

**Council 15 April 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 Richard Hilton  
To the Cabinet Member for Children's Services**

**Question**

The official report into Child Sexual Exploitation and 'grooming gangs' in Oxfordshire suggests this could happen in any town or any borough in the country. The Prime Minister is considering making social workers, police and Councillors personally criminally liable if they are aware of abuse and do not report it. What steps has she taken in Merton in anticipation of this potential law change and does she agree with it?

**Reply**

As no doubt Mr Hilton is aware, as yet there have been no changes to the law on this issue, with his former Conservative MP colleagues in the House of Commons, and their Liberal Democrat partners, voting against a recent Labour proposal to amend the Modern Slavery Bill to include a specific criminal offence of child exploitation.

Unfortunately this seems to demonstrate that the government is not at all serious about bringing in stronger laws to protect our children and young people.

Nonetheless, the council with key partners takes the issue of Child Sexual Exploitation extremely seriously. With partners we have developed and established a robust strategic response to identifying, assessing and intervening to reduce the risks for these vulnerable young people. The national profile of this serious matter has led to heightened scrutiny by officers and members. Senior officers across the partnerships maintain an overview of the strategic plans and also the individual case management of young people who are victims and at risk of sexual exploitation. The council endeavours to ensure that wherever young people are at risk of sexual exploitation that they are identified and assessed and kept safe.

In the absence of any legal changes from government, the council with partners nonetheless endeavours to ensure that all our staff and those of our partners are aware of their personal responsibility to report suspected abuse of children and how to go about doing this.

**2) From Dominic Moass  
To the Leader**

**Question**

A report out in March by IFS suggests immigration has had a significant impact on council services leading to large cuts, particularly in London. Does he agree?

**Reply**

Sadly the biggest impact on council services and the significant cuts we are facing has been the Conservative and Liberal Democrat government's decision to cut local government funding to the bone.

There have indeed been demographic changes in London including an increasing number of older people who, after a lifetime of hard work and paying their taxes, are entitled to expect the council's adult social care services to look after them in their old age. However, the government's decision to cut council funding means that all councils in the country will struggle to maintain these essential services to older people.

Most economic analysis shows that this is not caused by immigration. This is because people who move into the UK from abroad contribute more to public services through taxation and the economic benefits of their hard work than they take out, as they tend to be in work and healthy. Although some politicians have sought to exploit immigration as an issue, in Merton we are proud of the contribution that has been made to our council services, the local NHS and our other public services, and to businesses large and small, by people born outside of the UK.

**3) From John Brereton  
To the Cabinet Member for Environmental Cleanliness and Parking**

**Question**

Streets are becoming increasingly filthy with piles of rubbish and litter. Why does Labour Merton Council seem to ignore the issue?

What is the rate of Street Sweeping by ward and how does Clive Rd in Colliers Wood compare with the average?

**Reply**

Mr Brereton might like to note that in fact there has been an improvement in residents' satisfaction levels with the street cleansing service since 2009 when government data showed that, under the previous Conservative administration, Merton was officially the dirtiest borough in London. Thankfully, under this Labour administration we are no longer the dirtiest borough in London and in fact satisfaction with our street cleaning services has remained consistently positive. This is despite satisfaction levels across London reducing.

However, we are never complacent and we know that people who litter our streets are a concern for our residents which is why we spend more than £5m a year keeping the borough's streets clean. In total we sweep more than 375km of roads each week, emptying 700 bins as well as cleaning town centres daily.

Our enforcement team work to deter people from dropping litter in Merton's streets, the enforcement officers are responsible for a range of other duties to keep the borough looking clean and tidy including the removal of graffiti and fly-posting, dealing with abandoned vehicles. We also work with specialist environmental enforcement officers who concentrate on our town centres.

We have set up the Love Your Street campaign to boost the positive work the council does with residents, community groups, businesses and schools to tackle litter in Merton.

Clive Road is scheduled to be cleaned on a weekly basis in line with all roads in Merton which are scheduled to be cleaned at least once a week.

**4) From Nicholas O’Gorman  
To the Cabinet Member for Children’s Services**

**Question**

What steps does Merton Council take to ensure the qualifications and identities of employees in Children's Social Services are legitimate?

Have there been incidents in the last 10 years of staff being found to have a false identity or fake qualifications, and were such incidents reported to Authorities? Have any Merton social workers been struck off?

