

Merton Council Council

16 November 2022

Supplementary Agenda 4

23 Non-Priority Questions and Replies

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From Cllr Anthony Fairclough to the Cabinet Member for Housing

Could the Cabinet Member confirm (since May 2022):

- (a) how many repairs issues with properties operated by Registered Providers have been raised with the Council's housing team, and the detail of the outcomes following such reports;
- (b) the details of organised site visits to properties operating by Registered Providers and attended by Merton's housing team, the dates and sites attended (including confirmation of whether ward councilors were informed/invited), as well as the number of issues raised with the RP following such visits, and the outcomes of such reports; and
- (c) the number of matters raised by residents with the Tenants' Champion (both in relation to RP and Private Sector Landlords) and the outcomes following such reports?

Reply

a) Between 1 May and 31 October 2022 there were 37 reported cases of disrepair for Registered Providers. The Council is currently reviewing its systems and processes in order to improve recording of cases and to produce meaningful information regarding outcomes of cases.

b) The list of estate visits and dates are below.

Visit Date	Location
26/05/2022	Sadlers Close
10/06/2022	Mainwaring Court, Armfield Crescent
17/06/2022	Edinburgh + Conniston Court, Grand Drive
24/06/2022	Pollards Hill (MOAT)
01/07/2022	Rawnsley Avenue and Octavia Close
08/07/2022	High Path Estate
15/07/2022	Moffat Court and Poplar Court
29/07/2022	The Meadows estate, Talbot Close (NHG)
05/08/2022	Glebe Court and Glebe Square
12/08/2022	Baron Court, Fenning Court and Gedge Court
19/08/2022	Sadlers Close
26/08/2022	South View, Clifton Road and Sycamore Road
02/09/2022	Phipps Bridge
07/10/2022	Singleton Close and Swains Road
14/10/2022	Hudson Court, May Court and Marsh Court (High Path)
21/10/2022	Beaumont Court, Fitch Court, Laburnum Court and Penfold Court
28/10/2022	Brookfields Avenue, Grove Farm Court and The Beeches
04/11/2022	Hatfeild Mead

Following these visits over 100 cases have been raised with housing associations regarding issues raised by residents. It is important to note that the figure quoted does not account for all cases submitted as some have been sent exclusively to the Housing Association for which we do not have a record.

c) As part of the current pilot the Tenants' Champion deals with a wide variety of private and public sector enquiries including complaints of disrepair with private and social landlords, as well as contractual disputes of a specialist legal nature. This role currently consists of the Tenants' Champion seeking to analyse complaints made, identify issues and obtain relevant information in relation from the tenant and/or Council officers before contact is made with the landlord/agent, Council officers or housing associations seeking a remedy. At present, the Tenants' Champion receives no administrative support and does not have the time currently to dedicate to collating the detailed information you have requested. It is recognised that this role is inadequately supported for the longer term. The role and the support provided is under review with proposed changes due by the end of this year. There is ongoing work in relation to both systems and processes as part of this review of the Tenants' Champion role.

From Cllr Susie Hicks to the Cabinet Member for Education and Lifelong learning

As families increasingly struggle to access and afford healthy food, the provision of free, nutritious meals in schools is a powerful way to stem the tide of worsening inequalities, according to recent analysis by PwC commissioned by urbanhealth.org.uk. Their cost benefit analysis shows that every £1 investment in Universal Free School Meals generates £1.71 in core benefits - including increased cost savings to schools, increased lifetime earnings and contributions, increased savings on food costs to families, and increased NHS savings (obesity). In light of this new research, would the Cabinet Member agree to explore ways in which to either provide free breakfast clubs and/or expand provision of free school meals to those families outside benefit boundaries.

Reply

The administration continues to be aware of the importance of a balanced diet for children's development and education and therefore continues support for central school meals contracts that have good quality, nutritious and affordable meals at their heart. The Council also has sound systems for making it as easy as possible to ensure any family that is eligible for Free School Meals is identified, with automatic enrolment checked on a fortnightly basis. Merton has also been coordinating the delivery of Governments Holidays Activities and Food (HAF) programme over school holidays. We have supported over 1,000 children on free school meals and other vulnerable children to access holiday provision that includes a free meal for 4 days a week in school holidays. We will continue to have some provision at half term and again over the Christmas break. We are also continuing to organise supermarket vouchers for children on school meals during the school holidays.

