

Agenda item 7 – Councillors ordinary priority questions and answers

1. From Councillor Sally Kenny to the Leader of the Council

Can the Leader update me on the latest 5 year plan proposed by the local CCG for hospital services in South West London, including St Helier hospital?

Reply

The latest 5 year plan for health services in SW London outlines proposals to “change the way we deliver health services” including the “likely need to reconfigure maternity and neonatal services” and suggests A&Es units are downgraded by “the introduction of two levels of emergency departments (Major Emergency Centre and Emergency Centre)”. Clearly this means that St Helier hospital remains under threat.

Supplementary Question

Can I congratulate the Leader for speaking up for local residents by asking the chair of the body responsible for the debacle to step down, and can we have an update please any on further development?

Reply

I have since written to the Secretary for State, Jeremy Hunt, on the issue and they are in touch with the Save Lewisham Hospital campaign who run ‘Justice for Lewisham Hospital’ to work together. We are now a Labour majority council and will do our utmost as a Labour council to save St Helier Hospital and to save the A&E, maternity and other services there.

2. From Councillor Janice Howard to the Cabinet Member for Community and Culture

What was the final value of the completed improvement works delivered by Circle Housing Merton Priory in 2013-14? How does this compare to the £23million originally projected to be the value of the programme of planned CHMP improvement works for 2013/14?

Reply

I have requested the information you seek from Circle Housing Merton Priory and have had the following response:

“On 1st April 2013 Circle Housing Merton Priory (CHMP) entered in to a new partnership with United House Limited (UHL) to deliver the investment programme under a 10 year agreement. The drivers for the move from three contractor partners to one partner were to; reduce complexity, achieve a consistent standard across the borough, deliver efficiency and increase the economies of scale from a large scale

procurement. The mobilisation took longer than both parties intended and work started on site in July 2013, however the outgoing providers were finishing off their outstanding programmes to this point.

An estimated budget for 13/14 was set at £23m. During the year we identified a need for and completed an extensive number of pre-works validation surveys which identified that £5.3m of work had already been completed by CHMP and £5.2m was not required (as the original survey data pre transfer had been cloned). In addition 424 customers (elderly or households with a disabled member) declined works at this stage. We will check regularly if they change their mind or complete the works as the homes become empty in the future. The budget from the regeneration properties due to have works in 13/14 was also included in the £23m budget.

A total of £4.5m worth of work was completed and invoiced in year and a further £1.9m works were completed by 31 March and accrued. This was in alignment with the reforecast we shared in December 2013. A work programme of £6.2m has been carried forward from 13/14 to be completed in the financial year 14/15.

UHL are onsite across the borough on a range of projects.”

My understanding of the above and how it reconciles with CHMP’s original budget is as follows:

£4.5m - Works completed in 2013/14 and invoiced
£1.9m - Works completed in March 2013/14 and not invoiced
£6.2m - Works carried forward to 2014/15
£5.3m - Projected works that had already been completed
£5.2m - Projected works not required due to inaccurate survey data
£23.1m - TOTAL

Supplementary Question

If Circle Housing don’t complete 6.2 million carried forward to 2014/15, does the Cabinet Member believe there should be compensation and can the cabinet member assure me that the terms of the transfer contract be reviewed to understand remedies for non-performance?

Reply

I have a monthly update with Circle and I will put that issue to them.

3. From Councillor Joan Henry to the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health

Could I congratulate the Cabinet Member on her recent appointment and ask her what her priorities are for adult social care and health in her new role?

Reply

Thank you for your good wishes. I am very honoured to take up this role and I look forward to working with members, officers, partner organisations and residents on taking forward our work in this area.

My priorities for adult social care and health (in no particular order) are:

- To chair the Health and Wellbeing Board in a way that supports working in partnership, while also holding local organisations to account
- To take forward the work on a new health facility in Mitcham
- To work with NHS partners on plans for quality and sustainability, on the basis that the council has a clear position on the need to retain accident and emergency, maternity and related services at St Helier Hospital
- To ensure oversight of the integration of health and social care services, to the benefit of local residents, and in line with the Better Care Fund
- To ensure the delivery of safe and effective social care services at a time of continued financial challenge and in line with the July Principles agreed on a cross party basis during the last Labour administration 2010-2014
- To continue our excellent partnership working with voluntary sector

Supplementary Question

The Cabinet Member in her new role attended the launch of the Council's new dementia hub in Mitcham's connecting service. Can she describe the services that will be on offer for residents at this new facility?

Reply

It gives me the opportunity to tell you all about the great services offered at the dementia hub. The dementia hub in Mitcham is the first of its kind in the country. Not only for those with dementia, but also for the carers and support groups. It offers for those with dementia a memory clinic and a support group called 'Life after Diagnosis.' There is also a carers' support group. Other services include in general, relaxation therapy, dentist and a sensory garden planted with herbs and vegetables. The hub offers a wealth of support and information for dementia sufferers.

