

# Merton Council

## Council

2 February 2022

### Supplementary Agenda 1 – Public and Councillor Questions and Replies

- |    |                                                                        |         |
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| 5  | Public questions to cabinet members                                    | 1 - 10  |
|    | The questions and written responses will be circulated at the meeting. |         |
| 6  | Councillors' ordinary priority questions to cabinet members            | 11 - 18 |
|    | The questions and written responses will be circulated at the meeting  |         |
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|    | The questions and written responses will be circulated at the meeting. |         |

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## **1 From Diane Sutton**

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

The lighting on Dorset Road is inadequate. My daughter walks down this road most days /evenings and I worry for her. I understand there is an issue with bulbs and the manufacturer is replacing them – can you ensure the lighting is adequate after this has been done.

### **Reply**

In 2016 the lanterns along Dorset Road were replaced with retrofit LED units offering savings in energy and carbon. These retrofit units have operated well to date, however in some cases throughout Dorset Road, we have seen issues with lighting levels where some of the lanterns have started to fail/dim and therefore not providing the sufficient lighting output as expected. We shall be replacing these fittings.

We are expecting delivery of the replacement units in February 2022 and are chasing on the delivery date with the manufacturer; however, we are aware that delays are being experienced due to global shortage of electronic components and haulage issues from overseas which may delay the expected timescale in receiving the replacement LED lanterns.

In addition, all roads that are maintained by Merton Council and have associated street lighting are lit to the required standards as outlined in BS5489-1:2020. This will be the case once the replacement LED lanterns are installed in Dorset Road.

## **2 From Pauline Kennedy**

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

The proposed work on the street lights in Dorset Road, does not address the real issue - the current lamps are not casting sufficient light when they are working and the trees block light. Can the proposed work be amended to resolve these issues?

### **Reply**

All roads that are maintained by Merton Council and have associated street lighting are lit to the required standards as outlined in BS5489-1:2020. This will be the case once the replacement LED lanterns are installed in Dorset Road

To address the concerns of the street trees, the Tree Team has visited the location on several occasions and has instructed the tree service provider to undertake a

selective canopy lift in the vicinity of impacted lamp columns to remove selective branches that may be impeding light from the lamp column. The healthy and mature London plane trees contribute significantly to the tree canopy in this area, which has many positive environmental benefits that need to be preserved. The work is to be undertaken prior to the spring period when leaves return.

### **3 From Suzanne Grocott**

#### **To the Cabinet Member for Local Environment and Green Spaces**

A lady was fined for walking her dog without a lead on Raynes Park Sports Ground. The man who approached her only briefly shared his ID, after it was requested. Why was this CEO not displaying identification given the distress this might cause following the murder of the Sarah Everard?

#### **Reply**

The Waste Services Team have reviewed the information provided and undertaken an informal investigation into the event and have concluded that the Fix Penalty Notice (FPN) was issued incorrectly, as such we have cancelled the FPN and no further action will be taken against the member of the public regarding this incident.

In reference to identification, our Environmental Enforcement Officers are issued and deployed in full branded uniform along with an official Merton approved identification badge containing photo identification. In addition, the service is reviewing the type of uniform worn by enforcement officers with a view to making their presence more overtly visible to the public when patrolling parks.

The safety and security of our residents and visitors using our park is of paramount importance and as such I have asked our Public Space staff to address safety concerns and environmental enforcement by increasing foot patrols across these valued assets.

### **4 From Rick Livesey**

#### **To the Cabinet Member for Local Environment and Green Spaces**

Veolia refuse waste collections from part of Commonsides East because the unsealed road may damage Veolia's vehicles. Every week soiled nappies, sanitary products and waste litter pavement and Commons causing a disgusting health hazard. Veolia are contracted to use pavements if road access is unavailable. When will this be resolved?

## **Reply**

Many thanks for bringing this to our attention. The condition of the unmaintained road along Commonsides East has been inspected by our service providers Health and Safety team, which concluded that the road is not suitable for a standard 26 tonne Refuse Collection Vehicle to operate safely due to the unevenness of the surface.

I have asked Waste Services to review the current provision of containers and collection points and to work with both the residents and our service provider in seeking a sustainable solution which will see overall improvements to the local environment. In the interim, residents have been provided with a revised sack-based collection system while the service seeks a mutually agreeable solution. It is hoped an agreed sustainable solution is in place by the end of February.

## **5 From Barry Smith**

### **To the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health**

Prior to the November meeting the figure for electric vehicle charging points in Merton was 258. Could you give me the updated figure for now please, and tell me if the difference represents the rate of installation the council expects to continue going forward?

## **Reply**

Merton is in top 20% of Local Authorities for EV charger availability per head of population.

Since the November meeting, the number of EV charge points available to Merton residents remains 258 since we have completed our in year programme.

These are:

- 6 Rapid Chargers – ESB Energy
- 140 On Street – SourceLondon
- 90 Lamp Column Chargers - Char.gy
- 22 Superstore/Retail Park charge points.

The current year's programme has been delivered. The Council will be developing an EV Charging Strategy and plan next financial year (2022/3). This work is part of

the borough's TFL funding package and is dependent on TFL agreeing the borough's financial settlement expected by March 2022.

