

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 7 February 2024

Time: 7.15 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. The meeting will be livestreamed.

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

Council Meeting

7 February 2024

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2	Declarations of Pecuniary Interest	
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	<i>To approve the minutes of the ordinary Council meeting and the Extraordinary Council meeting held on 15 November 2023.</i>	
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5	Public questions to cabinet members	
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	The questions and written responses will be circulated at the meeting	
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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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Agenda Item 3

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

COUNCIL

15 NOVEMBER 2023

(7.16 pm - 9.07 pm)

PRESENT

(in the Chair), Councillor Gill Manly,
Councillor Martin Whelton
Councillor Sally Kenny, Councillor Agatha Mary Akyigyina,
Councillor Stephen Alambritis, Councillor Laxmi Attawar,
Councillor Thomas Barlow, Councillor Hina Bokhari,
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 Paul Kohler,
Councillor Edith Macauley, Councillor Peter McCabe,
Councillor Simon McGrath, Councillor Nick McLean,
Councillor Aidan Mundy, Councillor Dennis Pearce,
Councillor Marsie Skeete, Councillor Eleanor Stringer,
Councillor Martin Whelton, Councillor Helena Dollimore,
Councillor James Williscroft, Councillor Sheri-Ann Bhim,
Councillor John Braithwaite, 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 Andrew Judge, 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 Slawek Szczepanski, Councillor Matthew Willis,
Councillor Max Austin and Councillor Victoria Wilson

ATTENDING

Councillor Dan Johnston

REMOTELY

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 1)

There were no apologies for absence.

Apologies for lateness were received from Councillor Skeete.

Councillor Johnston attended the meeting remotely.

2 DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY INTEREST (Agenda Item 2)

There were no declarations of interest.

3 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETINGS (Agenda Item 3)

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the ordinary and the special meeting held on 13 September 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 to welcome the Merton Youth Parliament who were observing the meeting and then provided updates on His Royal Highness King Charles III 75th Birthday, Remembrance weekend, Galpins Road, the Study Prep School and the Borough of Sport.

There were no announcements from the Chief Executive.

The Mayor provided an update on their recent and upcoming events and activities.

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 Borough of Sport was moved by Councillor Cooper-Marbiah and seconded by Councillor McCabe.

The Liberal Democrat amendment as set out in agenda item 17 was moved by Councillor Wilson and seconded by Councillor Willis.

The two Conservative amendments as set out in agenda item 17 were moved by Councillor Paterson and seconded by Councillor Cox.

Councillor Kohler also spoke on the item.

The Liberal Democrat amendment was put to the vote and fell: Votes For – 26, Against – 29, Abstentions – 1.

The Conservative amendment 1 was put to the vote and fell: Votes For – 26, Against – 29, Abstentions – 1.

The Conservative amendment 2 was put to the vote and fell: Votes For – 26, Against – 29, Abstentions – 1.

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)

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

Councillor McCabe also spoke on the item.

The motion was then put to a vote and fell – votes in favour: 24, votes against: 31, abstentions: 1.

8 REPORT FROM COMMUNITY FORUM: RAYNES PARK 19 SEPTEMBER 2023 (Agenda Item 8)

Councillor Willis presented an update which was received by the Council.

9 REPORT FROM COMMUNITY FORUM: WIMBLEDON 20 SEPTEMBER 2023 (Agenda Item 9)

Councillor Kohler presented an update which was received by the Council.

10 REPORT FROM COMMUNITY FORUM: MITCHAM 5 OCTOBER 2023 (Agenda Item 10)

Councillor Mundy presented an update which was received by the Council.

11 REPORT FROM COMMUNITY FORUM: MORDEN 18 OCTOBER 2023
(Agenda Item 11)

Councillor Charles presented an update which was received by the Council.

12 NOTICES OF MOTION (Agenda Item 12)

No motions were submitted to this meeting.

13 REVISION OF SENIOR PAY STRUCTURE AND ORGANISATIONAL PAY
AND GRADING STRUCTURE REVIEW (Agenda Item 13)

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

Councillor Fairclough also spoke on the item.

RESOLVED:

(A) That Full Council approved the following recommendations from the Appointments Committee:

- (I) The first tranche of the wider organisational pay and grading review, namely proposed revisions to the senior pay structure and salary levels for Tier 1 (Executive Director), Tier 2 (present Assistant Director) and Tier 3 (Head of Service) posts, to take effect from 1 April 2024, in so far as it relates to those roles where the revised salary range exceeds £100k per annum.
- (II) To delegate authority to the relevant Executive Directors to recruit to vacant senior roles given that at least some element of the salary range for each of these roles is expected to exceed £100k per annum.

14 CHANGES TO MEMBERSHIP OF COMMITTEES AND RELATED
MATTERS (Agenda Item 14)

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

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. That Council approved the changes requested by the Conservative group as detailed at 2.2 of the report.

15 PETITIONS (Agenda Item 15)

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

RESOLVED

That Council

1. Noted the update on the petition received at the last meeting,
2. Accepts receipt of a petition presented by Councillors Hall, Reiss and MacArthur stating “We the undersigned demand that Merton Council enforce the legal covenants agreed to by AELTC and Merton Council to keep their promises to the people of Wimbledon”.

16 BUSINESS FOR THE NEXT ORDINARY MEETING OF THE COUNCIL (Agenda Item 16)

That the Strategic Theme for the next ordinary meeting of the Council, being held on 7 February 2024, shall be Building a Sustainable Future.

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

COUNCIL
15 NOVEMBER 2023
(9.08 pm - 9.48 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 Hina Bokhari,
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
Sally Kenny, Councillor Linda Kirby, Councillor Paul Kohler,
Councillor Edith Macauley, Councillor Peter McCabe,
Councillor Simon McGrath, Councillor Nick McLean,
Councillor Aidan Mundy, Councillor Dennis Pearce,
Councillor Marsie Skeete, Councillor Eleanor Stringer,
Councillor Martin Whelton, Councillor Helena Dollimore,
Councillor James Williscroft, Councillor Sheri-Ann Bhim,
Councillor John Braithwaite, 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 Andrew Judge, 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 Slawek Szczepanski, Councillor Matthew Willis,
Councillor Max Austin and Councillor Victoria Wilson

ATTENDING Councillor Dan Johnston
REMOTELY

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 1)

There were no apologies for absence.

Councillor Johnston attended the meeting remotely.

2 DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY INTEREST (Agenda Item 2)

There were no declarations of interest.

3 REQUEST TO HOLD AN EXTRAORDINARY MEETING OF THE COUNCIL

UNDER PART 4A, SECTION 3.1(C) OF THE COUNCIL'S CONSTITUTION
(Agenda Item 3)

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

The Conservative amendment as set out in agenda item 5 was moved by Councillor Austin and seconded by Councillor Barlow.

The Liberal Democrat amendment as set out in agenda item 5 was moved by Councillor MacArthur and seconded by Councillor Fairclough.

Councillor Hall and Councillor Kohler also spoke on the item.

As six members of the Council requested that a recorded vote be taken on the vote on the Liberal Democrat amendment, a roll call was taken and the votes were as follows:

Votes in Favour (25): Councillors Austin, Barlow, Bokhari, Braithwaite, Cox, Dresselaers, Fairclough, Flack, Foley, Galea, Gould, Hall, Hicks, Holden, Howard, Kohler, MacArthur, McGrath, McLean, Oliver, Page, Paterson, Reiss, Willis and Wilson.

Votes Against (29): Akyigyina, Councillors Alambritis, Attawar, Bhim, Brunt, Butcher, Charles, Christie, Cooper-Marbiah, Dollimore, Fraser, Garrod, Hayes, Henry, Irons, Judge, Kaweesa, Kenny, Kirby, Macauley, McCabe, Mundy, Neaverson, Pearce, Skeete, Stringer, Szczepanski, Williscroft and the Deputy Mayor Councillor Whelton.

Abstentions (2): Councillor Mercer and the Mayor Councillor Manly.

As six members of the Council requested that a recorded vote be taken on the vote on the Conservative amendment, a roll call was taken and the votes were as follows:

Votes in Favour (25): Councillors Austin, Barlow, Bokhari, Braithwaite, Cox, Dresselaers, Fairclough, Flack, Foley, Galea, Gould, Hall, Hicks, Holden, Howard, Kohler, MacArthur, McGrath, McLean, Oliver, Page, Paterson, Reiss, Willis and Wilson.

Votes Against (29): Akyigyina, Councillors Alambritis, Attawar, Bhim, Brunt, Butcher, Charles, Christie, Cooper-Marbiah, Dollimore, Fraser, Garrod, Hayes, Henry, Irons, Judge, Kaweesa, Kenny, Kirby, Macauley, McCabe, Mundy, Neaverson, Pearce, Skeete, Stringer, Szczepanski, Williscroft and the Deputy Mayor Councillor Whelton.

Abstentions (2): Councillor Mercer and the Mayor Councillor Manly.

The report was then put to the vote and carried: Votes For – 29, Against – 25, Abstentions – 2.

RESOLVED:

A. That Council noted the contents of the report.

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From Cllr Attawar to the Cabinet Member for Local Environment, Green Spaces and Climate Change

What progress have the Council made in keeping Merton's streets clean, green and tidy over the winter months?

From Cllr Matthew Willis to the Cabinet Member for Housing and Sustainable Development

On Merton's emerging Local Plan: Can we have an update on expected timing for the progression of it toward adoption please?

From Cllr Michael Paterson to the Cabinet Member for Finance

Does the Cabinet Member still believe that this is a "business like" administration?

From Cllr Henry to the Cabinet Member for Sport and Heritage

What recent investments and progress has the Council made toward reaching our ambition to become London's Borough of Sport?

From Cllr Paul Kohler to the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Civic Pride

Given her responsibilities for trading standards, regulatory services, commercial environmental health and arts & cultural activity in the borough what lessons has the Cabinet Member learnt from public concerns over the health & safety and appropriateness of the "Wimbledon Festive Light Trail" in Cannizaro Park in November/December, and does she agree with the Council's assessment that it was value for money & safe and not reputationally harmful to Wimbledon?

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

The government's housing crisis has led to a sharp increase in the number of families and children living in temporary accommodation; how is this impacting demand in Merton and the Council's budget?

From Cllr Victoria Wilson to the Cabinet Member for Housing and Sustainable Development

Please could the Cabinet Member provide an update on the number of Merton Residents in temporary accommodation, and in doing so provide details of the numbers and percentages of those:

- 1) Housed within Merton;
- 2) Housed outside of Merton but less than 90 minutes away from Merton;
- 3) Housed outside of Merton but more than 90 minutes away from Merton, setting out the local authorities within which they currently reside; and
- 4) Any details that he has on average length of time residents spend in temporary accommodation separated out as an average for those housed in Merton and those housed outside of Merton.

From Cllr Dan Johnston to the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Civic Pride

Please can you provide an update on the progress of Operation Hambling, and the recent steps the Council have taken to reduce crime and anti-social behaviour in Mitcham Town Centre?

Committee: Council

Date: 07 February 2024

Wards: All

Subject: Strategic Theme: Building a Sustainable Future

Lead officer: Jane McSherry, Executive Director; Children, Lifelong Learning and Families

John Morgan, Executive Director; Adult Social Care, Integrated Care and Public Health

Lead member: Cllr Brenda Fraser, Cabinet Member for Children's Services

Cllr Peter McCabe, Cabinet Member for Health and Social Care

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.
- 1.2 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
- 1.3 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.
- 1.4 This report provides the Council with an opportunity to consider progress against the Building a Sustainable Future strategic priority, with a focus on **social care, and more specifically young people's health, and particularly their mental health**. The report covers:
 - (i) Identifying what support is available for young people's mental health in the borough.

- (ii) Improving understanding of the borough's role in reducing mental health issues among young people.
- (iii) Identifying what support is available to young people moving from children's social care to adult social care.
- (iv) Measuring the availability and accessibility of Merton's mental health services for young people.
- (v) Wider determinants of health impacting on wellbeing including air quality and immunisation.

2 DETAILS

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S MENTAL HEALTH

2.1 Mental health need covers a wide range of conditions. Those conditions which are of most relevance to children and young people are:

- Emotional disorders e.g., anxiety, depression, or phobias
- Eating disorders e.g., anorexia nervosa/bulimia nervosa
- Neuro-developmental disorders e.g., attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) or autistic spectrum disorder (ASD)
- Conduct disorders e.g., persistent/pervasive defiance or physical/verbal aggression.

2.2 Children and young people with mental illness have a greater risk of poorer mental and physical health in adulthood. Half of those with lifetime mental health problems first experience symptoms by the age of 14 and 75% before their mid-twenties^{lvi}. The more adversity a child experiences, the more likely the impact on their mental and physical health. These are called adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), they include but are not limited to physical abuse, sexual abuse, and emotional abuse. Anything we can do to prevent or mitigate ACEs will reduce the burden of mental illness in children and subsequently in adults.

Levels of mental health need amongst children and young people in Merton

2.3 It is estimated that approximately 9%, or 2,943 children and young people aged 5-16 in Merton have a mental health disorder. Amongst this group, it is estimated that 60% have a conduct disorder, 38% have an emotional disorder and 16% have neuro-developmental disorders^{lvii}, with some young people experiencing multiple conditions.

2.4 The pandemic and lockdown responses had a significant effect on young people's mental health and referrals to support services. We know this from feedback received from young people through the recent Merton Young People's survey. Nationally, 1 in 6 children aged 6-16 were identified as having a probable mental health problem in July 2021, compared to 1 in 9 in 2017^{lviii}.

- 2.5 Following the pandemic, mental health and wellbeing continue to be an issue for many young people.

Coordinated support

- 2.6 Council services work closely in partnership with our Integrated Care Board (ICB) partners, including local Community Services and Mental Health NHS providers, to ensure that there are effective services which address Merton children and young people's poor mental health. Services for young people experiencing poor mental health are largely commissioned by the ICB, in response to local need. The provision and effectiveness of those services is overseen by the local Children and Adolescents Mental Health Services (CAMHS) Partnership Board (co-chaired by a senior officer in Children, Lifelong Learning and Families, and a lead from the Integrated Care Board).
- 2.7 Officers in Children, Lifelong Learning and Families work to provide support, particularly through schools, including through the schools' Mental Health Leads' Forum, and providing a link to community services, both universal and targeted. Officers in the Public Health team also work to coordinate support and ensure that the range of support available is strong and meets local need.
- 2.8 Through this coordinated support particular mental health needs are addressed, but also links are made to other issues that affect children and young people. For example, we know that there is a clear link for some young people between anxiety and low attendance at school. The coordinated response to this issue has included the production of guidance for schools and professionals about how to support family with this 'Emotionally Based School Avoidance'.
- 2.9 Also responding to local need:
- The Council expanded the local school provision for children and young people who live in Merton and who are too unwell to attend their home school because of mental health as well as other needs. This provision is part of Melbury College and known as Lavender Campus.
 - A Self-Harm and Suicidal Ideation protocol has been created. This has been widely consulted on, with input from schools and parents and has now been rolled out to all schools in Merton.
 - We have also increased community-based specialist services. Additional capacity has been given to Cricket Green School, the Youth Justice Service and Melbury College.
- 2.10 Targeted support for children known to Children's Social Care is also provided by a Council funded service. This is a CAMHS in Social Care team where therapists work alongside social workers. This team is very impactful and was singled out for praise in Merton's safeguarding inspection.
- 2.11 The range of support for children and young people in Merton for their mental health includes:
- In school support from a counsellor, or other dedicated worker, provided from schools' own resources.

- In school support from a school's mental health team. In Merton all schools benefit from this service, a much higher proportion than seen nationally. The schools' mental health teams are operated by the South West London and St George's Mental Health Trust, and by Off the Record (a free counselling service, commissioned by the ICB), and are organised on the local school cluster model. They offer services linked to the needs identified by schools in their cluster and also Pan-Borough. A key focus for schools is working towards a whole school model of mental health support, and as part of this all schools have mental health leads who are supported through a whole borough mental health leads network.
- Online support from Kooth – an online counselling service commissioned by the NHS;
- Referrals to the Single Point of Access (SPA) which creates access to CAMHS, or Off the Record. The SPA also has a short-term treatment offer and offers weekly consultation slots to schools within the borough.

Accessibility

- 2.12 The accessibility of support for children and young people who experience problems with their mental health is considered by all relevant services, with an understanding that a range of access methods is necessary.
- Professionals (including schools) can refer children and young people to a range of services;
 - Children and young people can self-refer to the SPA, Kooth, Off the Record, and to their school based counsellor.

The needs of children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities are also considered, and a subgroup of the CAMHS Partnership Board, is looking at how services for these young people can be further enhanced.

- 2.13 Merton's Young Inspectors reviewed the self-referral processes to KOOOTH, Off the Record and CAMHS. Feedback was given and improvements were made. How children and young people access their support is monitored through data scrutinised by the CAMHS Partnership Board.

Referrals to South West London and St George's CAMHS service

- 2.14 Referrals from a General Medical Practitioner and Education Service remain the highest referral routes into South West London and St George's NHS Trust CAMHS in Merton.
- 2.15 There has been a steady rise in referrals over time. Comparing the last 6 quarters with the previous 6 we can see a 7% rise on the average levels of referral per quarter.
- 2.16 The service continues to be able to offer prompt responsive triage to all referrals received, with 99.6% of patients meeting the target of referral to triage within 24 hours via SPA.

Primary Reason for Referral

- 2.17 The Single Point of Access captures the Primary Reason for Referral as described on the referral. It is important therefore to note that the information presented below is not diagnosis information. Neuro-developmental conditions (excluding Autism) and anxiety are currently the most common primary reason for referral.

Off the Record counselling service for young people

- 2.18 The recent levels of referral to this counselling service for young people have been maintained at a similarly higher level from 2021. Anxiety, emotional issues, and family issues are the most common presenting issues.

Eating Disorders

- 2.19 National level data shows the rate of eating disorders among young people is increasing.
- In children aged 11 to 16 years, the rate of possible eating problems in England rose between 2017 (6.7%) and 2021 (13.0%), and then remained stable between 2021 and 2022 (12.9%). In girls aged 11 to 16 years, this pattern was the same. Rates rose between 2017 (8.4%) and 2021 (17.8%) and were stable between 2021 and 2022. In boys, rates were similar between 2017 (5.1%), 2021 (8.4%) and 2022 (8.1%).
 - In young people aged 17 to 19 years in England, the prevalence of possible eating problems rose from 44.6% in 2017 to 58.2% in 2021. Rates remained stable between 2021 (58.2%) and 2022 (60.3%). This trend was evident for young women and young men aged 17 to 19 years. In young women, rates rose from 60.5% in 2017, to 76.4% in 2021, and then remained stable in 2022 at 75.9%. In young men, rates were 29.6% in 2017 and 41.0% in 2021. The rate in 2022 (45.5%) was an increase on that in 2017 for young men.
- 2.20 South West London and St George's eating disorder service is a specialist service for treatment of eating disorders for children and young people in Merton, Wandsworth, Richmond, Kingston and Sutton. It provides a range of community and inpatient services, an integrated pathway of care with the Paediatric service at St George's Hospital and partner services in the South London Partnership (SLP). The service provides assessment, treatment and recovery support to children and young people with an eating disorder.
- 2.21 Children and young people (11-18) in Merton who require specialist in-patient treatment are cared for on Wisteria Ward at Springfield Hospital - a refurbished 12-bed inpatient Eating Disorder service.
- 2.22 Fifty nine children and young people from Merton were referred to SWL and St George's eating disorder services in 2022-23.

Self-harm

- 2.23 In Merton, 2020/21, the rate of hospital admissions due to self-harm in those aged 10-24 was 242.5 per 100,000, equal to 75 hospital admissions, similar to London but lower than England rates,^[vi] and is fairly stable. The rate of hospital admission due to self-harm for those aged 15-19 increased significantly from 2011/12 and 2020/21^[vii]. There was an increase in admissions for 20–24-year-olds in 2020/21 following a drop from 2019/20, a likely impact of the pandemic; it will be important to monitor this data on self-harm over time.

SUPPORT AVAILABLE TO YOUNG PEOPLE MOVING FROM CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE TO ADULT SOCIAL CARE

- 2.24 The London Borough of Merton is committed to providing high quality care and support to all children and young people with learning disabilities, physical disabilities, mental health issues, and additional needs. As a London Borough we want to ensure the transition into adulthood is smooth and straightforward for all young people who are eligible for council support.
- 2.25 Merton Transition Team is made up of social workers, who work closely with children's health and social care services, to support families and their young people with additional needs through the transition from childhood to adulthood.
- 2.26 We provide advice, assessment, planning and support and aim to help make the transition as easy and smooth as possible. A transition worker will work with other professionals to help a young person with their aims and goals for:
- education and employment
 - health and wellbeing
 - being part of the community
 - having friends and relationships
 - living independently, for example by looking at housing options
- 2.27 Above all, our aim for transition planning is to achieve the best possible outcome for each young person and maximise their independence, choice and control. We are committed to work together to overcome obstacles and join up services to achieve this aim.

Care Quality Commission regulation of Adult Social Care.

- 2.28 The new Care Quality Commission (CQC) assurance framework for adult social care came into operation on the 1st of April 2023 as a result of the Health and Care Act 2022. The Act places a new duty on the CQC to assess local authorities' delivery of adult social care duties under Part 1 of the Care Act 2014. The adult social care services to which young people transition fall within the scope of the new regulatory framework and assessment regime.
- 2.29 In April 2023 the CQC requested local authorities to volunteer to test out the assurance process across the four themes (working with people, providing support, ensuring safety within the system and leadership). The assessments were completed over the summer period and the final reports were published in November 2023. Transitions was one of the areas identified from these national

pilot assessments as requiring improvements. Within Merton, the Adult Social Care, Integrated Care & Public Health department, working collaboratively with Children, Lifelong Learning and Families, already have an established work programme in place focused on Transitions and Preparation for Adulthood. The improvements undertaken to date and the work ongoing is reflected in the CQC self-assessment and associated action plan.

- 2.30 The CQC intend to carry out a baseline assessment of all 154 local authorities over the next two years and will give a narrative report alongside a rating. Three local authorities were selected at the end of December 2023 to undertake the first wave of assessments which are due to start in 2024.
- 2.31 The assurance process has become clearer as a result of the pilots, updated CQC guidance and intelligence gathered from various national and local networks which officers attend e.g., Principle Social Worker network, London Association of Directors of Adult Social Services (ADASS). Officers will continue to be involved in these networks in order to gain insight and keep up to date with developments.
- 2.32 Once a local authority has been selected by the CQC, the Director will receive a notification email titled 'Notification of CQC inspection' with a formal letter detailing the process which will include completing an Information Return, providing details of key personnel for interview and the development of onsite visits and interviews. Indications are that leaders will be interviewed approximately four weeks from the notification, this is likely to include the Director of Adult Social Services (DASS), Principal Social Worker and senior leaders. Onsite visits will take place nine to eleven weeks after the notification.
- 2.33 The onsite visits will include key people for example, people who use services, the independent chair of the safeguarding adults board, a range of providers, relevant voluntary and community sector agencies, the adult social care portfolio holder and shadow portfolio holder, the chair of the health and wellbeing board, front line staff, director of public health, chair of the Integrated Care Board.
- 2.34 On 8th December 2023 the CQC issued updated guidance in relation to the type of information and evidence that they will require. This is called the Local Authority Information Return (the equivalent of Annex A for children's inspections).
- 2.35 There are 38 categories contained within the information return. Examples include the self-assessment (optional), feedback from compliments and complaints, feedback from staff and partners, processes and pathways (e.g., care assessments, reviews, financial assessments), waiting list size and management of, market position statements, market shaping plans, safeguarding adult reviews and action plans, adult social care risk register, unpaid carers strategy.
- 2.36 An important part of the Information Return will include case tracking. Details will be provided by CQC at the time of notification. However, this is likely to centre on producing 50 case summaries with a focus on the customer journey and practice across a range of groups including transitions. This will help the CQC understand people's journey through the social care system and their experience of how care and support decisions were made.

