

Merton Council Council

15 September 2021

Supplementary Agenda 5

22 Supplementary Questions and Replies

1 - 46

This page is intentionally left blank

1. From: Jonathan Foster

To the Cabinet Member for Housing, Regeneration and the Climate Emergency

Why has an assisted Living home for clients with mental health issues and challenging behaviours been allowed to open in Wydell Close Morden? Especially as it is in a semi detached home and in a small close?

Reply

Supported living schemes of the type set up at Wydell Close are not required to be registered with the Council and there is also no requirement on service providers to seek agreement from the Council to open such a service. The registering authority is the Care Quality Commission. In this instance, the service provider's main location is at an address in Croydon, and this is where the Care Quality Commission registration relates to. It is not uncommon, however, for supported living providers to operate services in other locations that do not need to be separately registered with the CQC as is the case here.

There may, depending on the nature of the property, be a need for the service provider or landlord to seek an HMO licence in relation to the property, but in this instance the property in question was already licensed with the Council, so no new application was required.

Since the Council became aware of the concerns raised by neighbours about the use of the property as a supported living scheme officers have been working with the service provider, the CQC and other parties to resolve those concerns. The current situation is that the supported living provider has no individuals placed with them at the Wydell Close property and the Council has placed a temporary suspension on any new admissions to the scheme, which has been formally communicated to the service provider and to all other London boroughs. Further work is being undertaken to address the various concerns raised and to determine the future of the scheme and neighbours will be kept informed as this work progresses.

2. From: Barry Smith

To the Cabinet Member for Housing, Regeneration and the Climate Emergency

What percentage of residents' car parking permits are currently for electric vehicles, and how does the council plan to increase this number?

Reply

Approximately 1% of resident permits are for electric vehicles (EV). Measures to increase EV uptake include the £20 EV parking permit and roll-out of lamp column chargers in residential areas for people without private off-street parking. 90 lamp column chargers have been installed in recent months and a bid is being submitted for Government funding for additional chargers in the next year. We are awaiting the Transport for London EV Charging Infrastructure strategy and delivery plan for the city,

which is due this Autumn. This publication will inform our Merton EV strategy for 2022, subject to LIP monies being available.

Supplementary

Yeah thanks for the reply to my question. Your reply states that further electric vehicle charging provision is dependent on funds which may or may not be made available in the future. However companies such as “char.gy” have a business model which allows councils to install charging points on lampposts for example at zero cost to the council or even to which allow the council to make a profit. Why is the council not taking advantage of such possibilities to install more charging points now?

Reply

I want to thank Mr Smith for his supplementary question and for his original question and he raises a very important point. So the London Borough of Merton is in the top 20 of local authorities for electric vehicle charging points already. We are waiting for TfL’s guidance to inform a pan-london strategy so residents don’t need to register multiple accounts for electric vehicles, but this is a priority for us. Thank you.

3. From: Marguerite Landells To the Cabinet Member for Children and Education

Why does year 6 at Hillcross have 37 pupils this year? Is there are any chance (understanding that funding isn’t set) this may happen in other years in the school? The reason we have been given is funding.

Reply

The general background to this is that after an unprecedented 35% increase in pupil numbers in the 11 years to 2017/18 and the requirement to provide for an extensive expansion programme, the position changed in around 2016. This change had not been forecast in any of the national or London-based population or school roll projections. 2017/18 was the peak in primary school numbers and now the council and schools are needing to manage falling demand for primary school places.

While the greatest impact has been on reception year intakes there has also been a gradual loss of pupils through the year groups - for example, the 2020/21 Year 6 school roll was some 12% lower across Merton than when that year group was in reception.

Hillcross is rated Good by Ofsted, and expanded to three forms in 20xx in response to the growth outline. It is now one example of a school managing a declining pupil population in the context of the national funding formula meaning schools are funded almost wholly on a per-pupil basis, providing very little flexibility when pupil numbers change, and therefore needing to organise themselves to meet a balanced budget while still maintaining and raising standards. They are more impacted by some schools in being at the difficult middle ground of needing to have large class sizes for 2-forms, but

insufficient roll for 3-forms. Therefore the only options open to them are: to merge classes within years, thereby increasing class sizes; to merge classes between years, maintaining smaller classes but with mixed year groups in one class; or to continue as they, and risk going into deficit and all the consequences of that.

As a local authority, given the national policy of a parental preference based system, it is not possible to move pupils between schools or direct which schools pupils join in Reception. However, we have assisted schools, including Hillcross, to cap individual year groups to manage class sizes in the best way possible. Wherever possible, we encourage schools to have admission numbers be multiples of 30. However, it is hard to manage this where there are changes in the population of older year groups. Class sizes should be considered in the context of all the support staff associated with the class, not just the teacher. In the context of Hillcross they have increased the number of support staff to the affected year groups, ensuring that there is at least one member of support staff allocated to each of the Y4, Y5 and Y6 teams (classes) – previously there were only two support staff working across Y5 and Y6 combined; and two working across Y3 and Y4 combined. Class teams will work together in a range of ways including team teaching, working with targeted groups and ensuring children receive catch up sessions where appropriate. Council school improvement officers therefore support the school in implementing a strategy that has pupils' achievement at the heart, with staff numbers comparable to any equivalent school, but ensures the school can meet a balanced budget, which is being set by the national funding formula.

According to the last school census, in Merton there were six schools plus Hillcross with a class size over 30, all with one teacher and one assistant, though numbers were 34 or below. The council has not done any local research on the impact but as per Hillcross' letter to parents in July, the Educational Endowment Foundation measure the impact of small class sizes as relatively low in comparison to feedback, collaborative learning and metacognition.

In summary, while we can understand the concerns of a headline class of 37, given the changes in the pupil population schools have limited options when it comes to balancing their budgets, and have to make sensible decisions that are right for their school. Hillcross School has a carefully worked out plan by the school that has the support of the council school improvement officers.

4. From: Mrs Peyton

To the Cabinet Member for Children and Education

Can the council please explain the reason/s why pupils in year 6 at Hillcross primary school will be taught in classes of **37 pupils** in academic year 2021/22 and whether there is an opportunity for you to help reduce this and make year 6 a 3-form entry?

Reply

The general background to this is that after an unprecedented 35% increase in pupil numbers in the 11 years to 2017/18 and the requirement to provide for an extensive expansion programme, the position changed in around 2016. This change had not been forecast in any of the national or London-based population or school roll projections. 2017/18 was the peak in primary school numbers and now the council and schools are needing to manage falling demand for primary school places.

While the greatest impact has been on reception year intakes there has also been a gradual loss of pupils through the year groups - for example, the 2020/21 Year 6 school roll was some 12% lower across Merton than when that year group was in reception.

Hillcross is rated Good by Ofsted, and expanded to three forms in 20xx in response to the growth outline. It is now one example of a school managing a declining pupil population in the context of the national funding formula meaning schools are funded almost wholly on a per-pupil basis, providing very little flexibility when pupil numbers change, and therefore needing to organise themselves to meet a balanced budget while still maintaining and raising standards. They are more impacted by some schools in being at the difficult middle ground of needing to have large class sizes for 2-forms, but insufficient roll for 3-forms. Therefore the only options open to them are: to merge classes within years, thereby increasing class sizes; to merge classes between years, maintaining smaller classes but with mixed year groups in one class; or to continue as they, and risk going into deficit and all the consequences of that.

As a local authority, given the national policy of a parental preference based system, it is not possible to move pupils between schools or direct which schools pupils join in Reception. However, we have assisted schools, including Hillcross, to cap individual year groups to manage class sizes in the best way possible. Wherever possible, we encourage schools to have admission numbers be multiples of 30. However, it is hard to manage this where there are changes in the population of older year groups. Class sizes should be considered in the context of all the support staff associated with the class, not just the teacher. In the context of Hillcross they have increased the number of support staff to the affected year groups, ensuring that there is at least one member of support staff allocated to each of the Y4, Y5 and Y6 teams (classes) – previously there were only two support staff working across Y5 and Y6 combined; and two working across Y3 and Y4 combined. Class teams will work together in a range of ways including team teaching, working with targeted groups and ensuring children receive catch up sessions where appropriate. Council school improvement officers therefore support the school in implementing a strategy that has pupils' achievement at the heart, with staff numbers comparable to any equivalent school, but ensures the school can meet a balanced budget, which is being set by the national funding formula.

According to the last school census, in Merton there were six schools plus Hillcross with a class size over 30, all with one teacher and one assistant, though numbers were 34 or below. The council has not done any local research on the impact but as per Hillcross' letter to parents in July, the Educational Endowment Foundation measure the impact of

small class sizes as relatively low in comparison to feedback, collaborative learning and metacognition.

In summary, while we can understand the concerns of a headline class of 37, given the changes in the pupil population schools have limited options when it comes to balancing their budgets, and have to make sensible decisions that are right for their school. Hillcross School has a carefully worked out plan by the school that has the support of the council school improvement officers.

**5. From: Roy England
To the Cabinet Member for Housing, Regeneration and the Climate
Emergency**

359-361 Kingston Road: Why has no enforcement action been taken in respect of what are breaches of planning conditions?

Reply

Planning permission was granted under ref. 19/P0808 on 14 November 2019 for the following development: Demolition of existing retail and workshop. Erection of a 5 storey building containing A1, A2 AND A3 use and residential units. Consisting of 7 x two bedroom and 2 x one bedroom self contained flats. Associated car parking and service areas at ground level.

The permission was subject to a number of conditions requiring the submission of additional information before works could commence (pre-commencement conditions).

In March 2021 the Council became aware that some works to demolish and clear the site had commenced and following site visits by the Planning Enforcement Team in May 2021 the developer's agent agreed that he would submit a discharge of conditions application and that works would stop until the relevant conditions were discharged.

