The Leader of Merton Council, Councillor Mark Allison, writes for My Merton

Welcome to the spring issue of My Merton. I would like to begin by highlighting a couple of important things.

Firstly, around the time you receive your magazine, we are required to send out your annual Council Tax bill. So, in My Merton, you will find information about how the money raised helps our community, plus a full A–Z pullout guide to our services to help you get the most from them.

We know your costs are going up, and we have worked to keep Council Tax as low as possible. Ours is the lowest Council Tax in outer South London and, unlike most councils, we still offer generous discounts for those struggling to pay – please check our website for financial support.

Secondly, we’ve launched our new community-led plan for the future of the borough: Merton 2030. This plan follows our biggest-ever consultation, when we listened to the views of more than 5,000 residents.

In this issue, you can read about some of the fantastic initiatives being put in place to help our community get back to normal as we emerge from the pandemic. For example, we’re investing in local high streets; providing free space for small business start-ups to help them keep costs down; and helping older residents stay in touch through our Connecting Merton programme.

We’re also investing £400,000 this year into extra street-cleaning services. This is in addition to the street-sweeping vehicles we have already purchased to keep Merton clean, and we now fine more people for littering than any other council.

You can read more about these plans on pages eight to 12 and see the full plan at merton.gov.uk/2030.

We are a great community – thank you for helping us update our priorities.

Councillor Mark Allison
Leader of Merton Council

Merton welcomes the Broncos

Merton welcomed another top sporting draw to the borough as the London Broncos, a professional rugby league side from the second tier of the sport, kicked off their season at AFC Wimbledon’s Cherry Red Records stadium in January.

The Broncos are the only professional side in the UK who are outside the sport’s traditional heartlands of the North, and have been playing at various venues across the southeast since 1988, including Fulham’s Craven Cottage ground.

In recognition of the new partnership, the club is playing in AFC Wimbledon’s yellow and blue colours for their first season at Plough Lane.

Broncos chief executive Jason Loubser said: “We wanted to show how much this move means to us and how much we respect and admire the AFC Wimbledon story.

“We can see how much the football club has done to build incredible community links in the area already and we want to do the same and become a proud part of the Wimbledon fabric.”

Council Leader Councillor Mark Allison said: “I’m delighted to welcome another professional sports team to our sport-loving community in Merton. I hope that Merton residents will give them a friendly welcome to the borough.”
More first preferences for Merton families

Merton Council has been able to offer nearly 70% of schoolchildren a place at their first preference secondary school – an increase of more than 5% on previous years.

The majority of families have selected a Merton school as the one they most wanted their child to attend, reflecting a high confidence in the borough’s secondary schools, all of which are rated Outstanding or Good by Ofsted.

Every Merton family that applied for a secondary school place, starting in September, has received an offer. Almost nine in ten (89%) Merton children have been offered a place in one of their top three preferred secondary schools, with almost 95% receiving a place at one of their six preferences. Parents are reminded that they should respond to their offer by 15 March and that our school admissions website gives further details to parents in different circumstances on what to do next.

BBC film author’s school visit

A classroom at Haslemere Primary School in Mitcham was the location for a BBC crew filming a documentary about new author Banji Alexander who recently published his debut book.

Banji, a former teacher, was inspired by the children in his class to write a story about the pandemic through a child’s eyes.

Banji explains: “I wrote Lockdown Looms: Reggie’s Birthday Party as I wanted children to know there was light at the end of the tunnel, regardless of how challenging things were. The children at Haslemere were brilliant ambassadors, not only for their school but the entire borough. Using the book, we had valuable conversations discussing characters’ feelings and children told the BBC what they found hard during lockdown.”

Lola Mai recalls, “I was really lonely on my birthday because I didn’t get to spend it with my friends at school, but Mrs Kenneavy cheered me up by sending me a recording of her singing happy birthday to me.”

Merton Saints head for global competition

There has been more sporting success for Merton youngsters as riders from the Merton Saints BMX team, who we featured in the last issue of My Merton, have qualified for the 2022 World BMX Championships, which are being held in Nantes, France, between 27 and 31 July.

The three cyclists are Noah Turner, riding in the boys 12-year-old category, and Imogen Cockerell and Isla Radcliffe (our winter edition cover stars), who will feature in the girls 13-year-old group.

This is an excellent achievement, as to qualify for the event, where they will race off against competitors from across the globe, the trio had to place in the top 16 in their event in the UK National rankings from last season.

Car park closed

Peel House car park in Morden (behind Sainsbury’s) closed in January until further notice for essential structural repairs. The work is expected to take approximately six months, although further surveys are needed to understand the full extent of the damage. Find an alternative car park merton.gov.uk/parking
Five-year housing strategy agreed

The council’s cabinet has agreed to adopt a Housing Delivery Strategy, contributing to a five-year action plan that will see an increase in the delivery of high-quality and affordable housing across the borough. This is crucial, given our housing target of more than 900 new homes a year, but it also deals with housing need as we have over 9,000 people on our housing waiting list. We will work with housing providers to deliver those much-needed new homes and will also utilise surplus council-owned land for more affordable housing.

The Local Plan is expected to call for 50% of new homes in the borough to be affordable and will align with the priorities set out in the housing strategy. Residents and interested organisations were invited to take part in six weeks of consultation on the strategy last year. The response to the consultation was broadly supportive, recognising the impact of the climate emergency and the need for more accessible housing. Robust planning policies were also addressed in submissions, as well as honing the offer around homelessness, the density of new developments, and the need for affordable housing to be at the heart of the strategy.

High Path regeneration

Residents are moving into Hyacinth Court and Iris Court, new housing built in High Path in South Wimbledon, marking the completion of Phase One of the estate’s regeneration by Clarion Housing Group. All existing tenants and homeowners in High Path will be offered a new home as part of the development, with everyone receiving a spacious and highly sustainable property. There will also be a new neighbourhood park and play trail for children in the future.

High Path is part of the £1.3bn Merton Regeneration Project that will eventually see more than 2,700 homes created across the borough, including the replacement of 1,000 existing homes plus the construction of 1,700 more homes.

Surplus land to be released for new homes

The council’s cabinet agreed to release surplus property assets in the borough, freeing up land on nine sites to be sold for the construction of almost 400 new homes.

The sites have been declared surplus to council requirements and can now actively be prepared for sale, to achieve a good price for council taxpayers from a favourable property market. This move will go some way in the long term to helping the council achieve its ambitious annual target of 918 new homes, as set by the London Plan 2021. Four sites that gained planning approvals under the former Merantun Development Ltd will make up the first tranche to be sold, and the council’s aim is to achieve 100% affordable housing on them when they are developed. The landlord will prioritise homes with Energy Performance Certificate ratings of D or lower. Retrofit measures will include fitting external wall and roof insulation, energy-efficient doors and windows, heat pumps and solar panels.

Energy-inefficient properties to be upgraded

Fifty of the most energy-inefficient social-housing properties in the borough will be upgraded over the next year as part of a Government decarbonisation drive.

Working alongside Clarion Housing Group, Merton was part of a joint bid with Fenland and Tonbridge & Malling councils that was awarded £5.2m as part of the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund – a programme that will boost the energy efficiency of around 20,000 social homes across England by March 2023. Clarion will retrofit and reduce the carbon emissions of the chosen homes, saving residents hundreds of pounds in energy bills.

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Shopkeeper prosecuted over counterfeit tobacco

Theivendram Sivendran, who previously owned the Church Mini Market, 172D Church Road, Mitcham, pleaded guilty on December 2 at Wimbledon Magistrates’ Court to possessing for-sale pouches of counterfeit Amber Leaf rolling tobacco and hundreds of packets of Marlboro cigarettes intended for sale in Eastern Europe. As they were manufactured for a foreign market, the cigarettes had no English-language health warning on them.

In 2017, Trading Standards officers searched the store, supported by a sniffer dog, and found the illegal cigarettes and rolling tobacco hidden within the ceiling void behind secret panelling near the serving counter.

Mr Sivendran was summoned to attend court to answer these serious allegations but initially failed to do so. Magistrates had no hesitation in issuing an arrest warrant to compel him to appear before them.

The operation against Mr Sivendran involved many local agencies, including Trading Standards officers, the expert evidence of trademark holders, and prosecution by the South London Legal Partnership, London’s first five-borough shared legal service, which works on behalf of Merton Council.

Mr Sivendran was made the subject of an 18-month community order, which requires him to complete 140 hours’ unpaid work, attend a rehabilitation programme to address his offending, and pay £3,850 of prosecution costs.

EUSS support

If you are an EU citizen who arrived in the UK before 31 December 2020, and you and your family members haven’t yet applied to the EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS), you must do so urgently to continue to live, work, study and access benefits and services, such as healthcare, in the UK. The deadline for making applications has now passed, although the Home Office may accept late applications where there are reasonable grounds for doing so.

To date, 49,930 applications have been made to the EUSS in Merton, with 47,650 applications having being concluded as of 30 September 2021.

We have given funding to the South West London Law Centres to support late applications. For more information, visit swllc.org or email euss@swllc.org.

Energy-efficiency grants

If you find it hard to heat your home and worry about your energy bills, you might be eligible for funding to improve the energy efficiency of your home. This could help improve the comfort and warmth of your home, cut your fuel bills and reduce your impact on the environment. You may qualify for help if you live in an energy-inefficient home, which you own or privately rent, and if you are in receipt of benefits or are on a low income.

