

6: Councillor Ordinary Priority Questions to Cabinet Members

From Councillor Aidan Mundy to the Cabinet Member for Housing, Regeneration and Climate Emergency

Can the cabinet member please update Council on the steps his department has taken to address Clarion Housing Association's repairs performance?

Reply

As Councillor Mundy will be aware at the sustainable communities overview and scrutiny panel on the 2nd September executive officers of the Clarion housing group provided a verbal update on how they are working to deliver an improved repairs service and provide quality and timely services to its tenants. I also chair regular performance review meeting with council officers and the executive officers of the Clarion housing group which includes updates on the repair service. In addition I and council officers receive weekly updates on the ongoing repair works on the Eastfields Estate. Of course, where I am contacted by individual tenants regarding ongoing disrepair matters affecting their homes by email or letter, I will personally raise these cases with Clarion representatives

From Councillor David Dean to the Cabinet Member for Housing, Regeneration and the Climate Emergency

At the July council meeting the Cabinet Member said that he was 'shocked' by the conditions on the Eastfields estate and that he took the issue 'with the utmost seriousness'. If he has made this a priority then why then has he failed to ensure that Clarion is held to its responsibilities to maintain the Phipps Bridge estate?

Reply

We have asked Clarion to respond promptly to their tenants concerns after the matter was raised with us and to set out when the necessary and appropriate works will be carried out. We are obviously deeply concerned about these issues and whilst clarion is responsible for any repairs, we are in regular contact with them to highlight any issues raised by residents and to insist that outstanding repairs are fixed without further delay. I also visited Richmond Court on the Phipps Bridge Estate with on 31 August and spoke directly to many tenants in block about repair and maintenance issues - these are being followed up with Clarion.

From Councillor Helena Dollimore to the Leader of the Council

Following the decision to downgrade St Helier hospital and move services to Belmont, the capital allocation for the project has been reduced by more than 25% – from £551m to less than £400m.

As the choice of site was made on the basis of that capital requirement being met, and before the full impact of the pandemic was known, what impact does the Leader consider these changes would have had on the options appraisal, and what does he think would need to be done to ensure that they do not lead to worse health inequalities in South West London?

Reply

I am very worried that there will be a significant impact on the life chances and health of Merton's residents, particularly those on low incomes or in disadvantaged groups, as a result of the government's cut of nearly a third to capital funding for local hospital services.

I was already extremely concerned about the government's decision to remove key services from St Helier hospital, and my concerns have only increased since the outbreak of Covid-19, which has evidently caused considerably more harm to those who already faced health inequalities in South West London.

Given that the government's decision to close key services at St Helier hospital was taken on the basis of capital funding being a third higher than now, and given that their decision was taken before any assessment of the new health inequalities facing the area as a result of Covid-19 could take place, I feel that the only way to avoid worse health inequalities in South West London is for that government decision to be reassessed.

I have therefore written to the new chief executive of the NHS England, Amanda Pritchard, to request that the decision is looked at again on the basis of current information, rather than on information from two years ago which is now clearly out of date, as I believe her calling that decision in would help save lives in Merton and the wider South West London area.

From Councillor Anthony Fairclough to the Cabinet Member for Housing, Regeneration and the Climate Emergency

Could the Cabinet Member outline any activities he has undertaken to fulfil the motion passed at the July full Council meeting, where it was requested that Cabinet "establish a Tenants' Champion service"? Could he give details of any meeting he has had about this, providing dates and information on attendees?

Reply

Councillor Fairclough will be aware as he attended sustainable communities and overview scrutiny panel on the 2nd September that Councillor Nick Draper is the appointed Tenants' Champion. At the meeting Councillor Draper helpfully shared with the panel his ambitions and I am liaising with him closely. I have also discussed this with our Head of Housing Needs Steve Langley at our weekly meetings in terms of implementing the recommendations.

From Councillor Ben Butler to the Cabinet Member for Finance

In their announcement to raise National Insurance for low income workers in order to reduce social care charges for homeowners the Government said: "We expect demographic and unit cost pressures will be met through Council Tax, social care precept, and long-term efficiencies." What analysis has the cabinet member made of the impact of further "precepts" and council tax increases on council taxpayers in Merton?

Reply

The Council is currently assessing the impact on spending and potential loss of income of the recent Government announcement regarding raising National Insurance contributions to help fund health and social care for the elderly.

We have already made assumptions about future Council Tax increases and reflected them in the current Medium Financial Strategy. We have not, however, assumed any future precept increases for Adult Social Care as there have been no Government announcements on this.

I would remind the Member that the Council continues to operate a very generous Council Tax support Scheme to those residents who find themselves in financial difficulties.

From Councillor Ed Gretton to the Cabinet Member for Housing, Regeneration and the Climate Emergency

Can the cabinet member update council on their recent efforts to promote regeneration in the borough?

Reply

At this meeting councillors will consider Cabinet's decision to support the regeneration of Clarion's three estates at Eastfields, High Path and Ravensbury, the largest regeneration scheme in the borough. In July 2021 the council's Local Plan was considered and supported at the full council meeting. In the past month I have also held a workshop with councillors on the future of Mitcham town centre.

