

Merton Council Overview and Scrutiny Commission



Date: 9 November 2022

Time: 7.15 pm

Venue: Council chamber - Merton Civic Centre, London Road, Morden SM4 5DX

AGENDA

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Overview and Scrutiny Commission membership

Councillors:

Edward Foley (Chair)
Mike Brunt (Vice-Chair)
Agatha Mary Akyigyina OBE
Billy Hayes
Usaama Kaweesa
Paul Kohler
Gill Manly
Nick McLean
Stuart Neaverson
Tony Reiss

Substitute Members:

Stephen Mercer
Thomas Barlow
Martin Whelton
Anthony Fairclough
John Oliver
Edith Macauley MBE

Co-opted Representatives

Mansoor Ahmad, Parent Governor
Representative - Secondary and Special
Sectors
Becky Cruise, Parent Governor
Representative
Dr Oona Stannard, Catholic Diocese
Roz Cordner, Church of England Diocese

Note on declarations of interest

Members are advised to declare any Disclosable Pecuniary Interest in any matter to be considered at the meeting. If a pecuniary interest is declared they should withdraw from the meeting room during the whole of the consideration of that matter and must not participate in any vote on that matter. For further advice please speak with the Managing Director, South London Legal Partnership.

What is Overview and Scrutiny?

Overview and Scrutiny describes the way Merton's scrutiny councillors hold the Council's Executive (the Cabinet) to account to make sure that they take the right decisions for the Borough. Scrutiny panels also carry out reviews of Council services or issues to identify ways the Council can improve or develop new policy to meet the needs of local people. From May 2008, the Overview & Scrutiny Commission and Panels have been restructured and the Panels renamed to reflect the Local Area Agreement strategic themes.

Scrutiny's work falls into four broad areas:

- ⇒ **Call-in:** If three (non-executive) councillors feel that a decision made by the Cabinet is inappropriate they can 'call the decision in' after it has been made to prevent the decision taking immediate effect. They can then interview the Cabinet Member or Council Officers and make recommendations to the decision-maker suggesting improvements.
- ⇒ **Policy Reviews:** The panels carry out detailed, evidence-based assessments of Council services or issues that affect the lives of local people. At the end of the review the panels issue a report setting out their findings and recommendations for improvement and present it to Cabinet and other partner agencies. During the reviews, panels will gather information, evidence and opinions from Council officers, external bodies and organisations and members of the public to help them understand the key issues relating to the review topic.
- ⇒ **One-Off Reviews:** Panels often want to have a quick, one-off review of a topic and will ask Council officers to come and speak to them about a particular service or issue before making recommendations to the Cabinet.
- ⇒ **Scrutiny of Council Documents:** Panels also examine key Council documents, such as the budget, the Business Plan and the Best Value Performance Plan.

Scrutiny panels need the help of local people, partners and community groups to make sure that Merton delivers effective services. If you think there is something that scrutiny should look at, or have views on current reviews being carried out by scrutiny, let us know.

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Agenda Item 3

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OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION

7 SEPTEMBER 2022

(7.15 pm - 9.30 pm)

PRESENT: Councillor Edward Foley (in the Chair), Councillor Michael Brunt, Councillor Agatha Mary Akyigyina, Councillor Billy Hayes, Councillor Gill Manly, Councillor Nick McLean, Councillor Stuart Neaverson, Councillor Tony Reiss, Mansoor Ahmad, Cruise, Dr Stannard and Roz Cordner

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Eleanor Stringer, Councillor Martin Whelton, Councillor John Oliver, Keith Burns (Head of Commissioning and Market Development), Zoe Gallen, Louise Round (Interim Executive Director of Innovation and Change) and Katy Saunders (Safer Merton Business Support)

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 1)

Apologies were received from Cllr Usaama Kaweesa (Cllr Martin Whelton as substitute) and Cllr Paul Kohler (Cllr John Oliver as substitute).

2 DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY INTEREST (Agenda Item 2)

There were no declarations of pecuniary interest.

However, Cllr Mike Brunt will abstain from voting on item 9 (as a Chair of CHAS).

3 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (Agenda Item 3)

Prior to the meeting, the Chair received an email from Cllr Paul Kohler requesting amendments to the minutes

Page 2 - First paragraph: On further questioning Cllr Ross Garrod confirmed a blueprint would be circulated within 12 months and this timeframe should be included in the minutes. The Panel RESOLVED to agree this addition.

Members of the Commission discussed Cllr Kohler's request that the minutes be expanded upon with regards to the AELTC, however Members agreed to leave as is, as the essence of that discussion is mentioned.

Lastly redacted minutes are available to Councillors on this Panel but we are aware there have been some difficulties with access on Modern Gov and this is being looked into.

The minutes were agreed.

4 BCU COMMANDER: CRIME AND POLICING IN MERTON (Agenda Item 4)

The Chair invited Chief Superintendent Lis Chapple to give a brief opening statement.

The Chief Superintendent requested to put on record her thanks to the people in this room, and to other partners, for the incredible and compassionate partnership work over the very sad incident that occurred in Galpins Road. It's been a time of significant difficulty for the families involved and I know a lot of the officers and Members in the room have given a lot of personal time to this issue. We continue to pursue our investigation on the matter.

The Metropolitan Police are now formally in special measures, as are several other forces nationally. I am in regular dialogue with the chief executives, including Hannah Doody, about our plans and how we'll be dealing with this.

We have a new Commissioner, Sir Mark Rowley, who starts on Monday and will be doing some press to set out what he hopes to achieve in his 100-day plan. We do know neighbourhood policing will be heavily prioritised.

In response to questions from Commission Members:

Neighbourhood crimes are burglary, anti-social behaviour, theft of motor vehicles and theft from motor vehicles. We have a combined burglary and robbery team as that's how resources across all BCU's are set up. Now because of the spike in robbery, from Monday, we will have split that team into separate robbery and burglary teams and I'm really hoping that that will help improve the focus and outcomes.

Across the whole BCU we do have the highest reductions of burglary in the Met so most other BCU's are showing a very small reduction or even a small gain, but we have overall the best rates for reducing burglary.

Regarding the issues raised at a public meeting in relation to how people's properties had been accessed in Galpin's Road, Cllr Whelton asked the Chief Superintendent whether she would be willing to attend one of the public meetings in Pollards Hill to help build trust with the community. The Chief Superintendent confirmed she is very happy to attend community meetings if that is needed.

The Ride-along Scheme is still in operation. Councillors can complete a short application form here:

Link to Ride-along scheme (currently working)

<https://www.met.police.uk/advice/advice-and-information/st-s/stop-and-search/ras/met/ride-along-scheme/>

The BCU is divided into two from a response policing perspective - we have two response bases.

- Twickenham - serves Kingston and Richmond
- Wimbledon – serves Merton and Wandsworth

Following the meeting, the Chief Superintendent supplied the information requested by Members below.

Neighbourhood officer vacancies

Wards with vacancies:

- Abbey - 1 PC instead of 2 as 1 PC is acting up as an Acting/PS
- Cricket Green - PCSO leaving to become PC
- Ravensbury - 1 PC has moved to Merton Park
- Village - 1 PC instead of 2 as 1 PC is acting up as an Acting/PS
- Merton Park - PCSO leaving for another role in the Met

Total Officers/PCSO's:

- 37 DWO's (3 under strength)
- 18 PCSO's (2 under strength)

There are 6 Sergeants, 2 are temporary in the role and the others are Substantive

Safer Schools Officers

The number of schools officers that Southwest BCU is allocates is 4 PS and 39PCs. There is currently 1 PC vacancy across the BCU which is at Kingston In the next few months we have the following leaving:

- 1 PS leaving on promotion
- 2 PCs leaving on promotion
- 1 PC moving to Heathrow
- 2 PCs retiring
- 1 PC resigned

Adverts have been put out and we have interested parties.

Sanction detection definition

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/191822/detection-open-data-notes.pdf

The Chair thanked the Chief Superintendent for attending.

5 SAFER MERTON: VAWG STRATEGY (Agenda Item 5)

The item was introduced by Katy Saunders (Interim Community Safety Team Manager), who provided an update on the work on the violence against women and girls agenda and the VAWG strategy which will cover 2022-25.

Merton Council plans to obtain white ribbon accreditation, which will demonstrate our commitment to engaging with men and boys to end violence against women and girls. We are currently working to recruit white ribbon ambassadors to help lead on

this work and we aim to launch the new strategy in November, during the 16 days against domestic violence and abuse campaign. During this year's campaign we plan to link in with a local partner AFC Wimbledon to send a clear message that men and boys in Merton want to be part of the change to promote equality and respect of women and girls and encourage the harassment of women to be called out.

In response to Commission Member questions,

- Our refuge provision has 17 beds for women that are fleeing domestic abuse. Of the 17 rooms/units - some are set up for women with children and some are set up for single women.
- Majority of reports are Domestic Violence based. Other classifications include forced marriages, honour-based violence, FGM and sexual violence.
- Sanction detection rates roughly around 15% for DV.
- Rape 6.3% (the conviction rate for rape nationally is extremely low - less than 1%).
- Domestic abuse cases are very complex, and investigations can take a very long time.
- The walk and talk initiative is still ongoing - female officers agreeing to meet with female members of the public to visit areas where women have indicated they feel less safe. Following this visit, we work with the Council and others to look at whether a lighting solution is needed etc.

Community Safety Manager happy to share the specific domestic violence profile produced by our data analysts.

6 PUBLIC SPACE PROTECTION ORDERS (Agenda Item 6)

The item was introduced by Alun Goode (Interim Head of Community Safety) and Katy Saunders (Interim Community Safety Team Manager).

Public spaces protection orders are one of a range of measures introduced by the anti-social behaviour crime and policing act 2014 to combat anti-social behaviour and its impact on individuals and the communities. A PSPO identifies a public space and prohibits certain activities within that area and a breach of a PSPO is a criminal offence.

In October 2020 the Council implemented a PSPO to address alcohol related ASB in the following five wards: Cricket green, Figges Marsh, Graveney, Lavender Fields and Ravensbury.

The current PSPO expires in October 2022 and from gathering evidence from our partners, and the results of the latest public consultation, we believe there is a case to extend the current PSPO for a further three years.

We also propose that work begins to consult on applying for a borough wide PSPO in future and this is with the aim of making Merton a responsible drinking borough and will help to ensure our public spaces, such as our parks, open spaces and town centres are places for everyone to enjoy safely.

In response to questions:

One of the reasons for looking at the borough wide consultation is because we are receiving complaints from residents in other parts of the borough, which indicates the problem is not confined to those five awards alone.

Cllr Martin Whelton would welcome an extension to Pollards Hill and borough wide.

There were six FPN's issued in the last financial year and in 2022 so far there's been two FPN's issued.

We've tasked the Kingdom officers over the past few weeks to attend Mitcham town centre daily. Last week they engaged with 21 street drinkers and in addition they handed out 16 leaflets to residents explaining what the PSPO is. It has also been explained to the Kingdom officers that they do need to offer the support information before going to the step of issuing an FPN.

7 SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT 2021/22 (Agenda Item 7)

A Commission Member commented that the report didn't contain enough information. The Scrutiny Officer explained that the report has been streamlined in comparison to its previous format to make it a bit more accessible, particularly for residents.

Other Members felt that the report has been presented in a professional manner and provides information about successes as well as the work of each Panel.

Cllr Whelton paid tribute to the work of the previous Chair of the Commission, Councillor Peter Southgate, who deserves rightful recognition of what he achieved over his 16 years.

A Member noted that reports like this evolve over time. Change was brought about to this report because of feedback that happened in the past. Therefore, as newcomers to scrutiny, we must go with the flow and develop things over time in the same way.

8 MEMBER SURVEY 2021/22 (Agenda Item 8)

Members discussed the low return rate of the survey.

It was around the time of the election that the information was being collected, with members leaving the council/stepping down.

The Chair reminded Members there is a collective responsibility to participate, as well as a personal responsibility, and we do need a higher return rate next year.

9 OSC WORKING GROUP FEEDBACK (CHAS) (Agenda Item 9)

The Chair invited Louise Round to speak on the report.

Whilst this item is on the forward plan for Cabinet on 19 September, this may be moved. It was decided that the final report would be agreed offline as some further information and amendments were still required.

10 WORK PROGRAMME (Agenda Item 10)

The work programme was agreed.

Cabinet

Date:

Subject: Draft Business Plan 2023-27

Lead officer: Caroline Holland – Director of Corporate Services

Lead member: Councillor Billy Christie - Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Services

Contact Officer: Roger Kershaw

Recommendations:

1. That Cabinet notes the approach to rolling forward the MTFS for 2023-27.
 - 2 That Cabinet confirm the latest position with regards to savings already in the MTFS
 - 3 That Cabinet agrees the approach to setting a balanced budget outlined in Section 4 as the basis for the setting of targets for 2023-27
 - 4 That Cabinet agrees the proposed savings targets based on a standstill position.
 - 5 That Cabinet agrees the timetable for the Business Plan 2023-27 including the revenue budget 2023/24 the MTFS 2023-27 and the Capital Programme for 2023-27.
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1. Purpose of report and executive summary

- 1.1 This report presents an initial review of the Medium Term Financial Strategy and updates it for development as part of the business planning process for 2023/24.
- 1.2 The report sets out the approach towards setting a balanced budget for 2023-2027 and a draft timetable for the business planning process for 2023/24. It also proposes initial targets to be met from savings and income over the four year period of the MTFS.
- 1.3 There is an update on the current information relating to the timetable for the Government's Spending Review / Budget.
- 1.4 Given the current high level of uncertainty over a range of factors that have the potential to impact significantly on the MTFS there is a sensitivity analysis of a number of issues including the potential impact across the MTFS period of current issues that impact on local government such as the current high level of inflation and also specific issues such as addressing the DSG deficit.

- 1.5 Finally, there is an assessment of the potential impact in 2023/24 and possibly beyond, of the coronavirus pandemic which first impacted at the end of the 2019/20 financial year.

Details

2. Medium Term Financial Strategy 2023-27

2.1 Background

Council on 2 March 2022 agreed the Budget 2022/23 and MTFS 2022-26. Whilst a balanced budget was set for 2022/23 there was a gap remaining in future years which needs to be addressed, as shown in the following table:-

	2023/24 £m	2024/25 £m	2025/26 £m	2026/27 £m
MTFS gap (cumulative)	4,618	18,791	21,659	27,767

- 2.2 The initial phase of the business planning process is to re-price the MTFS and roll it forward for an additional year. Development of the MTFS in recent budget processes allowed for various scenarios on a range of key variables to be modelled and it is intended to do the same this year and where feasible, to improve the approach to modelling.

