Merton Together
Support for residents, businesses and community groups

Merton heroes
Meet the council workers and volunteers on the front line
I want to start by saying thank you. Everyone’s lives have been turned upside down recently, and I need to thank every one of you for the part you have played in slowing down the spread of COVID-19.

I’ve been so moved by the work of all our incredible front line staff, whether they’re caring for the elderly and vulnerable, collecting refuse or keeping Merton’s streets and green spaces clean. And all the volunteers who continue to work with the council to make sure people who are shielding have been receiving essential food and medicine. Thank you.

My thanks also to residents for abiding by guidelines and staying home as much as possible, and social distancing effectively when out using the borough’s parks and open spaces. I’ve had lots of emails from residents delighted that they’ve had the pleasure of walking or cycling in Merton’s parks during this time when we have otherwise been shut indoors. I’m really proud that the parks have all stayed open over the past few months. I’m hopeful that people’s enthusiasm for being outdoors will continue as the crisis lessens and we all start adapting to a new way of living.

As we continue to look out for one another, our friends and family and neighbours, we also look to the future. We can’t say exactly how things are going to be in a post-pandemic world, but I do know that the people of Merton have shown a resilience and sense of care that should help us look to that future with a renewed optimism.

Councillor Stephen Alambritis
Leader of Merton Council

A £1 million neighbourhood funding programme to enhance community spaces and invest in infrastructure has been launched. Community groups, voluntary sector, charities, and other organisations across the borough are invited to submit bids to the Neighbourhood Fund. Bids can be made up until Friday 3 July, and a decision will be made on those that have been successful at Merton Council’s Cabinet meeting in September.

The key criteria for funding is how projects will bridge the gap between the east and the west of the borough – to reduce the economic and social inequalities measured against our community plan, and projects which will enhance neighbourhoods which have seen new developments and homes built.

Last year, the council received bids to the fund totalling £2.4m, with nearly £1m given out to 14 projects following a competitive process.

The Neighbourhood Fund comes from the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) – which is money developers are required to pay as part of planning consent to support the demands their development will place on the local area.

Merton Council’s Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Housing and Transport, Councillor Martin Whelton, said: “In these very challenging times, we see this as part of our recovery plan as we slowly emerge from the unprecedented restrictions placed on our activities and daily life. The process will contribute towards rebuilding our communities and addressing economic challenges.”

find out more
merton.gov.uk/neighbourhoodfund

£1 million neighbourhood fund
Working life
Bailiff Ross Cutler on delivering support for residents

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Merton comes together to protect the vulnerable

The Merton COVID-19 Community Response Hub was one of the first in the country to be set up after lockdown - our local response to the global pandemic. Staff and volunteers from organisations across the borough are working together to provide vital assistance to those who are most at risk from coronavirus.

The Merton COVID-19 Community Response Hub was set up to mobilise an army of volunteers to help those isolated in their homes, at risk of becoming critically ill if they caught the virus.

Hundreds of volunteers have been partnered up with key groups and allocated tasks such as shopping, prescription and medication collection, dog walking, electricity and gas pre-payment card top-up, as well as ‘keeping in touch’ calls. In addition, hundreds of emergency food parcels have been delivered to residents in need.

The hub was created in partnership between the council, Merton Voluntary Service Council, Merton Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and key voluntary groups from across the borough.

Simon Shimmens, the chief executive of MVSC, said: “We set up the volunteer support hub at breakneck speed, and it became one of the first hubs in the country. It was all hands to the pump immediately. We were also amazed to be so speedily inundated with volunteers who wanted to help out.

“From day one of the lockdown – Monday 23 March – we were up and running. In the first week we sent out emergency food parcels, which was vital as the Government’s support scheme did not kick in until two weeks later.”

Week 10 achievements – thank you to everyone who made this possible

- 829 residents sought help for themselves.
- 594 concerned individuals requested help for isolated parents, neighbours and/or friends.
- 1414 individual contacts logged.
- 186 isolated households to gain access to prescription and medication.
- £18,200 already pledged to the special Merton Giving Coronavirus Fund.
- 687 offers from volunteers.
- 479 emergency care packages delivered to local households.
Operation food delivery

Around 1,000 food parcels and cooked meals have been delivered every week across Merton since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Hundreds of residents have generously donated food, raised funds and offered to help.

Food has been delivered to residents identified as most at risk from COVID-19 by the Government and those whose income has been affected by the crisis. A wide range of groups have taken part in the food deliveries including the council, the volunteer hub charities, Wimbledon Foodbank and the Dons Local Action Group.

Rhiannon Larkman, the Operations Manager at Age UK Merton, also worked tirelessly to help run the hub. The charity had 300 residents referred to them for help with shopping and delivering food as well as befriending and keeping in touch calls. Volunteers from the Dons Trust and Mutual Aid Group have been helping with this work.

Age UK Merton are also providing an ‘at home’ service to support the most vulnerable residents and those who had just been discharged from hospital. This includes putting food away in the resident’s home and checking on their welfare.

Rhiannon said: “It was great to be able to support people from day one. Some people called in tears as they just didn’t know what to do – they were so relieved that there was some help available. Many in their 70s, who had to self-isolate, had never had to ask for support before – so it was great just to be there for them. It has been so scary for people, as it was all so unprecedented.”

If you need help, or know someone who does, please email help@mvsc.co.uk or call 020 8685 2272, Monday to Friday, 10am–4pm.

