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# Merton Council

## Children and Young People

### Overview and Scrutiny

#### Panel



Date: 29 September 2021

Time: 7.15 pm

Venue:

#### AGENDA

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## Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel membership

### Councillors:

Sally Kenny (Chair)  
Hayley Ormrod (Vice-Chair)  
Stan Anderson  
Omar Bush  
Nick Draper  
Edward Foley  
Joan Henry  
James Holmes  
Russell Makin  
Dennis Pearce

### Co-opted Representatives

Uzma Ahmad  
Mansoor Ahmad, Parent Governor  
Representative Secondary and Special  
Sectors  
Roz Cordner, Education Co-optee.

### Substitute Members:

Thomas Barlow  
Andrew Howard  
Carl Quilliam  
Dickie Wilkinson

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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. For further advice please speak with the Managing Director, South London Legal Partnership.

### 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

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## CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

23 JUNE 2021

(7.15 pm - 9.15 pm)

PRESENT: Councillors Councillor Brenda Fraser (in the Chair),  
Councillor Hayley Ormrod, Councillor Stan Anderson,  
Councillor Omar Bush, Councillor Nick Draper,  
Councillor Edward Foley, Councillor Joan Henry,  
Councillor James Holmes, Councillor Dennis Pearce,  
Mansoor Ahmad and Roz Cordner

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Eleanor Stringer, Joint Deputy Leader and Cabinet  
Member for Children and Education.

Jane McSherry (Director of Children, Schools and Families), Karl  
Mittelstadt (Head of Policy, Performance and Partnerships) and  
Dr Dagmar Zeuner (Director, Public Health) Stella Akintan  
Scrutiny Officer, Sue Myers, Interim Assistant Director,  
Children's Social Care, Nick Wilson Interim Assistant Director  
Education and Early Help.

### 1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 1)

Co-opted Member Mansoor Ahmad said he attended the topic selection workshop but his name has not been recorded.

### 2 DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY INTEREST (Agenda Item 2)

There were no declarations of pecuniary interests

### 3 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (Agenda Item 3)

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

### 4 COVID-19 UPDATE ON IMPLICATIONS FOR MERTON - PRESENTATION (Agenda Item 4)

The Director of Public Health gave an overview of her presentation highlighting that infection rates are rising nationally and steeply in South West London. The vaccine effectiveness means there is less severe illness, especially amongst the over 60s. The gap in vaccination rates between different ethnic groups is closing. All schools are open in Merton although cases are rising in schools.

In response to questions the Director of Public Health reported that;

Discussions have taken place with NHS colleagues about the availability of the Moderna vaccine for second doses.

Although some areas are using mass testing, vaccination is the best way to tackle the pandemic.

There are tools to respond to rise in infections rates amongst young people include testing, self-isolation, social distancing and vaccination.

Concern was raised that school pupils are not social distancing as they cluster outside schools, The Director said the risk is lower outside, peer to peer messages will help and our responses need to be proportionate.

## 5 DEPARTMENT UPDATE REPORT (Agenda Item 5)

The Director of Children Schools and Families gave an overview of the report highlighting that two new Assistant Directors had been appointed. Aileen Buckton was also appointed as Chair of the Adult Safeguarding Board.

In response to questions it was reported that:

Budget setting was delayed this year but the Department are working with schools on budget planning.

Further updates on the restructure in the children schools and families department will be shared in due course.

Three year budgets is a useful approach to financial planning because it helps when dealing with deficits, changes in spend and there are useful benchmarking tools.

Extra funding has been allocated for virtual schools to help pupils with their learning.

### RESOLVED

The Chair thanked officers for their report

## 6 PERFORMANCE MONITORING REPORT (Agenda Item 7)

The Head of Policy Performance and Partnerships gave an overview of the report.

A panel member expressed concern that there is limited opportunity for scrutiny within these indicators. The Panel were reminded that the indicators were agreed by this committee and that the chosen indicators provide appropriate information of the full range of activities across the department. In conjunction with the departmental update, members of the scrutiny panel are provided with qualitative and quantitative information to exercise effective scrutiny.

RESOLVED

The Chair thanked officers for their report

7 CABINET MEMBER CURRENT PRIORITIES - VERBAL UPDATE (Agenda Item 6)

The Cabinet Member thanked the Children, Schools and Families , schools and support staff for their work during the pandemic.

The Cabinet member reported that her priorities were focused on; education places, special educational needs and increases in the autism spectrum.

In response to questions the Cabinet Member reported that:

Head teachers issues of concern include; financial concerns particularly around the Designated Schools Grant, funding for special educational needs, school places and the logistical challenges of Covid.

In regards to supporting schools to embed racial in-equality, we are working across the borough to encourage learning and sharing on these issues.

In regards to support to young people in care Merton has lower rates than the London average but numbers of unaccompanied asylum seekers are rising. The aim is to ensure there is sufficient housing.

RESOLVED

Future department update report to consider support to looked after children

The Panel would like an update on implementation of the recommendations from the Care Leavers Accommodation work which took place in 2017/18.

8 WORK PROGRAMME REPORT 2021-2022 (Agenda Item 8)

RESOLVED

The Panel agreed the task group review will consider digital technology in schools.

The draft work programme will be agreed at the next meeting.

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## **Committee: Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel**

**Date: 29 September 2021**

Agenda item:

Wards: All

### **Subject: Schools Places Planning Strategy**

Lead officer: Jane McSherry, Director of Children, Schools and Families

Cabinet Member: Eleanor Stringer, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children and Education

Contact officer: Tom Procter, Head of Contracts and School Organisation

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#### **Recommendations:**

- A. To note the draft School Places Planning Strategy document showing the actual falling demand for primary school places and the forecast fall in demand for secondary school places, but the significant increase in demand for specialist provision that transcends these trends
  - B. To note and comment on the strategies to address this prior to consultation with schools
  - C. To note that the School Places Planning Strategy document will be expanded to include Early Years childcare sufficiency, which is currently a separate document
- 

## **1 PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 1.1. This report and accompanying document outlines the falling demand for primary school places, and forecast fall in demand for secondary school places, and increased demand for specialist provision.
- 1.2. The document sets out the supply and forecasting information and this report sets out the draft strategy for managing the changing demand, prior to consultation with schools

## **2 DETAILS**

### **Background**

- 2.1. The council has a legal responsibility for the sufficiency of school places. There has been no legal requirement for a published sufficiency plan since the requirement for a School Organisation Plan stopped in the mid-2000s but since this time there have generally been annual reports to committees on supply and demand. Up to 2016 this focussed on the rising demand for primary school and then secondary school places.

- 2.2. Since around 2016 the position has changed significantly in Merton, in London, and generally throughout the country, in there being a significant fall in demand for primary school places which is expected to feed into secondary schools in the coming years. However, at the same time there have been unprecedented increases in demand for Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and specialist school places associated with this.
- 2.3. The School Places Planning Strategy documents the detail of the supply and demand, and this cover paper outlines the council's draft strategy to manage this.
- 2.4. Following the comments from this committee the document will go to consultation with schools.

### **PRIMARY SCHOOLS**

- 2.5. After an unprecedented 35% increase in pupil numbers in the 11 years to 2017/18 (a rise of 4,367 from 12,683 to 17,050), 2017/18 was the peak in primary school numbers and we are now experiencing a significant fall, with a drop of 1,184 pupils (7%) to 2020/21. This fall was not forecast at London or national level prior to 2016, and seems to have been highly influenced by changing migration patterns as a result of the Brexit referendum and then Brexit itself.
- 2.6. Reception year numbers decreased in 2020/21 for the fifth consecutive year and, based on school admissions allocations, there is a further significant fall in the reception year in 2021/22. The expected fall in 2021/22 is far higher than was projected in any forecasting models and seems to be highly influenced by the implementation of Brexit and Covid factors, with families moving away from the area. Across London there was a fall of 6.7% in school admissions reception year offer day allocations for September 2021 compared to 2020; Merton was higher than average at 9.1%.
- 2.7. A further fall is forecast in future years; the extent of the further fall is dependent on the forecast model used, and the complexity of whether Covid factors are temporary or permanent. As the lower numbers flow to all year groups, the total primary school roll by the GLA forecast model is 15,108 in 2025/26, nearly 2,000 less than the 2017/18 peak. Our 'pupil retention' modelling suggests it will be 13,486, so 3,500 less than the 2017/18 peak. Since the last 18 months has been impacted by changing Covid-19 movement patterns and the end of the Brexit transition period there will need to be a regular review of demand.
- 2.8. The council has already facilitated the reduction in the published admission number by 10.5 forms of entry from 2016 to the present 2021/22 reception year entry. However, if the council is to be within the 'ideal' surplus places level of 5% as described in the School Places Strategy document then, based on the GLA forecast, a reduction by a further 9.5 forms of entry in reception year is required by 2025/26, with much of it to be in place by 2023/24. Based on our pupil retention model, this increase to 16 forms of entry.
- 2.9. School place numbers can be reduced by either reducing the admission number of a school or closing a school. The legal implications sections

outlines the statutory guidance on closing maintained schools, and it is a requirement of the statutory guidance to provide a statement on its necessity. Therefore closing a school is generally a last resort, when standards are inadequate, and without a strategy to be at least good (as judged by Ofsted) and/or the school is not considered financially viable.

2.10. Since the early 2010s the primary school expansion programme was, with one Free School exception, achieved by the expansion of existing schools rather than establishing new schools. Most primary schools are therefore of a good size to enable admission numbers to be reduced, often to previous numbers, and for the school to operate to at least one form of entry.

2.11. The broad strategy is as follows:

- Continue to encourage schools to reduce admissions numbers to multiples of 30 for education efficiency when practical to do so
- Encourage schools to work in cluster areas with the council to agree reductions in admission numbers at an area level
- Consider use of compatible alternative uses for space where appropriate such as primary age SEND Additional Resourced Provision when it can be agreed with schools
- Where appropriate consider alternative models to operate schools for school improvement and to manage a balanced budget e.g. hard and soft federations
- No plans to close schools

2.12. With regard to school closure, the council would only propose this when absolutely necessary, as per the statutory guidance. This would be where standards are poor without a viable strategy for school improvement, the school is not viable financially after all options have been exhausted, and that there are places elsewhere for children that would be displaced, and pupil forecasts do not suggest an increase in demand, The council will also be wary that once land is lost for schools it may not be possible to get it back for any future increase in demand that cannot be foreseen. The council has no statutory power to propose the closure of an Academy school.

2.13. It should be noted that some schools are reluctant to move down to 1-form of entry and would prefer to manage with an intake in the 40s. This will be dependent on the circumstances of the individual school, and the council does not see its role as to dictate as long as standards are high and the school is meeting a balanced budget. However, it will seek to facilitate area wide solutions wherever possible and may intervene if individual school decisions have a wider impact on school standards and meeting balanced budgets.

2.14. Since demand for school places is changeable, especially in the light of Covid, and is led by parent preference, it is important to have regular reviews to make decisions when they are needed rather than specific decisions being made before all the information is available. For example, demand for a school can increase or decrease very quickly following an Ofsted inspection. Our planned review process for this year will again be as follows:

- By 15 October 2021 – Review actual intakes in September from draft school census data along with the latest pupil forecasts, especially in reception year, to consider whether we should encourage schools to reduce their admission number for 2022/23 (requiring an application the Schools Adjudicator) and/or a reduction as part of the council's annual statutory school admissions consultation in late 2021 for 2023/24 entry. An unofficial cap may also be possible if there is not sufficient preferences from parents that would lodge an appeal
  - 15 January 2021 – Admissions offer closing date. Review whether, based on actual admissions applications, any of the decisions made in the autumn need to be reviewed for 2022/23 reception entry.
  - 20 February 2021 – Review early co-ordinated school admission round placement allocations to again review whether any of the decisions made in the autumn and January need to be reviewed for 2022/23 reception entry
- 2.15. In parallel the council will consider opportunities for placing additional resourced provision in primary schools in line with our High Needs safety valve discussions with the DfE (see section below on special provision).

