

# **Merton Council Council**

**7 February 2024**

## **Supplementary Agenda 7 - Non-Priority Questions to Cabinet Members and Replies**

20 Non-Priority Questions to Cabinet Members and Replies

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

I am told that the Wimbledon Park Angling Club (WPAC) has repeatedly told LBM that they are committed to training young people in the sport of angling. Grants are available, but their licence to fish at the (LBM-owned) lake runs out in March 2025 and a longer licence is needed to obtain grants. Will the Cabinet Member commit to working with the WPAC and other relevant parties to help resolve matters?

### **Reply**

The council entered into a Tri-partite annual access and angling agreement with All England Lawn Tennis Club and Wimbledon Park Angling Club on 28<sup>th</sup> June 2023, linked to access rights needing to be granted across AELTC land.

The Greenspaces Team, along with colleagues from LLP, worked closely with WPAC and AELTC to prepare the current Tripartite Agreement for Angling and Access. We are happy to arrange for further meetings between WPAC, AELTC, and Merton Council to discuss any issues being experienced from all sides.

At this stage the access and angling agreement can only run annually while we await a decision pending on the AELTC Wimbledon Park Project planning application. We appreciate that this is frustrating for the Wimbledon Park Angling Club, who do fantastic work training young people in the sport of angling.

## **From Cllr Thomas Barlow to the Cabinet Member for Local Environment, Green spaces and Climate Change**

Residents continue to report glitches and problems when using FixMyStreet especially around the collection of fly tipping which is often referred to as 'fly-tip not found' when in fact it is clearly and obviously easy to find.

What steps are being taken to improve FixMyStreet to ensure that residents can have confidence that it will accurately direct fly tipping teams to the problem?

### **Reply**

An issue has been identified with the mapping layers, occasionally resulting in locations being slightly different when received by the contractor through their management information system. Officers from Public Space have engaged with the Authority's Geographic Information System (GIS) team concerning this matter to pursue a resolution.

In the meantime, the contractor has instructed crews to remain vigilant within the local vicinity of where fly-tips are not found, and that all additional information within the report pertaining to the location is considered to help locate reported fly-tips and remove them.

We will continue to listen to feedback and concerns regarding FixMyStreet so that improvements can be made, and we can continue to make progress on tackling fly-tipping and keeping our streets clean.

### **From Cllr Susie Hicks to the Cabinet Member for Transport**

A frequent response to requests for works is that there is not enough money in the budget. How much are the annual budgets for Planned and Reactive repairs, and has this reduced in real terms in the last 25 years, if so by how much? In the last 2 years, during which time the budget has been slightly increased, how often have Reactive Repairs been rejected, delayed or moved to Planned repairs because there are insufficient funds in the Reactive Repairs Budget?

### **Reply**

The annual budgets for planned and reactive repairs are dependent on a variety of factors each financial year. These factors include, but are not limited to, money received by TFL for Principle Roads, the Local Government Financial Settlement, available council revenue and capital, inflationary pressures from industry, weather, and localised need. This variety of factors bears influence over the real terms fluctuations which appear on a year-by-year basis.

The Council undertakes a system of regular highway safety inspections of all its adopted highways to comply with its statutory duty to maintain the public highway in accordance with Section 41 of the Highways Act 1980.

Safety inspections are designed to identify all defects likely to create danger or serious inconvenience to users of the highway network or the wider community. The risk of danger is identified by a highway officer on site, and the defect is then categorised in terms of an appropriate priority response.

Defects that the Highway Officer's pass across to our term contractor to repair would have to meet the council strict intervention level and it is only possible to treat those defects that meet the council's current intervention criteria.

Any defects that are identified for repair would not be rejected or moved to planned repairs as the immediate defect needs to be addressed to ensure Merton is complying with its statutory duty. A small number of reactive repairs are delayed slightly as on occasions more substantial traffic management may be required (i.e. road closures, temporary traffic signals, bus stop closures) to undertake the repair safely.

The establishment of an effective regime of inspection, assessment and recording is a key component of highway maintenance. This regime also provides the basic condition data for the development of a maintenance programme.

To determine roads for inclusion in our annual carriageway resurfacing and footway 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.

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

Please can the Cabinet Member provide an update on the Playground Priority Upgrades Programme, including:

- Which playgrounds are planned to be upgraded in the future and, for each of these playgrounds, when are the upgrade works expected to take place
- Details of how playgrounds are assessed and prioritised for upgrade works.

