

From Cllr David Chung to the Leader of the Council

Could the Cabinet Member update me on the plans to build a new secondary school in South Wimbledon?

Reply

The requirement to open Harris Wimbledon for September 2018 is essential as we will have an additional 250 children leaving LB Merton Primary Schools next summer requiring a secondary school place. Harris Wimbledon Academy is advertised to open in September 2018 for two years at Whatley with the new school building at High Path, South Wimbledon to be open in September 2020.

The council is working hard to provide a clear site at High Path so that the ESFA can build the permanent school on time including the progression of a complex land assembly. This involves finalising the relocation of the High Path Day Centre, the purchase of the Domex industrial unit and exchanging one freehold site for an equivalent to support the relocation of Elim Church. Members will be aware that Merton Hall on Kingston Road SW19 is the only viable location following extensive research by external consultants and the EFA. Following concerns raised by the planning committee, officers have worked hard with their design consultants to ensure that a revised scheme can meet the initial concerns of the planning committee and have received a 'green' rating from the independent design review panel regarding the revised design. We also have clear assurance from Elim that the building will remain open for community use lettings when not required by the church

The ESFA are now working with two preferred contractors on the design of the new school at High Path and we expect, subject to the Planning Committee's decision on 21 September, that there will be a community consultation on the permanent new school design in November or December 2017.

Supplementary

This is for the Leader – Could the Leader outline how the plans for the new school will not only improve the chances for our young people including those at Singlegate and Merton Abbey but will also safeguard existing services and offer new opportunities for the local community?

Reply

Thank you Councillor Chung for your original question and for your supplementary. Let me begin at the beginning as they say on this one; the need for all our tomorrows that is for our children. Over the last decade there has been an unprecedented rise in children needing primary school places; we are all fully aware of that. To meet demand we have created 4000 primary school places so every child can receive an education where they live. Soon the children who joined reception madam mayor, a decade only will move to a secondary school, so we need to build a new School in South Wimbledon where the need is greatest. The New School will be built on land at High Path which includes Elim Church and High Path Day Centre. We found High Path Day Centre a new home, safeguarding the existing service madam mayor. But

Elim also needs a new home and building a new school must be value for money, so we've agreed to swap Merton Hall. Elim make a huge contribution to the Merton community and Elim host the local food bank helping the neediest families in our community. Since the Foodbank opened in 2011, it has had 157 tonnes of items donated by residents, businesses and churches, Madam Mayor. Over the Christmas period, Elim Church helped over 500 people with support of 70 volunteers. When Elim move into Merton Hall, residents can continue to hire Merton Hall as a community space, again, safeguarding the existing service. When the new Harris School opens, Merton children can continue to enjoy a first class education, where all Merton Secondary Schools are good or outstanding. We on this side Madam Mayor, support Elim Church, support Merton Hall and support a new School in South Wimbledon.

From Councillor Gilli Lewis-Lavender to the Cabinet Member for Community Safety, Engagement and Equalities

Please can the Cabinet Member provide details of all unauthorised traveller encampments in Merton over the past 2 years together with the costs incurred in dealing with these by both the council and the police (including officer time as well as property damage and clean up operations)?

Reply

Sixteen unauthorised traveller encampments were recorded in Merton since September 2015 but I cannot guarantee knowledge of all unauthorised traveller encampments as some may have taken place on private land and council officers may not have received notification. In addition I have no information on the private landowners' costs or police costs. Council officers do not log their time and in the time available it has not been possible to obtain costs from the MPS for their time and effort in dealing with these nor the cost of clearance. Further detail will be provided if and when available.

