

Care Leaver Strategy 2015-18

London Borough of Merton

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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 on to 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

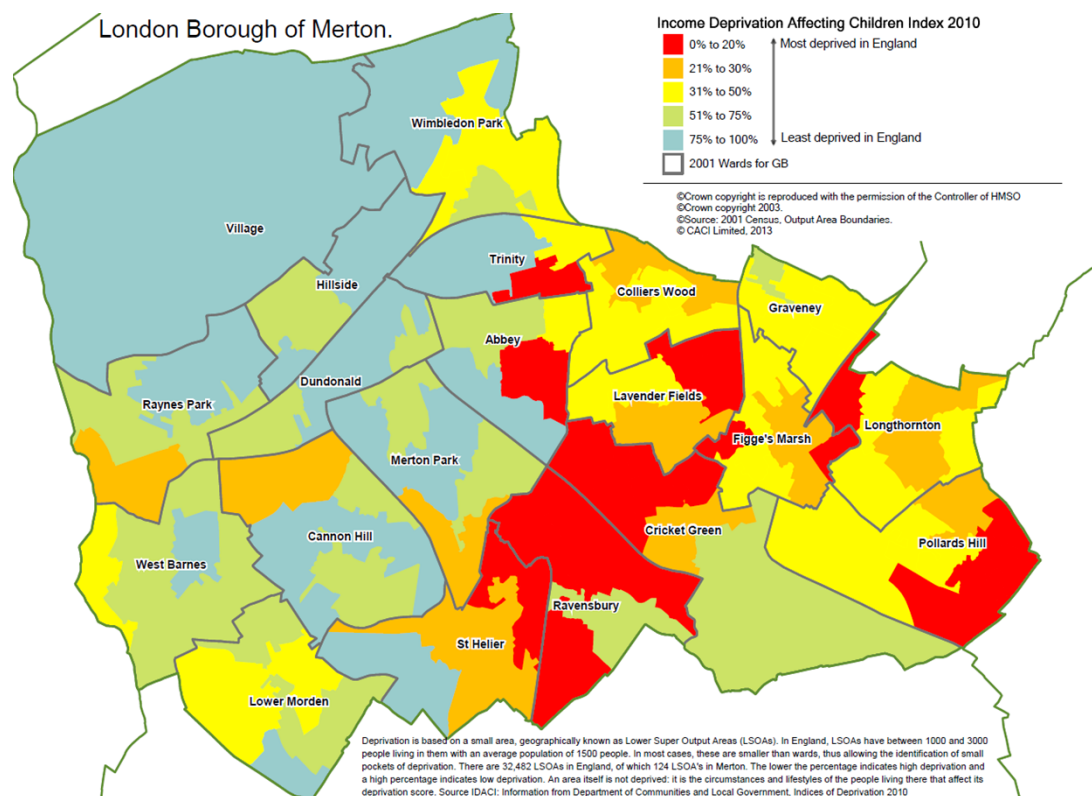
- Care leavers are roughly twice as likely not to be in education training or employment at 19 than the rest of the population¹

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.

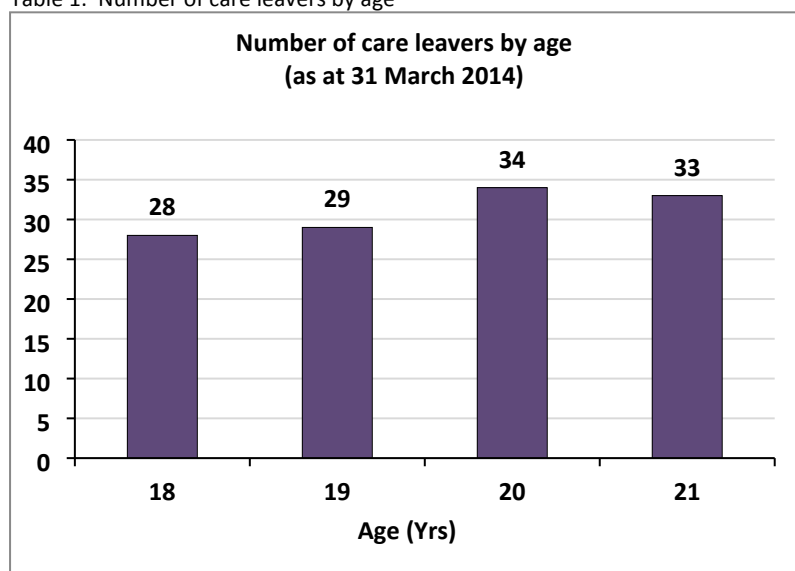
Merton's LAC gender distributions are similar to national averages; we have more LAC boys than girls. The age profile of children looked after at 31 March in Merton varies from the national norm with Merton caring for a large number of older looked after children aged 16 and over. In Merton 41% of our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