## **6 From Ben Dory**

### **To the Cabinet Member for Housing Regeneration and the Climate Emergency**

With yet another extension granted, is there any end in sight to the closure of Graham Road, something that never should have been allowed to happen in the first place?

#### **Reply**

The closure of Graham Road is due to be removed by 31<sup>st</sup> July 2022.

## **7 From Tony Burton**

### **To the Cabinet Member for Local Environment and Green Spaces**

It is four years since completion of the Rediscover Mitcham project was celebrated. Given the time lapsed, will Merton Council provide a map and details of the areas of green space in Mitcham town centre to be registered as Town Green and a timetable for when registration will be completed?

#### **Reply**

Officers are actively working on this and aim to conclude the registration over the next 6 months.

## **8 From Sandra Vogel**

### **To the Cabinet Member for Local Environment and Green Spaces**

When will Merton Council announce its official adoption of the FixMyStreet app for reporting flytips? What other methods for reporting flytips exist? What reports other than flytips from FixMyStreet will the council accept at launch? If none, when will other types of reports be accepted – by type and date?

#### **Reply**

I am pleased to advise that Merton Council is one of several London authorities to use FixMyStreet Pro and benefit from its intelligent functionality to handle the complex routing of inbound street and environment reports, automatically ensuring everything goes to the correct place, including being able to divert reports to Transport for London where relevant, with integration into the council's customer management system. This ensures a fully-optimised interface that works perfectly on any device and facilitates a two-way flow of data so that report-makers can stay up to date with the progress of their reports. Residents may also still continue to contact the council by telephone to report fly tipping incidents.

We officially went live on the 13<sup>th</sup> December as part of a phased launch we prioritised the services which were in greatest demand. We have now completed the first phase and all street cleansing related tasks are now live and residents can report directly through our website or through the mobile application a full set of service requests including sweeping, weeding, fly tipping, graffiti, and dog fouling. The council will soon be promoting the rollout of Fix My Street in Merton more widely. We are now looking at the second phase and reviewing how this application can deliver improved customer reporting for highway issues including potholes and lighting issues.

## **9 From Kirsten Galea**

### **To the Cabinet Member for Housing Regeneration and the Climate Emergency**

Does the Council request a plan for parking vehicles during medium and large scale constructions projects, which considers the impact on neighbouring residents and businesses? Are such plans considered as part of planning applications and then reviewed and/or enforced while the works are being completed?

### **Reply**

The Council routinely attaches conditions (Standard Condition H09 and H10) to planning permissions so as to require details of parking on site for construction workers and other vehicles along with loading and unloading arrangements and maintaining the construction site in a manner that minimises the impact on neighbour amenity in terms of on street parking dust and runoff from the site and the operation of the surrounding highway the effect of which would safeguard both residents and businesses.

Subject to site constraints, such as within town centre or more built-up locations, officers may request details in advance of a decision being issued and any planning permission would be conditional upon the development being implemented in accordance with those details.

Officers can confirm that there are examples of where delivery and construction activity has warranted on-going discussion with an applicant and where it has been necessary to conduct sites visits to speak with contractors where a failure to comply with details has been alleged. From a delivery / logistics perspective the Network Coordination officers wouldn't agree parking for contractors through the use of dedicated parking or alike, the focus is on the logistics and how deliveries are accommodated to and from site safely.

## **10 From Richard Poole**

### **To the Cabinet Member for Local Environment and Green Spaces**

Does the council have any plans to improve the quality and provision of children's play equipment in any parks in or around the Cannon Hill and Morden areas? In particular there is a lack of play equipment for children aged 12+.

#### **Reply**

A lot of the borough's playgrounds, including those in the Cannon Hill & Morden area are limited in terms of space, meaning there is limited opportunity to add additional equipment, particularly so as the equipment on offer for the older age groups tends to take up more space and often needs to be partitioned away from play equipment that is designed for younger users.

When playground equipment is renewed, we do look to improve equipment and install equipment that is able to be utilised by a wide range of age groups and that offers good play value. Officers in the Greenspaces team would welcome receive any further ideas that you may have to improve the play offer in specific areas.

## **11 From Christopher Coombe**

### **To the Cabinet Member for Housing Regeneration and the Climate Emergency**

Does Merton Council feel they are required to consult the community on any decision they need to make as landowner and trustees about the Wimbledon Park covenants and if so, how and when will they do this?

#### **Reply**

This is a hypothetical scenario. Should there be a breach or imminent potential breach of the Restrictive Covenant related to the Wimbledon Park Golf course land



then the Council will ensure that it meets its obligations, [including any obligation to consult the community] as Custodian of this public land.

## **12 From Lee Briggs**

### **To the Cabinet Member for Housing Regeneration and the Climate Emergency**

In recent years Merton's housing target has more than doubled from around 400 new homes per year to 900. As the London Plan based this growth on opportunities from Crossrail 2 which is now suspended, should this target also be suspended?

