

Merton Council Council

2 February 2022

Supplementary Agenda 4

22 Non-Priority Questions and Replies

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Non-Priority Questions – Council 2 February 2022

From Cllr David Simpson to the Cabinet Member for Housing, Regeneration and the Climate Emergency:

Would the Cabinet Member please indicate the improvements in Air Quality in Merton since my last question on this subject, also how much revenue has the Council received from School Streets fines and what improvements in air quality have been measured around the schools where this policy has been implemented?

Reply from the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health

Every year the Council produces an Annual Status Report (ASR) for Air Quality, this is part of our statutory framework and brings together information on the results of air quality monitoring in the borough.

These reports are normally a year behind as the objective levels are reported over a period of a year, there are also data corrections and adjustments that need to be made. Officers are starting to prepare this report and it will need to be submitted and approved by the GLA before we can publish it.

We expect that this will be published in May or June.

I think it's important to note that Merton has dramatically increased its number of monitoring sites over the years, extending this to schools and working with community groups. We have also challenged ourselves, and made sure we captured locations of high pollution in the borough.

On discussion with officers around the initial data for 2021, this is continuing to show some positive results, and despite the pandemic and the impact of reduced traffic in 2020 that affected annual monitoring results, we are still seeing improvements in 2021.

That said, the World Health Organisation has dramatically reduced the recommended health levels and we will need to see how these translate into the UK objectives.

We also need to note that we are starting to monitor ultrafine dust (PM2.5s) in the borough through the use of Breathe London monitors, this is a pollutant that is rarely monitored in detail and we will need to see how we are comparing with objective levels for this pollutant.

Regarding revenue received, please see below table showing PCNs issued and income received for the last 2 full financial years:

Year	PCNs	Income
2019/20	3,102	£112,736
2020/21	3,001	£195,165

From Cllr Daniel Holden to the Cabinet Member for Children and Education:

Why does the council's school admissions service need specialist medical forms when there is a cost to these forms?

Reply

I believe Cllr Holden's query relates to our admission policy for Community School which states that "Where there are professionally supported medical reasons or exceptional social reasons why a child should attend a particular school applicants... must supply professional evidence supporting their case at the time of application.....that the child must attend a particular school and cannot reasonably attend an alternative school."

It is important to have a medical/social criterion to provide an opportunity for pupils to gain admission to a school that can uniquely meet their needs where they would not be able to do so via the other criteria. However, this criterion places priority above families under the siblings and distance based criteria so to be fair to these applicants it is essential it is only agreed in rare occasions when a particular school can genuinely only meet the needs of a child. It does not include children with an EHCP (Education, Health and Care Plan) as this is part of a separate process.

Therefore it is essential that objective, professional evidence is provided. In most cases, the required supporting evidence will already exist in the form of letters and reports from specialists. A proforma is provided to assist parents and professionals to understand the information that would be required but is not essential if something similar already exists, and there is no reason why a professional involved in a strong case needs to charge.

From Cllr Janice Howard to the Cabinet Member for Local Environment and Green Spaces:

Can the cabinet member give an indication of what is being done to stop the casual fly tipping on non-collection days by flats above commercial premises? This is something that happens across the borough and residents complain that no action is being taken by Merton to remedy the situation.

Reply

Fly-tipping is a criminal offence, is anti-social and has a significant environmental and social impact in Merton. It is also costly for the council to clear up this waste which impacts on our ability to put our limited resources into other important services for the community.

There are numerous reasons why people fly tip and place waste out during non-collection periods, with not everyone doing so with malicious intent. However, any incident of fly tipping is a criminal offence, and the Council will seek to educate residents and enforce in any case it is able to, whether through the issue of a Fixed Penalty Notice or through a prosecution.

As part of our cleaner greener Merton Programme, I have been working with the public spaces team on a project to specifically address how waste is managed on our high streets. The project aims to educate residents about the correct way and time to present their waste, to ensure that the businesses in these locations have proper commercial waste arrangements and that these are enforced by our officers. As part of this project, I have written to over 2,500 households advising them on our zero tolerance stance on fly tipping along with advising them of how to correctly manage and present their waste ready for collection. In addition, the service is installing permanent street signage in these locations with collection times and will soon be writing to these residents on a quarterly basis to remind them of when to put out their waste and provide them with refuse sacks. Our aim is to help people to do the right thing and tackle those who don't.

To support this regular enforcement patrols are being deployed daily with officers examining bags of discarded waste outside of the scheduled collection day. Where evidence is available Fix Penalty Notices have been issued. Over the last 12 months we have issued 341 FPNs for fly tipping offences with a financial value of £128k.

The amount imposed through the FPN starts at £150 for small scale fly tipping of a domestic nature increasing to £400 for larger fly tips of a commercial nature.

