

Merton Council

Overview and Scrutiny Commission

9 September 2020

Supplementary agenda

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Committee: Overview and Scrutiny Commission

Date: 9 September 2020

Wards: All

Subject: Update on Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG) with a focus on Domestic Violence and Abuse (DVA)

Lead officer: Kiran Vagarwal, Zoe Gallen

Lead member: Cllr Edith Macauley

Contact officer: Kiran.vagarwal@merton.gov.uk

Recommendations:

- A. For Overview and Scrutiny Commission to note the update on the partnership work to respond to VAWG and DVA and the ongoing focus across all strands of VAWG specifically on Domestic Violence and Abuse, Sexual Violence, and Human Trafficking.
-

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1. This report provides an update on the partnership work undertaken in Merton to respond to VAWG and DVA and provide an outline of the services commissioned to support victims.
- 1.2. Although overseen by Merton's Safer Stronger Executive Board (SSEB) there is a well-established VAWG Board (A sub group of the SSEB) that leads on the delivery of the VAWG Strategic outcomes (2016-2020).
- 1.3. Some key outcomes over the last 12 months, overseen by the VAWG Board include:
- Delivering 16 Days of Activism campaign in November 2019
 - The domestic abuse One Stop Shop dealt with 213 cases between April 2019 to end of March 2020
 - Updated the 2019/2020 domestic violence and sexual violence profiles, providing the partnership with an evidence base to work from
 - Reviewed the outcomes against the VAWG Strategy
 - Marked other days and events as part of our commitment to ending VAWG in Merton.
- 1.4 Merton's current VAWG strategy concluded at the end of financial year 2019/20. The VAWG board discussed how they would like to renew the strategy moving forward and, due to links with the Mayor of London's VAWG strategy (which expires 31 March 2021) the VAWG board agreed to extend the current plan for a further 12 months to March 2021.
- 1.5 Over the next year the VAWG board will continue to work on and support work across all strands of VAWG with a focus on Domestic Violence and Abuse, Sexual Violence, and Human Trafficking.

1.6 The rationale for selecting these three areas for focused work over the next 12 months are:

Domestic Violence and Abuse

- This remains one of the biggest calls for service to Merton Council (LBM). The partnership have invested in a new five year contract with Victim Support which will see us develop step up and step down processes delivering “the right support at the right time” for victims.
- In summer 2019 the partnership were fortunate to be selected to undertake work with the Design Council on service approach. The detail of which is contained within section 2.4 of the report.
- The SSEB, with the VAWG board will be working to implement the new DVA legislation once passed through government.
- We will deliver learnings from two Domestic Homicide Reviews as they draw to their conclusions.

Sexual Violence

- Sexual violence remains a high profile matter at a regional, national and international level with the continued use of the #me-too campaign.
- Victims of sexual violence often find it hard to come forward and report, we want to support them to have the confidence to do this.
- We will develop the full remit of the No More campaign – which Merton was the second London borough to adopt. Our work has focused on DV previously and now we will focus on sexual violence.
- We will refresh our Ask Angela campaign to ensure that all licensed premises are engaged with and asked to support this programme.

Human Trafficking

- Over the last 12 months we have seen an increase in the reports of brothels in the borough. Safer Merton have closed six premises under the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 and the police have closed a further two brothels under the Sexual Offences Act during this period.
- Increased concerns with cuckooing are emerging. Working with colleagues in adult social care and police we will seek to better understand cuckooing, the approach taken by perpetrators and how best to minimise risk to vulnerable people.
- A new LBM trafficking policy is drawing to a conclusion. The VAWG board will oversee a programme of training to a range of frontline staff to allow them to understand signs and understand where, and how, to report these.
- The updated plan, once complete and ratified by members of the VAWG board will be placed on the council’s website within the Safer Merton webpage.

