

Merton Council Council

18 November 2020

Supplementary Agenda 8

34 Public and Councillor Supplementary Questions and Replies

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1. From: Kevin Clarke

To the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health

Dundonald Primary School was identified as a School Street candidate in the June Cabinet report but no plans were published and the school was not included in the August Cabinet Member report/Decision Notice. Please outline the reasons why safety measures for children travelling to Dundonald School could not be advanced?

Reply

The school street programme that we have recently delivered was an extremely challenging programme- large number of schemes within an extremely tight time frame and limited available funding. It simply would not have been possible to include all the schools in the borough. Additionally, those schools located on local distributor roads would require the appropriate and greater level of assessment in particular with regards to the impact on the surrounding roads – something that we did not have the time or the funding for.

2. From: Barry Smith

To the Cabinet Member for Children and Education

What proportion of Merton pupils are unable to fully access online learning due to lack of equipment/internet connection and what is Merton council doing to support these children being able to access home learning as fully as their peers?

Reply

The Council does not collect the numbers of these pupils to gather a Borough wide picture. However, individual schools are aware of who these pupils are, and are providing paper copy work for them in the event of their needing to self-isolate without access to online learning technology. We are also working to increase access to suitable equipment / online connectivity. The Education Division ensures that information is sent to all our schools about all schemes, national and local, to provide equipment and internet connections, and supports schools in making applications to these schemes. Most recently the Council has allocated funding for additional equipment for pupils facing 'digital disadvantage' and any requirement to self-isolate, and is working with schools with the highest proportion of disadvantages pupils to identify those young people with immediate need.

3. From: Luke Taylor

To the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health

Of the proposed School Streets schemes across the borough, how many are currently active and when are the rest due to become active?

Reply

In 2019 we introduced 3 school streets. During Sept/Oct 2020 we introduced 25 school streets. We now have 28 active school streets. There is only one pending TfL approval which we believe to be soon.

4. From: Kirsten Galea
To the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care & Public Health

When does the council expect the CCG to have the first Long Covid clinics in place to start seeing patients in South West London?

Reply

Services to support those suffering long Covid symptoms are currently available in all four South West London Trusts, in line with the national specification. Colleagues across the Trusts are working towards developing one networked service by the end of this month (November).

5. From: Richard Poole
To the Cabinet Member for Children and Education

How many Merton schools were able to put in place meals or vouchers for those families eligible for Free School Meals over the recent half term, what proportion of those children eligible were covered by this provision? How many meals/vouchers were issued and what was the cost to the council?

Reply

The council agreed to reimburse schools for support they provided to families eligible for Free School Meals over the October half term up to the value of £15 per child, and if they had not done so to provide supermarket vouchers or hampers retrospectively.

As of 13 November, 23 schools had submitted a claim to the council for 2,473 pupils, to the value of £36,013. Since this is less than half of schools we expect that substantially more children have benefitted but there is a lag in schools claiming from the council.

6. From: Dr Simon Jones
To the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care & Public Health

How does the current level of demand for health services compare to previous years and what steps are being taken to pro-actively reach out to groups of people where demand is significantly below expected levels to encourage take up of services?

Reply

The current level of demand for health services varies across services. In this response we focus on the impact on secondary care, which considers diagnostic, urgent and emergency care and referral activity. We also consider the impact on general practice and mental health services, in addition to the work being done to encourage greater uptake of these services.

Secondary care

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.

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.

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

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

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. The national campaign promoting the NHS is open continues.

Supplementary

I note in the answer that there mentioned a number of local campaigns to encourage patients to present early and I'm wondering if those could be related. This is to

encourage patients who have not been presenting themselves for diagnosis through GPs and other secondary care. I understand the Council is running a number of local campaigns to encourage this.

Reply

Thank you Dr Jones for your supplementary question, I think it's a very important one in the context of Covid that we are improving access to raising awareness of initiatives to ensure that people are able to access high quality care. As you'll know the services provided that were noted are by the Health Service who work very closely with in order to deliver those awareness raising campaigns and we do so via the Health and Wellbeing Board. Thank you.

7. From: Matthew James Willis To the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care & Public Health

What measures will Merton Council be putting in place to support clinically vulnerable (previously shielded) people during the November lockdown?

Reply

Merton Council recognises the impact and disruption the Covid-19 pandemic is having on residents lives and their wellbeing. The impact is particularly evident on residents who are clinically extremely vulnerable (CEV). This is the group who were previously shielding and lists have continued to be updated with names added and removed throughout the pandemic.

Since the initial outbreak earlier in the year Merton Council has been working closely with its partners in the voluntary sector to ensure that all residents have the support they need. The Merton Community Response Hub has been set up and has been operating since March 2020. This provides residents with a single point of contact for any queries or support they may need during the Covid-19 pandemic. The types of support available includes support with shopping and assisting CEV residents with priority online supermarket slots, collection of prescriptions and signposting to a range of services. Services signposted to include organisations that can support individuals on subjects such as money management, employment, benefits and housing.

Any CEV resident who contacts the national CEV hub requiring support will be contacted by Merton Council to ascertain their support needs and who will put arrangements in place with local partners.

8. From: Shipra Gupta To the Cabinet Member for Partnerships, Public Safety and Tackling Crime

What measures is Merton Council putting in place to support and assist victims of domestic abuse during the November lockdown?

