



# **Annual Corporate Parenting Report 2017-2018**

## **London Borough of Merton**

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## Executive Summary

Merton Council is 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 2017-18 and identifies the priorities for the year ahead.

- We continue to have a population of looked after children 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 on the number of adolescents in our care.
- There has been a decrease in the number of new admissions into care, however the age profile of children looked after in Merton differs from the national picture with Merton caring for a large number of older looked after children aged 16 and over.
- Merton has seen a decrease in the percentage of children in the 'Black' and 'White' ethnicity categories and an increase in mixed heritage and any other ethnic background groups.
- Children being accommodated due to a disability has decreased, whilst there has been a small increase in children being accommodated due to parental disability or illness.
- We have seen an increase in the numbers and proportion of Looked After Children on a care order (30 children, 44%) in line with the national trend and a decrease in the proportion accommodated children / young people under section 20 agreements as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2018. There has been an increase in Supervision Orders and an improvement in the timeliness of the average case in care proceedings.
- The Family Drug and Alcohol Court (FDAC) has now been commissioned. It was launched on 2<sup>nd</sup> January 2018 with a comprehensive package of support for parents and children with substance misuse to make the changes necessary for their children to remain in their care.
- There has been an increase in staying put arrangements, 13 young people remaining with their current foster carer. This increases their stability and security and supports them through the transition to adulthood, but also puts

pressure on the number of foster carers we have available for new placements.

- There has been a rise in agency foster carers compared to previous year, relating to number of older teenagers being accommodated and a recruitment drive to address the changing needs of the Looked After Children population.
- Placement stability continues to improve, Merton is currently 1% under the national figure and has prioritised placement stability in the coming year. The majority (94%) of children and young people (4-18yrs) felt safe in their homes 'all or most of the time'. Compared to *The Children's Worlds* survey which found 75% of children (8-13yrs) in the general population felt 'Totally safe' at home.
- 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 embedded in the service and offers 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 'Bright Spots' consultation taking place to inform the Looked After Child Strategy and re-energised Children in Care Council.

### Priorities 2018-2019

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
Improve the number of children experiencing Placement Stability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Greater service oversight and focus on matching long term for those children who remain in care.</li> <li>• Early identification of placements likely to disrupt.</li> <li>• Partnership working to stabilise placements</li> </ul>
Improve the take up of Strength and Difficulty Questionnaires (SDQ) with Looked After Children and young people.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased number of children with SDQ taking place</li> <li>• Emotional wellbeing will be identified earlier and action plans in place to address areas of concern.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improved emotional wellbeing and referral and access to services.</li> </ul>
<p>Improve outcomes for young people who are Not in Education Employment or Training ('NEET') by raising corporate aspirations</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improved outcomes for young people who are 'NEET'.</li> <li>Increased number of young people engaging in Education, Employment and Training</li> <li>Improved corporate aspirations across service areas</li> <li>Maximising resources and opportunities</li> </ul>
<p>Improve preparation for independence for Care Leavers</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pathway plans will identify clear routes and objectives to transition from dependent to independent</li> <li>Care leavers will have access to a housing pathway that will meet their need.</li> <li>Less reliance on Semi Independent Accommodation.</li> </ul>

## 1 Context

1.1 This report sets out an annual update on the corporate parenting arrangements in Merton: focusing on activity and performance during April 2017- March 2018. 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) and subsequently to all care leavers up to the age of 25. 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 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.
- 2.4 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.
- 2.5 The Children and Social Work Act 2017, Section 3 requires Local Authorities to provide Personal Advisors to care leavers up until they reach the age of 25, from April 2018. Previously services to care leavers ceased when a care leaver was 21 unless they engaged in further education where it was extended to the age of 25.
- 2.6 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 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; and

- f. To ensure that decisive action is taken to address any shortcomings in the services provided to children and young people.

### **3 Merton Background**

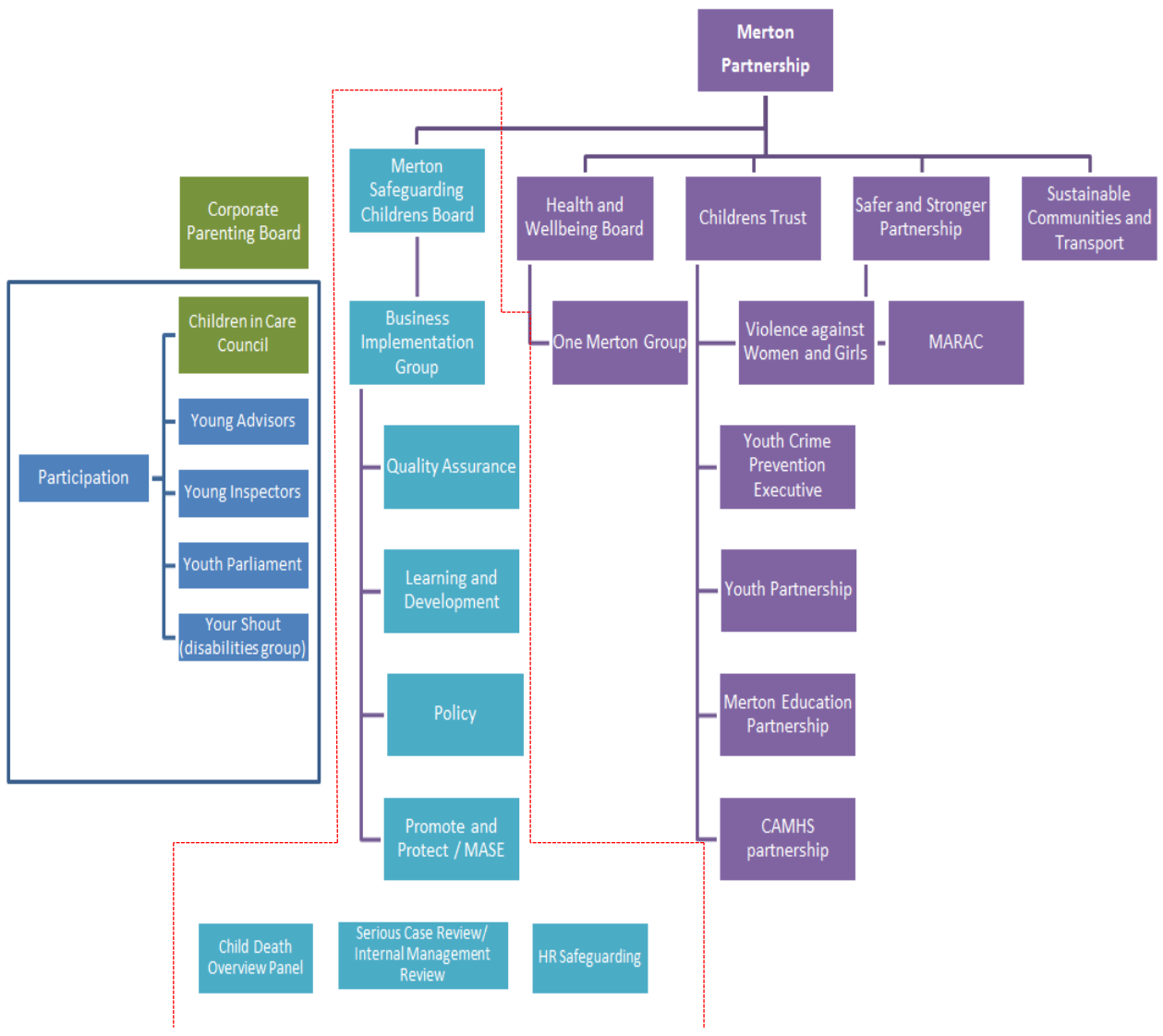
- 3.1 Merton is an outer London borough situated in south west London, covering 14.7 square miles. Merton has a total population of 200,543 including 47,499 children and young people aged 0-19 (Census 2011). The number of 0-19 year olds is forecast to increase by 4,450 (9%) by 2018, within which we forecast a 30% increase of children aged 5 to 9 (3,390).
- 3.2 Predominantly suburban in character, Merton is divided into 20 wards and has three main town centres: Wimbledon, Mitcham and Morden.
- 3.3 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. 13% of children aged under 16 are living in low income families. However, 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.
- 3.4 Fifty-two per cent of Merton's total population is Black, Asian or Minority ethnic (BAME) this is expected to increase further to 57% by 2018. 63% of people 0-19 are from BAME communities. Pupils in Merton schools are more diverse still, with 68% from BAME communities, speaking over 120 languages (2017). The borough has concentrations of Urdu speaking communities, Sri Lankan, South African and Polish residents.
- 3.5 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 25. This includes all unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) and children with disabilities who are receiving more than 75 days of respite care per year.
- 3.6 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. To enable children to remain at home or return home FFT, functional family therapy, and MST, multi systemic therapy is delivered through the Positive Families Partnership (PFP).
- 3.7 As at 31 March 2018 there were 154 Looked After Children in Merton which represents a 1.3% increase from 2017 (152 children). In England and Wales there were 75,420 looked after children as at March 2018, an increase of 3.1% from 2017 (72,590). In addition, Merton has 197 young people aged 18-25 years accessing leaving care services, making Merton a corporate parent to over 350 vulnerable children and young people.

