

# **Merton Council Council**

**12 July 2023**

## **Supplementary Agenda 4**

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The questions and written responses will be circulated at the meeting

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### **From Cllr Charles to the Cabinet Member for Health and Social Care**

Following the recent announcements on the New Hospital Programme, what can the Council do to safeguard the future of St Helier Hospital for all the local people who rely on it?

#### **Reply**

The Council continues to work to ensure that any investment in NHS services for the future, provides the maximum benefit for Merton residents. Whilst we welcome any investment in the NHS, the business case and integrated impact assessment on which the Future Hospitals funding decision is made was developed before the Covid 19 pandemic, an event which has significantly impacted on the NHS as a whole and further exacerbated and deepened the health inequalities that existed in our communities, prior to the pandemic. It is therefore vital that any future configuration of services ensures that Merton residents have equity of access to their south west London neighbours. We are concerned that the situation of the proposed new site will significantly alter the attendance pattern of Merton residents and put further pressure on other SWL hospitals. As has been announced, the Council has commissioned an independent review and assessment of the outline business case and integrated impact assessment

The Council also recognises that, irrespective of the configuration of services, St Helier Hospital remains an integral part of the operating model for the NHS trust into the future. The new hospital build will not be completed for at least 7 years and recent media stories have highlighted the state of total disrepair that St Helier is in. We will therefore continue to lobby NHS organisations and decision makers to ensure that adequate capital investment is made to provide St Helier with existing buildings that are fit for a 21<sup>st</sup> century healthcare system. In order for St Helier to operate effectively it must receive adequate capital investment to provide a safe, fit for purpose estate.

### **From Cllr Simon McGrath to the Cabinet Member for Sport and Heritage**

Would the Cabinet Member please state what consultation there has been - and when - with local and national athletics organisations about the proposed new Running Track in Morden Park?

#### **Reply**

Officers have met with England Athletics in April to have initial discussions regarding the potential for a new track at Morden Park. During the course of the meeting, we discussed local and regional suitability, the potential types of tracks that are being installed, as some now include covered areas for 'warm-up and warm down' and training to accommodate unseasonable weather. We are due to carry out borough wide strategic facilities review of the sporting facilities to have updated information of the local need and facilities available to support our sporting ambitions, Morden Park

will be a major part of this review. Following this, we will continue discussions with governing bodies and other key stakeholders.

### **From Cllr Michael Paterson to the Cabinet Member for Housing and Sustainable Development**

When the Labour administration forced the unpopular Local Plan through council, with the assistance of the Liberal Democrats, a major reason given by the administration was that it would provide a five-year housing land supply that would prevent overdevelopment such as at the Burlington Road site.

The Local Plan was due to be adopted in Spring 2022, however, this has not happened, and the council still cannot demonstrate a five year housing land supply. This led to the Wimbledon Chase site being given permission as the council would not be able to defend a refusal. When does the Cabinet Member expect the Local Plan to be approved by the Planning Inspectorate?

### **Reply**

The date of the Inspector's report into the Local Plan will be at the discretion of the Planning Inspectors appointed by the Secretary of State. The council has participated fully with the appointed Planning Inspectors since we submitted the plan to them in December 2021, undertaken site visits with the Inspectors, supported the Inspectors chairing a total of five weeks of public hearings during 2022 in Merton's council chamber and responded comprehensively to their questions. We are hopeful that the Inspectors will provide a positive report in due course, thus allowing us to adopt Merton's new Local Plan.

Councillor Paterson complains of the draft Local Plan, which begs the question what exactly he would put in its place?

Undoubtedly, we face a housing crisis and need to build a lot more homes to meet the immense demand.

Councillor Paterson complains that the Council cannot demonstrate a five year housing land supply as recently required by the National Planning Policy Framework of Conservative Governments. I sympathise, but it is very difficult to find more appropriate sites in Merton. This question is an opportunity for us all. Answers please on the back of an envelope! Perhaps Cllr Paterson can write to tell us which sites he thinks we have overlooked that can accommodate the hundreds, nay thousands of good quality, well designed homes situated in sustainable neighbourhoods that Merton residents undoubtedly need?

### **From Cllr Akyigyina to the Cabinet Member for Civic Pride**

It was fantastic to be able to attend Mitcham Carnival in June – back for the first time since 2019. How successful was the carnival, and how will be incorporating learnings from this year to make next year even better?

### **Reply**

I'd like to thank everyone who made the carnival a success, from organisers Andy Butcher and Charlie Shakespeare, to the many volunteers who performed, ran stalls and marshalled the event.

