



## Version 2 (informed by consultations)

**Merton's strategy for meeting the needs of children and young people who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) aged 0-25 years. (2020-23).**

**A place where children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities are valued, included, enjoy equality of opportunity, feel safe and supported, and are happy and fulfilled in all areas of their lives – at home, in the community, at school and beyond.**

## Table of contents

-Our 'vision' for Merton children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities.....page 3

How was the strategy developed?.....page 5

-Leadership and governance of special educational needs and/ or disabilities in Merton.....page 7

-1. Being healthy.....page 8

-2. Staying safe.....page 10

-3. Enjoying and achieving..... page 11

-4. Getting Involved, having a say.....page 13

-5. Becoming Independent.....page 15

-6. My Merton – connection with family, friends and the community.....page 17

# Our 'vision' for Merton's children and young people with special educational needs and/ or disabilities aged 0-25.

Merton's Children's Trust is responsible for bringing together services across the borough to work together and in partnership with children, young people and their families to facilitate improved outcomes for all children, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities – in Merton having high aspirations for children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities aged 0-25, and providing effective services to support their health and well-being, education and beyond to independence is 'everyone's business'.

Merton's 'Strategy for meeting the needs of children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities aged 0-25 (Merton's SEND Strategy)' is for all children and young people with SEND. This is defined in the SEND Code of Practice 2014 as those who 'have a significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of others of the same age which calls for special educational provision to be made for them, and/ or a disability which prevents them from making use of facilities generally provided for others of the same age in mainstream schools'. **In Merton this includes all those who are helped through SEN support in school, those who have an Education, Health and Care Plan and those who are eligible for 'short breaks'**. In addition, in this strategy the use of the term 'young person' means 'over the compulsory school age and under 25', as defined by the Code of Practice 2014.

Our '**vision**' is that Merton is a place where children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities are valued, included, enjoy equality of opportunity, feel safe and supported and are happy and fulfilled in all areas of their lives – at home, in the community, at school and beyond.

Implementing Merton's SEND Strategy 0-25 and the actions from the recent SEND area inspection are all part of our journey to deliver the best services we can for our children, young people and their families. In consultation with families and professionals we have agreed to work together to make sure that:

- Services are planned and delivered **in collaboration and in partnership** with children, young people and their families.
- We work closely with partners including schools and the voluntary sector to build links with all families including those who are under-represented in consultation and engagement activities (for example those whose **children are on SEN support and those with English as an additional language**).
- Children and young people can **build relationships and friendships** with their peers in their local community.
- Children and young people can **attend provision close to where they live**.
- There is a sufficient **range and choice of provision locally, where leaders are committed to developing an inclusive culture with well trained staff**, so that children and young people's **education and health outcomes are not disadvantaged**.
- Children and young people are given the appropriate level of support to **achieve well** in their local early years, schools and college settings.
- There is **seamless transition** though all the stages from local education into independent living for those who are eligible for adult social care as well as those who are not.

## Our SEND Journey

Drawing on evidence, good practice, continuous self-evaluation and working in partnership with children, parents and professionals we have achieved the following:

**2013 – Publication of Merton’s SEND strategy** for 2013-2015, including implementation of SEND reforms

**2016 – SEND included as an integrated part of Merton’s Children and Young People’s Plan 2016-2019.**

- multi-agency governance via the Children’s Trust
- SEND is ‘everyone’s business’
- focus on parent representation within the governance arrangements.

**2018– Publication of Merton’s Autism Strategy 2018-23** following extensive consultation and **high needs review undertaken.**

-Both of the above documents act as the basis for the revised Merton SEND strategy

**2019– New strategies:** Merton Children and Young People’s Plan 2019-23 and Merton’s Strategy for meeting the needs of children and young people who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (2020f-23).

# How was the strategy developed?

## Overview

The strategy has been developed by the local authority, the Merton Clinical Commissioning Group, and the parent carer forum Kids First, working in collaboration to drive our improvement agenda, and in partnership with Merton's children's trust partners. It is coordinated and monitored by the multi-agency SEND Strategic Implementation Board (SSIB) and the Children and Young People's Integrated Commissioning Group and will be reported to Merton's Children's Trust Board. The development and monitoring of the strategy's annual implementation plan will be similarly overseen.