2 DETAILS

- 2.1. The SSEB (Community Safety Partnership), guided by the Safer Merton Service, set the strategic priorities each year. Working alongside the Mayor of London's Police and Crime Plan there has been a clear focus on VAWG in Merton over recent years
- 2.2. Full reports have previously been provided to the Overview and Scrutiny Commission. This report provides a further update on our partnership response to VAWG in 2019-2020.
 - i. Between April 2019 and March 2020, Merton's DV Multi-agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) heard 428 cases.
 - ii. Between April 2020 and August 2020, Merton's DV MARAC heard 204 cases.
 - iii. Repeat MARAC figures between April 2019 and March 2020 were 168 which represents a repeat case rate of 40%. Merton's repeat rate is in line with national guidelines which advises that a successful MARAC should expect to see a repeat case rate of circa 40% as agencies effectively and efficiently identify repeat cases and ensure that victims are re-referred back to the Independent Domestic Violence Advisers (IDVA) with whom they were previously involved.
 - iv. Annual awareness raising events undertaken in 2019 at South Thames College, annual community raising awareness of DV services c/o stickers in toilets, features in every edition of My Merton plus weekly advertising of the Borough One Stop Shop via social media.
 - v. Due to lockdown and COVID all media has been via social media and this year's campaign will be virtual.
 - vi. In July 2019 the new IDVA and Refuge contracts went live. As part of the commissioning process Merton undertook a needs analysis for victims and survivors to inform what services would be delivered. As part of the new contract we have 3 IDVA's, 1 case worker in MASH and the new service also runs the day to day operations of the One Stop Shop. Since 23 March the One Stop Shop has been closed to physical attendance due to Covid19, however, partners have continued to work together to deliver a service where victims can call in and access advice and support. We have continued to promote the service throughout the lockdown to ensure victims are aware that support services are still there to help them.
 - vii. Journey mapping – Partnerships learning and development groups have come together to look at recent DV cases to see how the victims access services across the partnership and the council and how responsive they are to the victim's needs. This practice is now being embedded as part of ongoing learning to ensure that Merton continually reviews and improves how we support victims and further considers how we may work differently.
 - viii. The borough has also been working on two Domestic Homicide Reviews since 2017. Due to their vast complexities the work on both reviews continues. One review is completed in that the final report is with the Home Office and going through their quality assurance process. Once this has

been signed off by the Home Office we can proceed to publish the report. The second review is on pause until other legal processes have completed, specifically the Inquest.

2.3 As a partnership we are committed to planning and delivering work which is innovative and which lends itself, easily, to victim care and access. Our plans for 2020/21 are:

- One Stop Shop 10th anniversary – To celebrate the past 10 years of the One Stop Shop in September. This will happen via Zoom on 14th September.
- Campaigning with a stronger focus on sexual violence – Working more closely with the rape and sexual assault centre to improve how we support victims.
- Developing work with third sector colleagues for longer term sustained support.
- Exploring how we may align some of our campaigns across the South West Police Basic Command Unit (SWBCU) to improve clarity of service for residents in all boroughs.
- Amended working practices for Euro 2020 building on our experiences of Russia 2018. This was put on hold due to COVID.
- Continued collaboration and support across the SWBCU in regard joint bids for funds allowing us to continue our service in hospital c/o our shared complex needs IDVA.
- The Community Safety Partnership is commencing work and planning how we will deliver all requirements as set out in the new DVA legislation

Joint work with the Design Council

2.4 Aside from the “day to day” work associated with DVA the partnership were successful in its bid to the Local Government Association (LGA) to work with the Design Council on DVA. This programme, designed to explore how service delivery can be changed utilising design methodologies, has seen a programme team made up of Police, a Head Teacher, Victim Support and LBM (with representatives from Children’s services, adult social care, business improvement and Community Safety) work together for six months to look at this issue.

2.5 The work with the Design Council has been enlightening in identifying where our service delivery is strong, identifying gaps and also in posing questions as to where, and how, we may seek to change practice.

2.6 The Design Council work concluded in mid-March 2020, with a final presentation to the VAWG Board in July however, the recommendations and next steps in relation to innovation generated from this work will require some time to be further explored and delivered.

2.7 When making our bid the LGA and the Design Council commended our bid for being truly cross council and cross partnership in its impact and for creating one of the most varied project teams. In reality, the nature of DVA means that

our project team could have been multiple times larger than it was with victims, perpetrators, wider family and friends all affected by this crime

Victim Support and the Independent Domestic Violence Advocate (IDVA) Service

- 2.8 Victim Support have worked in Merton since 2006 and, over the last 14 years have formed an extremely strong relationship with our communities, partners and council.
- 2.9 In early 2019 the commissioning of a new IDVA service commenced in conjunction with colleagues in Children's Social Care and Adult Social care. Partners such as police and, most importantly, past victims were also engaged as we scoped the parameters of the expected service outcomes and worked to design a service which would be flexible and meet the needs of all victims regardless of sex.
- 2.10 Summer 2019 saw the award of a new contract to Victim Support delivering IDVAs who work in Wimbledon Police Station, the Safer Merton office and the Multi-agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH).
- 2.11 Our work and relationship with Victim Support will continue to grow and develop as we look to take the work forward and evolve the response for our victims.

