

If you are reading this electronically, the Council has saved **£1.10** on printing. For more information on the Modern.gov paperless app, contact Democratic Services

Merton Council

Sustainable Communities

Overview and Scrutiny

Panel



Date: 4 May 2021
Time: 7.15 pm
Venue: Merton Civic Centre

AGENDA

		Page Number
1	Apologies for absence	
2	Declarations of pecuniary interest	
3	Minutes of the previous meeting	1 - 4
4	Idverde - Verbal update	
5	Merton Adult Education - Annual Report	5 - 12
6	Libraries and Heritage - Annual Report	13 - 26
7	GLL Leisure	27 - 32
8	Performance Monitoring	33 - 40
9	Topic suggestions for 2021/22	

**This is a public meeting – members of the public are very welcome to attend.
The meeting room will be open to members of the public from 7.00 p.m.**

For more information about the work of this and other overview and scrutiny panels, please telephone 020 8545 4035 or e-mail scrutiny@merton.gov.uk. Alternatively, visit www.merton.gov.uk/scrutiny

Press enquiries: communications@merton.gov.uk or telephone 020 8545 3483 or 4093

Email alerts: Get notified when agendas are published
www.merton.gov.uk/council/committee.htm?view=emailer

Public Information

Attendance at meetings

The public are welcome to attend meetings of the Council. Seating in the public gallery is limited and offered on a first come first served basis.

Audio/Visual recording of meetings

The Council will film meetings held in the Council Chamber for publication on the website. If you would like to film or record any meeting of the Council held in public, please read the Council's policy [here](#) or contact democratic.services@merton.gov.uk for more information.

Mobile telephones

Please put your mobile telephone on silent whilst in the meeting.

Access information for the Civic Centre



- Nearest Tube: Morden (Northern Line)
- Nearest train: Morden South, South Merton (First Capital Connect)
- Tramlink: Morden Road or Phipps Bridge (via Morden Hall Park)
- Bus routes: 80, 93, 118, 154, 157, 163, 164, 201, 293, 413, 470, K5

Further information can be found [here](#)

Meeting access/special requirements

The Civic Centre is accessible to people with special access requirements. There are accessible toilets, lifts to meeting rooms, disabled parking bays and an induction loop system for people with hearing difficulties. For further information, please contact democratic.services@merton.gov.uk

Fire alarm

If the fire alarm sounds, either intermittently or continuously, please leave the building immediately by the nearest available fire exit without stopping to collect belongings. Staff will direct you to the exits and fire assembly point. If you are unable to use the stairs, a member of staff will assist you. The meeting will reconvene if it is safe to do so, otherwise it will stand adjourned.

Electronic agendas, reports and minutes

Copies of agendas, reports and minutes for council meetings can also be found on our website. To access this, click <https://www.merton.gov.uk/council-and-local-democracy> and search for the relevant committee and meeting date.

Agendas can also be viewed online in the Borough's libraries and on the Mod.gov paperless app for iPads, Android and Windows devices.

Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel Membership

Councillors:

Aidan Mundy (Chair)
Daniel Holden (Vice-Chair)
Laxmi Attawar
Ben Butler
David Dean
Nick Draper
Anthony Fairclough
Geraldine Stanford

Substitute Members:

Nigel Benbow
Eloise Bailey
Pauline Cowper
Edward Gretton

Note on declarations of interest

Members are advised to declare any Disclosable Pecuniary Interest in any matter to be considered at the meeting. If a pecuniary interest is declared they should withdraw from the meeting room during the whole of the consideration of that matter and must not participate in any vote on that matter. For further advice please speak with the Managing Director, South London Legal Partnership.

What is Overview and Scrutiny?

Overview and Scrutiny describes the way Merton's scrutiny councillors hold the Council's Executive (the Cabinet) to account to make sure that they take the right decisions for the Borough. Scrutiny panels also carry out reviews of Council services or issues to identify ways the Council can improve or develop new policy to meet the needs of local people. From May 2008, the Overview & Scrutiny Commission and Panels have been restructured and the Panels renamed to reflect the Local Area Agreement strategic themes.

Scrutiny's work falls into four broad areas:

- ⇒ **Call-in:** If three (non-executive) councillors feel that a decision made by the Cabinet is inappropriate they can 'call the decision in' after it has been made to prevent the decision taking immediate effect. They can then interview the Cabinet Member or Council Officers and make recommendations to the decision-maker suggesting improvements.
- ⇒ **Policy Reviews:** The panels carry out detailed, evidence-based assessments of Council services or issues that affect the lives of local people. At the end of the review the panels issue a report setting out their findings and recommendations for improvement and present it to Cabinet and other partner agencies. During the reviews, panels will gather information, evidence and opinions from Council officers, external bodies and organisations and members of the public to help them understand the key issues relating to the review topic.
- ⇒ **One-Off Reviews:** Panels often want to have a quick, one-off review of a topic and will ask Council officers to come and speak to them about a particular service or issue before making recommendations to the Cabinet.
- ⇒ **Scrutiny of Council Documents:** Panels also examine key Council documents, such as the budget, the Business Plan and the Best Value Performance Plan.

Scrutiny panels need the help of local people, partners and community groups to make sure that Merton delivers effective services. If you think there is something that scrutiny should look at, or have views on current reviews being carried out by scrutiny, let us know.

For more information, please contact the Scrutiny Team on 020 8545 4035 or by e-mail on scrutiny@merton.gov.uk. Alternatively, visit www.merton.gov.uk/scrutiny

This page is intentionally left blank

Agenda Item 3

All minutes are draft until agreed at the next meeting of the committee/panel. To find out the date of the next meeting please check the calendar of events at your local library or online at www.merton.gov.uk/committee.

SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL 23 FEBRUARY 2021

(7.15 pm - 9.35 pm)

PRESENT Councillors Councillor Aidan Mundy (in the Chair),
Councillor Daniel Holden, Councillor Ben Butler,
Councillor David Dean, Councillor Nick Draper,
Councillor Anthony Fairclough, Councillor Geraldine Stanford
and Councillor Dave Ward

John Bosley (Assistant Director Public Space Contracts and
Commissioning), Chris Lee (Director of Environment and
Regeneration), Paul McGarry (FutureMerton Manager) and
James McGinlay (Assistant Director for Sustainable
Communities)

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 1)

No apologies were received.

2 DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY INTEREST (Agenda Item 2)

There were no declarations of pecuniary interest.

3 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (Agenda Item 3)

The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed as a true and accurate record.

Matters arising:

The Chair invited Steve Peach, Head of Neighbourhood Services at Moat Housing, to update the Panel on the work that Moat are doing to manage the waste in the Pollards Hill Estate.

Moat completed a three-year program of regeneration works at Pollards Hill which included improvements to the buildings and garden areas but whilst the regeneration created substantial improvements, it didn't fully address some of the ongoing issues with the refuse and bulk waste. After analysing the types of waste, Moat merged the grounds maintenance and waste collection contracts for a more coordinated approach, which to a certain degree, has helped to keep Pollards Hill tidier. Use of a neighbourhood response team has also enhanced this work.

Following a question on lessons learned, Steven replied that consulting with the community and utilising Veolia to complete a full assessment to understand the capacity required before we installing the bins were extremely useful.

4 CLARION HOUSING REGENERATION (Agenda Item 4)

Paul Quinn, Director of Regeneration for Clarion Housing, gave a progress update on the regeneration.

Panel Members were encouraged to visit ravensburylive.com. This digital tool allows residents to see their own homes being built out effectively in real time.

We have just appointed a social value regeneration officer to work on developing metrics around the world of circular economy

In terms of feedback to residents, we've learned different ways to engage residents such as;

- Zoom meetings with resident steering groups
- Ran a final planning consultation outside with social distancing and a big mobile cinema screen
- Usage of Ravensburylive.com has been enormous and much higher than we see from traditional consultation events.

5 DESIGN REVIEW PANEL (Agenda Item 5)

The Chair invited Tony Burton, Secretary of Mitcham Cricket Green Community and Heritage to speak on their submission to the Panel.

Our review of how Merton's design review panel operates reveals a series of problems;

- There is a deep-seated culture that views the panel as a closed group of behind-the-scenes advisors that stand separate from normal standards of public scrutiny and engagement
- No agreed terms of reference
- Lack of public information about its members or how they are recruited
- Lack of transparency around how the panel handles its members inevitable conflicts of interest
- Often fails to publish its documents and reports in a timely manner

We recommend an overhaul of the panel to include the appointment of an independent chair and independent secretariat to meet the standards required by the London quality review charter and to provide effective terms of reference and transparency in the recruitment of panel members and the management of their conflicts of interest.

The Head of Future Merton gave a presentation addressing several of the points outlined above.

Following questions from the Panel Members, further clarification was supplied;

- The review will provide a brand new code of conduct for all DRP members and there'll be key changes to the structure and operations of the panel.
- The introduction of virtual meetings has worked well for panel members and applicants. We can schedule meetings much more quickly, we can go through much more detail digitally and we've actually had more meetings during lockdown than we ever had because they're quick to set up.
- The review does include an improved a method of recruitment and a recruitment pack which is along the lines of those produced by the private providers like design south east. Information will be added to the public domain on how people are recruited, what skills you need etc.

