

Merton Council Council

1 February 2017

Supplementary agenda

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From Sarmad Gassoub

To the Cabinet Member for Street Cleanliness and Parking

How can the Council possibly justify operating a noise abatement service in Merton that is restricted to summer weekends when its cash reserves run into millions of pounds and when neighbouring boroughs like Wandsworth are able to offer a daily service?

Reply

We currently provide a noise pollution service Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm and every Saturday night from 11pm to 4am. During the busy summer months of June, July and August we also provide an additional Friday night service 11pm to 4am.

The provision of any service is determined by a number of factors, including; cost, resourcing, demand and priority. The council has looked at various service level options including the provision of a full night duty service as well as a 24/7 service. These options have been presented to Cabinet, where the decision was taken to maintain the existing level of service provision.

We now share our noise services with a partner borough. As part of this sharing of services we are committed to maintaining the service provision that we currently have, but there is limited demand for an extended service which would be unaffordable in the current financial climate.

From Diane Neil Mills

To the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Environment and Housing

What were the costs associated with the recent resurfacing works undertaken in July through September 2016 of Courthope Road SW19, broken down by category of expenditure (e.g. contractor labour, contractor equipment/overheads, materials, council supervision/overhead)?

Reply

The total cost associated with the footpath reconstruction works within Courthope Road, SW19 was £52,562.03 and the total cost of the carriageway resurfacing that was undertaken shortly after was £20,136.01. Therefore a total cost of all £72,698.04 for the renewal of the public street scene. This work included more intricate works to re-set the edging cobbles in the carriageway.

I'm unable to give you a breakdown of expenditure for contractor labour, contractor equipment/overheads, materials, council supervision/overheads within this total cost as each individual rate within the Highways Works and Service Contract 2012-17 is already inclusive of these elements.

**From Debra Earl
To the Cabinet Member for Finance**

Why not increase the rates by at least 10% a property to improve the services offered by the council? I seem to have paid £1,300 for a number of years now.

Reply

Whilst the level of council tax is determined by the local authority, the government sets a limit each year by which it can increase, without the need for a referendum. This level is currently 2%, in place from 2013/14 to 2017/18. Prior to this In 2011/12 to 2012/13, the limit was 3.5%.

Just as importantly, it needs to be remembered that council tax is a regressive form of taxation. In other words, people with lower incomes tend to pay a higher proportion of their income on council tax than those who are richer. That is one reason why in Merton we have maintained council tax rebates for the very lowest earners, but we also have a duty to consider the cost of living of those who are just about managing.

Particularly at a time when millionaires have received income tax cuts and there is a widespread problem with tax avoidance and evasion, we do not think that the government should be forcing councils to increase council tax, by cutting grants that fund services, or by introducing their council tax levy (the so-called "precept"). The government needs to get to grips with the national crisis in adult social care that has emerged under their watch, properly fund councils for the services its citizens require, and ensure that the costs are spread fairly and do not fall on those who are struggling to make ends meet.

**From Geraldine Kirby
To the Cabinet Member for Street Cleanliness and Parking**

I am very concerned about fortnightly refuse collection; I have indoor cats, as do many residents and their waste is deposited in my domestic waste. I believe constitutes a severe public health hazard and I would like to know what the council are going to do to mitigate this risk?

Reply

The changes in waste collection and introduction of wheelie bins is scheduled to be implemented in October 2018.

Animal faeces, similar to nappies, providing that they are appropriately wrapped present no health issues with this waste being collected on alternate weeks.

As with current collections it will be the responsibility of the resident to ensure that this waste is effectively wrapped before depositing into the wheelie bin.

The major contributor to the 'smelly waste' is food and as this is collected weekly there are no health concerns with moving to an alternate week collection for the general waste

**From Terry Sullivan
To the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Environment and Housing**

Rediscovering Mitcham project in Mitcham town centre. This is scheduled for completion January 2018--18 months after start. Why is this minor project taking so long-is it to justify the obscene price-tag?

Reply

Rediscover Mitcham is a 3 year major project representing £6m investment in Mitcham town centre, with the majority of the funding from TfL.

The programme of works has already delivered the new Market Square, re-paving of Majestic Way, creation of the Clock Tower Gardens, restoration of the Clock Tower itself (supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund) and the cleaning and general improvements to Three Kings Pond.

The current phase of works involves changes to the road layout and creation of the bus street. The project programme was publicised via our website and Mitcham Community Forum mid-2016. The current phase of works are running to schedule and on-track for completion in December 2017.

Major town centre projects are by their nature, complex, particularly when keeping the town centre active and traffic flowing during the works. We do not consider the project to be 'taking so long'.

**From Andrew Boyce
To the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Environment and Housing**

What progress has he made in bringing before full Council, for its decision, the application to include the 1820s cottages at 34-40 Morden Road in South Wimbledon on the Council's local list of heritage assets?

Reply

I have been very supportive of the efforts of my colleague Cllr Andrew Judge to get these added to the local list of heritage assets and recognise the value of our existing 1820 cottages, which any future development should improve, not demolish. Any recommendations on their inclusion will be made by officers to the Borough Plan Advisory committee on 8th March and then to the subsequent Full Council meeting for a decision, but I do hope that the cottages are added to the council's local list of heritage assets.

Supplementary

Thank you to the Cabinet Member for his response to my question. It's over two years since this Council launched a consultation exercise on this very issue. In response to this question tonight, can he confirm for me, that his party as the leading party on this Council, is the only party that can actually decide whether or not the cottages are put on the list, and will they make that decision at the April meeting of this Council?

Response

Well as you will see from the response, it is a matter that will first be determined by the Borough Planning Advisory Committee, which is chaired by my colleague Councillor Ian Munn. That has been the protocol for the Council and they will make any subsequent recommendations to Full Council, but it will first go to that committee for determination. I would just like to add that I am very supportive and I believe that they should be protected, and I do praise the work of my colleague Councillor Judge in asking for these to be locally listed as assets of heritage value.

From David Anderson

To the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Environment and Housing

What actions are the council taking to ease the impact of a significant increase to traffic and pollution on residents in close proximity to the Durnsford Road, Plough Lane, Gap Road, Haydons Road junction?

Reply

In terms of traffic, TfL's annual monitoring report (Traffic in London) suggests that traffic has been broadly stable in Merton over the last 4/5 years. However, there appears to be an increase on light commercial traffic along major roads with particular area of growth being home deliveries etc.

It should, however, be noted that Haydons Rd, Plough Lane, Gap Rd and Durnsford Road are all London Distributor Roads forming part of the borough's key strategic network i.e., these roads are key thoroughfares and they accommodate commercial units / industrial estates. In terms of overall action, the Council has a number of initiatives that is aimed at promoting public transport, sustainable modes of transport such as cycling, pedestrians' facilities, car clubs, electric vehicle charging points and we support business and new developments with sustainable travel plans, the overall aim is to reduce the need for vehicular trips.

In terms of air quality, the council has a number of initiatives that are aimed at reducing pollution by promoting public transport, sustainable modes of transport such as cycling, pedestrians facilities, car clubs, electric vehicle charging points, travel plans etc.

**From Nicola Thompson
To the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Environment and Housing**

I note that air quality monitoring has been suspended in Plough Lane since 2014. When will it be reinstated, and could similar monitoring could be installed in the heavy traffic area of north Haydons Road which is a popular walking route for parents and children of nearby primary schools?

Reply

The diffusion tube network used to help monitor Nitrogen Dioxide in the borough changes from time to time and these 'tubes' are sometimes located in different places to provide additional information or focus on a particular problem area. I am pleased to say that Plough Lane has been reinstated. I note from discussions with officers that diffusion tubes placed at this site have been removed or tampered with in the past, which hasn't helped with the data collection. The whole issue of monitoring and site selection is currently being discussed by the council's Sustainable Communities Scrutiny and Overview Panel. One potential outcome from this dialogue is likely to be an enhanced and more robust monitoring network in the future.

**From Garry E Hunt
To the Cabinet Member for Street Cleanliness and Parking**

What is the justification for Merton Council to introduce quickly in April 2017 a very high parking levy, purporting to improve Merton's air quality, specifically for owners of diesel vehicles in CPZ areas and without warning to the residents' concerned?

Reply

Air Pollution in London has been described as a 'Public Health emergency' in the House of Commons. Locally this has been debated at Scrutiny and Cabinet and we consider that the health problems caused by air pollution and in particular diesel vehicles to be so significant and important that we must take steps now to help address the 9,000 deaths associated with poor air quality in London. A consultation process regarding the diesel surcharge is currently underway and residents can make their opinions known through this process.

Supplementary

Since Merton can't control the air in this borough, how can Merton justify these huge changes, the levies they are proposing for the parked diesel vehicles, without this being just a money collecting exercise for the Council, without the quantitative proof that that action is going to have any real effect on the air quality of London as a whole?