- September 2015. Segas Site, Western Road, Mitcham. Private site.
- February 2016. Rear of Pets at Home, Bushey Road, Shannon Corner. Private Site.
- August 2016. Morden Park Playing Fields.
- August 2016. Halfords Car Park, Streatham Road, Mitcham. Private site.
- August 2016. Cricket Green, Mitcham.
- August 2016. Land adjoining Vestry Hall, Mitcham.
- September 2016. Car Park adjoining Hillcross Depot, Hillcross Road, Morden.
- September 2016. Figges Marsh, Streatham Road, Mitcham.
- October 2016. Pitch 9, Brickfield Road Traveller Site, Wimbledon.
- November 2016. Halfords Site, Streatham Road, Mitcham. Private site.
- January 2017. Ruach City Church, Turle Road, Streatham. Private Site.
- February 2017. Rear of former Nurdin and Peacock building, Bushey Road, Shannon Corner. Private site.
- June 2017. Cannon Hill Common, Cannon Hill Lane, Morden.
- July 2017. Rear of White Hart Public House, London Road, Mitcham. Private site.

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- August 2017. Cranmer Green, Cranmer Road, Mitcham.
- August 2017. Cannon Hill Common, Cannon Hill Lane, Morden.

Supplementary

I thank the Cabinet Member for her reply. I must say I find the answer very disappointing but I do look forward to receiving further detail because it is quite clear it is a problem, and it should be logged properly. So to my question; during the recent encampment on Cannon Hill Common, one lady, one of my residents, was bitten by a dog and had to go to hospital and the dog belonged to the travellers. Yet so far no charges have been brought. This dithering infuriates residents in West Barnes that the Council comes along and spends thousands of pounds clearing up the mess, yet does nothing to stop the travellers taking up residence in the first place. When is the Council going to introduce proper permanent safeguards to prevent travellers gaining access to our beautiful common? Thank you.

Reply

Thank you Councillor Lewis-Lavender for your supplementary question. As you are very much aware, most Councils in London suffer from the same predicament as you have mentioned in your question. We as an authority in Merton we do our best to do what we can in sorting these problems. It is very difficult we cannot give the figures or costs as I mentioned in the reply which you have in front of you. I am very sorry to hear that someone was bitten by a dog, as you know it is very difficult as well to prosecute somebody for a dog bite case, obviously you must prove that the dog is dangerous that the dog has bitten someone before; it is something which I have dealt with before as part of my job and I know how difficult dog bite cases are to deal with. So please bear with us, if and when we get the figures we will pass it on.

From Cllr Dennis Pearce to the Cabinet Member for Education

Could the cabinet member outline how we work with our schools to improve performance?

Reply

The Council has a School Improvement Strategy which it has agreed with schools. The strategy sets out the Local Authority's (LA's) principles, aims, priorities and mechanisms to ensure that all Merton schools are supported and challenged to continue to improve and to provide the best possible education for the children and young people in their care.

The Council has a range of services working within the strategy, led by the School Improvement team, providing the support and challenge required to secure the best outcomes. The School Improvement team comprises inspectors and advisors who both work in schools and provide universal, central support, (mostly through continuing professional development opportunities). Other officers from a variety of teams provide support for behaviour, IT, Looked After Children, safeguarding, governors, attendance, exclusions, traveller pupils, admissions and data analysis.

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All schools are linked to an inspector, and receive at least two visits a year. During these visits, inspectors seek to work as closely as possible with school leaders in the individual context of each school, focusing on the areas covered by the Ofsted framework, including safeguarding. Advisory support is also available for all schools from the MSI team.

Where schools are evaluating themselves to be less than good, or where the Local Authority has concerns about performance, support from the inspector increases. Advisors also provide targeted support for these schools.

Schools where significant concerns are identified also work with the LA through the mechanism of Support and Challenge Groups. These groups, chaired by the Head of School Improvement, challenge and hold the school to account for improvements required in line with the school's action plan/development plan, and ensure that support for the school is effectively co-ordinated, and broker additional support where needed.

Supplementary

Thank you for the answer. Would the Cabinet Member agree with me about the continued rise in standards from our young people in the GCSE and A Level Results over the years and congratulate them on all the hard work they have put in?

