

MITCHAM COMMUNITY FORUM
6 OCTOBER 2021

(7.15 pm - 9.15 pm)

PRESENT Councillors Councillor David Chung (in the Chair),

1 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS (Agenda Item 1)

The meeting was held via Zoom, and chaired by Councillor David Chung. Three residents and four councillors attended on Zoom with 81 additional views on YouTube. The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and explained how the meeting would work.

2 LEADER OF THE COUNCIL UPDATE (Agenda Item 2)

Councillor Mark Allison, Leader of the Council, thanked the chair for the invitation. Mark has been a Cllr for nearly 20 years and is proud of his connection with the local area. He was born locally in St Helier and grew up in St Helier area before moving to Mitcham. Mark said that Merton is a great community but there are big challenges. Mitcham is one of the more disadvantaged areas and whilst huge progress has been made the COVID pandemic has undone some of the progress hitting areas like Mitcham and Pollards Hill particularly hard. Improving schools has been a vital element in improving life chances. Progress has also included a new leisure centre and new library.

As part of a mixed race family Mark said he is passionate about fairness and being inclusive, including appointing the most diverse cabinet in Merton's history. As Leader he plans to celebrate Merton's diversity.

Mark has been Leader since November so has only experienced the role during the COVID pandemic. Mark launched Merton Together to recognise how many in the community wanted to step up and help their neighbours. Mark thanked everyone in Mitcham who got involved in responding to COVID as their efforts have made a huge difference. Merton Council has worked with the NHS and other partners to help keep people safe but of course many families have lost love ones or had their circumstances changed and their lives may never be the same again. Supporting these households through this will be a major priority.

As a result of the major changes for many we launched the Your Merton engagement exercise to listen to residents about what they value and what their ambitions are for the borough. We are still analysing the results but it is clear that residents value their

community, their local open spaces, and were much more conscious of their local area, especially their local high streets. Mark said he is still in listening mode and wants to hear what people have to say. Three major things have come out of the listening exercise:

- Concerns about the cost of living – which is why we will not be raising parking charges
- The need for better homes – being isolated in poor housing has had a huge impact on some so the council will be investing in development of affordable homes
- People want to feel safe – although Merton is a low crime area people want to feel safe. £1m investment in CCTV coverage

Mark said he knows that there are other local issues that will need addressing and wants to work together, as we did during the pandemic, to tackle the challenges ahead. Mark said he was proud of Merton and Merton's community, and wants to build on residents priorities.

A resident said that open spaces includes non-parkland including closed graveyards and footpaths that are not well maintained and do not feel safe. They would like the council to think about the small neglected spaces that set the tone for an area. Cllr Allison agreed that it was not just about the big spaces, and use of the smaller areas has increased during pandemic. Cllr Allison said he was happy to look into the specific areas raised. Sometimes there are no easy answers to improving safety in some cases but will want to work with the community to address their concerns.

3 LONDON ASSEMBLY UPDATE (Agenda Item 3)

Leonie Cooper, Assembly Member for Merton and Wandsworth, provided an update on the work of the London Assembly. Leonie was in Mitcham today talking to local businesses on Willow Lane industrial estate and has been on a call about development in the area.

Assembly is still looking at COVID issues, a [new report](#) by Imperial College London commissioned by the Mayor of London showed strong links between air pollution and greater risk of COVID hospitalisation in addition to the previously established links to ethnicity and deprivation.

The Mayor and London boroughs have offered to help resettle refugees from Afghanistan. Mayor has offered Help to Buy Back fund to local council to source homes for refugees. They have also set up London Refuge Response to coordinate donations and have been overwhelmed by the response. The Mayor has committed a £400k fund to tackle hate and racism. The Mayor is setting up Creative Enterprise Zones to support Londoners who are unemployed or in low paid work including last

support from European Social Fund. There is also £5m for Academies Hub to address skills gaps in key sectors like construction.

