

06: Non ST Questions

From Councillor Eleanor Stringer to the Cabinet Member for Education

Can the Cabinet Member provide an update on the building of the new secondary school at High Path?

Reply

The new Harris Wimbledon School is opening as planned for September 2018 at its temporary site in Whatley Avenue SW20 and is fully subscribed. This year more than 260 extra children are leaving primary school in Merton, and our existing 'outstanding' and 'good' secondary schools - the best in the country for progress between entering secondary schools and doing their GCSEs - are more popular than ever.

Harris Federation is undertaking minor refurbishment to ensure the Whatley Avenue building is suitable for two years and the planning application for the permanent site in High Path, South Wimbledon has been submitted by the Education and Skills Funding Agency; the representation period as part of this application is expected to commence in the week of this council meeting.

Projects to provide suitable buildings to re-locate the High Path Resource Centre to Leyton Road SW19 and Elim Church to Merton Hall and so enable a clear site at High Path for the new permanent school are now progressing well.

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

How many public litter bins are there in Merton?

Reply

This year we have increased the number of litter bins in town centres and on the highway to 904. There are approximately 430 litter bins located within the borough's parks and open spaces.

From Councillor Ben Butler to the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care

Can the Cabinet Member update me on recent work to bridge the gap between the east and west of the borough?

Reply

Merton's Community Plan sets out the vision and priorities for borough. The Community Plan's first priority is working to bridge the gap between the east and west of the borough and between different communities. The strategy for bridging the gap is to focus on those factors that reduce inequalities. Good progress is being made across the council on a comprehensive range of initiatives that improve outcomes for disadvantaged and excluded groups. Notable recent examples include:

- Social Prescribing has gone from strength to strength in Merton and the independent evaluation has shown a reduction in GP appointments, a reduction in attendances at A&E and improvements to the self reported wellbeing of those going through the programme. Merton's approach to Social Prescribing is being

used a case study in a GLA commissioned report on Social Prescribing in London and has now been rolled out to all nine practices in east Merton and an additional four in the west of the borough.

- The Healthier Catering Commitment engages with local businesses to get them to sign up to the scheme or make some positive changes to provide healthier options. The project was targeted in the east of the borough where there are higher rates of childhood obesity.
- There has been a narrowing of the gap for students from disadvantaged families at the primary stage including early years foundation stage and at the end of KS1 and KS2.
- The gap in the school attendance and exclusion figures between disadvantaged pupils and their peers was also narrower than those seen nationally.
- Town centre improvements to Mitcham and Colliers Wood and a bold vision for the future of Morden working in partnership with TFL.
- Working closely with Clarion and Moat on major regeneration schemes that will also deliver new affordable housing.
- The council's strategic partner programme providing information and advice to citizens and support to the voluntary sector as a whole is being recommissioned and expanded to include preventative physical and mental wellbeing services.

The council adopted a new Hate Crime Strategy on the back of a major engagement exercise and there were events across the borough during Hate Crime Awareness Week to raise awareness of the council's zero tolerance approach to hate crime.

This year's Merton Annual Public Health Report will focus on tracking the trends in health inequalities between different communities in Merton over time (particularly the east and the west of the borough, and the 30% most and 30% least deprived wards). This will chart progress made to date, and serve as a baseline to inform the refresh of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy post 2018 and most suitable indicators to monitor progress in reducing health inequalities going forward.

From Councillor Nigel Benbow to the Cabinet Member for Environment and Street Cleanliness

What height do weeds and grass verges need to reach to trigger the council's contractors to actually make amends?

Reply (From the Cabinet Member for Community and Culture)

The contractual standards for street cleaning including weeding and detritus reflect best practice from Defra's Code of Practice on Litter. The contract is based on an output specification requiring the contractor maintain consistent standards across the entire borough. This is a move away from a frequency based approach where standards can fall between sweeps without any obligation on the contractor to resolve the issue.

