

Merton Council

Colliers Wood and NE Mitcham Community Forum Agenda

Membership

Councillors:

Gregory Patrick Udeh (Chair)

Date: Tuesday 20 October 2015

Time: 7.15 pm

Venue:

This is a public meeting and attendance by the public is encouraged and welcomed. For more information about the agenda please contact getinvolved@merton.gov.uk or telephone [020 8545 3896](tel:02085453896).

All Press contacts: communications@merton.gov.uk, 020 8545 3181

Colliers Wood and NE Mitcham Community Forum Agenda

20 October 2015

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|---|--|--------|
| 1 | Welcome and Introductions | 1 - 4 |
| 2 | Council Update - Councillor Martin Whelton | 5 - 20 |
| 3 | Date of next meeting | |

Note on declarations of interest

Members are advised to declare any Disclosable Pecuniary Interest in any matter to be considered at the meeting. If a pecuniary interest is declared they should withdraw from the meeting room during the whole of the consideration of that matter and must not participate in any vote on that matter. If members consider they should not participate because of a non-pecuniary interest which may give rise to a perception of bias, they should declare this, withdraw and not participate in consideration of the item. For further advice please speak with the Assistant Director of Corporate Governance.

Colliers Wood and North East Mitcham Community Forum
20 October 2015
Chair's Report

Councillor Greg Udeh chaired the meeting. 10 residents attended, as well as six other councillors and officers from the council and its partners. The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Former gasworks site on Western Road

Alex Wilson updated the meeting, on behalf of National Grid, following a number of incursions by Travellers over the summer. The site shared with SGN, who own the disused gas holder and a modern pressure reduction system. Following court orders the Travellers had vacated the site but had left more than 50 tonnes of rubbish. This has now been cleared by National Grid.

Security measures have been increased to prevent future incursions:

- 24 hour on-site security with dogs until the physical measures could be completed
- Large concrete blocks to protect entrances
- Increased monitored CCTV coverage

SGN still needs daily pedestrian access but vehicle access will be restricted to an annual maintenance visit. This will require specialist equipment to temporarily remove the concrete blocks. Residents were asked to report any further incursions on to the site to National Grid on 0800 0731047.

The long term solution is the development of the site but this is dependent on SGN relocating their equipment. Once this is completed a development brief would be created and residents would be consulted before a planning application was submitted. A previous planning application had been successful in 2010 for remedial works to clear up the land and remove some of the old buildings. In response to questions Mr Wilson said he did not know where the Travellers had moved on to and confirmed that National Grid were exploring the possibility of temporary uses of the land by other tenants.

Merton Council Budget

Councillor Martin Whelton presented an update on the Council's budget and how decisions were being taken. The presentation can be found at:

<http://www.merton.gov.uk/community-living/communityforums/mitchamcommunityforum.htm>

Councillor Whelton said that Council Tax would continue to be frozen at the 2010 level until 2018. Along with continued reductions in government grant this would create pressures on the budget of £15m over the next three years. Decisions would be made using the 'July principles', which emphasis protecting the vulnerable. A number of residents asked about the possibility of increasing council tax to help with the budget gap. Councillor Whelton explained that without a referendum any rise is capped at 1.99% and it would

take a 20% increase to meet the budget gap. It was a manifesto commitment to freeze council tax in 2010 and in 2014 in order to protect those for whom council tax is difficult to pay. In addition there has been a grant from government for freezing Council Tax. An increase in households helps slightly as does the New Homes Bonus

In response to questions Councillor Whelton said that Merton supported further devolution to councils and has been working with other south London councils on a potential package that would include skills. Councillor Whelton also said that there was continuing pressure on school places and the council was looking to expand existing secondary schools in addition to the new Harris Academy School that is looking for a site in South Wimbledon.

Councillor Whelton explained that the Council's Climate Change Strategy can be found on our website at <http://www.merton.gov.uk/environment/sustainability-climate/climatechange/what-are-we-doing/climatechangestrategy.htm>

Residents were concerned about cuts to social care and referred to a petition to national government being organised by Age UK.

Asked about Merton Adult Education Councillor Whelton explained that the council was in the process of commissioning new providers and tenders are currently being sought. The new service is expected to be in place by August 2015 but it would not include services at Whately Avenue.

