

Name of decision-maker Oversight and Scrutiny Commission	DATE 11 September 2024
REPORT/DECISION TITLE Change Programme	WARD(S) ALL
CHIEF OFFICER Asad Mushtaq, Executive Director for Finance and Digital Date: 28/08/24	CABINET/LEAD MEMBER Councillor Billy Christie, Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Services Date: 25/08/24
DECISION CLASSIFICATION Non Key	IS THE FINAL DECISION ON THE RECOMMENDATIONS IN THIS REPORT TO BE MADE AT THIS MEETING? Report is for noting only.

1 Recommendations:

- A. To note the overall approach to the change programme and progress to date in delivering a two-year change delivery plan.
 - B. To note and discuss the Change Team’s work underway with colleagues to achieve the Council Plan ambitions to strengthen our resident-centric approach.
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2 Purpose of Report and Executive Summary

2.1 The report provides an update on delivery of the Council’s Change Programme.

3 Links to the Merton Priorities (Borough of Sport/Civic Pride/Sustainable Futures)

3.1 In January 2024 Merton Council’s new Change Team was formed and work started on the delivery of a two-year change programme to modernise the organisation and support colleagues to fulfil the council’s ambition set out in the 2023-2026 Council Plan - Building a Better Merton Together. The council is delivering this ambition with three strategic priorities: Nurturing Civic Pride, Building a Sustainable Future and creating a Borough of Sport.

3.2 The change programme is designed to bring colleagues together from across the council to work on issues that cross departmental boundaries. By taking a strategic view across the council, assessing current activities and looking ahead to future requirements to identify gaps and opportunities, the Change Team are helping colleagues to focus resource and effort on the most impactful change initiatives. The Change Team are breaking down silo working, facilitating and equipping the organisation to deliver on cross-cutting strategic priorities while also continuing to deliver high-quality services to our residents, communities and businesses in a financially sustainable way.

4. Introduction and Background

- 4.1 As requested by the Overview and Scrutiny Commission, this report provides details of the change programme, highlighting progress to date and the strategic direction for the next year.
- 4.2 The Change Team formed in January 2024 responsible for facilitating the changes needed to be made across the council to support delivery of the ambitions within the 2023-2026 Council Plan - Building a Better Merton Together. The Change Team were appointed from existing staff through open competition for an initial two-year period. This was a new approach and was welcomed by staff across the council as a signal that the Senior Leadership Team are working in new ways. Subsequent recruitment campaigns across the council have followed this approach. Staff see the benefits of this approach which provides ways to learn and grow their skills, take on new responsibilities and challenges, whilst remaining in Merton and progressing their careers, recognised for the work they do in our shared endeavour. It also strengthens staff retention, reduces the costs of the organisation losing experienced and knowledgeable colleagues and builds capability and resilience in our workforce. It also bolsters our recruitment effort as we are seen as a forward-thinking council that values our staff, providing interesting work and routes to progress in fulfilling and stretching careers.
- 4.3 Following appointment, the Change Team spent a period of discovery engaging with internal colleagues and stakeholders, as well as exploring external ways of working and best practices. This comprehensive approach helped identify barriers to delivering the Council Plan. The insights gathered led to the development of the change programme and accompanying two-year delivery plan. Work centres around four change delivery themes:
1. People and Culture;
 2. Customer and Digital;
 3. Financial Sustainability; and
 4. Story and Reputation.
- 4.4 Work initially prioritises quick wins - focussing on issues causing the most friction and affecting the most people. Finding solutions and the resulting change from these early projects shows colleagues that change is possible, demonstrates the organisation's commitment to change and underlines our intention to continue. Annex A shows the work programme in more detail.

