

Merton Council

Council

2 February 2022

Supplementary agenda

22a Supplementary Agenda 5 (Public and Councillor
Supplementary Questions and Replies)

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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.

Supplementary

I'd like to thank the Councillor for their answer, although it's very disappointing that the Council will have gone six months without installing a single additional charging point by April. In your answer you refer to TfL funding which will be needed for installing further charging points. So my question is, what is the council's plan b if the expected TfL funding does not become available?

Reply

I'd like to thank Mr Smith for joining us this evening and for his initial question I think that I would share his frustration and that setting up additional electric vehicle charging points is very much an ambition for us. We are to a degree at the behest of TfL, but it is still in our plans. We are completing our EV strategy and we will be rolling out as many as we can. Thank you.

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 31st 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 13th 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.

Supplementary

Thank you Mr Mayor. Thank you to the Cabinet Member for their response to my question. I suspect that many parents like myself in Canon Hill would be surprised to learn that Joseph Wood Recreation Ground, which according to the Council's website is 8.5ha in size, is too small to take play equipment for children aged 12+. Can the Cabinet Member confirm that, incredibly, the amount of space within a park of 8.5ha in size is indeed the only barrier other than perhaps their lack of ambition that the Council can see to more and updated play equipment at Joseph Wood Rec?

Reply

I'd like to thank him for his question and his supplementary. I think every single one of us knows how important our green spaces are to this borough. The results of our Your Merton survey made that plain and clear and think all of us used our green spaces far more during the pandemic. I think I'll refer though to the original response in that if you do have locations specifically that you do want to see different types of equipment put in, please do speak to the Green Spaces Team and we can review that as and when things need to be replaced.

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.

Supplementary

Thank you Mr Mayor and thank you to the Cabinet Member for the reply. If I may ask a supplementary, as all the parties on the Council have stated that they are against the All England's development, will Merton Council please explain how they will enforce the covenants, and this question is no longer hypothetical amid rumours

that the application is to be pushed through Planning Committee in March. Thank you.

Reply

I thank Mr Coombe for his supplementary. The planning application is an altogether separate matter from the covenant. As I have been clear before, there is a legal covenant in place, it is place, and it is staying in place. Thank you.

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

Supplementary

I thank the Cabinet Member for the update. However, after 12 years of Labour trying to get Morden regeneration started, does he accept that Morden will only be regenerated under a Conservative administration?

Reply

I would like to thank Mr Pocock for his supplementary question. I don't agree with him in terms of his comments. Council, we have actively worked to deliver this regeneration but also as well the question of getting funding for the regeneration. So we are still in talks with Homes England in terms of looking at potential money for that because we recognise that this is an important project and as a Council we are still fully committed to regeneration, but this is a complex jigsaw. It won't happen overnight, but as a Council we are working ambitiously to deliver regen in Morden. Thank you.

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.

Supplementary

I thank the Cabinet Member for the answer, but I am sure that she will understand that the residents want more than the mere anticipation that something will be done. Will the Cabinet Member guarantee that at least some of the 16 Morden Park tennis courts will be refurbished?

Reply

I thank Mr Paterson for his question, but can only tell you that the Green Space Team is working with the LTA to assess the borough's tennis facilities, with a view to revitalising those that require attention. This is carried out by an application process. The process is currently in the development stages with the anticipation that Morden Park, Links Avenue End, along with other tennis facilities in the borough will benefit from this grant funding. Thank you.

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 recognises 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)

Supplementary

I'd like to thank the Cabinet Member for her question and of course her ongoing great work she does for the borough. My question is, what are we doing about this devastating impact of the government's failure to fully fund our SEND services since 2018?

Reply

Thank you Councillor. Thank you for his supplementary. We are doing everything in our power. So we've already increased the number of dedicated places for children with special educational needs either in special schools or additionally resourced provisions. But in local authority run additional resource positions or special schools and by September there'll be 276 further such places than there were just a few years ago. But we can't deliver on all of our plan without further funding, so that's why we are, as you get out in your question, calling for the government to deliver that further investment and why we in Merton are working closely with the department to

make the case for the funds that we need to deliver on our plans to bring our spending on special educational needs in line with the income. Thank you.

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.