Reply

I would like to thank Mr Hunt for his question. I am unapologetic about the scheme that is being produced, I think that we across London and across the UK, face a real difficulty in terms of the illegal levels of air pollution that are facing our communities and it is important that as a Council, in the absence of the Government from acting, that we step up to the plate and actually deliver schemes that will help improve the air pollution in the borough. In terms of your point of views, I would urge you to submit them to our consultation which runs until 3 February, so they will be considered as part of that process.

**From Anthony Fairclough
To the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Environment and Housing**

As there are about 25,000 households in rented accommodation in the borough, has the council actively considered introducing selective licensing in the borough or any parts of it, and what research was undertaken?

Reply

The Council is awaiting feedback on central government's recent consultation on the licencing of HMO and related reforms before carrying out research into selective licencing.

**From Gemma Illsley
To the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Environment and Housing**

How is the council planning to resolve the congestion at the Haydons Road/Plough Lane junction and impact on the side roads; namely Haydon Park Road?

Reply

Annually the Council nominates key signalised junctions to TfL for review to optimise efficiency and reduce congestion (where possible). Last financial year, the Haydons Road/Plough Lane junction was reviewed by TfL and the appropriate changes within the phasing were made to maximise the capacity and operation of the junction.

To address the reported problems within the adjacent side roads as caused by the various banned movements at the Haydons/Plough junction, Merton worked with TfL to remove the banned turns thereby removing the need for motorists to use the residential side roads.

**From Antony Buckle
To the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Environment and Housing**

Does Council share the view of the Planning Inspectorate who, in 2015, deemed the 1820s cottages at 34-40 Morden Road in South Wimbledon heritage assets, which positively contribute to the character of the area? If so, will it endorse that view by adding the cottages to its local list?

Reply

I have been very supportive of the efforts of my colleague Councillor Andrew Judge to get these added to the local list of heritage assets and recognise the value of our existing 1820 cottages, which any future development should improve, not demolish. Any recommendations on their inclusion will be made by officers to the Borough Plan Advisory committee on 8th March and then to the subsequent Full Council meeting for a decision, but I do hope that the cottages are added to the council's local list of heritage assets.

From Joanna Durrans

To the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Environment and Housing

Does Council recognise the positive benefits, both to it and the local community, which could be realised were it to agree to add the 1820s cottages at 34-40 Morden Road, South Wimbledon to its local list of heritage assets?

Reply

I have been very supportive of the efforts of my colleague Cllr Andrew Judge to get these added to the local list of heritage assets and recognise the value of our existing 1820 cottages, which any future development should improve, not demolish. Any recommendations on their inclusion will be made by officers to the Borough Plan Advisory committee on 8th March and then to the subsequent Full Council meeting for a decision, but I do hope that the cottages are added to the council's local list of heritage assets.

From Simon McGrath

To the Cabinet Member for Street Cleanliness and Parking

Given the short timescale for implementing new parking charges for diesel cars, what is the council's objective in introducing the charge? For example, what percentage reduction in diesel vehicles registered to park in the borough over what period of time would be considered a success for the policy?

Reply

I refer you to my answer outlined in question 9 with regards to the urgency of implementing this policy.

We are proposing a two year review of this project to evaluate its success. Encouraging vehicle owners to move away from diesel cars is essential to reducing poor air quality in our borough and in London as a whole. A recent study shows that a modern diesel car emits more toxic pollution than a bus or heavy truck, this is something we cannot ignore and where we can take steps to change behaviour of owners, we should. I would consider any shift away from polluting vehicles as a success.

Supplementary

I welcome this intention to review the project after two years to evaluate its success, but in order to evaluate its success, there must be criteria by which it will be judged. What percentage reduction in diesel vehicles will be regarded as a success for this policy?

Reply

I'd like to thank Mr McGrath for his supplementary question. The success will be the cultural change that residents display in terms of changing the vehicles that they choose to purchase. I hope and I believe that this policy will help change people's choices when they are purchasing these vehicles in the future.

From John Tippett-Cooper To the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care & Health

Given continued funding cuts, is the council confident it will continue to meet its statutory duties in relation to adult social care and has the council sought legal advice in relation to its statutory duties in the last 12 months?

Reply

The Council is committed to continuing to meet its statutory duties for adult social care. This is why it is considering putting significant extra funding into this budget for 17/18. Officers of the council are fully aware of the relevant statutory duties, but do from time to time take legal advice on specific matters of interpretation.

From Sandra Vogel To the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Environment and Housing

Will Merton Council a) update its Nitrogen Dioxide monitoring figures last posted online in 2013 b) explain its commitment to improving air quality across the borough c) clearly and precisely describe how that commitment is reflected in practice d) commit to encourage citizens to engage in air quality monitoring.

Reply

Merton Council has set up a website called "Love Clean Air" <http://lovecleanair.org/> which outlines air pollution within Merton and the surrounding boroughs. All boroughs are now coordinating their monitoring and annual reports through this website and I would urge colleagues and members of the public to visit it as it is very informative and user friendly.

From Vincent Bolt To the Cabinet Member for Finance

Has the council made an assessment of the initial impact of the Brexit vote on 24 June on council investments, including the impact on the council's pension scheme? If so, what was the impact?

Reply

The Director of Corporate Services presented a Briefing Paper on the short and medium to long-term impact of Brexit on the Council's Pension Fund, the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) and UK and wider global economy to the Pension Fund Advisory Panel (PFAC) at its meeting on Wednesday 29 June 2016.

In summary, the Briefing Paper discussed:

- The extreme volatility in the immediate aftermath of the Referendum result including falls in UK domestic and foreign markets equity prices, rise in Credit Default Swaps pricing and sharp decline in the value of Sterling
- Review and downgrade of the UK economic outlook by the major ratings agencies; and
- Yield compression due to uncertainty and increased demand for Government bonds and index-linked bonds

As for the implications for the L.B Merton Pension Fund and the LGPS, the Paper sounded a note of caution:

- Merton Pension Fund is a long-term investor with well-diversified investment portfolio. The Fund is cashflow positive with no need to dispose assets to pay pensions
- Brexit could pose significant political and economic challenge in the near term. However, it could deliver real opportunity from a global investments perspective in the medium to long-term
- Equity markets have demonstrated some resilience, rebounding strongly since the lows following the Referendum result. The value of the Pension Fund assets appreciated from £533m at the end of May 2016 to £588m at the end of July 2016 reflecting the post-Brexit rally in equity markets and currency gain from weak Sterling. The market value of the Pension Fund was £623m at 31 December 2016. To put this into context, the FTSE 100 index was 6,230 at 31 May 2016, 5,982 at 27 June and 6,724 at 29 July. The index of the top 100 UK companies closed at 7,183 on Friday 27 January 2017.
- Review of the Pension Fund investment strategy is in progress. The review will seek an appropriate balance between growth and matching assets, taking account of the Fund's financial circumstance, global economic, financial and markets forecasts, the Council's risk appetite and current Government regulations and pooling agenda
- Pension Fund accounting deficits fluctuate with bond yields
- Need to avoid knee-jerk reaction to market volatility. The Pension Fund assets are managed by external fund managers with full discretion and expertise to act appropriately when threats and opportunities are perceived.
- Weak Sterling has been beneficial to the Pension Fund performance by virtue of its un-hedged overseas exposure
- Upcoming crystallisation events such as South London Waste Partnership transaction will be negotiated carefully by Council officers and the Fund actuary

At the time of writing, it remains unclear how Brexit and the evolving UK and global political and economic landscape would impact the Pension Fund long-term save that there is the view that:

- Brexit is a risk to UK domestic exposures with perhaps some long-term opportunities (although it will never be known if those opportunities would have been greater than the opportunities arising from remaining within the EU).
- The global economy is heating up. The US economy could overheat by 2019
- European political risks may be overstated
- The new US administration is changing the distribution of growth forecasts
- Inflation and interest rate will rise

In conclusion, a better cyclical picture is emerging but policy uncertainty and complexity remains, from a pension fund perspective, largely due to Brexit.

From Dr Amal Hassan

To the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Environment and Housing

Will the planned diesel levy be means-tested? If not, has an assessment been undertaken on the impact of the levy increase on residents on lower-incomes?

Reply

No, tax and vehicle emissions are not normally 'means tested' I do not consider the parking surcharge to be disproportionately high and it is still lower than that levied by some other London boroughs. Merton' resident parking permits are amongst the lowest in London.

From Viv Vella/MacVeigh

To the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Environment and Housing

Will the council be supporting the Homelessness Reduction Bill currently passing through parliament that promotes best practice in reducing homelessness?

