

Merton Council

Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel



Date: 22 March 2016
Time: 7.15 pm
Venue: Committee rooms C, D & E - Merton Civic Centre, London Road, Morden
SM4 5DX

AGENDA

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1 Apologies for absence	
2 Declarations of pecuniary interest	
3 Minutes of the previous meeting	1 - 8
4 Expert witness: Nick Berbiers, Head of Young People's Services, The Who Cares? Trust A presentation will be provided at the meeting.	
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**This is a public meeting – members of the public are very welcome to attend.
The meeting room will be open to members of the public from 7.00 p.m.**

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Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel membership

Councillors:

Linda Taylor OBE (Vice-Chair)
Charlie Chirico
Edward Foley
Joan Henry
James Holmes
Katy Neep (Chair)
Marsie Skeete
Dennis Pearce
Jeff Hanna
Agatha Mary Akyigyina

Substitute Members:

Sally Kenny
Peter Southgate
Fidelis Gadzama
Najeeb Latif
Stephen Crowe

Co-opted Representatives

Colin Powell, Church of England diocese
Simon Bennett, Secondary and Special
School Parent Governor Representative
Denis Popovs, Primary School Parent
Governor Representative

Note on declarations of interest

Members are advised to declare any Disclosable Pecuniary Interest in any matter to be considered at the meeting. If a pecuniary interest is declared they should withdraw from the meeting room during the whole of the consideration of that matter and must not participate in any vote on that matter. If members consider they should not participate because of a non-pecuniary interest which may give rise to a perception of bias, they should declare this, withdraw and not participate in consideration of the item. For further advice please speak with the Assistant Director of Corporate Governance.

What is Overview and Scrutiny?

Overview and Scrutiny describes the way Merton's scrutiny councillors hold the Council's Executive (the Cabinet) to account to make sure that they take the right decisions for the Borough. Scrutiny panels also carry out reviews of Council services or issues to identify ways the Council can improve or develop new policy to meet the needs of local people. From May 2008, the Overview & Scrutiny Commission and Panels have been restructured and the Panels renamed to reflect the Local Area Agreement strategic themes.

Scrutiny's work falls into four broad areas:

- ⇒ **Call-in:** If three (non-executive) councillors feel that a decision made by the Cabinet is inappropriate they can 'call the decision in' after it has been made to prevent the decision taking immediate effect. They can then interview the Cabinet Member or Council Officers and make recommendations to the decision-maker suggesting improvements.
- ⇒ **Policy Reviews:** The panels carry out detailed, evidence-based assessments of Council services or issues that affect the lives of local people. At the end of the review the panels issue a report setting out their findings and recommendations for improvement and present it to Cabinet and other partner agencies. During the reviews, panels will gather information, evidence and opinions from Council officers, external bodies and organisations and members of the public to help them understand the key issues relating to the review topic.
- ⇒ **One-Off Reviews:** Panels often want to have a quick, one-off review of a topic and will ask Council officers to come and speak to them about a particular service or issue before making recommendations to the Cabinet.
- ⇒ **Scrutiny of Council Documents:** Panels also examine key Council documents, such as the budget, the Business Plan and the Best Value Performance Plan.

Scrutiny panels need the help of local people, partners and community groups to make sure that Merton delivers effective services. If you think there is something that scrutiny should look at, or have views on current reviews being carried out by scrutiny, let us know.

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Agenda Item 3

All minutes are draft until agreed at the next meeting of the committee/panel. To find out the date of the next meeting please check the calendar of events at your local library or online at www.merton.gov.uk/committee.

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

10 FEBRUARY 2016

(7.15 pm - 10.05 pm)

PRESENT: Councillor Katy Neep (in the Chair), Councillor Linda Taylor, Councillor Charlie Chirico, Councillor Edward Foley, Councillor Joan Henry, Councillor James Holmes, Councillor Sally Kenny, Councillor Dennis Pearce, Denis Popovs and Councillor Agatha Mary Akyigyina

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Martin Whelton, Jane McSherry (Assistant Director of Education), Paul Ballatt (Head of Commissioning, Strategy and Performance, CSF), Keith Shipman (Head of Education Inclusion), Yvette Stanley (Director, Children, Schools & Families Department), Elizabeth Fitzpatrick (Head of School Improvement) and Annette Wiles (Scrutiny Officer)

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 1)

Apologies were received from Councillors Maxi Martin and Marsie Skeet and co-opted member Colin Powell.

The resignation of co-opted member Simon Bennett was noted.

The Chair also informed the panel of the death of co-opted member Peter Connellan. Thanks were giving for Mr Connellan's contribution and it was noted condolences have been sent to his family.

Requests have already been made to the appropriate organisations to seek replacements to fill both vacant co-opted member posts.

2 DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY INTEREST (Agenda Item 2)

None.

3 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (Agenda Item 3)

Panel members sought to clarify why comments are not attributed to named panel members in the minutes.

RESOLVED: To seek legal advice from Paul Evans, Assistant Director, Corporate Governance on writing minutes of scrutiny panel meetings.

4 UPDATE FROM COUNCILLOR MARTIN WHELTON, CABINET MEMBER FOR EDUCATION (Agenda Item 4)

Martin Whelton provided an opening narrative; there has been an improvement across all indicators in the last three years although some slight drops in the last year. Merton had the fastest improving GCSE results in London in 2014. As Cabinet Member for Education, his role is to monitor and challenge including examining the data of individual schools, monitoring if schools are achieving expected progress and questioning officers based on this knowledge. It is important to understand if fluctuations in performance are cohort related or are the result of other trends. With resources stretched, capacity of officers to intervene with schools needs to be carefully targeted.

In response to member questions, Yvette Stanley clarified;

- Schools are monitored in an ongoing fashion, and proportionate to their level of need to ensure they are on track. This goes beyond examination of data and includes softer measures such as a senior staff leaving a school and any increase in safeguarding reports;
- Schools in the *Requires Improvement* Ofsted category are given additional support and challenge;
- The Department's relationship with schools in the *Good* Ofsted category is required to be light touch and very light touch for those that are *Outstanding* making it more difficult to identify schools that aren't on track in these categories. This is being exacerbated by the diversification and fragmentation of the schools system and the reduction of the middle tier (the role of the council); and
- Exam data for all schools is available in the summer with benchmark data available from September. All schools receive feedback from the Department and, where needed, are called in for meetings to discuss how to address any deterioration in pupil progress and outcomes. Any school subject to an Ofsted inspection in the autumn term would therefore have little opportunity to address any identified issue(s) in pupil outcomes.

5 SCHOOL STANDARDS: ANNUAL REPORT ON ATTAINMENT AND PROGRESS OF PUPILS IN MERTON SCHOOLS (Agenda Item 5)

Executive Summary

Jane McSherry noted there has been a rapid improvement in Ofsted outcomes and that there is good picture in terms of year-on-year and trend comparisons with national data. The change in the Key Stage 4 performance measure in 2014 was highlighted meaning that comparison with previous data is not possible. It was explained that the Department's target is to do the same or better than statistical and Outer London neighbours on all measures.

In response to panel member questions, Elizabeth Fitzpatrick clarified:

- Attendance is improving whilst rates of persistence absence are failing (these are both positive trends);
- Support and training for Early Years assessments is on-going as there is a continual need to ensure this is strengthened and being done correctly, particularly by teachers new to the workforce; and

- Inclusion and safeguarding are supported through safeguarding leads meeting termly or more often to share best practice, advice, policies and research on inclusion and how to support families. This is an essential part of the school improvement process.

Keith Shipman noted consideration of wellbeing is reflected in broader achievement.

Context

Clarification was provided in response to panel member questions:

- (Jane McSherry) Benchmarking external to the borough happens not only via national datasets but also through membership of the *South West London Schools Partnership* and the *London Assistant Directors Group*;
- (Elizabeth Fitzpatrick) The increasing responsibility on governing bodies to scrutinise schools has resulted in a change to the required skill set of governors. Merton has been evaluating the governing bodies in all schools with mixed outcomes. Work is happening to develop governing bodies further; and
- (Jane McSherry) Every school in the borough has a *Merton Education Partner* who is responsible for challenging and supporting the head and school leadership team to achieve school improvement. Schools judged to be less than good, either through their most recent inspection, or as a result of concerns being raised between inspections, receive additional challenge through half termly 'Support and Challenge' meetings with detailed scrutiny of all data.

Early Years Foundation Stage

Elizabeth Fitzpatrick highlighted the increase in pupils achieving the 'Good Level of Development' and the *Average Point Score*. Last year's target to narrow the attainment gap for pupils eligible for the Pupil Premium in this phase of education focused on schools with the biggest gap, and where fewer pupils achieved the 'Good Level of Development'. Schools involved with the project made better than average improvements. The new baseline assessment that takes place as children join the school in Early Years has been piloted in 2015/2016 and will be implemented in the next academic year.

In response to panel member questions, Elizabeth Fitzpatrick clarified:

- A full breakdown of the progress for all ethnic groups is available on page 83 of the agenda pack; and
- The progress and achievement of those identified as on *SEN support* remains a priority with more being done to identify these pupils earlier and give them access to support.

Yvette Stanley highlighted the demographic time bomb that is affecting the whole capital with many heads hitting retirement age, and the knock on requirement to recruit strong and successful heads in their place. The strengths of retiring headteachers are being drawn on in many ways: for example, supporting the Council's School Improvement team.

Primary phase

Elizabeth Fitzpatrick highlighted the 9% increase in children reaching the expected standard in phonics decoding over the past two years and the narrowing of the achievement gap achieved in this phase for pupils eligible for the Pupil Premium. Whilst improvements at Key Stage 1 might be seen to have plateaued, it should be noted that with regard to progress across Key Stage 2, Merton is ranked 8th in the country for reading and 4th for writing. It was highlighted that the nationally expected level to be achieved by the end of Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 will rise to the equivalent of a level 2b and level 4b respectively from summer 2016.

In response to panel member questions, Elizabeth Fitzpatrick clarified:

- The less strong improvements in the maths results is linked to big changes in the primary maths curriculum; for example aspects of what used to be expected in Year 6 now have to be secured in Year 4;
- All schools are being encouraged to provide support for parents whilst changes to assessment come into effect;
- Both the Singapore and Shanghai models for teaching maths are being used in schools in the borough, with approaches from both being incorporated in the new National Curriculum. Judgements about the effectiveness of schools' approaches to teaching maths are made on whether maths teaching is having an impact and is well led in the school; and
- Prior underachievement in Key Stage 1 is being robustly tackled. Cohorts are now in Year 3 and above with the progress of each year group being carefully monitored.

Secondary phase

Elizabeth Fitzpatrick highlighted that whilst the headline GCSE figure is down, if the performance of Academies is removed, the authority has maintained its high performance from 2014. At Key Stage 5, whilst performance in all indicators has improved, the *Average Point Score* per student has not risen as much as nationally. This is being discussed with schools.

In response to panel member questions, Yvette Stanley clarified:

- Changes to grade boundaries have had an impact on achievement at Key Stage 4 making this a less reliable measure. Pupils' progress is a better measure;
- Schools are paying to support individuals to have GCSEs remarked because access to A Level programmes depends on GCSE grades. The desire for stability in grade boundaries was highlighted; and
- The implementation of the English Baccalaureate is putting pressure on the recruitment and retention of maths, science and modern foreign language teachers. The need to expand provision because of population growth means that there is also pressure on head recruitment and retention. This is being discussed with the Department for Education.

Inclusion

Keith Shipman highlighted there has been a significant reduction in the number for which destinations are “not known”. This means that there is a corresponding increase in the number of NEETs, but this figure remains lower overall than the national and London averages. The overall picture for young people that are NEET and not known is a good one. The large number of NEETs with special educational needs is being examined in depth (an increase of 27%). Merton is part of a group of London boroughs bidding for ESF funds to support NEET provision.

Fixed term exclusions have significantly reduced. The increase in permanent secondary exclusions is linked to persistent disruptive behaviour. The Department is working with a small group of Headteachers to identify reasons for this increase.

In response to panel member questions, Keith Shipman clarified:

- Use by Merton schools of *London Ambitions* will be explored;
- The number of young mothers in the NEET cohort has gone up despite teenage pregnancies decreasing. This is because young mothers are coming into the borough from other areas to access housing. These young mothers come under the remit of the *MyFuture* initiative with provision for their children through the Early Years Service
- The number of those with SEN within the NEET cohort emphasises the need for better vocational provision and routes into employment;
- In-depth research has found that parental illness is a key cause of persistent absence, but where schools offer support it is possible to make a difference, enabling children to achieve the 90% attendance target. However, it is important to explain to parents that 90% attendance is the minimum required;
- There are some inherent difficulties in successfully addressing the behaviour of children from out of the borough; it is harder to access a range of support services out of borough.

Yvette Stanley agreed that there is a need to continue to work on the inclusion of black Caribbean children including home-school relationships.

RESOLVED: to note the report.

6 BRIEFING: SCHOOL STANDARDS COMMITTEE (Agenda Item 6)

Jane McSherry provided a verbal update on the School Standards Committee. This has met four times since April 2015. The committee consists of a chair, councillors and one co-opted member. Its work comprises:

1. Consideration of overarching issues: looking at thematic issues affecting school improvement generically in the borough; and
2. In-depth scrutiny of individual school performance: schools that have recently had an Ofsted inspection are chosen for scrutiny. This covers a range of Ofsted outcomes from outstanding to requiring improvement. The preparation for this scrutiny includes a school visit, a detailed consideration of all the school's data and academic achievement/progress, the input of the school's education partner and an examination of the most recent Ofsted report. Gorrington, Lonesome, St Mark's and Poplar Primary Schools are those that have most recently attended

the committee. The SMART Centre and Raynes Park High School will participate next. Schools that go through this process were noted to find it beneficial.

RESOLVED: to thank officers for the new approach of the School Standards Committee through which the council is leading on school improvement.

7 PROGRESS UPDATE: RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE SCHOOL LEADERSHIP SUCCESSION TASK GROUP (Agenda Item 7)

Recommendation 1: in response to a panel member question, Jane McSherry clarified that the council does not have a written policy on school leadership succession. It is planned to develop this as part of the revision of the school improvement strategy.

RESOLVED: for the council to have a written policy on school leadership succession.

8 UPDATE REPORT: CHILDREN, SCHOOLS AND FAMILIES DEPARTMENT DEVELOPMENTS (Agenda Item 8)

Bomb alert hoax warnings: Yvette Stanley clarified that whilst Merton had been one of the worst affected areas, police have advised that these are not terrorism related incidents but a form of IT crime; they are being caused by those who want to cause disruption. All warnings are subject to a police risk assessment which means it is unlikely that they will be in attendance. The Department has met with all secondary heads, is talking to all primary heads and continues to issue guidance which forms part of on-going safeguarding practice. The panel was reminded that children are safest when in school.

Troubled families: in response to a panel member question, Yvette Stanley confirmed the council will still be in receipt of funding for troubled families (about half of the funding previously received). This will be targeted at those with the most complex needs.

School admission arrangements: a panel member expressed concern regarding the rental of flats in the Wimbledon Chase area to secure a school place. Paul Ballatt confirmed that the consultation on school admission arrangements remains open and that similar points were being made in the responses received.

RESOLVED: for the panel to review the findings of the consultation on school admission arrangements when these are available.

School places: in response to a panel member question, Keith Shipman clarified every case of a child seeking to return to a school after an extended period of time (ie: a year), is individually examined. It would need to be understood if the child had remained on or had been removed from the school roll. If removed, they would need to reapply for entry to the school and a place would only be given if available. Yvette Stanley emphasised that it is policy not to prevent access to education for any child.

RESOLVED: to note the report.

9 PERFORMANCE REPORT: CHILDREN, SCHOOLS AND FAMILIES DEPARTMENT (Agenda Item 9)

In response to a panel member question, Yvette Stanley explained the increase in items designated with a red status on the Children, Schools and Families Department Performance plan, has resulted from various factors, including:

- An end of year accumulation;
- Ambitious targets; and
- Working with challenging cohorts, (for example, teenagers not turning up for review meetings).

Yvette Stanley also confirmed that performance indicators will be reviewed and adjusted in line with services plans, to make them more challenging based on what has now been achieved.

RESOLVED: to note the report.

10 WORK PROGRAMME: CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (Agenda Item 10)

The Chair highlighted the plans for the next panel meeting (22 March 2016) which will focus on *Looked-After Children* and feature an expert witness and a workshop approach.

RESOLVED: to agree the work programme as set out in the agenda.

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Committee: Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Date: 22nd March 2016

Agenda item:

Wards: All

Subject: Corporate Parenting, Looked After Children (LAC) and Care Leavers

Lead officer: Yvette Stanley, Director of Children, Schools and Families

Lead member: Cllr Judy Saunders, Interim Cabinet Member for Children's Services

Contact officer: Paul Angeli, Assistant Director CSC & YI/Sarah Daly, Head of Permanency, LAC & Care Leavers

Recommendations:

Members of the Panel consider the contents of the report as part of their scrutiny of Merton's approach to corporate parenting and of support of and outcomes for Merton's looked after children and care leavers.

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1. The report provides members with an overview of our work to support and improve outcomes for Merton's looked after children and care leavers and by way of appendices provides the Panel with information which is seen and scrutinised by the statutory Corporate Parenting Panel (CPP). The CPP is chaired by the Chief Executive and includes the partners who have a statutory duty to work together to ensure the championing of and better meeting the needs and aspirations of our LAC and care leavers.
- 1.2. It should be noted that the information in appendices has been anonymised and redacted to ensure that children and young people cannot be identified and to enable the information to be published. The CPP is provided with more detailed information but this would not be suitable for public discussion.

2 DETAILS

- 2.1 The Corporate Parenting Panel is chaired by the Chief Executive and is attended by the administration and opposition lead members for children's services as well as officers from across the council and its partners in providing children's services.
- 2.2 The terms of reference include:
 - Understanding and championing the needs and ambitions of looked after children and care leavers across the Merton Partnership.
 - Ensuring joined up pathways in education, health, employability, leisure and recreation, for Merton LAC, LAC children overseen by the Virtual School and Merton care leavers.

- Receiving direct feedback from Merton Children in Care Council and the wider looked after children and care leaver population, to improve council and partner service development and delivery.
- Providing mutual challenge within and across the partnership to prioritise continuous improvement for services and outcomes.
- Giving conspicuous care and attention to particularly vulnerable looked after children such as young offenders, substance misusers and pregnant teenagers, to ensure effective risk assessment and appropriate service support.

2.3 The CPP meets bi-monthly and routinely: reviews the LAC and care leavers and their outcomes; receives feedback from LAC and care leavers participation; and throughout its annual work programme receives reports with a specific focus: health; education; housing; CAMHs etc. Where performance or other intelligence indicates it the CPP can and does receive more detailed reports on specific issues. Its role in summary is to both advocate for LAC and care leavers and to scrutinise and challenge all partners regarding LAC and care leaver outcomes. Key information from a selection of reports received at the last meeting of the CPP is attached (see appendix list).

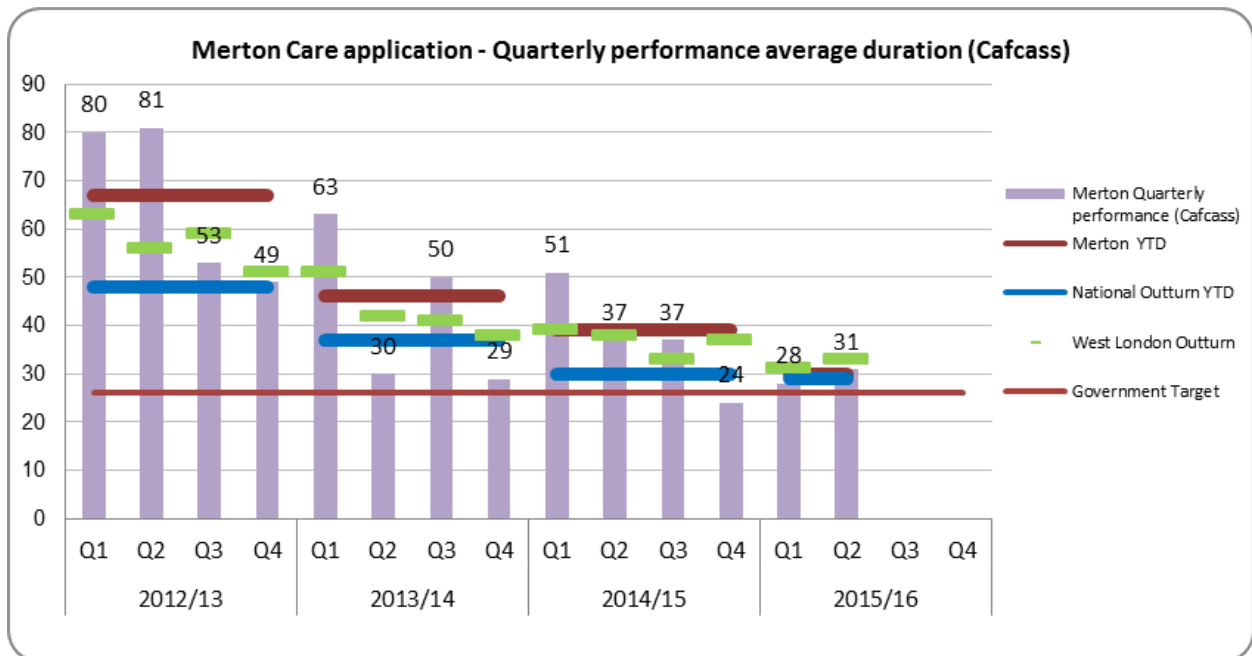
3 THE EXPERIENCE AND PROGRESS OF OUR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN AND CARE LEAVERS

3.1 In Merton we are ambitious for all our children and young people, particularly so for all children who become looked after by the authority. This was reflected in Ofsted's inspection of safeguarding and looked after children services in January 2012 which rated Merton's 'ambition and prioritisation' as Good. Our Children and Young People's Plan sets out our ambitions for our looked after children and this is enhanced by our LAC Strategy and Care Leavers Strategy which has been endorsed and monitored by the Children's Trust, the Merton Safeguarding Children's Board and the Corporate Parenting Panel.

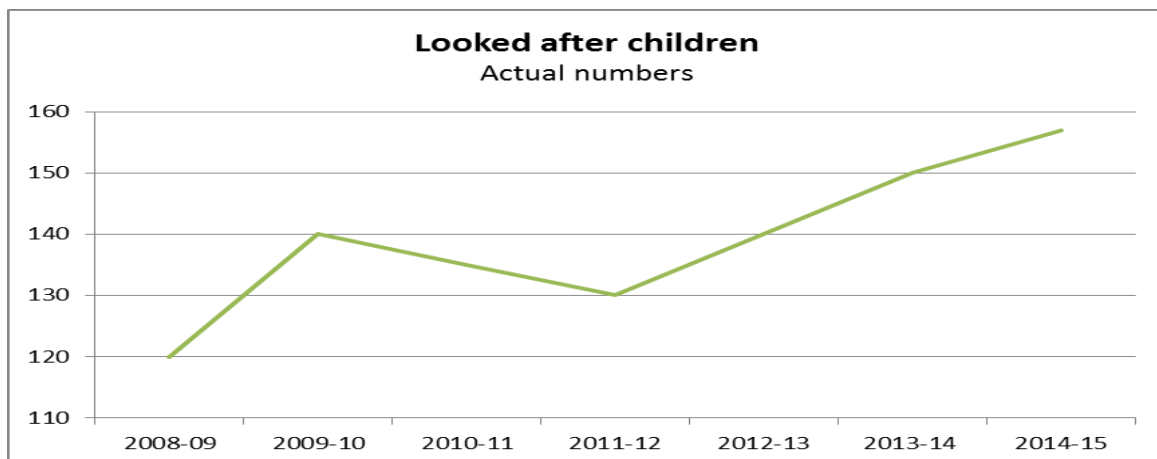
3.2 Since 2012, however, both national and local expectations have risen with regard to performance in relation to a number of key areas involving LAC and care leavers including a greater focus on adoption and a raft of changes arising out of the Children and Families Act including the rights of care leavers to "stay put" with their foster carers and to extend the duration of leaving care services.

3.3 **Care proceedings** – During 2013, we redesigned our looked after children and permanency services to deliver permanency more quickly and accommodate the requirements of the Family Justice Review and Children and Families Act. We established a team aimed to reduce delay and to deliver a timescale for care proceedings cases to conclude in 26 weeks. Further structural changes were made in 2015 to ensure a stronger focus on long term care. We have reviewed key processes and procedures to ensure compliance with the new Public Law Outline guidance. These changes ensure a more joined up approach with clearer accountability and effective

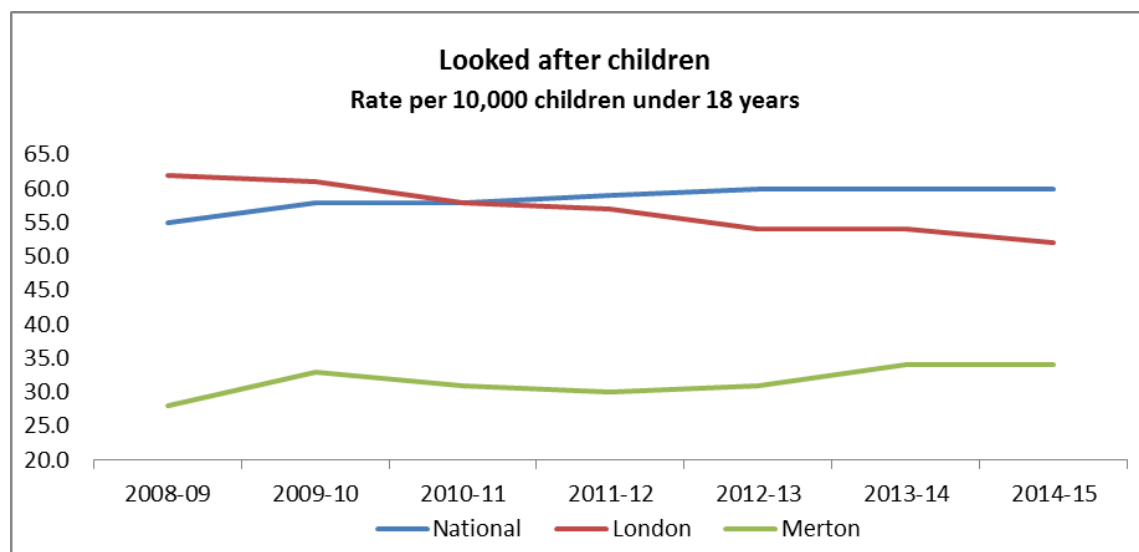
working across services and teams. Management oversight continues to be maintained through monthly case tracking panels chaired by service managers and attended regularly by the Director or Assistant Director. As a result we have seen considerable improvements in the duration of care applications. It should be noted however that small cohorts of children can significantly impact quarterly performance.



3.4 The LAC population – Our LAC population has increased from 96 (2006/7) to 157 (2014/15) and currently stands at 160 (January 2016). The reasons include increased national awareness of safeguarding, increasing birth rate, classification of young people on remand as LAC and more general demographic changes in Merton. Merton has an unusual profile of looked after children at the older age range this includes an increase in the numbers of Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers (32 during 2014/15). UASC account for a significant proportion of our increase in LAC and care leavers.



3.5 Merton's rate per 10,000 in March 2015 was 34, this remains below statistical neighbours.



3.6 **Care planning** – While children are in care, we implement robust parenting assessments and family group conferences which lead to a sustainable long term plan for the child. For children leaving care, their Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) will chair a planning meeting to transfer the LAC Care plan to a Child in Need plan. This is supported by a multi-agency core group and ensures that the appropriate support is put in place for the family and child at the point of transition. Where this plan involves returning home, parenting support programmes are offered which are intended to address identified risks and support a safe return home, building family capacity and confidence - an example is the 'Caring Dads' programme.

3.7 Merton endeavours to continue to work with the family and child returning home to reduce the chances of a subsequent episode of care. We started an 'Entry to Care and Rehabilitation Home Resource Panel' in April 2014, which has increased our focus on the rehabilitation of children and oversees planning for work with individual families to support rehabilitation.

3.8 Children and young people are encouraged to give their views during all their reviews. At the end of March 2015, 87% had participated in all reviews during the financial year. On evaluating the cases in which the young people had not participated in reviews, we noted that data recording was an issue and that participation had actually taken place. New guidance has been issued to the IRO team to support and facilitate participation and accurate recording of this activity.

3.9 Children are supported by their carers and social workers to complete consultation papers as an aid and in preparation for discussion at reviews and to confirm their views. In addition to completing consultation papers,

Independent Reviewing Officers ensure they meet with children away from reviews to create a relationship with them. If children raise concerns, the IRO contacts relevant team managers for quick resolutions. Should this not resolve the issue, we operate a dispute resolution process and all IRO's meet with the Assistant Director quarterly and bi-annually with the Director to review themes and issues arising.

- 3.10 The child's social worker and the family finding social worker, as well as the adopter's social worker (where relevant), ensure that the child understands what is happening to them and support them to act on their feelings and wishes. All care plans for LAC are regularly reviewed and Personal Educational Plans are ambitious for our LAC in fulfilling their potential.
- 3.11 **Listening to our LAC and Care Leavers** – We are committed to listening and responding to our young people's voices and there has been a longstanding commitment in Merton to investing in direct work skills training which equips social workers with high level engagement and communication skills. In line with this commitment and with the recommendations of the Munro review, learning and development opportunities for both newly qualified and more experienced staff routinely have included:
- Keeping the child in focus - communicating with vulnerable children and young people.
 - Direct work with children
 - Life Story Work and My Story (workshops delivered by the adoption team in partnership with CAMHS) Children's rights
 - Signs of Safety
 - Motivational interviewing
- 3.12 Social workers are aware of the statutory requirements for the frequency of visits to children, and include seeing children alone. 95% of LAC reviews were completed within timescale as at 31 March 2015. Records of visits are saved to the child's case record in a timely way and managers review and authorise the visits. Social workers see children regularly and the monitoring of these visits and the capture of children's views is coordinated through a monthly performance report to all managers.
- 3.13 When things go wrong, Merton reviews feedback from children and young people as a central part of our drive for continuous improvement of services. All looked after young people have access to advocates although some may choose not to take up this service commissioned from Jigsaw4U.
- 3.14 We facilitate young people's forums and activities which link with and impact on the management of children's services and the adult democratic process. These include the Children in Care Council, Youth Parliament, Young Advisors, Young Inspectors and Your Shout (specifically for older young people with disabilities). Feedback from children and young people across these strands of work have informed strategies including the Children and Young People's Plan, LAC Strategy, CSF service plans and discrete improvement plans as well as broader council services such as the borough's regeneration plans. The membership of and interest in the Children in Care Council has grown steadily throughout recent years. The appointment of a full

time co-ordinator during 2012/13 has enhanced this function. In 2014/15, we first appointed a care leaver as a participation officer and we have continued this tradition. Representatives from the Children in Care Council played a significant role in the successful launch of the Looked After Children and Care Leaver's Pledge in February 2014 and will be involved in its review in April 2016. Young people from the Children in Care Council are involved in the recruitment to the Children's Social Care Division and senior posts across CSF.

- 3.15 Feedback from the Children in Care Council is obtained by the Director, Lead Member for Children's Services and Head of LAC and Permanency who ensure a feedback loop to the Corporate Parenting Board, MSCB and the council's administration. Actions arising from this feedback are taken forward by relevant parties and fed back to the young people.
- 3.16 **LAC health outcomes** – Health outcomes for Merton looked after children are better than the national average. These are backed by good support from NHS Trusts with good levels of routine health surveillance and access to specialist provision, e.g. CAMHs, where necessary. Ninety four per cent of Merton LAC had an annual health assessment during 2014/15 compared to 89% nationally (2014/15). Ninety five per cent of Merton LAC had a dental check during 2014/15, compared to 85% nationally (2014/15). 86% of Merton LAC had immunisations that were up to date (2014/15), compared to 86% nationally in 2014/15.
- 3.17 6% of Merton LAC (5 young people) were identified as having a substance misuse problem during 2014/15 compared to 4% nationally in 2014/15. This followed on from a proactive campaign to get social workers to make referrals for substance misuse assessment and intervention and the relatively high figure might be in part explained by our larger number of older young people in care as a proportion of the total cohort. Specialist substance misuse services are commissioned which provide a full range of support and therapeutic interventions for young people under the age of 25 using substances at a level affecting their ability to live a healthy, functioning life. Over the last year, the services have engaged young people referred for targeted interventions via schools, the youth justice service and other voluntary and statutory agencies by providing structured programmes of support and education to reduce and cease drug/alcohol use.
- 3.18 The Merton CAMHS Social Care Team (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service) is now in place as part of the borough's Children's Social Care service. This adds a quality, integrated mental health component to the engagement, assessment, planning and support of our looked after children.
- 3.19 The LAC CAMHS works as part of a multi-agency response to improve the quality of life for children and young people that have a wide range of presenting social, psychological and mental health needs. It provides effective evidence-based interventions as part of the clinical and social response to meeting the emotional and mental health needs of these vulnerable children and young people.

- 3.20 **LAC educational outcomes** – Education outcomes for our looked after children are improving. No Merton looked after child has been permanently excluded from school in the last six years. Fixed term exclusions significantly reduced.
- 3.21 Our innovative Virtual School for LAC is proving effective in championing the education of LAC (particularly important in out of borough placements) and supporting improved educational attainment and progress and attendance. 80% KS2 LAC achieved Level 4 in reading, writing and maths compared to 48% nationally (2013/14). 20% achieved 5 GCSEs incl. English & Maths (above national 12%) (2013/14). 45% achieved five GCSE's. LAC primary attendance 94% (2013/14) in line with 2012/13 national. LAC secondary attendance 93% (2013/14), 2% better than 2012/13 national.
- 3.22 The Virtual School provides dedicated teacher capacity for LAC at primary, secondary and 16+ phases. Personal Education Plans are well established and the quality of education planning has improved with the involvement of specialist teaching staff. Foster carers have direct access to Virtual School staff. Through effective negotiation and advocacy, improved SEN provision has been secured for Merton's LAC placed out of borough.
- 3.23 As part of our children and social care restructure the 16+ team became the 14+ team to enable earlier planning and support for young people during their GCSE years. Increasing numbers of LAC are entering higher education and we are working hard to improve our NEET numbers. 44% of our care leavers are in education, employment or training (2014/15) - this is below the national average of 48%, our new Care Leavers Strategy aims to improve this performance, despite having some very complex young people
- 3.24 Attendance of Merton's LAC is monitored routinely by a commissioned service which provides timely feedback to carers and foster carers. Merton's Virtual School for LAC maintains an overview of LAC school attendance providing support and challenge to schools, social workers and carers to maximise attendance and attainment. The Head teacher of the Virtual School provides an annual report to the Corporate Parenting Board and information on LAC educational outcomes was reported to the CYP Panel as part of the Standards Report. A copy of the Virtual Heads report is included as an appendix.
- 3.25 **Wider educational, social and recreational opportunities for LAC** – Merton's overall approach to working with children looked after incorporates a holistic understanding of the importance of life chances. We not only support good health and educational outcomes but also see other elements of life as core to promoting good outcomes. The care planning process identifies interests and hobbies of our children in care and funding is available to encourage our young people to participate in these interests. This includes the creative use of corporate parenting budgets to encourage talents and special aptitudes of LAC and care leavers. There is a delegated authority protocol in place that clarifies the decision making responsibility of foster carers in respect of access to recreational and leisure activities. Following the withdrawal of the Personal Education Allowance (PEA), the Virtual School

was allocated funding to support enrichment activities for Looked After Children. Additional funding from the Designated Schools' Grant was awarded for the financial year 2015/16. This funding has been included in the base budget allocations going forward.

- 3.26 The Virtual School provides resources to foster carers which include books, puzzles, games, CDs and DVDs. We have also secured e-safety training and on-going support for six Olympic Legacy Computers for foster carers in need of a PC. We have secured additional DSG funding to ensure that all eligible looked after children have their own computer provided and maintained by the Virtual School.
- 3.27 In recent times the authority has supported music lessons, bought sporting equipment and funded young people to attend events of interest. In one instance, following music lessons funded by our Virtual School, one of our LAC has been awarded the London Mayor's Music Scholarship. Other examples of enrichment activities include: the Letterbox Project involving children receiving a parcel of books, maths activities and other materials monthly. We also organise a number of cultural activities which include theatre trips for LAC, their carers and our care leavers.
- 3.28 We support a range of events and activities throughout the year including for example BBQs, celebrating success events which the Lead Member for Children's Services always attends. We also hold a monthly social event at a local coffee shop where young people and practitioners get together to play games and watch films.
- 3.29 Our young people are encouraged to participate in the Children in Care Council which gives them the opportunity to take on leadership roles in areas of interest such as leisure and housing. We have continued to support the Aim Higher Project (previously government funded) which encourages young people to aspire to a university education - four Merton Looked After Children have attended university taster days this year. We have continued to secure funding to establish apprenticeships within the Local Authority for care leavers.
- 3.30 **Safe, stable and appropriate placements** – All placements for looked after children are made by our dedicated Access to Resources (ART) service. A separate report covers placements sufficiency including stability and other factors.
- 3.31 **Family-finding and permanent placements** – Our family finding strategies are informed by an assessment of the child's needs and matched by suitability. This includes the work at Bond Road in completing Family Group Conferences and parenting assessments at an early stage to identify potential SGO placements. Decisive action to find appropriate families aims to avoid drift and delay to permanency. In Merton, the process of family finding starts from the day the child enters care. In addition to the usual supervisory oversight, permanency plans are tracked by senior managers on a monthly basis to ensure that they are in the best interest of the child, that practice processes are followed in line with expected timescales and that delays for individual children are minimised. Respite care is used when this

is in the best interests of children and young people. Permanency planning meetings are chaired by senior managers and as part of this process, early virtual matches are made with prospective adopters who are progressing through the process. This enables us to achieve early matches where possible at the adoption approval panel. The identification of adoptive placements takes place prior to the conclusion of care proceedings.

- 3.32 **Matching for permanence** – Permanency is considered for all children at the earliest point possible, triggered by discussions in tracking and planning meetings. All children for whom adoption is the plan are proactively reviewed by the Adoption team who are responsible for the assessment of prospective adopters. This facilitates matching at an early stage in the process. Anonymised discussions are held with prospective adopters regarding children for whom adoption is the plan. Planning meetings are held prior to a placement progressing and introductions are carefully monitored to ensure successful transition of care for the child. Life story work is used to support such transitions for any child of an age and understanding to ensure that they are best prepared for their move to a permanent placement.
- 3.33 The child's wishes and feelings are elicited and described in the Child Permanence Report prepared for the presentation to the Adoption, Fostering and Permanency Panel. Family Finding Adoption team social workers draw up profiles for children eliciting their views (where possible given their age) both for written profiles and in videos. Tools are available to support social workers, children and families to develop life story work. An interactive life story resource is available for workers to use. This is a very useful tool to help a child express their emotions and perceptions. We feel it is never too late to do a life story book or too early to start one. We have examples of using innovative tools to capture life story work which includes a visual presentation for children with special needs. Post adoption feedback received has identified the transition process to be well managed and supportive to those involved.
- 3.34 **The role of the Independent Reviewing Officers** – Permanency plans are monitored by Independent Reviewing Officers who challenge colleagues on care planning issues where necessary. IROs engage directly where appropriate with children and their guardians to support the delivery of the plans. Children are encouraged to give their views during their reviews; Independent Reviewing Officers also ensure they meet with children away from reviews to create a relationship with them. If the child raises any concerns, the IRO contacts the various team managers for a resolution. Should this not resolve the issue, we operate a dispute resolution process and all IROs meet with the Assistant Director quarterly to review themes and issues arising. IROs engage with children's guardians and care planning.
- 3.35 Routine IRO reports are presented to the Continuous Improvement Board enabling senior managers to have sight of themes and issues which may require their intervention.
- 3.36 **Adoption** – Merton's adoption agency was inspected in January 2013. Ofsted found that we provided a 'Good' service to all children for whom adoption was the plan and that their outcomes were good. The report

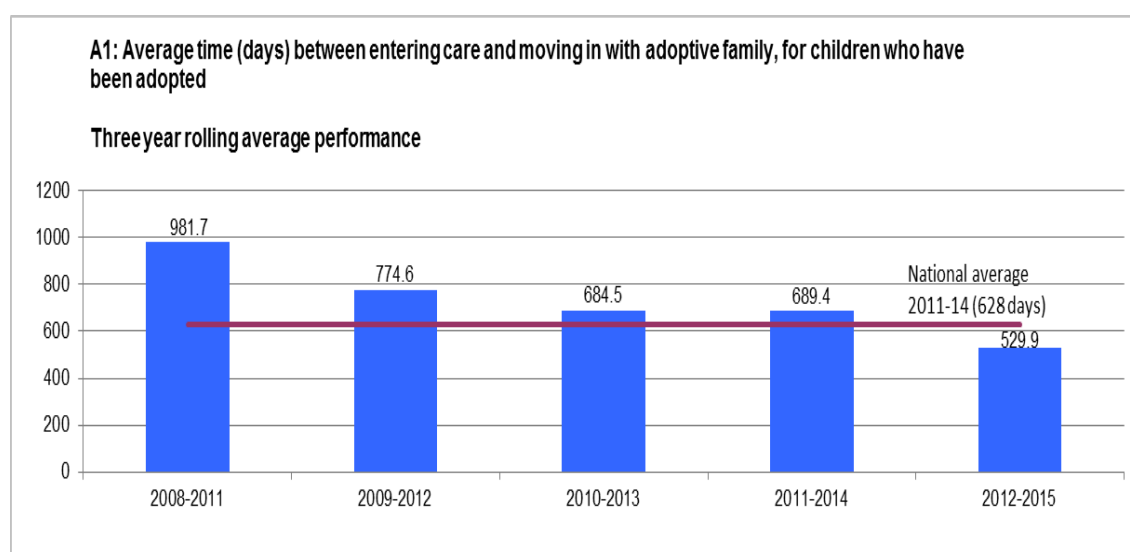
highlighted many areas of good practice with inspectors recognising that the lifelong implications of adoption are fully understood and people's needs catered for, whatever their age. Ofsted noted that adoption is viewed as a positive option for all children needing permanency, whatever their needs or characteristics. The report clearly identified that the DfE adoption scorecard published in 2012 highlighted poor historical timeliness issues which the department had worked hard to improve and that current performance showed substantial improvements across all areas. The inspection team made five recommendations for areas for improvement all of which were implemented and delivery monitored.

3.37 We have especially focused on improving our adoption performance. We are not only delivering more adoptions per year but are also consistently delivering adoptions faster.

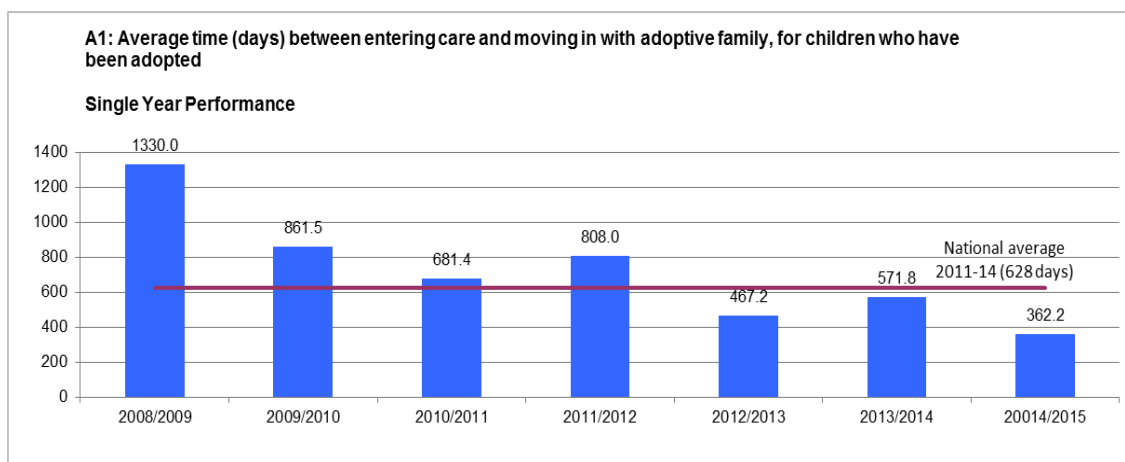
Numbers of adoptions made:

Year	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Number of children adopted	5	2	5	9	5	10	8

3.38 We believe that wherever we have decided that adoption is the plan for a child, we should aim to place the child as early as possible with the carers who are likely to become their adoptive parents. We use concurrency placements and fostering to adopt approaches. We recognise however that as only relatively small numbers of looked after children are adopted, any delay in even one case results in a disproportionate impact to our overall performance and distorts our reported figures. Despite the challenges of small cohorts and complex cases year on year, we are able to demonstrate a trend of improvement in the average time it takes for a child who goes on to be adopted from entering care to moving in with his or her adoptive family.

