

Merton Council Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel



Date: 11 March 2024

Time: 7.15 pm

Venue: Council chamber - Merton Civic Centre, London Road, Morden SM4 5DX

AGENDA

Page Number

1	Apologies for absence	
2	Declarations of pecuniary interest	
3	Minutes of the previous meeting	1 - 8
4	Corporate Parenting <i>To follow</i>	
5	Education Standards Report	
6	Child Healthy Weight Report	
7	Departmental update report	9 - 24
8	Performance monitoring	
9	Topic suggestions for 2024/25	25 - 30

**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.**

For more information about the work of this and other overview and scrutiny panels, please telephone 020 8545 4035 or e-mail scrutiny@merton.gov.uk. Alternatively, visit www.merton.gov.uk/scrutiny

Press enquiries: communications@merton.gov.uk or telephone 020 8545 3483 or 4093

Email alerts: Get notified when agendas are published
www.merton.gov.uk/council/committee.htm?view=emailer

Public Information

Attendance at meetings

The public are welcome to attend meetings of the Council. Seating in the public gallery is limited and offered on a first come first served basis.

Audio/Visual recording of meetings

The Council will film meetings held in the Council Chamber for publication on the website. If you would like to film or record any meeting of the Council held in public, please read the Council's policy [here](#) or contact democratic.services@merton.gov.uk for more information.

Mobile telephones

Please put your mobile telephone on silent whilst in the meeting.

Access information for the Civic Centre



- Nearest Tube: Morden (Northern Line)
- Nearest train: Morden South, South Merton (First Capital Connect)
- Tramlink: Morden Road or Phipps Bridge (via Morden Hall Park)
- Bus routes: 80, 93, 118, 154, 157, 163, 164, 201, 293, 413, 470, K5

Further information can be found [here](#)

Meeting access/special requirements

The Civic Centre is accessible to people with special access requirements. There are accessible toilets, lifts to meeting rooms, disabled parking bays and an induction loop system for people with hearing difficulties. For further information, please contact democratic.services@merton.gov.uk

Fire alarm

If the fire alarm sounds, either intermittently or continuously, please leave the building immediately by the nearest available fire exit without stopping to collect belongings. Staff will direct you to the exits and fire assembly point. If you are unable to use the stairs, a member of staff will assist you. The meeting will reconvene if it is safe to do so, otherwise it will stand adjourned.

Electronic agendas, reports and minutes

Copies of agendas, reports and minutes for council meetings can also be found on our website. To access this, click <https://www.merton.gov.uk/council-and-local-democracy> and search for the relevant committee and meeting date.

Agendas can also be viewed online in the Borough's libraries and on the Mod.gov paperless app for iPads, Android and Windows devices.

Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel membership

Councillors:

Usaama Kaweesa (Chair)
Chessie Flack (Vice-Chair)
Max Austin
Michael Butcher
Caroline Charles
Jil Hall
Billy Hayes
Joan Henry
Linda Kirby MBE
Samantha MacArthur
James Williscroft

Co-opted Representatives

Mansoor Ahmad, Parent Governor
Representative Secondary and Special
Sectors
Roz Cordner, Church of England Diocese
Becky Cruise, Parent Governor
Representative
Dr Oona Stannard, Catholic Diocese

Substitute Members:

Sheri-Ann Bhim
Jenifer Gould
Andrew Howard
Edith Macauley MBE
Robert Page

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. For further advice please speak with the Managing Director, South London Legal Partnership.

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.

For more information, please contact the Scrutiny Team on 020 8545 4035 or by e-mail on scrutiny@merton.gov.uk. Alternatively, visit www.merton.gov.uk/scrutiny

This page is intentionally left blank

Agenda Item 3

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL 25 JANUARY 2024

(7.15 pm - 10.00 pm)

PRESENT Councillors Councillor Usaama Kaweesa (in the Chair),
Councillor Chessie Flack, Councillor Max Austin,
Councillor Michael Butcher, Councillor Jil Hall,
Councillor Billy Hayes, Councillor Linda Kirby,
Councillor Samantha MacArthur and Councillor James Williscroft

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 1)

Apologies were received from Cllr Charles and Marakie Tiluhan

2 DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY INTEREST (Agenda Item 2)

There were no declarations of interest.

3 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (Agenda Item 3)

The minutes of the meeting of 27 November 2023 were agreed.

4 MERTON SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN PARTNERSHIP - ANNUAL REPORT (Agenda Item 4)

The Team Manager Policy and Partnerships introduced the report. In response to questions it was confirmed that:

- Training programmes in February and March would give practitioners information from the young scrutineers to their areas
- The conference in March will also be focused on inequalities.
- Youth Crime Executive Board has a sub group which looks at disproportionality.
- The Multi-agency toolkit and training offer seeks to address identifying issues around neglect, feedback is regularly sought and work is ongoing to refine.
- Feedback suggests that it is being used and well received.
- Important to consider the overall number of children receiving attention, changes in figures in one area can correlate to a change in figures elsewhere as cases move through the system.
- Our figures are commensurate with other local authorities

- Quality assurance work is an ongoing exercise to ensure that children are safe and looked after.
- Every month the senior leadership looks at the figures and the cases and examines the details to ensure that thresholds and action are where they should be.
- Can come back to committee with extra information around Clares Law cases.

Members requested that future papers for scrutiny panel consider the volume of children across the Borough where English is a second language where relevant.

Chair was grateful for a well presented report with useful infographics, good updates and pleasing to see numbers of multi agency delegates receiving training and the cooperating between adult safeguarding and childrens' boards to collaborate where appropriate.

