

## **From Cllr Neaverson to the Cabinet Member for Transport**

How is the Council supporting people who live and work in Merton to be able to rent, own or share an electric vehicle?

### **Reply**

Merton will soon become the best-equipped area for on-street charging in Outer London.

Of the 90,000 households in the borough, an estimated 37,000 cannot access off-street electric vehicle (EV) charge points at home. Officers are finalising the roll-out of 530 lamp column charge points within the next six weeks, having reached the halfway mark on 30 March.

The project will triple the number of public charge points available to Merton residents from 259 at the start of January to 789. Once completed, 78,000 Merton homes will have at least one charge point within a two-minute walk of their home.

In addition to the current roll-out of lamp-column chargers, the Council is also in the process of bidding for LEVI (Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure) funding announced recently which will further increase EV charging infrastructure for our residents and businesses.

The Council's Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Panel have established an EV Charging Task Group which has met over the past three months and is due to report back to Cabinet a set of recommendations to shape the borough's EV charging strategy which officers will commence this spring.

We have also written to every large supermarket operator, retail park owner and petrol forecourt operators in the borough to encourage greater provision of rapid EV charging in these locations to support residents to charge cars as part of shopping trips and also to contribute to the borough's carbon reduction goals. The Council is also encouraging petrol station operators to convert sites to local EV charging hubs.

Merton also has a number of car-club operators in the borough including Enterprise and Zip-Car. Zip-Car already offer a number of EV vehicles to members in the borough. In discussion with ZipCar, we understand that they intend to have a fully electric fleet by 2025.

We want Merton to be one of the best places in London to own or drive an electric vehicle and we are making significant progress.

### **Supplementary**

Thank you very much for the answer, and it's been fantastic to see just the amount of progress that has been made to make Merton one of the best boroughs in London to own an electric vehicle, so my congratulations go to the Cabinet Member and the officers on the speed with which they have managed to do that. On the subject of speed, can I ask the Cabinet Member what is happening to bring more rapid charging options to the borough.

## **Reply**

I thank Cllr Neaverson for his original question and for the brilliant timing of his supplementary because this very afternoon, the Leader and I, with officers met at a fast charging station run by a fast charging company with a network of such stations abroad and in the UK. Their stations can take just fifteen minutes to add 300km and for those who prefer the British Imperial Unit, the distance in terms of miles is 15 minutes to add 186.4113576, do you want me to continue 71.

## **From Cllr Hall to the Cabinet Member for Sport and Heritage**

AELTC are making various claims about the feedback received on their plans, could the Cabinet Member please detail what agreements have been made between cabinet members, officers, and representatives of AELTC regarding the Club's planning application for developing the former golf course regarding publicising and sharing the results of informal and formal consultations with residents?

## **Reply**

Officers have been negotiating with the agent for the planning application around matters of planning judgement and potential heads of terms for a Section 106 legal agreement for planning obligations, but their views and recommendation have not been finalised and will not be confirmed until the report to the Planning Applications Committee has been completed, signed off and published for public consumption.

It is not a legal requirement of the national Development Management Procedure Order 2015 for details of informal consultations between applicants and the Council to be published on the planning register. All comments from statutory advisors and formal responses to them by applicants are displayed online at the Council's website. The analysis of these by the Planning Case Officer, together with all material planning considerations, will be published in the report to the Planning Applications Committee in due course.

## **Supplementary**

Thank you Madame Mayor and thank you very much for the answer to my question which was regarding the All England Tennis Club. I am asking whether there can be published the details of any formal or informal discussions held with representatives of the AELTC to date, regarding their planning application, which is 21/P2900, and also are you aware of any misleading statements being made by their representatives on their many interactions with our residents and residents of Wandsworth, if not I can supply you with relevant information and I'm asking this because they are making some claims about people and organisations which are supposedly supporting their plans, when this is simply not true, and I have documentary evidence of this, so I would like to make an opportunity to talk to the relevant Cabinet Member in the future about this, thank you.

