

Merton Council Council

16 November 2022

Supplementary Agenda 2

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From Mary Butler

To the Cabinet Member for Housing and Sustainable Development

Councillors often mention the number of people on their housing list and use that to justify granting permission to all sorts of developments, so, by council ward, how many people on that list have moved in to any of those new developments each year from 2018 to 2022?

Reply

The Council has nominations rights to housing association homes that become vacant in the borough, and when these are new build, the Council normally has 100% rights to rented units. There are currently in excess of nine and half thousand households waiting for accommodation, and as result the Council looks to maximise the nominations we receive to meet housing need and ensure all nominations are taken up. The Council does not hold information specifically on new build nominations by ward, but from April 2017 to march 2021 there were 104 cases housed in new build properties off of the housing register.

From Tony Burton

To the Cabinet Member for Local Environment, Green Spaces and Climate Change

In response to a Council Question on 2 February 2022 Merton Council said it would deliver on its Rediscover Mitcham commitment to register additional green spaces around Fair Green as a Town or Village Green over "the next six months". Nine months have passed. When will it make the registration?

Reply

The Council is in the process of registering the additional land as a result of the rediscover Mitcham Project. Documentation has been produced and is currently going through the appropriate process of registration with Legal and recording with Land Charges. Some delays were experienced as members of the team were on duty throughout a major incident over the summer. The update of the Town Green boundaries is currently ongoing and is hoped to be completed by the end of the year, dependent on ensuring the correct legal procedures are followed.

From Tom Killick

To the Cabinet Member for Transport

Have the wands protecting cyclists from other traffic on Merton High Street been removed in order to be replaced and can the Cabinet Member advise when this will take place, and if not, why not?

Reply

The wands on Merton High Street were added in addition to the statutory cycle lane as part of the covid-transport plan. In this particular location, they have suffered problems with wands constantly being hit, removed or gone missing.

We had reports of the wands' reflective strips getting dirty, despite Council officers going out to clean them.

The issue was that with the wands not being reflective, they were being hit by larger vehicles and either being damaged, or come out of the ground completely. This left the black plastic blocks in the road where we then received complaints of motorists hitting the blocks. It posed an ongoing maintenance and safety issue that the Council couldn't sustain.

Council officers consulted the Cabinet Member, local ward members and Merton Cycling Campaign about the proposed removal of the wands.

We have secured funding from TFL as part of this year's LIP programme and will be consulting soon on plans to introduce stepped-track cycle lanes on this section of Merton High Street (similar to the new ones in Plough Lane, Holborn Way and London Road Mitcham Bridge). The works are planned to be completed by April 2023.

I'm sure cyclists will agree that the stepped track cycle lanes offer a better and longer term solution to improving our cycling infrastructure than the temporary wands and blocks

From Malcolm Brown

To the Cabinet Member for Health and Social Care

Can you please confirm the number of Merton residents who receive council-funded social care from third party providers who do not pay at least the London living wage, do not pay the HMRC approved car mileage usage rate, and do not pay for time spent on training?"

Reply

At any one time there are around 650 Merton residents who are in receipt of council-funded care from third-party providers. The Council's current home care contracts do not require that London Living Wage is paid as a minimum, and officers are not aware that any of those third party providers currently pay the London Living Wage to care staff. These contracts will be recommissioned in 2023 and in line with the recent Cabinet decision to seek Living Wage accreditation it is intended that London Living Wage be a requirement of the new contracts. The current contracts do require payments for travel time and that training be provided but different third party providers have their own policies with regards to payments for travel time and training. We will be strengthening these requirements through the new contracts when they are commissioned next year so that all contracted providers are required to pay agreed amounts for mileage. London Living Wage will also be required to be paid to carers when attending training.

From Chris Stanton

To the Cabinet Member for Local Environment, Green Spaces and Climate Change

What action is Merton Council taking in collaboration with the local community to replace the stolen swords on Mitcham war memorial?

Reply

After a recent heritage theft of three bronze swords from the Lower Green Scheduled War Memorial, the Council reported this to English Heritage.

The Council Greenspaces and Planning Conservation Officers have been working with Mitcham Cricket Green Community and Heritage on an application to the War Memorial Trust for the re-casting of the bronze swords. The reinstatement of the lost bronze swords will be informed by the remaining sword and by photographs held of the memorial. The replacements shall replicate as closely as possible the originals and will require further repatination to align with the original sword. In addition, the

grant application will also recommend additional works to the memorial as listed below.

Stone cleaning

Stone cleaning using steam cleaning equipment and hand cleaning using natural bristle brushes and a chemically neutral soap and low-pressure water

Re-pointing

Careful removal of defective/loose mortar from construction joints. Re-pointing of construction joints with an appropriate lime mortar

Inscription work

The lead lettering appears to be in relatively good legible condition however if upon closer inspection there are letters which are damaged or lost, their replacement/repair to match the original design should be part of the project. I would also propose that if there is evidence for the lettering having originally been painted, then the re-painting of lettering using an appropriate oil-based paint in colour to match to improve legibility can also form part of the works

Railings

These works have already been completed as they related to a Ward Allocation Funded improvement project and was delivered by the Greenspaces Team in September 2022.

An application will be submitted to the War Memorial Trust in December 2022 and await decisions March-April 2023.

From John Davis

To the Cabinet Member for Sport and Heritage

What action is Merton Council taking to replace the unsightly black metal frame and door blighting the 500 year old Grade II listed dovecote at The Canons and will this be completed as part of the current Lottery Project? This and other snagging points still remain unresolved.

