

Merton Council Council

3 February 2021

Supplementary Agenda 5

29 Public and Councillor Supplementary Questions and Replies

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1. From: Stephen Marsh

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

Will Merton council back the end our cladding scandal campaign and if not why not? Stephen Hammond has added his support but it seems not the council. Why?

Reply

As cabinet member I have publicly supported the 10 pledges of the end our cladding scandal campaign which will be debated at council later tonight. I find it deeply regrettable that the Conservative government have failed to provide support tenants facing having huge bills to remove dangerous cladding when it should fall upon the building owners.

2. From: Tim Gaunt

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

Please could I ask why so little is being done in terms of new cycle lanes being built in Wimbledon?

Reply

The Council submitted a bid to the Government in summer 2020 to deliver a significant cycling project in Wimbledon, but the project was not selected by the MHCLG.

We have, however, attracted investment via the Department for Transport Active Travel Fund and have introduced segregated cycle lanes on Haydon's Rd bridge; cycle lanes along Plough Lane, cycle improvements on Merton High Street, Church Road Mitcham, Raleigh Gardens Mitcham and extended bus lanes in London Road Mitcham which also provide more space for cyclists. We will be delivering a cycle contraflow scheme in Wimbledon Village this quarter and have allocated £100,000 of Merton's Community Infrastructure Levy towards cycling and active travel next financial year.

3. From: Daniel Beglin

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

What is the council doing to ensure that disabled people like my father who rely on their wheelchairs to get around, do not risk their lives by using the road to get around cars which have been parked on the pavement?

Reply

Merton is committed to reducing unauthorised obstructions on the pavement including tackling those who park without permission. There is a London wide pavement parking ban which has been in place since the 1970s. Parking on pavements is only permitted if signs allow. Before any pavement parking is permitted at any location an assessment on pedestrian access, including wheelchairs and prams etc, would have been undertaken. Our Civil Enforcement Officers (Parking Attendants) enforce footway parking as part of their normal duties and issue a Penalty Charge Notice if a

vehicle is in contravention. If there are specific areas of the borough which require extra enforcement to stop the activity Parking Services would be happy to make additional visits. Residents can report unauthorised parking via the details on the Council website or via the parking hotline on Monday to Saturday from 7am to 10pm, and Sundays 11.45am to 4pm on 020 8545 4661

Supplementary

The reply given states that before any pavement parking is permitted an assessment would have been undertaken. Then why does it take my father to risk his life by going on the road to get around parked cars on the pavement?

Reply

I'd like to thank Mr Beglin for his supplementary answer. Clearly in terms of pavement parking, it's something that we do review and where there are incidences where it does block off access in terms of wheelchairs we will take the necessary action and if cars are parked illegally and reported we will get our Parking Services team out to address that matter and there's also areas as well where we do from time to time introduce waiting restrictions on roads to stop parking.

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

Has Merton conducted an equalities assessment to evaluate the impact that the proposed amendment to visitors permits and the proposals to phase out scratch card permits long term will have on elderly, disabled and disadvantaged residents?

Reply

Yes a full equalities analysis accompanies our proposals around changes to visitor permits The Emission Based Charges report made reference to an annual review towards phasing out scratch cards in the long term. There is no specific recommendation for the removal of this service at this time. Therefore an Equalities analysis specifically on any withdrawal of scratch cards will take place as part of any future review of this provision.

The demand for scratch cards will be assessed annually with a view towards phasing these out in the long term as sales via the RingGo APP increase, although this would be subject to further consultation.

5. From: John Braithwaite To the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health

How does the council propose to measure and offset the impact of the increase in pollution from stationary and queueing traffic on Kingston Road which will result if the proposed Low Traffic Neighbourhood schemes are introduced on surrounding roads?

Reply

Low Traffic Neighbourhoods are designed to remove through-traffic from residential streets (unclassified roads). Quieter streets are safer and provide greater opportunity for residents to make local trips by walking and cycling.

LTNs keep through-traffic on A and B roads (classified roads) which are designed for, and intended to perform a cross-borough traffic function. We accept that in the short-term, as schemes bed-in that there may be some displacement of traffic, but studies from other LTNs demonstrate that this impact is short-lived. This is why we intend to implement LTNs as experiments. At the end of the monitoring period, the Council will consider whether to keep, adapt or remove the LTNs.

LTNs must be viewed not only as a road safety measure, but form part of the Council's longer term objectives in changing driver behaviour, improving air quality and mitigating the impacts of climate change.

6. From: Anne Macartney

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

Is there any intention to extend the consultation period for the current LTN proposals due to the problems notifying residents due to the situation at Wimbledon Sorting office. If not, how else does the council intend to notify residents regarding the consultation please?

Reply

We have recently been informed of capacity issues with the local postal service as a result of Covid-19. The Council will consider extending the consultation period and any extension would be posted on the Council's website. However, given that many of the local communities are aware of the consultation via councillors, Resident Associations and word of mouth, the information can be viewed on the website. The questionnaires are simple and do not take more than a few minutes to complete; we recommend that everyone uses the online feedback forms where possible.

7. From: Tom Killick

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

What steps is the Council taking to ensure that housing planning applications it approves meet its 40% "affordable" target? In 2018-19 only 24% of units in approved schemes were "affordable" *.

*Monitoring report, Table 7.2, page 52.

Reply

The delivery of affordable housing in Merton is affected by government's introduction of Prior Approval rights to convert office, shops and storage premises to residential use without the need for full planning permission and without the requirement to deliver affordable housing. Merton is also characterised by fragmented land ownership and small sites (i.e. sites of 10 homes or less) which again do not normally contribute to affordable housing.

Due to this, only one development in 2018-2019 was liable to provide affordable housing via the planning system. It was a development of 11 homes that provided 45% affordable homes, in excess of the 40% borough-wide target. (Authority Monitoring Report 2018-19, page 27 for planning applications granted permission in 2018-2019, the council negotiated affordable homes ranging from 17% to 43% depending on the site circumstances including development viability [Authority Monitoring Report 2018-19.pdf \(merton.gov.uk\)](#))

We have just finished a consultation on a draft new Local Plan (public consultation period : 13 November 2020 – 1 February 2021). This includes policy H4.1 (Housing choice) which aims to boost the provision of affordable housing by including a requirement for sites of 10 homes or less to contribute to affordable housing provision. The new local plan also proposes some larger sites be allocated for new homes, which will help boost the supply of sites that can contribute to affordable housing. The draft new Local Plan can be accessed at: [Local Plan consultation 2a 2020 \(merton.gov.uk\)](#)

8. From: Andrew Biden

To the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health

The 2019 Air Quality Status Report states illegal air pollution at the five most polluted Merton sites have "remained relatively static" for "a number of years." By what date does the Council intend to reduce air pollution at these sites to legal levels and how will they achieve this?

Reply

Our Annual Status Report (ASR) for 2019 shows the overall picture of air quality in the borough and relates to monitoring in 2019. In general the ASR is showing an improving trend in NO₂ throughout many areas of the borough. It is also important to note that we have increased our monitoring to ensure that this is capturing the most polluted areas. This monitoring is reviewed every year.

