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Merton Council

Children and Young People

Overview and Scrutiny

Panel



Date: 10 November 2022

Time: 7.15 pm

Venue: Council chamber - Merton Civic Centre, London Road, Morden SM4 5DX

AGENDA

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Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel membership

Councillors:

Usaama Kaweesa (Chair)
Chessie Flack (Vice-Chair)
Michael Butcher
Caroline Charles
Jil Hall
Billy Hayes
Andrew Howard
Linda Kirby MBE
Samantha MacArthur
Dennis Pearce

Co-opted Representatives

Mansoor Ahmad, Parent Governor
Representative Secondary and Special
Sectors
Roz Cordner, Church of England Diocese
Becky Cruise, Parent Governor
Representative
Dr Oona Stannard, Catholic Diocese

Substitute Members:

Max Austin
Sheri-Ann Bhim
Jenifer Gould
Edith Macauley MBE
Robert Page

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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.

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Agenda Item 3

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CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL 29 SEPTEMBER 2022

(7.15 pm - 9.20 pm)

PRESENT: Councillors Councillor Usaama Kaweesa (in the Chair),
Councillor Michael Butcher, Councillor Caroline Charles,
Councillor Jil Hall, Councillor Billy Hayes,
Councillor Andrew Howard, Councillor Linda Kirby,
Councillor Samantha MacArthur, Councillor Dennis Pearce,
Mansoor Ahmad, Roz Cordner, Cruise, Dr Stannard and
Councillor Robert Page

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Sally Kenny (Cabinet Member for Education and
Lifelong Learning)

Richard Ellis (Interim Assistant Director for Strategy,
Commissioning and Transformation) Elizabeth Fitzpatrick
(Assistant Director for Education and Early Help) Dheeraj
Chibber (Assistant Director for Children's Social Care and Youth
Inclusion) Maisie Davies, (Head of Policy, Improvements and
Partnerships) Stella Akintan (Scrutiny Officer).

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 1)

Apologies of absence were received from Councillor Chessie Flack. Councillor Robert Page attended as a substitute.

2 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (Agenda Item 2)

A panel member asked if an update on the immunisations work can be presented to the next meeting. The Chair said he will liaise with officers to determine if this will be possible.

The Minute was agreed as a true and accurate record.

3 DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY INTEREST (Agenda Item 3)

There were no declarations of pecuniary interests.

4 DEPARTMENT UPDATE (Agenda Item 4)

The Assistant Directors in the Children Schools and Families Department gave an overview of the report.

A panel member asked how the growth of Education Health and Care Plans (EHCP) will be slowed and what criteria is used to deny assessment. The Assistant Director of Education and Early Help said they are looking at evidence vigorously and fairly ensuring those children who need an EHCP can get it. They are also considering how needs can be met in school through ordinarily available school resources including Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) funding. There is a strategy to provide training and support to leaders and teachers and support staff in schools, to share best practice and improve consistency.

The Interim Assistant Director of Strategy, Commissioning and Transformation said the Department for Education encouraged the council to apply thresholds appropriately and consistently and look at other options not just EHCPs.

A panel member asked for the reasons why young people give no comment interviews. The Assistant Director for Children's Social Care and Youth Inclusion said there is a correlation between stop and search and no comment interviews due to a lack of trust in the police. No comment interviews mean young people are more likely to be charged with a crime. In response to a question, it was also reported that it is likely that young people affiliated with gangs are also more likely to give no comment interviews.

A panel member asked about the support available for children who attend reception with additional needs. The Assistant Director for Education and Early Help said their needs are likely to be identified in preschool provision (if they attend this), in which case the provider would receive support from the inclusion support team. For some children (including those not attending a provision) where identified needs are particularly high, there is support from the portage. The transfer of records from pre-school to school is also very important.

RESOLVED

The Chair thanked officers for their work and especially for exceeding national targets.

