

Merton Council Council

1 February 2017

Supplementary agenda

25 Councillor Non Priority Questions and Answers

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Councillor non priority questions

From Councillor Daniel Holden to the Cabinet Member for Street Cleanliness and Parking:

The first batch of vehicle electric charging points was installed in early December. When will they be activated and ready to use and how does he expect to encourage more people in Merton to move to using electric vehicles when they can't currently charge them up anywhere?

Reply

The Electric Vehicle Charge Points installed over December 2016, have been waiting for BT connections before going live. This work is currently in hand and the first charge point should be live within the next couple of weeks. Charge point locations including the new Merton bays as well as details about using the facilities and how to become a member details can be found on the Source London web site. A further batch of charge points will follow in locations across the borough in 2017.

From Councillor Daniel Holden to the Cabinet Member for Street Cleanliness and Parking:

Given the continuing problem of theft from and damage to parking meters, can the Cabinet Member tell me a) what the council is planning to do to reduce and stop this costly problem; and b) whether, given the cost of repairs and lost revenue from the machines, he has also factored in the cost of updating the parking machines to accept the new shaped £1 coins?

Reply

- a) The Council has invested capital funding into providing preventative measures in the machines themselves. These consist of steel plates fixed to the back and sides of the interior of each machine and locking devices around the internal mechanisms. As a result of these measures, the ability of the culprits to gain access to the cash within the machine has been considerably diminished and cash losses significantly reduced. At the height of the problem between August and December 2015 losses were running at an average of £4,000 per month. At the point of the last reported cash loss in December 2016, the loss was £126 for the month and there have been no reported attacks in January 2017. Parking Services has also worked extensively in partnership with Safer Merton, neighbourhood police and the multi-agency Locations Board to alert all sections of the community to the problem and raise awareness.
- b) A capital investment of £88K has been made for the upgrading of all machines to accept the new £1 coin. The machine manufacturer is currently in the process of making these changes in readiness for the launch of the coin at the end of March 2017.

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From Councillor Janice Howard to the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Environment and Housing:

Devon has a volunteer 'force' that fills potholes in the road of less than 25mm thereby helping prevent the road from deteriorating. Given the recent figures published on the growing cost to councils of repairing potholes, does the Cabinet Member have any plans to implement a scheme such as Devon's here in Merton?

Reply

We have a regular inspection regime and intervention criteria for all the borough's roads, annually, quarterly and monthly depending on the status of the road. We also have systems for residents to report potholes directly.

Of course there is a vast difference between levels of traffic in Devon and London which will have safety implications for those undertaking street works (staff or volunteers) and we have a duty to monitor effectively, our reactive maintenance spend.

We have no plans to roll out the Devon approach however we will research it and identify any best practice, where possible.

From Councillor David Williams to the Leader of the Council:

Would the Leader please list the meetings and correspondence he has had since the last ordinary meeting of the Council on 23rd November 2016 to save St Helier Hospital?

Reply

In the two months since our last meeting I have:

- Attended the Leaders Committee meeting in December where the Sustainability and Transformation Plan (STP) process, and how we work together on a pan-London level, was on the agenda and where I expressed our concerns about the threat to St Helier hospital.
- Worked with my Cabinet Member for Health and Adult Social Care to respond to the proposed appraisal of acute options, where we have made clear only an approach that does not, from the outset, tend towards assuming the downgrading of St Helier hospital would be acceptable to Merton residents.
- Met with the Chair of the CCG where I again put the case for St Helier hospital and the importance of retaining its A&E and maternity unit.
- Helped organise the successful meeting with Siobhain McDonagh MP regarding the Wilson Hospital on 31 January, where residents took the opportunity to make clear their support for St Helier and their opposition to any proposal to downgrade or close the hospital.

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From Councillor Najeeb Latif to the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Environment and Housing:

Further to the question I asked on this at Full Council on 23rd November 2016, does the Cabinet Member agree that, given the neighbourhood CIL funding is designed to ensure residents benefit from developments in their own area, it is crucial residents have a say over how it is spent on improving local infrastructure? Furthermore, could he give clear assurances that local residents will be given the opportunity to be involved in the fund allocation process both through the 5 Community Forums and their ward councillors rather than unelected council officers simply determining where and how these precious funds are used?

Reply

Under the CIL Regulations and Government Guidance the neighbourhood proportion of CIL is to be spent:

- on addressing the demands development places on local areas where development occurs; and
- on priorities agreed between the council and the communities from those areas.

From 28th of November 2016 to 27th January 2017 Merton's local communities have been asked for their priorities on how they wish neighbourhood CIL funding to be spent. Over the next 6 months the Council will report back on the priorities for the local areas where development is occurring and with the support of ward councillors look for projects to which funding can be allocated and then seek scrutiny/authorisation via the normal councillor committee process for allocations of the funding for projects to be implemented from 1 March 2018.

From Councillor James Holmes to the Cabinet Member for Finance:

Can the Cabinet Member provide an update on the plans for a Merton Energy Company or ESCO that has been approved by Cabinet? In Woking and Peterborough similar arrangements have reduced bills for residents and have provided a revenue stream to the councils.