The future is electric

With electric vehicles (EV) becoming a lot more popular in recent years, we’ve been hard at work installing hundreds of new electric charging points. There are three types of EV charging points that can be found across the borough:

- **Rapid chargers (50kW+):** typically charge an electric vehicle to 80% in around 30 minutes.
- **Source London chargers:** there are 145 on-street slow to fast chargers (3kW, 7kW and 22kW) in high streets and residential locations throughout the borough. A 7kW charger can usually provide a full charge in three to five hours, although a 22kW unit could complete a charge much quicker.
- **Lamp column chargers:** are intended for overnight charging in residential areas and usually take between six and 12 hours to charge.

Altogether, there are now over 200 public EV charging points across Merton; you can see their exact locations at: www.zap-map.com/live. This year, we are developing an EV charging strategy. You can contact us to suggest a location for an EV charging point.

75 stories of the borough

Council staff and councillors have shared their stories as part of a digital project recording life in Merton.

Wimbledon and Wimbledon Community Association (WCA) have been collecting 75 stories from across the borough to mark their 75th anniversary year. These are a mixture of memories and inspiring tales of community action centred on the theme of connecting people places and passions.
**Council secures £30,000 costs against developer**

We successfully prosecuted the developer behind a set of unauthorised extensions in late 2021 at Wimbledon Magistrates Court, bringing to a close an action that has lasted more than two years.

Nizar Mitha, who owned the property at 7 Streatham Road, Mitcham, was fined more than £35,000 for non-compliance with two enforcement notices and ordered to pay £14,580 of the council’s costs, plus a surcharge of £181, giving a total of £30,961.

Council officers had first served the notices in June 2019, requiring that Mr Mitha demolish an outbuilding that had been erected on the property without permission, as well as to remove three dormer extensions that had also been built at the address.

Mr Mitha appealed to the Planning Inspectorate to allow the developments to remain, but these were dismissed and, with no further compliance noted, legal proceedings were launched on behalf of Merton Council by the South London Legal Partnership.

On 16 December, Deputy District Judge Cohen found Mr Mitha, who was represented by solicitors and a barrister, guilty of non-compliance with the two enforcement notices and imposed the significant financial penalty.

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**Panto raises riches for mayor’s charities**

The mayor’s charities, Christian Care Association and Marie Curie, were given a significant boost thanks to another, fictional, mayor over the festive period. At the end of each of his 50 performances of Wimbledon Theatre’s Christmas pantomime, *Dick Whittington*, the star of the show, Shane Richie, promoted Mayor Councillor Michael Brunt’s charities and helped them to raise more than £31,500 from bucket collections.

Shane, who as Whittington played one of history’s most famous mayors, also popped in to the Civic Centre before Christmas with some cast members to meet Councillor Brunt and Deputy Mayor Councillor Edith Macauley MBE.

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**Free school meals over Easter**

Merton Council will continue providing young people in receipt of Free School Meal (FSM) with vouchers over the Easter holidays to the sum of £30 per family.

Almost a quarter of secondary school pupils in Merton are eligible for FSM, and, with residents facing unprecedented pressures on their budgets due to food and energy-price inflation, it’s increasingly important to maintain this vital support for families.

The free Fun and Food holiday activities programme will also run, offering enjoyable activities and nutritious meals for Merton primary and secondary school children who are eligible for benefits-related free school meals.

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**Community forums**

These are free meetings where you can discuss a range of issues, which will then be followed up by relevant organisations.

Meetings can be held online. Check the website for details:
- Raynes Park forum
  Tuesday 22 March, 7.15pm, Thursday 30 June, 7.15pm
- Wimbledon forum
  Wednesday 23 March 7.15pm, Wednesday 15 June, 7.15pm

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**Council elections**

Elections will be held for every seat on Merton Council on Thursday 5 May. The full list of candidates standing will be published on our website on Wednesday 6 April.

The deadline to apply to register to vote is Thursday 14 April. The deadline to apply for a postal vote is 5pm on Tuesday 19 April. The deadline to apply for a proxy vote is 5pm on Tuesday 26 April.

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**PROSECUTED**

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On 16 December, Deputy District Judge Cohen found Mr Mitha, who was represented by solicitors and a barrister, guilty of non-compliance with the two enforcement notices and imposed the significant financial penalty.
Last summer, we ran our biggest-ever community engagement programme to understand how the pandemic has impacted residents’ lives, and their ambitions for the future of the borough. The result is Merton 2030 – our long-term plan for Merton.

*In every area, the pandemic will have left a long-term impact. People are spending more time in their local area, working more flexibly and valuing things like local green spaces more than ever.

But how has this change impacted people’s long-term ambitions for Merton, and what sort of borough do they want to live in in the future? To find out, we spent two months last spring running Your Merton, an in-depth programme of engagement that allowed us to talk to residents, businesses, service users and seldom-heard communities. We asked people to tell us what they love about Merton, what frustrates them, how the pandemic has impacted their lives and what their ambitions are for the future. The consultation generated more than 5,000 views from people through focus groups, surveys and a website for residents to leave comments.

The resulting plan, Merton 2030, is our ambition for the borough, and sets out the things we will do to listen to you and ensure your ambitions are met.*
Many responses were as you would expect – the sense of community spirit throughout the pandemic and the quality of the borough’s open spaces rated as the things you are most proud of in Merton. With more than 10,000 residents who had to shield, and many more who needed support from family and friends, this reflects the sense of local spirit we have seen since the pandemic began.

However, as we all spend more time locally, street cleanliness and parking have become top priorities for improvement. And looking further ahead, you told us you wanted to spend more time on your local high street – but wanted it to be a place for more than just shopping. You want to see community hub high streets with a range of facilities, and a cleaner Merton.
As a result of this extensive feedback, we’ve set five key priorities to help address your ambitions and create a borough we are all proud to call home.

These priorities aim to combine to create a borough where everyone has fair access to opportunity, and people can go as far as their ambitions take them, without having to leave the area.

Each priority theme will be reviewed annually and new improvements added.

1 **EDUCATION & SKILLS**

Creating opportunities for residents and supporting economic recovery will be crucial in the aftermath of the pandemic. All secondary schools in Merton are already rated as good or outstanding, and we have added hundreds of extra places in recent years. We will:

- Continue to expand the number of places for children with special educational needs to meet demand;
- Provide extra education support to those at risk of falling behind as a result of the pandemic;
- Launch new apprenticeships schemes and expand our partnerships with local colleges to offer more opportunities to local people;
- Develop a youth employment programme for Merton;
- Work to attract more technology and green-sector jobs to the borough.

2 **COMMUNITIES, HIGH STREETS AND THE ECONOMY**

Economic recovery is key to residents’ ambitions, particularly the regeneration of local high streets and housing. We will:

- Develop a Merton Local app to connect local people to local businesses from their mobile phones;
- Invest in the market at Mitcham with a dedicated manager to grow the market locally;
- Provide extra spaces on local high streets for events;
- Start an investment fund to support community development with local groups;
- Push forward the regeneration of Morden town centre;
- Keep developing low-carbon solutions such as more electric charging points.

3 **SUPPORTING THOSE IN NEED**

One of the council’s core functions is to be there to support residents in need, as well as promoting the health and wellbeing of everyone in the borough. We also want to bridge the gap between the east and west of the borough. We will:

- Renew our commitment to the Community Hub, which has provided help to thousands of residents;
- Continue to provide financial support to those on lower incomes through the Household Support Grant and the Council Tax Support Scheme;
- Deliver a series of improvements for the safety of women and girls in the borough, as well as others who are vulnerable to abuse.
### A Cleaner, Greener Merton
This has consistently been your top priority across the consultation. You told us you want a clean, sustainable borough with high-quality spaces for leisure and recreation. We will:
- Invest £650,000 over two years into improved street-cleaning services, with additional sweeping vehicles and services;
- Review our overall waste-management contract to see how the service can be improved;
- Target fly-tippers more than ever with specific campaigns, and aim to keep clearing the majority of tips within 24 hours;
- Launch a park ranger service to help residents feel safe in our parks;
- Introduce air-quality monitoring technology on high streets;
- Develop a detailed carbon-zero plan for the council and its buildings

### Fairness, Equality and Housing
Creating a more equal borough is one of our most important priorities. We want to reduce the inequalities gap between east and west Merton, and support those in need to help build a better future. We will:
- Work with housing providers to ensure an increase in the number of affordable homes;
- Ensure the successful completion of the rebuild of the Clarion Housing estates at Ravensbury, High Path and Eastfields;
- Move forward with the regeneration of Morden town centre, including new affordable homes for residents

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### What can residents expect from the council over the next 10 years?

