



**Annual Corporate Parenting Report  
2015-2016  
London Borough of Merton**

**Corporate Parenting Board  
November 2016**

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## Executive Summary

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

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

As a Corporate Parenting Panel we need to understand what we are doing well, what our areas of challenge are and the actions that we will take to address these challenges. This report presents activity and performance data from 2015-16 and identifies the priorities for the year ahead.

- We continue to have a LAC population that has a high proportion of adolescent young people. The report sets out that whilst a high number of these are unaccompanied asylum seeking young people, factors such as housing and anti-social behaviour are also impacting.
- The improvement planning in place in our 14+ Team has seen a significant impact in outcomes for our care leavers in terms of ETE and housing. We are also in touch with a greater number of care leavers and are able to evidence the benefits of relationship based practice.
- Our fostering recruitment campaign has been successful, but we are still facing a challenge to recruit carers for our adolescent cohort.
- We have seen an improvement in children's participation in their reviews and the IRO Team is now working to embed a child centred model for LAC Reviews.
- Placement stability has seen significant improvement over the last year, and the development of the LAC Permanence Team has meant that our stable LAC now have the attention of a focused team who are working hard to develop relationships with children, carers and parents.
- Adoption performance continues to be a strength in terms of clear planning and management oversight of cases. As a result of embedded processes adoption placements are achieved in a timely manner.
- The CSC CAMH Team is now well embedded in the service and offering an excellent service to children, young people, carers and practitioners
- Good progress has been made to ensure that the voice of the child in care is heard, with the development of the LAC and Care Leaver Pledge, the Care Leavers Survey, and the involvement of young people in our foster carer training.

## Priorities 2016-2017

Based on the analysis in this annual report and our broader understanding of our looked after children and care leavers we have identified the following actions as our priorities for the year ahead;

Action	Impact
Development of a Care Leaver Hub	Care leavers are able to access a number of different services and resources in an accessible and young person friendly environment.
Development of a Care Leaver Forum	Care leavers are empowered to challenge their corporate parents on the progression of the Care Leaver Strategy.
Development of Participation for all ages	Children of all ages are engaged in regular participation events through an age appropriate Child in Care Council Group.
Development of a Placements Panel	All residential placements are reviewed to ensure placements are addressing identified needs and provide value for money.
Signs of Safety Approach is incorporated into the work of the LAC Teams	Mapping exercises support practitioners to implement safety plans for our looked after children and care leavers.

## **1. Context**

1.1 This report sets out an annual update on the corporate parenting arrangements in Merton; focusing on activity and performance during 2015-16. It advises members on key legislation and guidance alongside key performance indicators for Looked after Children and Care Leavers.

## **2. The Legal Framework**

2.1 The Children Act 1989 and the Leaving Care Act 2000 place clear statutory duties upon the Council to protect children from suffering significant harm and to provide continued financial and transition support to care leavers aged up to 21 (or 25 if in full time education). Underpinning corporate parenting is a wide range of national policies, guidance, regulations and legislation, which are subject to change by High Court rulings, such as the Southwark ruling in 2009.

2.2 The revised care planning regulations and guidance, including The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 2: Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Volume 3: Planning Transition to Adulthood for Care Leavers and the Statutory Guidance on Securing Sufficient Accommodation for Looked After Children March 2010, place increased emphasis on effective care planning with a focus on the child, and are designed to improve the quality and consistency of care planning, placement and case review for looked after children. They also aim to improve the care and support provided to care leavers.

2.3 In 2014 the Children and Families Act 2014 was introduced. The Act takes forward a commitment to improve services for vulnerable children. It reforms the systems for adoption, Looked after Children, family justice and special educational needs.

2.4 The Volume 3: Planning Transition to Adulthood for Care Leavers (Revised May 2013) sets out expectations for local authorities in respect of planning and arranging suitable accommodation for the transition to independent living, including 'accommodation with former foster carers (Staying Put arrangements)'. The Staying Put legislation places a legal duty on local authorities to support every care leaver who wants to stay with their foster carers until their 21st birthday. The opportunity to 'stay put' should apply equally to young people that have been cared for by foster carers from the local authority or independent fostering services.

2.5 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:

a. To receive and consider accurate and timely management information reports on the numbers, characteristics and needs of looked after children and care leavers

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

### **3. Merton Background**

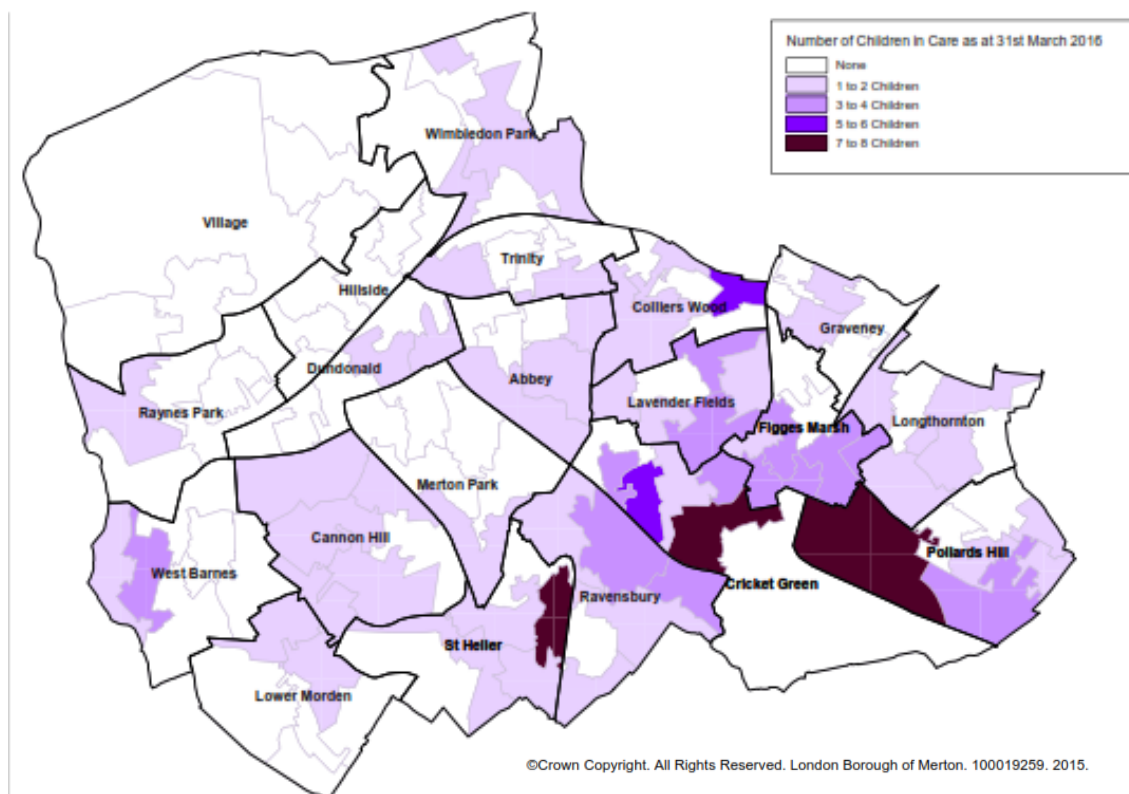
- 3.1 Merton is an outer London borough situated in south west London, covering 14.7 square miles. Merton has a total population of 200,543 including 47,499 children and young people aged 0-19 (Census 2011). The number of 0-19 year olds is forecast to increase by 3,180 (7%) by 2017, within which we forecast a 20% increase of children aged 5 to 9 (2,270).
- 3.2 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.
- 3.3 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 67% from BAME communities, speaking over 120 languages (2016). The borough has concentrations of Urdu speaking communities, Sri Lankan, South African and Polish residents.
- 3.4 Looked After Children (LAC) are those children and young people aged 0-18 years who cannot safely remain with their family and are cared for by the local authority. The local authority has continuing legal and financial responsibilities to many of these children until they are 21 (or 25 if in full time education). This includes all unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) and children with disabilities who are receiving more than 75 days of respite care per year.

3.5 There are clear thresholds for admitting children into care and in all cases significant attempts should have been made to support the child or young person to remain with their family or within their community. In Merton an Edge of Care and Rehabilitation Panel ensures management oversight of care planning in the decision making to accommodate a child or rehabilitate them home.

3.6 As at 31 March 2016 there were 163 Looked After Children in Merton which represents a 4.5% increase from 2015 (156 children). In England and Wales there were 70,440 looked after children as at March 2016, an increase of 1.4% from 2015 (69,480). In addition Merton has 144 young people aged 18-25 years accessing leaving care services, making Merton a corporate parent to over 307 vulnerable children and young people.

3.7 The local Family Poverty Needs Assessment shows that Merton is a relatively affluent borough, ranking as the fourth least deprived authority of London's 33 boroughs.

3.8 54% of the LAC population came from an area of deprivation (Indices of Deprivation Affecting Children Index 2015 bottom 30%), an increase of 5% from 2015 but still 6% below the level reported in 2014. The majority of children looked after as at 31 March lived in wards, pre intervention, in the east and south of the borough.

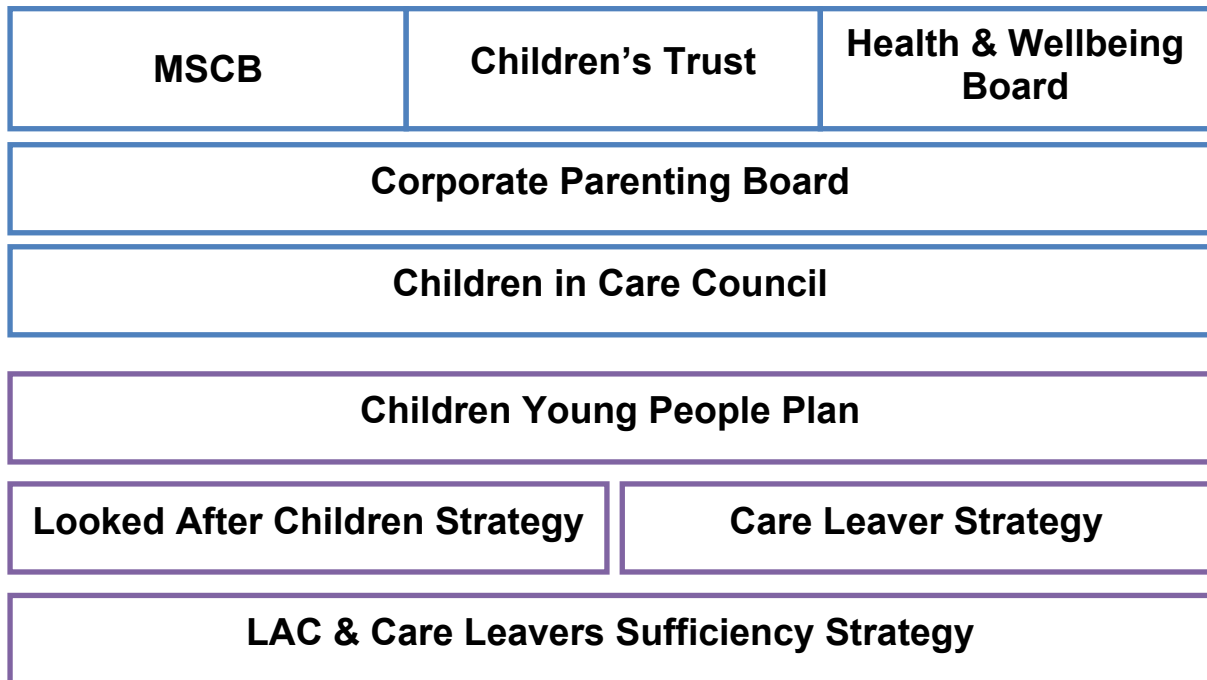


Source: SSDA903

#### 4. Corporate Parenting – Roles and Responsibilities

4.1 The Children and Young Persons Act (2008) reinforces the message that all outcomes for children looked after by the local authority. To ensure this council wide ownership Corporate Parenting Board is chaired by the Chief Executive London Borough Merton.