The approved method for managing weed growth is to apply a chemical weed killer. For this to be applied the weeds need to be 2- 3 inches with full leaf growth. This ensures that the weed and the supporting root system is killed. The weed spraying scheduled started this year in April with the next spray due to commence the first

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week in July. In between sprays the weeds are manual removed by the beat sweepers.

The maximum acceptable height for grass on highways verges is 70mm.

We are requiring the contractor to remove weeds that have not been dealt with by way of a chemical solution.

From Councillor Simon McGrath to the Leader of the Council:

What is the Leader's position on the newspaper reports that properties within 3km of Crossrail 2 stations will be asked to pay additional Council tax to fund this regional and national asset?

Reply

Merton Council has regular liaison meetings with the Crossrail 2 team, which, to date has principally been about the design and understanding the impacts of the scheme for Merton residents and businesses.

It is surprising that the first we heard of this proposal was in the press. We are currently in dialogue with Crossrail 2 to understand the provenance and credibility of the proposal. We know that the project is undergoing an independent financial review and is due to report back to Treasury in Autumn with an interim findings statement now imminent.

We believe that the land-value capture tax is just one of a range of possible funding mechanisms being explored for the project. At this stage, we understand that it is just an idea under consideration. We will of course stand up for Merton residents on this matter and we are seeking clarity around the proposal and its financial impacts on home-owners. Other than the press reports, there's no detail available at the moment. It is disappointing that the government has yet to guarantee funding for CR2 and I call on our local MPs to put pressure on the Transport Secretary to provide the help that he and our residents expect.

The Leader of the Council has convened a meeting with CR2 Managing Director Michelle Dix on 4th July and this topic will be top of our agenda; as well as seeking a timeline for when CR2 will undertake the next round of public consultation.

From Councillor Natasha Irons to the Cabinet Member for Children's Services:

How does the Council support care leavers who want to stay put?

Reply

The Council has a staying put policy, this policy originated from the Children and Families Act 2014 which placed a legal duty on local authorities to support every care leaver who wants to stay with their former foster carers with whom they were placed prior to their 18th birthday until their 21st birthday. It is the duty of the local authority:

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- To monitor the Staying Put arrangement; and
- To provide advice, assistance and support to the young person (known as a “Former Relevant child”) and to the former foster parent with a view to maintaining the Staying Put arrangement (this must include financial support), until the child reaches the age of 21 (unless the local authority consider that the Staying Put arrangement is not consistent with the child’s welfare). The intention of Staying Put arrangements is to ensure that young people can remain with their former foster carers until they are prepared for adulthood, can experience a transition akin to their peers, avoid social exclusion and be more likely to avert a subsequent housing and tenancy breakdown.

We undertake a Leaving Care Assessment of Need at the age of (around) 15 $\frac{3}{4}$ which determines whether it will be appropriate to facilitate a Staying Put arrangement. Where it is appropriate, and where the child and the foster parent want to make a Staying Put arrangement, then we provide advice, assistance and support to facilitate that arrangement. Later, when the young person is (around) 16 $\frac{1}{2}$ a Staying Put meeting takes place with the right people involved to make these arrangements. This meeting is reconvened as necessary, depending on the complexity of the young person’s situation, but as a minimum a second meeting takes place at (around) age 17 $\frac{1}{2}$ to make sure all necessary arrangements are in place by the time a young person turns 18.

For young people in local authority foster care, Staying Put carers will continue to receive the full fostering payment (allowance and fee) being paid at the point the young person turns 18 minus subsistence allowance which is paid direct to young people on means tested benefits. This will continue until the young person moves on or until their 19th birthday, whichever is sooner. For all young people who wish to remain with their IFA foster carer under a “Staying Put” agreement this agreement is made directly between the carer and Merton; the allowance and Level 3 fee element of the Merton foster carer payment minus the subsistence allowance will be paid to the foster carer up until the young person’s 19th birthday. In circumstances where the YP has income, (either from benefits and/or from wages), that is equivalent or more than the DWP subsidy allowance, the value of the DWP subsidy allowance will be deducted from the SP/SL carer payments. This will continue until the young person moves on or their 21st birthday, whichever is sooner.