Future Merton committed to bringing the review back to scrutiny post consultation.

6 MORDEN TOWN CENTRE REDEVELOPMENT (Agenda Item 6)

The Head of Future Merton presented a short update on the Morden regeneration project. This follows on from updates provided to the financial monitoring task group in December and the cross party member steering group last week.

Parts of the project are commercially sensitive because we are about to embark on the procurement process however members have been briefed on the commercial aspects of it.

7 PERFORMANCE MONITORING (Agenda Item 7)

In response to a question on waste patterns and recycling rates;

- The recycling rate in terms of recycling tonnage increased by 1400 tons over this last year from April to December.
- From a Covid perspective in the change in how people use their homes and how they stay within borough over this period, the net impact overall to us is we've seen a 5% increase in residual waste. Comparatively speaking, with other three boroughs that are part of the South London Waste Partnership, we are the lowest in terms of percentage increase of residual waste so we do have more residents who are choosing recycling.
- Recycling levels - just over 40% which is a very good performance and is top quartile across London. It's a big increase from 18 months/2 years ago when we were at 33/34. But we also know that around 60% to 70% of the average waste produced by a household is recyclable so there is still room for improvement
- We will be reviewing our targets for the new financial year.

In response to a question on the high number of planning enforcement cases, the Assistant Director for Sustainable Communities explained that the service is not reaching the targets we would like it to but work is being undertaken to address this. We have developed an action plan that is underpinned by additional resource going into the team. We've got a full-time equivalent of three and we're currently over that in terms of the use of some additional agency staff and that's partly to address the

backlog but it's also to get to a more even baseline position so that we can work within our target. It's an area that needs improvement and there's additional resources that's going into that and a greater scrutiny and oversight of the planning enforcement service.

8 WORK PROGRAMME (Agenda Item 8)

The work programme was agreed.

Committee: Sustainable Communities Overview & Scrutiny Panel

Date: 4 May 2021

Wards: All

Subject: Merton Adult Learning Annual Report 2019/20 (academic year)

Lead officer: Anthony Hopkins; Head of Library, Heritage & Adult Education Service

Lead member: Councillor Caroline Cooper-Marbiah – Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure and Skills

Contact officer: Anthony Hopkins; Head of Library, Heritage & Adult Education Service

Recommendations:

-
1. That the Scrutiny Panel review and discuss the progress over the last year of the Adult Learning provision in the borough.
 2. That the Scrutiny Panel review the provision of services and amended plans throughout the Covid-19 pandemic.
-

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1. Since August 2016 Merton's Adult Learning Service has been operating in a commissioning model. The strategic rationale for moving to a commissioning model was to ensure that education grants received maximised investment in Merton residents, supporting them to develop new skills and improve their life chances. The change also ensured that the service could be managed within the funding allocation received to ensure the sustainability of adult learning in the borough.
- 1.2. A refreshed set of strategic objectives for the service were agreed by Cabinet on 27 January 2020:
- 1.3. *"The London Borough of Merton is committed to providing high quality and sustainable adult learning in order to improve the social, economic, health and wellbeing of our residents. We will deliver this through a strategic investment approach: commissioning provision to the best providers in the field and by developing sophisticated evidence based approaches to what we deliver.*
- 1.4. *We aim to reduce inequalities across the borough by focussing a significant proportion of our investment on those most socially and / or economically disadvantaged whilst providing a broad range of learning opportunities to develop all of our resident's skills."*
- 1.5. In October 2019 Merton Adult Learning Service was subject to a full inspection by Ofsted under the new Education Inspection Framework (EIF) and were the first borough in London to be inspected under the new framework. The inspectors noted the good progress made since the previous inspection and awarded the service 'Good' in all six judgment areas. The Ofsted inspectors noted that, "Leaders and managers ensure

that learners benefit from high quality courses. They pay close attention to planning a curriculum that meets the social, economic and health priorities of the borough.”

- 1.6. This report summarises performance of the last academic year and outlines future projects of the service.

2 DETAILS

2.1. Adult Learning Strategy

- 2.2. In January 2020 Cabinet agreed the refreshed strategic objectives for the Adult Learning Service. The objectives are to:

- Use an evidence based approach to commissioning to ensure the fullest return on investment.
- Embrace technological developments and support residents through the delivery of courses that improve learners’ economic and digital opportunities.
- Deliver courses to improve the health and wellbeing of our residents and reduce social isolation.
- Continue to provide popular courses whilst expanding provision for families to encourage intergenerational learning.
- Increase the quality and number of courses in employability and ensure that a thread of employability and life skills is weaved into all courses.
- Provide targeted courses for adults to improve literacy and / or numeracy skills to enable learners to participate more fully socially and / or economically.
- Further develop the range of courses for learners with learning difficulties and / or disabilities to enable them to live as independently as possible to improve their wellbeing and life chances.
- Tailor the learning journey for all learners from beginning to end so that they progress onto new opportunities.
- Deliver excellent teaching and learning across providers and work collaboratively with them to ensure that best practice is shared and embedded in course provision.

2.3. Providers

- 2.4. Merton Adult Learning Service commissions a range of providers in the borough to deliver services on its behalf. Contracts are currently in place with the following providers:

- South Thames College Group – Main adult learning contract. Accounts for approximately 80% of the grant allocation for Merton.
- GSS (Global Solution Services) – Contract for the provision of community based accredited learning courses.

- RHACC (Richmond and Hillcroft Adult and Community College) – Contract for the provision of courses for learners with learning difficulties and/or learning disabilities (LLDD).
 - A range of smaller providers are also commissioned on an annual basis to deliver community based family learning, digital inclusion and employability programmes. Current providers being used include City Lit, MiComputSolutions, The Assessment and Training Centre (TATC) Merton Home Tutoring (MHT) and Adult Training Network (ATN).
- 2.5. The main services contract, currently delivered by South Thames Group, expires on 31 July 2021. Cabinet agreed the award of the new contract on 8 February 2021. The new contract will ensure that more residents will have access to learning provision in the borough and the contract will focus in particular on upskilling residents in key areas identified in the job market in response to the Covid-19 pandemic.
- 2.6. **Ofsted Inspection**
- 2.7. Merton Adult Learning was inspected by Ofsted under the new Education Inspection Framework between 8 and 11 October 2019. Ofsted noted that good progress has been made across all of the provision. They said:
- 2.8. *“Learners gain a range of benefits from their courses. They enjoy the subjects they study. Those facing social isolation build their self-confidence and form new friendships while they study. Learners are taught valuable skills that help increase their self-esteem and play a more active role in the community. Learners who are not confident with English improve their speaking and comprehension.*
- 2.9. *Tutors create a positive work-ethic among learners. It helps learners to develop the behaviours they need to go on to study at a higher level or increase their prospects of employment.*
- 2.10. *Learners receive a range of advice and guidance that enable them to make the right career and study choices. Specialist careers advisors know what learners who have been out of work for some time need to help them seek employment. Tutors help learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and their families find the right next step for them.*
- 2.11. *Learners appreciate the high-quality accommodation at the community venues in which lessons take place. They make productive use of the resources at the various community settings. Learners feel safe and know whom to approach should they have any concerns.*
- 2.12. *Tutors are experienced, knowledgeable and well qualified in their subjects. They have high expectations for their learners.*
- 2.13. *Leaders and managers ensure that learners benefit from high-quality courses. They pay close attention to planning a curriculum that meets the social, economic and health priorities of the borough. For example, learners with LDD benefit from courses such as cookery, information and communication technologies and gardening.*

- 2.14. *Leaders and managers work well with local partners to shape and deliver the curriculum offer. They work with subcontractors who offer courses that meet their curricular ambitions.*
- 2.15. *Effective governance has resulted in leaders working well together to improve the quality of the curriculum.*
- 2.16. *Leaders and managers place a suitable priority on safeguarding. Leaders are thorough in checking the safeguarding arrangements at subcontractors before working with them. Staff are appropriately trained in safeguarding and the 'Prevent' duty. When they need to act to safeguard learners and promote their welfare they do so promptly and effectively."*
- 2.17. Since the outbreak of the pandemic there have been limitations on Ofsted inspections and significant focus has been placed on reviewing provider's capacity to deliver courses in different ways such as online and through distance learning methods.
- 2.18. Improvement actions have been incorporated into this year's Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) and formulate part of the continuous improvement of the service. Key areas for further improvement are:
- Continuing to work with providers to improve online platforms and increase resident access amongst disadvantaged groups to ICT to support their learning.
 - Work with providers to ensure that courses delivered in a class room are Covid safe and that learners are comfortable in their learning environment.
 - Further improve attendance levels in courses to above 90%.
 - Increase learner numbers on courses who live in disadvantaged wards.
 - Improve the tracking and reporting of learners' progression and destination once they have finished courses to better inform the service as to what impact the course has had.
 - Further develop the curriculum so addresses the future skills needs of residents.

