

From Cllr Attawar to the Cabinet Member for Civic Pride

How is the Administration's commitment to upgrade Merton's CCTV network progressing?

Reply

As referenced in the main report, Merton is investing £1.3m in updating its CCTV systems to help tackle crime and anti social behaviour. Merton CCTV and IT are currently working on finalising the contract with the fibre supplier. We expect this contract to be signed before the end of April. The fibre is going to connect most of Merton CCTV cameras and will be the backbone for the new CCTV network and the new High Definition cameras, but it will take several months before it is installed. As soon as fibre is installed in an area, the upgraded cameras will follow.

In the meantime, we are using existing infrastructure to upgrade the cameras in Wimbledon Town Centre and the Civic Centre. These upgrades are expected to finish by the end of June.

Overall, the upgrade is progressing according to plan. Merton CCTV appointed a consultant who has done similar upgrades in other boroughs, and who has produced the specification, and the design for the upgrade. If everything goes according to plan, most of the cameras in Merton will be upgraded by April 2024.

Supplementary

I'd like to thank the Cabinet Member for her response, and I do have a supplementary. How is Merton using CCTV to prevent crime in addition to bringing people to justice when they have committed it, and making people, in particular women, feel safe walking in our green spaces?

Reply

Thank you Madame Mayor and I'd like to thank Cllr Attawar for her question and for her supplementary. And as I said in my speech, this is a really important aspect of our service. So we work really closely with the police, so we actually have access to the police radio in our CCTV operative room, so that they can coordinate with the police when there is an ongoing incident and share information. And recently we have signed an information sharing agreement between the police and Merton which is absolutely vital for joint operation, for example against gang violence, and we can share that evidence that they can use in their prosecutions. Our system is being upgraded and this includes additional cameras in hotspot locations where we know that women and girls have reported feeling unsafe, including in our parks. So we are working with park colleagues to survey the sites where additional cameras are particularly needed to deter crime and prevent antisocial behaviour. Thank you.

From Cllr Flack to the Leader of the Council

Could the Leader of the Council outline what he stated as his reason for becoming a White Ribbon Ambassador, when he applied to become one?

Reply

I was pleased to become a White Ribbon Ambassador last year, as part of Merton's accreditation to the campaign – demonstrating Merton's commitment to helping our employees and residents in combatting violence against women and girls. The reason I became an ambassador and have supported this campaign is that I believe all men can make a difference in tackling violence against women and girls by thinking about their own behaviour, and being prepared to call harassment and misogynistic behaviour when they see it.

By working with men and boys and helping them not to repeat the patterns of behaviour of previous generation, we will hopefully one day make violence against women and girls a thing of the past.

Supplementary

Thank you and thank you to Cllr Garrod for your response and acknowledging how important it is to treat women with respect and taking action against violence against women and girls. As part of the pledge to become an ambassador, the White Ribbon Association asks its ambassadors to reflect on their own behaviour, and look positively towards influencing other men and as you say it's so important to tackle those patterns of behaviour. Following this, I was wondering if you had chance to reflect on your behaviour towards me when completely unprovoked, criticised me and called me a part time councillor during a full council meeting. Would you like to take this opportunity to apologise?

Reply

Thank you Madame Mayor and thank you Cllr Flack for your question and your supplementary. I am proud to be a White Ribbon Ambassador and I take my responsibilities extremely seriously in this regard and I'm extremely privileged to lead a Borough that is doing fantastic work with the police, with other neighbouring boroughs in trying to tackle the scourge of violence against women and girls and at this point I'd like to pay tribute to Cllr Stringer and the team of officers in the council who have been doing a lot of work on this area. But I'm also hugely privileged to be a councillor and I take those responsibilities extremely seriously, including turning up to meetings and furthering on case work enquiries and I feel the best way to support residents is being present and being that voice for them in the chamber. Thank you.

From Cllr Holden to the Cabinet Member for Housing and Sustainable Development

What action has the council taken to improve the built environment so that it is less intimidating to women and girls?

Reply

Safer Merton has a Violence Against Women and Girls strategy that includes women's safety, and as part of this work Safer Merton work with other teams within the Council to ensure that women and girls feel safe in the borough.