## **Reply**

Thank you very much Cllr Hall for your original question which you received a response and thanks for the supplementary. Yes, I'll be willing to sit with you and discuss anything that you may want to discuss in the future, but as this is still a live application, there is not much that we can say about it. Also you'll be aware that any representation that is made will come in planning report in due course, but yes we can discuss afterwards, thank you.

## **From Cllr Macauley to the Cabinet Member for Civic Pride**

What are the Council's plans to mark the Coronation of His Majesty King Charles?

## **Reply**

The Coronation of King Charles III will be one of the country's biggest celebrations in decades – and we're working hard to ensure the borough can mark the occasion appropriately. We've taken an approach of enabling our communities to celebrate the way they want to and applied this across the key themes of Street Parties, Big Lunches, and the Big Help Out on Monday May 8.

For street parties - as with the Queen's Jubilee celebrations, we are again waiving the fees associated with street closures and supplying party packs to make it easy for people to hold street parties. We have more than 100 street parties booked, which is more than the Jubilee celebrations in 2022.

For Big Lunches – larger-scale events – we opted to use our resource to offer money to local community groups and organisations to help them run their own parties, in the way they want to. £350 grants are being awarded to all organisations holding a Big Lunch.

This has been a very popular offer. We have more than 40 Big Lunch events booked, ranging from 100 to 500 people per event. Successful applicants include Age UK Merton, Wimbledon & Putney Common Conservators, the Commonsides Trust and Morden Little League.

Our grants are helping to pay for things like speakers, food and gazebos, while the council is also providing tables and chairs for those events that require them, at no additional cost for residents.

A big screen will also be installed for the weekend at Fair Green in Mitcham, as there are community events booked there for both Saturday and Sunday.

The Mayor is holding a special Big Lunch for our fantastic local charity contacts, and myself and the Leader will be attending another special Big Lunch for our community and voluntary partners, to be held at Merton College.

For the Big Help Out – the volunteering-themed day – we are running a ticketed volunteering event at Three Kings Piece in Mitcham, where residents can come along to help us plant wild flowers and share a bite to eat. We're also working with

Merton Connected to support a sustained push to encourage even more residents to volunteer in their communities regularly.

And we're promoting our brilliant staff volunteering policy internally, which allows every colleague at the council to take two paid days off for community volunteering every year.

Finally, we will be making sure the borough looks the part. 150 Coronation lamp-post banners will be installed in our high streets, and our libraries and other central areas will be planted with flowers to mark the occasion.

### **Supplementary**

Madame Mayor, I would like to thank the Cabinet Member for her response. And I would like to ask her a supplementary question. Can she tell us tonight, how many residents are we expecting to attend the weekend event.

### **Reply**

I'd like to thank the Councillor for her question and her supplementary. As we heard from the Leader we are expecting around 100 street parties, so more than we had for the jubilee and over forty big lunches this time as well, so we are providing grants. So we estimate there are going to be around 10,000 people attending those, so there'll be lots of things going on in your area. On top of the volunteering opportunities that Cllr Garrod outlined on Three Kings Piece on Monday, there are also events like the big Womble Clean Up on Wimbledon Common and there'll be lots of other ways to get involved. Given Cllr Macauley's commitment and affection for the Royal Family, I am particularly keen to see what amazing outfit she puts on and how she celebrates the weekend.

### **From Cllr Mercer to the Cabinet Member for Civic Pride**

We are all enjoying the daffodils which are visible in lots of the Borough. We all love the green spaces in Merton and we know that bulbs are cheap when bought in bulk. Would the Council consider making an annual grant available to provide supporters of our parks (such as Friends groups) and residents groups with bulbs for planting each year?

### **Reply**

Thank you for your comments about the bulb drifts in Parks and Amenity Locations across Merton we are very pleased with the outcomes so far, which this year has totalled some 250,000 spring bulbs including standard Daffodil mixes seen primarily on Merton Amenity Grass Verges as well as more floristically diverse Bee and Butterfly Biodiversity Mixes which includes more Pollen and Nectar rich bulbs which you will see in Merton Park as part of a Pollinator Parks Program set to launch in 2023. Many of the flowers you see were planted by local volunteers, and I'd like to thank everyone

who has given up their time and put on their gardening gloves to help to add colour to our greenspaces.