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



4.3 The Board meets 6 times each year.

4.4 Over the past year the Board has considered reports on topics including:

- Educational progress of looked after children
- Health outcomes of looked after children
- Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children
- Placement Stability
- Voice of the child
- LAC Sufficiency
- CAMHS
- Assessments of young people aged 16 & 17 years presenting as homeless
- Trends in the care population



## 5. LAC and Care Leavers Pledge

### A pledge to children in care and care leavers in Merton

We promise to support you to:



#### Your health

- Ensure you are registered with a GP and Dentist.
- Provide advice, guidance and support on substance misuse, sexual health and mental health.
- Run courses on cooking healthy meals
- Make a financial contribution towards leisure activities.
- Explain to you about why you have a health assessment.

#### Your safety and support

- Maintain positive relationships with your family.
- Help you to understand your rights.
- Make safe choices and take reasonable risks in a safe and supportive environment.
- Prepare for meetings and accompany you when you ask.
- We will talk to you about the information we share about you.
- We will support you to identify the right placement.

#### Your voice

- Provide regular information on the advocacy service.
- Meet with me after meetings to discuss what has been agreed.
- We will come with you to appointments when you ask us to.
- Encourage you to give us feedback and when necessary to make a complaint.
- We will make you aware of your options and support you in making choices.

#### Your education and training

- Make sure that you have access to IT and other equipment to support your education and training.
- Celebrate your success.
- Provide an education pack to let you know about the Virtual School.
- Make sure that you get extra study support if you need it.
- Develop a post 18 PEP.
- More training and apprenticeship opportunities.
- Provide information on the financial support that you are entitled to.
- Access English and Maths tuition.

#### Your finances

- Make you aware of your financial entitlements as a child in care or care leaver.
- Provide advice and guidance in respect of benefits and budgeting.
- Help you to prepare to leave care and live independently.
- Access the best possible education and training.
- Help you develop life skills/work towards your goals.

#### Your rights

- We will support you to access good quality legal advice.
- We will support you to attend meetings with solicitors and the Home Office.
- We will provide information on the law and your rights.

[merton.gov.uk/lookedafter](http://merton.gov.uk/lookedafter)

## 6. Update on Priorities from 2015-2016

Action	Update	RAG
Review of the Care Leaver Strategy	A Care Leaver Task Force has been developed to support the ongoing review of the Care Leaver Strategy. This has ensured regular focus on areas such as housing, EET and health. The strategy is reviewed every six months to feed into the continuous improvement plan.	
Establishment of a targeted NEET/EET intervention for Care Leavers	A new NEET Practitioner post was developed within the Virtual School to work specifically with the Care Leaver cohort. The Practitioner has undertaken 1:1 and group work with our young people. There has been an improvement in the number of care leavers engaged in ETE.	
Participation of children and young people in their LAC reviews	In improvement plan was put in place to ensure shared ownership in supporting the participation of all children in their LAC reviews. We involved young people in sessions to establish how we might make the review process more child focused, and as a result of this a new model is being piloted by the IRO Team. There has been an increase in the number of children and young people engaging in their LAC review.	
Establishment of the LAC CAMH Team	The CAMH Team is now well established and there is a comprehensive offer in place. Further information on the Team and the work that they have undertaken will be referenced later in this report. SDQ training has been delivered to all practitioners and there is an agreed process with CAMHS for 'high scores'.	
Looked After Children and Care Leavers Needs Assessment to be undertaken	The LAC Health Needs Assessment was undertaken to inform the development of strategies and services employed in health and social care. The needs assessment had a particular focus on: transitions into and out of care, out of borough placements, and CAMHS.	

## 7. Corporate Parenting Performance Activity 2015-2016 (SSDA 903)

### Section 1: Looked After Children Cohort Overview (Numbers and Characteristics)

#### Numbers and rates of children looked after as at 31st March

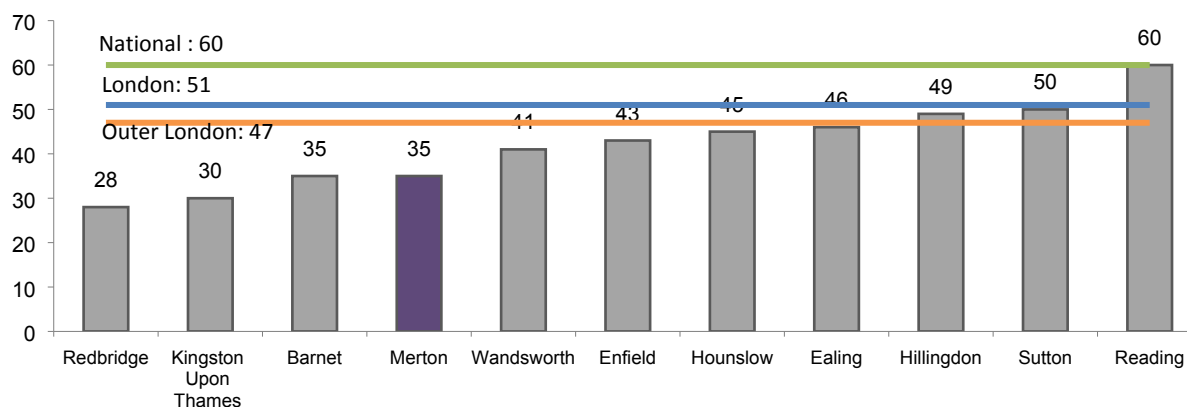
	2012		2013		2014		2015		2016	
	Number	Rate per 10,000	Number	Rate per 10,000	Number	Rate per 10,000	Number	Rate per 10,000	Number	Rate per 10,000
Merton	129	30	140	31	150	34	157	34	163	35
London	10,260	57	10,080	54	10,110	54	9,980	52	9,860	51
National	67,070	59	68,060	60	68,810	60	69,480	60	70,440	60

England and London totals are rounded to the nearest 10.

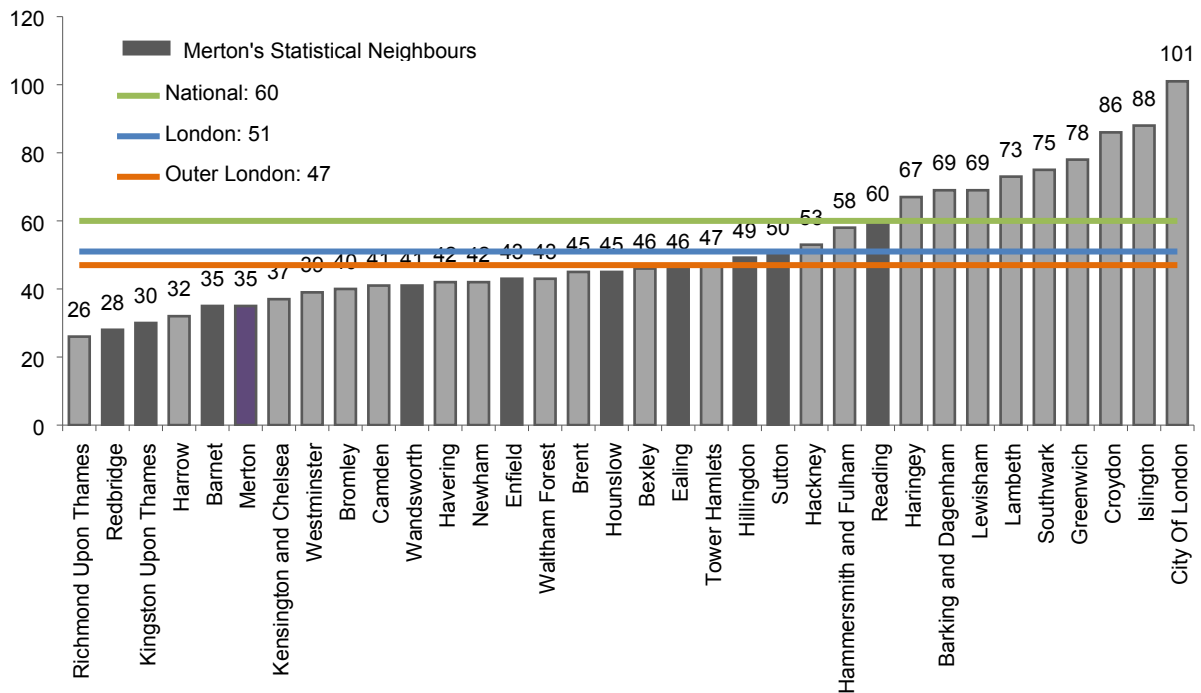
7.1 The number of looked after children has continued to rise both locally and nationally. There were 163 looked after children as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2016, an increase of 3.8% compared to March 2015. Outer London has seen a 0.5% increase since March 2016. The rise over time reflects the higher number of children starting to be looked after than ceasing. In particular we have seen a rise in the number of unaccompanied asylum seeking children entering care since 2012 and this increase influences the characteristic of our overall looked after child population. For example there has been a rise in the number of children aged 16 and over.

7.2 In the year 2015-16 there were 128 new admissions into care (relating to 122 children). 57% of starters were still in care at the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2016, and a larger proportion of starters (36%) were aged 16 and over. This is double the national proportion of starters in this age range. Whilst Merton has seen a rise in its looked after child population in the past 4 years the rates per 10,000 population remains stable and we continue have one of the lowest LAC populations when compared to our statistical neighbours. Merton has the 3<sup>rd</sup> lowest rate amongst its Statistical Neighbours. There are only five (four in London) local authorities with a rate per 10,000 less than Merton.

