

Committee: Cabinet

Date: 12 July 2021

Wards: All

Subject: Strategic Partner Grants Programme – future approach

Lead officer: John Dimmer, Interim Head of Corporate Policy and Improvement

Lead member: Councillor Marsie Skeete, Cabinet Member for Women and Equalities
Councillor Rebecca Lanning, Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care & Health

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Recommendations: That Cabinet:

- (1) Agree to the extension of funding for one further year (April 2022-March 2023) for each of the five elements of the Strategic Partner Programme 2019-22 as set out in Appendix I and summarised in paragraphs 3.1 to 3.5 to support the full development and implementation of the current work streams outlined in this report.
 - (2) Note the progress of key strands of the Recovery and Modernisation Programme as set out in paragraphs 2.3 to 2.8.
 - (3) Note the further review of C&H prevention activities as set out in paragraphs 2.9 to 2.11.
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1 PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1. This report sets out the current funding allocations to voluntary and community sector organisations who receive grant funding from the Strategic Partner Programme 2019-22. The 15 organisations receive Strategic Partner funding totalling £4,572,159 over the 2019-22 period.
- 1.2. The report sets out a proposal to extend the current Strategic Partner programme arrangements for a further year and requests grant funding of £1,524,053 be rolled forward into 2022/23. This would allow time for the development of a new programme focussed on increasing community resilience and providing access to appropriate support when needs first arise. This is a key project in our Recovery and Modernisation Programme. Extending the programme also ensures that the current arrangements for supporting residents during the Pandemic are not destabilised at a critical time.
- 1.3. The current Strategic Partner Programme, co-designed with the VCS, has been highly effective in achieving what it was designed to do, as

demonstrated through the numbers of people that the existing providers have assisted and the outcomes that they have delivered for residents.

- 1.4. The current Strategic Partners have demonstrated their value in both their response to the pandemic and the work they have undertaken together as part of the wider response, including the setup of the Community Response Hub.
- 1.5. Extending the current programme for a further year would enable us take forward our work on the Transforming How We Work with Communities project and other key work streams. We would then be positioned to align this funding programme with any new models, ways of working and opportunities for innovation we have identified through this project, building on existing good practice. Due to the current engagement and development work, there would not be sufficient time to re-launch the Strategic Partner Programme ready for the next financial year.
- 1.6. We have identified that any new model would need to ensure there are opportunities built in for smaller VCS organisations going forward. The Council has ensured continued funding opportunities for smaller and community led organisations. In particular, the Council has provided additional financial resources via Merton Giving to ensure that smaller and medium organisations can bid for necessary support. The Council has allocated significant resources to all three Phases of the fund to date, with Phase 3 just launching. We will continue to review funding for this scheme going forward. In addition, BAME voluntary and community sector organisations will also be able to access a new funding opportunity via Phase 2 of the Community Resilience Programme.
- 1.7. The proposed extension to current funding arrangements would also provide a further period of stability for current Strategic Partners, many of which have reported a large rise in the number and complexity of cases. Current and future challenges include the end of the moratorium on evictions and the likely end of furlough, as well as a rise in the need for debt and benefits support, plus an immediate need to tackle loneliness and isolation for our vulnerable communities. Relaunching the Strategic Partner Programme at this point may destabilise the current work of these organisations while we are still in the pandemic.

2 DETAIL

- 2.1. The Strategic Partner programme comprises of five elements:
 - Information and Advice provision;
 - Voluntary Sector Infrastructure Support;
 - Wellbeing Services;
 - Carers Services; and
 - Healthwatch Merton
- 2.2. The Strategic Partner Programme is due to come to an end on the 31 March 2022. This report recommends an extension of one year from the 1

April 2022 to 31 March 2023. This is for a number of factors highlighted in this report.

- 2.3. The pandemic has shone a light on existing inequalities, both in terms of the direct impact of infection but also the indirect economic and social impacts. There is work to do to understand this better as it is still early days, but we expect that the pandemic will have exacerbated those inequalities. Some of the impacts are likely to have been masked by the furlough scheme and temporary restrictions on evictions. We need to understand further how we can work to support families and communities to improve their physical, social and economic resilience. Some of the work within the Recovery and Modernisation Programme and the Community and Housing Recovery and Reset Programme will be learning from the engagement work undertaken or currently happening and local data to help shape and inform the strategic direction of the grants programme going forward.
- 2.4. The core focus for the Your Merton strand of the Recovery and Modernisation Programme is the development a new long-term vision for Merton post-pandemic. The Council has launched its biggest-ever engagement programme to understand the views, experiences and ambitions of local people to help shape this new vision outlining the key priorities for Merton going forward. Continuation of the current Strategic Partner Programme for a further year would ensure the alignment of the new programme outcomes with this new strategic vision and priorities.
- 2.5. Through the Transforming How We Work with Communities strand of the Recovery and Modernisation Programme we want to explore how we can support community resilience and whether that will in turn help people to support each other. We aim to build on the experience we have had working with many different partners in our community during the pandemic and before. We will also be looking at opportunities for service redesign or improvement and the starting point will be from our residents or service users.
- 2.6. The Council has now engaged Collaborate CIC, experts in helping public services collaborate to tackle complex social challenges, to support us in this project. In the initial stages, Collaborate is helping us to gain better insights around how residents access support and services in the borough and how different services join up. Engagement is underway with a wide range of stakeholders, including a planned workshop with commissioners and local place-making leads. The work on this project over the coming year is likely to open up further opportunities to join up our commissioning of preventative services across a wider range of services.
- 2.7. Some of the intended benefits to the sector include a more central role in the co-design of commissioned services, a strengthened relationship between commissioners and providers and greater capacity to identify assets and efficiencies across the system. We have also identified that any model would need to ensure there are opportunities built in for smaller VCS organisations.