5 BUDGET/BUSINESS PLAN (Agenda Item 5)

Agenda items 5 and 6 were considered together.

The Cabinet Member introduced the report and thanked the Chief Executive, Executive Directors and Officers who worked hard to analyse the detail in the settlement and prepared papers for Cabinet and Scrutiny.

There is provision for some extra funding for social care, but it does not go as far as was hoped. The settlement indicates we will receive £20million less than in 2010, the burden passes onto Council Tax payers.

Further investment coming to the services outlined in the cabinet papers, however not much change to areas of concern to this committee.

Executive Directors noted that this is an update since November which includes updated assumptions around inflation, pay and grants. Pressures in social care and housing still exist, we are not alone, other boroughs are also affected.

Final settlement will come in the next week or ten days, the pressures are challenging, funding has not matched changes in service and demand over recent years.

It's the fifth year in a row of receiving a 1 year settlement, which makes longer term planning more challenging.

In response to questions it was confirmed that:

- Govt figures suggesting 5.8% increase in core spending power assumes that the full power to increase council tax will be taken advantage of.
- An announcement in late December around funding followed by an update in January made the budgeting environment very challenging
- Placement spend is 24% below average per child, recent assessment by Grant Thornton shown that we have a cost effective system in place. Work is ongoing to assess ability to provide more care within the borough,
- Also looking at providing semi-independent accommodation for children leaving care.
- Highest cost is £29k per week for one child, in secure placement. \$8k per week is normal for an average placement.
- Local foster carers is more cost effective than using agencies, which in turn are more cost effective than children's homes.
- Looking at ways to use dynamic purchasing to reduce SEN transportation costs, through travel training, and other initiatives.
- It won't take two years to do the feasibility study, but will need some expert advice to help follow up the recommended work from that study. Will be looking at existing building stock, but will put in a capital bid at the appropriate time, but expect as a long term spend to save, such a bid would be well received.
- Local response to cost of living includes providing saving accounts to y7 pupils in the borough through Croydonplus Credit Union along with lessons in school around money management.
- The social care grant is ring fenced for children and adults but does not specify the proportions. No reduction in overall funding.
- Most of what can be seen in family hubs is different services coming into one place, the services will continue, though transformation funding will cease.
- Capital spend projects may take place over a longer period of time or in the future. Members can scrutinise each of these projects, if requested, but the budget report does not go into high detail on each project. Members can also seek briefing from Executive Directors. The Commission will also look at the details.
- We are working hard to ensure that early years provision can continue, some savings will come from an increase in grants, but nevertheless ambition is to ensure provision meets requirements.

6 BUDGET/BUSINESS PLAN - LATEST CABINET PAPER (Agenda Item 6)

Covered in previous item.

7 CHILDHOOD IMMUNISATIONS (Agenda Item 7)

The Lead Nurse Consultant introduced the report, highlighting that Merton has an immunisation uptake below the SW London average, but we do have a highly mobile population. Uptake in the north of the borough is particularly below the average. However, uptake on MMR vaccination is above SW London average. A dip in Q2 is normal and expected to pick up in Q3 and 4. Work is underway to ensure that practises have sufficient stocks of both kinds of MMR vaccine, and posters to advertise the need to immunise.

In response to questions it was confirmed that:

- Work is underway to ensure advertising around vaccinations and immunisation is accessible to as many people as possible and recommendations from members are welcome.
- Commission and delivery of childhood vaccinations sits with NHS, mainly in primary care, Public Health provide oversight and support, home visiting and school nursing.
- Communications are targeted both geographically as well socio-economically and ethnically and focusing on areas with low uptake of immunisations.
- There is a trend for not immunising children, the alleged link between MMR and autism has been disproven, but it's easier to come across and latch onto negative views. It is challenging to work against misinformation, which has an impact. Staff are trained to answer difficult questions.
- Data from CHIS is a snapshot and the figures allow for a variance, the immunisation targets are set by WHO, by hitting these targets the illnesses become unable to circulate.
- If we have not been informed of a change of address, former residents can remain registered with a Merton GP for up to a year and this can skew the data for the area. We can though show that trends are upwards.
- Immunisation data stays with the child, so when they move areas/GPs the data goes with them through the CHIS system.
- In the London wide Measles and Polio campaign, phase 2 identified 200000 children missed and follow-up work is targeting this group but only 2000 attended and around 80% are completely unvaccinated, this is a trend in the region and across England.
- Lots of training around vaccine confidence and engaging residents through youtube, faith leaders, working in different languages, local tv and schools.
- We do share best practice across the country.
- If residents come from abroad without records we can access country records and estimate what would have been received, can also reimmunise, which is safe.
- If someone does not want to share records, they don't have to, it doesn't have to go on the system and can be coded in a way that limits access to information.

- The percentages of immunisation can be a blunt measure, and when you examine the data specifically can allow healthcare providers to target their work specifically to capture more people and work is ongoing to identify the missing 15% and using the data shows where the focus needs to be.
- Students are targeted during Freshers weeks and encouraged to register with local GP to fill the gaps in their vaccination records.
- Some students don't register with a local GP, but if they get in touch they will be encouraged to do so and given the advice they need.
- Whatever issue they visit for, Drs are alerted to their vaccination status and encourage them to get MMR, ACWY and HPV vaccines.
- Not dismissive of the percentages/data, policies are evergreen and work will continue until the percentages improve.

8 LOCAL PLAYGROUNDS (Agenda Item 8)

Chair thanked the department for a detailed report.