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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

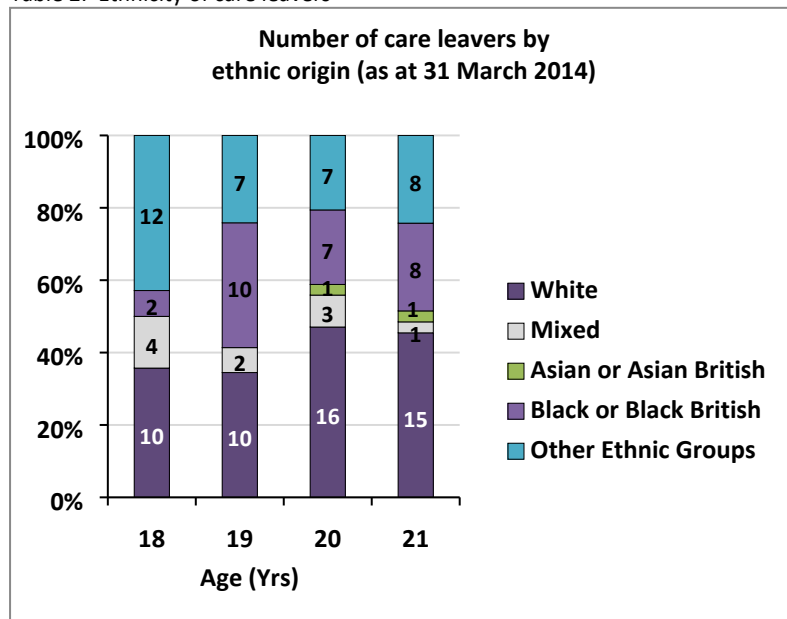


Source: DfE SFR - Children looked after in England, including adoption (Dec 2014)

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).