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 25th November – 10th 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

9. From: Tony Burton

To the Cabinet Member for Housing, Regeneration and the Climate Emergency

Please explain, in the light of the Local Government Association's guidance on "Probity in Planning" that "Every council should regularly review the way in which it conducts its planning business" when the last review was undertaken and what changes were made?

Reply

The planning service is constantly adjusting its service in response to changes in legislation and government guidance. For example the Planning Applications Committee reviewed and adjusted its public speaking arrangements in 2018 and this year the service was established virtually in response to the pandemic.

Members of the planning Committee operate within a published code of conduct to ensure procedures are adhered to. It is understood the last one was over 10 years ago and the matter is kept under review to see if changes or a review is needed. However, given the current national emergency, it is not considered that resources

should be directed to such a review at this particular time given other service pressures and as it is not a formal statutory requirement to do so.

10. From: Jane Plant

To the Cabinet Member for Housing, Regeneration and the Climate Emergency

Assuming council's declaration of climate emergency intends to arrest the degradation of the environment, will forthcoming policies to achieve this, including the Local Plan and Tree Strategy, address the true monetary value that trees contribute, or will compensation for losing a mature tree to development continue to be a sapling?

Reply

I would like to start by thanking Jane Plant for her work as coordinator of the Tree Warden Group in Merton.

Neither the current nor emerging Local Plan policy on trees specifies the size or age of a tree to be used as replacement tree. Both the current and emerging policies require applicants to have regard to BS 5837:2012 'Trees in relation to construction - Recommendations', BS 3998:2010 'Tree Work – Recommendations' and other relevant documentation such as the Arboricultural Advisory and Information Service's 'Arboricultural Practice Note 12

Both the current and emerging planning policies also state that the council may require semi-mature replacement trees when, for example, the original trees had an important landscape or screening function.

Supplementary

My question number 10 about tree assessment was not answered as none of the documents or policies referred to in the answer address the assessment of the monetary value of trees to the environment. I repeat, will forthcoming policies address this issue for example using Itree and Cavat? Thank you.

Reply

I'd like to thank Jane Plant for her supplementary, I don't have the full answer in terms of her question but we will write back to her with a further response. Thank you.

11. From: Mary Butler

To the Cabinet Member for Housing, Regeneration and the Climate Emergency

When did Merton Council last give planning permission for an application for a significant new building or structure without elevations, plans and sections at 1:50 or 1:100 scale, and how was this requirement met by the "General Arrangements" plans included with the application for a replacement Mitcham Bridge (20/P2438)?

Reply

Merton receive over 4000 planning applications per year and it is not possible to answer the specific question raised in terms of the plan sizes and when Merton last gave planning permission for such an application. Historically, planning applications are often very different requiring varied assessments and what might be relevant to one application in terms of the submission may not be applicable to another. Officers use their judgement to ensure sufficient information is submitted to ensure all applications can be properly assessed

In any event, plans included with the planning application for Bishopsford Road Bridge, ref; 20/P2438, fully complied with the Council's published validation requirements.

1. Site Location Plan, Scale 1:1250
2. Proposed Elevation and General Arrangements, which includes the following;
 - Sections, Scale 1:50
 - Plans, Scale 1:50
 - Elevations, 1:50
 - Details of boundary treatments and materials, Scale 1:25
3. Proposed Highway Plan Scale 1:1250
4. Proposed reinstatement details of the new bridge, Scale 1:50
5. Existing images and CGI for the proposals,
6. Various other plans imbedded within the submitted technical documents; including flood risk and WFD Screening and Scoping (existing and proposed bridge structure), Ecology, Trees and other reports

12. From: Daniel Goode

To the Cabinet Member for Housing, Regeneration and the Climate Emergency

Please provide specifics regarding what official investigations – by experts – were undertaken to ascertain if the wall to be removed in the Bishopsford/Mitcham Bridge rebuild is the last remaining extant structure from the house (and estate) that once stood on the Ravensbury Park site and therefore it's age/historic importance.

Reply

As set out in the heritage strategy submitted with the planning permission https://planning.merton.gov.uk/MVM.DMS/Planning%20Application/1000111000/1000111309/20P2438_Heritage%20Statement.pdf, the heritage consultant visited the site. The report sets out their investigation of the wall and states "The existing wall is approximately 6ft in height and prevents views into the park, whilst also enclosing one side of the road leading to the bridge. It comprises brickwork of varying date, some

19th century but much of it has been rebuilt (as evident in Fig.19). This arrangements encourages pedestrians to edge near to the road and is not ideal. The report also states on page 27:

The existing brickwork of the wall is in a poor condition. The bricks themselves are of no particular interest and of varying date, but the patina of age and the overall character of the wall, within the context of the bridge and the conservation area, has been considered and acknowledged.

Supplementary

I submitted a question about the wall in Ravensbury Park that's to be removed for Mitcham bridge. My question actually wasn't answered at all, none of the points were in fact answered so I'm going to ask this question again to the Cabinet member for Housing, Regeneration and the Climate Emergency and I'd really welcome a specific response to my specific question. Please provide specifics regarding what official investigations by experts have been done to check if the wall to be removed in the Bishopsford Mitcham Bridge rebuild is the last remaining extant structure from the house and estate that once stood on the Ravensbury Park site and therefore its' age and historic importance.

Reply

I'd like to thank Councillor Goode for his supplementary I believe we have set out in full in responding to his question I believe that all relevant assessments have been carried out in terms of the wall and that we can proceed with its' demolition, thank you.

