

From Cllr Nigel Benbow to the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health

What steps is the council taking to ensure that:

- The public are aware of the safety of the Covid19 vaccines, especially in BAME communities;
- Rough sleepers are housed during the lockdown;
- Young people do not suffer mental health issues during lockdown and can get access to necessary services;
- The NHS can successfully roll out a mass vaccination program in Merton?

Reply

- The public are aware of the safety of the Covid19 vaccines, especially in BAME communities;

All vaccines in use have been approved by the MHRA and are safe for everybody. The council is using its own communication channels as well as working collaboratively with NHS and voluntary sector colleagues and Merton's community champions to ensure this message is heard throughout Merton. Through this collaboration, we also aim to ensure that individuals from BAME and other communities in Merton have the opportunity to ask questions or raise concerns around vaccine safety and can receive responses from local experts and leaders. For example, a webinar entitled "Covid-19 Vaccination: your questions answered" was held on Sunday 31st January and was well attended by Merton residents. A collection of informative resources are also being compiled on the "Merton Hub" which will help all council employees to be well informed on vaccine safety when communicating with the community.

- Rough sleepers are housed during the lockdown;

The Council has taken a proactive approach in meeting the housing and support needs of rough sleepers and embraced the "everyone in" principle .. This has meant that any person Rough Sleeping or at risk of rough sleeping has been provided with suitable accommodation . At the current time there are just 2 entrenched rough sleepers not in accommodation, but both of these have been offered a suitable place to live but sadly have repeatedly refused assistance Despite this officers are continuing in their efforts to find housing solutions which are acceptable to them . Officers have worked closely with statutory, voluntary and faith groups to meet the needs of the most vulnerable individuals facing homelessness at this difficult time

- Young people do not suffer mental health issues during lockdown and can get access to necessary services

We have been concerned about young people struggling with their mental health in lockdown. The CCG increased the capacity of mental health counselling services that are directly available to all young people. They have done this through proving Kooth, an on line app based counselling service and through the commissioning of Off the Record to provide self-referral services. For Off the Record their open access counselling - pre-Covid was primarily delivered face-to-face. In March 2020, due to Covid lockdown, the service pivoted to entirely remote delivery and, as with

many services, saw a substantial fall in new referrals in the first couple of months. However, this trend reversed dramatically in autumn 2020 with new referrals in Q3 59% higher than they had been in Q2 and 46% higher than they had been in Q3 the previous year. In addition their online counselling was able to continue unaffected by the Covid lockdown in March 2020 and therefore new registrations didn't fall away but have instead grown steadily throughout 2020. New registrations in Q3 2020-21 were 28% higher than in Q2 and 77% higher than in Q3 the previous year.

In addition we have increased the availability of school based support through the Mental Health Trailblazers where we now have 3 clusters developing in Merton: Ursuline School led cluster; South Thames College led cluster and an SEND cluster with Sutton. Schools have attended additional DFE proscribed training in the autumn term on supporting children who returned. We are maintaining a termly Mental Health Leads in schools forum to support all schools. The Merton CAMHS board will continue to monitor the levels of support offered.

- The NHS can successfully roll out a mass vaccination program in Merton?

The council is supporting the NHS with the vaccination programme in Merton. Vaccination is being offered according to the priority groups defined by the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI). The Council is providing local knowledge to support NHS colleagues to ensure these priority groups are being reached in Merton and primary care networks (PCNs) are following up eligible individuals who have not yet accessed vaccines. In addition, the Health and Wellbeing Board (HWBB) and its community subgroup is working with NHS colleagues and through community champions on tackling barriers to vaccination. A lot of engagement has already taken place and more is planned in the coming weeks.

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

To what extent have the Council's air monitoring stations recorded a change in air quality since the previous parking charges increase was introduced, and how do the "hotspots" correlate to the CPZs?

Reply

Every year the Council produces an report on air quality and monitoring in the borough, this is called an Annual Status Report (ASR). This outlines air quality monitoring in the borough, including locations and measured results. The ASR normally relates to the previous year as data is annualised and ratified before publishing. The ASR for monitoring in 2020 is due to be published in the summer of this year.