#### Rate per 10,000 population of Children Looked After against Merton's Statistical Neighbours 2016

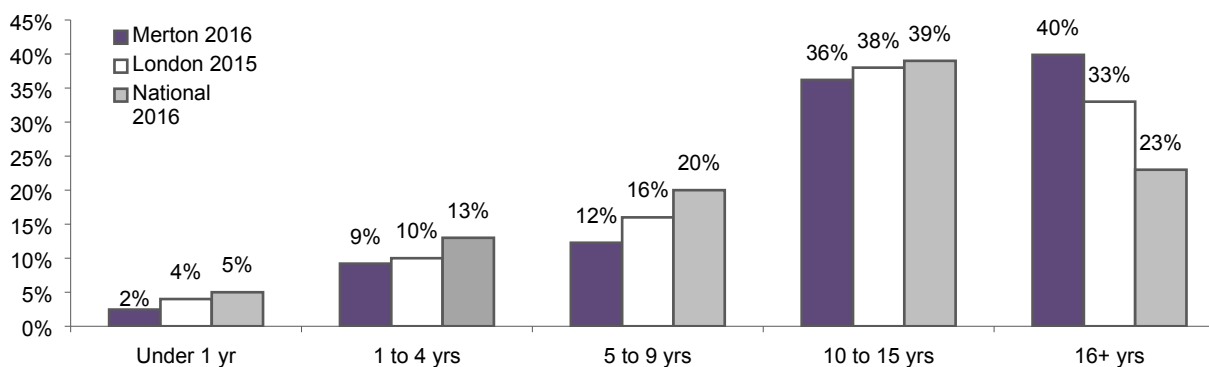


### Rate per 10,000 population of Children Looked After against Merton's Statistical Neighbours and all London Boroughs 2016



7.3 As set out in the bi-monthly LAC Cohort Corporate Parenting Reports the age profile of children looked after in Merton differs significantly from the national picture with Merton caring for a large number of older looked after children aged 16 and over. At 31 March 2016 40% of our looked after children were aged 16 and 17 compared to 23% nationally. The inverse trend is reflected in the 0 to 15 year olds.

### Percentage of children looked after as at 31st of March 2016 by age group compared to London 2015 and National 2016



## Gender, Age and Ethnicity of Looked After Children

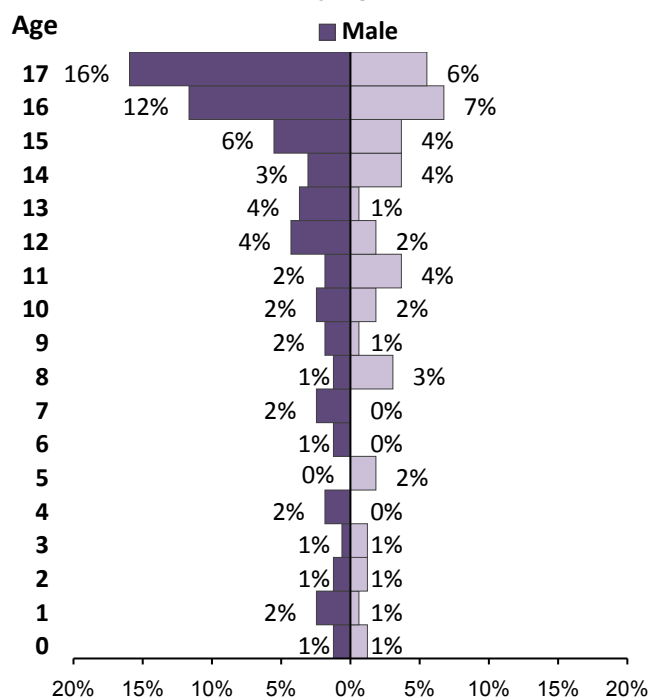
7.4 The table below shows the significant increase in the older population over the previous 5 years. Review of the local information shows that of the forty-four 16 and 17 year olds accommodated 15 were accommodated due to their UASC status, 10 were accommodated following a joint assessment under the homeless protocol and 9 due to concerns relating to anti-social behaviour. 5 had experienced neglect and abuse and 4 were at risk of CSE. 1 young person was accommodated due to their disability.

### Age of children looked after by year as at the year end 2016

Merton	Age (in years)																	
	<i>(number of Children Looked After, as at 31<sup>st</sup> March)</i>																	
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
2012	7	4	3	4	4	1	3	7	5	2	7	2	9	8	15	13	16	19
2013	6	7	5	1	5	4	2	2	7	5	5	6	2	8	9	17	24	25
2014	8	6	4	5	0	2	5	3	2	7	5	6	8	1	15	12	22	39
2015	6	3	5	4	3	0	3	6	4	4	10	7	5	10	10	18	26	33
2016	4	5	4	3	3	3	2	4	7	4	7	9	10	7	11	15	30	35

Source: SSDA 903

### Percentage of Children Looked After at 31st March 2016 by Age and Gender



	Gender	
	<i>(percentage of Children Looked After)</i>	
	Male	Female
Merton 2016	63%	37%
London 2015	58%	42%
National 2016	56%	44%

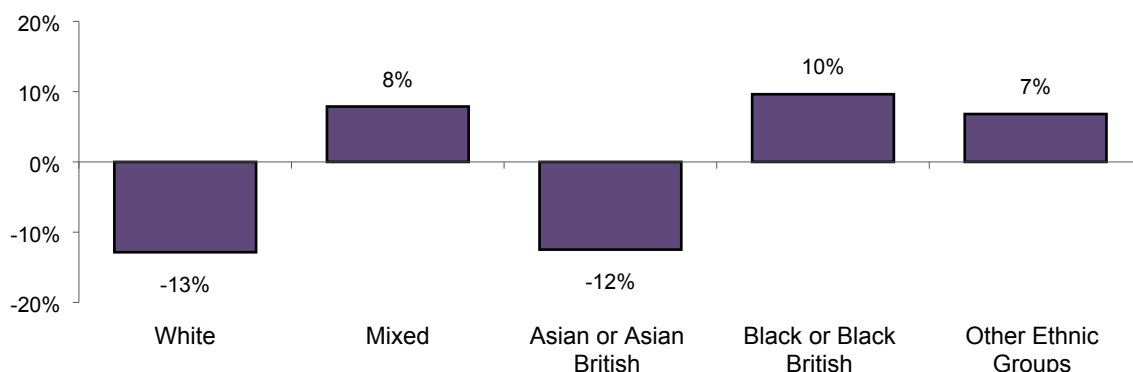
Overall, 63% of the LAC population is male and 37% female.

The breakdown of the gender/age data highlights the fact that our older LAC cohort is significantly over-represented by males (the majority of UASC and LASPO referrals received relate to males).

7.5 The age profile has continued to change over the past four years, with a steady increase in the number and proportion of older children. 76% of children were aged 10 years and over in 2016 compared with 69% in 2012 (comparing with 62% and 56% nationally). There has been a reduction in the number and proportion of children aged 0-4 from 17% in 2012 to 12% in 2016 (comparing with 24% to 18% nationally).

7.6 The majority of children looked after in Merton are from a white background. This is a lower proportion than the general resident population (by 13%). There are fewer Asian or Asian British than the all persons Merton population. Children from Mixed ethnic backgrounds, Black or Black British heritage and 'Other Ethnic Groups' are over-represented in our looked after child population and this is likely to reflect the increase in the numbers of unaccompanied asylum seeking children.

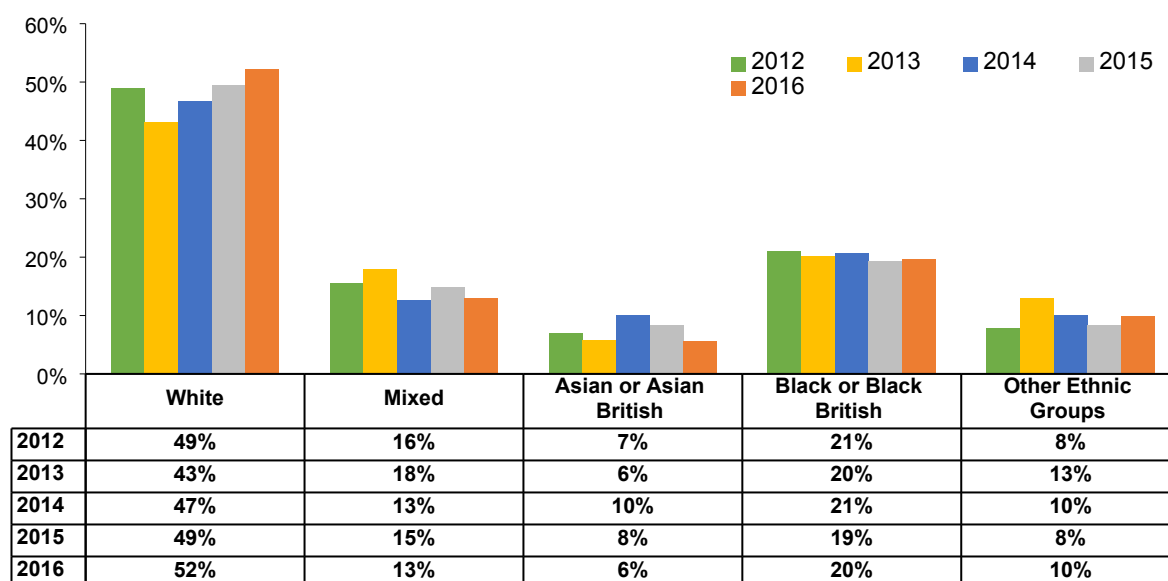
### Difference in Ethnic Group of Looked After Children as at 31st March 2016 from the Merton Resident Population 2011



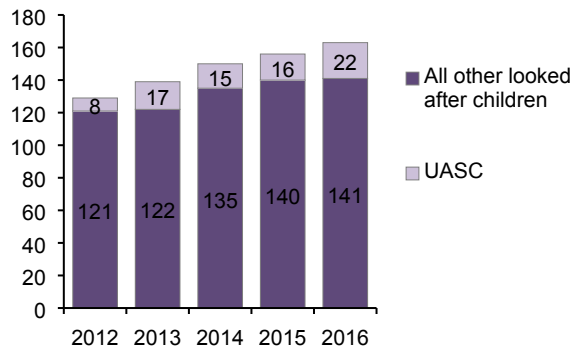
*Note: Other Ethnic Groups is a census defined category and represents a number of ethnic groups where ethnic heritage cannot be defined in the Asian, Black White or Mixed groups. The category includes Afghanistani, Arab, Chinese, Egyptian, Filipino, Iranian, Iraqi, Japanese, Korean, Kurdish, Latin / South / Central American, Lebanese, Malay, Moroccan, Polynesian, Thai, Vietnamese, or Yemeni.*

7.7 The 5 year trend data indicates that the ethnic origin of our looked after children has remained relatively stable. Merton has however seen a decrease in the percentage of children in the 'Mixed' category from 18% in 2012 to 13% in 2016.

### Percentage of Children Looked After by Ethnic Origin from 2012 to 2016

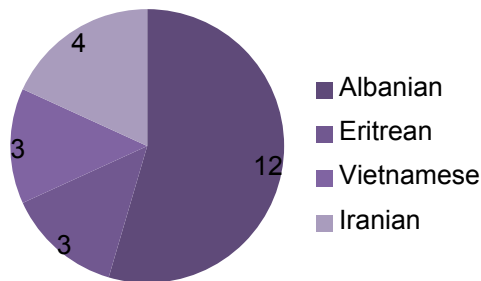


**Number of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children looked after at 31st of March**



The graph on the left highlights the increase in LAC and UASC populations since 2012. In 2012 the UASC population was 6% of the overall LAC cohort. In 2016 this has risen to 16%, which is significantly greater than the national figure of 6%. Two thirds of all unaccompanied asylum seeking children are located in London and the South East.

**Nationality of UASC Population (as at 31st March 2016)**



The ethnicity section of this report demonstrates a large proportion of LAC in the category of 'Other Ethnic Groups', this reflects the number of UASC within the overall cohort.

