

# **Merton Council Council**

**3 February 2021**

## **Supplementary Agenda 4**

28 Councillor Non-Priority Questions and Replies

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## Non Priority Questions – Council 3 February 2021

### Ordinary Questions

#### **From Cllr Adam Bush to the Cabinet Member for Housing, Regeneration and the Climate Emergency**

Can the cabinet member give an update on where he is one year on from his promise to update the planning explorer, he previously said “We are looking to provide access to representations for councillors with redaction software and also to better access to such redacted documents when requests are made.”

Members of the public and their ward councillors are still being denied access to planning comments, number of objections and even statutory respondees comments not being loaded. What happened to transparency in planning?

#### **Reply**

The IT project to upgrade the Northgate M3 module to the ‘Assure’ module is taking longer than expected. Although there has been significant progress the team is not quite ready for the upgrade that would allow for the re-investigation about how representations might once again be uploaded directly on the planning explorer in some form. It has been made very clear that anyone can email the planning team and redacted versions can be provided by email in the interim and also any comments are summarised in any reports.

#### **From Cllr Eloise Bailey to the Cabinet Member for Children and Education**

Could the Cabinet Member please update me on how many children are currently living in unregulated homes and what progress is being made with ensuring Merton's children are not placed in unregulated homes?

#### **Reply**

Unregulated provisions are not illegal and when used correctly, they can be an important stepping stone for some young people into adulthood. However, because they are not regulated and due to the national sufficiency problems in regulated provisions, they have, elsewhere in the country, been vulnerable to inappropriate use. In Merton we are very careful to use Semi-Independent Accommodation (the most common form of unregulated provision) appropriately. We only place young people in provisions we know offer a good service through our quality assurance mechanism and when it is in line with the young person's Pathway Plan. The Corporate Parenting Board is sighted on this issue and the way Merton uses this provision. A paper detailing the use on unregulated SIA provision, the national context and the Merton picture was presented and discussed at the Board in November 2020.

As of 2 February 2021, there are twelve 16-and 17-year olds living in unregulated Semi-Independent Accommodation (SIA) provision. This SIA provision is appropriate and part of the plans for all these 12 young people. The Service has a Sufficiency

Strategy and action plan that is driving work to increase our sufficiency options which includes: targeted recruitment to increase the number of foster carers for older children; working in partnership with other local authorities in the South London Commissioning Programme; undertaking an options appraisal and cost benefit analysis of establishing in-house provision for both SIA and Registered Children's Homes. Below is a link to the current sufficiency strategy.

[https://lbmerton.sharepoint.com/:w:/r/sites/ppp/\\_layouts/15/Doc.aspx?sourcedoc=%7B96CA6EF3-77EC-45E0-9719-52130D8C5298%7D&file=sufficiency%20strategy%20FINAL.docx&action=default&mobileRedirect=true&DefaultItemOpen=1](https://lbmerton.sharepoint.com/:w:/r/sites/ppp/_layouts/15/Doc.aspx?sourcedoc=%7B96CA6EF3-77EC-45E0-9719-52130D8C5298%7D&file=sufficiency%20strategy%20FINAL.docx&action=default&mobileRedirect=true&DefaultItemOpen=1)

**From Cllr Andrew Howard to the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health**

Can the cabinet member please clarify what action is being taken to properly monitor and control driver behaviour in and around school streets? Instead of following "Park and Stride" advice, many parents are parking and idling in the immediate vicinity of these streets, causing congestion and adding to the air quality problem these measures are meant to alleviate.

**Reply**

The use of Automatic Number Plate Camera enforcement technology and Civil Enforcement Officers will be used to enforce the roads within School Street Zones. In respect of the surrounding streets, daily visits will be undertaken by Civil Enforcement Officers and enforcement will take place if a car is seen parked in contravention. Parking Services are happy to attend specific hot spots locations and welcome reports of such activity from members of the public, which will help prevent congestion and idling through appropriate enforcement.

Prior to the UK lockdown in March 2020, training was given to CEO's on Anti Idling engagement in line with the Mayor of London's Idling Action Campaign, with a focus (but not solely) on engaging drivers idling outside primary schools within the borough. As with many authorities many direct campaigns of this nature have been paused due to social distancing. The work of the London wide project has now moved to online engagement and awareness raising. We hope to resume training (and public engagement) with CEO's and Cllrs when restrictions allow.

**From Cllr Paul Kohler to the Cabinet Member for Housing, Regeneration and the Climate Emergency**

Given the shortage of housing in Merton, residents are rightly concerned that the Virgin Active site has remained vacant and undeveloped throughout this council's current term. Can the Cabinet Member please provide a detailed account of what discussions have taken place in respect of the site's future use and in particular whether or not any plans exist to use the land for affordable housing?

**Reply**

Currently works are in hand, for example title investigation and planning advice so that when market conditions are right and the site is put on the market the opportunity for

a successful sale, and redevelopment is maximised. Consideration of any conditions in the sale contract to inform the form of development in addition to planning control will be considered together with the council's need for capital receipt.

The Council's Future Merton team have allocated the site for residential development in the Local Plan and provided urban design guidance to determine the scale / quantum of homes, including affordable, that could be achievable on the site and this in turn informs delivery of the Council's 5 year housing supply target. The urban design and site capacity advice will inform the marketing details when the Council is in a position to proceed with the disposal of the site.

### **From Cllr Oonagh Moulton to the Cabinet Member for Local Environment and Green Spaces**

Christmas trees lie strewn across the borough and yet it's almost six weeks since Christmas. Residents were asked to put them out before 6am on 18 January, why are so many still uncollected?

