

# Building Positive Culture Change in Merton:

Evaluating and changing the organizational culture of Merton Council

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# **Building Positive Culture Change in Merton**



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# **Abstract**

Merton is a diverse London borough whose municipal government is undergoing an organizational cultural change initiative. As a step in this process, we must create a snapshot of Merton Council's current culture and provide a procedure for evaluating future culture change. To do so, we utilized surveys and focus groups targeting office staff and frontline workers. Through qualitative analysis and data visualization, we found that Merton Council is a welcoming and collaborative workplace with opportunities to improve inter-team communication and management accountability.

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# Executive Summary

This report presents the findings and recommendations of a cultural assessment conducted within Merton Council, the municipal government of a London borough. The assessment aimed to capture the current organizational culture and establish a framework for analyzing culture change over time.

Our primary goal was to create a comprehensive snapshot of Merton Council's organizational culture and provide a procedural template for future assessments, enabling the council to foster a more positive and effective workplace environment. We employed a rigorous multi-method approach incorporating surveys and focus groups to target a representative sample of Merton Council office staff and frontline workers.

A survey targeting the Council's office workers gave us a numerical basis to gauge Merton's organizational values alongside open-ended responses contributing additional context. This survey was based on Kim S. Cameron and Robert E. Quinn's Competing Values Framework, which we modified to better capture Merton Council's core values of innovation and collaboration, as well as its position as a municipal workforce. The survey consisted of seven sections—each containing four questions each—covering topics such as organizational leadership, collaboration, career progression, and pride. In addition, a set of demographic questions were used to track responses across ethnicity, gender identity, faith, disability, and role within the Council. Finally, we included an open-ended response allowing respondents to add extra details or justifications for their answers. With the help of advertising materials on the Merton Council Hub, email communication, and physical posters, our survey received a total of 402 responses, representing 21.2% of the Civic Centre workforce.

To incorporate feedback from specifically those outside the Civic Centre, a focus group containing staff from a frontline satellite office was held. This focus group responded to questions regarding communication, loyalty, work-life balance, and how the organization handles staff suggestions. To accompany this focus group, a shortened paper survey was conducted in a different department covering similar topics in a "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" scale. Similarly to the Full Staff Survey, demographic questions were included in order to develop a better understanding of who responded to the survey.

Finally, a focus group drawing from Merton Council's staff networks aimed to gather input from staff with protected characteristics who may feel less comfortable taking staff-wide surveys. This focus group asked similar questions as the frontline focus group but placed a greater emphasis on inclusivity and respect. Together, this approach facilitated a thorough qualitative analysis complemented by data visualization techniques to ensure clear and impactful communication of findings.

Alongside providing our survey materials to facilitate similar organizational culture assessments in the future, we created a visualization dashboard to compare survey results over time and track how future initiatives change the organization's dominant characteristics. Part of this visualization process involved using staff responses to generate an overall score for four core qualities—collaboration, competition, innovation, and efficiency—which form a radar graph capable of conveying the strength of these qualities at a glance. Using this calculation, collaboration is the most prominent quality, followed by efficiency, with innovation and competition as the weakest qualities. Although the novelty of this method makes its inclusions difficult to prove empirically, it nonetheless forms another tool to track future culture change.

Our analysis revealed that Merton Council is characterized by a welcoming and collaborative atmosphere. However, opportunities for improvement were also identified, particularly in enhancing cross-team communication and management accountability. Through demographic analysis, we determined that the Merton Council has a diverse workforce that reflects the broader community's varied ethnic, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Combining our survey and focus group data, we determined a few key findings. While employees generally view the workplace positively, concerns about communication efficiency and managerial transparency were raised. Focus group feedback highlighted the need for better cross-departmental collaboration and a more inclusive approach to decision-making processes. Additionally, frontline workers expressed a strong sense of dedication but often felt underrepresented in organizational decisions.

Based on the findings, we propose several recommendations to Merton Council. Firstly, enhance communication channels by implementing structured communication strategies to facilitate better information flow between teams and management. Secondly, management accountability can be increased by developing clear metrics for managerial performance and

ensuring regular feedback mechanisms are in place. Thirdly, promote inclusivity by actively involving diverse voices in decision-making and recognizing the contributions of all staff members. Increasing positive feedback given to staff can also assist with this recognition process and increase morale. Lastly, a repeatable assessment framework should be established to monitor cultural changes over time and adapt strategies as needed.

This report underscores the importance of understanding and actively managing organizational culture to improve workplace dynamics and service delivery. Following the outlined recommendations, Merton Council can enhance its work environment, better serving its diverse community while ensuring employee satisfaction and engagement. The proposed framework offers a robust tool for ongoing cultural evaluation and development, supporting sustained positive change within the organization.

# Authorship

## Background

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Executive Summary	CG, SR
Introduction	CG, SR
Defining and Assessing Organizational Culture	SR
Communicating and Visualizing Culture Change	SR
History and Culture of Merton	EK, CG
Structure of Merton Council	EK, CG
Merton and Organizational Culture	SR

## Methods

Determining Merton's Organizational Culture	SR, EK, CG, BB
Demographic Representation and Trends	EK

## Findings

Demographic Analysis	EK
Findings From Full Staff Survey	SR
Findings From Full Staff Free Responses	BB, EK
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Note: Every team member participated in the editing process

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# Introduction

Organizational culture can significantly shape the dynamics and outcomes of workplaces, which is particularly evident within public sector entities like Merton Council. Responsible for a borough in southwest London with a diverse community, Merton Council oversees various public services for its residents. Recognizing the need for improved collaboration, flexibility, diversity, and resident-centric services, Merton Council is committed to identifying and understanding its unique municipal organizational culture. This understanding is a crucial step toward fostering positive cultural change and ensuring that the council's services effectively meet the diverse needs of its community.

Due to its diverse classes, ethnicities, and geographies, the borough of Merton presents a challenge for exploring and reshaping its organizational culture. This diversity necessitates a balanced approach to service delivery while ensuring the well-being of its employees. Existing research has utilized demographic data extensively to understand municipal workforce composition (Merton Council, 2021). However, Merton Council's understanding of the deeper behaviors, values, and underlying assumptions that guide its workplaces was limited, often confined to interactions within specific departments. A more holistic understanding of Merton's organizational culture was necessary for initiatives that could motivate culture changes, enhance operational efficiency, and foster a more inclusive, team-oriented work environment. Despite available methods and instruments for assessing organizational culture, there was a need for a tailored, repeatable, multi-method approach that addresses the unique needs of a diverse and financially stable borough like Merton. This project aimed to fill this gap by developing a comprehensive cultural assessment framework that is sensitive to the nuances of Merton's diverse community and organizational structure.

This project has assessed how municipal employees perceive and experience Merton's workplace culture, forming a council-wide understanding of organizational culture, which can be traced back to the core factors that motivate it. From here, we can create a set of recommendations for how Merton could change its workplace practices to build a more positive organizational culture and better fulfill its goals. Ultimately, we will translate our research

methods and recommendations into a repeatable template for evaluating Merton's organizational culture and tracking its progression.

This research document is structured to provide a comprehensive understanding of Merton Council's place in the wider concept of organizational culture. We start by defining organizational culture and its relevance in the workplace and then by analyzing existing research on workplace culture. We then delve into the context of the London Borough of Merton and Merton Council, focusing on their demographics and organizational structure. Then, we outline our research goals and multi-method approach, including focus groups, questionnaires, and demographic data. Finally, we discuss our findings and recommendations. This rigorous approach ensures the validity and reliability of our findings.

# Background

## Defining and Assessing Organizational Culture

Even after a half-century of academic research and analysis, organizational culture remains hard to define, particularly in municipal organizations (Bellot, 2011). These organizations often consist of dozens of employees and embody a diverse set of goals, making their workplace cultures difficult to categorize effectively. In the scope of this project, we define organizational culture as the shared values, beliefs, norms, and practices that shape the behavior of individuals within an organization. It influences how employees interact, make decisions, and perceive their roles and responsibilities. These behaviors, conventions, and assumptions in turn can have a drastic impact on an organization's performance. As an abstract yet powerful force, it influences the overall atmosphere, employee morale, and even a company's strategic direction (Schneider, 2000).

Since the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, researchers managed this complexity by creating taxonomies for organizational culture. Although Elliott Jaques' 1951 book *The Changing Culture of a Factory* coined the term, it was not until the 1970s and 80s that the study of organizational culture became popular (Rowlinson & Procter, 1999). Edgar Schein's 1985 work *Organizational Culture and Leadership* divides organizational culture into three parts based on the visibility of their effects; underlying assumptions, values, and artifacts. Underlying assumptions form the core of workplace culture, made up of largely unconscious beliefs, perceptions, thoughts, and feelings. Values are slightly more concrete, containing defined strategies, goals, and philosophies driven by previously undefined assumptions (Bellot, 2011). Artifacts make up the physical manifestations of these values, representing the written documents, business decisions, or otherwise tangible deliverables produced by an organization. These three categories provide a framework for linking the ways organizational culture is expressed in the workplace with the assumptions that underly it.

In addition to determining how organizational culture manifests in the workplace, researchers have also spent significant time categorizing organizational culture itself. For example, one workplace may impose strict project deadlines on its employees, while another may hold frequent progress reports to ensure employees are on track. Despite manifesting in

different ways, these behaviors may indicate the same desire to produce work quickly with minimal delays. A modern example of this categorization comes from Geert Hofstede's 2011 model. In his model, Hofstede identifies six dimensions of organizational culture, each containing statements used to gauge whether the dimension is applicable to a specific culture or not. A person or company who is comfortable switching jobs may have a weaker uncertainty avoidance than one who prioritizes staying in one position even if they dislike it (Hofstede 2011). The importance of Hofstede's model lies in not only the creation of discrete, comprehensive categories, but a system of inquiry for people to decide for themselves what type of organization they are participating in.

Hofstede is not alone in the categorization of organizational culture, with researchers devising countless additional dimensions. According to the work of W.Z. van der Post, to properly analyze organizational culture, you must first identify the specific facets of culture that are meaningful to an organization. By conducting a literature review that revealed 114 dimensions used across organizational culture research, Post distilled these dimensions into fifteen constructs with the aim of creating widely applicable cultural categories. Some of these categories are primarily applicable to for-profit companies, like performance and reward orientation, but many touch upon relevant aspects of respect and belonging, such as disposition towards change, identification with the organization, and employee participation (Van Der Post et al., 1997). Ultimately, the intangibility of organizational culture is reflected by the diversity of its categorizations, forcing organizations to choose instruments that measure the constructs that matter most to them.

The difficulty of defining organizational culture is reflected in its assessment. Even though the behaviors of employees or the qualities of the work they produce may imply a specific culture, they are guided by values, which are in turn motivated by assumptions. Thus, it is important to consider not only the effectiveness of these behavioral artifacts, but to what extent they were motivated by values and assumptions within one specific workplace as opposed to individual choice or intuition fueled by outside experiences (Packer, 2002). In other words, since many workers are shaped by past positions and experiences, we must examine the extent to which employee behaviors reflect Merton Council's culture specifically. By carefully tracing

behaviors back to the values and assumptions that motivate them, a structural understanding of Merton's municipal organizational culture is uncovered.

Unfortunately, this process is significantly more complex than asking employees to describe workplace behaviors and expectations, giving rise to instruments aimed at efficiently evaluating organizational culture. Due to the studied link between effective organizational culture and performance outcomes, assessing and responding to organizational culture has formed its own private industry (Homburg & Pflessner, 2000). Fortunately, the United Kingdom is one of the largest sources of organizational culture instruments—second only to the United States—meaning locality is not a large limiting factor. While some instruments were developed for specific contexts or sectors, including the School Quality Management Culture Survey or Thomas' Professional Accounting Sub-Culture Questionnaire, most instruments are aimed at general use. Furthermore, a small number of instruments such as the Organizational Assessment Survey explicitly target the public sector, but the general applicability of most cross-sector instruments makes this focus a benefit as opposed to a requirement (Jung et al., 2009).

In addition to encompassing a wide range of countries, languages, and sectors, organizational culture instruments vary widely in their methodologies and roles in larger culture explorations. A minority of instruments provide a standalone approach for determining culture and guiding change, but the vast majority are explicitly diagnostic, meant to provide general growth areas while relying on more in-depth analysis to account for unspoken assumptions or otherwise subtle cultural aspects. Out of these diagnostic instruments, almost all fall into two major categories, dimensional and typological (Scott et al., 2003). Dimensional approaches plot specific cultures on continuous variables, with the number of dimensions varying from one to over fifteen. Typological instruments such as the Organizational Cultural Assessment Instrument rely on categorization to form their analysis, sorting culture into “types.” Despite this distinction, both dimensional and typological instruments are commonly used in practice.

Finally, instruments utilize different questionnaire methods to generate their qualitative analysis. The most common approaches are Likert scales, in which respondents are asked to record their degree of agreement or disagreement with specific statements, Q-methodology, asking participants to arrange value statements into a scale, and ipsative measures, which involve dividing a specific number of points between a small number of statements (Jung et al., 2009).

Importantly, almost all methodological approaches used in organizational culture instruments are not universally superior over others, but are contextually dependent (Scott et al., 2003). For example, those experienced with data analysis may prefer the numerical summarization that dimensional instruments bring, while managers with a long track record at a single organization may connect with cultural typologies by reflecting upon past experiences. Regardless of which instruments are ultimately selected, the methods they use must be carefully considered to fit an organization's needs.

Tools like the Denison Organizational Culture Survey have significant academic rigor in their consistency and utility, but rely on expensive third parties to prepare, carry out, and analyze (Jung et al., 2009). Out of the tools that are both simple to administer and have relatively strong academic examination, the Competing Values Framework (CVF) mentioned previously serves as a promising choice. The CVF plots an organization's culture along two axes: internal-external and stability-flexibility, the latter of which is an attribute the Merton Council is directly interested in exploring. Additionally, the CVF divides cultures into four categories: clan, adhocracy, market, and hierarchy. For this reason, the CVF is both a dimensional and typological mode of analysis. It is inexpensive and simple to organize, but this simplicity is reflected in a limited domain of application for its findings (Hartnell et al., 2011; Howard, 1998).

