

Merton Council Council

12 July 2023

Supplementary Agenda Item 7 - Non-Priority Questions to Cabinet Members

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Non-Priority Questions to Cabinet Members 12 July 2023

From Cllr MacArthur to the Cabinet Member for Sport and Heritage

The 'Borough of Sport Get Active Portal' is a main workstream of the administration's new plans around the 'Borough of Sport', both as a tool to increase uptake of activity and to measure success of the strategy. Development work has started on this. Can the Cabinet Member please tell me the costs of the work procured, and the evidence base used to determine that this portal will effectively reach the target groups of under 16 year olds and over 65s?

Reply

Cappagh have agreed to sponsor Borough of Sport and their sponsorship funding is covering the costs of developing, launching and running the Get Active Portal across the three year 2023/26.

Get Active was primarily chosen because it means the Borough of Sport Activity Finder can be built on an existing not for profit platform with a good track record. This has reduced the cost and time it will take to get the activity finder up and running.

The Activity Finder has been chosen to enable all Merton residents to access sport and physical activities and promote the wide variety of opportunities available in the borough. In terms of checking the platform's reach to children, young people and older people we looked at how others have been using Get Active. This included:

Greater Manchester have used a bespoke offer from Get Active, similar to what is being built for Merton, as part of their Local Delivery Pilot. They believe their residents are far better informed of opportunities to be active. Like here in Merton, Greater Manchester have particularly targeted action on children, young people and older people.

Hertfordshire, where the platform is being used in conjunction with public health and the Saracens Foundation, and they have seen take up of classes by older people increase significantly after they were uploaded to the platform. For example, the Watford L2D class at Wellspring Church increased by 40% and the class at Potters Bar by 28%. All other classes have seen increases of at least 10%. Whilst this could be due to a number of factors, they are confident that using the portal has made a significant difference.

London Sport told us that Get Active has helped over 25,000 of the least active older Londoners get.

England Golf have used the platform to increase participation in girls (5-18) golf by 209% and increased coaches delivering their programmes by 94%.

The activity finder will also link to local newsletters and be a tool for link workers based within GP surgeries which will extend its use and reach.

From Cllr Austin to the Cabinet Member for Local Environment, Green Spaces and Climate Change

Reports in the media have shown examples of councils planting lots of trees, but the trees then subsequently dying in the heat. How will the cabinet member ensure Merton's new trees do not suffer the same fate?

Reply

Rising annual temperatures and increasing incidents of Amber and Red weather warnings means the council is having to plan accordingly in order to limit the potential for failures when planting new trees. As with any form of horticulture, nothing is for sure and there are failures, but the below outlines are actions being taken to mitigate against the impacts new trees face in this demanding climate.

- Planting in line with best arboriculture practice, by planting in the correct season, preparing tree pits well and mulching trees after planting where appropriate.
- Climate adaptation can be improved by changing the species planted to better cope with heat stress, using trees such as Firs, Maples and Catalpa that better cope with heat stress that we now have to contend with due to affects in our local and global climate.
- Enhanced maintenance and aftercare sees each planted tree gets a 3 year maintenance and watering plan. We are also researching and looking at implementing further improvements, such as Gator Tree Watering Bags that allow watering teams to water trees to field capacity as well as fill the gator bag reservoirs.

The councils recently adopted Tree Strategy will encourage targeted tree planting in Merton's Highways and Parks, with a particular focus on policy EO4 - Establishment and Aftercare - will be a important to the arboriculture team for working with our service providers and volunteers to support a greener Merton for successive generations.

From Cllr Kohler to Cabinet Member for Education and Lifelong Learning

Could the Cabinet Member please give an update on the impact on primary and secondary schools across the borough as detailed in the School Places Planning Strategy document – which showed falling demand for primary and secondary school places, and the significant increase in demand for specialist provision that transcends these trends and how the council is responding to these changes?

Reply

In respect of secondary schools, after a significant rise in demand, and therefore admissions applications over the past 10 or so years, there was a drop in applications this year as was forecast in the School Places Planning Strategy document. However, following the admissions allocation process we are not expecting a significant drop in roll in any secondary schools this year as some

neighbouring boroughs still have increasing demand in year 7 and we are favourably improving cross-border pupils movement flows.

In respect of primary schools we received a further 102 less on-time resident applications this year, further reflecting the drop in demand reported in the School Places Strategy in November. We are in conversation with further schools on reducing admission numbers to allow efficient class sizes and match demand.