3 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 3.1. There are no alternative options as this report is for information and update only

4 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED

- 4.1. Not applicable

5 TIMETABLE

- 5.1. Not applicable

6 FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1. Funding provided by the council to deliver domestic abuse services are set out in table 1.

Table 1: Funding to support domestic abuse services

	Service	Budget	Commissioning & Budget Lead
1	Independent Domestic Violence Advocacy Service provided by Victim Support (3 IDVA's)	£76,764 (LCPF) £52,736 (LBM) (Annual figure) £46,112 (LBM) (Annual figures) (Total LBM Funding: £98,848)	Funded by London Crime prevention Fund until March 2021 Safer Merton Children, Schools and Families
2	Refuge and Complex Need Service provided by SPEAR and Refuge	£300k (Grant) Up to 31 st March 2021	4 Borough funding secured from the Ministry of Housing and Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) Commissioned and managed by Wandsworth Council
3	Merton Refuge (17 Beds) Provided by Hestia	£80,000 (LBM)	Commissioned and Managed by Housing Support
4	Domestic Violence, Sexual Violence and MARAC Co-ordinator	£42,370 (LBM)	Funded by Safer Merton

7 LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

7.1. No specific matters relating to this which members need to be aware of.

8 HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS

8.1. Domestic Violence and Abuse can have major implications on community cohesion. With 1 in 20 residents affected by this crime the partnerships work in supporting victims, taking action against perpetrators and ensuring that our communities understand the work we are doing on this subject is vital in achieving our ambitions for more victims to report and for more friends, family and/or neighbours to report matters of concern.

9 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

9.1. As Safer Merton oversee the work, as lead service, the team ensure that all crime and disorder concerns are considered within this work

10 RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

10.1. As a response to the ongoing concerns re Covid-19 the Safer Merton service and our partners, have evolved our business continuity plans to cope with the challenges which this virus may place us under.

10.2. Victim Support and Safer Merton have shared each other's plans and are working on a daily basis to understand one another's pressures and challenges as we work to ensure that service is delivered to our victims.

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

11.1 None

12 BACKGROUND PAPERS

12.1. None

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Overview and Scrutiny Commission

Date: 9 September 2020

Subject: Communicating with residents, businesses & partners through the Covid-19 pandemic

Lead officer: Matt Burrows, Head of Communications & Customer Experience

Lead member: Stephen Alambritis, Council Leader

Contact officer: Matt Burrows

Recommendations:

- A. That the Overview and Scrutiny Commission considers and notes the update on communications during the pandemic, and offers any suggestions and recommendations to further add to the Council's approach.
-

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to update Commission Members on our communications with all key audiences during the Covid-19 pandemic to date.
- 1.2.

2 DETAILS

Summary

- 2.1. The Council has communicated comprehensively with residents, businesses and staff throughout the pandemic, delivering messages via all its existing channels, as well as through the introduction of two new, temporary digital channels (a residents e-newsletter and a business e-newsletter) to signpost to our main website pages holding latest information.
- 2.2. The pandemic has also generated unprecedented increases in the demand and consumption of communications, with increases of 1,000% in consumption of external communications (news page views) and more than 150% internally (views on staff intranet pages) from March-August.
- 2.3. The below outlines the channels & content/information we have delivered to date, and our current future priorities are outlined at the foot of the section.
- 2.4. **External Communications**
- 2.5. **Channels**
- 2.6. **Website** – a dedicated set of Covid-19 web pages were created (one for residents, and one for businesses) in early March, and have consistently been the most-visited pages on the website since, with an increase of more than 1,000% in page views.
- 2.7. These pages have been updated on a regular basis with comprehensive advice on health, financial support, business support and stakeholder support, and our other channels have been successfully used to signpost to this. The pages are available at <https://news.merton.gov.uk/covid19/>