The Cabinet Member and Head of Parks introduced the report. £2mill set aside for play parks over the next few years, work underway to upgrade parks, starting with those of greatest need. Designs take into account feedback from local communities. Councillors are welcome to contact the Parks team with questions and suggestions relating to facilities in their wards.

In response to questions it was confirmed that

- Play manufactures aware of over reliance on particular materials, so we do look at alternative options, that also fit with the environment. They do sometimes have metal underground, but all timber is FSC approved, Where plastics are used, they are recycled, which is more durable, and long lasting
- Capital for Wimbledon Park is an investment in the infrastructure, the splash pad rather than the pool, the upgrade is linked into the legionella testing, which will extend the life of the feature. £150k ringfenced for the improvement to the play infrastructure, £87 for making it compliant with legionella testing. Worked with S106 officer on that work.
- Not quite completed works, so communications will begin after March when they reopen. Green spaces strategy will cooperate with a group call Safe Spaces for Girls, Surveys show that young people like our parks, we need to maintain that.
- We don't have statistics on usage, but that is something that can look at doing.

- Willing to engage with other groups to promote the park spaces and the improvements.

IS the water feature a new element, or just maintenance on existing

Thanks given to the Parks team for their work.

9 DEPARTMENTAL UPDATE (Agenda Item 9)

The Executive Director introduced the report noting the Joint Target Area Inspection, which included inspectors from 4 organisations including CQC and OFSTED and took place over three weeks, with 12 inspectors on site in the third week.

The inspectors noted Merton had strong partnerships, recognised the strength of working participation and Childrens Voices. There were also areas to improve.

The report does not apply a 'grade', but will outline areas of strength and for development, and expected to produce and action plan for those. The final letter will be published on 12 February and will be included in the departmental update in March.

In response to questions

- The council is committed to retaining school improvement function, maintained schools have access to MEPs, there's no plan to reduce that resource
- Schools delegate money from schools grant, to support school in difficult circumstances and support schools with falling rolls.
- We're not increasing the budget but we're not losing it, and continue to work closely with schools.
- No plans for closure of schools, a nearby school which is closing is an academy, not a maintained school and it does have very low numbers.
- Headteachers meet in clusters and we do try to manage admission numbers across those schools, so that all don't choose to reduce class volumes at the same time.
- Intake numbers and long term plans should not be a surprise to Governors, would expect them to flag to us that a school may be becoming unsustainable.

10 PERFORMANCE MONITORING (Agenda Item 10)

The committee noted the contents of the report.

11 YOUTH TASK GROUP - REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS (Agenda Item 11)

The Chair of the TaskGroup introduced the report , highlighting that bigger pools of philanthropic funding have thresholds that we don't quite meet. The consequence of that is that the third sector working in the borough doesn't have access to the same resources as large organisations.

The smaller charities can effectively form a consortium giving access to larger funds and then divide the money appropriately amongst themselves.

YPF is the direction of travel, regardless of the views of the council. So the report sets out four recommendations on how it might be implemented and how it can work with council and the councillors.

The Panel agreed the recommendations

The Chair thanked the Task Group for their work.

12 WORK PROGRAMME (Agenda Item 12)

3 updates

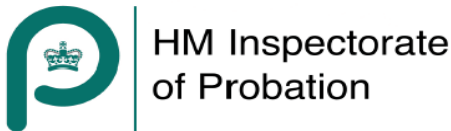
Task group focused on how effective the council is at engaging young people in local democracy and political activities, likely to be rolled over to the next scrutiny year.

This can form part of topic selection at the next meeting.

Will also be seeking feedback on the functioning of the panel from interested parties.

Next meeting 11 March.

This page is intentionally left blank



HM Inspectorate
of Probation



12 February 2024

Jane McSherry, Executive Director of Children's Services, London Borough of Merton
Justin Roper, Executive Lead, Clinical Commissioning Group
Sophie Linden, Deputy Mayor of London for Policing and Crime
Sir Mark Rowley, Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police Service
Michelle Waldron, Youth Offending Service Manager
Sarah Lawrence, Independent Scrutineer, Merton Safeguarding Children Partnership

Dear Merton, Local Safeguarding Partnership

Joint targeted area inspection of London Borough of Merton

This letter summarises the findings of the joint targeted area inspection (JTAI) of the multi-agency response to serious youth violence in Merton.

This inspection took place from 4 to 8 December 2023. It was carried out by inspectors from Ofsted, the Care Quality Commission (CQC), His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) and His Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation (HMIP).

Context

The findings in the report evaluate the effectiveness of the multi-agency response to children aged 10 and over who are at risk of, or affected by, serious youth violence and/or criminal exploitation. Even where the report does not specifically refer to this group of children, all findings relate to this scope.

The inspectorates recognise the complexities for agencies in intervening to address serious youth violence when risk and harm occur outside of the family home. Consequently, risk assessment and decision-making have a number of complexities and challenges. A multi-agency inspection of this area of practice is more likely to highlight some of the significant challenges to partnerships in improving practice. We anticipate that each of the joint targeted area inspections (JTAs) of this area of practice that are being carried out will identify learning for all agencies and will contribute to the debate about what 'good practice' looks like in relation to the multi-agency response to serious youth violence. In a proportion of cases seen by inspectors, children had also experienced other forms of abuse, which reflects the complexity of the needs and risks for children.

Headline findings

Most vulnerable children in Merton affected by serious youth violence and/or criminal exploitation benefit from effective strategically aligned and integrated partnership arrangements. These arrangements are underpinned by comprehensive joint contextual safeguarding strategies that include a holistic analysis of factors that



make children more vulnerable to serious youth violence and criminal exploitation, those missing from home and those exploited by organised gangs. This provides a shared understanding for prioritising and meeting children's needs.