13. From: Chris Stanton

To the Cabinet Member for Housing, Regeneration and the Climate Emergency

Please provide details of the information showing how the plans for the new Mitcham Bridge (20/P2438) are "fully compliant" with Local Transport Note 1/20 and the 2014 London Cycling Design Standards, as stated by the case officer to the Planning Applications Committee on 22-10-20.

Reply

As set out in the Committee Report, the design follows the guidance in Local Transport Note 01/20 in providing a shared surface of 3.0m as a better provision than providing nothing at all for cyclists as stated in the Local Transport Note 01/20. London Cycle Design Standards 2014 also allow for shared surfaces where there isn't space for segregation, particularly on a short stretch.

14. From: Sandra Vogel

To the Cabinet Member for Housing, Regeneration and the Climate Emergency

The Modifications Sheet presented to Planning Applications Committee on 22 October for planning application 20/P2438 (Mitcham Bridge) fails to mention that six objections were received on 21 and 22 October, focusing instead only on representations of support. Why was the PAC kept in the dark about late objections received?

Reply

The above noted objection letters were only sent to the planning representations in box. Planning officers were not copied into the email, therefore planning officers did not have the immediate opportunity to view these objection letters before PAC, as they were all uploaded by the admin team on 23/10/20.

Planning records show these objections were received on 21/10/20 and 22/10/20. The planning Applications Committee was held on 22/10/20 at 7:15pm.

1. Received 21/10/20 @ 11:51am - objection received without address, planning admin wrote back to objector, response received, Planning admin uploaded on internal explorer 26/10/20.
2. Received 21/10/20 @ 1:49am - Uploaded on internal explorer 23/10/20.
3. Received 21/10/20 @ 9:10am - Uploaded on internal explorer 23/10/20.
4. Received 21/10/20 @ 12:26pm - Uploaded on internal explorer 23/10/20.
5. Received 21/10/20 @ 9:49am - Uploaded on internal explorer 23/10/20.
6. Received 22/10/20 @ 3:01am - Uploaded on internal explorer 23/10/20.
7. Received 22/10/20 @ 12:12pm - Uploaded on internal explorer 23/10/20.

The above noted objection letters were only sent to the planning representations in box. Planning officers were not copied into the email, therefore planning officers did not have the immediate opportunity to view these objection letters before PAC, as they were all uploaded by the admin team on 23/10/20.

It is considered to be reasonable for the planning admin team to be allowed reasonable time to upload comments given the number received by the section, although they try and do this as soon as practicably possible. With late comments being received a day before or on the day of PAC it is unfortunate they were not reported to Committee, however, there is a risk that such late comments may not be uploaded in-time for officers to view and report verbally. This is especially important given the current remote working situation where person to person contact in the office is significantly reduced. The application had been in the public domain for some time with the initial consultation taking place 11 August 2021 and the standard consultation period requesting comments to be received by 1 October. In any event, the letters

mentioned above raised issues already fully covered in the report to members so it is considered no one was prejudiced by them not being reported to members.

With regards to the letters/petitions in support of the scheme, please note that these were hand-delivered to planning administration and also emailed directly to planning officers. Therefore, officers were aware of these comments in-time to be able to report verbally at PAC.

15. From: Carolyne Price
To the Cabinet Member for Housing, Regeneration and the Climate Emergency

For the new Mitcham Bridge the council is destroying 7.75m depth of park and trees to gain 1.34m needed for its scheme. 16 trees at risk fall outside the 1.34m strip. Why flatten the whole wood to requisition so small an amount of land?

Reply

As set out in the arboriculture report submitted with the planning permission [https://planning.merton.gov.uk/MVM.DMS/Planning%20Application/1000111000/1000111309/20P2438_CGO%20Ecology%20-%20\(trees\).pdf](https://planning.merton.gov.uk/MVM.DMS/Planning%20Application/1000111000/1000111309/20P2438_CGO%20Ecology%20-%20(trees).pdf) and referenced in the Committee report, of the 47 trees and two groups surveyed, 23 trees will be removed. About half have to be removed to facilitate the development, and the other half are unsuitable for retention and would have to be removed regardless of the development. Reasons for removal include where trees are dead, dying or overhanging the road.

16. From: Emma Maddison
To the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Local Environment and Green Spaces

How is Merton Council monitoring Veolia's performance on collection of recyclables introduced for home collection with the current contract? What action is taken by Merton Council on performance monitoring/requiring action from Veolia where residents have complained about non-collection/improper collection of recyclables (e.g. recyclables collected as landfill)?

Reply

The operational performance of the contract is overseen and managed in a number of different ways in order to maintain and improve performance for the benefit of our residents. The contract monitoring function is managed within the Public Space division whose primary role is to monitor the contract through site visits and daily interaction with the contractors' Neighbourhood Environmental Managers, residents, stakeholders and local Members.

They also gather intelligence and information, analyzing data held in the Council's customer management system to the target where improvements are required. In addition, they have access to the contractor's operational management systems in

order to determine what resources are being used in order to deliver the services and when. Through their work they are developing strong relationships with key stakeholders as well as intricate knowledge of the wards for which they are responsible. This helps them to pre-empt problems and resolve issues in order to avoid disruption and inconvenience to our residents.

