



MERTON SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN PARTNERSHIP

Annual Report 2022-2023



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Foreword

This report covers the work of the Merton Safeguarding Children Partnership (MSCP) during the period April 2022 to March 2023, a year which saw pressures on safeguarding systems from the Covid-19 pandemic reducing, albeit with other pressures developing for children and families and local services, such as the cost-of-living crisis. In this year, the government launched their Stable Homes, Built On Love proposal based on the Independent Review of Children's Social Care and the national review into the tragic murders of Arthur Labinjo-Hughes and Star Hobson, and committed to reforms aimed at promoting children's welfare by supporting children's families and the loving relationships around them. Focus on addressing disproportionality and promoting anti-racist practice continued to be a priority, in response to the Child Q review in Hackney alongside many other local and national factors. Strong partnership working with schools continued to be important, particularly in response to Everyone's Invited and concerns around school attendance continuing to remain below pre-pandemic levels nationally.

During 2022-23, the MSCP saw a period of stability after recruiting to our independent posts and permanent business support unit in the previous financial year. The Partnership's Executive Group also remained consistent through the year. This allowed us to maintain a strong focus on delivering our priorities in the MSCP business plan, including further strengthening our multi-agency training programme, ongoing review of multi-agency datasets and delivering robust learning reviews and thematic scrutiny.

Within this work, we are pleased to have gathered the voice of children and their families in various ways and are keen to continue building on this important work going forwards. We were delighted to hear from our Young Scrutineer, Halima Mehmood, and Independent Scrutineer, Sarah Lawrence, during the year, with their holistic and

child-focused approach to scrutiny, including on the adultification of black children.

Our Independent Chair, Aileen Buckton, was unwell for a period and we were very grateful to Nicola Brownjohn for stepping in to provide interim cover and help maintain independent leadership of our partnership.

Through working closely together with the Merton Safeguarding Adults Board (MSAB), including sharing an Independent Chair and delivering a second Joint Safeguarding Conference in March 2023, we have been able to progress joint working with adults' colleagues including around "Think Family" and embedding learning from local adults and children's learning reviews.

We are immensely proud of the work of all our partners who work tirelessly with families to keep them safe and promote their welfare and wellbeing. We also remain highly ambitious for our children and families and hope the year ahead will bring further opportunities to improve how children and families experience our services.

Justin Roper

Director of Quality, SWL ICB on behalf of Gloria Rowland

Ian Cameron

Head of Safeguarding, Public Protection, Southwest BCU

Jane McSherry

Executive Director of Children, Lifelong Learning and Families, London Borough of Merton

Introduction

The Children's Social Work Act 2017 and Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018 requires each Local Authority area to establish arrangements for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children. The Merton Safeguarding Children Partnership fulfills this role for the London Borough of Merton. More detail on our local arrangements can be found in our [Partnership Agreement](#).

Every 12 months the safeguarding partners must prepare and publish a report on what the safeguarding partners and relevant agencies for the local authority area have done as a result of the local safeguarding arrangements and outline how effective those arrangements have been in practice.

This report provides an overview of the impact of the MSCP's work on the safety and wellbeing of Merton's children and families, as well as an update against the Partnership's key priority areas outlined in the partnership's business plan for 2021-23. These priorities are:

Strong Leadership and Strong Partnership		
Early Help and Neglect	Domestic Abuse and Think Family	Contextual Safeguarding

Under the first priority area, the report will also include how the Partnership learns from scrutiny, audits and learning reviews (local child safeguarding practice reviews) to embed a culture of continuous improvement in our local safeguarding arrangements.

Our Children & Young People

We have 51,985 children and young people living in Merton

41,350 CYP are in school or full-time education

36% school-age children have English as an additional language

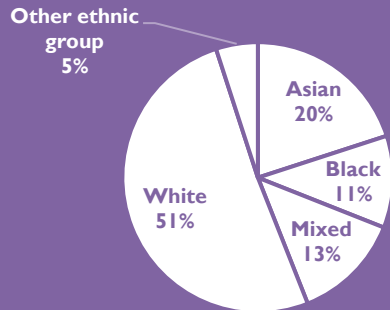
2,446 children with an Education, Health & Care Plan at March 2023

1,229 children in need of help and protection at 31 March 2023*

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*Defined by Children Act 1989 as including children on child in need plans, child protection plans, looked after by local authorities, care leavers and disabled children.

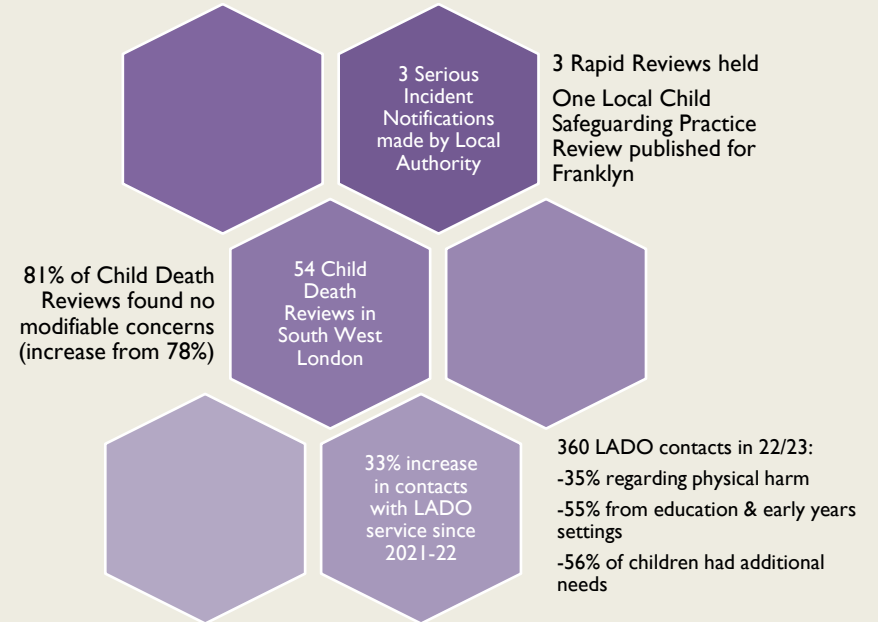
ETHNICITY OF MERTON CHILDREN



¹ Data sources: 2021 Census, Merton School Census 2023, Merton SEN dashboard March 2023, DfE Children in Need statistics 2023.

Data Overview

Below is a brief overview of the key data included in this report.



²

MSCP Training programme

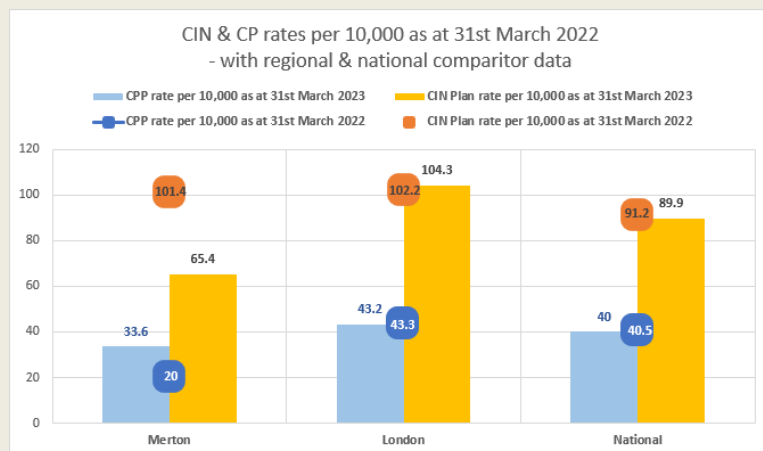
- 792 multi-agency delegates trained through delivery of 63 sessions of 36 separate courses/events
- Significant increase maintained from 222 delegates during the pandemic in 2020-21 and small increase from 760 in previous year 2021-22
- Attendance rate of 70% of the total bookings made (1,125)

² Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) manages concerns and allegations against professionals and volunteers working with children in Merton

Children's social care

In 2022-23, **Merton remained below London and national averages for the below children's social care indicators.** Compared to previous year (2022), Merton saw a:

- Reduction in the rate of children with a child in need (CIN) plan from 101.4 to 65.4 per 10,000 children at 31 March. This relates to a reduction from 484 children to 312 children with a CIN plan between March 2022 and March 2023.³
- Increase in the rate of children subject to child protection plans (CPP) from 20 to 33.6 per 10,000 children at 31 March. This relates to an increase from 94 children to 158 children with a CPP between March 2022 and March 2023.
- 26 of every 10,000 children in Merton are in care, in line with previous year and lower than the rate nationally (70) and across London (52). This relates to 122 children in care in Merton at March 2023.



Re-referrals to Merton children's social care were 18.3% during 2022, in line with London average (18%) and remaining below national (21.5%).

³ CIN plan reporting for CIN census is currently experimental statistics- local data provided here. Work is ongoing to ensure data accuracy.

Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC)

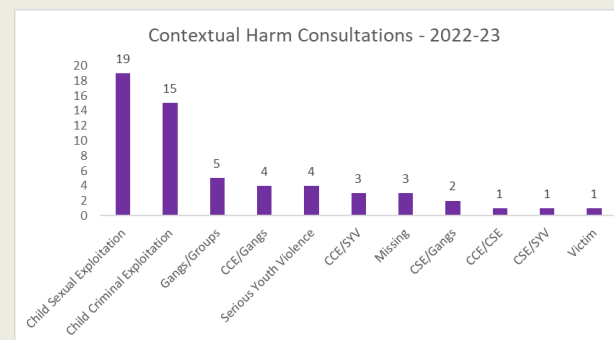
In 2022/2023 the MARAC discussed **592** high risk and complex cases involving domestic abuse, **564** children were identified as part of these discussions. This is in line with an increase in the number of cases discussed at MARAC since the pandemic started in 2020.

Figure 1: An overview of MARAC cases 2019/20 – 2022/23

Year	Number of Cases Discussed	Number of Repeat cases	% repeat cases	Number of children in the household
2020-21	576	234	41%	557
2021-22	636	301	47%	639
2022-23	592	259	44%	564

Contextual Harm consultations

During 2022-23, **58 contextual harm consultations were completed** as per the pathway into the Multi-Agency Child Exploitation (MACE) panel (28 females and 30 males).



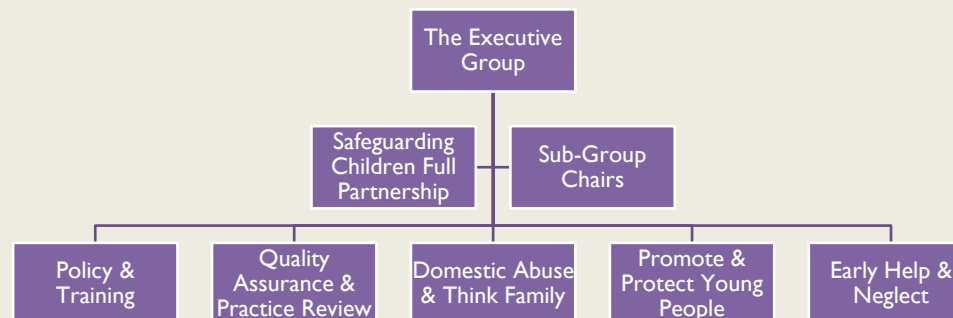
Strong Leadership and Strong Partnership

Governance and Oversight

The MSCP has two key documents, our Partnership Agreement and our Business Plan⁴, which provide an overview of the partnership's agreed priorities, and the governance and oversight established to oversee delivery of them.