Regular updates will be provided throughout the year as part of Business Planning reports for the MTFS period 2023-27 and the estimated impact of inflation, COVID-19 and eliminating the DSG deficit will be modelled and included in this analysis.

2.3 Review of Assumptions

The pay and price calculations have been reviewed using the approved budget for 2022/23 as the starting point.

2.3.1 Pay

Based on pay awards of 2% the provision in the MTFS approved by Council has been reviewed as follows:-

Provision for Pay Inflation:

(Cumulative £000)	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27
Pay inflation (%)	2.0%	2.0%	2.0%	2.0%
MTFS 2022-26 (Council 2/3/22)	1,920	3,840	5,760	7,680
Pay inflation (%)	3.0%	2.0%	2.0%	2.0%
MTFS 2023-27 (Latest)	2,974	4,957	6,940	8,923
Change (cumulative £000)	1,054	1,117	1,180	1,243

Pay Negotiations 2022/23

For 2022/23 the final pay award has not been agreed but provision of 2% was included in the MTFs, and 2% also for each subsequent year. On 6 June 2022, the three local government unions, UNISON, GMB and Unite, representing 1.4 million council and school employees, submitted a pay claim for staff in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The 2022 claim, which would apply from the start of April 2022, would see council employees receive either a £2,000 rise at all pay grades or the current rate of RPI (presently 11.1%), whichever is higher for each individual.

On 25 July 2022, the National Employers agreed to make the following one-year (1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023), final offer to the unions representing the main local government NJC workforce:

- With effect from 1 April 2022, an increase of £1,925 on all NJC pay points 1 and above
- With effect from 1 April 2022, an increase of 4.04 per cent on all allowances
- With effect from 1 April 2023, an increase of one day to all employees' annual leave entitlement
- With effect from 1 April 2023, the deletion of pay point 1 from the NJC pay spine

This offer would achieve a bottom rate of pay of £10.50 with effect from 1 April 2022 (which equates to a pay increase of 10.50 per cent for employees on pay point 1); everyone on the NJC pay spine would receive a minimum 4.04 per cent pay increase; and the deletion of pay point 1 on 1 April 2023, would increase the bottom rate to £10.60 (providing 10p headroom above the current upper-end forecast for the NLW on that date), pending agreement being reached on a 2023 pay award.

Potential rates of pay for London from 1 April 2022 based on the national employers' pay offer to the unions representing Local Government Services employees.

- With effect from 1 April 2022 the national offer is for a pay increase of £1,925 on all NJC pay points.
- In London this translates to an equivalent offer of £2,229 on all Outer London pay points and an increase of £2,355 on all Inner London pay points.
- Allowances to be increased by 4.04%

It is estimated that the overall increase in pay arising from this offer will be c.6.0%

National Living Wage

The offer from the National Employers also made the following comments about the National Living Wage (NLW):-

“At the pay briefings, your council may have been among those who supported a long-term (two years) pay deal, covering the period 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2024. A pay offer of that duration was until recently looking the most likely option for the National Employers. However, the current wider political situation means there is now some uncertainty that the current policy of the NLW reaching 66 per cent of median earnings in 2024 will remain as previously stated.

As was conveyed at the regional pay briefings, since its introduction in 2014, the NLW has presented a huge challenge for local government in managing to maintain headroom between the bottom pay points and the statutory NLW. Local government is almost alone in the public sector in having this challenge. Other public sector pay structures’ lower rates of pay are far enough above the NLW for it not to present the same pressure as we face and involve a far smaller proportion of those sectors’ workforces than is the case in local government.

The National Employers hold a longstanding principle of not pegging the bottom rate in local government to the NLW, as they do not believe the sector should be a minimum wage employer.

When the NLW was increased to 60 per cent of national median earnings in the last parliament, local government managed to achieve some breathing space by revamping its pay spine in 2018-19. On 1 April 2019, there was 79p headroom between the lowest local government pay rate and the NLW. However, following the General Election in December that year, central government introduced a revised policy for the NLW to increase from a target of 60 per cent of national average earnings, to 66 per cent by April 2024.

Since 1 April 2022, the bottom rate of pay in local government has been at parity with the NLW at £9.50 (pending this year’s pay award). 2020 to 2022 saw a 8.94 per cent increase in the NLW, while affordability of pay awards in local government has resulted in pay growth in the sector over the same period at only around half that: 4.55 per cent.

The economic turmoil over the past two years has only increased the volatility of the projections. In April 2020, the Low Pay Commission (LPC) set out that the projected NLW rate for April 2024 was £10.69. Due to the impact on the economy of the COVID pandemic, the OBR revised down this forecast to £10.10 in December 2020, though by April 2021, when the LPC published that year’s NLW consultation documentation, the projection had rebounded to £10.33. By the Budget in Autumn 2021, the projection had rebounded once more and stood at £10.70.

The LPC's latest published forecast for the NLW states from March 2022:

Although our recommendations in the autumn will be subject to Commissioners' assessment of economic conditions, our current best estimate for the on-course NLW rate in April 2023 is £10.32, within a range of £10.14 - £10.50. Our current best estimate of an NLW set at two-thirds of median earnings for those aged 21 and over in 2024 would be £10.95 within a range of £10.58 - £11.33. These are based on the latest wage growth forecasts, but actual wage growth may turn out higher or lower, and we will update these ranges in the summer based on changing forecasts. We will publish a report, to coincide with the increase in NLW and NMW rates, setting out this pathway in more detail.

This projection is the highest rate yet predicted for the NLW in 2023 and 2024 and there is no guarantee it won't rise further due to the ongoing economic volatility, potential impact of the international context and expected further increases in the rate of inflation. The lack of a fixed figure to work towards and the volatility of the forecasts of what the NLW rate will be, has made it difficult for local government to plan effectively over the past few years.

The National Employers fully support the increase of the NLW but have made clear to government that in meeting the cost of this policy, additional funding is required. If this is not forthcoming, jobs and services will be at risk as employers struggle to accommodate this additional cost when trying to balance their budgets.

Conclusion

The National Employers are eleven senior elected members, some of whom are Leader of their council. They are all acutely aware of the additional pressure this year's offer will place on already hard-pressed budgets, especially for those councils and schools with large numbers of employees on the lower pay points. However, for the reasons set out above, they believe their offer meets the NLW challenge (at least in the short-term) and is fair to employees, given the wider economic backdrop and is in line with awards made recently to other parts of the public sector workforce. However, they are also aware that without additional funding from central government, meeting the NLW challenge and providing a fair award for local government staff will come at a cost to jobs and / or service provision. The National Employers have written to the relevant government department (DLUHC) to make this point clear."

Unions are balloting their members on the offer. There are three recognised unions involved, Unison, GMB and Unite. Unison members have voted to accept the offer whilst the outcome of the GMB and Unite ballots will not be known until October.

Further details on any progress towards agreeing a pay award for 2022/23 and the impact on the MTFs, will be reported during the Business Planning process as more information becomes available.

Impact of 2022/23 Pay Award on MTFS 2023-27

The cost to the Council of the 2022/23 pay offer outlined above are expected to be c.6%.

Each 1% of pay costs c. £0.990m and if a 6% pay award is made in 2022/23 this will have the following impact on the MTFS 2023-27:-

	2023/24 £000	2024/25 £000	2025/26 £000	2026/27 £000
Additional Impact of a 6% pay award	3,960	4,039	4,120	4,202

2.3.2 Prices

The current assumptions regarding price inflation incorporated into the MTFS are

- 2.5% in 2022/23 and 1.5% in each subsequent year of the MTFS

The MTFS agreed by Council on 2 March 2022 includes the following provision for price inflation

Provision for Prices Inflation:

	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27
Price inflation in MTFS (%)	1.5%	1.5%	1.5%	1.5%
Original MTFS 2022-26 (cumulative £000)	2,139	4,278	6,417	8,556

This has been reviewed using the approved budget for 2022/23 and the latest estimate based on 1.5% price inflation is:-

(Cumulative)	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27
Price inflation (%)	1.5%	1.5%	1.5%	1.5%
Revised Estimate (cumulative £000)	2,282	4,564	6,846	9,129
Change	143	286	429	573

Each 1% of price inflation costs c. £1.5m.

Given the forecast level of inflation is not expected to drop back to 2.5% until 2024, the current 1.5% provision in 2023/24 may not be adequate and an increase to 3% in 2023/24 and 2% in 2024/25 is proposed

(Cumulative)	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27
Price inflation (%)	3.0%	2.0%	1.5%	1.5%
Revised Estimate (cumulative £000)	4,564	7,607	9,889	12,172

Net change in Pay and Price inflation provision:

The overall change in inflation provision since Council in March 2022 is

(Cumulative) (£000)	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27
Latest Inflation estimate	10,507	15,612	19,958	24,306
Original MTF5 2022-26 (Council March 2022)	4,059	8,118	12,177	16,237
Change	6,448	7,494	7,781	8,069

Current inflation

The Consumer Prices Index (CPI) rose by 9.9% in the 12 months to August 2022, down from 10.1% in July. On a monthly basis, CPI rose by 0.5% in August 2022, compared with a rise of 0.7% in August 2021. A fall in the price of motor fuels made the largest downward contribution to the change in both the CPIH and CPI annual inflation rates between July and August 2022. Rising food prices made the largest, partially offsetting, upward contribution to the change in the rates.

The Consumer Prices Index including owner occupiers' housing costs (CPIH) rose by 8.6% in the 12 months to August 2022, down from 8.8% in July. On a monthly basis, CPIH rose by 0.5% in August 2022, compared with a rise of 0.6% in August 2021. The largest upward contributions to the annual CPIH inflation rate in August 2022 came from housing and household services (principally from electricity, gas and other fuels, and owner occupiers' housing costs), transport (principally motor fuels), and food and non-alcoholic beverages.

The RPI rate for August 2022 was 12.3%, which is unchanged from July 2022.

Outlook for inflation:

The Bank of England's Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) sets monetary policy to meet the 2% inflation target and in a way that helps to sustain growth and employment.

At its meeting ending on 21 September 2022, the MPC voted to increase Bank Rate by 0.5 percentage points, to 2.25%. Five members voted to raise Bank Rate by 0.5 percentage points, three members preferred to increase Bank Rate by 0.75 percentage points, to 2.5%, and one member preferred to increase Bank Rate by 0.25 percentage points, to 2%. The Committee also voted unanimously to reduce the stock of purchased UK government bonds, financed by the issuance of central bank reserves, by £80 billion over the next twelve months, to a total of £758 billion, in line with the strategy set out in the minutes of the August MPC meeting.

The next Bank of England MPC base rate decision is on 3 November 2022.

In the minutes to the September meeting, the MPC gave a bleak economic outlook stating that "In the August Monetary Policy Report, the MPC noted that the risks around its projections from both external and domestic factors were exceptionally large, given the very large increase in wholesale

gas prices since May and the consequent impacts on real incomes for UK households and on CPI inflation.

Since August, wholesale gas prices have been highly volatile, and there have been large moves in financial markets, including a sharp increase in government bond yields globally. Sterling has depreciated materially over the period.

Uncertainty around the outlook for UK retail energy prices has nevertheless fallen, following the Government's announcements of support measures including an Energy Price Guarantee. The Guarantee is likely to limit significantly further increases in CPI inflation, and reduce its volatility, while supporting aggregate private demand relative to the Committee's August projections. An additional Growth Plan announcement is scheduled to take place shortly after this MPC meeting, which is expected to provide further fiscal support, and is likely to contain news that is material for the economic outlook. Once this announcement has been made, and as part of its November MPC round, the Committee will make a full assessment of the impact on demand and inflation from all these announcements, along with other news, and determine further implications for monetary policy..... Nevertheless, energy bills will still go up and, combined with the indirect effects of higher energy costs, inflation is expected to remain above 10% over the following few months, before starting to fall back.

The MPC's remit is clear that the inflation target applies at all times, reflecting the primacy of price stability in the UK monetary policy framework. The framework recognises that there will be occasions when inflation will depart from the target as a result of shocks and disturbances. The economy has been subject to a succession of very large shocks. Monetary policy will ensure that, as the adjustment to these shocks continues, CPI inflation will return to the 2% target sustainably in the medium term. Monetary policy is also acting to ensure that longer-term inflation expectations are anchored at the 2% target."

On 26 September the Governor of the Bank of England made the following statement:-

"The Bank is monitoring developments in financial markets very closely in light of the significant repricing of financial assets. In recent weeks, the Government has made a number of important announcements. The Government's Energy Price Guarantee will reduce the near-term peak in inflation. Last Friday the Government announced its Growth Plan, on which the Chancellor has provided further detail in his statement today. I welcome the Government's commitment to sustainable economic growth, and to the

role of the Office for Budget Responsibility in its assessment of prospects for the economy and public finances.

The role of monetary policy is to ensure that demand does not get ahead of supply in a way that leads to more inflation over the medium term. As the MPC has made clear, it will make a full assessment at its next scheduled meeting of the impact on demand and inflation from the Government’s announcements, and the fall in sterling, and act accordingly. The MPC will not hesitate to change interest rates as necessary to return inflation to the 2% target sustainably in the medium term, in line with its remit.”

On 4 August 2022, the Bank of England also published its quarterly Monetary Policy Report for August 2022. In this report the MPC include forecast quarterly CPI inflation rates over the next three years as follows:-

2022	2022	2023	2023	2023	2023	2024	2024	2024	2024	2025	2025	2025
Qtr.3	Qtr.4	Qtr.1	Qtr.2	Qtr.3	Qtr.4	Qtr.1	Qtr.2	Qtr.3	Qtr.4	Qtr.1	Qtr.2	Qtr.3
CPI %	CPI %	CPI %	CPI %	CPI %	CPI %	CPI %	CPI %	CPI %	CPI %	CPI %	CPI %	CPI %
9.9	13.1	12.6	10.8	9.5	5.5	4.3	2.6	2.0	1.4	1.2	0.9	0.8

The MPC’s analysis of this forecast are that “the direct contribution of energy prices to CPI inflation alone is expected to peak at 6½ percentage points in 2022 Q4. That is substantially higher than in the Committee’s forecasts over the past year, given the successive very sharp increases in global energy prices over this period. Together with higher indirect effects from energy prices, which can affect both goods and services prices, this accounts for most of the much higher outlook for CPI inflation over the first half of the forecast since May. Though responsible for much less of the rise in headline inflation, domestic inflationary pressures have also increased and are projected to be a little stronger than previously expected. In particular, it appears that the labour market is currently tighter than the Committee previously assumed. Together with a little more upward pressure on pay from higher price inflation, nominal private sector regular pay growth rises by more than in May over the first half of the forecast. This is broadly consistent with the Agents’ survey on employment and pay, which suggests that firms expect pay settlements to average 6% over the next year, higher than the equivalent survey set out in the February Report. As a result, CPI inflation is a little higher throughout the projection from this judgement.”