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<tr>
<th>Involving the community</th>
<th>Collaborative working</th>
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<tr>
<td>Residents care a lot about the borough and want to be involved in shaping its future. The council will engage, involve and communicate effectively with the community so that everyone has a say about what happens in the area.</td>
<td>The council will work alongside local partners and grassroots organisations to deliver its priorities. It will build more partnerships and learn from best practices across other local authority areas to help address inequalities in Merton.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Financial stability and value for money</th>
<th>Environmental and social impact</th>
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<tr>
<td>Residents expect the council to manage its finances and make the best use of the resources at its disposal. We will also deliver high-quality services while developing innovative solutions to maximise efficiency.</td>
<td>The council will consider the impact of any measures it recommends on Merton’s communities, especially those that are the most disadvantaged. It will design policies, programmes and strategies to maintain the environment and tackle climate change.</td>
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<th>Digital technology and data security</th>
<th>Monitor progress</th>
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<td>The council will use the latest digital technologies to become more efficient and help keep personal data safe. A strong digital strategy that harnesses insight and intelligence will support this ambition.</td>
<td>The council will use the data and insight it collects about the borough and its population to set a baseline and monitor progress. It will draw on UN Sustainable Development Goals to set indicators for tracking delivery and impact against its priorities.</td>
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<th>Council Tax</th>
<th>#1 Putting Merton first</th>
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<td>At a time of increased financial pressure on households due to rises in the cost of living, the council will aim to keep Council Tax at the same level or lower than the average of our neighbours in outer London.</td>
<td>The council will champion Merton in every economic decision, especially in regards to commissioning and procurement because it is the council’s responsibility to benefit local communities and the economy.</td>
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<th>Equality, representation and inclusion</th>
<th>Long-term strategy</th>
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<td>The council will promote equality, representation and inclusion across all the diverse communities in Merton.</td>
<td>The council will develop a long-term strategy to achieve sustainable, measurable change. This clear direction for the future will be built on short-term milestones.</td>
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You can track our progress and find out how we’re delivering by visiting the council website or through our social media channels at merton.gov.uk/merton2030
The impact of coronavirus on young people in Merton

Last year, we commissioned Partnership4Young London to join Merton’s Young Inspectors to run a research project to examine the impact of the pandemic on young people.

More than 2,000 young people responded to a questionnaire and another 200 took part in targeted focus groups. Having analysed all the responses, the team shared their findings with the Merton Youth Parliament and then presented their report to the Children’s Trust. The trust’s action plan for the coming year is now focused on addressing the report’s key issues, which will aim to bring about meaningful change in the borough.

The team found that isolation during the lockdowns had a negative effect on the mental health of more than a third of young people in Merton, primarily because they couldn’t see their friends at school. Nearly three quarters of young people also found transitioning to online schoolwork difficult and many were worried about falling behind in their studies.

“The survey highlighted the level of digital poverty in Merton,” explains Halima Mehmood, one of Merton’s Young Inspectors. “Lots of parents don’t have enough devices to share between their children and some families only have limited internet access, so many students couldn’t access online learning when schools closed.”

Perhaps most importantly, young people felt that decision-makers were excluding them from discussions about how the borough could recover from the pandemic. “I remember many emotional stories from the care leavers’ focus group about how young people felt they didn’t have a voice, particularly on issues that affected them,” Halima adds. “The sessions highlighted the importance of finding out what young people wanted before making recommendations to the council. We must be prepared to hold the council to account if it doesn’t then deliver on its promises.”

Young people felt more positive about how they had used the time during lockdown to bond with their families, and they also mentioned how Merton’s parks and green spaces had enabled them to make the most of the outdoors. They said it is essential that local government funds are made available to maintain the borough’s parks and recreational spaces.

The report also underlined how the pandemic is still affecting people regardless of their age or socioeconomic background, although certain groups – particularly young carers – were affected disproportionately and many experienced food poverty.

Denise Vidal-Candengue, another Young Inspector and former member of Merton’s Youth Parliament, says: “There was also a deterioration in the relationship some young people had with the police. While they were generally viewed in a positive light, discussions with focus groups revealed that a combination of COVID-19 and the Black Lives Matter movement saw ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, and many young men lose trust in the police. People at the focus groups also raised concerns about how those with disabilities felt they weren’t understood and didn’t have a voice in the community.”

Merton’s Young Inspectors are now taking the findings of the Youth Survey to senior managers across local services so that they can learn from young people’s experiences.
Merton’s Youth Parliament gives young people the opportunity to represent their peers in the borough, as well as a platform to campaign on issues that are important to them. Denise Vidal-Candengue was a Member of the Youth Parliament between the ages of 11 and 17 and she’s now a Young Inspector. My Merton spoke to her about how both roles have helped her bring about change in the borough.

"The Merton Youth Parliament meets in the Council Chamber every two weeks under normal circumstances but they have only been meeting once a month while coronavirus restrictions remained in place," she explains. "Members are usually aged 11 to 19 but they can be aged up to 25 if they have special needs or a disability. They serve for a year initially but have the option to remain for longer."

All members are encouraged to champion the views of young people in Merton, bringing about change by campaigning on important issues, organising events, making speeches, holding debates and meeting local councillors and MPs. Some members will then go on to become Young Inspectors.

Denise landed a role as a Young Inspector in the middle of the pandemic. “We are employed by the council to help young people in areas like mental health, education and making community services more accessible,” she adds. “Anyone aged 16 to 23 can apply and, if they are successful, each inspector will be allocated an outcome area for them to focus on, such as helping young people stay healthy, become independent or live with a disability.”

After the Youth Residents Survey was published in January, Merton Youth Parliament and the Young Inspectors came together to discuss their recommendations for the future. “Our suggestions included helping young people choose what matters most to them in their communities,” Denise says, “addressing any concerns they have on topics like education and safety, and increasing funding for the borough’s most popular activities and services, such as the parks and recreation areas.”

Denise loves the fact that every day as a Young Inspector is different. “One moment I’m listening to young people in a focus group, the next I’m designing a hub with colleagues to help them with their mental health, and then we could be undertaking quantitative analysis of survey data.”

Merton Youth Parliament is looking for new members from schools, colleges and many other organisations in the borough. For more information about the Youth Parliament or to find out about how you could become a Young Inspector, please email youth.participation@merton.gov.uk.

Helping young people have their voices heard
Supporting our community

While there is cautious optimism that we are starting to emerge from the pandemic, help is at hand for those who still need it.

Connecting Merton

Connecting Merton is a community project run by our libraries that loans laptops, tablets and smart speakers with internet access to vulnerable and isolated residents in a bid to reduce digital exclusion.

As well as providing people in the borough with technology that could help them stay in touch with loved ones during the pandemic, Connecting Merton also asked library staff and volunteers to teach residents valuable digital skills, such as shopping online and managing their social media accounts.

Nearly three quarters of all the people who received devices said that being able to connect with friends and family online improved their emotional wellbeing.

To apply for a device, vulnerable or digitally excluded Merton residents aged 18 or over can pop in to one of our seven libraries. Call 0333 370 4700 or visit merton.gov.uk/libraries.

“I was classed as vulnerable during the COVID-19 pandemic,” says Merton resident Gloria Stringer. “I am grateful for this project and the opportunity to learn and practise new computer skills. It’s enabled me to feel more confident, find information that I need, and connect with friends and family.”

A caseworker adds: “I have just spoken to a resident and he is so enjoying being connected on the laptop. He has gone from strength to strength with the help of his wonderful volunteer. This programme has made a big difference and he is now doing Zoom calls with his son and has Amazon Prime and BBC iPlayer to watch TV. This really will transform his life.”

Accoutre Centre for Learning

Inspirational young artist Adedoyin, nine, won the Accoutre Centre for Learning’s Christmas card competition. The centre in Mitcham runs an education service to help Black African children aged between seven and 16 fulfil their potential.

Merton Community Hub

The hub is run by our voluntary sector partners, Age UK Merton, Wimbledon Guild and Merton Connected. It helps people in the borough with their shopping and provides mental health support, as well as a befriending service for those who are lonely or isolated.

The Merton Community Hub is open Monday to Friday from 10am–4pm. They have recently launched a new website: mertoncommunityhub.org.uk; telephone number: 020 8066 4086; and email address: help@mertoncommunityhub.org.uk

Dons Local Action Group

Set up by AFC Wimbledon fans at the start of the pandemic, the Dons Local Action Group aims to keep the community fed, connected and supported against poverty. Volunteers collect donations of food from customers outside supermarkets and use these to pack and deliver food parcels to vulnerable residents facing financial hardship. The group, which is a registered charity, also runs a laptop-donation scheme to benefit school children without online access at home and supports residents facing furniture poverty.

Community Fridge

Merton’s Community Fridge is a long-term initiative to address food poverty and reduce the amount of food that is wasted. The Merton Community Fridge is at the back of Morden Baptist Church on Crown Lane. Together with the other fridges in the network, it complements the borough’s existing foodbanks.

Foodbanks

No one should have to face the prospect of being unable to afford food. If you no longer have the means to buy basic supplies, you can contact Wimbledon Foodbank via their website, wimbledon.foodbank.org.uk, or call this freephone number: 0808 2082138 (open Monday to Friday 9am–5pm).
Helping to make ends meet

COVID-19 has highlighted inequalities and these have been compounded by the rising cost of living in recent months. With the price of essentials including gas, petrol and food soaring, many low-income families are being faced with tough choices as the bills mount up.

The pandemic has magnified inequalities, but help is available for people suffering financial hardship. From the Welfare Benefits Service and South West London Law Centres to the Wimbledon Guild and Citizens Advice, support is there when you need it most.