Despite the improving locations we are aware that there are areas of entrenched poor air quality, these sit mainly on our High Streets with the main contributing factor being traffic.

This is a picture we are seeing in many boroughs across London, generally the predicted compliance for NO₂ in most areas will be 2025, but even at this date we will likely still see a few hot spots throughout London.

Merton remains committed to tackling air pollution and is one of the London Authorities that is using all the controls that we have available to tackle the problem. With regards to traffic we are looking to implement an emissions based parking scheme to incentivise cleaner vehicles and sustainable transport. We also have policies and a commitment to creating an environment where cycling and walking are a real choice for people.

We continue to lobby for cleaner buses and have a commitment from TfL to have all buses at least Euro 6 compliant by April 2021. The recent changes in the Low Emissions Zone will further clean freight and delivery vehicles.

We are consulting on a new Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) for Planning and Development which includes those steps we can take to ensure new development has a positive contribution to air quality in the borough, and specific focus areas.

Unfortunately there are areas that contribute to pollution that remain outside our direct control and with regional & national government, we continue to lobby these partners for new legislation and changes in policy as well as ensuring cleaner vehicles.

Through traffic and pollutants that don't respect borough boundaries are a key concern, again we have limited control over these, however many authorities are looking towards similar parking schemes and measures that Merton are adopting.

Merton are developing the use of information and technology 'Smarter Cities' to capture granular data around travel, vehicle use and air quality, including particulate pollution, to better understand and influence decision and policy making.

I am confident as a borough we are doing all we can to tackle those areas we can control, and lobby for those we can't. We are not complacent and will currently review actions we can take to reduce pollution.

9. From: Pippa Maslin

To the Cabinet Member for Local Environment and Green Spaces

Despite many complaints from the public, Veolia persists in blighting our environment with their piles of green bags that sit for days, in numerous spots around the borough, before being collected. Why is this and can we, the public, expect a change?

Reply

I would like to note the continued commitment and professionalism demonstrated by our waste collection and street cleansing crews in delivering these critical front-line services during these unprecedented times.

The street cleansing service, whilst showing improvements in performance over the last year, continues to be a priority area of focus for our Client team, Veolia and our residents. When we are notified of deficiencies in the service, such as the wrongful positioning of green bags, the service responds well within targeted requirements. However, we have acknowledged that the green sweeper sacks continue to be a challenge and are a contributing factor in attracting additional side waste which is a blight on our community. To address this the Client team are working closely with Veolia to ensure that these locations are approved and scheduled to be cleared the same day. In order to focus our service delivery we have revised the agreed Service Performance Indicators and Veolia are tasked with removing these within 24hrs of

being reported. We have also increased our proactive monitoring of the service with the aim to inspect the service delivery in each road across the borough monthly.

10. From: Matthew Willis

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

As it is currently looking unlikely that restrictions on the use of public transport will have been fully lifted by April 2021, will the council delay the introduction of the proposed emissions based parking scheme until the situation with Covid-19 has dramatically improved?

Reply

The Council is looking to introduce the Emissions Based Charging arrangements from May 2021 at the earliest. We recognise that the availability of safe reliable public transport is part of the key to changing behaviour and shifting away from the private motor car and we will keep this date under review. This needs to be set alongside concerns that we are experiencing a car borne recovery with greater impact on air quality and carbon dioxide production.

Supplementary

I thank the Cabinet Member for his answer and for suggestions that emissions based charges could be deferred until public transport is safe again. However, if he is concerned about a car borne recovery as stated, why does the scheme provide for lower charges in the East of the Borough where there's a greater reliance on private motor vehicles?

Reply

I'd like to thank him for his supplementary answer. The new charges will apply to all of the Borough where there is controlled parking zones but also on and off street parking. We believe that as a Council we need to take the necessary action to address emissions in our Borough but also as well to improve air quality. Thank you.

11. From: Christopher Stanton

To the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health

In 2020, how many encounters with idling drivers were recorded by CEOs in Merton, and how many of these encounters resulted in a fine?

Reply

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.

**12. From: Robin Vaughan-Williams
To the Cabinet Member for Local Environment and Green Spaces**

Regarding household waste, a) how much household waste did Merton Council send to the incinerator at Beddington in 2019 and 2020, b) what is its projection for this year and each of the next five years?

Reply

Part A

Below are the figures for the total tonnes of residual waste collected by Merton in the calendar years (i.e. January - December 2019). This includes fly tipped, bulky waste that is co-collected with the household residual waste:

	ERF	Landfill	Total Residual	% to ERF
2019	38,350	2,758	41,108	93%
2020	42,191	0	42,191	100%

Part B

Total projected Merton residual waste for January - December 2021 is 44,108. This includes fly tipped, bulky and some commercial waste that is co-collected with the household residual waste.

The contract states that no more than 7% of SLWP's waste should go to landfill. Therefore, if we assume a maximum 1.5% residual waste growth each year the estimated tonnes for the next 5 years and that the contractor meets their target, it can be assumed that 93% of the residual waste that Merton collects as a minimum will be processed through ERF.

On that basis, the estimated figures are as follows:

	Total waste	93% to ERF
2021	44,108	41,020
2022	44,770	41,636
2023	45,441	42,260
2024	46,123	42,894
2025	46,815	43,538

**13. From: Andrea Milde
To the Cabinet Member for Local Environment and Green Spaces**

Does the council think that a) incinerating waste is an appropriate response to the climate emergency given that incinerators such as the Beddington facility are pollutants and that b) incinerating waste does not discourage waste generation?

Reply

Thanks to the Beddington Energy Recovery Facility (ERF), 100% of Merton's residual waste in 2020 was diverted away from landfill and used to generate energy. This represents an important step up the waste hierarchy for the borough; treating waste in energy from waste facilities like the one at Beddington delivers significant carbon savings over landfill. Even so, we recognise that treating the residual waste we collect from households remains a significant contributor to the borough's carbon emissions. We are committed to reducing that in the coming years to help us achieve our ambition of the borough becoming net carbon zero.

Merton has gone to great lengths in recent years to increase recycling and minimise waste, and there has been some real progress in this area. For example, the amount of food waste we collect for recycling increased by 76% between 2016 and 2019. We offer a comprehensive recycling service and encourage residents to use it to its full potential, so nothing that could be recycled ends up at the Beddington ERF.

We would all like to see a future where residual waste treatment facilities are not needed. But the reality is that - for now at least - they are a vital part of our waste management infrastructure. Despite being one of the best recyclers in London, Merton Council is left with around 40,000 tonnes of waste each year that either cannot be recycled or has not been sorted for recycling by residents. There are three options available to the borough: bury that waste in landfill, export it out of the area for someone else to deal with (which would significantly increase traffic movements and transport emissions) or treat it in a local, modern energy from waste facility. We are confident that in the Beddington ERF, we have a safe, environmentally-sustainable and cost-effective solution.

14. From: Sara Sharp

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

Please list all planning conditions relating to application 18/P1921 (Harris Academy School, South Wimbledon SW19) with a) the detail of each condition, b) whether and how the condition was met, c) if it is hasn't been met, what measures are being brought to ensure it is met.