2.37 The CQC will select six of the cases randomly and hold four in reserve. They will speak to the individual as well as any significant people and agencies involved. The lived experience of people who are supported by adult care is key to the assessment. The allocated workers for the cases chosen by the CQC will also form part of the interview schedule.

Update on CQC preparation in Merton

2.38 Two staff conferences were held in December 2023 with 101 staff attending across both events. Key themes included an overview of progress on the Towards Outstanding Programme, the current and future budget position, an overview of the CQC framework and feedback from the pilot inspections, an overview of the annual account with a focus on 'how well do you know our demography / community'.

2.39 There was also a feedback and celebration session gaining views from staff in relation to our strengths and what they are most proud of. Some of the examples included;

- challenging opinions of others for the benefit of the individual,
- utilising community resources and sign posting,
- direct payments monitoring and claiming back unspent money,
- supporting individuals to apply and obtain NHS continuing health care funding,
- promoting an integrated approach with health,
- strengths based working,
- good relationships with providers and working through issues,
- Occupational Therapy assessment centre providing quick assessments whilst promoting independence.

2.40 Working with an independent provider of web based policy platforms, the Department launched Merton Adult Social Care Tri.x site on 20th November 2023, and ran three staff sessions to support them to become familiar with the site.

2.41 The site provides our staff with consistent guidance, easier to access, up to date information. The guidance on the Tri.x site is based on national legal requirements and best practice.

2.42 The information included will:

- Guide and inform practice,
- Provide information about local policy and procedures for social workers, occupational therapists, and other social care practitioners in the London Borough of Merton in one easy to use site; and
- Keep practitioners up to date with local and national developments in adult social care.

2.43 All external adult social care pages have been reviewed and are being updated to ensure there is up to date information for people using adult social care services, including providing information and advice. They have also been

reviewed to ensure our documents published online are accessible to people with disabilities, including using simple language and structure, style and formatting.

2.44 A questionnaire covering the four CQC themes was carried out with staff and partners and ran from July until December 2023. In all there were 39 responses with an even distribution of staff and partners. The results have been analysed and will be used to inform the self-assessment and action planning. Some of the feedback received included:

- Strengths: Some recurring themes in relation to staff approach being well intentioned, competent, caring and person centred; Partnership and collaborative working appears to be strong and valued within Merton; Response to crisis and incidents of increased risk appears to be proactive; Strong safeguarding partnership and making safeguarding personal evident.
- Areas for development: lack of a self-assessment at the first point of contact; information can be confusing and complicated for people; a perception that people can wait a long time for assessments to be completed and services to be started. The questionnaire also highlighted a lack of a response and awareness in relation to the areas of equality of experience in outcomes and awareness of learning and innovation which suggests that promotion and further development within these areas is needed.

2.45 In response to the new guidance in relation to the Local Authority Information Return a new spreadsheet has been created to map the evidence that the CQC will require. For each of the 38 evidence areas, key documents or links to documents will be stored, these will be reviewed and updated to ensure that this process runs smoothly at the time of an inspection. Where there are gaps in the Information return an action plan will be created to address the shortfall and these will be tracked to measure progress.

BROADER DETERMINANTS OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S HEALTH

Air Quality in and around schools and educational establishments

2.46 Air Quality in London, as with many cities in the UK and across the world continues to be a major health concern. It is now considered the most significant environmental risk to public health. This has been reinforced by the World Health Organisation (WHO) to dramatically reduce its own guidance levels for air quality health exposure.

2.47 In Merton, as with all London Boroughs, air pollution still exceeds the UK National Objectives for air quality in many locations throughout the borough. These locations are in areas of high traffic and within our Town Centres. The primary causes of pollution in these areas are from combustion engines associated with road traffic, and domestic and commercial heating. Traffic is responsible for around 60% of pollution in the borough.

- 2.48 Merton's Air Quality Team is one of the most decorated Local Authority teams in the country delivering extensive projects beyond the boundaries of the borough and across London that are delivering real change. They have won awards for their innovation in the use of air quality monitoring to change behaviour and completely changed the face of the construction industry emissions in London working in partnership with boroughs and the Greater London Assembly (GLA).
- 2.49 The team's work covers a number of key school initiatives including the monitoring of air pollution and engagement on issues related to air pollution. This engagement includes providing a bespoke air quality assessment for schools to identify, and where possible mitigate the impact of air pollution. Other activities include anti-idling initiatives, health awareness, and hosting sessions with hundreds of pupils through the junior citizens' programme.
- 2.50 Children are more vulnerable to breathing in polluted air than adults because their airways are smaller and still developing. They also breathe more rapidly than adults, meaning they take in more polluted air. If a child breathes in high levels of air pollution over a long period of time, they might be at risk of: their lungs not working as well as they grow older developing asthma during childhood or as an adult - and if they have asthma already, air pollution can make it worse. Children exposed to polluted air are also at greater risk of cancer and cardiovascular disease later in their lives
- 2.51 As part of the Council's Air Quality Action Plan schools were prioritised for action and in August 2019 an extensive school air quality monitoring programme was initiated by London Borough of Merton. Diffusion tubes were located at all educational institutions in the borough recorded on the Gov.UK register of schools^[1]. Where there were two road sources, tubes were installed on both school/road boundaries. Due to the large number of sites, it was decided the monitoring programme would be split into two phases:
- Phase one: A screening phase August to December 2019: The screening phase was used to establish which schools were low risk and could be removed from the programme. Low risk sites were characterised as having an average Nitrogen Dioxide (NO₂) concentration of at least 20% below the annual Air Quality Objective (AQO) (32 mgm-3 'raw' unadjusted value). The majority of educational sites were found to be 'low risk' and additional monitoring was completed at 24 schools.
 - Phase two: A full 12 months monitoring programme January to December 2020. A total of 24 schools were monitored between January and December 2020. The annual mean AQO was achieved at all monitoring locations. However, 9 school sites were added to the Council's main diffusion tube network in January 2021 for observation, nitrogen dioxide concentrations were the highest at these sites. Since 2021, nine schools have received ongoing monitoring and in line with Action 66 of the Air Quality Action Plan (AQAP) the schools have been offered an Air Quality Assessment in order to assess how the impact of air pollution can be mitigated.
- 2.52 The assessments/audits include all aspects of air quality and climate change, including classroom air quality measurements and indoor observations; active travel reviews (how the school community travel to and from school), outdoor observations and measurements, including green planting and anti-idling;

- internal audit of building, grounds, and heating systems – including the checks of boilers and ventilation systems (this is purely observational, followed by desktop research). The assessment also involves an assessment meeting with key school staff members which is an opportunity for the school to voice any concerns about air quality and there is an opportunity for the air quality officers to gain an understanding of what happens at the school on a daily basis e.g., the number of deliveries to the school; any changes in travel trends.
- 2.53 Audit recommendations have included emission and exposure reduction measures and mitigation where necessary. Breathe London & Vivacity monitors have also been installed in School Streets within the borough to monitor travel and air quality.
- 2.54 Evidence of the impact of air quality on schools has also been documented as part of the GLA School Superzone with Merton Abbey Primary's pilot on Active Travel and Air Pollution. This pilot includes partnership working with Asthma and Lung UK, who provided free diffusion tubes between January and February 2023 to monitor the local air pollution at street level surrounding the Merton Abbey Primary School. The pilot also worked with the students over a month of face-to-face workshops to explore how best to reduce the impacts immediate to the school.
- 2.55 In addition, a project is underway to better understand the impact of environmental factors such as air pollution and mould or poor ventilation in homes and schools on primary school students with asthma and to use the findings to improve asthma management pathways. The project will work with pupils with asthma in four primary schools located in two of the borough's air pollution priority areas. It will focus on lived experience and innovative approaches to monitoring air quality including use of personal air quality sensors which track air quality in the home, school and on the journey to school. This project will engage young people, families, schools, GPs, and school nurses and relates directly to the national bundle for asthma deliverables on environmental air quality and will be a blueprint for further roll out and action.
- 2.56 It should be noted that London Borough of Merton (LBM) has a legal duty to monitor air quality and to publish an air quality action plan. The current Air Quality Action Plan is due to be refreshed in 2023/24 and will be informed by the work of the Health and Wellbeing Board and by a consultation that is planned for after the May 2024 election(s).
- 2.57 The Merton Air Quality Action Plan (AQAP) brings together the policies and actions that the Council can take to tackle Air Pollution in the borough. The plan covers over 70 measures which are reported annually as part of the Council's Annual Status Report on air quality. The Annual Status Report for 2022 was published on 31st May 2023. This is a legal requirement as part of the air quality management framework. A Task Group is due to be set up to deliver new Air Quality Action Plan for 2024.
- 2.58 As part of the current plan, LBM is committed to continue the pro-active air quality monitoring in schools in areas of high pollution and to reach out to schools to increase the uptake of air quality assessments, engaging with them to promote materials and other interventions e.g., advice on travel to and from

school, walk to school maps to avoid pollution, anti-idling events signs and banners, awareness, and education.

- 2.59 Other actions in the Action Plan Raise include raising awareness of indoor air quality and its links to health and wellbeing, including damp and mould to residents, health professionals and housing providers: and developing and promote alerts e.g., alerts and text messages to ensure residents with asthma and COPD are made aware and can manage their long-term respiratory condition, as air quality changes.

Climate change and the impact on schools

- 2.60 Increased heat risk will cause significant challenges across the UK, but impacts will be particularly severe in London due to its location in the South East of the country, and its pronounced Urban Heat Island (UHI) effect – the observed higher temperatures of urban areas due to a combination of waste heat generation from human and operational activity and trapping of solar heat by buildings and infrastructure.
- 2.61 Recent studies have demonstrated that many new school buildings are failing to meet minimum comfort standards, leading to low productivity and need for energy-hungry air conditioning devices^[2]. Indoor thermal comfort and air quality in school classrooms are of global concern due to their significant effects on pupil health, academic performance, and productivity.
- 2.62 A study on disruption to children’s learning experience in Southampton, UK, found that summer heat had the largest detrimental impact of the nine factors studied, and London schools that were consulted for mayoral guidance also highlighted that high temperatures had negatively affected children’s concentration levels in the past^[3].
- 2.63 Heat risk in schools arises when the heat entering or generated in buildings exceeds the heat that escapes through walls and ventilation. It can be controlled by limiting the amount of heat that enters a building - for example, through shading, reducing the waste heat generated inside buildings, and by using smart controls and efficient appliances - and increasing the amount of heat that escapes, through well-designed and easy to operate ventilation. Managing this requires an integrated strategy that combines appropriate physical design, equipment and facilities operation, and behavioural practices.
- 2.64 Heat risk can occur in school grounds as well as buildings, when high outdoor temperatures are exacerbated by a lack of shading, or the use of surfaces that trap heat such as tarmac and dark roofing materials. Effective ways to control outdoor temperatures in schools include replacing hard surfaces with plants, grasses, water features and natural materials that trap less heat. Planting trees, installing other shade structures, and reflective surfaces can also be an effective way to control outdoor temperatures in schools.

Ventilation in schools

- 2.65 Good ventilation is key to having a healthy and productive indoor space and can help reduce the risk of viral airborne transmission, including of Covid-19. In most spaces in schools and other education settings like nurseries and colleges this

kind of ventilation can be achieved by opening windows and doors. Where this is not possible, schools are advised to explore what remedial works may be required to improve ventilation.

- 2.66 In 2021 the Department of Education (DfE) provided CO₂ monitors to all state-funded schools and other childcare settings to help them assess how well-ventilated their spaces were and help balance ventilation with thermal comfort over the winter months^[4]. Where settings could not maintain adequate ventilation, they could apply for DfE-funded air cleaning units while the underlying ventilation issue was addressed. Settings were also supported to purchase air cleaning units through a marketplace we set up to ensure they got a competitive rate. At the end of this process, more than 386,000 CO₂ monitors and over 8,000 air cleaning units were distributed by the DfE to eligible settings.
- 2.67 In January 2022, DfE surveyed schools and other settings to find out how effectively they had been able to use the CO₂ monitors. 96% of them were using their monitors and of those, 95% said they had been able to use them to identify when to increase ventilation. 12% of those using the monitors reported high CO₂ readings of 1500ppm and above, of which the majority could be improved with quick fixes like opening windows. 3% of settings using the monitors found they had CO₂ readings of 1500ppm or higher that could not be remedied via quick fixes. These were able to apply for DfE funded air cleaning units as a temporary mitigation measure to help reduce the risk of airborne transmission whilst the underlying ventilation issue was addressed.

Immunisations

- 2.68 High immunisation rates are key to preventing the spread of infectious disease, protecting from complications and deaths. Childhood immunisation helps to prevent disease and promote child health from infancy, creating opportunities for children to thrive and get the best start in life.
- 2.69 The World Health Organization (WHO) currently recommends at least 95% of children are immunised against diseases preventable by immunisation and targeted for elimination or control, specifically, diphtheria, neonatal tetanus, pertussis, polio, Haemophilus influenzae type b (Hib), Hepatitis B, measles, mumps, and congenital rubella.

Responsibilities for childhood vaccination

- 2.70 The Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) provides national strategic oversight of vaccination policy in England, with advice from the independent Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) and the Commission on Human Medicines. The DHSC also sets performance targets.
- 2.71 NHS England (NHSE) is responsible for commissioning national immunisation programmes in England. NHSE is accountable for ensuring that local providers of services deliver against the national service specifications and meet agreed population uptake and coverage levels. NHSE is also responsible for monitoring providers' performance and for supporting providers in delivering improvements in quality and changes in the programmes when required.

- 2.72 The UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) provides expert advice to NHSE immunisation teams in cases of immunisation incidents.
- 2.73 Integrated Care Systems (ICSs) have a duty of quality improvement, and this extends to primary medical care services. ICSs provide opportunities for improved partnership working across NHSE (London), local authorities, voluntary and community sector partners to improve immunisation uptake and reach underserved areas and populations.
- 2.74 NHSE (London), alongside ICBs, local authorities and others, work to progress delegated commissioning for vaccination. It is anticipated that the first wave of delegation of the commissioning of immunisation services will be in Spring 2024.
- 2.75 Local authority public health teams deliver population health initiatives including improving access to health and engagement and promotion of immunisations overall.

Delivery of childhood vaccination

- 2.76 Pre-school vaccinations are usually delivered by GP surgeries, commissioned through the NHS GP contract. Five core GP contractual standards have been introduced to underpin the delivery of immunisation services:
- a named lead for vaccination service
 - provision of sufficient convenient appointments
 - standards for call/recall programmes and opportunistic vaccination offers.
 - participation in nationally agreed catch-up campaigns, and
 - standards for record keeping and reporting.
- 2.77 In addition, one of the five Quality and Outcomes Framework (QOF) domains in primary care is childhood vaccinations and shingles vaccination, rewarding GP practices for good practice. School-age immunisations are commissioned by the seven regional NHSE teams and delivered through School Age Immunisation Services (SAIS).
- 2.78 Vaccinations are also provided by maternity services, some outreach services, and community pharmacies.

National, regional, and local coverage

- 2.79 Overall, coverage for most vaccines in England is high and comparable with other high-income countries although there has been a small but steady decline in the last few years. Nationally, in 2021-2022, vaccine coverage decreased by 0.2% to 1.1% depending on the vaccine. No vaccines met the 95% target. Coverage for the 6-in1 at 5 years decreased from 95.2% in 2020-21 to 94.4% in 2021-22.
- 2.80 The 2022-23 childhood vaccination statistics for England, showed a decrease in almost all childhood vaccines compared to the previous year, and coverage of Measles, Mumps and Rubella (MMR)1 and MMR2 at five years of age was at the lowest level since 2010-11.

- 2.81 A similar picture was observed in London, for example, coverage of MMR2 at five years old decreased for the third consecutive year and was 74 per cent in London, compared to 84.5 per cent in England, whilst coverage of the pre-school booster was 72.7 per cent in London compared to 83.3 per cent in England.
- 2.82 Historically and currently, London performs on average below national (England) levels. Uptake in London has fallen faster than in England in the past 6 years. Every borough is below the 95% WHO target. For some vaccinations e.g., MMR all boroughs are below 90% (2/3 of measles cases in England in 2023 were in London).
- 2.83 London has a very mobile population, a large migrant population, and significant areas of socio-economic deprivation. Vaccination uptake is lower in areas of socio-economic disadvantage.

Data for Merton

Immunisation	England	London	SWL	Croydon	Kingston upon Thames	Merton	Richmond upon Thames	Surrey	Sutton	Wandsworth
12m_DTaPIPvHib3	↓ 91.9%	↓ 87.9%	↑ 89.7%	↑ 85.2%	↓ 89.6%	↑ 91.0%	↑ 85.3%	↑ 91.6%	↑ 91.5%	↑ 89.4%
12m_MenB	↓ 91.6%	↓ 87.4%	↑ 89.6%	↑ 84.6%	↓ 91.0%	↑ 90.3%	↑ 85.9%	↑ 91.5%	↑ 91.5%	↑ 89.3%
12m_PCV	↓ 94.0%	↑ 90.5%	↑ 92.0%	↑ 88.6%	↓ 92.4%	↑ 93.0%	↑ 88.2%	↑ 93.9%	↑ 93.9%	↑ 90.4%
12m_Rota	↑ 89.3%	↑ 85.9%	↑ 88.3%	↑ 85.7%	↓ 89.2%	↑ 89.1%	↑ 83.3%	↑ 89.7%	↑ 91.1%	↑ 87.4%
24m_DTaPIPvHib3_Primary	↑ 93.0%	↑ 88.8%	↑ 90.9%	↑ 88.3%	↓ 90.3%	↑ 90.9%	↑ 91.0%	↓ 91.9%	↓ 91.2%	↑ 90.8%
24m_HibMenC_Booster	↓ 88.9%	↓ 81.6%	↓ 80.7%	↓ 77.2%	↓ 85.7%	↓ 80.7%	↑ 81.8%	↓ 79.8%	↓ 83.0%	↑ 83.4%
24m_MenB_Booster	↓ 87.8%	↓ 80.0%	↓ 80.7%	↓ 78.1%	↓ 83.9%	↓ 81.0%	↑ 80.8%	↓ 79.6%	↓ 84.5%	↑ 83.7%
24m_MMR1	↓ 89.0%	↓ 82.2%	↓ 81.8%	↓ 79.5%	↑ 86.5%	↑ 82.7%	↑ 83.6%	↓ 79.7%	↓ 86.2%	↑ 85.2%
24m_PCV_Booster	↓ 88.5%	↓ 80.6%	↓ 81.5%	↓ 79.0%	↑ 86.3%	↑ 83.4%	↑ 82.4%	↓ 80.0%	↓ 84.9%	↑ 83.7%
5y_DTaPIV_Booster	↑ 84.0%	↑ 74.7%	↑ 77.4%	↑ 74.0%	↑ 80.1%	↑ 72.3%	↑ 74.5%	↓ 81.7%	↑ 79.5%	↑ 68.4%
5y_DTaPIPvHib3_Primary	↑ 93.5%	↑ 89.0%	↓ 90.3%	↓ 87.3%	↑ 90.9%	↑ 90.3%	↑ 92.9%	↓ 90.9%	↓ 91.5%	↑ 89.0%
5y_HibMenC_Booster	↓ 91.0%	↑ 85.5%	↑ 87.4%	↑ 84.4%	↑ 87.1%	↑ 84.4%	↑ 86.7%	↓ 90.0%	↑ 88.3%	↑ 83.9%
5y_MMR1	↑ 92.9%	↑ 87.5%	↑ 90.0%	↑ 86.3%	↑ 90.8%	↑ 85.9%	↑ 90.0%	↑ 92.6%	↑ 91.3%	↑ 86.2%
5y_MMR2_Booster	↑ 85.2%	↑ 75.2%	↑ 79.1%	↑ 73.7%	↑ 80.0%	↑ 73.4%	↑ 74.3%	↑ 83.1%	↑ 80.7%	↑ 76.5%

Cover of vaccination evaluated rapidly (COVER) Programme 22-23. Date July-Sept 2022.

Improving childhood vaccination rates

- 2.84 It is recognised that to improve vaccine uptake in London and in Merton, there is a need both to:
- strengthen the routine immunisation programme, ensuring access to vaccination is convenient and accessible, but also
 - develop sustainable catch up for those un or partially vaccinated, which might require bespoke outreach and innovative approaches.
- 2.85 Taking action to increase vaccination uptake is complex and requires a suite of interventions. Work is ongoing at a national, regional, system, and at place level to increase uptake in Merton. A strong focus for Merton, SWL and London is to increase childhood immunisation coverage overall to pre-pandemic levels and to identify the communities which are persistently missed vaccination and other health services during the pandemic. A particular high risk in 2023 is the sub-optimal childhood MMR1 and 2 coverage (below 95%) which increases the risk of preventable measles outbreaks.

Action at London level

2.86 Through the leadership of the London Immunisation Board (LIB) and development of the London Immunisation Strategy (LIS), agency action plans and strong community engagement, work is underway to improve coverage for London and reverse the trends in inequalities across London:

- Following an initial 'Phase 1' polio booster campaign, National Health Service England (NHSE) London region began a Phase 2 polio and MMR catch up programme across London in May 2023. This programme involved school aged immunisation service (SAIS) providers contacting over 10,000 families to reach partially or unvaccinated children, while primary care continued to focus on reaching those children aged one to four years old.
- ICBs, delivering through neighbourhood and community services, have delivered additional outreach services to vulnerable communities to improve registration and reach. Following identification of poliovirus isolated in the London Beckton sewage treatment works from February 2022 that persisted for several months, no further poliovirus isolates have been found in the wastewater since early November 2022.
- NHSE London funds local Immunisation Coordinators across the region. These coordinators provide a critical interface between GP practices, ICBs and NHSE-L to ensure that immunisation strategic plans get delivered through services on the ground. Immunisation coordinators working across primary care conduct regular data cleansing, provide quality improvement and standardisation across practices. They work with practice nurses and primary care teams to improve accurate and timely data capture and share that with teams to rectify.
- A London Immunisation Strategy is currently being developed to both improve vaccination uptake and reduce inequalities. The first draft of the London Immunisation Strategy was reviewed by the London Immunisations Board in late June 2023.
- NHSE (London) has been supporting the national NHSE MMR vaccination call and recall service which was implemented between September and December 2022. This promoted the take-up of the MMR vaccine amongst individuals between the ages of 1 to 25 years through letters and texts.
- NHSE has commissioned UKHSA to deliver immunisation training to all vaccinators in London. Confident and competent staff are crucial to building and maintaining trust and delivering a high-quality service. This includes listening to parental concerns or reservations and preventing any vaccine incidents.
- Vaccinations have been added to the Making Every Contact Count London resource hub to facilitate using every available opportunity to engage with the public to increase vaccination.
- A regional communications campaign took place across London in March 2023 to encourage the uptake of missed MMR doses. This included media, social media, health ambassadors, translated materials, and attendance at local events and community groups.
- In a concentrated effort to reach all missed children and ensure London remains polio-free, a funded regional catch-up programme through the School Age Immunisation Service and GP practices is underway to provide DTaP catch-up, MMR catch-up, and full-schedule catch-up. We anticipate

Page 30 10 | Report on Immunisation Services in the Borough of Merton that the first quarter findings and uptake rates for London will be available by January 2024.

- The London Immunisation Board, The Mayors Health Board, and SW London Integrated Care Board have all agreed on the 10 principles for London vaccination. Action will now focus on developing this into a comprehensive delivery approach tailored to community needs and building on Borough-led health initiatives.