- 2.8. **Weekly borough e-newsletter** – In March we launched a weekly Covid-19 e-newsletter, which is now distributed to more than 100,000 email addresses each Thursday and has become our main channel. The newsletter generates an average 35% open-rate (70% at peak), and generates, on average, between 1,000 and 4,000 visits to our website per story.
- 2.9. **Merton Business e-newsletter** – established to inform & engage local businesses through the pandemic, our as-needed business newsletter has been issued twice, to more than 5,000 businesses, supporting the council to one of the best performances pan-London in delivering businesses support.
- 2.10. **Social media** – the council runs two main social media accounts (on Facebook and Twitter), and both have been used on a daily basis, as a core channel for delivering each campaign. Our total reach is over 20,000.
- 2.11. **My Merton** – We have published two editions of My Merton (83,000 households) since the start of the pandemic, and the third is due for delivery in early September.
- 2.12. **Local media** – Local and regional media have all been supportive of the council in publishing vital information on the public; we have had regular pieces in the Wimbledon Times and on Radio Jackie throughout, as well as pieces on BBC London and BBC Radio London. The Council Leader has also written two columns for the local Times.
- 2.13. **Community & faith groups** – an engagement manager has been working closely with the MVSC, Community Hub and community groups throughout, delivering information to more than 50 community & faith groups across the community, and later on via online Community Forums. The Chief Executive has also written to (and spoken with) faith leaders to keep them updated of impacts to their communities.
- 2.14. **Video** – video has been a central part of our campaign to inform residents in a human, short, easy-to-digest way. These have featured both staff and Cabinet Members.
- 2.15. **Printed media** – we have, where necessary, produced printed media to inform residents, primarily to offer support and translation services to those presenting at the civic for support.
- 2.16. **Members & MP's update** – A weekly Covid-19 update to all members & MPs from the Chief Executive was launched in March and continues to provide up to date information on case rates, council decisions and performance in combatting the virus.
- 2.17. **Content & Campaigns**
- 2.18. Each campaign has reached more than 100,000 people through a mix of the above channels.
- 2.19. **Merton Together (March-July)**: Our initial campaign to highlight public services & support to those impacted by the initial lockdown. The campaign also provided daily updates to local services, closures & the establishment of the Community Hub with MVSC, which formed the partnership base for the future campaign.

- 2.20. **Merton Heroes (March – July):** This campaign aimed to celebrate the frontline staff and volunteers across Merton who continued to provide critical care & health support to vulnerable residents, and who kept vital everyday services (eg bin collection) running throughout. You can see our campaign video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RNeGtNtl-IA>.
- 2.21. **Re-opening Our Borough (August – September):** Highlighted the safe re-opening our council services to the public, as well as the re-opening of businesses & high streets. This included burst-campaigns for libraries, open spaces and a comprehensive campaign around re-opening of high streets & shops.
- 2.22. **Keep Merton Safe (July – current):** Running throughout all our campaigns has been our core Keep Merton Safe campaign, reiterating public health, NHS and Government guidance throughout the pandemic. This has included advice on social distancing, face-coverings, and outbreak control planning.
- 2.23. **Discover Merton (August):** Our summer campaign was targeted at parents, families and young people, and was aimed at helping them safely start enjoying the borough's open & public spaces again, encouraging local activities. This included a re-Discover Merton activities promotion for children & families as well as *Hearts in Parks*, aimed at encouraging a safe return to local parks to find hearts sprayed on the ground.
- 2.24. **Back to School Safely (August – September):** Our current campaign is aimed at parents and pupils, helping them understand and find the relevant guidance for safely returning to school, as well as providing information on safely preparing for cycle routes, walking routes, School Streets etc. ([See the campaign here on facebook](#))
- 2.25. **Active Transport –** this has been a regular feature of our campaigns, and our safe transport improvements have been highlighted through each campaign.
- 2.26. **Supporting Merton Businesses (April – current):** Using our website and business e-newsletter to promote take-up of business financial support, supporting the council to the 3rd-best performance in London for financial support to businesses.
- 2.27. **Outcomes**
- 1,000% increase in consumption of council communications (website news page visits March-July)
 - 100,000+ emails reached weekly with updates on guidance on information locally
 - Record levels of engagement with campaigns on social media
 - 40% open rate on weekly e-newsletter
 - 90% positive/neutral media coverage & social media sentiment