The latest inflation and unemployment forecasts for the UK economy, based on a summary of independent forecasts are set out in the following table:-

Table: Forecasts for the UK Economy

Source: HM Treasury - Forecasts for the UK Economy (September 2022)			
	Lowest %	Highest %	Average %
2022 (Quarter 4)			
CPI	7.4	14.0	10.2
RPI	8.7	17.7	13.1
LFS Unemployment Rate	3.6	4.5	4.1
2023 (Quarter 4)			
CPI	0.9	7.6	4.0
RPI	1.6	8.9	5.1
LFS Unemployment Rate	3.2	5.0	4.3

Note the wide range between highest and lowest forecasts which reflects the volatility and uncertainty arising from volatile fuel and utility costs impacting on the cost of living and the difficulty of forecasting how the situation will evolve. Clearly where the level of inflation during the year exceeds the amount provided for in the budget, this will put pressure on services to stay within budget and will require effective monitoring and control.

Independent medium-term projections for the calendar years 2022 to 2026 are summarised in the following table:-

Source: HM Treasury - Forecasts for the UK Economy (August 2022)					
	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
	%	%	%	%	%
CPI	8.3	4.7	1.3	1.6	1.8
RPI	9.1	6.5	2.4	3.1	3.4
LFS Unemployment Rate	3.9	4.2	4.2	3.8	3.7

2.3.3 Provision for Excess Inflation:

There is also a corporate provision which is held to assist services that may experience price increases greatly in excess of the budgeted inflation allowance provided when setting the budget. This will only be released for specific demonstrable demand. This was increased to £2.5m in 2022/23 but reduces to £0.5m from 2023/24 onwards. Whether this is sufficient is dependent on inflation reducing back towards the Government's 2% target by 2023/24 and the extreme volatility in utilities costs and supply being brought under control.

The provision in the MTFS is currently :-

	2023/24 £000	2024/25 £000	2025/26 £000	2026/27 £000
Budget in MTFS 2022-26	500	500	500	500

The cash limiting strategy is not without risks and if the inflation rate fails to return to the Government's 2% target levels of inflation by 2025/26 it will lead to further pressure on service budgets.

2.3.4 London Living Wage (LLW) and Living Wage Employer Accreditation

Merton is seeking accreditation as a Living Wage Employer and will introduce the Real Living Wage into Merton contracts - as and when the contracts come up for re-tendering (excluding Care Home contracts) – Phase I.

More work will be undertaken to ascertain a more realistic cost for implementing the LLW across Merton's Care Home contracts and this work will be carried out after Merton has achieved its Living Wage Employer accreditation – Phase II.

The total additional cost to the Council - for the life of contracts which do not currently cover LLW and excluding Care Homes - is in the region of £7.23m over the next five years. The Living Wage foundation reviews its rates each year. These rates are not in line with RPI and as such it is difficult to predict what the uplift will be year-on-year and the actual increased cost to the Council.

Contract	Financial Year					Total
	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	
Corporate Catering	£ 33,288	£ 33,288	£ 33,288	£ 33,288	£ 33,288	£ 166,440
Corporate Cleaning	£ 70,888	£ 70,888	£ 70,888	£ 70,888	£ 70,888	£ 354,440
Corporate Security	£ 56,410	£ 56,410	£ 62,051	£ 62,051	£ 62,051	£ 298,973
School Catering	£ 155,324	£ 155,324	£ 155,324	£ 51,775	£ 155,324	£ 673,071
School Cleaning	£ 169,669	£ 254,504	£ 254,504	£ 254,504	£ 84,835	£ 1,018,016
Home Care	£ 744,123	£ 372,062	£ 1,200,000	£ 1,200,000	£ 1,200,000	£ 4,716,185
	£ 1,229,702	£ 942,476	£ 1,776,055	£ 1,672,506	£ 1,606,386	£ 7,227,124

Figures in red are based on new contracts that would include LLW

Some figures vary year-to-year due to contract start / end dates not aligning to full financial year

The MTFS 2022-26 currently includes provision for the additional cost of implementing the LLW for the contracts included in the table above (i.e. excluding care homes) as follows:-

	2022/23 £000	2023/24 £000	2024/25 £000	2025/26 £000	2026/27 £000
Provision in MTFS 2022-26	521	711	2,382	2,430	2,478

The provision will be reviewed and an update provided in a future report once the final increase has been announced.

2.4 Income

- 2.4.1 The MTFS does not include any specific provision for inflation on income from fees and charges, as these have now been subsumed into the overall gap and therefore approach to targets. However, in the business planning process for recent years, service departments have been able to identify increased income as part of their savings proposals and increased income currently makes up c.6.3% of future savings.
- 2.4.2 It is also the case that the Council's income streams were decimated by COVID-19 in 2020/21 and there is uncertainty about how long it will take to return to pre-COVID19 budgeted levels.

2.5 Forecast of Resources and Local Government Finance Settlement

2.5.1 Background

The main elements of financial planning that impact on local government are summarised as follows

Spending Review

The Spending Review 2021 covered the period 2022/23 to 2024/25. It was published on 27 October 2021 at the same time as the Autumn 2021 Budget.

Spending Reviews set out departmental Resource and Capital Departmental Expenditure Limits for forthcoming years. Details from the Spending Review will form the basis of allocations to local authorities for 2023-27 and beyond as announced in the Local Government Finance Settlement 2023-24. The total amount of funding available for local authorities is essentially determined by the amount of resources that Central Government has allocated as part of its annual Departmental Expenditure Limit.

Fair Funding Review

The government first announced that there would be a 'fair funding review' in February 2016 which was followed by consultations in July 2016 and December 2017. The results of the latter were published in December 2018.

At the start of 2022 the government announced that it would be consulting on potential reform on local government finance "in the spring". The Government has stated its commitment to ensuring that funding allocations for councils are based on an up-to-date assessment of their needs and resources. The Government has also noted that the data has not been updated for a number of years and that it will work closely with the sector and other stakeholders to update this and to look at the challenges and opportunities facing the sector before consulting on any potential changes.

The Institute of Fiscal Studies (IFS) state that “the current spending needs formulas use data that is now around ten years ago and were originally devised in the mid-2000s. There hasn’t been a well-functioning funding system that takes account of both spending needs and revenue-raising capacity since the mid-2000s either. Funding allocations are therefore based on increasingly out-of-date data and arbitrary and ad hoc decisions. This is what prompted the Fair Funding Review in the first place. But it also makes it harder to deliver the Review, especially in the context of a funding environment that looks increasingly tight, not least due to rising inflation. That’s because the ‘fair’ funding allocations implied by the new formulas and funding system are likely to differ significantly from the out-of-date and arbitrary allocations local authorities currently receive. Moving to the new allocations would therefore create many big losers who would see their real-terms funding cut – and this group who would likely be much more vocal than those winning.”

The MTFS included an adjustment of £3m from 2023/24 on the prudent assumption that the Fair Funding Review and potential Brexit effect including the implementation of the levelling up agenda, would result in a net loss of funding.

Spring Statement 2022 and Autumn Budget 2022

Following the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the significant jump in utilities costs and inflation, the Government issued a Spring Statement on 23 March.

It is expected that there will be an Autumn Budget, probably around October 2022, and this may be accompanied by a Spending Review 2022. The financial implications of these for local authorities will be incorporated into the Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement 2023/24 which is usually issued in mid-December at the earliest. The funding announcements in the provisional Settlement will underpin the Council’s funding estimates for 2023/24.

Updates on the expected timetable for these announcements will be reported as part of the Business Planning process when further information is known.

- 2.6.2 The current level of resources included in the draft MTFS 2023-27 as agreed by Council in March 2022 is as follows:-

DRAFT MTFS 2023-27:				
	2023/24 £000	2024/25 £000	2025/26 £000	2026/27 £000
Revenue Support Grant	0	0	0	0
*Business Rates (inc. Section 31 grant)	*(41,216)	*(41,658)	*(42,105)	*(42,556)
Adult Social Care Grants inc. BCF	(5,010)	(5,010)	(5,010)	(5,010)
Social Care Grant	(6,282)	(6,282)	(6,282)	(6,282)
PFI Grant	(4,797)	(4,797)	(4,797)	(4,797)
New Homes Bonus	(300)	(300)	(300)	(300)
Corporate Funding in the MTFS	(57,605)	(58,047)	(58,494)	(58,945)

* Net of £3m adjustment for Fair Funding Review and Spending Review 2022 potential effect.

These figures currently assume the London Business Rates pool is not reintroduced in 2023/24 and that there is an annual 2% uplift for CPI inflation to the Business Rate multiplier. Funding levels have been netted down by £3m p.a. from 2023/24 to reflect the potential loss of funding (government grant and business rates) arising from the potential ongoing economic impact of COVID-19 and Brexit, and the potential redistribution of resources away from London which could result from the Government's Fair Funding Review and the levelling up agenda.

The Government's aim is to allow local authorities to retain 75% of their Business Rates income but this has been deferred and the deadline for implementation is not yet known.

Updates will be provided in future reports as part of the Business Planning process.

2.6.4 Social Care Funding

Improved Better Care Fund

In 2022/23 the Improved Better Care Fund (iBCF) was increased by £63m (3%) and £10m in London. This was an inflationary uplift on 2021-22 allocations in line with the September 2020 to September 2021 change in the Consumer Price Index (CPI) and the distribution formula was unchanged and the grant will continue to be required to be pooled as part of the Better Care Fund .

Merton's allocation for 2022/23 was

Improved Better Care Fund	2022-23 £m
Merton	5.010

Social Care Grant

National Social Care Grant allocations were increased by £636m in 2022-23. This grant is not ringfenced, and there are conditions attached on reporting requirements. In particular, local authorities can determine how much of it should be spent on adult social care and how much should be spent on children's social care.

Merton's 2022/23 allocation is:-

Social Care Grant	2022-23 £m
Merton	6.282

2.6.5 Business Rates - Update

As previously reported, due to uncertainty arising from COVID-19 and the collapse in Business Rates income replaced by government Section 31 grant, the London Business Rates pool was discontinued for 2021/22 and 2022/23. Although the economic position is slowly improving for businesses, it is not currently known whether there will be an attempt to reinstate the London pool for 2023/24. Reconciliation of final figures for when the London pool was in operation has not yet taken place as some London boroughs have not yet produced audited Statements of Account.

Updates will be provided as the Business Plan process develops.

2.7 **Council Tax and Collection Fund**

2.7.1 Council Tax

The Council Tax income forecast in the current MTFS agreed by Council in March 2022 assumes that the Council Tax Base will increase by 0.5% per year with a collection rate 98.75% from 2023/24 to 2026/27. It also assumes the following changes in Council Tax over the MTFS period:-

	2023/24 %	2024/25 %	2025/26 %	2026/27 %
Council Tax increase - General	2.0%	2.0%	2.0%	2.0%
Council Tax increase – ASC*	0%	0%	0%	0%

* Currently no provision to be able to levy an ASC charge but if allowed has no impact on the MTFS gap

On the basis of these assumptions the Council Tax income included over the period of the MTFS is:-

(Cumulative figures exc. WPCC)	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Council Tax - No change in rate	105,933	106,507	107,125	107,532
Council Tax – General (2%)	2,119	4,259	6,420	8,603
Council Tax income	108,052	110,766	113,545	116,135

The Council Tax Referendum Principles for 2023/24 will not be known until the Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement for 2023/24 is announced, usually around mid-December.

There are several main issues that need to be considered when formulating a council tax strategy for the MTFs period 2023-27:-

- i) To what extent will the high cost of living inflation impact on collection rates in 2023/24 and beyond?
- ii) Will the Government revise the referendum principles to enable Councils to set higher council tax levels as part as a move towards balancing budgets from local taxation?
- iii) What impact will the high level of inflation have on the level on collection rates in 2022/23 and therefore what level of budget deficit relating to council tax will it be necessary to fund in 2023/24 ? (This will be reflected in a Collection Fund deficit as at 31 March 2023)

The Council Tax Base will be updated later in the year following the return of the Government's CTB statistical return, usually in October, which is based on properties on the valuation list in September. The collection rate will impact on the council tax base.

2.7.2 Collection Fund

In the MTFs approved by Council on 2 March 2022, the shares to preceptors of the collection surplus/deficit for Council Tax and NNDR based on the estimated Collection Fund balance at 31 March 2022 are summarised in the following table:-

	Surplus/ (deficit) as at 31/03/22 Estimate	Surplus/ (deficit) as at 31/03/22 Estimate	Total surplus/ (deficit) as at 31/03/22
	Council Tax	NNDR	
	£000	£000	£000
Central Government	N/A	(4,939)	(4,939)
GLA	554	(5,537)	(4,983)
Merton	2,026	(4,490)	(2,464)
Total	2,580	(14,966)	(12,386)
Payable in 2022/23	3,701	(13,052)	(9,351)
3 year spread to 2023/24	(1,121)	(1,914)	(3,035)

2.7.3 Merton's share of the surplus/deficit for council tax and NNDR were built into the MTFs agreed by Council in March 2022.

2.7.4 Since then, the Council has produced its draft 2021/22 accounts as at 31 March 2022 which are currently being audited. The draft accounts for 2021/22 include the following surplus/deficit for Council Tax and NNDR as at 31 March 2022.

	Surplus/ (deficit) as at 31/03/22 Outturn	Surplus/ (deficit) as at 31/03/22 Outturn	Total surplus/ (deficit) as at 31/03/22
	Council Tax £000	NNDR £000	£000
Central Government	N/A	(6,652)	(6,652)
GLA	590	(7,459)	(6,869)
Merton	1,948	(6,051)	(4,103)
Total	2,538	(20,162)	(17,624)

2.7.5 The overall change in shares of surpluses/deficits is:-

	Surplus/ (deficit) as at 31/03/22	Surplus/ (deficit) as at 31/03/22	Total surplus/ (deficit) as at 31/03/22
	Council Tax £000	NNDR £000	£000
Central Government	N/A	(1,713)	(1,713)
GLA	36	(1,922)	(1,886)
Merton	(78)	(1,561)	(1,639)
Total	(42)	(5,196)	(5,238)

2.7.6 The net change in Merton's share of the surplus/deficit is therefore:-

	Estimated Surplus/ (deficit) as at 31/03/22	Outturn Surplus/ (deficit) as at 31/03/22	Surplus/ (deficit) as at 31/03/22 Change
	£000	£000	£000
Council Tax	2,026	1,948	(78)
NNDR	(4,490)	(6,051)	(1,561)
Total	(2,464)	(4,103)	(1,639)

2.7.7 There is no change to the surplus/deficit figures agreed for 2022/23 as all variations are managed via the Collection Fund. However, the net deficit of £1.639m will need to be taken into account when calculating the Merton General Fund's share of any surplus/deficit due to/from the Collection Fund in 2023/24.