Reply

ANSWERED BY THE CABINET MEMBER FOR REGENERATION, ENVIRONMENT AND HOUSING

Merton's future energy proposals centre around two main activities: solar PV and district energy. These would form the basis of a Merton energy company.

Key updates:

- Solar PV: Facilities Management are in the process of agreeing a formal power purchase agreement (PPA) with Beecholme School (Academy) that will allow it to charge the academy for the solar PV generated electricity it uses on site. This will be charged at 75% of market (grid) rates. All solar PV income is currently

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charged on a cost recovery basis (i.e. to help recoup the financial outlay of the PV system)

- District energy: Future Merton appointed consultants AECOM to undertake energy master-planning and district heating feasibility for Merton in three phases:
 - Stage 1: Refresh Merton's district heat opportunity areas and undertake energy mapping to determine the high level feasibility of creating a district heating network (completed Jan 2017 – draft report awaiting sign-off prior to circulation)
 - Stage 2: High level techno-economic feasibility and options appraisal of the two regeneration projects at Morden Town Centre and South Wimbledon / Colliers Wood (due April 2017)
 - Stage 3: Detailed feasibility studies and financial modelling for the preferred options in order to support the delivery of the energy master-plans (due summer 2017 – subject to approval)

Following the outcome of stages 1 to 3 officers will consider the options for delivery of the Merton Energy Company and the resources required

From Councillor Stephen Crowe to the Cabinet Member for Community and Culture:

How many fewer trees will now be planted in Merton over the next 4 years as a result of the Mayor of London's decision to ditch his key election promise to plant two million trees in the capital by 2020?

Reply

The Council has not planted any trees funded by the Mayor since the 2014/15 winter planting season when 100 highways trees were planted and so there will be no new and direct impacts arising from any recent change of policy by the Mayor.

The Council has its own allocated tree investment funds for highways locations which this current winter has witnessed 278 new trees planted.

The challenge with the Mayor's historical contributions for tree planting is that it has only been available for tree purchases and planting; the Council has been required to pick up their on-going maintenance and watering costs from within its own budgets.

From Councillor Daniel Holden to the Cabinet Member for Street Cleanliness and Parking:

What was the impact in Merton of the RingGo parking app failure at the end of last year and how much revenue was lost as a result?

Reply

The failure of the RingGo app on 23 November 2016, resulted in an estimated reduction of payments through the RingGo service of £2,800 based upon the

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average daily taking levels through this payment method. However customers would have had the option to use cash in pay and display machines as an alternative: evidence suggests that the cash collections on the days following the date of the outage which would have included the cash received on that day were c£900 higher for on-street machines when compared to average collections for equivalent days in the preceding five months.

From Councillor Brian Lewis-Lavender to the Cabinet Member for Street Cleanliness and Parking:

Given the Council's legal obligations to deal with noise nuisance under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 and the fact that noise nuisance and other anti-social behaviour does not conveniently restrict itself to taking place solely during office hours or on Saturday nights (and Fridays in the summer), can the Cabinet Member please explain to me what recourse defenceless residents in my ward (West Barnes) have when they are continually plagued by unacceptable levels of noise in their street very late at night and yet Merton Council refuses to act?

Reply

We currently provide a noise pollution service Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm and every Saturday night from 11pm to 4am. During the busy summer months of June, July and August we also provide an additional Friday night service 11pm to 4am. For persistent, on-going noise cases, our officers are expected to visit customers outside normal hours as part of their general case management. To cover the intermittent and sporadic noise the council also has specialist noise monitoring kit which can be deployed in complainants' properties.

The provision of any service is determined by a number of factors, including; cost, resourcing, demand and priority. Officers have looked at various service level options including the provision of a full night duty service as well as a 24/7 service. These options have been presented to Cabinet, where the decision was taken to maintain the existing level of service provision.

We now share our noise services with a partner borough. As part of this sharing of services we are committed to maintaining the service provision that we currently have, but we simply cannot afford to extend this in the current financial climate nor is there a business case which shows that the demand is there to require such a service.

Strategic Theme

From Councillor Suzanne Grocott to the Cabinet Member for Community and Culture:

Residents living around Dundonald Rec are unhappy about the current state of the public amenities in the Rec following the expansion of Dundonald Primary School and would like to have answers to the following questions:

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- a) When will the gate at the entrance to Fairlawn Road and remaining green space be released back to the public?
- b) When is the hole in the public tennis court going to be fixed so that members of the tennis club can play?
- c) Are residents now able to book the Community Hall and if so, what times are available? How many people have tried to book to date?