A condition discharge application was submitted on 26th June 2021, which sought to discharge all the pre-commencement conditions:

3 (MATERIALS)

4 (REFUSE AND RECYCLING),

8 (NOISE),

13 (SURFACE WATER DRAINAGE),

15 (DEMOLITION AND CONSTRUCTIONS LOGISTIC PLAN),

16 (NOISE),

19 (SOUNDPROOFING),
20 (CONTAMINATION),
22 (SCREENING TO ROOF TERRACES) &
29 (LANDSCAPING AND PLANTING)

However, the submission was lacking in important information needed to satisfy the requirements of the conditions, for the following reasons:

- Refuse and recycling collection arrangements require a large Council refuse vehicle to reverse into the service road which would not be acceptable. Further clarification and revision to this arrangement is required (condition 4).
- No surface water drainage plan has been submitted and the proposal does not meet the London Plan policy requirements in relation to runoff attenuation and rates Condition 13).
- The submitted demolition and construction logistics plan includes delivery times which coincide with peak hours and therefore further clarification and revision to this arrangement is required (condition 15).
- No details of soundproofing between the commercial units and residential units has been provided (condition 19).

The planning and enforcement service have made a number of attempts to contact the agent including an email dated 13 August to inform them that there were problems with the servicing arrangements proposed and that no further works should take place until such time as the pre-commencement conditions had been discharged. No response was received.

The Council's Planning Enforcement Officer have continued, without success to make contact by way of telephone calls and email. The Council has now written to the agent on 7th September to inform them of the continuing concerns relating to surface water drainage and delivery hours proposed and set out that a dialogue must be opened on this matter within the next 7 days or the Council would take formal enforcement action. Therefore, on 15th September 2021 if the developer has failed to contact the Council to resolve the outstanding matters to the satisfaction of the Council, the Council will consider taking enforcement action, which could include the serving of a Temporary Stop Notice ([section 171E of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990](#)) which would require that an activity which is a breach of planning control should stop immediately.

Supplementary

My question, thank you Mr Mayor, my question is a follow-up to that of number five on the list. I just would like to ask what more is there to consider before taking enforcement action, by whom, and how long it will take please?

Reply

I'd like to thank Mr England for his supplementary question. I think it outlines in terms of the steps we have to take before we can actually formally take enforcement action on this case. But I have asked officers to give a further report to myself following up on this council question, but we do take this issue with the utmost seriousness. Thank you.

6. From: Paula England

To the Cabinet Member for Housing, Regeneration and the Climate Emergency

Why was no enforcement action taken in respect of this vehicle during May 2020 to December 2020 when the vehicle was both driven and parked on the public highway? COVID is not an excuse for inaction given the length of time and the lifting of restrictions from time to time. *(vehicle details and location supplied)*

Reply

As Ms England has identified, 31 PCNs were issued to the vehicle registration she has referred to, from 22 May 2020 to December 2020. However, this vehicle was not parked on public highway but on private land. The enforcement of PCNs is a statutory process and must be adhered to at the risk of committing a procedural impropriety which could invalidate the PCNs issued.

As a result of the pandemic, and lockdown, and the subsequent introduction of emergency legislation, a number of the normal statutory processes were unable to take place within the usual time frames, and some of the emergency legislation specifically prohibited the enforcement of warrants by enforcement agents.

As matters now stand, warrants have been issued for all but one of the 31 PCNs and these cases are now with the enforcement agents to enforce. The legislation that grants authorities the civil enforcement powers to enforce parking restrictions places a legal requirement on the authority to only request the details of the vehicle owner at least 28 days after a PCN has been issued to the vehicle. The enforcing authority is legally obliged to do this for every single PCN issued to a vehicle. It is illegal for an enforcing authority to obtain the vehicle keeper details from another source e.g another PCN.

Only the DVLA can take enforcement action in relation to a lack of tax or SORN declaration, and potentially the police could take action against a vehicle for a lack of tax or insurance. The council's abandoned vehicles officer visited this site, but advised that the vehicle was in a good state of repair, and as such, had no powers to take any action.

The London Borough of Merton does not have any arrangements in place other than the data transfer files requesting and receiving keeper details, which is an automated process. Civil Enforcement Officers (CEO) do not have a facility to check a vehicle's tax or insurance or MOT details as this is not something that they can enforce.

The London Borough of Merton does not have a car pound, nor do we operate a towing service. As previously advised, as the enforcement of these issues has to follow a statutory process, we are not allowed to immobilise a vehicle until warrants have been issued, and that is only after the enforcement agents have sent an Enforcement Notice to the vehicle owner. As previously advised, emergency legislation prevented the enforcement of warrants until August / September 2020, and the London Borough of Merton enforcement agents did not start operating again until mid-October 2020.

We will, however, continue to explore how we can further improve services to ensure our highways are not despoiled by abandoned vehicles.

Supplementary

Thank you Mr Mayor. On this one, some basic research will indicate that the vehicle in question is registered to a one pound capital company, has no assets, and is currently in liquidation and hence there's no point in incurring costs in taking enforcement action. The only hope of recovery of the more than three thousand pounds owed to the council is in the value of the vehicle. Will the council take action to confiscate the vehicle and sell it in order to offset some of the amounts due to the council please?

Reply

I would thank Mr England for his supplementary question. Warrants have been issued for all but one of the 31 PCNs that have been issued and we will be following up with this. Thank you.

7. From: Richard Poole

To the Cabinet Member for Children and Education

To what extent have past and current policies of the council contributed to Hillcross primary school needing to teach year 6 in class sizes of 37 pupils in the academic year 2021/22?

Reply

The general background to this is that after an unprecedented 35% increase in pupil numbers in the 11 years to 2017/18 and the requirement to provide for an extensive expansion programme, the position changed in around 2016. This change had not been forecast in any of the national or London-based population or school roll projections. 2017/18 was the peak in primary school numbers and now the council and schools are needing to manage falling demand for primary school places.

While the greatest impact has been on reception year intakes there has also been a gradual loss of pupils through the year groups - for example, the 2020/21 Year 6 school roll was some 12% lower across Merton than when that year group was in reception.

Hillcross is rated Good by Ofsted, and expanded to three forms in 20xx in response to the growth outline. It is now one example of a school managing a declining pupil population in the context of the national funding formula meaning schools are funded almost wholly on a per-pupil basis, providing very little flexibility when pupil numbers change, and therefore needing to organise themselves to meet a balanced budget while still maintaining and raising standards. They are more impacted by some schools in being at the difficult middle ground of needing to have large class sizes for 2-forms, but insufficient roll for 3-forms. Therefore the only options open to them are: to merge classes within years, thereby increasing class sizes; to merge classes between years, maintaining smaller classes but with mixed year groups in one class; or to continue as they, and risk going into deficit and all the consequences of that.

As a local authority, given the national policy of a parental preference based system, it is not possible to move pupils between schools or direct which schools pupils join in Reception. However, we have assisted schools, including Hillcross, to cap individual year groups to manage class sizes in the best way possible. Wherever possible, we encourage schools to have admission numbers be multiples of 30. However, it is hard to manage this where there are changes in the population of older year groups. Class sizes should be considered in the context of all the support staff associated with the class, not just the teacher. In the context of Hillcross they have increased the number of support staff to the affected year groups, ensuring that there is at least one member of support staff allocated to each of the Y4, Y5 and Y6 teams (classes) – previously there were only two support staff working across Y5 and Y6 combined; and two working across Y3 and Y4 combined. Class teams will work together in a range of ways including team teaching, working with targeted groups and ensuring children receive catch up sessions where appropriate. Council school improvement officers therefore support the school in implementing a strategy that has pupils' achievement at the heart, with staff numbers comparable to any equivalent school, but ensures the school can meet a balanced budget, which is being set by the national funding formula.

According to the last school census, in Merton there were six schools plus Hillcross with a class size over 30, all with one teacher and one assistant, though numbers were 34 or below. The council has not done any local research on the impact but as per Hillcross' letter to parents in July, the Educational Endowment Foundation measure the impact of small class sizes as relatively low in comparison to feedback, collaborative learning and metacognition.

In summary, while we can understand the concerns of a headline class of 37, given the changes in the pupil population schools have limited options when it comes to balancing their budgets, and have to make sensible decisions that are right for their school.

Hillcross School has a carefully worked out plan by the school that has the support of the council school improvement officers.

**8. From: Corinne Garrod
To the Cabinet Member for Children and Education**

Do any other primary schools in Merton have class sizes over 30 with one teacher and one member of support staff and if so, how has this affected the academic performance of that year group/school and the mentality of the children?

Reply

The general background to this is that after an unprecedented 35% increase in pupil numbers in the 11 years to 2017/18 and the requirement to provide for an extensive expansion programme, the position changed in around 2016. This change had not been forecast in any of the national or London-based population or school roll projections. 2017/18 was the peak in primary school numbers and now the council and schools are needing to manage falling demand for primary school places.

While the greatest impact has been on reception year intakes there has also been a gradual loss of pupils through the year groups - for example, the 2020/21 Year 6 school roll was some 12% lower across Merton than when that year group was in reception.

Hillcross is rated Good by Ofsted, and expanded to three forms in 20xx in response to the growth outline. It is now one example of a school managing a declining pupil population in the context of the national funding formula meaning schools are funded almost wholly on a per-pupil basis, providing very little flexibility when pupil numbers change, and therefore needing to organise themselves to meet a balanced budget while still maintaining and raising standards. They are more impacted by some schools in being at the difficult middle ground of needing to have large class sizes for 2-forms, but insufficient roll for 3-forms. Therefore the only options open to them are: to merge classes within years, thereby increasing class sizes; to merge classes between years, maintaining smaller classes but with mixed year groups in one class; or to continue as they, and risk going into deficit and all the consequences of that.