The level of missed collections is a key indicator of how the collection service is performing. Following the service change in October 2018 and the introduction of wheelie bins the trend for the number of missed collections /per 100K has fallen steadily and the current level of missed collections is averaging at just over 1 missed collection per crew per day.

With regards to the improper collection of recycling material where it is alleged that there has been mixing of waste stream each incident is investigated by our service provider and the findings assessed by the client team . This will include vehicle footage taken from the vehicles cameras, route data of each collection round serving the identified location and tonnage data of the waste disposed of from the individual rounds.

Residents should continue to report missed collections via the Council website so they can be rectified quickly.

17. From: Paul Sheehan
To the Cabinet Member for Partnerships, Public Safety and Tackling Crime

Please provide precise figures for the number - and type – of a) crimes and b) antisocial incidents reported to the police and/or Merton Council, along the path running through the green space between the footbridge over the Wandle at Bishopsford/Mitcham Bridge and London Road over the last three years.

Reply

The Met Police's response to the planning application for Bishopsford Bridge includes a table of different types of crime in the local area.

https://planning.merton.gov.uk/MVM.DMS/Planning%20Application/1000111000/1000111309/20P2438_Comments_25.08.2020.pdf

The Met Police's response states that the open rail design is of benefit security wise as it will facilitate natural surveillance to the nature reserve, Ravensbury Park and towards the western footbridge. The removal of the wall separating Ravensbury Park and London road A217 and replacing with railing again would allow for greater visibility along the pedestrian footpath so reduce the chance of crime, fear of crime and avoidance of the area.

18. From: Andrea Milde
To the Cabinet Member for Housing, Regeneration and the Climate Emergency

When will Merton Council (a) review the probity of its planning decision on the new Mitcham Bridge (20/P2438) given the misinformation presented to the Committee or

(b) prepare revised plans that have a lower environmental impact and are compliant with cycling standards?

Reply

(a) The Council is not aware of any misinformation presented to Committee. The planning application went through the appropriate due process including full public consultation. All relevant issues raised were discussed in the report so members were fully informed before the decision was made. It is considered that no probity review is required.

(b) As set out the Committee report, planning permission 20/P2438 should result in net biodiversity gain as well as providing more space for walking and cycling than in the previous bridge. Ecological enhancements include:

- Planting 26 trees to replace those that will be removed or are dead
- Installing 5 bat boxes and 5 bird boxes in nearby trees
- Installing one hedgehog home
- Installing a mammal ledge under the bridge for the use of otters
- bring intrinsic improvements to channel flow and bed characteristics, increasing the extent of gravel bed available for spawning fish by building a single span bridge.
- Providing additional planting and landscaping adjacent the bridge to provide a habitat for water voles.

The Environment Agency and Natural England did not object to the planning application.

19. From: Pippa Maslin To the Cabinet Member for Housing, Regeneration and the Climate Emergency

Please provide details (including scale drawings and plans) of the 'segregated cycle lane' being provided on the new Mitcham Bridge, as cited in Merton Council's press release announcing planning permission, and where it is included in the documents accompanying the planning application 20/P2438.

Reply

Please see the documents and drawings on Merton's planning explorer here <https://planning.merton.gov.uk/MVM/Online/DMS/DocumentViewer.aspx?pk=1000111309&SearchType=Planning%20Application> including the "proposed highway and general arrangement" https://planning.merton.gov.uk/MVM/DMS/Planning%20Application/1000111000/1000111309/20P2438_Proposed%20Highways%20General%20Arrangement.pdf For example Section A-A of the "proposed elevation and general arrangement" presented at a scale of 1:50 demonstrates that the proposed cycle lane is segregated from the carriageway by a stepped kerb in line with the guidance in Local Transport Note 01/20

Cycle	Infrastructure	Design
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https://planning.merton.gov.uk/MVM.DMS/Planning%20Application/1000111000/1000111309/20P2438_Proposed%20Elevation%20&%20General%20Arrangements.pdf

20. From: John Davis

To the Cabinet Member for Housing, Regeneration and the Climate Emergency

Councillors Irons and Whelton, amongst others, quote 11 of the 23 trees being removed for the new Mitcham Bridge are dead or decaying. The tree survey submitted with the planning application says 3 are dead, 1 dying. Explain the discrepancy and show the 'dead and dying' trees on a map.

Reply

Pages 5 to 12 of the arboriculture assessment report accompanying the planning application and available online here

[https://planning.merton.gov.uk/MVM.DMS/Planning%20Application/1000111000/1000111309/20P2438_CGO%20Ecology%20-%20\(trees\).pdf](https://planning.merton.gov.uk/MVM.DMS/Planning%20Application/1000111000/1000111309/20P2438_CGO%20Ecology%20-%20(trees).pdf) contains the results of the tree survey, including a list of all trees surveyed, their species, condition and approximate age. A map of these trees is available on page 12 of the report.

21. From: Sara Sharp

To the Cabinet Member for Housing, Regeneration and the Climate Emergency

When did Merton Council officers first engage with the National Trust about options for using its land for alternative designs for the replacement Mitcham Bridge/Bishopsford Road Bridge to those in application 20/P2438 and for correspondence to be published, or to confirm no such engagement has occurred?