## **SECONDARY SCHOOLS**

- 2.16. The significantly increased pupil numbers have reached secondary age in the last 5 years and the Year 7 roll has broadly plateaued following the significant increase up to September 2018, when the council facilitated the opening of the Free School Harris Academy Wimbledon for September 2018 to enable sufficient places, and which moved to its permanent site in autumn 2020.
- 2.17. However, the lower numbers flowing through primary schools will reach year 7 within the next 2-3 years and so there is concern there will be surplus places and a need to reduce the capacity of some schools.
- 2.18. The level of demand continues to be dependent on the pupil retention from year 6, as there is extensive cross border movement.
- 2.19. There has been some concern regarding the impact of a proposed second new Free School in Sutton some 700 metres from the boundary, and there is also concern regarding the proposed opening of a new Voluntary Aided school in Kingston that is also close to the Merton border. After successful lobbying, initially by Merton Council and Merton schools and followed by Sutton schools, it has very recently been confirmed that the mainstream Sutton Free School will not be progressed. There will however be a 56 place special school there, due to open in 2024.
- 2.20. The School Places Strategy document shows a significant discrepancy between GLA projections and those based on a consistent pupil retention of numbers flowing through primary school. The GLA projections are based on the council meeting ambitious housing targets and resulting child yield.
- 2.21. Based on the GLA forecasts there is only a need to reduce supply by 2-3FE to be at the ideal 5% surplus level. However, based on the pupil retention model of the year 6 to year 7 transfer being 79%, to maintain an ideal 5% surplus there is a need to decrease the admission numbers by the

equivalent of 9 forms of entry less than at present. In simple terms this could be 4 schools reducing from 8-forms of entry (240 pupils per year) to 6-forms of entry (180 pupils per year)

- 2.22. Over the present academic year there will need to be discussion with secondary schools to agree the best strategy for managing this.

### **SPECIAL SCHOOL PROVISION**

- 2.23. There has been a more than doubling increase in the number of EHCPs over the last 5 years, from 1075 in January 2016 to 2252 in January 2020 (SEN2 count), and still rising.
- 2.24. We have increased the number of special school placements. The number of places in 2016 was 358; by 2020 it had risen to 520. There are agreed plans for an 80 additional places through Whatley Avenue from September 2022 (the expansion of Melrose onto an additional site and widening of the SEND intake to include ASD).
- 2.25. We have also increased the number of ARP (Additionally resourced Provision within mainstream school) places. The number of places in 2016 was 101; by 2020 it had risen to 150.
- 2.26. However, the number of increased places has not kept up with the increase in EHCPs and the council still places more children with EHCPs to independent sector provision than other councils, and the council has a significant and growing deficit in its High Needs Block DSG (Dedicated Schools Grant). We will be discussing the need for further additional state funded special school provision with the Department for Education's (DfE) as part of the 'Safety Valve Intervention Programme'.
- 2.27. Under this process, over the autumn, the DfE team will work closely with the council to challenge and support the development of the DSG management plan through detailed discussions. During this process, the local authority will be working towards submitting a proposal to the department setting out:
- How the authority will go about reaching an in-year balance on the DSG, and the timeframe for achieving this;
  - How the authority will itself reduce the historic cumulative deficit, and what support might be required from the department to eliminate the deficit in full.
- 2.28. Final proposals will be submitted to the DfE in early December but in the meantime the council will work on bringing forward proposals for the optimum balance of school places to meet this strategy. The negotiation teams will assess the proposals and determine whether they secure the sustainability of the authority's high needs systems and spending appropriately and quickly, and whether any request for support represents value for taxpayer money.
- 2.29. The actual and projected fall in demand for primary school places, and the projected fall in demand for secondary school places offers the opportunity to deliver additional specialist spaces for a lower capital cost and make best use of buildings.

### **3 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

- 3.1. The report described the various options to address the reduction in demand for schools places and increased demand for specialist provision.

### **4 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED**

- 4.1. The school places strategy document will go to CYP Overview and Scrutiny Pane and to schools for consultation.

### **5 TIMETABLE**

- 5.1. The various timescales are set out in the document

### **6 FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1. The increase in demand for specialist provision for SEND children with EHCPs has resulted in a significant overspend in the Dedicated School Grant. The increased numbers outlined above has also resulted in a significantly increased number of requests for travel assistance for children with EHCP, which is leading to overspends in the council's general fund
- 6.2. The majority of funding to individual schools is provided through the national funding formula based on their school roll, council officers will continue to work closely with maintained schools to facilitate decisions that will provide a balanced budget.

### **7 LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1. The council has a duty under section 14 of the Education Act 1996 to secure that sufficient schools are available for its area to provide the opportunity of appropriate education for all pupils. It must exercise this function with a view to securing diversity in the provision of schools, and increasing opportunities for parental choice.
- 7.2. A reduction in the published admission number (PAN) of a maintained school (community, controlled and voluntary aided schools) can be agreed by the admission authority for the school as part of the annual determination of admission arrangements. Admission arrangements must be determined in March in the year prior to the admission year so that this is approximately 20 months prior to implementation (consultation in late 2021 for determination in March 2022 for September 2023 entry). The council is the admission authority for community and voluntary controlled schools and the governing body for voluntary aided schools. Before determining a reduction in a PAN, the admission authority must carry out a consultation exercise in accordance with the School Admission Code and the School Standards and Framework Act. Objections may be submitted to the Schools Adjudicator. Community and voluntary controlled schools have the right to object to the Schools Adjudicator if the PAN set for them is lower than they would wish. An application can also be made to the Schools Adjudicator for a change in the PAN in-year where this is necessary in view of a major change in circumstances occurring since the PAN was determined.
- 7.3. The Council can propose the closure of a maintained school following the statutory process under section 15 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006. There must be consultation prior to publication of proposals and publication of a statutory notice inviting representations, following which the

council will determine whether to approve the proposals. Regard must be had to the statutory guidance. The statutory guidance for opening and closing maintained schools is here:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/851585/Opening\\_and\\_closing\\_maintained\\_schools1012.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/851585/Opening_and_closing_maintained_schools1012.pdf)

- 7.4. Closing a school should only be undertaken when ‘necessary’ and reasons for closing a maintained school are stated in the statutory guidance as to include, but are not limited to, where:
- There are surplus places elsewhere in the local area which can accommodate displaced pupils and there is no predicted demand for the school in the medium to long term;
  - It is to be merged or amalgamated with another school;
  - It has been judged inadequate by Ofsted and there is no sponsored academy solution;
  - It is to acquire, lose or change its religious character;
  - It is no longer considered viable; or
  - It is being replaced by a new school
- 7.5. School size: The statutory guidance states that Decision-makers should not make blanket assumptions that schools should be of a certain size to be good schools, although the viability and cost-effectiveness of a proposal is an important factor for consideration. The decision-maker should also consider the impact on the LA’s budget of the need to provide additional funding to a small school to compensate for its size
- 7.6. The statutory guidance requires a statement explaining the reason why closure of the school is considered necessary, and further requirements including the requirement to consider equality issues, travel, displaced pupils, and impact on the community.
- 7.7. In determining statutory proposals for school closures, the guidance requires that the council as decision maker should be satisfied that there are sufficient surplus places elsewhere in the local area to accommodate displaced pupils, and the likely supply and future demand for places in the medium and long term. The council as decision maker is required to take into account the overall quality of alternative places in the local area, balanced with the need to reduce excessive surplus capacity in the system. The decision-maker should have regard for the local context in which the proposals are being made, taking into account the nature of the area, the age of the children involved and, where applicable, alternative options considered for reducing excess surplus capacity.
- 7.8. The governing body of a voluntary or foundation school may also publish proposals to close its own school following the statutory process. Such proposals are then determined by the council. Alternatively, the governing body of a voluntary or foundation school may give at least two years’ notice of its intention to close the school to the Secretary of State and the local authority.

- 7.9. Changes to academies (including free schools) including changes to the PAN and school closures are a matter for the Secretary of State acting through the ESFA (Education and Skills Funding Agency) and in accordance with the school funding agreements. Where the PAN of an academy is reduced, an objection can be made to the Schools Adjudicator.

## **8 HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1. The legal implications above show the implications to be considered of any change in school organisation

## **9 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1. None specific

## **10 RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS**

- 10.1. There are a series of risks in reducing the supply of school places, and the increase in DSG expenditure has been identified as one of the greatest risks for the council

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

1. School places Planning strategy – draft 21 September 2021

## **12 BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 12.1. None



**Merton School Places  
Planning Strategy  
2021-2026  
(subject to annual review)**

Draft 21 September 2021

## **Introduction**

This plan sets out the existing supply and demand for school places, and projections based on the annual review in summer 2021. After an analysis of the basis of projections it has three sections: primary school, secondary school, and specialist provision.

## **Current school provision in Merton**

In Merton there are the following state funded schools:

- 27 Community primary schools all with a nursery
- 11 Voluntary Aided primary schools, all with a nursery
- 6 Primary school Academies (including a Free School)
- 3 Community/Voluntary Controlled secondary schools, all with sixth forms
- 2 Voluntary Aided secondary schools, both with sixth forms
- 4 Secondary school Academies (including a Free School)
- 3 Special Schools
- 1 Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) including specialist medical service

## **Overall aims**

Merton in its role as the Local Authority seeks:

- To provide the highest standards of education and ensure all our schools are good or outstanding;
- Results for attainment and progress which compare with the best in London;
- To ensure that all children and young people enjoy learning opportunities, feel rewarded by their experience and achieve their full potential;
- Provision which contributes to the broader well-being of children and families
- Provision which is a positive choice for families

Providing sufficient, good quality school places is a key part of this role.

## **Definition of capacity**

The DfE prescribe a number of measures for measuring surplus places:

- Net capacity is the physical capacity measure of a school. For maintained schools this is based on a prescribed method for calculating the accommodation available, and so reducing the admission number will not reduce the net capacity unless there is a specific alternative use of spare classrooms e.g. a special needs additional resourced provision. For Academy Schools it will be prescribed in the school funding agreement so it could be that in reality a school has some spare physical space.

- The 'capacity in year group' will reflect admission number changes and will specify the level of surplus that schools are operating to based on their admission numbers.

The first measure is therefore a good means for measuring efficiency of buildings, but the second measure reflects shorter term measures that the council can facilitate to assist the efficient operations of schools and managing the school budget. By concentrating on Reception Year we can see how the trend of higher or lower numbers will flow through the rest of the school.

### **Level of surplus places**

Deciding an appropriate level of surplus places is a balance between choice and efficiency. Surplus places across schools provide more choice of school places, but since schools are largely funded based on numbers on roll, surplus places have a negative impact on the school budget, and therefore potentially teaching and learning. Key Stage 1 primary school classes cannot be in classes of more than 30 pupils yet it is difficult to balance a budget when classes are substantially smaller than 30. With a high number of surplus places primary schools are more likely to have year group numbers that are not possible to manage in a traditional 1-form/2-form/3-form entry classes of 30 structure.

In the late 1990s the Audit Commission recommended that a surplus of 5-10% would enable the appropriate balance of choice and to economically provide sufficient school places, and this is still considered a reasonable estimate of best practice. Since the Merton Council area is a compact area with its schools relatively close together and any surplus can be disproportionately placed in a small number of schools, a surplus of 5% is considered an ideal at reception year, with a tolerance for slightly less at the peak of demand. Since there is a net loss of pupils after reception year the surplus across the year groups would be higher.

### **Basis of school roll projections**

The council use the service of the Greater London Authority (GLA) demography team of pupil projections, based on the Borough Preferred Option population projections

The GLA school roll projection model creates a roll projection for each school based on the GLA population projections of the wards where its pupils live. For each ward of residence in London, National Curriculum (NC) year (R to 11) and sex, the proportion of children of the corresponding age attending each mainstream state school is calculated. These proportions are carried forward as the pupils age through the school in the years being projected.

For new pupils entering a school in future years, for example at reception, proportions are calculated as averages over the latest years of actuals, with 4 being the standard number of years used (2018, 2019, 2020 and 2021). The same approach is used at years 7 and 12, even if the school is an all through school, as it is assumed that there will be significant changes in the cohort at this point.

The rolled forward and calculated new intake proportions for future years are then applied to the population projections to give projections of the number of children on roll by school by age and sex. Due to lower retention rates, sixth form projections are calculated using a survival ratio as the cohort ages through sixth form. School level projections are then aggregated to planning areas (in the case of primary schools) and borough totals.

The Council checks the GLA forecasts against school admissions intelligence for the following academic year, and also against a simple pupil retention model, which calculates retention percentages on the last 3 years based on a 3:2:1 ratio, with published and forecast live births used as the source data to forecast reception year. This has shown the GLA forecasts to be higher than expected for 2021/22 year R and 7 based on admissions intelligence, and higher across the board in future years, with GLA forecast primary school rolls some 10% higher by 2025/26 compared to the simple retention model.