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

- 4.1 The Children and Young Persons Act (2008) reinforces the message that the while council is responsible for all outcomes for children looked after by a local authority. To ensure this council wide ownership, the 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 and care leaver / participation
  - Looked After Child Placement Sufficiency
  - CAMHS
  - Trends in the care population
  - Adoption
  - Number of cases in proceedings and outcomes
  - Independent Reviewing Service, impact and outcomes

#### **Merton's Strategic Policy Framework and Governance Structures**





## 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 health 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 2016-2017

Action	Update	RAG
Develop the Looked After Children Strategy 2018-21	Leaving Care Services for Care Leavers are developed and resourced up to the age of 25.	Green
Develop Care Leavers Strategy 2018 -21	This was delayed to ensure it reflected the voice of the care leaver, undertaken by Coram Baaf over the Summer of 2018, the analysis was received in December 2018.	Yellow
Enhancement of the Local Offer for Care Leavers	The Local Offer has been promoted on Merton Directories, Young Merton, this continues to be developed to include up to date information and future Housing Options.	Green
Reinvigoration of Children in Care Council	This did not take place during this period, the participation of children services was transferred from the Looked After Children Services to the Quality Assurance Service to offer participation across children services.	Red
For children whose care plan is long term foster care, priority will be given to matching children with in house foster carers.	There has been a recruitment drive to recruit in house foster carers with a continued target of 20 further families in 2019, this is to enable all children and young people to be placed local to Merton, further to this is the development of the Permanence Policy which will create a culture of 'Merton First' in respect of future matched placements for children and young people.	Green

## 7. Corporate Parenting Performance Activity 2017-2018 (SSDA 903)

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

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

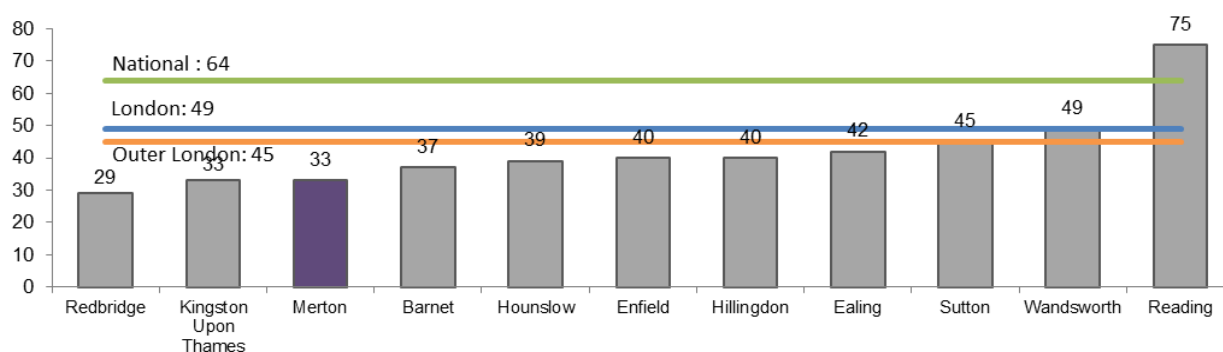
	2014		2015		2016		2017		2018	
	Number	Rate per 10,000	Number	Rate per 10,000	Number	Rate per 10,000	Number	Rate per 10,000	Number	Rate per 10,000
Merton	151	34	156	34	163	35	152	33	154	33
London	10,110	54	9,980	52	9,860	51	9,900	50	9,890	49
National	68,810	60	69,470	60	70,400	60	72,590	62	75,420	64

England and London totals are rounded to the nearest 10.

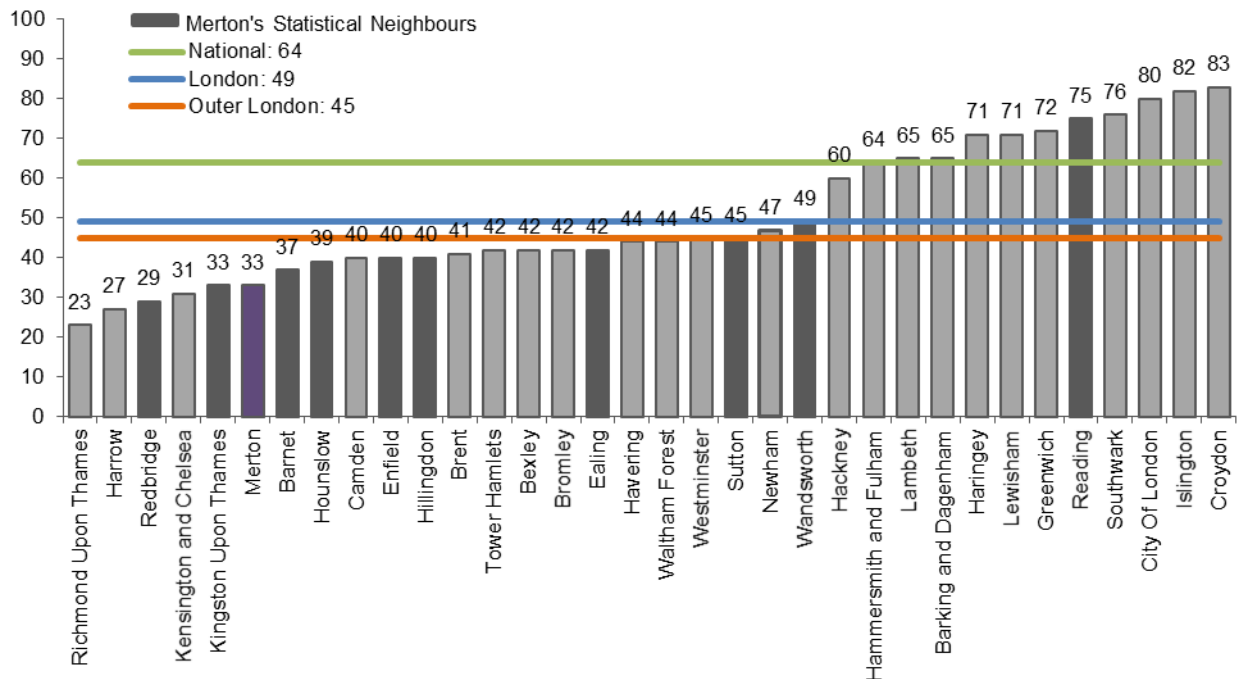
7.1 The number of looked after children has continued to rise nationally, with Merton seeing a two child increase on 2017 at 31<sup>st</sup> March. There were 154 looked after children as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2017, parity on rate per 10,000 at 33. Merton 163 in 2016 was an outlier in a consistent profile of 150-156. Outer London has also seen a decrease from a peak since March 2016.