- 2.8. Both the latest 2020-21 VCS funding database, also for consideration at this meeting, and the soon to be published State of the Sector report will inform the intelligence base for the Transforming How we Work with Communities project. Merton Council has commissioned Merton Connected to produce the 2021 State of the Sector (SoS) report to provide up to date information on the key issues affecting VCS organisations, their trustees, volunteers and employees. This latest report also focuses on the impact of Covid on the sector, its capacity going forward and any gaps in provision. These pieces of work will in turn inform the future direction of the Strategic Partner funding programme.
- 2.9. As part of the recovery work, the Community and Housing department are developing preventative and community based services that reach out to where people are and want to be.
- 2.10. Adult Social Care has recently commissioned the Community Response Hub (contract commencing 1 June 2021-31 May 2022, with the option to extend for a further year). This preventative and early intervention service will support individuals and families who are self-isolating, or who are vulnerable and isolated. This service will make best use of the increased volunteer offer and social capital available as a result of the pandemic. We would want the partners that support this service as part of the wider community emergency and preventative response to expand to include services that directly support young people and families. As this service and approach develops, we would use the data to help inform the Strategic Partner Programme going forward.
- 2.11. Both ASC and CSF commission services with Carers Support Merton. ASC commission the Carers Hub via the Strategic Partner Programme. CSF have a contract with Carers Support Merton to support young carers to the value of £67kpa. The CSF contract has been extended until March 2022, but CSF are proposing an exemption to continue until March 2023, to co-terminus with other contracts and grants that have been identified to be part of Integrated Community Services. Therefore, it makes sense to align both of these services to co-terminus at the same time to ensure a more joined up partnership approach to commissioning carer preventative services is developed in the future.
- 2.12. The recommended programme extension will ensure continued support for key preventive services, who continue to have a key role in the local community response to the pandemic, while we work with our wider partners to develop and implement the key recovery work streams outlined above.
- 2.13. Performance has continued to be measured for these organisations against key outcomes and outputs. All organisations commissioned through this programme have continued to operate during a challenging year. Some organisations have reported a sharp increase in demand for their services, and have had to seek additional sources of funding to meet this demand. Organisations have also demonstrated their ability to respond rapidly to changing needs, most notably through the creation of the Community Response Hub in partnership with the Council and SWL CCG.

- 2.14. Despite a need for some flexibility in how these services have been delivered in the last year, organisations continue to meet the required objectives of the Strategic Partner Programme.

3 INFORMATION AND ADVICE

- 3.1. There was a total allocation of £1,587,300 for 2019-22 from the Information and Advice funding pot. During 2020/21, it was agreed that funding for Year 3 would be allocated at the same level as Year 1 and 2. The detailed funding amounts are set out in Appendix 1.

VOLUNTARY SECTOR INFRASTRUCTURE SUPPORT

- 3.2. There was a total allocation of £555,000 for 2019-22 from the Voluntary Sector Infrastructure Support funding pot. As above, during 2020/21 it was agreed that funding for Year 3 would be allocated at the same level as Year 1 and 2. The detailed funding amounts are set out in Appendix 1.

WELLBEING SERVICES

- 3.3. There was a total allocation of £1,226,202 for 2019-22 from the Wellbeing Services funding pot. The detailed funding amounts are set out in Appendix 1.

CARERS SERVICES

- 3.4. There was a total allocation of £828,657 for 2019-22 from the Carers Services funding pot. The detailed funding amounts are set out in Appendix 1.

HEALTHWATCH MERTON

- 3.5. There was total allocation of £375,000 for 2019-22 for Healthwatch Merton from this funding pot. The detailed funding amounts are set out in Appendix 1.

4 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 4.1. The decision could be taken to stop providing Strategic Partner funding after the current agreements end in March 2022. However, the current funding climate for local authorities, with reducing budgets and activity also reinforces the continuing need to stimulate and nurture social action: filling gaps and enabling self-help within communities. It is inevitable that if we ceased to fund these services at the current level or withdrew a significant proportion of funding without time for the current providers to seek alternative funding, the current services would cease, potentially with the current providers being financially unviable going forward. This would inevitably have a knock-on effect in terms of increasing demand for Council services. **Not recommended.**
- 4.2. The decision could be taken to go ahead with recommissioning the Strategic Partner Programme this year. However, there is insufficient time to engage with partners effectively to establish the commissioning approach and model going forward, to develop a revised prospectus for

the programme (if this is what is decided), give time for applications to be completed and effectively evaluate and implement new services that meet current or anticipated demand. Due to the extenuating circumstances from the previous year, we need time to understand further how we can work to support families and communities to improve their physical, social and economic resilience and develop a model, which can support this. **Not recommended.**

