

# **Merton Council Council**

**1 February 2023**

## **Supplementary Agenda 2**

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Public Questions to Council 1 February 2023

**From Ian Regan**

**To the Cabinet Member for Housing and Sustainable Development**

There are a large number of council-owned commercial properties not currently trading right across the borough. Some have been closed for years. What is being done about this? I'm a local resident, I want to establish my business within the borough and help serve my local community

**Reply**

Whilst there are a number of vacant commercial properties which are not currently trading, very few are owned by the council. Any properties that do become available at the end of a lease will be marketed and details placed on the council's website: [Rent or buy council land or property | Merton Council](#)

**From Chris Larkman**

**To the Cabinet Member for Housing and Sustainable Development**

At Raynes Park Station there are 2 pieces of land which are being transferred from Network Rail to the Council. Building work commenced 2 months ago with a completion target of 2 months. However, the site remains an unsightly building site. When will this work be completed?

**Reply**

Merton have submitted all documentation to Network Rail as requested, there have been delays due to changes in approval forms required by Network Rail resulting in resubmission of all design forms, and changes requested by Network Rail regarding the type of retaining wall required for the southside section of the project.

This has resulted in redesign of the retaining wall and revisions to the Risk Assessment Method Statement required for all footway and fencing works on the embankment and working safely next to live rails.

Network Rail have confirmed that following our latest submission they expect to send confirmation of their acceptance of all submissions week commencing 30<sup>th</sup> January 2023. The Council anticipate following their approval, the works are likely to be undertaken in conjunction with other scheduled roadworks planned within Raynes Park in the coming months. We understand that the delays to the project caused by Network Rail have been a source of frustration locally and we hope to conclude the works this quarter.

**From Bill Petch**

**To the Cabinet Member for Housing and Sustainable Development**

## **Public Questions to Council 1 February 2023**

I am sure you are aware of the mess outside the South side of Raynes Park station. This is I believe two sites transferred from Network Rail. Could you explain the lack of effort to clean them up.

### **Reply**

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### **From Chris Edge**

#### **To the Cabinet Member for Housing and Sustainable Development**

For several years, the RPA has been lobbying to have the small parcel of land, South of Raynes Park station, opened up to provide better pedestrian access. We are appalled by the bureaucracy between NR/LBM; the project has again stalled. What will the Council do to make this happen quickly.

### **Reply**

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**From Tony Edwards**

**To the Cabinet Member for Housing and Sustainable Development**

Two small pieces of spare NR land are shown on the RP enhancement plan for the last 12 years. Yet again the transfer has stalled. How long does the community have to wait for a result?

**Reply**

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**From George MacGillivray**

**To the Cabinet Member for Housing and Sustainable Development**

Why is it taking so long to complete to work opposite the south side entrance to Raynes Park station? I understand that you are extending the pavement at that corner; this is surely straightforward and the project has been planned for years,

**Reply**

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Park in the coming months. We understand that the delays to the project caused by Network Rail have been a source of frustration locally and we hope to conclude the works this quarter.

**From Jerry Cuthbert**

**To the Cabinet Member for Housing and Sustainable Development**

The land by Raynes Park Station was supposed to be transferred from NR to LBM years ago, to improve pedestrian access and safety along Approach Road. It has been dogged by bureaucracy. The temporary fencing is an eyesore. Will Merton please take action to expedite this?

**Reply**

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**From Malcolm Green**

**To the Cabinet Member for Transport**

The Council has committed to installing traffic sensors around the East Hillside area (see answer to Council question on 7 July 2021): will he please now give a date by which these long-overdue sensors will be installed and operational?

**Reply**

In December 2022, Merton Council approved an allocation of s106 funding to support the installation of additional VivaCity traffic sensors around the borough. The funding will allow for 45 new traffic sensors in Merton.

Council officers have met with VivaCity in January 2023 to agree positions for cameras, including those for the East Hillside area as a priority in the programme. VivaCity will be testing the proposed camera locations in February for visibility and to ensure that the cameras will pick up the data required in the desired locations. Following this assessment Merton Council Highways will provide the electrical

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connections on lamp-columns for the cameras. We hope to have the traffic sensors installed in March 2023.

**From Craig Bullen**

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

How will the council commit to improving domestic waste and recycling collections specifically in relation to missed collections and the council allowing false information regarding calling and waste not present to be published?

**Reply**

Over the last 12 months we have seen a sustainable improvement in the waste and recycling collections with 95% of all missed kerbside collections rectified within the required performance standard.

The service measures the actual performance based on the number of missed collections per 100k collections. The table below illustrates the current standard being achieved last month.

Collection Service	Missed per 100,000
Refuse Collection	54/100k
Recycling Collection	34/100k
Paper / Card Collection	81/100k
Food waste Collection	41/100k

Following Cabinet's decision to end Merton's contract with the current contractor, we are in the process of reviewing our waste and recycling collection service. Options for the future of this service will be presented to Cabinet at the end of February and will include the results from our recent resident consultation

Regarding your specific concerns of missed collections and reported 'Not Presented' if you are able to share your address, I will request officers to investigate this matter and ensure that any service issues are resolved.

**From Richard Poole**

**To the Cabinet Member for Sport and Heritage**

Tennis for Free is a voluntary group providing free tennis for children every Saturday helping to keep children fit and active. Does the Council believe that it would be unfair to charge tennis coaches a court fee which will be passed onto parents struggling with the cost of living crisis thus potentially ending "tennis for free"?

**Reply**

Merton council actively supports charitable organisations and grassroots sports activities that provide free access to participants. We have an ambition to have healthier and active communities. The use of our tennis courts by children to develop a passion for lifelong tennis helps to deliver on this ambition. Tennis for Free are a nationwide charitable operation and operate out of our facilities located at Joseph Hood Recreation Ground. It is my understanding that the Tennis for Free coaching sessions primarily take place on a Saturday morning at 10am and we will continue to support this session without charge.

In terms of charging tennis coaching sessions, I would like to be clear that our intention is to ensure that commercially operating businesses that use the council owned and maintained facilities are charged fairly to ensure we can develop and maintain these valued assets for our current and future users.