Reply

It is acknowledged that the current door to the dovecote is not in keeping with the building and the intention is to rectify this within the site-wide interpretation works which is currently being developed.

The delivery of this project will be managed through the Green Flag Management and Maintenance Plan being developed for the site ready for January 2023 application.

From Serafina Zammataro

To the Cabinet Member for Housing and Sustainable Development

Given rejection of plans for developing high rise tower blocks on Mitcham Gasworks at a public meeting called by the MP and by 99% local residents in a street audit will Merton council reduce the number of homes planned and withdraw support for "tall buildings" in the new local plan?

Reply

The Council's Local Plan was submitted to the Secretary of State in December 2021 and is now being examined by independent planning inspectors. The independent planning inspectors held public hearings in June and again in October 2022. Mitcham Gasworks was discussed at both hearing sessions as a part of the discussion on site allocations and also as part of the discussions on housing supply and urban design. Considering local feedback, the Council has worked hard with St William to review and agree a [new Statement of Common Ground \(dated September 2022\)](#) which proposes a reduction in building height to nine storeys, from the original 14 storeys, with a range of homes which will take account of the need for new homes, including for affordable homes, in Merton. Just over nine storeys was the approximate height of a previous gasholder on the site.

All the information connected with the Local Plan examination is published on the Council's website [Local Plan submission and examination library | Merton Council](#) or by www.merton.gov.uk/local-plan-submission

The Inspectors published a "hearings closing note", also available online at [INSP20 Merton Hearings Closing Session](#) sets out their next steps for the Local Plan examination over the next few months. This will include undertaking all the actions arising from the hearings and then public consultation on all the modifications made to the Plan so far during the examination. There will therefore be further opportunity for residents and others to comment on any changes to the Local Plan's site allocation for Mitcham Gasworks. Please keep an eye on Merton Council's website www.merton.gov.uk/local-plan-examination for more details including forthcoming consultation dates once the planning inspectors have approved it.

From Tom Conway

To the Cabinet Member for Transport

When will the pavement, which is cordoned off on Morden Road next to Spur House, be reopened and why has it taken three months for LB Merton to arrange for a temporary bus stop to be established nearby?

Reply

At present the timeline for the reopening of the pavement is unknown. The Council's Building Control and Legal Services teams are working together on court order proceedings to ensure the landowner of Spur House makes all balcony glazing safe. The Council has organised for the Glass and Glazing Federation to assess the building, and this analysis has been carried out, but the necessary remedial works have not been implemented yet. Only when these are complete can the cordon be removed. The Council did request that a temporary bus stop be established the start of the works, this is the responsibility of Transport for London but we understand that a temporary stop is in place.

From Dr Pippa Maslin

To the Cabinet Member for Sport and Heritage

Merton is the home of the Wimbledon Championships, but public access to tennis courts in the borough is patchy. I am aware that the Council Leader wants to promote sport. What is the plan for the currently unusable courts in Morden Park?

Reply

Currently the Greenspaces' Team CIL improvement plan will see £350,000 invested into the boroughs tennis courts infrastructure this financial year. These investments will see improvements at Haydons Road Rec (Commenced in August 2022) and Colliers Wood Recreation Ground and Morden Rec (Commencing in Spring 2023), which will see the improvements to eight lighted tennis courts and allow multi-sports to also be played, including basketball, football, netball and cricket.

The Greenspaces Team are also working with colleagues in Leisure Services, Planning and external funders from the Lawn Tennis Association to review the condition and future requirements for the further tennis courts across our parks that shall require future investment, including those in Morden Park. To date, the Team has prepared detailed assessments of our tennis courts within our parks across the borough. The survey work will allow us to look at potential funding opportunities to bring these sites into improved playable condition, while the work we are undertaking at neighbouring sites, such as Morden Recreation Ground, will better inform the type of playing services required in order to meet resident demand for sporting areas that cater for differing sporting opportunities.

The Greenspaces Team will continue to work with colleagues to ensure that investments are made where they are most needed and where we can provide the most impact to the lives our local communities. The Team will continue to work with organisations, like the Lawn Tennis Association, to secure funding to better improve our facilities, including those in Morden Park.

From Lin Bowdery

To the Cabinet Member for Local Environment, Green Spaces and Climate Change

Why is Garden Waste bin collection so expensive? If the bin collection was made much more affordable, more people would have them which would make for less Fly tipping.

Reply

Our Garden Waste collection service remains a valued service and continues to grow. Over the last 5 years we have seen the level of subscriptions increase from 6,500 customers in 2017 to over 13,000 last year. As such last year we were able to hold the current price and not apply any inflationary increase.

In reviewing the charges for the service compared with our neighbouring boroughs including RB Richmond, the charges range between £82.00 and £68.80 with an overall average of £74 with Merton currently charging slightly above the average at £79.50 which equates to only £3.05 per collection.

Our garden waste is a major contributor to our overall recycling rate which is currently 43% and places us in the top quartile of all London Boroughs recycling performance.

Regarding fly tipping, the level of green waste which is fly tipped is low and only comprises of 7% of all material collected as fly tipping. This is similar to the level of garden waste collected as part of the kerbside general waste of which recent waste analysis suggest that only 7% of this material could have been processed as compostable waste.

As such the garden waste service continues to provide value for those residents with gardens and ensures that we are not subsidising the service.