The Welfare Benefits Service (WBS) advises residents about what benefits they can claim, including a Carer’s Allowance, Council Tax Support, Disability Living Allowance, Personal Independence Payments, Housing Benefit, Pension Credit and Universal Credit. The service also provides help to people who find it difficult to complete the forms, as well as guiding them through the first stage of the appeals process.

Residents can contact the Welfare Benefits Service to request a telephone appointment by calling 020 8545 4178 Monday–Friday 9am–5pm or emailing WelfareBenefitsTeam@merton.gov.uk.

South West London Law Centres (SWLLC) offers a free money-advice service to help with a range of financial problems. The team can advise on rent and Council Tax arrears, utility and credit-card debt, how to maximise your income, and long-term options for problem debt. To make an appointment, please email debt@swllc.org. SWLLC also delivers free money webinars on topics such as Universal Credit, disability benefits and carers’ benefits. See swllc.org/webinars.

Wimbledon Guild provides financial assistance to eligible residents who need help paying for food, warm clothing, utility bills, essential furniture and household appliances. If you are unable to meet your basic needs, you can apply for a small grant by downloading the forms at www.wimbledonguild.co.uk/how-we-help/financial-assistance/small-grants. Simply complete the relevant sections, then submit the form with your supporting documents and the welfare team will contact you to discuss your application. For more information about the help provided by the Wimbledon Guild, please email welfare@wimbledonguild.co.uk.

Many people in the borough have had their jobs disrupted by the pandemic, and many more have found it difficult to claim sick pay or navigate the benefits system. If your finances are being squeezed and you’re unable to afford your rent, mortgage, utility bills, Council Tax or basic food, you can get help from Citizens Advice Merton & Lambeth (CAML).

CAML can also advise you how to reduce your energy costs and shopping bills, and clear any rent or mortgage arrears. They can be contacted Monday–Friday from 10am to 4pm on 0808 278 7831 or emailed at informationsupport@caml.org.uk, or you can visit the website to complete an online enquiry form. www.caml.org.uk
A budget to deliver on your priorities

Each spring, the council has to balance its budget for the new financial year. This year, spending decisions have been made in line with residents’ priorities as set out in Merton 2030 - our community-led plan for the future of the borough.

The cost of living crisis is affecting every area of the country, and Merton is no exception. With household bills rising this year, and inflation remaining stubbornly high, households across our borough will inevitably feel some financial strain in 2022. We’ll be helping the least well off by investing £10.3 million into our Council Tax Support Scheme, which is more generous than most other schemes, to once again give significant reductions to lower income households, despite the Government cutting funding for that particular benefit.

Just like local households, we are facing increased costs this year, but this budgetary pressure is made worse by the fact that our funding from central government has been almost halved since 2010.

Despite these difficulties, our budget for 2022/23 has allocated millions of pounds to help us deliver on your priorities. During the Merton 2030 consultation, the widest-reaching community-engagement programme in our history, you told us that one of the best things about living in Merton is our fantastic access to parks and green spaces. Managing and maintaining these public spaces takes a lot of work, and this year we’ve committed £2.58 million to the upkeep of these incredible public assets. We’ve also invested £60,000 in our tree-planting programme to give us greener, healthier streets.

You told us that you wanted to see investment in our local high streets. We’re delivering on that wish by putting £200,000 towards the development of Morden town centre. Additionally, we’re making our streets safer by investing in new and upgraded CCTV, and by giving £50,000 to the ‘designing out crime’ programme, where we change our urban environment to make our communities safer. Pedestrians will also see £1 million allocated to the upkeep of our borough’s footways.

Another area that you wanted us to focus on was keeping Merton clean. Overall, we’re spending £15.45 million to empty bins, tackle fly-tipping and littering, and process recycling. We’re also investing an extra £400,000 this year on street cleaning.

You told us that one of the best things about living in Merton is our fantastic access to parks and green spaces. This year we’ve committed **£2.58 million** to the upkeep of these incredible public assets.
A guide to key council services
2022–2023

Your pullout and keep guide

merton.gov.uk
Parking permits
Buy, renew or change a permit.

Planning
Find and view planning applications, apply for planning permission and get planning advice.

Libraries
Renew items, download free ebooks and magazines, search for new releases and join the library.

Schools
Apply for a school place.

Council Tax
Pay your bill, check your account, tell us you've moved and apply for discounts or exemptions.

Waste
Book a bulky waste collection or report a missed collection.

For a full list of online services, go to merton.gov.uk/doitonline

Life is mobile, so is your council

Adoption (Adopt London)
adoptlondon.org.uk
adoptionALS@southwark.gov.uk
020 7525 1746

Adult education
merton.gov.uk/adulteducation

Adult social care
merton.gov.uk/adult-social-care
020 8545 4388 (9.30am–1.30pm)

Benefits advice and local welfare
merton.gov.uk/benefitsadvice
welfarebenefitsteam@merton.gov.uk
lwss@merton.gov.uk
020 8274 4908 (11am–3pm)

Blue Badge parking permits
merton.gov.uk/bluebadge
concessionarytravel@merton.gov.uk
020 8274 4990 (11am–3pm)

Bulky waste collections
merton.gov.uk/bulky
020 8274 4902

Cemeteries
merton.gov.uk/cemeteries
020 3876 8806

Childcare and early years
merton.gov.uk/childcare
fsd@merton.gov.uk
020 8274 5300

Children's social care
merton.gov.uk/childrensservices
children@merton.gov.uk
020 8545 4226/7
Out of hours 020 8770 5000

Comments, compliments and complaints
merton.gov.uk/complaints
complaints@merton.gov.uk
020 8545 3060

Committees and meetings
merton.gov.uk/committee
democraticservices@merton.gov.uk
020 8545 3616

Conservation areas
merton.gov.uk/conservation_areas
conservation.areas@merton.gov.uk
020 8545 3153

Council Tax
merton.gov.uk/counciltax
local.taxation@merton.gov.uk
020 8274 4904

Council Tax Support
merton.gov.uk/cts
housing.benefits@merton.gov.uk
020 8274 4903

Councillors
merton.gov.uk/councillors
Conservative 020 8545 3396
Labour 020 8545 3424
Liberal Democrats 020 8545 4770
(Tuesday–Thursday 8.30am–2.30pm)
Merton Park Ward Independent
Residents 020 8545 4026

Education welfare services
merton.gov.uk/educationwelfare
020 8545 4021

Electoral services
merton.gov.uk/voting
020 8274 4901

Emergency information
Information about emergencies and emergency plans affecting Merton residents or business.
merton.gov.uk/emergency
civilcontingencies@merton.gov.uk
020 8274 4901 or 020 8545 3476

Events
Find out about council events or, if you are running a community event, you can advertise it for free on our online events calendar.
merton.gov.uk/events

Adoption (Adopt London)
adoptlondon.org.uk
adoptionALS@southwark.gov.uk
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020 8274 5300

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Out of hours 020 8770 5000

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020 8545 3060

Committees and meetings
merton.gov.uk/committee
democraticservices@merton.gov.uk
020 8545 3616

Conservation areas
merton.gov.uk/conservation_areas
conservation.areas@merton.gov.uk
020 8545 3153

Council Tax
merton.gov.uk/counciltax
local.taxation@merton.gov.uk
020 8274 4904

Council Tax Support
merton.gov.uk/cts
housing.benefits@merton.gov.uk
020 8274 4903

Councillors
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merton.gov.uk/events

Keeping in touch with the council
Subscribe to receive our email news. Be the first to hear about the latest news, events and services, plus emergency alerts and updates.
Sign up: merton.gov.uk/newsletter
@Merton_Council
@mertoncouncil
whatsoninmerton
YouTube youtube.com/mertoncouncil

