

From Councillor Peter McCabe to the Leader

Is the Cabinet Member aware of reports of the soaring building costs of the proposed hospital at Belmont which threatens the economic viability of the whole scheme?

Reply

I am aware that additional requirements have been imposed on the 40 new and enhanced hospital schemes by DHSC and that this impacts on the financial viability of the Epsom St Helier proposal. I have also become aware of potential constraints on the overall capital pot and I have written to the CCG requesting clarification of the implications and sight of any revised plans as a result. I have not yet received a response.

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

Given the recent fiasco and waste of public money on the Hartfield Walk project, what processes has the cabinet member put in place to ensure valuable CIL money is spent wisely, correctly and projects have the necessary planning & licensing permissions that may be applicable?

Reply

The Hartfield Walk project is not a waste of public money. The Council received a CIL funding application from LoveWimbledon to deliver a series of placemaking improvements to what was an unassuming, blank space in Wimbledon town centre. The CIL bid sought to green the space by introducing planters, public seating, play graphics on the footway and to provide kiosks to support existing businesses. The kiosks also have green roofs to improve biodiversity. The project, as built, has delivered on these objectives.

The Councillor is mistaken regarding licencing. The business owners had the appropriate street trading licenses issued by the Council before, and after the Hartfield Walk improvements.

Cllr Dean's views on planning and the pre-planning communications should be directed to the applicant.

The Council already expects recipients of CIL funding to undertake their own due diligence on delivery matters such as planning. This will be strengthened in grant award contracts. It is disappointing that some of the Hartfield Walk structures were in place before planning permission was granted – despite officers raising such concerns.

From Councillor Stephen Alambritis to the Cabinet Member for Finance

Can the Cabinet Member provide an estimate of the number of Merton residents who have lost £20 per week as a result of the Government's decision to withdraw the extra

Universal Credit paid during the pandemic, and what is the overall net loss after the Government's attempt to make amends through the Household Support Grant?

Reply

As at August 2021 there were 7,992 Merton residents in receipt of Universal Credit. This equates to an estimated yearly loss of £8.3 million for residents. The Household Support grant awarded to Merton is £1,186,607. The fund is not intended to just help residents in receipt of Universal Credit.

From Councillor Eloise Bailey to the Cabinet Member for Local Environment and Green Spaces

Can the cabinet member give an update on (a) drain cleaning by ward since August 2021 and (b) details of meetings he has personally attended with Thames Water and/or the Environment Agency on flooding during the period 2020-2021?

Reply

- a) Just this calendar year to date we have completed over 6500 gully cleans across the borough. With a number of additional cleans to high priority gullies during July and August. The Council continues to undertake significant work to mitigate this risk and to ensure our highway assets flow as freely as possible.

The Leader of the Council has written to Thames Water following the flooding in July asking them to improve arrangements and invest in the necessary work to reduce this risk. Thames Water have arranged an independent review of this occurrence which will report in the new year. We hope to invite Thames Water to attend our Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Panel once they have completed the independent review to explain how they will address this recurring problem.

- b) I met with Thames Water on 20th October 2021.

Councillor Joan Henry to the Cabinet Member for Finance

Can the Cabinet member reassure me that the Council will be make it a priority to look after some of our most vulnerable residents by continuing to offer one of the country's most generous Council Tax Support Schemes?

Reply

At tonight's meeting we will be voting on adopting our 2022/23 Council Tax Support Scheme. The proposal is to again adopt the same scheme with the government uprating. This scheme still protects the most vulnerable residents and is one of the most generous schemes in the country.

From Councillor Dickie Wilkinson to the Cabinet Member for Housing, Regeneration and the Climate Emergency

At its meeting on 3rd February this year, council agreed to create the role of Morden Champion to drive forward the regeneration programme. Could the Cabinet member please update us on the progress made towards appointing the Morden Champion since then?

Reply

A cross-party Members' steering group has been established to oversee regeneration activities in Morden town centre. This ranges from the delivery of CIL funded projects, updates on planning activity and the status of the overall regeneration programme. I am actively considering the appointment of a Councillor Champion for Morden.

Councillor John Dehaney to the Cabinet Member for Local Environment and Green Spaces

Would the Cabinet Member outline how she is improving the borough's streets and parks in the next few months?

Reply

Our Neighbourhood Client Team will continue to conduct site inspections and work closely with the contractor's Area Managers to ensure that service standards are maintained, and any rectifications are addressed in line with our contractual agreements. In conjunction with the Assistant Director of Public Space, we are looking at restructuring this area in order to build greater resilience into the service with a focused neighbourhood approach which will be underpinned by a Cleaner and Green Programme Board.

To raise awareness of how our community can play their part in keeping Merton Clean, we will continue to expand our Keep it Clean, Love Merton campaign. This includes developing better communication of collection times, how to report issues and what penalties may be given if you are caught dumping waste on our streets.

We will continue to work on our pilot programme that specifically addresses small bags of waste dumped on our streets. Since its launch in October 2021, this pilot programme has issued approximately £15,500 in fines to offenders. We will be re-procuring a new environmental enforcement Contract with an increased specification to including the investigation and prosecution for fly tipping.

The service has invested in new street sweeping appliances that will be received shortly and deployed across the borough to improve the standards of sweeping on our footways. This makes the service more effective and improves the physical collection of dirt and litter.

In addition, and in response to feedback from our residents, the service has also invested an additional £300k in a jet washing programme for “grot spots”, a roving fly tipping response unit, improvements in signage and small infrastructure in our parks and a programme to improve biodiversity in urban areas.

From Councillor Nigel Benbow to the Cabinet Member for Children and Education

Funding growth is often requested to meet the increased demand for travel care and support services for children and young people. Can the Cabinet Member for Children and Education assure this has a neutral impact on those with protected characteristics to ensure the needs of children and young people are met to the same high standards of service provision in line with acceptable requirements?

Reply

Any decision where it is proposed that provision for young people should change, is scrutinised to understand the impact on vulnerable groups, including those children with protected characteristics. Through this scrutiny officers will seek to ensure that these groups are well supported, and not affected in an unfairly negative way.

From Councillor Sally Kenny to the Cabinet Member for Children and Education

Can the Cabinet Member please update us on the continuing work of the Council in supporting disadvantaged pupils during school holidays?

Reply

The council will be running and commissioning a range of Holiday, Activities and Food (HAF) Programs over the winter break. The council youth service will be running provisions at both youth centres, and the Adventure Playground will be open on an open access basis to local children in the first week. The three council provisions are focused on providing services in the three most disadvantaged areas of Merton. In addition, 10 voluntary sector providers have come forward to run a range of activities including sports and arts based work. There will be visits to Wimbledon Theatre Panto as well as workshops and Cinderella at the Polka. AFC Wimbledon and Tooting and Mitcham football club have also donated tickets for matches over the holiday. There will be some provision each day in the first week, between Christmas and New Year and on the first day in January. In the Government’s recent Autumn Budget and Spending Review, there was notification of the continuation of HAF funding nationally next year. Details will be announced in early 2022.

The council is using the Household Support Grant to ensure we continue to fund £15 per week school holiday supermarket vouchers for young people in receipt of Free School Meals, designating a further £600,000 to cover the recent autumn half term, the forthcoming Christmas holidays, the February half term and Easter holidays.

The Government’s Covid Support Grant, which previously helped to cover the cost of Free School Meals was insufficient for the summer holidays, but the council covered the gap with use of £75,000 from its own resources.

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