

Committee: Health and Wellbeing Board

Date: 29/01/2019

Wards: All

Subject: Sustainable Communities Plan 2019 - 25

Lead officer: Darren Tulley, Borough Commander - Fire

Lead member: Councillor Edith Macauley MBE, Cabinet Member for Community Safety, Engagement and Equalities

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Recommendations: The Health and Wellbeing Board are asked to:

- A. Note the progress so far on the development of a new Sustainable Communities Plan for the borough and the links that can be built with the review of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy;
 - B. Highlight any examples of projects they have been overseen by the Board or that are upcoming which promote or build social capital;
 - C. Outline how the Board engages with the subsidiary groups and organisations that feed into it and any engagement channels that could be used to support the development of the Sustainable Communities Plan; and
 - D. Consider whether there are any places or communities they wish to prioritise for the engagement work with hard to reach groups and suggest any channels or mechanisms for how to engage with them.
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1 PURPOSE AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to provide an update to the Health and Wellbeing Board on progress to date on the development of a new Sustainable Communities Plan for the borough. The Board is also asked to consider three questions outlined in the recommendations that sets out how the Board can help feed into the Plan at this stage.
- 1.2. The Sustainable Communities Plan will set out the Merton Partnership's long term ambition for the borough. As well as a final document, the Plan will have an online presence that will evolve alongside its development and during the lifetime of the Plan. The aim is to provide an online resource for the community that is easily accessible to residents, councillors, officers, and partners.
- 1.3. The overarching goal of the Sustainable Communities Plan will be to increase social capital in Merton as a key underlying driver to improve wellbeing across the borough. The Plan will look at how social capital varies across the borough, the effect it can have on increasing positive outcomes

for residents, and how it can be nurtured and built upon to support communities to become resilient.

- 1.4. A supporting theme of the Plan will be helping to embed the 'Think Family' approach and contextual safeguarding across the Merton Partnership, with the aim of making Merton a place where individuals, families and communities support each other and where we work collectively to enhance the life chances of our young people.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1. The previous Community Plan runs from 2013-19.
- 2.2. This plan is a standalone written document, containing a number of case studies highlighting projects delivered by the council, the voluntary sector and community groups. It also set out the aims for the partnership across the borough.
- 2.3. The plan's aims were split into six themes, these were:
 - Working on bridging the gap;
 - Merton: a place to work;
 - A healthy and fulfilling life;
 - Better opportunities for youngsters;
 - Keeping Merton moving;
 - Being safe and strong.
- 2.4. Each year the Merton Partnership produces an Annual Report setting out progress and achievements in delivering the Community Plan.

3 DETAILS

- 3.1. The focus of the Sustainable Communities Plan 2019-2025 will be on building social capital in the borough. Social capital can be broadly defined as 'the social networks, exchanges, obligations, and shared identities that in turn provide potential support and access to resources.' The political scientist Robert Putnam argues that social capital extends beyond this to include community cohesion, reciprocity and trust, and positive attitudes to community institutions that include participation in community activities or civic engagement.
- 3.2. To understand this better, Putnam suggested thinking about social capital in four ways: Engagement in Public Affairs; Community Volunteerism, the extent to which people volunteer; Informal Sociability, how much people socialise informally with others in their community; and Social Trust, how much people trust others in their community.
- 3.3. Our borough has a growing and thriving voluntary and community sector and a long history of partnership working across the public, voluntary and private sectors. There are already many of examples of social capital in action

which showcase the types of activity that the Sustainable Communities Plan is further looking to develop. Some of these include;

- Mitcham Community Orchard: a community project which has transformed a derelict site into a community leisure resource with the development of an orchard of fruit trees, bushes, flowers and decorative shrubs. The success of this project has depended on local volunteers and business sponsorship
- The Magic Club, Phipps Bridge: A specialist youth group for children with moderate to severe learning disabilities or Autism
- 1Way Project, Mitcham: A group which organises meetings for young people to discuss youth issues. Ex-gang members and drug dealers have been invited in to talk to members about how they turned their lives around
- Neighbourhood Watch Groups that look to ensure the safety and cohesion of their neighbourhood

