

From Councillor Sally Kenny to the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health

Can he update us on the local NHS's Sustainability and Transformation Plan (STP) and how it might impact older people in the borough.

Reply

The STP for Southwest London was submitted to NHS England on June 30 as required. The document is not currently in the public domain. Whilst the Council has been involved in discussions on the STP, it is principally an NHS document and has been led by the Clinical Commissioning Groups for Merton, Wandsworth, Croydon, Sutton, Richmond and Kingston. However what I can say is that Merton Council along with other local authorities has worked hard to seek to shape the plan, and as a result of this there is now a greater emphasis on prevention and on care in community settings. It is common knowledge that across the country too many older people are admitted to or stay in hospital when they don't need to, with all the consequences on their own ability to live independently and on NHS finances. Southwest London is no exception. It is therefore hoped that this plan will lead to more older people being able to receive the right treatment in the right place.

Supplementary

Does the Cabinet Member agree with me that there is a danger that the STP will again turn out to be a way of ending services at St Helier Hospital, putting older, vulnerable people in need of emergency care at risk, and how has he responded to this threat?

Reply

I would like to thank Councillor Kenny for all the work she has done campaigning for St Helier Hospital over the last few years. The first thing I'd say is that I think we have to welcome the approach the NHS has taken on the STP. Officers that I have been talking to have been through many NHS reconfigurations and say that there is definitely a step change this time and they are involving us in these discussions far more so than they have done previously. I think we have to welcome that and we have to work collaboratively with the CCG on that. But in terms of her question, there will be proposals around acute reconfiguration as part of the STP. In discussions I've had to date with the CCG I've been clear about this Administration's position on St Helier, and been clear that if it is used as a stalking horse to resurrect those proposals then we will have to take the line previously taken and do all we can to disable it.

From Councillor Brian Lewis-Lavender to the Cabinet Member for Street Cleanliness and Parking

Whilst we appreciate that the parking charges in Sir Joseph Hood Memorial Playing Fields are designed to deter commuters from parking there, is this fair to local residents using the park, many of whom have to drive to it because they are elderly or disabled or else have children as well as picnics and games to transport there?

Reply

The proposal to introduce parking charges in parks was only taken with some reluctance, but it is undeniable that the currently free car park at Sir Joseph Hood MPF suffers from some abuses from commuters utilising Motspur Park train station and from local businesses to the detriment of parks users.

The proposed pay and display scheme attempts to strike an appropriate balance between discouraging commuter parking and not unduly penalising genuine parks users. Charges will not apply on Sundays or Bank Holidays, for example, nor in the evenings or early mornings and the proposed hourly rate will be minimal for most typical park users who might enjoy the park for, say, 1-2 hours per visit.

Supplementary

I would just like to say that it was a surprise to many in my ward that pay and display ticket machines were installed in the car park of Sir Joseph Hood Memorial Playing Fields before either residents, park users or ward councillors were consulted. Those living in nearby roads, many of whom are elderly and rely on being able to park close to their homes, are understandably fearful that drivers who can no longer park in the park will try to park in the already congested roads. Will the Cabinet Member reassure these residents that he will suspend this pay and display scheme until full consultation has taken place.

Reply

As I stated in the original response, it was with some reluctance that we have introduced these schemes. We need to strike a balance between those that are abusing the parks, particularly commuters, to allow residents who need to use their cars to go to parks, to enjoy them. In terms of the pricing structure, I understand that it's still under consultation and I would encourage the councillor to feed into that process.

From Councillor Mike Brunt to the Cabinet Member for Street Cleanliness and Parking

Could the Cabinet Member update me on how the proposed new joint South West London waste collection service will take into account the needs of our older residents?

Reply

With the proposed introduction of wheelie bins, Waste Services will work closely with the preferred bidder during fine tuning to recommend / update the existing 'Assisted Collections Policy'.

The preferred bidder acknowledges that given the extra weight / size of the bin that there will be a need to review the assisted collection policy and ensure that all residents who meet the new criteria are provided with an assisted collection. Please

note that those residents currently on the scheme will remain eligible for the assisted collection service.