7.2 In the year 2017-18 there were 91 new admissions into care (relating to 86 children). An 14% decrease on 2017. 43% of starters were still in care at the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2018, and a large proportion of starters (31%) were aged 16 and over. This is double the national proportion of starters in this age range. Merton's rate per 10,000 population remains stable on 2017 and we continue to have one of the lowest LAC populations when compared to our statistical neighbours. Merton has the 2<sup>nd</sup> lowest rate amongst its Statistical Neighbours. There are only six (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 2018

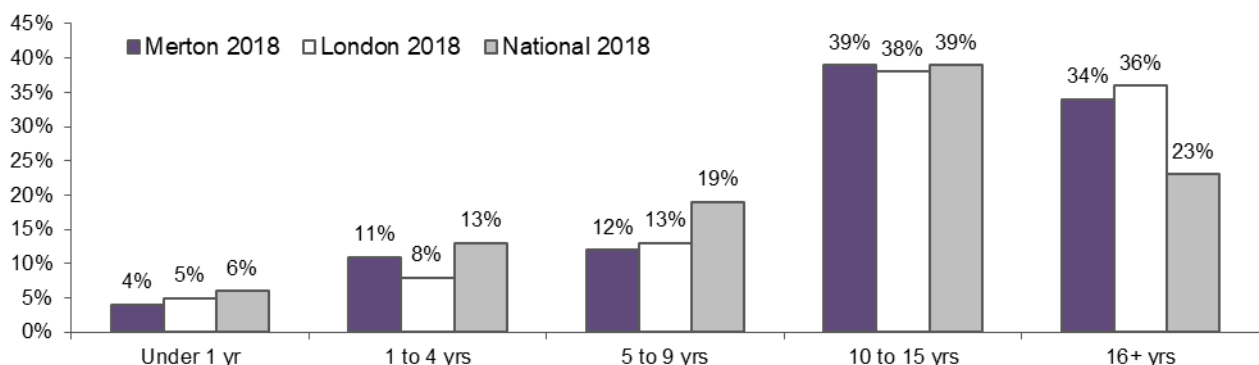


### Rate per 10,000 population of Children Looked After against Merton's Statistical Neighbours and all London Boroughs 2018



7.3 As set out in the bi-monthly LAC Cohort Corporate Parenting Reports the age profile of children looked after in Merton differs from the national picture with Merton caring for a large number of older looked after children aged 16 and over. At 31 March 2018 34% of our looked after children were aged 16 and 17 compared to 23% nationally. This is a decrease in the proportion in previous years but as noted further in this report there was an increase in 18 year olds ceasing care in 2017-18. The inverse trend is reflected in the 0 to 15 year olds.

### Percentage of children looked after as at 31st of March 2018 by age group compared to London 2018 and National 2018



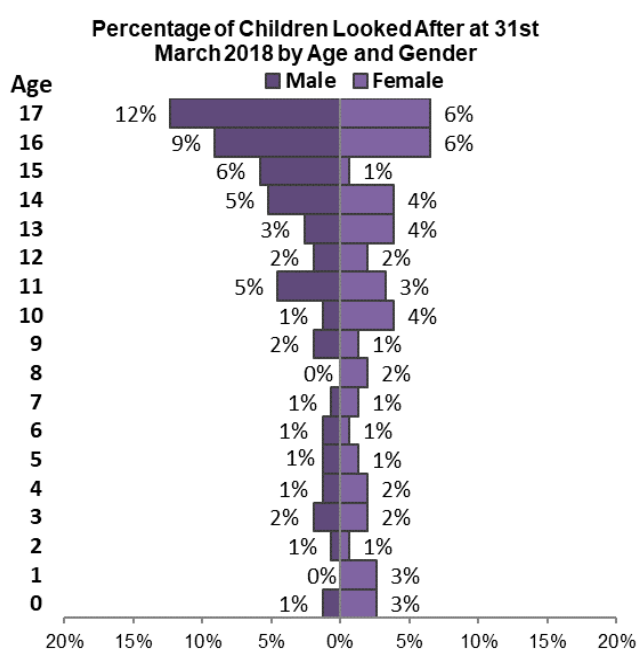
## Gender, Age and Ethnicity of Looked After Children

7.4 The table below shows the Merton trend in the older population. There is a decrease in the older population on last year (16%), this relates to a large number of 2017 cohort turning 18 in the 2017-18 year. Review of the local information shows that of the twenty-seven 16 and 17 year olds accommodated in 2016-17, 14 were accommodated due to their UASC status,

### Age of children looked after by year as at the year-end 2018

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
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	32
2016	4	5	4	3	3	3	2	4	7	4	7	9	10	7	11	15	30	35
2017	5	2	4	2	3	4	3	3	3	8	8	5	10	10	6	13	21	42
2018	6	4	2	6	5	4	3	3	3	5	8	12	6	10	14	10	24	29

Source: SSDA 903



	Gender	
	<i>(percentage of Children Looked After)</i>	
	Male	Female
Merton 2018	53%	47%
London 2018	59%	41%
National 2018	56%	44%

Overall, 53% of the LAC population is male and 47% female.

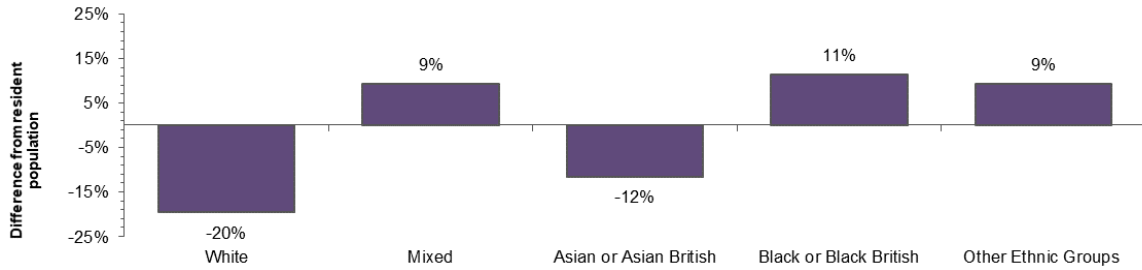
The breakdown of the gender/age data highlights the fact that our older LAC cohort is significantly over-represented by males (the majority of UASC and LASPO referrals received relate to males).

7.5 The age profile has plateaued over the past four years, in the number and proportion of older children. 73% of children were aged 10 years and over in 2018, 72% in 2014 (comparing with 62% and 58% nationally). This comparative pattern continues with the number and proportion of children aged 0-4 from 15% in 2014 and 15% in 2017 (comparing with 23% to 19% 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 20%). 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.

