Committee: Cabinet

Date: 23 March 2020

<mark>Wards: All or Agenda Item:</mark>

Subject: Merton Community Plan 2020-26

Lead officer: Rachael Wardell, Director of Children, Schools and Families, Merton Council

Lead member: Cllr Stephen Alambritis, Leader of Merton Council and Chair of the Merton Partnership

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Recommendations: That Cabinet

A. Reviews and endorses the draft Merton Community Plan 2020-2026 at Appendix 1; and

B. Agrees that the draft Community Plan can be submitted to Full Council in April 2020 for adoption as one of the council's core strategic plans.

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 This report provides Cabinet with an update on the work of the Merton Partnership Executive Board to develop a new Community Plan that sets out the priorities for partnership working and seeks Cabinet's endorsement of the Merton Community Plan 2020-26 at Appendix 1.

1.2 The development of the new Community Plan was led by Police Chief Superintendent Sally Benatar on behalf of the Merton Partnership, with the support of the Director of Children, Schools and Families and the council's Policy, Strategy, and Partnership Team. A draft Community Plan was approved by the Merton Partnership Executive Board at its meeting in January 2020. Cabinet is asked to endorse and support the implementation of the Community Plan.

1.3 The overarching goal of the Community Plan is to increase social capital in Merton as a driver to improve resilience and wellbeing, focussing on those parts of the borough with the lowest socio-economic outcomes. The wards with the lowest combined scores for socio-economic outcomes and social capital are in the east of the borough in Mitcham and Morden. The Plan therefore focuses on improving social capital in those deprived neighbourhoods and communities with the lowest outcomes and is fully aligned with the council's wider ambition of bridging the gap.

1.4 In addition, the draft Community Plan has eight thematic priorities which were agreed by the relevant Thematic Networks of the Merton Partnership (Safer Merton, Health and Wellbeing, Children's Trust and Sustainable Communities and Transport). These priorities are based on strong evidence and engagement. The Community Plan ensures that partnership working is focused on a small number of agreed priorities. Delivery is via the Thematic Networks, and oversight is provided by the Merton Partnership Executive Board. The Community Plan will be reviewed annually by the Merton Partnership, and an annual report of progress will be published.

1.5 Priorities in the draft Community Plan are tightly focused with clear actions for the members of the Merton Partnership as well as actions that residents and businesses can take.

1.6 A baseline of social capital at a ward level was undertaken to support the development of the draft Community Plan – see appendix 2. This was mapped against thematic outcomes for each ward and indicates that in general wards with a low ranking for social capital also have lower socio-economic outcomes. The development of the Plan was also supported by a bespoke piece of social research conducted by M.E.L Research to ensure the voice of 'seldom listened to' groups fed into the development of the draft Community Plan.

1.7 The draft Plan will be available online and with a small run of a printed version. The online version will be supported by resources for residents and businesses, including links to funding, a portal to community support and an online map of social infrastructure in the borough.

2. **BACKGROUND:**

2.1 There is no longer a statutory requirement for councils to produce a community plan. The requirement to produce a Community Plan was originally introduced in the Local Government Act 2000 and subsequently removed by the Deregulation Act 2015. The Merton Partnership Executive Board (comprising executives from the major statutory, voluntary and business sectors) decided to commission a new Community Plan to provide an overarching plan for partnership working in the borough and to ensure clarity on the priorities for partnership working.

2.2 The previous Community Plan ran from 2013-19. 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.

2.3 An overview of what has been achieved against the aims of the 2013-19 Plan is included in the new Plan.

2.4 The development of the new Community Plan was informed by the latest evidence on social capital in the UK. An index is created every year to measure prosperity around the world, with social capital being one of the components measured. In the prosperity index 2019, the UK ranks 14th for social capital and comes after most western European countries as well as other English-speaking countries. To be specific, the overall rank of 14th masks significant weakness in some key aspects of social capital. In the last 10 years, the UK has seen a decline in the stability of personal and family relationships (now ranked 56th, a fall of 25 places in the global rankings), and the country's ranking for social networks has also slipped back to 52nd. The level of civic participation and institutional trust have also declined recently.

