

**From Councillor David Chung to the Cabinet Member for Housing, Regeneration and the Climate Emergency:**

What are the numbers of people in temporary accommodation in Merton, how does this compare to other London Boroughs, and how are you addressing this issue?

**Reply**

As at the end of March 2021 there were 197 Households living in temporary accommodation which is the lowest numbers of households in temporary accommodation of any London Borough (save the City of London).

**Supplementary**

Can I congratulate the work of the cabinet member and the Housing Needs team for achieving the lowest London. Although Merton has the lowest in London what steps are being taken in ensuring people who are made homeless have temporary accommodation in the Borough.

**Reply**

I want to thank Cllr Chung for his supplementary and that is why we have decided to join Capital Letters which will help in terms of the procuring of accommodation close to people needs. Although we have the lowest in London which I am proud of, it is still 197 too many households here in Merton. It's important that we find accommodation close to where people live and grow up. We have an excellent record in terms of TA and I would also like to thank Steve Langley and his team for all the work they do. We cannot be complacent and going forward and this continues to be a challenge the 60,000 people in temporary accommodation in London. Which shows the sheer scale of the task here across the capital city so a lot done but a lot more to do, thank you.

**From Councillor Nick McLean to the leader of the Council:**

Do you agree with me that cabinet members who have turned parts of Mitcham into 21<sup>st</sup> century slums should resign?

**Reply**

If Cllr McLean is referring to reports about poor maintenance and servicing of formerly council-owned properties, the cabinet member in the previous Conservative administration who led on the decision to hand over Merton's homes to a housing association, and for agreeing the terms of the transfer, is no longer a councillor. I congratulate the Labour cabinet members who have worked so hard to overcome the issues that have arisen as a result of that decision, and as a result of cuts to council funding and funding for social housing since 2010.

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We will continue to press the current provider of former council-owned properties, Clarion, to keep to its promises to maintain these homes to decent standards, and to regenerate their estates to ensure new homes, including affordable homes, are provided for Merton residents.

### **Supplementary**

Thank you for the response although I wish I was on the chamber tonight to deliver this message was utterly pathetic and predictably weak answer. This is a failure of the Merton Labour Party and its MP, it was Cllr Judge who first tried to transfer the housing stock, Labour thought it a good idea, but it failed. The Conservatives tried and succeeded, Labour failed Conservatives get things done. Labour have been running Merton council for 11 years, and yet Cllr Allison still seeks to blame others. Does he not realise how ridiculous he now sounds so I ask him, show some proper leadership, stand up for the residents of Eastfields and fire the cabinet member responsible.

### **Reply**

By tradition, I say thank you for the follow up response, but this is testing traditions. I think after 11 years of Tory led government; we've had so many problems with our housing. My cabinet member is not one I would like to thank my cabinet member for doing as much as he has done. As a result of his work Merton has the lowest number of people living in temporary accommodation anywhere in London. Merton was 100% successful in getting homeless people off the streets in the "everyone" campaign. Now this doesn't happen by accident, it happens thanks to the hard work and commitment and passion to help our communities of people. Like the cabinet member responsible, so I hope members will thank Cllr Whelton for his hard work and lay the blame where it properly belongs with the government of this country, for failing us on housing for too long. Thank you Cllr Whelton.

### **From Councillor Geraldine Stanford to the Cabinet Member for Housing, regeneration and the Climate Emergency:**

What actions have you taken with Clarion following the terrible reports of conditions on the Eastfield estate?

### **Reply**

I was very disappointed and alarmed at the poor housing conditions for the residents of the Eastfields Estate and acted immediately just as soon as the seriousness of the matter was brought to my attention. These actions included the dispatch of a number of the Councils Housing Enforcement officers onto the site, attending a public meeting attended by residents, officers of the Council and the local MP. I have also lead on performance review meetings with Senior Clarion Housing colleagues and

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Council Officers to discuss Eastfields Estate as well as all other Clarion Merton estates. I have also spoken to colleagues of the resident's associations group as well as individual tenants. I can provide my assurances that these actions do not stop here and I will continue to work for our residents until I am satisfied that the dwellings are improved and suitable and reasonable for the tenants continued occupation.