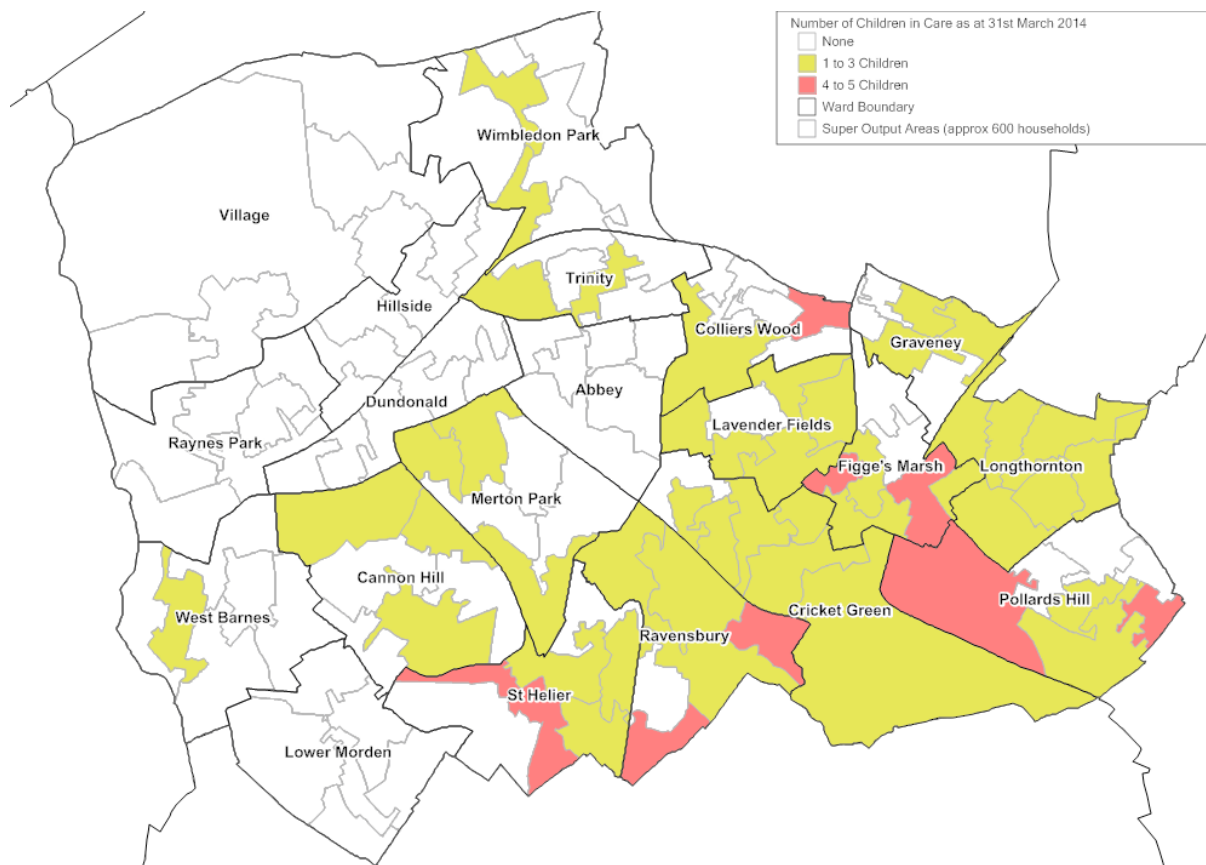
Table 2: Ethnicity of care leavers



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



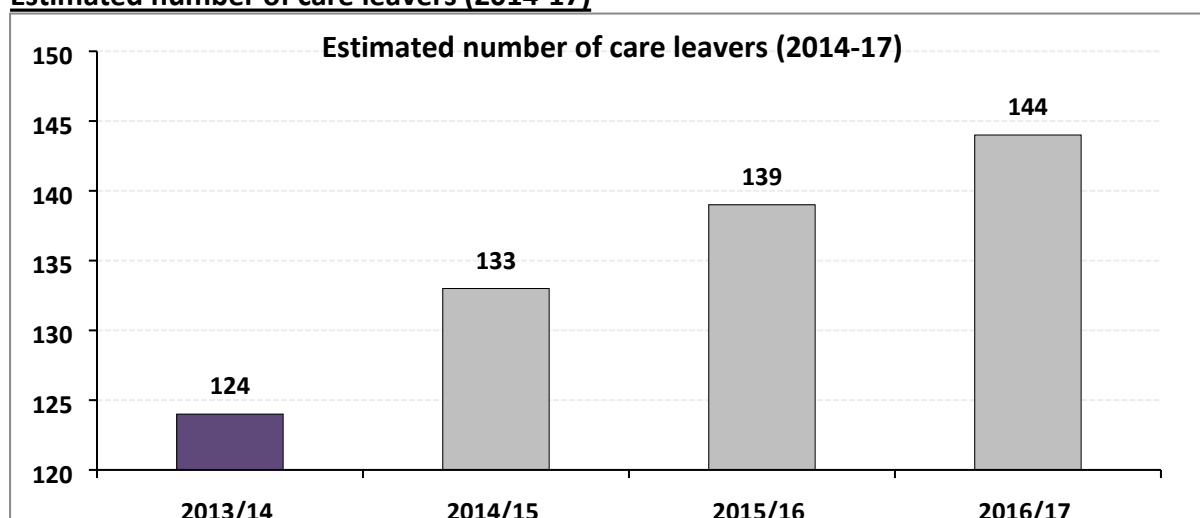
Our children have a range of complex needs at the point they become looked after 19% (2014) have SEN statements. Significant numbers of our LAC have experienced mental health and drugs or alcohol abuse issues within their families.