For information on volunteering email: volunteer@mvsc.co.uk.

He added: “We were able to establish so quickly because of the existing strong relationships we had with the CCG and the voluntary groups and because the support of the council was so good. It has been a great team effort with everyone stepping in and making a contribution from their area of work.”

The hub brought together a whole host of groups from across the borough including Wimbledon Guild, Age UK, Commonside Trust, Merton and Morden Guild and Friends In St Helier.

The Mutual Aid Group, founded by 18-year-old resident Zakaria Dada, was also brought into the hub network. The group, set up online to provide neighbourly help, attracted around 3,000 members.

Louise Inman, Programme Director – Merton Health and Care Together at the CCG, played a key role in developing the hub’s work.

She said: “So many people’s lives dramatically changed as they had to self-isolate. Often people have neighbours who pop by and they enjoy meeting people at the local shops and then suddenly they faced not having anyone to speak to.”

She said: “The most popular requests were for a keeping in touch call, and help with shopping. Most people just wanted a chat once a week and a feeling of being connected – they wanted to feel that help is there if they need it. Another really important part of the work is ensuring people get their prescriptions for medicines and we worked with the GPs on that.”

Praising the great team working at the hub, Louise added: “Everyone working together made the hub succeed. This included the council librarians, who in the first week were answering all the calls, and the bailiffs who were running round with the food parcels. The charities were great at supporting them in their new world and helped train staff.”

Wimbledon Guild delivered meals made by Two Teaspoons and chocolate eggs over the Easter weekend to residents in need.

Rhiannon Larkman, operations manager, Age UK Merton
feature
Maintaining critical services

Council staff on the front line

As the country went into lockdown, council staff responded to the fast-moving situation with resilience and dedication to help and protect our most vulnerable residents.

Staff from across the council were drafted into front line work to help Merton’s residents most at risk from the COVID-19 virus, who were asked to stay at home.

In addition to maintaining adult social care services, with the huge challenges social distancing brought, the council was tasked with contacting and meeting the needs of more than 6,000 residents, who are shielding from the virus due to underlying health conditions.

Operation Shield has been a major cross-council effort, with many departments volunteering staff to take part, to support social care teams in the operation. Bailiffs, librarians, leisure centre, revenue, benefits and environmental health staff were among the many redeployed to support social care teams.

Over the Easter weekend alone, Merton’s shielding team made more than 2,000 calls to residents, and arranged 180 home visits for those who could not be reached by phone. Around 40 per cent of the residents contacted did require some assistance, such as the delivery of food or medicine.

As part of the huge operation, a council food hub was rapidly established to pack emergency food parcels and deliver them to those in need across the borough to grateful responses from residents.

Staff also ordered and delivered urgently required personal protective equipment to care workers and nursing homes.

Promoting cycling and walking

Changes have been made to pavements and roads to enable more people to walk and cycle. Merton Council actioned an emergency transport response to the coronavirus pandemic to enable people to observe the social distancing guidelines. People are being encouraged not to use public transport to travel to work or other trips, especially in busy times.

The plan is focused on improving road safety and making more space for walking and cycling. Some pavements have been extended into the road in some of the busiest parts of the borough, such as town centres and local shopping parades. The emergency changes will be followed by longer term work to improve walking and cycling routes throughout the borough.

Need to travel?

If possible, walk or cycle or go by car.

STAY ALERT • CONTROL THE VIRUS • SAVE LIVES
Maintaining critical services

Taking the temperature of young people under lockdown

While schools remained closed for pupils during the lockdown, except for vulnerable children and those whose parents are key workers, the schools team has been supporting parents who are home schooling their children and resolving issues with online learning. More than 80 youngsters and their families took part in our Taking the Temperature project to assess the impact of the pandemic on young lives, while the Life Under Lockdown phone film competition encouraged young people to share their feelings.

Both found that the initial elation of being off school quickly turned to boredom – but many are now enjoying creative activities and spending more time with their families, while keeping in touch with friends on social media.

The youth engagement team has been keeping in touch with young people, taking to the streets to make sure they are staying safe and producing a newsletter, which was distributed by secondary schools. They also helped some young people, who were unemployed before lockdown, to start key worker roles such as carers.

Financial support for residents

The council has offered financial support to around 2,650 of the borough’s least well off residents. Working age residents, who are in receipt of council tax support and have a balance to pay, will be eligible for up to £200 off their council tax bill. The reduction is funded by the £1.48 million the council received as part of the Government’s Local Authority Hardship Fund. All councils are required to give a reduction to council tax support recipients, however, Merton’s support goes further than the £150 discount offered by most local authorities.

Council decision-making goes online

The borough’s first ever virtual public meetings are being held to make key decisions during the pandemic. Cabinet, planning committee and a licensing sub-committee were the first to be live-streamed on the council’s YouTube channel: www.youtube.com/user/MertonCouncil.

For a calendar of future meetings and details on how to participate, visit: merton.gov.uk/meetings.

Library membership doubles during lockdown

Although the library buildings have had to close during lockdown, new memberships of our award-winning library service have almost doubled compared to the same period last year. New borrowers can sign up online for instant access to thousands of free eBooks, eComics, eMagazines and eAudiobooks, without having a library card. Readers can download the Libby app to enjoy these offline and their library membership also gives them free access to Ulverscroft uLibrary and the RBdigital Entertainment package.