### **Supplementary**

Can I thank Cllr Whelton for his response to my question. When he provides an update in terms of the road regeneration, as many of my residents have been asking about what's been happening in terms of the rebuilding of the estate. This is Eastfields where I'm talking about obviously and I'm very concerned that they are losing faith in Clarions ability to construct the new buildings to a high standard. Following their experiences with the dreadful repair and maintenance service that they have endured for the past few years, thank you.

### **Reply**

I would like to thank Cllr Stanford for her supplementary and all the work that she does on behalf of fixed Marsh residents, along with Cllr Gina and Cllr Brunt. I think she's quite right in terms of the regeneration it was under this administration that outline planning permission was given for all three states. Likewise, we have received detailed applications which have been passed for Ravensbury and for the first two stages in terms of high path in terms of Eastfields. Clarion haven't submitted their application, we are hopeful it will come shortly but there also be a report in relation to regeneration coming to the September Council meeting. We believe it is important that the full Council discusses these issues and that will be brought forward. We know that Eastfield state does need to be regenerated and it does need to be redeveloped. We are also looking at ways and means that it can be expedient, everyone deserves to have a decent house, thank you.

### **From Councillor Ed Gretton to the Cabinet Member for Housing, Regeneration and the Climate Emergency:**

Does the cabinet member feel a sense of shame that he has failed to protect West Barnes and the wider borough from predatory development due to his administration's failure to demonstrate a five-year housing land supply?

### **Reply**

No. This application was refused by the Merton Council planning applications committee. Government's planning rules make it increasingly difficult for local authorities to defend Planning Application Committee refusals. The National Planning Policy Framework, London Plan and Merton's Local Plan are all pro-growth to address the ongoing housing crisis which recognises the need to deliver more homes,

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nationally and in London given the housing shorting. The Government's inspector concluded that the scheme in West Barnes did not, in their view demonstrate significant harm to the character of the area.

The comment is also dismissive of the hard work and determination officers have invested in preparing the local plan, borough character study, small sites tool kit and other supplementary planning documents to ensure Merton develops and grows appropriately whilst delivering much needed housing.

### **Supplementary**

Thank you, Mr Mayor. I asked the cabinet member for housing about his failure they demonstrate the five-year housing land supply which left very embarrassingly for this Council and Borough. Are planning committee's decision to reject the Tesco towers and Billington Road being overturned. So given that as he failed to protect the residents of West Barnes against the predatory development and as he failed to protect the integrity of our own planning committee. Will he apologise to the residents of West Barnes or will he apologise to this Council for the embarrassment and humiliation he has brought to our planning committee its integrity. Will he offer his resignation tonight to this Chamber.

### **Reply**

I would like to thank Cllr Gretton for his supplementary and the planning decision was approved by a Planning Inspector and the Secretary of State could have had the right to have called that in, that Secretary of State is Robert Jenrick. the democratically elected committee. Merton refused this planning application the conservative Secretary of State overturned it. Under their planning reforms residents would not even have a say in terms of that and I think that would be a detrimental impact as well. These questions really need to be directed towards Mr Jenrick, Mr Jenrick could have called this in like he has many other applications. He is obviously making excuses for his Secretary of State because he's the person who lays the blame for this one going through. In terms of housing supply as well we have had in terms of the local plan the sites plan for the next five years, that sets out in terms of homes within this Borough. We are aware of challenges in terms of supply and given the number of small sites that do exist here in Merton. There is a need to build more homes in the Borough that something and we want to see happen and that is going to lead to challenges going forward. We have been told we have to deliver more homes, Mr Jenrick wants us to deliver 1400 homes, that thankfully is 900 and it is a challenging housing target. We know this as well has indeed in the Borough, it's time that the conservatives accept that we do need to have more homes provided here in Merton, instead of having a nimby approach to every kind of development that comes before us, thank you.

