

7b: Strategic Theme: Councillor Questions

From Councillor Michael Butcher to the Cabinet Member for Education and Lifelong Learning

As children's mental health continues to suffer, can the Cabinet member tell us about the work of the Trailblazer teams in Merton's schools in tackling these issues?

Reply

All schools in Merton have access to a Mental Health in schools team. These teams were previously known as Trailblazer teams. Each schools' team supports a cluster of schools, which are headed up by one lead school. The schools work together with the team to prioritise the work of therapists to support the needs of the children in the cluster.

The teams offer a range of support, including: one to one counselling, group work, parenting support, online parenting sessions, case discussion and supervision, and training and support for school staff on mental health. One cluster is also offering drama therapy, and another is developing play therapy.

The work of the teams is designed to focus on children with low mood or lower level anxiety. It is a preventative service which sits within Merton's 'i-Thrive' model of support for children with mental health difficulties, which also includes the 'Off the Record' self referral service; support from the Mental Health Single Point of Access (SPA); and support from CAMHS.

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

Could the Cabinet Member detail what steps are being taken to address the obesity epidemic for Merton's children?

Reply

Obesity is a complex problem and there is no single solution, with evidence indicating that a comprehensive programme focusing on the physical, food and cultural environment is most likely to be successful, and cost effective.

Childhood obesity in the borough has been a key priority of Merton's Health and Wellbeing Board since 2015 and the multi-agency Child Healthy Weight action plan has been refreshed covering actions across three main themes. There is also the opportunity to increase physical activity through the new commitment to Merton as a borough of sport/activity, with a focus on inclusion across the life-course.

Specific current work through the Merton Child Healthy Weight Action Plan includes:

Making child healthy weight everyone's business:

- 50 schools in Merton have registered for the Healthy Schools London programme, and 83 early years settings are registered for Healthy Early Years London Programme.
- 29 primary schools in Merton participate in the Daily/Active Mile

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- 12 organisations in Merton are signed up to Sugar Smart, an initiative aiming to help organisations reduce sugar consumption.
- A new school meals' contract is being awarded with public health, which includes nutritional outcomes, and a move to more plant based menus.
- We are rolling out training for frontline staff on having conversations about healthy weight and being able to signpost to support, starting with support to the Holidays and Activity programme.
- A refreshed communication and engagement plan for child healthy weight is being refreshed.

Supporting children, young people and their families:

- Community Health Services which includes Health Visiting, have achieved and maintained the Unicef Baby Feeding Friendly Initiative. Breastfeeding support is provided and a specialist clinic is also available for mothers
- School Nurses deliver the 'Familystart' programme, a weight support service for children and their families to achieve healthy lifestyle and reduce their weight
- Investment in Merton's Food Poverty Action Plan has ensured the continuation of Merton's Community Fridge Network and coordination of local efforts to reduce food poverty, through Sustainable Merton.
- Local Healthy Start Voucher scheme booklet has been developed to increase families access to vouchers for free fruit, vegetables, milk and vitamins
- Children and Young People's Social Prescribing pilot to be developed and implemented for those classified as obese or with low level emotional health.

Healthy place - shaping the places we live, learn, work and play and influencing choices on the food we eat:

- Merton's Climate Strategy and action plan contributes to tackling child healthy weight, committing to active travel and greening the borough.
- Merton's Local Plan adopted mechanisms to manage new takeaway restaurants within 400 metres of schools.
- Water fountains have been installed in Mitcham, Colliers Wood, Morden and Raynes Park and Wimbledon.
- A Transport for London (TFL) style advertising policy aiming to tackle unhealthy advertising and promote wellbeing implemented in Merton.
- A School Superzone pilot will be testing out ways to make the environment around schools more healthy and 10 schools have been funded to make improvements, such as developing a school garden or open space.

From Councillor Laxmi Attawar to the Cabinet Member for Health and Social Care

With the health inequalities between the east and the west of Merton well-documented, can the Cabinet Member outline the importance of the work the Dementia Hub in Mitcham is doing in terms of outreach across the borough?

Reply

Merton's community dementia services are run by the Alzheimer's Society and based at the Dementia Hub in Mitcham. Following consultation the service model has recently been revised (October 2022) to deliver a community based service, with services available at the Dementia Hub but also offered across the Borough, nearer to people's communities and their homes. For example a Dementia Support Worker may meet a client at the Dementia Hub, at a person's home (if this was needed), over digital platforms such as Zoom (if appropriate such as for a carer who worked) or at a 'pop up' session hosted by another community or voluntary sector organisation in a different part of the borough.