From Hester Rowland

To the Cabinet Member for Local Environment, Green Spaces and Climate Change

Why were the local community neither consulted nor informed before the arrival of a chainsaw crew at Norman Rd on 31/10/22 to destroy 3 mature healthy trees? Residents should have some say on what occurs in their own streets, this would avoid them being treated shabbily by Council employees.

Reply

The Council's Greenspaces Team have been working on the above case for many years to try and mitigate the need for removal of the three trees in question. The three Italian Alders on Norman Road have been the subject to an insurance case for subsidence damage to neighbouring properties and appropriate and proportionate action is legally required by the Council to limit the damage being caused.

The Greenspace Team have been working with insurers for a number of years to mitigate the claim of subsidence by modifying the tree canopy and undertaking measurements of the ground movement, but we are no longer able defend this case and the only action available was to remove the trees. I can confirm that we will be replacing lost trees with more suitable varieties under the Council's 2022-23 tree replacement program.

The Greenspace Team apologise for any distress caused by this necessary action being taken without the prior notice to residents. The Greenspaces Team have used this opportunity to improve internal processes and are currently developing an Insurance tracker to monitor all trees that are involved in insurance claims so if a tree fell is required, the necessary correspondence will go out to all residents in proximity of the tree to inform them of the action being taken.

From Fergus Clegg

To the Cabinet Member for Local Environment, Green Spaces and Climate Change

Why did the council cut down three mature trees at the end of Norman Road at the junction with Merton High Street without consulting residents or councillors, or giving notice of the work to be carried out? We, the residents, want to be consulted before further action takes place.

Reply

As per the previous response on this issue, the three Italian Alders on Norman Road had been the subject to an insurance case for subsidence damage to neighbouring properties and appropriate and proportionate action is legally required by the Council to limit the damage being caused to the buildings through the movement of the soil caused by the trees' growth.

The Greenspace Team apologise for any distress caused by this necessary action being taken without the prior notice to residents. The Greenspaces Team are developing an Insurance tracker to monitor all trees that are involved in insurance claims. If a tree fell is required, the necessary correspondence will go out with at least 2 weeks' notice to all residents in proximity of the tree to inform them of the action being taken and more details about the background to the case, so residents are kept informed.

As you will be aware the works were ceased on the day as the matter was raised by local residents and will not resume until further communications go out to residents, which the team are looking to get out next week. This will give a two week notice of works commencing as well as consultation plan for the three tree replacements that are required and associated future management and maintenance plan of these trees moving forward. The Greenspace Team will want to consult with residents on the options for the tree area at the end of Norman Road, including choosing the type of replacement tree from a selection of appropriate species that will not have the same negative impact to neighbouring buildings.

From Kevin Clarke

To the Cabinet Member for Transport

Please update on the progress of negotiations to bring dockless bicycle to Merton

Reply

This is a priority for the Council and we have been meeting some providers. We are currently working with our Legal Team to determine the best route in terms of procurement / Agreement. Once the route is agreed, further discussions will be held with potential providers to launch in Merton.

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From Councillor Whelton to the Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Services

What impact has the mini-budget of 23 September, and the subsequent financial and economic turmoil, had on the Council's finances?

Reply

The mini-budget had a major initial impact on the bond market and therefore interest rates. The impact on Bond markets had a knock-on effect on Pension fund valuations. Given the major u-turns since then the effect has been largely reversed and the market is waiting for this week's Autumn Statement.

There is currently a black hole in the government's finances, rumoured to be c. £55 billion and it is said that there will be cuts in government department spending which in turn will have a detrimental impact on grant allocations. The government may have to loosen Council Tax referendum limits allowing councils to increase council taxes by more than initially planned but allowing the government to pass the burden on to council tax payers. There is also likely to be a restraint on council pay awards etc.

Although the Council is benefiting from its investment returns in light of increases in interest rates (following recent Bank of England base rate increases – currently 3%) it is expected that the additional demands on Council services from the Cost of Living crisis will more than offset any interest gains that may accrue.

So probably the fallout from the mini budget in September has not yet been felt but will hit home when the Provisional LGF Settlement is announced, and through the continued increase in demand for council services, temporary accommodation, and financial support.

From Councillor Simon McGrath to the Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Services

Could the Cabinet Member please outline any changes made in the Civic Centre Car Park since May 2022, the cost of any such changes, the reasons for making such changes and whether specific representations were made to the Council for any such changes.

Reply

Since May there has been a reassignment of parking spaces within the Civic Centre car park after concerns were raised. These works occurred in August and involved removing and remarking parking spaces by the Council's contractors FM Conway. The total cost of this was £152.32. Alternative options would have significantly added to the cost of the works.

From Councillor Hayes to the Cabinet Member for Sport and Heritage

Can the Cabinet Member outline the role that Merton's libraries can play as hubs in our communities?

Reply

Merton's seven public libraries are the high street presence of the Council and provide an invaluable range of services to our communities. Beyond the usual things you would expect to see in libraries such as a range of materials for borrowing, study space, information and free computer access our libraries deliver a huge range of services working in collaboration with partners. Over 60 community organisations deliver services via our libraries and over 450 events are delivered each month.

With regards to the Health & Wellbeing Offer in our libraries we host weekly events delivered by our health partners including Merton Uplift and One You Merton that promote a range of preventative services such as smoking cessation, weight management and wellbeing. Launching on 24 November at Morden Library new Health & Wellbeing Zones have been established at all of our libraries and will provide a range of digital services to support residents including health monitors and massage chairs along with information and events. A partnership with Nuffield Health will mean that residents will have access to free exercise classes in our libraries along with health advice.

