

Merton Council Council

7 February 2024

Supplementary Agenda Item 2

17 Strategic Theme Councillors Questions and Replies

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From Cllr Kaweesa to the Cabinet Member for Children's Services

How are mental health services in Merton identifying young people at risk of experiencing a mental health condition, and how are they providing support and taking preventative action?

Reply

As recommended by 'Future in Mind', the Merton CAMHS Board decided in 2018 to move away from traditional models of CAMHS and implement a model called "i-Thrive". This has involved a culture shift in practice as well as a reconfiguring of services. The model moves away from the old tiers of service (tiers 1 – 4), to the following categories: 'Getting Advice and Support'; 'Getting Help'; 'Getting More Help' and 'Risk Support', moving from support for the lower levels of need, to very intensive support for acute conditions.

i-Thrive implementation has led to the development of more services at the lower levels which help to identify young people at risk of experiencing a mental health condition, to take preventative action, and to provide them with support. This includes:

- In 2019, a young people's self-referral service for 11 – 25 year olds, run by Off The Record.
- Every school in Merton is now part of a Mental Health in Schools Cluster, which supports the whole school or college model of mental health support. All schools receive support in this model from a Mental Health in Schools Team. As part of this support, services run a range of activities for pupils and parents, that focus on wellbeing, being open about the things that challenge and seeking help when needed. Much of this work is preventative. The key intervention of the Mental Health in Schools workers is to provide support for children with "low mood".

However we know that there are a range of environmental and social challenges that affect children. Many children are exposed to traumatic experiences or have a range of social factors in their lives that mean that they do need a higher level of support. We have a range of services offered by the South West London and St Georges Mental Health Trust and 'Off the Record', to support children with higher needs. One area of development this year has been a council funded public health project using a social prescribing model to support young people and engage them in therapy or activities. This is in its early days but is now being expanded from its pilot phase in Pollards Hill to include Morden.

There will also be young people who are learning to live with a mental health condition. The council for example provides counselling and activity support to young people 16-18 who are not in education training and employment who are struggling to cope. This might start with walking in green spaces with a mentor but will develop into support to get into college or a job.

From Cllr Simon McGrath to the Cabinet Member for Health and Social Care

The Government have recently announced changes in local authorities' ability to refer changes in proposed NHS reconfigurations for review. Do these affect Merton's ability to refer the proposed changes in paediatric cancer care - including children's cancer services at St George's Hospital, and can the Cabinet member assure us that in any event the Council will use whatever powers we have to ensure the Government and NHS leadership are aware of our support for retaining services at St George's?

Reply

The changes to Paediatric Cancer services for Children were discussed at the Healthier Communities & Older People Overview and Scrutiny Panel in 2023 and following my plea the panel voted via a majority decision in favour of supporting retaining services at St George's.

The decision on the location of the new Principal Treatment Centre (PTC) is of vital importance to local families - the options are between St Georges and the Evelina Hospital in Central London.

The NHS England (NHSE) consultation closed in December and the NHS decision is indicated to be made on the site of the new PTC in Spring 2024. I responded to the consultation in favour of the St George's site having previously written to and subsequently met the Regional Medical Director & CCIO of NHSE to convey my strong support for the St George's case.

As previously highlighted, the St George's proposal is to consolidate the PTC onto the St George's site in a new, state-of-the-art children's cancer wing building on their current in-house clinical experience and expertise.

The expertise is already in situ at St George's with a multi-disciplinary team including paediatric intensive care, oncologists, pathology, diagnostic radiology and interventional radiology.

At the last London Clinical Senate meeting in January 2024 NHSE presented an update on the Health & Social Care Act 2022: Substantial service change, which refers to the new power for the Secretary of State to intervene in reconfigurations.

We can and will request a call in if NHSE opts for the Evelina as the site for the new PTC. Previously this call-in option just sat with OSCs and JHOSCs but due to recent legal changes, this call-in power now also includes Health and Wellbeing Boards too.

