

Merton Council

Council Meeting

Membership

The Mayor: Councillor Gill Manly

The Deputy Mayor: Councillor Martin Whelton

Councillors: Sally Kenny, Agatha Mary Akyigyina OBE, Stephen Alambritis MBE, Laxmi Attawar, Thomas Barlow, Hina Bokhari, Mike Brunt, Billy Christie, Caroline Cooper-Marbiah, Anthony Fairclough, Edward Foley, Brenda Fraser, Jenifer Gould, Joan Henry, Daniel Holden, Andrew Howard, Natasha Irons, Linda Kirby MBE, Paul Kohler, Edith Macauley MBE, Peter McCabe, Simon McGrath, Nick McLean, Aidan Mundy, Dennis Pearce, Marsie Skeete, Eleanor Stringer, Helena Dollimore, James Williscroft, Sheri-Ann Bhim, John Braithwaite, Michael Butcher, Caroline Charles, Eleanor Cox, Klaar Dresselaers, Chessie Flack, Kirsten Galea, Ross Garrod, Jil Hall, Billy Hayes, Susie Hicks, Dan Johnston, Andrew Judge, Usaama Kaweesa, Samantha MacArthur, Stephen Mercer, Stuart Neaverson, John Oliver, Robert Page, Michael Paterson, Tony Reiss, Slawek Szczepanski, Matthew Willis, Max Austin and Victoria Wilson

Date: **Wednesday 13 September 2023**

Time: **7.30 pm**

Venue: **Council chamber - Merton Civic Centre, London Road,
Morden SM4 5DX**

This is a public meeting and attendance by the public is encouraged and welcomed. For more information about the agenda please contact

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All Press contacts: communications@merton.gov.uk, 020 8545 3181

Council Meeting

13 September 2023

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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.

Partnership.

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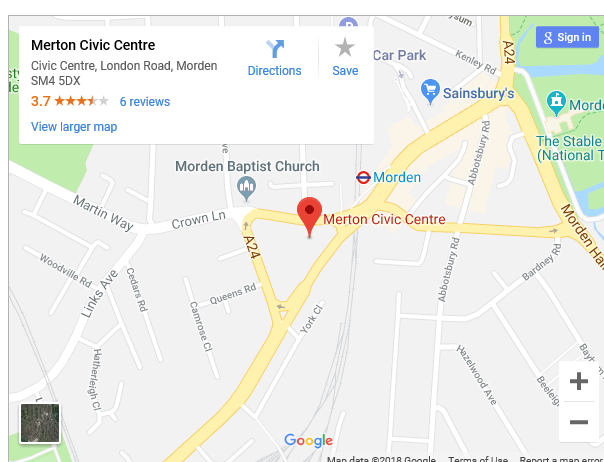
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Agenda Item 3

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COUNCIL

12 JULY 2023

(7.17 pm - 9.33 pm)

PRESENT

(in the Chair), Councillor Gill Manly,
Councillor Martin Whelton
Councillor Agatha Mary Akyigyina,
Councillor Stephen Alambritis, Councillor Laxmi Attawar,
Councillor Thomas Barlow, Councillor Michael Brunt,
Councillor Billy Christie, Councillor Caroline Cooper-Marbiah,
Councillor Anthony Fairclough, Councillor Edward Foley,
Councillor Brenda Fraser, Councillor Jenifer Gould,
Councillor Joan Henry, Councillor Daniel Holden,
Councillor Andrew Howard, Councillor Natasha Irons,
Councillor Linda Kirby, Councillor Sally Kenny,
Councillor Paul Kohler, Councillor Edith Macauley,
Councillor Peter McCabe, Councillor Simon McGrath,
Councillor Nick McLean, Councillor Aidan Mundy,
Councillor Marsie Skeete, Councillor Eleanor Stringer,
Councillor Helena Dollimore, Councillor James Williscroft,
Councillor Sheri-Ann Bhim, Councillor Michael Butcher,
Councillor Caroline Charles, Councillor Eleanor Cox,
Councillor Klaar Dresselaers, Councillor Chessie Flack,
Councillor Kirsten Galea, Councillor Ross Garrod,
Councillor Jil Hall, Councillor Billy Hayes, Councillor Susie Hicks,
Councillor Dan Johnston, Councillor Usaama Kaweesa,
Councillor Samantha MacArthur, Councillor Gill Manly,
Councillor Stephen Mercer, Councillor Stuart Neaverson,
Councillor John Oliver, Councillor Robert Page,
Councillor Michael Paterson, Councillor Tony Reiss,
Councillor Matthew Willis, Councillor Max Austin and
Councillor Victoria Wilson

ATTENDING

Councillor John Braithwaite

REMOTELY

Councillor Andrew Judge

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 1)

The Mayor opened the meeting to speak on the recent tragic incident at The Study Prep School in Wimbledon. Councillors Barlow, Austin, Kohler and Foley also spoke.

The Mayor announced the death of former Councillor Maurice Groves and Councillor McLean also spoke.

The Mayor spoke on the recent death of Baroness Margaret McDonagh.

All present observed a minutes' silence.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Bokhari, Pearce and Szczepanski.

Councillors Braithwaite and Judge attended remotely.

2 DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY INTEREST (Agenda Item 2)

There were no declarations of interest.

3 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (Agenda Item 3)

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 17 May 2023 are agreed as an accurate record.

4 ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE MAYOR, LEADER OF THE COUNCIL AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE (Agenda Item 4)

The Leader spoke on the incident at the Study, on former Councillor Maurice Groves and on Baroness McDonagh.

The Leader provided an update on Galpins Road and also spoke on Mitcham Carnival, Tennis and Pickleball Courts within the Borough and spoke to thank Louise Round, Managing Director South London Legal Partnership at her final Council meeting.

The Mayor thanked Councillors and the Mayoral Team for their support and assistance and provided a brief update on her events and activities.

There were no announcements from the Chief Executive.

5 PUBLIC QUESTIONS TO CABINET MEMBERS (Agenda Item 5)

The responses to the written public questions were circulated prior to the meeting. The Mayor then invited each of the questioners in turn to ask (if they wished) a further question to the Cabinet Member. A copy of the supplementary questions and responses will be included in the 'public questions to Cabinet Members' published document.

6 COUNCILLORS' ORDINARY PRIORITY QUESTIONS TO CABINET MEMBERS (Agenda Item 6)

The responses to the written member ordinary priority questions were circulated prior to the meeting. The Mayor then invited each of the members in turn to ask (if they wished) a further question to the Cabinet Member. A copy of the supplementary

questions and responses will be included in the 'member ordinary priority questions to Cabinet Members' published document.

7a STRATEGIC THEME: MAIN REPORT (Agenda Item 7a)

The Strategic Theme report on Building a Sustainable Future was moved by Councillor Irons and seconded by Councillor Alambritis.

Councillors Oliver, Hall, Fairclough and Judge also spoke on the item.

The Conservative Amendment to the report was moved by Councillor Cox and seconded by Councillor McLean.

The Liberal Democrat Amendment 1 to the report was moved by Councillor Gould and seconded by Councillor Page.

The Liberal Democrat Amendment 2 to the report was moved by Councillor Fairclough and seconded by Councillor Hicks.

The Conservative Amendment was put to a vote and fell: Votes for – 8, Against - 28, Abstentions - 16

The Liberal Democrat Amendment 1 was put to a vote and fell: Votes for – 24, Against – 28, Abstentions – 0.

The Liberal Democrat Amendment 2 was put to a vote and fell: Votes for – 24, Against - 28, Abstentions - 0

RESOLVED: That the Strategic Theme report is agreed.

7b STRATEGIC THEME: COUNCILLORS' QUESTIONS TO CABINET MEMBERS (Agenda Item 7b)

The responses to the written member strategic theme priority questions were circulated prior to the meeting. The Mayor then invited each of the members in turn to ask (if they wished) a further question to the Cabinet Member. A copy of the supplementary questions and responses will be included in the 'member strategic theme priority questions to Cabinet Members' published document.

It was also noted that a copy of the remaining Member questions and responses will be published after the meeting, in line with Constitutional requirements.

7c STRATEGIC THEME: MOTIONS (Agenda Item 7c)

No Strategic Theme motions were submitted.

8 REPORT FROM COMMUNITY FORUM - RAYNES PARK 25 APRIL 2023

(Agenda Item 8)

Councillor Flack presented the report which was received by the Council.

9 REPORT FROM COMMUNITY FORUM - WIMBLEDON 14 JUNE 2023
(Agenda Item 9)

Councillor Kohler presented the report which was received by Council.

10 NOTICE OF MOTION - LIBERAL DEMOCRAT MOTION (Agenda Item 10)

The motion was moved by Councillor Gould and seconded by Councillor Wilson.

Councillor Stringer also spoke on the item.

The motion was then put to a vote and fell – votes in favour: 24, votes against: 28, abstentions: 0.

11 UPDATE ON MOTIONS AND AMENDMENTS FROM COUNCIL 2022-23
(Agenda Item 11)

The report was moved by Councillor Garrod and seconded by Councillor Bhim.

The Liberal Democrat amendment to the report was moved by Councillor Page and seconded by Councillor Hall.

The Liberal Democrat amendment was put to a vote and fell: Votes for - 24 , Votes against – 28, Abstentions – 0.

RESOLVED:

- A. That Council noted the updates within the report on motions and amendments passed at Council during the previous municipal year

12 APPOINTMENT OF INTERIM MONITORING OFFICER (Agenda Item 12)

The report was moved by Councillor Christie and seconded by Councillor Garrod.

Councillor Fairclough also spoke on the item.

RESOLVED:

- A. That Council approved the appointment of the Head of Law, Fabiola Hickson to be designated as the Monitoring Officer from 28 July 2023 until the permanent appointee begins in post on 6 September 2023 and agrees that she be authorised to carry out any actions delegated to the Managing Director, SLLP during that time.

13 CHANGES TO MEMBERSHIP OF COMMITTEES AND RELATED

MATTERS (Agenda Item 13)

The report was moved by Councillor Bhim and seconded by Councillor Stringer.

Councillor Fairclough spoke on the item.

RESOLVED:

That the Council:

1. Noted the changes to the membership of Committees that were approved under delegated authority since the last meeting of the Council.
2. Agreed the changes to the membership of Committees put forward by the groups for Council approval as detailed at paragraph 2.3 of the report

14 PETITIONS (Agenda Item 14)

The report was formally moved by Councillor Garrod and formally seconded by Councillor Stringer.

RESOLVED

That Council

1. Notes the update on the petition received at the last meeting,
2. Accepts receipt of a petition presented by Councillor Cox entitled Stop ULEZ

Accepts receipt of a petition presented by Councillor Gould entitled Eastway Day Care Centre

15 BUSINESS FOR THE NEXT ORDINARY MEETING OF THE COUNCIL (Agenda Item 15)

That the Strategic Theme for the next ordinary meeting of the Council, being held on 13 September 2023, shall be Nurturing Civic Pride.

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From Councillor Macauley to the Cabinet Member for Sport and Heritage

I was pleased to see Merton announce free swimming for under-16s in our leisure centres over the summer, what has uptake of this offer been?

From Councillor Kohler to the Cabinet Member for Sport and Heritage

Would the Cabinet Member please confirm, when the Cabinet approved a capital expenditure of £2.75m on building a new running track in Morden Park, it was done:

- without a feasibility study;
- without any discussion with Hercules, the Borough's pre-eminent athletics club or any other local athletics group; and
- without reference to senior officers' previous assurances that the existing athletics stadium in Wimbledon Park would be refurbished and the running track renewed in the next 5 years, following recent measures to make the existing track useable in the short-term?

From Councillor Barlow to the Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Services

Please can the Cabinet Member provide the costs for:

- Total cost of new council pigeonholes?
- Total cost of refurbishing the Labour offices?
- Total increase in the staffing budget for the Labour group office?
- Total cost of the proposed card access system to the 12 doors on the first floor group offices?

From Councillor Kaweesa to the Cabinet Member for Education and Lifelong Learning

It was great to see the joy and excitement of Merton students receiving their GCSEs and A-level results. How did Merton do as a borough?

From Councillor Reiss to the Cabinet Member for Local Environment, Green Spaces and Climate Change

What does the Cabinet Member consider to be their top priority challenges to improving our Open Spaces?

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

FOI requests show that Merton has the second highest number of requests granted for staff to work from abroad at 251 requests. Can the Cabinet Member tell me how staff are monitored to ensure taxpayers are getting value for money?

From Councillor Szczepanski to the Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Services

It has been six months since this Administration's cost of living budget, how have the measures we introduced helped local people?

From Councillor Flack to the Cabinet Member for Housing and Sustainable Development

At its meeting on 5 December 2022, the Cabinet adopted a report highlighting the need for a "dedicated officer/contracted support" to carry out its Tenants' champion service, which should "have knowledge of landlord and tenant law", further noting that there would be "a form for tenants to complete to detail their concerns. And that "this should come in the first instance to the officer/contracted support to handle." Would the Cabinet Member state when this Cabinet decision will be followed through?

From Councillor Cox to the Cabinet Member for Housing and Sustainable Development

Providing better access to amenities will boost local business trade. An important project which can achieve this in Merton is completing the Missing Link bridges. Will the Cabinet Member please provide an update on progress on completing the Missing Link bridges, across the Wandle at Wimbledon Park to Earlsfield, and the other at Ravensbury Terrace footbridge, and confirm that the council is fully committed to the completion of these bridges within the next 12 months?

From Councillor Attawar to the Cabinet Member for Local Environment, Greenspaces and Climate Change

It is great to see the council has approved plans to refurbish play parks in the borough, which will benefit Merton residents. Could the Cabinet Member update us on where we are with the year one sites?

Committee: Council

Date: 13 September 2023

Wards: All

Subject: Strategic Theme: Nurturing Civic Pride

Lead officer: Polly Cziok, Executive Director: Innovation and Change

Dan Jones, Executive Director: Environment, Civic Pride and Climate

Lucy Owen, Executive Director, Housing and Sustainability

Lead member: Cllr Eleanor Stringer, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Civic Pride

Cllr Andrew Judge, Cabinet Member for Housing and Sustainable Development

Cllr Stephen Alambritis, Cabinet Member for Transport

Contact officer: Keith Burns, Interim Assistant Director, Customers, Policy and Improvement

Recommendations:

A. That the Council note and consider the content of this report.

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1. The Council, at its meeting on the 19th of March 2023, approved 'Building a Better Merton Together', the Council Plan for 2023 – 2026, which sets out three strategic priorities for the Council. In accordance with the Council's Constitution, delivery against these priorities is monitored by the Council. To facilitate this monitoring role, each meeting of the Council receives a report providing an update on performance against one of the three strategic priorities.

Building a Better Merton Together sets out how the Council will deliver its ambition with three strategic priorities that shape and guide delivery:

- i. Nurturing Civic Pride
- ii. Building a sustainable future
- iii. Creating a borough of sport

1.2. The achievement of these strategic priorities will require extensive engagement with residents, voluntary groups, and businesses, building on partnerships and alliances to reach a common goal.

1.3. This report provides the Council with an opportunity to consider progress against the Nurturing Civic Pride strategic priority, with a particular focus on:

- (i) Reducing deprivation in the borough.
- (ii) Improving understanding of the borough's diversity and fostering better understanding between communities.

- (iii) Inclusion – including meeting the needs of disabled people.
- (iv) Increasing the involvement of under-represented groups in Council decisions.
- (v) Better reflecting the borough’s diversity in Merton’s employees.
- (vi) Measuring the accessibility of Council services.

1.4. For each of the above three areas of focus this report provides:

- (i) An overview of the Council’s long-term ambitions.
- (ii) Progress to date against those ambitions, including any specific decisions made since the Council last met in April 2023 as well as performance against key performance indicators where relevant.
- (iii) Key deliverables and commitments over the life of the new Council Plan (2023 to 2026) and any identified risks or issues relating to these deliverables and commitments.