5 SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND DISABILITY - PROGRESS WITH WRITTEN STATEMENT OF ACTION (Agenda Item 5)

The Assistant Director of Education and Early Help gave an overview of the report.

A Panel member sought clarification on who had agreed the actions within the written statement. The Interim Assistant Director for Strategy, Commissioning and Transformation said colleagues from the Department for Education have examined these and monitored progress against the three areas for improvement identified.

The actions sit within the wider SEND strategy. A follow-up inspection, revisiting the three areas is expected when Ofsted will examine the evidence base provided to ascertain the progress made.

Resolved

The Chair thanked officers for their report.

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

The Cabinet Member for Education and Lifelong Learning gave an overview her priorities.

The overarching aim is to ensure there is a high standard of education for all children in the borough.

To ensure more children who live in Merton to be educated in the borough. Many actions are taking place to facilitate this including reducing transport costs.

Reduce the number of EHCPs and ensure all children get the best standard of education. The Cabinet Member expressed support for the development of the Additionally Resourced Provisions (ARPs) as part of the Council's SEND Strategy.

RESOLVED

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member for her update.

7 PERFORMANCE MONITORING REPORT (Agenda Item 7)

The Assistant Director for Children's Social Care and Youth Inclusion and the Policy and Partnerships Manager gave an overview of the report.

A panel member asked for clarification on the indicator relating to "Percentage of Children that became the subject of a Child Protection Plan for the second or subsequent time" The Assistant Director for Children's Social Care and Youth Inclusion said a large sibling group has increased the numbers, and as numbers are traditionally low it has impacted on the proportions. There has been an increase in need, some post covid and some more complex cases.

A Panel member asked if schools should be asked to reduce capacity due to surplus of school places. The Assistant Director of Education and Early Help said the numbers of Children and Young People requiring school places has been impacted by Covid and Brexit as more families moved out of London. There is a Place Planning Strategy, which was brought to scrutiny last autumn and the situation is being monitored.

A panel member raised concern about the on-going need for in-house foster carers and the impact on children affected by lack of foster carers and how long children must wait, cost of living could affect foster carers.

The Assistant Director of Children's Social Care gave an overview of the provision for children in foster care and the national shortage of foster carers. The panel

considered if further scrutiny was required in this area. It was agreed to review as part of the special meeting on corporate parenting in February 2023 and an update to be brought forward if possible.

RESOLVED

Recruitment of foster carers will be considered during the corporate parenting meeting and an overview of the work will be brought forward if feasible.

8 WORK PROGRAMME 2022-23 (Agenda Item 8)

The Chair said it is important to involve young people in the work of the Children and Young People scrutiny panel and therefore would like to work with officers to look at a number of options including co-option or involving young people in specific pieces of work. Panel members with an interest were invited to join the discussion and the vice-chair Councillor Chessie Flack would also be asked to be involved. Councillor Butcher agreed to participate.

Panel members expressed general support for the idea and would like further background information on how it will work. It was also suggested that the Panel could work closely with youth parliament and school councils. It was also highlighted that we need to be creative in the way young people participate.

Councillor Kirby said she is concerned about the rise in mental health amongst young people and is happy to lead a review in this area. Panel members supported this suggestion and Cllr Kirby will conduct a review on self-harming and mental health. Cllr Butcher supported the review and Cllr MacArthur and Cllr Hall agreed to participate in the review.

RESOLVED

The work programme was noted.

A report on involving Young People in Scrutiny would be brought to the next meeting.

A councillor led review on self-harm would be established.