You are correct that bulk purchases are a cheaper way to add visual interest and colour and if suitable mixes chosen can also provide much needed early nectar sources for pollinating insects and this year we have been using a Machine Bulb Planting technique that sees circa 100-150 bulbs planted per square meter by machine and creates a much denser carpet of colour in spring. We will obviously continue to promote community bulb planting events for smaller area in tandem also.

The councils will soon re-launch its Ward Allocation Scheme April 2023- March 2026 with £15K allocated per ward that community groups can request funding for. This year LBM Greenspaces have been working closely with colleagues in Planning to provide a catalogue of options that will include Machine Bulb Planting and Community Bulb Planting as priced options and the mixes that could be offered and the benefit they hold from colour and visual interest as well as more those richer in early nectar for foraging insects. Watch this space for the launch package that will go out to ward councillors and community groups alike.

### **Supplementary**

I'd like to thank the Cabinet Member for her response which is good news with regard to Ward funds, I support wholeheartedly her enthusiasm, if she needed any, for the flowers, the colourful demonstrations across the borough, which lots of people have contributed to. I just wanted to mention my experience in relation to planting which has taken place in Merton Park, 2 years ago when I was but a humble street representative in daffodil planting. The ward allocation provided the funding for all the bulbs purchased in Merton Park, there was an enthusiastic response from the local residents, but a year later the same residents were raring to go and the ward funds were no longer available. The John Innes Society and others chipped in a saved the day and the recent glorious display is the result. You have suggested a prospect of future funding that should enable momentum to be maintained rather than lost, and I can only say please can we go forward with as much certainty as possible.

### **Reply**

Thank you Madame Mayor, and thank you Cllr Mercer for all your efforts you put into your local community before you were a councillor, and many of us here have been busy digging up ground and laying bulbs. So we are really excited about the ward allocation scheme, we have put lots of effort in to trying to make it as straightforward and as easy possible to fund a whole range of different types of projects, so for the next couple of months, councillors across the chamber will be hearing from officers to have dedicated meetings to explain the process to them and we hope to get the money out and funding some great projects across all of our wards over the next few years

### **From Cllr Barlow to the Cabinet Member for Transport**

Could the Cabinet Member for Transport please provide an update on the Council's plans for data collection in and around the proposed East Hillside Low Traffic Neighbourhood.

#### **Reply**

Council officers are finalising positions for the cameras, including those for the East Hillside area as a priority in the programme. Electrical connections are due this month. Officers have engaged local groups and have received some suggestions for further camera locations on the periphery of the neighbourhood. These locations are being assessed prior to the installation of sensors which we anticipate will be in the coming weeks (April - early May)

#### **Supplementary**

Thank you Madame Mayor, thank you to the Cabinet Member for his answer. Does he agree that the only way to assess if one area's traffic is worse than another's is to have data to compare those areas, and if he does will he commit to the same level of data collection across Village Ward and the wider area as is planned for East Hillside?

#### **Reply**

I'm happy to meet Councillor Barlow to discuss this further.

### **From Cllr MacArthur to the Cabinet Member for Civic Pride**

Following the recent opening of the Toynbee water fountain, could the Cabinet Member for Civic Pride please advise as to the administration's policy regarding the installation of further water fountains across the Borough and outline any specific plans they may have?

#### **Reply**

The Council is proud to have partnered with the Heritage of London Trust (HOLT) to restore the Victorian Toynbee Fountain, not only for its historic value, but as a working water bottle refill station.

The Council is in discussion with HOLT regarding restoration of the Hanbury Fountain as a future project.

Elsewhere in the borough, the Council has worked with Thames Water and the Mayor of London to install new water refill stations in Colliers Wood, Mitcham, Raynes Park, Morden and Wimbledon town centres.

The installation was carried out by Thames Water; under a programme led by the Mayor of London and co-ordinated by the FutureMerton team.

<https://www.london.gov.uk/programmes-strategies/environment-and-climate-change/waste-and-recycling/single-use-plastic-bottles/drinking-fountains-london?ac-50764=160301>

The Mayor / Thames Water's programme has now ended. There isn't at present any new programme for installing water fountains. If there are any suggested locations; it may be suitable as a candidate project via Civic Pride – Investing in Neighbourhoods funding, and the next round will open in the autumn.