2 DETAILS

REDUCING DEPRIVATION IN THE BOROUGH

OVERVIEW OF AMBITIONS

2.1. The Council Plan, Building a Better Merton Together, includes the following priorities directly related to reducing deprivation in the borough:

- More residents will be able to access secure and well-paid employment in a local economy that is fairer and more inclusive.
- Residents across Merton will be supported through the cost of living emergency.

2.2. In addition to the priorities that speak directly to reducing deprivation there are a broad range of other priorities and initiatives set out in Building a Better Merton Together that aim to mitigate the impact of deprivation. These include priorities relating to attracting new businesses and inward investment; improving educational outcomes and access to training for employment; increasing the supply of quality affordable housing; and broadening access to sport and physical activities with a particular focus on children under 16 and adults over 65.

PROGRESS TO DATE

2.3. In February 2023, the Council achieved accreditation as a London Living Wage Employer from the Living Wage Foundation. To achieve this accreditation, the Council is required to ensure that all directly employed employees are paid at least the London Living Wage (LLW), currently £11.95 per hour, as well as ensuring that all employees of organisations with whom the Council holds contracts are paid LLW (or the Real Living Wage if based outside of London) or that there is a plan in place to deliver this. The requirement to pay LLW within the re-commissioning of the Council’s Home

Care contracts during 2023, with new contracts scheduled to commence on the 2nd of October 2023, is an early example of the positive impact LLW will have on a large group of employees who historically have been low paid, many of whom will be residents of the borough.

- 2.4. More work is required to develop an approach to applying LLW to residential care contracts, however, the Living Wage Foundation recognise this as a national issue that individual local authorities can have a limited impact on given the way the care home market is structured and the often multiple purchasers of care in a single home. Nevertheless, the Council has made a clear commitment to work with the Living Wage Foundation to explore solutions to this complex problem.
- 2.5. In response to the cost of living emergency the Council launched a £2million Cost of Living Fund, with the first tranche of spend totalling £1million being agreed by Cabinet in September 2022 and the second tranche of a further £1million of spend being agreed in March 2023.
- 2.6. Highlights from the projects and initiatives funded through both tranches of the Cost of Living Support Fund include the following:
 - Over 1,800 residents have attended Merton's Cost of Living events held across the borough so far.
 - Through funding to the Community Fridge Network and groups funded through Emergency Assistance Fund, a greater number of residents were able to access food provision. The Community Fridge Network distributed 57,169 kg of food between October 2022 – June 2023.
 - In the seven months to the end of July 2023 just under 500 Merton based individuals engaging with Citizens Advice Merton and Lambeth's Merton Cost of Living team and 166 individuals receiving cost of living advice support for over 550 advice issues.
 - Through the first quarter of 2023-24 (April 23-June 23) Thinking Works and Warm and Well partners have already distributed 184 fuel vouchers, completed 169 energy efficiency visits, carried out 33 heating checks, 21 residents were supported with small energy measures installed by the handyman service, and there was £101,000 in benefits uptake.
 - From May 2023 and for the whole 2023-24 academic year, Merton's Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) Programme have been extended to half term holidays. These half term arrangements are entirely funded from the Council's Cost of living fund as Government funding for the HAF Programme does not cover these periods.
 - Through combined funding from the Household Support Fund and Cost of Living Fund, £60 post office vouchers were made available to Council Tax Support claimants in 2022-23.
- 2.7. Other initiatives that help to mitigate the impact of deprivation include the local Scrappage Scheme announced in August 2023; 'The Library of Things' lending scheme via the borough's libraries; the Summer 2023 'Kids Swim for Free' offer; and work currently underway to provide period products in publicly accessible council buildings. Through the 2023/24 financial year, Merton Council continues to have a comprehensive council tax support

scheme that ensures assistance for low income households. In addition, those living in Band A-D homes have received a one per cent reduction to their council tax bills. £11million will be spent on council tax support, lifting 7,000 residents out of paying any council tax. The administration is committed to supporting residents through these challenging times and will continue to provide additional resources when available to a range of practical cost of living support measures.

KEY DELIVERABLES AND COMMITMENTS 2023 TO 2026:

- 2.8. As noted at 2.1 and 2.2 above, the Council Plan, Building a Better Merton Together, includes a number of priorities that relate directly to reducing deprivation in the borough, with a number of other priorities that aim to mitigate the impacts of deprivation.
- 2.9. At the same time as agreeing the second £1million tranche of expenditure from the Cost of Living Fund, in March 2023, the Cabinet also agreed a Cost of Living Strategy and Action Plan covering the period 2023-25. This Strategy and Action Plan sets out a cross-council, boroughwide approach to supporting residents in need in Merton. This encompasses the initiatives funded via the Cost of Living Fund and a number of Government grants as well as detailing the broader action the Council is taking to support residents through the cost of living emergency.
- 2.10. The Cost of Living Strategy and Action Plan has two main aims: to address and mitigate the immediate impacts of the cost of living emergency; and to help build sustainability and resilience for the longer term.
- 2.11. The Council has submitted an Expression of Interest to be involved in Phase 2 of the Pan-London Pension Credit Campaign, which is funded by the GLA and delivered by Policy in Practice in partnership with London Councils. Phase 1 of the campaign has now completed and resulted in 1,696 successful claims across 18 boroughs with an annual benefit of more than £6million.
- 2.12. The Council Plan commitment to delivering 400 affordable homes in the borough, along with the introduction of a number of initiatives to improve quality in the Private Rented Sector, is a further example of the wide range of initiatives that are helping to mitigate the impacts of deprivation across the borough.

IMPROVING UNDERSTANDING OF THE BOROUGH'S DIVERSITY AND FOSTERING BETTER UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN COMMUNITIES

OVERVIEW OF AMBITIONS

- 2.13. The Equality Act 2010 requires the council to publish equality objectives every four years to demonstrate how it intends remaining compliant with the Public Sector Equality Duty. The requirement to publish every four years was introduced from April 2018.
- 2.14. The Council is currently consulting on a new Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Strategy to cover the period January 2024 to March 2026. This

strategy forms part of the Council's Policy Framework and as such is scheduled to come before full Council in November 2023 for adoption.

2.15. The draft Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion strategy, which Cabinet agreed to consult on in July 2023, outlines the following four Equality Objectives:

- Tackling poverty, the structural differences in social circumstances, and the resulting differences in access and outcomes.
- Promoting community engagement to empower our residents, improve understanding of the issues faced by local people, and develop services to meet the differing needs.
- Promoting a safe, healthy, and cohesive borough where communities get on well together.
- Improving our evidence base to inform our decision making.

2.16. The requirement to publish equality objectives every four years encompasses the nine 'Protected Characteristics' covered by the Equality Act 2010. It is proposed in the draft Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Strategy, that the scope be broadened to include, in addition to the nine protected characteristics, a further four groups / characteristics when considering the equality impacts of policies and service changes. These four additional groups are:

- Care experienced young people;
- Armed forces veterans;
- One-parent households;
- Socio-economic status.

2.17. It should be noted here that socio-economic status is already incorporated as a characteristic into the Councils Equality Impact Assessment template. Incorporating it into the Strategy as an additional characteristic is intended to ensure that socio-economic status has a more explicit profile as part of the Council's broader work to address inequality. The first objective listed at 2.15 above explicitly recognises the need to tackle poverty as a key means of reducing inequality. As part of the broader refresh of the Equality Impact Assessment process referred to at 2.24 below, more detailed guidance will be developed on how officers can take socio-economic status into account when considering the equalities impacts of policy or service changes.

2.18. There are a number of factors that have informed the proposal that the new Strategy cover the period January 2024 to March 2026. As noted at 2.13 above, the Equality and Human Rights Commission require local authorities to publish equality objectives every four years. As this requirement came into effect in 2018, April 2026 is the next point at which this four-year cycle is due to renew. March 2026 also coincides with the end date of the current Council Pla, and it is sensible to develop the next iteration of an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy at the same time as developing the next Council Plan as tackling inequality is likely to remain a central theme of the new Council Plan.

- 2.19. It is also recognised, and the fourth objective set out above explicitly addresses this, that while the Council has a good understanding of many of the protected characteristics in the context of the population of the borough there is more work to do to develop a full understanding of the issues and priorities facing all residents with protected characteristics (including the cumulative impact related to multiple characteristics). Undertaking research to better understand these issues in the round is a key element of the draft strategy with a view to ensuring that the next iteration of the Strategy, covering the period beyond 2026, is built from a more fully formed evidence base than is currently available.
- 2.20. The Joint Consultative Committee with Ethnic Minority Communities (JCC) is a key means by which the Council engages with community representatives to improve our understanding of, and relationship with these communities and to identify ways in which we can foster better community relations. The Faith and Belief Forum plays a similar role in relation to religious and faith groups across the borough.

PROGRESS TO DATE

Draft Equality Diversity and Inclusion Strategy

- 2.21. As noted above, the draft Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy is out to public consultation now and is due to be presented to full Council for adoption in November 2023.
- 2.22. The most recent strategy covered the period 2017 to 2021, but as a result of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has remained current pending the development of the new Strategy outlined above.
- 2.23. As noted in the report to Cabinet seeking agreement to consult on the draft Strategy, this iteration of the strategy has been informed by:
1. Evidence of existing inequalities in the borough and opportunities to continue to narrow the gap in outcomes for disadvantaged residents and communities.
 2. The findings from extensive community engagement to support the development of the new Council Plan that provided analysis of residents' experience of life in Merton, their experience of the pandemic and their aspirations for the future.
 3. Learning from the Covid-19 pandemic and cost of living emergency that has highlighted issues such as:
 - a. Health inequalities
 - b. Digital exclusion
 - c. Food poverty
 4. Findings from the research commissioned by the Health and Wellbeing Board looking at the disproportionate impact of Covid-19 on protected groups, in particular ethnicity, age, and disability.
 5. The Councils' response to the Cost of Living crisis
 6. Issues raised through the Black Lives Matter protests.
 7. Implementing the Local Outbreak Management Plan.

8. The learning and recommendations of the Workforce Race Equality Standards pilot.
 9. The work of the Transforming How We Work With Communities project to increase community resilience and delay / prevent demand for acute services.
- 2.24. The Council will continue to work with the JCC, the Faith and Belief Forum, the developing LGBTQ+ network and other organisations representing communities with protected characteristics to continuously develop and strengthen the commitments in the draft Strategy over its lifetime.
- Broader support to the VCS sector and vulnerable communities.**
- 2.25. Cabinet, in January 2023, agreed the award of £4.9m of Civic Pride grant funding for the period 2023 to 2026 to support the VCS sector across the borough. This represented a 35% increase on the previous Strategic Partner Programme funds, with grants being awarded to a total of 20 organisations, which included 3 organisations who had not previously been funded. Increasing the diversity of organisations supported was a key aim of the programme. 28% of the funding was awarded to small VCS organisations and over £500k awarded to organisations supporting people with disabilities.
- 2.26. Following the approval of the Council Motion to seek Borough of Sanctuary status the Council has worked in partnership with Merton Citizens; people with lived experience of seeking asylum / with refugee status; and with a broad range of local organisations to take forward a programme of work that will lead to an application for accreditation as a Borough of Sanctuary. The multi-agency group expect to submit this application around June 2024.
- 2.27. Since the invasion of the Ukraine by Russia in early 2022, the Council has worked with the Polish Family Association, Commonsense Trust, Wimbledon Guild and a number of other organisations to provide support to guests arriving from the Ukraine. This has been achieved without any community tensions being experienced.
- 2.28. The Safer Merton Partnership's Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy, agreed in 2022, sets out a broad range of objectives designed to enable better early intervention and prevention as well as to provide better support to women and girls experiencing violence.

KEY DELIVERABLES AND COMMITMENTS 2023 TO 2026

- 2.29. The draft Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2024 to 2026 is supported by a delivery plan that covers each of the four equalities objectives. Further work is being undertaken during the period of the public consultation to refine this delivery plan prior to it being presented to Council in November for adoption. This process of refining the delivery plan will include responding to comments and feedback received during the consultation.
- 2.30. The draft Strategy also notes a commitment to review and update the Equality Impact Assessment process and guidance. This work is commencing now and will be complete by the end of 2023. It is intended that revisions to the process will allow for more tailored approaches to specific types of decision in response to recent case law. The making of Traffic

Regulation Orders is one such example of where a tailored approach may be beneficial. The overall aims of this work are to provide more clarity for officers on how to complete robust assessments, cover the expanded scope of protected characteristics proposed in the draft Strategy, and provide more tailored approaches where it is beneficial to do so.

INCLUSION – INCLUDING MEETING THE NEEDS OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

OVERVIEW OF AMBITIONS

- 2.31. The Council Plan, Building a Better Merton Together, includes the following priorities directly related to promoting inclusion
- We will continue to embrace diversity across the borough.
 - Equal access to local health services in Merton
- 2.32. As with deprivation, there are a number of other priorities and initiatives in the Council Plan that promote inclusion including those relating to the promotion of Black and underrepresented businesses; tackling violence against women and girls; the introduction of the Civic Pride Awards; the building of a new special school in the borough; and work to increase access to sports and physical activities for children and adults over 65 in particular.
- 2.33. The newly renamed ‘Merton Partnership Civic Pride Volunteer Awards’ is an annual celebration which recognises the tremendous contribution that local volunteers make to the life of the borough. On Friday 2 June 2023, Merton Connected (Merton Voluntary Service Council) held its 8th awards ceremony, with sponsorship from the Council. This year there were fourteen award categories including the Chris Frost Volunteer of the Year Award and the Cllr Maxi Martin Young Volunteer of the Year Award, plus a special Coronation Award for 2023. Many of the volunteers celebrated at the award ceremony are working with communities with protected characteristics.
- 2.34. The Adult Social Care, Integrated Care and Public Health Directorate Plan for 2023/24 identifies a number of other priorities specifically related to meeting the needs of disabled people. These include increasing independence and dignity by using equipment and technology to reduce the need for two carers to provide physical care; promoting independence by increasing the take up of the Mascot Telecare service; increasing the take up of Direct Payments (increasing choice and control); and modernising the community support offer to people with learning disabilities.
- 2.35. Public realm accessibility is a key inclusion priority, including for people with disabilities, and this is covered in more detail in the section below.

PROGRESS TO DATE

- 2.36. There have been a number of events and activities during 2023 that have been led or supported by the Council which have demonstrated the Council’s ongoing commitment to diversity and inclusion, including; the events to mark the Windrush 75 anniversary; Holocaust Memorial Day;

Refugee Week; and the re-signing of the Armed Forces Community Covenant.

- 2.37. Officers are also continuing to work closely with colleagues in the NHS and a range of voluntary sector organisations to improve access to health care.

Public Realm Accessibility

- 2.38. As noted at 2.26 above, public realm accessibility is a key inclusion priority, including for people with disabilities.

Highways, pedestrians and cycling

- 2.39. There is a small Transport for London (TfL) budget within the Local Implementation Plan for the borough that allows the Council to consider and introduce small schemes that would improve pedestrian and cycle access. Many of these schemes are developed in response to requests and concerns received from residents / road users / local business, other Council departments such as Waste and at times schools.

- 2.40. Due to changes in TfL criteria and approval procedures, larger / more expensive schemes must first be approved and meet their criteria. This includes the introduction of formal crossings such as zebra crossings. Schemes not funded by TfL or partially funded are usually delivered as part of the Council's Capital Programme. All measures are tested to ensure that they are Disability Discrimination Act and Equality Act compliant.