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

On 22nd January the BBC reported that a resident of Mayfair Homecare in Merton, had received appalling levels of care which has left him in poor health and unable to walk due to ulcers and sores that have developed on his feet.

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Please can the Cabinet Member tell me why the council's monitoring of Mayfair Homecare failed to ensure that the resident was given acceptable standards of care?

Reply

Let me make it absolutely clear that the Council finds any failings in the care of our most vulnerable residents completely unacceptable. Upon learning about this case, the Council launched a comprehensive safeguarding enquiry, which limits what I can say about this matter.

Homecare providers have an individual responsibility to raise safeguarding incidents with the care regulator, the CQC. Mayfair homecare were subject to routine quality assurance and there was no prior concern with the organisations delivery of care and support to multiple clients across the borough. In this specific case the provider failed to act on its duty to report concerns.

The council relies on all partner agencies to safeguard individuals, it is everybody's business to safeguard vulnerable adults. We are grateful to the family member who raised the concern. The individual's care and support were reviewed by our social work teams, which led to the removal of Mayfair as the care provider, and replaced by Merton's directly provided reablement team.

The Cabinet has invested in our homecare services to enable us to pay the London Living Wage to all carers and our new contracts further hold providers to account through requiring recording of care calls through Electronic Care Monitoring. Providers are also subject to contract monitoring and quality assurance processes throughout the contract. Finally, I can report that Mayfair Homecare is no longer under contract with the local authority to deliver homecare services on behalf of Merton.

From Cllr Dollimore to the Cabinet Member for Transport

Air quality in London is considered one of the most significant health risks to our young people, can the Cabinet member tell us how the Council are reducing this risk?

Reply

A national award-winning team that sits within the Regulatory Services Partnership (RSP), delivering statutory services to circa 750,000 residents across the three London Boroughs of Merton, Richmond upon Thames and Wandsworth. The partnership itself is overseen by its governing board, meeting quarterly on both performance and service planning across the three partner boroughs; this is in addition to corporate oversight at respective cabinet and committees within each sovereign council. As well as a number of core statutory functions the team delivers innovative projects around air quality some spanning across London.

Key Air Quality Activities for reducing air pollution in Merton include:

- Renewal of Merton Air Quality Action Plan

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Merton's Air Quality Action Plan (AQAP) is produced as part of the Borough's statutory responsibility to tackle pollution in an Air Quality Management Area (AQMA). This management area has been declared boroughwide for both NO₂ and Particulates. The plan sets out policy commitments and activities the Council will take to tackle these key pollutants in the borough.

The current plan includes a commitment to the ongoing air quality monitoring network (including schools) comprised of multiple diffusion tubes/automated stations. It also sets out funding towards projects such as NRMM (Cleaner Construction), air TEXT and the love clean air website. Borough specific initiatives are also focused on anti-idling campaigns, and the schools air quality audit programme.

A timetable will be set out in the coming months for the next five-year plan commencing 2024.

- Air Quality monitoring
- 61 nitrogen dioxide (NO₂ diffusion tubes) which provide a monthly average concentration which is used for long term trend analysis.
- Two continuous real-time monitoring stations, measuring nitrogen dioxide outside the Civic Centre Morden and particulate matter (PM₁₀) on Merton Road, Wimbledon. These stations produce high quality, accurate data and as such are expensive to install and maintain. Recently the Council has invested on upgrading the two monitoring stations and on installing a further two new stations in the borough.
- 21 Breathe London Nodes. These monitors measure both nitrogen dioxide and fine particulate matter (PM_{2.5}) in real-time and are the middle ground between diffusion tubes and continuous monitoring stations, they are deemed 'low-cost sensors'. This enables us to see in real-time NO₂ and PM 2.5 in detail which have never seen before, this is also linked to traffic and transport monitoring in the borough to give a picture or the contributions to pollution from transport sources.