Merton Libraries are automatically renewing all due books and waiving all fines until 1 July.

Our home visits library service is available for residents who have received an NHS letter advising them to shield.

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Council invests in business continuity

Merton was one of the top three fastest of the 33 London local authorities to distribute grants to eligible small businesses. This injection of millions of pounds into the local economy is in addition to the support that the council and its partners are providing to help companies and entrepreneurs survive COVID-19.

The council pulled out all the stops to get the Government’s grant packages for COVID-19 relief out to help Merton’s businesses as soon as possible.

In the first month, Merton Council paid out £23,815,000 in grant payments to 1,777 businesses across the borough. This represented 91.5 per cent of the amount allocated to eligible businesses, which was well above the London average.

Recognising that the grants are a vital lifeline, the council worked quickly to identify the 1,975 businesses across the borough which qualified for the grants in the days following the Government’s announcement.

The grant package includes £10,000 for businesses whose premises have a rateable value of less than £15,000, and those which get small business rate relief. Businesses in the retail, hospitality and leisure industries, whose premises have rateable values of more than £15,000 up to £51,000, have been allocated £25,000 in funding.

The council was able to make the grant payments immediately for all the businesses that it had bank details for. Staff then worked tirelessly to contact all eligible businesses by telephone, email and social media. Work has also been carried out to urgently implement the business rate holidays, agreed by the Government.

Under the scheme eligible businesses in the retail, hospitality and leisure sectors will not have to pay business rates for the 2020–21 tax year. Nurseries also do not have to pay for the tax year, which began in April, if they are on the Ofsted Early Years Register.

Top-up business grant fund

The council lobbied hard with London Councils to get additional support to help the many small businesses in Merton which were not eligible for the first wave of financial support.

This resulted in the council being allocated £1.3m to distribute. The grants, of up to £25,000, are available for small businesses with fixed property related costs, whose income has significantly dropped due to the pandemic.

However, the fund is unlikely to cover grants for every business that will apply, and so the council will have to distribute this money according to a pre-defined criteria. To find out more about this criteria and how your business can apply, visit: merton.gov.uk/discretionarygrant.

The council is keen to support businesses to reopen in a way that is safe for staff and customers. If you own a local business and you want support to carry out a thorough risk assessment, visit merton.gov.uk/healthandsafety or email RSP@merton.gov.uk.

Business-like council

Aware that many Merton businesses are struggling to survive, the council has introduced some additional support for them. This has included offering its commercial tenants the opportunity to defer paying rent for three months and the suspension of street trading licences.

To avoid a backlog in decisions, which could prove costly to businesses, the council has been continuing to hold planning and licencing committees throughout the lockdown. Payments to its Business Improvement Districts have been made by the council in advance, so they can give assistance to businesses in their areas.

Colourful additions created by the council’s Future Merton team to support town centres
The council has joined forces with Merton Chamber of Commerce to help the borough’s businesses recover after COVID-19. The chamber immediately mobilised to help the borough’s businesses when the lockdown began by launching its Reach Out and Connect programme. As part of the council’s work to support businesses, it has awarded a grant to the chamber for its sterling work. The council continues to work with the chamber to support Merton businesses implement their plans to get back into action.

During lockdown the council joined in the Reach Out and Connect video sessions to listen to the needs of businesses, and to give them advice and support directly. Information from these sessions will also feed into the council’s strategic planning to help businesses.

Diana Sterck, Chief Executive of Merton Chamber of Commerce said: “We are delighted to work with Merton Council on such an important issue. Our shared ambition is for Merton to be a shining example to support businesses in navigating their way through and out of the COVID-19 pandemic.”

The chamber has been working hard to lobby national and regional Government on the further financial help businesses need. Work is also ongoing, by the chamber, to identify the future challenges that face the borough’s business community.

Raising the bar for financial help

The council is lobbying alongside Love Wimbledon Business Improvement District and the South London Partnership to back the Raise the Bar campaign. The campaign is urging the Government to increase the threshold for the £25,000 cash grants to help shops, pubs, restaurants, leisure and hotel businesses survive the COVID-19 crisis. The call is being made for the rates threshold to rise from £51,000 to £150,000.
COVID-19

In May, the Government moved into a new phase in the battle against coronavirus and set out a roadmap for lifting the lockdown restrictions. However, everyone must continue to stay alert, and follow the social distancing guidelines to help control the spread of the virus.

Stay alert key rules
- Everyone can spend as much time as they like outdoors as the risk of COVID-19 being spread outside is low, if the social distancing guidelines are followed. Since Monday 1 June groups of up to six people from different households can meet in parks and gardens and take part in some outdoor activities.
- People are advised to work at home if they can. Those who do have to travel to work are advised to walk or cycle if possible and avoid using public transport, particularly at peak times.
- There has been some easing of restrictions, allowing daily time outdoors, for those classed as extremely vulnerable to the virus, due to underlying health conditions.

COVID-19 symptoms
- A high temperature.
- A new, continuous cough.
- Loss or change to your sense of smell or taste.

Stay safe outside
- Keep two metres apart from anyone you don’t live with.
- Carry hand sanitiser in case there are no facilities for regular hand washing.
- Wash your hands as soon as you are back indoors.

Face coverings
Wearing a face covering on public transport is now compulsory. Coverings can be cloth and homemade and the use of medical-grade masks is discouraged. Face coverings help to prevent an infected person passing on the virus.