- 2.41. Schemes that support public realm accessibility have included:

- Pram ramps.
- Tactile paving.
- New footways or an extension of, where there are grassed verge or steps.
- Preventative measures to address obstructions such as obstructive parking or driving over the footway.
- Preventative measures along Public Rights of Way where cyclists are not permitted but frequently are in contravention.
- Informal crossings such as pedestrian islands
- Formal crossings such as zebra crossings
- Introduction of a pedestrians phase within signalised crossing – although driven and funded by the Council, these must be approved and implemented by TfL signals.
- Upgrading of existing substandard pedestrian islands.
- Narrowing of junctions to reduce speed and reduce distance for pedestrians crossing the road with improved sightlines.
- Junction entry treatments to reduce speed and to make it easier for pedestrians to cross particularly for those with mobility issues.
- Speed tables and formal or informal crossings on speed tables – to reduce speed of traffic and highlight pedestrians crossing the road.
- Introduction of yellow line restrictions to prevent footway parking; where crossovers particularly shared crossovers are impeded by obstructive parking; along narrow roads that would impede flow of traffic particularly access for emergency services; and where sightlines are obstructed.

- 2.42. Footway parking is illegal in London unless an exemption Order is made to allow either full or partial footway parking. These are permitted where footway is wide enough and are identified by marked bays and signage. As per the Highway Code, it is unlawful to park within 10 meters of a junction but due to lack of compliance, more often than not, the Council is compelled to reinforce this contravention by means of double yellow lines.
- 2.43. Across the borough there are many roads where there is extensive illegal footway parking. The main reason is that for the most part, the road is too narrow to accommodate parking and many residents do not have off street parking. Multivehicle ownership also exacerbates the situation. As a result, motorists park on the footway which then narrows the footway for pedestrians particularly for those with pushchairs, wheelchairs and mobility scooters. The bumper-to-bumper parking also affects pedestrians' ability to cross the road safely and at times to get back on to the footway. Reports of obstructive footway parking, which is of great concern, include those wheelchair users who cannot get in or out of their front gates and those who cannot be picked up and dropped off by the ambulance service or community transport.
- 2.44. There have been a number of requests from TfL and Councillors for the Council to undertake a full review and address the ongoing footway parking issues. Currently each road is assessed on a case-by-case basis in response to complaints and localised problems.
- 2.45. The borough is committed to promote and improve cycling including the provision of secure cycle parking; cycle hire parking and cycle lanes preferably segregated. In many instances, these features need to be on the carriageway which means loss of parking which often results in strong objections from residents. When making a decision, the Council must, therefore, be mindful of its objectives in ensuring that access to such infrastructure is given priority.
- 2.46. The Council has commissioned consultants to develop a deliverable Walking and cycling Strategy and an Electric Vehicle strategy, which will include the repurposing of kerbside space to facilitate the necessary infrastructure.

Bus travel and accessibility

- 2.47. With regard to buses, TfL have carried out a review of bus journey times and bus stop accessibility throughout the borough.
- 2.48. TfL in partnership with London Boroughs has an objective to ensure that 95% of all bus stops on the network are improved in line with accessibility standards and the Equality Act. The review of bus stop accessibility identified that across the borough there are 152 bus stops that do not meet the accessibility requirements.
- 2.49. TfL's Accessible Bus Stop Design Guidance (2017) requires a bus stop to meet three key requirements to be fully accessible:
- Clearway markings to discourage parking in the bus stop by vehicles other than buses.
 - A minimum kerb upstand of 100mm with an ideal range of 125mm-140mm to enable ramps to be easily deployed.

- Access free of obstructions. This access relates to access of bus patrons as well as buses getting in and out of bus stops. The one factor in terms of accessibility for passengers and buses involves parking.

Step-free access to rail, tram, and underground stations.

- 2.50. All 8 of the London Trams stops in Merton, from Wimbledon to Mitcham Junction, are fully accessible from the street to the tram. Wimbledon and Morden Underground Stations are also fully accessible from street to train, providing step-free access to District and Northern underground Line services.
- 2.51. A recent scheme implemented at Wimbledon Park Underground Station provides step free access between the street and the platform via a lift, although assisted access from the platform to the train via a boarding ramp is still required. In addition, the Thameslink services at Wimbledon, Mitcham Junction and Mitcham Eastfields, all also have step-free access from the street to platform but require assisted boarding ramp access between the platform and the train.
- 2.52. In 2019 the Government announced stations that had been successful in securing funding under the current round of the Access for All (AfA) programme. This included Mostpur Park on the South Western Railway Network, and Tooting Station on the Thameslink Network, which is located in Merton, on the borough boundary with Wandsworth, and serves surrounding residential areas in north Mitcham. Network Rail are delivering the schemes, both of which have started on site and are due to be completed by mid-2024. Merton Council agreed to make a significant SCIL funding contribution of 10% towards the Motspur Park scheme, which is likely to have contributed to the bid being successful.
- 2.53. Haydon's Road Station already has step-free access to the eastbound platform (towards London). The Council successfully secured a level access route to the westbound platform (towards Wimbledon) through land at 1 Caxton Road as part of a planning application. This provides a significant opportunity to quickly, easily and cost effectively improve accessibility at Haydon's Road Station. The Council has agreed the allocated £100k of SCIL funding to contribute towards the necessary enabling works and is currently working with Network Rail and Thameslink to progress the scheme, which it is hoped will be delivered by the end of 2023.

KEY DELIVERABLES AND COMMITMENTS 2023 TO 2026

- 2.54. The draft Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy incorporates, as noted above, a delivery plan that will be further refined prior to the Strategy being presented to full Cabinet in November 2023. This delivery plan includes a range of measures designed to promote inclusion.
- 2.55. The current Health and Wellbeing Strategy also sets out a range of deliverables designed to have a positive impact on inclusion, including promoting the inclusion of people with disabilities.
- 2.56. As noted above, the Council has commissioned consultants to develop a deliverable Walking and cycling Strategy and an Electric Vehicle strategy,

which it is expected will include a number of recommendations that are relevant to the promotion of inclusion and accessibility.

- 2.57. As also noted above, TfL have undertaken a review of bus stop accessibility. Following on from this, TfL have commissioned consultants to prepare a full report detailing all the necessary improvements that are required at all failed bus stops. The Borough is required to implement the required improvements once the report is finalised.
- 2.58. In 2022 the Department for Transport opened a further round of funding for new Access for All (AfA) schemes to be delivered over the next 5 years and invited Train Operating Companies to submit bids for stations on their networks. The Council worked with South Western Railway and Thameslink to identify stations to prioritise in Merton. Access for All funding bids were submitted for step-free schemes for Raynes Park, Wimbledon Chase and St Helier Stations and the Council provided accompanying letters in support of all these bids in April 2022.
- 2.59. Following completion of the works at Motspur Park, Raynes Park Station will remain the only SWR service station in Merton that does not have step free access. After Wimbledon, Raynes Park station is the next busiest station in Merton by far, with 4 million annual entries and exits. Raynes Park Station serves a large residential catchment area and is also an important for sub-regional interchange which enables orbital connections within South West London. The Council would seek to allocate capital funding for a substantial financial contribution (up to 10%) to support any successful AfA scheme at Raynes Park Station, in accordance with South Western Railway's request that local authorities also make a funding contribution to AfA bids at stations on their network.
- 2.60. Wimbledon Chase Station is the 2nd busiest Thameslink station in Merton. The Station forms part of a potential development site which will provide 80+ new residential units and provide a new entrance to the station. As part of pre-application discussions, the potential applicant has developed a report into the feasibility and costs of various step free access options. Whilst, it may not be economically viable for a development to fully fund any of the scheme options, the design does allow passive provision for this to be added by Network Rail in future and the Council will seek to secure a financial contribution from the Developer towards the scheme as well as lobbying Network Rail for further investment. Securing AfA scheme funding for this station would therefore be particularly beneficial in delivering the scheme in tandem with the redevelopment. The Leader of the Council wrote again to the Department of Transport in February 2023, to urge consideration of the allocation of Access for All funding to Wimbledon Chase Station.
- 2.61. St Helier Station is located in a residential area that has otherwise poor public transport accessibility levels, so is very reliant on the Thameslink service, particularly for journeys into London. The station is also the nearest to St Helier hospital which can be reached by a short connecting bus journey, so an AfA scheme would improve access to Hospital services in the region. It is considered that an AfA scheme could potentially be delivered cost effectively at St Helier station due to the layout of the station access and platform.

- 2.62. In November 2022, TfL published the results of a consultation undertaken about Step-Free Access at underground stations. TfL are now assessing how to select and prioritise the best stations for step-free access in line with feedback and are looking to develop an accessibility programme that will deliver improvements, dependent on long-term funding.

INCREASING THE INVOLVEMENT OF UNDER-REPRESENTED GROUPS IN COUNCIL DECISIONS

OVERVIEW OF AMBITIONS

- 2.63. The Council Plan, Building a Better Merton Together, includes the following priority:
- We will put residents at the heart of everything we do, and be responsive and resident-centric in our approach to customer service, communication, and engagement.
- 2.64. In July 2023, the Cabinet agreed proposals designed to modernise the Council's approach to community engagement. These proposals focus on reforming the Community Forums, strengthening face-to-face engagement, improving our digital offer, and strengthening our coordination of work across the organisation. How under-represented groups are supported and enabled to engage with the Council is a key element of these plans.
- 2.65. The draft Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy also sets out a number of ways in which the Council intends improving access by under-represented groups to Council decision making processes.

PROGRESS TO DATE

- 2.66. The Council has several key mechanisms for increasing the involvement of under-represented groups in Council decisions. The Joint Consultative Committee with Ethnic Minority Communities meets quarterly and is a primary mechanism by which officers and partners can engage with representatives from Black and Minority Ethnic Communities on a range of policy and service developments.
- 2.67. The Faith and Belief Forum provides an equivalent function in relation to faith and belief groups. The Forum is Chaired by the Chief Executive and the next meeting is scheduled to take place on the 24th of October 2023.

KEY DELIVERABLES AND COMMITMENTS 2023 TO 2026

- 2.68. Through the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy for 2023 to 2027, increased resources to support resident and community engagement was agreed, and recruitment to these new roles is ongoing. The new posts include a Community Development Officer and additional Resident Engagement capacity. Successful recruitment to these positions will enable a greater focus on enabling access to Council decision making by under-represented groups. It is envisaged that the individuals in post will work closely with the Equality and Community Cohesion Lead and officers across the Council to identify ways in which engagement with all residents and communities can be enhanced.

- 2.69. Progress on this will be reported in future updates on the implementation of the new Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy.

BETTER REFLECTING THE BOROUGH'S DIVERSITY IN MERTON'S EMPLOYEES

OVERVIEW OF AMBITIONS

- 2.70. The development of a new People Strategy for the Council is ongoing and nearing completion. This strategy will include a number key aims that are directly relevant to ensuring that the Council's workforce reflects the community, and that this extends across all levels within the organisation. These include:
- Vision and values
 - Recruitment and retention
 - Training and Skills
 - Workforce planning
 - Workforce Equality, Diversity and Inclusion
 - Staff engagement
 - Employee experience
- 2.71. Further updates on the People Strategy will be reported to future meetings of the Council as appropriate.

PROGRESS TO DATE

- 2.72. The Council undertook a Workforce Equality, Diversity and Inclusion survey in 2022 and an update on progress following on from the survey has recently been published on the Merton Hub.
- 2.73. **Key findings from the survey**
- 792 staff participated – a 37% response rate.
 - Over 600 comments were received.
 - 66% of staff felt the council respects their individual differences.
 - 46% of ethnically diverse colleagues consider the Race Equality Network as a safe space.
 - 52% feel comfortable discussing race at work.
 - 48% of staff believe the Corporate Management Team promote an inclusive work culture with a further 42% saying they neither agree nor disagree.
 - 21% reported experiencing or witnessing bullying, harassment, or discrimination
- 2.74. Since the survey was undertaken progress in responding to the issues identified has been made in a number of ways:
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Training: A comprehensive procurement exercise was undertaken to select suitable learning and development

training for leadership in response to survey feedback. The Race Equality Network contributed to determining what type of training should be procured.

- Inclusive Language Guide: In collaboration with the staff networks, officers have developed an Inclusive Language Guide. One workshop has been held to discuss the terminology in more detail and there is a plan to have more sessions.
- Zero-Tolerance Approach: Bullying and harassment have no place here. The Council introduced a zero-tolerance approach against bullying and harassment to create a more respectful and inclusive environment. This has been added to the Councils Workforce EDI policy.
- Support for recruitment panels: Ethnically diverse staff are now invited to participate in all recruitment panels at posts MGA and above.

2.75. More broadly, the Council publishes an annual Equalities in Employment report. The report for 2022/23 is due to be published by the end of September and provides a comprehensive overview of a range of equalities measures. The data for 2022/23 shows that 38% of the overall Council workforce is from black and ethnic minority communities, which compares with a figure of 39.2% from black and minority ethnic communities across the population of the borough as a whole (Census 2021).

2.76. The report also shows that the proportion of the overall workforce that is from black and ethnic minority communities has increased in each of the last three years (from 35% in 2020/21). The report also, however, shows that only 18% of the top 5% of earners is from black and minority ethnic communities, demonstrating the work that still needs to be done to ensure that the workforce reflects the community at all levels.

2.77. The Council has an active Race Equality Network, and the inclusion of ethnically diverse staff on interview panels for posts at MGA and above was championed by this network. There is also an LGBTQ+ network, which is now becoming more active. There has in the past been a Disability Network, which is not currently active, and the Workforce Equality Lead is seeking to revitalise this during the latter part of 2023/24.

2.78. A Corporate Equalities Steering Group meets bi-monthly and includes representatives from the Race Equality and LGBTQ+ networks. This group is currently chaired by the Executive Director for Children, Lifelong Learning and Families.

KEY DELIVERABLES AND COMMITMENTS 2023 TO 2026

2.79. As noted at 2.52 above, the Council is in the process of completing a new People Strategy. Once completed, this will set out the key deliverables and commitments relating to ensuring that the Council has a workforce that reflects the community at all levels in the organisation. This will include further actions to address the issues raised in the Workforce Equality, Diversity and Inclusion survey and the findings from the annual Equalities in Employment data.

MEASURING THE ACCESSIBILITY OF COUNCIL SERVICES

OVERVIEW OF AMBITIONS

- 2.80. The Equality Act 2010 and the associated Public Sector Equality Duty require the Council to report annually on the accessibility of council services to those individuals with protected characteristics. The Council is also required to demonstrate how improvements to accessibility are being made in response to the published accessibility data.

PROGRESS TO DATE

- 2.81. As a result of resource constraints, the Council has made limited progress on this requirement to date. However, work is underway to address this, and to ensure that the requirement is fully met for 2022/23 and for subsequent years. The 2022/23 report is expected to be published by the end of December 2023 and will be further built on for future years.

KEY DELIVERABLES AND COMMITMENTS 2023 TO 2026

- 2.82. As noted above, work is ongoing to develop a report to cover the 2022/23 year. The coverage of this report, and the report for 2023/24 will be limited by the availability of data. Work is also underway to ensure that for future years a broader set of service delivery accessibility data is collected, so that the reports for 2024/25 and subsequent years are comprehensive.

3 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 3.1. This report is for noting and discussing only, so alternative options are not being presented.

4 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED

- 4.1. Any relevant consultation undertaken or proposed is referenced in the body of the report.

5 TIMETABLE

- 5.1. The body of the report includes details on a range of planned deliverables and commitments over the period 2023 to 2026.

6 FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1. The cost implications for the initiatives outlined in this report are covered within the current MTFs. Any further spending required beyond existing budgets will be reported to Cabinet.

7 LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1. This report has been prepared as required by part 4A, paragraph 2.3 (g) of the Constitution and there are no legal implications arising out of this report.

8 HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1. None immediately arising beyond those covered in the body of the report.

9 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1. None immediately arising.

10 RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

10.1. A robust process for monitoring delivery of the Council Plan, including many of the commitments and deliverables referenced in this report, is being put in place to minimise the risk of non-delivery.