South West London and London Borough of Merton

- 2.87 A three-year immunisations strategy for South West London (SWL) is being developed with partners, which will include six borough-specific immunisation delivery plans. The aim of the strategy will be to support boroughs by providing a framework within which to operate, setting key priorities for SWL as well as at borough level based on local need.
- 2.88 London Borough of Merton is also developing a Merton specific immunisation strategy and action plan. The focus of the immunisation strategy for Merton is improving the uptake of preschool boosters and MMR. Key actions include:
- Working with local GP practices to ensure correct coding of vaccination data, unregistering children who have moved, sending text reminders, and opening additional vaccination clinic slots in the school holidays.
 - Insight-led behaviour change campaigns: multiple channels to reach Merton's local community: digital advertising including social media, google, and advertising on other relevant websites, radio adverts, ad-vans, billboards, street ambassadors, and community champions.
 - Reporting on Immunisation Services in the Borough of Merton-involves developing partnerships, through fortnightly meetings with the ICB and Local Authority communications colleagues and regular meetings with providers.
 - Working with the voluntary sector: a new grants programme for community organisations. Funding was prioritised for events likely to reach communities experiencing health inequalities. During the events, residents received tailored messages which focused on vaccinations and included other information including cost of living support and mental health services.
 - Tailoring information to support an informed decision: responding to misinformation circulating on vaccinations using local insight. Recently, an audit of the feedback from over 6000 South West London residents was used to create a new leaflet responding to misinformation. This was shared in a range of different languages.
 - A report on children and young people's immunisation in Merton was taken to the Merton Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel on 25th January. There was renewed focus on the potential for measles outbreaks in Merton, linked to low uptake of MMR vaccine. A series of actions to address this, including greater engagement with schools, enhanced working between London Borough of Merton and the ICB are in train.
- 2.89 The Merton Immunisation Steering Group will oversee the Merton Immunisation Strategy. It meets quarterly and reports into a SWL Operational Delivery Group chaired by the ICB. Partnership working has been used to:

- develop and share content.
 - provide up-to-date information for community champions.
 - host webinars, and engagement opportunities
 - identify relevant pop-up locations for the local community.
- 2.90 In response to escalating measles cases and outbreaks in England in 2023 and 2024, linked to declining and sub-optimal uptake of the MMR vaccination (including in Merton) a Merton MMR Subgroup of the Merton Immunisation Steering Group has been established to coordinate the local response to improve uptake across our communities.
- 2.91 System meetings have also been convened in January 2024 with the Cabinet Member for Health and Social Care and local strategic ICB leads including to understand gaps in uptake by GP Practice and support the planned targeted response.

Case study example

- 2.92 Local Vaccine Coordinators working with Merton's GP practices GP practices are supported to review the practice immunisation records. For example, at one Merton GP surgery preschool booster uptake rose from 50% to 75% when already delivered vaccine doses were correctly recorded.
- 2.93 These reviews also identify all the children with incomplete vaccine schedules for targeted action. Reasons identified include refusals amongst some families for all vaccinations, patients who have left the country but have not been deregistered from the GP practice, doses given a few days early so not recognised in the data collection process, and some children who have recently moved to Merton from abroad but have not given their vaccination history to the GP practice.
- 2.94 There is a recognition that opportunistic vaccination when the child attends the GP practice for other reasons is key to accessing these groups: Making Every Contact Count.

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

Footnotes:

^[i] Kessler RC, Berglund P, Demler O, Jin R, Merikangas KR, Walters EE. Lifetime prevalence and age-of-onset distributions of DSM-IV disorders in the national comorbidity survey replication. Archives of General Psychiatry. 2005;62(6):593. Available from: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/15939837/>

^[ii] Merton Council. Thriving in Merton, Merton Child and Adolescent Mental Health (CAMHS) and Emotional Wellbeing Strategy 2020-2023. NHS South West London Clinica. [cited 4 October 2022]. Available from: <https://swlondonccg.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/FINAL-MERTON-CAMHS-Strategy-2020-2023-.pdf>

^[iii] Mental Health of Children and Young People in England 2021 - wave 2 follow up to the 2017 survey [Internet]. NHS Digital. 2021 [cited 4 October 2022]. Available from: <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/mental-health-of-children-and-young-people-in-england/2021-follow-up-to-the-2017-survey>

^[iv] Mental Health of Children and Young People in England 2021 - wave 2 follow up to the 2017 survey [Internet]. NHS Digital; 2021. [cited 20 October 2022]. Available from: <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/mental-health-of-children-and-young-people-in-england/2021-follow-up-to-the-2017-survey>

^[v] Office for Health Improvement and Disparities. Public Health Profiles [Internet]. Public health profiles. [cited 4 October 2022]. Available from: <https://fingertips.phe.org.uk/search/self%20harm#page/1/gid/1/pat/6/ati/402/are/E09000024/iid/21001/age/1/sex/4/cat/-1/ctp/-1/yr/1/cid/4/tbm/1>

^[vi] Office for Health Improvement and Disparities. Public Health Profiles [Internet]. Public health profiles. [cited 4 October 2022]. Available from:

<https://fingertips.phe.org.uk/search/self%20harm#page/4/gid/1938133225/pat/6/par/E12000007/ati/402/are/E09000024/iid/92796/age/6/sex/4/cat/-1/ctp/-1/yr/1/cid/4/tbm/1/page-options/car-do-0>

^[1] <https://get-informationschools.service.gov.uk/>

^[2]

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0378778821005752#:~:text=Climate%20change%20could%20impact%20schools,by%20impairing%20their%20cognitive%20ability.>

^[3] https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/gla_schools_adaptation_guidance_14-10-20_issue.pdf

^[4] <https://educationhub.blog.gov.uk/2022/06/30/how-schools-are-managing-ventilation-to-prevent-the-spread-of-airborne-viruses-like-covid-19/>

Notice of Motion – Labour Motion

Council 7 February 2024

Council notes:

- Merton is proud to be a diverse borough and to have a workforce that is making great strides towards being truly reflective of the communities we serve.
- Merton's diverse communities and employees have played a vital role in shaping our borough's identity and are a key part of the vibrant culture and neighbourhoods that make Merton the fantastic place it is today.
- That our diverse ethnic communities have distinct characteristics histories, cultures and identities that should not be homogenised. We have created an 'Inclusive Language Guide' for staff through the continued collaboration with our staff networks and communities, and we are aiming to develop more appropriate terminology to describe the borough's diverse communities.
- The impact of the government's policies and rhetoric on the rise in racism and hate crime during the last 14 years and the impact this has had on Merton's communities and employees.
- That Merton Council and its partners can play an important role in eliminating racism, both within the workplace and within our communities and neighbourhoods.
- The need for all Councils to embed racial equality considerations in the decisions we make.
- That our most recent Equality Diversity and Inclusion survey showed that only 52% of staff feel comfortable talking about race at work, and that 7% of respondents have personally experienced, and/or witnessed a colleague experience, a form of racism whilst working for Merton Council.

Council welcomes:

- The zero-tolerance approach to racism, bullying, and harassment adopted by our organisation, but recognises that more work needs to be done.
- The publishing of our Hate Crime and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion strategies, and the priority of this administration to instil civic pride through reducing inequality, tackling discrimination, and promoting and celebrating diversity across our borough.
- Our commitment to having dedicated safe spaces for open and meaningful discussions about Equality Diversity and Inclusion topics, issues, and concerns.
- The work of our Joint Consultative Committee with Ethnic Minorities and our Faith and Belief forums to advise on strategic policies, including the local concerns of ethnic minority communities, and our work to eliminate discriminatory practices and racial prejudice in the delivery of Council services and shape inclusive services that are culturally sensitive.
- The Race Equality Network's (REN) continued work to develop and build initiatives across the council, including advising in the procurement of Equality,

Diversity, and Inclusion training for leadership and their active support on all recruitment panels for managerial roles and above.

- The launch of new staff networks, for underrepresented groups, as well as the Aspiring Leaders Program, which aims to nurture career progression and provide skills and training for staff aspiring to leadership roles.

Council believes that:

- Our signature of UNISON's Anti-Racism Charter demonstrates Merton's ongoing commitment to being an explicitly anti-racist organisation and employer. We are committed to being proactively anti-racist, not just non-racist.

Council resolves to:

- Sign UNISON's Anti-Racism Charter and work with UNISON to introduce the commitments contained within the Charter.

Cllr Eleanor Stringer

Cllr Edith Macauley

Cllr Billy Christie

Anti-Racism Charter

Our organisation pledges we will introduce the following ongoing commitments within 12 months of signing:

Our leaders will

- Recognise the need and benefit in championing a racially diverse workforce.
- Challenge racism internally and externally wherever it arises in relation to the organisation.
- Recognise the impact of racism upon staff members' wellbeing.
- Set and regularly review strategy to improve racial equality, diversity and inclusion so that the organisation reflects the communities it serves.

Our organisation will

- Have a clear and visible race equality policy championed by leadership.
- Have a clear and visible anti-racism programme of initiatives and actions.
- Undertake equality impact assessments for all strategic-level decisions.
- Undertake ethnicity pay gap recording and publicly publish results.
- Undertake workforce ethnicity recording and publicly publish results.
- Provide unconscious bias and anti-racism training for all staff members.
- Provide a racism reporting process for notifying, investigating and recording outcomes.
- Provide robust equality training for managers involved in recruiting, promotions and investigating allegations.
- Provide a wellbeing support facility for staff experiencing racism in the workplace.
- Will be anti-racist, not just non-racist in all we do.

Our equality auditing process will review

- Recruitment processes to identify and address race disparities in equality of opportunity.
- Exit interview results to identify and address race disparities in retention of staff members.
- Promotional processes to identify and address race disparities in equality of opportunity.
- Discipline and grievance to identify and address race disparity in outcomes of comparable cases.
- Policies and research under a duty or commitment to promote solidarity and tackle racism.
- Our mission, values, and support to removing racial discrimination in all its forms.

Employer

Date



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Committee: Council

Date: 7th February 2024

Wards: All

Subject: Council Tax Support Scheme 2024/25

Lead officer: Asad Mushtaq, Executive Director of Finance and Digital

Lead member: Councillor Billie Christie

Contact officer: Rebecca Dodd, Head of Benefits

Recommendations:

1. That the updating revisions for the 2024/25 council tax support scheme detailed in the report be agreed, in order to maintain low council tax charges for those on lower incomes and other vulnerable residents.
 2. That Council agrees the proposed revisions to the 2024/25 scheme.
-

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1. This report details the proposed revisions to Merton's adopted council tax support scheme to ensure that the level of support awarded stays in line with the old council tax benefit scheme had it continued and therefore residents are not worse off due to the new scheme.
- 1.2. That Council agrees to implement recommendation 1 and 2.

2. DETAILS

2.1. Council Tax Support Scheme 2024/25

- 2.1.1. As part of the Spending Review 2010, the Government announced that it intended to localise council tax benefit (CTB) from 1 April 2013 with a 10% reduction in expenditure. These plans were included as part of the terms of reference for the Local Government Resource Review and the then Welfare Reform Bill contained provisions to abolish CTB.
- 2.1.2. Following a formal consultation exercise full Council agreed on the 21 November 2012 to absorb the funding reduction and adopt the prescribed default scheme in order to maintain low council tax charges for those on lower incomes and other vulnerable residents. CTB was formally abolished with effect from 1 April 2013
- 2.1.3. Council have subsequently agreed to continue with the same scheme, subject to revisions on an annual basis for 2014/15, 2015/16, 2016/17, 2017/18, 2018/19, 2019/20, 2020/21, 2021/22, 2022/23 and 2023/24.
- 2.1.4. The Government have stated that under the new local council tax support scheme pensioners must not be worse off and that existing levels of support for them must remain and this protection will be achieved by keeping in place existing national rules, with eligibility and rates defined in Regulations broadly similar to those that previously existed. This is known as the Prescribed Pensioners scheme. This scheme cannot be changed by the billing authority.

- 2.1.5. When full Council adopted the Government's default scheme in November 2012 it was not clear what would happen with regards to the uprating of the default scheme from April 2014 onwards. Advice received from the then Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) at the end of September 2013 stated that if a Council did not formally agree a revised scheme for the following financial year which would include any "uprating" then its local scheme for the previous year would automatically become its default scheme and as a consequence the "uprating" would not take place and many residents would face an increased council tax bill.
- 2.1.6. In 2021/22, the Government introduced increases to disregarded earnings and grants and loans for the self-employed to support people during the COVID-19 pandemic. These resulted in increases to Universal Credit and other DWP benefits which reduced council tax support for our residents. The Council awarded the difference in the form of a hardship reduction as part of the Council Tax Hardship facility; however the Council was unable to amend the disregards set out in the Council Tax Support Scheme.
- 2.1.7. The rules of the scheme for 2021/22 were amended and agreed by full Council to permit any in year changes if the Government made any in year changes to disregards or elements of the Housing Benefit scheme or Prescribed Pensioners scheme that will benefit residents.
- 2.1.8. Any in year changes will be approved by the Section 151 officer of the Council. However, the Council's decision making process will be followed for any changes.
- 2.1.9. This means that if Merton wants to continue with its council tax support scheme which is broadly similar to the old council tax benefit scheme it would have to formally consult and agree on the revised "uprating" each year. Merton has subsequently agreed this approach in prior years and is now seeking agreement to the same for 2024/25.
- 2.1.10. It is estimated that if the uprating was not applied the expenditure of the scheme, if everything else remained constant, would be approximately cost neutral. Increases in payments for non-dependants living in households would not be applied and some residents receiving disability benefits or premiums could face higher council tax bills.

2.2. **Council Tax Support Scheme 2024/25**

- 2.2.1. Each year the Government "uprate" the housing benefit scheme and the prescribed Council Tax Support scheme for pensioners. This is where state pensions and benefits are increased by a set percentage and the Government also increase the applicable amounts and personal allowances (elements that help identify how much income a family or individual requires each week before their housing benefit starts to be reduced) and also non dependant adult deductions (the amount an adult who lives with the claimant is expected to contribute to the rent and/or council tax each week).

2.2.2. The Government have also previously introduced new elements to the housing benefit scheme and pensioner scheme which can affect entitlement. These introductions are often made after Council has agreed the CTS scheme for the following year. For example, on 12th February 2022 the Government introduced [new legislation](#) which introduced the £150 energy rebate. This was introduced after Council agreed the scheme in November 2021 but before the new scheme began on the 1st April 2022. The changes to the scheme will include any changes affecting CTS entitlement under new legislation and changes to the pensioner scheme and Housing Benefit Scheme after Council have agreed the scheme and before the scheme commences on 1st April 2024.

2.2.3. The Government will uprate the housing benefit scheme from the 1 April 2024 and the detail of this process is unlikely to be known until early February 2024.

2.2.4. The Government has also uprated the prescribed pensioner scheme for council tax support from 1 April 2024, and the data from these changes have been used to uprate the local council tax support scheme for working age residents. The additional changes to the 2023/24 prescribed scheme are as follows:

- Increases to the allowances used to calculate Council Tax Support
- Increases to the deductions for other adults living in the property where Council Tax Support is awarded;
- The inclusion of disregards to payments under the Post Office compensation scheme and vaccine damage payments;
- Inclusion of persons affected by the Israeli/Palestinian conflict and the conflict in Sudan.

2.2.5. The new council tax support scheme will be effective from the 1 April 2024

2.2.6. Full details of the responses to the consultation are included in Appendix 3.

3. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

3.1. The only alternative option for the Council Tax Support Scheme based on the consultation undertaken would be not to revise it and not uprate the scheme and continue with the existing scheme. This would result in some of the poorest residents facing increased council tax bills from April 2024.

4. CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED

4.1. A formal consultation exercise regarding the proposed revision of the scheme was undertaken between 16 August 2023 and 10 October 2023. The consultation was on 2 options which are detailed in the briefing paper

in Appendix 1. Twenty two responses were received, 15 preferred Option 1, to apply the uprating, and 7 preferred Option 2, not to apply the uprating. Of the responses, 10 respondents indicated that they were in receipt of council tax support.

- 4.2. The Council has also consulted with our major precepting authority, the Greater London Authority (GLA). The GLA have acknowledged the Council's proposal and is content to endorse Merton's preferred option 1 and would encourage the Council to take a proactive approach to informing those council tax support claimants facing difficulties paying council tax bills about the help available, particularly in light of the current cost of living difficulties Londoners are faced with.

5. TIMETABLE

- 5.1. The key milestones for council tax support scheme are detailed below:

Task	Deadline
Consultation with public and precepting authority on proposed change to the scheme	Completed - 10 October 2023
Report to LSG and Cabinet for agreement to proposed change to the scheme	Completed - November 2023
Detailed analysis of the housing benefit and prescribed pensioner schemes uprating to establish exact parameters to be applied for the uprating of the council tax support scheme	Completed – January 2024
Full Council approval	7 th Feb 2024
Testing of IT software for amended scheme	February 2024
Deadline for agreement of amended scheme	10 March 2024
Implement revised scheme	1 April 2024

6. FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1. Based on levels of council tax support, as at October 2023, it is estimated that £13.141 million will be granted in council tax support for 2024/25 assuming a 5% increase (Council Tax Referendum Limit) in council tax from April 2024. This figure includes the Greater London Authorities share of the scheme (£3.028 million), the cost for Merton is estimated at £10.113 million.
- 6.2. The council has recently submitted its Council Tax Base Return (CTB) to Government. This is based as at October 2023 and incorporates the latest information on council tax support and discounts and exemptions. This will be used to calculate the Council Tax Base for 2024/25 and the Medium

Term Financial Statement 2022-2026 will be updated as appropriate during the budget process.

- 6.3. The level of reduction in Council Tax Base due to the Council Tax Support Scheme has decreased from last year and is the highest decrease since the scheme began. The adjustment for reduction in tax base as a result of local council tax support since the scheme was introduced is summarised in the table below:

CTB year	Reduction in Council Tax Base due to Local Council Tax Support Scheme	Change in CT Base	Yr..on Yr. % Change
CTB Oct.2013	10,309.31		
CTB Oct.2014	9,686.64	(622.67)	-6.04%
CTB Oct.2015	9,099.90	(586.74)	-6.06%
CTB Oct.2016	8,639.20	(460.70)	-5.06%
CTB Oct.2017	8,192.10	(447.10)	-5.18%
CTB Oct.2018	8,177.10	(15.00)	-0.18%
CTB Oct.2019	7,688.10	(489.00)	-5.98%
CTB Oct.2020	8,320.70	632.60	8.23%
CTB Oct.2021	8,086.00	(234.70)	-2.82%
CTB Oct.2022	7,462.06	(623.94)	-7.71%
CTB Oct.2023	7,220.00	(242.06)	-3.24%

7. LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1. Under the Local Government Finance Act 1992, as amended by the Local Government Finance Act 2012, (“the Act”) every billing authority in England is required to make a Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTRS). Merton refers to its CTRS as its Council Tax Support Scheme.
- 7.2. Each financial year every billing authority in England is required to consider whether to revise or replace its CTRS. The Act imposes certain procedural requirements which must be satisfied before a billing authority can make any revisions, including a requirement to consult persons who are likely to have an interest in the operation of their CTRS.
- 7.3. The statutory consultation is intended to ensure public participation in the decision-making process. In determining what revisions, the Authority should make to its CTRS, if any, it must have regard to the requirements of the Act, including the outcome of the consultation and the public sector equality duty referred to below. The outcome of the consultation is considered elsewhere in this report.
- 7.4. If the Authority’s CTRS is to be revised as proposed the decision to do so must be made by Full Council no later than 10 March 2024 to enable the revisions to come into force on 1 April 2024.
- 7.5. As with any public law decision of the Authority it may be challenged by way of an application for judicial review.
- 7.6. If the revised scheme is not agreed by 10 March 2024, then the scheme the Council administered for the previous year (2023/24) would become the default scheme for 2024/25.

8. HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1. A formal consultation exercise has been undertaken. The results of this are detailed in section 4 above.
- 8.2. Any changes to the council tax scheme which results in reductions of support will mean some residents facing an increase in their council tax bills. Some of these residents, due to the yearly uprating undertaken by the DWP, would not have previously been faced with increased council tax bills. In the past it has sometimes proved difficult in collecting council tax from residents who are on limited income and or benefits.
- 8.3. In considering the proposed revisions to the Council Tax Support Scheme, upon which the Authority is required to consult, the Council must consider the Council's Public Sector Equality Duty under Section 149 of the Equalities Act 2010 and to have due regard to the need to:
 - a) Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation
 - b) Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a protected characteristic and persons who do not, and
 - c) Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

9. CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1. None for the purpose of this report.

10. RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1. The Council will need to continue to closely monitor the cost of the council tax support scheme to ensure it is affordable for future years. Although in previous years we have not seen an increase in caseload, it is possible that the full impact of the welfare reform could result in more families located in inner London moving into Merton which would result in an increase in council tax support expenditure.
- 10.2. Additionally, the applicable amounts and personal allowances used to calculate the local council tax reduction, have been matched to the rate of inflation in September. This may increase the number of residents who are entitled to CTS if wages do not rise in line with inflation. The council tax support expenditure for 2024/25 could further increase if there is an increase in claims. The current economic climate is volatile given the impact of inflation, particularly in energy costs. Unemployment rates are currently low, but many claimants are working and any increase in benefit allowances will mean more people may qualify under the new rates.

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

- 11.1. Appendix 1 Consultation briefing paper
- 11.2. Appendix 2 Equalities Impact Assessment
- 11.3. Appendix 3 Consultation comments from respondents

12. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None

Appendix 1 - Council Tax Support update for 2024/25

Merton's Council Tax Support Scheme (CTS) was developed in 2012 after it was announced that the Government's Council Tax Benefit (CTB) scheme would be replaced by individual CTS schemes run by local authorities from April 2013. The Government decided that pensioners would not be worse off under any local council tax support schemes. To achieve this, the Government continued with a prescribed CTS scheme for pensioners (where the entitlement is determined by regulations). The local CTS scheme for working age residents is up to each Local Authority to decide. The decision-making process must include consultation with interested parties.

Since then, Merton's CTS scheme for working age residents has mirrored the Government's prescribed scheme for pensioners. This ensures that that residents would get the same rate of CTS had CTB continued and that working age residents receive a similar level of support as pensioners. Merton has also decided to propose the continuation of that principle for the 2024/25 scheme.

Additionally, every year national benefits and tax credits for working age people are reviewed by the Government. These adjustments are not always known in advance of the scheme being set by Merton. These reviews can result in increases, decreases or indeed no change to the amount of:

- HB
- Prescribed CTS scheme and
- national welfare benefits, tax credits, grants and loans.

To ensure the principle of mirroring the scheme continues, several changes are required to the existing scheme from 2023/24 and therefore we are consulting on these proposed changes.

We are consulting on the following options:

Option 1 – To incorporate any changes made to the HB scheme and the prescribed Council Tax Reduction scheme for pensioners during the 2023/2024 financial year including all revisions required to give effect to amendments made by the Council Tax Reduction Schemes (Prescribed Requirements) (England) Regulations 2012, as amended, or otherwise. Additionally, the scheme will retain the option to make changes within the year the scheme applies where changes are made to HB scheme, prescribed Council Tax

Reduction scheme and national welfare benefits, tax credits, grants and loans, where it affects the award of CTS:

This is the Council's preferred option. It allows Merton to amend the scheme in line with these changes made by the Government at a national level, at any time during the financial year to which it applies. These in year changes will be approved by the Section 151 officer responsible for the proper administration of the council's affairs. The Section 151 officer can also refer the decision to Cabinet.

The effect of this will be that:

1. Any national changes which affect the award of CTS such as equivalent applicable amounts, personal allowances, non-dependant deductions and disregards, may be reflected in the CTS scheme. This includes those changes already known and any which occur in the year the CTS scheme applies. This includes beneficial and non-beneficial changes and allows for consideration of the financial impact to the Council and its residents. It also includes any schemes introduced by central government after this consultation has taken place.
2. There may be changes announced which are beneficial to claimants which we would not be able to introduce until the following year if Option 2 is the selected option.

Broadly speaking Option 1 means the claimant would receive the same amount of Council Tax Support as they would have done under the Government's previous Council Tax Benefit scheme, providing circumstances remain the same. It will allow the Council to decide how changes made to the HB scheme, prescribed Council Tax Reduction scheme and national welfare benefits, tax credits, grants and loans, should be treated under the CTS for Merton.

Option 2 - Continue to award Council Tax Support based on the current scheme, including the current rates of applicable amounts, personal allowances and non-dependent deductions. Not make technical adjustments to the scheme to bring it in line with the HB scheme, prescribed Council Tax Reduction scheme and national welfare benefits, tax credits, grants and loans.

The effect of this will be that:

1. if the national applicable amounts, personal allowances and disregards are increased these would remain the same in the CTS scheme and therefore the claimant would not get

as much Council Tax Support compared to the amount they would have got under the Government's old scheme.

