

07: Non ST Questions

**From: Councillor Ben Butler to the Cabinet member for Local Environment and Green Spaces**

Can the Cabinet member provide the number of i) Stage One and ii) Stage Two complaints for the waste and street cleansing department, covering the three month period August to October 2020, and can she compare this with the same period in 2019? Please provide a week by week comparison if that is possible.

**Reply**

The numbers of Stage One and ii) Stage Two complaints for the waste and street cleansing department for the same three month time period for 2019 and 2020 is shown below.

	Stage one	Policy	Stage Two
Aug-19	21	1	2
Sep-19	51	3	0
Oct-19	47	3	0
Aug-20	14	3	1
Sep-20	5	1	1
Oct-20	7	0	1

Weekly figures:

	Stage one	Policy	Stage Two
1-2 Aug 19	1	0	0
5-9 Aug 19	15	0	0
12-16 Aug 19	9	1	0
19-23 Aug 19	9	0	2
26-30 Aug 19	13	0	0
2-6 Sept 19	12	0	0
9-13 Sept 19	10	1	0
16-20 Sept 19	13	0	0
23-27 Sept 19	9	1	0
30 Sept - 4 Oct 19	4	0	0
7 - 11 Oct19	7	1	0
14 - 18 Oct 19	10	0	0
21 - 25 Oct 19	9	1	0
28 Oct - 1 Nov 19	17	1	0
Total	138	6	2

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	Stage one	Policy	Stage Two
3 - 7 Aug 20	4	0	0
10 - 14 Aug 20	5	3	0
17 - 21 Aug	6	0	1
24 - 28 Aug 20	0	0	0
31 Aug - 4 Sept 20	1	0	0
7 - 11 Sept 20	1	0	0
14 - 18 Sept 20	2	0	0
21 -25 Sept 20	1	1	0
28 Sept - 2 Oct 20	1	0	2
5 - 9 Oct 20	2	0	0
12 - 16 Oct 20	1	0	0
19 - 23 Oct 20	2	0	0
26 - 30 Oct 20	1	0	0
Total	27	4	3

### **From: Councillor Hayley Ormrod to the Cabinet Member for Housing, Regeneration and the Climate Emergency:**

Does the cabinet member agree with me that any future development at Centre Court and in Wimbledon Town Centre should be built to sensible heights that enhances the town centre rather than obscuring it with concrete?

### **Reply**

Yes, and this is what the administration have set out in the Future Wimbledon SPD which we will debate to council later tonight.

As the councillor is aware, Centre Court is currently on the market and our foremost thoughts are ensuring that existing retailers and their employees are supported by the centre owner during the transition and to ensure that Wimbledon residents can maintain access to the shopping offer (post lockdown)

As the site is on the market, we are a long way off from any possible planning applications. Officers have already stated that the content of the marketing brochure is misleading and have confirmed that the heights shown (up to 25 storeys) in the marketing brochure are not in accordance with the Future Wimbledon SPDs height guidance and other relevant local planning policies.

Should any prospective purchasers seek pre-application advice from the Council's planning and regeneration service, they will be advised to adhere to the SPD, which has undergone a number of community consultations and revisions to express a vision for Wimbledon that promotes investment, at the right 'sensible' scale and with an emphasis on design quality.

Regarding concrete. There is no suggestion anywhere that the proposals would be concrete. Most buildings are either steel or concrete structures, for engineering

reasons (even Wimbledon's former town hall, the station, the theatre) But the elevational treatments, to be determined through Planning, should be guided by the materials guidance set out in the Design Quality section of the Future Wimbledon SPD. The Council supports materials that blend with Wimbledon's existing architecture including Portland Stone, Terracotta, Red brick and yellow London Stock brick to name a few.

The marketing material published by Centre Court and the increase in planning applications in Wimbledon demonstrates that not only is Wimbledon a good place to invest and deliver improvements; it brings into sharp focus, the need to adopt the Future Wimbledon SPD to provide greater clarity and control of the scale and style of developments in Wimbledon as well as being on the front-foot in responding to the rapid changes our high streets and town centres face.