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

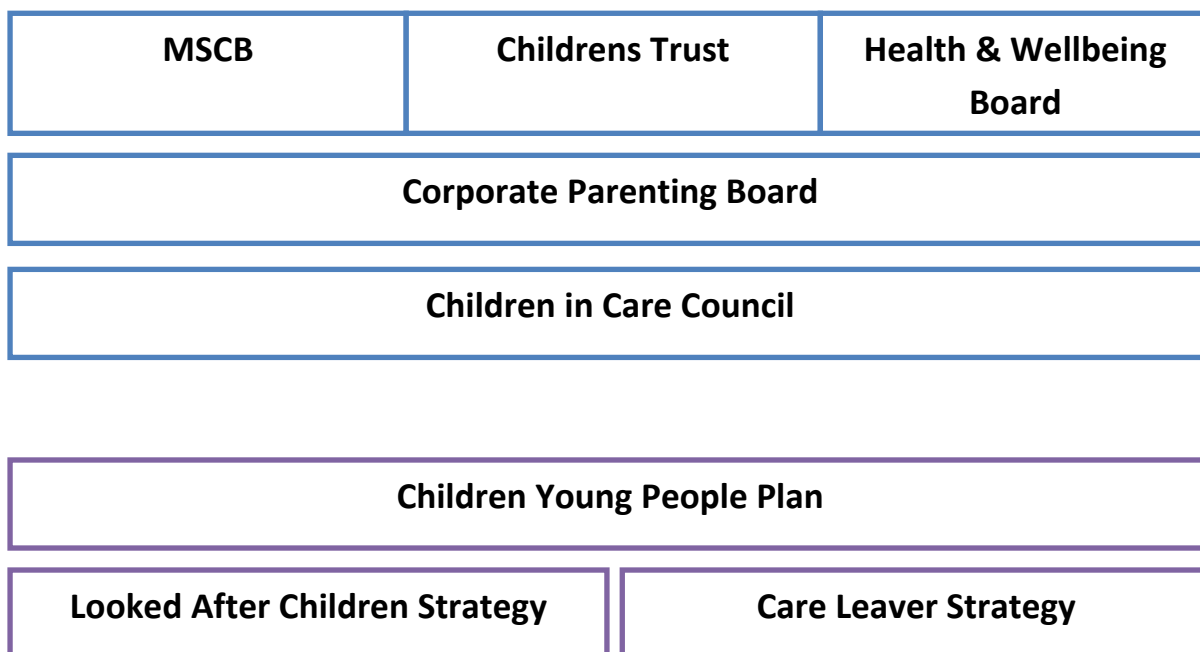
Grey shading indicates the estimated number of care leavers based on the forecasting model in Appendix 1 (pg 34)

