

Committee: Council

Date: 22 November 2017

Wards: All

Subject: Strategic Objective Review – Corporate Capacity with a focus on Bridging the Gap

Lead officer: Caroline Holland, Director of Corporate Services

Lead member: Councillor Mark Allison, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Councillor Edith Macauley, Cabinet Member for Community Safety, Engagement and Equalities

Contact officer: John Dimmer, Head of Policy, Strategy and Partnerships

Recommendations:

A. That Council consider the content of this report.

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 Council at its meeting on 1 March 2017 approved the Business Plan 2017-2021. The Business Plan sets out five strategic priorities and each meeting of the Council receives a report updating against one of the council's strategic themes.
- 1.2 This report provides Council with an opportunity to consider progress against the priorities that are to be delivered under the theme of Corporate Capacity with a focus on the Community Plan priority of Bridging the Gap.

2. BACKGROUND

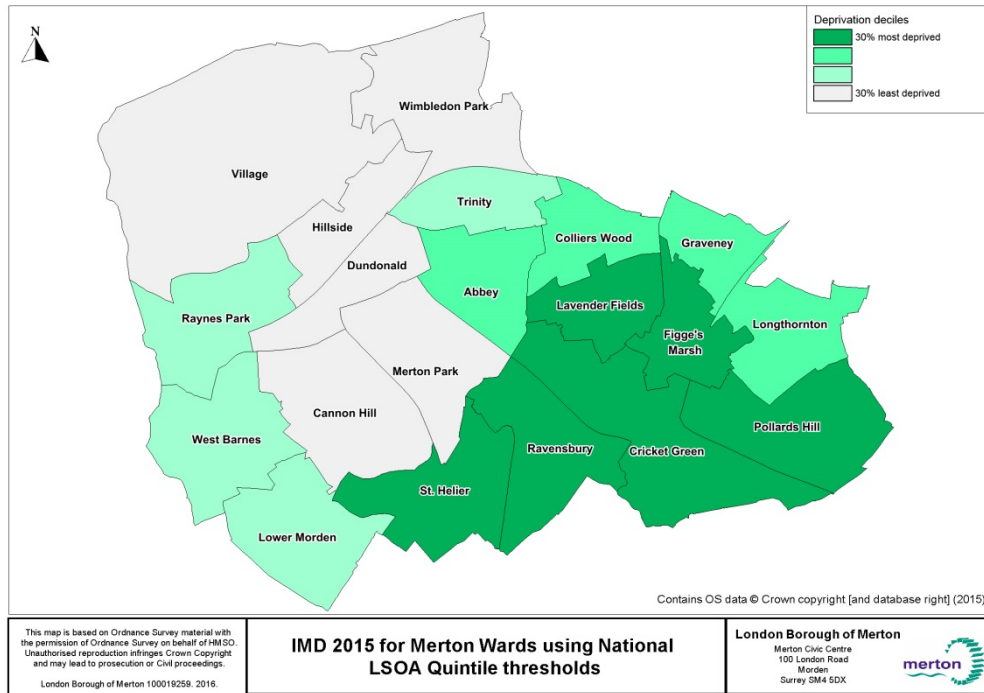
2.1 The Community Plan

2.1.2 The Community Plan was refreshed in 2013 and is the overarching strategic plan of the Merton Partnership and sets out the Partnership's long term vision and priorities for borough. The Community Plan's first priority is working to bridge the gap between the east and west of the borough and between different communities. Our strategy for bridging the gap is to focus on those factors that reduce inequalities and this report sets out progress and plans for:

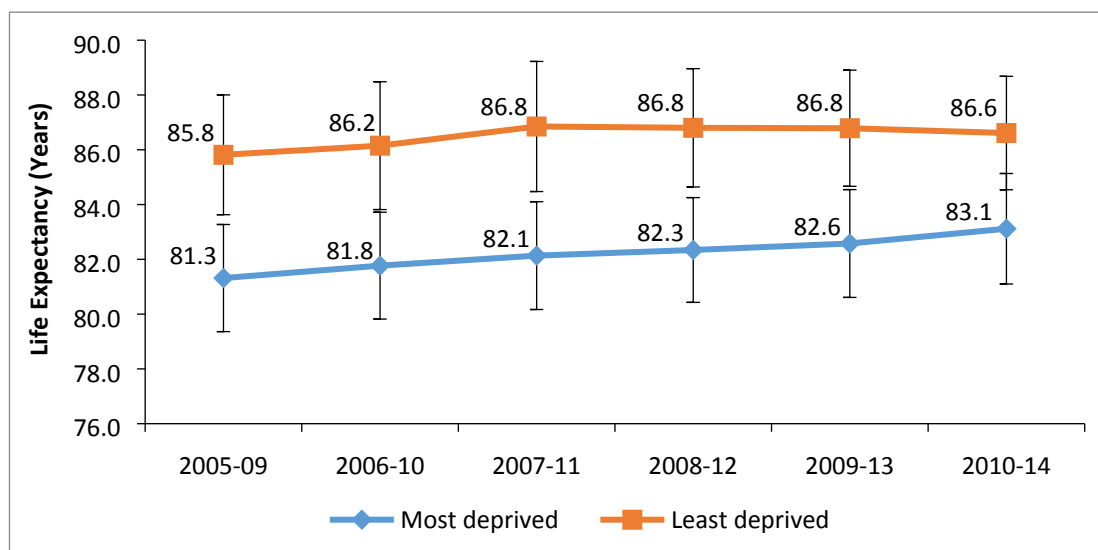
- engaging communities and creating a more inclusive borough;
- providing a high quality education and learning offer that continues into adulthood;
- employment support and affordable childcare provision;
- a clean, safe, accessible and attractive public realm;
- maximising the number of affordable homes and regenerating our major estates; and
- high quality health care and supporting residents to lead healthier lifestyles.