Regarding Culture & Creativity we have two dedicated Arts Spaces at Wimbledon and Mitcham libraries that host a range of arts and cultural events in locations that have professional equipment such as staging, lighting and sound systems. All of our libraries work with cultural partners to deliver theatre, music and arts events in our libraries and we have recently been successful in applying to Arts Council England to become a National Portfolio Organisation (NPO). The Council will receive £357,000 of NPO funding over the next 3 years to invest in cultural opportunities via our libraries. The funding will ensure that a high quality cultural offer will be delivered utilising high quality artists and performers. A particular emphasis is on enriching arts and cultural opportunities in the east of the borough and ensuring that all residents have access to high quality activities and events.

With regards to Employability & Skills support our libraries host a range of job clubs and CV writing sessions working with partners such as Job Centre Plus. They also host a range of adult learning courses supporting residents into better work and developing their career opportunities. Business start up centres are also located at Wimbledon and Mitcham libraries that have supported hundreds of residents to set up their own businesses and get advice leading to greater inward investment in the borough.

Our libraries provide quality information and digital support. With regards to our information services we have a set of skilled staff who can support residents with a range of Council and other services and in particular to support residents to access services online. All our libraries are Citizens Advice Bureau information points and a range of partners deliver legal and money management advice for residents. In terms of digital support beyond the free computers and Wi-Fi our libraries provide

one to one and group IT training sessions from beginners through to intermediate levels. Our pioneering Connecting Merton scheme loans high quality computer equipment and broadband to residents along with providing a dedicated support and training programme for any resident who is socially or digitally excluded. This scheme has been nationally recognised and is being promoted as a good practice example by the London Office of Technology and Innovation (LOTI) and has so far supported over 200 residents to get online.

From Councillor Nick McLean to the Cabinet Member for Local Environment, Green Spaces and Climate Change:

After the recent traveller incursion on Cannon Hill Common, can the Cabinet Member update me on the current status of the council's 'Persons Unknown' injunction?

Reply

The Council had obtained an injunction covering the borough however following a Court decision this is no longer available to us. An appeal against the decision of the Courts means that whilst the Council can no longer obtain a borough wide injunction it could now apply for a new injunction relating to a smaller number of specific sites.

In relation to Merton, on the information available, legal advice is that it is unlikely that we would be able to satisfy the Court of a sufficient urgent need to proceed with an injunction unless we have evidence of substantial and serious risk to particular identified sites, based on a recent history of unlawful encampments. The advice is to keep this under review over the next 12-24 months.

From Councillor Jenifer Gould to the Cabinet Member for Local Environment, Green Spaces and Climate Change

According to a study undertaken by the Natural History Museum, the UK is one of the world's most nature-depleted countries on Earth, this decline is projected to worsen with business-as-usual scenarios. So, can the Cabinet member explain why, over the past twelve years, the Council has failed to update the maintenance plans including ecology reports for Merton's 15 nature reserves and will she commit to doing so now? Would she also include what actions the Council is taking for climate change mitigation in relation to Merton's Nature Reserves?

Reply

It was nice to meet you at Cherry Wood Nature Reserve on 4 November along with the Council's Head of Parks Andrew Kauffman and Tree Officers Chris Rayner Rix.

As discussed while on site, the majority of Reserve Management Plans are out of date and do require updating. Since taking over the head of parks service role in February 2022 Andrew and his team have been reviewing both the Nature Reserve and Park management plans (see list below of sites under review).

In line with wider discussions while on site relating to tree planting, please be aware that linked to the Phase 1 Tree Strategy recommendations that the borough will also

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be reviewing tree species planted and ensure that plant species with Climate adaption in mind, choosing appropriate and native species that have greater drought tolerance.

Site	Management Plan Date
Bennett's Hole	No Plan
Beverley Meads/Fishpond Woods	(2001-2010)
Cannon Hill Common	(2001-2010)
Cherry Wood	(1998)
Merton Green Walk	(1998) Now forms part of the Abbey Recreation Ground Green Flag Management Plan
Morden Park	(2000)
Myrna Close	(2007-12)
Sir Joseph Hood Memorial Woods	(2007-12) Now forms part of the Abbey Recreation Ground Green Flag Management Plan
Oakleigh Way Railway Sidings	(No plan)
Wandle Meadow Nature Park	(1997)
Cramner Green	(2001) Working with Trees for cities on a community woodland proposal.
Lower Wandle	(2001)
Ravensbury Park	(2001)
Pyle Brook Nature Reserve	(2001-10)
Fishponds Wood and Beverley Mead	(2001-2010)

1. Abbey Recreation Ground (2012-2022) Action Plan annually reviewed linked to Annual Green Flag visits
2. Colliers Wood Recreation Ground (2012-2022) Action Plan annually reviewed linked to Annual Green Flag visits
3. Dundonald Recreation Ground (2012-2022) Action Plan annually reviewed linked to Annual Green Flag visits
4. John Inness Park (2012-2022) Action Plan annually reviewed linked to Annual Green Flag visits
5. South Park Gardens (2012-2022) Action Plan annually reviewed linked to Annual Green Flag visits
6. Sir Joseph Hood Memorial Playing Fields (2012-2022) Action Plan annually reviewed linked to Annual Green Flag visits
7. Cannizaro Park (2023-33) New 10-year plan developing with Friends of Cannizaro
8. Haydon's Road Recreation Ground (2023-32) New 10-year plan developing with Friends of Haydon's Rd
9. The Canons House and Grounds (2022-32) New 10-year plan developing with Friends of Canons House and Grounds linked to recent National Heritage Lottery upgrade