Hand washing
Remember, washing your hands regularly for at least 20 seconds with soap and water can help reduce the risk of you catching or spreading the virus.

NHS Test and Trace
- Anyone who tests positive for COVID-19 will be contacted and asked for information on who they have been in close contact with. The contacts will be traced and told they must isolate for 14 days, even if they have no symptoms.
- If people isolating develop symptoms, they should book a test. If they test positive, they must continue to stay at home, for at least seven days, until their symptoms have passed. Those who test negative must complete the 14-day isolation period.

To book a test, visit nhs.uk/coronavirus or call 119.

- For NHS information and advice on COVID-19, visit nhs.uk/coronavirus
- For the latest Government guidelines to control the spread of coronavirus, visit gov.uk/coronavirus
- For updates on Merton Council’s services, useful links and details about community action to support vulnerable people in the borough, visit merton.gov.uk/coronavirus
Usually people are not too pleased to see us when we turn up on their doorstep, but with our new role it was a complete contrast,” said Ross Cutler, speaking about his work to help support vulnerable residents.

From day one of the lockdown, Ross and his colleagues from the council’s enforcement team have been helping out at food depots, delivering emergency food parcels and medicines to residents, in addition to taking personal protective equipment to home care workers and care homes.

Ross said: “We were put on stand-by from day one, and our first job was to go to food wholesalers and load up our vans with all the food and necessities for the Council Food Hub. Basically, we have been doing whatever is needed – we have helped out at the foodbanks and delivered food parcels for the council’s shielding operation, the Wimbledon Foodbank and the food distribution centre run by Merton Age UK.”

Ross said: “It’s been enjoyable and very rewarding as we did feel we were making a positive contribution to the community, and people have been very appreciative of the work the council has been doing.”

The bailiffs also played a key role in the council’s ‘shielding’ operation to contact and offer support to the thousands of residents identified as highly vulnerable to COVID-19.

Ross said: “We helped to make the welfare calls to residents to ask them what help they needed – such as food or medicines. We also wanted to find out if they were on their own and if they would like someone to be in touch with them. We visited all the people we were not able to reach on the phone, and if we got no response on the doorstep on the first visit we would keep going back and speak to neighbours to really make sure no one in need slipped through the net.”

Ross’s job usually involves visiting people to collect debts, but although his new role is markedly different, he has found he can draw upon the skills and experience he has honed in his enforcement work. He said: “As a bailiff visiting properties, you do get to recognise the signs that someone is home or not, and we often have to investigate people’s whereabouts. It is a role with lots of direct contact with the public.”

Bailiffs have been out knocking on doors during lockdown. But instead of collecting debts, they have been delivering food parcels and medicines.
How to dispose of waste safely during COVID-19

During this unprecedented time, we are working closely with our commercial partners, Veolia and Viridor, to minimise the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on your recycling and rubbish collections.

You can play an important part by making sure you dispose of your rubbish and recycling safely and responsibly to help keep the service operating effectively and our collection teams and other residents safe:

- Please minimise the amount you throw away and reuse and recycle as much of your waste as possible. Ensure that recycling is clean and dry and rubbish bags are securely tied to help prevent spills.
- On your essential grocery shop, don’t buy more food than you need and freeze it if you can’t eat it before the use by date. For recipe ideas on how to use up leftovers and top tips on how to store different types of foods to make them last longer, visit www.lovefoodhatewaste.com
- Don’t put disposable paper masks into your paper and card recycling bin. Put masks – and disposable gloves – into your general waste and tie the bag securely.
- Plastic bottles for liquid soap, detergent and hand sanitiser bottles can be recycled in your green recycling box (or communal recycling bin for flats).
- Protect yourself and your collection crews from COVID-19 by wiping the handles of your bins and recycling boxes when you put them out for collection. Wash your hands thoroughly before and after you touch the containers.
- Instead of having a clear out, while the Household Reuse and Recycling Centre in Morden is only open for essential trips, which must be booked in advance, why not upcycle an old piece of furniture or update a vintage outfit with a new look as a #StayAtHome project.
- Please don’t leave your unwanted items outside charity shops, which is fly-tipping. Check they are able to accept your donation before you drop it off.
- Please don’t start bonfires for disposal of your waste, as this can be harmful for people who are self-isolating or are outside taking their daily exercise and has a dramatic impact on local air quality.
- If you are cutting the grass or weeding the borders, please try to minimise your garden waste and only put your garden waste bin out for collection if it is full. Create a compost heap to enrich your soil later in the year.

Waste disposal for self-isolating households

It is vital that households who are self-isolating because of a confirmed or suspected case of coronavirus follow the Government’s advice, which states:

- Store personal waste, such as used tissues and disposable cleaning cloths in disposable rubbish bags.
- Place these bags into a second bag, tied securely and kept separate from other waste.
- These bags should be put aside for at least 72 hours before being put in your usual external general waste bin.
#MertonHeroes

The 10,000th customer to sign up for our garden waste collection service has won a year’s free subscription.

Saskia who lives in Morden with her husband and eight year old son, Luke, said: “I’m absolutely thrilled. We knew managing our garden waste might get a bit tricky during lockdown, so we signed up to the service. I was really impressed with the quick delivery of my garden waste bin, and I am very happy with the waste and recycling services in my area.” The keen gardener, and her son, have been busy planting seeds and hope to have a crop of courgettes, aubergines, herbs and tomatoes.