The majority of our UASC cohort are male young men from Albania.

**Number of Children who started to be Looked After during the year ending 31st March**

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Merton	83	92	114	107	122
% increase / decrease year on year	-2%	11%	24%	-6%	14%

Source: SSDA 903. Only the first occasion on which a child started to be looked after in the year is counted.

7.8 The number of children starting to be looked after has been increasing locally and nationally since 2012, with a 14% increase in children starting care in 2015-16 compared to 2014-15. The key increase for us locally is in the 16-17 age group. 13% of those who started to be looked after in 2015-16 were UASC (16cyp: 1 aged 14, 8 aged 16 and 7 aged 17), a reduction from 16% in 2014-15 (17cyp: 1 aged 13, 11 aged 16 and 5 aged 17). It is the non-UASC starters aged 16-17 which have increased substantially from 13 in 2015 to 29 in 2016, although this is still lower than the level reached in 2014 (32 non-UASC aged 16-17).

**Age of Children who started to be Looked After during the year ending 31st March**

Merton	Age (in years)																	
	(number of children who started to be Looked After; ages on entering care)																	
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
2012	10	2	2	1	0	2	5	4	1	3	2	2	3	6	8	9	13	10
2013	10	2	1	1	1	3	0	3	1	0	5	1	1	5	9	10	24	15
2014	13	5	5	3	4	1	3	5	3	1	3	4	2	7	9	7	22	17
2015	8	3	4	3	2	2	3	2	5	7	2	1	4	4	15	13	17	12
2016	11	3	5	1	6	3	4	3	2	5	4	2	7	4	7	11	19	25

## Reason for being looked after

7.9 When a child becomes looked after their primary need is collected and the table below shows that the proportions of children in each group have remained fairly stable. The significant difference between our local and the national data is the absent parenting category which reflects the number of UASC.

Merton	Category of Need							
	Abuse or neglect	Child's disability	Parent's illness or disability	Family in acute stress	Family dysfunction	Socially unacceptable behaviour	Low income	Absent parenting
2012	40%	6%	8%	9%	19%	3%	0%	14%
2013	37%	6%	6%	6%	23%	2%	0%	20%
2014	41%	5%	6%	7%	20%	3%	0%	17%
2015	42%	9%	4%	8%	19%	3%	0%	15%
2016	40%	9%	4%	10%	18%	2%	0%	17%
London 2015	47%	2%	4%	9%	13%	6%	1%	18%
National 2016	60%	3%	3%	9%	16%	2%	-	7%

## Legal status of looked after children

7.10 In the period 2012-2016 we have seen a steady increase in the numbers and proportion of Looked After Children on a care order and this is in line with the national trend, however we have a significantly lower proportion of our looked after children subject to such orders than nationally (Merton data for 2016 was 42% of children on ICO's and Full Care Orders, National data was 65%). In the London Borough of Merton we have seen a slight increase in Placement Orders over the period 2012-2016, and we currently have a higher proportion of children subject to such orders than London and National. This suggests that we have been less impacted by two related court judgements known as Re B and Re B-S, which we believe is an impact of our improved Notice of Intent process for cases in the pre-proceedings cohort.

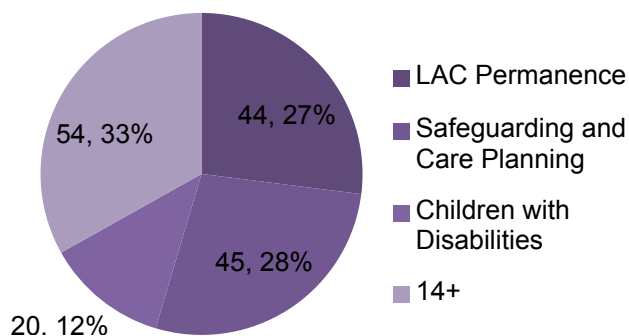
## Team allocation of looked after children

7.11 In 2015-16 we developed the LAC Permanence Team; a team designed to work with settled Looked After Children aged 6+. The key driver behind the development of the team was to provide greater support for children with plans for permanency. We had witnessed a decline in our performance in placement stability during the course of the last year and a half. While it is evident from the review of these cases that the factors involved in the lack of stability are multifarious, it is also clear that changes of social worker and manager have contributed to this difficulty. On the basis of national evidence it is also clear that stability of social work practitioner has an impact on the success of placement stability for children.



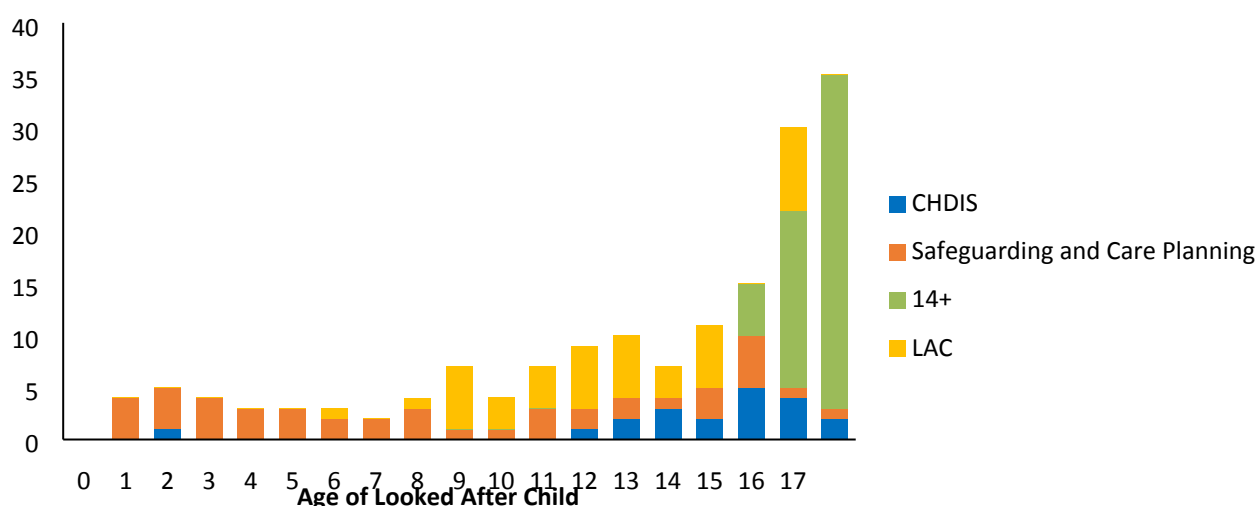
7.12 The team has now been in place since October 2015, and a recent feedback exercise completed with children and their carers highlighted that the children felt that their social workers understood them and what they wanted. Carers reported that the communication with the team was excellent and that they felt more informed about what was happening for the child. Further information is available in the full LAC Permanence Team Report.

### Team Allocation



The graph to the left shows the allocation of cases across the Children's Social Care teams. As anticipated with the larger adolescent cohort the 14+ Team carries the largest number of LAC cases.

### Team Allocation by Age of Looked After Child



### Number of Children who ceased to be Looked After during the year ending 31st March

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Merton	92	85	107	105	117
% increase / decrease year on year	-9%	-8%	26%	-2%	11%

Source: SSDA 903

7.13 The number of children who ceased to be looked after in 2015-16 has increased by 11% when compared to 2014-15. 117 care episodes ceased during the year ending 31 March 2016. The number of children who ceased to be looked after has increased across all but the 5-9 age group, which holds the same number of children as last year (10).

7.14 The table below reflects the age related care pathways of the majority of the children and young people entering care. The greatest number of children leaving care are those reaching adulthood at age 18 who are moving into the care leaver cohort. For those aged 0-5 years permanence is found outside of the care system either through reunification, placement with relatives or adoption. The age group most likely to remain in care is the 5-12 year cohort most of whom are subject to care orders and permanently matched with foster carers.

#### Age of Children who ceased to be Looked After during the year ending 31st March\*

Merton	Age (in years)																		
	<i>(number of children who ceased to be Looked After; age on leaving care)</i>																		
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
2012	3	4	4	3	8	3	1	1	2	4	1	3	2	5	8	5	6	7	22
2013	3	1	4	1	2	1	0	4	1	1	2	1	1	4	11	10	9	5	24
2014	4	5	10	4	3	5	1	5	2	3	3	1	2	5	2	9	6	9	28
2015	3	5	8	1	5	0	4	1	2	3	2	2	1	2	7	7	2	8	42
2016	5	6	5	2	8	1	1	3	2	3	5	2	1	4	6	7	7	7	42

\*by number of children not number of episodes

7.15 Children ceasing care to return home to live with parents/relatives has remained stable in 2016 (39%). Nationally a third of children ceasing care returned home. In 2016, 19% of Merton's looked after children moved to independent living, a reduction of 41% on 2015; this nevertheless remains above the national of 13% and reflects the higher proportion of older young people in our LAC cohort.

#### Reason for children leaving care\*

Merton	Adoption (E11, E12)	Died (E2)	Care taken over by another LA in UK (E3)	Returned home to live with parents/relatives** (E4)	Return home to live with parents/relatives as part of the care planning process (E4A)	Return home to live with parents/relatives which was not part of the care planning process (E4B)	Left care to live with person with no parental responsibility (E13)	Residence Order (or from April 2014 a child arrangements order) Granted (E41)	Special Guardianship Order (E43, E44)	Moved to independent living (E5, E6)	Transferred to residential care funded by Adult Social Services (E7)	Sentenced to custody (E9)	Accommodation on remand ended (E14)	Age assessment determined child aged 18 or over (E15)	Child moved abroad (E16)	Care ceased for any other reason (E8)
2012	9	0	0	37			0	2	3	23	0	1	0	0	0	17
2013	5	0	0	43			0	0	3	21	2	4	0	0	0	7
2014	10	0	1	52			0	3	4	27	0	3	0	0	0	7
2015	8	1	0		33	7	3	1	4	37	2	1	0	1	0	7
2016	11	0	0		40	6	4	2	2	22	1	2	1	0	2	24

\*by number of children not number of episodes

\*\*from 2015 this reason for ceasing was replaced by E4A and E4B

### Staying Put (year ending 31<sup>st</sup> March)

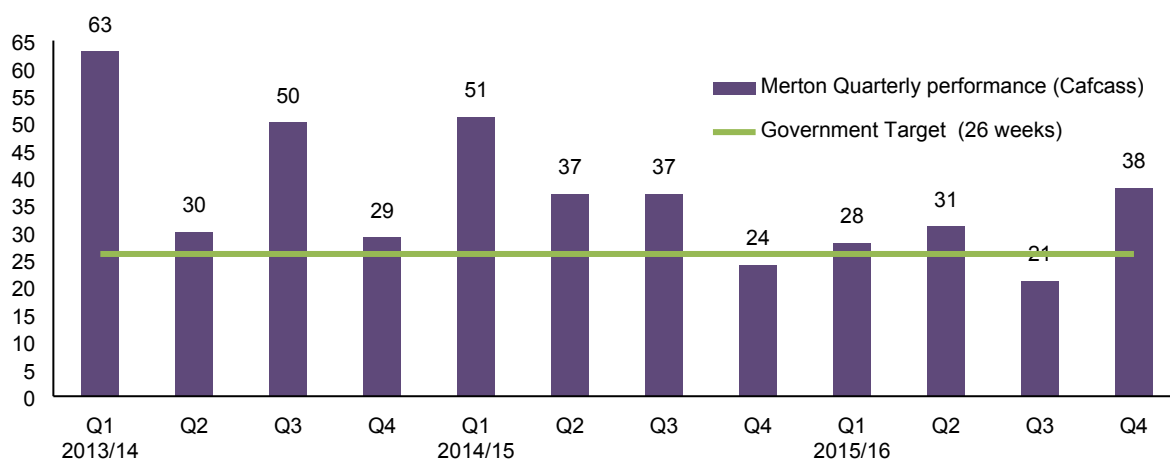
7.16 'Staying Put' relates to young people who have turned 18 and left care in the year ending the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2016, eligible for care leaver support and remaining with their former foster carers 3 months after their 18th birthday. In 2015-16, 6 young people entered into 'Staying Put' arrangements.