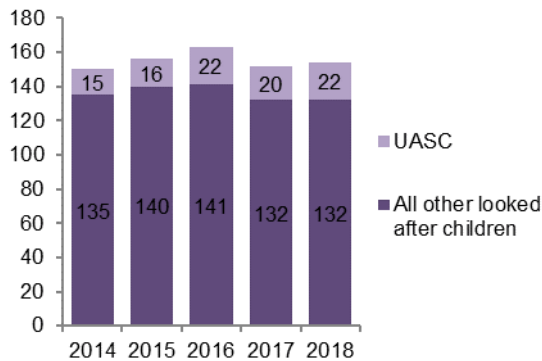
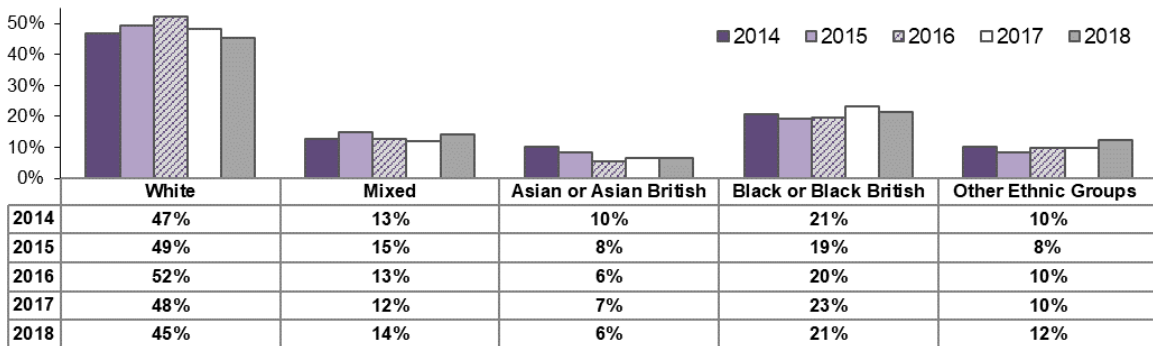
**Difference in Ethnic Group of Looked After Children as at 31st March 2018 from the Merton Resident Population 2011**



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.

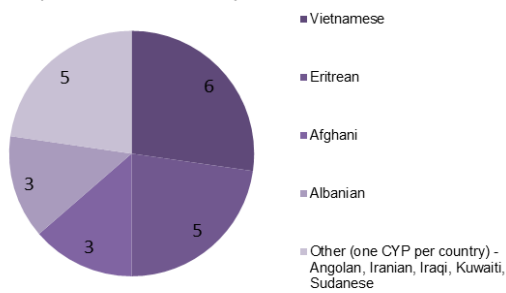
7.7 The trend data shows a change in the ethnic origin of our looked after children in 2018. Merton has however seen a decrease in the percentage of children in the 'Black' and 'White' categories and an increase in mixed heritage and any other ethnic background groups.

**Percentage of Children Looked After by Ethnic Origin from 2014 to 2018**



The graph on the left highlights the increase in UASC populations since 2014. In 2012 the UASC population was 6% of the overall LAC cohort. In 2018 this has risen to 14%, which is 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 2018)**



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

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.

2018 has shown UASC of increased nationality diversity, with nine nationalities in comparison to four nationalities in 2016. The profile of nationalities has changed from 2017, with Vietnamese and Eritrean forming the greater proportion.

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Merton	114	107	122	100	86
% increase / decrease year on year	34%	-6%	14%	-18%	-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 following an increase locally and nationally since 2013, Merton has had fewer new starters in 2017-18. An 14% decrease in children starting care in 2017-18 compared to 2016-17. Whilst there are fewer children starting to be looked after, the 16-17 age group has proportionally had a greater number of starters. 52% of the 16 and 17-year-old children starting to be looked after were UASC.

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

Merton	Age (in years)																	
	<i>(number of children who started to be Looked After; ages on entering care)</i>																	
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
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
2017	8	4	4	2	3	2	2	2	2	9	1	3	7	1	7	8	18	17
2018	9	3	1	3	3	3	4	0	3	3	2	4	2	5	7	7	17	10



## 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 (10%) 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
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%
2017	43%	8%	3%	14%	15%	0%	0%	17%
2018	43%	6%	5%	10%	18%	0%	0%	18%

## Legal status of looked after children

7.10 In 2017-18 we have seen an increase in the numbers and proportion of Looked After Children on a care order (30 children, 44%) and this is in line with the national trend, however we have a lower proportion of our looked after children subject to such orders than nationally (Merton data for 2018 was 64% of children on ICO's and Care Orders, National data was 73%). Inversely there has been a decrease in the proportion accommodated under section 20 agreements as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2018, although this is a higher proportion of children subject to such orders than National.

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

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Merton	107	105	117	113	85
% increase / decrease year on year	6%	-2%	11%	-3%	-25%

Source: SSDA 903

7.11 The number of children who ceased to be looked after in 2017-18 has decreased by 25% when compared to 2016-17. 88 care episodes ceased (85 children and young people) during the year ending 31 March 2018. The number of children who ceased to be looked after has increased for those aged 18 (5 children).

7.12 The table below reflects the age related care pathways of the majority of the children and young people ceasing 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 old 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
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
2017	2	8	5	4	3	0	2	2	3	4	3	2	6	4	3	7	7	10	38
2018	5	1	2	1	2	2	2	3	1	2	1	0	1	2	5	2	4	6	43

\*by number of children not number of episodes

7.13 Children ceasing care to return home to live with parents/relatives has decreased in 2018 (21%). Nationally 31% of children ceasing care returned home, in London 27%. In 2018, 25% of Merton's looked after children moved to independent living. This is an increase of 9% from 2017 and remains above the national of 15% 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)
2014	10	0	1	52			0	3	4	27	0	3	0	0	0	7
2015	8	1	0	40	33	7	3	1	4	37	2	1	0	1	0	7
2016	11	0	0	46	40	6	4	2	2	22	1	2	1	0	2	24
2017	11	1	2	47	41	6	4	0	5	25	1	3	0	1	0	13
2018	9	0	0	22	12	10	3	0	3	27	4	2	0	1	1	13

\*by number of children not number of episodes

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

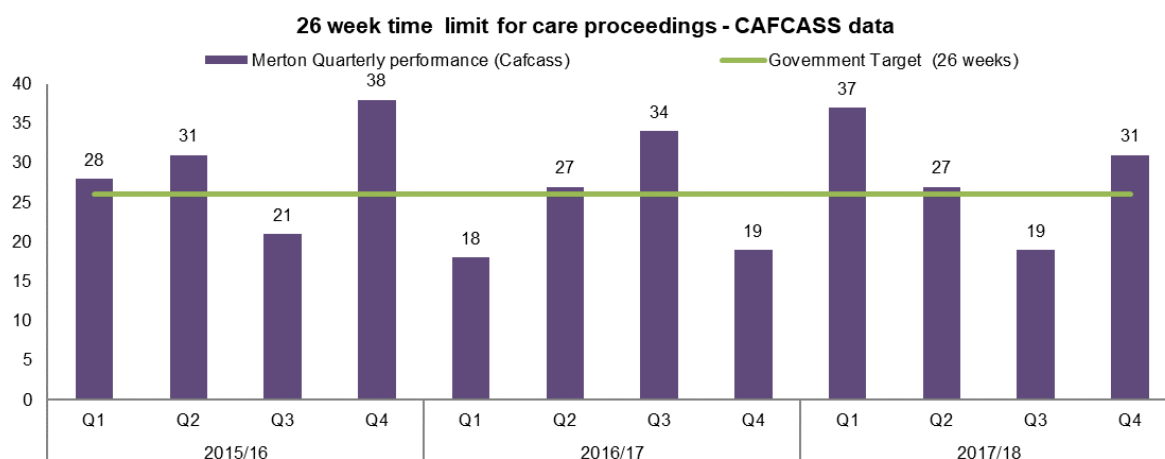
## Staying Put (year ending 31<sup>st</sup> March)

7.14 'Staying Put' relates to young people who have turned 18 and left care in the year ending the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2018, eligible for care leaver support and remaining with their former foster carers 3 months after their 18th birthday. In 2017-18, 13 young people entered into 'Staying Put' arrangements.

