

06: Non ST Questions

From Councillor Natasha Irons to the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Housing and Transport

Following the recent collapse of the Bishopsford Road Bridge, would the cabinet member please update council on what work has been undertaken with residents and businesses in the area?

Reply

Since the partial collapse of the bridge, Merton Council has worked closely with its partners, FM Conway Ltd and the Environment Agency to monitor any bridge movement and stabilise the structure.

These stabilisation works will finish on Monday 8 July, subject to weather conditions, and work will then commence on a full structural inspection followed by an assessment to determine the extent of repair work needed. Following the emergency phase of this problem when the Council sought to support those most affected through our emergency planning arrangements the Council has now moved into a process of working towards business as normal.

Senior officers from the council have worked closely with affected residents and most recently attended a public meeting on 3rd July 2019 to consider bus diversion proposals with Transport for London. Officers are arranging signage (“open as usual”) for nearby businesses and encouraging businesses in the area that pay business rates to apply to the council for business rates relief. We are working to establish a single point of contact via email and website for any enquiries relating to Bishopsford Road Bridge.

From Councillor Oonagh Moulton to the Cabinet Member for Commerce, Leisure and Culture:

What is the Cabinet Member doing to ensure that litter from picnics and BBQs is removed quickly and efficiently from our parks and open spaces, and can she assure residents that there will not be a repeat of the public health hazards of last summer?

Reply

The Greenspaces team discussed this matter with our grounds contractor, idverde, in preparation for the start of this summer season, with Wimbledon Park specifically in mind as picnics and barbeque waste issues are much greater there and not such a significant issue at other open space venues.

A working practice has been put in place which involves a litter picking team attending the park from 7.30am daily in advance of the park’s formal opening (8am on weekdays; and 9am on weekends). There is, furthermore, a dedicated litter picker who attends the park for 4 hours at the end of the day during the core summer period and at weekends.

These arrangements are over and above the standard litter picking and waste arrangements and designed to deal with the elevated popularity of Wimbledon Park for these social activities. Officers will also review these arrangements over the course

of the seasonal period to ensure these arrangements address efficiently any issues with litter and waste from site users.

From Councillor Marsie Skeete to the Cabinet Member for Finance

I note that overall satisfaction with the council rose to 70% in the latest annual residents' survey. What analysis has the cabinet member made of the underlying reasons for this, and the variation in satisfaction levels for individual services?

Reply

The survey results show that the vast majority of Merton residents are satisfied with their local area as a place to live and that satisfaction with the way that the council runs things has increased since the last survey was carried out two years ago. People, particularly families, come and live in Merton because of our schools, parks and green spaces, libraries and sports and leisure facilities and this is reflected in the survey. More residents have also told us they feel safe in the borough and satisfaction with street lighting has increased.

The residents' survey was carried out soon after the largest service change that the council has made in recent times – to the recycling and rubbish collection service. This affected almost all households in the borough. Since the survey was done, recycling rates have continued to increase and action has been taken to improve street cleaning and the collection service. The council is working hard with Croydon, Sutton and Kingston, which together form South London Waste Partnership, to drive up Veolia's performance.

More service users than two years ago rated secondary education, primary education, libraries, leisure and sport facilities as good or very good.

From Councillor Daniel Holden to the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Housing and Transport:

Does the cabinet member believe in nudge theory to change behaviour relating to parking?

Reply

Nudge theory is a concept in behavioral science, political theory and behavioral economics which proposes positive reinforcement, indirect suggestions and other means as ways to influence the behavior and decision making of groups or individuals.

The Council believes that most residents will make the right choices in light of clear information regarding the impact that the motor car has on air quality and the climate alongside sensible pricing to reduce demand. This will include suitable available healthy and affordable modes of transport [active and public].

Governments across the world have adopted nudge theory and established units to promote its use across a range of public policy areas. There is no reason to believe that its application is not suitable for parking and car use.

From Councillor Carl Quilliam to the Cabinet Member for Commerce, Leisure and Culture

Will the Cabinet member confirm the last time money was collected from the tennis courts at Joseph Hood Recreation Ground, Dundonald Recreation Ground and John Innes Park, how much was collected, what the charges were, and what the process was for deciding to reintroduce charges?