Committee: Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Date: 10th November 2022

Subject: MSCP Annual Report 2021-22

Lead officer: Jane McSherry (Director of Children's Schools and Families)

Lead Member: Cllr Brenda Fraser, Cabinet Member Children's Services, and Cllr Sally Kenny, Cabinet Member Education and Lifelong Learning

Lead Officer: Maisie Davies, Head of Performance, Improvement and Partnerships

Recommendations:

- A. To note the content of Merton Safeguarding Children Partnership (MSCP) Annual Report 2021-2022 (see Appendix 1).
-

1 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The MSCP is required to produce and publish a report on actions taken by statutory partners and relevant agencies for the local authority area to safeguard children and promote their welfare and outline how effective those arrangements have been in practice.
- 1.2 Like last year, the MSCP has produced a shorter report with a clearer outline of deliverables against the priority areas articulated in the business plan.
- 1.3 The report has had input from all statutory partners as well as local agencies and the MSCP sub-group chairs. It received formal sign off from the MSCP Exec partners and the MSCP Full Partnership in October 2022. The MSCP's Independent Scrutineer and Young Scrutineer have had the opportunity to review and comment.

2 DETAILS

- 2.1 Whilst there remained continued pressures on safeguarding systems as a result of the pandemic, safeguarding partners in Merton have worked together to continuously improve our safeguarding systems and strengthen the voice of the child in our Partnership. During the reporting period, the partnership welcomed on board our Young Scrutineer, who works in partnership with our Independent Scrutineer. We also appointed an interim Independent Person, Aileen Buckton, who also chairs Merton Adults Safeguarding Board (MSAB). We also welcomed Justin Roper, Director of Quality, who represents South West London CCG (now ICB) and Andrew Wadey, Detective Superintendent who represents the Police on the MSCP Executive Board.

- 2.2 During 2021/22, work was progressed against our three thematic priorities: Early Help and Neglect; Domestic Abuse and Think Family; and Contextual Safeguarding. The appended report provides further details about work in these areas and the difference this has made to safeguarding practice locally. The MSCP also further developed our training and audit programmes, including the completion of a Section 11 safeguarding audit.
- 2.3 During the business year 2021/22, the partnership oversaw the publication of three local child safeguarding practice reviews (LCSPRs) (Jason, Baby Grace and Ananthi). During the business year, the MSCP also published our partnership review on Eddie and undertook a local learning review on Sudden Unexpected Death in Infancy (SUDI). There were no further notifications to the DfE of significant incidents during 21/22. The MSCP annual reports sets out some of the steps the partnership has taken to respond to these reviews.

3. NEXT STEPS

- 3.1 The MSCP's annual report will be published on the MSCP's website.



MERTON SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN PARTNERSHIP

Annual Report 2021-2022

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Foreword

This report covers the work of the Merton Safeguarding Children Partnership (MSCP) during the period April 2021 to March 2022, a year which saw continued pressures on safeguarding systems as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. In this year, the tragic deaths of Arthur Labinjo-Hughes and Star Hobson shed a light nationally on the continued challenges in safeguarding children. The upsetting case of Child Q also highlighted the serious consequences for children and families when agencies do not take a safeguarding first approach or engage in robust, professional challenge.

During 2021-22 there were some significant changes locally for the MSCP. We were delighted to welcome on board our Young Scrutineer, Halima Mehmood, who has enabled us to start to scrutinise in depth how well we meet our ambitions to put children and young people's voices at the heart of what we do. Halima has worked closely with our Independent Scrutineer, Sarah Lawrence during the year to provide holistic and child-focused scrutiny on some key topics. The appointment of our interim Independent Person during 21-22 (Aileen Buckton), who also chairs the Adults Safeguarding Board, has helped us forge stronger connections with our Adults counterparts and progress our work around supporting a 'Think Family' approach and ensuring effective transition.

With the appointment of a new permanent team to support the Partnership from April 2021, the MSCP has been able to deliver significant progress against the priorities set out in the MSCP Business Plan. New data sets and dashboards were developed to help the Partnership monitor the impact of its work with families, supported by a multi-agency data lead.