2. if the national applicable amounts, personal allowances and disregards are decreased these would remain the same in the CTS scheme and therefore the claimant would more Council Tax Support compared to the amount they would have got under the Government's old scheme.
3. Not making the changes will leave the council tax support scheme misaligned with the prescribed pensioner scheme and HB scheme.

Merton's current scheme will become our default scheme for 2024/25 if no changes are required or full Council do not agree a new scheme.

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Appendix 2 - Equality Impact Assessment



What are the proposals being assessed?	Council Tax Support Scheme for 2024/25
Which Department/ Division has the responsibility for this?	Corporate Services / Resources

Stage 1: Overview	
Name and job title of lead officer	Rebecca Dodd, Head of Benefits
1. What are the aims, objectives and desired outcomes of your proposal? (Also explain proposals e.g. reduction/removal of service, deletion of posts, changing criteria etc)	<p>Agree the Council Tax Support scheme for 2024/25.</p> <p>The national Council Tax Benefit (CTB) scheme ended on 1st April 2013 to be replaced by a locally determined system of Council Tax Support. The funding available for the new scheme will be cash limited and be determined by the Council.</p> <p>The aim of the council tax support scheme is to provide financial assistance to council taxpayers who have low incomes. Persons who are of state pension credit qualifying age are protected under the scheme in that the calculation of the support they are to receive has been set by Central Government. For working age applicants however, the support they receive is to be determined by the local authority.</p>
2. How does this contribute to the council's corporate priorities?	Ensures that residents on low income are supported by the Council with help with their council tax
3. Who will be affected by this proposal? For example, who are the external/internal customers, communities, partners, stakeholders, the workforce etc.	<p>Working age local residents currently in receipt of council tax support, working age residents who will apply for council tax support within the financial year.</p> <p>Pension age residents receive support based on the Government Prescribed scheme.</p>
4. Is the responsibility shared with another department, authority or organisation? If so, who are the partners and who has overall responsibility?	The Council collects a council tax precept for the Greater London Authority from all residents. The amount of council tax support granted affects the level of the precept collected for the Greater London Authority.

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Stage 2: Collecting evidence/ data

5. What evidence have you considered as part of this assessment?

Provide details of the information you have reviewed to determine the impact your proposal would have on the protected characteristics (equality groups).

The Council has continued to base its local council tax support scheme on the Government's previous Council tax benefit scheme. This has ensured that working age residents have not had to contribute more towards council tax since the localization of the scheme.

This has ensured that the working age, disabled, families and the less well off all continue to receive up to 100% council tax support based on their circumstances and income.

It also ensures parity between working age and pension age residents, with no group being unequal in entitlement to Council Tax Support.

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Stage 3: Assessing impact and analysis

6. From the evidence you have considered, what areas of concern have you identified regarding the potential negative and positive impact on one or more protected characteristics (equality groups)?

Protected characteristic (equality group)	Tick which applies		Tick which applies		Reason Briefly explain what positive or negative impact has been identified
	Positive impact		Potential negative impact		
	Yes	No	Yes	No	
Age	✓			✓	Positive impact for all working age claimants – the level of council tax support will not be reduced - Neutral impact for pension age claimants as the Government have stipulated this group must have their claims assessed
Disability	✓			✓	Positive impact for all working age claimants – the level of council tax support will not be reduced
Gender Reassignment	✓			✓	Positive impact for all working age claimants – the level of council tax support will not be reduced
Marriage and Civil Partnership	✓			✓	Positive impact for all working age claimants – the level of council tax support will not be reduced

Pregnancy and Maternity	✓			✓	Positive impact for all working age claimants – the level of council tax support will not be reduced
Race	✓			✓	Positive impact for all working age claimants – the level of council tax support will not be reduced
Religion/ belief	✓			✓	Positive impact for all working age claimants – the level of council tax support will not be reduced
Sex (Gender)	✓			✓	Positive impact for all working age claimants – the level of council tax support will not be reduced
Sexual orientation	✓			✓	Positive impact for all working age claimants – the level of council tax support will not be reduced
Socio-economic status	✓			✓	Positive impact for all working age claimants – the level of council tax support will not be reduced

7. If you have identified a negative impact, how do you plan to mitigate it?

N/A

Stage 4: Conclusion of the Equality Analysis

8. Which of the following statements best describe the outcome of the EA (Tick one box only)

Please refer to the guidance for carrying out Equality Impact Assessments is available on the intranet for further information about these outcomes and what they mean for your proposal

- Outcome 1** – The EA has not identified any potential for discrimination or negative impact and all opportunities to promote equality are being addressed. No changes are required.
- Outcome 2** – The EA has identified adjustments to remove negative impact or to better promote equality. Actions you propose to take to do this should be included in the Action Plan.
- Outcome 3** – The EA has identified some potential for negative impact or some missed opportunities to promote equality and it may not be possible to mitigate this fully. If you propose to continue with proposals you must include the justification for this in Section 10 below, and include actions you propose to take to remove negative impact or to better promote equality in the Action Plan. You must ensure that your proposed action is in line with the PSED to have ‘due regard’ and you are advised to seek Legal Advice.
- Outcome 4** – The EA shows actual or potential unlawful discrimination. Stop and rethink your proposals.

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Stage 5: Improvement Action Plan

9. Equality Analysis Improvement Action Plan template – Making adjustments for negative impact

This action plan should be completed after the analysis and should outline action(s) to be taken to mitigate the potential negative impact identified (expanding on information provided in Section 7 above).

Negative impact/ gap in information identified in the Equality Analysis	Action required to mitigate	How will you know this is achieved? e.g. performance measure/ target)	By when	Existing or additional resources?	Lead Officer	Action added to divisional/ team plan?

Note that the full impact of the decision may only be known after the proposals have been implemented; therefore it is important the effective monitoring is in place to assess the impact.

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Stage 6: Reporting outcomes


10. Summary of the equality analysis

This section can also be used in your decision making reports (CMT/Cabinet/etc) but you must also attach the assessment to the report, or provide a hyperlink

This Equality Analysis has resulted in an Outcome 1 Assessment

There is potential negative impact on the SMEs that do not meet the Government criteria. Local equality data needs to be collected at the application stage to give a better picture of the types of businesses applying for the grant or may be ineligible for the grant.

Stage 7: Sign off by Director/ Head of Service

Assessment completed by	Rebecca Dodd – Head of Benefits	Signature: 	Date: 18 October 23
Improvement action plan signed off by Director/ Head of Service	Roger Kershaw – Assistant Director Resources	Signature:	Date:

Council Tax Support Scheme 2023 – 2024-25 scheme consultation results:

Options consulted on:	Number of responses for option
<p>Option 1 – To incorporate any changes made to the HB scheme and the prescribed Council Tax Reduction scheme for pensioners during the 2023/2024 financial year including all revisions required to give effect to amendments made by the Council Tax Reduction Schemes (Prescribed Requirements) (England) Regulations 2012, as amended, or otherwise. Additionally, the scheme will retain the option to make changes within the year the scheme applies where changes are made to HB scheme, prescribed Council Tax Reduction scheme and national welfare benefits, tax credits, grants and loans, where it affects the award of CTS:</p>	<p>15 (68.18%)</p>
<p>Option 2 - Continue to award Council Tax Support based on the current scheme, including the current rates of applicable amounts, personal allowances and non-dependent deductions. Not make technical adjustments to the scheme to bring it in line with the HB scheme, prescribed Council Tax Reduction scheme and national welfare benefits, tax credits, grants and loans.</p>	<p>7 (31.82%)</p>

Comments from respondents:

Response
<p>As more and more of us, cannot afford sufficient food. This becomes more vital!</p>
<p>I Support option 1 because where possible non-dependents should increase their contribution if their income permits.</p>
<p>I think it is important, and appreciate that the council agrees, that CTS for non-pensioners should provide support broadly equivalent to what would have been provided by CTB. People eligible for CTS will, by definition, have little money as it is, so obliging them to contribute when they have minimal income, will only push already vulnerable people into debt. By providing CTS for up to 100% for non-pensioners, you will help to avoid residents from sliding into debt, which is in no-one's interest.</p>
<p>Option 1 would give the council the opportunity to apply the maximum amount of uprated support to the benefit of the claimant. This is especially important at this difficult time where council tax is so expensive, and the benefits received do not cover the amount payable.</p>
<p>Thank you for consulting with us, hopefully this will ensure those who use the scheme are able to have their say. Needs to be more widely advertised that</p>

this consultation is in fact taking place. Maybe writing to those in receipt of it directly, would also be an option as well as online responses. Older/vulnerable recipients of council tax support may not be able to/have access to/know about this consultation online. All of those who receive it, should be directly notified. Resources permitting. Thank you

The criteria used to assess what Council tax support is given isn't straightforward and doesn't reflect the challenges residents face day to day. It puts the vulnerable off asking for help.

Liberal Democrat members' response:

See Annex 1 – response from the Liberal Democrats in Merton

Conservative members' response:

Merton Conservatives support option 1 of the Council Tax Support Scheme update for 2024/25.

The Greater London Authority response:

See Annex 2 Greater London Authority response:

Annex 1 – response from the Liberal Democrats in Merton

Council Tax Support scheme consultation 2024/25

The Council's 2024/25 consultation document, as in previous years, asks residents to choose between two options.

The first option enables the Council to vary the scheme to keep it in line with any changes the Government makes to the underlying rules and monetary amounts of the underlying welfare benefits.

The second option freezes the scheme at its 2022/23 values.

Given this binary choice option 1 is preferable

However once again the opportunity has been missed to include a third option in which residents could express a preference for the scheme to be reviewed and updated to reflect the current realities of stagnating or falling real incomes and the cost-of-living crisis.

Merton Liberal Democrats believe it is time for a new approach. We have repeatedly asked that new thinking be applied to this scheme. We pressed for urgency last year, given the Truss mini-budget and financial meltdown that ensued and the cost-of-living crisis that hit and continues to hit many of our residents. Each time we have been told by the administration that the Merton scheme devised in 2012 is generous and fit for purpose. In effect, telling residents they should be grateful for what the council sees fit.

This is not good enough. Residents need the council to take a fresh look at the eligibility criteria – so that more people are helped to live in a more financially stable way. They need a better targeted, inclusive scheme that limits the administrative burden on both the council and residents. Simply rolling forward the same Council Tax Scheme formulated in 2012, without addressing the current and worsening cost of living crisis is an inadequate response. Neither option 1 nor 2 in the consultation document reflects the harsh economic realities facing a growing number of residents who now need help.

As the council's consultation briefing acknowledges, Council Tax Benefit (CTB), the national system of support for Council Tax bills, was localised and replaced in England by what is now known as Council Tax Reduction or Support in April 2013. Such schemes reduce, sometimes to zero, the amount of Council Tax which a household has to pay. English councils were left to devise their own schemes for working-age residents. The full protection for pensioners provided by CTB remained a requirement of each local scheme. Councils were advised to devise schemes that encouraged work and which protected the vulnerable; however, ***defining 'vulnerable' was at the discretion of each local authority.***

This last point is **our first ask** and what we need the council to review. Those who could be considered **'vulnerable'** in 2013 have expanded and bring different people in 2023. As we said last year, the cost-of-living emergency is impacting almost everyone, in ways previously thought unimaginable. People beyond traditional

benefit boundaries are in financial peril – food and fuel poverty are a daily reality for many, with the added strain of keeping a roof over their head.

In addition to an expanded, better targeted scheme, residents also need an easy to understand and apply to scheme. Merton council stated in Building a Better Merton Together - Council Plan 2023-26 that “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”

Our second ask is therefore for the council to demonstrate this commitment by publishing in plain language what the entitlement criteria is for the scheme, alongside making available a benefits calculator to enable people to quickly assess whether to apply to the scheme or not. This would also assist those colleagues working with residents to quickly identify what their full benefit entitlement would be.

Agreeing to our **two asks** would be a tangible and practical demonstration of the council’s aspirations for Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity across the borough. And it need not be a resource intensive process – other councils have worked with specialist providers to devise a complete claim solution with full integration with back-office systems.

In summary, we call on the Council again to be bold and innovative in developing an expanded Council Tax Support scheme to reach those residents who were just about managing, but are no longer doing so, and those who have additional needs that may be exacerbated by the crisis.

Liberal Democrats Merton

10 October 2023

Annex 2 Greater London Authority response:

Thank you for your email on 18 August informing the GLA about the council's consultation on proposals for the draft council tax support (CTS) scheme for 2024-25. The draft scheme options consulted on are summarised in this letter. This letter sets out the GLA's response to the consultation.

Introduction

As in previous years, the GLA recognises that the determination of council tax support schemes, under the provisions of the Local Government Finance Act 2012, is a local matter for each London borough. Individual schemes need to be developed which have regard to specific local circumstances, both in respect of the potential impact of any scheme on working age claimants (particularly vulnerable groups) and, more generally, the financial impact on the council and local council tax payers – and therefore the final policies adopted may, for legitimate reasons, differ across the capital's 33 billing authorities.

This fact notwithstanding the GLA also shares in the risks and potential shortfalls arising from the impact of council tax benefit localisation in proportion to its share of the council tax in each London billing authority. It is therefore important that we are engaged in the scheme development process and have an understanding of both the factors which have been taken into account by boroughs in framing their proposals, as well as the data and underlying assumptions used to determine any forecast shortfalls which will inform the final scheme design.

Framing Proposals

As part of the introduction of council tax support in 2013-14, the Government set out its expectation that, in developing their scheme proposals, billing authorities should ensure that:

- Pensioners see no change in their current level of awards whether they are existing or new claimants;
- They consider extending support or protection to other vulnerable groups; and
- Local schemes should support work incentives and, in particular, avoid disincentives to move into work.

The GLA concurs with those general broad principles and would encourage all billing authorities in London to have regard to them in framing their schemes.

Proposed Options for 2024-25 Scheme

The London Borough of Merton has had a commitment since the localisation of council tax support (CTS) to keep the Borough's local scheme for non-pensioners aligned to the Government's prescribed CTS scheme and the Housing Benefit (HB) scheme. The intention is that residents should get broadly the same level of CTS as they would have done if Council Tax Benefit (CTB) still existed.

Having regard to the above commitment the council is consulting on two options relating to updating the scheme for 2024-25. These options are as follows:

1	Option 1 – To incorporate any changes made to the Housing Benefit (HB) scheme and the prescribed Council Tax Reduction scheme for pensioners during the 2023/2024 financial year including all revisions required to give effect to amendments made by the Council Tax Reduction Schemes (Prescribed Requirements) (England) Regulations 2012, as amended, or otherwise. Additionally, the scheme will retain the option to make changes within the year the scheme applies where changes are made to HB scheme, prescribed Council Tax Reduction scheme and national welfare benefits, tax credits, grants and loans, where it affects the award of CTS.
2	Option 2 - Continue to award Council Tax Support based on the current scheme, including the current rates of applicable amounts, personal allowances and non-dependent deductions. Not make technical adjustments to the scheme to bring it in line with the HB scheme, prescribed Council Tax Reduction scheme and national welfare benefits, tax credits, grants and loans.

The GLA notes that Option 1 is the council’s preferred option. The effect of this option would be that:

- any changes made to the Government’s schemes would be reflected in the local council tax support scheme. This includes the rules relating to claiming and who is eligible to claim as well as increases or decreases in student income, applicable amounts, personal allowances and deductions for non dependant adults used to calculate entitlement to local CTS.
- the council will maintain the policy not to restrict applicable amounts to two dependant children - this will give higher awards than the equivalent prescribed scheme and HB scheme.
- the remaining rules in the CTS scheme will stay aligned to the prescribed Local Council Tax reduction scheme and the Housing Benefit regulations.

The alternative Option 2 would continue to award Council Tax Support based on the current scheme, including the current rates of applicable amounts, personal allowances and non-dependent deductions. The effect of this option will be that:

- the applicable amounts and personal allowances would remain the same and therefore the claimant would receive a reduced award of Council Tax Support compared to the amount they would have got under the Government’s previous Council Tax Benefit scheme.
- where a claimant has non-dependents living with them, the amount that the non-dependents are expected to contribute would not increase and they would be better off than previous years;
- the CTS scheme will not match the rules applicable to the prescribed scheme and the Housing Benefit scheme.
- the council will maintain the policy not to restrict applicable amounts to two dependant children - this will give higher awards than the equivalent prescribed scheme and HB scheme.

Under both option 1 and 2, the Council retain the change made by it in 2022-23, to enable the council to make changes mid year which enables us to reflect mid-year changes to the prescribed scheme and Housing Benefit by the government.

Option 1 would, in broad terms, ensure that, providing a household's circumstances remained the same, a claimant would receive the same level of CTS as they would have done had the former default council tax benefit scheme continued. If Option 2 were adopted, applicable amounts and personal allowances would remain the same in 2024-25 as in 2023-24, and therefore the claimant would receive a reduced award of CTS compared to the amount which would be received had the scheme been updated, as in Option1.

The GLA acknowledges that local authorities face difficult choices on CTS schemes, as overall funding from central government was reduced in the years immediately after the introduction of localised council tax support in 2013-14. Funding for CTS is also no longer identifiable within the local government finance settlement and allocations across the country have not therefore kept paced with or been updated to reflect relative changes in claimant numbers. The fair funding review of needs and distribution may also be implemented in the next parliament.

The GLA notes, the council has committed to maintaining the principle of mirroring the existing scheme, despite uncertainty over future funding levels. Furthermore, the council will continue its policy of not restricting applicable amounts to two dependant children only. These commitments are welcomed by the GLA.

In light of the above factors, the GLA is content to endorse Option 1, the Council's preference for the 2024-25 scheme, recognising that the proposed scheme is in accordance with the general principles set out by Government (as listed above).

Providing Information on Schemes

Whilst we recognise that the detailed rules on council tax support schemes are inevitably complex, the GLA would encourage all boroughs to make every effort to set out information on their schemes as clearly as possible. Information that may help potential claimants could include an online calculator, to identify whether potential claimants are likely to be entitled to support, as well as 'Frequently Asked Questions' and a summary document outlining concise details of the scheme. In addition, for existing claimants, we would encourage boroughs to consider how the process for reporting changes in circumstances can be made as straightforward as possible. We recognise this is less critical for councils such as Merton adopting the default scheme.

Setting the Council Tax Base for 2024-25 and Assumptions in Relation to Collection Rates

The council will be required to set a council tax base for 2024-25 taking into account the potential impact of the discounts the council may introduce in respect of council tax support and any potential changes the council may implement regarding the changes to the treatment of second and empty homes.

The council will need to make a judgement as to the forecast collection rates from those claimants and council taxpayers affected by any changes to council tax support.

The GLA would encourage the council to provide it with an indicative council tax base forecast as soon as options are presented to members for approval, in order that it can assess the potential implications for the Mayor's budget for police, fire and other services for 2024-25. This should ideally be accompanied by supporting calculations disclosing any assumptions around collection rates and discounts granted having regard to the final council tax support scheme design.

Collection Fund Forecast Outturn for 2023-24

By 24 January 2024, the council is required to notify the GLA of its forecast collection fund surplus or deficit for 2023-24, which will reflect the cumulative impact of the localisation of council tax support since it was introduced in 2013-14. The GLA would encourage the council to provide it with this information as soon as it is available.

I would like to thank you again for consulting the GLA on your proposed council tax support options for 2024-25.

Yours sincerely

[Martin Mitchell](#)
Finance Manager

Committee: Council

Date: 7th February 2024

Agenda item:

Wards: All

Subject: Equality Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2024 - 2026 – draft for consultation

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

Lead member: Cllr Eleanor Stringer, Cabinet Member for Nurturing Civic Pride

Contact officer: Susan Botros, Interim Equalities and Community Cohesion Lead

Recommendations:

- A. That Council endorses and adopts the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2024-2026 and the supporting action plan.
-

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1. 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.
- 1.2. This report sets out a refreshed Equality Strategy and Action Plan for 2024-26 that Council is asked to endorse and adopt. It outlines Merton's commitment to tackling inequalities and remaining compliant with the Public Sector Equality Duty. The refreshed Strategy has incorporated feedback from public consultation, which ran from 16 August 2023 to 13 November 2023. An overview of the consultation is also included in the report.

2 DETAILS

- 2.1. The refreshed strategy is a key way in which the Council demonstrates that it is meeting legislative requirements to publish equality objectives every four years.

Approach

- 2.2. The draft Equality, Diversity and Inclusion strategy (appendix 1) outlines the following four Equality Objectives:

1. **Tackling poverty, the structural differences in social circumstances and the resulting differences in access and outcomes**
2. **Promoting Community engagement to empower our residents, improve understanding of the issues faced by local people and develop services to meet the differing needs.**
3. **Promoting a safe, healthy and cohesive borough where communities get on well together**

4. Improving our evidence base to inform our decision making

- 2.3 The strategy is appended by an action plan setting out the Council's commitments against each of the four equality objectives. The actions in the implementation plan are linked to the Council Plan and other key Council Strategies and delivery plans. The actions are also linked to consultation feedback.

3 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 3.1. The Equality Act 2010 requires the council to prepare and publish equality objectives and subsequently update these objectives at least four-yearly. Not having an Equality Strategy would put the Council at serious risk of legal challenge and potentially damage the Council's reputation.

4 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED

- 4.1. Extensive consultation was undertaken with a range of stakeholders which included meetings with user groups and a web-based survey. As part of this exercise and to ensure equitable engagement with underrepresented and marginalised communities, focus groups and interviews were conducted with racially minoritised communities, as well as LGBTQ+ and disabled groups. (Consultation feedback is outlined below). Public consultation ran from 16 August to 13 November and outlined below are the questions in the online survey:

- The Strategy identifies four main objectives, please tell us how you rate these objectives.
- Please tell us if you think there is priority that should be included that was not in the draft strategy.
- Please tell us how you would rate the activities in the implementation plan for each priority?
- Please tell us if you have any other suggestions for actions that will help implement our objectives.
- Please tell us if there anything you feel we should be measuring in order to understand how successful we are being in delivering the strategy?
- Please tell us if there are there any sources of evidence relating to particular Protected Characteristics that you feel we haven't taken sufficiently into account in the strategy?
- Intersectionality as a term refers to the unique experience of discrimination and oppression that individuals experience based on their individual characteristics. Please tell us if the focus on this as an issue in the strategy is about right, too much or too little?
- Looking towards 2026, when we next update the strategy, please tell us if there is any particular research you feel we should be

undertaking over the next two years to improve our understanding of inequality and discrimination in the borough?

- Please tell us if you have any other comments about the strategy?

4.2. 106 respondents accessed the online consultation. The four equality objectives were rated good or very good by between 62% and 72% of respondents. Further discussions about the draft strategy took place with the Joint Consultative Committee (JCC) with Ethnic Minorities, MertonPlus (the LGBTQ+ community group), MCIL, and additional BAME community groups.

4.3. Overall the draft strategy has been well received and it was felt that we are broadly focusing on the right things. In terms of specific feedback, there were some consistent themes which are set out below. We have endeavoured to incorporate this feedback, wherever practicable, into the final draft attached to this report. Specific issues raised include:

- Protected characteristics not equally recognised – particular reference to LGBTQ+, disability and women
- The need to improve services on basis of community feedback; better co-production with the community is needed
- Accessibility was not recognised, in particular reference to disabled groups
- The need to address the disparities between the affluent and deprived geographical locations of the borough

4.4. The emerging issues will be discussed with departments and the responses have been integrated into the final draft version of the strategy. Additional and/or improved actions in the implementation plan incorporates this feedback. For example, disability and accessibility considerations have been mainstreamed throughout the strategy; there are now additional actions concerning the LGBTQ+ community in particular reference to safety. Particular reference to the council's approach to Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) is now featured in the strategy. Equality objective 4 concerning improved evidence base has additional actions on improving data. There is reference to conducting needs assessments, which are able to holistically capture any further research required into the needs of protected characteristics. There are actions to specify the integration of community inclusion and forums in council decision-making processes.