Reply

The relevant conditions can be found on the Merton website at the following location:

https://planning.merton.gov.uk/MVM.DMS/Planning%20Application/1000102000/1000102508/18P1921_Decision%20Notice.pdf

There are 40 conditions in total and 10 informatives. Not all conditions require specific approval of details to be formally submitted. Records show that conditions 2, 4, 5, 10, 13, 14, 19, 24, 27, 29, and 35 have been discharged.

The Council do not have the resources to run full compliance checks on all planning decision notices and all the relevant conditions. With over 4000 such decisions per year and as is demonstrated in this particular case, up to and beyond 40 conditions which may be relevant, the number of total conditions runs into the tens of thousands per year. If there are any specific issues raised with regard to any of the conditions and evidence is provided to demonstrate why the relevant condition may not been complied with, then the Enforcement Team can investigate accordingly. At this moment, enforcement records show that there have been no specific issues raised to date.

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From: Councillor John Dehaney to the Cabinet member for Adult Social Care and Public Health

What assessment has there been during second wave of Covid-19 of the impact on BAME communities?

Reply

Data on Covid impact on BAME in the second wave:

Following the first wave, research has been done across London and the UK, showing that BAME populations were disproportionately affected by COVID. This included the direct effects, including hospitalisation and death, as well as medium to long term effects, such as social, economic and mental health impacts. The effects are complex and likely due to a combination of underlying health, social and economic determinants which interact with each other. Factors such as employment, including public facing roles, economic uncertainty, overcrowding, and multigenerational households will have increased the risks certain populations have been exposed to.

The impact of COVID-19 on the BAME community in the second wave is constantly evolving and is under analysis. It is likely that the impacts of COVID are still not being felt evenly and impact some groups more than others. During recent weeks of sharp increase of infections in London, there have been diverging infection rates across East and West Merton, and between white and ethnic minority groups with patterns of increased infections across the East and in BAME groups. This is likely to be driven by housing risks (multi-occupancy) and types of jobs (e.g. frontline, contact with the public).

We will continue to monitor and work closely with the NHS and Public Health England London on further analyses as more data becomes available to understand the acute effects of infections and deaths, in coming weeks and months. This is being complemented by work with the voluntary sector to gather information about the lived experience of Covid in our diverse community including among BAME groups and will also include work in the JSNA to understand the more long-term effects including health, social and economic factors.

Supplementary

Councillor Dehaney did not ask a supplementary question.

From Cllr Adam Bush to the Cabinet Member for Finance:

What is the total amount of money that has been given to Merton Council by the government to assist local businesses during the pandemic, and does the Cabinet Member feel that the council could have done more to assist businesses in Merton during the pandemic?.

Reply

06: Non ST Questions

The Council has reacted quickly and awarded grants and rates relief in line with the Government Guidance. We were in the top three London boroughs for paying the small business grant sand retail, hospitality and leisure grants last year.

We are currently making payments on all the different Local Restrictions Grant schemes, automated where possible to reduce the need for multiple applications as the country moves in and out of lockdown, including the discretionary scheme unlike many local authorities.

The Council has supported businesses by setting up dedicated pages on our website identifying areas of support both from the Council and other external sources and worked closely with the Merton Chamber of Commerce. Businesses were also able to defer their payments to us and we have not commenced any enforcement activity in this area. Due to the limited funding for the discretionary schemes and a net cost to the authority for its expenditure on Covid, we have not been able to support the many businesses in Merton that have suffered falls in income.

A list of the grant schemes and support is detailed below

Extended retail, hospitality and leisure relief	£44.5 million	Business rates relief
Nursery relief	£0.779 million	Business rates relief
Business Support Grants – small business grants and retail, hospitality and leisure grants	£29.318 million	Direct grants
Discretionary Grants	£1,312,750	Discretionary grants (own scheme)
Local Restrictions Grants – Addendum – (lockdown 5 November to 2 December)	£3,099,762	Grants for business rate payers mandated to close in national lockdown
Local Restrictions Grants – Open (17 October to 4 November)	£360,853	Grants for business rate payers affected by tier 2 restrictions
Local Restrictions Grant – ARG (Discretionary Grants (5 November to 31 March 22)	£4,130,960	Discretionary grants (own scheme) – phase one being administered
Local Restrictions Grants – Open (2 December to 19 December)	£305,984	Grants for business rate payers affected by tier 2 restrictions
Local Restrictions Grants – Closed (2 December to 19 December)	£13,924	Grants for business rate payers affected by tier 3 restrictions
Local Restrictions Grants – tier 4 (20 December to 4 January)	Not notified yet	Grants for business rate payers affected by tier 4 restrictions

Christmas Support Package for Pubs	£38,400	Grants for wet led pubs
Local Restrictions Grants – Addendum – (lockdown 5 January to 15 February)	£4,649,643	Grants for business rate payers mandated to close in national lockdown
Closedown Business Grants	£9,297,000	One off grants for retail, hospitality and leisure businesses
Top up to Local Restrictions Grant – ARG (Discretionary Grants (5 November to 31 March 22))	£1,834,777	Additional funding for Discretionary grants (own scheme)

Supplementary

Thank you Madam Mayor. I thank the Cabinet member for his answer. In July last year, the current Council leader said the Council could not give local small businesses the support they deserve and yet in December the Council used £316,000 to pay for an extra day for staff. Does he agree with me that these funds should have been used to help support local businesses instead?

Reply

Thank you Madam Mayor and I thank him for his question and his supplementary. I'm sure he'll be surprised to hear that I do not agree with him and I think that it is Madam Mayor a good opportunity to put on record the administration's gratitude and thanks for the incredibly hard work that our staff have put in over the course of the last year. It is disappointing Madam Mayor that the opposition has taken the view that it has; the opposition has called it a gimmick, which is incredibly disappointing and I would urge him and all of his colleagues to support our staff and to support any measures that we can put in place to say thank you to them for everything they've done over the course of the response to the pandemic. Thank you Madam Mayor.

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

Can the Cabinet member update us on the rollout of Covid-19 vaccinations in Merton?

Reply

The roll out of the NHS led vaccination programme in Merton continues at pace, with huge progress made to meeting the government's challenging ambition of vaccinating all those in the top four priority groups by February 2021, as set out by the Joint Vaccination and Immunisation Committee (JVCI)

At this time, the vaccine is being offered to the top four priority cohorts, they are:

06: Non ST Questions

1. Residents in a care home for older adults and their carers
2. all those 80 years of age and over and frontline health and social care workers
3. all those 75 years of age and over
4. all those 70 years of age and over and clinically extremely vulnerable individuals

Primary care teams are delivering vaccines from the Wilson and the Nelson medical centres, and frontline health and social care staff are predominantly accessing hospital hub sites across South West London. These include St George's and St Helier Hospitals, in addition to the first large vaccination site in South West London, situated at Hawks Road, Kingston. A roving team has also been mobilised to vaccinate care home residents and those who are housebound. The team has also vaccinated a number of care home staff whilst vaccinating residents.

Our local NHS colleagues are also working hard to establish a standard data set to show progress in numbers. The national data set suggest that across South West London, over 70 % of our residents aged 80 and above have already been vaccinated. We are also working on a local dataset which we hope to share at the end of next week.