The Greenspaces Team (including borough ecologist and tree officer) are currently working with service provider at idverde UK and other conservation partner

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organisations - including Woodland Trust and RSPB - to review the current plans and source the necessary funding to update them, and prepare a prioritised programme for updating the plans

Once we have sourced the funding to update the plans we will communicate with the Friends of Nature Reserves and Parks and work with the community to develop the future management plan and associated action plan for each site using the Green Flag Award management and maintenance plan methodology.

From Councillor Attawar to the Cabinet Member for Health and Social Care

What discussions has he had with NHS partners about their plans to relocate health services from St Helier Hospital to Belmont?

Reply

As an administration we remain deeply concerned that the decision to relocate services from the current site at St Helier to the site in Belmont will reduce access to essential health provision for residents of the borough, particularly those in the East of the borough. With the developing cost of living crisis and the impact this will have on household finances, the potential future impact of travel costs to get to the new site only increases this concern.

With the Leader I have, since very early in the life of the new administration been seeking answers from the senior leadership of the new Integrated Care Board as well as from the Epsom and St Helier NHS Trust, both on whether there is an opportunity to further review previous decisions and whether the proposed new hospital remains affordable. I regret to report that the responses received from NHS colleagues thus far have been both incomplete and disappointing in their content. It is particularly concerning to be told that the Outline Business Case for the new hospital has not yet been approved by NHS England and that there appears to be no clear timetable for this decision making.

Members will be aware that there is much speculation in the media about whether the New Hospital Programme is properly funded and as an administration we will be continuing to press hard for clarity on this point. We will also continue to stress the need for an alternative plan that protects and enhances the buildings and services at the current St Helier site so that should, as appears increasingly likely, the national New Hospital Programme be delayed or discontinued there is a plan B in place that ensures our residents can continue to access the high quality services they have a right to expect from the NHS.

From Councillor Max Austin to the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Civic Pride:

Please can the Deputy Leader tell me whether Merton's Winter Night Shelter, organised by Faith in Action, will operate this Winter with the Council's support?

Reply

Faith in Action (FIAMHP), which does so much good work, operating two drop in sessions for the homeless and insecurely housed every week, will decide upon their

own night shelter provision this winter. Faith in Action are independent and do not depend on Council funding to run the winter night shelter.

As a statutory organisation the Council follows the Government's guidance 'Operating principles for Night Shelters' which requires us to provide single room accommodation. The guidance indicates that communal night shelters should only be used if there is significant demand and there are no alternatives. The GLA follows the same guidance. The Council will be providing 6 further single rooms of accommodation which allows the rough sleepers to use the rooms day and night.

Faith in Action wants to run a communal night shelter for 12 -14 people for overnight stays. Merton Council has offered Faith in Action the use of the 'six bed' self-contained accommodation, but this was not accepted, so the Council will run its own provision.

If Faith in Action operate a communal shelter, Public Health and Housing officers will work with them to mitigate any risks of infection. Council officers met with a representative from government on 8 November who affirmed Merton's approach was correct. Merton officers will aim to assist rough sleepers to move into more settled housing and have opportunities to develop new skills and open doors for meaningful employment.

We recognise that there are many wonderful volunteers who work with Faith in Action, and we will aim to work with them as part of a response in future years.

From Councillor Robert Page to the Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Services

Could the Cabinet Member set out:

- a) the approach taken by the Council to collect Council Tax arrears;
- b) the number of overdue accounts pursued in each of the last 5 years; and
- c) the number of overdue accounts resolved in each of the last 5 years by use of bailiffs/bailiff services?

Reply

- a. The Council follows the collection and recovery procedures as prescribed by the Council Tax (Administration and Enforcement) Regulations 1992 and Council Tax (Demand Notices) (England) Regulations 2011 (as amended).

Specifically, this involves the issue of a reminder notice, or final notice, when an amount payable becomes overdue. If the amount remains unpaid after 14 days, any right to pay by instalments is cancelled, and a court summons is issued in respect of the full amount payable to the end of a financial year, for a hearing at the Magistrates' court.

If the council tax amount remains unpaid at the date of the court hearing the council makes application for a liability order. A liability order gives the council a number of options by which to collect the debt. This includes passing the debt to

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enforcement agents (bailiffs) for collection, or making an attachment to a person's earnings or benefits.

- b. The number of accounts where a court summons has been issued, and a liability order obtained are as follows:

	Summons	Liability orders
2022/23	2,907	2,100 (from 1 April – 31 October 2022)
2021/22	11,744	8,152
2020/21	1,624	1,401
2019/20	8,675	6,538
2018/19	10,011	7,424

- c. Number of accounts paid in full following the use of the enforcement agents:

2022/23	798 (from 1 April – 31 October 2022)
2021/22	1,596
2020/21	687
2019/20	2,262
2018/19	3,016

From Councillor Daniel Holden to the Cabinet Member for Transport

Please can the Cabinet Member tell me how many EV charging points have been installed since May 1st?