Regulatory Activity

- Oversight of permitted processes across the borough (referred to as 'Pollution Prevention Control'-PPC) (Pollution Activities such as petrol stations, dry cleaners)
- Regulation of Construction activities around air quality and contaminated land.
- Planning consultation for development control & policy
- Complaint resolution

Non-Road Mobile Machinery (NRMM)

Emissions arising from demolition and construction machinery have historically been effectively unregulated in the UK. The RSP took the lead in establishing the Cleaner Construction for London project; implementing and enforcing the London Low Emission Zone for construction machinery [Non-Road Mobile Machinery or NRMM] on behalf of Mayor of London and the 31 local authorities.

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The initial three year project 2019-22 has now been extended a further 3 years, with an options appraisal underway with a number of key stakeholders to determine mechanisms to take the project further (including commercial opportunities).

Anti-idling Campaign

Over the last three years we have delivered more than 30 events at 'hotspots' in the borough; Such events include the use of signage and delivering anti-idling workshops to schools. This has raised awareness in the communities.

Smarter Greener Logistics

Merton Council are part of Cross River Partnership's Smarter Greener Logistics – a Defra funded project. Two sensors are being installed in the Willow Lane Estate to monitor emissions from the industrial sites within the estate. The CRP and Merton Council are working with EMSOL, who have successfully delivered a similar project in the Weir Road Estate.

London Wood Burning Project

Merton Council are part of the London Wood Burning Project – a pan London project that highlights the dangers of wood burning stoves to residents of the borough.

From Cllr Anthony Fairclough to the Cabinet Member for Children's Services

Paragraph 21.15 of the report notes that referrals to CAMHS show significant rises in referrals, can the Cabinet Member tell me what work has been done to 'look behind' the reasons for referrals?

Reply

A range of surveys of young people's views have been undertaken nationally to understand the drivers behind this rise. In June 2023 Young Minds published the results of their national survey [53% rise in yearly referrals to CAMHS | YoungMinds](#). This found two main drivers: the cost of living (53% of young people surveyed were worried about money), and worries about academic catch up post pandemic. There has also been research on the 'echo chamber' created by social media which can bring young people together in mutual support but can also create access for them to damaging content, online abuse and a feeling of missing out.

The last two Merton Young People surveys, the first undertaken in the immediate aftermath of the pandemic in [2021](#), and the second undertaken very recently and not yet published, both show that Merton young people also have academic worries and are concerned about the cost of living.

The data behind referrals continues to be regularly scrutinised at the Merton CAMHS Partnership Board. The focus on young people's mental health, both locally and nationally, has meant that there is more discussion about the topic, and more generally about wellbeing, and we are seeing a greater take up of support by young people.

From Cllr Max Austin to the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Civic Pride

Please can the Deputy Leader confirm whether the council will be committing the necessary £10,000 for the Faith in Action A10 Support Grant, and what steps can be taken to improve the funding of the Faith in Action Drop-In to ensure that they have the necessary funding for future years and do not need to apply for funding retrospectively?

Reply

Yes, I can confirm that the Council is providing £10,000 of funding to Faith in Action for their excellent A10 project again this year. I have asked officers to look at ways in which we may be able to develop a longer-term approach to this funding but as a Government grant is the source of the funding, and as the Government only provides one-year settlements we do not have any certainty about the future unfortunately.

From Cllr Williscroft to the Cabinet Member for Health and Social Care

How is the Council embedding the Borough of Sport throughout the Council's public health work streams?

Reply

The Public Health and Borough of Sport teams are working effectively both strategically and operationally, to ensure that our ambitions and programmes complement each other. Physical inactivity is one of four public health risk factors, alongside smoking, diet and alcohol misuse (underpinned by mental wellbeing). The Borough of Sport approach and activities will increase the number of Merton residents that are physically active. This will have a positive impact on both physical and mental health; it also brings people together to participate in fun and healthy activity.