**Councillor Mike Brunt to the Cabinet Member for Partnerships, Public Safety and Tackling Crime**

Can the Cabinet member outline how the council has been providing reassurance to the community following the alleged attacks on schoolchildren earlier this month, and if she will make a statement?

**Reply**

Following the terrible incident of an attempted abduction that took place on the 3<sup>rd</sup> November, the council worked closely with the police to ensure the victim and her family had access to the specialist support required and the community messaging was in line with the police messaging as they were leading on the investigation. The police provided reassurance patrols and were further supported by the council and Clarion Officers, for example, our Schools Inclusion Team and Youth Outreach Services worked closely with the police schools officers to engage with the local schools and young people throughout the day. The police have confirmed the individual concerned has been charged and will be prosecuted.

2 public meetings were convened by Siobhain McDonagh MP on the 9<sup>th</sup> November, with over 300 people in attendance (via Zoom). In attendance were officers from the council and the police who provided reassurance and an update on both this awful incident and the second incident that was reported in the local papers. The police confirmed the second incident had some discrepancies they were looking into. It was not certain whether this second incident had taken place. The council were asked to consider the provision of personal panic alarms for young people. I can confirm that we do provide panic alarms to young people through our MASCOT service, this is arranged by the council's Youth Offending Team attached Police Officer.

I would like to extend my gratitude and thanks to Zian and her family who showed so much courage and intervened to safeguard another young person – truly demonstrating how safeguarding children and young people is everyone's business. Zian, aged 11, showed such bravery by calling her mother and alerting her of what she had seen, resulting in her sisters and mother intervening. We are keen to ensure this bravery receives recognition.

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We also heard at the public meeting how our community wanted to come forward and work with us and the police, volunteering their services to help safeguard children and young people in Merton. Working with the police and our partners in the voluntary sector, we will be providing further information to the local community on how they can volunteer their services.

### **From: Councillor Hina Bokhari to the Cabinet Member for Women and Equalities**

Would the Cabinet Member please explain what the council is doing to support the Lift the Ban Coalition, which is campaigning to restore the right to work for everyone waiting for more than 6 months for a decision on their asylum claim?

#### **Reply**

Merton Council supports refugees and the rights of refugees, becoming a Borough of Sanctuary in February 2020. Refugees in Merton who present to the Council with any needs are supported by our services where appropriate.

### **From: Councillor Dennis Pearce to the Cabinet Member for Women and Equalities**

Baroness Doreen Lawrence's report, "An Avoidable Crisis", published last month, described how Covid 19 has thrived on racial inequalities and recommended a national plan to tackle health inequalities. Has the Cabinet Member looked into the potential impact on the BAME community of the government's decision to move health services from the disadvantaged neighbourhood of St Helier to affluent Belmont?

#### **Reply**

One of our main reasons for referring the proposals was our concern that no proper analysis had been done of the impact of the proposals on local communities, including those from a BAME background. This was of particular concern giving the evidence which was then emerging that COVID-19 was having a disproportionate impact on people from BAME communities, not only in terms of their susceptibility to the virus but also in relation to the severity of symptoms. Our view was that the proposals ought to have been paused pending a proper review of the emerging evidence. The report prepared by the IHT on the impact of COVID did not attempt to address this issue. We welcome the subsequent decision to commission the King's Fund to review the evidence but believe such a report should have been available before the decision to proceed with the proposals was made.

### **From: Councillor Nick McLean to the cabinet member for finance**

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Please confirm the levels of government support for the current full financial year 2020/2021 for businesses in Merton in relation to each for the following:

- Business Support 'Leisure Grants' providing the £10,000 and £25,000 small business and retail, hospitality and leisure grants to help our local businesses
- Business Rates Relief / business rates 'holidays' for retail leisure and hospitality
- Business Rates Relief for nurseries
- S31 Business Rates relief grants compensation
- Discretionary Grants funding for Small Businesses
- Reopening the High Streets Fund
- The further ongoing awards of funding for discretionary grants in relation to the current lockdown closures and the awards of £3,000 cash grants for closed businesses in Merton