### **Supplementary**

Thank you Madame Mayor and the Cabinet Member for her response. While I am of course pleased to see the restoration of the Toynbee fountain and the others mentioned, I am surprised that there are no plans to install more water fountains across our borough, especially in our parks and green spaces given that we are trying to encourage sustainability and move away from single use plastics. I understand from a letter in The Guardian that the Cabinet Member disputed Polly Toynbee's assertion that local councils are unhelpful with regard to water fountains because of health and safety concerns or costs, and I wondered therefore what are the reasons for not having a more proactive plan for installing water fountains in Merton?

### **Reply**

I'd like to thank Cllr MacArthur for her question and this is an issue that we feel very strongly about, reducing plastic use and encouraging people to use water fountains which is why we have put our money into restoring the fountain she is talking about and why we have secured funds to install new water fountains that did not exist only 18 months ago across our town centres, so we have been leading the way and we would love to, when we have more resources, to put more of these and we would encourage all of our residents, when they are out and about to take a reusable water bottle and use the water fountains that exist.

### **From Cllr Hayes to the Cabinet Member for Local Environment, Greenspaces and Climate Change**

What is the Council doing to increase the borough's tree canopy?

### **Reply**

We know from a recent study that Merton's total tree canopy (including trees on private land) covers an area of 1,040 hectares) . This is equivalent to approximately 28% of the borough.

The major concentrations of canopy cover are in Wimbledon and Mitcham Commons and Morden Park. From the study we also know that of the total tree canopy:

- 26% consists of woodlands contained within parks and public open spaces (266.12ha).
- 1.5% consists of individual woodlands (15.2ha).
- 11.2% consists of street trees (116.7ha).
- 61.3% is in private gardens, cemeteries and institutional grounds (641.98)

But as you will see from (Figure 2 Map) showing tree canopy distribution and (Figure 3 Graph) showing % Tree Canopy cover in Merton by Ward shows that nearly all wards in Merton have a tree canopy cover below the London average of 21%

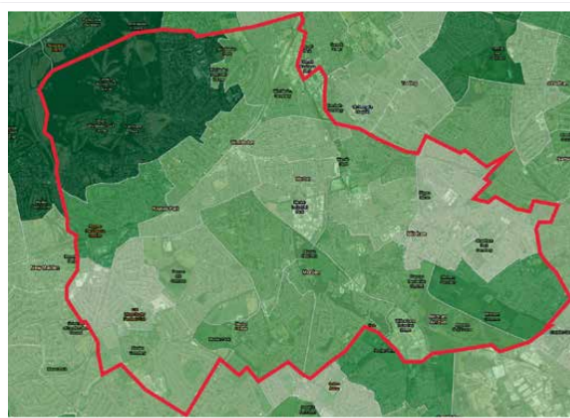


Figure 2 – Tree canopy cover distribution in Merton by Ward (pre-2022 Merton Ward boundary changes 2022). Darker green indicates more tree cover (Source UK Ward Canopy Cover Map. Forest Research)

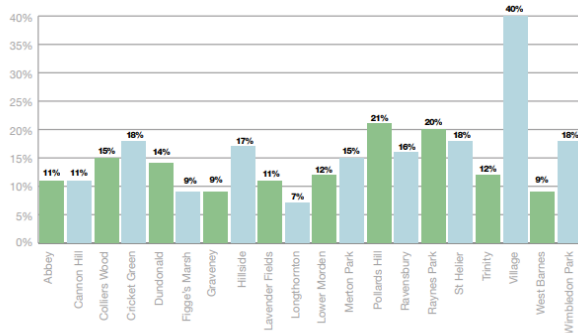


Figure 3 – Percentage tree canopy cover in Merton by ward (pre-2022 Merton Ward boundary changes 2022). (Source: UK Ward Canopy Cover Map. Forest Research)