Changes to governance implemented in 2021-22 are now well embedded, and partners fed back during consultation on the business plan for 2023-25 that structures, as outlined in the diagram below, were working well. This includes a monthly Executive of the three statutory partners for agile decision-making, a termly Full Partnership meeting including wider partners such as schools, providers and so on, and five subgroups meeting quarterly to drive forward workplans based on the partnership's statutory duties and agreed priorities. Sub-group chairs also meet monthly to ensure that the work of sub-groups is coordinated and support with strategic updates to the Executive.

Agency engagement has been strong overall, and strong multi-agency engagement in the delivery of statutory and non-statutory processes demonstrate continued commitment from partners. The chairing of subgroups is shared across the three statutory partners and there has been a strong commitment to ensuring all relevant agencies are represented within these meetings.



The Partnership also has three independent posts to support with our core duty to promote the welfare of children and monitor the strength of partnership working.

- An Independent Chair
- An Independent Scrutineer, and
- A Young Scrutineer

An Independent Chair, Aileen Buckton was recruited during 2021-22. Nicola Brownjohn provided sickness cover from January 2022 – March 2023 within the year this report refers to. Aileen and Nicola have provided independent challenge to our Partnership when chairing the Executive and the Full Partnership. Aileen, and Nicola whilst in post, also chaired the Merton Safeguarding Adults Board, facilitating stronger working relationships between the two safeguarding partnerships, including effective delivery of our second Joint Annual Conference in March 2023, themed on Domestic Abuse Safeguarding: “Learning from the Lived Experience of Trauma from Child to Adult”.

⁴ Dec 2021 Partnership Agreement and MSCP Business Plan 2021-2023 are available on request. Both documents have since been refreshed for 2023-24, and therefore MSCP website reflects the updated versions.

Sarah Lawrence has been our Independent Scrutineer since February 2020, and Halima Mehmood has been our Young Scrutineer since May 2021. Both have developed strong working relationships with partners in Merton, enabling robust and informative scrutiny of key themes to help the MSCP embed improvements to safeguarding practice.

Our Young Scrutineer role places us within the 29% of local safeguarding partnerships nationally, who involve young people in a scrutiny role⁵.

“As the outgoing Young Scrutineer, I’m really pleased that the MSCP has both developed and matured in youth voice inclusion. It is crucial to maintain this through improving accessibility, specifically for disabled and marginalized children across the Borough, as this ensures that we continue to provide informed insights on children’s safeguarding concerns. I am grateful for the time I have spent working with the MSCP and Sarah Lawrence, the Independent Scrutineer, and proud of the work we have achieved.”

Halima Mehmood, Young Scrutineer, MSCP

Business Plan refresh

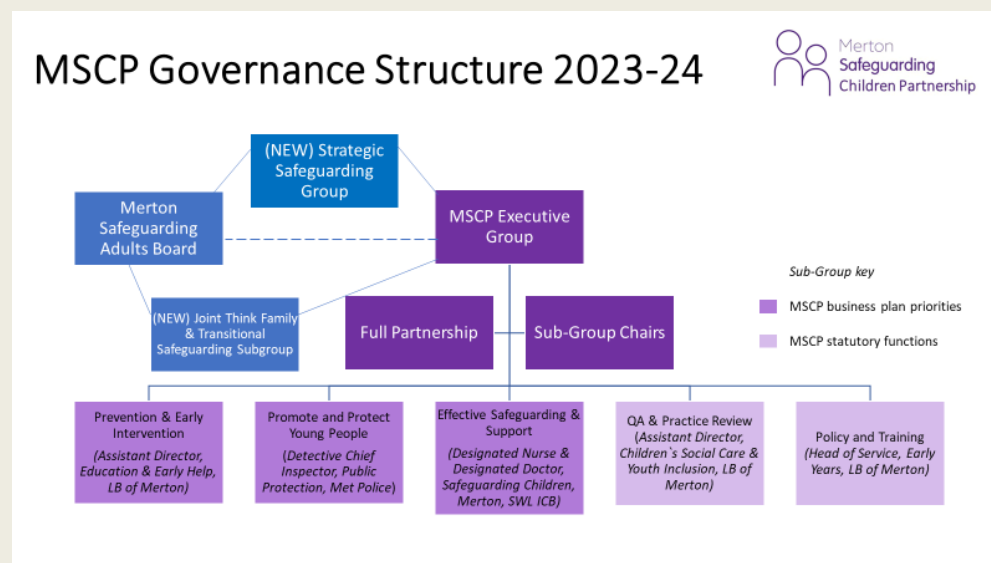
During 2022-23, work began to refresh the MSCP business plan for 2023-25. The positive feedback on existing governance structures was considered and therefore, although priorities have changed slightly and a set of cross-cutting themes have been introduced, the above governance structures have remained with small tweaks to

⁵ [Independent Scrutiny and Local Safeguarding Children Partnership Arrangements](#)

the focus of the three thematic subgroups (and their titles alongside this).

To further build on joint working with the Merton Safeguarding Adults Board (MSAB) and ensure effective senior leadership oversight from the statutory partners of both partnerships (local authority, integrated care board and police), a new Joint Strategic Safeguarding Group will also be established during 2023-24. It is proposed the group will meet twice yearly and be chaired by the London Borough of Merton Chief Executive. There is also a proposal to establish a joint Think Family & Transitional Safeguarding subgroup which will be accountable to the MSCP Executive Group and the MSAB Board.

From April 2023, the MSCP governance has therefore been agreed as follows:



Scrutiny Activity

The MSCP's Independent Scrutineer and Young Scrutineer work to a jointly owned workplan and report regularly to the Executive. The workplan uses best practice models for Independent Scrutiny including the 'Checklist for Independent Scrutiny' published by Vulnerability Knowledge and Practice Programme (VKPP) and the 'Six Steps to Independent Scrutiny'.

"What can MSCP do to prevent the adultification of black children in Merton?"

During 22-23, the Scrutineers undertook their annual thematic review based on the above question. This followed learning identified in the Child Q LCSPR in Hackney, national research and local work focused on disproportionality in the justice system by the Youth Crime Prevention Executive Board.

Importantly, our Independent and Young Scrutineer spoke directly to young people living and learning in Merton to understand their experience of adultification and how to improve the Partnership's response to the issue. This included focus groups with children in secondary schools, special schools/colleges, conversations with children working with the Youth Parliament and Our Voice children in care council. Children told them about lots of examples of adultification and how this had negatively affected them, and other children:

"We are automatically labelled as aggressive for making a point"

"Whenever anyone mentions drugs they always look at us black children first..."

"In sports we are expected to be better, and get criticised if we aren't the best"

"You don't realise its racism because you're used to it"

The review also included a survey, and meetings with practitioners that work with children in the borough including those working in schools and colleges, police, health and local authority, including children's services and community safety.

At the MSCP's Full Partnership meeting in March 2023, our scrutineers presented the findings of their adultification scrutiny. Key themes identified were:

- Race and Racism
- Children's safety, children's rights and vulnerability
- Disproportionality & Bias
- Attitudes and Language
- Expectations and Pressure
- Trust in Services.

In follow-up, the Executive made a commitment to respond to the recommendations including a Task & Finish group and to build on existing work to address racism across the partnership. Going forwards into 2023-24, our Young Scrutineer will also lead the presentation of the findings to other forums, including the Youth Crime Prevention Executive Board, Children's Trust and delivering workshops at the Race Equality in Schools Conference.

Recommendations from the scrutiny work continue to be incorporated into the Partnership's ongoing workplans. Some examples of these include (this is not an exhaustive list):

- Developing and delivering adultification training to the partnership to raise awareness and help professionals to guard against it in their practice.
- Incorporating learning from the adultification scrutiny into the refresh of the substance misuse in schools' procedure.

- Incorporating learning from the sexual harassment and violence in schools & colleges scrutiny into the refresh of the harmful sexual behaviour policy.

Further Independent Scrutiny activity undertaken in 22-23

- Work with the Full Partnership and sub-groups to ensure focus on children's and families voices in all MSCP activity.
- Chairing an annual Section 11 (of the Children Act) peer review session of partner duties, to scrutinise partners progress in taking actions to improve from previous review.
- Research, feedback and challenge to partners on issues raised nationally – including learning from cases via the National Child Safeguarding Review Panel, and reviews such as the Care Review.
- Disseminating learning from previous scrutiny on sexual violence and harassment in schools and colleges, including via visual summary poster (see below).
- Presenting annual report to Overview and Scrutiny Panel, responding to debate and raising awareness of key safeguarding issues.
- Review and input to 21-22 MSCP Annual Report, ensuring a focus on assessing impact on children.



Reflections from Independent Scrutineer & Young Scrutineer

“Our joint work with children, practitioners and with the MSCP during this year has provided us with some very rich information enabling us to assess how well the partners work together to safeguard children in Merton.

In this year we heard from over 45 children about their lived experience of adultification and racism, how this impacted on their safety, and their ideas that can bring about change. Their insights were powerful and very hard to hear. Children gave many examples of the harm and negative impact of adultification – often complex and detailed, examples can be found in our findings document. What was striking to us, and a recurrent theme not only for Merton to consider, was the sense that racism and adultification happens to black children every day, in all aspects of their lives – in relationships, in school, in the community, at home. In one child's words;

“This is part of my 'normal life', it happens every day”

Children told us that their negative experiences are exacerbated where intersecting issues exist, for example because of their gender, special educational need or disability and / or their status as a care giver or young parent. For example;

“As a young black parent, I am treated like an adult, **no exceptions**. ... You are expected to know everything straight away”

Learning from our engagement with children has shaped the recommendations we made to the MSCP. We are aware of the next steps planned in response to the scrutiny locally and will be supporting this work and, with MSCP, will seek assurance of progress throughout the coming year. We want to take this opportunity to thank the children for their honesty and trust in us in this process. We also want to express our gratitude to the many practitioners that engaged with us in this work, including those that work with Our Voice, Youth Parliament and Merton schools and colleges for enabling independent and open engagement with children that they work with.

Our wider reflections on the MSCP, and local leadership of safeguarding services this year are predominantly positive. Attendance at strategic and political meetings has shown to us that safeguarding is a priority in the borough, and we are encouraged by the commitments made to develop safeguarding services at this high level. Partners demonstrated their ability to adapt to changing needs of families in feedback to each other at MSCP meetings. We therefore feel confident that MSCP can act on ‘stubborn’ safeguarding issues and has prioritised them in future planning for multi-agency work. While we have identified learning and improvement that is needed through scrutiny, including co production, accessibility, and engagement with children, we feel confident that the MSCP is a mature and developed safeguarding partnership that can continue to respond to ever present challenges that face children and families at this time.

Sarah Lawrence
Independent Scrutineer MSCP

Halima Mehmood
Young Scrutineer MSCP

Joint Work with Merton Safeguarding Adults Board

The MSCP continued to work closely with the Merton Safeguarding Adults Board (MSAB) during 22-23, including delivering activities together and attendance of key representatives to link the MSCP Exec and Full Partnership to the MSAB Board. The MSCP and MSAB continued to share an Independent Chair, including via interim cover, which further supported this.