Over recent months, Safer Merton have been working on a Home Office funded 'Safer Streets' project to improve the safety of women and girls in public spaces. Alongside work to train staff working in our businesses and members of our community on how to intervene safely if an incident occurs, this work has included an audit of the Night Time economy in Merton, where officers from several teams undertook a walk around the borough at night and noted any potential areas for improvement. The recommendations from this will be shared with colleagues in Future Merton in terms of the built environment and how this can be improved.

In addition, Merton's CCTV system is currently being upgraded and this includes additional cameras being installed in hotspot locations where women and girls feel vulnerable.

Supplementary

Thank you Madame Mayor and thank you to the Cabinet Member for their answer. Large parts of the borough are rather poorly lit by street lights and can feel intimidating such as alleyways and the London railway path at certain times of night. Will the Cabinet Member consider placing brighter street lights and cctv in dark pinch points on such alleyways and in particular the railway path.

Reply

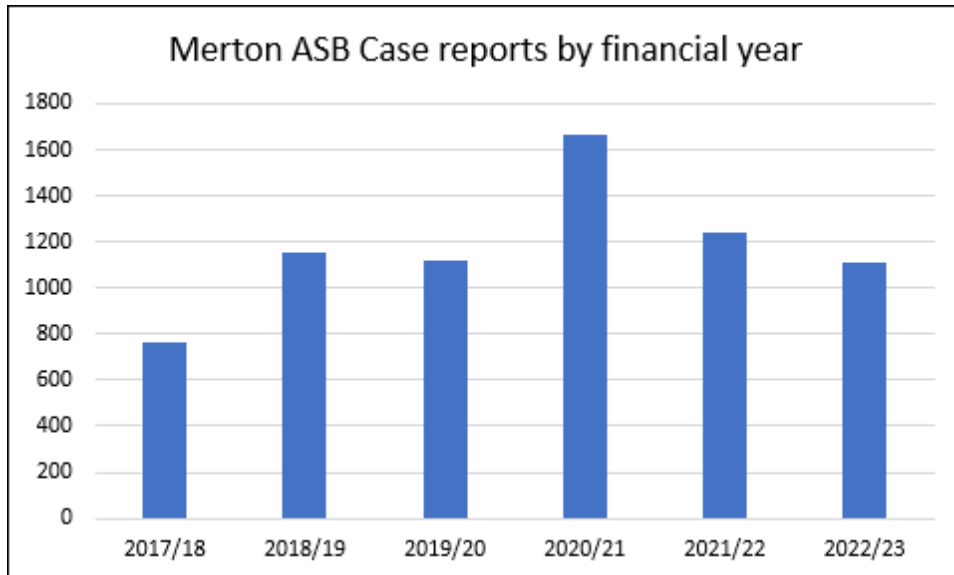
Thank you very much Cllr Holden for your question. This is one of those issues that definitely fits across multiple people's portfolio, but as the person ultimately responsible for the safety of women and girls I'm very happy to lead on this. And as we said, we've been doing a lot of work on safer streets, we have had our officers out in our town centres at night spotting exactly the type of issue and where the areas are and I will always be happy to take specific suggestions from colleagues about areas where they think there are needs for improvements to keep women and girls as safe as possible.

From Cllr Kohler to the Cabinet Member for Civic Pride

Anti-Social Behaviour is a pernicious and growing ill in our society. In addition to the valuable data in paragraphs 4.2-4.4 of the Strategic Theme Report can the cabinet member please provide quantitative information concerning long-term trends, current outcomes and how the success of the Council's current ASB processes & procedures are monitored and evaluated?

Reply

The number of reports to the Council's Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) Team are detailed below. There was an increase in reports during the Covid-19 pandemic which have now stabilised back to previous levels.



The wards with the highest number of reports to the Council's ASB team in 2022-23 were Cannon Hill, Lower Morden and Lavender Fields. It should be noted that Cannon Hill and Lower Morden wards rank 19th and 18th lowest out of the total 20 wards in terms of overall crime during 2022-23 however there have been a number of complex neighbour disputes being dealt with in these wards, which has led to an increase in reports to the ASB Team.

In terms of evaluation, the ASB team conduct customer satisfaction surveys on victim led reports to assimilate how residents feel their cases were dealt with and to take feedback on how the service can be improved.

The team are also making improvements to the use of the case management system to make full use of its capabilities in collecting ASB data and its breakdown.