While the CVF will provide an overview of cultural qualities, it fails to account for subtle or subtextual aspects of organizational culture, and including other methods of analysis alongside survey-based instruments is important. Since the 1980s, studies that incorporate a mixture of observation, interview, questionnaire, and focus group have been the prevailing method of evaluating organizational culture. This "mixed method" approach allows for better analysis opportunities, facilitates investigation into the relationship organizations have with the concept of culture itself, and presents explanations of error variance (Bellot, 2011). This variety of research methods will inform multiple facets of our analysis. The depth and team-centered environment found in focus groups provides a platform for understanding group behaviors and the organizational values that motivate them.

Recent studies, such as Hussain et al. (2020) and Andrews (2011), revealed the critical need to integrate equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) within their organizational culture assessment within different organizations, such as the public sector. These studies expressed the

need for an indirect approach toward EDI initiatives, while also observing the shifts in dynamics and developments to update the EDI strategies in response. Effective and efficient EDI initiatives required an understanding of workforce composition and a commitment to updating and adapting to the changes within the organization, such as downsizing.

Especially relevant when considering diversity initiatives, satisfying a moral responsibility for the success of an organization versus the well-being of its employees are separate yet related goals (Hofstede, 1998). The absence of an ultimate financial bottom line makes both goals easier to achieve simultaneously for Merton Council and many other non-profit organizations, but prioritizing the provision of services to Merton's residents over the comfort and health of employees can have similar detrimental effects. Regardless, the changes we propose to Merton Council's organizational culture must consciously balance the desires of residents for effective, widespread services and employees for a comfortable, positive workplace. To do so, frequent and clear communication of the purpose, content, and outcomes of change initiatives are important to improve resident and employee understanding of the project and facilitate opinions that may guide the data collection and analysis process.

## **Communicating and Visualizing Culture Change**

Effective communication and justification of our suggestions remain critical for conveying the significance of our research and solutions while ensuring faithful implementation. Employers, frequently excluded from talks about organizational transformation, must understand what needs to change and which workplace procedures or customs might be altered to make it happen. On the side of employees, it is helpful to connect changes directly to the employee concerns they will help alleviate, allowing affected employees to take an active role in planning change (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2015). Ultimately, prioritizing transparency and using clear, direct language in internal communication contributes to more effective organizational culture change.

With its power to aid in persuasion and ability to lead data analysis, data visualization serves as a useful method to guide the Merton Council towards effective organizational culture change. In a study performed on a small range of topics comparing graphical and textual

representations of the same data, charts consistently outperform tables in improving persuasion (Pandey et al., 2014). Data visualization can link quantitative demographic data with employee experiences and sentiment. When describing its workplace environment, the London Borough of Camden relies heavily on quantitative achievements as evidence, pointing towards completion rates of diversity training to support its EDI initiatives (Camden Creative services, 2022). Although, the persuasive ability of data visualization is magnified by initial attitudes, signaling a need for a clear conceptual understanding of our recommendations prior to engaging with visualizations (Pandey et al., 2014).

There are multiple analysis frameworks used for qualitative data, such as the guidelines outlined by Gioia, which usually involve codifying certain phrases or terms and then organizing said codes into themes (Gioia et al., 2013). Results are sometimes presented as an overview with relevant interviewee anecdotes, theories, themes, and model development (Tenny et al., 2024). Proper data visualization and structural setup is required to provide scientific analysis, as qualitative data is subjective and less concrete, and quantifying it may eliminate some of its nuance.

Ultimately, conducting a multi-method analysis requires not only an understanding of the language municipal employees use to describe behaviors, but also the demographic, cultural, and organizational context that forms Merton. If we do not utilize a breadth of historical knowledge to inform recommendations for change, we risk ignoring important cultural patterns that led to Merton's current organizational culture in favor of alleviating its symptoms. Discovering how Merton's government operates and who exactly utilizes their services forms the first step in creating a platform for cultural comparison.

## History and Culture of Merton

The Borough of Merton, located in southwest London, has a rich history and cultural diversity that dates to its formation in 1965 through the merger of the municipal London Boroughs of Mitcham, Wimbledon, Merton, and Morden. Celtic, Roman, and Germanic Anglo-Saxon traditions influence its diverse cultural heritage, contributing to the borough's unique identity. Merton comprises 20 wards, which have experienced various health and well-being

levels, with historical inequalities noted between wards in the East of the borough as compared to those in the West and North West of the borough. It is key to be aware of these factors when addressing representation and inclusion in the workplace, especially as corporate culture is heavily influenced by local culture (Frost et al., 2023).

Merton stands out for its diversity as it is home to peoples from a variety of ethnic, religious, and cultural backgrounds. In the educational sector, many students speak a language other than English as their first language—46% in primary schools and 35% in secondary schools, according to the Office for National Statistics' (ONS) census. As of 2018, Merton was composed of approximately 38% Black, Asian, Mixed, and other ethnic groups, with the 2021 ONS census data showing a 60.2% white and 39.8% non-white population. Merton is also one of the most religiously diverse boroughs in London, home to one of the largest mosques in Western Europe. This diversity indicates a variety of different kinds of religious expression, and thus likely different experiences with faith and culture within the Merton Council. Frost et al. (2023) explored religious expression in the workplace and found members of certain faiths would be more likely to discuss religion at work, while others may be more likely to express their religion in the workplace. Acknowledging and respecting these varied faiths can lead to a more inclusive environment where employees feel valued and understood.

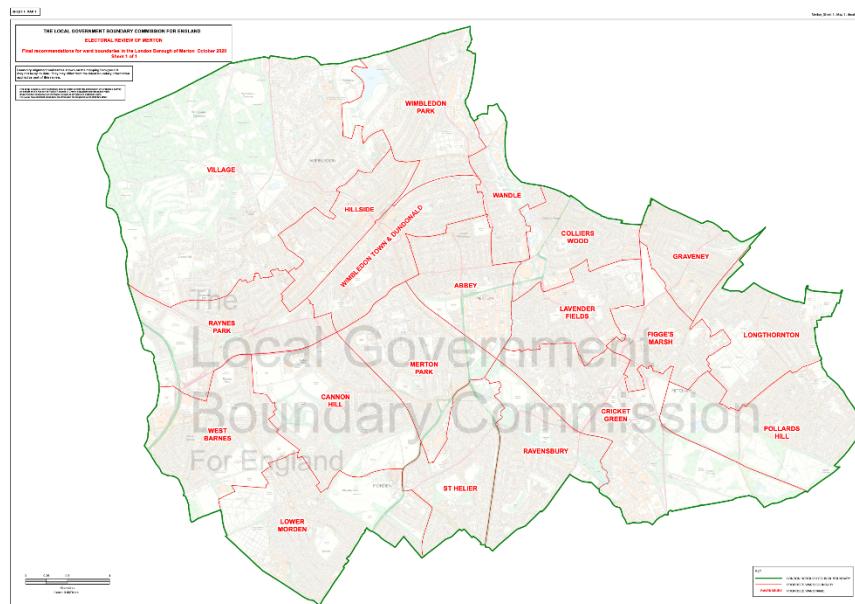
Merton is less impoverished than London on average; however, this is due to the drastic contrast between the wards in the East of the borough as compared to those in the West and Northwest of the borough. Socioeconomic gaps highlight the east-west divide in Merton, with the eastern part of Merton being substantially more impoverished. According to the 2019 Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD), eastern wards also score much lower, indicating more significant levels of deprivation. Specifically, wards such as Cricket Green, Figge's Marsh, and Pollards Hill in the east exhibit deprivation levels that exceed the London average. Some wards rank within the top 5% for affluence, while others fall within the top 15% for income deprivation nationally. Employment trends vary across the borough, with the eastern wards having greater unemployment than their western counterparts. Individuals in the eastern wards have a lower life expectancy and are more likely to develop significant illnesses and die prematurely than those in the west.

## Structure of Merton Council

The Merton Council operates as the governing body of the London Borough of Merton, structuring its administration through a democratic election process. Councilors are elected for four years, with each ward electing two to three members. Councilors must be residents of the ward they represent, emphasizing the importance of local representation and community ties. The wards were last redrawn in 2020 by the Local Government Boundary Commission of England, reshaping the most recent 2022 election landscape (see Figure 1). The redrawing of wards is done at the council's request and/or when deemed necessary and can directly affect the results of elections, especially as the number of Councilors selected from each ward are determined by these boundaries.

**Figure 1**

*Map of Merton Borough's New Wards (The Local Government Boundary Commission, 2020)*



At the heart of the Council's decision-making is the Cabinet, comprised of no more than ten Councilors, who make the majority of executive decisions and oversee the rest of the organization. Leadership within the Council is determined through an electoral process, with the Council electing a Leader, who has the authority to select all other Cabinet members,

centralizing the decision-making process. The Leader is an important figure in establishing the direction of the Council's initiatives. Merton Council employs workers in six directorates—Adult Social Care, Integrated Care & Public Health, Children, Lifelong Learning & Families, Environment, Civic Pride & Climate, Finance & Digital, Housing & Sustainable Development, and Innovation & Change—that each focus on providing different services for Merton residents. In London, demographics often differ based on industry, and certain trends can be noted which may affect workplace culture; for example, there is less ethnic minority representation in the energy and water sectors (Business in the Community, 2023).

Staff career progression is largely by applying for publicly posted jobs on the Merton job board, allowing qualified individuals to apply for any position. Hiring includes both external candidates and internal promotions; though not all employees live in Merton. Employees typically work 35 hours a week on a salary basis, with some even working on a condensed schedule over a 4-day work week. Many divisions of the Merton workforce have become fully remote or hybrid in recent years, partly because of the COVID-19 pandemic, allowing for more flexible working options. Several frontline workers rarely spend time in the office, and instead work in and engage with the community. They handle the retail service in Merton, such as traffic, parking, and maintenance, in addition to roles like teaching or senior care.

Merton has several work sites, each serving different functions within the community. The primary location is the Civic Centre which functions as a central hub—it is where the council is based, and most administrative activities occur. This central hub is essential for Merton's governance and daily operations. Additionally, several other significant buildings, such as the Morden Park House, are located in the borough. This historic building functions as the registration office and doubles as a wedding venue. In addition to these primary locations, Merton is home to a network of public libraries spread throughout the borough. Merton also has several strategically located satellite offices to ensure services are accessible to residents across the borough.

Merton Council strives to create positive change within Merton and address the needs of its diverse population. The Merton Council develops a council plan every few years that outlines goals for the local authority over a set period of time. One of the main thematic priorities of the 2023-2026 Council Plan: Building A Better Merton Together is focusing on increasing pride

within Merton and creating a better future for the borough (Merton Council, 2024). As part of pursuing a positive future and creating a workforce that employees are proud of, Merton Council prioritizes EDI and is dedicated to fostering an inclusive organizational culture. The Council signed the Anti-Racism Charter in February 2024 and possesses six staff networks—Pride Network, Race Equality Network, Women’s Staff Network, Disabled Employees Network, Muslim Faith Network, and Merton Staff Christian Fellowship—all created for providing support to its community, often targeting minority groups (Merton Council, 2024). The organization is committed to zero-tolerance bullying and harassment policies and is consciously trying to create a productive workplace where employees feel included. Understanding, including, and acknowledging the Borough of Merton’s cultural diversity is key to creating a positive and productive work environment.

As part of their larger Council Plan, Merton Council formed the Change Team in January 2024, a diverse group of employees within Merton Council’s Change and Innovation department. They are tasked with overseeing the implementation and analyzing progress of the Council Plan’s initiatives. Part of this initiative included establishing Merton’s United Values in February 2024, which include trust, collaboration, integrity, inclusion, pride, and creation. These are values formed around the central beliefs held by workers. The Change Team is interested in seeing the current status of Merton’s workplace culture, as well as if their initiatives and values have impacted it, which resulted in the need for a metric to gauge the status of Merton Council’s workplace culture.

## Merton and Organizational Culture

The borough of Merton's rich historical and cultural diversity brings unique challenges in building and maintaining effective organizational structures. Despite extensive research on organizational culture, there is still a lack of instruments to assess and guide cultural change, particularly within municipal organizations. Merton Council's efforts to foster a positive work environment, address disparities, and embrace EDI reflect a commitment to overcoming these challenges. However, the diverse ethnic, linguistic, and socio-economic profiles within the borough, combined with municipal governance complexities, require a nuanced approach to

organizational culture. While Merton Council has made progress in creating inclusive workplace policies, gaps remain in fully understanding and addressing specific cultural dynamics. Our research aims to investigate these gaps, providing a comprehensive analysis of Merton's organizational culture and offering a system to revisit as the dynamics change over time in Merton Council.

# **Methods**

The purpose of this research is to investigate the organizational culture of Merton Council and produce data informing suggestions for its improvement. This cultural snapshot will inform a set of culture growth areas that will assist the Merton Council's positive cultural change initiatives. To achieve this goal, we:

1. Determined Merton Council's organizational culture within its municipal workforce.
2. Noted and compared demographic statistics from the population of the London Borough of Merton and Merton Council's workforce.

Because of its application in many countries and industries, as well as encompassing a wide range of subtle human behavior, precisely defining organizational culture remains difficult. To navigate this ambiguity and gain a comprehensive understanding of Merton's organizational culture, we utilized a mixed method approach in our research. Our approach included observing focus groups led by both an EDI lead as well as the Change Team program manager in addition to conducting questionnaires and workplace observations to distill organizational culture and analyze employee behavior. We also analyzed Merton's population and workforce demographics to identify behavioral patterns and growth areas for workforce inclusion.