5 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED

- 5.1. The Council undertook extensive engagement in the development of the Strategic Partner Programme 2019-22, as outlined in the relevant Cabinet and funding decision reports.
- 5.2. Early engagement is underway as part of the Transforming How We Work with Communities project and comprehensive engagement is planned as the project progresses across a range of stakeholders including Children, Schools and Families and Environment and Regeneration departments internally alongside the VCS, Health and service users.
- 5.3. The Your Merton survey is our most significant residents' engagement programme to date. The feedback from the survey will begin to define the council's future priorities for 2022 onwards.
- 5.4. Since the start of the pandemic, a Covid-19 Community Response Steering Group was established which includes a number of voluntary organisations and community groups, including all Strategic Partners. All Strategic partners have been engaged on a regular basis to work in partnership to provide a community response to Covid-19 across Merton. The Transforming How We Work with Communities project will consider whether to use this group as a platform for further engagement to shape the Strategic Partner Programme.
- 5.5. As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, a number of impact reports have been produced following engagement with local residents. In particular, people with Dementia and their carers, people with a learning disability and their carers and people from Black and Minority Ethnic Communities. The Council has also commissioned Merton Connected to complete a 'State of the Sector' report, which will be published in June 2021. These reports will further inform the direction going forward.
- 5.6. The Big Conversation, an engagement programme with people who have learning disabilities, their families, carers and the professionals who support them was launched in May 2021 which will help define the LD offer going forward, which will include preventative services that promote wellbeing and carers support.

6 TIMETABLE

6.1. The decision timetable is set out below:

Cabinet	12 July 2021
Existing providers notified of funding extension for 2022/23	19 July 2021
Funding continues for existing partners	1 April 2022

6.2. Revised funding agreements for the Strategic Partner Programme will begin on 1 April 2022, for all allocated funding.

7 FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS

7.1. The cost of the Information and Advice element proposed in this report is £529,100 over one year 2022-23 (excluding notional funding). This can be met within the current core budget.

7.2. The cost of the Voluntary Sector Infrastructure Support element proposed in this report is £185,000 over one year 2022-23 (excluding notional funding). This can be met within the current core budget.

7.3. There is a Strategic Partner Grant saving built into the MTFs of £78k from 2022/23 onwards. This saving could still be delivered if we roll forward for 2022/23 to allow time to implement the new approach, as there is sufficient additional funding in the core budget.

7.4. The cost for Wellbeing Services element in this report is £408,734 over one year and the Carers Services element is £276,219 over one year. The grant funding for these services is from the Adult Social Care core budget and the Better Care Fund budget.

7.5. The grant funding available for Healthwatch Merton is £375k over the three years 2019-22. The additional cost in this report to fund 2022-23 is £125k. This is met predominately from Corporate Services budget (£106,000 per annum) with the remainder met from the Department of Health Local Reform and Community Voices grant.

8 LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

8.1. There are a number of duties that the Council must adhere to which will apply to the funding as proposed and legislation that must be taken into account when providing such funding.

8.2. Under the Care Act 2014 (Part 1 Section 4) a local authority must establish and maintain a service for providing people in its area with information and advice relating to care and support for adults and support for carers.

8.3. Under the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 (Section 2) local housing authorities are required to provide advisory services, free of charge, which

provide information and advice on preventing homelessness and securing accommodation when homeless.

- 8.4. The Care Act 2014 states that local authorities must actively promote wellbeing and should have different types of support, services, facilities and resources that help a person avoid developing needs for health and social care support. This includes supporting carers and provision of information and advice.
- 8.5. Merton Council has a legal duty set out in the Health and Social Care Act 2012 to commission a local Healthwatch organisation that is independent of the Council and the NHS.
- 8.6. When funding allocations to voluntary and community sector organisations who receive grant funding, the Council must be mindful of the Equalities Act 2010 in particular its public sector equality duty under section 149 of that Act.
- 8.7. The Council has the power under the Localism Act 2011 (known as the general power of competence) to do anything an individual may do, unless specifically prohibited. This includes the power to make grants.
- 8.8. In adopting an outcomes-focused commissioned grants approach, care must be taken to ensure that the outcomes identified are not such that a funding agreement is in reality a contract, which would be subject to the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 and/or the Council's Contract Standing Orders.
- 8.9. Care should also be taken that the giving of a grant does not amount to a State Subsidy.

9 HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1. The process and decision-making for the Strategic Partner Programme was informed by robust equality analysis and this was published alongside the September 2018 Cabinet Report, December 2018 key decision report and February 2019 decision report.
- 9.2. When decisions are made as to which voluntary organisations will continue to be funded and which are not to be funded, regard will need to be had to the public sector equality duties and decision-making will be informed by equality analysis. This is attached at Appendix II.
- 9.3. In summary:
 - The proposals for continued funding will ensure that there is robust support for the voluntary and community sector in the borough to provide broad reaching information and advice, infrastructure support, wellbeing, carers and Healthwatch Merton services to residents.
 - Some organisations that were previously funded via the ACS Ageing Well Programme have received funding since 2019 and agreed up to March 2022. This has been whilst ASC have funded a programme of

support with Merton Connected to explore more sustainable options with the five organisations.

- As it is proposed that the existing programme will be extended with the existing organisations, any potential negative impacts identified for customers who are supported by other organisations who may have wanted to seek funding via the next round of Strategic Partner Programme applications will be mitigated through the actions outlined in the attached Equality Analysis Improvement Action Plan. This includes providing additional funding via Merton Giving to ensure that smaller and medium-sized organisations can bid for funding to provide a community response, and assist with recovery and build resilience.