It therefore appears that there are impacts due to Covid-19, at least in the short term, which are not properly accounted for in the GLA projection models. To ensure a more accurate forecast, for 2021/22 Year R and Year 7 we have therefore used our best estimate based on school admissions intelligence in July 2021, and continued this suppressed GLA forecast for the cohort. We have also done a similar suppression for the 2022/23 Year R entry and the cohort as it flows through the school.

The pupil retention model does not take into account additional housing so it was decided to use the GLA forecast figures for all other forecasts including Year R and 7 cohort from 2023/24 but there is some concern that these may be forecasting too many pupils. All models forecast a fall in roll and the position will be closely monitored.

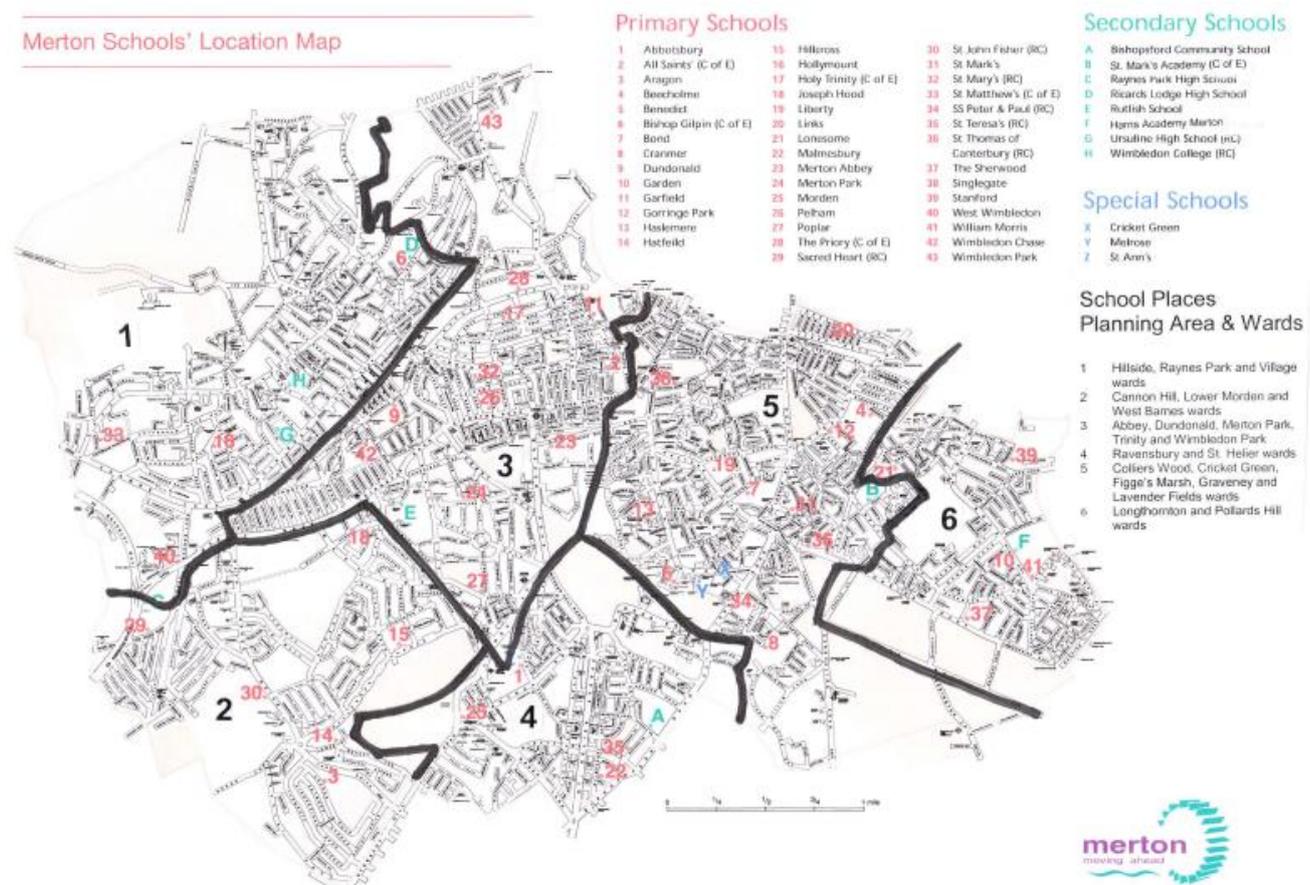
In summary, for 2021/22 and 2022/23 Year R and for 2021/22 Year 7 cohorts, intelligence from school admissions application information up to 23 July 2021 has been used, but otherwise the GLA projections were used as the council's official forecasts submitted to the DfE.

# Primary schools

## Place planning areas

For the purposes of school places planning Merton has 6 primary school place planning areas, which are groups of wards. However, there are few natural barriers preventing easy travel across the planning areas so when making decisions on school expansion and reductions it is necessary to look beyond individual planning areas.

### MAP OF MERTON SCHOOLS AND PRIMARY SCHOOL PLANNING AREAS



Note – map doesn't include Harris Academy Wimbledon or The Park - to be added

## Rise and fall in demand

- 1.1 From 2008 to 2015 the council experienced an exceptional increase in demand for primary school places, which required a substantial expansion programme that expanded more than twenty schools. In 2017/18 there were more pupils in Merton primary schools for more than a generation – a rise of 4,367 pupils from 12,683 to 17,050 on roll (35% increase) compared to 11 years previously.
- 1.2 However, in 2016/17 there started to be a drop in demand for reception year places which is flowing through primary schools, and the fall in demand in reception year

demand has continued to 2020/21. This fall was not forecast at London or national level prior to 2016, and seems to have been highly influenced by changing migration patterns as a result of the Brexit referendum and then Brexit itself.

1.3 There is an expected fall in 2021/22 that is far higher than was projected in any forecasting models and seems to be highly influenced by the implementation of Brexit and Covid factors, with families moving away from the area. Across London there was a fall of 6.7% in school admissions reception year offer day allocation for September 2021 compared to 2020; Merton was higher than average at 9.1%.

1.4 The table below shows this exceptional rise and now fall in the primary school roll by year group.

MERTON PRIMARY SCHOOL ROLL 2006/07 TO 2020/21 (JANUARY CENSUS)

Academic year	2006 /07	2007 /08	2008 /09	2009 /10	2010 /11	2011 /12	2012 /13	2013 /14	2014 /15	2015 /16	2016 /17	2017 /18	2018 /19	2019 /20	2020 /21
Reception	1879	1937	2140	2229	2285	2651	2599	2547	2627	2628	2524	2437	2305	2370	2279
Year 1	1845	1885	1929	2148	2228	2313	2612	2577	2532	2591	2595	2465	2392	2250	2283
Year 2	1839	1816	1885	1921	2115	2227	2284	2557	2554	2509	2535	2529	2420	2322	2204
Year 3	1794	1801	1835	1859	1905	2093	2197	2224	2502	2486	2455	2463	2450	2338	2237
Year 4	1794	1781	1773	1833	1830	1901	2082	2149	2209	2458	2419	2385	2417	2414	2241
Year 5	1840	1789	1778	1742	1832	1817	1888	2028	2109	2156	2407	2393	2339	2374	2311
Year 6	1692	1794	1762	1756	1725	1837	1817	1848	2024	2081	2113	2378	2363	2270	2311
<b>Primary Total</b>	12683	12803	13102	13488	13920	14839	15479	15930	16557	16909	17048	17050	16686	16338	15866

## Current position

### Current level of surplus places in primary school

The table below provides by school and planning area:

- The total roll (January 2021 school census for the statutory school years R to 6)
- The Net capacity
- The surplus and surplus percentage
- The current reception year admission number (those in red have reduced)
- The reception roll
- The reception year surplus and surplus percentage

This shows that against net capacity there were 16.7% surplus places in spring 2021. However, because admission numbers have been reduced the percentage was only 10.6% for reception year against admission number.

Despite the overall surplus in each planning area there are still some heavily oversubscribed primary schools in Merton, with about six schools still offering to less than 600 places on offer day.

MERTON PRIMARY SCHOOLS AND PLANNING AREA – SURPLUS AGAINST NET CAPACITY AND AGAINST RECEPTION YEAR ADMISSION NUMBER 2020/21

School Name	Total roll (excl. nurs)	Net capacity	Surplus	Surplus %	R admission No.	R roll	Surplus R	Surplus R %
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PA1: Hollymount , West Wimbledon, St Matthew's CofE, Bishop Gilpin CofE.

<b>Total PA1</b>	<b>1386</b>	<b>1490</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>7.0%</b>	<b>210</b>	<b>188</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>10.5%</b>
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PA2:Hatfeild, Joseph Hood, Hillcross, Aragon, Sacred Heart RC, St John Fisher RC

<b>Total PA2</b>	<b>2389</b>	<b>2928</b>	<b>539</b>	<b>18.4%</b>	<b>390</b>	<b>339</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>13.1%</b>
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PA3: Dundonald, Garfield, Merton Abbey, Merton Park, Park, Pelham, Poplar, Wimbledon Park, Wimbledon Chase, All Saints' CofE, Holy Trinity CofE, St Mary's RC, The Priory CofE

<b>Total PA3</b>	<b>4790</b>	<b>5648</b>	<b>858</b>	<b>15.2%</b>	<b>780</b>	<b>717</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>8.1%</b>
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PA4: Morden, Abbotsbury, Malmesbury, St Teresa's RC

<b>Total PA4</b>	<b>1365</b>	<b>1431</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>4.6%</b>	<b>210</b>	<b>201</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>4.3%</b>
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PA5: Beecholme, Bond, Benedict, Links, Haslemere, St Mark's Primary, Singlegate, Cranmer, Gorringer Park, Liberty, St. Peter and Paul RC, St Thomas of Canterbury RC

<b>Total PA5</b>	<b>4357</b>	<b>5652</b>	<b>1295</b>	<b>22.9%</b>	<b>690</b>	<b>621</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>10.0%</b>
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PA6: Harris Primary Academy Merton, Stanford, Lonesome, The Sherwood, William Morris

<b>Total PA6</b>	<b>1579</b>	<b>1890</b>	<b>311</b>	<b>16.5%</b>	<b>270</b>	<b>213</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>21.1%</b>
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<b>Total all borough</b>	<b>15866</b>	<b>19039</b>	<b>3173</b>	<b>16.7%</b>	<b>2550</b>	<b>2279</b>	<b>271</b>	<b>10.6%</b>
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### Actions to date to reduce surplus places (by planning area)

The recent fall in the primary school roll at a time of financial constraint has the potential to cause budget issues for a number of primary schools so some schools have reduced their admission numbers, in most cases by a multiple of 30, to ensure that they have largely full classes. Because the increase in demand was catered for by expansion of existing schools, with the exception of one Free School, schools are of a larger size so are more equipped to deal with the reduction in demand than previously.

The following 11 schools have reduced their admission number over the last 5 years:

#### MERTON PRIMARY SCHOOLS THAT HAVE REDUCED THEIR ADMISSION NUMBER SINCE 2015

	2015 PAN*	2021 PAN/WITH CAP	
West Wimbledon	60	30	Schools Adjudicator agreed Dec 2020
Hillcross	90	60	Unofficial cap from 2018. Official from 2020
Merton Abbey	60	30	Official change from 2019
Park	60	30	Officially changed for new provider
The Priory C of E	60	45	Schools Adjudicator agreed Jan 2021
Benedict	60	30	Unofficial cap in 2019 and 2020. Officially changed for new provider
Cranmer	90	60	Unofficial cap for 2021
Gorringer Park	90	60	Official published from 2019

Liberty	90	60	Unofficial cap from 2017. Official from 2020
St Thomas of Canterbury	90	60	Unofficial cap from 2018 on (VA school), made official by 2021
Stanford	60	30	Permanent change to school capacity with ARP
<b>Total</b>	<b>810</b>	<b>495</b>	<b>Total reduction of 315 places (10.5 FE)</b>

Note - PAN is "published admission number"

## Merton forecasts submitted July 2021

### Primary school projection figures and projected surplus

The primary school projections provided in the council's SCAP (annual school capacity survey) return to the DfE in July 2021 were as follows:

#### MERTON PRIMARY SCHOOLS – WHOLE BOROUGH FORECASTS JULY 2021

Academic year	Primary whole borough							
	Reception	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total
2020/21 (actual)	2279	2283	2204	2237	2241	2311	2311	<b>15866</b>
2021/22	2260	2235	2249	2169	2207	2214	2282	<b>15616</b>
2022/23	2289	2239	2219	2234	2157	2194	2201	<b>15533</b>
2023/24	2175	2260	2223	2202	2224	2141	2180	<b>15405</b>
2024/25	2144	2144	2243	2206	2191	2210	2126	<b>15264</b>
2025/26	2082	2108	2132	2222	2195	2176	2193	<b>15108</b>

Taking the borough as a whole, the implications of these projections on surplus places in future years is as follows:

#### MERTON PRIMARY SCHOOLS – FUTURE SURPLUS PLACES BASED ON OFFICIAL PROJECTIONS AND NO CHANGE

Year actual and forecast	Total roll	Net capacity	Surplu s	Surplu s %	R admission No.	R roll	Surplus R	Surplus R %
2020/21 (actual)	15866	19039	3173	16.7%	2550	2279	271	10.6%
2021/22	15616	19039	3423	18.0%	2475	2260	215	8.7%
2022/23	15533	19039	3506	18.4%	2475	2289	186	7.5%
2023/24	15405	19039	3634	19.1%	2475	2175	300	12.1%
2024/25	15264	19039	3775	19.8%	2475	2144	331	13.4%
2025/26	15108	19039	3931	20.6%	2475	2082	393	15.9%

On the basis that 5% is considered the ideal level of surplus school places, then by 2025/26 the total admission numbers would need to reduce by 285 to 2190 to match supply, thus reducing schools by a further 9.5 forms of entry.

