

Committee: Council

Date: 2 February 2022

Wards: All

Subject: Strategic Theme Report Health and Wellbeing

Lead officer: John Morgan, Interim Director of Community and Housing

Lead member: Councillor Rebecca Lanning, Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care & Public Health

Contact officer: Dr Dagmar Zeuner, Director of Public Health, Richard Ellis, Interim Head of Strategy and Partnerships, Clarissa Larsen, Health and Wellbeing Board Partnership Manager

Recommendations:

A. That the Council consider the content of this report

PURPOSE OF REPORT

Council, at its meeting on 3rd March 2021, approved the Business Plan 2020 - 2024. The Business Plan sets out five strategic priorities and each meeting of the council receives a report updating against one of the council's strategic themes.

The Business Plan sets out how the council will deliver the Community Strategy, which is grouped into five strategic themes:

- Sustainable communities,
- Safer and stronger communities,
- Healthier communities,
- Older people
- Children and young people.

Performance against these themes, plus an additional theme of corporate capacity, is monitored by Council. Each meeting of Council receives a report updating on progress against one of these strategic themes.

This report provides Council with an opportunity to consider progress against the priorities that are to be delivered under the theme of Healthier Communities.

The key outcomes set out in the Business Plan relating to this theme are those set out in Merton Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2019-24. This report provides Council with an opportunity to consider progress against the priorities of the Strategy and gives an overview of health and wellbeing in Merton with a focus on healthy living for all.

Format and scope of the report

This report sets out in brief:

Introduction and context – Your Merton and Health and Wellbeing	Section 1
How healthy people are in Merton	Section 2
Ongoing response to COVID-19	Section 3

Examples of continuing work on the key themes of Merton Health and Wellbeing Strategy:	
Start well	Section 4
Live well	Section 5
Age well	Section 6
Healthy Place	Section 7
Healthier Communities and Older People Overview and Scrutiny Panel contribution	Section 8

- The report includes both physical and mental wellbeing, social care, food, physical activity, alcohol and smoking, underpinned by social wellbeing and connectedness with a focus on equity.
- Rather than being comprehensive, the report gives a **range of examples** of relevant initiatives and their impact.
- Links and a contact officer are provided for each section for further information.
- Acute health service provision is outside the scope of this report.

1. INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to have a huge impact on our health and wellbeing in Merton. Communities across the borough have experienced the pandemic in different ways and we are working collaboratively to respond to the latest challenges. At the same time, continuing to work towards recovery, building on the insights we have gained to date, including the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 for some of Merton's communities, especially in the East of the borough.

Your Merton and Health and Wellbeing

1.1 Recovery plans for the borough have been developed as part of [Your Merton](#), the Council's widest ever engagement programme. The aim is to develop 'a place-based vision' for Merton. This aligns closely with [Merton Health and Wellbeing Strategy](#) and the [Merton Local Health and Care Plan](#), both of which have equity of service access, provision and health outcomes at their heart, and are underpinned by other topic specific strategies.

1.2 *Your Merton* sees a place-based recovery, in which environment, green spaces and communities are highly valued, recognising that how we feel about our neighbourhood affects our wellbeing and sense of belonging. Like our Health and Wellbeing Strategy, it seeks to build a greener, healthier and fairer borough with a strong local economy, providing a healthy place with the physical and social conditions for all people to thrive

1.3 Previous research and engagement has highlighted inequalities across the borough and we have listened to people, to better understand the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on some of our more disadvantaged communities. Isolating and social distancing can affect people's wellbeing, including those who experience a lack of face to face social interaction which, for some, is compounded by digital exclusion that has made the pandemic particularly isolating.

1.4 Merton’s green spaces give people a chance to connect with nature, relax, meet others and feel connected to their community. Green spaces are also important for physical wellbeing providing places to exercise and participate in the activity and sport facilities they offer. There is opportunity for greater use of outdoor space in Merton and building the benefits that this asset can bring to people’s health and wellbeing.

Health and Wellbeing Governance

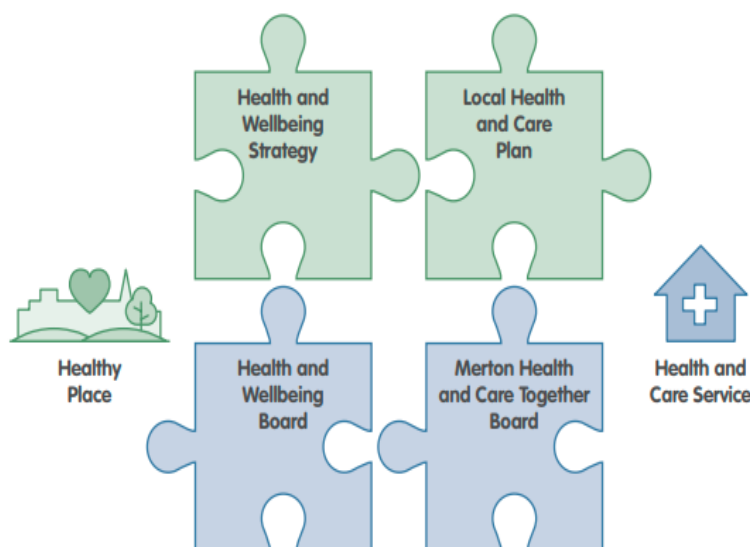
1.5 The last Strategic Theme Report to Council on Health and Wellbeing, November 2020, set out our initial response to COVID-19 and demonstrated the strength of partnerships across Merton.

In line with the Health and Care Bill 2021, changes in the way the NHS is structured locally are due to be introduced in 2022 with new regional Integrated Care Systems (ICSs), Integrated Care Partnerships (ICPs) and, at borough level, Place Based Partnerships to be established.

The statutory guidance places a greater emphasis on collaboration and shared responsibility for the health of the local population with the flexibility to deliver commissioning activities differently. The changes offer potential opportunities for system partners, to work more collaboratively. Work is taking place with NHS colleagues and the voluntary sector to help deliver these new ways of working by building on existing partnership structures:

- Merton Health and Wellbeing Board (HWBB) is a statutory Board chaired by the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health, providing the overall vision, oversight and strategic direction for health and wellbeing as set out in [Merton Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2019-2024](#).
- Merton Health and Care Together Board (MHCT) is a non-statutory partnership between the Council and the NHS, reporting to the HWBB. The recently refreshed draft [Merton Local Health and Care Plan 2022-24](#) focuses on holistic integrated health and care services and prevention.