**Reply**

The Playground Priority Upgrades Programme can be viewed here: [Playground and paddling pool upgrades | Merton Council](#)

The parks have been prioritised for improvement based on an independent ROSPA (The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents) assessor's report. In year 1, we will be upgrading Rowan Road Recreation Ground, Miles Road Playing Fields, and Lewis Road Recreation Ground. These parks will see transformations that cater to various age groups, creating inviting spaces that inspire play and adventure. On site consultation exercises were carried out at the below sites with all residents in each ward being leaflet dropped ahead of each event:

- Rowan Recreation Grounds
- Miles Road Recreation Ground
- Lewis Road Recreation Ground

Following intrusive underground inspections and inspections of playground decks were carried out, upgrades to Cottenham Park and Haydon's Road Recreation Playground will also now take place. These inspections showed that items needed to be replaced and upgraded as it was more cost effective than repair. Signage has now gone up on site and ward councillors and Friends of Parks Groups have been updated about the works to replace the equipment at Cottenham Park and Haydon's Road Rec.

Play Area	Consultation	Priority Number
Rowan Recreation Ground	31 <sup>st</sup> August 2023	1
Miles Road Recreation Ground	1 <sup>st</sup> September 2023	2

Lewis Road Recreation Ground	27 <sup>th</sup> October 2023	3
Cottenham Park	ROSPA Report December 2023 highlighted upgrade to Junior Multi-Play required in 2024 after intrusive underground inspections	
Haydon's Road Recreation Ground	ROSPA Report December 2023 highlighted upgrade to Junior Multi-Play required in 2024 after intrusive underground inspections	

**From Cllr John Oliver to the Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Services**

The Merton website states that "We have agreed to provide the funding for Merton state funded schools to continue to provide supermarket vouchers for pupils with benefits related Free School Meals until at least and including the Easter holidays 2024". Will the Cabinet Member consider the extension of this scheme to at least the end of the 2024/2025 academic year?

**Reply**

School holidays can be a difficult time for families and pupils eligible for Free School Meals across the borough. This administration is proud to provide supermarket vouchers for residents in need, particularly during the cost of living crisis, and we want to continue supporting the scheme.

That's why this Council has prioritised £1.4 million of the Household Support Fund for it this year and we are able to use that grant to provide the funding to schools at the end of March to support pupils through the forthcoming Easter holidays.

However, the continued lack of clarity from the government regarding the Household Support Fund, or equivalent that councils could use to support families with school-age children with the extra cost of school meals during the school holidays, means councils across the country cannot plan effectively for the future provision of this support. That's why I wrote to the Chancellor at the end of last year, urging the government to meet their commitment that the Household Support Fund will continue into 2024/25, and calling on them to provide early notice of the value to help us plan for the year ahead.

We are deeply concerned that the government has still not confirmed if this funding will be provided in 2024/25. Given the continued strain on local finances caused by the government refusing to fund councils properly or sustainably whilst demand continues to increase, we will find it extremely difficult to plug this gap from our own resources, if the grant is discontinued by the government.

We will continue to add our voice to calls for the government to live up to its commitment and provide the funding for 2024/25 so that support such as supermarket vouchers for families in receipt of free school meals during the school holidays can continue.

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

Please can the Cabinet Member detail over the last five years, how much has been budgeted and spent for graffiti removal?

**Reply**

Graffiti removal forms part of the Authority's Street Cleansing contract with Veolia. The cost is incorporated within the core street cleansing payment, which includes the deployment of a dedicated graffiti crew undertaking responsive and proactive graffiti removal. Currently, the resource for graffiti removal comprises one vehicle with specialist equipment, and one operative.

However, the administration will be increasing resources for graffiti removal in our budget for the next financial year. We have also allocated a fund for the rapid removal of graffiti in areas of high priority.

As a Council, we are continuing to work with ward Councillors, Veolia, the police, residents and local businesses to catch offenders, and we're exploring alternative and innovative ways to deter repeat offenders.

**From Cllr Chessie Flack to the Cabinet Member for Cabinet Member for Health and Social Care**

Can the Cabinet Member provide an update on local trials of 'GLA school superzones' and outline lessons learned? Will the Council be seeking further funding on this?

**Reply**

The School Super Zone programme consists of initiatives within a 400 meter radius of local schools to address hazards specific to the local primary school community such as; air quality, safety, tobacco and alcohol sales, advertising, active travel. Three lots of £30,000 GLA funding was successfully bid for - and with this funding we established three School Super Zones at Merton Abbey Primary, Abbotsbury Primary and St Mark's Primary. Each Super Zone seeks to reduce exposure to harmful elements in the urban environment and improve health outcomes for our children and young people and to where possible create a legacy that reduces local health inequalities.