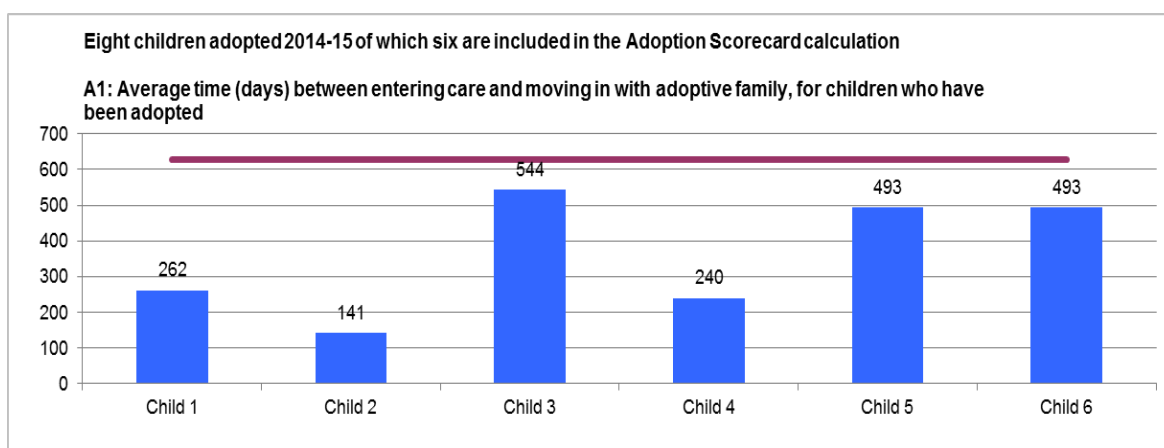


3.39 The individual years show a clear improving trend.

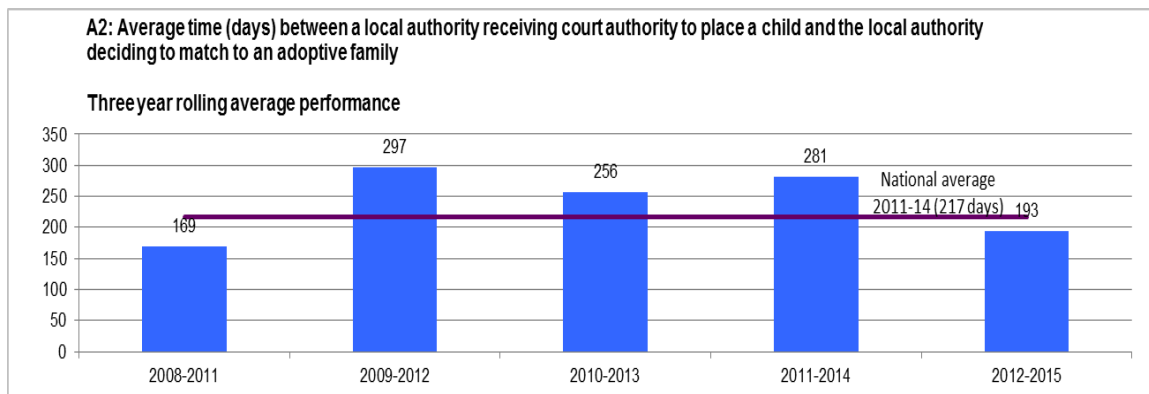


3.40 In 2014/15, Merton had 8 children who were adopted of which six are included in the Adoption Scorecard calculation. Of these 8 children, none took longer than the national average time of 628 days to be matched for adoption once the court had formally decided that adoption was the best option. These children had additional needs which needed to be catered for. Factors which have caused delays in Merton adoption processes in the past include:

- Birth parent appeal at key stages in the process
- Complexity of the child's needs (e.g. disability)
- Sibling groups



3.41 Year on year, we are also able to demonstrate some continued improvement in the average time from receiving court authority to place a child and matching with adoptive family (A2).



3.42 Merton's three year rolling average for this indicator is 193 (2012/15) - this is better than the average of 217 days (2011/14).

3.43 **Care leavers** – Merton has maintained and strengthened services for care leavers to support their successful transition to adulthood. The outcomes achieved by our care leavers often depends on the age they become looked after, however our ambitions for all looked after children and care leavers remain high. In 2014/15 we launched a specific Care Leavers Strategy to highlight our focus and priorities to support these young people which supports our Looked After Children strategy. During 2014/15, we established a multi-agency task and finish group to drive through our improvement commitments to our Care Leavers. On a daily basis, our organisational structure (14+ team) supports the delivery of our ambitions and ensures that we develop long lasting proactive relationships with our young people. A number of our care leavers choose to continue to support the Children in Care Council and more informally choose to keep in touch with us when they have left care for advice, guidance and kinship.

3.44 Our LAC and Permanency service aims to promote and improve care planning for young looked after children for whom remaining in care is the long term plan. The team focuses on supporting these young people to adulthood and independence. This includes empowering them to understand risks and how their life choices will affect their safety and well-being. Any risks associated with offending, drug or alcohol misuse, going missing or with sexual exploitation are identified and known by social workers who are able to put plans into place to reduce these risks. We continue to build on a track record of establishing strong relationships with our young people who are receiving a service. Our low staff turnover in this team means that those relationships can be long-standing and are maintained throughout the key transitions, however we consider the need of each child rather than set an arbitrary age of transition. Our care leavers receive on-going support to help them understand and access their life choices.

3.45 Strategy meetings are held when young people go missing or are deemed at risk of offending, drug or alcohol misuse or with sexual exploitation. Catch 22 provides a commissioned drug and alcohol misuse service. Other independent agencies such as the Wimbledon Guild are used where appropriate to provide a broader more holistic counselling services. This

approach provides young people choice rather than a direct referral to a one size fits all service.

- 3.46 Care leavers' pathway plans address the needs of our young people and are updated when their circumstances change. Young people have access to facilitated independence programmes designed to support ambitions and maximize their potential in early adulthood - these intentions are captured in their pathway plans. Pathway plans are developed in consultation with young people. Comments from young people are captured in the plans which are drafted over a two/three week period to ensure that they capture and fully detail understanding of the young person's development, ambitions and goals. All young people are offered a copy of this care plan when completed. Merton also issue "My guide to independence" and "Keys to the future" to every young person which provides guidance in relation to entitlements and the care leaver offer. Pathway plans are updated every six months as a minimum and when circumstances change where relevant.
- 3.47 In the case of young people with disabilities or continuing care needs, careful transition and pathway planning is undertaken between the children with disabilities social work team and the social work transition team located in Adult Social Care. Development work has been undertaken working across children's social care, adult social care and health to identify key transition points and access to services for children with complex disabilities and other health needs. Clear interim processes are in place until permanent planning structures emerge from cross agency work on implementing the requirements of the new Children and Families Act.
- 3.48 All of our looked after young people aged 16 and 17 are encouraged to remain in care until their 18th birthday where this is in their best interest. We only discharge these young people from care if they insist following an assessment of risk and needs or when they are being successfully rehabilitated home. Our young people understand that we will act to support their transition into adulthood at least until they are 21 and, where necessary, until they are 25. We frequently receive contact from care leavers for on-going general guidance and support.
- 3.49 **Health needs of care leavers** – The health needs of care leavers are supported by social workers, support workers, accommodation key workers and carers. Young people receive advice and guidance from these workers in relation to their physical and emotional health needs ensuring these are addressed in a timely manner and do not impact on a young person's capacity to access education, employment and training. Social workers aim to ensure that all young people are registered with their local GP and dentist and that these are relocated when the young person moves. Social workers will liaise with health visitors, community paediatrics, GPs and midwives in support of young care leaving parents. Independent living workshops held cover issues such as relationships including sexual relationships and healthy eating. Attendance is required as part of young people's pathway plans to support their preparation for independence. Care leavers are provided with "Leaving Care Summaries" to support their understanding of their health histories and to provide information they will need as young adults. Young people in Merton are asked how they would prefer to receive these

summaries with options including electronically, via email or post. A copy is always kept on young people's files. Care leavers are also provided with all key documents they need to begin their lives as young adults including, for example, national insurance numbers, birth certificates and passports where available.

- 3.50 **Maximising life chances for care leavers** – Independence workshops are run for 16+ young people during holiday periods covering areas such as budgeting, careers, cooking and DIY to develop the skills and confidence they need to maximise their chances of successful transition to adulthood. Welfare benefits advice is provided by a specialist officer. Take up and feedback on these workshops and advice service is good. Young people in semi-independent accommodation are provided with support to address various aspects of their skills development. Looked after children and care leavers are strongly encouraged to participate in their communities and make their voices heard. A number of young people have participated in volunteering through Merton's Volunteer Centre.
- 3.51 **Care leavers and housing** – We have a good range of accommodation options for young people including strong links with providers of supported lodgings. Our approach to housing gives weight to a young person's views about the timing of moves to greater independence. During 2014/15, our Care Leavers Task and Finish group focused on a number of key issues for Care Leavers which were identified as areas for improvement. These included a focus on the commissioning of specialist support provided within the housing provision for more vulnerable care leavers such as those with substance misuse issues or those involved within the criminal justice system.
- 3.52 There has been a rise in young people becoming looked after at age 16 and 17 under the Southwark judgement and unaccompanied asylum seeker children which has resulted in the need to look at development of a joint housing/social care response to ensure a number of housing and support options are available to young people presenting as homeless. Management action is on-going in this respect.
- 3.53 At the end of 2014/15, 81% of our care leavers were living in suitable accommodation - this equates to 71 of a total relevant cohort of 93 (aged 19, 20 and 21). This is better than 66% in 2013/14 and better than the national average of 80% (2013/14). In 2014/15, of those in appropriate accommodation 28% were living in semi-independent accommodation, 5% were in supported lodgings, 18% were living independently and 12% were living with parents or relatives. It is of note that Merton does not use B&B accommodation for care leavers.
- 3.54 Merton has a long established supported lodgings/placements service for those aged 16 and above. These placements provide a helpful step to independence for those young people who choose this option. Supported lodgings carers are supported and guided by accommodation officers working in the 14+ team. This service is well received by both our young people and our relevant carers. Supported lodging placements enable our young people to develop their independent living skills within a family environment. Our

young people and their carers are supported by this function from aged 16 to 21 depending on need.

- 3.55 Young people are supported to apply for permanent social housing and Merton's housing; the policy includes a quota for 20 care leavers. When a young person is offered a permanent property, the 14+ team will assist to ensure that the property is up to a suitable standard and care leavers are provided with a setting up allowance of £2000.
- 3.56 Where it is identified that a young person is at risk of a tenancy breakdown, the 14+ team will seek to mitigate the issues arising and on occasion seek to mediate with housing providers. Support can include outreach support from key workers, independent living skills workshops and support with budgeting so that a young person can sustain their tenancy wherever possible.
- 3.57 **Care leavers and education and employment opportunities** – There is a strong emphasis on further education, training and employment for all looked after children in Merton. Our 2014/15 task and finish group focused on improving our understanding of this cohort of children. In 2014/15, 44% of our care leavers (aged 19, 20 and 21) were in education, employment or training - this is better than the national average of 39% (2014/15) but below our aspirations for our young people and previous outcomes (2011/12, 70%). We renewed our focus through our task and finish group with this NEET cohort during 2014/15 by allocating new resources to provide targeted NEET support to improve this outcome. This extra resource is already beginning to have an impact on young people's outcomes. Many of the young people targeted for this bespoke support are engaging well, including submitting applications for further education in the next academic year. Additional employability workshops have been run, with young people being supported with advice on career planning and producing a CV.
- 3.58 All young people discuss education and career planning with their social workers as part of the Pathway Planning process. These are reviewed as a minimum every six months. Where the young person has an established education pathway, this is supported by the social worker or support worker to encourage and maintain. This can include financial support such as a £200 book allowance or travel fares. Our Virtual School provides a range of support to care leavers including individual tuition and support at specific times such as applications to college and universities. Those care leavers with SEN are offered particular support.
- 3.60 Merton is also developing apprenticeship and work experience offers for care leavers to work in the Council and working with colleges at the Job Centre and the broader partnership. During 2013/14, we had two care leavers working in CSF, both of whom have recently left to go on to university. In 2014/15, we recruited another one of our care leavers as a participation apprentice in support of the Children in Care Council and broader 'user voice' LAC activity.

4 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED

- 4.1. None for the purposes of this report.

5 TIMETABLE

5.1. N/A

6 FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS

6.1. The increase in children in care is impacting on a range of budgets across the CSF department, most significantly on placements and staffing. The pressures on placements alone amount to £1m although these have been partially offset during 2015/16 by underspends elsewhere. These underspends will not reoccur in 2016/17.

7 LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

7.1. The council has extensive legal duties with regard to LAC and care leavers and is the legal parent to these children and young people.

8 HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS

8.1. We are dedicated to narrowing the gaps in outcomes between our LAC and care leavers and their more advantaged peers.

9 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

9.1. Children entering the care system become looked after and can be eligible for leaving care services.

10 RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

10.1. Social workers have to utilise a range of risk assessment and management tools both within child protection and looked after children's work.

11 APPENDICES – THE FOLLOWING DOCUMENTS ARE TO BE PUBLISHED WITH THIS REPORT AND FORM PART OF THE REPORT

- LAC and Care leaver Cohort review Nov 2015 (redacted)
- Care Leaver Strategy 2015-18
- LAC Strategy 2015-18
- Virtual School Annual report 2014-2015

12 BACKGROUND PAPERS

12.1. None

Care Leaver Strategy 2015-18

London Borough of Merton

Issue Date	Author	Date Of the Next Review	Lead officer
January 2015	Sarah Daly/Naheed Chaudhry	January 2016	Paul Angeli

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Our Vision

In its role as Corporate Parent Merton Council wants to achieve the same good outcomes for our looked after children as any parent would wish for their children. We want our looked after children to have similar opportunities and chances in life to that of children growing up in their own families.

We will seek to provide looked after children with the support and help that they need to reach their potential during childhood and into adult life. We provide our looked after children with good quality placements and ensure that they receive a good education and good health care. Planning for gradual development to independence should be age appropriate and be throughout any child's life. There is no difference for a young person who has been brought up in care, and the expectation is that throughout his/her time in care each child/young person will be supported in acquiring and developing independence skills across all aspects of their life.

Like any good parent we will assist our young people through higher education or into employment or training opportunities, and ensure that they have somewhere suitable to live once they leave their care placement. To do this we provide every young person aged between 16 and 25 who qualify for leaving care services with a social worker or Family Support Worker (all those under 18 will be allocated to a qualified social worker), who will provide support and guidance, and work with other agencies to help the young person gain access to wider support services. These may include services from adult social care and health services for care leavers who have learning difficulties or mental health problems.

Our Objectives

- To motivate and assist each young person to reach their potential for education, training and employment so that they can achieve independence
- To promote their good health by encouraging a healthy sexual, emotional and physical lifestyle
- To facilitate and support them in suitable accommodation
- To help them to maintain positive family and social/friendship relationships
- To assist them to be financially independent, and be able to budget, and to save and manage their money.
- To provide them with an allocated worker to support them in their aspirations.

LAC and Care Leavers Pledge

MERTON COUNCIL

A pledge to children in care and care leavers in Merton

We promise to support you to:

Be healthy

- Ensure you are registered with a GP and Dentist
- Ensure all your medical, dental or other health needs are met
- Respect the culture, traditions, language, and religion of all children and young people in care
- Promote your emotional well-being (including mental health and resilience) and remain in contact with your family
- Help you to maintain your personal hygiene and look after yourself
- Provide services and support if you are a parent
- Provide support and information for you on drug and alcohol misuse.

Enjoy and achieve

- Ensure you have access to the best possible education and training
- Make sure we do what your Personal Education Plan says we are supposed to do
- Support you to attend and do well at school/college or university
- Make sure you get extra study support if you need it
- Make sure you have access to IT and other equipment needed to support your education and training
- Arrange meetings that, where possible, avoid you having to come out of class
- Expect your carers to take an active interest in your education and homework and meet your teachers
- Help you get involved in leisure/cultural activities for enjoyment and having fun
- Believe in you and what you can achieve and have high aspirations for you
- Provide accommodation for you during the holiday times when you are at university
- Provide information on the financial support that you are entitled to, to help you learn or study.

Achieve economic well-being / Support for your future

- Celebrate your achievements
- Develop your life skills/help you work towards your goals
- Encourage, support and help you prepare to leave care, live independently, and achieve your full potential
- Ensure that you are aware of your financial entitlements as a child in care or care leaver from Merton Social Care
- Ensure that the whole local authority recognises its responsibilities to you as your corporate parent by providing you with a range of opportunities
- Involve you in the development and the delivery of our services to you
- Provide you with good quality and stable accommodation
- Provide access to information relating to welfare benefits, budgeting and saving.

Stay safe / feel supported

- Enable you to take reasonable risks in a safe and supportive environment
- Be on time for meetings, and let you know if we are running late
- Provide a safe environment, where you will feel supported
- Make sure you have an independent reviewing officer to help plan with you what you need and to ensure these plans are carried out
- Give you advice and support to help you to stay safe
- Give careful thought to where you live so that you live in a home that feels like a home, with a carer who really cares and with a social worker, who together make sure they do things for you to keep you safe and well
- Explain why we cannot always provide you with everything that you want
- Provide access to support networks
- Provide you with an independent advocate.

Make a positive contribution / Make a difference

- Encourage you to have confidence to speak out, be heard and treated with respect
- Support you to have your say in meetings
- Aim to make your time in care less stressful, make a difference and try to help with your problems
- Encourage you to give us feedback and when necessary to support you to make a complaint
- Ensure that we feed back to you on the issues that you raise
- Involve you in planning your review so that you feel part of it
- Ensure that we establish, support and work in partnership with the Children in Care Council
- Ensure that you participate fully in your care and pathway planning
- Involve you in the recruitment and selection of foster carers and staff
- Provide opportunities for you to be involved in peer mentoring
- Support your development as an individual by helping you with passport, bank accounts, becoming a citizen, national insurance number, birth certificate, provisional driver's licence and immigration status
- Ensure that you understand our commitment to you, that all young people receive a service that values diversity, promotes fairness and challenges discrimination.

Leaving care

- We will trust and respect you
- Encourage your carer to teach you how to budget, cook and learn the skills you need to live independently
- Make sure you have your own worker to make a pathway plan with you
- Make sure that you can access support and guidance regarding your financial entitlements
- Stay in touch until you are 21, or sometimes up to 25 if in full time education.

Yvette Stanley
Director of Children, Schools and Families

Councillor Maxi Martin
Cabinet Member for Children's Services

Children in Care Council members

merton

The National and Local Context

The National Context

There were 68,840 looked after children as of 31 March 2014, an increase of 7% compared to 31 March 2010. The number of looked after children has increased steadily over the past five years and it is now higher than at any point since 1985. Nationally the rate of looked after children per 10,000 is 60. At local authority level the rate varies significantly.

The majority of looked after children – 62% in 2014 - are provided with a service due to abuse or neglect. The reasons why looked after children are provided with a service have been relatively stable since 2010. The age profile of children looked after has been relatively stable since 2010. The largest age group is 10 to 15 year olds, which made up 37% of looked after children at 31 March 2014. There has been a slight increase in the percentage of 5 to 9 year olds, from 17% in 2010, to 20% in 2014. These trends are in line with the age breakdown of all children. The majority of children looked after at 31 March 2014 (74%) are from a White British background, the same proportion as the general population of all children. The ethnic breakdown for children looked after has varied little since 2010.

There were 27,220 care leavers aged 19-21 years as of March 2014. 59% of the national care leaver cohort is male and 41% female. Due to the changes in the SSD 903 return for 2013-14 (the cohort was extended this year to 20 and 21 year olds). Due to this change, trends over time are not available).

In 2013 Government launched the 'Care Leaver Strategy', setting out a coherent cross department approach to support of care leavers, setting out changes to how local services are provided on the ground, building on the best local practice.

Children and young people achieve their best outcomes when provided with security, stability and love throughout their childhood and beyond. The majority of looked after children return home to their families after a short period of time in the care of the local authority. The underpinning principle of the Children Act 1989 places a legal duty on local authorities to support families to stay together when this is a safe and realistic option.

Every year almost 10,000 young people leave care, most will have experienced instability and trauma in their childhoods and will go onto face extreme challenges in adulthood.

It is estimated that:

- 20% of young homeless people were previously in care
- 24% of the adult prison population have been in care
- 70% of sex workers have been in care

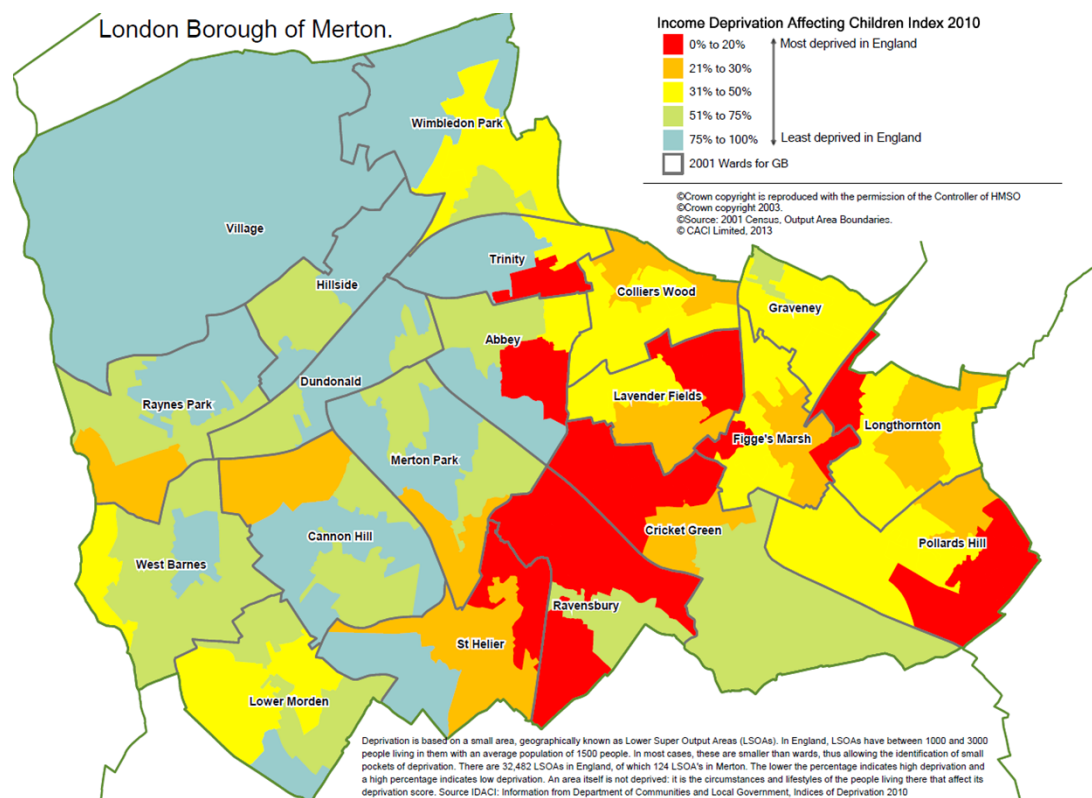
- Care leavers are roughly twice as likely not to be in education training or employment at 19 than the rest of the population¹

The Local Context - Merton the place

Merton is an outer London borough situated in south west London, covering 14.7 square miles. Merton has a total population of 200,543 including 47,499 children and young people aged 0-19 (Census 2011). The number of 0-19 year olds is forecast to increase by 3,180 (7%) by 2017, within which we forecast a 20% increase of children aged 5 to 9 (2,270). We have a younger population than the England average and have seen a 39% net increase of births over the last ten years (2,535 births in 2002 rising to 3,521 in 2010). The birth rate reduced in 2012/13 and again slightly in 2013/14 suggesting that the rate is stabilising. However the last ten years alongside other demographic factors has placed additional demand on all children's services.

Predominantly suburban in character, Merton is divided into 20 wards and has three main town centres; Wimbledon, Mitcham and Morden. A characteristic of the borough is the difference between the more deprived east (Mitcham/Morden) and the more affluent west (Wimbledon). There are a number of pockets of deprivation within the borough mainly in the eastern wards and some smaller pockets in the central wards. These wards have multiple deprivation, with high scores on income deprivation, unemployment and limited educational attainment. Merton has 39 Super Output Areas which are amongst the 30% most deprived areas across England for children. This means 45% of Merton school pupils are living in an area of deprivation (30% most deprived, IDACI 2010). Since 2010 we have seen an increase of 23% of children who are eligible for free school meals (2010, 2881 FSM children, 2014, 3548 FSM children).

¹ Source: The Centre for Social Justice [Survival of the Fittest?](#)



Thirty five per cent of Merton’s total population is Black, Asian or Minority ethnic (BAME) this is expected to increase further to 39% by 2017. Pupils in Merton schools are more diverse still, with 66% from BAME communities, speaking over 120 languages (2014). The borough has concentrations of Urdu speaking communities, Sri Lankan, South African and Polish residents.

The number of children with Statements and School Action Plus pupils in Merton schools is also rising. Numbers of SEN Statements in Primary schools has risen from 255 in Jan 2011 to 310 in Jan 2014 (+22%), numbers of SEN Statements in Secondary schools has risen from 212 in Jan 2011 to 224 in Jan 2014 (+6%) and the number of SEN Statements in Special schools has risen from 249 in Jan 2011 to 321 in Jan 2014 (+29%).

Merton’s looked after children and care leavers

Merton’s looked after children population in the last ten years has ranged from a low of 96 (2006/7) to 150 (2013/14). This increase has been reviewed and audited to establish what is behind this trend. There are a number of reasons for this increase including increased national awareness of children’s safeguarding, an increasing birth rate and more general demographic changes. Merton has a higher than average profile of looked after children at the older age range, including a significant increase in the numbers of Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers and an increase in young people coming into care through the Southwark Judgement.

Merton’s LAC rate per 10,000 in March 2014 was 33, this remains within the range of our statistical neighbours (Redbridge, Sutton, Barnet, Kingston,

Enfield, Ealing). London's LAC rate per 10,000 ranges from the low 40s to the high 60s.

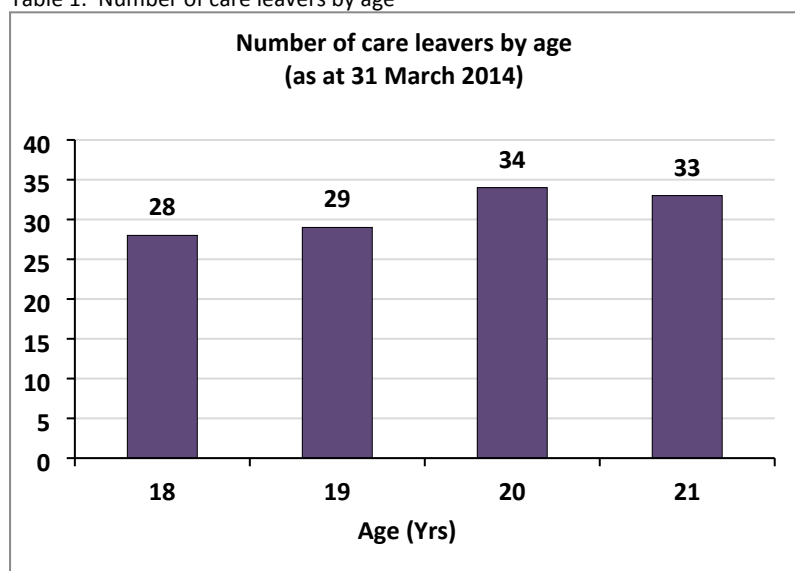
Merton's LAC gender distributions are similar to national averages; we have more LAC boys than girls. The age profile of children looked after at 31 March in Merton varies from the national norm with Merton caring for a large number of older looked after children aged 16 and over. In Merton 41% of our looked after children are aged 16 and 17 compared to 21% nationally.

Merton's LAC gender distributions are similar to national averages; we have more LAC boys than girls. The age profile of children looked after at 31 March in Merton varies from the national norm with Merton caring for a large number of older looked after children aged 16 and over. In Merton 41% of our looked after children are aged 16 and 17 compared to 21% nationally.

Merton has a changing profile of ethnic groups for LAC. The majority of children looked after in Merton are from a white background, this is lower than the general resident population (18%). There are fewer Asian or Asian British than the all persons Merton population also. Mixed ethnic backgrounds, Black or Black British heritage and 'other ethnic groups' have looked after children proportions greater than the resident population. We continue to report an increase in the category of 'other ethnic groups' in 2013 and 2014 circa 80% were known to the authority as Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children.

Merton has a Care Leaver cohort of 124 young people (2013/14). As with our looked after population there are more males (65%) than females (35%) in this cohort.

Table 1: Number of care leavers by age

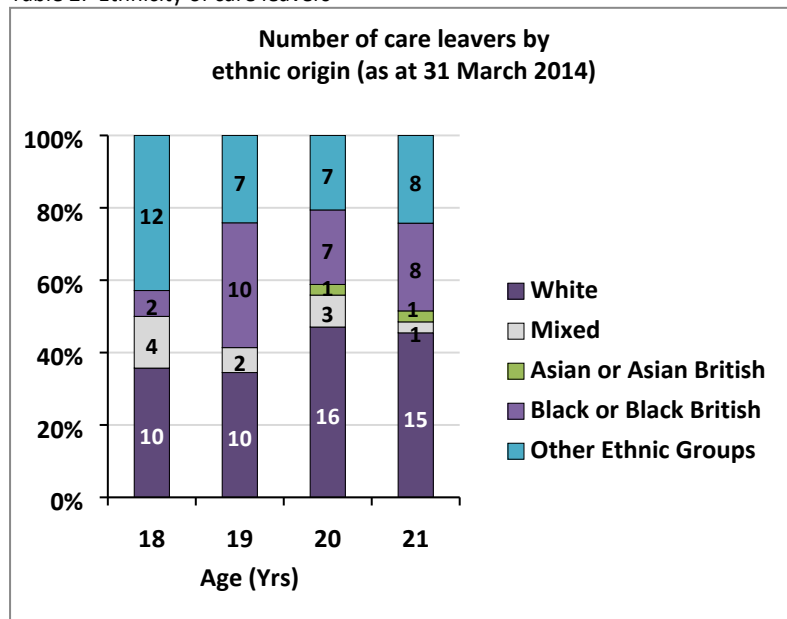


Source: DfE SFR - Children looked after in England, including adoption (Dec 2014)

The ethnicity profile of our care leaver cohort is set out in table 2 below. As with the LAC population the largest cohort of care leavers are from a white background (41%). The increase in the category of 'other ethnic group' is likely to reflect the impact of the pan London UASC rota (in the first 2 quarters of 2014/15 Merton has

accommodated 16 UASC aged 16 & 17 years who are predominantly Albanian males). Merton currently has 29 UASC in its care leaver cohort (Sept 2014).

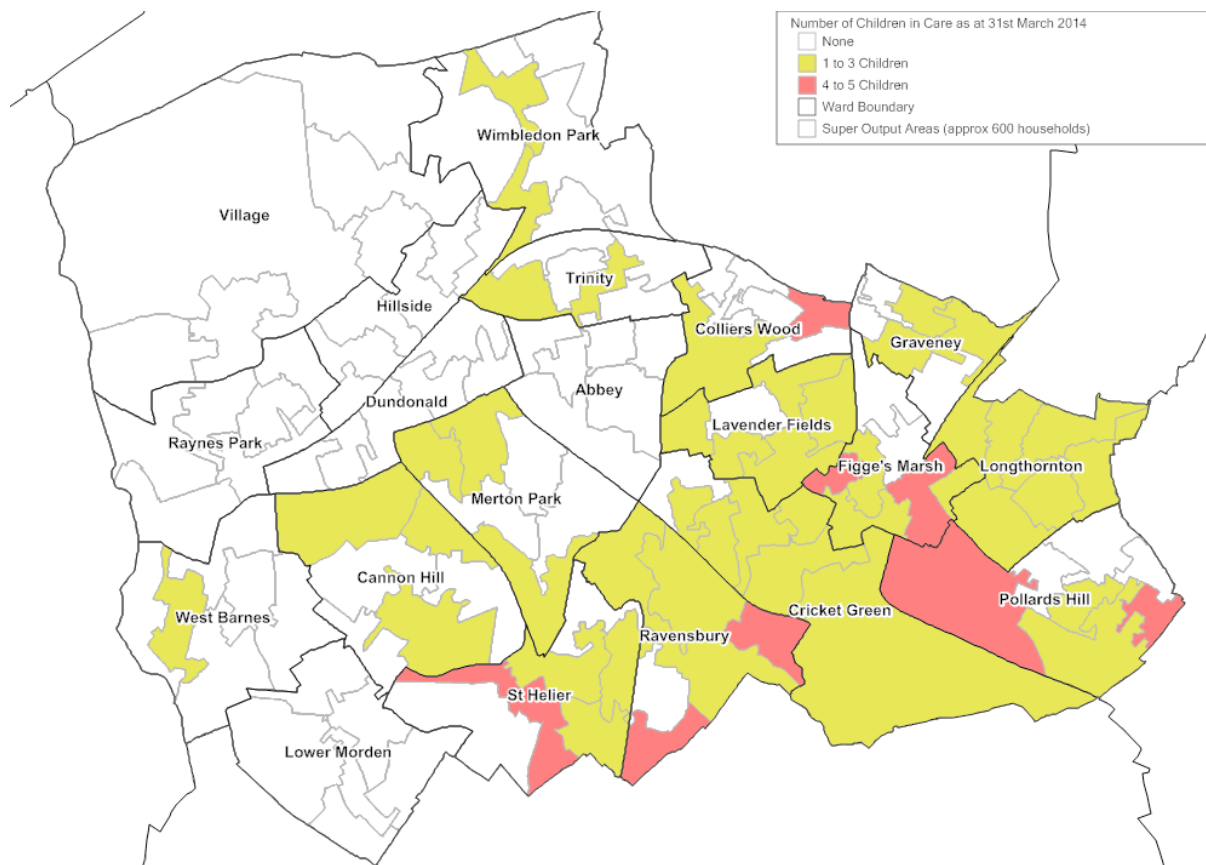
Table 2: Ethnicity of care leavers



Source: DfE SFR - Children looked after in England, including adoption (Dec 2014)

The borough map below represents their residents prior to being looked after, 60% of the 2014 LAC population came from an area of deprivation (Indices of Deprivation Affecting Children Index bottom 30%), an increase of 9% from 2013. The majority of children looked after as at 31 March 2014 lived in wards, pre intervention, in the east and south of the borough.

This map shows by ward the home address of Children Looked After at the 31st March



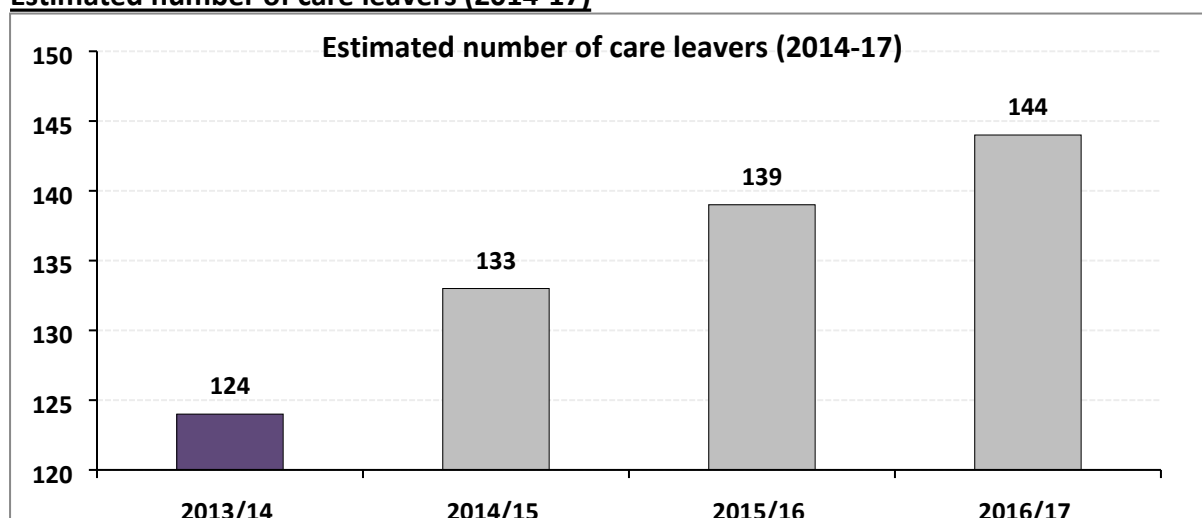
Our children have a range of complex needs at the point they become looked after 19% (2014) have SEN statements. Significant numbers of our LAC have experienced mental health and drugs or alcohol abuse issues within their families.

Forecast

When considering the future planning for our care leaver cohort it is important that we have some understanding of the projected number of care leavers that we will be working with in the next 3 years. The following tables set out a forecasting model has been developed to support the Care Leavers Strategy in estimating the number of care leavers for future years. The predicted numbers have been calculated using data from the 2013-14 and previous 903 CLA Returns. The model has been designed to calculate the number of 18yr old care leavers by accounting for:

- Children known to Children’s Services (as at 31st March 2014) who met the eligibility criteria to be considered a care leaver (i.e. looked after for a total of 13 weeks after their 14th birthday, including at least some time after their 16th birthday)
- Average percentage of looked after children aged 14 and 15 that are still looked after aged 16 (3yr average)
- Average number of children becoming looked after for the first time aged 16 or 17 who are in care for longer than 91 days (3yr average)

Estimated number of care leavers (2014-17)



Est. number of care leavers (2014-17) by age

Year	Age (Yrs)								Total 18-21	Total 22-25	Total 18-25
	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25			
2013/14	28	29	34	33	13	13	12	18	124	56	180
2014/15	42	28	29	34	33	13	13	12	133	71	204
2015/16	40	42	28	29	34	33	13	13	139	93	232
2016/17	34	40	42	28	29	34	33	13	144	109	253

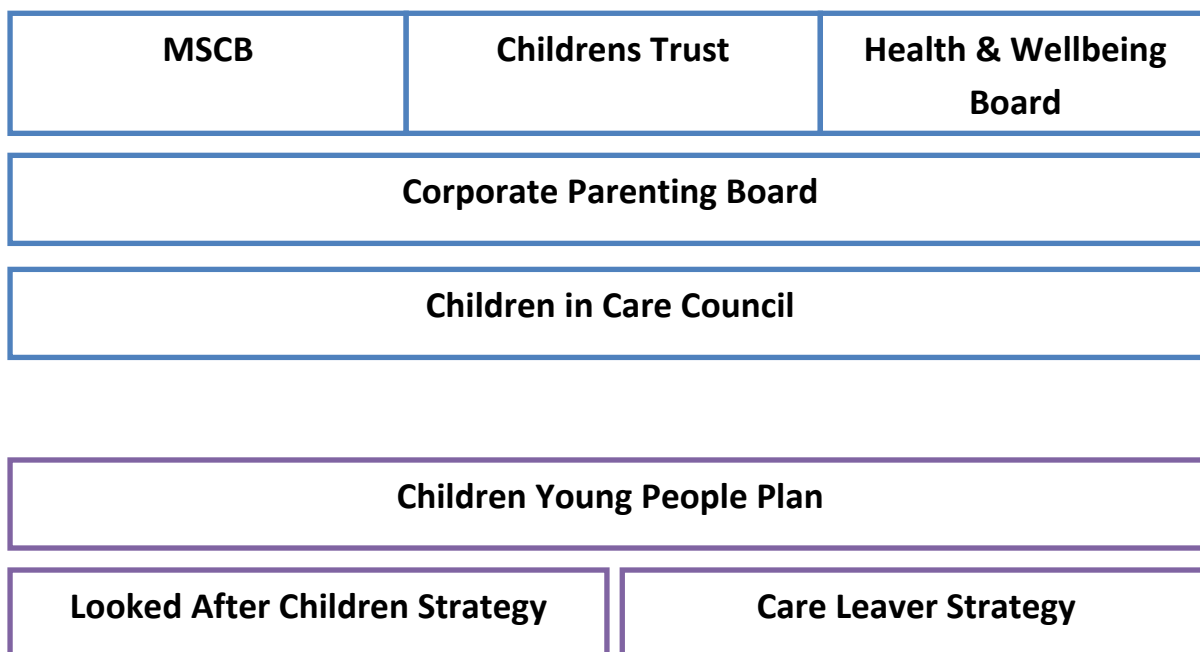
Grey shading indicates the estimated number of care leavers based on the forecasting model in Appendix 1 (pg 34)

Merton's Strategic Framework and Governance

This Care Leaver Strategy is not a stand-alone publication. Our Children and Young People's Plan sets out our ambitions for our looked children and this is enhanced by this LAC Strategy and our Care Leavers strategy, which are both endorsed and by the Children's Trust, the Merton Safeguarding Children's Board and the Corporate Parenting Board.

The Corporate Parenting Board is comprised of senior managers and officers from education, health, housing, social care and elected members this chaired by the Chief Executive London Borough Merton, ensuring a high level of scrutiny and cross directorate responsibility for delivery of our priorities.

Strategic management oversight



This Strategy will be reviewed each year by the Corporate Parenting Group. The Corporate Parenting Group is comprised of senior managers and officers from education, health, housing, social care and elected members. The Corporate Parenting Board is chaired by the Chief Executive London Borough Merton, ensuring a high level of scrutiny and cross directorate responsibility for delivery of our priorities.

Our Corporate Parenting responsibilities

Effective corporate parenting requires knowledge and awareness of the needs of children and young people who are looked after and the services that they receive. This is a shared responsibility for the Council as a whole. The role of the corporate parent is to,

- a) To receive and consider accurate and timely management information reports on the numbers, characteristics and needs of looked after children and care leavers
- b. To receive and consider reports demonstrating how effectively Merton is serving its looked after population through the provision of services and targeted initiatives
- c. To receive briefings on new national and local initiatives designed to improve children and young people's life chances
- d. To gain knowledge of services based on direct involvement and opportunities to meet and gain the views of stakeholders, especially listening to the views of children and young people looked after and members of the Children in Care Council
- e. To monitor and review progress on the delivery of the Pledge to children looked after and care leavers
- f. Ensure that decisive action is taken to address any shortcomings in the services provided to children and young people

The Children in Care Council directly supports the Corporate Parenting Board to measure and monitor the effectiveness and quality of 'Corporate Parenting' in Merton. The group meet on a monthly basis, they have a Chair and each member of the CICC has a lead area (e.g. complaints and housing). The group meet regularly with senior managers to discuss important issues affecting children and young people in care. The CICC have a standing agenda item at Corporate Parenting Board Meetings and a young person attends the Corporate Parenting Board.

The Legal Context

Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000

This Act provides the legal framework for the policy and arrangements in respect young people leaving the care of the local authority, and after care services. The local authority has a duty to prepare looked after young people for the time when they leave care. Children's Social Care has a range of duties and powers to provide after care advice and assistance to these young people, and to those who have been accommodated by other specified agencies. Good Corporate Parents will provide young people with help and support to access education, employment and training opportunities and to find accommodation suitable to meet their needs.

Children and Young Persons Act 2008 and Care Leavers' (England) Regulations 2010

The 2010 Regulations clarified the requirement of the 2008 Act for looked after children moving from accommodation regulated by the Care Standards Act 2000 (or semi-independent accommodation) into other accommodation to have a statutory review chaired by their Independent Reviewing Officer. It also introduced the requirement for local authorities to pay a Higher Education Bursary for certain *former relevant* young people and the right of care leavers under 25 years of age wanting to access education or training to resume support from a personal advisor.

Definitions

a) Eligible Young Persons

These are young persons aged 16 or 17 years who have been looked after for a period or periods totalling at least 13 weeks starting from their 14th birthday and are still looked after children, except for young persons with a disability who have had a series of short term pre-planned respite care placements lasting up to 4 weeks. The Council has a duty to support these young people up to the age of 18, wherever they are living, and beyond into independence, if they become *former relevant* young people. The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010 (Volume 2) requires that a thorough assessment of the young person's needs is undertaken to inform the actions for achievement in the Pathway Plan (see 7), that the Pathway Plan is reviewed, and that a worker is appointed as personal adviser to the young person.

b) Relevant Young Persons

These are young persons aged 16 or 17 who have already left care but were previously looked after for a total of at least 13 weeks from the age of 14, and at some time during their 16th or 17th year. This does not apply to a young person who

has returned to their home from care and this has been successfully maintained for a period of 6 months or more. A young person is also *relevant* if, having been looked after for three months or more, he or she is then detained after their 16th birthday either in a hospital, remand centre, young offenders' institution or in a secure training centre. There is a duty to support *relevant* young people up to the age of 18 years, wherever they are living.

The Care Leavers Regulations 2010 require the Council to remain in contact with relevant young people, and to undertake the responsibilities outlined in a) above.

c) Former Relevant Young Persons

These are young people aged 18 to 21 years (or up to 25 years if attending an agreed course in further or higher education specified in their Pathway Plan) who have been *eligible* and/or *relevant* and were placed in care subject to a Care Order, or remanded into care, or accommodated by voluntary agreement. The Care Leavers Regulations 2010 make the same requirements of the Council as in 6a and 6b above. These requirements continue until the young person becomes 21 or up to 25 in some cases. In setting out goals and actions for achievement, the Pathway Plan should also set out timescales for completion so that it is clear when the Plan will expire so leaving care services can lawfully cease.

For *former relevant* young persons aged between 21 and under 25 years of age and wishing to take up an agreed programme of education, the Care Leavers Regulations 2010 make the same requirements of the Council as in a) and b) above. This is to provide appropriate assistance by, for example, contributing to expenses incurred by the young person in living near the place where s/he is receiving education or training; or by making a grant towards meeting the costs and expenses of their course, based on the assessment of their needs and circumstances and included in the Pathway Plan.

d) Young People Qualifying For Advice and Assistance

Category A Special Guardianship

These young people are those young persons aged between 16 and 21 who are not *eligible*, *relevant* or *former relevant young persons*, but *qualify* for advice and assistance because they are or were subject to a Special Guardianship Order prior to their 18th birthday, or who had been looked after immediately prior to their becoming subject to a Special Guardianship Order or who were looked after children when over the age of 16 years but for less than a total of 13 weeks after their 14th birthday. These qualifying young persons are known as "category A". Advice and assistance is provided to *qualifying* young persons by their *relevant* local authority. This is the last local authority in which the young person was a looked after child.

Category B Looked After Children

For young persons aged under 21 years of age who were looked after for a period in total of less than 13 weeks after their 16th birthday (starting from their 14th birthday)

the local authority is required by Section 24(5) of the Children Act 1989 to provide appropriate advice and assistance. In this case, the *relevant* local authority is the local authority approached by the young person. These qualifying young persons are known as “category B“. However, if a young person aged below 18 years and previously looked after for a period in total of less than 13 weeks after their 16th birthday (starting from their 14th birthday) has returned home she or he is not to be regarded as *qualifying* for the purpose of Section 24 Children Act 1989, but support should be assessed and provided under Section 17 Children Act 1989 (child in need).

Care Planning

Transition to adulthood for looked after children should not just start on their 16th birthday; preparation for a time when they will no longer be looked after should be integral to the care planning process throughout their entire time in care.