The service has named officers attached to each Primary Care Network (PCN) in the borough further ensuring reach in East Merton. The service is also in discussion with a community organisation in Pollards Hill to establish a sustained presence within Pollards Hill and one that responds to the needs of the local community. Alzheimer's Society are also in discussion with offices leading on 'Health on the High Street' to increase awareness across the Borough. Finally national research highlights that ethnic minority communities may lack access to dementia services. Locally the Alzheimer's Society are in discussion with a Tamil community group to ensure engagement and awareness around dementia, dementia diagnosis and the support that the community dementia service can offer.

All Councillors are being offered a Dementia Friends awareness session and a briefing on what Community Dementia Services do by the Alzheimer's Society as part of Councillor training.

From Cllr Hina Bokhari to the Cabinet Member for Health and Social Care

Merton's collective performance on screening for breast, cervical, and bowel cancers are acknowledged as poor (60% vs Havering at 76% on Breast screening, for example). What is the Cabinet Member doing to find out how other Councils are achieving better performance?

Reply

Cancer Screening services are commissioned by NHS England who are responsible for the performance of the provider of cancer screening services. The Council has no direct commissioning relationship with providers and is not responsible for their performance, however we do have an oversight role and the Healthier Communities an Older People Overview and Scrutiny Panel considered screening at their June 2022 meeting. The meeting had a focus on breast cancer screening, also covering recovery from the Serious Incident declared by NHS England and service improvement measures.

There are a number of factors and issues that impact on London's performance with regard to cancer screening. These can range from population mobility, deprivation and service awareness amongst some ethnic minority communities. Services may

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also be impacted by access to appointments and a lack of qualified sample takers e.g. for cervical cancer screening.

Public Health officers have recently met with the NHS commissioner lead for bowel cancer screening and will be attending as a Local Authority representative at quarterly performance meetings in August 2022 to greater understand performance of the provider around bowel cancer screening and understanding in greater detail activity to improve performance. Looking forward the Council will use our networks to raise awareness around bowel cancer screening and promote provider initiatives locally.

Officers are also engaged with the community engagement officer at the Bowel Cancer Screening Centre at St Georges Hospital and we plan a number of engagement activities with the community and voluntary sector to raise awareness around bowel cancer screening. Earlier this month the network of Community Champions, a key part of the pandemic response in Merton, had a presentation on bowel cancer screening which was very well received.

Public Health officers are meeting in August with other South West London Council and NHS colleagues to talk through cancer screening and ways to improve performance. We will raise the issue around high performing boroughs, such as Havering for breast cancer screening, to find out what they have done to improve cancer screening in their local authority.

Public Health Team officers have also been promoting the 'Help Us, Help you, Cancer - Earlier Diagnosis Campaign' (asking anyone who has concern over a symptom to contact their GP practice) to local community and voluntary sector partners.

From Cllr Max Austin to the Cabinet Member for Health and Social Care

What has the council identified as the most urgent social determinants of health in Merton?

Reply

One of the most important social determinant and pervasive root cause of ill health and inequality in health is poverty, driving earlier onset and poorer health outcomes across a wide range of physical and mental conditions, and disabilities and leading to reduced overall and healthy life expectancy. The current cost of living crisis is making poverty probably the most urgent social determinant of health, not only in Merton but London and the rest of the country. Closely linked to the importance of decent wages/income /benefits are access to good jobs, housing and food, all essential social determinants of health. Globally, the climate crisis is one of the most important determinants / threats to health and equity now and for future generations, requiring urgent and sustained action to prevent irreversible changes to the planet with detrimental impact on population health.

From Councillor Caroline Charles to the Cabinet Member for Health and Social Care

As figures reveal that a quarter of over-65s and even more over-85s are living with frailty, what is the Council doing to address this, in particular its link to isolation and loneliness?

Reply

Frailty and being concerned over falling can impact a person's ability and confidence around 'day to day' activities such as going to the shops or meeting friends. It can lead to increased loneliness and isolation as someone feels less confident or is less able to get out and about. Regular physical activity with a focus on strength and balance can help address both frailty and the risk of falls. Physical activity can also reduce the risk of long-term conditions and create opportunities for social connection with others.

The Council has worked collaboratively with the NHS locally and taken a multi-agency approach in developing a project to reduce frailty. This had led to the Council commissioning 'Get up and Go' a physical activity programme run by Everyone Health for residents in East Merton and Morden. The programme focuses on strength and balance and will include activities such as Nordic Walking, seated exercise classes, Tai Chi and Dance. The programme that has just started will run initially until August 2023. There is also a social element to activities, such as tea and coffee afterwards. The programme also includes wider activities such as new age Kurling. It also contains a 'train the trainer' and 'small grants' element to get local community and voluntary sector groups involved in running local activities.

