

# **Merton Council Council**

**18 November 2020**

## **Supplementary Agenda 5**

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**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

## 07: Non ST Questions

	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.

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**

## 07: Non ST Questions

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

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**



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

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.

## 07: Non ST Questions

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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**From: Councillor Stan Anderson to the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health**

What work has the Council undertaken to safeguard care home residents who are discharged from hospital with a positive test result for COVID-19?

**Reply**

The Council has been working in partnership with South West London CCG and a local care provider since September to establish a dedicated facility that provides a safe discharge destination for care home residents who have tested positive for COVID-19 while in hospital. To limit the spread of COVID-19 in care homes when the hospital confirm that a resident is ready to be discharged but has tested positive we have commissioned with the CCG this temporary alternative accommodation.

The resident will be discharged from hospital and will likely remain there for approximately 2 weeks until they are no longer infectious and can return to their permanent care home. This work pre-empted national Government direction to local authorities to ensure the availability of provision of this type in their area. As a result of our early focus on the need for a unit of this type we have been able to establish a 13 bed unit in a local care home that is physically separated from the main part of the care home, has its own dedicated staff team and has been inspected by the Care Quality Commission who have confirmed it meets all necessary infection control standards. The unit opened for admissions in early November and is the first unit of its type to be up and running in South West London, with further units planned to be available in neighbouring boroughs in coming months. The unit is funded by South West London CCG who have also made arrangements to ensure that there is specific GP support for individuals while they are resident in the unit.

More broadly, officers from the Council's Public Health and Adult Social Care services continue to work closely with NHS colleagues and with care home managers to ensure that all care homes in Merton are supported to continue providing safe and high quality care to residents through the period of the pandemic.

**From: Councillor Thomas Barlow to the Leader of the Council**

Does the cabinet member agree with the Independent Reconfiguration Panel's advice that **Epsom and St Helier University Hospitals NHS Trust's buildings are not fit for purpose and has the absence of a workforce** in emergency care to deliver accepted clinical standards?

**Reply**

We recognise that the buildings St Helier need bringing up to date in order to provide the facilities our residents need and deserve. This is why we have been calling for investment there as opposed to the downgrading of services proposed by the CCGs. We do not agree that it is not capable of hosting a world class workforce to deliver emergency care. What is required is a strategic approach to workforce development rather than an acceptance that services must be built around the contrived constraint of a shortage of clinical staff. It is extremely disappointing that the IRP appears to

have ignored the many cogent arguments put forward by the Council, particularly in relation to the impact of the proposals on the more deprived communities in our borough. It is of great concern to us that the Improving Healthcare Together partnership has not seen fit to pause and reconsider in light of a proper analysis of the impact of Covid-19, including the disproportionate effect on people from BAME communities including the disproportionate effect on people from BAME communities and those from other protected groups including those facing socio-economic disadvantage.

**From: Councillor Laxmi Attawar to the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health**

What work is being done to address the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on vulnerable groups?

**Reply**

Merton's Local Outbreak Control Plan prioritises community engagement and protecting vulnerable residents and those groups that have had a disproportionate impact of COVID-19 including young people, older people, Black Asian and Minority Ethnic communities, carers and residents with a disability. We are working closely with our partners in the Merton Health and Care Together partnership including South West London Clinical Commissioning Group, to align communications and engagement approaches and to tackle health inequalities that have been exacerbated by COVID-19.

The Council's approach, overseen by the Health and Wellbeing Community sub-group, includes the development of a network of Community Champions who pass on key messages to their networks, a series of community engagement workshops to understand the lived experience in our communities and pro-active engagement and support to Faith Groups and Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) organisations including Merton Mencap and BAME Voice, who are leading on community led programmes of engagement and resilience building.

We have contributed funding to Merton Chamber of Commerce and Merton Voluntary Service Council's Merton Giving initiative, which launched its Coronavirus Fund Phase 2 'Response, Resilience & Recovery' Programme on Monday 16<sup>th</sup> November with £150,000 available for VCS organisations across three themes; addressing disproportionate impact, supporting vulnerable people and connecting our communities.