5 TIMETABLE

5.1. The action plan which supports the Strategy will be delivered over the period March 2024 to March 2026.

6 FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS

6.1. None for the purposes of this report.

7 LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

7.1. The legal and statutory implications are addressed above in this report.

8 HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS

8.1 By setting out its equality, diversity and inclusion commitments in the Equality Diversity and Inclusion Strategy the Council is re-affirming its commitment to human rights, equality and community cohesion as well as demonstrating ongoing compliance with the Public Sector Equality Duty.

9 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

9.1. There is a risk of increased hate crime activity directed towards certain groups if there is no commitment to eliminate discrimination and harassment.

10 RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

10.1. There is a risk to the Council's reputation if it fails to produce and publish equalities objectives. Additionally, there is a risk of claims of discrimination based on age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

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

Appendix 1 - Draft EDI strategy

12 BACKGROUND PAPERS

12.1. None

CONSULTATION DRAFT

LONDON BOROUGH OF MERTON

**EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION (EDI) STRATEGY:
JANUARY 2024 TO MARCH 2026**

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INTRODUCTION TO THE CONSULTATION VERSION OF OUR NEW EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION STRATEGY

Cllr Eleanor Stringer, Deputy Leader of Merton Council and Cabinet Member for Civic Pride

As Cabinet Member for Civic Pride, I am delighted to introduce the draft of the Council's new Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy, which we will consult widely on between July and November 2023.

Reducing inequality, tackling discrimination, and promoting and celebrating diversity across our borough are fundamental to our administration's commitment to nurturing civic pride and this strategy document is intended to set out how we will tackle these issues over the period 2024 to 2026.

The strategy covers the nine 'characteristics' afforded with protection by the Equality Act 2010 and by the Public Sector Equality Duty: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion and belief, sex and sexual orientation. As an administration we are committed to ensuring that people do not experience disadvantage and discrimination on the basis of these characteristics, but we also want to go further in identifying possible causes of disadvantage. To that end, I am very pleased to highlight our intention to broaden the scope of this strategy to include:

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

We know that care experienced young people and armed forces veterans experience a range of disadvantages in everyday life and we will continue to explore ways in which those disadvantages can be reduced or eliminated, both in the way in which we deliver our services and by encouraging others to recognise and mitigate the challenges faced.

We also know that single-parent households and those with lower socio-economic status are more likely to experience disadvantage in accessing services and opportunities and over the life of this strategy we intend exploring ways in which we and our partners can reduce and mitigate the impact of these disadvantages.

The EDI Strategy has been out for public consultation and the feedback has contributed to strengthening the final document. We will continue to engage widely with a broad range of groups and communities over the life of the Strategy to ensure it is inclusive and representative of those we aim to support.

Eleanor Stringer

Cabinet Member for Civic Pride.

1. Introduction to the Strategy

- 1.1. Merton is a place of great diversity, reflecting an identity that has been partly shaped by the great movements in which strong communities have grown in the Borough, particularly in the last 50 years. For example, Pollards Hill is home to the largest Ghanaian British community in the UK; Merton is home to one of the largest Korean communities outside of Korea; we have large Tamil and Polish communities; Morden is the site of Europe's largest mosque; and the borough has hosted the 4th largest number of Homes for Ukraine refugees in London, despite being the 25th smallest borough by population.
- 1.2. We have much to be proud of as a borough. We are one of the safest boroughs in London, and we have worked hard to prevent homelessness and maintain the lowest number of households in temporary accommodation of all London's boroughs. Our schools and children's services are excellent. Children's services have been graded "outstanding" by OFSTED and our primary and high school students' results are significantly above London and national averages. Our library service has the highest usage rates of any in London with 35% of residents regularly using their libraries and 67% members. Furthermore, each year, 500,000 visitors come to our borough to enjoy the Wimbledon Championships.
- 1.3. However, we must recognise the challenges we face. Parts of Merton have higher levels of overcrowding, poorer health, deprivation and poverty and a greater proportion of lower-income households that are more affected by the cost-of-living emergency. The Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) 2022, the council's report on health and related data, tells us that inequalities across the borough can be stark. Taken as a whole, Merton is the 5th least deprived borough, but this can mask some big differences: life expectancy is 7 years lower in the east of Merton, compared to the west of the borough, unemployment is 7% vs 3%, even climate risk factors are higher. In 2015 13.5% of residents in Merton that are of a working-age were recorded as having a disability or long-term health condition.
- 1.4. Reducing inequality, tackling discrimination, and promoting and celebrating diversity across Merton are central to our borough's work across Civic Pride and beyond. Merton's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Strategy 2024-2026 sets out the Council's equality objectives and outlines how we will embed equalities considerations into our day-to-day business.
- 1.5. The Strategy drives our commitment to ensuring that people do not experience disadvantage and discrimination on the basis of the 9 protected characteristics recognised under the Equalities Act 2010. The 9 characteristics are: Age, Disability, Gender Reassignment, Marriage and Civil Partnership, Pregnancy and Maternity, Race, Religion and Belief, Sex and Sexual orientation. Unless otherwise specifically stated, the commitments and objectives set out in this strategy and the associated action plan apply equally across all nine protected characteristics.

- 1.6. In developing objectives that promote EDI in Merton we have also recognised that there are a number of groups of people with shared characteristics - beyond the nine characteristics protected by the Equality Act 2010 - who are at risk of experiencing disadvantage in accessing Council services and in other aspects of their day to day lives. The Council will, therefore, consider these groups to be within the scope of this Strategy and will take into account those characteristics when undertaking Equality Impact Assessments. The four identified groups / characteristics are:
- Care experienced young people¹
 - Armed forces veterans
 - One-parent households
 - Socio-economic status.
- 1.7. We recognise that people share more than one protected characteristic and as a result some may face multiple disadvantage and discrimination. As a council, we will do all we can to address issues of intersectionality and inequality, both in our actions to reduce inequality and in recognising the potential for cumulative impact when undertaking Equality Impact Assessments.
- 1.8. Under the Equality Act 2010, the Council has a Public Sector Equality Duty to ensure that in exercising our functions and delivering services and partnership work we:
- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation
 - advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a protected characteristic and persons who do not share a protected characteristic
 - foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
- 1.9. As a Council we acknowledge that we have a key role to play to promote a fair and more equal society and that we can do this by putting equalities considerations at the heart of the decisions we make about strategic priorities, policies and plans, service delivery, contract arrangements and employment. Through the Merton Partnership we will continue to engage with partner organisations to identify ways in which we can work together to deliver better equalities outcomes for our residents and communities.
- 1.10. We also recognise that our understanding of the inequality impacts in relation to each of the nine protected characteristics is not equally well developed and over the lifetime of this strategy we will seek to address this with targeted research and consultation work. There are a number of specific commitments focused on improving our understanding of inequality impacts relating to specific characteristics set out in the delivery plan that supports this strategy.

¹ This category of young people has more commonly been understood under the term of 'care leavers'. We recognise and support the shift towards the definition 'care experienced', as the legal definition of 'care leavers' does not capture all those in need of support.

- 1.11. In producing this strategy, we have developed objectives that promote equality, diversity and inclusion, as well as nurturing civic pride in Merton by:
- listening to our diverse communities and understanding that everyone is unique and “one size does not fit all”
 - taking measures to address existing inequality and differential service outcomes
 - developing strong partnerships with our Voluntary and Community Sector to work towards co-producing the delivery of services that increase access to services and opportunities that nurture Civic Pride
 - seeking opportunities for building a sustainable future for all
 - appreciating the different backgrounds cultures and experiences that make Merton a great place to live, work and visit.
- 1.12. The Council recognises that as well as our obligations to promote and enable equality, diversity and inclusion across the borough in the way we deliver services, we also have a key responsibility to our own workforce, both current and future. We are committed to creating an environment that drives systemic change and works to ensure that we bring to life our pledges, remain committed to our values, and embed a diverse and inclusive culture that allows everyone to realise their potential. As an organisation our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion approach will include fair recruitment, continuous education and awareness of EDI to make everyone feel their uniqueness is valued, and ensure all staff are comfortable in their own skin. The Council’s people strategy, ‘Our People and Culture’ is where we set out our equalities objectives as they relate to our workforce. Our People and Culture should, therefore, be viewed as a companion document to the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy.

Our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Objectives

- 1.13. To underpin our commitment to prevent and reduce identified inequalities in Merton, and to support and promote diversity and inclusion, we have developed four Equality Objectives that aim to improve the life chances of our residents and create a more level starting point for all.
- 1.14. Key issues in Merton have been evidenced by extensive research and engagement. This engagement has taken place with residents, communities and organisations in the borough, as well as research commissioned on the impact of COVID-19; and a range of demographic data.
- 1.15. Our EDI Objectives are:

Objective 1. Tackling poverty, the structural differences in social circumstances and the resulting differences in access and outcomes

Objective 2. Promoting Community engagement to empower our residents, improve understanding of the issues faced by local people and develop services to meet the differing needs.

Objective 3. Promoting a safe, healthy and cohesive borough where communities get on well together

Objective 4. Improving our evidence base to inform our decision making.

Our Commitment

- 1.16. The Equality Act (2010) underpins this Strategy and the objectives apply to all the protected characteristics identified in the Act, as well as to the four additional characteristics / groups identified at 1.6 above. As a Council we will not tolerate discrimination and will endeavour to consider all the protected characteristics in the delivery of our services.
- 1.17. We have developed an Equality Charter that is our statement of intent and outlines our commitment and sets out the framework for the management and effective delivery of equality, diversity and inclusion in Merton and contributes to the newly adopted Council Plan for 2023 to 2026 “Building a Better Merton Together”. The council is committed to “Nurturing Civic Pride “ and wants residents to be proud of their local area, feel more connected to their community and get more involved in making Merton a great place to live, work and visit. Our Equality Charter is set out in Appendix 1 of this Strategy.
- 1.18. The Council’s Equality Charter has been informed by London Councils’ Anti-racism Statement (reproduced at Appendix 2 of this strategy) and by the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives’ Statement of Intent on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion ([ED&I Statement of Intent 2022.pdf \(hubspotusercontent-na1.net\)](#)). The Council endorses both the London Councils Anti-Racism Statement and the SOLACE Statement of Intent on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion.
- 1.19. The Strategy has been designed to cover the period from January 2024 through to March 2026. This end date aligns with the end Date of the Council Plan and coincides with the end date of the Equality and Human Rights Commission’s four-year cycle. It is intended that the next iteration of this Strategy will be developed alongside the next Council Plan so that reducing and tackling inequality continues to sit at the heart of the Council’s commitment to our residents and communities.

2. Our Borough: Merton, the place

Demographics

2.1. We are a growing and diverse borough – Merton is home to 215,187 people, an increase of 7% over the last 10 years. Diversity is a fundamental part of Merton’s DNA and there is a wide range of communities who live and work in the borough – this adds to the rich tapestry of the borough, making it a great place to be. However, whilst recognising our borough’s diversity, it is important to note that our strengths exist alongside inequalities.

A SNAPSHOT OF OUR BOROUGH

Population and demographics

Residents: 215, 187 (Census 2021)

Population by age:

Age 0-15: 23%

Age 16-64: 65.3%

Age 65+: 11.8%

Born in the UK: 59% (Census 2021)

Main language other than English:

21.45%

(Census 2021)

Ethnic group (Census 2021):

Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh: 18.6%

Black, Black British, Black Welsh,

Caribbean or

African: 10.6%

Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups: 5.9%

White: 60.2%

Other ethnic group: 4.6%

Religion (Census 2021)

No Religion: 28%; Christian: 47.1%;

Buddhist: 0.9%; Hindu: 5.9%;

Jewish: 0.4%; Muslim: 10.1%

Sikh: 0.3%; Other religion: 0.6%

Not answered: 6.9%

Education and Qualifications

60.6% of adults with a degree or equivalent:

2.3% of adults with no qualification: (APS 2021)

24.2% of pupils eligible for free school meals (DFE, 2021/22 academic)

12.8% of Primary school pupils getting SEN support

14.8% of secondary school pupils getting SEN support (DfE 2022)

Economy and Environment

£6,299 million GDP in Merton at current market

prices: in 2020 (ONS, 2022)

13,305 Businesses in Merton: (Inter-Departmental Business Register – IDBR, 2020)

80.9% Employment rate: (Annual Population

Survey – APS, June 2022):

18,633 Universal Credit recipients (*DWP Claimant Count, December 2022*)

Built and Natural Environment

2.7 tonnes CO2 emissions per capita (Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy – BEIS, 2020)

79,871 tonnes Total waste collected: (DEFRA, 2020-21)

10.5% Fuel poverty rate: (BEIS fuel poverty sub-regional statistics, 2020)

28% Canopy cover as of 2020: (Merton Climate Delivery Plan Year 2, 2022)

Health and Wellbeing

78.6 years Male 83.5 Female Life expectancy (Merton Story 2022)

7.7 years for males and **5 years** for females - gap in life expectancy between the 10 % most and least deprived (Merton Story 2022)

14.1% Disabled under the equality act (Census 2021)

53.3% of adults getting five-a-day (Sport England, 2019/20)

67% of adults getting enough physical activity: (Merton Data, 2020/21)

10% of residents aged over 65 live with frailty (Merton Story 2022)

Social & Cultural Environment

86% People who feel a sense of community cohesion: (Merton Residents' Survey, 2021)
6.6 Crime rate per 1,000 people: (MPS data, 12 month rolling August 2022)

63% People who feel safe during the night: (Merton Residents' Survey, 2021)
204 Charities based in Merton: (Merton Connected, 2021)
17,945 Volunteers involved in local charities: (Merton Connected, 2021)

3. The Evidence-base: Key Themes that have informed our strategy and what we are doing to respond.

- 3.1. From research and engagement, several cross-cutting themes emerged which informed our approach to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) and underpinned our 4 objectives. These themes reflect issues that affect our residents in different ways and it is important that the development of our Strategy takes account of these issues. It is also important that we implement measures to produce positive outcomes for all and recognise that successful implementation will require collaborative working across the council and Merton Partnership.
- 3.2. The issues and themes identified are not all new; and existing strategies such as the Health and Wellbeing Strategy (2019-2024) and our Cost of Living Action Plan (2023-2025) have started to address those known themes and issues. The new Council Plan similarly seeks to address a range of relevant issues including those relating to housing and the environment as well as focusing on inclusion and equality through nurturing Civic Pride. These strategies are referred to in the EDI Action Plan as we seek to implement progressive change in a coherent manner across the council, rather than duplicating programs and initiatives that are already in place.
- 3.3. The COVID-19 pandemic, the Black Lives Matter movement and the Cost-of-Living crisis have brought to the forefront a range of challenges faced by our residents. Such challenges increasingly require the council and our partners to deliver services in a joined-up way, acknowledging and understanding the borough's diversity and being culturally sensitive to the varying backgrounds and needs of our residents.
- 3.4. We recognise not everyone receives the same start in life and this can significantly shape an individual's opportunities. As a council we recognise that understanding this inequality is key to addressing some of the complex issues that create barriers and exclusion for some of our residents. On this basis, we are committed to working toward:

- Everyone having an opportunity to fulfil their potential from the outset
 - Individuals having choice and control to improve life chances and outcome
 - Tackling the structural barriers that lead to inequality
- 3.5. It is evident that some families experience inter-generational disadvantage that results in individuals experiencing inequality throughout their lives. The challenge, therefore, is for the council to work with partners to find ways to break the cycle of deprivation still faced by many. The complex challenge of cyclical disadvantage is experienced by a range of people including children growing up in lower socio-economic households; Gypsies and Travellers; the long-term unemployed; people living with a disability; Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities; and young adults leaving care.
- 3.6. The Covid-19 pandemic has impacted all our lives and has further entrenched the inequalities that were already evident in society as a whole and across our borough. This has focused our attention even more on the need to work with our communities to promote opportunity and proactively take steps to eliminate discrimination and the disadvantage faced by many.
- 3.7. Mainstreaming disability awareness and accessibility across Council services and communications is key to the Strategy. People living with a physical disability, learning disability or mental health condition can face additional barriers, discrimination, and challenges in their lives from people and wider society. The UK Disability Survey (2021) noted that unsurprisingly, accessibility challenges extend beyond the home, to public buildings and spaces. These findings, as well as vast and extensive research on the issue, highlight the need to make accessing public services, including online services, as smooth and easy as possible. As a council, we want to contribute to enhancing accessibility for our residents in Merton.

Health Inequalities

- 3.8. The existence of health inequalities in the borough is well evidenced by our Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) 2022. The key findings from the JSNA have informed commitments in our existing work, including measures in the Health and Wellbeing strategy to address the poorer health outcomes for residents of the East of the borough. Everyone has the right to live a healthy life regardless of income and social status and should be able to have a good quality of life.
- 3.9. The JSNA highlights inequalities in the wards in the East of the borough in life expectancy, mortality and morbidity for main diseases. Overall life expectancy in the borough is 78.6 years in males and 83.5 years in females, and healthy

life expectancy is 66.6 years in males and 67.1 years in females. The gap in life expectancy between the 10% most deprived, primarily in the East of the borough, and the 10% least deprived in Merton, is 7.7 years for males and 5 years for females.

- 3.10. Pre-existing health inequalities have been compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic. The JSNA 2022 illustrates that “the pandemic has not impacted health and wellbeing in Merton equally, with some groups affected more than others including older people, young people, those with learning disabilities, those living in wards in the East of the borough and some ethnic minorities.
- 3.11. We know that disabled people face inequalities around the wider determinants of health. For example, lower rates of employment, higher levels of unemployment and earning less than non-disabled workers. We also know that disabled people face barriers around ‘preventative’ activities that promote health and wellbeing, for example people with a disability may face barriers to participation in sport and physical activity and are less physically active than those without a disability. The JSNA 2022 notes that in 2020, there were an estimated 3,789 people with a Learning Disability in Merton aged over 18, predicted to increase by 6% by 2040. 5.1% of Merton’s population aged 18-64 have impaired mobility, this increases to 18% of those aged 65+.
- 3.12. The Health and Wellbeing Board commissioned research by Black Asian Minority Ethnic Voice and Mencap that gave an insight into the effects of the pandemic on B.A.M.E. communities and residents living with a disability. The findings and recommendations from this work have informed the development of our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy. The council is committed to working in partnership to tackle the long-term impact of Covid-19 and supporting our communities to be resilient and have access to the tools to promote healthy lifestyles.
- 3.13. In the short term we have worked with local community organisations such as Black Asian Minority Ethnic Voice and the Polish Families Association to better understand the issues their communities face and have gained insights that now inform this Strategy.
- 3.14. Going forward we will continue to work with Voluntary and Community organisations and the Integrated Care System to deliver the Health and Wellbeing strategy and the Local Outbreak Management Plan to provide fair and equal access to health care.

Black Lives Matter

- 3.15. The disproportionate impact of Covid-19 on B.A.M.E. communities and the horrific death of George Floyd in the United States prompted a resurgence in

the Black Lives Matter movement across the world. Both events have underlined the ongoing issues of structural inequalities and racism that affect B.A.M.E. communities in the UK.

- 3.16. In Merton we are committed to continuous engagement with our diverse communities to better understand and develop appropriate measures to address the issues affecting the borough's B.A.M.E. communities. We will continue to work in partnership to identify and address the causes of the inequality still faced by some of our residents.
- 3.17. Within the council we have been working with the Race Equality Network (REN) to develop Equality Diversity and Inclusion training and anti-racist initiatives across the council.
- 3.18. The disproportionate impact of Covid-19 on some communities underlines the importance of small community-led voluntary groups in Merton to support and engage with more marginalised communities. These groups have consistently told us that our criteria for awarding grant funding do not always recognise the benefits that these smaller grass roots organisations can offer. As part of our response to Black Lives Matter, we committed ourselves to recognising the contribution of these groups to tackling inequalities and this led to us reviewing the way that we award funding through the Civic Pride Fund: Supporting the Voluntary and Community Sector 2023-26 to ensure a fair and balanced distribution of resources. We will continue to refine this approach for future funding rounds.

Community Engagement

- 3.19. In 2021 we undertook extensive engagement to get a better understanding of the impact of the pandemic on our residents and young people and what is important to them. We spoke to individuals and community groups and we discovered that residents valued the amount of green spaces in the borough and the strong community feel. Residents' frustrations included feeling isolated as a result of the pandemic; litter and cleanliness; traffic and congestion; anti-social behaviour and crime; and concern about the declining high streets.
- 3.20. Looking to the future residents could see opportunities to build on the community spirit that emerged during the pandemic; maximising our green assets such as parks; making Merton a green borough through active travel and green transport; and revitalising our high streets for the whole community. Additionally, young people asked for improvements to make them feel safe and wanted to be included in decision making.
- 3.21. We are in the process of reviewing our existing corporate engagement structures, developing a new approach to engaging with residents and other

stakeholders that includes using new digital tools and refreshing some of our existing structures, such as the Community Forums.

- 3.22. The EDI Strategy 2024-2026 went out for public consultation with the feedback having been analysed and incorporated into the final document. As part of this exercise and to ensure equitable engagement with underrepresented and marginalised communities, focus groups and interviews were conducted with racially minoritised communities, as well as LGBTQ+ and disabled groups. This approach recognises that particular marginalised groups may present needs or views that are different from those of the majority. When considering a strategy that is designed to address inequity and exclusion, it is therefore important to note that these needs and views may remain unrecognised if they are not consulted effectively.

Cost of Living

- 3.23. We are committed to supporting our residents with the Cost-of-Living crisis and are working in partnership with the Voluntary sector to address five priority themes:

1. Food Poverty
2. Energy Efficiency and Homes
3. Finance, Benefits and Debt
4. Jobs and Skills
5. The Next Generation.

- 3.24. Working with our voluntary partners means that our cost-of-living support is informed by and embedded in our communities. The Young Peoples survey conducted in 2021 showed the level of food poverty in Merton. Ten percent of young people have skipped meals because there wasn't enough food, while twenty percent went a whole day without eating. By considering how residents are being affected and how best to prepare them for future challenges, we are delivering support that meets immediate needs and also starts to build longer-term resilience.

Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG)

- 3.25. We recognise that real change in responding to and ending VAWG can only be achieved when all agencies, residents, and communities work effectively together. On a survivor's journey, they are likely to encounter a number of services, organisations, and individuals. Each will hold vital information and can help build a picture of what support is needed so survivors do not have to navigate services to get the help they need. Ensuring everyone knows the role they play in responding to VAWG and how they work with each other is a

process known as the Coordinated Community Response (CCR). Our CCR approach ensures a whole system response to a whole person.

- 3.26. In many instances VAWG remains hidden and under-reported, but it is not inevitable and collectively we can end it. Our VAWG strategy (2022-2025) sets out the role we can all play in ending VAWG as part our coordinated community response.

Education inequality

- 3.27. We are committed to providing Merton's children with the best start in life and a good or outstanding education for all. Further information about how Merton works in partnership with schools to secure and maintain improvement to educational outcomes for all children can be found in our education standards report, Celebrating Success.
- 3.28. Merton also works in partnership with schools to facilitate the Black Lives Matter and Equalities Forum, which meets half-termly. The forum has enabled opportunities to hold events, discussions and consultations which drives forward our work on anti-racism and equalities. A review of achievements in 2022-2023 and priorities for 2024 are captured in The Strategy to Address Racism and Racial Inequality across Merton Schools 2023 – 2024.

Access to decent housing

- 3.29. Merton, like other London boroughs, faces a housing crisis with increasing numbers of households in temporary accommodation, the pressures of living with high housing costs and poor-quality accommodation.
- 3.30. We are working towards improving our housing offer for care experienced young people.
- 3.31. We are also committed to increasing the supply of affordable and sustainable homes aiming to build 400 affordable homes on council owned land by 2026 and prioritising the regeneration of Mitcham and Morden. We are working to improve standards in social and private housing through introducing selective licensing and strengthening our housing enforcement activities.
- 3.32. We will ensure new developments make reasonable adjustments for people with different abilities, including physical features of premises. This means ensuring all new developments achieve the highest standards of accessibility and inclusive design, and for the public realm to be accessible and usable for all. We want to ensure that regeneration developments include opportunities for first class homes in which residents can age well, and which can adapt to meet emerging care needs, and that there are good quality homes for those with disabilities and mental health conditions.