### **Reply**

Merton's share of London's new homes in the 2021 London Plan is for 918 new homes to be built in the borough each year (up from 411 new homes in the 2016 London Plan). This is based on both housing needs for London and land availability, brought together in a London-wide Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment carried out in 2017. The study did include a scenario for housing growth arising from Crossrail 2. However, this additional capacity is not included in the London Plan housing targets as Crossrail2 would have finished in the 2030s, outside the 10-year timescale for the London Plan. Link to the Mayor's Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment

[2017\\_london\\_strategic\\_housing\\_land\\_availability\\_assessment.pdf](#)

## **13 From Frank Pocock**

### **To the Cabinet Member for Housing Regeneration and the Climate Emergency**

Can the Cabinet Member please provide an update on the search for a development partner for the Morden regeneration project?

### **Reply**

The regeneration of Morden Town Centre is a key ambition of Merton Council and remains a high priority. We are fully committed to regenerating Morden into a thriving town centre with new homes, improved transport and public realm, revitalised retail and modern business space.

A major regeneration project of this scale will take a number of years to develop and deliver. The delivery of the adopted vision for comprehensive regeneration will require significant funding to attract a suitable development partner to ensure

investment and a long-term commitment to deliver the regeneration in Morden town centre. The council continues to work collaboratively with Transport for London, the Mayor of London and the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and Local Government's (DLUHC) sponsored agency, Homes England to explore funding opportunities. Given the implications of Covid 19 on our high streets, and the recent results from the [Your Merton 2021 engagement](#), a review is currently being undertaken of alternative delivery and funding options for the town centre, to bring forward the regeneration.

As the joint statement from the cross-party Morden Regeneration Steering Group highlights: "This is a long-term project which will require collaboration with partners and cross-party working as collectively we all want to see a thriving and regenerated Morden which brings new homes, jobs, and investment in the local infrastructure."  
[www.merton.gov.uk/moremorden](http://www.merton.gov.uk/moremorden)

#### **14 From Michael Paterson**

##### **To the Cabinet Member for Culture Leisure and Skills**

Does the council have any plans to refurbish the tennis courts at Morden Park?

##### **Reply**

The Greenspaces team is working with the LTA to assess the boroughs tennis facilities with a view to revitalising those that require attention, this is carried out via an application process. This process is currently in the development stages with the anticipation being that Morden Park (Links Avenue end) along with other tennis facilities in the borough, will benefit from this grant funding.

#### **15 From Jonathan Foster**

##### **To the Cabinet Member for Housing Regeneration and the Climate Emergency**

What mitigations are being put in place by the council to prevent Wydell Close/ Lower Morden flooding again?

##### **Reply**

Merton Council is responsible for the road gully and connection pipe, which in the case of Wydell Close discharges into the Pyl Brook main river. Wydell Close is at risk of river flooding due to the proximity of the main river which is managed by the Environment Agency.

In the summer rainfall events, Wydell Close was affected by sewer flooding from manholes that are managed by Thames Water.

Notwithstanding this, the Council undertook checks and surveys of the road gullies including the low lying one at the end of the Cul-de-sac. This was found to be in good condition and was cleaned and free of silt. The pipework was also not found to be defective. We have also installed a 4G gully sensor which monitors silt and water levels. This sensor presents real time/live data to us and alerts us if silt levels in the gully reach a level for action or cleansing.

We have since been meeting regularly with Thames Water regarding this matter in our capacity as Lead Local Flood Authority to ensure that the sewer flooding is being appropriately addressed by them. We will also be publishing a report, under section 19 of the Flood & Water Act into the causes of the flooding including recommendations and actions for the appropriate organisations.

## **16 From Dr Pippa Maslin**

### **To the Cabinet Member for Local Environment and Green Spaces**

In December 2020, the Beddington incinerator/'EfW facility' was granted a permit for a 15% increase in tonnage throughput. Now, Sutton Council says that there is an application for a further increase. What has Merton Council been told about this and what is the Council's position on the matter?

### **Reply**

We are disappointed that Viridor is making this application just 12 months after the Environment Agency agreed to increase the maximum capacity of the facility by 15%. Whilst we recognise the need for additional energy from waste treatment capacity in London and the southeast (significant volumes of non-recyclable waste continue to be landfilled or exported to energy from waste facilities in mainland Europe) we are concerned about the impact that any increase in capacity at the Beddington facility would have on the intensification of local traffic congestion and residents.

We expect the Environment Agency to view this as a 'Substantial Variation' to the permit, which means there will be a period of consultation, most likely taking place in summer 2022. This will be an important opportunity for local residents and stakeholders to review the technical information that has been submitted by Viridor in support of the application, and share feedback with the Environment Agency directly, who will ultimately make the decision on whether to approve the application or not."

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## **From Councillor Ben Butler to the Cabinet Member for Children and Education**

What has been the cost to the Council of the government's failure to fully fund our SEND service since 2018?

### **Reply**

What has been the cost to the Council of the government's failure to fully fund our SEND service since 2018?

The Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) funding has four ring-fenced blocks within the grant, these are as follows:

- Schools Block which funds the individual maintained Primary and Secondary schools budgets;
- Early Years Block which funds the provision for under 5 year olds for schools with Nursery provision and the PVI sector;
- Centrally Retained LA Block where a small element of funds are retained centrally for services provided by Merton;
- High Needs Block is an allocation that supports the SEN(D) service and children diagnosed with SEN(D) and where the main elements of overspend are.

Since 2018 the annual pressures (outturn) reported within the accounts are:

2018/19 £2.9m

2019/20 £9.3m

2020/21 £12.7m

2021/22 £12.6m (forecast)

## **From Cllr Thomas Barlow to the Leader of the Council:**

To ask the Leader if he has received legal advice on the covenant covering the sale of land from Wimbledon Golf Club to the All England Lawn Tennis Club (AELTC) and if he will share this in full with the residents of Merton?

### **Reply**

I understand that all party leaders, including his Group Leader, Cllr Nick McLean, have received the legal advice and that Cllr Barlow has also been advised it can be appropriate to share legal advice received by the Council with some councillors on a confidential basis, with the knowledge they can be trusted not to share it further.

I also understand he has been advised that advice is subject to legal privilege and that the reason for keeping such information confidential is that at some point the Council may find itself in court, and that it would put the Council at a disadvantage should the full detail of the advice be in the public domain as that would mean that the counterparty in the proceedings was also privy to that advice.

Given this, the nature of privileged information therefore means that it would be irresponsible to publish any advice, as doing so would harm the Council's position in this matter. Nevertheless, I can confirm that a covenant in the interests of the residents of Merton exists on the Wimbledon Park Golf Club land, and the council intends it to be respected.

The covenant, and the legal advice about its status, does not affect or predetermine the outcome of any planning application. There will be a debate about whether or not a new park on land that has never previously been freely open to the public would be a welcome addition to the local community. That will be a matter of judgment separate from any legal considerations. I appreciate this is a confusing distinction but I hope it is helpful.

**From Councillor Billy Christie to the Cabinet Member for Local Environment and Green Spaces**

Can the Cabinet Member please update us on the rollout of the Fix My Streets app?

**Reply**

I am pleased to report that the implementation of the new FixMyStreet reporting function went live on the 13<sup>th</sup> of December. This new tool has provided our residents, street champions and Ward Members with an improved and efficient tool to report street issues. To date, residents have made over 2,200 reports, with 60% of these reports relating to fly-tipping. The system also allows improved functionality if residents need to report issues when outdoors by using the dedicated FixMyStreet mobile app.

I am also pleased to report that Merton Council is the most responsive Council of FixMyStreet users in the time taken to fix problems from when they are reported. In addition, the system also allows Officers better oversight in analysing where incidents are occurring through heatmaps and with this tool, they are able to look at issues on a Ward basis to better inform where resources should be directed.

We have further plans over the next few months to widen the range of issues that can be reported using this system, with Highway reporting being the next phase in the rollout.

<https://www.fixmystreet.com/>

**From Nigel Benbow to the Cabinet Member for Local Environment and Green Spaces:**

What is the cabinet member doing to maintain the waste service?

**Reply**

I am pleased to advise that the waste service has continued to be prioritised throughout these unprecedented times, both due to the pandemic and the national shortage of qualified drivers for large goods vehicles, in which we are operating. Our

service Business Continuity Plan (BCP) has been activated throughout this period and we continue to work closely with our service provider Veolia to minimise the impact the recent increase in Coronavirus cases has had on our waste and recycling services.

We are reviewing these impacts daily and have, to date, been able to rely on a core collection and street cleansing service being delivered across the borough. It is acknowledged that in line with our BCP and as part of our agreed prioritisation of services, we have at times needed to collect different materials from our communal flats locations. Our waste contractor is also training nine (9) additional drivers in Merton to provide further future resiliency to our services.

**From Cllr Simon McGrath to the Cabinet Member for Housing, Regeneration and Climate Emergency**

In light of the desperate shortage of affordable housing in the borough, why has the decision about the amount of affordable housing to be built on the Council-owned sites which are due to be sold, been left to an Officer of the Council to decide?

**Reply**

The Council recognises the challenge of increasing the delivery of affordable housing and Cabinet recently approved Merton's Housing Delivery Strategy and on 6<sup>th</sup> December, approved the disposal of four LBM owned sites to deliver 100% affordable homes. The level of affordable housing for these sites has been determined by Cabinet; to address the acute need for more affordable housing. The disposals process is delegated to senior officers to progress in accordance with Merton's scheme of delegation.

**From Councillor Joan Henry to the Cabinet Member for Children and Education**

Can you please update us on the number of children in Merton living in poverty, and how this compares to the number before the pandemic began in March 2020?

**Reply**

Growing up in poverty is damaging to child health and well-being. Adverse childhood circumstances are associated with future adult ill health and negatively affect future health and life chances.

In 2018/19, 5,195 (13.1%) children in Merton under 16 years lived in low-income families, a lower proportion than the average for London (19.2%).