The Assembly recently questioned Transport for London about the current funding deal which runs out in December, and TfL needs long term solution. The Ultra-Low Emission Zone (ULEZ) is being expanded to South Circular from 25 October. Current zone has reduced NO2 by 44% and we expect the expanded zone to have a similar impact on encouraging people to change their vehicle. The Assembly asked about keeping public transport COVID secure, including mask mandate. Elizabeth Line trials going well, after many delays, hoping to open in first half of 2022.

The Assembly has called for £20 uplift to Universal Credit to stay, for increased pay for police, solutions to supply issues, for support for HIV in London, restrictions on Freedom passes to be reduced. The Mayor of London has committed to funding social housing, up to 79,000 starts, that are environmentally sustainable.

Violent Crime Reduction unit working with 9 housing associations to reduce crime and divert young people.

If any residents have any issues for Leonie they can email to leonie.cooper@london.gov.uk

Cllr Agatha asked what is being done to tackle violence against women. Leonie said the Home Office announced an inquiry into police behaviour relating to Sarah Everards. Leonie has been meeting regularly with Borough Command Unit and discovered that unconscious bias training is voluntary and feels this should be compulsory for all officers. There has been a debate about the Commissioner, but neither Home Sec nor Mayor have asked her to leave and expect the Commissioner to stay. Misogyny should be designated a hate crime. Leonie expects this will be an ongoing issue at the Assembly and she will be meeting with the Deputy Mayor Sophie Linden to push for more actions.

Cllr Macauley asked about the cuts to the criminal justice system and the significant backlog in the courts, and if the Mayor has lobbied the government to invest in the system.

Leonie said that the Mayor doesn't have control of that area of the criminal justice system so is limited to lobbying, either publicly or privately. There is a widespread recognition that investment is needed to resolve the backlog. It can take up to five years for cases to come to trial. Lobbying is taking place as part of the Comprehensive Spending Review but Leonie was happy to follow up directly.

Cllr Fraser asked about police officer arresting someone when not in uniform. Leonie said it was really important to change the training to address these issues as well as

look at the culture within the organisation as it is clearly not just bad apples. This incident undermines confidence in the police making their job much harder.

4 LOCAL CANCER SERVICES (Agenda Item 4)

Dr Navdeep Alg, South West London Clinical Commissioning Group cancer lead gave a presentation on cancer services in the area. The presentation can be found attached to this report. The pandemic has delayed care and diagnosis in some cancers and there is a need to catch up. This is particularly the case for breast, lung, and urological cancers, mainly due to less screening taking place during the pandemic.

South West London CCG is trying to raise awareness through social media, local press, TV, and non-digital advertising. They are working with an organisation called Community Links to target particular communities and offer information in community languages.

The CCG is also attending public engagement events to have face-to-face contacts. This includes a Cancer Awareness Day at Vestry Hall on 6 November. Dr Alg is happy to attend any community events and asked if anyone has any ideas for events he could attend to email Steven.Nzekwue@swlondon.nhs.uk. Dr Alg also asked attendees to help share the message that services are open and we want to see patients who have symptoms.

Cllr Fraser asked if there is any educational information for young men to encourage them to ask for help. Dr Alg said prostate cancer tends to be an older man's disease so have been prioritising those groups but would be happy to attend any event that target younger men as part of a longer term strategy.

Cllr Macauley asked for information about what services are available at Grand Drive Surgery. Dr Alg said there is different offers for different cancer pathways, for example calling patients to come in for smear tests to catch up with pre-pandemic levels. Grand Drive employs admin staff to follow up people who haven't taken up tests that are available. GPs are also reviewing their referral criteria to improve quality.

Cllr Agatha surprised that so many cancer patients were left behind during the pandemic and catching up is too late for those who may have died. Steven Nzekwue said that we have heard this point and have tried to adopt a multi-pronged approach to those who have been hard to reach including analysing data to target effectively. The NHS is having to manage the impact of Covid across a number of different areas.

Cllr Chung encouraged local community to make sure they access relevant screening services.

5 PUBLIC HEALTH COVID UPDATE (Agenda Item 5)

Barry Causer, Public Health Lead for COVID Resilience, gave a presentation on the latest situation with COVID in Merton. The presentation is attached to this report and covered the latest statistics, and key updates.