In respect of special school provision we opened the new Melrose Whatley provision and additionally resourced provision at Cranmer Primary School in September 2022 which will provide further places in 2023, both in existing buildings. We are also continuing the expansion of the additionally resourced provision at Hatfeild and West Wimbledon Primary schools. We are in design stage on the expansion of Perseid School. We have also received approval from the Secretary of State to establish a new 120 place special school for which the DfE will be launching a competition for a new provider to the council's specification by the end of this month.

From Cllr Barlow to the Cabinet Member for Finance

Please can the Cabinet Member tell me what support the council has offered to small businesses to assist with their transition to net zero?

Reply

- In 2022, the Council launched its new [Business Support for Cost of Living and Climate Action web page](#) to help businesses reduce their energy costs and carbon emissions.
- Since November 2022, there has been at least one business feature in every [Climate Action Newsletter](#) (released monthly).
- The Council uses its weekly business bulletin as a platform to share messaging and opportunities to promote change towards low carbon models.
- The Council has [allocated funding to recruit a new member of staff to lead on the development of a low carbon economy](#) which will enable greater engagement with and support for local businesses.
- The Council has also [allocated funding for a business retrofit support scheme](#) to help businesses in Merton decarbonise and save on their energy bills.
- The South London Knowledge Exchange Project helps facilitate research and innovation with businesses and educational institutions, which will help develop green skills in South London. A number of programmes are coming out of this with a focus on social value and procurement, supply chains, and developing the local economy;
- The B.I.G. (Business, Innovation & Growth) Programme has sites in Morden and Mitcham with the aim to have affordable workspaces in the borough for collaboration between entrepreneurs, businesses and nominated Universities across South London. These workspaces will provide a thriving environment for a plethora of activities including supporting the Green Economy on a local and sub-regional level.

- Clean Air Villages: A project spanning multiple London Boroughs with the aim to improve air quality in different London ‘villages’, where both air pollution and population density levels are high. Funding awarded by DEFRA and in-kind match funding by LBM. Clean Air Villages 4 (CAV4): Active dates May 2021 – June 2022. Building on the business engagement exercise in 2020/21 a cargo bike courier service was procured for delivery of a free 120-hour trial for businesses in Wimbledon. Details regarding outcomes are available at [Wimbledon Cargo Bike Trial Case Study](#).
- Merton celebrates businesses through Merton’s annual Best Business Awards, including Merton’s Climate Action award to celebrate businesses who demonstrate mechanisms to reduce their carbon emissions.
- The Launch of the Merton Local App encourages residents and businesses to reduce their carbon footprint and shop local.
- The Council’s procurement processes encourage local businesses to consider their environmental impact as part of the Council’s tender processes.

From Cllr Hall to the Cabinet Member for Housing and Sustainable Development

Given the Council’s support for eco-friendly housing developments, can the Cabinet member confirm that there will be sufficient outdoor amenity space at the new homes being built which is usable for drying clothes?

Reply

We want to see sufficient amenity space for all homes built in Merton. The London Plan 2021 provides space standards and the Mayor of London has recently (June 2023) published additional guidance, [London Housing Design Standards](#), which council officers are now recommending to developers to use. Merton is a borough characterised by the development of small sites due to fragmented land ownership and high land values. To improve the quality of developments on small sites that are typical of Merton we have adopted [Merton’s Small sites toolkit](#) as planning guidance, which includes guidance on designing successful internal and external spaces.

The first 93 homes in the Council’s housebuilding programme benefit from existing planning permissions which include external areas; either via balconies, gardens and communal open spaces, which are useable for drying clothes

From Cllr Howard to the Cabinet Member for Transport

Please can the Cabinet Member tell me how much money has been raised in fines from the Links Road LTN and the Sandy Lane LTN since March 2022?

Reply

The value of paid fines relating to the LTN on Links Road is - £109,292 and the one on Sandy Lane is - £69,589

From Cllr Hicks to the Cabinet Member for Transport

Given the council's commitment to increasing active travel, and the dangers posed to cyclists by the increasingly fast and heavy traffic on East/West distributor roads such as through Hillside, would the Cabinet Member commit to developing strategic cycle routes and to work with Transport for London to limit heavy through traffic on residential roads?

Reply

The Council has just commissioned consultants to work with the transport team to develop a walking and cycling strategy for Merton which will set out the Council's vision for active travel including a plan for strategic cycle routes in the borough.

Monitoring and enforcement of vehicle speed on the highway is the responsibility of the Police. For locations with speed related issues, TfL in partnership with the Metropolitan Police undertake many speed management initiatives, e.g. Community Road Watch. Community Roadwatch is a road safety initiative which aims to reduce speeding in residential areas and gives local residents the opportunity to work side by side with their local police teams and use speed detection equipment to identify speeding vehicles in their communities.