Reply

The Council installed 90 extra chargers in 2021. However, no EV charging points have been installed since May 2022. However, the Council has concluded a procurement exercise in this time and appointed an operator to provide 500 lamp column charge points across Merton by March 2023. Our contractors have begun work on structural/ electrical surveys. The installations will happen in batches with the first batch due to commence this month.

Residents can find out more about EV charging on the Council's website, including a live map of available chargers. The new installations between now and March 2023 will be added to Zap-Map as they go live.

From Councillor Williscroft to the Cabinet Member for Transport

Can the Cabinet Member provide an update on the administration's plans to provide 500 additional EV charging points across the borough by March 2023?

Reply

The Council has concluded the procurement exercise to appoint an operator with the contract in place since August 2022. The contractor has been conducting extensive survey work to assess the electrical and structural suitability of lamp columns and has

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now identified viable locations to proceed with for just under 150 sites. Details of these locations have been published on the website and a Section 17 notice has been placed on the lamp column giving residents 28 days to comment. The first batch of site installations is due to commence towards the end of November. A significant number of columns tested so far, either require additional tests or have been assessed to be unsuitable for the installation of a chargepoint, so additional survey work is ongoing to find alternative viable locations for the remaining sites to deliver the 500 additional chargers.

Residents can find out more about lamp column chargers roll-out on the Council's website at [Electric vehicle charging : Plans for new lamp charging points | Merton Council](#).

From Councillor Kaweesa to the Cabinet Member for Civic Pride

Can the Cabinet Member explain what role Merton's voluntary and community sector can play in creating civic pride in the borough and how the Council is supporting them in their important work?

Reply

The Your Merton engagement findings showed that Merton residents felt a strong sense of pride in the community spirit that exists in the borough. Merton's large and diverse voluntary and community sector (VCS) is key to this sense of community spirit. It plays a pivotal role in creating civic pride throughout the borough. Working in partnership with the Council, the VCS in Merton provide a range of services on the ground, reaching residents in need of help and support, and delivering improvements in our communities that lead to a greater sense of pride and wellbeing for all. Engendering a feeling of pride requires fostering a more equal and inclusive society and the VCS is a highly valued partner in taking forward this priority.

The Council has a long and highly-valued track record of working in partnership with the borough's VCS. This is reflected in the increase in funding towards the sector that the Council has made in recent years. Funding for the VCS in 2018/19 totalled £9.929m, and in 2019/20 funding increased to £10.041m. Funding to the VCS for 2021/22 was £10.55m, an increase of 5%.

The Council's Civic Pride Fund is divided into two areas which together meet these aims: Supporting the Voluntary and Community Sector and Investing in Neighbourhoods. In both cases, the eligibility criteria required for strategic partners in VCS organisations to demonstrate during the application process are focussed on restoring, nurturing and embedding civic pride.

Civic Pride Fund: Supporting the Voluntary and Community Sector

This funding programme looks to support services which variously:

- address inequalities by targeting resource and valuing community insight
- learn together and share insights openly to improve trust, relationships and quality of information
- invest time in relationships, collaborate across professions and join up support
- connect local communities, grow relationships and encourage social action
- help earlier in empowering, accessible and person-centred ways
- support people to take further action themselves and to improve their own circumstances
- work in partnership with other VCS organisations to mobilise citizen and community efforts to improve services that support people
- recruit, induct and train volunteers
- build on the strengths of people and communities

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Civic Pride Fund: Investing in Neighbourhoods

This funding programme which uses Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funding has a focus on projects that support demands that developments such as new homes and commercial buildings place on our neighbourhoods, which has included funding public realm and shopfront improvements to our high streets.

Over £5m of Neighbourhood CIL funding since 2018 has gone to a wide variety of projects across the borough, including new playgrounds on estates and tree planting, all of which contribute to a sense of civic pride. Applications for this funding are usually made by and on behalf of local communities wanting to improve the spaces they live and work and bring up their families in.

From Councillor Flack to the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Civic Pride

We want to encourage a more vibrant high street, but our local businesses are hampered by long waiting times for relatively minor changes. What is the average waiting time for planning applications?

Reply

In the year to date 73.15% of minor planning applications have been decided within the statutory determination period of 8 weeks or by a deadline agreed with applicants and agents. This exceeds the nationally set target of 70%. By the end of November there will be a full complement of 4 Principal Planners in the new higher level of the staff structure. They will coach junior members of staff and sign off minor application decisions so it is anticipated that this performance figure will be improved further before the end of the year.

From Councillor Charles to the Cabinet Member for Civic Pride

Can the Cabinet Member set out how the Council and Merton's voluntary and community sector are working together to support Ukrainian refugees and their host families?

Reply

At the outset of the conflict in Ukraine we moved quickly to commission the Polish Family Association, Commonsense Trust and Wimbledon Guild to provide a range of face to face, online and telephone support to Ukrainians arriving in the Borough and to those providing them with accommodation.

I am particularly proud of the way in which our partner organisations were able to rapidly mobilise that support and the way in which they have maintained and built on it since March. For the Commonsense Trust this has included maintaining the provision of face to face support at the New Horizon centre while also hosting the Galpin's Road rest centre – a significant achievement.

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While the Government has only provided funding to support Ukrainians arriving under the Homes for Ukraine visa scheme we have always been clear that the support we have commissioned from our voluntary sector partners should be equally available to all Ukrainian guests arriving in the borough, and that commitment continues.