Mitigating the health harm of COVID-19 is a key part of the Council's approach and we are launching a 'Better Health Merton' campaign to encourage residents, staff and volunteers to improve their health and reduce the risk of severe COVID-19 by eating healthily, stopping smoking, getting a flu-jab and managing their long term conditions e.g. diabetes.

**From: Councillor Paul Kohler to the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health**

Could the Cabinet Member please explain the large increase in excess deaths due to non-Covid related causes during the period 28/3/20 - 24/4/20 – setting out steps that have been taken to identify deaths that were due to changes in care provision and/or access to health services and the measures being taken to ensure this does not happen in the future?

**Reply**

During the first COVID-19 peak, there was an increase in deaths across the borough, in similar patterns seen across the UK. Some of these excess deaths might have been due to undiagnosed COVID (people who had symptoms but were not tested), and some of may have been due to people not accessing healthcare services. We have recognised this and are working to address the backlog to ensure those who are awaiting health services can access them. The national campaign promoting the NHS is open continues, with messaging to the public reinforcing the importance of accessing healthcare, taking up vaccinations, and symptoms to look out for. We continue to monitor closely the situation in Merton, and are working closely with our partners in the CCG and NHS, and can report the following:

- **Waiting times:** South West London and CCG performance against waiting standards is just under 60%. This is the highest performing in London, but work is being done to meet the full recovery target of 92%.
- Since June, there has been a steady return to business and usual activity (BAU) and in August, the backlog of patients waiting over 18 weeks reduced by 5,719. South West London is now at 98% of BAU activity for first outpatient work and 81% for admitted activity. Patients on waiting lists are actively contacted and booked in.
- **Two-week waits for cancer:** Provider and CCG performance also achieved the two week wait standard for cancer in August, at 96.6% and 96.4% respectively. South West London again leads London in performance against this target . Referral volumes are steadily increasing however they remain approximately 20% lower than the same period last year (as of August 2019). There are national and local campaigns for patients to present early
- **Diagnostics:** The activity in diagnostics were tracking at 89% against pre-COVID-19 activity levels showing that South West London is making progress on the reduction of the backlog. Some diagnostics are being carried out in primary care to support this, and reduce waiting times for patients.
- **Urgent and Emergency Care:** attendances at A&E are tracking at 78% of BAU levels but are also impacted by initiatives to use 111 more effectively . 111 calls are 32% higher than this time last year
- **Mental Health:** Mental health service activity across inpatient, community and primary care is well in excess of levels in 2019 / 2020.
- Referral and access to psychological therapies (IAPT) also continues to increase. IAPT recovery has maintained a steady performance throughout with the move to virtual appointments. South West London CCG continues to meet the dementia diagnosis target, but challenges in undertaking assessments during COVID-19

means work is being undertaken, such as monitoring by the Mental Health Transformation Board, to ensure this performance is not interrupted

- **Primary Care:** GP practices are actively reaching out to their most vulnerable patients, including those living with long term conditions, those living with a learning disability and severe mental illness. They continue to target children for immunisations and women for cervical smears and have made very good progress on delivering the flu vaccination this year. Once again, they are ranked first in London. They are also promoting new ways of working such as remote consultations.

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

How has the Council ensured vulnerable groups are still able to access activities and support despite the necessary closure of day centres during the pandemic?

**Reply**

Merton closed all of its four in-house day centres in March apart from JMC in Mitcham. This site was kept open to support a number of customers with learning disabilities and families who were in most need of support. This was agreed to be fifteen people per day. At that time attendance at all sites had dropped to a handful of people per day due to widespread concern about COVID-19 and the vulnerability of our customers.

Day service staff worked with colleagues across Adult Social Care to identify alternative support for customers and families. This involved regular phone calls and video link ups but also social workers arranging extra care calls and increases to personal budgets if required, and support with shopping and collecting medication. The teams worked closely with the Merton Response Hub to arrange practical support. The learning disability team made its health and therapy staff available to support families.

Within a couple of weeks day service staff from the learning disability centres were organising Zoom calls and running dance, exercise and music sessions on line, linking people together. Staff also began making home visits where safe to do so, and as restrictions eased, collected people from home to go for walks and visits to cafes. In mid-July Leyton Road re-opened under strict conditions and took in ten people per day while continuing the alternative support to its wider group of customers.

