

06: Non ST Questions

From: Councillor John Dehaney to the Cabinet member for Adult Social Care and Public Health

What assessment has there been during second wave of Covid-19 of the impact on BAME communities?

Reply

Data on Covid impact on BAME in the second wave:

Following the first wave, research has been done across London and the UK, showing that BAME populations were disproportionately affected by COVID. This included the direct effects, including hospitalisation and death, as well as medium to long term effects, such as social, economic and mental health impacts. The effects are complex and likely due to a combination of underlying health, social and economic determinants which interact with each other. Factors such as employment, including public facing roles, economic uncertainty, overcrowding, and multigenerational households will have increased the risks certain populations have been exposed to.

The impact of COVID-19 on the BAME community in the second wave is constantly evolving and is under analysis. It is likely that the impacts of COVID are still not being felt evenly and impact some groups more than others. During recent weeks of sharp increase of infections in London, there have been diverging infection rates across East and West Merton, and between white and ethnic minority groups with patterns of increased infections across the East and in BAME groups. This is likely to be driven by housing risks (multi-occupancy) and types of jobs (e.g. frontline, contact with the public).

We will continue to monitor and work closely with the NHS and Public Health England London on further analyses as more data becomes available to understand the acute effects of infections and deaths, in coming weeks and months. This is being complemented by work with the voluntary sector to gather information about the lived experience of Covid in our diverse community including among BAME groups and will also include work in the JSNA to understand the more long-term effects including health, social and economic factors.

From Cllr Adam Bush to the Cabinet Member for Finance:

What is the total amount of money that has been given to Merton Council by the government to assist local businesses during the pandemic, and does the Cabinet Member feel that the council could have done more to assist businesses in Merton during the pandemic?.

Reply

The Council has reacted quickly and awarded grants and rates relief in line with the Government Guidance. We were in the top three London boroughs for paying the small business grant and retail, hospitality and leisure grants last year.

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We are currently making payments on all the different Local Restrictions Grant schemes, automated where possible to reduce the need for multiple applications as the country moves in and out of lockdown, including the discretionary scheme unlike many local authorities.

The Council has supported businesses by setting up dedicated pages on our website identifying areas of support both from the Council and other external sources and worked closely with the Merton Chamber of Commerce. Businesses were also able to defer their payments to us and we have not commenced any enforcement activity in this area. Due to the limited funding for the discretionary schemes and a net cost to the authority for its expenditure on Covid, we have not been able to support the many businesses in Merton that have suffered falls in income.

A list of the grant schemes and support is detailed below

Extended retail, hospitality and leisure relief	£44.5 million	Business rates relief
Nursery relief	£0.779 million	Business rates relief
Business Support Grants – small business grants and retail, hospitality and leisure grants	£29.318 million	Direct grants
Discretionary Grants	£1,312,750	Discretionary grants (own scheme)
Local Restrictions Grants – Addendum – (lockdown 5 November to 2 December)	£3,099,762	Grants for business rate payers mandated to close in national lockdown
Local Restrictions Grants – Open (17 October to 4 November)	£360,853	Grants for business rate payers affected by tier 2 restrictions
Local Restrictions Grant – ARG (Discretionary Grants (5 November to 31 March 22)	£4,130,960	Discretionary grants (own scheme) – phase one being administered
Local Restrictions Grants – Open (2 December to 19 December)	£305,984	Grants for business rate payers affected by tier 2 restrictions
Local Restrictions Grants – Closed (2 December to 19 December)	£13,924	Grants for business rate payers affected by tier 3 restrictions
Local Restrictions Grants – tier 4 (20 December to 4 January)	Not notified yet	Grants for business rate payers affected by tier 4 restrictions
Christmas Support Package for Pubs	£38,400	Grants for wet led pubs
Local Restrictions Grants – Addendum – (lockdown 5 January to 15 February)	£4,649,643	Grants for business rate payers mandated to close in national lockdown

Closedown Business Grants	£9,297,000	One off grants for retail, hospitality and leisure businesses
Top up to Local Restrictions Grant – ARG (Discretionary Grants (5 November to 31 March 22))	£1,834,777	Additional funding for Discretionary grants (own scheme)

From Councillor Mary Curtin to the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health

Can the Cabinet member update us on the rollout of Covid-19 vaccinations in Merton?