Income received from commercial tennis coaching will be used to fund our annual maintenance programmes thus improving our facilities for all residents who wish to access our free to use courts.

**From Laura Paine  
To the Cabinet Member for Sport and Heritage**

Joseph Hood Recreation Ground car park floods and needs resurfacing. Now the Council is promoting Merton as a "Borough of sport" when will this be prioritised as it is restricting the playing of team matches and the use of the sports facilities there.

**Reply**

Officers in the Parks and Greenspaces team are aware of the current condition of the Joseph Hood Recreation Ground car park and the periodic flooding experienced at times of high rainfall events

In recent years the council has installed a drain in the centre of the carpark at Joseph Hood Recreation Ground that collects the runoff from the main field. The drain, during periods of high rainfall, can become blocked and causes localised pooling, but the Greenspaces team are working on resolving this issue.

In the short term, we are currently working with our facilities management team to arrange the installation of an interceptor to the car park drain to ensure that the fine materials collected do not block the drain and in periods of high rainfall the water should flow back out to the main road, Martin Way, and would hope to have this infrastructure installed by March 2023.

In the medium to long term, the team have secured funding to look at the field drainage and infrastructure on a number of strategic sports sites across Merton. This programme will include works to improve the field drainage at Joseph Hood Recreation Ground and plans are currently being designed for a project in 2023 which will include improvement to drainage on the sports pitches as well as swales

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and bunds to offer protection and storm water attenuation which will improve localised flooding impacts.

**From Michael Marks**  
**To the Cabinet Member for Housing and Sustainable Development**

When is the area with temporary fencing, opposite the south entrance to Raynes Park Station on the corner of Approach Road, going to be completed? It is unsightly and not very secure

### **Reply**

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**From Barry Smith**  
**To the Cabinet Member for Housing and Sustainable Development**

How much has the Council spent so far in this financial year obtaining legal advice on the AELTC application to build on Wimbledon Golf Course and what was the budget for this item for 2022/23 and what is in the provisional budget for 2023/24?

### **Reply**

There will be no cost to the Council for legal advice sought for the live planning application submitted by AELTC as an agreement has been reached with the applicant that our legal fees will be reimbursed by them.

**From Christine Peace**  
**To the Cabinet Member for Local Environment, Green Spaces and Climate Change**

Does the council have any plans to reinstate the graffiti removal team (disbanded in 2017) and if not, what steps is the council taking to help residents in areas where there is a lot of graffiti - for example on buildings along the railway line between Wimbledon and Raynes Park?

**Reply**

Graffiti is a prominent issue that impacts on the quality of our lives. Although we have seen a significant reduction in graffiti incidents since 2017, we have maintained services across the borough to remove and address graffiti on public property. Since 2017, the Council commissioned Veolia Environmental Services UK to undertake our street cleansing services in which they have continued to provide a dedicated graffiti removal team to undertake the removal of graffiti from public sites, including a rapid response team for any offensive graffiti incidents.

It is important to note however that the Council is not authorised to remove graffiti from private property as this is the responsibility of the owner. However, when the graffiti incident is of an offensive nature, we will take prompt action with the owner to remove the offending graffiti but there may be a charge for these services.

Officers within the Public Space Team are happy to work with you, along with private landowners such as Network Rail, to ensure that this specific area is addressed.

**From Sam Seager  
To the Cabinet Member for Transport**

Why does the Council think it is resource intensive to change the parking restrictions in CPZ H1 from

8.30am – 8pm everyday to

8.30am – 6.30pm Monday to Friday and  
9.30am – 9.30pm on match and events days?

**Reply**

During September 2020 the Council carried out an informal consultation to extend the operational period of the zone in response to a petition from the residents. A further consultation in the form of a statutory consultation was carried out in February 2021. The changes / current operational periods were introduced as a direct result of majority support in the neighbourhood. The reports that are available on the website sets out the outcome of the consultations. <https://www.merton.gov.uk/streets-parking-transport/parking/consultations/cpz/h1-cpz-kohat-road-area>

To change the hours again, an informal consultation would need to be carried out to seek the views of all those within the zone. If there is majority support then a statutory consultation would be carried out. This is lengthy process which requires the engineer to prepare documents for consultation; schedules; assess all feedback received; respond to enquiries; prepare reports; publications and Notices etc

The current restrictions were introduced as a direct result of majority support from the residents who responded to the informal and statutory consultation. The restrictions are to safeguard residents not just during match days but also from other events and activities that the stadium might hold, as well as to protect parking provision in H1 from the residential part of the stadium development.

## **Public Questions to Council 1 February 2023**

To apply the temporary restrictions every time there is an event is extremely resource intensive and expensive in terms of officer resource. The Council would be required to install and manage all the temporary traffic and parking management prior to and after each event and have full enforcement in place. This is not something that is practical or that the Council is in a position to fund and manage.

The current CPZ arrangement is considered to be the best manageable and viable option.

### **From Bridget Clemson To the Cabinet Member for Transport**

Why does the council think it is resource intensive to change the parking restrictions in CPZ H1 From 8am to 8.30pm To new time of 8.30 to 6.30pm Monday to Friday and to 9.30am to 9.30pm on football and events days.

### **Reply**

During September 2020 the Council carried out an informal consultation to extend the operational period of the zone in response to a petition from the residents. A further consultation in the form of a statutory consultation was carried out in February 2021. The changes / current operational periods were introduced as a direct result of majority support in the neighbourhood. The reports that are available on the website sets out the outcome of the consultations. <https://www.merton.gov.uk/streets-parking-transport/parking/consultations/cpz/h1-cpz-kohat-road-area>

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## Public Questions to Council 1 February 2023

**From William Woodward**  
**To the Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Services**

Could you please tell me how old the civic centre's current boiler, hot water and heating system are, whether they meet the council's ambitions for net zero and what the plans are for replacing them?