## Section 2: Care Processes

### Timeliness of care proceedings when taking children into care

7.17 A revised Public Law Outline introduced in April 2014 set out streamlined case management procedures for dealing with public law children's cases. Under revised legislation care and supervision proceedings must be completed 'without delay and within twenty-six weeks'. This places an increased emphasis on pre-proceedings work and the quality of assessments.

26 week time limit for care proceedings - CAFCASS data



7.18 In 2015-16, 24 Sets of Care Proceedings (38 children) were concluded compared to 26 sets of Care Proceedings (43 children) in 2014-15.

7.19 As indicated in the above graph there continues to be progress made in improving the timeliness of Care Proceedings. Merton's average case duration for 2015-16 was 30 weeks compared to 2014-15 where the average case duration was 42 weeks. This is compared to the national average of 28 weeks and London wide average of 32 weeks.

7.20 41% of cases were completed within 26 weeks. This is slightly below the London wide average of 49%. Non-standard track cases have a significant impact on our figures. Of the 24 cases where proceedings concluded, 10 were on the non-standard track. These are cases where the Court has agreed that elements of the case are exceptional and are unable to conclude within 26 weeks. These cases have bespoke timetables set by the Court.

7.21 Over the past year, there has been a strong focus on Pre- Proceedings cases and this has contributed to reducing the overall duration of Care Proceedings cases. There are also system improvements in place which include a review of all court related cases, and an increased focus on the interface between key teams and partners e.g. MASH & First Response, Safeguarding & Care Planning Teams, Bond Road, and the Adoption Team.

### Looked After Children reviews

#### Percentage of Children Looked After as at 31st March reviewed on time

Merton	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Timely Reviews	95.9%	95.9%	96.5%	95.8%	98.7%

Source: SSDA 903

Notes: The DfE do not publish national comparisons for this indicator. The indicator only includes children who had been in care continuously for 4 weeks as at 31<sup>st</sup> March.

7.22 In order to ensure that LAC reviews are held in a timely manner we established a clear understanding of the practice standard and introduced an escalation process for all reviews going outside of timescales. This has resulted in the improvement in performance noted in the past year.

#### Percentage of reviews participated in during the year

Merton	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
No. of reviews	372	328	407	450	446
No. of reviews participated in	343	303	356	391	430
% Participation	92.2%	92.4%	87.5%	86.9%	96.4%

Source: SSDA 903

Notes: The DfE do not publish national comparisons for this indicator. Excludes reviews with a participation method of 'Child aged under 4 at the time of the review'.

7.23 Participation in LAC reviews was identified as a priority area in 2015-16 due to the year on year decline in performance that had been noted. An improvement plan was put in place that focused on the following areas:

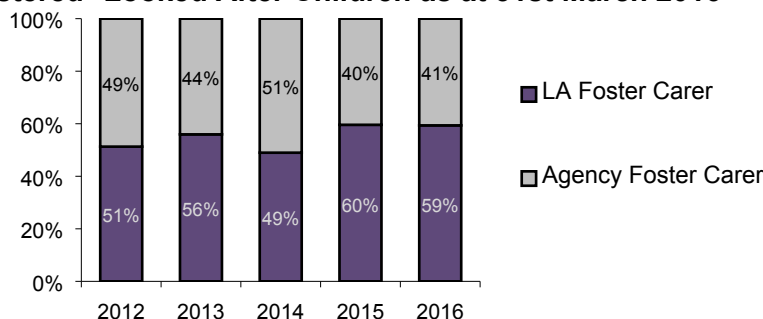
- Consultation with children and young people to get their views on participation in LAC reviews
- Affirming practice standards
- Training for practitioners working with non-verbal children
- Guidance on promoting participation
- Improved data quality

The success of this improvement plan and the commitment from practitioners is evidenced in the improved performance data for this year.

### Section 3: Placements

7.24 Children are looked after in a variety of settings; foster care, children’s homes, residential special schools, Youth Offending Institutes, and a small number are in hospital settings. At 31 March 2016, 66% of looked after children (108 children) were placed in foster care. This is below the national figure of 74%. 57 children (59% of our looked after children) were placed with in house foster carers; this remains stable from the previous year. This continues to be an area of scrutiny for us due to the impact on budget, but also due the fact that agency placements are often outside of the borough. The most common use of agency placements is for adolescents, as a number of our in house carers are only approved to take foster children up to the age of 10 years. The Access to Resources Service is committed to targeted recruitment of teenage carers; however there is a Pan London issue with many agencies and Local Authorities competing for a small number of carers.

#### Fostered\* Looked After Children as at 31st March 2016



\*Excludes children placed with family or friends

#### Placement Type for Looked After Children as at 31st March 2016

Merton	Placement Type							
	Foster Placement	Placed for Adoption	Placement with Parents	Other Placement in the Community	Secure Units, Children’s Homes & Hostels	Other Residential Settings	Residential Schools	Other Placement
2012	81	3	5	0	25	1	4	10
2013	89	5	5	8	22	8	1	1
2014	104	5	1	1	34	3	2	0
2015	108	7	2	0	34	3	2	0
2016	108	7	0	1	43	2	2	0
London 2015	7,480	310	160	560	1,090	260	140	0
National 2016	51,850	2,940	3,810	3,040	7,600	960	140	100

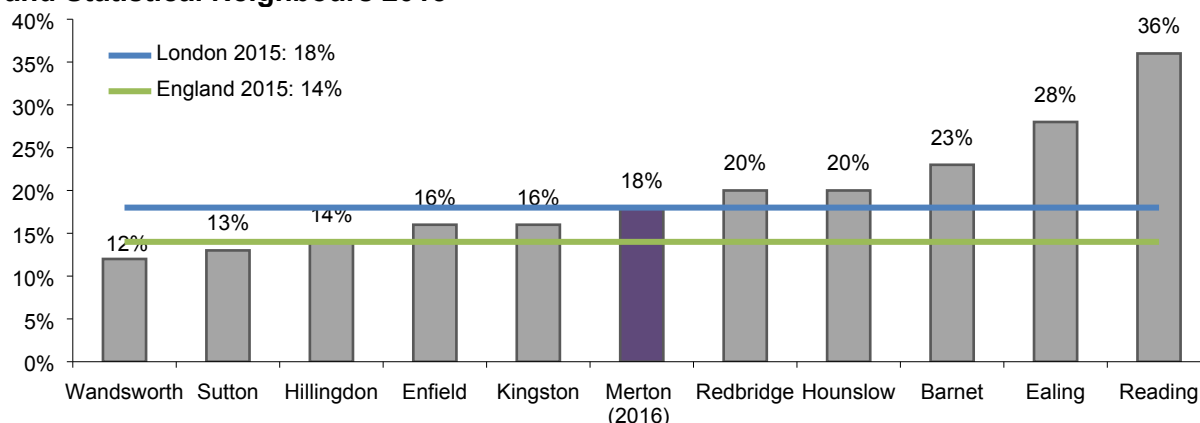
Source: SSDA903

Note: ‘Secure units, children’s homes and hostels’ – Secure units, homes and hostels subject to Children’s Homes regulations and homes and hostels not subject to Children’s Homes regulations (this includes supported lodgings).

2012 and 2013 only- ‘Other Placement’ includes children missing from their placement.

7.25 Merton has a greater proportion of children placed under the category ‘secure units, children’s homes and hostels’ than nationally. A large proportion of this cohort are young people living in supported lodgings (37%) which are classified within this group.

**Percentage of Children Looked After as at 31st March placed outside the Local Authority boundary and more than 20 miles from where they used to live; Merton 2016 and Statistical Neighbours 2015**



7.26 18% of Merton’s looked after children are placed outside the local authority boundary and more than 20 miles from where they used to live, compared to 14% nationally (2015). Merton is 6th amongst its 11 statistical neighbours (2015). 77% of all new LAC placements made in 2014-15 were within a 10 mile radius of Merton and 62% of all LAC placements were within a 5 mile radius.

7.27 For some young people placements away from their home community are a key part of the care plan as a result of anti-social behaviour/risk management. For some the needs of the young people are such that they require specialist placements which are not available in Merton or surrounding boroughs. For all children being placed outside of the borough the Head of Service and DCS is required to sign off agreement for the placement. Care plans for these children and young people are reviewed to ensure that where possible young people are supported to return to their home community at the earliest opportunity. A more detailed analysis of these placements will be available in Merton’s ‘Securing Sufficient Accommodation Statement for Looked After Children and Care Leavers’ refresh autumn 2016.

**The percentage of Children Looked After at 31st March with three or more placements during the year ending 31st March**

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Merton	15%	16%	17%	14%	10%
National	11%	11%	11%	11%	10%

Source: SSSA 903

Note: Missing episodes are included in figures for 2012 to 2014. From 2016 if a child and their carer move to a new address this is no longer counted as a placement move. If a child is placed for adoption with their existing foster carer this is also not counted as a placement move.

7.28 10% of Merton looked after children in care as at 31<sup>st</sup> of March had three or more placement moves during 2015-16. This is the same proportion as reported nationally.

7.29 68% of Merton’s looked after children are in stable placements; the technical definition of stability is defined by the DfE as the percentage of children looked after as at 31<sup>st</sup> March aged under 16 who have been looked after continuously

for at least 2.5 years who were living in the same placement for at least 2 years.

#### Percentage of Looked After Children with stability in their placement

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Merton	68%	64%	58%	46%	68%
National	68%	67%	67%	Not available	Not available

Source: SSDA 903

Note: The percentage of Children Looked After aged under 16 at 31st March who had been looked after continuously for at least 2½ yrs, who were living in the same placement for at least 2 yrs, or are placed for adoption and their adoptive placement together with their previous placement last for at least 2 yrs

7.30 We have seen a significant improvement in placement stability over the past year following the implementation of an improvement plan informed by the Placement Stability Analysis Report completed in April 2015. The improvement plan focused on the following areas:

- All requests for placement moves in the 14+ Team to be approved by the Head of Service
- Development of a Permanence Team to have case management responsibility for children on Care Orders
- The LAC CAMHS Team to be established
- Analysis of risk factors supports placement planning and results in early identification of placement instability

#### Children accommodated under an agreed series of short-term breaks

Short-term breaks, also referred to as respite care, must include at least one night away from home but cannot exceed 17 days of continuous care, or 75 days within a 12 month period.