Fig 1 – Relationship between Health and Wellbeing Strategy and Local Health and Care Plan



1.6 The new Merton Place Based Partnership, which will receive local delegated NHS budget, will link closely to both, and local governance structures will continue to evolve with potential to streamline. Statutory guidance makes a commitment to inclusive partnership working and tackling inequality. Initially planned to be in place from April 2022, new structures are now due from July 2022.

1.7 Alongside NHS reform, Public Health England has also been abolished with duties taken up by two new successor organisations:

- UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) combining the health protection capabilities of PHE and NHS Test and Trace
- Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID), Department of Health and Social Care, ‘tackling health disparities across the UK and work to prevent health conditions before they develop’.

In addition, NHS England and NHS Improvement (NHSE/I) now cover services including immunisation and screening.

Health and Wellbeing Strategy

1.8 Merton Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2019-2024 was outlined to members in the last Strategic Theme Report on Health and Wellbeing, with its focus on the influence that the wider determinants – the air we breathe, our schools, workplaces, homes, food, transport and relationships with friends and family – have on our health and impact on health equity.

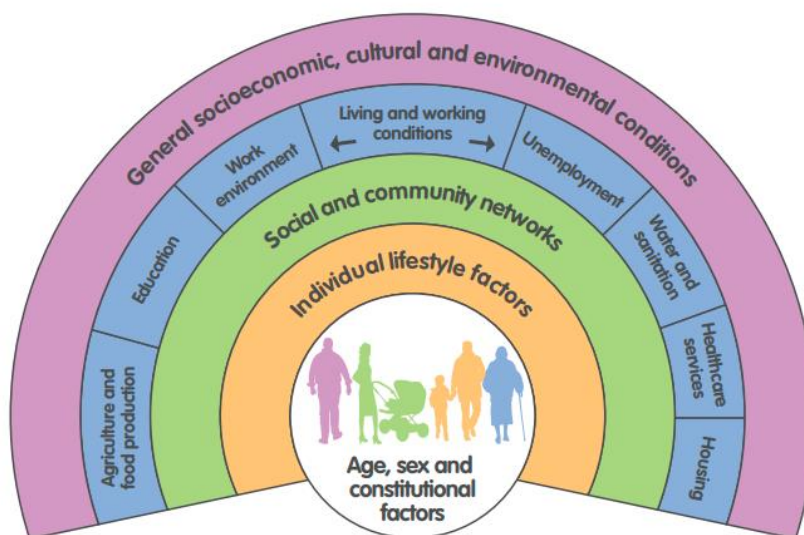
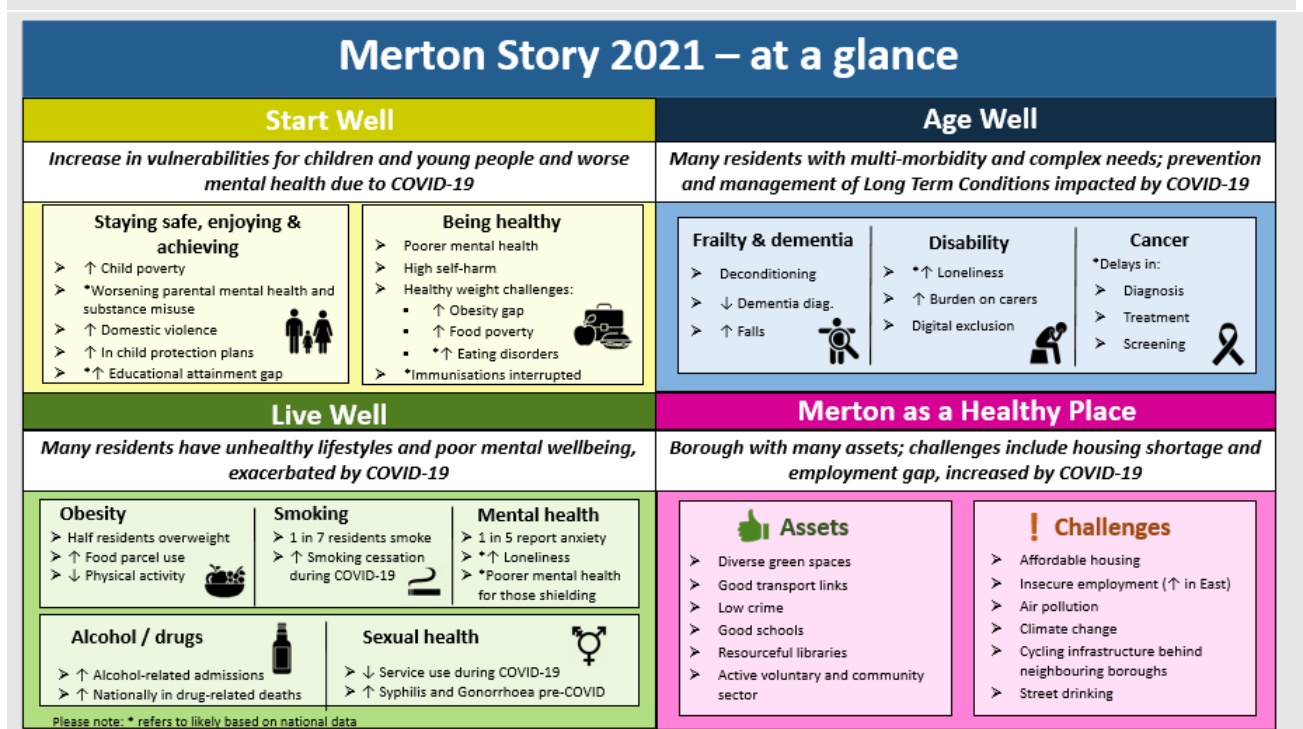
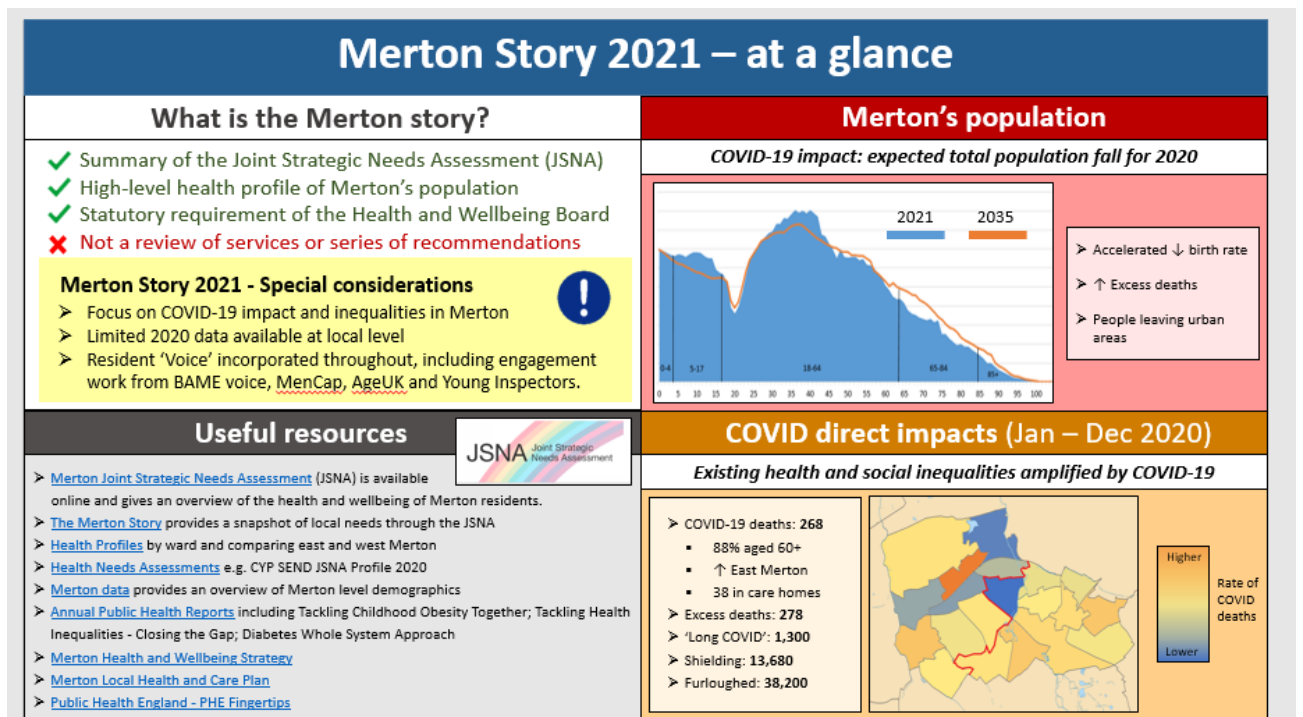