10 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1. None specific to this report. The proposals in this report do not have a direct crime and disorder impact; however, they will contribute to an inclusive and cohesive society and improve the resilience of vulnerable residents. Overall, this should have a positive impact on the factors that contribute to crime and disorder and reduce the likelihood of vulnerable residents becoming victims of criminal behaviour.

11 RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1. Two of the council's key risks relate to equalities and to partnership working. The proposals set out in this report will mitigate risks in relation to both of these.

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

- Appendix I Proposed Strategic Partner funding 2022/23
- Appendix II – Equality Analysis

13 BACKGROUND PAPERS

1. Key Decision Report - Strategic Partner Programme 2019/22 25/02/2019 <https://democracy.merton.gov.uk/ieDecisionDetails.aspx?ID=714>
2. Key Decision Report - Strategic Partner Programme 2019/22 18/12/2018 <https://democracy.merton.gov.uk/ieDecisionDetails.aspx?ID=687>
3. Cabinet report – Strategic Partner Programme 2019/22 – commissioning requirements 17/09/2018 <https://democracy.merton.gov.uk/ieDecisionDetails.aspx?ID=629>
4. Cabinet report - Future Funding of the Strategic Partner Programme – 03/07/2017 <https://democracy.merton.gov.uk/ieDecisionDetails.aspx?ID=477>

Appendix I

Proposed Strategic Partner funding Year 4 (2022/23)

Information and advice provision

Organisation	Summary of Service	Funding amount 2019-22	Funding amount 2020-21	Funding amount 2021-22	Proposed funding amount 2022/23
Citizens Advice Merton & Lambeth	Continue to provide a range of information, advice, casework and specialist support services to people across the borough relating to social welfare law. Additionally provide a Specialist Support Partnership Service and Merton Advice Forum.	£355,000	£355,000	£355,000	£355,000
Association for Polish Family	Provide support for the Polish and EE communities in Merton mainly through the provision of information and signposting but also piloted skills development workshops.	£27,000	£27,000	£27,000	£27,000
Commonside Trust	Outreach support provided by South West London Law Centres (SWLLC) to Commonside Trust service users. Provision will include qualified legal advice in the areas of debt and housing. Hosting of specialist adviser from SWLLC three times per month.	£8,100	£8,100	£8,100	£8,100
deafPLUS	Provide a new Merton Deaf Advice Service. Delivery of a two or three day per week Social Welfare Advice Service to Deaf and Hard of Hearing	£24,000	£24,000	£24,000	£24,000

Organisation	Summary of Service	Funding amount 2019-22	Funding amount 2020-21	Funding amount 2021-22	Proposed funding amount 2022/23
	residents of Merton.				
South West London Law Centres	Provide legal casework and representation services in social welfare law (debt, employment, immigration, asylum, community care, housing and welfare rights) and pro-bono clinics offering legal advice services	£56,000	£56,000	£56,000	£56,000
Springfield Advice and Law Centre	Provide a legal advice service for mental health services users, offering advice and casework representation in debt and welfare benefit matters, including advice outreach sessions.	£59,000	£59,000	£59,000	£59,000

Voluntary sector infrastructure support

Organisation	Summary of Service	Funding amount 2019-20	Funding amount 2020-21	Funding amount 2021-22	Proposed funding amount 2022/23
Merton Connected (Merton Voluntary Service Council)	Continue to provide a one-stop shop infrastructure, strategic representation and volunteering support service for the voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise sector and volunteers and potential volunteers in Merton.	£175,000	£175,000	£175,000	£175,000
BAME Voice	Continue to provide support and voice for BAME organisations and communities in Merton. Introduction of a new peer mentoring and buddying scheme.	£10,000	£10,000	£10,000	£10,000

Wellbeing Services

Organisation	Summary of Service	Funding amount 2019-22	Funding amount 2020-21	Funding amount 2021-22	Proposed funding amount 2022/23
Age UK Merton	Living Well service to continue to provide support to older adults throughout Merton to enable them to continue to live independently, to improve physical and mental wellbeing, and to reduce their need for local health and social care services.	£88,450	£88,450	£88,450	£88,450
Merton Mencap	My Life, My Community Services to continue to improve opportunities for people with Learning Disability and/or Autism to participate socially to prevent, reduce and delay the need for social care and health services. My Life, My Community The service includes 2 Hub sessions a week which will run a series of activities, projects and workshops	£48,569	£48,569	£48,569	£48,569
Imagine Independence	To continue to provide 1-1 support, workshops, community based peer groups and support with inclusion and healthy living for people who have a mental health condition	£120,000	£120,000	£120,000	£120,000
Wimbledon Guild	To continue to provide ongoing emotional and practical support for people 60+ with complex needs and promote healthy minds through emotional support groups on bereavement, continuity of concern and wellbeing.	£97,000	£97,000	£97,000	£97,000
Merton Vision	To continue to support people with	£54,715	£54,715	£54,715	£54,715

Organisation	Summary of Service	Funding amount 2019-22	Funding amount 2020-21	Funding amount 2021-22	Proposed funding amount 2022/23
	sight loss with information, advice, guidance, practical help via volunteers and to build confidence in the community and with communication and daily living skills.				