2.2 Inequalities in Merton

2.2.1 The Index of Multiple Deprivation map below graphically illustrates the contrast between the east of west of Merton: the darker the shading the higher the level of deprivation. In 2015 6 wards in the east of the borough were in the 30% most deprived in England This contrasts with the west of the borough which had 6 wards in the 30% least deprived.

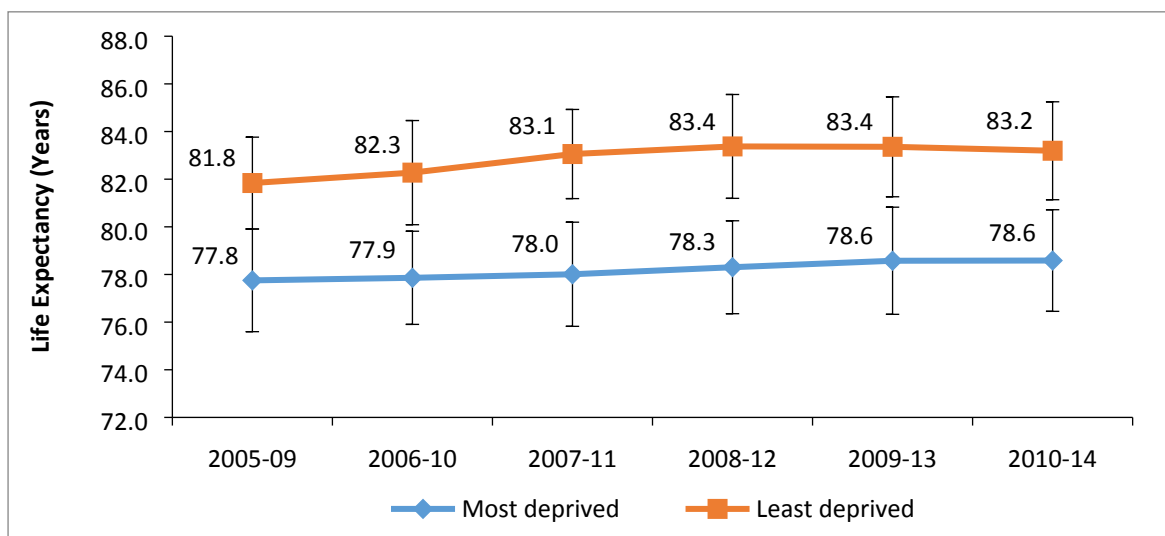


2.2.2 Across all 7 IMD domains there are significant disparities between the east and the west of the borough. Most noticeably perhaps is the impact of socio-economic factors on life expectancy¹ for those growing up in the east and west of the borough – see charts below.



Average female life expectancy at birth in most and least deprived wards of Merton, 2005-14

¹ Source: GLA Life expectancy by ward



Average male life expectancy at birth in most and least deprived wards, 2005-14

3. PROGRESS IN BRIDGING THE GAP

3.1 A sound and fair financial platform

- 3.1.1 In these challenging financial times it is critical that we collect the income due to the council to sustain the delivery of frontline services. In 2016/17 we collected 97.64% of Council Tax and 97.91% of business rates. These collection levels were both higher than 2015/16
- 3.1.2 The way we deliver these services continues to change and we look to increase our cheapest methods of payment and communication with residents. In 2016/17 we further increased the number of council tax payers receiving electronic bills by 7% so now just over 18% of residents receive electronic bills. For businesses we also increased the number of electronic bills we send from 31% to just over 38%. These changes result in cheaper administration costs of the service. Our aim is to push these figures even higher to make it easier for tax payers and automate services where possible.
- 3.1.3 We have had to take a number of difficult funding decisions in recent years and we use Equality Analysis as a means of considering the potential impact of proposals on local communities and in particular those who have a 'protected characteristic' (ethnicity, gender, age etc.) under the Equality Act 2010. This ensures that decision makers are aware of the council's statutory duty to consider the impact of decisions on service users and the wider community. All financial decisions and changes to service provision will have an Equality Analysis undertaken by officers to inform decision makers. This also provides a transparent record of the considerations taken into account when arriving at a decision.

Welfare support

- 3.1.4 We aim to operate an efficient Housing Benefit service to minimise delays. In 2016/17 we processed 8,529 new claims taking on average 15.3 days. In 2017/18 we have further reduced processing times down to 14.2 days.

