

Merton Council Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel



Date: 10 October 2017
Time: 7.15 pm
Venue: Committee rooms C, D & E - Merton Civic Centre, London Road, Morden
SM4 5DX

AGENDA

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1 Apologies for absence	
2 Declarations of pecuniary interest	
3 Minutes of the previous meeting	1 - 8
<u>Matters arising</u>	
• Care leaver accommodation reference going to Cabinet on 16 October 2017;	
• Statutory member, Mansoor Ahmad has resigned.	
4 Cabinet Member priorities	
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Contribution from Kathy Bundred, Children's Improvement Adviser for the Local Government Association	
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**This is a public meeting – members of the public are very welcome to attend.
The meeting room will be open to members of the public from 7.00 p.m.**

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Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel membership

Councillors:

Dennis Pearce (Chair)
Linda Taylor OBE (Vice-Chair)
Agatha Mary Akyigyina OBE
Mike Brunt
Pauline Cowper
Charlie Chirico
Edward Foley
Joan Henry
James Holmes
Jerome Neil
Brenda Fraser
Sally Kenny

Substitute Members:

Adam Bush
Peter Southgate
Jill West

Co-opted Representatives

Helen Forbes, Parent Governor
Representative - Secondary and Special
Sector
Colin Powell, Church of England diocese

Note on declarations of interest

Members are advised to declare any Disclosable Pecuniary Interest in any matter to be considered at the meeting. If a pecuniary interest is declared they should withdraw from the meeting room during the whole of the consideration of that matter and must not participate in any vote on that matter. If members consider they should not participate because of a non-pecuniary interest which may give rise to a perception of bias, they should declare this, withdraw and not participate in consideration of the item. For further advice please speak with the Assistant Director of Corporate Governance.

What is Overview and Scrutiny?

Overview and Scrutiny describes the way Merton's scrutiny councillors hold the Council's Executive (the Cabinet) to account to make sure that they take the right decisions for the Borough. Scrutiny panels also carry out reviews of Council services or issues to identify ways the Council can improve or develop new policy to meet the needs of local people. From May 2008, the Overview & Scrutiny Commission and Panels have been restructured and the Panels renamed to reflect the Local Area Agreement strategic themes.

Scrutiny's work falls into four broad areas:

- ⇒ **Call-in:** If three (non-executive) councillors feel that a decision made by the Cabinet is inappropriate they can 'call the decision in' after it has been made to prevent the decision taking immediate effect. They can then interview the Cabinet Member or Council Officers and make recommendations to the decision-maker suggesting improvements.
- ⇒ **Policy Reviews:** The panels carry out detailed, evidence-based assessments of Council services or issues that affect the lives of local people. At the end of the review the panels issue a report setting out their findings and recommendations for improvement and present it to Cabinet and other partner agencies. During the reviews, panels will gather information, evidence and opinions from Council officers, external bodies and organisations and members of the public to help them understand the key issues relating to the review topic.
- ⇒ **One-Off Reviews:** Panels often want to have a quick, one-off review of a topic and will ask Council officers to come and speak to them about a particular service or issue before making recommendations to the Cabinet.
- ⇒ **Scrutiny of Council Documents:** Panels also examine key Council documents, such as the budget, the Business Plan and the Best Value Performance Plan.

Scrutiny panels need the help of local people, partners and community groups to make sure that Merton delivers effective services. If you think there is something that scrutiny should look at, or have views on current reviews being carried out by scrutiny, let us know.

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Agenda Item 3

All minutes are draft until agreed at the next meeting of the committee/panel. To find out the date of the next meeting please check the calendar of events at your local library or online at www.merton.gov.uk/committee.

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

24 JULY 2017

(7.16 pm - 9.45 pm)

PRESENT: Councillors Dennis Pearce (in the Chair), Pauline Cowper, John Dehaney, Edward Foley, Joan Henry, James Holmes, Jerome Neil, Michael Bull and Adam Bush

Co-opted Members Mansoor Ahmad, Helen Forbes and Colin Powell

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Caroline Cooper-Marbiah (Cabinet Member for Education), Paul Angeli (Assistant Director Childrens' Social Care and Youth Inclusion), Jane McSherry (Assistant Director of Education), Yvette Stanley (Director, Children, Schools & Families Department) and Karla Finikin (Service Manager - SEN & Disabilities Integrated Service)

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 1)

Apologies were received from Cllrs Brunt, Taylor and Chirico (Cllrs Dehaney, Bush and Bull substituted). Apologies were also received from Cllr Akyigyina OBE and Cllr Katy Neep, Cabinet Member for Children's Services.

2 DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY INTEREST (Agenda Item 2)

There were no declarations of pecuniary interest.

3 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (Agenda Item 3)

The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed as a true and accurate record.

Matters arising: in response to a member question, Yvette Stanley, Director, Children, Schools and Families, clarified that the department has been working with Steve Langley in Housing to develop a care leaver accommodation offer with private landlords. This would provide multiple occupation dwellings supported with wrap-around care. However, these have not come to fruition at the current time and further work is ongoing. The successful innovation fund bid was also highlighted. A grant of £1m from the Department for Education (DFE) will be used in partnership with five other south London boroughs to meet the needs of looked after children including improving access to high quality residential care and foster placements.

4 CABINET MEMBER PRIORITIES (Agenda Item 4)

Cllr Caroline Cooper-Marbiah, Cabinet Member for Education, provided an update to members, highlighting the following:

1. Merton's response to the Grenfell Tower fire: the DfE has requested a local authority report on any school buildings that are four stories high and over. All school buildings in Merton with cladding are two storeys or less and therefore do not fall into the DfE's higher risk category. However, as a precautionary measure, checks are currently being carried out to establish the type of cladding used on some of Merton's schools. Additionally, the fire safety arrangements of all community schools in the borough are being reviewed through a survey. So far this has established that all fire safety arrangements are up-to-date;
2. Outcomes of school Ofsted inspections: the Cabinet Member congratulated the staff and Headteacher of Rutlish School that moved from a good to outstanding judgement as a result of its recent inspection. Aragon, Hatfield, Joseph Hood and Pelham schools were all highlighted as having retained their good Ofsted judgements. However, it was noted that Merton Abbey has moved from a good to a requires improvement judgement;
3. Special school expansion: having previously expanded the lower school at Perseid, work has now started on the expansion of the upper school. The Cabinet Member highlighted that the publication *Children and Young People Now*, has recently featured Perseid, highlighting its best practice. The Cabinet Member gave her thanks to Tina Harvey, the Headteacher at Perseid, for all she has achieved;
4. School attendance: new data shows that Merton schools are doing better than the national average at all levels for attendance (primary, secondary, special and pupil referral unit);
5. Merton resident survey: this has shown an increase in the number of Merton residents who regard the borough's schools as good; and
6. Harris Wimbledon: the planning application to move Elim Church to Merton Hall was rejected because the planned frontage was not in keeping with the existing exterior of Merton Hall. Officers have a new plan in place to address this.

In response to member questions, the Cabinet Member clarified:

1. Merton Abbey Primary: officers were aware of areas needing improvement prior to the Ofsted inspection and were already providing support and challenge. This will be increased where necessary. The Cabinet Member checks with officers that all the support needed is being given. The proximity of Merton Abbey to Harris Wimbledon is a positive development given the facilities that will become available to the primary school as a result;
2. Future Ofsted inspections: highlighted this is a rolling and on-going programme. Officers maintain a list of schools that are due an inspection and when this is likely to happen. The Cabinet member is regularly briefed on our schools causing concern;
3. Governing bodies: the Cabinet Member checks with officers that all schools have a full governing body and that governors have the skills that are needed. The importance of schools having a full governing team with the necessary skills was highlighted. Noted that governor training is provided by the Council and that all are encouraged to participate; and

4. Merton's response to the Grenfell Tower fire: officers are still working on the results of the survey of school fire safety arrangements. However, the Cabinet Member noted she is pleased with the results already received. Also, noted that Merton is going further than the requirements stipulated by the DfE as all schools with cladding are being tested and not just those that are four storeys and higher.

Additionally, Yvette Stanley, Director, Children, Schools and Families, clarified that further information on the schools budget, as a result of the new funding formula, is still awaited and only when this information is provided will the implications be known for the Special Educational Needs budget. Highlighted that the new schools funding formula won't necessarily come with the ability to move funding between the various funding blocks as is currently the case with the Direct Schools Grant. Currently, this allows for some movement of funds which has been able to support the increase in revenue costs driven by the growing need for Special Educational Needs support. However, under the new formula, the funding is split into discrete blocks. Whilst a surplus has been built-up that will alleviate the initial pressure, it is not clear what will happen after this has been used. Highlighted that as a result the schools budget will need to be discussed as part of the Council's overall budget.

5 PERFORMANCE UPDATE: EDUCATION CARE AND HEALTH PLANS (EHCPs) (Agenda Item 5)

Jane McSherry, Assistant Director of Education, introduced the item highlighting that the timeliness of ECHPs has been a focus for the Panel for some time and that as a result it had requested a deep dive in order to fully understand this matter. The increase in the number of ECHPs requested was noted as being higher than the increase in Merton's population. However, not all requests are accepted; there is a process used to assess if requests should be accepted. Agreed that the number of plans issued within the statutory 20 week timescale is lower than wanted but that this has improved (47% of plans are now issued within 20 weeks). It was also noted that the number of tribunals resulting from the ECHP process has notably decreased. This is seen as resulting from the extent parents are now positively involved in the ECHP process. At the same time as having to issue ECHPs within the 20 week timeframe, existing SEN statements all have to be transferred to ECHPs by March 2018. The Department is on track to achieve this target.

In response to member questions officers (Jane McSherry and Karla Finikin, Service Manager, SEN & Disabilities Integrated Service), clarified:

1. Streamlining: examples of how the ECHP process has been streamlined in order to meet the 20 week target include getting requests to the assessment panel quicker (now within two rather than six weeks) which allows additional time for processing if the request is accepted, documentation has been reviewed to ensure it is easier to complete and training has been undertaken with personnel in other departments to ensure they are able to engage in the process effectively and efficiently;
2. Online files: the process is necessarily information heavy which has historically resulted in a lot of paper files. Now that this is all online through the new Mosaic system, it means all information is kept in one place and can be more easily

- accessed by all those involved. However, it is not yet possible for Mosaic files to be accessed externally and cannot yet be used by the SEN team;
3. Assessment of requests for ECHPs: there is a multidisciplinary approach to assessing requests for ECHPs; whilst schools are involved in the assessment process this isn't solely reliant on the information schools provide. Others such as educational psychologists, social care, paediatric specialists etc are also involved;
 4. Rejected requests: where requests for an ECHP are assessed and rejected, the expectation is that a child's needs will be met through the SEN Support provision;
 5. Independent provision: the increase use of independent provision reflects the overall increase in ECHPs being issued (resulting from the increase in the Merton population and the rise in the age requirements; going from 18 to 25 years). The use of independent provision is something that is being kept under review and which the department is seeking to address through increased maintained provision (for example, through the expansion at Perseid). Continued use of independent provision will depend on need – use will continue if demand continues to grow. Highlighted the use of dynamic purchasing and working through a consortium to keep costs down;
 6. Expansion of maintained provision: it is difficult to suggest that the need for Perseid to expand should have been predicted earlier. This started in 2009 and reflects a changing profile of needs resulting from an increase in prevalence, changes to diagnosis and expectations; and
 7. Children and young people from a Black and Minority Ethnic background: the number of children and young people from a Black and Minority Ethnic background that have a SEN Statement or EHCP is proportionate to the composition of the school population in Merton.

6 ACTION PLAN: ROUTES INTO EMPLOYMENT FOR VULNERABLE COHORTS TASK GROUP (Agenda Item 6)

This item has been deferred until the Panel's meeting in November 2017.

7 FINAL REPORT: RAPPORTEUR SCRUTINY REVIEW OF USER VOICE (Agenda Item 7)

Cllr Neil Jerome provided a detail introduction to his report highlighting the recommendations made:

- That Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel (CYP) examine the implications of the Staying Put policy increasing the cohort of looked after children (LAC) for which the council is responsible and its effects on participation within the borough;
- That a working group – perhaps with the involvement of the Children in Care Council (CICC) – be set up to consider the viability of introducing a “Mentor/Champion Scheme for Looked After Children” as considered by Leicester City Council;
- That CYP ask the Children, Schools and Families Department to continue to monitor its use of feedback loops and report on this at regular intervals through the department update report during this municipal year; and

- That CYP examine how best to engage the LAC and care leaver cohort in its work.

In response to member questions, officers (Yvette Stanley, Director, Children, Schools and Families and Paul Angeli, Assistant Director Children's Social Care and Youth Inclusion) clarified:

1. Staying put policy: this is the relatively recent change that allows those in foster care to stay within their current provision beyond their 18th birthday potentially up until they are 21 years (or to 25 years if they are at University). Currently, the department is reviewing awareness of the policy amongst young people - it is felt that there is more to be done in explaining the provision. However, it was noted that it can be difficult for foster carers to accommodate the new policy; having young people in their homes can make it difficult to have younger foster children, and affect income and benefits. Ultimately foster carers might not wish to agree to Staying Put arrangements;
2. Impact of user voice: there are lots of examples of where user voice is influencing services. Examples provided include the independence guide for foster carers which was written by looked after children and care leavers, the influence that those in care have on their own individual plans and the 32 promises that comprise the care leaver pledge which were compiled from a survey of those leaving care; and
3. Social media: use of social media to maintain contact and communicate with looked after children and care leavers is restricted due to corporate security requirements. However, funding is available to develop a dedicated website. The CSF Department is awaiting the ability of the corporate centre to secure the skills to do the technical aspects of this work.

Yvette Stanley, Director, Children, Schools and Families responded to Cllr Neil's paper:

- Ofsted has noted listening to young people as a service strength;
- Care needs to be taken when engaging with looked after children and care leavers to manage expectations; aspirations can be great and impossible for the Council to achieve. Care also needs to be taken to qualify the feedback and experience of any one individual;
- Expressed reservations about any form of befriending scheme based on prior experience. This can take a lot to get right including training for Councillors. Highlighted the trauma and loss of looked after children and care leavers which can make short term relationships difficult;
- Noted that engagement of young people in scrutiny and other meetings requires preparation and that opportunities for engagement through the Youth Parliament and the Children in Care Council need to be used wisely; young people involved in these have their own objectives they want to achieve and are only willing to give up a limited amount of time to adults' concerns;
- Noted that the Department does undertake a lot of consultation with looked after children and care leavers but could do more to ensure this is shared with the Panel;

- Thanked Cllr Neil for his report and the good ideas it contains but noted the care that is needed to take these forward. Recommended a meeting with Cllr Neil and Cllr Neep (Cabinet Member for Children's Services) to discuss this further following which a response to the paper could be provided by the department to the Panel.

RESOLVED: to thank Cllr Neil for his paper and for Cllr Neil, Cllr Neep, (the Cabinet Member for Children's Services), and Yvette Stanley, (Director, Children, Schools and Families), to meet and discuss the recommendations resulting from the review. Following the meeting the Department will provide the Panel with a response to the paper.

8 TERMS OF REFERENCE: PREVENT TASK GROUP (Agenda Item 8)

In response to member questions, officers (Yvette Stanley, Director, Children, Schools and Families and Paul Angeli, Assistant Director Children's Social Care and Youth Inclusion) clarified:

- Community input to the task group: the Panel has already heard from the community groups which might be able to provide an insight to the effect of the *Prevent* duty. Given that 50% of referrals currently received are for primary age children, it will be important for the task group to hear the views of parents who have children who are affected by the duty;
- Scope of the *Prevent* duty: this is broad and covers risk of any form of radicalisation. It is not exclusively concerned with Muslim fundamentalism;
- *Prevent* practice: this refers to the duty the Government has placed on schools to provide a range of inputs to prevent radicalisation. Keith Shipman, Education Inclusion Manager, is the lead officer working with schools on their *Prevent* practice. This is supported through the Safer Schools Partnership.

RESOLVED: to approve the terms of reference for the task group. Cllrs Henry, Holmes, Foley and Neil volunteered as members.

9 PERFORMANCE MONITORING (Agenda Item 9)

In response to member questions, officers clarified:

- Placement stability: the 15.8% of children subject to three or more moves in a year equates to 22 children (the impact is large in percentage terms because of the smaller size of Merton's looked after children cohort). Typically, these are older children coming into care later (aged 15, 16 and 17 years). These children are often in care due to family breakdown, criminal and/or anti-social behaviour or are at risk of Child Sexual Exploitation. They are very vulnerable and traumatised. Getting placements right can take time with moves often needed in order to protect them from further risk of harm. Placements are regularly monitored and managed by a specialist team. The £1m innovation fund grant from the DfE (Merton leading a consortium of six London boroughs) will be used to address what is a London-wide problem through the provision of placements with wrap-around specialist care (ie: care to tackle the risk of Child Sexual Exploitation). Suggested featuring an specific example as a case study in a

forthcoming update report to enable Panel members to better understand the issues involved;

- Access to Children's Centres: there is no national benchmark or statutory requirement set for access to Children's Centres by families from areas of deprivation – the 75% is Merton's own ambition. Following a borough wide consultation, a new Children's Centre offer has been published and the model has been reshaped to increase take-up. The impact will be reviewed this year; and
- Food poverty: confirmed that there are families suffering food poverty in the borough. Families for which there is no recourse to public funds were highlighted as an example of where this is the case. The department works with charities and food banks to ensure access to food for such families. Currently work is ongoing with public health to try to increase the quality and variety of food available through food banks. The department works with schools to make sure families suffering food poverty are supported to access this help;

RESOLVED: to elect Cllr Brunt as the performance monitoring lead for the Panel.

10 DEPARTMENT UPDATE REPORT (Agenda Item 10)

Paul Angeli, Assistant Director, Children's Social Care and Youth Inclusion, highlighted the formation of a new Family Drug and Alcohol Court (FDAC) which Merton is leading as part of a 10 borough consortium. This aims to achieve better outcomes for vulnerable children at risk from harm caused by parental substance misuse. This approach has been evaluated by the Nuffield Foundation and found to have better outcomes for the children involved as well as providing considerable financial savings. The new service has just gone out to tendering with Merton leading the commissioning process.