Carers Services

Organisation	Summary of Service	Funding amount 2019-22	Funding amount 2020-21	Funding amount 2021-22	Proposed funding amount 2022/23
Carers Support Merton	To continue to provide a Carers Hub where Adult Carers (people over 18 caring for another adult) in Merton can access a range of interventions, activities, and support to assist them in their caring role. This includes Assessments and administration of Carer Discretionary Grants	£276,219	£276,219	£276,219	£276,219

Healthwatch Merton

Organisation	Summary of Service	Funding amount 2019-22	Funding amount 2020-21	Funding amount 2021-22	Proposed funding amount 2022/23
Healthwatch Merton	Provides a voice to consumers of health and social care services in accordance with our statutory obligations to commission a local Healthwatch service.	£125,000	£125,000	£125,000	£125,000

Appendix II - Equality Analysis



What are the proposals being assessed?	Proposals submitted to the Chief Executive on 17 June 2021 regarding the continued allocation of the Strategic Partner funding for 1 year: 2022-2023
Which Department/ Division has the responsibility for this?	Lead for delivery: Corporate Services, Customers, Policy and Improvement Division

Stage 1: Overview	
Name and job title of lead officer	John Dimmer, Head of Policy, Strategy and Partnerships
1. What are the aims, objectives and desired outcomes of your proposal? (Also explain proposals e.g. reduction/removal of service, deletion of posts, changing criteria etc)	The purpose of this report is to continue to commission services for Information and Advice, Voluntary Sector Infrastructure Support, Wellbeing, Carers and Healthwatch Merton for a further year.
2. How does this contribute to the council's corporate priorities?	<p>The Council's overarching policy priority is to bridge the gap in terms of outcomes between the east and west of the borough and between different communities. Funded organisations will continue to 'Support the delivery of Merton's Community Plan, actively contributing to 'bridging the gap' between the east and the west of the borough.'</p> <p>The Council has a key corporate priority to develop a new long-term vision for Merton post-pandemic. The Your Merton strand of the Recovery and Modernisation Programme will engage with residents to understand their views, experiences and ambitions to help shape this new vision outlining the key priorities for Merton going forward. Continuation of the current Strategic Partner Programme for a further year would ensure the alignment of the new programme outcomes with this new strategic vision and priorities.</p> <p>The Community and Housing Recovery and Reset Programme will be learning from the engagement work undertaken or currently happening and local data to help shape and inform the strategic direction of the grants programme going forward.</p> <p>The Strategic Partner programme also supports the Council's prevention agenda linked to a priority around prevention in the Health and Wellbeing Strategy.</p>

3. Who will be affected by this proposal? For example who are the external/internal customers, communities, partners, stakeholders, the workforce etc.

Key identified customers: existing and potential voluntary and community sector organisations; existing and potential service users; other internal/external commissioners.

A brief summary of each proposal is included in Appendix I. The users of the services covered by the applications for funding include, but are not limited to:

Information and Advice:

- Local residents, including older people, people from BAME communities, disabled people and people with long term health conditions, people with poor mental health, disadvantaged and vulnerable people in need of support with benefits, housing and debt and people in the disadvantaged east of the borough.
- Individuals seeking advice and casework support and legal advice and representation across the various areas of social welfare law, including: deaf and disabled people, people from BAME communities including Eastern Europe, mental health service users.
- Older adults aged 60 plus living with complex health, care and other needs, older men, carers and families, people from BAME communities, people with mobility or access issues which could prevent them from leaving the home.

Infrastructure Support:

- Small and medium sized voluntary and community sector organisations, including organisations representing BAME, older people, young adult, disabled, mental health and faith groups and organisations serving communities in the disadvantaged east of the borough;
- BAME organisations and communities, in particular those in the disadvantaged east of the borough.

Wellbeing:

- Adults over 18 whose mental health is at risk of escalating into a crisis.
- Older individuals who are 50+, older residents of Goan, Tamil and South Asian heritage. People who do not engage in physical activities. Individuals with enduring mental ill health. People in abusive relationships. People who are lonely and isolated.
- Individuals living with sight loss in the borough.
- All adults aged over 50 living in the borough.
- Adults with any learning disability/autism living across Merton, particularly those living at home with their families.
- People with mental health issues accessing support through primary or secondary care services or known to voluntary and other services.
- Individuals with complex mental health issues, older adults, anyone over 18 who has experienced loss and people over 50 who are socially isolated.
- Members of the community who are isolated and excluded from traditional activities, with a focus on

	<p>young, elderly, unemployed, disabled and those on a low income. Users predominantly from BAME communities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individuals, organisations and groups that provide wellbeing services and projects. • Vulnerable, lonely and isolated people over 50 who live in Merton. • Asian people over the age of 50 <p>Carers: Unpaid carers over the age of 18 living in the borough of Merton.</p> <p>Healthwatch Merton: People living or working in Merton who is legally entitled to access publicly funded health or social care services in Merton or anyone who carers for or represents anyone who has access to these services. This includes children and young people and their parents/carers.</p> <p>General:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indirect services users may include staff who access these services; departments and partners that refer individuals to these services; • Statutory and non-statutory partner organisations. <p>How the proposal will benefit the council: The proposed extended programme will continue to ensure more targeted use of the council's limited resources. In the current financial climate, we will be looking to support services that prevent, reduce or delay the need for more expensive interventions. The council will benefit through the contribution these services make to the council's corporate priorities and the priorities set out in the Community Plan.</p>
<p>4. Is the responsibility shared with another department, authority or organisation? If so, who are the partners and who has overall responsibility?</p>	<p>Programme Sponsor: Director of Community and Housing and Director of Children, Schools and Families, LB Merton</p> <p>Responsibility for co-ordinating the engagement work, development of the funding prospectus and administration of the front end of the funding process sits within Corporate Services. Divisions within Community and Housing have responsibility for the wellbeing services and carers' service strands of the programme and the direct commissioning of these services.</p>

Stage 2: Collecting evidence/ data

5. What evidence have you considered as part of this assessment?

Provide details of the information you have reviewed to determine the impact your proposal would have on the protected characteristics (equality groups).

