

Merton Council Council

18 November 2020

Supplementary Agenda 7

33 Councillor Non-Priority Questions and Replies

1 - 8

This page is intentionally left blank

ORDINARY COUNCIL MEETING – WEDNESDAY 18 NOVEMBER 2020

Non Priority Questions

Ordinary Council Questions

From Councillor Daniel Holden to the Cabinet member for Housing, Regeneration and the Climate Emergency:

How many fines have been levied against rogue landlords in the last two years and how much money has been raised?

Reply

In the last two years there has been a total of 4 cases where fines were handed down to Landlords for breaches of the Housing Act 2004. The total fines amounted to £ 23,545.

From Councillor Andrew Howard to the Cabinet Member for Local Environment and Green Spaces:

Can the cabinet member tell me what increased public litter bin emptying has been put in place to cope with the increased rubbish, especially at weekends when the public litter bins are most prone to overflow?

Reply

I am pleased to advise that over the last seven months since the first lockdown in April 2020 our service provider Veolia has maintained and deployed a full street cleansing service and I would like to place on record my acknowledgement to the commitment and professionalism demonstrated by the Veolia workers in delivering these critical front-line services during these unprecedented time. I am also grateful to the many residents who help to keep our borough clean either by using our bins, taking their litter home with them

The street cleansing service including litter bins continues to be a priority area of focus for our Client team, Veolia and our residents The Council's performance monitoring officer continues to undertake both monthly and quarterly inspections across the borough to assess the level of contract performance.

Over the last six-month period we have received 232 reports of over flowing litter bins. When reviewing this data compared to the previous six months and despite the intensification of the use of public spaces by residents working from home and staying local, we have seen only a marginal 8% increase in the number of reported incidents over this period, equating to 1.3 overflowing litter bins across the borough reported daily.

From Councillor Anthony Fairclough to the Cabinet Member for Women and Equalities

In August 2020, Cllr Bailey asked the then Cabinet Member a question which received no response from her nor from the then Leader of the Council, when it was

passed to him. That question was: will the Cabinet member consider implementing name anonymous recruitment practices in Council staff recruitment, and if not, why not? This is used by many organisations, including by the GLA/the Mayor of London. In the past, the administration has pointed to the difficulties of doing so, or that the numbers of BAME staff in junior roles is sufficiently representative of the borough, but we feel this misses the point. Furthermore, in September 2019 Council voted to “carry out a review into how to make being a councillor more accessible”, and we would like an update on what work has been carried out on this?

Reply

In order to provide this member with a comprehensive response it might be relevant to refer the member to this paper that went to the JCC in June 2020 which explains in detail why the Council have considered and decided not to implement blind recruitment.

On the last point made by the Councillor referring to how we make being a Councillor more accessible we are currently preparing a comprehensive programme for new Councillors to Merton in advance of the next election so that they will have an indepth induction into their new role.

<https://democracy.merton.gov.uk/documents/s32913/JCC%20ethnic%20minorities%20senior%20manager%20workforce%20-%20June%202020%20final.pdf>

From Councillor Simon McGrath to the Cabinet Member for Finance

Could the Cabinet Member please explain how Croydon Council’s recent 114 declaration will impact Merton, such as in areas of shared services like the South London Waste Partnership?

Reply

The Senior Management team in Merton along with our colleagues as part of the South London Waste Partnership are currently assessing all areas of potential impact and associated financial risks. At this stage I am unable to comment as this matter first needs to be addressed internally within Croydon and their intentions on any changes that may impact on shared services.

From Councillor Nigel Benbow to the Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure and Skills

The Battles Area Residents’ Association has been campaigning for many years to get the Haydon’s Road Recreation Ground former sports facility (enclosed fenced hardcourt area), back into community use in South Wimbledon. Can the Cabinet Member offer their support for this, and why has this taken so long?

Reply

I can advise that the current use of the site does aid in supporting local business and improving the wider outcomes of road safety through its use as a training centre for motorbike training and safety.

However, I also appreciate the development potential of this space to support the use of this area back into sports use. The site has been earmarked in our Football Facility Plan as a priority under small sided facilities – see quote “*There is an aspiration from the group to improve the MUGA for football and other sport usage. This opportunity was also highlighted by Fulham FC Foundation*”.

The development of this facility will be dependent on funding to support these aspirations and the service team will be looking to secure a bid for these works through funding streams as they arise.

From Councillor Oonagh Moulton to the Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure and Skills

In recent weeks we have seen an increase in the number of private firework parties and bonfires across the borough plus associated anti-social behaviour with the use of fireworks along with distress to residents and their animals.

Can the Cabinet Member assure us that the cancelled fireworks events normally held by the council on 5th November and first Saturday in November in Wimbledon Park and Morden Park, will return next year?