The 1989 Act requires that a pathway plan must be prepared for all eligible children and continued for all relevant and former relevant children. Each young person's pathway plan will be based on and include their care plan and will set out the actions that must be taken by the responsible authority, the young person, their parents, their carers and the full range of agencies, so that each young person is provided with the services they need to enable them to achieve their aspirations and make a successful transition to adulthood.

The needs assessment that is the basis for the Pathway Plan should have been concluded within three months of the young person's 16th birthday. As well as starting to plan for the future, including higher education and career ambitions, this will be an opportunity to establish whether the young person has special needs that ought to be considered as they enter adulthood and to ensure that other services such as Adult Social Care and Housing can begin their planning. The assessment of needs should address the following:

- The nature and level of contact and personal support to be provided, and by whom, to the young person.
- Details of the accommodation the young person is to occupy.
- A detailed plan for the education or training of the young person.
- How the responsible authority will assist the young person in relation to employment or other purposeful activity or occupation.
- The support to be provided to enable the young person to develop and sustain appropriate family and social relationships.
- A programme to develop the practical and other skills necessary for the young person to live independently.
- The financial support to be provided to the young person, in particular where it is to be provided to meet his accommodation and maintenance needs.
- The health needs, including any mental health needs, of the young person, and how they are to be met.
- Contingency plans for action to be taken by the responsible authority should the Pathway Plan for any reason cease to be effective.

The views of the young person must be recorded and incorporated into the pathway plan and a copy of the plan must be given to the young person.

The Pathway Plan and the needs assessment is reviewed by a statutory review chaired by the young person's IRO within 3 months of their 16th birthday and

thereafter every 6 months or sooner if required. The partnership working between social worker, family members, carers, Virtual School, designated LAC nurse, and other relevant professionals is vital if actions and outcomes are to be achieved. If the young person remains placed in non-regulated accommodation, the Pathway Plan should be reviewed within 28 days of that placement, then after 3 months, and thereafter every 6 months.

If a young person has been assessed to have additional/complex needs, for example, mental health needs requiring additional support, the Independent Reviewing Officer will ensure at the review closest to the young person's 17th birthday that a detailed and robust Transition Plan is in place.

Education

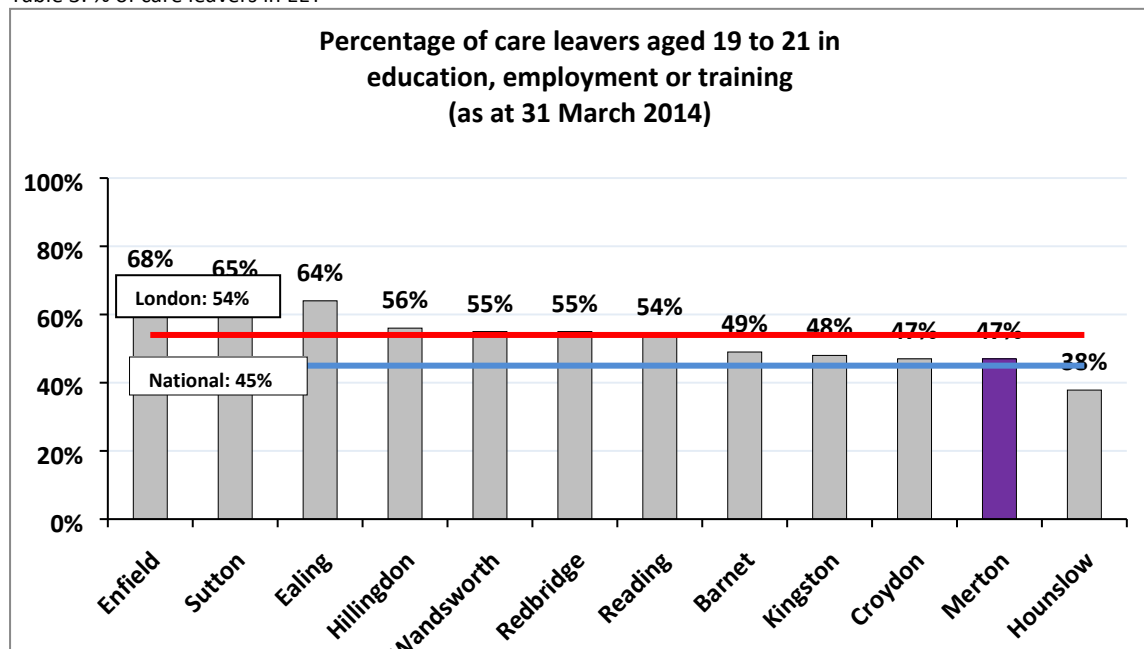
A good standard of education is a key driver towards achieving positive employment outcomes in adulthood. However, there remains a significant gap between the educational achievements of care leavers and their peers.

Up until 2011, the attainment gap between looked after and non-looked after children generally increased. However, for the last two years, this attainment gap has started to narrow. In 2014 there is a difference of 40.1 percentage points between the rates of looked after and non-looked after children achieving 5+ A*-C GCSEs in English and mathematics.

There are several factors that impact on poor education results for looked after children. Around one-quarter have a statement of special educational needs compared to 2.8% amongst the general population². The majority of looked after children have changed school more than once and almost one-fifth have changed school three or more times due to placement moves³.

As part of the SSDA 903 return local authorities provide the DfE with information about the cohort of children who have turned 19, 20 or 21 this year who were previously looked after. 38% of the young people in this age cohort were not in education, employment or training (NEET).

Table 3: % of care leavers in EET

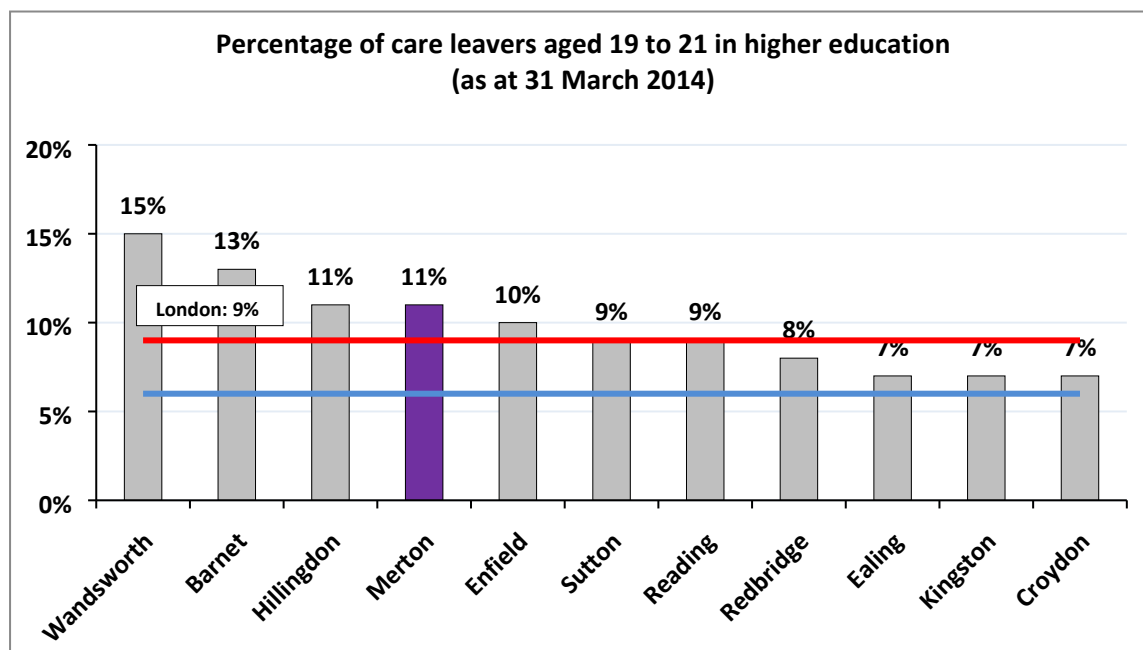


Source: DfE SFR - Children looked after in England, including adoption (Dec 2014)

² Source: DfE: [Children looked after in England, including adoption 2013](#)

³ Source: Ofsted [Children's care monitor 2011](#)

6% of care leavers go into higher education nationally compared to 11% of care leavers from Merton (2014 data)⁴.



Source: DfE SFR - Children looked after in England, including adoption (Dec 2014)

A priority for London Borough Merton is, therefore, to ensure that children in care and care leavers get the support they need from schools, colleges, universities and local authorities to maximise their educational attainment and employment opportunities

What we have done

- The Virtual School support Care Leavers placed in and out of Borough to access further and higher education courses.
- The Virtual School works closely with neighbouring colleges and universities to help them understand the needs of Care Leavers
- The Virtual School helps young people prepare applications and CV's; they also assist with study skills and interview preparation.
- We have identified a named worker from the My Futures Team (ETE) to support our Care Leaver cohort.
- To incentivise young people to continue in education we have a £15 per week 'Education Engagement' payment.

What will we do

- Ensure all workers are aware of the 'Skills support for Care Leavers' and are utilising this to support care leavers to understand further education options and the range of supports available.

⁴ Source: DfE: [Children looked after in England, including adoption 2014](#)

- Develop a mentoring scheme for care leavers thinking about going into higher education.
- Develop planning pathway for SEN/EHCP
- Contribute to the review of the SEN Strategy
- Establish a monthly meeting to review the NEET cohort.
- Annual Care Leaver Survey will be undertaken to ascertain the views of the care leaver cohort on a number of subjects including education.

Impact of Measures

- Academic achievement (GCSE's)
- 903 Benchmark NEET figure from 2013-14.
- % (number) Care Leavers in further education
- % (number) Care Leavers in higher education
- % of young people in contact with the Virtual School/My Futures
- Feedback from annual care leaver survey regarding education
- The 'Skills support for Care Leavers' is referenced in all Pathway Plans

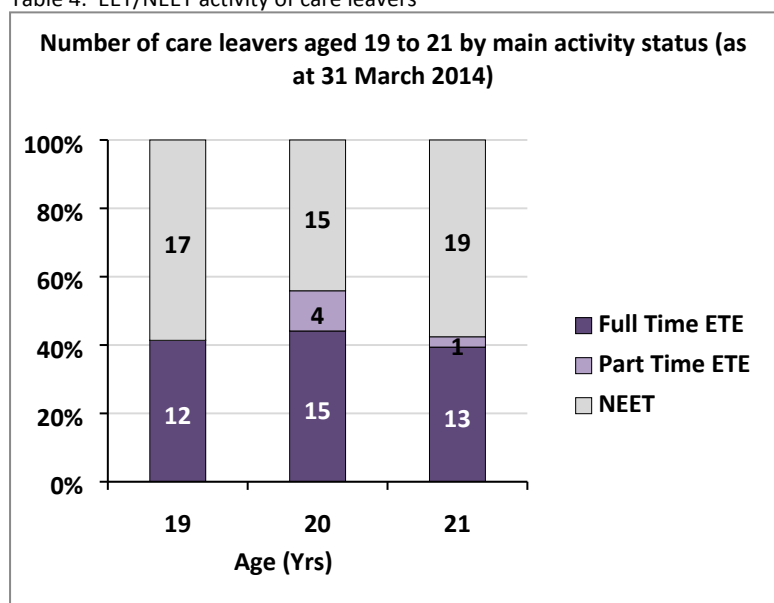
Employment

The Social Justice Strategy, Social Justice: Transforming Lives, sets out the importance of work not just as the best route out of poverty, but as a means of delivering positive change for individuals and for whole communities. The benefits of work are far wider than just remunerative and we know work provides structure, a sense of purpose, progress, achievement, self-confidence and personal responsibility.

Too many care leavers are not in education, employment or training (NEET) or are long term unemployed. There are currently significant challenges for many young people taking their first steps into the world of work. However, some local authorities and charitable organisations – working independently and with Jobcentre Plus - have nonetheless increased the number of care leavers they have supported into employment, education and training through focused action and support.

Levels of unemployment at 19 have remained high over the past 10 years at roughly 30% of all care leavers, twice the average for their age group⁵

Table 4: EET/NEET activity of care leavers



Source: DfE SFR - Children looked after in England, including adoption (Dec 2014)

Government is determined to maximise employment opportunities for all care leavers by learning from this good practice and being vigorous about building on our responsibilities as corporate parents.

What we have done

- We have recently undertaken work with Mitcham Job Centre Plus to develop a joint working protocol specifically in respect of Care Leavers

⁵ Source: DfE: [NEET Statistics 2012](#)

- A 'Single Point of Contact' for Care Leavers have been established at Mitcham, Sutton and Kingston Job Centre Plus Offices to ensure a consistent and good quality response.
- We have identified a named worker from the My Futures Team to support our Care Leaver cohort.
- Developed 2 Care Leaver Apprentice posts in our LAC Participation Team
- Deliver the Teenagers to Work scheme

What will we do

- Develop and deliver workshops on employability skills, the world of work and what employees are looking for.
- Local Work Programme Providers will promote the Day 1 Work Programme for Care Leavers.
- Local Work Programme Providers will record referrals and data relating to Care Leavers as a specific group to support future analysis and understanding of service demand. This will also support us to track outcomes for our care leavers.

Impact of Measures

- 903 Benchmark NEET figure from 2013-14.
- % of care leavers in contact with the My Futures Service
- Number of young people attending employability skills workshops
- Number of care leavers in apprenticeship placements
- Feedback from annual care leaver survey regarding employment issues
- Evaluation of the effectiveness of the Day 1 Work Programme
- Satisfaction of care leavers in apprenticeships

Financial Assistance

When you do not have the support of family to fall back on, particularly when having to meet the challenge of independent living at a much younger age than your peers, having access to timely financial help is crucial.

Care leavers in Merton have told us that they often find it a challenge to work out what financial support they are entitled to and would be.

The London Borough Merton is committed to ensuring that care leavers are adequately supported financially in their transition from care to adulthood to enable young people leaving care to have the same opportunities to fulfil their potential as their peers.

What we have done

- We have developed a 'Financial Provision for Care Leavers' to support Looked After Children and Care Leavers better understand their financial entitlements and to offer guidance in respect of budgeting.
- We have developed the 'My Guide to Independence', a tool to support young people as they work towards independence.
- The Benefits Maximisation Officers undertake financial assessments for all young people
- The Benefits Maximisation Officers support the completion of the pathway plan
- To incentivise young people to continue in education we have a £15 per week 'Education Engagement' payment.
- The Pathway Plan has been revised to ensure a more focused approach to budgeting
- We have recently undertaken work with Mitcham Job Centre Plus to develop a joint working protocol specifically in respect of Care Leavers.
- 'Single Point of Contact' for Care Leavers have been established at Mitcham, Sutton and Kingston Job Centre Plus Offices to ensure a consistent and good quality response.
- Local Work Programme Providers will record referrals and data relating to Care Leavers as a specific group to support future analysis and understanding of service demand. This will also support us to track outcomes for our care leavers.
- London Borough Merton is signed up to making Setting Up Home Allowance (leaving care grant) payments of at least £2,000.

What will we do

- We will embed the joint working protocol with Mitcham Job Centre Plus

- We will review the 'My Guide to Independence' on a bi-annual basis with members of the Child in Care Council
- We will undertake an annual review of the Setting Up Home Allowance with our Child in Care Council
- We will undertake an annual review of the Financial Provision document.
- We will offer 1:1 sessions to care leavers to support them develop their budgeting skills
- The Benefits Maximisation Officers will undertake individual annual financial assessments of all care leavers

Impact of Measures

- All Care Leavers report that they are confident in managing their income and reduce the risk of falling into debt
- There is good sign up to the Independence Skills Workshop in respect of budgeting.
- There is good sign up to the 1:1 sessions offered by the Welfare Maximisation Officers.
- The Care Leaver Survey reports that young people have a good understanding of their financial entitlements and feel supported in learning budgeting strategies.
- Number of SUHA payments made annually
- Number of care leavers receiving the education engagement payment

Health

Children often enter the care system with a poorer level of physical and mental health than their peers, and their longer-term outcomes remain worse. Two thirds of looked after children have at least one physical health complaint, and nearly half have a mental health disorder. Care leavers frequently tell us that they encounter a lack of support in accessing appropriate services. They often feel that the professionals working close to them do not have an understanding of their needs, particularly in respect of mental health. Care leavers also face difficulties around the transition from Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) to adult services.

What we have done

- We have identified a named worker from the Catch 22 Team to support our Care Leaver cohort in respect of drug screening and substance misuse interventions
- A multi-agency Teenage Pregnancy pathway has been agreed
- Independent Living Skills workshop covering issues relating to healthy living

What will we do

- Ensure all care leavers receive a copy of their health summary
- Review protocol and guidance for transitions to adult mental health
- Consider specific mental health provision for care leavers
- Consider care leavers as a specific cohort in the LAC Health Strategy Meeting
- Establish sexual health pathway for Care Leavers.

Impact of Measures

- % of Care Leavers issued with a Health Summary
- % of Care Leavers registered with a GP
- The Care Leaver Survey reports that young people have a good understanding of the housing options available to them
- The Care Leaver Survey reports that young people feel safe in their accommodation

Housing

Care leavers are a vulnerable group of young adults who have particular needs in relation to housing and homelessness. Around a quarter of those living on the streets have a background in care.⁶ The majority of care leavers leave care by the age of 18 and rising demands on social housing and other accommodation is making it increasingly difficult for young people to find suitable accommodation as they enter adulthood.

Becoming independent is a challenge for all young people as they take on responsibility for themselves. Care leavers are leaving a comparatively supportive environment earlier than other young people and are less prepared to leave and often have little support managing their new lives. In the vast majority of cases care leavers move to independence at the age of 18 compared to their peers who on average leave home at 24⁷.

The DfE has worked closely with Ofsted on their revised inspection framework, which now has a specific judgement on the quality of support provided to care leavers. Local authorities will be judged on the accommodation they provide to all care leavers and will only receive a 'good' judgement if they can demonstrate they provide accommodation that "*is appropriate for each young person to safely develop their independence skills*" and where they "*are safe and feel safe*".

78% of care leavers aged 19, 20 and 21 are in accommodation classed as suitable⁸. Frequent feedback from care leavers, however, is that they do not always feel safe in their accommodation. We know that the best local authorities are using "staying put" arrangements to ensure that care leavers can continue to live with and get support from their former foster carers.

In Merton the percentage of care leavers in suitable accommodation was 66% as at end of March 2014, equating to 29 young people. Of these 29 young people 27 were 'not in touch' with the local authority and in line with the dataset guidance must therefore be recorded as not living in suitable accommodation. The remaining 2 young people were reported to be living in bed and Breakfast accommodation. One was on a gap year in Australia and was staying in hostel accommodation, and the second had presented to another local authority and had been placed in emergency accommodation.

Statutory guidance is already clear that B&B accommodation is not considered to be suitable accommodation. In response to the findings of the Education Select Committee, following its review of post-16 care leaver support, DfE will amend guidance to make clear that emergency placements in B&B should be exceptional and limited to no more than two working days. We believe this strikes the right balance - setting clear expectations about the quality of support for young people,

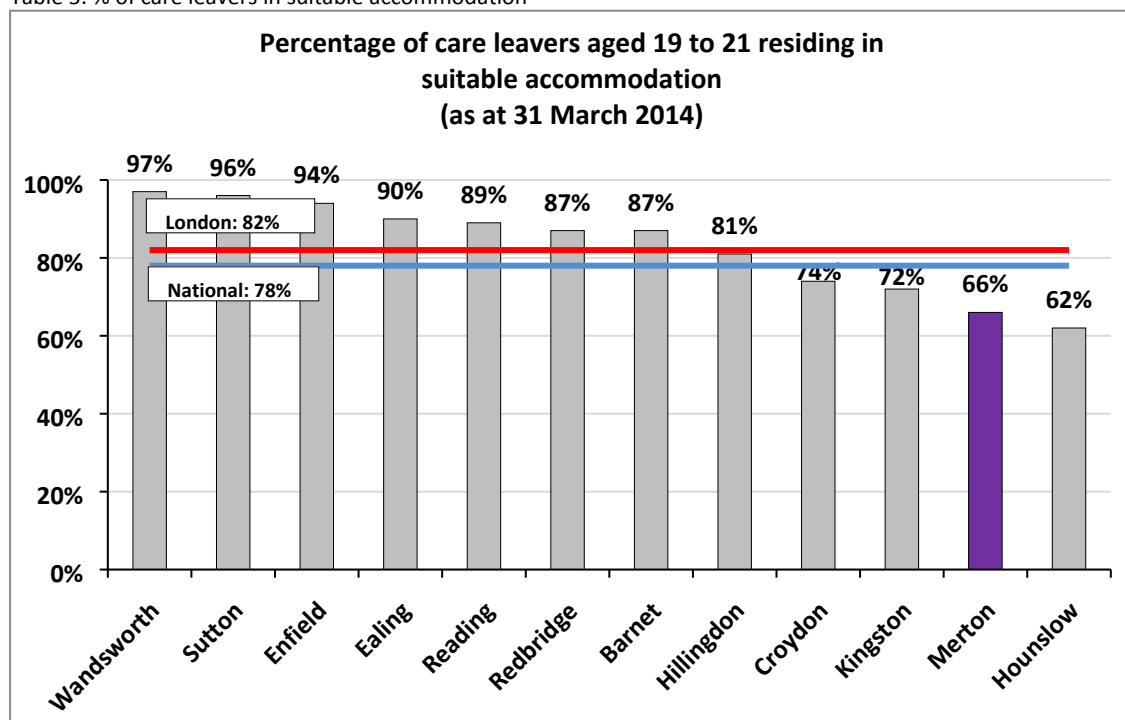
⁶ Source: CRISIS: [The hidden truth about homelessness: Experiences of single homelessness in England](#)

⁷ Office for National Statistics: Young adults living with parents in the UK.

⁸ Source: DfE: [Children looked after in England, including adoption 2014](#)

while retaining the flexibility necessary to ensure that B&B can be used if it the best way to meet a young person’s needs.

Table 5: % of care leavers in suitable accommodation



Source: DfE SFR - Children looked after in England, including adoption (Dec 2014)

The legal framework for care leavers aims to make sure that they receive the right support and services in their transition to adulthood, including access to accommodation. General homelessness legislation also provides a safety net for young care leavers experiencing homelessness.

The legislation most relevant to care leavers' accommodation needs is the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000, which imposes accommodation duties on local authorities to support certain categories of looked-after children and care leavers.

In providing accommodation for young care leavers, the regulations and guidance stipulate that local authorities should:

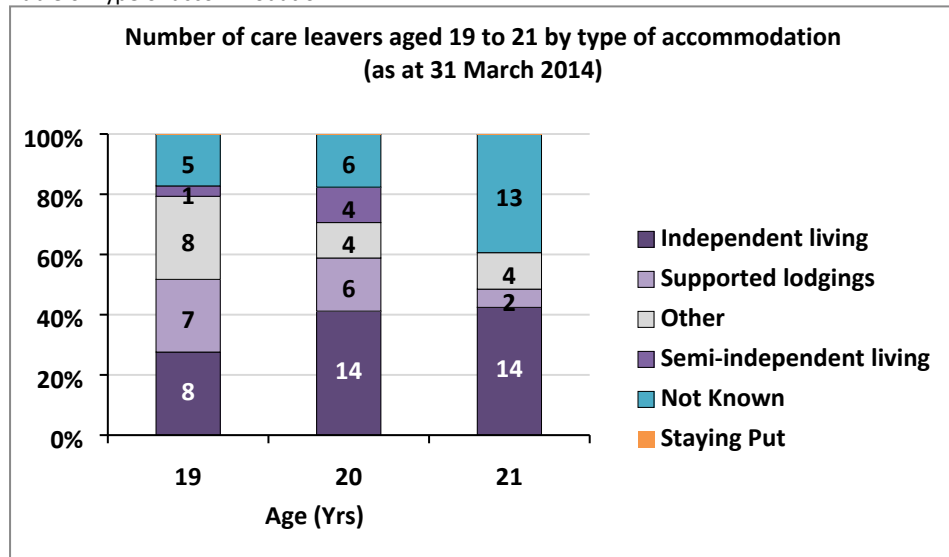
- avoid moving and disrupting young people who are settled
- assess young people’s needs and prepare them for any move
- offer a choice of accommodation (where practicable)
- provide a support package to go with the accommodation
- have a contingency plan in case accommodation arrangements break down

For many young people, moving straight from care to independent living is too big a step. A young care leaver may be able to make a more successful transition if there is a choice of returning home for a short time, remaining with a former carer, or

moving to supported lodgings or to a semi-independent option with some support, depending on the young person's needs.

The Access to Resources Team and Housing Options Team work closely with the 14+ Team to ensure that the accommodation needs of individual young people are met through a variety of different accommodation options.

Table 6: Type of accommodation



Source: DfE SFR - Children looked after in England, including adoption (Dec 2014)

What we have done

- Transferred commission of 16+ accommodation to the Access to Resources Team
- Developed and launched the Merton Staying Put Policy
- Commission Fostering Network to awareness sessions on Staying Put
- Developed and launched the Joint Protocol for Homeless 16 & 17 year olds.
- Homeless Quality Assurance Group established
- Reviewed and re-launched the 'Keys to My Future' and My Guide to Independence' documents
- Established an Independent Living Skills Workshop, 'Managing a Tenancy.'

What will we do

- Develop a housing pathways/options guidance
- Develop a broader menu of housing options
- Run a housing themed Child in Care Council meeting on an annual basis
- Review the implementation of 'Staying Put'.
- Ensure that no Care Leavers are accommodated in Bed & Breakfast accommodation other than on an emergency basis for no longer than 2 days.

Impact of Measures

- % of Care Leavers in B&B
- 903 Benchmark NEET figure from 2013-14 - % YP in appropriate accommodation.
- % (number) of Care Leavers in Staying Put arrangements.
- Number of young people accommodated via the Southwark route
- Number of care leavers accessing their Setting Up Home Allowance
- Annual Care Leaver Survey reports that young people are happy with their accommodation offer and feel safe in their accommodation.

Justice System

The Ministry of Justice (MoJ) and Home Office (HO) recognise that young adults who have been in care can be particularly vulnerable as they transition into adulthood, particularly if they are in the criminal justice system. They are also a particularly vulnerable group that are at risk of being drawn into crime. Equally we know that care leavers can be particularly vulnerable to becoming a victim of crime, including in some cases falling victim to grooming and exploitation online or offline.

Despite the recent reduction in the number of first time entrants to the criminal justice system, and a welcome drop in the number of children imprisoned in England and Wales, looked after children are vastly over-represented in the youth justice system: children in care and care leavers account for less than one per cent of the population (The Care Leavers Association, 2013) yet almost a third of children in prison have been looked after by a local authority at some point (HMIP, 2012).

- Children in care and care leavers account for less than 1% of the population.
- Over 25% of the adult prison population has previously been in care.
- 49% of young men under the age of 21 in the Criminal Justice System have spent time in care.
- 27% of young men in custody have spent time in care.
- 40% of girls in the 15-18 age group in custody have spent some time in local care⁹.

To support the embedding of the Legal Aid and Sentencing/Punishment of Offenders Act in Merton, a LASPO Operational Group was established in January 2014 to monitor the arrangements and process in place when young people are placed on remand.

What we have done

- LASPO policy and process has been developed
- LASPO Operational Group established
- Youth Offender Management Panel regularly reviews young people up to the age of 19 allows local partners to come together to ensure that risk management of young offenders is managed in a co-ordinated way.

What will we do

- Ensure robust multi-agency exit plans are in place for all care leavers at point of discharge from custody
- Ensure that the voice of the young person in custody is heard

⁹ Source: Contact: [Care Leavers, LAC and the Criminal Justice System](#)

- Engage with the local probation agency to develop a working protocol for partnership working with care leavers

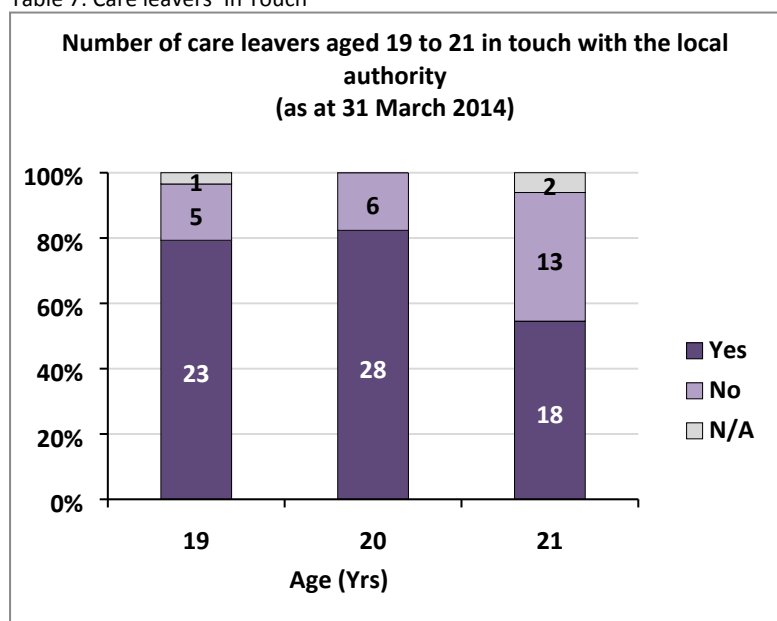
Impact of Measures

- % (number) of Care Leavers in custody
- Care leavers in custody are supported to undertake an adapted care leaver survey.

Ongoing Support

Care leavers require support and guidance before and after they turn 18. Care leavers unlike their peers may not have networks of support outside of their local authority. We know that young people leaving care frequently feel isolated, lonely and lacking the safety net of someone to talk to and advise them in a crisis.

Table 7: Care leavers 'In Touch'



Source: DfE SFR - Children looked after in England, including adoption (Dec 2014)

What we have done

- Developed a financial policy to clarify Care Leaver entitlement.
- Developed In Touch Guidance
- Launched the LAC and Care Leaver Pledge
- Annual Care Leaver Survey
- Pathway Plans explore positive activity and social engagement
- We visit all care leavers on a bi-monthly basis

What will we do

- Develop local protocol to ensure Director Children's Services scrutiny of 16 and 17 year old's leaving care.
- Develop a Care Leaver Task Force to embed and monitor the Care Leaver Strategy
- Review the LAC and Care Leaver Pledge on an annual basis
- Hold regular social/positive activity events

Impact of Measures

- % (number) of Care Leavers in touch
- % Care Leaver visits
- Feedback from the Care Leaver Survey regarding social work intervention

Voice of the Care Leaver

The 'Voice of the Child/Care Leaver' has been highlighted as a priority area in all Children's Social Care Service Plans 2014-15. For children and young people to become involved, practitioners need to be able to work in a way which enables participation and ultimately affects change or improvement within the organisation.

What we have done

- Worked with young people to develop and launch the LAC and Care Leaver Pledge
- Gathered and reviewed informal feedback from care leavers
- Run drop in sessions for LAC and Care Leavers
- Annual Care Leaver Survey
- Audit of Pathway Plans to review the participation of young people
- Involved care leavers in training for foster carers
- Involved care leavers in development of local protocols (Staying Put and Homeless Protocol).

What will we do

- Develop local protocol to ensure DCS scrutiny of 16 and 17 year old's leaving care.
- Develop a Care Leaver Task Force to support the embedding of the Care Leaver Strategy
- Ensure the voice of the child is evidenced in all Pathway Plans
- Ensure all care leavers have signed their Pathway Plan and have a copy of the plan.
- Develop a LAC participation strategy

Impact of Measures

- % of signed Pathway Plans
- Attendance at Child in Care Council
- Attendance at drop-in sessions
- Annual Care Leaver Survey

Estimating the number of care leavers (2014-17) - Methodology

A forecasting model has been developed to support the Care Leavers Strategy in estimating the number of care leavers for future years. The predicted numbers have been calculated using data from the 2013-14 and previous 903 CLA Returns. The model has been designed to calculate the number of 18yr old care leavers by accounting for:

- Children known to Children’s Services (as at 31st March 2014) who met the eligibility criteria to be considered a care leaver (i.e. looked after for a total of 13 weeks after their 14th birthday, including at least some time after their 16th birthday)
- Average percentage of looked after children aged 14 and 15 that are still looked after aged 16 (3yr average)
- Average number of children becoming looked after for the first time aged 16 or 17 who are in care for longer than 91 days (3yr average)

Year	Data source	How to calculate the number of 18 year old care leavers
2013/14	2013-14 CLA 903 Return	Use 2013-14 CLA 903 Return data
2014/15	2012-13 CLA 903 Return 2013-14 CLA 903 Return	(16 yr olds (+91 days in care after 14yrs) on 2012-13 CLA 903 return + 17 yr olds (+91 days in care after 14yrs) on 2013-14 CLA 903 return) – make sure each child only appears once on list (remove duplicates) + average number of 17 yr old LAC starts per year who are in care for longer than 91 days (3yr average)
2015/16	2011-12 CLA 903 Return 2012-13 CLA 903 Return	((14 yr olds on 2011-12 CLA 903 Return + 15 yr olds on 2012-13 CLA 903 Return) - make sure each child only appears once on list (remove duplicates)) X average percentage of LAC aged 14 and 15 that are still LAC aged 16 (based on 3yrs data) + average number of 16 and 17 yr old LAC starts who are in care for longer than 91 days (3yr average)
2016/17	2012-13 CLA 903 Return 2013-14 CLA 903 Return	((14 yr olds on 2012-13 CLA 903 Return + 15 yr olds on 2013-14 CLA 903 Return) - make sure each child only appears once on list (remove duplicates)) X average percentage of LAC aged 14 and 15 that are still LAC aged 16 (3 yr average)

		+
		average number of 16 and 17 yr old LAC starts who are in care for longer than 91 days (3yr average)

3 yr average calculations

3 yr average calculations	Data source	Building the cohort list	Calculated by
Average percentage of LAC aged 14 and 15 that are still LAC aged 16	2009-10 CLA 903 Return 2010-11 CLA 903 Return 2011-12 CLA 903 Return 2012-13 CLA 903 Return 2013-14 CLA 903 Return	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 14 and 15yr old LAC on 2009-10, 2010-11, 2011-12, 2012-13 CLA Returns– combine together on one list – make sure each child only appears once on list (remove duplicates) 16 yr old LAC on 2011-12, 2012-13 and 2013-14 CLA Returns – combine together on one list – make sure each child only appears once on list (remove duplicates) Match cohorts together – adding a column to 14 and 15yr old list called convert to 16 and state yes or no for whether the child was on the 16yr old list 	<p>Number of 14 and 15 yr old LAC who convert to 16</p> <p style="text-align: center;">÷</p> <p>Number of 14 and 15 yr old LAC on combined CLA Returns</p>
Average number of 16 and 17 yr old LAC starts who are in care for longer than 91 days	2011-12 CLA 903 Return 2012-13 CLA 903 Return 2013-14 CLA 903 Return	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 16 and 17yr old LAC starts who are in care for longer than 91 days on 2011-12, 2012-13, 2013-14 CLA Returns –combine together on one list – make sure each child only appears once on list (remove duplicates) 	<p>Number of 16 and 17 yr old LAC starts who are in care for longer than 91 days</p> <p style="text-align: center;">÷</p> <p style="text-align: center;">3</p>
Average number of 17 yr old LAC starts who are in care for longer than 91 days	2011-12 CLA 903 Return 2012-13 CLA 903 Return 2013-14 CLA 903 Return	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 17yr old LAC starts who are in care for longer than 91 days on 2011-12, 2012-13, 2013-14 CLA Returns –combine together on one list – make sure each child only appears once on list (remove duplicates) 	<p>Number of 17 yr old LAC starts who are in care for longer than 91 days</p> <p style="text-align: center;">÷</p> <p style="text-align: center;">3</p>

Recent Publications

Overview of care and leaving care

- [NAO report into Children in care - Is DFE improving the quality of care and stability of placements?](#)
- [Local authority statistics on looked after children and care leavers are now out](#)
- [Entitlements Inquiry 'One Year On' Report](#)

Education, training and employment

- [Committee publishes evidence on careers guidance](#). The Education Committee publishes written evidence for its follow up inquiry on careers guidance for young people. (12 Nov)
- [Policy: Raising the achievement of disadvantaged children](#). (Updated 13 Nov)
- [Traineeship eligibility is changing](#) - find out the latest information
- [NIACE research looking at the role of the PA and pathway planning](#) to support care leavers education

Health and Wellbeing

- [Promoting the health and welfare of looked-after children: updated statutory guidance](#) - consultation until 9 Jan
- [CAFCASS research on SCR](#)
- [Health select committee report on CAMHS](#)

Accommodation

- [The views and experiences of children in residential special schools: overview report](#)
- [Investigating special guardianship: experiences, challenges and outcomes: research report](#)
- [Coram Voice report on youth homelessness](#) - 16 and 17 year olds approaching local authorities

Financial support

- [The young are the new poor: Sharp increase in number of under-25s living in poverty, while over-65s are better off than ever](#)

Young People with additional support needs

- [Greater protection to be given to 17-year-olds in custody](#).
- [Gangs in prison report](#) - Catch22 Dawes unit
- [CLA evaluation of pilot scheme for care leavers](#) involved in criminal justice system
- Research looking at [how to support risks in adolescence](#)

Looked After Children Strategy 2015-18

London Borough of Merton

Issue Date	Author	Date Of the Next Review	Lead Officer
March 2015	Naheed Chaudhry/Sarah Daly	March 2018	Paul Angeli

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Our Mission Statement

We have a longstanding approach to preventing children becoming looked after. When children do need to come into care we seek to ensure that care proceedings are timely and our care plans appropriately safeguard children and support decisions around permanency which are in the best interest of each child.

We are committed to ensuring all our looked after children and young people are given every opportunity to experience a safe, healthy and happy life in which they achieve their potential. We will make every effort to ensure they are able to grow up in a stable and supportive environment with a sense of belonging. We will make available the widest range of placements in order to support the individual needs of our looked after children and where they can feel cared for and cared about.

Our role as corporate parents is significant and far reaching and we will exercise this with commitment and accountability across all areas of the council and partnership. Through this we will consistently ensure all our young people reach their potential, develop into independent, self-confident adults and enjoy their place in society.

We will ensure high expectations for our looked after children are shared widely and wholeheartedly. By involving our partners we will ensure coordinated wrap-around services are provided so that our children maintain healthy development, are safe both in and out of the home, achieving at school, involved in out-of school activities, whilst developing their sense of independence.

Our looked after children are the best experts we have and we value their experiences. At every stage of planning, service delivery or change we will listen to what looked after children and young people say and act accordingly.

Merton's services for looked after children form part of a comprehensive continuum of support for children and young people who may be facing difficulties at home. These range from family support to intensive community interventions or seeking permanence through permanent alternative care. In taking this approach we will remain committed to ensuring that the right children enter care and that their experiences are positive and their opportunities many.

Our strategic priorities

1. Improving the **timeliness of care proceedings**
2. Improving **placement stability and choice**
3. Improving **educational outcomes** for Looked After Children
4. Supporting good **health outcomes** for Looked After Children
5. Encouraging **participation and positive activities**
6. Understanding the needs of and supporting **LAC in particular circumstance**
7. **Achieving permanency**
8. Supporting our **Care leavers**

LAC and Care Leavers Pledge

MERTON COUNCIL

A pledge to children in care and care leavers in Merton

We promise to support you to:

Be healthy

- Ensure you are registered with a GP and Dentist
- Ensure all your medical, dental or other health needs are met
- Respect the culture, traditions, language, and religion of all children and young people in care
- Promote your emotional well-being (including mental health and resilience) and remain in contact with your family
- Help you to maintain your personal hygiene and look after yourself
- Provide services and support if you are a parent
- Provide support and information for you on drug and alcohol misuse.

Enjoy and achieve

- Ensure you have access to the best possible education and training
- Make sure we do what your Personal Education Plan says we are supposed to do
- Support you to attend and do well at school/college or university
- Make sure you get extra study support if you need it
- Make sure you have access to IT and other equipment needed to support your education and training
- Arrange meetings that, where possible, avoid you having to come out of class
- Expect your carers to take an active interest in your education and homework and meet your teachers
- Help you get involved in leisure/cultural activities for enjoyment and having fun
- Believe in you and what you can achieve and have high aspirations for you
- Provide accommodation for you during the holiday times when you are at university
- Provide information on the financial support that you are entitled to, to help you learn or study.

Achieve economic well-being / Support for your future

- Celebrate your achievements
- Develop your life skills/help you work towards your goals
- Encourage, support and help you prepare to leave care, live independently, and achieve your full potential
- Ensure that you are aware of your financial entitlements as a child in care or care leaver from Merton Social Care
- Ensure that the whole local authority recognises its responsibilities to you as your corporate parent by providing you with a range of opportunities
- Involve you in the development and the delivery of our services to you
- Provide you with good quality and stable accommodation
- Provide access to information relating to welfare benefits, budgeting and saving.

Stay safe / feel supported

- Enable you to take reasonable risks in a safe and supportive environment
- Be on time for meetings, and let you know if we are running late
- Provide a safe environment, where you will feel supported
- Make sure you have an independent reviewing officer to help plan with you what you need and to ensure these plans are carried out
- Give you advice and support to help you to stay safe
- Give careful thought to where you live so that you live in a home that feels like a home, with a carer who really cares and with a social worker, who together make sure they do things for you to keep you safe and well
- Explain why we cannot always provide you with everything that you want
- Provide access to support networks
- Provide you with an independent advocate.

Make a positive contribution / Make a difference

- Encourage you to have confidence to speak out, be heard and treated with respect
- Support you to have your say in meetings
- Aim to make your time in care less stressful, make a difference and try to help with your problems
- Encourage you to give us feedback and when necessary to support you to make a complaint
- Ensure that we feed back to you on the issues that you raise
- Involve you in planning your review so that you feel part of it
- Ensure that we establish, support and work in partnership with the Children in Care Council
- Ensure that you participate fully in your care and pathway planning
- Involve you in the recruitment and selection of foster carers and staff
- Provide opportunities for you to be involved in peer mentoring
- Support your development as an individual by helping you with passport, bank accounts, becoming a citizen, national insurance number, birth certificate, provisional driver's licence and immigration status
- Ensure that you understand our commitment to you, that all young people receive a service that values diversity, promotes fairness and challenges discrimination.

Leaving care

- We will trust and respect you
- Encourage your carer to teach you how to budget, cook and learn the skills you need to live independently
- Make sure you have your own worker to make a pathway plan with you
- Make sure that you can access support and guidance regarding your financial entitlements
- Stay in touch until you are 21, or sometimes up to 25 if in full time education.

Yvette Stanley
Director of Children, Schools and Families

Councillor Maxi Martin
Cabinet Member for Children's Services

Children in Care Council members



The National and Local Context

Under the Children Act 1989, a child is legally defined as 'looked after' by a local authority if he or she:

- is provided with accommodation for a continuous period for more than 24 hours
- is subject to a care order; or
- is subject to a placement order

A looked after child ceases to be looked after when he or she turns 18 years old. On reaching his or her 18th birthday, the status of the child changes from being looked after to being a young adult eligible for help and assistance from the local authority as a care leaver.

Children and young people achieve their best outcomes when provided with security, stability and love throughout their childhood and beyond. The majority of looked after children return home to their families after a short period of time in the care of the local authority. The underpinning principle of the Children Act 1989 places a legal duty on local authorities to support families to stay together when this is a safe and realistic option.

The National Context

Nationally there were 68,840 looked after children as at 31 March 2014, an increase of 7% compared to 31 March 2010. The number of looked after children has increased steadily over the past five years and it is now higher than at any point since 1985. Nationally the rate of looked after children per 10,000 is 60. At local authority level the rate varies significantly.

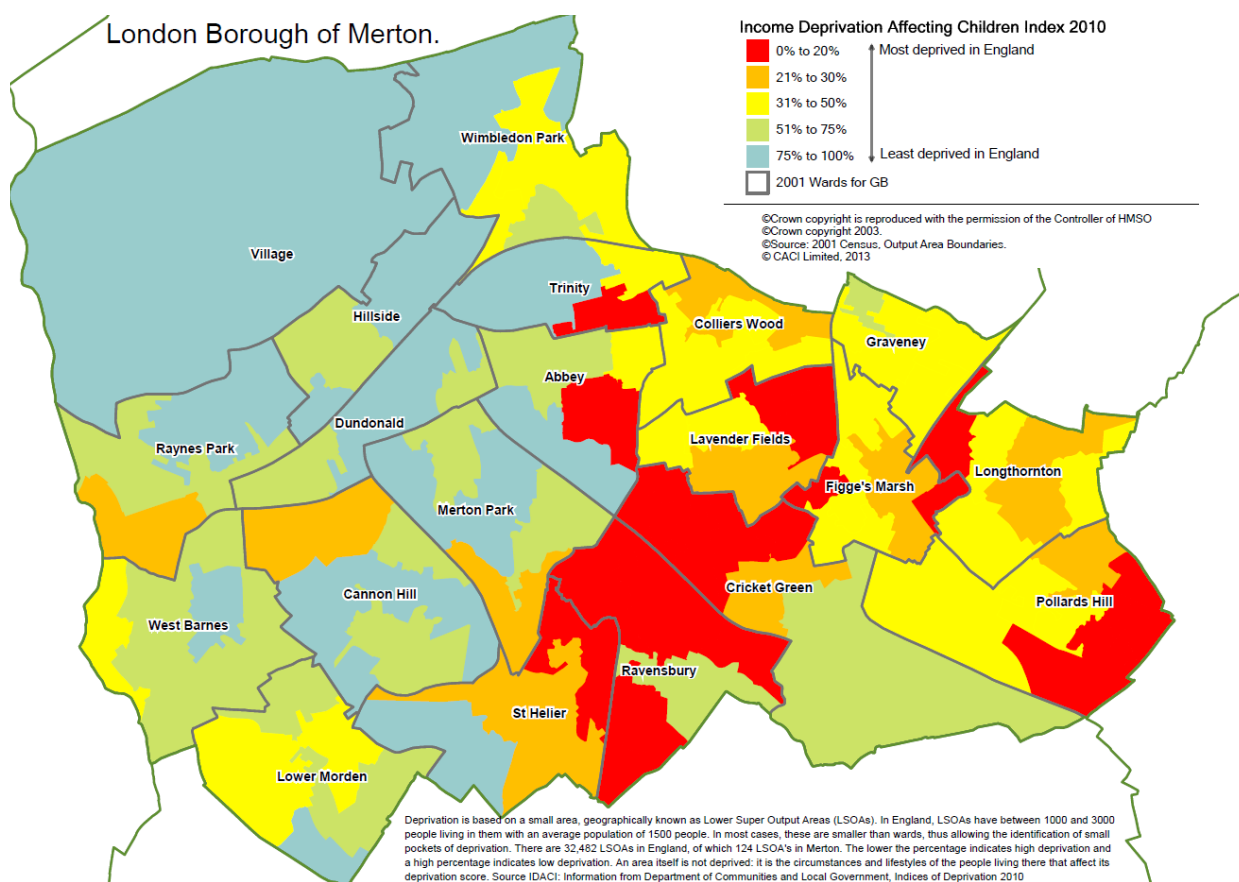
The majority of looked after children – 62% in 2014 - are provided with a service due to abuse or neglect. The reasons why looked after children are provided with a service have been relatively stable since 2010. The age profile of children looked after has been relatively stable since 2010. The largest age group is 10 to 15 year olds, which made up 37% of looked after children at 31 March 2014. There has been a slight increase in the percentage of 5 to 9 year olds, from 17% in 2010, to 20% in 2014. These trends are in line with the age breakdown of all children. The majority of children looked after at 31 March 2014 (74%) are from a White British background, the same proportion as the general population of all children. The ethnic breakdown for children looked after has varied little since 2010

The Government has been clear in its drive to improve services and outcomes for looked after children in all types of permanence care, with revised statutory guidance that clearly sets out the need to address the problem of delays for example within the adoption system. It is apparent for all professionals working within children's social care that the current court processes are contributing to the delays encountered by children and as a result the Family Justice Review has reviewed the Public Law Outline with a programme that aims to dramatically speed up care proceedings, including a time limit of 26 weeks within which all but exceptional cases must be completed.