Prior to the introduction of wheelie bins, we would welcome the opportunity to meet with relevant community groups, and I have already met with the Centre for Independent Living to discuss any additional support required for elderly and disabled residents.

Supplementary

Does the Cabinet Member agree that the Conservatives' opposition to wheelie bins across the borough will mean no end to the problems of detritus from ripped open black sacks from foxes and cats.

Reply

I'd like to congratulate Councillor Brunt on his victory in Figges Marsh. We know from the literature delivered how much interest the councillor takes in litter and how much he will be working with me in order to improve street cleanliness across the borough and hopefully support the introduction of wheeled bins. After all, 50% of street litter in residential streets is compounded by the bags split by foxes. So I hope that the Opposition get on board and move with the times and support the roll out of wheeled bins.

From Councillor David Williams to the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health

Can the Cabinet Member confirm a) the Council's projected deficit for 2015-16 as per the calculations/assumptions included in this year's Budget papers i.e. the amount by which the Council was expecting to overspend in the last financial year at the point at which the latest swathe of Adult Social Care cuts were agreed by Budget Council in March 2016; and b) the Council's actual deficit (or overspend) for 2015-16 as shown in Merton's recently published draft accounts?

Reply

- a) When the Council agreed its council tax and expenditure and income levels for 2016/17 the latest available monitoring information was based on expenditure to 31st December 2015 and there was a projected overspend in 2015/16 of £2.605m at that time.
- b) The Council's unaudited draft accounts for 2015/16 showed a net overspend of £0.694m for 2015/16 outturn.

Savings for Adult Social Care have been agreed by Cabinet in 2013/14, 2014/15 and in 2015/16 for the years 2016/17 up to 2018/19, as has been the case for a number of years to assist with our long term financial planning.

A Savings Mitigation Fund Reserve of £1.3m was created in 2016/17 in response to the concerns raised at Scrutiny to reduce the impact of the savings in 2016/17 on vulnerable residents.

Supplementary

Does the Cabinet Member think it business-like to invite the council to take budget decisions that cut essential services because there is no room for manoeuvre, and 29 days later find that they are better off than they thought by £1.99M? Wouldn't a business that gets its financial forecast so wrong go bust if it wasn't in the public sector?

Reply

I think that, as the nature of our amendment to the motion makes clear, the very nature of financial forecasts is that they have to be estimates, but they're the estimates that we have to work within. I think it's regrettable, as our amendment makes clear again, that it led to some of the decisions that were taken, but obviously this is the data that we have to work with and it is likely to lead to fluctuations from time to time.

From Councillor Jerome Neil to the Cabinet Member for Community and Culture

How does our leisure offer contribute to helping our older residents live active and fulfilled lives?

Reply

The leisure centre contract with the operator GLL, requires them to provide for older people within their leisure offer

This year's development plan covers;

- Walking football at the Canons Multi use games area, this is being looked at with a view to holding competitions against other centres
- The current 55+ clubs at Canons and Wimbledon have a very health membership, various activities are played such as Badminton, indoor bowls. The group compete in the GLL 50 plus games each year at the Copper Box in the Olympic stadium
- Following feedback from members, there is a new group formed to organise social events
- GLL have a target to increase the older membership by 3%

In addition:

- Healthy walks are organised by the Council
- The Watersport centre has a 50 plus sailing group
- There are green gyms in various parks, these are free to all
- There are also bowls clubs based around the borough

Supplementary

May I congratulate the Cabinet Member on the recent decision by the Planning Committee to agree on a design for the new Morden Leisure Centre, something we heard a great deal about from the Conservatives when they were in power and which we delivered. Will he tell us how the new leisure centre will cater for the whole family, in particular the older residents in my ward, St Helier.

Reply

I'd like to thank the Planning Committee for putting the leisure centre through. I know an awful lot of hard work has gone into it. Although it's easy to say "we built it and you didn't", I know the reason why you couldn't; because at the time it was costing too much to build it. When I came into post that was still the case and we found cheaper ways of doing it. We will build this leisure centre to budget and in time and that's the pledge you get from me.