Supplementary

Thank you Mr Mayor. In his answer, the leader gives the impression that he's keen for this application to move forward after which we'll surely find out what the fairly ambiguous intention for the covenant to be respected actually means. In which case, why is the council kicking this issue into the long grass with the senior officer telling me last week that this won't go to planning until after the election and when was the council intending to communicate this to residents?

Reply

Well thank you Mr Mayor. Thank you for the follow-up question, which was slightly confusing. I wasn't sure whether it was talking about the application or the covenant.

Planning applications obviously are a planning matter and have to go through a planning process and planning applicants have rights there and can choose when their applications are to be dealt with. In terms of the covenant, all the party leaders have been briefed on this and all have been advised that it would damage any potential court proceedings to share legal opinions or offer early judgment on them or on the planning application. And I hope that all members here will agree that anyone divulging confidential information that led to decisions that were harmful to the people of Merton would be rightly condemned by the people of Merton and I hope that all the leaders here will guarantee that if that happens any losses to the people of Merton will be personally underwritten by the councillor who does it

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 13th 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/>

Supplementary

Thank you Mr Mayor and thank you to the Cabinet Member for her response. Could I ask her if she can tell me how environmental enforcement is also playing its part in helping to keep our borough's streets clean?

Reply

I'd like to thank him for his question and his supplementary. I think the first thing to always say when we're talking about enforcement is, the overwhelming majority of our residents want to take pride in our borough and take responsibility for their waste. However we have to acknowledge what we do with those who don't. So last year we issued over 800 000 pounds worth of fixed penalty notices for littering and fly-tipping offences and according to the Sun newspaper we are the - we've issued the most f[ines for littering in the entire country, double that of our neighbours over in lovely Wandsworth. So we have one clear message for anyone who's not taking their responsibility seriously - don't mess with Merton. Thank you

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.

Supplementary

Thank you for answering the question. An increasing proportion of the residents live in blocks of flats, why are so many experiencing problems with getting bins emptied, and does the Cabinet Member think it's fair to treat residents in flats as second class citizens?

Reply

I'd like to thank you for his question and advance notice of this supplementary. I want our collection services to work just as well for front doors as they do for flats. That, period. I've asked officers to look specifically at how our business continuity plans that were laid out in the original response are impacting on smaller blocks of flats across the borough. If he has specific addresses he has in mind when he

submits this question please do let me know and I will ensure that they're looking at that.

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 6th 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.

Supplementary

Thank you very much for the answer. There are a number of sites that the council are selling and it's true that some of them - the former ransom sites - are going to be 100%, are going to be affordable housing, but the other sites my understanding is the Cabinet have left the decision of the officers and what the percentage of affordable housing is and does the Cabinet Member agree with me that that is a political decision that should be made by politicians rather than officers?

Reply

I'd like to thank Councillor McGrath for his supplementary. Of course any decision that is made by the Director is in consultation with the Cabinet Member. That's the same for a number of different decisions, clearly there is close cooperation between the directors and the members and it's the scheme of delegation in terms of the council. It also enables us as well to speed up decision-making within the council and of course that decision can be called-in by any members if they so wish.

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.

Supplementary

Thank you Mr Mayor. I'd like to thank the Cabinet Member for her response. How does growing up in poverty affect a child's life and what are you doing about it?

Thank you

Reply

Thank you Mr Mayor and I'd like to thank Councillor Henry for her question and Supplementary. So we know that growing up in poverty is horrible. Some of us know that from experience, others might know it from research or from indirect experience. But we know from research that also on average children growing up in low-income households have poorer outcomes later in life. So they're on average less likely to get the best grades at school and even when you control for attainment they're less likely to go onto good jobs and complete good university courses. That's why we are so worried about the cost of living crisis which the national government is doing very little to address. So we in Merton are doing what we can to tackle poverty at its source with our policies such as the council tax rebate scheme and as a Children Schools and Families Department, we're doing everything we can to ensure that those children who are growing up in low income households are getting the support they need in school and out of school so that they can achieve well. Thank you.

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.

Supplementary

Thank you to the Cabinet Member for her answer. Given the Mayor of London's direction of travel to tax and ban cars off the road, does the Cabinet Member agree with me that this cost of Khan will be detrimental to the resident's cost of living in Merton?