### Reply

- Business Support 'Leisure Grants' providing the £10,000 and £25,000 small business and retail, hospitality and leisure grants to help our local businesses - - **£13,240,000**
- Business Rates Relief / business rates 'holidays' for retail leisure and hospitality - **£44,881,250**
- Business Rates Relief for nurseries - **£829,168**
- S31 Business Rates relief grants compensation - **£5,317,031**
- Discretionary Grants funding for Small Businesses - **£15,030,000**
- Reopening the High Streets Fund - **£182,103**
- The further ongoing awards of funding for discretionary grants in relation to the current lockdown closures and the awards of £3,000 cash grants for closed businesses in Merton:
- Local Restrictions Support Grants (Closed) Addendum (for national lockdown) **£3,099,762 – this is not discretionary scheme**
- Local Restrictions Support Grant (Open) (restrictions for tier 2) **£360,853**
- Additional Restrictions Grant (discretionary to March 22) **£4,130,960**

Whilst all support received from the government during the pandemic is welcomed, the grants the Council has received for businesses are no way near sufficient, resulting in many organisations having their applications turned down. The pressure on businesses during this period has resulted in a significant increase in unemployment in the borough: Office for National Statistics data from early March to

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October shows that the number of people claiming unemployment benefit has increased by nearly 65% up to over 10,000.

I would like to put on record my thanks to all Council staff who have worked tirelessly throughout this period to support businesses in the borough and ensure grants are distributed as quickly as possible.

**From: Councillor Billy Christie to the Cabinet Member for Housing, Regeneration and the Climate Emergency**

As we enter winter alongside the current Covid restrictions, what work is the council doing to prevent homelessness and address rough sleeping in the borough?

### **Reply**

The Council remains committed in meeting housing need including the most acute form of need i.e. homelessness , and work to achieve this objective has continued during the coronavirus pandemic

A central plank to the work we do is the prevention of homelessness and since April 2020 we have prevented 227 number of households from facing a homelessness episode. This is achieved in accordance with the Housing Act 1996 Part 7 as amended by the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. Activities to prevent homelessness include working with Landlords on tenancy matters, advice on security of tenure and possession proceedings, debt and money advice, finding sustainable housing solutions in the private sector, advice on welfare benefits and relationship difficulties

We continue to take a proactive approach is seeking to eliminate rough sleeping, in partnership with MHCLG and the GLA and have successfully accommodated 52 Rough Sleepers. Sadly there remains a small number of rough sleepers who continue to refuse offers of help and our outreach team are working hard to encourage them to leave the streets and take up offers of accommodation and support.

We are working closely with the YMCA to deliver a winter night shelter, which has been renamed Merton Emergency Winter Accommodation to highlight that the night shelter has been remodelled due to Covid 19 , and will be providing self-contained accommodation . The project will open on Monday the 30<sup>th</sup> November for 3 months.

**From: Councillor Ed Gretton to the cabinet member for finance**

The Council is claiming Direct Support from Government in the form of Robert Jenrick's "75p in the £1" lost income funding for the current financial year - please clarify whether or not the Council has included such funding in the Council's statement of forecast revenue variance for the current financial year as reported to Cabinet 9 November?

### **Reply**

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As stated in the monitoring report we are waiting for confirmation of the payment of the grant. The grant needs to be certified by MHCLG and was originally due to be paid in October. The latest update we have from them is that the grant is due to be paid on the 27<sup>th</sup> November. When confirmed it will be included in our forecast which we expect to be in the period 7 monitoring report.

It is important to note that the 75p is not assessed on all income, and therefore falls some way short of the three quarters of funding local authorities were promised. Similarly, it is 75p in the pound after the first 5%, so the maximum is only 70p. This falls a long way short of the Secretary of State's pledge to reimburse councils to do 'whatever it takes' to support their local communities in their response to the pandemic.

### **From: Councillor Adam Bush to the cabinet member for finance**

What net adverse variance was stated by way of revenue forecast for the current full financial year 2020/2021 at the 13 July Cabinet this year, and what net adverse variance for the current full financial year was stated at the most recent Cabinet 9 November?

