

## COUNCIL MEETING – WEDNESDAY 15 APRIL 2015 ITEM 13 - NOTICE OF MOTION

### LABOUR AMENDMENT

**Amend the motion as per the tracked changes below, with words underlined inserted and words struck through deleted:**

This Council shares public concern about travellers illegally occupying public green spaces and other public areas in the Borough.

Council congratulates officers, the police and the courts on the recent speedy work to move on Travellers illegally camping on some of our parks and open spaces.

However, it is often the case that ~~Whenever travellers are evicted by the Council from one site they move on to occupy another available site in the vicinity.~~ This is mostly on public land such as parks where their removal is ~~has been going on for many months~~ at the expense of public funds, ~~although there have also been encroachments on private land where the landowner is responsible and the legal requirements for removal are less exacting.~~

There are legal requirements that the council must abide by and ~~The~~ the process of undertaking travellers' needs assessments, ~~and applying for court orders and injunctions~~ is not only costly and time consuming but also causes a good deal of inconvenience and anxiety to the local residents, ~~although this is not something that can be avoided given the current legal framework.~~

Council congratulates officers on the speed and efficiency with which they have returned affected parks to cleanliness, but notes that ~~Subsequent~~ cleaning up and any cost effective and appropriate additional securing of the sites after the travellers' eviction is achieved by further spending tax payers' money.

The council has a statutory duty to assess the welfare needs of Travellers in its area, and in particular the welfare needs of Traveller children and young people. Evictions cannot be progressed until this process has been undertaken and any welfare needs assessed. However council notes that officers are carrying out a review of the welfare assessment procedure to identify whether there are ways of speeding up this process whilst continuing to abide by the legal requirements.

In addition, by their very nature, our parks and open spaces need to remain open and accessible to residents. Whilst the council uses a number of methods to seek to prevent illegal encampments on our parks and open spaces, this is difficult to achieve without stopping residents from accessing their local parks. The council therefore seeks to achieve a balance between discouraging illegal encampments and maintaining access for residents, in the knowledge that it is not possible to completely secure parks from those who are determined to set up illegal encampments without affecting residents' rights of access to their local parks and open spaces.

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Council notes the strong partnership approach to illegal encampments on our parks and open spaces between the council and the police service in Merton. This has helped speed up the eviction process and we are dependent on the police service's ability to continue to support us in this way, with reductions in police resources a potential threat to this partnership working.

This Council therefore resolves that it should:

- Continue to take a proactive approach to secure public parks in the borough, bearing in mind the difficulty of fully securing all of our parks and open spaces given that residents must still be able to fully access them;
- Continue to adopt a strong stance in order permanently to prevent travellers from illegally occupying public parks and other public spaces in the future, bearing in mind the legal duties placed on the council to assess the welfare needs of Travellers and in particular Traveller children and young people; and
- Continue to take full advantage of the powers that public bodies, such as Merton, have to help them deal with unauthorised traveller encampments, a summary of which was recently published by the Government, bearing in mind that none of these powers are new and the appropriate powers are already in use by the council.