**Reply**

he council carries out robust recruitment procedures including:

- employment references covering at least five years,
- sight of original certificates of qualifications, and registration with appropriate professional body
- original evidence of identity and right to work in the UK. This includes a passport and proof of National Insurance number.
- If born outside UK - sight of original visa and/or work permit DBS check.

We have not had any incidents of staff being found to have a false identity or fake qualifications, and hence none struck off as a result.

**5) From Mark Egerton  
To the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration**

**Question**

Can the Leader confirm when the data gathering for local traffic flow for the proposed Plough Lane Football stadium development was carried out and if done during the off-peak summer months does he agree this could give an artificially low assessment of traffic flow impact to the surrounding area and an artificially high assessment of available on street parking?

**Reply**

Traffic count data associated with the proposed redevelopment of the Greyhound Stadium site was originally collected in July 2012, prior to the school holiday period. This consisted of Automatic Traffic Count (ATC) data (collected over 7 days) and classified turning counts (collected on one weekday and a Saturday).

To address any concerns with the validity of the data further ATC surveys were undertaken in February 2015 at the same locations as 2012.

The overall trend of the traffic flow data remains the same in both 2012 and 2015.

We do not believe that this provides an artificially low assessment of traffic flow.

**6) From Tony Burton  
To the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration**

**Question**

To ask the Council when it will act on its commitment to compulsory purchase of the Burn Bullock site and to list the criteria on which it will base this decision?

**Reply**

The Council are in the process of taking enforcement action against the site owners of the Burn Bullock. Approvals have been granted for Listed Building consent for works to be carried out and the owner has another 4 months to conclude these works and officers have been pressing the site owner for their schedule of works.

The Council is also following up on development proposals that could revitalise the Burn Bullock. The Council will wish to fully exhaust all proactive and enabling options to secure the improvement and redevelopment of the site. Compulsory Purchase is a last resort, which we will only consider once all reasonable endeavours to redevelop the site have been exhausted.

**7) From Sandra Vogel  
To the Cabinet Member for Community and Culture**

**Question**

Mitcham Carnival is Mitcham's premier event of the year. Is there going to be a parade this year and if not why?

Please provide all the parade's associated costs including payments to the police.

**Reply**

The police withdrew their traffic management support of this event in line with a review of their own risk and health and safety policies. This action resulted in a requirement for the event organiser to obtain and implement a Road Traffic Order and manage the operation of that on the day. The financial and administrative implications of this were simply not manageable.

Associated costs of the parade when it was running were for officer and organising committee time. No payments were made to the police.

**8) From Melanie Nunzet**

**To the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration**

**Question**

Will the Council provide a map to at least 1:2500 scale identifying land owned by the Mitcham Common Conservators, any adjoining land owned by Merton Council and the Metropolitan Open Land covering Mitcham Common?

**Reply**

The Mitcham Common Conservators have recently obtained permission from the Land Registry and Ordnance Survey to convert the Land Registry's plan showing the boundaries of the Common into a format which can be viewed by the public. This should be available at the Conservators' June meeting and will clarify the land ownership of Mitcham Common and its environs.

All of Mitcham Common is designated as Metropolitan Open Land.

**9) From Ben Saunders**

**To the Cabinet Member for Finance**

**Question**

Will the council reverse the announced £32m-a-year cuts if a Labour government is elected, and if so, to what extent?

**Reply**

Due to the Conservative and Liberal Democrat government's continued mismanagement of the country's finances, including doubling the size of the national debt and their inability to cut the deficit as they promised they would, any new government will face a difficult financial situation. However I am confident that a Labour government will take a sensible approach to the economy, paying down the debt in a structured way that reduces the impact on local services and allows fully funded investment in key areas of concern to residents.

After the global economic crisis of the late 2000s, Britain's economy was growing when the current Government took control. Sadly, their savage cuts stifled economic growth and the economy flatlined for too long. A Labour government will have to sort out that mess.

**10) From Darren Stillwell**

**To the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration**

**Question**

To ask for a response as to whether the maintenance of Mitcham Common will be included in the proposals for contracting out parks and green space maintenance across Merton?

**Reply**

Mitcham Common is managed by the Mitcham Common Conservators and although Merton Council acts as their agent, it is for the Conservators to determine whether they wish to have the Common included in any future grounds maintenance contract. The Conservators have discussed the matter but have not yet taken a decision.

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