

Councillor Handbook 2014:

DRAFT for consultation with group leaders and other councillors, December 2013

Contents:	Page
Welcome	2
The London Borough of Merton	3
Getting started	4
IT & other equipment	7
How decisions are made	9
The chief executive and council departments	11
The Mayoralty	14
Attending council meetings	15
Casework and responding to your residents	18
Your personal responsibilities as a councillor	22
Members' allowances and expenses	25
Member development and training	28
Communications and Community Engagement	29
Appendix 1 – a guide to dealing with enquiries that are frequently raise by residents	33
Appendix 2 – useful phone numbers and email addresses	36

Welcome

Congratulations on your election and welcome to Merton Council.

You have been elected to represent the interests of your constituents and the 200,000 residents of the London Borough of Merton and the thousands more who work in or visit the borough every day.

This handbook provides you with information to help you to carry out your duties and responsibilities as an elected Member and provides an introduction to the Council and its services. Its primary purpose is to assist newly-elected Members and it is introductory in nature. To further assist you, officers will be holding a number of induction events and details will be given to you separately about these.

The primary role of a councillor is to represent their ward and the people who live in it, dealing with issues that affect individuals and communities. Representation involves building relationships with individuals and groups, to inform, consult and empower people and facilitate effective community involvement in local government.

The problems and issues people raise with ward councillors are known as casework. This can be extensive and it is important for new councillors to seek support to help in dealing with these effectively.

Councillors have a central part to play in making decisions that impact on their ward and across the whole area covered by their council. They will be involved in decision-making through attending council and other committee meetings, taking part in overview and scrutiny, sitting on boards of local organisations and as school governors and in taking part in community forum meetings.

Councillors also have a responsibility to communicate council policy and decisions to people in the ward. Members of political groups should take advice from their group leader on the best way of doing this.

This handbook provides an introduction to these roles and contact details for further information:

Casework and responding to enquiries from residents – page x

Attending council meetings – page y

Community leadership and engagement – section 13

Ged Curran
Chief Executive

London Borough of Merton

Formed in 1965, the London Borough of Merton is an outer London borough to the south-west of the capital. The borough has five main town centres - Wimbledon, Mitcham, Morden, Raynes Park and Colliers Wood..

Merton has a population of 200,000 residents living in 80,000 households, served by 7,500 businesses, and an area of approximately 14.7 square miles. Merton is home to the world-famous All England Lawn Tennis Club, where the Wimbledon Championships take place every year bringing an extra 500,000 people into the borough for the tennis extravaganza.

The borough is also home to a number of important cultural and heritage sites including:

Merton Priory, founded as an Augustinian priory in the 12th Century. The Statutes of Merton, the basis of common law in England for centuries and seen by many as the forerunner for modern parliament, were signed here.

Baitul Futuh Mosque, modern and purpose-built, it is the largest mosque in Europe and a focal point for the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community.

Information on other sites: <http://www.merton.gov.uk/leisure/history-heritage.htm>

Merton is generally a safe and prosperous place to live with good transport links and numerous green spaces. There are significant differences between those living in the east and west of our borough. Bridging these gaps is one of the top priorities of the Merton Partnership. Work being done by the Council and partner organisations is set out in the Community Plan::[http://www.merton.gov.uk/community-living/merton_community_plan_single_pages .pdf](http://www.merton.gov.uk/community-living/merton_community_plan_single_pages.pdf)

The Council's website includes detailed information from the 2011 census, illustrating the diversity of the borough and how it is changing:

<http://www.merton.gov.uk/community-living/statistics.htm>

Getting Started

Access to the Civic Centre

Councillors are provided with ID cards to allow access to all parts of the Civic Centre and to use any printer within the Civic Centre. New councillors will be able to get their ID cards at the Welcome Event on Saturday 24 May, 10am-2pm at the Civic Centre.

The main front doors are open from 7.45am to 8.00pm on weekdays. At all other times access is via the rear staff entrance. Security staff normally work between 7.00am and 10.00pm, however, a member of staff will remain to lock the building after late meetings and functions.

There is a ramp and entrance for disabled access from the rear car park from 7am to 10pm. This entrance leads to a corridor from which you will need to turn right and right again to arrive at the disabled lift in the main lift lobby. All councillors' ID cards will allow access to this entrance. Alternatively, the security staff can be alerted by pressing the button on the intercom outside the door

The Civic Centre is not open to the public at weekends. Access for councillors on a Saturday can be arranged through Security providing that building maintenance work is also taking place on that Saturday.

Saturday access is via the rear entrance only. You should alert Security and sign the visitors' book located in the ground floor lift lobby when entering and leaving on a Saturday. This covers safety procedures and will avoid getting locked in.

Car Parking

Councillors needing to use their cars to attend meetings during the day can use the Civic Centre car park, which has a barrier. Your ID card will activate the barrier. Please note that places are extremely limited and available on a first come first served basis and that priority is given to council service vehicles such as MASCOT and parking vans.

The car park is kept as clear as possible for councillors' use when there are meetings of the full Council. You should give your car registration number to Security when first using the facility.

Security staff can be contacted on 020 8545 3437.

Bicycles

There is a bicycle compound behind the Civic Centre, which is observed by CCTV. Your ID card will open the compound gate.

Emergency Instructions

If you discover a fire, immediately inform a member of staff or operate the nearest alarm.

In the event of intermittent ringing of the fire alarm, prepare to vacate the building but do not leave until the ringing is continuous.

In the event of continuous ringing of the fire alarm, vacate the building immediately using the nearest available fire exit. Exit through the fire escape stairs at either end of the Civic Centre. Do not use the lifts or the main stairs.

On exiting the Civic Centre, proceed to York Road car park and wait for permission to return to the building.

If you receive a bomb warning when at the Civic Centre, try to obtain details of its location, type, when due to go off etc and call for assistance as soon as possible.

If you are a person with disabilities who cannot use the stairs, you must make yourself ready to evacuate as soon as any fire bell sounds, whether continuous or intermittent. Ring 3437 on the internal telephone, or use the fire phones located in the lift lobbies, and ask the security staff to bring the lift to your floor. Then go straight away to the lift lobby on your floor or the nearest fire exit point and wait for security staff. Do not attempt to call the lift yourself.

On all floors below the floor on which the alarm has been activated, the Security Officers will use the lifts to evacuate people with disabilities. On floors at or above the floor where the alarm has been activated, the main staircase will be used and “evac” chairs used by the Security Officers to carry people with disabilities. Floor fire officers are asked to stand and wait with disabled members of staff if at all possible, until they have been evacuated.

Council & Committee meetings

The Full Council meeting is held in the Council Chamber, which is located on the mezzanine floor, to the left of the main entrance to the Civic Centre.

Most committee or panel meetings are held in the Committee Rooms on the first floor. There is a connecting corridor from the first floor to the foyer to the Council Chamber. This corridor is closed after 8pm.

There are hearing loops in the council chamber and committee rooms that are constantly in operation.