Transforming How We Work With Communities

- 3.33. Through the Transforming How We Work with Communities project, we have developed a new bespoke 'Working Better with Communities' Framework in partnership with a range of stakeholders including the voluntary and community sector. This Framework provides a toolkit for services to use to work collaboratively with communities. It sets out how the council can take action at different levels to mobilise all the assets in the borough and to create the connectivity and community resilience needed to ensure that everyone gets help when they need it. Tackling disadvantage and promoting equality and inclusion is a key element of the framework.

Digital Inclusion

- 3.34. Increasingly, public services are moving online and the pandemic has demonstrated that not all households have access to smart devices or broadband (either at all or at speeds that enable good access) – highlighting a digital divide. As such there is a risk that a sizeable number of residents may be digitally excluded from accessing services. Data from Merton Mencap shows that Merton carers are above the national average for digital poverty; 33% are basic or non-users compared with the national average of 22%, and likely to be the most digitally excluded group of residents. Over the period of this strategy we will be undertaking significant work to improve the ways in which residents and businesses can access services and communicate with us as a Council.
- 3.35. Data from the Office of National Statistics on internet users in 2020 has shown that 19% of disabled adults do not use the internet; digital inclusion must also be underpinned by accessibility. As a Council, we acknowledge the need to communicate with residents in an inclusive manner to ensure access to information and services. Avoiding further exclusion of digitally excluded households and individuals will be central to our approach to this work.

Funding

- 3.36. “The Covid-19 pandemic has not just revealed some of the inequalities existing within Merton’s wards east of the borough, it has also exposed a failure to protect and keep afloat, B.A.M.E. organisations which knew and understood the needs of their communities” – B.A.M.E. Voice report, 2021.

We have listened to the concerns of our communities, using the Transforming How we Work with Communities framework, and revised the grant funding process to enable smaller organisations to successfully bid for Civic Pride funds.

3.37. The Civic Pride Fund: Supporting the Voluntary and Community Sector 2023-26 aims to:

1. Invest in and support Merton's local voluntary and community infrastructure
2. Nurture a strong sense of community and reduce inequalities
3. Bring together preventative services that provide information, advice and support in the community to strengthen Merton resident's physical, social, emotional, and economic resilience.

3.38. We have allocated almost £5million, over the three years 2023 to 2026, from the Civic Pride Fund to organisations in the voluntary and community sector – a sizeable amount has been given to organisations supporting; older people, people living with disabilities and B.A.M.E. communities.

Black Asian and Minority Ethnic (B.A.M.E.) terminology

3.39. In Merton we value the borough's diversity and aim to provide an inclusive and culturally sensitive service to all. Through engagement with our residents we have learned that many people from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (B.A.M.E.) backgrounds do not identify with or feel comfortable with the use of that term to describe their ethnic identity. This also reflects wider societal moves in the UK toward to terminology that is considered more representative.

3.40. For the purpose of data collection and analysis the term B.A.M.E. can be useful for the collective categorisation of ethnic groups. However, we understand and respect that our diverse ethnic communities have their distinct characteristics histories, cultures and identities that should not be homogenised. We are working to improve our understanding of the different communities in the borough and collaborate with voluntary sector partners to shape inclusive services that are culturally sensitive.

3.41. We are developing an inclusive language guide for staff and through continued engagement with our communities, we are aiming to develop more appropriate terminology to describe the borough's diverse communities.

Equality Analysis

3.42. An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) is an analysis and improvement process that helps us to determine how the Council's policies, procedures, services, practices, or new proposals will impact on or affect different communities – especially those groups or communities who experience inequality, discrimination, social exclusion or disadvantage. Undertaking EIAs is a key way in which the Council ensures ongoing compliance with the Equality Act 2010 and Public Sector Equality Duty.

3.43. In Merton, EIAs are generally used to inform and or support the following:

- Major policy changes that could impact on service access
- Proposals to close or remodel services, or to change availability
- Growth and Savings proposals (as part of the annual budget setting process)
- Organisational restructuring proposals

3.44. Senior managers within Departments are responsible for identifying which proposed changes require an Equality Analysis. Additionally, officers are required to provide decision takers, including Cabinet Members, with sufficient evidence about who the stakeholders are; how they will be affected by proposed changes; and what mitigation is required to reduce / remove any negative impacts.

3.45. We are reviewing our approach to EIAs to ensure, among other improvements, that consideration of the potential impact on the additional four characteristics / groups (see 1.6) is included alongside the core nine Protected Characteristics.

4. Governance and monitoring: How we will measure delivery of the strategy.

Leadership – responsibility and accountability

4.1. The Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy is part of the Council's policy framework and elected members therefore have overall responsibility for delivery. The Cabinet Member for Civic Pride has the executive responsibility for promoting equality and diversity across the partnership and all council services, including those delivered on its behalf by businesses, voluntary, community and faith organisations.

4.2. Our Corporate Management Team and Departmental Management Teams will have responsibility for the operational implementation of the strategy. This includes making sure that equality diversity and inclusion is central to all work done by the council, communicating and promoting the strategy to others inside and outside the council, setting out what we aim to achieve in terms of equality and diversity, and holding departments to account through performance reviews.

4.3. All managers must be familiar with the strategy and be responsible for ensuring equality and diversity is an integral part of any policy development; service design and delivery; employment practices; and procuring and commissioning of goods and services.

- 4.4. All staff including those in organisations we work in partnership with, and who are contracted or commissioned to work on our behalf, have a responsibility to promote equality; eliminate discrimination in their day-to-day work; and recognise and respect the different backgrounds and circumstances of people.

Monitoring of delivery

- 4.5. The strategy will be monitored through the governance structure outlined below:
- 4.6. The Corporate Equality Steering Group is chaired by the Corporate Management Team Equalities Champion and includes senior departmental representatives. The group will take the lead in monitoring the delivery of the strategy's commitments and where necessary highlight issues of concern and make recommendations to the Corporate Management Team for further improvements.
- 4.7. Departmental Equality Steering Groups - each department has a steering group comprised of representatives from across the department. They will be responsible for local delivery of the corporate objectives and will review and revise the priorities based on assessment of service need.
- 4.8. Departments, Services and Teams - will be responsible for the delivery of the strategy through service planning and personal development plans.
- 4.9. The Corporate Management Team - will receive progress reports twice a year.
- 4.10. The Overview and Scrutiny Commission - will receive an annual update on our progress towards achieving the priorities identified in the strategy. This annual update will also be taken to the Joint Consultative Committee with Ethnic Minorities.

Action Plan

- 4.11. The plan for implementing the strategy, and the four key objectives, is set out on the following pages. Upon implementation of the plan, we will further develop a range of robust performance indicators that will support monitoring our performance and reporting on our progress against the strategy.

5.0 EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION STRATEGY 2024 – 2026: ACTION PLAN

Ref	Key activity	Timescale	Intended outcome	Key strategy/Plan	Lead Directorate(s)
Equality Objective 1: Tackling poverty, the structural differences in social circumstances and the resulting differences in access and outcomes					
1.1	Delivering the Council’s Cost of Living Action Plan	2024 - 2026	Mitigated impact of the cost of living crisis on low income households	Cost of Living Action Plan	Innovation and Change
1.2	Ensure contingency and exit plans are in place to minimise negative impacts of ending of the Government’s Household Support Fund	2024	Tapering of support where practicable to reduce any ‘cliff edge’ impacts.	Cost of Living Action Plan	Innovation and Change
1.3	Continue to deliver the Holiday Activity and Food (HAF) programme (subject to continuing funding from Government)	2024 - 2026	Increased Volume of children on Free School Meals accessing the programme over time and increased engagement in healthy activities	Cost of Living Action Plan	Children Lifelong Learning and Families
1.4	Continue to support the ‘Black Lives Matter and Equalities Network’ in partnership with Merton Schools.	2024 - 2026	Improved academic / inclusion outcomes for pupils of black and minority ethnic background.	School Improvement Plan	Children Lifelong Learning and Families
1.5	Increase the number of ‘in-house’ specialist SEND school places by 2026	2026	Additional 354 places by 2026	SEND Strategy	Children Lifelong Learning and Families

Ref	Key activity	Timescale	Intended outcome	Key strategy/Plan	Lead Directorate(s)
1.6	Ensuring a mix of affordable housing, with a priority on social housing, in well-designed schemes that promote inclusion and integration.	2024 - 2026	Number of housing units approved/built and percentage of affordable accommodation – Annual Housing Performance Monitoring Report	Merton’s Housing Delivery Strategy; Local Plan	Housing and Sustainability
1.7	Ensure new housing developments achieve the highest standards of accessibility and inclusive design, and for the public realm to be accessible and usable for all	2024 - 2026	Ensure that regeneration developments include opportunities for first class homes in which residents can age well, and which can adapt to meet emerging care needs, and there are good quality homes for those with disabilities and mental health conditions.	Merton’s Housing Delivery Strategy; Local Plan	Housing and Sustainability
1.8	<p>Increase financial Inclusion by:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Continue to offer a wide selection of payment methods including cash. 2. Maintaining the Council tax support scheme 3. Maintaining the Local Welfare Support Scheme 4. Continuing to provide a Discretionary Housing Payment 	2024 - 2026	<p>Reduced Council Tax bills for low-income households.</p> <p>Increasing take up of Local Welfare Support scheme and Discretionary Housing Payments.</p> <p>Residents benefit from convenient payment methods and terms.</p>	Council Plan	Finance and Digital

Ref	Key activity	Timescale	Intended outcome	Key strategy/Plan	Lead Directorate(s)
	<p>– where housing benefit or universal credit does not cover housing costs for exceptional circumstances.</p> <p>5. Offering extended payment arrangements for council tax or other payments due to the council.</p> <p>6. Young Savers project to encourage saving and access to credit unions</p>				
1.9	<p>Increase Digital Inclusion in a range of ways by:</p> <p>1. Connectivity – ensuring that residents and organisations can access both the internet and council services wherever they are in the community.</p> <p>2. Democracy - making maximum use of digital technology to increase community engagement and collaboration, improve transparency, and optimise democratic decision making.</p>	2024 - 2026	<p>Reductions over time in the extent and impact of digital exclusion.</p> <p>Access to services in ways that suits all residents and does not exacerbate digital exclusion.</p>	Council Plan	Innovation and Change & Finance and Digital

Ref	Key activity	Timescale	Intended outcome	Key strategy/Plan	Lead Directorate(s)
	<p>3. Inclusion – continue to develop new ways of ensuring that the benefits of the internet, digital technologies and digital services are available to everyone.</p> <p>4. Services – ensuring that access to Council services is designed around the needs of residents and users, rather than reflecting professional, organisational and technological silos.</p>				
1.10	<p>Review the Strategic Partners Grant ('Civic Pride Fund: Supporting the Voluntary and Community Sector 2023-26') programme to improve access to funding from small organisations. Publish report with breakdown of where funding has been awarded by protected characteristic.</p>	2025-2026	<p>Increased number of small organisations accessing funding either directly or indirectly, via investment from the new programme commencing in 2026. Transparency on funding allocation by equality groupings.</p>	Council Plan	Innovation and Change
1.11	<p>Continue Borough of Sanctuary initiative with community partners to provide a safe and supportive borough for refugees and asylum seekers</p>	2024-2026	<p>Refugees and asylum seekers are supported in Merton through service adaptations and community collaboration</p>	Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy	Innovation and Change

Ref	Key activity	Timescale	Intended outcome	Key strategy/Plan	Lead Directorate(s)
1.12	Ensure equality, diversity and inclusion principles are integrated into Council Procurement process	2024	Improved diversification of suppliers; improvements in addressing structural barriers to economic inclusion and advancement for underrepresented groups	Procurement Strategy	Finance and Digital Corporate Services
1.13	Ensure equality, diversity and inclusion is continually integrated into the Council Climate delivery plan and climate engagement strategy	2024-2026	Negative effects of climate change and environmental issues are mitigated when considering marginalised and vulnerable communities in the borough	Climate Engagement Strategy	Environment, Civic Pride and Climate

	Key activity	Timescale	Intended outcome	Key strategy/Plan	Lead Directorate
	Equality Objective 2: Promoting Community engagement to empower our residents, improve understanding of the issues faced by local people and develop services to meet the differing needs.				
2.1	<p>Continue to embed the Council’s new approaches to how we engage communities and residents: Working Better with Communities / Community Engagement Strategy.</p> <p>Review community engagement mechanisms and improve outreach methods to enhance community co-production in service design.</p>	2024 - 2026	<p>Framework and toolkit in routine use and impact measurable.</p> <p>Provide opportunities for residents to participate in service design, policy-making and decision-making by engaging and consulting with them meaningfully and appropriately</p>	Council Plan / Community Engagement Strategy	Innovation and Change
2.2	<p>Initiate and maintain a Standing Advisory Group on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion with community representation across the nine statutory Protected Characteristics plus the four additional groups.</p>	2024 - 2026	<p>Better informed Council decision making on matters relating to equality, diversity and inclusion.</p> <p>Improved planning for annual events and marking of key dates.</p>	Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy	Innovation and Change
2.3	<p>Continue to work with the Joint Consultative Committee (JCC) with Ethnic Minorities and Faith and Belief forums to create a dialogue and an opportunity to shape and influence</p>	2024 - 2026	<p>Regular or quarterly meetings</p>	Council Plan	Innovation and Change

	Key activity	Timescale	Intended outcome	Key strategy/Plan	Lead Directorate
	policy / service delivery relating to specific Protected Characteristics.				
2.4	Continue to support and champion a vibrant and active LGBTQ+ Forum for the borough.	2024 - 2026	LGBTQ+ communities' views and needs increasingly represented in policy and service development work.	Council Plan	Innovation and Change
2.5	Initiate and develop a Disability Forum with community representation to shape and influence policy and service delivery, especially in terms of accessibility.	2024-2025	Improved accessibility for disabled residents; enhanced representation and inclusion of disability on key policies and service delivery and design	Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy	Innovation and Change
2.6	Confirm a corporate calendar of equality dates. Continue to celebrate diversity by promoting community cohesion activities throughout the calendar year according to key equality dates.	2024 - 2026	Diversity is celebrated by holding annual civic events for Holocaust Memorial Day, Pride History Month and Black History Month events as well as other key dates	Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy	Innovation and Change
2.7	Continue to strengthen role of the Youth Parliament in the oversight and delivery of the Children and Young People's Action Plan.	2024 - 2026	Members of the youth parliament attend Children's Trust Board meetings and are enabled to make a meaningful contribution.	Children and Young People's Action Plan	Children, Lifelong Learning and Families (Children's Trust)

	Key activity	Timescale	Intended outcome	Key strategy/Plan	Lead Directorate
2.8	Continue to support parent champion programme and advisory groups in support of delivering Children Centre and Family Hub Programme	2024 - 2026	12 Parent Champions recruited by 2024	Family Hub Plan	Children Lifelong Learning and Families
2.9	Ensure equality of access to Sport and Cultural activities for all groups through the Borough of Sport ambition. Social or community sport should be available for all ages across their whole life and for all abilities with choices and inclusion and diversity at their heart	2024 - 2026	Reporting from providers on use by groups demonstrates increasing access over time.	Sport and Physical Activity Plan	Environment, Civic Pride and Climate
2.10	Publish a forward plan of consultations to enable greater participation	2024-2026	Greater community representation to provide feedback and insights to the Council and ensure relevance of services and policies	Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy	Innovation and Change
2.11	Review of Council phone line with an accessibility lens to improve access for disabled residents	2024	Improved accessibility for disabled residents to Council telephone line		Finance and Digital Corporate Services

	Key activity	Timescale	Intended outcome	Key strategy/Plan	Lead Directorate
Equality Objective 3: Promoting a safe, healthy and cohesive borough where communities get on well together					
3.1	Work with the Metropolitan Police Service in its local implementation of the Commissioner’s Turnaround Plan and broader response to the findings from the Casey review.	2024 - 2026	Improved community relationships. Better collaboration at local level between Council and Police services.	Turnaround Plan (MPS)	Environment, Civic Pride and Climate
3.2	Continue to promote and develop Family Hub services across local communities	2024 - 2026	Uptake of services reflects local community	Family Hub Development Programme	Children Lifelong Learning and Families
3.3	Ensure the effective implementation at local level of the Home Office’s planned changes to operational Prevent delivery.	2024 - 2025	New arrangements implemented without reduction in effectiveness during the transition	Prevent Delivery Plan	Innovation and Change
3.4	Develop new ways of engaging effectively with our diverse communities and promoting positive communications that celebrate and showcase our diverse communities.	2024 - 2026	Increased community cohesion Increased community awareness of diversity and achievements	Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy	Innovation and Change
3.5	Ensure continued delivery of the Council’s Hate Crime Strategy	2024 - 2026	Reductions in hate crime incidents Victims are better supported	Hate Crime Strategy	Environment, Civic Pride and Climate

	Key activity	Timescale	Intended outcome	Key strategy/Plan	Lead Directorate
3.6	Ensure continued delivery of Council's VAWG strategy (Violence Against Women and Girls)	2024-2026	Reduction in VAWG incidents Survivors are better supported	Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy	Environment, Civic Pride and Climate
3.7	Deliver and promote a series of events to promote Hate Crime Awareness week annually	2024 - 2026	Profile of work to reduce hate crime raised	Hate Crime Strategy	Environment, Civic Pride and Climate
3.8	To deliver and promote a series of annual events to promote 16 Days of action (activism) against Domestic Violence	2024 - 2026	At least two events held annually	Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy	Environment, Civic Pride and Climate
3.9	Continue promotion of Ask for Angela campaign	2024-2026	Increased safety for women and girls	Hate Crime Strategy	Environment, Civic Pride and Climate
3.10	Implementation of LGBT+ safe space campaign with venues across the borough. Integrate with Third Party Reporting Centres in Council's Hate Crime Strategy	2024-2026	Create safe spaces for LGBT+ individuals should there be a real or perceived threat of danger and unsafety. Nurture psychological and physical safety in the borough for LGBT+ community. Integration with third party reporting centres to increase reporting,	Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy	Innovation and Change

	Key activity	Timescale	Intended outcome	Key strategy/Plan	Lead Directorate
3.11	Ensure planning policies promote a more cohesive borough.	2024 - 2026	Better designed environments that support integration and cohesion.	Merton's Local Plan	Housing and Sustainability
3.12	Ensure implementation of the heritage strategy reflects equality, diversity and inclusion principles, and is representative of our vibrant borough	2024-2026	More inclusive and diverse representation in the borough's heritage and culture activities	Heritage Strategy; Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy	Library, Heritage and Adult Education
3.13	Ensure residents are engaged in large-scale celebratory events in the borough, for example the Mitcham Carnival organising committee	2024 - 2026	Resident contributions inform the themes and activities of large-scale cultural events, such as the Carnival	Council Plan	Environment, Civic Pride and Climate
3.14	Encourage and support the development of Friends of Parks groups in parks that are underrepresented	2024 - 2026	Increased number of active Friends of Parks groups Increased accessibility to parks and open spaces across the borough	Council Plan	Environment, Civic Pride and Climate

	Key activity	Timescale	Intended outcome	Key strategy/Plan	Lead Directorate
	Equality Objective 4: Improving our evidence base to inform our decision making				
4.1	Compile and publish an annual Council service user diversity report.	2024 - 2026	Improved understanding of accessibility of key Council services and identification of potential areas of under-representation for further investigation and mitigation. Compliance with Public Sector Equality Duty	Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy	Innovation and Change
4.2	Mainstream equality monitoring forms across council services to gain better insights into resident service usage. Create a data repository to hold data-sets of demographic and service user information which can be used for analysis and for developing insights	2024-2026	Disaggregated data along protected characteristics to better inform service delivery and planning. Data and intelligence is used to inform approaches to prevention and early intervention	Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy	Innovation and Change; Finance and Digital Corporate Services
4.3	Deliver, over the lifetime of the strategy, a programme of focused research and consultation work to improve our understanding of the inequality impacts relating to specific individual Protected Characteristics. For example, needs assessments.	2024 - 2026	Improved understanding of the inequality impacts for individual communities, enabling more tailored and appropriate service responses to be developed.	Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy	Innovation and Change

	Key activity	Timescale	Intended outcome	Key strategy/Plan	Lead Directorate
4.4	Ensure continued compliance with requirement to publish rolling three years of gender pay gap data.	2024 - 2026	Transparency on whether progress is being made in reducing the gender pay gap over time.	Our People and Culture Plan	Innovation and Change
4.5	Introduce an updated Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) methodology that incorporates the four additional Protected Characteristics identified in the Strategy; provide support and guidance to Council officers about when and how to use this tool	2024	<p>Better informed Equality Impact Assessments informing service planning, policy and budget decision making.</p> <p>Ensure that decisions, and especially those relating to service re-configuration, have regard for equalities and diversity issues, and use impact assessments to evidence issues and develop mitigating or alternative actions.</p>	Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy	Innovation and Change
4.6	Utilise published Census 2021 data in conjunction with Greater London Assembly data and other nationally published data (Office for National Statistics, Office for Health Improvement and Disparities) to produce an up to date 'diversity index' for the borough	2024	<p>Improved understanding of diversity across our population and communities.</p> <p>Better targeting of future interventions.</p> <p>Better informed Equality Analyses informing policy</p>	Council Plan	Innovation and Change

	Key activity	Timescale	Intended outcome	Key strategy/Plan	Lead Directorate
			and budget decision making.		
4.7	Seek to work with an academic institution to develop a model for understanding the inequalities related to socio-economic status in the borough and use this model to develop appropriate interventions.	2024 - 2025	Improved understanding of the impact of socio-economic status on our residents. Improved targeting and design of services enables mitigation of negative impacts relating to socio-economic status.	Council Plan	Innovation and Change
4.8	Continue to make use of survey feedback to review outcomes of under-represented groups when making policy decisions relating to children and young people	2024 - 2026	Improved service design and delivery.	Children and Young People's Plan	Children Lifelong Learning and Families
4.9	Continue to use detailed contextual data arising from schools' census and other published children's data to identify underperforming groups	2024 - 2026	Improved learning outcomes for	Children, Lifelong Learning and Schools Directorate Plan	Children Lifelong Learning and Families
4.10	Identify and examine disproportionalities in crime and anti-social behaviour patterns via the Annual Community Safety Strategic Assessment (PP)	2024 - 2026	Safer and Stronger Executive Board enabled to make better informed decisions about targeting of available resources.	Community Safety Partnership Plan/ Strategic Assessment	Environment, Civic Pride and Climate

	Key activity	Timescale	Intended outcome	Key strategy/Plan	Lead Directorate
4.11	Utilise local parks management plans and asset surveying to identify areas of under investment to ensure equitable and community-based improvements in parks	2024 - 2026	Park local management plans & service asset information	Council Plan	Environment, Civic Pride and Climate
4.12	Collaborate and share data across Council directorates and partners to drive wider improvements in the borough	2024-2026	Improved cross-collaboration and shared knowledge to enhance policies and services	Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy	All Commissioning Directors
4.13	Mainstream the use of a range of data analysis tools, techniques, and disciplines to become a data-driven organisation	2024-2026	Improved evidence-base and analytical processes in place to effect positive outcomes for residents	Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy	Innovation and Change
4.14	Develop and monitor measures relating to social progress and use this framework to inform actions to improve outcomes	2024-2026	Improved social progress outcomes for residents; improved tailored services according to need	Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy	Innovation and Change
4.15	Conduct accessibility review of Council services and communications to ensure improved access for disabled residents	2024-2025	Improvements in accessibility of Council services and communications	Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy	Innovation and Change

Appendix 1

Merton Council's Equality Charter

The Equality, Diversity and Inclusion strategy will be delivered to meet the aims of our Equality Charter

We are committed to making a real difference by:

- Making Merton a welcoming borough where everyone feels they belong
- Inspiring trust and confidence in all the borough has to offer
- Recognising, valuing and celebrating diversity
- Listening to and understanding the diverse needs of all people
- Building good relations and understanding between people
- Creating a fairer borough through promoting inclusion, participation and equal access
- Challenging discrimination, harassment, bullying, hate crime and victimisation
- Eliminating barriers, encouraging people to reach their full potential, raising aspirations and creating opportunities for growth beyond limit.
- Eliminating subtle and covert unchecked "prejudice, assumptions, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping that lead to Institutional racism" (McPherson Report)

As an organisation we will:

- Actively promote equality
- Work with partners and the community to make our information, services and products more accessible and inclusive
- Put equal opportunity at the heart of our recruitment, employee development and service delivery
- Continually review the diversity of our workforce and ensure it's representative of our local community across all levels
- Address all allegations of discrimination, harassment, bullying and victimisation
- Promote good relations between people from different backgrounds
- Share good equality practice with our partners
- Measure and share our progress and success.