## **Determining Merton's Organizational Culture**

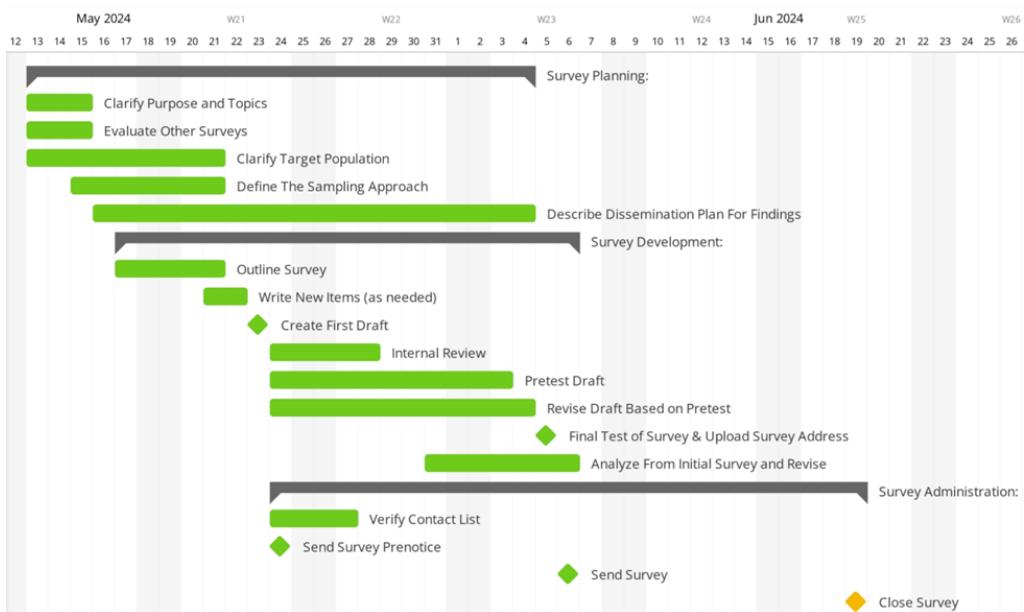
To investigate the organizational culture of Merton's municipal workplaces and its impact on employee behavior, our study relied on focus groups and surveys as key data-gathering methods. These tools were essential for obtaining detailed insights directly from staff about their impressions of the workplace environment. These techniques enabled participants to describe their experiences with teamwork, creativity, and inclusiveness while providing a forum for discussing workplace culture changes and their repercussions. Additionally, the surveys further contextualized how individual cultural aspects form a larger whole, linking general employee sentiment with specific values and conventions while preserving anonymity. The workforce was informed of our arrival, so they were not surprised by our presence. Several articles about us and our project were published, informing the staff about our intentions and upcoming research. Our

presence was met with excitement and positive reception. This enthusiasm contributed to our project, allowing us to receive high survey engagement.

Forming our largest data collection method and the core of the quantitative segment of our analysis, we conducted an online questionnaire aimed at Civic Centre staff. Questionnaires with validated internal consistency are crucial to evaluate organizational culture effectively. They also come with other benefits like easier accessibility and distribution, as well as being more private for individuals who are less inclined to share their experiences face-to-face. Unfortunately, many organizational culture instruments are not rigorously tested in this regard, significantly limiting the pool of possible instruments (Jung et al., 2009). Additionally, it was important for this study that our chosen instruments have historical use in both England and the public sector, avoiding the use of an instrument in a previously unknown context. As Merton Council conducts a bi-yearly online survey, we know our target audience is accustomed to the use of such data collection methods. This greatly improved the metrics generated by these instruments to be applicable to Merton's municipal workforce, as well as increased the likelihood of survey responses, as employees have worked with these methods in the past. Table 1 further details the process of developing and conducting our questionnaires.

**Table 1**

*Questionnaire Gantt Chart*



Part of the survey creation process involved investigating other organizational culture instruments, choosing not to utilize them due to a variety of factors. These tools included the Organizational Culture Inventory, which, despite its rigorous testing and popularity, is under prohibitive licensing (Human Synergistics International, 2016). Similarly, the Denison Organizational Culture Survey has significant academic backing but is dependent on third-party participation and is often expensive and time-consuming as a result (Denison et al., 2014). Ultimately, these tools proved too costly, complex, or slow to administer and analyze in our time frame.

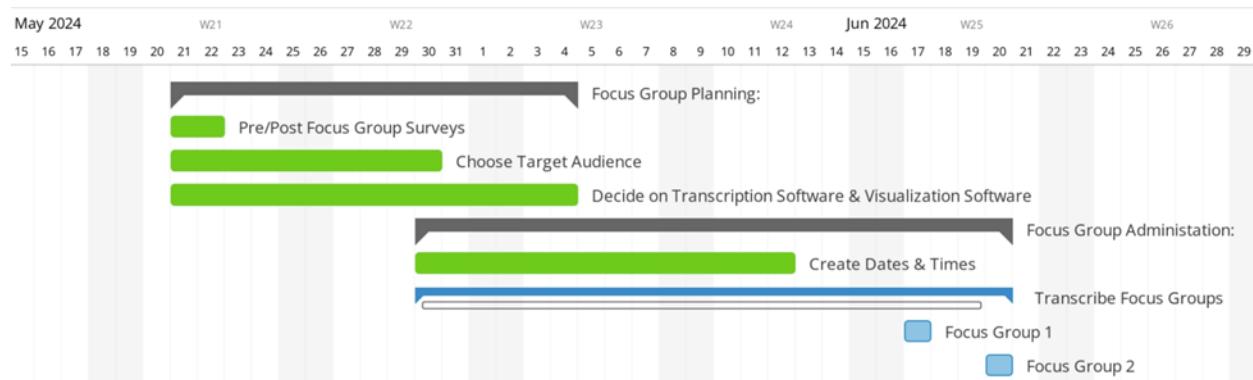
Due to its public domain licensing and availability of psychometric testing, we heavily adapted the Competing Values Framework (CVF) for our research. The CVF consists of six parts, each addressing different aspects of organizational culture, which include: dominant characteristics, organizational leadership, management of employees, organizational glue, strategic emphases, and criteria of success. Each part contains four specific statements that may apply to each workplace. Participants must divide a total of 100 points between these statements, further separating them between a current perspective of an organization's culture and its capability to change in the future. After gathering responses, the CVF generates a chart placing an organization culture along an axis corresponding to each aspect, including both its current culture and future growth capabilities (Cameron & Quinn, n.d.). Ultimately, its simplicity makes it a valid choice for being used in conjunction with other individualized data collection methods.

Despite reportedly being tested in British and municipal contexts, we adjusted the language and content of the Competing Values Framework to provide better accessibility for Merton Council. First, American spellings of terms were replaced with British English. Next, many questions referenced concepts relating to competition and production, which are minimally applicable to municipal workplaces. These concepts and their related phrases such as “products,” “market,” and “winning” were replaced by ones that better reflect the largely collaborative relationships between borough governments. Next, we modified the question categories to better capture each of Merton’s core values. This was done by removing “management of employees”, “strategic emphases,” and “criteria of success,” replacing them with “personal experience,” “career progression,” “collaboration,” and “pride”. We modeled each new question’s statements

around the four organization archetypes created by the CVF, retaining the ability to score Merton Council along the framework's original dimensions. Finally, even though the CVF's constant sum point scoring is descriptive, its complexity created a barrier for respondents. To ensure the survey's accessibility and brevity, we replaced the point scale by a four-option Likert scale ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree" and consequently removed the "future" column of scoring. By assigning a point value to each option and scaling that point value so that each set of statements sums to 100, we can replicate the point scale that the CVF uses for its analysis. The culmination of these changes resulted in the Full Staff Survey, tailored to the needs of Merton Council.

To help administer the survey, the Organizational Culture Assessment Instrument (OCAI) provides a readymade online interface to administer the CVF. However, our modifications to the original survey prevented us from utilizing it. Fortunately, the availability of online survey tools such as Qualtrics and Merton's own survey database made creating an interface for our version trivial. The Full Staff Survey was then administered and analyzed manually, online or on paper (Cameron & Quinn, n.d.).

Having used questionnaires in the past for topics like disability inclusion and its biannual employee survey, Merton Council has already integrated online survey instruments into their data collection workflow, likely implying an easy transition into our survey. Additionally, because a portion of Merton's workforce is employed remotely or works in a hybrid format, conducting the survey online ensured that the perspectives of this group of workers were represented in the results of the questionnaire. Instruments based on the CVF are quick to administer and complete, so we conducted our initial analysis prior to administering our more complex and in-depth focus groups. This way, any immediate focus areas that were consistently identified could inform initial codes for interview and focus group analysis. Due to its low time commitment, a link to the questionnaire was distributed to Merton Council employees by email as well as being accessible on their central online hub, with responses collected in a central survey utility. For a detailed schedule of how these activities were coordinated, please refer to Table 2, which outlines the timeline for developing and administering questionnaires as well as processing the responses.

**Table 2***Interview/Focus Group Gantt Chart*

Although the Full Staff Survey prioritizes accessibility, it relies on language and themes that have limited use outside of corporate or office environments. To gather feedback from Merton Council employees in field work positions or sites physically and culturally separated from the main hub, an alternate survey was created focusing on procedural aspects of workplace culture. These themes include responsibilities, adequate or inadequate pay, training, sense of value, platforms for conflict, and community. Similarly to the Full Staff Survey, the questions utilize Likert scales, but the structure of the questionnaire prevents it from being analyzed in the same way. Instead, trends will be analyzed and—where parallels exist—compared to the results of the Full Staff Survey. Using the same strategy as the focus groups, free response answers were coded and analyzed. By doing this, we hoped to better understand the relationship between the opinions expressed in the sessions and how they were translated into questionnaire responses.

To ensure the relevance and appropriateness of the topics discussed during our focus groups, we worked with Merton Council's EDI coordinator as well as the Change Team's Programme Manager. These individuals brought a deep understanding of the local cultural context and professional expertise to formulating questions, ensuring they are both sensitive and pertinent. Each lead a focus group that was created for a different target audience to investigate the opinions of groups who may have a differing perspective of organizational culture compared to their peers. These groups were separated into frontline workers and employees from various staff networks that support staff with protected characteristics (as defined by the Equality Act 2010). Due to the nature of their various backgrounds, we wanted to ask different questions for

each group to truly delve into their experience. These questions are listed in Appendices C and D.

During the focus groups, our areas of inquiry included examining relationships among employees such as collaboration dynamics, sense of belonging, and perceived value from others. We also explored the Council's leadership structure and work styles, assessing aspects like learning mindsets, task flexibility, innovation propensity, leadership rigidity, and role specificity. These themes and the core ideas of the Schein organizational culture model, alongside Merton's values, helped us guide our surveys and questionnaires as well as our analysis of the personal anecdotes of employees to understand the perceived culture in the workplace.

However, as our team, the Change Team Programme Lead, and the EDI coordinator were all closely linked to Merton Council, participants may not have viewed our research team as a neutral party and may have felt inclined to self-censor their opinions. Additionally, as the majority of these discussions were conducted within the workplace, there was the possibility of this exacerbating employees' discomfort sharing their true sentiments for fear of risking their employability. We recognized that our presence may have altered participant behavior in these sessions, although we tried to mitigate this by reducing the number of us present (only two researchers at a time) and restricting ourselves to observing rather than facilitating the focus groups, as well as ensuring anonymity for participants.

We utilized a hybrid inductive-deductive data analysis approach to sort through free responses and focus group themes, each containing several key words or codes. Initially, each research team member read through the responses and transcriptions, making an individual list of common themes and codes. We then combined and stratified our codes into four topics of response themes: communication, staff support and retention, antiquated systems, and management. The first category, communication, included codes concerning collaboration in day-to-day tasks as well as in the greater organization, identified using codes such as "collaboration," "communication," "team", "silo working", and "departments". Staff support and retention touched on workplace conflict, work-life balance, and loss of staff, including codes such as "bullying", "harassment", "discriminate", "diverse", "workload", "mental health", "work-life balance", and "understaffing", as well as looking at themes of losing workers to other boroughs. The third category concerns antiquity in systems, culture, and policies, and how those

affect the workforce, mainly identified using “old”, “out of date”, “antiquated”, “not updated”, “modernisation”, “old-fashioned”, and “risk averse”. Finally, topics regarding management were investigated with codes like “leadership”, “managers”, “management”, “hierarchy”, “career progression”, “promotion”, “trust”, “transparent”, “openness”, and “engagement”. We also individually added codes and subcategories as necessary, using intercoder reliability to capture and categorize the full range of responses more effectively.

However, data visualization can prove difficult when it comes to representing qualitative data, and as a result, many social science researchers have developed methods to quantify qualitative information. Although observational studies can sometimes be transformed into numerical data, such as counting the number of people who walk by a room, forms of data gathering like interviews and focus groups may be more challenging to analyze quantitatively. A common way to analyze interviews is via data analysis software, taking a recorded transcript and feeding it into a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software—such as NVivo—to determine trends and themes mentioned by interviewees. It is ultimately up to the researchers to decide what is important for analysis, as NVivo and similar software do little to structure the research design process (Zamawe, 2015). As qualitative research generates large amounts of data in the form of transcripts, survey responses, and observational notes, we planned to utilize data analysis software such as NVivo to speed up our coding process. Focusing on the overarching themes in the CVF and Schein models in combination with Merton own core values, we were able to use NVivo to efficiently identify common ideas across our data pool (Pope, 2000). This allowed us to quickly note trends and gain a strong idea of how employees perceive the current organizational culture.

In order to utilize NVivo, it is first necessary to create an accurate transcription of the interview or focus group being analyzed. Although methods of transcription often go undiscussed in research papers, the process of audio transcription can be challenging and sometimes include biases (McMullin 2023). Given the nature of the sensitive topics being discussed, it is even more important to provide clarity regarding our transcription methods. We performed a type of naturalized transcription, which omits utterances and incorrect grammar but can include markers for nonverbal communication such as tone of voice (McMullin 2023). This was done first through recording the focus groups on a mobile device, then uploading the

recording to a personal computer equipped with OpenAI’s Whisper model, which can fairly accurately transcribe audio (Graham et al). Bokhove et al. suggests that these automated transcripts are “good-enough” for a first draft and can significantly reduce the time taken for transcribers. This method proved incredibly useful given our seven-week time frame. Once we had this first draft, we were then able to edit the transcript to ensure its accuracy and also noted any nonverbal cues, as automated generators tend to miss or exclude such information (Baruch et al). Although Whisper is less accurate at analyzing British English compared to American English, and occasionally struggles with analyzing heavily accented speech, we were able to mitigate this with our manual edit during the transcription process (Graham et al).

## **Demographic Representation and Trends**

As representation is critical to inclusion and fairness in the workplace, it was important to analyze the demographics of Merton Council and the constituents it represents. We utilized data collected on both the borough as a whole and the statistics of the municipal workforce. This allowed us to make comparisons between the proportions of staff with protected characteristics (age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation) and their presence in the municipal government workforce (Equality Act, 2010). We also utilized this data to add another layer of complexity to our other data collection methods to note if there are trends in the perception of Merton’s organizational culture among groups of people. A Gantt chart outlining the schedule for cleaning, analyzing, visualizing, and communicating our data from our findings is included to ensure efficient management of our tasks (Table 3).