Group Offices

As of April 2014, there are five Group Offices, which reflect the leadership and opposition groups on the Council at that time. Support staff and office space is allocated according to the size of the political group.

Support officers provide a range of services including:

- Secretarial and administrative support
- Facilitating contact between members and officers.
- Help with managing casework and member enquiries
- Maintaining up to date records about members
- Providing policy advice to Members, officers, the public and other statutory organisations with regard to committee business and related issues.
- Co-ordinating member attendance at council-run events.
- Assisting with the publicity of some meetings involving councillors.
- Research support

Note that group office staff are subject to the same constraints as other Council employees in relation to political activity.

The contact details for each office are:

Group	Phone	Group Secretary	Policy Officer
Conservative	020 8545 3396	Ann Page	Tom Goose
Labour	020 8545 3989	Carolyn Ives	Deirdre Costigan
Liberal Democrat	020 8545 4026	Penny Garry	
Merton Coalition	020 8545 4648	Theresa Lees	
Merton Park Independent Residents	020 8545 4026	Penny Garry	

Group office support is overseen by the Head of Democracy Services:
contact Julia Regan on 0208 545 3864 or email julia.regan@merton.gov.uk

IT and other equipment

Councillors will be provided with facilities to assist them in discharging their role as members of the Council, as set out in the protocol on the use of council resources and facilities (Part 5E of the Constitution - http://www.merton.gov.uk/democratic_services/w-agendas/w-constitution/36.pdf).

These resources must not be used in connection with party political or electoral campaigning activity or for private purposes.

Facilities available in Group Offices

Computers, phones and working space will be available in each of the group offices. This is normally on a “hot desking” basis and work spaces are allocated on a first come first served basis.

Each councillor will have a pigeonhole from which post can be collected. Each Thursday evening all post for the councillor will be collected and delivered by courier to the councillor’s home (or other nominated location).

IT facilities *(note - the offer outlined in this draft is still under discussion with group leaders and with IT)*

Each councillor will be given a council email address:
firstname.lastname@merton.gov.uk

The email address will be published on the council’s website, together with a telephone number of the councillor’s choosing (the group office number may be given as the primary contact point if preferred).

Councillors will be provided with a laptop and printer to use at home for accessing council emails, the intranet and documents on the council network. A PC may be provided as an alternative should the councillor have particular needs that make a PC a more suitable option. Laptops need to be connected to the corporate network every month to update software and patches.

Councillors may use their own home laptop or PC through a secure portal but will not be able to print out council emails and documents at home.

Councillors will be expected to use their own home broadband. The IT will advise any councillor who wishes to install broadband, but all charges should be paid by the councillor.

If councillors wish to access the council’s IT system from home or elsewhere they can be issued with a token which will enable secure access to the intranet, network drives and email system.

Stationery

Printer paper and print cartridges will be supplied on request by the group office.

Phones

Councillors are expected to use their own phones for council business.

Council mobile phones may be provided to Cabinet Members and to the Mayor. These are provided on the basis that the making of any private calls will be recorded and that the Council will be reimbursed for the cost of any private call.

These items must be returned to IT when the Member ceases in this role.

Councillors can have “Good” technology installed by the Council’s IT team on their personal mobile phones (except Blackberries) and smartphones so that they can receive council emails securely.

IT support

The Council has an IT Service Desk to deal with problems and issues relating to computer equipment and software.

Users are encouraged to make contact through the self service portal on the council intranet:

<http://msapp13/sw/selfservice/portal.php>

Alternatively, for urgent issues or if you can’t access the intranet, the service desk can be reached on 020 8545 3563 between 8am and 6pm on a working day.

Calls that can’t be immediately resolved will be passed to IT support technicians who may phone with advice/help or arrange for the equipment to be brought to the Civic Centre for repair.

Relevant policies

Your welcome pack will include a copy of the Council’s IT, Information Security and Remote Access policies. The pack will also include a form stating that you have read and will abide by these policies, as well as a form to outline your IT requirements.

How decisions are made

Councillors are responsible for agreeing the strategic direction and key policies of the council.

Leader and Cabinet

Merton has a “Leader and Cabinet” model. The Leader is the lead executive member of the Council. S/he leads the decision-making process and directs strategic policy and budget setting. The Cabinet is responsible for taking the day-to-day decisions on running the authority within the budget and policy framework agreed by the full Council.

The Leader is elected by full council for a four year term. The Leader may appoint a Cabinet of up to a maximum of 9 cabinet members and may also appoint assistant cabinet members to assist one or more cabinet member. Each member of the Cabinet has their own particular area of responsibility or ‘portfolio’, although decisions at Cabinet meetings are taken collectively. The Leader decides the content of the Cabinet portfolios and can make changes to these.

Cabinet makes appointments to some (non-statutory) committees and to some external bodies.

The Council's Forward Plan, published on the website, provides notice of the decisions that are to be made by Cabinet (and any “key decisions” delegated to individual Cabinet members or Chief Officers) over the next four months.

Key decisions not in the Forward Plan cannot be taken unless strict criteria justifying the need for urgency have been met.

Once a key decision has been taken, it is published and becomes subject to possible “call-in,” to one of the Council’s overview and scrutiny committees. Call-in is intended to be used in exceptional circumstances for decisions believed to be contrary to the authority’s decision making principles.

By its nature, call-in acts as a delaying mechanism to the decision in question. The three possible outcomes of a call-in are:

- to refer the decision back to the decision making body for reconsideration
- to refer the matter to Full Council (only if the decision is considered to be contrary to the policy or budget framework)
- to decide not to refer the matter back, in which case the decision can take effect immediately.

Merton’s call-in process is set out in Part 4E, paragraph 16, of the Council’s Constitution: http://www.merton.gov.uk/democratic_services/w-agendas/w-constitution/22.pdf

Full Council

Decisions that affect the policy framework of the council or the budget must be agreed by all councillors and they are therefore taken to a meeting of Full Council.

The Full Council comprises all 60 elected Members meeting together and is chaired by the Mayor. Full Council usually meets five times each municipal year, plus the Annual Meeting, the Budget Meeting and any extraordinary meetings required.

The responsibilities of Full Council include:

- electing the Leader of the Council
- electing the Mayor
- agreeing the Council's policy framework and the budget
- adopting and changing the Constitution
- agreeing and/or amending the terms of reference for committees, deciding on their composition and making appointments to them
- making appointments to external bodies where member representation is required
- adopting the Members' Allowances scheme and the Council's Pay Policy
- confirming the appointment of the Head of Paid Service (the Chief Executive) and other specified officers

Meetings of Full Council provide an opportunity for councillors to ask questions of the Cabinet members. These are submitted in writing in advance of the meeting via the councillor's group office. Questions and answers are published on the website. Residents and business rate payers are also invited to put forward questions at full council. These are submitted in advance of the meeting, a written response is prepared and circulated at the meeting and the questioner is invited to ask a supplementary question at the meeting to which the Cabinet Member will respond.