Supplementary

I would like the Cabinet Member to join me in thanking the National Health Service for its' work in delivering the vaccine to the residents in Merton. Thank you.

Reply

Thank you Madam Mayor and thank you to Councillor Curtin for highlighting in your question I think the frankly heroic effort undertaken by our NHS partners with support from our Social Care and Public Health teams in terms of the vaccine rollout and I certainly wish to join you in commending their efforts in doing so.

From Cllr Ed Gretton to the Cabinet Member for Finance:

What is the revised MTFS gap for the financial year 2021/22 as reported in the January cabinet papers?

Reply

As set out in the table in para 7.1 of the January Cabinet report, the revised MTFS gap is as set out below.

	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
	£000	£000	£000	£000
MTFS Gap (Cabinet 7 Dec 2020)	11,739	12,766	13,860	12,777
Capital Financing costs	372	(366)	(819)	223
DSG deficit update	4,922	1,793	1,979	2,163
New Homes Bonus	396	300	300	300
Contract costs/London Living Wage	(266)	0	0	0
Covid RNF and LCTS grant	(6,811)	0	0	0
Social Care Grant	(1,670)	0	0	0
Collection Fund – deficit funding	(2,573)	(2,573)	(2,573)	0
Additional Savings proposals	(1,223)	(1,404)	(1,404)	(1,404)

Supplementary

Thank you Madam Mayor. Wow, £100million of funding for businesses in Wimbledon, Mitcham and Morden from Rishi Sunak and tens of millions of pounds of extra funding to Merton Council from Robert Jenrick; there's no budget gap any longer it seems the new financial year, but Madam Mayor, given Councillor Allison's ill-informed claims a few months ago about the Council being on the verge of bankruptcy despite him awarding a million pounds, an extra holiday and unbudgeted pay rises, will the Cabinet Member for Finance now find the grace, the good grace to send a letter of apology to the Secretary of State Robert Jenrick for suggesting that the Government was not delivering on its' promises and if he can't find the good grace to apologise, will he join me now in thanking the Secretary of State Robert Jenrick on behalf of all the residents and businesses in Merton for the tremendous hundreds of millions of pounds of financial support the Government's provided to the residents businesses and Council of Merton? Thank you.

Reply

Thank you Madam Mayor and can I thank him for his question and his supplementary question. I would note Madam Mayor that the Councillor appears to have difficulty in accessing the Council papers because his questions seem to just ask for information that is publicly accessible, so he can perhaps be forgiven for missing the fact that in the financial monitoring papers the deficit that the Council has suffered due to Covid remains significant and I would remind him that Robert Jenrick's pledge that was made that he refers to was that Local Authorities should do whatever it takes to look after their communities and that the Government would fully recompense them for doing that. That is not the case Madam Mayor and the Council remains worse off as a result of the work that its done to support its' community. I would also note Madam Mayor that he refers to the gap having been reduced and it is reduced and of course we are grateful for the money that the Government has provided us, but ultimately that money is a series of one-off grants there is no long-term certainty, there is no ability to plan beyond the immediate year and I would also note that the gap is reduced because significant savings have been brought forward, savings which have been necessitated by his Government's failure to recompense the Council. The gap has been reduced due to the hard work of all of the staff, the staff that he doesn't believe are worth an additional day off and the gap is reduced because we are assuming a significant increase in Council tax which the Government is effectively forcing all Local Authorities to take in order to meet the

gap of its' own making. So I won't be taking up his invitation to write to the Chancellor or the Secretary of State and I hope he can understand why Madam Mayor.

From Councillor Joan Henry to the Cabinet member for Children and Education

After seeing the shocking images on social media of some of the "hampers" provided to families eligible for Free School Meals, can the cabinet member reassure us that none of our borough's children have suffered this indignity?

Reply

I can assure you that none of the schools under the council's control receive inadequate school lunch food hampers. Since the autumn there has been a requirement to organise lunch provision for children not attending school for Covid reasons, even when off school for a short period. Working with our cluster primary school representatives, we could see that the hamper offer was not sufficient and offered little flexibility to support family budgets while children were at home. We therefore opted for the supermarket voucher option which has always been permitted but not recommended by government. We are pleased to see government guidance has now caught up to be more open towards supermarket vouchers.

Supplementary

Thank you Madam Mayor. Can the Cabinet Member please tell us what is being done for families eligible for free school meals for the half term holiday?

Reply

Thank you Madam Mayor and thank you Councillor Henry for your question and supplementary. I can confirm that we will be providing £20 vouchers for pupils eligible for free school meals because their households have a low income over the February half term and as per our scheme over Christmas, this will also be available for families with pre-school children young carers and some other vulnerable young people. So we the Council are doing what we can protect the rising number of children who are growing up in poverty from its' worst effects but we do need the Government to do more to prioritise supporting low-income families during this incredibly challenging time and as Councillor Byers highlighted this needs to be done with something more than one-off grants that they only give out in the face of huge public outcry. Thank you.

From Cllr Simon McGrath to the Cabinet Member for Housing, Regeneration and the Climate Emergency

What steps are the Council taking to ensure that the sites it owns, which had been planned to be used by Merantun Development Ltd, can now be used for building new social housing?

Reply

The redevelopment of these sites will be managed through the disposal process that will seek to balance the form of development including social housing with the council's fiduciary duty. These disposals will be progressed when the market conditions are right and in addition to any conditions within the sale contract their use will be controlled through the council's powers as planning authority.

Supplementary

Madam Mayor this is a fantastically wet answer. We've got nearly 10,000 families on the housing list and this is the answer we get. Will the Cabinet Member give an unambiguous answer that the Council will try to use these sites for social housing?

Reply

I'd like to thank Councillor McGrath for his supplementary answer. Clearly as a Council we do have to examine all options in terms of these sites but as a Council we do want to provide more social homes for rent in the Borough. Due to Government cuts when his party was in Government in 2010 the money for social housing was cut in half. So we do want to build those homes, we do want to have the ability to do this and I am as Cabinet Member committed to bringing forward more homes for social rent in Merton over the next year. Thank you.

Councillor Pauline Cowper to the Cabinet member for Partnerships, Public Safety and Tackling Crime

Can the Cabinet member outline the ongoing work to tackle the rise in Domestic Violence brought about by lockdowns to tackle the pandemic?

Reply

Partnership work to respond to Domestic Violence continues to be delivered throughout lock down. Specialist services delivered include:

- Independent Domestic Violence Advocacy service (IDVA) – providing one to one support to victims
- Complex Needs IDVA -specialist support for victims who have complex needs (mental health, substance misuse as well as domestic abuse and violence)
- Virtual One Stop Shop – where victims can call in and speak to arrange of partners and secure advise to support them
- Regular communications to promote the service's available
- Monthly multi-agency case panel meetings (DV MARAC) where the most high risk cases are discussed by partners and wrap around interventions agreed

In addition to this the police have developed and are implemented an enhanced approach to Domestic abuse and violence. Actions include:

- Ensuring body worn cameras are used when attending to incidents of domestic abuse and violence

06: Non ST Questions

- Maximising the opportunities to arrest at the scene or within 24 hours of the reported incident
- Increasing the use of Domestic Violence Protection Orders and Notices where appropriate
- Targeting activity against our High Harm offenders and those Wanted on Warrant

Close working across the community safety partnership and the Children and Family Services also continues to ensure the safeguarding of children who are impacted by Domestic abuse and violence.