The number of children eligible for Free School meals has gone up in Merton over the past years, from under 6,000 to over 7,000 of the circa 25,400 children in our

schools. With the lunchtime meal cost per child being circa £500 per year, an expansion of free school meals would run into the millions of pounds. Free School meals are paid for as part of the Dedicated Schools Grant and it is a national responsibility to expand the programme, which the administration would fully support in addition to funding other cost pressures on schools such as the cost of energy.

The Council is working with local schools that are eligible, to ensure they are benefiting from funding from the National School Breakfast Programme. This programme aims to support schools with a higher proportion of pupils whose family live in poverty.

From Cllr Andrew Howard to the Cabinet Member for Transport

Residents continue to be worried by heavy goods vehicles both a) breaking residential "local access" road weight limits, and b) speeding (of all vehicle types), what action is the cabinet member doing to help residents, and will he commit to meeting Conservative councillors to discuss this issue?

Reply

We do take safety seriously but monitoring and enforcement of speed and other traffic offences is the responsibility of the Police, who of course have limited resources and other priorities. Other than moving contraventions, the Council does not have the legal powers to enforce speed and other traffic violations. For locations with speed related issues TfL, in partnership with the Metropolitan Police, undertake many speed management initiatives, including Community Road Watch. Community Road Watch is a road safety initiative which aims to reduce speeding in residential areas and gives local residents the opportunity to work side by side with their local police teams, and use speed detection equipment to identify speeding vehicles in their communities. Concerns from members of the public on speeding, and other road offences, can be sent to Roadsafe London. This portal is an information and intelligence gathering tool that informs police activity <https://www.met.police.uk/notices/met/community-roadwatch/>.

The remit of the Council is to assess personal injury collisions and attempt to improve road safety and access, where highway design can lead to improvements. Limited funding, and the demand for action outweighing the Council's resources, means it has always been necessary to prioritise what actions the Council invests in. This is done by considering those areas with recorded personal injury collisions over a 3-year period. Traffic calming measures are expensive, and resource intensive to introduce and maintain. Additionally, due to noise and vibration associated with effective traffic calming features, residents often do not support traffic calming. Site constraints can also often prevent the introduction of effective features. Each road is assessed on its merit.

With regards to enforcement of 7.5T restrictions, where there is a 7.5T HGV ban, access to properties in the zone is still permitted which makes enforcement extremely challenging. In previous years Parking Services investigated establishing some form of enforcement including possible use of cameras, but other authorities have found that over 90% of larger vehicles had the right to enter the area under one

of the exemptions. With very few PCNs issued and sustained, camera enforcement has been found not to be as effective as first thought or offer value for money.

I am always happy to meet councillors to discuss local concerns.

From Cllr Klaar Dresselaers to Cabinet Member for Local Environment, Green Spaces and Climate

I understand the Council does not have the facility to collect waste from underground storage, as it requires specialised vehicles, not part of the current service provider's contract. Fortunately, I hear underground storage facilities for street litterbins will be considered when planning the development of future services. With a better waste collection service, less rubbish on streets, and investing in the future in mind, can the cabinet member confirm underground storage facilities will indeed be part of negotiations in the conditions for the contract with the next service provider?'

Reply

At this current time no decision has been made on how we deliver the future waste collection service after the current contract with Veolia comes to an end in 2025. At present Merton housing estates do not have the facility of underground waste collection containers. As such, our current contractor is not required to provide specialist collection vehicles for such activities at this time.

Underground storage of waste has several advantages, and is most suited in areas of high population such as housing estates. Retrofitting of these locations with underground storage facilities is however expensive and requires a great deal of redesign to the road network and utilities to facilitate the safe collection of waste from this type of operation.

I am pleased to note that as part of their estates regeneration programme, Clarion are working with Merton Planning Department to assess the benefits of underground storage solutions for waste containerisation.