**Table 3***Data Visualization Gantt Chart*

Main Tasks	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6	Week 7
Choose Visualization Options							
Clean The Data							
Analyze The Data							
Visualize The Data							
Communicate The Data							

We worked alongside Merton Council to ask for volunteers from a variety of backgrounds and experiences to better represent the workforce. We hoped to get input from at least one individual who is a member of each protected category under the 2010 UK Equality Act to gauge a comprehensive set of experiences from vulnerable groups (Equality Act, 2010). We also looked to gather anecdotes from various workplace sites, such as those who work in the main hub, but also those who work in satellite workplaces, in the field, or do remote work. Leadership, retention, and succession are other key elements of Merton's culture, so we tried to note trends among employees of different leadership and seniority statuses without compromising confidentiality. As diversity representation often varies depending on industry, and different fields of work have varying work environments and tasks, we also tried to survey widely across the municipal workforce in each of its directorates.

# Findings

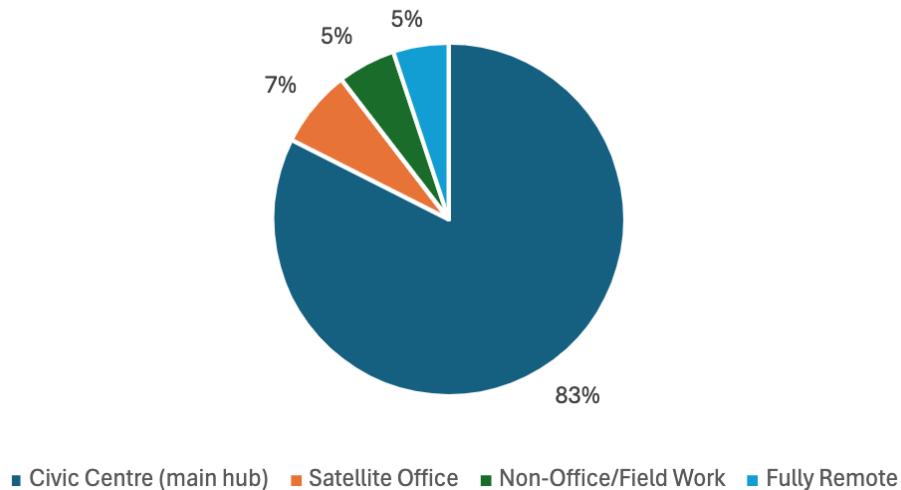
## Demographic Analysis

Although most of Merton Council is comprised of full-time, Civic Centre office workers, there are many employees who do not fall into that category (see Figure 2). Despite 83% of responses coming from Civic Centre staff, they make up only around 56% of the total workforce. In order to understand Merton Council's organizational culture from its various employees' perspectives, our methods targeted different audiences. Our Full Staff Survey was sent out to the entire workforce, but we also worked to get feedback from frontline workers and employees from protected groups. Overall, our data collection methods provided a good representation of Merton's workforce.

**Figure 2**

*Full Staff Survey Respondents by Work Location*

Survey Respondents by Work Location



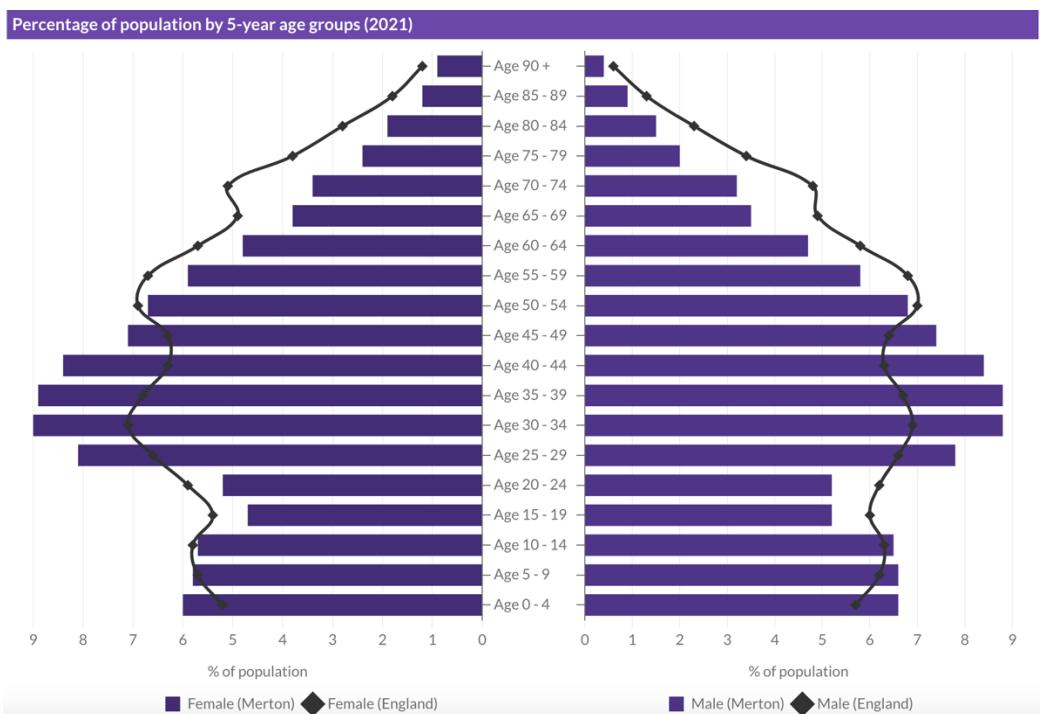
Being a municipal government, it is important that Merton Council understands and meets the needs of its residents, especially as a common source of pride for employees was serving the residents of Merton. Although only around 42% of Merton Council's workforce resides in the borough of Merton, the demographics of the workforce generally mirror the borough's (Merton Council, 2024). To analyze these demographics in detail, we can compare the

statistics provided by the 2021 ONS Census of Merton, Merton Council's data on its workforce from their Annual Equalities and Diversity in Employment Report, and information from our collection methods. To preserve anonymity, we limited the analysis of demographic data to the Full Staff Survey, as the populations for our focus groups and Frontline Survey are smaller.

It is difficult to compare the age distribution of the borough with the workforce data or our survey population, because ages are grouped differently in each of our primary data sources (see Figures 3.1, 3.2, 3.3). In addition, UK child labor laws prevent younger demographics from entering the workforce – children can only start part-time work at 13, and full-time work at 16 (UK Government, 2024). Because of this, it is not surprising that employees under 25 make up only 2.8% of Merton Council, and only 2.1% of our survey respondents. However, older workers make up a much larger population of Merton Council. 46.4% of Merton Council's workforce is comprised of people within the 50 to 64 age range. 33.5% of our survey respondents indicated they were 55 or older. Perhaps correlated to this, 36.7% respondents stated that they had worked for Merton Council for more than 10 years (Merton Council, 2024).

**Figure 3.1**

*Merton Data: Population by 5-year Age Groups*

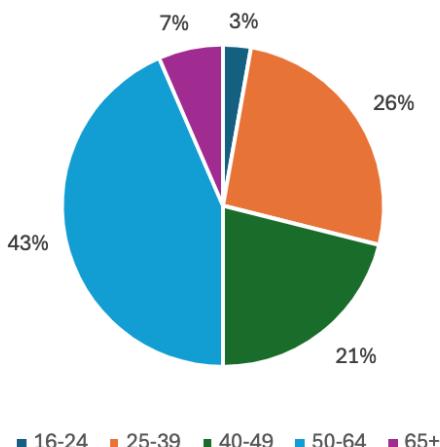


(Merton Council, 2021)

**Figure 3.2**

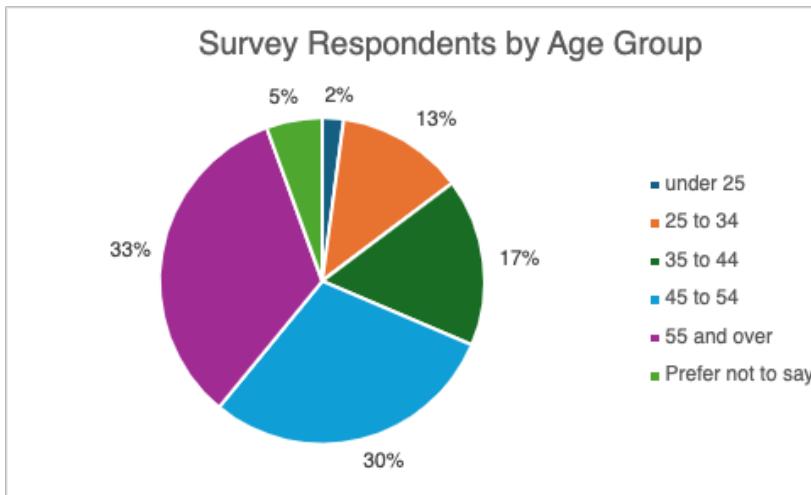
*Merton Council's Workforce by Age Group*

**Merton Council's Workforce by Age Group**



**Figure 3.3**

*Full Staff Survey Respondents by Age Group*

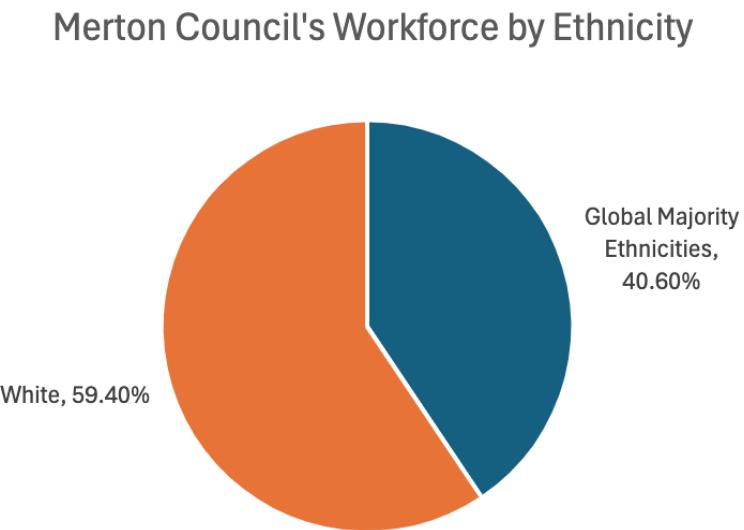


About 51% of Merton Borough is female, while Merton Council's workforce has a larger presence of women, being 68% female (ONS, 2021 & Merton Council, 2024). 67% of our survey respondents also identified as female, being approximately representative of the workforce. Notably, the borough demographics come from the ONS Census, which specified sex rather than gender, while our survey asks only for gender. Merton Council's workforce data is based on gender from the legal documentation first submitted upon employment - which only includes male and female and would not be updated if an employee transitioned. The 2021 census and our survey did not collect information on sexuality, but Merton Council does, with 2.5% of the workforce identifying as LGBTQIA+ (Merton Council, 2024).

Within Merton, around 36% of the population is Black, Asian, or of a Global Majority ethnicity—defined as any non-white ethnicity (Merton Council, 2024). Merton Council has a population of 40.6% Global Majority ethnicities, while only 24.2% of our survey respondents belong to this group, see Figure 4 (Merton Council, 2023). This is a notable demographic with underrepresentation in our Full Staff Survey, although the focus groups had notably more representation of Global Majority ethnicities.

**Figure 4**

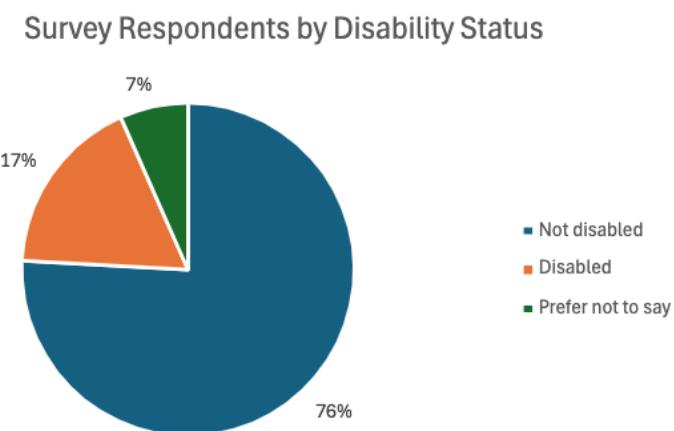
*Merton Council's Workforce by Ethnicity*



Around 12% of Merton's population is disabled under the 2010 Equality Act (ONS, 2021). However, this percentage is notably less when compared to Merton Council's workforce, with disabled people making up only 6% of the population (Merton Council, 2024). Despite this, 17.5% of our survey respondents self-identified as disabled, meaning it is possible for their overrepresentation to skew our survey data (see Figure 5).

**Figure 5**

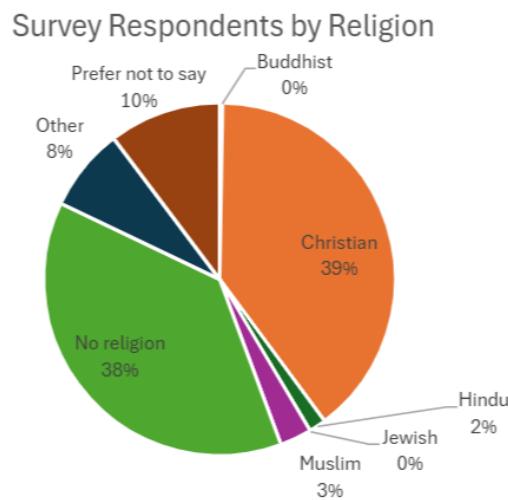
*Full Staff Survey Respondents by Disability Status*



Merton is known for its religious diversity, with just under half (47.1%) of the borough identifying as Christian, 28% with no religious affiliation, 10.1% identifying as Muslim, and 5.9% identifying as Hindu (ONS, 2021). Comparatively, Merton Council's workforce is majority Christian, with Christians making up about 58% of the population. About 7% of the workforce is Muslim and only 3% are Hindu, meaning the workforce has a significantly different religious composition than the borough (Merton Council, 2023). However, Christians are underrepresented in the Full Staff Survey, making up only 40% of the survey respondents. People with no religious affiliation are overrepresented in the survey, being roughly 38% of the population compared to the overall workforce's 27% (Figure 6).

**Figure 6**

*Full Staff Survey Respondents by Religion*



We also analyzed Merton Council's top 5% of earners, hoping to get a better idea of the demographic composition of senior management and higher leadership positions within the workforce. We found that some groups with protected characteristics were underrepresented within this top salary band. Global Majority ethnicities are severely underrepresented in these roles, being only 18% of the top 5% of earners despite making up 40% of the workforce and 37% of the borough. People with disabilities are slightly underrepresented when compared to the workforce, only 4% of the top salary earners but 6% of all staff. However, when compared to the borough, people with disabilities are very underrepresented as they are roughly 12% of the

population. Women, despite being the majority (54%) of top 5% earners, are underrepresented when compared to the workforce's 68% female population (Merton Council, 2023 & ONS, 2021). These statistics mirror some of the sentiments regarding representation in senior management found in the focus groups.