4. From Councillor David Williams to the Leader of the Council

Would the Leader please list the meetings and correspondence he has had since 22nd May 2014 to save St Helier Hospital?

Reply

- Met with the Chair of the CCG to ask him to step down from his post as Chair
- Press released my call for the Chair of the Merton CCG to step down
- Agreed an article on the Save St Helier campaign to be included in current edition of My Merton
- Instructed officers to reinstate the save St Helier banners on the front of the building
- Wrote to Jeremy Hunt MP, Secretary of State for Health, to ask that the chair of the CCG be removed from his post

Supplementary Question

As the five actions amount to telling Howard Freeman to get lost three times and twice authorising dubious use of council tax payers' money to justified a political campaign, how does the Leader propose that the council scrutinises his success or otherwise in achieving his objectives?

Reply

I do have to remind Cllr Williams, former Leader of the Council, of one thing, and I will start doing that by reading from a lyric of a song, 'Gather around people wherever you roam, and admit that the waters around you will have grown' that's Bob Dylan, 1964. 50 years later, Cllr Williams, 'the times they are a changing'. We will do what we have to do to save St. Helier.

5. From Councillor Ross Garrod to the Leader of the Council

Would the Leader comment on the current partnership work between Merton and the London Fire service?

Reply

We have a strong record of partnership working with the Fire Authority and indeed just recently our public health team undertook joint work with the authority on training fire fighters to advise residents on giving up smoking. It was featured by London Councils as a good public health case study – see <http://www.londoncouncils.gov.uk/policylobbying/healthadultservices/publichealth/casestudies.htm> for more details.

Supplementary Question

Would the Leader join me in condemning the Mayor of London's plans to pack the London Fire Authority with political placement and reduce the number of elected members from London Council? Furthermore, will he write to the Secretary of State opposing the current government consultation on these changes which have been taken in response to the fierce opposition against the dangerous cuts to fire services he has imposed on Londoners?

Reply

It always gives me great pleasure to join people in condemning the Mayor of London, Boris Johnson, so I will do that, and it also gives me great pleasure to write to Eric Pickles on the lines he suggests although I don't know what the point of Eric Pickles is.

6. From Councillor Stephen Crowe to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration

Can the Cabinet Member outline this new Labour administration's policy on traffic management in the borough?

Reply

The Council's main transport related priority is to reduce the number of road traffic casualties on our roads, in particular vulnerable road users such as pedestrians, cyclists and motorcyclists. We are also working hard to reduce dependency of the motorcar and encourage a shift to more sustainable modes of transport. To this end we have ambitious modal shift targets in the council's Local Implementation Plan (LIP).

Residents are also concerned at excessive and inappropriate speed in their roads. We are currently reviewing the effectiveness of all our 20mph zones and limits in the borough and also gathering intelligence on the effectiveness of borough wide 20mph zones/limits in London and nationally to inform future decisions on speed management and agree a policy approach later this year. Lorry control also remains a concern and we are developing measures to prevent large vehicles from unnecessarily using residential roads and also protect surrounding roads from the displacement effects.

We are continuing our work in introducing Home Zones 'Lite' schemes (the type of measures recently introduced on the residential road networks adjoining the A298 corridor (Kingston Road and Merton High Street) consisting of junction entry treatments, street trees and planters to highlight to drivers that they are entering a residential area and should therefore adjust their driving behaviour.

We will continue to consider the introduction of Controlled Parking Zones to meet the parking needs of residents where demand exists and the proposals are supported by residents.

Work is currently underway to review parking provisions at designated and secondary shopping parades across the borough to assist businesses with their parking / loading needs.

The Council is also required to meet the transport strategic objectives of the Mayor's Transport Strategy which is to:

- Mitigate for the negative impact of transport on climate change;
- Reduce road traffic casualties;
- Encourage active transport (walking and cycling);
- Reduce the impact of traffic congestion levels;
- Contribute to the improvement of all public transport and community transport services;
- Improve the general transport infrastructure, including arrangements for parking and loading;
- Improve accessibility and social inclusion in the transport network

Funding is made available through the annual LIP allocation to develop suitable measures aimed at delivering the above priorities.

Supplementary Question

Last month the new Labour administration abolished the Street Management Advisory Group without any discussion with the opposition. How does the cabinet member explain that decision to residents who valued the democratic forum that this committee provided for open and public debate on the contentious traffic issue, in front of an impartial panel of councillors?

Reply

I did not find SMAC advice, frequently very expert or actually adding much to the debate. Instead I have made a decision to concentrate consultation on ward councillors for any scheme that is proposed. So ward councillors must be consulted before any SMAC decisions are made. If necessary for significant decisions, we will hold public meetings in the area to which residents will be invited.

7. From Councillor Fidelis Gadzama to the Cabinet Member for Education

What steps has the cabinet member undertaken to provide school places to all Merton primary school children?