2.19. **Performance**

2.20. The table below summarises end of academic year performance:

Measure	Total Academic Year 2018/19	Target	Total Academic Year 2019/20	Trend
Number of unique learners funded by the ESFA	1,841	1,112	1,717	▼
Number of enrolments funded by the ESFA	3,697	3,746	3,619	▼
Overall achievement on accredited courses	87%	85%	87%	▶
% of learners from deprived wards	30%	27%	28%	▼

% retention rate per annum	97%	93%	98%	▲
% of end of course evaluations where teaching and learning is rated as good and above	99%	95%	99%	▶
Average cost per learner	£375	£241	£386	▲

- 2.21. Performance in the 2019/20 academic year was affected by the pandemic although figures are still close in the majority of cases to 2018/19 performance. Term 3 performance was greatly impacted due to lockdown and in a normal year the majority of targets would have been exceeded. The reduction in enrolments during the pandemic matches the national picture.
- 2.22. Despite the challenges performance was still strong in retention and achievement with both figures being above national averages. Work to address inequality in the borough will be further developed this year with increased emphasis on supporting those who only have limited access to IT in the household.
- 2.23. **Covid-19 Response**
- 2.24. At the outbreak of the pandemic last March all in person courses were cancelled. The service worked closely with its providers to mobilise new ways of working to ensure that there was minimal disruption to learners throughout the pandemic. This has included moving a significant proportion of courses online and upskilling tutors and learners to work in new ways. The movement to working in new ways was at a far greater pace than the majority of adult learning providers.
- 2.25. Where online provision hasn't been possible regular keeping in touch sessions have been established with learners and hard copies of work posted to learners. In the case of some LDD provision socially distanced visits to learner's homes have also been undertaken.
- 2.26. Some limited in person courses started again in September where the provision is impractical to be delivered in a distance manner. This provision has again been paused since January 2021 due to the latest lockdown.
- 2.27. Recognising the impact the changes to provision have had on learners Merton Adult Learning has been successful in applying for £517,687 of additional funds to the Greater London Authority. These funds have been used to purchase additional IT equipment to enable learners with limited access at home to continue their learning. Equipment has also been purchased to ensure that classrooms are Covid safe and there is an increase of over a third in courses available. The additional course provision focuses in particular on reskilling residents for the changing job market along with additional courses focussing on health and wellbeing.

3 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 3.1. The London Borough of Merton undertook an extensive consultation process before deciding upon its commissioning model. All options of delivery were considered and the new model has achieved financial sustainability and a more developed curriculum to better meet the needs of Merton residents.

4 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED

- 4.1. Feedback and evaluation is gathered from all learners. Learner feedback is very high with 99% of learners rating teaching and learning as good or above.
- 4.2. The service is working to improve the information it records to track learners progression onto new courses or onto new employment opportunities. A new performance measure will be included in next year's reports to measure progress in this area.

5 TIMETABLE

- 5.1. The Adult Learning Service Plan was reviewed at the Sustainable Communities Overview & Scrutiny Panel on 19 January 2021 and details key project and timelines.

6 FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1. Merton Adult Learning relies solely on external grants to provide its provision. From the 2019/20 academic year the majority of the grants are now administered by the GLA and their allocation for Merton this year is £1,379,881. A smaller grant for out of London learners is administered by the ESFA of £36,710.

7 LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1. The main statutory basis for the adult learning service is section 15B of the Education Act 1996. This section empowers local authorities to secure the provision for their area of full-time or part-time education suitable to the requirements of persons who have attained the age of 19, including provision for persons from other areas. It includes power to secure the provision of training, including vocational, social, physical and recreational training, and of organised leisure time occupation which is provided in connection with the provision of education or training. The authority may do anything which appears to them to be necessary or expedient for the purposes of or in connection with the exercise of their functions under this section. In exercising their functions, the authority must in particular have regard to the needs of persons with learning difficulties or disabilities.
- 7.2. The authority does not therefore have a statutory duty to maintain an adult education service but must in considering whether to provide a service and what service to provide take account in particular of the needs of people with learning difficulties or disabilities.

8 HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1. A significant proportion of Adult Learning's investment is on those most socially and / or economically disadvantaged whilst providing a broad range

of learning opportunities to develop all resident's skills. Focussed programmes are developed that identify priority needs and use a wide range of sources to inform commissioning principles.

9 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

9.1. No implications identified for the purpose of this report.

10 RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

10.1. No implications identified for the purpose of this report. Risk registers are maintained and updated by the service.

11 APPENDICES – THE FOLLOWING DOCUMENTS ARE TO BE PUBLISHED WITH THIS REPORT AND FORM PART OF THE REPORT

- None included for the purpose of this report.

This page is intentionally left blank

Committee: Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Date: 4 May 2021

Wards: All

Subject: Library & Heritage Service Annual Report 2020/21

Lead officer: Anthony Hopkins – Head of Library, Heritage & Adult Education Service

Lead member: Councillor Caroline Cooper-Marbiah – Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure and Skills

Contact officer: Anthony Hopkins – Head of Library, Heritage & Adult Education Service

Recommendations:

-
1. That the Sustainable Communities Overview & Scrutiny Panel note progress made with the Library & Heritage Service in the last financial year, review performance and discuss key projects.
-

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1. The Library & Heritage Service annual report sets out the key achievements that have been delivered over the last year and highlights future projects. The last year has been an unprecedented year for library services along with all council services due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The report highlights the impact that this has had on service delivery and outlines the realigned priorities of the service going forward.
- 1.2. Merton's Library & Heritage Service continues to be a high performing and cost efficient service. It has kept all of its libraries open and has extended the opening hours of all of them over the last 10 years.
- 1.3. The main projects delivered, which have been impacted by the pandemic, include:
 - Setting up all of our public libraries as Covid secure facilities to ensure the highest levels of safety for our staff and customers.
 - Developing a 4-stage model of recovery that can quickly be adapted depending upon circumstances.
 - Expanding our online offer so that even more people have access to high quality e-books and other information. As part of this an expanded online events and activities programme has been launched.
 - Supporting the Council on wider projects including the establishment of the Community Response Hub, Shielding Service, Lateral Flow Test Centres and Operation Eagle.
 - The launch of Library of Things at Morden Library. An equipment loaning system.

- The launch of the new Heritage Strategy that outlines the strategic objectives of the Council and its partner organisations to further broaden participation and understanding of our shared heritage.
 - Continuing work to engage with underrepresented groups and to assist with reducing social isolation and digital exclusion.
- 1.4. The report details have been summarised under the objectives of ‘Libraries Deliver: Ambition for Public Libraries 2016 – 2021’, the DCMS’s 5-year strategy for public libraries in England. It also includes an additional section on wider community support that the service has provided in light of the pandemic.

2 DETAILS

2.1. Covid-19 Impact

- 2.2. Like the majority of sectors the Covid-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on the way services have been delivered. Following government guidance in March 2020 all libraries were closed to the public and staff were deployed to support with the wider Council response to the pandemic.
- 2.3. During the time of closure the Library & Heritage Service developed a 4-stage model of recovery for services that can be adapted in response to government or local restrictions. The 4 stages in summary are:
- All libraries closed and an expanded online offer.
 - A click and collect service with bookable PC’s available for essential use only.
 - All libraries open for browsing and PC services but with restrictions on dwell time and a limited activity programme.
 - Libraries return to pre Covid-19 levels of service.
- 2.4. Under all 4 models the Home Visits Library Service operates to ensure that Merton’s most vulnerable residents have access to high quality books and information.
- 2.5. The service reopened for click and collect services in July 2020 and resumed browsing services in September 2020. Since the second lockdown in November and London’s move to Tier 4 public libraries in Merton have fluctuated between providing click and collect and browsing services, in line with government guidance. At the time of publishing this report all libraries in Merton are open providing the stage 3 browsing service. Opening hours have been adapted throughout the pandemic to ensure that staffing is in place to implement the increased safety measures on site.
- 2.6. Covid-19 safety practices on site are stringent and have been developed with Health & Safety and Public Health colleagues. They have also incorporated the best in sector expertise and knowledge. Particular areas of focus in ensuring Covid-19 safety protocols are:

- Managing risk and ensuring that libraries have both site and individual staff risk assessments in place. In particular to focus on protecting people at higher risk.
- Communicating the additional safety measures in place to customers and ensuring that they are abiding by the new rules and regulations.
- Additional cleaning and PPE, including creating quarantine zones for the return of stock.
- Managing contact between staff and customers.
- Installing additional equipment such as Perspex screens at counters to improve social distancing.

2.7. **Increased Reading and Literacy**

2.8. *Reading and literacy are two of the most fundamental skills in life. Libraries give everyone free access to books and literature regardless of age, disability, wealth or education. This access makes libraries a catalyst for improved reading and literacy skills.*

2.9. **Project Sense**

2.10. Project Sense is a £94,826 Arts Council England funded project to make Merton's children's libraries even more accessible. The funding has been used to develop a comprehensive SEND (special educational needs and / or disabilities) stock and equipment offer and to ensure all library staff and volunteers are trained in better supporting children with SEND and their carers or parents.