Complementing the Borough of Sport activities, Public Health are working on a number of targeted physical activity programmes including working in partnership with the Alzheimer's Society on promoting and using their 'Feel Good Folder' toolkit here in Merton. These folders have been developed by the Alzheimer's Society in association with Sport England and co-produced by people living with dementia.

The aim of the approach is to encourage greater physical activity for people living with dementia alongside their families and carers and the Alzheimer's team at Merton's Dementia Hub, CLCH nurses, Better leisure, Wimbledon Guild and Age UK Merton have all signed up to promote the folders, which I am launching at the Merton Dementia Action Alliance meeting on Thursday 8th February 2024.

The Council are also delivering:

- Free Swimming sessions for over 65s launched in November 2023. This provides a weekly free swimming session in each of the three leisure centres.
- Our parks sessions launched in Mitcham, one of which takes place at 9.30am on a weekday which may suit those who are more likely retired.

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- Plans are advancing to deliver a new Parkrun with weekly sessions at Morden Park due to launch in Spring 2024. This is very popular with the over 65s.
- AFC Foundation granted £70,000 to deliver three hubs in the borough that meet the needs of older adults, carers, adults with disabilities or mental health conditions. A Health Activator and a small team of qualified sports and physical training coaches and tutors deliver a range of regular activities based on participation in physical activity and a social element that provides a touch point for individuals to meet new people, reduce social isolation, exercise in a safe and welcoming environment and continue to engage in their local community.

Currently we are awaiting the outcome of a funding application in partnership with Fulham FC Foundation which will deliver significantly more activities aimed at over 65s in Merton.

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

In recent reports from UK Health Security Agency and The London Climate Resilience Review commissioned by the Mayor state the health impacts of climate breakdown are already being felt locally and globally and these risks will accelerate. The report warns of major impacts on mental and physical health from increasing temperatures and that the changing climate will exacerbate existing health inequalities.

What adaptive and mitigation measures are the Council taking to avoid these impacts?

Reply

We recognise the co-benefits to health and wellbeing of our residents in developing strategies and delivering projects to adapt and mitigate the impacts of climate change such as excess heat and flood risk.

Merton's Climate Strategy and Action Plan (adopted in November 2020) sets out Merton's strategic response to the Climate Emergency and identifies actions required from the council, and other stakeholders across the borough, to achieve Merton's commitment of being a net zero carbon borough by 2050.

Merton's Climate Delivery Plans for 2021, 2022 and 2023 set out the steps the council has taken to mitigate and adapt to the impacts of climate change since the adoption of our Climate Strategy & Action Plan. This includes the allocation and spending of £4million council funding until 2026 on climate matters to support net zero targets.

Merton's tree strategy 2023-2029 is also designed to ensure the borough's resilience in the face of environmental challenges: setting out how we will protect trees and hedges, increasing Merton's tree canopy by 10% by 2050 under the principle of "right tree, right place and enhancing the diversity of tree species, and planting and

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managing trees in a way which is beneficial for biodiversity, ecology and our residents.

Merton's Local Planning policies integrate climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies, including green infrastructure, urban design, sustainable travel, and flood resilience. Key initiatives include:

- Recent consultations in Mitcham prompted plans for increased tree planting in exposed areas of Rowan Road Rec, Miles Road Playing Fields, and Lewis Road Rec, starting in 2024.
- In 2022, volunteers and council staff planted over 6,000 tree whips and 12 standard trees at Cranmer Green Mitcham, supported by a successful bid to "Trees for Cities."
- A volunteer-led tree planting programme began in Morden Park on February 6th, 2024, enhancing species diversity, canopy cover, and shade.
- Significant tree planting efforts across the borough include projects like the Queen's Green Canopy and the Urban Tree Challenge, with a focus on areas like Mitcham.
- Active travel projects, such as cycle lane improvements and pedestrian safety measures, aim to reduce carbon emissions while enhancing biodiversity and creating healthier environments.
- A comprehensive project along the Wandle Trail aims to improve safety, increase habitat opportunities, and enhance tree species diversity, with stages completed in 2023 and ongoing work planned for 2024.
- Flood mitigation measures, including rain gardens and planning for future projects such as that at Kenilworth Gardens, are being implemented in collaboration with Thames Water.
- Successful funding bids support initiatives like the Raynes Park flood alleviation scheme, reducing flood risk and enhancing public realm infrastructure.
- Merton's upcoming Home Energy Efficiency Loan scheme, launching in Spring 2024, will assist residents in making their homes more energy-efficient and reducing energy bills.