### Reply

Thank you for your question. The Civic Centre's main boilers were installed in approximately 1980 and are therefore roughly 42 years old, with the associated heat distribution equipment being original to the building. This system provides the majority of the heating and hot water to the building, with some smaller areas being heated through smaller more modern localised heating systems. All of these boilers run on gas and therefore are not currently within the council's ambitions for net zero carbon emissions, however, we have recently been successful in a bid to the Government's Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme, which will provide the majority of the funding needed to decarbonise the heating in the building. This will enable us to replace the heating system with a modern low carbon electric heating system over the next two years, getting us closer to the council's net zero carbon 2030 goal.

**From Zarak Pasha**  
**To the Cabinet Member for Transport**

Why does the Council think it is resource intensive to change the parking restrictions in CPZ H1 from 8.30am – 8pm everyday to:

8.30am – 6.30pm Monday to Friday and  
9.30am – 9.30pm on match and events days?

This would be a much more practical solution and make the lives of residents better.

### Reply

During September 2020 the Council carried out an informal consultation to extend the operational period of the zone in response to a petition from the residents. A further consultation in the form of a statutory consultation was carried out in February 2021. The changes / current operational periods were introduced as a direct result of majority support in the neighbourhood. The reports that are available on the website sets out the outcome of the consultations. <https://www.merton.gov.uk/streets-parking-transport/parking/consultations/cpz/h1-cpz-kohat-road-area>

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## **Public Questions to Council 1 February 2023**

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The current CPZ arrangement is considered to be the best manageable and viable option.

### **From Kerry Davies To the Cabinet Member for Civic Pride**

When is the council going to invest in improving the shopping parade in Green Lane, Morden, as with the Central Morden shopping parades? The recycling bank causes mess and dumping. The shops have tenants, but over half of them are not open and are sublet for living accommodation.

### **Reply**

Part of Civic Pride is being proud of how your area looks, and we know how important our local shopping parades are to local residents.

All commercial units in the Green Lane parade are currently leased out. However, the Property Management team are aware that some of the units are not trading and we are considering the options to address this and investigate the issue of subletting.

The Council has a programme of shopping parade improvement works funded by Community Infrastructure Levy, which are funds raised from developers when their projects commence. We are currently reviewing which shopping parades are most in need of development, and will consider Green Lane for future year's programmes subject to available resources.

The recycling banks on Green Lane are a valued asset to our local residents who live above the shops and nearby housing estates. Our service provider undertakes 3 collection per week following which our Public Space Team undertake daily inspections and all fly tip material is inspected and where appropriate the enforcement team have issued Fix Penalty Notices to those who dump items around the bins.

### **From Rae Davies To the Cabinet Member for Civic Pride**

Can anything be done to improve postal services in SW20 8DZ, where we received only 2 letter deliveries in the whole month of December?

## **Public Questions to Council 1 February 2023**

### **Reply**

The Council understands that due to staff shortages and industrial action that postal services have been disrupted in several areas across the borough. Industrial action is, whilst disruptive, a legitimate action taken by postal workers to ensure better working conditions and pay; especially during the current cost of living emergency.

The Council will write to the local postal service representatives to highlight concerns expressed by residents in SW20 and other affected areas.

## 6: Councillors Ordinary Priority Questions to Cabinet Members

### **From Cllr Manly to the Cabinet Member for Finance & Corporate Services**

To date, what support has the Council provided to residents to support them during the Cost of Living Emergency?

### **Reply**

In July 2022, Merton Council was one of the first in London to declare a Cost of Living Emergency. Since then, measures have been undertaken by the Council and its partners to identify and support people in need.

A Cost-of-Living Support Fund of £2 million was agreed by Cabinet on 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2022. Allocations were agreed for the first tranche of £1 million:

- Provision for individual payments of £60 by Post Office voucher to residents in receipt of Council Tax Support was agreed.
- Cabinet agreed to commit £630,000 of the Household Support Fund to free school meal vouchers for the period October 2022 to March 2023.
- £100,000 was agreed to support arrangements in the voluntary and community sector for delivering emergency assistance to residents.
- £100,000 was allocated to Sustainable Merton and partners to support the Community Fridge Network in order to grow capacity in accordance with increasing need.
- An allocation of £400,000 to initiatives that reduce heating costs was agreed, including expansion of the Warm and Well Programme.
- An allocation of £200,000 was agreed for Citizens Advice Merton and Lambeth to expand its debt advice service for Merton residents, with a focus on in-person advice given in a community setting.

There are strong mechanisms in place for engaging with voluntary sector and other key partners, including the Community Response Steering Group and its Fuel Poverty sub-group, plus the Food Response Network and the Cost-of-Living Communications Campaign Working Group. These provide an opportunity for discussions on key issues affecting residents.

The Council has run a series of free Cost of Living events for residents in Merton's libraries and the Civic Centre, attended by more than 1,200 people. Five Cost of Living events have taken place since July in Morden, Mitcham, Wimbledon, Colliers Wood and Pollards Hill, with a further dedicated energy saving event taking place in Morden in November. Feedback from residents has been very positive. Two Cost of Living events were also held for Council employees in October and November.

All of Merton's libraries have been set up as Warm Spaces and are available to all residents. A web page on the council website has been set up to promote all of the warm spaces in Merton along with the resources available at them including those set up by community and faith groups. The continuing promotion of warm spaces encourages more organisations to sign up and promote their offer.

## 6: Councillors Ordinary Priority Questions to Cabinet Members

A Cost-of-Living webpage has been set up at [www.merton.gov.uk/costofliving](http://www.merton.gov.uk/costofliving), providing up to date information and advice for residents, including details of forthcoming events. It is widely shared by partners and regularly updated.

The Merton Community Hub, set up during the Covid-19 pandemic by the Council working in partnership with Merton Age UK, Wimbledon Guild and Merton Connected, has pivoted to providing assistance and support to residents in response to the Cost-of-Living emergency. Residents are able to get in touch either online, or, crucially, by phone.

We are working on the development and implementation of a Cost-of-Living Action Plan setting out activities, timescales and ownership for the next two years. The Action Plan, along with proposals for the second tranche of £1 million of the Cost-of-Living Support Fund, will be taken to Cabinet in March.

