

Merton Council

Council

1 February 2023

Supplementary agenda

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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 22nd 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

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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.

A Cost-of-Living webpage has been set up at 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.

Supplementary

I'd like to thank the Cabinet Member for his detailed and very helpful response to my initial question. And I'd like to also ask that, given the ongoing disgracefully led chaos caused by the Conservative Government, is the Cabinet Member considering providing any further support to the residents in the forthcoming council budget? Thank you.

Reply

Thank you Cllr Manly for your supplementary question and you'll note of course the significant steps the council has already taken to support local residents during the cost of living emergency as detailed in my written answer. But, I am pleased to confirm that, yes, we will be bringing a cost of living budget to full council next month which amongst other things to support residents includes an expansion of our exceedingly generous council tax support scheme to low income households, it includes £7 million of investment over the next five years to fund paying the London living wage to, as the Leader said, not only our staff but to our contractors' staff and as announced in January, we will be bringing a proposal for a special one off, 1% cost of living discount to the majority of residents in Merton on their council tax bills in the next year, Madame Mayor, because this Labour administration is supporting residents during the cost of living emergency.

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:

On the first floor; and

On the seventh floor

Of the Civic Centre,

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

for rooms on the first floor; and

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'.

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 7th and 1st floors will provide a 'showcase' for the Merton Office of the Future which managers and staff can 'road test' before deciding

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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 1st floor is £149,771

The works to the 7th floor will cost £341,570.50

The furniture on the first floor will cost £79,790 and the cost of furniture on 7th 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.

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

Supplementary

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Thank you Madame Mayor, just to be clear Madame Mayor, the answer talks repeatedly about the first floor, but this is actually about the Leader's office and the Labour Group Offices. Last month the Cabinet Member had to defend moving the Council Leader's parking space, this time it's a lot more indefensible. £230,000 including £10,000 of new carpets, £5000 for a tea point with a kitchen just down the corridor and £10,000 for new chairs, some of them £640 each. Will the Cabinet Member come with me to Cllr Garrod's ward and knock on a few doors and ask people whether they think when their electricity's going up, their gas is going up, their food is going up, their council tax is going up, that they think spending £230,000 on the Labour Group Offices and the Leader's Office is a good use of their money.

Reply

Thank you Madame Mayor, thank you Cllr McGrath for that interesting question. I would say to him, first of all, I've spent a lot of time with the Leader knocking on residents doors in his ward already, so I have a pretty good understanding of what residents across Mitcham feel. And I know that they feel, like I do, that Merton Council should be run professionally, it should have a proper professional operation as we deliver services to 200,000 residents with a £500 million annual gross budget and I think that they would expect that our staff are able to operate in a modern, professional office. So I think that this kind of LibDem whataboutery about spending money on our professional operations is actually irrelevant. And I am sure that residents in the Leaders' Ward and across the borough would agree with me.

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.

Supplementary

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Can the Cabinet Member give an indication of how many residents are using our libraries as warm spaces during this cost of living emergency?

Reply

Thank you Madame Mayor. Our libraries continue to flourish. We just had a recent survey that shows that our residents continue to enjoy the services and benefit from the services in our libraries. We have now launched all of our libraries as warm spaces, I've said before, in fact we've seen that our library use has gone up by 24% compared to previously. We also have 140,000 residents who are library members in Merton, and I just want to put a call out there actually that, if you live in Merton and you are not a library user, please contact your local library and become a member because there are so many services in there that you can benefit from.

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.

Supplementary

Thank you Madame Mayor and can I thank the Cabinet Member for his answer. Clearly it was disappointing that we were unsuccessful in gaining our bid for the Living Up fund, yet again, but I think that does show the importance of ensuring that funds from the sale of CHAS are ring-fenced in order to fulfil the need for town centre regeneration. So I would welcome if Cllr Christie could confirm that indeed the funds will be ring fenced for capital projects.

Reply

Thank you Madame Mayor, thank you Cllr McLean for your question. I would say that we will do what we always do with regard to our budgetary decisions, which is that we will bring forward ambitious proposals to invest in the borough and that we will do that in an open and transparent way as we always do, so I won't commit ring-

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fencing things in a particular way at this point, but I'll say that we will commit to investing in our borough.

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 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.