As a local authority, given the national policy of a parental preference based system, it is not possible to move pupils between schools or direct which schools pupils join in Reception. However, we have assisted schools, including Hillcross, to cap individual year groups to manage class sizes in the best way possible. Wherever possible, we encourage schools to have admission numbers be multiples of 30. However, it is hard to manage this where there are changes in the population of older year groups. Class sizes should be considered in the context of all the support staff associated with the class, not just the teacher. In the context of Hillcross they have increased the number of support staff to the affected year groups, ensuring that there is at least one member of support staff allocated to each of the Y4, Y5 and Y6 teams (classes) – previously there were only two support staff working across Y5 and Y6 combined; and two working across Y3

and Y4 combined. Class teams will work together in a range of ways including team teaching, working with targeted groups and ensuring children receive catch up sessions where appropriate. Council school improvement officers therefore support the school in implementing a strategy that has pupils' achievement at the heart, with staff numbers comparable to any equivalent school, but ensures the school can meet a balanced budget, which is being set by the national funding formula.

According to the last school census, in Merton there were six schools plus Hillcross with a class size over 30, all with one teacher and one assistant, though numbers were 34 or below. The council has not done any local research on the impact but as per Hillcross' letter to parents in July, the Educational Endowment Foundation measure the impact of small class sizes as relatively low in comparison to feedback, collaborative learning and metacognition.

In summary, while we can understand the concerns of a headline class of 37, given the changes in the pupil population schools have limited options when it comes to balancing their budgets, and have to make sensible decisions that are right for their school. Hillcross School has a carefully worked out plan by the school that has the support of the council school improvement officers.

9. From: Gobi Sriparan

To the Cabinet Member for Housing, Regeneration and the Climate Emergency

I have noticed that whilst the Council have completed refurbishment of Lower Morden Lane - works have only been completed for half of the street (from the Morden Brook pub to Hillcross School). When will the council conduct works on the remainder of Lower Morden Lane?

Reply

We cannot provide a definitive date as this is reviewed annually. The Council's highway investment programme is prioritised based on the underlying conditions of roads, surveyed by radar. The highest priority sections of carriageway are resurfaced to ensure that the boroughwide infrastructure is well maintained. In some cases, this means that only sections of road need replaced, rather than the entire length. For information, other sections of Lower Morden Lane have been resurfaced within the last 8 years. These sections with Lower Morden Lane that have been resurfaced are between Cardinal Avenue and no. 95 (resurfaced during February 2015) and Garth Road to Beverley Roundabout (resurfaced during July 2013).

10. From: Andrew Cunningham

To the Cabinet Member for Local Environment and Green Spaces

Can the Cabinet Member tell me what actions he has taken to prevent flooding in Lower Morden?

Reply

At the Merton Council Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Panel on 2nd September 2021, a report was presented providing an overview of the recent flooding incidents and actions that the Council is taking, as well as other risk management authorities such as Thames Water and the Environment Agency. The Council pro-actively mitigates flood risk through a programme of high-risk gully cleansing, gully sensors, annual maintenance of drains, implementation of SuDS such as raingardens and is working with Thames Water to unblock and de-silt their drains using CCTV investigations of the infrastructure. In addition, the Council has undertaken flood risk investigations under section 19 of the flood & water management act.

The full report is available online. Please see page 17 onwards at: <https://democracy.merton.gov.uk/documents/g4011/Public%20reports%20pack%20Thursday%2002-Sep-2021%2019.15%20Sustainable%20Communities%20Overview%20and%20Scrutiny%20Panel.pdf?T=10>

Supplementary

Thank you Mr Mayor. My question is No. 10, regarding recent flooding, particularly in Lower Morden, so i'm grateful to the Cabinet Member for her response and the information contained in that response. But as recent flooding has shown the council's solutions don't appear to be working, so my supplementary is to ask her whether she'll commit to ensuring that all drains and gullies in Lower Morden have been cleaned and unblocked by the end of September?

Reply

Thank you Mr Cunningham for your question and your supplementary. I would just like to highlight that they are being checked and that's down to a lot of the work of Councillor Sally Kenny from Lower Morden, the councilor there at the moment - she's done a lot of work trying to make sure that these drains and gullies have been inspected. But we can commit to ensuring that they are inspected as part of the programme and that any blockages that are found, are dealt with.

11. From: Laura Cox To the Cabinet Member for Children and Education

What are projected primary school numbers for Merton schools in the coming years? If numbers are projected to decline, what is the LA strategy to ensure that children continue to receive high quality and well funded primary education?

Reply

After an unprecedented 35% increase in pupil numbers in the 11 years to 2017/18 (a rise of 4,367 from 12,683 to 17,050), 2017/18 was the peak in primary school numbers and we are now experiencing a significant fall, with a drop of 1,184 pupils (7%) to 2020/21.

Reception year numbers decreased in 2020/21 for the fifth consecutive year and, based on school admissions allocations, there is a further significant fall in the reception year in 2021/22. A further fall is forecast in future years, the extent of the further fall is dependent on the forecast model used. As the lower numbers flow to all year groups, the total primary school roll by the GLA forecast model is 15,108 in 2025/26, nearly 2,000 less than the 2017/18 peak. Our 'pupil retention' modelling suggests it will be 13,486, so 3,500 less than the 2017/18 peak. The last 18 months has been impacted by changing Covid-19 movement patterns and so there will be a need to be a regular review of demand.

The council has already facilitated the reduction in the published admission number by 10.5 from 2016 to the present 2021/22 reception year entry. However, if the council is to be within the 'ideal' surplus places level of 5% then a reduction by a further 9.5 forms of entry in reception year is required by 2025/26.

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

A detailed paper is being presented to Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Panel on 29 September 2021

12: From: Luana Baldwin

To the Cabinet Member for Children and Education

Does Council have any plans to intervene financially or otherwise to reduce class sizes in year 6 at Hillcross primary? I would like to know why Hillcross seems to be the only school in the Borough faced with such large numbers and if Council will be assisting in any way?

Reply

The general background to this is that after an unprecedented 35% increase in pupil numbers in the 11 years to 2017/18 and the requirement to provide for an extensive

expansion programme, the position changed in around 2016. This change had not been forecast in any of the national or London-based population or school roll projections. 2017/18 was the peak in primary school numbers and now the council and schools are needing to manage falling demand for primary school places.

While the greatest impact has been on reception year intakes there has also been a gradual loss of pupils through the year groups - for example, the 2020/21 Year 6 school roll was some 12% lower across Merton than when that year group was in reception.

Hillcross is rated Good by Ofsted, and expanded to three forms in 2011 in response to the growth outline. It is now one example of a school managing a declining pupil population in the context of the national funding formula meaning schools are funded almost wholly on a per-pupil basis, providing very little flexibility when pupil numbers change, and therefore needing to organise themselves to meet a balanced budget while still maintaining and raising standards. They are more impacted by some schools in being at the difficult middle ground of needing to have large class sizes for 2-forms, but insufficient roll for 3-forms. Therefore the only options open to them are: to merge classes within years, thereby increasing class sizes; to merge classes between years, maintaining smaller classes but with mixed year groups in one class; or to continue as they, and risk going into deficit and all the consequences of that.

As a local authority, given the national policy of a parental preference based system, it is not possible to move pupils between schools or direct which schools pupils join in Reception. However, we have assisted schools, including Hillcross, to cap individual year groups to manage class sizes in the best way possible. Wherever possible, we encourage schools to have admission numbers be multiples of 30. However, it is hard to manage this where there are changes in the population of older year groups. Class sizes should be considered in the context of all the support staff associated with the class, not just the teacher. In the context of Hillcross they have increased the number of support staff to the affected year groups, ensuring that there is at least one member of support staff allocated to each of the Y4, Y5 and Y6 teams (classes) – previously there were only two support staff working across Y5 and Y6 combined; and two working across Y3 and Y4 combined. Class teams will work together in a range of ways including team teaching, working with targeted groups and ensuring children receive catch up sessions where appropriate. Council school improvement officers therefore support the school in implementing a strategy that has pupils' achievement at the heart, with staff numbers comparable to any equivalent school, but ensures the school can meet a balanced budget, which is being set by the national funding formula.

According to the last school census, in Merton there were six schools plus Hillcross with a class size over 30, all with one teacher and one assistant, though numbers were 34 or below. The council has not done any local research on the impact but as per Hillcross' letter to parents in July, the Educational Endowment Foundation measure the impact of small class sizes as relatively low in comparison to feedback, collaborative learning and metacognition.

In summary, while we can understand the concerns of a headline class of 37, given the changes in the pupil population schools have limited options when it comes to balancing their budgets, and have to make sensible decisions that are right for their school. Hillcross School has a carefully worked out plan by the school that has the support of the council school improvement officers.

**13 From: Kevin Clarke
To the Cabinet Member for Finance**

There is currently a polling places review. Given recent progress, in line with government advice, in reducing the use of schools as polling places is there a target date to find alternative arrangements throughout the borough?

Reply

The Local Government Boundary Commission for England has recently undertaken an Electoral Review of the London Borough of Merton ward arrangements. As a result of the review, there have been alterations to the current ward boundaries which require changes to the Polling Districts within them. Therefore, Merton is undertaking a review of its polling districts and also the location of polling places/stations for use at both national and local elections to mirror the changes to the ward boundaries. The changes to the Wards and Polling Districts will come into force at the Local Council Elections on 5 May 2022. Local political parties, MPs and Councillors have been consulted and views were also invited from residents, disability groups and other stakeholders.