### **From Cllr Simon McGrath to the Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Services**

Could the Cabinet member please tell me the total of the cost of works planned under the recent Workplace Design Property Infrastructure Procurement decision:

- a. On the first floor; and
- b. On the seventh floor

Of the Civic Centre,

And similarly, the cost of new furniture planned under the recent Workplace Design Furniture Procurement decision:

- c. for rooms on the first floor; and
- d. for rooms on the seventh floor

Of the Civic Centre?

### **Reply**

In answering this question, I think it would be helpful to set out the context in which these works are being carried out. The current Civic Centre office accommodation is tired and in urgent need of refurbishment. Specifically, the toilets, kitchens, internal decorations, carpets and furniture are now all past their normal operational life expectancy and are overdue replacement.

In July 2021 a report was presented to the Council's corporate management team setting out the findings of a cross Council survey of departmental heads of service to understand their operational readiness to adopt new hybrid working arrangements, and also seeking CMT's agreement to go live with the new Merton SMART working arrangements.

The report also sought approval to allocate funding to commission a specialist design consultancy to work with officers to develop proposals for redesigning our office space and create the 'Merton Office of the future'.

## 6: Councillors Ordinary Priority Questions to Cabinet Members

In July 2022 CMT reaffirmed its commitment to adopting the principles of hybrid working as the Council's future operating model, which included a radical approach to office accommodation. The purpose of the 'Merton Office of the Future' project is to provide fit for purpose, modern office accommodation at the Civic Centre, which in property terms will then allow the Council to use its office space more efficiently and support new hybrid ways of working. The Covid pandemic has brought the need to work in a more agile way sharply into focus and many organisations are reviewing the way space is used as a result.

Completion of the pilot on the 7<sup>th</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> floors will provide a 'showcase' for the Merton Office of the Future which managers and staff can 'road test' before deciding the configuration and layout for each department as the refurbishment works are then rolled out on other floors of the building.

An additional benefit of these works is that they will facilitate the relocation of SLLP from Gifford House and release that building for disposal or redevelopment as housing.

As part of the second stage of the refurbishment programme, officers will determine what improvement works are necessary in other group offices. In the meantime, we are taking action to upgrade the technology in the publicly accessible committee rooms on the first floor to improve the quality of hybrid and webcast meetings.

Turning to your specific questions:

The cost of the works to the relevant part of the 1<sup>st</sup> floor is £83,492

The works to the 7<sup>th</sup> floor will cost £341,570.50

The furniture on the first floor will cost £79,790 and the cost of furniture on 7<sup>th</sup> floor is £393,083 These costs are net of VAT.

The furniture has been procured through a number of specialist commercial suppliers via a competitive tender process against a very comprehensive performance and quality specification, that includes compliance with British Furniture Standards for elements such as foam and fabric, together with a typical five-year manufacturer's warranty and an anticipated lifespan of approximately 15 years.

It should be noted that the figures quoted include £56,515.50 for the costs of 7th floor toilet refurbishment and for the lighting elements of the schemes at £90,212, These works were already planned to be undertaken throughout the building, but there are economies of scale in combining them with the office refurbishments.

Whilst the works have been competitively tendered, general inflationary pressures and a significant increase in the cost of raw materials, utilities and labour rates have had an adverse affect on construction costs. As an example, construction materials prices rose by 8.0% in quarter 2 of 2022 compared with the previous quarter, and by 22.3% compared with a year earlier.

## 6: Councillors Ordinary Priority Questions to Cabinet Members

It is not possible at this stage to say what the costs for the remainder of the Civic Centre will be.

### **From Cllr Bhim to the Cabinet Member for Sport & Heritage**

What were the results from the recent Libraries Customer Satisfaction Survey?

#### **Reply**

We are delighted with the results from the recent Libraries Customer Satisfaction Survey that showed that overall library customers are 100% satisfied with the service with 96% of respondents rating the library service as very good or good. Our extended opening hours offer assisted with improvements in satisfaction with our opening hours, with 94% of customers rating them as very good and good.

Other notable improvements since the last survey include, 98% of customers would recommend their library to someone else and 97% rated their local library as very good or good. 70% of respondents said the libraries have made a difference to them and there were significant improvements in satisfaction with our online resources and the use of our free e-books offer.

### **From Cllr Nick McLean to the Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Services:**

The Conservative Group congratulate the management of CHAS for their expertise in establishing the company as a market leader, evidenced by the sale price achieved for the company. Please can the Cabinet Member provide an update on what the administration proposes to do with the proceeds of the sale?

#### **Reply**

The Council is keen to ensure the proceeds of sale benefit not only present but also future residents of Merton. We are currently developing plans to utilise the proceeds to both invest in some legacy projects for Merton and to support the Council's finances going forward as part of our Medium-Term Financial Strategy.

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

I was grateful for the opportunity to tour the Civic Centre with Officers recently to see how we might be able to make improvements to accessibility for our residents and visitors. Would the Cabinet Member please set out his plans and associated timelines for refurbishing the reception, including installing a Changing Places Toilet?

#### **Reply**

The redesign and refurbishment of the main reception and ground floor customer services areas within the Civic Centre form part of a wider review and update of the Council's Customer Contact Strategy.

At present, this work has temporarily been paused pending appointment of the new Executive Directors, who will lead a review of the Council's Customer Contact and

## 6: Councillors Ordinary Priority Questions to Cabinet Members

Digital Strategies and also undertake an assessment of the operational buildings to develop the concept of delivering services locally utilising community hubs.

Once this review has been completed, a redesign of the main reception will then be undertaken incorporating 'Changing Places' toilet facilities that currently cannot be provided due to space limitations.

### **From Cllr Brunt to the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Civic Pride**

How many organisations will benefit from the Merton Civic Pride Fund: Supporting the Voluntary and Community Sector, and how will this funding support capacity, particularly among smaller VCS organisations?

### **Reply**

Eighteen local organisations will benefit from the Merton Civic Pride Fund: Supporting the Voluntary and Community Sector. This funding invests in and supports Merton's local voluntary and community infrastructure.

Out of the 18 organisations, three organisations have not received this funding previously and 28% of the overall funding will be going to smaller VCS organisations. This provides both stability for the sector and the ability to continue supporting our residents, and also creates opportunities to explore new projects.