2.7.8 The calculation of the estimated surplus/deficit on the Collection Fund as at 31 March 2023 will be made later in the budget process when key variables are firmed up and council tax base and NNDR returns have been completed. Until this time, the increase in the net surplus carried forward from 2021/22 of £1.639m will be included in the draft MTFS for 2023/24.

2.8 Capital Programme 2023-27 and implications for Treasury Management: Capital Financing Costs and Investment income

2.8.1 Council in March 2022 approved the following Capital Programme for 2021-26:-

Capital Expenditure	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
	Estimate	Estimate	Estimate	Estimate	Estimate
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Capital Expenditure	26,872	32,611	18,050	15,949	37,869
Slippage and Underspends	(5,118)	(2,408)	3,921	(119)	(392)
Total Capital Expenditure *	21,754	30,203	21,971	15,830	37,477
Financed by:					
Capital Receipts	1,856	900	900	900	500
Capital Grants & Contributions	14,778	18,730	10,177	5,756	4,464
Revenue Provisions inc. borrowing	5,120	10,573	10,894	9,174	32,513
Total financing	21,754	30,203	21,971	15,830	37,477

*Includes Multi-Function Devices finance lease.

2.8.2 Since the capital programme was approved by Council in March 2022 and the revenue implications built into the MTFS, there have been a number of amendments arising from outturn 2021/22, monthly monitoring and a review by project managers. There has been a great deal of effort made to ensure that the capital programme set is realistic, affordable and achievable within the capacity available. This has been accompanied by improved financial monitoring and modelling of the programme's costs over the period of the MTFS which has enabled the budgets for capital financing costs to be reduced and therefore scarce resources to be utilised more effectively.

2.8.3 It is important to ensure that the revenue and capital budgets are integrated and not considered in isolation. The revenue implications of capital expenditure can quickly grow if the capital programme is not contained within the Council's capacity to fund it over the longer term.

2.8.4 Following the closing and preparation of final accounts for 2021/22, the level of slippage required from 2021/22 and the re-profiling of schemes over the programming period has been undertaken to ensure that the level of capital budget is aligned with the Council's capacity to deliver it.

2.9 Reserves – Review of Earmarked Reserves

2.9.1 Reserve for Use in Future Year's Budgets

The Business Plan and MTFS for 2022-2026 approved by Council on 2 March 2022 forecast that a contribution of £8.112m would be required in 2022/23 with the balance of £8.513m applied in 2023/24.

Following the final accounts process for 2021/22 (subject to audit), the balance on the Reserve for use in Future Year's Budgets (subject to audit) on the Reserve as at 31 March 2022, excluding the contribution set aside for 2022/23 of £8.112m is £9.172m. This means that there is c. £0.659m more available to balance the budget over the MTFS period.

The reserve will be applied over the period of the MTFS to reduce the budget gap and enable longer term, strategic management of the budget.

It should be recognised that the use of reserves is a one-off form of funding and alternative ongoing savings would need to be identified to address the budget gap over the long-term.

2.9.2 Review of Earmarked Reserves

The use and availability of Reserves is monitored throughout the year as part of the monthly monitoring process.

It should be recognised that reserves are a one-off source of funding and should not be used to fund ongoing expenditure commitments.

2.10 Review of Outturn 2021/22 and Current Budget and Spending 2022/23

2.10.1 There may be issues identified during the final accounts process and from monthly monitoring, elsewhere on this agenda, that have on-going financial implications which need to be addressed in setting the budget for 2023-27.

2.10.2 Monitoring 2022/23

At period 4 to 31 July 2022 the year end forecast is a net £5.448m unfavourable variance compared to the current budget:-

	Original Budget 2022/23 £000s	Current Budget 2022/23 £000s	Year to Date Budget (July) £000s	Year to Date Actual (July) £000s	Full Year Forecast (July) £000s	Forecast Variance at year end (July) £000s
<u>Department</u>						
Corporate Services	29,209	30,090	10,020	11,709	31,234	1,144
Children, Schools and Families	60,401	60,995	17,699	20,902	61,995	1,202
Community and Housing	66,201	66,539	26,479	22,972	67,387	848
Public Health	(162)	(162)	651	(5,019)	(162)	0
Environment & Regeneration	11,763	11,931	366	(7,814)	16,723	4,792
Overheads		(267)			0	267
NET SERVICE EXPENDITURE	167,412	169,126	55,215	42,750	177,177	8,253
				6		
TOTAL CORPORATE PROVISIONS	166	(1,687)	7,969	1,349	(4,115)	(2,428)
Covid-19	0	0	0	52	52	52
TOTAL GENERAL FUND	167,578	167,439	63,184	44,099	173,114	5,877
FUNDING	(167,305)	(167,305)	(10,317)	(14,403)	(167,734)	(429)
NET	273	134	52,867	29,696	5,380	5,448

The main reasons for the variance based on July 2022 monitoring are:-

- a) Corporate Services: Marketing and communications, Press and publications, bailiffs service income, human resources
- b) Children's, Schools and Families: Child Social Care and Youth inclusion including agency social workers and Social Care Placements. Education - high transport costs. DSG budgets in line with Safety Valve Agreement is showing a deficit of £10.4m
- c) Environment and Regeneration: Regulatory Services, Parking Services income, waste services, Leisure and culture, Greenspaces, Future Merton, Building and Development Control
- d) Community and Housing: Adult Social Care placements, Housing General Fund – Temporary Accommodation

2.10.3 COVID-19

Hopefully the implications of COVID-19 will have been addressed by 2023/24 and not have a significant impact whilst recognising at the same time there have inevitably needed to be some changes to how the Council delivers some services. The most affected services, particularly those to vulnerable groups will continue to be reviewed and monitored to ensure that they are managed effectively.

2.10.4 Savings under pressure

As shown in the following table, the budget monitoring report for July indicates that some savings assumed in the MTFs are under pressure in 2022/23 and this may impact on 2023/24.

Department	Target Savings 2022/23	Projected Savings 2022/23	2022/23 Expected Shortfall
	£000	£000	£000
Corporate Services	550	395	155
Children Schools and Families	1,888	1,338	550
Community and Housing	1,659	305	1,354
Environment and Regeneration	1,898	833	1,065
Total	5,995	2,871	3,124

Monitoring of the delivery of savings is important and it is essential to recognise as quickly as possible where circumstances change and savings previously agreed are either not achievable in full or in part or are delayed. If this is the case, departments will need to identify replacement savings from elsewhere within their overall budgets. If it is not possible to find replacements, if any of the savings included in the MTFs approved by Council in March 2022 are not achieved this will result in an increase in the budget gap and increase pressure on services. The projected shortfall in savings of c. £3.124m in 2022/23 will add to the budget gap and make it more difficult to achieve the balanced budget that is a statutory requirement.

2.10.5 Growth

New proposals for growth in service budgets will be considered at a future meeting.

2.11 DSG Safety Valve Agreement – implications for the MTFs

2.11.1 The DSG deficit was moved to an unusable reserve at the end of 2020/21 and will continue to grow unless action is taken. Resolution of the underlying problem was a consistent cause of uncertainty throughout 2021/22 but, following negotiations, agreement was reached with the government

(Department for Education) and a Dedicated Schools Grant “Safety Valve” Agreement signed in March 2022 with the DfE.

2.11.2 Under the terms of the Agreement it is planned that the DSG deficit will be cleared by 2026/27 and thereafter will need to be effectively managed so that it breaks even, year on year.

2.11.3 As reported in the 2021/22 Outturn report to Cabinet, the first phase of implementing the Safety Valve Agreement has been executed and had a significant impact in 2021/22 with receipt of £11.6m Safety Valve Grant turning an overspend of £0.8m in 2021/22 to an underspend of £10.8m. For the Medium Term Financial Strategy, the Safety Valve Agreement will have an ongoing impact on future years and, subject to successful implementation it will eliminate the deficit by 2026/27.

2.11.4 Although they will continue to be a continuing, but reducing annual deficit until 2026/27, thereafter it should breakeven.

2.11.5 In monitoring and managing the elimination of the DSG deficit, there are four key elements:-

- The DSG Deficit Unusable Reserve
- The Spending Review Reserve containing Merton resources to contribute towards eliminating the deficit
- Merton’s annual revenue budget towards eliminating the deficit
- The Government’s Safety Valve grant payments up to 2026/27

2.11.6 The financial implications of the Safety Valve Agreement if successfully implemented, over the period of the MTFs, are summarised as follows:-

DSG Unusable Reserve	Outturn 2021/22 £m	Forecast 2022/23 £m	Forecast 2023/24 £m	Forecast 2024/25 £m	Forecast 2025/26 £m	Forecast 2026/27 £m
B/F DSG Deficit	24.98	26.93	31.03	32.93	34.03	34.23
In year deficit	13.55	7.10	5.40	4.60	3.70	(0.90)
Sub-total	38.53	34.03	36.43	37.53	37.73	33.33
Safety Valve Payments	(11.60)	(3.00)*	(3.50)	(3.50)	(3.50)	(3.20)
Deficit c/f	26.93	31.03	32.93	34.03	34.23	30.13

* Safety Valve payment £3.5m less £0.5m required for staffing costs

Spending Review Reserve Cover for DSG	Outturn 2021/22 £m	Forecast 2022/23 £m	Forecast 2023/24 £m	Forecast 2024/25 £m	Forecast 2025/26 £m	Forecast 2026/27 £m
B/f Provision	23.74	26.93	31.03	32.93	34.03	34.23
Budget provision for DSG Deficit	14.08	10.54	11.63	12.71	13.80	15.00
Revised balance	37.82	37.47	42.66	45.64	47.83	49.23
Sum Required to meet DSG Deficit	26.93	31.03	32.93	34.03	34.23	30.13
Balance available to be released/(overspend)	10.89	6.44	9.73	11.61	13.60	19.10
Less: Corporate contribution		0.50	0.50	0.50	0.50	0.50
Balance Available for Other purposes		5.94	9.23	11.11	13.10	18.60

2.11.7 As can be seen, successful implementation of the Safety Valve Agreement will enable c. £58m of revenue resources to be used on other council services whereas failure to implement the Agreement will jeopardise the £28.8m grant that the government has pledged if the Council eliminates the deficit.

3. Re-priced MTFS 2023-27

3.1 As indicated in the report, there have been a number of changes to information and data to factors which impact on the Council's MTFS and budget gap.

3.2 The net result of making these adjustments is to amend the forecast budget gap to the following:-

(cumulative)	2023/24 £000	2024/25 £000	2025/26 £000	2026/27 £000
MTFS Gap (Council March 2022)	4,618	18,791	21,659	27,767
- DSG Safety Valve Benefit	(9,228)	(11,114)	(13,099)	(18,600)
- Inflation reprice - Pay and Prices	7,439	8,486	8,773	9,060
- Collection fund deficit revised for 21/22 outturn	1,629	0	0	0
- Capital financing costs (July monitoring, No slippage)	440	405	410	463
- Waste contract	0	0	1,800	1,800
- Parking contract and systems	0	0	900	900
- Use of Reserves	(659)	0	0	0
Revised MTFS Gap 2023-27	4,239	16,568	20,443	21,390

3.3 There has been a substantial improvement in the council's strategic approach to business planning in recent years and it is important that this is maintained. Planning should be targeted towards the achievement of a balanced budget over the four year MTFS period.

3.4 Progress made in recent years in identifying savings over the whole period of the MTFS has reduced pressure on services to make short-term, non-strategic cuts. Hopefully, the impact and uncertainty of COVID-19 and the DSG Deficit issue have been brought under control and although there is currently the problem of high levels of inflation, this will be relatively short term and can be managed over the MTFS period to reduce the budget gap by the end of the four year period.

3.5 However, whilst recognising the great level of uncertainty about future costs and funding, it is still necessary to forward plan and set savings targets aimed at eliminating this gap on an ongoing basis.

4. Approach to Setting a Balanced Budget

4.1 This is the initial report on the business planning process for 2023/24 and there is a great deal of work to be done.

4.2 Savings Targets for 2023-27

4.2.1 In previous years the approach to setting savings targets for departments for the Business Planning process has been based on using controllable budgets and aimed to protect front-line services and services to the vulnerable in line with the 'July principles'. Weightings for each department; Corporate Services, Environment and Regeneration, Community and Housing, and Children, Schools and Families in the ratio (100%) : (100%) : (67%) : (50%), were applied to reduce the impact on Adult Social Care, Children's Social Care and vulnerable groups. The targets set also took into account the level to which departments had achieved savings against targets set for previous years. The

balance of unachieved savings targets from last year's business planning process are summarised below:-

	Targets £'000	Proposals £'000	Balance £'000
Corporate Services	5,222	254	4,968
Children, Schools & Families	3,533	518	3,015
Environment & Regeneration	7,257	624	6,633
Community & Housing	8,033	1,100	6,933
Total	24,044	2,496	21,549

4.2.2 APPROACH FOR 2023-24

It is proposed that the savings targets for 2023-2027 are based entirely on each service department's controllable budgets for 2022/23 which are as follows:-

DEPARTMENTAL SAVINGS TARGETS USING 2022/23 CONTROLLABLE BUDGETS	Controllable Expenditure 2022/23 £000	Weighting by dept. No.	Weighted Controllable £000	Weighted Controllable %
Corporate Services	31,081	1.50	46,621	23.4%
Children, Schools and Families	38,032	0.75	28,524	14.3%
Environment and Regeneration	38,990	1.50	58,484	29.4%
Community and Housing	65,353	1.00	65,353	32.8%
Total	173,455		198,982	100%

4.2.3 Savings targets to address the revised gap on the MTFs are then calculated using the latest controllable budgets:-

SAVINGS TARGETS BY DEPARTMENT	Allocation using controllable budgets £000	Total £000
Corporate Services	5,012	5,012
Children, Schools and Families	3,066	3,066
Environment and Regeneration	6,287	6,287
Community and Housing	7,025	7,025
Total	21,390	21,390

SAVINGS TARGETS BY DEPARTMENT	2023/24 £000	2024/25 £000	2025/26 £000	2026/27 £000	Total £000
Corporate Services	993	2,889	908	222	5,012
Children, Schools and Families	608	1,767	555	136	3,066
Environment and Regeneration	1,246	3,624	1,139	278	6,287
Community and Housing	1,392	4,049	1,273	311	7,025
Total	4,239	12,329	3,875	947	21,390
Total (cumulative)	4,239	16,568	20,443	21,390	

5. Alternative Options

5.1 The range of options available to the Council relating to the Business Plan 2023-27 and for setting a balanced revenue budget and fully financed capital programme will be presented in reports to Cabinet and Council in accordance with the agreed timetable which is set out in Appendix 1.