The support offered varies depending on individual need but typically will include assistance with finding employment, access to English language learning, welfare benefits advice, access to health services and, increasingly, support in coming to terms with the traumas that individuals have and are experiencing.

At the current time we have some 260 hosts providing accommodation and support via the Homes for Ukraine scheme. Those hosts are supporting approximately 370 individuals, 110 of whom are children

In addition to this, the Polish Family Association and Commonsense Trust are providing support to around 200 households – around 500 adults and children – who have arrived via Friends and Families visas. Our partners estimate that there may be another 70 Ukrainian households who have arrived in Merton and who are not currently accessing the available support. A range of social media and word of mouth communication channels are being used to make sure that all are aware of the support available.

From Councillor Kohler to the Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Services

The cabinet member has previously reported on the number of times the Merton Local App has been downloaded and the number of businesses that have signed up to it. However as neither of these metrics are reliable indicators of the success of an App please can he confirm what other metrics are being recorded in relation to the app and the details of what they reveal?

Reply

I do not agree with Cllr Kohler's subjective assertion that the level of downloads by both residents and businesses are unreliable indicators of success. These remain the two indicators reported to councilors as they are clear indicators of uptake and interest by the two primary groups that the Merton Local App aims to connect. In addition to these, there is an internal dashboard where officers can access metrics in more detail. This provides metrics by duration, by customers (new and repeat) and by businesses. It can identify the number of shares of the App, provides data on offers, events and products. It also provides basic statistics such as customers by area, current offers by community (town centre), businesses by industry and performance trends.

A fortnightly meeting takes place with the contractor, this includes a discussion around how we can encourage more onboarding and widen the reach. It has been planned that we publish some good news stories from businesses using the App. This will provide an additional means to understanding the impact of the App, if the businesses are experiencing any difference in, for example, sales and footfall.

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We also continue to use the App to send out messaging around local council led events to support reach to residents who may not have access to a PC. The onboarding and reach can be measured based on the release of the event. We can see from responses (views/shares/redemptions) that the release of an event spikes the response such as the Council's fireworks ticket sales.

From Councillor Mercer to the Cabinet Member for Civic Pride

The Council has put considerable support behind its provision for Ukrainian refugees. However, what was once an emergency provision for 6 months is now starting to look like uncertain and barely adequate provision some 9 months after the Russian invasion. In the interests of our Ukrainian guests, their hosts and of the various support services, what plans does the Council have for the next 9 months?

Reply

As I have already said in response to an earlier question, I am proud of the way in which this Council and our partners have responded to the support needs of our Ukrainian guests and those providing them with a home and with support. We are acutely aware that there are a range of uncertainties about what will happen in the future, not the least of these being how long the conflict may continue and when those who wish to return to Ukraine will be able to do so. The absence of a clear longer-term plan from Government is also a concern.

Despite this lack of clarity from Government we are planning for the longer term. To help ensure that Homes for Ukraine hosts feel supported to continue providing a home to their guests beyond the first 6 months we have recently agreed to increase the £350 a month thank you payment by an additional £100 per month from month 7 onwards and this will be paid to all qualifying hosts from the beginning of December.

We know that finding longer term accommodation will be a major challenge for many Ukrainian households and we have recruited an additional specialist Housing Options Adviser to ensure that we can provide the right advice and support at the right time. We will increase this specialist resource as and when that becomes necessary.

Our schools have provided places for over 180 Ukrainian children and have provided those children with a whole spectrum of wrap around support and will continue to do so. Our Adult Education providers are offering a range of English language learning and again will continue to do so. We continue to work very closely with our local Department of Work and Pensions colleagues to ensure access to employment and training opportunities.

Subject to clarity about future funding from Government we will also maintain, and enhance where required, the support services being provided by our valued partners the Polish Family Association, Commonside Trust and Wimbledon Guild.

I am extremely proud of the way in which the residents of our borough have welcomed not just Ukrainians arriving in the borough but also refugees and asylum seekers from all over the world. As a council we will continue to promote and support that welcome.

From Councillor Mundy to the Cabinet Member for Civic Pride

Can the Cabinet Member set out the role of the voluntary and community sector in supporting residents in the cost of living emergency?

Reply

Merton Council has an exceptional track record in partnership working, bringing together people from across sectors to support our residents. Just as the borough's VCS working in partnership with the Council has responded to all the crises of the past few years – the Covid 19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine, the Galpin's Road tragedy – so too is it pulling together to help residents through the cost-of-living emergency.

The Council has run five extremely well-attended resident events at borough libraries since July attended by over 1,300 residents (with a further event scheduled for 26th November) where VCS organisations have attended to give people information on a wide range of support available from debt advice and accessing benefits through to ways to keep warm in the winter months and keep energy bills down.

In addition to the Council's funding programme for the borough's VCS, in September it agreed a £2m Cost of Living Support Fund which is going towards VCS support and services, as set out in the report. From this fund, £100,000 makes up an immediate Cost of Living Assistance Grant Scheme for existing strategic partners and organisations to provide crisis support for Merton residents in need.

Organisations in Merton's dedicated voluntary and community sector came together with Council colleagues on 3rd November at the Merton Partnership Cost-of-Living Summit to examine ways in which to respond to the current and immediate crisis, and, crucially, to look at ways of working together to build resilience for the challenges of the future. The role, aims and ambitions of the VCS in supporting residents in the cost-of-living emergency can be demonstrated in some of the initial outcomes from the Summit's key areas of discussion, and some examples below.