Partners in the Children's Trust include children, young people and families, health, social care the voluntary and community sector, Police, early years settings, schools and colleges, and the local authority.

Merton's SEND Strategy is driven by statutory requirements as set out in the Children and Families Act 2014 (reform for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities), the SEND code of practice 0-25 years, the Equality Act 2010 and learning from the recent joint 'local area SEND inspection' conducted by Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission.

It is aligned with the current [Merton Autism Strategy 2018-24](#), and feeds into the Children and Young People's Plan 2019-23.

## Consulting on the draft strategy

A draft version of the strategy was sent out for consultation during September and October 2019 to further develop and test the 'vision' and strategic objectives ('we wills'). The draft version was based on our 2019 'self-evaluation' of SEND services which was informed by a needs analysis of prevalence, outcome and 'user voice' data. The latter was taken from formal consultations with parents (High Needs review 2018), with children and young people (Children and Young People's Plan consultation 2019 and the Young Residents' survey 2019), and with children's professionals in the local authority, health and education (High Needs Review). We also gather a wealth of regular feedback that comes from close working with children and young people, parents and partners, the themes of which fed into the draft version of the strategy.

Consultation on the draft version included:

1. Over **100 parents of children with SEN and/or disabilities and professionals/ parents who work with them**, made a full response to the Merton SEND Strategy consultation September/ October 2019
2. Around **70 children and young people aged from 9-18** were involved in discussion groups across six Merton primary, secondary and special schools. The children and young people involved represented those supported at SEN support, and those with an EHC plan.
3. Discussions with **parents and professionals/ staff** via a number of our regular meetings and SEND governance focus groups

## **Using the consultations to inform the final Merton SEND Strategy**

The purpose of the consultation was to discuss and draw out stakeholders' key issues and concerns, and to make sure that these are addressed in the strategy 'vision', and by the strategic objectives ('we wills') set out in the strategy.

### **The final strategy consists of the following sections:**

#### **Six outcome areas for children and young people:**

Merton's SEND Strategy is based on the 'six outcomes' featured in the Merton Children and Young People's Plan 2019-23. These are the areas of children and young people's lives Merton's Children's Trust partners are committed to improving. The six outcomes were endorsed by children and young people themselves, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, through an extensive online survey and a range of focus groups. We have used the same outcomes as we have the same ambitions for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities as we do for all Merton's children and young people. The six outcomes are:

1. Being healthy;
2. Staying safe;
3. Enjoying and achieving;
4. Getting involved, having a say;
5. Becoming independent;
6. My Merton – connection with family, friends and the community.

### **What do our children, young people and families say?**

Each section of the strategy includes key pieces of 'user voice' feedback data that has been collated from surveys and focus groups, and which have been used to inform the development of the strategy.