6. Consultation Undertaken or Proposed

6.1 All relevant bodies have been consulted.

7. Timetable

7.1 In accordance with current financial reporting timetables.

7.2 A chart setting out the proposed timetable for developing the business plan is provided as Appendix1.

8. Financial, resource and property implications

8.1 As contained in the body of the report.

9. Legal and statutory implications

9.1 As outlined in the report.

10. Human rights, equalities and community cohesion implications

10.1 None for the purposes of this report, these will be dealt with as the budget is developed for 2023 – 2027.

11. Crime and Disorder Implications

11.1 Not applicable.

12. Risk Management and health and safety implications

- 12.1 There is a specific key strategic risk for the Business Plan, which is monitored in line with the corporate risk monitoring timetable.

13. Appendices – The following documents are to be published with this Report and form part of the Report.

Appendix 1 – Business Plan Timetable 2023-27

Appendix 2 – Revised MTFS Gap

14. Background Papers

- 14.1 The following documents have been relied on in drawing up this report but do not form part of the report:

2021/22 Budgetary Control and Final Accounts Working Papers in the Corporate Services Department.

2022/23 Budget Monitoring working papers

MTFS working papers

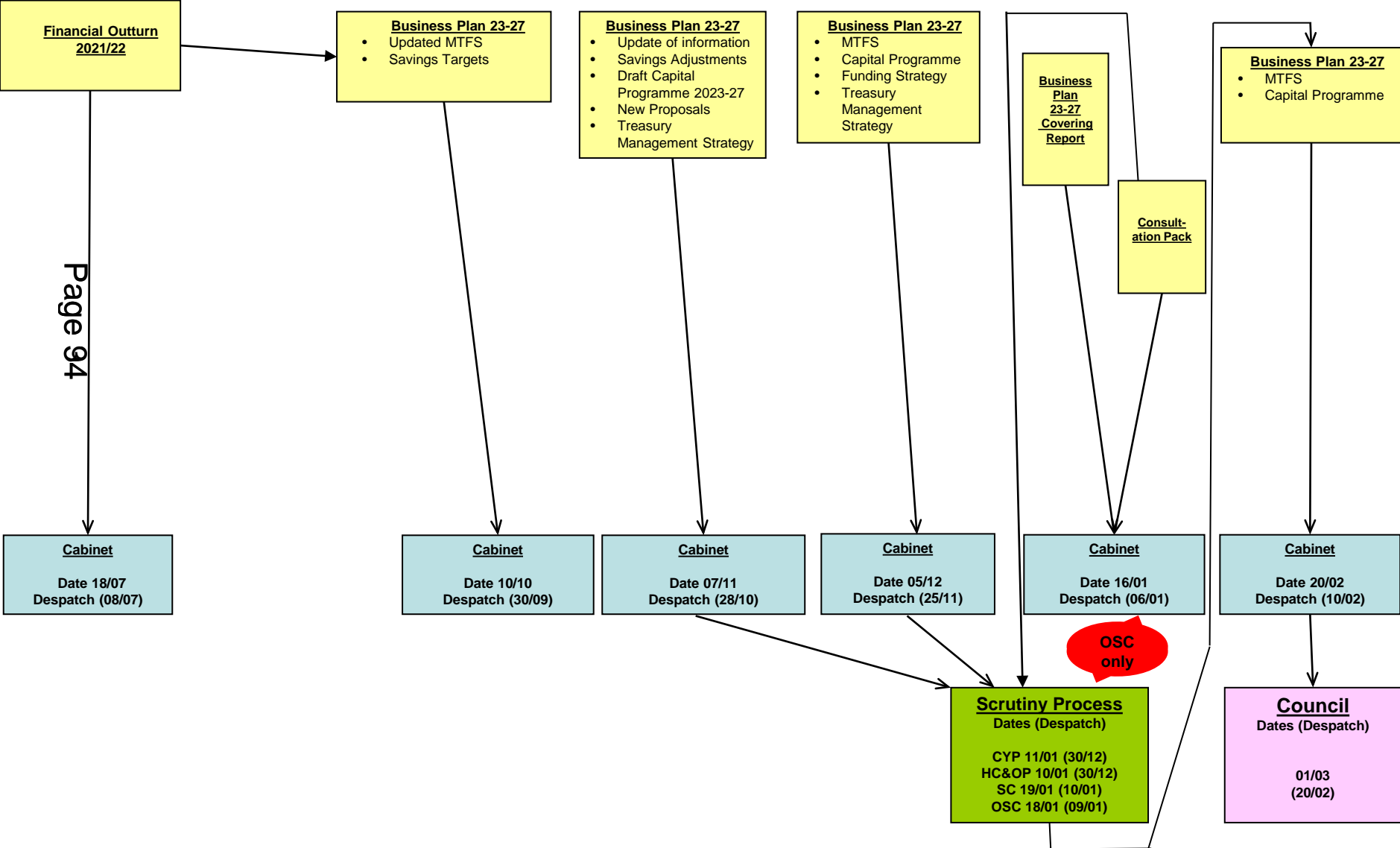
15. REPORT AUTHOR

- Name: Roger Kershaw

- Tel: 020 8545 3458

email: roger.kershaw@merton.gov.uk

BUSINESS PLANNING TIMETABLE - BUSINESS PLAN 2023-27



OSC only

DRAFT MTFS 2023-27:				
	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27
	£000	£000	£000	£000
Departmental Base Budget 2021/22	173,022	173,022	173,022	173,022
Inflation (Pay, Prices)	8,229	14,926	19,191	23,456
NI increase	7	16	24	32
Salary oncost increase (15.2% to 17.06%)	48	72	96	120
FYE – Previous Years Savings	(2,218)	(2,166)	(2,063)	(2,072)
FYE – Previous Years Growth	390	390	390	390
Amendments to previously agreed savings/growth	0	0	0	0
Change in Net Appropriations to/(from) Reserves	(3,226)	(3,226)	(3,676)	(3,676)
Taxi card/Concessionary Fares	1,457	4,468	5,712	5,712
Social Care - Additional Spend offset by grant/precept	(479)	(469)	(482)	(477)
Growth	0	0	0	0
DSG Safety Valve	0	0	0	0
Provision - DSG Deficit	2,400	1,600	700	(3,600)
Contract increases	0	0	2,700	2,700
Other	4,440	4,599	4,760	4,922
Re-Priced Departmental Budget	184,070	193,232	200,374	200,530
Treasury/Capital financing	11,968	12,989	12,821	16,335
Pensions	0	0	0	0
Other Corporate items	(20,050)	(20,323)	(20,646)	(20,328)
Levies	611	611	611	611
Sub-total: Corporate provisions	(7,471)	(6,723)	(7,214)	(3,382)
Sub-total: Repriced Departmental Budget + Corporate Provisions	176,598	186,509	193,160	197,147
Savings/Income Proposals 2022/23	0	0	0	0
Sub-total	176,598	186,509	193,160	197,147
Appropriation to/from departmental reserves	(752)	(752)	(302)	(302)
Appropriation to/from Balancing the Budget Reserve	(9,172)	0	0	0
ONGOING IMPACT OF COVID-19 (NET)	505	0	0	0
BUDGET REQUIREMENT	167,179	185,757	192,858	196,845
Funded by:				
Revenue Support Grant/Covid RNF & LCTS grant	0	0	0	0
Business Rates (inc. Section 31 grant)	(41,216)	(41,658)	(42,105)	(42,556)
Adult Social Care Grants inc. BCF	(5,010)	(5,010)	(5,010)	(5,010)
Social Care Grant	(6,282)	(6,282)	(6,282)	(6,282)
PFI Grant	(4,797)	(4,797)	(4,797)	(4,797)
New Homes Bonus	(300)	(300)	(300)	(300)
Council Tax inc. WPCC	(108,428)	(111,141)	(113,921)	(116,510)
Collection Fund – (Surplus)/Deficit	3,093	0	0	0
Market Sustainability and Fair Cost of Care Fund	0	0	0	0
2022/23 Services Grant	0	0	0	0
TOTAL FUNDING	(162,940)	(169,188)	(172,414)	(175,455)
GAP including Use of Reserves (Cumulative)	4,239	16,568	20,443	21,390

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OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMISSION

Date: 09 November 2022

Wards: All

Subject: Council's Website

Lead officer: Sean Cunniffe, Head of Customer Contact

Lead Member: Councillor Christie, Cabinet Member for Finance & Corp Services

Recommendations:

That the Commission note the contents of this report and proposes any further requirements for the review or recommendations moving forward.

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This briefing paper is providing some analysis and feedback on the website as requested by the Overview & Scrutiny Commission.

2. BACKGROUND

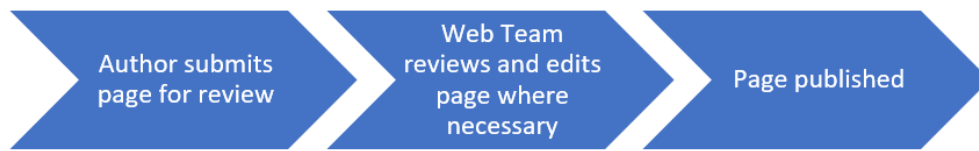
- 2.1 We currently have around 1500 pages on our main website www.merton.gov.uk. This is down from around 2300 in 2016. As part of the first phase of the Customer Contact Programme, redundant and unused pages were deleted, to make the site easier to navigate and manage. We constantly review customer feedback to identify gaps in content and add missing information where needed.
- 2.2 As part of the Customer Contact programme one of the key deliverables was a full refresh and migration of the Council's website to deliver a suite of on-line transactions and designed to ensure customers can easily access information and services across a myriad of devices.
- 2.3 The Strategy aimed at meeting the changing needs of our customers for access to services and, in particular, for services accessed on-line.
- 2.4 Our then partners engaged a design agency looking at best practice across all local authorities and central government, branding, and accessibility requirements. They also consulted internally with officers and service users.
- 2.5 We redesigned and automated a number of processes (over 100) with integration through the CRM system into partner systems.
- 2.6 In December 2018 the system was transferred to a new hosted environment and support arrangements. This proved less than ideal, and the entire system was transferred over to a new platform (as the previous one was no longer supported).

This significantly improved reliability issues with our external website that was often subject to downtime before the transfer.

- 2.7 Since then we have continued the development of processes and integrated commercial “apps” such as Fix My Streets through to relevant service areas to ensure customers are not disadvantaged by delays and can use the method of reporting that is most suitable to them.
- 2.8 The website continues to be a key communication aid. This has been particularly prevalent over the years and can be demonstrated by the response to the global pandemic, Britannia Point and Galpins Road incidents and more lately our response to the passing of The Queen.

3. Content governance and maintenance

- 3.1 The Web Team, consisting of 2 FTE, have overall governance of the website, acting as gatekeepers and content curators.
- 3.2 Pages that are updated frequently in a standard format (for example licensing registers, roadworks bulletin, Mayor’s calendar) are edited by staff in the relevant service area and sent to the Web Team for review before they are published.



- Other pages are edited by the Web Team directly.
- 3.3 Before publishing content, the Web Team edits it where necessary to ensure that it’s written in Plain English, follows Merton’s Style Guide, Government Digital Service content design guidelines, and the legally mandated “WCAG 2.1 AA” accessibility guidelines. These guidelines are very detailed, and content design is a skilled task, so this review stage is important.
- 3.4 Service managers are responsible for ensuring that the web pages about their services are kept up to date. When an update is required, they can update it directly if they have access to Drupal, or contact the Web Team to request an edit. The Web Team also undertakes regular pro-active reviews of content, working with services to identify redundant and out of date content. We aim to review every page on the website once a year.
- 3.5 The monthly accessibility index published by Socitm (Society of IT Managers) and Silktide (“Silktide Index”) currently rate our website as “Excellent” for accessibility. This is based on automated testing for a selection of the WCAG 2.1 guidelines.

3.6 There is a customer feedback option at the end of all web pages and e-forms. The Web Team review all feedback monthly and use this to drive improvement as demonstrated in the performance data below.

4. CURRENT USERS

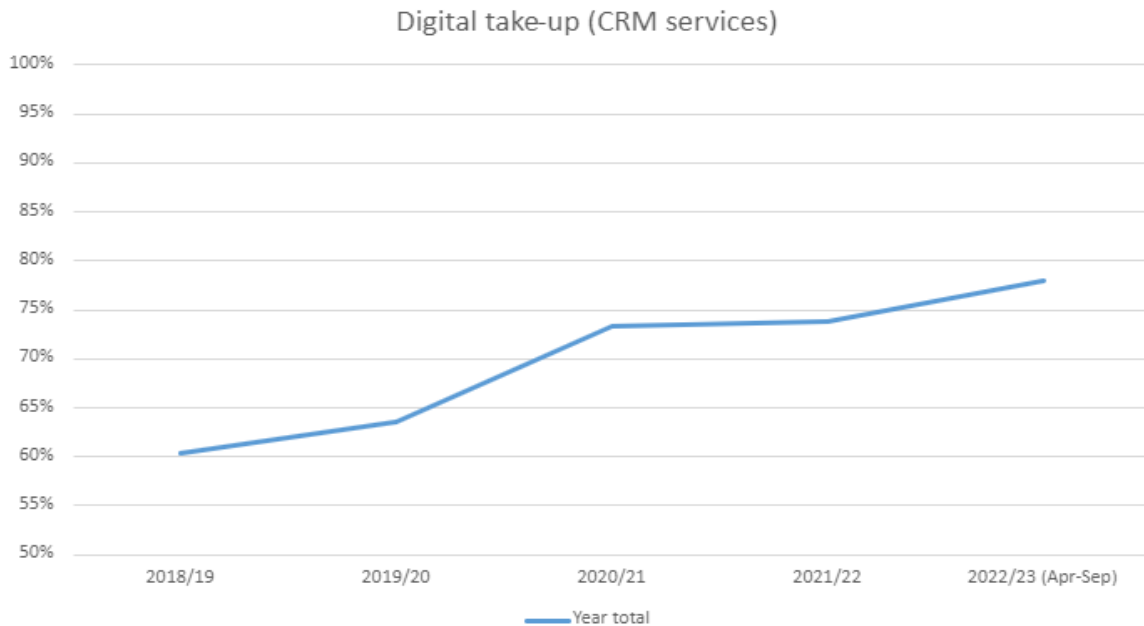
4.1 We currently use Google analytical tools to understand and gain an insight into our website users, what they are viewing and the device being used to access it. Key information can be found in Appendix A.