From Cllr Hina Bokhari to the Cabinet Member for Housing, Regeneration and Climate Emergency

Considering the worrying increases in air pollution caused by an increase in traffic on roads like Grand Drive in West Barnes, what is the council doing to ensure that HGVs will not be using these roads during restricted hours with clear signage, cameras and enforcement and will monitors be put in place to measure pollution levels?

Reply

The Director of Environment and Regeneration and officers recently met with local residents on 31st January to discuss the issue. Grand Drive is a classified B road and a cross-borough route. Only HGVs over 18tonnes are banned at night and weekends unless servicing a property in the area, or they are in receipt of a permit from the London Lorry Control Scheme

The London Lorry Control Scheme (LLCS) controls the movement of heavy goods vehicles (HGV) over 18 tonnes maximum gross weight. It operates at night and at weekends on specific roads in London helping to minimise noise pollution.

Enforcement is carried out in residential areas during unsociable hours through restricted use of these roads. The scheme has been in place since 1985 under the Greater London (Restriction of Goods Vehicles) Traffic Order 1985 and is enforced utilising the London Local Authorities and Transport for London Act 2003. London Councils manages the Traffic Order on behalf of 31 London boroughs

The scheme was decriminalised in April 2004, with the requirement for operators to have permission for each of their vehicles continuing. In January 2010 London Councils reviewed the need for issuing physical permits and simply granted virtual permits by letter.

Officers reported on HGVs to the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel on 19th January 2021.

“The Panel supported the work the Council has done so far on HGV’s and encourage further work in this area, particularly a wider emphasis across the borough on numbers and emissions, and with an increased focus on those areas outlined by residents as a concern, where the financial resource is available”. The Council has recently installed Air Quality Monitors on Grand Drive and as part of the Innovate (Internet of Things) project, we now have Vivacity Traffic sensors on Grand Drive which will provide the council and community accurate data on the road traffic volumes and types of vehicles. The Council has also added further 20mph signs and flashing speed activated signs in locations near schools. The council will review any other aspects following the meeting with residents.

From Cllr David Dean to the Cabinet Member for Local Environment and Green Spaces:

Is it true that some Merton waste, collected as recyclable, is incinerated? Also, is it reported as recyclable or incinerated?

Reply

I am pleased to advise that except in exceptional circumstances all material which is collected as a recyclable material is processed as such and is not sent for energy Recovery through our disposal providers facility in Beddington.

It should be noted that we have activated our Business Continuity Plan due to the national, regional and local reduction in available qualified drivers which has arisen by a combination of COVID and Brexit. In line with this, we have agreed with our service provider the co collection of general waste with dry-mix recyclable waste from our communal collections from flats. We do have in place recovery plans to re-implement separate collections when driver availability resumes. The service provider is currently training an additional nine (9) drivers from the local contract staff to provide further resiliency within the service.

In the small minority of cases where recyclate has been contaminated to the extent that it is not recyclable then this is treated as residual waste.

From Cllr Stephen Crowe to the Leader of the Council:

Over the last four years the council has provided around £40 million in funding for the voluntary sector. How has the spending and service delivery been monitored to ensure that value for money has been achieved and can the Leader offer any examples of where services have been monitored and improved?

Reply

Merton Council continues to recognise the vital role that the voluntary and community sector plays in the borough and the services that it provides, in particular during the Covid Pandemic. Funding to the voluntary sector follows a standard process. For funding programmes such as the Strategic Partner Programme, funding opportunities are promoted, organisations bid for funds, bids are submitted to funding panels and their funding recommendations are then subject to senior level sign off. Funding agreements are in place for all funded organisations and regular

monitoring is undertaken. Merton Council also produces a voluntary sector funding database on an annual basis. Internal Audit have also undertaken regular reviews of the allocation and monitoring arrangements of grants to the voluntary and community sector.

As an example, weekly monitoring data is requested for the Merton Community Hub, initially set up during the Covid Pandemic. Regular monitoring meetings are also held with commissioning officers, as well as monthly meetings focused on the wider community response. This has strengthened referral pathways and has helped us to identify and address any gaps in the existing offer and any training and learning needs. As a result, the current offer is well linked to the needs of residents.

From Cllr Nick McLean to the Cabinet Member for Housing, Regeneration and the Climate Emergency:

How many Penalty Charge Notices have been issued to residents for breaching the schools streets restrictions introduced in 2020, how much money has this raised, and how many PCNs have been overturned on appeal?

Reply

The data provided is for all School Street PCNs issued and is not split into Merton and non-Merton 'residents'. Of the total PCNs issued, 38 cases were overturned on appeal by the independent appeals tribunal.