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

- None

12 BACKGROUND PAPERS

12.1. None

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Agenda Item 8

RAYNES PARK COMMUNITY FORUM
28 JUNE 2023

(7.15 pm - 9.00 pm)

PRESENT Councillors Councillor John Oliver (in the Chair),

1 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS (Agenda Item 1)

The meeting was held in Raynes Park Library and chaired by Councillor John Oliver with Chris Edge from the Raynes Park Association (RPA). Around 16 residents and two councillors attended, with 67 views on YouTube following the meeting. The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

2 POLICE UPDATE (Agenda Item 2)

PC Manning from Raynes Park Safer Neighbourhood Team gave an update on local policing issues. PC Manning joined the team four months ago and is now one of two ward officers. Ward panel sets priorities each quarter. The team are problem orientated and will work with communities to find solutions to their priorities.

The three priorities in Raynes Park are youth anti-social behaviour (ASB), motor vehicle crime, and burglaries.

Motor vehicle crime is low in Raynes Park compared to London and other parts of the borough but there have been a few incidents. The team conduct reassurance visits, gather CCTV or resident evidence. They set up a joint operation with the Traffic team involving the low visibility patrols at night. This resulted in a decrease in catalytic convertor thefts. The team has also been holding events in Raynes Park and Wimbledon to assist residents in preventing thefts.

On burglaries the team used crime mapping to identify locations for additional patrols and this resulted in a reduction of 50%. The team will continue to conduct reassurance visits. The team has also been working on parcel thefts on the Apostles.

There are two main ASB issues on the high street and on the Carters Estate. The team has created a portfolio of those involved in both areas.

A few shops have been targeted on the High Street, namely Starbucks, Co-op, and Waitrose. The team is working with these stores to identify opportunities to improve security. The Co-op has been especially targeted, so the team is working with the staff, but the layout and the CCTV is poor. The Area Operations Manager and

Security Manager visited the store recently and committed to improving the CCTV arrangements. A new manager at Waitrose will also hopefully meet with the team soon, along with their external security team. There have also been increased patrols on High Street following robberies from young people of their phones. As a result, four youths were stop and searched, and three arrested for theft from the Co-op.

On the Carters Estate the team is working with Clarion and LBM. The team has visited three addresses of those responsible for some of the ASB and made home visits to residents reporting issues. The team conducted Stop and Search of six individuals who were smoking cannabis in stairwells of buildings that were not their own. Clarion will be replacing doors on the estate to increase security. The team are also working with the schools' officer at Raynes Park High School to identify the young people involved.

A resident asked about boundaries and for contact details for other Safer Neighbourhood teams. PC Manning said that the SNT teams now match LBM ward boundaries and contact details can be found [online](#).

A resident asked what will be done to stop ongoing harassment of residents by young people involved in ASB. PC Manning said they working across other ward teams and school teams to identify those involved and take action against them.

A resident said that young people are smoking cannabis by the parklet and PC Manning asked that residents let the team know where these locations are so they can target hotspots.

A resident on Gore Road asked about people outside regularly making noise still at 3am, so who should they contact to report this to. PC Manning said that in an emergency call 999, or otherwise you can report issues [online](#), or in the case of noise or ASB [report to LBM](#).

A resident asked about plans to extend the SNTs and PC Manning said that a Sergeant covers several wards, and then there are two PCs and one PCSO per ward. Another resident asked how much time the team spend on the ward. PC Manning said it varies as they often have to cover other events such as the coronation, Wimbledon, football matches and the response teams. Five out of six days are usually on the ward and hopefully SNTs will be a bigger priority in the future.

A resident said they were disappointed in the Co-op response and the message it sends to staff, residents, and police. PC Manning said that this is not a new issue, and they get a lot of calls to Co-op, 13 in the last month. The poor design of the store does not help.

Cllr Willis asked if the team are looking for new members of the Ward Panels. PC Manning said the Raynes Park panel is meeting on Friday at the Salvation Army Church, and new people are welcome. The leader of the Korean church will also hopefully be joining the panel after the team reached out to the Korean community.

3 OPEN FORUM (Agenda Item 3)

A resident asked about pollarding of trees on Edna Road. Cllr Wilson said that the council is behind on the current cycle of works following previous staff shortages and the season for pollarding has finished and will not begin again until September as it stops for the nesting season. The council will still clear branches if they are dangerous. Please [report problems with trees online](#). London Borough of Merton (LBM) will be publishing its works schedule on the website. You have the right to prune [overhanging tree branches](#) back to the boundary line of your property, even if you do not own the tree.

A resident asked about parking on Kingston Road, as there is a proposal to restrict parking on Sundays but there will be no change to the controlled parking zone on the Apostles. Cllr Willis said the Kingston Road scheme will be going ahead in July. Chris Larkman said that a complaint was made by the Apostles Resident's Association about the Cabinet Member, Cllr Alambritis, as he had previously said the scheme would not be going ahead. The church on Kingston Road has submitted a legal challenge as well.

A resident asked about plans to change the gyratory in Raynes Park. Cllr Willis said this was part of the plans to address the flooding in area and to create a civic space by changing the road layout. It will need funding from multiple sources and the LBM funding already announced is spread over 2024/25 and 2025/26 so it is unlikely that there will be major changes soon.

The forum was asked if they wished to continue meeting in the current format, chaired by councillors and the RPA, in addition to events that will be organised by the LBM engagement team in new formats to be discussed by Cabinet in July. Attendees agreed that they would like to meet again in the autumn.

4 UPDATES FROM COUNCILLORS (Agenda Item 4)

Cllr Wilson said that residents had been telling her that having reported fly-tipping through Fix-My-Street they were then told the issue is fixed when it has not been. If this happens, please let councillors know so that they can raise the problem with the Public Spaces Team. There will be a litter pick on Saturday at 2pm from West Barnes Lane to cover the Carters estate.

Cllr Willis said there had been a substantial flooding event recently, but it cleared quickly, suggesting that some of the changes have helped. Thames Water is still working with LBM on long term solutions.

Cllr Oliver said residents have been raising a number of issues including council tax; fix-my-street; fly-tipping; ASB neighbour dispute; housing lists; step-free access at Motspur Park station; and modifications of homes for disabled people through Occupational Therapy.

5 GENERAL UPDATES (Agenda Item 6)

Chris Larkman and Tony Edwards from the Raynes Park Association gave an update on local issues.

Railway

Land Transfer – the small piece of land on the south side transfer has been delayed after an electrical cable had been discovered underground.

The Embankment on north side had been cleared by volunteers and the Friends group are now looking at appropriate planting for the autumn.

Kiss and Ride – Stephen Hammond MP has spoken with Workspace and they are appointing a company to manage the parking.

Chris Larkman has met with managers from Network Rail, South Western Railways and Stephen Hammond to look at the front of station to ask them to make some basic improvements like signage and removing the wooden fencing on platform 1.

Step-free access is going to be installed at Motspur Park but is also urgently needed at Raynes Park. The complication is installing a lift shaft for platform 3 and 4. A solution is to install a lift to platform 2 then create a new bridge and lift to platform 3 and 4. This approach will cost about £10m and is now on the list for consideration.

A resident asked about someone rough sleeping at Raynes Park station. PC Manning said LBM and the SNT working together, have issued a Community Protection Warning to the individual which if breached would result in a Community Protection Notice. LBM is also working to re-house the individual concerned and provide other services to support them.

Flooding in the area and rain gardens

The Thames Water and LBM appointed consultant is due to report soon so there should then be a chance to study any implications of any proposed changes. Cllr Willis said LBM has approved £300k for the project and town centre improvements.

A resident asked about the leaking water main on Durham Road and Tony said this was old infrastructure that needs to be replaced.

LBM is following up on possible enforcement to remove the advertising sign diagonally opposite Waitrose.

6 PLANNING UPDATE (Agenda Item 7)

The Development Control team had provided an update that Kris Witherington shared.

- Residential development at Wimbledon Chase station approved by Planning applications committee on 26 April 23. Officers working on legal agreement before issuing decision.
- 23/P0869 (579-589 Kingston Road, former Manoplastics site) – current planning application is still currently under assessment by officers.
- Aviva plans for the Pets at Home site on Bushey Road, application (22/P3021) – still under assessment.
- The LESSA site – approved by Planning applications committee on 22 September 22. Secretary of State decided recently not to call in the application, officers working on legal before issuing decision.

7 DATE OF NEXT MEETING (Agenda Item 8)

There was no other business, so Cllr Oliver thanked everyone for attending and closed the meeting.

The next meeting is on **Tuesday 19 September 2023**, at 6.30pm in Raynes Park Library

Any issues or questions can be emailed to getinvolved@merton.gov.uk

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Committee: Council

Date: 13 September 2023

Subject: Members Allowance Scheme

Lead Director: John Scarborough, Managing Director, South London Legal Partnership

Lead member: Councillor Billy Christie, Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Services

Contact officers: Andrew Robertson, Head of Democracy and Electoral Services and Amy Dumitrescu, Democracy Services Manager

Recommendations:

A. That the Council approve the recommendations of the Standards and General Purposes Committee set out in this report:

(i) that the basic allowance should be increased to £12,014 in line with the recommendation of the 2022 Independent Remuneration Panel;

(ii) to agree to award the Special Responsibility Allowances set out in appendix A;

(iii) that Council reaffirms the linking of future allowances to the annual staff pay award, such increases to be applied automatically and that in future the Scheme be approved as part of the annual budget;

(iv) that the Licensing Committee chair should also be the chair of the Licensing Sub committee meetings convened for the purpose of determining individual licensing applications

(iv) that the new allowances should apply with immediate effect (as of 13 September 2023), but will not be backdated to 1 April 2023.

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 The current scheme for paying allowances to members was approved by Council on 24 September 2003 (the Scheme) and it was made under powers conferred by the Local Authorities (Member's Allowances) (England Regulations, 2003 ("The Regulations")). That Scheme has been readopted in subsequent financial years as required by the Regulations.

1.2 The Scheme and current rates can be found at Part 6 of Merton's Constitution and provides for a number of Special Responsibility Allowances (SRAs) to be payable to those Councillors appointed by Council to particular positions in addition to the basic allowance paid to all councillors. The Scheme is currently considered and approved annually by Council alongside the Pay Policy Statement.

1.3 The existing Scheme for 2022/23 was approved by Council on 1 March 2023 and was based on a scheme agreed in 2008 which has not been significantly reviewed since that time. The current schedule of rates has therefore not been increased in fifteen years. The current scheme allows for an automatic

increase to Councillors on an annual basis in line with staff pay awards, however these increases have not been applied to Councillors allowances.

- 1.4 This has meant that the current level of basic allowance has for many years been one of the lowest across the capital, at £8694. When calculating what the allowance would have been for 23/24 had the annual uplifts been applied in line with the staff pay – the basic allowance would now be set at £10,057 – which is still considerably lower than the average in London today. Similarly, Merton’s Special Responsibility Allowances are largely lower than the London average, with Cabinet Members for example receiving one of the lowest levels anywhere in London.
- 1.5 London Council’s Independent Remuneration Panel published a report on Councillor remuneration in January 2022. That report recommended rates in excess of those currently paid by the Council and at its meeting on 27 April, the Standards and General Purposes Committee agreed to establish a cross party working group to carry out a review of the current scheme in light of the IRP report and to make recommendations to that Committee.
- 1.6 The working group (the Group) comprised Councillors Hayes, Bhim, Kaweesa, Whelton, Oliver, Willis, Paterson and Mercer. It was chaired by Councillor Hayes and met on three occasions, on 8th, 22nd and 28th June. One of the Council’s independent persons, Katy Willison, was also present as was the Council’s Monitoring Officer at that time Louise Round and the Democracy Services Manager.
- 1.7 The working group made a number of recommendations which were considered by the Standards and General Purposes Committee at its meeting on 19 July 2023.
- 1.8 The Standards and General Purposes Committee agreed the recommendations made by the working group as set out within the recommendations to this report.

2. DETAILS OF THE CONSIDERATIONS OF THE WORKING GROUP

BASIC ALLOWANCE

- 2.1 The Group began by considering the rate at which members’ basic allowance should be paid. It was logical to do so because the overall structure of the Council’s scheme is to award a basic allowance and for the special responsibility allowances (SRAs) to be calculated using a multiplier approach. So, for instance, the Leader receives a basic allowance at the same rate as all other councillors plus a SRA of 4 times that basic rate. The factors to be applied will be depending on the level of responsibility and / or workload of the role in question. The Group agreed that this overall approach should be maintained.

- 2.2 The Group noted that although the current Scheme allows for the allowances to be uplifted automatically annually by reference to the staff pay award, in fact that annual uplift has not been applied since 2008/09. This has meant that the current level of basic allowance for many years been one of the lowest across the capital,. The Group were presented with exemplifications of what the allowance would have been for 23/24 had the annual uplifts been applied – the basic would now be set at £10,057 - which is still considerably lower than the average in London today.
- 2.3 The IRP explains that following the challenges of the last few years, including the pandemic and the cost of living crisis, has placed a “major impact on the demands place on all councillors and of those councillors charged with special responsibilities”. The Group noted that the IRP is due to report again in September this year and that there is every indication that it will recommend a further increase in the basic allowance due to these increasing pressures and workload, beyond that made in its January 2022 report which was £12,014. However, in light of the wish to have the matter resolved at Council in September, the Group was content to work on the basis of the 2022 report. One member of the Group expressed some concern about whether, in light of the cost-of-living crisis, now was the right time to increase allowances at the percentage proposed and in a single change, but although the Group acknowledged this valid concern, it did agree, unanimously, to recommend the adoption of the IRP 2022 recommendation of £12,014.
- 2.4 The group also agreed to recommend the retention of the automatic uplift in line with the staff pay award as in integral part of the Scheme. There would be no need for a specific vote on this at Full Council each year although the Group noted that it is a requirement of the regulations that the Scheme is readopted before the beginning of each year to which it applies. However, the view of the Group was that this could be done as part of the overall budget, as is common in other councils, rather than as a separate report taken with the Pay Policy as has happened to date.

EXISTING SPECIAL RESPONSIBILITY ALLOWANCES

- 2.5 The group then proceeded to consider the existing special responsibility allowances paid to councillors and to decide whether to recommend that the current multipliers should remain the same. With the exception of the proposals for Cabinet Members and the Chair of Development and Planning Applications Committee, these were agreed unanimously. The existing multipliers are set out in the table below for ease of reference:

Special Responsibility Allowances	Formula	Current SRA
Leader	4	£34,776
Deputy Leader	2	£17,388
Leader of the Opposition	2	£17,388
Leader of Minority Group	0.66	£5,737
Cabinet Member	1	£8,694
Chair, Scrutiny Commission	1	£8,694
Chair, Planning Committee	1	£8,694
Chair Licensing Committee	1	£8,694
Chair, General Purposes Committee	0.33	£2,868
Scrutiny Panel Chairs	0.33	£2,868

The Leader

- 2.6 The Group considered the current multiplier of 4 for the Leader of the Council was appropriate and agree to recommend that it should remain at that level. This would make the Leader's SRA £48,056, which would be below the . the IRP recommendation of £62,092.

Cabinet Members

- 2.7 In relation to Cabinet Members whose SRA is set at a multiple of one, there was not unanimity amongst the Group.. A proposal was moved to increase the multiple to 2 on the basis that the level of responsibility and volume of work required of a Cabinet Member can be very significant and, in some cases, amounts to a full-time job, and in some instance statutory responsibilities. If the Council wants to attract talented people from all backgrounds into these roles, it should pay an amount which would allow them either to give up work, or at least reduce their paid work while in that role. Otherwise, there was a risk that only people who were either retired or had independent wealth would be able to take these roles. It was noted that the IRP recommendation for Cabinet Members ranged from £39,860 to £42,271 whereas this proposal would lead to an SRA of £24,028.
- 2.8 A contrary view was expressed that whilst accepting there was an argument for some increase in the SRA paid to cabinet members, as the Group had already agreed to recommend an enhanced basic allowance, this increase would feed into the SRA calculation so that the rate for a cabinet member would increase from £8694 to £12,014 in any event without the need to increase the multiplier. One member proposed that a multiplier of 2 would only be appropriate if the number of cabinet members was reduced to, say 6 or alternatively that a multiplier of 1.5 should apply if a higher number were to be retained.
- 2.9 As it was not possible to reach agreement, the question was put to the vote and the Group agreed by a majority to increase the multiple to 2.