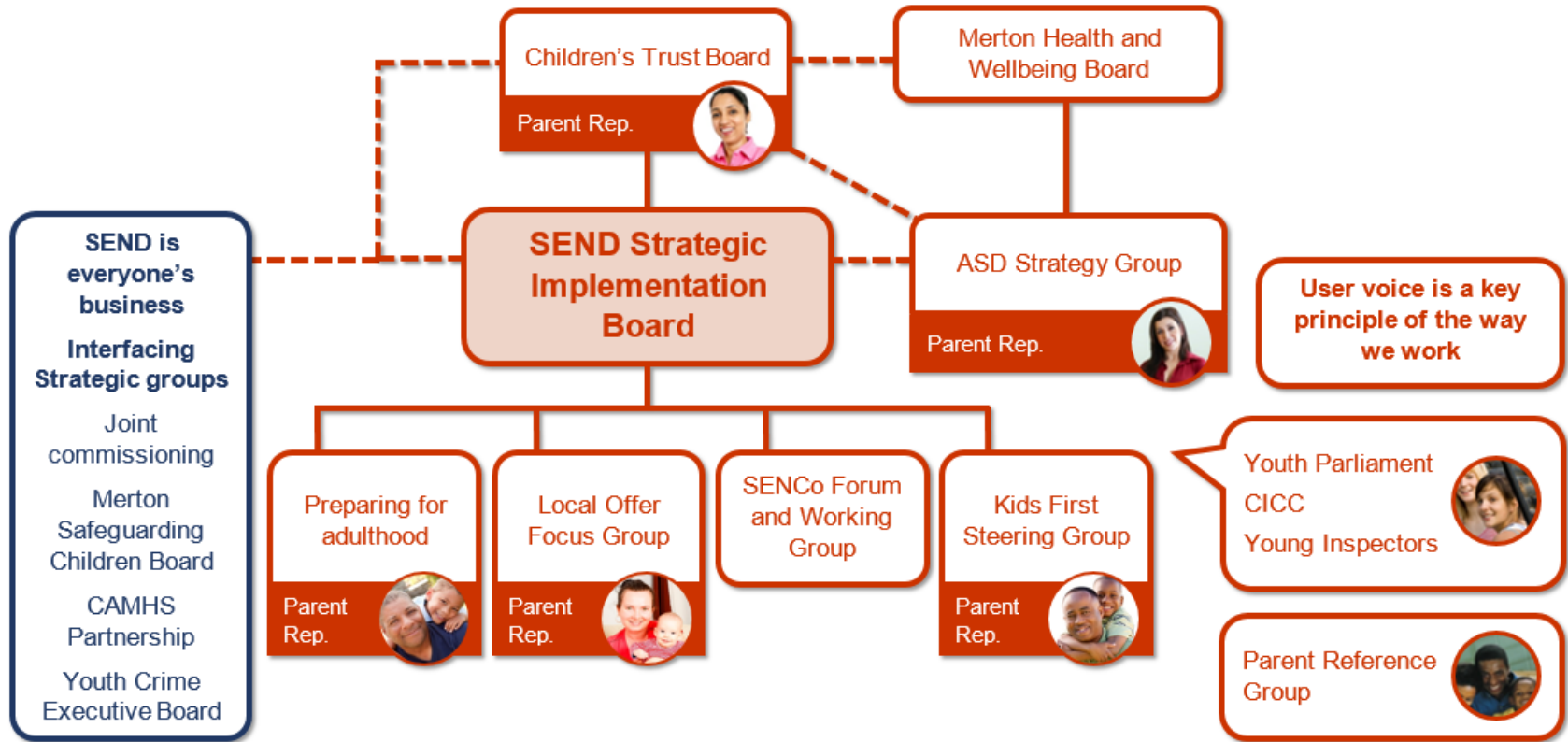
### **We will:**

Under each outcome area there is a list of 'strategic objectives' that partners are committed to delivering and which have been informed by statutory requirements, good practice and the expressed needs of children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their families.

### **How will we do this?**

Merton's SEND Strategy is a three-year document delivered by Merton's Children's Trust. Partners are also developing an annual action plan with specific and measurable activities under each of the 'strategic objectives'. Progress against the action plan will be overseen by Merton's Children's Trust and by children, young people and families via a range of stakeholder forums.

# Leadership and Governance of SEND in Merton





# 1. Being healthy

We are committed to providing effective oversight and planning to improve health services for children with special educational needs and/ or disabilities aged 0-25, as set out in statutory reforms, with the aim of ensuring equal access to services and delivering a choice of health provision locally, which meets the range of needs and closes gaps in health outcomes.

## What do our children, young people and families say?

- The current referral and assessment process for children with autism “*takes too long and there is no support available to those who are awaiting assessment*”. (Autism Strategy consultation 2018).
- “*Experience of having therapists on site or all in the same centre really helps, for example at Cricket Green School which has a Speech and Language Therapy department in school*”. (Parent at a Kids First Forum).

Comparing feedback from young people with a disability to those without, recent surveys show:

- Fewer think that ‘*school supports healthy choices*’.
- Fewer know where to go for information, advice and guidance on mental health, sexual health and substance misuse.

## We know:

- There is robust identification of health needs in the early years - 83.5% uptake of ‘Ages and Stages’ questionnaire at 12 months, and 80% at 2.5 years.
- Children and young people have good support from health visitors and school nurses including through open access drop in clinics (Local area SEND inspection 2019).
- Timely coordination of Care, Education and Treatment Reviews (CETR) ensuring that the child’s needs are central to the professional network.
- 60% of children with special educational needs and/or disabilities are on the autistic spectrum.