The formal consultation period began on Monday 2 August 2021, and closed on Monday 13 September 2021. Details of any representations received will be made available for inspection and will be published on the website at the conclusion of the review. The outcome of the review will be reported to Standards and General Purposes Committee and then full Council in November for decision to enable the Electoral Registration Officer to make any alterations necessary to the register of electors in good time to prepare for the May 2022 elections.

In accordance with the requirements of section 18C of the Representation of the People Act 1983 (as amended by section 17 of the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013), polling district reviews must be held every 5 years from the date of the last review. However, in practice, polling places are reviewed on a far more regular basis, and in line with government advice, finding alternatives to schools as polling places is an ongoing target.

Merton Council has remained proactive in attempting to find replacement venues for schools that are used as polling stations, and this was the basis for the previous full polling district review that was conducted in 2019. Based on The Returning Officer's current proposals, (unless there are any amendments in response to representations which have been received) the council will be using 8 schools as polling stations in

2022, which has been reduced from over 20 schools that were used back in 2014. The guidance from the Department of Education advises that where schools are the only viable option in an area, the Head Teacher should look for a way of allowing the school to remain open whilst also being used as a polling station. Where the council is proposing to continue to use a school as a polling place, there is no suitable alternative that we know of in the vicinity. Therefore the above guidance would apply, and we would ask the Head Teacher if they can look for a way of allowing the school to remain open.

14. From: Robert Kennedy
To the Cabinet Member for Local Environment and Green Spaces

For many years the Community have wished for a walk around Wimbledon Park lake in line with the agreement within the Land Registry title document dated 23rd December 1993. Now golf ceases completely in January 2023, what progress has been made in the implementation of the walk around the lake?

Reply

The council's 2018 Wimbledon Park masterplan recognises the community's ambition of increased public access around the Wimbledon Park Lake. The council owns about a third of the lake boundary and the All England Lawn Tennis Club own about two thirds of the lake boundary. The All England Lawn Tennis Club has recently applied for to the council for outline planning permission (reference 21/P2900) which includes the provision of increased public access around the lake. The council, in its role as Local Planning Authority, will consider this planning application in due course.

15. From: Danielle Edie
To the Cabinet Member for Children and Education

Has any consideration been given towards health and safety/teachers and pupils mental health? Teachers have done a fantastic job can you explain the thought process of giving a teacher a class of 30 plus pupils and assure us they won't have a mental breakdown dealing with large volumes of pupils?

Reply

The Council is working with schools to address issues related to the health and wellbeing of both staff and pupils.

School staff have faced many challenges over the past year and leaders have had their wellbeing at heart as they have undertaken risk assessments for the school, and supported and reassured individual members of staff.

This is also in the context of Ofsted now including teacher workload and wellbeing within the matters they look at when schools are inspected.

Where class sizes are larger, leaders will be mindful of the wellbeing of staff, and look to ensure they are well supported, including by perhaps working in larger staff teams. This would include ensuring there are support staff working alongside teachers.

With regards to children and young people: we are very concerned about the rise in mental health issues amongst them. We were seeing a rise in mental health concerns pre-pandemic. We are now seeing heightened concerns for those children who were already suffering, but also a rise in young people's anxiety because of the pandemic.

The council is working closely with the CCG and partners to develop a new approach to mental health in Merton, called 'i-Thrive'. This is a culture change involving the expansion of service provided to children and young people at different levels of identified risk.

To support this approach we have developed new partnerships of schools and colleges. The partnerships work together to develop whole school models to support good mental wellbeing. This approach is supported by a mental health in schools team that support low-level issues. We now have four such partnerships in Merton led by Ursuline Secondary School, South Thames College, Cricket Green and Hillcross School. The aim is that by 2023 all schools in Merton will be in such a partnership or cluster, and we are well on the way to achieving this. This has been supported through successful bids for additional government funding and increased CCG funding for young people's mental health.

In addition, the CCG have commissioned a range of additional mental health support from the KOOTH app, through which young people can access support 24/7 on their phones from 'Off the Record', which accepts direct referrals from young people on line and face to face.

A significant concern that young people have told us about is their anxiety about having missed so much education. We have been working with schools on their catch up and recovery curriculums to support children's wellbeing as they return to schools.

St George's Mental Health Trust has also now developed an out-of-hours crisis line. The lead clinician outlined this service to schools at the termly mental health leads forum and promotional materials were circulated before the summer.

The development of the i-Thrive model involves cultural change over time. Work is ongoing to pilot more targeted support for young people who have experienced trauma. We are also in the process of a surveying and listening exercise with young people, hearing their views, through a borough wide youth survey. This will inform the next developments of services to support our young people.

16. From: Caroline Poole

To the Cabinet Member for Children and Education

Does the council have any plans to intervene financially or otherwise to reduce the class sizes in years 5 and 6 at Hillcross Primary School?

Reply

The general background to this is that after an unprecedented 35% increase in pupil numbers in the 11 years to 2017/18 and the requirement to provide for an extensive expansion programme, the position changed in around 2016. This change had not been forecast in any of the national or London-based population or school roll projections. 2017/18 was the peak in primary school numbers and now the council and schools are needing to manage falling demand for primary school places.

While the greatest impact has been on reception year intakes there has also been a gradual loss of pupils through the year groups - for example, the 2020/21 Year 6 school roll was some 12% lower across Merton than when that year group was in reception.

Hillcross is one example of a school managing this in the context of the national funding formula meaning schools are largely funded with even less flexibility based on pupil numbers, and therefore needing to organise themselves to meet a balanced budget as well as raise standards. They are more impacted by some schools in being at the difficult middle ground of needing to have large class sizes for 2-forms, but insufficient roll for 3-forms. Nationally we have a parental preference based system so it is not possible to direct pupils from other schools. However, we have assisted schools, including Hillcross, to cap individual year groups to manage class sizes in the best way possible.

Class sizes should be considered in the context of all the support staff associated with the class, not just the teacher. In the context of Hillcross they are ensuring that there is at least one member of support staff allocated to each of the Y4, Y5 and Y6 teams (classes) – previously there were only two support staff working across Y5 and Y6 combined; and two working across Y3 and Y4 combined. Class teams will work together in a range of ways including team teaching, working with targeted groups and ensuring children receive catch up sessions where appropriate. Council school improvement officers therefore support the school in implementing a strategy that has pupils' achievement at the heart, with staff numbers comparable to any equivalent school, but ensures the school can meet a balanced budget, which is being set by national formula.

According to the last school census, in Merton there were six schools plus Hillcross with a class size over 30, all with one teacher and one assistant, though numbers were 34 or below. The council has not done any local research on the impact but as per Hillcross' letter to parents in July, the Educational Endowment Foundation measure the impact of small class sizes as relatively low in comparison to feedback, collaborative learning and metacognition.

In summary, while we can understand the concerns of a headline class of 37, it is a parent led preference system for schools and so schools have to manage with the numbers that are allocated. Hillcross School has a carefully worked out plan by the school that has the support of the council school improvement officers.

17. From: Joseph Hackett

To the Cabinet Member for Local Environment and Green Spaces

What action has been taken since the Conservative West Barnes action team handed in their petition, signed by 231 concerned local residents, to clean up West Barnes and Motspur Park?

Reply

We acknowledge the concerns raised by the Conservative West Barnes action team.

Our Neighbourhood Client team regularly monitor these areas along with joint inspection with Veolia's Environment Managers. The information is collated by the service provider and, if required, the schedule can be amended in order that the streets are cleaned to a required frequency to ensure that they do not fall below grade.

Regarding West Barnes Lane and the daily presentation of domestic waste, I have asked for this to be investigated and action taken to ensure the required standard is met. With respect to the commercial bins at this location, we will be contacting the business and managing agents to ensure that these are removed from the highway outside of the day of collection.

Supplementary

I'd like to thank the Cabinet Member for her response to my question, question 17. However there's been a problem with rubbish in Motspur Park and West Barnes for far too long. Will she commit to meeting with the West Barnes Action Team who submitted this petition on this issue to discuss how the problems can be resolved?

Reply

I'd be absolutely happy to meet West Barnes Action Team. I think we're all on the same page here, we want a cleaner, greener Merton and that's why we commit to trying to keep our streets as clean and tidy as possible. We have cleared sixteen thousand fly tips, 90% of them within 24 hours and in the last year we've fined over, we've created, generated over £500,000 in fines from fly tipping and littering offences. So we're committed to making this Borough cleaner and greener. I'll be more than happy to meet with you to discuss it.

**18. From: Frank Pocock
To the Cabinet Member for Local Environment and Green Spaces**

How often are the grass verges cut and weeds cleared from the gutters in Cannon Hill?

Reply

In reference to the management and control of weeds, our street cleansing contractor undertake a borough wide weed spray 3 times a year at seasonal intervals. To support this Veolia have implemented a neighbourhood approach to deliver the street cleaning operations. Each neighbourhood has an associated team of Veolia operatives and an Environmental Manager overseeing and co-ordinating their work. This approach contributes towards building knowledge and a sense of pride amongst the neighbourhood team. The Environmental Managers become familiar with the requirements of the area and apply their resources accordingly.

The contract requires Veolia to maintain a consistent standard of cleanliness across the whole borough in line with best practice from Defra's Code of Practice. This approach measures the contractor based on their output rather than the amount of resources they use or the frequency at which they clean the streets and remove any detritus and weed growth. In order to achieve the required standard, the contractor is required to apply whatever resources, at whatever frequency, are required to maintain the necessary contractual standards. In practice, this means the contractor will apply more resources to town centres than residential areas even though the contract requires the streets in both areas to be maintained to the same standard.