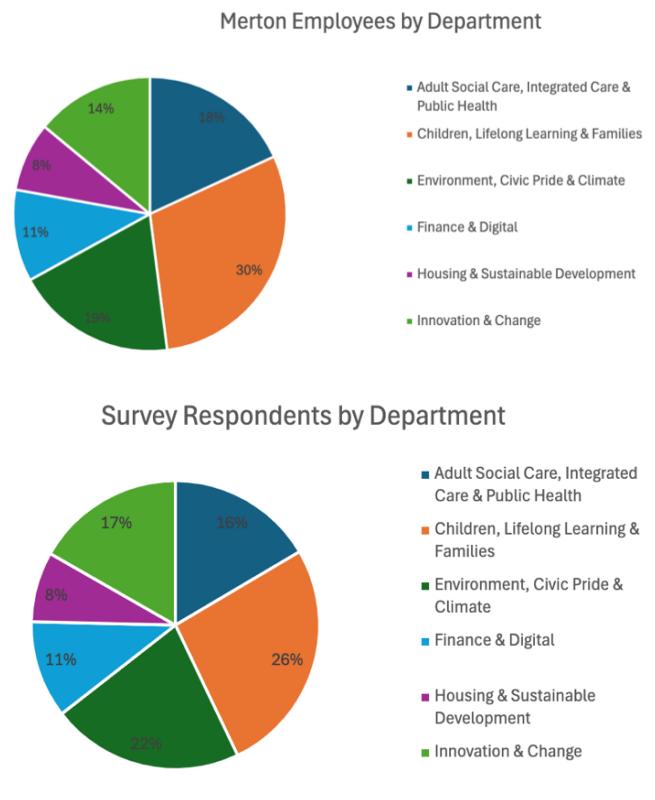
## **Findings From Full Staff Survey**

Our survey had a total of 402 responses, representing 21.2% of the Civic Centre workforce. Out of these respondents, 81.1% answered every non-demographic question and 34.6% provided additional context in the free response question. Although we did not record what drew respondents to the survey, we believe the communications with staff alerting them to our arrival and continual updates concerning the purpose and progress of the project may have had a positive role. Overall, the survey data emphasized Merton's reliance on structure, its employee-led collaboration culture, and lack of competitive attitudes.

The population of respondents accurately represents the workforce of Merton Council, with a very similar spread of individuals across departments and various demographic groups (see Figure 7).

**Figure 7**

*Merton Council Employees by Department versus Full Staff Survey Respondents*



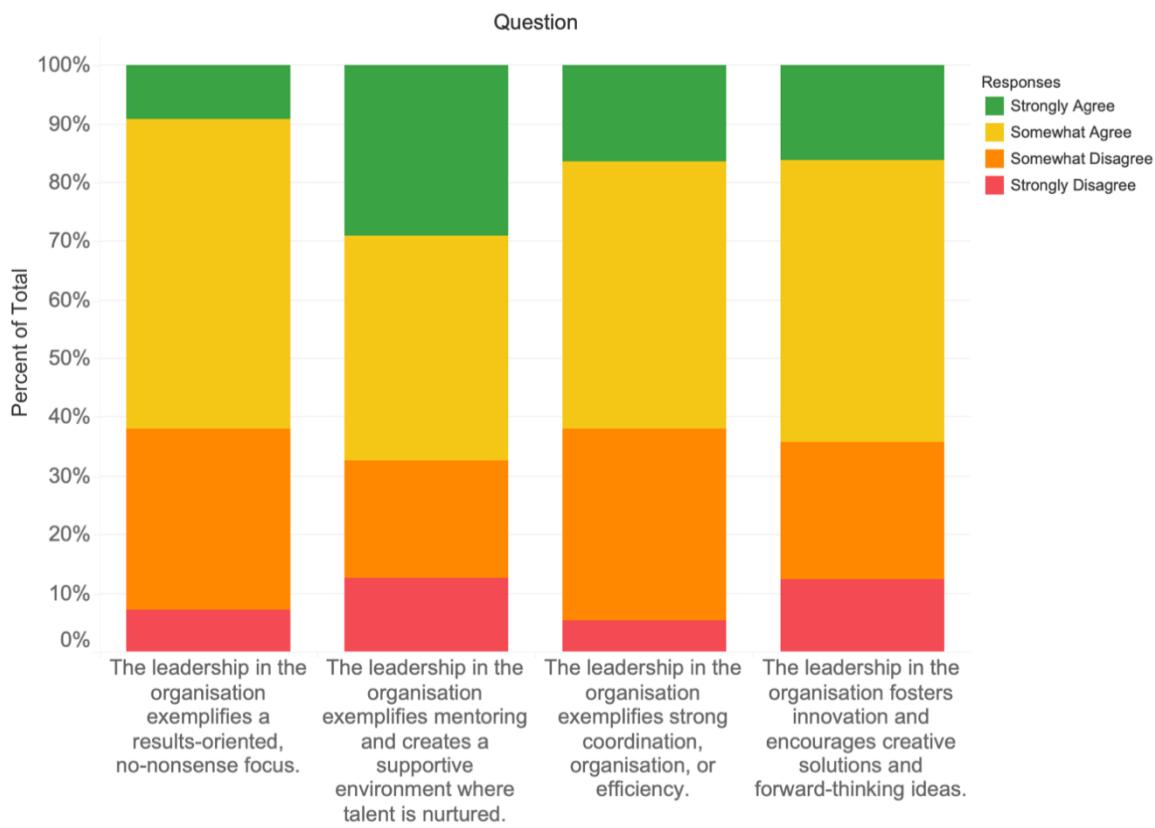
There is overwhelming agreement for Merton's openness and welcoming attitude, with 34.29% strongly agreeing and 58.57% somewhat agreeing. This conclusion is consistent across race and gender groups, but those who responded "prefer not to say" to either demographic question had slightly less support. Similarly, 70.85% of respondents were proud of the workplace community fostered by the organization. Although a small minority of respondents mentioned bullying in the workplace, many more appreciate the character and capability of individuals and teams within Merton Council.

Over three quarters of staff (82.83%) agree that Merton Council is a "controlled and structured place." Similarly, loyalty and formal guidelines have roughly equal importance to what staff believe holds the organization together. This quality is generally disliked by respondents, who mention that much of this policy is dated and does not reflect the ways in which teams now operate.

Underscoring this diversity in team behavior, there exists little consensus on leadership values. No more than 60% of respondents agreed or disagreed on any question in the section (see Figure 8). However, the existence of strong responses points to a significant variance between the leadership in each department. To support this conclusion, some participants mentioned difficulties answering the question due to limited experience with other departments, with other participants noting that leadership experiences vary significantly across the workforce.

**Figure 8**

*Staff Responses to Organizational Leadership Questions*



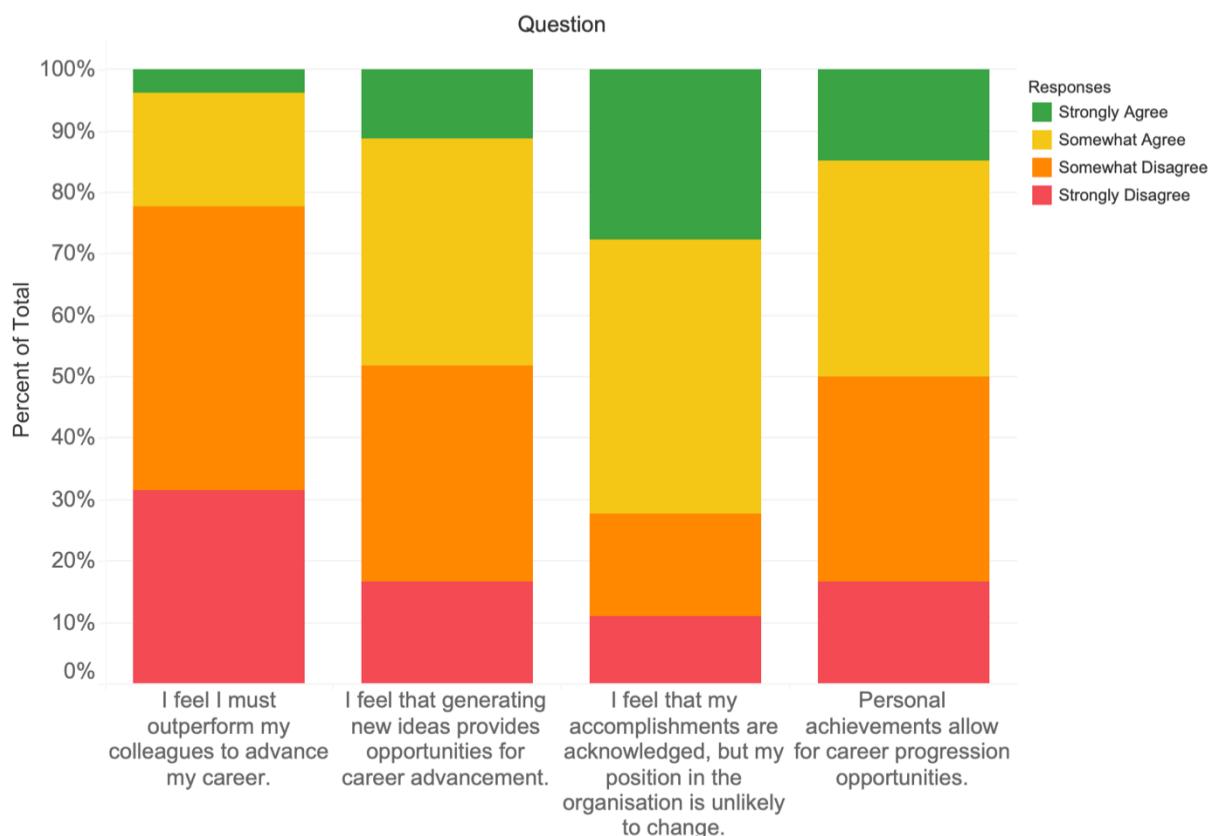
Even though teams themselves do not share many common cultural attributes, collaboration is consistent across individuals. 72.54% of people somewhat or strongly agree that they utilize collaboration to build positive relationships in the workplace, while 67.25% believe that collaboration is optional and 49.48% believe that collaboration is only required when it is most efficient. Additionally, over 90% of respondents prioritize teamwork in their own work—with over half strongly prioritizing it—pointing towards a significant personal willingness to collaborate. This leads us to believe that collaboration is frequent but largely organic, resulting from staff seeking proofreading or assistance with new and difficult tasks as opposed to being inherent to Merton's work expectations.

To make this self-motivated collaboration culture within teams even more evident, the willingness for staff to collaborate is viewed as not very important for promotion or career progression. Less than half of respondents agreed that generating new ideas or outperforming

colleagues were important to career progression (see Figure 9). At 50.51%, the importance of personal achievements had slightly more support. Ultimately, 30.48% of respondents strongly agreed and 45.55% somewhat agreed that their position in Merton Council were unlikely to change. Job security and risk-taking are both prioritized by over 65% of respondents, implying that although innovation is not strongly encouraged by the Council's workplace culture, taking risks may not have strong implications for job security. The low support for our specified metrics of career progression were elaborated upon in the free responses; the form of career progression that staff most often identified—dependent upon existing relationships with managers—was not included in our survey.

**Figure 9**

*Staff Responses to Career Progression Questions*



## **Findings From Full Staff Free Responses**

We received 139 responses with feedback to the free response on the Full Staff Survey, making up 34.6% of respondents. Although there were 157 answers to the free response question on the Full Staff Survey, some said they did not have anything else to add. These free responses provide insights into the organization's present situation. Many staff members express pride, flexibility, and satisfaction in their teams and roles. Although, there were concerns about perception, regeneration, the impact of remote working, management practices, inclusivity, modernization, trust, workload, and resource allocation.

The borough's free responses mentioned the perception of and need for regeneration within Merton. Four percent of respondents have expressed how the current state of the borough negatively affects perceptions and morale within the workplace. Three percent of respondents described Morden as drab and in need of significant borough regeneration to improve its social and visual environment. The feedback from the free responses has highlighted several areas within the organization that need attention. These respondents would like a borough that strives for continual improvement, enhancing the community's love and pride for their workplace.

The impact of remote working on organizational dynamics has revealed a mix of benefits and challenges. Five percent of the free responses have expressed that the opportunity for remote working has allowed them to manage their personal and professional lives more effectively, leading to higher job satisfaction and increased productivity. Hybrid working approaches have been crucial in retaining and attracting talented staff, as one respondent noted that this flexibility "can drive performance, retention of staff, and organizational loyalty." Additionally, supporting hybrid working fosters a positive organizational culture and enhances team collaboration, benefiting those with personal responsibilities and promoting inclusivity and equity within the workplace. However, 18% of respondents talked about innovation and collaboration being stifled by the option to work remotely. Ten percent mentioned that remote working has expanded the distance between teams, stressing that "Collaboration with external bodies is almost impossible, even with other local authorities. It's hard to innovate," and that "Innovation and collaboration happen in office contexts. Team performance before and after the pandemic are chalk and cheese." Eight percent stressed the importance of in-office interaction for innovation, viewing

efficient teamwork and cohesion as hindered by the lack of face-to-face interaction within the organization.

Some management practices within the organization have become a concern for staff, with over thirty percent of unique free response answers describing promotion fairness, recognition, and workplace environment. Fifteen percent of respondents say that promotions are not based on merit and hard work, but instead one's relationship with those in charge. Ten percent of respondents feel undervalued, with inadequate pay and benefits, and five percent report a toxic work environment, often dependent on the work site, management, department, and team. Due to feeling underappreciated, some employees grew apathetic towards their responsibilities. One respondent stated that, "Hard work [is] never recognized and the awards are divisive. No promotions. No growth." Another respondent mentioned that due to "hierarchy within the department" as well as "the Council as a whole," they believed that certain people are "afforded preferential treatment" by receiving promotions when they have "no actual merit." These respondents speak of a divide within the organization because staff are not feeling heard or appreciated for their valuable work and are not being appropriately awarded for their contributions.