Diagram 1 – Wider determinants of health
Source: Dahlgren & Whitehead, 1991

Both the Health and Wellbeing Strategy and Local Health and Care Plan are based around a commitment for people to: Start Well, Live Well and Age Well in a Healthy Place and tackling inequality.

1.9 By healthy place, we mean the physical, social and economic factors that help people lead healthy lives linking to those of Your Merton. The principles build on the early work of the Council on Health (and health equity) in All Policies (HiAP), currently being developed as part of recovery. There is also a strong link to the Council's Climate Emergency Action Plan, as a healthy place and healthy living for all are essential components of sustainability.

2. HOW HEALTHY ARE PEOPLE IN MERTON?



* **USEFUL RESOURCES** - for live links please see the online versions here [PowerPoint Presentation \(merton.gov.uk\)](#).

COVID-19 is subject to ongoing regular surveillance with a public facing Situation Assessment Report (SAR) produced every two weeks and reported to the Health and Wellbeing Board [SAR to HWBB November 2021](#)

For further information please contact Samina Sheikh, Principal Public Health Intelligence Specialist samina.sheikh@merton.gov.uk

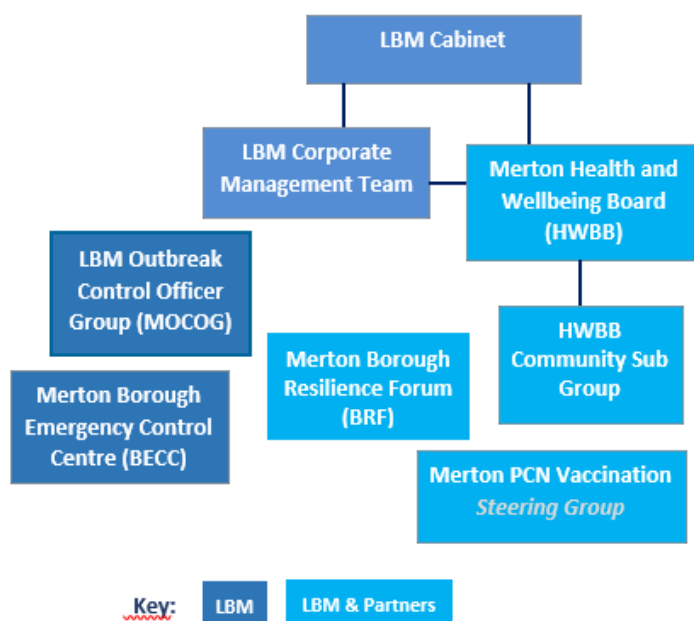
3. RESPONSE TO COVID-19

The Strategic Theme Report on Health and Wellbeing to Council in November 2020 set out in detail the Council and its partner’s initial response to COVID-19. Since then, work continues to respond to and mitigate the impacts of the pandemic.

Local Outbreak Management Plan (LOMP)

3.1 [Merton’s Local Outbreak Management Plan \(LOMP\)](#), published in April 2021, the LOMP provides an overarching plan for our response to COVID-19. It sets out how we work with our key partners at a local, regional and national level. Oversight is led by the Health and Wellbeing Board Community Subgroup, specifically set up to address the disproportionate impact of COVID on some of our communities with a particular focus on vaccine equity and Post COVID Syndrome (previously Long COVID). At officer level, delivery of the LOMP is managed by the Outbreak Control Officer Group.

Fig 2 – Governance structures relating to COVID Local Outbreak Management Plan



3.2 The LOMP aims to reduce inequalities and promote equity. It promotes infection prevention and control, testing, local contact tracing and vaccination and responds to COVID variants of concern. It seeks to develop effective targeted communication and engagement, data and insights and address compliance and enforcement, involving the community throughout as a key part of its approach.