The council's ground maintenance contractor idverde UK Ltd maintains the grass verges on a cyclical basis, according to schedules which are being adhered to and managed regularly. There was some growth due to the warm and wet weather during the Spring and early summer and this is being managed. There are officers in the Cannon Hill ward weekly assessing the cleanliness of the streets and the condition of the verges and reporting where there are areas of improvement and liaising direct with the service supervisor.

Supplementary

Yes, I thank the Cabinet Member for her answer. Please can she tell me the dates that the weeds in the gutters were last sprayed by Veolia in Cannon Hill?

Reply

Thank you Mr Speaker. I'm afraid I don't have the information for you but i can get it for you and I'll be happy to make sure you get it.

19. From: Calum McGrath

To the Cabinet Member for Housing, Regeneration and the Climate Emergency

Why did the council fail to ensure that step free access was brought in at Haydons Road station as part of the 1 Caxton Road planning application?

Reply

The Council has followed up with the developer of 1 Caxton Road who is, and has been, willing to enable step-free access to Haydons Road Station. The project is halted due to an objection from Govia Thameslink who manage the Station. Thameslink are unwilling to manage new gated access to the station. The Council has written to Thameslink challenging their stance as it fails to serve our residents or support Local and national policies to improve access to public transport and are seeking a meeting with representatives from Govia Thameslink.

This page is intentionally left blank

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

Can the cabinet member please update Council on the steps his department has taken to address Clarion Housing Association's repairs performance?

Reply

As Councillor Mundy will be aware at the sustainable communities overview and scrutiny panel on the 2nd September executive officers of the Clarion housing group provided a verbal update on how they are working to deliver an improved repairs service and provide quality and timely services to its tenants. I also chair regular performance review meeting with council officers and the executive officers of the Clarion housing group which includes updates on the repair service. In addition I and council officers receive weekly updates on the ongoing repair works on the Eastfields Estate. Of course , where I am contacted by individual tenants regarding ongoing disrepair matters affecting their homes by email or letter, I will personally raise these cases with Clarion representatives

Supplementary

Thank you Mr Mayor. I'd like to thank the Cabinet Member for that answer and the zero tolerance approach he has taken in this matter. Would the Cabinet Member please provide further details on the partnership approach he and his office have taken with the Scrutiny Panel, Members of Parliament, officers, Residents Associations and Clarion that has meant we can be tough on poor repairs while simultaneously tackle the root cause and secure the biggest regeneration scheme in a council's history of over 1600 rebuilt homes?

Reply

Thank you. I have been in close contact with all those organisations in relation to the regeneration but also as well in terms of following up on repairs issues which have been raised directly with myself. I have had regular meetings with Clarion and have been made perfectly aware for myself that it is unacceptable in terms of their standards of service on those estates but also as well the number of disrepair issues that have arisen and i look forward to continuing dialogue with all those organisations and working with the Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Panel. Thank you.

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

At the July council meeting the Cabinet Member said that he was 'shocked' by the conditions on the Eastfields estate and that he took the issue 'with the utmost seriousness'. If he has made this a priority then why then has he failed to ensure that Clarion is held to its responsibilities to maintain the Phipps Bridge estate?

Reply

6: Councillor Ordinary Priority Questions to Cabinet Members

We have asked Clarion to respond promptly to their tenants concerns after the matter was raised with us and to set out when the necessary and appropriate works will be carried out. We are obviously deeply concerned about these issues and whilst clarion is responsible for any repairs, we are in regular contact with them to highlight any issues raised by residents and to insist that outstanding repairs are fixed without further delay. I also visited Richmond Court on the Phipps Bridge Estate with on 31 August and spoke directly to many tenants in block about repair and maintenance issues - these are being followed up with Clarion.

Supplementary

I thank the cabinet member for his answer but there's no specific information in this answer. You actually say you met with dot dot dot so clearly that was fill in the gap from the officers but you didn't fill in the gap. You don't say and then you say Clarion will follow up I suppose is that the vagueness that they followed up in the last decade in Eastfield's estate? My question is what i've just said. There is no information in this answer. I need, in the next three weeks, specific responses and what Clarion will follow up on Phipps Bridge and i'd like to know who you did meet because it's not in your answer. Thank you Mr Mayor.

Reply

Unlike Councillor Dean, I took the time to actually meet with local residents on Richmond Court and speak to them about their concerns about disrepair. I think that is right to actually go out there and talk direct to them. I'd probably like to ask what Councillor Dean has actually done. I suspect nothing rather than a twitter quote.

From Councillor Helena Dollimore to the Leader of the Council

Following the decision to downgrade St Helier hospital and move services to Belmont, the capital allocation for the project has been reduced by more than 25% – from £551m to less than £400m.

As the choice of site was made on the basis of that capital requirement being met, and before the full impact of the pandemic was known, what impact does the Leader consider these changes would have had on the options appraisal, and what does he think would need to be done to ensure that they do not lead to worse health inequalities in South West London?

Reply

I am very worried that there will be a significant impact on the life chances and health of Merton's residents, particularly those on low incomes or in disadvantaged groups, as a result of the government's cut of nearly a third to capital funding for local hospital services.

I was already extremely concerned about the government's decision to remove key services from St Helier hospital, and my concerns have only increased since the outbreak of Covid-19, which has evidently caused considerably more harm to those who already faced health inequalities in South West London.

6: Councillor Ordinary Priority Questions to Cabinet Members

Given that the government's decision to close key services at St Helier hospital was taken on the basis of capital funding being a third higher than now, and given that their decision was taken before any assessment of the new health inequalities facing the area as a result of Covid-19 could take place, I feel that the only way to avoid worse health inequalities in South West London is for that government decision to be reassessed.

I have therefore written to the new chief executive of the NHS England, Amanda Pritchard, to request that the decision is looked at again on the basis of current information, rather than on information from two years ago which is now clearly out of date, as I believe her calling that decision in would help save lives in Merton and the wider South West London area.

Supplementary

Thank you Mr Mayor and I'd like to thank the Leader for his answer to my question and his support to save St Helier hospital. Does the Leader share my concern about the further damage that moving services away from St Helier will do to health outcomes for our residents and with funding for the project reduced by central government, does he agree that it's time to rethink and keep services here at St Helier and does he share my concern at the recent proposals to strip St Helier hospital of inpatient kidney services, moving them to St George's hospital, where we know that the CQC has already said the site is too full?

Reply

I'd like to thank Councillor Dollimore for her supplementary and congratulate her on the hard work that she does in her wards where it is very clear that the disadvantage that already existed even before COVID in terms of health outcomes has only increased and yet the Government's response to a widening health inequalities issue is to take services away from those who need it the most. The Conservative government are taking away support for the most disadvantaged people in our communities with the greatest health - he himself has used a figure that is already out of date because the Government has even take away 150 million pounds of the money that he says that they have been given. It is a disgrace that this is happening, the Government should review the situation based on actual health outcomes, now, after COVID.

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

Could the Cabinet Member outline any activities he has undertaken to fulfil the motion passed at the July full Council meeting, where it was requested that Cabinet "establish a Tenants' Champion service"? Could he give details of any meeting he has had about this, providing dates and information on attendees?

Reply

Councillor Fairclough will be aware as he attended sustainable communities and overview scrutiny panel on the 2nd September that Councillor Nick Draper is the appointed Tenants' Champion. At the meeting Councillor Draper helpfully shared with the panel his ambitions and I am liaising with him closely. I have also discussed this with our Head of Housing Needs Steve Langley at our weekly meetings in terms of implementing the recommendations.

Supplementary

Thank you Mr Mayor and thank you to the Cabinet Member for his reply, although I must admit that the five lines of the reply are equivalent to a blank stare at a blank page. My question to the Cabinet Member is, you reference the meeting on the 2nd of September, but of course Councillor Draper was appointed at the July 4 Council, now Councillor Draper told us on the 2nd September meeting that he hadn't met with you on the issue of tenants champion although you did manage a panicked phone call to him between the reserved meeting business and my question to you is what exactly would you consider a resigning matter in this issue? Thank you.

Reply

Well frankly I think it's about sorting out the issues that do exist. I'd like to thank Councillor Draper for undertaking that role. We're in the process of finalising its roles and responsibilities and actually getting on with things rather than some of these questions that you raise Councillor Fairclough. It is important that tenants issues are followed up and I look forward to working closely with Councillor Draper on this matter. Thank you.

From Councillor Ben Butler to the Cabinet Member for Finance

In their announcement to raise National Insurance for low income workers in order to reduce social care charges for homeowners the Government said: "We expect demographic and unit cost pressures will be met through Council Tax, social care precept, and long-term efficiencies." What analysis has the cabinet member made of the impact of further "precepts" and council tax increases on council taxpayers in Merton?

Reply

The Council is currently assessing the impact on spending and potential loss of income of the recent Government announcement regarding raising National Insurance contributions to help fund health and social care for the elderly.

We have already made assumptions about future Council Tax increases and reflected them in the current Medium Financial Strategy. We have not, however, assumed any future precept increases for Adult Social Care as there have been no Government announcements on this.

6: Councillor Ordinary Priority Questions to Cabinet Members

I would remind the Member that the Council continues to operate a very generous Council Tax support Scheme to those residents who find themselves in financial difficulties.

Supplementary

I'd like to thank the Cabinet Member for his response. I would ask what reassurances he can give residents on low incomes in the Borough, that regardless of the constant uncertainty of financial support we see from the Government and more than 10 years of austerity, that we won't pass that uncertainty on to those residents that are so vulnerable?