Reply

I'd like to thank Councillor Pearce for his question and I'm sure everyone across the Chamber will join in congratulating all of our young people in their outstanding GCSE and A Level results. I am sure that many of us are aware but lets remind us, that this has been a year of change and actually exams have got tougher and young people who are sitting their GCSEs, those of us who maybe employ young people, you may get a CV this year that has a mixture of numbers and letters so there has been quite a lot of change that our young people and our schools have had to take on board. Despite all of that change, 72% of our young people achieved grades 4-9 which was equivalent of the A* to C grades in English and Maths which is well above our 2016 national average and 2% up compared on last year, so I think despite all of those changes we should congratulate those who sat their GCSEs. In terms of A Levels we achieved the proportion of A*-E grades were at 99% which is above the national average of 98% and again that's against a backdrop of some challenging and changing exams. As we have already heard tonight we are a Borough that has Children's Services that are dynamic ambitious and successful and that goes for our Schools as well. Every single one of our Secondary Schools has been judged outstanding by OFSTED. So I think we should be proud, we should put on record tonight and I hope everyone will join me to thank the headteachers, the teachers, the teaching staff, the team here, Yvette and Jane and most importantly our young people, who despite the changes that we throw at them are turning up, working hard and pumping out results. So I thank the Councillor for his question and yes, definitely recognise the excellent work of all of our young people.

From Councillor Janice Howard to the Cabinet Member for Community and Culture

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Can the Cabinet Member update me on the popularity of the borough's paddling pools with residents this summer?

Reply

The attraction of these facilities is generally very weather-dependent and the general impression of officers in Greenspaces is that overall numbers were down on 2016 due to the fact that the weather was not especially favourable during the core weeks of the summer this year. On those days when the sun shone and the ambient temperatures were in the 20-30 degrees range then attendances, most especially at the more popular venues at Wimbledon Park, Sir Joseph Hood Memorial Playing Fields and at Tamworth Recreation Ground, were good and typically measured in the hundreds per day. Obviously on days of inclement weather the sites are less popular and can be entirely empty

Supplementary

I thank the Cabinet Member for his response but I was concerned to learn of the delays to the opening of the paddling pools this Summer due to maintenance issues by the Council's new contractor idverde. Can the Cabinet Member tell me the size of the fine which I understand the Council has issued to idverde as a result of their failure to maintain Merton's playgrounds and paddling pools to an acceptable standard?

Reply

Thank you very much indeed for your question. I can't tell you that straight away I will give you that information in the near future. I will say however that on the first day that the paddling pools were supposed to be open myself and Councillor Mary Curtin sent exactly that same question saying why on earth is this not open on time. Idverde have had teething troubles, they dealt with those teething troubles as quickly as they possibly could, as soon as they realised they had created a problem and our paddling pools were up and running within 3 days of when they should have been. As far as the fine goes, I am very very glad that you have pointed out there is a fine on the way; I will come back to you with an exact sum as soon as I possibly can.

From John Sargeant to the Cabinet Member for Community and Culture

The Eastern Electrics event which was held in Morden Park on 5 August was hailed as a success by local news organisations. We would support the council seeking opportunities to raise the profile of Morden and to raise funds from appropriate outdoor events where the financial risk is borne by external organisations.

While we welcome the fact that council officers are preparing a report to learn lessons from the event, can the Cabinet Member tell us how many people attended, whether any arrests were made in the vicinity of the event and how many complaints were received from members of the public?

Reply

Teams across the Council worked hard to ensure the Eastern Electrics event at Morden Park was safe and secure. They worked closely with the police and the event organisers to carefully manage noise pollution, food hygiene, litter and anti-social behaviour associated with large crowds. The event was subject to close scrutiny by the Licensing Committee and restrictions were put on the event to limit its numbers to 17,000 and reduce the times at which loud music could be played. Our enforcement officers ensured these limits were adhered to and we appreciate the efforts of the event organisers to follow these restrictions as well as manage the behaviour of the crowds. Overall the event was a success and proved popular. However, in line with best practice, our officers are of course reviewing the event and identifying lessons to be learned to ensure the safety and success of any future events.

The official attendance figure for the event was 15,995, of which no arrests were made.