Other decisions

Other decisions are taken by specific committees that have been set up to cover these areas e.g. the Planning Committee. See Section 8 for details of other council decision making committees.

Day to day decisions in relation to operational issues are taken by the council's officers. See next section for further details.

Council departments

The Council is served by its employees working within departments to implement Council policies and provide services

The role of the chief executive

The Chief Executive is the senior officer who leads and takes responsibility for the work of the 5,000 paid staff of the council. As head of the paid service, the Chief Executive works closely with elected members to deliver leadership, strategic direction, policy advice, partnerships and operational management.

Chief Executive: Ged Curran 020 8545 3332 ged.curran@merton.gov.uk

The role of the departments

Merton Council is made up of four departments:

Corporate Services

Children, Schools and Families

Environment and Regeneration

Community and Housing

The Council's website www.merton.gov.uk gives full details about their functions, summarised below.

Corporate Services

The Corporate Services Department provides a wide range of services to the residents of Merton and support services to all Council departments and staff, from being the first point of contact for visitors to the Civic Centre through Merton Link, to vital IT support to staff and paying all staff and Members.

Services include:

Business Improvement
(Programme Office and IT Systems Integration)

Corporate Governance
(Democracy Services, Electoral Services, Information Governance, Internal Audit, Investigations, Legal Services, the council's Monitoring Officer and Safety Services)

Communications
(Communications, Community Engagement, and Web Team)

Customer Services
(Contractors' Health and Safety Assessment, Customer Contact, Revenues and Benefits, and the Registration Service)

Human Resources
(Business Partnerships, Employee Relations, and Learning, Development and Diversity)

Infrastructure and Transactions
(Facilities Management, IT Service Delivery, and Transactional Services)

Resources
(Accountancy, Business Planning, Commercial Services and Policy, Strategy and Partnerships)

Director: Caroline Holland 020 8545 3450 caroline.holland@merton.gov.uk

Children, Schools and Families

The Children, Schools and Families Department aims to improve the life chances of all local children and young people. It does this by making sure that they receive the quality of service they need to live healthy and happy lives with their family.

Services include:

Commissioning, Strategy and Performance
(Access to Resources Team, Business Support Team, Contracts and School Organisation, and Joint Commissioning and Partnerships)

Education
(Early Years and Child Care, Merton School Improvement, Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Inclusion Service, and Youth Inclusion)

Social Care and Youth Inclusion
(Safeguarding Standards and Training, Permanency Placements and Looked After Children, Children's Central Social Work Services, Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub and Child Protection Services, and Family and Adolescent Services)

Director: Yvette Stanley 020 8545 3251 yvette.stanley@merton.gov.uk

Environment and Regeneration

Environment and Regeneration provides a co-ordinated approach to managing the public realm, as well as the regeneration of our town centres and neighbourhoods. It aims to maintain and improve the local environment and economy of the borough by delivering quality services and by creating regeneration and partnership initiatives.

Services include:

Public Protection and Development
(Development Control, Parking Control, Public Protection and Development, and Environment Health, Trading Standards and Licensing)

Safer Merton
(Antisocial Behaviour Team, Mediation, CCTV Team and Safer Merton Strategic Team)

Street Scene and Waste
(Finance and Admin Support, Highways & Engineering, Transport and Operations, Waste Operations, and Waste Services)

Sustainable Communities
(Business Performance, Future Merton, Leisure and Culture, Green Spaces, and Property Management)

Director: Chris Lee 020 8545 3050 chris.lee@merton.gov.uk

Community and Housing

The Community and Housing department aims to provide residents with the chance to live independent and fulfilling lives, in suitable homes within sustainable communities, with chances to learn, use information, and acquire new skills. The department also commissions and provides a range of services to vulnerable people. This includes older people, people with learning disabilities, physical disabilities, sensory impairment or mental health needs.

Services include:

Adult Social Care Commissioning

(Commissioning Team, Community Care Training, Merton Independent Living and Engagement Service, Occupational Therapy, Planning and Performance, Procurement, and Brokerage)

Direct Provision

(Access and Assessment, Direct Provision, Supported Living, Learning Disability Team, Mascot, Mental Health Team, Merton Employment Teams, Day Centres and Residential Care Homes)

Housing Needs and Enabling Service

(Housing Options, Housing Registration and Nominations, Temporary Accommodation Service, Housing Strategy and Housing Supply and Development)

Libraries and Heritage

Adult Education

(Arts and Craft, Business Development, Languages, Skills for Life, Support and Commercial Services, and Arts and Community Learning)

Director: Simon Williams 020 8545 3680 simon.williams@merton.gov.uk

The Mayoralty

The Mayor is the first citizen of the borough and the official representative of the Crown. This is a non political role.

In May each year the Council elects a councillor to serve as Mayor for twelve months. The Mayor then appoints a Deputy Mayor for the same period. The Mayor can choose to appoint a Mayor's Chaplain, who also serves for a year.

The Mayor becomes Merton's ceremonial and civic head for the year and during that time can choose not to serve on committees. The Mayor chairs full Council meetings.

The Mayor represents Merton at public engagements and civic and ceremonial events. The Mayor also entertains guests in the Mayor's Parlour at the Civic Centre for both formal and informal events.

In addition to attending events all over the Borough, the Mayor has the role of receiving Members of the Royal Family during any official visits to the Borough.

Mayor of Merton's Charitable Trust

The Mayor of Merton's Charitable Trust is a registered charity. The Trust is managed by a Board of Trustees and supported by the Head of Democracy Services.

The purpose of the Trust is to collect and distribute charitable donations for the benefit of the residents of the borough. Each year the mayor will nominate one or more local organisations that s/he will support through fundraising events and other activities. The Trust may also choose to make donations to other specific organisations from time to time.

Mayor's Parlour

The Mayor's Parlour and Mayor's Office are on the first floor of the Civic Centre, just past the Leader's Office.

For further information regarding the Mayor or the Mayor's Charitable Trust, contact Carol Vincent, Mayor's Personal Assistant, on 020 8545 3517, or email: carol.vincent@merton.gov.uk

Attending council meetings

A brief description of each of the Council's committees (as of April 2014) as well as a list of outside bodies to which Council makes appointments is given below.

Legislation requires a 'political balance' to be secured on council committees, sub-committees etc. so as to reflect the overall political composition of the Council. Committee places are therefore allocated on a proportional basis to each political group, in consultation with group leaders. Each group then has its own procedures for allocating individual councillors to specific committee places.

Councillors who have arrears of council tax are not entitled to vote at council meetings. You are therefore encouraged to pay your council tax by direct debit in order to guard against inadvertently accruing arrears. Direct debit arrangements can be set up by phoning the council tax team on 020 8274 4904.

Non-attendance at meetings

If you are unable to attend a committee meeting, you should let your group whip know and arrange a substitute.

If a councillor fails to attend any meeting of the authority for a period of six months, they automatically cease to be a member of the authority.