Reply

Well can I thank Councillor Butler for his question and for his supplementary question. As he rightly says the Government in recent year has sought to push the burden on funding adult social care onto local authorities through the adult social care precept and ultimately onto our residents and they've also forced local authorities to raise council tax by assuming it in the funding allocations that they give us and it's very disappointing that in the announcement made around adult social care funding it would appear that that approach has not changed and they are still assuming that we will continue to raise monies through the precept and through council tax and that ultimately will be on top of the increase to national insurance. I'm very pleased to tell him that the council does still have the council tax support scheme which supports those residents on lower incomes to pay their council tax. We saw unprecedented demand on that scheme last year throughout the pandemic. Merton is one of the very few local authorities to retain that scheme following the government's wrapping of its support a number of years ago and we have absolutely no plans to get rid of it.

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

Can the cabinet member update council on their recent efforts to promote regeneration in the borough?

Reply

At this meeting councillors will consider Cabinet's decision to support the regeneration of Clarion's three estates at Eastfields, High Path and Ravensbury, the largest regeneration scheme in the borough. In July 2021 the council's Local Plan was considered and supported at the full council meeting. In the past month I have also held a workshop with councillors on the future of Mitcham town centre.

The Council is also supporting regeneration through a number of projects including the recently adopted FutureWimbledon SPD, Small Sites Toolkit SPD and Borough Character Study SPD.

<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/bf9b9bfc19f34cb1a4391af5344d723b>

6: Councillor Ordinary Priority Questions to Cabinet Members

The Council is continuing its programme of local shopping parade renewals funded through CIL. Colliers Wood High Street has been completed, Bramcote Parade in Mitcham is close to completion and procurement and preparatory works have commenced for Haydons Road North.

The Council's main regeneration priority remains Morden town centre. Regular briefings have been provided to the cross party steering group. The Council is working closely with TFL and Homes England to secure the investment needed to kickstart Morden regeneration. A strategic development framework for Morden has been published as part of the Local Plan. The Council is also investing £300,000 of CIL in Morden for art, greening, public realm improvements and meanwhile uses pending the longer term project commencing.

Supplementary

I'm surprised that the Cabinet Member would raise as an example of his own success, the most terrible deal with Clarion which is likely to have cost our Borough tens of millions of pounds in money for regeneration. If the Cabinet Member is taking regeneration so seriously then please can he tell this chamber, Mr Mayor, which councillor holds the position of Morden Champion that was passed in the motion in this chamber in February, why has he not informed the council of this?

Reply

I think obviously in terms of the Morden champion, I haven't got the details with me now, but I will say obviously in relation to Councillor Gretton's comment, we actually want to get on and deliver the regeneration of those estates in what is a very complex deal and the Tories may be opposed to the regeneration, which clearly they are, but we believe that people live in decent standards of housing - but you don't want to get it done and we know that. Thank you Mr Mayor.

From Councillor Joan Henry to the Cabinet Member for Women and Equalities

Following the horrific events in Afghanistan can the Cabinet Member on what work is being done to offer support for Afghan refugees here in Merton?

Reply

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

6: Councillor Ordinary Priority Questions to Cabinet Members

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 Councillor Simon McGrath to the Cabinet Member for Housing, Regeneration and the Climate Emergency

Given the climate emergency and the recent flooding, has the Cabinet Member met with Thames Water and the Environment Agency to discuss changing the regulatory environment for Thames to ensure they maintain their assets to protect residents from regular flooding events?

Reply

Following the rains in July 2021, the Leader of the Council wrote to Thames Water seeking assurances that assets were being maintained and that Thames Water would make it easier for residents to contact Thames Water directly and get the help and reduced bills that Thames Water can provide. Since then officers have met Thames Water on a regular basis to identify issues, and ensure that all assets are maintained. As well as this, council officers, the Environment Agency and Thames Water attended a meeting with Siobhain McDonagh MP on 2nd September 2021, officers will also be attending Raynes Park Forum alongside Thames Water later in September to ensure that residents are updated on these actions and know who to contact in the event of a flood. More information is available on Merton Council's website <https://www.merton.gov.uk/streets-parking-transport/streets-and-pavements/flooding/report> and a link for residents to Thames Water's flooding questionnaire is available on Thames Water's website <https://www.thameswater.co.uk/help/emergencies/flooding>

Supplementary

Mr Mayor, a simple 'no' would have actually been a perfectly adequate answer to my question. The Cabinet Member hasn't met with Thames Water and the Environment Agency. Will he give a commitment that he will actually meet with them so we can

6: Councillor Ordinary Priority Questions to Cabinet Members

have a joined up approach to the flooding problems in the Borough and he can also talk about the need to change the regulatory structure which Thames Water works under? Thank you.

Reply

I'd like to thank Councillor McGrath and for his supplementary answer. I can update him, that we are in the process of arranging a meeting and we just need to find a date but I would like to take this opportunity of thanking all the work of Merton Council officers who dealt with flooding issues in the Borough and I'd also like to add that a number of meetings have taken place with Thames Water to identify the issues across Merton. It's clear that the regulatory framework needs to be tougher in terms of Thames Water and I think they've systematically failed to do the repairs for sewers over a number of years and it's quite clear that more work needs to be done for that and that I think it's time that the government do take action in terms of Thames Water and that they do have a tougher regulatory framework, so thank you Councillor McGrath.

From Councillor Daniel Holden to the Cabinet Member for Local Environment and Green Spaces

What meetings has the cabinet member had with Thames Water and other partners to stop the frequent flooding we have seen across Merton this summer?

Reply

Following the rains in July 2021, the Leader of the Council wrote to Thames Water seeking assurances that assets were being maintained and that Thames Water would make it easier for residents to contact Thames Water directly and get the help and reduced bills that Thames Water can provide. Since then officers have met Thames Water on a regular basis, including on w/c 19th July, 26th July 8th September and corresponded weekly to identify issues, and ensure that all assets are maintained. In August 2021 council officers also applied for to Thames Water's surface water management programme for over £700,000 to help manage surface water in Raynes Park town centre and Wimbledon Park (jointly with Wandsworth. On the 25th of August, officers met with neighbouring boroughs, Thames Water, the Environment Agency and the South East Rivers Trust for the meeting of the South West London Strategic Flood Partnership where the recent flooding was discussed in detail. As well as this, council officers, the Environment Agency and Thames Water attended a meeting with Siobhain McDonagh MP on 2nd September 2021, officers will also be attending Raynes Park Forum alongside Thames Water later in September to ensure that residents are updated on these actions and know who to contact in the event of a flood. More information is available on Merton Council's website <https://www.merton.gov.uk/streets-parking-transport/streets-and-pavements/flooding/report> and a link for residents to Thames Water's flooding

6: Councillor Ordinary Priority Questions to Cabinet Members

questionnaire is available on Thames Water's website
<https://www.thameswater.co.uk/help/emergencies/flooding>

Supplementary

Thank you Mr Mayor. I thank the Cabinet Member for her response but much of the problem with flooding stems from Labour's failure to enforce the contract with Veolia, so will the Cabinet Member follow this up with Veolia and will she attend the Sustainable Community Scrutiny Panel on the 1st of November to provide an update on when Veolia will have cleared all the gullies and drains in the Borough?

Reply

I thank Councillor Holden for his question and his supplementary. I will come to the Sustainable Communities Panel because I'm due to come anyway to discuss issues around Veolia so I'll be more than happy to come along and i will commit to updating you into where they are within their programme of the regular cleaning and also how many of the high-risk areas have had the sensors pinged in in recent months.

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

Can the Cabinet Member please update us on the numbers of rough sleepers in the borough and how this compares with other boroughs?

Reply

There are currently no known rough sleepers in Merton. The figures below show number of rough sleepers in neighbouring boroughs as at 31st August 2021. The only other boroughs with zero rough sleeper are Havering and Lambeth:

South West London

Croydon	12
Kingston upon Thames	16
Merton	0
Richmond upon Thames	16
Sutton	2
Wandsworth	29

From Councillor Mary Curtin to the Cabinet member for Children and Education

How is the council working to support children and young people given the rise in mental health issues?

Reply

We are very concerned about the rise in mental health issues amongst young people. We were seeing a rise in mental health concerns pre-pandemic. We are now seeing heightened concerns for those children who were already suffering, but also a rise in young people's anxiety because of the pandemic.

The council is working closely with the CCG and partners to develop a new approach to mental health in Merton, called 'i-Thrive'. This is a culture change involving the expansion of service provided to children and young people at different levels of identified risk.

To support this approach we have developed new partnerships of schools and colleges. The partnerships work together to develop whole school models to support good mental wellbeing. This approach is supported by a mental health in schools team that support low-level issues. We now have four such partnerships in Merton led by Ursuline Secondary School, South Thames College, Cricket Green and Hillcross School. The aim is that by 2023 all schools in Merton will be in such a partnership or cluster, and we are well on the way to achieving this. This has been supported through successful bids for additional government funding and increased CCG funding for young people's mental health.

In addition, the CCG have commissioned a range of additional mental health support from the KOOTH app, through which young people can access support 24/7 on their phones from 'Off the Record', which accepts direct referrals from young people on line and face to face.

A significant concern that young people have told us about is their anxiety about having missed so much education. We have been working with schools on their catch up and recovery curriculums to support children's wellbeing as they return to schools.

St George's Mental Health Trust has also now developed an out-of-hours crisis line. The lead clinician outlined this service to schools at the termly mental health leads forum and promotional materials were circulated before the summer.

The development of the i-Thrive model involves cultural change over time. Work is ongoing to pilot more targeted support for young people who have experienced trauma. We are also in the process of a surveying and listening exercise with young people, hearing their views, through a borough wide youth survey. This will inform the next developments of services to support our young people.

Supplementary

Thank you Mr Mayor and thank you to the Cabinet Member for her response. Can the Cabinet Member reassure me that she will keep a close eye on the worrying increase in mental health issues in our children so that we can all do our best to support them? Thank you.