In response to member questions, officers clarified:

- Ofsted: the outcomes of the inspection under Ofsted's Single Inspection Framework are likely to be known on or around 25 August 2017. Time has already been allocated at the October Panel meeting to consider this in detail;
- Merton Safeguarding Children Board priorities: these have been extended from 2016/17 through to 2019 because these are challenging strategic priorities which require time and activity to deliver; and
- Social impact bonds: these are part of the current environment although few have yet come to fruition. This means there is yet to be sufficient information on which to fully judge whether they are a successful way to deliver change. However, there is some evidence that they are starting to have an effect. Merton has taken the decision not to be a trail blazer in the use of these but to take the opportunity to learn from the experience of others. Potentially they allow for partnership working and innovation to deliver services that the authority would struggle to provide by itself. They offer the opportunity to respond to children with complex needs.

11 CHILDREN, SCHOOLS AND FAMILIES GLOSSARY (Agenda Item 11)

This item was provided for information.

12 SETTING THE SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2017- 18 (Agenda Item 12)

It was noted that the work programme has capacity to allow for activity linked to the outcome of the Ofsted inspection to be added as needed. This will be considered in detail once the report is published and may require time in the work programme throughout the remainder of the municipal year.

Members were encouraged to consider the information about experts, visits and lines of questioning provided in the topic suggestion packs (the scrutiny officer will provide this in soft copy to improve ease of access). Guidance is required from Panel members on which external experts and visits they wish to pursue. Additionally, it was suggested that members give feedback on the available questioning guidance to ascertain whether this meets their needs.

It was noted that the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel will pick-up the topic of care leaver accommodation as part of a housing deep dive at its meeting on 5 September 2017. It has requested that members of the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel attend to assist them in this task. Additionally, the Overview and Scrutiny Commission is considering whether to undertake a task group looking at the recruitment and retention of school staff.

RESOLVED: to accept the work programme as presented.

Committee: Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Date: 10 October 2017

Wards: All wards

Subject: Ofsted Inspection Report 2017

Lead officer: Yvette Stanley, Director, Children Schools and Families

Lead member: Councillor Katy Neep; Councillor Caroline Cooper-Marbiah.

Contact officer: Mark Gwynne, Interim Head of Policy, Planning and Performance.

Recommendations: That the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Panel:

- A. Note the outcome and recommendations from the Ofsted Inspection Report
- B. Consider how the recommendations made by Ofsted inform the Panel's work programme

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1. To provide the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Panel with an update on the Ofsted inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers and review of the effectiveness of the Local Safeguarding Children Board.

2 DETAILS

- 2.1. As part of their regular and planned inspection programme, Ofsted announced during May that they would be visiting from 12 June to 6 July 2017 to carry out this inspection. The inspection report was published on 25 August 2017. This report identified some major achievements and commented that "Children in Merton benefit from services that are dynamic, ambitious and successful. Exceptional leadership and governance and strong frontline management ensure that children's services are consistently good. All children receive a good service and some receive an outstanding service. Inspectors saw that significant and sustained improvements had been achieved since the last inspection in 2012, when all services were judged as good. Staff are very effective in improving outcomes for children."
- 2.2. This acknowledgement contributes significantly towards The Merton Partnership's shared vision for: "Merton to be the best place to grow up and for all children and young people, including the most vulnerable to achieve the very best outcomes".
- 2.3. The Panel will be pleased to note that Ofsted identified that "Senior managers and politicians model a constructive, enquiring and engaging style of leadership and management. It comprises a blend of compassion and concern for the most vulnerable children and families, and conspicuous care and support for frontline workers."

2.4. Ofsted’s categorised judgement shows each aspect of the service provided as shown:

Children’s services in the London Borough of Merton are good.	
1. Children who need help and protection	Good
2. Children looked after and achieving permanence	Good
2.1 Adoption performance	Outstanding
2.2 Experiences and progress for care leavers	Good
3. Leadership, management and governance	Outstanding
4. Review of the Local Safeguarding Children Board	Outstanding

2.7. In making this judgement, Ofsted have identified particular successes in several of our frontline services including early help “Children are protected through an outstanding early help offer and a robust ‘front door’, to consider which intervention would help them best... Effective intervention at an early stage is having a positive impact on the number of children who require more specialist support.”

2.8. They identified significant strengths in supporting our looked after children “Adoption performance is outstanding, with all children requiring adoption currently placed and no children waiting. Merton has not had an adoption placement breakdown for over five years” and recognised the outcomes for children and young people stating that “Adoption support is excellent and highly creative. It ensures that adopted children form strong attachments to their families, and potential issues are identified and addressed at the earliest stage.”

2.9. In concluding that Merton Safeguarding Children Board is outstanding, inspectors recognised that “There are strong governance arrangements underpinned by established partnerships with other strategic boards, including the Health and Wellbeing Board, the Corporate Parenting Board, the Children’s Trust and the Safer and Stronger Partnership.”

2.10. All Ofsted inspections are required to make recommendations to support the continuous improvement of services. The inspection report highlighted four recommendations as show below:

1. Ensure that all plan, including child in need, child protection, care plans for children looked after and pathway plans, consistently contain specific actions, achievable timescales and clear, measurable outcomes.
2. Improve the use of return home interviews for each episode of missing for children missing from home or care and ensure that risks are understood and reduced for individual children.
3. Ensure that ‘staying put’ is made available to all care leavers who would benefit from this.

4. Ensure that all former relevant care leavers receive information on their health histories.
- 2.11. A response and action plan will be developed, involving other key agencies, during October to address these recommendations quickly and clearly, with most only requiring a small revision of our approach or communications. Delivery of this action plan will be managed through Merton Safeguarding Children Board. It is recommended that scrutiny consider progress in addressing these recommendations as part of the work programme for the year.

3 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 3.1. None

4 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED

- 4.1. None

5 TIMETABLE

- 5.1. None

6 FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1. None

7 LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1. None

8 HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1. None

9 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1. None

10 RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1. None

11 APPENDICES – THE FOLLOWING DOCUMENTS ARE TO BE PUBLISHED WITH THIS REPORT AND FORM PART OF THE REPORT

Appendix 1: Ofsted Inspection Report, August 2017

12 BACKGROUND PAPERS

Ofsted Inspection Outcomes Presentation

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London Borough of Merton Council

Inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers

and

Review of the effectiveness of the Local Safeguarding Children Board¹

Inspection date: 12 June 2017 to 6 July 2017

Report published: 25 August 2017

Children's services in the London Borough of Merton are good.	
1. Children who need help and protection	Good
2. Children looked after and achieving permanence	Good
2.1 Adoption performance	Outstanding
2.2 Experiences and progress of care leavers	Good
3. Leadership, management and governance	Outstanding

¹ Ofsted produces this report under its power to combine reports in accordance with section 152 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006. This report includes the report of the inspection of local authority functions carried out under section 136 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 and the report of the review of the Local Safeguarding Children Board carried out under the Local Safeguarding Children Boards (Review) Regulations 2013.

Executive summary

Children in Merton benefit from services that are dynamic, ambitious and successful. Exceptional leadership and governance and strong frontline management ensure that children's services are consistently good. All children receive a good service and some receive an outstanding service. Inspectors saw that significant and sustained improvements had been achieved since the last inspection in 2012, when all services were judged as good. Staff are very effective in improving outcomes for children.

The director of children's services (DCS) and all senior leaders have created and sustained a highly effective culture of clear strategic planning alongside warmth and compassion for each and every child. The leadership style offers an ideal balance of rigorous attention to outcomes combined with sensitivity, humility and a sound understanding of the vulnerability experienced by children and their families. This was described by one partner as a 'productive and human way of working' that is both 'very respectful and challenging'.

Leaders and managers are highly visible and show care and concern for children and staff. They provide a strong culture of learning and a determination to improve further on outcomes that are already good. Innovative and creative thinking ensures that Merton achieves maximum impact from the resources available. This includes a coherent practice model to assist social workers in their analysis, manageable caseloads, frequent supervision, reflective auditing and mature partnerships. This results in an environment in which social work practice continues to develop and flourish despite a turnover of staff.

A strong and embedded culture of review and learning enables robust analytical understanding of all aspects of services in Merton. Regular wholesale reviews of services or local case and threshold reviews result in a local authority that knows itself well. This was described by one manager as, 'If we spot a problem, we dig,' and this professional curiosity was strongly evident during the inspection. The small areas of practice requiring additional work that were seen by inspectors were already known and were being actively addressed by senior managers.

Children are protected through an outstanding early help offer and a robust 'front door', to consider which intervention would help them best. A review in 2016 of the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) and regular threshold testing audits ensure a rounded multi-agency response to protect children when their needs first become known. Responses are timely and proportionate to risk. Thresholds are clearly and consistently applied for children, including when their circumstances and needs change. Child protection plans and child in need plans help to protect and support children and their families well and are based on thorough assessments. Some plans are not sufficiently clear, and so families may not fully understand what is required of them.

Children who are looked after by Merton benefit from good-quality placements, social workers who visit them often and strong support from the virtual school. Comprehensive assessments and support enable children to return home safely

when this is their plan. Applications to court reflect timely planning and strong social work practice, as reflected in very positive feedback from the judiciary and court partners. The role of the corporate parent is well embedded and is taken very seriously. The lead member for children, the chief executive and senior managers consider all children to be 'their' children and they are determined to do their best for them. Parents and carers feel included, leading to positive partnership working. Letters to parents and children, including pre-proceedings letters or complaints, are carefully personalised.

Permanence is secured quickly for children and progress is closely tracked. Children placed in permanent foster care receive a certificate from the assistant director, affirming their sense of belonging. Adoption performance is outstanding, with all children requiring adoption currently placed and no children waiting. Creative use of the adoption support fund ensures that adoption is well supported. Merton has not had an adoption placement breakdown for over five years.

Care leavers do well in Merton. The vast majority are in touch with staff, and determined efforts are made to re-engage with those who are not. Care leavers feel safe where they live and they achieve well. Young people who have left care recently have benefited from receiving their health histories although not all care leavers have received their health histories yet, despite this being a longstanding issue. Only a few care leavers continue to live with their foster carers beyond their 18th birthday; the local authority is actively trying to increase numbers.

Risks associated with child sexual exploitation, missing children, gang involvement or radicalisation are understood exceptionally well and overseen appropriately from a senior multi-agency perspective. Regular scrutiny is provided through a range of methods, including a weekly 'missing' meeting. However, the response to each child for each episode of missing from home or care is not sufficiently robust.

Accurate data and helpful performance information provide insight and ensure that strategic changes to demand and need are anticipated and met. Service redesign, including a flatter management structure, has enabled a 33% increase in frontline social workers. The redesign has resulted in manageable caseloads and effective spans of control, and has enabled changes to the workload of the MASH and the safeguarding teams, as well as the creation of a dedicated permanence service. The very recent implementation of a replacement information technology and case recording system, just prior to the inspection, is being managed efficiently, and staff are being well supported.

Detailed strategic plans and localised improvement plans are aligned with each other and are overseen by mature and exceptionally strong partnerships. The strong professional partnerships in Merton demonstrate that children and their families are highly valued and that they deserve high-quality services.

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The local authority

Information about this local authority area²

Previous Ofsted inspections

- The local authority does not operate any children's homes.
- The previous inspection of the local authority's safeguarding arrangements was in January 2012. The local authority was judged to be good.
- The previous inspection of the local authority's services for children looked after was in January 2012. The local authority was judged to be good.

Local leadership

- The DCS has been in post since January 2009.
- The chief executive has been in post since March 2004.
- The chair of the LSCB has been in post since March 2014.

Children living in this area

- Approximately 46,697 children and young people under the age of 18 years live in Merton. This is 23% of the total population in the area.
- Approximately 15% of the local authority's children aged under 16 years old are living in low-income families.
- The proportion of children entitled to free school meals:
 - in primary schools is 14% (the national average is 15%)
 - in secondary schools is 16% (the national average is 13%).
- Children and young people from minority ethnic groups account for 45% of all children living in the area, compared with 21% in the country as a whole.
- The largest minority ethnic groups of children and young people in the area are Asian or Asian British and Black and Black British.
- The proportion of children and young people who speak English as an additional language:
 - in primary schools is 47% (the national average is 20%)
 - in secondary schools is 36% (the national average is 16%).

² The local authority was given the opportunity to review this section of the report and has updated it with local unvalidated data where this was available.

Child protection in this area

- At 31 March 2017, 1,356 children had been identified through assessment as being formally in need of a specialist children's service. This is a reduction from 1,901 at 31 March 2016.
- At 31 March 2017, 127 children were the subject of a child protection plan (a rate of 27 per 10,000). This is a reduction from 138 children (30 per 10,000) at 31 March 2016.
- At 31 March 2017, four children lived in a privately arranged fostering placement. This is a decrease from nine at the time of the last published data in 2015.
- In the two years prior to inspection, two serious incident notifications have been submitted to Ofsted and one serious case review (SCR) has been completed.
- There were no SCRs ongoing at the time of the inspection.

Children looked after in this area

- At 31 March 2017, 152 children were being looked after by the local authority (a rate of 33 per 10,000 children). This is a reduction from 165 (35 per 10,000 children) at 31 March 2016. Of this number:
 - 102 (or 67%) live outside the local authority area
 - 18 live in residential children's homes, of whom 94% live out of the authority area
 - two live in residential special schools³, both of whom live out of the authority area
 - 108 live with foster families, of whom 58% live out of the authority area
 - three live with their parents, none of whom live out of the authority area
 - 16 are unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.
- In the last 12 months:
 - there have been 11 adoptions
 - six children became the subject of special guardianship orders
 - 113 children ceased to be looked after, of whom 10% subsequently returned to be looked after
 - 25 young people ceased to be looked after and moved on to independent living
 - two young people ceased to be looked after and are now living in houses in multiple occupation.

³ These are residential special schools that look after children for 295 days or less per year.

Social work model

- The local authority uses a systemic practice model that includes 'Signs of Safety'.

Recommendations

1. Ensure that all plans, including child in need, child protection, care plans for children looked after and pathway plans, consistently contain specific actions, achievable timescales and clear, measurable outcomes.
2. Improve the use of return home interviews for each episode of missing for children missing from home or care and ensure that risks are understood and reduced for individual children.
3. Ensure that 'staying put' is made available to all care leavers who would benefit from this.
4. Ensure that all former relevant care leavers receive information on their health histories.

Summary for children and young people

- All staff, including senior managers, know children well and work well together to consider how to help each child and their family.
- Although services for children and young people are already good, staff continue to question how they do things and are keen to do even better. They regularly look carefully at what they have done to see what they can learn.
- Planning for children is mostly done well, but in a few cases the plans are not clear enough about what needs to change for children and what families need to do to make children safer.
- Staff work hard to keep children safe in Merton. Any risks or concerns are taken very seriously and acted on quickly. They do this by working closely with other people, such as the police.
- Some children have had a number of different social workers, but managers keep a close eye on what is happening for children, to minimise the impact of changes.
- Children who are looked after by Merton are involved in the planning for their care. They are listened to and they influence planning for the future.
- Children and families who arrive from different countries receive an exceptional service and are supported sensitively to ensure that they feel secure. This includes meeting with other children in similar circumstances so that they do not feel alone.
- Children who are not able to live with their families live in safe and secure homes. Social workers ensure that children who are placed at some distance from Merton do not miss out on things that will be of interest or help to them.
- Care leavers are supported to do well and they feel safe where they live. Only a small number of young people continue to live with their foster carers after their 18th birthday. The local authority is taking action to ensure that more young people can stay with their foster carers if they wish to.

<p>The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection</p>	<p>Good</p>
<p>Consistently good services support children in need of help and protection in Merton, improving their circumstances and keeping them safe. High-quality early help assessments help to identify needs, leading to children and families benefiting from a range of integrated early help support services.</p> <p>Staff within the MASH effectively assess and prioritise contacts and referrals, ensuring prompt and proportionate responses so that children most at risk receive appropriate and timely services. Strong management oversight and decision-making are evident on all case recording.</p> <p>Effective multi-agency responses to children at risk of sexual exploitation and children who are missing from home or school help to ensure that they are kept safe. Good outcomes are supported by strong attendance at the multi-agency sexual exploitation panel, weekly multi-agency missing meetings and timely strategy discussions with a range of appropriate services. However, the response to individual children who go missing from home, including the timeliness of return home interviews, is not consistent, so the factors that influence the behaviour are not clear.</p> <p>Staff have a good understanding of risk. Effective early identification of risks in relation to female genital mutilation, forced marriage, gang affiliation and radicalisation leads to proactive and immediate safeguarding of young people. If necessary, this includes legal orders, accompanied by comprehensive multi-agency support. Strong multi-agency partnership working, including information sharing and attendance at child protection meetings, is protecting children from risk of further significant harm. However, child in need and child protection plans are not clear enough to ensure that parents understand what needs to change, and in what timescales, and to help monitor the progression of each plan.</p> <p>Timely and effective arrangements are in place to respond to 16- and 17-year-olds at risk of homelessness. The local authority does not use bed and breakfast accommodation for any 16- or 17-year-olds.</p> <p>Comprehensive awareness raising in relation to private fostering has led to appropriate referrals. Children currently known to be living in private fostering arrangements are appropriately safeguarded and supported well.</p> <p>There is good use of advocacy, including appropriate advocacy for disabled children and children and young people subject to child protection procedures, enabling careful consideration of their voices within planning.</p>	

Inspection findings

5. Children and young people in need of help and protection in Merton receive a good service. Managers and staff know their children well. Manageable caseloads and skilled staff mean that they are able to visit children and their families regularly, build meaningful relationships and undertake purposeful direct work. Effective direct work is widespread, including with children at risk of sexual exploitation, and individualised direct work with disabled children meets the communication needs of each child.
6. The Merton Child and Young Person Well-Being Model guides threshold decisions and is supported by a well-embedded wide range of integrated early help services, commissioned and brokered by the Children's Trust partnership. Thresholds are understood well by partner agencies and applied appropriately, resulting in effective and timely interventions for children.
7. The training and engagement with early help partners contribute to very strong early help assessments, which are undertaken by a wide range of partners. This ensures timely identification of need, with decision-making and work overseen by a social work qualified team manager. Effective intervention at an early stage is having a positive impact on reducing the number of children who require a more specialist service. Families benefit from prompt support from a range of innovative, high-quality early help services, such as a dedicated victim support service for children, and mental health practitioners in schools. Parents spoke very highly of the early help services available and the positive difference that they are making for children.
8. If risks to children change, they experience a relatively seamless transition between early help and statutory services. Step-up and step-down processes are well considered and purposeful, with the vast majority evidencing a clear rationale and decision-making. This ensures that children and their families are receiving the right service at the right level of intervention to meet their needs.
9. Multi-agency information sharing has improved significantly, with increased access to a wide range of multi-agency data. Consent is understood well and is clearly recorded. Children's social care services, the police, health, early help and education are co-located in the MASH, ensuring timely risk analysis of information to inform decision-making to safeguard children. However, consistency is still required in ensuring that information from schools is obtained in a timely manner. The 'vulnerable children's team' is working closely with schools to improve timescales.
10. Additional staffing resources for the MASH and first response teams, as from 2016, are further improving timely responses. The majority of cases are handled within the agreed timescales and are monitored closely via the recently implemented MASH live dashboard. This is enabling timely and

carefully considered responses so that children most at risk quickly receive appropriate services. There is good liaison and handover with the emergency duty team, which is staffed by suitably experienced children's social workers, who provide an effective service to children and families out of normal office hours.