It will be a family centre and it will be for the whole family, including older people and I'm not going to tell you exactly what that means for older people right now, because we will consult and we will continue to consult until we get what older people want.

From Councillor Charlie Chirico to the Cabinet Member for Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Environment and Housing

Further to my recent question to the Cabinet Member Community and Culture about housing schemes for over 55s in Merton, what leverage is there within Merton's current planning policies to help deliver more housing that is both of high quality design and appropriate to the needs of older residents in the borough?

Reply

Merton's Local Plan [Sites & Policies 2014] provides the planning policy provision for over 55s housing.

Policy DM H1 Supported care housing for vulnerable people or secure residential institutions for people housed as part of the criminal justice system

Links to Core Planning Strategy policy CS 8 Housing Choice

Policy aim

To provide a variety of accommodation with different levels of support or care, that is both appropriate to the needs of the potential residents and that is sensitive to the surrounding residential environment.

Policy

a) The suitability of proposals for supported care housing will be assessed having regard to the following criteria:

- i. Demonstrable need;
- ii. The proximity of the site to public transport facilities;
- iii. The provision of a safe and secure environment;

- iv. The provision of an adequate level of amenity space which is safe and suitable;
- v. The provision of adequate parking facilities for residents, staff and visitors;
- vi. The convenience of the site's location in relation to local shops, services and community facilities;
- vii. The quality of accommodation complies with all relevant standards for that use.

b) Generally, proposals for supported care housing will be expected to provide affordable housing in accordance with Core Planning Strategy Policy CS8 Housing Choice, unless nominations for people in housing need can be made available through the council.

c) The council will resist development which results in the net loss of supported care housing for vulnerable people or secure residential institutions for people housed as part of the criminal justice system unless either:

- i. adequate replacement accommodation satisfies criteria DM H1 a (i) to (vii) inclusive above;
- or,
- ii. it can be demonstrated there is a surplus of the existing accommodation in the area; or,
- iii. it can be demonstrated that the existing accommodation is incapable of meeting relevant standards for accommodation of this type.

d) Where the council is satisfied that the requirements of criterion (c) of this policy have been met, the council will require that an equivalent amount of residential floorspace (Use Class C3) to be provided to help meet Merton's need for permanent homes. These proposals will be considered in respect to Core Planning Strategy Policy CS8.

The Council have recently approved a number of schemes in the borough for specialist housing including Circle Housing's new sheltered housing schemes at the Oaks in Lower Morden and Doliffe Close in Mitcham. As part of the Nelson Hospital redevelopment an assisted living residential scheme was provided by McCarthy & Stone.

Supplementary

Many older residents nearing retirement or in the early years of retirement are looking to downsize into a smaller house or a ground floor flat, preferably closer to local amenities. This in turn helps to free up larger properties for growing families. Will the Cabinet Member commit to review Merton's Planning policies, and to bring forward for consideration changes that would help facilitate the building of more housing in the borough which is appropriate for the needs of older residents?

Reply

Obviously in terms of Planning policy it is really helpful when people downsize. In terms of specifics we do have to be careful when setting out Planning policy. But it's also important that we have supported housing and sheltered housing for people.

Also it's important for us as a council to work closely with people who are in social housing who wish to downsize and actually free up larger family homes and I know there are some older people that do want to do that. Clearly there are things in terms of permitted development within the Planning policy, but we as a Council think that this is important and we should have Planning policies that permit a range of different housing, and addressing the needs of our older people is important. I believe that our policies do that but there is always room for making further changes when we review the policies.

From Councillor Mary Curtin to the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health

Could he update us on our Older People's Strategy and the approach he intends to take to this work going forward?

Reply

The Council is currently reviewing all of its strategies to ensure that they reflect the ambition of working in a more integrated way with health partners. This work will be undertaken in liaison with the Clinical Commissioning Group and will complement the work being undertaken for the Sustainability and Transformation Plan, ensuring that the strategy for older people is properly joined up between health and social care. The strategy will also be developed in close liaison with all those who use our services and their carers.