Year	PCNs	Income
2019/20	3,102	£112,736
2020/21	3,001	£195,165

From Cllr Paul Kohler to the Cabinet Member for Local Environment and Green Spaces

Why over the last 4 years, have Veolia and the Council failed to combat the chronic refuse problem in locations such as Haydon's Road, with a large number of flats above commercial premises and what are they proposing to do to finally address this blight on many of the major thoroughfares across the borough?

Reply

The Public Space Client team are continuing to undertake weekly ward inspections, ensuring that each ward is inspected at least once per week. To date they have undertaken in excess of 8,000 individual inspections and all findings have been recorded along with the escalation of all tasks which need rectification from our service provider.

These regular inspections have identified a number of hot spots which require additional attention such as Haydon's road which is regularly recorded as below grade due to a number of issues including waste presentation.

As part of our cleaner greener Merton programme, I have been working with the public spaces team on a project to specifically address how waste is managed on our high streets. The project aims to educate residents about the correct way and time to present their waste, to ensure that the businesses in these locations have proper commercial waste arrangements and that these are enforced by our officers. As part of this project, I have written to over 2,500 households advising them of our zero-tolerance stance on fly tipping along with advising them of how to correctly manage and present their waste ready for collection. In addition, the service is installing permeant street signage in these locations with collection times and will soon be writing to these residents on quarterly basis to remind them of when to put out their waste and provide them with refuse sacks. Our aim is to help people do the right thing and tackle those who do don't.

With specific reference to Haydons Road, it will be included within this project work, and I have asked officers to ensure it is receiving adequate patrols from our enforcement team.

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

What is the current status of the two projects to support sustainable transport at the River Wandle in Wimbledon Park (the new footbridge to link Wimbledon Park to Earlsfield shops and train station from 12A Ravensbury Road, and the new foot and cycle path to link Merton to Wandsworth and finally close the missing link on the Wandle Trail under the rail bridge at Garrett Mills). What timelines is the Council working to complete these two important projects, why have the projects not completed to date despite the s106 funding being put in place for the bridge in 2017 and why has the Council sought to combine and conflate the two separate projects and their S106 funding when they are in fact hundreds of yards apart?

Reply

An update on this project was provided to Cllr Gretton in Councillor Questions on 17th November 2021. That response set out the capacity issues that have led to the project being initiated in 2021 (Specifically that the staff resources required for the Wandle Links were focussed on the delivery of Mitcham Bridge and Wimbledon Park lake project)

LBM officers met with the developers of Garratt Mills and with officers and members from the London Borough of Wandsworth to discuss the scheme objectives, feedback from the Environment Agency and next steps.

It was agreed on 30th November that LBM officers would prepare by end of January 2022, a brief for the procurement of consultants to deliver the feasibility study for both bridges. This is on track and a draft of the brief has been shared with Cllr Gretton. A follow up meeting took place on 28th January and was attended by a neighbouring Wandsworth Cllr with apologies received from Cllr Gretton who had been invited to the meeting

The feasibility study for the project is expected to take 6 months. LBM is the lead partner, working with LB Wandsworth, the Environment Agency and Network Rail to determine deliverable, costed solutions. Both the Missing Link, and Ravensbury Terrace footbridge are located in the same stretch of river. We have combined these in the feasibility study to save commissioning two sets of hydrology modelling. The cumulative impact of both structures in the same location requires the modelling to account for both structures. In addition, by combining both projects, we streamline the liaison with partners such as LBW, NR and EA.

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

Please can the Cabinet Member tell me how many affordable homes have been started in Merton since 2018, and how many affordable homes have been started in LB Wandsworth in the same period?

Reply

As part of the Local Plan monitoring, both borough's count completions rather than starts.

Affordable Housing Completions: Merton

- 2018/19 – 5 affordable (total homes built: 273)
- 2019/20 – 85 affordable (total homes built: 349)
- 2020/21 – 267 affordable (total homes built: 650)

Affordable Housing Completions: Wandsworth

- 2018/19 – 306 affordable (total homes built: 1851)
- 2019/20 – 383 affordable (total homes built: 1330)
- 2020/21 – data unavailable for this period

It should be noted that the boroughs cannot be directly compared in terms on number of units completed. Both boroughs have quite different housing targets (LBM: 918 homes per year LBW:1812 homes per year)

The borough characteristics and development opportunities are also markedly different. Merton is characterised by small sites and infill development. Wandsworth is an opportunity area, partly in Zone 1 with major development schemes underway in Nine Elms, Wandsworth Riverside, Wandsworth Town, Winstanley Estate and Springfield Hospital.