Reply

Merton Council has been engaging with the National Trust since 2019 as neighbouring landowners. We welcome their support in the project to reopen Bishopsford Bridge. Local residents and landowners, including the National Trust, were consulted in May 2020 on the proposed alternative design for the new bridge. The bridge design was altered as a result of feedback from this consultation to arrive at the design in planning permission reference 20/P2438

22. From: Stephen Shimwell

To the Cabinet Member for Housing, Regeneration and the Climate Emergency

Planning application 20/P2438 Mitcham Bridge. The Public consultation pointed out that the Council's first design proposals did not include cycle lanes, as promoted by London Transport's strategy for active travel. Why were they not initially included and how much time was wasted redesigning the bridge to include them?

Reply

The council encourages pre-application consultations with local people on important planning applications and does not consider it to be a waste of time for any applicant to amend the proposals to take account of local people's feedback. The pre-application consultation on a like for like replacement finished in June 2020 and feedback included requests for more cycling infrastructure. The amended planning application was submitted to the council in early August 2020.

23. From: Charles Barraball

To the Cabinet Member for Housing, Regeneration and the Climate Emergency

10 years ago a resounding ovation from a Sustainable Transport Thematic Group greeted Engineers Mitra Dubet and Peter Thomas announcing:

"Henceforth in Merton's Engineering "Flush would mean mean flush".

Could the Council shed any light on the implementation of that intent on dropped curbs throughout the Borough?

Reply

Over the years the Council has used its limited available funding in providing dropped kerbs (pram ramps) / upgrade existing infrastructure to improve accessibility in response to requests and as part of highway maintenance.

Supplementary

Thank you. Will the Cabinet Member look forward to the many uses of wheeled appliances enjoying the flushed dropped kerbs wherever they are installed accessing paths pavements and rights of way?

Reply

Well obviously we do look at these issues very closely and obviously if he's got specific areas in mind please let me know I know he has raised one with me recently and I have responded but do get in touch if you believe there are areas where we need to make adjustments. Thank you.

24. From: Natalie Gordon

To the Cabinet Member for Housing, Regeneration and the Climate Emergency

Was an Equality Impact Assessment conducted for the decision to remove the Bishopsford bridge wall and if so, what equality impacts were identified and how were councillors made aware of it? I am concerned about the impact of greater noise and air pollution on Watermeads estate and Wessex Terrace residents.

Reply

No. An equality impact assessment considers the impact of a proposal on the protected characteristics of age, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, marriage and civil partnership and pregnancy and maternity. An equality impact assessment is not required for the removal of the wall. The planning decision to rebuild the bridge includes several requirements to help reduce pollutants and support residents amenity including the requirement for planting and landscaping in Ravensbury Park (condition 6) a construction method statement (condition 9 - including the control of dust etc) and a construction logistics plan (condition 10). The council's environmental health department had no objections to the planning application:

https://planning.merton.gov.uk/MVM.DMS/Planning%20Application/1000111000/1000111309/20P2438_Comments_25.08.2020...pdf

Supplementary

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak today. I'm deeply concerned about the decision to remove the Bishopsford Bridge wall and trees on residents living in Wessex Terrace and Octavia Close in Mitcham. Their gardens will become significantly more exposed to the A217 resulting in much greater exposure to air and noise pollution and I say that as a resident of the Watermeads Estate. Please can it be explained why an Equality Impact Assessment was not believed to be required for the removal of the wall. The Equality Act 2010 refers to size of impact rather than just the number of people affected and the response to a Design Review Panel member who specifically asked whether a noise assessment had been carried out and it was not confirmed whether a noise assessment took place so my question is please can it be explained why an Equality Impact Assessment was not believed to be required and whether a noise assessment has taken place?

Reply

Thank you. We believe that an Equality Impact Assessment wasn't needed for the Bridge. EIAs relate to protected characteristics of age, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, marriage and civil partnership and pregnancy and maternity. We don't believe that an EIA applies in terms of the bridge and that's why one wasn't undertaken.

25. From: Stefan Wrombel

To the Cabinet Member for Housing, Regeneration and the Climate Emergency

Was evidence of crime specifically relating to the area crossing the bridge and on the paths adjacent to the wall considered as part of the decision to remove the Bishopsford bridge wall?

Reply

The Met Police's response to the planning application for Bishopsford Bridge includes a table of different types of crime in the local area.

https://planning.merton.gov.uk/MVM.DMS/Planning%20Application/1000111000/1000111309/20P2438_Comments_25.08.2020.pdf

The Met Police's response states that the open rail design is of benefit security wise as it will facilitate natural surveillance to the nature reserve, Ravensbury Park and towards the western footbridge. The removal of the wall separating Ravensbury Park and London road A217 and replacing with railing again would allow for greater visibility along the pedestrian footpath so reduce the chance of crime, fear of crime and avoidance of the area.

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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.

Supplementary

Thank you Madam Mayor. Would the Cabinet Member agree with me that Covid19 has highlighted the urgency of delivering a substantial funding solution for adult social care?

Reply

Thank you Councillor Anderson I entirely agree and I think that the Government recognises this too; you'll recall that it was just three years ago that the Health Secretary pledged to publish a green paper on adult social care that we're still waiting to see and similarly last year the Prime Minister stood on the steps of Downing Street and committed to fixing the social care crisis once and for all, but this month we've been told that social care will not be a priority in 2020 despite the huge impact that Covid has placed on this vulnerable group. So yes I entirely agree that a sustainable solution for adult social care must be found.

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.