The number of complaints received by the Council subsequent to the event was 16.

Supplementary

I thank the Cabinet Member for his reply. We were pleased that there were so few complaints received associated with this new innovative event, indeed with its joyous toe-tapping music. We welcome too the better more robust financial approach that we are taking for events such as this, but I wonder will the member be reviewing the £50,000 which we stand to gain from the event in view of the fact that there are quite a few costs which the Council incurred associated with it and in fact, will he be checking that £50,000 is the right sort of level bearing in mind other events around London of a similar nature?

Reply

Thank you very much for your secondary question. I'd also before I start I'd like to thank the Licensing Committee for, after a long debate, I know it was a very difficult debate, allowing this event to go ahead in the first place. I am very very grateful to you all for that because as it turned out, the event, which I'm the first to admit I had real concerns about, it's the first time that we'd ever done something of this nature in Merton, did prove to be a success, quite a large success as far as I'm concerned 16 complaints are 16 complaints wherever they come from, we do take them seriously. We have learnt, different things will happen next year. There was a certain amount of monitoring that took place of course those are our overhead costs, but 50,000 quid is 50,000 quid. Yes, we are going to look at it again, yes, I would expect in the future to get more, not only from this event but other events as well. I am aware of what is charged elsewhere in London for not totally similar events but nevertheless and I very much hope, however difficult this may be, that we get a decent amount of income from events such as this, hopefully some quieter ones as well, within our Parks too, because it is, Parks are there for all our population to use, and for people from elsewhere to use and we should be making money from them and we should be putting that money back into our Parks and back into our Community.

From Cllr Pauline Cowper to the Leader of the Council

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Could the Leader comment on whether he has met with the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime regarding their Public Access and Engagement consultation.

Reply

I can confirm to Cllr Cowper that I did indeed meet with MOPAC and the Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime, Sophie Linden in June regarding their current consultation. The Deputy Mayor outlined to me the severe pressures the Met is under with a significant cut in their government funding. They are in a similar position to the council with huge loses in funding meaning difficult decision need to be considered in order to protect front line services, which for the police means protecting frontline police officer numbers. However I am very clear that in Merton we need both our police stations, in Wimbledon and in Mitcham, and I strongly believe that London deserves sufficient government funding to protect police stations as well as "bobbies on the beat."

Supplementary

I'm glad to hear that the Leader has met with MOPAC regarding their consultation on the Police stations in the Borough. Will the Leader take up funding of the Met Police with the Home Secretary and Minister for London so that both our police stations can remain open?

Reply

I thank Councillor Cowper for her original question and for her supplementary. I will commit to writing to both the Home Secretary Amber Rudd and to the Minister for London Greg Hands. I will write to them taking up funding issues so that both of our Police stations can remain open. Madam Mayor I will also refer them to the Deputy Commissioner of the Met Police, Craig Mackey. Mr Mackey has again raised concerns about the future of the Mets crime-fighting ability in the face of plans by this Tory Government to cut £400 million from the service over the next 4 years. In August, Mackey told the Evening Standard that as demand grows, you have to have a way of controlling and triaging, he is of course referring to the likelihood Madam Mayor that vulnerable victims will need to be prioritised over other victims of crime in London. What a state of affairs of policing in London under this Tory Government. I would also refer them to the latest Home Office statistics that the number of Met police officers is slowing down year-on-year. In September 2015 there were 32,183 serving officers, by March 2017 Madam Mayor, this figure had fallen to 31,517 officers. Again, what a state of affairs for policing in London. On this side of the Chamber Madam Mayor, we will not pick and choose; we support both of our police stations. Thank you Madam Mayor.

From Councillor James Holmes to the Cabinet Member for Education:

Can the Cabinet Member update me on the expansion of secondary schools in Merton including funds deployed to date and the planned construction at school sites?