Reply

- a) The extended multi use sports area and extended children's playground are due to be open to the public week beginning 6 February 2017. The contractor will then be able to work their way out of the recreation ground, with the temporary path removed and the original perimeter path reinstalled. Due to the weight of contractor vehicles over the contract period, the original perimeter path will need to be re-built, with the Fairlawn entrance gate being the last remaining item to complete. Until this time, the temporary entrance a few metres away will remain open. We hope final completion will be by late February, but need to agree the exact scope of the perimeter path works to agree specific dates with the contractor.
- b) It is assumed by 'hole' that the question refers to a permanent puddle in one of the two courts completed in the Phase 1 works in early 2015. The council is in discussion with the original contractor regarding this defect. The problems appear to be ground water related and some further works will need to be undertaken. From week beginning 6 February the third court will open, so there will be two fully operational courts in addition to this one with this problem. The council will ensure that two courts are kept open while any rectification work is undertaken to the one court where there is a problem.
- c) At the current time the Council is not taking any private or community bookings for the community hall as there are a number of snagging issues outstanding post building construction. Evenings and weekends will be the principle times when the facility is made available for casual lettings. There have been a small number of enquiries about the facility to date, 2 to our recollection. Alternative Council venues have been suggested to these customers.

From Councillor Daniel Holden to the Cabinet Member for Education:

Given the national rise in obesity of children, what proactive measures are being taken to improve physical exercise of teenagers, and girls in particular who can be put off exercise by various societal, cultural and religious pressures?

Reply

ANSWERED BY THE CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Merton Annual Public Health Report 2016/17 focuses on Tackling Childhood

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Obesity Together and will be published in February 2017. This sets out the challenge of childhood obesity and includes information on the perceptions of young people about weight and body size, as well as examples of action already taking place in Merton to increase levels of physical activity and improve the physical environment. It is complemented by a child healthy weight action plan which sets out commitments promote healthy weight and to increase the number of children and young people, and their families, who are regular users of parks, open spaces, informal recreation space and allotments.

There is a wide range of joined up action to support young people to get and remain active in Merton. Led by a variety of partners this utilises the assets of the community alongside public amenities and the private sector:

Merton School Sports Partnership provides expert PE advice and support to schools. Their work to coordinate school competitions develops primary aged children to be young people who have tried a range of different activities before they attend KS3. Additionally each secondary school's PE Lead Teacher will provide a varied curriculum and opportunity to try activities.

Local leisure providers Better (GLL) & Virgin Active Gyms have developed physical activity programmes for teenagers to include speed agility and quickness training and the use of specialist equipment at their clubs.

To promote better use of leisure centres by young people under 16 years and to increase physical activity in this group, GLL and the council's Leisure Team introduced an 'enhanced junior offer'. This increased the number of activities available as part of membership for a monthly fee, including the gym, taking part in group training sessions, fitness classes, lane swimming in the pool and the pool inflatable sessions. In creating a membership offer of varied activities, the centre aims to cultivate a more positive training environment. The enhanced junior offer was marketed through member schools/colleges, website and other partners and a junior 'Welcome Desk' was put up on the gym floor.

Wimbledon Park Watersports and Outdoor Centre offers courses in sailing, kayaking, archery, climbing, orienteering and much more. Merton's Leisure Active Kids provides after school and holiday activities for ages 4 - 16 years.

Merton Sports Blast has delivered sporting activities for young people over three years, focusing on the east of the borough. So far the programme has engaged with 8,000 people and has been running free sports courses for 14-25 year olds and families.

Healthy Schools London: - The Healthy Schools London (HSL) programme has been adopted in Merton and schools are being supported to achieve bronze, and silver and gold status. HSL provides a framework to deliver a 'whole school approach' to health and well-being. 24 schools are registered with HSL, 4 have achieved the Bronze award and 2 are in the process of achieving Silver award. Further work aims to increase engagement of schools onto the programme across the borough. As part of the HSL process, schools audit their health and well-being needs and choose to target certain universal and targeted groups. During 2016 a

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school in Mitcham has focussed on encouraging inactive girls, less motivated to try activity to join after school dance groups.

The Merton Family Services Directory provides information on the range of activities available to young people:

<https://fsd.merton.gov.uk/kb5/merton/directory/home.page>

From Councillor Daniel Holden to the Cabinet Member for Children's Services:

Can the Cabinet Member tell me a) how much the council is currently spending on Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children; and b) what checks and assessments are in place to establish the correct age of all refugee children and young people within the Council's care?

Reply

CSF's most recent budget monitoring forecasts expenditure for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking children to be £590k against a budget of £60k. Merton is part of long-established Pan London arrangements for the distribution of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking children 16-18 years old. All boroughs co-operate in a rota to distribute young people as they arrive in the capital through a triage system established by Croydon in partnership with the Home Office. Age checks are usually undertaken prior to young people being allocated to the boroughs, however if necessary in Merton they would be undertaken by a Team manager and a senior social worker with specific expertise. Home Office Guidance on age assessments suggests the following:

"All available sources of relevant information and evidence should be considered since no single assessment technique or combination of techniques is likely to determine the applicant's age with precision." The impact of extreme trauma can have significant impact on young people's development and there are no reliable dental or medical checks which can firmly establish age."

When asked to clarify what their guidance means in terms of checks during the Calais dispersal an HO spokesperson responded with the following statement:

"These (checks) include whether asylum seekers have provided credible and clear documentary evidence proving their claimed age and that they have a physical appearance or demeanour which does not strongly suggest they are significantly over 18 years of age." Where age is disputed two workers review all the available evidence and interview the young person and form a view.