Merton's 2022/23 Annual Public Health Report highlighted the health benefits of climate action and opportunities for partnership across themes like active travel, diets, green spaces, and housing.

Additionally, the Warm and Well program, funded by Merton Council, along with partners like Wimbledon Guild, Age UK Merton, and Thinking Works, raises awareness about staying healthy in cold weather. It offers support including a handyperson, energy advice, and grants for eligible households struggling with heating bills.

Moreover, Public Health has collaborated with SWL ICB and General Practice in Merton on a pilot program promoting healthy, green, and active practices. Measures include switching to greener asthma inhalers, which reduce carbon emissions while remaining cost-effective and providing the same medication to patients.

From Cllr Kirsten Galea to the Cabinet Member for Health and Social Care

The link between mental health problems and poverty are well-known. Disabled people and their families are amongst those hardest hit by the rising cost-of-living. Scope estimates that disabled people face roughly £583 a month of extra costs, on average, as more is spent on essential goods and services like heating, insurance, equipment and therapies.

Has the Cabinet Member reviewed relevant policies to understand what additional help could be provided to disabled residents and their families to help with ever rising care costs?

Reply

We recognise the financial and wider wellbeing challenges many of our residents face owing to rising living costs. It is also recognised that people with disabilities are often some of the hardest hit, not only experiencing higher spend on essentials but also receiving, on average, lower incomes.

The Council has invested heavily in services and initiatives to relieve the cost of living pressures on our residents and continues to do so under the Cost of Living Fund and programmes such as our Community Response Hub and Warm & Well. Merton Council currently funds a dedicated Disability Adviser based at Citizen's Advice Merton and Lambeth. This adviser provides benefits advice and support for residents who are disabled or living with long term health conditions. In addition, Merton's Warm and Well in Merton programme offers advice and support to help residents manage with increasing costs, including free, confidential advice on transport, benefits, debt and housing support. Warm & Well in Merton is delivered in partnership with Wimbledon Guild, Age UK Merton and Thinking Works. Details of a broad range of support for residents are also detailed in our Cost of Living pages: [Cost-of-living support | Merton Council](#)

For those disabled residents who receive care and support, they are, like all residents, subject to financial assessment in order to assess what contribution the individual is able to make towards their care and support. This is a means tested assessment that takes into account the level of income the individual receives and specifically disregards certain benefits such as Attendance Allowance and Mobility payments as well as discretionary disregards for an individual's personal living expenditure, which recognises the additional costs people with disabilities often bare.

The financial assessment process itself acts as an opportunity to maximise an individual's income through a thorough assessment of benefits eligibility and where appropriate, referring residents on to agencies that can support application processes and ensure the resident receives all they are entitled to.

From Cllr Butcher to the Cabinet Member for Children's Services

The government continues to refuse to provide the sustainable, long-term funding of Children's Social Care that young people in care in Merton need. How is the council mitigating this and protecting these vital services?

Reply

We seek to be as effective as possible in our services and make innovations in the way we provide those services to ensure the money we do receive is used cost effectively. Through our good practice, reflected in our 'Outstanding' Ofsted status, we aim to provide service early and prevent unnecessary escalation, which is better for children and families. The number of children in care in Merton is one of the lowest compared to equivalent boroughs.

Whilst the announcement of some extra funding for social care in 2024/25 is welcome, it has not been confirmed for future years and so the government continues to put Councils in the position where they are less able to plan because of financial uncertainty.