

# **Merton Council Council**

**1 February 2023**

## **Supplementary Agenda 4**

20 Councillor Non-Priority Questions and Replies

1 - 12

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

Could the Cabinet Member set out the spending in the following areas:

- Media training for Cabinet Members
- Social media training for Cabinet Members
- “Meet the Cabinet” promotional videos
- Photography/imagery – of and for Cabinet Members, additional to the standard council issue Member photographs

Since May 2022, and the same figures for each of the previous 4 years?

### **Reply**

#### **Media training**

All Cabinet Members including the Leader are expected to carry out regular media duties as part of their role in explaining council policies to the media. It's standard for most authorities to provide the necessary training for Cabinet members to help them in their role in explaining often-complex issues to journalists, and in particular so they are equipped to handle emergency situations where media interviews are required. For example, the council had to give media updates to the national press on a regular basis throughout August during the emergency at Galpin's Road.

In 2021, training was carried out for the Cabinet following the election of Mark Allison as Leader. The cost was £6,102. In 2022, the exercise was repeated when a new Cabinet was appointed following the election. The cost was £9,344.52.

No further training is currently planned.

#### **Meet the Cabinet videos**

The Meet the Cabinet videos offered a short introduction to each portfolio and the relevant Cabinet members, intended to help local residents find out more about who makes local decisions on key services. These were a one-off exercise at the start of the new administration and the cost of filming, editing, production and subtitling was around £6,900. The project has since been endorsed by the LGA as best practice in raising interest and awareness about the role of local councillors and is being featured in the LGA's national “Become a Councillor” campaign, providing further profile for the borough nationally. The videos have received over 3,000 views.

#### **Social media training for Cabinet Members**

Social media training is delivered in-house and is offered to all Members annually. There is no cost to this and no specific training for Cabinet Members.

#### **Photography**

No professional Cabinet photography has been taken during the past four years outside of the standard photographs taken at the start of the new Municipal cycle for all councillors. Business-as-usual photography of Cabinet Members through the year is done by Communications Officers at no cost.

The only exception is three years ago (2020), when professional photographs were taken of the new Cabinet members & Leader following Mark Allison's appointment. This totalled £295.

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

Bin collections have been repeatedly missed across Lower Morden. What steps will the Cabinet Member take to resolve this and ensure Veolia collects the waste on time in future?

**Reply**

Our waste collection service in Lower Morden continues to maintain a high standard of service with 163 reported missed collections over the last 3 months compared to an a boroughwide average of 230 missed collections per ward. This equates to under 1 miss collection per day per collection crew.

All missed collection reports are of importance and I am pleased to confirm that over the last 12 months we have seen a sustainable improvement in the waste and recycling collections with 95% of reported missed collections being resolved within the required performance standard.

In order to ensure that this level of service is maintained, I have asked officers in the Public Space team to continue to monitor the waste collection service and ensure that all repeated missed collections are identified, and rectification proposals are agreed and implemented with our service provider for individual locations.

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

**From Cllr Susie Hicks to Cabinet Member for Health and Social Care**

Given the continuing problems with delayed breast cancer screening, lack of uptake of those services that are available and the fact that St George's hospital is the nearest place offering mammograms to Merton residents, could the cabinet member confirm what progress has been made with the pilot scheme to take screening into the community?

**Reply**

Across London there is generally good coverage of breast cancer screening sites which are accessible within 30 minutes by public transport. Sites are located as per the National service specification requirements to ensure that screening takes place in suitable and appropriate locations, which take account of the public transport links and adequate car parking arrangements.

The South-West London Breast Cancer Screening service runs a static site model with appointment offered at a number of locations including St Georges. Other locations that may be nearer for Merton residents include sites at Croydon, Roehampton,

Teddington, Surbiton and Sutton. Further information can be found at [Breastscreening \(london-breastscreening.org.uk\)](http://Breastscreening(london-breastscreening.org.uk))

The South-West London service does not currently offer mobile sites for breast cancer screening or have a static site in Merton. Sites must comply with strict guidance for locating premises including infrastructure, electricity requirements and guidance around housing specialist x-ray equipment. The size of equipment is also a factor for mobile sites. These all must be taken into consideration.

It is important to recognise that location/ accessibility is one factor amongst many affecting up take of services. Behaviour insight research<sup>[1]</sup> into the uptake of breast cancer screening highlighted a range of factors that may act as barriers including anxiety, lack of knowledge and language barriers as well as facilitators of uptake, including SMS text reminders, supportive social environments, perceived value and knowledge.

South-West London ICB are working with RM Partners (West London Cancer Alliance) to look at what can be done to increase screening in the community in Merton and will be involving NHSE and local screening services on this shortly. This work is still in early development.

