Celebrating age – valuing experience

A strategy for people over 50 in Merton
A summary document – September 2007

www.merton.gov.uk
Celebrating age – valuing experience

Introduction

Why we have produced this
As a nation we are living longer and enjoying life to the full, well past retirement age. Great news for us all, but how prepared are we? What does an older population expect, and how do individuals want to be treated if their needs change due to ageing?

Here in Merton the borough’s population is relatively young, but we expect the number of people over 50 to increase significantly over the next twenty years: the growth of those aged over 85 will be particularly high, and the number of older ethnic minority residents will rise. Turning 50 isn’t old but for most people it is the time when they start to lay the foundations for the years to come. As a council we want to support you in that planning and make sure we too are prepared. This strategy will help us plan appropriate services for the future, enable residents to enjoy life whatever their age, and ensure older people continue to contribute to society and stand up for their rights. We want you to maximise your independence and maintain individuality and dignity. We want our residents to grow older with positive expectations of the support they will receive.

What we have done
At the end of 2006, the council produced a draft strategy for older people which was based upon national research and drawn up with key local partners, particularly the Primary Care Trust and the voluntary sector. To ensure that the final strategy reflected local aspirations we then talked to our older residents and local organisations. During May and June we consulted people across the borough, including those who find it difficult to leave their homes, and some people from ethnic minorities (although we would have liked more from them).

Our thanks go to Merton Seniors Forum, (who promote the welfare and interest of all Merton residents over 50), that led the consultation. The response was very good and meant we heard from 1% of the local population, and we are confident that this strategy addresses your interests and concerns. It focuses on areas that you told us were important to you and highlights the key actions we plan to take in the next twelve months.
Next steps and how it will be monitored
The strategy was launched on 10 September 2007 during the Celebrating Age Festival. You can download a copy of this summary from the council’s website www.merton.gov.uk as well as a copy of the full report. A hard copy will be held in each of Merton’s libraries. If you would like a personal copy or a copy in large print, Braille or audio tape or in a language other than English, please call 020 8545 3770.

During Autumn 2007 detailed programmes will be drawn up by the council and its partners, for actions promised in the strategy and they will use the strategy as a planning tool in future business plans.

Regular progress reports will go to the Older People Thematic Partnership, a sub group of the Merton Partnership. There are two voluntary sector representatives on that group from Age Concern and Merton Seniors, and they will be challenging if they consider the council (or a partner) to be failing on a commitment. The independent Merton Older People’s Housing Forum will be asked to review the strategy’s progress twice a year.

The council will also report annually to the Celebrating Age Festival (usually held in September) and will issue a newssheet twice a year which will be distributed across the borough. Information will also be held on www.merton.gov.uk under “Information for over 50s” which will go live early in 2008.

The strategy will be updated each year to reflect further improvements we have delivered and any future feedback from you.
1. Transport

We will continue to promote the range of travel modes used by older people, including measures to improve the accessibility, affordability and safety of public transport.

You told us:

- The Freedom Pass for the over 60s is really valued as a passport to independence and choice and you are prepared to fight to save it, should it ever be threatened.

- Bus safety needs to be improved; bus drivers do not always pull right up to the kerb, buses move off before people are seated, aisles are too narrow and the step to the back seats is too high.

- You do not like the congestion on buses created by school children, especially when they take up a place to travel just one stop.

- Railway and tube stations need better facilities, including working lifts and less steep steps onto the train or tube.

- Car users would value refresher training.
Where we are now (August /September 2007):

• Maximising the benefits of the Freedom Pass, Taxicard and Dial-A-Ride schemes.
• Making at least 15 bus stops accessible within our 2007/8 programme.
• 49 Merton schools now have school travel plans, which encourage walking to school.
• New mainline station Eastfields, due to open at the end of 2007.
• Funding has been secured for refresher courses for older drivers.