At the moment 8 young people are Staying Put with Merton foster carers and a further 5 young people are Staying Put with their Independent Fostering Agency foster carers. There are a number of young people turning 18 this year, foster carers have already expressed their wish to continue their commitment to the young people in their care beyond 18, therefore the number of young people remaining in staying put is set to rise.

From Councillor Nick McLean to the Cabinet Member for Community Safety, Engagement and Equalities:

With regard to the proposed closure of Wimbledon Police Station, did the Council conduct any impact studies in the vicinity and surrounding areas?

Reply

As part of the London wide consultation, undertaken by the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime, a city wide EIA was completed and this is attached. As such Merton did not undertake its own EIA rather we worked, with our partners, elected members and community leads to ensure that Merton's response to the 17 questions asked by MOPAC were responded to in the richest manner possible.

The MOPAC EIA can be viewed here:

<https://www.london.gov.uk/mopac-publications/public-access-strategy>

Cllr Aidan Mundy to the Cabinet Member for the Environment and Street Cleanliness

Can the Cabinet Member provide an update on the introduction of wheelie bins, and an update on the number of flytipping cases that have been successfully taken to court?

Reply

The roll out of the new waste collection service is on schedule to come into effect from 1st October 2018. The service change will affect every household in the borough and is the biggest change in waste collection they have experienced in recent years. In order to minimise the disruption and to support the roll out of the new service Veolia and council officers have been working collectively to design and implement a communications and engagement plan which will reach every household in the borough. The first communication to every household is due to be delivered over the coming weeks.

In reference to fly tipping, This financial year we have 22 cases ready for prosecution and are currently awaiting court hearing dates , this is for larger fly tipping offences. We have been using new legislation that came into force May 2006 issuing £400 FPN for small fly tips.

From Councillor Paul Kohler to the Leader of the Council

In light of the predicted damage Brexit will do to London's economy and hence this Borough and its residents, will the Leader back a referendum on the terms of the Brexit deal, and will he write to both the borough's MPs, seeking confirmation that they will do likewise?

Reply

I continue to talk to our MPs to push for a meaningful vote in parliament on the terms. This is one of the vital issues of our times, which is why I have also brought it in to the portfolio of the Cabinet Member for Finance, and why we are working constantly to assess the impacts and ways in which we can support our EU residents.

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Anyone can see that the Conservative government are handling the result of 2016's referendum abysmally, putting businesses and families here and across the UK at risk.

From Councillor Owen Pritchard to the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance:

How is the council working to support businesses in the borough and developing the local economy?

Reply

The Council supports business and the local economy through provision of a broad range of services and functions that make Merton an attractive place to establish and sustain a business. These range from for example our approach to discretionary rate relief, our sponsorship of the Best Business Awards and our approach to parking management and the way this supports town centres and shopping parades. It also includes our work via the futureMerton economic development team. The council has agreed to use CIL to fund town centre premises improvements this year and has selected sites to deliver parade improvements and to fund a town centre officer post.

Much of the support to business is now through the sub-regional south London Partnership (SLP). futureMerton works closely with the SLP to support employment through a skills and employment working group. The group have prepared a "Skills for south Londoner's Strategy" in February 2018 and are now working in partnership to deliver the proposed actions, including aligning the skills offer with our growth and strategic sector needs identified.

The Council fully supports Small Business Saturday and the Leader has marketed local small businesses by visiting them on the National Small Business Day in early December each year. The Council also provides free parking on all council run car parks in the December weekends running up to Christmas Day. This is very popular with both customers and shopkeepers.

See also the link to our dedicated pages on business support

<https://www.merton.gov.uk/business-and-consumers/business-support-and-advice>