Supplementary

Does the Cabinet Member agree with me that tackling domestic violence increases is vital at this time?

Reply

Thank you Madam Mayor, thank you Councillor Cowper. I absolutely agree with you and I think that the partnership working group is actually doing a great job in this lockdown to be able to make sure that families are well looked after; they've been going to one-stop shop and also being supported in various services so I totally agree with you we need not lose sight of what's happening at the moment so thank you for your question.

From Cllr Thomas Barlow to the Leader:

What is the total amount of money that has been spent on the Steer report and the council's attempts to oppose the implementation of the recommendations of the Improving Healthcare Together consultation report?

Reply

Thank you for your question. The Council commissioned the services of Roger Steer in order to assist it in discharging its duties under the Local Authority (Public Health, Health and Wellbeing Boards and Health Scrutiny) Regulations 2013 in properly considering and scrutinising the proposals for acute reconfiguration proposed by the Committee in Common as part of the Improving Healthcare Together programme. As these proposals will lead to the most significant changes in decades to healthcare services for residents across the borough, it is right that we ensured they were fully scrutinised and that we commissioned independent, specialist advice to do so.

Mr Steer was not commissioned to oppose the recommendations. The whole health scrutiny structure is designed to ensure affected local councils are afforded every opportunity to scrutinise, and if necessary to challenge, such far reaching proposals. Mr Steer produced a comprehensive report as well as giving evidence both to the Council's Healthier Communities and Older People Scrutiny Panel and to the Joint Health Scrutiny Committee covering the South West London region.

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Following the decision by the Committee in Common to recommend that St Helier Hospital be downgraded, a decision was taken to refer this matter to the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, pursuant to Regulation 23(9) (a) and (c) of the 2013 Regulations. As we have done at every stage of the process, the Council took independent legal advice before making this decision, balancing the need to ensure we submit the proposals to proper and rigorous scrutiny and challenge and argue for what would be in the best interests of our residents with the cost to the Council of doing so.

The total cost of commissioning Mr Steer to undertake an independent review of the proposals, subsequent legal advice and the referral to the Secretary of State was £32,360. In contrast, the NHS spent over £2.2m on the IHT consultation and is estimated to have spent between £40m and £50m on similar exercises over the years with its repeated attempts at downgrading services at St Helier Hospital.

Supplementary

Thank you Madam Mayor. I'd expected my question to be answered by the Cabinet Member for Finance but I suppose old habits die hard for the Leader. Can he tell residents what this £32,000 has achieved and can you assure the residents of Merton that no more public money will be wasted on blocking investment in Epsom and St Helier?

Reply

Thank you Madam Mayor I'd like to thank him for that follow-up. I'm disappointed the Conservatives are so opposed to keeping health services at St Helier and are trying to turn this into a political game. We've just passed a terrible milestone in this pandemic during which it's been clear people from disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to need emergency care, yet the Conservatives want to move emergency care more than 20 minutes further away from the very areas of disadvantage that have been shown to need them the most. My answer showed that this is a David and Goliath fight, people wanting to take services away from us have a budget of millions, we have had a budget of just a few thousand. The people of Merton know it is them who have been wasting money that should have been spent on services and I know they will want us to continue our fight to save St Helier and to continue to use this money in an appropriate way to protect St Helier Hospital.

From Councillor Billy Christie to the Leader

Does the Leader agree with the Tories that giving the staff a day off for their work during the pandemic is "a gimmick"?

Reply

I'd like to make it clear that those comments in no way reflect my views, or the views of the people of Merton. I'd like to thank our staff for their hard work throughout the

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pandemic and for going the extra mile to help our residents. Our staff have gone above and beyond, and being able to give them an additional day off is a small sign of our community's gratitude to them for their efforts.

Supplementary

Thank you Madam Mayor and thank you to the Leader for his answer. I certainly agree that it is not a gimmick to reward the heroic efforts of our hard-working staff with one additional day off after the year that they've had, but does the Leader have any advice that he would like to offer the Conservative Leader, Councillor Bush I heard and perhaps other members of the Conservative group on how they instead could help to motivate our amazing workforce who have done so much to help our residents in the past year?

Reply

Thank you Councillor Christie for your follow-up. To be honest, it's not been difficult to motivate our staff because they are as keen to ensure that Merton's a great place as I am. However, they really have gone an extra mile this year and despite understandable concerns about the virus, our schools have stayed open with free school meals and vouchers for those who need them, our rubbish has been collected with no interruptions, our parks have been oasis's of tranquillity and we have continued to care for our vulnerable and bringing food to those in need. So my advice would be that if they want to motivate our staff for the next 12 months, they should not diminish the efforts of our staff in the way that they have shamefully done so this evening and I'm sorry that they've done so and I hope that at their next opportunity they will apologise.

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From Councillor Laxmi Attawar to the Cabinet member for Housing, Regeneration and the Climate Emergency

Can the Cabinet member give an update on Lower traffic Neighbourhoods in Merton, and the benefits to improving air quality?

Reply

An update on the Council's active travel measures, including Low Traffic Neighbourhoods (LTNs), was presented to the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel on 19th January 2021.

<https://democracy.merton.gov.uk/documents/s36456/Active%20Travel%20SCSP%2019%20Jan%2021.pdf>

Merton has a number of pre-existing Low Traffic Neighbourhoods which have been successful and welcomed by residents. These include:

- **South Wimbledon:**
Hamilton, Hardy, Nelson, Victory, Trafalgar Hotham, Norman, Grove, Laburnum, Leyton and Milner Roads.
- **Colliers Wood:**
East and West of the High Street are all no-through traffic neighbourhoods.
- **Mitcham:**
Lewis Road, Love Lane, Mitcham Park, Sandy Lane, Tamworth Park St Georges Rd and Ashbourne Rd.

As part of the Council's active travel response to Covid-19, we secured funding to roll out further LTNs.

New LTNs have been introduced under experimental orders and the consultation on these schemes are live. The locations are:

- Commonside East
- Links Rd
- Seeley Rd
- Sandy Lane
- Botsford Rd

In December 2021, we secured additional funding and are currently consulting with residents to introduce further LTNs in:

- Merton Park
- Haydon Park
- Raynes Park.

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Low Traffic Neighbourhoods are also part of the Council's response to the Climate Emergency. LTNs create more space for people to participate in active travel such as walking, cycling and scooting. With fewer people driving and opting for active travel choices, carbon emissions are reduced, helping to mitigate against climate change.

Whilst primarily a road-safety intervention, there are secondary benefits to quieter streets including less noise, improved air quality and creating a safer environment for people to walk and cycle in their local area.

A low traffic neighbourhood (LTN) is a residential area, bordered by main roads (the places where buses, lorries, non-local traffic should be), where "through" traffic is discouraged or removed. Strategic road closures (like bollards or planters) prevent through traffic. Every street is still accessible to residents by vehicle.