Reply

The administration's strategy for school expansion is to expand schools in the east as needed to meet demand, and to facilitate the Harris Wimbledon Academy in the South Wimbledon area. I have updated Cllr Chung with regard to the detail on the new school but the expenditure to 31 August 2017 is £6.71 million, largely on the purchase of the Domex site at High Path in the last financial year. Local parents are very supportive of the new school which will offer their children more opportunities to attend a good quality state funded local secondary school at a time of increased demand. As part of the land assembly for the new schools we are also moving the High Path Day Centre to an improved site, with service users and carers involved in the plans for what the new centre will offer. The Elim church is planning to move to Merton Hall as part of the scheme and I am pleased this excellent local faith group will be continuing their work in the local community, (subject to planning consent) including running the Wimbledon Food Bank from the new site.

The other mainstream secondary school expansion currently in process is the expansion of Harris Academy Merton. The capital project is almost completed and the scheme expenditure up to 31 August 2017 is £2.23 million.

There have been substantial improvements at the Harris schools since they were introduced, with GCSE grades increased significantly since 2006 and the new Harris Primary recently rated Outstanding by Ofsted. I would like to thank Lord Harris and his team led by Dan Moynihan for their efforts in the borough.

Supplementary

I thank the Cabinet Member for her answer. My question relates to the GLA revised figures suggesting how many pupils might now be progressing to Secondary Schools and the expectation that it is less than had been originally planned. My question is what implications do you see in those figures, how has that affected your planning, and if it does mean that more money is available than anticipated, in other words not all of it is needed at secondary schools, what would be your priorities as to where that might be spent instead?

Reply

I thank Councillor Holmes for his supplementary question. In terms of numbers I think the thing about this Council and the officers we have, is that we are always planning, we are always making sure we are looking at the data and planning ahead so we are ahead of the game. So we are prepared for whatever comes and will be prepared to make sure that our children are attending the best Schools that we can provide for them, so therefore when it comes to any extra money, I don't know where the extra money will come from in fact because I think the government is still struggling to fund schools properly, so I can't imagine there being any extra funding, but if there is, we will definitely find a way to use it properly.

From Cllr Brenda Fraser to the Cabinet Member for Children's Services

Could the Cabinet Member comment on how we have focused on improving outcomes in adoption and fostering?

Reply

In 2012 Ofsted found our work in adoption and fostering to both be “Good”. Fostering is now no longer inspected separately but I am delighted that Children’s Services received an overall “Good” judgement again this year and that our Adoption Services were found to be “outstanding”. Continuous improvement is our stated ambition for all our children’s services and I’m delighted that Ofsted concluded: “Exceptional leadership and governance and strong frontline management ensure that children’s services are consistently good. All children receive a good service and some receive an outstanding service. Inspectors saw that significant and sustained improvements have been achieved since the last inspection in 2012.” The Director and her team have maintained this continuous improvement through a robust approach to quality assurance and regular self-evaluation with service improvement plans for key services to ensure that we continue to press for further improvements to deliver our ambitions for our children and for their improved outcomes. With regard to fostering and adoption specifically we have continued to recruit and retain excellent foster carers and to ensure we have robust and timely plans to achieve permanence for our children. Year on year we have improved our performance on a range of adoption performance indicators and I am particularly proud that the report noted...” Adoption performance is outstanding, with all children requiring adoption currently being placed and no children waiting.”

Supplementary

I’d like to congratulate the Cabinet Member on the recent OFSTED inspection result which rated Merton as Good with Outstanding features and can she outline how this compares with other Boroughs?

Reply

I thank Councillor Fraser for her question. We’ve heard tonight where we got - it’s been a great result. In terms of where that lands us as an authority - only 3 local authorities in the whole of the country in fact have been awarded Outstanding overall and only a small number have been judged Good with Outstanding features which puts us in the top 3 Local Authorities in London and the top 10 in the Country, so again I’d like to put on record my thanks to the staff to Yvette and the team for all of their hard work but also to our parents, carers and young people that take part in those figures. That’s quite a good result. Thanks.

From Councillor Michael Bull to the Cabinet Member for Street Cleanliness and Parking

Over the summer, has the Council been undertaking any activity to ensure that residents take appropriate protective action during periods of hot weather and that those who are vulnerable to heat are protected?