Twelve percent of respondents highlighted the importance of recognizing and supporting staff efforts and contributions. A respondent who has worked in many local authorities stated that they "have found Merton to be a good place to work" and that they "have supportive and caring managers" which shows how the organization does well compared to other organizations. Another mentioned, "I feel valued and supported in my role by senior colleagues and peers." Although some feel supported in their workplace, as shown with these positive comments, as described above, others express the opposite. This highlights the disparities within different departments and teams, suggesting the need for more consistent management practices across the organization that equally value their staff.

Some say the lack of inclusivity within the workplace leaves them feeling undervalued. Although the organization aims to be inclusive and equal among all individuals, a respondent stated, "Merton has declared that it supports those with special needs, but again, has not made adjustments which could have helped their own employees." However, all staff do not share this sentiment, as respondents "feel the Merton Community is mostly committed to looking after

staff" and that a limited amount of the staff are "out for themselves rather than a collaborative and team-based outlook."

Furthermore, eight percent of respondents perceive the organization as old-fashioned and risk adverse, in need of modernization in practices and policies. One respondent articulated, "The organization talks about encouraging innovation but then refuses to resource it." Then another respondent spoke that, "Merton is quite risk-averse and there is a reluctance to change in favour of sticking with process and sometimes clunky governance" and that this tends to "make it difficult to innovate and do things differently, also affects the good will and commitment of staff." Addressing these issues is crucial to creating a more positive, productive, and supportive work environment. These responses also point out that a percentage, although small, view a disconnect between words and actions.

Ten percent of respondents expressed opportunities for improving trust within the organization. One respondent mentioned, "I have no relationship with senior managers they work at home all of the time. We are now so short-staffed it's ridiculous. From what we were to what we are now is pitiful." Another respondent stated, "It appears that promotions are often given to individuals based on personal relationships rather than merit or performance." These respondents express that the organization's senior management is disconnected from their staff and their career progression opportunities are biased. As an employee noted, "Loyalty and commitment to the work hold the organization together, but mutual trust is lacking." This is one of the 10% of responses that view the organization as needing more trust between their fellow staff and management.

Penultimately, the feedback given by the staff underscores the necessity of addressing workload and resource allocation issues. Within this research, we have learned that fifteen percent of respondents mention that the organization tends to have understaffed groups that "[are] the main cause of tension; it can make the workplace unsafe." Another respondent mentioned, "Teams are spread too thin and spinning too many plates due to lack of resource, recruitment and retention. Therefore people have less time to help others as they are under too much pressure from their own service area." Ensuring adequate and equitable staffing with sufficient resources is essential to maintain employee well-being and sustain high-quality service delivery.

Finally, twenty percent of respondents praised their time in the organization. One of the respondents added, "Merton is full of hard-working and humble people, all of whom go above and beyond every day to provide the best services they can to our residents." Another mentioned, "The workplace culture is positive. I think there is a strong and passionate senior leadership team." This shows us that there is a pride and drive for providing peak performance within the organization. Although many people find working at Merton a worthwhile experience, by addressing these varied and complex issues mentioned in the free response, the organization can create a more cohesive, innovative, trusting, and supportive environment for all its staff.

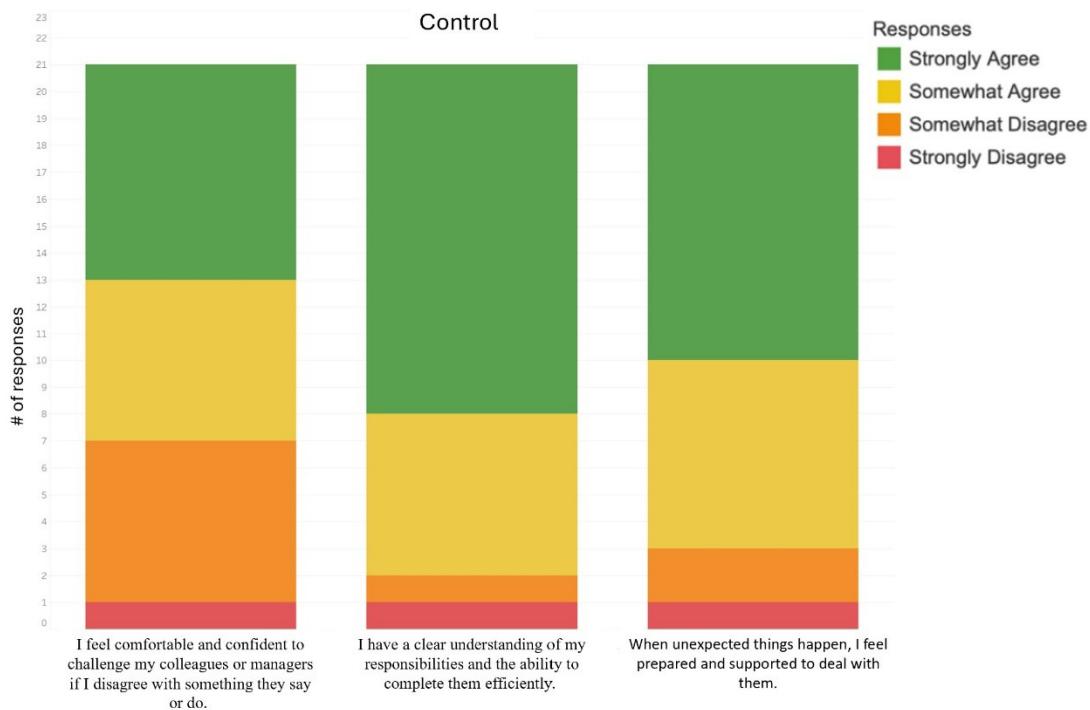
## **Findings From Frontline Worker Survey**

Our frontline worker survey had a total of twenty-one responses, representing about 30% of the frontline workers in one selected department, which is unnamed to preserve the anonymity of staff responses. The response rate exceeded our expectations. We expected to get no more than 10 responses and we received 21 responses. This survey overall revealed the resilience, professionalism, pride, and collaboration within the frontline workers.

The data visualization shown in Figure 10 reflects the finding from the frontline staff survey regarding their sense of control in their roles. The survey results pertaining to control cover these three statements: feeling comfortable and confident to challenge colleagues or managers, having a clear understanding of responsibilities, and feeling prepared and supported when unexpected things happen. About 85.7% of survey respondents feel in control, prepared, and supported in their tasks. This shows that the majority feel in control in the workplace, however, 33.3% of the survey respondents do not feel comfortable challenging colleagues or managers. This means there are a fair amount of staff who are not confident about voicing disagreements, and the need for improvement in open communication in the workplace.

**Figure 10**

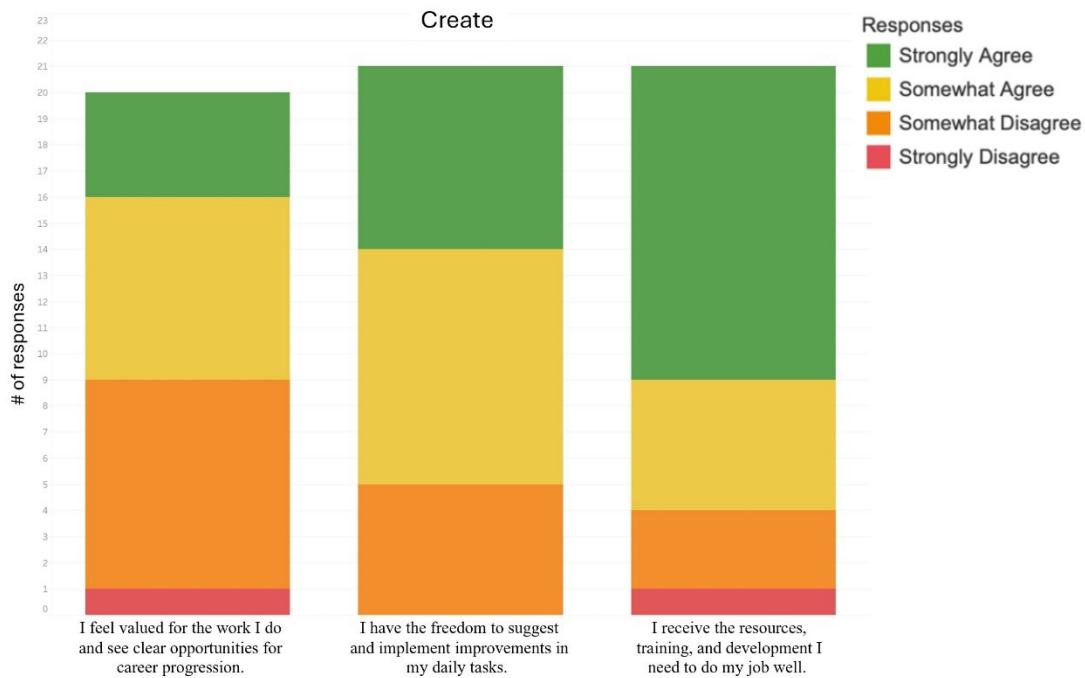
*Frontline Staff Responses to Control Questions*



The information represented in Figure 11 shows the innovation quadrant of the Frontline Survey that focused on three key aspects of the frontline survey respondent's work experience: feeling valued and seeing opportunities for career progression, having the freedom to suggest and implement improvements, and receiving the necessary resources, training, and development to complete their job well. 81.0% of the survey respondents feel that they have received the resources, training, and development they need to do their job well. This indicates that most frontline staff feel well supported in terms of resources and training. We also found that 76.2% of respondents believed they have the freedom to suggest and implement improvements in their daily tasks. This indicates that most respondents feel they have some autonomy and ability to innovate. Ultimately, 55.0% agreed that they felt valued for the work they did, but there remains 45.0% of respondents that feel undervalued for their work and efforts.

**Figure 11**

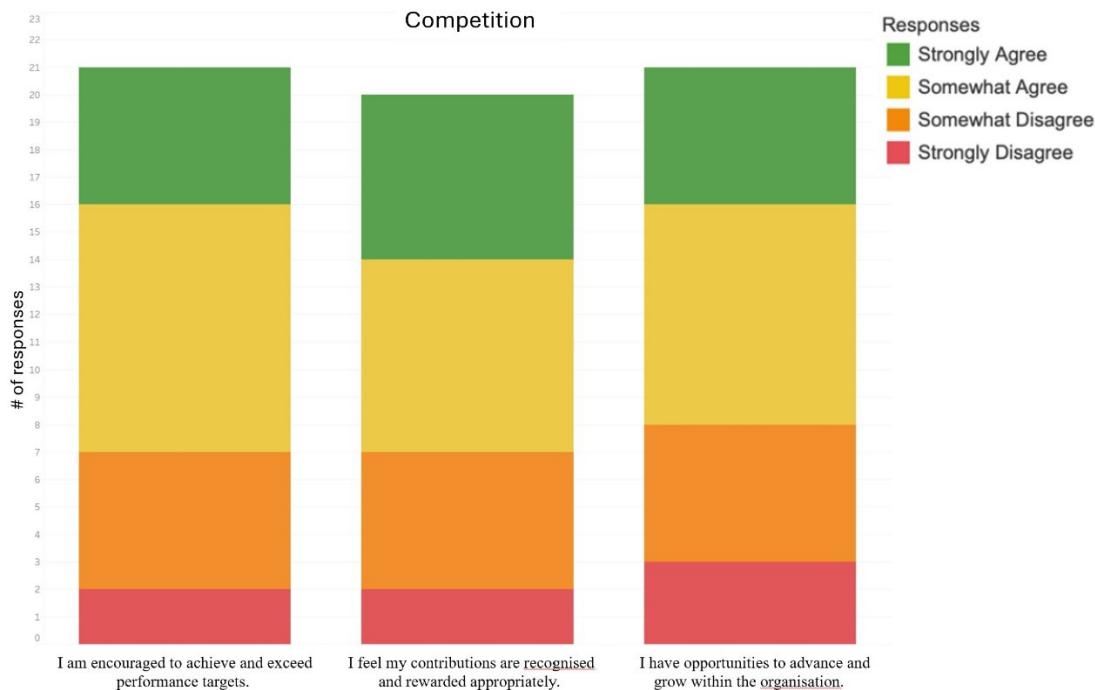
*Frontline Staff Responses to Create Questions*



The data presented in Figure 12 represents the survey results from frontline staff concerning competition and career opportunity in the workforce. The survey includes three statements: being encouraged to achieve and exceed performance targets, feeling contributions are recognized and rewarded appropriately, and having opportunities to advance and grow within the organization. Over 61.9% of survey respondents believed they achieved and exceeded performance targets, recognized for their contributions, and the opportunity to advance in their career. There were 2-3 individuals who strongly disagreed on these three statements, and at least 33.3% of survey respondents felt they were not motivated to go the extra mile, did not feel recognized for their contributions, and did not see any opportunities for advancement in the organization.

**Figure 12**

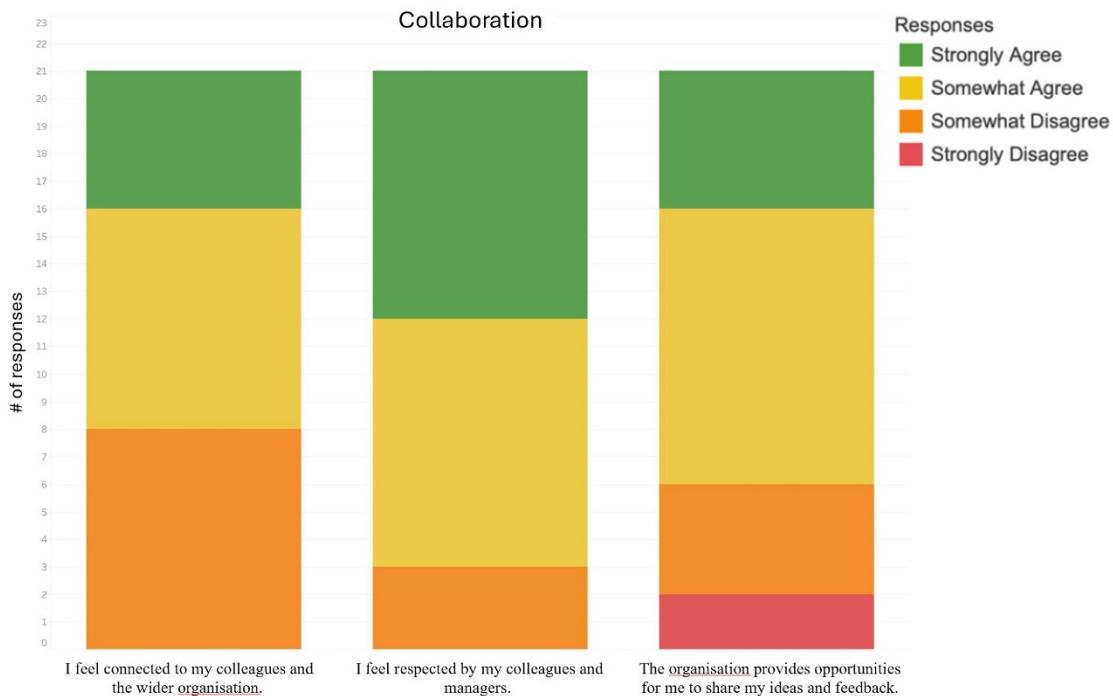
*Frontline Staff Responses to Competition Questions*



The data visualized in Figure 13 is based on the survey responses from frontline staff about their experiences with collaboration within the organization. The survey addresses three statements: feeling connected to colleagues and the wider organization, feeling respected by colleagues and managers, and having opportunities to share ideas and feedback. 61.9% of survey respondents said they feel connected to their colleagues and the organization which portrays a general sense of connection and community. However, 38.1% of respondents did not feel that sense of belonging. Positively speaking, 85.7% of respondents felt respected by their colleagues and managers. While 28.6% of respondents disagreed that the organization provided opportunities to share ideas, 71.4% felt free to share their voice and idea with their colleagues and management.