East Merton has a higher proportion of children living in poverty than West Merton, with Pollards Hill, Cricket Green, Figge's Marsh, and Ravensbury wards most affected. The gap between child poverty in East and West Merton between 2014/15 and 2018/19 has widened, with child poverty increasing more in East Merton wards than West Merton wards.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has been greater for those already on lower income as they are more vulnerable to changes in income. More families are likely to fall into poverty due the economic impact of the pandemic, particularly in East Merton where a higher proportion of families work in professions that are more likely to have been disrupted.

The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM) is a useful proxy indicator for family income and child poverty. The proportion of school pupils eligible for FSM in Merton before the pandemic was 17.5% (academic year 2019/20) however this has risen to 22.1% in 2020/21, showing the negative financial impact the pandemic has had on families locally. This is an extra 1,220 pupils in Merton eligible for FSM in the academic year 2020/21.

**From Cllr Daniel Holden to the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health**

Is the cabinet member worried about future parking income not rebounding to the previous high point in 2019-20?

**Reply**

Parking income funds a range of transport related activity across the Council. This is particularly important when funding via TfL is much reduced and uncertain for the immediate future. Parking income has been significantly affected during Covid and this has been recognised by Government who have provided some compensation. All aspects of parking income have been affected and the situation remains turbulent, and is therefore of concern since our Medium Term Financial Strategy has factored in parking income. But it is also of concern because the reduction in income does not of itself denote a reduction in care use, which therefore means we continue to observe poor air quality and congestion.

**From Cllr David Simpson to the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health**

The Your Merton consultation has drawn fresh attention to the areas of the borough that suffer from poor air quality. What steps does the Cabinet Member have planned to improve air quality in these areas?

**Reply**

Merton remains committed to tackling air quality in the borough, last month we saw one the largest rollout of new automated monitoring regimes of any borough in London. This network includes 68 new Breathe London Monitors as well as traffic and transport monitoring in areas of concern in the borough. This will show pollution hotspots and sources in detail we have never seen before.

This will also enable us to see the impact of ultrafine dust (PM2.5) which is a priority pollutant.

Some of the activities we have underway in the borough include:



- An anti-idling plan focusing on priority areas in the borough, with our Air Quality Team welcoming support and ideas for locations to focus on.
- Our programme of work around schools air quality audits and school specific monitoring is continuing.
- We have projects including a Clean Air Village in Wimbledon and our Healthy Streets Everyday project is building environmental learning areas at 3 schools in the borough.
- Our Air Quality Team are still delivering the world's first Low Emission Zone for Construction across London in partnership with boroughs and the GLA, a project that is shaping the air quality impact on construction throughout London.
- Our new Air Quality Supplementary Planning Document is now in place and gives clear guidance to new developments in the borough as to what we expect of them to actively contributing to tackling air pollution.
- We have a unique Behavioural Insights project focused anti-idling at Level Crossings and the use of interactive signage.

Our officers are starting to put together air pollution monitoring data for 2021 as part of our annual reporting; this will be published in the next couple of months.

Even with all this good work, we cannot be complacent, we cannot resolve the problem of air quality as a borough alone as pollution does not respect boundaries and traffic from outside the borough directly affects our residents.

This year we will be producing a new Air Quality Action Plan and I look forward to working with Members, businesses, community groups and the public to build a new plan for the next 5 years.

### **From Councillor John Dehaney to the Leader of the Council**

Can the Leader please reassure us that during national lockdowns, enforced during the pandemic to slow down the spread of the virus, every effort was made in Council buildings to adhere to measures mandated by the Government?

### **Reply**

So far as I am aware, the Council has at all times aimed to operate within guidance and advice from public health officials.

As part of the Council's wider response to Covid-19, a number of physical adjustments and additional measures were introduced within the Council's operational buildings to ensure the safety and protection of staff and visitors.

These included the introduction of suitable and sufficient social distancing arrangements and reduced occupancy within the Council's buildings, the use of one-way systems and additional cleaning/sanitisation of workstations, common areas and any potential 'touch' points such as door handles with a suitable hospital grade disinfectant.

All the measures introduced were initially discussed and agreed with colleagues from Public Health to confirm that they were suitable and sufficient, and the arrangements were then reviewed on a regular basis to ensure that they met the constantly changing advice from central government.

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

Please comment on how successful the council's efforts are to get care leavers into work and employment?

**Reply**

This is something we take very seriously and are always trying to improve on, as we understand the importance of education, training and employment for the later life outcomes of our care experienced young people. Excitingly, our current performance has improved and in Quarter 2 we were the 2<sup>nd</sup> best performing borough on the Pan London Dash Board\* with 72% of our care experienced young people in ETE. We have a dedicated post in our virtual school committed to engaging some of our hardest to reach care leavers and track all our young people who are not in ETE on a monthly basis. Of recent success, we were very proud to see 2 of our care experienced young people be successful in their application for the Civil Service Care Leaver Internship Scheme.

**From Councillor Mary Curtin to the Cabinet Member for Housing, Regeneration and the Climate Emergency**

How is the cabinet member progressing with retrofitting fuel-poor homes, a crucial measure councils can take in tackling the climate emergency?