With specific reference to future Clarion developments, outline Planning Permission was granted, subject to S.106 Obligation, in April 2019 for the High Path Estate and Eastfields Estate which includes the proposal for underground refuse system (URS).

There is provision within the agreed outline consent and s106 legal agreement to ensure that Clarion works with the Council to secure the URS. This will be installed and maintained by the Clarion.

From Cllr Tony Reiss to the Cabinet Member for Local Environment, Green Spaces and Climate Change

Would the Cabinet Member please state what the current value of the Climate Emergency Reserve Fund is, and when doing so detail how much money has been spent and on what since its inception, and include her plans and timelines for future spending?

Reply

The Council allocated £2 million in July 2021 and another £2 million in June 2022 to help progress the Council's climate strategy and actions towards being a net zero carbon council by 2030 and a net zero carbon borough by 2050.

Each year the Council publishes a Climate Delivery Action Plan which sets out what we have done and what the plans and timelines for the future. Please see the 2021 and 2022 climate delivery plans.

Climate Delivery Plan Year 1 – 2021

Climate Delivery Plan Year 2 - 2022

Some examples of projects that we are undertaking on climate action include:

- Supporting the Climate Action Group including:
 - Merton Garden Streets
 - The Wheel
 - Energy Matters
- the Canon's Climate Summer Fair which took place in June 2022
- Schools Climate Conference which took place in November 2022
- Including climate action in the Council's procurement policies and implementing these in new contracts.
- Supporting residents in accessing government funding to retrofit their homes
- Successfully bidding to NetZero Innovation Programme and working with University College London and The Wheel to promote the circular economy in Merton's high streets.

One of the barriers to delivering climate action across the Council has been the difficulty in recruiting staff, particularly in the building retrofit sector which has very high demand across the country.

The Council is considering how it allocates the latest £2 million and will be looking at the support it can provide, including to businesses, for retrofitting homes, and to community projects. In January 2023 Cabinet will consider the Climate Delivery Plan year 3 and the details of the next £2 million climate fund which will help deliver climate action in 2023 and beyond.

From Cllr Eleanor Cox to the Cabinet Member for Housing and Sustainable Development:

How many planning applications received since 1st January 2020, which receive more than the threshold number of objections, have been decided under delegated powers and not by PAC?

Reply

None as there is no precise number of objections set out in the Scheme of Delegation under the Constitution of the Council to automatically trigger a referral of a planning application to the Planning Applications Committee.

The determination of applications is referred to the Committee where objections are received which cannot be overcome by conditions but where the application is considered to be in accordance with the Development Plan and so is recommended for approval (minor developments or changes of use may be excluded from this exception).

From Cllr Kirsten Galea to the Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Services

Would the Cabinet Member please explain why the needs of disabled residents were not reflected or even considered in the September 2022 *Cabinet Paper Cost of Living Fund and Household Support Grant*?

Reply

The needs of disabled residents absolutely were considered when preparing the Cabinet Paper, as indeed they are when preparing all Cabinet reports. Given that the evidence is that disabled people are disproportionately impacted by the Cost of Living crisis, in terms of lower incomes, higher energy costs and housing issues, many of the proposals put forward in the September Cabinet report will directly benefit this cohort of residents e.g. energy efficiency advice to reduce energy bills, increasing debt advice capacity at Citizens Advice, funding to alleviate food poverty and additional funding to voluntary groups including Carers Support Merton. As happened in September, we will look again at the needs of disabled residents as part of discussions around the remaining £1 million in the Cost of Living Emergency Support Fund

Where an individual with a disability is in receipt of social care services and subject to an assessment of their ability to contribute to the cost of their care a standard amount of what is known as disability related expenditure is excluded from the assessment. Where an individual's disability related expenditure is higher than the standard amount and evidence of that can be provided, the Council will take this into account by excluding that higher amount from the assessment, which in turn will lower the amount of the contribution. Individuals who are seeing their disability related costs rising as a result of the cost of living crisis could therefore request a reassessment of their financial contribution.

It should be noted that 616 disabled people on Council Tax Support will get £60 and after the first payments have been distributed, we will be looking at how best to support that specific group with the funds that are left.