COVID response actions

3.3 Joint actions as part of the LOMP to date include:

- Commissioning voluntary and community organisations, including Merton Mencap and BAME Voice, to work with their networks to produce **research insight into the lived experience of COVID-19** to understand better the **disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on some of our communities**. Action on the learning includes a Phase 2 programme valued at over £200k for VCS organisations to deliver community led projects, co-create and share COVID-19 messaging and increase capacity for BAME organisations to be at the decision making table, ensuring authentic community voices are heard.
- Developing a **network of COVID-19 Resilience Leads**. The Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) team support managers of adult social care settings to strengthen capacity to manage and prevent outbreaks of COVID-19 and other communicable diseases. There is also support for managers providing housing for hard to reach populations such as, rough sleepers, YMCA residents, asylum seekers, and travellers. Additionally, support for those working with children and young people supporting primary, secondary and special schools to improve infection prevention and control practices.
- **Setting up asymptomatic testing** programmes in a number of locations, including Centre Court Shopping Centre, the Wilson Hospital and 17 community pharmacies across Merton.
- **Local case tracing** has been in operation for 12 months, with a current Merton team of six full time equivalent posts, receiving cases that have not engaged with the digital journey, nor provided information to the national team. The team send emails, texts and call the COVID-19 cases to contact trace and to provide advice and signpost to further support.
- Comprehensive communications programme including **webinars, virtual meetings and community fora** - led by trusted clinicians and aimed at groups, including BAME communities, young people, parents, pregnant women and their partners, facilitating an ongoing dialogue with communities.
- Continuing to develop the **network of Community Champions and Young Adults Community Champions (YACCs)** - 166 active Champions including

councillors, front-line workers, clinicians and residents. The YACC have produced videos and posters targeted at under 18s. Most recently £485k of funding has been successfully secured to develop a further programme of **COVID-19 Vaccination Community Champions**.

- Analysing emerging data from national and regional sources to develop **surveillance and reporting** to inform action and oversight, with enhanced contact tracing and local intelligence, used to monitor areas of higher risk of COVID-19 transmission. Using this intelligence to monitor progress and target resources effectively, developing understanding of those with less confidence in the vaccine, shaping our response including active promotion of the 'evergreen' vaccination offer
- Supporting our NHS colleagues with the further refinement and roll out of the **service and support model for Post COVID Syndrome** (previously long COVID). The focus is again on equity, so that those who suffered most of the burden of COVID-19, and are now suffering from Post COVID Syndrome, have access to appropriate clinical services as well as community and self-management advice to support recovery and rehabilitation. Pro-active promotion around Post COVID Syndrome in the community, to complement the NHS approach to case finding, is also taking place.

For further information on the Local Outbreak Control Plan and engagement programme please contact Barry Causer, Public Health Lead for COVID Resilience barry.causer@merton.gov.uk

3.4 Vaccination Programme

- The Council has supported the NHS to deliver over **400,000 COVID-19 vaccinations** across the borough – most recently the mass booster campaign during December 2021 and going forward, new vaccine offer for high risk 5-11 year olds, second doses for 12-15 year olds and roll out of booster to 16-17 year olds.
- The vaccination programme is continually evolving, learning and developing from experience to date. In May 2021, the HWBB Community Subgroup agreed the [Vaccination Equity Plan](#), informed by insight work with communities. The plan is aimed at reducing barriers to access, promoting targeted communication and engagement, partnerships and governance and making best use of data and emerging information to ensure a strong focus on making sure no one is left behind.
- The vaccination programme has been rolled out at key sites across the borough: the Wilson Hospital, Nelson Health Centre, Morden Assembly Hall and Wimbledon Centre Court together with over **35 pop-up vaccination clinics** in areas of low vaccine uptake and other settings including the Civic

Centre, sports clubs, places of worship, local community centres, food banks and transport venues.

- As well as COVID, promoting **Flu vaccination has been a priority**, and there has been a wider offer from the NHS with free jabs for over 50's, school children aged 2 to 16 years and vulnerable groups. Messaging has included promoting winter 'double protection' widely. The council has also offered all LBM staff and teachers at maintained schools, not eligible for the NHS offer, the opportunity to get a jab at a local pharmacy and claim up to £15 reimbursement.
- Schools have been working tirelessly to keep their pupils staff safe during the COVID pandemic, at the same time ensuring the best possible access to education. Since the Autumn term, schools have: managed return-to-school Asymptomatic Testing; hosted vaccination clinics for 12 to 15 year olds; carefully followed COVID guidelines and managed outbreaks with the support of the Public Health Infection Prevention and Control team; introduced the use of CO2 monitors to identify and manage areas with poor ventilation; and, participated in COVID resilience training. Pupils have also signed up to be COVID Vaccine champions, led by Merton's Young Inspectors.

Staff shortages due to staff self-isolating has been a big challenge, and headteachers have been working in creative ways to manage school resources to keep classes open. To help schools deal with some COVID related funding issues, particularly those related to staff absences, the Government re-opened the COVID-19 workforce fund from 22nd November 2021. It is designed to provide financial support to settings with the greatest staffing and funding challenges, but not all staffing absences are covered and therefore most schools continue to incur additional costs.

For further information on the vaccination programme please contact Julia Groom, Consultant in Public Health Julia.groom@merton.gov.uk

4. START WELL

Giving children the best start in life is a key priority of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy. COVID-19 has led to an increase in vulnerabilities for children and young people and worsening mental health. Work is underway and ongoing across the Council to help address this and throughout all areas of activity there has been close collaboration with partners, particularly with health and education.

SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disability)

4.1 Fifteen percent (15%) of pupils attending Merton's state funded schools have their needs met through special learning programmes or plans, known as SEN support. SEN support is a range of interventions, develop with the school's SEN Co-

ordinator (SENCO), they can include children working in smaller groups, teachers providing extra help or an assistant helping to access classroom activities. Primary and community health services offer advice and support to schools to deliver SEN support.

Over the past year there has been a sustained focus on ensuring pupils and young people aged 0-25 years with an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP), and their families receive the right support, at the right time, even during the pandemic which has impacted on delivery of services. There has been a focus on improving the quality of the professional advice received as part of the Education Health and Care Needs assessment process and improving compliance with issuing first EHCP's within the 20-week statutory timescale.