Reply

For September 2014, excluding the proposed Park Community Free School, the council has provided 690 additional reception year school places compared to September 2007. 510 of these extra places have been established since September 2010.

We have continued a significant investment programme in which 600 additional places (20 forms of entry – eventually 4,200 places across all year groups) are in good quality permanent buildings either completed since 2010 or currently under construction. We also have a contractor ready for the expansion of Dundonald Primary School to provide a further 210 places.

To ensure there were sufficient places for this September year we provided 90 temporary reception places, so I am confident that all residents that require a reception place for September will be able to receive one, even though it may not be at a preference school. We will review the position for next year in the autumn, when the implications of the new Park Community Free School should be clearer.

Supplementary Question

I congratulate the Cabinet Member for the work under taken to ensure that all children have received a school place this year. Can he give some details on how he intends to cater for increasing demand over the next four years?

Reply

I would like to thank Cllr Gadzama for his supplementary question and welcome him to the council. It is great to have a gold medallist on the council. In relation to his question we will be providing an additional 2000 school places for the next 4 years, which is a manifesto pledge we are busy implementing. We also know there has been a significant demand this year, hence why we are providing a further form of entry as a bulge year at Joseph Hood located on Cannon Hill, and West Wimbledon. This administration is in the midst of an £80 million regeneration programme, an ambitious capital programme to provide expanding good schools and much needed school places.

8. From Councillor Suzanne Grocott to the Cabinet Member for Education

What is Merton council's policy on allowing the parents of summer-born children to defer their child's start in reception until they turn five?

Reply

Merton's policy is published on the council website as part of our "Admission Arrangements 2015/16".

Merton's general policy for admission is in line with national guidance for children to start full-time schooling in the September prior to their fifth birthday. However, parents may request to defer their child's entry until statutory school age which is the term following their fifth birthday. In the case of a summer born child this will either be by taking a Year 1 place or requesting admission outside the normal age group. Our policy for this is as follows:

"1.3 Admission of Children Outside Their Normal Age Group

Parents wishing to apply for places outside the child's normal year group will have their application considered by each admissions authority they are

applying for based on the circumstances of each case. Applicants should include relevant supporting professional evidence for consideration, based on the individual needs of their child.

Parents are encouraged to seek advice from the Local Authority in these circumstances before applications are submitted.”

Supplementary Question

I've seen government guidance on the subject, that was issued in July 2013 has finally been implemented by this administration, even though it did need Stephen Hammond and myself to push for it. What process does the administration use to consider government guidance that has been issued, and how much time is allowed to incorporate the guidance into their operating procedures?

Reply

In terms of government guidance you have to consider a number of issues, which do need to be thought through more before implementation. I think, in relation to the guidance that she refers to, there were some inconsistencies between other previous government guidance as well. As an authority, this is clearly a very serious issue. There are different circumstances, which are considered on its own merits. But we as an authority do admit government guidance, but it does have to be consistent government guidance and so, therefore, in terms of its actual implementation these have to be considered with a whole range of factors as well.

9. From Councillor Mary Curtin to the Leader of the Council

Can the Leader supply a list of all those Merton residents who have received Honours in the past ten years?

Reply

In the time available and given the gratifyingly long list, I have only been able to go back to June 2010. I have included all those with a link to Merton:

Joyce Andrews, MBE

Jenny Archer, MBE

Dr Richard Barker, OBE

James Bennet, MBE

Robert Bieber, MBE

James Cochrane, CBE

Barry Cox, CBE

Professor David Delpy, CBE

Marion Friend, MBE
Chris Frost, MBE
Honor Godfrey, OBE
DCI Caroline Goode, Queen's Police Medal for Distinguished Service
Prof Judith Freedman, CBE
Dr Howard Freeman, MBE
Philip Froomberg, British Empire Medal
Keith Grimshaw, MBE
Andrew Gairdner, MBE
Rosemary Hickson, British Empire Medal
Sophie Hosking, MBE
Michael Hourahine, OBE
Judith Ish-Horowicz, MBE
Stephen Jack, OBE
Fiona Jeffery, OBE
Dr Kanwaljit Kaur-Singh, MBE
Dr Kenton Lewis, MBE
Cllr Edith Macauley JP, MBE
Karl Mackie, CBE
Selina Master, MBE
Sylvia Morris, Dame
Indira Patel, Dame
Martin Rumsey, MBE
Peter Steiner, British Empire Medal
Paul Strank, MBE
Christopher Townsend, OBE

Supplementary Question

This is a very distinguished list and we should take great pride in all their good work. Does the Leader share my astonishment that in the past decade the only one of these that has been praised by the Conservatives in a motion to council, is the chair of our local health service, who most residents hold responsible for the disastrous issues surrounding St. Helier. Why have they praised him and not anyone else?

Reply

I do not know why they placed the motion mentioning only one honourable mention for one Merton recipient. For the others just an incidental, brief, casual mention. As Councillor Mary Curtin knows this issue will be rebalanced later by an amendment to their ill-judged motion.