What we plan to do:

• Lobby on your behalf if the Freedom Pass is ever threatened.
• An annual rolling programme to make the remaining council controlled bus stops compatible with low floor buses.
• Press Transport for London (TfL) to improve driver skills and regularly seek feedback on driver performance in Merton.
• Working with schools, transport operators and the police continue to address transport and related issues for schoolchildren.
• Press TfL, the police and other organisations to ensure that travel stops and stations in the borough are safe and accessible.
• Lobby for transport improvements such as, extending the current Tramlink routes.
• Seek to provide more dedicated disabled parking bays, publicise their locations and how to apply for a blue badge.
• Work to resolve the problem round the use of pavements by cyclists and for parking.
• Work with older people to identify priority footways for attention within the council’s work programme.
2. Health and social care

For those who need it, getting the health and social care services that match their needs can be crucial in enabling them to lead independent lives and stay in their own homes and within their own communities. We will work with our partners to secure improvements in the quality and availability of social care and health services for older people in Merton.

You told us:

• You would prefer to stay in your own home as long as your health allowed it.

• 30% of respondents didn’t know whom to contact for home adaptations or equipment.

• 25% found finding specialist local services difficult, such as chiropodists, dentists and physiotherapists.

• About 40% of respondents would not know where to get advice concerning health and community services.

• Carers and those being cared for find it difficult to participate as fully as they wish in local life.
Where we are now (August/September 2007):

- Joint health and council teams for mental health care and equipment services for older people with disabilities, provide a more seamless service to clients.
- More people can remain in their homes with Additional Intensive Home Support Services, MASCOT careline emergency alarm and telecare services.
- Working with the Primary Care Trust to reduce health inequalities between east and west Merton, focusing on tackling smoking, obesity and mental wellbeing.
- Age Concern has been supported to pilot a community chiropody service (Solemates).
- Following a review of the council’s adult social care service work has begun on an improvement programme to reshape the services to meet the needs of Merton’s residents better.
- Support voluntary groups who operate in the area of health and social care.

What we plan to do:

- Use our planning powers to enable as appropriate the provision of new care homes and extracare housing.
- Increase the take up of direct payments and related schemes for older people.
- Work with health and other partners to promote action on mental health in line with latest research, such as Improving Services and Support for Older People (August 2007).
- Wherever possible provide healthcare for people near where they live, including local care hospitals at the Wilson and Nelson Hospital.
- Examine options for providing more community chiropody and/or nail cutting services.
- Support the uptake of careline and telecare services, together with a dedicated handy person for the users of careline services.
- Working with health and others, make the changes arising from the adult social care review so that people receive appropriate and speedy responses to their needs.
- Decide how best to support lunch clubs and day centres.
- Engage with and support carers to identify and address their quality of life issues.

(see section 7 – Employment)
3. Leisure and learning opportunities

We will support measures to ensure older people can participate in, and benefit from, cultural, learning and leisure activities and facilities.

You told us:

• Most people over 50 do not take active part in any formal sport activities but they do walk and some cycle or swim.

• Most respondents have heard of the Celebrating Age Festival but don’t go because of age or caring for others.

• About half of respondents are members of a local faith, community/arts/leisure/culture group.

• Not many people attend adult education classes, the cost putting many of you off.

• Most people use local libraries, though many do not use all the services they offer.
Where we are now (August/September 2007):

- Provide a choice of leisure activities for older people, such as courses for people over 50 (Club Wellness), and (with health) Healthy Walks Programme and cycling activities for people over 50.
- Volunteering opportunities are offered in arts, libraries, sports and parks.
- Local theatre companies and arts groups receive funding to carry out activities specific to older people, e.g. Attic Theatre Company and Connaught Opera concerts.
- Funding arts development projects, including South London Tamil Welfare Elders Group and the Positive Network Community Project.
- One third of enrolments for Merton Adult Education courses in 2006 were older people.
- Library services include books in large print, talking books, CDs and DVDs, a Books on Prescription service and a Home Service for housebound or mobility impaired people.
- Grant aided the 5th Celebrating Age Festival organised by Age Concern in 2007.