11. The social work model used by children's services is helpfully also applied by partner agencies, and this is leading to improvements in the quality of work to assess risks to children. The vast majority of case recording identifies appropriate safeguarding concerns and safety goals, which are developed in regular child in need meetings, child protection conferences and conference reviews. However, plans are not consistently clear in all cases. This means that a small number of parents are not fully aware of what needs to change and in what timescales, and this makes it more difficult to monitor whether plans are progressing in a timely way. (Recommendation)
12. In the vast majority of cases, escalation of concerns or non-engagement by families leads to appropriate, timely and proportionate responses to risks to children, in line with contingency plans overseen by managers.
13. Child protection enquiries to protect children at risk of abuse, through strategy discussions and section 47 child protection enquiries, are timely. In the majority of cases, a multi-agency response informs the decision-making to protect children. However, there is some variability for a small minority of children, with some agencies not participating consistently. As a result of efforts made by senior managers and the Merton Safeguarding Children Board (MSCB), multi-agency attendance and input to child in need meetings and child protection conferences have significantly improved and continue to be closely monitored.
14. Children's wishes and feelings are strongly heard and clearly reflected in practice. Their views and voices are carefully considered in assessments, strategy meetings and social work records to inform planning. Case records are clear, timely and up to date, including assessments and chronologies. In a very small minority of cases, case recording does not fully reflect the lived experiences of very young children or does not consistently highlight the separate needs of individual children in large family groups. Recording evidences management oversight and decision-making. There is a small amount of inconsistent recording of timescales for actions within assessments and supervisions, which senior managers are aware of.
15. The local authority has undertaken a comprehensive needs analysis to understand the prevalence of domestic abuse, mental ill health and substance misuse within the borough. Recent developments include the appointment of a specialist adult mental health liaison worker to enhance partnership working, to provide training across adults' and children's services and to update the joint protocol for safeguarding children and families who have mental health

needs. The multi-agency public protection arrangements (MAPPA) and multi-agency risk assessment conferences (MARAC) are consistently well attended and effective in supporting timely information sharing, effective risk management and decision-making.

16. There are clear and effective multi-agency responses to identify and respond to children at risk of going missing or missing education. Most cases of children missing education close within three months, as the vast majority of children are effectively supported back into school. Education welfare staff are persistent in their tracking of children missing education, an example being undertaking unannounced visits at known addresses. They liaise and share information effectively with other local authorities and within the council, and escalate cases to social care when necessary, overseen by the multi-agency children missing education panel.
17. Risks associated with child sexual exploitation or missing from home are given a high priority and are understood well. Weekly 'missing' meetings are held in the MASH. The meetings are regularly attended by social workers, the police, a gangs worker, the children looked after nurse, the youth offending service, the child sexual exploitation lead and a representative from the commissioned service that provides return home interviews. Through the combination of the multi-agency sexual exploitation panel, weekly multi-agency 'missing' meetings and timely strategy discussions, children missing from care or home and children at risk of sexual exploitation are effectively identified and responded to. A wide range of appropriate services, including commissioned services, are in place to support and protect children. However, the processes for offering children return home interviews following every episode of going missing, or completing those interviews in a timely manner to fully understand the push and pull factors, are not robust. (Recommendation)
18. Disabled children receive support and services that ensure that they are protected and achieve. There is strong early identification of risks in relation to female genital mutilation, forced marriage, gang affiliation and radicalisation, overseen by the MSCB promote and protect young people (PPYP) steering group. This is leading to proactive and immediate safeguarding of young people, including legal orders, supported by comprehensive multi-agency support.
19. Children living in private fostering arrangements receive a good service. Comprehensive awareness raising has led to appropriate referrals and timely assessments. In cases seen by inspectors, children were seen alone within statutory timescales and they were appropriately safeguarded and supported well.
20. Young people aged 16 and 17 who present as homeless receive timely and thorough joint assessments with housing services. Assessments show that social workers consider their views and those of their family. However,

recording does not consistently reflect social workers' explanations to young people about their legal entitlements in order to demonstrate that young people have made informed choices about their futures. When young people choose not to be looked after, suitable accommodation and support are provided.

21. Arrangements for managing allegations against staff, carers and volunteers who work with children in Merton are timely and appropriate, and thresholds and intervention are applied appropriately. However, inspectors found that a turnover of four different designated officers since April 2016, a change of line management and the implementation of a new recording system had resulted in inconsistent and unclear case recording. The local authority responded promptly and appropriately and was able to evidence the work that had been done, accompanied by a clear management overview of each case.
22. Inspectors saw very effective use of advocacy, including appropriate advocacy for disabled children, when there have been issues of deprivation of liberty. Increasing numbers of advocates are working with children subject to child protection procedures, to ensure consideration of their views in conferences.
23. Social workers carefully consider the diverse needs of the families that they work with. However, case recording is not fully reflective of the range of ways in which this takes place and the thoughtful work undertaken.

<p>The experiences and progress of children looked after and achieving permanence</p>	<p>Good</p>
<p>Children looked after in Merton receive a consistently good service. The needs of each individual child are known well. Children become looked after at the right time and without unnecessary delay. Appropriate support and edge-of-care services are used effectively as an alternative to care. Effective management oversight of pre-proceedings and assessment work adds rigour to decision-making and ensures safe oversight of the experiences for children on the threshold of being looked after. Assessments for children returning home are robust, and ongoing support is provided to the families.</p> <p>The majority of children looked after enjoy a stable relationship with their social workers. A small number of children have experienced changes of social worker early in their care journey, which has made it more difficult to form trusting relationships. Caseloads are maintained at a manageable level to enable social workers to have time to develop relationships with the children. The service to unaccompanied asylum-seeking children is impressive. It is sensitive and swift and enables the children to settle quickly and to form friendships.</p> <p>Children’s participation is encouraged, their individual needs are known and their voice is evident. Children have access to advocates wherever they are placed, and participation in reviews continues to strengthen. A committed and active Children in Care Council (CiCC) influences service developments and provides consultation and feedback on issues relating to their experiences.</p> <p>The local authority is aware of the priorities within the children looked after population and continues to work to meet the challenges of placement stability and sufficiency for the significant proportion of older adolescents. Diversity is given careful consideration. Risks associated with going missing and sexual exploitation are known and effectively tracked on a multi-agency basis, and effective work is undertaken to ensure that children are kept safe. However, information gained through individual return home interviews is not always used effectively to inform future planning.</p> <p>Permanence options are considered early, ensuring that there is no delay in the formulation of long-term plans. The work in the adoption service is outstanding. Skilled and tenacious social work practice ensures good outcomes for children, and prospective adopters receive excellent preparation and training. No children are currently awaiting an adoptive placement.</p> <p>The vast majority of care leavers are supported well. They develop the skills that they need to live independently and to achieve their career and education goals. Not all care leavers have received a copy of their health history and only a very small number currently remain with their foster carers under a ‘staying put’ arrangement.</p>	

Inspection findings

24. The needs of children looked after are understood well by managers and staff. The local authority has been proactive and rigorous in identifying and understanding the needs of the looked after population, including the large group of children aged over 16. Thresholds to care have been tested through a time-limited edge of care panel and a comprehensive adolescent needs analysis. Thresholds are applied appropriately and children receive the service that they need to ensure that they are kept safe in a timely way. Clear management oversight and accountability ensure that thresholds are consistently applied. The head of service for children looked after agrees all new admissions, adding further rigour to the decision-making.
25. Children are protected well through appropriate use of the court process when necessary. Use of the Public Law Outline is effectively monitored and supported by a court progression officer, who offers guidance and advice to social workers. Progress is monitored well via case progression meetings and a tracker system to ensure a timely response for children.
26. Permanence in all forms has a high priority and is considered early for children. Regular permanency tracking meetings are chaired by the head of service for children looked after and attended by heads of service for safeguarding and resources, the court progression officer and the adoption team manager. This ensures that plans progress in a timely and considered manner. Separate consideration for children under five and over five provides further rigour to permanence planning.
27. All types of placements, including with friends and relatives, are well supported. Assessments of connected persons are completed in a timely way. The number of children in special guardianship placements has increased in the last year, and there have been no breakdowns of extended family placements during this time.
28. The judiciary and the Child and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass) are extremely complimentary about the work of the local authority, considering it robust and timely. With proceedings completed within an average of 24 weeks, Merton is exceeding national guidelines and has improved in this area of practice considerably.
29. When children return home to live with their families, a robust assessment and comprehensive support ensure a successful and enduring rehabilitation. Social workers remain involved and plans continue to be monitored.
30. Children experience good and stable relationships with social workers, who are part of a dedicated looked after and permanence service. Greater stability of social workers and manageable caseloads provide stronger social work

relationships to children and a deeper understanding of their needs. For a small number of children, changes of social worker in the early part of their care journey affected the quality of relationships and the formulation of their plan.

31. Care planning is effective for the vast majority of children, and the needs of each child are understood well. For a small minority of children, forward planning is not sufficiently clear and does not include measurable timescales. For a few children, the care plan does not reflect changes in the child's circumstances. (Recommendation)
32. An effective and well-used advocacy service assists children to participate in their reviews and provides support when they are making complaints. This service is also available to children who are placed out of borough, ensuring that no one is excluded. A successful independent visiting service supports children, and more volunteers are currently being trained and already matched to children. Due to the success of this service, in both numbers and the relationship offered, there are still children waiting to be matched with an independent visitor. Senior managers are aware of this and are considering how to ensure that children do not miss out on this valued support.
33. An active CiCC influences and guides services for children looked after. The CiCC has been involved in the development of 'The Pledge' and invites other services and professionals to attend, including the lead member for children's services and a representative from the housing department. The permanence team for children looked after is seeking ways to engage younger children in the CiCC, to ensure that the views of a wider age range are considered.
34. Children benefit from regular review meetings that are well attended and inclusive. The local authority has piloted a new model of looked after reviews, aimed at facilitating greater involvement by the child in the review meetings. This is having a positive effect, with the most recent local authority data showing 99.5% of children participating in their reviews. Independent reviewing officers (IROs) report having access to court bundles and being included more in the planning process. IROs challenge practice when necessary, and disputes are resolved informally when possible. However, the recording of this is inconsistent and, as a consequence, the footprint and influence of the IROs are not evident on children's files.
35. Children's views are taken into account when forward planning, and case records illustrate the work that is being completed with children and discussions regarding their future. Appropriate contact with birth families is supported, and children are assisted to understand their life histories at a time and pace that is suitable for them. Life story work is of a consistently high quality. A skilled and flexible in-house child and adolescent mental health service (CAMHS) team offers consultation and guidance to social workers and foster carers and direct work to children. The quality of this input is high, and

there are clear, improved outcomes for children. This systemic service reflects the wider model of practice used in Merton and workers remain involved for as long as the need remains.

36. The health of children looked after is effectively monitored and overseen. A dedicated health nurse for children looked after has been in post since November 2016 and ensures that the health needs of children looked after are recognised and met. This includes proactive follow up of documents to ensure that an initial health assessment can take place, and travelling to see children out of authority if necessary. Regular reporting to the corporate parenting board and the health strategy board, as well as providing a health presence in child sexual exploitation meetings and 'missing' meetings, results in a widespread awareness of the health needs of children looked after.
37. Children and young people receive good support from the virtual school wherever they live. Staff maintain good oversight of the progress of children looked after. They know the circumstances of individual children and use this information very effectively to work with others, such as social workers, carers and schools, to plan the support that children need to make progress in their learning. The large majority of children looked after (96%) go to a school judged good or better by Ofsted. When they do not, staff carefully consider whether the setting is meeting the individual needs of children.
38. A high proportion (74%) of children looked after have special educational and/or complex needs. Their attainment is often below age-related expectation. However, with the support of the virtual school and partners, the majority of children looked after make good progress in their education. After children leave school, nearly all successfully engage in further education, training or employment.
39. Advisory teachers and the virtual school headteacher take the lead on the planning of the education of children looked after. As a result, children have good-quality, up-to-date and timely personal education plans that reflect their needs well. Their education targets are clear and they help carers and professionals to maintain good oversight of children's progress. The pupil premium grant and additional funding from the virtual school are used well to support children's academic progress and their personal development.
40. The virtual school team closely monitors children looked after who are missing education and is an active partner in supporting their return to education. The team makes strenuous efforts to ensure that children and young people engage in learning. As a result, most children looked after attend school regularly and few experience exclusion from school. There have not been any permanent exclusions from school for the last seven years, and fixed-term exclusions are reducing, both in terms of the number of episodes and the number of children.

41. The majority of children in Merton benefit from secure and stable placements. Sufficient in-house fostering households, with appropriate commissioning arrangements, result in children living in well-matched placements. The number of 16- and 17-year-olds who enter local authority care is increasing and they now constitute 44% of the overall cohort. The local authority has responded to this challenge in proactively analysing the need and tailoring services as required. Despite the considerable effort and planning invested, it remains a challenge to locate placements for teenagers who have complex needs or who are at risk of sexual exploitation or exploitation by gangs. The local authority continues to actively plan and respond. The learning and development strategy is focusing on the skills needed to manage teenagers, to encourage current carers to consider extending their offer.
42. Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children receive an impressive service. The local authority ensures that it exercises its responsibilities without delay and with considerable sensitivity. Regular, informal coffee shop group meetings offer friendship and help to develop confidence and to reduce isolation. Whenever possible, the children are placed in family placements. Good connections with a local college enable the children to access courses to develop their English language skills, and links with solicitors reduce the stress of legal uncertainty.
43. Risks generally are understood, and social workers act quickly to protect children in their care. Children at risk of sexual exploitation are effectively monitored by the child sexual exploitation coordinator. In addition, there has been some good joint work between children's social care and youth offending services, to address the risks associated with involvement with gangs. Children who are missing from care are known, and risks are actively monitored at weekly 'missing' meetings. The recording of return home interviews is not consistently good and, in a small number of cases, it could not be determined what information had been gathered to inform risk management and safety plans. (Recommendation)
44. Family finding for permanent foster placements is tenacious, and children who are waiting for families benefit from the same determined approach as those seeking adoptive families. Approved foster carers safely meet the needs of a range of children, including those who have complex needs or disabilities and groups of brothers and sisters. Within a well-run fostering service, foster carers receive consistent support and regular announced and unannounced visits from supervising social workers, and they are able to access a range of appropriate and regularly available training. Allegations against foster carers are carefully and robustly investigated and result in de-registration if appropriate.
45. Foster carers understand delegated authority, and children are encouraged to access activities that promote their social, educational and recreational needs. Annual reviews are comprehensive and up to date.

The graded judgement for adoption performance is that it is outstanding

46. The local authority gives high priority to identifying and quickly securing adoption for children when adoption is in their best interests. Strategic leaders, managers and social workers have an excellent knowledge about the children in their care, and they are passionate about achieving the very best outcomes.
47. Timely and accurate early identification of children, when adoption is in their best interests, leads to appropriate and prompt family finding. Successful outcomes are driven through case progression, monthly tracking and permanence and care planning meetings. Managers maintain a stringent overview for each child and provide an early alert to the adoption social workers and wider consortium about the children's profiles. Consortium meetings facilitate further exchange and discussion about prospective matches. Children benefit from early identification of potential matches with approved adopters, including before the granting of the placement order, and move swiftly to live with their new families following the court decision.
48. The experienced senior practitioners in the adoption team are highly skilled and know their children and adopters well. Family finding is creative and tenacious and is supported effectively by a skilled publicity officer who provides professional profiling and marketing. Children's drawings form the backdrop to their profiles, which are highly personal and regularly refreshed and updated. An extensive range of local and national family finding methods are used and this results in an equally positive outcome for very young babies through to older children who have complex needs. The success of the service has resulted in there being no children currently awaiting an adoptive match, and all children who require adoption are placed.
49. The assessment, preparation, training and support of adopters are exceptional and are consistently of the highest standard, being insightful, highly effective and responsive. Prospective adopters benefit from hearing powerful histories from birth parents, adopters and adopted adults at introduction and preparation sessions. Feedback from adopters to inspectors reflected the impact of the high-quality preparation, including the increased empathy for birth parents and a balanced expectation of parenting as adopters.
50. The quality of prospective adopter reports is impressive. Child permanence reports are comprehensive and analytical and lead to a logical recommendation for adoption. Social workers comprehensively explore a wide range of potential issues with sensitivity and insight. All assessments seen by inspectors bring out the unique needs of children and the individual skill of adoptive parents, and some are of an outstanding quality. Recruitment is effective and has led to a significant increase in the number of approved

adopters in the last year (from three to 12), which means that there is an increased pool of suitable families waiting to provide children with a permanent home. A well-embedded foster for adoption scheme ensures that social workers discuss this option with all prospective adopters. A specially tailored workshop is then offered to interested adopters to help to prepare them further.

51. Social workers are determined in their efforts to find families for brothers and sisters, children from a range of cultural and religious backgrounds and children who have complex needs. This persistence has achieved successful adoptions for brother and sister groups, for children who have special needs and for older children. All of the 11 children adopted last year moved into their adoptive families in 10 months or under. This is a significant improvement on the previous year. For a very small number of children who have had a change of plan away from adoption, this is well informed and the alternative permanent placement has been secured. Inspectors have seen positive progress for all children, and there are no children currently waiting for a family.
52. Performance against the adoption scorecard demonstrates that the local authority is performing well and has made further significant progress in the past year. The consistently improving trajectory of Merton's performance is evidence of the effectiveness of the authority's sharp focus on timeliness. This is strong practice, confirmed by feedback from the judiciary and Cafcass.
53. Adopters spoke consistently of the excellent quality and timeliness of matching and placement. Success with foster for adoption placements and the fast-track process for second-time adopters contribute to this achievement. Excellent foster for adoption arrangements have resulted in the successful early placement of three babies in foster for adoption families, directly from hospital. Children benefit from particularly resourceful and, where appropriate, culturally sensitive pre- and post-birth work to safeguard mothers and their unborn babies and to ensure a nurturing environment after they are born. Support for birth parents is outstanding in helping them to make difficult decisions and to remain involved through indirect contact and by providing a wealth of information for life story work.
54. A gradual phased introduction to their new family prepares children well for adoption and proceeds at the child's pace. Social workers are creative in supporting and directing the process, using photographs and other resources to help children to make the transition calmly and positively. The timeframe for the transition is led by the child. Foster for adoption introductions are supported sensitively to take place between birth parents and adopters.
55. The independent panel chair and the agency decision maker (ADM) regularly discuss children's plans, and inspectors saw evidence of appropriate strong challenge. Together, they achieve the highest standards in the planning for

children. The highly effective cycle of quality assurance is having a noticeable impact, and panel and ADM decisions are very well considered and thorough. Adoptive parents benefit from meeting with the medical adviser at panel, which gives them the opportunity to discuss the potential health needs of children so that they are well informed.