Strategic partners are largely aware of the extra-familial harm complexities involved in preventing further risk to children affected by serious youth violence and/or criminal exploitation in their local area and neighbouring boroughs. They respond swiftly together to ameliorate emerging risks to children in local communities.

The London Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) nominated professional links with the 'Safer Merton' Community Safety Partnership (CSP) leads across the borough. Clear communication rooted in a prevention and early intervention ethos ensures that children's experiences inform decisions. These favourable conditions are strengthened further by flexible operational service planning. They successfully attract funding to develop innovative practice models across the spectrum of services. Visible strategic leaders and elected members have an accurate understanding of the collective local and national challenges they face.

Merton's distributed learning approach has created a tangible culture, where most staff understand that children's experiences can contribute to children being violent and/or exploiting other children. Nevertheless, despite the individual efforts of committed police officers, the absence of a child-centred policing strategy in London is contributing to a disjointed and inconsistent service to children affected by serious youth violence and/or criminal exploitation. Officers are not aware of the strategic intent of the force. In addition, they lack the requisite training, skills, knowledge and capacity to work effectively in this complex area of policing. These findings concur with the recently published His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services inspection of the Metropolitan Police.

Most leaders across the multi-agency partnership, which includes the police, health services, children's social care, youth justice services (YJS), schools, youth services and voluntary sector organisations, are unremittently committed to placing children's needs and safety at the centre of their work. They accept that the quality of practice for some children known to professionals for extended periods is inconsistent and needs to be strengthened.

Leaders are cognisant that children with neurodiverse and social communication needs, and Black Caribbean and African boys and young men, are disproportionately affected by serious youth violence and/or criminal exploitation in the borough. Collectively, leaders have taken prompt action to reduce harm for these children. Merton is the fourth safest borough in London; it is the only borough with a reduction in neighbourhood crime. Assiduous work and shared objectives by the



partnership have reduced knife-enabled violence by 8% and serious violent robberies by 16%.

Targeted work by the Merton Safeguarding Children Partnership (MSCP) to raise awareness about the adultification of Black children and those from a minority ethnic background is helping to build trusting relationships with children, which is a key priority for the partnership. While specialist health professionals are co-located across teams to support children with speech and language, and emotional health challenges, children with neurodiverse and social communication needs who are vulnerable to violence and criminal exploitation are not identified soon enough or prioritised for intervention.

YJS leaders are well connected at a strategic level and the youth justice plan is aligned with wider partnership priorities in relation to serious youth violence and/or criminal exploitation. Leaders have reconfigured services effectively to maintain a specific focus on work to address serious youth violence by working collaboratively with the social care contextual harm team, health commissioned services and school leaders. Professionals work conscientiously to avoid unnecessarily criminalising children and have maintained low levels of first-time entrants into the youth justice system.

What needs to improve?

- The development of a cohesive child-centred policing policy for London.
- Child-centred training for police officers across all teams and services in responding to and investigating crimes for children affected by serious youth violence and/or criminal and sexual exploitation.
- Rigorous management oversight and consistent child-centred decisions in the police custody suite when children are arrested and searched.
- The frequency of the strategic multi-agency partnership oversight, scrutiny and audits of children affected by serious youth violence and/or criminal and sexual exploitation.
- Identification and fast-tracking of referrals by health professionals for children with neurodiverse and social communication needs who are vulnerable to serious youth violence and/or criminal and sexual exploitation to ensure that they can access appropriate support quickly.
- The time that children in care wait for an initial health assessment through the appointment of a designated doctor.
- The quality and impact of supervision and contingency planning for children known to children's social care and other agencies for extended periods of time.
- The consistent and prompt sharing of strategy meeting minutes and decisions with the police, school staff, health colleagues, the London Ambulance Service (LAS) and commissioned services.



- The consistent use, and review, of the contextual harm risk matrix tool and regular review of children's plans to prevent drift when there are changes to social workers.
- Systems for consistent sharing of information and intelligence between the YJS, the police and Probation about adults who pose a risk to children affected by serious youth violence and/or criminal and sexual exploitation.
- Better sharing of information, communication and involvement with the LAS, strategically and operationally.

Strengths

- Co-located professionals in the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) work together effectively to identify, and provide help and protection for, children who are at risk of, or affected by, serious youth violence and/or criminal exploitation.
- Strategic leaders make continuous and strenuous efforts to respond swiftly to evolving risks to children and to collectively drive forward innovation and improvement.
- Targeted initiatives and projects delivered jointly across the borough are reducing risks to children affected by serious youth violence and/or criminal exploitation. Local places and spaces are made safer for children because of these interventions.
- Children who are victims of serious youth violence benefit from coordinated care and support when attending St George's Hospital emergency department. Staff with requisite knowledge and skills collaborate closely with the police and children's social care to keep children safe in hospital.
- Strong multi-agency relationships, both operationally and strategically, mainly result in effective communication and information-sharing between the services.
- Joint mapping of children's relationships, including cross-borough planning and coordination, helps to identify potential risks, such as county lines and unsafe locations. A key example of this is the daily meeting between the pupil referral unit (PRU) and school police officers, in which live information about children at high risk is shared effectively.
- The police have a youth integrated offender management (YIOM) team that, together with partner agencies, provides a child-centred wraparound safeguarding response to children in the criminal justice system.
- Tenacious child-centred practice with children and young people by skilled practitioners and police officers in the social care and police child exploitation teams is contributing to reducing risks and protecting them from further harm.
- The weekly multi-agency Liaison and Diversion meeting consistently considers children who come to the notice of the police when there are concerns about their vulnerability. Professionals act to provide voluntary support to divert children from courts.