The Local Context – 'Merton the place'

Merton is an outer London borough situated in south west London, covering 14.7 square miles. Merton has a total population of 200,543 including 47,499 children and young people aged 0-19 (Census 2011). The number of 0-19 year olds is forecast to increase by 3,180 (7%) by 2017, within which we forecast a 20% increase of children aged 5 to 9 (2,270). We have a younger population than the England average and have seen a 39% net increase of births over the last ten years (2,535 births in 2002 rising to 3,521 in 2010). The birth rate reduced in 2012/13 and again slightly in 2013/14 suggesting that the rate is stabilising. However the last ten years alongside other demographic factors has placed additional demand on all children's services.

Predominantly suburban in character, Merton is divided into 20 wards and has three main town centres; Wimbledon, Mitcham and Morden. A characteristic of the borough is the difference between the more deprived east (Mitcham/Morden) and the more affluent west (Wimbledon). There are a number of pockets of deprivation within the borough mainly in the eastern wards and some smaller pockets in the central wards. These wards have multiple deprivation, with high scores on income deprivation, unemployment and limited educational attainment. Merton has 39 Super Output Areas which are amongst the 30% most deprived areas across England for children. This means 45% of Merton school pupils are living in an area of deprivation (30% most deprived, IDACI 2010). Since 2010 we have seen an increase of 23% of children who are eligible for free school meals (2010, 2881 FSM children, 2014, 3548 FSM children).

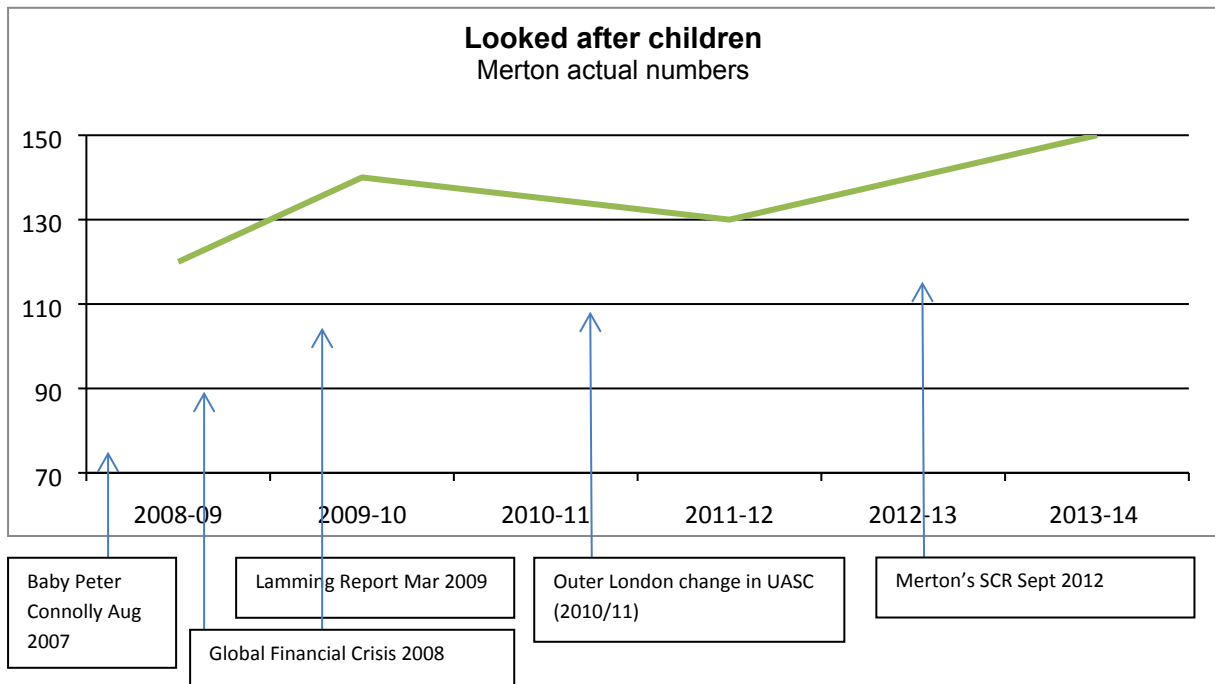


Thirty five per cent of Merton’s total population is Black, Asian or Minority ethnic (BAME) this is expected to increase further to 39% by 2017. Pupils in Merton schools are more diverse still, with 66% from BAME communities, speaking over 120 languages (2014). The borough has concentrations of Urdu speaking communities, Sri Lankan, South African and Polish residents.

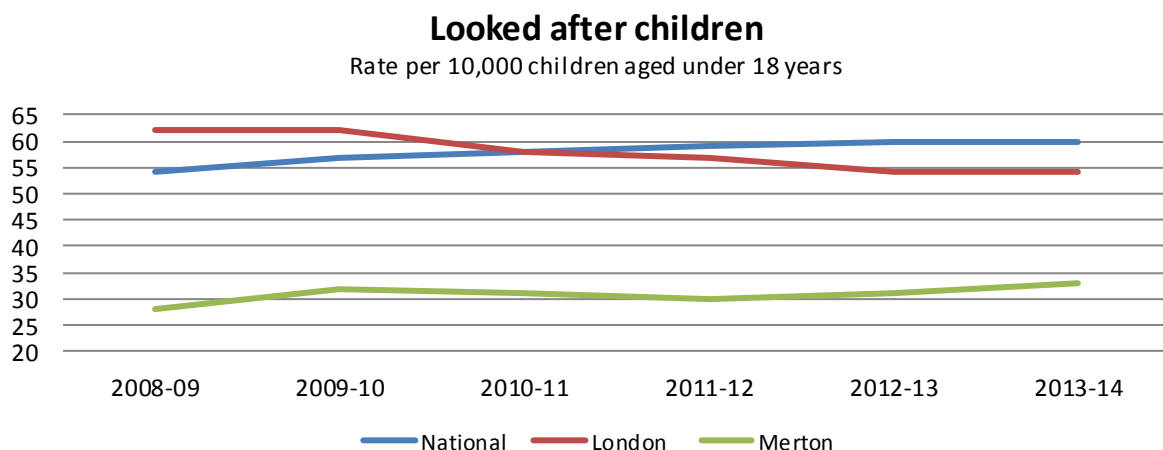
The number of children with Statements and School Action Plus pupils in Merton schools is also rising. Numbers of SEN Statements in Primary schools has risen from 255 in Jan 2011 to 310 in Jan 2014 (+22%), numbers of SEN Statements in Secondary schools has risen from 212 in Jan 2011 to 224 in Jan 2014 (+6%) and the number of SEN Statements in Special schools has risen from 249 in Jan 2011 to 321 in Jan 2014 (+29%).

Merton's Looked After Children

Merton's looked after children population in the last ten years has ranged from a low of 96 (2006/7) to 150 (2013/14). This increase has been reviewed and audited to establish what is behind this trend. There are a number of reasons for this increase including increased national awareness of children's safeguarding, an increasing birth rate, more general demographic changes and a change in legislation in relation to children coming into care through remand placements. Merton has a higher than average profile of looked after children at the older age range, including a significant increase in the numbers of Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers and an increase in young people coming into care through the Southwark Judgement.



Merton's LAC rate per 10,000 in March 2014 was 33, this remains within the range of our statistical neighbours (Redbridge, Sutton, Barnet, Kingston, Enfield, Ealing). London's LAC rate per 10,000 ranges from the low 40s to the high 60s.

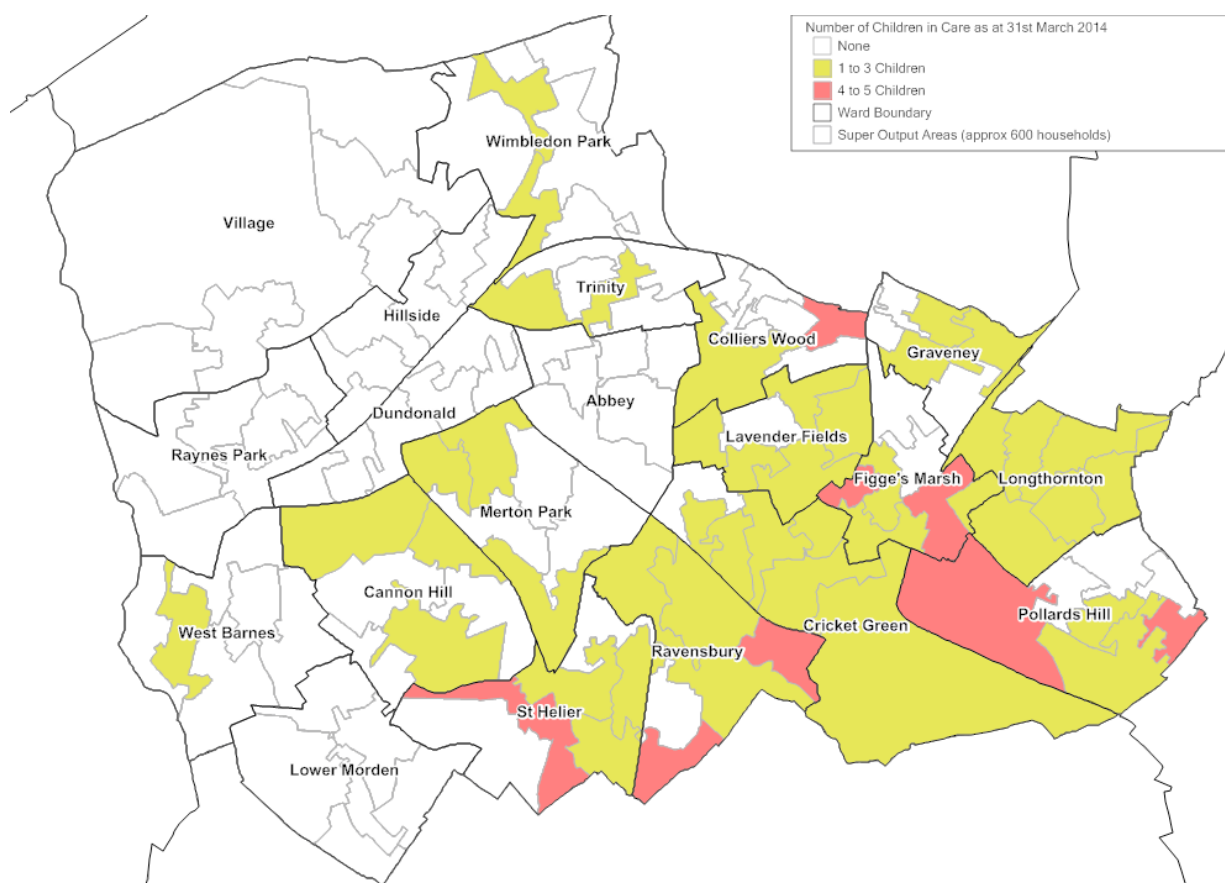


Merton's LAC gender distributions are similar to national averages; we have more LAC boys than girls. The age profile of children looked after at 31 March in Merton varies from the national norm with Merton caring for a large number of older looked after children aged 16 and over. In Merton 41% of our looked after children are aged 16 and 17 compared to 21% nationally.

Merton has a changing profile of ethnic groups for LAC. The majority of children looked after in Merton are from a white background, this is lower than the general resident population (18%). There are fewer Asian or Asian British than the all persons Merton population also. Mixed ethnic backgrounds, Black or Black British heritage and 'other ethnic groups' have looked after children proportions greater than the resident population. We continue to report an increase in the category of 'other ethnic groups' in 2013 and 2014 circa 80% were known to the authority as Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children.

The borough map below represents our looked after children's residents prior to being looked after, 60% of the 2014 LAC population came from an area of deprivation (Indices of Deprivation Affecting Children Index bottom 30%), an increase of 9% from 2013. The majority of children looked after as at 31 March 2014 lived in wards, pre intervention, in the east and south of the borough.

This map shows by ward the home address of Children Looked After at the 31st March 2014



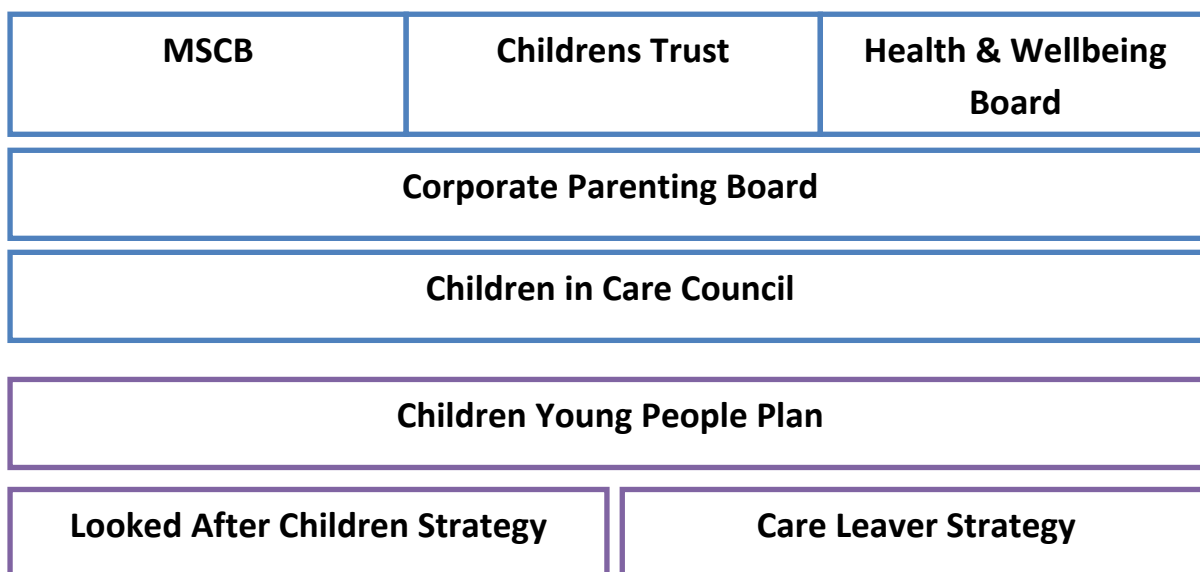
Our children have a range of complex needs at the point they become looked after 19% (2014) have SEN statements. Significant numbers of our LAC have experienced mental health and drugs or alcohol abuse issues within their families.

Clearly the decision to accommodate a child or young person is a momentous and life changing event and should only happen with due consideration of all the alternatives and with the needs of the child or young person at the forefront of our consideration. We support the view that children's needs are best met within their own families. To support such reflection and decision making Merton has set up an 'Edge of Care' Panel to ensure that the any decision to accommodate a child or young person between the ages of 0-16 is rigorously reviewed.

Merton’s Strategic Framework and Governance

This Looked After Childrens Strategy is not a stand-alone publication. Our Children and Young People’s Plan sets out our ambitions for our looked after children and this is enhanced by this LAC Strategy and our Care Leavers strategy, which are both endorsed and by the Children’s Trust, the Merton Safeguarding Children’s Board and the Corporate Parenting Board.

The Corporate Parenting Board is comprised of senior managers and officers from education, health, housing, social care and elected members this chaired by the Chief Executive London Borough Merton, ensuring a high level of scrutiny and cross directorate responsibility for delivery of our priorities.



Our Corporate Parenting responsibilities

The Children Act 1989 and the Leaving Care Act 2000 place clear statutory duties upon the Council to protect children from suffering significant harm and to provide continued financial and transition support to care leavers aged up to 21 (or 25 if in full time education).

When a child comes into care, the council becomes the Corporate Parent. Put simply, the term ‘Corporate Parent’ means the collective responsibility of the council, elected members, employees, and partner agencies, for providing the best possible care and safeguarding for the children who are looked after by the council. A child in the care of the council looks to the whole council to be the best parent it can be to that child. Every member and employee of the council has the statutory responsibility to act for and for that child in the same way that a good parent would act for and for their child.

Effective corporate parenting requires knowledge and awareness of the needs of children and young people who are looked after and the services that they receive. This is a shared responsibility for the Council as a whole. The role of the corporate parent is to,

- a. To receive and consider accurate and timely management information reports on the numbers, characteristics and needs of looked after children and care leavers
- b. To receive and consider reports demonstrating how effectively Merton is serving it’s looked after population through the provision of services and targeted initiatives

- c. To receive briefings on new national and local initiatives designed to improve children and young people's life chances
- d. To gain knowledge of services based on direct involvement and opportunities to meet and gain the views of stakeholders, especially listening to the views of children and young people looked after and members of the Children in Care Council
- e. To monitor and review progress on the delivery of the Pledge to children looked after and care leavers
- f. Ensure that decisive action is taken to address any shortcomings in the services provided to children and young people

The Children in Care Council directly supports the Corporate Parenting Board to measure and monitor the effectiveness and quality of 'Corporate Parenting' in Merton. The group meet on a monthly basis, they have a Chair and each member of the CICC has a lead area (e.g. complaints and housing). The group meet regularly with senior managers to discuss important issues affecting children and young people in care. The CICC have a standing agenda item at Corporate Parenting Board Meetings and a young person attends the Corporate Parenting Board.

Priority 1: Timeliness of care proceedings

The National context

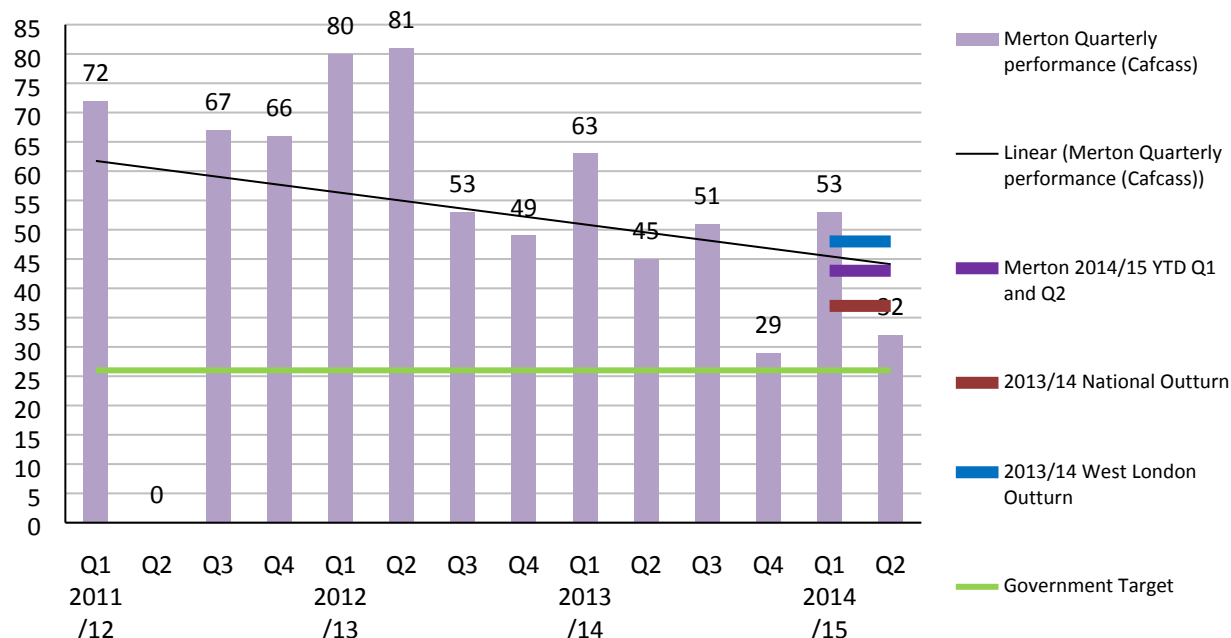
A revised Public Law Outline introduced in April 2014 set out streamlined case management procedures for dealing with public law children's cases. Its aim was to identify and focus on the key issues for children to making the best decisions for them within the timetable set by the Court, and avoiding the need for unnecessary evidence or hearings. Under the revised section 32(1) (a) of the Children Act 1989 (introduced by section 14 of the Children and Families Act 2014), care and supervision proceedings must be completed 'without delay, and, in any event, within twenty-six weeks beginning with the day on which the application was issued'. This places an increased emphasis on pre-proceedings work and the quality of assessments. The national average performance benchmark as at the end of 2013/14 is 33 weeks (National annual average 2013/14, CAFCASS).

Merton's track record

During 2013 we redesigned our looked after children and permanency services to deliver permanency more quickly and accommodate the requirements of the Family Justice Review and Children and Families Bill.

Merton's Case Progression Team was formed in June 2013 which aimed to reduce delay and establish a timescale for care proceedings cases to conclude in 26 weeks. There are clear thresholds for admitting children into care, in all cases significant attempts are made to support our children or young people to remain within their family or community.

Merton Care application - Quarterly performance average duration (Cafcass)



We have seen progress in the timeliness of our court proceedings from 72 weeks in 2011/12 to 32 weeks in 2014/15 (Merton 2014/15 Q2, CAFCASS). It should be noted however that small cohorts of children can significantly impact performance.

Merton's commitment moving forward

1. We will retain a dedicated 'Case progression function' within the department to pre-empt challenges and thus supports the timeliness of court proceedings.
2. We will shift our focus to pre-proceedings by developing clear processes which ensure that as much activity as possible is front loaded. This includes robust care planning, the coordination of viability assessments, expert assessments and parenting assessments. The challenge is to ensure services are joined up and there is close, integrated working across key teams.
3. We will continue to track cases from the 'notice of intention' stage to avoid unnecessary drift.
4. We will continue to review cases which go over 26 weeks to ensure that lessons are learnt and practice improved.

Impact measure

- A. Care application average duration (national target 26 weeks) (CAFCASS). (32 weeks in Q2 2014/15)

Priority 2: Placement stability and choice

The National context

Providing stability relies on identifying the right placement for a child early in their care journey whilst ensuring that individual and family needs are properly assessed and support services provided in order to achieve early permanence.

Local authorities should provide a range of placement options to ensure that the right placement is available for every child. For many children returning home to their family after a period in care will be the route to permanence and stability. For others, returning to other family or friends under a formal or informal arrangement will be the setting they need in order to thrive. Remaining in care with a long term foster family or finding a new permanent family through adoption, special guardianship or residence orders are other routes to permanence.

While it is evident that achieving timely permanence is desirable, nationally annual data returns show that a small but substantial number of children still experience multiple placements each year.

Merton's track record

Clearly the decision to accommodate a child or young person is a momentous and life changing event and should only happen with due consideration of all the alternatives and with the needs of the child or young person at the forefront of our consideration. We support the view that children's needs are best met within their own families. To support such reflection and decision making Merton has set up an 'Edge of Care and Rehabilitation' Panel to ensure that the any decision to accommodate a child or young person between the ages of 0-16 is rigorously reviewed and a robust care plan in place that has a focus on short term and long term care planning.

In addition to decisions relating to accommodation the panel also considers care planning where consideration is being given to rehabilitating a child to their parents care. National data shows that children who return home from care are the largest single group of children who cease to be looked after in any one year. Research shows that careful assessment of needs, evidence of improvements in parenting capacity, slow and well managed return home and the provision of services to support children and their families after the return were associated with a positive experience of reunification which lasted. The role of the panel is to ensure timely and effective decision-making and purposeful social work with children and their families to prepare and support the return, underpinning long term stability and good outcomes for individual children.

Merton's Fostering agency was rated Good by Ofsted in November 2012, inspectors noted that "Children and young people are able to make good progress in relation to their starting points across all aspects of their care and effective arrangements are in place to support this. Children and young people have positive views about their care and their relationships with foster carers".

All placements for looked after children are made by our dedicated Access to Resources (ART) service. Our placement stability performance of 12.7% (3 moves or more) is line with the national average of 11% (2013/14). Similarly our placement length performance (2 years or more) on a three year rolling average is 66% this is also in line with the national average of 68% (2011 – 2013). While our placement stability is broadly in line with national averages we continue to review the children who have undergone 2 and 3 moves or more during the year.

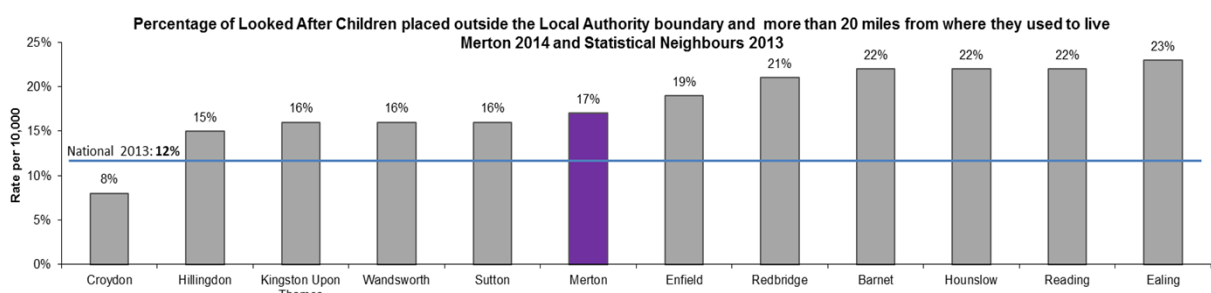
We are determined to find the most appropriate care for our looked after children, using family and friends; in-house foster carers; carers from the South West London consortium or a number of Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs).

We are placing more children with in house carers and therefore relying less on IFAs. Our annual LAC Sufficiency Strategy supports us to target our placement needs and procure appropriate care for our children. Since the establishment of a dedicated Access to Resources team in October 2011 we have approved 29 foster carers (as at September 2014), in recent years we have targeted the recruitment of in-house fosters towards our known deficits; including carers for sibling groups and teenagers.

When we are required to use independent settings we use those rated Good or Outstanding by Ofsted only, in exceptional circumstances we seek senior management authorisation to place children in settings which are rated adequate. Where we have children placed in IFA placements and the placement is identified as meeting their long term needs and in the best interest of the child, we committed to funding these placements long term.

Any young person who is reported as missing is referred to our commissioned service who undertakes a 'return to home' interview to support on-going risk management. For older young people pathway planning processes are used to agree a temporary absence from placement, through pre-arranged agreement. Merton has a child sexual exploitation strategy which provides clear and practical guidance for social workers and other practitioners dealing with cases where there is suspected child/young person sexual exploitation.

As at 31 March 2014 17% of our Looked After Children live more than 20 miles away from their home address. For some young people placements away from their home community are a key part of the care plan as a result of anti-social behaviour/risk taking behaviours. For some the needs of the young people are such that they require specialist placements which are not available in Merton or surrounding boroughs. For all children being placed outside of the borough the Director of Childrens Services is required to sign off agreement for the placement.



Merton's involvement in the Staying Put (2012/13) and Right2Bcared4 (2012/13) pilots has resulted in successful transition for a number of young people into greater independence at a pace that was appropriate to them.

Merton has small but well established supported lodgings/placements service for those aged 16 and above. These placements provide a helpful step to independence for those young people who choose this option. Supported lodgings carers are supported and guided by an accommodation officer working in the Fostering Team. Supported lodging placements enable our young people to develop their independent living skills within a family environment. Our young people and their carers are supported by the function from aged 16 to 21 depending on need.

Merton's commitment moving forward

1. We will develop a consistent approach to care planning for rehabilitation cases
2. We will continue to undertake work to understand our looked after children, this work will continue to inform our commissioning activity of suitable and sufficient places.
3. We will maintain conspicuous management oversight of 'two moves' cohort so that vulnerable placements can be identified and greater support interventions put in place.
4. We will reduce the use of independent fostering agencies.
5. We will reduce our of Borough placements which are greater than 20 miles
6. We will increase the number of in house foster carers for targeted groups
7. We will increase our focus on the rehabilitation of children and support to individual families.
8. We will carry out an 'At a distance review' as per the DfE publication to ensure our offer is the best it can be.

Impact measures

- A. Placement stability performance (3 moves or more) in line with national average or better (Merton 12.7%, national average 11% (2013/14)).
- B. Placement length (2 years or more) in line with national average or better (Merton three year rolling average 66%, national average 68% (2011 to 2013))
- C. Percentage of looked after children placed more than 20 miles away from home in line with national average or better (Merton 17%, national average 17% (2013/14))
- D. Number of in house foster carers recruited ART Team, (Since the establishment of a dedicated Access to Resources team in October 2011 we have assess and approved 29 foster carers (as at September 2014).)
- E. Percentage of children in foster care placed with IFA (independent fostering agencies)
- F. Percentage of children who more than one LAC episode

Priority 3: Education of Looked After Children

The National context

Local authorities are required to discharge their statutory duty under 22(3A) of the Children Act 1989 to promote the educational achievement of looked after children. That includes those children placed out-of-authority. The Children and Families Act 2014 amends section 22 of the Children Act 1989 to require every local authority in England to appoint an officer employed by the authority, or another authority, to make sure that its duty to promote the educational achievement of its looked after children is properly discharged (Virtual School Heads). Social workers, Virtual School Heads (VSH)s and IROs, school admission officers and special educational needs departments should work together to ensure that - except in an emergency - appropriate education provision for a child is arranged at the same time as a care placement.

All looked after children should have a Personal Education Plan (PEP) which should form a part of the child's care plan or detention placement plan.

Merton's track record

Our Virtual School provides a dedicated service for Merton's Looked After Children and Care Leavers wherever they live or are educated. The school's specialist Advisory Teachers in primary, secondary and post sixteen phases of education work to champion the need for all Looked After Children and Care Leavers. This is to ensure that they all have access to high quality schooling or education and training provision. The Virtual School also liaises with The Early Years Team to promote quality provision for younger children.

For children of statutory school age, The Virtual School closely monitors school attendance, progress and attainment. The Personal Education Plan is used to challenge and support schools and settings, social workers and carers to accelerate pupil progress and ensure good educational outcomes. The Virtual School distributes Pupil Premium funding according to the grant's terms and conditions and contributes to the funding of interventions to meet identified needs. Through effective advocacy, negotiation, improved SEN provision and inclusive practice, no Merton Looked After Child has been permanently excluded for the last five years

Carers, social workers, school staff, and young care leavers have direct access to The Virtual School for advice and guidance to ensure that education and training is integral to and supported as part of a child's care or pathway plan.

As part of our children's social care restructure the 16+ team became the 14+ team and a dedicated worker for Looked After Children was identified within the 'My Futures' team to enable earlier planning and support for young people during their GCSE years and transition to post 16 opportunities. Although The Statutory Guidance on the role of the Virtual School Head makes reference to Personal Education Plans being extended to include 16 and 17 year olds, we have focused more on ensuring robust pathway plans for all older Looked After Children which is reflected in increasing numbers of our young people entering further and higher education and relatively low number of young people who are Not in Education Employment or Training (NEET).

The Virtual School Headteacher provides an annual report to The Corporate Parenting Board and to the CYP Scrutiny Panel as part of the annual School Standards panel report. The report currently covers all aspects of education for Looked After Children and the engagement in education and training for Care Leavers.

Merton's commitment moving forward

1. We will continue to work with Early Years Specialists, Carers and setting to develop robust Early Years PEPs for 2, 3 and 4 year olds.
2. We will continue to support Looked After Children's pathway plans by ensuring earlier support for transition to education, training or employment at the end of Year 11 and beyond.
3. We will extend the Designated Teacher network to include all schools, colleges and commissioned Alternative Providers to enhance support for Merton Looked After Children and Care Leavers
4. We will build on our 'Celebrating Success' events for all age groups.
5. We will continue to support the local 'Aim Higher' project encouraging children to aspire to a university education.
6. We will continue to deliver apprenticeships specifically for our Looked After Children each year.
7. We will continue the five year track record to ensure that no Merton Looked After Child is excluded from school.

Impact measures

- A. Percentage of initial Personal Education Plans (PEP) completed within timescale.
- B. LAC primary attendance 94.8% (2012/13)
- C. 44% of LAC at Key Stage 2 achieved expected level of progress (National 31%)
- D. LAC secondary attendance 91.5% (2012/13)
- E. 21% LAC achieved 5 GCSEs including maths and English (2012/13), better than National 15.3%
- F. Number of Looked After Children excluded from school
- G. Number of Looked After Children in apprenticeships funded by Merton Council
- H. Number of Looked After Children further education
- I. Number of Care leavers in higher education
- J. Percentage of Care Leavers who are NEET
- K. Foster carers satisfaction on support provided in relation to education issues (Foster Carers survey)

Priority 4: Health of Looked After Children

The National context

Children often enter the care system with a poorer level of physical and mental health than their peers, and their longer-term outcomes remain worse. Nationally two thirds of looked after children have at least one physical health complaint, and nearly half have a mental health disorder.

Merton's track record

Health outcomes for Merton looked after children are better than the national average, these are supported by good support from NHS Trusts with good levels of routine health surveillance and access to specialist provision where necessary e.g. CAMHs.

Ninety five per cent of Merton LAC had an annual health assessment during 2013/14, compared to 87% nationally. Eighty three per cent of Merton LAC had their dental checks up to date during 2013/14, compared to 82% nationally. Ninety five per cent of Merton LAC had immunisations that were up to date during 2013/14, this is also better than the national average of 83%.

Eight per cent of Merton LAC (approximately 14 to 16 young people) were identified as having a substance misuse problem during 2013/14, compared to 3.5% nationally. Our higher percentage of substance misuse identification is representative of a proactive campaign to get social workers to make referrals for substance misuse assessment and intervention and partly due to our larger number of older YP in care as a proportion of the total cohort. Specialist substance misuse services are commissioned which provide a full range of support and therapeutic interventions for young people under the age of 25, using substances at a level affecting their ability to live a healthy, functioning life. Over the last year the services have engaged young people referred for targeted interventions via schools, the youth justice service and other voluntary and statutory agencies by providing structured programmes of support and education to reduce and cease drug/alcohol use.

Our annual strengths and difficulties questionnaire which measures the emotional wellbeing of our children in care puts us in line with the national average (Merton 12.3 average score, national average 13.9, 2013/14). A report is presented to our corporate parenting board annual the findings of which influence service improvement.

Merton's commitment moving forward

1. Health outcomes remain positive for our looked after children, we will ensure that we retain a good practice focus on dental appointments and LAC health appointments.
2. We will continue to use LAC review to ensure that the child's health needs are being met and escalate matters of concern to appropriate services.
3. We will continue to work with partners to ensure that we meet the needs of our LAC cohort when they are identified as having a substance misuse problem. We are confident that we have a good rate of successful identification, but need to improve performance in engaging young people with interventions.
4. For those children where mental health concerns are identified liaison takes place with CAMHS to ensure that needs are met. In some cases where children are not in settled placements the provision of support can prove challenging we will continue to find solutions to support these children.
5. We will continue to commission an independent advocacy service for Looked After Children

6. We will maintain effective challenge and accountability of services through the LAC Health Strategy group.

Impact measures

- A. Annual dental checks: 83% of Merton LAC have had their dental checks on time, this is in line with national 82% (2013/14)
- B. Annual health checks: 95% have annual health check, this is better than national 87%(2013/14)
- C. Annual immunisation: 95% have up to date immunisations, this is better than national 83% (2013/14)
- D. 8% of Merton LAC (approximately 14-16 young people) were identified as having a substance misuse problem during 2013/14, compared to 3.5% nationally
- E. Emotional and behavioural health SDQ score (strengths and difficulties questionnaire) Merton's average score 12.3, national benchmark 13.9
- F. Number of Looked After Children accessing the independent advocacy service.

Priority 5: Participation and positive activities

The National context

We all want our looked after children and care leavers to shape and influence the parenting they receive, and to see their views reflected in our strategies and commissioning plans. The council should facilitate Children in Care Council which encourages and supports children and young people to participate in decisions that affect their lives.

Social workers and carers are expected to support looked after children to access and benefit from hobbies, leisure, cultural and sporting activities. Social care staff should work with other professionals to maximise LAC access to local services.

Merton's track record

A central component of Merton's User Voice Strategy is a commitment to encouraging and supporting Looked After Children to give us feedback and to ensure that their views are key to informing decisions about care planning as well as informing wider service planning and delivery.

We listens to the views of children and young people, carers, parents and other service users through four key avenues. These are:

- An approach expected of all practitioners and managers which puts children's wishes and feelings at the centre of decision making and planning
- Merton's youth participation promise
- Targeted user feedback
- Complaints and compliments.

We have commissioned an independent advocacy service for many years to provide support to Looked After Children to ensure that their voice is heard and is central to decisions made about their care, since 2013 this has been delivered as an opt out service. We receive feedback from the advocacy service which has influenced practice and service strategy. For example young people have reported that any change in social worker causes them anxiety. We understand that having to build new relationships is difficult, so when we restructured our children's social care division in 2013 we minimised the transition points for children and young people moving through our services.

We have supported looked after young people to be involved in fostering preparation training and foster carer support group meetings, in order to share their experiences of being looked after. Feedback from potential/ current foster carers suggested that the training increased their understanding of the needs and experiences of looked after children; the aim is that this will have a positive impact on their practice:

- "it was good to understand the foster child's views"
- "It was good to think about the situation from a child's perspective"
- "it was nice to hear the view of other foster children"
- "I have learnt about how to welcome a child. Let the child know you are there for him"

All our in-house foster cares are required to regularly complete a "Let's Talk" update with all children in their care, these are fed back to social workers to take forward any concerns or actions identified.

Our Independent Reviewing Officer Service (IRO) is growing stronger to support and monitor how we the local authority ensures that every child's view and wish is heard in decisions about their care plans.

We facilitate young people's forums and activities which link with and impact on the management of children's services and the adult democratic process. These include the Children in Care council, Youth Parliament, Young Advisors, Young Inspectors and Your Shout (specifically for older young people with disabilities). Feedback from CYP across these strands of work have informed strategies including the Children and Young People's Plan, this LAC Strategy, the Care Leavers Strategy, children's services departmental service plans and discrete improvement plans.

The membership of and interest in our Children in Care Council has grown steadily throughout recent years. The appointment of a full time co-ordinator during 2012/13 enhanced this function which has been further supported by two Care Leaving apprentices during 2014/15. Representatives from the Children in Care Council played a significant role in the successful launch of the Children in Care Pledge in 2014. Young people from the Children in Care council are involved in the recruitment of senior Children Schools and Families staff including the Children Social Care Assistant Director in 2013 and the Education Assistant Director in 2014. Feedback from the Children in Care council is obtained by the Director and Lead Member for Children's Services who ensure a feedback loop to the Corporate Parenting Board, MSCB and the council's Administration. Actions arising from this feedback are taken forward by relevant parties and fed back to the young people. An example of this is a recent request for gym membership for looked after children following this request as at September 2014, 20 LAC have received free membership to our local gyms.

When things go wrong, Merton reviews feedback from children and young people as a central part of our drive for continuous improvement of services. Complaints are resolved quickly through resolution meetings at stage one, and are seen as an opportunity to improve services. Looked after young people also have access to independent advocates.

Merton's commitment moving forward

1. We will continue to ensure an independent advocacy service is available for children looked after by the local authority
2. We will continue to support our IRO service to deliver robust challenge to practice
3. We will continue to encourage participation in the Children in Care council, and our young people to take on leadership roles in areas of interest.
4. We will continue to resolve complaints quickly and if possible through resolution meetings before the need for formal complaints arise.
5. We will continue to identify interests and hobbies through our care planning process
6. We will continue to create a range of opportunities for appropriate formal and informal 'participation' and engagement for our looked after children, including for example coffee meetings, fun activities and surveys.

Impact measures

- A. Percentage of LAC satisfied with the service received (IRO survey)
- B. Percentage of LAC participating in there reviews
- C. Maintain a range of at least 8 to 15 children and young people regularly participating in the Children in Care Council events
- D. Number of complaints made by children in care
- E. Percentage of children supported by the independent advocacy service
- F. Numbers of young people involved in task and finish service develop groups.

Priority 6: Looked after Children of particular circumstance

The National context

Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012

The Ministry of Justice (MoJ) and Home Office (HO) recognise that young adults who have been in care can be particularly vulnerable as they transition into adulthood, particularly if they are in the criminal justice system. They are also a particularly vulnerable group that are at risk of being drawn into crime. Equally we know that care leavers can be particularly vulnerable to becoming a victim of crime, including in some cases falling victim to grooming and exploitation online or offline.

Despite the recent reduction in the number of first time entrants to the criminal justice system, and a welcome drop in the number of children imprisoned in England and Wales, looked after children are vastly over-represented in the youth justice system: children in care and care leavers account for less than one per cent of the population (The Care Leavers Association, 2013) yet almost a third of children in prison have been looked after by a local authority at some point (HMIP, 2012).

- Children in care and care leavers account for less than 1% of the population.
- Over 25% of the adult prison population has previously been in care.
- 49% of young men under the age of 21 in the Criminal Justice System have spent time in care.
- 27% of young men in custody have spent time in care.
- 40% of girls in the 15-18 age group in custody have spent some time in local care¹.

Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SENDIS)

Short breaks

Short breaks are part of a continuum of services which support children in need and their families. They include the provision of day, evening, overnight and weekend activities for the child and can take place in the child's own home, the home of an approved carer, or in a residential setting. The decision to provide a short break under Section 17 or under Section 20 of the Childrens Act 1989 should be informed by the assessment of the child's needs and should take account of parenting capacity and wider family and environmental factors, the wishes and feelings of the child and his/her parents and the nature of the service to be provided.

Residential educational placements

The issue of residential school placements is a more complex matter and will depend on the individual circumstances of each case. A reference point for such decisions is case law dated 2011: R (O) v East Riding of Yorkshire Council (2011) EWCA CIV 196.

In the majority of cases the decision to place a child in a residential school setting will be informed by a statutory assessment under the terms of the Children and Families Act 2014. The statutory assessment involves following a specific set of legal procedures, and draws together evidence from educational, medical, social care and other staff.

In relation to 38 week residential school placements there will also need to be consideration given to individual case circumstances, and whilst a the majority of children with not become

¹ Source: Contact: [Care Leavers, LAC and the Criminal Justice System](#)

looked after, there will be circumstances where some will. This is particularly the case when they have respite in addition and the Section 20 criteria are met.

Merton's track record

Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders

To support and embed the Legal Aid and Sentencing/Punishment of Offenders Act 2012 (LASPO) in Merton, a LASPO Operational Group was established in January 2014 to monitor the arrangements and process in place when young people are placed on remand.

During 2014 Merton's LASPO Operational group has developed a LASPO policy and process. Our Youth Offender Management Panel regularly reviews young people up to the age of 19 this allows local partners to come together to ensure that risk management of young offenders is managed in a co-ordinated way.

Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

Short breaks

Disabled children assessed as needing short breaks to support them remaining within their families are offered a variety of services, including direct payments, day care provision and overnight stays. Merton's disabled children have a choice of day care and weekend provision and access to mainstream holiday schemes, depending on their individual needs and requirements. Some of these services are commissioned from external providers and offer a range of services including weekday, after school, holiday and weekend activities.

Merton continues to run a children's respite home (Brightwell) that offers both day care and overnight short breaks for disabled children, which was graded Good by Ofsted in 2015. Inspectors noted that we are "very focussed on outcomes, partnerships and goals" and we have a clear idea of what to prioritise to maintain a good care environment. There remains a small group of young people who have been unable to access the overnight provision at Brightwell due to their specific needs. The two main groups in this area are children with specific medical needs, requiring more specialist medical intervention and children with extreme challenging behaviour which could put others at risk of injury. These children have their needs met through external services.

Any decision to place a child under a Section 20 short breaks arrangement is authorised by a Service Manager and presented to the Edge of Care and Rehab Panel.

Residential educational placements

Children and young people who have complex special needs and educational requirements are supported into appropriate residential educational placements. These residential placements offer children and young people the assistance to pursue their academic achievements, develop independence and living skills.

Merton only places in educational residential placements which are graded good or Outstanding, in exceptional circumstances if a school is rated as adequate and meets a very specific need senior management authorisation is sought.

The quality of placement for these most complex children have been well matched, no child or young person has needed to be transferred to an alternative provision.

Merton's commitment moving forward

Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders

1. We will ensure robust multi-agency exit plans are in place for all LAC at point of discharge from custody
2. We will ensure that the voice of the young person in custody is heard
3. We will ensure the robust tracking of multi-agency involvement on all LASPO cases to promote practice standards

Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

1. We will ensure that Merton continues to facilitate diverse ranges of communication methods to enable children with disabilities to influence their plans and placements.
2. We will continue to improve multi agency coordination to meet the complex needs of these children and young people
3. We will continue to ensure that our children and young have access to the appropriate provision based and a robust needs assessment
4. We will continue to seek the consult of children and parents when developing services

Short breaks

1. We will continue to ensure that good quality suitable short break provision made available
2. We will ensure that for those children who are fostered and require respite that this need is met

Residential educational placements

3. We will continue to ensure that only good or outstanding residential educational placements are procured, except in exceptional circumstances when senior management authorisation will be sought.
4. We will ensure that where children are placed at a distance we will maintain a full service offer.