Wandsworth is developing at significantly higher densities and heights than Merton. For example, Winstanley and York Rd Estate ranging up to 30 storeys tall; Wandsworth Town at 27 storeys (Mapleton Crescent) and 25 storeys (Courthouse Way)

Information is available online at:

<https://www.merton.gov.uk/planning-and-buildings/planning/local-plan#titleCol20>
<https://www.wandsworth.gov.uk/authority-monitoring-report-amr>

Strategic Theme Questions

From Cllr Andrew Howard to the Cabinet Member for Adult social Care and Public Health:

Can the Cabinet member tell me whether the predicted underspend on Adult Social Care is still there on the latest figures, and will any monies be carried forward into the 2022/23 budget?

Reply

As at Month 8, ASC are reporting an favourable variance of £1.7m, and the latest position being reported to Cabinet on 7th February is a reduction in that to £1.6m. The main reasons for the underspend at Month 8 are:

- reduced salary spend due to difficulty filling vacant posts and reduced use of bank staff in day centres
- Reduced spend on concessionary fares as there has been less usage
- Increased income esp from health
- Small underspend on care placements but this is reducing as the volume of care out of hospital increases
- The net underspend also funds the overspend in housing (TA) and libraries (lost income)
- However, we have had a 50% increase in hospital discharges that we support over the last year and that trend looks like it will continue into 2022/23.

ASC	Employee Related	(532,475)
	Concessionary Fares	(228,530)
	Placements overspend	(292,418)
	Income	(547,911)
	Other non pay	(122,124)
		<hr/>
		(1,723,458)
Housing	net overspend	351,945
Libraries	net overspend	32,192
		<hr/>
C&H net underspend period 8		(1,339,321)

The Council is currently reporting a net adverse variance of £7.4m, so there are no monies at this stage to carry forward, as that would increase the adverse variance further.

From Cllr Eloise Bailey to the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health

Could the Cabinet Member explain what has been done to overcome vaccine hesitancy and to change people's attitudes to having vaccines, and how successful interventions have been measured, particularly regarding Covid vaccination uptake by BAME groups, and set out whether and how this experience has changed (all) vaccine implementation policy, including what more will be done to learn lessons and spread best practice?

Reply

We have a Vaccine Equity plan in place and have undertaken significant community engagement to address vaccine hesitancy and to raise vaccine confidence in our communities. Our vaccination engagement approach includes delivering virtual engagement sessions for different audiences such as parents, community groups, on-street engagement. The aim of our community engagement is to change attitudes by explaining the benefits of being vaccinated, providing reassurance on safety, and to dispel myths. This involves giving accurate information and building trust through responding to people's concerns for example on vaccine safety. Examples of our community engagement includes:

- Working with BAME Voice, a local Community organisation, to deliver Covid-19 webinars where we meet with their member organisations to promote key messages including vaccination.
- Our established bi-weekly Covid community champions programme where we have an on-going dialogue with the community and explore all aspects of covid resilience including vaccination.
- Information webinars for school staff through our COVID Resilience Programme for schools

These engagement sessions provide rich insight which we then use to tailor our messages, engagement and delivery. Based on community feedback, we are taking a targeted approach and working with small pockets of communities where uptake is low to facilitate conversations on vaccine hesitancy and offering localised vaccination pop up clinics for greater access – this also ensures that vaccinations are delivered at locations where residents feel comfortable and safe such as faith settings and hostels for asylum seekers. So far over 40 pop up clinics in community settings been delivered. Vaccine hesitancy is a huge challenge to ensuring all our residents are protected from Covid-19. We plan to strengthen our engagement strategy to achieve greater vaccine confidence in different communities following the recent funding that the local authority has been awarded for COVID vaccination champion programme.

From Cllr Oonagh Moulton to the Cabinet Member for Adult social Care and Public Health:

I would like to acknowledge the hard work of the Council, NHS, partners and volunteers and to thank all for the part they have played to ensure an excellent number of residents have now received their booster.

However there are a large number of Merton residents who remain unvaccinated and are yet to have their first dose.

What is the Cabinet Member doing to ensure that all Merton residents are contacted and encouraged to take up their vaccinations to protect themselves and their families and communities?

Reply

We are committed to ensure that every individual in Merton has the opportunity to be vaccinated. There are number of reasons why someone may remain unvaccinated which include vaccine hesitancy, individual choice and for some they simply have not got round to vaccinating. As of 29th January 2022, we have approximately 28.3% residents who have not had their first Covid vaccine (ONS).

In addition to the GP's role in reaching out to unvaccinated residents, we have undertaken significant community engagement to address vaccine hesitancy and to raise vaccine confidence in our communities. Our approach includes delivering virtual engagement sessions for different audiences such as parents, community groups, on-street engagement. The aim of our community engagement is to explain the benefits of being vaccinated, providing reassurance on safety, and to dispel myths. This involves giving accurate information and building trust through responding to people's concerns for example on vaccine safety. Examples of our community engagement includes:

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