The Partnership's Executive Board saw some changes with NHS representation, with Julie Hesketh Director of Quality, SWLCCG being replaced by Gloria Rowland, Chief Nurse, SWL CCG who is

represented by Justin Roper, Director of Quality. In addition the responsibilities of the SWL CCG transferred to SWL ICB (Integrated Care Board) on its establishment in July 2022. The ICB has responsibility for the development of the Integrated Care System (ICS), which will support improvements in health and wellbeing across SWL. Owain Richards, Superintendent, was also replaced on the Board by Detective Superintendent Andrew Wadey in July 2021.

In what has been another challenging year, safeguarding partners in Merton have worked together to continuously improve our safeguarding systems and strengthen the voice of the child in our Partnership. We welcomed the recognition from Ofsted in their inspection of the Local Authority's Children's Services that in Merton '*strong and respectful safeguarding partnerships act to protect children from harm*' and that locally excellent services are '*making a positive difference to enrich the daily lived experiences of children, while making them safer*'.¹ The inspection found that Children's Services in Merton are Outstanding.

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

Justin Roper

Director of Quality, SWL ICB on behalf of Gloria Rowland

Andrew Wadey

Head of Safeguarding, Public Protection, Southwest BCU

Jane McSherry

Director of Children, Schools and Families, London Borough of Merton

Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

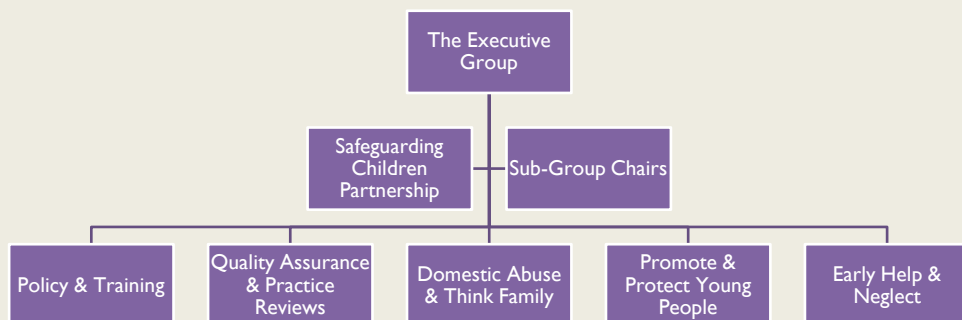
¹ [50182669 \(ofsted.gov.uk\)](https://www.ofsted.gov.uk/inspections/50182669)

Strong Leadership and Strong Partnership

Governance and Oversight

In May 2019, the MSCP formally adopted changes ushered in by the Social Work Act 2017. These are outlined in the [MSCP's Partnership Agreement](#), which we refreshed in December 2021 following consultation with partners. Changes include an additional Full Partnership meeting, holding them termly to have more regular engagement with our wider partners (especially schools). Executive meetings would include the three statutory partners as core members and be held monthly to enable more agile decision making.

Business is prioritised and organised in the Biannual [Business Plan](#) and functions delivered through Sub-Groups which meet quarterly. Agency engagement with sub-group meetings has been strong overall, and strong multi-agency engagement in the delivery of statutory and non-statutory processes demonstrate continued commitment from partners. Sub-group chairs also meet monthly to ensure that the work of sub-groups is coordinated and effective and support with leading strategic updates to the Executive.



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

- An Independent Person, to act as chair
- An Independent Scrutineer, and
- A Young Scrutineer

Following the departure of the MSCP's Independent Person during 20-21, an interim Independent Person, Aileen Buckton was recruited. Aileen also chairs the Merton Safeguarding Adults Board and has provided challenge to our Partnership when chairing the Executive and the Full Partnership. She has also facilitated closer, more joined up working with the Merton Safeguarding Adults Board. This has enabled the MSCP to work more closely with the Merton Safeguarding Adults Board, for example in delivering a joint conference on Think Family and Transition. It has also supported closer working together in preparation for new requirements around the Mental Capacity Act and Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards.

Sarah Lawrence has been our Independent Scrutineer since February 2020, and during this year the MSCP prioritised appointing to the Young Scrutineer post. The MSCP was delighted to see this post filled by Halima Mehmood, a young Merton resident, who also worked as a Young Inspector for the London Borough of Merton.