Reply

The Council welcomes the principle behind the Homeless Reduction Bill that would see the homelessness prevention activity starting earlier. We are however concerned that if the bill is approved and becomes law, it is critical that we are provided with appropriate levels of central government funding to meet the costs of resourcing.

From Myriam Bertero

To the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Environment and Housing

Does the Council have estimates of the total increase in annual revenue from the new parking charges for diesel vehicles?

Reply

The aim of introducing a Diesel levy is to reduce the number of diesel vehicles within Controlled Parking Zones requiring a parking permit. It is expected that over a 1 to 3 year period a reduction in the demand for parking permits for diesel vehicles in controlled parking zones will occur thus justifying this method of managing demand.

The table below shows the total number of parking permits issued and the number that are diesel and the revenue estimates for the 3 year phased introduction of this surcharge.

Revenue raised must lawfully be used on transport purposes including the cost of the Freedom Pass as well as traffic schemes that will assist in reducing congestion and air pollution.

Permit Type	Number of permits currently issued	Number of Diesel vehicles	Current first permit charges PA	Surcharge 2017/18 £90	Surcharge 2018/19 £115	Surcharge 2019/20 £150
Resident Parking Permit	16,136	5,486	£65	£493,740	£630,890	£822,900
Business Parking Permit	523	182	£752 inner zones £662 outer zones	£16,380	£20,930	£27,300
Trades Permit	211	73	£900 (Full Year) £600 (6mnths) £375 (3mnths) £150 (1mnth) £50 (1 wk)	£6,570	£8,395	£10,950
Total	16,870	5,741		£516,690	£660,215	£861,150

The above table is based upon the numbers of diesel vehicles, However we expect this figure to decline as the surcharge starts to impact upon ownership.

From Carl Quilliam

To the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Environment and Housing

Has the council made an initial assessment of what changes and additional investment would be needed to implement the requirements of the Homelessness Reduction Bill? If not when will you be doing so?

Reply

The Council takes the view that until the Bill is passed and the detail becomes clearer it would not be necessary or appropriate to develop a funding and capacity assessment . Any such assessment would need to be considered alongside any government formula for investment.

**From Rachel Waitt
To the Cabinet Member for Education**

What assessment has the council made of the impact of cuts to school budgets on the numbers of teachers and teaching assistants in Merton?

Reply

As my fellow councillors will be aware from national press coverage and from campaigns being led by London Councils, teacher unions and headteachers professional associations, there are considerable concerns about the changes being made to school funding for April 2017. The fairer funding formula is deeply worrying as, even for Councils like Merton, who may slightly gain from the process, that there will be less money for London schools and schools overall at a time when pupil numbers are at their highest. The government is redistributing money from areas with higher levels of deprivation as well as delivering savings for the Treasury. With increases in staffing costs; inflation on non staffing costs; and the application of the apprenticeship levy on schools' budgets, the actual position is that many schools will have a reduced amount of money to spend per child. The Council works with all its maintained schools to ensure that any budget pressures or issues are addressed promptly but a few schools have had to make difficult decisions and restructure staffing leading to redundancies or vacant posts. When maintained schools make these decisions they always discuss them with the Council. Although the impact to date has been limited we will continue to work with schools to keep the situation under review.

**From Giorgia Gamba
To the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care & Health**

What representations has the council made to Merton CCG in relation to the closure of the Wilson GP surgery and drop-in centre?

Reply

The council shares the concerns of residents about these changes and the manner in which they have been communicated and is working closely with the CCG to clarify the situation for patients and residents who currently use the Wilson.

The CCG have informed us that the contract for the practice was coming to an end and the walk-in centre did not comply with the latest standards for integrated urgent care. Given the planned re-development of the Wilson site, the CCG made a decision not to renew the contract or continue to provide the walk-in centre. As such, the CCG have informed us that patients are being asked to transfer to one of several

practices within 1.5 miles of the site. The CCG have given assurances that a support package has been agreed for both the patients and the GPs to assist in the transfer and all vulnerable patients have been identified, supported and tracked to ensure smooth hand-over.

The council welcomes these measures to ensure continuity of access to care, but will be monitoring this closely to ensure all patients are able to register at a suitable alternative practice.

In addition, the CCG have informed us that an analysis of users of the walk-in centre has shown that a majority of patients would ordinarily have been seen by GPs, but could not get appointments. As such, the CCG has agreed that a primary care hub open 8am-8pm, seven days a week, will be set up in one of the practices in Mitcham until the Wilson site is developed, which will allow better access to all GPs with additional and flexible appointments and integrated with existing out-of-hours GP services.

In the longer term, the CCG and the council have been working on ambitious plans to redevelop the Wilson site as part of the East Merton Model of Health and Wellbeing, which aims to address the greater health needs in the east of the borough. The plan is to co-create a new Health and Wellbeing Centre on the Wilson Hospital site to enable easier access to primary care, investigations and treatment as well as wellbeing services led by the local community for the people of east Merton. Following extensive discussions with local people over the summer, the service model is being finalised. Proposals seek to integrate one of the two borough primary care hubs for provision of extended primary care - 8am-8pm 7 days a week - on the Wilson site.

**From Christopher Holt
To the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Environment and Housing**

After beginning the third stage Local Plan Estates Plan consultation on the run up to Christmas, will the council be able to accept responses from the public past 3rd February 2017? Why weren't residents given more time & publicity for this also?

Reply

There has been extensive promotion of the estates Local Plan consultation through the council's website, mail outs and community forums. We have already allowed for an extra two weeks for this consultation to take account of the holiday period. This final stage of pre-submission publication of the council's Estates Local Plan started on 8th December 2016 and will end on 3rd February 2017; eight weeks long when government have advised it should be six weeks. Even prior to this stage, we have already undertaken more than four and a half months of consultation on the council's Estates Local Plan since 2014. It is also normal practice for Planning Inspectors to require additional consultation as part of examining the plan later in 2017. Following all the feedback from everybody, we are now keen to give residents the certainty of a final plan and make progress towards submitting the Plan to the Secretary of State by the end of March.

**From Cypren Edmunds
To the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Environment and Housing**

Social tenant buildings in the borough are either initiated by the local authority and delivered by a resident provider, much to the dissatisfaction of all who dwell in it. Can the Council take Lewisham council's lead and propose bigger initiatives in Merton? How widespread does Merton Council promote Self Building?

Reply

Affordable homes in Merton are managed by Registered Providers, either by the Registered Provider buying land and building homes themselves or buying homes directly from the developer or via the planning system which requires up to 40% of major residential developments to be affordable where this is viable. Merton Council does not own or build social housing since transferring its stock to a Registered Provider in 2010. Merton Council has a self build register and already has 194 people interested in self build in Merton: www.merton.gov.uk/self-build-register.

From Councillor Imran Uddin to the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care

Could the cabinet member update me on the budgetary pressures his department is facing this year?

Reply

The significant budgetary pressures on adult social care come from three main sources:

- We are having to pay higher fees to providers to ensure that we can still commission care and support for our customers. The reason for this is partly because of cost pressures for providers themselves (for example the National Living Wage) and partly because we are looking for capacity in a shrinking market in some key areas such as dementia nursing care. The market is shrinking in real terms as self funders and the NHS are making more use of it.
- The amount of care we are commissioning has increased in two key areas. Firstly the volume of home care hours (and particularly 'double ups') has gone up due to the increased dependency levels of those we are supporting, partly due to the NHS discharging patients earlier and less rehabilitated. Secondly, as in every year, there are people with high levels of need coming through into adult services as young people.
- Some of the mitigating underspends officers were able to use in previous years are no longer available

It is well known that the pressures in the first two areas are being seen right across the country.

I have worked hard with the Cabinet Member for Finance and with key officers to understand these pressures and how long term these are likely to be, and as a result we are looking to take some difficult decisions in order to ensure that we continue to abide by our agreed July Principles and prioritise services for vulnerable people.

Supplementary

I thank the Cabinet Member for his response. I would just like to ask him, if he could confirm whether the government has actually listened to the Conservative chairs of Local Government Association and the Health Select Committee in giving any extra funding at all to tackle the national crisis in Adult Social Care?

Reply

Thank you for his question and his supplementary. The Association of Directors of Adult Social Services today published their representation to the Government for the forthcoming budget and I thought I would actually quote from that because that sets out the position very succinctly. The most recent settlement acknowledges concern but does not introduce additional funding. It redistributes a new homes bonus to form an Adult Social Care Grant. The recycling of new homes bonus money will leave some Councils with less money to spend on Adult Social Care. ADASS took a snap fold of directors over the Christmas period in relation to the Local Government

financial settlement, and of 75% who responded, 28% thought the measures allowance would have no effect, and 70% considered the measures would make very little difference. Only three Councils thought the measures would be substantive. ADASS states that the settlement is £1 billion short of where the Kings fund, the LGA and the Nuffield Trust say is needed to fund Social Care in the next year. I think one line sums it up very nicely; the settlement to date has been overstated, inevitable and inadequate.