Impact measures

- A. Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders
 - a. Percentage and number of looked after children in custody.
- B. Special Educational Needs and Disabilities
 - a. Percentage and number of residential educational placement moves (expected polarity low)

Priority 7: Permanency

The National context

The best possible care involves giving children security, stability and love through their childhood and beyond. There are a range of permanent care options which can do this. Many looked after children are looked after by local authorities for short periods and then return home to live with their families. Local authorities are under a legal duty to support families to stay together when that is a realistic prospect. Nationally three quarters of looked after children are in foster placements. For some this is a temporary arrangement, but for many children, particularly older children with a link to their birth parents, long-term foster care, often with family or friends, is the best permanent care option.

Special guardianship was introduced in 2005 as a way of giving foster carers, a relative or family friend parental responsibility for a child without severing the child's ties with his or her birth family. Residence orders were introduced in 1989 and are usually used by relatives. Residence orders are made for some children who are in children's homes – when this environment can provide the best for children with particularly complex and specialist needs. Each of these options can offer the best possible care to an individual child.

In some cases adoption is the best option – particularly for younger children, but also for some older children. Adoption gives vulnerable children, including many with complex needs and a history of ill-treatment, the greatest possible stability, in a permanent home with a permanent family. The Government continues to monitor the timeliness of adoption through annual returns and the adoption scorecard process. The adoption scorecard focuses on local authorities and the adoption process for children; this has developed to include data on timeliness for prospective adopters from 2014.

Merton's track record

We have a longstanding approach to preventing children becoming looked after. If we understand that it is in the best interest of the child to become looked after we seek to ensure that our care plans appropriately safeguard our children and support decisions around permanency. As such we pursue permanency in the form of returning home, placements with friends and family as connected persons, long term fostering, residential care, special guardianship orders and adoption.

We have worked with the British Association for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF) to review and support our permanency improvement plans. Recommendations have been followed through and we have completed significant work around Family and Friends care across the service and embedded a greater understanding about Connected Persons and the processes to be followed.

Permanence planning for children aged 0-5 years has seen a great deal of focus over the past 18 months and as a result we have seen an increase in the number of Special Guardianship and Adoption Orders made (Ten looked after children were adopted and four made subject of a Special Guardianship Order during 2013/14 year). We ensure that we track each child's progress to permanency so that we can understand their journey and learn from any delay that may have been experienced.

Merton's Adoption agency was inspected in January 2013, Ofsted found that we provided an effective service to all affected by adoption and gave an overall judgement of Good. Inspectors noted that the DfE adoption scorecard published in 2012 highlighted historical poor timeliness issues but found that the authority had worked hard to improve. They recognised that subsequent year on year performance showed substantial improvements across all areas

albeit that the impact of the rolling three year data would continue to impact on published performance tables for some time. We recognise the need to maintain our improvement trajectory and continue to act more quickly in our family finding and deliver our action plans to improve permanency and speed up care proceedings. Ofsted noted that Adoption is viewed as a positive option for all children needing permanency, whatever their needs or characteristics and that “the lifelong implications of adoption are fully understood and people’s needs are catered for, whatever their age”. Since our inspection we have also strengthened our sub regional working, launching a South West London Adoption Consortium Adoption website in November 2014. This aims to improve information and guidance published for those interested in adopting, improve our recruitment processes delivering a south west London approach to application interest and assessment.

Merton’s commitment moving forward

1. We will remain committed to considering all options of permanency for all our children requiring a placement outside of their own family; this includes for those with the most complex needs, regardless of the impact on our performance scorecard
2. We will continue to work closely with the South West London Adoption Consortium (SWLAC) to ensure that we are pooling resources and subsequently securing best matches.
3. We will maintain an effective publicity campaign to ensure that we are targeting carers who are prepared and able to meet the complex needs of the children for whom adoption is the plan.
4. We will continue to improve the timeliness of good quality matches for children for whom permanency is the plan.
5. We will improve permanency planning for children aged 6+.

Impact measures

- A. Placement length (2 years or more) in line with national average or better (Merton three year rolling average 66%, national average 68% (2011 – 2013))
- B. Number of adoptions made (2013/14, 10 CYP)
- C. Average time (days) between entering care and moving in with adoptive family, for children who have been adopted’ indicator shows improvement (Adoption Scorecard indicator A1). Merton’s current A1 performance is 689 days (2011-2014), the national average is 647 days (2010-2013)
- D. Number of adult adopters recruited (2013/14, 7 adopters (5 couples and 2 singles))
- E. Numbers of Special Guardianship Orders granted (2013/14, 4 CYP)
- F. Number (and percentage) of 6 to 14 year old children with Full Care Orders (Section 31) who have been permanently matched.

Priority 8: Care Leavers

The National context

The duty to promote the educational achievement of a looked-after child extends to looked-after young people aged 16 or 17 preparing to leave care. These are referred to in the Children Act 1989 as 'eligible children'.

Merton's track record

In 2014 Merton launched a Care Leavers strategy based on the DfE best practice paper. Priority 8 should therefore be read in conjunction with the Care Leavers strategy in which all of our priorities and commitments to our Care leavers are presented.

Merton has maintained and strengthened services for care leavers to support their successful transition to adulthood. The outcomes achieved by our care leavers often depend on the age they become looked after, however our ambitions for all looked after children and care leavers remain high. In addition to a targeted Care Leavers strategy we also formalised our commitment to all Care Leaver's by signing up to a co-developed Charter in February 2013.

Our organisational structure (14+ Team) supports the delivery of our ambitions and ensures that we develop long lasting proactive relationships with our young people. A number of our Care leavers choose to continue to support the Children in Care Council and more informally choose to keep in touch with us when they have leave care for advice, guidance and kinship.

Merton's commitment moving forward

1. Performance in the Care Leaver area is challenging and we have therefore worked with partners to develop a Care Leaver Strategy which targets issues relating to housing, employment and health. Please refer to the Care Leavers strategy for more information about our service and support commitments.

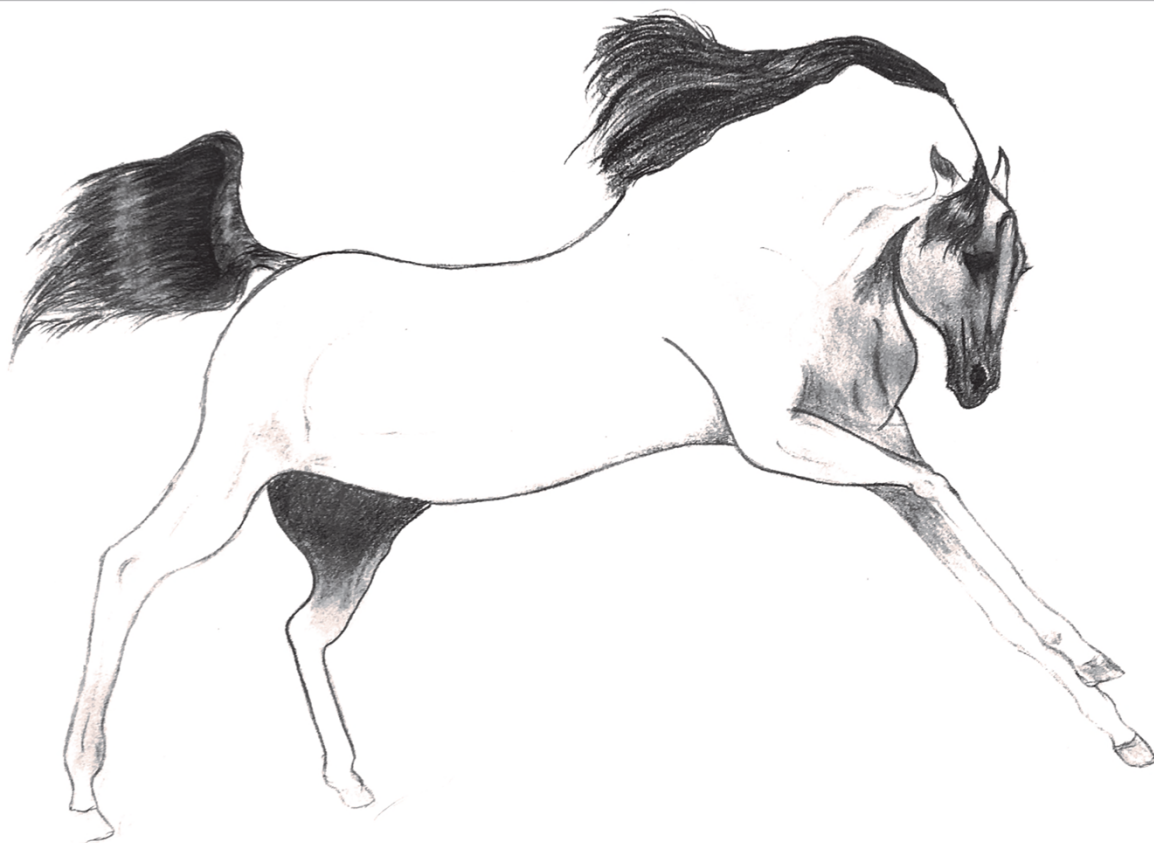
Impact measures

- A. A range of impact measures relating to Care Leavers education; attainment and housing amongst other things are addressed in our Care Leavers Strategy.

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MERTON COUNCIL

The Virtual School for Looked After Children and Care Leavers



Annual report 2014 - 2015

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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This is the annual report of work of the Virtual School for Looked After Children (LAC) and Care Leavers for the academic year 2014- 2015.
- 1.2 It draws together the work of all LA officers involved in securing the best outcomes for LAC and Care Leavers seeking support to continue in education or training.
- 1.3 The needs of individual LAC are kept at the centre of the Council’s work, and the importance of closing the gap between the outcomes for LAC, and their non looked after peers, remains both a national and local priority. Ensuring the best educational experiences and outcomes for LAC provides them with the best opportunity to develop into active and emotionally secure adults who are able to play a full and productive role in our communities.
- 1.4 The report and its findings enable us to identify future priorities to ensure we provide the best service for all those working to improve the educational outcomes for Merton’s LAC and Care Leavers. These priorities can be found in section 8 of the report.
- 1.5 The core purpose of The Virtual School, Merton is to ensure that there are high aspirations for all children and young people in public care and to support and challenge all those who work with them to promote their educational achievement and make sure they reach their potential. This includes children looked after by Merton wherever they access education but also those children looked after by other boroughs attending schools and educational settings in Merton .Whilst the majority of the data included in this report focuses on the outcomes of children looked after by Merton, the Virtual School’s support for those children looked after by other boroughs is considerable and includes:
 - work with the Designated Leads for LAC in Merton schools to ensure their work with all LAC is as strong as possible;
 - tracking the outcomes of all LAC in Merton schools, including those looked after by other boroughs, and ensuring that schools are working to narrow the gaps, through the Merton School Improvement Team; and
 - tracking the admissions and attendance of all LAC.
- 1.6 In addition, The Virtual School has responsibility for the distribution of the Pupil Premium Grant for LAC to remove barriers to learning and ensure that pupils make accelerated progress.
- 1.7 The Department for Education (DfE) collects information on the educational outcomes of LAC in Annex A of the SSDA903 return. This information is collected annually on the basis of children who have been continuously looked after for at least 12 months on 31st March. It is the data for this cohort of LAC that is used in the achievement section of this report, to allow valid comparisons with national dataset.
- 1.8 The Virtual School Merton collects, analyses and evaluates data but cohort sizes can be very small and so trends in such data should be viewed with caution. It is therefore important to note that a personalised approach to ensuring that each and every child and young person, in every year group, succeeds, underpins the strategies and actions of the Virtual School.

2. CONTEXT FOR THE VIRTUAL SCHOOL

2.1 Merton Looked After Children

2.1.1 Any child or young person of statutory school age who is, or becomes, looked after by Merton during an academic year is added to the Virtual School roll. During 2014-2015 a total of 129 school aged children were, or became looked after.

2.1.2 Table - Merton statutory school age pupil numbers by key stage

	Reception	KS1	KS2	KS3	KS4	Total
In borough school or education setting	1 (1)	7 (6)	6 (6)	11 (8)	18 (17)	43 (38)
Out of borough school or education setting	0 (0)	5 (3)	16 (15)	13 (15)	24 (17)	58 (50)
Total	1 (1)	12 (9)	22 (21)	24(23)	42 (34)	101(88)

As of 26th June 2015, point of reference for year on year comparative purposes for the Virtual School role. 2014 numbers in brackets.

There were 101 pupils on role from reception to year 11. This represents an increase of 13 pupils when compared with the number for the previous academic year.

2.1.3 The Virtual School also keeps a roll of pre-school children (0-4); those aged 16 -18 whose education, employment and training provision is recorded under the Raising of Participation Age requirement; and the number of young care leavers aged 19 – 21 that may continue to require support from the Virtual School. During the academic year 2014-2015:

- there were 83 young people between the ages of 16 and 18 eligible for services and support for education or training from the Virtual School;
- there were 93 care leavers aged 19 – 21 on 31st March 2015.

Although some involvement from the Virtual School may continue, children and young people are removed from the school roll once they cease to be looked after.

2.1.4 Children with Special Educational Needs

Based on the Special Educational Needs code of Practice January 2015, around 70% of Merton LAC had some form of Special Educational Need during 2014 - 2015. This is much higher than in the Merton school population as a whole. Nationally, in the 2014 census, 2.8% of all children and 29% of LAC had a Statement of Educational Need¹.

2.1.5 From September 2014, in line with the new legislation detailed in Part 3 of the Children and Families Act 2014 and associated regulations, and the Statutory Guidance, Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice: 0 to 25 years, arrangements have been put in place to support the transition for relevant pupils from Statements of Educational Need to Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs). The Virtual School worked with Merton and other authorities where pupils are placed to ensure a smooth transition. Some pupils continue to have statements, and the transition to EHCPs will happen in the coming months.

¹ DfE SRF 49/2014 Outcomes for Children Looked After Children by local Authorities in England as at 31 March 2014

2.1.6 Table - Merton LAC with Statement of Educational Need or EHCP

	Reception	KS1	KS2	KS3	KS4	Total
In borough school or education setting	0	1	0	5	7	13
Out of borough school or education setting	0	0	6	5	15	26
Total	0	1	6	10	22	39

38.6% of Merton LAC have a Statement of Educational Need or EHCP.

2.1.7 Types of School attended by Merton LAC

Merton LAC attend a variety of maintained and independent schools. The Virtual School recognises the variety of schools and education settings now available to children and young people and seeks to ensure the setting that best meets their needs.

2.1.8 With effect from this academic year many former alternative education providers have gained DfE registration as independent schools. This allows for them to accept full responsibility for the education of pupils exclusively on their roll, or to provide a service to those pupils whose needs are best met through Alternative Provision.

2.1.9 Pupils can be registered and attend more than one school or setting. Where this is the case, the Virtual School records all settings attended but the information in the table below shows the type of school or setting which is the child or young person’s main provision of registration. In other words, it records the school which is responsible for the pupil’s education, even if as part of this it has arranged some alternative provision.

2.1.10 The Virtual School expects to be consulted when any change to timetable or provision is proposed and this would normally be by way of a review of the child’s personal education plan.

2.1.11 Table - Types of education provision attended by Merton LAC

	LA mainstream	LA special	LA Alternative Provider	Academy	Free School	Independent	Independent Special	Non Maintained School Special	Other Alternative Provider	Total
EYs/Primary	28	0	0	4	0	0	3	0	0	35
Secondary	19	6	8	15	0	0	12	1	5	66
Total	47	6	8	19	0	0	15	1	5	101

2.2. Other Borough Looked After Children attending Merton schools

2.2.1 The Virtual School strives to ensure an accurate register of other borough LAC in Merton Schools is kept, so that support for them and the schools they attend is the best it can possibly be. Each term the Virtual School sends a proforma to all schools requesting details of any LAC on their roll.

2.2.2 Table - Other Borough Looked After Pupils

Other Borough LAC in Merton Schools	2014-15	2013-14	2012-13
Primary	22	-	-
Secondary	33*	-	-
Total	55	61	53

* This includes 23 Yr 11 students

2.2.3 There are 55 other borough LAC attending Merton schools. This is a slight reduction on the previous year and replicates the mean average of the last 4 years. This compares with 43 Merton LAC attending Merton Schools. Stanford Primary School and St Mark's Academy have consistently been the schools with the highest number of LAC, including other borough LAC, on roll.

2.3 Looked After Children applying for schools in Merton

2.3.1 Merton School Admissions Team advises the Virtual School of applications and admissions from non-Merton LAC, which may require a follow up discussion with the headteacher of the child's 'home' Virtual School and/or carers to ensure child's need will be best matched by the school of preference. In order to discharge responsibility to all LAC within the borough, the Virtual School Head works with the Admissions Team at Merton to ensure applications to Merton Schools and Academies are processed as quickly as possible. If the School Admissions Team note any delay or concerns regarding school placement then the children's details are referred to the Children Missing Education Panel.

2.3.2 Table - time, in days, between receipt of application for a school place and the child going on school roll.

No of days	0 – 10	11 – 20	21 – 30	31 – 40
Primary (12 children)	7	8	0	1
Secondary (17 children)	6	7	3	1

The gap between the application being received and a child joining a school roll does not necessarily mean that the child has not been in school/on a school roll. Particularly for primary aged pupils it is likely that the application to a school is part of a planned placement move.

3. THE ACHIEVEMENT OF PUPILS IN THE VIRTUAL SCHOOL

3.1 Overview

- 3.1.1** The Department for Education (DfE) collects information on the educational outcomes of Looked After Children (LAC) in Annexe A of the SSDA903 return. This information is collected annually on the basis of children who have been continuously looked after for at least 12 months on 31st March. This is the data that is used in this report, allowing comparisons with national datasets which are collected at the same time.
- 3.1.2** The national dataset regarding the achievement of LAC for 2015 is not yet available. The latest national comparisons that appear in this report are from 2014.
- 3.1.3** It should also be noted that, although their achievement is not noted in this report, the Virtual School supports all Merton LAC, however long they have been registered as such, and whether they are included in the SSDA903 return.
- 3.1.4** When a child or young person becomes looked after, the Virtual School strives to complete a retrospective chronology which includes details of schools attended and educational attainment and progress to date. This data is used to track individual and cohort performance and allows analysis against local and national indicators.

3.2 Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFSP)

- 3.2.1** The EYFSP is an assessment against the 17 Early Learning Goals (ELG). These assessments are completed and reported for each child by the end of the academic year in which they reach the age of 5 i.e. Reception Year.
- 3.2.2** The ELGs are grouped into the following 'prime' areas: Communication and Language; Physical Development; Personal, Social and Emotional Development; and Literacy and Mathematics. Achievement at least at the expected level in all these 'prime' areas would mean that a child has achieved a Good Level of Development (GLD). Assessments are also made in the areas of Understanding the World, and Expressive Arts and Design.
- 3.2.3** Table - EYFSP outcomes

EYFSP Good Level of Development (GLD)	2014		2015	
	Percentage GLD	No. of Children	Percentage GLD	No. of Children
Merton LAC	0%	0	50%	2
Merton All Pupils	60%		68%	
National All Pupils	60%		66%	

- 3.2.4** One child who was assessed using the EYFSP achieved the good level of development. The other child scored well, achieving the expected standard in many areas, but was missing achievement in a few key areas (notably in those related to social communication), meaning the GLD was not achieved. This child has now transitioned to Year 1 and ongoing tracking of progress indicates this is accelerating.
- 3.2.5** The tiny number of children in this cohort mean that all data, especially when comparing with national averages, should be viewed with caution. However, this tiny number is also indicative of the success of the Borough's Early Help strategies that have either prevented children becoming looked after, or have achieved permanency for children through adoption.
- 3.2.6** No national LAC cohort information is available for comparison at this key stage.

3.3 Key Stage 1 (KS1)

3.3.1 The Phonics Screening Check is a reading test based on pupils' ability to recognise words and sounds using phonic decoding strategies. Pupils' performance is reported on the basis of whether they have achieved the expected standard or not. There are no grades. All pupils in Year 1 are expected to be checked unless they have no phoneme/grapheme correspondence (ie they are unable to link letters on the page to the sound they make). The small numbers of pupils that do not achieve the expected standard in Year 1 are rechecked at the end of Year 2.

3.3.2 Table - Year 1 Phonics Screening Check outcomes

Phonics Screening Check (Year 1)	2013		2014		2015	
	Percentage achieving standard	No. of Children	Percentage achieving standard	No. of Children	Percentage achieving standard	No. of Children
Merton LAC	0%	1	20%	5	n/a	0
Merton All Pupils	68%		76%		77%	
National All Pupils	69%		74%		77%	

3.3.3 No Merton LAC were on roll in Year 1 as of the 31st March, and so there are no Merton outcomes for this year.

3.3.4 KS1 SATs take place in Year 2. Each pupil is teacher assessed in reading, writing and mathematics. By the end of KS1, pupils are expected to achieve at least at Level 2. This level is further divided: Level 2C is just into the level; Level 2B is securely at Level 2; and Level 2A is at the top of Level 2. The performance of pupils working towards Level 1 is described as 'W'. P levels are used to describe the attainment of those children with Special Educational Need who are working below National Curriculum levels.

3.3.5 Tables - KS1 outcomes

Key Stage 1 - READING	2013				2014				2015			
	2c+	2b+	3+	No.	2c+	2b+	3+	No.	2c+	2b+	3+	No.
Merton LAC	100%	100%	100%	1	100%	100%	0%	1	83%	50%	0%	6
Merton All Pupils	87%	76%	26%		89%	80%	29%		90%	81%	29%	
National LAC	69%				71%				TBC			
National All Pupils	89%	79%	29%		90%	81%	31%		90%	82%	32%	

Key Stage 1 - WRITING	2013				2014				2015			
	2c+	2b+	3+	No.	2c+	2b+	3+	No.	2c+	2b+	3+	No.
Merton LAC	100%	100%	0%	1	100%	100%	0%	1	83%	33%	0%	6
Merton All Pupils	81%	62%	12%		84%	65%	14%		87%	69%	16%	
National LAC	61%				61%				TBC			
National All Pupils	85%	67%	15%		86%	70%	16%		88%	72%	18%	

Key Stage 1 - MATHS	2013				2014				2015			
	2c+	2b+	3+	No.	2c+	2b+	3+	No.	2c+	2b+	3+	No.
Merton LAC	100%	100%	100%	1	100%	0%	0%	1	83%	33%	0%	6
Merton Schools All Pupils	90%	73%	21%		92%	79%	24%		92%	78%	26%	
National LAC	71%				72%				TBC			
National All Pupils	91%	78%	23%		92%	80%	24%		93%	82%	26%	

3.3.6 83% of Merton LAC (five of the cohort of six) attained the expected Level 2c or above in reading, writing and mathematics. This is below the national averages for all pupils in each of these subjects, but above the national averages for LAC nationally in 2014. The one child that did not achieve the expected Level 2 or above made slow progress over the key stage, and will be targeted for support as they move into Year 3.

3.4 Key Stage 2 (KS2)

3.4.1 KS2 SATs take place in Year 6. Each pupil is tested in reading, mathematics and grammar, punctuation and spelling. They are also teacher assessed in reading, writing, mathematics and science. By the end of KS2, pupils are expected to achieve at least at Level 4. This level is further divided for the subjects tested (but not teacher assessed): Level 4C is just into the level; Level 4B represents more secure achievement; and Level 4a is at the top of the level. Pupils attaining Level 5 or Level 6 are working above age related expectations.

3.4.2 Pupils' progress across KS2 is also measured at the end of Year 6. Pupils are expected to have made at least two levels progress across the key stage. Pupils making more than two levels progress have made better than expected progress.

3.4.3 Tables - KS2 outcomes

Key Stage 2 - Reading	2013				2014				2015			
	4c+	4b+	5+	No.	4c+	4b+	5+	No.	4c+	4b+	5+	No.
Merton LAC	100%	100%	67%	5	100%	100%	50%	3	100%	100%	0%	2
Merton All Pupils	90%	79%	49%		91%	80%	52%		91%	82%	52%	
National LAC	63%				68%				TBC			
National All Pupils	86%	75%	45%		89%	78%	50%		89%	80%	49%	

Key Stage 2 - Writing	2013			2014			2015		
	4+	5+	No.	4+	5+	No.	4+	5+	No.
Merton LAC	100%	33%	5	100%	0%	3	100%	50%	2
Merton All Pupils	85%	33%		86%	36%		89%	38%	
National LAC	55%			59%			TBC		
National All Pupils	74%	48%		76%	52%		89%	43%	

Key Stage 2 - Maths	2013				2014				2015			
	4c+	4b+	5+	No.	4c+	4b+	5+	No.	4c+	4b+	5+	No.
Merton LAC	100%	67%	33%	5	100%	50%	0%	3	100%	50%	50%	2
Merton All Pupils	86%	77%	47%		88%	78%	46%		89%	79%	45%	
National LAC	59%				61%				TBC			
National All Pupils	85%	73%	41%		86%	76%	42%		89%	80%	49%	

3.4.4 Both LAC pupils in Year 6 achieved the expected Level 4 or above in all three subjects: one child achieved the higher Level 5. The percentage puts the achievement of LAC in Merton well above the national averages.

3.5 Key Stage 4 (KS4)

3.5.1 Table - KS4 outcomes

GCSE	2014					2015				
	Any passes	5+ GCSEs at Grade A*-G or equivalent	5+ GCSEs at Grade A*-C or equivalent	5+ GCSEs Grade A*-C (or equivalent) incl En/maths	No. of Children	Any passes	5+ GCSEs at Grade A*-G or equivalent	5+ GCSEs at Grade A*-C or equivalent	5+ GCSEs Grade A*-C (or equivalent) incl En/maths	No. of Children
Merton LAC	60%	60%	40%	0%	5	75%	33%	8%	8%	12
Merton Schools All Pupils	97%	92%	71%	64%			94%	69%	58%	
National LAC			16%	12%		To be published 2016				

3.5.2 8% of Merton LAC achieved 5+ GCSEs at Grade A*-C including English and mathematics (this represents one child). This is below the 2014 national average for LAC of 12%. The achievement of students at this key stage will be an ongoing priority for the Virtual School in the coming year.

3.5.3 Of the 12 students in this cohort, eight (67%) had special educational needs, including seven with statements. These proportions are well above national averages, and well above the proportion of LAC students last year with SEN (20%).

3.6 Post 16

3.6.1 Three young people followed A level/ A level equivalent courses.

Young Person	Courses and grades as shared by student	Destination
A	Btech Performing Arts (Distinction) Btech Art (Merit) 'A' level Sociology	Roehampton University to read psychology
B	'A' level English Literature, Psychology and Sociology (grades CDE)	Christ Church Canterbury
C	3 A levels	Gap year

3.6.2 52 out of 67 young people aged 16 or above have pursued were successful in a range of courses, from Entry Level to Level 3.

3.6.3 Six young people have completed their degrees (three in nursing; one in Computer Science; one HND in Health and Social Care; one HND in Event Management (Hospitality)).

4 Actions undertaken by the Virtual School to secure improved outcomes

4.1 Ofsted

- 4.1.2** The Virtual School continued to strive to ensure that all children and young people attend good or outstanding schools. Where a LAC remained in a school judged to be less than good in its most recent inspection, very careful consideration was given to the child's situation, and it was decided that a move would not be in the child's best interest, and monitoring of the pupil's progress increased.
- 4.1.3** During 2014 – 2015 81% of statutory school aged LAC attended schools, where a grade was known, that are good or better. This is the same as the proportion attending such schools in 2014.
- 4.1.4** In the primary phase 76% of pupils attended schools, where a grade was known, that are good or better.
- 4.1.5** In the secondary phase 87% of students attended schools, where a grade was known, that are good or better. Of those students attending in borough schools where a grade was known, 93% attended schools that are good or better. Of those pupils attending other borough schools, 81% attended good or better schools. This difference reflects the current high standards in Merton secondary and special (with secondary age students) schools: 92% were judged good or better by the end of the academic year 2014 – 2015. Since then that proportion has risen to 100%.

4.1.6 Table – Quality of schools attended by Merton Looked After Children

	At school in	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory/ RI	No current category	Total
EY/Primary	Merton	1	6	3	4	14
	Other borough	1	14	6	0	21
Secondary	Merton	6	20	2	1	29
	Other borough	10	16	6	5	37
Total		18	56	17	10	101
% of Merton LAC		17.8%	55.4%	14.6%	11.9%	

4.2 Personal Education Plans (PEPs)

- 4.2.1** All LAC must have a care plan, of which the Personal Education Plan (PEP) is an integral part. The PEP is an evolving record of what needs to happen to ensure each child or young person makes expected progress and fulfils his or her potential. During the PEP process, the achievement of LAC is carefully tracked, and where they are falling behind, schools are challenged to identify how they might be supported to make accelerated progress, including how the Pupil Premium Grant for LAC might be best used to secure improved outcomes.
- 4.2.2** During 2014/15 281 initial and review PEPs were completed. Statutory guidance requires that a child's PEP is reviewed each term. The Virtual School has robust systems and processes to track, monitor and report on their timeliness and quality. Equal regard is paid to the education of children who are placed out of borough as well as those who live in Merton and the Virtual School ensures the challenges of distant placements are met, including attendance at Personal Education Planning Meetings

4.2.3 Much work was undertaken during the academic year to ensure that the PEP embedded within the new Social Care Information System meets developing needs for planning and tracking progress. The Virtual School worked in close partnership with social workers to coordinate meetings and record and administer PEPs.

4.2.4 Table – Timescale of PEP Completion

	Autumn 14	Spring 15	Summer 15	Academic Year 14-15
No. who became LAC	24	16	24	64
Ceased being LAC before PEP	5	3	0	8
PEP completed within 20 days	16	11	20	47
PEP completed after 20 days	3 (one by one day)	2	4	9

4.2.5 There is a statutory requirement for Personal Education Planning meetings to take place within 20 days of a child becoming looked after, or after a change in school placement. 64 initial PEPs for children new into care were required during the academic year but eight children ceased to be LAC before the PEP due date. 47 of the required 56 initial Personal Education Planning meetings (84%) were completed within 20 days of a child becoming Looked After. Reasons for the remaining initial PEPs not being completed within the specified time scales were:

- no school place available but tuition provided whilst school being sourced;
- children becoming LAC during the school holiday period;
- Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children arriving very late in school year in Year 11.

4.2.6 Table – Timescale of PEP Review

	Autumn 14	Spring 15	Summer 16	Academic Year 14-15
No of PEPS to be reviewed	78	70	80	228
Completed within 6 months of previous PEP	73	67	78	218
% reviewed within time scales	93.5%	95.7%	97.5%	95.6%

4.2.7 95.6% of PEP reviews were completed within six months of the previous PEP which meant that they were updated in time for the child’s Care Plan Review.

4.3 Pupil Premium

4.3.1 The Virtual School was allocated a pupil premium grant of £1900 for each Looked After Child by the government. This grant was passed to schools in the maintained sector and non-maintained special schools attended by LAC, to remove barriers to learning and to accelerate progress. Qualifying schools received £600 per LAC per term during 2014/15, allowing for the grant to follow the child if a school move occurred. Payment of the grant was dependent on the implementation of interventions to support the child’s education plan, which were detailed in the PEP. The PEP document includes a finance sheet to track provision available to and accessed by our pupils, and funded by Pupil Premium. The Virtual School monitors the impact of pupil premium funded interventions via the Pupil’s Education Plan.

4.3.2 The grant was used for:

- Academic intervention programmes

- Behavioural, emotional, mental health Interventions
- Additional 1:1 support
- Learning Resources
- Out of school learning including educational visits
- Technology – hardware/software
- Specialist tuition/equipment e.g. music lessons
- Subject tuition
- Clubs and activities

4.3.3 The grant was also used to fund requests for additional resources for exceptional need and in several instances has helped a pupil to retain a mainstream school place during particularly difficult times.

4.4 One to One Tuition

4.4.1 The Sutton Trust research data shows that One to One Tuition is particularly effective in accelerating progress for children, particularly at KS2, and particularly in English and mathematics. Short, regular sessions of about 30 minutes, 3-5 times each week, and over a period of time (6-12 weeks) has optimum impact. In order to secure the best educational outcome for all Merton's LAC 1:1 tuition was considered as part of each child's or young person's Personal Education, or Pathway, Plan.

4.4.2 Tuition funded by The Virtual School was provided in the majority of cases by two key agencies: Harrison Allen Tutors and Fleet Tutors, and normally delivered in the care setting. Occasionally, 1:1 tuition was provided outside the school day by school staff.

4.4.3 Table - Number of LAC accessing 1:1 tuition

Key Stage	Total students recorded as having tuition 2014-15	Tuition for less than one term	Tuition for 1 to 2 terms	Tuition for more than 2 terms and ongoing
KS1	1(1)*	0(0)	0(0)	1(1)
KS2	5(15)	0(0)	0(0)	5(15)
KS3	10(10)	0(1)	1(1)	9(8)
KS 4	19(19)	1(0)	0(0)	18(19)
Post 16	30(29)	0(0)	2(1)	28(28)
Total	65(74)	1(1)	3(2)	61(71)

*2013-14 figures in brackets.

4.4.4 65 Merton LAC received 1:1 tuition over the course of 2014/15. Generally the focus for tuition in Key Stages 1, 2 and 3 was English and mathematics. The range of subjects broadened at KS4 to include GCSE examination subjects. The number is larger for post 16 pupils as this includes additional sessions for English for Speakers of Other Language.

4.5 Pupil Voice

- 4.5.1** The Virtual School continued to seek to develop a relationship with all its pupils and students and encouraged them to participate in their Personal Educational Planning meetings either by attending for some or all of the meeting, or by completing a view sheet.
- 4.5.2** This year the Virtual School undertook a piece of work to identify any common themes voiced by the young people. Views were collected either at PEP meetings or through a completed pupil view sheet. Themes emerged regarding friendships for the primary aged pupils; and behaviour, concentration and organisation for secondary aged pupils. 10 students raised bullying as a concern: six primary aged children and four secondary aged pupils. In all incidences the Virtual School followed up concerns to ensure the physical and emotional safety of our pupils.

4.6 Development & Training

- 4.6.1** The Virtual School continued to contribute to the development and training of education workers, including school governors social care, youth justice workers and foster carers.
- 4.6.2** The Virtual School gave a presentation on the role of the Virtual School for newly qualified teachers annually at their Induction Day.
- 4.6.3** During 2014-2015 30 Merton schools had LAC on their roll. This included LAC from other boroughs, as well as Merton LAC. To ensure that all schools (whether they currently host LAC or not) were prepared to support LAC the Virtual School supported the designated leads for LAC in all Merton schools. The training sessions across 2014/15 for the designated leads focused on the following:
- The requirements of the Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities and its implications for schools.
 - Joint training of teachers, careers and social workers with the London Fostering Association.
 - Promotion of the role of the Designated Teacher (with Croydon Virtual School and Merton's Commissioning Manager for Alternative Education).
- 4.6.4** The Virtual School Heads for Merton and Sutton worked collaboratively to deliver a training session for Governors with responsibility for LAC. The training included understanding their statutory responsibilities and how to support and challenge schools to meet children's needs.
- 4.6.5** The Virtual School led training for all new foster carers and those requiring updates on how they can support their young people to achieve in education. This training was extended to include a contribution from the Early Years Team.
- 4.6.6** In addition to support for learning at home, foster carers also used the Virtual School as a resource for advice, guidance and support for educational matters. This means that Advisory Teachers provided telephone support; gave advice with regard to the choice of school; and accompanied carers to school meetings.
- 4.6.7** Through the 2015 Merton Foster Carer Survey, 92% of respondents stated that the support provided by the Virtual School was good or excellent.

4.7 The Virtual School Newsletter & Young Merton Together

- 4.7.1** The Virtual School kept partners informed via news letter and regular contributions to Young Merton Together, an e-magazine that features key aspects of the work of the Children's Schools and Families Department and Children's Trust partners.

5. SUPPORTING LEARNING AT HOME AND ENRICHMENT

5.1 The Virtual School believes that all children should be given the best opportunity to achieve their potential. Schools and education settings need foster carers, key workers and all professionals to encourage the children and young people to aspire to, make progress and achieve academic success. As we also believe that education is more than academic performance alone the Virtual School encourages pupils to participate fully in school life and to develop extra curricular hobbies and interests. The Virtual School discusses and records these as part of the PEP.

5.2 Enrichment support

To support out of learning at home the Virtual School has:

- funded participation in the Letterbox project for 15 pupils. Each child enrolled received a parcel of books, mathematics activities, games and puzzles once each month from May to October;
- supplied resources for learning including puzzles, games CDs, DVDs and art materials;
- encouraged library membership for all LAC and actively promoted Merton Library's summer challenge "Record Breakers"; and
- funded laptop computers for secondary aged pupils who have been in care for 6 months (14 students). This was with exceptions for some young people generally related to safeguarding,

5.3 Aim Higher/Raising Aspirations

The Virtual School supported the widening participation agenda promoted by a range of universities and contributed to the continuation of the local Aim Higher Project which organised and ran visits to local universities specifically for looked after young people. Three university visits were arranged during the year. The themes were Film Making (at Kingston University), Art (at St Mary's University) and Clinic Skills (at St Georges Medical School). Eight Merton looked after young people attended these visits. Their evaluation of the visits showed that they would be more likely to aspire to university as a result of the visits, and that the visits had motivated them to work harder to achieve the grades they would require.

5.4 Art

5.4.1 During 2014/15 the Virtual School worked in partnership with Room 13 on an art project at Aragon Primary School. The project was attended by eight children and six foster carers who worked together in a relaxed and supported way to explore a variety of art techniques and learn new skills. There is to be an exhibition of their work in spring 2016.

5.4.2 As in previous years, the Virtual School produced a desk calendar for the coming academic year. The calendar featured art work from children and young people across the school age range, including those with special needs. It also featured the work of a foster carer who attended the Room 13 art project.

Children's art work was featured in the Virtual School Christmas card and notelets.

5.5 Theatre

The Virtual School organised a trip to the Polka Theatre in Wimbledon for a performance of Peter Pan. It was attended by nine children and eight carers.

5.6 Music

The Virtual School continued to fund out of school music lessons for those who express an interest. For two children it also assisted in the purchase of a guitar and keyboard, to encourage their music making.

5.7 Dance

Two students continued to attend out of school dance lessons

5.8 Science

The Virtual School funded a science workshop which was incorporated in the Children in Care Council's celebration event for primary aged children. The workshop had originally been intended as an opportunity to encourage children and carers to participate in science activities in the home but although the activities engaged and enthralled the children the event fell short of achieving its intended purpose.

5.9 Sports

The Virtual School encourages all LAC to develop healthy lifestyles and participate in sport or other physical exercise. In particular we have set ourselves the challenge to ensure that all pupils of the Virtual School have the opportunity to learn to swim. During the academic year 12 pupils attended swimming lessons.

5.10 Educational Visits

The Virtual School assisted with funding for educational visits and was able to support the fund raising efforts for one of our pupils who attended the World Scout Jamboree in Japan.

6. ATTENDANCE

6.1 Overview

- 6.1.1** School attendance is essential for children and young people to make academic progress. Regular school attendance is also linked to effective safeguarding, and a reduced risk of anti-social behaviour and crime. Children whose attendance falls below 90% are identified as persistent non-attenders.
- 6.1.2** The Virtual School has robust and rigorous processes to track and monitor pupil attendance via a commissioned service, Welfare Call. During 2014 – 2015, with the exception of children in hospital schools or remanded in custody, Welfare Call contacted every school or education setting daily and recorded attendance for each LAC on an Individual Pupil Record (IPR). This record was accessible through a secure portal from anywhere, 24 hours a day, enabling close monitoring by the Virtual School team. In particular, the Virtual School continued to be careful to ensure that accurate attendance data was recorded where a child was on the roll of a school but educated off site. The Virtual School also commissioned Welfare Call to collect attendance data for Other Borough LAC on roll of maintained schools in Merton.
- 6.1.3** Children who do not value learning or find the learning they receive inaccessible will often absent themselves from school. The Virtual School Advisory Teachers monitored their attendance and addressed any emergency or emerging issues. This included working with education welfare officers, carers, schools, social workers and other professionals to develop a plan to improve engagement, attendance and punctuality.
- 5.1.4** The Virtual School celebrated 100% attendance, or a significant improvement in attendance, with personal letters and vouchers to spend at W.H. Smith.

6.2 Whole School Attendance Data

- 6.2.1** The Virtual School roll changes frequently as children become, or cease to be, looked after. Statistics for previous years are included to help identify any trends, but need to be viewed in the context of the changing size of roll.
- 6.2.2** One pupil was very unwell during the year and achieved only 6.1% school attendance. As such, this figure is a statistical outlier and has been excluded from the data set, which equals 100 students in the table below.

6.2.3 Table - Attendance Data

Academic Year	2014-15	2013-14	2012-13	2011-12
Total Pupils (number)	100	88	98	80
Average attendance	91.7%	90.67%	87.14%	89.39%
Pupils with 25+ absence	12% (12)	17% (15)	21.4% (21)	24% (19)
Pupils with attendance >90%	75% (75)	70.4% (62)	67.3% (66)	68.8% (55)
Pupils with attendance >95%	55% (55)	55.6% (49)	54% (53)	48.8% (39)

As at 26th June 2015. Pupil numbers are identified in brackets after the proportions. There are no national comparators for this cohort.

- 6.2.4** Average attendance is calculated as the number of sessions actually attended as a percentage of the number of session available to attend. Overall, the underlying upward trend in attendance continues. This year the average attendance for Merton Looked After Pupils attending Merton Schools or settings was slightly

below that of pupils attending schools out of borough, but of no real statistical significance. The reduction in the number of pupils with 25 or more days absence continued.

6.2.5 The range was from 6% attendance for one young person (excluded from data set) to 100%. The next lowest attendance was 35%.

6.3 Attendance by Age Phase/Key Stage

	EYFS	KS1	KS2	KS3	Yr 10	Yr 11
Total number of pupils	1	12	22	23	20	22
Average attendance 14-15 (13-14 figures in brackets)	98.2% (94.7%)	98.7% (89.9%)	96.5% (97.4%)	86.1% (93.2%)	79.5% (91.3%)	87% (77.6%)
Pupils 25 day absence as a proportion of cohort	0% (0)	0% (0)	4.5% (1)	7.6% (1)	25% (5)	23% (5)
Pupils attendance > 90%	100% (1)	100% (12)	77.2% (17)	70.8% (17)	45% (9)	63.6% (14)
Pupils attendance >95%	0% (0)	100% (12)	77.2% (17)	52.2% (12)	35% (7)	27.3% (6)

Pupil numbers are identified in brackets after the proportions.

6.3.1 The average rate of attendance was 97.3% in the Early Years and Primary Age Phase: this demonstrates an improvement on rates in 2013 - 2014 when the figure was 94%, and is above the national average rate of attendance for all pupils in this phase. The average rate of attendance was 85.6% in the Secondary Age Phase, a drop on the 2013 - 2014 rate (87.3%). This will be a focus for improvement in the coming year.

6.3.2 Overall, there was an increase in rates of attendance for Early Years and KS1. The falls in attendance at KS2, KS3 and Year 10 were attributable to:

- the increased number of fixed term exclusions awarded to pupils in these age groups;
- days out of school waiting for a new school place to be found when the school has advised that they are no longer able to meet need; and
- school refusal among a small group.

While tuition is always offered in such circumstances, there can be a delay in finding a tutor with the appropriate skills to match the child's learning or behavioural need.

6.3.3 Attendance for Year 11 pupils has improved. The increased attendance both reflects the number of students in specialist settings whose timetable continues throughout the summer term, and schools' increasing response to supported study during the summer term examination period.

6.4 Change of schools

6.4.1 It is well established that for many children school provides a consistent structure to their daily lives. Apart from the expectation of academic learning it is where they develop their sense of self, their social skills and make friendships. Wherever possible, a child becoming looked after should retain his or her place at school or college. During 2014 – 2015 LA officers across a range of departments worked in partnership to ensure continuity of schooling wherever possible. The Virtual School worked to ensure that where changes to schooling became necessary as a result of care placement move, the best school or setting was identified to meet the child's needs.

6.4.2 During 2014 – 2015, 14 children and young people changed school as a result of becoming looked after or of changes in care placement. This represents 10.8% of the total number of school aged children on the Virtual School roll during the academic year. Nine children (7%) changed care placements without disruption to school place.

6.5 Other Borough LAC attending Merton Schools

6.5.1 Welfare Call monitored and collected attendance data for other borough children and young people attending Merton schools.

Other Borough LAC in Merton Schools	2014-15	2013-14	2012-13
Total Pupils	55	61	53
Average attendance	90%	92%	84%
Pupils with 25+ days absence	10% (9)	6.5% (4)	32% (17)
Pupils with attendance >90%	67.2% (37)	80.3% (49)	58% (31)
Pupils with attendance >95%	54.5% (30)	54% (33)	43% (23)

6.5.2 Average attendance for other borough LAC in Merton Schools was slightly lower than the average attendance of Merton LAC in all schools. The Virtual School Head (VSH) liaised, as required, with other Virtual School Heads regarding issues such as attendance and behaviour.

7. EXCLUSIONS

7.1 Overview

7.1.1 The Virtual School works with Merton’s Educational Psychologists, the Virtual Behaviour Service and the School Inclusion Coordinator to reduce the need for fixed term and permanent exclusions for LAC, seeking to minimize the negative impact such sanctions can have on this particularly vulnerable group of pupils.

7.1.2 The Virtual School’s Advisory Teachers encourage schools and foster carers to contact the Virtual School if a pupil is at risk of exclusion and exclusions are always followed up by the Virtual School.

7.2 Exclusions for Merton Looked After Children

7.2.1 The following tables include any Merton LAC who was excluded during their time in care. For the 2014-2015 figures all the children with fixed term exclusions were in care on 26th June 2015.