Merton Public Health, St Georges Breast Cancer Screening Service, Southwest London ICB, NHS London Breast Cancer Screening leads and RM Partners (who work to improve cancer screening uptake across London) will be working together to develop an action plan around breast cancer screening, which will look at all factors affecting screening uptake in Merton. The Merton Breast Cancer Screening Action Plan will be produced for the June 2023 Cabinet.

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

Please can the Cabinet Member provide an update on the performance of the Member Enquiries function, including data on the percentage of enquiries answered within the ten working days target over the last two years.

### **Reply**

The Council is in the process of implementing a new case management system to deal with public complaints which will significantly improve the way in which external complaints are dealt with. We are aiming for this to go live after Easter; the second phase of this work is to apply a similar approach to members enquiries which will also speed up response to those queries too.

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

Can the Cabinet Member provide details of the current backlog of road resurfacing needed in (a) West Barnes and (b) the borough and provide a timeline for tackling this backlog in both please?

## **Reply**

With the available funding invested into carriageway resurfacing, 18 roads were resurfaced during financial year 2022/23, As part of the annual carriageway resurfacing programme two roads were resurfaced in the West Barnes ward, these were Tennyson Avenue and Kingsway.

To determine roads for inclusion in our annual carriageway resurfacing and reconstruction programme each year the council uses a robust prioritisation model. This model benchmarks and ranks all roads in the borough in comparison to each other and considers a range of criteria such as Engineers Assessment, Condition Survey results, Road Classification, Safety Inspector Priority, Reactive Maintenance Expenditure, Traffic Volumes, Population Density, Emergency, Bus and Cycle routes, Traffic Generators (schools & hospitals etc), Ward Deprivation and Complaints Received. The information used in this model is reviewed and updated annually when the programmes are developed to ensure that the most current picture of the network is considered. The data collated is currently being imported into our prioritisation model and the intention is to provide a carriageway resurfacing programme of works for 2023/24 at the end of February 2023.

In relation to an indicative carriageway resurfacing programme and timeline produced for 2022 to 2026, please see below link available on Merton Council webpage.

[Merton Highways indicative 4-year maintenance programme](#)

For information, following UKPMS (United Kingdom Pavement Management System) highway surveys undertaken on Merton Council highway network recently (Sept to Nov 2022), the current level of defectiveness for carriageways across the borough is within target at 19%.

## **From Cllr Max Austin to the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Civic Pride:**

The Coronation of King Charles III will take place in May. Please can the Cabinet Member tell me:

- What plans the council has to celebrate and support the commemoration of the Coronation?
- Will the council commit to providing additional financial support for community events and additional items such as road closures and additional tree planting that are linked to the celebration of the Coronation?

## **Reply:**

We have already begun planning for this event, which will be a once-in-a-generation opportunity for many residents to come together and celebrate the King's coronation.

## **Street Parties**

- We have set up a dedicated web page at [merton.gov.uk](http://merton.gov.uk) to house information for residents earlier this month, and applications for street parties can be made here– we have already received around ten applications.

- The deadline to apply for a street party is on March 31, and you can find the page by searching “King’s Coronation Merton”.
- In addition, we have already confirmed we will be waiving the fees associated with road closures for street parties – as we did during the most recent Jubilee celebrations.
- Every resident gets a street party pack, including safety equipment and clothing to ensure any road closures are focussed on being safe for residents.

### **Coronation Day (May 6)**

- We are also exploring plans to host a screening in the centre of the borough (possibly Morden Park) and encourage residents to come together and enjoy the event with their community.

### **Big Lunch Day (May 7)**

- To support the more localised theme on Sunday, we are investigating the option of be facilitating smaller events in each locality, facilitating big lunches at parks and open spaces in Mitcham, Morden and Wimbledon.
- We are also exploring outdoor screens for the Coronation Concert and will be focussed on including the option of installing outdoor screens to televise the Coronation Concert.

### **Big Help Out (May 8)**

- We will be running a communications campaign in the run-up to the Coronation weekend encouraging local residents to spend some of Monday volunteering
- This will include a Volunteer in Merton page on our website to signpost to local organisations & groups, as well as a social media takeover on Monday when we will be asking residents to share their volunteering experiences

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

Can the Cabinet Member for Finance please advise how many and what percentage of households receiving Universal Credit in Merton qualify for 100% Council Tax Support?

### **Reply**

There are 3791 households on Universal Credit who receive Council Tax Support. Of these 2736 or 72% of them get 100% CTS.