The carnival was met with an overwhelmingly positive response from the community, a testament to its success in fostering unity and promoting local culture. The event was marked by enthusiastic participation, robust turnout of over 5,000 people, and a palpable sense of shared enjoyment. The successful execution of the carnival is particularly noteworthy, given its smooth progression with negligible incidents. This further underscores the commitment and professionalism of all involved in its planning and conduct, ensuring a safe and harmonious environment throughout the festivities

Various council officers were in attendance to provide information and assist people, and to advertise a feedback consultation. A great way of improving next year's show will be to consider the feedback from this, and from the responses to the broader consultation being run by Future Merton about residents' ideas for Mitcham Town Centre.

### **From Cllr John Oliver to the Cabinet Member for Sport and Heritage**

Would the Cabinet Member please update Council on the outcome of meetings she has had with Wimbledon Tennis and Dean Jeeves to discuss the Junior Golf Programme?

### **Reply**

Last year Officers met to discuss possible alternatives that we could assist with in aiding the Wimbledon Park Junior Golf Academy to find local alternative locations to undertake coaching. The goal was to identify potential venues to continue their commendable work of providing golf lessons to young enthusiasts.

However, finding an adequate space that met with their approval proved challenging due to the extensive area required for golfing activities to ensure safety. As an alternative, we proposed the track area in Wimbledon Park and also recommended initiating a dialogue with Mitcham Golf Club so that a full golfing programmes maybe offered.

The Academy expressed their gratitude for our efforts, but they are currently exploring opportunities outside the borough. We remain open and willing to continue these discussions and to collaboratively explore other options within an alternative location to support their programme.

**From Cllr Nick McLean to the Cabinet Member for Local Environment, Green spaces and Climate Change**

The grass verges in much of the borough are currently in an appalling state and are completely overgrown. Please can the Cabinet Member tell me how frequently the grass verges should be cut and how often the gullies should be cleared?

**Reply**

The councils verges are scheduled to be cut on a monthly cycle between March and October so 8 cuts per year . Service contractors from Idverde UK have been working hard during late May and June to catch up with the verge grass cutting.

Some early season staffing and machinery issues combined with a very wet spring and very warm early summer meant the rate of grass growth impacted the service heavily and were playing catch up, which is now in a much stronger position for the remains of the season

It is also worth noting that there are a number of wards including Canon Hill and Morden Park where a high volume of community bulb planting has been delivered in the last few years via the councils ward Allocation Scheme. Bulbs particularly in narrow verges does mean that grass cutting in these areas cannot happen until late May early June, but in these cases ward councillors tend to be aware of this impact at the bidding stage, but we are aware not all councillors and residents will always be aware of these issues.

In respect to the query about gully clearance, this would depend on the definition of gully. If the query is in reference to channel clearance, these are cleaned as part of the routine street cleansing operations. The frequency of cleansing is scheduled on an output basis and depends on the land type, footfall of the street in question and demand. Frequencies range from fortnightly in low footfall, low requirement residential areas, to weekly, twice weekly and daily in some high footfall areas such as Town Centres.

Some channels are hard to access due to parking and for this reason, the Council has a schedule of deep cleans, which involve a soft road closure (not an official road closure and relies on residents complying with the request to move their cars). The deep cleans take place over two days with a different side of the road being done each of the two days. The deep cleans are scheduled to take place every week in a different road across the Borough.

If the query relates to drainage gully systems, there is a schedule of routine gully cleaning as shown below:

- Scheduled routine borough-wide Gully (Non-priority): Minimum of once every two years
- Town Centres with high footfall: Minimum of three (3) times per year
- High risk (flooding) areas: Minimum of once per year, with additional cleans scheduled following Met Office flood warnings prior to weather events

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In addition to this, our Service Provider attends ad-hoc gully cleaning requests as made by members of the public and Client Officers (as requested during routine monthly inspections).

### **From Cllr Williscroft to the Cabinet for Civic Pride**

I was pleased that our local armed forces community were able to mark Armed Forces Week with two events at the Civic Centre in June, and to see the Council recommit itself to the Armed Forces Covenant. How is the Council supporting serving personnel, reservists, veterans, and military families?

#### **Reply**

Merton is proud to support our armed forces community and to be the location of [Haig Housing](#)'s original, and largest, housing estates for veterans.

Merton Council is committed to supporting the armed forces community and first signed the Armed Forces Covenant in 2013 as a promise to recognise the unique sacrifices that the armed forces make to support the nation and ensure that no member of the armed forces community should face disadvantage compared to other citizens.

The council reaffirmed its commitment in June 2023 by re-signing the Armed Forces Covenant at a special event at the Civic Centre in Morden attended by senior representatives of the armed forces and local partner organisations.