4.2 Training has been provided to education, health and care partners and the audit and quality assurance framework has shown that there has been an improvement in both timeliness of receipt of advice and quality. Positive and constructive feedback has been received from parents/carers highlighting effective communication, positive experiences and feeling involved in the process for the Integrated Complex Needs service. The local authority has significantly improved their compliance in issuing a first EHCP within 20 weeks, which in December 2021 were above the National Average.

4.3 Merton Health and Tripartite Panels were embedded to support prompt access to services for children and young people. Blended virtual/face-to-face support for families continued to be offered. In April 2021 the local authority recommissioned the Education Occupational Therapy provision for pupils with an EHCP. The new provider mobilised in September 2021 and feedback from the Merton maintained special schools is that this has improved their delivery of Occupational Therapy.

4.4 The local authority is in the process of expanding the Additionally Resourced Provisions for pupils in mainstream school with a diagnosis of autism. This will ensure that more pupils can remain within Merton schools, remain with their peer group and will not have to travel long distances to access their education. In addition Melrose Primary School successfully opened in September 2021 which has decreased the dependency on out of Borough maintained and independent Special Schools with further expansion of places planned.

4.5 A review of the Adult Social Care Transitions Team has taken place and an options paper has been written for consideration by Senior Leaders to agree the configuration of this team and to ensure that young people aged from 14 years receive the right advice to plan for adulthood at the right time. In addition, the new team will ensure that young people, where eligible, receive their Care Act Assessment prior to their 18th Birthday. A Transitions Protocol and Leaflet have been written so that parents, young people, and services are clear on what to expect for Transition to adulthood.

Mental Health Support

4.6 Merton is adopting a new model of mental health support called 'I Thrive', which is jointly led by LB Merton and SWL CCG. Under this model we have expanded the services on offer at a 'Getting Help' stage. 'Off the Record' have been commissioned to provide a self-referral service. 'Kooth' as an online app for young people is available across south London. We have set up another school mental health cluster and the final cluster will be set up from January 2022 so that every school and further education provider in Merton can be in a schools mental health cluster and benefit from accessing a specialist team as well as working on a whole school model of support. These teams have been actively supporting children, parents and staff.

4.7 We know that many young people have struggled with their mental health as we have worked our way through the pandemic. At the Merton CAMHS Board we have monitored referral rates to CAMHS and Off the Record our preventative service. CAMHS referrals dropped in lockdowns but are now are pre pandemic levels - however they contain much higher complexity. We have seen this come through in referrals to our Merton Medical Education service where children's mental health means that they are struggling to access school at all. We are expanding this service and it will be moving to new improved premises in the new year to meet this demand. Off the Record take up is now above pre-pandemic levels.

4.8 We are also just completing a Youth Survey of 2000 young people and 200 more in focus groups. This work was led by Merton's young inspectors, these are young people trained to lead youth engagement and participation. One early finding is how many young people were struggling with their mental health in lockdowns - but were feeling more positive being back in school and in sports clubs.

As with CAMHS teams nationally, the Merton CAMHS team has been struggling with a higher level of referrals to the service. There has been a 20% increase in referrals between July-Sept 19/20 and July-Sept 20/21, as well as a significant increase in urgent referrals, which is a demonstration of the increase in complexity and risk presentation to the service following the pandemic lockdowns. The service is working to reduce this through additional investment to recruit more staff. They have also developed a comprehensive resource, a 'whilst you wait' pack as well as signposting to digital resource/support for waiters.

4.9 Merton's Young Person's Risk and Resilience Service, Catch22 reported in its Impact Report for 2020-2021 that the higher level of vulnerability and complexities among young people has again increased. Lockdowns across the year have impacted on the young people the service works with and practitioners have needed to work creatively to engage young people and support them through difficult periods especially where there is conflict within the family home. Increasingly the service has seen a significant rise in referrals for targeted interventions and counselling for emotional health, many were using substances that are just below the threshold for a specialist Public Health England National Treatment Agency psychosocial

intervention. This year 56% of the referrals into the service were for a targeted substance misuse intervention.

For more details on Risk and Resilience Service, contact Rob Carrick, Commissioning Manager, Robert.carrick@merton.gov.uk

Healthy Weight

4.10 The pandemic has had a negative impact on children's healthy weight with increases in obesity and eating disorders, together with significant food poverty, all underpinned by the associated impact on emotional and mental health. Obesity in childhood is a significant risk factor for poor physical and mental health in childhood and is a significant risk factor for diabetes and other health conditions into adulthood. National and London data for 2020/21 shows the highest annual rise in obesity levels since measurement began in 2006/07.

Local data for 2020/21(unpublished) indicates that rates of overweight and obesity in Merton are similar to London, where 15 % of 4-5 year olds and 30% of 10-11 year olds are obese, and 45% of 10-11 year olds either overweight or obese. Childhood obesity is a major health inequalities issue, with children living in the most deprived areas more than twice as likely to be obese than those living in the least deprived areas.

Evidence is emerging that restrictions during the pandemic, including that stay-at-home guidance, the move to online education and closures of leisure facilities, has disrupted children's routines leading to negative impacts on sleep, nutrition and physical activity levels. The economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has seen an increase in food poverty and impacted families' ability to maintain healthy weight through accessing and being able to afford healthier food options.

Since the pandemic, poorer mental health and wellbeing has been reported in children and young people, particularly those in care or disadvantaged financially. Poor mental health has a marked effect on obesity. There have been increases nationally in referrals to child and adolescent mental health and eating disorder services during the pandemic. Obesity stigma can be particularly severe for children and young people and can also lead to disordered eating, avoidance of physical activity and avoidance of support.

4.11 Obesity is a complex problem and there is no single solution, with evidence indicating that a comprehensive programme focusing on the physical, food and cultural environment is most likely to be successful, and cost effective. Merton's Child Healthy Weight Action Plan (CHWAP) is currently being refreshed alongside the Diabetes action plan, with three key themes of:

- Making childhood healthy weight everyone's business
- Supporting children, young people and their families
- Healthy place - shaping the places we live, learn, work and play and influencing choices on the food we eat.