## We will:

- ❖ Improve and offer a range of co-ordinated specialist child health services provided by community-based clinicians (doctors, nurses and therapists) that can be easily accessed in the most appropriate and child focused setting which is closer to home.
- ❖ Review and improve the nursing and health therapies offer across all Merton schools to enable it to better meet current and future needs.
- ❖ Make sure young people have easy and timely access to local health services including mental health, sexual health and substance misuse (including information, advice and guidance).
- ❖ Work with partners including schools and settings to support healthy eating in children and young people.
- ❖ Deliver improved and consistent services for children with autism, including delivering the children and young people’s aspects of the Merton Autism Strategy 2018-23.



**We will (continued):**

- ❖ Improve the quality and sufficiency of health advice included in Education, Health and Care Plans (Local area SEND inspection 2019).
- ❖ Review 'children's continuing care' service provision (care packages for children with needs arising from disability, accident or illness that cannot be met by universal services alone) to improve the assessment and decision-making process and to inform the Education Health and Care Planning process where appropriate.
- ❖ Review the school nursing service's school entry 'health questionnaire' process to make sure that the information is sufficient to plan appropriate support services in schools.

## 2. Staying safe

**We aim to deliver a range of services and pathways to support children with special educational needs and/or disabilities aged 0-25 and their families, to build skills and resilience to feel safe and stay safe from the early years up to adulthood and independence. This work to align with the work of Merton's Safeguarding Partnership.**

### What have our children, young people and families said?

- *"This is a brilliant course. It helped me to understand my child's behavioural needs. I am more confident to support/manage my child's needs"* (Parent commenting on Incredible Years parenting course).
- *"This programme will change your outlook on parenting a child with special needs"*. (Parent commenting on Incredible Years parenting for autism and language delay).

Comparing feedback from young people with a disability to those without, recent surveys show:

- More feel worried about bullying.
- Fewer feel safe in their local area.

### We know:

- 100% of our Children's Centre are rated by Ofsted as 'good' or 'outstanding'
- 100% of families report improved outcomes from attending an evidence based children's centre parenting course.
- 100% of families said that they were satisfied with the service they received from Merton's Supporting Families Team.
- There is consistent participation of social care professionals in the identification and assessment of children and young people with special educational needs and/ or disabilities (Local area SEND inspection 2019).

### We will:

- ❖ Work together across education, health and social care to support young people to prepare for a safe and happy adulthood including employment, independent living, community inclusion and social life, and health.
- ❖ Create new referral pathways for swift and easy access to Merton's multi-agency 'early help' offer for families and professionals.
- ❖ Provide information, advice and guidance to parent carers to support their well-being and enable their caring role, with a focus on early support.
- ❖ Support children, young people and families to appropriately deal with bullying and staying safe online.
- ❖ Help build skills and resilience for children, young people and their families to feel safe and stay safe.

# 3. Enjoying and achieving

**We are committed to supporting all children and young people with SEN and/ or disabilities (as defined by the SEND code of practice) to achieve well, enjoy themselves and be fully included in their local early years, schools and college settings, attending provision close to where they live.**

## What do our children, young people and families say?

- 77% of parents said Merton needs to develop additional in-borough provision, the majority stating that this should be 'new specialist bases in mainstream schools'; 64% stated they have an educational placement 'a reasonable distance from home which meets needs'.
- 87% of head teachers say their staff would benefit from additional training to meet the needs of children with an Education, Health and Care Plan.
- Feedback from parents/carers as well as front line practitioners identifies that inconsistency across different settings in interpreting and reporting on needs is a cause for concern.
- *"Make local parks more exciting with more equipment"* (special school focus group)

Comparing feedback from young people with a disability to those without, recent surveys show:

- Fewer agree that *'I am able to enjoy and do well in my education'*.
- More feel that there is a *'lack of opportunities to be physically active which makes it harder for young people to lead healthy lives in my area'*.

## We know:

- 64% increase in EHC Plans issued in the four years from 2015.
- 91% referrals for EHC Plan assessments reviewed at panel within 2 weeks; 58% EHC Plans completed within deadline.
- All Merton special schools, 93% of all schools, and 97.5% of EYFS settings rated 'good' or 'outstanding'.
- As a result of attending good or better education provision children and young people 'typically achieve well academically by the end of each key stage of education'. (Local area SEND inspection 2019)
- ASD and SLCN are the most common 'identified need' for children with EHC Plans, and SLCN and SEMH for those on 'SEN Support'.
- Increased capacity of specialist places in mainstream and special schools.
- More children in the early years with an EHC Plan and those on SEN Support achieved a 'Good Level of Development'.
- All key stage results improved for pupils at SEN Support, including strong Progress 8 score - higher than national.
- Above national for maths at Key Stage 1 for children with an EHC Plan, but reading and writing below.
- Lower than national fixed term exclusions for children with an EHC Plan and those on SEN Support.
- Above national attendance rates in Merton special schools with reducing persistent absence.
- All of our three special schools run the Duke of Edinburgh programme and have achieved notable success.