The borough’s quarterly magazine My Merton is also available at merton.gov.uk/mymerton
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Website/Mail/Phone Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Family Services Directory</strong></td>
<td>Information and support on parenting, childcare, health and children's activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>merton.gov.uk/fsd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fostering</strong></td>
<td>merton.gov.uk/fostering <a href="mailto:foster@merton.gov.uk">foster@merton.gov.uk</a> 0800 073 0874</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fly-tipping</strong></td>
<td>Report fly-tipping on public roads and pavements online.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>merton.gov.uk/flytipping 020 8274 4902</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Freedom of Information</strong></td>
<td>merton.gov.uk/foi  <a href="mailto:foi@merton.gov.uk">foi@merton.gov.uk</a> 020 8545 4634</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Freedom Passes for disabled people</strong></td>
<td>merton.gov.uk/freedompasses <a href="mailto:concessionarytravel@merton.gov.uk">concessionarytravel@merton.gov.uk</a> 020 8274 4990 (11am–3pm)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Freedom Passes for older people</strong></td>
<td>londoncouncils.gov.uk/ freedom-pass 0300 330 1433 (Monday to Sunday 8am–8pm). Calls charged at local rate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Garden waste collection service</strong></td>
<td>merton.gov.uk/gardenwaste 020 8274 4902</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Graffiti removal</strong></td>
<td>Report graffiti online. We aim to remove graffiti from council property within five days and offensive, including racist, graffiti anywhere in the borough within 48 hours. merton.gov.uk/graffiti 020 8274 4902</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Homelessness</strong></td>
<td>Advice and guidance for those at risk of becoming homeless.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>merton.gov.uk/homelessness <a href="mailto:housingadvice@merton.gov.uk">housingadvice@merton.gov.uk</a> 020 8545 3636 020 8770 5000 (6.30pm–9am)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Housing Benefit</strong></td>
<td>merton.gov.uk/housingbenefit <a href="mailto:housing.benefits@merton.gov.uk">housing.benefits@merton.gov.uk</a> 020 8274 4903</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Housing register</strong></td>
<td>merton.gov.uk/allocations <a href="mailto:registration@merton.gov.uk">registration@merton.gov.uk</a> 020 8545 3305</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Leisure</strong></td>
<td>Hall hire, school holiday activities, sports pitches and courts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>merton.gov.uk/leisure <a href="mailto:leisure@merton.gov.uk">leisure@merton.gov.uk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Libraries</strong></td>
<td>merton.gov.uk/libraries <a href="mailto:library.enquiries@merton.gov.uk">library.enquiries@merton.gov.uk</a> 0333 370 4700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Licensing</strong></td>
<td><a href="mailto:licensing@merton.gov.uk">licensing@merton.gov.uk</a> 020 8545 3969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Litter bins</strong></td>
<td>Report a problem with a litter bin.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>merton.gov.uk/litter-bins 020 8274 4902</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Local land charges searches</strong></td>
<td>merton.gov.uk/landcharges <a href="mailto:locallandcharges@merton.gov.uk">locallandcharges@merton.gov.uk</a> 020 8545 3350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Local Studies and Heritage Centre</strong></td>
<td>merton.gov.uk/localstudies <a href="mailto:local.studies@merton.gov.uk">local.studies@merton.gov.uk</a> 020 8545 3239</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Morden Library Merton Civic Centre London Road Morden SM4 5DX</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MASCOT Telecare</strong></td>
<td>Helps people to live safely, securely and independently in their own homes. The service is available 24/7 and uses simple technology linked to our response centre. merton.gov.uk/mascot 020 8274 5940</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Noise nuisance</strong></td>
<td>merton.gov.uk/noise <a href="mailto:noiseandnuisance@merton.gov.uk">noiseandnuisance@merton.gov.uk</a> 020 8545 3025 (9am–5pm)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Out of hours 020 8545 9750 (Friday and Saturday 11pm–4am)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Occupational therapy</strong></td>
<td>The occupational therapy service provides a range of services to people living with a permanent and substantial physical disability. merton.gov.uk/occupationaltherapy <a href="mailto:ssotduty@merton.gov.uk">ssotduty@merton.gov.uk</a> 020 8545 4428 or 020 8545 4477 (9.30am–12.30pm)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parking</strong></td>
<td>Penalty Charge Notices, parking permits and car parks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>merton.gov.uk/parking <a href="mailto:parking@merton.gov.uk">parking@merton.gov.uk</a> 020 8545 4661 (11am–4pm)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parks</strong></td>
<td>merton.gov.uk/parks 020 3876 8806, press option 7 for Merton parks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Planning</strong></td>
<td>merton.gov.uk/planning <a href="mailto:planning@merton.gov.uk">planning@merton.gov.uk</a> 020 8545 3777 (1–3pm)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pot holes</strong></td>
<td>See roads and highways</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Public health</strong></td>
<td>merton.gov.uk/publichealth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Register office</strong></td>
<td>Contact the register office if you want to get married, have a civil ceremony or civil partnership, register a birth or death, name a baby or take part in a citizenship ceremony. merton.gov.uk/register <a href="mailto:register.office@merton.gov.uk">register.office@merton.gov.uk</a> 020 8274 5777</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Morden Park House Morden Park London Road Morden SM4 5QU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Opening hours 9am–4.30pm</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The information in this brochure is correct at the time of printing, but is liable to change.
Roads and highways
merton.gov.uk/
roads-highways-pavements
trafficandhighways@merton.gov.uk
020 8545 3700 (10am–4pm)

Rubbish and recycling
merton.gov.uk/recycling
020 8274 4902

Schools admissions
merton.gov.uk/schools
020 8274 4906

Snow clearance
We take action, as far as reasonably practicable, to allow the safe movement of all highway users on important routes in the borough, and keep delays to a minimum. This work includes gritting and salting roads to reduce the risk of ice forming, as well as clearing roads and pavements of accumulated ice and snow.
merton.gov.uk/wintermaintenance
trafficandhighways@merton.gov.uk
020 8545 3700

Street cleaning
merton.gov.uk/street-care-cleaning
020 8274 4902

Street lighting
merton.gov.uk/streetlighting
trafficandhighways@merton.gov.uk
020 8545 3700 (10am–5pm)

Trading standards
merton.gov.uk/tradingstandards
trading.standards@merton.gov.uk
020 8545 3025 (9am–5pm)

Tree preservation
A tree preservation order (TPO) is an order made by the council intended to protect one or more trees or woodland if its removal would have a significant impact on the local environment and its enjoyment by the public.
merton.gov.uk/tpo
planning@merton.gov.uk
020 8545 3777 or 3815 (1–3pm)

Connecting Merton
Want to get online but don’t have a computer? Need help with using a computer?
If you’re a Merton Library member, you can use the libraries’ computers and access the WiFi for free. If you have your own tablet or laptop but struggle to get online, just visit your nearest library and start surfing for free. Our libraries offer one-to-one IT support, plus a range of IT courses for beginners right the way through to the more advanced.

Library staff and volunteers have helped isolated residents to keep in contact with their community through Connecting Merton, an IT-equipment-loaning scheme. Vulnerable or digitally excluded people across the borough can borrow a laptop or a tablet to get online to carry out essential daily tasks and to stay in touch with loved ones.

If you’re not yet a library member, registering is quick and free. Pop in to any of our seven branches, call 0333 370 4700 or visit merton.gov.uk/libraries

0333 370 4700
merton.gov.uk/libraries

The information in this brochure is correct at the time of printing, but is liable to change.
Other highlights from the budget include

**£2.66 million**
this year, as part of a multi-year investment to provide increased capacity in our educational provision for children with Special Educational Needs.

**£63.75 million**
on providing social care for older people, and adults with learning or physical disabilities.

**£3.21 million**
on running our seven public libraries, our online library services, and our Heritage and Local Studies Centre.

**£290,000**
on installing environmentally friendly LED streetlights.

**£3.86 million**
on tackling homelessness, providing homes to those in need, and upholding standards in private rented homes.

**£1.62 million**
for Safer Merton, our team focussed on reducing violent crime, anti-social behaviour and incidences of hate in our borough.

**£24.25 million**
for our Children’s Social Care and Youth Inclusion service to support, protect and care for over 2,000 vulnerable or disadvantaged children and young people.

**£5.19 million**
on Freedom Passes to provide free travel for older people and those with a disability.

The cost of living crisis, reductions in Government funding, and the costs incurred by COVID-19 have all contributed to challenging times for local authorities like Merton Council. However, with the resources available, our budget tries to deliver on the priorities that you told us we should address.
Living with long COVID

While most people make a full recovery from COVID-19 in a week or so, research suggests that a small minority have symptoms which persist for much longer.

The most common symptoms of long COVID include tiredness, shortness of breath, problems concentrating (brain fog), loss of appetite, and changes to your sense of smell and taste. If you have any of these symptoms more than four weeks after being infected with COVID-19, you should contact your GP to discuss treatment and support.

Perhaps surprisingly, the chances of suffering long-term symptoms don’t seem to be linked to the severity of the initial infection. If you are concerned about a close family member or friend who is experiencing symptoms of long COVID, there is plenty you can do to help with their physical and emotional wellbeing.

You should be ready to offer support while also encouraging them to become more independent.

If your partner is suffering from long COVID, it can have a negative impact on your relationship. You may also have concerns about your finances, work and health. If you’re feeling overwhelmed, try to prioritise what’s important and don’t take on too much, work together during the recovery process, and offer consistent support and reassurance.

As a relative or friend of someone who has been seriously ill with COVID-19, you could also be experiencing anxiety about their long-term prospects of recovery. You should try to understand the impact that supporting someone has on you, take time out to enjoy your own space, or talk to Merton Uplift or One You Merton if you’re feeling anxious or depressed.

Long-term side effects from the vaccines are extremely rare, but long-term symptoms from a coronavirus infection are much more common and are often more severe, even for people who are young with no underlying health conditions. Vaccines and boosters are therefore a safe and effective way to protect yourself from catching COVID-19 and suffering serious long-term symptoms.

For more information about how you and your loved ones can live with long COVID, visit www.yourcovidrecovery.nhs.uk.

Do you want to have Better Health in 2022?

It’s never too late to resolve to improve your health and wellbeing.

Even if your January resolutions to eat healthily and get more exercise have fallen by the wayside, there’s no reason not to pick up the reins again and make 2022 the year you really get moving.

Whether your goal is improving your diet, becoming more active, stopping smoking, managing your alcohol consumption or boosting your mental wellbeing, Better Health Merton can support you.

Its online resources and quizzes will help you identify the changes you want to make and provide you with all the information you need to get started.

If you’re a smartphone user, you can also find out about apps that will help you track your progress towards your targets, including weight loss and activity levels. There are also plenty of nutritious and delicious recipes and tips on how to keep going when motivation is low.

