

Morden Community Forum 8 October 2013 Chair's Report

The meeting was held in the Council Chamber at Merton Civic Centre and was chaired by Councillor Maurice Groves. 27 residents attended, as well as eight Merton Councillors and officers from the council and its partners.

Councillor Groves apologised for the lack of minutes from the previous Morden community forum meeting.

Police update

Inspector Boyd explained that the change in policing structure from Safer Neighbourhood teams to Neighbourhood Policing Teams had led to fewer police buildings but a greater number of staff. New officers have been recruited and are currently being trained; by Christmas this year, Merton's police force will be up to full strength in terms of staff and residents should notice more officers in the borough.

In the last rolling 12 months, crime has decreased by 9.4% in the borough vs. the Met. average of a 6.4% decrease. As a whole all types of crime have decreased apart from theft from individuals. Morden wards specifically have seen an 18% reduction in all types of crime. There were a few spikes in certain wards, particularly Cannon Hill which suffered from burglaries, but these have stopped after the offenders were caught and arrested.

The current priorities for the Morden cluster of wards are: additional patrols and problem solving in Wimbledon Chase; additional patrols and problem solving in the Morden areas close to New Malden and Raynes Park; and additional patrols and problem solving in Morden Town Centre (where the dispersal zone has been extended for another six months) to reduce antisocial behaviour and crime.

Questions/comments:

- Councillor Maxi Martin asked if the police keep a record of domestic violence rates by ward and if so, could that be fed back to the forum in future. Inspector Boyd said he would look into whether such figures are available.
- In response to a question about how people could help reduce vehicle crime (particularly in Cannon Hill ward), Inspector Boyd advised that the best way would be to avoid leaving valuables in cars.
- Asked how it is determined whether the police or Trading Standards should deal with an offence, Inspector Boyd said that it depends on legislation and whether police prosecution is possible; if not, Trading Standards may deal with the issue. In the first instance, people should call the police if there is a problem.
- A resident asked if it is the case that police officers are trained by a private company. Inspector Boyd confirmed this explaining that there are regional centres for training.

- Asked if Lower Morden ward had the lowest crime rate of all the wards, Inspector Boyd said it wasn't the lowest but overall crime in that particular ward was lower than it had been last year.
- Residents are concerned about people parking recklessly outside Hillcross School and Poplar Primary School. Officers will be sent to both schools to assess the parking situation.
- Drivers are not keeping clear of the box junction at Martin Way and Crown Lane. Inspector Boyd said this would be reported to the Enforcement team at the council.
- Inspector Boyd advised residents not to invite doorstep cold-callers into their houses.
- Councillor Stan Anderson asked how the police have found the Controlled Drinking Zone. Inspector Boyd said that it is enforced where necessary but has not been overused, especially not in Morden.
- A resident asked that leaflets delivered by agencies and partners in Merton be pushed through letterboxes properly and not left hanging out as this invites crime.

Deputy Leader's Update

Councillor Mark Allison provided an update on the council, with a focus on budgets. The presentation can be downloaded from the Morden Community Forum webpage at www.merton.gov.uk/communityforums.

Questions/comments:

- Councillor Shears commented that the council has £50m in reserves, therefore could consider giving residents a 10% cut in council tax. Councillor Allison explained that this was not a figure he recognised, and the unallocated reserves are currently approximately £19m. He added there are different types of reserves set aside for different things, for example for school expansion. Merton plans to draw down and use some of these reserves but all Councils are required to keep sufficient reserves in case of an emergency. Relative to other London boroughs, Merton's reserves are quite low. If council tax were reduced by using one-off reserves, the money would soon be gone and council tax would have to rise again.
- A resident commented that a slight increase in council tax should be considered so that too many cuts do not have to be made and the council can maintain current standards.
- In response to a complaint about foxes tearing bin bags open and scattering waste on the street, Councillor Allison said that all residents should be using their lockable brown bins for food waste in order to deter foxes.
- Liberal Democrat Parliamentary candidate for Wimbledon Shas Sheehan asked why services for elderly people are being cut when there was a health and social care underspend of approximately £5m in 2010. Councillor Allison explained that decision had to be made regarding certain services and that the council is working with the voluntary sector to ascertain the best ways to continue to provide services in areas where cuts have been made.