5 CURRENT PERFORMANCE

5.1 One of the key performance indicators we measure is the amount of digital take-up of services as opposed to telephone requests. The graph below shows the continuous improvement attained throughout the year and the rise of on-line transaction being performed by residents.

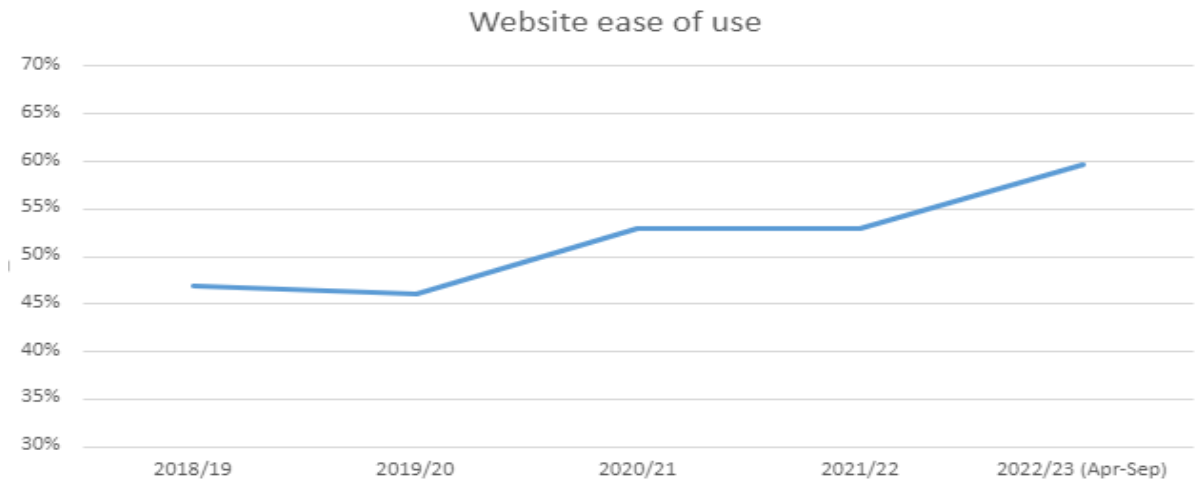
5.2 It was originally thought that our target was ambitious, but the results clearly demonstrate that residents are happy using the on-line functionalities that we have developed over time.

				CRP 118 / SP 548 Digital take-up (CRM services)		CRP 118 / SP 548 Digital take-up (CRM services)
	Actual	Actual	Actual	Actual		Target
	2022/23	2022/23	2022/23	2022/23		2022/23
Month	Digital transactions (web + FixMyStreet web + FixMyStreet app)	Phone transactions	Total transactions	Digital take-up	Month	Digital take-up
April	9,216	2,732	11,948	77%	April	71%
May	10,328	2,932	13,260	78%	May	72%
June	12,248	3,785	16,033	76%	June	69%
July	10,397	2,992	13,389	78%	July	70%
August	10,398	2,890	13,288	78%	August	72%
September	9,594	2,456	12,050	80%	September	70%



5.3 The other key performance indicator measured against the website is ease of use that is collated from @ 400 responses made by users each month. Members will note the significant improvement in 2022/23 due to continuous improvements.

	Actual	Actual	Actual	Actual	Actual	Actual	Target setting	
Month	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	Average (3yrs)	Improve by	Target 2022/23
Apr	37%	46%	53%	50%	60%	50%	1%	61%
May	47%	42%	53%	55%	60%	50%	1%	61%
Jun	47%	47%	51%	51%	58%	50%	1%	59%
Jul	51%	48%	41%	45%	60%	45%	1%	61%
Aug	53%	49%	58%	46%	60%	51%	1%	61%
Sep	52%	47%	48%	53%	58%	49%	1%	59%
Oct	47%	48%	48%	45%		47%	1%	48%



The target is reviewed each month to ensure it is challenging throughout the year and although the target improvement is relatively low against the current year it should be considered against the 3-year average given.

- 5.4 Between 21 September – 20 October 2022 we conducted a user survey on the website. This was slightly delayed due to the passing of The Queen. A relatively low number of responses were received, and the results can be found in Appendix B. Work continues to analyse the results and determining the appropriate way forward to address any highlighted concerns or issues.

6. NEXT STEPS/MOVING FORWARD

- 6.1 The website continues to be work a in progress and is continuously reviewed for accuracy and performance levels. Feedback is monitored daily to understand the needs of the customer and wherever possible, changes made where appropriate.
- 6.2 Developmental work continues to be undertaken to further develop services a fully digitised offering through the website to maintain our guiding principle of digital by design to enable residents a fully accessible 24/7. Integration to line of business systems is imperative to avoid double-entry of data.
- 6.3 Preliminary work continues to be undertaken into the feasibility of connecting all on-line functionality under a single sign-on customer account.
- 6.4 A fully mediated access to services is available for those with accessibility issues either over the telephone or through our Library network.
- 6.5 Members should be encouraged, and have confidence in, using the on-line functionality of services instead of utilising the Members enquiry for service requests as this would alleviate a high level of administrative work and duplication.

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Data for www.merton.gov.uk

Year to 30 September 2022

Users

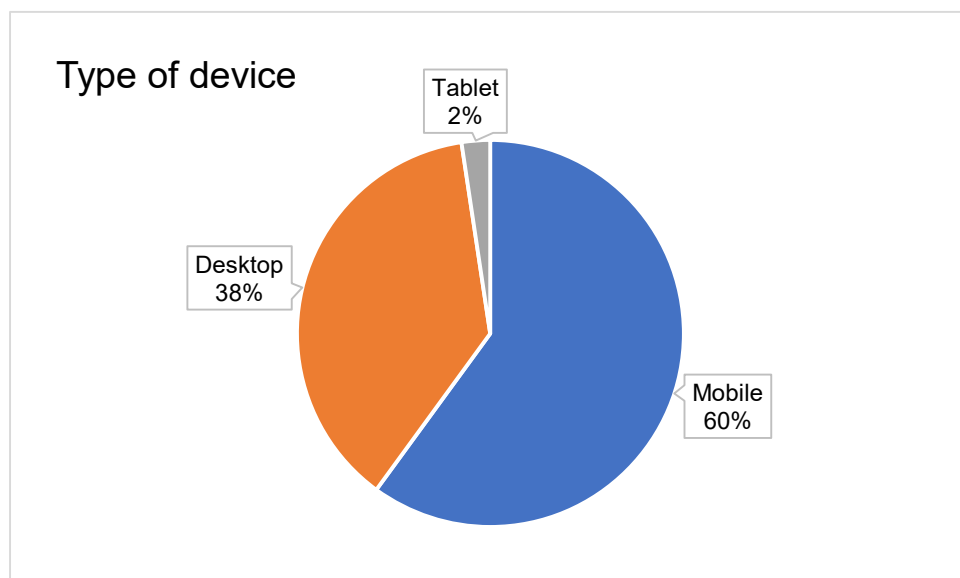
Source: Google Analytics

Page Views	Users	Sessions (visits)
6,495,849	2,374,224	4,644,597

Type of device used

Source: Google Analytics

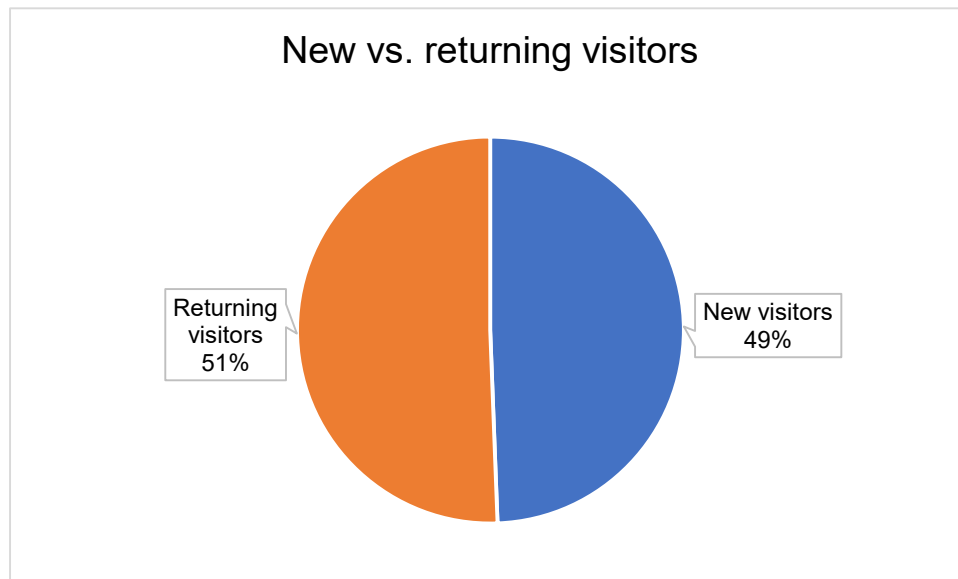
Device	% of sessions
Mobile	60%
Desktop	38%
Tablet	2%



New vs. returning visitors

Source: Google Analytics

New visitors	49%
Returning visitors	51%



Pages

Number of web pages on the www.merton.gov.uk website:

1,542

Top 100 web pages

Source: Google Analytics

	Page title	Page views Jan-Sep 2022	%
1	Home	751,770	14.88%
2	Garth Road Household Reuse and Recycling Centre	172,141	3.41%
3	Search	156,734	3.10%
4	Collection days for rubbish, recycling and garden waste	120,441	2.38%
5	My Tax and Benefits: manage your account online	112,386	2.22%
6	Make a payment	96,240	1.91%
7	Council Tax energy bill rebate	95,336	1.89%

	Page title	Page views Jan-Sep 2022	%
8	Parking permits	88,552	1.75%
9	Planning, buildings and environment	82,999	1.64%
10	Benefits, Council Tax and housing	80,853	1.60%
11	Council Tax	77,765	1.54%
12	Rubbish and recycling	74,629	1.48%
13	Apply for or renew a parking permit	74,368	1.47%
14	School term dates and holidays	60,803	1.20%
15	Penalty charge notices	43,708	0.87%
16	Contact us: Overview	38,720	0.77%
17	Apply for social housing	38,168	0.76%
18	Wimbledon Park	35,734	0.71%
19	Election results	33,928	0.67%
20	Car parks in Wimbledon	32,637	0.65%
21	Get a new bin, box or recycling bags	32,318	0.64%
22	Jobs at Merton Council	31,538	0.62%
23	Find street parking charges and payment terminals	31,138	0.62%
24	Planning permission	29,763	0.59%
25	Parking	29,647	0.59%
26	Garden waste	29,306	0.58%
27	Streets, parking and transport	28,446	0.56%
28	Paying your Council Tax	27,937	0.55%
29	Report a missed rubbish or recycling collection	27,155	0.54%
30	Household Support Grant	25,454	0.50%
31	Morden Park House (Register Office)	23,936	0.47%
32	CPZ maps and hours of operation	23,199	0.46%
33	Visitor scratchcard parking permits	22,436	0.44%
34	Council tax charges and bands	22,295	0.44%
35	Wimbledon Park Watersports and Outdoor Centre	21,898	0.43%
36	Staff login: Webmail and network access	21,710	0.43%
37	Car parks in Morden	21,328	0.42%
38	Your Council Tax account and bills	20,648	0.41%
39	Apply for a school or nursery place	20,496	0.41%
40	Morden Park House (Register Office): Book a ceremony	20,130	0.40%
41	Recycling your furniture, fridges and other bulky items	19,972	0.40%
42	Moving home and registering for Council Tax	19,945	0.39%
43	What goes in your bins, bags and recycling boxes	19,630	0.39%

	Page title	Page views Jan-Sep 2022	%
44	Paddling pools and splash pads	19,476	0.39%
45	Garden waste: Renew or change your garden waste service	17,392	0.34%
46	Council Tax discounts, exemptions and support: Exemptions	17,337	0.34%
47	In-year school admissions, junior applications, and transfers	17,269	0.34%
48	Check your Council Tax account balance	16,641	0.33%
49	Contact Parking Services	16,296	0.32%
50	Council Tax energy bill rebate: Overview	16,178	0.32%
51	Council and democracy	15,998	0.32%
52	Council Tax charges and bands	15,857	0.31%
53	Education and learning	15,686	0.31%
54	Claiming Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support: New claims	15,193	0.30%
55	Planning	14,830	0.29%
56	Find a school	14,401	0.29%
57	Controlled parking zones	14,388	0.28%
58	School waiting lists	14,309	0.28%
59	Recycling furniture, fridges and other bulky items	13,790	0.27%
60	Births, marriages and deaths	13,714	0.27%
61	School streets (school safety zones)	12,899	0.26%
62	Apply for a school nursery place: Apply for a school nursery place	12,819	0.25%
63	Council Tax discounts, exemptions and support: Discounts and reductions	12,509	0.25%
64	Primary school Reception applications	12,450	0.25%
65	Planning applications and appeals	12,438	0.25%
66	Check if you're eligible for a parking permit	12,409	0.25%
67	Elections and voting	12,354	0.24%
68	Multi-watersports (ages 8 to 16)	12,220	0.24%
69	Leisure, libraries and culture	11,933	0.24%
70	Blue Badge parking permits for disabled people	11,848	0.23%
71	Wards	11,640	0.23%
72	Report a noise nuisance: Overview	11,585	0.23%
73	Controlled parking zones in Wimbledon Town Centre	11,317	0.22%
74	Guide to Council Tax	11,038	0.22%
75	How to put out your rubbish and recycling for collection	10,775	0.21%
76	Holiday activities and food clubs	10,701	0.21%
77	Pay your Council Tax by Direct Debit	10,605	0.21%
78	Secondary school applications	10,508	0.21%
79	Children's school holiday watersports courses	10,470	0.21%

