

Merton Council Council

15 September 2021

Supplementary Agenda 5

21 Councillor Non-Priority Questions and Replies

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Council 15 September 2021
Councillor Non-Priority Questions

From Councillor Hayley Ormrod to the Cabinet Member for Housing, Regeneration and the Climate Emergency:

How much has the council spent on the derelict site where Virgin Active used to be since Virgin gave notice, and how much revenue has the council earned from the site over the same period of time?

Reply

Acquisition of leasehold interest

Consideration £4,800,000

SDLT £229,500

Land registry fees £910

Expenditure Including security and demolition

2017-18 £13,998.06

2018-19 £544,898.14

2019-20 £109,000

Income

£3,500

From Councillor Thomas Barlow to the Leader of the Council:

Can the Leader please provide details of each consultation that has taken place since 2013 where the majority of residents have opposed the proposal? And of these how many proposals have been taken forward regardless?

Reply

It is not practically possible to research and report on this question without extensive work. The Council undertakes a significant amount of consultation in reaching decisions. Some of this consultation is statutory and some discretionary. In all cases the decisions are reached taking into account a range of factors with the views of residents being one important area. Consultation is sometimes confused with referenda where the result determines the decision. The Council seeks to make rational decisions taking a balanced view of all relevant matters, which includes, vitally, the views of residents – a fact I hold in the utmost importance, as exemplified by the rolling out of Your Merton, the largest consultation exercise ever undertaken in the borough.

From Cllr Hina Bokhari to the Cabinet Member for Women and Equalities

Since, February 2020, what progress has been made to make Merton a Borough of Sanctuary (by upholding all its pledges) other than finally joining the Lift the Ban coalition in June 2021? And how many refugees from Afghanistan will be welcomed to Merton, what is the plan to ensure that their physical & mental health will be supported and that suitable accommodation will be provided, acknowledging that

there is a desperate need for emergency Council funding top up from the Government?

Reply

The council works closely with colleagues in the voluntary and community sector to coordinate help and support to those seeking refuge in the borough. Recently we have coordinated efforts to support over 100 asylum seekers placed in the borough by the Home Office. We grant fund agencies who provide help and advice to asylum seekers and migrants, for example Citizens Advice, South West London Law Centre and the Association of Polish Families. We have a Hate Crime Strategy with a very clear 'no tolerance' to hate crime and regularly publicise this e.g. through 'Your Merton'. We have developed a network of third part reporting sites for hate crime as well as monthly hate crime advice surgeries. The Council formally signed up to the Lift the Ban Coalition on 22 June 2021 making it clear our support for the right for asylum seekers to be able to work in the UK.

The Home Office has contacted local authorities asking them if they can help resettle Afghan families including those who worked with British Forces in Afghanistan over the last 20 years. Specifically they are looking for family homes of 3 bedrooms or more. With no housing stock of our own we are working with housing associations, community networks and the private sector to identify suitable family sized accommodation. This is no easy task and we are working hard to pursue several leads.

In the meantime we are working with our partners in the voluntary sector to put in place a network of support to welcome Afghan refugees to the borough and help them settle in. We have some fantastic groups in the borough who we have worked with in the past to support refugees and in particular those organisations who have supported families through the Community Sponsorship Scheme. We are in close contact with these organisations.

We have worked with the Chamber of Commerce and Merton Connected (previously MVSC) to set up an appeal for donations to support [refugees and migrants](#) as part of our commitment to being a Borough of Sanctuary. The council has donated £15,000 to help support local VCS organisations that support refugees and migrants arriving in our borough..

However, we are starting to see a trickle of Afghan families presenting as homeless outside of the arrangements put in place by the Home Office. Whilst the responsibility for temporary accommodation post quarantine sits with the Home Office we have offered them temporary accommodation whilst we liaise with the Home Office on how the situation is best managed going forward.

From Cllr Eloise Bailey to the Cabinet Member for Partnerships, Public Safety and Tackling Crime

In April, the Council held an extraordinary meeting called by the Liberal Democrats regarding the local response to violence against women and girls. In this meeting women councillors shared very personal stories in order to ensure the gravity of the situation was understood. Can the Cabinet Member please tell us what action has been taken to follow up on the recommendation of the meeting?