The above knowledge and insight is helpful, but only goes so far. This is because we still need a much more detailed understanding about the composition of our urban forest and the value of its benefits, so that we can target effective improvements and benchmark our strategic progress. The Phase 2 of Merton's Tree Strategy which is currently in scoping phase will see a more detailed I-Tree survey of Merton's Urban Forest in both Council Owned and Private Land

This will all enable us to focus our tree planning resource towards areas of greater need. Councillors would have noted our 10,000 tree commitment in 2022-23 which has been funded from a mixture of council funded tree replacement and new planting as well as a variety of external funding initiative that the council's tree team has



pursued including Urban Tree Challenge / Queens Green Canopy / Trees for Cities Urban Community Woodland Projects and Trees for Streets Street Tree Sponsorship program seeking targeted funding to expand our tree canopy in most needed wards. As well as the borough proactively managing its existing canopy and veteran trees.

### **Supplementary**

Thanks Madame Mayor and thanks to the Cabinet Member for his response. I must say when reading this, it was quite an uplifting piece of information and I was tempted to break into the famous Joyce Kilmer poem, I will never see anything as lovely as tree, but I won't. How are we supporting people, who live in Merton, to be part of ambitions to increase the tree canopy.

### **Reply**

Thank you Cllr Hayes and thank you for your supplementary and for not reciting a poem. You're right is an ambitious target, our target is to increase our canopy by 10% by 2050 and we can't do that alone. As we've said many many times in this place and other places, we've planted 10,000 trees this year, which is our biggest tree planting year ever, but 3000 of those trees were planted on a community planting day over in Cranmer Green in partnership with Trees for Cities, in honour of Dave Lofthouse, who was one of our longest serving arboriculture managers and is a fitting legacy to a man with such passion and dedication to the trees of this borough. So community planting days to involve people and get them to understand their impact and what they can do, but also we've recently partnered with Trees for Streets which is an amazing online platform which allows residents business groups to plant trees that they sponsor in locations near to their homes or businesses and it's really easy to use and it's a great thing to have here available in Merton. And finally we're just about to wrap up on our first phase of our tree strategy and phase two will look at planting on private property and how we can support residents to look after their trees on their property, so lots of ways to get involved and lots more work to do, thank you for your question.

### **From Cllr Galea to the Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Services**

What plans does the Council have to further develop the Council's ED&I agenda/strategy and support managers and staff at all levels to develop, monitor and review public facing policies, strategies and procedures to enable inclusive and accessible services to the residents of Merton?

### **Reply**

Our new Council Plan, Building a Better Merton Together, includes a number of priorities that are aimed at improving inclusion and accessibility. These include:

- Launching a new Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Strategy – including street safety, White Ribbon Accreditation, awareness campaigns and a new initiative for young women.
- Developing our support for Black businesses, including introducing a new Best Black Business Award in the Merton Business Awards.
- Developing our apprenticeship scheme to increase opportunities with a focus on disadvantaged young people.
- Engaging with event companies to attract cultural events to the borough.
- Working with our communities to relaunch the LGBTQ+ forum.
- Celebrating the 75<sup>th</sup> Windrush anniversary in partnership with local groups and communities, for which planning is well advanced.

We have also committed to launching and delivering on a new Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Strategy. Officers are preparing a draft of this strategy now, which will come to Cabinet in draft form in July. It will then be the subject of broad public consultation before a final version is recommended for adoption by Council later this year.

Alongside the new strategy we are also putting together a report that provides data on a range of council services and how these are experienced by people with protected characteristics as defined by the Equality Act 2010. This report will then be updated on an annual basis both with data for the most recent year available and with narrative explaining what we are doing to address any issues of accessibility highlighted by that data.

### **Supplementary**

Thank you Madame Mayor and I thank you to the Cabinet Member for his response. I am pleased to learn that the council is working on a new equality diversity and inclusion strategy and I look forward to reviewing it when it's available. I was also pleased to learn last week that the council now has a workforce equality diversity and inclusion lead. It's good to know that we have an experienced professional looking at making sure the working environment at the Council is somewhere where everyone is comfortable to bring their whole self. It's a good start, but the council urgently needs and EDI role with a focus to develop and monitor and review public facing policies, strategies and procedures in order to enable inclusive and accessible services to the residents of Merton with a focus obviously on disabled members of the community because apparently we're not meeting everyone's needs, of all our residents, especially when they require adjustments. One resident, a carer for their teenage daughter, both describing as neurodiverse, therefore does the Cabinet Member agree with me that our new Equality Diversity and Inclusion lead and their team should look into how we can improve the accessibility of our services, policy work, communications and accessibility both to our buildings, public spaces and services. Thank you.