**Reply**

Over the last year, the Council has worked with partners to apply for national retrofit funding for fuel poor homes in Merton through the Green Homes Grant Local Authority Delivery (LAD) Schemes, the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund (SHDF), and the Sustainable Warmth Competition. The Council is awaiting confirmation of delivery mechanisms for the GLA's Sustainable Warmth funding, but referrals for eligible households are being progressed through local and regional partners for the LAD schemes. Sustainable Warmth is open until March 2023.

The Council is also working with local housing providers to understand the key obstacles and operational challenges to retrofitting their local housing stock and to consider opportunities for collaboration, including knowledge and skills sharing between housing providers.

To date there has been limited capacity within the Council to drive borough-wide retrofit. However, funding has been secured to recruit two additional members of staff from April 2022 to promote borough-wide retrofit. Securing and delivering national retrofit funding for fuel poor homes in Merton will continue to be a priority in 2022. Priorities will also include the development of a retrofit strategy for the borough to consider key barriers to retrofit in Merton, mechanisms to overcome supply chain issues and upfront costs, and how best to identify and engage with local

homeowners, businesses and landlords to drive the uptake of good quality retrofit. This will be subject to being able to recruit suitably qualified staff which may be challenging given the intense competition in the market for energy professionals.

The Council is also supporting the Merton's community-led Climate Action Group to engage with residents and encourage the uptake of retrofit in Merton. The Climate Action Group has developed a proposal and secured Neighbourhood CIL funding to run energy training in 4 pilot schools in Merton to empower the younger generation with knowledge to drive behaviour change around energy use, and help tackle fuel poverty in the borough. The intention is to develop a delivery model which could be replicated in schools across Merton.

Merton is also working with the South London Partnership to consider opportunities for collaboration to drive domestic retrofit across the sub-region, including the Mayor's Construction Academy for South London which is looking to support an expansion of green construction skills and jobs.

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## **From Councillor Sally Kenny to the Leader**

Can the Leader update us on plans to move St Helier hospital to Belmont and away from those people most in need?

### **Reply**

I am afraid that it is still the government's intention to close services at St Helier and move them to Belmont. While we have an excellent relationship with the NHS, we regularly raise our concerns that health inequalities will widen as a result of this government decision. While there are many factors in this, we have urged the government to reconsider, given the clear evidence that Covid-19 has had a disproportionate impact on communities living closest to St Helier.

## **From Cllr David Williams to the Leader of the Council:**

After 20 years of interference in the delivery of services at St Helier Hospital by Labour politicians in Merton, stoking up community fear with half truths - and holding back the development of 21st century medical care - will the Leader confirm that his Administration will now focus on delivering decent Council services and leave the NHS to get on with its job?

### **Reply**

I do not recognise this characterisation of events. I also do not share his fears about an administration being unable to focus on a wide number of issues at the same time, though I do of course understand his experience as Leader may have led him to this conclusion. Nevertheless, I am afraid that it is still the government's intention to close services at St Helier and move them to Belmont. While we have an excellent relationship with the NHS, we regularly raise our concerns that health inequalities will widen as a result of this government decision. While there are many factors in this, we have urged the government to reconsider, given the clear evidence that Covid-19 has had a disproportionate impact on communities living closest to St Helier.

## **From Councillor Stephen Alambritis to the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health**

Can the Cabinet Member explain how the Health on the High Street pilot project fits into the wider landscape of healthcare in Merton?

### **Reply**

Can the Cabinet Member explain how the Health on the High Street pilot project fits into the wider landscape of healthcare in Merton?

A priority in the Local Health and Care Plan, Health on the High Street is an approach to help change how people access health and wellbeing services and will pilot health and wellbeing hubs on the high street and in community venues across Merton. The pilot will complement and enhance access, rather than replace the need for direct access to primary care. The pilot aims to demonstrate the effectiveness of community health on the high street by bringing services (COVID-19 vaccination and testing, holistic health and care, prevention and welfare) to where people live their

lives e.g. the high street, provide support in an integrated way rather than expecting people to attend numerous different services and support reviving the high street.

A Project Manager, funded by SWLCCG, has been now recruited and activity will start at the end of February 2022.

**From Cllr Anthony Fairclough to the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health**

Looking at the health and wellbeing aspect of Covid management in schools: could you please detail, for example, what is being done to address proper ventilation, staff shortages and any other additional measures to mitigate the impact of Covid in schools?

**Reply**

**Measures to mitigate the impact of Covid in schools**

The Public Health team have provided responsive, personalised and up to date support for Merton headteachers generally and for each school. Headteachers value and are confident in the quality of the advice they receive about reintroducing, as necessary, 'bubbles,' zoning and face covering in communal areas as enhanced measures where there are outbreaks in particular year groups.

In weekly meetings with secondary headteachers and primary headteacher cluster representatives, public health attend and provide an update on national measures and on the local pattern of infections in age groups. Merton Education Partner (MEP) Inspectors called each of their schools in the first two days of the spring term 2022 to find out about staffing absences after Christmas so that we had an overview of issues across our schools. Those contacts – through phonecalls and the regular schedule of MEP visits – are continuing and the Head of School Improvement contacts those schools highlighted on the PH weekly spreadsheet with outbreaks/high levels of infection.