Reply

We very much hope that we are in the position to deliver our long-standing organised firework displays. Whilst this will be dependent on any requirements involving the gathering of large crowds, it is recognised that organised events such as these are very popular with the public; offering the opportunity for a fun and safe community event. I can also confirm that the contractual arrangement for the provision of fireworks to support our regularly planned events is already in place in anticipation of next year.

From Councillor Nigel Benbow to the Cabinet Member for Housing, Regeneration and the Climate Emergency

Pavement repairs are badly needed across South Wimbledon (Abbey ward). Can the Cabinet Member list the number of pavement repairs and road repairs by wards across Merton in the last ten years?

Reply

The London Borough of Merton undertakes a system of regular highway safety inspections of all its adopted highways in order to comply with its statutory duty to maintain highways in accordance with Section 41 of the Highways Act 1980. Safety inspections are designed to identify defects that meets the Council intervention criteria. The risk of danger is identified by a highways officer on site, and if a defect meets the intervention criteria this is categorised in terms of an appropriate priority response.

Defects that the Highway Officer's pass across to our term contractor to repair would have to meet the council strict intervention level and due to the current financial position of the Council, it is only possible to treat those defects that meet the current

intervention criteria . For information, Merton Council's intervention thresholds are 20mm either on a footway or a designated cycleway and 40mm within the carriageway.

Due to the time it takes to extract and populate the data for this request, it is not possible to turn-around within the Council Questions timeframe. We can only been able to provide information for 2019 and 2020 (to date).

In 2019 there was a total of 2108 reactive repair jobs that were undertaken and on the footways and 1328 on the carriageway. For Abbey Ward this equates to 91 reactive repairs undertaken on the footway.

For 2020, up until the 16th November 2020, there has been a total of 2347 reactive jobs undertaken on the footways and 1237 on the carriageway. For Abbey ward this equates to 88 reactive repairs undertaken on the footway.

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

What is the total number of trees that will be removed as a result of the planning applications passed in the last three meetings of the PAC, and when will the council plant the 107 trees at the Harris Academy as stated in the planning permission?

Reply

A review of the Committee reports show that a total of 62 trees will be removed. The quality of those trees was assessed before the decisions were made and conditions were attached to ensure more trees are planted than removed in accordance with policy. The Council is requesting further information from the applicant about the planting at the Harris Academy and will follow that query up accordingly.

From this year we are investing an additional 40k of CIL monies (which comes from developments) to plant and crucially maintain new street trees on top of the 60k of existing capital expenditure. The use of CIL allows us to put some money aside to maintain the trees a cost which cannot be included in mainstream capital.

Council Questions under the Strategic Theme

From Councillor Najeeb Latif to the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health

Health inequality is widening within Merton. To control this, the Council will require orderly and effective action in partnership with private and voluntary sectors and Local Communities. Can the Cabinet Member confirm he understands the implications and what strategy does he intend to adopt to meet this challenge?

Reply

The immediate and urgent effects of COVID-19 have been seen during the pandemic through illness, admissions to hospital and in some cases, death. However, there are also broader medium and long term effects that will impact the

borough's population economically, socially, and their overall health. These effects are not felt equally and disproportionately impact the most vulnerable. COVID-19 has widened most existing inequalities, including in educational attainment, unemployment, and overall health including wellbeing. The full impact of COVID-19 is only emerging. We are working with local residents and the voluntary and community sector to understand the lived experience of COVID-19 in Merton. The insight and ideas that come from the community are being used to inform immediate actions to prevent outbreaks and to mitigate the health harm of COVID-19.

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. 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 16th November with £200,000 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.

Health and wellbeing form a core part of Merton's work on recovery and place-based strategic vision for the borough; a long term and forward looking ambition grounded in the borough's strengths but also ready to meet the challenges and opportunities ahead. We will seek to build on our assets and our communities' resilience, creativity and connectivity to work towards a fair and green recovery, looking for co-benefits across sustainability, climate change and health to build a healthy place with conditions for people to thrive, as well as equitable health and care services to tackle health inequalities.

From Councillor Stephen Crowe to the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health

To what extent will the health of residents in the east of the Borough suffer as a result of them not being in areas where an environmental tax is proposed to be levied on parked cars?

Reply

Air Quality is an absolute priority for the council as we continue to breach the legal objectives for pollution across the borough. The vast majority of this is linked to traffic and our main roads. Merton has a number of activities underway to tackle what has been described as a public health emergency. These activities are outlined in our Air Quality Action Plan and include all areas that the council can influence. Tackling the most polluting vehicles in the borough is a priority, as is the promotion of active travel, therefore we must use all of the policies available to us to tackle this problem.

We do accept that Controlled Parking Zones do not necessarily cover all parts of the borough but this should not stop us in using all available powers we have available to tackle air pollution.