Reply

Following a members motion and a report submitted on violence against women and girls, full council on 21st April resolved as follows:

That the council consider and note the content of the report, recognising that misogyny is systemic, and acknowledging the hurt and anger expressed more recently by women and girls in response to the murder of Sarah Everard, which was in part calling for their lived experience to be listened to and real action taken to address their concerns, Council calls on Cabinet to:

(a) develop safe and confidential opportunities for women and girls to share their experiences with the Council and other appropriate authorities to inform their work in changing male behaviour to reduce VAWG; and (b) to explore how restorative justice processes might be utilised to provide victims with an additional form of support and means of reducing VAWG.

In response to this, Safer Merton have established a Task Group which has met monthly to look at how this can be developed further, considered good practice and will be preparing a report for members setting out what the council currently does, gaps, recommendations and resource implications. The task group have made good progress, this has included:

1. Developing a communications plan to raise awareness and consideration of a safe platform where women and girls can share their views.
2. Identified a set of focus groups where key cohorts can be engaged with to hear about their experiences, views and suggestions – a members focus group has been proposed – further detail of this will be provided in the final report
3. Submitted a bid to the Safer Streets Fund – focussing on the safety of women and girls
4. Submitted a bid for the Night Time Economy Fund – focussing on the safety of women and girls – we are awaiting the outcome of this
5. Working with the licensing team to develop closer working with businesses and their commitment to the night time charter and the safety of women and girls

6. Considered good practice and how other boroughs are responding to this for example Kingston, Croydon, Barking and Dagenham, United Nations recommendations, the Mayors Night Time Charter
7. Produced a data profile on Sexual violence, Rape, sexual indecent assault – to further understand the trend in Merton – following an evidence based approach
8. Officers have met with organisations that deliver restorative justice to explore if this is something that can be used to address VAWG – further detail of this will be in the final report

The outcome of the Task group will be to:

- Develop a clear partnership set of actions that respond to the safety of women and girls
- Incorporate this work in the Violence against women and girls strategic plan – currently being developed
- Understand the trends of incidents in the borough and the profile of victims and offenders
- Secure funding and resources to deliver a borough wide communications campaign and increased engagement with businesses, expansion of the Street Pastors Scheme (all part of the recent bid submitted)
- Hold the focus groups to ensure wider engagement and raised awareness
- Consider any policy, strategic or operational areas we can improve on
- Produce the report for members – supported by the communications plan, Focus group plan and delivery plan to ensure this work continues and is recognised as part of the VAWG Strategy and delivery

From Councillor Nigel Benbow to the Cabinet Member for Housing, Regeneration and the Climate Emergency:

Since the excellent news for step-free access at Wimbledon Park and Motspur Park, can the Cabinet Member explain why no real progress has been made on accessibility improvements to our transport infrastructure across Merton for people with disabilities and others with limited mobility, including older people and those with young families?

Reply

The Council will continue to work with TfL, Network Rail and Transport Operators to seek improved accessibility on public transport services and at stations. This includes the recently completed lift at Wimbledon Park and proposals for future step-free access at Tooting Train Stations.

We have supported step-free access at Haydons Road station and are disappointed that the train operator Thameslink has refused to support creating a second entrance which was part of a S106 agreement on an adjacent development on Caxton Road.

New highway schemes are designed with consideration to guidance on accessibility and the Council has continued to allocate a proportion of the annual Local

Implementation Plan (LIP) funding specifically to accessibility improvement schemes on the highway network, including at bus stops to enhance accessibility.

From Councillor Hayley Ormrod to the Cabinet Member for Housing, Regeneration and the Climate Emergency:

Can the Council please advise why it is taking longer than usual to respond to residents who have decided to appeal PCNs?

Reply

The recent introduction of enforcement of 'school streets' during May, June, July 2021, throughout the borough has resulted in an increasing number of representations being received by the PCN Processing team.

