £7.14 per hour, this equates to a value of £5,226. Extrapolating this across the borough, the annual contribution of friends and community groups is perhaps in the region of £50,000, but this figure cannot be substantiated based upon actual data and is an estimate only.

**14. From Andrew Boyce
To the Cabinet Member for Environmental Cleanliness and Parking**

Question

Why was it considered necessary for the Council to ignore its statutory obligations and not undertake any street cleansing activity on the High Path and Station Road in South Wimbledon between 23 December - 5 January, causing the Council's own litter bins to be overflowing in excess of ten days?

Reply

Street cleansing is scheduled to take place each working week. Due to the Christmas and New Year period street cleansing was not scheduled in High Path and Station Road for that period of four working days. However, a response team visited the area and was available to respond to any issues that needed to be addressed. On checking the Council's system no reports relating to street cleaning were received during the period mentioned.

Both roads were cleaned and checked on the scheduled day Monday 5 January 2015, and have been added for checking on a weekly basis to ensure the required standard of cleaning is maintained.

Andrew Boyce

Why didn't the response team go to visit the overflowing bin in question, or indeed why did the council need the public to remind it of its own statutory obligations, the incident not being an isolated incident in South Wimbledon? I ask Councillor Saunders to set out her own understanding of the council's statutory obligations for street cleansing and whether allowing a bin to overflow for ten days is in line with those statutory obligations?

Councillor Saunders:

I do understand the statutory obligations and when we're not meeting them. I believe we were meeting the statutory obligations, but that there were issues in your neck of the woods over the Christmas period. We are looking at how we can improve the services round there. At Christmas we were juggling resources and staff at that time. I am discussing what can be done with officers to ensure we can improve that area.

**15. From Jane Plant
To the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration**

Question

How many hectares of public open space, including cemeteries, allotments, highways verges and land transferred when Circle Housing took control of housing stock, are maintained by Greenspaces, what is spent annually doing so and how does this compare with the spend per hectare of the three other SLWP boroughs”?

Reply

The total area of open space managed by the Merton Greenspaces team, including highways verges, cemeteries, churchyards and allotments is 650.72 hectares.

This figure includes landholdings that are managed by the Greenspaces team, but not owned and funded by Merton Council.

Merton Council’s annual expenditure on the provision of local parks and green spaces in 2014/15 is £5,255,000.

The equivalent figure for Sutton Council is, we understand, £5,283,800.

The equivalent expenditure per hectare is:

London Borough of Merton:	£11,538
London Borough of Sutton:	£12,048

We do not have comparable and up-to-date information for these services within the Royal Borough of Kingston or the London Borough of Croydon at the present time. These two boroughs are not party to the current parks and green spaces service procurement exercise that both Merton and Sutton are actively engaged in.

It should be noted that not all local authorities deliver exactly the same services within the remit of their parks and open spaces service and so are not reliably comparable.

Jane Plant:

Will the comparison that I asked for of the cost per hectare be made available for Sutton, Kingston and Croydon boroughs so that we can see the good value that Green Spaces currently provides?

Councillor Judge:

We have made available the information with respect of Sutton and our initial proposal is for joint tendering with Sutton. I don’t think we have the information in respect of Kingston or Croydon, at the moment. There is no doubt that, per hectare, our Green Spaces team provide very good value for money. However, like other boroughs we are facing horrendous cuts which are driving local governments

effectively to dissolution over the next few years and so we are put in the positions, despite being effective, despite being efficient, of making difficult cuts across a range of services, so this is the situation we face. If we have any information in respect of other boroughs, we will be very happy to supply it.

**16. From Bob Grahame
To the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health**

Question

What is the current PFI debt of our local St Helier Hospital, and does the council agree that PFI deals have put additional financial pressure on NHS services within Merton.

Reply

I have been informed that there is no PFI debt at Epsom and St Helier University Hospitals Trust, and local NHS advice is that there are no significant PFI funded schemes in Merton.

In the past PFI has been used throughout the UK to ensure public services can improve our communities when the alternative was for capital investment in our public services to deteriorate.

**17. From Naomi Martin
To the Leader of the Council**

Question

Does LBM have a Social Value statement and can the Council give an indication of how it intends to make use of the Public Services (Social Value) Act, effective from January 2013, to benefit local people, the economy and environment.

Reply

Social value is not a new concept to LBM and is something we take seriously. We are in the process of producing a council wide policy, together with associated procurement guidelines and training. We anticipate that the policy will be adopted and published by mid 2015.

Naomi Martin:

I ask for reassurance that in producing the council wide policy that is referred to in the answer, that the council will actively seek very valid contribution from local social enterprises and charities.

Councillor Alambritis

I assure we will do all we can to engage with social enterprises with the proviso that we do need to bow to value for money, we do need to have an eye to the European regulations on procurement but apart from that I will be urging my officers to look at the Public Services Social Value Act 2012 to see whether we can engage on the lines suggested by Naomi.