2.5 Similarly, the latest Office for National Statistics (ONS) data on social capital in the UK indicates that positive engagement with neighbours, such as exchanging favours or stopping to talk, fell by three and four percentage points since 2011. Our sense of belonging to our neighbourhoods across the UK also declined in

recent years. Within our families, parents in the UK were less likely to regularly give help to, and receive help from, their adult children not living with them, falling by four and six percentage points respectively over the same period. On an individual level, reported membership of political, voluntary, professional or recreational organisations declined by five percentage points, whereas institutional trust declined by 11 percentage points in the UK since 2011.

2.6 The figures above show that the biggest challenge for the UK is arguably not an economic one, but a societal one. It is critical to note that increasing social capital is not something that state bodies can do on their own or create artificially – it is not a top down driven process. Rather, it needs to be nurtured from the bottom up, identifying and building on existing community assets that we can work with. However, there is a key role for the public sector, and bodies such as the council, to help create the conditions and remove barriers to help it to grow.

2.7 The new Community Plan is also a response to the solid and existing research on loneliness in the UK. Research shows that over 9 million people in the UK across all adult ages – more than the population of London – are either always or often lonely. There is evidence that loneliness is likely to increase the risk of death by 29%, and lonely people are more likely to suffer from dementia, heart disease and depression. It has also been estimated that disconnected communities could be costing the UK economy £32 billion every year if nothing is done.

2.8 Although figures on the amount of loneliness in Merton specifically are not available, we are aware that there are currently about 7,000 people aged 65-84 and 1,000 over the age of 85 living alone in the borough. The amount of loneliness in older people is also likely to increase given that the total numbers of older people are predicted to rise by about 10% of those aged 65-84, and 65% of those aged 85+. Furthermore, loneliness is frequently reported by people who receive social care from the Council. In the most recent survey of users of adult social care services, only 40.6% reported that they had as much social contact as they would like (2017/18). This is significantly lower than the average for England (46%), although similar to the average for London (41.4%).

2.9 The figures on loneliness in Merton, which do not capture lonely residents aged less than 65, seem to be consistent with the existing levels of civic participation, community engagement and social infrastructure in Merton as they were measured to develop the new Community Plan. Scoring social capital in each ward also enabled us to recognise that different areas have different strengths, and although some neighbourhoods will have higher social capital scores, only few wards are strong across all the measures in Merton.

2.10   For all these reasons, a Community Plan based on social capital is a forward-thinking Plan and recognises the need to involve, engage and support communities to help themselves. From pubs to factories, the spaces where we socially connect are in decline, and there is a real need to rebuild social bonds. This Community Plan recognises and enhances the atavistic and innate desire for social connection which is hardwired into our psychology as well as a global trend which is inbred to the historical time we live in. The Plan aims to be the framework for increasing collective participation to better achieve the ambitions of the people that live and work in the borough.

3. **DETAILS**

3.1 The overarching goal of the Community Plan 2020-2026 is to build social capital in the borough as an underlying driver to improve resilience and wellbeing. Social capital is about creating a shared sense of responsibility and the ways in which

communal activity can benefit everyone. It is about shared values and co-operation, building trust and reciprocity.

3.2 A number of studies have highlighted two different forms of social capital: bonding and bridging. The difference between them relate to the nature of the relationships in the social group or community. Bonding social capital is within a group or community whereas bridging social capital is between social groups, social class, race, religion or other important socioeconomic characteristics. It is this form of bridging social capital that the Community Plan is attempting to build, looking at how engagement in communal action can bridge divides that can exist within communities.

3.3 Evidence suggests a strong link between high social capital and better outcomes, be it lower crime rates, greater chances of early intervention, a reduced reliance on services, better physical and mental health and wellbeing, lower levels of loneliness and isolation, and stronger community cohesion. Communities where there is more resilience are better able to withstand social and economic shocks, while areas that have poor social capital and where people are not looking out for one another are more likely to require intervention. This has serious implications given that the resources of the public sector and its ability to intervene have been significantly diminished during the last 10 years.

3.4 Studies highlight that areas tend to have higher levels of social capital as a result of higher levels of volunteering, higher engagement with the council and other civic agencies, communal infrastructure and places where people can meet. Having strong social infrastructure in an area is the enabler for helping social capital to grow.