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

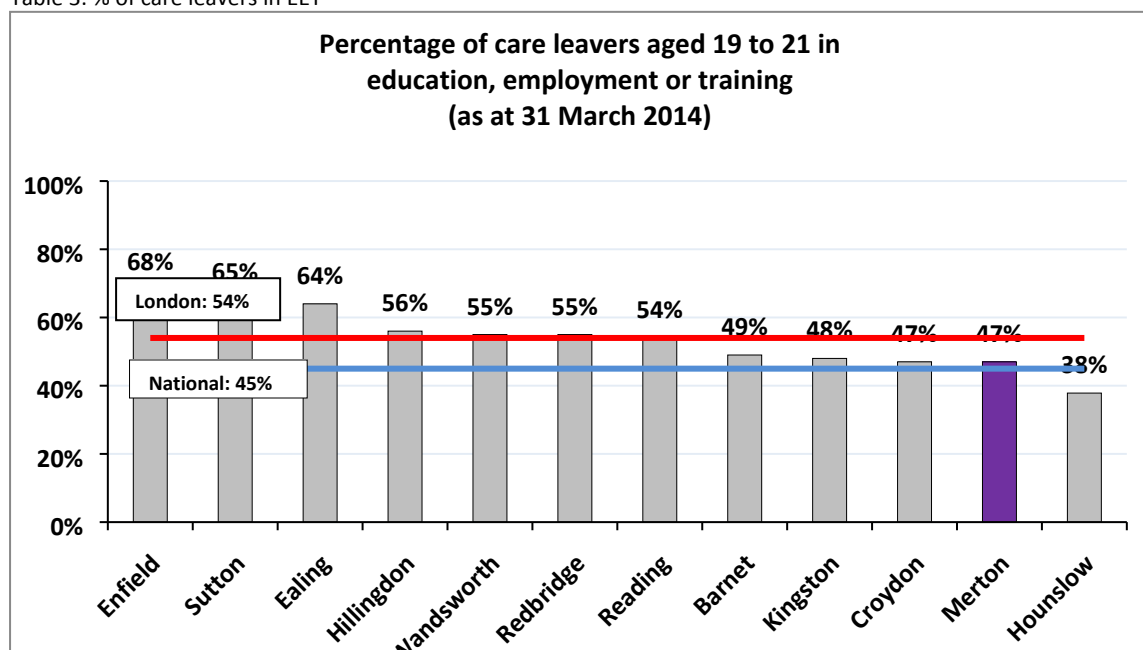
A good standard of education is a key driver towards achieving positive employment outcomes in adulthood. However, there remains a significant gap between the educational achievements of care leavers and their peers.

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

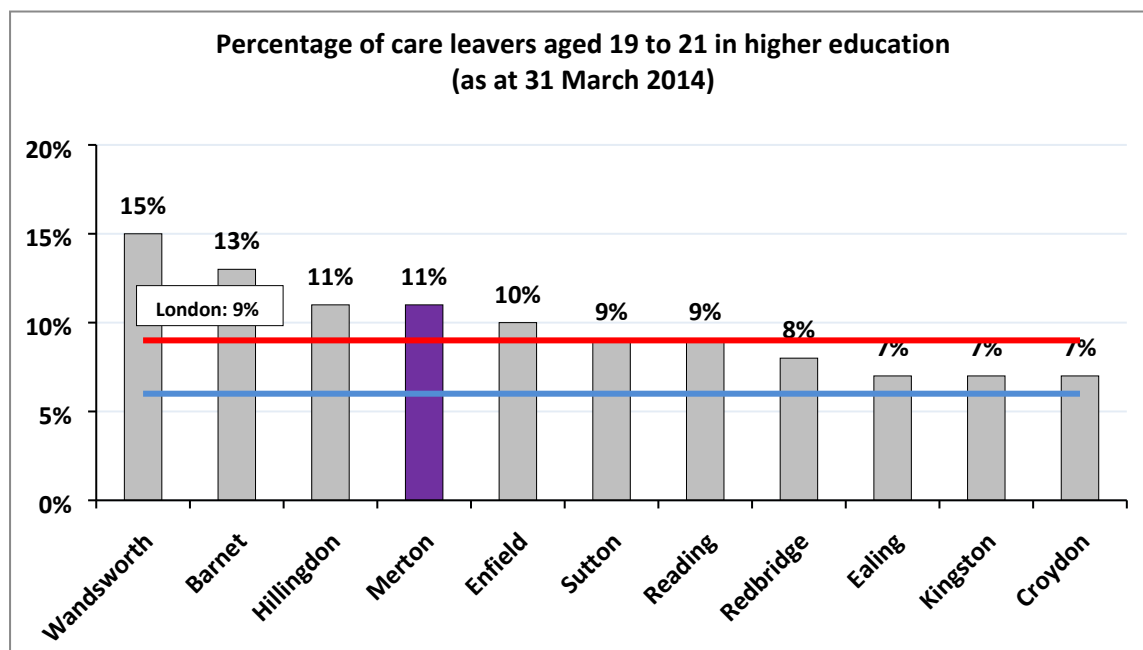


Source: DfE SFR - Children looked after in England, including adoption (Dec 2014)