Internal Communications

- 2.28. **Channels**

- 2.29. **Intranet** – dedicated Staff Pages have been set up on the council intranet, along with regular blog updates from relevant directors on key issues such as remote working, risk assessments, manager support and safety guidance.
- 2.30. **Staff Bulletin** – between March and August, Staff Bulletins were issued each day at 5pm with comprehensive latest guidance on service changes, staff advice on remote working, safety updates, decisions affecting the borough and the latest Government updates.
- 2.31. **All Staff Briefings & Q&As** – Video briefings have been held every eight weeks for all staff, while Directors have held directorate video updates each month.
- 2.32. **Outcomes**
- 2.33. 92% satisfaction with communications from the council leadership team to staff during the pandemic (July Wellbeing Survey)
- 2.34. 86% of staff adapted well to remote working and feel well-supported in the change (July Wellbeing Survey)

Future priorities

- 2.35. **Keep Merton Safe (Ongoing)**
- 2.36. The next few months will focus on promotion of the Council's **Outbreak Control Plan**, which will be subject to resident & business communications as well as community group engagement.
- 2.37. **Shop Local, Shop Safe (October – December)**
- 2.38. This campaign will focus on the promotion of using local shops & town centres safely, particularly in the run-up to Christmas.

3 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

N/A

4 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED

N/A

5 TIMETABLE

N/A

6 FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS

To date, £50,000 has been allocated to communications from the ringfenced Public Health Covid-19 budget to cover the next 6 months. This is funding a temporary Senior Communications Officer for Public Health.

7 LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

All Council publicity is guided by (and meets the standards within) the Local Government Code of Publicity Conduct.

8 HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS

N/A

9 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

N/A

10 RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

N/A

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

- Campaign examples – Merton Together (series of visual examples of our social media communications)

12 BACKGROUND PAPERS

12.1. None

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Communications update – social media examples

Scrutiny Commission, September 9 2020

Page 15

Bringing #MertonTogether



Protecting the vulnerable and thanking our #MertonHeroes

Merton Council
April 15 at 12:30 PM · 🌐

...oliaUK are working hard to provide your recycling and rubbish collection service during this difficult time.


...se help them by keeping your waste to a minimum and checking what to put out ➡ <http://ow.ly/3VnO50zeBC6>



...tonRecycles 🌱 #MertonTogether 🤝 #MertonHeroes 🙌





65 10 Comments 4 Shares

65 likes, 10 comments of support for our bins and recycling crews....

 **Terry Davies Snr** Doing a fantastic job on [REDACTED] thank you.
Like · Reply · 1w

 **Terry Davies Snr**

Like · Reply · 1w

 **Stanka Pantusheva** Never took the time to think about how important you are in our lives. Thank you for all the hard work! 🌈
Like · Reply · 6d  2

Merton Council
 April 18 at 11:00 AM · 🌐

Pat from the reablement team.
 that she wears to work - head-to-toe in PPE so she can give vital
 residents who have tested positive for #COVID19.
 e Pat the recognition she deserves for her totally selfless work.
 Heroes 🙌 #MertonTogether 🙌



4 Comments 5 Shares

Like Comment Share

Patriona Saunders You are fabulous Pat
 Like · Reply · 3d

lyaan Tanv 🍷🍷🍷🍷
 Like · Reply · 3d

Sara Taylor
 🙌🙌🙌

Pat – our PPE-clad
 Merton hero,
 supporting those with
 confirmed cases of
 coronavirus
 (65 likes, 4 comments, 5
 shares)

Merton Council
 April 17 at 1:15 PM · 🌐

This is Dean, who is one of our bailiffs.
 Usually, his job involves paying people visits to collect debts.
 However, now he is making welfare visits and delivering food parcels to
 residents most at risk of a serious illness if they catch #COVID19 ...
 See More



49 6 Comments 9

Like Comment Share

Oldest ▾

Clair Marshall Residents most at risk my family has to self isolate
 for 12weeks because of my daughter with severe respiratory
 conditions and son is special needs we got a letter from st George's
 to isolate we havent recieved one ounce of help or food paroeel, me
 and my husband are both carers and I still have to go out and risk
 the health of my daughter
 Like · Reply · 3d

Sara Taylor Clair Marshall Contact AFC Dons. They are
 delivering great food paroeels. There is an email address on
 this link

Dean – bailiffs take on
 food deliveries to the
 vulnerable
 (49 likes, 6 comments,
 9 shares)

Merton Council

April 17 at 5:20 PM · 🌐

Sharing some photos of some of our @VeoliaUK crew members who are our #MertonHeroes 🙌

Today they are working hard to maintain recycling and rubbish collection services, despite the current situation.