56. Adoption support is excellent and highly creative. It ensures that adopted children form strong attachments to their families, and potential issues are identified and addressed at the earliest stage. There is a range of provision coordinated by a dedicated social worker post. Annual fun days for adopted children, theraplay and individual parenting sessions are available. The consortium provides a range of established post-adoption support groups for birth parents and adopted adults. There is effective and creative use of adoption support funding (ASF) and this is having a positive impact for children and families. Families are aware of how to access the provision, and all families who have requested support are receiving it. ASF is helping children and families to access therapeutic work and dyadic developmental psychotherapy. Adoption support is extended to all children in the household when required.
57. Later life letters are sensitive, non-judgemental and written so that children can understand how and why they were adopted. Letters are child-focused, compassionate and insightful, with a respectful understanding of the experience of the birth parents. Letterbox arrangements are robust. Compelling life story work helps children to understand and make sense of their past and the reasons that they are unable to live with their birth families. Excellent work is undertaken to enable children to understand identity, including cultural identity. The virtual school recognises the unique education needs of adopted children and provides additional support for children placed for adoption.

<p>The graded judgement about the experience and progress of care leavers is that it is good</p>

58. The majority of young people who leave care receive good support that builds their skills and confidence well as they move towards independence. Social workers and personal advisers in the dedicated 14-plus team are in touch with 96% of their care leavers and form trusting and productive relationships with them through regular face-to-face contact. Young people described their workers as approachable and supportive.
59. If young people disengage, staff make concerted efforts to establish contact through unannounced visits to their homes, via letter, text and email, through known family and friends and through the job centre, if appropriate. In the best instances, this results in young people re-engaging with the support services on offer.

60. Social workers and personal advisers know and understand young people's individual circumstances and needs well. They manage known risks to young people, including sexual exploitation, well. They develop effective plans with partners, such as the police, which are responsive to young people's changing needs, and over time young people stabilise their lives and make good progress. In a small minority of cases, managers do not intervene quickly enough to help staff to consider alternative plans, when young people are not moving forward with their lives.
61. Planning is effective for the large majority of young people who have an up-to-date pathway plan that covers well all aspects of their lives. Plans are detailed, and young people are effectively involved in developing their own plans. A minority of pathway plans are insufficiently detailed, and there is not enough emphasis on the support that the young person will receive to achieve their goals. The pathway plans of a small minority of young people are out of date, and planning to meet the young people's current needs is insufficient, although inspectors did not see any detriment to young people as a result of this. (Recommendation)
62. The virtual school, social workers and personal advisers effectively support young people to navigate the education, employment and training (EET) options available to them. As a result, a good proportion of care leavers are in EET. Within this overall positive picture, senior managers and staff recognise that staff do not sufficiently promote apprenticeships to young people. Managers are developing strategies to ensure that apprenticeships are more widely available to vulnerable young people.
63. Young people seeking to study at university receive particularly good assistance prior to applying for a university place, and they receive practical help with their applications and personal statements. This results in a high number of young people studying at university. The local authority is flexible and creative in extending support. While studying, young people receive good financial support and additional funding, for example, to purchase essential books and for travel to see relatives.
64. The large majority of care leavers live in suitable accommodation. All young people who spoke to inspectors feel that they are safe where they live. With good support from carers, the 14-plus team and housing providers, many young people make a successful transition from care to living independently.
65. There is a good range of accommodation options for young people. Most care leavers live in semi-independent accommodation with support available that is appropriate for their particular needs. Bed and breakfast accommodation is never used; young people who need emergency accommodation are usually housed within the existing housing provider network. However, the use of 'staying put' arrangements is underdeveloped. Managers are aware of this and

are developing plans to improve the opportunities for young people to remain with their foster carers beyond the age of 18. (Recommendation)

66. Young people receive good support in developing the skills and knowledge that they need to live independently and to manage their own affairs. Prior to securing their own tenancies, they attend useful workshops on managing their money, budgeting to run a household and home maintenance. With ongoing help from social workers and personal advisers, young people manage their tenancies successfully. There have been no tenancy breakdowns in the last two years for young people moving into their first homes.
67. Care leavers who arrive as unaccompanied asylum-seeking children receive very good support from the 14-plus team. Young people value highly the support and help that they receive from their foster carers and social workers. Young people settle quickly in foster care, attend school or college and develop well in their spoken English. Their health needs are assessed and met promptly. A monthly drop-in provides excellent opportunities for these young people to develop friendships with their peers, receive informal support and gain new experiences, such as taking part in outdoor activities and restaurant visits. Many make excellent progress in their studies and are highly ambitious for their future.
68. Most young people are aware of their rights and entitlements, such as the support that they will receive while at college or university and the financial help that they are entitled to when they set up their first homes. The advocacy service has recently been extended to include care leavers to support this further.
69. Staff effectively help young people to manage their own health needs independently. On turning 18 years old, young people receive a useful leaflet on important health services and contacts. Most young people register with their local doctors and dentists. Although this year all young people who have turned 18 years old have received a copy of their health history, this is not the case for all those young people currently open to the leaving care team. (Recommendation)
70. Care leavers who are more vulnerable, such as those in custody, are equally well supported by staff, who are sometimes the only regular visitors while they serve their sentences. Most young people have appropriate accommodation available to them on their release from custody. Staff are proactive in trying to secure EET options for young people at the time that they leave custody and, in most cases, work well with other partners, such as the virtual school, to ensure that young people have every opportunity to succeed.

Leadership, management and governance	Outstanding
<p>Senior managers and politicians model a constructive, enquiring and engaging style of leadership and management. It comprises a blend of compassion and concern for the most vulnerable children and families, and conspicuous care and support for frontline workers. A highly visible thread of meaningful children’s participation and influence is apparent. These elements are balanced with high expectations for skilled, evidence-based social work that improves the circumstances for children.</p> <p>This leadership and management landscape creates a lively, challenging and rewarding environment for social workers. Strong frontline managers, carefully managed workloads and an evidence-informed approach create time for social workers to practise creative and effective direct work with children. This leads to well-crafted assessments and interventions, which are concentrated on understanding and improving the experiences of children.</p> <p>High-quality data and performance information are used well at all strategic and operational groups and across all management layers. The performance and quality assurance frameworks are closely interwoven and provide a wide range of useful information. This leads to services, teams or individual workers that require attention being quickly identified. Equally, senior managers identify and celebrate many examples of good social work, offering practitioners ample exposure to effective social work practice. Leaders and managers are ambitious and driven to continually develop the services that vulnerable children receive. They strive to improve even when evidence indicates that they are already performing well.</p> <p>Departmental and inter-agency senior management communication is regular and purposeful, ensuring that children’s issues are prominent in the Health and Well-being Board and the Safer and Stronger Partnership Board. Relationships and lines of accountability between the Children’s Trust Board and MSCB are strong and clear. Strategic partnership and governance arrangements across the spectrum of boards provide a cooperative climate for high-level conversations. This is subsequently reflected in improved or new approaches to operational arrangements, including, for example, young people exposed to extremist influences, gangs and sexual exploitation.</p> <p>Creative recruitment and detailed and continuous promotion of social workers’ professional development at all levels of experience ensure a skilled workforce. The impact of staff turnover is mitigated appropriately by strong operational management oversight.</p>	

71. The DCS is highly skilled, dedicated and experienced. As the longest serving DCS in London, she provides a sustained and energetic commitment to continually improving outcomes for the most vulnerable children. The quality of all services is good or better, building further on the 'good' judgements at the last Ofsted inspection in 2012. The leadership style emphasises the core values of compassion, humility, social justice and inclusion. These sit alongside a requirement for the highest standards of frontline practice with children and families, and poor practice is actively addressed. This approach is apparent in the DCS's leadership of the Children's Trust, which maintains an authoritative and informed overview of performance.
72. Strong and impressive early help services, improved educational attainment and high-quality targeted and specialist services are prioritised in equal measure by leaders and senior managers. These include a prominent focus on disabled children and children who have special educational needs. The DCS maintains a variety of formal and informal routes for regularly meeting frontline staff, foster parents and children, including those who are looked after and unaccompanied asylum seekers. This provides the DCS with a comprehensive and well-informed range of insights into the effectiveness of frontline practice.
73. An influential corporate parenting board, chaired by the longstanding and experienced chief executive, illustrates the importance given at the highest level of the local authority to effective cross-council responses to the needs of children looked after. It enables the chief executive to understand directly the performance of frontline services. Successful collaborative working yields results for children. As an example, the formation of an integrated commissioning hub assisted in opening negotiations with local social housing providers. This resulted in the provision of additional priority accommodation for young people leaving care and led to the housing department becoming standing members of the board. The board's priorities are carefully considered and take into account the joint strategic needs assessment (JSNA), performance information and the views of the CiCC.
74. Strong partnership, shared accountability and challenge are clearly evident in Merton. The chief executive, the lead member for children's services and the DCS all have active chair or membership roles in the Safer Merton Partnership Board, the Violence against Women and Girls Group, the Health and Well-being Board and the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Panel. This has resulted, for example, in the chair of the Health and Well-being Board and the lead member meeting before each board to plan the inclusion of children's priorities in the agenda. Any impact on children's health outcomes is considered in all local authority priorities. Additionally, progress has been made in targeted objectives, such as improving the take-up of immunisations and the joint commissioning of community health services for the under-fives, with the clinical commissioning group. The capacity and availability of CAMHS practitioners in social work teams have increased,

including the provision of more direct support and consultation for children looked after.

75. The DCS chairs the Youth Crime Executive Board. This cross-representation means that domestic abuse services for families, including MARACs and the independent domestic violence advisers, are closely aligned with adult services. Well-devised strategic and operational relationships with the police enable rigorous responses to child sexual exploitation, gangs, missing children and other adolescent vulnerabilities. Similarly, frequent meetings with the chair of the MSCB result in well-aligned single- and multi-agency training programmes and auditing schedules. The assistant director social care and youth inclusion chairs the MSCB's quality subgroup, demonstrating an intent to expand relevant parts of the practice model across partner agencies, and to have oversight of the quality of multi-agency practice.
76. Interventions with children and young people vulnerable to extremist influences are well planned and effective. Arrangements for multi-agency governance, awareness raising, operational oversight and partnership work with the local police and counter-terrorist police are all well designed, including regular work with local schools. A partnership board coordinates intelligence carefully and oversees a wide spectrum of community cohesion work, embracing local mosques and churches through a 'safe faith' approach. Local MSCB guidance for partner agencies is clear and helpful. A Channel panel meets monthly to plan and review interventions with a small number of children where concerns are greater.
77. Children exposed to risks of sexual exploitation receive protective and well-developed strategic and multi-agency responses. Multi-agency governance arrangements are tightly coordinated and led by the MSCB. A multi-agency sexual exploitation panel closely tracks the impact of risk reduction work provided by a range of locally commissioned services. Joint work with the police is highly integrated, and targeted strategy meetings are attended by all involved agencies, chaired by an experienced and knowledgeable specialist child sexual abuse coordinator. The coordinator routinely checks the quality of responses to contacts and referrals into the MASH, and is further developing the use of screening and assessment tools through ongoing consultations with social workers. Multiple risks to missing children are also well understood and evaluated through pan-agency weekly meetings. However, the individual response for each child through completion of return home interviews is inconsistent. This is being carefully monitored and addressed by senior managers.
78. High-quality performance information is closely scrutinised at all management levels and at the children's and young people's overview and scrutiny committee, through weekly, monthly, bi-monthly and quarterly datasets. The chief executive and DCS discuss performance information at their regular meetings. Accessible dashboards provide snapshots of all local and national

indicators across the spectrum of services, and useful hyperlinks allow closer examination of particular teams and individual practitioners. This enables early attention to emerging difficulties.

79. Performance management and reporting are firmly established with a stable team manager group. Remedial actions result in notable improvements, including, for example, additional investment to increase social worker capacity in the first response teams. This resulted in an improvement in both the quality and timeliness of assessments. Following manager attention, participation rates in EET for young people leaving care climbed above national levels.
80. Performance and quality assurance frameworks are closely aligned and mutually reinforcing. Auditing is well targeted, based on sound performance intelligence, resulting in practice learning and improvement. When performance trends require greater exploration, periodic deeper dives are undertaken. An adolescent needs analysis is a recent example of a detailed and probing analysis of factors underlying placement instability, triggered by a surge in the numbers of older young people becoming looked after. A care leavers' service improvement board, chaired by an assistant director, has led to important service improvements. The assistant director children's social care meets regularly with the team manager group to discuss and highlight learning points arising from audits and quality assurance activities, further demonstrating a deeply ingrained learning and development culture.
81. New elements of the practice model are being introduced and piloted, including regular practice observations and a live auditing model to promote coaching for social workers facing difficult, complex issues in their casework. The DCS, assistant director social care and youth inclusion and all managers maintain a high level of interest, curiosity and knowledge about children's cases. Social workers highly value these appreciative inquiries and interest in their work. Regular, high-quality supervision and management oversight are evident across all services. They are largely evaluative, analytical and well recorded, providing helpful direction for practitioners.
82. Developments in children's needs are understood by increasingly bespoke JSNA reports that are regularly updated. Incisive analyses have been undertaken, for example, of child sexual exploitation and children living in families exposed to the higher risks associated with the 'trigger trio' of parenting vulnerabilities: domestic abuse, mental ill health and substance misuse. Joint and single commissioning of universal and targeted services is concentrated on the most deprived parts of the borough, where outcomes for many children are known to be poorer. Young people are both involved and highly influential as 'young inspectors' throughout commissioning programmes. Their participation in the design and development of a forthcoming community hub has been extensive. Commissioned services, and

those provided directly by the local authority, such as parenting programmes, are subject to rigorous and regular contract monitoring.

83. Both the judiciary and Cafcass report a consistently high standard of evidence preparation by social workers in care proceedings, which are completed within the required 26-week timescale. Communication with the local authority is positive and constructive, enabling any issues to be quickly addressed.
84. Merton's social work practice model is at the centre of the continuous development of effective and evidence-based social work with children and families. The model is based on systemic theories and appreciative, critical enquiries to assess the strengths, needs and risks in families. It is led by the assistant director for children's social care, who chairs a social work board and a practice development group. The model features a number of evidence-based practice tools and direct work methods, such as motivational interviewing with older children. Social workers and managers are provided with phased and continuous training in the model through a close and well-established partnership with a local university. Social workers' ongoing professional development is promoted at all stages of their experience. Well-defined career progression pathways encourage committed and talented social workers to progress and flourish. The continuing development of the practice model is supported by additional funding and a well-formulated project plan, illustrating a demonstrable corporate and departmental commitment to high-quality social work with children and families.
85. A restless ambition to continuously develop better practice is discernible, led by the assistant director for children's social care who is a committed, motivational and skilled social work leader. The learning and development programme is centred on the model, providing many openings for social workers to learn new approaches, for example in direct work with adolescents. Senior managers are outward facing and regularly invite external peer reviews of their services. They are actively engaged with, or lead, regional groups and initiatives and are eager to learn about social work practice in other local authorities. This is exemplified in the leadership of the introduction of a Family Drug and Alcohol Court, and the active participation in an evolving social impact bond edge-of-care service, which will include multi-systemic and functional family therapies.
86. Annual turnover of social workers is approximately 25%. This turnover occurs despite a supportive and dynamic professional environment for social workers, positively reported on in their annual survey. Recruitment and retention, a constant senior manager preoccupation, are of critical importance, featuring constructive joint work with human resources. Recruitment initiatives are widespread and continuous. Additional annual funding of £1 million each year over the last three years, through corporate growth and contingency use as well as recycling money within the children's services department, has increased frontline social worker posts by 33% and enabled manageable

caseloads and smaller teams with tighter management oversight. Students and newly qualified social workers are provided with high-quality support and training. The 'Frontline' programme is well established and 'Step Up to Social Work' is being developed. Market supplements and retention incentives are used to attract experienced social workers and to retain them in service areas where turnover is typically greater. Senior managers resist recruiting too many newly qualified social workers, as they are aware that this will add to the responsibilities and pressures on their existing experienced frontline workers. Senior managers remain resolute in their commitment to recruit able and committed social workers, who will continue to provide high-quality services to the most vulnerable children and families.

The Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB)

The Local Safeguarding Children Board is outstanding

Executive summary

Merton's Local Safeguarding Children Board (MSCB) is outstanding. It is highly effective in holding agencies to account for their individual safeguarding arrangements in the welfare and protection of children. The strength and maturity of the board are reflected in the established strategic arrangements and the high level of engagement across the partnership and with other strategic boards. The board benefits from decisive strategic leadership by the independent chair and a highly competent business manager. The board is well attended by capable senior strategic leaders who can influence safeguarding in their individual agencies. The contribution and participation of the voluntary sector and lay members greatly enhance the effectiveness of the board's work within the wider community. There is effective communication between the chief executive, DCS, lead member and chair of the MSCB, and accountability for the work of the board is strong.

The board's strategic priorities are relevant and informed by detailed analysis of local need to target the most vulnerable children, including children at risk of sexual exploitation and extremism and children missing from home or care. There is a sustained commitment to and focus on the delivery of the board's safeguarding priorities, including families in which adult mental health, neglect, alcohol, drugs and domestic violence feature in children's lives. The safeguarding needs of children pervade the board's work and business and subgroup plans.

The systems and processes underpinning the work of the board result in the availability of detailed multi-agency performance information of frontline practice, including around the application of thresholds for intervention (known locally as Merton's Well-Being Model) and compliance with the pan-London child protection procedures. The board promotes a culture of continuous development. Learning from SCRs and learning improvement reviews (LiRs) is used to improve safeguarding practice and in the development of multi-agency policies. The routine and innovative use of single- and multi-agency case file audit means that the board can assure itself of the quality and impact of frontline social work practice and take decisive action to drive improvement. The collaboration of partners at both strategic and operational level allows for alerts and trends to be identified and acted on swiftly.