Agenda publication

All committee agendas and minutes are published on the council's website, and emails/texts can be requested to alert you to publication:

<http://www.merton.gov.uk/council/decision-making/committee.htm>

On the rare occasion that there are agenda papers that are restricted from public view, these can be accessed through the Members' private area of the website – details and passwords will be available from your group office.

Details of council committees

Overview and Scrutiny

Overview and scrutiny provides councillors with an opportunity to hold the Cabinet to account, to contribute to policy development and review and to examine the performance of Council departments and external agencies which deliver services within the Borough. Scrutiny also provides opportunities for community involvement and democratic accountability

In Merton there is an Overview and Scrutiny Commission, which deals with cross-cutting issues and acts as a coordinating body supporting three Overview and Scrutiny Panels with individual areas of responsibility:

- Children and Young People
- Healthier Communities and Older People
- Sustainable Communities

Further detail on the work of overview and scrutiny can be found on the website: www.merton.gov.uk/scrutiny

This includes:

- Overview and Scrutiny Annual report - sets out the work done in the preceding year and highlights policy and service changes that have been made as a result of scrutiny:
- Overview and Scrutiny handbook - provides details of how scrutiny operates, with advice for councillors on how to achieve effective outcomes:

Standards Committee

The Standards Committee has the responsibility to promote and maintain high standards of conduct within the council, the enforcement of the Member Code of Conduct and advising the council on ethical governance issues. The committee monitors the registers maintained in relation to gifts and hospitality received by councillors and offered to and accepted by staff.

General Purposes Committee

General Purposes Committee is responsible for a range of non-executive functions, including audit matters and approval of the Council's statement of accounts, electoral matters and personnel issues. It is responsible for ensuring compliance with relevant laws and regulations, internal policies and procedures and overseeing council accounts and audit activity. It also has responsibility for considering and making recommendations to Full Council on any changes to the Council's Constitution.

Planning Applications Committee

The Planning Applications Committee meets regularly to consider certain planning applications. The agenda for the meeting contains reports that planning officers have written, detailing each application being presented to the committee. The Committee will question the officers, hear from members of the public and other interested parties and debate the issue prior to making a decision.

Licensing Committee

The Licensing Committee considers and recommends 'statements of policy' to full Council with regard to the exercise of its statutory functions. The areas covered include street trading, licensing of premises, gambling and controlled drinking zones.

A licensing sub-committee, comprising three members of the committee meets regularly to consider specific applications for personal and premises licences relating to the provision of food and alcohol, and to consider gambling applications.

Health and Wellbeing Board

Health and Wellbeing Boards have statutory responsibilities to deliver strategic, local leadership in health and wellbeing. The Board's work is central to informing the commissioning of health and social care services in Merton and has a core role in encouraging joined-up services across the NHS, social care, public health and other local partners.

Membership includes councillors, council officers, the Merton Clinical Commissioning Group, HealthWatch and the voluntary and community sector.

Borough Development Plan Advisory Committee –

The cross-party Borough Development Plan Advisory Committee considers and makes recommendations advises to Cabinet and Council on issues relating to the

Merton's local development plan Local Development Framework, known as the Borough Local Plan.

All local planning authorities are required to draw up a development plan for their area and keep it up to date. This plan sets out the local authority's policies and proposals for the development and other uses of land. The policies in the plan are used to guide decisions on planning applications for new development in Merton.

Street Management Advisory Committee

The Street Management Advisory Committee is appointed by Cabinet. It considers and makes recommendations on matters referred to it by the responsible Cabinet member. In particular, it will be asked to consider those matters that have been the subject of representations from the public, e.g. traffic and parking management schemes.

Community Forums

Merton Council organises annual community forum meetings in Colliers Wood, Mitcham, Morden, Raynes Park and Wimbledon. The chair of each forum is appointed by Council. These are in the autumn, to coincide with the council's budget making process. Local councillors attend and residents are encouraged to attend and make their views on council and other public services known.

Some forums hold additional meetings during the year; organising, chairing and minuting the meetings themselves. Details are on the individual forum webpage: <http://www.merton.gov.uk/community-living/communityforums.htm>

Community Forums are also covered in more detail in the section on Communications and Community Engagement. (page xx)

Outside Bodies

Council appoint councillors to represent it on a number of outside bodies. These will be listed in a report to Annual Council so that groups can nominate representatives on an annual basis.

Casework and responding to residents

Casework

The problems and issues local residents raise with ward councillors are known as casework. This can be extensive and it is important for new councillors to seek support to help in dealing with these effectively.

Some of the questions and answers to issues commonly raised with councillors are set out in Appendix 1.

Concerns about child protection

From time to time you may come across child protection concerns, perhaps raised by a third party through a surgery enquiry or from your direct contact with a young person or their parent or carer.

Where you have a child protection concern raised with you, the concern needs to be raised directly and speedily with the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH), which incorporates staff from children's social care, education, health, police, probation and youth justice.

This enables the concern to be recorded properly and to ensure a risk assessment and decision regarding appropriate action is undertaken at the earliest opportunity. It also then enables service staff to track the concern so that they can ensure appropriate action has been taken.

The MASH duty team will immediately be able to access records to establish if the child is known to any of the co-located agencies and to share appropriate information when there is a child protection concern.

The contact details for the CSF MASH are:

Telephone: 020 8545 4226 or 020 8545 4227

(Out of hours: 020 8770 5000)

Email: mash@merton.gov.uk

For further information please access the links below:

<http://intranet/mash-referral>

<http://www.merton.gov.uk/health-social-care/children-family-health-social-care/lscb/worriedaboutachild.htm>

Concerns about domestic violence

If you have concerns where an adult is experiencing domestic violence but there are no children involved, this should be referred to the partnership One Stop Shop service:

The One Stop Shop is open on Monday mornings (except bank holidays) 9.30-12.30 at Morden Baptist Church, Morden. No appointment needed.

If a client needs advice on other days they can call 020 8944 6069 or 0208 879 9023.

If you require further information about domestic violence please contact Zoe Pullman on 020 8545 4146, zoe.pullman@merton.gov.uk

Information is also available on the Council's website
www.merton.gov.uk/domesticviolence

Surgeries

Councillors may hold surgeries in their own wards to receive casework from constituents, to share information with constituents and to obtain views.

Councillors are not required to hold surgeries. As an alternative, many councillors prefer to make themselves available for individual meetings upon contact.

For those councillors who do have surgeries, arrangements may be made to hold these jointly with other councillors within the ward.

The Group Office can assist with booking a venue and issuing publicity.

Member and MP Enquiries system

The term Member Enquiry has a broad definition. It can include requests by councillors for information; constituency casework (where you are advocating on behalf of a constituent); notification of service failures by the Council (e.g. a damaged pavement); and queries about Council policy on different issues.

There is one single point of contact for all councillors and MPs :
member.enquiry@merton.gov.uk

Councillors should always use this email address when submitting enquiries, constituent casework or requests for information to the Council for response. There is no need to email specific individual departmental officers.

This email address is monitored continually by officers in the Council's Complaints Team whose responsibility it is to direct the enquiry to the right person in the relevant department and to ensure that a response is received by the Member or MP within the statutory timescale of 15 working days.