Doing our very best to bring #MertonTogether 🙌



9 Comments 2 Shares

Like

Comment

Share

Lara-jane Sharpe



Like · Reply · 3d

Melanie Pheasant Yes they are amazing and doing a brilliant job for us in garth close x thank you

Like · Reply · 3d

Online support for bin collection crews (40 likes, 9 comments, 2 shares)



Merton Council

April 16 at 10:00 AM · 🌐

We would like to say thank you to our Council officers who are our #MertonHeroes 🙌

Many of our officers have been redeployed from their usual role and are working hard to help prepare food and care packages for our most vulnerable residents.

It's just one of the ways we're helping to bring #MertonTogether 🙌



You and 32 others

11 S

Thanking our redeployment heroes (32 likes, 11 shares)

Supporting Merton businesses



Updates on grant distribution, and appeals for businesses to get in touch with us...



Weekly borough Covid-19 e-newsletter



Every week we will bring you the latest news about the response to the coronavirus pandemic in Merton.

Hopefully you are finding our updates helpful!

We offer updates on other topics you may be interested in. Just take a moment to [update your preferences](#) to receive even more news and information from us on events and services plus emergency alerts and updates.

**Support our borough's businesses
and shop local whilst staying safe**



As lockdown begins to ease it is clear that the COVID-19 pandemic has brought changes to everyone's lives. We have all had to make adjustments to the way we work, live, exercise and shop. Some of these adjustments have seen positive changes, such as shopping more locally and using independent traders.

- Launched to keep residents informed of latest local developments & decisions
- Short-term only, with 100,000 recipients each week
- Open rate of (on average) 40%
- Up to 4,000 website visits from most popular updates

Merton Council
 April 14 at 11:05 AM · 📍
 Latest edition of #MyMerton is out now! 🌟
 For a vulnerable family member, friend or neighbour the
 includes useful information on:
 informed about coronavirus... See More



2 Comments 3 Shares

feature
 Protect yourself and others

COVID-19

We all have a part to play in stopping the spread of COVID-19. Here is a summary of the key health guidance on how you can try to avoid catching the virus and help protect those most at risk of developing severe symptoms.

How to avoid catching and spreading COVID-19

- The most effective way for you to protect yourself from catching the virus is by regularly washing your hands.
- Wash your hands for at least 20 seconds with soap and water. This is safer than hand sanitiser.
 - Always wash your hands after using public transport or after blowing your nose, sneezing or coughing.
 - Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands.
 - Cough and sneeze into a tissue, and then throw the tissue in a bin and wash your hands.
 - Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces in the home.

Why social distancing is so important

It is vital for everyone to limit their contact with others as this will help to reduce the transmission of the virus. Social distancing aims to help slow down the spread of the virus to those most at risk of becoming severely ill, including people aged 65 or over, people with health conditions and pregnant women.

- Keep your distance**
- Stay 2 metres apart from other people.
 - Work from home if this is possible.
 - Avoid social gatherings.
 - Avoid visits from family and friends.
 - Avoid all non-essential travel.

Advice and information

- For advice on how you can protect yourself, visit www.gov.uk/coronavirus
- The latest information on the virus is available on www.gov.uk/coronavirus
- For updates on Merton Council's actions to support vulnerable residents, visit www.merton.gov.uk/coronavirus

feature
 How you can help your community

Joining forces to support vulnerable residents

In these toughest of times, heart-warming stories continue to emerge about how residents across the borough are volunteering to provide support for their vulnerable neighbours.

As the numbers of COVID-19 cases increase, it is important that we look out for vulnerable residents in the borough who are at risk of a serious illness if they catch it. Public health advice is that vulnerable people and their carers should make special arrangements to stop them coming into contact with the virus known as shielding. This means not leaving their homes and maintaining all non-essential contact with other members of their household. Some who are most at risk will require practical assistance so, if you are willing and able to help, here are steps you can take to support those in need, whilst following the guidance on social distancing.

Connect and reach out to your neighbours – find new ways to stay in touch with neighbours you would normally see in person to check on their physical and mental health. Share contact details and call, video chat, email, instant message or text.