The fund will enable local organisations to continue to provide preventative services that provide information, advice and support and nurture a strong sense of community as well as contributing to reducing inequalities.

For example, Merton and Morden Guild (a smaller VCS organisation) currently provides a range of activities for older people and with the new Civic Pride Fund will have the capacity to continue to deliver activities for the next three years. Merton and Morden Guild provides preventative activities for older people in a welcoming environment that increases self-esteem, confidence and mobility, and encourages more participation in our local community. The activities provided also help to reduce the effects of isolation and has a positive impact on individuals' physical, social and emotional wellbeing and resilience.

In addition, BAME Voice has a significant increase on the amount of funding previously received. Commonsense Development Trust and the Association of Polish Families have also seen a large increase in their grants. This recognises the important work they have done with the council both during the Covid pandemic and more recently on the cost of living crisis.

## 6: Councillors Ordinary Priority Questions to Cabinet Members

To further support and develop Merton's small, volunteer and community led organisations, including diversity-led groups, the Civic Pride Fund: Supporting the Voluntary and Community Sector, will allocate funding for smaller groups to build in opportunities and address challenges around infrastructure and capacity. This will be administered via Merton Giving to the value of £50,000pa for the next three years starting in April 2023.

### **From Cllr John Oliver to the Cabinet Member for Housing and Sustainable Development**

Can the Cabinet Member advise how many homes are expected to be insulated in Merton during the next financial year as a result of the Warmer Homes programme?

#### **Reply**

The Mayor of London's Warmer Homes programme, which commenced on 1 April 2022, is expected to run until 31 March 2023 and is currently well into the delivery phase. The programme is open to low-income households and administered, via the Greater London Authority, to 20 London boroughs participating in the GLA-led consortium.

To ensure Merton's lower income households can easily and efficiently access this funding, the FutureMerton and Public Health teams have written directly to low-income households to inform them about the programme and how they can apply. The Council also secured Warmer Homes funding for "Thinking Works", an award-winning South London non-profit fuel poverty and energy advice organisation, to support Merton residents, particularly vulnerable residents, through the journey from their application to installation.

Feedback from the GLA indicates our outreach has been effective in increasing the number of Merton households engaging in the programme. Merton's outreach programme to encourage low-income residents to apply for the funding was the first to be implemented and formed engagement best practice; Merton officers were asked to present their engagement best practice to other participating councils.

Currently there are 461 applications to the GLA from households in Merton to date, which is the third highest in London; however not all applicants may be eligible or choose to progress to installation. The programme is still running, so some households are mid application or arranging installation. Delivery of installations started three months ago (mid October 2022) and 21 properties are already complete. We will update councillors at the end of the programme when all installations have been complete.

### **From Cllr Paul Kohler to the Cabinet Member for Health and Social Care**

Residents have expressed their distress to us about the proposed closure of the Dementia Hub at the Eastways Centre as it provides a much needed and valued service to residents and their carers. Would the Cabinet Member please reassure residents and their carers that respite services will continue to be provided, where they will be and how they will be accessed?

#### **Reply:**

## 6: Councillors Ordinary Priority Questions to Cabinet Members

Eastway is an older people's day centre in Morden serving people from across the borough run by Merton Council and open Monday to Friday: 9am-3.30pm. The Dementia Hub in Mitcham is a recognised centre of excellence for people with dementia or alzheimers operated by the Alzheimer's Society.

The Dementia Hub opened in 2014 and is accessible to Merton residents diagnosed with dementia. The services provided are delivered through a partnership between Merton Council, Alzheimer's Society, South West London and St George's Mental Health Trust, Merton ICB, and other voluntary and charity organisations. It provides support and information for people living with or caring for someone with dementia and carers. It provides a calming environment specifically designed around people with dementia and is open Monday-Friday 9am to 5pm.

The Council has worked with the Dementia Hub over the last year to develop a building based and outreach model and this has created capacity within the Dementia Hub. This capacity can provide an enhanced service to current users of the Eastway service who are living with dementia, be replicated in homes and libraries and community spaces, and therefore can spread this approach across the borough. Not everyone is well enough to travel to current services. The Dementia Hub is at the heart of the partnership with health and other voluntary and charity organisations and is therefore able to facilitate access to the range of specialist dementia support and services they offer to people and their carers. The Dementia Hub provide Carers and Relatives Information Support Programmes and the Strategies for Relatives 1-1 support programme in the persons home in addition to their peer support groups for carers.

The Council and the Alzheimers Society wish to work together to build on the work of the Hub and offer a wider range of support to people with dementia and their families, provide an excellent service for the future, and to meet the needs of the increasing numbers of people who are frail.

A consultation on the proposed replacement of the Eastway day centre will provide an opportunity for residents and carers to express their views, ask questions and to help shape the existing and new opportunities and services offered by the Dementia Hub that would replace it.

Each user of Eastway, together with their families and carers will have a Care Act assessment and a new care plan that considers their individual needs and circumstances including the need for respite care, and each carer would be offered a carers assessment.

During the care and support planning with service users and carers, the Council will provide support to access other services to meet their needs if they do not wish to make use of the excellent services offered by the Dementia Hub.

### **From Cllr Mundy to the Cabinet Member for Housing & Sustainable Development**

How many responses were received to the consultation on landlord licensing and HMO planning controls?

## **Reply**

The Council's consultation on landlord licensing and additional planning controls ran for 12 weeks from 14<sup>th</sup> November 2022 until 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2023. As well as publicising the consultation widely through the Council's communications channels, we employed a specialist communications consultant, Opinion Research Services, to organise the consultation and facilitate three workshops for landlords – two online and one in Merton in the civic centre 2023.

419 responses were received to the consultation (as at 26<sup>th</sup> January). Officers and ORS are reviewing all responses and there may be some remaining duplicates:

- 176 from landlords
- 22 from Letting agents
- Others from residents/ businesses
- 12 direct responses specifically on HMO planning controls

## Strategic Theme Questions to Cabinet Members

### From Cllr Neaverson to the Cabinet Member for Transport

Further to the welcome announcement in December of a partnership between Merton Council and Human Forest to provide residents with access to e-bikes in the borough, can the Cabinet Member update on when the service will launch, and how many e-bikes and bays will be provided across the borough?