Supplementary

Thank you Madam Mayor thank you to the Leader for his answer. Could the Leader place on record any allegations he'd like to make about the independence of the Independent Reconfiguration Panel?

Reply

The only allegations that I have about the Independent Review Panel is that we allege that they've come to the wrong conclusion. It's very clear to us that St Helier is the area with greatest need in the catchment area and if there's going to be £500 million spent on our local health services we believe that it should be spent where it's needed, where the greatest health inequalities are, where people are struggling with poor health and where people are dying as a result of Coronavirus rather than in one of the richest areas of the catchment area – Belmont, which is at least a twenty minute drive away if you're lucky enough to have a car and many of our residents in St Helier do not have cars. So that is the only allegation that I would make that they have made a poor decision that we should all as Council oppose with all our might.

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 16th 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.

Supplementary

Thank you Madam Mayor, I have a supplementary. I'd like to ask the Cabinet Member as Covid19 has highlighted the stark inequalities that exist across the Borough, does the Cabinet Member agree it's more important than ever that the Council continues to commit to bridging the gap?

Reply

Thank you Councillor Attawar and I think you're absolutely right to make that point. Covi19 has certainly exposed that our health outcomes are impacted by far more than just our access to care and we know that your risk of dying from Covid doubles if you live in a poorer area, so ultimately I think this reinforces how critical our work is to bridge the gap and we need to tackle those underlying socioeconomic inequalities. So I'm really glad to see just one example of tonight's agenda through the Council Tax Support Scheme which demonstrates that this administration is supporting those in the greatest need.

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.

Supplementary

Thank you Madam Mayor. I'd like to congratulate Councillor Lanning on her new appointment and thank her for her answer which is impressively data rich. Given the answer, given her professional experience and new role I'm sure she'd agree with me that data is absolutely critical to making medical and clinical decisions. I'm therefore surprised that the Council still has so little faith in the vaccination data given they make reference to it in the report. Do you agree with me that the report should have highlighted its' failings and do you think it was a mistake not to do so, given that you're now saying that we can't rely on the figures quoted?

Reply

Sorry Councillor Kohler, your point is that it was wrong to essentially reference the data around vaccinations in the report?

Reply from Councillor Kohler

If you're now saying it can't be relied upon, why not make that point in the report rather than draw conclusions from that data?

Reply from Councillor Lanning

I think ultimately what I would say about is that Councillor Kohler you'll be completely aware that there is a multitude of different data sets that will be used and obviously what is used in the Public Health team and what's used by NHS England will also be different, we have to rely on the data that we have been provided with ultimately in order to be able to make our decisions and I think the point ultimately around vaccination data is that we obviously oversee the NHS in providing certain services and that is our role from sort of a statutory function and we have to accept that vaccination data.

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.

Supplementary

Thank you Madam Mayor. I'd like to ask Councillor Lanning the Cabinet Member to join me in thanking the voluntary sector in adapting its' services to continue supporting people during Covid?

Reply

Thank you Councillor Curtin and I would certainly like to join you in thanking the fantastic and vibrant voluntary sector that we have here in Merton and I agree that its' response to the pandemic has been incredibly impressive, they have adapted their services very quickly and ably to ensure that people can access the community

hub and for those who haven't been able to do so that contact has been maintained with them and I would like to extend my thanks to both the voluntary sector staff who are paid and also the volunteers because without them we wouldn't have been able to support the most vulnerable that we have in the way that we've done so over the past eight months.

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.

Supplementary

Thank you Madam Mayor, it was a question under the strategic theme I thought. Thank you for this reply regarding the location of services. All Councils received an update from the South West London CCG on the 9th of November detailing how resources are being marshalled in response to Covid19 by creating specialist hubs for general surgery, gynaecology, urology etc and transferring patients between them. Does the Cabinet Member believe it's wrong to this approach to give patients the best possible outcome for surgery and has she written to the CCG complaining about their medical decisions?

Reply

Thank you Madam Mayor. I think what is wrong and I think what the Councillor knows is wrong, is the decision to move services away from St Helier, the area of greatest health needs to Belmont, the most affluent area, many miles away and I think that he knows that it's wrong and I think that he and his colleagues on the conservative group should really fall behind the rest of the groups of Merton Council and support protecting St Helier and saving services at St Helier for the good of all

our patients who deserve to have a good chance in life. They do not deserve to be let down by the Conservatives at this time.

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.

Supplementary

Thank you Madam Mayor. I thank the Leader for his response and I'd like to know if he agrees with me when he reads the words of the Independent Reconfiguration Panel which says the financial assumptions include an ambitious program of reductions in non-elective activity and substantial revenue savings. There is a significant risk that these will not be delivered and that the new hospital will have to cater for higher levels of activity than currently assumed with higher running costs than planned. In our letter to the secretary of state we said the money does not add up. Doesn't this demonstrate that the Independent Reconfiguration Panel have reached the same conclusion about the finances?

Reply

Councillor McCabe asks me whether I would agree with him and I have to say that after 18 years on the Council alongside him I very rarely would have wanted to disagree with him. I completely agree with the points that he's made and he's very distinguished on this matter he's represented the Council for many years on Joint Health Scrutiny and as Chair of the Healthier Communities Panel so when he speaks, people should listen. So yes, I agree with him that the case has not been made for removing services away from St Helier. The finances are in peril, I've spent

10 years looking after the finances of Merton Council and I can tell you from what I know about finances that the St Helier case is very strong and the case is very weak. The Health Service and the Government and the Conservatives on Merton Council should all reconsider their opinion. Thank you Madam Mayor.