From Councillor Linda Taylor to the Cabinet Member for Street Cleanliness and Parking

Can the Cabinet Member explain why, in a congested street in the centre of Wimbledon Park which forms part of a CPZ, it is possible for a Spanish-registered car to park there every day since November, effectively free of charge, whilst residents who have paid for an official parking permit have to park in streets some distance away from their homes?

Reply

The issuing of Penalty Charge Notices (PCN) is a legislative process.

When a PCN is issued, if payment is not made, in order for the case to progress to the next stage, the legislation we work to requires us to apply to the DVLA for details of the vehicles keeper so we can serve them with subsequent statutory documents.

Where a vehicle has a foreign registration, the DVLA do not hold records of the vehicle keeper. This means that we are unable to serve the subsequent statutory documents to the vehicle keeper, as required by the relevant legislation.

Because we are unable to serve the Notice to Owner, Charge Certificate and Order for Recovery to the address of the vehicles registered keeper, as we are legally required to do, we are unable to satisfy the legislative requirements of the act that allows us to undertake the civil enforcement of parking contraventions in England, and the PCN becomes un-enforceable.

Where a foreign vehicle is brought into the UK, there is no requirement for the vehicle to be registered with the DVLA until it has been in the country for 6 months. At this point, if the vehicle has not been registered, the DVLA have powers to seize the vehicle and fine the owner.

Regrettably, unless there are changes to the relevant legislation, or changes requiring vehicles with foreign registrations to be registered upon their entry to the UK, this is a problem that enforcing authorities will continue to experience.

Supplementary

I thank the Cabinet Member for his response. I thought you might like to know that as of today this particular vehicle has had twenty parking tickets since November, and our residents are pretty upset about it. I understand that many other Councils tow vehicles away when they are parked in CPZs without a relevant permit for more than

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a few days. Can you explain why Merton Council has not adopted such a policy and what plans do you have to ensure residents receive priority over the small minority who park illegally in this borough?

Reply

I'd like to thank my colleague Councillor Linda Taylor for her supplementary, and I will discuss with officers and come back to you with an answer.

From Councillor Pauline Cowper to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Regeneration and Housing

Can the Cabinet Member outline some of his priorities for town centre regeneration in the coming year?

Reply

Merton is progressing with a number of town centre regeneration schemes which collectively will accommodate additional homes and support economic growth in the borough.

My priorities for 2017 range from the completion of some projects and setting out the groundwork for future projects.

Colliers Wood

In 2016 we saw the completion of major public realm upgrades at Baltic Close, Wandle Park and the Wandle Riverside as part of the £3m Connecting Colliers Wood Scheme (in partnership with TFL)

In 2017, we will shortly see the completion of the new piazza at Colliers Wood Tower and the first residents moving into the newly refurbished (and vastly improved) tower later in the year. Our regeneration team are supporting local business in the area through our programme of shopfront improvement grants. Three shopping parades in Colliers Wood will benefit from new shopfronts in the next year. We will also see the completion of the new Colliers Wood Library.

Rediscover Mitcham

We have already delivered the new Market Square, re-paved Majestic Way, created the new Clock Tower Gardens and restored Mitcham's iconic clock tower with the Heritage Lottery Fund and vastly improved the landscape and water quality of Three Kings Pond. Five empty shop units have been brought back into use. This year's Christmas lights in Mitcham were a spectacular new addition to the Fair Green.

In 2017 our priority is to complete the Rediscover Mitcham works, which include rationalising many of the road junctions, improving traffic flow, creating segregated cycle routes and re-opening London Road for buses. We will also be exploring opportunities for new business space and creative pop-up ventures in Mitcham Town Centre once the major road works are complete.

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Morden

In 2017 the Council's regeneration priority will be to select a development partner to deliver significant regeneration in Morden. Work is now well underway with TfL and the GLA to test the viability of Morden's regeneration plans as a pre-cursor to taking the project to the market. We are making good progress with concept designs for Morden's road layout, traffic flow and solutions to the overcrowded and unsightly bus station. We hope to engage residents and business further in these plans later in the year.

We have also invested in many of Morden's independent businesses through shopfront and lighting improvements on London Road and we hope to complete in March, the transformation of the Art Deco Morden Court Parade.

Our latest newsletter for Morden regeneration is available online at www.merton.gov.uk/moreMorden

Future Wimbledon

Wimbledon is our main town centre with half the borough's jobs and a significant amount of local interest in Wimbledon's future, in terms of how the council will manage growth, respond to design quality and heritage and integrate emerging proposals from Crossrail 2.

We have now started the community workshops to understand people's views, concerns and aspirations for the town centre. This is in preparation for our masterplan that will be prepared throughout 2017. We will also be engaging businesses and landowners as the project progresses.

Supplementary

Can the Cabinet Member update me on the Morden Gateway Project?

Reply

I'd like to thank Councillor Cowper for her supplementary. Currently we are underway in terms of selecting a Development Partner to work with in terms of the regeneration of Morden. We received £42 million as a housing zone last year. This is very good news because the regeneration of Morden is a top priority. We also recently welcomed Deputy Mayor for Housing James Murray to the borough to talk about our ambitious plans. Delivering more housing but also delivering more affordable housing is a major priority for this Council and I look forward to working with the Morden Councillors to progress this scheme forward as it is a major priority for this Council, but also regenerating our town centre, bringing homes, bringing jobs as well, and I look forward to developing that vision as we move forward.

From Councillor Najeeb Latif to the Cabinet Member for Community and Culture

There appears to be deep concern and mistrust by the local trades union representatives in relation to the procedures and awarding of the contract to *idVerde*

for parks and green space maintenance. This council has a duty of care towards the employees being transferred across to this company. Will the Cabinet Member therefore give a categorical assurance that in negotiating this outsourcing the rights of all staff members have been protected under TUPE and can he detail in his answer precisely how this is so?

Reply

I am pleased to see Cllr Latif is taking an interest in protecting workers under TUPE, although I am disappointed he has not raised his concerns about government policy until now. I assume he is aware that his Conservative friends in government have purposely diluted TUPE rights, with employers now able to renegotiate conditions one year after the transfer of staff. Previous TUPE rules which protected staff from being forced to move to a new place of employment have also been removed by the Conservative government.

It is already becoming clear that TUPE is under further threat from the Conservatives under Brexit, with Conservative MEP Martin Callanan calling for the scrapping of the Working Time Directive, the Agency Workers' Directive and the Pregnant Workers' Directive and leading Conservative think tank Civitas stating: "Securing an opt-out from TUPE with respect to public services should be a key priority."

This attack on TUPE is part of a pattern of attacks on workers' rights by the Conservative government including:

- Hiking up employment tribunal fees so that this is now only an option for the well paid
- Reducing the amount of time employers need to consult on collective redundancies from 90 days to 45 days
- Removing legal aid for all employment cases except discrimination

The Conservatives also tried to make it easier to sack workers and wanted striking workers to wear special armbands and to give police 2 weeks' notice of their tweets.

The council has had to consider different ways of delivering services such as green spaces due to the Conservative government's 40% cut in funding to local councils. Such dramatic government cuts inevitably mean cuts to local services but in Merton we have been innovative and found a way of working with our neighbouring boroughs to retain a quality green spaces service at a much lower price.

The Council recognises that this new way of working has meant some significant changes for the Greenspaces team and appreciates that the staff, some of whom have worked for the Council for many years, have been apprehensive about this.

The Council has recognised its responsibilities throughout the procurement process and both local authorities concerned (Merton & Sutton) and the incoming contractor, *idverde*, are aware of the TUPE law, have practical experience of transferring staff to external contractors and consider that the requirements of TUPE have indeed been met.

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There has been a regular series of meetings and newsletters to update staff on progress since the procurement was first announced in the autumn of 2014 and throughout the process. A number of meetings have taken place between the staff, unions and *idverde* since the summer of 2016, including two individual staff one-to-one meetings.