There are many ways to design a low traffic neighbourhood, but the main principle is that every resident can drive onto their street, get deliveries etc., but it's harder or impossible to drive straight through from one main road to the next.

The aims of LTNs include:

- deterring traffic from diverting from congested main roads to residential streets as rat runs
- making it safer for pedestrians to social distance, for instance by walking in the street where pavements are narrower than the recommended two metres
- encouraging people to use bikes where possible by reducing traffic that many find intimidating and off-putting for cycle journeys, especially short, local trips
- encouraging people to walk for short journeys such as local shopping trips rather than taking the car
- securing gains made during lockdown, such as cleaner air, neighbourliness and reduced noise
- reducing traffic on residential streets, creating low-traffic corridors across Merton so more people can walk and cycle as part of their daily routine.

Evidence from Waltham Forest who introduced several LTNs saw that around 15 percent of non-local traffic from LTNs disappeared entirely as the drivers adjust their routes and behaviours. This led to a reported 90% reduction in household exposure to nitrogen dioxide after Waltham Forest Council installed over 40 filters in residential areas. LTNs also minimise the growing propensity for in-car navigation systems to divert traffic away from main roads.

<https://www.livingstreets.org.uk/media/3843/lcc021-low-traffic-neighbourhoods-intro-v8.pdf>

Research also indicates that annually, up to 10,000 early deaths across Greater London are attributed to poor air quality. Reducing the dominance of cars in our residential areas counters this trend.

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

Supplementary

Thank you Madam Mayor, yes I do have a supplementary. I'd like to thank the Cabinet Member for his answer. Colliers Wood has had an LTN for the last 30 years, which was organically brought in to stop rat running. I recently heard that the Conservatives have been campaigning to remove LTNs in Merton. Will the Cabinet Member reassure me that it will remain in place and that the Council is committed to LTNs?

Reply

I'd like to thank Councillor Attawar for her supplementary. The Council is fully committed to LTNs and we have seen the benefits in terms of Devonshire Road being an LTN for the last 30 years which stopped rat running. We've also seen the benefits in areas like the Battles and the Apostles and in Mitcham but also in my own ward of Pollards Hill where we have had long-standing LTNs, first introduced in 1973. In terms of the proportion of our roads with LTNs, Merton has one of the highest in the country and I find it appalling that the Conservatives think these have all been a failure because it seems to me that they want to remove all LTNs in the Borough including in roads like the Battles and the Apostles and across Merton. Low Traffic Neighbourhoods bring considerable benefits to their areas in terms of reducing traffic movements and as a Labour administration we will continue to have LTNs and hopefully if residents support them, introduce further ones throughout Merton. Thank you.

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

Does the Cabinet Member agree with me that two air quality monitoring stations in the borough is insufficient, and if so does the Cabinet Member accept that the council needs to improve air quality monitoring in the borough?

Reply

In recent years Merton has reviewed and increased air pollution monitoring in the borough, we have an established diffusion tube network covering 50 key locations. In addition we have been monitoring at schools in areas that have poor air quality. We also actively support citizen science monitoring with various community groups.

The two automated air quality monitoring stations are a part of this regime and also link into the strategic London air network. We have secured funding for an additional automated site through section 106 and we will be looking to install this in the near future. (Plough Lane area)

In addition we are working on a smarter cities programme over the next 2 years to look at capturing data on transport and travel activities in and through the borough and link this new low cost real-time air quality sensors that will further enhance our understanding of pollution in the borough. This will include pollutants that we need more information on, such as particulate matter.

Supplementary

Thank you Madam Mayor I thank the Cabinet Member for the response but before I start, I would actually like to put on record that we totally value the work of the Council staff, our point is simply that in the Borough, many people are struggling, many people, many businesses and Councillor Allison couldn't use his discretion to find further funding for companies that have gone to the wall so it is wrong and to Councillor Whelton on Battles and the Apostles and LTNs, I'll put it straight here as well, that's also a lie. May I now move to the question, it's now two years since this Council passed a motion to introduce low emission bus zones in town centres. In September last year we were promised an update on progress by the former Leader of the Council. Why has this not been provided and has this new Cabinet Member, the previous Cabinet Member or any officer held recent discussion with TfL on this matter and if so when did this take place? Thank you.

Reply

Thank you Madam Mayor and thank you Councillor McLean for that question on TfL. I will pick up with you separately on a direct response to that. Thank you.

Councillor Nick Draper to the Cabinet Member for Housing, Regeneration and the Climate Emergency

Following the news that Merton Council has invested the highest proportion of council budget into solar energy since 2015, can the Cabinet member outline the business-case analysis behind their investment in sustainable energy schemes.

Reply

The business case for the installation of the solar panels was based around three areas of payback –

- Central government Feed In Tariffs (FIT) income, which provides a secured cost per kWh of generated electricity over 20 or 25 years, even where that electricity is used on site.
- Utility savings created by solar panels generating free electricity for the site. Any excess power not used on site is exported to the national grid, and a section of the utility savings being diverted to the corporate budgets for providing a return on investment.
- Schools agreed to sign up to Power Purchase Agreements (PPA), by which the council issues a bill for renewable power used on site. Schools will NOT be charged for electricity which is exported to grid, only for solar generated power they actually use on site. The p/kWh rate for this is always lower than the rate they would pay for this electricity via the Corporate Electricity contract, thus providing a saving for schools and a return on investment for the council. It was agreed that schools

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would receive a period of free electricity from the panels before the PPAs were implemented.

Overall payback on the systems varies between 10 and 12 years depending on the FIT rate secured at the time of install and the cost of the system installed, with both seen to drop over the lifespan of the project.

Supplementary

Thank you Madam Mayor I have got a supplementary question. Thank you very much Councillor Byers for your answer it's a truly exciting project. Will the Cabinet member, yourself, join me in congratulating the Council on its' ambitious work of investing in solar energy?

Reply

I'd like to thank him for his supplementary question. I think it's great news that Merton has had the highest proportion since 2015 and these are obviously one of a number of measures that we have introduced in the Borough because we do want to be zero carbon by 2030 and this is something that we are fully committed to. There's a lot of work being done and a lot of work to do.

From Cllr Anthony Fairclough to the Cabinet Member for Local Environment and Green Spaces

I note in the Strategic Theme report "Councillors are encouraged to drive changes to encourage carbon reduction in their areas of responsibility and within their wards, promote the main themes within the climate strategy, and use available funding to support projects that align with the objectives of the climate change policy and co-benefits". Could the Cabinet member list some ways that he feels Councillors could do this?

Reply

When the Climate Delivery Plan was adopted in January, I was delighted to hear how committed Cabinet colleagues were to tackling climate change.

Merton's Climate Strategy and Action Plan sets out actions that apply to every individual, business and organisation in Merton. Councillors have an influential role to champion these actions through their discussions within their ward, and through their responsibilities to the Council.

Councillors can attend and encourage residents and businesses to participate in the Climate Action Group, set up to foster community-led action to reduce carbon emissions. The next meeting, on the 24th February will be about creating a green and circular economy.

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Councillors can champion borough initiatives that are likely to reduce emissions, such as the air quality action plan and school streets programme.