Healthwatch Merton

Jade Fairfax from Healthwatch Merton provided an update on their work. Jade joined Healthwatch in the summer and replaced Adele who attended the forum in 2014. Healthwatch is an independent champion for consumers of health and social care services and aims to make sure providers and commissioners listen and understand the voice of users. Merton is part of a network of local Healthwatch organisations that are linked to a national body, Healthwatch England.

Some of the current projects being supported by Healthwatch Merton include:

- Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) – spoke to users and parents about the services to feed into a review.
- Healthy High Street – spoke to 192 people Mitcham about the town centre for Public Health. Identified public toilets as a key issue.
- GP access – spoke with residents across the borough and put recommendations to the Clinical Commissioning Group including training for frontline staff. The report is available on the Healthwatch Merton website
- Patient Participation Groups – every surgery should have one of these but quality varies hugely. Working with two surgeries to develop best practice that can be shared across the 24 practices in Merton
- Outreach work – met with homeless drop-in group; YMCA service users; and visited Bond Primary.

- Urgent care – held a public meeting on 30 September to look at services like the Wilson Walk-in and 111 as part of a review. Other events will follow.

More information about this work, including the Healthy High Streets report, is available from the Healthwatch Merton website:

<http://www.healthwatchmerton.co.uk/>

Jade said she would be delighted to attend a Colliers Wood Residents Association meeting.

More information about the proposed Cumulative Impact Zone for Mitcham can be found at:

<http://www.merton.gov.uk/business/licences/licensing/licensing-policies.htm>

Street Cleaning

Tony Gant, Cleansing Supervisor, Merton Council, explained that there had been some staffing issues in Colliers Wood recently. Regular staff had been absent and unfortunately the cover arranged was not satisfactory. The existing team would be back in place from 21 October whilst improved monitoring and mentoring of other staff has been put in place. Tony expected the team to get on top of problem areas as soon as possible. Arranging cover for absent staff can be difficult and occasional a short term measure of a mobile response team is put in place.

Refuse collection teams are trained to collect any spillages as they go and all staff were encouraged to use their common sense.

In response to questions Tony agreed that it would be helpful to notify local councillors of any future staffing issues. Enforcement officers from the Council and our contractor Kingdom have focused on Colliers Wood before and will be back from 27 October. The split bins are separated to ensure recyclable waste is not sent to landfill.

Problems around Lyveden Road were raised. Tony said that sweepers should usually go up to the steps regardless of the actual borough boundary. Police were aware of street drinking issues and check the area when they can.

Bin lockers on Grenfell Road were raised as bags left in the bins had not been collected recently. Tony said that usually bags need to be on the edge of the resident's property but he would check to see if there were any particular problems at this site. Tony confirmed that the council does have standards for street cleaning and these can be found at:

<http://www.merton.gov.uk/environment/waste/refuse/anti-littercode.htm>

Soapbox

Residents asked for an update on the future location of the Colliers Wood GP surgery. Councillor Caroline Cooper-Marbiah had recently met with council

officers and confirmed that they were still looking for a potential site and were working with the NHS but as yet no appropriate site has been found.

Residents also raised the Estates Review being undertaken by Epsom and St Helier NHS Trust. More information on this can be found at <https://www.epsom-sthelier.nhs.uk/estates-review>

**Colliers Wood and North East Mitcham
Community Forum Meeting
20 October 2015**

Update on Merton Council

**Cllr Martin Whelton Cabinet Member
for Education**

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Agenda Item 2



**Best
Achieving
Council**



Where Merton gets its money

- About half Merton's "spending power" is from Council Tax
- The other half comes from the main Government settlement or other Government grants
- So a fall in our government funding is bound to affect services

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The Financial Challenge

- Since 2010, the government have cut **40%** of the funding for local council's.
- In September, we calculated the budget gap until 2019/20 would be £15m.
- This will mean **significant** cuts to council services on top of all of the cuts already agreed.

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2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
£0m	£0m	£3.5m	£15.3m

It may be even worse

- But this doesn't take into account government's recent announcement of a further **40%** cut to council funding.
- For Merton, this would mean a **further** £9m in savings, bringing the total potential gap to £24m.