#### **Reply**

This year, the collection of Christmas trees commenced in early January and operated until the 29<sup>th</sup> January. The service is offered in order to maximise our recycling performance in a sustainable way and to ensure that this process does not impact residents by blocking footway access, we ask residents to present their trees on their property and to make sure it is visible to the mobile collection crews before 6am on the 18<sup>th</sup> January. This ensures that over the two week collection cycle the trees presented for collection are recycled. Trees presented outside of this window are still collected by our mobile street cleansing teams as part of the schedule cleansing rounds.

The service has been made aware of a number of isolated location in which the collection of trees has not been completed, as such I am pleased to advise that our service provider is deploying additional evening crews to attend to these areas. Whilst this has been limited, the service has been exploring the reasons for any omissions in service. Early information shows that placements of trees that are not on the resident's property are more prone to non-collection. The service will be reviewing how improvements can be made for next year's programme.

### **Questions on the Strategic Theme**

#### **From Cllr Stephen Crowe to the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health**

Q) Merton have TfL funding for LTNs in both Dundonald and Raynes Park,

a) Was the Dundonald LTN scheme funded by TfL and has the consultation and the scheme itself now been cancelled?

b) If yes, what distinguishes that decision from the Raynes Park decision to press ahead with the consultation despite massive opposition?

#### **Reply**

Merton Council was awarded additional funding from the DFT Active Travel Fund (tranche 2) to deliver additional LTNs.

The bids were originally submitted in Summer 2020 following Cabinet's adoption of the Covid Transport Plan. Council's open call for ideas in May 2020 were the genesis of bids for LTNs across Merton. However, the funding was only approved late December 2020

a) The proposed LTNs for Dundonald ward were also part of the DFT tranche 2 funding.

The informal consultation on the two Dundonald ward LTNs has not progressed because it was not supported by the local ward councillors.

In dialogue with local ward members, it was agreed that the proposed point-closures in Burstow and Fairlawn would have minimal impact on through traffic at the ward level. We collectively understand that through-traffic issues in Dundonald require a more holistic view than that available from the restricted DFT funding. In addition, the timescales involved in the DFT funding prohibit the ability think wider than the few LTN point closures that were approved

b) The difference between Dundonald and Raynes Park LTNs is that in dialogue with local ward councillors, there has been some measure of support for exploring the LTN and an openness to at least consult informally.

Subsequently there has been some objection to the proposals from resident's associations, the main feedback being that through-traffic is not considered an issue. To hear these views is helpful, especially since we have also received support for an LTN in this area.

At this stage, we don't believe it would be right to abort the consultation in Raynes Park as it is live, but allow residents to continue to have their say. Receiving feedback on whether the design of the scheme is a barrier to support; concerns the LTN will cause spill over congestion; or that residents simply do not support the policy proposed is also helpful for us and officers to reflect on in terms of future planning. The informal consultation process is the appropriate way to gauge the views of residents before we consider next steps.

**From: Cllr Hina Bokhari to the Cabinet Member for Housing, Regeneration and the Climate Emergency**

There is growing evidence that reusable cloth nappies have both financial and environmental benefits. To encourage more families in Merton to swap disposable nappies for cloth nappies would the Cabinet Member consider joining a nappy voucher scheme, such as the Real Nappies for London scheme, to support new parents with using environmentally friendly nappies?

**Reply**

There are currently 8 London boroughs who have signed up for the Real Nappies for London scheme which provides an incentive scheme to encourage more families to

use re-usable nappies. With finite resources, this has not been a priority area for funding in Merton. The council however remains committed to reducing waste and recycling as part of our waste management strategies and to see how we can better use our communication channels to promote re-usable nappies to new parents going forward.

In terms of support available in Merton, there is already a “Reusable Nappy Library” scheme currently operated by Wimbledon National Childbirth Trust (NCT). This provides impartial advice and support to families interested in trying reusable nappies. “Demo” kits are offered to parents (including nappies, fleece and liners and wet bags) for a small monthly hire cost and returnable deposit. More information about this scheme is available at: <https://www.nct.org.uk/local-activities-meets-ups/region-london/branch-wimbledon-district/nappy-library>

### **From Cllr Nigel Benbow to the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health**

Can the Cabinet Member update the Council on what air quality & road safety measures have been installed so far at the Harris Academy at High Path, built in one of the most polluted areas in Merton, and can the Cabinet Member confirm whether any trees have been planted there using CIL money

### **Reply**

To be clear, there is continued misunderstanding surrounding pollution in this area. This is not one of the areas of highest pollution in the borough, this was a challenge made throughout the planning phase of the new school, and answered comprehensively by council officers.

Monitoring in Merantun Way and the additional monitoring in High Path as part of our schools air quality project shows that these areas are compliant with the legal objectives. That said and to mitigate for any possible increase in pollution, which I can confirm we are not seeing, officers requested additional work to further improve air quality including fencing, planting and designing the layout of the building. We shall continue to monitor air quality in the area.

The Council is aware of illegal pavement parking on High Path, in particular the Cycle Lane opposite Merton Abbey Primary.

The Council has increased enforcement action to ensure children have safe pedestrian access to the school.

In addition, the Council's Highways team have ordered bollards to be placed along the cycle-lane to stop pavement parking in this location.

The Council is also working with TFL to finalise plans for signalised pedestrian crossings at Merantun Way / Morden Road.

This work was unfortunately delayed in 2020 with TFL making the difficult decision to furlough staff. We understand that TFL are now progressing with the signal design and approvals for implementation later this year.

With regards to trees discussions are progressing including officers from Planning, Greenspaces, Future Merton and CIL to establish the planting regime to be

implemented. Once this is fully agreed it can be shared. It has been established that there may be some limitations on where some trees can be planted due to services, however, other replacement options will be fully investigated in those circumstances.

For data I refer to the Councils Annual Status Report