Councillors can also support funding of carbon emission reduction such as ward allocation and bids to the Neighbourhood Fund that reduce emissions. Last year, the Neighbourhood Fund provided around £400,000 to climate emergency related projects across the borough.

Supplementary

Thank you Madam Mayor and I'd like to thank the cabinet member for his reply setting out a couple of the schemes. I think my point was more around the opportunities for public engagement and involvement and I'd like to ask the cabinet member whether he would agree with me that the award allocation still is quite difficult to spend in a meaningful way and that it would be good to use it for climate emergency related projects like planting more trees?

Reply

I'd like to thank Councillor Fairclough for his supplementary. I think in terms of the ward allocation, this has been subject to debate at previous Council meetings and clearly the ongoing revenue costs we do review how neighbourhood cil is spent from time to time, this was something that was introduced by a Labour administration and it has been spent on many good initiatives across the Borough but we do have to be conscious that things we do don't have ongoing revenue costs to us as an authority. Thank you.

From Cllr Najeeb Latif to the Cabinet Member for Local Environment and Green Spaces:

Looking at the latest available data, why has the target for fly tip removal been missed in the months of September, October and November 2020?

Reply

In line with the National trend, we have been responding to a sustained increase in the volume of fly-tipped waste incidents across the borough. The regularity of waste deposited is becoming a common form of anti-social behaviour, which is damaging to the overall image of our Public Realm. In recent months we have seen a 35% increase above target in the number of reported incidents. This increase is outside of the control of our service provider who are tasked in the removal of these fly-tips, creating additional pressure on the service.

In terms of the rectification period of 24hrs which I acknowledge has been missed in September - November, it is important to highlight that additional data analysis is required to fully understand the actual level of performance being achieved and any

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mitigating circumstances leading to a missed response time. An example of this is when the crews identify Hazardous material within the fly-tip which then needs to be cleared by a specialist contractor. At present, we do not have the design solution within the software to re-assign tasks and as such the task remains open until such time the fly tip is removed. In this example our service providers crew may have been at the location within the allotted time frame, however, the fly-tip was not removed until such time that the specialist contractor was informed and on site. This is equally the same for larger industrial fly-tips which following a site inspection and assessment that a specialist vehicle needs to be deployed with the appropriate lifting equipment to rectify the reported issue.

We are working hard with our contractor to ensure the service standard is met.

Supplementary

Thank you Madam Mayor I do have a question. I want to thank the cabinet member for his written response, thank you. What actions has the cabinet member taken to ensure that fly tips are removed as quickly as possible and does he agree with me that it was a mistake for the Labour administration to reject our budget amendment last year that would have provided two additional full-time flytipping officers? Thank you.

Reply

I'd like to thank Councillor Latif for his supplementary question and also say at the beginning that I'm delighted to be Merton's first maternity cover cabinet member, I think that's an important statement for equalities in our Borough. What actions have I taken, well I have been in the role now for ten days, I certainly was out in Mitcham town centre going through some bags on Friday as was my habit when I was the cabinet member before and I'm passionate about fly tipping, so I go out I actively pursue and I know that our officers do that. What I would do to encourage what actions we should be taking is for people to report fly tips using the app or you know logging in and report them online because they are removed within 24 hours at a very high rate so I would encourage people to do that. I don't go along with your suggestion that we needed two extra officers I think we need to have smart technology that supports the people out there collecting fly tips and I encourage everyone to do it that way.

From Councillor Aidan Mundy to the Cabinet member for Local Environment and Green Spaces

Was there any interruption to waste collections in Merton over the Christmas period?

Reply

I am pleased to advise that that our service provider, Veolia, deployed a full waste collection service over the Christmas period.

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Following our agreed schedule, the service did not operate on Christmas Day, Boxing Day and New Year's day. The Christmas collection schedule can be challenging due to the increased volume of waste being generated by our households, but Veolia has successfully deployed the necessary additional resource required in order to ensure that the disruption from the revised collection schedule and day change was kept to a minimum, taking into account the loss of 3 Bank Holidays.

I believe it is important to note the continued professionalism demonstrated by both our waste collection and street cleansing crews in delivering these critical front-line services during these unprecedented time. I would like to place on record our appreciation to our front-line workers for their continued commitment in delivering the service.

Supplementary

Councillor Mundy has written to the Cabinet Member with a supplementary question as he was not present at the meeting.

From Cllr Jenifer Gould to the Cabinet Member for Housing, Regeneration and the Climate Emergency

Following the cross-party Climate Emergency declaration made in July 2019, could the Cabinet Member please outline specific action that has been taken to mitigate the negative effects of climate change and detail the resulting benefits to the environment?

Reply

Following the declaration of a climate emergency in July 2019, we worked with residents who volunteered their time as part of Merton's Climate Emergency Working Group to help shape Merton's Climate Strategy and Action Plan, which was adopted in November 2020. We'd like to thank everybody who volunteered their time and skills to participate in the Climate Emergency Working Group and to everybody who fed back to the consultations on the climate strategy and action plan. [Climate change \(merton.gov.uk\)](https://www.merton.gov.uk/ClimateChange)

The next step from the climate strategy and action plan is the implementation of the Climate Delivery Plan – year 1 which sets out the council's climate change priority actions for 2021, and was approved by Cabinet in January.

We are delighted that so many residents volunteered their time to participate in the Climate Action Group Launch that took place on 27th Jan 2021. The group will be meeting regularly this year to develop community-led projects to reduce greenhouse gas emissions which are outside the scope of the council's control and will help us reach our 2050 net zero carbon target.

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We've worked with other boroughs to develop planning policies on climate change that are consistent with our carbon reduction targets, for new developments in Merton's new Local Plan, and the public consultation has just closed.

We have submitted a bid of around £0.5 million for the Public Sector Decarbonisation Fund to reduce carbon emissions from our children's centres and community buildings. This should also help to reduce energy bills for the occupiers as well as reduce emissions.

A successful bid to the Green Homes Grant Local Authority Delivery Scheme boosted funding to create warmer homes for those in need through the installation of energy saving measures which also reduce carbon emissions.

We are working closely with London Councils and other London boroughs on the Covid19 green recovery, leading regional discussions on supporting London's Green New Deal to double the size of the green economy. This may lead to the development of cross borough working to reduce the low carbon skills gap.

The council has also moved over to a green energy provider which means we are now purchasing electricity sourced wholly from renewable energy.

The covid transport strategy has accelerated the implementation of 26 school streets 4 low traffic neighbourhoods and improvements to a number of cycle lanes, which help to reduce car use and support active travel.

The Council has already implemented revised parking charges in Jan 2020 to reduce carbon and improve air quality and we are advancing our plans to refine this and introduce emissions based charging in 2021.

We have initiated a number of campaigns to support greener behaviour amongst our partners and Merton residents. One example is supporting GP practices to have climate champions more sustainable workplaces.

Another is to encourage residents to participate in the London Mayor's "Solar Together" help to buy scheme, which opens to new registrations from 15th February.