Reply

The roll out of the NHS led vaccination programme in Merton continues at pace, with huge progress made to meeting the government’s challenging ambition of vaccinating all those in the top four priority groups by February 2021, as set out by the Joint Vaccination and Immunisation Committee (JVCI)

At this time, the vaccine is being offered to the top four priority cohorts, they are:

1. Residents in a care home for older adults and their carers
2. all those 80 years of age and over and frontline health and social care workers
3. all those 75 years of age and over
4. all those 70 years of age and over and clinically extremely vulnerable individuals

Primary care teams are delivering vaccines from the Wilson and the Nelson medical centres, and frontline health and social care staff are predominantly accessing hospital hub sites across South West London. These include St George’s and St Helier Hospitals, in addition to the first large vaccination site in South West London, situated at Hawks Road, Kingston. A roving team has also been mobilised to vaccinate care home residents and those who are housebound. The team has also vaccinated a number of care home staff whilst vaccinating residents.

Our local NHS colleagues are also working hard to establish a standard data set to show progress in numbers. The national data set suggest that across South West London, over 70 % of our residents aged 80 and above have already been vaccinated. We are also working on a local dataset which we hope to share at the end of next week.

From Cllr Ed Gretton to the Cabinet Member for Finance:

What is the revised MTFG gap for the financial year 2021/22 as reported in the January cabinet papers?

Reply

As set out in the table in para 7.1 of the January Cabinet report, the revised MTFG gap is as set out below.

	2021/22 £000	2022/23 £000	2023/24 £000	2024/25 £000
MTFG Gap (Cabinet 7 Dec 2020)	11,739	12,766	13,860	12,777
Capital Financing costs	372	(366)	(819)	223
DSG deficit update	4,922	1,793	1,979	2,163
New Homes Bonus	396	300	300	300
Contract costs/London Living Wage	(266)	0	0	0
Covid RNF and LCTS grant	(6,811)	0	0	0
Social Care Grant	(1,670)	0	0	0
Collection Fund – deficit funding	(2,573)	(2,573)	(2,573)	0
Additional Savings proposals	(1,223)	(1,404)	(1,404)	(1,404)
Council Tax adjustment (2% to 1.99%)	8	9	9	9
Other Corp items inc Reserves replenishment	1,710	710	(290)	(290)
Use of Reserves and 2020/21 u/s	(6,604)	(5,312)	0	0
Revised MTFG Gap Jan 21	0	5,922	11,061	13,778

From Councillor Joan Henry to the Cabinet member for Children and Education

After seeing the shocking images on social media of some of the “hampers” provided to families eligible for Free School Meals, can the cabinet member reassure us that none of our borough’s children have suffered this indignity?

Reply

I can assure you that none of the schools under the council’s control receive inadequate school lunch food hampers. Since the autumn there has been a requirement to organise lunch provision for children not attending school for Covid reasons, even when off school for a short period. Working with our cluster primary school representatives, we could see that the hamper offer was not sufficient and offered little flexibility to support family budgets while children were at home. We therefore opted for the supermarket voucher option which has always been permitted but not recommended by government. We are pleased to see government guidance has now caught up to be more open towards supermarket vouchers.

From Cllr Simon McGrath to the Cabinet Member for Housing, Regeneration and the Climate Emergency

What steps are the Council taking to ensure that the sites it owns, which had been planned to be used by Merantun Development Ltd, can now be used for building new social housing?