Supplementary

Thank you Madame Mayor, and thank you to the Cabinet Member for the response to my question. I am pleased to see that there is a plan to improve the reception area at the Civic Centre and to include the Changing Places toilet in due course, but why is the council prioritising spending money as we have heard from Cllr McGrath, filling two Labour Group offices with nearly £8,000 of new furniture when the existing furniture was more than just fine, with the Changing Places toilet in the public area of the civic centre would better encourage Civic Pride.

Reply

Thank you Madame Mayor, thank you Cllr Galea for your question. I would repeat what I said to Cllr McGrath, which is that this LibDem whataboutery, trying to suggest that spending money our professional operations is not a good thing to do, is just nonsense. I've provided a written answer in which I've said that we will be bringing forward plans to deliver a Changing Places toilet in the reception of the Civic Centre

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and I stand by that, and I think that is completely irrelevant to the council doing what all professional modern organisations do, which is investing in their facilities.

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.

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

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be administered via Merton Giving to the value of £50,000pa for the next three years starting in April 2023.

Supplementary

Thank you Madame Mayor, I'd like to thank the Deputy Leader for her response and ask a supplementary. How will this funding help Merton's incredible voluntary and community sector organisations support our residents during the cost of living emergency.

Reply

Thank you Madame Mayor, and thank you Councillor Blunt for his question and his supplementary. And indeed a number of grants made through the Civic Pride Fund will be supporting directly projects that will be helping residents through the cost of living crisis, for example, supporting South West London Law Centre and Springfield Law Centre that provide Benefit and Debt and Welfare Law Advice, the Power Centre Church in Mitcham, a new grantee is extending its food bank for those in need. And a common side here that we all know very well will be continuing to provide their crucial support. But more fundamentally by providing these multi-year grants to our excellent voluntary community sector, as he says, gives them the kind of sustainability and stability that they can be there for our residents and be there on the front line when people need them, thank you.

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

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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.

Supplementary

Thank you Madame Mayor and I'd like to thank the Cabinet Member for the answer to my question about the Warmer Home Programme. Does the Cabinet Member agree with me that funding some of the applications that may miss the criteria for the Warmer Home Programme might be a better use of money than the extravagant refurbishment of the Leader's and Labour Group Offices on Floor 1?

Reply

I'm not sure that I thank Councillor Oliver for his supplementary question, I think this just points to the triviality of his group, they can't make serious points about this borough, they play politics and they waste the time, actually, of this council.

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:

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

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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.

Supplementary

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Thank you Councillor McCabe for your answer. Eastways Centre provides valuable respite care for carers, you know that, I know that and they are not happy that it's been closed. We've heard the others, I've seen your face in this debate. Are you happy saving £180,000 closing Eastways when you're spending almost a quarter of a million pounds on new carpets, a new table for him and nothing for officers there, just for Labour Group Officers, are you happy with that when you're closing Eastways?

Reply

I thank you for your supplementary, which is nothing to do with the original question, and I understand why you are trying to do that, but my concern is actually improving services to dementia. I speak as somebody who cared for his father in his final years, you know that, because I've already shared that with you. There is nothing that I would do to harm people with dementia or their carers and what is proposed here is that we make use of the excellent Centre of Excellence that we have in the Dementia Hub which is partnered by our Health Partners and provides an excellent service. And instead of worrying about the furniture today, I went down to the Dementia Hub to refresh my understanding of the services that they provide and I am really impressed by what they do for people with dementia and their carers and that is my first concern in this role.

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 14th November 2022 until 22nd 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 26th 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

Supplementary

Thank you Madame Mayor, I'd like to thank the Cabinet Member for his answer, and clearly Article in HMO Licencing is a vital tool in the Housing Department's arsenal and it's a credit to him and his leadership in the action taken in this area. Could he outline the next step and how he sees these tools will improve the conditions for those living in the private rented sector please?

Reply

Thank you Councillor Mundy and I thank him for his supplementary question. My original response suggested that there had been 176 responses from landlords. The updated information is 190, that we had 22 from Letting Agents, it's now 25. We also had 263 other responses. The way forward is that the responses and representations are currently being analysed. For an immediate Article 4 direction, requiring planning permission for HMOs in the wards identified, the immediate Article 4 direction was introduced on 17 November, a report will follow to the March Cabinet and the final consultation report and responses will be available in late March and also we will have a report to the June Cabinet on Landlord Licensing. There has been a legal challenge to the immediate Article 4 direction and we've engaged counsel to advise. Subject to analysis of the consultation responses and legal advice, the intention is to confirm the Article 4 direction at this April Council. That should improve the quality of conversions of houses to flats in the borough in the context of HMOs in this borough so that people in the future will have adequate room sizes, adequate amenity spaces, adequate sound proofing, adequate energy efficiency, these are really important factors and off course they will be determined by planning officers and the Planning Committee. The work on the preparation for the introduction of Landlord Licencing, both selective and additional licencing, is ongoing with the intention subject to consultation responses of introducing it in Septembers. That will give us Housing Officers to inspect houses in the selected wards to make sure that there are not category 1 and category 2 hazards existing for tenants in those wards. Those wards have been selected after inspecting the data across the borough as being the wards with the largest incidence of issues arising. So that will give us a Housing Officer capacity we simply have not had before to uphold standards on behalf of residents.