## Section 2: Care Processes

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

7.15 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.



7.16. In 2017 – 2018 we issued proceedings on 30 cases consisting of 61 children, 11 of which were issued by the First Response Team and 2 by the Vulnerable Children's Team. 2 further cases were issued in other Local Authorities and transferred to Merton. In comparison, during April 2016- March 2017 we issued a total of 30 cases consisting of 51 children. Whilst the number of cases have not increased, the number of children has.

7.17 In 2017 - 2018 29 sets of Care Proceedings concluded (46 children) compared to 2016-17, 24 sets of Care Proceedings (38 children) were concluded. During this period there were 11 supervision orders granted, in comparison with previous years 8 being granted in 16/17 and only 3 in 15/16.

7.18 The populations of Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) children represented 41% of the cohort of care proceedings cohort.

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 2017-18 was 31 weeks. This is in line with the national average of 31 weeks.

7.20 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.

7.21 The Family Drug and Alcohol Court (FDAC) has now been commissioned and it launched on 2<sup>nd</sup> January 2018 with the first Merton case being referred in January under the PLO process, there are currently 6 families involved in FDAC.

### Looked After Children reviews

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

Merton	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Timely Reviews	96.5%	95.8%	98.7%	97.2%	95.6%

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 2017-18 there were 83 initial reviews and 343 subsequent reviews took place. 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.

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

Merton	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
No. of reviews	407	450	446	413	371
No. of reviews participated in	356	391	430	411	366
% Participation	87.5%	86.9%	96.4%	99.5%	98.7%

Source: SSDA 903

Notes: The DfE do not publish national comparisons for this indicator. As per DfE guidelines the data excludes reviews with a participation method of 'Child aged under 4 at the time of the review' as children under 4 are not required to participate in their reviews.

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:

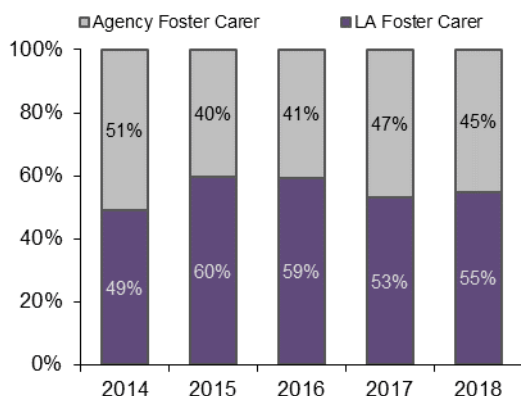
- Consultation with children and young people to get their views on participation in LAC reviews
- Affirming practice standards

- Training for practitioners working with non-verbal children
  - Guidance on promoting participation
  - Improved data quality
- 7.24 The success of this improvement plan and the on-going commitment from practitioners is evidenced in the improved performance data on 2016 for this year at 98.7%.
- 7.25 A Position Paper on the Participation of Children and Young people in Merton was completed in November 2017 by two of the Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) and the previous Participation Manager which summarised the developments and initiatives that have taken place in Merton during the last 2 years and recommendations will be taken forward by the Participation Pilot. The Participation project is being delivered as a pilot by Jigsaw4u from 1<sup>st</sup> July 2018 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2019. It is funded from the Participation Officer post that moved to Quality Assurance and Practice Development in July 2017 following a review of recruitment which had not identified a person with the right skill set and experience

### **Section 3: Placements**

- 7.26 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 2018, 78% of looked after children (120 children) were placed in foster care. This is above the national figure of 73%. 55% children were placed with in house foster carers; this is an increase on the previous year but below preceding years. 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.
- 7.27 The below chart evidences that 55% of children were placed in Local Authority Foster Placements in 2018; there was a rise in 2017 in the use of agency foster carers compared to 2015 and 2016, in 2018 it reduced by 2%; there is a recruitment drive to increase the current cohort of in house carers by 20 in the year 2019, which should further reduce the dependency on agency foster carers.

## Fostered\* Looked After Children as at 31st March 2018



\*Excludes children placed with family or friends

## Placement Type for Looked After Children as at 31st March 2018

Merton	Placement Type							
	Foster Placement	Placed for Adoption	Placement with Parents	Other Placement in the Community	Secure Units, Children's Homes and Hostels	Other Residential Settings	Residential Schools	Other Placement
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
2017	108	5	3	0	32	2	2	0
2018	120	0	4	0	30	0	0	0
London 2018	7,080	190	230	600	1,480	270	30	Suppressed
National 2018	55,200	2,230	4,700	3,100	8,530	1,230	130	300

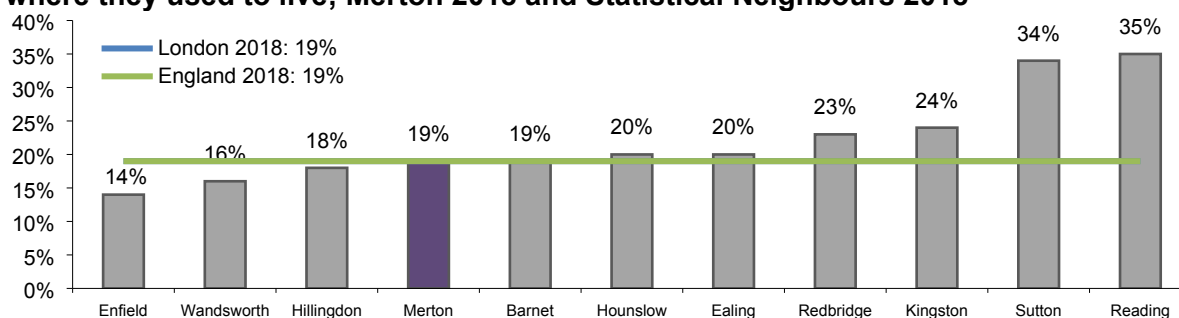
Source: SSDA903

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). In 2017/18 no children were placed in a secure welfare unit or hostel, 5 children were placed within criminal justice estate.

2013y- 'Other Placement' includes children missing from their placement.

7.28 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 semi-independent accommodation (37%) which are classified within this group.

**Percentage of Children Looked After as at 31st March placed more than 20 miles from where they used to live; Merton 2018 and Statistical Neighbours 2018**



7.29 19% of Merton’s looked after children are placed outside the local authority boundary and more than 20 miles from where they used to live, in line with more than 20 miles nationally (19%). Merton is 4<sup>th</sup> amongst its 11 statistical neighbours. 78% of all new LAC placements made in 2017-18 were within a 10-mile radius of the child’s home and 60% of all LAC placements were within a 5-mile radius. Merton has increased the proportion of placements beyond each of these key distances since 2017, but this is due to finding the appropriate placement to meet the needs of the children.

7.30 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 ADCS 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 2018.

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

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Merton	17%	14%	10%	16%	12%
National	11%	11%	10%	Not available	10%

Source: SSDA 903

Note: Missing episodes are included in figures for 2013 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.