Better Health Merton is for everyone who lives, works or is registered with a GP in Merton.

find out more merton.gov.uk/betterhealth
Anyone who has not yet had their first, second, or booster dose of a COVID-19 vaccine is encouraged to take up the offer of getting immunised.

As we emerge from winter into spring and restrictions are lifting, it might be tempting to think that COVID-19 is a thing of the past. But although hospitalisations and death rates are thankfully falling, the message from our local NHS remains the same: stay safe by getting fully vaccinated.

The vaccine is safe and effective and the best way to protect yourself from severe illness and hospitalisation.

More than three quarters of a million people in South West London had their booster and third dose vaccines to protect themselves and their loved ones. Yet that still leaves over 250,000 people without that all-important full protection.

There are still many people who haven’t had their first vaccine jab too. Anxiety or lack of confidence about the vaccination process, misinformation or fear of needles could all play a part.

Edward Grier, 70, was one of these people. He didn’t have his first vaccine until 12 January, when a routine visit to the Nelson Health Centre led to a chat with the vaccine walk-in clinician and Chief Pharmacist, Sedina Agama.

When Edward walked out of the clinic, he’d had his first jab and was on his way to getting fully vaccinated. Edward said: “I don’t want to catch COVID-19 and end up in the hospital – I’m so happy to be vaccinated.”

Some people may be putting off vaccination because of the apparent mildness of the Omicron variant. While Omicron may affect some people mildly, this is not the case for everyone.

Data published by the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) shows that unvaccinated people are up to eight times more likely to be hospitalised with COVID-19. Vaccination may also reduce the risk of debilitating long-COVID symptoms.

Lead GP for Merton, Dr Vasa Gnanapragasam said: “For those of you who haven’t had any vaccine yet, don’t worry about it; that’s history, we start here and now.

“Get the first dose, get some protection, get the second dose, get more protection, then get a third one and get even more protection. It will save your life and it will help us all to get on with our lives.”

If you’re still feeling a little anxious, pop into one of the NHS vaccination centres in Merton where the friendly staff are always ready to have a chat. No-one will pressure you to get vaccinated unless you feel ready.

Protect your children against measles

Parents and guardians in Merton are being encouraged to take their pre-schoolers to their GP to get their measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccines. A new national campaign warns of the serious risk from highly contagious measles, which is preventable if children have had two doses of the MMR vaccine. In Merton, 89% of five-year-olds had received one dose of the MMR vaccines in 2020/2021, and this drops to 72% for those receiving two doses by the time they are five. Children can get their second dose from the age of three years and four months onwards. Two doses of the MMR vaccine gives 99% protection against measles. Unvaccinated children are at higher risk of contracting vaccine-preventable diseases such as measles. The measles virus can lead to complications such as ear and chest infections, fits and inflammation of the brain, which can result in long-term disabilities or even death. Contact your GP surgery to arrange an appointment for the vaccine. If you want to find out more, visit the NHS website www.nhs.uk/conditions/vaccinations/mmr-vaccine
A survey of over 2,000 young people in Merton last year found that more than a third had suffered mental health issues during the pandemic, mostly because schools had closed and they were unable to see their friends. Many older people who didn’t have access to technology also felt isolated because they couldn’t connect with their families during the national lockdowns.

**Merton Uplift**
Merton Uplift, a partnership between the NHS and the voluntary sector, is a service that aims to help people over the age of 18 access psychological services and wellbeing support. If you’re worried about your mental health, you can book an assessment with a Merton Uplift expert and they will outline your options. Support can include guided self-help, counselling, workshops or online courses. For more information, please contact mertonuplift@swlstg.nhs.uk or call 020 3513 5888.

**Good Thinking**
Since 2017, more than half a million Londoners have used Good Thinking’s digital service to manage their mental health and wellbeing. You can contact them 24/7 on any device for free advice on tackling stress, anxiety, mood swings and poor sleep. You can also access free NHS-approved apps, articles, podcasts, self-assessment forms and workbooks to monitor and improve your mental health. If you would like to know more, visit www.good-thinking.uk.

**The Samaritans**
Every day, the Samaritans respond to around 10,000 calls for help. During the pandemic, many more people have been facing personal, financial, physical and emotional challenges that have affected their mental health. Tips for managing the pressures of everyday life include eating well, getting plenty of sleep, exercising regularly, meeting friends and trying relaxation techniques. If you need extra support, call 116 123 to speak to a Samaritan, email jo@samaritans.org or visit the website: www.samaritans.org.

**One You Merton**
Looking after your mental health is just as important as your physical wellbeing. If you’re anxious or depressed and can’t alleviate the symptoms, or if you’re having trouble sleeping and feel you can’t cope with the pressures of everyday life, One You Merton offers a mind-plan tool that helps you take a few simple steps to improve your overall wellbeing. For more information about One You Merton, contact oneyou.merton@nhs.net or call 020 8973 3545 Monday to Friday 9am–5pm.

**Community Chorus**
Celebrating its 10th year, Wimbledon Community Chorus is a not-for-profit choir that is open to singers of all ages and abilities. Under the musical direction of Soo Bishop (by arrangement with Merton Music Foundation) and accompanied by musician Giles Kennedy, the choir meets every Tuesday evening from 7.45–9.30pm. It has been instrumental in supporting its members’ social and emotional needs during the pandemic. find out more email wimbledonccmembers@gmail.com.

**Kooth**
Counsellors and therapists at Kooth support children and young people aged between 11 and 21 with a mental health toolkit, enabling them to choose what kind of support works best for them. find out more www.koothplc.com.
Although some businesses were able to continue to offer their services online, those who depended on customers coming to their premises suffered losses.

Now you’re able to get out and about more, you can go out and support your local businesses and visit your high street for shopping or socialising, but we want you to be able to stay safe.

COVID-19 is still in circulation and you may have seen our advertising boards and lamppost banners with reminders to:

- Wash your hands before you leave the house, take a small bottle of antibacterial handwash with you, and wash your hands again when you get home
- Wear a face covering if you’re in a crowded place
- Test yourself with a lateral flow kit before meeting people
- Keep up to date with your vaccinations and boosters.

These small measures will allow you to support businesses on your local high street and safeguard the livelihoods of the workforce in the retail sector.

You will also be protecting yourself, your friends and family, and the community.

Kindness in the Community

In December, Merton Council presented a Kindness in the Community Award to Craig Wellstead, Cormac van der Hoeven and Xavier Wiggins of the Dons Local Action Group. They were announced as the winners at the prestigious Merton Business Awards ceremony, held at the All England Lawn Tennis Club, for their work across Merton, Kingston and Wandsworth in the pandemic, during which they enlisted 20,000 volunteers to deliver food and furniture to those who needed help. They also focused on helping people escape digital poverty, giving them access to devices to stay in touch with loved ones when mixing with others was banned.

Merton Local e-commerce app

This spring, the council will be launching a new e-commerce app called Merton Local. Businesses can register to be featured on the app and offer special discounts and deals on any products and services exclusively to app users.

The app will show users where their nearest local business, service or special offer is, encouraging them to stay local. It will also help residents to find local events and things to do in the borough.

Look out for more information in the coming months.
Keeping Merton’s streets clean and green

Keeping the borough’s streets clean and green is a top priority for residents and the council too. *My Merton* gets an update on what is being done to tackle dumped rubbish, including the new Wall of Shame CCTV appeal, plus news on the thousands of trees being planted across the borough.

INVESTING IN OUR STREETS

Keep an eye out on Merton’s streets for our two new state-of-the-art mechanical pavement sweepers, which we have invested in as part of the latest phase of the Keep It Clean Love Merton campaign.

As part of the drive to keep the borough’s streets clean, these new fuel-efficient, multi-functional sweepers are equipped with a quick-change system, meaning Veolia’s street-cleansing teams can complete a range of tasks, such as vacuuming up litter, cleaning all those hard-to-reach places, like under street furniture, and jet washing our pavements.

The first phase of work will target residential roads and undertake a deep clean of pavements across the borough.

We asked residents to take part in the council’s competition to name the mechanical pavement sweepers and received over one hundred suggestions. Sign-up to our *My Merton* e-newsletter to find out the winning names.

merton.gov.uk/newsletters

HELP TO CATCH THOSE ILLEGALLY DUMPING RUBBISH

Every year, we receive hundreds of reports of illegally dumped rubbish. This not only makes the borough look unsightly, but it also costs an estimated £1 million a year to clear, money we would rather spend on vital services like social care for our most vulnerable residents.

Our enforcement team is working tirelessly to crack down on the small minority of selfish people who dump rubbish, but we need your help to identify some of these fly-tippers. This is why we have launched the Merton Wall of Shame CCTV appeal.

The Wall of Shame will show short CCTV video clips of culprits dumping rubbish on our streets. We are encouraging residents to watch these videos and, if you recognise anyone, report them directly to us. We pride ourselves on being one of London’s greenest boroughs and will continue to do everything within our power to keep Merton clean.

Keep an eye out for new episodes every month on our YouTube page: www.youtube.com/mertoncouncil
THREE EGG-CELLENT WAYS TO RECYCLE THIS EASTER

1. Choose chocolate eggs that have minimal packaging.

2. Once you’ve enjoyed your chocolate treats, recycle your cardboard boxes, together with Easter cards and their envelopes, in your blue-lidded wheelie bin.