*\*Information for context - there are 7180 households **not** on UC that get Council Tax Support. Of these 4186 or 58%, of them get 100% rebate.*

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

The Mayor of London has said he has helped set up local authority wood burning working groups. Could the Cabinet Member say how many complaints have been logged and how many fines have been issued by Merton on wood burning and has the council set up a working group to phase out wood burning in the Borough?

### **Reply**

The whole of Merton is legally declared as a 'Smoke Control Area' as such we discourage all forms of burning as it contributes to air pollution, can upset neighbors and damages health.

In Merton, wood burning is the second largest source of fine particulate matter, known as PM2.5 after road transport which is why controlling domestic burning is such a critical issue.

Over the last 5 years, we have received around 15 complaints about smokey chimneys however no fines were issued in Merton, or indeed in any other London borough over the same period. Historically, Local Authorities have lacked the necessary powers to deal with chimney smoke due to shortcomings in the legislation. After years of lobbying Central Government, in May 2022 there were a number of amendments made to the Clean Air Act 1993 made through the Environment Bill designed to help us.

Merton Council participates in the GLA Wood Burning Working Group established in May 2021 which meets every quarter.

A recent Winter Wood Burning Campaign ran across the Council's social media channels from mid-November 2022 to end-January 2023 to raise awareness about our smoke control area and the impact that wood burning has on the borough's air quality and our health.

To support the campaign, the Council's Smoke control areas webpage was updated to provide clearer information to residents on the topic <https://www.merton.gov.uk/smokecontrolarea>

We appreciate that there are some who will continue to burn, and we are committed to finding ways to change this behavior. Merton Council are also partners in a Defra funded project which seeks to deliver behavior change and reduce PM2.5 emissions from domestic wood-burning.

This project is designed to improve our understanding of how domestic heating affects indoor and outdoor air quality whilst building public understanding of air pollution as the largest environmental risk for health. The project involves measurements of air pollution in real-world settings to explore the ways in which different forms of domestic space heating can affect air quality. We are also undertaking surveys to learn about public perceptions of air quality from domestic heating as well as other environmental issues.

Ultimately to adequately resolve this issue and the cumulative impact of wood burning on air pollution, we need greater powers, which we continue to lobby for.



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

Merton CIL have raised their concerns with the Council that Merton Parks are not inclusive to disabled residents and visitors, with many paths in disrepair, some gates not allowing access to all, and lack of toilet facilities for all but especially disabled people. Could the Cabinet Member please set out her plans to remedy this situation?

### **Reply**

The Council's Greenspaces Team is currently in the process of carrying out an infrastructure and facilities audit of all the boroughs parks and open spaces, which commenced in 2022.

As part of this audit, accessibility to existing facilities within the borough's parks will be considered in line with Council's responsibilities under The Equality Act 2010 and places a responsibility on the Council to make reasonable adjustments for disabled people to allow access to existing facilities including path networks, playgrounds, paddling pools, sports facilities, toilets and pavilions.

The Council would hope to complete this extensive piece of work in Winter 2023 and will use the data to prioritise improvements in the boroughs parks in subsequent years and target our Parks Investment budget as well as seeking external and Community Infrastructure levy funding for these modifications and improvements

In 2022 the council have delivered a number of strategic facilities improvements that have considered equalities access needs which included enhanced access ramps into six council Paddling Pools as well as access ramps to the surrounding path infrastructure that will progress in 2023. We have also included accessible pathways and improvements to several projects through 2022, including Colliers Wood playground improvements, Haydon Road multi-use sports area and Sir Joseph Hood Memorial Playing fields playground.

We would welcome further discussions with CIL Centre for Independent Living representatives on future proposals to ensure we proactively engage with a wide range of accessibility groups.

## **From Cllr Klaar Dresselaers to Cabinet Members for Civic Pride**

I understand streets in the Battles area in my ward were furnished with latest LED lanterns in 2018 as part of Merton's energy and carbon reduction initiative. Although these streets are lit to British Standard and lighting levels are good. Unfortunately, I have been told that, as is typical throughout the borough, because the streets are tree-lined this will cause shadowing which is unavoidable. With safety for women and girls in mind, can the cabinet member confirm this issue will urgently be taken into account as part of the planning of tree pollarding around Merton?

### **Reply**

In line with the Council's new tree contract which commenced in November 2022 and Tree Strategy adoption planned for March 2023 the Council's program of winter pollarding commenced in December 2022 with Barkland Trees and we are working

with service providers to bring the Annual / Biennial and Triannual pollards of street trees back into regular cycles.