#### Reply

The Council completed its contract with Human Forest in December 2022 in its first step to introduce bike hire and e-bike hire to Merton residents. We are also in ongoing discussions with Lime to introduce a similar scheme, providing greater micro-mobility options for the borough.

Council officers are working with Human Forest to identify suitable docking locations across Merton whilst seeking to minimise the impact on pedestrians using our footways.

Priority locations such as near transport hubs, shopping centres, shopping parades, key public buildings such as leisure centres, education centres are all being assessed where pavement width allows. Where the footway width is not sufficient, officers are also assessing where road-space can be utilised to support bike docking locations.

In some instances, this may include appropriating car parking bays for bike hire. Some of these spaces are within Controlled Parking Zones which require a statutory consultation and traffic orders to amend some CPZs and enable the roll-out. It is envisaged that the first batch of on-pavement locations would be in place by mid-March 2023.

Officers are working with Human Forest to agree the launch date which is dependent on having a critical number of docking locations; which in turn influences the number of bikes available to residents across the borough.

### From Cllr Flack to the Cabinet Member for Education and Lifelong Learning

Would the Cabinet Member confirm how many school streets within the borough had Breathe London and Vivacity monitors, or any other type of air quality monitor, installed before the school street was implemented and how many of these still have them in place now the school street is up and running?

#### Reply from the Cabinet Member for Transport

The majority of Merton's school streets were implemented during 2020 in the pandemic, as a result of funding made available at that time to deliver this project.

The concept of school's streets is to improve safety and prevent the largescale congestion we all see during the school runs. In terms of pollution around the schools, it is clear that if the traffic is taken away during peak periods, it removes the congestion and vehicle idling we regularly see around schools.

## **Strategic Theme Questions to Cabinet Members**

During 2019 the Council's Air Quality Team worked hard to map pollution at all of our schools and highlight schools to focus on as part of our Air Quality Action Plan. This exercise used diffusion tubes which is successful in monitoring monthly averages and compliance with the annual objectives for Nitrogen Dioxide, but unfortunately does not capture the peaks and troughs in pollution we see around school hours.

In 2021 the Council secured additional funding from the South London Partnership Innovate project to work on the rollout of new low-cost real-time monitoring which also captures data on PM2.5s (fine particles). This monitoring covers nearly 70 locations in the borough and includes 15 schools, many of which are school streets. Unfortunately, neither the technology nor funding was available to do a full before and after emissions analysis of the school streets. Direct analysis will be difficult during this period due to the impact on schools during Covid 19.

Officers are in the process of reviewing the considerable data for 2022 including the breathe London data, this work will provide an excellent foundation for preparing our new Air Quality Action Plan this year, as well as assessing the impact of the proposed ULEZ expansion.

All of this data will be presented as part of our statutory duty to produce an annual status report on air quality in the spring.

As the Innovate project is coming to an end, officers are currently reviewing the need for continuing much of this work to help determine the effectiveness of our measures to reduce air pollution.

### **From Cllr Kirby to the Cabinet Member for Local Environment, Green Spaces and Climate Change**

Can the Cabinet Member update on progress towards our plans to reach net zero?

#### **Reply**

Merton's Climate Strategy and Action Plan was adopted in November 2020. Since then, Cabinet has published annual Climate Delivery Plans which set out what happens in the year and actions for the next year, to ensure that we are transparent and consistent about progress we are making to be a net zero borough by 2050 and a net zero council by 2030. The Council has awarded £4million to assist, most recently an additional £2million in June 2022 and is using this money to help residents and businesses save costs and reach net zero. Climate action is being embedded in all procurements and decisions we make and there is a strong crossover with the Cost-of-Living emergency. Merton's Climate Delivery Plan for Year 3 will be considered by Cabinet at its meeting in February 2023 and details our progress towards net zero. Recent progress includes:

- Developing and implementing mechanisms to enforce Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards in the private rented sector, helping private sector tenants with their energy bills

## Strategic Theme Questions to Cabinet Members

- Supporting Merton's response to the Cost-of-Living emergency by helping fuel poor households access retrofit funding through the Mayor's Warmer Homes programme. This includes using Merton's Carbon Offset Fund to top up existing national and regional funding streams to maximise the impact of this retrofit.
- Developing new planning policies that go further than national policy and the London Plan to ensure that new development in Merton is compatible with Merton's carbon reduction targets and to reduce the need for further expensive retrofit;
- Boosting the Council's capacity to act ourselves and help our residents and businesses, including on buildings retrofit, climate engagement and a climate building surveyor to decarbonise the Council's buildings and schools
- Delivering a range of climate engagement activities including the Canons Summer Fair in June 2022, World Car Free Day activities in September 2022, and Merton's Schools Climate Conference in November 2022;
- Launching Merton's new Schools Climate Network and Charter;
- Continuing to support community-led climate action in Merton, primarily through the roll-out of three Climate Action Group projects funded through NCIL: Merton Garden Streets 2022, Energy Matters, and the Wheel;
- Securing £750,000 external funding to deliver 500+ EV charging points in Merton;
- Working with other local authorities and pan-London groups to identify opportunities for a green recovery from Covid through London Councils' seven programmes on climate change and the London Recovery Board's Green New Deal mission. This includes working with the South London Partnership to bid for funding, share best practice and deliver collaborative projects across several themes including green jobs and skills, waste reduction and retrofit
- Developing Phase 1 of Merton's Tree Strategy for the management of Council-owned trees;
- Securing £12,000 to work with University College London and The Wheel to help boost businesses and minimise their waste, focussing on Morden town centre high street;
- Embedding low carbon as a factor in all Council procurement processes so that we are influencing our supply chain to reduce their carbon footprint when we work with them.
- Developing Merton's Draft Climate Engagement Strategy;
- Surveying Merton's operational buildings and community schools to inform Merton's estate decarbonisation plans and future funding bids;

## **Strategic Theme Questions to Cabinet Members**

- Continuing the decarbonisation of Merton's pensions investments;
- Developing and delivering green skills training opportunities and programmes for Merton's residents through Merton's Towards Employment team, Merton's Adult Education programme, and partnership projects with the South London Partnership; and

Re-launching the Environment & Climate sub-group of Merton's Sustainable Communities and Transport Partnership, including the Council, housing associations, local community groups and the Chamber of Commerce to progress discussions with partners across the four key themes of Merton's Climate Strategy & Action Plan: Buildings & Energy, Transport, Green Economy and Greening Merton.