If you would like to find out how you can help tackle the +95% of carbon emissions in Merton that are outside the council's control, the Council will be highlighting some of the steps you can take to reduce your carbon footprint as part of our climate change communications campaign throughout 2021. The campaign will be focussing on a different theme each month (February's theme is green business and investments) and you can find out more on our website [Climate change pledges \(merton.gov.uk\)](https://www.merton.gov.uk/climate-change-pledges)

Supplementary

Thank you Madam Mayor and thank you for the reply that I received. Is the reason that you do not comment on your commitment and actions the Council are taking to protect and maintain our local natural environment wildlife and biodiversity against the

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effects of climate change because you do not believe this to be an important part of the Council's climate action plan? Thank you.

Reply

I'd like to thank Councillor Gould for her supplementary, I completely disagree with her comments I am fully committed in terms of climate change but also as well in terms of implementing measures to make Merton zero carbon by 2030. This is one of the Council's top priorities and will continue to be. Thank you.

From Cllr Daniel Holden to the Cabinet Member for Housing, Regeneration and the Climate Emergency

Can the Cabinet Member for the climate emergency confirm that trees are important?

Reply

Yes trees are important and we are thankful that Merton is already one of the greenest boroughs in London with one of if not the largest tree canopy cover.

Merton's Urban Forest Canopy is between **20.5 % and 24%** of the land surface of the borough. Green Infrastructure of all types – trees and other natural surfaces and cover – are nearly **50% of the surface of the borough** but less than one third of this is in Local Government control. Merton has approximately 17,626 trees on council owned land.

In addition to trees, over 8Ha of land has been made into publicly accessible green space (from previously private land / private playing fields)

- Rowan Park
- Brenley Park
- Morley Park

We have also created rain-gardens out of what was tarmac at Eastfields with more planned (the next being in South Wimbledon)

We have also added more street trees to the public realm in Colliers Wood (piazza, Priory Road, Baltic Close), Mitcham Fair Green, Morden Court Parade, Plough Lane and soon at Harris Academy High Path. More trees have been planted at Morden Park as part of the Leisure Centre project and the former pool site has been returned to greenspace. We are also creating a new park in High Path as part of the regeneration which will also see an uplift in the number of trees and greenspace.

This year and next we are investing an additional £100k in total in additional tree planting and maintenance through our Community Infrastructure Levy showing that we are committed to increasing the tree stock.

Supplementary

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Thank you Madam Mayor and thank you to the cabinet member for his answer. Why has the Council itself felled so many trees across Merton since declaring a climate emergency and will he commit to changing the planning policies in the new local plan to force anyone cutting down trees including the Council to replace said trees by condition to at least the same or more tree years either on the same site or money equivalent the Council to replant elsewhere.

Reply

I'd like to thank Councillor Holden for his supplementary as a Council in terms of the annual highways tree planting programme we have increased the number of trees being planted by 40 percent. In terms of planning developments we want to minimise the number of trees being felled and for them to be replaced as part of the conditions and I wholly disagree with Councillor Holden's comment; we are a Borough fully committed, we're one of the greenest Boroughs in London and that will continue to be the case. Thank you.

From Councillor Stan Anderson to the Cabinet member for Culture, Leisure and Skills; Cabinet Member for Performance, Recovery and the Local Economy

Can the Cabinet member explain how the council's work in Adult Education provision is important in the borough's recovery?

Reply

Cabinet agreed new strategic priorities for its Adult Learning Service in January 2020. The priorities showed foresight that the service would need to be adaptable to support residents to improve their economic, social and health outcomes. The strategic priorities also demonstrate ambition that has been built upon since the move to a commissioning model of service in 2016. The service is now financially sustainable with an offer that more adequately meets the skills requirements of residents. The quality of the provision has also improved significantly, as recognised via the November 2019 Ofsted inspection and its 'Good' rating.

This work has been further intensified by the Covid-19 pandemic and the service is playing a critical role in providing educational opportunities for residents who need to reskill for the future job market. As part of this the service has been in receipt of almost £550,000 of additional funding to help support residents by providing new training opportunities and delivering them in a variety of different ways to ensure they are delivered safely. Equipment loaning and digital skills training is an essential part of the provision to help people improve their life chances and live independently in a post Covid-19 environment.

Cabinet are in the process of approving the award of the new main services contract for adult learning and this contract will form a significant part of the boroughs core adult learning offer going forward. This, coupled with the rich list of providers already

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engaged, means that residents will continue to have access to high quality adult learning provision that caters to changing demand.

Supplementary

Thank you Madam Mayor. I thank the cabinet member for her reply. Can the cabinet member update members on our bid to the GLA for the delivery of their South London meet program?

Reply

Thank you Madam Mayor and can I thank Councillor Anderson for his original question and his supplementary question. I'm delighted to announce that our towards employment project team were part of a successful bid for the GLA to deliver a meet and pre-meet support activity in partnership with grounds work. We expect that the funding attached to this activity to be approximately £60,000 for the year 2021 –22 and another £60,000 for the following year 2022-23.and officers are currently working on the details. I'd also like to just say thanks to them for their work on securing this bid and also to thank all who supported the bid in any way. Thank you.

From Cllr David Dean to the Cabinet Member for Housing, Regeneration and the Climate Emergency:

Can the cabinet member assure me that planning permissions which include conditions on tree planting are actually implemented?

Reply

In assessing any planning application with potential tree planting, every effort is made in the first instance to ensure that the planting is possible, appropriate and realistic before being agreed. Every effort is made to ensure such tree planting occurs and the success of such measures is demonstrated in numerous developments throughout the Borough where full landscaping schemes are implemented in their entirety. It is accepted that there can be rare occasions where unforeseen technical circumstances may limit the choices about where trees may be planted, such as the discovery of underground services that may make planting inappropriate in that exact location. However, such cases are not the norm and there are often negotiations about alternative options depending on the characteristics of the development site. If it is considered developers are intentionally attempting to circumvent the requirement to plant trees, then the planning enforcement team can be utilised to secure compliance.

From Councillor Ben Butler to the Cabinet member for Housing, Regeneration and the Climate Emergency

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Would the Cabinet member provide further information on what steps are being taken to grow more trees in the borough?

Reply

The borough's urban forest canopy currently covers approximately a quarter of our surface land. Even with one of the largest number of trees of any London borough we are committed to increased tree planting. We are currently delivering the annual Highways tree planting programme and have increased the number of trees being planted by 40%. These trees locations include new locations requiring tree pit excavation and will further support improvements in canopy cover in the future. We have also developed a new reporting function on the website that enables residents to request to have a tree planted in a location. This helps the Greenspaces team to better plan and further develop tree planting where it can benefit our communities most.

In 2020, we were successful in applying for funding through the Urban Tree Challenge which will see the planting of 800 trees in Morden Park and 400 trees in Pollards Hill Recreation Ground. Our tree officers also work closely with our key stakeholders, supporting the further planting of trees in Morden Park which was undertaken by the Friends of the Earth and the Tree Wardens. We are equally focussed on extending woodland and greenspace infrastructure by encouraging natural regeneration of existing woodland areas, a viable and important means of increasing tree stock and canopy cover while improving local habitats with wildlife benefits.

The forthcoming challenge is to expand the importance of trees in not only public spaces, but to also encourage the promotion of trees in our private lives, using the large spaces available to residents to further contribute to our urban forest.

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