Reply

The redevelopment of these sites will be managed through the disposal process that will seek to balance the form of development including social housing with the council's fiduciary duty. These disposals will be progressed when the market conditions are right and in addition to any conditions within the sale contract their use will be controlled through the council's powers as planning authority.

Councillor Pauline Cowper to the Cabinet member for Partnerships, Public Safety and Tackling Crime

Can the Cabinet member outline the ongoing work to tackle the rise in Domestic Violence brought about by lockdowns to tackle the pandemic?

Reply

Partnership work to respond to Domestic Violence continues to be delivered throughout lock down. Specialist services delivered include:

- Independent Domestic Violence Advocacy service (IDVA) – providing one to one support to victims
- Complex Needs IDVA -specialist support for victims who have complex needs (mental health, substance misuse as well as domestic abuse and violence)
- Virtual One Stop Shop – where victims can call in and speak to arrange of partners and secure advise to support them
- Regular communications to promote the service's available
- Monthly multi-agency case panel meetings (DV MARAC) where the most high risk cases are discussed by partners and wrap around interventions agreed

In addition to this the police have developed and are implemented an enhanced approach to Domestic abuse and violence. Actions include:

- Ensuring body worn cameras are used when attending to incidents of domestic abuse and violence
- Maximising the opportunities to arrest at the scene or within 24 hours of the reported incident
- Increasing the use of Domestic Violence Protection Orders and Notices where appropriate
- Targeting activity against our High Harm offenders and those Wanted on Warrant

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Close working across the community safety partnership and the Children and Family Services also continues to ensure the safeguarding of children who are impacted by Domestic abuse and violence.

From Cllr Thomas Barlow to the Leader:

What is the total amount of money that has been spent on the Steer report and the council's attempts to oppose the implementation of the recommendations of the Improving Healthcare Together consultation report?

Reply

Thank you for your question. The Council commissioned the services of Roger Steer in order to assist it in discharging its duties under the Local Authority (Public Health, Health and Wellbeing Boards and Health Scrutiny) Regulations 2013 in properly considering and scrutinising the proposals for acute reconfiguration proposed by the Committee in Common as part of the Improving Healthcare Together programme. As these proposals will lead to the most significant changes in decades to healthcare services for residents across the borough, it is right that we ensured they were fully scrutinised and that we commissioned independent, specialist advice to do so.

Mr Steer was not commissioned to oppose the recommendations. The whole health scrutiny structure is designed to ensure affected local councils are afforded every opportunity to scrutinise, and if necessary to challenge, such far reaching proposals. Mr Steer produced a comprehensive report as well as giving evidence both to the Council's Healthier Communities and Older People Scrutiny Panel and to the Joint Health Scrutiny Committee covering the South West London region.

Following the decision by the Committee in Common to recommend that St Helier Hospital be downgraded, a decision was taken to refer this matter to the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, pursuant to Regulation 23(9) (a) and (c) of the 2013 Regulations. As we have done at every stage of the process, the Council took independent legal advice before making this decision, balancing the need to ensure we submit the proposals to proper and rigorous scrutiny and challenge and argue for what would be in the best interests of our residents with the cost to the Council of doing so.

The total cost of commissioning Mr Steer to undertake an independent review of the proposals, subsequent legal advice and the referral to the Secretary of State was £32,360. In contrast, the NHS spent over £2.2m on the IHT consultation and is estimated to have spent between £40m and £50m on similar exercises over the years with its repeated attempts at downgrading services at St Helier Hospital.

From Councillor Billy Christie to the Leader

Does the Leader agree with the Tories that giving the staff a day off for their work during the pandemic is "a gimmick"?

Reply

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I'd like to make it clear that those comments in no way reflect my views, or the views of the people of Merton. I'd like to thank our staff for their hard work throughout the pandemic and for going the extra mile to help our residents. Our staff have gone above and beyond, and being able to give them an additional day off is a small sign of our community's gratitude to them for their efforts.

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