- The weekly police-led Merton Violence Communication meeting is well established across the partnerships. It is a highly effective vehicle for sharing real-time intelligence about risks to individual children and in local areas. It includes operational leaders and frontline practitioners from key agencies. Staff and police officers know children well. Appropriate and timely actions about these children are agreed with individual professionals.
- Children in care placed out of borough due to serious youth violence and those in custody in a youth offending institute receive a prompt health assessment by the designated looked after children's nurse. The virtual school plays a crucial part in supporting children and young people at risk, including those who are in care and placed outside the area. It has forged strong partnerships with other boroughs to ensure that the same robust systems apply to all children, wherever they are placed.
- Schools and other education providers use a range of well-established systems to identify children at risk of, or subject to, serious youth violence. Education partners are well represented on a range of panels. They play a key part in both the strategic and operational aspects of this work. This enables education leaders to build a clear understanding of the potential risks and needs in the local area, including places and spaces.
- A public health approach helps to deliver initiative-taking early intervention for those children at risk, for example a focus on school attendance and recognition that anti-social behaviour can lead to more serious criminality and exploitation.
- Learning from practice and rapid reviews of children affected by serious youth violence have directly informed the MSCP training programme delivered to practitioners and managers.

Main findings

The multi-agency morning meeting in the MASH provides an effective forum for swiftly sharing information with relevant professionals in real time about children affected by serious youth violence and/or criminal exploitation. Social care staff, together with co-located partner agencies, understand the relevant thresholds of need, risk and harm. This ensures that most children and their families are identified quickly and are provided with help, support and protection.

The consistent use of a screening tool for children at risk of serious youth violence and extra-familial harm assists staff in the MASH to identify levels of risk and harm to children. Contacts are promptly screened by a consultant social worker, and recorded decisions by managers about the next steps to help and protect children are clear.

The police use a different child exploitation risk assessment and management tool to grade exploitation risk and determine case ownership. This can cause confusion when two tools are in use. Police officers submit referrals to the MASH when children



are victims of serious youth violence or criminal exploitation, but do not consistently recognise the safeguarding issues and risks for children who are suspected of causing offences, for example when children are arrested. During the inspection, leaders had to act to improve the quality of care, protection and support provided to children affected by serious youth violence and/or criminal exploitation when they are arrested and searched in police custody. In addition, not all health partners consider the associated risks of serious youth violence and/or criminal exploitation within their risk assessment tools. Consequently, there are missed opportunities to intervene early to prevent harm from escalating.

The health navigators based in the MASH attend all strategy meetings and share health information. The Metropolitan Police have invested in a specialist contextual harm sergeant who provides essential intelligence about children at risk and adult perpetrators of harm. Minutes and decisions following strategy meetings are not shared promptly across the partnership. This means that not all practitioners involved with the child have the most up-to-date and overarching plan.

When children go missing, there is a systematic approach to ensuring that these children are discussed at a weekly missing meeting, and that they are referred to a dedicated service for a return home interview. Risks for missing children affected by serious youth violence and/or criminal exploitation are evaluated at the multi-agency child exploitation (MACE) meeting. Most return home debriefs completed by the police are done over the phone, and some missing children are not spoken to directly. This means that the police could be missing important information and intelligence that could help reduce future risk to vulnerable children.

Many children affected by serious youth violence and/or criminal exploitation benefit from a well-coordinated array of services that provide help at an early stage. Children requiring a child-in-need or child-protection plan are transferred quickly to the assessment and safeguarding teams in children's social care. Most child assessments are thorough and child-centred. Diligent work to build trusted relationships with children by statutory and commissioned services is central to the work of practitioners, with strong examples evident of direct work by staff who know children well. While assessments and screening tools identify children's needs clearly in the MASH, they are not routinely updated or adapted to subsequent changing needs and risks by the partnership. This limits professional understanding of escalating harm for these children.

Some children affected by serious youth violence and/or criminal exploitation have been the subject of multiple previous assessments and interventions for abuse and neglect, sometimes over many years. Practitioners and their managers understand that children's lived experiences and childhood trauma can contribute to children being victimised and/or exploiting other children. Despite this, in a small number of children's cases, the current work is limited to evaluating risks outside of the home.



Management supervision is insufficient for these children as the focus is too narrow, with incomplete evaluations about children's wider lived experiences. This impacts the quality of plans and the analysis of whether changes to children's lived experiences can be sustained. This is exacerbated when there are changes in social workers.

Most children known to the YIOM team benefit from an enhanced child-centred wraparound safeguarding response. Officers and staff in these teams understand the experiences of children and the importance of working collaboratively with other statutory agencies and voluntary sector staff, who assist in building connections with children. Daily police risk meetings and weekly partnership meetings ensure that the risks to children are reviewed and appropriately escalated to the pre-MACE forum.

Nevertheless, there is too much inconsistency across various Metropolitan Police teams as children are investigated by multiple teams of officers, the majority of whom have not been trained in working with children affected by serious youth violence and/or criminal exploitation. In a small number of children's cases brought to the attention of leaders during the inspection, the absence of a cohesive Metropolitan Police child-centred culture and strategy means that risks for some children are missed, or their vulnerabilities are not recognised or understood by police officers, thus leaving children exposed to harm.