7.2.2 Table - number of exclusions

	2014-15	2013-14	2012-13
No on roll	101	88	98
Permanent Exclusions	0%	0%	0%
Fixed Term & Lunchtime Exclusions	17% (17)	11% (10)	9% (9)
National (DfE 1 st Statistical Release)	Not yet available	Not yet available	9.79%

7.2.3 Table - patterns of exclusion per pupil with one or more fixed term exclusion

	2014-15	2013-14	2012-13
1 fixed term exclusion	7%(7)	6%(5)	2%(2)
2 fixed term exclusions	3%(3)	3%(3)	4%(4)
3 fixed term exclusions	2%(2)	2%(2)	1%(1)
4 fixed term exclusions	3%(3)	0%(0)	1%(1)
5 or more fixed term exclusions	2%(2)*	0%(0)	1%(1)

Proportions expressed as a percentage of the total Virtual School Population.

** Each with 7 fixed term exclusions*

7.2.4 The most recent DfE Statistical First Release: Permanent and Fixed Period Exclusions in England 2013 to 2014 (SRF28/2015) reports that 0.06% of the school population were permanently excluded. In this context, it is very pleasing that the LA has sustained the record for seven years of no LAC child being permanently excluded.

7.2.5 Since the number of children on roll is very small, every exclusion features significantly as a percentage: it is nevertheless disappointing to notice the increase in fixed term exclusions over the year.

- 8.6% of primary age LAC were given fixed term exclusions. All LAC involved attended out of Borough schools: no child was given a fixed term exclusion from a Merton Primary School.
- 21.2% of secondary age LAC received a fixed term exclusion during the academic year. 10 out of the 29 (34%) secondary age LAC attending Merton Secondary Provision were excluded.

7.2.6 The reasons for fixed term exclusions included physical assault, unacceptable behaviour including possession and use of illegal substances, and disruptive behaviour.

7.2.7 Of the children receiving a fixed term exclusion:

- 29% had been in care for less than a year;
- 41% had at least one change of change of care placement during the academic year;
- 41% had statements of educational need; and
- 59% were attending special schools or alternative education.

The reduction in the need for and use of fixed term exclusions is to be a priority for The Virtual School.

8. PRIORITIES FOR 2015-16

- 8.1 To review the membership and terms of reference of the Virtual School Steering Group/Governing Body to ensure strategic and operational decisions and processes support good educational outcomes for Looked After Children and Care Leavers.
- 8.2 To improve the educational outcomes for Looked After Children and reduce vulnerability to spending time not in employment, education or training (NEET).
- 8.3 To improve understanding of progress made by LAC by further developing the PEP and education section of Pathway plans to ensure that all LAC and Care Leavers achieve their potential.
- 8.4 To extend partnerships with the Early Years and Social Work and Intervention Services to ensure quality Personal Education Plans for children aged two and above, including registration at Children's Centres where appropriate
- 8.5 To further improve the attendance of LAC and Care Leavers, especially in the secondary phase.
- 8.6 To improve the ability of care givers to support children's learning and development
- 8.7 To reduce fixed term exclusion rates for all LAC.

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Committee: Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Date: 22nd March 2016

Agenda item:

Wards:

Subject: Fostering and Other Placements for Looked After Children, Young People and Care Leavers

Lead officer: Paul Ballatt Assistant Director, Commissioning, Strategy and Performance CSF Department

Lead member: Cllr Judy Saunders

Contact officer: Liz Broughton Head of Access to Resources, CSF Department

Recommendations:

- A. Members of the Panel consider the contents of the report as part of their scrutiny of Merton's approach to corporate parenting and of support of and outcomes for Merton's looked after children and care leavers including placements.
-

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1. This report is to give an overview of the types of placements and processes that are undertaken when sourcing suitable accommodation for looked after children and care leavers.
- 1.2. The Council has a statutory duty to undertake an annual Sufficiency Assessment to inform actions to ensure that there is sufficient suitable accommodation for looked after children and young people.
- 1.3. The Placement team in the Access to Resources service undertakes all placement finding and monitors cost and quality of placements. When making placements a variety of factors are considered including:
- Ensuring any placement meets the needs of the child as identified in the Care Plan;
 - Locality;
 - Matching issues, including ethnicity, religion, language, culture and disability;
 - Siblings remaining together;
 - Maintaining links with family;
 - Retaining links with current education provision;
 - The likely length of any placement; and
 - Any other significant factors

- 1.4. Placements are considered depending on the circumstances of the child or young person and include:
 - Placement with friends or family;
 - Placement for adoption;
 - Placement in foster care;
 - Placement in a children’s home or residential school;
 - Placement with supported lodgings or semi-independent providers
- 1.5. When working to provide sufficient placements, an annual Sufficiency Assessment analyses the needs of children looked after care leavers and helps to inform strategy going forward.
- 1.6. The Fostering Recruitment and Assessment team in the Access to Resources service recruits and assesses foster carers to provide care of a high quality to looked after children and young people, as far as possible, in the local area.
- 1.7. The lack of local good quality children’s homes and sufficient semi-independent provision in Merton means that some young people are placed at a distance from the borough, although the majority of our young people are placed close to home.
- 1.8. We aim to develop our offer of a menu of placement options in the local area, in borough and near-by, for our young people during the coming year by
 - Increasing the pool of foster carers locally
 - Working with potential Children’s Homes providers about the possibility of them opening a home in the Merton area
 - Considering whether Merton should procure a Children’s Home in the borough
 - Working with semi-independent providers to open good quality units in the Merton area
 - Working with the South London SEN consortium to implement good commissioning practices for independent school placements.

2 DETAILS

GENERAL INFORMATION

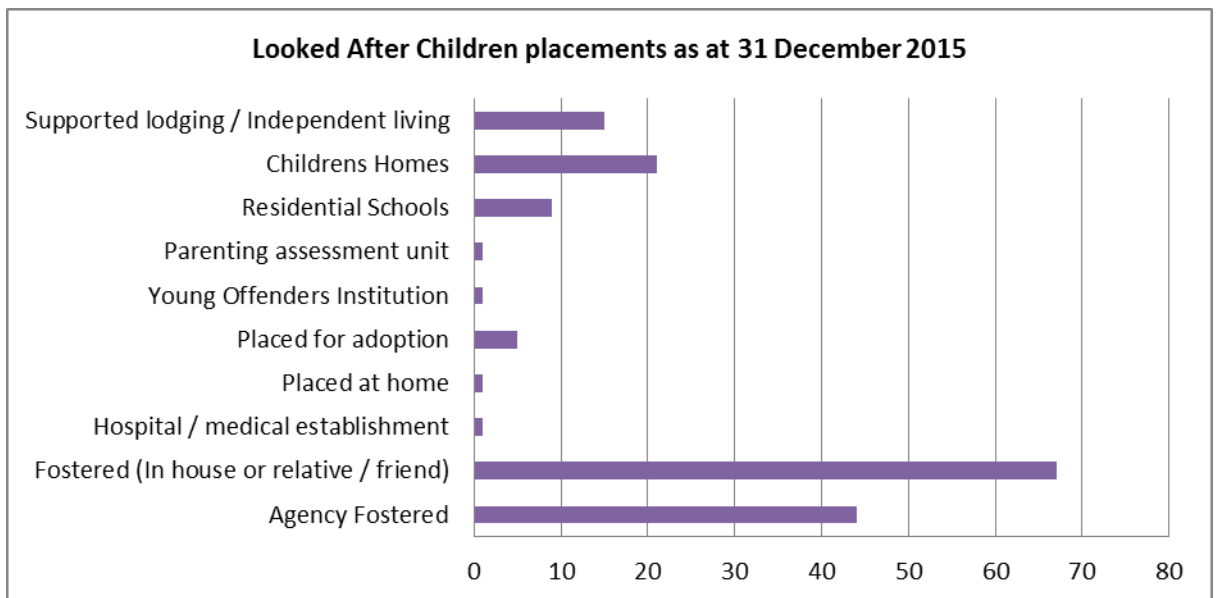
- 2.1. The Children Act 1989 and the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 place clear statutory duties upon the Council to protect children from suffering significant harm and to provide continued financial and transition support to care leavers aged up to 21 (or 25 if in full time education.) Under the Children Act 1989, the local authority has the responsibility to safeguard and promote the welfare of any child looked after by them.
- 2.2. Once a child becomes looked after, the Local Authority become the child’s “corporate parent” and assumes responsibility for services to ensure that the child reaches his/her full potential. This may be in partnership with the child’s

parents or the Local Authority may assume the lead role in this, depending on the route the child's journey into care has taken. The role of "corporate parent" extends beyond the Children, Schools and Families department of the Council and elected members and all departments have a role to play in championing the rights and needs of looked after children and care leavers in their area.

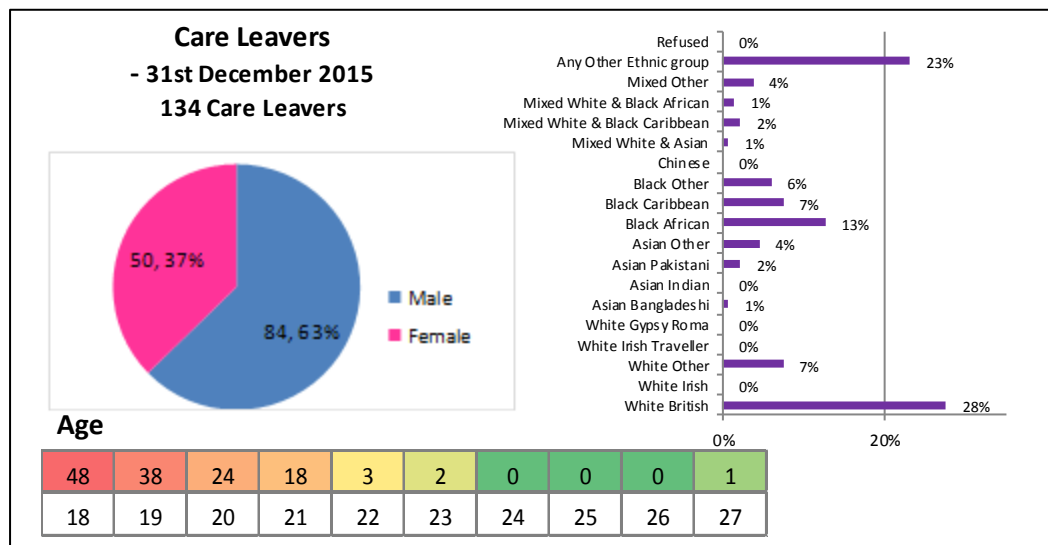
- 2.3. It is also the duty of the Local Authority to provide sufficient accommodation for all looked after children within or as near to that authority as appropriate to meet the child's needs. This is known as the Sufficiency Duty. (Children Act 1989 Section 22G)
- 2.4. In Merton we take conspicuous care in providing a range of placement options to support the stability and continuity plans for those looked after children and young people in our care and for our Care Leavers.
- 2.5. Requests for placements are made through our Access to Resources service, where our Placement Team have good links with providers and where placement quality and cost are robustly challenged to ensure good quality placements for our looked after children, young people and care leavers.
- 2.6. When we are asked to source a placement for a child or young person, we consider a variety of factors including:
 - Locality, including the risks of any child or young person remaining in or near to Merton
 - Matching issues, including ethnicity, religion, language, culture and disability
 - The importance of siblings remaining together where it is in their best interests
 - The importance of maintaining links with family, kinship and friendship networks
 - The importance of retaining links with current education provision
 - The likely length of any placement
 - Any other significant factors that may impact on our children and young people
- 2.7. Sometimes children and young people come into our care for a very short period of time. They may need a short period away from their families or they may be remanded into our care through the Criminal Justice System. Many of these young people will be reunited with their birth parents and be able to access community support.
- 2.8. When children and young people become looked after, whether for a short period or longer term, we have a range of placement options that we consider:
 - Placements with alternative family members or friends under Fostering or Special Guardianship arrangements: this option allows children and young people to retain strong links with their families and is a preferred option for some families.

- Placements for adoption: adoption provides a permanent alternative family placement for children outside of their own family and this also allows them to move outside of local authority care. Permanence by adoption is the placement of choice for younger children who are unable to be cared for within their birth families.
- Placement with foster carers: this is the usual placement of choice when a child or young person is initially looked after. Well matched placements can also provide stability for young people through to adulthood and beyond with the Government's "Staying Put" agenda which encourages foster carers to continue to offer a home to young people once they reach 18.
- Placement in Children's Homes: some young people struggle to live in alternative families and find the option of living with other young people more manageable. In addition some young people present with behaviours that foster families struggle to manage e.g. aggressive behaviour or serious involvement in gang activity.
- Placement in Residential Schools: for some young people who also struggle with education, this option can meet their needs in a more holistic way. Residential schools can offer 38 or 52 week placements.
- Placement with semi-independent providers: this is usually either with approved supported lodgings carers (approved by Merton) or in shared accommodation with additional support, typically provided by private or voluntary providers. Where a young person is aged 16+ and more independent, these types of placement can often provide a better outcome for them, enabling them to remain there through to adulthood where appropriate and supporting them to learn life skills to equip them for independent living.

2.9. At the end of December 2015, Merton Council was looking after 165 children and young people, ranging from 0-17 years of age. A high proportion of these are aged 16 and 17. This graph shows the type of placement for children and young people in December 2015. (Placement types have been simplified from the DfE census codes for presentation).



2.10. At the end of December 2015, Merton Council had responsibility for 134 care leavers. The information below relates to care leavers for whom Merton has responsibility as at December 2015.



MAKING PLACEMENTS

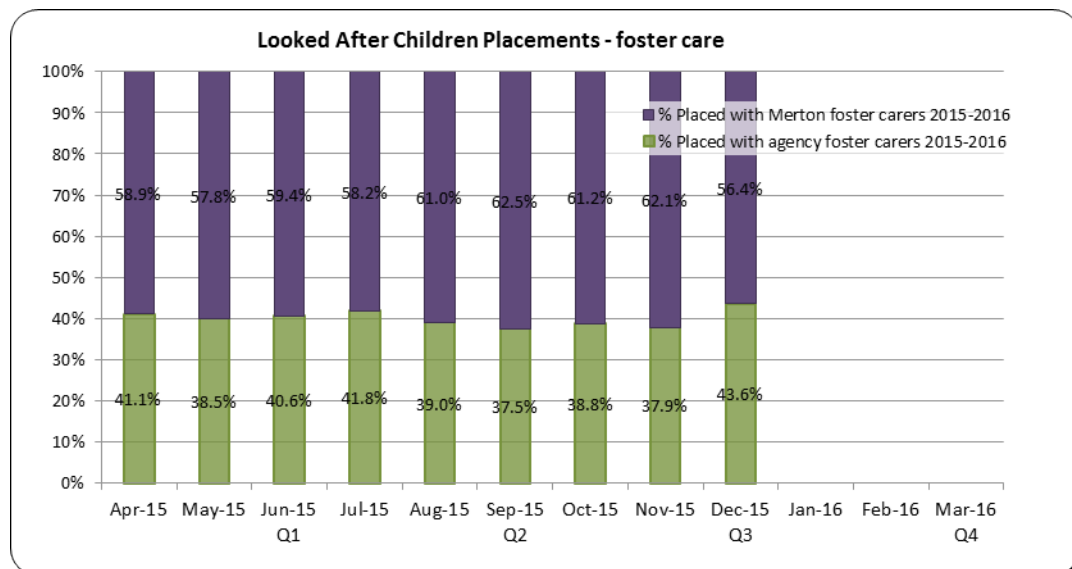
Adoptive placements are made through Merton's Adoption and Permanence Team. Merton's performance in adoption has improved year on year since 2012. In 2015/16 to December 2015, 9 children had already been adopted with a further 5 placed in adoptive placements awaiting a final adoption order. The majority of other placements for looked after children and care leavers are commissioned through the Placement team based within Merton's Access to Resources service. The role of the team is to provide the most appropriate placement for any child or young person, taking into account the quality of the provision and the cost to the Council of providing such a placement.

- 2.11. The Placement team undertakes all negotiations of cost for placements. Finance must be considered for placements as the placement budget is a volatile, pressurised budget with an outturn that is difficult to predict due to the potential numbers of referrals received throughout any year. However, placement choice is made on the assessed need of any child or young person and, whilst cost has to be a consideration, expensive placements are still provided where necessary and appropriate. Costs of all placements are rigorously challenged and reviewed on a regular basis to ensure value for money to the Council.
- 2.12. In some instances, placement costs are shared across social care and education budgets and with contributions from Merton CCG. This has been an important development over the past 2 years and has ensured more appropriate apportionment of financial responsibility.
- 2.13. In addition the Placements team have responsibility for the quality assurance of placements and aim to visit provision prior to the placement of a young person (where possible) and on an annual basis to ensure that the provision continues to meet our exacting standards. The team also examines any regulatory reports on provision we are interested in accessing. Children's Homes and IFAs are inspected and rated by Ofsted on a regular basis.
- 2.14. Quality assurance of placements is particularly important for the semi-independent sector, which is an unregulated market. Therefore, the Placement Team gives the highest priority to this sector and undertakes robust visits on an annual basis to those semi-independent placements we use on a regular basis.

Our initial placement of choice for any child or young person coming into our care would be with a foster carer. This would give us an opportunity to assess the child's on-going needs and to consider the most appropriate care plan for that child. In the majority of cases, we would want to place a child within Merton where possible or as near to the borough boundary to enable that child to continue to access their school and to maintain links with their family and community. To that end, we would initially look to our in house fostering service. Where this is not possible, we would approach Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs) who also have a pool of approved carers. This enables a child to continue to live with a family and this is an important consideration when making any placement.

- 2.15. However, placements with IFAs would not be our preferred option for several reasons:
- We have limited knowledge of the carers and are dependent on another agency to offer support and guidance to them
 - This option is a more expensive one as most IFAs are profit making businesses
 - We have limited control over any other young people who may be placed with these carers
- 2.16. At December 2015, 56% of children placed with foster carers were with Merton approved foster carers. The graph below shows a comparison of our

children placed with Merton carers with those placed in IFA placements throughout the year to date.



- 2.17. If a Residential Children’s Home or Residential School is felt to be the best option for a young person, the Placement team will explore these options with providers who are able to best meet the young person’s needs. We would not normally consider placing any young person under 11 in a Children’s Home unless there are exceptional needs.
- 2.18. In December 2015, we had 27 children recorded as being placed in Children’s homes of which 8 were placed in Residential schools. As there are no good quality Children’s Homes in Merton and no residential schools, all of these young people are placed outside of the borough. Because of their specific needs, some of these young people are a significant way from the borough, being as far as Shropshire and Devon.
- 2.19. For young people aged 16+ there is an alternative option of placements within a semi-independent unit. These are units set up by providers who do not need to register with Ofsted and are therefore not regulated and have no statutory oversight. As such, we are more rigorous in our QA of these and have developed good working relationships with good quality providers who we believe are able to offer a good quality service to our young people. As at December 2015, 16 young people were placed either in supported lodgings or supported housing provision.
- 2.20. Currently there are no good quality semi-independent providers in Merton, so all of these young people are placed outside of Merton. Most of this provision is placed relatively locally in Croydon, although we are not always keen to place our young people in that area – eg if a young person is known to be involved in or threatened by gang activity.

SUFFICIENCY OF PLACEMENTS

- 2.21. As part of our Sufficiency duty we consider how many of our looked after children and care leavers are placed within 5 miles of Merton and how many are beyond 20 miles.
- 2.22. At the end of December 2015, 30% of our looked after children and young people were placed within Merton. Although this seems low, Merton is a small borough and we therefore have children placed outside of the borough who are still able to continue to access their school, health and community services within the borough.
- 2.23. In our Sufficiency Statement 2016/17, based on data as at 31/03/15, 41% of our Merton in house foster carers live outside of Merton in neighbouring boroughs. Also in the Sufficiency Statement, 75% of our looked after children and young people were placed within 10 miles of their home address
- 2.24. As required, we undertake an annual sufficiency assessment looking at the needs of our young people and how we have been able to meet these with appropriate placements. We are able to use this to inform our strategic overview and future plans for placements and also for our Foster Carer Recruitment strategy.
- 2.25. Wherever possible, we want to place our looked after children and care leavers in Merton. To that end we want to recruit as many local foster carers as possible. Within Merton's Access to Resources service, there is a designated Foster Carer Recruitment team whose role is to recruit and assess foster carers of a high standard who will meet the complex needs of our children and young people.
- 2.26. Since the formation of this service in November 2011, the team has successfully recruited 42 foster carers, 13 of which have been recruited since April 2015 to date. 7 of the carers approved this year are available to take teenage placements whilst a further 4 have expressed a view that they would like to start with younger children and progress to take teenagers as they become more confident in their new role.
- 2.27. We have been working closely together with Merton Churches Together this year with a view to enlisting their support in the recruitment of local families who may wish to foster. So far we have had one set of foster carers approved as a result of this initiative. We have also presented information at a Muslim Women's group which has also triggered interest in more information.
- 2.28. The Access to Resources Service is committed to increasing the placement menu options for our young people and care leavers. As well as increasing the number of in house foster carers, the service is working closely with providers to develop services in two other main areas:
- Developing Children's Home provision within the borough
 - Developing Semi-Independent provision within the borough
- 2.29. Currently we do not have a mainstream Children's Home in or near to Merton of a good quality and are therefore placing those young people who require this sort of provision outside of our area. We are currently in

discussion with two independent and voluntary providers who are each considering opening a 3 or 4 bedded Children's Home in or near to Merton.

- 2.30. If these discussions do not provide a possible solution to this, we are considering whether to present a Business Case for going through a formal procurement process to commission a provider to open a Children's Home within Merton on our behalf.
- 2.31. We are also working with providers well known to Merton (Grenfell and Ownlife) to develop a menu of semi-independent options for our older looked after young people and care leavers (16+). This will include 24 hour supported housing units through to independent living with additional support. Grenfell has identified a property which they are opening as a semi-independent unit and which they are prepared to staff on a 24 hour basis if needed. They are hoping to open this next month.

FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

In line with our Sufficiency Statement, 2016/17:

- 2.32. We will aim to recruit 15 new sets of foster carers and 4 sets of Supported Lodgings carers in 2016/17 who live within or very near to Merton and who can offer placements for those young people we currently need to place with IFA carers outside of Merton.
- 2.33. We will recruit In house foster carers approved to take on short term (one month or less) emergency placements and those able to take on long term placements (1 year plus).
- 2.34. We will recruit younger foster carers able to replace carers to be lost through retirement and other reasons
- 2.35. We will continue to review all existing In-house foster carer approvals to build in further flexibility specifically with regards to 'range of care provided' and ages of children they are able to care for
- 2.36. We will continue to explore the development of a Children's Home within Merton so that we are able to meet the needs of our young people in a high quality commissioned service in the local area.
- 2.37. We will work with existing and new Children's Homes providers within 5 miles of Merton to develop closer commissioning relationships.
- 2.38. We will work closely with well-developed semi-independent and housing providers to encourage them to consider the options of supporting young people within Merton.
- 2.39. We will train and support young looked after children and care leavers to support the team in undertaking robust QA assessment visits to unregulated semi-independent providers.
- 2.40. We will continue to work with colleagues from neighbouring boroughs to establish good commissioning practices and where appropriate Consortium arrangements.

3 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

3.1. Not applicable

4 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED

- 4.1. Not applicable for the purpose of this report but consultation about fostering recruitment has taken place with members of local religious groups to inform our strategy, resulting in a Churches Together initiative to find new foster carers and a presentation at a local Muslim Women's Group.
- 4.2. We are in constant consultation with social work colleagues within the Children's Social Care service about the suitability and quality of placements for individual children and young people.
- 4.3. We have foster carers who support delivery on Fostering Preparation Training
- 4.4. As part of our commitment to have young people at the heart of our service, we have a former looked after young person on our Adoption and Fostering Panel.
- 4.5. In addition, our care leavers run a preparation training session for prospective foster carers. As part of this they provide formal feedback which is added to panel papers going forward.
- 4.6. We are also in the process of identifying a group of looked after young people and care leavers to support us in the quality assurance functions of the service with semi-independent non- regulated providers. We are confident that this will add an additional perspective to our QA processes and will offer training and support to enable them to do this.

5 TIMETABLE

5.1. Not applicable for this report

6 FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1. The budget allocated for LAC Placements and Care Leaver provision is volatile due to the unpredictability of placement requests.
- 6.2. As a department, CSF is working to ensure that we are looking after the right children for the right length of time. We do this through robust challenge through case management, at the point of placement referral and through our Edge of Care Panel.
- 6.3. We are working closely with our colleagues in the CCG to ensure shared allocation of funding for packages of care where appropriate.
- 6.4. We are part of London Care Services, where robust negotiations on overarching annual cost increases with providers are agreed
- 6.5. The Placement team negotiates costs with providers for individual placements to ensure that children are getting the service they need and the Council is getting value for money

7 LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

10

- 7.1. The Local Authority has a range of duties in respect of looked after children and care leavers. The main legislative framework is the Children Act 1989 and the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000.

8 HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1. Looked after children and care leavers are considered a vulnerable group and there is a responsibility under legislation on the local authority to provide for their care and well-being.
- 8.2. There is also a responsibility of the local authority to ensure that any looked after child's racial, religious, language and cultural needs are met through services offered to children, including placement opportunities.
- 8.3. Where it is in their best interests, the local authority also promotes contact for looked after children with their birth families and with other community based organisations where there have been links prior to the child coming into local authority care.
- 8.4. Looked after children have historically have had poorer education outcomes and Merton's Virtual School for Looked After Children looks to help narrow the gap of education attainment.

9 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1. Young people who commit criminal offences may be remanded into the care of the local authority. This may involve them being remanded into custody or into a placement commissioned by the local authority. In addition, young people are sometimes discharged from custody into the care of the local authority
- 9.2. In both these instances, the Placement team will source placements, taking into account risk factors associated with the young person's offending behaviour and work with providers and the Youth Offending service to support young people in the community.

10 RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1. The management of risk is implicit in making placements for looked after children, young people and care leavers. Before placements are undertaken, social workers are asked to undertake a risk assessment.
- 10.2. We are sourcing placements to meet the specific needs of each child or young person, as identified by the social worker working with him/her.
- 10.3. Specific risky behaviours e.g. risk of sexual exploitation, missing from placement, gang affiliation, offending behaviour are discussed in detail with providers with a safety plan being put in place. Merton has robust policies and procedures for monitoring the most risky young people with our partner agencies.
- 10.4. Constant liaison with and visits from social workers and looked after children statutory reviews ensures a robust oversight of a child's placement. In addition the links into the placement service provides a further overview of the placement provider.

- 11 APPENDICES – THE FOLLOWING DOCUMENTS ARE TO BE PUBLISHED WITH THIS REPORT AND FORM PART OF THE REPORT**
- Securing Sufficient Accommodation for Looked After Children and Care Leavers 2016 – 2017
- 12 BACKGROUND PAPERS**

Securing Sufficient Accommodation for Looked After Children and Care Leavers 2016 - 2017

London Borough of Merton

Issue Date	Data & Policy Analysis	Date Of the Next Review	Lead Head of Service
October 2015	Naheed Chaudhry , Head of Policy Planning and Performance Martin Clarke, Performance Analyst	October 2016	Liz Broughton, Head of Access to Resources

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Executive summary

This annual Sufficiency Statement is a needs analysis which helps us to deliver our commitment to making available the widest range of placements in order to support the individual needs of our looked after children and care leavers.

Local authorities have a statutory duty to ensure that there is sufficient accommodation to meet the needs of looked after children in their community. This duty is supported by statutory guidance that makes it clear that children should live in the local authority area, with access to local services and close to their friends and family, when it is safe to do so.

The guidance emphasises that 'having the right placement in the right place, at the right time', with the necessary support services such as education and health in place, is crucial in improving placement stability, which leads to better outcomes for looked after children.

This Sufficiency Statement informs and therefore should be understood within the context of Merton's strategic priorities for looked after children and care leavers as summarised in;

- Children and Young People's Plan
- Looked After Children Strategy
- Care Leavers Strategy
- Annual Corporate Parenting Report(s)

Needs analysis 2014/15 key summary

Merton's rate of children looked after per 10,000 population has remained stable over the last five years (between 30-34 LAC per 10,000 population). We remain within range of our comparable statistical neighbours and low compared to London and National benchmarks.

However, our actual numbers of children in care each year has risen by 16% over the last five years from 220 children in 2010/11 to 255 children in 2014/15. This has placed additional demands on our placement budget. We have alleviated some of this additional demand by recruiting 36 new in house foster carers in the same period.

The reasons for the increase in Looked after Children are complex but include heightened national awareness of children's safeguarding, an increasing birth rate and more general demographic changes.

So far as practicable in all circumstances the authority is required to find a placement for each Looked after Child which;

- Distance:
 - Is near the child's home;
 - Is within the local authority's area, unless that is not reasonably practicable
- Siblings: Enables the child to live with an accommodated sibling;
- Equalities: Where the child is disabled, is suitable to meet the needs of that child;
- Education: Does not disrupt his/her education or training;

In the absence of national benchmarks and looking at the contributory factors, Merton is doing well in providing sufficient placements to meet the needs of some groups of looked after children. During the year Merton made 377 placements for 255 looked after children.

Of the children that were placed in provision with an Ofsted judgement, 95% were placed in Good or Outstanding provision. (31st March 2015, 130/137)

- Outstanding - 4% of children placed (5cyp)
- Good – 91% of children placed (125cyp)
- Requires improvement/adequate – 5% of children placed (7cyp)
- Inadequate – 0% (0cyp)

Distance

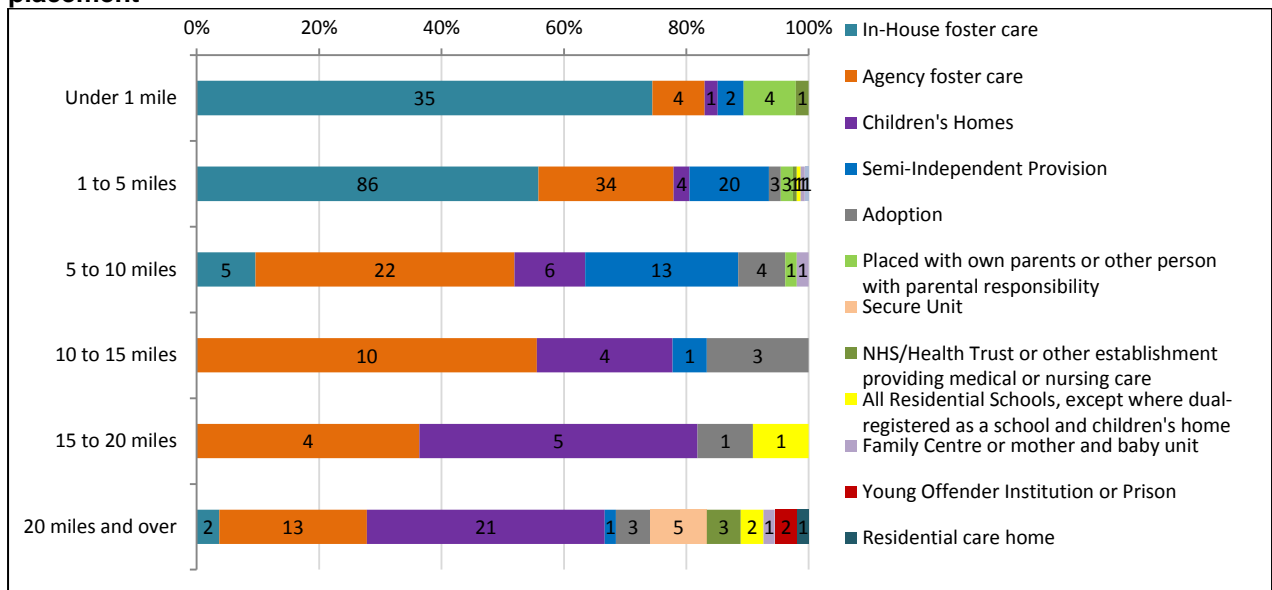
There are two nationally reported measures associated to placement distance, 'percentage placed in and out of borough and percentage placed over 20 miles'.

- Of all our placements made 16% were over 20 miles away.
- Of all our children placed 32% were placed in borough, although this seems low we are a small borough and this increases the challenge to provide placements within the borough boundary.
- In fact 60% of children were placed within 5 miles of their home address and 75% were placed within 10 miles. 41% of our in-house foster carers are not based in Merton
- We recruited 10 new foster carer families in 2014/15. All are within 5 miles of Merton and 6 were approved to offer placements to teenagers (a key need identified in our last plan).

Looked after children live away from their home authority for many reasons; Some need to be out of area to help keep them safe from dangerous influences closer to home. Others need the kind of specialist support that is not available in all local authority areas. Some looked after children are moved out so that they can live with brothers and sisters, or be cared for by relatives who are approved as foster carers.

We are committed to good placement stability, therefore where we place a child in Agency Foster Care Provision if the child is settled and happy we may decide not to remove them in spite of the cost implications to the authority. During 2014/15, fifteen of our looked after children were placed for adoption with permanent families outside of Merton. In this instance, distance from Merton is not the most significant factor as adoption will enable them to become permanent members of a family elsewhere. Five looked after children were placed in hospital and five within the criminal justice system. There are no secure units or young offenders institutions within the area and Health England has limited resources for young people with acute mental health difficulties. There are also no residential schools in borough and we had four children placed outside of Merton in stable residential placements.

Figure 1: Placement Distance from Home for all placements during 2014-15 by type of placement¹



Source: SSDA903 2014/15

¹ Excludes 41 placements where home address was not available – cases relating to UASC and those with no fixed abode

We can see from the graph above that the further away placements are the more specialist they tend to be and thus able to meet the needs of our most complex children

Education

Good practice also involves assessing whether placements allow a child to continue to attend their education or training and community contacts.

- Our Virtual School works with all looked after children placed both within and outside of Merton to support them with all aspects of their education.
- During the academic year 2014/15 only 14 children had to move their educational setting as a direct result of a placement move. This equates to 14% of the Merton LAC school roll (101 CYP, June 2015).
- The ART placement team and the Virtual School continue to work effectively together to minimise days lost during disruption.
- Findings from our Foster Carers Survey highlight that 92% of respondents felt the supported delivered by Merton's Virtual School was good or excellent. Additional 90% felt the child placed with them attended a school which was good or excellent.

Health

We know that when we move children a long way from Merton, they have more difficulty in accessing specialist health services.

- We have a protocol in place to ensure that our looked after children are able to access mental health services in a timely way where necessary if they are placed outside of Merton
- Our looked after children's nurse maintains contact with all looked after children, both within and outside of Merton

Sibling groups

We are required to enable children to live with their siblings where it is in the best interest of the children involved. We have successfully targeted previous In-house foster carer recruitment campaigns to attract foster carers willing to take family groups.

- During 2014/15 of the 255 children looked after 69 belonged to 29 sibling groups.
- 76% of the sibling groups were placed together, 22 of 29.
- Two thirds of the sibling groups were placed together within 5 miles of their home (15 out of 22 sibling groups placed together; 68%)
- 91% of sibling groups were placed together within 10 miles of home (20 out of 22 sibling groups placed together)
- 35% of our In-House foster carers are approved to take sibling groups

Equalities and disabilities

Merton's LAC gender distributions are similar to national averages, in that we (as nationally) have more boys than girls in care. However, there is still an over-representation of boys in our care compared to nationally (62% of Merton LAC are boys compared to 55% nationally as at 31 March 2015). Merton also has an over representation of older children in care, 38% of our LAC are aged 16 and over compared to 22% nationally (as at the 31st March 2015).

Drilling down we are able to evidence that a significant number of the boys in our care are teenagers. In fact 68% of our over 16s are boys, half of whom are Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers (32 in 2014/15). Other reasons for supporting such a large group of teenagers in Merton include breakdown of family relationships and a group of young people who become looked after by being remanded into the criminal justice system.

Nearly two-thirds of all placements made during 2014-15 were for children aged 12 or over (230 out of 377 placements; 61%), maintaining good levels of suitable provision for teenagers remains a key priority.

The majority of children looked after in Merton are from a white background reflective of the general Merton population. There are fewer Asian or Asian British (8%) than the “all persons” Merton population. Mixed ethnic backgrounds, Black or Black British heritage and ‘other ethnic groups’ have looked after children proportions greater than the resident population. Just over half of all placements during 2014-15 were for children from Black and Minority Ethnic Backgrounds (206 out of 377 placements; 55%)

One in five placements were commissioned to care for disabled looked after children (80 out of 377 placements; 21%). Disabilities identified range from mild to the most complex as reported in the Child in Need record.

User Voice

Our User Voice Strategy 2014-16 states that we have the highest ambitions for all our children and young people, and that we judge our success by a range of criteria including being able to demonstrate that the views and ambitions of children and young people have informed and improved our service offer.

This year’s LAC Sufficiency Statement is informed by the following ‘User voice’ activity;

- Foster Carers Experiences 2015 (survey)*
- Young People’s Views on Placements (survey January – March 2015)**
- Independent Advocacy Service feedback
- Children in Care Council
- Independent Reviewing Officer Review feedback
- Complaints/Compliments

***The Foster Carer Survey 2015** captured foster carers’ views on the recruitment, retention and support services delivered to them by our fostering services, in order to identify good practice and areas for improvement. All 55 fostering households (as at March 2015), were contacted to take part in the survey using an electronic tool. 32 households completed the survey delivering a response rate of 58%; the survey was adapted from the Fostering Network national survey tool.

- *100% of carers say they would recommend fostering in Merton.*
- *92% rated the quality of training available to them as good or excellent.*
- *All carers have a personal development plan and access to training and supervision;*
- *However of the Carers who took children outside of their approval age range (18% of respondents) - 60% said that they received either partial or no support. This group also identified that helpful support included the out-of-hours service, and financial support for challenging placements.*
- *It should be noted that 86% of all respondents rated the Out of Hours service as good or excellent, compared to 44% nationally.*
- *36% of respondents reported not having adequate information about the child at the time of placement and 17% identified lack of information about the care plan. We must improve the quality of referral information that the foster carer receives and ensure that placement plans are available in a timely manner.*
- *97% rated their supervising social worker as good or excellent, compared to 73% nationally. 97% stated that they saw their supervising social worker at least every 6 weeks*
- *80% rated the child’s social worker as good or excellent, compared to 50% from the survey in 2012.*

****The ‘Young People’s views of placements’** report is a summary of 35 children and young people’s views as recorded by their Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) during the LAC review process. The vast majority of respondents - 86% - were aged 13 and over with the remaining 14% aged from 7-12 years. Thirty four per cent of respondents were placed with agency foster care, 31% with in-house foster care, 17% in semi-independent housing and the remaining 17% representing placements in residential children’s homes, connected persons, and secure units. Below are key responses.

- *I am happy in my placement – 80%*
- *I am well looked after in my placement – 91%*
- *I am shown respect and treated with dignity – 80%*
- *I feel safe – 85%*

Areas progressed in 2014/15

Fostering

Research shows that children usually thrive from being part of a family group and for this reason, we consider fostering as a first option for our looked after children. We remain committed to improving our number of in house carers to ensure best choice and value to the Council. In 2014/15 we:

- Recruited 10 new foster carer families within 5 miles of Merton, 6 of whom are approved to offer placements to teenagers
- Undertook 5 preparation training groups for prospective foster carers
- Continued to involve our looked after young people and care leavers in delivering preparation training for our prospective foster carers and being involved in the assessment process
- Continued with targeted fostering recruitment campaigns to meet the needs of our young people based on the Sufficiency Strategy 2014/15
- Developed a good quality tracking processes to ensure we are providing suitable care to young people who need this
- Developed a Staying Put policy to enable our young people to remain in their placements post 18.
- Appointed to our specialist CAMHS posts to offer support to looked after children

Children’s Homes

There are a small number of young people for whom it will be difficult to provide stability through a family based placement. As there are no mainstream Children’s Homes of a good quality within the Merton area, we have always had to place our young people further away than we would like. In 2014/15 we have:

- Worked closely with existing providers to ensure best quality and value for money
- Begun to explore options around procuring a Children’s Home in Merton
- Formed links with a new provider who is planning to open a Children’s Home in Merton
- Begun to work with a voluntary organisation (Action for Children) with a Children’s Home in a neighbouring borough which is planning to change approval to take young people with more challenging behaviours.
- Developed tracking processes to ensure we are using Children’s Homes placements for the right young people.

Semi-Independent Provision

For young people aged 16+, semi-independent provision offers a level of independence and can support young people prior to a move into independent living. We have been keen to develop links in this area and, as this is an unregulated market, we have a duty to ensure good quality as well as best value. During 2014/15 we have:

- Developed a financial framework for providers of semi-independent accommodation
- Developed a quality assurance framework to ensure quality of provision
- Worked with specific providers of semi-independent and housing provision (Grenfell Housing and Notting Hill Housing Trust) to develop provision within Merton and to increase the menu of options of for care leavers
- Developed tracking processes to ensure we are using the placement we commission to continue to meet the needs of our young people and care leavers and support them towards independent living.

Other Relevant areas

As well as direct work with providers, in 2014/15 we have:

- Continued to work with colleagues in the South West London consortium for looked after children, sharing information and commissioning tools to procure good quality best value placements
- Continued to work with the South East London Commissioning Consortium to work with providers to provide discount for placements on a consortium basis.
- Become more involved in the South London SEN commissioning consortium, including being successful in securing a Go Procurement award and a DCLG grant towards setting up a dynamic purchasing system to ensure more efficient commissioning of independent school placements.

Future Plans

- A. Recruit 20 new In-House foster carers of which 10 should be targeted to teenagers (aged 12 – 15)
- B. Recruit as many carers within the Merton boundary so that our young people do not have to move away from the area.
- C. Recruit In house foster cares approved to take on short term (one month or less) emergency placements and those able to take on long term placements (1 year plus).
- D. Recruit younger foster carers able to replace carers to be lost through retirement and other reasons
- E. Review all existing In-house foster carer approvals to build in further flexibility specifically with regards to 'range of care provided' and aged of children able to care for
- F. Reinforce the need for quality referrals from all social workers to enable good placement selection in response to Foster Carers feedback
- G. Continue to explore the development of a Children's Home within Merton so that we are able to meet the needs of our young people in a high quality commissioned service in the local area.
- H. Work with existing and new Childrens Homes providers within 5 miles of Merton to develop closer commissioning relationships.
- I. Work closely with well-developed semi-independent and housing providers to encourage them to consider the options of supporting young people within Merton.

Policy context

In compliance with the statutory 'sufficiency duty' Merton's Sufficiency Statement sets out our strategic approach to securing sufficient accommodation to meet the needs of our Looked After Children.

The sufficiency duty is understood in the context of the local authority duty under section 22C (5) of the Children Act 1989. The overriding factor is that placements must be the most appropriate placement available. Next, preference must be given to a placement with a friend, relative or other person connected with the child and who is a local authority foster carer. Failing that, a placement must be found, so far as is reasonably practicable in all circumstances, that:

- Is near the child's home;
- Is within the local authority's area, unless that is not reasonably practicable.
- Enables the child to live with an accommodated sibling;
- Where the child is disabled, is suitable to meet the needs of that child; and
- Does not disrupt his/her education or training;

Merton's Sufficiency Statement is also in compliance with the 2010 Sufficiency Statutory Guidance on securing sufficient accommodation for Looked after Children. The guidance implements Section 22G of the Children Act 1989 (inserted by Section 9 of the Children and Young Persons Act 2008) which requires local authorities to take steps that secure, so far as reasonably practicable, sufficient accommodation for Looked After Children within their local authority area.

The 2010 guidance states that local authorities should have embedded plans for the 'sufficiency duty' as part of their commissioning processes and through partnership working, should be in a position to secure where reasonably practicable, sufficient accommodation for Looked After Children in their area.

Under the Equality Duty 2010, all local authorities have a statutory duty to consider and mitigate against any potential negative impact of services, policies, and procedures on people with 'protected characteristics'. The characteristics relevant to this policy are age, disability, race, religion, sex and sexual orientation.

Merton's Sufficiency Statement also takes into account UN Convention on the Rights of the Child especially, but not exclusively article 8 – preservation of identity; article 12 – respect for the views of the child; article 20 – children deprived of a family; article 28 – right to education.

Background information

Merton the place

Merton is an outer London borough situated in south west London, covering 14.7 square miles. Merton has a total population of 200,543 including 47,499 children and young people aged 0-19 (Census 2011). The number of 0-19 year olds is forecast to increase by 3,180 (7%) by 2017, within which we forecast a 20% increase of children aged 5 to 9 (2,270 CYP). We have a younger population than the England average and have seen a 39% net increase of births over the last ten years (2,535 births in 2002 rising to 3,521 in 2010). The birth rate reduced in 2012/13 and again slightly in 2013/14 suggesting that the rate is stabilising. However the last ten years alongside other demographic factors has placed additional demand on all children's services.

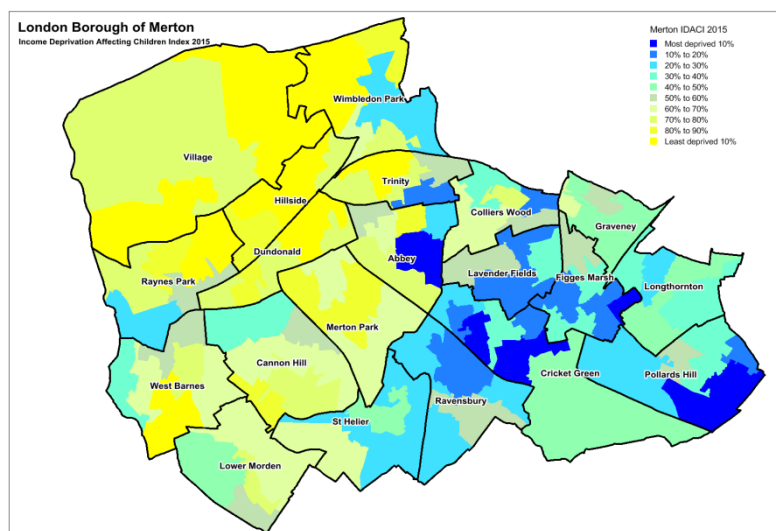
Predominantly suburban in character, Merton is divided into 20 wards and has three main town centres; Wimbledon, Mitcham and Morden. A characteristic of the borough is the difference between the more deprived east (Mitcham/Morden) and the more affluent west (Wimbledon).