3. Scrunch up foil into a ball and recycle it in your purple or green box or communal recycling bin for residents in flats.

THOUSANDS OF TREES TO BE PLANTED ACROSS THE BOROUGH

Throughout 2022, the council will be planting a tree for every child born in the borough in support of the Queen’s Green Canopy tree-planting initiative. The Queen’s Green Canopy is a unique scheme that invites people and organisations from across the United Kingdom to Plant a Tree for the Jubilee to mark Her Majesty’s Platinum Jubilee this year. With 3,000 children born in Merton every year, our aim is to honour this special anniversary by increasing the number of trees across the borough.

In addition to the Queen’s Green Canopy scheme, the council has also secured 1,340 new trees from the Urban Tree Challenge Fund, which will help make the borough even greener. Thanks to our volunteers and The Baitul Futuh Mosque, Morden Park was the first open space to gain 400 young trees. The groups helped the council plant the wipes in February. Planting will continue borough-wide throughout the year.

A NEW WAY TO REPORT DUMPED RUBBISH

We’ve made it quick and easy to report fly-tipping and littering in the borough. Visit the new Merton Council report-it webpage and, with a drop of a pin plus a few details, you can report the precise location of a fly-tip on a map.

Reporting dumped rubbish means...
- Veolia, our waste contractor, can remove it from the streets quickly
- Our enforcement officers can issue a Fixed Penalty Notice to anyone caught discarding their rubbish

See it, report it: merton.gov.uk/fly-tipping
Community projects awarded £1.3million

Neighbourhoods across the borough will benefit from funding for projects, including children’s play areas, energy-saving initiatives, garden streets and a re-imagined bus shelter.

More than £1.27million from the council’s Neighbourhood Fund has been shared among a range of community projects. Since 2014, the council has been collecting a Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) for Merton for infrastructure and other projects to support the demands that development places on our neighbourhoods. By the end of September, Merton had received £5.6million for its neighbourhood projects, of which over £4million was approved for spending.

This is the third year that Merton’s Neighbourhood Fund and the Ward Allocation Scheme have combined to distribute funds that account for 15% of Merton’s CIL. A total of 32 bids requesting nearly £1.8million were received from community groups, residents, businesses, charities and council services.

Priority was given to bids that would contribute to community plans, especially those which helped to tackle inequality across the borough, particularly in the most deprived wards to the east and south. Funds have also been allocated to projects that will help the borough recover from the pandemic and tackle issues that contribute to climate change.

Schemes that will receive money include refurbishing the 1950s Pollards Hill Bus Shelter to create an indoor and outdoor community space (£150,000). Funds will also be allocated to provide more playground equipment for older children at Colliers Wood Recreation Ground and an immersive learning centre in Mitcham. This exciting project will provide younger pupils with a fun and enriching virtual learning experience that will help them develop their core skills and imagination using opportunities for interactive exploration beyond the classroom.

Attic’s Creative Community Engagement Programme has been allocated more than £40,000 and will deliver a comprehensive programme of workshops. Drama and creative activities will aim to help people including students, refugees and dementia sufferers to build their confidence, feel less isolated and enable them to pursue educational or employment opportunities.

Several projects receiving funding are focusing on addressing climate change. This is in line with the council’s Climate Change Strategy, which aims to make Merton a net-zero carbon borough by 2050. Nearly £90,000 has been allocated to Energy Matters: Building the next generation of energy champions. The scheme involves training energy educators in schools across the borough to deliver an Energy Matters module that highlights the benefits of using low-cost energy-saving devices such as LED lightbulbs, radiator reflectors, draught excluders and cavity insulation.

A second initiative – Community Champions 2022: Building social capital in Merton’s journey towards net zero – has been allocated £64,000. This will go towards supporting the programme for a year and will allow it to reach more residents in an effort to inspire sustainable behavioural change.

The Wheel – A Circular Economy for Merton will receive £75,000 to connect existing waste-reduction projects via a virtual hub. Another 20 smaller projects will hopefully join the scheme to build capacity and capability during 2022. Having established the virtual hub, the project plans include opening permanent storage sites, training spaces and shared workshops in 2023.
THE FULL LIST OF SUCCESSFUL BIDS

- Pollard’s Hill bus shelter refurbishment: £150,000
- Attic’s Creative Community Engagement Programme: £42,549
- The Small Quarter: Community growing and culture space: £38,914
- The Mitcham Colour Way: £3,500
- The New Horizon’s Centre – better spaces – better place: £68,500
- Sherwood Park Cafe and Mini Golf: £60,000
- Uptown Youth Services: £30,000
- Immersive Learning Centre: £80,490
- Museum of Wimbledon Refurbishment Project: £50,000
- Improving Colliers Wood Rec Playground: £67,000
- Martin Way – Greener, brighter and revitalised: £27,335
- Merton Garden Streets 2022: £31,288
- There’s More to Morden: £35,000
- Community Champions 2022: £64,000
- 20mph banners: £35,000
- Polka Green Retrofit – decarbonisation measures to the Polka Theatre’s old building: £20,180
- Community centre energy-saving lighting: £35,000
- Energy Matters: Building the next generation of energy champions: £88,823
- The Wheel – A circular economy for Merton: £75,000
- Merton Priory/Anima Una: £50,000
- Abbey Recreation Ground: £40,000
- South Wimbledon Business Area Wayfinding: £135,360
- Bramcote Parade top-up: £20,000
- Parade Programme Management top-up: £27,500

For more information about the CIL and Neighbourhood Fund, please visit merton.gov.uk/neighbourhoodfund
In February 1952, representatives of the boroughs of Mitcham, Wimbledon, and the Urban District of Merton & Morden, gathered at their respective town halls to announce the death of King George VI and to proclaim the accession of Elizabeth II.

Whilst residents mourned the death of their beloved king, they were excited at the prospect of a coronation. Many viewed the Queen's accession as the dawn of a colourful new era – one that would bring progress and prosperity after the hardships of World War II.

Planning began in earnest for events to mark the coronation, scheduled for 2 June 1953. Services of thanksgiving were held in the parish churches, coronation souvenirs were distributed to schoolchildren, and local councils gave prizes for the best-decorated shops and gardens.

In Merton, much of the programme focused on Morden Park, which hosted everything from open-air services to sports displays and dancing. The Band of the Irish Guards also gave the first performance at the new coronation bandstand. On 2 June, thousands of people descended on the park for a torchlight procession, culminating in the lighting of a vast bonfire.

Mitcham held several events on its historic cricket green, including a grand challenge match between the Old Disraelians XI and the Old Keir Hardians. On 6 June, there was a special procession to Mitcham Stadium, where youth organisations staged sports activities, demonstrations, a miniature tattoo and a costumed Pageant of Elizabethans.

At Tamworth Recreation Ground, the parks department also created intricate coronation displays using thousands of bedding plants.

In Wimbledon, the mayor held a garden party at Cannizaro Park and a banquet at the Wimbledon Hill Hotel. Residents threw colourful street parties and the borough's recreation grounds were used for public celebrations, including a vast children's event at Cottenham Park. Around 1,500 people packed into the town hall for a civic service and on 2 June, coronation tradition was maintained with an ox-roast on Wimbledon Common, followed by singing, dancing and a grand fireworks display.

Children from Ashtree Avenue, Mitcham, cheer the arrival of specially designed mugs and pens commemorating the Queen's Silver Jubilee. Many children also received a specially minted coin.

On 6 February 2022, Her Majesty the Queen became the first British monarch to celebrate a platinum jubilee. We focus this issue on how our borough has marked her 70-year reign and her local associations.
Uniquely, the Queen's coronation was the first to be televised and residents across Merton clubbed together to hire sets, crowding into living rooms to watch the official ceremony. Local councils also arranged public screenings of the broadcast at venues such as Vestry Hall, Merton Public Hall and Marlborough Hall, Wimbledon. Merton's cinemas later advertised colour screenings of the event, filmed in Cinemascope.

Merton residents honoured the Queen with equal enthusiasm in 1977, when processions and street parties were held across the borough to mark her Silver Jubilee. In July 2002, to mark 50 years on the throne, Merton welcomed the Queen’s Jubilee baton relay, hosting special events including a vast open-air concert and fair. As a more lasting memorial of the Golden Jubilee, fundraising events helped to safeguard Mitcham’s historic cricket club and an area of woodland was planted in Morden Park.

Merton residents have also been involved in honouring the Queen through individual artistry. Wimbledon-based June Mendoza is one of the most highly regarded portrait artists in the world and is clearly a Royal favourite, having produced four portraits of the Queen between 1981 and 1988.

Her Majesty the Queen has visited Merton on a number of occasions during her reign. In the 1960s, she visited Atkinson Morley Hospital in Wimbledon.

At the time of the Queen's visit, the hospital had an international reputation for its pioneering work in neurosurgery and the treatment of brain injuries.

Although not an avid tennis fan herself, Her Majesty attended the famous Wimbledon Championships in July 1957, July 1962 and July 1977, when she presented the Ladies' Singles trophy to the victorious Virginia Wade. Her most recent visit was in 2010, when she met tennis champions past and present in the members’ enclosure and also took the time to talk to Club officials, ball boys and girls. All four Club visits have attracted huge crowds, as tennis fans and residents filled the streets of Wimbledon to greet the monarch.