### **From Cllr Holden to the Cabinet Member for Local Environment, Green Spaces and Climate Change:**

What action has the council taken to help reduce surface flooding occurrences since the summer of 2021?

#### **Reply**

The Council has worked very hard both on its own and with partners and other risk management organisations to help reduce flood risk from all sources and in particular, the occurrence of surface flooding incidents in Merton. This includes:

- Undertaking the high risk gully cleaning programme each winter to ensure the borough's own road highway drains and gullies are clear and unblocked. This includes an in-depth clean of gullies (total of 8953 gullies cleaned this winter) and pipework in higher risk areas, measuring the level of silt within the gully to accurately forecast future cleaning cycles and mapping the results to inform where defects are;
- Collaborative working with Thames Water on their sewer network across the areas of greatest surface water flooding risk in Merton and supporting Thames Water to use the council's planned road closures to remove over 21 tonnes of silt from the Thames Water sewer network in Raynes Park centre;
- Upgrades to the Raynes Park bridge pump station;
- Collaborative drainage surface water modelling and mapping of the West Merton area to refine flood risk maps and to help support flood alleviation schemes and unlock central government funding;
- Installed 4G sensors which monitor silt and water levels in gullies in high risk locations and issue alerts when full;

## Strategic Theme Questions to Cabinet Members

- CCTV surveys of over 3km of drains and sewers across Merton to ensure pipework, sewers and culverts are free of defects and where they have found issues we have undertaken physical repairs such as installing new pipework, pipe lining or removing tree roots for example. We completed major works in Raynes Park town centre on Coombe Lane reconfiguring, installing new upsized and repairing historic drainage pipes runs;
- Developing the Raynes Park Flood Alleviation project with partners Thames Water, Network Rail and the Environment Agency to reduce flooding to homes, businesses and infrastructure in the area; this includes securing financial contributions from partner organisations;
- Invited the Thames Region Flood & Coastal Committee elected members and the Environment Agency to Merton and have shown them delivered schemes and planned projects in the borough such as Raynes Park with the aim of gaining additional Flood Defense Grant in Aid (FDGiA) funding for flood alleviation;
- Installing SuDS rain gardens on Wimbledon Hill Road, Wimbledon Chase and on The Path, South Wimbledon. We have designed a new SUDS rain garden which is programmed for construction in Raynes Park town centre in February 2023. Rain gardens are a type of SuDS or Green Infrastructure measures to help slow down and attenuate the flow of water into the underground sewer system as well as making the streetscene more attractive and having biodiversity, air quality and water quality benefits;
- Undertaking specialist independent flood risk investigations into the areas that significantly flooded in summer 2021 (known as Section 19 reports), to identify the sources and actions that can be taken to ensure the risk is minimized of it happening again. We undertook an online borough wide flood survey to ensure that residents and businesses had an opportunity to feed into this investigation and to capture all flooding incidents during summer 2021. The reports will soon be published in spring following detailed review by Thames Water and the Environment Agency;
- We successfully bid for and secured Thames Water Surface Water Management funding to aid the design and construction of a new pocket park in Kenilworth Green/Home Park Rd in Wimbledon Park;
- Completed the Wimbledon Park Lake Reservoir Safety Project to ensure the category A reservoir is compliant with national safety standards and to help better protect homes and businesses in Merton and Wandsworth from reservoir flooding. The major improvement scheme improved the Lake and dam by construction a new lake toepath, new spillways, capping and provided a new emergency drain down as well as delivering other benefits such as Eel Passes.  
<https://www.merton.gov.uk/leisure-recreation-and-culture/parks-and-open->

## Strategic Theme Questions to Cabinet Members

[spaces/parks-and-recreation-grounds/wimbledon/wimbledon-park/wimbledon-park-lake-project](#)

- Successfully securing £204,000 from the Environment Agency and DEFRA to deculvert and restore the previously culverted Wimbledon Park Brook, reducing flood risk to residential properties and the park and maximising biodiversity potential and natural flood risk management. Having visited the site in January 2023 with councillors from other parts of the wider Thames Region flood committee, the Environment Agency and Thames Water are nominating this project for the Institute of Civil Engineers [Chris Binnie Medal](#), an award for work which has benefited society by improving the sustainability of water;
- Clearance of ditches and watercourses across the borough in December and January 2023, as well as working with Mitcham Common Conservators to maintain the ditches around the Common and elsewhere to ensure water can run through;
- Undertaking highway drainage soakaway chamber clearance and maintenance;
- Ensured the culverts and watercourses in Motspur Park, around Sir Joseph Hood are cleared of tree roots and are running clear to the Beverley Brook;
- Merton actively fed into the Pan-London Summer 2021 independent flood review by led by an expert panel;
- Inputted via workshops and provided consultation responses to Thames Water's 25 year Drainage & Wastewater Management Plan (DWMP) to ensure Merton receives significant capital investment with regards to sewerage infrastructure upgrades.

### From Cllr Braithwaite to the Cabinet Member for Transport

Does the Cabinet member believe that the decision to remove the provision of road safety training at schools is compatible with the target of increasing active travel within the borough?

### Reply

The Council is committed to improving road safety and active travel through a range of initiatives delivered through TfL funding, Merton capital funding and community infrastructure levy.

The saving discussed at the Overview and Scrutiny Commission on 25 January relates to a reduction of the Council's revenue funding in the team but does not seek to stop the service. Officers are working to maintain the service through alternative funding sources including via TfL funding, income from school streets ANPR cameras, increased income in the FutureMerton Team and through greater collaboration with Public Health and its resources.