We make sure our commitment is reflected in the services that we deliver, and we are now asking our suppliers to make the same commitment when they deliver services for us. Additionally, in recognition of the disadvantages that members of the armed forces community can experience, as part of the development of our new Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy for the borough we are exploring ways in which the risk of disadvantage occurring can be reduced.

Further detail is available online at <https://www.merton.gov.uk/communities-and-neighbourhoods/armed-forces>

The Council has a specific Armed Forces Quota on its Housing Register which gives priority for rehousing for those serving or leaving the armed services for a period of up to 5 years.

### **From Cllr Reiss to the Cabinet Member for Health and Social Care**

Could the Cabinet Member please set out what action the council is taking to address women's health issues?

#### **Reply**

The Council continues to work closely with partners across Merton to improve the health and wellbeing of women in Merton, including:

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- Awareness raising and uptake of breast and cervical screening programmes, with a focus on inequalities, through the Community Champions network, supporting cervical screening prevention week (June 2023), the development of a comprehensive action plan to increase uptake of breast cancer screening and making the case for a breast cancer screening site in Merton – including lobbying the NHS directly on this issue.
- Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG) can have a long-lasting impact on mental and physical health and tackling VAWG is a key priority of the Council and Community Safety Partnership. Services are provided for women who are victims of domestic violence and abuse, sexual abuse, forced marriage, violence committed in the name of "honour" and other crimes listed as VAWG. The Council is White Ribbon accredited, with an action plan in place and the campaign is also promoted to staff encouraging them to sign up to become White Ribbon Ambassadors and Champions.
- The Council have signed the Menopause Pledge and have a menopause policy and guidance for staff, have a specific sickness absence category for the menopause, a dedicated menopause page with information, help and support, menopause awareness training for staff and managers, menopause cafes where staff can come together to discuss their experiences and support via occupational health and the Employee Assistance Programme. The Council is also raising awareness of the Menopause pledge with businesses and partners across Merton, including how to support women in the workplace through a series of Business Masterclasses.
- Perinatal mental health - supporting women's mental health during the perinatal period (during pregnancy until 1 to 2 years after birth) is led by the health visiting service. As part of their routine practice health visitors talk to women about their mental health and wellbeing at the mandated 6-to-8-week visit. There is also a specialist perinatal mental health visitor who supports mothers with higher needs and provides support and training to other staff about perinatal mental health.
- In Merton, women make up an estimated 60% of those who are frail and in 2020/21 women made up nearly 57% of Merton residents aged 65+ admitted in an emergency to hospital for a fall. As part of an approach to 'active ageing', the Council have commissioned a 'Get up and Go' service delivering a number of activity classes in East Merton and Morden with a focus on strength and balance and Wimbledon Guild's 'Merton Moves' programme, which provides a one-to-one coaching programme for older people supporting them to take up physical activity.
- A workshop on Improving Women's Health and Wellbeing was delivered in March 2023, as part of International Womens Day, setting out the life course approach to women's health, the importance of fairness, equity and inclusion and the benefits of co-production in the design and delivery of services and taking a whole system approach to women's health.
- Nationally around 60% of informal carers are women and there are a total of 8,335 informal carers in Merton that are women. The Council commissions Carers Support Merton to provide support and advice to carers and other



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organisations are funded to support specialist groups of carers, such as the Alzheimer's Society for people with dementia.

- Access to contraception in Merton is via GPs, pharmacies and the integrated sexual health (ISH) service. The Council complement the ICB funded GP contraception offer, by commissioning long-acting reversible contraception (LARC) from 9 GP practices and emergency hormonal contraception service (EHC) for 13-24 year olds from 9 community pharmacies, with EHC available for other age groups via ISH and GPs.

### **From Cllr Skeete to the Cabinet for Sport and Heritage**

It's fantastic news that we have embarked on one of the largest tennis court refurbishments in the country – how are we making sure these courts are accessible for everyone to get active and use them?

### **Reply**

Working in partnership with the Lawn Tennis Association (LTA), we are undertaking an extensive refurbishment scheme for tennis courts located within 11 parks throughout our borough.

This collaboration between Merton Council and the LTA has already seen substantial progress, with our valued public park tennis courts across the borough being rejuvenated. An investment nearing £1 million pounds is being channelled into this project, the aim of which is to enhance the tennis facilities for our residents, supporting our Borough of Sport ambitions.

The refurbishment, which is already halfway to completion, will offer top-notch facilities for our local community. In addition to this, we have also introduced 'pickleball courts' at three key locations in Mitcham, Morden, and Wimbledon. Once this project concludes, we will have 16 of these new dedicated courts across the borough, thereby broadening the spectrum of sporting opportunities for individuals of all abilities and mobility levels.

We will work with our Communications team to further publicise the courts to ensure as many people as possible are aware as they are completed.

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