The image shows the agenda for the Joint Annual Conference 2023, featuring logos for Merton Safeguarding Adults Board and Merton Safeguarding Children Partnership. The agenda is structured as follows:

Lead	Description	Time
Opening Address		
1. Introduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nicola Brownjohn: Interim Independent Chair for MSAB and MSCP Clr. Brenda Fraser: Cabinet Member for Children's Services Clr. Peter McCabe: Cabinet Member for Health and Social Care 	13:30 – 14:00
Part 1		
2. Keynote Speech: Trauma-Informed Practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hayley Tuffin: Registered social worker and experienced psychotherapist with a particular interest in trauma 	14:00 – 14:40
3. Sandra's Story	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trish Stewart: Associate Director of Safeguarding, DASH (Reflections on a recent Safeguarding Adult Review) Loret and Karlyn: Speakers with lived experience 	14:40 – 15:30
10-Minute Break until 15:40		
Part 2		
4. Understanding Childhood Experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Zoe Gallen: Domestic Abuse and VAWG Lead, London Borough of Merton Claire Bowden: Senior IDVA, Victim Support 	15:40 – 16:10
5. Breakout Rooms and Feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What learning/actions can we take forward in our different agencies? 	16:10 – 16:45
6. Closing Remarks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nicola Brownjohn: Interim Independent Chair for MSAB and MSCP 	16:45 – 17:00



In March 2023, the MSCP delivered a second joint conference with the Merton Safeguarding Adults Board on Domestic Abuse Safeguarding: “Learning from the Lived Experience of Trauma from Child to Adult”. These themes were jointly agreed by representatives from the MSCP Policy and Training sub-group and the MSAB Learning and Development sub-group. The post-event evaluation highlighted the event was well received as per the above chart.

Feedback from participants included:

"Attending this event will help me be more professionally curious, listen to the voice of the child more, and think family and more systemically."

"Sandra story - having people with lived experience brings so much more meaning and learning - with them bringing a perspective and details that professionals can't possibly bring."

"That lead councillors attended and showed their passion for the work and what the council are working on to improve services for the residents of Merton."

The MSCP also commissioned training on Mental Capacity Act and Deprivation of Liberty for children and young people, which was identified as part of joint work with MSAB around implementation of Liberty Protection Safeguards.

As noted in the earlier governance section, plans have been agreed during 22-23 to further strengthen existing links between the two partnerships through establishing two new groups during 23-24:

Strategic Safeguarding Group

- Chaired by LB of Merton Chief Executive and co-chaired by SW BSU Chief Superintendent
- Provide senior oversight of the MSCP and MSAB, including annual reports, priority setting and key themes

Think Family & Transitional Safeguarding Subgroup

- Chair to be agreed
- Delivery of activity around key themes for both partnerships, including but not limited to Think Family, transitional and contextual safeguarding, housing conditions

Reviewing and Developing Practice

Learning Reviews

During 22/23, there were three serious incident notifications, one of which led to a local child safeguarding practice review (LCSPR) for Franklyn.

Given the publication of three LCSPRs (Jason, Baby Grace, and Ananthi), and two partnership reviews (Eddie, and SUDI review) during the previous year 2021/22, there was also continued focus on sharing and embedding the learning from these children's cases.

All our [learning review full reports](#) and [7 minute learning briefings](#) can be found on our website at the relevant webpages.

Review & link	Published	Themes
Jason LCSPR	Jun 2021	Contextual Safeguarding; Child Criminal Exploitation
Baby Grace LCSPR	Aug 2021	Non-Accidental Injury; Support with crying babies; Domestic abuse
Ananthi LCSPR	Nov 2021	Parental health; Impact of Covid-19 - health services and school closure; Use of interpreters
Eddie Partnership Review	Nov 2021	Contextual Safeguarding; CYP Mental Health/trauma informed approaches
SUDI Review	Feb 2022	Housing/homelessness, professional curiosity, safe sleeping
Franklyn LCSPR	May 2023	Trauma-informed practice; Clarity of services for families; Disproportionality; family voice; Commissioning care packages

Child L / 'Franklyn' – LCSRP

Franklyn was a baby born with a life-limiting disability and complex health needs. He died in hospital aged four-and-a-half months old, after suffering an out-of-hospital cardiac arrest, in June 2022. At the time of his death, Franklyn had been subject to a Child Protection Plan for seven weeks due to concerns around domestic abuse and parental substance misuse.

The Franklyn review was approved in early 2023, and learning was shared within the partnership including at the March 2023 Full Partnership meeting. The final report was published in May 2023, following Police investigation concluding, allowing for lunch & learn and wider sharing of learning to take place during 23/24.

Rapid reviews

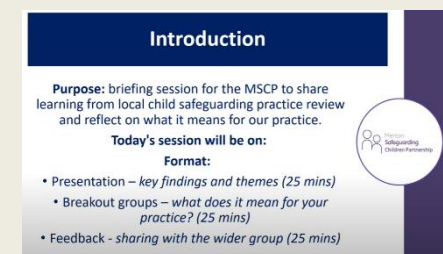
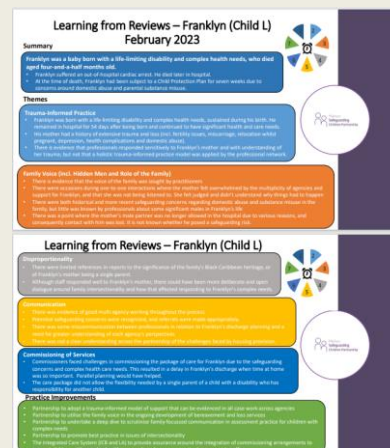
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There were **two serious incidents** which the rapid review panels concluded **did not require a further LCSRP** - for Child M and Child O⁶. Some of the themes raised within these reviews included: trusted relationships & attempts to achieve positive engagement; collaboration, child's voice in safety planning, timely information sharing and use of escalation processes; school attendance and creative approaches, and prioritisation of safeguarding first approach.

During 2022-23, the MSCP also **contributed to a Surrey rapid review** for a young person who had previously been open to Merton children's social care. This also did not proceed to LCSRP. Learning was shared with the MSCP networks.

⁶ Decision reversed for Child M following national panel feedback and review by our Independent Chair. LCSRP to be undertaken during 2023-24.

What we did in response to the reviews

The MSCP took a range of actions in response to the reviews outlined above. In addition to final reports for each review, the chair and lead author for each review helped **develop learning materials** for dissemination across the partnership, which are published alongside the full reports on the [MSCP website](#).



We continued with our well-received **'Lunch and Learn' events**, launched in 21/22, to share the learning from our reviews and audits. These provide an opportunity for report writers and practitioners to explore the themes and recommendations from the reviews and embed the learning into their future work and practice. The MSCP also worked with agencies to **embed learning from reviews into multi-agency and single agency training and events** such as delivering presentations at the Youth Crime Prevention Executive Board, Strategic Multi-Agency Child Exploitation Panel (MACE) and Children Schools and Families' Practice Week and Learning & Improvement Board.

The MSCP's Section 11 audit 2021/22 identified that disseminating and embedding learning from reviews was a particular strength for the Partnership, demonstrating the impact of this work.

Learning from the practice reviews has also directly impacted on the strategic work of the MSCP and its training programme. During 22-23, the MSCP continued to implement its contextual safeguarding strategy and action plan, as highlighted in the below [contextual safeguarding section](#) to respond to issues raised in the Jason and Eddie reviews, as well as two rapid reviews during the current year.

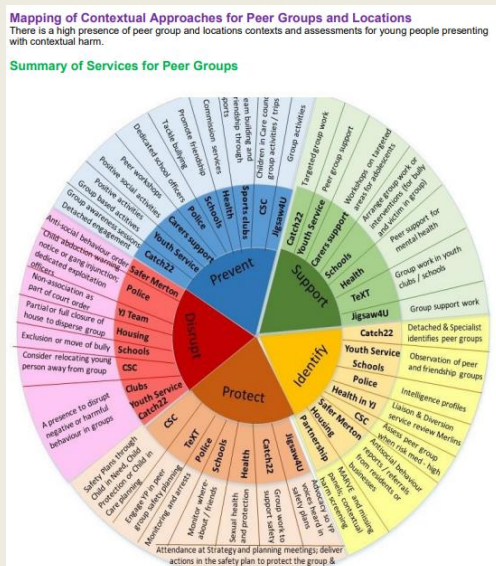


Image from MSCP contextual safeguarding strategy

The actions from the 2022-23 rapid reviews are being overseen by the Quality Assurance & Practice Review subgroup. In addition, due to contextual safeguarding and criminal exploitation themes, the Strategic MACE panel has embedded actions from one rapid review into their own workplan.

Local reviews continue to highlight the importance of trauma-informed practice (e.g., Franklyn), although positively there was evidence of good practice around this seen alongside areas for improvement. Multiple agencies have an internal offer around trauma-informed practice, however the MSCP has agreed to include a trauma-informed practice course as part of the core MSCP training programme to enhance consistency. The 2022-23 Joint Conference with MSAB included a keynote speech on trauma-informed practice.

Learning from Child O rapid review has been shared with Children Missing Education panel membership to ensure it is considered within panel decisions and actions, and secondary behaviour leads. There will also be a move towards strengthened attendance tracking based on DfE requirements during 2023-24.

In response to 2022-23 reviews, the Section 11 audit for 2023-24 will be amended to provide assurance from agencies around:

- Trauma-informed practice (Franklyn)
- Safeguarding First approach (Child O, Child M)
- Equality, diversity & inclusion policies (Franklyn, Child O)
- Think Family approach (Franklyn, Child M, alongside various Safeguarding Adults Reviews and LCSPRs from previous years)

The MSCP also delivered training to embed learning from reviews from previous years, for example:

- Baby Grace: the MSCP has commissioned and launched the ICON programme across the partnership, which shares important messages with new and expectant parents about coping with crying. More details are highlighted in the [Early Help & Neglect section](#). The MSCP also commissioned Inner Strength Network (ISN) to deliver multi-agency training on Having Difficult Conversations.
- Jason: No Recourse to Public Funds training was commissioned and delivered.

Learning from national reviews

There continued to be **considerable learning for safeguarding partnerships nationally**, following the 2022 publication of the Child Protection in England report on the tragic deaths of Arthur and Star. Work continued into 2022-23 including the **launch of two refreshed MSCP documents**: Bruising in Non Independently Mobile Infants and Children policy and Pre-Birth Protocol and Assessment Tool.

In March 2022, the concerning case of Child Q in Hackney reminded us of the **ongoing concerns around the adultification of Black children** and the **importance of professional challenge** across partnerships. The MSCP chose this **theme for the 2022-23 scrutiny** topic led by Independent and Young Scrutineers, alongside **commissioning training from Listen Up**, delivered in part during 2022-23. The training was commissioned jointly with Wandsworth and Croydon safeguarding children partnerships. Plans for 2023-24 include developing a local training course that can be delivered across the three partnerships routinely.

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Independent scrutiny 2022-23 – quotes from children



Merton has contributed towards and considered the recommendations of the **national review into safeguarding children with disabilities in residential settings**⁷. In Merton, the Phase 1 audit of two children that met criteria was completed by children's social care with oversight from MSCP Executive.