**From Councillor Paul Kohler to the Cabinet Member for Housing, Regeneration and the Climate Emergency**

Given the shortage of affordable housing in Merton, and the apparent lack of progress, since my previous question asking what the Council was proposing to do with the vacant Virgin Active site, will the Cabinet Member please provide an update detailing whether anything has been achieved in the last 3 years beyond the recent commitment to include the site in the local plan?

**Reply**

As a council, the pandemic has had an impact on the market which confirmed it would have been unwise to market the site until matters had returned to a condition suitable for marketing. The Council is still working to dispose of the site with housing likely to be preferred use of the site. We hope to be able to provide a further update shortly on future options for the site.

**Supplementary**

Thank you, Mr Mayor, and thank you Cllr Whelton your answer. You have had a tough night tonight. You will be pleased to know that my plaudits don't stop there, the budget active site has been inactive since 2018 and I congratulate you on your foresight, in doing nothing for two years in anticipation of pandemic, results in a third human activity can you please explain why in light of your failure to achieve more than 30% affordable housing during the current Council term you delayed so long. Why giving your answer, you are now proposing to sell the site on the open market rather turn it into a community Land Trust. Something I remind you your previous boss Cllr Alambritis promise to pursue the Merton citizen's hustings prior to the last local election, thank you.

**Reply**

Thank you, Cllr Kohler, for your supplementary answer. Part of the delay was in relation to this site as it was designated for leisure use. The redesignation has to be put through in terms of making the site into housing is something obviously we are committed to bringing forward in terms of options and in terms of disposable. As cabinet member we are going to look at bringing the sites forward in terms of usage. I will say to council in terms of the overall housing supply, all the housing sites combined would only supply 450 in the borough, if all of them were developed with just showing the sheer scale of housing. I said earlier tonight things will be coming forward in terms of housing in the Borough shortly. We will be taking a decision, the pandemic has had an impact I think we have to recognise that but we are obviously determined to build more homes as a Council, thank you.

**From Councillor Joan Henry to the Cabinet Member for Housing, Regeneration and the Climate Emergency:**

Can you update us on the council's Housing Strategy?

**Reply**

The council's draft housing delivery strategy will be recommended to Cabinet at their meeting on 12<sup>th</sup> July 2021 for public consultation. Should Cabinet agree, we will publish the draft strategy for at least six weeks and the feedback from residents, landowners, social housing providers and others will be used to inform the draft strategy.

**Supplementary**

Thank you, Mr Mayor, and thank you to the Cabinet member for his reply. In Pollards Hill where I represent along with yourself and Cllr Mundy, many have expressed concerns about overcrowded accommodation and are looking to be rehoused through the Housing strategy that steps will be taken to increase supply including social homes for rent.

**Reply**

I'd like to thank Cllr Henry for her supplementary. That is why we are bringing forward Housing supply and strategy, which will open up that discussion about how to supply more homes. I think all of us are well aware of the number of overcrowding issues, to only have 194 nominations in the last year 18 of those were three bedroomed homes. This shows that the level of overcrowding which does exist in the Borough and that is an issue in terms of the Eastfields Estate and the other Estates where overcrowding issues do need to be addressed and do need to be taken seriously. As a Council we are determined to see an increase in supply but it has been challenging given that the amount of money available for social housing has been slashed by the government, since 2010. That is something we are determined to deliver, thank you.

**From Councillor Daniel Holden to the Cabinet Member for Housing, Regeneration and the Climate Emergency:**

The Labour administration has failed the residents of the Eastfields estate for years; is this down to the negligence of this Labour administration or the cabinet member's personal incompetence?

**Reply**

I absolutely reject the suggestion that the Labour administration and myself have failed Eastfields Estate residents for years The circumstances where the Council has

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control over any housing association is limited, it is the social housing regulator which has the overall powers relating to the regulation of the housing association sector. The ability of the Council to interfere with housing association business is limited to its statutory duties. Where issues of disrepair have been raised with either myself, fellow ward councillors or the relevant MP they have been raised with the Clarion Housing Group and its predecessors Merton Priory Homes and Circle.