Concerns from members of the public on speeding, can be sent to Roadsafelondon. This portal is an information and intelligence gathering tool that can inform police activity.

The link shows the address for the Roadsafelondon website

<https://www.met.police.uk/notices/met/community-roadwatch/>

Any other road traffic offences/incidents can be reported on this link;

<https://www.met.police.uk/ro/report/rti/rti-beta-2.1/report-a-road-traffic-incident/>

The Council will also be drafting a new Air Quality Action Plan this year, as we know 60% of the pollution in our borough is from road transport. Therefore, a vital part of that Plan is aimed at active travel, this will be essential to reduce traffic on our roads and improve health. I look forward to working with colleagues on this Plan, including actions that make cycling and walking attractive and safe to people travelling in the borough.

From Cllr Flack to the Cabinet Member for Education and Lifelong Learning

It is disappointing to see that Merton College is only offering language courses in Spanish and French in 2023, can the Cabinet Member advise how much financial support the Council has made available for foreign language learning in the borough over each of the last 10 years including the budget for 2023/4?

Reply

The London Borough of Merton is committed to providing high quality and sustainable adult learning to improve the social, economic, health and wellbeing outcomes of our residents. We deliver this through a strategic investment approach: commissioning provision to the best providers in the field and by developing sophisticated evidence based approaches to what we deliver. We aim to reduce inequalities across the borough by focussing a significant proportion of our investment on those most socially and / or economically disadvantaged whilst providing a broad range of learning opportunities to develop all of our resident's skills.

This strategy has served the Adult Learning Service well since it started commissioning services in 2016. With the focus being particularly on supporting residents to develop their skills and improve their life chances the focus of the service is on core life skills such as English, Maths, employability and digital skills whilst continuing to provide popular courses. A large part of the provision is our ESOL (English for speakers of other languages) provision and this has continued to grow each year. In this academic year the council has commissioned circa £95,000 in ESOL provision and has supported over 150 Ukrainian refugees with their language skills.

Merton Adult Learning has not commissioned any foreign language courses since the 2017/18 academic year. During that year it commissioned courses that amounted to £40,500 in value and a similar figure the previous year. Due to the change in commissioning records prior to this cannot be obtained.

The reason for not commissioning courses is that there is not enough demand in order for courses to run as the funding requirements of the Greater London Authority (GLA) and Education, Skills and Funding Agency (ESFA) require a minimum number of learners per course. Merton College, who are part of the South Thames Group, have continued to run foreign language courses across their campuses through their own GLA and ESFA funding. Whilst we cannot speak for them we would suspect that curriculum decisions are made for very similar reasons (e.g. demand).

Unlike some neighbouring boroughs Merton Adult Learning has continued to see its grants from the GLA and ESFA grow due to the rationale and strategy for commissioning courses that is in place and which is closely aligned to the Mayor of London's 'Skills for Londoners Strategy'. This is enabling more residents to benefit from adult learning provision than ever before.

From Cllr Page to the Cabinet Member for Housing and Sustainable Development

Can the Cabinet Member set out the overall energy efficiency of council owned buildings including schools?

Reply

The majority of council owned buildings, included schools are required to have a “Display Energy Certificate” (DEC), which is an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) specifically designed for buildings with regular public access. They are very similar to Domestic EPCs which you may be more familiar with and they show the energy efficiency of the buildings.

The below list shows the current DEC ratings of our buildings and those schools who have procured DEC through the council. Some of these are under review as DEC generally require annual renewal. We have just re-procured a corporate DEC supplier who will be updating our council certificates over the next few months.

Site	Grade	Site	Grade
Abbotsbury Road Primary School	D	Pollards Hill Youth Centre	C
Acacia Intergenerational Centre	F	Poplar Primary School	C
All Saints Day Centre	E	Raynes Park High - Bushey Block	C
Aragon Primary	B	Raynes Park High - Design	C
Beecholme Primary School	C	Raynes Park High - Main	C
Bishop Gilpin Primary School	D	Raynes Park High - Sixth Form	C
Bond Primary School	C	Raynes Park High - Sports Hall	B
Bond Road Family Centre	G	Raynes Park Library	C
Brightwell Respite Care Centre	E	Raynes Park Sports Ground	D
Canons Leisure Centre	B	Ricards Lodge High - sixth form	B
Chaucer Centre	B	Ricards Lodge High -Main	D
Civic Centre	D	Rutlish School - admin block/lodge	D
Colliers Wood Library	E	Rutlish School - Centenary Block	D
Commons Extension Sports Field	B	Rutlish School - Innes Block	D
Cottenham Park Recreation Ground	C	Rutlish School - Main	C
Cranmer Court Primary	E	Rutlish School - Sixth form	C
Cranmer Primary School	E	Sacred Heart Primary School	D
Cricket Green School	D	Singlegate - Tower Hill Building	E
Dundonald Primary	D	Singlegate Primary	D