In detail:

- The obligation to inform and consult prior to a transfer arises under reg.13 of the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 2006 (SI 2006/246). The council has undertaken extensive meetings specifically focused on the Phase C procurement with members of its Departmental Consultative Committee (DCC) over the past year providing detail on the ongoing progress of the two contracts (Lot 1 and Lot 2) thereby complying with its duty to inform alongside communication's with employees as described previously (briefings, team meetings, FAQ's, newsletters)
- Once the contract was close to being awarded and at the end of Fine Tuning, the Council's HR Department requested on 8 November 2016, that *idverde* provide detail of any 'measures' they envisaged taking. While there is always an obligation to inform, the obligation to consult arises only if either the transferor or the transferee anticipates taking measures in relation to affected employees as a consequence of the transfer.
- The formal consultation commenced on 16 December 2016 after the council's recognised trade unions representatives were formally advised that a transfer would take place and were invited to a meeting, facilitated by the council, to enable *idverde* to present their initial measures envisaged. Unfortunately, the invitation was declined by the Trade Unions but they were provided with the information on the same day. The council invited the Trade Unions to make any representations regarding these measures.
- *idverde*, with the Council's help, agreed to arrange one to one meetings with all employees affected by the transfer. Many attended these one to ones and some declined. However, *idverde* produced a further list of FAQs and answers as a result of the one to one's.
- The regular communication and newsletters provided employees with the opportunity to also request a one to one with London Borough of Merton officers, if they were best placed to provide answers. This communication channel also provided an ongoing dialogue between the council and its employees.
- Once *idverde* were provided with the Employee Liability Information (as required by TUPE legislation) they had further measures envisaged and then requested further meetings be facilitated so they could present these to Employee Representatives (Trade Unions) and then to employees this took place on 17 January 2017.
- The Council received a formal 'measures' letter incorporating all measures envisaged by *idverde* on 19 January 2017 which it provided to the Trade Unions on the same day and sent individually to all employees affected by the transfer.
- The Council facilitated further one to one consultation opportunities (18 and 19 January 2017) with *idverde* to enable those who could not attend the first time the opportunity to meet with them and also for further questions arising as a result of further information received and the measures envisaged.

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- The Employee Representatives raised concerns following the detailed measures presentation and letter and a further consultation meeting was held on Monday 30 January 2017 that provided further clarification of the measures by *idverde*.

The transfer of the relevant components of the parks and grounds maintenance service to *idverde* occurred on Wednesday 1st February 2017.

In relation to staff terms and conditions under TUPE, the employees of the outgoing employer automatically become employees of the incoming employer at the point of transfer. They carry with them their continuous service from the outgoing employer, and should continue to enjoy the same terms and conditions of employment with the incoming employer.

Following a transfer, employers often find they have employees with different terms and conditions working alongside each other and wish to change/harmonise terms and conditions. However, TUPE protects against change/harmonisation for an indefinite period if the sole or principal reason for the change is the transfer. Any such changes will be void.

Collective agreements in place at the time of the transfer also transfer to the incoming employer. These include terms and conditions of employment negotiated through collective bargaining as well as the wider employment relations arrangements. Examples include: the collective disputes procedure, time off facilities, training for union representatives, negotiated redundancy procedures or job security arrangements and flexible working arrangements. Terms and conditions from collective agreements may be renegotiated after one year provided that overall the contract is no less favourable to the employee.

Finally, whilst not a TUPE matter Pensions are protected as the contractor is taking 'Admitted Body' status and staff who are members of the LGPS will continue to enjoy the benefits of a Local Government Pension unchanged.

Supplementary

I also want to thank the Cabinet Member for his very detailed response. Many of the Parks team have worked and lived in the borough for a long time and clearly feel let down by the way this process has been managed by the Council. Given that the new contract went live today, can the Cabinet Member explain why it wasn't until the 19th January that staff were informed by their new employer that there would be no trade union recognition, and that there would be not detail NJC collective agreement. And, why as late as Friday 27th January there was still a lack of clarity over staff pay, their conditions, and their entitlement to employment rights such as flexitime and bicycle allowances?

Reply

Thank you for your supplementary question. As far as the TUPE arrangements go, I can assure him that the unions will be recognised, and assure him that all current privileges are to be retained. But the most important thing I would like to point out, is that this change, which is the only pragmatic solution we have, means that our staff, who we value, who as you've said, have done magnificent service over a long period of time for this borough, will get the chances for advancement that we can't give them, because we don't have the jobs to do so. They will get the training they deserve, because we haven't got any training budget left. They will get better pay rises than we could possibly afford to give them. And will, I believe, get a better level of protection for their jobs than we can give them. And if you want to ask me why, which I notice you didn't put in your question, why we can only do that by externalising these jobs, is because we have been starved over a number of years by Central Government; we are no longer in a position to be able to do these things ourselves.

From Councillor Dennis Pearce to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Regeneration and Housing

Could the cabinet member update us on the provision of affordable housing in the borough?

Reply

Over the past 5 years Merton has strengthened its performance on the delivery of affordable homes. This is despite the reductions in government grant for affordable housing and substantial changes to national planning rules which mean that most offices and other commercial buildings converted into homes no longer have to provide any affordable housing as part of their new development. The table below sets out Merton's performance since 2010. The lower performance in the 2015-16 financial year is due in part to the changes in national planning rules for the conversion of offices and the high number of homes build in Merton last year.

Over the past five years we have also worked in partnership to deliver some exceptional and award winning affordable homes: Brenley Park in Mitcham, winner of 2013 Best Development in the Affordable Homes Sector and in 2015 the Richard Rogers designed Y-Cube nominated for RIBA's prestigious Stirling Prize. Looking to the future we are continuing to pursue greater affordability for our residents in taking forward the recommendations of the cross-party Affordable Housing Task Group from 2016.

We report on Merton's performance each year in our authority monitoring report: www.merton.gov.uk/annual_monitoring_report

Financial	Total number of homes built in	Number of affordable	% Affordable (against 40%
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Year	Merton (private and affordable) –	homes built in Merton	target)
2010/11	357	112	31%
2011/12	453	162	36%
2012/13	478	141	29%
2013/14	440	163	37%
2014/15	459	186	41%
2015/16	678	68	10%
Total	2865	832	30%

Supplementary

I'd like to thank the Cabinet Member for his answer. I know that we are one of only a small number of authorities in London that specifically mention veterans in our Housing Policy. I wonder if he would like to comment on how he feels this is going.

Reply

I'd like to thank Councillor Pearce for his supplementary, and this has been recognised recently by the Veterans Advisory Pensions Committee alongside the University of Kent, who has compiled a report on how Local Authorities across the country helped homeless veterans, and has singled out Merton as one of the few London Boroughs who have actually taken specific steps to address this growing problem. It is right that we do give priority to veterans, and that is why the policy was changed in 2013. Those people who serve the country deserve to be given priority, and we are also actively working with Haig Homes in the St Helier Ward and I was very pleased that the go ahead was given for additional homes last year. Haig Homes do a great job in terms of housing veterans and I would like to commend their work in the borough and that they have chosen to build more homes for veterans. This can only be a good thing.

From Councillor Peter Southgate to the Cabinet Member for Street Cleanliness and Parking

In view of the rising concern over pollution generated by exhaust vehicle emissions, has the Cabinet Member considered introducing spot fines for motorists who leave their engines running unnecessarily e.g. When parked?

Reply

The Council can adopt powers to enforce vehicle idling and this is one of the measures currently proposed as part of the Council's new Air Quality Action Plan. We anticipate this plan will be open to consultation in February 2017.

Supplementary

I would like to thank the Cabinet Member. I am encouraged that we are going to be looking at other measures. I am wondering if he could enlarge on one or two of those? Perhaps he could show us how they will be effectively targeted at emissions rather than the way in which the rather blunt instrument of the surcharge on parking permits for Diesel owners is not.

Reply

I'd like to thank Councillor Southgate for his supplementary question. I just want to be frank and say that I will leave no stone unturned in my war on pollution and I will consider any policies that are adopted by other Councils as well as hopefully initiate some of our own in the Council, so that we can look at other Councils such as Westminster Council who are currently charging extra for Diesel Vehicles for parking charges, but I will rule out no options and I will explore every opportunity.

From Councillor Gilli Lewis-Lavender to the Cabinet Member for Finance

I am aware that the Customer Contact Programme is in the process of being implemented albeit considerably delayed and that the Council is encouraging residents to interact online/by email wherever possible. However for countless residents it remains a real challenge to get a response from certain parts of the Council. Many of my residents who need to use the phone – especially those without internet access or where relevant enquires are not yet automated – share my frustration at being pushed from pillar to post only to end up where I started, with no clear indication of when or even if I will get an answer. Does the Cabinet Member understand the significance of the problems I have outlined above and does he agree with me that, as part of the Customer Contact Programme work, it is vital that the Council addresses the difficulties residents and Members have in getting through to the right person and then getting appropriate action?

Reply

Merton's Customer Contact strategy sets out the council's intention to make services more accessible for customers and enable them to be delivered 'right first time, on time'. The Customer Contact Programme is the primary vehicle to deliver this ambition and has already redesigned over 400 of the council's business processes so that they are available for customers to complete online, without having to call or come into the council. These new processes are also available to our contact centre staff so that where a resident chooses to call the council, their query or service request can be resolved immediately during that initial call. It is important to note that there is no intention to remove the telephone as a point of access, only to ensure that as many queries as possible can be answered by the officer taking the call rather than residents having to speak to a number of people. As a result of this we have seen an increase from 10% to over 50% of customers using the website to

complete transactions with us. It has also had the effect of encouraging residents who may not have used Council services before to do so, as for example our new on-line bulky waste collection service. Our new Customer Contact system records all interactions so resident can be assured that we understand the history and issues related to their inquiry or request. Given your indication that both residents and Members are having difficulty getting through to specific service areas, officers have contacted you seeking clarification and will respond as soon as their investigation of the issues is complete. Please let me know if you would like any further assistance from me.

