

Merton Council Council

21 November 2018

Supplementary agenda

31 Councillor Non-Priority Questions and Replies

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Ordinary

From Councillor Nick McLean to the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health:

With the publication of the London Housing plan and the subsequent increase in the annual target for new homes being built in the borough increasing from 400 homes to 1300, what provisions are being made to increase the number of GP surgeries to cope with the increased demand?

Reply

The council is supportive of much of the emerging new London Plan and we are actively pursuing a wide range of measures to enable Merton to deliver its share of London's new homes. This includes supporting the regeneration of three housing estates and Morden town centre, redevelopment of key sites in the current and emerging Merton Local Plan and ongoing detailed work on sites to provide new homes and the infrastructure necessary to support them.

However, like all outer London boroughs, we are objecting to the proposed increase in housing target for Merton. We are seeking a housing target for Merton that is ambitious but deliverable each year over the 15-year lifetime of the plan and through various economic cycles. Housebuilding changes in Merton largely in response to macro-economic factors; the previous four London Plans have also changed the housing targets for each of London's 33 boroughs but this change in policy has not automatically resulted in a substantial increase (or decrease) in homes being built in the affected boroughs. We continue to work closely with the NHS, specifically the Clinical Commissioning Group and the NHS Healthy Urban Development Unit, and with the council's Health and Wellbeing Board and the Public Health team to identify primary healthcare demands and needs as part of the council's emerging Local Plan. For specific locations such as Morden town centre where primary healthcare demand is already anticipated, the council is working with the NHS to allocate sites and seek planning obligations to help fund necessary infrastructure.

From Cllr Anthony Fairclough to the Cabinet Member for Environment and Street Cleanliness

Many residents have expressed frustration at the difficulty of getting in touch with the Council regarding the roll out of the new waste collection system - for example customers experiencing over 30 min wait times when calling the Council, or the online reporting system not working – is there anything the Cabinet Member would have done differently to prevent these issues, and what will the Council do differently going forward, including to resolve ongoing issues?

Reply

We are sorry that the service provided did not meet our own very high standards. We anticipated a significant increase in calls from the go live date, after a lessons learnt briefing from colleagues in a neighbouring borough. They advised us to increase the resource within the Contact Centre by 100%. This was done but on the first day the average number of calls received, normally 350 per day, increased to 1800, a 500% increase. Officers immediately sought assistance from across the organisation, and

this was given, to alleviate the pressures on the telephone queue. We changed the message at the start of the calls to advise of the potential for a long wait and redirecting callers to the website. This resulted in a high percentage of abandoned calls, normally after only a minute, so residents took heed of the advice and we received over 14,000 on-line transactions relating to waste services in October.

The vast majority of calls related to the non-delivery of wheeled bins. Our partners, Veolia, had received assurances that all bins had been delivered but this was clearly at a variance to the intelligence we were receiving from our residents. There was also a concentrated delivery of bins in the week prior to go live that resulted in an increase in calls. In regards to lessons learned we might not have agreed a go live date so close to Croydon's mobilisation and there should've have been better governance on the information between Veolia and the third party delivery of bins as, despite an early lead in time starting from 01 August, it transpired that many remained outstanding in the penultimate week.

There was also an issue with the availability of food caddies. This was due to the fantastic take-up of this service. At times it was necessary to halt further requests while Veolia awaited new supplies. These have been received and deliveries are ongoing. This has also assisted with the significant decrease in calls and on-line transactions.

The situation has now significantly improved and is being managed within agreed resources (no longer reliant on others within the organisation). The current average waiting time is a little over 1 minute with over 50% being answered within 30 seconds. My thanks to all the staff for the excellent service they have given to our residents during this difficult time. We continue to monitor, in real time, queues on the telephones and remedial action is taken to handle peaks in demand. We also continue to share intelligence with our partners, through twice daily conference calls, in the hope to remedy known concerns that are brought to our attention.