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 25th November – 10th 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

Supplementary

Thank you Madam Mayor and thanks to the Cabinet Member for your response. My follow-up question is about services that go hand in hand that are often needed by those who are escaping from abuse at home such as mental and sexual health services. Can the Cabinet Member please let us know what Merton has done to make sure that those services are also accessible during this period?

Reply

Thank you Councillor Bailey for your question. I'd like to thank you for your supplemental question again but as a new Cabinet Member I've been looking into it and if you don't mind I'll get back to you with the appropriate response because I think this is something that deserves a better response than just a quick answer.

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 (NO₂ and PM_{10,2.5}) 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 NO₂, CO₂, 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.

Supplementary

Thank you Madam Mayor. The failure to bid for money from the Clean Air Fund is the latest in a long example of this administration failing to bid for available funding to improve people's lives. At May's Overview and Scrutiny Commission meeting former Council Leader Alambritis said he would reflect on why this administration does not bid for available funding. Why did the Cabinet Member not listen to his former leader's advice?

Reply

Thank you Councillor Bush. Firstly I'd like to say that I'm glad that you've raised the issue of air quality on tonight's agenda because ultimately pollution does pose a major threat to health and wellbeing. I do want to reassure him that we always look at opportunities to secure external funding to meet our objectives and we look at them based on their merits as you can see in the original answer there are two bids that we have gone for just last month so hopefully that reassures him on that point.

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/>

Supplementary

Thank you Madam Mayor and thank you to the Cabinet Member for your response. Does the Cabinet Member share the concerns about the rise in the use of foodbanks?

Reply

Thank you Councillor Henry and I think you're absolutely right to raise concerns about what is an alarming rise in the use of foodbanks both in Merton and across the country which is ultimately linked to levels of insecurity caused by Covid and while I do want to pay tribute to foodbanks and to the voluntary sector and of course to our community who have given up a lot of time to donate and also to distribute food parcels. Ultimately far more needs to be done for a sustainable solution to food insecurity and on that note Councillor Henry I too am really delighted to congratulate you on your role as food poverty champion and I look forward to working closely with you to tackle this issue.

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

Supplementary

Thank you Madam Mayor and I'd like to congratulate the Cabinet Member on her new post and thank her for her response to my question. Can she tell me how she intends to maintain this improvement in figures?

Reply

Thank you Councillor Butler and thank you for your supplementary question and your original question. These improvements have been the work of officers within the Council driving Veolia to make the improvements but it's also come from a bit of a commitment from Veolia to do that and I just wanted to thank them for the work they've done throughout both lockdowns in keeping our services on the road and keeping our bins collected. However, going forwards we need to focus on making sure these improvements are consistent across the Borough and are consistent across the service. We need to redouble our efforts to see the full rollout of our fly-tipping strategy because we need to tackle that in our Borough it's a national issue but it's something we obviously are all impacted by and we need to put a further focus on street cleansing and making sure that's consistent across the Borough and we're also looking to tackle issues around flats above shops and the way that they manage their waste. So we have a lot of packed priorities but we'll definitely be still driving for improvements.

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.

Supplementary

Thank you Madam Mayor. What would be the view of the Cabinet Member for an application for flats to replacing the existing shop units at Centre Court?

Reply

I'd like to thank Councillor Ormrod for her supplementary. In terms of Centre Court, as she is aware the shopping centre is currently up for sale. We will be later on tonight debating the Wimbledon Supplementary Planning Document and within that document there is a limit in terms of 12 storeys. The proposals that have been put forward from Centre Court owners Aberdeen Asset Management in terms of its' sales are unacceptable to the Council. What we do want on that site if it is sold is a mixed development maybe it is residential that is included as well but it's got to fit in with the surrounding area. Thank you.

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 3rd 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 9th 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.

Supplementary

Does the Cabinet Member agree with me that it is vital that we work closely with the Police and our communities to help people feel safe especially as we're now in the dark winter months?

Reply

Thank you very much Councillor Brunt for your supplementary question. I do agree with you that we should be working closely with the Police as we head into the winter dark months and I think we should try and get all our residents also to be working with all of us as well. So thank you very much for your question.

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.

Supplementary

Thank you Cabinet Member for your answer but your answer does not clearly address the question in regards to the 200 asylum seekers who are currently in temporary accommodation in Merton having a right to work. It's interesting that Merton have been awarded the Borough of Sanctuary but why? The City of Sanctuary movement supports the lift the ban campaign, will you do so publicly and can you provide clear evidence that the Borough upholds the Sanctuary pledge. How many asylum seekers are unaccompanied children or young adults, have they been supported by Merton, how many asylum seekers together have been given mental health, educational or language support?

Reply

Thank you Madam Mayor. I would like to thank the Councillor for raising these issues with me. I'm very proud of the work we do to support refugees including becoming a Borough of Sanctuary. As I have only started my Cabinet role I will look into it and get back to you later. Thank you very much.

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.

Supplementary

Thank you Madam Mayor. Does the Cabinet Member agree with me that it is vital to reach out to different communities we have in Merton so that you do not feel underrepresented or forgotten during the course of this pandemic?

Reply

Thank you for your question Councillor Pearce. I agree with you that it is very important that we continue to look into why different communities suffer in different ways from Covid19 and to find ways that the Council can support our communities and to have the best information and keep them safe. Thank you very much.