Evidence gathered:

Extensive engagement was undertaken in the development of the Strategic Partner Programme 2019-22 as outlined in the relevant Cabinet and funding decision reports. Evidence included in the original funding bids indicated that residents from the groups with Protected Characteristics have higher needs and are over-represented in terms of take-up of advice and support from the voluntary sector. These include deaf and disabled people, people from BAME communities including Eastern Europe, mental health service users and people in the disadvantaged east of the borough.

Early engagement is underway to gather evidence as part of the Transforming How We Work with Communities project and comprehensive engagement is planned as the project progresses across a range of stakeholders including Children, Schools and Families and Environment and Regeneration departments internally alongside the VCS, Health and service users.

As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, a number of impact reports have been produced following engagement with local residents. In particular, people with Dementia and their carers, people with a learning disability and their carers and people from Black and Minority Ethnic Communities. The Council has also commissioned Merton Connected to complete a 'State of the Sector' report. These reports are drafted and awaiting publication and will provide evidence to consider as part of this assessment.

Impact of evidence on proposals:

The proposals for continued funding will ensure that there is robust support for the voluntary and community sector in the borough to provide broad reaching information and advice, infrastructure support, wellbeing, carers and Healthwatch Merton services to residents.

'Bridging the Gap' was included as one of the four key scoring criteria for this Programme. This accounted for 20% of the overall scoring. Panel members were asked to assess how well each bid demonstrated that it meets demonstrable needs, helps deliver LBM equalities duties, reaches priority client group and involves service users in design. Applicant organisations were also required to demonstrate a track record; meet the requirements set out in the key features sections of the prospectus and demonstrate value for money.

The aim of the proposal for Wellbeing Services was to support the voluntary sector to improve the wellbeing of people who use or might be at risk of using adult social care services. Adult social care, by its nature, supports people who might be vulnerable and/or have disability. It is therefore likely that they will have one or more protected characteristics. The proposal was designed to have a positive impact on the wellbeing of those that use preventative services.

The grant programme was an open process based on a prospectus. That prospectus was designed in consultation with the sector through a task

group and workshops. The grants awarded have had and will continue to have a positive impact on those who use those services. Some organisations that were previously funded via the ACS Ageing Well Programme have received funding since 2019 and agreed up to March 2022. This has been whilst ASC have funded a programme of support with Merton Connected to explore more sustainable options with the five organisations.

The extension to the existing programme will have a positive impact as it will allow time for us to develop an inclusive new commissioning programme informed by the latest evidence and aligned with the council’s new strategic priorities.

As it is proposed that the existing programme will be extended with the existing organisations, any potential negative impacts identified for customers who are supported by other organisations who may have wanted to seek funding via the next round of Strategic Partner Programme applications will be mitigated through the actions outlined in the following Equality Analysis Improvement Action Plan. This includes providing additional funding via Merton Giving to ensure that smaller and medium organisations can bid for funding to provide a community response, and assist with recovery and build resilience within Merton communities.

Stage 3: Assessing impact and analysis

6. From the evidence you have considered, what areas of concern have you identified regarding the potential negative and positive impact on one or more protected characteristics (equality groups)?

Protected characteristic (equality group)	Tick which applies		Tick which applies		Reason Briefly explain what positive or negative impact has been identified
	Positive impact		Potential negative impact		
	Yes	No	Yes	No	
Age	✓		✓		Generally, a positive impact identified. Any investment in Information and Advice services will have a positive impact on the equality groups who are over-represented as service users. There is a broad reach of support for all residents accessing services funded through this programme. There is a broad reach of support for all residents accessing wellbeing services via the Adult Social Care Wellbeing programme including older people. The extension to the existing programme will allow time to develop an inclusive new commissioning programme informed by the latest evidence and aligned with the council’s new strategic priorities. Any potential negative impacts identified for residents will be highlighted

				via engagement platforms. In addition, any organisation who may have wanted to seek funding via the next round of Strategic Partner Programme applications can apply for Merton Giving Funding. The Council will contribute additional financial resources to Merton Giving to ensure that smaller and medium organisations can bid for funding to provide necessary support after April 2022.
Disability	✓		✓	<p>Generally, a positive impact identified. Any investment in Information and Advice services will have a positive impact on the equality groups who are over-represented as service users. There is a broad reach of support for all residents accessing services funded through this programme. There is a broad reach of support for all residents accessing wellbeing services via the Adult Social Care Wellbeing programme including disabled people. The extension to the existing programme will allow time to develop an inclusive new commissioning programme informed by the latest evidence and aligned with the council's new strategic priorities. The extension to the existing programme will allow time to develop an inclusive new commissioning programme informed by the latest evidence and aligned with the council's new strategic priorities.</p> <p>Any potential negative impacts identified for residents will be highlighted via engagement platforms. In addition, any organisation who may have wanted to seek funding via the next round of Strategic Partner Programme applications can apply for Merton Giving Funding. The Council will contribute additional financial resources to Merton Giving to ensure that smaller and medium organisations can bid for funding to provide necessary support after April 2022.</p>
Gender Reassignment	✓		✓	<p>Generally, a positive impact identified. Any investment in Information and Advice services will have a positive impact on the equality groups who are over-represented as service users. There is a broad reach of support for all residents accessing wellbeing services via the Adult Social Care Wellbeing programme including people undergoing gender reassignment. The extension to the existing programme will allow time to develop an inclusive new commissioning programme informed by the latest evidence and aligned with the council's new strategic priorities.</p> <p>Any potential negative impacts identified for residents will be highlighted via engagement platforms. In addition, any organisation who may have wanted to seek funding via the next round of Strategic Partner</p>