Eastway Day Centre	E	Sir Joseph Hood Memorial Playing Field	D
Garfield Primary School	D	Smart Centre	D
Harris Academy - Block A-G	E	St Marks Primary	F
Harris Academy - Block H	E	St Marys Primary School	E
Harris Academy - Sixth Form	C	St Peter and Paul Primary	D
Hatfeild Primary School	B	St Teresa's Primary	D
Hillcross Primary School	B	St Thomas of Canterbury Primary School	E
Hollymount Primary School	B	Stanford Primary	D
Holy Trinity Primary	D	Steers Mead Childrens Centre	F
Jan Malinowski Centre	D	The Sherwood Primary	D
Joseph Hood Primary School	E	Ursuline High - Brescia	D
King George Playing Field	B	Ursuline High - DK	C
Lavender Childrens Centre (London Road)	E	Ursuline High - Main	C
Links Primary School	B	Ursuline High - Merici	B
Lonesome Primary School	D	Ursuline High - St Angela's	C
Malmesbury Primary school	B	Ursuline High - St George's	D
Melrose Special School	F	Ursuline High - St Ursula's	E
Merton Park Primary school	E	Ursuline High - USFC	E
Mill House Ecology Centre	E	Ursuline Prep School	F
Mitcham Library	C	Vestry Hall	C
Morden Assembly Hall	D	West Barnes Library	B
Morden Park House	C	West Wimbledon Primary School	D
Morden Primary	D	William Morris Primary	D
Newminster Children's Centre	F	Wimbledon Chase School	C
Pelham Primary	D	Wimbledon College - Main	G
Perseid Lower	F	Wimbledon College - Sports and Sixth	D

Perseid Upper	D	Wimbledon Leisure Centre	B
Phipps Bridge Youth Centre	C	Wimbledon Library	D
Pollards Hill Library	B	Wimbledon Park - Bowls Pavilion	C
		Wimbledon Park - Water Sports Centre	E

From Cllr Cox to the Cabinet Member for Housing and Sustainable Development

In reference to the regeneration of the Eastfields Estate, please can the Cabinet Member tell me:

- When does he expect a planning application to come forward?
- What date does he believe regeneration of the estate will begin?
- When does he believe regeneration will be completed?

I appreciate that the exact dates will be unknown but please offer a general timetable.

Reply

Planning permission has already been granted for the Eastfields estate – initially in February 2018 Merton’s Planning Applications Committee resolved to approve outline planning permission for the Eastfields Estate, and the decision notice was issued in April 2019.

Permission for Phase 1 was granted in April 2022 and Clarion have informed us that work is due to start later in 2023.

At the start of the regeneration project in c2014 Clarion owned approximately 60% of the 464 homes at Eastfields, with the remaining 40% in private ownership. Clarion has been engaging negotiating with homeowners and absentee landlords since then to acquire homes and support residents in taking up the resident offer to remain on the estate in a new home once the regeneration is complete. Clarion is continuing to negotiate with the small number of remaining property owners as ownership of all the homes will be required in order to complete the regeneration. To ensure the regeneration of the whole of Eastfields, the council are supporting a [Compulsory Purchase Order](#) which will only be used to secure the remaining properties if the final negotiations with property owners are not successful. Clarion have recently acquired a site at Station Road in Colliers Wood and Merton’s Planning Applications Committee resolved to grant permission for more than 90 socially rented homes (100% affordable). To speed up the regeneration of Eastfields existing residents at Eastfields have been offered the opportunity to move to Station Road once it is built and Clarion say that more than 40 households have expressed an interest in this

Eastfields is due to be completed in three phases, with the first phase starting in 2023.

From Cllr Bokhari to the Cabinet Member for Local Environment, Green Spaces and Climate Change

Would the Cabinet Member please set out how many street trees and trees in parks have been lost in the last 5 years, and whether this is due to under-watering?

Reply

Based on the council performance data for annual tree planting and contractor reporting on annual watering cycle the council can provide the below figures between 2019-23.

2022 onwards has seen a marked increase in the numbers of trees planted coming through a mixture of internal as well as external funding sources and 2022 was a very strong year for planting but equally saw a very positive trend towards reducing losses due to improvements in ground preparation for planting and aftercare.