- 3.1.5 The council makes cash payments for hardship and helps residents re-settle into the borough with household goods. In 2016/17 just over £35,000 was paid out. For cash payments 69% of payments were made to residents in the east of the borough and 31% to those in the west. For the purchase of household goods 60% of payments were for residents in the east of the borough and 40% to those in the west.
- 3.1.6 The full Universal Credit service will be implemented in Mitcham Job Centre in December 2017 and the remainder of the borough by March 2018. There have been well documented challenges with the implementation of Universal Credit to date, including delays to payments. The housing element of Universal Credit is paid direct to tenants and at the initial stage of a claim there is no option to have housing costs paid direct to the landlord. There are potential risks of financial hardship and housing difficulties with this approach that the council will monitor closely. We will work with the DWP to highlight and resolve problems within Merton. The council has implemented support processes for residents that have difficulty claiming and accessing this benefit and need help with money management.
- 3.1.7 In terms of housing, the council has a good working relationship with our local registered housing providers and will work to ensure that tenancies do not fail as a result of financial difficulties arising from the implementation of Universal Credit. We have an excellent track record of helping tenants resolve issues with private sector landlords as part of our homelessness prevention service. We have our rent deposit and rent bond schemes to help those with a statutory need secure private rented housing. Ultimately our hardship scheme provides a safety net for residents in severe financial hardship.
- 3.1.8 Many of the government's welfare reforms have been implemented and two that have affected residents levels of housing benefit paid are the "benefit cap" and the under occupation reduction or "bedroom tax". Both of these changes have resulted in reductions of housing benefit paid to residents. Just over £500,000 was paid in 2016/17 to support residents through this scheme with the council funding the payments made in excess of the funding received.
- 3.1.9 The council's welfare benefits team offers advice and assists residents access the welfare benefits they are entitled to but often do not claim. In 2016/17 the team dealt with 245 referrals and helped residents claim the equivalent of £680,000 yearly income. Of these referrals 64% were from residents in the east of the borough and 36% in the west.

3.2 Bridging the gap - communities

Older people

- 3.2.1 The council continues to minimise the need for residential care by supporting vulnerable older people to remain in their own homes. Our data shows we are placing less people in residential accommodation with more people supported to remain in their own homes close to their friends and family networks. Provision of care at home has increased from 481 people in 2015/16 to 666 people in September 2017.

Vulnerable adults

- 3.2.2 The Shared Lives service currently helps 44 adults who have learning disabilities or mental health issues to lead fuller everyday lives and be part of their local community through support tailored to each person's needs. Residents in our supported living accommodation are now able to be more active participants in their local community, including through their volunteering activities. The council is also enabling their voice to be heard through facilitating the Speak Out group. Customers accessing the support provided by our Employment Team have been able to secure paid jobs within the borough, over the last 5 years our targets have always been achieved, supporting over 100 clients in to paid work.
- 3.2.3 The Homeless Placement Policy takes account of people's individual needs and assesses which cases have priority for a local placement. All temporary accommodation is inspected by an officer to ensure it is fit for purpose.

Community cohesion

- 3.2.4 The council has put a number of mechanisms in place to provide a voice and opportunity for communities who are perhaps less well engaged through traditional routes. We want to ensure that they have a voice and an opportunity to contribute to initiatives and decisions that affect their lives.
- 3.2.5 The council has supported the establishment of BAME Voice to represent the interests of BAME residents and influence service policy and practice in Merton. BAME Voice has had a busy first year and has run activities that have brought different ethnic communities together to socialise and to learn about each others cultures and traditions. In addition, BAME Voice has been a major resource for different sectors and it has participated in more than 50 different events and consultations.
- 3.2.6 The Joint Consultative Committee (JCC) has continued to provide a formal mechanism for ethnic minority communities to engage with the work of the council. JCC meetings have provided opportunities for BAME representatives to engage on numerous issues, particularly health and crime. The JCC has also provided the mechanism for Public Health and the Clinical Commissioning Group to engage on matters such as the Health and Wellbeing Strategy and encourage outreach to target these communities to increase take up of Health Checks.
- 3.2.7 The Lesbian, Gay, Bi-Sexual and Transgender (LGBT) Forum was refreshed in 2015 and through its board has successfully engaged with a range of partners to take forward issues affecting the community. The forum is now self sustaining and works closely with the council on a range of issues. Notably the forum has set up a Youth Group and a Coffee Morning for the over 50s in an effort to tackle isolation and loneliness. The forum has been proactive in promoting the council's zero tolerance approach to Hate Crime and leads on the annual LGBT History Month celebrations.
- 3.2.8 The Faith and Belief Forum continues to promote community cohesion and integration. The forum is keen to work with others to tackle deprivation and support those in need of help. The Winter Night Shelter has been supported

by the inter faith communities in the borough to provide venues and volunteers to work with Faith in Action and the YMCA to assist those faced with homelessness in Merton. The Faith and Belief community also continues to support Food Banks in the borough.