- 4.12 Successes from the Child Healthy Weight Action Plan to date include:
- Merton's Local Plan adopted mechanisms to **manage new takeaway restaurants within 400 metres of schools.**
 - **Installation of water fountains** in Mitcham, Colliers Wood, Morden and Raynes Park and Wimbledon.
 - 49 schools in Merton registered for **Healthy Schools London**
 - 29 primary schools in Merton participated in the **Daily/Active Mile**
 - 12 organisations in Merton are signed up to **Sugar Smart**, an initiative aiming to help organisations reduce sugar consumption.
 - A new **school meals contract** has been developed with public health and nutrition outcomes included in the service specification
 - A refreshed **Communication and Engagement Strategy** for child healthy weight has been developed to support a co-ordinated approach across partner organisations

For more details on child healthy weight, contact Hilina Asrress, Senior Public Health Principal, hilina.asrress@merton.gov.uk

Children and Young People's Social Prescribing

4.13 In response to the impact of COVID on obesity and emotional health and well-being, a Children and Young People Social Prescribing Pilot is being developed in Merton. Social prescribing is a way of linking patients in primary care with sources of support within the community. It provides GPs, and other referrers, with a non-medical referral option that links general practice to community, voluntary, and local authority services to improve health and wellbeing. The Social Prescribing Link Worker will support the family/young person to navigate and access appropriate support.

4.14 A local provider will work with partners and stakeholders, including our Young Inspectors, to develop the model for children and young people and their families taking a holistic approach to support, learning from Merton's experience with adult social prescribing, evidence and best practice. The development and implementation of the pilot is planned to start in early 2022 and will be focused in the east of the borough where we know childhood obesity levels are much higher and will be independently evaluated.

For more details on CYP Social Prescribing, contact Hilina Asrress, Senior Public Health Principal, hilina.asrress@merton.gov.uk

5. LIVE WELL

Health on the High Street

5.1 Health on the High Street is an approach to help change how people access health and wellbeing services, piloting health and wellbeing hubs on the high street and in community venues across Merton. Working jointly with the RB Kingston upon Thames, the pilot aims to demonstrate the effectiveness of community health on the high street by:

- Bringing services (COVID-19 vaccination and testing, holistic health and care, prevention and welfare) to where people live their lives e.g. the high street,
- Providing support in an integrated way rather than expecting people to attend numerous different services,
- Reviving the high street.

5.2 Health on the High Street is still in development but is likely to utilise a model that will have a number of fixed locations, possibly the network of community libraries. Learning from the successes of the COVID-19 vaccination programmes, a number of pop-ups sites are also being identified in partnership with Merton Primary Care Networks. A Project Manager has been recruited and activity is due to start in January/February 2022.

5.3 It is important to state that Health on the High Street will complement and enhance access, rather than replace the need for direct access to primary care. Access to primary care will be the subject of a report to the Health and Wellbeing Board in March 2022. This will consider both access to GPs and to wider services, including local access hubs, and will build on the report on [Access to Primary Care](#) made to the Healthier Communities and Older People Overview and Scrutiny Panel in November 2021.

For more information on the Health on the High Streets project, please contact Barry Causer, Public Health Lead for COVID-19 Resilience barry.causer@merton.gov.uk

Mental Health and Suicide Prevention

5.4 Progress has been made in meeting the objectives of Merton's [Suicide Prevention Framework 2018 -2023](#) including reducing risk in high-risk groups, suicide awareness with good mental health for all and support for those bereaved by suicide.

5.5 Work has taken place to raise awareness of suicide risk amongst high risk groups including those working with middle aged men, young people and those experiencing drug or alcohol dependence. Working in collaboration with South West London CCG we have promoted suicide prevention champions in Merton, focusing on risk amongst middle aged men, the largest group in the population who die by suicide. Short one hour awareness training sessions around suicide prevention are also taking place as part of the South West London initiative focused on middle aged

men as well as young people. In 2022 we are also funding a 'men's shed' project aimed at getting middle aged and older men engaged in activity and making friends, helping to address issues of isolation and loneliness.

5.6 Other work includes promoting suicide awareness and the London Mayor's commitment to making London a zero suicide city. Work has just started with SW London CCG including 2 Merton GP practices on 'Project Hope', a training programme for GP staff on awareness of risk factors around suicide and young people.

5.7 The Council and SW London CCG have also continued to run bespoke suicide prevention training courses in Merton focusing on those who work with at risk groups but open to all. These will continue into 2022. Working with Children Schools and Families, SW London CCG and local schools we are promoting specialist half day suicide prevention training to school staff in Merton and across South West London.

5.8 The Council is continuing to work with SW London CCG on a bereavement support service, supporting those bereaved by suicide to engage with specialist suicide counselling and support services.

For more details on Suicide Prevention in Merton, contact Dan Butler at daniel.butler@merton.gov.uk

Substance misuse

5.9 Westminster Drugs Project (WDP) is Merton's specialist integrated drug and alcohol treatment service for adults. Operating in the borough since April 2018. WDP has shown itself to be a co-productive and responsive partner to both the borough and its partners.

5.10 The service consistently performs in top quartile nationally in terms of key outcomes for adults who experience drug or alcohol dependence and works to enhance its offer. Examples include recruitment of Polish and Tamil speaking workers in response to increasing numbers of adults from these communities presenting to the service and developing new partnerships with other community organisations.

5.11 In 2021 the service was asked to recruit several new posts funded by the rough sleeper's initiative and the Government's commitment to increase capacity for drug treatment. WDP responded creatively, and Merton was at capacity far quicker than neighbouring boroughs.

5.12 Through the course of the pandemic WDP adjusted its model of provision to ensure that those who needed the service could access it safely. This included a switch to digital contact for some whilst ensuring face to face contact to those most vulnerable and at risk. In 2019 the CQC awarded the service an overall rating of 'good', with its response to community 'outstanding'. Merton's own review echoed the CQC conclusions and commended the service's value for money

5.13 Following a recent national review by Dame Carole Black and the publication of the Government's ten year plan "From harm to hope", the Substance Misuse Partnership Board will work to address the current challenges and opportunities for improved prevention and treatment in Merton. In 2022 Merton is working with its strategic partners to refresh its substance misuse needs assessment to inform the Substance Misuse Partnerships Board.