**Figure 13**

*Frontline Staff Responses to Collaboration Questions*



## Findings From Frontline Worker Free Responses

The effectiveness of any organization is largely dependent on its internal culture, communication, and support systems. For frontline staff within the council, several key aspects shape their daily work experience and overall job satisfaction. These include pride and teamwork, communication within and between teams, work-life balance, and management support.

Frontline staff express deep pride, professionalism, and love for their teamwork. An individual expressed, "I try to be professional at all times and perform tasks to the best of my ability, knowing the trust Merton has in me." This expresses the general sentiment that the frontline staff are trusted by their superiors to complete their tasks efficiently. The frontliners' comments also showed their dedication to 'go the extra mile' in accomplishing their tasks because "teamwork is important to reach goals." Another frontline staff member said, "I feel

very [much a] part of the community and my working team." These responses pinpointed a desire to strive for excellence in their tasks and the spirit of collaboration within the organization.

Good relationships within teams and supervisors are crucial to success within teams. An employee praised the "brilliant supervisors" and "supportive colleagues" in their team, which shows trust, support, and collaboration within the teams on the frontline. These values portrayed within teams on the frontline foster a supportive and productive relationship and workspace within team dynamics.

## **Findings From Frontline Worker Focus Group**

Our first focus group focused on departments and offices that do not have a strong connection to the Merton Hub or Civic Centre. The staff in these departments are less likely to use email communication or frequently access the Hub network, and as a result, are less likely to have participated in our other data collection methods. Additionally, since our staff survey focused on facets of culture most relevant to office work, staff primarily engaging in frontline work may have had more difficulty answering those questions. For this reason, we assembled a focus group containing staff within a frontline department to more effectively capture the range of work that happens within Merton Council. Our focus group was small, with three participants, but we greatly appreciated their willingness to speak about issues.

Because limited communication with the Civic Centre inspired the creation of the focus group, communication was our largest topic. As described by the participants, teams within the department communicate well within themselves. Although the communication platforms each team uses are inconsistent—some used email, some used SMS group chats, and others relied on WhatsApp groups—the conventions adopted by individual teams were generally effective. However, communication between teams seemed limited. Specifically, when detailing recent struggles regarding route logistics, one participant mentioned that two important teams within the department do not have frequent or consistent correspondence, resulting in consistent, long-term issues providing services. In this case, it may be partly due to the lack of standardization of communication methods across the department, no specific procedures for reaching out to adjacent teams, or simply the fact that various teams work in separate offices. But in other cases,

staff attributed the lack of cross-team communication to having largely separate, defined roles that don't often involve Merton as a whole. One participant in the session claimed to regularly access the Hub but said that this is not the norm for their colleague.

Having had a recent management change, the focus group participants detailed how their workplace became more efficient and how their department fits into the wider Merton workforce. This change in management was received positively by the participants, with them praising their new focus on productivity and reaching targets, allowing for a greater degree of flexibility in how individual teams reach those goals. Additionally, the new management prioritized modernizing the department's IT infrastructure, such as transitioning to a database that does not require frequent manual data refreshing, but participants said there is still room for improvement. Overall, communication with managers is more casual and less stressful than with prior management. Knowledge about the management structure of the wider organization is mixed; people were largely unfamiliar with Merton's Executive Directors, but all knew the name of Merton Council's Chief Executive Officer. The participants felt like they did not have much personal connection with Civic Centre teams—they felt as if their work as a department were appreciated but were rarely given personal recognition.

The COVID-19 pandemic, which hit Merton two years before the change in management, had a similarly transformative role in workplace behavior. It greatly relaxed expectations regarding work location and unplanned life events, which has persisted to today. One participant strongly supported this policy, saying that flexibility surrounding work location helped them work around circumstances without making individual exceptions for each situation, which in turn improved their mental health. The other participants agreed with this sentiment. Although the policy predated COVID-19, Merton's flexi-day policy was praised by the participants for similar reasons. Despite these benefits, this flexibility in work location meant that fewer people are in the office on any given day, which required new workflows for communicating with coworkers.

Although employees are alerted to career progression opportunities, promotion is not often prioritized by department staff. When asked if they were aware of opportunities, every participant responded affirmatively. They mentioned that upcoming roles were listed on the Merton Hub and posted on the public-facing Merton careers website, and internal vacancies were

emailed directly to the relevant departments. This marks an improvement over previous management, which filled internal vacancies much less publicly. Additionally, the interview process is consistent and streamlined, making the road towards potential career progression visible. However, vacancies typically require employees to step out of their current role and into one with a different job title and set of responsibilities. Furthermore, it may be difficult to build the managerial skills required to progress within a department. For this reason, few employees choose to take this route, with many preferring to stay within their current role.

Even though new management has improved technological efficiency within the department, future improvement may be limited by the lack of a robust employee suggestion workflow. Although employees feel comfortable communicating new ideas to management, with one participant saying that “the door is open for new ideas”, the department lacks a consistent procedure for implementing employee feedback. This means that each suggestion is handled individually, and that it is largely up to management and the persistence of employees whether a piece of feedback is taken seriously. From there, it is difficult for employees to contact upper management individually about their suggestion, requiring managers to fill the communication role for them. As a suggestion travels up the management ladder, it becomes increasingly important that the staff pushing the suggestion formulate ways to demonstrate the effectiveness of a proposed change. For experimental suggestions or those new to the Council entirely, proving the effectiveness of suggestions can be difficult or impossible. Even if a suggestion is taken seriously by an employee’s immediate management, reaches people capable of changing policy, is proven effective, and finally implemented, staff are very rarely explicitly rewarded for their contributions. If a suggestion saves the organization money, one participant’s previous position at a different organization would reward employees with a percentage of the money saved. Such a system does not exist in Merton, with the only reward for successful changes and increased efficiency being the indirect opportunity to fill higher roles or receive a pay bump at the discretion of management. Overall, the department’s response to suggestions mirrors the organization as a whole, possibly preventing staff from thinking innovatively and confidently expressing new ideas.

## **Findings From Staff Network Focus Group**

The second focus group, led by Merton Council's EDI lead, targeted individuals from the six staff networks created to support individuals with protected characteristics or from traditionally marginalized groups. To improve accessibility, this session was conducted via a hybrid online and in-person approach, attended by five individuals in-person and six individuals online. Many of the respondents reflected views seen in our other data collection methods, including expressing pride for fellow coworkers and the borough, voicing concerns about communication, and emphasizing the need for modernization. In addition, this focus group pointed out the need for more support and inclusivity within the organization — particularly with interactions with management—and highlighted some of the organization's strengths and weaknesses.

Many staff members emphasized pride towards their fellow coworkers, the work they do, and the residents they serve. One participant said that Merton Council's staff "have a lot of pride in what they do and know that they're helping residents and making a difference in the community." Merton Council employees who are residents of the borough also mentioned feeling a commitment to Merton as a place. However, most staff noted that they weren't particularly proud or loyal to Merton as a larger organization, one saying that "I know I'm just a number" and another stating they don't feel that the Council is loyal to their staff. Attributed causes to the lack of loyalty to Merton as an organization by participants included seeing unequal treatment within the workplace and feeling undervalued by management.

Often, talent is recruited from outside the organization, which can lead to loyal staff members feeling ignored or not valued by management. This not only impacts the long-term, hardworking staff, but it also demotivates newer staff, with one participant saying, "that makes me more disloyal to the council, because I don't think they're going to be loyal to me if they weren't loyal to someone who's been here 15 or 20 years". Another staff member mentioned that feedback received from management is mostly negative, recommending managers give more positive feedback that could increase employee morale. Unequal treatment was also brought up, with the mentioning of budgeting being different between groups that perform the same tasks due to personal bias of management.

One key discussion regarding Merton Council's culture in terms of respect and inclusivity focused on discrimination and bias based on protected characteristics. The focus group emphasized the need for greater inclusivity, particularly in meetings, management practices, and policy formulations. Participants noted that personal bias, stemming from individuals' backgrounds, often influenced decision-making processes. This unconscious bias directly affected the inclusivity of discussions and decisions. Moreover, outdated language in policies further perpetuated exclusionary practices and conformity bias, where individuals felt pressured to conform to the dominant group's norms. This was particularly noted in higher management roles and among promotions, where one focus group participant stated that "if your face don't fit, you don't have a chance". Some participants felt that their identities led to them being dismissed or undervalued, one mentioning that their ideas were not listened to until they were brought up by a white male coworker. Specific incidents regarding alleged discrimination were detailed in the focus group, with reportedly little consequences for the perpetrators. Increasing staff awareness of both conscious and unconscious bias could improve support for staff with protected characteristics across the organization.

One of the concerns of focus group participants was the need for Merton to take more initiative and hold higher accountability for its employees. Incidents of discrimination were met with few consequences by the perpetrators, and the desire for updated language and policies all reflect participants' sentiment that Merton Council should take a decisive and proactive stance when it comes to their policy making and enforcement. Although Merton has a zero-tolerance policy regarding bullying and harassment, some staff felt that it was hypocritical and "w wishy-washy" because of the lack of accountability when it comes to enforcing it at all levels of management.

One possible cause of the lack of action was noted by participants as a culture of "risk-aversion". Risk aversion can be a positive when it protects people, but it becomes detrimental when it hampers processes that can make positive change. One member of the focus group mentioned that they believed Merton has good intentions, but they need to do more to follow through on them. Another participant noted that they felt Merton was "always following, never leading", and attributed the fear of failure as an organizational fear. This was listed as a main inhibitor to innovation and idea-sharing, one of the values Merton staff generally feel least

applies to the organization. This leads to difficulties, especially when it comes to taking on change initiatives like modernization.

Technology at Merton Council has been variable over the years and struggles to improve because of innovation inhibition. One focus group participant mentioned the constant changes in IT and its services being stressful due to a lack of reliability in the technology, and that IT is understaffed and too busy to provide help. Experimenting and moving towards modernized technologies has been expressed as a need for staff, especially due to its potential in reducing “busy work” and staff workload. Some of our focus group members mentioned that budget cuts, while often necessary, sometimes target technology, which increases workload for workers and can lead to burnout.

Finally, communication was touched on as a critical aspect of Merton’s culture that could be improved. Inter-departmental and inter-team communication was emphasized, especially due to poor communication creating inefficiencies in resource allocation. Some staff members mentioned that they felt like they had to work unreasonably hard to “get the work that my team and I do on people’s agenda”, which was difficult and time-consuming but necessary for the team’s success. However, the Hub has been praised for its functionality and accessibility, the only comments for improvement being for employees to read it more on their own, and for older information to be removed.

# Conclusions and Recommendations

The first major conclusion we reached was the need for more frequent and effective communication between teams. Our various data collection methods have echoed this statement across the workplace. While internal team communication is thriving, with people interacting actively within teams, the same cannot be said for the wider organisation. To address this, we recommend implementing more cross-functional teams and organizing events specifically designed to facilitate interactions between different teams. These initiatives could include regular inter-team meetings, joint projects, and social events aimed at fostering stronger relationships and better communication channels between teams.

Our team's second major conclusion is that there needs to be more trust between senior management and staff. Multiple factors contribute to this. A significant number of staff members have expressed concerns about perceived biases in career progression opportunities and the allocation of resources. There is a widespread sentiment that senior management favors specific types of individuals that fit a particular mould, undermining trust among the staff. Addressing this issue requires senior management to embrace more transparent and fair decision-making approaches. This should include explicit criteria for promotions and resource allocation and regular, open communication channels via which employees can express their concerns and receive feedback. Additionally, a comprehensive accountability framework, particularly considering frequent reported instances of bullying within top management, should be implemented to ensure that events are handled swiftly and efficiently to promote a safer work environment. There is also a perceived gap between managers and their staff, with many believing that supervisors must understand their daily experiences and interact appropriately with them. To close this gap, senior management must prioritize meaningful contacts while actively seeking to understand and address employee issues through regular check-ins, feedback sessions, and inclusive decision-making methods. Senior management may rebuild and strengthen confidence inside the organization by promoting transparency, accountability, and genuine participation.

Our third conclusion points to significant gaps in support for employees with special needs and hidden disabilities. As Merton works to establish a more inclusive and friendly

workplace, it is critical to focus on appropriate support for these individuals. This entails making the required modifications and establishing a solid support structure to meet their specific needs. Initiatives could include training programs for managers and staff to raise awareness about hidden impairments, forming a dedicated support team, and frequent evaluations of workplace regulations to ensure they are inclusive and supportive of all employees.

Our fourth conclusion is that individuals often experience a state of emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion, commonly known as 'burnout.' This condition can lead to feeling overlooked or undervalued, negatively impacting personal well-being and professional performance. Our recommendation is to establish a culture of constructive feedback and recognition. Implementing regular positive acknowledgments and providing meaningful feedback can significantly boost morale, enhance mental well-being, and create a more supportive work environment.

Our fifth conclusion is that there needs to be more policy enforcement from the top down. The lack of enforcement can result in inconsistencies and a lack of accountability among the staff. To address this, it is crucial to strengthen the enforcement of policies at all levels of the organization. Ensuring management leads by example and consistently applies these standards can improve compliance and performance.