However, our pupil retention model suggests a reception roll of only 1885 by 2025/26, suggesting the reduction would need to be 16 forms of entry to be at the ideal 5%. The pupil retention model takes into account the expected Covid related fall in reception roll in September 2021 which has been influenced by Covid.

The pupil projections by planning area in the SCAP return are as follows:

MERTON PRIMARY SCHOOLS – FORECASTS BY PLANNING AREA JULY 2021

Academic year	Primary PA1						
Forecasts	Reception	1	2	3	4	5	6
2020/21 (actual)							
2021/22	175	188	188	197	198	193	190
2022/23	160	176	189	186	197	199	189
2023/24	170	161	175	187	187	198	195
2024/25	176	171	161	173	187	187	194
2025/26	171	177	171	159	173	188	183

Academic year	Primary PA2						
Forecasts	Reception	1	2	3	4	5	6
2021/22	332	336	349	321	326	331	354
2022/23	330	330	334	349	318	325	333
2023/24	334	327	327	332	346	316	327
2024/25	309	332	323	326	330	345	318
2025/26	297	307	329	320	323	328	345

Academic year	Primary PA3						
Forecasts	Reception	1	2	3	4	5	6
2021/22	692	694	702	677	674	651	657
2022/23	679	676	684	692	667	666	646
2023/24	642	662	666	674	681	657	659
2024/25	625	624	653	656	666	672	652
2025/26	611	607	617	642	646	656	666

Academic year	Primary PA4						
Forecasts	Reception	1	2	3	4	5	6
2021/22	186	193	196	183	191	197	194
2022/23	191	180	195	193	184	190	199
2023/24	185	183	182	192	194	184	191
2024/25	181	178	185	179	194	194	185
2025/26	176	174	181	182	181	193	195

Academic year	Primary PA5						
Forecasts	Reception	1	2	3	4	5	6
2021/22	584	611	598	565	605	620	662
2022/23	616	583	607	592	563	599	613
2023/24	633	611	581	599	590	558	592
2024/25	633	626	608	575	596	587	549
2025/26	618	627	625	600	573	591	579

Academic year	Primary PA6						
Forecasts	Reception	1	2	3	4	5	6
2021/22	202	212	215	225	214	219	225
2022/23	215	204	211	222	228	214	220
2023/24	212	216	202	216	226	229	214
2024/25	219	212	212	208	219	225	230
2025/26	209	218	209	218	211	219	225

There is therefore a need to manage the falling demand for school places to ensure that schools can continue to improve and manage a balanced budget. The broad strategy is as follows:

- Continue to encourage schools to reduce admissions numbers to multiples of 30 for education efficiency when practical to do so
- Encourage schools to work in cluster areas with the council to agree reductions in admission numbers at an area level
- Consider use of compatible alternative uses for space where appropriate such as primary age SEND Additional Resourced Provision when it can be agreed with schools
- Where appropriate consider alternative models to operate schools for school improvement and to manage a balanced budget e.g. hard and soft federations
- No plans to close schools

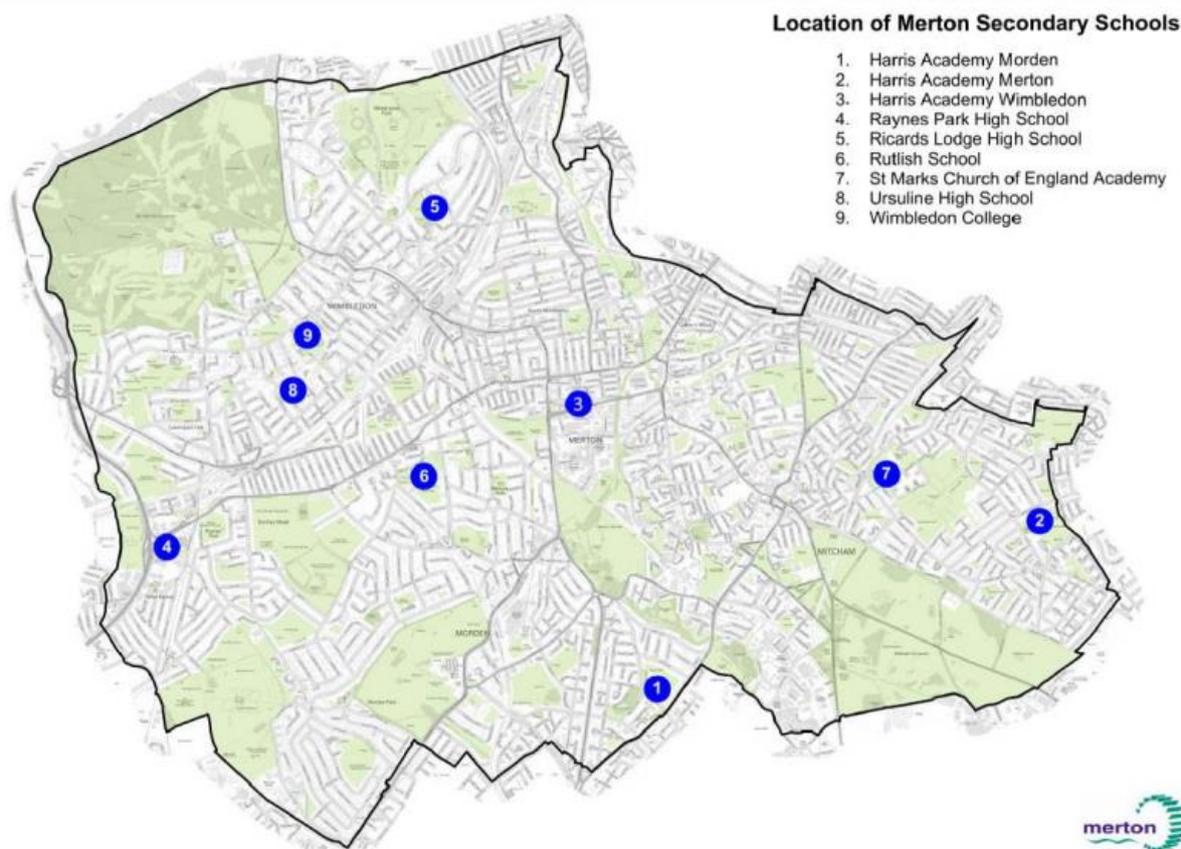
The strategy will be developed further in consultation with schools.

# Secondary schools

Secondary school places planning is undertaken on a borough wide context, but local factors are considered when major school planning decisions are made e.g. the new Harris Academy Wimbledon secondary school was facilitated to be in the South Wimbledon area to meet a gap in school provision in this area.

A map of the mainstream state funded secondary schools in Merton is below:

MAP OF MERTON SECONDARY SCHOOLS



## General issues for provision of secondary school places in Merton

The pattern of demand for Merton secondary schools is very different to primary schools, with families willing to travel much greater distances and parental preference patterns being more significant.

For many years Merton more Merton resident children have travelled out of the borough state schools for their secondary schooling than the other way around. Since the movement in the primary sector is relatively minor and more children attend independent schools from year 7, there is a significant net reduction in pupils in Merton state funded schools from Year 6 to year 7.

Standards in Merton secondary schools have risen significantly over the last 10 years, and the DfE figures from 2017 to the last exam based publication in 2019 showed that they were consistently in the top 10 in the country for progress from primary school to the end

of Key Stage 4 (GCSE year). All Merton secondary schools (maintained and academy) are at least 'good' in Ofsted terms, with over judged to be outstanding.

As shown in the table below, the year 6 to year 7 transfer rate fell from circa 88% in the 2000s to 75% in the mid-2010, and the council therefore reduced its previous secondary school expansion plans to only 8 forms of entry (FE – 1 FE is a year group of 30 pupils) – 2FE through the expansion of Harris Academy Merton and 6 FE through Harris Academy Wimbledon.

Over the last 2 years it has recovered to just below 80%.

YEAR 6 TO YEAR 7 TRANSFER PERCENTAGE ON MERTON SCHOOLS 2008/09 TO 2020/21

2008 /09	2009 /10	2010 /11	2011 /12	2012 /13	2013 /14	2014 /15	2015 /16	2016 /17	2017 /18	2018 /19	2019 /20	2020 /21
88.2 %	87.6 %	85.5 %	84.5 %	79.2 %	80.6 %	80.7 %	78.0 %	74.8 %	74.3 %	74.9 %	79.5 %	79.4 %

### Rise in demand

The significant increased pupil numbers has reached secondary age over the last few years and the Year 7 roll has broadly plateaued following the significant increase to September 2018 when the council facilitated the opening of the Free School Harris Academy Wimbledon for September 2018 and which moved to its permanent site in autumn 2020.

However, the lower numbers flowing through primary school will reach year 7 within the next 2-3 years and so there is concern there will be surplus places and a need to reduce the capacity of some schools

The level of demand continues to be dependent on the pupil retention from year 6.

MERTON SCHOOLS SECONDARY SCHOOL ROLL 2008/09 TO 2020/21

Academic year	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Year 7	1583	1544	1502	1457	1454	1465	1492	1578	1556	1569	1782	1878	1803
Year 8	1536	1608	1547	1516	1450	1459	1462	1482	1553	1547	1593	1767	1854
Year 9	1544	1556	1618	1573	1508	1440	1450	1451	1477	1564	1587	1583	1722
Year 10	1589	1573	1551	1630	1571	1503	1446	1454	1419	1460	1573	1534	1557
Year 11	1566	1576	1540	1548	1590	1532	1497	1416	1403	1383	1497	1518	1508
Year 12	369	412	606	609	699	856	805	754	239	774	716	724	814
Year 13	316	309	298	398	455	499	657	632	585	616	700	643	665
Secondary Year 7 - 11	7818	7857	7758	7724	7573	7399	7347	7381	7408	7523	8032	8280	8444
Secondary Year 12+	685	721	904	1007	1154	1355	1462	1386	824	1390	1416	1367	1479
<b>Secondary Total</b>	<b>8503</b>	<b>8578</b>	<b>8662</b>	<b>8731</b>	<b>8727</b>	<b>8754</b>	<b>8809</b>	<b>8767</b>	<b>8232</b>	<b>8913</b>	<b>9448</b>	<b>9647</b>	<b>9923</b>
<b>Year 6/7 Transfer Rate (%)</b>	<b>88.2 %</b>	<b>87.6 %</b>	<b>85.5 %</b>	<b>84.5 %</b>	<b>79.2 %</b>	<b>80.6 %</b>	<b>80.7 %</b>	<b>78.0 %</b>	<b>74.8 %</b>	<b>74.3 %</b>	<b>74.9 %</b>	<b>79.5 %</b>	<b>79.4 %</b>

### Current level of surplus places in secondary school

The table below provides by school and planning area:

- The total roll (January 2021 school census for the statutory school years R to 6)
- The Net capacity
- The surplus and surplus percentage
- The current reception year admission number (those in red have reduced)

- The reception roll
- The reception year surplus and surplus percentage

This shows that against net capacity there were 6.3% surplus places in spring 2021, and 5.9% in year 7 against published admission number. These numbers are therefore a close match to the 5% ideal level, though it should be recognised that most of the surplus is in two schools and therefore brings challenges to these schools.