Scrutiny Activity

The MSCP's Independent Scrutineer and Young Scrutineer work to a jointly owned workplan and report regularly to the Executive. The workplan uses best practice models for Independent Scrutiny including the 'Six Steps to Independent Scrutiny'.

At the MSCP's Full Partnership meeting in February 2022, our Young Scrutineer, Halima, presented the findings of the [Merton Young Residents Survey](#), a survey of over 2,000 children and young people living and learning in Merton, with particular reference to

'Staying Safe'. She highlighted how young people still turn to informal support from family and friends in favour of professional support, and that many young people do not think they have a say in decision making.

"Young people want to feel safe locally, with a better relationship with the police"

"If there were more people to help... young people when getting sexually harassed because when it does happen it makes young people feel uncomfortable, scared, and panicked"

In follow-up to this session, Halima attended all of the MSCP's sub-groups to look at how we can better engage children and young people in the day-to-day work of the MSCP. It is hoped that we start to feel the impact of this work in 2022-23 as the Partnership's workplans are reviewed to reflect our Young Scrutineer's feedback.

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During 21-22, the Scrutineers also undertook a thematic review on sexual harassment in schools, following concerns raised by the Everyone's Invited testimonials and the subsequent Ofsted report, which recommended safeguarding partnerships improve their working with schools and colleges. The review included interviews with headteachers and designated safeguarding leads in a variety of education settings, as well as wider partners (Children, Schools and Families, Community Safety and the Police). Importantly, they also spoke to young people living and learning in Merton to understand their lived experience of sexual harassment and how they experience the Partnership's response to the issue.

"School makes our feelings feel valid, e.g., they say 'banter' is not an excuse."

"We have to trust the people before we'd tell them or report SH. If we have a bad experience before it puts us off telling them something so personal."

Recommendations from the scrutiny work have been incorporated into the Partnership's ongoing workplans. Some examples of these are (this is not an exhaustive list):

- Refreshing Harmful Sexual Behaviour Policy with schools and college representatives, including special schools
- Develop and promote innovative ways that children can report sexual harassment and abuse
- Supporting all schools, including primary and early years, on this topic, and to share good practice

Other scrutiny activity undertaken by the scrutineers on behalf of the Partnership during 21-22, include:

- Scrutiny of the 20-21 MSCP Annual Report
- Scrutiny of the Section 11 audit submissions
- Engaging the Full Partnership and sub-groups on the voice of the child
- Feedback and challenge around nationally important issues such as Arthur Labinjo-Hughes, Star Hobson and Child Q

Reflections from Independent Scrutineer & Young Scrutineer

"We have worked together, with children, practitioners and with the MSCP during this year to assess how well the partners work together to protect children. We have carried out scrutiny work as this report describes which has enabled us to assess the level of success and impact that MSCP has had in doing this."

We have been very privileged to be able to speak directly to children in the Borough gaining their views about safeguarding and what they would like to see happen to support them to stay safe. We are also grateful to the practitioners and system leaders that have contributed to our work."

Our reflections fed by our work this year are, on the whole, very positive and while we have identified learning and improvements that can be made in some key areas, we feel confident that the MSCP is a mature and developed safeguarding partnership that can continue to respond to ever present challenges that face children and families at this time. We feel the feedback given by Ofsted reflects the strength of the MSCP accurately. They said:

“Partnership working is strong, both at strategic and operational levels...a culture of professional accountability, respectful challenge and mutual support [exists] across the partnership. Consequently, almost every child in Merton has access to good or outstanding support”.

The need for safeguarding services that respond to the needs of children and families is ever evolving and demand is growing. Learning from Merton and national safeguarding practice reviews of tragic cases this year have highlighted this starkly. It is evident to us that the high level of trust and cooperation between safeguarding partners in the borough will enable services to adapt in response.