				Programme applications can apply for Merton Giving Funding. The Council will contribute additional financial resources to Merton Giving to ensure that smaller and medium organisations can bid for funding to provide necessary support after April 2022.
Marriage and Civil Partnership	✓		✓	<p>Generally, a positive impact identified. Any investment in Information and Advice services will have a positive impact on the equality groups who are over-represented as service users. There is a broad reach of support for all residents accessing wellbeing services via the Adult Social Care Wellbeing programme. The extension to the existing programme will allow time to develop an inclusive new commissioning programme informed by the latest evidence and aligned with the council's new strategic priorities.</p> <p>Any potential negative impacts identified for residents will be highlighted via engagement platforms. In addition, any organisation who may have wanted to seek funding via the next round of Strategic Partner Programme applications can apply for Merton Giving Funding. The Council will contribute additional financial resources to Merton Giving to ensure that smaller and medium organisations can bid for funding to provide necessary support after April 2022.</p>
Pregnancy and Maternity	✓		✓	<p>Generally, a positive impact identified. Any investment in Information and Advice services will have a positive impact on the equality groups who are over-represented as service users. There is a broad reach of support for all residents accessing wellbeing services via the Adult Social Care Wellbeing programme. The extension to the existing programme will allow time to develop an inclusive new commissioning programme informed by the latest evidence and aligned with the council's new strategic priorities.</p> <p>Any potential negative impacts identified for residents will be highlighted via engagement platforms. In addition, any organisation who may have wanted to seek funding via the next round of Strategic Partner Programme applications can apply for Merton Giving Funding. The Council will contribute additional financial resources to Merton Giving to ensure that smaller and medium organisations can bid for funding to provide necessary support after April 2022.</p>
Race	✓		✓	Generally, a positive impact identified. Any investment in Information and

				<p>Advice services will have a positive impact on the equality groups who are over-represented as service users. There is a broad reach of support for all residents accessing wellbeing services via the Adult Social Care Wellbeing programme including people from BAME communities. The extension to the existing programme will allow time to develop an inclusive new commissioning programme informed by the latest evidence and aligned with the council's new strategic priorities.</p> <p>Any potential negative impacts identified for residents will be highlighted via engagement platforms. In addition, any organisation who may have wanted to seek funding via the next round of Strategic Partner Programme applications can apply for Merton Giving Funding. The Council will contribute additional financial resources to Merton Giving to ensure that smaller and medium organisations can bid for funding to provide necessary support after April 2022.</p>
Religion/ belief	✓		✓	<p>Generally, a positive impact identified. Any investment in Information and Advice services will have a positive impact on the equality groups who are over-represented as service users. There is a broad reach of support for all residents accessing wellbeing services via the Adult Social Care Wellbeing programme, irrespective of their religion or belief. The extension to the existing programme will allow time to develop an inclusive new commissioning programme informed by the latest evidence and aligned with the council's new strategic priorities.</p> <p>Any potential negative impacts identified for residents will be highlighted via engagement platforms. In addition, any organisation who may have wanted to seek funding via the next round of Strategic Partner Programme applications can apply for Merton Giving Funding. The Council will contribute additional financial resources to Merton Giving to ensure that smaller and medium organisations can bid for funding to provide necessary support after April 2022.</p>
Sex (Gender)	✓		✓	<p>Generally, a positive impact identified. Any investment in Information and Advice services will have a positive impact on the equality groups who are over-represented as service users. There is a broad reach of support for all residents accessing wellbeing services via the Adult Social Care Wellbeing programme with key strategic focus on engaging more men within the services and support on offer. The extension to the existing programme will allow time to develop an inclusive new commissioning</p>

				<p>programme informed by the latest evidence and aligned with the council's new strategic priorities.</p> <p>Any potential negative impacts identified for residents will be highlighted via engagement platforms. In addition, any organisation who may have wanted to seek funding via the next round of Strategic Partner Programme applications can apply for Merton Giving Funding. The Council will contribute additional financial resources to Merton Giving to ensure that smaller and medium organisations can bid for funding to provide necessary support after April 2022.</p>
Sexual orientation	✓		✓	<p>Generally, a positive impact identified. Any investment in Information and Advice services will have a positive impact on the equality groups who are over-represented as service users. There is a broad reach of support for all residents accessing wellbeing services via the Adult Social Care Wellbeing programme. The extension to the existing programme will allow time to develop an inclusive new commissioning programme informed by the latest evidence and aligned with the council's new strategic priorities.</p> <p>Any potential negative impacts identified for residents will be highlighted via engagement platforms. In addition, any organisation who may have wanted to seek funding via the next round of Strategic Partner Programme applications can apply for Merton Giving Funding. The Council will contribute additional financial resources to Merton Giving to ensure that smaller and medium organisations can bid for funding to provide necessary support after April 2022.</p>
Socio-economic status	✓		✓	<p>Generally, a positive impact identified. Any investment in Information and Advice services will have a positive impact on the equality groups who are over-represented as service users. Service users for Information and Advice and Wellbeing services and VCS groups are significantly higher for the east of the borough as users with lower economic status have higher needs and therefore are over-represented in terms of service demand. The extension to the existing programme will allow time to develop an inclusive new commissioning programme informed by the latest evidence and aligned with the council's new strategic priorities.</p> <p>Any potential negative impacts identified for residents will be highlighted via engagement platforms. In addition, any organisation who may have</p>