The advantages of this single point of contact for Members and other elected representatives are as follows:

- councillors don't need to try and work out or remember who the correct officer in a particular department or team is to deal with your specific enquiry or that of your constituent; instead you just have one single point of contact to which all enquiries can be sent.
- having one email address prevents any delay in teams receiving enquiries due to absence or leave by individual officers.
- enquiries are monitored to ensure that officers respond in the statutory 15 working days so that councillors won't need to spend time chasing
- having a single point of contact enables the Council to provide more meaningful data to councillors on the volume of Member enquiries received.

Any enquiries received in hard copy can also be submitted by scanning them in and sending to the member.enquiry@merton.gov.uk email address for response. Group office staff will be able to assist with this if needed.

If you have any queries, contact the Head of Information Governance on 020 8545 4182 or email Karin.lane@merton.gov.uk

Dealing with confidential information

Confidential information will only be given to councillors when they need this to carry out their official duties. This should not be shared with anyone else (except another councillor if they have the right to see it) or be published.

It is a breach of the Member's Code of Conduct to use personal, confidential or exempt information obtained from the council for personal or political advantage.

As part of a Member's Enquiry, councillors may be given personal information about a constituent as long as that person has given consent in writing. In order to comply with the data Protection Act, you are required to keep a copy of the consent form.

The consent forms should be readily available for inspection by the Information Commissioners Office and also the Council's Head of Information Governance.

You can share the information you receive in response to the Member's Enquiry with the constituent who signed the consent form, but not with anyone else.

All confidential information should be treated in compliance with the Data Protection Act. As part of this, all councillors will be registered with the Information Commissioners Office as Data Controllers.

Only your Merton Council email address provides the appropriate level of security to comply with the DPA – your own personal email address is not sufficiently secure and should not be used for Member Enquiries.

Unlawful disclosure of personal data can result in legal action and fines for the Council, political party or individual councillor.

Councillors should ensure that constituent records are only kept as long as needed. It is suggested that constituent records are destroyed three years after the last contact with a constituent.

To help you keep information confidential:

- IT will provide encrypted memory sticks, on request
- red bins are available in the group offices for the disposal of confidential waste

Training will be provided to help you handle confidential information appropriately. Further information can be obtained from the Information Governance team by emailing data.protection@merton.gov.uk or phoning 020 8545 4182.

Customer Service Standards & Charter

The Council has a customer services standards charter that affirms its commitment to the public:

- Council offices open to the public will be accessible during published opening hours.
- Staff in public offices or visiting a customer's home will identify themselves by clearly displaying their identification card.
- Staff will promote a positive image of the council and not publicly criticise its policies.
- Staff will be courteous and respectful to all customers and adopt 'continuous improvement' in their attitude and approach.
- Staff will take responsibility for ensuring customers are dealt with by the most appropriate person. Staff will resolve enquiries as quickly as possible and ensure customers understand when this will be.
- Staff will not make promises they cannot keep. Customer expectations just be balanced with what the council can statutorily, reasonably and realistically provide within existing policies.
- Staff will avoid the use of unnecessary jargon and ensure customers understand information they are providing, using plain English wherever possible.
- Customer focus will be a priority for all staff, teams, service areas, divisions and departments.
- We will welcome complaints, compliments, comments and suggestions and learn from them across the organisation.

The full charter is available at [http://intranet/mcsc_final .pdf](http://intranet/mcsc_final.pdf)

Complaints

The Council welcomes customers' views and will use them to improve services. If you receive a formal complaint from a resident please forward it to complaints@merton.gov.uk.

For environmental services such as reporting a missed refuse collection, broken street lights, or fly-tipping please use the [Street scene enquiry form](#) on the website or telephone the Contact Centre on 020 8274 4902.

Complaints about Penalty Charge Notices should be directed to parking@merton.gov.uk

Your personal responsibilities as a councillor

Your role as a Councillor

The residents of Merton have put their trust in you as their representative, and your new role brings many opportunities and privileges.

However, the office of councillor also carries a number of legal duties and responsibilities. You can face official sanctions and potential liability if you breach those duties or responsibilities. You can also incur significant liabilities for the Council in some circumstances.

The council's Monitoring Officer, Paul Evans (paul.evans@merton.gov.uk, tel: 020 8545 3338) will be able to advise you if you have any questions about these matters.

Declaration of Pecuniary Interests

The Localism Act 2011 requires every councillor to notify the Monitoring Officer (within 28 days of being elected or co-opted onto the authority) of all current "disclosable pecuniary interests" of which they are aware, and update the register within 28 days of being re-elected or re-appointed.

Failure to register any such interest, failure to register within 28 days of election or co-option, or the provision of misleading information on registration without reasonable excuse, will be criminal offences. Prosecution is at the instigation of the Director of Public Prosecutions.

The declaration is made by completing a form which is subsequently published on the council's website.

The form and guidance are available on the Council's website, from the group office or from the Head of Democracy Services:

http://www.merton.gov.uk/council/councillors/councillors_declarations_of_interests.htm

Declaration of Related Party Transactions

The Council has a legal responsibility to publish, in its Annual Statement of Accounts, any 'related party transactions' that occurred during the financial year .

Councillors are therefore sent a form at the end of each financial year in order to provide the relevant information.

Declaration of Gifts and Hospitality

Councillors are required to declare offers of gifts and hospitality which are made to them in their official capacity. These declarations are published on the council's website.

Every individual gift or item of hospitality received that is over £25 in value must be registered within 28 days of the date of receipt. Even if all councillors, or a large number of them, received the same gift or were invited to the same event, they must each make *individual* notifications.

Declaration forms are available on the website:

http://www.merton.gov.uk/council/councillors/councillors_declarations_of_gifts_and_hospitality.htm

Completed forms should be given to your group office, who will pass it on to the Council's Monitoring Officer. The form must be signed by you *personally*; they should not be signed by support staff for you. Forms will be checked and returned if not completed properly.

Failure to comply with these rules is a breach of the Members' Code of Conduct.

Full guidance on the protocol for the offer, acceptance, and declaration of gifts is on the website at

[http://www.merton.gov.uk/council/councillors/gifts and hospitality guidance revised feb 2013.pdf](http://www.merton.gov.uk/council/councillors/gifts_and_hospitality_guidance_revised_feb_2013.pdf).

Code of Conduct

Elected councillors and statutory co-opted members of Merton Council are required to agree to the council's Code of Conduct, set out in full in the box below:

- As a member or co-opted member of Merton Council I have a responsibility to represent the community and work constructively with our staff and partner organisations to secure better social, economic and environmental outcomes for all.
- In accordance with the Localism Act provisions, when acting in this capacity I am committed to behaving in a manner that is consistent with the following principles to achieve best value for our residents and maintain public confidence in this authority.
- The Act further provides for registration and disclosure of interests and in Merton Council this will be done in accordance with guidance issued by the Standards Committee.