The review highlighted **good relationship-based practice** with the young people. All the professionals working with the young people knew them very well and had developed significant and meaningful relationships. No significant concerns were raised through this review however there were areas identified to strengthen practice as a multi-agency partnership, including **strengthening transitions pathways** between children's services and adults and **developing monitoring of children's placements**. Learning was shared with the QAPR subgroup with areas for improvement picked up by relevant services. A focus on **implementing the national recommendations from Phase 2** will be a key priority in 2023-24.

The relevant MSCP subgroups also considered learning from the national panel reports published on the **management of bruising in non-mobile infants** and **multi-agency safeguarding and domestic abuse**, including incorporating findings into relevant policies under review.

The national panel published their annual report detailing themes from LCSPRs alongside rapid review examples, which were reviewed by the QAPR Subgroup and the Full Partnership. The themes outlined in the report were considered during development of the refreshed MSCP business for 2023-25, to ensure that the MSCP was **focusing appropriately on nationally important themes alongside local priorities**.

⁷ [Safeguarding children with disabilities in residential settings - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/safeguarding-children-with-disabilities-in-residential-settings)

Child Death Overview Panel (Summary of Caseload 2022-23)

The Merton Safeguarding Children Partnership works alongside the Child Death Overview Panel, which **reviews all child deaths in Merton**. A full report of activity of the Child Death Overview Panel can be found in the CDOP annual report. The Child Death Review process is a systematic process whereby the circumstances surrounding the death of a child under the age of 18 are reviewed and analysed to identify any actual or potential opportunities for prevention and improvement in health and other agencies to prevent similar deaths in the future.

The panel commenced reporting on feedback activity with the SW London Patient Safety Surveillance group in 2022-23 based on shared learning from SW London Child Death Overview Panel reviews as part of the CDOP's contribution to the organizational response to child deaths in the integrated care system (ICS).

As part of the upcoming National Patient Safety Strategy, the purpose is to provide professionals with a resource of learning and recommendations from child death reviews. Child death reviews can **contribute to collaborative learning**, for better health, public health, social care, and safety provision during the reporting year to reduce child deaths.

The report covers statistical information from the 6 South West London boroughs of Merton, Sutton, Kingston and Richmond upon Thames, Croydon, and Wandsworth. As of 1st April 2023, there were 64 new notifications of child death and 97 open cases. **Child death notifications have returned to pre-COVID-19 levels** of child deaths per annum. In 2021-22 there was a reduction of 16 deaths which was attributed to the social distancing and public health measures implemented by the regulations of the response to the COVID-19 Pandemic. For the 2022-23 reporting year:

- **Fifty-four (54) Child death reviews** were completed.

- There were fifty-four local Child Death Review Meetings completed at SW London Hospitals, three at other tertiary level hospitals outside the local area, and eight Child Death Overview Panel Meetings under the new working arrangements for Child Death Reviews.
- In 2022-23, **81%** of child deaths had no modifiable concerns which was more than the previous year at **78%** of child deaths in SW London.
- For unexpected deaths notified across SW London during the 2022-23 reporting year, **twenty-six** Joint Agency Response (JAR) meetings were initiated.
- **48%** of child death reviews were completed in six months, with **52%** completed up to 12 months from notification. As a result of delays in obtaining post-mortem reports and coroners' inquests, **20%** were over one year old at the time of review.

Local Authority Designated Officer service (2022-23 overview)

The Merton Safeguarding Children Partnership works alongside the LADO service. The service **manages concerns and allegations against professionals and volunteers working with children** in Merton. A full report of activity of the LADO can be found in the LADO annual report. The LADO post within Merton is a permanent role covered by one full-time LADO. Since February 2023, the LADO service expanded to include a part time LADO who covers 1.5 days per week.

- This **additional capacity** has enhanced the ability of the service to manage the increase in contact with the service which has risen by **33%**, from 271 contacts in 2021-22 to 360 in 2022-23.
- Early years and education settings have the most contact with the service, accounting for **55%** of all contacts.
- Concerns about physical harm continue to be the primary reason for contacting the LADO with **35%** of all contacts

relating to concerns about physical harm. This is a slight increase from last year's figure of **30%**.

- Children with additional needs are referred in high numbers (**56%**). This is a broad category and includes pre-school children, children with special educational needs and/ or disabilities, children looked after by the local authority and children subject to child protection and child in need plans.

Most consultations do not progress to allegations meetings which suggests that **advice is being sought around issues that could be dealt with as complaints or practice issues with LADO oversight**, rather than allegations against individual staff members.

The **establishment of a regular training programme** and work to **enhance the profile** of the role within Merton are contributing factors to the increase in contacts over the last year. The LADO continues to provide training via the MSCP, reaching 32 multi-agency delegates during 2022/23, and has **delivered bespoke training** to local settings. Awareness raising of the role and training remained a key priority for 2022/23.

The LADO has worked with the MSCP and another local authority to **produce a set of leaflets** aimed at schools, parents/ carers and after school provision. The leaflets are aimed at **keeping children safe in after school activities** and are being circulated across the borough (see [Safer After School campaign](#) on MSCP website).



The LADO continues to **liaise with regulatory bodies** and to **make referrals** when there are concerns about potential risk of harm and the suitability of that individual within the children's workforce.

The LADO service has **sought feedback** from a range of settings. The feedback has been positive however the responses have come mainly from the education sector. We need to ensure that our next evaluation includes more views from our colleagues in the wider statutory and voluntary sector. Some comments from referring agencies have been provided below.

What do you think we do that is good?

- "Being very quick to respond to concerns and to offer guidance and support every step of the way".
- "The outcome and advice was comprehensive and I was able to share with all parties easily".
- "LADO is easily accessible; happy to discuss concerns and offer advice"
- "Easy service to access, quick to respond and very knowledgeable" (Education setting). (Placement)

What do you think we could do better?

- "Perhaps offer more frequent training to community groups"?
- "Training/CPD sessions have been valuable; please can we have more of these please".
- "Timelines when outside agencies are involved such as police- this can be problematic".
- "Perhaps updates on ongoing situations although this was fairly good".

Learning from audit

During 22-23, the MSCP continued to establish the multi-agency audit programme aligned with its commitment to continuous improvement, and to ensure the MSCP meets expectations set out in Working Together 2018 to learn from multi-agency audits.

Section 11

The MSCP undertakes bi-annual Section 11 audits, in line with the Working Together guidance, to help organisations in Merton undertake their own quality assurance processes to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. More information on the previous 21-22 audit can be found in our Section 11 learning summary.

To ensure actions had been progressed and learning was being implemented effectively from the 21-22 audit, the MSCP held a **“One-Year-On” Peer Review session** in January 2023.

The 16 organisations who submitted an audit response were invited and this was chaired by our Independent Scrutineer and Young Scrutineer. Examples of progress included:

- To strengthen voice of the child strategically, Young Scrutineer attended the 5 sub-groups and the Full Partnership to explore this and share findings of the Young Residents Survey. Participation and the child's voice is further embedded into 2023-25 business plan with each subgroup required to agree activity for their workplans around this.
- Regular promotion of the Escalation Policy and several sessions held on having 'difficult conversations' to support with healthy professional challenge.
- Commissioned wider training opportunities on mental health and wellbeing, in particular self-harm and suicide, Kooth mental health resources.

- Scrutineers contributed to review of MSCP Learning and Development strategy.
- Child-friendly version of St George's Mental Health Trust safeguarding policy developed, and a section written by young people.

Multi-agency audits

During 2021-22, the MSCP developed a modest audit programme, with a rotating chair to share ownership across partners, and overseen by the QA sub-group. All audit briefings are published on our website to support dissemination of learning.

During 22-23, the MSCP led a **multi-agency audit on contextual safeguarding**, which concluded:

What is working well?

- Good inter-agency communication and information sharing.
- Voice of the child – routinely captured alongside voice of their family, even where engagement had been difficult to achieve.
- Evidence of work to build positive relationships.

Themes for improvement

- Information and decisions could have been shared more quickly after key meetings and across agency boundaries
- Although services championed the use of trusted adults, further support could be offered to help with building of strong, positive relationships between young people and professionals supporting them.

The **findings were shared widely**, including at the MSCP Full Partnership, relevant subgroups and the Strategic MACE panel.

Actions that have taken place as a result include:

- MSCP training programme reviewed by Policy & Training subgroup to ensure professional curiosity is picked as key theme across relevant courses.
- Development of relationship-based practice training for multi-agency audience, to build up knowledge of children's social care practice within the partnership (to launch in 2023-24)
- 2023-24 audit theme will focus on national review into murders of Arthur Labinjo-Hughes and Star Hobson to further review core multi-agency safeguarding practice.
- Plans for a multi-agency roundtable to consider and propose approaches to improve information sharing following key meetings.

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Cross-boundary working is key theme within 2023-24 LCSPR for Child M with engagement from Sutton and Croydon where further learning will be explored on this.

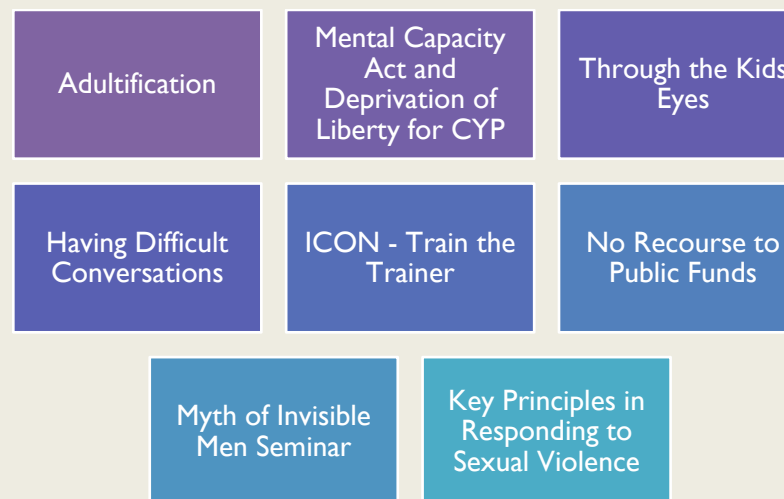
The recommendations from the audit are being overseen by the QAPR sub-group, and relevant actions have been added to the workplan for the PPYP subgroup which focuses on contextual safeguarding.

Learning and Development

Training Programme 2022-23

The MSCP training programme is overseen by the quarterly Policy and Training sub-group. The MSCP offered **63 sessions of 36 separate courses/events** in 22-23, **reaching 792 multi-agency delegates** through the year. Feedback indicated that the option to **access training remotely** enabled more partners to participate and therefore, the MSCP continued to deliver most courses virtually.