## Reply

Thank you Madame Mayor, thank you Cllr Galea for your question. I do agree with you that the Council needs to ensure that we are focusing on how our services and our buildings can be accessible and welcoming to all our residents. And indeed, you may not have been aware, we do have a head of equalities position on our staff, whose role is to do exactly that, so that work is already under way, and as I set out in my written answer, we will be bringing forward a new EDI strategy that will be coming to Cabinet in July and that will set out how we are continuing to progress that work. Thank you.

## From Cllr Andrew Howard to the Cabinet Member for Education and Lifelong Learning

Please can the Cabinet Member tell me how many children failed to return to school in Merton after the Covid19 lockdowns, excluding children who are receiving elective home education?

## Reply

Attendance is measured at various points in the school year. The data covering four half terms (up until Easter 2022) has been published and national comparators exist for this data set. Ofsted use the four half term data to judge attendance when they are inspecting schools. Rates of attendance in Merton have dropped during this period, as they have done nationally, demonstrating the impact of the pandemic as schools have moved back to normal expectations of attendance. Anxiety on the part of both children and their parents is affecting attendance levels. Merton continues to be above the national average for attendance and Merton's rate of Persistent Absence is also better than the national average. Improving attendance will be a significant priority for Merton in 2022/23, as it is nationally, and in line with newly issued guidance from the Government. Attendance is 2% below pre – pandemic levels and Persistence Absence is running at double the pre pandemic level based on 2 term data.

	Merton	National
Attendance	93.6%	92.7%
Absence	6.4%	7.3%
Persistent Absence	18.9%	22.0%

Date for 2 terms, Autumn 2021 and Spring 2022

Severe Absence is a new attendance category brought in as part of the Government's new approach to attendance. Merton Schools and the Local Authority have been working in partnership to support and challenge families to ensure the attendance of their children. There have been briefings for schools, governors, community champions.

Significant input from young inspectors told us many of the issues for young people that lead to severe absence. A key element of this is anxiety and mental health support. All Merton Schools have access to Mental Health in Schools Teams in Merton. We are working on drilling down of severe absence planning in Merton and are doing some baseline work which we intend to lead to a pilot with a couple of schools after Easter.

### **Supplementary**

I thank the Cabinet Member for their response, and just have to cycle back to the question which was how many children returned to school, because of course that question wasn't answered, it was rather an obfuscatory response which talked about the method of collecting data and then simply gave me percentages of children not attending, and of course percentages can hide rather scary numbers. So frankly I would like the Cabinet Member to return to the question and actually conjure the actual numerical figure of children who are not in school in Merton or receiving elective home education and indeed what do they intend to do about it.

### **Reply**

Thank you Madame Mayor, and I thank Cllr Howard for his question and his supplementary. Data is often returned in percentages and it gives you a clear indication that in every area, such as attendance, absence and persistent absence, Merton consistently performs above the national average, but as you want specific figures for the borough, I don't have them to hand, but I will look into it and see if I can get them to you, if that is recorded. Thank you.

### **From Cllr Kaweesa to the Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Services**

How is the Council continuing to support people through the cost of living crisis?

### **Reply**

Since the council declared a cost of living emergency in July 2022, it has continued to work with its partners to identify and support people in need.

A Cost of Living Emergency Support Fund of £2million was agreed by Cabinet in September 2022. Cabinet agreed allocations for the first £1million, focusing on crisis support and addressing immediate challenges and an update on this first tranche of funding was presented to January Cabinet.

Ongoing mechanisms are in place for engaging with voluntary sector and other key partners, including the Community Response Steering Group made up of the Council and partners, sharing ideas and best practice, determining volunteering and neighbourhood support and oversight of local demand and emerging themes and its Fuel Poverty Subgroup, plus the Food Response Network.