Make the most of local online groups – keep up-to-date, share information and be a positive part of your local community conversations. Share accurate information

Merton's volunteer workforce

Merton Voluntary Service Council (MVSVC) is the umbrella body for voluntary and charity groups in Merton, together with the voluntary sector in the borough, the council, Healthwatch and Merton Clinical Commissioning Group. We have mobilised the Merton COVID-19 Community Response Team to help isolated households and those most at risk from COVID-19.

MVSVC is connecting people in need of support with a volunteer who can provide assistance. More than 600 volunteers have already signed up but more are needed. Anyone who puts themselves forward may be asked to support people who are currently unable to leave their home by helping with essential tasks such as shopping, picking up prescriptions and helping to top up electricity and water bills.

If you are able to volunteer, contact volunteers@mvsvc.co.uk to offer your services.

If you need help with daily tasks and already receive support or services from a voluntary sector organisation in Merton, please contact them directly and they will help to signpost you towards the support that you need.

If you are isolated and need support, or know someone that does, please email help@mvsvc.co.uk or call 020 8488 2272.

Because of the expected high volume of calls, please be patient in getting through. We may need to take your details and ask a volunteer to call you back. Your assigned volunteer will take the time to fully understand your needs and how we may be able to help you through this difficult time. A dedicated, telephone-based team in touch service linking individuals to our trusted volunteers, will allow changing needs or circumstances to be supported wherever possible.

Merton Giving Coronavirus Fund

A fund has been launched by Merton Voluntary Service Council to provide grants to charities and voluntary groups, which are working locally to support people who are at risk of becoming severely ill with coronavirus. Please donate if you are able to. All money raised will help assist volunteers to deliver shopping and provide other vital support to vulnerable people who are isolated in

Friends In St Helier (FISH)

Friends In St Helier (FISH), usually run five social clubs which offer more than 500 older people every week a chance to meet friends, participate in activities and enjoy a freshly prepared hot meal. How the group have adapted their services to make sure people stay connected whilst self-isolating, and are delivering meals to members of their group who are most in need. They are also providing

The Spring and Summer editions were redesigned to focus on the latest news for audiences, including health advice to older people and support available through the voluntary sector

feature
 How you can help your community

Merton Covid-19 Mutual Aid Group

A borough has set up a support group to help vulnerable residents. The group is working alongside other organisations to provide vital support to isolated residents. The group is working alongside other organisations to provide vital support to isolated residents. The group is working alongside other organisations to provide vital support to isolated residents.

Zoe Doherty, 48, founded the Merton Covid-19 Mutual Aid Group to fill in the gaps between existing services, which attempts to support vulnerable people and those in isolation in the borough. The group is working alongside other organisations to provide vital support to isolated residents. The group is working alongside other organisations to provide vital support to isolated residents.

"The volunteers are all ages, and have come from many backgrounds. They will be working in a variety of ways, some are supporting, safely, essential and able to get groceries and toilet paper."

She added: "At just 65 years old, I was in school and working. I've never set up such a group and receive so much support from people across the borough."

With over 100 households, there are a number of the efforts, including dropping off supplies and administering medication.

Adult social care and support for vulnerable residents

Our social workers and other professionals are continuing to support our vulnerable residents. We are working with all providers of adult social care services and our care teams in Merton, to ensure we are helping our most vulnerable residents with the latest government guidance. This includes providing and ensuring open homes, as well as home care. All residents are doing everything they can to keep as safe as possible and we are working to plan for the possible future.

In line with the government's measures to prevent the spread of coronavirus, we made the very difficult decision to close Merton City Centre to the public from 23 March until further notice. We are continuing to work hard to provide vital services and to ensure our most vulnerable residents are supported. Alternative arrangements have been put in place for residents who require face-to-face services and we will provide further updates with details on this as soon as possible.

If you can, we ask you to limit full use of our website, instead of phoning the council, so this gives us more capacity to speak to those who cannot access online services.

If the information you need is not online, please refer to our A-Z guide of services in this edition of MyMerton for contact addresses and telephone numbers for specific services, or those who refer to adults and children, people requiring assistance and residents who are being subjected to domestic violence. Our customer contact centre is open on weekdays 9am and 5pm on 020 8545 4300. We appreciate your patience and support. Please check our website www.merton.gov.uk and our Facebook and Twitter accounts for further updates.