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Number of children	30	5	3	26	19
Number of episodes	358	21	34	673	483

7.31 Nineteen children were accommodated under an agreed series of short-term breaks during 2015-16, a decrease from 26 in 2014-15. One child previously receiving respite care became a looked after child.

#### Missing and absent from placement

	Number of children	Number of episodes/ periods
Number missing from placement as at 31/03/2016	2	
Number of 'away from placement' instances during 2015-16	17	48
Number of 'missing' instances during 2015-16	43	102
Number of 'missing' and 'away from placement' instances during 2015-16	48	150

Source: SSDA 903

7.32 In 2015-16 we updated the Children Missing from Care and Home Protocol and established a weekly multi agency missing meeting. This has resulted in a timelier sharing of information in respect of the children reported as missing from home and care. Strategy meetings are convened on children who go missing from care and there is embedded practice of escalation of cases to senior management.

7.33 Most missing incidents were short; 88% lasted two days or less (this is in line with the national figure of 89%). 27% of missing episodes related to a period of less than 24 hours.

- 2 children were missing or absent from placement 10 or more times throughout the year and were accountable for 14% of all absences
- 9 children were missing or absent from placement more than 5 times throughout the year and were accountable for 26% of all absences.
- 20 children were missing or absent from placement more than once throughout the year and were accountable for 75% of all absence.

7.34 Four young people were missing for extended periods (98 days+), 3 young people have been located and have returned to our care but one continues to be missing. In these instances regular strategy meetings are convened to ensure sharing of intelligence between professionals. One young person within this cohort has been referred to the National Referral Mechanism due to concerns relating to trafficking.

#### Missing and absent by age at start of period of absence

	Age at start of absence													
	Numbers							Percentages						
	7	12	13	14	15	16	17	7	12	13	14	15	16	17
<b>All episodes</b>	2	25	1	22	27	36	37	1%	17%	1%	15%	18%	24%	25%
<b>Missing</b>	0	4	1	18	19	31	29	0%	4%	1%	18%	19%	30%	28%
<b>Absent</b>	2	21	0	4	8	5	8	4%	44%	0%	8%	17%	10%	17%

Source: SSDA 903

Additional information on our missing cohort is available in the Missing from Home and Care Annual Report 2015-16.

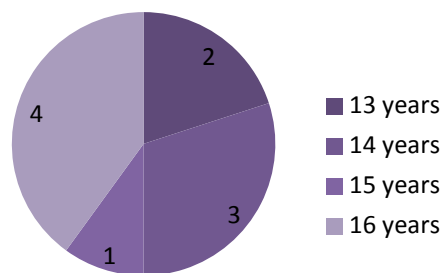


### Children at risk of CSE

For the year 2015-16 there were 10 looked after child cases reviewed at the multi Agency Sexual Exploitation Meeting, 9 female and 1 male.

- 7.35 The CSE lead tracked the progress of the 8 LAC cases where there were known or suspected concerns for sexual exploitation.
- 7.36 The audit of Care Planning documentation showed that in all of the cases specific reference to the issue of CSE and how this needed to be monitored by the placement and allocated social worker was evidenced.
- 7.37 In all the cases there was evidence of the involvement and support from the specialist services delivered by Jigsaw4U, Barnardo's, MOPAC and CAMHS; providing direct work and consultation to address concerns as young people were reported missing, through to detailed relationship based work to address self-esteem and risk awareness.

**Age of young people at risk of CSE  
2015-16**



### Section 4: Permanency

- 7.38 The Government continues to monitor timeliness through review of quarterly and annual returns and the adoption scorecard process. The initial focus of the adoption scorecard is on Local authorities and the adoption process for children. As a result of the increased scrutiny in the monitoring of cases, we have seen a steady improvement in the timeliness of the child's journey through to adoption.
- 7.39 In the year 2015-16, eleven looked after children were adopted and two were made subject of a Special Guardianship Order. Whilst children ceasing care through this permanency route (11%) is below the national rate (17%), performance is good when considered against the age cohort of our looked after children.

**Number of Looked After Children Who Were Adopted or Made Subject of a Special Guardianship Order During the Year ending 31st March**

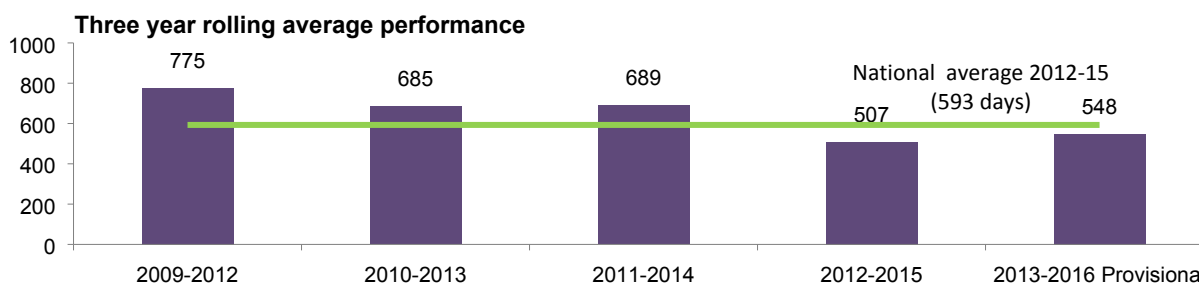
	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Adoptions	9	5	10	8	11
Special Guardianship Orders	3	3	4	4	2
Merton Total	12	8	14	12	13

Source: Children in Care and Adoption Performance Tables and SDA 903

7.40 For children who have been adopted, the projected three year rolling (2013-16) average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family is 548 days, which is lower than the 2012-15 national average of 593 days. Additional information on this cohort of children is available in the Adoption and Permanence 6 Monthly Reports.

**National adoption scorecard A1 indicator which presents the three year rolling average during which children enter and moving in with their permanent carers**

**A1: Average time (days) between entering care and moving in with adoptive family, for children who have been adopted**



2015-16 data is provisional therefore the three year average for 2013-16 is estimated and not yet published.

7.41 Additional information on this cohort of children is available in the Adoption and Permanence 6 Monthly Reports.

## Section 5: Health

7.42 Health outcomes in 2016 for dental checks and annual health assessments are above national average (2015). Immunisations are slightly below national (2015) and this is likely to reflect the large proportion of unaccompanied asylum seeking children within the cohort.

7.43 The LAC Health Team is situated within the LAC Service and this supports communication between practitioners. The team regularly attend participation events and work hard to build relationships with our looked after children. Following the LAC Health JSNA additional capacity has been created in the team in recognition of the increase in LAC numbers in recent years.

7.44 The LAC Health Strategic Group meets on a bi-monthly basis. The purpose of this group is to understand and champion the health needs of Children looked after and Care Leavers in Merton and respond to the Merton Health Needs Assessment for Looked After Children. In the year 2015-16 we have focused on the following areas:

- LAC Health Action Plan
- Quarterly performance relating to health assessments
- Care Leaver health passports

### Health Care of Children Looked After (LAC continuously for at least 12 months, ending 31 March)

Merton	Looked After for at least 12 months	Children whose Immunisations were up-to-date	Children who had their Teeth Checked by a Dentist	Children who had their Annual Health Assessment
2012	74	89%	93%	97%
2013	84	90%	99%	83%
2014	83	95%	83%	95%
2015	87	86%	95%	94%
2016	94	81%	93%	91%
London 2015	6,410	85%	89%	90%
National 2015	48,090	88%	86%	90%

Source: SSDA903

7.45 Research shows that more than one in four children who have been in care has significant levels of maladjustment<sup>1</sup> (Buchanan and Ten Brinke, 1997), with over 67% of those in the care system and 96% in children's homes

<sup>1</sup> Buchanan, A. & Ten Brinke, J-A (1998) *Recovery from Emotional and Behavioural Problems*. NHS Executive, Anglia and Oxford. University of Oxford

having clinical level of psychiatric illness<sup>2</sup> (McCann, James, Wilson, and Dunn, 1996).

- 7.46 Emotional and behavioural health is determined by the average score of children looked after children for whom a Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire was completed. The average score for 2016 was 14.9, which is higher than the 2014 national average of 14.9. A low average score is deemed 'good'.
- 7.47 To promote practice improvement in the use of SDQ tools we have run training sessions for practitioners and agreed a process for the escalation of scores over 17.

### Emotional and Behavioural Health of Looked After Children

Statistical Neighbours	As at 31st March (Merton 2016, Statistical Neighbours, London and National 2015)		
	Percentage of Eligible Children for whom an SDQ score was submitted	Average Score (a low average score represents the best)	Average Score Rank (1st=Lowest, 10th= Highest)
Barnet	98%	13.7	7 <sup>th</sup>
Ealing	88%	12.6	3 <sup>rd</sup>
Enfield	86%	12.9	5 <sup>th</sup>
Hillingdon	67%	12.7	4 <sup>th</sup>
Hounslow	92%	13	6 <sup>th</sup>
Kingston Upon Thames	81%	12.4	2 <sup>nd</sup>
Merton 2016	74%	14.9	9 <sup>th</sup>
Reading	94%	17.3	11 <sup>th</sup>
Redbridge	99%	11	1 <sup>st</sup>
Sutton	59%	15.4	10 <sup>th</sup>
Wandsworth	80%	14.1	8 <sup>th</sup>
London	82%	13.2	-
National	72%	13.9	-

Source: SSDA 903

Average Score of Children Looked After for whom a Strengths & Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) was completed.

- 7.48 The Merton CAMHS in Social Care was re-established in June 2015. The service provides an integrated mental health service within Children's Social Care, as part of the engagement, assessment, planning and interventions alongside Social Care professionals.
- 7.49 The Service works as part of a multi-agency response to improve the quality of life for children and young people who have a wide range of presenting social, psychological and mental health needs. The Service provides effective, evidence-based interventions as part of the clinical and social response to meeting the emotional and mental health needs of these

<sup>2</sup> McCann, J., James, A., Wilson, S., & Dunn, G. (1996) Prevalence of psychiatric disorders in young people in the care system. *British Medical Journal* 313, 1529-30

vulnerable children and young people. The Service also assists and supports Social Workers to implement new approaches to their work.

7.50 Additionally, the service provides Reflective Practice to Social Workers and their managers, as well as consultation and training in a systemic approach to working.

7.51 At its inception, the CAMHS in Social Care provision was a specialist CAMHS for children who are looked after by the local authority. However, the service is now expanding to provide a service for children who are subject to a Child Protection or Children in Need Plan.