Nevertheless, stubborn challenges on some key safeguarding topics remain for the partnership, some of which were reflected in feedback to MSCP from our scrutiny work. We feel confident that MSCP is able to act on such issues and has prioritised them in future planning for multi agency work. For example, children have clearly vocalised ways that partners can improve the level of trust they have in reporting abuse and harassment and we will continue to monitor and evaluate responses to these concerns through our scrutiny work in the coming year, while supporting MSCP with its priorities.

Sarah Lawrence
Independent Scrutineer MSCP

Halima Mehmood
Young Scrutineer MSCP

Learning Reviews and Audit

Learning Reviews

During 21/22, the partnership oversaw the publication of three local child safeguarding practice reviews (*Jason, Baby Grace, and Ananthi*). We also published our partnership review on Eddie and undertook a local learning review on Sudden Unexpected Death in Infancy (SUDI), following the death of two babies in SUDI circumstances. There were no serious incident notifications during 2021/22. All our [learning review full reports](#) and [7 minute learning briefings](#) can be found on our website at the relevant webpages.

Child F / ‘Jason’ – LCSPR

The events surrounding ‘Jason’ led the MSCP to commission a Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review (LCSPR). Jason had been missing for the first two weeks of April 2019, during which time he was involved in selling drugs (county lines) in a large town many miles from his home. On his return he presented as traumatised and disclosed that he had been assaulted and threatened that he would lose his life by those organising the drug-selling. He was highly anxious about his safety. The day after, Jason was taken to hospital after being stabbed in his leg and back.

The final report and a 7-minute learning briefing were published in June 2021 and lunch and learn events held to share findings with the MSCP.

Baby Grace – LCSPR

Grace died in 2017, aged four weeks. Post-mortem forensic evidence showed that she had been shaken on three separate occasions and had 27 fractures. In November 2020, both her parents were found not guilty of murder, but both were convicted of causing, or allowing the death of a child. After the parents were charged with murder in Spring 2019 the MSCP agreed to commission a review to

learn lessons and to ascertain if any changes to local systems were required as a result.

The final report and a 7-minute learning briefing were published in August 2021 and lunch and learn event held to share findings with the MSCP.

Child H / 'Ananthi' – LCSPR

On 30 June 2020, emergency services were called to an address where a woman and 5-year-old child were found with serious injuries, stab wounds. They were both admitted to hospital. The child was in cardiac arrest when found and was pronounced dead at the scene, but the woman underwent surgery for her injuries. Ananthi was described by her father as *'a lovely child. She was very confident at cycling, and you were going to remove the stabilisers on her bike. She was good at school and liked learning spellings and doing well in spelling tests.'*

The final report and a 7-minute learning briefing were published in November 2021 and lunch and learn event held to share findings with the MSCP.

Child E / 'Eddie' – Partnership Review

In May 2019, a child, referred to in this review as 'Eddie', took an overdose of 9 Ibuprofen following an argument with a friend on the phone and following negative comments from his father. Following a Critical Incident Notification from the Youth Offending Team, this was escalated to the MSCP Quality Assurance Sub-Group and then to Statutory Partners to consider whether the incident met the criteria for a Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review under Working Together 2018. At an Extraordinary Meeting of the MSCP in June 2019, it was agreed that the case did not meet the criteria for a LCSPR but did warrant further investigation through a Partnership Review.

The final report and a 7-minute learning briefing were published in November 2021 and lunch and learn events (jointly with the Jason review) were held to share learning with the MSCP.

SUDI Review

The MSCP received a recommendation from a Joint Agency Response (JAR) meeting to undertake a Partnership Review on two cases of Sudden Unexpected Death in Infancy (SUDI). Although neither of the SUDI cases met the criteria for a Serious Incident Notification, the JAR identified that there could be learning for multi-agency partners. The review took the form of two learning events, chaired by an independent lead reviewer using an appreciative inquiry approach.