The intention is to draw out learning from these programmes to inform future bids to widen the approach in the borough (alongside learning from other Super Zones across London).

An example of lessons learnt from the Abbotsbury Super Zone is how this approach has been pivotal in the driving forward of improvements to the accessibility of Morden Recreational Ground Park entrance and the road's design layout between Abbotsbury Primary and Morden Recreational Ground. This has helped to resolve

concerns with road dangers for pedestrians, whilst also increasing local active travel and accessibility to green space for residents.

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

Please can the Cabinet Member provide an update on the progress of the regeneration of the Eastfields Estate, and when does he expect the CPO for phase 1 to be completed.

**Reply**

I am delighted to say that Eastfield's Phase 1 started in January 2024 which will provide new homes for existing residents on the Eastfield estate. The public hearing for Eastfield's Phase 1, High Path Phases 2 and 3 and Ravensbury Phases 2-4 is due to finish on 1 March 2024, and we hope that the independent inspector will issue us with a positive report later this year.

**From Cllr Jil Hall to the Cabinet Member for Children's Services**

Could the Cabinet Member let me know to what extent that officers for children with SEN attend the key annual review meetings prior to the child transitioning to a different level of education or leaving full time education?

**Reply**

For those children with an Education, Health and Care Plan the SEN Teams have been prioritising attendance at all annual reviews but with a particular focus on Phased Transfer annual reviews (Reception, Year 7, Post 16 and for those pupils over the age of 19 where the local authority is proposing to cease the EHCP). It is important to note that for phased transfers the discussions are had at the annual review, which takes place 18 months before the pupil is due to transfer to another phase of education. For example, for a pupil who is transitioning from Year 6 to Year 7 the phased transfer discussed in the Year 5 Annual Review and consultations for the Year 7 education provision are undertaken following this review meeting. The local authority is required to name the Year 7 provision in Section I of the EHCP by the 15th February of the year when the pupil is in Year 6.

We are developing a report on Synergy, the SEN case management system, which will provide detailed data for all annual reviews and whether the EHC Co-ordinator attended or not. Once that report has been developed, the data will be presented and monitored at the SEND Strategic Governance Board.

**From Cllr Nick McLean to the Cabinet Member for Housing and Sustainable Development**

Does the Cabinet Member have any plans to introduce an Immediate Article 4 Direction to limit the permitted development rights of HMO landlords in the rest of the borough not currently covered by the existing Immediate Article 4 Direction?

**Reply**

The private rented sector is an important part of our housing stock and is growing rapidly in Merton. Whilst many landlords operate within guidelines, there are also others who do not. This leads to issues affecting health and safety, the wider community, as well as the environment. Merton is committed to improving housing conditions in the private rented sector; and to tackling the instances of anti-social behaviour, poor housing conditions, and other issues that arise from poorly managed rented properties and in particular HMOs. This administration has introduced landlord licensing and changed planning rules which prevents the creation of new small HMOs in some parts of Merton without planning permission, known as an Article 4 Direction.

The government's requirements for Article 4 Directions are that "in all cases, [they must] be based on robust evidence, and apply to the smallest geographical area possible". In line with the government's requirements, we procured a specialist consultancy who developed extensive evidence on the number and distribution of HMOs across the whole of the borough. This robust evidence demonstrated that there is a concentration of HMOs in seven wards in Merton: Colliers Wood, Cricket Green, Figges Marsh, Graveney, Lavender Fields, Longthornton and Pollards Hill and the Article 4 was introduced immediately for these wards in November 2022. There was no robust evidence to support a wider Immediate Article 4 Direction, but if further evidence arises in future years, we will keep under review whether we should seek to extend the Direction to include more wards.

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

Play is important for mental health in small children including group play. In addition:

- As a general trend, overall temperatures in the UK have been increasing, leading to warmer temperatures in spring and summer.
- Warmer weather can be particularly uncomfortable for children
- Paddling pools and splashpads should be accessible to all, regardless of income, to provide some relief from the heat
- The primary users of paddling pools and splashpads are children below school age.

Therefore, would the Cabinet Member agree that for 2024 all Merton's paddling pools and splashpads be opened a month earlier than the current published date (which is 22<sup>nd</sup> July).

## **Reply**

The Council's Splash Pads across the borough provide a free, accessible and fun way for children to play and stay active during the warmer months and over the Summer school break. Our Splash Pads were extremely popular in 2023, and the council were pleased to keep our Splash Pads open later than planned, following warmer weather than expected later in the year.

