

From **Councillor Kelly Braund** to the **Cabinet Member for Children's Services**

One of the four recommendations from our Ofsted report was to ensure that 'staying put' is made available to all care leavers who would benefit from this. Can the Cabinet Member update us on progress of this?

**Reply**

At the time of the inspection Merton had two young people who were in Staying Put arrangements with their Foster Carer and we were in the process of updating and refreshing our Staying Put Policy. At the time of writing we now have five young people in SP arrangements and we are likely to have more so in the future. These arrangements can be better for our young people and can be less costly than semi-independent provision. There are potentially a further six young people who are 18 before April 2018, currently expressing an interest in Staying Put. It is recognised that increasing the number of young people staying put places extra demand on existing foster care provision and therefore increases the importance of continuing to recruit new foster carers.

**Supplementary**

Thank you Deputy Madam Mayor. I have a question for the Cabinet Member for Children's Services. Can the Cabinet Member tell us what action is being taken to ensure that we have a sufficient number of foster carers?

**Reply**

I thank Councillor Braund for her supplementary. As she will know and many people know there is a national foster carer shortage. It's not unique to Merton. In Merton we do have a challenge around particular groups; siblings and teenagers but we work tirelessly to ensure that we are getting out regular fostering information across events, we have Social Media, Print Media, if you pick up today's Guardian you will see there is an advert for Foster Carers. There are regular Foster Information Events, the next one is actually on Valentines Day, what better connection; 10:30am at Morden Baptist Church but all of that information and I will make it clear across this Chamber, if we all put it out in our newsletters and use our Social Media, do everything we can to drum up more fostering support.

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

There have been significant traffic problems in Trinity/Wimbledon Park wards along Haydons Road. When will the council investigate measures to reduce this traffic congestion problem?

**Reply**

Haydons Road is a local distributor road and a main traffic link between Merton & Wandsworth with a major junction at Durnsford Rd.

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In March 2017, the capacity and the operation of the Haydon's Road / Durnsford junction was fully reviewed by TfL and as part of Merton's congestion relief proposal to remove all the banned movements at that time, the signals were modified to operate at its optimum capacity. The road network in this location is a London distributor road and it is operating better than some other junctions in the Borough. The Council, therefore, has no further plans for this junction at this time and always encourage motorists to consider walking and cycling for short local trips and improving air quality.

### **Supplementary**

I do thank the Cabinet Member for his response, I have to say I think it is rather a weak and complacent response, but what I'd like to know is; the long term delays and closures of Ashcombe Road Bridge which have caused a lot of grief to residents and exacerbated traffic congestion. Why didn't the Cabinet Member ensure that the works were completed much more quickly instead of making our residents suffer and what lessons has he learnt to make sure that such a fiasco does not happen again?

### **Reply**

I'd like to thank Councillor Taylor for her supplementary on Ashcombe Road. It is regrettable that the works went on longer than anticipated but these were necessary works that needed to be carried out to the Bridge. Whilst we would like things to happen promptly, sadly that is not always the case. I recognise the additional traffic that congestion that must cause in this area, but this isn't the first instance of this happening in the Borough; from time to time, bridges close, roads close which do have an impact in terms of traffic movements in the Borough. So I would say to Councillor Taylor I believe that the works were necessary, they needed to be carried out and I believe that the Council took the right approach. Thank you.

### **From Councillor Brenda Fraser to the Cabinet Member for Children's Services**

With increasing demands on housing across London what are we doing in Merton to support our Care Leavers?

### **Reply**

We have just refreshed our Looked after Children and Care Leavers Sufficiency Strategy which has been informed by the recent Scrutiny Review of care leavers Accommodation. We are busy taking forward the priorities arising from the strategy and the recommendations from the task group. These include: one House of Multiple Occupancy Pilot for five young people, with discussions ongoing regarding a second provision; work with Community and Housing to establish closer links with the Shared Lives programme; full uptake of our annual Housing quota in liaison with Housing Needs; and a review of our current semi-independent offer. This is in addition to our refresh of Staying Put locally.