Supplementary

Figures produced late last year revealed that Stage 1 complaints to the Council increased by 17%, whilst Stage 2 complaints increased by a massive 65%. The Council also responded to 8% fewer Stage 1 complaints than the year before, and more money was also paid out to complainants as compensation. How does the Cabinet Member reconcile this poor performance with his claim to run a business-like Council and what does he plan to do to address this rising dissatisfaction?

Reply

Thank you for the follow up. I think that there are a number of areas where we can do more to find out what residents actually feel about the Council. Unfortunately the Annual Survey that we undertake to find out what we think about the Council, it hasn't been possible to do it in the last year because the company that we usually use no longer provides that service. However it is important to remember that in the years that we have been in control of this authority, resident satisfaction overall has been up. I feel very pleased with that but we don't rest on our laurels, and that's why we encourage people to give us their feedback and to complain, so that we can learn from their complaints, and so that we can become a better Authority.

Ultimately though, in the end the real judge on resident satisfaction comes down to the ballot box and we hope that next year residents will have a good opportunity to have a say about what they think about the Council, and retain a good, Labour, business-like council here in Merton.

From Councillor Russell Makin to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Regeneration and Housing

Can the cabinet member comment on whether he has raised the issue of Southern Rail and the levels of service our residents in Mitcham are having to endure?

Reply

I have written to Chris Grayling, the Secretary of State for Transport with fellow South London transport leads on 18 November calling for devolution of Southern trains services to Transport for London immediately, given the appalling unreliability, delays and overcrowding that are being suffered on a near daily basis for Merton commuters who use Southern rail. I am disappointed that the secretary of state has reneged on promises previously made by the government and is not prepared to

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take action to address the issues with Southern Rail which is causing economic hardship on a near daily basis to many hard working people in the borough who rely on Southern Rail.

Supplementary

Does the Cabinet Member agree with me that the decision of ex-Merton councillor Chris Grayling not to allow TFL to take over the running of Southern Rail services has let down commuters who rely on this service to get to work daily?

Reply

I'd like to thank Councillor Makin for his supplementary and I wholly agree with his comments in relation to Chris Grayling in terms of putting politics over commuters. Let me say that the service that Southern is providing is an absolute disgrace; whether it is cancellations, staff shortages, or delays, train users are suffering as a result of having to put up with this inadequate service. I am deeply disappointed that Chris Grayling has scrapped plans to transfer Southern Rail to Transport for London who actually have a track record of delivering high performing lines as is shown with the London Overground and also are directly elected and accountable to the people of London. I do hope that former Merton Councillor Grayling, now Secretary of State, does reconsider, because commuters in Mitcham are absolutely sick and tired of the inadequacy of the service.

From Councillor Daniel Holden to the Cabinet Member for Street Cleanliness and Parking

Does Merton Council still endeavour to clean residential streets once a week?

Reply

Subject to contract award, From April 2017 the operational responsibility for street cleaning will be undertaken by our preferred/ recommended contractor, Veolia.

Veolia propose to implement a Neighbourhood approach to deliver the street cleaning operations which will allow the needs of the local area to be understood and addressed directly by accountable area Environmental Managers. This allows the staff to be fully integrated as part of the local community which they are responsible for.

The proposal is to establish 3 Neighbourhoods aligned to ward boundaries to facilitate this integration and provide local Members with clear visibility of the resources and points of contact for their ward. The contractor will be required to ensure that on the completion of any cleaning activity i.e. manual sweeping, litter picking and mechanical sweeping the relevant area of land has been cleaned to a Grade 'A' standard as reported in line with the guidelines set as part of NI 195, (the National Indicators for local Authorities). In addition to this the frequency of cleaning needs to ensure that town and district centres and residential roads meet a Grade 'B' standard as a minimum.

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The Output specification may require cleaning of streets more frequently than weekly in some instances but it will be the output standards that matter.

Supplementary

Thank you to the Cabinet Member for his answer, however he doesn't answer the question I raised, so I will try again. Given the Council's usual advice to residents and members that residential roads are to be swept weekly, is he now admitting that weekly street sweeping will not be happening any more?

Reply

I'd like to thank Councillor Holden for his supplementary. The focus on the externalisation will be on output. We will have cleaner roads as a result of this contract with Veolia with the introduction of wheeled bins, where there is evidence that it does reduce street litter by 50%. There will also be activities such as manual sweeping, litter picking and mechanical sweeping which will help keep our borough clean.

From Councillor Joan Henry to the Cabinet Member for Street Cleanliness and Parking

Can the cabinet member update us on progress on modernising our refuse and recycling collection services?

Reply

We are working in conjunction with our neighbouring boroughs as part of the South London waste Partnership and have concluded fine tuning. We are currently in the process of finalising all financial and legal documents ready to issue Alcatel (late January). We are on schedule to award the contract early February with contract starting on 1st April 2017. The changes in waste collection and the introduction of wheelie bins are scheduled for Oct 2018.

Supplementary

I'd like to thank the Cabinet Member for his response. Could the Cabinet Member confirm the saving expected from joining the Kingston, Sutton and Croydon's wheelie bin collection service and how this will impact on the streetscene in Merton?

Reply

I'd like to thank Councillor Henry for her supplementary and all the work that she does in Pollards Hill in introducing initiatives to help clean her ward. In terms of her supplementary question; going into these discussions with the South London Waste Partnership, the aim of those negotiations was to deliver a 10% saving on the current budget. I am delighted to say that is well exceeded with the externalisation to Veolia and when fully implemented we will save millions of pounds for this Local Authority. As I mentioned, evidence shows that 50% of street litter will be reduced by the

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introduction of wheelie bins, and I am delighted that we will be having wheelie bins in this borough, one of the last few remaining boroughs in the country not to do so.

From Councillor Abigail Jones to the Cabinet Member for Children's Services

Can the Cabinet Member update us on the number of unaccompanied asylum seeking children that Merton has supported?

Reply

As at 31st December 2016, Merton has supported 32 unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASCs) under 18 during the current financial year. The monthly figure varies as we take in young people through the London rota or they reach the age of 18 and become a care leaver. In recent months it has varied between 16-20 UASCs being supported. Each young person has had an allocated social worker and has been provided with a care placement or semi-independent accommodation depending on age. Support in respect of education or employment and immigration status is also routinely provided. Merton continues to support our UASCs as they become care leavers and into independence.

Supplementary

What support is in place for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children once they are placed in Merton, and how can members and resident support?

Reply

I thank Councillor Jones for her supplementary question. As I outlined in my report there are a number of things in place to support Asylum Seeking Children; care placements, semi-independent living, education, employment (depending on what age they are) and to support their immigration status, we also continue to support our unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children as they become care leavers, currently 56 of whom are residing in Merton. I'd like to thank both members and residents for all their support that they have given to our young children who have come from other countries, our refugees, the dubs amendment children. Anyone who does want to get involved please take your enthusiasm and your support to Merton Welcomes Refugees, they do a fantastic job and they will be able to signpost anyone who wants to get involved.

From Councillor Charlie Chirico to the Cabinet Member for Education

Can the Cabinet Member update me on how effectively the pupil premium is being utilised in Merton?

Reply

Pupils eligible for the Pupil Premium in Merton schools are doing well. At all key stages, with the exception of progress scores at KS2, the gap for these pupils with their peers is smaller than that found nationally.

Accountability for schools with regard to the spending of the Pupil Premium has been tightened this academic year (as of 1st September 2016), with each school required to produce a detailed pupil premium strategy. These strategies are monitored by

governing bodies. In addition, Ofsted scrutinise a school's strategy during an inspection, and identify how current pupil performance indicates that the spending has had an impact on outcomes for targeted pupils. For the five schools inspected by Ofsted this academic year, Ofsted have commented particularly positively in the reports for four:

- “Excellent support ensures that disadvantaged pupils and the most able pupils make rapid progress.” (Good school moving to outstanding)
- “Leaders have used the pupil premium funding effectively to provide pupils with well-targeted support that ensures that they are ready to learn. Leaders have already taken steps to refine their use of the pupil premium to diminish differences in achievement for the most able.” (School judged to require improvement).
- “Your disadvantaged pupils also made better progress than was typical nationally. However, despite this better progress some disadvantaged pupils did not attain as highly as all pupils nationally.” (School judged to require improvement).
- “The distance between those pupils who are disadvantaged and supported by additional government funding known as pupil premium and other pupils has dramatically diminished over recent years.” (Good school retaining a good judgement).