Reply

I'd like to thank Councillor Holden for his initial question and also his supplementary question. Ultimately, as this council also agrees, we need a sustainable long-term solution to actually switch - to get residents to switch their vehicles from high-polluting vehicles to lower polluting vehicles. Part of that is a wider challenge which we need to invest in and so I can't agree on his point

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.

Supplementary

I thank the Cabinet Member for the response. Residents have told Labour repeatedly that Merton suffers from a pollution crisis and apart from taxing parked cars little or nothing has been done. So if Labour had listened to residents they would know this and it wouldn't have cost them a million pounds of taxpayers' money either. So will the Cabinet Member please accept that our air quality will only improve when we have a change of administration to a Conservative administration on the 5th of May?

Reply

I'd like to thank Councillor Simpson for his supplementary question. But I'd have to disagree and I think the healthy streets scorecard would also disagree, as we were ranked second in all outer London boroughs for the work that we're doing to combat toxic air. Almost half of our schools have a school street and we just unveiled 68 new air quality monitors to track and monitor air quality data, so that we can inform our decisions. As I mentioned in my previous answer to Councillor Holden's question, for us a priority is to tackle toxic air and that is what we will continue to do.

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.

Supplementary

Thank you Mr Mayor. I will thank the Leader of the Council for his response to my question. But would the leader agree that one of the duties of being a leader is leading by example. If he told us in Merton to do one thing and then did another himself, what impression does he think that would give the people of Merton?

Reply

Can I thank my colleague for his question and supplementary. I imagine that he's referring to some other events elsewhere and I would like to reassure everybody in Merton that it has never been within the rules in Merton to hold parties in the

Leader's office. If I were to have held parties in the Leader's office, I think I know what consequences there would have been for me. I think I know the police would have knocked on my door. I think I know that the opposition parties would have said something - they might have said the leader that has had this illegal party should step down. They will have another opportunity in a moment to say exactly the same thing. Nothing ... not a pip ... nothing. They are prepared for leaders to break the rules, that they set, that cause harm to our residents and face no consequences. This is the Conservative party in Merton, this is the Conservative party in Britain and they should be ashamed of it.

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 2nd 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.

Supplementary

Can I thank the Cabinet Member for her response. The CYP papers for last month shows that the Council has not succeeded in getting a single care leaver onto the Kickstart scheme, despite over a hundred thousand people across the country finding employment through it. Why has Merton Labour failed to get any care leavers onto the programme?

Reply

Thank you. I am actually delighted with this question because I would love to be talking more about our care leavers as well as our vulnerable young people in this chamber. What I don't like some people trying to score political points when actually as you can see from their existing description we're doing really well in supporting these young people. What we pride ourselves on, is treating this as a kind of cross-council issue it's not just the Children Schools and Families team, we work across the council to try and make sure that the right opportunities are found for those

young people. If it was your own child, you wouldn't put them onto a scheme with a vacancy that just happened to be there. You would want it to be the opportunity that was right for your child and we as corporate parents take our corporate parenting responsibilities seriously and we're proud that we get so many of our young people into employment training, we're proud of the breadth of opportunities that we offer them and we want to make sure that they're moving into sustainable employment that means that they'll be in jobs for the rest of their lives. Thank you.

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.

Supplementary

Thank you Mr Mayor and I'd like to thank the Cabinet Member for his response. But can I ask the Cabinet Member to tell us what measures he's been taking so far in Merton Council buildings to work towards targets set in the climate change action plan

Reply

Can I thank Councillor Curtin for his supplementary question. In 2019, the council began purchasing renewable energy guarantees of origin which certified that 100% of the energy it uses is from a renewable source. This means that electricity purchased by the council is very low carbon. We're also committed to using electricity efficiently where possible to produce local renewable energy and to switch to a low carbon electricity supply. We've also as well installed 44 solar panels on council-owned buildings, including 27 schools. This is an area we take incredibly serious and you will obviously shortly see more measures we will be bringing forward in terms of our transition to make the council zero carbon by 2030. Thank you Mr Mayor.

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.

Supplementary

Thank you Mr Mayor will the leader join me in reiterating once again that if the government insists on moving services away from Saint Helier to Belmont it will only further disadvantage advantage people who are already most in need?