The Council is also supporting regeneration through a number of projects including the recently adopted FutureWimbledon SPD, Small Sites Toolkit SPD and Borough Character Study SPD.
<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/bf9b9bfc19f34cb1a4391af5344d723b>

The Council is continuing its programme of local shopping parade renewals funded through CIL. Colliers Wood High Street has been completed, Bramcote Parade in Mitcham is close to completion and procurement and preparatory works have commenced for Haydons Road North.

The Council's main regeneration priority remains Morden town centre. Regular briefings have been provided to the cross party steering group. The Council is working closely with TFL and Homes England to secure the investment needed to kickstart Morden regeneration. A strategic development framework for Morden has been published as part of the Local Plan. The Council is also investing £300,000 of CIL in Morden for art, greening, public realm improvements and meanwhile uses pending the longer term project commencing.

From Councillor Joan Henry to the Cabinet Member for Women and Equalities

Following the horrific events in Afghanistan can the Cabinet Member on what work is being done to offer support for Afghan refugees here in Merton?

Reply

The Home Office has contacted local authorities asking them if they can help resettle Afghan families including those who worked with British Forces in Afghanistan over the last 20 years. Specifically they are looking for family homes of 3 bedrooms or more. With no housing stock of our own we are working with housing associations, community networks and the private sector to identify suitable family sized accommodation. This is no easy task and we are working hard to pursue several leads.

In the meantime we are working with our partners in the voluntary sector to put in place a network of support to welcome Afghan refugees to the borough and help them settle in. We have some fantastic groups in the borough who we have worked with in the past to support refugees and in particular those organisations who have supported families through the Community Sponsorship Scheme. We are in close contact with these organisations.

We have worked with the Chamber of Commerce and Merton Connected (previously MVSC) to set up an appeal for donations to support [refugees and migrants](#) as part of our commitment to being a Borough of Sanctuary. The council has donated £15,000 to help support local VCS organisations that support refugees and migrants arriving in our borough.

However, we are starting to see a trickle of Afghan families presenting as homeless outside of the arrangements put in place by the Home Office. Whilst the responsibility for temporary accommodation post quarantine sits with the Home Office we have offered them temporary accommodation whilst we liaise with the Home Office on how the situation is best managed going forward.

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

Given the climate emergency and the recent flooding, has the Cabinet Member met with Thames Water and the Environment Agency to discuss changing the regulatory environment for Thames to ensure they maintain their assets to protect residents from regular flooding events?

Reply

Following the rains in July 2021, the Leader of the Council wrote to Thames Water seeking assurances that assets were being maintained and that Thames Water would make it easier for residents to contact Thames Water directly and get the help and reduced bills that Thames Water can provide. Since then officers have met Thames Water on a regular basis to identify issues, and ensure that all assets are maintained. As well as this, council officers, the Environment Agency and Thames Water attended

6: Councillor Ordinary Priority Questions to Cabinet Members

a meeting with Siobhain McDonagh MP on 2nd September 2021, officers will also be attending Raynes Park Forum alongside Thames Water later in September to ensure that residents are updated on these actions and know who to contact in the event of a flood. More information is available on Merton Council's website <https://www.merton.gov.uk/streets-parking-transport/streets-and-pavements/flooding/report> and a link for residents to Thames Water's flooding questionnaire is available on Thames Water's website <https://www.thameswater.co.uk/help/emergencies/flooding>

From Councillor Daniel Holden to the Cabinet Member for Local Environment and Green Spaces

What meetings has the cabinet member had with Thames Water and other partners to stop the frequent flooding we have seen across Merton this summer?

Reply

Following the rains in July 2021, the Leader of the Council wrote to Thames Water seeking assurances that assets were being maintained and that Thames Water would make it easier for residents to contact Thames Water directly and get the help and reduced bills that Thames Water can provide. Since then officers have met Thames Water on a regular basis, including on w/c 19th July, 26th July 8th September and corresponded weekly to identify issues, and ensure that all assets are maintained. In August 2021 council officers also applied for to Thames Water's surface water management programme for over £700,000 to help manage surface water in Raynes Park town centre and Wimbledon Park (jointly with Wandsworth. On the 25th of August, officers met with neighbouring boroughs, Thames Water, the Environment Agency and the South East Rivers Trust for the meeting of the South West London Strategic Flood Partnership where the recent flooding was discussed in detail. As well as this, council officers, the Environment Agency and Thames Water attended a meeting with Siobhain McDonagh MP on 2nd September 2021, officers will also be attending Raynes Park Forum alongside Thames Water later in September to ensure that residents are updated on these actions and know who to contact in the event of a flood. More information is available on Merton Council's website <https://www.merton.gov.uk/streets-parking-transport/streets-and-pavements/flooding/report> and a link for residents to Thames Water's flooding questionnaire is available on Thames Water's website <https://www.thameswater.co.uk/help/emergencies/flooding>

From Councillor David Chung to the Cabinet Member for Housing, Regeneration and the Climate Emergency

Can the Cabinet Member please update us on the numbers of rough sleepers in the borough and how this compares with other boroughs?

Reply

There are currently no known rough sleepers in Merton. The figures below show number of rough sleepers in neighbouring boroughs as at 31st August 2021. The only other boroughs with zero rough sleeper are Havering and Lambeth:

6: Councillor Ordinary Priority Questions to Cabinet Members

South West London

Croydon	12
Kingston upon Thames	16
Merton	0
Richmond upon Thames	16
Sutton	2
Wandsworth	29