The achievement of PPG eligible pupils remains a focus for the Council.

Supplementary

Can she tell me what plans she has to continue raising awareness of this and to ensure that all eligible families are identified so that their children can benefit from the additional funding?

Reply

I'd like to thank Councillor Chirico for her supplementary question. The Pupil Premium is well used in this borough just as has been said. The one problem we have with that is not everyone is applying for it who is entitled to it, so what schools are doing now is coming up with schemes to encourage parents to apply for it. We do not understand why they are not applying for it, and so we are working on that to find out the reasons and to try to encourage them to do so.

From Councillor Laxmi Attawar to the Cabinet Member for Children's Services

Can the Cabinet Member update me on the Transforming Families Programme?

Reply

The Transforming Families team can work with around 65 families at any given time over a period of six months, which can extend up to nine months for complex cases. The TF programme in Merton is on course to successfully meet the target of engaging 378 families on the Troubled Families Expanded Programme in 2016/17.

In terms of the number of families achieving significant and sustained progress, we estimate a total of 210 by 31 March.

The DCLG recently visited to look at the work of the team and programme in Merton. Their feedback was largely positive. They were particularly impressed by the passion and commitment demonstrated by TF staff. The DCLG officials also spent some time talking to parents. They relayed to us that they found the words of a number of the parents that attended the session very moving. Merton is thought of highly by DCLG and we continue to have a good working relationship. They have offered to support our case for maintained core funding next financial year. With respect to service user feedback, we conduct quarterly forums to hear the views of families. We usually hold separate forums for children and parents. At the most recent young people's service user forum, the majority of young people stated that they felt supported by their allocated TF Practitioner.

The DCLG funding formula poses on going challenges for the team as part of our income is dependent on payment by results. This will continue to pose a considerable challenge to us in the future and this will be monitored closely.

Supplementary

Thank you. I'd like to ask to ask the Cabinet Member what impact will the cuts in the Government Grant have on our ability to continue to deliver these outcomes?

Reply

I thank Councillor Attawar for her supplementary. As in the written response, the Transforming Families Programme has been exceptionally successful here in Merton. In terms of going forwards and the Government Grant, unfortunately changes to government funding that rely on payment by results, make it a bit of a risky business and there's going to be some tricky decisions for us here. If we go forward on performance related pay we need to make some decisions around whether or not that balance that we will have to pay that possibly needs to go into other front line services would be better spent there based on the risk that we may run if the performance targets and the goalposts are moved by the Government it is a bit of a balance at the moment. We are immensely proud of the work that has done but to go forward it is going to be a bit of a dice roll, so I will keep you up to date.

From Councillor Jill West to the Cabinet Member for Children's Services

The Youth Service in Merton has been cut severely in recent years. What innovative ideas does the Cabinet Member have for providing activities that engage young people without adding to pressures on the Children and Young People budget?

Reply

Merton Youth Services and their partners have responded with great creativity to the national situation of reductions in funding to councils which has impacted on spend available for youth services. Merton still runs three key hubs for youth work in Pollards Hill, Phipps Bridge and Eastfields (the adventure playground).

Each centre is developing community partnerships to bring in new organisations with their own external funding to support young people to enhance the work of council youth workers. This year we have had an excellent animation project funded by Wimbledon Tennis Foundation for example, Fulham Football Club, the Joseph Maye project and AFC Wimbledon have both provided additional sports sessions, including football and gym training. Catch 22 have a run a mixed martial arts project in 2 of our centres. The May Project are currently working with young people from Pollards on a film project. We have had a woman mentor working with our young women and we are working with Morden Hall Park to get our young people involved in environmental projects. "The Monday Club" has been established at Phipps open to local residents to use the centre to get together with their children in order to promote community ownership of the centre. These residents are planning how to increase the numbers of parents and their children involved. At the Adventure Playground the Salvation Army run an excellent community drop in during the day and are developing plans for their own Monday session.

In addition through working with local housing providers they are offering employability support to residents and receiving free rent but contributing to a fund that support the delivery of youth work.

Going forward we have set up Friends of Pollards Hill Youth Club with parents and ex members of the club as a charity that can seek external funding. In addition we have the exciting development of working with a charity called BECS Link who are supporting us to connect with new charities, sports clubs and businesses in a partnership with Rayners Park School. We hope that this will enhance the offer even more in 2017. We are also working with two primary schools and Fulham Football Club to deliver 'Double Club' providing curriculum support to identified children followed by an hour of football with a Fulham coach. The latter is funded by Circle Housing.

The future funding position remains challenging for our youth services but we will continue to work hard to sustain this very important local youth offer.

Supplementary

I'd like to thank the Cabinet Member for the answer. I am aware that several local Authorities have secured sponsorship from both the private sector and large organisations; could the Cabinet Member tell us if there are any such plans in Merton to do this?

Reply

Thank you for your supplementary. In terms of what is going on at the moment we are working with some of the large employers in the area such as the Housing Associations to secure funding from them to make sure that our youth services do continue but I would welcome anyone who has connections or ideas that we could take forward, because we need to fight very hard to protect our Youth Services, and I want any support that we can gain for these young people.

From Councillor Sally Kenny to the Cabinet Member for Children's Services

Following the release of examination data can the Cabinet Member update us on school performance in Merton?

Reply

Pupils in Merton schools continued to perform strongly in the exams and assessments carried out in the summer of 2016.

- In the EYFS, the proportion of pupils achieving the Good Level of Development (GLD) has risen by 3.5 percentage points to 71.2%, maintaining outcomes in Merton above the national average for the second year in a row, and in line with the London average.
- In Year 1, the proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard in the Phonics Screening Check has risen by three percentage points to 80%, which is just below the national and Outer London averages.
- At the end of Key Stage 1 (KS1), in Year 2, the proportion of pupils achieving the new expected standard in the core subjects is 74% in reading, 64% in writing and 73% in mathematics. Merton outcomes are in line with the national averages in reading and mathematics and just below in writing.
- At the end of Key Stage 2 (KS2), in Year 6, the proportion of pupils achieving the new expected standard in the core subjects is 57% and four percentage points above the national average. No schools were below the Department for Education (DfE) Floor Standard. One primary school has hit the threshold for the new DfE Coasting Schools Standard.
- At the end of Key Stage 4 (KS4), in year 11, the Attainment 8 score is 52.4 (in comparison with the national average of 48.5); and the new Progress 8 score is 0.27 (in comparison with the national average of -0.03). The proportion of students achieving at least A* - C grades in English and mathematics rose by eight percentage points to 70%. This remains well above the national average of 59%. No Merton school was below the DfE Floor or new Coasting Schools' Standards.

Supplementary

I'd like to thank the Cabinet Member for her response and the detailed statistical analysis. I'd like to ask her view: much attention is placed on the new progress 8 and attainment 8 measures; can the Cabinet Member outline what improvements we have seen across all our schools and how we are working towards future improvement this year?

Reply

I'd like to thank Councillor Kenny for her supplementary question. As the answer I have already given has stated, we have been doing very in our exam results, with the new measure of attainment 8 and progress 8 we are also doing very well. We have progress 8 the score is 0.27 so we are doing very well in that as well. We are not going to be satisfied until only every child achieves the best that they can, so

even though we have good results here, we are going to encourage them and to work with schools to make sure that our students do very well.

From Councillor Adam Bush to the Cabinet Member for Education

In view of the limited outdoor space on the proposed site for the new secondary school, how does the Cabinet Member propose to ensure pupils have plenty of scope for exercise and games, in line with current government policies on fitness and reducing childhood obesity?

Reply

The specifications for the proposed new secondary school have been drawn up under the supervision of the government's EFA. Any criticism of the site should be directed at the government and the site requirements introduced with their "free school" policy. Nevertheless, we believe that the borough's new school will provide an excellent offer for young people, in partnership with the excellent Harris Federation, whose schools continue to achieve very good results.

Due to the challenges of building in an urban area, most new schools in London are built on small sites. Harris has already demonstrated it is possible to build an outstanding school on a similar sized site at Harris Boys in Dulwich.

The new school will have a small outside sports facility on site and playing fields will be within walking distance so that students can participate in two hours per week of physical education as all schools do. It is also possible to phase lunch times to make best use of external space. The school will have a modern 4 badminton court sized sport hall.

The Harris Federation are launching a consultation on the new school next month including 7 public meetings, and the Executive Headteacher will be able to explain how he will be able to effectively ensure quality PE activities for children.

There has been widespread criticism of the government for "watering down" their childhood obesity strategy. Despite having limited resources, the council is working hard to overcome the paucity of government ideas, and we have published our own strategy for helping to reduce childhood obesity, our Child Healthy Weight Action Plan, published in December 2016.

