

## Key messages

### Healthy Place

#### Headline

Overall Merton is rich in physical and social assets, in particular its green spaces, libraries and sports history. However Merton is a borough of contrasts. It contains neighbourhoods with accessible and well-maintained parks, vibrant highstreets, strong local engagement, rich cultural and historic assets and good transport and active travel infrastructure. Equally, Merton has neighbourhoods with socio-economic deprivation and neglect, poor housing lacking insulation, traffic and transport, air pollution and environment vulnerability.

#### Key statistics

##### Employment and cost of living

- Unemployment is low: 121,900 people are economically active (83.3%) compared to 79.7% in London and 78.6% in England. Unemployment is about 5,300 (4.3%) compared to 4.7% in London and 3.8% in England. 5.8% of the working age population were receiving unemployment benefits in March 2022. However, most wages are not increasing in pace with inflation and similarly benefits remain below the inflation rate of over 10%, therefore many people are experiencing a reduction in income in real terms.

##### Housing

- Housing in Merton is of mixed quality, with the East having more low quality and overcrowding.
- Of Merton's homes, 30% are owned with a mortgage, owned outright is 30% and private rented 30%. Under the latter ownership category are some of the most poorly maintained properties. In March 2021, there were 304 registered Houses in Multiple Occupation in Merton.
- In London social rented housing has the highest proportion of overcrowded households at 14.6%, followed by private rented 12.6% and owner occupier 2.7%. Most recent data show that 7.2% of Merton total households (private and social housing) are overcrowded.
- Three quarters of Merton's 86,000 homes have an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) rating of D (poor) or below and 98% of homes in Merton use gas as their primary source of heating making them vulnerable to increases in energy prices.

- By January 2023, it is estimated that (in the absence of an energy price cap) 66 per cent, or 18 million households, in the UK would be in fuel poverty, which would mean for Merton 57,000 households. In 2020, 10.5% (8,969 of 85,283) of Merton households were estimated to be in fuel poverty. The prevalence of fuel poverty varies across the borough however, ranging from 4 to 22.8% by Lower Super Output Area.
- In Merton, there were an estimated 60 excess winter deaths, between August 2019 and July 2020. It is estimated that 21.5 per cent of excess winter deaths i.e. about 15 are attributable to cold homes. Damp and mould may contribute to approximately 10 to 15 per cent of new cases of childhood asthma across Europe. See also respiratory health section.

### Food Environment

- Two million Londoners – of which an estimated 400,000 are children under 16 – struggle to afford or access enough food.
- Nationally, over a half of adults meet the five fruit and vegetables a day target.

### Green Space

- 22.4% of Merton residents live within 500m of woodland two hectares or larger, compared with 11.9% of London residents and the average distance to a public green space is 390m. Of London's 32 borough's Merton has one of the highest proportions of greenspace, but it is not equally distributed across the Borough.
- In 2017, the conservatively calculated benefit of Merton's major greenspaces value to its residents is; avoided healthcare costs (£464m), access to recreation activities (£453m), carbon sequestration (£5m), temperature regulation (£14m) and property value (£1.62bn), or £657 per year to each resident.
- The majority of residents report valuing local green spaces more as a result of the pandemic and feel that tackling climate change is important.

### Climate Change

- The main health risk factor linked to climate change (through fossil fuel combustion) is air pollution – see next section. Other direct health impacts of climate change are due to heat and cold/damp housing, affecting the most vulnerable such as the very young, old and those with underlying health conditions.
- In Merton, neighbourhoods vulnerable to the 'heat island effect' contain what is classified as greenspace but with few trees and high concentration of grass, surrounded by traffic prioritised environments. Increasing tree cover would improve public health.
- These greenspaces, for example, Fair Green and Figges Marsh, have high levels of air pollution (PM<sub>10</sub>, PM<sub>2.5</sub>), which is a major disease risk factor, in combination with nearby poorly insulated homes leading to higher susceptibility to deaths related to overheating.

## Community Cohesion and Crime

- Approximately 43 community voluntary organisations in Merton helped a total of 61,815 residents in 2022.
- Crime across the borough has remained steady over the past 2 years. Figges Marsh, Trinity, Dundonald, Wimbledon Park, and Collier's Wood are the wards in Merton with the highest crime rates. Knife crime has seen an increase, meanwhile in Mitcham Town Centre burglary has seen a reduction.
- Domestic Violence accounts for 13.6% of all recorded crime in Merton, 72% of victims are female. Between October 2021 and October 2022 there were 499 domestic abuse violence with injury offences reported by the Met Police in Merton.
- While overall crime rates are generally low, hospital admissions for violence are higher than expected.

## Transport and Air Quality

- The Mayor of London set a target for 80% of all journeys in London to be made on foot, by bicycle or public transport by 2041. In Merton transport links are good and currently 61% are made on sustainable forms of transport, approximately 30% by walking and only 2% by bicycle. Only a third of Merton's residents do 20 minutes of active travel a day, and there has been a decline over the last five years.
- Driver compliance with 20mph speed limits is less than 20%.
- Merton's Air Quality Status Report 2021 provides a full analysis of air quality in the borough in 2020, finding that Merton was still exceeding government targets. It is estimated, that between 54 and 100 people a year die in Merton due to air pollution. The fraction of mortality attributable to particulate air pollution in 2020 is 7.2% in Merton and 5.6% in England. Across England those living in the 20% most deprived neighbourhoods and neighbourhoods where more than 20% of the population are non-white experience higher concentrations of air pollution.

## Conclusions to inform priorities

- **Maximising health co-benefits from climate action, especially active travel air quality, energy efficient housing.**
- **Developing libraries as community assets.**
- **'Actively' Merton programme/movement complementing the borough of Sport ambition – see also under Live Well.**
- **Healthy place focus around schools, especially school streets and school super-zones – see also under Start Well.**