This document is public and can be found here:

<https://www.merton.gov.uk/Documents/Annual%20Status%20Report%202020.pdf>

In general we are seeing a large majority of our monitoring locations showing reductions in pollution, some still remaining unchanged and a few increases.

It is important to note that a direct link to the parking charge changes is difficult to discern so far not least as we have had the unusual effect of Covid 19 and several Lockdown periods. What we can say is that the overall reductions we see in NO2 throughout London is being driven by the push for cleaner vehicles, therefore and I am glad to see that Merton is playing a vital role towards incentivising fewer and less polluting vehicles.

Our colleagues in GIS team are overlaying the AQ data against the Controlled Parking Zones and we will pass this information over as soon as this is available.

From Cllr Thomas Barlow to the Cabinet Member for Performance, Recovery and the Local Economy

What flexibility is the council able to provide on licensing agreements to allow businesses to sell essential items during the Covid19 restrictions?

Reply

Local authorities cannot provide flexibility on licensing agreements to allow businesses to sell essential items during the current Covid-19 restrictions. The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions)(All Tiers) (England) Regulations 2020 dictate which types of businesses are permitted to trade under the current restrictions. The Regulatory Services Partnership enforces these regulations on behalf of Merton and takes a graduated approach to enforcing compliance. The business types which are permitted to remain open under the Regulations are listed under paragraph 17 of the Regulations, attached (See pages 102 -103). The government guidance refers to essential and non-essential in order to simplify the Regulations to improve general understanding. In determining whether a retailer is allowed to stay open it must be in one of the categories of retailer permitted to stay open and not on the basis that it is selling products which may be perceived to be essential e.g. flowers and plants. Business types classified as essential within the Regulations do not require a licence to trade.

Where there is uncertainty over whether a business can be considered as an essential retailer or otherwise officers consult with the Office for Product Safety and Standards (OPSS) who act on behalf of the government to provide clarification for enforcing authorities, monitor enforcement activity and ensure consistency nationally. For those businesses classified as non-essential they are still able to sell products through other remote sales methods such as click & collect or internet sales. The Regulatory Services Partnership is able to offer advice and support to non-essential businesses where required to help with alternative sales methods.

From Cllr Nigel Benbow to the Cabinet Member for Children and Education

Can the Cabinet Member confirm what steps her department is taking to ensure that children with special educational needs are able to catch up on their education, and

therapies such as speech and language, occupational therapy, and educational psychology to ensure a healthy and productive life after the pandemic?

Reply

A number of children and young people with Special Educational Needs with an Education, Health and Care plan are attending school or receiving remote learning opportunities and are being monitored and supported through their schools and when appropriate specialists.

Speech and Language Therapists, Educational Psychology and Occupational Therapy are still going into school settings to deliver provision and have developed programs of support such as ELSA, online therapy sessions, home to school packs.

The Local Authority has been working with health professionals to ensure there is an offer for home/remote therapy sessions where appropriate and that sessions can be delivered in schools. The redeployment of some health staff has impacted on the delivery of some therapy provisions as has sickness and staffing capacity but we are working with individual schools and families to address the missed appointments. As part of the recovery planning we will work with education, health and social care partners to consider our approach to those pupils who have not received some of their provision.

For pupils at SEN Support they are being actively supported by their schools and have access to remote learning or are attending school if deemed vulnerable.

Following the government announcement yesterday we are awaiting further government guidance regarding their plans for catch up sessions and summer schools to be announced.

From Cllr Ed Gretton to the Cabinet Member for Finance

What level of shareholder funds has the Council invested in Merantun Development Ltd to date and what capital sums were approved by the Council on 4 March 2020 for this and next year's capital investment in Merantun?

Reply

To date the London Borough of Merton has invested £2,160,561 in Merantun in the form of share capital.

On 4 March 2020 Council approved the following budget for Merantun for the period 2020-22:

Department	Proposed Budget 2020-21	Proposed Budget 2021-22
Housing Company	16,491,220	6,883,220
Total Corporate Services	16,491,220	6,883,220

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