The VCS plays a fundamental part in ensuring people in Merton are not going hungry as the cost-of-living crisis pushes people and families to the brink and presents them with a "heating or eating" dilemma. £100,000 from the Cost-of-Living Support Fund is going to Sustainable Merton and their wider Community Fridge partners to ensure surplus food supply is redistributed where needed across the borough.

£400,000 of the Cost-of-Living fund will be used to fund organisations such as Thinking Works that support our Warm and Well initiatives to fund small home improvements which will help keep households warm and reduce their energy bills. There is an opportunity in this area for the council and VCS in Merton to work with residents to find longer term more sustainable solutions to reducing energy bills, through tailored intervention and provision of information. This has been a growing area of interest for residents at the council-run cost-of-living events. The event on the 26th November will focus on energy efficiency.

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There has been a huge increase in the numbers of people sliding into further debt in order to meet the costs of living, and a steady rise in the numbers of people getting into debt for the first time. VCS partners have first-hand experience of the numbers of people affected and the pressures on the services and support available. Citizens Advice Merton and Lambeth report a 42% increase in the number of enquiries about debt alone in just a three month period, August to October of this year. The council benefits from a close working relationship with VCS partners in order to have access to figures like this which paint a full picture of the scale of the crisis. Part of the council's Cost-of-Living Support Fund is going towards CAML's debt advice services.

Merton has a thriving community of volunteers. Based on the 2021 Merton Residents Survey around 70,000 residents did some form of unpaid volunteering work in their community over the past year, from helping out at food banks and taking part in litter-picking, through to offering up more specialised help such as accounting. Volunteering opportunities present people with ways to expand their experience, and it is an ambition to further grow the number of local private companies which encourage their workforce to take on volunteering opportunities.

From Councillor Samantha MacArthur to the Cabinet Member for Sport and Heritage

Could the Cabinet Member please tell us how many local amateur sporting clubs there are in the Borough and how many of these she has made contact with. Furthermore, could she advise what proposals she has identified to help develop and support them?

Reply

In my capacity as Cabinet Member for Sport and Heritage, I have taken the opportunity to meet with several local clubs and I meet on a regular basis with clubs as well as Governing Bodies and other strategic stakeholders.

I am aware that the Council's Playing Pitch Strategy 2019 states that there are:

- 149 football teams
- 100 cricket teams
- 44 rugby teams

Many of these teams are undertaken by our key amateur clubs such as Motspur Park F.C., Westside, Wimbledon Cricket Club, Old Ruts, Hercules Wimbledon and many more.

In order to support community sporting, we are due to complete work on Haydon's Road multi-use-sports-area (MUSA), which has seen us renovate an old space which was used for motorcycle training, into a state-of-the-art games area. In addition, both Colliers Wood and Morden Recreation Ground MUSAs are due to be renovated in the new year.

Further support that will be undertaken includes investment in our natural grass playing pitches at Sir Joseph Hood Memorial Recreation Ground where we will be

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undertaking improvements to the drainage of the pitch, allowing for more matches to be played and improving the pitch standards.

In addition, we have engaged London Sport to work with officers and stakeholders from this month to develop a blueprint for our sporting strategy that will contribute to supporting improved sporting outcomes and removing barriers for participation in these activities.

From Councillor Jil Hall to the Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Services

Would the Cabinet Member please set out the main Council funding streams for voluntary organisations in the last 6 years, giving the percentage changes. Can an estimate be given as to the impact of inflation on these figures?

Reply

The main Council funding streams for voluntary organisations for the last six years is set out in the table below. We are currently in the process of collating the figures for 2021/22. It is not possible to give an estimate of the impact of inflation as accounting for inflation differs for different types of funding e.g. grants are normally provided over a number of years as a block of funding that does not include an inflation uplift.

Year	Cash grants / commissioned services	Notional rents	Discretionary Rate Relief	Total	% change
2020/21	£10,048, 209	£286,400	£219,700	£10,554,309	5%
2019/20	£9,526,062	£290,859	£224,296	£10,041,217	1%
2018/19	£9,153,842	£251,189	£524,443	£9,929,474	2%
2017/18	£8,913,187	£257,418	£541,733	£9,712,338	-20%
2016/17	£11,787,812	£274,868	£153,674	£12,216,353	-13%
2015/16	£13,584,757	£272,804	£153,957	£14,017,518	N/A

From Councillor Macauley to the Cabinet Member for Civic Pride

Following Black History Month, can the Cabinet Member provide an update on the Council's work with Merton's voluntary and community sector in developing a refreshed Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy for the Council?

Reply

The Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) strategy is being refreshed and will set out the Council's equality objectives to meet the statutory requirements of the Equality Act 2010 to publish equality objectives every four years

The EDI strategy is being informed by:

- The outcome of extensive community engagement including the 2021 'Your Merton' engagement findings and the Working Better with Communities project;

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- Commissioned research such as the Black Asian and Minority Ethnic (B.A.M.E.) Voice, Community Resilience COVID-19 report and Mencap report into the impact of the pandemic on residents living with a disability;
- Black Lives Matter concerns;
- Existing evidence of inequalities in the borough.

The approach to developing the strategy and draft objectives has been discussed at the Joint Consultative Committee (JCC) with Ethnic Minorities. Extensive consultation will commence in January 2023 and the voluntary and community sector will be given an opportunity for further input into the strategy. The draft EDI strategy will be discussed at the Overview and Scrutiny Commission in January.