### **Supplementary**

Yes Madam Deputy Mayor, I'd like to thank the Cabinet Member for her answer and also to find out if she could expand on the HMO pilot?

### **Reply**

I thank the Councillor for her supplementary. We have, as I think it is eluded to in my written response, had a successful pilot so far with a House of Multiple Occupation, so another way in which we can support our care leavers with alternative options when they are looking for housing. That pilot has gone so well that we already in talks for a second HMO so again showing our partnership working with the private sector also our care leavers and the Social Workers here. So we hope to be able to have that second one up and running alongside some of the other initiatives that we talked about in there including need and mentor tenancies, so hopefully we will be able to offer that range for our Looked After Children so they have all of the options that are available to them but so far the pilot is going well.

From **Councillor Oonagh Moulton** to the **Leader of the Council**:

What is the administration's view on external partnerships with private companies, particularly when it comes to housing?

### **Reply**

With regard to housing, Merton Council is a non-stock owning authority following the stock transfer of homes to Clarion Housing Group in 2010. The council has no current proposals to procure any external partnerships with private companies for the delivery of housing save for our exploration of a Joint Venture Delivery vehicle for the development of Morden Town Centre. Such a venture could assist the Council in providing additional capacity and resources to deliver the growth we believe possible at less risk to the Council tax payer.

### **Supplementary**

Thank you Madam Deputy Mayor. I just do have a supplementary. Given the recent Momentum debacle in Haringey and forcing out of Labour Leader amid accusations of sexism and bullying, what threat does Momentum pose to this Council and its residents and indeed to the future Labour Group leadership of Councillor Alambritis?

### **Reply**

I thank the Leader of the Opposition. The only threat that this group and the residents of this Borough face is should, god forbid, a Tory Council take over in 2018. I don't see that happening; we will be here for a long time to come, thank you very much.

From **Councillor Mike Brunt** to the **Cabinet Member for Education**

With the Government recently revising GCSE and A level results figures, can the Cabinet Member update us on the standing of Merton's schools?

### **Reply**

Merton's performance in GCSE outcomes has been exceptionally strong this past year. The Borough's schools are ranked first in the country for Progress 8 (one of

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the key indicators against which schools are judged). The Attainment 8 score is well above the national average, as is the proportion of students achieving grades 9-5 in both English and mathematics.

At KS5, the proportion of students achieving grades A\*-E in the A level examinations have risen in comparison with last year. Schools are also judged in relation to students' performance in Applied General qualifications, where Merton's points score of 41.56 is well above the national average of 35.72. Three schools achieved average grades of starred Distinction in these qualifications (Raynes Park High School, Ursuline School, and the combined 6th form for Rutlish and Ricards). St Mark's Academy achieved an average of Distinction.

### **Supplementary**

Thank you Madam Deputy Mayor. I thank the Cabinet Member for her answer to the question but I would like her to expand more on why she thinks Merton Schools have such a high achievement in the face of cuts from National Government in Education?

### **Reply**

I'd like to thank Councillor Brunt for his supplementary question. I'd like to first of all thank, and I attributed to that, to actually thank the Headteachers, the teachers, the staff, students, parents for all their hard work and their dedication to what they do. I've visit Schools I've visited nearly all the Schools in this Borough and I have seen first-hand how enthusiastic and hardworking our teachers and head teachers are and all of that contributes to their achievement despite all of the challenges not only is there a shortfall in funding but also changes to curriculum that continue to raise the standard in our schools. Thanks also to our officers here, special thanks to Yvette, as we mentioned earlier she arrived in 2009 when Merton Schools were 104<sup>th</sup> out of 150 Local Authorities and now we are first in the entire country. So she came and did and now she's leaving but that's the state she is leaving this Borough in, so thanks to her for all she has done for education in this Borough. But it's all of that, that has made us to be, to have the kind of standard that we have in this Borough. That's why we have an additional 209 residents applicants for Secondary School and we applaud it, we want it and we need the extra space and that's why we also want Harris Academy Wimbledon to open so that we will be able to have the space for them. We want them to also be a good or outstanding Secondary School, so thank you very much for your question.