Supplementary

I will start by thanking the Cabinet Member for her response. There is clearly concern amongst some families in Merton, including those with children at Merton Abbey Primary School about the constrained nature of the High Path site for a new secondary school. Can the Cabinet Member please tell me what action the council is taking to look at shared space with other nearby schools or organisations that may have space and fitness facilities available?

Reply

Thank you Councillor Bush for his supplementary question. I would just like to point out firstly that the new school will be a free school and so therefore it is the Educational Funding Agency responsible for that along with Harris and also in the response we are going to be having a consultation soon, and they will be laying out their plans for space for playing areas. I am very excited by the new school, I think it will provide a good school for our young people. Harris is a very good provider, and have proven themselves and I am very excited to be working with them.

From Councillor Agatha Akyigyina to the Cabinet Member for Children's Services

How many foster carers do we have in Merton?

Reply

Merton had a total of 62 fostering families as at 31st December 2016.

In house fostering is the placement of choice for most of our looked after children and young people and CSF department has a small team which undertakes publicity campaigns, recruits prospective foster carers and completes the statutory assessment process prior to applicants being approved. For 2016-17 we set an ambitious target to approve 15 new fostering families. To date we have approved 12 families since April 2016 and are expecting to meet this year's target.

Supplementary

I'd like to thank the Cabinet Member for their response. I'd like to know, how are we working across London to continue to recruit foster carers and adoptive families?

Reply

Thank you Councillor Akyigyina for your supplementary. I am excited to be able to tell you that we are currently working on a Pan- London Adoption Programme where we will be looking at opportunities to maximise our ability to assess and to recruit new adoptive families, it will help us spread our reach so that we can ensure that more people come to Merton to take part. We welcome this as an approach but we are very clear that we will ensure that there continues to be a Merton element; it's important, we know our young people and we know the types of families so we will work to ensure that we maximise any opportunity to recruit more people but we will keep it in house and in Merton to ensure placement happens there.

From Councillor Linda Taylor to the Cabinet Member for Children's Services

Can the Cabinet Member explain what services and support are being given to the children and families from Tower Hamlets currently living in Vantage House in Wimbledon Park?

Reply

Unfortunately due to this Government's amendment to planning policy, provision of such housing within a site like Vantage House is allowed through the government's new rules of permitted development. Consistent cuts to local authority funding and a lack of government investment or commitment to affordable housing means that local authorities are often forced into taking such steps to provide housing for families who need it the most. As a result, the London Borough of Tower Hamlets entered into a 5 year lease in Summer 2015 with the owner of Vantage House for it to house 71 homeless households from Tower Hamlets on a temporary basis. The arrival at the time of such a large number of families, including pregnant mothers and small children placed a significant burden on local health and children's services, but we worked in co-operation with Tower Hamlets and our then local community health provider to assess needs and provide relevant services. Our Community Health Provider provided a health visitor to support the pregnant mothers and children under 5. Early Years provided a weekly drop in play activity in a local building and supported families through outreach. Some school age children commuted to Tower Hamlets for their education, others were settled in Merton schools.

Whilst Tower Hamlets remains the authority which owes the residents a Housing duty the families are now eligible for local services from Merton. Since September 2015, 29 children from Vantage House have taken up places in Merton schools. With regard to Early Years, initially a stay and play group was set up close to Vantage House which was well attended. After approximately a year and once children centre staff had brokered most of the older ones into local 2 year provision the numbers were not enough to sustain the group. However, some families do now attend Abbey Children's Centre stay and play sessions and the targeted Young Parents group at Church Road. In addition a Family Support Worker has been doing a monthly drop in meeting in reception at Vantage House where any residents can come to see her and get information, advice and guidance or referral for additional support. On average 6/7 families have attended the drop in each month. In addition the Family Support Worker attends Vantage House once a fortnight for specific work with families. The Family Support Worker works closely with our specialist health visitor and the locality health visitor to identify, refer and support the families in the block. Currently there are 49 parents and 52 children registered on Estart, and each of those would have had a children's centre contact.

In common with other residents some children from Vantage House may have special needs and some may be assessed as needing some of our specialist Education or Social Care services. Adults are also eligible for adult services if they meet the relevant criteria. Universal and specialist Health services are also provided locally.

Supplementary

I'd like to thank the Cabinet Member for their response. I'd like to know what action has been taken to liaise with Tower Hamlets over the wellbeing of these residents particularly those with young children following the disbanding of the playgroup?

Reply

Thank you Councillor Taylor for her supplementary. We have worked throughout the time these families arrived in Merton to liaise with Tower Hamlets, Stephen, as leader of the Council has spoken to his opposite number in Tower Hamlets, Yvette Stanley and officers have spoken to their counterparts and those conversations continue. As outlined in the response, Tower Hamlets continue to have a responsibility for these families, but we are working very closely through health and education, they are now present in the borough and a number of them now go to Merton Schools, so we continue that dialogue through the officers and politically to make sure they are fulfilling their due diligence but we also provide that support that is needed for these families.

From Councillor Jerome Neil to the Cabinet Member for Children's Services

We talk a lot about young people but how much do we listen to them?

Reply

Listening to children and young people is absolutely at the heart of the work of the CSF department and is a value shared by our Children's Trust and Safeguarding Children Board partnerships and we are keen to ensure *that the views and ambitions of children and young people have informed and improved our local service offer*. The partnership has also signed up to a 'Participation Promise' which means we will enable children to be listened to and to be involved in making choices and decisions in how we spend money for children's services. Our User Voice Strategy is implemented by an annually refreshed action plan and contains a number of commitments to ensuring that children, young people and families' voices are central to driving service and practice development across children's services. These are summarised below with some examples of how we have responded.

1. Delivering on our Participation Promise: Providing opportunities for all children and young people to influence the services which make Merton a great place to grow up. This includes:
 - Facilitating young people's forums and conferences - e.g. Merton Youth Parliament, specialist groups including Children In Care Council and school councils, events such as HealthFest and the recent LGBTQ Conference
 - Inviting young people to take part in service commissioning processes and quality review – e.g. the work of our Young Inspectors and Young Advisers.
 - Enabling young people to take part in consultations and surveys, which inform service and strategy developments - e.g. Anti-Bullying Strategy; Annual Young Residents' Survey.
2. Enabling users of children's services to influence key decision makers and inform the continuous improvement of our service offer systems and processes. This includes:

- Facilitating user forums for vulnerable children who are in receipt of Children's Trust Services – e.g. Children in Care Council, and the Your Shout Group for learning disabled young people.
 - Enabling users to take part in consultations and surveys, which inform service and strategy developments – e.g. LAC and Care Leavers survey; agreeing the LAC Pledge.
 - Supporting young service users to deliver training – e.g. looked after children involved in new foster carer information sessions and training.
 - Facilitating access to advocacy, and to complaints processes – e.g. Jigsaw 4u advocacy; and our internal IRO service.
 - Enabling feedback by users on their level of satisfaction, including access to feedback sessions with senior managers – e.g. young offenders satisfaction survey; Lead member, Merton's Director of Children's Services, and other senior managers and decision makers across the Children's Trust, regularly attend forums to hear directly about users' level of satisfaction with services.
3. Delivering on Merton's approach to social care practice: Putting children and young people's wishes and feelings at the centre of individual case work decision making and planning.
- Using child centred practice models for assessment, planning and review – e.g. Implementing a child centred approach through utilising Signs of Safety; Motivational Interviewing; and our Helping Families' Programme in TF.
 - Supporting children to participate in their reviews – e.g. Piloting a model of LAC reviews to ensure that the child is more clearly at the centre.
 - Ensuring that 'user voice' is included in case audit processes – e.g. Our Children's social care Quality Assurance (QA) Framework includes provisions to review and evaluation of how well children, young people, and families participate in decisions about their care.

Supplementary

Thank you to the Cabinet Member for her response. I wonder could she expand a little on the role that Looked After Children play in decisions about their own lives?

Reply

Thank you Councillor Neil for your question and also on the rapporteur you are taking up on behalf of the Children and Young People Panel to really engage our young people I think it's going to be an exciting thing and I look forward to hearing the results. In terms of our Looked After Children how they take part in decisions about them and their care, there are number of things highlighted in the response but I would like to share a good news story. Last week I heard a lot about the way that our social workers are now working with young people who are in care to put them front and centre of their care planning, so they lead the meetings, and they use quite innovative things such as play, drawing, post-it notes, baking cakes, for those young people to lead their care, to make their own decisions, to be part of that conversation and I think that is something that we are working more towards as a department to

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ensure that the voice of the young people is front and centre; we spend a lot of time talking about young people but we need to ensure that they are here to talk to them.

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