MEP Inspectors and Advisers continue to maintain a focus on school improvement and the quality of education. They support and advise schools in their preparations for inspection and continue to review, advise, support and challenge in those few schools not securely Good.

**Air ventilation**

Through the weekly (sometimes, daily, when there are rapid changes to statutory Covid-security measures) emails to headteachers in all Merton schools, Merton School Improvement provides headteachers with links to the latest DfE updates and statutory operational guidance for schools. This includes information about how to order CO2 monitors and air cleaning units. Unfortunately most of our schools report that their applications for the latter are deemed ineligible because open windows provide sufficient ventilation as measured by the monitors.

**Staff shortages**

Even with the reduction in the length of time required for isolation after a positive PCR, staff absence remains a pressure in many of our schools. Additional Covid-related factors include the 10-day isolation requirements for unvaccinated staff each time they have been in contact with an infection, mental health and anxiety and the

resumption of jury service which cannot be deferred. It is very difficult to book agency staff and some headteachers are now booking supply staff in advance, as a precautionary measure. The cost of supply over the last year is a significant and increasing budget pressure.

Headteachers are constantly revising their contingency planning so that returning to remote learning for any class of pupils is a final resort. It has only been used this term in a very few schools. Early Years staff-pupil ratios have been temporarily adjusted and this has added some limited flexibility to how headteachers can manage staff absence. In most instances, those headteachers who are close to having to introduce remote learning for a class or year group, contact the Head of School Improvement / Assistant Director CSF for advice and consultation before making that decision.

**From Councillor Nick Draper to the Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure and Skills**

Can the Cabinet Member please outline the part libraries play in improving the mental health of Merton residents?

**Reply**

Merton's libraries promote healthy living and provide self-management support and engagement opportunities for children and adults supported by welcoming spaces; effective signposting and information to reduce health, social and economic inequalities. They offer a range of creative and social activities which engage and connect individuals and communities, combat loneliness and improve wellbeing.

Our seven libraries already host a range of groups and services that support our communities, including a range of health and wellbeing services covering subjects such as healthy eating, sexual health, diabetes, mindfulness and smoking cessation. A year round approach to promoting healthier lifestyles through libraries is in place and links in with national and local initiatives. Some examples of services delivered include:

Tuned In aims to combat some of the issues of loneliness in the borough by facilitating musical jam sessions every Monday at Merton Arts Space, Wimbledon library. The sessions share and develop musical skills and build knowledge, as well as helping individuals build social connections and friendship groups. The project is open and accessible to all and participants have reported impressive results in improving their health and wellbeing, social and community connectedness and awareness of health services as a result of attending.

Launched during the pandemic the Library Service provides an equipment loaning scheme for vulnerable and/or isolated residents who do not have access to IT equipment in the home. The scheme not only provides good quality IT equipment such as laptops and tablets but advice, guidance and training on how to get the equipment set up and how to get online in a safe way. Library staff and volunteers support residents by providing training either in person or via the telephone. Participants are also linked into a range of free IT learning courses provided by

Merton Adult Learning and other providers. So far just under 200 residents have joined the scheme with 100% of residents reporting improvements in their IT skills as a result of borrowing a device.

Libraries provide a range of employability support services working with training providers. Examples include CV writing workshops, job clubs and other skills training. The use of library services is integral for a number of community based courses and in a more informal way through sessions such as one to one IT support and other activities delivered by partners and volunteers.

Another project shortly to be rolled out across all libraries is Mind Space. Mind Space will develop all libraries as digital, education and wellbeing hubs – a place to engage and enhance your mind in new ways. Through external funding we will make adaptations to the buildings and purchase new equipment to create a multi-sensory experience that enhances resident's digital, education and health outcomes.

**From Cllr Adam Bush to the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health:**

How has the uptake been on the Covid19 vaccine rollout amongst the BAME community?

**Reply**

Vaccination across ethnic groups is an important topic which is monitored through the regular Situational Awareness Report. The last report dated 6<sup>th</sup> of January revealed a lower proportion of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic group populations being vaccinated than, for example, White Irish or White British populations. For example, 75% of those in the White British group have had at least their first dose compared with 56% of those in the African group having had at least their first dose. There are also differences in vaccine uptake between Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic groups, with 72% of those in the Indian group having had at least their first dose, for example. The proportion vaccinated continues to increase across all ethnic groups.

A significant amount of work has been put into the vaccine programme to bridge this divide. Locally over 40 pop-up clinics have already taken place in Merton ranging from faith setting, community centres to homeless shelters. SWL CCG are now focusing on the small pockets of communities that are showing a low vaccine uptake and holding specific pop ups in those locations. This will go hand in hand with our local on street engagement plans to boost uptake. The local authority has recently been awarded funding for the COVID vaccine champions programme, this will help build a network of networks, increase vaccine engagement and setting up a call and recall service for those that have not been vaccinated yet.