The training programme is mostly delivered in house, by a range of partners across the MSCP. Courses and training themes are derived from sub-group work plans and recommendations (via Policy & Training Sub-Group), as well as from learning from case reviews. The training programme for 22/23 included training modules on three of our thematic priorities (Domestic Abuse, Early Help via Effective Support for Families, and Contextual Safeguarding), as well as a range of core safeguarding training. It also included a wide range of courses to respond to ongoing or emerging concerns:

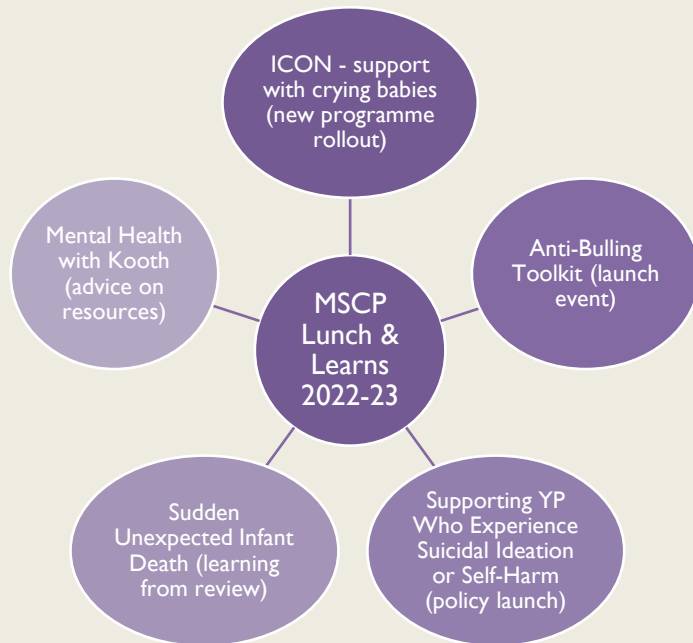


In the previous year, the MSCP introduced 'Lunch and Learns' to share bitesize learning from emerging themes from our learning reviews, which have continued to be successful in engaging higher numbers of delegates from a wider range of partners.

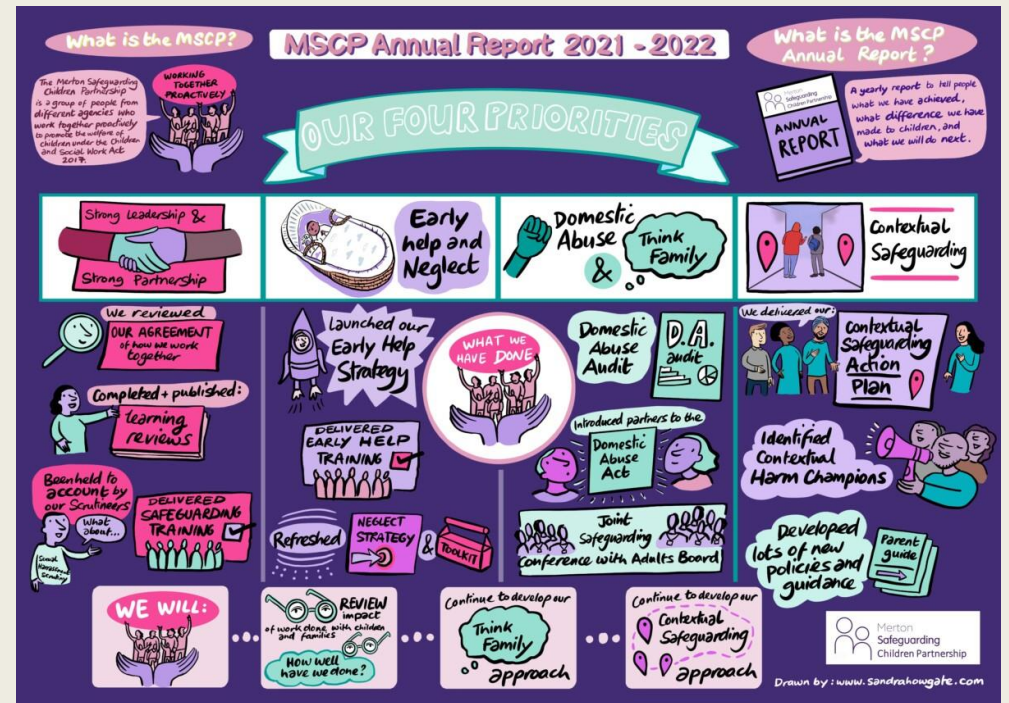
"I enjoy the lunch and learn sessions, they provide essential information and allow for multi-agency discussions."

This year we expanded this to pick up other key pieces of partnership activity, such as the launch of new guidance and toolkits, as highlighted in the diagram below:

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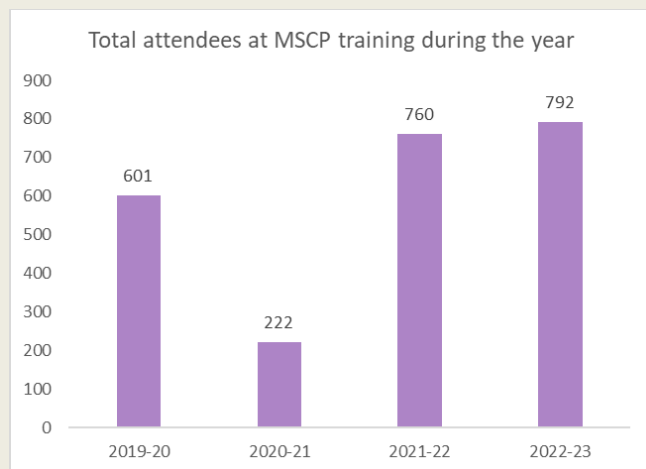
To support with **sharing learning and partnership updates with professionals and children, young people and families**, the Policy & Training subgroup approved funding of **visual summaries** of the 2021-22 annual report (see below) and the sexual violence in schools & colleges scrutiny (see [Scrutiny section](#)). These were positively received and it has been agreed to develop similar visual summaries in future.



Impact of our Training Programme

During the 2022/23 period, the MSCP offered 63 occurrences of 36 separate courses/events. We offered a total of 1,726 training places; we had 1,125 bookings and **792 attended**, an attendance rate of **70% of total bookings**. This has dropped slightly compared to last year's attendance rate of 74%. However, as the chart below

shows, there has been a small increase in total numbers since last year and has **continued to be above pre-pandemic training attendance.**



The services with the highest number of attendees at MSCP training events during 2022/23 were London Borough of Merton Children Schools and Families (Children's Social Care and Youth Inclusion), Education (Schools, Colleges & Nurseries), Central London Community Healthcare Trust, South West London St. George's Mental Health Trust (SWL STG MHT). Compared with last year, **attendance by SWL STG MHT has improved significantly. Attendance by Police colleagues has also improved**, increasing from 1 registered attendee last year, to 10 during 22-23. We are continuing to prioritise increasing this further. The Policy and Training sub-group monitors attendance at training by agencies regularly and follows up with agencies where take up is lower.

Evaluation

Improving the rate of return for evaluation forms was a priority during 2022-23. To date, **103 evaluation forms were returned** via the Learning Management System. This is a **significant improvement** from

last year (56 forms returned). The MSCP provides summaries of evaluation feedback to trainers, to **inform the development of the training programme.** It continues to be a priority to increase the evaluation response rate.

Feedback forms are distributed to participants via the Phew online platform. This year, feedback from participants resulted in the following average scores:

- How relevant to your current role do you think this topic is? (1, 'not at all', to 4, 'extremely') – **3.49 average, out of 4**



- The training facilitator's skills were... (from 1, 'poor' to 4, 'excellent') - **3.70 average**

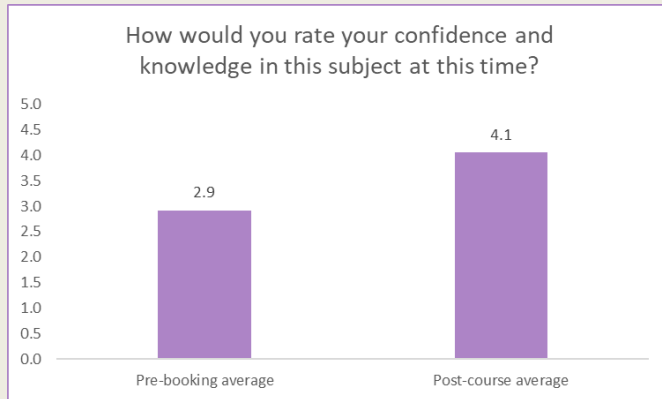


- Rate to what extent you agree that Equal Opportunities and Anti-Discriminatory practice were integrated (from 1, 'not at all', to 4, 'extremely') - **3.44 average, out of 4**



Although the average ratings were similar, there was a slightly lower score given for anti-discriminatory practice and equal opportunities (3.44). This is **fed back to trainers** to ensure they are sufficiently incorporating this in design of their course.

We also use pre-event and post-event forms. By asking the same questions before and after training, the MSCP assesses improvement in attendee knowledge and confidence. The two "**learning gain**" questions are assessed on a scale of 1 (low) to 5 (high):



The above chart highlights an **average “learning gain” increase** of 1.2, almost double last year’s increase of 0.66. This reflects an improvement in attendee confidence and knowledge.

Quotes from our training courses are shared throughout the report, including **highlighting the positive impact attendees felt the training will have on their practice with children and families.**

The **theme and content of the MSCP training programme and the sub-group workplans** is informed by multi-agency data and its analysis alongside the quality of multi-agency practice from audits and learning reviews. Each of the sub-groups conduct performance monitoring as standing items on their agenda to ensure that trends and themes identified are better developed, understood and responded to. Where training gaps are identified, the Business Support Unit works with the Policy and Training sub-group to source suitable courses.

MSCP-MSAB conference

The annual joint conference was **attended by over 160 multi-agency delegates**. It provided an opportunity to share practice between children and adults’ practitioners, particularly focused on **domestic abuse safeguarding (children and adults), trauma-informed practice**.

Two young people bravely **shared their lived experience**, after involvement in a Safeguarding Adult Review following their mother’s death, with powerful messages for all partners in attendance. Some of the feedback from delegates about the event and how it would support their practice can be found in the [MSAB](#) and the [Domestic Abuse & Think Family](#) sections.

Communicating with the Partnership

Alongside training and events, the MSCP continued to share learning and relevant updates with the wider Partnership during 22-23 through various routes. This has included:

- maintaining the MSCP website to ensure content for professionals is up to date, accurate and reflects best practice, including addition of new pages such as [ICON / Abusive Head Trauma](#) in response to local reviews
- A bi-monthly news bulletin to help share local, regional and national safeguarding news and best practice with partners, alongside promotion of the MSCP training programme.
- A mailing list to share relevant updates more quickly and encourage sign-ups to training programme where spaces remain available.

Partners have fed back that they find these methods helpful, particularly for keeping up to date with the MSCP’s training offer and to understand learning from learning reviews and audits.

Early Help and Neglect

One of the MSCP's priorities for 2022-23 was Early Help and Neglect. A dedicated sub-group, comprising a range of partnership agencies progressed actions to improve our early help offer and response to neglect.

What have we achieved this year?

After **launching our Early Help Strategy and Effective Support for Families Model** in 2021, focus continued on delivery and ensuring the new model was effectively embedded. Following a major focus on training and wider communications in 2021-22, we agreed a **core offer of quarterly training sessions** available to the multi-agency workforce.

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During 2022/23, a multi-agency task & finish group led the **rollout of the [ICON programme](#)**, chaired by the Designated Nurse for Safeguarding Children (SWL ICB), in response to Baby Grace LCSPR. ICON is a public health programme designed to help those caring for babies to cope with crying and reduce Abusive Head Trauma in infants. Development of materials, training and awareness raising took place in advance of and during the launch in December 2022, involving key agencies such as midwifery and health visiting alongside wider partners such as Children's Centres. Voluntary organisations, faith groups and Community Champions.