Leaders of Other Political Groups.

- 2.10 There was a full debate about the best approach to the SRAs payable to leaders of other political groups represented on the Council. A distinction was drawn between the terms "leader of the opposition" which refers to the leader of the largest opposition group – the Liberal Democrat Group at present - and "leader of minority group" which refers to leader of all other opposition groups – currently the Conservative Group and the Merton Park Ward Independent residents. The Scheme currently provides that for any opposition group with 7 or more members, the SRA is paid at a factor of 2 and for any group with fewer than 7 members, a multiple of 0.66 is applied.
- 2.11 The Group accepted that it should not necessarily be assumed that the fewer the members in the group the easier the role as in some ways the fewer the members, the heavier the workload for each individual member to allow them to cover all the areas of the Council in order to provide scrutiny and challenge. However, there was also an acceptance that for very small groups, it would be appropriate to see a reduction in the multiple applied. After some debate it was agreed to recommend a slightly different approach to the one currently in use, as follows:

The leader of the (largest) opposition group continues to receive a multiple of 2, yielding an SRA of £24,028. The same figure as proposed for Cabinet Members.

The leader of the largest minority group will receive a multiple of 1 – an SRA of £12,014

The leader of the next largest minority will receive a multiple of 0.5 - an SRA of £6007

No smaller group (if in future there are any) will received an allowance.

This was unanimously agreed and the Group recognised that if in future there were two groups of the same size attracting a multiple of 0.5, that would have to be accommodated. They also noted that it is always possible for the Full Council to review the Scheme at a future date should a situation arise where there are multiple smaller political groups.

Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Commission

- 2.12 Again, there was a difference of view on how best to approach the question of the multiplier for the role of Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Commission. Most members of the group felt it was a role with significant responsibility bearing in mind the function of the Commission as the most senior scrutiny body, responsible, among other things for coordinating the scrutiny response to the formal budget setting process. Others felt that it ought not to be more highly valued than the Chair of this Committee, bearing in mind this Committee's role as the audit committee and in relation to signing off the annual accounts. The Group noted that the Commission Chair has responsibilities outside the formal

meeting process as the councillor charged with the power to agree to urgent decision making and to waive call in. The Group's attention was drawn to the IRP report which does distinguish between the role of the lead scrutiny committee chair and other regulatory committees, placing the former in band 3 (which they recommend be paid at a higher rate) and the latter in band 2. After some debate the proposal to leave the SRA at the current multiplier of 1 was put to the vote and agreed by a majority. If that recommendation is agreed, it would mean an SRA of £12,014.

Chair of Development and Planning Applications Committee

- 2.13 The Group debated a proposal that the multiplier for the role of Chair of the Development and Planning Application Committee should remain at 1. Some members of the group felt that the workload of the Chair was considerable, and equivalent to that of a cabinet member. They remarked on recent innovations such as the welcome introduction of a technical briefing which added to that workload as did the merger at the last annual council meeting of the Planning Applications Committee with the Borough Planning Advisory Committee, which in itself received an SRA of 0.33%. Other members, while acknowledging the very thorough manner in which the current chair approaches the role, stressed that this exercise was about the role, rather than the individual. The proposal that the multiplier remain at 1 was put to the vote and was agreed by a majority. The Chair would therefore be entitled to an SRA of £12,014.

Chair of Standards and General Purposes Committee and Scrutiny Panel Chairs

- 2.14 After a short debate, the Group unanimously agreed that the multiplier for the chair of this committee and the three overview and scrutiny panel chairs should remain at 0.33, which would lead to an SRA of £3964.62.

Licensing Committee Chair

- 2.15 The debate in relation to this role centred around the fact that the main Licensing Committee has reserved relatively few functions to itself and all decisions on individual licence applications are taken by the sub committees. The chairs of those sub committees are elected on the day of the meeting and receive a one-off payment of £256 for each meeting they chair. On that basis, the full Licensing Committee only meets two or three times a year and the Group did not consider that warranted the current multiplier. Therefore, they unanimously recommended that the Licensing Chair role also takes responsibility for chairing the sub committee meetings and on that basis, it should retain the multiplier of 1. No payment should be made to any other subcommittee chair who might in future step in in the absence of the Licensing Committee chair.

NEW ROLES TO RECEIVE AN SRA

- 2.16 The Group unanimously agreed that the Mayor should receive an allowance although that role does not currently attract an SRA. They recognised that as well as chairing Full Council meetings, the Mayor is of significant symbolic importance for the Council and the community as a whole and carries an enormous workload. One member of the Group remarked that he had never known a Mayor in Merton who did not carry out that role diligently and conscientiously. They recommend that the Mayor should now receive an allowance with a multiplier of one and would therefore be entitled to an SRA of £12,014.
- 2.17 A proposal was put to the Group that four roles which do not currently receive an SRA should do so on the following basis:

Administration Whip	0.5	
Deputy Leader of the Opposition	0.5	
Opposition Whip	0.33	
Minority Group Whip	0.25	

The rationale for these proposals was a recognition of the importance and level of work undertaken to allow groups to provide an appropriate level of scrutiny and challenge across the Council, including, but not solely, to ensure that Full Council meetings run effectively. This applied across the political groups and it was pointed out that only one of the four proposed new roles outlined above would fall to the Administration.

- 2.18 Other members of the Group recognised that the proposal would benefit opposition groups and thanked the proposer for this even handedness. However, they were opposed in principle to any more SRAs being created, save for the Mayor, and so the matter was put straight to the vote and the creation of the new posts was passed by a majority.

Conclusion

- 2.19 The outcome of the deliberations and, where applicable, the votes, described above is summarised in appendix A. The Group noted that although reference is made in the current scheme to SRAs applicable to Assistant Cabinet Members and Adoption and Fostering Panel Members, no such roles exist. They therefore recommend that the references to them be removed from the Scheme.

3. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 3.1 Council could reject the recommendations of the Standards and General Purposes Committee and not change its Member Allowances scheme,

although in doing so it may wish to note the information previously before it which shows that the outcome of not having increased the allowances for some time means that they are becoming increasingly out of step with the IRP recommendations, the London average and some neighbouring boroughs. The working Group discussed the importance of attracting a diverse range of people to stand for election and the role of allowances in achieving this, while acknowledging that there are many motivations for standing for public office, and financial reward is rarely one of them.

- 3.2 Council could also choose to accept some, but not all, of the recommendations and to substitute some or all with their own proposals, although it would be important to be clear about the rationale for this.

4. CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED

Both the Standards and General Purposes Committee and the working group thereof have cross-party memberships with representation from all political groups.

5. TIMETABLE

Standards and General Purposes Committee recommended that any new allowances be paid to councillors with effect from the date of the full Council meeting when they are agreed, that being 13 September 2023. They will not be backdated to 1 April 2023 as councillors did not feel this would be appropriate. In accordance with the recommended retention of the link to the staff pay award, they would then increase again automatically with effect from year 1 April 2024 once the outcome of the staff pay negotiations are known.

6. FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 If adopted, the recommendations in this report will lead to an increase in the total cost of basic allowances from the current £495,558 to £684,798, an increase of £189,240.
- 6.2 The total cost of SRAs would increase from £199,783 to £386,252, an increase of £186,469.
- 6.3 The total overall cost of the proposed allowances rises from £695,341 to £1,071,050, an increase of £375,709. Provision was made for an increase in Members allowances within contingency budgets as part of the MTFS approved by Council in March 2023. The annual inflation increase will be reflected in the Council's annual provision for inflation increases for pay.
- 6.3 As the proposal is that the new scheme will not come into effect until 13 September this year, the above annual increases will be pro rata'd for this

financial year at an estimated cost of £199,000.

7. LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The Local Authorities (Members' Allowance) (England) Regulations 2003 (the Regulations) require a relevant authority to make a scheme providing for the payment of a basic allowance to each member of that authority.
- 7.2 Regulation 10 of the Local Authorities (Members' Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003 ("the Regulations") requires re-adoption of the scheme on an annual basis. Before making or amending its allowances scheme, the Council is required, by Regulation 19, to have regard to the recommendations of an Independent Remuneration Panel. Those obligations have been complied with as both the Standards and General Purposes Committee and the Group have considered those recommendations.
- 7.3 The Regulations do allow any increase in allowances to be backdated to the beginning of the financial year in which they are agreed; however, members agreed not to recommend that backdating be implemented.

8. HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS

The proposals set out above would not appear to have a disproportionate negative effect on any group with protected characteristics; the working group expressed the hope that the increases they are proposing will have a positive impact on the willingness of people from a diverse range of backgrounds to stand for election in Merton, thereby increasing the representativeness of the councillor cohort.

9 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

None

10 RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

None

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

Appendix A – Proposed schedule of rates for basic and special responsibility allowances.

12. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Working Group papers

London Council's Report Of Independent Remuneration [Panel](#)

London Benchmarking data on Members [Allowances](#)

Current [Members Allowances Scheme](#) and [Schedule of Rates](#)

Current Merton Basic Cllr Allowance	£8,684
Working Group Recommended Cllr Allowance	£12,014

Existing Special Responsibility Allowances	Formula	Existing SRA	Existing SRA Plus Current Basic	Proposed SRA	Proposed SRA Plus Proposed Basic with existing multipliers	Proposed Increase to Role SRA per Annum
Leader	4	£34,776	£43,460	£48,056	£60,070	£13,280
Deputy Leader	2	£17,388	£26,072	£24,028	£36,042	£6,640
Leader of the Opposition (7+ members)	2	£17,388	£26,072	£24,028	£36,042	£6,640
Leader Minority Group	0.66	£5,737	£14,421	£7,929	£19,943	£2,192
Cabinet Member (with increased multiplier from 1 to 2)	2	£8,694	£17,378	£24,028	£36,042	£15,334
Chair, Scrutiny Commission	1	£8,694	£17,378	£12,014	£24,028	£3,320
Chair, Planning Committee	1	£8,694	£17,378	£12,014	£24,028	£3,320
Chair Licensing Committee*	1	£8,694	£17,378	£12,014	£24,028	£3,320
Chair, General Purposes Committee	0.33	£2,868	£11,552	£3,965	£15,979	£1,097
Scrutiny Panel Chairs	0.33	£2,868	£11,552	£3,965	£15,979	£1,097
Mayor	1	N/A	N/A	£12,014	£24,028	£12,014
Administration Whip	0.5	N/A	N/A	£6,007	£18,021	£6,007
Deputy Leader of the Opposition	0.5	N/A	N/A	£6,007	£18,021	£6,007
Opposition Whip	0.33	N/A	N/A	£3,965	£15,979	£3,965
Minority Group Whip	0.25	N/A	N/A	£3,004	£15,018	£3,004

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Existing/Proposed Total Costs of Special Responsibility Allowances	Number of Cllrs Receiving SRA	Current SRA	Current Total Cost of SRAs	Proposed Formula	Proposed Number of Cllrs to Receive SRA	Proposed SRA	Proposed Total Cost of SRAs	Proposed Total Payment per annum (SRA + Basic)
Leader	1	£34,776	£34,776	4	1	£48,056	£48,056	£60,070
Deputy Leader	1	£17,388	£17,388	2	1	£24,028	£24,028	£36,042
Leader of the Opposition	2	£17,388	£34,776	2	1	£24,028	£24,028	£36,042
Leader of largest Minority Group	1	£5,737	£5,737	1	1	£12,014	£12,014	£24,028
Leader of next largest Minority Group	0	N/A	N/A	0.66	*0	£6,007	£0	NA
Cabinet Member (move to multiple of 2)	8	£8,694	£69,552	2	8	£24,028	£192,224	£36,042
Chair, Scrutiny Commission	1	£8,694	£8,694	1	1	£12,014	£12,014	£24,028
Chair, Planning Committee	1	£8,694	£8,694	1	1	£12,014	£12,014	£24,028
Chair Licensing Committee	1	£8,694	£8,694	1	1	£12,014	£12,014	£24,028
Chair, General Purposes Committee	1	£2,868	£2,868	0.33	1	£3,965	£3,965	£15,979
Scrutiny Panel Chairs	3	£2,868	£8,604	0.33	3	£3,965	£11,894	£15,979
Mayor	0	N/A	N/A	1	1	£12,014	£12,014	£24,028
Administration Whip	0	N/A	N/A	0.5	1	£6,007	£6,007	£18,021
Deputy Leader of the Opposition	0	N/A	N/A	0.5	1	£6,007	£6,007	£18,021
Opposition Whip	0	N/A	N/A	0.33	1	£3,965	£3,965	£15,979
Minority Group Whip	0	N/A	N/A	0.25	2	£3,004	£6,008	£15,018
Total			£199,783				£386,252	

* not payable while postholder also Chair of O&S

		Total Cost/Projected Total Cost of Basic Allowance	Total Cost/Projected Total Costs of SRAs	Total Cost/Projected Total Costs of Basic Plus SRAs
Total Costs of Basic + Special Responsibility Allowances				
Existing Merton Basic Cllr Allowance	£8694	£495,558	£199,783	£695,341
Working Group Recommended Cllr Allowance	£12,014	£684,798	£386,252	£1,071,050

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Committee: Council

Date: 13 September 2023

Subject: Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2022/23

Lead officer: Rosie Mckeever, Scrutiny Officer

Lead member: Councillor Edward Foley, Chair, Overview and Scrutiny Commission

Contact officer: Rosie Mckeever, Scrutiny Officer, 0208 545 4035

Recommendations:

That Council receives the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1. Council is invited to receive the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report.

2 DETAILS

- 2.1. The Overview and Scrutiny Commission is required to produce an annual report outlining the work of the overview and scrutiny function over the course of the municipal year. The Commission has used the report as an opportunity to draw attention to some of the outcomes achieved during the year as well as covering in detail the work undertaken by each of the Panels and the Commission itself.
- 2.2. The report was approved for submission to Council by the Overview and Scrutiny Commission at its meeting on 5 July 2023.

3 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 3.1. The Overview and Scrutiny Commission would be in breach of the constitution if it did not produce an annual report and present it to Council.

4 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED

- 4.1. The Overview and Scrutiny Commission approved the content of the Annual Report.

5 TIMETABLE

- 5.1. The Overview and Scrutiny Commission received, commented on and approved the report at its meeting 5 July 2023

6 FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1. There are none specific to this report.

7 LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1. The Overview and Scrutiny Commission is constitutionally bound to produce an annual report for the overview and scrutiny function and to present the report to the full Council. The Overview and Scrutiny Commission would be in breach of the constitution if it did not do this.