2.11. There is a dedicated resource library (Learn, Play, Grow Resource Library) with specialist communication technology, specially adapted toys and switches and story bag books, which can be borrowed free of charge and are used for library activity sessions. Family learning courses including wellbeing, next steps back into education and employment and self-care and personal development have taken place for parents and carers of children with SEND needs.

2.12. Whilst the pandemic has had an effect on the project, officers remain in close contact with partner organisations and support groups. All of the events over the last year have been delivered online and there is a desire from participants for face-to-face activities to restart once it is safe to do so.

2.13. **Schools and Libraries Membership Scheme**

2.14. Merton has a unique schools and libraries membership scheme that all school age children aged 5 - 14 are signed up to. The scheme is an invaluable way of promoting reading for pleasure amongst children and the improved life chances it brings.

2.15. The schools and libraries membership scheme has been extended to all SEND schools in the borough as part of Project Sense.

2.16. During the pandemic the service has kept in close contact with schools and is providing a book loaning service that prioritises children with limited or no access to books in their household. All school children have also been set

up with access to the Library Service's free online resources, which includes access to approximately 100,000 e-books along with a range of online study materials such as Britannica Online.

2.17. **Reading Promotions and Campaigns**

2.18. The Library & Heritage Service continues to develop its promotions and campaigns to tie in with initiatives such as World Book Day, National Poetry Day and Black History Month.

2.19. In January 2021 the services Health & Wellbeing month delivered 14 events involving 299 participants. All events since the start of the pandemic have been delivered online and an online library of events is being built up. Plans are in place to start delivering physical events and activities when it is safe to do so.

2.20. **Home Visits Library Service**

2.21. The Home Visits Library Service has continued to operate throughout the pandemic by delivering in a socially distanced manner and with volunteers keeping in touch with customers who are often vulnerable and with limited outside contact. The service has connected in with the Community Response Hub and is part of the wider community offer for clinically extremely vulnerable (CEV) residents.

2.22. **Cultural and Creative Enrichment**

2.23. *Cultural and creative opportunities enrich lives. They are important in developing local quality of life, sense of place and individual wellbeing. Libraries are well placed to extend cultural engagement because of their use by all social groups and their role as inclusive cultural hubs within communities.*

2.24. **Merton Arts Space**

2.25. Merton has two established Arts Spaces in Wimbledon and Mitcham libraries. These spaces enhance the cultural offer through libraries and have flexible lighting, sound and stage facilities to enable professional productions in community settings. A wide range of cultural events across different artistic disciplines has been delivered.

2.26. Since the pandemic the spaces haven't offered any physical events but the spaces are being used to support with additional study space for students and are being used as production suites to host a wide range of high quality online events. A music recording studio has also been installed in the Wimbledon space and is scheduled to open later this year.

2.27. **Merton Memories**

2.28. The Merton Memories web resource continues to develop and there are now over 18,000 unique images of the borough available for residents to review. The community is continually encouraged to help identify photos and add comments and information relating to the images.

2.29. Carved in Stone, Merton's digital archive dedicated to World War One, is also hosted via this website. This provides online access to over 700 profiles of local combatants and war workers, in addition to information about life on the Home Front and 2000 historic documents.

- 2.30. The heritage online offer has significantly expanded this year, resulting in a 30% increase in usage. A range of online activities and events have been developed from heritage trails and craft activities, to local history talks, quizzes and displays. A resource library has also been built so that schools, care homes and other settings can use the materials to provide classes or events. Special history pages have formed an integral part of the Council's commemoration of Windrush Day, the anniversaries of VE/VJ Day and Holocaust Memorial Day.
- 2.31. **Heritage Discovery Day**
- 2.32. Merton's annual Heritage Discovery Day celebrates the rich heritage of the borough and last year's event in the Heritage & Local Studies Centre was supported by 30 local heritage organisations and community groups. This year's event was delivered largely online with some small exhibitions available in the Heritage Centre. The event attracted over 150 visitors to heritage sites across the borough and over 1000 visitors to the Discovery Day web resources.
- 2.33. **Merton Heritage Strategy 2021 - 2025**
- 2.34. Cabinet approved Merton's refreshed Heritage Strategy on 18 January 2021. The strategy is focussed around four objectives:
- Raise Merton's profile by increasing public access to the borough's unique and diverse cultural heritage;
 - Safeguard the borough's varied heritage sites and resources;
 - Making Merton's heritage provision more inclusive and working collaboratively to widen public engagement and participation;
 - Increasing funding and investment in Merton's heritage through partnership work, external funding and sponsorship.
- 2.35. The Strategy summarises the achievements of the previous Heritage Strategy and outlines the objectives and key priorities of the Council and its partners over the next 5 years.
- 2.36. The Strategy seeks to address funding challenges and increase public engagement by encouraging collaborative work, the sharing of expertise and use of digital technology. It has been devised with heritage stakeholders and in consultation with the voluntary and business sectors. A public consultation was also undertaken to gather wider views.
- 2.37. Underpinning the Heritage Strategy 2021 – 2025 will be a work plan, drawn up in collaboration with heritage providers and community organisations, to monitor key projects highlighted in the strategy.
- 2.38. **Improved digital access and literacy**
- 2.39. *Public libraries provide a trusted network of accessible locations with free WiFi, computers, and other technology. As the world becomes more digital, access to technology and the ability to operate confidently and safely are ever more important.*
- 2.40. *Trained library staff, supported by volunteers, help local people use online services covering areas like benefits, business, health and wellbeing. They*

also provide the training and support individuals need to become independent users of digital services.

2.41. **Assisted Digital Support**

2.42. The Library & Heritage Service focusses its support on those most in need who potentially have limited access or knowledge of the Internet and other IT applications. In order to support residents, it provides a broad range of one to one and group IT support.

2.43. As part of the development of its assisted digital offer staff and volunteers have been trained in supporting customers with Universal Credit and other government services. Libraries play an important role in supporting customers with online Council services and other government services. They are also set up as information points for Citizens Advice Bureau services.

2.44. **Connecting Merton - IT Equipment Loan Scheme**

2.45. The Library Service has been working with voluntary sector partners to provide 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.

2.46. The scheme launched in pilot format on 15 February 2021 and officially launched on 8 March 2021.

2.47. **Library Services Platform (LSP)**

2.48. Libraries replaced their core ICT infrastructure with a new system provided by Sirsi Dynix in 2019. Working collaboratively with the renamed The Libraries Consortium (TLC), a consortium consisting of 19 London boroughs and a growing number of out of London authorities, a new platform has been procured that provides customers with improved web services including better personalisation of customer interests. The new solution also provides features such as a customer app and better integration with online services such as the borough's e-books and online reference resources.

2.49. Over the course of the contract the platform will be further developed to include additional features for customers including the enhancement of events and activities promotion along with new customisation and personalisation options. The new customer platform is expected to go live in May 2021.

2.50. A new customer mobile phone app will also enable customers to issue, renew and return items in a contactless way through their smart phone along with many other interactive features.

2.51. **Self-Service Technology**

2.52. Self-service technology continues to be an important element of the libraries delivery model and accounted for 98% of customer transactions in 2019/20.

- 2.53. Self-service technology has recently been replaced and includes new features such as the latest cashless payment options, contactless issuing and returning of stock and increased reliability.
- 2.54. The new provider is also in the process of installing new self-service technology that will enable access to libraries in a staffless environment from April 2022. This project will deliver agreed MTFS savings and ensure that the current opening hours offer remains in place.
- 2.55. **Healthier and Happier Lives**
- 2.56. *Councils have a responsibility for their communities' social wellbeing and for public health. They increasingly focus on preventative work, helping people manage their own health to reduce both the burden on the NHS and health inequalities. By extending joint working and sharing resources with health providers, public libraries will become increasingly important partners, leading to users having healthier and happier lives.*
- 2.57. **Prevention services**
- 2.58. Libraries play an important and visible role as the 'High Street presence' of the Council and play a vital role in supporting and signposting residents towards obtaining appropriate information and accessing Council services.
- 2.59. Collaboration has been strengthened with partners to provide better support to assist people in living healthier and happier lives. This has included the introduction of new standards of service to make our buildings more dementia and autism friendly whilst enhancing the information offer.
- 2.60. The prevention offer through libraries is a key part of Community & Housing transformation plans and work is being undertaken to look at how services provided by Adult Social Care and Housing colleagues can be better supported through the library network and building on the assisted digital support work already in place. As part of the wider Recovery & Reset project of the Council further work will be undertaken to ascertain how wider Council services can be even better supported via the library network.
- 2.61. **Health Offer**
- 2.62. The service works collaboratively with Public Health, social care, other health providers and Adult Learning colleagues to promote a range of initiatives to link in messages around good personal health. This includes supporting initiatives to raise awareness of health matters such as healthy eating, sexual health, diabetes and smoking cessation. A year round approach to promoting healthier lifestyles through libraries is in place and links in with national and local initiatives.
- 2.63. **Tuned In**
- 2.64. The impact of loneliness is a major public issue. It is known to have a detrimental impact on health and wellbeing causing depression and increasing the risk of premature death. Merton's public health team estimate that there are over 8,000 lonely people who live in the borough.
- 2.65. Tuned In launched in 2019 and is a project which aims to combat some of the issues of loneliness in the borough with funding from the Winter Pressures Fund. Tuned In works with acclaimed musician, performer, writer

and London Libraries Ambassador Jah Wobble (aka John Wardle), who facilitates 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. They create an environment for people from all walks of life to come together and enjoy mutual support.