Reply

For clarity, charges are not being “reintroduced” at these three venues. Tennis has been a “pay to play” activity continuously for many years in Merton and the current prices reflect those prices levied in the historical past, uplifted by an appropriate percentage annually to reflect inflation.

Whereas in the past these three park sites had dedicated site staff, some of whom were posted on site at weekends mainly to collect sports fees, this ceased around 2012. The court takings at that time were typically of the order of £2-3k per annum per site only and therefore somewhat out of balance with the staffing costs required to collect these fees at a time when the service was the subject to significant savings pressures. Consequently, the income from these venues dropped to nil, or very close to nil.

A new technology based tennis court booking system, developed by the Lawn Tennis Association, is being adopted at four venues, including the three named sites. This electronic system will ensure that our existing fees and charges are more efficiently and effectively applied and at no cost to the Council.

From Councillor John Dehaney to the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Housing and Transport

Would the cabinet member please provide information on what work the council is undertaking to improve conditions for tenants in the private-rented sector?

Reply

The Council is committed in improving housing conditions for tenants in the private rented sector. On the 3rd June 2019 the Cabinet member for Regeneration , Housing and Transport submitted a report to cabinet for approval setting out his plans for how the Council’s support to private rented sector tenants would be improved. This included the adoption of a new housing enforcement policy, the adoption of civil penalties and rent repayment orders and an indicative plan to develop selective licensing .In addition officers continue to discharge statutory housing functions in line with the Housing Act 2004 and have responded to 1253 cases of complaints of disrepair from private tenants. Officers continue to engage with private sector landlords both on a 121 basis and through its Landlord forum.

From Councillor James Holmes to the Cabinet Member for Schools and Adult Education:

The recent OFSTED inspection at Benedict Primary School downgraded their rating from 'requires improvement' to 'inadequate', what measures have been taken by the Cabinet Member since the inspection to improve performance?

Reply

Benedict is part of the Chapel Street Academy Trust, and therefore not a Local Authority School. The Local Authority keeps in regular contact with the Regional Schools' Commissioner (RSC) who has the responsibility for the performance of academies within their area. If the Local Authority has any concerns about the academies within Merton it is the role of the RSC to provide the challenge to the school. The Local Authority have expressed concerns to the RSC in the past about Benedict, particularly around financial management, and in light of the last Ofsted judgement the school received of 'requires improvement'. The Local Authority received reassurances from RSC, that in his view, the school was making progress in its improvement journey.

The process when an academy is judged to be 'inadequate' is led by the RSC, not the Local Authority, although the Local Authority keep in close contact with the RSC. The Assistant Director (Education) has had conversations with the RSC since the inspection to discuss Benedict. The decision about the future of Benedict (for example whether it stays with Chapel Street or moves to a different provider) will be made by the RSC following a conversation between the RSC and the Academy Trust which in turn would be scrutinised by the Head Teacher Board that the RSC works with. The Local Authority awaits the outcome of this initial decision.

The Local Authority is of the view that, whatever the governance arrangements, the school needs to be proceeding with school improvement activity immediately. As Benedict is not a Local Authority school, it is not working intensively with Merton School Improvement officers (for example, with a Merton Education Partner). Such support would not be automatic as Merton School Improvement is primarily funded by the Dedicated Schools Grant (funding made available for maintained schools), but it is available for the Trust to use through purchasing a Service Level Agreement, as three of the academies in Merton already do. Since the inspection, the school have bought in a small amount of support from Merton School Improvement, but they continue to source their core school improvement from the Trust.

From Councillor Agatha Akyigyina to the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care, Health and the Environment

Can the cabinet member provide an update on Improving Healthcare Together following the recent publication of the draft Integrated Impact Assessment and Clinical Senate Report?

Reply

As Council will be aware, Improving Healthcare Together is the NHS programme looking at a potential reconfiguration of services at Epsom and St Helier Trust.

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On 26 June, two new papers were published: the draft Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA), and the Clinical Senates Report.

The IIA builds on work previously undertaken by the NHS, including the Deprivation Impact Analysis, which was commissioned following a request by the Council. It explores equalities, health, travel and environmental impacts, among other things. The Council was involved in the steering group which oversaw the development of the IIA, and the Leader has sent a number of letters to the Independent Chair of the steering group to make the Council's position clear.