- 3.2.9 There has been strong cross-party consensus in support of the council's zero tolerance approach to hate crime. In October 2017 the council and the Metropolitan Police, along with partners, supported National Hate Crime Awareness Week by organising a number of community engagement events for Merton residents to report hate crime and to discuss their experiences or concerns they may have around this subject. Events took place at various locations around the borough where we engaged with hundreds of people. Around 200 people also took part in our Hate Crime Survey, the results of which will be fed directly into the Hate Crime Strategy

Working with the voluntary and community sector

- 3.2.10 The council recognise the value of Merton's vibrant and diverse voluntary and community sector in supporting our citizens in a range of ways. The council has a multi-award winning Compact with the sector and a collaborative working relationship is a key priority for us. We continue to grant fund the sector and Cabinet has recently agreed to extend the Strategic Partner programme that funds a number of support services to residents and the sector as a whole for a further three years. We will continue to include criteria that asks organisations to demonstrate how their work contributes to bridging the gap when awarding grant funding.

Communications and consultation

- 3.2.11 We will also promote the work that the council is undertaking to bridge the gap and campaign on behalf of our residents who experience inequalities. In terms of consultation and engagement our aim is to have a balanced and statistically reliable cross-section of responses. We aim to ensure that consultations are designed and use methods that are relevant to key stakeholders and ensure access to all communities. Collecting demographic information as part of a consultation can help us understand how effective the methods have been in reaching the target audience.

3.3 Providing the best start in life

Educational attainment

- 3.3.1 Access to high quality education is one of the key determinants of quality of life across a person's lifespan and for increasing social mobility. Merton's secondary schools are high performing in this regard, with 100% of schools in the borough rated as good or outstanding by Ofsted. In terms of pupil progress between KS2 and KS4, Merton's schools rank top across the entire country.
- 3.3.2 Bridging the gap for disadvantaged pupils is a priority and there has been a narrowing of the gap for this cohort at the primary stage in 2017 including early years foundation stage and at the end of KS1 and KS2. All Merton schools have Pupil Premium Strategies that set out their strategy for

narrowing the gap. There is still more work to do though as our aim is to close the gap to zero.

Exclusion and attendance

- 3.3.3 In 2016 the gap in the school attendance and exclusion figures between disadvantaged pupils and their peers was also narrower than those seen nationally. The absence rate for disadvantaged pupils in Merton was better than the national average; and persistent absence was lower in Merton than nationally for this group. Merton disadvantaged pupils are attending better than elsewhere nationally. However, the gap widened with regard to exclusions whilst the national picture narrowed, and so this too is a focus for improvement.

Early Years

- 3.3.4 The Early Years service has reshaped its Children's Centre and early help programme for 2017/18 with a focus on supporting families with young children where there are identified needs. This includes supporting families living on a low household income, who predominantly live in the east of the borough. Many of the programmes delivered are underpinned by a strong evidence base which shows improved outcomes for children and their families in terms of parenting capacity and children's early development. The range of Children's Centre and early help programmes are delivered borough wide, however our parenting programmes are exclusively delivered in the east of the borough facilitating easier access for families living in these areas. The success of this approach is evidenced by the narrowing of the gap at key progress measures outlined above.
- 3.3.5 At year end 2016 – 2017 the percentage take-up of families living in an area of deprivation (Income deprivation affecting childhood indices) who had accessed a Children's Centre service was 68%. The ongoing integration and co-location of Health Visitors within Children's Centres supports early identification of children and family needs and enables swift and easy referrals to early help services for many families living in the east of the borough. Of the five Children's Centres inspected by Ofsted between 2012 and 2015, 4 were graded good and Acacia Centre in the east of the borough was graded outstanding.
- 3.3.6 In terms of childcare provision, a key focus is ensuring sufficient free early education and childcare places are available as well as facilitating the take up of free places for eligible 2 year olds (families living in low income households). Of the 680 eligible 2 year olds approximately 55- 60% take up their free place and 100% of all 2 year olds who do take up a free places do so in good or outstanding early years provision. All Merton early years providers and schools delivering free early education have Early Years Pupil Premium strategies for narrowing the gap. The newly established 30 hour offer of free early education for 3 and 4 year olds living in working households will make childcare more affordable for many eligible families. All early years registered Ofsted provision in the east of the borough is graded good or above and the settings benefit from a comprehensive support programme from Early Years Advisors.