Supplementary

Does the Cabinet Member agree that the government's failure to manage the NHS has meant millions of pounds have been wasted on keeping older people in hospital unnecessarily when they could be looked after in their own homes if councils received sufficient funding? Will he update us on the work Merton is doing with other south west London authorities to try and mitigate this huge problem.

Reply

I would like to thank the councillor for all the work she does with FISH on this. The Leader and I asked Councillor Curtin to be the older people's champion in this borough and I am delighted that she has agreed to do that.

The problem of bed blocking is one that has been well documented across the country and it's a cyclical problem. The Government cuts our grants so we can provide less services in the community, the NHS is seeking to discharge patients ever more quickly which is in turn putting more pressure on our system, which is more constrained because of decreased budgets. As part of the STP work that was undertaken, a bed audit showed that on one day in South West London hospitals, 42% of people who were in hospital shouldn't have been there, so it is well documented and well known about.

I think it requires a joined up approach between health and care and I'm pleased to say that we now have in South West London a collaborative leadership group which

brings together all of the local authorities which are involved in the STP process with the CCGs and the NHS, and bed blocking is one of our priorities.

From Councillor Stephen Crowe to the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health

How much does the Council spend each year on activities for older people in Merton?

Reply

In 2015/16 the Council spent a total of £2,004,743 on activities including Lunch Clubs, Day Services and similar activities. This figure includes transport. In addition to this, Public Health directly spends annually approx. £125,000 on older people (falls prevention related, befriending scheme), bringing the overall total to c£2.13m.

Supplementary

I know that many residents are disappointed that the Celebrating Age Festival is not happening this year. Can the Cabinet Member reassure me that he'll be working hard over the coming months with Age UK Merton to identify alternative sources of funding, and thereby ensure that the festival has a long and sustainable future?

Reply

I am delighted to say that we are already doing exactly that. Discussions have taken place with Age UK and they are at a very early stage, but the idea is not to make it a festival for a fixed period of time but to have a celebrating age year which would see a series of events throughout the next year. I would be very happy to update Councillor Crowe as and when we have more detail.

From Councillor Dennis Pearce to the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health

Could he outline how our Public Health service works with older people in the borough.

Reply

Public Health Merton approaches the health and wellbeing of all residents in Merton from a life-course perspective, from early years to older people. Working with and through our partners, this includes addressing the issues of older people to enable them to live independently for as long as possible and support their wellbeing through their advancing years.

Public Health prioritises tackling dementia, falls prevention, and loneliness and isolation in the borough in a number of different ways:

1. Dementia- completed a dementia health needs assessment recently, and this is informing the development of a five year dementia strategy for the

borough through a multi-agency steering group; relaunching the Dementia Action Alliance in autumn, and the development of dementia friendly communities; evaluating the dementia hub.

2. Falls Prevention- developed a falls prevention strategy currently being implemented; fund the falls prevention service through the NHS Community Health Services (in partnership with the CCG); and have funded schemes for elderly at risk of falls.
3. Tackling loneliness and isolation- currently running a two-year pilot befriending scheme for older people through a consortium of voluntary sector organisations with AUM as the lead agency.

Additionally we are taking a systems approach in the development of the East Merton Model of Health and Wellbeing, and in the integration of health and social care, including the development of resilient communities and activated citizens – taking into account our older and vulnerable residents.

All our work in the above areas is underpinned by the involvement and participation of older people through consultation and active engagement, to co-design and co-produce the future models of care.

Supplementary

Could the Cabinet Member confirm the amount the Government has cut from our public health budget in 2016/17 and the outlook for public health services including those for older people given the government's continued cuts.

Reply

The Comprehensive Spending Review last November set out cuts to the Public Health grant of 2.2% for the current year, which is on top of a reduced baseline from the 15/16 budget. It further set out 2.5% cuts in 17/18 and 2.6% cuts in 18/19 and 19/20. I think it's inevitable that this will have an incredibly detrimental impact on older people in this borough, particularly being compounded by cuts to the Government grant.

I was reflecting earlier that, given our new Prime Minister is a former member of this chamber, she might see her way to finding us a bit of additional money, particularly as I understand there might be £350M going spare each and every week.

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