What we plan to do:

- Increase the amount of time older people spend weekly in sport, health and physical activity, including take up in a Merton GP Referral Scheme of activity for older adults.
- Improve access for older people and people with disabilities to cultural community, arts, sports and leisure venues.
- Increase opportunities for formal volunteering, promote the role of older people as volunteers in the Olympic and Paralympic Games and support developing volunteering schemes.
- Review the promotion of library services to older people, including ‘silver surfer’ computer sessions.
- Continue to grant aid the annual Celebrating Age Festival.
4. Environment

The Council will ensure that the needs of older people are addressed in the delivery of environmental strategies.

You told us:

• You’d like more seating and wardens in local open spaces.

• Allotment holders make good use of them.

• Almost all respondents do some recycling. Some do not know about the textile scheme, have difficulties with bulky waste, and find the boxes heavy to move for collection.

• 25% of respondents have difficulties gaining access into shops, leisure facilities and commercial buildings.

• You like your neighbourhood to be clean and litter free with well-maintained and level pavements, but trees and pavements free of clutter and posts are also important.
Where we are now (August/September 2007):

- Merton’s Open Space Strategy addresses the needs of older people, including setting up ‘Friends’ groups and the healthy walks programme.
- Merton Climate Change Strategy promotes help with energy saving measures to help people on low income and in poor housing, and improve inefficient heating systems.
- Older people consulted on and addressed in the guidelines which the Council uses for land use and the built environments.
- The council offers a substantial programme of Disabled Facilities Grants to enable some people to continue to live at home.
- A Street Design Guide has been produced to improve the design quality of street works schemes and reduce clutter.

What we plan to do:

- Continue improving the accessibility of open spaces in Merton, including footpaths and places to sit.
- Make it easier for older people’s participation in recycling schemes.
- Fight fuel poverty and include it in our climate change strategy.
- Publicise the national Warm Front scheme and the local Cold Busters scheme.
- Create a cleaner healthier environment by cutting CO2 emissions, which will help older people suffering from asthma and other breathing problems.
- Work to resolve the problem round the use of pavements by cyclists and for parking, and identify priority footpaths for attention in our work programme.
- Use planning policies to tackle noise pollution, develop lifetime homes and ensure ease of access to retail, leisure and commercial buildings.
5. Personal safety

We will continue to promote action to improve the personal safety of older people and reduce the fear of crime.

You told us:

- Vandalism, fly tipping, cycling on pavements, general rudeness and noise concern you.

- Most of you feel safe outside in the daytime, although more vulnerable when schoolchildren are coming home from school, but most of you do not feel safe after dark.

- More than half of respondents had met someone from the local police team, although only one third would know how to contact them.

- Many of you were aware of the Streetwatch scheme (reporting environmental crime to the council) although it is often confused with the Neighbourhood Watch scheme.

- Your top home safety issues are crime, falls and fire safety.
Where we are now (August/September 2007):

- Merton consistently has one of the lowest crime rates in London.
- Have piloted a scheme designed to reduce the number of distraction burglaries (No Cold Calling Scheme and Thames Water Bogus Callers packs) and how to prevent crime, falls and fire (Hanover At Home’s Safety Checklist).
- The council with the Primary Care Trust has implemented the falls prevention and treatment strategy.
- The council with Merton Fire Brigade carried out almost 500 free fire safety checks across Merton and installed smoke alarms if required.
- Tackling the abuse of vulnerable adults.

