

MORDEN COMMUNITY FORUM
22 FEBRUARY 2023

(7.15 pm - 9.00 pm)

PRESENT Councillors Councillor Caroline Charles (in the Chair),

1 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS (Agenda Item 1)

The meeting was held in the Council Chamber and on Zoom and chaired by Councillor Caroline Charles. Ten residents and eight councillors attended in person, three on Zoom with 88 additional views on YouTube. The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and explained how the meeting would work.

2 POLICE UPDATE (Agenda Item 2)

Sgt Jeff New from Cannon Hill and Lower Morden and PC Shaun Matthew from Merton Park Safer Neighbourhood Team gave an update on local policing issues. All officers are now working out of Mitcham Police Station and still waiting to hear which stations in Merton will be retained. Neighbourhood policing is a priority for new Commissioner, Mark Rowley. All SNTs have Ward Panels, made up of residents who help set local priorities. All the teams have regular drop-in surgeries and an online presence. Residents can contact their [local SNT](#) to be kept informed about local events.

Cannon Hill SNT has three priorities: reduction of anti-social behaviour (ASB) on open spaces; reduction of vehicle crime including theft of catalytic convertors; and reduction in burglary.

Current crime statistics are low and consistent with last year.

Lower Morden's priorities are ASB especially in Morden Park; reduction of vehicle crime; and reduction in speeding. In response the team has been carrying speed watches across the ward. Crime statistics are similarly low and consistent with last year.

Burglaries have involved daytime entry from the rear of the property and night-time thefts from sheds, especially bikes. For vehicle theft offenders are able to duplicate keyless entry and move vehicles across the country or ship overseas. The teams have been giving crime prevention advice on theft of and from motor vehicles including giving out Faraday pouches and property marking catalytic convertors. They have also recommended installing steering locks and Cat Clamps which cost

around £100. In the last year three men have received custodial sentences for theft from motor vehicles.

Merton Park's priorities are robbery and violence in Morden town centre; ASB in open spaces; burglary; speeding; and creating and visible police presence.

Ravensbury's priorities are robbery and violence in Morden town centre; ASB in open spaces; burglary; and speeding, mainly on Bishopford Road, St Helier Avenue and Middleton Road.

In response the teams are patrolling more in the evening and in parks, and burglary hot spots. The teams are providing prevention advice in hotspots and holding speed watch events. There was a rise in crime over the last 12 months compared to the previous year.

A resident asked what the plan is to restore confidence in the Met Police. PC Matthew said the Commissioner has opened new department and hotline for reporting corrupt officers. There has also been improved vetting, clamping down on these issues. Sgt New said there is a review into culture under Dame Casey is due to report in the next few weeks.

Commissioner Rowley has published a nine-point plan to rebuild confidence called the [Turnaround Plan](#). Rebuilding confidence will not be easy and will take time.

Cllr Dollimore asked what can be done to prevent catalytic converter theft and catch culprits. Cllr Dollimore also wanted to remind residents that [home safety inspections](#) by London Fire Brigade were available to book. Sgt New said this difficult due to the value of the items, marking helps prevent resale but clamps are effective in preventing the theft. It can also help to park close to a wall and advice is available from the [Met Police](#). Catching offenders is difficult and requires a lot of coordination with response teams.

Cllr Cox asked what advice could be given to residents to help prevent burglaries involving entry from the rear. Sgt New said measures which can prevent rear access are helpful, like fencing or gates over shared alleyways. The local SNT can make a crime prevention visit to advise residents. Cllr McLean said the [Alley gates](#) scheme is worth highlighting to help prevent burglaries

Cllr Cox asked about plans to tackle violence against women and girls. Sgt New said all wards have a violence or ASB priority, and tackling violence is a priority for the Met as a whole, including crimes targeting women. Incidents in Morden are rare, there was an incident in Stonecot Hill in January resulting in an arrest and some incidents of exposure in Morden Hall Park also resulting in arrest. The team is taking part in a Walk and Talk for women and it is possible to report issues via the [Met website](#).

Cllr Charles asked about tackling graffiti. There is a 'Nasty J' tag in Lower Morden, and the SNT is working with Merton Council to identify who is responsible and then will pursue criminal charges. Cllr Kenny said that graffiti is usually dealt with quickly by Merton Council.