There is a comprehensive suite of training available and attendance is good. The impact of training is actively monitored to ensure that it remains relevant and impacts on raising awareness and changing behaviours in the protection of children. The contribution and participation of children and young people are actively promoted and used well in the design and delivery of training and the development of priorities. There are no recommendations for the MSCB.

87. The MSCB is highly effective. There are strong governance arrangements underpinned by established partnerships with other strategic boards, including the Health and Well-being Board, the Corporate Parenting Board, the Children's Trust and the Safer and Stronger Partnership. Strategic leaders, elected members and partners work collaboratively and focus relentlessly on what matters to children in keeping them safe and promoting their welfare. There is strong engagement between the chief executive, DCS and lead member; roles and responsibilities are clear and accountability is strong. Suitable measures are in place to strengthen the partnership further with the Adult Safeguarding Board.
88. The independent chair provides decisive strategic leadership and challenge to partners. The chair has been central and extremely influential in driving forward the board's priorities and is highly respected by partners. The maturity of partners' relationships is reflected in the mutual trust and respect shown to each other. This is reflected in the sustained focus on ensuring that children's welfare and protection are at the heart of their work. Members expect, receive and are open to challenge, as the board seeks assurance on individual agency safeguarding responsibilities. Partners' contribution to the work of the board is valued and acted on. This supports collaborative and effective working relationships.
89. The business manager is highly experienced and competent and actively monitors the risk and challenge log and drives the business plan forward. His detailed knowledge and experience of MSCB priorities and subgroup work plans is impressive. The work of the board also benefits from excellent business administrators. This supports detailed scrutiny in the monitoring and reviewing of the progress of plans. The establishment of the business improvement group two years ago has enabled additional rigorous scrutiny of the board's priorities and supports partners in challenging each other in delivering against their individual agency's safeguarding responsibilities, on time and to the highest standard.
90. The experience and expertise of board members are used exceptionally well in partners discharging their safeguarding responsibilities and in holding each other to account. This is a notable strength, which permeates the work of the board and subgroups, the impact of which is demonstrated through the maturity of the partnership in collaboratively working to deliver single and joint priorities. There is a shared vision to safeguard all Merton children and a sustained and unyielding commitment in driving forward MSCB priorities: Think Family, vulnerable adolescents and early help. The board's priorities are the result of rigorous analysis of local need and reflect learning from SCRs, LiRs and national issues. The subgroup plans are closely aligned to the board's priorities and crosscutting themes around vulnerable children, including disabled children and children at risk of sexual exploitation. The joint focus on families in which neglect features in children's lives is well managed.

91. The culture of openness across the partnership is established and embedded. This, coupled with effective systems and processes, makes for a powerful force in the board holding partners to account and in understanding the effectiveness and impact of the quality of services in safeguarding children. There is a strong engagement across the partnership, including with schools, the voluntary sector, faith and wider community groups on safeguarding issues. Members are drawn from a wide range of partners who hold strategic safeguarding roles in their agency, and are experienced and influential in their organisations. All partners make a proportionate financial contribution to MSCB.
92. Members, including lay members, actively drive the business planning priorities. Members receive appropriate induction training and are clear about their collective and individual responsibilities. The impact of joint work on increasing awareness and supporting change is well evidenced. The business manager is effective and determined in driving and supporting change within the community to promote and safeguard children.
93. The understanding and application of thresholds by partners are reviewed regularly to ensure that they remain fit for purpose. The influence of the MSCB in evaluating and scrutinising the application of thresholds across frontline practice, including early help, is far reaching and innovative. The routine and detailed audit of frontline practice, including single- and multi-agency case file audit, focuses on the evaluation of the quality of children's lived experience and progress and is exemplary.
94. The wide range of audit activity includes a recent comprehensive audit of private fostering and was undertaken to ensure that practice met required regulatory standards. A recent sexual abuse threshold audit report in October 2016, undertaken by the MSCB quality assurance group and involving the police, children's social care and early years services, effectively reviewed the quality of decision-making. A themed multi-agency audit of child sexual exploitation over a number of years helped the board to determine whether changes in safeguarding practice were sustained. This is an effective approach to evaluating practice and determining the long-term impact of joint work with this vulnerable group. The quality assurance subgroup effectively conducted an audit of the quality of decision-making and practice with regards to children when disability is a feature of their lives. The learning from these audits informs business planning and wider training needs, including joint training.
95. There is an exceptionally effective section 11 process. The incisive analysis through the annual peer challenge and review meeting process ensures appropriate and respectful challenge of partners' compliance with safeguarding standards and seeks assurance of impact on practice. All senior agency representatives attend these annual challenge sessions. Partners

spoken to by inspectors said that they found the process to be rigorous but supportive.

96. The terms of reference for the child death overview panel (CDOP) and all subgroups are clear and link well to the board's priorities. The recently established Merton CDOP, which had been a joint panel with a neighbouring authority, fulfils its statutory responsibilities. The rapid response team convenes within timescales. Membership of the board is at appropriate senior and strategic level. The panel sensitively and appropriately supports the engagement of families. The panel uses learning events well to drive improvement. For example, a presentation to health professionals covering a five-year review of the work of CDOP was received well. Information on trends in cases of child deaths, both locally and nationally, is distributed through articles and has included features on alcohol poisoning, child mental health issues and internet safety.
97. The MSCB Annual Report 2015–16 gives a clear commentary and assessment of the performance and effectiveness of services across the partnership. The report outlines progress in the reporting period and future challenges for the board linked to the Wood Review. Since the last inspection, the board has reconstituted itself, placing greater emphasis on quality assurance. It has sharpened its focus on prioritising work at a time of reducing resources to ensure maximum impact on the welfare and protection of children across the partnership. The report provides an overview of each of the subgroups against the work plans, including the CDOP, and in particular focuses on the SCR in respect of Child B published this year and the LiR for Child C. The report reflects clear links with other strategic boards, and current priorities for 2016–18 are made clear. The annual report is received by the leader, the chief executive, the Children's Trust and the Health and Well-being Board, enabling effective challenge on key areas of improvement.
98. The MSCB has an established learning and improvement framework with statutory partners. The board has recently endorsed a revised learning and development strategy and has aligned learning needs to the board's priorities. This ensures that safeguarding training, including multi-agency training across the workforce, is targeted at the appropriate level. The opportunity for learning through SCRs and LiRs is robust and clearly aligned to the board's strategic priorities, subgroup work plans and frontline practice.
99. There are detailed action plans following the recent SCR and LiR, which appropriately link to recommendations. Progress is closely monitored through the quality assurance subgroup and the business improvement group. The importance of joint working in protecting children and young people where mental health and neglect feature are key priorities of the board. There is increasing joint development work with the adult mental health trust, and a 'Think Family' coordinator has recently been appointed to strengthen strategic and operational integration across children's and adults' services. The impact

of neglect, which featured in the learning review of Child C, is underpinned by the MSCB multi-agency neglect strategy and implementation and action plan to ensure that neglect is recognised and that children's voices are heard and acted on.

100. The local authority uses learning from reviews to effect change. For example, the learning from an SCR in 2014, underpinned by joint research with education colleagues, has been effectively used to drive improvement by promoting a lower tolerance of chronic school absence. This has helped to identify vulnerable children, including children at risk of sexual exploitation and those missing from education or care. This effective joint approach is now established and embedded in practice. This demonstrates the direct link between learning and improving practice. It also reflects the commitment of the board to driving improvement. Social workers and other professionals who spoke to inspectors understand well the findings of reviews and learning from training.
101. The comprehensive range of high-quality, up-to-date policies and procedures are exemplary. These are regularly reviewed by the board and the business improvement group to ensure compliance and to ensure that policies are relevant. The board promotes a strong and transparent learning culture, setting high standards and drawing effectively on independent research. The promote and protect young people subgroup (PPYP) provides strategic and effective oversight of multi-agency policies, protocols and procedures regarding children at risk, including risk from sexual exploitation, radicalisation and extremism.
102. The board has access to a comprehensive suite of multi-agency performance information, which is monitored and regularly and actively scrutinised. Joint performance information is detailed and clearly aligned with audit activity and supported by commentary on progress. The good attendance of partners at MSCB and subgroup meetings supports effective analysis and challenge.
103. Listening to children's views permeates the board's work in ensuring their welfare and protection. The most recent joint annual conference for practitioners and managers, which focused on the complexities of domestic abuse, involved young people. The conference content underpinned the strategic approach to engage partners and professionals, and to raise awareness and understanding.
104. The voice of children and young people is actively encouraged, including through their attendance at MSCB meetings. One example is a research project on young people's views on safeguarding that was commissioned in partnership with the board and London South Bank University. The project took into account the views of 148 young people in secondary schools, including children subject to child protection plans. A training day was held in May 2017 to consider lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender issues, and those

questioning their sexuality or gender, and young people ran part of the programme. The event focused on mental health, transgender identity and hate crime. A shorter version of the event was recently presented to the board by young people from a local school.

105. There is close alignment between the training programme and strategic priorities, ensuring the effective targeting of programmes to drive improvement in safeguarding practice. Future training needs are identified through the extensive single and joint audit programmes and findings from SCRs, LiRs and national and local issues. Attendance is very good, and feedback at the point of delivery and three months later is sought to evaluate impact on practice and to inform future training needs.
106. The board is actively engaged with the 'Prevent' duty on radicalisation, which includes a wide range of partners, including the police, schools and early years settings, and faith, voluntary groups and the wider communities. MSCB guidance on safeguarding children and young people from the harmful messages of violent extremism and terrorism has been reviewed to ensure its current relevance. The guidance is clear and informs partners of their safeguarding responsibilities. It incorporates helpful lists for recognising risk and links to referral pathways for the MASH and the Channel programme, which focuses on providing support at an early stage to people who are identified as being vulnerable to being drawn into terrorism. The board has also consulted with a range of community groups, especially with regard to its strategy on female genital mutilation, which is reviewed appropriately through the policy subgroup.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences of children and young people who have needed or still need help and/or protection. This includes children and young people who are looked after and young people who are leaving care and starting their lives as young adults.

Inspectors considered the quality of work and the difference that adults make to the lives of children, young people and families. They read case files, watched how professional staff work with families and each other and discussed the effectiveness of help and care given to children and young people. Wherever possible, they talked to children, young people and their families. In addition, the inspectors have tried to understand what the local authority knows about how well it is performing, how well it is doing and what difference it is making for the people whom it is trying to help, protect and look after.

The inspection of the local authority was carried out under section 136 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006.

The review of the Local Safeguarding Children Board was carried out under section 15A of the Children Act 2004.

Ofsted produces this report of the inspection of local authority functions and the review of the Local Safeguarding Children Board under its power to combine reports in accordance with section 152 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006.

The inspection team consisted of six of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) from Ofsted and one Ofsted inspector.

The inspection team

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London Borough of Merton Single Inspection and LSCB review Ofsted Outcomes 25 August 2017



Ofsted Single Inspection

During 4 very warm weeks in June (12 June 2017 to 6 July 2017)
7 Ofsted inspectors, 2 data analysts and 1 quality assurance manager...
finally arrived* and...

- Interviewed 206 staff and partners
- Tracked and audited 162 cases
- Requested and reviewed 429 documents
- And sat through a range of meetings observed and focused groups attended

- *During the inspection we were also visited by....Ofsted's Chief Inspector of Social Care, the Regional Director and ...the new Minister of State!

“Children in Merton benefit from services that are dynamic, ambitious and successful. Exceptional leadership and governance and strong frontline management ensure that children’s services are consistently good. All children receive a good service and some receive an outstanding service. Inspectors saw that significant and sustained improvements had been achieved since the last inspection in 2012, when all services were judged as good. Staff are very effective in improving outcomes for children.”

Single Inspection Ofsted report published August 2017

Key Judgement Area: The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection

Good

- *“Consistently good services support children in need of help and protection in Merton, improving their circumstances and keeping them safe.”*
- *“Children are protected through an outstanding early help offer and a robust ‘front door’, to consider which intervention would help them best... Effective intervention at an early stage is having a positive impact on the number of children who require more specialist support.”*
- *“Staff in the MASH....ensure prompt and proportionate responses so that children receive appropriate and timely services....Staff have a good understanding of risk....Thresholds are clearly and consistently applied for children, including when their circumstances and needs change.”*
- *“Child protection enquiries are timely....step up step down processes are well considered...MA information sharing has improved significantly.....The vast majority of cases (show)..appropriate safeguarding concerns...developed in regular CIN and CP conferences...escalations of concerns are appropriate.”*
- *“Managers and staff know their children well. Manageable caseloads and skilled staff mean that they are able to visit children and their families regularly, build meaningful relationships and undertake purposeful direct work.”*
- *“The social work model used by children’s services is helpfully applied by other agencies, and this is leading to improvements in the quality of work to assess risks.”*

Key Judgement Area: The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection

Good

- *“Children’s wishes and feelings are strongly heard and clearly reflected in practice. Their views and voices are carefully considered in assessments, strategy meetings and social work records to inform planning... Inspectors saw very effective use of advocacy, including appropriate advocacy for children who have disabilities. Increasing numbers of advocates are working with children subject to child protection procedures, to ensure consideration of their views in conferences.”*
- *“Children who have disabilities receive support and services that ensure that they are protected and achieve.”*
- *“Children living in private fostering arrangements receive a good service”.*
- *“There are clear and effective arrangements to identify and respond to children going missing or missing education”*
- *“Young people aged 16 and 17 who present as homeless receive timely and thorough joint assessments with housing services.”*
- *“Risks associated with child sexual exploitation, missing children, gang involvement or radicalisation are understood exceptionally well and overseen appropriately from a senior multi-agency perspective.”*

Key Judgement Area: The experiences and progress of children looked after and achieving permanence

Good

- *“Children looked after in Merton receive a consistently good service. The needs of each individual child are known well. Children become looked after at the right time and without unnecessary delay..... The role of the corporate parent is well embedded and is taken very seriously.”*
- *“Effective management oversight of pre-proceedings and assessment work adds rigour to decision-making and ensures safe oversight of the experiences for children on the threshold of being looked after.”*
- *“Children are protected well through appropriate use of the court process...The judiciary and the Child and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass) are extremely complimentary about the work of the local authority, considering it robust and timely. With proceedings completed within an average of 24 weeks, Merton is exceeding national guidelines and has improved in this area of practice considerably.”*
- *“Care planning is effective...Caseloads are maintained at a manageable level to enable social workers to have time to develop relationships with the children.”*
- *“Children who are looked after by Merton benefit from good-quality placements, social workers who visit them often and strong support from the virtual school.”*
- *“Social workers act quickly to protect children in their care.”*

Key Judgement Area: The experiences and progress of children looked after and achieving permanence

Good

- *“Permanence options are considered early, ensuring that there is no delay in the formulation of long-term plans.... Family finding for permanent foster placements is tenacious, and children who are waiting for families benefit from the same determined approach as those seeking adoptive families. Approved foster carers safely meet the needs of a range of children, including those who have complex needs or disabilities and groups of brothers and sisters.”*
- *“Children have good quality up-to date and timely PEPs,... education targets are clear... The (Virtual School) team make strenuous efforts to ensure YP engage in learning.”*
- *“The health of children looked after is effectively monitored and overseen and children and young people receive good support from the virtual school wherever they live.”*
- *“The majority of children in Merton benefit from secure and stable placements.”*
- *“The service to unaccompanied asylum-seeking children is impressive. It is sensitive and swift and enables the children to settle quickly and to form friendships.”*
- *“Children’s participation is encouraged, their individual needs are known and their voice is evident... and active CICC influences and guides services for children looked after.”*

**Key Judgement Area:
Adoption performance**

Outstanding

- *“Adoption performance is outstanding, with all children requiring adoption currently placed and no children waiting. Merton has not had an adoption placement breakdown for over five years.”*
- *“Strategic leaders, managers and social workers have an excellent knowledge about the children in their care, and they are passionate about achieving the very best outcomes.”*
- *“Timely and accurate early identification of children, when adoption is in their best interests, leads to appropriate and prompt family finding... Children benefit from early identification of potential matches with approved adopters, including before the granting of the placement order, and move swiftly to live with their new families following the court decision.”*
- *“The quality of prospective adopter reports is impressive. Child permanence reports are comprehensive and analytical and lead to a logical recommendation for adoption.”*
- *“Appropriate contact with birth families is supported, and children are assisted to understand their life histories at a time and pace that is suitable for them. Life story work is of a consistently high quality.”*
- *“Adoption support is excellent and highly creative. It ensures that adopted children form strong attachments to their families, and potential issues are identified and addressed at the earliest stage.”*

Key Judgement Area:
Experiences and progress of care leavers

Good

- *“Care leavers do well in Merton. The vast majority are in touch with staff, and determined efforts are made to re-engage with those who are not.”*
- *“Social workers and PAs know and understand their YPs individual circumstances... (SWs) manage known risks...develop effective plans...and over time YP make good progress...The majority of young people who leave care receive good support that builds their skills and confidence well as they move towards independence.”*
- *“All young people who spoke to inspectors feel that they are safe where they live. With good support from carers, the 14-plus team and housing providers, many young people make a successful transition from care to living independently.....The large majority live in suitable accommodation.”*
- *“The virtual school, social workers and personal advisers effectively support young people to navigate the education, employment and training (EET) options. Young people seeking to study at university receive particularly good assistance prior to applying for a university place, and they receive practical help with their applications and personal statements. This results in a high number of young people studying at university.”*
- *“Care leavers who are more vulnerable, such as those in custody, are equally well supported by staff, who are sometimes the only regular visitors while they serve their sentences.”*

**Key Judgement Area:
Leadership, management and governance**

Outstanding

- *“Senior managers and politicians model a constructive, enquiring and engaging style of leadership and management. It comprises a blend of compassion and concern for the most vulnerable children and families, and conspicuous care and support for frontline workers.”*
- *“The DCS... provides a sustained and energetic commitment to continually improving outcomes for children... The quality of all services is good or better, building on the “good” judgements... (2012)... The leadership style emphasises the core values of compassion, humility, social justice and inclusion... An influential corporate parenting board chaired by the longstanding and experienced CEO illustrates the importance given at the highest level.”*
- *“Strong partnership, shared accountability are clearly evidenced. The CEO, Lead Member and DCS all have active membership roles (HWBB, VAWG S&S, YCEB - which ensures)... strategic plans and localised improvement plans are aligned with each other and are overseen by mature and exceptionally strong partnerships.”*
- *“Work with the police is highly integrated... (P&PYP) is chaired by an experienced and knowledgeable specialist... The strong professional partnerships in Merton demonstrate that children and their families are highly valued and that they deserve high-quality services.”*
- *“The DCS and AD CSC& YI and all managers maintain a high level of interest, curiosity and knowledge about children’s cases.”*