- 2.66. The project targets men, particularly those in the age group 50+, where loneliness is at its highest. However, the project is open and accessible to all. The sessions work on a drop in basis and regularly see 30+ individuals attend. The project works in partnership with a number of local health and wellbeing groups.
- 2.67. Since the start of the pandemic Tuned In sessions have moved online and have been delivered through music production classes. Participants have enhanced their digital skills and recorded a number of songs ready for a commercial music release that is expected in summer 2021. The album will be released via Cherry Red Records.
- 2.68. The Monday evening sessions will start in person again when it is safe to do so and the now well established online sessions will also continue. Development of participant's skills will continue when they can safely use the newly installed music recording studio at the space.
- 2.69. To date over 170 people have participated in Tuned In sessions. Participants are tracked through their participation and asked a range of questions on their health and wellbeing. Of participants surveyed in the last evaluation round the following outcomes were reported:
- 96% of respondents reporting that Tuned In sessions had improved their health and wellbeing.
 - 35% of participants have increased their participation in sports, fitness or recreational (leisure) clubs or activities.
 - 52% of participants are more aware of health services in the borough since attending Tuned In sessions.
 - 83% have developed new friendships and / or relationships by attending Tuned In sessions.
 - 61% have developed more satisfying friendships and relationships since attending Tuned In.
 - 70% of participants feel more part of their local community since attending Tuned In sessions.
 - 74% of participants now feel they have a greater network of people to ask for help.
- 2.70. **Stronger, More Resilient Communities**
- 2.71. *Libraries are open to everyone. Their staff understand their community's needs and are trusted to provide reliable guidance and support on a wide range of issues when people need help. So they're vital to help public service's reach out into communities.*

2.72. **Volunteering**

2.73. Merton's volunteering numbers are some of the highest of any UK library authority with 545 volunteers contributing 27,437 hours in 2019/20. Since the pandemic volunteering numbers have reduced due to some volunteers being unable to attend libraries due to their own health or personal safety concerns. Some services that volunteers support with have also either been stopped or reduced during the pandemic due to restrictions around what can safely take place in libraries.

2.74. All volunteers continue to be kept in touch with and the vast majority have indicated that they are keen to start volunteering again when it is safe to do so. An increasing number of volunteer roles are also now being set up to provide support remotely such as supporting with marketing initiatives, telephone IT support and supporting with improving online content. Volunteers also play a key role in delivering online events and activities and some libraries have been set up as production suites to deliver online events to a high standard.

2.75. **Widening the community offer**

2.76. The library service provides a wide range of activities and events working in partnership with organisations from the community, business and health sectors. It also organises events to coincide with national initiatives such as LGBTQ Month, Black History Month, World Book Day and Dementia Awareness Week and supports borough events such as Wimbledon Bookfest and Merton Arts Trail. Work has also been intensified to work with supporting families with home schooling and to engage with clinically extremely vulnerable (CEV) groups.

2.77. **Library of Things**

2.78. With funding from the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Morden Library has recently launched the Library of Things. The Library of Things is an equipment loaning scheme that loans residents popular items that they may not have the space or money to purchase for their homes. Examples of items loaned include garden equipment such as hedge trimmers along with things such as projectors, carpet cleaning machines, electric sanders and other home DIT equipment. All of the items loaned are good quality items donated by companies like Karcher and Bosch.

2.79. Evidence from the scheme shows a range of benefits. It enables residents to feel better connected with their community and reduces spend and waste on equipment with users more likely to repair or recycle items.

2.80. **Greater Prosperity**

2.81. *The prosperity of an area is crucial for residents' wellbeing and quality of life. We want everyone to have the opportunity to participate in and benefit from this. Libraries support business to start up and grow by providing information and working with local economic development organisations to signpost businesses to sources of support and advice.*

2.82. **Employability and skills support**

- 2.83. Libraries provide a range of employability support services working with training providers. Examples include CV writing workshops, job clubs and other skills training.
- 2.84. 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.
- 2.85. Wimbledon Library hosts 'Wimbletech', an organisation that provides space, advice and support for start-up companies and co-workers and is part of Merton's Inward Investment Strategy. It currently has almost 200 resident members with a community digital platform recently launched.
- 2.86. The role of supporting residents back to work and reskilling has been further emphasised throughout the pandemic. Merton's library service continues to provide free access to public PC's and Wi-Fi and these have played a crucial role in supporting residents apply for jobs and make claims and enquiries to government for further support.
- 2.87. **Helping Everyone Achieve Their Full Potential**
- 2.88. *Libraries raise people's aspirations and promote lifelong learning, supplementing formal education provided through schools, colleges and adult education. This is increasingly important given the accelerated pace of change in the workplace and the world more generally, meaning that skills and knowledge need more frequent updating.*
- 2.89. **Online Services**
- 2.90. With the introduction of the new LSP online services have been enhanced and customers have improved access to resources such as e-books and online reference resources. The e-book offer has also significantly expanded due to collaboration work with other boroughs. Residents have access to over 100,000 e-book titles and around 400 e-magazines are published monthly. Provision has been significantly increased through the pandemic and more people are accessing these services than ever before.
- 2.91. Since the start of the pandemic e-book usage has increased by 40% and online membership has increased by 73%
- 2.92. **Adult Learning Services**
- 2.93. A range of services are provided in libraries to encourage lifelong learning and the service works closely with schools, colleges and adult learning providers to complement the borough offer.
- 2.94. Following the commissioning of adult learning services libraries are increasingly being used as venues for training. This includes a high proportion of courses in priority areas such as courses for people with learning disabilities and community based employability and language courses. Housing providers use libraries for their community training programmes too. The library setting provides an excellent environment for people to develop their skills and utilise the free resources available to them.

3 PERFORMANCE

3.1. The full year 2019/20 KPI (Key Performance Indicators) are summarised below. It should be noted that performance was impacted by the pandemic in comparison to the previous year's figures:

Service Plan #	Description of performance measure	2018/19	2019/20	Target
SP08	No. of people accessing the library service by borrowing an item or using a People's Network terminal at least once in the previous 12 months	71,648	65,791	56,500
SP09	Number of visitors accessing the library service online	234,486	255,417	220,000
SP279	Monthly transactions – Staff and Self-Service	98%	94%	97%
SP280	Active volunteering numbers in libraries	276	304	230
SP287	Income generation	£374,024	£420,951	£317,167
SP480	Visitor Numbers	1,124,613	1,115,562	1,200,000

3.2. Performance has improved across half of the indicators. The indicators that have been most adversely affected are the ones that required physical visits to libraries.

3.3. The 2020/21 end of year figures are currently being collated. Initial evidence is pointing towards a decline in performance against most performance indicators due to the impact of the pandemic.

3.4. Whilst it is difficult to project the long term position the 2020/21 figures estimate a 60% reduction in income, an 80% reduction in physical visits and a decline in usage numbers and volunteers. Whilst these are concerning the service has reported significant increases in its online services, with a 40% increase in e-book borrowing and a 73% increase in online membership. The service has also received strong feedback from customers that they intend to more regularly use libraries once it is safer to do so.

4 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED

4.1. Merton Library Customer Survey

4.2. The Library & Heritage Service Customer Survey was undertaken in October 2019. The responses showed high levels of customer satisfaction. The survey was conducted in two parts with a survey constructed for users of the library aged 16 and over and a separate survey for children and young people aged under 16.

4.3. The library customer survey for users over the age of 16 reported the following headline figures:

- 95% of respondents rated the service overall as very good or good, an increase of 2% compared to the last survey, with 100% of respondents satisfied.
- 96% of respondents said they would recommend the service to someone else.

- 93% of customers rate library opening hours as very good or good and 100% of respondents are satisfied with the current opening hours offer.
- 99% of respondents regarded libraries as a safe space.
- Book borrowing remains the most popular service with 63% of respondents saying they had borrowed a book in the last year.
- 94% of respondents rated the overall customer service experience as very good or good with 100% satisfied with their experience.
- The biggest improvement area in terms of results was in the difference that libraries have made to people's lives with 75% of respondents saying using the library had made a difference to their lives; an increase of 5% compared to the last survey, with:
 - 53% of respondents saying the library had improved their confidence, a 15% increase since the previous survey;
 - 34% said it had helped them get better at reading, an increase of 9% since the last survey;
 - 30% saying it had improved their social life, an increase of 12% since the last survey;
 - 19% said they had improved their relationships as a result of using libraries, an increase of 7% since the last survey;
 - 14% said that using libraries had improved their health, a 4% increase since the previous survey.