Reducing childhood obesity

- 3.3.7 Childhood obesity levels have been increasing across the country. This is a particular worry as being overweight/obese at a young age can establish a trend into later life and is a key risk factor causing an increasing prevalence of diabetes. In Merton the gap in obesity between the east and west of the borough is widening in both Reception and Year 6 (e.g. 10% higher in Year 6 in the east of the borough compared to the west). The focus of the Director of Public Health's Annual Public Health Report 2016/17 was childhood obesity and this is a major priority for the Health and Wellbeing Board. The Child Healthy Weight Action Plan sets out details of the commitments on childhood obesity from the council and its partners around 4 key themes. Recognising the higher childhood obesity rates in the east of the borough, the following provide examples of work that has been taking place to further support halting the increase in the gap between the east and west, then begin to reduce the gap to 8% by 2019/20
- 3.3.8 The Great Weight Debate Merton specifically sought to engage with residents in the east of the borough, Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities, parents, young people and stakeholders. Over 2,100 people engaged with the project over six months, contributing ideas; sharing experiences; suggesting and testing solutions. The findings and recommendations of the report will be disseminated to key stakeholders and taken forward through the Child Healthy Weight Steering group and influence local plans. As obesity levels are highest in the east of the borough, it was important to engage with residents in the east to support shaping and co-producing our approaches going forward.
- 3.3.9 The Healthier Catering Commitment scheme recognises those food businesses that demonstrate a commitment to offering healthier options. The project engages with local businesses to get them to sign up to the scheme or make some positive changes to provide healthier options. The project was targeted in the east of the borough where there are higher rates of childhood obesity but also in areas where there are relatively higher concentration of fast food outlets in the east. There are a total of 37 food businesses fully signed up to the scheme in Merton with nearly 50 premises visited and supported to make smaller changes if they are unable to achieve the full commitment.

Healthy schools

- 3.3.10 Public Health and CSF have previously had a Targeted Healthy Schools programme in the east of Merton which has funded a number of successful interventions including increasing physical activity of pupils and staff and also food growing, cooking and healthy eating sessions.
- 3.3.11 The Merton Schools Sports Partnership has now been commissioned to work with our schools to align to the Healthy Schools London (HSL) Bronze, Silver and Gold Awards scheme. A workshop was undertaken in July 2017 with representatives of 25 schools in the borough with input from the Greater London Authority (GLA) to support schools to achieve the awards. Currently, the majority of schools in the east of the borough have registered with 5 schools achieving their Bronze award and 1 of those schools achieving their Silver award.

3.4 Skills, employability and learning

Libraries and Adult Learning

- 3.4.1 Libraries in the east of the borough are thriving. Along with the My Library project and the improvement works at Mitcham Library, Pollards Hill has a library that is under 10 years old and has been radically enhanced by funding from the Big Lottery Fund. Colliers Wood will be the next locality to get a new library, which is due to open in early 2018. The new library will have increased floor space, improved community facilities and a coffee shop. The library is being built following productive negotiations with a developer that will also bring some more affordable housing to the area.
- 3.4.2 Funded by Arts Council England, the Library Service is developing a new arts and cultural offer through our libraries called 'My Library' that aims to work with hard to reach groups of young people in the east of the borough. Following consultation with young people a new series of workshops has been developed for young people and is currently being delivered in a newly established Arts Space at Mitcham Library. The service also continues to develop its offer for all residents and works with a number of agencies including focussing support initiatives in the east of the borough around health and employment.
- 3.4.3 The council's objective of bridging the gap is embedded in the strategic aims of the new Adult Learning contract with a strong focus on improving socio-economic outcomes. There has been a significant increase in the delivery of courses in the east of the borough and core skills around maths, English and employability have been embedded into the full course offer. There is a KPI target of 27% of learners from deprived wards and at the end of academic year 2016/17 performance was 29%.

Skills and employment

- 3.4.4 Skills are key to supporting economic growth in our area, and particularly higher end economic growth, to improve the average earnings of people employed in our borough (£28,102 compared to London £33,747). Some of our residents with lower skills are missing out economically with existing pockets of deprivation, higher levels of unemployment and NEETs concentrated in the east of the borough. Working with our South London partners we are developing a South London Skills Strategy to provide the evidenced priorities and objectives for improving skills in this part of London to support productivity and growth in our economy and the inclusion and economic independence of residents.
- 3.4.5 With the devolution of the new Health and Work programme to London there is a major opportunity to re-configure employment support services for people who have been out of work for over 2 years or who face particular health or disability-related challenges to get jobs. The new programme will begin in March 2018. We will be able to increase the total value of the programme in our area by match-funding it with ESF funding and improve the integration of the Work and Health Programme with other services and offers locally.

Apprenticeship programme

- 3.4.6 The Council has delivered an Apprenticeship scheme for a number of years. The scheme is primarily for Merton residents, those aged 16 – 24 years of

age, young people, Looked After or leaving care. There are a range of apprenticeships available in business administration, customer care, parking, IT, finance, HR and legal. The introduction of the apprenticeship levy (which can only be used to pay for development not wages) provides an opportunity for the council to upskill its existing workforce as the scheme allows qualifications up to degree level if there is a standard that matches the apprenticeship standard.

- 3.4.7 The council recognises that whilst it does not have many entry level roles it is however in a position to provide young people with invaluable work experience usually 2 weeks. We propose to commit each head of service to providing a work experience for a young person in 2018, building on the experience of customer contact and revenues and benefits. The placements will be advertised via our internet and young people will have to register their interest by a given date. There will be an induction programme for the young person and manager. We feel that this will provide a fairer access to work experience as well as formalising the process.