Reply

Thank you Councillor and thank you for the supplementary question and yes this is an absolute priority both for me as a Cabinet Member for the office that I speak to and also when I speak to health partners we're all aware that the increase in mental health problems young people both at the kind of prevention end of young people beginning to feel anxious and begin to feel stressed because of the change in the context but also at the harder end - the increase in of young people in hospital In-patient beds with eating disorders; with suicidal ideation, is incredibly worrying and we all need to work together as partners, health partners and services, but also as a society to do everything we can to help help these young people and of course it will be a priority for me.

From Councillor Hayley Ormrod to the Cabinet Member for Children and Education:

From 2013 the number of children with ECHPs began to rise, however it is only recently that the council began to expand in borough provision, why was this?

Reply

It is incorrect to state that the council has only begun to expand in-borough specialist provision - the council has been expanding special schools and resourced provision significantly for a decade – it is just that the rise in demand in Merton, as has occurred nationally, has exceeded any forecast that could reasonably be made. A summary of the major expansions already implemented over the past 10 years are as follows:

- ✓ Completed 2011 - Perseid School new upper school site providing for additional pupils
- ✓ Completed 2013 – Cricket Green expansion through use of adjacent former doctors surgery and Chapel Orchard
- ✓ Completed 2015 – Hatfeild School opening of ARP (Additionally Resourced Provision)
- ✓ Completed 2015 – Perseid School further expansion of lower school site
- ✓ Completed 2018 – Perseid School further expansion of upper school site
- ✓ Completed 2019 – Stanford School opening of ARP
- ✓ Completed 2020 – Cricket Green further major expansion
- ✓ Under construction and completing in late 2021 – Melrose School expansion including primary phase

Supplementary

I thank the Cabinet Member for her answer. However as the demand for places rose the council continued with few expansions of existing schools which clearly failed to meet the rise in demand. The large scale in-authority provision expansion that was necessary to meet the needs of EHCP children has only recently happened. Does the cabinet member regret that this has taken so long to meet the rising demand within the Borough that was identified over six years ago?

Reply

Thank you. I would thank the Councillor for her question and for her supplementary and do I regret that it takes a long time to open schools? Of course I do. Do I think this is due to any inaction on our part? Not in the slightest. We have worked as quickly as we can, using all the avenues that we can, to make sure that we can expand provision in a way which works with the strong special schools that we've already got., brings new provision in where it's needed and makes the best use of the estates that we have. We all know here, and anyone who's been involved in schools, how long it takes to kind of open a brand new school, which is why we've gone down the route, wherever possible, of expanding our successful existing special schools and we've been doing this as quickly as we possibly can.

From Councillor Dennis Pearce to the Cabinet member for Children and Education

How has the council supported schools to safely re-open this term?

Reply

Schools have been supported in a variety of ways to open safely this term:

- ✓ Weekly meetings have been held with headteachers both prior to the summer holidays (when the first set of guidance for return was issued by the government), and restarting just before the beginning of the autumn term. Chaired by the Assistant Director for Education and Early Help, and attended by Merton Public Health and other senior Education officers, these meetings helped schools to unpick the guidance, enabled key questions to be answered, and provided a forum for problem solving amongst themselves.
- ✓ These meetings covered the key issues facing schools on return including: onsite testing in secondary schools; the role of school in Track and Trace; supporting staff and pupils to return under the different arrangements (no bubbles, masks, social distancing, but with ongoing enhanced cleaning, hand sanitisation and ventilation); vaccinations of different groups; and self-isolation rules.
 - ✓ Daily emails to Headteachers during term time (and again resuming before the beginning of term) ensured that they were alerted to new guidance in a timely fashion, and summaries of the guidance were provided to help them focus on the key points.
- ✓ Schools are now required to have 'Outbreak Management Plans' in place: a model template for this was provided to schools.
- ✓ The Merton Public Health team supporting education settings has been expanded. There are now 1.6 FTE Infection Prevention and Control Coordinators, as well as a 1FTE Senior Public Health Principal.
- ✓ The Public Health team have streamlined the ways in which schools can contact them to log new cases and seek advice, which they have continued to do throughout the holidays and into the new term.
- ✓ Schools have been funded to employ 'Covid Resilience Leads' from September 2021, for 12 months. In the majority of cases schools are using the funding to enable current staff to step up into this role. The leads will support school leaders to manage the next steps of the pandemic. They will be trained by Merton Public Health, and meet regularly together. They will cascade key Covid messages to staff, and support the development of key Covid policies/processes.

Schools are reporting a relatively smooth return, though some have indeed had some cases, with which they have been supported by the Public Health team.

Supplementary

I'd like to thank the Cabinet Member for her reply. What mechanisms are in place to support our schools in the case of any future lockdowns as under this government we have to expect anything? Thank you.

Reply

Thank you Councillor and thank you for your supplementary. There's a number of mechanisms in place. I've already referenced our amazing school

improvement team who have really strong one-to-one relationships with each of our schools and meet with them regularly to know exactly what's going on. Our public health team in Merton have been absolutely extraordinary with helping schools to understand the ever-changing guidance and regulations that they've been expected to follow. I am hopeful that the new Education Secretary, having been previously been Vaccine Minister will bring some of that knowledge and thoughtfulness to any changes that do happen from the central government from now on - that would make it vastly easier in supporting schools with any new restrictions that need to be put in place

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

Based on Merton's 251 data, the spending on independent placements has been the highest in the country per capita. Please provide the breakdown between education and social care spending on independent placements since 2014.

Reply

The majority of the spend on the DSG in relation to independent placements are for independent day placements which is almost always an education not a social care reason for the placement and would therefore be fully funded by the DSG. The level of independent day placement spend is driven by a number of factors, a key one being the amount of independent provision in a borough. Merton has a high level of independent provision and has had less local authority provision. We therefore have more spend in that sector. However, we have been addressing that as part of the DSG recovery plan by increasing special school places.

There are a small number of independent residential placements – between 25-35 a year and these can be for 38 weeks (term time only) or 52 weeks. For each case an assessment of the social care (adult or children's social care) and health contributions (where they are appropriate) are made. Children's social care contributions are generally provided for the 52 placements and are divided on a 38/14 week split education/children's social care.

Supplementary

I thank the Cabinet Member for her answer. This is clear that had this administration taken action to increase in-authority provision by the scale that was necessary it would have reduced the cost of independent provision. Why did you not prioritise increasing in-authority provision when you became Cabinet Member?

Reply

Thank you Councillor. Thank you for your supplementary. I'm finding it very funny that this is the party here opposing us when we were trying to build one new school that we have successfully built, working with Harris Academy and now telling me that I should have magically, we should have magically, found lots of land, and open lots of brand new schools all over the borough. I look forward to your support next time that we do need to do that. We have, as I said earlier, I've been working as efficiently and effectively as possible to expand the quantity of provision without any

compromise on the quality. That's why we've worked with the partners that we've already known rather than trying to bring in any new free schools or academies. Thank you.

From Councillor 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

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 \(campaign.gov.uk\)](https://www.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 an 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.

Supplementary

I'd like to thank the Cabinet Member for her response, thank you very much. Could I ask for Merton to pledge to be a communication accessible council accredited by Communication Access UK to train staff, Councillors and adhere to the standards to be placed on a national directory, displaying the communication access symbol? This is a free program and provides training and standards on how to support people with communication difficulties. Communication Access UK is an initiative developed in partnership by charities and organisations that share a vision to improve the lives of people in communication difficulties, led by the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists.

Reply

Thank you Councillor, I think the question was would we commit to take this pledge? I'm very very happy to look at this and to see if it is something that is appropriate for us to do. As I say in my answer, we already do a lot around communication, we already work a lot with the provision that is available, a large number of our schools for example are taking part in the Nuffield Early Language Intervention, which is a kind of evidence-based speech and language programme. But I'm always happy to find out about new initiatives and we'll happily meet with you, Councillor Gould about about this one. Thank you Councillor.

From Councillor John Dehaney to the Cabinet member for Children and Education

There has been concern about youth crime over the summer in London. What has Merton been doing to reduce youth offending?

Reply

A comprehensive operation between police, social care and the youth service has been taking place throughout the summer in Merton. This has involved weekly meetings to discuss partnership interventions to prevent youth crime and an enhanced police response. Meetings between key partners has enabled target support and interventions to be in place before concerns arise in the community. This partnership working resulted in swift information sharing and improved communication between agencies. It enabled all agencies to respond quickly to any emerging intelligence regarding youth violence and measures were put in place to

control serious youth violence wherever possible. It equally means that all key partner agencies and professionals are aware of the concerns, what action is being taken to reduce them. Partners have been able to provide tailored support and focused safeguarding to individual young people as required. Where areas or locations of concern became known, there has been a targeted support and presence in that area to disrupt activity, but also support engagement with young people. Cross-border partnership work with colleagues in multiple London boroughs has additionally safeguarded young people travelling across London to commit offences.

Additional Summer Scheme (Holidays Activities and Food) sessions were funded to increase the engagement of young people and keep them safe, including provision running extended opening hours to support young people. Targeted day activities were also provided to engage older young people and support them into post 16 placements.

Supplementary

I thank the Cabinet Member for response to my question. I was interested to read about the funding of additional summer scheme settlements. Can you please let me - can you please tell me - how they increase engagement with young people and hopefully turn them away from crime?

Reply

I'd like to thank the Councillor for his question and the supplementary and yeah i'm really proud of the work that we did over the summer and we reached, you know, thousands of children. Your question was about the way in that that instruction engages young people and i just use the word. I think you're asking how engaged young people are? The theory is that it distracts young people and helps them with doing something fulfilling and that therefore makes any kind of involvement with criminal activity just less available to them. There's some evidence from the youth work world that where youth services and youth work provision has been cut there's been increases in crime and so part of what we're doing with our kind of summer activities is trying to put back in place some of that provision and services that we think is so important to children and young people.