Questions on the Strategic Theme

From Cllr Hina Bokhari to the Cabinet Member for Local Environment, Green Spaces and Climate Change and the Cabinet Member for Transport

A commitment was made at Full Council in July 2022 to review the borough's walking and cycling infrastructure, ahead of this, would the Cabinet Member please outline their strategy on helping small businesses reach net zero by 2030 by, for example, enabling them to use alternative modes of delivery vehicles like cargo bikes?

Reply

The Council is fully committed to a review of walking and cycling infrastructure / strategy however this is subject to recruiting a suitable candidate which thus far has proven challenging in the current marketplace. We hope to commence a walking, cycling and active travel strategy in spring 2022

"Merton's climate strategy 2020 sets out the Council's ambition to be a net zero carbon borough by 2050 with Council activities being net-zero by 2030.

The Council has worked with partners to encourage take-up of Cargo bikes for residents and business through the try-before-you-bike programme
<https://www.merton.gov.uk/streets-parking-transport/cycling/try-before-you-bike>

Earlier this year the Council launched a cargo bike scheme for local businesses, this forms part of the Defra-funded Clean Air Villages 4 (CAV4) programme, with partners Cross River Partnership, Love Wimbledon and cargo bike provider XeroE.

This service, which is provided by XeroE, is available to book via an online platform, with a set number of pre-paid hours available for local businesses to use. The cargo bike scheme aims to show businesses the ease of switching to cargo bikes for their deliveries, ultimately reducing carbon footprints, local air pollution, and saving costs.

Businesses can sign up to the scheme HERE. Just reference 'Free Wimbledon Project/Trial' in the 'Additional Notes' section.

Elys department store in Wimbledon has also launched a free same-day bike delivery service in partnership with Delivery Mates. Deliveries are available within a 4 mile radius of the store, which covers most of Merton, by cargo-bike.

From Cllr Michael Paterson to the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Civic Pride:

Over the past six years LBM has provided over £70 million in funding to the voluntary sector. Please can the Deputy Leader tell me:

- What targets do the organisations needs to meet to continue to receive funding?
- Has the level of funding for organisations decreased year on year? If so, please provide examples.

- How are the outputs of the partner organisations assessed over the 12 month period?
- The level of funding has increased steadily over the last three years: a) is support to the voluntary sector forecast to rise for the next year? B) If so, how much money would be saved if spending was frozen in line with 2020/21 figures?

Reply

What targets do the organisations need to meet to continue to receive funding?

Funding officers use a standard funding agreement for Council grant funding to voluntary and community sector organisations, which sets out agreed outputs and outcomes. Monitoring forms are returned during the year. The grant agreement clearly states that organisations who fail to meet the agreed outputs can have their funding withdrawn.

None of the current grantees are guaranteed future funding once their agreement ends. For example the previous Strategic Partner Programme has been replaced by the new Civic Pride Voluntary and Community Sector Fund, with a clear framework and assessment, jointly developed with the voluntary sector. Applications have been received by both existing grantees and those not currently funded, and will be judged on their application.

Has the level of funding for organisations decreased year on year? If so, please provide examples.

Funding has not decreased.

How are the outputs of the partner organisations assessed over the 12 month period?

A standard monitoring template is used for grants, and frequency of monitoring is set out in this agreement, including at least one monitoring visit per year. Within the monitoring report, organisations are required to demonstrate how they are meeting the outputs and outcomes that were agreed in the funding agreement before the service started.

Beyond this, we have developed a close working relationship with grantees, encouraging them to alert us to any problems early on before the monitoring report so that we can address them.

The level of funding has increased steadily over the last three years: a) is support to the voluntary sector forecast to rise for the next year?

It is anticipated that funding for the sector will continue to increase; however, the full picture will not be known until the latest funding database is completed and published.

B) If so, how much money would be saved if spending was frozen in line with 2020/21 figures?

As above. To be confirmed once funding analysis undertaken.

