

6: Councillor Ordinary Priority Questions to Cabinet Members

From Councillor Usaama Kaweesa to the Cabinet Member for Children's Services

Can the Cabinet Member please outline Ofsted's key judgements on Merton's Children's Services which means they are now confirmed amongst the best in the country?

Reply

The Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) is an in depth look across our early help and statutory children's social care services and makes judgements in 3 overarching areas,

The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families

The experience and progress of children who need help and protection

The experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers

and these three judgments contribute to a further judgment for overall effectiveness.

In the inspection carried out between 28 February to 4 March 2022 Merton's children services received the following judgments

The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families –

Outstanding

Inspectors noted "Leaders have strengthened and built on the impressive work at the time of the previous inspection. As a result, children and their families continue to benefit from highly aspirational, committed senior managers and political leaders who place them firmly at the centre of their decision-making and who have a collective determination to provide high-quality services. This unrelenting focus has ensured that progress has been sustained and services continually improved, despite the unprecedented challenges of COVID-19"

The experience and progress of children who need help and protection – **Good**

Inspectors noted: "Children and their families benefit from responsive well-coordinated universal and targeted early help services, helping to reduce harm. A recently updated coherent multi-agency strategy underpins the delivery of these services"

The experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers – **Outstanding**

Inspectors noted: Children in care and young people leaving care in Merton receive outstanding care and support. Teams of highly committed, ambitious and determined professionals work extremely well together to help children to remain safe and achieve in life. The local authority is dedicated to pursuing timely permanence for all children if they cannot live safely with their birth families.

Leading to the judgment of the overall effectiveness of Merton's children's service being **Outstanding**

This is an improvement on the overall rating of **Good** that the authority received in its last full inspection in 2017 and now rates the LA in the top children service in the country.

From Councillor Anthony Fairclough to the Leader of the Council

Could the Leader of the Council describe what he found when carrying out recently publicised site visits of Clarion properties?

Reply

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Since taking over as Leader of Merton Council, I have been and continue to have weekly visits to housing estates run by Clarion and by other housing associations. One of my priorities is to improve and provide more good quality housing across the borough, and my series of visits is to see first-hand the quality of existing properties run by registered providers. Following these visits, I raise the concerns I have directly with those providers. I also highlight issues raised by individual residents as well as compliments when they are satisfied with the service they are being provided.

From Councillor Dan Johnston to the Cabinet Member for Local Environment, Green Spaces and Climate

Following the announcement of a further £2million fund put towards Climate Change actions, can the Cabinet member please bring us up to speed on the delivery to date of the Climate Change Action Plan?

Reply

Merton Council adopted the Climate Strategy and Action Plan in late 2020 and has since published an annual report called “Climate Delivery Plan” each year to ensure that we remain on track to reach our 2030 council target and the 2050 borough wide target to achieve net zero.

Merton’s Climate delivery plan year 2 was approved by Cabinet and published online in February 2022.

- It monitors the Council’s progress in delivering its part of Merton’s Climate Strategy & Action Plan, and sets out how the Council intends to progress action in the coming year (January to December 2022). It uses a set of indicators to track progress against the baseline, provides an overview of progress against the priorities identified in the previous delivery plan, and identifies priorities for the coming year; highlighting delivery risks (see section 2)
- It assesses wider factors which give an indication of the likelihood of meeting Merton’s net-zero carbon targets (see section 3)
- It provides an explanation of the indicators and emissions referred to in sections 2 and 3 (see Annex 2).
- It sets out key considerations that were made when forming delivery actions (see Annex 3).
- It provides a detailed review of progress against more than 60 different actions identified in the Year 1 Delivery Plan and identifies all priority actions for 2022 (see Annex 4 – 35 pages) These actions are organised around the following workstreams:
 - Sustainable consumption and low carbon economy
 - Retrofit of the building stock in Merton
 - Future new build and regeneration
 - Transport infrastructure and modal shift
 - Greening Merton
 - Merton Council Estate and fleet management
 - LBM procurements and investments

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- Communication and outreach

The additional £2million awarded at Cabinet in June 2022 will be allocated in consideration of the latest Climate Delivery Plan to work towards meeting our targets. Merton Council's website (www.merton.gov.uk/climatechange) contains a wealth of information on the delivery of Merton's climate actions

- Link to [Merton's Climate Strategy and Action Plan 2020](#)
- Link to [Merton's Climate Delivery Plan 2021](#)
- Link to [Merton's Climate Delivery Plan 2022](#)

From Councillor Nick McLean to the Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Services

Does the Cabinet Member recognise the threat that the ULEZ poses to hard pressed Merton households, and will they join me in calling for the Mayor of London to drop his plans for a new tax on Merton residents?

Reply

Merton Council will be submitting a response to the Mayor of London's ULEZ consultation which sets out the Council's concerns about the impact of the scheme on low income residents. The Council is fully aware of the impact that the economic climate and cost of living crisis is having on our residents and businesses, which is a consideration in all of our policy making decisions.

The Council also has a duty to consider the impact on our residents of air pollution, which is the most significant environmental risk to health in the UK. The data shows that the majority of pollution in the borough is from traffic, so we cannot disregard measures that accelerate a transition to cleaner vehicles. The health risks of air pollution particularly fall on the most vulnerable in our borough, including children, the elderly and those with underlying health conditions. Data indicates that lower income groups in outer London, including in Merton, are also much less likely to own a vehicle (TfL Travel in London report 12). Therefore, whilst lower income groups are more likely to suffer the negative impacts of air pollution they are already much less likely to own a car and therefore to be directly affected by the proposals.