**From Cllr Michael Paterson to the Cabinet Member for Sport and Heritage**

Can I congratulate the Motspur Park FC for the excellent work that they have done to the lower field of Morden Park, it is wonderful to once again see competitive football being played at Morden Park. Cllr McLean and I are aware that Motspur Park FC are seeking a long-term lease and we believe that this would be a welcome position because it would open-up the possibility of additional grant funding from sporting bodies and secure the lower fields for community sporting activities. We fully support rejuvenating this part of Morden Park to its past glory as a community sports hub with tennis courts, grass running track, facilities for athletics and field events, cricket nets and football pitches. This would be an important step in achieving the administration's goal of Merton being a Borough of Sport. Therefore, would the Cabinet Member agree to meet with Cllr McLean and myself to discuss the long-term sporting future of Morden Park?

**Reply**

The Council's Greenspaces team continue to work very closely with many of the boroughs sports clubs and have been working with Motspur Park Football Club. We have allowed the use of Morden Park Lower Field during the 2022-23 Football Season as the club struggle to find suitable pitch provision to expand their junior and senior football operation at Sir Joseph Hood Memorial Playing Fields

The Council are incredibly pleased with the pro-active approach that Motspur Park Football Club as a community club have taken. It is acknowledged by officers that they have worked to establish good communication with the Friends of Morden Park and Mosque, ensuring that any changes were clearly communicated and additional maintenance and litter cleansing on the part of the club has been very much appreciated.

Council officers meet regularly with sport governing bodies, this is part of the actions which underpin our playing pitch strategy, and it will give us a strategic view of current and future needs to ensure that available space to support commercial and community grass roots sports can be delivered. The outcomes of these reviews will aid in decision making about how the team best supports Motspur Park FC and the use of Morden Park in the future.

**From Cllr Samantha MacArthur to the Cabinet Member for Sport and Heritage**

Whilst I was pleased to see the fabulous number and range of Sporting Facilities available in Merton, could the Cabinet Member confirm how many of those listed in the report are:

- Of a satisfactory standard and suitable for use
- Accessible to all our residents
- In need of repair and/or renovation
- Are free of charge

- Contractually maintained by Idverde?

### **Reply**

We have a very large range of sporting facilities across the borough. The Playing Pitch Strategy 2019 (PPS) and Football Facilities Plan 2020 give detailed reports of the condition of our pitch and ancillary facilities. Facilities highlighted as in need of upgrade and improvement are highlighted in these reports. The borough is investing a significant amount in multi-use sports improvement. Work is currently taking place at Haydon's Road Recreation Ground, Colliers Wood Recreation Ground and Morden Recreation Ground, with work being due to be completed by the end of this financial year. Linked to an assessment by England Athletics, the Council has committed further funding to improve the Wimbledon Park Athletics track to a Track-Mark standard to enable its continued use for sanctioned track events.

We are also investing in work at the Canons and Wimbledon Leisure Centre infrastructure to continue their suitable use, this will mean they are more efficient in terms of utility use and utility expenditure. This is part of planned works to keep our leisure centres fit for purpose into the future.

Accessibility for all residents key to achieving our ambitions, and as such officers carry out equality impact assessments to ensure that wherever possible no one is disadvantaged and that as many members of our communities can utilise public facilities.

Both our parks' facilities and Leisure Centres are managed by our contractors, however, the Council have the final say on price increases and rates which are in agreement with myself, as the Cabinet Member, and are bench marked against other boroughs on a yearly basis to ensure our prices are affordable and reasonable.

The Leisure Centres currently offer of *Kids Swim for a Quid* has moved to *Kids Swim for Free* and is in place until the end of the financial year, where it will be reviewed and likely extended into the new financial year.

Throughout the borough in our parks, we provide outdoor gyms which are free to use, at a time to suit all users, require no fees and are available year-round.

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

I was surprised to read that the Cabinet Member views 5 fly tipping prosecutions a good rate of return for the £850,000 spent each year on dealing with the problem – would she please a) give the breakdown between FPNs for littering offences and for fly tipping offences; b) agree to look at how other council's tackle fly tipping; and c) invest in more CCTV units to target notorious fly tip areas?

### **Reply**

In line with the National trend, we have been handling a sustained increase in the volume of fly-tipped waste incidents across the borough. The waste deposited illegally is becoming a common form of anti-social behaviour and damages the overall image

of our borough. On average, we are clearing in excess of 1,000 fly-tipping incidents per month with this sustained increase blighting our communities.

We continue to adopt a zero-tolerance approach to both littering and fly-tipping and have successfully issued 6,678 Fix Penalty Notices from which we have escalated in excess of 500 case for formal prosecution. Our Public Space Environmental Enforcement team also issue fix penalty notices at the higher fixed rate of £400 for fly tipping offences along with the lower rate of £100 - £150 for the discarded domestic waste and littering offences.