We need to note that pollution does not respect boundaries and impacts can travel way beyond the local areas that it is created in.

It is not just parking we are focusing on, we have a current consultation on a Supplementary Planning Document that covers development in the borough and how they will be expected to contribute to cleaner air, Merton is and wants to remain a leading borough in this work, even if this means making some difficult decisions.

From Councillor Jenifer Gould to Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health

As part of healthy environments, improving mental, well-being and reducing childhood obesity could the Cabinet Member set out their plans for a safer cycle infrastructure network so children can cycle safely to and from schools?

Reply

The Council is committed to improving road safety, particularly for children and we have invested over a number of years, a programme of safety improvements near schools such as 20mph and School Zones. Our Active and Healthy Travel response to Covid 19 saw Merton roll out the largest increase of School Streets in London and we now have the highest proportion of schools located in school streets in London.

School streets seek to reduce congestion and concentrations of poor air quality outside school entrances where children are more at risk of road safety and pollution dangers.

The Borough's cycling programme for infrastructure and cycle training is funded by Transport for London.

In March 2020, with all other borough's, Merton's TFL funding was withdrawn due to the financial challenges TFL faced.

We have received confirmation this week that a proportion of our TFL funding will become available for December-March delivery of priority schemes.

The Council's road safety priorities are already set out in our Local Implementation Plan <https://www.merton.gov.uk/streets-parking-transport/lip3>

We will be reviewing this programme in light of the reduced funding and constrained timescale for delivery of schemes.

Active travel is also an important component of the council's health and wellbeing priorities in relation to healthy weight in children in the borough. Healthy places is a key theme of the [Merton Child Healthy Weight Action Plan](#) with a focus on improving physical activity through active travel. The Merton School Neighbourhood Approach Project (SNAP) also aims to improve the urban environment around schools, part of which includes the aim of improving walking and cycling infrastructure.

From Councillor Janice Howard to the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health

What is the Cabinet Member doing to increase the number of green gyms across the borough in our many green spaces?

Reply

Merton's parks and open spaces currently enjoys 10 individual green gym venues. We recognise the benefits that these free to use facilities offer and their positioning has been considered to help address health inequalities in the borough. Green gyms are very expensive to purchase and maintain and so we have to be strategic about how new sites are selected. We will search for and will pursue all viable opportunities to secure further funding for the development of our green gym infrastructure. We also plan that future investment in green gyms will focus on locations where these facilities are lacking and where supported by the key stakeholders and local Friends of Parks groups.

Details of current compliment of gyms can be found here:

<https://www.merton.gov.uk/leisure-recreation-and-culture/parks-and-open-spaces/outdoor-gyms>

The Council continues to invest in other sports facilities to promote physical activity in our parks and the following investment has been delivered in the recent past .

TOTAL Sports investments over the last two (2) years			
Ward	Site	Description	Cost
CW	Colliers Wood Recreation Ground	Table Tennis Table	£9,495.04
CW	Colliers Wood Recreation Ground	x2 New Goal Ends	£1,634.55
FM	Figges Marsh	Table Tennis Table	£9,495.04
RP	Raynes Park Sports Ground	Cricket netting	£5,037.94
LF	Tamworth Rec	Tennis court surface preperation and new nets	£9,250.00
	Borough Wide	13 Rugby & Football posts	£26,152.57
A	Haydons Road Recreation Ground	New playground safety surfacing	£9,750
LM	King Georges Recreation Ground	New playground safety surfacing and safety gates	£10,329
G	Edenvale Open Space	Basket Swing	£714

PH	Pollards Hill	Skate Park Drainage Improvements to allow winter use	£4,308
WP	Wimbledon Park	Table Tennis Table - Donated by FOWP	£0
CG	Rock Terrace	Basketball court (Order placed)	£17,540.00
		TOTAL Investment(s)	£103,706.05

From Councillor Hayley Ormrod to the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health

How will the council measure air quality improvements in the areas where the school streets scheme is in operation, and if during the consultation a school or local residents wants the scheme amended or removed how would they achieve this?

Reply

Schools Streets schemes are not simply about air quality but encompass safety and the promotion of active travel to schools. They all have the benefit of respite to local residents from the excessive traffic we see around our schools.

We are, and have been monitoring air quality at our schools as part of our Air Quality Action Plan. This monitoring shows an optimistic picture around schools for compliance with the 'annual' air quality objectives, however it does not capture those moments in the day where we see a large about of vehicles arriving and idling, something that will have a negative impact on air quality, even for only a brief moment in time.

The pollution team are looking at new cheaper ways of gathering this live data around the ebb and flow of traffic around schools, but unfortunately the current monitoring only captures monthly averages, so don't show the inevitable short term peaks in pollution from school traffic.