Parking Services continue to respond to representations in line with any statutory deadlines and are taking action to further improve response times.

From Cllr Hayley Ormrod to the Cabinet Member for Children and Education:
With the number of pupils in school falling across the borough at the moment, what are the council's proposals to deal with this situation after 5 years of expanding schools, and what plans does the council have to help these schools financially?

Reply

This was also asked in the public questions to this meeting.

The council has already facilitated the reduction in the published admission number in schools by 10.5 forms of entry from 2016 to the present 2021/22 reception year entry. However, it is acknowledged that further work is required and a detailed paper is being presented to Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Panel on 29 September 2021.

As per the Children and Young People paper to this Council, the broad strategy is as follows:

- Continue to encourage schools to reduce admissions numbers to multiples of 30 for education efficiency when practical to do so
- Encourage schools to work in cluster areas with the council to agree reductions in admission numbers at an area level
- Consider use of compatible alternative uses for space where appropriate such as primary age SEND Additional Resourced Provision when it can be agreed with schools
- Where appropriate consider alternative models to operate schools for school improvement and to manage a balanced budget e.g. hard and soft federations
- No plans to close schools

With regard to assisting school financially, the National Funding Formula is prescriptive in how schools are funded primarily on roll numbers. However, there is a 'schools causing concerns' budget that schools have collectively agreed to 'de-delegate' to the council to use strategically, sometimes to assist schools in the transition to smaller roll numbers.

From Cllr Jenifer Gould to the Joint Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children and Education

We know how important early years' education and socialisation are for children's lifelong learning. Unfortunately, following COVID this has been diminished for many young children. We also recognise the impact that communication problems can have on every aspect of life, with particular concern surrounding the long-term effects on young children. What support is available to parents to help their children with any communication problems, or speech and language difficulties, specifically for the age range 3-5 who may not be in education or accessing an education establishment? Also what targeted speech and language support is available for all school-age children without a EHCP (such as for those with a stammer or other speech impediment, or following a head injury)?

Reply

This was also asked in the priority questions to this meeting.

All children under 5, regardless of whether they are in a setting or not, can access speech and language therapy service, community paediatrics, physiotherapy and occupational therapy services through their health visitor/professional, where this is deemed necessary and a referral made and accepted.

If children are known to the Children with Disabilities service (CWD), they will have a social worker with whom parents can speak; social workers are also able to engage with the health visitor/professional who again will assess and signpost where appropriate.

Professionals who may be working with the families can also refer to a range of evidenced based parenting programmes and/or group programmes for children with additional needs around communication, speech and language in Children's Centres. (criteria apply). Families will be supported and encouraged to take up a place in an early years setting.

Parents can also source information on line, and there are a range of national programmes that have been produced to support parents help their children [Hungry Little Minds – Simple fun, activities for kids aged 0 – 5 \(campaign.gov.uk\)](#) , as well as our own Face book page [Merton information for families | Facebook](#)

For school aged children without an EHCP, and who have speech and language issues such as a stammer, speech impediment or head injury: these would require clinical speech and language therapy, which is provided by the NHS through a contract with CLCH. Access to these services does not require an EHCP.

For children in mainstream school with general speech and language difficulties, without and EHCP, the Local Authority Language and Learning service offers a school buy back service that can be used to support pupils. Under lockdown, therapy for children continued even when children were not in school, as on line therapy. This meant that there was more interaction between therapist and parents. We will look to see how we can build on this and enhance the LA offer moving forwards.

Children in mainstream school often also have access to broader speech and language support from their school staff. For example, more than 20 primary schools in Merton took part in the Department for Education-funded Nuffield Early Language Intervention in 2021, an evidence-based programme that trains up Teaching Assistants to assess pupils' language skills and deliver targeted one-to-one and group sessions for pupils in Reception year

From Cllr Najeeb Latif to the Cabinet Member for Children and Education:

Since the passing of the Children Act in 2004, there has been a growing emphasis by councils to actively involve children and young people in the development and evaluation of services. Can the Cabinet Member confirm that the council did indeed involve children and young people and which services were commissioned or improved as a result of these consultations?