For more information on the substance misuse service please contact Martyn Penfold (Health Improvement Officer, substance misuse and mental health)
Martyn.Penfold@merton.gov.uk

One You Merton

5.14 The One You Merton service continues to provide improved outcomes to promote the health and wellbeing of our residents through a range of programmes information and advice - to eat well, move more, stop smoking and drink less. For example, One You Merton supported a significantly higher number of residents to stop smoking through the pandemic.

5.15 Between April 2020 and March 2021, 1,052 people have been supported to successfully quit smoking compared to 434 people for the same time period for 2019/20. This is including a high number of BAME residents (206). Merton is continuing to build on these services through commissioning more activity based programmes.

For further information contact Una O'Brien, Una.Obrien@merton.gov.uk and www.oneyoumerton.org

Workforce wellbeing

5.16 Dedicated staff were appointed in April 2021 to support Mental Health and Wellbeing resulting in approximately 1,300 participants being trained and 15 new courses commissioned directly as a result of COVID-19. Mental Health Awareness training was also run for Councillors. In addition to formal training, Wellness Policy, Procedures and Guidance have been developed and informal programmes, designed to alleviate stress have included:

Healthy Workplace Market days; Advice on managing Zoom fatigue; Support to the Black Asian and Minority Ethnic Forum delivering a programme of anti –racism training; Kindness Week (May 2020) programme of activities; Wellbeing Wednesday lunchtimes sessions; Singing from Home; and, Financial Fridays providing financial support on a range of topics.

5.17 In the last year over 30 staff were trained as fully accredited Mental Health First Aiders. In February 2021, CMT agreed to appoint an Executive Sponsor for Mental Health and to provide accredited Mental Health Awareness training to all managers. In July 2021, Mental Health Mondays were introduced, with a focus on a different wellbeing topic every first Monday of the month

5.18 Plans for the future include a Big Team step walking challenge, eLearning including a module on Taking Care of Yourself and development of the new Workforce Strategy including the theme of My Health and Wellbeing

For further information please contact Liz Hammond, Interim Head of HR Liz Hammond liz.hammond@merton.gov.uk

6. AGE WELL

The Council and partners are committed to older people being able to lead healthy, active and fulfilling lives and to age in a way that promotes as much independence as possible. COVID-19 has impacted older people's ability to do this and we are working to understand this impact and respond to it.

Community Dementia Services Engagement

6.1 This year the Council undertook engagement work on a proposed community dementia services model. This model continues to provide dementia services at the Dementia Hub in Mitcham as well as across the borough - nearer to people's homes and communities.

6.2 The community dementia services engagement was comprised of two focus groups attended by approximately 30 people and an online survey which had 106 respondents. Paper surveys were also sent to people living with dementia. Findings were collated and analysed together to form recommendations which were incorporated into the contract specification with the Alzheimer's Society.

6.3 Recommendations included proceeding with the development and provision of the six community dementia services model areas: information, advice and education, wellbeing support services, peer support groups, volunteer support services, Dementia Friendly Communities and community-based activities. Further recommendations included: strengthening partnership working in the borough, an awareness campaign to promote existing services in the borough, inclusive services and access to face-to-face services throughout a person's dementia journey.

6.4 The engagement ensured that our new service model incorporated the views of people living with dementia, carers, the voluntary and community sector as well as health partners. Merton Council will continue to work with Alzheimer's Society to help guide the service model changes over the next two years and to help improve the lives of people living with dementia and their carers. This links to [Merton Carers Strategy 2021 - 2026](#) which involved substantial consultation with carers including a survey and focus groups to inform our understanding of the issues carers face.

Dementia Action Alliance

6.5 Merton's commitment to make Merton a 'Dementia Friendly Community' continues and our Dementia Action Alliance (DAA) met in May 2021 to discuss the impact of COVID-19 on people living with dementia. DAA members researched this issue locally with survey work carried out by the Alzheimer's Society. Other partners

including Age UK Merton, Wimbledon Guild and Carers Support Merton who provided case studies.

6.6 This information informed the Health and Wellbeing Board Community Subgroup, who were looking at the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on different groups. Always focused on action, the evidence also informed the DAA meeting which highlighted action that organisations were taking to address issues raised such as loneliness/isolation as well as digital exclusion – and what we need to continue to focus on as the current situation with COVID-19 continues.

Addressing Frailty

6.7 Public Health England reported that fewer older adults undertook physical activity during the pandemic that resulted in increased deconditioning and increased risk of falls – an event that can have profound physical, mental and emotional impacts on an individual’s life as well as significant financial and operational burden on health and social care services. In Merton, voluntary sector providers have reported that many service users have noticed their increased frailty and want to do something about it.

6.8 To address the increased deconditioning among older adults, public health have commissioned services that address frailty. This has included funding a ‘Merton Moves’ project with Wimbledon Guild; an Engagement Co-ordinator assists individuals in choosing the right activities for their ability and interests, offering coaching support to help individuals back into exercise. Activities include Yoga, Pilates and Zumba and are held in-person and online.

6.9 Most recently, the Council is commissioning a frailty service that will target the areas in the borough with the highest proportion of GP registered patients with mild and moderate frailty – Morden and East Merton primary care networks. Providing quality, evidence-based strength and balancing training and wider physical activities for older people, this service will commence in February 2021 and run for 17 months

For more details on Older Peoples services in Merton, contact Dan Butler at daniel.butler@merton.gov.uk

7. HEALTHY PLACE

The local environment is a key shaper of people’s health and wellbeing. Across the Council and with partners we are working to create a healthy place in Merton as a particular focus of our recovery programme. This work links closely to the ongoing delivery of the Merton Climate Strategy and Action Plan as healthy living is beneficial for the health of people and the planet.

Libraries as Health and Wellbeing Hubs

7.1 Merton's libraries play an important and visible role as the 'High Street presence' of the Council and play a vital role in supporting and signposting residents towards obtaining appropriate information and accessing Council services.

Our seven libraries already host a range of groups and services that support our communities, including health and wellbeing services including healthy eating, sexual health, diabetes, mindfulness and smoking cessation, as a year round approach to promoting healthier lifestyles.

7.2 Tuned In is a project that aims to combat loneliness by facilitating musical jam sessions every Monday at Merton Arts Space, Wimbledon library. The sessions share and develop musical skills and build knowledge, as well as helping individuals build social connections and friendship groups. They create an environment for people from all walks of life to come together and enjoy mutual support, targeting men, particularly those aged 50 plus, where loneliness is at its highest, but open to all, and participants have reported impressive results.