Principles

- **Selflessness** Holders of public office should act solely in terms of the public interest. They should not do so in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family, or their friends.
- **Integrity** Holders of public office should not place themselves under any financial or other obligation to outside individuals or organisations that might seek to influence them in the performance of their official duties.
- **Objectivity** In carrying out public business, including making public appointments, awarding contracts, or recommending individuals for rewards and benefits, holders of public office should make choices on merit.
- **Accountability** Holders of public office are accountable for their decisions and actions to the public and must submit themselves to whatever scrutiny is appropriate to their office.
- **Openness** Holders of public office should be as open as possible about all the decisions and actions that they take. They should give reasons for their decisions and restrict information only when the wider public interest clearly demands.
- **Honesty** Holders of public office have a duty to declare any private interests relating to their public duties and to take steps to resolve any conflicts arising in a way that protects the public interest.
- **Leadership** Holders of public office should promote and support these principles by leadership and example.

Commitment

- I agree to behave in accordance with all our legal obligations, alongside any requirements contained within this authority's policies, protocols and procedures, including on the use of the Authority's resources.

Members allowances and expenses

Legal context

All councillors are automatically paid an allowance each month unless the councillor has chosen not to receive it. All payments made are published on the council's website:

<http://www.merton.gov.uk/council/councillors/councillors-payments.htm>

The payment of Members Allowances is governed by the Local Authorities (Members Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003. Council is required to agree a members allowances scheme each year and, in doing so, to give full regard to recommendations made by the London Councils' Independent Panel on Remuneration of Councillors.

The current member allowances were set in 2007 and been re-confirmed annually by Council so that the level is adjusted in line with the annual pay award to staff, if and when agreed.

Basic allowance

All councillors are entitled to a basic allowance. **In 2014-15 the Merton basic allowance is** (complete once agreed by Council in Feb 2014) . The basic allowance is recognition of the unpaid public service undertaken by councillors, that they are serving the local community and is compensation for the disturbance to a councillor's home and family life.

Councillors have their allowance paid by instalments every month direct into their bank account.

Special responsibility allowance (SRA)

Special responsibility allowances are paid to certain councillors who have been appointed to particular offices. These are listed in the scheme and include the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council, other group leaders, scrutiny committee chairs and chairs of planning, licensing and general purposes committees.

SRA's may change, subject to any future review, and, like the basic allowance, are currently subject to annual uplifting.

If you do not wish to receive an allowance

Under legislation, a councillor can choose not to receive any or part of the basic allowance and/or special responsibility allowance. If you wish to do this, you must inform the Head of Democracy Services by emailing julia.regan@merton.gov.uk.

Travelling allowance

Travel costs for journeys within the borough should be met from the basic allowance.

Councillors may claim for undertaking 'Approved Duties' outside of the borough, which can also include travel costs associated with attending learning and development events. Party meetings and constituency duties do not qualify.

Maximum rates for road mileage are prescribed in the Scheme. Actual costs are paid in respect of road or rail travel. Tickets and receipts should be retained and submitted to the group office with the claim form. Claim forms are available from the website:

<http://www.merton.gov.uk/council/councillors/councillors-payments.htm>

Details of all claims are published on the Council's website.

Dependent carers allowance

Councillors may claim this allowance as reimbursement of costs they incur for looking after children (under the age of 16) or dependant relatives whilst carrying out an approved duty, usually attending evening meetings. The councillor is responsible for making the care arrangements and the Council cannot accept responsibility for anything that might happen as a result of those arrangements.

Carers' allowances are not payable for carers who are related to the councillor (and living at the same address) or are under the age of 16.

Claim forms are available from the website:

<http://www.merton.gov.uk/council/councillors/councillors-payments.htm>

Details of all claims are published on the Council's website.

Reimbursement of late claims

Regulations dictate that claims must be submitted within two calendar months of fulfilling the approved duty. Failure to submit on time may result in the payment being refused.

Pensions

All councillors under the age of 70 are currently entitled to apply for inclusion in the London Borough of Merton Pension Scheme. There is no period of qualification required. Application should be made to the Pensions Department on 020 8871 8036. The cost of membership will be met by the appropriate reduction in the joining councillor's total member allowance.

Tax, national insurance and benefits

For tax and national insurance purposes councillors are regarded as employees of the Council. Councillors over retirement age and those already paying the maximum deduction in ordinary employment, may claim exemption from NI contributions.

Councillors who are unemployed or receiving income related benefits, such as Housing Benefit, should notify the relevant agencies that they receive an allowance, since this might affect their benefit entitlements. The Council's Payroll section will be asked to notify the agencies of the actual amount paid.

Councillors should note that equipment provided to assist in the performance of their duties, for example, computer equipment in the home etc. may be considered benefits upon which tax may be paid. A tax return on equipment held and its worth is made annually.

The Local Government Information Unit has produced a guide on this issue:

<http://www.lgiu.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/Councillors-Tax-And-Benefits-Guide.pdf>

What is required of a new councillors to receive their allowance and gain access to the pension scheme?

New councillors will be issued with forms to provide bank and other details so that allowances can be paid and, where applicable, pension scheme membership be commenced.

Contact details for Payroll and Pensions

Payslip queries: Frances Cockerton 020 8545 3523
frances.cockerton@merton.gov.uk

Tax queries: Payroll client team: 020 8545 3792 itrentclientteam@merton.gov.uk

Pension queries: Pensions Department 020 8871 8036

Member development and training

The Joint Head of HR Policy Development is responsible for Member learning and development. She draws together the programme of events for Members throughout the year and books Members on training events.

Learning and development takes place through a variety of sources – mentoring by political colleagues at Merton and by peers in other organisations, through political party organisations, briefings by senior officers, attendance at courses, (generally within Merton Civic Centre) and at conferences, seminars and workshops at external locations. Internally, a wide range of sessions are arranged, recent or planned examples being chairing and presentation skills, community cohesion and risk assessment.

The political groups also organise mentoring by experienced councillors and other support for new councillors to help them familiarise themselves with all aspects of the role.

There are a great number of conferences and seminars held on issues affecting local government and the role of councillors. If you have identified a conference which you wish to attend, you should discuss this with your group leader in the first instance.

Booking, travel and accommodation arrangements are usually made for you by HR. Councillors wishing to make their own travel and accommodation arrangements should be aware of the allowances payable as detailed in the Members' Allowance Scheme.

Councillors are asked, upon their return from a learning and development event, to complete an assessment form evaluating the conference and the facilities. You can also produce a short report about the conference/seminar topic for your colleagues to be shared by email and uploaded to the Members' Learning and Development intranet page.

Contact details

Kim Brown, Joint Head of HR Policy development for Sutton and Merton

email kim.brown@merton.gov.uk

phone 020 8545 3152

Communications and community engagement

Councillors and Communications

Everything a council or councillor does affects the way the public and other organisations perceive them.