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

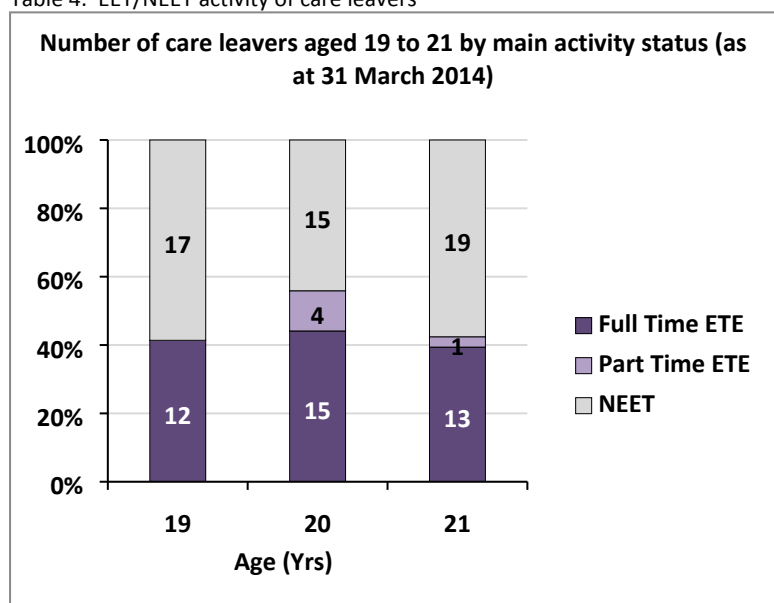
Employment

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,

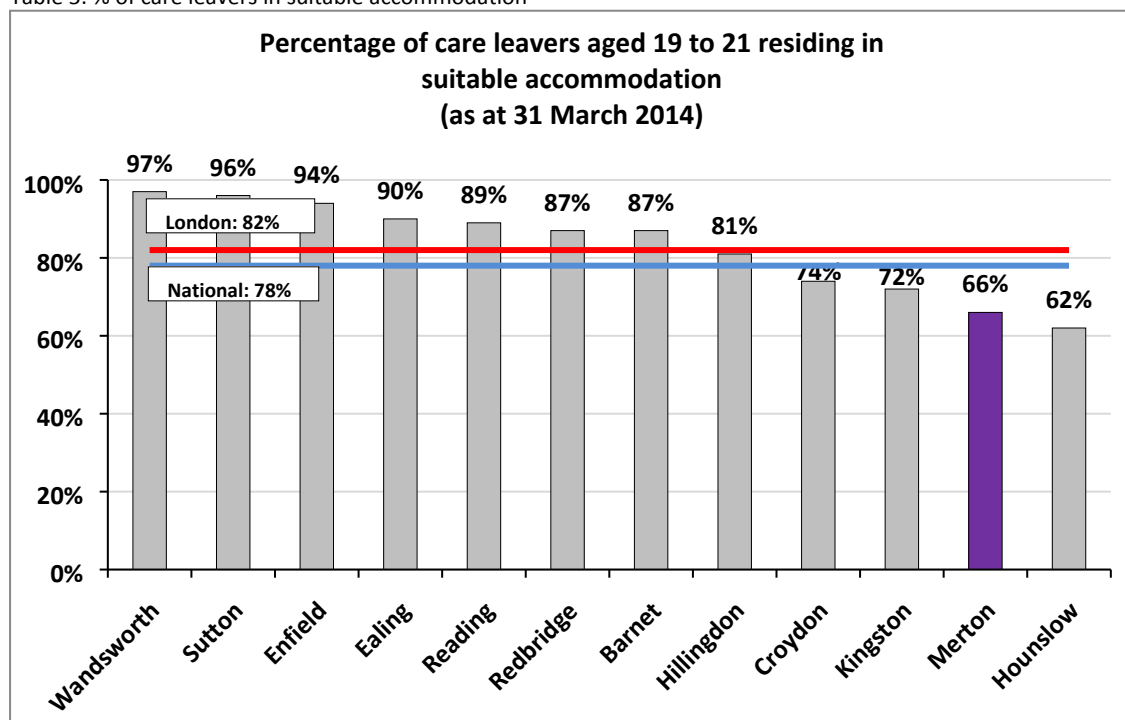
⁶ Source: CRISIS: [The hidden truth about homelessness: Experiences of single homelessness in England](#)