What we plan to do:

- Aim to reduce the fear of crime.
- Our statutory partnership, Safer Merton, will annually assess local crime and disorder to produce their next programme.
- Encourage and support work between younger and older residents to break down fear and mistrust and increase mutual respect.
- Continue to work with local anti-social behaviour teams.
- Continue to work with the London Fire Brigade to increase the home safety of older people, including free home fire safety checks annually.
- Continue to work with other agencies to improve public awareness of personal safety issues and abuse of vulnerable adults. Introduce a dedicated reporting line for the safeguarding of adults.
- Continue to work with health in providing advice and appropriate services following falls.
- Mascot Telecare offers technology to detect falls, combat bogus callers, while the handy person service (Helping Hand) will assist with securing homes against fire and crime.
- Keep publicising the Police Safer Neighbourhood Teams in every ward as they are a visible patrolling presence.
- Promote the council’s Neighbourhood Wardens in higher crime areas who act as the eyes and ears of the community, promote safety and tackle environmental problems.
6. Having an influence and being respected

We are committed to ensuring that the contribution made by older people to the quality of Merton life is recognised and valued, challenging perceptions, promoting a positive image of ageing and ensuring they can have their say in matters that affect them.

You told us:

• Less than 5% of you have been involved in any council opportunities for influencing services and policies.

• About 40% of respondents use their experience in a volunteer role and know about Volunteer Centre Merton.

• Age Concern is the most likely group you get involved with followed by Merton Seniors and the Older People Housing Forum.

• 90% think the council should work with organisations that campaign against age discrimination.

• There are many gaps in knowledge about information and sources of advice and help for older people.
Where we are now
(August/September 2007):

- Almost 2000 people over 50 are now involved in the Citizens Panel, Older People Housing Forum, Tenants and Residents Customer Panel and Celebrating Age Festival friends.
- Two people from the voluntary sector Community Engagement Network are members of the Older People Thematic Partnership to represent the interests of older people.
- Each of the 6 Area Forums are held quarterly in accessible venues.

What we plan to do:

- Highlight the positive contribution of older people in our publications.
- Help make volunteering easier for older people.
- Expect and support service providers to engage older people in the planning, delivery and monitoring of services.
- Bring together a wide range of lifestyle information for people over 50, including all the matters in the survey where you had difficulty finding information about, launch it in new pages on the council’s website and places accessible to older people.
- Encourage the work of older people’s community organisations, such as Merton Seniors Forum, Merton Older People’s Housing Forum and ethnic elders groups and continue to consult these on older people’s issues.
7. Employment

We will seek to tackle barriers to employment for older people.

You told us:
• Although most don’t want to carry on working after retirement, some would have liked to but were prevented because of caring responsibilities.
• For those who do work, keeping healthy and paying a mortgage were the main benefits.
• Some felt more anti-age discrimination measures are needed and believe the council should set a good example.
Where we are now (August/September 2007):

- Council employment procedures comply with the requirements of the Age Discrimination Act and exceed the minimum requirements of the legislation.
- One-third of the council’s staff is 50 years old or more (1,900), the council offers flexible working practices and managers have been trained on the implications of age discrimination legislation.
- About 36% (500) of our second largest local employer, Sutton and Merton Primary Care Trust, are 50 and over.
- The council has an Employee Carers Charter and an Employee Carers Forum that meets regularly.
- Merton Chamber of Commerce ran an “Extending the Right to Flexible Working for Carers” seminar during council funded Carers Week programme of events in June 2007.
- Merton Mencap Carer Community Advisers signpost working carers to resources.

What we plan to do:

- Work with the Chamber of Commerce and other partners to increase employment opportunities in Merton.
- Work with the Chamber of Commerce and other partners to challenge employers’ negative perceptions of minority groups, including older people.
- Examine specific employment issues affecting older people when the Community Plan is revised in 2008.
- Recommend our partner organisations do as we have done in 2006 and review their human resources policies to ensure that they actively promote equality, including age equality.
- Carers Support Merton has been commissioned by the council and is recruiting a Carers Employment Officer to support working carers and promote the council’s Charter to other employers.
8. Income

We are committed to reducing pensioner poverty in Merton.

You told us:
• Many of you know where to find out about benefits to which you are entitled.
• Many of you know about schemes to support older people to install central heating and insulation.
Where we are now (August/September 2007):

- Support Hanover At Home to provide a loft clearance service for vulnerable households seeking loft insulations.

