

From Councillor Sally Kenny to the Leader

Can the Leader update us on plans to move St Helier hospital to Belmont and away from those people most in need?

Reply

I am afraid that it is still the government's intention to close services at St Helier and move them to Belmont. While we have an excellent relationship with the NHS, we regularly raise our concerns that health inequalities will widen as a result of this government decision. While there are many factors in this, we have urged the government to reconsider, given the clear evidence that Covid-19 has had a disproportionate impact on communities living closest to St Helier.

From Cllr David Williams to the Leader of the Council:

After 20 years of interference in the delivery of services at St Helier Hospital by Labour politicians in Merton, stoking up community fear with half truths - and holding back the development of 21st century medical care - will the Leader confirm that his Administration will now focus on delivering decent Council services and leave the NHS to get on with its job?

Reply

I do not recognise this characterisation of events. I also do not share his fears about an administration being unable to focus on a wide number of issues at the same time, though I do of course understand his experience as Leader may have led him to this conclusion. Nevertheless, I am afraid that it is still the government's intention to close services at St Helier and move them to Belmont. While we have an excellent relationship with the NHS, we regularly raise our concerns that health inequalities will widen as a result of this government decision. While there are many factors in this, we have urged the government to reconsider, given the clear evidence that Covid-19 has had a disproportionate impact on communities living closest to St Helier.

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

Can the Cabinet Member explain how the Health on the High Street pilot project fits into the wider landscape of healthcare in Merton?

Reply

Can the Cabinet Member explain how the Health on the High Street pilot project fits into the wider landscape of healthcare in Merton?

A priority in the Local Health and Care Plan, Health on the High Street is an approach to help change how people access health and wellbeing services and will pilot health and wellbeing hubs on the high street and in community venues across Merton. The pilot will complement and enhance access, rather than replace the need for direct access to primary care. The pilot aims to demonstrate the effectiveness of community health on the high street by bringing services (COVID-19 vaccination and testing, holistic health and care, prevention and welfare) to where people live their

lives e.g. the high street, provide support in an integrated way rather than expecting people to attend numerous different services and support reviving the high street.

A Project Manager, funded by SWLCCG, has been now recruited and activity will start at the end of February 2022.

From Cllr Anthony Fairclough to the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health

Looking at the health and wellbeing aspect of Covid management in schools: could you please detail, for example, what is being done to address proper ventilation, staff shortages and any other additional measures to mitigate the impact of Covid in schools?

Reply

Measures to mitigate the impact of Covid in schools

The Public Health team have provided responsive, personalised and up to date support for Merton headteachers generally and for each school. Headteachers value and are confident in the quality of the advice they receive about reintroducing, as necessary, 'bubbles,' zoning and face covering in communal areas as enhanced measures where there are outbreaks in particular year groups.

In weekly meetings with secondary headteachers and primary headteacher cluster representatives, public health attend and provide an update on national measures and on the local pattern of infections in age groups. Merton Education Partner (MEP) Inspectors called each of their schools in the first two days of the spring term 2022 to find out about staffing absences after Christmas so that we had an overview of issues across our schools. Those contacts – through phonecalls and the regular schedule of MEP visits – are continuing and the Head of School Improvement contacts those schools highlighted on the PH weekly spreadsheet with outbreaks/high levels of infection.

MEP Inspectors and Advisers continue to maintain a focus on school improvement and the quality of education. They support and advise schools in their preparations for inspection and continue to review, advise, support and challenge in those few schools not securely Good.

Air ventilation

Through the weekly (sometimes, daily, when there are rapid changes to statutory Covid-security measures) emails to headteachers in all Merton schools, Merton School Improvement provides headteachers with links to the latest DfE updates and statutory operational guidance for schools. This includes information about how to order CO2 monitors and air cleaning units. Unfortunately most of our schools report that their applications for the latter are deemed ineligible because open windows provide sufficient ventilation as measured by the monitors.

Staff shortages

Even with the reduction in the length of time required for isolation after a positive PCR, staff absence remains a pressure in many of our schools. Additional Covid-related factors include the 10-day isolation requirements for unvaccinated staff each time they have been in contact with an infection, mental health and anxiety and the

resumption of jury service which cannot be deferred. It is very difficult to book agency staff and some headteachers are now booking supply staff in advance, as a precautionary measure. The cost of supply over the last year is a significant and increasing budget pressure.