4.4. The library customer survey for children and young people under the age of 16 reported the following headline results:

- 100% of respondents were satisfied with their library experience with 97% of respondents rating the library as very good/good, a 4% increase on the previous survey.
- 100% of respondents were satisfied with the overall customer service they experienced with 97% rating it as very good/good, a 4% increase since the previous survey.
- 95% respondents rated the inside of the library as very good/good, up from 91% since the last survey.
- 100% of respondents considered Merton's libraries to be a safe place with 95% of respondents rating the safety of the library as very good/good, an increase of 4% from the previous survey.
- 83% of respondents rated the choice of books as very good/good, a 6% increase in satisfaction since the last survey.
- 100% of respondents were satisfied with staff helpfulness with 96% rating it as very good/good, a 2% increase from the previous survey.

- 88% of all respondents said that the library had helped them in some way, a 20% increase since the previous survey.

5 TIMETABLE

- 5.1. The Library & Heritage Service Plan 2021/22 outlines key projects to be delivered and was presented at the Sustainable Communities Overview & Scrutiny Panel on 19 January 2021.
- 5.2. Key projects highlighted for 2021/22 are:
 - Covid-19 Recovery Work. As detailed earlier in the report a significant portion of time will be put into recovering services, where there is demand, to pre-pandemic levels whilst also continuing to enhance digital services.
 - Delivering a programme of events and initiatives to improve resident's health and wellbeing that builds on a number of the initiatives mentioned earlier in this report.
 - Increasing community participation in heritage services and further raising awareness of Merton's rich heritage.
 - Work to assist with improving residents economic and employment prospects by delivering collaborative projects such as enhancing the adult learning offer through libraries, hosting job clubs and other employment support and enhancing the digital offer through schemes such as loaning IT equipment to vulnerable residents.
 - Further enhancement of the library digital offer including the launch of the new library services platform.
 - Enhancing the offer to children and young people to support them with their personal development.

6 FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1. The Library & Heritage Service has 7 libraries and a Heritage & Local Studies Centre based on the second floor of Morden Library. All libraries have either seen significant redevelopment works or new libraries have been built since 2005 apart from West Barnes Library.
- 6.2. There has been a pause in redevelopment proposals for West Barnes Library whilst Cross Rail 2 development options were considered by Network Rail. Officers are currently undertaking renewed work to move forward with the redevelopment proposals for West Barnes Library, which has been further impacted by the pandemic.
- 6.3. The controllable net current budget for the Library & Heritage Service, without NNDR and depreciation, is £1,603,280 as at January 2021. A savings proposal in the MTFs has been proposed to deliver £60,000 of savings in 2022/23 through the reduction of the current security guard contract and an increase in income generation.

7 LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1. The Council is required under section 7 Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 to provide a 'comprehensive and efficient' library service, addressing the 'needs of adults and children'. Local authorities have a statutory duty to make provision for a library service but may decide on how this is to be done.
- 7.2. Certain aspects of the service must be provided for free including free lending of books, free access to information and free library membership.

8 HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1. Libraries hold a unique place within the community as a public space that is open to all. Where customers cannot make it to libraries a Home Visits Library Service provides books and other materials to people's homes.
- 8.2. Residents from BAME backgrounds make the most effective use of libraries with high proportions in particular of Asian and Black British people.

9 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1. None identified for the purpose of this report.

10 RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1. No specific issues identified in this report. A risk register is maintained for projects detailed in the Library & Heritage Service Plan.

11 APPENDICES – THE FOLLOWING DOCUMENTS ARE TO BE PUBLISHED WITH THIS REPORT AND FORM PART OF THE REPORT

- None included for the purpose of this report.

Committee: Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Date: 4 May 2021

Subject: AFFECT OF COVID ON LEISURE CENTRES

Lead officer: John Bosley

Lead member: Councillor Caroline Cooper-Marbiah

Contact officer: Francis McParland

Recommendations:

- A. For members to note the actions taken in partnership with Greenwich Leisure Limited (GLL) following the Covid-19 outbreak in 2020.
 - B.
-

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

To report to the committee on the impact of the Covid-19 outbreak on the Leisure Centre contract and Leisure Centre operations.

2 DETAILS

- 2.1. On the 20 March 2020, Central Government required providers of leisure facilities to close as part of their response to the Covid-19 pandemic. This requirement first came into force on the 21 March 2020, timeline below.
- 2.2. Merton's operator GLL immediately complied with this legislation and closed the three (3) leisure centres in the borough. Leisure officers and managers from GLL swiftly developed closedown plans, while the council's client team lead on activating its Business Continuity Plan (BCP) and preparing the subsequent Business Recovery Plan (BRP).
- 2.3. The closedown plans for the facilities outlined what GLL had to do to ensure centres were safely closed in line with Government requirements, the BCP set in motion the approach Public Space client team took to communicate with GLL during the closure and establish the process of support as outlined by the Government's Procurement Policy Note (PPN 02/20 & PPN 04/20) published on the 20 March 2020 to address suppliers relief due to coronavirus (COVID-19). This plan included daily updates from the GLL management who were not furloughed and were doing daily checks on the centres. The BRP focused on what the Leisure offer would be following re-opening and how the new way of working would look like to enable full and timely recovery.
- 2.4. The lockdown led the council and GLL to adopt a Covid-19 safe business model, which following reopening, involved partitioning the gyms so that social distancing was observed by users, putting in a booking system for the gym and swimming offers as well as encouraging customers to shower at home. Fitness classes were distanced and held outside where possible and dependant on weather.

- 2.5. Shortly after the initial lockdown on the 24 March, GLL alerted the council (and all other councils they had contracts with) that they anticipated a considerable financial shortfall and required financial assistance on top of the other areas of help they had used including the Government job protection scheme, business rates holidays and deferral of VAT payments.
- 2.6. Following the request, officers worked with GLL to consider how best to support them through the closure and in their development of re-opening plans whilst keeping their previous customer base supported through such measures as suspended membership fees, free online exercise classes and workout plans.
- 2.7. Once the centres re-opened on the 25 July 2020, we kept rigorous reporting procedures so we could follow the trends and appetite for customers returning to the centres until the further lockdown restrictions on the 5 November 2020 came into force.
- 2.8. Leisure centres were allowed to reopen following the four (4) week lockdown in November 2020 from the 2 December 2020, albeit for a brief period during the Christmas period until the Tier 4 lockdown on the 20 December 2020 followed by the third (3) national lockdown on 6 January 2021.
- 2.9. Following the most recent lockdown, the centres once again re-opened on 12 April 2021, and the table shows the overall usage figures for the two weeks since opening compared with December 2020 opening.

Gym usage as a percentage of maximum	Swim usage as a percentage of maximum
Week 1 4,098 attendees 34.2% of max. capacity -2.4% from Dec 2020	Week 1 1712 attendees 38.2% of max. capacity +17.2% from Dec 2020
Week 2 4290 attendees 38.2% of max. capacity +1.1% from Dec 2020	Week 2 2515 attendees 59.7% of max. capacity +21.5% from Dec 2020

- 2.10. Figures for the gym are similar to previous opening figures and swim figures are far higher than the December recovery period. It should be noted that maximum attendance was rarely achieved prior to lockdown. Swim figures for the first two *weekends* have been 88% of maximum.
- 2.11. Memberships have continued during lockdown, with people joining and leaving throughout. In April 2021 there have been 97 new members and 57 cancelling, leaving a net positive growth in new members. In addition 9% (433) of members still have frozen membership and GLL are prioritising these members to reactivate their memberships following the opening of the facilities for individual training, in anticipation for class based activities from the 17 May 2021. Supporting this, officers have developed a Transition Plan with GLL which will monitor closely GLLs transition to a full “pre-Covid-19” programme.

- 2.12. In terms of the impacts of the pandemic in achieving business recovery, the potential unpredictability of the relaxing of Covid-19 rules and potential regulations that may be imposed in the future, which impacts customer behaviour coupled with customer affordability due to external pressures on household incomes continues to fuel uncertainty in this service area.

3 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 3.1. The council has chosen to support GLL through this period of uncertainty and to provide relief funding and an additional repayable grant to support the longer term viability of the activity. Other options were to part support or provide no relief funding.

4 TIMETABLE AND SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

DATE	ACTIVITY
20 March 2020	Leisure Centres last day of trading
24 March 2020	GLL alert Merton to financial shortfall
02 June 2020	Key Decision Report Agreed to Support GLL with an interest free repayable grant of £305,555 to cover the period 20 March to 30 June 2020
09 July 2020	Government announcements on reopening of Leisure Centres
03 August 2020	Key Decision Report Agreed to Support GLL with an interest free repayable grant of £200,501 to cover the period 01 July to 30 September 2020 and to provide 'Relief' from paying the council under the contract terms
20 December 2020	Government announces closure of gyms in Tier 4 areas, this rolls into lockdown on 20 December
31 December 2020	Key Decision Report agreed regarding further financial support for GLL by way of an interest free repayable grant of £68,986 to cover the period 01 October 2020 to 31 March 2021 and to provide 'Relief' from paying the council under the contract terms.
February 2021	Sport England National Recovery Fund grants LBM £405,000 plus £1,500 for monitoring. The money is being transferred to GLL for their full recovery to the end of March 2021 as part of the funding conditions.
April 2021 to Quarter 3 2021/22	Through detailed analysis of GLL finances, we have budget projections based on activity levels and membership numbers that the business will be back to being able to pay the Management Fee as contracted by Quarter 3 2021/22.