## **We will:**

- ❖ Increase access to local, inclusive education provision for children with special educational needs and/ or disabilities.
- ❖ Encourage and support mainstream school leaders to develop an inclusive culture and improve staff knowledge, understanding and skills through training, school to school support and maximising opportunities for schools to work together.
- ❖ Improve the quality including monitoring of Education, Health and Care Plans to make sure they set clear targets to support the child or young person's development. (Local area SEND inspection 2019).
- ❖ Improve access to places where children and young people can enjoy themselves, socialise and access physical activities including after school clubs, youth clubs, parks and leisure, including effective promotion.
- ❖ Secure strong progress and achievement and raise attainment of children with special educational needs and/ or disabilities in schools and nurseries, and close gaps in education outcomes.
- ❖ Review current support services for children and young people with SEN and/or disabilities in education settings and identify recommendations for future delivery.
- ❖ Continue work to improve Special Educational Needs Coordinator practice across Merton's mainstream schools and settings, including consistency of identification and support, with a particular focus on children at 'SEN Support' level.
- ❖ Further develop school leaders' ability to evaluate and improve their support for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities, including integrating the SEN audit and whole school evaluation processes.

## 4. Getting involved, having a say

We will support children, young people and their families to be at the centre of decisions made about their education, health and care, and to have a voice as regards the strategic direction of services for special educational needs and/ or disabilities and other services in the borough. We will continue to work with partners including schools and the voluntary sector to improve links with all families including those who are under-represented in consultation and engagement activities (including those with children on SEN support, and with English as an additional language).

### *What have our children, young people and families said?*

- *“We receive information about what is on offer locally in terms of services, support, and advice and guidance; this is particularly useful to those who are new to the area, or to the issues”. (Parent attending a Kids First parents’ forum information session delivered by the local authority).*

*Comparing feedback from young people with a disability to those without, recent surveys show:*

- *More think that Merton ‘does not listen to the concerns of young people’.*
- *More think that Merton ‘does not involve young people in decision making’.*

### **We know:**

- Children and young people with SEN and disabilities from mainstream and special schools take part in the participation and engagement opportunities delivered across Merton including Youth Parliament, School Council Action Days, young inspectors, young advisers, and the Children and Young People’s Plan consultation.
- Young people with autism were involved in the development of the borough’s autism strategy.
- Disabled young people responded to key surveys in 2019, which were used to inform the strategic direction of the local authority’s work to support all young people.
- 70 children and young people from mainstream and special schools were involved in discussion groups to inform the new Merton SEND Strategy.
- Over 100 parents and professionals/staff responded to the online survey to inform the new Merton SEND Strategy.
- There is a whole hearted and effective commitment to ensuring children and young people have a voice in decision making. (Local area SEND inspection 2019)
- Merton’s parent carer forum, Kids First, understands the main concerns and positive views of parents in the area, providing a strong voice and challenge to leaders in the borough; it is trusted by parents who use the service. (Local area SEND inspection 2019).

### **We will:**

- ❖ Provide opportunities for children and young people (in mainstream, special schools and colleges), and families, to directly talk to all types of service providers about decisions which affect them.
- ❖ Improve how we support children, young people and families to make sure that their voices are central to identification, assessment, support and monitoring processes for children identified at SEN Support and those with an EHC Plan.

**We will (continued):**

- ❖ Continue to improve how we involve children, young people (in mainstream, special schools and colleges), and families in service and strategic planning for special educational needs and/or disabilities services.
- ❖ Continue to provide information, advice and support on education, health and social care, for all children, young people and families on matters relating to special educational needs and disabilities.

## 5. Becoming independent

We will work across education, health and social care and in partnership with young people and their families to embed the delivery of a multi-agency 'pathways to adulthood' model which is integrated across services and supports young people with Employment; Independent Living; Community Inclusion and social life; and Health – taking an approach which is person centred, timely and enables independent choices.