### **From Councillor Stephen Crowe to the Cabinet Member for Community and Culture:**

A Berkeley Homes newsletter said Morley Park would open last September, the Ursuline High School scheduled sports at Morley Park in their curriculum, and local residents formed the Friends of Morley Park. Despite all this, and a formal opening of the sports facilities by Clare Balding, the whole park including the sports facilities has remained closed.

What is the reason for this delay and when will the park be open for both the school and the public to enjoy?

### **Reply**

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The Ursuline High School and Berkeley Homes did host a celebratory event in September 2017 which marked the completion of the pavilion, which was in line with the original plans to open the site at that stage. However, it was not possible to open the entire site for public use at that time owing to some unresolved issues.

Owing to the complexity of reconstructing and establishing a new, high quality public open space of this nature, there have inevitably been delays in the project. This included resolving significant local flooding issues that occurred during the summer of 2016.

It is important that the Council only accepts the site from Berkeley Homes when the Council are satisfied with the condition of it, which is not yet the case. The Council and Berkeley Homes are still in negotiations regarding some elements of the site and therefore the legal process of transferring the site to the Council has not yet been completed.

On a positive note, there has been important recent progress on the negotiations between the Council and Berkeley Homes and all parties remain committed to opening the park for use by both the school and the public in the very near future, hopefully, during the forthcoming spring season.

### **Supplementary**

Thank you Madam Deputy Mayor. I'd like to thank the Cabinet Member for his answer to the question; I am delighted to note that Morley Park will be open, hopefully, the Cabinet Member says, in Spring this year. However my question concerns Japanese Knotweed, which is allegedly on the site of Morley Park. I would like the Cabinet Member to tell me if he can; the cost of clearing Japanese Knotweed and who would bear the cost if the Japanese knotweed were to spread off-site into the surrounding areas? Thank you very much.

### **Reply**

I'd like to thank you for your supplementary question. Like you, I really want to get this park open, I really do, as much for the benefit of the children of the Ursuline School as anything I think we should all be particularly grateful to my colleague Andrew Judge in that respect because he saw a chance for the School and he seized on that chance and I think that's great. But I am concerned that we want to get it right, the right park for the people of Merton, for all the people of Merton. That is to me much more important than when we get it. You talked about Japanese Knotweed; the problems are well documented and there has been a worry, there's no two ways about it, that it might spread to neighbouring gardens. I can't tell you how much the work already has cost because of course Berkeley Homes have paid for it all. I can tell you that Berkeley Homes have now guaranteed us against any future costs caused by spread to any gardens that are around the park but I know that is still going through our legal department and frankly I'm not going to hurry them because I want to be absolutely right and more to the point Councillor, that's not the end of this. When everything is sorted I want to go round that park and see and to make sure that all the things that we've hoped for, for the people of Merton, are going to be delivered and I invite you and your colleagues and Jane Barnes who I

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know has put an awful lot of work into this as well, to come round with me to make sure that park is exactly what the people of Merton need. Thank you very much.

From **Councillor David Chung** to the **Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Environment and Housing**

The Mayor of London Sadiq Khan has recently announced accessibility improvements being made to stations across the city. Can the Cabinet Member explain how Merton benefits from this initiative?

### Reply

Wimbledon Park has recently been named as one of 13 Tube stations which will become step-free by spring 2022 as part of a £200million investment.

Mayor of London Sadiq Khan announced the major boost to the accessibility of the London Underground network, which is the biggest push for step-free access in the Tube's 155-year history.

The latest raft of investment - part of the Mayor's draft Transport Strategy - will bring the number of step-free Tube stations to more than 100 - or 40 per cent of the network. "These improvements are going to make a big difference in helping Londoners move around our city and show the real progress we are making to improve accessibility right across the capital."

Merton Council have campaigned for more step-free stations and will continue to lobby for further accessibility improvements particularly around the Thameslink and South Western Railway stations.

### Supplementary

Thank you Madam Deputy Mayor. My supplementary question is as follows; In view of the welcome advances made by Transport for London in making stations step-free, what benefits would there be for the responsibility being given to them for National Rail Stations in Merton?