**MERTON SECONDARY SCHOOLS – SURPLUS AGAINST NET CAPACITY AND AGAINST YEAR 7 ADMISSION NUMBER 2020/21**

2020/21	Total roll	Net capacity	Surplus	Surplus %	Year 7 admission No.	Year 7 roll	Surplus Yr 7	Surplus Yr 7 %
<b>Total all 9 secondary schools*</b>	<b>9923</b>	<b>11284</b>	<b>712</b>	<b>6.3%</b>	<b>1909</b>	<b>1803</b>	<b>106</b>	<b>5.9%</b>

\*The 9 secondary schools are Harris Academy Morden, Harris Academy Wimbledon, Ricards Lodge High School, Raynes Park High School, Rutlish School, Wimbledon College, Ursuline High School Wimbledon, Harris Academy Merton, St Mark's Church of England Academy

**Secondary school projection figures and projected surplus**

The introduction section of this strategy describes the basis of the council using the GLA projections. The GLA projections show that the number of pupils entering year 7 will start to fall from 2023/24 only moderately, by the equivalent of 2-3 forms of entry

**MERTON SECONDARY SCHOOLS – OFFICIAL JULY 2021 (GLA FORECASTS FROM 2022/23)**

GLA projections – Merton secondary schools	7	8	9	10	11	Total 7-11	12	13	Total whole school
2020/21	1803	1854	1722	1557	1508	<b>8444</b>	814	665	<b>9923</b>
2021/22	1810	1786	1846	1706	1555	<b>8703</b>	830	736	<b>10269</b>
2022/23	1814	1803	1787	1841	1709	<b>8954</b>	850	751	<b>10555</b>
2023/24	1790	1804	1801	1779	1844	<b>9018</b>	915	769	<b>10702</b>
2024/25	1769	1780	1801	1788	1782	<b>8920</b>	925	828	<b>10673</b>
2025/26	1705	1757	1779	1789	1790	<b>8820</b>	926	838	<b>10584</b>
2026/27	1724	1694	1754	1764	1792	<b>8728</b>	931	838	<b>10497</b>
2027/28	1725	1712	1693	1739	1769	<b>8638</b>	938	844	<b>10420</b>

However, given the much lower numbers flowing through Merton primary schools there is the concern that the GLA is projecting significantly more pupils than there will be. Merton also runs a simple 'pupil retention model' which projects pupil retention percentage from the previous 3 years on a 3:2:1 ratio, therefore giving more weighting to the most recent year. Based on the year 6 to year 7 transfer being 79%, this projection shows that year 7 numbers will fall sharply from 2023/24, such that by 2025/26 the fall will be equivalent to 9 forms of entry (FE) less than at present.

PUPIL RETENTION PROJECTIONS JULY 2021

<b>79% Pupil retention projections</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>Total 7-11</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>Total whole school</b>
2020/21	1803	1854	1722	1557	1508	<b>8444</b>	814	665	<b>9923</b>
2021/22	1810	1803	1854	1722	1557	<b>8746</b>	778	740	<b>10264</b>
2022/23	1777	1810	1803	1854	1722	<b>8966</b>	805	708	<b>10479</b>
2023/24	1667	1777	1810	1803	1854	<b>8911</b>	895	734	<b>10540</b>
2024/25	1612	1667	1777	1810	1803	<b>8669</b>	961	815	<b>10445</b>
2025/26	1529	1612	1667	1777	1810	<b>8395</b>	935	875	<b>10206</b>
2026/27	1546	1529	1612	1667	1777	<b>8131</b>	939	852	<b>9922</b>
2027/28	1499	1546	1529	1612	1667	<b>7853</b>	922	855	<b>9630</b>

In this context there has been some concern regarding the impact of a proposed second new Free School in Sutton some 700 metres from the boundary, and there is also concern regarding the proposed opening of a new Voluntary Aided school in Kingston that is also close to the Merton border. After successful lobbying, initially by Merton Council and Merton schools and followed by Sutton schools, in early September 2021 it was confirmed that the mainstream Sutton Free School will not be progressed.

Based on a fall in demand of 9FE, there would be opportunities for schools to reduce admission numbers, with the possibility of Additionally Resourced Provision (reserved provision for pupils with SEND) provided in the spare space.

# Specialist school provision

LB Merton caters for pupils with SEND (Special Educational needs and disabilities) through mainstream schools, specialist provision within mainstream schools (“additional resourced provision”), special schools, and use of independent provision. For children with an EHCP (Education, Health and Care Plan which replaced SEN statements) there are three maintained special schools; in addition three primary and three secondary schools provide specialist provision for pupils with ASD (autistic spectrum disorders) and SCLN (Speech, language and communication needs. There is also a Pupil Referral Unit (SMART centre) which operates under the same management as Melrose, our special school for pupils with SEMH (Social, emotional and mental health).

When there is not a suitable placement for a child with an EHCP within the state funded sector the council is financially responsible for commissioning suitable specialist placements within the Independent sector.

The growth in demand for SEND placements is a national issue, and the problem is significant in Merton. The growth in EHCPs and the specialist placements by school type over the past 6 years is shown in the table below.

NUMBER OF MERTON RESIDENT EHCPs JANUARY 2016 TO JANUARY 2021 AND SCHOOL PLACEMENT TYPE (SEN 2 RETURNS)

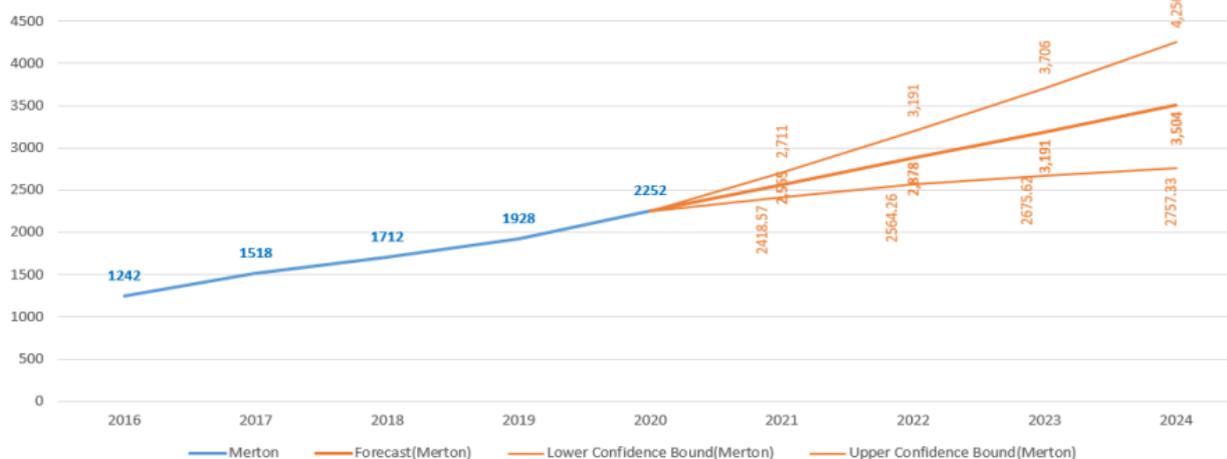
TABLE 4 - EHCP's and type of Provision	Jan 2016 Total Statements and EHCPs		Jan 2017 Total Statements and EHCPs		Jan 2018 Total Statements and EHCPs		Jan 2019 Total Statements and EHCPs		Jan 2020 Total Statements and EHCPs		Jan 2021 Total Statements and EHCPs	
	No	%										
Early Years (incl. Private & Voluntary Settings)	0	0%	1	0%	7	0%	7	0%	7	0%	8	0%
Mainstream Schools (incl. Academies, Free and Independent)	422	39%	461	37%	526	35%	584	34%	707	37%	816	36%
Additional Resourced Provision	110	10%	111	9%	116	8%	125	7%	125	6%	133	6%
State Funded Special Schools	358	33%	388	31%	416	27%	440	26%	474	25%	520	23%
Independent Special Schools	132	12%	153	12%	176	12%	228	13%	280	15%	367	16%
Post 16 College and traineeships	25	2%	93	7%	183	12%	212	12%	199	10%	268	12%
Post 16 Specialist	10	1%	25	2%	44	3%	37	2%	35	2%	44	2%
Alternative Education (incl. EOTAS, Hospital Schools and EHE)	15	1%	10	1%	22	1%	28	2%	61	3%	37	2%
No placement (including NEET)	3	0%	0	0%	28	2%	51	3%	40	2%	59	3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1075</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>1242</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>1518</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>1712</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>1928</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>2252</b>	<b>100%</b>
Change over previous year				16%		22%		13%		11%		17%

There has therefore been more than doubling in the number of EHCPs in the 5 years from 2016 to 2021.

The implications of the trend increase in EHCPs over the forthcoming years, shown in the graph below, is of significant concern.

INCREASE IN EHCPs 2016 TO 2021 AND IMPLICATIONS OF FUTURE TREND

## Projection for Merton Children and Young People with a Statement or EHC Plan



Based on the historic trend, a basic forecast shows the number of Children and Young People with EHCPs in Merton could reach up 4,250 by 2025 (an 89% increase from January 2021).

The council has been active in implementing special school expansion in recent years, through a new site for Perseid School in the early 2010s and then over the past five years further expansion of Perseid School, Additional Resourced Provision (ARP) at Hatfeild and Stanford Primary Schools, the expansion of Cricket Green School, the expansion of Melrose School including the provision of a primary department, and the recently agreed expansion into Whatley Avenue that will provide more places for ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorder) children.

<https://democracy.merton.gov.uk/documents/s41566/Cabinet%206%20Sep%2021%20Melrose%20Whatley%20Av.pdf>

We have therefore increased the number of special school placements from 358 to 520 and the Whatley Avenue project will add a further 80 additional places. The number of ARP places capacity in 2016 was 101 and by 2020 it had risen to 150.

However, as shown by the EHCP placement data, this has not been sufficient keep up with the increase in EHCPs and the council still places more children with EHCPs to independent sector provision than most councils. The budget allocation from the DfE has not kept up with the growing expenditure in Merton and so the council has a significant and growing deficit in its Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) High Needs block.

The DfE has recently invited Merton to participate in the second round of their 'safety valve' intervention programme with the aim of agreeing a package of reform to the high needs system that will bring the DSG deficit under control.

Over the autumn, the DfE's team will work closely with the council to challenge and support the development of the DSG management plan through detailed discussions. During this process, the local authority will be working towards submitting a proposal to the department setting out:

- How the authority will go about reaching an in-year balance on the DSG, and the timeframe for achieving this;
- How the authority will itself reduce the historic cumulative deficit, and what support might be required from the department to eliminate the deficit in full.

Final proposals will be submitted to the department in early December. The negotiation teams will assess the proposals and determine whether they secure the sustainability of the authority's high needs systems and spending appropriately and quickly, and whether any request for support represents value for taxpayer money.

The final decision on whether to enter into an agreement with any authority lies with the Secretary of State. If the authority's proposals are agreed to by the Secretary of State, they will form the basis of a published agreement. The agreement will require the authority to implement reforms to the agreed timetable, alongside maintaining an agreed savings profile. It will also set out additional funding which the department will release to support the reduction of your cumulative deficit and any potential resources required from LBM.

As part of this overall strategy, the council will consider the need for further specialist places. While it is likely that further expansion projects will be implemented to prevent more expensive further independent sector placements that are generally out of borough, it needs to be part of the overall strategy to reduce spend. The actual and projected fall in demand for primary school places, and the projected fall in demand for secondary school places offers the opportunity to deliver additional specialist spaces for a lower capital cost and make best use of buildings.

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## **Committee: Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel**

**Date: 29<sup>th</sup> September 2021**

Wards: All

### **Subject: Departmental Update**

Lead officer: Jane McSherry, Director of Children, Schools and Families

Lead member: Cllr Eleanor Stringer

Contact officer: Karl Mittelstadt, Head of Performance, Policy and Partnerships

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### **Recommendations:**

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

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## **1 PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

1.1. The report provides members of the panel with information on key developments affecting the Children, Schools and Families Department, since the panel's last meeting and not covered elsewhere on the agenda. It focusses on those aspects of particular relevance to the department.

## **2 DETAILS**

### **CHILDREN, SCHOOLS & FAMILIES**

2.1. September is always an eventful month in Children, Schools and Families Department. After a well-deserved summer break, schools have now returned without any Covid restrictions. This is great news for children. However, we are working closely with Public Health colleagues monitor Covid data. We are also keeping a close eye on attendance rates – especially for those open to children's social care or with an EHCP.