Merton Council’s garden waste service is a fortnightly collection service. Residents can sign up for a yearly cost of £77.50. That’s just £2.98 per collection. Sign up now at merton.gov.uk/gardenwaste

Household Reuse and Recycling Centre

The Household Reuse and Recycle Centre at Garth Road in Morden has partially reopened with revised opening hours for essential trips only. All visits to the centre must be booked in advance and cars are the only type of vehicle permitted on site. Social distancing measures are in place to protect staff and residents, who must provide proof of address. There are restrictions on the type of materials which can be disposed of and these must be sorted at home. Do not leave your rubbish at the entrance to the site – this is fly-tipping and you may be prosecuted.

Bank holiday waste collections

Recycling and rubbish collections are currently scheduled to continue as normal on Monday 31 August. Check our website nearer the time.

10,000th customer signs up for garden waste collection service

Introducing some of our Veolia bin collection crews who are working tirelessly to maintain your recycling and rubbish collections during COVID-19. We’ve received lots of messages from residents thanking these Merton Heroes for the great job they are doing in very difficult circumstances.
Due to concerns the COVID-19 outbreak will lead to a rise in children who cannot live with their birth families, the Government has enacted emergency legislation so councils can meet this need by increasing their amount of foster carers.

Merton urgently needs more foster carers for children, especially siblings, teenagers and unaccompanied asylum seeking children, all of whom need a safe, secure and loving home.

If you have ever thought about fostering, now is the time to act – you could be the person who changes a child’s life.

The council is hosting virtual fostering information meetings twice a month to answer questions, including how you will be assessed, support you will receive, how much you will be paid, training and what it’s like to care for a child in need of a home. We need to find 30 more foster families this year. Sadly, the number of carers needed is likely to increase as we face the consequences of the coronavirus.

Please don’t make the mistake of ruling yourself out before finding out more – we value diversity and we need people from all walks of life. Foster carers can be single, married, gay, straight, religious, atheist, a home owner, a tenant, on benefits or employed. There is no such thing as a ‘typical’ foster carer, but the one thing all our foster carers have in common is a really strong desire to make a difference to a child’s life. Our children come from different cultures and religions, and we want our foster carer population to be just as diverse.

As one Merton foster carer said: “We give a child a shot at a good future. Fostering changes their lives and ours – it’s so rewarding and no one day is the same.”

In Merton we pride ourselves on knowing all of our foster carers well, as many have worked with us for a number of years. Carers can receive up to £514 per week, per child, with 24 hour support, seven days a week and ongoing training and development.

If you think you have room in your home and your heart, contact us for a chat to find out more. Merton’s Fostering Recruitment Team welcomes applications from people who are new to fostering, as well as experienced foster carers.

Call 0800 073 0874 or 0208 545 4070, visit merton.gov.uk/fostering or email fostering@merton.gov.uk
Indomitable spirit

Although the current coronavirus pandemic is testing our resolve on a daily basis, together we will get through it. Merton residents have a track record of facing challenges with perseverance, strength of character and an indomitable spirit. This edition of *My Merton* offers three examples to inspire you...

During the 19th century, Mitcham resident **Priscilla Pitt** remained resolute, despite suffering more than her share of tragedy. The daughter of a Whitechapel Quaker, at 19 she nearly died from meningitis – an experience that led her to appreciate every aspect of life. During the 1860s she married draper George Pitt and moved to a property off London Road – now the site of a local Poundstretcher store.

Tragically, the couple lost five children in infancy.

A devoted Quaker, Priscilla was committed to improving the lives of others. She raised funds, organised social and educational events for the local community and founded the Berkeley Teetotal Society to save Mitcham people from the demon drink. This even involved taking large groups on trips to the seaside.

An equally courageous lady was Wimbledon suffragette, **Edith Begbie**. Born in 1866, she cared for her thirteen siblings from an early age, following the death of her mother. She was then separated from her friends and is thought to have been sent to an orphanage in Holloway. More tragedy beset her adult life, for Edith was widowed whilst still a young woman and left to raise her family on her own.

As a militant member of the Wimbledon Women’s Social and Political Union, Edith Begbie campaigned fiercely to secure votes for women, lobbying, staging protests and braving hostile crowds as police marched her back to her home on the Ridgway. She even broke the windows of Winston Churchill’s home and was sent to Holloway Jail where she staged a hunger strike.

**Arthur Scarf** grew up in Dunmore Road, Wimbledon. A student at King’s College School during the 1920s, he was described as “pleasant…but not frightfully brainy,” yet as a wartime RAF pilot, his extraordinary courage was honoured with a Victoria Cross.

By 1941, through hard work and perseverance, Scarf had achieved the rank of Squadron Leader and was based at Butterworth, a RAF airfield carved out of the Malayan jungle. On 9 December, his Blenheim bomber was the first airborne for a planned raid on the Japanese base at Singora, Thailand. However, this coincided with a surprise enemy attack that destroyed the rest of his squadron.

Scarf refused to abandon his mission and staged a successful lone attack. Surrounded by enemy fighters, his plane was badly damaged and he was seriously injured. Although forced to make a crash landing, he saved the lives of his crew but died soon after arriving at hospital.
Enjoying parks and green spaces on your doorstep

Many residents discovered some of Merton’s hidden gems during the recent lockdown as everyone was encouraged to visit their local parks and open spaces, rather than travel for their daily exercise.