The Queen also visited the borough on 12 May 2012, when thousands of cheering residents braved the weather, hoping to catch a glimpse of the Royal party. As part of the Diamond Jubilee celebrations, Her Majesty and the Duke of Edinburgh visited St Mark's Academy in Acacia Road, Mitcham. After chatting to students and dignitaries, they enjoyed a special lunch with South London's achievers and the 13 Merton councillors who have served as mayor since our borough's formation in 1965. The Queen has been Patron of Haig Housing since 1952. In October 2019 she visited Morden to officially open a new development of 70 homes.

We are inviting Merton residents to celebrate the Queen's Platinum Jubilee by applying to hold street parties during the four-day bank holiday weekend. Successful applicants will be allowed to close their road to vehicles on any of the days from Thursday 2 to Sunday 5 June. There will be no charges for communities, and the council will help you to close your street by providing signage. To find out more, visit merton.gov.uk/streetparties or search for #MertonJubilee on Twitter or Facebook.
MERTON ADULT EDUCATION

Learn something new with one of our exciting Adult Education courses. A wide range of subject areas are on offer, including:

- Business
- Cake Decorating and Cookery
- Childcare and Health Care
- Computing and IT
- Creative Arts
- English, ESOL and Maths
- Hairdressing
- Languages
- Music
- Musical Instrument Making and Repair
- Photography
- Pilates
- Teaching and Training
- Training for Work
- Wellbeing

Courses that fit around your lifestyle and working day, including Saturday courses. The quickest way to enrol is online. You will need to show proof of your identity to complete your enrolment. Suitable ID includes a passport, birth certificate, driving licence or Freedom Pass. For the latest course information, check our website stcg.ac.uk/merton.

DISTANCE LEARNING COURSES

FREE short courses leading to nationally recognised qualifications which you can study in your own time. We have a range of short distance learning courses from the awarding body NCFE, which can be completed in 4 – 8 weeks. These are fully funded, meaning there is no cost to the learner. On completion you will gain a nationally recognised Level 2 qualification.

Courses on offer include:

- Understanding Specific Learning Difficulties
- Understanding Autism
- Understanding Behaviour that Challenges
- Understanding Children and Young People’s Mental Health
- Understanding Common Childhood Illnesses
- Understanding Nutrition and Health
- Understanding Safeguarding and Prevent
- Equality and Diversity
- Creating a Business Start-up
- Level 1 Award in Employability

See website for the full list of courses.

Eligibility

You need to have lived in the EU for three years and be aged 19+. You will need to be confident with written English in order to meet the required standards.

For further information please contact martina.collett@stcg.ac.uk

Help the NHS and social care services by returning unused equipment

If you have items such as a bath lift, shower chair, or perching stool that are no longer needed, please arrange a free collection by Croydon Community Equipment Service, which works in partnership with Merton Council. Your unused equipment will be safety checked and deep cleaned, so that it can be used to help someone else live more independently.

To arrange a free collection, email cesadmin@croydon.gov.uk or call 020 8664 8860

REPORT DUMPED RUBBISH QUICKLY AND EASILY
merton.gov.uk/fly-tipping

KEEP IT CLEAN | LOVE MERTON.
One of the family

A young mum who used to be in foster care told *My Merton* about how the experience shaped her future.

Natalia told us about her experience as a foster child in Merton, now that she’s left the care of her foster parents. She said: “I first went into care when I was 13 but I had no idea what was happening and didn’t get any answers from social services. Several placements broke down because I was quite a difficult child who often behaved badly at school and occasionally ran away. Some foster families simply weren’t equipped to handle someone like me, and many of my experiences of care were negative, until one particular family took me in and treated me as one of their own children.

“They were a delightful married couple who were patient, motivated and caring, and they gave me the family life I needed to become a better version of myself. They brought structure to my life, they taught me how to cook, clean and manage my money, and they furnished me with a sense of self-worth that gave me the confidence to leave their care when the time was right.”

Natalia is now 25 and has two young children of her own. She’s managed to secure housing association accommodation and works part-time for social services on fostering panels. She’s also found employment with a Government law department. “Without the right care from the right foster family at the right time, I wouldn’t be where I am now,” she concludes. “And I’m still in contact with the family today.”

If you would like to be a foster carer, you will need to be over the age of 21 and live in Merton or one of the neighbouring boroughs. You must also be able to work in the UK, have a spare bedroom, and have the time and energy to care for a child who may be vulnerable.

Foster carers also need a good support network of friends and family, as well as being able to work with a team of social care professionals, teachers and birth parents. If you and your partner, as well as any children, can help the foster child feel welcome, safe and comfortable in your home, you will have met the main requirements for becoming a foster parent.

Merton Council supports its carers using the Mockingbird model, which has been shown to bring significant benefits to foster children and their extended families. You will receive ongoing training and a generous allowance of up to £514 per week for each child. This covers their clothing, food, travel, pocket money and any special equipment they may need. You will receive a contribution towards the increase in your bills, as well as extra money towards birthdays, religious festivals and holidays.

We host two fostering information sessions each month. To find out more about these sessions or becoming a foster parent in Merton, call 020 8545 4070 or visit merton.gov.uk/fostering.
Reducing crime across the borough

Since the tragic murder of Sarah Everard, the Metropolitan Police has established a taskforce to keep women and girls safe across London.

The Met Police’s action plan can be viewed here: www.met.police.uk/SysSiteAssets/media/downloads/met/about-us/action-plan.pdf

If you have been a victim of sexual harassment, domestic abuse or crime, support is available:

• Rape and Sexual Abuse Support Centre
  www.rasasc.org.uk
  0808 802 9999
  12 noon–2.30pm daily
  7–9.30pm daily

• Victim Support
  www.victimsupport.org.uk
  0808 168 9111

Crime is falling across Merton

Figures from the Metropolitan Police show that crime fell across the borough by more than 5% in 2021. The number of reported incidents fell by 712 to 12,876 over the year, almost 2,000 of which were captured on the borough’s upgraded CCTV system. The £3.2 million investment in Merton’s network of cameras will help keep drivers, pedestrians and those enjoying the borough’s public spaces safer in the future.

Designing out crime in a popular park

A review of safety measures in a busy park is being carried out by the council and the police after residents reported increased fears of crime.

In a safety assessment, which started in January, the council and police are looking into how to design out crime in Wandle Park in Colliers Wood.

The park is on two historic walking routes – the Wandle Trail and the Nelson Trail – and is often used as a short cut by pedestrians and cyclists, as well as being popular with dog walkers.

One Stop Shop

If you are over the age of 16 and are experiencing domestic violence or abuse, including physical, sexual and emotional abuse, or threatening, controlling or coercive behaviour. Merton’s One Stop Shop is a confidential service that allows people to discuss their circumstances with domestic-violence workers.

Legal coronavirus restrictions have now been lifted, but, to help prevent infection, the sessions at Morden Baptist Church on Crown Lane can still only be booked by appointment. The One Stop Shop takes place every Monday (excluding bank holidays) from 9.30am until noon. For more information, please call 020 7801 1777 or visit merton.gov.uk/domestic-violence.

Stop Hate UK Helpline

If you have been affected by or witnessed hate crime, you can now report the incident to a new 24/7 Stop Hate UK Helpline. Stop Hate UK is a major anti-discrimination charity that provides support to anyone who has been affected. Most hate crimes are under-reported and some communities are reluctant to speak to the police, but the new line will hopefully help reduce the incidence of hate crime across Merton.

The Stop Hate Helpline can be used anonymously and is open all day every day on 0800 138 1625, or you can email talk@stophatеuk.org.
Supporting victims of crime in Merton

Victim Support Merton provides people who have experienced domestic violence and abuse with access to trained caseworkers who can give them the emotional and practical support they need. This free service is strictly confidential and is available even if the crime has not been reported. My Merton spoke to Natalie, a senior Independent Domestic Violence Advocate, about this vital service.

Please tell us a bit more about Victim Support
Victim Support is an independent charity that supports victims of crime and other traumatic incidents. We provide specialist advice to help people recover from domestic violence or abuse to the point where they feel their lives are back on track. We champion victims’ rights and raise issues locally and nationally, working with policy-makers, commissioners, agencies in the criminal-justice system and local government.

Who does the service support?
Our specialist independent advisers offer confidential professional support to victims and survivors of domestic violence and abuse in Merton. We can also support victims and witnesses attending court.

What support is available?
Our IDVAs (Independent Domestic Violence Advocates) act as the primary point of contact for anyone who is experiencing abuse. IDVAs are highly trained caseworkers who will speak with clients about their relationships and talk them through their options. IDVAs support victims at risk of harm from intimate partners, ex-partners or family members to secure their safety and the safety of their children.

Having identified the level of risk, we develop a plan that includes things like planning for a safe exit from the relationship or preparing for emergencies if a client chooses to stay. We can signpost clients to legal services and advise on legal protection options. We can also help clients access safe housing and health services, as well as guiding them through the criminal-justice system.

If you feel someone is at risk of harm, do you involve the police?
We can support clients without involving the police, but we will contact the police or emergency services if we believe someone is in immediate danger.

find out more
Victim Support offers practical and emotional support for victims. You can contact them by calling the charity’s free 24/7 helpline on 0808 16 89 111 or visiting www.victimsupport.org.uk
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