22

During 2022-23, the Insights to Intervention Project continued to be overseen by the Early Help & Neglect subgroup. Funding was secured from the Supporting Families programme towards **improving business intelligence and data maturity, to help build a more detailed picture of Merton's residents, better understand their needs and indicators of risk and vulnerability**. The project aims to support services to more easily identify emerging trends to support delivery of early help to improve outcomes for children and families and prevent escalation of risk and high-cost statutory interventions. From 2023-2024, the next phase will focus on developing data lake further and integrating a range of data sets including anti-social behaviour, children missing education and substance misuse data.

Activity to **increase school attendance** has been monitored closely by the Early Help & Neglect subgroup. An example of the work in the last school year was the **development of an excellent tool to support schools** to make sure that children with mental health issues affecting their attendance can receive help. A borough-wide plan is in place to improve attendance and a new national strategy will be discussed with the DfE at a challenge/support meeting in autumn 2023.

Merton Council was successful in **securing funding through national DfE Family Hub Transformation (TF1)** from November 2022 until March 2024. A Family Hub is a system-wide model of providing high-quality, whole-family, joined up family support services. Planning began quickly for Merton delivery against the three main requirements: More Accessible, Better Connected and



Relationships-Centered. This work will be overseen by the Prevention & Early Intervention Subgroup during 2023-24, alongside other key partnership forums in the early help space.

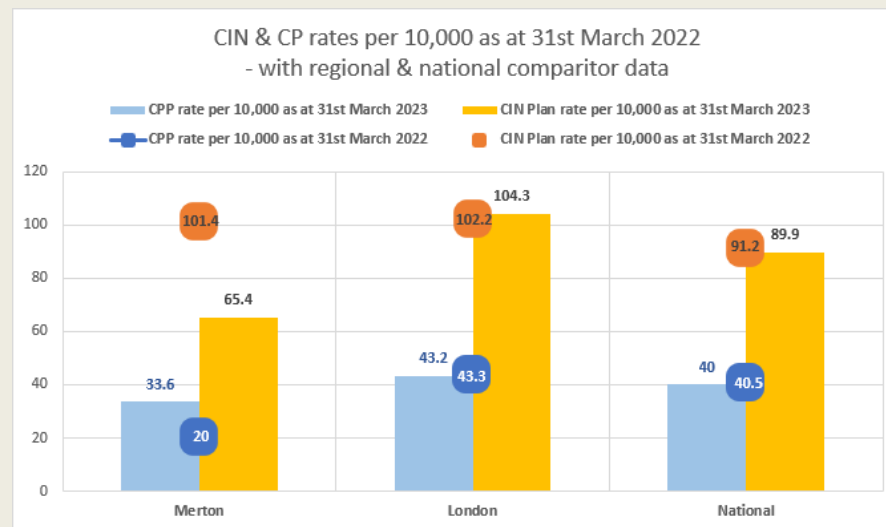
The MSCP commissioned a course on “**Introduction to support options for people with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF)**”, following our local child safeguarding practice review for Jason, which took place in February 2023. Attendance was targeted to leads across the multi-agency partnership to ensure messages could be disseminated back to relevant workforces. This included anti-social behaviour service and voluntary/community sector representatives.

LBM’s Head of Housing Strategy reported to the June 2022 Full Partnership meeting regarding **legislation around housing in the borough**. The housing presentation was shared with all partners and published online to continue to raise awareness. Housing and Children’s Services colleagues have provided assurances through ongoing joint working as presented in the above. Further training sessions for single agencies are being delivered on request by Housing following their offer to the partnership. Housing were also part of the targeted attendance at our No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) training commissioned noted above.

The **MSCP’s Neglect Strategy and toolkit** supports partners to identify and recognise neglect of children and young people. After launching in February 2022, the focus during 2022-23 was to raise awareness across the partnership and ensure the toolkit was being used effectively. Following exploration of internal offer with an external trainer, the MSCP has agreed to fund development of a Neglect training course during 2023-24.

What difference have we made?

During 2022-23, there was a **reduction in the rate of children with a child in need (CIN) plan** in Merton per 10,000 children alongside an **increase in the rate of children subject to child protection plans (CPP)**. For both indicators, Merton rates remained below London and national averages. Thresholds are scrutinised closely by the multi-agency partnership to ensure that they are being applied appropriately throughout the child’s journey.



Re-referrals to children’s social care were also monitored by the group which were 18.3% during 2022, in line with London average (18%) and remaining below national (21.5%).

Family Wellbeing Service (**targeted early help**) case audits findings were reported into the subgroup, with an overview of

actions in response to areas for improvement. The audit highlighted:

What's working well?

- Evidence of service users voice, wishes and feelings
- Family plans are clear and concise
- Timeliness at all points of the case work
- Consent across the multi agency network to gather and share information
- Initial contacts agree taking place in timescales (within 5 days of allocation)
- Provides context for data/performance

Areas for improvement

- Consistency around the audit process i.e 2 per month per managers
- Supervision frequency (varies across different managers)
- Closure summaries

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The Insights to Interventions project has helped **deliver SEND inclusion profiles**, which will be rolled out to schools in Merton during 2023-24 academic year.

In December 2022, we **rolled out ICON** across Merton with the support of over eight key partners, including Public Health, Police, Children's Social care, Voluntary Sector, Community Health services including Health Visitors, General Practitioners, CAMHS, Drug and Alcohol Services, Epsom & St Helier and St George's Maternity and Acute services, Merton Safeguarding Adults Board, Merton Libraries. We ran **two MSCP "Launch & Learn" events**, attended by 31 multi-agency partners, and delivered bespoke sessions for providers including Children's Centres (now Family Hubs). We **provided materials, including**

leaflets and posters, for partner agencies to display in their workspaces and use with expectant and new parents/carers. As a result of this training and awareness raising:

- **Over 200 professionals trained** in ICON to deliver the messages to new and expectant parents, including "Train the Trainers".
- **ICON message embedded** into Baby Early Learning Together 0-6 months and baby Massage course run by all children's centres (now family hubs).

School attendance in Merton is better than national and outer London comparators in Primary, Secondary and the Pupil Referral Unit. Attendance in our special schools is below national and outer London. However, attendance is 2-3% below pre pandemic levels of attendance and Persistent Absence (those below 90%) is double the level it was in 2019 (similar nationally). Therefore, **improving school attendance** remains a key focus for the partnership.

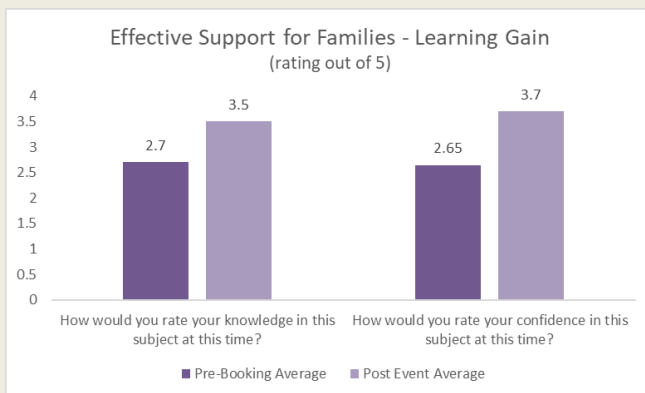
Highlights from the annual Children Missing Education (CME) report for 2022-23 include:

- There was a **significant fall in the number children in care who were vulnerable to CME**; a percentage drop of 2%.
- There were **no young people who had offended off roll** in the year and only 5 who were vulnerable to CME. This is the lowest this figure has been which is a significant achievement.
- **Ongoing rise in children with ECHPs identified as off roll** pending placement to 31 (from 16 in 2017-18), caused by a lack of specialist placements (locally & nationally).
- However, we have seen a fall in the number of children with EHCPs on roll who became vulnerable to CME from

80 in 2018-19 to 52 in 2019-20, whilst still a high number this a significant fall.

The **Children Missing Education (CME) Dashboard** compares performance to the previous year, which highlighted more children are now off roll and on roll but not attending school. This is in line with national data. However, work by the CME panel and partnership in Merton has led to improvements in the time taken to get children back into school - more children with “complex” cases are back in school within 140 days; this was previously 185 days.

We delivered 4 “**Effective Support for Families**” sessions to the Partnership, to 29 attendees from a wide range of partners. This reduction in numbers attending was expected, following 9 sessions with over 100 attendees in 2021-22 for the launch year. This continues to be monitored to ensure we are reaching the correct partners and delivering an appropriate number of courses through the year. Feedback from the course continued to be positive and encouraging, as highlighted below:



“I feel a lot more confident in my ability to signpost families and in my ability to assist families since the training.”

What will we do next?

Under the refreshed business plan, the Early Help priority will be overseen by the Prevention & Early Intervention Subgroup, and Neglect priority will be overseen by the Effective Safeguarding & Support Subgroup.

Priorities for 2023-24 will be:

- To continue to promote the Effective Support for Families Model and review alignment with pan-London threshold matrix.
- Refreshing and launching the new Early Help Strategy and corresponding multi-agency performance framework, aligned with Supporting Families Outcomes framework
- Strengthening promotion of the Neglect toolkit, including through adding a neglect course to our core MSCP training offer
- Continue to develop our multi-agency early help approach further, using resource secured through grant funding, e.g. Supporting Families, Reducing Parental Conflict and delivery of Family Hubs.
- Continue to develop our Data Maturity work through the Insights to Intervention Project.
- Continue to work with partners to improve school attendance, including implementing systems to achieve new government requirements.
- Continue to promote the ICON programme across Merton's safeguarding system and evaluate impact of first year.

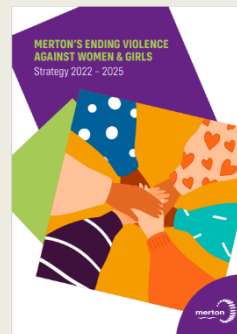
Domestic Abuse & Think Family

The MSCP's Domestic Abuse and Think Family sub-group has oversight of work on domestic abuse from across the Partnership. This includes regular reporting from representatives from the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) and Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Boards. Merton's multi-agency MARAC panel coordinates the partnership's response to the most complex/high risk domestic abuse cases using a range of statutory and non-statutory agencies.

What have we achieved this year?

The subgroup has continued to oversee:

- Communications around domestic abuse pathways and support services. Including **routine sharing of information from the VAWG & MARAC Lead with the partnership** via the mailing list and bi-monthly news bulletin.
- Driving **forward of actions from the MSCP's 'Baby Grace' LCSPR**, which featured learning on identifying and addressing risk of domestic abuse and promotion of Clare's Law.
- **Drafting of Think Family guidance** for raising awareness of the principles and how to apply to practice across the partnership. This will be finalised and shared in 2023-24.
- **Dedicated multi-agency performance dashboard** to monitor outcomes on a quarterly basis, including MARAC data.
- **Well-established Domestic Abuse multi-agency training**
- **New course** added to the core MSCP training programme: **Evidence Based Interventions to support Parents experiencing conflict in their relationships'** and delivered by Early Help Development Manager. This was offered three times during 2022-23.