Parks became a haven for people to meet friends and loved ones for the first time as the lockdown was eased, and have become incredibly popular places for residents to enjoy picnics, exercise and relaxation. However, it is vital that everyone continues to observe the social distancing guidelines, by keeping two metres away from people from other households, to reduce the risk of spreading COVID-19.

Across the whole of Merton there are an amazing 116 parks and open spaces, ranging from small grassy areas, nature reserves and ornamental gardens to the large commons, high profile parks packed with activities and recreation grounds. There are also lots of ‘green’ routes through the whole borough for people to safely walk or cycle, away from busy roads.

Merton’s proud status as being one of the greenest London boroughs is one of the many reasons it’s a great place for families to raise their children. Wimbledon Park is among the larger parks in the borough and has a wide range of attractions including one of the biggest lakes in south London, woodlands and ornamental gardens. For those who love nature trails, a visit to Morden Park is a must. The former deer park, which boasts many 200-year-old oak trees, has a community tree trail featuring 45 mature trees chosen by community groups to represent them. Mitcham Common is classed as a site of Metropolitan Importance for Nature Conservation, so it’s a great place to visit and appreciate the natural world.

There are also plenty of formal gardens across the borough for residents to enjoy, including South Park Gardens in Wimbledon which is a Grade II triangular shaped Victorian ornamental garden. Cannizaro Park in Wimbledon has a whole range of themed areas, including Italian and Mediterranean gardens, and its Azalea Dell. Mostyn Gardens in Morden, which features sunken gardens, is also a great treat to visit.

Follow the Wandle

There are lots of green routes throughout the borough, but the most popular is the Wandle Trail. The route follows the River Wandle from Croydon, through Merton, to the River Thames in Wandsworth. For a great walk or cycle trip, join the trail at Morden Hall Park and see some of the borough’s attractions, including Deen City Farm and Merton Abbey Mills, along the way.

Please take your litter home to help us keep Merton’s parks looking beautiful.
Boost to body and mind

Visiting parks for exercise, or a picnic is a great way to reap the benefits to mind and body from being outside in the fresh air. Any form of exercise, from a gentle stroll in the sunshine to a vigorous run, brings a significant boost to health.

Five benefits of outdoor exercise:
- Burst of Vitamin D from the sun.
- Boost to immune system.
- Lowers blood pressure and heart rate.
- Lifts mood and reduces stress.
- Improves sleep.

From bowls to kayaking, there are an amazing range of activities in Merton’s parks for families and residents of all ages to enjoy.

Tennis courts and bowling greens opened to the public in May, with social distancing reminders for users to keep two metres away from people from other households.

Please visit our website for updates on when activities in parks will be resumed, in line with Government guidelines.

World-class Merton parks
Six Merton parks have won the prestigious Green Flag status. The award flags up that an open space boasts the highest possible environmental standards, is beautifully maintained and has excellent visitor facilities. The parks awarded the internationally recognised accolade are Abbey Recreation Ground, Colliers Wood Recreation Ground, Dundonald Recreation Ground, John Innes Park, Sir Joseph Hood Memorial Playing Field and South Park Gardens.

Summer is a great time for families to make the most of parks – so do remember wherever you happen to live in Merton, a green open space is close by.
It’s okay not to be okay

The COVID-19 pandemic is having a huge impact on our mental health, but there is support available to help you take care of your wellbeing.

A recent survey by the Office of National Statistics revealed that four in five adults were worried about the impact the coronavirus epidemic had on their lives. More than half of the respondents said the pandemic had affected their wellbeing and nearly half reported high levels of anxiety.

However, there is support available and advice on ways people can boost their mood and care for their own wellbeing and that of their loved ones.

Many young people are feeling overwhelmed and worried about themselves, their family and friends. The opportunity to have honest conversations can help reduce the distress young people feel, and the risk of them self-harming. For guidance, visit: www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk.

Merton Uplift

Merton’s free mental health service provides support for adults with issues such as anxiety, depression and stress. The service has remained open, and is offering assessment and treatment appointments for adults via telephone or Skype. www.mertonuplift.nhs.uk or call 020 3513 5888.

Off the Record

This free and confidential counselling service, for youngsters aged 11 to 25, has extended its online and telephone support. The service gives young people the chance to explore their feelings in a friendly, non-judgemental space. Visit www.talkofftherecord.org/merton or call 020 3984 4004.

For free, anonymous counselling for those aged 11 and above, visit: www.kooth.com.

Every Mind Matters

For the latest tips from NHS experts on looking after your mental health and supporting loved ones, visit: www.nhs.uk/every-mind-matters.

Good Thinking

London Councils has teamed up with the NHS and Public Health England to offer digital wellbeing support specifically for Londoners. www.goodthinking.uk

Mood boosting tips

- Keep in regular touch with friends and loved ones, via the telephone or online if you are unable to meet them.
- Talk about your worries and reach out to others to listen to theirs.
- Try to keep to regular routines.
- Look after your body: eat healthy meals, exercise and get enough sleep.
- Try to make positive thinking a habit to stay on top of difficult feelings.
- Find time to relax – try some mindful breathing, listen to uplifting music or have a long soak in the bath.
- Keep your mind active by reading, writing, doing crosswords, puzzles, cooking, gardening or any form of creative activity.
- Do things you enjoy or learn something new.