### **Reply**

13 July Cabinet Adverse forecast (Based on May figures)  
£25.402m

9 November Cabinet Adverse forecast (based on September figures)      £10.728m

This must be viewed as moments in time which, if taken in isolation, can be misleading, particularly given all of the uncertainty caused by the pandemic this year. They also only represent the in-year forecast variance, so do not take account of the costs which have subsequently moved into future years. It is also important to note that the September figures were forecast prior to both London being moved into Tier 2 and the second national lockdown, both of which might result in further adjustments.

A significant amount of the reduction is due to the work undertaken by the Council to bring down the costs in recent months, without which the forecast adverse variance would be significantly higher.

### **From: Councillor Brenda Fraser to the Cabinet Member for Children and Education**

Will the Cabinet member provide an update on the work of Merton's schools since the autumn term to educate Merton's children in light of the Covid 19 pandemic?

### **Reply**

Merton schools' preparation for a successful September return started in July when the Government issued their guidance for full opening. Headteachers, governors and other leaders worked with their staff to identify how pupils could return safely in September: they carried out risk assessments, designed multiple measures to

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ensure they complied with government guidance and communicated with their parents and communities about their plan.

Schools report that pupils returned with great enthusiasm and were happy to be back. For the vast majority of schools attendance has been good (above the current national averages), in no small part due to the engagement by leaders with their communities, and with families who have been experiencing greater concern about their children's return.

All schools considered carefully what their curriculums should look like on return. Anticipating their pupils' needs, teachers designed lessons to support pupils back into learning. For many this included whole school topics, often based around a common book, reinforcing their sense of community, supporting pupils to remember learning behaviours, and focusing on aspects of PSHE (Personal, Social and Health Education) and PE. There were new rules to learn (in line with the new Covid measures), including how to remain within bubbles, and new codes of conduct were introduced. For the most part, pupils have responded well to behaviour expectations, and reported exclusions are lower than at the same time last year.

Following the first weeks, schools have designed and implemented curriculums to focus on establishing gaps in learning, and to enable those gaps to be filled. Schools have used a variety of assessment practices to see what gaps pupils have had as a result of lockdown: some have used tests, others assessment for learning techniques (assessing as they teach), and others a combination of the two. Schools are reporting a variety of situations: there have been some pleasant surprises with some pupils seeming to have kept up well, though for many others, significant gaps have been found. For example, many primary schools have reported that for pupils now in Year 1, the loss for many of almost half a year of Reception class, has meant that aspects of the Early Years Foundation Stage need to be addressed, and a transition model of more learning through play has been needed this term.

As a result of these assessments, schools have started to implement 'catch up' in a variety of ways: whole class teaching to address gaps for the cohort, interventions for groups of pupils, and then targeted work for individuals. They have planned how to use their catch up funding. Schools have been asked by the Government to ensure they return to the 'normal', broad curriculum by the summer term. Many Merton schools are reporting that they are already teaching the full, broad curriculum,

Merton schools have also planned their remote learning offer to support pupils who need to self isolate. This has included sourcing additional devices and routers to support families who are unable to access online learning, and has also continued to ensure that paper copies of resources are available. Devices and routers have come from the DfE, and as a result of donations from the Wimbledon Dons, and as sourced by elected members. Schools have also put in their own resources (at a time when budgets are particularly stretched) to buy devices. The £20,000 recently allocated by the Council for this purpose will also increase the number of devices schools can make available to families.

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Schools have put in place support for individual pupils, whether as a result of known needs, or as a result of needs that have emerged since the beginning of term.

Leaders have worked hard to support the wellbeing of their staff. Being a teacher in a school at the moment is not straightforward and the additional demands placed on staff are being carefully monitored by leaders, and support put in place as appropriate.

Leaders in Merton schools themselves have a significantly greater workload at the moment: whilst working to return the school to normal operation, refocusing the whole community on its core purpose of learning, and trying to return to their school's improvement priorities, they have maintained Covid safe measures, and most have also dealt with positive cases in their communities.

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