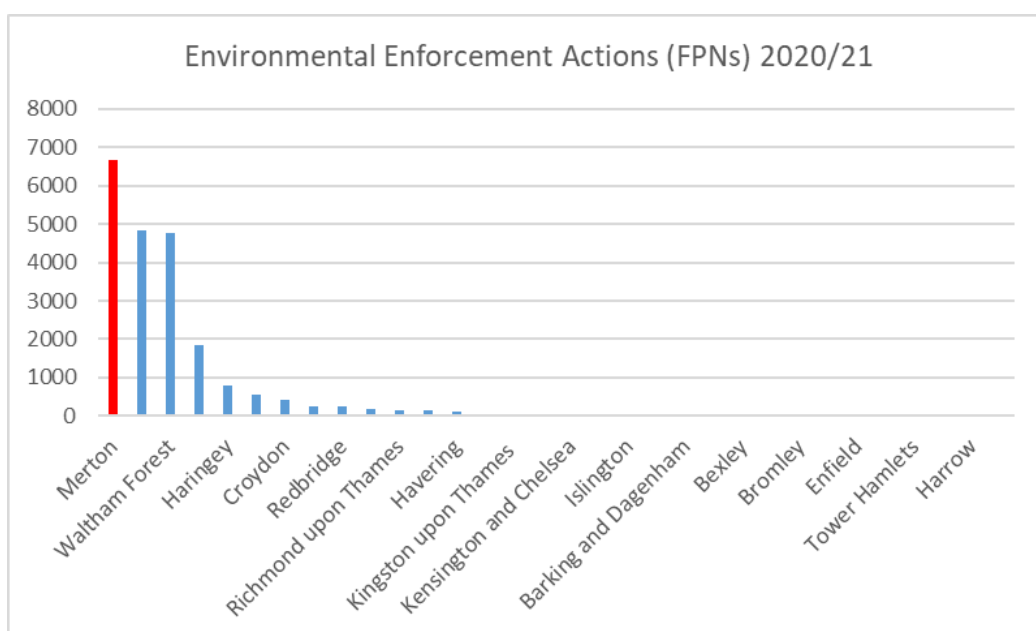
This is supported by a further 1,052 engagement and warning letters. This is the highest-level activity of all London Boroughs and makes up 24% of all direct environmental enforcement activities undertaken by London Boroughs.

It is important to note that a Fixed Penalty Notice is an invitation to effectively discharge ones liability to prosecution. This means that while this is not an admission of guilt, the alleged offender agrees that an offence has been committed and that by paying the sum of money specified no further action will be undertaken by the Council.

This method of dealing with offences not only saves the time involved in prosecuting cases at court, but the cost associated with a Fixed Penalty Notice is likely to be substantially lower than any fine that can be imposed by the courts.

I am pleased to report the continued success of our environmental enforcement, which includes the launch of the *Merton Wall of Shame* that has, with the assistance of our residents, identified and successfully prosecuted five offenders.

In addition to this success, we will be introducing a further ten Smart CCTV cameras with artificial intelligence software installed into the camera which will automatically send alerts to our enforcement team when they detect fly tipping is occurring.



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

Would the Cabinet Member agree to look at ways to make all Merton's public toilets at sports grounds and parks accessible and available for use at weekends, and report back to the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel with her findings please?

### **Reply**

The Greenspaces Team would like to thank the Councillor for her question about public toilets in parks.

A decision was made in 2012 that following ongoing issues with anti-social behavior and the significant cost of repair and maintenance, the public toilets in parks and open spaces were regrettably closed for general use. There are a number of locations where we have links with Friends of Park's Groups to enable access such as Cannizaro Park and Holland Garden. In addition, we work closely with concession café contracts that allow toilets to be opened at South Park Gardens and Canons house.

Further to this and in line with our commitment for sports provision in parks, toilet facilities are opened at the weekends specifically for the sports clubs use at Sir Joseph Hood Recreation Ground, Joseph Hood, Haydon's Road Recreation Ground, Dundonald and Cottenham Park.

In addition, during paddling pool season toilet facilities are open from the end of July to the first week in September at all the borough's six paddling pool locations, Morden Park, Rowan Road Recreation Ground, Tamworth, Colliers Wood, Sir Joseph Hood and Joseph Hood to enable park users' families and children usage during the peak season.

It should be noted that there is no statutory funding for parks and comparable authorities have had to make similar difficult decisions, however the Council's Greenspaces team will review current arrangements with the service provider, and I am content to report back to scrutiny, as agreed by the Chair.

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