					wanted to seek funding via the next round of Strategic Partner Programme applications can apply for Merton Giving Funding. The Council will contribute additional financial resources to Merton Giving to ensure that smaller and medium organisations can bid for funding to provide necessary support after April 2022.
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7. If you have identified a negative impact, how do you plan to mitigate it?

No specific negative impacts for equality groups identified arising from the evidence considered. However, we have identified a broader potential negative impact for customers supported by other organisations who may have wanted to seek funding via the next round of Strategic Partner Programme applications. To mitigate this, the Council will contribute additional financial resources to Merton Giving to ensure that smaller organisations can bid for funding to provide necessary support after April 2022. We will continue to use our current engagement platforms to ensure we are aware of any potential negative impacts for service users.

Stage 4: Conclusion of the Equality Analysis

8. Which of the following statements best describe the outcome of the EA (Tick one box only)

Please refer to the guidance for carrying out Equality Impact Assessments is available on the intranet for further information about these outcomes and what they mean for your proposal

- Outcome 1** – The EA has not identified any potential for discrimination or negative impact and all opportunities to promote equality are being addressed.
- Outcome 2** – The EA has identified adjustments to remove negative impact or to better promote equality.
- Outcome 3** – The EA has identified some potential for negative impact or some missed opportunities to promote equality and it may not be possible to mitigate this fully.
- Outcome 4** – The EA shows actual or potential unlawful discrimination. Stop and rethink your proposals.

Stage 5: Improvement Action Plan

9. Equality Analysis Improvement Action Plan template – Making adjustments for negative impact

This action plan should be completed after the analysis and should outline action(s) to be taken to mitigate the potential negative impact identified (expanding on information provided in Section 7 above).

Negative impact/ gap in information identified in the Equality Analysis	Action required to mitigate	How will you know this is achieved? e.g. performance measure/ target)	By when	Existing or additional resources?	Lead Officer	Action added to divisional/ team plan?
Potentially a negative impact for customers who are supported by organisations who are not currently funded through this programme and who may have wanted to seek funding via the next round	The Council will contribute additional financial resources to Merton Giving to ensure that smaller organisations can bid for funding to provide necessary support after April 2022. We can also review the criteria in negotiation with other funding partners and revise the criteria as the need demands.	A range of organisations supporting equality groups not funded through this programme will have received funding through Merton Giving	March 2023	Existing	John Dimmer Heather Begg	
Potentially a negative impact for customers who are supported by organisations who are not currently funded through this programme and who may have wanted to seek funding via the next round	The Council will continue to engage with our voluntary and community sector partners and ensure there are consistent platforms for engagement.	Voluntary and community sector partners are able to feedback any areas of negative impact for equality groups	March 2023	Existing	John Dimmer Heather Begg	
Potentially a negative impact for customers who are supported by organisations who are not currently funded through this programme and who may have wanted to seek funding via the next round	Public Health and Merton Connected to allocate funding of £165k, subject to final approval, to BAME Voice and its member organisations and the Polish Family Association, to support Phase 2 of the Community Resilience Programme.	BAME voluntary and community sector organisations not able to bid for funding in 2022/23 will be able to access to this new funding opportunity.		Existing	Barry Causer	

Note that the full impact of the decision may only be known after the proposals have been implemented; therefore it is important the effective monitoring is in place to assess the impact.

Stage 6: Reporting outcomes

10. Summary of the equality analysis

This section can also be used in your decision making reports (CMT/Cabinet/etc) but you must also attach the assessment to the report, or provide a hyperlink

This Equality Analysis has resulted in an Outcome 2 Assessment

Key impacts:

Positive: the range of services recommended for continued funding will ensure equal access to all members of the community, and can be targeted at those people and areas with the highest levels of need. The extension to the existing programme will allow time to develop an inclusive new commissioning programme informed by the latest evidence and aligned with the council's new strategic priorities.

Negative: there is potentially a negative impact for customers who are supported by organisations who are not currently funded through this programme and who may have wanted to seek funding via the next round.

To mitigate any potential negative impact, the Council will contribute additional financial resources to Merton Giving to ensure that smaller organisations can bid for funding to provide necessary support after April 2022. We can also review the criteria in negotiation with other funding partners and revise the criteria as the need demands. The Council will continue to engage with our voluntary and community sector partners and ensure there are consistent platforms for engagement.

Stage 7: Sign off by Director/ Head of Service

Assessment completed by	Amanda Roberts, Policy Strategy and Partnerships Officer Heather Begg, Commissioner, Community and Housing	Signature: Amanda Roberts Heather Begg	Date: 07/06/2021
Improvement action plan signed off by Director/ Head of Service	John Dimmer, Interim Head of Corporate Policy and Improvement	Signature: John Dimmer	Date: 10/06/2021