In December 2022, Merton launched its [new strategy for 2022-25](#) to help **prevent all forms of violence against women and girls (VAWG) and domestic abuse** in the borough. The partnership strategy brings in departments across the council as well as external partners such as the police. The strategy is formed of five key priorities as highlighted below and was informed by various pieces of work across the partnership, including the MSCP's sexual violence in schools and colleges scrutiny. Objective 5 has been a major focus following the murder of women such as Sarah Everard, Nicole Smallman and Bibaa Henry and Sabina Nessa in 2021, and a specific Women and Girls task group has been set up in the borough to look at this issue.

Merton Council **achieved White Ribbon accredited status** in November 2022, demonstrating the commitment in the borough to ending violence against women and girls by men and boys. As part of this, Bystander Training has been offered to partners and residents which is promoted by the MSCP. **Campaigns** have been led by Safer Merton **raising awareness** of Domestic Violence and Abuse and VAWG among our partners and the community – for example the 16 Days Against Domestic Violence and Abuse Campaign in November and December 2022 – which the MSCP has helped promote to children's safeguarding partners.



A **successful bid** was submitted to the Home Office for the **Perpetrator Programme**. This will involve 7-boroughs and each borough will have an attached Perpetrator Intervention Worker and IDVA. The IDVA will focus on the partner and children to ensure their

voice is heard. Perpetrator Intervention Workers will also work with the victims to ensure no escalation occurs in the home.

The DA Act Officer has compiled a **directory for child victims**, available on various websites. Training with MARACs took place around Clare's Law, and there are aims as part of the Police project to offer this across the partnership during 2023-24 via the MSCP.

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 brought in some significant changes including a statutory definition of domestic abuse for the first time and explicit recognition of children as victims of domestic abuse. The MSCP has continued to work with Safer Merton to **raise awareness of the changes and implications for practice**, including a directory of services for children as victims and highlighted during training that children are victims in their own right.

The sub-group also identified **child and adolescent to parent violence and abuse** as a key area of focus through regular discussions on our performance data. This prompted partners to bid for funding from MOPAC Violence Reduction Unit to support families in the latter where CAPVA is present. In 23-24, we found out our bid was successful and will be taking this work forward in the coming year.

What difference have we made?

In 2022/2023 the MARAC discussed **592** high risk and complex cases involving domestic abuse, **564** children were identified as part of these discussions. There has been a **continued increase in the number of cases discussed at MARAC** since 2020 and during the pandemic we saw a 90% increase in cases being discussed. The rise in repeat cases being seen by MARAC across the three reporting years has also continued and we believe this was due to the pandemic where more domestic abuse was reported but also professionals and agencies have better identified repeat victims and survivors and referred them back to MARAC.

Figure 1: An overview of MARAC cases 2019/20 – 2022/23

Year	Number of Cases Discussed	Number of Repeat cases	% repeat cases	Number of children in the household
2020-21	576	234	41%	557
2021-22	636	301	47%	639
2022-23	592	259	44%	564

Independent Domestic Violence Advocates [IDVAs]

The work of Merton's IDVAs continued throughout 2022/23. Having **introduced a case worker within the Children and Families Hub** (previously MASH - Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub) the three IDVAs in the community and Complex Needs IDVA have seen an increase in case referrals. This arrangement remains under review and reports regularly to the Domestic Abuse and Think Family sub-group.

The IDVAs role includes sourcing safe/emergency accommodation, referrals to Safeguarding and/or MARAC, accompanying service users to court, information provision around criminal justice system, signposting for legal advice including clients with no recourse to public funds, and emotional support. It is recognised that the **IDVA role plays a pivotal role in supporting and managing domestic violence issues**.

The **One Stop Shop confidential weekly drop-in service** for people experiencing domestic abuse has been re-opened since November 2021, after operating on a virtual basis during the pandemic. Numbers accessing have continued to rise.

The **IDVA service** received **626** referrals between April 2022 and March 2023 (compared to 769 the previous year), of which **256** were high risk. **54** of the total referrals came from Social Care services. In addition, the MASH DVA Caseworker (who took up post in June 2022):

Referrals during April 2022 to March 2023

Intensive support

The MASH DVA Caseworker provided 21 clients with 6 or more significant contacts e.g., appointments, joint appointments, telephone-based RIC and ISSP completion.

Medium support

The MASH DVA Caseworker provided 27 clients with 2-5 significant contacts. Single contact and advice provision was provided to 14 clients by the MASH DVA Caseworker.

Domestic Abuse Disclosure Scheme – Clare’s Law

Clare’s Law is a Police policy giving people the right to know if their current or ex-partner has history of violence or abuse. The aim is to help people to make a more informed decision on whether to continue a relationship and provide support when making that choice, or after separation. Learning from Merton’s Baby Grace review suggested that Merton would benefit from **increased promotion of Clare’s Law locally**. As a result, the MSCP has **delivered awareness raising activity**, promoting the law in our news bulletin as well as raising awareness of local training coordinated by the Police.

59 Clare’s Law requests have been made in Merton and of those **23** disclosures were carried out, the remaining numbers were either no DA history, disengaged or not authorised.

Operation Encompass

Following successful implementation at many schools in Merton, **Operation Encompass continues to inform school settings of incidents of domestic abuse involving children on roll**. This makes sure that Designated Safeguarding Leads and key staff are aware of this context when supporting and working with their children. However, a **recent DHR has highlighted that Op Encompass should be reviewed,**

to provide assurance that all schools are using the secure system to see notifications. This will be a priority during 2023-24.

Training

During 2022-23, the MSCP Training programme **delivered four Domestic Violence and Abuse training courses**, attended by 45 participants. This is an improvement compared to the previous year, with double the number of sessions, a jump in attendance from 14 attendees. Feedback from attendees was very positive, with all delegates saying they would recommend the course to a colleague.

“[The training] made me look at interactions and behaviour I have witnessed in my past from a different viewpoint and I hope that it will enable me to be more proactive should those situations reoccur.”

“The course was up to date with its information and included how technology can be used to track people, the difficulties that people face in leaving, and where people, both clients and professionals can access help.”

During 2022-23, the MSCP **delivered three Evidence Based Interventions to support Parents experiencing conflict in their relationships courses**, attended by 34 multi-agency participants. Positive feedback has been received within post-course evaluations and therefore the training will be continued in 2023-24.

“I can tell the different therapists in my service about this course which they could then communicate with health visitors / school nurses.”

The subgroup's **awareness raising around Think Family** helped lead to the joint conference focus alongside the proposal for a new Think Family & Transitional Safeguarding subgroup joint between the MSCP and Merton Safeguarding Adults Board.

Members of the sub-group **supported the planning of the Joint Conference**. The Merton Lead for DA/VAWG and a Senior IDVA **led a session on Understanding Childhood Experiences**. They provided an overview of key indicators of domestic abuse, the importance of professional curiosity and used a case study to help attendees explore “How does understanding Childhood Trauma or experiences help us better understand and support the person in front of us?”

- **91%** of attendees found this Extremely or Somewhat Useful (remaining **9%** chose Neutral).
- Attendees were also asked the below question in the, and many noted Think Family as a key take-away:

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“What difference do you think attending this event will make to your work with children, young people and their families?”

“Attending will help me be more professionally curious, listen to the voice of the child more, and think family and more systemically.”

“Encouraged re continuing to be holistic and to always consider family members with vulnerable adults.”

“Highlights the impact on the whole family and need to consider whole family needs .”

What will we do next?

Under the refreshed business plan, the Domestic Abuse Neglect priorities will be overseen by the Effective Safeguarding & Support Subgroup. Think Family will be a cross-cutting theme that all subgroups will be expected to deliver activities around, and the joint Think Family & Transitional Safeguarding subgroup with MSAB will provide further oversight.

In 2023-24, the Effective Safeguarding & Support sub-group will:

- Work with 6 boroughs to successfully implement Perpetrator Programme (led by Lambeth).
- Deliver multi-agency Clare’s Law training (led by Police).
- Implementation of grant funding for Child/Adolescent to Parent Violence and Abuse (CAPVA), including recruitment to new posts.
- Work to better capture the voice of the child and family on their experience of domestic abuse support and services in Merton.
- Support Safer Merton with White Ribbon, implementation of the new Merton Violence Against Women & Girls Strategy, including review of Operation Encompass and re-commissioning of Independent Domestic Violence Advisor (IDVA) service for July 2024 onwards.
- Continue raising awareness and knowledge around local thresholds and referrals pathways for domestic abuse and implications of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021.

Contextual Safeguarding

The Promote and Protect Young People (PPYP) sub-group has led on the Partnership's approach to contextual safeguarding, to facilitate effective understanding and response to young people's experiences of significant harm beyond their families.

What have we achieved this year?

Following the launch of the multi-agency Contextual Safeguarding Strategy in the previous year, work included:

- Delivery of **regular training** on contextual harm to safeguarding partners through 2022-23 reaching 67 multi-agency delegates, and our annual CSE awareness day.
- Continuing to **develop and promote online safety** work, through training and promotion of our policy and resources.
- Oversight of our Catch 22 Risk & Resilience Service, an integrated substance misuse, child exploitation and missing from home service, focused on **mitigating risk and promoting resilience** in young people in Merton.
- A **new protocol** regarding [Self-Harm and Suicidal Ideation](#) was developed and launched, with 2 training sessions held in October 2023 reaching 30 partners.

The subgroup also oversaw **publication of an Antibullying Best Practice Toolkit alongside Guidance for Schools**, with a launch event held in Q3. This incorporated best practice from national and local resources including case studies, alongside recommended tools and approaches.



The **MACE Panels in Merton** are based on the [Pan-London Child Exploitation Operating Protocol](#) and help to ensure swift identification of children at risk using screening tools. Plans are put together and cases reviewed by a panel of local subject matter experts (Pre-MACE) alongside supporting leaders locally to understand trends in the borough (Strategic MACE), which are regularly reported to the PPYP for oversight. Work includes:

- **Patterns of Exploitation & Early Intervention for younger children at early risk of exploitation:** the new contextual harm pathway explicitly recognises Early Help and Tier 1 and 2 aspects, and support can be sought from specialists for Tier 3 and 4 support in those early stages. This is clarified in the protocol pilot launch.
- **Pilot of joint Youth Integrated Offender Management/MACE panel** from September 2022 to ensure there is no duplication or gaps between the panels. Feedback was overwhelmingly positive and this will be permanently embedded for 2023-24.
- **Promotion of multi-agency trigger plans** ensuring joined up responses to our children at times of crisis.
- **Identification of key spaces and peer groups** that are risky and supporting multi-agency responses to improve those spaces and disrupt or engage risky groups.
- **Supporting Child Exploitation training** in schools, businesses, licensed premises & hotels (under MAKESAFE protocol) and for professionals all year and during National CE awareness week.