Children involved with the YJS have access to a wide range of interventions and support to meet a spectrum of needs, several of which underlie children's offending behaviour and increase their vulnerability to serious youth violence and/or criminal exploitation. Children receive holistic services in the YJS, with access to nurses, speech and language support, forensic psychiatrists and youth offending workers. This ensures that children's physical and mental health needs are identified and met, as well as education being provided, to prevent reoffending. Staff work effectively with partner agencies to support young people in making safer choices linked to their substance misuse and in managing their vulnerability linked to serious youth violence. The views of children and parents are included in the discussions and plans.

Leaders in social care have realigned the contextual harm team to maintain a specific focus on work to address serious youth violence and criminal exploitation. Children's cases have been reallocated to appropriate social work teams, thus increasing capacity for co-working, advice and training for partners on issues around contextual harm and exploitation. A substantial number of children known to the YJS are also allocated to social workers. Communication between Probation and the YJS about adults who pose a risk to children is inconsistent, leading to incomplete risk assessments. Practitioners and managers understand the cohort of YJS children and their profile, including the issues of disproportionality. There is limited evidence of how concerns about the over-representation of children from diverse backgrounds



and cultures are being addressed on a day-to-day basis. Leaders are not complacent and have commissioned a specialist to evaluate their practice in this area.

Schools and other education providers use a range of well-established systems to identify children at risk of, or subject to, serious youth violence. Education partners are well represented on a range of panels. They play a key part in both the strategic and operational aspects of this work. This enables education leaders to build a clear understanding of the potential risks and needs in the local area, including places and spaces. Education leaders speak of strong and effective communication with other agencies in the local area. They feel well supported in identifying and meeting the needs of these children and young people. Everyone understands the importance of education as a protective factor. There is a clear focus on partners working together to support children to remain in education.

The work of Melbury College and the virtual school is a key strength in this work. Overall, education exclusions are in line with London and national averages. Leaders acknowledge that there are challenges in the lack of availability of suitable alternative education provision currently. They have responded promptly to this. For example, Melbury College has expanded the range of vocational courses available to children and young people. Effective preventative work takes place with the PRU, including timed placements, training and support. However, sometimes, decision-making around permanent exclusions is more challenging due to the lack of options available.

The virtual school plays a crucial part in supporting children in care placed outside the borough. It has forged strong partnerships with other boroughs to ensure that the same robust tracking systems apply to all children, wherever they are placed. This robust attendance tracking, and the strong partnerships, allow leaders to get children the right help at the right time, particularly in terms of intervening before any potential suspensions, and therefore reducing the risk of any permanent exclusions.

Health partners are equal and active contributors at strategic and operational levels. Information-sharing across the health agencies visited is strong. All safeguarding teams can access health partners' records. This increases their understanding of the wider circumstances of children and their families, which improves safeguarding decisions for children affected by serious youth violence and/or criminal exploitation. The specialist school nurse service plays a vital role for children outside of mainstream school and those with higher levels of need.

When a child in care is placed out of borough due to serious youth violence or in a youth offending institute, the looked after children's nurse completes their health assessment review and consults swiftly with the placing borough or the young offenders institute health teams to ensure that there is no drift in health actions being progressed. Merton does not currently have a designated doctor for children in



care. Epsom and St Helier Hospital is commissioned to undertake the initial health assessments. Currently, children are waiting too long as, on average, it can take up to six weeks for their initial health assessments rather than the statutory requirement of 20 days.

Children who are victims of serious youth violence benefit from coordinated care when attending St George's Hospital emergency department. Positively, young people seen at St George's are managed by the paediatric service until the age of 18, allowing a continued focus on the young person as a child. Staff caring for them have an increased knowledge of safeguarding issues. Effective processes ensure a multi-agency approach to the immediate safety planning for children's next stage of care. Staff work closely with the police to manage the safety of children and young people; this is supported by internal security systems. Police passwords are quickly shared to ensure that information-sharing on the child is managed, and referrals to social care are made promptly. A dedicated commissioned service funded by the VRU provides sensitive support for families and advocacy to help children to extricate from criminal exploitation.

Children in Merton receive a timely response when referred to child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS). Most children are assessed and seen for treatment within 14 weeks. CAMHS has developed specialised roles within social care, the PRU and the YJS. A single point of access and a flexible approach prioritise children who are a risk to themselves or others. Risk assessments are evident in all children's records, although there are no specific prompts to support consideration of children affected by serious youth violence and/or criminal exploitation. The South West London and St George's Mental Health NHS Trust recognises that children with neurodiverse and social communication needs who are vulnerable to violence and criminal exploitation are not prioritised for intervention. In the last quarter, waiting times were within the 18-week target. Recently, however, due to demand, the waiting time for assessment to treatment has increased considerably. More work is required by the partnership to include the LAS at a strategic level in Merton. The LAS routinely requests feedback for all its safeguarding referrals in London but does not always receive information from children's social care in Merton. The LAS has recently been invited to the MSCP Promote and Protect Young People subgroup but does not have the capacity within its safeguarding team to attend. Effective work by the LAS with the Metropolitan Police and London Fire Brigade as part of a safety-first project is intended to raise awareness about serious youth violence. Three sessions in Merton, targeting around 600 pupils, are planned over the next few months.

Proactive work by the MSCP ensures that children and young people's voices are heard and acted on. Following a survey led by the independent scrutineers across schools, there have been 'stop and search' workshops and a programme of reverse mentoring involving young people and the police to help build children's trust and confidence. Awareness-raising on disproportionality and the adultification of Black



children, led by the MSCP young scrutineer and augmented by the work of eight young inspectors, has informed the work of the children's trust.

