

## **From Cllr Joan Henry to the Cabinet Member for Children's Services**

How do we ensure the voices of all our young people are heard and embedded in our decision making?

### **Reply**

The department has an extensive programme of user engagement throughout the year which is embedded within all our work to ensure that the views of young people are heard and taken into consideration in the planning and delivery of our services. Our approach to this is enshrined within our User Voice Strategy 2014-16 and is continued into the new Children and Families' Voice Framework 2017-19. We publish regular reports throughout the year summarising how we have engaged with young people and this is pulled together within an annual report, the most recent of which (User Voice Strategy 2016/17: End of Year Review) was published in May 2017, informed the Ofsted inspection and was presented to the Children's Trust at their meeting in October. As well as being the final end of year review for the strategy, this report also set out the focus for 2016/17 whilst the revised framework was developed along with input from young people.

The feedback received through participation events and day to day work is essential in ensuring that we maintain a culture which values learning from frontline practice and the lived experiences of children, drawing on these direct conversations. The recent Ofsted inspection recognises the strength of this aspect of our work, stating "Children's wishes and feelings are strongly heard and clearly reflected in practice. Their views and voices are carefully considered in assessments, strategy meetings and social work records to inform planning...". Ofsted then go on to recognise that "Children's participation is encouraged, their individual needs are known and their voice is evident... and an active Children In Care Council influences and guides services for children looked after" and that "Young people are both involved and highly influential."

## **From Councillor Abdul Latif to the Cabinet Member for Finance:**

Can the Cabinet Member update me on the council's asset management strategy and how regularly it conducts reviews of the rents charged on commercial premises it owns?

### **Reply**

The strategy at present is directed at maximising revenue and is expected to achieve over £100,000 above budget from the non-operational property by the end of this financial year. The reviews of rents of commercial property are specified within the leases to the individual tenants. The usual rent review intervals are five or ten years and the Property Management team ensures that rent reviews are undertaken in line with the terms of the leases.

**From Cllr Brenda Fraser to the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health**

Can the Cabinet member outline what Merton is doing to tackle food poverty in the borough?

**Reply**

The council recognises that tackling food poverty is a key way to help reduce health and social inequalities in the borough. The council has recently been awarded “Most Improved Borough” for 2017 at Sustain ‘Good Food for London” awards ceremony, held in October 2017. This reflects Merton’s ongoing commitment to tackling food poverty through supporting and promoting initiatives such as the Merton Child Healthy Weight Action Plan, the Healthier Catering Commitment for food businesses and UNICEF’s Baby Friendly Initiative for our commissioned Community Health Services, which supports breastfeeding.

To build on this work and develop a joined-up and comprehensive approach to tackling food poverty across the borough, the council is currently finalising a Food Poverty Action plan, led jointly by Public Health and Corporate Services.

Following a successful bid for funding from the Mayor of London to support this work, the council commissioned local charity Sustainable Merton to conduct a programme of workshops, community conversations and asset mapping. Based on this in-depth work with communities and partners, a comprehensive action plan has been developed to bring partners together to tackle food poverty across Merton.

The Food Poverty Action Plan will focus on working with partners to deliver three key aims:

- Delivering a joined-up and strategic approach across all partners in Merton to tackling food poverty
- Improving the use of surplus food and reducing food waste to contribute to a reduction in food poverty
- Strengthening and supporting the wealth of community and volunteering initiatives already working to tackle food poverty in Merton

Key actions included in the plan include establishing a new operational group to oversee implementation, expanding the Healthy Start voucher scheme (which provides free vitamins and food vouchers to eligible families), supporting breastfeeding across Merton and ensuring that food poverty is considered in all relevant strategies and policies of the council.

Merton’s Food Poverty Action Plan will be finalised in December 2017.

**From Councillor David Dean to the Cabinet Member for Finance:**

If you add up Merton Hall, Morden Leisure Centre, parks assets (ID Verde) and waste collection assets (Veolia), how much does this add up to in pounds that have been transferred to external, profit-making groups?

## **Reply**

None of these assets have been transferred to external, profit-making groups.

Having liaised with the government's Employment & Skills Funding Agency and the agreed school provider, it is proposed to dispose of Merton Hall to a non-profit faith group as best consideration and best value in the delivery of a Secondary school, in return for an asset that the community will receive in order to deliver a school.

Morden Leisure Centre as an asset remains the property of the council. The appointed contractor Greenwich Leisure Limited are a registered not-for-profit social enterprise.

No Parks assets have been transferred to idverde save for some existing grounds maintenance plant and equipment. The company also leases operational buildings for the delivery of services. These assets will all return to the council at the end of the life of the contract, the plant and equipment being replaced on a like-for-like basis at the end of the contract period, based upon an inventory of the items that transferred on 1st February 2017.