- 3.4. Examples of social capital can also include more informal examples of sociability outside of more structured groups, for example the extent to which residents interact with one another on a day to day basis in their community. An area with low social capital might mean that people don't talk to or know their neighbours or feel more isolated.
- 3.5. Studies suggest that areas with higher levels of social capital are likely to have higher levels of volunteering, higher engagement with the council and other civic agencies as well as lower levels of loneliness and isolation, and better community cohesion. In turn, evidence suggests a strong link between high social capital with lower crime rates, greater chances of early intervention, a reduced reliance on services, and better physical and mental health and wellbeing.
- 3.6. To support the development of the Sustainable Communities Plan, an evidence base is being put together that collates data from a series of indicators to measure the existing levels of social capital on a ward-by-ward basis and give us a baseline from which to work. This will enable the identification of areas with high social capital; existing community assets and good practice that can be tapped as well as areas with lower social capital; places where the Merton Partnership can be proactive at trying to strengthen existing assets as well as developing new projects.
- 3.7. We hope that the identification of opportunities to improve and nurture social capital can also help to guide possible options to use Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) monies to achieve this goal.
- 3.8. Developing the Plan will be based on a wide range of engagement activity to ensure that the views of residents, including hard to reach groups are captured, as well as the ambitions that they have for both their local area and the borough as a whole. This is outlined in 5.1 – 5.5.
- 3.9. The plan will include a clear list of 'you said, we did' deliverables; these will be reviewed as the document is updated, in order to demonstrate the impact the plan has on the borough.

4 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 4.1. The Local Government Act 2000 formerly placed a duty on local authorities to develop a strategy/plan for the local area in partnership with the community. It was expected that community strategies/plans should 'set out a vision for a local authority's area, along with actions and commitments to further economic, social and environmental well-being.
- 4.2. This requirement is no longer in place, therefore the borough could choose not to produce a new Sustainable Communities Plan or refresh the previous version. However the Merton Partnership has agreed that it is important to have a plan that sets out the long term vision for an area in line with the needs and ambitions of the local community.

5 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED

- 5.1. Consultation with children and young people. A survey distributed to over 900 children and young people (aged 11-16) across the borough asking them questions relating to social capital. The results of this will be used for the analysis of social capital on a ward by ward level.
- 5.2. Residents Survey. Questions relating to social capital are to be included in the 2019 Residents Survey. This will be a face to face survey of 1000 residents, a demographic cross-section of the borough. The results of this will be used for the analysis of social capital on a ward by ward basis.
- 5.3. A reference group is being established to inform the development of the Plan.
- 5.4. Engagement with hard to reach groups. A third party organisation will be commissioned to undertake engagement work with 'hard to reach' groups.
- 5.5. Interactive map. An online resource for residents to record areas of social infrastructure they use, what is good about it, and what could be improved. Users will also be able to see what other residents have said, thus improving knowledge of social infrastructure.
- 5.6. Consultation with Thematic Networks and Merton Partnership. To ensure that the aims of the Sustainable Communities Plan are aligned with the objectives of the different boards and the strategies that support their work.

6 TIMETABLE

- 6.1. Children and Young People's Survey – December 2018 – January 2019
- 6.2. Presentations to Merton Partnership Thematic Networks – January – March 2019
- 6.3. Annual Residents Survey – February – March 2019
- 6.4. Workshop with voluntary sector and community groups – April 2019
- 6.5. Targeted engagement with hard to reach groups – April – June 2019
- 6.6. Merton Partnership Executive Board Awayday in May
- 6.7. Merton Partnership Conference Autumn 2019.

- 6.8. Signoff of the plan from Merton Partnership – Autumn 2019
- 6.9. Signoff of the plan from Cabinet – Autumn 2019
- 6.10. Publication of the plan – December 2019

7 FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1. Any costs in developing the Plan will be met from the Merton Partnership's budget. The final Plan should inform the direction of resources for all the members of the Merton Partnership to achieve its goals.

8 LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1. The Local Government Act 2000 formerly placed a duty on local authorities to develop a strategy/plan for the local area in partnership with the community but this is no longer a requirement.

9 HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1. Studies suggest that areas with higher levels of social capital are likely to mean higher levels of volunteering, higher engagement with the council and other civic agencies as well as lower levels of loneliness and isolation, and better community cohesion.

10 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1. Evidence suggests a strong link between high social capital with lower crime rates.

11 RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1. Increasing social capital should increase levels of community cohesion and resilience and the ability for communities to withstand social, economic or environmental shocks.

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

NONE

13 BACKGROUND PAPERS

[Merton Community Plan 2013](#)

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