3.5 Improving the public realm, housing and transport

Mitcham town centre

- 3.5.1 Mitcham is changing for the better, with its smart market stalls, convenient shopping and the attractive Fair Green with its restored Victorian clock tower and landscaped gardens. A significant milestone in the Rediscover Mitcham project has been reached with the completion of the new London Road bus street opening for service. Buses have started to run along the new bus street, which opened in late August. The new bus route is an integral part of the improvements we are making to Mitcham town centre and is the final phase of the works on the Fair Green. Introducing the dedicated bus street will bring people directly into the shopping area of the town, which is better for both retailers and their customers.

Colliers Wood

- 3.5.2 It has been a year of change in Colliers Wood. Most notably, the transformation of Colliers Wood tower is nearing completion, as is the council's brand new Library on Colliers Wood High Street. In partnership with TfL, the council has completely overhauled the look and feel, and function of the public realm in Colliers Wood with a series of projects that have now completed. Improvements to Baltic Close, Wandle Park and along the river Wandle have created an accessible and inviting environment.
- 3.5.3 The council is excited to be part of the successful bid for Heritage Lottery Funding for the Canons. This £5 million, four year project, will combine capital works, landscape design and community activities. The Canons has a great variety of important landscape and built features reflecting over 500 years of enterprise and care, although it has never been designed as a single landscape. Now though, a coordinated design has been prepared that restores these historic features, enhances their setting whilst allowing for the inclusion of new facilities that includes café, toilets, play area and new square. This project will restore Grade II* Canons house and give it a sustainable future by offering a combination of workspace and community use. Activities

for schools and the wider community will engage people in the site's fascinating history and natural heritage.

Supporting active lifestyles

- 3.5.4 A brand new leisure centre is under construction in Morden Park to replace the ageing Morden Park Pools. Once completed and open in the Autumn of 2018 it will be able to increase the sports and leisure offer to our local schools and communities as it includes a 6 lane 25m pool and a large secondary pool, 13m by 15m with a moveable floor and a diving tower ensuring a whole host of water based activities can be provided to meet the range of needs in our community.
- 3.5.5 Out of the water there will be a café where residents can rest and relax and just enjoy each others company reducing the increased burden of isolation and there is plenty of opportunity for physical exercise in the health and fitness facilities of the gymnasium – equipped with state of the art equipment, fixed and free weights as well as aerobic exercise machines. Also, there will be a studio / community room for a range of activities and classes or just a place to meet.
- 3.5.6 Mitcham Community Orchard is a volunteer led initiative which has converted 1,500m² of spare ground (and a fly-tipping hotspot) into a green oasis; providing a leisure and educational resource for the local community around Fieldgate Lane. This has created a recreational facility for residents, an amenity for community events, an attractive bucolic experience in an urban area and an opportunity for fruit and veg growing and intergenerational social interaction.
- 3.5.7 Merton now has 10 outdoor gyms in its parks and the majority are located in the centre or east of the borough, in Morden and Mitcham, and consciously deployed in these locations to address differential health issues across the borough. The largest of these gyms are located in Morden Park and on Figge's Marsh and offer a range of free-to-use exercise apparatus for those keen on improving their health and fitness in an outdoor environment. The equipment has proven to be very popular with younger users, but not exclusively so. It can be enjoyed by people irrespective of their fitness levels and economic status. At several locations it can be accessed 24/7 too.

Air quality

- 3.5.8 Air quality is a serious concern for Londoners and in Merton the areas suffering higher pollution levels tend to be along the key transport links where there are higher volumes of traffic. Our new Air Quality Plan outlines the actions that Merton will deliver for the period 2017-22 in order to reduce concentrations of pollution, and exposure to pollution; thereby positively impacting on the health and quality of life of residents and visitors to the borough.
- 3.5.9 The council is using its policies around parking, planning and local roads together with our knowledge of local communities to improve air quality. In particular we want to encourage and facilitate a shift towards more sustainable forms of transport. As a result, we are significantly expanding the number of charging points for electric vehicles and supporting the development of car clubs.

Accessible streets

3.5.10 The introduction of the pavement parking policy was the council's response to concerns and complaints raised by residents who were unable to use pavements as a result of cars being parked in such a way to impede pedestrian movement, especially wheelchair users or those pushing buggies. This problem was disproportionately high in the east of the borough where there are less controlled parking zones and therefore more opportunity for motorists to park across footpaths without being penalised. The introduction of the pavement parking policy allows a penalty charge notice to be issued to motorists who park in an inconsiderate manner. It has led to footpaths now being kept clear and motorists behaviour has changed for the positive.

Housing

3.5.11 Clarion Housing Group is planning a £1 billion investment in Merton to build 2,800 homes on estates across the borough. Details of the proposals include building 1,800 new homes to rent and buy and replacing 1,000 homes, with all existing tenants and resident homeowners wishing to remain in the neighbourhood to be rehoused.

3.5.12 Residents have been consulted on the plans and feedback has been incorporated into the outline planning applications, which set out how the streets, buildings and outside spaces could look. The emphasis is on creating energy-efficient, durable homes, green spaces and community facilities. We have pledged to keep these communities together by guaranteeing that every existing tenant of ours and resident homeowner has the option to remain in their neighbourhood at no additional cost.

3.5.13 As the first phases progress, the scheme will also provide extensive opportunities for training and employment and a range of initiatives to improve the life chances of young people in Merton.