In relation to vaccine hesitancy and the developing implementation of vaccinations, please see the Vaccination Programme Point 3.4 of the recent Strategic Theme Report and specifically the link to our Vaccination Equity Plan which is a core focus of the Health and Wellbeing Board Community Subgroup. [HWB strategic theme report Council 170122.pdf \(merton.gov.uk\)](#)



### **From Councillor Dennis Pearce to the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health**

Will the Cabinet member please outline what work the council is doing in collaboration with the NHS to reduce vaccine hesitancy, particularly amongst health and social care staff?

#### **Reply**

Officers worked very closely and successfully with NHS colleagues to support vaccine uptake by staff working in the 38 care homes in the borough and have continued this collaborative approach to the wider implementation of the vaccine mandate for health staff and for care staff working in front line roles in CQC regulated settings including home care, extra care sheltered housing and supported living schemes. As a result of the joint work undertaken in advance of the vaccine mandate coming into effect for residential care staff in November 2021 only a very small number of care staff chose not to get vaccinated and to seek alternative employment, and no care home in the borough was significantly impacted as a result. Officers are continuing to work closely with NHS colleagues to ensure that the roll out of the vaccine mandate to wider health and care settings, which comes into effect on the 1<sup>st</sup> of April, is similarly achieved with the minimum possible impact on health and care services locally. The deadline for staff to have a first dose of the vaccine, in order to be able to have the second jab by the 1<sup>st</sup> of April, is the 3<sup>rd</sup> of February.

Officers and NHS colleagues have focused on very regular communication and engagement with care providers to:

- ensure that providers are aware of, and understand, the importance of the 3<sup>rd</sup> of February date, that any requested support is made available, and that providers are aware of locations where staff can get their vaccine;
- provide access to webinars and 1 to 1 / group discussion opportunities with GPs and other clinicians so that vaccine hesitant staff can be provided with explanations of the benefits of being vaccinated, to provide reassurance on safety, and to dispel myths; and
- working to ensure that vaccine availability is not an issue when staff decide to have the vaccine.

Officers are tracking daily the number of unvaccinated staff across the social care sector in the borough and meeting regularly with providers who have larger numbers of unvaccinated staff in order to understand what additional actions the providers are taking to manage risk and to offer bespoke assistance to those providers.

### **From Cllr Jenifer Gould to the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health**

Given the World Health Organisation's COP26 *Special Report on Climate Change and Health*, which spells out the global health community's prescription for climate action based on a growing body of research that establishes the many and inseparable links between climate and health, could the Cabinet Member explain why climate action and the impact on health is not included in the strategic theme

report, particularly as the council signed a cross-party motion on climate action almost 3 years ago?

### **Reply**

It is right to emphasise the link between climate change and health. Indeed, climate change can be considered a social determinant of health, alongside education, neighbourhood and physical environment – such as housing – employment, and social support networks. While this report cannot touch on each of these critical elements in detail, the important links between climate and health and joint actions that benefit both are mentioned in the strategic theme report in section 1.9 and 2 (Joint Strategic Needs Assessment summary) and in section 7 Healthy Place including introduction and 7.7 and 7.8 (air pollution) and 7.10 (Health in All Policies) with contact details of officers for more details.

### **From Councillor Stan Anderson to the Cabinet member for Adult Social Care and Public Health**

With an excellent record now on the number of School Streets in Merton, can the cabinet Member outline what further measures are planned or in place to improve air quality around our schools?

### **Reply**

Merton remains committed to tackling air quality in the borough, last month we saw one the largest rollout of new automated monitoring regimes of any borough in London. This network includes 68 new Breathe London Monitors as well as traffic and transport monitoring in areas of concern in the borough. This will show pollution hotspots and sources in detail we have never seen before.

This will also enable us to see the impact of ultrafine dust (PM2.5) which is a priority pollutant.

Some of the activities we have underway in the borough include:

- An anti-idling plan focusing on priority areas in the borough, with our Air Quality Team welcoming support and ideas for locations to focus on.
- Our programme of work around schools air quality audits and school specific monitoring is continuing.
- We have projects including a Clean Air Village in Wimbledon and our Healthy Streets Everyday project is building environmental learning areas at 3 schools in the borough.
- Our Air Quality Team are still delivering the world's first Low Emission Zone for Construction across London in partnership with boroughs and the GLA, a project that is shaping the air quality impact on construction throughout London.

- Our new Air Quality Supplementary Planning Document is now in place and gives clear guidance to new developments in the borough as to what we expect of them to actively contributing to tackling air pollution.
- We have a unique Behavioural Insights project focused anti-idling at Level Crossings and the use of interactive signage.

Our officers are starting to put together air pollution monitoring data for 2021 as part of our annual reporting; this will be published in the next couple of months.

Even with all this good work, we cannot be complacent, we cannot resolve the problem of air quality as a borough alone as pollution does not respect boundaries and traffic from outside the borough directly affects our residents.

This year we will be producing a new Air Quality Action Plan and I look forward to working with Members, businesses, community groups and the public to build a new plan for the next 5 years.

The Council also recognises the multiple benefits of the ambitious school streets programme which not only helps mitigate poor air quality in the vicinity of schools; but also provides benefits in terms of road safety, congestion, promoting active travel and the public health benefits of active travel to schools.

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