#### Emotional and behavioural health of looked after children by age group and gender

Merton	Age at 31 <sup>st</sup> March 2016			Gender	
	4 - 9	10 - 15	16+	Male	Female
0-13 (normal)	5	12	10	15	12
14-16 (borderline cause for concern)	1	8	4	9	4
17+ (cause for concern)	6	12	7	19	6
No Score Submitted	1	5	17	16	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>29</b>

Source: SSDA 903

## Section 6: Offending

### Offending by children who had been looked after continuously for at least 12 months at 31<sup>st</sup> March

Merton	Number of children looked after for at least 12 months and aged 10 or older at 31 March	Number and percentage convicted or subject to a final warning or reprimand during the year	
2012	55	10	18%
2013	54	6	11%
2014	62	6	10%
2015	68	3	4%
2016	75	2	3%
London 2015	31,820	1,650	5%
National 2015	4,840	280	6%

Source: SSDA 903

7.52 Looked after children are nearly twice as likely to be cautioned for or convicted of an offence than their peers<sup>3</sup> and, although estimates vary, it is thought that nearly a third of children in custody have been looked after<sup>4</sup>. It is therefore important that local strategies are in place to encourage positive

<sup>3</sup>Outcomes for looked after children by local authorities in England as at 31 March 2012

<sup>4</sup> HM Prisons Inspectorate thematic inspection of children and young people in custody

behaviour amongst looked after children who may be at risk of offending and that measures that will divert them from involvement with the youth justice system are clearly identified. Fostering services and children's homes should have an approach to care that manages children's behaviour and minimises any police involvement.

- 7.53 For all looked after child and care leavers where there is an identified risk of offending or re-offending, both the care/pathway plan and placement plan should include details about the support that will be provided to prevent this. The Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) should ensure that care plans adequately address this aspect of the child's needs, and should raise a challenge where a young person's needs are not being adequately assessed, resulting in the possibility of their becoming, or continuing to be, involved in offending behaviour.
- 7.54 A review of looked after children and care leavers who have been in custody or convicted in the year 2015-16 has been undertaken by the HoS LAC. This review found that the majority of young people in this cohort had experienced neglect, physical abuse and parental mental health during their childhoods, but had not been accommodated until they reached adolescence when their own behaviours became the presenting issue.
- 7.55 The most common offences for this cohort of young people related to robbery and assault. Alongside the more serious offences there was evidence to suggest that several of the young people had been arrested for causing criminal damage in their placements.
- 7.56 The review identified good partnership working between the YOT and 14+ Team, which was benefitting risk assessment and care planning for these young people.

## Section 7: Education

7.57 The education indicators represented are calculated for all the school age children looked after continuously for 12 months in the year ending the 31 March. For a complete picture of Education outcomes of Merton's Looked After Children population please refer to 'The Virtual School Annual Report'.

### Key Stage 1 (KS1)

The number of Children Looked After who were eligible to sit their Key Stage 1 assessments (at the end of Year 2) and the percentage of these children achieving at least the expected level (Level 2+)

Year	Number eligible to sit Key Stage 1 tasks and tests	Achieving Level 2+ in Reading	Achieving Level 2+ in Writing	Achieving Level 2+ in Mathematics
2015	6	83%	83%	83%
2014	1	100%	100%	100%
2013	1	100%	100%	100%
2012	1	100%	100%	100%
2011	4	75%	100%	100%
National (2015)		71%	63%	73%
All Merton Pupils (2015)		90%	87%	92%

Source: SSDA903 matched to the National Pupil Database

### Key Stage 2 (KS2)

The number of Children Looked After who were eligible to sit their Key Stage 2 assessments (at the end of Year 6) and the percentage of these children achieving at least the expected level (Level 4+).

Please note that national measures were changed in 2013 to report Reading, Mathematics and Writing rather than as previously English, Mathematics and Science.

Year	Number eligible to sit Key Stage 2 tasks and tests	Achieving Level 4+ in Reading	Achieving Level 4+ in Mathematics	Achieving Level 4+ in Writing	Achieving Level 4+ in Grammar, Spelling and Punctuation
2015	2	100%	100%	100%	100%
2014	3	100%	100%	100%	100%
2013	3	67%	67%	67%	33%
National (2015)		71%	64%	61%	54%
All Merton Pupils (2015)		91%	89%	89%	83%
Year	Number eligible to sit Key Stage 2 tasks and tests	National Indicator 99: Achieving Level 4+ in English	National Indicator 100: Achieving Level 4+ in Mathematics	Achieving Level 4+ in Science	Achieving Level 4+ in both English and Mathematics
2012	1	100%	100%	100%	100%
2011	5	40%	20%	40%	20%

Source: SSDA903 matched to the national pupil database

## GCSEs or Equivalent

The number of Children Looked After who were eligible to sit their GCSEs (at the end of Year 11) and the percentage of these children achieving GCSEs. Methodology changes in 2014 and 2015.

Year	Number in Year 11	Number who sat at least one GCSE	Percentage eligible who sat at least one GCSE or equivalent	Percentage who obtained			
				Any passes	5+ GCSEs at Grade A*-G or equivalent	5+ GCSEs at Grade A*-C or equivalent	5+ GCSEs Grade A*-C including English and mathematics
2015	12	10	83%	75%	33%	8%	8%
2014	5	4	80%	60%	60%	40%	0%
2013	13	11	85%	85%	54%	23%	23%
2012	9	8	89%	89%	67%	44%	22%
2011	3	2	67%	67%	67%	33%	0%
2010	12	10	83%	67%	50%	17%	0%
National (2015)				<i>not available</i>	<i>not available</i>	18%	14%
All Merton Pupils (2015)				98%	94%	71%	60%

Source: SSDA903 matched to the National Pupil Database

## Exclusions from School

The Children Looked After who had been looked after for at least 12 months.

	2011	2012	2013	2014
Merton - Percentage of children permanently excluded	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
National - Percentage of children permanently excluded	0.24%	0.15%	0.11%	0.13%
Merton - Percentage of children with at least one fixed term exclusion	<i>Suppressed</i>	20.93%	15.69%	<i>Suppressed</i>
National - Percentage of children with at least one fixed term exclusion	11.81%	11.36%	9.78%	10.25%

*Suppressed: number less than or equal to 5 or percentage where the numerator is less than or equal to 5 or the denominator is less than or equal to 10.*

## Absence from School

The Children Looked After who had been looked after for at least 12 months

	2011		2012		2013		2014		2015	
	Percentage Absence	Percentage classed as Persistent Absence	Percentage Absence	Percentage classed as Persistent Absence	Percentage Absence	Percentage classed as Persistent Absence	Percentage Absence	Percentage classed as Persistent Absence	Percentage Absence	Percentage classed as Persistent Absence
<b>Merton</b>	3.6%	0.0%	5.5%	<i>Suppressed</i>	4.1%	<i>Suppressed</i>	2.9%	<i>Suppressed</i>	3.9%	<i>Suppressed</i>
<b>National</b>	5.5%	7.3%	4.7%	6.0%	4.4%	5.0%	3.9%	4.7%	4.0%	4.9%

*Suppressed: number less than or equal to 5 or percentage where the numerator is less than or equal to 5 or the denominator is less than or equal to 10.*



## Section 8: Care Leavers aged 19-21

7.58 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.

7.59 Merton has 106 care leavers aged 19, 20 and 21 years old. This increase has a direct relationship with the increasing number profile of 16 and 17 year old looked after children in previous years

7.60 In 2013-14 the DfE amended the cohort of Care Leavers considered in the SSD903 to include young people aged 20 and 21 (from the traditional care leavers aged 19), and this should be taken into account when considering the year on year comparator data.

### Numbers of care leavers

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
<b>19-21 year olds</b>	17	20	93	93	106

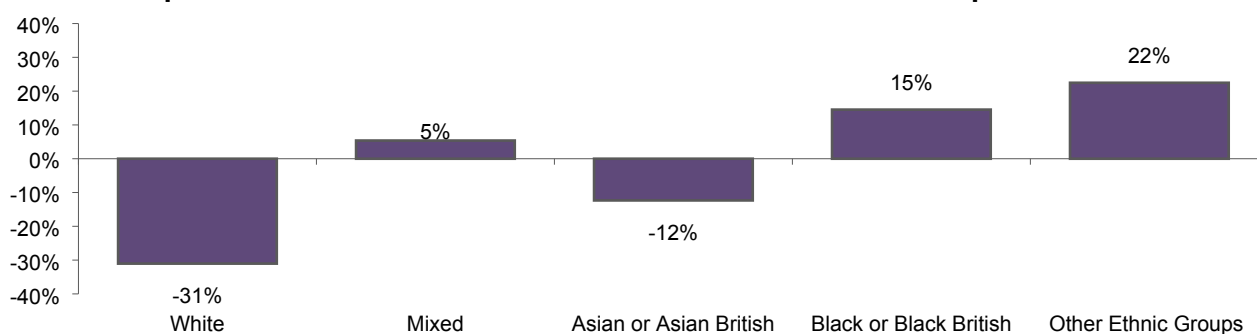
Source: SSDA 903

### Age and gender of Care Leavers

	Age (as at 31st March) <i>(percentage of Care Leavers)</i>			Gender <i>(percentage of Care Leavers)</i>	
	19	20	21	Male	Female
Merton 2016	42%	32%	25%	64%	36%
London 2015	32%	34%	34%	not available	not available
National 2016	34%	32%	33%	58%	42%

Source: SSDA 903

### Ethnic Group Difference of Care Leavers from the Merton Resident Population



Source: SSDA 903

Note: Other Ethnic Groups is a census defined category and represents a number of ethnic groups where ethnic heritage cannot be defined in the Asian, Black White or Mixed groups. The category includes Afghanistani, Arab, Egyptian, Filipino, Iranian, Iraqi, Japanese, Korean, Kurdish, Latin / South / Central American, Lebanese, Malay, Moroccan, Polynesian, Thai, Vietnamese, or Yemeni.

7.61 The DfE SSD903 return gathers ‘in touch’ information for all care leavers aged 19, 20 and 21 years. For this return the definition is that there is ‘contact’ between your local authority and the young person eligible for care leaver support around 3 months before and one month after the young person’s birthday.

#### Care Leavers in Touch

Merton	Number	%	National
Yes	87	82%	87%
No	3	3%	8%
Service No Longer Required	7	7%	3%
Young Person Refuses Contact	6	6%	2%
Young Person Returned Home	3	3%	Not available

Source: SSDA 903

7.62 In addition to this performance measure the ‘Care Leaver Regulations’ set out that the practitioner must visit the care leavers at no less than 2 monthly intervals. Due to the current reporting limitations of the CSC information system (Carefirst) we are not able to provide a report detailing the regularity of care leaver visits undertaken by the 14+ Team. In order to ensure worker and management oversight of the scheduling of visits each individual practitioner maintains a tracking sheet which is reviewed on a monthly basis. As a result of this increased scrutiny we have already noted an in year improvement in this area of performance.

7.63 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.

7.64 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.

7.65 Accommodation is to be regarded as suitable if it provides safe, secure and affordable provision for young people.

#### Percentage of Care Leavers in Suitable Accommodation 2012-2016

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Merton	88%	85%	66%	76%	94%
London	91%	88%	82%	83%	Not Yet Available
National	88%	88%	77%	81%	83%

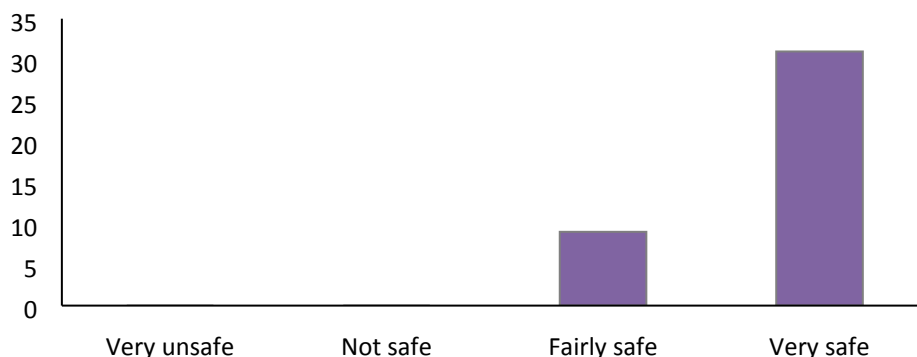
Source: SSDA 903

Note: In 2014 the DfE extended the care leaver cohort to include 20 and 21 year olds. As a result the figures for 2011-2013 include only to 19 year olds whilst the figures for 2014 and 2015 include Care Leavers aged 19-21.