The numbers of new infections is 'hovering' but at high levels, mostly driven by schools returning, increased social activity and people returning to work after the summer break. Merton is in the middle of the pack of South West London boroughs, and we need to remain cautious. There are higher numbers of young people, especially secondary school age getting COVID, but there have been breakthrough infections into those people who have been double vaccinated, due to waning immunity levels.

There has been a limited impact of these infections on NHS Indicators, which is different to earlier stages of the pandemic e.g. admissions look stable and the death rate remains low, due to the success of the vaccination programme. The government has announced two plans:

- Plan A based on vaccinations, test, track and trace
- Plan B explain the increased risk, introduce COVID passes, more working from home and mandatory face coverings

The COVID vaccination programme, is our front line of defence and has four strands:

- Evergreen – 1st and 2nd dose vaccinations for those who have not had a vaccine yet
- Boosters – for those most vulnerable e.g. care home residents, those over 50, front-line health and care staff and those with underlying health conditions
- Third dose – for those immunosuppressed residents
- Single dose for 12-15 year olds in schools

It is important to get your annual flu jab if offered by the NHS and those who aren't eligible for a free flu jab can get a flu vaccine for a few pounds at Community Pharmacies across Merton.

Regular asymptomatic testing remains vital and Lateral Flow Tests are available from assisted test sites in Merton (Wilson Hospital and Centre Court shopping centre) and can be collected from libraries, and community pharmacists for home use.

Better Health Merton is an overarching brand for services that support residents to improve their overall health. To find out more you can sign-up for the [Council COVID newsletter](#), and if you would like to be more involved in supporting your community

you can still join the [COVID Champions](#). There is also financial support available to local community groups through [Merton Giving](#).

Cllr Macauley thanked Barry for the campaign to encourage vaccination, especially links with the voluntary sector like Mayors Silver Club. Barry said the voluntary sector has been a critical part of the Merton COVID response and will also be invaluable in supporting the recovery.

6 ROWAN COMMUNITY FACILITY UPDATE (Agenda Item 6)

Rowan Site

James McGinlay, Head of Regeneration, gave an update from Merton Council and SW London CCG. The Rowan Park development including housing, park, community facility and health centre. Significant delay as community facility link to the health centre. Crest Nicholson were the developer but working with another partner, CSM, who will manage the community facility. Revised plans for the centre were agreed in 2020 but clashed with lockdown but Crest Nicholson furloughed staff until this summer. Some design issues for the health centre including noise insulation. Specification for construction has been submitted to CSM for agreement and then the CCG. If all agreed then could be starting on site early 2022.

Mitcham Bridge

The bridge on Bishopford Road collapsed in 2019 due to a heavy weather event. The bridge had to be shored-up, then design and planning permission agreed. The bridge is now complete, with the completion of surface works taking place. This is the final stages, and the bridge will open soon along with works to a wider cycle lane, and replanting 27 trees. The bridge may open before all surrounding work are completed.

A resident asked if the bridge would open this side of Christmas. James said he expect it to, this has been a challenging build but all of the significant works are completed. A resident asked if planting block some of the noise that was previously blocked by the wall on the river side that has been removed. James said tree planting will act as an acoustic barrier. A resident asked if the special bus service has been withdrawn and James replied that he did not expect it to be withdrawn until the bridge is opened but will confirm.

Cllr Agatha asked if it was possible to improve lighting in the area. James said he will need to check what changes will be made. Any improvements needed to be suitable for the park and local wildlife.

7 OPEN FORUM (Agenda Item 7)

Cllr Agatha asked about Christmas lights and James confirmed Mitcham will have lights for Christmas.

Cllr Chung said we have tried to get an update on the plans for Wilson Health Centre and inequality in Mitcham but could not get anything for this meeting. We hope to have something soon.

8 DATE OF NEXT MEETING (Agenda Item 8)

Councillor Chung thanked residents for attending and closed the meeting.

The date of the next meetings is Wednesday February 2022 at 7.15pm, venue to be confirmed.