- Merton Welfare Benefits Team provides advice on a whole range of national benefits, allowances and tax credits.

- Working with The Pension Service, the council has introduced a three page simplified Housing Benefit (HB) and Council Tax Benefit (CTB) claim form for you, if you also claim Pension Credit.

- All people needing community care services are offered a full benefit check as part of their assessment.

- If you have limited mobility, our new joint council and Pension Service team, called MOViT, will visit you to assess which benefits, allowances and tax credits you can claim. They will help complete forms and check original documents for you.

- If you privately rent or own your home and receive certain qualifying benefits, Coldbusters plus+ could help you with grants for better heating and insulating your home.

What we plan to do:

- Use new computer systems to target take-up of Housing Benefit, Council Tax Benefit and other welfare benefits to residents starting with areas that are considered deprived wards and with high numbers of people aged 50 and over.

- Use the same computer systems to target people who may be eligible for grants for better heating and insulation through Coldbuster plus+.

- Continue to develop and review simplified claim forms that reflect the needs of older people and changes to the law made by Central Government.

- Continue to offer full benefit checks to all older people assessed for care services arranged by us.

- Support reforms to Council Tax and Council Tax Benefit recommended in the recent Lyons Review.

- Support organisations within the voluntary sector that offer advice on welfare and social benefits for older people.
9. Better options for housing

We will ensure that strategic housing policy fully incorporates the needs of older people.

You told us:

• You would like to stay living in your own home as long as possible, although 30% respondents see themselves moving to a nursing home, warden assisted or retirement housing in the future.

• One third of respondents to this question are not able to maintain their garden.

• Not many people know what “Extra Care” housing is.

• If you didn’t know something about housing, then you would contact the council or Age Concern.
Where we are now  
(August/September 2007):  
• Published the Older People’s Housing Strategy, developed with older people, September 2006.  
• Set up the Older People Housing Forum in November 2006, chaired by voluntary groups working for older people, to influence older people housing and related issues in Merton.  
• Contracted with Asian Elders to provide housing related support to enable 48 people to live independently in their own homes.  
• Obtained planning consent in April 2007 for 34 new homes in Merton’s first Extra Care Housing Scheme, which is a form of sheltered housing.  
• Published the Housing Matters Directory of Housing Options for Older People, developed with Merton Seniors Forum, in July 2007.  
• A network of advice agencies has been established to improve the quality and consistency of advice given to older people.  
• Funded Hanover at Home to run a ‘Handyman’ service.

What we plan to do:  
• Implement the Older People Housing Action Plan which will keep housing strategies affecting older people under review, seeks to give older people choice, adequate support to stay in their own homes including work with small jobs, secure good quality housing designated for older people within the community and provide good quality information on housing matters from a central point.  
• Support the Older People Housing Forum, chaired by the “older people interest” voluntary sector, which is overseeing the implementation of the Strategy.  
• Develop a programme of training for agencies on the Advice Network.  
• Support and publicise the network of voluntary organisations that provide advice to older people on housing services.  
• Seek more resources to provide low-level support for older people such as minor repairs, gardening and decorating, to enable them to live independently.  
• Publicise the existing sources of gardening support available through Hanover at Home, Age Concern and Merton Volunteer Centre.
If you would like more information in your own language, please contact us at the address shown in the box below.

Nese deshironi me shume informacion ne gjuhen tuaj, ju lutemi te na kontaktoni ne adresen e dhene ne kutine me poshte.

إذا أردت معلومات إضافية بلغتك الأصلية الرجاء الاتصال بنا في العنوان المدون ضمن الإطار أدناه.

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如果你需要用中文印成的資料，
請按低端方格內提供的地址與我們聯繫。

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Si usted desea más información en su propia lengua, por favor contáctenos en la dirección al pie del formato.

You can also get this information in large print, in Braille and on tape.

Community & Housing Department,
Merton Civic Centre
Morden SM4 5DX
Tel: 020 8545 3770