Headteachers are constantly revising their contingency planning so that returning to remote learning for any class of pupils is a final resort. It has only been used this term in a very few schools. Early Years staff-pupil ratios have been temporarily adjusted and this has added some limited flexibility to how headteachers can manage staff absence. In most instances, those headteachers who are close to having to introduce remote learning for a class or year group, contact the Head of School Improvement / Assistant Director CSF for advice and consultation before making that decision.

From Councillor Nick Draper to the Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure and Skills

Can the Cabinet Member please outline the part libraries play in improving the mental health of Merton residents?

Reply

Merton's libraries promote healthy living and provide self-management support and engagement opportunities for children and adults supported by welcoming spaces; effective signposting and information to reduce health, social and economic inequalities. They offer a range of creative and social activities which engage and connect individuals and communities, combat loneliness and improve wellbeing.

Our seven libraries already host a range of groups and services that support our communities, including a range of health and wellbeing services covering subjects such as healthy eating, sexual health, diabetes, mindfulness and smoking cessation. A year round approach to promoting healthier lifestyles through libraries is in place and links in with national and local initiatives. Some examples of services delivered include:

Tuned In aims to combat some of the issues of loneliness in the borough by facilitating musical jam sessions every Monday at Merton Arts Space, Wimbledon library. The sessions share and develop musical skills and build knowledge, as well as helping individuals build social connections and friendship groups. The project is open and accessible to all and participants have reported impressive results in improving their health and wellbeing, social and community connectedness and awareness of health services as a result of attending.

Launched during the pandemic the Library Service provides an equipment loaning scheme for vulnerable and/or isolated residents who do not have access to IT equipment in the home. The scheme not only provides good quality IT equipment such as laptops and tablets but advice, guidance and training on how to get the equipment set up and how to get online in a safe way. Library staff and volunteers support residents by providing training either in person or via the telephone. Participants are also linked into a range of free IT learning courses provided by

Merton Adult Learning and other providers. So far just under 200 residents have joined the scheme with 100% of residents reporting improvements in their IT skills as a result of borrowing a device.

Libraries provide a range of employability support services working with training providers. Examples include CV writing workshops, job clubs and other skills training. The use of library services is integral for a number of community based courses and in a more informal way through sessions such as one to one IT support and other activities delivered by partners and volunteers.

Another project shortly to be rolled out across all libraries is Mind Space. Mind Space will develop all libraries as digital, education and wellbeing hubs – a place to engage and enhance your mind in new ways. Through external funding we will make adaptations to the buildings and purchase new equipment to create a multi-sensory experience that enhances resident's digital, education and health outcomes.

From Cllr Adam Bush to the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health:

How has the uptake been on the Covid19 vaccine rollout amongst the BAME community?

Reply

Vaccination across ethnic groups is an important topic which is monitored through the regular Situational Awareness Report. The last report dated 6th of January revealed a lower proportion of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic group populations being vaccinated than, for example, White Irish or White British populations. For example, 75% of those in the White British group have had at least their first dose compared with 56% of those in the African group having had at least their first dose. There are also differences in vaccine uptake between Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic groups, with 72% of those in the Indian group having had at least their first dose, for example. The proportion vaccinated continues to increase across all ethnic groups.

A significant amount of work has been put into the vaccine programme to bridge this divide. Locally over 40 pop-up clinics have already taken place in Merton ranging from faith setting, community centres to homeless shelters. SWL CCG are now focusing on the small pockets of communities that are showing a low vaccine uptake and holding specific pop ups in those locations. This will go hand in hand with our local on street engagement plans to boost uptake. The local authority has recently been awarded funding for the COVID vaccine champions programme, this will help build a network of networks, increase vaccine engagement and setting up a call and recall service for those that have not been vaccinated yet.

In relation to vaccine hesitancy and the developing implementation of vaccinations, please see the Vaccination Programme Point 3.4 of the recent Strategic Theme Report and specifically the link to our Vaccination Equity Plan which is a core focus of the Health and Wellbeing Board Community Subgroup. [HWB strategic theme report Council 170122.pdf \(merton.gov.uk\)](#)

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

Will the Cabinet member please outline what work the council is doing in collaboration with the NHS to reduce vaccine hesitancy, particularly amongst health and social care staff?