We know that residents want the situations addressed quickly. Therefore, an important Key Performance Indicator is monitoring the time it takes to respond to reports from residents, with 97.7% of complaints responded to within the correct timeframe in quarter 4 of 2022-23.

Supplementary

Thank you Madame Mayor and I'd like to thank Cllr Stringer for her answer, and I am pleased ASBs going down in the borough after the pandemic peak. I'm pleased that the council takes its seriously. I am also pleased that you do customer satisfaction surveys and KPIs but you've not told us the results of customer satisfaction surveys or any results of KPIs apart from one quarter of one KPI. I don't expect you to have that information now at your fingertips obviously. But can you agree to come back to

us with details, results of customer satisfaction surveys and the various KPIs and how they are looking?

From Cllr Bhim to the Cabinet Member for Civic Pride

It is good to see that Merton has formally responded to the Metropolitan Police Service Turnaround Plan. How will we support the implementation of the plan, and help the Met to learn from the excellent examples of local community policing we have here in Merton?

Reply

We broadly welcome the Turnaround Plan, and appreciate the recognition of the significant challenges that the Metropolitan Police face regarding public trust and addressing the appalling failings that have been uncovered in Baroness Casey's investigations. We strongly agree the plan will have a positive impact on policing in London. It sets out a series of commitments for an inclusive and diverse workforce and a stronger neighbourhood policing model.

Our experience of working with the Met in Merton is that a strong relationship already exists at a local level. This relationship is built on the foundation of partnership working. As detailed in the report, key examples of this are a weekly meeting between Safer Merton and Police Neighbourhoods Inspector to highlight key issues and areas requiring joint intervention. Problem solving takes place via the monthly Partnership Tasking meeting co-chaired by Safer Merton and the Police to collaborate to identify locations that are hotspots for ASB and crime. A weekly Violence Communication Strategy meeting discusses violent crimes of note on borough and how to safeguard those involved.

On behalf of those who live in Merton, our key priorities are to build strong neighbourhood policing links to reduce local crime and ASB, and to work with our young people to keep them from becoming victims or perpetrators of crime. We have sought assurances that both the Police stations in the borough will remain open to continue providing these services to the community. And we will continue to campaign to keep them open. Even with both stations, we recognise that the ambition to increase Police numbers and keep ward officers based locally may present problems in identifying suitable accommodation. Therefore, we have made clear we would welcome exploring opportunities for co-location with Council services.

We embrace strong local leadership and the return of a Merton based Superintendent and hope this will enable local officers to be kept focused on local issues. The new Superintendent is linked in closely with Safer Merton and will act as a co-chair of Merton's Community Safety Partnership Board, which sets our local priorities for reducing crime and ASB.

Via regional partnership forums, Merton are sharing the good practice and learning we have from our local community policing. We are also feeding this into regional consultations and discussions. Merton have offered to meet with the Commander for

Neighbourhood Policing and Community Engagement to further share the excellent examples of local policing in Merton.

We are contributing at a local and BCU level to police plans on how to improve confidence and trust. Initiatives such as the 'Street a Week' (where local ward officers door knock a road to introduce themselves to residents and offer support) began in Merton and are now being rolled out in the other boroughs in the south west BCU.

Merton also works in partnership with the Police to run the Merton Neighbourhood Watch scheme which aims to reduce crime and the fear of crime and build stronger relationships between communities. Merton's scheme is recognised as a model of good practice in the BCU, and as such we have shared our resources and experience with the Police Partnership and Engagement team.

In terms of reaching out to our residents, we continue to share our community contacts and take part in joint communications to ensure Police are linked in with our communities to make reach and representation as diverse as possible.

We will continue to work on supporting the plan from a local authority perspective, and hope that if well implemented, the plan will lead to improvements in trust in the Police and a reduction in crime.

Supplementary

Thank you Madame Mayor, I'd like to thank the Cabinet Member for her response and I'd like to ask a supplementary question. Over the last decade the Conservatives have slashed police funding and the numbers of police officers and PCSOs have fallen dramatically and our local police stations are being threatened with closure. What are we doing to protect local policing in our borough?