The Council's and councillors' reputations are affected by citizens' perceptions of their performance, in areas including:

- delivery of key services
- media coverage
- responding to citizens' needs
- civic signage
- maintenance of civic sites and buildings
- litter and graffiti
- safety on the streets
- low crime rates
- good healthcare, education and transport
- sport and entertainment facilities
- flourishing neighbourhoods
- their place in the community

Merton Council has a Communications team which plays a strategic role alongside the council's leadership. Their job is to represent the whole council to the media and other audiences from a corporate point of view, reflecting the policy decisions the council has made. There are strict guidelines setting out their roles and responsibilities concerning individual councillors: for example, they are not allowed to write or send out press releases on behalf of individual councillors.

Leaders and Cabinet members will promote council policy and decisions, local political parties may have their own communications strategies, and the group office officers may be able to help with this work (see Section 2), but otherwise you are responsible for your communications with constituents and the wider community.

Who do you need to communicate with?

The different groups councillors need to communicate with include:

- constituents
- fellow councillors
- council managers and officers
- local MPs and other elected representatives
- your political party or group
- local organisations and associations
- local businesses and employers
- the media
- partner organisations
- community and faith leaders
- central government and regional and national bodies

Your group office will be able to help you in finding the right people to talk to within these groups.

Communication Tools

There are many tools available to you to manage your message and your reputation. Many of these also allow your audience to respond: communication now more than ever is a two-way process: as well as letting people know what you have been doing, you will need to listen to constituents and organisations in your area.

Different tools will be better suited for different audiences, and your message will need to be tailored for the audience as well. Some audiences will not have English as their first language, while others will not have access to online services.

Some of the tools you can use are:

Email

Email is direct and two-way, and allows you to be seen as in-touch and engaged. It is important to send email only to residents who have asked to receive it, and to provide the option to decline future editions in each email.

Website

Many councillors now have their own websites, or at least their section of a website.

Merton will host a webpage for each councillor who requests it on the www.merton.gov.uk domain, although of course you may have your own personal or party webpage as well.

These webpages are important for residents to get a sense of who you are. They can carry background information about you, your achievements, contact and surgery details, and attendance records.

You should advertise your web address in all communications to encourage people to come and have a look. If information is carried on more than one site, it is important that you update it all simultaneously so that the information about you online is consistent and unambiguous.

Surgery details can be published on individual Councillors' Council – provided webpages. These web pages are not compulsory.

Blog

You may also want to include a blog on your website. A blog is a webpage that is regularly updated, like an online journal. Blogs can serve as public diaries or newsletters to keep people updated on your current activity (while a website is usually more static). Visitors are often able to comment on each entry, although if you allow this, you should monitor these entries on a regular basis – it is important to allow dissenting opinions from your readers but it will reflect poorly and discourage visitors if there is genuine online abuse.

Social Media

Social media is increasingly popular among councillors and their audiences. Facebook alone has more than 30 million registered users in the UK, and Twitter can

be a useful way to communicate directly with your constituents and other groups, talking about current topics.

If you decide to communicate via these sites you should make a clear distinction between your personal and civic life.

You will also want to consider whether the audience you are reaching is sufficient to deserve the time that it can take to use social media effectively. These sites can be time consuming for the audience that they ultimately reach.

Newsletters

Not all communication is digital. Significant numbers of residents will have limited or no internet access.

Many Councillors produce a non-political ward newsletter and the Group Office will be able to help should you wish to do this. Your local party may also have a regular publication that you can write for.

Local Media

You should get to know key media contacts covering your ward if you do not already, and start building up trust. The relationship between councillors and local journalists can benefit both.

If you have a story of interest, get in touch with Merton's Communications team (Bronwen Pickering, 020 8545 3483) so that they can help plan coverage.

In Person

Sometimes the best and most effective communication comes from a visible presence where your audience already is. Visit local meeting places, like cafés, markets, local shops and outside the school gates.

Community Engagement

The Council's Community Engagement Team delivers a number of community engagement and consultation tools that will be relevant to you and your constituents. The aim of these activities is to inform decision making and for you to use them as a resource for your work.

Annual Residents Survey

This survey usually takes place in the autumn and involves face-to-face interviews with over 1000 adults and around 250 young people. Core questions on issues of concern, attitudes to the council and satisfaction with services are asked in Merton and in a parallel pan-London survey. Additional local questions on issues such as crime, health, and community cohesion are used to track local perceptions. All the data is published and the Community Engagement team provide a number of briefings. For further details please see www.merton.gov.uk/residentssurvey.

Consultation Database

The Council carries out frequent consultations on a wide range of services throughout the year. These are all listed in a single database so the public can see what is happening and how to get involved. The database also allows residents to register for email alerts so they can be notified when a new consultation that

matches their interest is added. You may also find this a useful way of keeping informed. In addition many of our consultations make use of online surveys and these can be accessed through the database. For more details please see www.merton.gov.uk/consultations

Community Forums

These are public meetings based on the five town centres. Different forums meet at different frequencies but they are all an opportunity for residents to raise issues with the Council and other local services. Dates for the meetings are set as part of the corporate calendar but are all listed on the website at www.merton.gov.uk/communityforms

E-petitions

Residents and councillors petition the council regularly and this is a popular way for people to demonstrate how they feel about an issue. The Council agreed a petition scheme in 2010 that sets the standards for how we deal with petitions including the use of an electronic petition system. Petitioners may present their petitions directly to the Council, ask you to present it on their behalf or submit it electronically. You will be notified if any petitions specific to your ward are set up on the e-petition system. For more information please see www.merton.gov.uk/petitions

Healthwatch Merton

Healthwatch is an independent consumer voice on health and social care issues. Although commissioned by the Council the service is provided by the voluntary sector and participates in both Scrutiny and the Health and Well Being Board. They produce a regular newsletter that you may find a useful resource. Please see www.healthwatchmerton.co.uk for more information

Local Democracy Week

Each year, in the week around 15 October, Merton celebrates Local Democracy Week and organises events that bring together our elected politicians with future generations of electors. This includes school visits to the Civic Centre and we encourage councillors to make links with their local schools. <http://www.merton.gov.uk/council/getinvolved/localdemocracyweek.htm>

Get Involved – Merton’s Community Engagement Strategy

In 2010 the Merton Partnership agreed a shared Community Engagement Strategy called Get Involved. This was refreshed in 2013 and still forms the standards and principles that underpin all consultations and community engagement activities. Working together as a partnership is a key objective so you often see different partners working together to deliver activities. Please see www.merton.gov.uk/getinvolved for more information.

A guide to dealing with enquiries that are frequently raised by residents

Council tax

To follow

Council tax benefits and housing benefit enquiries

To follow

Flytipping

Fly-tipping is any waste which is dumped without authority. The council can remove fly-tipped refuse or rubbish from public roads and pavements.

Report using the on-line form:

<https://webforms.merton.gov.uk/default.aspx/RenderForm/?HideAll=1&F.Name=E9B Ct31Xu28>

Or phone the waste hotline on 020 8274 4902

If not satisfied with the response then escalate to member enquiries by emailing:

member.enquiry@merton.gov.uk

Free bulky waste collection

Residents can book a free collection of up to five items once every three months. A charge will be made for additional items to be collected

Contact the waste hotline on 020 8274 4902 to arrange a collection.