Reply

Officers worked very closely and successfully with NHS colleagues to support vaccine uptake by staff working in the 38 care homes in the borough and have continued this collaborative approach to the wider implementation of the vaccine mandate for health staff and for care staff working in front line roles in CQC regulated settings including home care, extra care sheltered housing and supported living schemes. As a result of the joint work undertaken in advance of the vaccine mandate coming into effect for residential care staff in November 2021 only a very small number of care staff chose not to get vaccinated and to seek alternative employment, and no care home in the borough was significantly impacted as a result. Officers are continuing to work closely with NHS colleagues to ensure that the roll out of the vaccine mandate to wider health and care settings, which comes into effect on the 1st of April, is similarly achieved with the minimum possible impact on health and care services locally. The deadline for staff to have a first dose of the vaccine, in order to be able to have the second jab by the 1st of April, is the 3rd of February.

Officers and NHS colleagues have focused on very regular communication and engagement with care providers to:

- ensure that providers are aware of, and understand, the importance of the 3rd of February date, that any requested support is made available, and that providers are aware of locations where staff can get their vaccine;
- provide access to webinars and 1 to 1 / group discussion opportunities with GPs and other clinicians so that vaccine hesitant staff can be provided with explanations of the benefits of being vaccinated, to provide reassurance on safety, and to dispel myths; and
- working to ensure that vaccine availability is not an issue when staff decide to have the vaccine.

Officers are tracking daily the number of unvaccinated staff across the social care sector in the borough and meeting regularly with providers who have larger numbers of unvaccinated staff in order to understand what additional actions the providers are taking to manage risk and to offer bespoke assistance to those providers.

From Cllr Jenifer Gould to the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health

Given the World Health Organisation's COP26 *Special Report on Climate Change and Health*, which spells out the global health community's prescription for climate action based on a growing body of research that establishes the many and inseparable links between climate and health, could the Cabinet Member explain why climate action and the impact on health is not included in the strategic theme

report, particularly as the council signed a cross-party motion on climate action almost 3 years ago?

Reply

It is right to emphasise the link between climate change and health. Indeed, climate change can be considered a social determinant of health, alongside education, neighbourhood and physical environment – such as housing – employment, and social support networks. While this report cannot touch on each of these critical elements in detail, the important links between climate and health and joint actions that benefit both are mentioned in the strategic theme report in section 1.9 and 2 (Joint Strategic Needs Assessment summary) and in section 7 Healthy Place including introduction and 7.7 and 7.8 (air pollution) and 7.10 (Health in All Policies) with contact details of officers for more details.

From Councillor Stan Anderson to the Cabinet member for Adult Social Care and Public Health

With an excellent record now on the number of School Streets in Merton, can the cabinet Member outline what further measures are planned or in place to improve air quality around our schools?

Reply

Merton remains committed to tackling air quality in the borough, last month we saw one the largest rollout of new automated monitoring regimes of any borough in London. This network includes 68 new Breathe London Monitors as well as traffic and transport monitoring in areas of concern in the borough. This will show pollution hotspots and sources in detail we have never seen before.

This will also enable us to see the impact of ultrafine dust (PM2.5) which is a priority pollutant.

Some of the activities we have underway in the borough include:

- An anti-idling plan focusing on priority areas in the borough, with our Air Quality Team welcoming support and ideas for locations to focus on.
- Our programme of work around schools air quality audits and school specific monitoring is continuing.
- We have projects including a Clean Air Village in Wimbledon and our Healthy Streets Everyday project is building environmental learning areas at 3 schools in the borough.
- Our Air Quality Team are still delivering the world's first Low Emission Zone for Construction across London in partnership with boroughs and the GLA, a project that is shaping the air quality impact on construction throughout London.

- Our new Air Quality Supplementary Planning Document is now in place and gives clear guidance to new developments in the borough as to what we expect of them to actively contributing to tackling air pollution.
- We have a unique Behavioural Insights project focused anti-idling at Level Crossings and the use of interactive signage.

Our officers are starting to put together air pollution monitoring data for 2021 as part of our annual reporting; this will be published in the next couple of months.

Even with all this good work, we cannot be complacent, we cannot resolve the problem of air quality as a borough alone as pollution does not respect boundaries and traffic from outside the borough directly affects our residents.

This year we will be producing a new Air Quality Action Plan and I look forward to working with Members, businesses, community groups and the public to build a new plan for the next 5 years.

The Council also recognises the multiple benefits of the ambitious school streets programme which not only helps mitigate poor air quality in the vicinity of schools; but also provides benefits in terms of road safety, congestion, promoting active travel and the public health benefits of active travel to schools.

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