Reply

Listening to the voice of young people individually or collectively is key to service improvement. This can be how an individual young person is involved in the planning of their Education Health and Care plan or representatives of young people influencing the commissioning of a whole service. The aim is co-production whereby the young person is part of the decision making. Through that we gain their insight and perspective and they learn about process and possibilities and limiting factors. To support our work towards co- production we employ 4 young inspectors posts and we have seconded 4 more to public health to support our pandemic work. These young people are champions of other young people – they talk to young people through various processes to feed ideas into processes of service improvement. Below are examples of where young people have been involved in commissioning of services, reviews of services, implementation of strategies and subsequent action plans and leading the consultation with young people. As a result all these services have been improved and will continue to be improved as we progress to reviewing existing services and remodelling future services.

- As part of the commissioning process for the Risk and Resilience Service, young people were consulted regarding the development of the service specification and contribute to the evaluation of bids submitted as part of the procurement process. In addition to this, Catch 22 (the current provider of the risk and resilience service in Merton), consult regularly with young people via surveys and face to face conversations to ensure that the service remains fit for purpose and relevant for young people in Merton. An example of this would be the extension of the c-card scheme that is made available in community based settings, meaning easier access for young people.
- The commissioning of Mencap, Carers Services and Advocacy services (priority services) were also co-produced with young people. Young people were involved in the development of the specification, tender evaluation and on-going surveys to ensure continuous service improvement.
- Young people and their families were also consulted (via Kids First) in the service model of the Educational Occupational Health Services. This was fed into the specification and evaluation. User voice is monitored via contract management meetings

In addition to commissioned piece of work, officers regularly consult with the young inspectors in order to steer and influence key pieces of work. Examples of this would be:

- Working with young inspectors over the commissioning of a provider to conduct a young persons survey regarding the impact of covid and subsequent lockdowns on the overall wellbeing of young people. A young inspector was key in designing the service specification, is a key member of the steering group, and was an evaluator of bids submitted as part of the work.
- Officers have engaged with a group of young people with educational needs in order to review a website specifically designed to promote health and social care services for young people in Merton. The work they young people are conducting is to review the website for SEND accessibility and feedback to officers to ensure relevance and ease of use for all young people and improve the user experience regardless of educational ability. Officers have worked with 4 young inspectors to develop and implement a COVID Young Champions project to support the Merton COVID response. Through engagement with the Young Inspectors, two projects were develop. One which targeted 18-30 year olds through online meetings to share latest COVID information and answer their questions facilitated by Young Inspectors. The second project developed an under 18's Young COVID Champions programme in schools, where young leaders and champions support the COVID response, disseminating appropriate information, developing online videos (over 5,000 views) on topics and engaging with young people in their schools to feed into plans.