5 FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1. Since March 2020 to end of March 2021, the amount of relief given to GLL from paying the monthly income to the council is £840,054.12.

- 5.2. In addition, the amount of grants given to GLL totals £575,042. However, these are repayable grants, and will be repaid over the next 10 years of the contract by changes to the profit share arrangements. The repayment terms mean that the council will receive 100% of the GLL's "Operating Surplus above Contractor Profit" each financial year until either the grants are repaid, or until the end of the contract in 2030.
- 5.3. To offset the payments, the lost monthly income from GLL is partially recoverable through the government's loss of income scheme for local authorities. Money has been paid to the council, however it is a lump sum for all affected services.
- 5.4. The monthly management fee expected this year once GLL recover is £76,566.

6 LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1. The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (England) Regulation 2020 (First Regulations), provided that indoor fitness studios, gyms, swimming pools, or other indoor leisure centres "must cease to carry on that business" from 2pm on 21 March 2020. The First Regulations, which have now been revoked made it an offence to contravene the First Regulations "without reasonable excuse".
 - 6.2. The First Regulations were revoked by the Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (No. 2) (England) Regulation 2020 (Second Regulations). The Second Regulations continue to enforce closure of businesses from 4 July 2020 for a period of six months. These regulations have now expired on 4 January 2021.
 - 6.3. The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (No. 3) (England) Regulation 2020 (Third Regulations) came into force on 18th July 2020 and expire 17th July 2021. The Third Regulations give the local authority powers to make directions in relation to the closing, restricting of entry and restrictions in relation to location of persons in premises. It is an offence under the Third Regulations to contravene a direction made in relation to the premises.
 - 6.4. The Council has provided financial assistance to leisure providers pursuant to guidance as noted under government issued guidance under Procurement Policy Notes with reference numbers 02/20 and 04/20 that related to the assistance and transition to re-opening. The requirement of these guidance notes was that they must be carried out lawfully and in particular in accordance with the Public Contracts Regulations 2015. The mechanisms for this support and recovery of funds are detailed in section 5 of this report which describes the mechanism that the Council and its supplier have utilised to give effect to the relevant guidance.

7 HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1. Leisure Centres are important community resources in which communities can take part in community sport and social activities. These venues offer

activities and events which engage with all people of all backgrounds and they do so to generate positive community cohesion experiences

- 7.2. The appointed operator for the council's leisure centres, Greenwich Leisure Limited (GLL), is an established charitable social enterprise working on a not-for-profit basis for the benefit of our communities, enabling us to deliver cost effective activities to improve our health and wellbeing.

8 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1. Leisure Centres, on the whole, are venues where activities and events take place to bring people and communities together. They are places that provide positive activities and role models and they discourage crime and disorder by offering positive alternatives

9 RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1. The greatest risk for the council is that GLL either does not survive the economic impact of the pandemic (longer-term) considering the national uncertainty of this service area, or seeks significant changes to the contract with the council, which has the potential, ultimately, of leaving the council without a viable operator. This would necessitate the sourcing of a new operator or alternative delivery model in a difficult market & economic climate. The council may have to, as an interim, take the direct management of the service back in-house, this would cause increased risks from a Health and Safety perspective, since GLL have been doing daily visits to check on all facilities to ensure that all plant and machinery are continuing to tick over and are in good working order as well as the buildings being safe throughout the lockdown period and are now mobilising the centres in readiness for re-opening.

10 APPENDICES – THE FOLLOWING DOCUMENTS ARE TO BE PUBLISHED WITH THIS REPORT AND FORM PART OF THE REPORT – NONE

11 BACKGROUND PAPERS



- 11.1. The key decision and report for seeking approval for providing initial financial support to our provider, can be found here - <https://democracy.merton.gov.uk/mglIssueHistoryHome.aspx?IId=19597&optionId=0>
- 11.2. The key decision report for seeking approval of additional financial support to our service provider, can be found here - <https://democracy.merton.gov.uk/ieDecisionDetails.aspx?ID=1007>
- 11.3. The key decision report for the final funding to the service provider can be found here - <https://democracy.merton.gov.uk/ieDecisionDetails.aspx?ID=1107>

This page is intentionally left blank

Environment and Regeneration February performance





















E&R Public Protection performance report

Dept.	PI Code & Description	Feb 2021					2020/21				
		Value	Target	Status	Short Trend	Long Trend	Value	Target	Status	Short Trend	Long Trend
Parking											
Parking	CRP 044 Parking services estimated revenue (Monthly)	960,900	1,808,645				11,954,246	19,895,095			
Parking	SP 258 Sickness- No of days per FTE from snapshot report (parking) (Monthly)	2.44	0.67				16.87	7.33			
Parking	SP 509 % of Permits applied/processed online (Monthly)	97%	55%				97.09%	55%			
Parking	SP 510 % of PCN Appeals received online (Monthly)	81%	55%				82.45%	55%			
Parking	SP 511 Blue Badge Inspections - cumulative (Monthly)	0	90				0	90			
Parking	SP 512 Total cashless usage against cash payments at machines (Monthly)	75%	60%				72.18%	60%			
Parking	SP 513 Percentage of cases 'heard' and won at ETA	Quarterly measure					76.67%	73%			
RSP											
Regulatory Services	CRP 120 / SP 562 % of Regulatory Services service requests with an initial response within the "defined timescale"	Quarterly measure					87.48%	90%		N/A	N/A
Regulatory Services	CRP 121 / SP 565 NEW FOR 2020-21 Number of monitoring stations that meet annual Particulate air quality objectives	Annual measure					N/A	TBC	N/A	N/A	N/A
Regulatory Services	CRP 122 / SP 566 NEW FOR 2020-21 Number of monitoring stations measuring below the Nitrogen Dioxide air quality objectives (Annual)	Annual measure					N/A	TBC	N/A	N/A	N/A
Regulatory Services	DATA 010 Safeguarding older people - number of cases investigated and intervene in cases of residents being targeted by financial scams and abuse (Quarterly)	Data only					55	Data		N/A	N/A
Regulatory Services	DATA 011 Number of new high risk massage and special treatment premises inspections carried out within 20 working	Data only					6	Data		N/A	N/A

	days of the premises being ready to trade						
Regulatory Services	DATA 012 Number of Air Quality Audits (using GLA toolkit) of schools, prioritising those in the highest pollution areas	Data only	2	Data		N/A	N/A
Regulatory Services	SP 521 Total % compliance of non-road mobile machinery on major construction sites with GLA emissions standards	Annual measure	N/A	85%	N/A	N/A	N/A
Regulatory Services	SP 561 Percentage of alcohol and regulated entertainment licences issued within 10 working days of the conclusion of the 28 day consultation period, excluding those that are subject to a licensing hearing	Quarterly measure	82.57%	95%		N/A	N/A
Regulatory Services	SP 563 NEW FOR 2020-21 Safeguarding young people - carry out age restricted sales physical interventions for knives, alcohol, fireworks, tobacco and e-cigarettes	Annual measure	N/A	TBC	N/A	N/A	N/A
Regulatory Services	SP 564 NEW FOR 2020-21 High risk A & B and non-compliant C-rated food establishments due for inspection completed (Annual)	Annual measure	N/A	100%	N/A	N/A	N/A

Page 34

Q&R Public Spaces

Dept.	PI Code & Description	Feb 2021					2020/21				
		Value	Target	Status	Short Trend	Long Trend	Value	Target	Status	Short Trend	Long Trend
Waste Services											
Waste Management & Cleansing	CRP 097 / SP 065 % Household waste recycled and composted (Monthly in arrear)	39.42%	48%				40.45%	48%			
Waste Management & Cleansing	CRP 103 / SP 454 % of fly-tips removed within 24 hours	76%	95%				89.36%	95%			
Waste Management & Cleansing	CRP 123 / SP 567% of sites surveyed on local street inspections for litter that meet the required standard (Monthly) and quarterly in line with NI 195 reporting	89.35%	87%				87.39%	87%		N/A	N/A
Waste Management & Cleansing	CRP 124 / SP 568% of street reports rectified within the contract standard time frame	DNR	90%	DNR			98.03%	90%		N/A	N/A
Waste Management & Cleansing	CRP 125 / SP 570% of sites surveyed that meet the required standard for detritus	Measured Quarterly					80.5%	80%		N/A	N/A