Reply

Thank you Mr Mayor and thank you to my colleague for her supplementary question and the point that that she made. I think we see from the ridiculous outburst where the NHS are being blamed for government decisions when the prime minister stands up in the run-up to an election and says he won't stop hospital building programmes and this is one of them, he is not prepared to take credit for those, it is absolutely preposterous that the leader of the opposition is seeking to disown his own government's decision which they believe is going to make matters better but everybody in Merton knows he's going to make things much worse. If Councillor McLean supports the closure of services... I would also like to highlight to everyone here that Councillor McLean has just accused me of being dishonest and it may not be pardoned... Thank you Mr Mayor and I have been speaking through you about the behaviour of other members in here and I would like to register again my extreme unhappiness about members on this side being accused of dishonesty by people on that side and I think it is telling that the decision that the Government has been making has been disowned in this way and I think that is telling because of precisely the point that everybody in Merton knows, that the decision to close services at St Helier hospital will hurt precisely those people the NHS is there to serve and we will be repeating the importance of the health of our most vulnerable residents, those who live in the areas of greatest need, throughout the next three months and we will stand by that. If they want to stand by what's being decided by the Government they can stand by that.

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.

Supplementary

Well Mr Mayor, I'd like to thank the Leader for his answer to my question. At every council meeting for ten years, I asked Councillor Alambritis what he'd done since the previous meeting to save St Helier hospital, and I did that because he came to this council through a by-election in 2003, where the whole campaign was 'save St Helier hospital'. Who from? A Labour council and a Labour government? Or was it an NHS decision? We get a different version tonight from the Leader of the Council as to who it is that takes these decisions. But I'm going to ask you about a decision that you can take, so will you confirm that your campaign to save St Helier hospital now has no substance, except rhetoric to frighten residents for political gain and there are no council resources currently being deployed by officers to support the campaign - it's just words?

Reply

I'd like to thank him for his follow-up question which at least was polite, unlike the current leader. I would appreciate it if the heckling would be prevented as well. We began with a bit of a history lesson and I will remind all members here, including Councillor Williams that in 2009 and 2010, the then Labour government did bring forward proposals to save St Helier and to rebuild St Helier hospital and they put in place a funding of 219 million pounds to do that. Ever since then, unfortunately, the Conservatives and Lib Dems took control of the government and that offer of a new rebuilt hospital for St Helier was taken away and we will continue to remind people

about that and we will continue to make the case against that, and in every meeting i have with the Health Service and in every meeting that many of our officers have with members, with officers, from the NHS, we repeat that services for the most vulnerable are most needed and those people are those who live in the areas closest to St Helier hospital. Losing St Helier hospital will be a terrible thing for this community and there is still time to reverse that decision and I call on the Government to do so.

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

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 been recruited and activity will start at the end of February 2022.

Supplementary

Thank you Mr Mayor. Can the Cabinet Member confirm she will continue to prioritise making the Wilson Health and Well-being Hub a reality for our residents in Mitcham? Thank you.

Reply

I would like to thank Councillor Alambritis for his supplementary question and I can confirm that it absolutely will be a priority for me and that the NHS has secured funding and in the process of developing their business case and I'm also delighted that we have our Director of Adult Social Care and Director of Public Health who are steering the ship as well for the Wilson.

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

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.

Supplementary

Thank you Mr Mayor and I'd like to thank the Cabinet Member for her reply to my question. A report to Merton's Healthier Communities and Older People Panel has just been released and within that there is the indication of significant reductions in flu vaccinations for the under sixes which include, reception, year one and some year two. I wondered, given local experience with Covid vaccinations and boosters, whether the Cabinet Member has any views on the reasons for this or proven interventions to improve the situation? Thank you.

Reply

I'd like to thank Councillor Fairclough for his supplementary question, I know that this is an area that is of particular interest to him and appreciate his correspondence on this as well. I think the experience from the covid vaccine is something that we're definitely learning on, it still needs to be considered that there is a difference between the uptake of flu vaccine, the uptake of Covid vaccine, but absolutely is a priority for us and something that we are looking into and I'll be able to provide more correspondence on the work that we're doing on that.

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.