However, the Council is mindful that the ULEZ proposals will still disproportionately impact some of the borough's hard pressed families and lower income groups, particularly those in areas of the borough with poor public transport accessibility that are more dependent on a vehicle. It is therefore particularly disappointing that the Conservative government have so far refused to properly reimburse TfL for the costs of COVID, undermining the public transport infrastructure in the capital and thereby exacerbating the reliance on motor vehicles in outer London and the subsequent damage this does to local air quality and the health of our residents. We would therefore encourage the few remaining Merton Conservative councillors to request that government ministers return to the negotiating table with TfL and agree to a sustainable funding package for future years.

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In addition, if the scheme is to be introduced, the Council will push for robust measures to mitigate the impact of it, including scrappage schemes and other support measures.

From Councillor Paul Kohler to the Cabinet Member for Sport and Heritage

Would the Cabinet Member please list the schools (and total number of participants) in Merton that have taken part in the Merton School Sports Partnership's **Junior Golf Programme** this academic year and any other Merton schools that have been included in the programme since its inception in 2014?

Reply

The Merton Schools Sports Partnership collaborates with Wimbledon Park Golf Club to deliver golfing activities for Merton children and young people. This is only one type of sport the partnership collaborates with. They also support PE subject leaders across all schools (network meetings and training); they provide coaches for direct delivery of PE/sport to pupils in schools; they coordinate the 'Schools' Sports Mark' in Merton; they coordinate Merton's entries to the London Youth Games; they organise inter school competitions in a range of sport; they created a PE scheme of work for the delivery of PE lessons in primary schools, and have input for Tag Rugby, Football, Gymnastics, Netball. Despite its name, and the close partnership working with the Council, the Sports Partnership is not a Council organisation. They have however kindly given us the following information about their work in this area. Since the tri-golf competition programme began in 2014, Wimbledon Park Golf Club has hosted 33 Merton Primary Schools during these events, with over 1000 children having the opportunity to compete.

From Councillor Gill Manly to the Cabinet Member for Sport and Heritage

Can the Cabinet Member please update us on how she has worked to make sure people across the borough can enjoy the Wimbledon fortnight?

Reply

This year for the first time, the council has been able to get a large screen from the AELTC so that it can show the tennis in the East of the borough. From Monday 4th July the screen will be in Canons Park showing tennis from 13.00 to 21.00. This will be a free event. In addition, deckchairs have been provided by the All England and there is ample picnic space in the park.

On Saturday 2nd July - the Middle Saturday Opened Up' a free community tennis event at the public tennis courts in Wimbledon Park, will take place.

The event, which will take place on the middle Saturday of The Championships, returns for a third year since the first edition in 2019, having previously taken place on the middle Sunday. The event uses tennis to bring the local community in Merton and Wandsworth together. It was created to support our vision of 'tennis opened up' and demonstrates the vital role park courts play as community assets in providing accessible opportunities to play and widening the impact of the physical and mental health benefits that being active through tennis can bring.

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In addition, officers have provided the annual support to and have worked with AELTC as they utilise Wimbledon Park and greenspaces to support The Championships. This includes the return of The Queue in the park and the park & ride that operates from Morden Park.

From Councillor Andrew Howard to the Cabinet Member for Housing and Sustainable Development

The Leader of the Council recently said that “in Merton sport is in our DNA.” Does the Cabinet Member regret the decision made by the previous Labour administration and the Liberal Democrats to vote for the Local Plan which allocates the LESSA sports ground for development?

Reply

The LESSA site has been unused and inaccessible to the public for more than twenty years. We support bringing this site back into active use for the benefit of Merton’s communities. Merton’s Local Plan proposes its site allocation as “Sporting or community use of the entire site will have to be proven as undeliverable before any other uses can be considered.

From Councillor Matthew Willis to the Cabinet Member for Transport

What does the new administration propose to do to achieve step-free access at Raynes Park station?

Reply

Council Officers are working with Network Rail and South Western Railway to support the submission of a joint bid for step-free access at Raynes Park Station under the current funding round of the Department of Transport ‘Access for All’ scheme. We will consider submitting a bid for Strategic Community Infrastructure Levy in due course when match funding is required from the council.

From Councillor Billy Hayes to the Cabinet Member for Finance

As the Cost of Living crisis continues, can the Cabinet Member outline work by the council to ensure those most in need are receiving information about support available to them?

Reply

The Cost of Living crisis, brought about by over a decade of Conservative and Liberal Democrat austerity policies and a lacklustre response to the economic shockwaves caused by Covid, are having a very serious impact on the lives of local residents. The council is taking significant steps to ease the burden on local families by providing support directly, and ensuring that residents are aware of all other forms of support available to them.

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Every resident eligible for the council tax energy rebate has either received the payment directly or has been contacted individually. Residents that pay their council tax by direct debit received their £150 automatically in April. All other eligible residents have been emailed, texted or written to twice to advise of the claim process. Just over 58,000 residents are eligible and 45,000 have been paid, with work ongoing to reach those who have not yet successfully claimed.

Residents that have been helped with the household support grants have been individually written to by the Leader of the Council advising of the support available. Grants of up to £125 have been issued to 8,300 residents in receipt of council tax support.

The council is organising three cost of living events on separate Saturdays in Mitcham, Morden and Wimbledon during July. The e-Merton newsletter has promoted these to 30,000 residents, targeted letters from the Leader have been sent to 12,000 residents and social media targeting residents and organisations will further reach.

A dedicated hub has been created to provide information, support and advice on help available by the council and external organisations. It also promotes events to help residents.

The Labour administration in Merton will continue to do everything in our power to help residents facing the effects of the cost of living crisis.