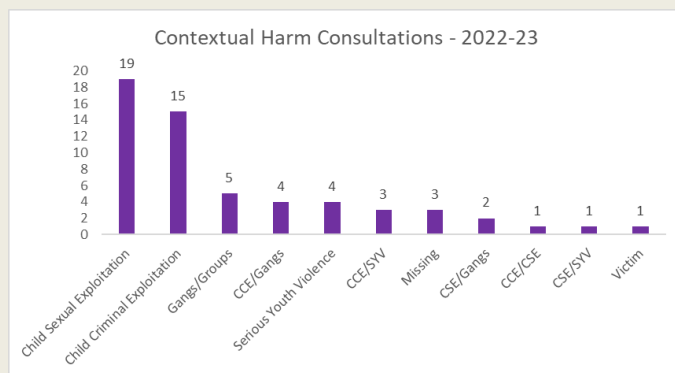
In early 2023, Merton's **multi-agency Missing Panel meeting** was reviewed to look at its effectiveness in assessing the risk for missing children. This included reviewing effective partnership working with key agencies. The panel moved from being online to key members attending in person and social workers giving feedback online. In addition to the Missing Panel itself, there is a **Pre-Missing meeting** agenda planning, where all missing episodes are reviewed and graded to ensure high risks are heard at panel.

The partnership continued to **respond to incidents and conflicts between groups and gangs in the borough and neighbouring boroughs**. This involved detailed individual safety planning with families, working in partnership with professionals across the network, including police, social workers, youth justice workers, youth workers, neighbouring boroughs, schools and colleges. Senior officers also met routinely, to agree joined-up communications plans for schools and the community and to ensure additional senior police representation at key strategic and operational meetings. This included weekly multi-agency meetings at points during the year, and **Police multi-strand activity focusing on all opportunities to disrupt, divert and safeguard**.

Merton's Youth Justice Service received the new **'Turnaround' grant** from the Ministry of Justice. The grant, which is offered to Youth Offending Teams across England and Wales, is available over three years, and has a **focus on early intervention and improving outcomes for children on the cusp of entering the youth justice system**. Work began in 2022-23 to implement the project and the grant requirements within Merton.

What difference have we made?

During 2022-23, **58 contextual harm consultations were completed** as per the pathway into the MACE panel (28 females and 30 males).

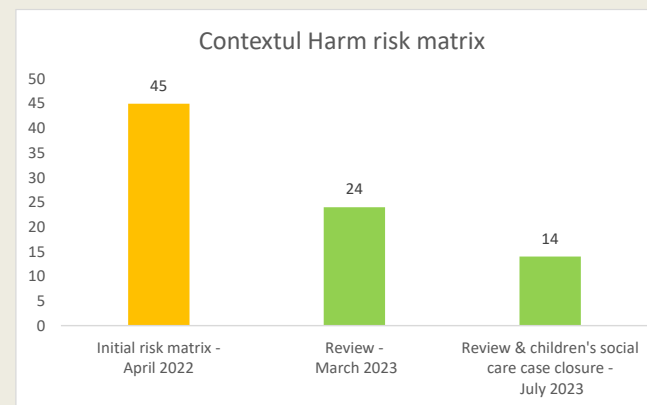


Case studies have **highlighted significant positive change** – for example, the young person highlighted below.

Case study

Reduction in risk for young male seen over persistent, partnership approach to support him and his family.

- Joined-up and relationships-based, trauma-informed support from partners including UTURN, Police Exploitation team, children's social care, Off the Record counselling, Redthread, youth justice service.
- Young person achieved employment, completion of youth justice order, accessed counselling and strengthened relationship with parents, who have also been engaged in safety planning and made progress in supporting and challenging him.



Score on CH Risk Matrix:

10-32 = Early Help (Emerging) – getting help/advice

33-64 = Targeted (Moderate) – getting more help

Catch's 22 [Risk & Resilience annual report 2022-2023](#) also highlights key achievement during the year **mitigating risk and promoting resilience in young people around substance misuse, child exploitation and missing from home**. Highlights include:

- **925** people reached. Of these: **174** were engaged in care planned interventions with SMART and achievable goals agreed, **95** successfully exited the service, and **76** remained engaged at year end.
- This year, the service achieved **97%** positive outcomes for the young people engaged in these interventions.
- **379** Return Home Interviews (RHIs) completed. **98%** offered within 24 hours of notification, and **82%** conducted within 72 hours where young person consented and was available. **55** missing from home “follow-on interventions” completed for young people where risk rating was red/amber.
- **96%** of young people under 18 (who completed treatment) had reduced their substance use and/or were drug free and met care plan goals at exit.

The **multi-agency MACE continued to enable partners to better understand practice and risk for young people**, identifying key themes and patterns including children and risk of being exploited, Locations, Cross-Border Working/Intel, Borough Intel, Missing young people, Group and Peer Mapping, and Best Practice. We have:

- Supported a dedicated multi-agency group working on identified group of young people at risk of exploitation and violence leading to multiple engagements, as well as arrests of linked adults.
- **Brought Clarion Housing into the MACE panel and engaging with their outreach work.** Through both Pre-MACE & Strategic MACE, with funding support from Clarion Housing (member of the MACE strategic panel), U-Turn (the council’s contextual harm team) were able to **offer a music project** in one of the hot spot areas.
- A **particular park in the borough was identified** as a key area of concerns for young people linked to robberies, violence and sexual offences. This generated a joint visit and inspection from the Contextual Harm Service, Designing Out Crime and Neighbourhood Policing and relevant property owners within the park. Youth outreach programme and proactive monitoring was put in place which has led to a **decrease in anti-social behaviour in the park.**
- Across all London Boroughs it was noted that there was a decrease in referrals for CSE, both male and female. **Following training refreshers there has been an increase in CSE referrals**, including CSE and CCE links, CSE and Gangs, and CSE and Serious Youth Violence. The above data reflects this.



The rapid reviews and contextual safeguarding audits undertaken during the year also identified good practice around contextual safeguarding as summarised earlier in the report.

“Every agency involved with Child O showed genuine care and concern about him, recognising his young age and vulnerabilities, and wanted to ensure that he was safe and well and wondered how he could be diverted away from the significant risks he was experiencing outside of his family home.”

“There have been, and continue to be, persistent efforts to support Child O and his mum by multiple agencies and services. At times, different professionals have been able to develop a positive relationship with Child O and his voice and his mother’s voice were heard clearly throughout the information supplied to the rapid review.”

“There was evidence of strong collaboration and information sharing across the partnership.”

Child O rapid review, February 2023

During the year, two Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) courses were offered (CSA Awareness and Intra-Familial CSA) and attended by 33 multi-agency participants in total. When asked “What difference do you think this training will make to your work with children, young people and their families?”, attendees noted:

“Greater awareness and being able to use the indicators tool.”

“I will feel more confident when speaking with a patient or their parent / guardian.”

Feedback from our Anti-Bullying toolkit launch included:

“As a newcomer to school social work, I feel I will be able to successfully complete work on restorative practice with children who are affected by bullying.”

What will we do next?

Priorities for 2023-24 will be:

- Finalise & launch refreshed young people's substance misuse protocol and accompanying guidance for schools and community settings
- Contribute to pan-London MACE review, including development of consistent process for multi-agency work around peer group mapping and safety planning.
- Review & refresh multi-agency online safety policy
- Refresh multi-agency harmful sexual behaviour, missing from home and care and online safety policies and raise awareness with partnership workforce.
- Support the Adultification Task & Finish group to develop and deliver actions in response to scrutiny recommendations, including rollout of multi-agency adultification training.
- Maintain strong oversight of the MACE panels and ongoing review of effectiveness in reducing risk and protecting children and young people from exploitation.
- Planning for 2024 refresh of MSCP Contextual Safeguarding Strategy
- Supporting the effective implementation of the Serious Violence Duty in Merton

Looked After Children and Care Leavers

When a child comes into care, the council becomes their 'Corporate Parent', the term means the collective responsibility for providing the best possible care and safeguarding for the children in our care. Children in Merton are less likely to be in care when compared to other boroughs. In 2022/23, 26 out of every 10,000 children in Merton are in care, which remains in line with the previous year, and lower than national (70) and London (52) rates.

Merton continues to buck the trend in increases of the number of children entering care nationally. The children-in-care population in Merton has been declining over the last five years. The number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in our care, had been declining over the past few years, but increased during 2022/23. Close oversight is maintained on thresholds and practice to ensure children who need to come into care in Merton are doing so. This has highlighted strong relationship-based practice in place and effective work to support children on the edge of care to remain with their families.

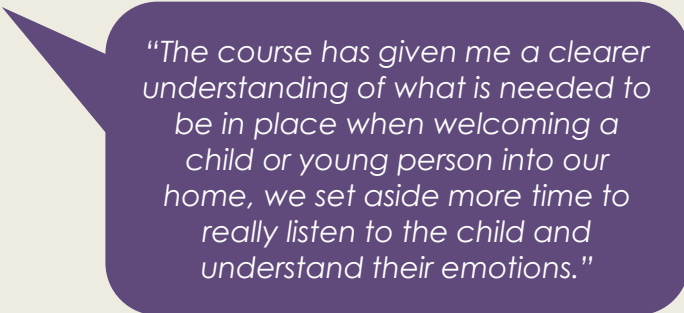
Provisional data shows there continues to be more boys in care than girls with no change in distribution from last year (55.7% vs 44.3%). We also know that proportionally more Merton children enter care at a later age when compared to London and national averages. Provisional data for 2022/23 also shows Black/Mixed children are over-represented in our care population. On 31st March 2023, the percentage of black/mixed-race is 46.3%; this compares with 24% of under-18s in Merton's general population. By contrast, only 7% of our children in our care are from an Asian background. This compares to just under 20% of Merton's under-18 population.

There are many reasons why a child may become looked after, in Merton for 2022/23, the main reasons for entering care are abuse or neglect. This has remained static for the last 7 years. Absent

parenting is the second biggest reason why a child became looked after in 2022/23.

For care leavers, provisional data shows, as at 31st March 2023, 91% of our care experienced young people between the ages of 19 and 21 were 'in touch' with the Local Authority; this compares with 92% nationally as of 31st March 2022. 89% of young people were in suitable accommodation at the end of 2022/23. Provisional calculations show performance remains in line with last year. 67% of our care experienced young people, according to provisional reports, were in education, employment or training during 2022/23.

During 22-23, the Corporate Parenting Board oversaw a refresh of [Merton's Corporate Parenting Strategy for 2022-24](#). This strategy offers an overview of strategic multi-agency priorities for children in care and care leavers. To support this work, the MSCP also commissioned "Through the Kids Eyes" training, which was delivered by a care leaver on experiencing the care system.



"The course has given me a clearer understanding of what is needed to be in place when welcoming a child or young person into our home, we set aside more time to really listen to the child and understand their emotions."

During 23-24, the Corporate Parenting Board will be reviewing and refreshing its approach, with the support of care experienced young people, foster carers and practitioners, beginning with an Away Day in July 2023. There will also be a focus on involving more young people with care experience in recruitment and training of professionals.

Annex 1: MSCP Budget and Spend 2022/23

MSCP Budget 2022-23 – Contributions by agency

London Borough of Merton	84,750
Merton ICB (previously CCG)	55,000
Metropolitan Police	5,000
Total	144,750

MSCP Spend 2022-23

		Spend	Budget	Variance
Staffing:	<input type="checkbox"/> Salaries	89,962	90,168	-206
	<input type="checkbox"/> Independent Posts	18,750	20,000	-1,250
Training		14,216	18,710	-4,494
Learning Reviews		4,000	3,890	110
Supplies and Services (Office costs)		4,768	11,982	-7,214
Total		131,696	144,750	-13,054

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