From Councillor Adam Bush to the Cabinet Member for Children and Education:

The budget outturn report for 2017/18 told us that there was a DSG overspend of £1.8 million yet no action was taken by your department to halt the overspend. Surely you must have been aware of this, so why did you not make the DSG a priority when you became the portfolio holder?

Reply

I became Cabinet member for Education in May 2019, and the minute of CYP Scrutiny in June 2019 show that I then stated that two of my top priorities were SEND funding the amounts we are paying for independent school places for children with EHCPs. It has been an ongoing priority for me ever since. More widely, the Council has been looking to address this issue for some time although I should point out that it is extremely challenging when government funding has just not kept up with the requirements set out in their Children's and Families Act 2014 legislation.

You will note a plan was presented in early 2019 and in autumn 2019 when it was considered by the Schools Forum, and a public report was presented to Cabinet in January 2020 Agenda for Cabinet on Monday 27 January 2020, 7.15 pm - Merton Council We met the DfE on the matter in February 2020.

Over the last 18 months resources have been prioritised on assisting schools to keep open during this difficult global pandemic period, and we support the DfE working with us on an issue which is significant for the council to address.

Supplementary

Thank you Mr Mayor. Can I start by thanking the Cabinet Member for her response. Since the Cabinet Member made this a priority, the overspend has risen by 10 million pounds. Why did your Department not respond to you making DSG a priority? Thank you.

Reply

Right, to make a couple of - thank you Councillor, for your question and Supplementary. I'd like to make a couple of points. Firstly i don't know how much you guys know about schools – children tend to go to them for a long time - so if a child is at an independent school and you've got that commitment to their place, I can't within six months, whip them out of that school and take that money without huge disruption to their education. Turning this around and the work that we're doing on the DSG is going to be a really difficult job and it's going to take a long amount of time because we need to start to change where peoples are going. Start bringing this new provision that we've already been talking about, but what I was never going to do, as I said in my speech, was start a fight with parents and start to withdraw services at an inappropriate time for their children.

From Pauline Cowper to the Cabinet member for Children and Education

What did the council do to support disadvantaged pupils when schools closed over the holidays?

Reply

Following on from activities which took place in the Easter holiday this year, the council worked with schools and voluntary sector providers to offer the Merton Fun

and Food scheme funded by the Department for Education Holidays Activities and Food (HAF) project. This enabled children that are eligible for free school meals to access free summer provision, which must meet HAF standards. These standards include: provision of at least four hours a day, four days a week of engagement activities; a meal every day meeting school nutritional standards; physical exercise; and nutritional education.

We are still collecting finalised data from providers but we estimate that 1600 children and young people accessed a four-day provision. This was slightly down on predicted numbers, as some schemes had to shut because of Covid outbreaks. However, that constitutes a reach to approximately 25% of those eligible for free school meals aged 5-16 in Merton. We estimate that 85% of the children accessing the summer scheme were from black and minority ethnic families, and 13% had EHCPs. We took direct referrals from social workers, offered open access provision in areas of high need, as well as targeting provision for particular communities. This included a week of activities in the Holiday Inn hotel in Colliers Wood to support the children. Of the 21 HAF providers, 12 were schools (five primary and seven secondary) who remained open during the holiday, and offered summer activities to their pupils, sometimes in partnership with other schools or voluntary sector providers. Merton Youth Service ran a summer scheme and hosted voluntary sector providers. We estimate that 8000 healthy meals were provided; 750 hours of physical activity; and 200 hours of nutritional education. Of course, this is in addition to children and young people having a lot of fun!

We would like to thank Merton Connected for working so hard to support our excellent offer in the voluntary sector: Tooting and Mitcham Football Club, AFC Wimbledon, Filmanthropy, Ashton Jazz, Hercules Athletics, Uptown Youth, Jimmy Asher Foundation, Unique Talent, Revoke.

One offer we would single out was run by the Jimmy Asher foundation for children at home. Activities and on line cooking were offered to children who would struggle to leave their homes. We also offered 1200 'take and make' meals, which involved a family having a box of fresh ingredients to enable them to cook the meal at home. These boxes were very popular during the Easter holiday, and so we continued to fund them across the summer.

We are now planning for the Christmas holidays which will continue the HAF offer.

In addition, Merton Council continued to offer food vouchers for families with children with free school meals across the summer. The government provided a 'Covid Support grant' but unfortunately the grant allocation to Merton did not provide for the increased number of children on free school meals. To ensure that all children on free school meals received a £80 voucher to cover the summer holiday period, Merton topped up the grant by some £72,000.

Supplementary

Thank you to the Cabinet Minister. When will plans be in place for support for disadvantaged pupils during their Christmas holidays?

Reply

I'd like to thank the Councillor for her question and her supplementary. Her question initially was about the summer program which I've already referenced and said we're really proud of. As it happens, cycling over here, I bumped into one of the local head teachers who provided this in his primary school and he was talking about how happy his staff were to come in over the summer and put on this additional provision and how keen they would be to do something similar again in the future holidays. What we need, to be able to do this, is funding. We were able to get some funding because of the exceptional circumstances this year, the government did kind of finally step up. We need serious funding so that we can offer ongoing support over the holidays, every single holiday, for every disadvantaged child who needs it. But I know that our schools will be up for that challenge, if we can find a way to source the funding.

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

As the number of children with ECHPs rose did the number of staff members dedicated to reviewing the ECHP also rise, and can you give me the average number of cases for an officer in 2013 compared with today?

Reply

In September 2013, before the Children and Families Act 2014, when pupils had a Statement of SEN, we had 1013 Statements of SEN and 4 FTE SEN Case Officer posts who had an average caseload of 253. In 2013, the age range for pupils with a Statement of SEN was up to the age of 19.

As of today's date, we have 2463 EHCPs (0-25years) and 11 FTE EHC Co-ordinator posts who manage final EHCPs with an average caseload of 223. We also have 6 EHC Co-ordinators undertaking EHC needs assessments

Since 2013 the number of EHC Co-ordinators who manage final EHCPs has risen by 7 full time equivalent.

Supplementary

Mr Mayor, thank you, and I thank the Cabinet Member for her response. My question and my supplementary question is to ask whether, given a projected near 37 of 37 million pound deficit whether a 175 increase in staff numbers covering this area but a 12% reduction in the case load for each of those staff

members is as worrying to her as it is to me given the overall deficit? Thank you Mr Mayor.

Reply

I'd like to thank the Councillor for his question and for his supplementary and it does not worry me in the slightest. In fact I think we need to do as much work as possible with these young people and their plans to make sure they're appropriate. The complexity of some of these cases is really significant. We need to be constantly looking at the provision for these young people and whether it's appropriate. That is the only way that we're going to be able to adjust the services and make sure that it is right for what that child and young person needs at that time.

From Councillor Stan Anderson to the Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure and Skills

Can the Cabinet member update Council on apprenticeships for young people in the borough?

Reply

The numbers of apprenticeships taken up by young people in Merton continue to be low, but are proportionately similar to neighbouring boroughs with low levels of Not in Education Training or Employment. Merton has been in and continues to be in the top quartile nationally for children in education training and employment with very strong levels of children staying in education 16-18. In areas with high levels of education apprenticeship take up is low. In Merton, this is approximately 800 apprentices per year. This figure fell last year regionally with many companies unable to offer apprenticeships. Merton College working with local businesses offers a range of apprenticeships to young people.

Feedback over time from young people and parents is that many apprenticeships do not pay sufficiently and/ or the key skills element puts them off. This is particularly true at level 1 and 2 apprenticeships where pay can be lower. The My Futures team which support young people who are not in education training or employment works hard with parents in particular where young people do have the qualifications to access higher paid apprenticeships but parental perception can be a barrier.

The London Borough of Merton currently employs 16 young Apprentices aged between 16-24. 6 of those apprentices started in 2021.

The Council has a dedicated apprenticeship [webpage](#) targeted at young people as an attraction piece on the types of apprenticeships within the local authority.

In addition to apprenticeships the council runs a Towards Employment team. This externally funded service supports young people furthest from employment into employment through purposeful links with employers.

The Towards Employment team are supporting Merton HR in the engagement and recruitment of YP to Merton's Kickstart scheme, holding Kickstart specific job clubs at the job centre where they have conducted interviews on behalf of managers. We have prioritised vulnerable young people to ensure that they get at least an interview. As of 10th September the Council has taken on a total of 24 Kick Start placements and is out to advert on a further 10 Kick Start job roles. These are all 16 – 25 year olds.

Supplementary (asked by Cllr Joan Henry on behalf of Cllr Anderson)

Thank you Mr Mayor. I'd like to congratulate the Cabinet Member on her new role and thank her for her answer. Would the Cabinet Member agree with me that it is vital to create professional opportunities for young people by supporting apprenticeship programmes?

Reply

Thank you Mr Mayor, that wasn't the name I had on my paper but never nevertheless I'd like to thank Councillor Henry for her questions and also for the supplementary question. I would all heartily, whole heartedly, agree with you for the importance of creating professional opportunities for our young people. Supporting apprenticeship programs is vital as not all students are able or even wish to go to university. Having said that you can as an apprentice study up from level two to seven and have lots of GCSEs if you so wish. However the people who tend to be apprentices are going to apprenticeship can earn as they go and they most times are offered jobs as they get to the end of their training. So with that in mind, yes, I do support the fact that students don't always want to go on to A-levels and then to university straight away. Thank you.