Customers living in residential care homes and supported living sites were kept at home. They have participated in the video calls and activities and where appropriate part of local walks.

Our older people's services, Woodlands and Eastway were both closed in March; Woodlands was a planned closure and the customers were supported by Eastway staff. Again social work teams arranged extra care calls and worked with families to agree extra personal budgets if required. Help with shopping and medication was



provided. Respite care was arranged in a number of cases. In August when 'shielding' was lifted, day service staff began home visits to customers as part of the support arrangements.

These arrangements are continuing and kept under review by day service and social work staff.

**From: Councillor David Williams to the Leader of the Council**

Does the cabinet member agree with the Independent Reconfiguration Panel's advice that the greater availability of senior staff across a range of specialist expertise leads to better, faster decisions about the sickest patients?

**Reply**

No.

This advice is predicated on a view that larger hospitals allow for a greater range of specialisms. But that is not the only consideration at play. We do not consider there is a proper evidence basis to support larger hospitals based on that argument. Taking services further away from patients and visitors, with the risk of creating a reluctance for patients or visitors to attend because of the distance and there is real doubt as to the evidence that, will have an impact on health outcomes whatever the size of a hospital. It is extremely disappointing that the IRP appears to have ignored the many cogent arguments put forward by the Council, particularly in relation to the impact of the proposals on the more deprived communities in our borough. It is of great concern to us that the Improving Healthcare Together partnership has not seen fit to pause and reconsider in light of a proper analysis of the impact of Covid-19, including the disproportionate effect on people from BAME communities and those from other protected groups including those facing socio-economic disadvantage.

**From: Councillor Peter McCabe to the Leader of the Council**

Can the Leader give an update on Merton scrutiny's reference back on the government's plans to move health services from St Helier to Belmont?

**Reply**

Following the decision of the Older People and Healthier Communities Panel, the Council made a referral to the Secretary of State asking him to exercise his powers to seek advice from an Independent Reconfiguration Panel about the proposals to downgrade St Helier hospital. We were pleased that he agreed to this request. However, on 30 October we were informed that the advice of the Independent Reconfiguration Panel was that the proposals should proceed. The Secretary of State indicated that he was prepared to accept that advice. This was extremely disappointing, not least because the IRP appears to have ignored the many cogent arguments put forward by the Council, particularly in relation to the impact of the proposals on the more deprived communities in our borough. It is of great concern to

us that the Improving Healthcare Together partnership has not seen fit to pause and reconsider in light of a proper analysis of the impact of Covid-19, including the disproportionate effect on people from BAME communities and those from other protected groups including those facing socio-economic disadvantage. We are taking advice about what options now remain open to us.

**From: Cllr Eloise Bailey to the Cabinet Member for Partnerships, Public Safety and Tackling Crime**

During Covid - 19, it has been reported that the need from those suffering domestic abuse for support has risen significantly, with victims finding it even more difficult to escape during lockdown. Could the Cabinet Member please explain the situation across Merton?

**Reply**

Referrals for domestic violence incidents are screened and then presented at the Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC), which is held every three weeks. The MARAC is chaired by a representative from the police and includes membership from all relevant sectors including Adult Social Care, Housing, Children Schools and Families as well as voluntary sector partners. A social worker from the Merton safeguarding team is a regular participant to the MARAC meetings where full sharing information agreements are applied. If there are urgent cases that fall out of the set meeting timescales 'extra ordinary' multi-agency meetings are arranged. The arrangements for working with victims of domestic abuse have remained in place during the pandemic and while the group meet using video conferencing the work has continued to support people throughout with victim support continuing to operate a virtual one stop service.

Merton's Domestic Violence and Abuse services are still operating virtually and have done so since the end of March.

- Information about services has been put out on social media on a regular basis since the end of March.
- Victims have been advised that they are allowed to leave their house if they are not safe and that police officers will go into a house to ensure someone's safety.
- 16 days against violence and abuse campaign takes place in November 25<sup>th</sup> November – 10<sup>th</sup> December and there will be information going out on Social media to advertise services.
- Support services within Merton are still operating virtually and continue to support victims.