3.5 The starting point for the development of the Plan was the evidence base that was put together to measure and map the existing levels of social capital in the borough. The evidence base collates data from a series of indicators on a ward-by-ward basis and has given us a baseline from which to work. The five measures of social capital we have identified are: social infrastructure, civic participation, volunteering, informal sociability, and social trust. It is important to note that as well as providing a guide to where social capital needs to increase, the evidence base is a tool that shows the strengths of communities as a resource for building social action. The ward based mapping of social capital is set out at **Appendix 2**.

3.6 The Plan has nine key priority areas on which it focusses: one overarching priority to increase social capital in those communities and neighbourhoods with the lowest outcomes and two each from the four thematic partnership boards that sit underneath the Merton Partnership umbrella (Children's Trust, Health and Wellbeing Board, Safer Stronger Partnership and Sustainable Communities and Transport Board). It sets out how collectively, the Merton Partnership, and the partner agencies which make up its membership can support our communities to grow social capital to meet these priorities.

3.7 The eight thematic priorities are:

- Priority 2 – Reducing carbon emissions to tackle climate change (Sustainable Communities and Transport Partnership)

- Priority 3 – Protecting and enhancing the local environment (Sustainable Communities and Transport Partnership)

- Priority 4 - Tackling diabetes and creating a healthy place (Health and Wellbeing Board)

- Priority 5 – Creating Healthy Workplaces across Merton (Health and Wellbeing Board)

- Priority 6 – Reducing serious violence (Safer Stronger Partnership)

- Priority 7 – Enforcing action against anti-social behaviour (Safer Stronger Partnership)

- Priority 8 - Getting involved and having a say – promoting the voice of children and young people (Children's Trust)

- Priority 9 - Making Merton a place where children and young people feel they belong and thrive (Children's Trust)

3.8 As well as engagement with our residents and stakeholders, national and local statistics have been used to justify the call to action for each priority. In addition, government legislation places duties and legal responsibilities on local authorities that are dealt with in the new Community Plan 2020-26.

3.9 The Plan also includes a series of case studies, linked to each of the priorities. These 'spotlights' detail the work an existing project, community group or individual is doing, and how that work is having a positive impact on the community. A key theme identified through the engagement with 'seldom listened to' groups was the need for people to be made more aware of the importance of getting involved in the community, and that there should be better showcasing of the individual impact of current volunteers and groups.

4. DESIGN AND DELIVERY

4.1 Alongside a limited print run to produce a summary document, it is proposed that the Community Plan becomes an online resource that helps enable greater participation in communal activities. This will incorporate a range of resources, tools and links, including information on how community groups can submit bids to Merton Giving and Community Infrastructure Levy funding. The webpages will be updated as delivering the priorities of the Plan progresses, enabling it to have a live and ongoing presence.

4.2 The online presence of the Community Plan will include an interactive map that collects community assets, groups and activities to encourage engagement from residents and businesses. It is also suggested that existing community resources will be utilised to enable residents to get involved and increase community participation. The Community Plan will sit on the Merton Partnership's website, with a clear link on the home page.

4.3 The new Community Plan will also include link to Merton Voluntary Service Council (MVSC)'s website. MVSC have an online and central directory of services and volunteering opportunities. In addition, there will be a link to the new Wellbeing Digital Hub which will be an easily accessible and navigable directory of 'wellbeing' services, including community activities.

4.4 It is proposed that the launch of the new Community Plan will be accompanied by a communication campaign which will utilise various outlets to reach out to potentially all the audiences in the borough. The communication campaign will ensure that residents are aware of the new Plan, and that they will be inspired to look out for opportunities to engage with existing initiatives or develop new projects to increase social capital in the borough.

4.5 The Community Plan aims to inspire a collective approach to achieving its priorities that will continue to make Merton a great place to live and work. Achieving the priorities of the Plan will be driven by the four thematic boards, overseen and held to account by the Merton Partnership Executive Board. Each of the priorities has its own delivery plan, setting the actions that members of the Merton Partnership will be taking to achieve them as well as ways in which the community can get involved as part of the collective approach. The Executive Board will have a problem solving role, acting as a forum for discussing new and emerging issues linked to achieving the priorities of the Plan.