### **Supplementary**

Thank you, Mr Mayor, thank you to the cabinet member for his reply. Let's be clear about the facts Cabinet member, in November 2016 in this Council Chamber voted to re-apply the decent homes standard and it's your job as a Cabinet member to enforce that this is your failure. You should be apologising and not making weak excuses will you do the decent thing and resign.

### **Reply**

In terms of Cllr Holden's strategy in terms of the decent home's standard, he was aware of that that was agreed by the Council. There has to be a level of Housing that is bought up, we have been very clear to carry in Housing in terms of that. What I will say about the conservative opposition it's been no of constructive things but how to find solutions. It's been negativity, we stop transferred under 2010 when your lot were running the Council, but clearly there is issues that do have to be actually addressed. We have been very clear it will take a long time for those Estates to be regenerated, but that Housing needs to be improved in the interim as well, because people deserve to have a decent standard of living, thank you

### **From Councillor David Dean to the the Cabinet Member for Housing, Regeneration and the Climate Emergency:**

Why have you let down the people of Eastfields?

### **Reply**

I absolutely reject the suggestion that I have let down the people of Eastfields Estate. The overall responsibility for ensuring that the homes on the Estate are properly maintained and do not fall into disrepair is the Clarion Housing Group This is their responsibility as Landlord and not elected members The circumstances where the Council has control over any housing association is limited , it is the social housing regulator which has the overall powers relating to the regulation of the housing association sector . The ability of the Council to interfere with housing association business is limited to its statutory duties. Where issues of disrepair have been raised with myself I raised these with the Clarion Housing Group

We have heard from Michelle Reynolds, Chief Operating Officer at Clarion who admits that their service to the Eastfields tenants was not what they would have hoped for and that they have developed robust actions plans to resolve matters . I can assure you that I will be holding Clarion to their word on this and will monitoring

closely their performance across not just Eastfields Estate but across all Merton Estates.

**From Councillor Carl Quilliam to the Cabinet Member for Local Environment and Green Spaces:**

Can the Cabinet member tell us how recent issues around refuse collection on estates being tackled?

**Reply**

Within the London Borough of Merton there are in excess of 84,000 household of which 19% of the properties are flats (16,000). The housing estates make up 40% of our flats across 40 separate developments which are managed by 17 separate Housing associations and Managing agents. The two largest housing associations are Clarion Housing Group and Moat.

It is important to note that it is the responsibility of the landlord - housing associations and managing agents to manage all waste on their respective sites and to provide the necessary infrastructure to ensure all waste is containerised to the approved specification outlined by the Council to facilitate regular collection.

Following the service review and changes in Oct 2018, the main operational challenge that has arisen is focused where housing estates have mixed property types, which utilise individual wheeled bin collections in conjunction with communal collections. It has proven, in practice that there is an over utilisation of the communal bins as opposed to using the individual wheelie bins provided. This has led to capacity issues with certain communal containers, which can be susceptible to increased fly tipping and disposal of bulky items.

To better understand the challenges being faced by our residents and the service provider, we have established a Stakeholder Forum with the housing associations along with setting up site specific 'task and finish' groups to assist in redesigning the service. This has been successful and, as example, the Watermeads Estate, managed by Clarion, has successfully worked in partnership with both the resident association and officers from the Council to ensure an optimal and sustainable services is delivered which encourages and supports residents to recycle. In addition, the service has been providing support, advice and guidance to Clarion to improve the waste collection arrangements at the Eastfields Estate. This has led to the installation of large waste bin storage areas and the service continues to work closely with Clarion, temporarily providing a weekly collection across the estate for both property types.

This partnership approach has been successful in Pollards Hill, working closely with Moat Housing, and we are in the process of finalising the last of the phased roll out of a new purpose-built waste stores across the estate.



**From Councillor Eloise Bailey to the Cabinet Member for Housing, Regeneration and the Climate Emergency**

Since 2018 we have been asking for a private landlords licensing scheme to be introduced, as the council has been so slow in taking this work forward, and given the dreadful conditions faced by residents in homes provided by Clarion, could the Cabinet Member please commit to appointing a Tenants' Champion, along the lines of that in place in Richmond?