2.2. After a competitive recruitment campaign for our permanent Assistant Directors in CSF, I am pleased to announce the appointment of Elizabeth Fitzpatrick as Assistant Director (Education and Early Help) and Dheeraj Chibber as Assistant Director (Children's Social Care and Youth Inclusion).

2.3. Members of this panel will know Elizabeth from her work as Head of School Improvement. She will be starting as soon as an interim replacement can be appointed. Dheeraj joins us from Hertfordshire County Council where he was Head of Family Safeguarding and will take up post in November. I have arranged for robust hand-over processes to take place for both interim ADs.

2.4. As I look forward to the autumn and winter months, we already have planned our Annual Engagement Meeting with Ofsted in November. This

will be an opportunity for us to appraise Ofsted on our improvements since their last full inspection back in 2018.

- 2.5. I would like to end with some really positive news. On the 26<sup>th</sup> August, the HM Inspectorate of Probation published our Youth Justice Service inspection report. The service was found to be 'Outstanding' in seven out of 12 areas surveyed, with four deemed 'Good'. The excellent work of the Youth Justice Service and the Youth Crime Prevention Executive Board and the difference they make to children and young people's lives in Merton were rightly recognised and endorsed through this inspection.

## **Supporting Vulnerable Children**

### **Supporting Children & Young People with Special Educational Needs**

- 2.6. The Education directorate is currently reviewing the SEN Support offer and a focus for this academic year is the graduated response (assess, plan, do, review) process. The review of how mainstream maintained schools and academies are meeting the Special Educational Needs of their pupils and utilising their notional funding will support the directorate in understanding further the reasons for the continued demand in referrals for statutory assessment.
- 2.7. Demand for statutory assessments has continued. At the end of August, the total number of EHCPs was 2476.
- 2.8. Since the beginning of the year we have seen a gradual increase in meeting the 20-week statutory timescale for issuing Education Health and Care Plans. Our year-to-date figure (calendar year) for issuing plans within 20 weeks was 63% at the end of August.
- 2.9. We monitor our 20 week timeliness on a monthly basis and saw an improvement in August where 79% of EHCPs were issued within 20 weeks.
- 2.10. The improvement in meeting timescales is as a result of our continued work with partners to improve processes for receiving professional advice within the 6 week statutory timescale.

### **DfE Safety Valve Programme**

- 2.11. As members will be aware from the recent strategic council report, the DfE have invited Merton to participate in the second round of their 'safety valve' intervention programme with the aim of agreeing a package of reform to the high needs system that will bring the DSG deficit under control.
- 2.12. This will start next week, with a meeting involving senior officers, when the local authority will set out our perspective on and reasons for the deficit position, and the particular challenges within the local authority. The department's team will ask questions and introduce their initial lines of enquiry based on a rigorous review of the data.

- 2.13. Over the autumn, the department's team will then work closely with the local authority to challenge and support the development of the DSG management plan through detailed discussions. During this process, the local authority will be working towards submitting a proposal to the department setting out:
- How the authority will go about reaching an in-year balance on the DSG, and the timeframe for achieving this;
  - How the authority will itself reduce the historic cumulative deficit, and what support might be required from the department to eliminate the deficit in full.
- 2.14. Final proposals will be submitted to the department in early December. The negotiation teams will assess the proposals and determine whether they secure the sustainability of the authority's high needs systems and spending appropriately and quickly, and whether any request for support represents value for taxpayer money.
- 2.15. The final decision on whether to enter into an agreement with any authority lies with the Secretary of State.
- 2.16. If the authority's proposals are agreed to by the Secretary of State, they will form the basis of a published agreement. The agreement will require the authority to implement reforms to the agreed timetable, alongside maintaining an agreed savings profile.
- 2.17. It will also set out additional funding which the department will release to support the reduction of your cumulative deficit and any potential resources required from LBM.
- 2.18. The authority's progress against the agreement will subsequently be monitored by the department, and will determine the release of further funding.

### ***Children's Social Care – General Update***

- 2.19. As part of our continuous improvement work, we regularly review the impact of our social work on Merton children and families. Senior leaders in Children Social Care have a good sense of our strengths, including:
- Permanent senior managers who know their service well and have a grip on practice
  - Effective relationships with partner agencies who take a shared approach to delivering key services in Merton
  - A wide range of Early Help services designed to prevent the need for statutory intervention
  - Effective 'front door' arrangements that continue to manage contacts and referrals into the service well. A recent Ofsted focused visit highlighted the strong practice in the hub and first response teams
  - Reducing numbers of children with CP plans

- A highly effective Youth Justice Service recently judged to be good with many outstanding features (August 21)
- Timely good quality practice with children who are involved in the public law framework
- Successful social workers in schools' programme exploring better ways to support children
- Good outcomes for children who are adopted or achieve permanence through SGO arrangements
- Good results in the retention and recruitment of foster carers so that we can keep our looked after children close to home.
- Development of the Mockingbird Programme to further support our carers.
- Stable placements for our looked after children
- Effective support from the virtual school for our children

2.20. However, we also know the areas we need to be focussing on, and have clear plans in place to address any weaknesses, including:

- We need to be able to better evidence the impact of our early help service
- Written plans and records do not always reflect the good work which takes place with children and families
- There has been a lot of activity around improving contextual safeguarding but we need to improve our systems and processes so that we can better record and monitor our responses more effectively and understand and report on outcomes for children
- Commissioning arrangements for placements for children with complex needs is underdeveloped. We need to work with partners to improve this.

### ***Case loads in children's social care***

- 2.21. Our average caseloads have reduced a little and are now within acceptable limits. Cases are not distributed evenly across all teams however and some social workers have higher case allocations.
- 2.22. Our case allocation is reviewed weekly, and we are trying to reduce the impact on teams through extra support and management oversight.
- 2.23. Recruiting social workers is difficult both in the region and nationally.
- 2.24. As part of our longer-term strategy to grow and develop our own workers, we have a high number of trainee social workers and newly qualified workers who need to have smaller caseloads.
- 2.25. The introduction of a combined front door means that we may be able to divert some cases into our targeted Early Help service. We are hoping this

will also contribute to a reduction in the workload of our First Response services.

### ***Youth Justice Service – Inspection Feedback***

- 2.26. In August, we received inspection feedback from HM Inspectorates of Probation (HMIP) following the inspection of Merton's Youth Justice Service in May. Merton's overall rating was 'good', with many practice areas achieving 'outstanding'.
- 2.27. The inspectorate found the work of our services to be of a high standard, highlighting that:
- There is a clear vision, which is well communicated across the partnership, and the YJS board is well attended. Board members advocate for YJS children and have sufficient seniority to make decisions and commit resources from their own agencies.
  - The workforce has a range of skills, knowledge and experience to develop trusting and supportive relationships with children
  - Quality assurance processes are used well, enabling a reflective and considered approach to the management of complex cases.
  - The case management of court disposals was of a high standard, supported by strong and purposeful management oversight
  - Assessment was rated as 'Outstanding' and was based on a wide range of sources and detailed information. We saw thorough and balanced analysis of factors to support desistance, address safety and wellbeing, and understand the risk of harm to others.
  - Planning, implementation and review were 'Outstanding', with strong evidence of effective partnership work and individualised responses to children and their families.
  - The joint work associated with out-of-court disposals was 'Outstanding', underpinned by a joint decision-making panel and a clear protocol with relevant stakeholders. Assessment work was 'Outstanding'. It was strengths-based, which helped staff to develop effective working relationships with children and families. Planning and implementation were 'Outstanding' for desistance work in all cases, and good in work to address safety and wellbeing and the risk of harm to others.
- 2.28. Inspectors suggested that the quality of our service could improve through further developing the use of data to inform longer-term planning, to better identify trends and connections, and to evidence the ongoing impact of its work. The management team have already acted on this recommendation, and have strengthened analytical capacity.

### ***Speech and language update (scrutiny request)***

- 2.29. Across the multi-agency Early Years sector, there is a strong evidence base that shows the importance of babies and children communication, language and speech, from pregnancy to the age of 5. As part of our

recovery from the Covid pandemic and associated periods of lock-down, we are paying particular attention to the early identification of speech and language needs.

- 2.30. In Merton all families have access to the Heath Visiting Service which is run by Central London Community Health (CLCH) who deliver the Healthy Child Programme. The Healthy Child Programme (HCP) is led by health visitors in collaboration with other health professionals. This is a universal offer with additional services for families needing extra support, whether short-term intervention or ongoing help for complex longer-term needs.
- 2.31. The programme comprises of health promotion, child health surveillance and screening. It provides a range of services to families, including, health and development reviews to support early identification of communication, speech and language, advice and support to help children's physical and emotional development. The programme can ensure families receive early help before problems develop further, which in turn reduces demand on higher cost specialist services.
- 2.32. In Merton, our HCP is delivered via our Children's Centres through co-location of staff and the delivery of health clinics. This approach facilitates partnership collaboration and a shared understanding of the needs of families and children in Merton, as well as supporting ease of access to programmes across our Children's Centres, supporting early communication, speech and language. All first time parents (and parents who may require additional support) have access to a 5 week programme designed upon the principles of 5 to Thrive<sup>1</sup>, providing an evidenced based approach to supporting parents to talk, play, relax, respond, engage in the very early days of their babies life to support wellbeing and healthy child development.
- 2.33. If a child is identified at 2 year health review as having some speech and language delay then they are invited to return to the health visitor after three months but in the meantime can be booked into a toddler programme at a Centre for further observation and 'assessment' of need. They could also be booked into a more specialist Social Communication group if the needs are more apparent, and follow on referral to the CLCH Speech and Language service may also be made.
- 2.34. There are a range of programmes for children up until the age of 3 and a half, delivered through the Centres, that support children's communication, with parents and children together. There are also a range of more targeted programmes for parents where there may be additional needs identified including specialist services for children with SEND.
- 2.35. Where children's communication and language is of a more significant concern, often highlighted by the health visitor or children centre staff, the early years service have Family Support Workers who are able to support parents by co-ordinating services for children, including making referrals and arranging for children to be seen by speech and language therapists

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<sup>1</sup> See <https://fivetothrive.org.uk/>

and community paediatricians. Children are also invited to weekly stay and play groups within children's centres, to support their social communication. Family Support Workers carry out regular home visits, offering advice so that parents can support their child's communication within the home. The early years' service also offers a parenting course called Incredible Years ASD/language delay, which is an 11 week course designed to support parents to engage their child in play that can support their child's communication and to help them with strategies around routines and behaviour.

- 2.36. The early years' service provides a brokerage service to encourage take up of 2 year funded early education, which is free nursery education for children meeting certain eligibility criteria who may be more vulnerable to not meeting expected outcomes. Supporting families to take up a funded 2 year old places, is key to our work in under 5s as evidence shows take up in good quality settings, has an ongoing positive impact on children's outcomes throughout school.
- 2.37. There are a team of Early Years Advisors who work in partnership with the range of early years providers and they deliver whole setting advice that supports children's speech and language, through on site visits and training programmes, as well as working with settings to plan individual support for children when needs may be identified. Support is given to parents where children with identified SEND are transitioning into an educational setting or school.
- 2.38. Once a child has started early years education, the early years' service provides inclusion officers who support practitioners and SENCO's to put effective SEND Support in place. This includes advise around effective strategies and interventions that will be beneficial for the child, supporting practitioners to co-ordinate services for the child such as extra support in the setting, referrals to speech and language therapists, physiotherapists and community paediatricians, so children's needs can be assessed. These professionals, along with Educational Psychologists, are available to provide services for the child, if they are deemed to need them, even if there is no EHCP in place.

## **Supporting Families**

### ***Children's Social Care – re-organisation***

- 2.39. The restructure has now been fully completed. This has been a complex piece of work involving the whole directorate. Communication was made more difficult because of remote working but by listening carefully to staff and keeping them informed at each step, speaking to unions and colleagues in HR, we have successfully delivered the plan on time.
- 2.40. All assimilated roles are now in place, we have completed internal interviews and appointments. All other/external vacancies are now out to advert and interviews are taking place over the next few weeks.

- 2.41. The task now is to settle staff and teams into the new working arrangements and to focus on continuing to improve our practice to achieve better outcomes for children. We need to ensure our staff have the right skills and support from managers to do their job well.
- 2.42. Recruiting and retaining social workers remains a challenge both locally and nationally. Merton is responding to this by advertising nationally, further developing our frontline teams(8 new social work students started last week with us) and supporting and encouraging our ASYE staff to stay with us.