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	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
Existing Gap	£0m	£0m	£3.5m	£15.3m
+ 40% cut	£2.8m	£6.1m	£6.8m	£8.9m
Potential Gap	£2.8m	£6.1m	£10.3m	£24.2m

Additional Pressures

- It's becoming more and more difficult to deliver services on the funding we currently have, let alone to make further cuts
- We overspent by £3.7m last year
- And we're overspending by £3.5m this year already

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Adult Social Care

- Our residents are living longer, but as a result there is a greater need for council funded care services (ASC)
- We spend almost 40% of our budget on ASC
- We overspent in ASC by £2.6m last year
- **ASC is already predicted to overspend by £1.5m this year**
- The government has announced an “in year” cut (to public health funding)
- **We expect to lose half a million pounds of public health funding**

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Children's Services

- Welcome advances in medical care mean more disabled children survive into adulthood, but this means increased need for council funded care
- It can cost £50,000 a year to care for one disabled child
- Need to look after children in care up to the age of 25, including university costs, and unaccompanied asylum seekers
- Increased birth rate means we need to expand schools
- We overspent in CSF by £2.7m last year
- **Children's Services is already predicted to overspend by £2m this year**

Can't we use our reserves?

- We are **already** using our reserves
- Last year we spent some of our reserves in order to cover the overspend of £3.7m
- This reduced our general reserve to £15m
- If we have to do the same thing this year our reserves could go down to just £10m
- What will we do if we overspend again in the following years?

What are the options?

- We can't refuse to agree a budget
- Central government would just take over the council and agree the cuts themselves
- We could cut every area equally
- Or we could try to protect services for the people who need it most
- We think it's fairer to make lower levels of cuts to Children's Services and Adult Social Care

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The principles underlying the budget process

In July 2011, Merton Council agreed the following priorities for the Administration.

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- Protect statutory services to vulnerable groups
- Low Council Tax and Clean streets
- To be a good place to grow up and go to school
- Be the best we can for the local environment
- Everything else is up for discussion

How we protect priority services

- First we look for savings in procurement, shared services, back offices and other efficiencies.
- After that, we try to protect services for the vulnerable.

Department	Budget	Savings Target	Percentage Savings
Corporate Services	£11m	£3m	27%
Chief Executives Dept	£2.5m	£0.4m	15%
Environment & Regeneration	£32m	£4.7m	15%
Community & Housing	£62m	£4.5m	7%
Children's Services	£37m	£1.4m	4%

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How we save you money

- Shared Services with other boroughs
- Better deals with our contractors
- Looked at everything the Council does and cut out inefficiencies
- Better use of IT e.g. libraries
- These moves have helped us to protect services and deliver low Council Tax

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Difficult Decisions

- Still have to make significant cuts – no area is safe
- **£2m** in Corporate Services (smallest budget)
- Over **£6m** cuts in Environment & Regeneration
- **£3.4m** in Community & Housing (including Adult Social Care)
- **£2m cuts** in Children's Services
- Currently working on finding these savings

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Our achievements

Despite the financial pressures, there's lots to be proud of:

- Introduced Street Cleaning hit squads
- New FREE Bulky Waste Collection scheme
- Food waste collection scheme rolled out borough-wide
- No Library closures and No Children's Centre closures
- New library in Colliers Wood
- Fastest improving GCSE results in London
- Expanding local schools including an additional 420 places at Singlegate
- Resident parking permit charges frozen; Visitors' parking permit prices reduced

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Our six year Council Tax freeze

We have kept our promise to freeze Council Tax:

- We delivered a zero Council Tax rise for 2011/12
- We delivered a zero Council Tax rise for 2012/13
- We delivered a zero Council Tax rise for 2013/14
- We delivered a zero Council Tax rise for 2014/15
- We delivered a zero Council Tax rise for 2015/16
- And we propose a zero Council Tax rise for 2016/17
- Plus no cuts to rebates for low-income households

We have done this by taking a prudent approach to our finances.

Challenging Times - but we're confident

- We have the right strategy
- We've kept council tax low
- We've protected the services you care about
- Resident satisfaction with the Council at a record high
- Voted "Best Achieving Council" in the country

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