TO BE ANSWERED BY THE CABINET MEMBER FOR ADULT SOCIAL CARE AND HEALTH

Reply

In the event of particularly hot or cold temperatures we write to our care providers advising them to take appropriate action to protect those that they care for. In the case of hot weather, this includes ensuring that the care for person is in a comfortable environment and has ready access to water. If they have concerns about someone, carers alert health as appropriate.

Supplementary

I thank the Cabinet Member for his response. Following the walk out of staff from JD Sports in Colliers Wood due to conditions during the June heatwave which were described by them as “unbearably warm”, what action has the Council been taking to ensure that workers within the Borough are not subjected to oppressive conditions during periods of extremely hot weather?

Reply

I thank him for his question and for his supplementary. It’s not something that I am able to answer this evening, but I am very happy to write to him after tonight with any action that we have taken.

From Cllr Sally Kenny to the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health

With “bridging the gap” a core strategic aim of the council, what measurements are used to determine progress with bridging the gap in public health services in Merton

Reply

The Public Health Outcomes Framework (PHOF) is the overarching set of indicators which public health uses to help us to understand how well public health is being improved and protected in the borough. Where possible, we look at this data at sub-borough level, to tell us how we are doing on closing the gap between the most deprived and the least deprived areas in Merton, for instance looking at differences in life expectancy between east and west over time.

Closing the gap in health inequalities in Merton is the overarching aim of the Health & Wellbeing Strategy 2015-2018, and includes a number of metrics that monitor the differences between east and west Merton, for instance:

- Gap between the percentage of 10-11 year olds who are obese between east and west
- Gap in alcohol-related harm between east and west

The Public Health team commissions a number of services covering children and young people (e.g. Health Visiting and School Nursing) through to adults and older people (e.g. Substance Misuse services, Befriending services). Commissioning is based on an assessment of need (through the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) process), including looking at where the inequalities are in access to services and in health outcomes, and provider performance is then monitored through metrics

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such as service activity and health outcomes, broken down by factors such as age, sex and where service users live, to assess whether services are meeting need.

However, it must be recognised that the public health budget is relatively small compared to council spending and that of other partners such as the NHS, and the evidence tells us that the influence of the 'broader determinants of health' (such as where people live, their socioeconomic status, their access to education, employment and training, etc) are more important than health services in ensuring a healthy population. Therefore delivery of public health services on their own will not close the gap; more influential is a 'Health in All Policies' approach, so the Public Health team are also working cross-council and with partners to ensure that the impact of broader public sector spend is health-promoting and appropriately targeted to need.

The Director of Public Health has a statutory duty to produce an independent Annual Public Health Report (APHR). Tackling health inequalities is selected as the focus for the 2017/18 report – it will analyse the trends in health inequalities in Merton (between the 30% most and 30% least deprived wards in Merton), and look at the potential closing the gap through focusing specifically on the broader determinants of health. This year's APHR will provide the baseline for the refresh of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy, informing priority setting to achieve increasing impact at scale. The APHR will be published towards the end of the financial year 2017/18.

Supplementary

I'd like to thank the Cabinet Member for his reply, and ask him how the closure of the Wilson Hospital and the secret plans to close the A&E at St Helier help the Council to achieve our stated aim of bridging the gap?

Answer

I'd like to thank her for her question and for her supplementary. The Council has had a long-standing ambition to bridge the gap between the East and West. We know that more people have a bad or very bad health condition living within a mile of St Helier than at Belmont and Epsom. We know that there were more adult A&E admissions at St Helier last year than there were at Epsom. We know that there were more paediatric A&E admissions at St Helier last year than there were at Epsom. We know that the percentage of neighbourhoods within a mile radius considered to be some of the most deprived and significantly higher than at Belmont or Epsom. Madam Mayor closing the walk-in centre and any potential downgrading or closure at St Helier would do nothing but widen the gap between the East and West which is why we have fought and will continue to fight against any such plans.

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