Mental health first aid training

Merton’s Public Health Team, in conjunction with Merton Clinical Commissioning Group, has just commissioned a new programme of courses to support people’s mental health.

The Mental Health First Aid courses provide awareness of mental health conditions and issues, training on potential crisis situations and practical skills such as non-judgemental listening. Trainees also learn how to signpost someone in crisis to appropriate services.

In the past two years, 90 people from the council, community and voluntary groups in Merton have been trained as mental health first aiders and more than 100 have attended a suicide awareness course. The next courses are due to start in September.
As residents have adapted to new ways of life during lockdown, the One You website has compiled a range of information on staying healthy at home. This includes ideas for exercising outdoors and adding more activity to your daily routine inside; shopping for and preparing nutritious meals, getting a good night’s sleep and taking the opportunity to give up unhealthy habits.

Westminster Drug Project (WDP) Merton also offer support for residents who wish to make a change to their alcohol or drug use. One You Merton and WDP Merton have suspended face to face consultations to conform to social distancing guidelines, but are continuing to provide support for residents online and via the telephone.

**Let’s get moving**
With everyone spending more time at home to reduce the spread of COVID-19, many are missing the benefits their favourite activities brought to their general wellbeing. One You Merton has 45 links to fun videos to help keep residents of all ages and physical abilities active. From yoga and dancing to indoor park run warm-ups and step routines with the ramblers, the videos offer a great way to enjoy getting fit at home or in the garden. Even just walking more around your home while carrying out tasks, and doing simple exercises can make a difference to general fitness.

**Quit smoking**
As COVID-19 is known to affect the lungs and airways, stopping smoking is of great importance. One You Merton offers advice for those who wish to quit smoking and specialist support for pregnant women, residents with poor mental health, those with respiratory disease and young people.

**Alcohol, drug and substance abuse**
One in five people who drink alcohol have been drinking more frequently since the lockdown. WDP Merton provides support for residents over the age of 18 who want help to make changes to their alcohol or drug use. Visit [www.wdp.org.uk](http://www.wdp.org.uk) or call 0300 303 4610.

**Healthy eating**
Many people’s eating habits have changed due to the closure of restaurants and cafes. However, the lockdown has also provided an opportunity to try out new recipes and cook more meals from scratch.

The One You Merton website has lots of advice on healthy eating and putting together a balanced diet from nutritionists. There are tips on eating well on a budget and meal planning before you set off on your essential grocery shop. There is also information on making food last longer, for example by freezing it, plus a handy guide to checking best before and use by dates to help you consume produce while it is fresh and avoid food waste.

**Gym-free workouts**
The NHS website has a series of illustrated guides for everyone to enjoy the gym experience in their own homes – with no equipment. These range from the Sofa Workout and Pillow Workout to the more advanced Stairs Workout and Cardio Hill Workout. There are also special guided routines for people needing to relieve tension in their necks, knees or backs and an energy-boosting routine for wheelchair users.

[www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/gym-free-workouts](http://www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/gym-free-workouts)
EU citizens
Merton residents

Supporting our EU citizens to apply for settled status: merton.gov.uk/euss
Making Merton’s air cleaner

Everyone noticed how much cleaner the air was during lockdown and a key reason was the reduction of car use. My Merton looks at the council’s ongoing work to tackle pollution and global climate change.

Walking and cycling friendly measures were speedily introduced by the council last month, as we began to move out of lockdown, to make it safer and easier for residents to travel on foot or by bike. Due to social distancing measures, residents are being discouraged from using public transport, especially at busy times. The council’s COVID-19 Transport Strategy includes widening pavements and creating temporary cycle lanes.

The council is committed to helping residents make fewer journeys by car to help reduce harmful nitrogen emissions from petrol and diesel powered vehicles.

The action is part of much wider work by the council to improve air quality in the borough and tackle global climate change.

Merton’s Climate Emergency Group

Last July, Merton Council unanimously agreed to step up its commitment to reducing emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases, by declaring a climate emergency. The council pledged to make every effort to become a carbon neutral organisation by 2030 and to reach carbon neutrality for the whole borough by 2050.

There was a fantastic response to the declaration, and we would like to thank all the residents and groups who pledged support and gave their views to our climate consultation. A Climate Emergency Group was formed with 15 volunteers, with strong links to the community, who have brought a vast amount of professional expertise in climate change issues. The group includes members of Merton Friends of the Earth, Merton Green Party and Sustainable Merton. The council is also grateful for the input from many of its partners, including Clarion Housing Group and Transport for London.

The declaration was called in response to the rising concern, across the world and locally, for urgent action to be taken following scientists’ warnings on the impact of global warming. It is recognised the rise in global temperature of one per cent, from greenhouse gases, is already causing extreme weather changes and a rise of two per cent would have a catastrophic impact.

It is estimated that Merton is responsible for around three million tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions – 700,000 is produced from energy and vehicles in Merton. Merton will need to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by around 12.5 per cent every year, up until 2050 to reach the net zero target.

Key actions

- Improving the energy efficiency of our homes, and work spaces and switching away from gas to local low carbon and renewable energy sources.
- Obtaining electricity from renewable providers, and using storage to manage peak demand.
- Reducing the number of car journeys, by supporting residents to take more journeys by foot and bike.
- Replacing diesel and petrol cars with electric vehicles, and expanding the network of electric vehicle charging points.
- Consuming more sustainable and local products to limit greenhouse gas emissions from their production, transport and disposal.
- Enhancing green space across the borough to reduce the impact of hotter weather and risk of flooding.