Reply

Thank you Madame Mayor and I'd like to thank the Councillor for her question and her supplementary. I completely agree that we cannot ignore that Tory austerity has slashed police funding and this is not a party political point, Baroness Casey in her independent review said, I quote, "the cost of maintaining officer numbers has been significant reductions in PCSOs, civilian staff, Special Constables and closure of police stations." We have fewer staff and fewer police stations. Thankfully here in Merton we have fought to protect both of our stations, and both the Leader and I are completely committed to continuing to demand that we have two fully operational stations in our estate. But also that we have the officers that we need locally to keep people safe. And we have repeatedly reiterated this call in meetings with the Deputy Mayor for Policing in London, with senior officers locally and in writing directly to the Commissioner Mark Rowley.

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

We note at paragraphs 5.21-5.22 of the strategic theme report that Cabinet has recently approved the extension of Community Dementia Services, and to keep the Alzheimers Hub in Mitcham open for another 2.5 years. The report does not mention the decision made at the Council Budget meeting in March, to close the Eastway Day Centre. This will end whole day respite care within Merton and diminish accessible dementia support for families in the West of the borough. What specific plans does the council have to replace the services lost through the closure of Eastway Day Centre, in order to provide support for the carers of people with advanced dementia, and to provide accessible support for families looking after relatives with dementia in the West of the Borough?

Reply

The dementia hub is a centre of excellence for people with dementia in Merton and we have worked with the Alzheimer's society of the past few years to improve and extend this service to focus an outreach model into people's homes and the communities as well as a building-based model and we have extended this contract. The decision at the Council Budget meeting in March was to include a savings proposal to support balancing the budget. The proposal relates to the closure of Eastway Day Centre. This proposal and its implementation will be facilitated by extending and expanding the community offer of support to people with advanced dementia. The expanded community model will support people at an earlier stage in their dementia journey and will also focus on providing outreach support to people in their own homes and communities across the borough, not just from the physical hub in Mitcham. There are numerous other providers of day opportunities for people with dementia within and across the borough boundaries and in near neighboring boroughs, some of which will often be closer to where a person lives than the travelling distance from home to Eastway.

We are now beginning a process of engagement with all those directly affected by the proposal to close the centre and this engagement and formal consultation will inform the decision-making process for taking the proposal forward to implementation. We are aware of our statutory responsibilities to those who have identified eligible needs under the Care Act and where necessary a review of their individual support plan, in view of not being able to use Eastway, will identify suitable alternative ways to continue to meet those needs.

We also recognize the importance of providing respite to carers of people with dementia in order that they can continue their caring responsibilities. We recognize the reassurance that centre based activities and sessions can provide for a carer and the benefit they provide to people with dementia and intend that this forms part of the offer in the future model, albeit not directly provided by the local authority.

Supplementary

Thank you Madame Mayor and I thank the Cabinet Member for Health and Social Care for his detailed reply. And I also if I may completely endorse his statement that helping maintain independence is a key objective of adult social care. Back in March, a month ago, this year, the administration voted unanimously against a

costed amendment to keep open the Eastway Dementia Care Centre. So I am absolutely delighted to see the commitment in this reply to identifying suitable alternative ways to continue to meet the complex care needs of people who at the moment rely on the Eastway Dementia Centre and also the recognition of the need to provide respite to carers of people with advanced dementia. In those circumstances will the Cabinet Member for Health commit to ensuring alternative provision both for people with complex advance dementia and for carers who are supporting them at home, will be in place before the council closes Eastway? Thank you.

Reply

Can I thank Cllr Hicks for her question, can I also thank her for attending the dementia friend training with some of her colleagues last night. I think that demonstrates our commitment to this particular issue and I think she will recognise that there were a good number of my colleagues attending as well. It's a really important issue. When I was looking at your question, I felt that the idea that you replace a service wasn't appropriate, for me what we want to do is provide a service that meets of the needs of both the people with dementia and their carers. What we are doing, we have already commenced the informal engagement phase with those directly impacted, including families, staff to understand their personal perspectives. We are also gathering information on current available alternative services, it doesn't have to be like for like and it doesn't necessarily have to be run by the Council. And I think the Dementia Hub in the borough is a demonstration of how good services can be when provided by the voluntary sector. At the end of that period, that process, we will pull together a report which will provide the information we have gathered from this exercise and that will inform the way forward in terms of implementing the proposal. And once we have formal plans for the closure of the service we will formally consult as you would expect us to and individual reviews and reassessments will inform how we continue to meet the needs of people who are eligible under the care act and where necessary a support plan and individual budgets will be applicable. Savings that we have proposed and voted to support are based on the running costs of the current service, the building running costs and the staff team transport costs are not included in these services and there is provision to meet the needs of this really important group and at the risk of repeating myself my father suffered from vascular dementia, I know what a strain that it is on families and I want to do the right thing for the sufferers of dementia and their families.