- Councillor Allison clarified that reference to making savings by the use of IT did not mean that cuts were being made in IT services, but that the council was making IT services more efficient, for example providing more online self-service options to help the council to make savings in the long-term.
- Asked to explain the council tax freeze, Councillor Allison said that there is a cap from Government on increasing council tax. If a local authority wants to increase council tax, it would be obliged to carry out a referendum on the matter, which would cost money; therefore a freeze was the more pragmatic option.
- A resident was advised to contact his ward councillors about the local issue of rubbish on Alexander Road and cars which are being parked on the pavement there. For those who do not use email, they can call the offices of their local councillor and have messages/complaints transcribed on their behalf.
- Asked about the cost of the new windows in the Civic Centre, Councillor Allison said that he did not have the exact figure to hand, but confirmed the council procured the lowest cost it could and the windows are being replaced because they are unsafe.
- A resident asked if there were plans to spend capital on improving sporting facilities/infrastructure in the borough and if the council makes use of available sports grants, for example for Sport England. Councillor Allison said that despite being advised to make more savings, the council had chosen not to close Morden Pool, and it is also working with local groups such as Morden Little League to provide sports activities. FutureMerton Manager Paul McGarry added that the council does receive some grants from Sport England for multi-use games areas. Sports facilities are also funded through development in the borough, for example if a housing development is granted planning permission, the developer is required to contribute towards infrastructure. Finally, some parks make a profit through their facilities and this profit is distributed evenly back into sports facilities in Merton.
- Asked what the lifespan of Morden Pool is, Councillor Allison said that it is unclear. The pool has had to be closed before for maintenance. Sadly, it has been shown to have had a shorter lifespan than Merton's other leisure centres.
- A resident commented that they were very pleased to hear that Merton's parks are being protected and that they received five 'Green Flags'.
- In response to a question about benefit fraud, Councillor Allison said that the Council's fraud team responds strictly against such acts.

Morden Station draft Planning Brief

FutureMerton Manager Paul McGarry (PM) gave a presentation on the Morden Station Draft Planning Brief, which the council is currently consulting with the public on. The presentation can be downloaded from the Morden Community Forum webpage at www.merton.gov.uk/communityforums.

Questions/comments:

- Asked how much of regeneration is down to organic growth, PM said that the council works with businesses to improve the retail offer in

Merton; however it does not own many properties in Morden and therefore does not control which shops open in Morden – other than by use-class as part of the normal planning system

- A business owner in Morden with offices above the station asked about the scale of development and if development would result in businesses being displaced. PM explained that the council does not want to move any viable businesses out of Morden and is in fact looking to encourage employment. The regeneration is about improving the front of the station building and extending the building. The detailed issue is one between a private landlord and their lease. The purpose of the planning brief is to provide more detailed planning guidance to land-owners and developers, should they wish to invest in Morden.
- In response to a question about whether there is developer interest in the regeneration, PM explained that the council regularly engages with development forums and so knows that there is interest in Morden, particularly because of its transport links, connections to London and relatively untapped potential of the area.
- Asked if there would be Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPOs) as part of the scheme, PM said that it is not the council's role to assemble land through this process; LBM is not a developer, not does it have the money to do so. The council is creating the framework to encourage landowners to bring forward their own sites for the type of development that is desired for Morden; set out in the brief..
- Asked for clarification on what the consultation is about, PM explained that the council is consulting on a planning policy document – on how policies that already exist should apply to the Morden station site. The brief is intended to give clarity to landowners, developer and the community about the type of development the Council would support on the station site. Views are being sought on matters such as the scale of development that is appropriate for Morden, the type of development uses and public spaces that people would like to see on the site.
- A resident asked if any of the buildings in Morden are listed. PM explained that the white Portland stone part of the original station is listed and the council proposes to maintain and enhance the station building. It has been assessed by engineers who have said it is suitable for extending and building on above (as the original 1920s design anticipated). The council would seek to have the 1960s extension re-modelled and re-clad. The other buildings in Morden town centre are not listed.

Cold Callers

John Hillarby (JH), the Trading Standards manager at Merton Council spoke to the forum about the role of the trading standards team and advised that if residents have problems with cold callers, they should contact the team. Examples were given of traders starting work on houses when the owners are out, without the owners' permission, and of traders who quote a certain price, which then escalates and where traders do not give a cancellation notice. In such situations, residents should contact trading standards who aim to come out to investigate on the same day, with the police if the trader is still around.