**Key Judgement Area:
Leadership, management and governance**

Outstanding

- *“Led by the AD CSC&YI... Merton’s social work practice model is at the centre of the continuous development of effective and evidence-based social work with children and families... (delivering a) coherent practice model to assist social workers in their analysis, manageable caseloads, frequent supervision, reflective auditing and mature partnerships... (leading to) a strong culture of learning and a determination to improve further on outcomes that are already good.”*
- *“Strong frontline managers, carefully managed workloads and an evidence-informed approach create time for social workers to practise creative and effective direct work with children. This leads to well-crafted assessments and interventions, which are concentrated on understanding and improving the experiences of children.”*
- *“An increase of social workers... has supported manageable caseloads and enabled changes to the workload of the MASH, the safeguarding teams and a dedicated permanence service.... Innovative and creative thinking ensures that Merton achieves maximum impact from the resources available.”*
- *“High-quality data and performance information are used well at all strategic and operational groups and across all management layers. The performance and quality assurance frameworks are closely interwoven and provide a wide range of useful information.”*

**Key Judgement Area:
Leadership, management and governance**

Outstanding

- *“A restless ambition to continuously develop better practice is discernible, led by an AD who is a committed, motivational and skilled social work leader.... Performance and QA frameworks are closely aligned and mutually re-enforcing. Auditing is well targeted.”*
- *“Senior managers are resolute in their commitment to recruit able and committed social workers, who continue to provide high-quality services to the most vulnerable children and families... Well-defined career progression pathways encourage committed and talented social workers to progress and flourish.”*
- *“Interventions with C&YP vulnerable to extremist influences are well planned and effective... and well designed... including regular work with local schools.”*
- *“Strong and impressive early help services, improved educational attainment and high quality targeted and specialist services are prioritised in equal measure by leaders and senior managers. These include a prominent focus on disabled children and children who have special educational needs.”*
- *“Children exposed to sexual exploitation receive protective and well-developed strategic and MA responses. MA governance is tightly co-ordinated and led by the MSCB.”*
- *“Young people are both involved and highly influential.”*

Ofsted Recommendations

1. Ensure that all plans, including child in need, child protection, care plans for children looked after and pathway plans, consistently contain specific actions, achievable timescales and clear, measurable outcomes.
2. Improve the use of return home interviews for each episode of missing for children missing from home or care and ensure that risks are understood and reduced for individual children.
3. Ensure that 'staying put' is made available to all care leavers who would benefit from this.
4. Ensure that all former relevant care leavers receive information on their health histories.

**Key Judgement Area:
Local Safeguarding Childrens Board**

Outstanding

- *“Merton’s Local Safeguarding Children Board (MSCB) is outstanding. It is highly effective in holding agencies to account for their individual safeguarding arrangements in the welfare and protection of children.”*
- *“There are strong governance arrangements underpinned by established partnerships with other strategic boards, including the Health and Wellbeing Board, the Corporate Parenting Board, the Children’s Trust and the Safer and Stronger Partnership.”*
- *“The Board is well attended by capable strategic senior managers and the contribution and participation of the voluntary sector and lay members greatly enhances the effectiveness of the board’s work. The collaboration of partners at both strategic and operational level allows for alerts and trends to be identified and acted on swiftly.”*
- *“The board’s strategic priorities are relevant and informed by detailed analysis of local need to target the most vulnerable children, including children at risk of sexual exploitation and extremism and children missing from home or care.”*
- *“There is a sustained commitment to and focus on the delivery of the board’s safeguarding priorities, including families in which adult mental health, neglect, alcohol, drugs and domestic violence feature in children’s lives. The safeguarding needs of children pervade the board’s work and business and subgroup plans.”*
- *“There are no recommendations for the MSCB.”*

Children's services in the London Borough of Merton are good.

1. Children who need help and protection	Good
2. Children looked after and achieving permanence	Good
2.1 Adoption performance	Outstanding
2.2 Experiences and progress for care leavers	Good
3. Leadership, management and governance	Outstanding
4. Review of the Local Safeguarding Children Board	Outstanding



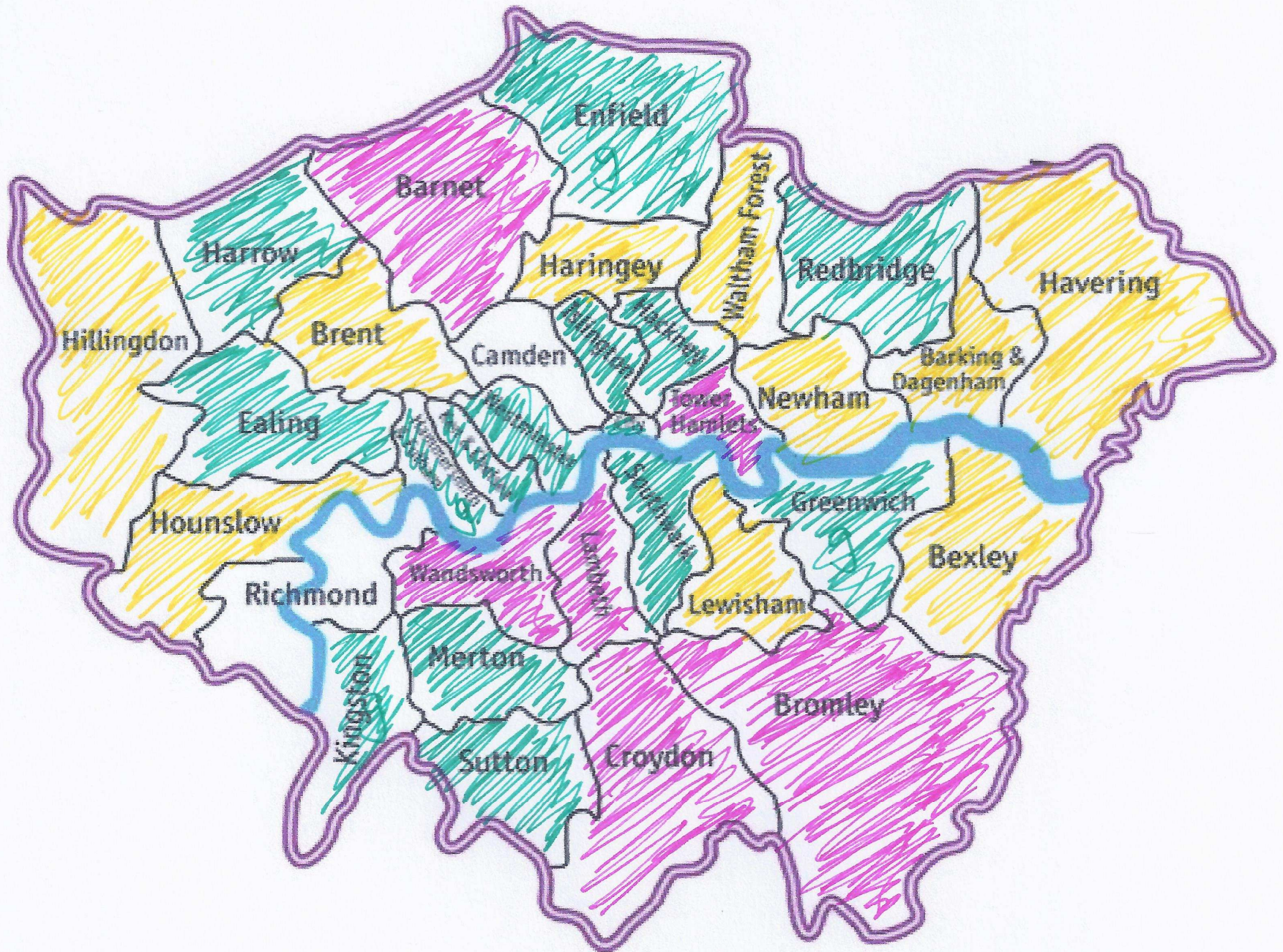
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Children Services – London Context

Kathy Bundred

LGA Children's Services Adviser

October 2017



What does this tell us about quality of children's services in London?

- No longer highest performing region for social care
- LAs in intervention all relatively recent and some unexpected
- However, for the most part there was some knowledge about failure and action being taken to address this
- Action judged to be overly process driven and slow by Ofsted
- Casework, supervision, staff turnover features (although staffing issues London wide and not particularly worse in inadequate rated authorities)
- Several LAs have continued to 'require improvement'

Some shared features of good authorities

- Stable and strong and relentless management and leadership
- All or most children receive a good service (and some outstanding)
- Good self knowledge
- Workforce strategy – training, caseloads, supervision
- Political leadership
- Partner engagement

Committee: Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Date: 10 October 2017

Wards: All wards

Subject: Performance monitoring 2017/18 (August 2017)

Lead officer: Yvette Stanley, Director of Children, Schools and Families Department

Lead member: Councillor Katy Neep; Councillor Caroline Cooper-Marbiah.

Contact officer: Mark Gwynne, Interim Head of Policy, Planning and Performance.

Recommendations: That the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Panel:

- A. Discuss and comment on Appendix 1: Performance Indicators – Rationale and linkages
- B. Discuss and comment on Appendix 2: August 2017 Performance Index

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1. To provide the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Panel with a regular update on the performance of the Children, Schools and Families Department and key partners. Data provided in appendix one is as at the end of August 2017.

2 DETAILS

- 2.1. At a Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel meeting in June 2007 it was agreed that the Children Schools and Families Department would submit a regular performance report on a range of key performance indicators. This performance report acts as a 'health check' for the Panel and as such is over and above the more detailed thematic reports scheduled to the Panel which relate to specific areas of activities such as the annual Schools Standards report, Corporate Parenting Report, MSCB annual report etc.
- 2.2. Following implementation of Mosaic as the new case management system for children's social care, reporting is being re-established and testing underway for the performance indicators to ensure accuracy of information and improved data quality within the system. This entails writing and testing new reports, then checking accurate migration of information between the systems, due to system design and data transfer assumptions made during implementation. This process is occurring through to December 2017, by which time it is hoped to resume reporting on performance indicators with increased ease and accuracy. This applies to most of the children's social care indicators.

Education, Health and Care Plans

KPI no. 3: Percentage of new Education, Health and Care plans issued within statutory 20 week timescale (new, including exceptions) – Red

- 2.3. As at the end of Quarter 1 (June 2017) 47% of new requests for EHC plans were completed within 20 weeks, raising to 49% year to date in July. This is an improvement as at the end of 2016/17 where 19% of new requests for EHC plans were completed within 20 weeks. In May 2017 we streamlined our processes which included the first 6 weeks of the EHC Assessment process being managed by the Business Support Team. This has meant that the timeframes for new EHC assessment requests being heard at panel and professional advice being sought and received have decreased.
- 2.4. This is a substantial improvement within the context of significant increase in new requests for EHCPs, alongside an ongoing challenging agenda, set by central government, to transfer all existing Statements of Special Educational Needs to Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) by March 2018; we currently have 348 Statements to transfer to EHCPs. We have used the SEN Implementation Grant to increase the capacity within the SEND team, reconfiguring roles and streamlining business processes to enable improved performance. In respect of the target to transfer all existing SEN Statements to EHC plans, Merton is currently performing relatively well, ranked 7th in London.

Child Protection

KPI no. 11: Percentage of Children that became the subject of a child protection plan for the second or subsequent time – Red

- 2.5. As at April 2017, 3 of the 15 children who had become the subject of a child protection plan were the subject of one for the second or subsequent time. Whilst this is managed effectively within the teams, corporate reporting will resume in line with other children's social care performance indicators. Starting in October, it is intended
- 2.6. that monitoring of all additional children subject of a plan for the second or subsequent time will be reported to the MSCB Quality Assurance Subgroup.

Looked After Children

KPI no. 15: Average number of weeks to complete care proceedings against a national target of 26 weeks – Red

- 2.7. This indicator is subject to a degree of fluctuation due to the small numbers concerned. It had previously been anticipated that performance on this target would worsen in Quarter 1: this is due in particular to two larger sibling groups within the period, which has had a significant impact on the timescales.

Children's Centres and Schools

KPI no. 25: Percentage outcome of school Ofsted inspections good or outstanding (overall effectiveness) – Red

- 2.8. As at the end of Quarter 1 (June 2017) 89% of Merton Schools are currently rated Good or Outstanding at inspection: this equated to 49 out of our 54

schools. Merton remains above the national benchmark of 88% (as at 31st March 2017). Over the summer period, Park Community School has been judged as “Good” and both Ruttlish and Harris Primary Academy have both been judged as “Outstanding”.

KPI no. 25: Number of Primary permanent exclusions (Academic year to date) – Red

- 2.9. There has been one Primary permanent exclusion during the year meaning that performance will be shown as red throughout the academic year as a result of there having been no exclusions during either of the previous two academic years.

3 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 3.1. None

4 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED

- 4.1. None

5 TIMETABLE

- 5.1. None

6 FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1. None

7 LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1. None

8 HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1. None

9 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1. None

10 RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1. None

11 APPENDICES – THE FOLLOWING DOCUMENTS ARE TO BE PUBLISHED WITH THIS REPORT AND FORM PART OF THE REPORT

Appendix 1: Children’s Performance Indicators – Rationale and linkages

Appendix 2: CYPP performance index as at August 2017

12 BACKGROUND PAPERS

CSF Performance Management Framework

<http://intranet/departments/csfindex/csf-performance.htm>

Appendix 1: Children’s Performance indicators – Rational and linkages CYP Scrutiny Panel Performance Index

Performance Indicator		Rationale / Why Important
1	Number of Common and Shared Assessments undertaken (CASA)	This is not a target measure. Numbers of CASAs undertaken is an indicator of early identification of problems / issues for a child. These are assessments undertaken by a wide range of the children’s workforce in the context of Merton’s Child and Young Person Wellbeing Model. The measure links to a suite of other indicators including numbers of contacts and referrals, single assessments, and CiN Plans.
2	Single Assessments completed within the statutory timeframe	Single Assessments are instigated after consideration of presenting issues by MASH. They are undertaken in order to identify whether or not statutory thresholds for children’s social care have been met and statutory services are required. There is a 45 day statutory timescale for completion. The measure links to CASAs; referrals; CiN Plans and Section47 safeguarding investigations.
3	Education, Health and Care Plans EHCPs) completed within the statutory timeframe	In line with Children and Families Act 2014, EHC plans replaced SEN Statements. They result from a multi-dimensional assessment of education, health and care needs. They specify outcomes to be achieved for a child and identify provision to meet those outcomes. There is a 20 week statutory timescale for completion. For the next few years conversion of ‘old’ SEN Statements and Learning Disability Assessments (LDA Section 139A) to ‘new’ EHC Plans will also be monitored against national targets.
4	Child Protection Rate per 10,000	This is a prevalence measure which is examined by managers and regulators alongside other rates including CiN and LAC. These provide a proxy for the ‘balance’ in the child care system. Can also reflect events / issues nationally e.g. media coverage of child abuse enquiries. Rates should be broadly in line with benchmarks, particularly statistical neighbours.
5	Number of Children on Child Protection Plans	Similarly, this is not a performance measure but indicates prevalence of need for intensive social care intervention. Also volume of intensive casework and social worker capacity required to fulfil statutory duties. Links to Child Protection Plans for children subject to a CP plan for the second or subsequent time in respect of decisiveness and impact of child protection interventions.
6	Numbers of Family Groups subject of Child Protection Plan	With relatively low numbers of children on Child protection plans the numbers of family groups are monitored as they can have a disproportionate impact on overall percentages etc.
7	Allocated Social Workers Child Protection	It is a statutory requirement that all Child Protection Plan casework is allocated to qualified social workers. This is a proxy for high quality interventions undertaken by qualified

Performance Indicator		Rationale / Why Important
		practitioners who are subject to national professional standards.
8	Quoracy (Quorate attendance at child protection conferences)	Child protection plans almost invariably require input from a range of professional disciplines and agencies. This is a proxy for appropriate engagement of key agencies e.g. NHS and Police in Child protection planning and delivery.
9	Timeliness of Child protection reviews	There is a national framework of expectations around interventions with children requiring safeguarding (see also above). This measure is a proxy for appropriate management / IRO (Independent Reviewing Officer) oversight of complex casework and decisive social work planning.
10	Child protection visits	As above this demonstrates appropriate contact between a child and the allocated social worker and is, in effect, a minimum standard.
11	Percentage of Children subject of a Child protection plan for the second or subsequent time	If a second child protection plan is required for similar reasons, this could indicate potential lack of impact of earlier Child protection interventions. Often can demonstrate multiple risks / challenges faced by children and families. Prompts enquiry into whether or not other statutory interventions should be / should have been considered.
12	Looked After Children rate per 10,000	As above this is a prevalence measure to be looked at alongside others including CiN/CP rates and should also be, broadly, in line with statistical neighbours.
13	Number of Looked After Children	As above this is compared with appropriate benchmarks and the measure also indicates professional social work capacity and placements / budgets required to fulfil statutory responsibilities.
14	Allocated Social Workers Looked After Children	It is a statutory requirement that all LAC casework is allocated to qualified social workers. This is a proxy for high quality interventions undertaken by qualified practitioners who are subject to national professional standards.
15	Timeliness of Care proceedings	It is imperative to avoid 'drift' in making permanency plans for LAC. Time taken to undertake care proceedings is a proxy for decisive casework and can be looked at alongside timeliness of achieving adoptions. Measure can be affected by issues beyond professional control e.g. court delays.
16	Timeliness of Looked After Children reviews	There are statutory requirements for reviewing the care plans for LAC within set timescales. This measure is a proxy for appropriate management / IRO (Independent Reviewing Officer) oversight of complex casework and decisive social work planning.
17	Percentage of Looked After Children	In line with best practice and Merton's own User Voice Strategy, LAC of sufficient age and understanding are