3.5.14 Moat Housing are also progressing with their own regeneration programme for Pollards Hill. Planning permission was secured in 2016 and Moat are now on-site delivering the refurbishment of existing homes in Pollards Hill. The next phase of works will include the delivery of over 90 new homes around Donnelly Green, which will also be re-landscaped as part of the £35m project.

3.6 Addressing health inequalities

3.6.1 The council has been working with the CCG and the voluntary sector to develop an innovative social prescribing programme in the borough. Working alongside traditional medical interventions, social prescribing allows GPs to make referrals to voluntary sector organisations to complement treatment e.g. to self-help organisations or fitness and wellbeing groups. The first year of the programme, initially piloted in two GP practices in the east of Merton, shows promising signs, with an increase in self-reported health gains and a reduction in GP visits. Funding is currently being applied for to extend the programme to all 9 GP practices in the east of Merton.

3.6.2 The council voiced its opposition to the NHS decision to close the walk-in clinic and registered list on the Wilson site in Mitcham through direct representation to the NHS as well as through the council's overview and

scrutiny process. Since the closures have taken place, the Health and Wellbeing Board received an update on the CCG primary care strategy including progress with improving patient access to primary care, especially in the east of Merton. The new extended access scheme boosts capacity both during working hours and during extended hours before 8am and 6.30 – 8pm Monday to Friday, and on Saturday mornings in some practices. Additionally there are two new primary care access hubs, one in the Nelson and one in Cricket Green practice Mitcham, offering appointments 8am to 8pm on Saturdays and the one in Mitcham also open 8am to 8pm on Sundays.

- 3.6.3 Further, the council is working with CCG and NHS colleagues to develop the site of the Wilson Hospital into a new Health and Wellbeing Campus for Mitcham which will include provision of primary care services. The aim is to develop an integrated model of health and wellbeing, with the community and voluntary sector directly involved.
- 3.6.4 The Council remains fully committed to ensuring that Merton residents continue to have access to a full range of NHS acute services on the St Helier hospital site. Epsom and St Helier University Hospitals NHS Trust undertook a patient involvement exercise to explore patient views concerning a range of possible reconfigurations of the acute services provided by the Trust earlier in the year when the council indicated its serious concern, including about apparent procedural irregularities of the exercise. Since then agreement has been reached that a wider piece of work around the needs for acute services including any impact on equality and health inequalities will be undertaken through the NHS SW London Sustainability and Transformation Partnership and once published will be presented to the Merton Health and Wellbeing board.
- 3.6.5 The next Merton Annual Public Health Report will focus on tracking the trends in health inequalities between different communities in Merton over time (particularly the east and the west of the borough, and the 30% most and 30% least deprived wards). This will chart progress made to date, and serve as a baseline to inform the refresh of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy post 2018 and most suitable indicators to monitor progress in reducing health inequalities going forward.

4. REPORTS OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

4.1 Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel

- 4.1.2 The Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel has undertaken the following activity during the current and past municipal years to contribute to the focus on bridging the gap:
- **Housing:** Scrutinised the work of Circle Housing Merton Priory with its representatives attending the Panel twice during the 2016 – 17 municipal year to discuss repairs and regeneration of estates. Now merged with Affinity Sutton, the newly formed organisation, Clarion, will similarly attend the Panel during this municipal year to again discuss repairs and regeneration plus housing safety. The Panel has also continued to monitor the

recommendations of the Housing Supply group which explored the role of the authority in the development of housing in the borough;

- **Care leaver accommodation:** the Panel has scrutinised the housing needs of one of the most vulnerable groups in the borough – care leavers. It worked in partnership with the members of the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel and officers from the Children, Schools and Families, Environment and Regeneration and Community and Housing Departments. The resulting reference, which has been accepted by Cabinet, focused on the provision of a sufficient range of independent accommodation options as the next step on from semi-independent arrangements;
- **Libraries and Heritage Service Annual Report:** this highlighted the very high performance of the service (demonstrated by benchmarking against similar services delivered by other councils). Performance monitoring benchmarks for this service will be considered during this municipal year;
- **Town regeneration:** members received a presentation updating them on progress achieved with all five town centre regeneration areas (Wimbledon, Raynes Park, Morden, Mitcham and Colliers Wood). The Panel is just about to receive a report on the Morden re-development for pre-decision scrutiny;
- **Merton Adult Education:** an update report was provided to the Panel on the operation of the service in its first year following the implementation of a new commissioning model. Members focused on how the service is providing appropriate progression for all learners, community learning provision within the context of a national fall in demand and how provision for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is being successfully provided in-house. The Panel will also be visiting South Thames College this year to see provision first hand; and
- **Facilities for physical activity in children's playgrounds:** 11.8% of 15 year olds in Merton are meeting the daily guidelines for physical activity and are sedentary on average for 7 hours a day. Only a quarter of adults are physically active in Merton. Childhood obesity is both a national and local priority. The National Childhood Measurement Programme has been used to establish that there are 4,500 overweight children in the borough with children in the east more likely to be affected than those in the west. Panel members heard how Public Health and Greenspaces intend to work more closely together to increase utilisation of children's playgrounds and open spaces in Merton (based on evidence and best practice as well as resident feedback).