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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.

Supplementary

Can the Cabinet Member say whether the Council is looking in to enter further partnerships with any other e-bike providers and how the Council will ensure that abandoned bikes do not become a nuisance and obstruction on our streets.

Reply

I'd like to thank Cllr Neaverson, winning the election first in Canons Hill, Colliers Wood and for being a councillor in this great Labour administration and for his supplementary question. Yes, this local authority does not rest on its laurels and it is talking to other providers for dockless e-bikes. We are also working with TfL, London Councils and neighbouring boroughs to get a best practice and to get a consistent service and the leader and I have met with a provider in particular where

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there have been bikes left in very very poor places, and we have had an exchange of correspondence and we had a face to face meeting as well, both with ourselves and with council bosses in attendance as well. I don't know who council bosses are sometimes, the opposition constantly talk about council bosses, are you referring to us to council officers, can you make that clear next time? But yes we have had meetings and that all will be clarified. Thank you very much.

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.

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.

Supplementary

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Thank you to the Cabinet Member for the answer. Your answer says that funding was not available to do a full before and after emissions analysis of school streets. As we are still yet to have an actual honest answer on this question, how come there is available funding for cosmetically renovating an office, by which your own admission is used less and less and not funding for making sure that our children have cleaner air to breathe?

Reply

Thank you for that original question, which was well placed, the supplementary not so well thought through or placed. I don't know if you've studied accountancy or finances, there are cost centres in things, so we weren't able to access money to do a before/after, that's where the money was going to come from and that's where the money could come from, you can't dip from one budget to another, cost centres are very important. We will continue to try and see what we can do to get that before/after, but it may be a bit later, thank you.

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
- 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

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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;
- 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

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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.

Supplementary

Councillor Irons mentioned the £2million climate reserve funding allocated in June 22, grateful to know how that's going to help us reach our crucial net zero targets please.

Reply

Thank you Cllr Kirby and thank you for your supplementary. Yes, so the £2million that we had allocated will be going to Cabinet in February where we will have a range of options to discuss, but crucially within this we are be trying to fill gaps that we think we have found in our plan around things like businesses, so we want to help businesses to retrofit their buildings, because we know emissions from buildings and energy are one of the key things in fighting climate change. It came up earlier about using top up money for people who don't quite qualify for retrofit, well we're going to use some of this money for that. We already use our carbon offset fund to top up the warmer homes fund, this scheme we're hoping to use to give funding to people who don't qualify for anything but don't have the money to retrofit their houses, so we're going to plug that gap. We're also looking to create a climate action fund for our residents so if there's any schemes they want to start locally that councillors can maybe help promote, we're going to try do that too so we've got lots of fun things to get started with and I can't wait, thank you

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

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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;
- 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

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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-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.

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Supplementary

Thank you Madame Mayor and thank you to the Cabinet Member for her answer. I'm grateful that council has made some efforts, but residents still complain to me about low lying streets and pavements that flood each time it rains. Will the Cabinet Member commit to meet with me along with officers to develop further proposals to reduce flooding in certain parts of Hillside?

Reply

Thank you Cllr Holden and thank you for your supplementary. Of course I'm always happy to meet with you and discuss how to improve things in your ward. I will say though, as you will have seen from the original answer, we've done a lot of work in really high profile areas like Raynes Park that have had significant flooding and we've worked in partnership with Thames Water to try and improve things there. We will continue to do that, and we met onsite in Raynes Park very recently, with colleagues from Thames Water and the Environment Agency to look at further measures we can take, but yes happy to meet with you and discuss things in Hillside.

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.

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://www.tfl.gov.uk/about-us/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.