Supplementary

Thank you Mr Mayor. I'd like to thank the Cabinet Member for her excellent answer about our excellent libraries, and I'd like to ask her if she could tell us about what

support there is in our libraries for young people looking for work? Thank you very much.

Reply

Thank you Mr Mayor and thank you Councillor Draper for your supplementary. I'm very proud that our libraries help young people find work, by offering employability support services that work directly with training providers. Most of you will probably know that I'm a governor at South Thames Group of Colleges, the Mayor mentioned them earlier and one of the people that we work very well with, and these people help with the library, help people to train and to write CVs and help them in getting jobs. They're also looking at in the council, as well as the libraries, and the colleges, apprenticeships. Not everyone wants to go to university, so we need to find other means. Training skills -there are lots of things, like for example NVQ training for Railtrack rail training railway train training, DJ skills for those who like music, so there are a lot of things going on for the 16 to 25 year olds. I would also like to bring to the attention of those who seems not to know, that the libraries are open frequently like from Monday, Tuesday Thursday, Friday and the lists are on the council, the library doors and they're also on the website because it seems as if in this chamber most people think that the library isn't functioning - it is functioning and doing very well and I'm proud to be part of it. Thank you.

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 6th 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 \(merton.gov.uk\)](#)

Supplementary

Can I start by thanking the Cabinet Member for her response and can I thank the Merton Health Team for their work amongst the BAME community rollout - specifically around Wimbledon Park mosque. The report mentions the local outbreak management plan and its work with the BAME community, as the report was published in April last year, what lessons have been learned from the recent Covid outbreak and how will this inform future thinking? Thank you.

Reply

I'd like to thank Councillor Bush for his initial question and also his supplementary question. I think there have been a number of learnings in terms of engaging with the BAME community in terms of improving uptake. I think we've worked really closely with some of our voluntary sector colleagues as I've mentioned, but also with our faith groups and tried a lot of different things really - so webinars but also something that worked really well with sort of peer support and one to ones with phone calls with some individuals and I think they're still future learning and coming back to Councillor Fairclough's supplementary question, I think this would spread across uptake of other vaccines as well so there are definitely future learnings for recovery as well. Thank you.

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 1st 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 1st of April, is the 3rd 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 3rd 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.

Supplementary

Thank you Mr Mayor. I'd like to thank the Cabinet Member for her answer. Given the disproportionate impact of Covid 19 on our BAME communities, will the Cabinet Member agree it is absolutely critical that we do everything to address these inequalities?

Reply

I'd like to thank Councillor Pearce for his initial question and his supplementary. I think in my response I would echo a similar response to the one that I provided to Councillor Bush. I wholeheartedly agree and I think while the government has today launched its levelling up white paper, in Merton we're trying to make bridging the gap a reality and that is embedded in our plans for Covid recovery, working closely with our NHS colleagues and our voluntary sector thank you

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.

Supplementary

Thank you Mr Mayor and I'd like to thank the Cabinet Member for her response to my question. Sadly we witnessed at the Covid update at the Healthy Communities Overview and Scrutiny panel in January, the Council's continuing failure to address the importance of climate action in tackling climate sensitive health risks which are disproportionately felt by the most vulnerable and disadvantaged. I therefore request that she incorporates, where possible, the 10 recommendations in the World Health Organisation's COP 26 special report on climate change which highlights the urgent need to prioritise health and equity, making them central to all climate action mitigation and adaptation actions into the Merton's climate action plan. Thank you.

Reply

I'd like to thank Councillor Gould for her initial question and her supplementary and for reference to the report that I know that our Public Health team is looking into. I'd like to reassure her that climate action is central to all of our work which is why we have Chris Lee who is also as part of the Health and Well-being Board and bring the NHS to speak about their green plan as well, so we can work across climate action together. Of course I work closely with my colleague Councillor Whelton who is leading on our work in climate emergency. But as a council we take health and all policies very seriously which is why health climate action is embedded across all departments

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.

Supplementary

Can the Cabinet Member confirm she will continue to pursue initiatives to encourage a switch to more sustainable modes of transport?

Reply

Yes, well I will just say that we are fully committed to pursuing initiatives to encourage our residents to switch to more sustainable modes of transport which includes making Merton a cleaner and greener borough, as that's what our residents told us they wanted as part of the Your Merton consultation. Thank you.

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