In October the website suffered no downtime. When Councillor Fairclough mentions the online reporting system not working I'm assuming he is referring to the 20 or so hours since go live when Veolia's system, Echo, had been off-line. This would impact on some transactions not being available for completion while the system is upgraded. We are unable to change this other than make the continued request that any planned maintenance is performed at a time when the traffic is slow i.e. late evening/early morning. We have received over 14,000 online transactions relating to waste services in the month of October, a testament of how useful and easy our residents find our transactional website.

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

Is it the council's policy to penalise residents by not notifying them of CPZ permit renewals, does the Cabinet Member accept this is unfair and how will he change the system in the future?

Reply

The council does not have a policy or practice of penalising residents by not notifying them of CPZ permit renewals. All residents and persons with a permit or season ticket

receive a renewal reminder within 4 weeks before a permit is due to expire. Reminders are sent by post or by email depending on the method the resident has previously used to purchase their permit. Sometimes depending on email providers, emails may be directed into their junk mail folder. Customers are often told to check this.

In addition, a two week grace period after the expiry of the permit is permitted. This is where no enforcement takes place by our Civil enforcement officers even though the permit has expired.

We do advise in our terms and conditions that renewal reminders are only a courtesy measure and that the onus is on the resident to ensure the permit is renewed in time.

From Councillor David Williams to the Leader of the Council:

Would the Leader please list the meetings and correspondence he has had since the last ordinary meeting of the Council on 12th September 2018 to save St Helier Hospital?

Reply

Since the last ordinary meeting of the Council on 12 September, the Leader of the Council, working with his Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health, has undertaken the following activity in support of St Helier Hospital:

- Worked with councillor colleagues to ensure there was representation at the Improving Healthcare Together (IHT) engagement events to continue to make the case for St Helier to be retained with a full suite of services
- The Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health met with the Clinical Chair of the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and representatives from the IHT Board on 2 October to discuss the programme and the work undertaken into deprivation
- Written to the Clinical Chair of the CCG and the Accountable Officer for South West London CCGs to express concerns about the process being followed and the gaps in the work undertaken on deprivation. Letters were sent on 7th and 13th November. A further letter is currently being drafted for issue imminently
- Worked with senior officers to ensure the Council's position regarding the process and the work on deprivation was clearly put in a meeting with representatives from the CCG attended by senior Council officers on 13 November

From Councillor Daniel Holden to the Cabinet Member for Environment and Street Cleanliness. Answered by the Cabinet member for Regeneration, Housing and Transport

With the increasing number of flexible car clubs, what is the council/cabinet member doing to ensure that floating car club cars do not stay put in any one location for long periods of time. This causes a nuisance and stress to residents. Please could the council provide a contact email and phone number to allow residents to get these clubs to move their cars on?"

Reply

The main flexible car club in Merton is ZipCar flex (www.zipcar.co.uk/flex). Zip Cars are one of several car clubs operating in the borough. Launched in June 2017 the flex scheme has been proving really successful in attracting members. Total Zip Car Membership in Merton is now 4923 (Sept 2018). Across London Zip Car membership alone is well over 200,000. By 2025 total car club membership across the capital could reach over 1,000,000 Members.

The Council has very rarely received complaints about car-club vehicles. However, we do pass on enquires to the relevant car club's customer service team to investigate and take appropriate action to relocate the vehicle if necessary.

Some residents can be very protective of the parking on the streets where they live. However, I am sure you will agree that residents who use the Zip Cars or similar car clubs have the very same entitlement to park in their own street, albeit with a hire vehicle. If they were to purchase additional private vehicles of their own they could be parked throughout the week taking up kerb space and not just when needed for a particular journey. Car-clubs make more efficient use of on-street bays compared to private cars. It remains in interest in Zip Car and other car clubs to keep vehicles on the move to maximise utilisation rates.