Supplementary

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Thank you Madame Mayor, I'd like to thank the Cabinet Member for his reply. And I'm glad to hear that Road Safety Training is still being taken seriously by this administration. However, I am puzzled though that there doesn't seem to be a clear plan for covering this in the future, vague references to TfL funding, ANPR, School Street funding, etc, but no clear plan as to how it's actually going to be done. So I'd just like to ask the Cabinet Member what the proposals are, and whether the money spent for his new sofa could be better have been spent on maintaining the current process?

Reply

I'd like to thank Cllr Braithwaite for his original question and his answer. I do have a soft spot for Cllr Braithwaite because he's an avid AFC supporter and I know he welcomed this Council's work and this side's work on bringing back AFC Wimbledon to Plough Lane and long may they prosper. As to his supplementary question, I'm very puzzled the broken record that seems to be playing from that side throughout, and I'm reminded of Kirsty McColl's song, there's bloke works in a chip shop, thinks he's Elvis, they all think they're Elvis at the moment, I don't know why. I'm keen to engage with Cllr Braithwaite to share the detailed plans that we're working on at the moment, in particular, with Public Health so that we can and we will continue to provide cycle training. For me the sight of the kids, training on cycles with tutors around especially along Mostyn Road is a sight to behold, and that will continue, but I will be glad to share the detail.

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

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- 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.

Supplementary

Thank you Madame Mayor, can I thank the Cabinet Member for her answer, can she tell me what other measure is underway to improve biodiversity in the Borough?

Reply

Thank you Cllr Skeete for your question and thank you for your supplementary. As I mentioned in the main introduction to the strategic theme, there's a range of measures that we're looking at, are actually doing at the moment to improve biodiversity within Merton. So, we've got our Wildways Scheme, which we're looking to expand to other grass verges wherever appropriate. We are also going to do less mowing around drip lines around trees, so that we can increase biodiversity there, and we also looking to plant more wild meadows across the borough, we've got a lot of really proactive and hard working Friends Groups that we are involving in these projects and we've got a lot of plans for our biodiversity increasing over the coming years.

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 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.

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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.

Supplementary

I'm all shook up Madame Mayor, I haven't studied accountancy, but I hope it's not trivial to point out spending money on a barrier access review and then not being able to update councillors on its progress does not represent value for money. We have to wait for new executive directors for a Changing Places toilet, but not for Level 1. So with what the administration has found money for, which we have heard all about, do you regret taking council time on agenda item 12, where the financial position of the council is blamed on everyone else, what about your role in this?

Reply

The supplementary, I don't whether it's well made or not. Value for money is very important for this local authority, it's crucial and has been at the core, certainly when I was leader for 10 years, that we access value for money for all residents and will continue to do so. Happy to meet the Councillor on this issue and I hope he's not too shook up.

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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 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.

Supplementary

Thank you Madame Mayor, I'd like to thank the Cabinet Member for her response regarding missed collections. But will she agree with me that Veolia are indeed failing to meet this 24 hour target for missed pick ups and as a result, Veolia and by extension the Council are the biggest fly tippers in the borough.

Reply

Thank you Councillor Howard for your question and your supplementary. I agree that there is an issue with the green sacks, and that's why we issued them with a service improvement notice about the green sacks. But as you saw in the response there are certain areas where they have to be left for ease of pickup. I am happy to look into certain locations if there's ones that you have noticed have not improved since we've issued that notice, and I'm more than happy to look into that for you. I wouldn't say that the Council are the biggest fly tippers, I'd say the fly tippers are the biggest fly tippers and quite frankly I wish they'd just stop because it's doing my head in. But I'm more than happy to come and see the issues that you have in your ward.

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

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

Supplementary

Thank you Madame Mayor and I'd like to thank the Cabinet Member for her answer, and her hard work for our residents. As you will be aware, we do have a particular issue in some parts of the borough for waste disposal from flats above shops. So I wanted to ask her, could the Cabinet Member tell me how we are working to tackle this and support residents who live in flats above shops?

Reply

Thank you Cllr Dollimore for your question and your supplementary. I have to say that flats above shops has been a project I've been rather passionate about for quite some time and I'm really pleased to see that we're going to be very shortly coming

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forward with plans to improve this service for these residents. I've said before that if our service doesn't work as well for flats as it does for front doors, then it's just not working, so I'm glad that we're able to finally move forward with this. What we're looking to do is increase the amount of collections from these properties because they are smaller and they have a more transient population and we're looking to increase the amount of communication for these properties, so that they know when their collections are, so yes, hopefully we will get to see this rolled out very soon and I'm quite looking forward to it making an impact on our streets.