Early Change Team work

- 4.5 Merton's United Values were launched in early 2024, setting the tone and expectations for how we create a culture of Merton United working together as a resident-centric organisation. Successful change delivery recognises the importance of organisational culture, identifies where the organisation wants to be, takes steps to close any gaps, and facilitates the organisation to evolve into the desired cultural state. To help with this, the Change Team commissioned and steered a cultural assessment undertaken by an external group of students from the Worcester Polytechnic Institute, (WPI), USA. The assessment captured the existing organisational culture and established a framework for analysing culture change over time. This has given the Change Team

a robust performance measurement mechanism to assess how the organisational culture is changing. Members can read the report: Building Positive Culture Change in Merton here [Organisational-Culture-Change-in-Merton-Final-Report-2 \(1\).docx](#)

- 4.6 The Change Team are heading towards the end of their first year of work and are delivering a range of projects to improve the processes and systems used by colleagues and the environment they work in. Work is also underway with colleagues to ensure our Administration and Business Support staff are optimally deployed to support cross-council working and equipped to provide a resident-centric service, making full use of technological advances. We are looking at developing digital skills assessment plans that aim to increase digital literacy and skills of staff with a view to leveraging our apprenticeship levy to upskill colleagues and show our commitment to professional development.
- 4.7 The Change Team are also working on longer term projects designed to unlock and release the creativity and innovation found within colleagues across the council. These projects are all aimed at helping colleagues to feel respected and valued and invested in our organisation's future success. Additionally, they focus on using innovation to potentially generate new income streams, whilst bolstering our financial sustainability and ultimately serving our residents in new and improved ways. The slide deck at Appendix A to this report was published on the Hub in July 2024 in order to provide an update on progress to all staff across the organisation and is included with this report in order to provide additional background information on the programme.

Change Projects likely to be of particular interest to the Commission

Customer contact

- 4.8 The Council Plan sets out the council's ambitions to strengthen our resident-centric approach and develop a new Customer Contact Strategy with a focus on the customer experience. The Change Team's Customer Journey workstream within the Customer and Digital programme supports these ambitions. Working with customer contact and digital colleagues here and other councils and with stakeholders, we are exploring how we make best use of data and technology in all aspects of Merton Council's business, using resources wisely whilst innovating in our service delivery. This includes exploring ways in which we could drive automation at the outset with a digital front approach. Together we are reviewing and re-imagining customer contact channels and arrangements across the Council to prioritise residents' needs and deliver better services for our communities. We are gathering benchmarking information to understand our residents' requirements and will use this as a way of measuring performance.

Members Casework Solution

- 4.9 In strengthening our resident-centric approach we recognise the important role of elected Members and understand their longstanding need for a more efficient, user-friendly system to manage their ward casework. This project aims to give Members better tools to process, manage and monitor progress of their ward casework, and serve their residents more efficiently and effectively. The intention is that the selected

solution will also streamline how officers respond to requests for information, by giving an oversight of everyone in the council who may be dealing with the resident at any given time, ensuring a comprehensive response is given. This will pave way to a Tell Us Once solution and should improve our response times to FOI and SAR requests, contributing positively to our performance management measures.

Our Future Workplace

- 4.10 This programme of work supports a range of change programmes. In essence, it's about creating an environment where staff, residents and external visitors want to be. The Change Team are working with colleagues from across the council and with wider public, private and third sector partners to reimagine our spaces to provide affordable, innovative places for work. We have started with the Civic Centre and are addressing our reception area as part of our early work to provide a welcoming and accessible area for our residents and visitors. We are also making better use of our available space, by clearing out the clutter that has built up over time – recycling and reusing as much as we can. This is allowing us to relocate staff around the building to strengthen cross-departmental and resident-centric working. It is also helping us to identify opportunities for releasing space for more commercial let. We will broaden our scope to include satellite offices as our work develops.

Our Future Workforce - Work Placements

- 4.11 The Council plan sets out our ambition for an excellent education and skills programme giving all residents opportunities to access well-paid jobs. Merton benefits from outstanding schools and education establishments and we are working with education colleagues to support the continuation of our young peoples' education by providing valuable and worthwhile work placement opportunities. Within the Change Team's Our Future Workforce workstream we are working together with colleagues to develop a council-wide policy and standardised processes for work experience placements. These are aimed at attracting young talent to the many and varied opportunities within the council, including apprenticeships and different career pathways. Departments are currently offering placements for Year 10 –13 students and supporting existing initiatives like our Towards Employment Team, Learning Disability Employment Service and Supporting Internship programme. The Change Team hosted three students in June 2024 and gave them the opportunity to feed into the policy development work with their direct experience. Working as Merton United, the Change Team is facilitating a cross-council team to drive the initiative forward to develop the final council-wide policy. In the early Autumn, new guidance will be rolled out and a survey - designed by the Change Team hosted students - launched to gather managers insights and feedback. Results will inform the Change Team's performance measurement metrics.