7.31 12% of Merton looked after children in care as at 31<sup>st</sup> of March had three or more placement moves during 2017-18. This is a higher proportion as reported nationally yet below 2017.

7.32 69% 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

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Merton	58%	40%	68%	71%	69%
National	67%	Not available	Not available	Not available	70%

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

7.33 We have maintained a level of stability over three years following a significant improvement in placement stability in 2016 following the implementation of an improvement plan informed by the Placement Stability Analysis Report completed in April 2015. The improvement plan actions implemented and embedded:

- All requests for placement moves in the 14+ Team to be approved by the Head of Service
- Permanence Team to have case management responsibility for children on Care Orders
- A LAC CAMHS Team 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.

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Number of children	3	26	19	16	4
Number of episodes	34	673	483	349	104

7.34 Four children were accommodated under an agreed series of short-term breaks during 2017-18, a decrease from 16 in 2016-17.

### Missing and absent from placement

	2016/17			2017/18		
	Number of children	% of all LAC	Number of episodes	Number of children	% of all LAC	Number of episodes
Children who were missing during the year	46	18%	232	24	10%	171
Children who were away from placement without authorisation during the year	22	9%	41	14	6%	31
Children who were 'missing' and / or 'away without authorisation' during the year	50	19%	273	29	12%	202

Source: SSDA 903



- 7.35 Following the update of the Children Missing from Care and Home Protocol and establishing 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.
- 7.36 Most missing incidents were short; 84% lasted two days or less (this is below the national figure of 89%). 17% of missing episodes related to a period of less than 24 hours.
- 5 children were missing or absent from placement 10 or more times throughout the year and were accountable for 60% of all absences
  - 11 children were missing or absent from placement more than 5 times or more throughout the year and were accountable for 82% of all absences.
  - 21 children were missing or absent from placement more than once throughout the year and were accountable for 96% of all absence.
- 7.37 Unlike 2016-17, there were no children or young people missing for extended periods (98 days+), two young people were missing for two weeks and one was absent for 28 days. In these instances, regular strategy meetings are convened to ensure sharing of intelligence between professionals.

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

	Age at start of absence											
	Numbers						Percentages					
	12	13	14	15	16	17	12	13	14	15	16	17
<b>All episodes</b>	1	4	4	32	47	114	0%	2%	2%	16%	23%	56%
<b>Missing</b>	1	3	4	27	36	100	1%	2%	2%	16%	21%	58%
<b>Absent</b>	0	1	0	5	11	14	0%	3%	0%	16%	35%	45%

Source: SSDA 903

- 7.38 Additional information on our missing cohort is available in the Missing from Home and Care Annual Report 2017-18.

#### Section 4: Permanency

- 7.39 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.

7.40 In the year 2017-18, nine Looked After Children were adopted and three were made subject of a Special Guardianship Order. Whilst children ceasing care through this permanency route (11%) is below the national rate (13%), performance is good when considered against the age cohort of our Looked After Children.

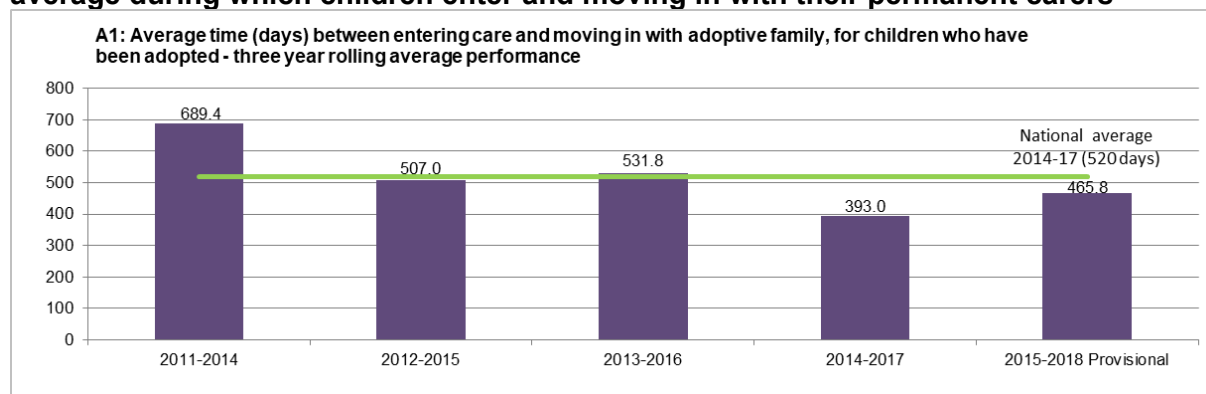
**Number of Looked After Children Who Were Adopted or Made Subject of a Special Guardianship Order During the Year ending 31st March**

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Adoptions	10	8	11	11	9
Special Guardianship Orders	4	4	2	5	3
Merton Total	14	12	13	16	12

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

7.41 For children who have been adopted, the projected three year rolling (2015-18) average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family is 466 days, which is lower than the 2014-17 national average of 520 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**



2017-18 data is provisional therefore the three year average for 2015-18 is estimated and not yet published.

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

**Section 5: Health**

7.43 Health outcomes in 2017-18 are above national average. Immunisations have improved on last year and are above national.

7.44 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.

7.45 The LAC Health Operational 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 2018 we have focussed on the following areas

- Reviewing the LAC health process and procedures
- 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
2014	83	95%	83%	95%
2015	87	86%	95%	94%
2016	94	81%	93%	91%
2017	94	82%	88%	96%
2018	88	89%	89%	98%
London 2018	6,470	78%	83%	90%
National 2018	52,180	85%	84%	88%

Source: SSDA903

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

7.47 Emotional and behavioural health is determined by the average score of Children Looked After for whom a SDQ was completed. The average score for 2018 was 15.9, which is higher than the national average of 14.2. A low average score is deemed ‘good’. Merton’s score was the highest of its statistical neighbours and had proportionately fewer eligible Children for whom an SDQ score was submitted.

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

<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

7.48 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, Statistical Neighbours, London and National 2018)		
	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, 11th=Highest)
Barnet	100%	12.5	3rd
Ealing	80%	12.3	2nd
Enfield	89%	11.4	1st
Hillingdon	76%	13.2	5th
Hounslow	100%	14.0	7th
Kingston Upon Thames	86%	14.5	9th
Merton	66%	15.9	11th
Reading	87%	15.3	10th
Redbridge	75%	12.9	4th
Sutton	97%	13.7	6th
Wandsworth	73%	14.3	8th
London	82%	13.0	-
National	78%	14.2	-

Source: SSDA 903

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

7.49 The Merton CAMHS in Social Care provides an integrated mental health service within Children's Social Care, as part of the engagement, assessment, planning and interventions alongside Social Care professionals.

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

7.51 During the period 2017 and 2018 there was 67 consultation requests related to Looked After Children, 42 (63%) progressed to a referral to the CAMHS team. 19 (29%) received a consultation and 2 (4%) were signposted to another service.

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

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

Merton	Age at 31 <sup>st</sup> March			Gender	
	4 - 9	10 - 15	16+	Male	Female
0-13 (normal)	0	14	8	9	13
14-16 (borderline cause for concern)	0	4	1	4	1
17+ (cause for concern)	4	10	13	14	13
No SDQ Score Submitted	4	16	8	19	15
<b>Total</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>39</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	
2014	62	6	10%
2015	68	3	4%
2016	75	2	3%
2017	75	1	1%
2018	74	4	5%
London 2018	5,200	220	4%
National 2018	36,760	1,510	4%

Source: SSDA 903

7.53 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 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.