3 OPEN FORUM (Agenda Item 3)

A resident asked if there was any update at St Helier Hospital and the plans for the Belmont hospital. Cllr Charles shared a statement from Merton Council:

The council remain deeply concerned that the decision to relocate services from the current site at St Helier to the site in Belmont will reduce access to essential health provision for residents of the borough, particularly those in the East of the borough. With the developing cost of living crisis and the impact this will have on household finances, the potential future impact of travel costs to get to the new site only increases this concern.

The cabinet, since very early in the life of the new administration been seeking answers from the senior leadership of the new Integrated Care Board as well as from the Epsom and St Helier NHS Trust, both on whether there is an opportunity to further review previous decisions and whether the proposed new hospital remains affordable.

There has been much speculation in the media about whether the New Hospital Programme is properly funded, and the council will continue to press hard for clarity on this point. We will also continue to stress the need for an alternative plan that protects and enhances the buildings and services at the current St Helier site so that should, as appears increasingly likely, the national New Hospital Programme be delayed or discontinued there is a plan B in place that ensures our residents can continue to access the high-quality services they have a right to expect from the NHS.

Cllr Alambritis said residents in Merton could still object to any planning application for a new facility in Belmont.

Pippa Maslin and Estifanos Habtesellasie (Vice Chair) from the [Merton Centre for Independent Living](#) highlighted the work of the organisation. A Deaf and Disabled People's Organisations model means services are run by deaf and disabled people for deaf and disabled people. They have three main areas of work, information/advice, discrimination, and making changes locally. MCIL have received extra funding from Civic Pride fund for their advice service and they also provide advocacy services. MCIL has met with the developers of Centre Court to discuss their plans and accessibility. They are building a good relationship with Merton Council on a range of issues and are working with other disability groups to challenge national policy. MCIL hosts a monthly craftivism discussion session. COVID had a significant impact on disabled people, and this is still ongoing. MCIL is working on a

strategic review, including new work with young people. There is an important role to play in supporting disabled people to live independently. They have five caseworkers, councillors can signpost disabled people, and residents can refer themselves. There is also support available to people through Care Act Assessments including financial resilience, concessionary travel applications and housing issues like unsuitable accommodation due to lack of accessible housing.

A resident said he was hiring a hall to do a presentation on the consultation and anyone wishing attend can contact him through Kris Witherington.

A resident said she had been impressed by the response from the Adult Social Care team to an emergency situation and was grateful for the support they provided.

4 FUTURE WASTE AND STREET CLEANING SERVICES (Agenda Item 4)

Cllr Natasha Irons, Cabinet Member for Local Environment, Green Spaces and Climate Change, gave a presentation on the future of waste collection, recycling and street cleaning services. The presentation is attached to this report.

Cllr Irons said there were several problems with the way the current contract worked. As a result, Cabinet decided in October to end the contract with Veolia in 2025. The Council then held a consultation with residents and received more than 2500 responses. The consultation showed that that satisfaction with waste collection dropped in 2019 but has improved since. Merton has the seventh highest recycling rate in London, so this element of the service is working well. In contrast satisfaction with Street cleaning has not recovered, and Merton issued Veolia with an improvement notice in 2022.

Resident's biggest concerns were street litter, fly-tipping and over-flowing street bins. There were also concerns about the arrangements for collection from flats, a residents felt that they were not being helped to recycle by the system. Residents were happy with Garth Road and the new booking system. Those residents who used the bulky and garden waste services were satisfied but there were concerns about the cost putting people off from using the service. Neighbourhood Recycling Centres can be fly-tipping hotspots. Residents felt there was a clear need to tackle fly-tipping, and satisfaction was especially low in South Wimbledon.

Cllr Irons said that the Council considered all the available options for service delivery, namely contracting, bringing in-house, setting up an arm's length company, and setting up a Joint Venture with providers. All of the options were tested against the same criteria and the evaluation concluded that contracting out waste, but bringing-in house street cleaning would offer the best solution.

For both services the Council will look to have a more prescriptive specification and work has begun to build those specifications with a view to going out to the market in April. In the meantime, the Council will also pilot a programme of bringing Garth Road to local communities in order to help residents recycle larger items.

A resident asked about having a Community Skip scheme, and if there would be an option for smaller wheelie bins. Cllr Irons said that two big changes would be happening quickly – changes to collections from flats above shops, and a 'Garth Road on the Road', taking option of recycling bulky waste close to communities. Previously skip schemes were abused so the new pilot will aim to increase recycling options. As part of the specification, we can review receptacles but will be sticking with wheelie bins. The number of options will depend on costs.

