

07a_Member Questions ST

From **Laxmi Attawar** to the **Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Environment and Housing**

Given the tragic events at Grenfell tower in Kensington and Chelsea has the cabinet member taken steps to ensue Merton residents in high rise flats are not at risk.

Reply

The council has sought and received assurances from all housing associations in the borough that have tall buildings that they are complying with DCLG guidance and required actions on carrying out appropriate Fire Safety checks following the Grenfell tower fire. I have met with senior managers at Clarion Housing who have confirmed that their tall buildings have recent Fire Risk Assessments and they are also doing an additional review of fire safety in these buildings. The council has also sought assurances from owners/managing agents for buildings in private ownership that they too are complying with DCLG guidance and required actions. As Cabinet member I have personally been briefed on several occasions and assured myself that officers are undertaking all that our residents would expect.

From **Councillor Linda Taylor** to the **Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Environment and Housing**:

Has a full review of all housing association buildings in Merton been undertaken since the Grenfell Tower disaster in Kensington and Chelsea?

Reply

See response to Question above.

From **Councillor Agatha Akyigyina** to the **Leader**

Would the Leader join me in sending our respects to those affected by the recent terror attacks, including on Manchester, London Bridge and Finsbury Park?

Reply

Like all of us in this chamber I was deeply shocked and saddened by the terror attacks in the last few months. After each of these attacks I sent mine and the council's sympathies and those of the people of Merton to those affected, their families and friends. In Merton we have made time to remember all of those affected, including by holding minutes silences outside the civic centre and opening books of condolence. I would particularly like to thank local faith leaders who have helped us in standing up to hate in society and in focusing instead on all that we have in common.

From **Councillor David Simpson** to the **Cabinet Member for Community Safety, Engagement and Equalities**:

Given the recent reports that Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, has been planning for the last 6 months to close half of London's police stations, can the Cabinet Member

update me on what this means for Mitcham's front counter which will in all likelihood be affected by this decision?

Reply

As Cllr Simpson will be aware, the Met has already seen the government slash its funding by 20% and now needs to make a further £400 million of savings by 2021, as a result of demands placed upon them by the Government. Although the Mayor Sadiq Khan took the hard decision to increase the GLA levy to help pay for more policing, the Government provides the vast majority of the Met's funding and continued underfunding will mean more front counters closing (in addition to the closure of almost half of front counters under the previous Conservative mayor) in order maintain police officer numbers and keep Londoners safe from crime.

No decisions have been made as to which front counter services will remain 24/7 and/or what timescales the police are working to on this. Currently Merton police are undertaking a needs assessment looking at demand at the two stations for front counter use. The Mitcham office is open Monday-Friday 09:00-17:00 as opposed Wimbledon 24/7

Until we know what the engagement routes will be from MOPAC and/or the police, and until we know when a decision will be made it is not possible to comment on the long term use of the front counter in Mitcham.

From **Councillor Joan Henry** to the **Cabinet Member for Community Safety, Engagement and Equalities**

Would the cabinet member update us on how safe Merton is compared to other London boroughs?

Reply

Merton remains the third safest borough in London. Data obtained for the 12 month period to the end of June 2017 shows that whilst overall crime is going up across the capital the rate of increase in Merton is less than the London average and less than the 3 neighbouring boroughs of Wandsworth, Kingston and Sutton. Merton, along with Kingston and Sutton, is in the bottom quartile for levels of total notifiable offences (TNO) and offences of violence against the person (VAP) recorded.

From **Councillor Stephen Crowe** to the **Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Environment and Housing**:

Can the Cabinet Member confirm:

- a) Whether a review of building control enforcement has taken place by the London Borough of Merton since 14th June?
- b) How many building control officers Merton currently has in post and how many vacancies?

Reply

- a) Assuming this relates to Grenfell: The Building and Development Control Manager has been working very closely with Merton's 'Action' group looking into the issue and we have written to all private building owners over 6 storey's in the borough. In addition, there is a very close watching brief being undertaken nationally including by the profession to ensure findings as they arise, are disseminated.
- b) 3.5 in post. 3 vacancies.

From **Councillor Stan Anderson** to the cabinet member for **Community Safety, Engagement and Equalities**

With the rise in terrorist attacks could the Cabinet Member outline how in Merton we work to ensure all our communities work together to combat hate?

Reply

Safer Merton holds the portfolio for hate crime. The recent terrorist attacks have not resulted in any increases in Merton's reported hate crime which is different to that seen after the vote to leave the EU. Safer Merton have undertaken a piece of analysis to look at hate crime reports and, working with communities, a four-year hate crime strategy has been developed and published on the website. Safer Merton and the community safety partnership are working with community leaders and partners to ensure that the profile of hate crime is raised and that we set ourselves targets in regard to engaging communities to come together and report hate crime. A hate crime working group, made up of a range of community organisations oversees the delivery of the hate crime strategy holding the council, our statutory partners and each other to account in its delivery. In October we will undertake a range of community engagement work through hate crime awareness week and this will be promoted far and wide to maximise direct face to face engagement and support from our partner agencies.

From **Councillor Michael Bull** to the **Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Environment and Housing**:

What can Merton Council do to ensure that appropriate fire regulations are enforced and being properly complied with in the borough, especially on housing association estates and properties?

Reply

The enforcement role for Fire Safety in the borough is with the London Fire Brigade via the Fire Regulatory Reform Order. There is a team of officers from across the council working collaboratively, and in liaison with the London Fire Brigade, to monitor Fire Safety compliance in the borough for housing associations and private landlords of tall buildings in the borough.

From **Councillor Mary Curtin** the **Cabinet Member for Street Cleanliness and Parking**

How safe are Merton residents when it comes to the quality of the air we breathe?

Reply

Air quality is a concern across the whole of the UK with 59% of the population estimated to live in areas with illegal levels of air pollution. As with many other London Boroughs and urban areas Merton exceeds the annual legal levels of pollution for Nitrogen Dioxide, which primarily emanates from diesel vehicles. These exceedances are almost entirely around some of our main highways and this is why we have introduced a new diesel levy which discourages diesel vehicles in our borough.

Compared to a number of other London boroughs, Merton has a relatively good record on tackling air pollution, but we should not be complacent and we must take the action we can as a local authority and work with other Councils, the GLA and the Government to tackle this problem. National government has a particularly important role as of course air pollution cannot be stopped at borough, city or county boundaries but requires a comprehensive whole-country approach.

The health impact of these pollutants is very complex and determined by exposure, age and any underlying health issue. However children are particularly at risk as their lungs are underdeveloped and exposure to high levels of pollutants may lead to issues such as asthma. This is why the Mayor of London has introduced clean air audits for London schools in the top air quality hotspots in order to identify practical steps that can be taken to reduce children's exposure to pollutants.

Merton's Pollution Teams produces an Annual Status Report on Air Quality in the Borough which is published on our website and gives a detailed update on the work we are doing to address what has been termed a national health emergency.