Strategic partnership arrangements in Merton are congruent and closely aligned, providing a clear understanding and shared approach to prioritising and meeting children's needs. The 'Safer Merton' CSP manages the serious violence duty effectively and is accountable for how the money from the VRU is being targeted and spent. Governance arrangements across the MSCP and the CSP and the support from the VRU are clear and mostly effective. Current work to strengthen links with the community and voluntary sector through regular site visits provides a better understanding of local projects. This informs the direction of the partnership and provides strategic insight as well as an evaluation of operational delivery. Leaders accept that, by increasing the frequency of multi-agency quality assurance activity, scrutiny and audits, they will enhance the strategic partnership evaluations for individual children and services.



Practice study: effective practice

Partners recognise that risks to children traverse London and national boundaries. A range of cross-borough joint initiatives is making a discernible difference to engaging vulnerable children and improving their life chances. For instance, a police officer-led multi-agency operation established positive relationships with a group of young girls identified as being criminally and sexually exploited across local boroughs. Joint mapping directly involving the children and their parents and the contextual exploitation team and information from MACE meetings assisted in identifying and disrupting adult males. Effective liaison with the south-west London police robbery team linked these perpetrators to multiple robberies with other borough command units. This group of perpetrators was broken up. The child victims have been provided with the requisite help and support and have returned to education.

The east of the borough of Merton has the highest prevalence of serious youth violence and criminal exploitation. Leaders and managers in the YJS are aware that male children, those from diverse backgrounds and children who have experienced abuse and neglect are over-represented as victims of serious youth violence and/or criminal exploitation. A disproportionality task force has been established to explore how to address these issues locally. Working creatively across borough boundaries, leaders have secured funding from the London VRU to set up the 'Gloves Not Gunz' project. The work is being delivered in conjunction with the contextual safeguarding and youth support team. It provides specialist mentoring and outreach, advice and support, educational workshops and group work for parents and children.



Practice study: area for improvement

For some children, there is an over-reliance on children and families self-reporting about the level of risk. There is variability in the response of the partnership to children's changing circumstances. In some children's cases, there is a timely and coordinated response. For others, however, there is insufficient regular review of the child's overall plan to ensure that it is addressing dynamic and evolving risks and current circumstances. This is exacerbated for those children who have experienced multiple changes of lead practitioner.

This was particularly evident for one child, where there was too much emphasis placed on the child disclosing risk rather than professionals evaluating all the available information. Inconsistent mechanisms for sharing and analysing information between partners meant that not everyone had the information they needed to fully understand the risks for this child. Risk matrix tools and assessments were not updated or shared frequently enough. Multi-agency panels did not analyse patterns of behaviours, for example numerous arrests, the available police intelligence and criminal allegations. Therefore, the professionals underestimated the level of involvement in crime and risk of serious harm to this child. As a result, key potential victims and risks were not identified. Missed opportunities to intervene earlier meant that this child's offending escalated both in terms of seriousness and frequency and, as a result, the risk of actual violent harm to him and other children increased.



Places and spaces: highly effective practice

Leaders and managers across agencies share and analyse intelligence to target children most at risk. Local initiatives are informed by the views of children and their families. Young people can share their concerns via postcode surveys and in targeted workshops in schools. Specific area resources are prioritised in response to children's concerns. Funding from the VRU and the local authority for youth workers, as well as the contextual safeguarding team, is used innovatively to enable young people to engage in activities, such as taking young people to the gym for one-to-one sessions or specific projects in areas of high need. Youth workers work closely with the 'Safer Merton' CSP to understand how young people, their families and friends are linked across the borough using mapping exercises. There is access to a wide range of training on serious youth violence and criminal exploitation for youth workers.

Operation Hambling provides effective joint-working between the police, highly skilled detached youth workers, the child exploitation team and local community groups, which is helping to divert children and prevent harm. Initiatives such as fishing sessions, basketball clubs and regular football sessions, which involve some Premier League football players, are a way of keeping young people busy and off the streets. Operation Hambling includes mentors who have real-life experience of serious youth violence and/or criminal exploitation. Practitioners have an acute understanding of children's life experiences and the challenges in families in terms of culture, poverty and the financial draw of criminality. Their work focuses on emotional well-being and identity to build self-esteem. A local youth club valued by parents and children provides a safe space where the young people can go, to engage with staff members through targeted activities. This helps children to feel secure enough to confide in a trusted adult when they are worried or frightened. The youth club is also used to identify emerging risks to individual children and those in the local area.

For instance, an immediate response by the partnership to increased violence in a specific area in Merton culminated in a week of collaborative action. Social care helped to identify the young people at risk, the police provided more active police presence in the locality, and housing associations were happy to patrol the local area, all supported by the detached youth work team. The local businesses and partners reported that communication improved between the stakeholders in the area. The local community centre, which provides a community hub on a local housing estate and offers groups and classes, is very much central to the activity and engagement in the area. This purposeful and persistent joint work engages many highly vulnerable children and reduces risks of further serious harm.



Next steps

We have determined that the MSCP is the principal authority and should prepare a written statement of proposed action responding to the findings outlined in this letter. This should be a multi-agency response involving the individuals and agencies that this report is addressed to. The response should set out the actions for the partnership and, when appropriate, individual agencies. The local safeguarding partners should oversee implementation of the action plan through their local multi-agency safeguarding arrangements.

The MSCP should send the written statement of action to ProtectionOfChildren@ofsted.gov.uk by 23 May 2024. This statement will inform the lines of enquiry at any future joint or single-agency activity by the inspectorates.