From: Councillor Nick McLean to the cabinet member for finance

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.

Supplementary

Thank you Madam Mayor and thank you to the Cabinet Member for his reply and I would also like to welcome him to his new role. Madam Mayor unlike his predecessor the now Council leader, will he acknowledge the Government's £87 million pounds of funding that they have provided to local businesses and will he also assure local businesses that he will not fail them and will use his discretion to support them during the pandemic?

Reply

I'd like to thank him for his question and for his supplementary question and thank him for his kind words. As the recent answer makes clear we do of course welcome all funding that the Government has provided whether that's to ourselves as a Local Authority or to the business community, but I'm sure he would recognise that that funding does still have significant gaps in it. The Federation of Small Businesses has recently reported that there are still a large number of new business owners and sole traders who are falling through the gaps in government support, the Office for National Statistics has recently shown that the number of self-employed people has fallen by half a million in the past year and the CBI has recently called for far more focused support for certain sectors who are still not benefitting from the Governments packages. So whilst I do welcome the Government's support for businesses I would urge him to join myself and Leader in calling for more support and of course I will do everything I can to ensure that the support we do get is distributed as quickly as possible as it was over the Summer.

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 30th November for 3 months.

Supplementary

Thank you Madam Mayor and thank you to the Cabinet Member for his answer. If I could ask him what is the Council doing to ensure that those rough sleepers who have been accommodated during the pandemic are not forced back onto the streets again once the emergency support ends?

Reply

I'd like to thank Councillor Christie for his supplementary, it's important that we do give those rough sleepers all the support we need I am concerned myself about those who have no recourse to public funds in terms of their future accommodation needs because Government has not provided the funding but also as well in terms of rough sleepers providing the wraparound support for those who have mental health issues, drug and alcohol addictions but also as well ensuring that they are housed in more permanent solutions and giving them all those options that are available to them we do want to see the end of rough sleeping, it's something that I feel is incredibly important and we do need to give them all the support that they need. Thank you.

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 27th 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.

Supplementary

Thank you Madam Mayor and thank you to the Cabinet Member for finance for acknowledging that for some reason the Council chose to omit references to Robert Jenrick's 7 or 8 million pounds of extra funding when the Council publicised its' own numbers but could the Cabinet Member for finance explain how it's possible for the Council to call itself business-like when the previous Cabinet Member for Finance who has now been promoted to Leader of the Council doesn't seem to know the difference between a surplus and a deficit and doesn't seem to have any idea as to

whether the Council closed its' books for the last financial year with a surplus or a deficit.

Reply

I'd like to thank Councillor Gretton for his question and his supplementary question. I think it's quite clear that my predecessor and the now Leader of the Council has done an absolutely outstanding job on the Council's finances over the past ten years. It's been a decade in which the coalition and then the Conservative government has absolutely decimated local government support; we've seen millions and millions and millions slashed from our budget and Councillor Allison and indeed Councillor Alambritis have ensured that not only have we been able to protect frontline services we've also been able to invest millions more into adult social care, we've been able to build a new library a new leisure centre and indeed support AFC Wimbledon in their return to the Borough so my predecessor and the now Leader of the Council has always taken a business-like approach and I will endeavour to follow that lead as I now take on the portfolio.

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.

Supplementary

Thank you Madam Mayor. Can I start by thanking the Cabinet Member for acknowledging that the Council has overstated its' deficit by over £14.5 million. Will the Cabinet Member for Finance apologise to the Wimbledon Times for the Council Leader having misled the Council's finances by overstating the deficit and without showing it through additional finance?

Reply

Well I thank him for his question and his supplementary question. I wasn't aware that I had acknowledged as he put it that admission or oversight but perhaps he's read the answer slightly differently to the way that it was written. Madam Mayor this year has been unprecedented and as I'm sure all colleagues will appreciate and the financial forecasting that takes place from month to month represents ultimately a single point in time it cannot be taken in isolation and indeed if one was to go back to the government's forecasts one would see that they have changed throughout the last 9 or 10 months as the situation has changed. The written response that was provided makes clear that actually a significant amount of the reduction that has been achieved in recent months has been down to the work that the Council has done in order to bring down costs and I would hope that Councillor Bush would join me in congratulating both Councillor Allison and our council officers for the work that's gone into this to ensuring that the deficit is as low as it possibly can be at this point in time.

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.

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.

Supplementary

Thank you Madam Mayor and thanks to the Cabinet Member for answering my question. I've got a supplementary; can the Cabinet Member please update us on Ofsted's recent visit to our children's centres? Thank you.

Reply

Thank you Councillor Fraser for your question and your supplementary and I'll be quick, as I mentioned earlier yes we were lucky if that is the right word to be one of the first local authorities to receive a visit, again if that's the right word, from Ofsted in early October. So their interest was quite wide and all-encompassing but particularly into how our social care system have been able to continue to deliver child centred practice and care given the impact of Covid on so many aspects of our lives and ways of working. I'd like to thank all the department staff and the partners beyond the Council who were involved in the inspection, thanking them for the effort they put into responding to the inspectorate's questions with honesty and diligence about the work we are doing, the outcomes we're delivering and the areas we're pushing ourselves to do better. I can't say much more than that but we expect the HMI's letter to be published on Friday this week and I look forward to sharing it with colleagues.

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