The way people move about London is changing very rapidly with lots of new mobility choices now available such as Uber, cycle hire schemes, on-demand mini bus services and car sharing apps/services. Car clubs form part of this mix of expanding mobility services.

The London Mayor has set a target to reduce car trips and car ownership across the capital and car clubs are seen as part of this solution, especially in outer London where public transport is less developed. The alternative is that our streets will become increasingly clogged with traffic to the detriment of resident's health, air quality and the environment.

For more information about the benefits of car clubs please see shared mobility charity CoMoUK web site www.como.org.uk

If people wish to report a car-club vehicle that should be moved, please google the relevant car-club provider and click 'contact-us' on their website.

Our main car club providers in Merton can be contacted via their websites

<https://www.zipcar.co.uk/>

<https://www.blue-city.co.uk/>

<https://www.drive-now.com/gb/en/london/>

From Councillor Janice Howard to the Cabinet Member for Environment and Street Cleanliness:

Can the Cabinet Member confirm that recycling and food waste are not mixed together when they are collected by Veolia?

Reply

Under our agreement with Veolia all recycling waste streams are required to be kept segregated including food waste.

To achieve this and to maintain operational efficiencies Veolia use split bodied vehicles which have two separate compartments at the rear of the vehicle, one side is for the recycling material and the other compartment is for the food waste.

We monitor the level of cross contamination very closely with our disposal contractor Viridor. To date we have received no rejected loads of recycling material due to contaminated of food waste.

From Councillor Nick McLean to the Cabinet Member for Community Safety, Engagement and Equalities:

As outlined in the meeting held with Cllrs and Officers on October 8th in the Cabinet Meeting Room, can the Cabinet Member confirm that it is still the Councils intention to apply for a High Court blanket injunction banning illegal traveller incursion onto designated Council land by Christmas?

Reply

I can confirm that it remains the intention to apply for an injunction before Christmas. This is intended to cover parks, open spaces and cemeteries (118), Mitcham Common (Wimbledon Common obtained one directly), Allotments (20), car parks (10 excluding multi storey), Libraries (7), Corporate accommodation (2), Schools (17 plus 5 Voluntary Aided if possible) industrial property and highways. The procedure requires that the initial injunction will be for three months following which an injunction for five years will be sought.

Strategic Theme

From Councillor David Dean to the Cabinet Member for Community and Culture:

When will the council reverse its disgraceful decision to charge for Little Leagues?

Reply

The Council has no specific plans to reverse its position on the introduction of charges for the Little Leagues.

The charges in question have been accepted by the Little Leagues and have now been adopted following a 12-month period of consultation and negotiation. The charges have been levied in order to cover the essential and basic costs of providing facilities, services and mitigating the environmental impacts of the several hundreds of children who participate in Little League activities across the borough weekly during the season.

The charges in question are very reasonable and equate to £10 per child per season (or approximately 40p per session), a season that extends from October through to the spring months and represents a small fraction of charges levied within the borough by commercial providers of seasonal junior football sessions, commonly over £100.

I believe that this decision, which brings Merton in line with Sutton and other Councils, will help provide essential funding for our sports fields and go towards securing a future for Little Leagues in Merton. In the face of increasing austerity measure from Conservative central Government, combined with delegation of financial

responsibilities, to local government, prudent measures such as this will in the longer term be seen as the protection that our community needs and deserves.

**From Cllr Eloise Bailey to the Cabinet Member for Children Services.
Answered by the Cabinet Member For Adult Social Care And Health**

Given that the strategic theme report states that the percentage of coverage for MMR2 (2 doses) for Merton is just 66.7% in the years 2017/18 compared with 80.4% in 2016/17 and the rate for England is 87.2%, what is Merton council doing to increase the rate of vaccinations to ensure there is herd immunity for our children and other vulnerable people, and what does the council think has caused the severe drop in uptake?