Appendix 2

London Local Government Anti-Racism Statement

Local authorities in London are committed to achieving racial equality because we recognise that persistent racial inequalities are unacceptable and adversely affect all Londoners.

We know that some groups are more likely to face inequality, experience poor outcomes and to live in poverty. We also know that this is sometimes used as an excuse not to acknowledge racial inequality. But groups don't happen to be more disadvantaged by chance. Structural disadvantage is rooted in racism and discrimination that is both historical and current.

We do have legislation to protect against overt racism, negative attitudes and treatment, but many of the systems that discriminate do so because of more subtle and covert unchecked "prejudice, assumptions, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping."

This wording draws on the Macpherson Report 1999 definition of institutional racism which is still relevant today. This is a dehumanising process that is unacceptable and communities are tired of being treated this way.

We cannot let another generation down by not responding to what remains a clear and compelling articulation of what must change.

Committee: Council

Date: 7 February 2024

Wards: All

Subject: Mid-year Treasury Management Performance Report for 2023/24 as at 30 September 2023

Lead officer: Roger Kershaw - Director of Finance and Digital

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

Contact officer: Nemashe Sivayogan- Head of Treasury and Pensions

Recommendations:

- A. That Council note the update on Treasury Management performance for the half year to 30 September 2023
 - B. That Council delegates authority to the Executive Director of Finance and Digital (S151 officer) to make short term treasury investment decisions not otherwise currently authorised by the Council's Treasury Management Strategy based on current market conditions/interest rates movements and funds availability to maximise the investment returns.
 - C. That Council notes that the Annual Treasury Management Strategy for FY2024/25 will be presented to the Council in March 2024.
-

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1. This report provides an update on Treasury Management performance for the half year to 30 September 2023. The last performance update report was presented to the Cabinet on the 18 July and covered the full year to 31 March 2023 and this report was presented to Cabinet in November 2023.
- 1.2. Since the beginning of the Covid-19 outbreak and continued lockdowns the Council took a precautionary move and held most of its cash in liquid form. Cash was placed in money market funds which gave us instant liquidity and security.
- 1.3. The BOE base interest has continued to rise during the period resulting in rising interest rate/return on fixed deposits and other cash investments. The current investment strategy has limitations on the amount and duration of our deposits together with approved counter parties.
- 1.4. There have been significant developments in the first half of the year. £38m of long-term Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) debt was settled early on the 6th April 2023 (funded by CHAS sales proceeds) with the remaining £13.7m balance naturally maturing at the end of the financial year, 31st March 2024. In addition we allocated £87.035m of the proceeds from the sale of CHAS to long-term

government bonds in June 2023. Another long-term loan, this time a LOBO loan held with Bayerische Landes Bank was settled early on the 28th September 2023 as both options were exercised, Bayerische wished to increase the rate from 4.9% to 6.5% and Merton exercised their right to redeem (in accordance with our practice). These events have significantly reduced the council's debt portfolio and therefore debt interest commitment. In the case of Bayerische the LOBO originally had a maturity of 28th March 2062. In redeeming the LOBO early we have secured a saving of £9.55m in cash interest payments.

2 DETAILS

- 2.1. The Council's Treasury Management Strategy and Prudential Indicators were set out in Section 1, A to the Business Plan Report 2023-2027 presented to the Council on 1st March 2023. They follow the requirements of the CIPFA Treasury Management Code of Practice and incorporate a debt management strategy that reflects the Council's potential need to borrow to finance its capital expenditure plans.
- 2.2. In addition, the Council follows the Ministry for Housing, the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC), revised guidance on local authority investments of March 2018 that requires the Council to approve an investment strategy before the start of each financial year. The Guidance stipulated that the Council monitors the Treasury management activity undertaken.
- 2.3. The Council operates a balanced budget, which broadly means cash raised during the year will meet its cash expenditure. Part of the treasury management operations ensure this cash flow is adequately planned, with surplus monies being invested in low-risk counterparties, providing adequate liquidity initially before considering optimising investment return.
- 2.4. The second main function of the treasury management service is the funding of the Council's capital plans. These capital plans provide a guide to the borrowing need of the Council, essentially the longer-term cash flow planning to ensure the Council can meet its capital spending operations. This management of longer-term cash may involve arranging long or short term loans, or using longer term cash flow surpluses, and on occasion any debt previously drawn may be restructured to meet Council risk or cost objectives.
- 2.5. Accordingly, treasury management is defined as:
"The management of the local authority's borrowing, investments and cash flows, its banking, money market and capital market transactions; the effective control of the risks associated with those activities; and the pursuit of optimum performance consistent with those risks."

- 2.6 This mid-year report has been prepared in compliance with CIPFA's Code of Practice on Treasury Management, and covers the following:
- A review of the Treasury Management Strategy Statement
 - An economic update for the first half of the 2023/2024 financial year;
 - The Council's capital expenditure, as set out in the Capital Strategy, and prudential indicators;
 - A review of the Council's investment portfolio for 2023/24;
 - A review of compliance with Treasury and Prudential Limits for 2023/24.
- 2.7 The Council approved the 2023/24 Treasury Management Strategy (TMS) at its meeting on 1st March 2023. The Council's stated investment strategy is to prudently manage an investment policy achieving first of all, security (protecting the capital sum from loss), liquidity (keeping money readily available for expenditure when needed), and to consider what yield can be obtained consistent with those priorities.
- 2.8 The total cash and deposit balance as at the end of 30 September 2023 (excluding bonds) was £209m. 2023/24 forecasted total interest income receivable is £11.790m against a budget of £6.321m. Rates continued to rise dramatically over the past year - the BoE decided to increase rates 14 consecutive times. This combined with the extra cash proceeds from the sale of CHAS has seen a big increase in interest income against the budget.
- 2.9 The Council's gross debt was £65.7m (after the redemption of the previously mentioned PWLB and LOBO early settlements) at 30 September 2023 and the average rate of interest is 6.69%. Based on the council capital programme the council will make new long-term borrowings if needed.
- 2.10 The Council's stated borrowing strategy is to finance long term borrowing from cash balances to the extent that reserves allow in addition to external borrowing.
- 2.11 Monthly Treasury meetings are held to discuss issues and to review the performance of the investments. Part of these meetings is to establish a position on whether the Council will go to the market to seek external borrowing or to continue funding its financial obligations through internal cash balances.
- 2.12 So far this year the decision has been not to borrow externally. This is mainly due to the fact the Council at this time does not need to borrow for any significant capital projects. PWLB rates have been steadily increasing and the cost of carry will be a factor in making the decision. The decision not to borrow has been further influenced by the available cash balance and the expected future capital expenditure. This decision is reviewed every month as part of the monthly treasury meeting

- 2.13 We are pleased to report that all treasury management activity undertaken between 1 April 2023 and 30 September 2023 period complied with the approved strategy, the CIPFA Code of Practice, and the relevant legislative provisions.
- 2.14 The key drivers for an effective treasury strategy are security, liquidity and yield management. A robust cash flow forecast is in place and is continuously reviewed to take account of the funding requirements both operational and major programme financing. This will better inform the borrowing and investment decisions providing an opportunity to review the budgeted investment income level.

Treasury Management Performance

- 2.15 The investment balance (excluding long-term bonds) held as at the 30 September 2023 stood at £209 million and the average rate of return on these investments was 4.95%. The forecast full year interest receivable income is £11.790m set against a budget of £6.321m.
- 2.16 The table overleaf shows the interest income forecast as at 30th September 2023 for CHAS and NON-CHAS deposits.

Counterparty	Investment value	Investment d	Maturity date	Rate	2023-24
Aviva investor sterling liquidity (30 Sept 2	106,690.40			4.51	
Standard Chartered Bank	7,000,000.00	04/04/2023	04/10/2023	4.65	163,195.89
Lloyds Bank Corporate Markets	7,000,000.00	04/04/2023	04/10/2023	4.87	170,916.99
Close Brothers - 03/05/24	15,000,000.00	04/05/2023	03/05/2024	5.20	711,616.44
Close Brothers - 22/05/24	15,000,000.00	22/05/2023	22/05/2024	5.20	673,150.68
Lloyds Bank Corporate Markets - 07/12/2	10,000,000.00	07/06/2023	07/12/2023	5.04	252,690.41
GB00B128DP45	1,035,000.00	07/06/2023	07/12/2046	4.25	35,913.08
GB00B128DP45	30,000,000.00	07/06/2023	07/12/2046	4.25	1,040,958.90
GB00BL6C7720	15,000,000.00	07/06/2023	29/01/2027	4.13	505,171.23
GB00B39R3707	25,000,000.00	09/06/2023	07/12/2049	4.25	861,643.84
GB00B39R3707	1,000,000.00	09/06/2023	07/12/2049	4.25	34,465.75
GB00B16NMR78	15,000,000.00	09/06/2023	07/12/2027	4.25	516,986.30
DMADF	25,000,000.00	27/03/2023	03/04/2023	4.05	5,547.95
DMADF	21,818,863.26	13/03/2023	12/04/2023	3.92	28,119.43
ATS Goldman Sachs	7,817,572.67	25/08/2023	23/02/2024	5.82	226,868.10
Lloyds Bank Corporate Markets	7,000,000.00	04/10/2023	28/03/2024	5.64	190,369.32
Goldman Sachs	7,000,000.00	04/10/2023	28/03/2024	5.56	187,669.04
CHAS MMF income end of 30 Sept 2023					1,071,713.72
Expected income from CHAS sale proceeds					6,676,997.08
National Westminster Bank	5,000,000.00	09/05/2023	09/11/2023	4.70	118,465.75
National Westminster Bank	5,000,000.00	11/11/2022	10/11/2023	4.30	131,356.16
STANDARD CHARTERED	5,000,000.00	24/05/2023	24/11/2023	5.19	130,816.44
Close Brothers Bank	5,000,000.00	29/03/2023	29/12/2023	4.60	171,397.26
Goldman Sachs	10,000,000.00	06/07/2023	08/01/2024	5.94	302,695.89
Santander Fixed Deposits	10,000,000.00	06/07/2023	08/01/2024	5.79	295,052.05
National Westminster Bank	5,000,000.00	20/01/2023	22/01/2024	4.45	180,438.36
National Westminster Bank	5,000,000.00	26/01/2023	26/01/2024	4.45	182,267.12
NATIONWIDE B.S	5,000,000.00	10/05/2023	12/02/2024	4.54	172,893.15
Goldman Sachs	5,000,000.00	01/08/2023	01/02/2024	5.79	145,939.73
Natwest	5,000,000.00	04/08/2023	07/05/2024	5.84	221,600.00
Standard Chartered Bank	5,000,000.00	24/08/2023	23/02/2024	5.80	145,397.26
ATS Goldman Sachs	4,247,295.98	25/08/2023	23/02/2024	5.82	123,257.65
Close Brothers Bank	5,000,000.00	28/09/2023	28/03/2024	5.60	139,616.44
2022-23 Deposits Matured in 2023-24					
NAT	5,000,000.00	07/11/2022	09/05/2023	3.80	95,260.27
N&AN	5,000,000.00	10/11/2022	10/05/2023	3.15	78,102.74
STAND	5,000,000.00	24/11/2022	24/05/2023	4.02	99,673.97
Goldman Sachs	5,000,000.00	01/02/2023	01/08/2023	4.10	68,436.95
Natwest	5,000,000.00	04/11/2022	04/08/2023	4.10	70,767.12
Standard Chartered Bank	5,000,000.00	24/02/2023	24/08/2023	4.39	87,198.63
Goldman Sachs	5,000,000.00	28/02/2023	29/08/2023	4.40	90,410.96
Close Brothers Bank	5,000,000.00	28/03/2023	28/09/2023	4.50	110,958.90
					973,846.57
Income from Non-CHAS Deposits					3,435,039.88
CCLA forecasted					408,501.24
NON-CHAS MMF					1,269,480.45
interest on current account balance					238.54
					1,678,220.23
					11,790,257.18

2.17 The table overleaf sets out the key performance indicators of our treasury management activities and the position as at 30 September 2023. Each indicator has been RAG rated for ease of reference.

Indicator Description	Agreed Performance or target	Status at 30 September 2023	RAG Status
Borrowing Limits for the years 2023/24			
Authorised Limit	£241m	£235m	
Operational Limit	£206m	£200m	
Security: average credit rating			
Portfolio average credit rating	A-	A-	
Compliance with CLG Non-specified investments Limits			
Total investments in Money Markets Fund (MMF)* increased to £100m at Sept 2021 Council meeting	£100m	£50m	
Total of other Pooled Funds	£10m	£10m	
Budgeted Investment Return			
Return on Investments	2.00%	4.95%	
Liquidity: cash available			
Total cash available without borrowing	£10m	£54m	
Total cash available including borrowing (cash + under borrowing)	£20m	£72m	
Deposit Interest rate exposure			
Fixed rate exposures	No limit	£55m	
Variable rate exposures	£100m	0	
Maturity structure of borrowing			
Under 12 months	0% - 20%	0.1%	
1 to 2 years	0% - 20%	18%	
2 to 5 Years	0% - 40%	10%	
Five years and within 10 years	0% - 20%	1%	
10 to 20 years	0% - 30%	11%	
20 to 30 years	0% - 50%	19%	
30 to 40 years	0% - 70%	41%	
Principal sums invested for periods longer than 365 days			
Investments longer than 365 but less than 2 years	£0m	£0m	

3.0 Risk Management and Creditworthiness Policy

3.1 This Council applies the creditworthiness service provided by Link Group. This service employs a sophisticated modelling approach utilising credit ratings from the three main

credit rating agencies - Fitch, Moody's and Standard and Poor's. The credit ratings of counterparties are supplemented with the following overlays:

- Credit watches and credit outlooks from credit rating agencies;
- CDS spreads to give early warning of likely changes in credit ratings;
- Sovereign ratings to select counterparties from only the most creditworthy countries.

3.2 This modelling approach combines credit ratings, credit Watches and credit Outlooks in a weighted scoring system which is then combined with an overlay of CDS spreads for which the end product is a series of colour coded bands which indicate the relative creditworthiness of counterparties. These colour codes are used by the Council to determine the suggested duration for investments. The Council will therefore use counterparties within the following durational bands:

Y	Pi1	Pi2	P	B	O	R	G	N/C
1	1.25	1.5	2	3	4	5	6	7
Up to 5yrs	Up to 5yrs	Up to 5yrs	Up to 2yrs	Up to 1yr	Up to 1yr	Up to 6mths	Up to 100days	No Colour

	Colour (and long term rating where applicable)	Money Limit	Time Limit
Banks	yellow	£25m	5yrs
Banks	purple	£25m	2 yrs
Banks	orange	£25m	1 yr
Banks – part nationalised	blue	£25m	1 yr
Banks	red	£10m	6 mths
Banks	green	£5m	100 days
Banks	No colour	Not to be used	
Other institutions limit	-	£5m	1yrs
Government (DMADF)		unlimited	6 months
Local authorities	Yellow	£35m	5yrs
	Fund rating	Money Limit	Time Limit
Money market funds (maximum 5 Funds, £20m per Fund)	AAA	£100m	Instant
Ultra-Short Dated Bond funds with a credit score of 1.25	Dark pink / AAA	£25m	Instant
Ultra-Short Dated Bond funds with a credit score of 1.5	Light pink / AAA	£10m	Instant

4. CAPITAL PRUDENTIAL INDICATORS 2023/24-2026/27

- 4.1 The Council is required to calculate various indicators for the next three years. The aim of prudential indicators is to ensure that the Council's capital investment plans are affordable, prudent and sustainable. The prudential indicators are calculated for the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) period and are linked to the CIPFA Prudential Code and TM Code of Practice. The indicators relate to capital expenditure, external debt and treasury management.
- 4.2 The Council will monitor performance against the indicators and prepare indicators based on the Statement of Accounts (SoA) at year end. Actuals are calculated from the SoAs with estimates based on the Capital programme.

Capital Expenditure

- 4.3 The Council's capital expenditure plans are fundamental to its treasury management activity. The output of the capital expenditure plans is reflected in prudential indicators, which are designed to provide Council members an overview and confirm the impact of capital expenditure plans.
- 4.4 This indicator is a summary of the Council's capital expenditure plans, both those agreed previously, and those forming part of this budget cycle as reported in the MTFS. Environment and Regeneration figures include projects relating to Public Health programmes however these are fully funded and have no impact on the council's net financing need for the year or borrowing requirement

Please find below the capital expenditure forecast (as at September 2023).

Capital Forecast	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27
	Actual	Estimate	Estimate	Estimate	Estimate
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Finance and Digital	3,654	8,007	6,525	1,280	7,536
ASC, Integrated Care & Public Health	0	0	0	0	0
Children, Lifelong Learning & Families	8,268	6,326	16,114	3,479	3,400
Environment, Civic Pride & Climate	7,626	14,374	11,369	15,655	12,970
Innovation & Change	0	45	0	0	0
Housing & Sustainable Development	3,817	12,228	18,086	20,682	17,445
Total	23,365	40,981	52,094	41,096	41,351

- 4.5 The above financing need excludes other long-term liabilities, such as PFI and leasing arrangements which already include borrowing instruments.

- 4.6 The table below shows how the capital expenditure plans are being financed by revenue or capital resources. A shortfall of resources means a borrowing need. The capital programme expenditure figures used in calculating the financing costs have been adjusted for slippage in the programme as at September 2023.

Capital Expenditure	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27
	Actual £'000	Estimate £'000	Estimate £'000	Estimate £'000	Estimate £'000
Capital Budget*	23,365	40,981	52,094	41,096	41,351
Slippage	0	0	0	0	0
Total Capital Expenditure	23,365	40,981	52,094	41,096	41,351
Financed by:					
Capital Receipts	5,797	900	900	500	500
Capital Grants & Contributions	13,736	23,856	30,310	17,679	16,741
Capital Reserves	0	0	0	0	0
Revenue Provisions	833	1,387	1,608	230	95
Other Financing Sources	0	0	0	0	0
Net financing need for the year (a)	2,999	14,838	19,276	22,687	24,015

5.0 ECONOMIC UPDATE ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- The first half of 2023/24 saw:
 - Interest rates rise by a further 100bps, taking Bank Rate from 4.25% to 5.25% and, possibly, the peak in the tightening cycle.
 - Short, medium and long-dated gilts remain elevated as inflation continually surprised to the upside.
 - A 0.5% m/m decline in real GDP in July, mainly due to more strikes.
 - CPI inflation falling from 8.7% in April to 6.7% in August, its lowest rate since February 2022, but still the highest in the G7.
 - Core CPI inflation declining to 6.2% in August from 7.1% in April and May, a then 31 years high.
 - A cooling in labour market conditions, but no evidence yet that it has led to an easing in wage growth (as the 3myy growth of average earnings rose to 7.8% in August, excluding bonuses).

- The 0.5% m/m fall in GDP in July suggests that underlying growth has lost momentum since earlier in the year. Some of the weakness in July was due to there being almost twice as many working days lost to strikes in July (281,000) than in June (160,000). But with output falling in 10 out of the 17 sectors, there is an air of underlying weakness.
- The fall in the composite Purchasing Managers Index from 48.6 in August to 46.8 in September left it at its lowest level since COVID-19 lockdowns reduced activity in January 2021. At face value, it is consistent with the 0.2% q/q rise in real GDP in the period April to June, being followed by a contraction of up to 1% in the second half of 2023.
- The 0.4% m/m rebound in retail sales volumes in August is not as good as it looks as it partly reflected a pickup in sales after the unusually wet weather in July. Sales volumes in August were 0.2% below their level in May, suggesting much of the resilience in retail activity in the first half of the year has faded.
- As the growing drag from higher interest rates intensifies over the next six months, we think the economy will continue to lose momentum and soon fall into a mild recession. Strong labour demand, fast wage growth and government handouts have all supported household incomes over the past year. And with CPI inflation past its peak and expected to decline further, the economy has got through the cost-of-living crisis without recession. But even though the worst of the falls in real household disposable incomes are behind us, the phasing out of financial support packages provided by the government during the energy crisis means real incomes are unlikely to grow strongly. Higher interest rates will soon bite harder too. We expect the Bank of England to keep interest rates at the probable peak of 5.25% until the second half of 2024. Mortgage rates are likely to stay above 5.0% for around a year.
- The tightness of the labour market continued to ease, with employment in the three months to July falling by 207,000. The further decline in the number of job vacancies from 1.017m in July to 0.989m in August suggests that the labour market has loosened a bit further since July. That is the first time it has fallen below 1m since July 2021. At 3.0% in July, and likely to have fallen to 2.9% in August, the job vacancy rate is getting closer to 2.5%, which would be consistent with slower wage growth. Meanwhile, the 48,000 decline in the supply of workers in the three months to July offset some of the loosening in the tightness of the labour market. That was due to a 63,000 increase in inactivity in the three months to July as more people left the labour market due to long term sickness or to enter education. The supply of labour is still 0.3% below its pre-pandemic February 2020 level.
- But the cooling in labour market conditions still has not fed through to an easing in wage growth. While the monthly rate of earnings growth eased sharply from an upwardly revised +2.2% in June to -0.9% in July, a lot of that was due to the one-off bonus payments for NHS staff in June not being repeated in July. The headline 3myy rate rose from 8.4% (revised up from 8.2%) to 8.5%, which meant UK wage growth remains much faster than in the US and in the Euro-zone. Moreover, while the Bank of England's closely watched measure of regular private sector wage growth eased a touch in July, from 8.2% 3myy in June to 8.1% 3myy, it is still well above the Bank of England's prediction for it to fall to 6.9% in September.

- CPI inflation declined from 6.8% in July to 6.7% in August, the lowest rate since February 2022. The biggest positive surprise was the drop in core CPI inflation, which declined from 6.9% to 6.2%. That reverses all the rise since March and means the gap between the UK and elsewhere has shrunk (US core inflation is 4.4% and in the Euro-zone it is 5.3%). Core goods inflation fell from 5.9% to 5.2% and the further easing in core goods producer price inflation, from 2.2% in July to a 29-month low of 1.5% in August, suggests it will eventually fall close to zero. But the really positive development was the fall in services inflation from 7.4% to 6.8%. That also reverses most of the rise since March and takes it below the forecast of 7.2% the Bank of England published in early August.
- In its latest monetary policy meeting on 20 September, the Bank of England left interest rates unchanged at 5.25%. The weak August CPI inflation release, the recent loosening in the labour market and the downbeat activity surveys appear to have convinced the Bank of England that it has already raised rates far enough. The minutes show the decision was “finely balanced”. Five MPC members (Bailey, Broadbent, Dhingra, Pill and Ramsden) voted for no change and the other four (Cunliffe, Greene, Haskel and Mann) voted for a 25bps hike.
- Like the US Fed, the Bank of England wants the markets to believe in the higher for longer narrative. The statement did not say that rates have peaked and once again said if there was evidence of more persistent inflation pressures “further tightening in policy would be required”. Governor Bailey stated, “we’ll be watching closely to see if further increases are needed”. The Bank also retained the hawkish guidance that rates will stay “sufficiently restrictive for sufficiently long”.
- This narrative makes sense as the Bank of England does not want the markets to decide that a peak in rates will be soon followed by rate cuts, which would loosen financial conditions and undermine its attempts to quash inflation. The language also gives the Bank of England the flexibility to respond to new developments. A rebound in services inflation, another surge in wage growth and/or a further leap in oil prices could conceivably force it to raise rates at the next meeting on 2nd November, or even pause in November and raise rates in December.
- The yield on 10-year Gilts fell from a peak of 4.74% on 17th August to 4.44% on 29th September, mainly on the back of investors revising down their interest rate expectations. But even after their recent pullback, the rise in Gilt yields has exceeded the rise in most other Developed Market government yields since the start of the year. Looking forward, once inflation falls back, Gilt yields are set to reduce further. A (mild) recession over the next couple of quarters will support this outlook if it helps to loosen the labour market (higher unemployment/lower wage increases).
- The pound weakened from its cycle high of \$1.30 in the middle of July to \$1.21 in late September. In the first half of the year, the pound bounced back strongly from the Truss debacle last autumn. That rebound was in large part driven by the substantial shift up in UK interest rate expectations. However, over the past couple of months, interest rate expectations have dropped sharply as inflation started to come down, growth faltered, and the Bank of England called an end to its hiking cycle.
- The FTSE 100 has gained more than 2% since the end of August, from around 7,440 on 31st August to 7,608 on 29th September. The rebound has been

primarily driven by higher energy prices which boosted the valuations of energy companies. The FTSE 100's relatively high concentration of energy companies helps to explain why UK equities outperformed both US and Euro-zone equities in September. Nonetheless, as recently as 21st April the FTSE 100 stood at 7,914.