- Through our commissioned services, listening to the voice of children and young people and their parents is embedded within our contracts. An example of this is Central London Community Health Care (CLCH) who deliver Health Visiting and School Nursing services commissioned by LA as well as a number of specialist services commissioned by CCG. Pre-COVID on a monthly basis, the service provides a Clinical Quality Report which includes undertaking a patient story. This involves a more in-depth engagement with a family/child/young person to understand their experiences of the services delivered. The patient story helps to identify both the positive and negative experiences of clients and is used to make service improvements. Monthly Patient Reported Experience Measure (PREMS) are also provided as part of the report.
- Officers have engaged with young inspectors regarding the promotion of sexual health services in the borough as officers wish to seek advice from young people over service development and improvement to ensure that the service is delivered in a timely and safe way.
- Officers work closely with young inspectors in Merton to promote their (YI's) information films via the Getting It On website. This improves the offer of the Getting It On website as means young people are directly involved in developing content that is produced by and for young people in the borough.
- A future piece of work for young people is collaboration around the development of health and wellbeing hubs in the borough – this piece of work is at a very early stage of development and young inspectors are being consulted to ensure that officers are heading in the right direction.
- YP are members of the Carers Implementation board and have chosen the priority outcomes that Merton will aim to achieve for them this year.
- Young inspectors attend the 'challenge' meetings, holding us to account in our delivery of the outcomes referenced above.
- We are currently reviewing/process mapping the current practice and delivery pathways of all 3 priority services in order to embed more opportunities for YP voice. Across the 3 services, the decision has been taken to invite YP into our monitoring meetings to directly feedback on/challenge/highlight quality and impact of practice.
- KS4 ESOL provision: This is provision commissioned in collaboration with Canterbury Crescent and accommodates in-year KS4 learners who require support to communicate in English. Every year the learners decide how they want to celebrate their time in the provision, pre Covid a trip to the seaside and fish and chips has been very popular as it is an experience they think every British teenager has had.
- Easter Holiday Activity Programme: Our team supported the development and delivery of a holiday activity programme for school age children entitled to free school meals. In order to achieve additional value, we supported young people aged 16 plus to co-design and co-deliver the project. This worked extremely well as our younger residents responded to their teenaged neighbours in an exceptionally positive way and our teenage residents thrived with the responsibility. We are very proud that some of the YP engaged to co-design and co-deliver have characteristics of extreme vulnerability and that working with them in this way kept them safe, fed, positively occupied and exposed to information, advice and guidance on targeted services. After every

activity, our young residents were asked to provide feedback which immediately informed how/if the activity was delivered the next day. They received feedback on how we had acted on what they had said so that they heard and could see how their voice mattered. At the end of each session our teenage residents had a debrief in which we collaboratively planned the following day. The quality of youth voice and youth co-delivery was noted by the Department for Education and used as a national example of best practice in the guidance they released for Local Authorities. They titled the case study: Effectively engaging teenagers and young people in helping with younger participants. Stop and Search: During an employability sessions delivered in August 20 a group of 40 young people began discussing their relationship with the police and desire increase shared understanding. They designed an activity which we delivered with them and on their behalf. This activity is still ongoing and led by the Participation team.

- KICKSTART: We have been supporting Merton's aim to recruit over 30 YP into Kickstart placements and have been hosting targeted job-clubs, conducting interviews and providing wrap around support. YP have been asked about how they have experienced the process and their feedback has resulted to adaptations in the recruitment process and language used.

From Cllr Nigel Benbow to the Cabinet Member for Children and Education:

Can the Cabinet Member please list all the education grants that have been applied for since May 2018? Please list all successful and unsuccessful applications.

Reply

Officers have identified 28 grants that have been received from the Department of Education in this time. In addition to this the council also successfully applied to the What Works Centre for funding to support the Social Workers in Schools project, the Designated Safeguarding Leads (DSL) supervision in primary schools project, and the DSL supervision in secondary schools project (with a focus on Child Sexual Abuse). There have also been successful bids to roll out the Mental Health Trailblazers work with schools across the Borough, and, in conjunction with the Wandle Teaching School, to create an Early Years Hub in the local area

From Cllr Nigel Benbow to the Cabinet Member for Children and Education:

Can the Cabinet Member for Children and Education confirm what action was planned/provided post Covid19 by the Children's and Education Services to support children and young adults with special educational needs and disabilities?

Reply

Since March 2020 when we experienced the first lockdown, children with special educational needs and disabilities have been supported in a variety of ways by education settings, and also by council officers. In the context of their education being prioritised by the Government, more detail of local action can be found in the

reports shared with the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee at the time

(<https://democracy.merton.gov.uk/ieListMeetings.aspx?Act=earlier&CId=153&D=202201121915&MD=ielistmeetings>).