- 7.66 With an increased focus on improving outcomes for care leavers we have seen a significant improvement in this area of performance. An aspect of this improvement relates to our improved 'in touch' performance which means that we have a better knowledge of where our young people are living. It also reflects the collaborative working arrangements between Children's Social Care and Housing.
- 7.67 Housing and Children's Social Care managers meet on a monthly basis to review placements for all 18+ care leavers to ensure the early identification of young people who are ready to be nominated for their own housing.
- 7.68 To ensure that young people are prepared to manage their own tenancy we run 'Independent Living Skills Workshops' in the following areas:
- My Bank
  - Cooking
  - DIY
  - My Drive
- 7.69 The success of these workshops and the support offered to our young people is evidenced by the fact that we have had no tenancy disruptions in the past 2 years.
- 7.70 To improve our understanding of our care leavers' experience of accommodation issues we asked a series of questions in our annual survey. The majority of the young people who responded to the survey were living in Semi-Independent placements and this reflects the overall care leaver population.
- 7.71 93% of respondents stated that they felt they got an appropriate level of support from the 14+ Team in respect of their housing needs, and only 20% stated that they lacked clarity in respect of the housing offer in Merton.
- 7.72 A previous concern raised by young people attending the Child in Care Council has been that they are not offered a choice in location of housing. Whilst this was an issue for some respondents it is positive to note that 68% felt that had been offered choice in terms of accommodation.
- 7.73 4 young people reported that the condition of the tenancy that they were given was poor. Whilst this is a low number, it is of concern that any of our young people are living in accommodation that they do not feel is of a good enough standard.
- 7.74 35 out of 40 young people who had moved into new accommodation reported that they had been visited by their social worker within the first week. The remaining 5 young people were all visited within a 2 week period.

7.75 Frequent feedback from care leavers is that they do not always feel safe in their accommodation and so it was reassuring for us that none of care leavers felt unsafe and the majority felt very safe in their accommodation.

### Do you feel safe in the place where you live?



7.76 Merton has a high number of care leavers living in suitable accommodation (94%) compared to the national figure (83%). Of the 7 deemed to be living in unsuitable accommodation, 2 were serving custodial sentences and 5 were living in 'other accommodation' (these young people were all staying with friends).

### Accommodation by Type

Merton	Accommodation																
	No Accommodation recorded*	With parents or relatives	Community home or other form of residential care	Semi-independent, transitional accommodation	Supported lodgings	Gone abroad	Deported	Ordinary lodgings without formal support	Residence not known	No fixed abode / homeless	Foyers and similar accommodation with opportunities for EET	Independent living	Emergency accommodation	Bed and breakfast	In custody	Other accommodation	With former foster carers
2012	2	1	0	2	4	0	0	1	0	0	0	5	0	0	0	1	1
2013	3	2	0	7	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	0	0	1	1
2014	27	1	1	5	15	0	0	0	0	0	0	33	0	2	4	0	5
2015	14	11	0	26	5	0	4	6	3	1	1	17	1	0	3	0	1
2016	7	9	4	42	2	0	5	2	5	1	0	20	0	0	2	5	2

\*In line with DfE guidance, 'No accommodation recorded' includes care leavers who are not in touch or have refused contact, those who have died and those who have returned home.

### Percentage of Care Leavers in Education, Employment or Training

The percentage of care leavers who were in education, employment or training

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Merton	70.6%	60.0%	47.0%	44.1%	58.3%

Source: SSDA 903

Note: In 2014 the DfE extended the care leaver cohort to include 20 and 21 year olds. As a result the figures for 2011-2013 include only to 19 year olds whilst the figures for 2014 and 2015 include Care Leavers aged 19-21.

7.77 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.

**Percentage of Care Leavers in Education, Employment or Training; Merton Compared to National**

	19 yr olds		20 yr olds		21 yr olds	
	Merton	National	Merton	National	Merton	National
In higher education i.e. studies beyond A level	12%	6%	6%	7%	4%	8%
In education other than higher education	26%	26%	12%	17%	15%	12%
In training or employment	26%	22%	45%	25%	26%	26%
Not in education, training or employment	35%	38%	33%	41%	26%	40%
Information not known	2%	8%	3%	10%	30%	15%

7.78 In the past year we have made significant progress with our care leavers cohort engaged in education, however it is important to note that this relates to a broader cohort and further work is being undertaken to consider the performance of different age cohorts. This area continues as a priority focus for us as a significant impact outcome for our young people. A deeper analysis of this data identifies that 10% (14 young people) are NEET due to illness/disability and pregnancy/parenthood and it is likely that this has impacted in their capacity to take up an ETE opportunity.

7.79 An ETE worker was recruited to in November 2015 and worked as part of the Virtual School to support a targeted group of care leavers both on 1:1 and group work basis.

## **8 Children in Care Council**

8.1 The role of the Merton Child in Care Council is as follows:

- Provide a voice for the wider population of children looked after and care leavers
- Help to monitor and implement the Merton Pledge
- Bring together service users and senior managers to influence positive change
- Develop skills and confidence building

8.2 The Children in Care Council directly supports the Corporate Parenting Board to measure and monitor the effectiveness and quality of 'Corporate Parenting' in Merton.

8.3 The Child in Care Council meets at the Civic Centre on a monthly basis and there is an established core membership of 6 young people. This year in response to the feedback received from the care leaver survey we have held themed meetings on housing, health, e-safety and the Child in Care website. We extend the membership to themed meetings to ensure that all young people have the opportunity to participate. In 2015-16 we have also used the Child in Care Council meetings to consult on the following developments within the service:

- Participation in LAC Reviews
- Financial Provision for Care Leavers
- LAC and Care Leaver Pledge
- JSNA LAC Health Review

## **9 Voice of the Child in Care**

9.1 Whilst we have been without a Participation Officer in 2015-16, the role played by the Participation Apprentice has been key in supporting the work of the Child in Care Council, improving the engagement of young people in their reviews and developing opportunities to ensure that young people's voices are heard through the Corporate Parenting Board.

9.2 Successes over the past year include:

## **10. LAC Health Study as part of Health Needs Assessment**

10. The aim of this piece of work was to capture the voices of Looked After Children and Care Leavers in the care of Merton about three key issues: young people's health care needs; accessing the child and adolescent mental health service (CAMHS); and how young people are supported through transitions.

10.2 The consultation undertaken with a number of Looked after Children and Care Leavers reported the following:

- Looked after Children, Care Leavers their parents and/or guardians are very much aware of who and where to go to if they need any support or advice to access any health care services, in relation to having their health care needs met. Findings from the responses were that there were no barriers to accessing services to meet their health needs. Many children and young people commented on going to either their social worker, family or friends for support and advice.
- Those placed out of the borough reported that they require more support and involvement to receive a more inclusive and participatory service, especially when they move between different areas for placements. The data collected from this study also shows that there is a need for greater consistency in making sure that children and young people in care, who are placed out of the area, have access to key services that support their health, education, well-being and development.
- Some young people's responses indicated that child and adolescent mental health workers do not understand their needs or situation, as a result some children and young people do not want to liaise with them. On the other hand the child and adolescent mental health service helped one young person to manage their anger by informing them of techniques, and providing someone to talk to.

10.3 The overall needs assessment report made a number of recommendations relating to overall findings to be monitored by the Merton Clinical Commissioning Group and London Borough of Merton.

## **11. Celebrating Success Events**

- 11.1 We have held 2 Celebrating Success Events in the year 2015-16 for 5-12 and 13+ young people. Both events were well attended by children, young people and their carers. All children and young people were presented with certificates celebrating their individual achievements.

## **12. Bi-monthly drop-in sessions**

- 12.1 Since 2015 the 14 Plus Team has been running monthly sessions at a local coffee shop between 5-8pm. These sessions alternate between social events and workshops attended and facilitated by different organisations. The sessions provide the opportunity for young people to meet other young people from different cultures and backgrounds who have had similar experiences. The purpose of the group is to allow them to experience a sense of belonging and familiarity and also to build social networks and a sense of being part of a community. These sessions strengthen the relationship between the young person and their social workers and helps built trust with the 14+ Team. The activities provide them with the opportunity to improve their independent living skills and gain insight from other organisations. These sessions have a good regular attendance of up to 15 young people.

## **13. Review of children and young people's participation in LAC Reviews**

- 13.1 The key messages being fed back from these consultations were that children and young people wanted to be able to choose the venue for their LAC review and for the meeting to be held at a time convenient to them. There was also a request for children and young people to be more involved in the planning for the meetings so that they were child centred and strengths focused.

- 13.2 The children and young people stated that:

- They often don't know who is coming to the review and would like to be more involved in agreeing who should attend.
- They wanted to meet the IRO prior to the LAC review meeting so that the ITO could get to know the young people rather than judge them on what they had read; 'we aren't always as we appear on paper'.
- They wanted more forward looking reviews; they felt that all too often the reviews focused on the past.

- 13.3 The IRO Team are now looking to adopt a good practice model which has been successfully piloted by the Participation Service in Sheffield. This model will support children and young people to feel that they are at the centre of the review meeting and have a strong influence in the shaping of their care plan.



## **14. Communication with children and young people**

- 14.1 The Participation Apprentice completed the first CICC Newsletter in December 2015 and this was circulated to all LAC and Care Leavers. This newsletter provided information on recent events and also gave details of future CICC Meetings. The plan is for this Newsletter to be a quarterly publication in 2016-17 and will be provided in hard copy and in e-form once the website is up and running.
- 14.2 We currently commission an independent advocacy service from Jigsaw 4U to provide support to Looked After Children to ensure that their voice is heard and is central to decisions made about their care. We receive feedback from the advocacy service when there are specific issues or areas that need addressing. Examples of specific issues raised are:
- The number of social workers allocated to a looked after child. This complaint was upheld. The case is now allocated to a Senior Social Worker in the LAC Permanence Team and the child has recently provided positive feedback to her LAC review stating that her social worker is one of the best that she has ever had and that she 'always listens to me carefully and always takes it on board'.
  - The standard of care provided by an in house foster carer. This complaint was partially upheld following a Standards of Care Review being undertaken by the Fostering IRO. The carer has received feedback from the young person relating to his experience and a learning and development programme was identified as an outcome of the review.
  - The need to supervise contact. This complaint was not upheld due to the nature of the concerns in the individual case. We did however ensure that the young person fully understood the reason that contact was supervised.
- 14.3 Where issues are raised by individual children the advocate will liaise with the relevant social work team to seek resolution.

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