From Cllr Williscroft to the Cabinet Member for Health and Social Care

How are our local NHS trusts performing in relation to discharging patients from hospital, and how are we as a Council supporting them to help people get back to their homes?

Reply

A number of key metrics demonstrate an NHS Trusts performance on discharge and these can be benchmarked relative to the South West London (SWL) sub-region and London as a whole region. The main hospitals that require London Borough of Merton support to discharge patients are; St Georges Hospital, Tooting; Epsom & St Helier and; Kingston.

One measure is the percentage of the overall bed base of a hospital, discharged by 5pm daily. The SWL average performance is 5.6% and the London average performance 6.1%. Both St Georges (6.8%) and Epsom & Helier (6%) are above the SWL average and in the case of St Georges, above the London Average. Kingston (4.7%) is currently below both the SWL and London average. Measuring the percentage of total discharges against the total bed base St Georges (12.8%) performs better than the SWL (10.1%) and London (10.5%) averages. Both Epsom (9.6%) and Kingston (8.9%) are performing below these averages.

Further measures include the percentage of patients in a bed who have no Criteria to Reside in hospital and are therefore ready for discharge. This is measured as a percentage of the total bed base. Latest data shows Epsom & St Helier (17.5%) and Kingston (16.2%) are below the SWL average of 11.4%. St Georges is performing better than the average at 6.1% and on current data, best performing in London.

The Council supports the discharge of Merton residents from hospital and in an average week, 45 residents are discharged from hospitals across SWL and England. The majority (33) are supported to return to their own home through our in-house reablement service. On average 10 people will be discharged to a temporary, bed-based, service until they are well enough to return to their own home. This short stay intervention is typically in a residential or nursing home setting. A further 2-3 people each week will be discharged to a residential or nursing home setting on a permanent basis. This is normally due to the person experiencing a fundamental change in their support needs following illness and a period of time in hospital.

Through the winter period of 2022/23 the Council worked with local NHS colleagues and the voluntary and community sector to implement their Adult Social Care Discharge plan. This was funding first announced in September 2022, confirmed in December 2022 and forms part of the Council's Better Care Fund plan, agreed through the Health & Wellbeing Board. Further funding has been made available for the whole of 2023/24 and we are currently finalising the plan for this fund. The successes of the winter period will inform this plan.

Supplementary

Thank you Madame Mayor, my question is to the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Health. In the light of the proposed downgrading of St Helier hospital can we anticipate these pressures getting better or worse in the future?

Reply

Thank you Madame Mayor and can I thank Cllr Williscroft for his original question and supplementary. Sadly, I think things can only get worse and I sadly have had to spend too much time in Emergency Departments just lately and I have been really disturbed by what I have seen. My local hospital is St Georges and members of this council will be aware that at the last meeting I had to rush out because an ambulance had been called to my son who had collapsed and can I, if I may, Madame Mayor, thank members of this Council, both members on this side and the opposition for their concern, for their enquiry, my son is making a really good recovery. Sadly I've had to go to St Georges a few times since, so we are making good use of the NHS and when you do, you find yourself saying thank god for the NHS and really matters to me and it matters to the people of Merton and what's going on in St Helier hospital is going to make the whole thing worse, because the people who live closest to St Helier, when it's moved further south will go towards Croydon University Hospital and mainly St Georges, some will go to Kingston, but the pressures that are unbearable there on their staff will just get worse and I really do fear for what we are going to see while that situation continues.

From Cllr Bokhari to the Cabinet Member for Housing and Sustainable Development

How many complaints about mould and damp have the Council and tenants champion received from private renters and housing association tenants?

Reply

A total of 109 complaints regarding damp and mould have been received during 2022/23 by the Council and the tenants champion. In line with the Housing Enforcement policy all complaints are followed up with the tenant or landlord and assessed to determine appropriate advice, guidance or action. This will often involve a Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) assessment and can also lead to informal or formal action against the landlord to remedy the defects.