As education has returned closer to 'normal operation' children and young people and their families have been supported in the following ways

- School provision following the March 'reopening' focused on reconnecting, and on pupils' social and emotional needs to support a return to face to face education. This was particularly focused on pupils with aspects of SEND, with schools implementing ELSA (Emotional Literacy Support) and other interventions for identified pupils. Schools looked at their PSHE programmes in particular to see how pupils' mental health and wellbeing could be supported.
- They also focused on identifying where gaps in learning lay, often identified through 'softer' assessments on return. These were less likely to involve tests, using teacher assessment followed by targeted teaching within class or in small groups.
- Council officers encouraged and supported schools to ensure there was a focus on summer term assessments, to underpin effective handover of information and to ensure that the September academic starting points for pupils was well understood.
- Schools used their catch up premium to support identified pupils, including those with SEND.
- Some schools also engaged with the National Tutoring Programme (NTP) to support pupils, including those with SEN. The NTP has specialist SEN tutors providers. Many Merton schools delivered tuition using their own staff who know pupils well.
- Summer schools held by all Merton secondary schools included provision for pupils with SEN to support year 6 to year 7 transfer. Over the summer holiday the Holiday Activity and Food (HAF) programme also supported some children with SEND>
- There was online transition support for children moving from Year 6 to Year 7.
- Over this period council work to improve local SEND provision included a local focus on meeting needs of pupils at SEN Support. This work was developed through the SENCO forum and the SENCO working group which continued to meet online.
- Advisers and therapists are working as 'normal' with schools and with individual pupils.
- A range of support services such as parenting, family support, group and individual work is being offered to a range of families with children across the age ranges.
- There is a new Occupational Therapy contract in place supporting children and young people.
- Children and young people can continue to access a range of out of schools services, including short breaks.

From Cllr Omar Bush to the Cabinet Member for Children and Education:

How do the educational attainment levels of children in care compare with children that are not in care?

Reply

Research suggests that when children in care are compared with children in the general population, they tend to have poorer outcomes in areas such as educational attainment and mental and physical health (Rahilly and Hendry, 2014). However, this is not necessarily the case when compared with other groups of children who are likely to have had similar experiences, such as children in need. One study, which analysed government data, found that looked after children who were continuously in care in England had better educational attainment than children in need (Sebba et al., 2015).

The picture is similar in Merton to that seen nationally. With regards to GCSE attainment in 2020: there were 20 Merton children in care. 25% of these achieved a standard grade 9-4 pass in English and maths, in comparison with 24% of children in care nationally. Merton children who have been in care for at least 12 months tend to do better than those who have come into care more recently. In 2020, 38% of that cohort achieved the standard pass in English and maths.

As always with such small cohorts these percentages need to be viewed with significant caution. However they are well below the proportions of the wider Year 11 population achieving the standard pass: in Merton 75% achieved that benchmark, and nationally it was 71%.

Children in Care Standard 9-4 pass (GCSE) in English and Maths (Merton compared to National / Regional) 2020					
<i>Total number of children in care in Merton in Year 11</i>	<i>Number of Merton CiC (Y11) for at least 12 months</i>	<i>% (Merton children in care)</i>	<i>% (Merton children in care for at least 12 months)</i>	<i>% Outer London</i>	<i>% England</i>
20	16	25%	38%	23%	24%

From Cllr Nigel Benbow to the Cabinet Member for Children and Education:

Will the Cabinet Member for Children and Education confirm whether the council has applied for Decarbonisation Grant Funding to deliver a target of 'net-zero' emissions for the schools in the most polluted areas, particularly at High Path, in Abbey? What has been done to date, including the road safety measures for the pupils and the promised trees?

Reply

The council was successful in receiving some Decarbonisation funding from government earlier this year, but the priority was projects that would be the most straightforward and impactful to deliver such as Whatley Avenue which has recently been agreed by Cabinet to be special school provision and the refurbishment of the building can be integrated. Buildings in higher pollution areas have not been prioritised for decarbonisation projects, as local pollution and decarbonisation is not necessarily the same thing.

With regard to road safety measures and the trees funded from the Section 106 agreement at High Path, this is a matter for the Cabinet member for Local Environment and Green Spaces but I understand officers are awaiting TfL's approvals for signal works which have been delayed due to TfL's covid/financial position, and with regard to trees where £50,000 was provided by the DfE as part of the Harris Academy Wimbledon planning approval, officers in Greenspaces are completing the stage of identifying the suitable locations to plant in this autumn season.

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