Page title	Page views Jan-Sep 2022	%
80 Getting married	10,436	0.21%
81 Fireworks displays in Wimbledon and Morden, south west London	10,150	0.20%
82 Book a rapid test for coronavirus (lateral flow test)	9,999	0.20%
83 Tennis courts	9,968	0.20%
84 Contact us about council tax	9,954	0.20%
85 Current and planned roadworks and traffic disruptions	9,648	0.19%
86 Council Tax energy bill rebate: Discretionary scheme	9,591	0.19%
87 Getting a new home: Apply for social housing	9,540	0.19%
88 Litter, fly-tipping and weeds on streets: Report it	9,466	0.19%
89 Recycle your Christmas tree	9,446	0.19%
90 Adult social care	9,048	0.18%
91 Find vacancies in primary schools	9,041	0.18%
92 Garden waste: How the garden waste service works	8,999	0.18%
93 Moving house	8,922	0.18%
94 Building control	8,761	0.17%
95 Primary school Reception applications: When to apply and important dates	8,573	0.17%
96 Social care	8,540	0.17%
97 Help with the cost of living	8,502	0.17%
98 Claiming Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support: Who can claim and how much	8,426	0.17%
99 Official notices: elections and voting	8,317	0.16%
100 Building control applications and inspections: Inspections	8,192	0.16%

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Results of website user survey

Survey ran 22 September 2022 to 21 October 2022

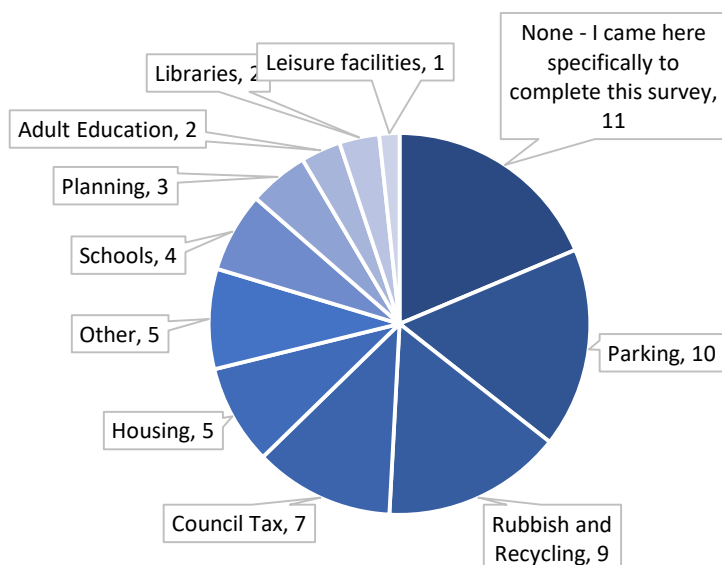
59 respondents accessed the campaign

What was the main service that you were interested in today?

Answered by 59 respondents.

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
None - I came here specifically to complete this survey	11	18.64%
Parking	10	16.95%
Rubbish and Recycling	9	15.25%
Council Tax	7	11.86%
Housing	5	8.47%
Other	5	8.47%
Schools	4	6.78%
Planning	3	5.08%
Adult Education	2	3.39%
Libraries	2	3.39%
Leisure facilities	1	1.69%
Electoral Register	0	0.00%
Health	0	0.00%
Highways	0	0.00%
Social Care	0	0.00%

What was the main service that you were interested in today?

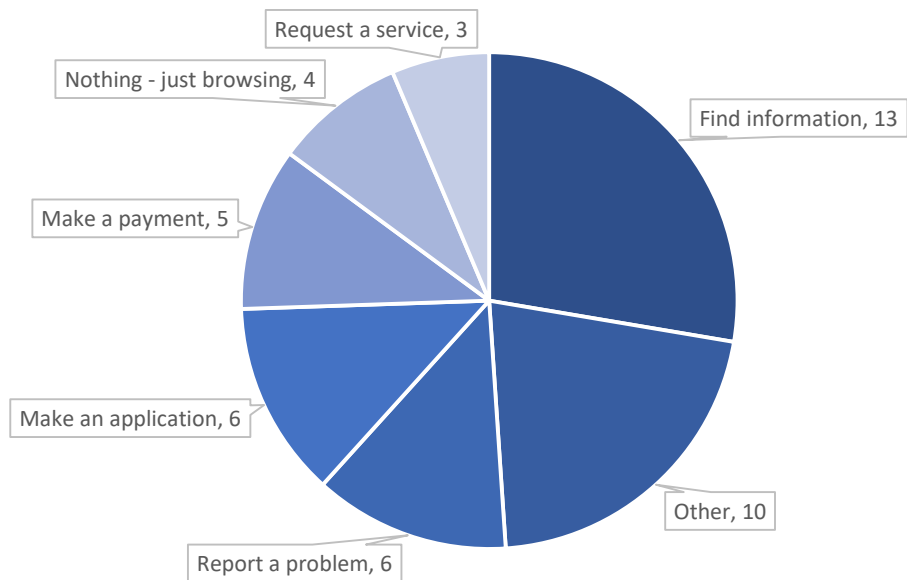


What did you want to do?

Answered by 47 respondents.

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
Find information	13	27.66%
Other	10	21.28%
Report a problem	6	12.77%
Make an application	6	12.77%
Make a payment	5	10.64%
Nothing - just browsing	4	8.51%
Request a service	3	6.38%
Make a booking	0	0.00%

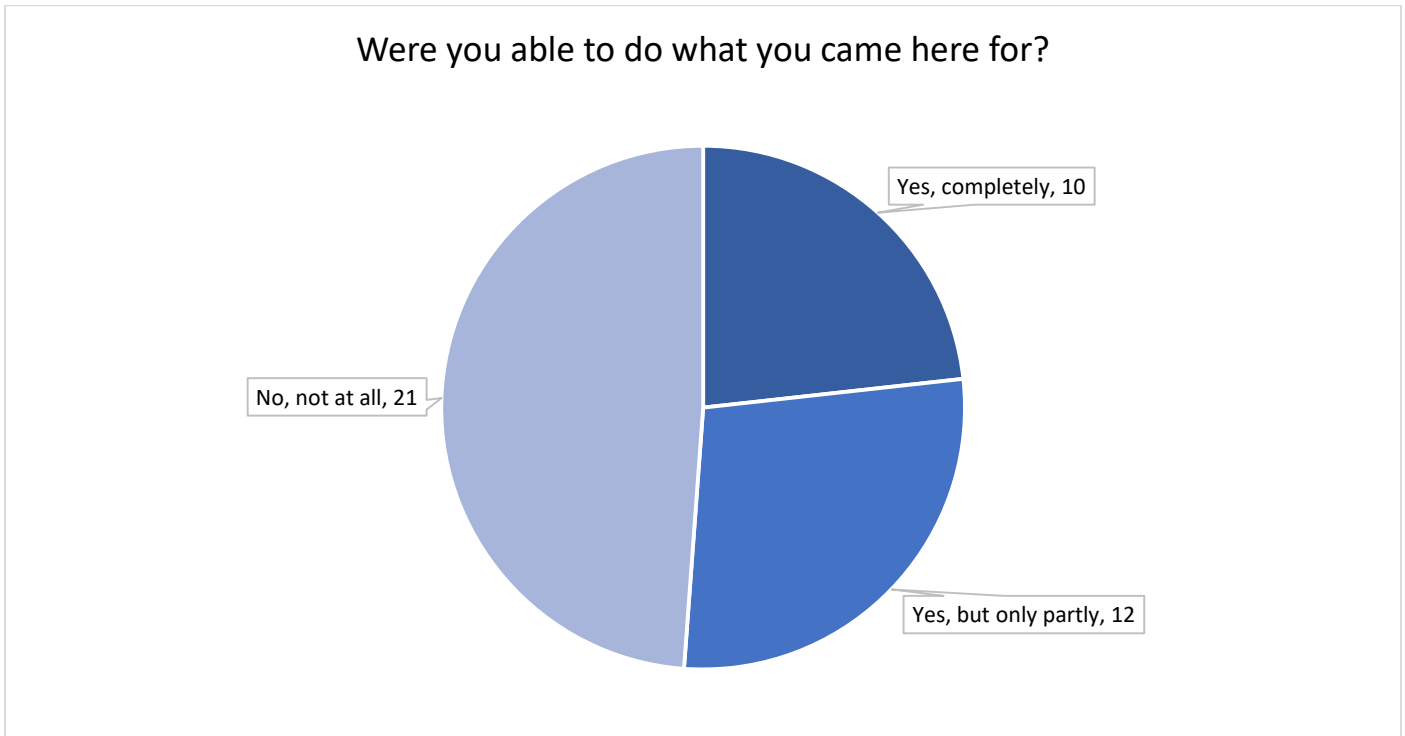
What did you want to do?



Were you able to do what you came here for?

Answered by 43 respondents.

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
Yes, completely	10	23.26%
Yes, but only partly	12	27.91%
No, not at all	21	48.84%



Please tell us what you could not do. Don't include personal information in your response, such as names or contact details.

Answered by 28 respondents.

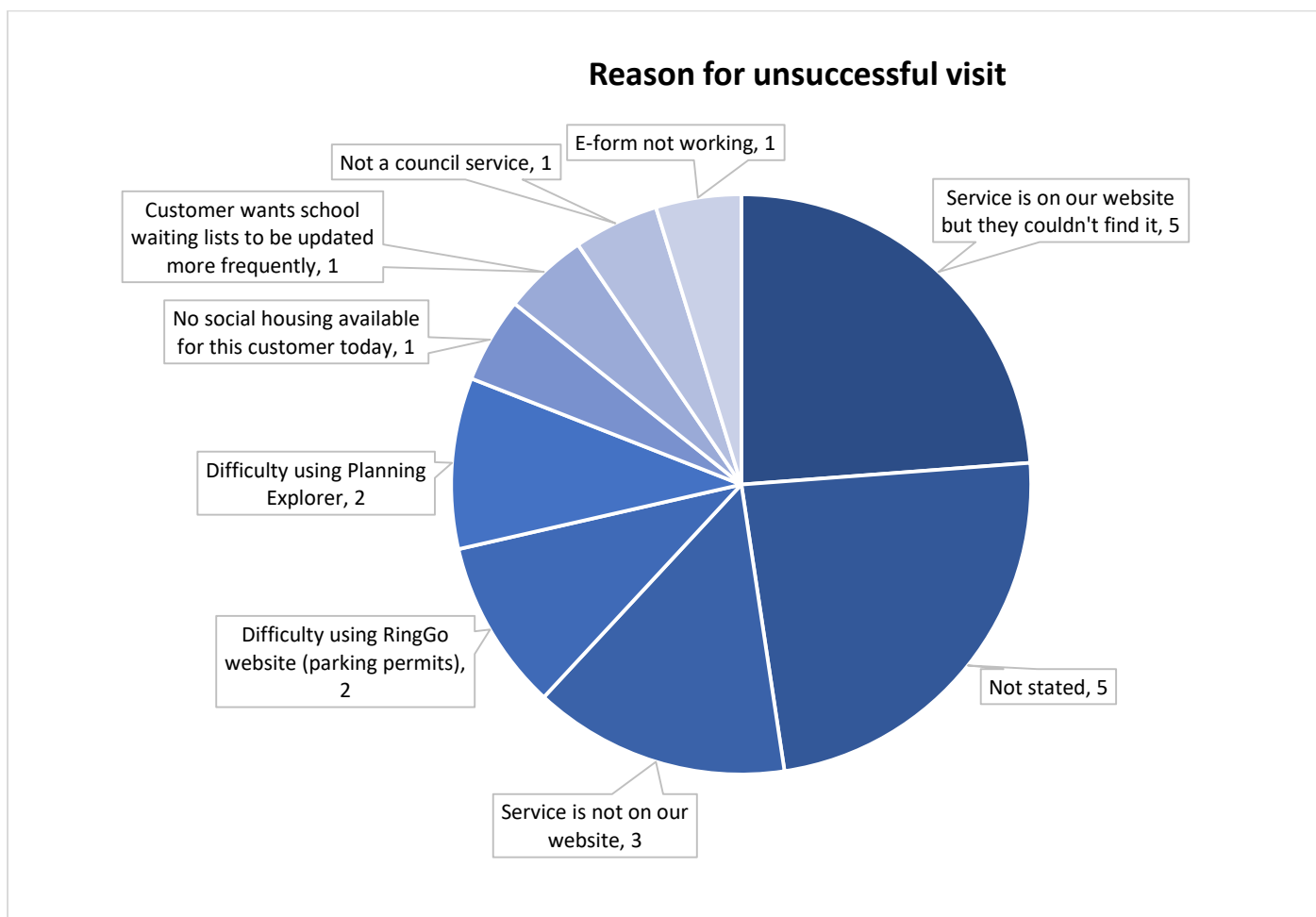
Summary of feedback:

Service	Task	Category
Rubbish and Recycling	Find contact details for complaints	Service is on our website but they couldn't find it****
Rubbish and Recycling	Report a missed recollection (assisted collection)	Service is not on our website
Rubbish and Recycling	Couldn't find link to request a replacement bin	Service is on our website but they couldn't find it**
Rubbish and Recycling	Complain about the conduct of waste crews	Service is on our website but they couldn't find it**
Rubbish and Recycling	Not stated	Not stated
Parking	Apply for/renew a visitor parking permit	Difficulty using RingGo website (parking permits)
Parking	Apply for/renew a visitor parking permit	Difficulty using RingGo website (parking permits)
Parking	Check the status of a dangerous tree report *	Service is not on our website
Parking	Not stated	Not stated
Schools	Check school waiting list	Customer wants school waiting lists to be updated more frequently
Schools	Apply for a school place	Service is on our website but they couldn't find it**
Schools	Not stated	Not stated
Planning	Find a planning application	Difficulty using Planning Explorer
Planning	Find a planning application	Difficulty using Planning Explorer
Planning	Object to a planning application	Service is on our website but they couldn't find it**
Council Tax	Follow up on an application for single person discount	Service is not on our website
Council Tax	Not stated	Not stated
Other	Report dead tree	E-form not working
Other	Find out about warm hubs	Not a council service
Housing	Not stated	Not stated
Leisure facilities	Bid for properties on Home Connections *	No social housing available for this customer today

* These 2 customers' comments didn't match the service they selected on the previous question - this is not an error in our analysis of the survey

**The services these respondents couldn't find were:

- Contact details for complaints
- Request a replacement bin
- Complain about the conduct of waste crews (complaints)
- Apply for a school place
- Object to a planning application

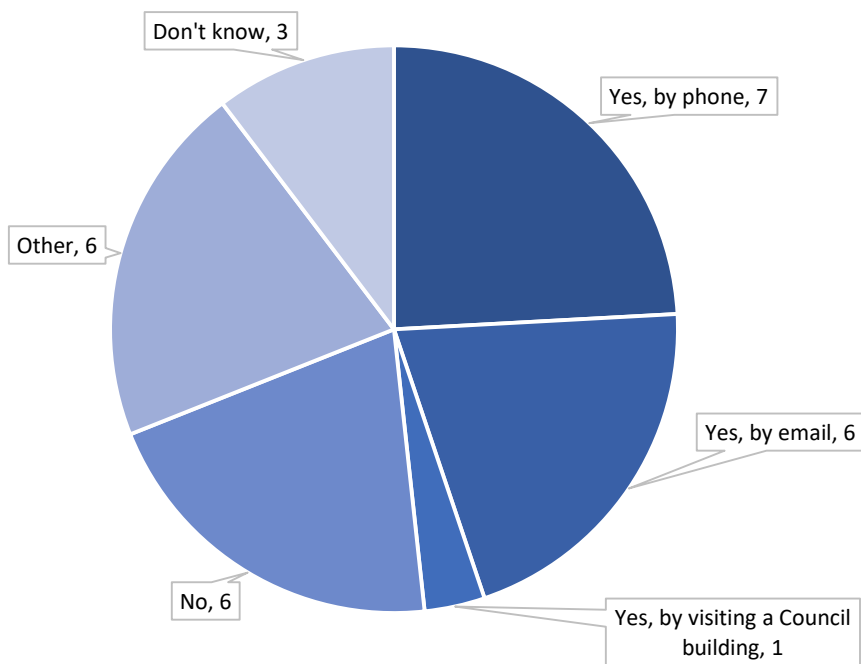


Will you contact us to complete your task?