4.6 In terms of nurturing social capital, the priorities in the Community Plan will be part of the criteria for bids for Community Infrastructure Levy funding. They will also inform the criteria for funding from Merton Giving – the borough's community giving scheme.

5. CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED

5.1 The Merton Partnership has used a comprehensive engagement programme with residents and stakeholders to inform the development of Merton Community Plan 2020-26.

5.2 Responses to the Climate Change consultation, and advice from the Climate Emergency Working Group, have identified 125 potential actions to be considered for the Merton's Climate Action Plan, which aims to achieve one of the main priorities of the Community Plan 2020-26, that is, reducing carbon emissions to tackle climate change.

5.3 Responses to the latest residents' survey, children and young people survey, and Safer Merton survey have provided great insights on what is needed to increase social capital in the borough, and empower Merton communities to thrive.

5.4 The Merton Partnership has also commissioned M.E.L. Research to undertake research with 'seldom listened to' groups to ensure that the voice of our more marginalised communities who sometimes get overlooked by traditional engagement methods was heard when we were developing the Community Plan. M.E.L Research held a number of focus groups in the community to collect insight and better understand the challenges and opportunities to increase active participation in the borough. Focus groups were held with members of a number of different organisations to ensure that a wide spectrum of voices were heard. These included: Age UK. BAME Voice, Merton Centre for Independent Living,

Merton Mencap, Muslim Women of Merton, Polish Family Association, Sustainable Merton and Merton's Youth Parliament and Young Advisers.

5.5 A workshop with voluntary sector and community groups was held in June 2019.

6. TIMETABLE

6.1 Final draft of the Community Plan to be reviewed by LSG – 9 March 2020

- Community Plan to Cabinet - 23 March 2020
- Community Plan to Council for adoption – 8 April 2020.
- Community Plan branding agreed with designer – April/May 2020
- Design of Community Plan web pages – to begin to be built from April 2020 onwards
- Communications to residents to raise awareness of social infrastructure and encouraging them to get involved in their local neighbourhood – May 2020 onwards

7. FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS

7.1 The cost of the commissioned work on community engagement with 'seldom listened to' groups was £14,500, while £2,200 was spent on the commissioning of a copywriter to research and write up 16 case studies of community activity in action.

7.2 There will be a cost of engaging a designer to develop branding, including infographics and headers and banners for use in documents and on web pages. For way of comparison, a similar piece of work to design the new Health and Wellbeing Strategy c £2,000 incl. VAT, which gives an indication of the likely estimated cost.

7.3 There will be a small cost for printing a limited number of copies of the Plan, but in the main it is anticipated that people will read the Plan online. There could also be a small cost for developing the online presence in terms of supporting development work on the infrastructure map platform.

7.4 Outside of the resources already allocated in 7.1 and then highlighted in 7.2 and 7.3, it will be the responsibility of the thematic boards to consider how resources can best be co-ordinated to achieve the priorities set out in the Plan. The thematic boards can help to identify and support bids to different funding streams that they may choose to utilise, including bids to use the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and to Merton Giving for example.

8. LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

8.1 Previously the Local Government Act 2000 placed a duty on local authorities to develop a strategy/plan for the local area in partnership with the community. This statutory duty was removed in 2010, so there is no longer a requirement to develop a Community Plan. However, it was agreed by the Merton Partnership that there is significant value in setting out a collective vision for a local authority's area.

9. HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS

9.1 None directly for the purposes of this report. An increase of social capital will increase community cohesion. Also, the engagement with 'seldom listened to' groups specifically sought to engage those communities who are often overlooked

in traditional engagement methods and this includes communities with 'protected characteristics' as defined by the Equality Act 2010.

10. CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

10.1   None directly for the purposes of this report. An increase of social capital will determine crime reduction across the borough. In particular, two of the priorities have been put forward by the Safer Stronger Partnership, and aim at reducing serious violence and anti-social behaviour.

11. RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

11.1   None for the purposes of this report.

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

- Appendix 1 - Draft Community Plan January 2020
- Appendix 2 – Social Capital analysis by ward 2019

13. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- Merton's refreshed Community Plan 2013