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:

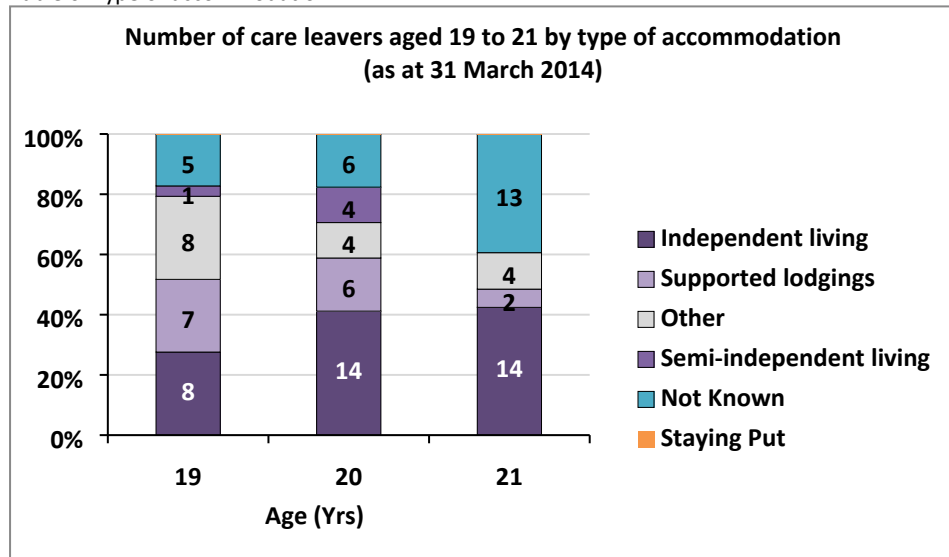
- avoid moving and disrupting young people who are settled
- assess young people’s needs and prepare them for any move
- offer a choice of accommodation (where practicable)
- provide a support package to go with the accommodation
- have a contingency plan in case accommodation arrangements break down

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

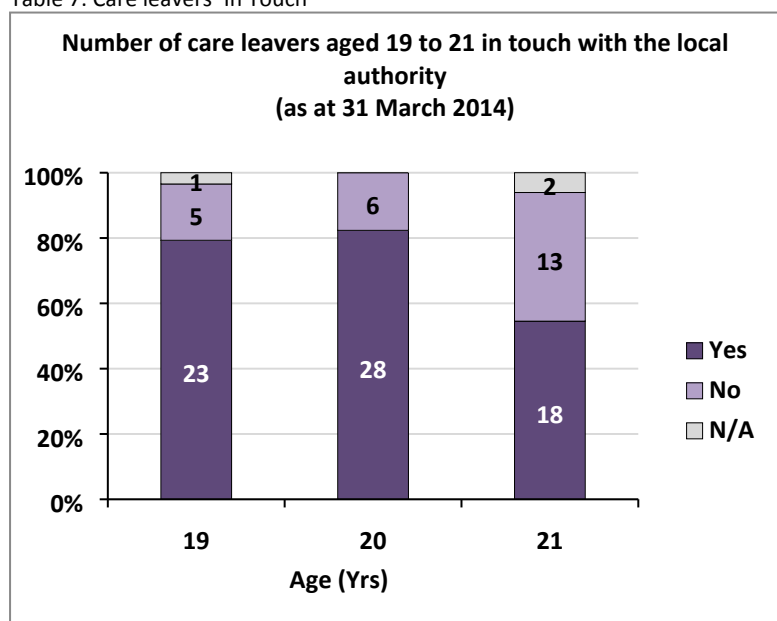
Impact of Measures

- % (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](#)