From Cllr John Braithwaite to the Cabinet Member for Transport

Fast food delivery companies provide a valuable service and source of employment but what is the Council doing to:

- a) prevent delivery bikes dominating parking bays and stopping them from parking on double yellow lines in Wimbledon town centre;
- b) deter the minority of uninsured and unlicensed riders; and
- c) provide them with suitable parking, rest and toilet facilities?

Reply

- a) To address the current moped parking on Wimbledon Bridge the Council has carried out a statutory consultation to remove parking all together by introducing 'At Any Time' waiting and limited loading restrictions. The area will then be available for loading / unloading and drop off / pick up during certain time of the day. The Statutory consultation is due to conclude on 11th November 2022. The consultation has resulted in representations which will be reported to the Cabinet Member for a final approval and if agreed implementation will be programmed.
- b) This is a matter for the police
- c) Alternative parking has been provided for riders in Hartfield Rd car park and St Georges' car park. The community toilet scheme, and local businesses who the riders serve provide toilet facilities

From Cllr Thomas Barlow to the Cabinet Member for Transport:

Will the Cabinet Member review street furniture on the borough's high streets that is negatively impacting mobility?

Reply

The Council does prioritise access for vulnerable road users such as pedestrians and more specifically those with a disability, ensuring that safe access is maintained at all times through physical measures and enforcement.

Most street furniture items will be assessed for their impact on mobility (whether placed by the Council or approved by planning permission). Generally we would expect 2m clear pavement for passage between street furniture. If there are any specific pinch-points where the member feels that the space available falls below 2m, please pass on the details via Member Enquiries whereby the Highways Team will be happy to review it.

From Cllr Victoria Wilson to the Cabinet Member for Civic Pride

Would the Cabinet Member please provide the current number of empty shops on the borough's high streets and outline what is being done to incentivise the use of these spaces?

Reply

396 shops are empty as of quarter 2 (July-Sept 2022) which equates to 18% vacant borough wide. The Council has no control over private landlords but as part of the Civic Prides High Street Incubation exercise there is a proposal to consider the creation of a landlord directory to enable officers to engage with local landlords. With a dialogue we will be able to encourage use of window wrapping and pop up uses in vacant units, linking landlords to opportunities and contacts.

From Cllr John Oliver to the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Civic Pride

Could the Deputy Leader please list how many meetings she has had with the Borough Commander and/or Senior Police Officers since the May elections, what issues have been raised with her and whether such dialogue is useful? Does she have any concerns or continuing issues regarding policing in Merton at the present time?

Reply

Between the Leader and Deputy Leader, we have met with the Borough Commander and senior police officers eight times since May. In these meetings we have constantly reiterated the need for local neighbourhood policing to remain a priority, and for these police to be based in both police stations in our borough.

Currently the Police in Merton as with many other boroughs are struggling with resources, particularly in the Safer Neighbourhoods Teams. This has been brought about by significant demands on the service through aid. Before, including and since The Queen's funeral, huge demands have been placed on policing with Extinction Rebellion and most recently with the Just Stop Oil campaign. In addition, large numbers of officers are undergoing mandatory training on a system called connect, an IT system to assist officers with a range of activities. Locally though police are initiating a plan (operation stabilizer) in order to try and ensure resources are available to respond to priorities such as 999 calls.

Robbery remains a challenge in the borough and additional resources have been brought in by the police, such as dog patrols to tackle this, supported closely by officers from Children's Services and Safer Merton in the Council. We are also working closely with the police to collaborate on complex issues, including both crime and anti-social behaviour issues in Mitcham Town Centre, and working together to prevent youth violence and tackle gang-related activity, and to make sure that additional resources brought in by the police through schemes such as Operation Nightingale are targeted effectively. A combination of these activities has achieved some notable successes.

From Cllr Matthew Willis to the Cabinet Member for Civic Pride

The Civic Pride Fund (Supporting the Voluntary & Community Sector) closed for applications on Friday 11/11/22. Could the cabinet member share how many applications in total were received and whether this was in line with expectations?

Reply

A total of 40 applications were received across the four programme themes. This compares with 27 applications received for the 2019-22 funding round. This is in line with expectations, as the fund has been co-designed with the voluntary sector and widely promoted.

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