7.3 Launched during the pandemic the Library Service provides an equipment loaning scheme for vulnerable and/or isolated residents who do not have access to IT equipment in the home. The scheme not only provides good quality IT equipment such as laptops and tablets but advice, guidance and training on how to get the equipment set up and how to get online in a safe way. Library staff and volunteers support residents by providing training either in person or via the telephone. Participants are also linked into a range of free IT learning courses provided by Merton Adult Learning and other providers. So far just under 200 residents have joined the scheme with 100% of residents reporting improvements in their IT skills.

7.4 Libraries provide a range of employability support services working with training providers. Examples include CV writing workshops, job clubs and other skills training. The use of library services is integral for a number of community based courses and in a more informal way through sessions such as one to one IT support and other activities delivered by partners and volunteers.

7.5 Wimbledon Library hosts 'Wimbletech', an organisation that provides space, advice and support for start-up companies and co-workers and is part of Merton's Inward Investment Strategy. It currently has almost 150 resident members with a community digital platform recently launched. Building on the success of Wimbletech, we will be rolling out the Workary at Mitcham Library from February 2022. Mitcham library will also shortly be hosting Barclay's new community banking service to help remedy the loss of banking services from branch closures. This provision will also be available at Colliers Wood and Pollards Hill libraries and will operate on an appointment basis.

7.6 Another project to be rolled out across all libraries is Mind Space that will develop libraries as digital, education and wellbeing hubs – a place to engage and enhance your mind in new ways. Through external funding we will make adaptations to create a multi-sensory experience that enhances resident's digital, education and health outcomes. The renovations will enhance residents' educational experiences

with events centred on adult learning provision and study space enhanced to enable learning in high quality conditions.

For more details on libraries, please contact Anthony Hopkins (Head of Library, Heritage and Adult education services) Anthony.Hopkins@merton.gov.uk

Air Quality

7.7 Air quality is a fundamental determinant of health with many acute and chronic diseases and premature deaths linked to air pollution and often the least well off suffering most while polluting least. That is why air quality is one of the priorities identified in Merton's Health and Wellbeing Strategy and it is a key part of Merton's climate strategy and action plan.

7.8 Covid-19 has affected the progress of a number of projects within the borough's Air Quality Action Plan. However, successes include the Borough's **School Streets Programme** that now covers 29 schools, the highest number of any London borough. Other work includes **anti-idling initiatives**, wide spread **air quality monitoring**, and promotion of **active travel**. Partnership working with the NHS on air quality and sustainability has increased significantly since the NHS has embraced an ambition to become carbon neutral and requires all NHS organisations to produce 'Green Plans'. An example are five GP practices in the East of the borough that are working towards achieving accreditation with the Active Practice Charter and aim to become active transport beacons to tackle health inequalities.

For more details on air quality, please contact Jason Andrews Jason.Andrews@merton.gov.uk, for more information about the Climate change strategy please contact Dominique Hill, Dominique.Hill@merton.gov.uk

Health in All Policies

7.9 Merton's Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2019-24 continues the commitment to embed health in all policies and tackle health inequalities, empower communities and to experiment and learn. Merton has a longstanding commitment to Health in All Policies (HiAP). As the first London Borough to take part in the Local Government Association's Health in All Policies (HiAP) Programme, the council has worked across a wide range of activities to improve wellbeing including:

- Merton won the award for the Most Improved Borough for the work on bringing partners to develop **Merton's first Food Poverty Action Plan** and implementation of actions which showed progress
- **Workforce wellbeing initiatives**, ad set out above (5.16 – 5.18) including an ongoing programme of training, events and activities to support employees physical and mental health and wellbeing.
- Ongoing innovative projects – for example around air quality. Merton's Regulatory Services Partnership is delivering the world's first **Low Emission**

Zone for Construction on behalf of London boroughs and The Mayor of London, work which won an LGC award 2020

7.10 With the challenges of COVID-19 and climate change, it is time for the borough to refresh its health in all policies action plan, to make sure that everything we do going forward improves wellbeing while ensuring that the borough is more inclusive, fair and sustainable. We are also reviewing how we use evidence and data across the organisation, to ensure we can track our progress and make decisions based on evidence to achieve our goals across the council.

For more details on Health in All Policies, please contact Yannish Naik (Consultant in Public Health) Yannish.naik@merton.gov.uk

8 Healthier Communities and Older People Overview and Scrutiny Panel

8.1 Throughout the pandemic, the Director of Public Health provided updates at every meeting on the latest COVID-19 data. Recommendations and action from the Panel on COVID-19 included:

- The Director was asked to work with NHS colleagues to ensure clear and consistent messages to residents regarding localised COVID-19 outbreaks.
- The Panel received an update from South West London Mental Health Trust, South West London Clinical Commissioning Group, Epsom and St Helier NHS Trust and St George's NHS Trust on their approach and key challenges during the pandemic.
- The Panel considered a report on services for those suffering from Post COVID Syndrome (Long-COVID). There was particular concern to ensure the community are aware that this service is available.
- A report on the impact of the pandemic on maternity services (from the CCG), and on care homes will be considered in March 2022.
- The Panel has also asked for further analysis and the key lessons learned from those who died of COVID-19 in their own homes.

8.2 Other key areas of review included; Integrated Care Systems, the Panel reviewed the plans with a specific focus on the budget implications for Merton. Future meetings will continue to review this programme as it develops. Access to GP services is reviewed on an annual basis. Panel Members were informed that six access hubs had been opened across the borough. There was some concern that more provision was needed in East Merton to address the issue of health inequalities. Further updates on the rollout of this programme will be presented to the Panel in due course.

9. CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED

A wide programme of consultation and engagement on the impacts of COVID-19 on Merton's communities has taken place as set out in this report.

10. FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

11. LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

The Health and Wellbeing Board is a statutory partnership. There are no direct legal implications of this report.

12. HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS

Health equity is a key focus of Merton Health and Wellbeing Strategy and is integral to the work set out in this report.

13. CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

None for the purposes of this report.

14. RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

None for the purposes of this report.

15. BACKGROUND PAPERS

[Merton Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2019-2024](#)

[Merton Local Health and Care Plan summary 2022-24](#)

[Merton Story 2021](#)