The Clinical Senates Report was undertaken by the independent Clinical Senates of London and the South East and reviews the clinical model developed by Improving Healthcare Together. The report makes 94 recommendations for the programme to take account of.

The Council is in the process of comprehensively reviewing both documents and will be formally responding in due course.

From Councillor Ed Gretton to the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Housing and Transport:

Can the Cabinet Member please clarify to what extent the council held any discussions with TFL regarding TFL's misguided closure of the District Line throughout the weekend at the start of the Tennis Championships just when tourists were arriving from around the world?

Reply

The Council works closely with TfL who ultimately are responsible for the safe operation of the transport network and we recognise that some essential works cannot be delayed. We were pleased to see that Transport for London managed to complete their work on improving the District Line between Saturday 29th and Sunday 30th June, prior to the Wimbledon Championships starting on Monday 1st July 2019. Wimbledon is the only part of London accessible by all four public transport modes of tube, train, bus and tram and we look forward to continuing to work with Transport for London on improvements to these services.

From Councillor Aidan Mundy to the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Housing and Transport

Can the cabinet member please give further details on the allocation of the neighbourhood fund schemes and proposals for ward allocation funded schemes from the Community Infrastructure Levy?

Reply

Following a trial in 2018, funding of £15,000 is available for every ward in Merton to spend on specific types of public space projects under the Merton's Ward Allocation Scheme. The scheme was approved by Cabinet on 14th January 2019. The scheme is in the early stages of the three-year lifetime – from April 2019 ward councillors have been able to select from a list of project types to be funded by the £15,000 for

their wards. The list is made up of small-scale public space project types which are not already covered by the council's existing highways and green spaces contracts and meet criteria set out by the government for spending the Neighbourhood Community Infrastructure Levy.

From Councillor Andrew Howard to the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Housing and Transport:

The proposed parking fees increase will have varying impacts on different communities, what discussions has the Cabinet Member had with Age UK Merton and care homes who will be disproportionately effected?

Reply

Whilst we have not specifically consulted with individual community groups the parking charges consultation was very widely advertised and was extended in duration. Articles were placed in My Merton distributed to every household, 6,000 street signs were placed across the Borough, statutory consultees, resident and business associations were asked to provide their views, which led to over 3,000 responses being received.

From Councillor Anthony Fairclough to the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Housing and Transport

What evidence is there that the proposed increases in parking permit charges in CPZs will reduce car ownership?

Reply

Price is a long established and recognised economic tool to manage demand. Where prices remain low demand increases, all other things being equal. Over the last 10 years where car parking and permit prices have been frozen the number of cars registered in Merton rose from 69,500 to 71,900.

Decisions on car ownership take price into account. This might be at the point when a decision on car replacement is being made or at some other point in time but car owners or prospective car owners will weigh up future costs as well as alternate transport options. This administration believes that Merton is not isolated from these economic principles and that sensible and appropriate pricing strategies for parking and permits will assist in reducing car use and ownership.

From Councillor Ed Gretton to the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care, Health and the Environment:

Does the Cabinet Member believe that local residents are satisfied with the administration's ability to manage rubbish and street cleaning?

Reply

The Annual Residents survey conducted earlier this provides a snapshot of satisfaction with a range of services and showed that at that time resident satisfaction with waste collection and street cleaning had dropped when compared to previous years. Whilst disappointing, this was perhaps not surprising given the point in time that

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the survey was carried out [Jan / Feb2019], coming so soon after the largest waste collection service change the borough has experienced.

Since that survey was undertaken, a further survey was undertaken by West Co on behalf of the South London Waste Partnership in March 2019, which asked residents about the new recycling and rubbish collection service. This showed much higher levels of satisfaction, with 82% of residents surveyed expressing satisfaction with the waste collection service they receive and 84% stating that they have had no issues regarding the service.

However, I accept that for residents in some parts of the borough the service is still working as well as we would like it to, which is why we are working hard with officers and Veolia to improve performance.

I will be writing to all councillors shortly to announce some of the initiatives we are taking and am keen to visit as many wards over the summer as possible to understand the particular challenges faced in different parts of the borough and what solutions might be required.

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