8 HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS

8.1. There are none specific to this report.

9 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

9.1. There are none specific to this report.

10 RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

10.1. There are none specific to this report

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

- Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2022/23

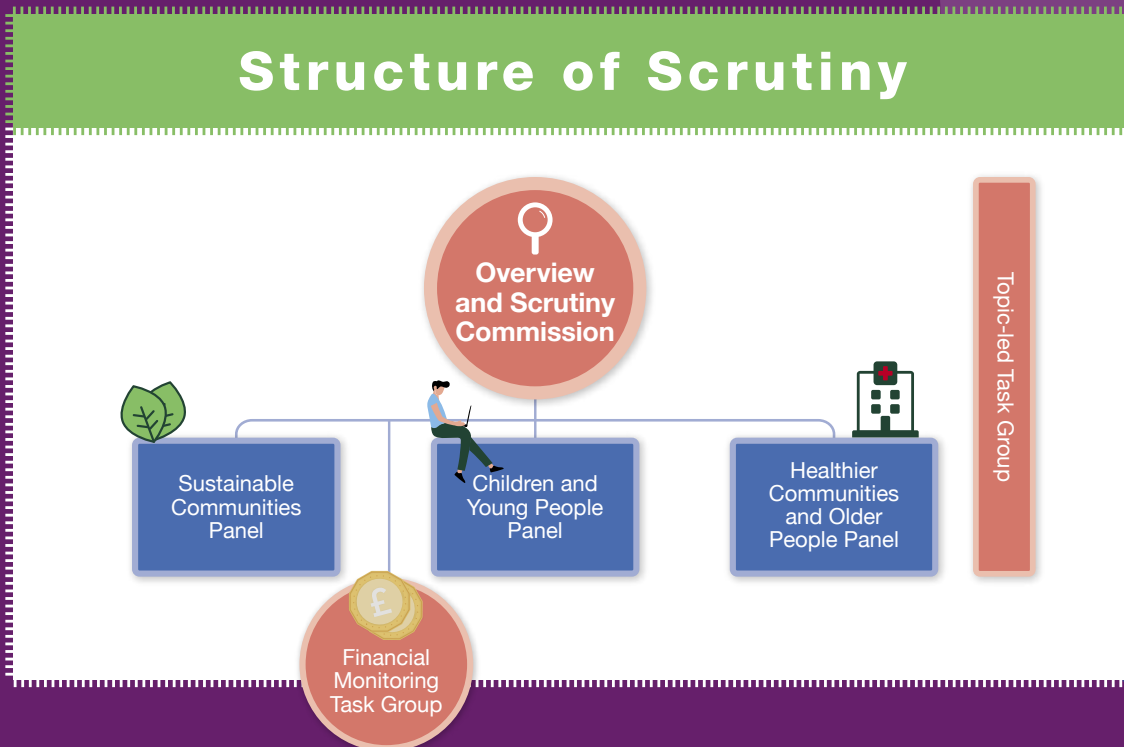
12 BACKGROUND PAPERS

12.1. None

Scrutiny in Merton

The scrutiny function acts on behalf of the community to improve services and decision-making inside and outside of the council. It does this through in-depth reviews, evidence-gathering sessions on a topic or questions to service providers, Cabinet members or partners.

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Foreword

Scrutiny is at the heart of the decision-making process in Merton and is a forum for councillors to discuss complex local issues. This past year, the **Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel** has helped shape the future of the borough's waste collection services. The **Overview and Scrutiny Commission** assembled a working group to review options for the future of CHAS 2013 Ltd. The **Healthier Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel** has overseen a review of day care opportunities, to ensure a variety of activities are available for vulnerable residents. The **Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel** held a special session to understand their role as corporate parents and to review current service provision for looked after children.



Councillor Edward Foley, Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission, said: *"It has been a busy year for scrutiny. New councillors have become acquainted with their role in holding decision makers to account. We have welcomed residents to scrutiny meetings, visited services and held budget scrutiny training sessions. Thanks to commitment from councillors, we have run more task groups this year than ever before. I have met with Chairs and Vice Chairs to map out continuous improvement for the function."*

Scrutiny in action

Merton's Violence Against Women and Girls strategy (VAWG) was presented to the **Overview and Scrutiny Commission**, along with plans to obtain white ribbon accreditation, in order to demonstrate the Council's commitment to engaging with



men and boys to end violence against women and girls. Commission members supported this work by placing a strong focus on the safety of women and girls in their agendas this municipal year. The Borough Commander and Safer Merton officers were in regular attendance at meetings. Merton Council has since achieved White Ribbon accredited status, and will make changes to communications, HR policies, employee development, training, and overall organisational culture.

The Chair of the **Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel** led on a plan to enhance the participation of young people within scrutiny. As a result, a young inspector has been appointed to the Commission and each of the Panels for a one-year pilot scheme. The Young Inspectors will draw on the experiences of young people across the borough and enable their voices to be heard. Merton Young Inspector Lola Kareem ➔



said: *“Being a Young Inspector on the scrutiny panel has been an innovative experience as this has allowed me to ensure young people’s views are heard within these settings and by decision-makers. As a Young Inspector sitting on the Healthier Communities and Older People Panel, I have been able to hear about the initiatives being delivered for our older residents and challenge our decision-makers to ensure these services are also reaching younger residents”*

Following a presentation on the fly-tipping strategy, members of the **Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel** made a cross party recommendation that Cabinet look at ways to involve the community to develop plans on the collection of waste. May 2023 saw the first two pilots of ‘Garth Road on the Road’, a pop-up tip for residents who live in Pollards Hill, and another in the St Helier and Ravensbury area, to dispose of their excess household rubbish, recycling, green waste, and bulky items.

Improving the uptake of breast screening is a major concern for the **Healthier Communities and Older People Overview and Scrutiny Panel**. NHS colleagues were asked to provide simple messages on the importance of screening which councillors can then share with the community.

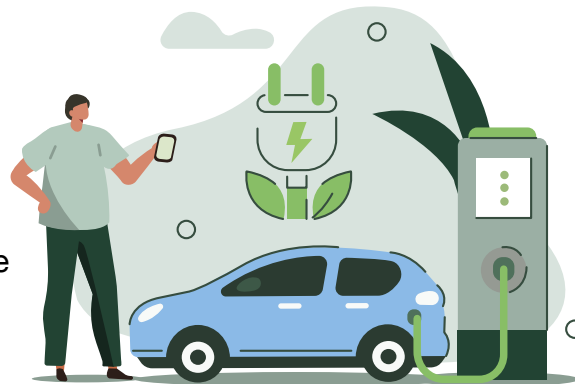


Improving services at St Helier hospital has been a focus this year. Councillors visited services in August 2022 and the Chief Executive of Epsom and St Helier attended the Panel in September 2022

Panel members continue to advocate for an accessible breast screening clinic within the borough. This will support vulnerable people and make it easier for residents to get to.

In September 2022 the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel agreed to undertake a scrutiny review of **Electric Vehicle (EV) Charging in Merton**. The EV Task Group considered the current progress of the EV charger rollout and the anticipated future demands and helped to shape the Council’s upcoming Electric Vehicle Strategy. The strategy will set out Merton’s vision and policy, and estimate the infrastructure needed in the coming years and consider how this work could be implemented. Delivery will include spreading a range of charging types

and speeds as evenly as possible throughout the borough, how to manage street cluttering and possible solutions to cable channels on pavements. At the time of publishing this annual report, the group's recommendations were scheduled for Cabinet but not yet approved.



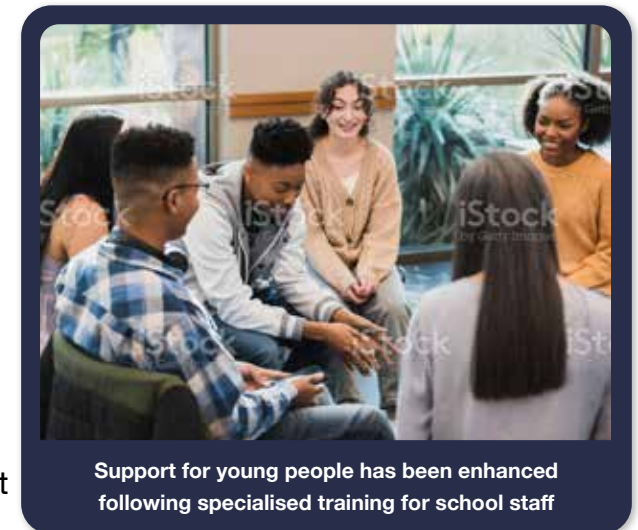
A review on **Youth Funding** is looking at the role of Young People's Foundations as a vehicle to attract funding sources. Task Group members have met with council officers, the voluntary sector, and examined work taking place in other local authorities. They are due to report their findings later this year.

A review on **Employment Opportunities for People with Autism** is looking at the role of the council as a community leader in providing employment for neuro diverse people. The review will report later this year.

This year, two additional councillor-led task groups were conducted with reduced officer support. This has increased activity within the function and provided more opportunities to put forward recommendations on issues of public concern.

A review looking at **community toilets** has received over 900 responses to a public survey. Recommendations are currently being drawn up. The review on **Reducing Eating Disorders and Self Harm amongst Young People** has completed. Recommendations focussed on training for professionals and promoting support services. Councillors have been pleased outcomes from previous reviews.

The majority of the recommendations from a **Children's Mental Health Task Group** have been implemented including specialised training for school governors, expansion of mental health first aid training to schools, collaborative work between youth parliament and young inspectors to improve communication material. A pilot social prescribing scheme for children and young people is in place.



Support for young people has been enhanced following specialised training for school staff

The recommendations from a **High Street Task Group** led to a council funding pot of £50,000 to procure culture led projects across the borough.

Other topics scrutinised

Children's
mental health

Long
Covid

Suicide
prevention

Flooding

Discussions
with Borough
Commander

Child healthy
weight
programme

Tackling
climate
change

Housing
support

Page 51

Scrutiny in numbers

Meetings and members

- ⊕ 24 panel meetings
- ⊕ 40 members
- ⊕ 4 co-optees
- ⊕ 76 items considered
- ⊕ 2,475 views on YouTube

Plus

- ⊕ 3 task group reviews
- ⊕ 2 call-ins
- ⊕ 11 scrutiny referrals/recommendations to Cabinet

Ways to get involved:

There are a number of ways you can get involved in the work of scrutiny at the council by:

- ➔ suggesting an issue or topic for scrutiny to look at merton.gov.uk/council-and-local-democracy/decision-making/overview-and-scrutiny/get-involved or by writing, emailing or phoning the Scrutiny Team on **020 8545 4035**
- ➔ attending a meeting open to the public
- ➔ requesting to give information and views in writing or speaking at a meeting
- ➔ contacting your local councillor on how to get involved

You can also view our scrutiny pages on our website, which include meeting dates, agendas and panel membership, via merton.gov.uk/scrutiny or by contacting the Scrutiny Team on scrutiny@merton.gov.uk



Committee: Council

Date: 13 September 2023

Wards: All

Subject: Standards and General Purposes Annual Report

Lead officer: Polly Cziok, Executive Director Innovation and Change

Lead member: Billy Christie, Cabinet Member Finance and Corporate Services

Forward Plan reference number: N/A

Contact officer: Margaret Culleton, Head of Internal Audit

Email: margaret.culleton@merton.gov.uk

Recommendations:

- A To note the Annual Report and agree to its for publication and distribution to relevant stakeholders.
 - B To note the appointment of an independent person and to co-opt such a person onto the S&GP Committee for the purposes of providing advice on the audit functions of the S&GP Committee; and
 - C To consider S&GP's recommendation to agree the amended terms of reference for S&GP Committee in accordance with Appendix C.
-

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report presents the Annual Report of the Standards and General Purposes Committee for 2022/23, which was approved by the S&GP committee on the 19 July 2023, with a recommendation that this decision go to full Council.
- 1.2 The purpose of this Annual Report is to demonstrate to stakeholders the work undertaken by the Standards and General Purposes Committee over the previous 12 months in promoting good governance and fulfilling its terms of reference.
- 1.3 It also reviews guidance issued by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) and invites the Committee to consider whether to adopt amended terms of reference and to appoint an independent advisory member for the purposes of its audit functions.

2 Details

- 2.1 The Annual Report of the Standards and General Purposes Committee is drafted

on behalf of the Committee by the Head of Internal Audit.

- 2.2 It is recommended practice, by CIPFA, for audit committees to review and assess themselves annually or to seek an external review. The results of the assessment should be available in the annual report from the committee.
- 2.3 The external auditor also considers the effectiveness of the audit committee when evaluating the authority's governance arrangements. If they have any significant concerns, they will make recommendations for improvement. Any such recommendations should also be included in the committee's annual report. No recommendations have been made by the external auditor Ernst and Young in their review for 2021/22.
- 2.4 Internal control, governance and risk management arrangements are in place to help ensure the Council makes appropriate use of its resources and powers to make a positive difference to the lives of Merton residents. The Standards and General Purposes committee is a key component of governance. Their purpose is to provide an independent and high-level focus on the adequacy of governance, risk and control arrangements. They play an important role in supporting leadership teams and elected representatives and help the Council to achieve the priorities set out in Merton's Corporate Plan.
- 2.5 The Council recognises the benefits of strong internal control, governance and risk management which include: -
 - Better decision making as we are more aware of control risks.
 - Better governance and the ability to demonstrate it to our stakeholders.
 - Reduction in failure, error and fraud risks
 - Improvement in our corporate governance
 - Compliance with statutory and regulatory requirements

3 Annual Report

- 3.1 The Annual Report has been compiled with the principal aims of reviewing the Standards and General Purposes Committee's activities during 2022/23 and providing some forward-looking information including the work plan for the next 12 months for the Standards and General Purposes Committee.
- 3.2 It is planned that the Annual Report will be published on the Council's website.
- 3.3 Audit committees are a key component of governance, providing independent and high-level focus on the adequacy of governance, risk and control arrangements. They play an important role in supporting leadership teams, elected representatives, and commissioners, and help provide assurance to all stakeholders that an organisation is well run. The Standards and General Purposes Committee undertakes this function for the Council and receives a number of regular or standing items across each year, as well as specific reports on relevant control, risk or governance issues.
- 3.4 The annual report outlines the reports submitted to the committee during the year

2022/23. This included external audit reports, internal audit updates, fraud updates, HR reports and regular updates on the Council's treasury management activities. The annual report also sets out proposed reports for 2023/24 as a work plan for the Committee.

- 3.5 The Committee Members changed from June 2022, following local elections. Training on their role for this Committee was provided to Committee Members in July 2022.

Cipfa guidance 2022

- 3.6 CIPFA provided updated guidance for audit committees in 2022. This recommends a number of actions for committees to improve effectiveness. A skills assessment was sent to committee members in March 2023, using the CIPFA recommended questions. This has found that the committee has a good mix of skills and knowledge, where there were new members, some training has been identified, which will be considered during 2023/24.
- 3.7 A review was undertaken comparing Cipfa recommended terms of reference to the Standards and General Purposes terms of reference (in relation to the audit committee element), this found that the councils' terms of reference require review and update, in accordance with Appendix C. Committee is invited to consider whether to recommend these amended terms of reference to full Council.
- 3.8 CIPFA also recommends that audit committees appoint independent advisory members in order to provide external expertise and challenge to the work of the committee. Although the Committee has the benefit of two independent advisory members for the purposes of giving advice and support on standards and conduct issues, to date there has not been an analogous role in respect of its audit functions. If appointed, such advisory members would be non-voting and if the Committee and Council agreed that one should be appointed, an external recruitment exercise would be undertaken to secure a suitably qualified person. CIPFA recommends that the person be appointed for a term that spans the borough elections to provide continuity outside the political cycle.

4 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 4.1. There are no options to consider as this item is not for decision.

5 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED

- 5.1. None.

6 TIMETABLE

- 6.1. Review of the committee terms of reference and additional training to be considered in 2023/24.

7 FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS

7.1. There are no implications arising directly from this report.

8 LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

8.1. There are no direct legal implications arising from the recommendation(s) in this report.

9 HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS

9.1. There are no implications arising from the recommendation in this report

10 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

10.1. There are no specific crime and disorder implications arising from this report.

11 RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

11.1. There are no implications arising from the recommendation in this report

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

Appendix A – Standards and General Purposes Annual Report
Appendix B -Planned Meeting Dates & Provisional Work Plan: 2023/24
Appendix C- Terms of Reference suggested updates
Appendix D- Skills Assessment results

13 BACKGROUND PAPERS

13.1. Papers held within the Internal Audit Service.

London Borough of Merton Standards and General Purposes Committee Annual Report: 2022/23

Report drafted by:

Margaret Culleton – Head of Internal Audit

Report issued to:

Standards and General Purposes Committee – 19 July
2023

Council – 13 September 2023

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 <u>Appendices</u>	
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B. Provisional Work Plan: Standards and General Purposes Committee 2023/24	9
C Recommended terms of reference	11
D Skills Competency results 2022/23	12

Introduction

I hope that this Annual Report helps to demonstrate to the residents of the Borough and the Council's other stakeholders the vital role that is carried out by the Standards and General Purposes Committee and the contribution that it makes to the Council's overall governance. As with other Council Committees, all scheduled meetings are open to members of the public and I would encourage residents to get involved and see the Committee in action.