7.54 For all looked after children 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 IRO should ensure that care plans adequately address this aspect of the

<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

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.

## Section 7: Education

7.55 For a complete picture of Education outcomes of Merton's Looked After Children population please refer to 'The Virtual School Annual Report'.

## Section 8: Care Leavers aged 19-21

7.56 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.

7.57 Merton has 128 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 olds looked after children in previous years.

7.58 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

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
19-21 year olds	93	93	106	123	128

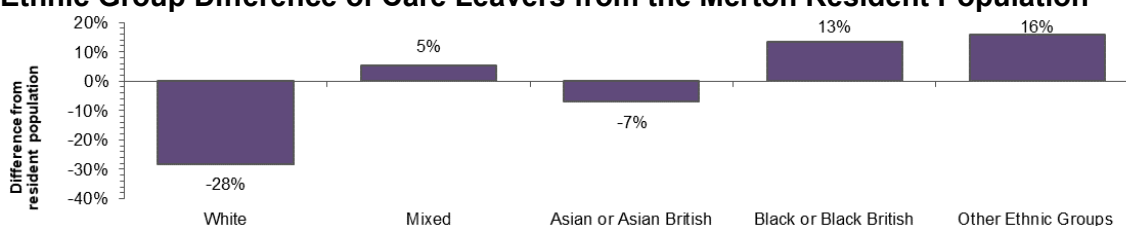
Source: SSDA 903

### Age and gender of Care Leavers

	Age (as at 31st March)			Gender	
	<i>(percentage of Care Leavers)</i>			<i>(percentage of Care Leavers)</i>	
	19	20	21	Male	Female
Merton 2018	30%	34%	35%	66%	34%
National 2018	35%	33%	31%	59%	41%

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.

7.59 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	110	86%	88%
No	5	4%	7%
Service No Longer Required	12	9%	2%
Young Person Refuses Contact	1	1%	3%
Young Person Returned Home	0	0%	Not available

Source: SSDA 903

7.60 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.

7.61 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.

7.62 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

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Merton	85%	66%	80%	91%	87%
London	83%	83%	82%	79%	81%
National	77%	81%	83%	84%	84%

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 2013 include only to 19 year olds whilst the figures for 2014 and 2015 include Care Leavers aged 19-21.

7.63 With an increased focus on improving outcomes for care leavers we have seen maintained levels of performance, above national and London. 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.

- 7.64 Housing and Children’s Social Care managers meet on a fortnightly basis to review semi-independent placements for all 18+ care leavers to ensure the early identification of young people who are ready to be nominated for their own housing.
- 7.65 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
- 7.66 To improve our understanding of our care leavers’ experience of accommodation issues in February 2018 Merton commissioned Coram Baaf to undertake a consultation in 2018, this is to take place in the Summer of 2018 and the findings will be used to inform the Care Leavers Strategy 2018 – 2021.
- 7.67 Merton has a high number of care leavers living in suitable accommodation (87%) compared to the national figure (84%). Of the eleven deemed to be living in unsuitable accommodation, three were serving custodial sentences, two residence unknown, three deported, one gone abroad, and one was living in other accommodation (those who are homeless and temporarily staying with friends as an emergency measure).

### 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
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
2017	14	9	5	52	4	2	2	1	1	1	1	24	0	0	3	4	0
2018	10	8	6	49	1	3	3	3	3	1	0	32	0	0	5	3	1

\*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



	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Merton	47%	44%	58%	60%	45%
National	Not Available	Not Available	49%	50%	51%

Source: SSDA 903

Note: In 2014 the DfE extended the care leaver cohort to include 20 and 21 year olds.

7.68 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 year olds		20 year olds		21 year olds	
	Merton	National	Merton	National	Merton	National
In higher education i.e. studies beyond A level	3%	5%	5%	7%	7%	7%
In education other than higher education	49%	30%	20%	18%	16%	12%
In training or employment	5%	22%	14%	26%	18%	27%
Not in education, training or employment	38%	36%	52%	41%	38%	41%
Information not known	5%	7%	9%	9%	22%	13%

7.69 In the past year we have made further 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 20% (11 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.

7.70 The ETE worker, working as part of the Virtual School to support a targeted group of care leavers both on 1:1 and group work basis has supported performance yet more work is required in this area to get performance above national.

## 8 Children at risk of CSE

8.1 In 2015 and 2016 the Merton Safeguarding Children's Partnership produced a self-evaluation of their work on CSE. This was updated in 2017/18, to gain refreshed engagement across the partnership governance boards to ensure continued understanding of and commitment to the shared objectives, strengths and priorities for improvement across the partnership.

8.2 The National Working Group Network produced a benchmark during 2016 for LSCBs to assess their responses to CSE, which covers the following areas:

1. Developing a strategic response
2. Understanding the local picture of CSE

3. Prevention
  4. Awareness raising and training
  5. Identification and risk assessment
  6. Supporting victims
  7. Supporting parents
  8. Intelligence Gathering, Disruption and Prosecution
  9. Youth participation
- 8.3 Merton Safeguarding Children's Board's Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) strategy was launched in 2013, refreshed in 2015 and again in 2017. These reviews were supported by intelligence from the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment and 2014 peer review on CSE and changes in the Definition of CSE and the appointment of a CSE Lead in 2017.
- 8.4 In early 2018 a review of Adolescent Panels was undertaken to consider opportunities for streamlining the attendance and potential duplication across the partnership. This review incorporated interviews of chairs and scrutiny of membership and case lists across MASE, Missing, Children Missing Education, Youth Offender Management, Gang Multiagency, Transforming Families, LAC and Antisocial Behaviour panels.
- 8.5 In addition to the potential structures streamlining there is also recognition of the need for criminal and sexual exploitation to be overseen jointly. Decisions about these arrangements will be confirmed by DMT and PPYP with consideration of how the profile of CSE will be maintained.
- 8.6 The most recent 'Dashboard' in regard to CSE was completed 30<sup>th</sup> September 2017. This outlines all those referred to MASE during 2017/18 and of those referred (32) the following had Social Care involvement:
- 18.7% (6) were Looked After
  - 18.7% (6) were on a Child Protection Plan
  - 21.8% (7) were on a Child in Need Plan
  - 0.31% (1) was a Care Leaver
- 8.7 Current open cases are tracked each month at the Multi-agency Sexual Exploitation meeting.

### **Catch22 CSE Service**

- 8.8 Catch 22 CSE service was commissioned in 2017 to receive referrals for young people in Merton at High risk of CSE. Catch 22 covers work with Merton Looked After Children and young people placed in borough or in neighbouring boroughs within one hour travel distance. The CSE team delivers targeted initiatives and 1:1 work.
- 8.9 Catch22 has had a high rate of engagement from referrals during this reporting period. Of the 30 cases referred, 26 young people were engaged with and 4 of these were Looked after Children.