There are a number of pockets of deprivation within the borough mainly in the eastern wards and some smaller pockets in the central wards. These wards have multiple deprivation, with high scores on income deprivation, unemployment and limited educational attainment.

Figure 2: Map of Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index Merton (IDACI 2015) Source: IDACI 2015

Since 2010 we have seen an increase of 31% of children who are eligible for free school meals (2010, 2881 FSM children, 2015, 3796 FSM children).

Thirty five per cent of Merton's total population is Black, Asian or Minority ethnic (BAME) - this is expected to increase further to 39% by 2017. Pupils in Merton schools are more diverse still, with 66% from BAME communities, 42% with a first language which is not English, speaking over 124 languages (2015).



The borough has concentrations of Urdu speaking communities, Sri Lankan, South African and Polish residents. The most prominent first languages for pupils apart from English are Tamil 5.7%, Urdu 5.8% and Polish 5.7%. The number of pupils with Special Educational Needs is also increasing, with SEN statements/EHC plans rising from 668 in January 2011 to 880 in January 2015 (an increase of 32%).

Merton’s Strategic Framework and Governance

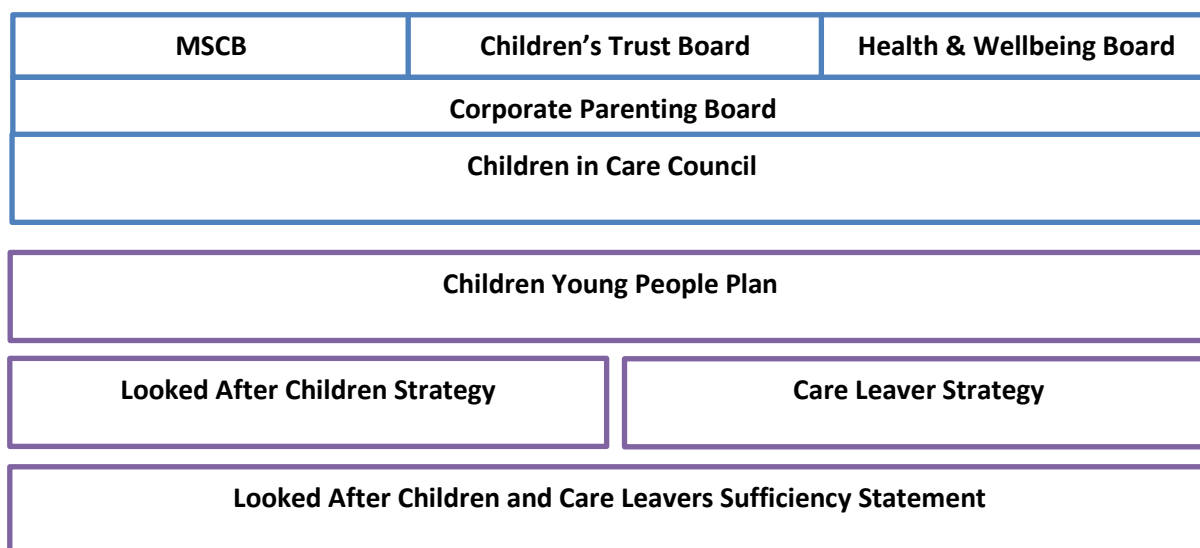
This Looked after Children and Care Leavers Sufficiency statement informs our Strategic plans, commissioning and procurement functions.

Our Children and Young People’s Plan sets out our ambitions for all our children and particularly those most vulnerable to poorer outcomes. The LAC Strategy and Care Leavers strategy, which are both endorsed and by the Children’s Trust, the Merton Safeguarding Children’s Board and the Corporate Parenting Board provider further focus for our collective ambitions. Placement Stability and Choice is one of eight key strategic priorities in Merton’s Looked after Children Strategy.

Looked After Children Strategy Strategic Priorities

1. Improving the **timeliness of care proceedings**
2. Improving **placement stability and choice**
3. Improving **educational outcomes** for Looked After Children
4. Supporting good **health outcomes** for Looked After Children
5. Encouraging **participation and positive activities**
6. Understanding the needs of and supporting **LAC in particular circumstance**
7. **Achieving permanency**
8. Supporting our **Care leavers** (*see also Care Leavers Strategy*)

The Corporate Parenting Board is comprised of senior managers and officers from education, health, housing, social care and elected members this chaired by the Chief Executive London Borough Merton, ensuring a high level of scrutiny and cross directorate responsibility for delivery of our priorities.



Our Corporate Parenting responsibilities

The Children Act 1989 and the Leaving Care Act 2000 place clear statutory duties upon the Council to protect children from suffering significant harm and to provide continued financial and transition support to care leavers aged up to 21 (or 25 if in full time education).

When a child comes into care, the council becomes the Corporate Parent. Put simply, the term ‘Corporate Parent’ means the collective responsibility of the council, elected members, employees, and partner agencies, for providing the best possible care and safeguarding for the children who are looked after by the council. Effective corporate parenting requires knowledge and awareness of the needs of children and young people who are looked after and the services that they receive. This Sufficiency statement informs the Corporate

Parenting board of the numbers, characteristics and needs of looked after children and care leavers and an analysis of how effectively Merton is serving it's looked after population through the provision of appropriate placements.

Principles

Merton's services for Looked After Children form part of a comprehensive continuum of support for children and young people who may be facing difficulties at home. These range from family support, intensive community interventions, or permanent substitute care. In taking this approach we are committed to ensuring that the right children enter care and that their experiences are positive and opportunities many.

Services for Looked After children are delivered in accordance with the following principles:

- Safeguarding children is the paramount consideration and levels of risk are always thoroughly assessed.
- In terms of their experience of being cared for Looked After Children are the best experts we have, and we value their views. At every stage of planning, service delivery or change we will listen to what they say and act accordingly, providing access to advocacy support and an Independent Reviewing Officer.
- Alternatives to care will be considered before a child becomes looked after. This means ensuring that Merton's Early Intervention and Prevention processes and services effectively support families to prevent children from going into care.
- Services will offer support to families where a child has been returned to their care after being looked after for a period.
- Where a child does have to be cared for away from their family, placement decisions will be made on the basis of a thorough assessment of their needs.
- In this case, first consideration will be given to care provided through extended family or friends, and placement decisions will take into account the need to be near to family, friends and other support.
- We aim to make available the widest range of placements within or near Merton borough, in order to meet the individual needs of our Looked After Children, and to increase the chance of continuing in the same school, and having appropriate contact with their family and friends.
- Placement provision and placement planning will take into account children and young people's needs in terms of the equalities 'protected characteristics' – age, disability, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation.
- Once a decision is made to look after a child this will be for as short a period as possible taking into account their best interests
- Decisions to find alternative and permanent placements for the child will be made within the shortest possible timescales.
- Where a child cannot go home, planning for permanence will always include consideration of adoption, special guardianship or child arrangement orders, thus reducing the role of the state in children's lives
- Where children remain looked after long-term, the overall aim will be to replicate the stability and level of care that any good parent would provide to their child, so as to give the child every chance of success.

Needs Analysis and Sufficiency review 2014/15

Overview of placements during 2014/15

In line with continuous improvement principles, the LAC Sufficiency Statement was reviewed this year's with a new approach agreed to support a greater understanding of placement needs. This 2014/15 needs analysis has reviewed all placements made during the financial year, identifying provision needs to guide commissioning and procurement.

Table 3: Demographics of Merton looked after children placed during 2014/15

All placements (2014-15)		No. of children	All placements (2014-15)		No. of children
Age at placement start date	Under 1 year	18	Ethnicity	White	115
	1 to 4 years	26		Mixed	31
	5 to 11 years	64		Asian	23
	12 to 15 years	78		Black	61
	16 years and over	86		Other	25
Total (no duplicates)		255	Total		255
Gender	Male	159	Disability	Disabled	57
	Female	96		Non-Disabled	198
Total		255	Total		255

Source: SSSA903 2014-15

There are thirteen types of placement provision as listed in the table below. During 2014/15, 255 looked after children were placed in 377 placements. The majority of children who came into care during the year were placed with our In House Foster Carers; this was an improvement on last year.

Table 4: Number of placements by placement type 2014/15 with 2013/14 benchmark²

Type of placement	2013-14			2014-15			Difference	
	No. of children	No. of placements	% of placements	No. of children	No. of placements	% of placements	No. of children	No. of placements
In-House foster care	118	140	39%	131	149	40%	13	9
Agency foster care	72	78	22%	79	90	24%	7	12
Children's Homes	19	24	7%	26	41	11%	7	17
Semi-Independent Provision	36	45	13%	43	53	14%	7	8
Adoption	12	12	3%	15	15	4%	3	3
Placed with own parents or other person with parental responsibility	14	14	4%	8	8	2%	-6	-6
Secure Unit	2	2	1%	3	5	1%	1	3
NHS/Health Trust or other establishment providing medical or nursing care	8	9	3%	5	5	1%	-3	-4
All Residential Schools, except where dual-registered as a school and children's home	3	3	1%	4	4	1%	1	1
Family Centre or mother and baby unit	8	8	2%	3	3	1%	-5	-5
Young Offender Institution or Prison	8	9	3%	2	2	1%	-6	-7
Residential care home	1	1	0%	1	1	0%	0	0
Independent Living	12	14	4%	1	1	0%	-11	-13
Total	250	359	100%	255	377	100%	5	18

Source: SSSA903 2013-14 & 2014-15

² Excludes short break and missing episodes

Of the children that were placed in provision with an Ofsted judgement, 95% were placed in Good or Outstanding provision. (31st March 2015, 130/137).

- Outstanding - 4% of children placed (5cyp)
- Good – 91% of children placed (125cyp)
- Requires improvement/adequate – 5% of children placed (7cyp)
- Inadequate – 0% (0cyp)

In the following chapters each of the main 'placement type' have been reviewed by the demographic characteristic of the children placed and by distance. All tables include a comparison between the specific placement cohort and the overall placement cohort (referred to as 'All Placements' throughout).

Foster Placements

A Foster Placement is provided by Foster Carers approved either by Merton Council (In House) or by an Independent Fostering Agency (IFA). Merton approved foster carers can live either within Merton or outside. Most are within close travelling distance of Merton. Some are approved as Connected Persons for a specific named child or young person. Foster Carers approved by an Independent Fostering Agency may live in Merton or outside of the borough. Some may live a distance from the borough boundary.

Key Findings: In-House Foster Care	Key Findings: Agency Foster Care
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 149 In-House foster care placements during 2014-15 (40% of all placements during 2014-15) • 94% of In-House foster care placements during 2014-15 located within 5 miles of home address (121 out of 128 placements matched) • Two thirds of In-House foster care placements during 2014-15 located in Merton LA (94 out of 149 placements; 63%) • One-third of Looked After Children placed in an In-House foster placement as at 31 March 2015 had been in the same placement for 1 year or longer (22 out of 68 children; 32%) • 40% of In-House foster care placements ceasing during 2014-15 lasted for less than 1 month (32 out of 81 placements ceased) • Nearly half of In-House foster care placements for children aged over 12 years old at placement start date (68 out of 149 placements; 46%) • 14 sibling groups placed together in In-House foster care placements during 2014-15 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 90 Agency foster care placements during 2014-15 (24% of all placements during 2014-15) • Two-thirds of Agency foster care placements during 2014-15 located within 10 miles of home address (60 out of 87 placements; 69%) • Majority of Agency foster care placements during 2014-15 located outside of LA (76 out of 90 placements; 84%) • 60% of Looked After Children placed in Agency foster care placements as at 31 March 2015 had been in the same placement for 1 year or longer (24 out of 40 children) • One-quarter of Agency foster care placements ceasing during 2014-15 lasted for 1 year or longer (12 out of 50 placements ceased; 24%) • Higher prevalence of Agency foster care placements during 2014-15 for children aged over 12 years old than In-House foster care placements (57% compared to 46% of In-House foster care placements) • Eight sibling groups placed together in Agency foster care placements during 2014-15

What we need to do:

- We will continue to target our recruitment of foster carers to provide more carers for teenagers aged 12+ of either gender. The recruitment target for 2015/16 target is 20 carers with at least 10 for target groups of teenagers. Recruiting foster carers for teenagers is a challenge as there is a competitive market with IFAs and other local authorities also trying to build up their own provision.
- Although we will recruit for our target group we are also aware that we need to ensure Merton will have enough carers for the long term to cover all ages. This includes ensuring that we have carers in the younger age group to replace those who will retire in the near future.
- We are confident that we are able to promote Merton as the local authority of choice for prospective foster carers by offering:
 - a) quick, well managed recruitment processes and assessments
 - b) good quality support to our carers
 - c) regular review to ensure competitive fostering rates in relation to local neighbours

Use of Foster Care

The proportion of Merton LAC placed in own provision (In-House foster placements) has improved from 35% in 2012 to 46% as at the end of March 2015. This is in line with our Statistical neighbours and the London benchmark. Increasing Merton's own provision offer (realised through greater numbers of In House foster carers being recruited) remains both a priority and a challenge.

Table 5: Percentage of Children Looked After placed in Own Provision against comparator data (as at 31 March: 2012-2015)

	2012	2013	2014	2015
Merton	35%	46%	40%	46%
London	45%	45%	46%	DNA
Outer London	47%	47%	47%	DNA
Statistical Neighbours	47%	47%	47%	DNA
England	59%	58%	57%	DNA

Source: DfE SFRs –SSDA 903

We use agency carers only when we are unable to place in-house or it is in the best interest of the child both in terms of safeguarding but also in terms of suitability match. Merton expects the highest standards of care for all our looked after children and we have a policy of not using external agencies to provide placements which are not rated Good or Outstanding by Ofsted without Director/Senior management authorisation.

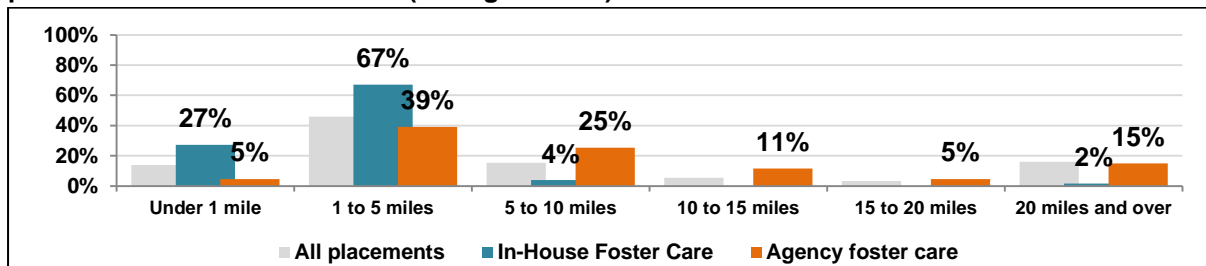
Placement distance and length

It should be noted that 37% of our In-house foster care provision is located Out of Borough, however 94% is within 5 miles of the child's parental home (126 out 128 placements matched to a home address; 94%). Placement distance varies more for agency placements, although the majority are still located within 10 miles of the child's home address.

Table 6: Percentage and Number of In-House and Agency foster care placements by placement location (during 2014-15)

Location	All placements			In-House Foster Care			Agency foster care		
	No. of children	No. of placements	% of placements	No. of children	No. of placements	% of placements	No. of children	No. of placements	% of placements
Merton	106	121	32%	86	94	63%	13	14	16%
Other LA	185	256	68%	52	55	37%	69	76	84%
Total	255	377	100%	131	149	100%	79	90	100%

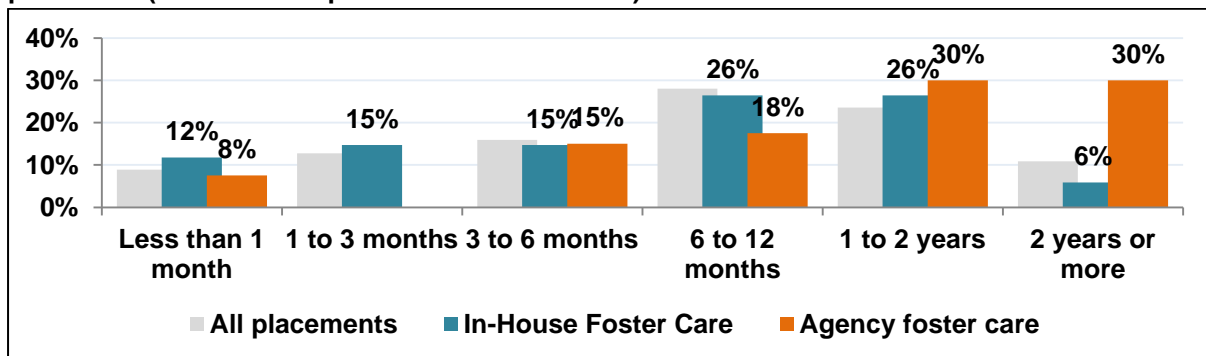
Figure 7: Percentage and Number of In-House and Agency foster care placements by placement distance from home (during 2014-15)³



Source: SSDA903 2014-15

Most of the In-House foster care placements have been open for between 6 months and 2 years as at 31 March 2015 (36 out of 68 open placements; 52%). Three times as many agency placements were open for a period of 2 years or more as at 31 March 2015 when compared to In-House placements open for the same time (12 agency placements compared to 4 In-House placements).. Foster Placements as a collective were open for longer durations as at 31 March 2015 than All placements, which suggests they are more stable than other types of provision.

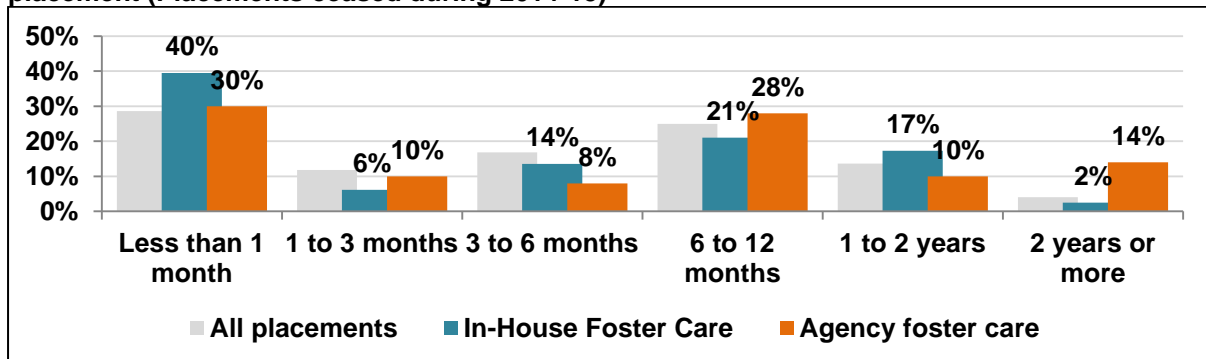
Figure 8: Percentage and Number of In-House and Agency foster care placements by length of placement (Placements open as at 31 March 2015)



Source: SSDA903 2014-15

As we are committed to good placement stability, we therefore bear the cost of Agency Foster Care Provision so long as the child is settled in placement, this is evidence above where 60% of agency provision has been open (in use) for over one year.

Figure 9: Percentage and Number of In-House and Agency foster care placements by length of placement (Placements ceased during 2014-15)



Source: SSDA903 2014-15

³ Excludes UASC cases and those where child's home address is unknown.

A high proportion of In-House and agency foster placements ceasing during 2014-15 lasted for a period less than 1 month. The number of placements ending after 6 to 12 months with In-House foster carers can partly be explained by Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children arriving in Merton after the age of 17 and residing in the same placement until they turn 18 years old. In addition some children and young people return home or move onto permanent care arrangements in a timely manner since the improvement in timeliness of care proceedings during this period.

Gender, Ethnicity and Age

The gender breakdown of In-House foster care placements is broadly in line with the All placements cohort. However, a higher proportion of females are placed with agency foster carers compared to 'All placements'.

Table 10: Percentage and Number of In-House and Agency foster care placements by gender (during 2014-15)

Gender	All placements			In-House Foster Care			Agency foster care		
	No. of children	No. of placements	% of placements	No. of children	No. of placements	% of placements	No. of children	No. of placements	% of placements
Male	159	231	61%	79	88	59%	40	44	49%
Female	96	146	39%	52	61	41%	39	46	51%
Total	255	377	100%	131	149	100%	79	90	100%

Ethnicity for In-House and Agency foster care placements is broadly in-line with the All placements population.

Table 11: Percentage and Number of In-House and Agency foster care placements by ethnicity (during 2014-15)

Ethnicity	All placements			In-House Foster Care			Agency foster care		
	No. of children	No. of placements	% of placements	No. of children	No. of placements	% of placements	No. of children	No. of placements	% of placements
White	115	171	45%	57	61	41%	41	46	51%
Mixed	31	52	14%	18	20	13%	10	10	11%
Asian	23	34	9%	11	16	11%	7	7	8%
Black	61	88	23%	34	41	28%	15	17	19%
Other	25	32	8%	11	11	7%	6	10	11%
Total	255	377	100%	131	149	100%	79	90	100%

Table 12: Percentage and Number of In-House and Agency foster care placements by age (during 2014-15)

Age at placement start date	All placements			In-House Foster Care			Agency foster care		
	No. of children	No. of placements	% of placements	No. of children	No. of placements	% of placements	No. of children	No. of placements	% of placements
Under 1 year	18	26	7%	15	17	11%	1	1	1%
1 to 4 years	26	39	10%	18	21	14%	8	8	9%
5 to 11 years	64	82	22%	39	43	29%	27	30	33%
12 to 15 years	78	104	28%	28	34	23%	30	35	39%
16 years and over	86	126	33%	33	34	23%	14	16	18%
Total (no duplicates)	255	377	100%	131	149	100%	79	90	100%

Source: SSSA903 2014-15

The number of teenagers placed with IFA carers is a reflection of the challenge of recruiting experienced foster carers to Merton to manage children with complex difficulties. For example a high proportion of In-House and agency foster placements which only last less than 1 month are temporary LAC episodes.

Disability

Our provision for disabled children and young people in house is good but it is out stripped by demand. We need to continue to focus on recruiting in house foster carers able to support disabled children.

Table 13: Percentage and Number of In-House and Agency foster care placements by disability status (during 2014-15)

Disability	All placements			In-House Foster Care			Agency foster care		
	No. of children	No. of placements	% of placements	No. of children	No. of placements	% of placements	No. of children	No. of placements	% of placements
Disabled	57	80	21%	21	22	15%	19	19	21%
Non-Disabled	198	297	79%	110	127	85%	60	71	79%
Total	255	377	100%	131	149	100%	79	90	100%

Source: Policy, Planning and Performance Team

Profile of In-House Foster Carers

Key Findings: Profile of In-House Foster Carers

- 69 In-House foster carers were on the Merton Fostering Register during 2014/15
- Three-quarters of In-House foster carers offered Task Based or Short Term Care Provision (52 out of 69 carers; 75%)
- Majority of In-House foster carers aged over 50 as at 31 March 2015 (50 out of 69 carers; 73%)
- In-House foster carers predominately based in Merton and within 5 miles of the child's home residence
- Between 70% and 85% of In-House foster care placements were used by at least one looked after child at any given time during 2014-15

We would approach our in house foster carers for a placement before considering an agency placement. This is because

- we can be confident of the support they will receive,
- we can ensure the appropriateness of matching of any additional placements
- our in house provision is generally more local than IFA provision
- our in house provision offer better value for money to the Council

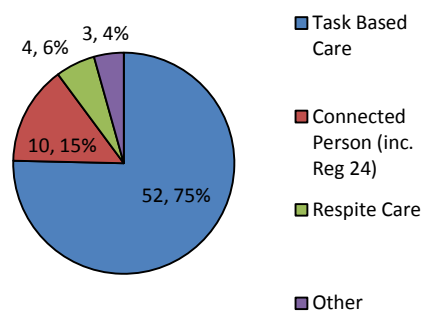
What we need to do:

- We will to develop our existing pool of carers to ensure we are maximising their skills. This involves our Fostering Supervision Team working with carers as part of their annual review process to ensure they access appropriate learning and development
- As part of the annual review processes for foster carers, we will continue to ensure that we have carers with as wide an approval range as possible to provide flexibility and opportunities when placement finding.
- We will work to retain our current carers by ensuring adequate support is available for them when they take a placement. This includes improving the level of support for carers taking on children outside of their age ranges.
- We need to improve the quality of referral information that the foster carer receives and ensure that placement plans are available in a timely manner to support carers to take on young people with more challenging behaviours

In-House Foster Carer Provision - The Detail

The majority of Merton In-House foster carers provide 'Task Based Care' services (52 out of 69 carers; 75%). Task Based care is where carers are working towards a permanent plan for the child. This may be return home, adoption or another route to permanence. Eight In-House foster carers were classified under Regulation 24 care (12% of cohort). Regulation 24 states that a person connected to the child or young person can be approved as a temporary foster carer in an emergency, pending a full fostering assessment. This approval lasts for a maximum of 16 weeks with a possible extension of a further 8 weeks in exceptional circumstances to allow for completion of a fostering assessment. Once approved, these carers are called Connected Persons Foster Carers.

Figure 14: Percentage of In-House foster carers by type of care provided



We have good provision of In house Foster cares approved to care for most age ranges. However base on our use of agency carers and the numbers of children coming in to care, we should increase our provision for 12 – 15 years olds.

Figure 15: Number of In-House foster carers offering task based care during 2014-15 by ages of looked after children approved for

Carer Ref number	Ages approved for																	
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
1																		
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Age approved for (Years)	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
Number of In-House foster carers approved offering task based care	32	32	32	34	35	43	39	39	41	41	43	42	41	39	38	37	36	36
% of In-House foster carers approved offering task based care (out of 52)	62%	62%	62%	65%	67%	83%	75%	75%	79%	79%	83%	81%	79%	75%	73%	71%	69%	69%

Source: Fostering Register 2014-15 – Fostering Team

Distance

Most Merton In-House foster carers are based within the local authority and placements are often within 5 miles of the child's home address. Merton CSF have been able to recruit foster carers from neighbouring boroughs too, with several placements in Sutton, Croydon and Wandsworth. Those carers placed further afield are Connected Person's foster carers.

Table 16: Number and Percentage of In-House Foster carers by residence (as at 31 March 2015)

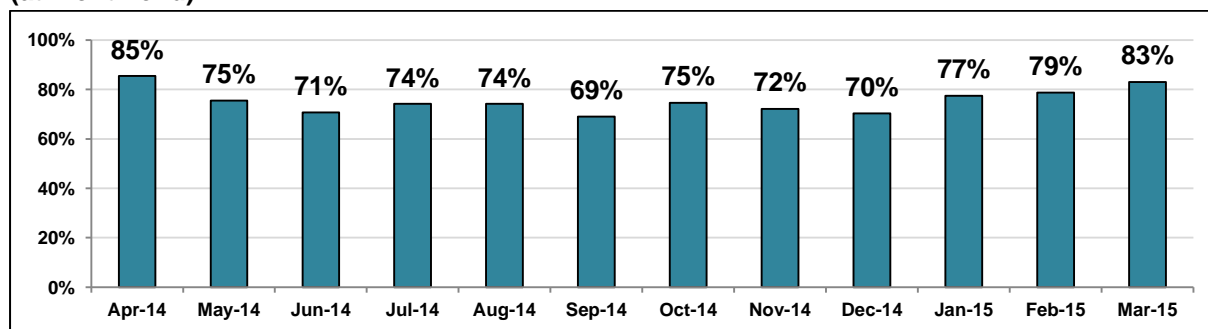
Location of foster carers	No.	% Total
Merton	40	58%
Sutton	9	13%
Croydon	8	12%
Wandsworth	5	7%
Lambeth	3	4%
Southwark	2	3%
Surrey	1	1%
Kent	1	1%
Total	69	100%

Source: Fostering Team - Fostering Register 2014-15

Usage

Throughout 2014-15, between 70% and 85% of placements were being used by at least one child at any one time. To a certain extent, it is encouraging to see most placements filled, with spare capacity available for any new LAC starters who enter care. However there needs to be awareness that some placements will preclude a foster carer from taking an additional child or young person, due to behaviour of a child placed or space factors (e.g. a carer may have one spare room where a sibling group may be placed but not two unrelated children)

Figure 17: Percentage of In-House foster placements used by at least one child during 2014-15 (at month end)

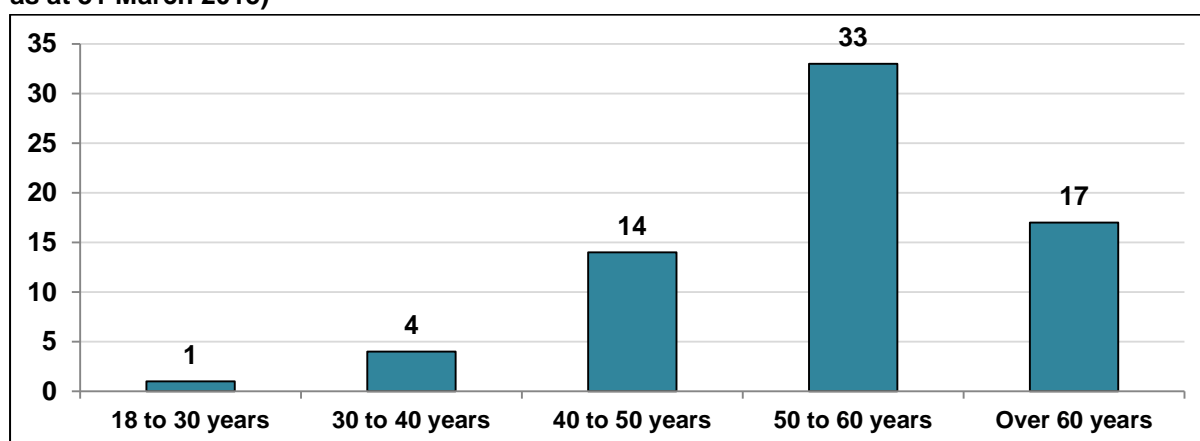


Source: Fostering Team - Fostering Register 2014-15

Age of carers

A high proportion of Merton In-House foster carers are aged between 40 and 60 years old. However, a quarter of registered In-House Foster Carers are aged over 60 years (17 foster carer placements). Potentially, some of the older carers (those aged 60 or over) will retire and leave the fostering register over the next few years. As a result, the continuous drive towards recruiting a 'younger' profile of foster carers (those aged between 35-50 years old) will counter this risk, ensuring we have a stable number of foster carer for the long term.

Figure 18: Number and percentage of In-House foster carers by age range (age of foster carer as at 31 March 2015)



Source: Fostering Team - Fostering Register 2014-15

Retention and Length of Approval

The recruitment and retention of in-house foster carers remains a priority. Over the last two years (April 2013-March 2015), 28 foster carers have been recruited by Merton CSF. Also, there were 25 foster carers who had been registered with Merton CSF for longer than 5 years.

Table 20: Number and percentage of In-House foster carers by length of time approved as a carer (as at 31 March 2015 or de-registration date)

Length of time approved as foster carer	No.	% Total
Less than 1 year	15 ⁴	22%
1 to 2 years	13	19%
2 to 5 years	16	23%
5 to 10 years	7	10%
More than 10 years	18	26%
Total	69	100%

Source: Fostering Team - Fostering Register 2014-15

During 2014/15 10 In-house foster carers were permanently recruited, however 6 de-registered, this resulted in a net gain of four. Reason for deregistration included ill health of foster carer and a change of vocation. A lack of placements for the foster carers preferred child type, the end of a 'connected person's arrangement' and the adoption of a Merton child.

Table 19: Retention of In-House foster carers during 2014-15

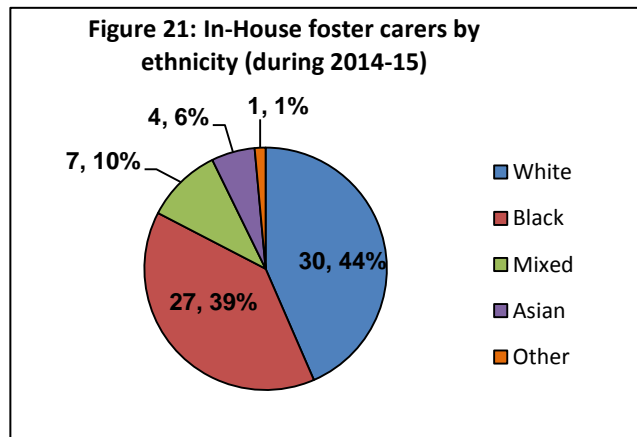
In-House foster carers	No. of In-House foster carers
Permanently recruited during 2014-15	10
De-registered during 2014-15	6
Net Gain during 2014-15	4

Source: Fostering Team - Fostering Register 2014-15

⁴ Includes three temporary approvals and two foster carers awaiting approval as at 31 March 2015

Ethnicity

The ethnic diversity of Merton In-House foster carers is reflective of the ethnic breakdown of the LAC population. The majority of In-House foster carers are from White British, Black Caribbean and Black African backgrounds. The ethnicity breakdown of foster carers may change over the next few years as the borough's resident population becomes more diverse.



Source: Fostering Team - Fostering Register 2014-15

Children's Homes

Children's Homes provide a residential setting for children and young people. Children's Homes are often run by private or voluntary providers. Merton has no full time Children's Homes of its own. Currently there is only one privately run Children's Homes in the Merton area with an Ofsted rating of higher than Requires Improvement. That provision offers a specific service to disabled children.

Key Findings: Children's Homes

- 41 Children's Home placements during 2014-15 (11% of all placements during 2014-15)
- A high proportion of Children's Home placements during 2014-15 for disabled children (25 out of 41 placements; 61%)
- Two-thirds of Children's Homes placements during 2014-15 for children aged 12 to 15 years old at start of placement (26 out of 41 placements; 63%)
- 88% of Children's Homes placements during 2014-15 for males (36 out of 41 placements)
- Majority of Children's Homes placements during 2014-15 located 15 miles or further from home address (26 out of 41 placements; 63%)

What we need to do

- We are creating a Business Case to progress the procurement of a Children's Home within Merton so that we are able to meet the needs of our young people in a high quality commissioned service in the local area.
- In addition, we will work with existing and new providers within 5 miles of Merton to develop closer commissioning relationships. There has been interest expressed by several providers in developing services in neighbouring authorities and we need to explore these further
- We will continue to work with providers to ensure quality and best value of placements through regular quality assurance visits and robust fee negotiations both on placement and at key points during changes in service delivery.
- We will maintain contact with a new provider who is planning to open a Children's Home in Merton. Once this provision is registered we will explore making placements here.
- We are working with Action for Children around their plans to consider changing registration of one of their children's homes in Kingston to meet the needs of more challenging young people. This may be an opportunity for us to commission placements nearer to Merton.

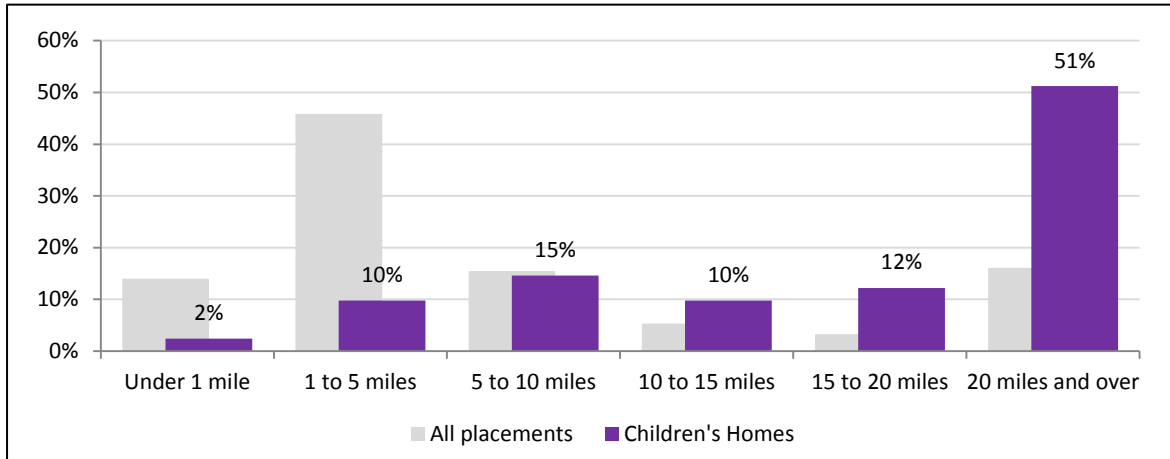
Use of Residential Children's Homes

There are no suitable children's homes within Merton which we would choose to use (except for Merton's own respite unit for children with disabilities and one other specialist provision). There are limited placement options within neighbouring authorities. There are significant increased cost implications for placing young people in residential Children's Homes

Distance

Children's Homes placements vary considerably in terms of placement distance from a child's home residence. Sometimes, it may be part of a care plan to place the child further away to safeguard a young person at risk of CSE or gang affiliation. In some situations, a young person will have more positive outcomes away from a negative peer group or area.

Figure 22: Percentage and Number of Children's Home placements by placement distance from home (during 2014-15)



Source: SSDA903 2014-15

Finding an appropriate children's home placement that for looked after children with complex needs can be challenging. Children's Home placements during 2014-15 were mainly utilised for older children aged between 12 and 15 years old at start of placement (26 out of 41 placements; 63%).

Age

There were a small number of younger children placed in Children's Homes, including two children aged 9 when they started the placement. One of these is a historic placements and the placement service would prefer not to place children under 10 in Children's Homes provision where possible.

Table 23: Percentage and Number of Children's Home placements by age group at placement start date (during 2014-15)

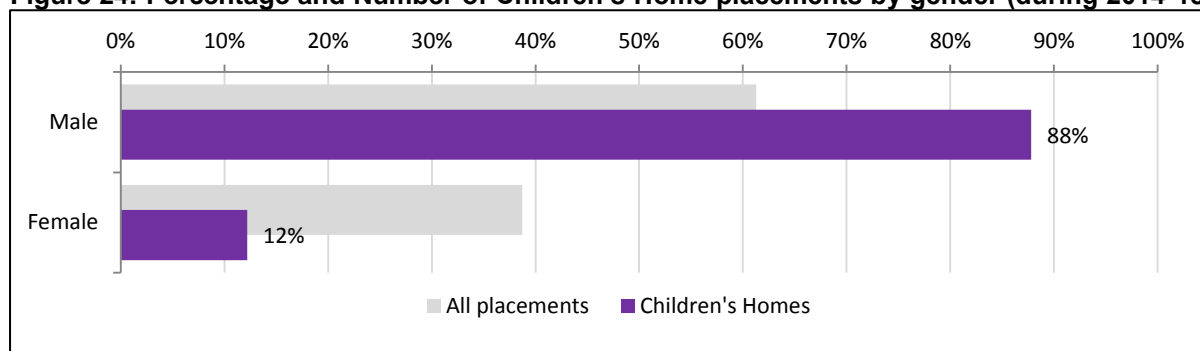
Age at placement start date	All placements			Children's Homes		
	No. of children	No. of placements	% of placements	No. of children	No. of placements	% of placements
Under 1 year	18	26	7%	0	0	0%
1 to 4 years	26	39	10%	0	0	0%
5 to 11 years	64	82	22%	4	4	10%
12 to 15 years	78	104	28%	17	26	63%
16 years and over	86	126	33%	8	11	27%
Total (no duplicates)	255	377	100%	26	41	100%

Source: SSDA903 2014-15

Gender

Males were over-represented in Children's Home placements compared to all placements (36 out of 41 placements; 88%).

Figure 24: Percentage and Number of Children's Home placements by gender (during 2014-15)



Source: SSDA903 2014-15

Disability

A high proportion of Children's Home placements during 2014-15 were made for disabled children (25 out of 41 placements; 61%)

Table 25: Percentage and Number of Children's Home Placements by Disability Status (during 2014-15)

Disability	All placements			Children's Homes		
	No. of children	No. of placements	% of placements	No. of children	No. of placements	% of placements
Disabled	57	80	21%	20	25	61%
Non-Disabled	198	297	79%	6	16	39%
Total	255	377	100%	26	41	100%

Source: Policy, Planning and Performance Team

Ethnicity

Ethnicity breakdown is broadly in line with the all placements cohort, barring the mixed background cohort. This figure is skewed by the fact that one child had seven children's home placements during 2014-15.

Table 26: Percentage and Number of Children's Home placements by ethnicity (during 2014-15)

Ethnicity	All placements			Children's Homes		
	No. of children	No. of placements	% of placements	No. of children	No. of placements	% of placements
White	115	171	45%	12	17	41%
Mixed	31	52	14%	4	12	29%
Asian	23	34	9%	2	2	5%
Black	61	88	23%	7	9	22%
Other	25	32	8%	1	1	2%
Total	255	377	100%	26	41	100%

Source: SSDA903 2014-15

Length of Placement

A third of Children's Home placements (open as at 31 March 2015) had been used for between 1 and 3 months (7 out of 19 placements; 37%). Five children had been in the same Children's Home placement for 1 year or more.

The majority of Children's Home placements ceasing during 2014-15 lasted less than 6 months (17 out of 22 placements; 77%).

Figure 27: Percentage and Number of Children's Home placements by length of placement (Placements open as at 31 March 2015)

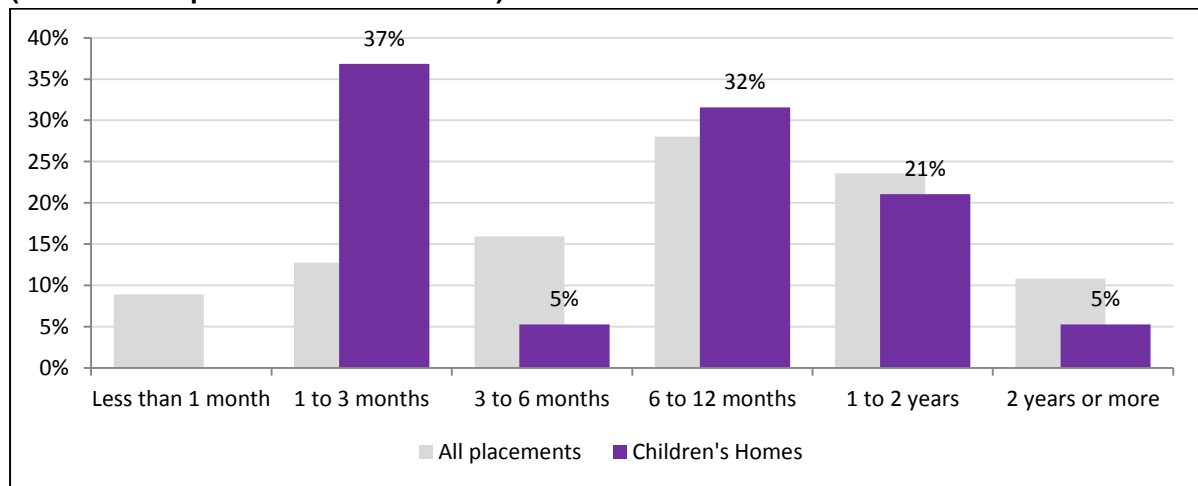
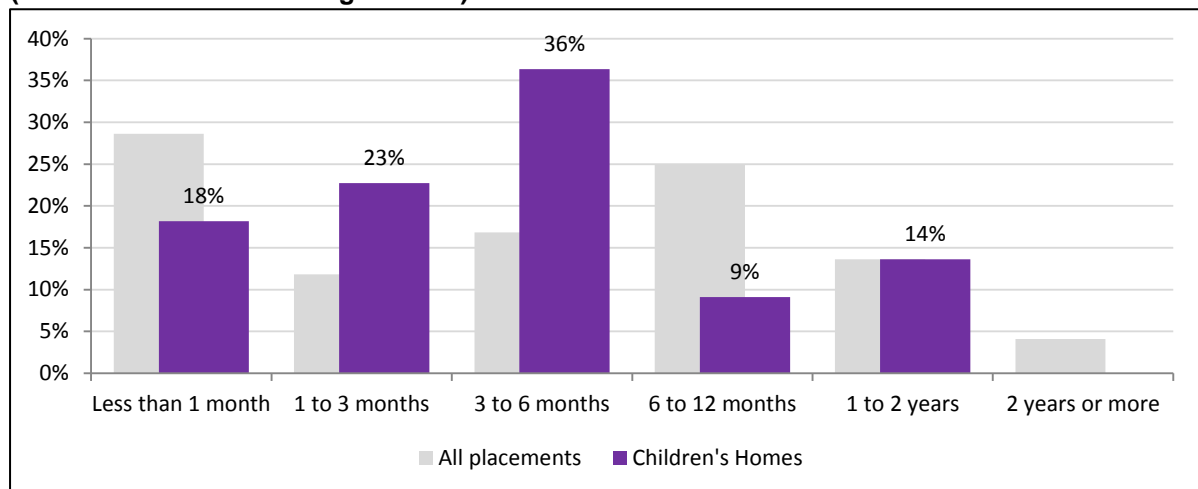


Figure 28: Percentage and Number of Children's Home placements by length of placement (Placements ceased during 2014-15)



Semi-independent Provision

Semi-independent accommodation includes placements in residential accommodation which provide semi-independent providers. Many of these placements offer a support element. This provision is not subject to Childrens' Homes Regulations and is only available for young people aged 16+. This cohort of young people also includes those placed in supported lodgings placements. Merton has a small supported lodgings carer scheme for young people aged 16+.