Interest Rate Forecasts

The Council has appointed Link Group as its treasury advisors and part of their service is to assist the Council to formulate a view on interest rates. The PWLB rate forecasts below are based on the Certainty Rate (the standard rate minus 20 bps) which has been accessible to most authorities since 1st November 2012.

The latest forecast on 25th September sets out a view that short, medium and long-dated interest rates will be elevated for some little while, as the Bank of England seeks to squeeze inflation out of the economy.

Our PWLB rate forecasts below are based on the Certainty Rate (the standard rate minus 20 bps, calculated as gilts plus 80bps) which has been accessible to most authorities since 1st November 2012.

Link Group Interest Rate View		25.09.23											
	Dec-23	Mar-24	Jun-24	Sep-24	Dec-24	Mar-25	Jun-25	Sep-25	Dec-25	Mar-26	Jun-26	Sep-26	Dec-26
BANK RATE	5.25	5.25	5.25	5.00	4.50	4.00	3.50	3.00	2.75	2.75	2.75	2.75	2.75
3 month ave earnings	5.30	5.30	5.30	5.00	4.50	4.00	3.50	3.00	2.80	2.80	2.80	2.80	2.80
6 month ave earnings	5.60	5.50	5.40	5.10	4.60	4.10	3.60	3.10	2.90	2.90	2.90	2.90	2.90
12 month ave earnings	5.80	5.70	5.50	5.20	4.70	4.20	3.70	3.20	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00
5 yr PWLB	5.10	5.00	4.90	4.70	4.40	4.20	4.00	3.90	3.70	3.70	3.60	3.60	3.50
10 yr PWLB	5.00	4.90	4.80	4.60	4.40	4.20	4.00	3.80	3.70	3.60	3.60	3.50	3.50
25 yr PWLB	5.40	5.20	5.10	4.90	4.70	4.40	4.30	4.10	4.00	3.90	3.80	3.80	3.80
50 yr PWLB	5.20	5.00	4.90	4.70	4.50	4.20	4.10	3.90	3.80	3.70	3.60	3.60	3.60

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Committee: Council

Date: 7 February 2024

Wards:

Subject: Variation to Merton Community Panel Terms of Reference

Lead Director: Lucy Owen, Executive Director of Housing and Sustainable Development

Lead member: Councillor Andrew Judge, Cabinet Member for Housing and Sustainable Development

Contact officer: Steve Webb, Housing Business Support and Relationship Manager

Recommendations:

- A. That members agree to the proposed variation to the Merton Community Panel Terms of Reference.
 - B. That members delegate authority to the Executive Director of Housing and Sustainable Development to agree any future variations to the Terms of Reference in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing and Sustainable Development.
-

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1. The primary purpose of this report is to inform members of the request from Clarion Housing to vary the Terms of Reference to the Merton Community Panel and to seek their approval.
- 1.2. The report sets out the background to the Merton Community Panel.
- 1.3. The report seeks the approval of members to delegate the authority to approve any future variations, to the Executive Director of Housing and Sustainable Development, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing and Sustainable Development.
- 1.4. The Panel's work supports the Council's priorities with regards to Civic Pride and Sustainable Futures.

2 DETAILS

Background

- 2.1. The Council transferred its former housing stock to Merton Priory Homes (MPH) on 22 March 2010 following a positive ballot of tenants in June 2009.
- 2.2. MPH was a subsidiary of Circle Housing.
- 2.3. On 1st February 2017, a report was presented to Council to update members on the Circle Housing plans to simplify the group structure and consolidate the nine housing associations in the group, including MPH, into one association and to seek members support for these plans.

<https://democracy.merton.gov.uk/documents/s16153/MPH%20report.pdf>

- 2.4. The report also set out the plans to create a Community Panel and that any changes to the Terms of Reference would be with the Council’s consent.
- 2.5. Members also agreed to delegate authority to the Director of Community and Housing to agree the final terms of the variations to the Stock Transfer Agreement which included the Terms of Reference for the Community Panel.

Current position

- 2.6. Following a review of the Panel performance and Terms of Reference (ToR), officers from Clarion Housing (successors to Circle Housing) have requested that a number of changes are made to the ToR.
- 2.7. The original ToR approved as part of the variation to the Stock Transfer Agreement is attached as Appendix 1.
- 2.8. The revised ToR for approval is attached as Appendix 2.
- 2.9. The majority of changes update the text to replace “Circle Housing” with “Clarion Housing” and there are a small number that update internal committees and officer names.
- 2.10. The main change to the ToR relates to the membership.

Original Terms of Reference 5.1
The Panel shall consist of between 8 and 12 members, ideally (at full membership) 6 residents, 4 independents and 2 nominees from LBM. Employees shall not be members. The Chair shall be an independent member appointed by Circle Housing. The Panel may co-opt up to 3 (non-voting) co-optees, to fill temporary vacancies or to meet a skill gap on the Panel
Revised Terms of Reference 5.1
The Panel shall consist of between 8 and 12 members, ideally (at full membership) 7 residents, 3 independents and 2 nominees from LBM. Employees shall not be members. The Chair shall be an independent member appointed by Clarion Housing. The Panel shall appoint a tenant Co-Chair and a Vice Chair, this could be a resident of any tenure. The Panel may co-opt up to 3 (non-voting) co-optees, to fill temporary vacancies or to meet a skill gap on the Panel.

- 2.11. Clarion Housing have provided their reasoning for each of the changes:
 - (i) The number of resident members increase from 6 to 7 as residents on the panel felt that there should be a greater resident say in decision making and this increases the potential for additional tenants without losing existing leaseholders and freeholders.
 - (ii) The Chair continues to be an independent member and appointed by Clarion Housing.
 - (iii) The Co-chair will be appointed by the Panel and will substitute for the Chair when they are not available. This post is proposed to increase the residents’ voice and put them at the heart of decision making.

(iv) The Vice Chair supports the Chair and Co-chair and participates in other internal Clarion groups and feeds back to the Panel.

Going forward

- 2.12. 4.1 of the ToR states “Any changes arising from such reviews shall be with the consent of LBM, where such consent will not be unreasonably refused.”
- 2.13. Members previously provided delegated authority for the Director of Community and Housing to agree the Community Panel ToR.
- 2.14. Members are requested to provide delegated authority for the Executive Director of Housing and Sustainable Development, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing and Sustainable Development, to approve any future ToR variations.

3 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 3.1. Members could decline the approval of the ToR variation, taking regard of the previously agreed text: “Any changes arising from such reviews shall be with the consent of LBM, where such consent will not be unreasonably refused.”
- 3.2. Members could retain decision making at Council and decline the request to delegate the authority to approve any future variations, to the Executive Director of Housing and Sustainable Development, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing and Sustainable Development.

4 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED

- 4.1. Clarion Housing officers have consulted internally with the Merton Community Panel members: independent members, tenants, leaseholders, freeholders and LBM nominated members.
- 4.2. Wider promotion of the posts will be made as part of any recruitment plans to advertise any vacancies.

5 TIMETABLE

- 5.1. For approval at Council on 7 February 2024.

6 FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1. There is no anticipated financial impact on the council.

7 LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1. Under the current Terms of Reference where a review has been carried out and changes proposed this requires the consent of the Council, where such consent will not be reasonably refused.
- 7.2. The delegation being proposed in Recommendation B is permissible under S101 of the Local Government Act 1972.

8 HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1. The Merton Community Panel provides a voice for local people.

9 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1. None

10 RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

10.1. None

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

- Appendix 1 – Original Terms of Reference from 2017
- Appendix 2 – Revised Terms of Reference for Approval

12 BACKGROUND PAPERS

12.1. Report to Council, 1st February 2017

<https://democracy.merton.gov.uk/documents/s16153/MPH%20report.pdf>

Department Approval	Name of Officer	Date of Comments
Legal	Fabiola Hickson	02/11/2023
Finance	Marsha Walker	02/11/2023
Executive Director	Lucy Owen	19/01/2024
Cabinet Member	Cllr Andrew Judge	23/01/2024

MERTON COMMUNITY PANEL: TERMS OF REFERENCE

1. Background

1.1 Circle Thirty Three Housing Trust (known as Circle Housing) is a charitable registered provider of social housing, regulated by the Homes and Communities Agency. It is part of the Clarion Housing Group (“the Group”).

1.2 Circle Housing’s fundamental charitable purpose is the provision of housing and associated services for those in need, in particular the provision of social and affordable housing for rent and for sale to those unable to access market housing.

1.3 Stock within Merton was transferred in 2010 by the London Borough of Merton (“LBM”) to Merton Priory Homes which on [] transferred its engagements to Circle Housing.

2. Statement of Purpose

2.1 The Merton Community Panel is a consultative panel established to provide a local voice and to support Circle Housing in monitoring the following activity in Merton:

2.1.1 regeneration activity,

2.1.2 delivery of the housing and estates services,

2.1.3 development and delivery of the Group’s Community Investment strategy.

2.2 The Panel will be a source of intelligence for shaping and informing Circle Housing’s activities in Merton and act as a two way communication conduit between locally based Panel Members and the Circle Housing Board.

3. Key Areas of Activity

- Monitoring the role of Circle Housing in managing successful neighbourhoods in Merton, and, in partnership with the Regional Housing Director, advising on the operation of the local neighbourhood budget (covering issues not provided for under existing repairs and maintenance or neighbourhood management budgets);
- Overseeing the neighbourhood planning model; ensuring local issues are understood and addressed through service and asset management plans;
- Scrutinising landlord services, focussing on effective delivery and value for money, and including matters such as charges to tenants and leaseholders. In doing so, the Panel will maintain an effective dialogue with the Circle Housing Board, the Service Improvement Panel, and the Regional Panel
- Providing local engagement in helping to shape regeneration activity;
- Support Circle Housing in understanding local markets and opportunities for growth and in informing plans for investment in new affordable homes in the area;
- Promoting excellent local partnership working;
- Determining priorities for the allocation of the community investment budget in Merton, in line with the priorities set by the Clarion Foundation Trustees.

4. Duration and Meetings

4.1 The Panel shall continue for a period of 10 years or such shorter period as Circle Housing, with the consent of LBM, might reasonably determine having regard to the Panel’s effectiveness. There will be a review at the end of each period of 2 years to consider the effectiveness, terms of

reference, activities and membership. Any changes arising from such reviews shall be with the consent of LBM, where such consent will not be unreasonably refused.

4.2 It is anticipated that the focus of the Panel's activities will shift over time to concentrate primarily on regeneration activity within Merton.

4.3 It is expected that the Panel shall meet four times each year, with any changes being agreed by the Panel with Circle Housing.

5. Membership

5.1 The Panel shall consist of between 8 and 12 members, ideally (at full membership) 6 residents, 4 independents and 2 nominees from LBM. Employees shall not be members. The Chair shall be an independent member appointed by Circle Housing. The Panel may co-opt up to 3 (non-voting) co-optees, to fill temporary vacancies or to meet a skill gap on the Panel

5.2 All resident members must be tenants or leaseholders of Circle Housing and should live in the Merton area. It is intended that all independent members will either reside in or work in the Merton area, although it may be desirable to appoint independent members from outside in the area in some circumstances. It is intended that resident panel members will come from a representative range of areas and tenure types.

5.3 Panel members will be recruited and selected in accordance with the Group's policies, having regard to the skills, knowledge and experience required.

6. Membership Requirements

6.1 Resident members must not be in breach of their tenancy/lease nor be in legal dispute with Circle Housing for a period of 12 months prior to appointment and during their membership (and may be removed on written notice from the Company Secretary if they are). Membership is limited to one member per household at any one time.

6.2 Circle Housing will provide LBM with a statement of skills and experience necessary for its nominees. LBM shall use reasonable endeavours to nominate persons with the required skills and experience. Circle Housing shall be entitled, acting reasonably, to decline a nomination should the nominee not meet the required skills

6.3 Panel members shall be expected to comply with the Group's Code of Conduct and any other relevant policies, regulations or guidance. Circle Housing shall be entitled to remove a member after consultation with the Chair of the Panel should the member be in breach of such Code, policies, regulations or guidance.

7. Liaison and Escalation

7.1 The Panel shall be supported by the Regional Housing Director on operational issues and shall have an Executive Director sponsor who will lead on strategic issues.

7.2 Should the Panel consider that there is a significant service failure it can request that the matter be examined by the Circle Housing Board, which shall report back to the Panel in a timely fashion having regard to the nature of the issue referred.



CLARION
HOUSING

Merton Community Panel Terms of Reference

1. Background

1.1 Clarion Housing is a charitable registered provider of social housing, regulated by the Regulator for Social Housing (RSH). It is part of the Clarion Housing Group (“the Group”).

1.2 Clarion Housing’s fundamental charitable purpose is the provision of housing and associated services for those in need, in particular the provision of social and affordable housing for rent and for sale to those unable to access market housing.

1.3 Housing stock within Merton was transferred in 2010 by the London Borough of Merton (“LBM”) originally to Merton Priory Homes, now Clarion Housing as of (December 2016).

2. Statement of Purpose

2.1 The Merton Community Panel is a consultative panel established in April 2017 to provide a local voice and to support Clarion Housing in monitoring the following activity in Merton:

- 2.1.1 regeneration activity
- 2.1.2 delivery of the housing and estates services
- 2.1.3 participation in the Group’s community investment programme in Merton.

2.2 The Panel will be a source of intelligence for shaping and informing Clarion Housing’s activities in Merton and act as a two way communication conduit between locally based Panel Members and the Clarion Housing Board.

3. Key Areas of Activity

- Monitoring the role of Clarion Housing in managing successful neighbourhoods in Merton, and, in partnership with the Regional Housing Director, advising on the operation of the local neighbourhood budget (covering issues not provided for under existing repairs and maintenance or neighbourhood management budgets);
- Overseeing the neighbourhood planning model; ensuring local issues are understood and addressed through service and asset management plans;
- Scrutinising landlord services, focussing on effective delivery and value for money, and including matters such as charges to tenants and leaseholders. In

doing so, the Panel will maintain an effective dialogue with the Clarion Housing Board and the Regional Scrutiny Committee;

- Providing local engagement in helping to shape regeneration activity;
- Support Clarion Housing in understanding local markets and opportunities for growth and in informing plans for investment in new affordable homes in the area;
- Promoting excellent local partnership working;
- Determining priorities for the allocation of the community investment budget in Merton, in line with the priorities set by the Trustees of Clarion Futures of our charitable foundation.

- Standing items on the Agenda:
 1. Housing Performance
 2. Resident Involvement – where the panel encourages intransigent issues to be brought forward by residents.

4. Duration and Meetings

4.1 The Panel shall continue for a period of 10 years or such shorter period as Clarion Housing with the consent of LBM might reasonably determine having regard to the Panel's effectiveness. There will be a review at the end of each period of 2 years to consider the effectiveness, terms of reference, activities and membership (Current review completed 31st March 2019). Any changes arising from such reviews shall be with the consent of LBM, where such consent will not be unreasonably refused.

4.2 LBM contact is Steve Webb, Business Support and Relationship Manager, Merton Housing Needs and Strategy.

4.3 It is anticipated that the focus of the Panel's activities will concentrate primarily on regeneration activity within Merton.

4.4 It is expected that the Panel shall meet four times each year, with any changes being agreed by the Panel with Clarion Housing.

5. Membership

5.1 The Panel shall consist of between 8 and 12 members, ideally (at full membership) 7 residents, 3 independents and 2 nominees from LBM. Employees shall not be members. The Chair shall be an independent member appointed by Clarion Housing. The Panel shall appoint a tenant Co-Chair and a Vice Chair, this could be a resident of any tenure. The Panel may co-opt up to 3 (non-voting) co-optees, to fill temporary vacancies or to meet a skill gap on the Panel.

5.2 All resident members must be tenants, leaseholders or Freeholders of Clarion Housing and should live in the Merton area. It is intended that all independent members

will either reside in or work in the Merton area, although it may be desirable to appoint independent members from outside the area in some circumstances. It is intended that resident panel members will come from a representative range of areas and tenure types.

5.3 Panel members will be recruited and selected in accordance with the Group's policies, having regard to the skills, knowledge and experience required.

6. Membership Requirements

6.1 Resident members must not be in breach of their tenancy/lease nor be in legal dispute with Clarion Housing for a period of 12 months prior to appointment and during their membership (and may be removed on written notice from the Company Secretary if they are). Membership is limited to one member per household at any one time. Household members are allowed to be resident members.

6.2 Clarion Housing will provide LBM with a statement of skills and experience necessary for the LBM nominees. LBM shall use reasonable endeavours to nominate persons with the required skills and experience. Clarion Housing shall be entitled, acting reasonably, to decline a nomination should the nominee not meet the required skills.

6.3 Panel members shall be expected to comply with the Group's Code of Conduct and any other relevant policies, regulations or guidance. Clarion Housing shall be entitled to remove a member after consultation with the Chair of the Panel should the member be in breach of such Code, policies, regulations or guidance.

7. Liaison and Escalation

7.1 The Panel shall be supported by the Regional Housing Director Marek Witko on operational issues and shall have an Executive Director Sponsor Michelle Reynolds who will lead on strategic issues.

7.2 Should the Panel consider that there is a significant service failure it will request that the matter be examined by the Clarion Housing Board, which shall report back to the Panel in a timely fashion having regard to the nature of the issue referred.

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Committee: Council

Date: 7 February 2024

Wards: All

Subject: Review of proportionality and changes to Membership of Committees

Lead Director: John Scarborough, Monitoring Officer

Lead member: Not applicable

Contact officer: Amy Dumitrescu, Head of Democracy Services

Recommendations:

That Council:

- A. Approve the allocation of seats to political groups as detailed in Appendix A to the report
 - B. Approve the appointment of nominations to those seats as detailed in Appendices B, C and D
 - C. Appoint the Tenants Champion as detailed in Appendix D
 - D. Notes the changes to the membership of Committees that were approved under delegated authority since the last meeting of Council.
-

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1. This report is presented in the context of Councillor Charles becoming an Independent Councillor, leading to a change in the allocation of seats to the groups represented on the Council, in accordance with the principles of proportionality.

1.2. Council must allocate the requisite number of seats to each of the groups and approve the appointment of nominees to those seats.

1.3. The report also 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 15 November 2023.

2 DETAILS

2.1. Councillor Caroline Charles became an Independent Councillor on 26 January 2024 and is now non-aligned to any political group.

2.2. The Council has a statutory duty to review the representation of different groups on the Council in order to ensure that a political balance is secured on Council committees, sub-committees and other bodies to reflect the political composition of the Council.

2.3. Officers have carried out a review of proportionality and the proposed allocation of seats to committees calculated to reflect the change in the political composition of the Council. This is attached at Appendix A.

2.4. Appendices B-D also detail appointments to places on other committees and bodies for Council approval.

2.5. Councillor Charles was appointed as Tenants Champion at Annual Council on 17 May 2023. It is proposed that this role is now to be appointed as detailed within Appendix D and this report seeks Council approval of this appointment.

2.6. It is noted that Councillor Charles is the current Chair of the Merton and Sutton Joint Cemetery Board. The appointment of Chair to that Board is not made by Council and therefore the Board will at its next meeting on 27 February 2024 elect a new Chair from the members of the Board.

2.7. The following membership changes have been made by the Chief Executive under their delegated authority in accordance with part 3E of the Constitution and are also noted as part of this report:

Committee	Member resigning	Replaced by	Date
Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel	Cllr Thomas Barlow	Cllr Nick McLean	21 November 2023
Healthier Communities and Older People Overview and Scrutiny Panel	Cllr Bhim – Substitute	Cllr Hayes – Substitute	21 November 2023
North East Surrey Crematorium Board	NA	Cllr Bhim – substitute	21 November 2023
Development and Planning Applications Committee	Cllr Thomas Barlow	Cllr Michael Paterson	29 November 2023
Development and Planning Applications Committee	Cllr Michael Paterson	Cllr Thomas Barlow	8 January 2024
Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel	NA	Cllr Andrew Howard – Substitute	17 January 2024

3 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

3.1. Council could choose to not to approve the proposals within the report and submit alternative options which would need to be ratified by Council.

4 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED

4.1. None for the purposes of this report.

5 TIMETABLE

5.1. Any appointments to Committees have already taken place under delegated authority, any new appointments will take immediate effect.

6 FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS

6.1. None for the purposes of this report.

7 LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

7.1. The Local Government Act and Housing Act 1989 contains provisions relating to the political balance on committees, the allocation of seats to political groups and giving effect to allocations.

7.2. The Council has to ensure that a political balance is secured on Council committees so as to reflect the overall political composition of the Council.

7.3. The requirement to allocate seats must be made in accordance with the following statutory principles:

- (i) All of the seats are not to be allocated to the same political group
- (ii) The majority of the seats must be allocated to the political group with a majority on the Council
- (iii) Subject to the two principles listed above, the number of seats on the total of all the ordinary committees of the Council allocated to each political group must bear the same proportion to that on Full Council

7.4. The information regarding membership changes in this report complies with legal and statutory requirements. Council is required to accept nominations made by political groups.

8 HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS

8.1. The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the substance of the Equality Act. There is no apparent equality impact on end users.

9 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

9.1. None for the purposes of this report

10 RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

10.1. None for the purposes of this report

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

- Appendix A – Allocation of committee places to political groups (to follow)
- Appendices B, C & D – Nominations to committee places, other and outside bodies (to follow)

12 BACKGROUND PAPERS

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

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Committee: Council

Date: 7 February 2024

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, Head of Democracy Services

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 response provided to the petition submitted at the meeting held on 15 November 2023.
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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 15 November 2023 the petition listed below was submitted and the response is 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

A petition signed by 1685 persons was submitted by Councillors Hall, Reiss and MacArthur stating "The All-England Lawn Tennis Club's planning application to build a new 8,000 seater stadium, 38 more competition tennis courts and 10 additional buildings on part of Wimbledon Park has recently been passed by Merton's planning committee.

When the Council sold the freehold of the Wimbledon Golf Club site to AELTC in 1993 they gave public assurances that they would never build on the land, backed up with a legally enforceable covenant in the sale agreement.

We, the undersigned demand that Merton Council enforce the legal covenants agreed to by AELTC and Merton Council to keep their promises to the people of Wimbledon".

Officer Response

In October 2023, our planning committee voted to approve the application made by the All England Lawn Tennis Club (AELTC) for expansion of its site at Wimbledon.

Following the London Borough of Wandsworth's planning committee's decision to refuse permission, the Mayor of London has the power to direct that he will become the local planning authority for the application. In addition, AELTC has a right of appeal to any ultimate refusal of the Wandsworth element.

Separately to the planning process, the land in Merton earmarked for development remains subject to covenants. Our Council Leader has written to the All England Lawn Tennis Club to seek clarity on how it intends to address these covenants. AELTC have responded saying they will consider this once the planning process has completed. A motion at Full Council in February 2022 noted that 'covenants over this land held on behalf of the residents of Merton will need to be respected henceforth.

2.6 Members are invited to present petitions at this meeting, and a copy of the response will be provided to the next ordinary Council meeting in July 2024.

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.