**Reply**

As Cabinet Member I have tasked officers to continue to explore all options to improve the housing conditions of all its residents, and this includes planning for a Selective Licensing Scheme. I would point out that a Selective Licensing Scheme would not improve the housing conditions of tenants living in Clarion housing stock as housing associations are exempt in accordance with the Selective Licensing of Houses Order 2004. Prior to the Covid 19 pandemic officers were carrying out due diligence as to the merits of a selective licensing scheme. This included the research of relevant legislation and guidance. Selective licence submissions were made by a range of Councils (accepted and rejected by MHCLG) and were reviewed to identify lessons learned and good practice. Meetings were held with LB Waltham Forest and LB Enfield, and a data analytics company that assisted the successful introduction of schemes in England and extensive data analysis carried out on a wide range of Merton ward data relevant to the regulatory criteria. However, following the outbreak of the Covid19 pandemic and the disruption and challenges this has brought to our community further work has been delayed. We are also conscious that several councils including Brent, Croydon and Liverpool have also had their application for renewal of the schemes rejected by the Secretary of State due to the evidential base not being robust. Officers have been asked to continue reviewing the position as to the viability and effectiveness of such a scheme as the benefits of selective landlord licensing for improving the conditions of tenants in the private sector is widely recognised. As cabinet member I am aware of the Tenants Champion Scheme operating in Richmond, and whilst I am sure it offers benefits to Richmond residents, its roles and commitments mirrors the work already being undertaken by ward councillors and officers working in Merton. Importantly it points out to residents that it expects residents of housing association homes to take up issues of disrepair with their landlord in the first instance.

**From Councillor David Williams to the the Cabinet Member for Housing, Regeneration and the Climate Emergency:**

Does the Cabinet Member think that forcing Eastfields residents to live in squalid, damp, rotting homes that are infested with rodents should be a resigning matter?

**Reply**

I absolutely reject the suggestion that I should be resigning regarding this matter, as I have worked tirelessly as Cabinet Member to improve the housing conditions and

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choices of our residents . As Cabinet member I have taken the lead on major housing challenges . During the Covid 19 pandemic I have ensured that officers delivered the everyone in principle for rough sleepers as well as ensuring that rogue Landlords have had criminal penalties imposed upon them , the most recent being in April 2021 when a fine of some £ 16k was imposed. I can offer my assurances that I will seek to improve the housing conditions on the Eastfields Housing Estate by approaching the matter with Clarion with the same degree of commitment and tenacity that I have used in other housing matters

### **From Councillor Laxmi Attawar to the Cabinet Member for Local Environment and Green Spaces:**

What is being done to help and support community engagement in the borough's green spaces?

### **Reply**

*The service, as part of its core principles, provides community engagement and support to active groups involved in the management and use of our Parks and Open Spaces. Typical engagement and support is provided on a site-specific nature or focused on the mutual objectives when working with a specific group, such as the Tree Wardens. Our work with specific Parks has been beneficial and six of our parks have achieved and maintained Green Flag status.*

Recent examples of work of support and engagement with community groups involves work at;

- Morden Park – working with key members of the Friends group about events and how we will work to mitigate negative impacts
- Wimbledon Park – significant engagement and consultation whilst designing the planned necessary works for the lake. While also providing engagement and responding to recommendations involving events.
- Canons HLF – Community Engagement Officer is employed to provide regular meetings with stakeholders and to steer the project based of agreed recommendations.
- Dundonald Recreation Ground – the installation of a concession kiosk was a response to stakeholders and the service worked to provide agreeable and sustained solutions to operate this activity in a site sensitive manner.

Further work is being planned by the service to develop a Green Spaces Strategy which draws on the work undertaken by the Merton Green Infrastructure Study (2020), the Playing Pitch Strategy (2019), the Climate Change Strategy and the developing Tree Strategy, which will further develop links with and support with the community and key stakeholders.