## **Strategic Theme Questions to Cabinet Members**

The Council will continue to provide road safety training in schools, supplemented by online road safety learning as part of the TfL STARS accreditation of Merton's schools. [About STARS \(tfl.gov.uk\)](https://tfl.gov.uk/about-stars)

The Council will also be preparing a new walking and cycling strategy in 2023 to promote active travel and enhance cycling and walking infrastructure.

### **From Cllr Skeete to the Cabinet Member for Local Environment, Green Spaces and Climate Change**

How many trees will the Council be planting this year?

#### **Reply**

Trees are an invaluable contributor to improving the quality of our local environment. The contributions of trees to wellbeing, clean air and community pride are well known. Because of their importance, we are ambitiously planning on planting 10,000 trees during this municipal year.

A list of some of the successful programmes that have and are being delivered are;

- Urban Tree Challenge (NEW Parks and Highway Tree Planting)
- Trees for Cities (Urban Woodland Project Cranmer Green)
- Trees for Streets Street Tree Sponsorship Project and associated additional funding from Mayor or London Cool Space Project
- Queens Green Canopy commemorative trees
- Inter Faith Week Planting
- London Road Playing Field Growing Together Orchard Planting
- Grow Back Greener funded project at Mostyn Gardens
- Trust for Conservation Volunteers I Dig Trees planting events with Friends of parks groups including Abbey Recreation Ground and Friends of Wimbledon Park

All funding secured for these schemes includes an element of tree aftercare for three years, ensuring that these new trees for the borough have every opportunity of success to establish themselves.

Additional Council funding for the planting of trees is delivered through our annual street and park tree budgets along with tree planting funds associated with planning agreements linked to developments.

Our soon-to-be finalised Tree Strategy will further support the importance of tree planting and there will be a number of tree policies to support this important activity.

### **From Cllr Willis to the Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Services**

The 'Barrier Review April 2015' (which identified 199 barriers to access and audited 91 in detail) was undertaken by Transport Initiatives paid for by Merton Council. In

## **Strategic Theme Questions to Cabinet Members**

the spirit of value for money, can it be confirmed how many of these barriers have since been addressed?

### **Reply from the Cabinet Member for Transport**

Given the time that has passed since the review, and the change in officers since then, it is not possible to provide a detailed account of the progress without reassessing 91 sites across the borough.

Officers are aware of a significant amount of guard-rail removal that has been undertaken in town centres between 2015-2020, particularly where major improvements to the public realm and streetscape have been delivered. For example removing guard-rails to reduce severance on the A24 London Road in Morden (in partnership with TFL) and though improved pedestrian crossings in Mitcham town centre, Wimbledon town centre, Figge's Marsh junction and Colliers Wood town centre.

The Council has also replaced a number of fire-gate barriers with trees and bollards to promote cycling / filtered permeability on residential streets whilst limiting through traffic. Examples include many streets north of Merton High Street, Milner Rd, Mitcham Park, and Havelock Rd.

There remain a number of pedestrian guard rails in the vicinity of schools, for the obvious road safety and protection that they provide immediately in front of school gates.

The Council is aware of the desire for further guard rail removal on laneways where they are perceived as a barrier to cycling. In trials in Mitcham in 2015, we found that when guard rails were removed from pedestrian routes, there was an increase in moped and motorbikes using some paths causing nuisance to local residents. The Council has to strike an appropriate balance between the need for guard-rails to protect pedestrian laneways from vehicular use and promoting active travel. This remains a growing risk with the increase of delivery mopeds serving residents in the borough.

The cabinet member has agreed that on a case-by-case basis the council is willing to remove more barriers on a trial basis subject to resources. Officers are happy to meet with the councillor to discuss any locations in his ward.

### **From Cllr Howard to the Cabinet Member for Local Environment, Green Spaces and Climate Change:**

How are locations for green sacks left on the streets chosen and what is the pickup frequency specified in the contract?

### **Reply**

Following our early concerns raised within last years' Service Improvement Notice, which included the placement and collection of street sweeper sack, our service

## **Strategic Theme Questions to Cabinet Members**

provider has undertaken a full review of the street cleansing service and implemented new fixed locations for the placement of sacks.

Our manual beat sweepers have been directed to fill at least 4 sacks before depositing them at these agreed collection locations. To support this, each beat sweeper is provided with maps which clearly define the agreed location from which the mobile response crews will collect from by the end of the working day. If a location is missed our service provide is required to undertake the missed collection within 24 hours.

The location of these approved collection points has been designed to ensure that each location is easily accessible by the collection crew and as such are located at the junctions where roads intersect which mitigates the need for crews to drive into side roads searching for any sweeper sacks which may have been left.

### **From Cllr Dollimore to the Cabinet Member for Local Environment, Green Spaces and Climate Change**

What progress has there been in improving the waste collection service for residents?

#### **Reply**

Our waste collection service continues to get better and is a priority service that is relied on by our residents. Over the last 12 months we have seen a sustainable improvement in the waste and recycling collections with 95% of reported missed collections resolved within the required performance standard.

I am pleased to report that feedback from our recent resident engagement surveys in 2022 shows that 63% of residents are satisfied with our waste and recycling collection compared to 48% in 2019.

We continue to work closely with our service provider and have introduced an evening economy collection service to our main town centres and smaller local shopping parades. This ensures that all waste presented after the business hours is collected during the evening. On average, this service is collecting between 5 – 8 tonnes of waste per night which otherwise would be left out ready for the street cleansing service to clear the following morning.

I am pleased to report that this service will be expanded to provide a twice weekly evening collection of domestic waste from flats above shops households.

In addition to this our Public Space Team are in the process of finalising a pilot to introduce community mobile recycling collections which is designed to provide a localised collection point for recycling for those residents unable to access our facility at Garth Road.

To ensure these enhancements to our service are sustainable, Officers are working on a new minimum service requirements as part of a new waste and recycling collection service. Recommendations on how this is delivered will be presented for

## **Strategic Theme Questions to Cabinet Members**

Cabinet consideration in February and will take into account the feedback from the resident consultation conducted at the end of last year.