The challenges to reach Merton’s Climate Change goals are huge – it is estimated the number of petrol or diesel fuelled vehicles in the borough will have to be reduced by 2,600 every year to 2050 to meet the target.

Join us to tackle climate change and improve air quality. For more information, visit: merton.gov.uk/climatechange.
**Staying safe during COVID-19**

Beware of criminals, who are using the coronavirus pandemic to commit fraud and don't live in fear during lockdown.

**Keeping safe at home**

Not everyone has been safe at home during the lockdown. The distressing reality is that many people have found themselves trapped inside with an abusive partner or family member. Vital services to support residents suffering from domestic abuse and sexual violence are continuing during the COVID-19 crisis.

The One Stop Shop is closed, due to social distancing guidelines, but abuse victims and survivors can access services online and via the telephone. You can contact Merton Independent Domestic Violence Advisors, 020 7801 1777. For information and advice, visit: www.victimsupport.org.uk. Always call 999 if you are in danger. For more advice visit: merton.gov.uk/domesticviolence.

**Grieving scams**

Sadly, many people are now vulnerable to bereavement scams. Be wary of fake debt collectors claiming you’re responsible for a loved one’s debts. Watch out for scams claiming that someone has left you a policy pay out, but you must make the final payment. Don’t give away too many personal details in obituaries, as these could be used to forge identities.

**Report hate crime**

All forms of hate crime are taken extremely seriously in Merton and both the council and police are working hard to encourage victims to come forward and report it. The message is that no one should have to suffer in silence, if they have been targeted because of their race, religion, sexual orientation, disability or gender identity. To report a hate crime to the police, dial 101. Call Crimestoppers to remain anonymous on 0800 555 111 or report online to True Vision www.report-it.org.uk. In an emergency always dial 999. For local support visit: merton.gov.uk/hatecrime. Merton’s Hate Crime Advice Surgery continues to run over the phone, on the second Tuesday of each month, between noon and 1pm. Call 020 8545 4146.

While most people are pulling together to help each other in these challenging times, unfortunately criminals are taking advantage of people’s trusting nature.

A number of COVID-19 related scams have appeared, offering testing and medicines for the virus. Residents are urged not to be conned – there is currently no known cure for the virus and only the NHS can offer reliable tests.

Scammers have worked out that it’s easier for them if you give them your details than trying to hack your accounts. Watch out for emails and texts pretenting to be from someone else, for example a bank, NHS or government department. The aim of the email is to install software on your device to get your personal information, including login credentials.

Be wary of telephone calls from companies claiming that you are owed a refund and asking for your details to process these. And remember the police would never call to ask for details for an investigation.

**Top tips**

- Don’t assume an email, text or call is genuine.
- Never click on the links in these emails – visit an organisation’s website.
- Never ring the number left in a voice message.
- Never give out your banking or personal details to a caller.
- If you give out your details, call the bank to discuss and let them know.

Report scams to Citizens Advice on 0808 223 11 33 or via www.citizensadvice.org.uk/consumer and to Action Fraud on 0300 123 2040 or via www.actionfraud.police.uk. Visit: merton.gov.uk/tradingstandards
**What is Merton Giving?**
It’s a dedicated grant fund to benefit Merton residents which is given to small non-profit making organisations for projects and services in the borough.

**Why was the coronavirus fund urgently set up?**
Many of our small groups had to rapidly adapt services to meet the challenges the virus and social distancing guidelines brought. For example, a lot of community centres suddenly lost a huge amount of their income from activities such as room hiring. We set the fund so they could continue to support the residents who rely on them.

**What were the biggest concerns?**
Many families were confined to over-crowded homes, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, unable to pay for basics such as food. Food poverty increased from the loss of school meals for children and from people losing their jobs or a much-needed 20 per cent of their wage if they were furloughed. Many people were spiralling in to debt. We have also seen mental health problems rise and impact people from all walks of life.

**What were the achievements?**
We were able to set up immediately after the lockdown and get funding to groups within a fortnight. The panel awards funds every week and, as of 10 June, £127,785 has been awarded so far to 52 organisations.

**Where did the funding come from?**
We are really grateful to all the residents and businesses who have made donations. We had an opening amount of £150,000, which included large donations from Merton Council, Moat Housing, Clarion Futures – Clarion Housing Group’s charitable foundation Homes and Wimbledon Foundation.

**What are the challenges moving forward?**
The impact of this global crisis is going to be with us for a long time. It could be the final nail in the coffin for many local organisations who do important work in the community. We will need to continue to give them support.

[Find out more](https://www.mvsc.co.uk/MGCoronavirusFund) or make funding applications by visiting: [www.mvsc.co.uk/MGCoronavirusFund](https://www.mvsc.co.uk/MGCoronavirusFund). Merton Giving is a charitable partnership between Merton Chamber of Commerce and MVSC. To make donations visit justgiving.com/mvsc

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**Beau Fadahunsi**

Beau Fadahunsi, head of community development, volunteer services and funding advice at Merton Voluntary Service Council (MVSC) led work to urgently set up Merton Giving Coronavirus Fund.

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**Open for applications**

[Meriton Giving Coronavirus Fund](#)
Subscribe to our COVID-19 email news