No waste collection assets have been transferred to the ownership of Veolia. The buildings at Garth Road are leased to the contractor who is charged the market rate for rent. In 2017 /18 this was £233k.

The operational responsibility for managing the plant and machinery is under licence, with the ownership and responsibility reverting back to the council at the end of the contract.

Had the Council not transferred such assets to Veolia and idverde then the contractors would have had to purchase/lease new ones and pass the cost on to the Council, which would have been a poorer value solution for council taxpayers.

## **From Cllr Judy Saunders to the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health**

Could he update me on the future of the Wilson Hospital in Mitcham which is an area of high inequality but currently stands empty whilst the Nelson, in an area of lower health inequalities, is an excellent facility and thriving local centre.

## **Reply**

The council is working closely with CCG and NHS colleagues to develop the site of the Wilson Hospital into a Health and Wellbeing Campus for East Merton which will include provision of primary care services. The aim is to develop an integrated model of health and wellbeing, with the community and voluntary sector directly involved, which specifically works to tackle the inequalities seen in this area of the borough.

This programme of work is Merton CCG owned and led, driven by a need to improve the range, integration and quality of health services in the east of the borough, but

also to rationalise and upgrade estates. There is significant opportunity for partners including the council to work with the CCG to develop a holistic model of health and wellbeing centred on the Wilson site which also takes into account local community assets such as the Canons redevelopment.

The Wilson Programme Board (WPB) has responsibility for overseeing the delivery of the whole Wilson Health and Wellbeing Campus. WPB membership includes senior executive managers from Merton CCG, NHS Property, and partners including the council and MVSC, facilitating strategic oversight, timely decision making, and robust challenge. As delivery of the Wilson Hospital site is a Merton CCG programme, the WPB reports through Merton CCG governance structures, although regular updates are also provided to the Health and Wellbeing Board, which provides scrutiny and oversight.

This is a long term programme of work with the Campus expected to open 2021. In the meantime Merton CCG has boosted capacity for extended primary care access Monday to Friday and opened two primary care access hubs, one in the Nelson and one in Cricket Green practice Mitcham, offering appointments 8am to 8pm Saturdays and the one in Mitcham also open 8am to 8pm on Sundays.

**From Councillor Gilli Lewis-Lavender to the Cabinet Member for Street Cleanliness and Parking:**

Please can the Cabinet Member update me on what progress Merton Council has made on upgrading the borough's street lights to LED and how much money has been saved as a result?

**Reply**

Merton currently has 363km of roads and 810km of footways and cycleways. Laid end-to-end they'd stretch from Mitcham Fair Green to Barcelona. These routes are lit with over 13,000 lamp columns.

We have already switched over 3,335 lights to low energy LEDs. Which has achieved a saving of approx. £80,000 to £100,00 per year on energy costs. The reason for the range is due to the switchover being a rolling programme and that energy prices change each year.

Moving forward. Our current future investment plans for 2018 & 2019 will see a further 6,000 lights going to LED (cost permitted) therefore taking our total percentage of LED's street lights to 70% of the borough. Where technically feasible and value for money we aim to convert all light fittings over time

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

Could the Cabinet Member update me on the "engagement" carried out by Epsom and St Helier Trust over the summer, which includes options that could see St Helier lose it's A&E and other acute services at the current site which is in an area of health inequality, with these services potentially moved to Epsom or Belmont where health outcomes are already far higher.

## Reply

Following the engagement period, Epsom and St. Helier NHS Trust has just published a Strategic Outline Case for Investment in their Hospitals 2020-2030 (report available on their website), alongside a report detailing the responses received from their process. At this very early stage, Commissioners are reviewing the Strategic Outline Case and considering the recommendations that have made. In line with Department for Health guidance, as the proposals put forward for consideration have a capital investment, they will also require NHS Improvement approval in order to proceed to the potential next stage of the Trust capital approvals process.

If Commissioners give their approval to proceed, the next stage would be the development of a Pre-Consultation Business Case that will be required in line with NHS England guidance for planning, assuring and delivering service change for patients.

The Council is currently seeking clarity on how the process undertaken by the Trust will be reflected in the STP 'refresh', due to be published this month, and how the STP will assess whether any changes are required in any other Trusts in the STP footprint.

The Council will continue to engage constructively with the Commissioners. Following discussion, it has been agreed that a wider piece of work needs to be undertaken through the STP and Estates Strategy assessing the health needs of the population. The Council will closely monitor this and engage at the appropriate time.