Reply

To clarify the Merton and the London position on childhood immunisations, a large data issue has been identified across the whole of London recently. Due to a major change in the Child Health Information Systems (CHIS) that record the childhood immunisations data for London, migrating into 4 CHIS hubs, this has affected the accuracy of the reported data across London for 2017/18. NHS Digital who publishes the data have therefore put a caveat and asked that the data is treated with caution saying 'Local Authority (LA) COVER data in London has been provided by four newly-established CHIS hubs and as such reflect a system in transition. Changes in Local Authority coverage in the London region should be interpreted with caution.' Quarter 1 data has now been published for 2018/19 which shows some good uptake across some immunisations, however it still shows MMR 2nd dose and the pre-school booster (Dtap/IPV Booster) for children aged 5 as being similar to the 2017/18 annual rates seen. We are working with NHS England, Merton CCG and partners to look at the approach around these particularly with the aim of putting any additional actions in place to improve the accuracy of the data as well as increasing take up.

Since April 2013, NHS England have been responsible for commissioning of all national immunisation programmes from local providers in line with agreed service specifications and hence are accountable for ensuring that the population are protected from vaccine preventable diseases. Local Authorities (through the Director of Public Health) have an oversight function to ensure plans are in place to protect their population, however do not commission any of these services.

The good news is that the annual childhood immunisations uptake has improved across all immunisations comparing 2013/14 (benchmark year) to 2017/18 with 2016/17 showing Merton having some of its highest immunisations rates. The 2016/17 rates are higher or similar to the London average. London has however historically lower vaccination rates than England.

Actions supporting improving childhood immunisations include:

- The Local Authority working with NHS England commissioners, Merton CCG and providers of immunisations through the Merton Immunisations Steering group which meets regularly with an action plan that is refreshed annually and data monitored quarterly.

- Childhood Immunisations is one of the 5 key outcomes under the Best Start in Life theme for the Health and Well-being Strategy (2015 – 2018). This keeps a focus on improving immunisations locally.
- Public Health promotion of childhood immunisations across the borough e.g. articles in My Merton (which is a publication that goes into every single home in Merton), Young Merton Together, Social media etc. Promotion of children's flu vaccinations through leaflets in all Libraries and Children's Centres
- Health Visiting services commissioned by LA are systematically (through universal health reviews) as well as opportunistically asking about the child's immunisations, promoting immunisations take up as well as signposting parents to their GP for their child to be immunised.

From Councillor Nick McLean to the Cabinet Member for Education:

Despite the Leader of Council repeatedly stating that the site of the former Adult Education Centre in Whatley Avenue would not be turned into a residential development, can the Cabinet Member confirm that this is indeed now the intention, and when was this decision taken?

Reply

In September 2018, Cabinet resolved to ask Merton's communities their thoughts on stage 2 of Merton's draft Local Plan. The draft Local Plan contains a variety of potential sites for redevelopment over the next 15 years.

The council's site at Whatley Avenue is proposed for redevelopment over the next 15 years for "Residential use class once it has been demonstrated that there is no demand for educational use at primary or secondary level". Cabinet recognise that this site could either provide school places but if this is no longer needed, it should be used to provide much needed new homes in Merton.

Anyone who is interested in the long-term future of Whatley Avenue or any other potential sites in the draft Local Plan <https://www.merton.gov.uk/planning-and-buildings/planning/local-plan/newlocalplan> should respond to the consultation by writing to future.merton@merton.gov.uk before 6th January 2019.

From Cllr Carl Quilliam to the Cabinet Member for Education

How much do schools pay towards the apprenticeship levy each year and what proportion of that do Merton's schools access? Can you provide a breakdown for both council maintained schools and academies locally?