The Council has agreed to open its Splash Pads at Wimbledon Park and Tamworth Recreation Ground concurrently from 17 June – 8 September this year meaning both sites will be open 1 month early this year.

The Paddling Pools at Sir Joseph Hood Memorial Playing Fields, King Georges Playing Fields, Colliers Wood, Rowan Rec, Joseph Hood Rec and Morden Park will all be open from the 22 July 2024 as usual.

Whilst we would like to be able to open the paddling pools for longer in the season, the cost implication of doing so and the additional staffing and mobilisation costs equate to a cost of £202.70 per day per facility to mobilise early. If applied to the 17 June date, which is the same as the Splash Pads, this would total around £42,500, and unfortunately, we do not have the funds to facilitate this.

## **From Cllr Daniel Holden to the Cabinet Member for Transport**

Resident groups and civic societies continue to complain about the rise of inappropriate parking of Lime bikes and other such cycle hire companies. What action is the Cabinet Member taking to address these long-standing concerns and will the Cabinet Member commit to meeting with myself and these companies to ensure the concerns of residents are not ignored?

## **Reply**

I met with Lime in January to raise these issues and explore options to enter a formal agreement with Lime that will include better enforcement of poor parking and the creation of dedicated parking bays, initially focusing on busy and problem areas. We will also continue to raise the issue of inappropriate parking of cycle hire bikes at a London level, and our officers will continue to attend regular working groups about cycle hire with TfL, the Mayor of London, and London Councils. We will also learn from and collaborate with other London Boroughs on these issues, with the aim of introducing a formal London wide cycle hire scheme in 2025 that will better manage parking issues, including through the provision of mandatory parking only in dedicated bays.

**From Cllr John Braithwaite to the Cabinet Member for Children's Services**

Would the Cabinet Member commit to undertaking a review looking to increase therapies (range/type or hours available of existing therapies) available for Neuro-development disorders and ADHD in children?

**Reply**

Locally commissioned and provided services deliver Occupational Therapy and Speech and Language Therapy for neuro-diverse children, including those with ADHD. The volume of both types of therapy provided is adjusted to support the number of identified children in our schools. As the number of children and young people with EHCPs has risen, and the number of school places available in our special schools and additionally resourced provisions has also risen, we have expanded both services to meet that need. The level of need is reviewed periodically as needs change over time. Occupational Therapy and Speech and Language Therapy provision for children aged under five years is funded by the NHS, through the local Integrated Commissioning Board (ICB).

The other group of therapies that support neuro-diverse children are funded by the NHS and provided by Southwest London and St George's Mental Health Trust (SWLSTG) and GPs. ADHD and Autism diagnosis for children over the age of five is provided through a centralised service across the area of Southwest London. Local Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) psychiatrists oversee ADHD medication support. SWLSTG have added an additional post of an ADHD outreach nurse who works proactively with schools and families. This role has been an excellent addition to support children and young people.

As a subgroup of the i-Thrive Board, a working group of parent representatives and clinicians are working together to understand how well neuro-diverse children and young people are supported with their mental health, to map the services available to them, and to identify gaps.

**From Cllr Hina Bokhari to the Cabinet Member for Education and Lifelong Learning**

Can the Cabinet Member set out what is being done to ensure the provision of healthier and more sustainable food in Merton's schools?

**Reply**

We are committed to ensuring Merton's children and young people get the very best possible start in life, and key to that is providing healthier and more sustainable food in our schools. This benefits both the health of our pupils, as well as helping them to focus on their studies and get the most out of their learning.

This commitment has been aided by the initiative launched by the Labour Mayor of London which provides universal free school meals for pupils in year groups 3-6. The

Mayor has provided funding to each London Borough to fund these meals for which parents would otherwise have needed to pay. This support is especially welcome during the ongoing cost of living crisis.

We provided a detailed report on this matter to our Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel on 22 November 2023, which can be viewed here:

<https://democracy.merton.gov.uk/documents/s51829/School%20Meals%20in%20Merton%20-%20CYP%20OS%20November%202023.pdf>

In short, we have excellent buy-in from schools to manage two central contracts that have clear contractual requirements around the quality of meals, with a very detailed specification dealing with all elements of the service including the use of additives and managing allergens. These contracts also ensure nutritious meals, with a variety of options including vegan and vegetarian meals and at least one day a week which is 'meat free'. The council has a rigorous monitoring regime with regular visits to schools to complement this.