4.2 Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel

4.2.1 The Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel has undertaken the following activity during the current and past municipal years to contribute to the focus on bridging the gap:

- **Routes into employment for vulnerable cohorts:** working closely with colleagues in all departments in the Council as well as Merton's Economic Wellbeing Group, the task group's recommendations focus on the use of work tasters/work experiences and apprenticeships with these being offered through the Council's contractors and other services providers to vulnerable cohorts. The report has been accepted by Cabinet and an action plan is anticipated;

- **Harris Wimbledon Secondary School:** members were given the opportunity to scrutinise the proposed site for the school prior to this gaining Cabinet approval. Members focused on the anticipated growth in demand for secondary schools places and the resulting reference to Cabinet requested that the new school be developed to ensure all its pupils gain the same advantage enjoyed by children at other secondary schools in Merton;
- **School Provision:** the Panel has continued to review provision of sufficient school places which is one of the Council's key statutory duties. Members were reassured that surplus places are in line with the Audit Commission's advice taking into account rising birth rate projections. Performance monitoring data is being revised to assist the Panel in achieving on-going scrutiny of this provision;
- **Health and wellbeing:** with the support of the community health provider, (Central London Healthcare NHS Trust), the Panel looked at how the Council is giving children and young people in Merton the best start in life by improving access to child mental health services, achieving school readiness, increasing the rate of immunisations and tackling childhood obesity. Members focused on the quality of information being used to promote immunisations, the role of parents in their children's health and how community venues, such as children centres, are being used to achieve outreach; and
- **Schools Annual Report:** members received their detailed annual schools report giving them the opportunity to focus on attainment for all key stages as well as at foundation stage and for post 16. Members noted the need to retain their focus on children on SEN support as well as looked after children.

4.3 Healthier communities and Older People Overview and Scrutiny Panel

4.3.1 The Healthier Communities and Older People Overview and Scrutiny Panel has undertaken the following activity during the current and past municipal years to contribute to the focus on bridging the gap:

- **Impact of welfare reform on local residents:** the Panel hosted a session looking at the impact of the changes to the welfare benefits system since 2010. Given the cross cutting nature of the issue, members of the Sustainable Communities Panel were invited to attend. The purpose of the session was to understand the effect at the local level and consider how the council and its partners can provide support. The Panel found that many residents, particularly those with disabilities, had experienced a loss in income and difficulties in navigating the appeals process. Local organisations, Faith in Action, Citizens Advice and Merton Centre for Independent Living attended to give an overview of the issues from their perspective. After a wide ranging discussion, Panel Members resolved to ask council officers and Citizen's Advice to look at additional venues for drop-in advice sessions and look at the feasibility of sending benefits advisors to Faith in Action drop-in sessions.
- **Preventing Diabetes in the South Asian community Task Group:** the Panel commissioned a task group to look at the rise in Type Two Diabetes. The task group decided to focus on services for people of South Asian heritage as they were found to have the highest incidence of this condition. Recommendations included ensuring existing services are culturally

appropriate and working with voluntary and community sector organisations to share health messages.

- **Tackling loneliness amongst older people:** the Panel commissioned a task group to look at ways to prevent loneliness amongst older people. The task group found that Merton has a wide range of local services which aim to connect communities; one of the challenges is to identify those who are lonely and would benefit from local activities. The task group found that social prescribing and the East Merton Model of Health will provide even more opportunities to strengthen local communities and reduce loneliness and isolation. Recommendations from the task group included developing an agreed list of service providers who tackle loneliness which can be shared widely across the borough, to include preventing loneliness in the Health and Wellbeing Strategy, Hoarding Protocol and the Volunteering Strategy.

4.4 Overview and Scrutiny Commission

- 4.4.1 Each year, at its first meeting, the Commission has received a presentation from the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive to set out the Council's priorities for the year ahead. Members have used this as an opportunity to ask questions about the council's corporate capacity and on progress being made with "bridging the gap".
- 4.4.2 The Commission also scrutinises the Merton Partnership Annual report at its July meeting – this year members requested additional information on the findings and outcome of the apprenticeship review as well as the number of affordable homes that have been provided in the borough.
- 4.4.3 The Commission has closely scrutinised the Council's Equality Strategy and associated Action Plans on an annual basis. The Commission commented on a draft of the new Equality and Community Cohesion Strategy and suggested changes that were then included in the final strategy.
- 4.4.4 The Chief Executive of Merton Voluntary Service Council attended in November 2016 to discuss the voluntary sector and volunteering strategy. The Commission endorsed the strategy's direction of travel and made some comments on the draft that were taken into account in producing the final document, notably on the development of definitions for social value.

5. CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED

- 5.1 None for the purposes of this report.

6. FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

7. LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 There are no legal or statutory implications arising from this report.

8. HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 There are no direct implications arising from this report.

9. CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 None for the purposes of this report.

10. RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

10. None for the purposes of this report.

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

11.1 None.

12. BACKGROUND PAPERS

12.1 None.

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