The Council remains fully committed to ensuring that Merton residents continue to have access to a full range of NHS acute services on the St Helier site.

### **From Councillor Suzanne Grocott to the Cabinet Member for Finance:**

I am sure all Members were sorry to hear the news that our Director of Children's Services, Yvette Stanley, will be leaving Merton next spring to move on to a new role. Can the Cabinet Member please outline what the council's HR processes are whenever an employee leaves the organisation (at whatever level)?

## Reply

The processes for recruiting to a vacant role are set out as follows:

### Preparation

- Establish if the role is needed in its current form
- Could it be carved to allow for an apprentice to be appointed
- Review the job description to ensure relevant
- Consider different delivery models, if applicable

Process for senior appointments on an Interim/agency basis

## 07a\_Member Questions ST

- Establish if interim/agency/acting up is required to cover vacancy – if so check if additional position available on Trent: if not complete establishment control form
- Complete recruitment authorisation form and obtain relevant approvals from Head of Service AD, Finance, Director and HR business partner

Process for senior appointments on a permanent basis (for all other levels of staff, the standard recruitment process is followed and managed in-house without the need for an executive search agent)

- Produce report for Full Council to obtain permission to commence the recruitment process – if salary of role in excess of 100k
- Call meeting of Appointments Committee to appoint a final panel
- In line with procurement process, issue invitations to tender to suppliers on the current LGRP (Local Government Resourcing Partnership)
- Receive bids from suppliers, review on both quality and price element and award to preferred supplier
- Invite preferred supplier to briefing meeting
- Produce timetable of key dates of recruitment process, advertising text and associated microsite to attract candidates to the role
- Merton liaises with relevant media to advertise role
- Preferred supplier to carry out executive search while job is live
- Once advert and search closes, preferred supplier to carry out initial sift and rate all candidates as a) recommended b) marginal or c) not recommended
- Appointments committee meet with preferred supplier to agree longlist of candidates
- Preferred supplier arranges for longlisted candidates to undergo a preliminary interview with a technical assessor, that has been agreed by Merton
- Preferred supplier produces reports for each of the longlisted candidates following preliminary interview with technical assessor
- Appointments committee meet with preferred supplier to agree shortlist of candidates
- Preferred supplier arranges for shortlisted candidates to undergo psychometric assessment as agreed by Merton
- Preferred supplier produces reports for each candidate of outcome of psychometric assessment for consideration by the Appointments Committee
- Preferred supplier invite shortlisted candidates to the final panel day
- Preferred supplier takes up references for all candidates invited to interview, and these are held in a sealed envelope until required
- Merton in liaison with the preferred supplier arranges the final panel interview day, to include relevant stakeholder panels, 1:1 with Chief Executive and then final interviews with the Appointments Committee
- Appointments committee decides successful candidate
- Merton makes the offer to the successful candidate
- Preferred supplier feeds back to the unsuccessful candidates
- Merton issues written offer to successful candidate subject to relevant pre-employment clearances

- Merton carries out pre-employment clearances

#### Employee leaving the organisation

- Candidate hands in notice
- Merton accepts resignation in line with contractual notice
- Merton provides reference for candidate to new organisation, if requested
- Merton carries out exit interview with leaving employee
- Merton to arrange for handover to be agreed in conjunction with leaving employee and agree actions and responsibilities
- If appropriate inform key customers and partners of who to contact in the interim
- Merton to action the leaver on iTrent so no overpayment is made
- Merton to remove access levels to IT systems and security pass

#### **From Cllr Sally Kenny to the Leader of the Council**

Could the Leader outline how we use bailiffs and ensure that already vulnerable residents are given the opportunity to clear their debts.

#### **Reply**

We use bailiffs as a last resort to collect unpaid debts. Our recovery procedures encourage residents to make contact with us to discuss any problems they have at the earliest opportunity. Officers will enter into payment arrangements with residents at all stages of the recovery process. We offer open surgeries where residents can come in to discuss accounts and payment plans and we also offer managing your money workshops to residents to help them with financial issues.

The bailiffs will assess each case on its own merit and will enter into payment arrangements with residents. They are trained to identify vulnerable residents and in such instances will withdraw from the property in line with national guidelines.

Last week the Money Advice Trust congratulated Merton for reducing the number of cases it passed to bailiffs by 14% over the previous two years. In fact, the Money Advice Trust recognised that in London parking fines make up a disproportionate amount of fines, so they looked at council tax arrears in particular and they found that in Merton we have reduced our use of bailiffs in council tax cases by 38% in two years, a significant achievement. This is because we keep council tax affordable for low income families, we work with residents in arrears to find payment solutions that work for them, and we use bailiffs only as a last resort.

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