### ***Improved front door arrangements***

- 2.43. The 'Children and Family Hub' went live on 27<sup>th</sup> September. The hub functions as a combined front door for both Children's Social Care and Early Help services – those overseen by the council (the 'Family and Wellbeing Service') as well as universal Early Help services in the community.
- 2.44. The transition from from previous arrangements has been smooth. A pilot phase enabled us to learn and adapt the model prior to go-live. This was supported by regular meetings between colleagues in Children's Social Care and the Family Wellbeing service.
- 2.45. As part of introduction of the Children and Family Hub we have introduced a new 'Request for Service' form. This process enables our partners agencies to seek council input more effectively – ensuring that children receive a timely and proportionate response to their need.
- 2.46. The introduction of the hub brings to an end an extensive piece of work with our partners. We are now supporting the go-live date with an extensive training programme for our own staff as well as partner agencies

### **Supporting Schools**

#### ***Race Equality in schools***

- 2.47. Merton schools continue to work in partnership to address issues of race equality, particularly following the death of George Floyd and other sad events last year, and the Black Lives Matter movement. The forum continues to meet on a twice termly basis. Activity within the forum has included:
- overseeing the refreshing of the strategy for Merton schools to address race equality;
  - examining the most recent data we have available for Merton schools, to inform actions for the coming academic year;
  - hearing from inspirational external speakers to keep our focus fresh and to ensure we continue to use external perspectives to challenge our thinking;
  - reviewing the impact of activity last year

2.48. A conference for school staff was held in June. This was a very successful event, held virtually and attended by over 50 delegates from across Merton schools. Evaluations of the key note speakers and of the workshops was positive. Professor Steve Strand spoke about 'Race, sex, class and educational achievement at age 16'; the author and broadcaster Afua Hirsch spoke about her experiences of racism and equality, as someone who attended Merton schools, and was brought up locally; and we had workshops on:

- Raising the achievement of Black Caribbean pupils: Good practice (Professor Feyisa Demi, Honorary Professor, School of Education, Durham University)
- Building confidence for discussing race, racism and anti-racism, using a shared language (The Merton EPS)
- Decolonising the curriculum and pedagogy (Sabrina Edwards, Director of Educating for Equality)
- A call to action: What are your next steps on your anti-racism journey? (The Merton EPS)
- Improving inclusion through partnership with parents (Keith Shipman, Social Inclusion Manager and Inclusion Team, Merton Council)

### ***Schools' action to address climate change***

2.49. Working in collaboration with the Council's Climate Action Group, a conference will be held for school leaders at the end of September to help focus schools on the action they can take to address climate change with and through their pupils. The conference will alert schools to the Council's 2030 net-zero carbon emissions target, and challenge them (through the 'Let's Go Zero' campaign for schools) to take action themselves. Schools will hear about local best practice; how to address these issues through the curriculum; hints and tips on how to save energy and water in school; and how to promote active travel to school

### ***Schools' return in September***

- 2.50. Schools returned for the new academic year from 1<sup>st</sup> September. This was the first time that they have operated under revised and reduced measures to manage Covid, since the introduction of 'Stage 4' (in July). The only measures that schools are now required to implement for 'business as usual' cover the ventilation of spaces; enhanced cleaning regimes; and hand washing/sanitisation. Bubbles are no longer required, and children under the ages of 18 years and 6 months (as well as people who have received their two Covid vaccinations) are not required to self-isolate if they are in contact with a positive case. In addition, schools no longer have a formal role to play in 'Track and Trace' when a positive case is identified in the school community.
- 2.51. The start of term seems to have been relatively smooth for most schools, though the number of cases in schools has risen slightly over the past

week, with some schools experiencing an outbreak (now defined as five positive cases who have been in contact with each other). Where outbreaks have been identified colleagues in Public Health have been providing advice and guidance to leaders. So far the types of additional measures needed to be implemented have been minor; in the very small number of schools where there have been larger numbers of cases, measures have included the temporary reintroduction of limited mixing between classes, staggered lunches and the use of face masks.

- 2.52. Secondary schools implemented two on site tests for all pupils. This too seems to have gone smoothly, with only a limited number of positive cases being found through this exercise.
- 2.53. Schools are now being funded to employ 'Covid Resilience Champions' from this September, who will be key conduits of information between Public Health and schools, and help infection prevention and control measures to be embedded across schools.
- 2.54. The challenge now for schools with secondary age pupils is the implementation of the vaccination programme for 12-15 year olds. The Council is working closely with the CCG and the agency responsible for the programme roll out (Hounslow and Richmond Community Healthcare Trust) to try to ensure this happens the minimum disruption for schools. It will nevertheless be a big undertaking for schools, at a time when they are trying to get back to some semblance of 'normality'.

## Committee: Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel

**Date: 29<sup>th</sup> September 2021**

Wards: All

### Subject:

Lead officer: Jane McSherry, Director of Children, Schools and Families

Lead member: Cllr Eleanor Stringer

Contact officer: Karl Mittelstadt, Head of Performance, Policy and Partnerships

### 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. This report summarises the performance information for 2021/22, up to 30<sup>th</sup> June 2021 for quarterly indicators, and up to August 2021 for monthly indicators, as set out in the accompanying document, the Children & Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel Performance Index 2021/22.

## 2 DETAILS

### *Exception Report*

2.1. The following indicators are marked as amber or red.

No	Indicator	Rating	Service Commentary
2	% of Single Assessments authorised within 45 days	R	The rate of assessments completed within 45 days has declined at a time when contacts and referrals to social care have increased.  The rate remains higher than national and regional averages.
16	Average number of weeks taken to complete Care proceedings against a national target of 26 weeks.	R	We always strive to meet the nationally set target of 26 weeks. Due to small number of children in proceedings in Merton, delays with one family can skew our figures.  Nationally, the duration of care proceedings has increased. This is a result of court closures during the

			<p>pandemic. As lock-down eases, we should see this having an impact.</p> <p>Whilst above the nationally set target of 26 weeks, Merton's performance in Q1 (2021/22) is slightly better than the national average (44 weeks).</p>
22	Number of in-house foster carers recruited	R	See commentary below.

### **Commentary**

- 2.2. In addition, the following indicators, whilst not target indicators, will be of particular note to the scrutiny panel.

*Looked after children participating in their reviews (excludes children 0-4) (Indicator 18)*

- 2.3. We have seen a reduction in this indicator in August. This follows seasonal patterns as a number of children are away during August. We would expect this indicator to rise again in September and beyond, and will keep this under review.

*Number of in-house foster carers recruited*

- 2.4. Whilst we have appointed 1 new foster carer in Q1, this masks the wider success of our foster recruitment work. We received a total of 27 new applications. We have made 6 initial visits and 11 assessments are ongoing. We expect to see an increase in the number of approvals shortly.

### **Amendments, Corrections and Data Caveats**

- 2.5. Current system configuration and data recording issues in our social care reporting system Mosaic have an impact on our ability to report performance against some of the indicators effectively. This does not mean that the department is unable to monitor performance.
- 2.6. We are currently not able to report accurately against the following indicators:

Indicator Number	Descriptor	Commentary
8	% of quorate attendance at child protection conferences	<p>Data reporting is currently unreliable. The way in which Mosaic is currently configured does not allow an easy analysis of quoracy.</p> <p>The QA and Practice Development Team review quoracy as part of their service.</p>
19	Stability of placements of Looked After Children – number of placements (3 or more in the year)	<p>Our automated calculations have not matched manual calculations undertaken by the service.</p> <p>We are in the process of reviewing existing reports and formula to ensure accuracy.</p>
20	Placement Stability – Looked After Children (aged 16+):length of placement (in care 2.5years, placement 2 years)	<p>Our automated calculations have not matched manual calculations undertaken by the service.</p> <p>We are in the process of reviewing existing reports and formula to ensure accuracy.</p>

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

- Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel Performance Index 2020/21.

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Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel - Performance Index 2020/21

Please note that Year to date performance - unless otherwise stated indicates April - March

No.	Performance Indicators	Frequency	Target 2020/21	Benchmarking and trend				BRAG rating	Merton 2021/22 performance											
				Merton 2019/20	Merton 2018/19	England	London		Apr-21	May-21	Jun-21	Jul-21	Aug-21	Sep-21	Oct-21	Nov-21	Dec-21	Jan-22	Feb-22	Mar-22
<b>Assessments</b>																				
1	Number of Early Help Assessments undertaken by the Authority	Monthly	Not a target measure	68 completed	n/a	No benchmarking available	No benchmarking available	Not a target measure	5	16	9	23	34							
2	% of Single Assessments authorised within the statutory 45 days	Monthly	91%	94%	84%	83.1% (DfE 2018/19)	83% (DfE 2018/19)	Red	97%	92%	85%	66%	87%							
3	% of Education, Health and Care (EHCP) Plans issued within statutory 20 week timescale (YTD Calendar Year /Monthly)	YTD/Monthly	55%	39.6% (DfE SEN2 Jan 2021 for the 2020 calendar year)	56.4% (DfE: SEN2 Jan 2020 for the 2019 calendar year)	58% (DfE: SEN2 Jan 2021 for the 2020 calendar year)	61.8% (DfE: SEN2 Jan 2021 for the 2020 calendar year)	Green	63%	61%	64%	61%	63%							
									62%	56%	74%	42%	79%							
<b>Child protection</b>																				
4	Child Protection Plans rate per 10,000	Monthly	Not a target measure	19.5	38.9	43.7 (DfE 2018/19)	36.7(DfE 2018/19)	Not a target measure	37.1	36.3	32.5	30.0	30.8							
5	Number of children subject of a Child Protection Plan	Monthly	Not a target measure	92	184	No relevant benchmarking available	No relevant benchmarking available	Not a target measure	176	172	154	142	146							
8	% of quorate attendance at child protection conferences	Quarterly	95%	N/A		No relevant benchmarking available	No relevant benchmarking available				N/A		N/A							
9	% of reviews completed within timescale for Children with Child Protection Plans	Monthly		99%	90.4% (DfE 2018/19)	91.8% (DfE 2018/19)	95.7% (DfE 2018/19)	Green	100%	97%	95%	94%	95%							
10	% of Children subject of a CP Plan who had a CP visit within timescales in the month	Monthly	Not a target measure	84%	77%	No relevant benchmarking available	No relevant benchmarking available	Not a target measure	97%	97%	95%	93%	99%							
11	% of Children that became the subject of a Child Protection Plan for the second or subsequent time	Monthly	range 12-20%	19%	17.2% (DfE 2018/19)	20.8% (DfE 2018/19)	17.5% (DfE 2018/19)	Green	16%	14%	16%	13%	14%							
<b>Looked After Children</b>																				
12	Looked After Children rate per 10,000	Monthly	Not a target measure	33.0	33	65 (DfE 2018/19)	50 (DfE 2018/19)	Not a target measure	30.0	30.6	31.0	30.6	30.0							
13	Number of Looked After Children	Monthly	Not a target measure	154	157	78,150 (DfE 2018/19)	10,030 ((DfE 2018/19)	Not a target measure	142	145	147	145	142							
14	Number of UASC children and young people	Monthly	Not a target measure	29	32	No benchmarking available	No benchmarking available	Not a target measure	23	21	20	19	19							
16	Average number of weeks taken to complete Care proceedings against a national target of 26 weeks	Quarterly	26 weeks	37	33	31 (CAFCASS 2018/19)	No relevant benchmarking available	Red			42									
17	% of Looked After Children cases which were reviewed within required timescales	Monthly	96%	96%	88%	Not published	Not published		99%	96%	94%	94%	97%							
18	% of Looked After Children participating in their reviews in month (year to date) (excludes children aged 0 - 4)	Monthly	Not a target measure	90%	95%	No relevant benchmarking available	No relevant benchmarking available	Not a target measure	94%	88%	91%	100%	83%							
19	Stability of placements of Looked After Children - number of placements (3 or more in the year)	Quarterly	11%	7%	8% (DfE 2018/19)	10% (DfE 2018/19)	11% (DfE 2018/19)	Green			n/a									
20	Stability of placements of Looked After Children (aged 16+) - length of placement (in care 2.5years, placement 2 years)	Quarterly	65%	75%	73% (DfE 2018/19)	69% (DfE 2018/19)	67% (DfE 2018/19)	Green			n/a									