Missed rubbish collections

Report using the on-line form:

<https://webforms.merton.gov.uk/default.aspx/RenderForm/?F.Name=L8KAXJGARV &HideAll=1>

Or phone the waste hotline on 020 8274 4902

If this is a persistent problem then escalate to member enquiries by emailing:

member.enquiry@merton.gov.uk

Parking tickets

The council issues penalty charge notices for parking, moving traffic and bus lane contraventions.

You can view photographic evidence of your contravention (if any was taken) and appeal or pay your PCN on our self-service website. You will need your Penalty Charge Notice number and vehicle registration.

Please note that it is not possible to pay the penalty charge and then challenge the PCN. Payment of a PCN indicates that the motorist has accepted liability and the right of appeal is lost. If you challenge a PCN within 14 days of it being issued (21 days for parking PCNs issued on the basis of a record produced by an approved device) and are not successful we will re-offer the discount for a further 14 days beginning from the date on which we reply to your challenge.

Where a PCN, Notice to Owner or Enforcement Notice has been served by post, we will only enter into correspondence with the registered keeper of the vehicle as recorded by the DVLA. The registered keeper may email or write to us to advise that they have appointed a representative to deal with the matter on their behalf and only then will we correspond with the named representative.

Details of the appeals process are set out on the council website:

<http://www.merton.gov.uk/transport-streets/parking/pcn/pcnappeals.htm>

check this section with Jim Rogers

School admissions process

The council's website contains advice for parents who wish to appeal against Merton Council's decision not to grant a place for a child at the school of their choice. This includes frequently asked questions about each stage of the process, an appeal information leaflet and contact details for independent advice:

<http://www.merton.gov.uk/learning/schools/changingschool/admissions/admissionsappeals.htm>

Homelessness

If you are contacted by a resident who thinks they are going to be homeless, the most important thing to do is to advise them to contact the Council's Housing Options team for advice as soon as possible:

Telephone: 020 8545 3636

Out of Hours: 020 8770 5000

Email: housingadvice@merton.gov.uk

The Council prevents homelessness in the following ways-

Helping people to stay in their current accommodation

Advising tenants of their rights of occupation, or negotiating with landlords on their behalf. Where customers are having trouble affording their rent we provide advice and help claiming benefits.

Providing advice on court proceedings for Private, Council, and Housing Association tenants.

Intervening in cases where a Landlord is harassing tenants or threatening to evict them illegally.

Providing advice and assistance to people who have difficulties paying their mortgages.

Providing legal advice on relationship breakdown

In cases where young people have been asked to leave by their parent or guardian, we offer mediation to help them resolve any difficulties.

Helping people find alternative accommodation

Merton Council has referral rights to a number of local hostels some of which provide supported housing.

Merton Council runs a service called Housing Solutions that provides private sector tenancies to customers who the council would likely have a legal duty to house.

Advice on position in relation to the council's housing register

Note that some people that are threatened with homelessness are given additional priority on the council's housing register so homelessness is prevented by an offer of a Housing Association home where possible. The rules that concern who gains additional priority are complicated and are set out in the Council's Register and Nominations policy; it will depend on whether your household falls into a specified priority group. If you are threatened with homelessness and you fall into a priority group your case will be referred to an options adviser who will visit you and check all your circumstances before giving you additional priority. Unfortunately there is a chronic shortage of Housing Association properties. This, coupled with the large number of applications received for housing, means that demand far outstrips the supply of properties that is available, particularly for large family sized properties, so there is no guarantee that the Council will be able to re-house you before you are actually homeless

Merton Priory Homes

The ownership and management of all Merton Council homes has transferred to the local housing association Merton Priory Homes.

Contact details:

The Grange, 1 Central Road , Morden , Surrey, SM4 5PQ

Tel: 0300 500 3000

<http://www.circle.org.uk/merton-priory#>

Planning enquiries

Information on planning applications, decisions and appeals:

<http://www.merton.gov.uk/environment/planning.htm>

Useful phone numbers and email addresses

Civic centre security team	020 8545 3437
Conservative Group Office	020 8545 3396
Labour Group Office	020 8545 3989
Liberal Democrat Group Office	020 8545 4026
Merton Coalition Group Office	020 8545 4648
Merton Park Independent Residents Group Office	020 8545 4026
IT helpdesk	020 8545 3563 between 8am and 6pm on a working day.
Council officers	
Chief Executive, Ged Curran	020 8545 3332 ged.curran@merton.gov.uk
Director of Corporate Services, Caroline Holland	020 8545 3450 caroline.holland@merton.gov.uk
Director of Children, Schools and Families, Yvette Stanley	020 8545 3251 yvette.stanley@merton.gov.uk
Director of Environment and Regeneration, Chris Lee	020 8545 3050 chris.lee@merton.gov.uk
Director of Community and Housing, Simon Williams	020 8545 3680 simon.williams@merton.gov.uk
Monitoring Officer: Assistant Director, Corporate Governance, Paul Evans	020 8545 3163 paul.evans@merton.gov.uk
Mayor's Office	Carol Vincent, Mayor's Personal Assistant, on 020 8545 3517, or email: carol.vincent@merton.gov.uk
Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) – for child protection concerns	020 8545 4226 or 020 8545 4227 (Out of hours: 020 8770 5000) Email: mash@merton.gov.uk
One Stop Shop – for domestic violence concerns	Monday mornings (except bank holidays) 9.30-12.30 at Morden

	<p>Baptist Church, Morden. No appointment needed.</p> <p>If a client needs advice on other days they can call 020 8944 6069 or 0208 879 9023.</p>
Member Enquiries	member.enquiry@merton.gov.uk
Complaints Team	<p>complaints@merton.gov.uk</p> <p>020 8545 3573</p> <p>For complaints about environmental services use the Street scene enquiry form on the website or telephone the Contact Centre on 020 8274 4902.</p> <p>Complaints about Penalty Charge Notices should be directed to parking@merton.gov.uk</p>
<p>Payslip queries: Frances Cockerton 020 8545 3523 frances.cockerton@merton.gov.uk</p> <p>Tax queries: Payroll client team: 020 8545 3792 itrentclientteam@merton.gov.uk</p> <p>Pension queries: Pensions Department 020 8871 8036</p>	
Member training and development	<p>Kim Brown kim.brown@merton.gov.uk phone 020 8545 3152</p>
waste hotline on 020 8274 4902	waste hotline on 020 8274 4902
Council's Housing Options team	<p>Telephone: 020 8545 3636</p> <p>Out of Hours: 020 8770 5000</p> <p>Email: housingadvice@merton.gov.uk</p>
Merton Priory Homes	<p>The Grange, 1 Central Road , Morden , Surrey, SM4 5PQ</p> <p>Tel: 0300 500 3000</p>
Council tax	
Council tax benefits and housing benefits	

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