I am pleased to note that the Committee has continued to make progress in discharging its responsibility to provide independent assurance on the Council's control environment and governance framework. As outlined in the body of this report, the Committee has been actively engaged with our Internal and External Audit functions and the results of their work. In addition, the Committee has taken a keen interest in governance developments such as the Council's participation in the South-West London Fraud Partnership.

Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to those officers who have, over the past year, attended the meetings to present and discuss reports and supported the previous Chair.

**Standards and General Purposes
Committee Chair**

Merton's Standards and General Purposes Committee: Frequently asked Questions

What does a Standards and General Purposes Committee do?

The Standards and General Purposes Committee is a key component of the Council's corporate governance. It provides an independent and high-level focus on the risk management framework, internal control environment and the integrity of the financial reporting and annual governance processes that underpin good governance and financial standards. Audit Committees in Local Authorities are necessary to satisfy the wider statutory requirements for sound financial management.

The Council's Standards function is undertaken by this committee, as well as discharging its responsibility as an audit committee.

Why do we need it?

The Standards and General Purposes Committee has a vital role to play in ensuring that residents of the Borough are getting good quality services and value for money. It also oversees the Council's annual financial reporting process comprising the Council's main financial statements and those of the Pension Fund. It ensures that the governance arrangements are robust.

When did the committee meet in 2022/23?

There were three scheduled meetings on: 21 July, 13 October and 28 November, starting at 7.30pm and lasting approximately 2 hours. The agenda items discussed are shown in Appendix A and the recording of the meetings, supporting papers and reports are publicly available on the Council's website, www.merton.gov.uk.

In 2022/23 the Committee membership consisted of twelve councillors in proportion to the Council's political composition, with an opposition Vice Chair, and two ex-officio members that sat on the committee by virtue of their position as Independent Persons under the Standards Regime set out in the Localism Act 2011.

What was its main workload in 2022/23?

A work plan was agreed at the start of the municipal year. For 2022/23 it included regular and ongoing review of the following:

- Member complaints
- Updates to the constitution
- The work of the External Auditor
- Internal Audit Reports and Activities
- The Council's Statement of Accounts
- The South West London Fraud Partnership updates
- Risk Management.

Specific details of the committee's activity during 2022/23 are shown in Appendix A(i). The planned agenda was supplemented by reports where

the committee requested additional information or assurances from management.

Taking the year as a whole, the Committee was successful in:

- Providing updates on member conduct
- Maintaining a comprehensive overview of internal control and governance
- Maintaining an overview of the Council's anti-fraud arrangements

What is the role of the Internal Audit function?

The South London Audit Partnership (SWLAP) carries out Internal Audit reviews throughout the year on the effectiveness of the Council's governance and internal control arrangements, including risk management. The Head of Internal Audit reports Internal Audit activity regularly to the Committee and also provides an Annual Report on the effectiveness of internal control. The investigation of fraud is provided by the South West London Fraud Partnership (SWLFP), they provide twice yearly updates to the committee.

Who is the Council's External Auditor?

The External Auditor is Ernst and Young. A representative attended all the Committee meetings in 2022/23 and reported progress on the annual cycle of external audit work, including planned activities and the fees for their work.

Does the Standards and General

Purposes Committee meet best practice standards?

The functions of the Standards and General Purposes Committee were aligned to those recommended by the Chartered Institute for Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) in its 2022 publication "Audit Committees – Practical Guidance for Local Authorities".

A review of the committees' terms of reference against CIPFA's was undertaken in March 2023 resulting in a number of additions to be considered (see Appendix C).

A knowledge skills assessment was sent to all members of the committee for completion, 7 completed returns were received. These shows a good balance of knowledge, and the results will be used to identify any training requirements for 2023/24. (see Appendix D)

Training for members

A Member Development programme was agreed for all councillors in January 2022, covering 2022/23. Updates were provided to this committee on attendance and the move to on-line training. Additional training was provided in July 2022, to the members of the Standards and General Purposes Committee on the role of the committee.

Meetings schedules for 2023/24

Details of the meetings planned to take place during 2023/24 are shown in Appendix B with the provisional work plan.

Appendix A(i)

Audit Committee Activity: 2022/23

Meeting: 21 July 2022

External Auditors Annual Report for 2020-21 Annual report for 2020/21

External Audit Planning Report Proposed audit approach and scope for the 2021/22 audit.

Annual Governance Statement. Statement on the annual governance arrangements in place during 2021/22.

Internal Audit Annual Report. Head of Internal Audit's opinion on the Council's internal control environment and the Annual Review of Effectiveness of Internal Audit

Amendments to the Constitution changes to the Constitution to update sections with current working practice and to amend any other sections.

Political Group Use of Council Resources options for the use of Merton letterheaded paper by councillors and establish a cross party working group to consider the options.

Freedom of the Borough To agree the nominations for Freeperson of the Borough Status

Complaints against Member Update on member complaints which have been received and dealt with since the last meeting.

Work Programme

Meeting: 13 October 2022

Appointment of Independent Person approval of the appointment of one Independent Person

Annual Complaints Report complaints received by the Monitoring Officer over the past two years.

Work Programme

Meeting: 28 November 2022

Internal Audit Progress Report on Annual Audit Plan Internal Audit's progress in delivering the Annual Audit Plan up to October 2022.

Fraud Update Report including RIPA authorisations. Fraud Progress report

with indicative plan for the application of resources for 2022/23, a review of activity completed during 2021/22 and 2022/23 to October 2022

Final Accounts revised Statement of Accounts, including the Group Accounts and the Pension Fund Accounts, Audit Results Report, Letter of Representation, delegate authority to the Executive Director of Finance and Digital to sign off the final accounts once completed.

Risk Management. Risk management framework and the associated control environment and Key Strategic Risks and Issues

Annual Gifts and Hospitality Report (members) Declarations of gifts and hospitality including reasons for acceptance and amended Gifts and Hospitality Protocol

Annual Gifts and Hospitality Report (officers) Yearly update on the registration by officers for gifts and hospitality

Hearings Sub-Committee subcommittee to undertake hearings as and when required to consider complaints against members.

Work Programme

Appendix B

Planned Meeting Dates & Provisional Work Plan: 2023/24

Meeting: 27 April 2023
External Audit 21/22 Final Audit Results Report for Council and Pension Fund
External Audit Plans for Council and Pension Fund Accounts
Internal Audit Plan
Whistleblowing Policy and Anti-Money Laundering Policy Review
Fraud Update Report
Process Review - Nominating Honorary Aldermen
Freedom of the Borough
Remuneration of Councillors
Amendments to the Constitution
Member Complaints
Work programme

Meeting: 13 July 2023
Annual Governance Statement
Internal Audit Annual Report
External Audit – Fee Letters for the Council and Pension Fund Accounts
External Audit of the Council and Pension Fund Accounts
Complaints against Members
Annual Complaints Report 2021/22
Work Programme

Meeting: 14 September 2023
Internal Audit progress report on annual audit plan
Final Accounts
Update on RIPA authorisations
Work programme

Meeting: November 2023
External Audit Annual Letter
Internal Audit progress report on annual audit plan
Final Accounts
Fraud Update Report
Annual Gifts and Hospitality report (members)
Annual Gifts and Hospitality report (officers)
Risk management
Temporary and Contract Staff update
Work programme

Meeting: March 2024
External Audit Certification of Claims report
External Audit progress report
External Audit Plans for Council and Pension Fund accounts
Internal Audit Plan
Internal Audit progress report
Update on RIPA authorisations
Temporary and Contract Staff update
Work programme

Appendix C

Review of Standards and General Purposes Committee terms of reference (in relation to Audit Committee function) compared to CIPFA guidance – recommended terms of reference 2022.

Current terms of reference (covering audit committee role)

Financial Governance and Audit Matters

- To approve the Council's statement of accounts, and to consider any reports produced by the Chief Finance Officer, in accordance with the duty to make arrangements for the proper administration of the Council's financial affairs
- To consider reports and receive recommendations from External Audit.
- To consider reports and receive recommendations from Internal Audit and the shared fraud partnership.
- To monitor the effectiveness, development and operation of risk management and governance.
- To formally agree the Annual Governance Statement and review the improvement plans.

Recommended Terms of reference

Financial Reporting

To review and approve the annual statement of accounts. Specifically, to consider whether appropriate accounting policies have been followed and whether there are concerns arising from the financial statements or from the audit that need to be brought to the attention of Council

To consider the external auditor's report to those charged with governance on issues arising from the audit of the accounts

To consider reports on the effectiveness of financial management arrangements, including compliance with CIPFA's Financial Management Code

External Audit

To consider the external auditor's annual letter, relevant reports and the report to those charged with governance. This includes considering the Council's arrangements to secure value for money and review assurances and assessments on the effectiveness of these arrangements

To consider specific reports as agreed with the external auditor
To comment on the scope and depth of external audit work and to ensure it gives value for money
To consider options for the appointment of the Council's external auditor and make recommendations to full Council
Internal audit
To approve the internal audit charter
To approve the risk-based internal audit plan, including internal audit's resource requirements, the approach to using other sources of assurance and any work required to place reliance upon those other sources. This includes approving significant interim changes to the risk - audit plan and resource requirements
To consider the Head of Internal Audit's annual report: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The opinion on the overall adequacy and effectiveness of the council's framework of governance, risk management and control together with the summary of the work supporting the opinion – these will assist the committee in reviewing the Annual Governance Statement. <p>The statement of the level of conformance with the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards and Local Government Application Note and the results of the Quality Assurance and Improvement Programme that supports the statement - these will indicate the reliability of the conclusions of internal audit</p>
To consider summaries of specific internal audit reports as requested
To consider reports from the Head of Internal Audit dealing with the management and performance of providers of internal audit services. These will include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Updates on the work of internal audit including key findings, issues of concern and action in hand as a result of internal audit work. Regular reports on the results of the Quality Assurance and Improvement Programme. (QAIP) Reports on the effectiveness of internal audit including instances where the internal audit function does not conform to the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards and whether the non-conformance is significant enough that it must be included in the Annual Governance Statement To contribute to the QAIP including the external assessment undertaken once every five years
To consider a report from internal audit on agreed recommendations not implemented within a reasonable timescale
To review proposals made in relation to the appointment of external providers of internal audit services and to make recommendations
To monitor the counter-fraud strategy and policies, actions and resources. To review the assessment of fraud risks and their impact and ensure that fraud resources are directed at the areas of highest risk
Risk Management

To monitor the effective development and operation of risk management and corporate governance in the Council. This includes monitoring progress in addressing risk-related issues reported to the committee and ensuring that the Council's framework of assurance adequately addresses the risks and priorities of the Council

Governance

To review the Council's Annual Governance Statement prior to approval and consider whether it properly reflects the risk environment and supporting assurances, taking into account internal audit's opinion on the overall adequacy and effectiveness of the council's framework of governance, risk management and control

To review the council's corporate governance arrangements against the good governance framework and consider annual governance reports and assurances

Accountability Arrangements

To report to full council on a regular basis on the committee's performance in relation to the terms of reference and the effectiveness of the committee in meeting its purpose. This includes reporting on the committee's findings, conclusions and recommendations concerning the adequacy and effectiveness of governance, risk management and internal control frameworks, financial reporting frameworks and internal and external audit functions

To publish an annual report on the work of the committee, including a conclusion on the compliance with the CIPFA Position Statement

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CIPFA Knowledge and Skills Self Assessment



Your response deadline is 04/04/2025. Send reminder to people who have not responded.

[Remind them](#)

7

Responses

12:35

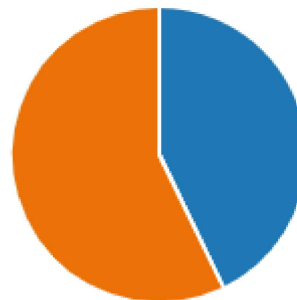
Average time to complete

Active

Status

1. I am aware of the CIPFA Audit Committee practical guidance 2022

- Yes 3
- No 4



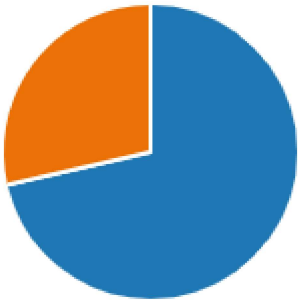
2. I have an overview of the governance structures of the authority and decision making processes.

- Full 4
- Some 3
- No Knowledge 0



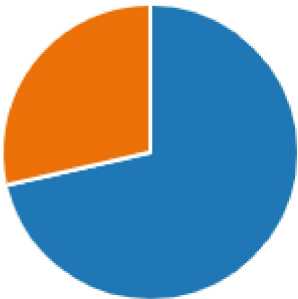
3. I have knowledge of the organisational objectives and major functions of the authority

● Full	5
● Some	2
● No knowledge	0



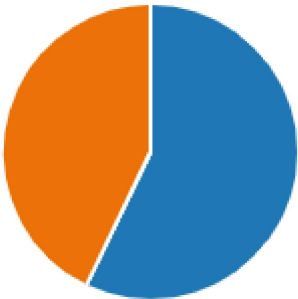
4. I have an understanding of the Standards and General Purposes committee's role and place within the governance structures

● Full	5
● Some	2
● No knowledge	0



5. I have familiarity with the committee's terms of reference and accountability arrangements

● Full	4
● Some	3
● No knowledge	0



6. I have knowledge of the purpose and role of the Standards and General Purposes Committee

● Full	6
● Some	1
● No knowledge	0



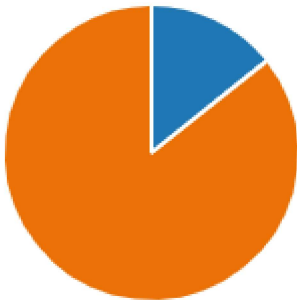
7. I have knowledge of the seven principles of the CIPFA/SOLACE Good Governance Framework and the requirements of the Annual Governance Statement (AGS)

● Full	1
● Some	5
● No knowledge	1



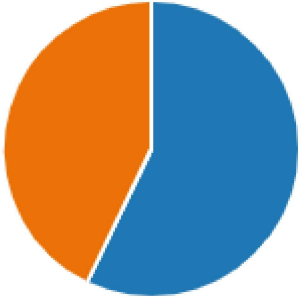
8. I have an awareness of the key principles of the the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards. I have knowledge of the arrangements for the delivery of the internal audit service and how the role of the Head of Internal Audit is fulfilled.

● Full	1
● Some	6
● No knowledge	0



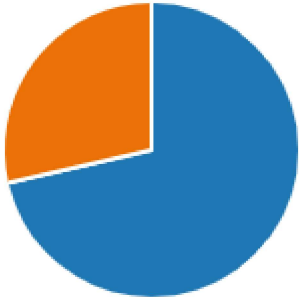
9. I have an awareness of the financial statements that a local authority must produce and the principles it must follow to produce them.