Answered by 29 respondents.

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
Yes, by phone	7	24.14%
Yes, by email	6	20.69%
Yes, by visiting a Council building	1	3.45%
No	6	20.69%
Other	6	20.69%
Don't know	3	10.34%
Yes, by post	0	0.00%
Yes, by social media	0	0.00%

Will you contact us to complete your task?

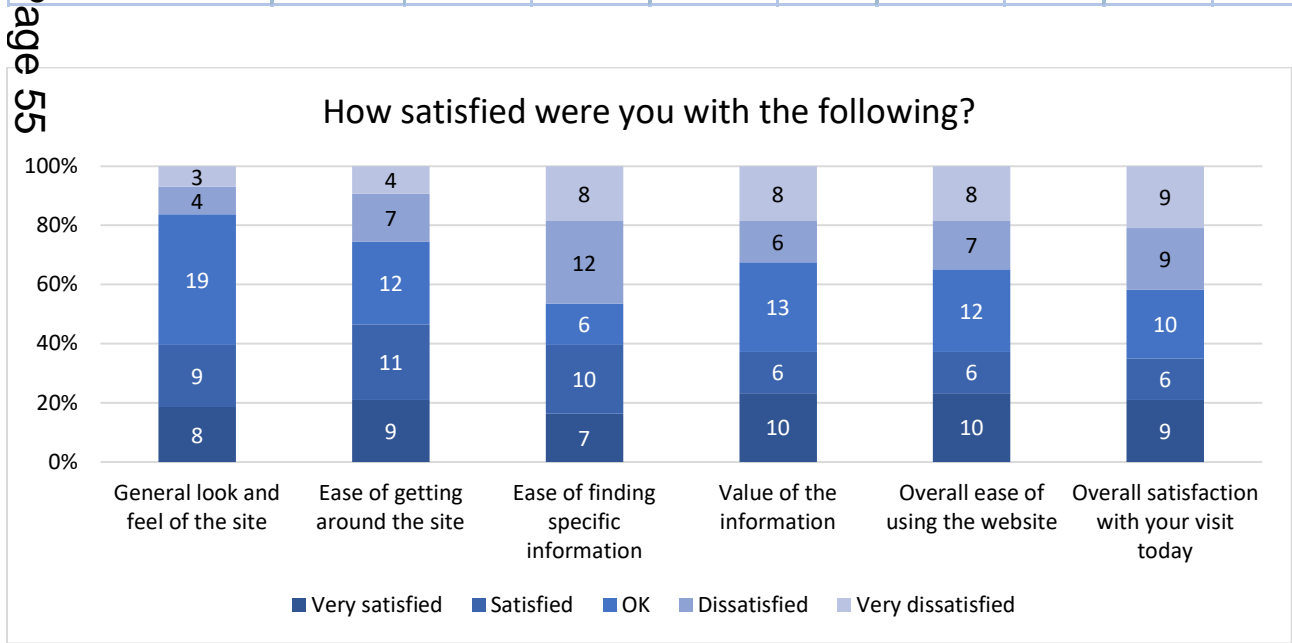


How satisfied were you with the following?

Answered by 43 respondents.

Response	General look and feel of the site		Ease of getting around the site		Ease of finding specific information		Value of the information		Overall ease of using the website		Overall satisfaction with your visit today	
Very satisfied	8	19%	9	21%	7	16%	10	23%	10	23%	9	21%
Satisfied	9	21%	11	26%	10	23%	6	14%	6	14%	6	14%
OK	19	44%	12	28%	6	14%	13	30%	12	28%	10	23%
Dissatisfied	4	9%	7	16%	12	28%	6	14%	7	16%	9	21%
Very dissatisfied	3	7%	4	9%	8	19%	8	19%	8	19%	9	21%

% positive or neutral		84%		74%		53%		67%		65%		58%
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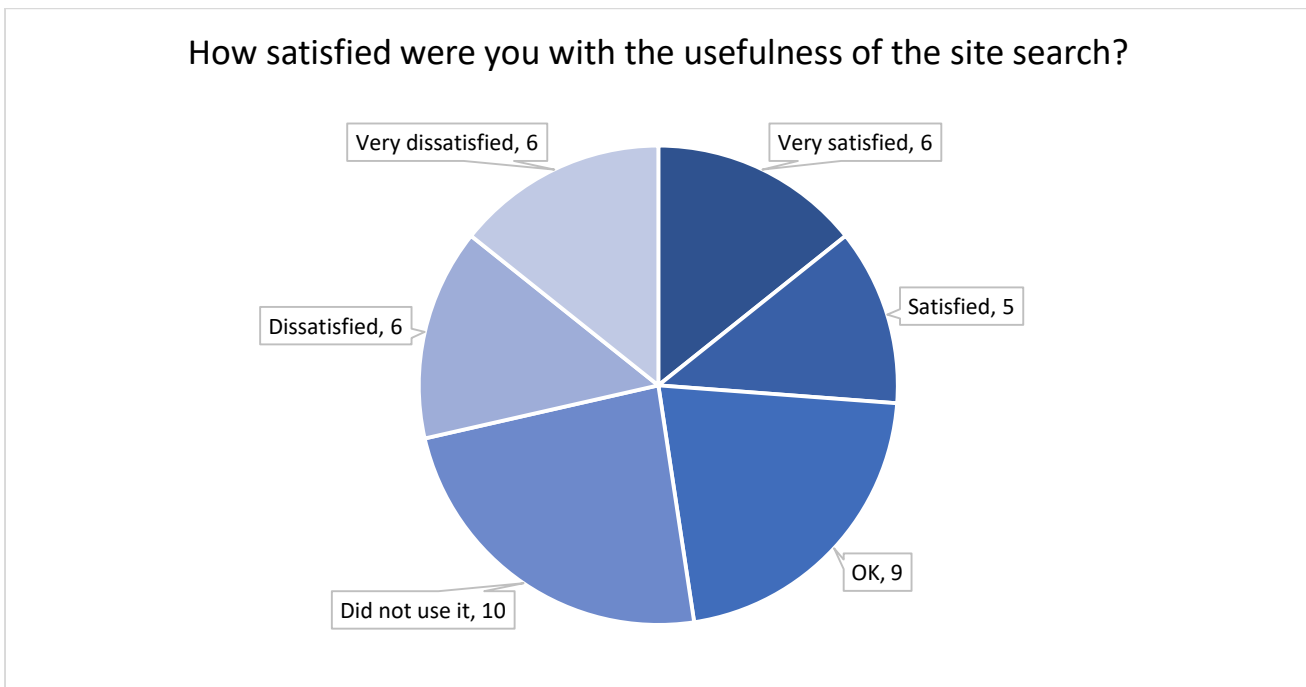


How satisfied were you with the usefulness of the site search?

Answered by 42 respondents.

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
Very satisfied	6	14.29%
Satisfied	5	11.90%
OK	9	21.43%
Did not use it	10	23.81%
Dissatisfied	6	14.29%
Very dissatisfied	6	14.29%

% positive or neutral	71.43%
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Do you have any conditions that affect how you use technology, for example a visual impairment that requires you to use a screen reader?

Answered by 42 respondents.

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
Yes	4	9.52%
No	34	80.95%
Prefer not to say	4	9.52%

We plan to add a 'My Account' section to the website where you can log in to access information and services that are personalised to you. What information or services would you like to find there?

Answered by 27 respondents.

Suggestions	Count of Suggestions
Nothing/don't know/unclear	12
Bin collection days	4
Council tax accounts	2
Local plans in my area	2
Services I've signed up for	1
Benefits accounts	1
Activities and events	1
CPZ rules in my area	1
Schools and education	1
Garden waste account	1
Statistics about climate-friendly changes to buildings	1
Account status	1
My councillors	1
PCNs	1

Overview and Scrutiny Commission Work Programme 2022/23



This table sets out the draft Overview and Scrutiny Commission's Work Programme for 2022/23 following discussions at the topic workshop on 7 June 2022.

The work programme will be considered at every meeting of the Commission to enable it to respond to issues of concern or to request new pre-decision items ahead of their consideration by Cabinet/Council.

Chair: Cllr Ed Foley

Vice-chair: Cllr Mike Brunt

Scrutiny Support

For further information on the work programme of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission please contact: -

Rosie McKeever, Scrutiny Officer

Tel: 020 8545 4035; Email: rosie.mckeever@merton.gov.uk

For more information about overview and scrutiny at LB Merton, please visit www.merton.gov.uk/scrutiny

Meeting date: 13 July 2022 (**Deadline for papers:** 12pm, 5 July 2022)

Item/issue	How	Lead member and/or lead officer	Intended outcomes
Questions to the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive - priorities and challenges for 2022/23	Verbal update with Q&A	Cllr Ross Garrod, Leader of the Council; Hannah Doody, Chief Executive	
CHAS Proposals	Report	Louise Round, Managing Director, South London Legal Partnership	Confidential paper
Identify questions for the Borough Commander	Discussion	Cllr Ed Foley, Chair of Overview & Scrutiny Commission	Plan line of questioning for 7 September meeting
Overview and Scrutiny Commission work programme 22/23	Report	Cllr Ed Foley Chair of Overview & Scrutiny Commission	Discuss and approve work programme and re-establishment of the FMTG

Meeting date: 7 September 2022 (~~Deadline for papers: 5pm, 29 August 2022~~)

Item/issue	How	Lead member and/or lead officer	Intended outcomes
BCU Commander – crime and policing in Merton	Report and in-depth discussion	BCU Commander	To hold BCU Commander to account on crime and disorder
Safer Merton – VAWG Strategy	Report	Zoe Gallen, Domestic Abuse & VAWG Lead	Report to focus on safety of women and girls in Merton
Public Space Protection Orders	Report	Kelly Marshall, Strategic Development Lead	
Scrutiny Annual Report 21/22	Report	Cllr Ed Foley Chair of Overview & Scrutiny Commission	Agree content before presentation at Council
Member Survey	Report	Cllr Ed Foley Chair of Overview & Scrutiny Commission	
OSC Working Group (CHAS)	Report	Louise Round, Managing Director, South London Legal Partnership	Feedback from the group on their findings and recommendations
Work programme 2022/23	Written report	Rosie McKeever, Scrutiny Officer	To agree the work programme.

Meeting date: 9 November 2022 (***Deadline for papers:*** 5pm, 1 November 2022)

Item/issue	How	Lead member and/or lead officer	Intended outcomes
Business Plan - budget update	Report	Roger Kershaw	
Council website	Report	Sean Cunniffe, Head of Customer Contact;	Focus on resident experience, resident survey feedback (if available)
Work programme 2022/23	Written report	Rosie McKeever, Scrutiny Officer	To agree the work programme

Meeting date: 18 January 2023 (**Deadline for papers:** 5pm, 9 January 2023)

Item/issue	How	Lead member and/or lead officer	Intended outcomes
Business Plan Update – budget scrutiny	Report – common pack for Panels and Commission	Roger Kershaw	To report to Cabinet (7 Feb) on budget scrutiny
Scrutiny of the Business Plan; comments and recommendations from the overview and scrutiny panels	Report	Cllr Ed Foley Scrutiny Officer	To send comments and recommendations from the overview and scrutiny panels to Cabinet on 7 Feb
Equality Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) strategy	Report	Evereth Willis	Update on refresh of the strategy
Merton as an employer	Report	Peter Little, Head of Organisational Development	Update on Workforce Strategy
Identify questions for the Borough Commander	Discussion	Cllr Ed Foley Chair of Overview & Scrutiny Commission	Plan line of questioning for meeting on 15 March
Work programme 2022/23	Written report	Rosie McKeever, Scrutiny Officer	To agree the work programme.

Meeting date: 25 January 2023 (**Deadline for papers:** 5pm, 17 January 2023)

Item/issue	How	Lead member and/or lead officer	Intended outcomes
Voluntary Sector	Report	John Dimmer, Head of PSP; Merton Connected	Report to include information on grants and infrastructure support, exposure for voluntary groups, publicity and signposting
Merton as a service provider	Report	Roger Kershaw,	External review of contract procurement
Work programme 2022/23	Written report	Rosie McKeever, Scrutiny Officer	To agree the work programme.

Meeting date: 15 March 2023 (*Deadline for papers: 5pm, 6 March 2023*)

Item/issue	How	Lead member and/or lead officer	Intended outcomes
BCU Commander – crime and policing in Merton	Report and in-depth discussion	BCU Commander	To hold BCU Commander to account on crime and disorder
Safer Merton Update			Report to focus on ASB and designing out crime
PSPO		Katy Saunders, Community Safety Team Manager	Consultation results
Planning the Commission's 2023/24 work programme	Report	Cllr Ed Foley Chair of Overview & Scrutiny Commission	To review 2022/23 and agree priorities for 2023/24

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