Following the tragic death of Awaab Ishak who died at two years of age as a direct result of mould in his family home, the Council has taken a number of actions. We have written to every registered provider (Housing Association) in the borough asking them to provide information on their approach to assessing the extent of damp and mould in their properties and the action they are taking. The Council has also arranged up to date training sessions on damp and mould for housing enforcement staff and is looking to provide wider training on awareness for other Council staff.

A Landlord forum was held on the 12th January 2023 which included a training session for Landlords on damp and mould awareness and their responsibilities to maintain and improve their properties. There is also an ongoing series of visits by the Leader, housing enforcement staff, and housing association representatives to social housing estates in the borough to talk to residents first hand.

Supplementary

Thank you very much for the answer and it was a very full answer. And I really appreciate the fact that there is a mention of Awaab Ishak who actually died of mould and this is the reason for the question. Will the Council adopt the Housing Ombudsman's recommendation from his report Spotlight on Damp and Mould, supporting the idea that lifestyle is not the prime cause of damp and mould for the landlords and housing associations to have zero tolerance approach to mould and damp. The fact that there are 109 complaints is pretty shocking in itself and it really shouldn't be that high. And will the Cabinet Member report back the full feedback that they are getting back from enforcement officers on tackling poor housing providing services and will they also agree that landlords need to tackle damp and mould within a specified timescale.

Reply

Thank you Cllr Bokhari, this is a really important issue. There should never be an assumption that lifestyle is behind damp and mould, exceptional cases it may be the case, but the assumption should be that there is something wrong with the maintenance, with the disrepair of the dwelling and it should be approached on that basis. In terms of other matters, we want to focus on this as much as we can. I think it's a cross party cross council endeavour, all of us as councillors have these reports coming through from both private and public housing stock in the borough about damp and mould, we have to take it very seriously, I have to say that 109 properties is a considerable underestimate of the amount of damp and mould in this borough and in all boroughs, it needs to be taken more seriously or there will be more deaths wherever they occur from this condition. But thank you for your question.

From Cllr Charles to the Cabinet Member for Health and Social Care

How is the Council using our MASCOT Service to provide assistance to vulnerable and elderly residents to keep their homes safe and comfortable to live in?

Reply

Mascot has over 1400 customers who gain reassurance from the service and which helps them to continue living independently in their own home. Customers are provided with a range of equipment to suit their needs, starting with an alarm, pendant and smoke alarm as a basic package and increasing to having fall sensors and door exit sensors included as required. Most customers opt to have mobile response attached to their package, meaning that a member of the Mascot team will go to their home in the event of a fall or similar situation. Mascot liaises with family members, emergency services and other relevant agencies as required. Staff will contact family members or social workers if they have concerns for a customer's wellbeing. Families often refer to the peace of mind they get from having Mascot in their loved one's home.

All customers are given a full safety assessment of their property when they sign up and subsequently an annual visit and check is made. This appointment follows a call made on the customer's birthday. There are also regular calls to test the equipment and the connection between each device and the control room.

Mascot has a Handy Person service as part of the package, enabling customers to have a trusted person carry out repairs in their homes.

Since December Merton has been trialling a free four-week installation of Mascot telecare for suitable people being discharged from hospital. At present 41 people have been or are going through this trial. Of the 24 people who completed the trial, 14 have decided to take the service up on a permanent basis, a retention rate of 58.33%.

Supplementary

Thank you madame Mayor and I'd like to thank Cabinet Member McCabe for his response. I'd like to ask him to tell us what impressed the most when he spent time working with the MASCOT team recently.

Reply

Thank you Madame Mayor and can I thank my ward councillor for her question and her supplementary question. I was really impressed by the team we have working for us. We should all be proud of the MASCOT team. The care, the concern, the time, that they give to people is really impressive. The range of equipment is also all about meeting individual needs of somebody, so if somebody liable to have a fall they can have sensors to respond to that. I think for families the most important thing is reassurance, they know that if somebody that they love is in difficulty and the alarm sounds, that even if they can't get there quickly, somebody will. And the emergency services will be called and the appropriate action taken. So it's an incredibly impressive set up providing reassurance and enabling people to continue to live independently. And I met one very elderly woman who made it quite clear that she wanted to remain in her own and home and that the MASCOT system enabled her to do that and that is great to hear.