● Full	4
● Some	3
● No knowledge	0



10. I have an understanding of the financial risks the Council face

● Yes	5
● No	2



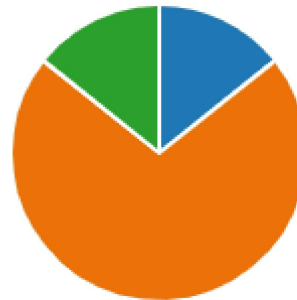
11. I have an understanding of good financial management principles

● Full	4
● Some	3
● No knowledge	0



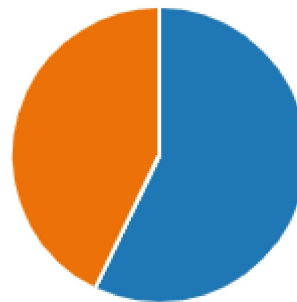
12. I have knowledge of how the organisation meets the requirements of the role of the Chief Financial Officer, as required by the CIPFA statement on the Role of the Chief Financial Officer in Local Government

● Full	1
● Some	5
● No knowledge	1



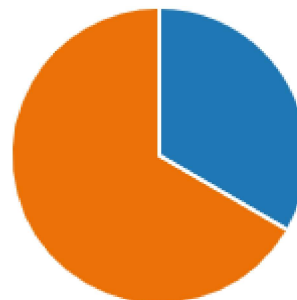
13. I have knowledge of the role and functions of the external auditor and who currently undertakes this role.

● Full	4
● Some	3
● No Knowledge	0



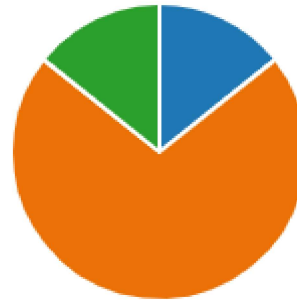
14. I have knowledge of the key reports and assurances that external audit will provide

● Full	2
● Some	4
● No knowledge	0



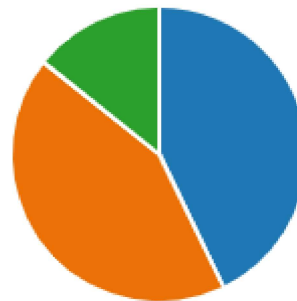
15. I have knowledge about arrangements for the appointment of auditors and quality monitoring undertaken

● Full	1
● Some	5
● No knowledge	1



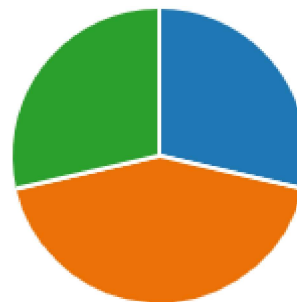
16. I have an understanding of the principles of risk management, including linkages to good governance and decision making

● Full	3
● Some	3
● No knowledge	1



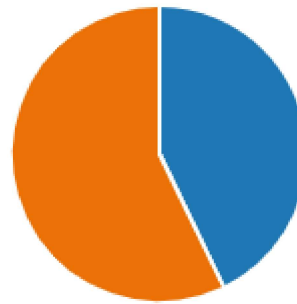
17. I have knowledge of the risk management policy and strategy of the organisation

● Full	2
● Some	3
● No knowledge	2



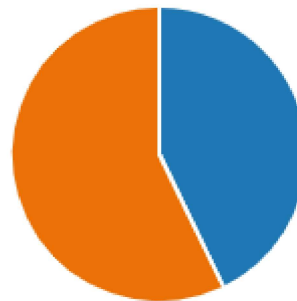
18. I have an understanding of risk governance arrangements, including the role of members of the Standards and General Purposes Committee

● Full	3
● Some	4
● No knowledge	0



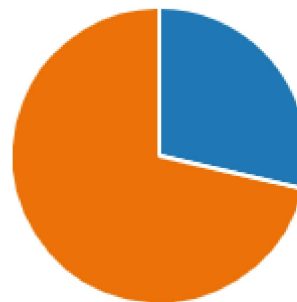
19. I have knowledge of the current risk maturity of the Council and any key areas of improvement

● Yes	3
● No	4



20. I have an understanding of the main areas of fraud and corruption risk the Council is exposed to

● Full	2
● Some	5
● No knowledge	0



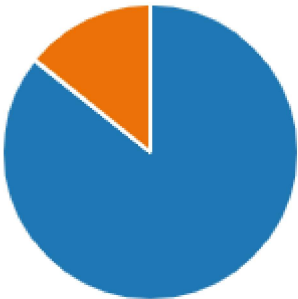
21. I have knowledge of the principles of good fraud risk management practice (CIFPA Code of Practice on managing the risk of fraud and Corruption 2014)

● Full	1
● Some	5
● No knowledge	1



22. I have knowledge of the Councils arrangements for tackling fraud

● Yes	6
● No	1



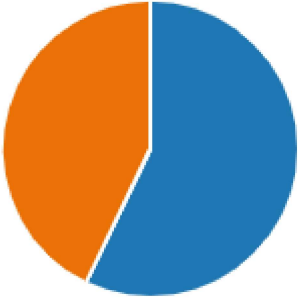
23. I have knowledge of the Seven Principles of Public Life

● Yes	6
● No	1



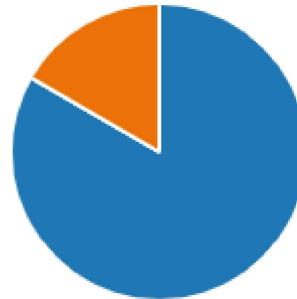
24. I have knowledge of the Councils key arrangements to uphold ethical standards for members (I.e Code of Conduct)

● Full	4
● Some	3
● No knowledge	0



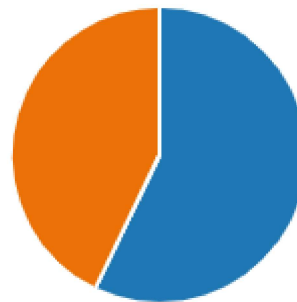
25. I have knowledge of the Whistleblowing arrangements in the Council

● Yes 5
● No 1



26. I understand that effective scrutiny of Treasury Management is important and am familiar with the key knowledge areas which are regulatory requirements, treasury risks, treasury management strategy and policies and procedures in relation to treasury management

● Yes 4
● No 3



27. Do you have any skills/experience in the following areas: accountancy, internal audit, risk management, governance, legal, IT system and security, expert service knowledge relevant to the Council (provide details below)

7
Responses

Latest Responses

"Previous experience as a charity trustee exposed me to risk ..."
"I have some experience as an Auditor in my early working lif..."
"experience in legal, some in IT system, and some risk manag..."

28. How many years experience do you have sitting on an Audit Committee? (can you add details on number of years and whether local authority)

7
Responses

Latest Responses

"Nothing prior to joining Merton Council."
"1 year on London Borough of Merton's committee"
"i have spent over 10 years in an audit committee in the loc..."

29. Would you like additional training to be provided, if so, what should this cover?

7
Responses

Latest Responses

"This is hard to answer as a number of the areas of responsib...

"none"

"yes"

30. Do you have any other comments?

7
Responses

Latest Responses

"N/A"

"Not at this stage"

"none"

Committee: Council

Date: 13 September 2023

Wards:

Subject: Approved Capital Programme Amendments Requiring Council Approval

Lead Officer: Asad Mushtaq, Executive Director Finance and Digital

Lead Member: Billy Christie, Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Services

Contact Officer: Zoe Church, Head of Financial Strategy and Capital
zoe.church@merton.gov.uk

Recommendations

- A. That Council approve Ricards Lodge Sixth Form Expansion scheme of £3,600,000 as detailed in the table below:

Scheme	Budget 2023-24	Budget 2024-25	Narrative
Ricards Lodge - 6th Form Expansion	50,000	3,550,000	DfE Post 16 Capacity Funding £3,235,706 and School Contribution £364,294 match funding

- B. That the School Capital Maintenance Budget is treated as one budget for financial management, reducing substantially the level of formal approval required for budget virement sign off to provide valuable historic information whilst allowing for effective budget management.

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to approve the budget adjustments required to properly record the asset enhancement in Merton's accounts for the Ricards Lodge Sixth Form Expansion and facilitate the effective management of the schools capital maintenance programme whilst maintaining historical expenditure by treating the capital maintenance budget as one budget in the capital programme.
- 1.2 In accordance with the Authority's Financial Regulations, any addition of £500,000 or more to the Capital Programme for a new scheme must be authorised by decision of Council.

2. DETAILS

2.1 Ricards Lodge Sixth Form Expansion:

2.1.1 With assistance from the council, Ricards Lodge School was successful in a capital bid for DfE grant to expand their sixth form. Ricards Lodge operates a joint sixth form with Rutlish. Rutlish School also submitted the bid but was unfortunately unsuccessful. The grant has been awarded directly to the school by the DfE but will require cabinet approval as the asset being extended is owned by the Council and appears on our balance sheet. Technical requirements in the accounting for this scheme require it to be added to the Authority's capital programme. Council officers are supporting the school who are directly managing the building project.

2.2 School Capital maintenance schemes are treated as one budget

2.2.1 With the movement to quarterly monitoring it is necessary to adjust approval arrangements for the capital programme

2.2.2 Officers are requesting that School Capital maintenance schemes are treated as one budget for efficient financial management of this DofE grant that is supplemented by schools contributions. The budget is currently split over school cost centres to provide officers with a historical breakdown of spend. Access to schools to undertake work is limited requiring officers to manage the budget flexibly and this change in treatment will minimise the number of formal virement sign off each month. Changes between individual schemes are frequently required as tender figures come through and the time delay of Cabinet approval causes operational difficulties for timely contracting. This approval would allow officers to manage the budget within the overall approved level, any adjustments to the overall level would still be subject to formal approval.

4. FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS

4.1 Revenue

4.1.1 It is envisaged that the additional funding generated by the schools funding formula will be sufficient to fund the expanded operation of the sixth form.

4.2 Capital

4.2.1 The approved capital programme will require the addition of the scheme in the table below – as this is a new scheme it will require Council approval to be formally added to the programme:

Scheme	Budget 2023-24	Budget 2024-25	Narrative
Ricards Lodge - 6th Form Expansion	50,000	3,550,000	DfE Post 16 Capacity Funding £3,235,706 and School Contribution £364,294 match funding

4.2.2 The adjustments required in respect of the schools capital maintenance budget are detailed in the report

5 LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

5.1 There are no legal implications arising out of this report.

6 HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS

6.1 None for the purposes of this report

7 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

7.1 None for the purposes of this report

8 RISK MANAGEMENT AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

8.1 None for the purposes of this report

9 APPENDICES

None

10 BACKGROUND PAPERS

10.1 Papers held by Resources.

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Committee: Council

Date: 13 September 2023

Subject: Changes to Membership of Committees and related matters

Lead officer: Hannah Doody, Chief Executive

Contact officer: Amy Dumitrescu, Democracy Services Manager

Recommendations:

That the Council:

1. Notes the changes to the membership of Committees that were approved under delegated authority since the last meeting of the Council.
-

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1. This report asks Council to note the changes made to committee memberships under delegated authority since the publication of the agenda for the last ordinary Council meeting on 12 July 2023.

2 DETAILS

- 2.1. The following membership changes have been made by the Chief Executive under their delegated authority in accordance with part 3E of the Constitution:

2.2.

Committee	Member resigning	Replaced by	Date
Development and Planning Applications Committee	Cllr Thomas Barlow	Cllr Michael Paterson	17 July 2023
Appointments Committee	Cllr Caroline Cooper-Marbiah	Cllr Natasha Irons	25 August 2023

3 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED

- 3.1 None for the purposes of this report.

4 FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1. None for the purposes of this report.

5 LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1. The information regarding membership changes in this report complies with legal and statutory requirements. Council is required to accept nominations made by political groups.
- 5.2. The Housing and Local Government Act 1989 contains provisions relating to the political balance on committees, the duty to allocate seats to political groups and the duty to give effect to allocations.

6 HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS

6.1. None for the purposes of this report.

7 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

7.1. None for the purposes of this report.

8 RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

8.1. N/A

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

9.1 None.

10 BACKGROUND PAPERS

Documents from the authorised officer confirming approval of the membership changes agreed under delegated authority.

Committee: Council

Date: 13 September 2023

Subject: Petitions

Lead officer: John Scarborough, Managing Director South London Legal Partnership

Lead member: Leader of the Council, Councillor Ross Garrod

Contact officer: Amy Dumitrescu, Democracy Services Manager

Recommendation:

1. That Council receive petitions (if any) in accordance with Part 4A, paragraph 18.1 of the Council's Constitution.
 2. That Council notes the responses provided to the petitions submitted at the meeting held on 12 July 2023.
-

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1. This report invites Council to receive petitions in accordance with Part 4A, paragraph 18.1 of the Council's Constitution.

2 DETAILS

- 2.1. At the meeting held on 12 July 2023 the two petitions listed below were submitted and the responses are set out below. Any petitions received by Council are referred to respective departments with responsible officers asked to advise the presenting member in each case of the way in which the petition is to be progressed.

Petition One

A petition was submitted by Councillor Cox which stated "We the undersigned call on the Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, to stop his plans to expand the ULEZ to the whole of Greater London and Merton".

Officer Response

"Thank you for submitting this petition. Merton Council acknowledges that the petition is addressed to the Mayor of London who is responsible for the ULEZ expansion and we have forwarded (or will forward) the petition to Sadiq Khan's office for consideration and response."

The petition was forwarded as per the above to Mayor Khan's office and the following response was received from them on 1 September 2023:

"We thank you for your correspondence, please see the stance of Merton Council, who are creating their own scrappage scheme to support their residents, following the court case ruling in support of the Mayor's plans".

Petition Two

A petition was submitted by Councillor Gould in relation to Eastway Day Centre. The prayer stated as follows: "Eastway Day Care Centre in Cannon Hill will be closed under plans by Labour run Merton Council.

From the Council's own consultation –

“On the 1 March, Merton Council approved its budget for 2023-24. As part of the process of setting a balanced budget, one proposal is to close Eastway Day Centre in Morden and seek to join 2 services together to offer an enhanced community-based model at the Dementia Hub in Mitcham and in other parts of the community. However, this is unlikely to be the same type and level of service and the new approach”.

Officer Response

Prior to the meeting of Full Council on 12 July and prior to the submission of the petition, the administration communicated their decision to halt proposals to close Eastway Day Centre, following a consultation with people in Merton living with dementia, their families, and the staff who support them. This is because the consultation made it clear that to do so could put people in a position where they would need to take difficult decisions for their families – and the administration have been clear that this would not be appropriate.

Furthermore, the consultation showed a desire in the community for a wider range of dementia support services in Merton, which would need to be in place before any changes to Eastway are considered. Therefore, we will commission specialist support to undertake a review of the current provision in Merton to identify the current gaps and co-design a new model of dementia support, through engagement with service users, their families, and other stakeholders.

On this basis the proposal has been halted until the referenced further work is complete and a fully informed key decision can be taken by the Cabinet. Following this decision, the Leader of the Council and the Cabinet Member wrote to all residents who use Eastway and their families to inform them of the decision, and to thank them for their involvement in the engagement exercise. The letter also recognised that the past few months have been unsettling.

The proposals were originally brought forward to make a necessary saving in the Council’s budget, and to re-provide and enhance the service through other means for those who currently use Eastway. The aim being to deliver a service fit for the future and to provide the best care possible for each person living with dementia in Merton, understanding and meeting their needs and those of their carers. Officers will now continue with this important work so that we can meet the wide range of needs of people using Eastway, their families, and carers in Merton for years to come. We will update the community on this work regularly and want to assure you that the current services at Eastway will continue to be provided.

- 2.6 Members are invited to present petitions at this meeting, and a response will be provided to the next ordinary Council meeting in November 2023.

3 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 3.1. None for the purposes of this report.

4 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED

4.1. None for the purpose of this report.

5 TIMETABLE

5.1. None for the purpose of this report.

6 FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS

6.1. None for the purpose of this report.

7 LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

7.1. None for the purpose of this report.

8 HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS

8.1. None for the purpose of this report.

9 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

9.1. None for the purpose of this report.

10 RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

11 APPENDICES

11.1. None

12 BACKGROUND PAPERS

12.1. None.

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