A cross-council Cost of Living Working Group was also established in November 2022 which draws together and builds on the various strands of work being

undertaken to address the cost of living crisis by sharing knowledge on the changing scale and nature of residents' cost of living needs, both short and long term. This working group has developed and overseen the implementation of the draft Cost of Living Strategy and Action Plan setting out activities, timescales and ownership. The group has also taken the lead on collating and considering proposals for the second tranche of the £2million Cost of Living Support Fund. Alongside the £2million Cost of Living Support Funding, the Cost of Living Working Group is also keeping track of other pots of funding we can potentially draw upon, to maximise our available resources, as well as developing an approach to encouraging businesses in Merton to become London Living Wage employers.

The Cost of Living Strategy and Action Plan 2023-2025 – A cross-council boroughwide approach to supporting people living in Merton, sets out a two-year plan to ensure the council is responding to the cost of living crisis in the most effective and collaborative way possible by identifying and fully utilising means of support and funding across different areas, and by identifying and responding to the real needs of our residents. The priorities and actions set out in the Action Plan will be aligned going forward with those set out in the new Council Plan and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy.

Proposed allocations of the second tranche were considered and agreed at March Cabinet.

A portion of the second tranche of funding (just under £25,000) is set aside as contingency as different priorities emerge, such as additional winter pressures in 2023/4 and any potential gaps in other related funding streams for example at present we do not know whether the household support fund will continue beyond March 2024.

£154,113.33 is allocated from the second tranche to extend funding to the end of March 2025 for Sustainable Merton and partners to support the Community Fridge Network and £42,000 is allocated to the Wimbledon Dons and the Trussell Trust to help them meet additional need over winter 2023/24.

To support arrangements in the voluntary and community sector for delivering emergency assistance to residents, an additional £100,000 is set aside for a further round of funding in 2023/24.

Provision has been made for £40,000 to top up the Discretionary Housing Payment fund to cover the April 2023 to March 2024 period.

Funding of £150,000 will extend to half terms the Holiday Activities and Food Programme which provides food and activities across school holidays for children on free school meals.

The Council's Communications team is working with partners to develop a new combined Cost of Living Communications Campaign to promote cost of living advice and support to residents, particularly reaching those who are digitally excluded. The campaign, called 'Cost Of Living Action', features a refreshed [cost of living webpage](#) with signposted support organised by topic and community groups, plus a range of

campaign resources. £35,000 of the second tranche of funding is allocated to the cost of living communications campaign.

Following a series of well-attended cost of living events for residents in Merton's libraries and the Civic Centre during the latter half of 2022 and early 2023, a schedule of events is being finalised for the remainder of 2023. £10,000 is allocated towards the cost of running this future programme of events.

Finally £199,621 of the tranche two funding has been earmarked to fund the continued operation of the Merton Community Hub from 1 June 2024 to end May 2025.

### **Supplementary**

Thank you Madame Mayor and you be pleased to know my question will be short and to the point and I thank the Cabinet Member for his response and can I ask as well as supporting families through the cost of living crisis now, we need to help them prepare for the future, especially as we continue to live under this Conservative Government where we can't expect things to get better any time soon, so can I ask the Cabinet Member, how is the Council doing that? Thank you.

### **Reply**

Thank you Madame Mayor, thank you Councillor Kaweesa for your question. You are absolutely right as well, as the very many measures the council has taken to help our residents of all ages through the cost of living crisis. And I would say many of which were voted against by the opposition party at our last budget meeting. We are particularly excited, or I am particularly excited about our plans to foster greater financial security for our younger residents and I particularly want to highlight our plan for working together with the Croydon and Sutton Credit Union, where we intend to give £20 to every year 7 child in the borough in September this year that sets up a young savers account with the Credit Union as well as ten pounds to every responsible adult that acts as a trustee for each child's account and to encourage them develop a healthy and sustainable savings habit. That money can only be accessed once they turn 17, so truly encouraging the young people of the borough to set up a healthy savings habit and secure greater levels of financial security for our next generation. Thank you Madame Mayor.