Key Findings: Semi-Independent Provision

- 53 Semi-Independent placements during 2014-15 (14% of all placements during 2014-15)
- Three-quarters of Semi-Independent placements during 2014-15 for children aged 17 years old at start of placement (40 out of 53 placements; 75%)
- Majority of Semi-Independent placements during 2014-15 located outside of Merton local authority boundary (47 out of 53 placements; 89%). Although 94% were located within 10 miles of Merton (35 out of 37 placements)
- Two-thirds of Looked After Children in Semi-Independent Provision as at 31 March 2015 had been in the same placement for 6 to 12 months (8 out of 13 children; 62%)

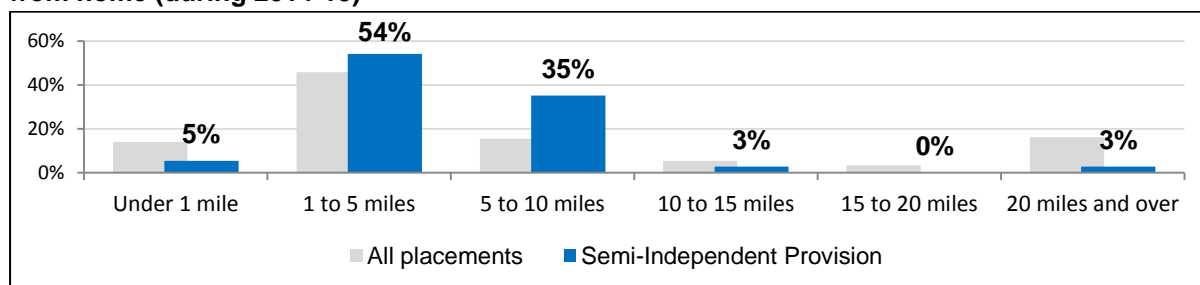
What we need to do

- We will work closely with well-developed semi-independent and housing providers to encourage them to consider the options of supporting young people within Merton. This would enable our young people to remain in the Merton area
- We will continue to embed established links with housing providers (Grenfell and Notting Hill Housing Trust) who have developed their services to better meet the needs of our young people and care leavers within Merton
- We will continue to embed our financial framework with providers to ensure that we are getting best value of placements made.
- We will work closely with our Housing colleagues to ensure we use our quota of Housing for our young people in a timely way where appropriate

Distance

The majority of Semi-Independent placements are located outside of Merton. However nearly all Semi-Independent placements are located within 10 miles of the children's home address (35 out of 37 placements; 94%).

Figure 29: Percentage and Number of Semi-Independent placements by placement distance from home (during 2014-15)

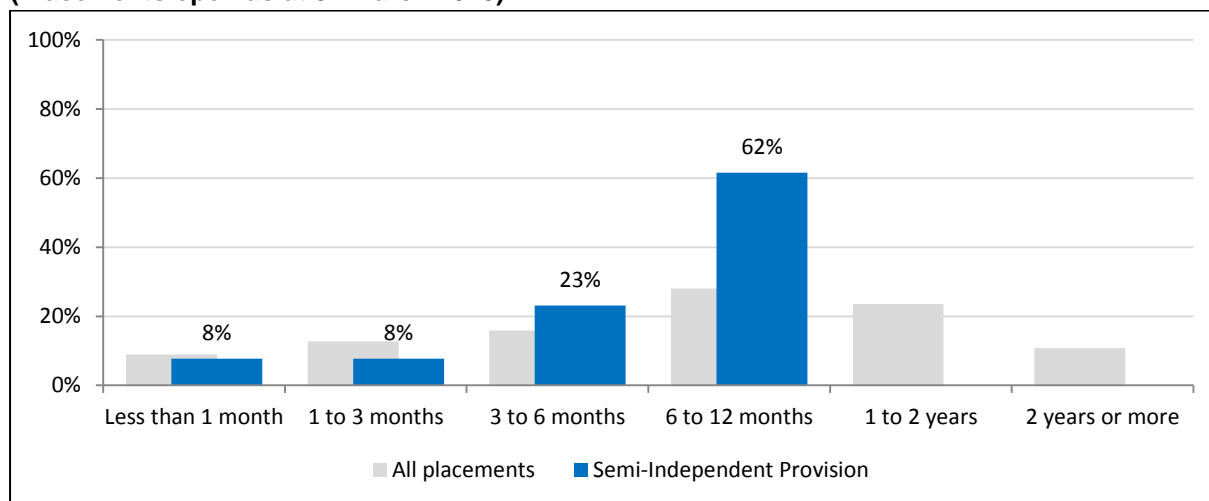


Source: SSDA903 2014-15

Length of Placement

Nearly two thirds of Semi-Independent placements for children looked after as at 31 March 2015 were open for between 6 and 12 months (8 out of 13 placements; 62%).

Figure 30: Percentage and Number of Semi-Independent placements by length of placement (Placements open as at 31 March 2015)



Source: SSDA903 2014-15

A high proportion of Semi-Independent placements ceasing during 2014-15 had lasted between 6 and 12 months (16 out of 40 placements; 40%). Many semi-independent placements do not last longer than 2 years as they are aimed at older looked after children who will turn 18 before 2 years in the same placement have amassed.

Table 31: Percentage and Number of Semi-Independent placements by length of placement (Placements ceased during 2014-15)

Placement length (Ceased placements during 2014-15)	All placements			Semi-Independent Provision		
	No. of children	No. of placements	% of placements	No. of children	No. of placements	% of placements
Less than 1 month	54	63	29%	7	7	18%
1 to 3 months	24	26	12%	5	6	15%
3 to 6 months	36	37	17%	7	7	18%
6 to 12 months	50	55	25%	15	16	40%
1 to 2 years	30	30	14%	4	4	10%
2 years or more	9	9	4%	0	0	0%
Total	155	220	100%	31	40	100%

Source: SSDA903 2014-15

We currently have a designated quota of permanent housing for 15 young people who are assessed as being able to manage living independently. We work closely with our Housing colleagues to ensure that the right people are placed in this provision. In 2014/15 we used 14 places. We are already close to using our full quota for 2015/16. With the increase in our number of looked after children, there will be an increase in Care Leavers requiring accommodation, meaning that our current quota is likely to be insufficient for our future demand.

Gender

An appropriate proportion of young males and females are taking up semi independent provision.

Table 32: Percentage and Number of Semi-Independent placements by gender (during 2014-15)

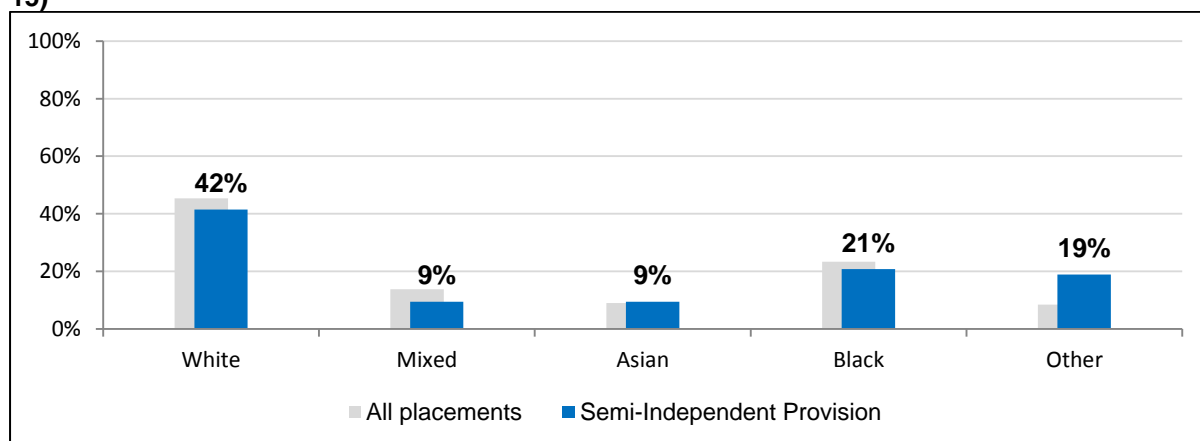
Gender	All placements			Semi-Independent Provision		
	No. of children	No. of placements	% of placements	No. of children	No. of placements	% of placements
Male	159	231	61%	29	34	64%
Female	96	146	39%	14	19	36%
Total	255	377	100%	43	53	100%

Source: SSDA903 2014-15

Ethnicity

Similarly take up of Semi-independent provision by ethnicity is in proportion to the whole population and as we would expect.

Figure 33: Percentage and Number of Semi-Independent placements by ethnicity (during 2014-15)



Source: SSDA903 2014-15

Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Mini task group update and recommendations

Introduction

During the 2015/2016 municipal year, the Children and Young People (CYP) Overview and Scrutiny Panel has trialled a new approach to task groups; these are smaller in scope and put members in the driving seat of undertaking research and gathering information.

Two mini task groups were set-up to investigate:

- Improving educational outcomes for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND); and
- Preparing young people leaving care with specific reference to accessing and securing employment and housing.

Recommendation

Whilst the work of the mini task groups is yet to conclude, based on the insights already gained, it is recommended that these be brought together under a single focus on routes into employment for both of these vulnerable cohorts (children with SEND and those leaving care).

No judgement has yet been made as to whether this mini task group approach has or has not been successful. This may be harder to judge given this new approach has been trialled during a period of change within the democratic services team, with some resulting loss in momentum. It is recommended that this be considered more fully as part of the work programme planning for the 2016/2017 municipal year.

Cohort information

Information available to the mini task groups supports a greater focus on routes into employment for these vulnerable cohorts:

1. Young people with SEND

At the February 2016 meeting of the CYP Panel, the Children, Schools and Families department presented the annual school standards report. This highlighted:

- There has been a 27 percentage point rise in the number of young people with SEN in the 16 – 18 cohort and a rise in the number of them who are not in education, employment or training (NEET); and
- Those most at risk of being NEET have had support with their SEN at school, were known to social care and/or were also known to youth offending teams. The largest group received support with their SEN in school but did not have a statement of special educational need.

2. Care leavers

In the July 2015 report on *Looked-After Children*, the number of care leavers who are not engaged in education, employment or training was identified as an area of focus as a year on year decline in performance had been identified. At the time the report was written, 59% (82 out of 140 young people in the care leaver cohort) were engaged in employment,

education and training, (with a remaining 41% or 58 young people in the care leaver cohort that are also defined as NEET).

An update to the report to the *Looked-After Children* report is anticipated in March 2016.

Next steps

1. Gain the agreement of the care leavers task group for this approach (by 10/03/16);
2. Gain the agreement of the CYP panel for this approach (by 22/03/16);
3. Develop a short project plan to help bring this work to fruition (by 22/03/16). This will define what information is still required, which experts should be consulted, consideration of the existing Merton routes into employment offer for these cohorts, comparison with the offer from other local authorities (with a focus on those that are award winning or have been demonstrated to be the most successful) and review the progress on existing task group recommendations that support routes into employment for these vulnerable cohorts.
4. Both task groups have already identified the importance of the vocational offer from Merton to underpin routes into employment for these cohorts with specific reference to apprenticeships and mentoring schemes. This will be a key focus of the remaining activity.

Annette Wiles
March 2016

Committee: Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Date: 22nd March 2016

Agenda item:

Wards: All

Subject: Update on Developments Affecting Children, Schools and Families Department

Lead officer: Yvette Stanley, Director of Children, Schools and Families Dept

Lead members: Cllr Maxi Martin (Cllr Judy Saunders), Cllr Martin Whelton

Contact officer: Paul Ballatt, Assistant Director, Commissioning, Strategy and Performance

Recommendations:

A. Members of the panel discuss and comment on the contents of the report.

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1. The report provides members of the panel with information on key developments affecting Children, Schools and Families Department since the panel's last meeting in February 2016.

2 DETAILS

- 2.1 Two primary schools have been inspected with reports published since the panel's last meeting. All Saints retained its overall rating of good and Malmesbury has improved its rating to good.
- 2.2 The DfE has confirmed Chipstead Valley Academy Trust as the preferred sponsor for Beecholme Primary School. An initial meeting with the Board of Directors of Chipstead Valley has taken place and the LA has been working with the sponsor to facilitate meetings with staff and parents as part of the consultation process. In parallel, work is taking place to improve teaching and learning and a full review was undertaken in February. This review has informed the development of the school's post Ofsted inspection action plan.
- 2.3 The council has recently consulted on school admissions arrangements for 2017-18. Views were sought on a number of potential changes to arrangements as reported to the Panel at its last meeting. Over 50 public responses were received, largely supporting the proposals. Following consideration of the responses and discussions with the cabinet member, changes are expected to be agreed by the Director on March 15th under delegated powers. There will now be a more flexible approach taken to enable delayed entry to primary school for summer born children; the existing Admissions Priority Area (APA) around Wimbledon Chase Primary School will be reduced and a new APA for Dundonald primary School introduced; the sibling policy at the above schools will be altered to prioritise siblings living within the APAs; minor changes to sixth form entry requirements for the

- combined RR6 will be implemented and a cross sibling policy between Ricards Lodge and Rutlish Schools introduced.
- 2.4 Officers have been examining preference data for primary school admissions in September 2016. As anticipated there was a slight reduction in overall applications from Merton residents for 2016 reception class places, with 2745 applications compared to 2768 in 2015. Preferences for schools in Wimbledon have increased significantly with more modest increases in the Raynes Park and central Mitcham areas. Preferences for schools in Morden and east Mitcham have reduced. It is likely that children unable to be offered a preference school in the Wimbledon area will be provided with central offers largely at the Park (Free) Community school in south Wimbledon or in schools to the east of the borough. School expansion plans in Lambeth seem to have affected preferences for Stanford and Lonesome schools in particular.
- 2.5 Offers of secondary school places have recently been made to Merton pupils as part of the national secondary school places 'offer day'. The council received over 70 additional resident applications compared to last year but was able to increase the percentage of first preference offers from 62.76% to 65.00%. We were also able to increase marginally the percentage of first to third preference offers from 88.35% to 88.75%. 98 (4.8%) Merton resident pupils received central offers, however, with no offer of a preference school being possible. Officers expect all secondary school year 7 places to be filled in 2016 except at Raynes Park, which is expected nevertheless to be in a healthier position than in 2015, and at St Mark's Academy, whose popularity continues to concern the council.
- 2.6 An interim inspection of Brightwell children's home has found the home has 'improved effectiveness' since its last full inspection rating of requiring improvement. Requirements from the full inspection have been addressed with notable improvements including the completion of the registration process for the interim manager; revisions made to policies and procedures including on safeguarding and transitions arrangements; the review of the home's Statement of Purpose; the completion of a workforce plan supported by bespoke training already provided; and refurbishment of the fabric of the building. The home is expected to have its next full inspection during 2016-17.
- 2.7 Merton's Safeguarding Children's Board held a successful annual conference in early March with some 80+ attendees. Chaired by Merton's Young Inspectors, the event included keynote presentations on learning from research on best practice in inter-agency working and on further developing a 'think family' approach in child protection work. A number of workshops were also delivered by CSF and our partners including adult services providers and included working with learning disabled parents and those experiencing mental health or substance misuse difficulties. The conference is part of the MSCB's and council's comprehensive learning and development offer for workers involved in children's safeguarding in Merton.
- 2.8 The department is currently refreshing its Target Operating Model (TOM) documentation which is supporting the next phase of our service transformation and the delivery of the savings the department is likely to be required to make over the next two to three years. As noted in previous reports, key elements of the department's approach include reviewing thresholds for services and

focusing resources on our statutory duties; streamlining access points for service users; increasing use of new technology to improve efficiency where possible; delivering service specific change projects; reviewing the department's property needs and refreshing our workforce strategy. Significant re-organisation of the department's functions will also be required. During 2016-17, the following key pieces of work will be progressed as part of the department's Transformation Delivery Plan:

- Review and restructure of the department's management functions to enable the deletion of the Commissioning, Strategy and Performance Division and the transfer of service areas to the remaining two Divisions.
- Undertake feasibility and progress further integration of commissioning responsibilities across CSF department, other council services and Merton's Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG).
- Review of the department-wide data and intelligence functions, developing options for future organisation.
- Review of the department's business support/administrative function, developing options for future organisation.
- Review of the department's property portfolio to examine potential rationalisation and asset release.
- Review of Merton's Child Wellbeing Model including our early help offer, MASH operation, thresholds for services and pathways for accessing services.
- Complete implementation of MOSAIC, the new ICT client information and casework system, within CSF and Housing and Community departments.
- Progress further implementation of our early years TOM, including implementation of new fees policy for council delivered childcare, establishment of a sustainable provision map of children's centres and the co-location of community health staff into children's centres.
- Further develop and extend the department's trading approach with schools in Merton and examine wider trading opportunities outside the borough.
- Develop further proposals to promote the future sustainability of universal youth provision.
- Review current SEN transport arrangements including taxi contracts and clienting function.
- Continue implementation of the SEN components of the Children and Families Act 2014

More detailed updates on progress in implementing these key projects will be provided during the course of the year.

3. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

3.1 None for the purposes of this report.

4. CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED

4.1 None for the purposes of this report.

- 5. TIMETABLE**
- 5.1 N/A
- 6. FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS**
- 6.1 No specific implications from this report.
- 7. LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS**
- 7.1 No specific implications from this report.
- 8. HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS**
- 8.1 An equalities assessment was completed during the consultation on changes to school admission arrangements for 2017-18
- 9. CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS**
- 9.1 No specific implications from this report.
- 10. RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS**
- 10.1 No specific implications from this report..
- 11. APPENDICES – THE FOLLOWING DOCUMENTS ARE TO BE PUBLISHED WITH THIS REPORT AND FORM PART OF THE REPORT**
- 11.1 N/A
- 12. BACKGROUND PAPERS**
- 12.1 None

Committee: Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Date: 22 March 2016

Agenda item:

Wards: All wards

Subject: Performance monitoring 2015/16 (January 2016)

Lead officer: Paul Ballatt, Assistant Director of Commissioning, Strategy and Performance, Children Schools and Families Department

Lead member(s): Cllr Maxi Martin (Judy Saunders); Cllr Martin Whelton.

Forward Plan reference number: n/a

Contact officer: Naheed Chaudhry, Head of Policy, Planning and Performance.

Recommendations: That the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Panel;

- A. Discuss and comment the current level of performance as at the end of January 2016 (appendix 1)
-

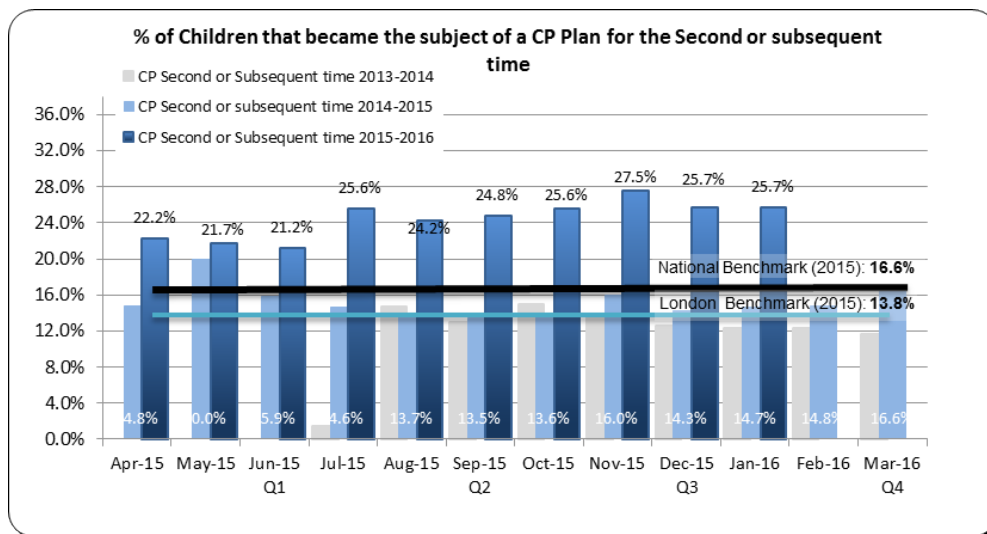
1. **PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 1.1. To provide the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Panel (CYP panel) with a regular update on the performance of the Children, Schools and Families Department and key partners.
- 1.2. Data provided in appendix one is as at the end of January 2016. At the point of publishing this report the February 2016 data had not yet been validated.

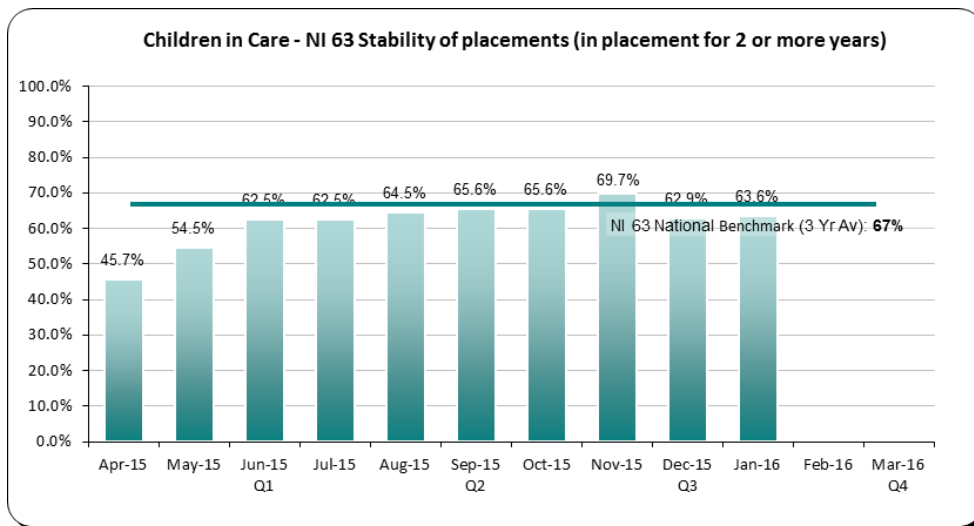
2. **DETAILS**

- 2.1. At a Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel meeting in June 2007 it was agreed that the Children Schools and Families Department would submit a regular performance report on a range of key performance indicators.
- 2.2. This performance monitoring report acts as a 'health check' for the Panel and as such is over and above the more detailed performance reports scheduled to the Panel which relate to specific areas of activities such as the annual Schools Standards report, Corporate Parenting Report, MSCB annual report etc.
- 2.3. This performance index is periodically reviewed and revised by Members. A new dataset was agreed at the January 2015 Scrutiny meeting and has been implemented from April 2015. Officers have also agreed to flag with Members any additional KPIs on which there may be additional management oversight at any given point in the year.
- 2.4. With the exception of those reported below, as at 25 February 2016, no additional KPIs are of particular concern to DMT.
- 2.5. **January 2016 Performance commentary**
- 2.6. Appendix one presents the performance dataset for 2015/16. Comments are provided below on exception only for those indicators reporting as Red or Amber.

- 2.7. **Line 11 Percentage of children that became the subject of a Child Protection Plan for the second or subsequent time – Red.**
- 2.8. Twenty six per cent of children subject to a child protection plan were the subject of a plan for the second or subsequent time. This indicator relates to 44 children with previous plans (new child protection plans started YTD 171).
- 2.9. The indicator has increased significantly in 2015/16 and is higher than Merton's norm. This indicator is also above the national average of 16.6% and above the London average of 13.8% (CIN census 2014/15).
- 2.10. An action plan involving all of the services within CSC and the MSCB is in the process of being finalised. The improvement plan will include the social work training programme for 2016/17 having a focus on improving care planning and the MSCB will run workshops on developing and implementing plans in Core Groups.



- 2.11. **Line 16 Percentage of Looked After Children cases which were reviewed within required timescales (Year to Date) – Red.**
- 2.12. 97% of child children in care cases were reviewed within the required timescale, although below an ambitious target of 100%, this outturn performance is considered to be within thresholds of appropriate levels of performance.
- 2.13. Internal procedures exist to notify the Assistant Director for Children's Social Care and Youth Inclusion when LAC reviews are missed and he is able to seek reassurance that reviews are followed up quickly after. The DfE no longer publish national comparable data for this performance indicator.
- 2.14. **Line 19 Stability of placements of Looked After Children - length of placement – Red.**
- 2.15. This length of placement indicator refers to a small cohort of children under the age of 16 who have been in care for 2 and half years or more and have been in their current placement for 2 years or more (In care for 912+ days and in a placement for 730+).
- 2.16. As at the end of January 64% of this cohort had been in placements for 2 years or more, this relates to 21 of 33 children or young people. After a year of stabilising this indicator and three months performing better than the national average we have just dipped below the benchmark. Each child or young person continues to be tracked and monitored by Heads of Service. Placement stability remains a challenge particularly with the teenage LAC cohort.



1. APPENDICES – THE FOLLOWING DOCUMENTS ARE TO BE PUBLISHED WITH THIS REPORT AND FORM PART OF THE REPORT

Appendix 1: CYPP performance index 2015/16 (January 2016)

2. BACKGROUND PAPERS

CSF Performance Management Framework <http://intranet/departments/csf-index/csf-performance.htm>

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Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel - Performance Index 2015/16



No.	Performance Indicators	Target 2015/16	Deviation	Polarity	Benchmarking and trend				BRAG rating	Merton 2015/16 performance											Notes	
					Merton 2013/14	Merton 2014/15	England 2014/15	London 2014/15		Apr-15	May-15	Jun-15 / Q1	Jul-15	Aug-15	Sep-15 / Q2	Oct-15	Nov-15	Dec-15 / Q3	Jan-16	Feb-16		Mar-16 / Q4
1	Number of Common and Shared Assessments undertaken (CASAs)	Not a target measure	n/a	High	707	443	No benchmarking available	No benchmarking available	Not a target measure			162			300			401				Quarterly (Time lag in collating CASAs from partner agencies) YTD
2	% of Single Assessments completed within the statutory 45 days	82% (National 2014)	2.5%	High	81%	91%	81%	80%	Green	93%	92%	93%	93%	94%	95%	94%	95%	93%	90%			Year to Date
3	% of Education, Health and Care plans issued within statutory 20 week timescale	85%	2.5%	High	100% (SEN2)	Due in July 2016	61.5% (SEN2 2013/14)	64.0% (SEN2 2013/14)	Red			87%			72%			60%				Year to Date
Child protection																						
4	Child Protection Plans rate per 10,000	Not a target measure	n/a	n/a	39	42	43	41	Not a target measure	35.9	35.6	35.4	35.2	36.9	37.2	35.2	35.6	33.0	32.6			Monthly - as at the end of the month
5	Number of children subject of a Child Protection Plan	Not a target measure	n/a	n/a	182	180	No relevant benchmarking available	No relevant benchmarking available	Not a target measure	165	164	163	162	170	171	162	164	152	150			Monthly - as at the end of the month
6	Number of family groups subject of Child protection plans	Not a target measure	n/a	n/a	86	84	No relevant benchmarking available	No relevant benchmarking available	Not a target measure	94	96	94	86	90	88	83	84	78	75			Monthly - as at the end of the month
7	% of Children subject of a Child Protection Plan with an allocated Social Worker	100%	n/a	High	100%	100%	No relevant benchmarking available	No relevant benchmarking available	Green	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%			Monthly - as at the end of the month
8	% of quorate attendance at child protection conferences	95%	2.5%	High	93%	91%	No relevant benchmarking available	No relevant benchmarking available	Red			92.3%			82.7%			90.0%				Quarterly
9	% of reviews completed within timescale for Children with Child Protection Plans	96% (National 2013)	n/a	High	93%	93%	94%	96%	Green	100%	100%	98%	98%	98%	98%	98%	98%	97%	97%			Year To Date (NI 67)
10	Percentage of Children subject of a CP Plan who had a 4 weekly visit within timescales in the month - (reporting activities)*	Not a target measure	n/a	High	No relevant benchmarking available	No relevant benchmarking available	No relevant benchmarking available	No relevant benchmarking available	Not a target measure	92%	90%	82%	87%	80%	79%	84%	87%	89%	92%			*Measure reviewed mid year to meet local managements needs (Dec 2015)
11	% of Children that became the subject of a Child Protection Plan for the second or subsequent time	13% (London 2014)	20%	Low	11%	17%	17%	14%	Red	22%	22%	21%	26%	24%	25%	26%	28%	26%	26%			Year To Date (NI 65)
Looked After Children																						
12	Looked After Children rate per 10,000	Not a target measure	n/a	n/a	33	34	60	52	Not a target measure	34.3	34.8	35.9	35.4	34.8	34.8	33.3	33.9	35.9	34.8			End of the month snapshot
13	Number of Looked After Children	Not a target measure	n/a	n/a	150	157	No relevant benchmarking available	No relevant benchmarking available	Not a target measure	158	160	165	163	160	160	153	156	165	160			End of the month snapshot
14	% of Looked After Children with an allocated Social Worker	100%	n/a	High	100%	100%	No relevant benchmarking available	No relevant benchmarking available	Green	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%			Year to Date
15	Average number of weeks taken to complete Care proceedings against a national target of 26 weeks	37 weeks	8%	Low	29	24 weeks (Q4)	30	No relevant benchmarking available	Green			28 weeks			31 weeks			not yet published				Quarterly
16	% of Looked After Children cases which were reviewed within required timescales	100%	1%	High	97%	95%	Not published	Not published	Red	97%	100%	100%	100%	99%	99%	98%	97%	97%	97%			Year To Date (NI 66)
17	% of Looked After Children participating in their reviews in month	90%	2%	High	87%	66%	No relevant benchmarking available	No relevant benchmarking available	Green	84%	95%	86%	90%	88%	88%	91%	89%	88%	88%			Year to Date
18	Stability of placements of Looked After Children - number of moves (3 moves or more in the year)	15%	n/a	Low	13%	14%	11%	No relevant benchmarking available	Green	1%	2%	3%	3%	4%	6%	5%	7%	10%	12%			Year To Date (NI 62)
19	Stability of placements of Looked After Children - length of placement	68%	2%	High	58%	46%	67%	No relevant benchmarking available	Red	46%	55%	63%	63%	65%	66%	66%	70%	63%	64%			End of the month snapshot (NI 63)
20	% of Looked After Children placed with agency foster carers	46%	12%	Low	50%	41.8%	39%	No relevant benchmarking available	Green			40.6%			37.5%			43.6%				Quarterly
21	Number of in-house foster carers recruited	20	10%	High	14	10	No relevant benchmarking available	No relevant benchmarking available	Red			4			7			10				Year to Date
22	Number of Looked After Children who were adopted and agency Special Guardianship Orders granted	13	8%	High	15	16	No relevant benchmarking available	No relevant benchmarking available	Green	2	4	4	5	6	9	11	11	12	13			Year to Date

No.	Performance Indicators	Target 2015/16	Deviation	Polarity	Benchmarking and trend				BRAG rating	Merton 2015/16 performance										Notes
					Merton 2013/14	Merton 2014/15	England 2014/15	London 2014/15		Apr-15	May-15	Jun-15 / Q1	Jul-15	Aug-15	Sep-15 / Q2	Oct-15	Nov-15	Dec-15 / Q3	Jan-16	
Childrens Centres and Schools																				
23	% outcome of all Children Centre Ofsted inspections good or outstanding (overall effectiveness)	100%	0%	High	100%	100%	66%	72%	Green			100%			100%			100%		Year to Date. National and London Comparitors as at 31/08/2015.
24	% of total 0-5 year estimated ACORN estimated population from areas of deprivation (IDACI 30%) whose families have accessed children's centre services	75%	n/a	High	78%	78%	No relevant benchmarking available	No relevant benchmarking available	Green			33.4% (see note)			50.6% (see note)			62.4% (see note)		Year to Date Cumulates (Target 19% per quarter)
25	% outcome of School Ofsted inspections good or outstanding (overall effectiveness)	86%	2.5%	High	87%	85%	84%	88%	Green			85%			85%			89%		Year to Date. National and London Comparitors as at 31/08/2015.
26	Number of Primary permanent exclusions (Number YTD Academic year)	0	n/a	Low	0 (Academic Year 2012-2013)	0 (Academic Year 2013-2014)	n/a	n/a	Green	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	August End of Acad. Yr. YTD (August data interim until November). September start of the new Acad. Yr.
27	Number of Secondary permanent exclusions (Number YTD Academic year)	19	n/a	Low	12 (Academic Year 2012-2013)	7 (Academic Year 2013-2014)	n/a	n/a	Green	10	12	13	15	19	0	0	2	2	2	Awaiting confirmation of 4x Academy exclusions. August End of Acad. Yr. YTD. September start of the new Acad. Yr.
28	% of Secondary persistent absenteeism (15% absence)	5%	n/a	Low	5.8% (2013)	4.5% (2014)	5.3% (2014)	4.2% (2014)	Annual											Annual Measure 2.5 terms DfE Published SFR maintained and academies
29	% of Reception year surplus places	5%	n/a	Low	3.8%	1.10%	No relevant benchmarking available	No relevant benchmarking available	Annual											Annual measure
30	% of Secondary school (Year 7) surplus places inc. Academies	5%	n/a	Low	12.3%	11.32%	No relevant benchmarking available	No relevant benchmarking available	Annual											Annual measure
Young People and Services																				
31	Youth service participation rate	1,800	n/a	High	2032	3,234	No relevant benchmarking available	No relevant benchmarking available	Annual											Annual Measure
32	% of CYP (16 - 18 year olds) not in education, employment or training (NEET)	5%	20%	Low	4.0%	4.3%	7% (2014)	No relevant benchmarking available	Green	4.2%	4.2%	4.2%	4.0%	4.1%	5.5%	4.3%	2.5%	3.2%	3.5%	Monthly
33	% of CYP (16 - 18 year olds) education, employment or training status 'not known'	Not a target measure	n/a	Low	9.8%	6.6%	9.0%	10.4%	Not a target measure	4.9%	5.0%	5.1%	4.7%	4.1%	27.8%	38.9%	16.7%	7.6%	4.8%	Monthly
34	Rate of proven re-offending by young people in the youth justice system	1.10	n/a	Low	1.10	1.05	1.04 (2013)	1.10 (2013)	Green			0.50			0.45			0.48		Quarterly (NI 19)
35	Number of First Time Entrants (FTEs) to the Youth Justice System aged 10-17	80	5%	Low	88	60	No relevant benchmarking available	No relevant benchmarking available	Green			9			21			38		Year to Date
36	Number of 'Troubled families' turned around (Transforming families programme)	378	n/a	High	185 TD	326/370 88%	No relevant benchmarking available	No relevant benchmarking available	Data not yet published			370			370			370		Quarterly
37	% of commissioned services for which quarterly monitoring was completed	100%	2%	High	100%	100%	No relevant benchmarking available	No relevant benchmarking available	Green			100%			100%			Not Supplied		Quarterly (Time lag in collating from partner agencies)

Committee: Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Date: 22 March 2016

Agenda item:

Wards: All

Subject: Planning the Panel's 2016/17 work programme

Lead officer: Julia Regan, Head of Democracy Services

Lead member: Councillor Katy Neep, Chair of the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Contact officer: Annette Wiles; annette.wiles@merton.gov.uk; 020 8545 4035

Recommendations:

- A. That the Panel reviews its 2015/16 work programme (set out in the appendix), identifying what worked well, what worked less well and what the Panel would like to do differently next year;
 - B. That the Panel suggests items for inclusion in the 2016/17 work programme – both agenda items and potential task group review topics; and
 - C. That the Panel advises on agenda items for its meeting on 29 June 2015.
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1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 To enable the Panel to plan its work programme for the forthcoming municipal year and, in particular, to agree agenda items for the first meeting of the municipal year.

2. DETAILS

Identifying issues for the 2016/17 work programme

- 2.1 At the beginning of each municipal year, each Overview and Scrutiny body determines the issues it wishes to build into its work programme for the forthcoming year. The Overview and Scrutiny bodies have specific roles relating to budget and business plan scrutiny and performance monitoring, and these should automatically be built into the work programme.
- 2.2 In addition to this, Overview and Scrutiny bodies may choose to build a work programme which involves scrutinising a range of issues through a combination of pre-decision scrutiny items, policy development reviews carried out by task groups, performance monitoring, on-going monitoring items and follow up to previous scrutiny work. Any call-in work will be programmed into the provisional call-in dates identified in the corporate calendar as required.
- 2.3 The remit of the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel is as follows:
 - 2.3.1. Children's social care, including child protection;

- 2.3.2. Education, including school standards, special educational needs, the extended schools programme and the healthy schools initiative;
- 2.3.3. Youth services and youth engagement, including the Youth Parliament, young people 'Not in Education, Employment or Training' (NEET), and the Connexions Service;
- 2.3.4. Youth offending;
- 2.3.5. Children's Centres; and
- 2.3.6. The Children's Trust.
- 2.4 The scrutiny officers are currently gathering suggestions for issues to scrutinise, either as Panel agenda items or task group reviews. Suggestions are being sought from members of the public, councillors and partner organisations including the police, NHS and Merton Voluntary Service Council. Other issues of public concern will be identified through the Annual Residents Survey. The council's departmental management teams have been consulted in order to identify forthcoming issues on which the Panel could contribute to the policymaking process.
- 2.5 The Panel is therefore invited to suggest items for inclusion in the 2016/17 work programme – both agenda items and potential task group review topics.
- 2.6 All the suggestions received will be discussed at the Panel's topic workshop on 25 May 2016. As in previous years, participants will be asked to prioritise the suggestions using criteria so that the issues chosen relate to:
 - The Council's strategic priorities;
 - Services that are underperforming;
 - Issues of public interest or concern; and
 - Issues where scrutiny could make a difference

Planning the first meeting of the 2016/17 municipal year

- 2.7 A note of the workshop discussion and draft work programme will be reported to the first meeting of the Panel in the new municipal year. The Panel will be requested to discuss this draft and agree any changes that it wishes to make.
- 2.8 The Panel is asked to advise on any other items that it would be helpful to include on the agenda for its 29 June 2016 meeting.

3. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 3.1 The Panel can select topics for scrutiny review and for other scrutiny work as it sees fit, taking into account views and suggestions from officers, partner organisations and the public.

4. CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED

- 4.1 To assist Members to identify and prioritise a work programme for 2016/17, the Scrutiny Team will undertake a consultation programme with Panel Members, co-opted members, members of the public, LB Merton Officers, Local Area Agreement partners (Merton LSP) and Voluntary and Community Sector organisations to determine other issues/items for Members consideration for inclusion in the Panels 2016/17 work programme.

5. FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There are none specific to this report. Scrutiny work involves consideration of the financial, resource and property issues relating to the topic being scrutinised. Furthermore, scrutiny work will also need to assess the implications of any recommendations made to Cabinet, including specific financial, resource and property implications.

6. LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Scrutiny work involves consideration of the legal and statutory issues relating to the topic being scrutinised. Furthermore, scrutiny work will also need to assess the implications of any recommendations made to Cabinet, including specific legal and statutory implications.

7. HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 It is a fundamental aim of the scrutiny process to ensure that there is full and equal access to the democratic process through public involvement and engaging with local partners in scrutiny reviews. Furthermore, the outcomes of reviews are intended to benefit all sections of the local community.
- 7.2 Scrutiny work involves consideration of the human rights, equalities and community cohesion issues relating to the topic being scrutinised. Furthermore, scrutiny work will also need to assess the implications of any recommendations made to Cabinet, including specific human rights, equalities and community cohesion implications.

8. CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 Scrutiny work involves consideration of the crime and disorder issues relating to the topic being scrutinised.

9. RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 There are none specific to this report. Scrutiny work involves consideration of the risk management and health and safety issues relating to the topic being scrutinised. Furthermore, scrutiny work will also need to assess the implications of any recommendations made to Cabinet, including specific risk management and health and safety implications.

10. APPENDICES – THE FOLLOWING DOCUMENTS ARE TO BE PUBLISHED WITH THIS REPORT AND FORM PART OF THE REPORT

- 10.1 2015/16 work programme

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 11.1 None

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Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel –Work Programme 2015/16

Meeting Date – 1 July 2015

Theme: Setting the work programme			
Item	Purpose/intended outcome	Responsible officer /Member Topic Lead	External Witnesses /Representatives in attendance
Elected Member & Departmental Portfolio Priorities	Outlining the portfolio priorities of Cabinet Members and officers' service priorities for 2015-16 to inform discussion of the Panels work programme for 2015/16	Paul Ballatt/Yvette Stanley Cabinet Members – Cllrs Whelton and Martin	
Agreeing the Work Programme 2015/16	To agree work programme and consider: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • thematic approach to work programme • appointing topic leads • getting the best from performance monitoring • how shorter task groups will operate • opportunities for pre decision scrutiny • monitoring of task group recommendations 	Cllr Katy Neep/Rebecca Redman	
Draft Final Report – Online Strategies in Schools Task Group	Panel to endorse report and recommendations for submission to Cabinet for consideration.	Rebecca Redman	
Performance Report	Discussion of proposed 'basket' of performance indicators for on-going monitoring	Paul Ballatt	

Meeting Date - 21 October 2015

Theme: Improving Health Outcomes for children and young people			
Item	Purpose/intended outcome	Responsible officer /Member Topic Lead	External Witnesses /Representatives in attendance
Looked after children and corporate parenting report	This is a standard item looking at services across the borough to support looked after children, pre and post-adoption.	Paul Ballatt	NHS Police
Annual report and business plan of Merton's Safeguarding Children Board	To enable the Panel to consider the work and performance of Merton's Safeguarding Children Board	Paul Ballatt	Invite Chair of MSCB and partner agencies.
Update Report	Update on developments affecting CSF department since the last scrutiny meeting for information.	Paul Ballatt	
Performance Report	Report on basket of indicators selected by Panel with commentary on areas of concern/underperformance.	Paul Ballatt	
Housing and employment offer for care leavers task group	To agree scope for cross cutting review to be undertaken over 2/3 meetings, to report back to the Panel at its March 2016 meeting.	Rebecca Redman	
Educational attainment of disabled children and young people task group	To agree scope for task group, to report back to Panel at meeting in February 2016.	TBD	
Work programme		Rebecca Redman	

Meeting Date – 3 November 2015

Theme: Safeguarding/Corporate Parenting			
Item	Purpose/intended outcome	Responsible officer /Member Topic Lead	External Witnesses /Representatives in attendance
CSF Budget Proposals (Round 1)	To enable the Panel to comment on the budget proposals and any new or revised savings as part of the first round of the process for agreeing the councils budget and business plan.	Yvette Stanley/Zoe Church	
Executive Response and Action Plan – Online Strategies in Schools Task Group	To provide a response from Cabinet outlining which recommendations from the review have been agreed and how they will be implemented going forward.	TBD	
Update Report	Update on developments affecting CSF department since the last scrutiny meeting	Paul Ballatt	
Performance Report	Report on basket of indicators selected by Panel with commentary on areas of concern/underperformance.	Paul Ballatt	
Work programme		Rebecca Redman	
Transfer of public health functions to the local authority and broader engagement of health in service provision - task group	To agree scope of potential task group review	TBD	Witnesses/partners to be identified. Public Health CCG Head of Community Health Services provision

Meeting Date – 13 January 2016

Theme: Budget Scrutiny			
Item	Purpose/intended outcome	Responsible officer/Member Topic Lead	External Witnesses/Representatives in attendance
CSF Budget Proposals (Round 2)	To enable the Panel to consider the councils budget and business plan proposals and forward any comments/recommendations to the Overview and Scrutiny Commission to compile a scrutiny response on the Budget/Business Plan to Cabinet. To include discussion of major projects identified in CSF draft service plans.	Yvette Stanley/Zoe Church	
Update Report	Update on developments affecting CSF department since the last scrutiny meeting for information.	Paul Ballatt	
Performance Report	Report on basket of indicators selected by Panel with commentary on areas of concern/underperformance. Members may wish to select areas for more in-depth scrutiny if there is persistent underperformance in a particular service/area.	Paul Ballatt	
Work programme		Julia Regan	

Meeting Date – 10 February 2016

Theme: School Standards			
Item	Purpose/intended outcome	Responsible officer /Member Topic Lead	External Witnesses /Representatives
Responsible Cabinet Member review	Update from the responsible Cabinet Member(s). Questions from panel members.	Martin Whelton/Maxi Martin	
School Standards	Annual Report on Attainment and Progress of Pupils in Merton Schools. To include consideration of attainment of disabled children and young people	Jane McSherry Cllr Katy Neep to report back on task group work	
Briefing- School Standards Committee	To gain a more in depth understanding of the role and work of this Committee and to seek the view of the Chair of the School Standards Committee on areas of concern and how scrutiny might support this work.	Cllr Dennis Pearce Jane McSherry	
Progress Update - School leadership succession planning task group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To enable the Panel to performance manage delivery of the task group's recommendations • Topic leads should be appointed to champion this work through a follow up meeting with lead officers mid-year 	Jane McSherry	
Update Report	Update on developments affecting CSF department since the last scrutiny meeting	Paul Ballatt	
Performance Report	Report on basket of indicators selected by Panel with commentary on areas of concern/underperformance.	Paul Ballatt	
Work programme	Chair to outline ideas for March meeting.	Annette Wiles	

Meeting Date – 22 March 2016

Theme: Transition between child and adult social care and health services			
Item	Purpose/intended outcome	Responsible officer/Member Topic Lead	External Witnesses/Representatives in attendance
Expert witness	Nick Berbiers, Head of Young People's Services, The Who Cares? Trust: what should scrutiny of the corporate parenting role look like?	Councillor Katy Neep	Yes
Workshops			
Looked after children and corporate parenting report	Update to October 2015 report if available - looking at services across the borough to support looked after children, pre and post-adoption.	Paul Angeli	
Recruitment of foster carers and other placements for looked after children	Report on the recruitment of foster carers with a view to identifying any areas for further scrutiny/or make any recommendations to Cabinet or partners.	Paul Ballatt	
PLENARY SESSION	Workshop feedback and closing comments from expert witness.		
Report of housing and employment offer for care leavers task group	Report back from the task group and recommendations for agreement to forward	Councillor Katy Neep Annette wiles	
Update Report	Update on developments affecting CSF department since the last scrutiny meeting	Paul Ballatt	

Performance Report	Report on basket of indicators selected by Panel with commentary on areas of concern/underperformance.	Paul Ballatt	
Topic Suggestions	Panel to raise any topics for the 2016/17 work programme to consider at the Topic Workshops in May/June 2016	Annette Wiles	

Special meeting – date to be determined

Pre decision scrutiny – School Expansion Programme	To enable the Panel to comment at pre decision stage on revised proposals for the school expansion programme.	Paul Ballatt	
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Forward plan for next municipal year

June/July meeting

Progress Update – online strategies in schools task group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To enable the Panel to performance manage delivery of the task group’s recommendations To appoint topic leads to champion the work 	Paul Ballatt	
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