2023 data is showing that losses have increased this season, but increasing resources for watering via term contractors from both our term provider for arboriculture services and our parks service provider has certainly improved the situation and we will continue to monitor both Highway and Parks trees for the duration of this season.

The rise in incidents of Amber and Red weather warnings means that the council continues to review its policies on tree planting and establishment and aftercare. The council's recently adopted Tree Strategy will encourage targeted tree planting across Merton's Highways and Parks and practical policies to the species selected, planting preparation and aftercare, including watering, will ensure that our successes are sustained.

Date	Trees planted	Trees lost	% total trees planted lost due to irrigation	
2019	328	12	3.7%	
2020	276	8	2.9%	
2021	328	14	4.3%	
2022	2756	6	2.1%	
2023	9250	17	1.8%	

N.B Please note the 2023 data record for trees planted 9250 relates to trees planted within the financial year, the council extended its planting season in 2023 with both Urban Tree Challenge Round 3 and Highways Tree Replacement programs extending into May 2023 and reaching 10,000 new trees.

From Cllr Wilson to the Cabinet Member for Local Environment, Green Spaces and Climate Change

Biodiversity loss and climate change are intrinsically linked – experts from the Zoological Society of London have stated that both global emergencies needed to be tackled in unison to avoid falling short on solutions. Could the Cabinet Member confirm the timeline for the biodiversity strategy and how this will be integrated with the existing climate strategy and action plan?

Reply

The Environment Act 2021 introduced the requirement for the establishment of a [Local Nature Recovery Strategy \(LNRS\)](#). The Greater London Authority are responsible for the establishment of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy across London, which is still at a relatively early stage of the process. The council will be supporting the GLA with the establishment of London's Local Nature Recovery Strategy, which will be informed by the results of the 2020 Green Infrastructure, Biodiversity and Open Space Study, for which the reports are available on the council's [Local Plan Research webpage](#). The details of how London's Local Nature Recovery Strategy will be integrated with the London-wide and Merton's climate strategy and action plan, will only be known when the GLA publish London's Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

From Cllr Braithwaite to the Cabinet Member for Local Environment, Green Spaces and Climate Change

Would the Cabinet Member agree to develop measures with a view to identifying pockets of land available for biodiversity purposes?

Reply

The council's existing and new Local Plan identifies land for biodiversity purposes including Local Nature Reserves and Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation. We work with other London boroughs, the Mayor of London and Greenspaces Information for Greater London to share up to date information on protected species, across boundaries. In support of the new Local Plan, the council carried out a borough-wide review of open spaces, which included consideration of the biodiversity value of the sites. The results are published in the 2020 Green Infrastructure, Biodiversity and Open Space Study and the reports are available on the on the council's [Local Plan Research webpage](#). The council is still awaiting the publication of government regulations and guidance on sites that could benefit from Biodiversity Net Gain funding; once government has published the necessary information we will consider how best to take this forward in Merton.

From Cllr Dresselaers to the Cabinet Member for Local Environment, Green Spaces and Climate Change

Protecting our environment from biodiversity loss is an important part of climate action. Given the Council states it is working to improve its management of green spaces and is proud of the parks in Merton, could the Cabinet Member advise what actions officers have taken to hold Thames Water accountable for raw sewage entering local watercourses especially against the backdrop of many reported sewage leaks in the past years in the River Wandle and Thames Water contributing a £250,000 enforcement undertaking to prevent any further prosecution in 2017?

Reply

While the issue of pollution from sewer outfalls into the river network falls to the Environment Agency (EA) and OfWAT as the regulatory bodies for water quality, Merton work closely through the river catchment board approach with partners including the EA, the South East Rivers Trust and Thames Water to hold Thames Water to account and to look at interventions to help improve the overall condition of our waterways.

Merton officers meet very frequently with Thames Water, to ensure that they are actively cleaning their sewer network, undertaking CCTV surveys, increasing network capacity and installing monitoring devices in areas affected by poor water quality or flooding.

Merton have worked collaboratively with Thames Water to deliver schemes and have successfully obtained funding from Thames Water to implement Green Infrastructure Sustainable Drainage Measures such as the planned scheme for Kenilworth Green pocket park all of which will help improve water quality and reduce the risk of flooding. These schemes will cumulatively reduce the frequency of combined sewer overflows into our local watercourses such as the Wandle or Beverley Brook.

Through regular officer liaison with the Environment Agency, we inform them of known problematic river outfalls which may either be due to fly tipping or misconnected drainage systems.