Yours sincerely

Yvette Stanley
National Director Regulation and Social Care, Ofsted

Dr Sean O'Kelly BSc MB ChB MSc DCH FRCA
Chief Inspector of Health Care, CQC

Michelle Skeer OBE QPM
His Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary
His Majesty's Inspector of Fire & Rescue Services

Sue McAllister CB
His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Probation

This page is intentionally left blank

Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel - Work Programme 2023/2024



This table sets out the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel work programme for 2023/24; the items listed were agreed by the Panel at its meeting on 21 June 2023. This work programme will be considered at every meeting of the Panel to enable it to respond to issues of concern and incorporate reviews or to comment on pre-decision items ahead of their consideration by Cabinet/Council.

The work programme table shows items on a meeting-by-meeting basis, identifying the issue under review, the nature of the scrutiny (pre-decision, policy development, issue specific, performance monitoring, partnership related) and the intended outcomes.

Chair: Councillor Usaama Kaweesa
Vice-chair: Councillor Chessie Flack

Scrutiny Support

For further information on the work programme of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel please contact: -
Octavia Lamb, Policy and Scrutiny Manager
Tel: 020 8545 4728; Email: Octavia.lamb@merton.gov.uk

For more information about overview and scrutiny at LB Merton, please visit www.merton.gov.uk/scrutiny

Meeting date: 20 September 2023 (~~**Deadline for papers:** 12pm, 11 September 2023~~)

Item/issue	How	Lead member and/or lead officer	Intended outcomes
Departmental update	Written Report	Jane McSherry, Executive Director Children Lifelong Learning and Families	Review priority work streams within the Children, Lifelong Learning and Families Department.
Pupil Place Planning Strategy	Written Report	Elizabeth Fitzpatrick, Assistant Director of Education and Early Help	Review approach to managing school places.
Performance monitoring	Basket of indicators	Maisie Davies, Head of Performance, Improvement and Partnerships	To review the basket of indicators
Work programme 2023/24	Written Report	Councillor Usaama Kaweesa, Panel Chair	To review the work programme and agree any changes

~~Meeting date: 27 November 2023 (Deadline for papers: 5pm 16th November 2023)~~

Item/issue	How	Lead member and/or lead officer	Intended outcomes
Budget/business plan Round 1	Written Report	Councillor Billy Christie, Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Services	To discuss and make recommendations to forward to Commission
School Meals in Merton	Written Report	Elizabeth Fitzpatrick, Assistant Director of Education and Early Help	Review provision of meals at all phases of education
Youth Services	Written Report	Keith Shipman, Head of Education Inclusion	Review service and gaps in current provision
Youth Task Group - Report and Recommendations	Written Report	Cllr Max Austin, Task Group Chair.	Agree the recommendations and for report to go to Cabinet.
Departmental Update	Written Report	Jane McSherry, Executive Director	Review priority work streams within the Children, Lifelong Learning and Families Department.
Performance monitoring	Basket of indicators	Maisie Davies, Head of Performance	To review the Basket of indicators and highlight items of concern
Work programme 2022/23	Written Report	Councillor Usaama Kaweesa, CYP Panel Chair	To review the work programme and agree any changes

Meeting date: 25 January 2024 (~~**Deadline for papers:** 5pm 16th January 2024~~)

Item/issue	How	Lead member and/or lead officer	Intended outcomes
Budget/business plan scrutiny	Written Report	Councillor Billy Christie, Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Services	To discuss and make recommendations to forward to Cabinet
Merton Safeguarding Children Partnership Annual Report	Written Report	Tom Procter,	Review services over last 12 months.
Local playgrounds	Written Report	John Bosley, Assistant Director of Public Space Contract and Commission	Review of provision and how they ensure children and young people remain healthy
Childhood Immunisations	Written Report	NHS England	Review uptake of immunisations.
Departmental update report	Written Report	Jane McSherry, Executive Director	An overview of the key issues within the Children, Lifelong Learning and Families Department.
Youth Task Group - Report and Recommendations	Written Report	Cllr Max Austin, Task Group Chair.	Agree the recommendations and for report to go to Cabinet.
Performance monitoring	Basket of indicators	Head of Performance, Improvement and Partnerships	To review the Basket of indicators and highlight items of concern
Work programme 2023/24	Written Report	Councillor Usaama Kaweesa, CYP Panel Chair	To review the work programme and agree any changes

Meeting date: 11 March 2024 (**Deadline for papers:** 12pm 28 February 2024)

Item/issue	How	Lead member and/or lead officer	Intended outcomes
Corporate Parenting	Written Report	David Michael, Assistant Director Children's Social Care and Youth Inclusion	Review service performance
Education Standards Report	Written Report	Elizabeth Fitzpatrick, Assistant Director of Education and Early Help	Review overview of performance in schools
Child Healthy Weight Report	Written Report	Public Health Merton; Hilina Asrress	Review services including those to tackle childhood obesity
Departmental update report	Written Report	Jane McSherry, Executive Director; Children, Lifelong Learning and Families.	An overview of the key issues within the Children, Lifelong Learning and Families Department.
Performance monitoring	Basket of indicators	Maisie Davies, Head of Policy, Planning and Performance	To review the Basket of indicators and highlight items of concern
Topic suggestions for 2024/25	Written Report	Councillor Usaama Kaweesa, CYP Panel Chair	To identify topics for the 2023/24 work programme

MOVE TO NEXT YEAR

0-19 Healthy Child service update report	Report to the Panel	Public Health Merton; Hilina Asrress	Review services in for children aged 0-19 Services under review, tendering for new provider
--	---------------------	---	--