### What have our children, young people and families said?

- 69% of parents were satisfied or better with the qualifications on offer to their child by the school/college. (High Needs Review)
- *“My son learning how to travel independently was the turning point for him and our whole family”* (parent whose child attended travel training).
- *“We need more services to help young people get jobs”* (special school focus group)
- 11% fewer young people with a disability than those without agree that *‘I feel supported to make decisions about my future’*.

### We know:

- Lower than London average rate of young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities 'Not in employment education or training' (NEET) or 'not known'.
- 11% of young people with an Education, Health and Care Plan, and 28% with additional needs (SEN Support) support are 'not in education, employment or training' (February 2019).
- 'The children's community nursing team ensures that young people approaching transition to adulthood are appropriately prepared for the next step'. (Local area SEND inspection 2019)
- The timeliness of support for transition to adulthood in social care (and for those not eligible for social care – including ASD and specific learning difficulties) is an 'identified area for improvement'. (Local area SEND inspection 2019).
- Merton's Information and Advice Service for special education needs and/or disabilities supported over 300 families in 2018/19.

### We will:

- ❖ Implement the borough's multi-agency transitions project across education, health and social care, to develop a 'pathways to adulthood' model which includes - Employment; Independent Living; Community Inclusion; and Health – is person centred and timely, and meets the needs of those who are eligible for adult services and those who are not.
- ❖ Simplify the process of transition from children's to adults' services in education, health and social care, to enable an integrated, seamless pathway which supports young people through significant changes. (Local area SEND inspection 2019).
- ❖ Further develop the post 16 offer (Education, Training and Employment) including creating more supported internships, volunteering and employment opportunities.



### **We will (continued):**

- ❖ Promote good communication and coordination between the young person's family and service providers to promote choice and control for the young person.
- ❖ Provide early support and accessible information, advice and guidance for young people and their families, who may not be eligible for adult social care, to be able to navigate 'preparing for adulthood', and to prevent escalation of need (Local area SEND inspection 2019).
- ❖ Provide a 'pathways to adulthood' model which incorporates a robust support process for looked after children and care leavers who have SEN and/or disabilities.
- ❖ Develop improved access to advocacy, information, advice and guidance to support young people who do not have families to have an independent say in planning their future.
- ❖ Support community inclusion through improved access to leisure activities in the evenings and weekends for 18-25 year olds
- ❖ Work in partnership across agencies and teams to enable adult social care is able to plan and prepare for young people who may transition into the service.

## 6. My Merton – connection with family, friends and the community

We are committed to working in collaboration with partner agencies including schools and the voluntary sector, to create an environment where children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their families can feel part of their community and build relationships and friendships with their peers, through sufficiency of service provision and access to information, advice and guidance. This work to include ensuring accessibility by under-represented groups including those with English as an additional language

### What have our children, young people and families said?

- “*Get young people involved in local events*” (special school focus group).
- A third of children and young people with a disability who were surveyed agreed that they are ‘treated differently’ because of having a disability.
- Fewer young people with a disability than those without feel ‘part of their community’.

### We know:

- There are a range of leisure and community activities on offer for children and young people with SEN and/ or disabilities provided by the statutory, and voluntary and community sector, available at all levels of support - Universal, targeted and specialist.
- Merton’s local offer directory gives information about the range of opportunities that are available for children and families to enjoy themselves and build their family and community relationships.
- Increasing social capital is a key priority in Merton’s sustainable communities plan to strengthen community connections.
- Merton’s Health and Well-being strategy supports focus on creating a healthy social and physical environment in the borough.

### We will:

- ❖ Undertake a review of the local offer of services for children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their families to identify whether these are sufficient to meet needs.
- ❖ Improve promotion and accessibility of the ‘Local Offer for children with SEN and/or disabilities’ and ‘Young Merton’ to broaden awareness of the availability of local opportunities, support and advice and guidance for children, young people and their families.
- ❖ Support children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their families to feel part of their community by promoting positive attitudes and understanding, and making Merton a friendly place for those with disabilities.
- ❖ Support service providers from all sectors to make reasonable adjustments (in line with the Equality Act 2010) so that children and young people with SEN and/ or disabilities can enjoy the full range of opportunities alongside their peers.

This page is intentionally left blank