Waste Management & Cleansing	CRP 126 / SP 573 Number of refuse collections including recycling and kitchen waste (excluding garden waste) missed per 100,000 (Monthly)	85	65				837	715		N/A	N/A
Waste Management & Cleansing	DATA 013 Number of street cleansing site inspections undertaken by Client team (target 868 per month, 10,416 per year) (Monthly)	1,082	Data				33,786	Data		N/A	N/A
Waste Management & Cleansing	DATA 014 Number of waste collection site inspections undertaken by Client team (Monthly)	0	Data				3,734	Data		N/A	N/A
Waste Management & Cleansing	DATA 015 Number of spot checks undertaken re Health & Safety compliance (Phase C Lot 1 Services) (Monthly)	0	Data				0	Data		N/A	N/A
Waste Management & Cleansing	DATA 016 Number of Environmental Enforcement incidents formally (NOT formerly) processed (Monthly)	224	Data				931	Data		N/A	N/A
Waste Management & Cleansing	SP 064 % Residents satisfied with refuse collection (Annual) (ARS)	Measured annually					N/A	73%	N/A	N/A	N/A
Waste Management & Cleansing	SP 066 Residual waste kg per household (Monthly in arrear)	47.3	39.5				47.3	39.5			
Waste Management & Cleansing	SP 067 % Municipal solid waste sent to landfill (waste management & commercial waste) (Monthly in arrear)	4%	10%				4%	10%			
Waste Management & Cleansing	SP 262 % Residents satisfied with recycling facilities	Measured annually					N/A	72%	N/A	N/A	N/A
Waste Management & Cleansing	SP 269 % Residents satisfied with street cleanliness	Measured annually					N/A	57%	N/A	N/A	N/A
Waste Management & Cleansing	SP 354 Total waste arising per households (KGs)	78.8	80				756.72	830			
Waste Management & Cleansing	SP 407 % FPN's issued that have been paid (Monthly)	70%	70%				70%	70%			
Waste Management & Cleansing	SP 485 No. of fly-tips in streets and parks recorded by Contractor (Monthly)	1,198	1,075				14,391	11,825			
Waste Management & Cleansing	SP 569 NEW for 2020-21 % of sites surveyed that meet the required standard for weeds (Quarterly)	Measured Quarterly					91.33%	90%		N/A	N/A
Waste Management & Cleansing	SP 571 NEW FOR 2020-21 % of sites surveyed that meet the required standard for graffiti (Quarterly)	Measured Quarterly					93.33%	98%		N/A	N/A
Waste Management & Cleansing	SP 572 NEW FOR 2020-21 % of sites surveyed that	Measured Quarterly					99.2%	97%		N/A	N/A







	meet the required standard for flyposting (Quarterly)										
Waste Management & Cleansing	SP 574 NEW FOR 2020-21 Resident satisfaction with the Household Re-use and recycling facility (Garth Road) (Annual)	Measured annually			N/A	75%	N/A	N/A	N/A		
Parks											
Parks and Green Spaces	CRP 119 / SP 558 Average Performance Quality Score (Litter and Cleansing Standards) (Quarterly)	Measured Quarterly			4.98	5		N/A	N/A		
Parks and Green Spaces	SP 026 % of residents who rate parks & green spaces as good or very good (Annual) (ARS)	Measured annually			N/A	77%	N/A	N/A	N/A		
Parks and Green Spaces	SP 027 Young peoples % satisfaction with parks & green spaces (Annual) (ARS)	Measured annually			N/A	85%	N/A	N/A	N/A		
Parks and Green Spaces	SP 032 No. of Green Flags (Annual)	Measured annually			N/A	6	N/A	N/A	N/A		
Parks and Green Spaces	SP 318 No. of outdoor events in parks (Monthly)	0	0				5	136			
Parks and Green Spaces	SP 514 Income from outdoor events in parks (Annual)	Measured annually			N/A	£540,000.00	N/A	N/A	N/A		
Parks and Green Spaces	SP 515 Average Performance Quality Score (Grounds Maintenance Standards) (Annual)	Measured annually			N/A	5	N/A	N/A	N/A		
Parks and Green Spaces	SP 517 Number of street trees planted (Annual)	Measured annually			N/A	235	N/A	N/A	N/A		
Parks and Green Spaces	SP 557 NEW FOR 2020-21 Average Performance Quality Score (Grass Verge Standards) (Quarterly)	Measured Quarterly			4.48	5		N/A	N/A		
Parks and Green Spaces	SP 559 NEW FOR 2020-21 % of tree works commissions completed within SLA (30 days)	Measured Quarterly			96.66%	85%		N/A	N/A		
Parks and Green Spaces	SP 560 NEW FOR 2020-21 Number of friends and similar groups volunteering within Merton's parks and open spaces (Annual)	Measured annually			N/A	40	N/A	N/A	N/A		
Transport											
Transport	Average days lost to sickness absence (Transport)	2.34	0.79				25.39	8.7			
Transport	SP 136 Average % time passenger vehicles in use	Measured annually			N/A	85%	N/A	N/A	N/A		

	(transport passenger fleet) (Annual)											
Transport	SP 137 % User satisfaction survey (transport passenger fleet) (Annual)	Measured annually			N/A	97%	N/A	N/A	N/A			
Transport	SP 271 In-house journey that meet timescales (transport passenger fleet) (Annual)	Measured annually			N/A	85%	N/A	N/A	N/A			
Transport	SP 526 % of Council fleet using diesel fuel (Annual)	Measured annually			N/A	80%	N/A	N/A	N/A			
Leisure												
Leisure	SP 251 Income from Watersports Centre (Monthly)	£0	£3,500				£81,633	£381,000				
Leisure	SP 349 14 to 25 year old fitness centre participation at leisure centres (Monthly)	0	9,750				17,532	96,670				
Leisure	SP 405 No. of Leisure Centre users (Monthly)	0	97,000				154,945	1,001,000				
Leisure	SP 406 No. of Polka Theatre users (cumulative)	Measured Quarterly					2,570	20,000				

HR Sustainable Communities

Page 37	Dept.	PI Code & Description	Feb 2021					2020/21				
			Value	Target	Status	Short Trend	Long Trend	Value	Target	Status	Short Trend	Long Trend
	Development and Building Control	CRP 045 / SP 118 Income (Development and Building Control) (Monthly)	41,633	157,166				1,398,453	1,743,204			
	Development and Building Control	CRP 051 / SP 114 % Major applications processed within 13 weeks (Monthly)	100%	68%				87.49%	68%			
	Development and Building Control	CRP 052 / SP 115 % of minor planning applications determined within 8 weeks (Monthly)	86.67%	71%				75.81%	71%			
	Development and Building Control	CRP 053 / SP 116 % of 'other' planning applications determined within 8 weeks (Development Control)	87.91%	82%				79.37%	82%			
	Development and Building Control	DATA 007 /SP 414 Volume of planning applications (Monthly)	294	Data				3,524	Data			
	Development and Building Control	SP 040 % Market share retained by LA (Building Control) (Monthly)	64.86%	54%				59.75%	54%			

Dept.	PI Code & Description	Feb 2021					2020/21				
		Value	Target	Status	Short Trend	Long Trend	Value	Target	Status	Short Trend	Long Trend
Development and Building Control	SP 113 No. of planning enforcement cases closed (Monthly)	24	43				202	476			
Development and Building Control	SP 117 % appeals lost (Development & Building Control) (Quarterly)	Measured Quarterly					21.67%	35%			
Development and Building Control	SP 380 No. of backlog planning enforcement cases (Monthly)	612	500				612	500			
Future Merton	CRP 096 / SP 020 New Homes (Annual)	Measured annually					N/A	918	N/A	N/A	N/A
Future Merton	CRP 101 / SP 389 Carriageway condition - unclassified roads, % not defective (annual)	Measured annually					N/A	75%	N/A	N/A	N/A
Future Merton	CRP 108 / SP 475 Number of publically available Electric Vehicles Charging Points available to Merton Residents	Measured annually					N/A	145	N/A	N/A	N/A
Future Merton	DATA 008 Streetworks - number of utility works overrun incidents (FPN issued) (Monthly)	4	Data				110	Data		N/A	N/A
Future Merton	DATA 009 £ fines from Streetworks FPNs (Monthly)	6,920	Data				82,460	Data		N/A	N/A
Future Merton	SP 327 % Emergency callouts attended within 2 hours (traffic & highways) (Monthly)	100%	98%				100%	98%			
Future Merton	SP 328 % Streetworks permitting determined (Monthly)	100%	98%				100%	98%			
Future Merton	SP 391 Average number of days taken to repair an out of light street light (Quarterly)	Measured Quarterly					1.14	3			
Future Merton	SP 476 Number of business premises improved (Annual)	Measured annually					N/A	10	N/A	N/A	N/A
Future Merton	SP 508 Footway condition - (% not defective, unclassified road) (Annual)	Measured annually					N/A	75%	N/A	N/A	N/A
Property	SP 024 % Vacancy rate of property owned by the council (Quarterly)	Measured Quarterly					1%	3%			

Dept.	PI Code & Description	Feb 2021					2020/21				
		Value	Target	Status	Short Trend	Long Trend	Value	Target	Status	Short Trend	Long Trend
Property	SP 025 % Debt owed to LBM by tenants inc businesses (Quarterly)	Measured Quarterly					4.13%	7.5%			
Property	SP 386 Property asset valuations (Annual)	Measured annually					N/A	150	N/A	N/A	N/A
Property	SP 518 Number of completed Rent Reviews (Quarterly)	Measured Quarterly					6	16			

This page is intentionally left blank