The Council commissions 'Merton Moves' a programme run by Wimbledon Guild who offer 'one to one' coaching to older people to get involved in a physical activity. The service works with someone and provides encouragement to join a physical activity class or group that they are interested in, encouraging greater social connectivity.

The Council also commissions a Befriending Service with Age UK Merton and Wimbledon Guild for older people over 65 who are isolated. The service matches a volunteer with a client based on shared interests. Physical activity (whilst not a key part of the befriending offer) is encouraged, such as going for a walk with a befriender.

The Council's Carers Strategy and through the work of Merton's Dementia Action Alliance also considers isolation and loneliness affecting older carers in Merton.

Overview and Scrutiny have also held a Task and Finish Group on the issue of loneliness and isolation.

Try 22 in 2022, is a new campaign to raise awareness of the range of opportunities to be more active, including active travel, sport and fun activities and games in Merton. There are five resources with ideas for adults, babies and toddlers, children and young people and pregnant women to get more active and there is a

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specific resource for older people. Further details can be access at www.merton.gov.uk/mertoncan

From Cllr Simon McGrath to the Cabinet Member for Health and Social Care

At the Healthier Communities and Older People Overview and Scrutiny Panel on June 20th 2022 a report on Breast Cancer Screening Rates was confidential and not available to the public. Why?

Reply

Whilst the majority of this presentation was published and made available to the public, Council officers were advised by the NHS that three slides contained sensitive information and unvalidated data and therefore could not be published. However, the NHS were keen to share the emerging findings with Councillors and therefore held a discussion with them in a private session to allow members to discuss all the data submitted.

From Cllr Susie Hicks to the Cabinet Member for Health and Social Care

If the Cabinet Member agrees that the Council has a role to play in promoting ways in which local employers can help efforts to improve the health of our residents, does she agree to signing up to the Menopause Workplace Pledge?

Reply

As an employer of a diverse workforce, Merton Council offers assistance and support for any member of staff requiring support. All Merton staff are made aware of our Occupational Health provider and our Employee Assistance programme through a wide range of internal channels. Merton also provide a range of employee wellbeing resources, policies, procedures and guidance and training and we have Wellbeing Champions located throughout the Council that staff have access to.

We have recently reviewed work around assisting employees that may require support due to the menopause. There is a dedicated page on the hub, [Menopause \(sharepoint.com\)](https://sharepoint.com) which was written with public health colleagues and includes various support and training options, which will be developed into a future eLearning module. We have a dedicated area on the new learning management system (due to be launched in the coming months) for all matters related to health and wellbeing. The above link and other learning and support materials will be included. I am happy to investigate signing up to the Menopause Workplace Pledge and identify the implications for the Council.

From Councillor James Williscroft to the Cabinet Member for Health and Social Care

Can the Cabinet Member please tell us about the social value elements of recently agreed contracts for supported living services for adults with a learning disability?

Reply

The Council has a Social Value Charter that covers four main areas of social value: economy, social, environmental and innovation. The Charter provides a 'menu of options' covering a broad range of value adding activities and commitments. Bidders are asked to select from this menu and to define the quantity of each activity that they are committing to deliver. For example, a number of apprenticeships to be offered, or a number of hours of employee volunteering in local communities or similar. The quantities each have an allocated cash value which is used to calculate the overall equivalent financial value of each bidders social value commitment.

With regards to the contracts referenced by my colleague in his question, while the award recommendation was agreed by Cabinet on the 27th of June, there are a number of legal processes that it is necessary to complete before the contract award to the recommended bidder can be confirmed. For this reason and for reasons of commercial confidentiality I am not able to divulge the exact nature of the equivalent financial value of the recommended bidder's submission but I am pleased to be able to confirm that this was a significant amount. In general terms, the recommended bidder's social value commitment included six main commitments across the life of the contract:

- The recruitment of a number of young people who are identified as Not in Employment, Education or Training;*
- The recruitment of a number of people who are long term unemployed*
- Staff volunteering in local communities over the life of the contract*
- Supporting a number of paid work experience placements per year for adults with learning disabilities*
- Offering training opportunities for staff across the life of the contract*
- Supporting environmental programmes with local groups/schools plus attendance at school recruitment fairs throughout the life of the contract*

Once the contract is awarded officers involved in monitoring contract delivery and quality will ensure that all of the social value commitments made by the winning bidder are honoured