A resident asked about the future role of South London Waste Partnership. Cllr Irons said Merton and the other boroughs will be going our own way on collection but the transportation and disposal of waste done together still works and will continue. The SLWP will continue to look for efficiencies.

A resident said that there are problems with BIFFA bins in the access road behind Sainsburys in Morden. Cllr Irons explained commercial waste would not be part of the specification as businesses have to make their own arrangements, but Merton can look at enforcement of that site.

A resident gave thanks for improvements on Netley Gardens that had resulted in a reduction in fly-tipping but there is still have a problem with a landlord on St Helier Avenue. Cllr Irons said she would need to check with officers.

A resident asked about the recently purchased mechanical street sweepers and Cllr Irons said that these belong to Merton Council so would transfer to the in-house service.

5 DORSET HALL (Agenda Item 5)

Barbara Gorna talked about [Dorset Hall](#) on Kingston Road. The hall built in 1736 and is now owned by Clarion. It was previously owned by a suffragette Rose Lamartine Yates who hosted suffragettes freed from prison fresh from hunger-strike, and ran the WSPU, the local branch of the Pankhursts' union. Barbara had formed the Dorset Hall Group (DHG) to improve the building. An Options Appraisal by the National Trust, If-Do architects, management consultants, surveyors, and the Architectural Heritage Trust, cost £750,000. This includes the repair of the badly damaged roof. The building is now watertight. Barbara, on behalf of Dorset Hall Group said that they were now handing over responsibility for the building to the local councillors, Cllr Ed Foley and Cllr Stephen Mercer who would liaise with Clarion on a suitable future for

Dorset Hall, which reflects its important past, both as a Grade II listed building and its political importance.

A resident asked what had happened to the house prior to Clarion taking over. Barbara explained that the house had been used for single person housing by Merton Council and then Clarion up to 2016 when it closed. The building was then occupied by squatters. Clarion is looking to sell the building.

A resident asked about possible future uses, and Barbara said she would like to prioritise women's health and well-being. Barbara is talking to Heritage Lottery Fund about an application for funding and the National Trust has put together detailed report on possible options.

Cllr Dollimore thanked Barbara for her work on preserving the house.

6 FUTURE ENGAGEMENT IN MORDEN (Agenda Item 6)

Kris Witherington, Engagement and Consultation Manager at Merton Council, gave a presentation on proposals to improve resident engagement across Merton. The presentation is attached to this report.

Kris said that the changes were focused on the work of the corporate engagement team rather than work done by many services with specific audiences and service users. The team had learnt a lot from changing approaches during COVID and from the feedback from residents on the Community Forums in 2022. They had identified three areas where improvements needed to be made and how this would be resourced through increased capacity.

The first area was face-to-face engagement, including the Community Forums. Kris said the current approach was not working as well as it should be, and instead the plan is to hold two events in each area per year. One would be a large-scale question-time event involving local services leaders, including the Leader of the Council, and the second would be more of a workshop format for residents to work together rather than a presentation and question approach. The Engagement team would also support local arrangements, working with local groups and councillors ensuring that solutions are right for each area rather than a one-size fits all approach.

The second area to improve is engagement with Civic Society, meaning resident groups, both formal organisations and informal arrangements like WhatsApp groups. The Engagement Team will look to map what work is taking place, offer a point of contact, provide an e-newsletter and host an annual event that brings these groups together.

The third area was the way residents can engage with the council digitally. Currently the Council has an online consultation hub and design tool for online survey but there are new tools available like mapping, discussion boards and an online resident's panel.

These changes will be delivered by recruiting a new Events Officer post to manage the meetings, a Community Development Officer to work with the Civic Society and an Engagement Officer to work on digital engagement and support departmental consultations.

A resident asked where these ideas had emerged. Kris said they had looked at what took place in other boroughs and looked at where we had issues that needed to be improved in Merton.

A resident asked about the Council Twitter account and why posts were not responded to. Kris explained that the account was managed by the Communications team which does not have access to the Customer management system so can not deal with specific issues, only signpost to the ways to report those issues.

A resident asked about councillors blocking residents on Twitter and Kris said that was not an issue he could comment on.

Cllr Mercer asked about how the residents panel would work, and Kris said that the most common approach was to send out invitations randomly and then there would be an ongoing issue of replenishing the panel. It is possible to skew invitations to encourage different responses, collect demographic information and weight responses to ensure the sample is representative.

7 DATE OF NEXT MEETING (Agenda Item 7)

Cllr Charles thanked everyone for attending.

The date of the next meeting is to be confirmed.