### Reply

Thank you Madam Deputy Mayor, thank you Councillor Chung for your supplementary. I think it would be of great benefit if TFL took over the running of National Rail stations in this Borough. We've seen the transformation of London Overground stations, North of the river in terms of a better service, a more reliable service, more frequent service. We've also seen a huge change in terms of the look and feel of those stations. TFL have been ambitious, National Rail less so, I do hope that the Secretary of State, former Merton Councillor Chris Grayling does reconsider his decision not to transfer stations to TFL because we do want a truly integrated system but we want a system which is accessible to all people in this Borough. Thank you.

From **Councillor Adam Bush** to the **Cabinet Member for Finance:**

Can the Cabinet Member provide me with a breakdown by ward of how many households there are in each council tax band?

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### Reply

Unfortunately, the council tax register is not required to identify properties based on ward, so the information cannot be extracted from the system. However, please see below the breakdown for the borough:

Band A	1,090
Band B	8,392
Band C	22,961
Band D	27,709
Band E	13,171
Band F	5,461
Band G	4,025
Band H	1,727
Total	84,536

### Supplementary

Can I firstly start by thanking the Cabinet Member for Finance for his response. Against the backdrop of his national party wanting to hike Council Tax by approximately 20-100% across Merton residents living in properties classified in Band D or above, will the Cabinet Member today publically reject this proposal by Jeremy Corbyns' close ally Chris Williamson which would cost families across this Borough over £300 a year? Thank you.

### Reply

Thank you Madam Deputy Mayor and I thank the Councillor for his follow-up. This evening may very well be a first because I am actually going to defend Jeremy Corbyn, for sacking Chris Williamson for making that suggestion and I think it would be scandalous if local Tories went around telling our residents that was going to be policy when it is demonstrably not and someone who has suggested has lost their job as a result. So let that be a warning to you if you go out there, or if they go out there, Madam Mayor and say those sort of things we will hold them to account. We have a very good record on Council Tax here, I don't think anybody could characterise us as being spendthrift, or as being against people who have done well for themselves, we have taken a fair approach to Council Tax, we have only raised it when it has been absolutely necessary in order to protect services and we have absolutely no plans to introduce new bands for Council Tax. We would only do that if the Conservative Government enforce that on us and we would not be happy about that.

From **Councillor Mary Curtin** to the **Cabinet Member for Community and Culture**

Can the Cabinet Member please update Council on the new Collier's Wood library and how it will benefit the community?

### Reply

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The new library in Colliers Wood Library opened on Monday 5 February 2018. Residents will benefit from a modern, flexible library with more space for books and computers. The library has been designed with three flexible meeting rooms that can be used for a range of community events and a café is available.

The new building provides a sustainable library that will be enjoyed for generations to come. Building on the good work that the library service has been doing there will be a focus on work with children and young people and a broader offer for the rest of our residents including an increased number of events and activities.

Residents have been consulted throughout the building of the new library and have had the opportunity to feed into both the external and internal design elements. Working with the Alzheimer's Society the library has also been designed to be dementia friendly.

### **Supplementary**

Thank you Madam Deputy Mayor. I would like to thank the Cabinet Member for his reply; can he please tell us about any further Culture and Leisure facilities that benefit Merton's residents please?

### **Reply**

Thank you Madam Deputy Mayor and thank you Mary for your supplementary. There's loads, there's loads, but I'm only going to give you three. First of all, the new Morden Leisure Centre will be opening later in the year and it's going to be beautiful, but you know I've talked a lot about that already, I'm looking forward to you all finding out about it for yourselves; you will be amazed. Second of all, there is a whole range of activities at the Canons in Mitcham, following our very successful HLF bid, those will be happening over the next few years; look up the details for those, and third of all, I'm afraid I can't take an awful lot of credit for this, I pass the credit to our Leader for his tremendous work in this respect; we are going to be bringing AFC Wimbledon back to Merton and I think everybody should be very happy with that. Thank you very much.