No.	Performance Indicators	Frequency	Target 2020/21	Benchmarking and trend				BRAG rating	Merton 2021/22 performance											
				Merton 2019/20	Merton 2018/19	England	London		Apr-21	May-21	Jun-21	Jul-21	Aug-21	Sep-21	Oct-21	Nov-21	Dec-21	Jan-22	Feb-22	Mar-22
21	% of Looked After Children in foster placements who are placed with in-house foster carers	Quarterly	60%	N/A	n/a	No relevant benchmarking available	No relevant benchmarking available	Green			48%									
22	Number of in-house foster carers recruited	Quarterly	20	12	13	No relevant benchmarking available	No relevant benchmarking available	Red			1									
23	Number of <u>Looked After Children</u> who were adopted (YTD)	Monthly	Not a target measure	data not yet available	4 (6% of those leaving care), DfE	No relevant benchmarking available	No relevant benchmarking available	Not a target measure	0	0	0	0	1							
23a	Number of <u>Looked After Children</u> for whom agency Special Guardianship Orders were granted (YTD)	Quarterly	Not a target measure	10 (11%)	9 (13% of those leaving care 2019, DfE data)	3840 (13% of those leaving care, DfE 2019)	480 (9% of those leaving care, DfE 2019)	Not a target measure			0									
<b>Childrens Centres and Schools</b>																				
25	% of total 0-5 year estimated Census 2011 population from areas of deprivation (IDACI 30%) whose families have accessed children's centre services (cumulative)	Quarterly	n/a	55%	56%	No relevant benchmarking available	No relevant benchmarking available	Not a target measure			12%									
26	% outcome of School Ofsted inspections good or outstanding (overall effectiveness)	Quarterly	91%	95%	95% (AY year-end 31/08/2019)	86% (31/08/2019)	93% (31/08/2019)	Green			95%									
27	Number of Primary* permanent exclusions (Number YTD Academic year)	Monthly	Not a target measure	0	<5	No relevant benchmarking available	No relevant benchmarking available	Not a target measure	<5	<5	<5	<5	<5	0						
28	Number of Secondary* permanent exclusions (Number YTD Academic year)	Monthly	Not a target measure	13	9	No relevant benchmarking available	No relevant benchmarking available	Not a target measure	<5	5	13	13	13	0						
29	Secondary *** persistent absenteeism (10% or more sessions missed)	Annual	Not a target measure	Academic year measure	10.3% (DfE AY 2018/19)	13.7% (DfE AY 2018/19)	12% (DfE AY 2018/19)	Not a target measure												
30	% of Reception year surplus places*** (calculated October and January)	Reported Quarterly	Range 5 - 10%			No relevant benchmarking available	No relevant benchmarking available	Red			10.9%									
31	% of Secondary school (Year 7) surplus places *** (calculated October and January)	Reported Quarterly	Range 5 - 10%	TBC	11.7% (AY2017/18)	No relevant benchmarking available	No relevant benchmarking available	Green			5.9%									
<b>Young People and Services</b>																				
32	Youth service participation rate	Annual		1859	2395	No relevant benchmarking available	No relevant benchmarking available	Green												
33	% of CYP (16 - 17 year olds) not in education, employment or training (NEET)	Monthly	Not a target measure	Awaiting confirmed annual rate	1.6%	2.6% (DfE 2018/19 based on Dec - Feb average)	1.7% (DfE 2018/19 based on Dec - Feb average)	Not a target measure	1.3%	1.4%	1.4%	1.4%	TBC							
34	% of CYP (16 - 17 year olds) education, employment or training status 'not known'	Monthly	Not a target measure	Awaiting confirmed annual rate	0.6% Q4 (0.8% DfE benchmark data)	2.9% (DfE 2018/19 based on Dec - Feb average)	3% (DfE 2018/19 based on Dec - Feb average)	Not a target measure	1.2%	1.2%	1.2%	1.2%	TBC							
35	Number of First Time Entrants (FTEs) to the Youth Justice System aged 10-17 (cumulative)	Monthly	50	38	33 (published rate per 10k:	224 (rate per 10,000, 2019)	260 (rate per 10,000, 2019)	Green	3	4	8	10	13							

No.	Performance Indicators	Frequency	Target 2020/21	Benchmarking and trend				BRAG rating	Merton 2021/22 performance											
				Merton 2019/20	Merton 2018/19	England	London		Apr-21	May-21	Jun-21	Jul-21	Aug-21	Sep-21	Oct-21	Nov-21	Dec-21	Jan-22	Feb-22	Mar-22
36	Rate of proven re-offending by young people in the youth justice system	Quarterly	Not a target measure	TBC	45.2% YJB pub 2021)	38.4% (2018/19 YJB pub 2021)	41.8% (2018/19, YJB pub 2021)	Not a target measure			45.5%									
37	TF: Number of Families engaged for Expanded Programme	Quarterly	Not a target measure	254	320	No relevant benchmarking available	No relevant benchmarking available	Not a target measure			100									
38	% of commissioned services for which quarterly monitoring was completed	Quarterly	100%	100%	100%	No relevant benchmarking available	No relevant benchmarking available	Green			100%									
39**	% agency social workers (HR data)	Quarterly	New	18.2% Year End (FTE)	38.1% Year End (FTE)	No direct comparable benchmark (DfE Census Sept 2019, 15.8%)	No direct comparable benchmark (DfE Census Sept 2019, 23.8%)	New												
40**	Average total caseload for social workers (working with looked after children and/or children subject of child protection plans) (total caseload including non LAC and CPP cases as at end of month) <b>Combines and replaces previous indicators 7 and 15</b>	Monthly	New	16 (Year-End) 14 (Annual average)	NEW (DfE Census Sept 2018** 17.7)	No direct comparable benchmark (DfE Census Sept 2018, 17.4)	No direct comparable benchmark (DfE Census Sept 2018 15.8)	New	14	15	13	12	12							

Indicators 27 & 28: \* all pupils educated in Merton Schools (including special schools)

Indicators 29, 30 & 31: \*\*\* all pupils educated in Merton Schools (excluding special Schools)

Indicators 39 & 40\*\* Quarterly and monthly data reported from live date reported by Human Resource or Mosaic respectively. There is no direct comparable benchmarkable data as the DfE uses a different definition of a 'social worker' for the purpose of who is included in the annual Children's Social Workforce Census.

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# Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel - Work Programme 2021/2022



This table sets out the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel work programme for 2021/22; the items listed were agreed by the Panel at its meeting on 26 June 2021. 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:** Councillor Sally Kenny

**Vice-chair:** Councillor Hayley Ormrod

## **Scrutiny Support**

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

Stella Akintan, Scrutiny Officer

Tel: 020 8545 3390; Email: [stella.akintan@merton.gov.uk](mailto:stella.akintan@merton.gov.uk)

For more information about overview and scrutiny at LB Merton, please visit [www.merton.gov.uk/scrutiny](http://www.merton.gov.uk/scrutiny)

Meeting date: 29 September 2021 (**Deadline for papers: 12pm, 20 September 2021**)

Scrutiny category	Item/issue	How	Lead member and/or lead officer	Intended outcomes
<b>Standing items</b>	Covid 19 update	Presentation	Dagmar Zeuner, Director of Public Health.	Presentation on the on the impact of COVID-19 within schools and amongst children and young people.
<b>Holding the executive to account</b>	School Places Planning Strategy	Written Report	Tom Procter, Head of Contracts and School Organisation	To review the Strategy for managing the changing demand for primary and secondary school places.
<b>Scrutiny of the CSF Department</b>	Departmental update report	Written report	Jane McSherry, Director of Children, Schools and Families	An overview of the key issues within the Children, Schools and Families Department.
<b>Holding the executive to account</b>	Cabinet Member Priorities	Verbal Update	Councillor Eleanor Stringer, Cabinet Member for Children and Education	Overview of key issues of concern for the Cabinet Member.
<b>Performance Monitoring</b>	Performance monitoring Report	Written Report	Head of Policy, Planning and Performance	Panel to review the basket of indicators
<b>Setting the work programme</b>	Work programme 2021/22	Written report	Stella Akintan, Scrutiny Officer	To review the work programme and agree any changes

Meeting date: 3 November 2021 (*Deadline for papers: 12pm 25 October 2021*)

Scrutiny category	Item/issue	How	Lead member and/or lead officer	Intended outcomes
<b>Standing Item</b>	Covid 19 update	Presentation	Dagmar Zeuner, Director of Public Health	To review the impact of COVID-19 within schools and amongst children and young people.
<b>Scrutiny of local services</b>	Support for pupils after the pandemic	Written Report	Elizabeth Fitzpatrick Head of School Improvement, Keith Shipman, Head of Education Inclusion	Review the provision for pupils.
<b>Budget scrutiny</b>	Budget/business plan scrutiny (Round 1)	Written report	Caroline Holland, Director of Corporate Services	To discuss and refer any comments to the O&S Commission
<b>Scrutiny of the CSF Department</b>	Departmental update report	Written Report	Jane McSherry, Director of Children, Schools and Families	An overview of the key issues within the Children, Schools and Families Department.
<b>Holding the executive to account</b>	Cabinet Member Priorities	Verbal Update	Councillor Eleanor Stringer, Cabinet Member for Children and Education	Overview of key issues of concern for the Cabinet Member.

<b>Performance management</b>	Performance monitoring	Written report	Karl Mittelstadt, Head of Policy, Planning and Performance	Panel to review the basket of indicators
<b>Setting the work programme</b>	Work programme 2020/21	Written report	Stella Akintan, Scrutiny Officer	To review the work programme and agree any changes

Meeting date: 12 January 2022 (**Deadline for papers: 12pm 3 January 2022**)

Scrutiny category	Item/issue	How	Lead member and/or lead officer	Intended outcomes
<b>Standing items</b>	Covid 19 update	Presentation	Dagmar Zeuner, Director of Public Health	To review the impact of COVID-19 within schools and amongst children and young people.
<b>Budget scrutiny</b>	Budget/business plan scrutiny (Round 2)	Written report	Caroline Holland, Director of Corporate Services	To discuss and make recommendations to forward to Cabinet
<b>Scrutiny of local services</b>	Apprenticeships	Written Report	Liz Hammond, Interim Head of HR	Overview of the work of the council and partners to support apprenticeships for young people
<b>Scrutiny of the CSF Department</b>	Departmental update report	Written Report	Jane McSherry, Director of Children, Schools and Families	An overview of the key issues within the Children, Schools and Families Department.
<b>Holding the executive to account</b>	Cabinet Member Priorities	Verbal Update	Councillor Eleanor Stringer, Cabinet Member for Children and Education	Overview of key issues of concern for the Cabinet Member.
<b>Performance management</b>	Performance monitoring	Basket of indicators	Head of Policy, Planning and Performance	To highlight items of concern

<b>Setting the work programme</b>	Work programme 2021/22	Written report	Stella Akintan, Scrutiny Officer	To review the work programme and agree any changes
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**Meeting date:** 09 February 2022 (**Deadline for papers:** 12pm 31 January 2022)

<b>Scrutiny category</b>	<b>Item/issue</b>	<b>How</b>	<b>Lead member and/or lead officer</b>	<b>Intended outcomes</b>
<b>Standing item</b>	Covid 19 update	Presentation	Dagmar Zeuner, Director of Public Health	To review the impact of COVID-19 within schools and amongst children and young people.
<b>Scrutiny of local services</b>	Mental Health and Wellbeing of children and young people	Written report	Keith Shipman, Head of Education Inclusion	Overview of services to support young people after the pandemic
<b>Holding the executive to account</b>	Departmental update report	Written report	Jane McSherry Director of Children, Schools and Families	An overview of the key issues within the Children, Schools and Families Department.
<b>Performance management</b>	Performance monitoring	Basket of indicators	Head of Policy, Planning and Performance	To highlight items of concern
<b>work programme</b>	Work programme 2021/22	Written report	Stella Akintan, Scrutiny Officer	To review the work programme and agree any changes

Meeting date: 15 March 2022 (*Deadline for papers: 12pm 07 March 2022*)

Scrutiny category	Item/issue	How	Lead member and/or lead officer	Intended outcomes
<b>Holding the executive to account</b>	Schools Standards Annual Report	Written report	Elizabeth Fitzpatrick & Head of School Improvement  Keith Shipman, Head of Education Inclusion	To scrutinise attainment information
<b>Scrutiny of Health Services</b>	Childhood Immunisations	Written Report	NHS England	To review the uptake of immunisations amongst children and young people in Merton.
<b>Setting the work programme</b>	Topic suggestions for 2022/23	Written report	Stella Akintan, Scrutiny Officer	To identify topics for the 2022/23 work programme
<b>Standing items</b>	Covid 19 update	Verbal update	Dagmar Zeuner, Director of Public Health	To review the impact of COVID-19 within schools and amongst children and young people.

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