Performance Indicator		Rationale / Why Important
	participating in their reviews	encouraged to participate in a variety of ways in their own reviews – e.g. attending; chairing; written submissions; use of advocate.
18	Stability of placements: 3+ moves	There are two key measures for placement stability – the numbers of placement moves in a year and the long term stability of placements. Placement stability is a foundation stone for improving outcomes for LAC as it enables consistent relationships between young people and their carers; consistent school placements; a settled context in which young people can develop social networks etc. While some placement moves are ‘positive’ – e.g. move to a permanent home; move to withdraw a young person from a risky environment, others occur due to e.g. breakdown of relationships / behaviour issues etc. and should be minimised.
19	Stability of placements: length 2+ years	There are two key measures for placement stability – the numbers of placement moves in a year and the long term stability of placements. The length of placement indicator refers to children under the age of 16 who have been in care for 2 and half years or more and have been in their current placement for 2 years or more. Placement stability is a foundation stone for improving outcomes for LAC as it enables consistent relationships between young people and their carers; consistent school placements; a settled context in which young people can develop social networks etc. While some placement moves are ‘positive’ – e.g. move to a permanent home; move to withdraw a young person from a risky environment, others occur due to e.g. breakdown of relationships / behaviour issues etc. and should be minimised.
20	Percentage of Looked After Children in Independent Fostering Agencies	Although placements with foster carers are, almost invariably, the first option to be considered for LAC, a shortage of ‘in house’ carers i.e. recruited and approved by LB Merton results in placements being commissioned from independent sector providers. These are often profit making organisations, carers are often not local and carers are not supported or managed by Merton services. Also, placements are typically significantly more expensive thus adding to pressure on placement budgets. Our aim is to reduce dependency on IFA placements. This indicator should be reviewed with the numbers of children in care at any given point, the profile of these children and their likely needs and our progress in recruiting In-house foster carers.
21	Number of in house carers recruited	In view of the above we have set ambitious targets for increasing the number and range of in-house foster carers.
22	Number of Looked After Children, adopted or subject of a Special	The key aim for looked after children who cannot return to their families of origin is to find alternative permanent families. Numbers of adoptions and Special Guardianship

Performance Indicator		Rationale / Why Important
	Guardianship Order	arrangements are, therefore, closely monitored by managers. Central government, from time to time and including the present government, issues policies aimed at increasing the number of children adopted.
23	Percentage of Children's centres graded good or outstanding by Ofsted (overall effectiveness)	Like schools and other children's services, children's centres are subject to regulation from Ofsted. Our ambition is that services provided by LB Merton are at least good or better. This measure is a proxy for the quality of early years provision which is a key enabler of improved outcomes in later childhood.
24	Children's Centre access from children living in deprived areas	Children's centres are, increasingly, targeted services which aim to 'reach' more disadvantaged families, including those from more 'deprived' areas of the borough. High quality early years provision is known to be a particularly important contributor to improved outcomes for disadvantaged children and to narrowing gaps in outcomes in line with Merton's Community Plan.
25	Percentage of Schools graded good or outstanding by Ofsted (overall effectiveness)	Schools are subject to regulation and inspection from Ofsted. Our ambition is that LB Merton schools are at least good or better. This measure, to be considered alongside e.g. Key Stage results, progress measures, attendance and exclusion data, is a proxy for the quality of Merton's schools provision.
26	Primary - permanent Exclusions	Permanent exclusion can severely disrupt a pupil's education and social networks and exclusion in the primary phase can be particularly damaging to education outcomes in the longer term. The LA has mechanisms in place to both minimise time out of education and to identify alternative provision for pupils who are permanently excluded. The measure needs monitoring even though Merton has not had a permanent exclusion from primary schools for some considerable time.
27	Secondary - permanent exclusions	Permanent exclusion can severely disrupt a pupil's education and social networks. It can be extremely challenging to find alternative school / alternative education for pupils excluded in the secondary phase because of the nature of the factors leading to the exclusion. However, the LA has mechanisms in place to both minimise time out of education and to identify alternative provision for pupils who are permanently excluded.
28	Secondary – persistent absence	The LA monitors persistent absence in primary, secondary and special school sectors. Persistent absence harms pupils' outcomes but also triggers powers and duties the LA has to ensure pupils' attendance.
29	Percentage of Reception year surplus places	The LA has a statutory duty to provide sufficient suitable school places for children and young people in the borough. The challenge is to have neither an over-supply nor an insufficiency of places. A reasonable level of surplus is

Performance Indicator		Rationale / Why Important
		required, however, to enable an element of parental choice.
30	Percentage of Secondary school (year 7) surplus places	The LA has a statutory duty to provide sufficient suitable school places for children and young people in the borough. The challenge is to have neither an over-supply nor an insufficiency of places. A reasonable level of surplus is required, however, to enable an element of parental choice.
31	Youth Service Participation	Participation in positive activities and informal educational curriculum provided by or enabled by LBM youth service supports positive outcomes for young people, particularly those from more disadvantaged areas.
32	Percentage of CYP who are Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEETs)	Non-participation in education, employment or training beyond age 16 is a major predictor of long-term unemployment and low income. This indicator should be reviewed alongside the 'Not Known' outturn.
33	Percentage of CYP who's 'Education, Employment or Training' (EET) status is "Not Known".	The EET status of young people can be difficult to ascertain e.g. once pupils leave Merton's schools. The aim is to have a low number of young people whose EET status is 'not known'. This indicator should be reviewed alongside the NEET outturn.
34	First Time Entrants (FTE) in the youth justice system aged 0-17	Offending can be linked to factors such as truancy, low attainment, substance misuse, employability etc. and the challenge to the council, schools and partner agencies in a local area is to prevent young people from entering the youth justice system.
35	Re-offending rate by young people in the Youth Justice system	This indicator measures the re-offending of specific cohorts of young people following an initial pre-court or court disposal.
36	Number of families 'turned around' by the local Transforming Families programme (nationally known as Troubled Families)	The national Troubled Families initiative aims to 'turn around' families identified with multiple issues including anti-social behaviour; worklessness; poor school attendance etc. Without effective intervention, these families are particularly likely to require statutory interventions and are potentially the most costly on the public purse.
37	Commissioned services monitoring	The CSF department commissions some services to be delivered by third parties including the local community and voluntary sector. It is important that these services are monitored to ensure compliance with service specifications and value for money.

No.	Performance Indicators	Frequency	Target 2017/18	Benchmarking and trend				BRAG rating	Merton 2017/18 performance											Notes
				Merton 2016/17	Merton 2015/16	England	London		Apr-17	May-17	Jun-17 / Q1	Jul-17	Aug-17	Sep-17 / Q2	Oct-17	Nov-17	Dec-17 / Q3	Jan-18	Feb-18	
Childrens Centres and Schools																				
23	% outcome of all Children Centre Ofsted inspections good or outstanding (overall effectiveness)	Quarterly	100%	100%	100%	66% (31 August 2015)	72% (31 August 2015)	Green			100% (5/5)							Year to Date. National and London Comparitors as at 31/08/2015.		
24	% of total 0-5 year estimated Census 2011 population from areas of deprivation (IDACI 30%) whose families have accessed children's centre services	Quarterly	Not a target measure	68%	72%	89% (31 March 2017)	93% (31 March 2017)	Not a target measure			23% (1063 of 4718)							Year to Date Cumulates (Target 19% per quarter)		
25	% outcome of School Ofsted inspections good or outstanding (overall effectiveness)	Quarterly	91%	91%	89%	85%	89%	Red			89% (49/54)							Year to Date. National and London Comparitors as at 31/12/2015.		
26	Number of Primary permanent exclusions (Number YTD Academic year)	Monthly	Not a target measure	0 (AY 2015/16)	0 (AY 2014-15)	1145 (AY 2015/16)	105(A Y 2015/16)	Red	1	1	1	1	1					August End of Acad. Yr. YTD (August data interim until November). September start of the new Acad. Yr.		
27	Number of Secondary permanent exclusions (Number YTD Academic year)	Monthly	Not a target measure	17 (AY 2015/16)	19 (AY 2014-15)	5445 (AY 2015/16)	805(A Y 2015/16)	Green	10	12	15	17	17 (+2 sept panel)					August End of Acad. Yr. YTD. September start of the new Acad. Yr.		
28	Secondary persistent absenteeism (10% or more sessions missed)	Annual	Not a target measure	12% (AY 2015/16)	n/a	13.1% (AY 2015/16)	11.7% (AY 2015/16)	Not a target measure										Annual Measure 6 half-terms DfE Published SFR maintained and academies		
29	% of Reception year surplus places	Annual	6%	3.5 (AY 2015/16)	6.2%	No relevant benchmarking available	No relevant benchmarking available	Annual										Annual measure		
30	% of Secondary school (Year 7) surplus places inc. Academies	Annual	5%	6.5% (AY 2015/16)	5.5%	No relevant benchmarking available	No relevant benchmarking available	Annual										Annual measure		
Young People and Services																				
31	Youth service participation rate	Annual	1800	NRTP	3,695	No relevant benchmarking available	No relevant benchmarking available	Not a target measure										Annual Measure		
32	% of CYP (16 - 17 year olds) not in education, employment or training (NEET)	Monthly	3.5%	1.5% (Q4)	2.2%	4.4%	No relevant benchmarking available		1.7% (64/3819)	2.0% (70/3817)	1.9% (71/3835)	1.9% (72/3844)	1.9% (75/3849)					Monthly (totals are adjusted) - reported a month in arrears		
33	% of CYP (16 - 17 year olds) education, employment or training status 'not known'	Monthly	Not a target measure	1.5% (Q4)	2.7%	2.7%	No relevant benchmarking available		2.2% (84/3819)	2.0% (77/3817)	1.9% (73/3835)	1.7% (67/3844)	1.9% (75/3849)					Monthly (totals are adjusted) - reported a month in arrears		
34	Number of First Time Entrants (FTEs) to the Youth Justice System aged 10-17	Monthly	50	64	61	326.90 rate per 100,000 (2016)	405.50 rate per 100,000 (2016)	Green			12							Year to Date		
35	Rate of proven re-offending by young people in the youth justice system	Quarterly	Not a target measure	0.55	0.88	1.04(2013)	1.10(2013)	Not a target measure			1.30							Quarterly (NI 19)		
36	TF: Number of Families engaged for year 1 of Expanded Programme	Quarterly	Not a target measure	320	300	No relevant benchmarking available	No relevant benchmarking available	Not a target measure			741							Quarterly		
37	% of commissioned services for which quarterly monitoring was completed	Quarterly	100%	100%	100%	No relevant benchmarking available	No relevant benchmarking available	Green			100%							Quarterly (Time lag in collating from partner agencies)		

Committee: Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Date: 10 October 2017

Wards: All

Subject: Update on Developments Affecting Children, Schools and Families Department

Lead officer: Yvette Stanley, Director of Children, Schools and Families Department

Lead members: Cllr Katy Neep, Cabinet Member for Children Services
Cllr Caroline Cooper-Marbiah, Cabinet Member for Education

Contact officer: Mark Gwynne, Interim Head of Policy, Planning and Performance

Recommendations:

A. Members of the panel to discuss and comment on the contents of the report.

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 The report provides members of the panel with information on key developments not covered elsewhere on the agenda and affecting the Children, Schools and Families Department since the panel's last meeting in July 2017.

2 DETAILS

2.1 **School Ofsted inspections** – Members were aware that Park Community School was inspected in June and has been judged as “Good”. Over a quarter of Merton’s schools are now judged to be outstanding. At the end of the Summer term, Harris Primary Academy was inspected and have been judged to be “Outstanding”. Aragon Primary School has converted to an Academy.

2.2 In recent weeks our Pre-school at the Abbey Children Centre has been inspected and we eagerly await the report: when last inspected in 2011 it was rated as “Satisfactory”.

2.3 **Harris Wimbledon Academy** – The school is advertised to open in in September 2018, and be located in the former Adult Education Building at Whatley Avenue, SW20 for two years before the new building at High Path is ready. An open evening was held on 3 October 2017. Merton primary schools have circa 250 additional year 6 pupils on roll compared to last year so it is essential for the new school to open in September 2018 to ensure the council provides sufficient places.

2.4 The council is managing the projects to ensure a clear site at High Path for which three separate users need to move. All the existing regular users can be accommodated elsewhere. The council’s day centre will locate to 21 Leyton Road plans are in development. The Elim Church will be relocated to Merton Hall and the design has recently gained planning approval.

2.5 **SEN school expansion** – There continues to be a significant increase in demand for special school places, especially for ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorder) and MLD (Moderate Learning Difficulties) children, which continues to place pressure on budgets. The council is working on projects to increase provision in our special schools. Construction of the expansion of Perseid School has commenced to ensure that the

capacity of the upper school matches the previously expanded lower school, and detailed design is underway to expand Cricket Green School.

- 2.6 **30 hours** – Following on from the work of the summer term, early years providers, including schools, continue to engage with families and the local authority to facilitate implementation of the policy for 30 hours of free early education which came into effect in September 2017. The success of this will not be known until after the headcount returns have been completed.
- 2.7 **Collaborative school improvement** – The new model for collaborative school improvement in Merton is being established, and is called the ‘Merton Strategic School Effectiveness Partnership’. The new board, with representatives from all clusters, will meet for the first time in a few weeks.
- 2.8 **Merton Safeguarding Children Board (MSCB)** – has extended key development priorities for 2016/17 through to 2019. These priorities are:
- **Think family:** Actions a Think Family Coordinator has been appointed. The current focus is on adult mental health and embedding Think Family across adults and children;
 - **Supporting Vulnerable Adolescents:** The Self-harm protocol has been approved, along with Harmful sexual behaviour and Online Strategies, the focus is on contextual safeguarding – addressing adolescent risk outside of the home; review CSE Protocol and strategy; and
 - **Early Help:** The Merton Child, Young Person and Family Well-Being Model has been approved. We are updating tools and looking at implementing the Social Work Practice Model (including Signs of Safety) across the system.
- 2.9 These also link with the MSCB business as usual activities (e.g. CSE, Missing, PREVENT, FGM, etc.) undertaken by the Board and its sub groups. The Board continues to seek to improve its links to practitioners and their managers as part of our quality assurance processes to inform service improvement and development as well as maintaining our strong focus on the Voice of the Child / Young person.
- 2.10 Addressing the incidence and impact of neglect, is a cross-cutting theme that runs across the work of the Board and each of the priorities. A plan is being finalised for the piloting of a Neglect Tool to be used across the system and an audit of neglect cases is being conducted alongside this.
- 2.11 **Merton Youth Parliament Manifesto 2017-2018.** Following their election earlier in the year, the Youth Parliament. have worked together to establish a manifesto setting out their priorities for the coming year focussing on:
- Preventing crime in Merton
 - Hate crime
 - Knife Crime
 - Theft in Schools
 - Gang Awareness
 - Health & Safety
 - First Aid Training
 - Area Youth Forums

- 2.12 This sets out how they intend to involve and engage with young people through leaflets and social media, as well as the Youth Forums and through schools as a means to spread awareness and examples of the priorities, encouraging socialising and sharing of views and ideas in the process.
- 2.13 **Wellbeing Model** – the Wellbeing Model has been updated and is being communicated across the partnership setting out the revised thresholds and model for service delivery.
- 2.14 **Adoption Agency** – London boroughs continue to work through the process for the establishment of a regional adoption agency from September 2018. This requires a business case to be presented to the DfE for approval by December 2017, enabling mobilisation of the new agency in September 2018. The new format will see Merton as part of the South London hub.
- 2.15 **Family Drug and Alcohol Court (FDAC)** – Working together with Croydon County Court, West London Family Court and the Inner London Family Court, the partnership will offer an alternative form of care proceedings for parents and children in those cases where substance misuse is a key factor in the decision to bring proceedings: known as the Family Drug and Alcohol Court (FDAC). Referrals will be made by children’s social care and will be agreed internally to ensure referrals meet the criteria for FDAC services. Work is at an advanced stage in development of this new service, which Merton is leading, across ten boroughs. The contract has just been awarded and mobilisation meetings are underway to ensure that the new service is up and running from January 2018.
- 2.16 **Contextual Safeguarding** - Merton is committed to the Contextual Safeguarding Framework, which will involve a system-wide application and implementation. Merton is working in partnership with other London boroughs to learn from Hackney’s innovation project and implementation. In parallel, Merton will be undertaking an audit to support effective implementation locally. The preliminary stages of this process have been completed: identified governance and reporting structure, choosing a single point of contact and setting up a steering group and deciding on a timeline for the audit. The MSCB subgroup, Promote and Protect Young People will oversee the timeline and audit, which involves three stages:
- Collecting and analysing strategic documents related to peer-on-peer abuse;
 - Observations of meetings and training from strategic to operational levels; and
 - Focus groups with young people and practitioners. The first stage is due to start week commencing 23rd October and is reliant on project support being recruited.
- 2.17 **Social Impact Bond (SIB)** – Merton Council is part of the Pan-London Care Impact Partnership - with Tower Hamlets, Bexley, Newham and Sutton councils - which was formed to deliver Multi-Systemic and Functional Family Therapy services for councils within the partnership, leveraging in financial resources using a (SIB). The aim of the programme is to keep vulnerable families together and prevent children from being taken into care.
- 2.18 The partnership has commissioned Positive Families Partnership to deliver the infrastructure of the SIB and to deliver the services. A SIB is a way of financing a ‘Payment by Results’ contract, which means Positive Families Partnership will be paid only if it succeeds in meeting certain milestones related to keeping the young person with their family. This contract has recently been awarded and mobilisation meetings are underway to ensure that the new service is up and running from January 2018.
- 2.19 **Structure changes** – there have been a few structural changes across the department recently and a new structure chart is contained as Appendix 1. This is the next stage in implementation of the changes in moving from three divisions to two divisions resulting in changes to some heads of service and the re-aligning of some functions.

3. FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS

3.1 No specific implications from this report.

4. LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

4.1 No specific implications from this report.

5. HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS

5.1 No specific implications from this report

6. CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

6.1 No specific implications from this report.

7. RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

7.1 No specific implications from this report.

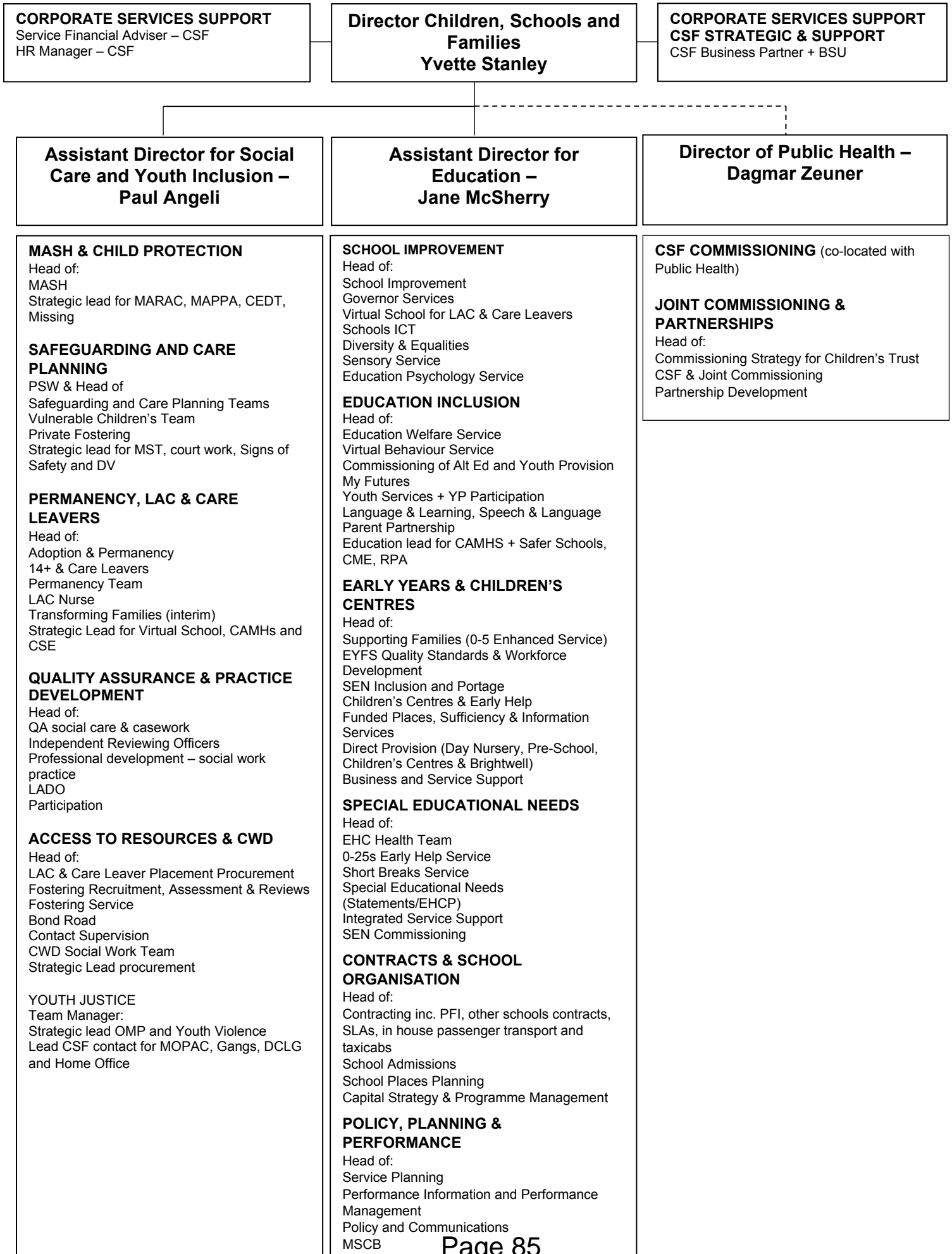
8. APPENDICES – THE FOLLOWING DOCUMENTS ARE TO BE PUBLISHED WITH THIS REPORT AND FORM PART OF THE REPORT

8.1 Appendix 1 – Revised Children, Schools & Families Structure Chart

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

9.1 None

CHILDREN, SCHOOLS AND FAMILIES DEPARTMENT (OCTOBER 2017)



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Children and Young People Work Programme 2017/18



This table sets out the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel work programme for 2017/18; the items listed were agreed by the Panel at its meeting on 24 July 2017. This work programme will be considered at every meeting of the Panel to enable it to respond to issues of concern and incorporate reviews or to comment on pre-decision items ahead of their consideration by Cabinet/Council.

The work programme table shows items on a meeting-by-meeting basis, identifying the issue under review, the nature of the scrutiny (pre-decision, policy development, issue specific, performance monitoring, partnership related) and the intended outcomes.

Chair: Cllr Dennis Pearce

Vice-chair: Cllr Linda Taylor

Scrutiny Support

For further information on the work programme of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel please contact: -

Annette Wiles, Scrutiny Officer

Tel: 020 8545 4035; Email: annette.wiles@merton.gov.uk

For more information about overview and scrutiny at LB Merton, please visit www.merton.gov.uk/scrutiny

Meeting date: 24 July 2017 (*Deadline for papers: 12pm 14 July 2017*)

Theme: setting the work programme			
Item	Purpose/intended outcome	Responsible officer/Member topic lead	POSSIBLE external witnesses/visits and questioning guidance (TBC)
Cabinet Member priorities	Update from the responsible Cabinet Member. Questions from the Panel.	Cabinet Member for Education (Cllr Caroline Cooper-Marbiah)	
ECHP performance update	The Panel will look at this performance measure within a wider context including growing demand, parental satisfaction, and the transfer of existing statements and the performance of other authorities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jane McSherry, Assistant Director of Education Karla Finikin, Service Manager – SEN & Disabilities Integrated Service 	
Final report of the rapporteur scrutiny review of user voice	Report on how looked after children and young people are able to expressed their wishes and feelings as well as participate in decisions that affect their lives.	Cllr Jerome Neil	
Prevent task group – terms of reference	To agree whether or not to proceed with a <i>Prevent</i> task group and accept the suggested terms of reference.	Annette Wiles, Scrutiny Officer	
Performance monitoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discussion of the existing basket of performance indicators for on-going monitoring; and Selection of a Panel Member to act as a lead on performance monitoring. 	Naheed Chaudhry, Head of Policy, Planning and Performance	
Department update report	Update on developments affecting the Children, Schools and Families Department since the last	Yvette Stanley, Director of Children,	

	scrutiny Panel meeting. Questions will be taken from Panel members.	Schools and Families	
Children, schools and families glossary	A glossary of acronyms commonly used within the remit of the Children, Schools and Families Department will be provided.	Naheed Chaudhry, Head of Policy, Planning and Performance	
Agreeing the Panel's work programme	To agree the Panel's work programme and consider: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a thematic approach to the work programme; • appointing topic leads; • getting the best from performance monitoring; • the Panel's use of task groups; • opportunities for pre-decision scrutiny; and • monitoring task group recommendations. 	Cllr Dennis Pearce, Panel chair, and Annette Wiles, Scrutiny Officer	

Meeting date: 10 October 2017 (*Deadline for papers: 12pm 2 October 2017*)

Theme: setting the work programme			
Item	Purpose/intended outcome	Responsible officer/Member topic lead	POSSIBLE external witnesses/visits and questioning guidance (TBC)
Cabinet Member priorities	Update from the responsible Cabinet Member. Questions from the Panel.	Cabinet Members for Education (Cllr Caroline Cooper-Marbiah) and Children's Services (Cllr Katy Neep)	
Performance monitoring	Discussion of the existing basket of performance indicators for on-going monitoring.	Naheed Chaudhry, Head of Policy, Planning and Performance	
Department	Update on developments affecting the Children,	Yvette Stanley,	

update report	Schools and Families Department since the last scrutiny Panel meeting. Questions will be taken from Panel members.	Director of Children, Schools and Families	
Ofsted inspection outcome	Exact content and format to be determined once the Ofsted report is available (approx. 25 August 2017). This is likely to focus on areas for improvement highlighted by Ofsted and take a workshop approach. This will allow members to focus on and become a champion of a specific aspect of the Ofsted report/action plan. It has been suggested that the workshop be supported with training provided by service heads.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yvette Stanley, Director of Children, Schools and Families • Paul Angeli, Assistant Director Children's Social Care and Youth Inclusion 	Contribution from Kathy Bundred, Children's Improvement Adviser for the London Government Association
Work programme	To amend/agree the Panel's work programme and accommodate any new/additional pre-decision or other items that the Panel may wish to consider.		

Meeting date: 8 November 2017 (*Deadline for papers: 12pm 31 October 2017*)

Theme: setting the work programme			
Item	Purpose/intended outcome	Responsible officer/Member topic lead	POSSIBLE external witnesses/visits and questioning guidance (TBC)
Cabinet Member priorities	Update from the responsible Cabinet Member. Questions from the Panel.	Cabinet Members for Education (Cllr Caroline Cooper-Marbiah) and Children's Services (Cllr Katy Neep)	
Performance monitoring	Discussion of the existing basket of performance indicators for on-going monitoring.	Naheed Chaudhry, Head of Policy, Planning and	

		Performance	
Department update report	Update on developments affecting the Children, Schools and Families Department since the last scrutiny Panel meeting. Questions will be taken from Panel members.	Yvette Stanley, Director of Children, Schools and Families	
Children, Schools and Families Budget/business planning (Round 1)	<p>To enable the Panel to comment on the budget proposals and any new or revised savings as part of the first round of the process for agreeing the Council's budget and business plan.</p> <p>The current budget required cost savings to the CSF department. This agenda item also provides the opportunity to understand if this objective is being realised and what impact this is having in terms of service provision.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yvette Stanley, Director of Children, Schools and Families • Caroline Holland, Director of Corporate Services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Caroline Holland, Director of Corporate Services, will provide training before the January meeting giving a detailed guide to the Medium Term Financial Strategy. <u>All members are encouraged to attend.</u> • Scrutiny of finance – Councillor workbook (the Local Government Association).
Harris Wimbledon update	To monitor progress of the delivery of the new school in line with the Panel's reference to Cabinet in June 2016: 1) ensuring the opening date for the new school is optimised to not destabilise existing Merton secondaries, 2) maximising the design to give pupils the same advantage enjoyed by children at other Merton secondaries, 3) supporting Merton Abbey Primary in agreeing shared use of the site, 4) protecting the financial interests of the borough during the development of the site, 5) sustaining the level of community rental space, and 6) ensuring the safety of pupils using the site.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yvette Stanley, Director of Children, Schools and Families • (Possibly Chris Lee to discuss site clearance for permanent site) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invite representative(s) of the Harris Academy Chain to update members directly on the development of the school and plans for its future • Visit Harris Merton, to see the expansion project and to hear from the provider of the new school first hand and in situ

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free schools: challenges and opportunities for accountability: Centre for Public Scrutiny
Routes into employment for vulnerable cohorts task group – executive response and action plan	The task group's report has been accepted by Cabinet. This will be to receive an executive response to the task group's recommendations and an action plan.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sara Williams, Programme Manager Economy, futureMerton • Kim Brown, Head of Organisational Development & HR Strategy 	
Final report of the rapporteur scrutiny review of user voice	When presented to the Panel at its meeting in July, it was agreed that Cllr Neil, Cllr Neep, (the Cabinet Member for Children's Services), and Yvette Stanley, (Director, Children, Schools and Families), would meet to discuss the recommendations resulting from the review. Following the meeting the Department will provide the Panel with a response to the paper.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yvette Stanley, Director of Children, Schools and Families • Paul Angeli, Assistant Director Children's Social Care and Youth Inclusion 	
Work programme	To amend/agree the Panel's work programme and accommodate any new/additional pre-decision or other items that the Panel may wish to consider.		

Meeting date: 17 January 2018 (**Deadline for papers:** 12pm 9 January 2018)

Theme: setting the work programme			
Item	Purpose/intended outcome	Responsible officer/Member topic lead	Possible external witnesses/visits and questioning guidance

Cabinet Member priorities	Update from the responsible Cabinet Member. Questions from the Panel.	Cabinet Members for Education (Cllr Caroline Cooper-Marbiah) and Children's Services (Cllr Katy Neep)	
Performance monitoring	Discussion of the existing basket of performance indicators for on-going monitoring.	Naheed Chaudhry, Head of Policy, Planning and Performance	
Department update report	Update on developments affecting the Children, Schools and Families Department since the last scrutiny Panel meeting. Questions will be taken from Panel members.	Yvette Stanley, Director of Children, Schools and Families	
Children, Schools and Families Budget/business planning (Round 2)	To enable the Panel to consider the Council's budget and business plan proposals. Additionally to forward any comments/recommendations to the Overview and Scrutiny Commission to compile a scrutiny response on the Budget/Business Plan to Cabinet. To include discussion of major projects identified in the CSF draft service plans.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yvette Stanley, Director of Children, Schools and Families • Caroline Holland, Director of Corporate Services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Caroline Holland, Director of Corporate Services, will provide training before the January meeting giving a detailed guide to the Medium Term Financial Strategy. <u>All members are encouraged to attend.</u> • Scrutiny of finance – Councillor workbook (the Local Government Association).
Health and wellbeing strategies for children and	In partnership with public health, look at strategies to support the health and wellbeing of children and young people including consideration of school travel plans. It has agreed that this will focus on childhood obesity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dagmar Zeuner, Director of Public Health 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invite relevant members of the CCG and mental health teams

families	<p>and mental health strategies (including the developing autism strategy). <u>Members of the Healthier Communities and Older People Panel to be invited to attend.</u></p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invite attendance by Central London Community Healthcare NHS Trust (CLCH) to provide oversight of the commissioned services it provides • Visit the Children's centre to see CLCH in action, to provide interaction with parents and see how child health and wellbeing services are being delivered • <u>10 questions to ask if you're scrutinising local immunisation services</u> (Centre for Public Scrutiny) • <u>Best start in life: promoting good emotional wellbeing and mental health for children and young people</u> (Local Government Association)
Task group updates	<p>For the Panel to decide whether or not it wants receive a further update for any of the following task groups:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provision of secondary school places; • Succession planning in schools; and 	Annette Wiles, Scrutiny Officer	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online strategies in schools. 		
Work programme	To amend/agree the Panel's work programme and accommodate any new/additional pre-decision or other items that the Panel may wish to consider.		

Meeting date: 1 February 2018 (*Deadline for papers: 12pm 24 January 2018*)

Theme: setting the work programme			
Item	Purpose/intended outcome	Responsible officer/Member topic lead	Possible external witnesses/visits and questioning guidance
Cabinet Member priorities	Update from the responsible Cabinet Member. Questions from the Panel.	Cabinet Members for Education (Cllr Caroline Cooper-Marbiah) and Children's Services (Cllr Katy Neep)	
Performance monitoring	Discussion of the existing basket of performance indicators for on-going monitoring.	Naheed Chaudhry, Head of Policy, Planning and Performance	
Department update report	Update on developments affecting the Children, Schools and Families Department since the last scrutiny Panel meeting. Questions will be taken from Panel members.	Yvette Stanley, Director of Children, Schools and Families	
Merton Safeguarding Children Board annual report	An in-depth review of safeguarding for children and young people in Merton. This will focus on strengths, areas for review during the coming period and work with schools as well as areas which were agreed as priorities from last year including action to address knife crime, domestic abuse, mental health issues and substance misuse.	Paul Angeli, Assistant Director Children's' Social Care and Youth Inclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keith Makin, the Independent Chair of the Merton Safeguarding Children Board attending. • Invite Steven Wallace, Borough Commander

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invite a representative of the <i>Muslim Women in Morden</i> • Invite a representative from the Association of Independent LSCB Chairs • Visit to Jigsaw4U, provider of Merton commissioned services including return home interviews for missing children. • Safeguarding Children – a practical guide for overview and scrutiny councillors (Local Government Association and the Centre for Public Scrutiny)
Prevent task group draft final report	As highlighted at its outset, the local elections in May 2018 mean this task group must report to Cabinet at its meeting on 26 March 2018. In order to comfortably meet this deadline, the draft final report of the task group should be presented to this meeting of the Panel.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Task group chair (TBC) • Annette Wiles, Scrutiny Officer 	
Work programme	To amend/agree the Panel's work programme and accommodate any new/additional pre-decision or other items that the Panel may wish to consider.		

Meeting date: 14 March 2018 (*Deadline for papers: 12pm 6 March 2018*)

Theme: setting the work programme			
Item	Purpose/intended outcome	Responsible officer/Member topic lead	Possible external witnesses/visits and questioning guidance
Cabinet Member priorities	Update from the responsible Cabinet Member. Questions from the Panel.	Cabinet Members for Education (Cllr Caroline Cooper-Marbiah) and Children's Services (Cllr Katy Neep)	
Performance monitoring	Discussion of the existing basket of performance indicators for on-going monitoring.	Naheed Chaudhry, Head of Policy, Planning and Performance	
Department update report	Update on developments affecting the Children, Schools and Families Department since the last scrutiny Panel meeting. Questions will be taken from Panel members.	Yvette Stanley, Director of Children, Schools and Families	
Schools annual report	Members receive the detailed annual schools report giving them the opportunity to focus on attainment for all key stages as well as at foundation stage and for post 16. As a result of the presentation of the schools annual report during the last municipal year, members noted the need to retain their focus on the attainment and progress of children on SEN support as well as looked after children. Also, how to oversee the work of the school standards panel.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yvette Stanley, Director of Children, Schools and Families • Jane McSherry, Assistant Director of Education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invite representatives of Merton heads' group • <u>Back to School – Ways for scrutiny to influence local education and support school leaders to improve results</u> (Local Government Association and the Centre for Public Scrutiny)
Ofsted inspection outcome	For members to monitor progress made against the Ofsted action plan.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yvette Stanley, Director of Children, 	TBC once the initial workshop has taken place

workshop follow-up		Schools and Families <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paul Angeli, Assistant Director Children's' Social Care and Youth Inclusion 	
Topic suggestions 2017/2018	To seek topic suggestions form the Panel to inform discussions about the 2018/19 work programme	Annette Wiles, Scrutiny Officer	

Forward Plan items

Construction contract decision for 21 Leyton Road

To approve construction contract for the refurbishment and adaptation of 21 Leyton Road to accommodate High Path Resource Centre.

Decision type: Key

Reason Key: Expenditure > £500,000;

Decision status: For Determination

Notice of proposed decision first published: 06/06/2017

Decision due: 1 Nov 2017 by Director of Children, Schools and Families

Lead member: Cabinet Member for Education

Lead director: Director of Children, Schools and Families

Contact: Marina Bowyer, Admin Officer, Contracts & School Organisation Email: marina.bowyer@merton.gov.uk.

Documents to be considered: Officer report.

Merton Hall - Construction Contract

To award the construction contract for the refurbishment and partial re-build of Merton Hall for Elim Church to enable a clear site for the new Harris Wimbledon Academy school.

Decision type: Key

Reason Key: Expenditure > £500,000;

Decision status: For Determination

Notice of proposed decision first published: 14/02/2017

Decision due: 13 Nov 2017 by Cabinet

Lead member: Cabinet Member for Education

Lead director: Director of Children, Schools and Families

Contact: Marina Bowyer, Admin Officer, Contracts & School Organisation Email: marina.bowyer@merton.gov.uk.

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