## 9 Children subject to Trafficking- Service: Love 146

- 9.1 Love146 is an international human rights organisation working to end child trafficking and exploitation through survivor care and prevention. Merton commissioned Love 146 to work with young people identified as having been trafficked into the UK and presenting as an unaccompanied asylum seeking child.
- 9.2 Of the 5 young people referred to Love 146 during the period April 2017 – March 2018 where there was significant concerns in relation to the young person being trafficked, the following work was undertaken;

Young Person	1	2	3	4	5
<b>Assessments completed</b>	Trafficking Assessment	Trafficking Assessment	No - young person disclosed history and was living in UK and had movement before referral took place	No formal assessment - though general assessments discussed and shared with SW on regular basis	Yes
<b>Placed on Immediate Safety Plan - yes (+ duration) /no</b>	Yes - 02/06/2017 - 21/08/2017	Yes - 29/06/2017 - 11/10/2017	Partial restriction plan put in place	No, due to already been living at placement for extended period.	Yes - 16/03/2018 - 16/04/2018
<b>Placed on Safety Plan Reduction Programme - yes (+ duration) /no</b>	Yes - 21/08/2017 - 05/10/2017	Yes - 11/10/2017 - 22/11/2017	No, gradually increased independence in terms of phone and internet access	No - an adapted version considered	Yes - 17/04/2018 - 31/05/2018
<b>Missing Persons Passport created and shared with partners</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>Safety Device provided?</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes

### Summary of outcomes

- 9.3 Through the outcome of the intervention the concerns in respect of the young people being at risk of further trafficking, or under remaining under threat from the adults that trafficked them was as follows:
- Young Person 1 – demonstrated theoretical understanding of abusive / controlling behaviour, settled in placement

- Young Person 2 – developed good learning around sexual exploitation, supported by Foster carer who also worked with Love 146
- Young Person 3 – settled in semi-independent accommodation, safely.
- Young Person 4 – had a placement breakdown, concealed depth of trafficking and impact on self-esteem, supported with reengaging information for future use.
- Young Person 5 – increase in ability to break links with traffickers, supported to develop UK network of support.

9.4 All of the 5 young people were successfully supported to feel safe from the adults that trafficked them.

## **10 . Children in Care Council (CICC)**

10.1 The participation project is being delivered as a pilot by commissioned service Jigsaw4u. The project is being delivered in two parts, the first is developing relationships with Merton children reviewing and best practice participation models of participation and developing the CICC, the second phase is to establish, implement and embed participation and deliver a range of agreed activities.

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

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

10.3 The Child in Care Council meets on a monthly basis and there is an established core membership of 6 young people. The Bright Spots consultation has been reviewed and a 'you said' 'we will' letter has been circulated along with the consultation feedback to all Looked After Children, the outcome of this work will be published in the 2018 – 2019 Annual Corporate Parent Report.

10.4 During April 2017 and October 2017 a comprehensive participation plan was drawn up which included opportunities for the CICC to participate and understand the following:

- Attend foster carers association
- Gain an understanding of the LSCB
- Consultation of Care Leavers on the Health Passport
- Attend and participate in the Foster Carer's Induction

- Receive Interview Training
- Meetings with FE Colleges
- Participate in UCL research (belonging at school for unaccompanied children)
- Meeting with ASDAN – workbooks received
- Independent Reviewing Workshop
- Meeting and planning with Jigsaw4U and advocacy
- Meeting re Apprenticeships and work experience
- Attendance at all party Parliamentary Group

## **11 . Voice of the Child in Care**

- 11.1 In March 2018 Coram BAAF undertook the Bright Spots well-being indicator consultation with looked after children in Merton. The survey identified the areas where children appear to be flourishing and where things could be improved, providing an evidence base of children’s experience and wellbeing to inform service improvements.
- 11.2 The majority of children and young people reported they felt safe and settled in their homes
- 11.3 94% of young people (aged 12-18) and 78% of children (aged 5-11) felt their life was improving.
- 11.4 The majority (94%) of children and young people (4-18yrs) felt safe in their homes ‘all or most of the time. *The Children’s Worlds* survey found that 75% of children (8-13yrs) in the general population felt ‘Totally safe’ at home.
- 11.5 Compared to the general population and other looked after young people a greater proportion of young people had very high scores (9 or 10) on the wellbeing scales.
- 11.6 84% of young people in Merton liked school
- 11.7 The majority (96%) of children and young people had a really good friend. This was similar to their peers (97%) in the general population.

- 11.8 A central component of Merton's User Voice Strategy is a commitment to encouraging and supporting Looked after Children to give us feedback: ensuring that their views are key to informing decisions about care planning as well as informing wider service planning and delivery.
- 11.9 We have commissioned an independent advocacy service, Jigsaw4u to provide support to looked after children to ensure that their voice is heard and is central to decisions being made about their care. The quarterly feedback we receive from the advocacy service influences our practice and service strategy.
- 11.10 We have supported looked after young people to be involved in fostering preparation training and foster carer support group meetings, including being involved in recruitment and successfully interviewing and supporting the

		Merton	2018 average in 13 LAs	Peers in general population (10-17yrs)
Life satisfaction	High scores	36%	34%	27%
	Low scores	7%	15%	5%
Happiness yesterday	High scores	39%	39%	26%
	Low scores	11%	19%	8%
Things done are worthwhile	High scores	52%	36%	29%
	Low scores	0%	12%	6%
Positive about future	High scores	44%	35%	19%
	Low scores	4%	11%	7%

appointment of the current Director of Children, Schools and Families.

- 11.11 Our IRO Service is growing stronger to support and monitor how we ensure that every child's view and wish is heard in decisions about their care plans.
- 11.12 We facilitate young people's forums and activities which link with and impact on the management of children's services and the adult democratic process. These include the Children in Care Council, Youth Parliament, Young Advisors and Young Inspectors. Young Advisors recently completed a consultation on safety. Young Inspectors are currently working on projects related to service reviews/ commissioning
- 11.13 Feedback from children and young people across these strands of work have informed strategies including the Children and Young People's Plan, this LAC Strategy 2018 -2021 and children's departmental service plans.

## Enjoy and Achieve Events

11.14 We have held several well attended Enjoy and Achieve events during 2017 and 2018 including a summer BBQ (2017) for young people aged 16plus. A party in the park for children aged under 16 in the permanence team (2017 & 2018) a Residential Trip for UASC (unaccompanied asylum seeking children – 2017 & 2018). In addition to this several young people engaged in the National Citizen Service summer programme.

### **Monthly drop-in sessions**

11.15 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.

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

11.16 Merton commissions an independent advocacy service from Jigsaw 4U to provide support to Looked After Children over the age of 10, 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. Where issues are raised by individual children the advocate will liaise with the relevant social work team to seek resolution.

11.17 During this reporting year the service received 156 referrals and engaged 72 young children, of these referrals there was approximately 48 Looked After Children referrals, of this number 45 children engaged in the service. Referrals were received directly from the social worker or advocate who referred back to the service following a Looked After Child (LAC) Review. During the course of the year an advocate can attend more than one LAC review for the same child. The contract was extended to offer a service to care leavers.

In 2017-2018 steps were taken to increase awareness of the project, this included

- Liaison with LAC health professionals
- Promotional literature to social workers and managers
- Promotion through training and induction.

### **Advocacy – Complaints**

11.18 The term complaints is used to capture a range of activities beyond care planning including pieces of advocacy work to be undertaken requested by Social Care.

11.19 25 referrals were made and 24 young people engaged in making a complaint, the majority of 'direct' complaints were made either by care leavers or young people aged 17 transitioning to independence, the majority of which were resolved or captured under the following themes:

- Placement accommodation, residential placements or semi-independent living, (there were no complaints in this period about foster carers or foster placements)
- Lack of support from social workers
- Allocated social worker
- Budgeting

11.20 On 3 occasions the young person involved in the complaint decided they did not want to engage further with the process, following intervention with the advocacy service.

### **Independent visiting**

11.21 The Independent Visiting service continues to be a great success, as of the end of March 2018, there was 12 Independent Visiting matches in place, with 2 young people over the age of 18. 3 of those matched are placed out of borough.