Our sixth conclusion highlights the possibility of an innovation fund to address the unequal allocation of resources and the subsequent stifling of innovation. This fund would empower employees to bring forward new ideas, generating additional value for the organization. To further bolster this initiative and promote participation, we propose the implementation of incentives. These incentives could include recognition or monetary rewards for valuable contributions or cost-saving ideas. This comprehensive approach can potentially foster a more dynamic and innovative organizational culture.

Despite the concerns mentioned, many employees show tremendous pride in their work at Merton and are optimistic about the organization's future. They believe in the potential for enormous results and are dedicated to the organization's success. Merton Council can develop its collaborative and supportive environment by addressing the identified difficulties, such as improving inter-team communication, fostering trust between senior management and workers,

and assisting employees with special needs more. This will ensure all employees prosper and help the firm achieve its long-term goals and objectives.

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# **Appendix A: Full Staff Survey**

## **Merton Council Workplace Culture Questionnaire**

We are a team of Worcester Polytechnic Institute students working on a research project in collaboration with Merton Council's Change Team. This questionnaire is one of the tools we are developing to help the organisation better understand their workplace culture.

All responses will be kept confidential, stored on a restricted access SharePoint site accessible only to the research team. Any personal data you choose to share with us will be stored securely and disposed of August 28, 2024 in line with the UK General Data Protection Regulation 2018. You may decline to answer any question or stop participating in the survey at any time and for any reason.

We will not ask for your name, but we will ask about your job role and department within Merton Council. This information helps us understand which groups are responding and will not be linked to your answers. You can skip any question for any reason.

1. How long have you worked for Merton Council?

(Less than 1 year)    (1-2 years)    (3-5 years)    (6-10 years)    (More than 10 years)

2. What is your department in Merton Council?

(Adult Social Care & Public Health)	(Children, Lifelong Learning & Families)
(Environment, Climate & Civic Pride)	(Finance & Digital)
(Housing & Sustainable Development)	(Innovation & Change)

3. How would you describe your work pattern?

(Mostly in-person)    (Hybrid in-person and remote)    (Mostly remote)

4. State your work location.

(Merton Civic Centre)      (Satellite office)      (Non-office/field work)      (Fully remote)

We will now ask questions about protected characteristics as defined by the Equality Act 2010. We are asking for this information to understand more about the profile of Merton Council staff participating in this survey. As with every question in this survey, you may skip any question for any reason.

5. This question is about your gender identity. Do you identify as:

(Woman)    (Man)    (Transwoman)      (Transman)  
(Non-binary/genderqueer/agender/gender fluid)    (Don't know)      (Prefer not to say)

6. What is your ethnic background?

(White British or Irish)      (White/Eastern/European)      (White Other)      (Black British)  
(Black Caribbean)    (Black African)    (Mixed White & Caribbean)      (Mixed White and African)  
(Mixed White and Asian)    (Mixed Other)      (British Asian)    (Indian)      (Bangladeshi)  
(Pakistani)    (Tamil)      (Chinese)    (Other)    (Prefer not to say)

7. Do you consider yourself to have a disability?

(Yes)    (No)    (Prefer not to say)

8. What is your age?

(Under 25)    (25 to 34)    (35 to 44)    (45 to 54)    (55 and over)    (Prefer not to say)

9. What is your faith / belief?

(Buddhist)    (Christian)    (Hindu)    (Jewish)    (Muslim)    (No religion)    (Other)    (Prefer not to say)

### **Rating Statements:**

The following section will contain statements about organisational culture. Please rate each statement on a scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree based on how much you think the statement applies to your organisation. There are no right or wrong answers to these questions.

## **ORGANISATIONAL CHARACTERISTICS**

1. The organisation is an opening and welcoming place.

(Strongly Agree) (Somewhat Agree) (Somewhat Disagree) (Strongly Disagree)

2. The organisation is a very dynamic and entrepreneurial place. People are willing to advocate for themselves and take risks.

(Strongly Agree) (Somewhat Agree) (Somewhat Disagree) (Strongly Disagree)

3. The organisation is very competitive and achievement oriented. A major focus is getting the job done.

(Strongly Agree) (Somewhat Agree) (Somewhat Disagree) (Strongly Disagree)

4. The organisation is a controlled and structured place with defined hierarchies and roles.

(Strongly Agree) (Somewhat Agree) (Somewhat Disagree) (Strongly Disagree)

## **ORGANISATIONAL LEADERSHIP**

1. The leadership in the organisation exemplifies mentoring and creates a supportive environment where talent is nurtured.

(Strongly Agree) (Somewhat Agree) (Somewhat Disagree) (Strongly Disagree)

2. The leadership in the organisation fosters innovation and encourages creative solutions and forward-thinking ideas.

(Strongly Agree) (Somewhat Agree) (Somewhat Disagree) (Strongly Disagree)

3. The leadership in the organisation exemplifies a results-oriented, no-nonsense focus.

(Strongly Agree) (Somewhat Agree) (Somewhat Disagree) (Strongly Disagree)

4. The leadership in the organisation exemplifies strong coordination, organisation, or efficiency.

(Strongly Agree) (Somewhat Agree) (Somewhat Disagree) (Strongly Disagree)

## PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

1. I prioritise teamwork, consensus, and colleague feedback in my own work.

(Strongly Agree) (Somewhat Agree) (Somewhat Disagree) (Strongly Disagree)

2. I take risks, innovate, and produce unique work.

(Strongly Agree) (Somewhat Agree) (Somewhat Disagree) (Strongly Disagree)

3. I am competitive with my colleagues and meet high demands to achieve my own goals.

(Strongly Agree) (Somewhat Agree) (Somewhat Disagree) (Strongly Disagree)

4. I prioritise job security and predictability in my own work.

(Strongly Agree) (Somewhat Agree) (Somewhat Disagree) (Strongly Disagree)

## ORGANISATIONAL COHESION

1. Loyalty and mutual trust hold the organisation together. Commitment to this organisation runs high.

(Strongly Agree) (Somewhat Agree) (Somewhat Disagree) (Strongly Disagree)

2. Commitment to innovation and development holds the organisation together. There is an emphasis on being on the cutting edge.

(Strongly Agree) (Somewhat Agree) (Somewhat Disagree) (Strongly Disagree)

3. The emphasis on achievement, outstanding performance, and delivery of goals holds the organisation together.

(Strongly Agree) (Somewhat Agree) (Somewhat Disagree) (Strongly Disagree)

4. Formal guidelines, policies, and procedures hold the organisation together. Maintaining clear expectations and standards is important.

(Strongly Agree) (Somewhat Agree) (Somewhat Disagree) (Strongly Disagree)

## CAREER PROGRESSOIN

1. Personal achievements allow for career progression opportunities.

(Strongly Agree) (Somewhat Agree) (Somewhat Disagree) (Strongly Disagree)

2. I feel that generating new ideas provides opportunities for career advancement.

(Strongly Agree) (Somewhat Agree) (Somewhat Disagree) (Strongly Disagree)

3. I feel I must outperform my colleagues to advance my career.

(Strongly Agree) (Somewhat Agree) (Somewhat Disagree) (Strongly Disagree)

4. I feel that my accomplishments are acknowledged, but my position in the organisation is unlikely to change.

(Strongly Agree) (Somewhat Agree) (Somewhat Disagree) (Strongly Disagree)

## COLLABORATION

1. Collaboration is frequently used to build positive relationships within the workplace.

(Strongly Agree) (Somewhat Agree) (Somewhat Disagree) (Strongly Disagree)

2. Collaboration is mainly utilised for idea sharing and generation. Collaboration is optional as long as assigned tasks are completed effectively.

(Strongly Agree) (Somewhat Agree) (Somewhat Disagree) (Strongly Disagree)

3. Competitive attitudes sometimes get in the way of teamwork.

(Strongly Agree) (Somewhat Agree) (Somewhat Disagree) (Strongly Disagree)

4. Collaboration is expected and required only when it is the most efficient course of action.

(Strongly Agree) (Somewhat Agree) (Somewhat Disagree) (Strongly Disagree)

## PRIDE

1. I am proud of the workplace community that the organisation fosters.

(Strongly Agree) (Somewhat Agree) (Somewhat Disagree) (Strongly Disagree)

2. I am proud of how the organisation strives to produce innovative services and ways of working.

(Strongly Agree) (Somewhat Agree) (Somewhat Disagree) (Strongly Disagree)

3. I am proud of the work I do for the organisation.

(Strongly Agree) (Somewhat Agree) (Somewhat Disagree) (Strongly Disagree)

4. I am indifferent towards the organisation, I just want a stable job.

(Strongly Agree) (Somewhat Agree) (Somewhat Disagree) (Strongly Disagree)

Is there anything else you would like to mention concerning Merton's workplace culture?

## Appendix B: Frontline Worker Survey

Introduction:

“Hello, do you have a couple minutes to talk about working for Merton?”

Preamble:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. I am \_\_\_\_\_, a student researcher for Merton Council to help make it a better place to work. I will ask questions about your experience working for Merton. There are no right or wrong answers. We will not be collecting your name, however we will be asking for personal information - not to identify you, but to analyze which employee groups are participating. All collected responses will be stored on a private Merton server, accessible only to the research team, and be destroyed shortly after. However, your anonymized responses will be shared with the research team and used as part of our report to the Merton Council Change Team. You can skip questions or stop at any time for any reason.

Basic Information:

What department do you work in?

- |                                      |  |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| (Adult Social Care & Public Health)  | (Children, Lifelong Learning & Families) |
| (Environment, Climate & Civic Pride) | (Finance & Digital)                      |
| (Housing & Sustainable Development)  | (Innovation & Change)                    |

What is your role in Merton Council?

- Operational/administrative staff (team/business support, reception, similar)
- Front-line/key worker (parking attendants, social workers, park maintenance)
- Manager
- Senior leader (head of service or above)

How long have you worked for Merton Council?

- (Less than 1 year)    (1-2 years)    (3-5 years)    (6-10 years)    (More than 10 years)

Please indicate your gender identity:

- (Woman)    (Man)    (Trans woman)    (Trans man)  
(Non-binary/genderqueer/agender/gender fluid)    (Don't know)    (Prefer not to say)

What is your ethnic background?

(White British or Irish) (White/Eastern/European) (White Other) (Black British)  
(Black Caribbean) (Black African) (Mixed White & Caribbean) (Mixed White and  
African) (Mixed White and Asian) (Mixed Other) (British Asian) (Indian) (Bangladeshi)  
(Pakistani) (Tamil) (Chinese) (Other) (Prefer not to say)

Do you consider yourself to have a disability?

(Yes) (No) (Prefer not to say)

What is your age?

(Under 25) (25 to 34) (35 to 44) (45 to 54) (55 and over) (Prefer not to say)

What is your faith / belief?

(Buddhist) (Christian) (Hindu) (Jewish) (Muslim) (No religion) (Other) (Prefer not to say)

Questions:

1. I feel my contributions are recognised and rewarded appropriately.

(Strongly disagree) (Disagree) (Neither agree nor disagree) (Agree) (Strongly agree)

2. I feel respected by my colleagues and managers.

(Strongly disagree) (Disagree) (Neither agree nor disagree) (Agree) (Strongly agree)

3. When unexpected things happen, I feel prepared and supported to deal with them.

(Strongly disagree) (Disagree) (Neither agree nor disagree) (Agree) (Strongly agree)

4. I receive the resources, training, and development I need to do my job well.

(Strongly disagree) (Disagree) (Neither agree nor disagree) (Agree) (Strongly agree)

5. I am encouraged to achieve and exceed performance targets.

(Strongly disagree) (Disagree) (Neither agree nor disagree) (Agree) (Strongly agree)

6. The organisation provides opportunities for me to share my ideas and feedback.

(Strongly disagree) (Disagree) (Neither agree nor disagree) (Agree) (Strongly agree)

7. I have a clear understanding of my responsibilities and the ability to complete them efficiently.

(Strongly disagree) (Disagree) (Neither agree nor disagree) (Agree) (Strongly agree)

8. I have the freedom to suggest and implement improvements in my daily tasks.

(Strongly disagree) (Disagree) (Neither agree nor disagree) (Agree) (Strongly agree)

9. I feel valued for the work I do and see clear opportunities for career progression.

(Strongly disagree) (Disagree) (Neither agree nor disagree) (Agree) (Strongly agree)

10. I feel comfortable and confident to challenge my colleagues or managers if I disagree with something they say or do.

(Strongly disagree) (Disagree) (Neither agree nor disagree) (Agree) (Strongly agree)

11. I feel connected to my colleagues and the wider organisation.

(Strongly disagree) (Disagree) (Neither agree nor disagree) (Agree) (Strongly agree)

12. I have opportunities to advance and grow within the organisation.

(Strongly disagree) (Disagree) (Neither agree nor disagree) (Agree) (Strongly agree)

Free Response: Is there anything else you want to tell us about working for Merton Council?

## **Appendix C: Focus Group Questions - Frontline Workers**

1. How would you rate the level of communication and coordination within the organisation?
2. Do you feel a sense of pride and loyalty towards the organisation? If so, what generates that pride? If not, are there any factors that prevent this?
3. To what extent does Merton Council respect work-life balance and employee well-being?
4. Describe Merton Council's current processes for experimenting with new approaches or technologies. To what extent can the scope and expectations of work tasks be negotiated?
5. Do you feel valued for the work you do?
6. Are you aware of opportunities for career advancement and succession within the organisation?
7. Do you feel that collaboration and teamwork is encouraged and rewarded within the organisation?
8. How responsive is the organisation to implementing innovative suggestions or improvements?
9. What values and beliefs do you believe are most important to the organisation?

## **Appendix D: Focus Group Questions – Office Staff, Staff Network Members**

1. How do Merton's stated values align with the day-to-day behaviours and decisions you observe? Do they align with your own values?
2. Do you feel that language used within the organisation is inclusive and respectful of diverse perspectives and backgrounds?
3. Do you feel respected and valued in the workplace, regardless of your background or identity?
4. How would you rate the level of communication and coordination within the organisation?
5. Describe Merton Council's current processes for experimenting with new approaches or technologies. To what extent can the scope and expectations of work tasks be negotiated?
6. Do you feel a sense of pride and loyalty towards the organisation? If so, what generates that pride? If not, are there any factors that prevent this?
7. Are you aware of opportunities for career advancement and succession within the organisation? Do you feel encouraged or supported by your coworkers to pursue these opportunities?
8. To what extent does Merton Council respect work-life balance and employee well-being?
9. To what extent do you think your unique perspectives and experiences are valued and incorporated into decision-making processes within the organisation?