For more information, please visit: [www.merton.gov.uk/domesticviolence](http://www.merton.gov.uk/domesticviolence)

**From: Councillor Omar Bush to the Cabinet member for Adult social care and Public Health:**

Is it 'business like' to fail to bid for available funding to improve air quality in Merton?

**Reply**

I can assure members that the Council's Air Quality service is actively pursuing funding for air quality initiatives wherever possible. Examples of the council's activity includes two bids submitted in October for Defra's air quality grant scheme that provides funding to help improve air quality. These bids were for:

1. **Behavioural Insight - Whole School Air Quality Approach:** This project would seek to use behavioural insights as a means of educating and nudging primary school children to change their behaviour, promote health & wellbeing, and the principles of sustainability in relation to air quality.

A behavioural insight team would strive to develop a series of interactive educational learning activities to inform the children about air quality (NO<sub>2</sub> and PM<sub>10,2.5</sub>) and incentivise them to implement changes within their schools and their community through learning and nudge techniques.

This would also allow through teaching, the children to come up with ideas to impact on air quality and these ideas will be implemented at their school sites (for example, bug hotels, green screen/wall, urban wilderness, gorilla gardening, food growing, sensory gardens, Parklets etc.). This could be done in school class bubbles in line with COVID-19 guidelines, utilising outside areas to hold the interactive pop-up activities and stalls.

This also links in with the current concepts that are being implemented within Merton (School Streets, Anti-Idling projects) and also emphasising initiatives such as Active Travel (walking and cycling to and from school).

2. **Clean Air Villages 4 (CAV4) :** Cross River Partnership's (CRP's) Clean Air Villages 4 (CAV4) project will build on the work undertaken through the Defra-funded Clean Air Villages 1, 2 and 3 projects, and deliver ambitious Freight Solutions for a Clean Air business recovery from Covid. CAV4 will enhance CRP's measure BEST monitoring tool, to capture, measure and analyse pollutants (including NO<sub>2</sub>, CO<sub>2</sub>, PMs) within 23 of London's most polluted 'hotspots'.

The CAV4 project has been designed to be delivered virtually, and / or physically, or using any hybrid combination of the two, over the period 1st April 2021 – 31st December 2022.

The outcome of these bid applications will be announced and awarded in early 2021.

**From: Councillor Joan Henry to the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health**

Can the Cabinet member outline what work is being done to counteract impact of food poverty on the health of young people in the borough?

## Reply

In response to COVID-19, promoting healthy weight remains a priority and activities will be reviewed and adapted to respond to current challenges. Food poverty and insecurity has been a main focus of Merton's COVID response. This included the development of a Community Fridge Network, which established a food distribution hub from Merton College, with fresh food supplied by the London Food Alliance/ Fareshare. Food parcels were distributed to existing partners, to pass on to residents in need. On average over 300 parcels a week were distributed, the majority of which went to families living in the east of the borough.

In September 2020, The Merton Community Fridge voluntary and community sector organisations (Sustainable Merton, Wimbledon Guild, Commonsides Trust and The Polish Family Association) successfully won a bid of £50,000 from the CIL (Community Infrastructure Levy) Neighbourhood Fund, to set up four Community Fridges across the borough. Moving forward, these four organisations will operate as the Merton Community Fridge Network.

The Community Fridge Network in addition to distributing fresh food will also support local communities by providing a Community hub where people can: learn about preparing and cooking fresh healthy food, expand their food choices through education and access, support children's after school cooking sessions and develop further links with local food growing enterprises and volunteer led community gardens to supply locally grown fruit and vegetables.

All schools are supported by the borough Healthy Schools London network to develop School Food policies which promote a healthy eating environment and include links to healthy eating resources. We are also very active in ensuring that parents register for free school meals and approve applications within a few days where eligible. During the October half term break, the Council agreed to fund families eligible for free school meals, if families need further support schools are encouraged to sign post them to the Merton Covid Community Hub.

We are committed to promoting healthy eating messages and are continuously seeking more effective ways of achieving this with our partners, and have tabled this as an agenda item at the next Community Response Steering Group meeting.

<https://news.merton.gov.uk/2020/10/26/merton-council-pledges-to-cover-the-cost-of-free-school-meals-this-half-term/>