Innovation

- 4.12 Long-term financial sustainability will come from unleashing the creativity and innovation from across our workforce. We cannot stay as we are, the public we serve have high expectations and see how other service delivery organisations have risen to the challenge and seized the opportunities of working in a digitised and automated world. Staff across the council want to be part of a modernised, forward-thinking, and

innovative service that reaps the benefits of new ways of working, whilst retaining the human element core to our public service ethos. The Change Team is developing the council's approach to innovation with this in mind. We have heard many interesting and exciting ideas from staff about how to improve the way we do things and about how we could generate more income. Learning from our previous successes and challenges, consulting with other public and third sector bodies, and talking with private sector organisations, we are developing the processes, systems and structures to systematically generate, capture and commercially exploit ideas that come from our colleagues and the Change Team. We will report our findings and recommendations to Cabinet early in 2025.

5. Available Options

5.1 This report is an update on the change programme and is for noting only.

6. Consultation Results

- 6.1 Following their appointment the Change Team consulted staff and Members through a series of meetings and presentations to ensure the change programme focussed on the right areas to support change and modernise to deliver the Council Plan.
- 6.2 The Change Team embraces the collaboration value and involves as many colleagues and partners in their work as appropriate, thereby ensuring consultation is an ongoing process.
- 6.3 The Change Team published their work programme on the Staff Hub and invited colleagues to comment.
- 6.4 The Change Team will analyse the results of the Staff Survey alongside the results of the WPI assessment survey to understand how colleagues are responding to the change programme so far. The Team is attending the staff conference on 17 September and will use this as another opportunity to consult staff on the change programme to keep on track with delivering the change colleagues feel needs to be made.
- 6.5 The Change Team updated Cabinet Members in February 2024 on the outline plans for the Change Programme. Feedback included a request for more details on resident focused work and performance measures to assess success of the Change Programme. We have captured this in paragraphs 5.1-5.5 above. Performance is managed through a newly created Change Programme Board – part of the refreshed Council Plan governance structure and accompanying arrangements.
- 6.6 The Change Team are gathering benchmarking information through the resident survey to understand our residents' requirements in our work.

7. Report Appendices *(please indicate where these are exempt from publication)*

7.1 The following documents are to be published with and form part of the report:

- Appendix A: [Change Programme update for Staff – July 2024](#)

8. Background Papers

8.1 Building Positive Culture Change – An Interactive Qualifying Project submitted to the Faculty of Worcester Polytechnic Institute in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Science by Brendan Byrne, Chase Goings, Ellie Kim and Samuel Randa, and report submitted to the Change Team in LB Merton on 27 June 2024. [Organisational-Culture-Change-in-Merton-Final-Report-2 \(1\).docx](#)

9. Cross-Cutting Issues and Implications and Sign-Off

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
Legal including Human Rights Act	There are no specific legal implications arising out of this report.	Fabiola Hickson Head of Law, Procurement & Information Governance 21/8/24
Finance and other resources	This report has no immediate financial implications. The financial implications to specific projects or system solutions are captured individually as they are proposed.	Gina James Service Financial Advisor 21/08/24
Equalities	This report is for noting only and does not introduce any new matters that need to be tested for relevance to the substance of the Equality Act. Any potential equality impact on end users arising from individual initiatives referenced in this report have been, or will be, subject to an assessment of their impact.	Keith Burns Director of Policy, Strategy and Innovation 21/08/24
Digital	Comments incorporated within the report.	Matt Ford-Enfield 23/08/24
Information Governance	Various projects within the Change Programme have Information Governance implications. These implications are project specific and will be addressed via project level Data Protection Impact Assessments as necessary	Keith Burns Director of Policy, Strategy and Innovation 21/08/24
Executive Director	Report Approved at DMT Asad Mushtaq	Finance and Digital, Executive Director 28/08/24
Cabinet Member/s	Report Approved Cllr Christie	Cllr Christie 25/08/24
REPORT AUTHOR: Council Change Team Ruth Knox, Change Programme Manager Tel no. 07733315172 Email ruth.knox@merton.gov.uk		

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