Cold callers/rogue traders will often target a street or a particular area, so if a house has been targeted, trading standards will notify neighbouring houses and streets with information on what to do if faced with a similar situation.

The team also works with banks and building societies, training them to look for signs, for example, residents withdrawing unusually large sums of money for building/maintenance work and on occasions because a trader has told them to and may even have driven the resident to the bank.

JH said that Trading Standards are happy to make presentations to, and advise, residents' groups.

Questions/comments:

- A resident commented that suspect cold callers and traders seem to target new builds because of the carpets and new furniture. There also appears to have been a spate of cold callers accessing houses and taking money by telling residents – particularly the elderly – that they have electricity problems.
- A resident said that there were a number of stickers that went up by residents' doors in Wimbledon for a locksmith. Following a police investigation, the stickers were removed as it was a scam. JH said that he was unaware of this but would speak to the police about the matter.

Healthwatch Merton

Adele Williams (AW) from Healthwatch Merton introduced herself and the service, which launched on 17 July.

The focus of Healthwatch, which is funded by the Department of Health, will be on partnership working and on making sure the views of the public regarding health services are taken into account and heard by decision-makers. Healthwatch is not a provider of health or social care services, rather it works with the people who provide such services, encouraging them to take people's views on board.

A lot of outreach and engagement will be carried out to listen to the public's views and also to feedback to people on how they have influenced services.

Questions/comments:

- Asked if Healthwatch's brief would include dealing with potential hospital closures, AW explained that it is not the service's role to make decisions about hospital closures; however if members of the public felt their voice wasn't being heard on such matters, Healthwatch could speak to the relevant authorities on the public's behalf.
- AW explained that Healthwatch is not part of the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) therefore does not have contact information for the group's lay members; however, it was agreed Healthwatch could act as a conduit for feedback and would therefore ask the CCG to put information about its lay members on its website.

Soapbox

Narin Cakir from Pop Up Talent introduced the Big Lottery funded youth employability project, which is launching in Merton. The project aims to tackle youth unemployment and a pop-up shop has opened in Mitcham for people to visit. Local employers are being encouraged to attend and talk to young people about the range of jobs available. The project is being run jointly by charities and a social enterprise. More details can be found at www.popuptalent.org.

Questions had been submitted anonymously from a member of the public prior to the forum meeting relating to parks and green spaces. Written responses had been provided to these questions by Doug Napier, the Leisure and Culture Greenspaces manager at Merton Council, and were read out at the forum, as follows:

Question: Has there been any progression on the multi-dog walking situation in Merton's parks and open spaces? A year has now elapsed since the Council's public consultation/questionnaire took place, yet nothing seems to have happened. This problem is an on-going one – and has been so for many years. Why is Merton dragging its heels on introducing legislation on this when neighbouring boroughs already have measures in place?

Response from Doug Napier: I am afraid that I cannot be more specific on the DCOs as the decision/recommendation will need to be considered and approved at a number of levels within the Council, and it is likely to be the turn of the year for completion of that process.

Question: Could we be given an update on the latest situation re Morden Park and Playing Fields, vis-à-vis the Community Trust. We were told, at various meetings over the summer, that it was "all systems go" and that planning permission for the pavilion and the soccer pitches, etc., would be applied for in September/October. Has this happened yet? If not, why not? When WILL it happen?

Response from Doug Napier: There have been a couple of very useful meetings between officers and reps from the Community Trust. The Trust has presented the Council with its draft proposals, following their community consultation back in the early summer. The Council is currently considering how best to proceed on working with the Trust to our mutual benefit and a suitable timetable for doing so, one that considers all the relevant factors.

Actions for next meeting

- Police to provide domestic violence figures by ward if available.
- Police to investigate parking situation during peak hours at Hillcross and Poplar Primary Schools.
- Police to liaise with Council's Enforcement team regarding cars stopping in box junction on Crown Lane/Martin Way.
- Healthwatch to ask CCG to add details of its lay members to its website.

Date of next meeting – Thursday 20 March 2014, in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Morden SM4 5DX.