Reply

The Apprenticeship levy came into being in April 2017. As Merton has a wage bill over £3 million we are required to pay 0.5% of that bill. The Levy is paid via payroll to the HRMC. Maintained Schools are required by the government to be included in the calculations of the Levy (voluntary aided and academies are excluded as they are considered Employers). We have 16 schools that do not buy in the Council's payroll service so their providers will make the deductions and submit these on the Schools behalf. For 2017/18 the Council has paid £579k of which the schools have contributed £364k this is based on actual pay which changes on a monthly basis.

Merton schools are able to access the apprenticeship levy fund. There are no conditions attached they simply need to contact HR as they have access to the Council's digital account and are able to provide advice to the schools on apprenticeships, which has been happening. The levy can be used for the development (training) of new apprentices or to develop the existing Schools workforce if there is an associated standard.

The apprenticeship levy is paid monthly to the providers through a digital account. Of the total number of Local Authority schools able to access the Levy through HR 17 have committed to or are accessing the Levy. The cost of programmes those Schools are currently accessing or have plans to access is £153k for the duration of the programmes.

From Councillor Ed Gretton to the Cabinet Member for Education:

Can the Council explain why in recent years LBM schools have been below the national average on a-level results and what the improvement plans are to ensure LBM schools raise their standards to deliver a-level results that become materially better than the national average?

Reply

Merton's provisional A level performance for 2018 shows an improvement on 2017 outcomes (please note these figures will probably change on publication of the performance tables by the DfE in January 2019):

- The proportion of pupils achieving A*-C grades rose by 1.3 percentage points to 76.3% which is broadly in line with the national average of 77%.
- The proportion of pupils achieving A*-B rose by 4.5 percentage points to 49.5%
- The proportion of pupils achieving A*-A rose by 1.9 percentage points to 21.9%

These improvements follow a focus by Merton schools on this key stage, with support from the Local Authority, including reviews of all maintained 6th forms in the Borough. The outcomes for maintained schools only (excluding academies) are even stronger.

The focus for the Local Authority remains achievement at the higher grades of A*-B, where performance remains below national averages. There is a comprehensive plan in place, supported by funding from the Merton School's Partnership, 'Attain', which includes the following actions:

- Arranging Senior Examiner visits for subject teachers
- Encouraging A level teachers to become subject examiners with 4 days of release time to facilitate this
- Funding professional memberships of subject associations in key underperforming subject areas
- Organising learning visits of senior staff to outstanding sixth forms in the local area

- Supporting the sharing of good practice relating to monitoring, target setting, use of data and Careers Information Advice and Guidance through Head of Sixth Form meetings
- Developing online subject networks for A level teachers

We want to support our sixth forms to be inclusive and all our children to reach their full potential, and therefore we will not support measures that would lead to slightly lower attaining pupils being denied the opportunity to study at sixth form.

From Councillor Hayley Ormrod to the Cabinet Member for Community and Culture:

Given concerns about the air quality in many children's play areas across the borough, but especially in Haydons Road Recreational Ground, what action is the Cabinet Member taking to monitor and improve air quality, and what plans are in place to relocate children's play areas that are in heavily polluted areas?

Reply

Merton takes the issue of air quality very seriously and has produced a new Air Quality Action Plan which covers a number of specific themes aimed at reducing the causes of pollution, as well as mitigating its impact. As an authority we are taking those difficult decisions around influencing the reduction in polluting vehicles through our diesel levy, and we have specifically set aside part of the action plan to cover issues of schools.

As part of this commitment we are continually reviewing the monitoring locations in the borough that take into account specific sensitive areas and this will include school playgrounds in polluted areas as from January 2019. (The Diffusion Tube network is reviewed annually).

Our expert officers have reviewed the playground area and looked at the mapped data and although the road is considered a polluted location the fall-off expected in pollution would mean that the play area is safe. That said, I have asked that officers consider this location as a potential site for further monitoring which they will consider as part of the monitoring network refresh.

A link to the Air Quality Action Plan is here:

<https://www.merton.gov.uk/assets/Documents/Merton%20AQAP%2020182023.pdf>

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