The review found good practice of agencies providing information to families around risk factors for SUDI, including safe sleeping, addressing smoking and drinking alcohol, and monitoring birth weights. Following learning from Baby Grace, it was also positive to find that routine enquiries had been made for both babies. There was good information sharing and evidence of timely decision making.

The review identified some areas for improvement, which included strengthening the relationship between Children, Schools and Families and Merton Housing Services to ensure early, proactive support for families at risk of experiencing homelessness or overcrowding. The review also identified learning around how Early help services, midwifery, health visiting and the Children and Families Hub work together, the importance of undertaking agency checks and use of professional curiosity by agencies. Several recommendations were made and will be implemented by the MSCP.

The report was published in February 2022 and lunch and learn was held to share the findings of the report with the MSCP in March

2022, along with a Safer Sleep event to raise awareness in coordination with the Lullaby Trust.

What we did in response to the reviews

Sharing Learning

The MSCP took a range of actions in response to the reviews outlined above. In addition to final reports for each review, the chair and lead author for each review helped develop learning materials for dissemination across the partnership, which are published alongside the full reports on the [MSCP website](#). We also launched 'Lunch and Learn' events to share the learning from our reviews and audits. These provided an opportunity for report writers and practitioners to explore the themes and recommendations from the reviews and embed the learning into their future work and practice. The MSCP also worked with agencies to embed learning from reviews into multi-agency and single agency training and events such as delivering presentations at the Early Help Summit and Children Schools and Families Practice Week.

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

Informing our Strategy and Practice

Learning from the practice reviews has directly impacted on the strategic work of the MSCP and its training programme.

- During 21-22, the MSCP continued to implement its contextual safeguarding strategy and action plan, as highlighted in the below contextual safeguarding section to respond to issues raised in the Jason and Eddie reviews.
- The practice reviews highlighted the importance of addressing trauma, and recommendations around

trauma-informed approaches were made in both the Eddie and Jason reports. As a result, the CCG (now Integrated Care System ICB) funded CAMHS to deliver trauma-informed training to the MSCP to help embed trauma-informed approaches. Partners are also delivering trauma-informed practice across Merton. Asked what difference delegates thought the training would make to their work with children, young people and families, comments included:

- *“Reinforce the importance in foster carers to be trauma informed; to better serve the needs of our children in care.”*
 - *“I would feel confident with supporting families/teachers with the approach to managing trauma.”*
 - *“Allows greater knowledge of how trauma has affected the person and its impact on younger sibling members.”*
- To respond to concerns around disproportionality, the multi-agency Youth Crime Prevention Executive Board has focused on disproportionality as a priority, particularly in relation to young people open to the Youth Justice Service. Given learning around use of stop and search in Jason's story, a local stop and search pilot in Merton has been in place to identify where further interventions can be made to support young people who are stopped and searched. 66 young people were referred for further interventions to a range of partners offering support as a result.
 - Following the 'stop and search' pilot and the national learning from Child Q, the BCU has adopted a policy whereby all children who are stopped and searched

receive a Merlin² which will then be followed up through appropriate pathways, e.g., MASH checks and Liaison and Diversion Panel. A Stop and Search workshop was also held to support better relationships between young people and the police, and to support better awareness raising of young people's rights. One young person said as a result of the workshop:

'I feel like I will definitely complain in the future now if the police treat me badly, I think I would have more understanding now.'

- In response to Baby Grace, the MSCP has commissioned the ICON programme to ensure it can be embedded systemically across the Partnership. Further work on implementation will continue into 2022-23. Health partners have shared learning from the Baby Grace report widely, for example, at the GP leads safeguarding forum in March 2021 and delivering targeted training on issues arising from the review, for example, having difficult conversations and routine enquiry.
- The MSCP has commissioned Inner Strength Network (ISN) to speak to the Full Partnership about difficult conversations in the context of Baby Grace. ISN will also be delivering training sessions on this area during 2022-23. Although our Non-Accidental Injury (NAI) audit found good evidence of routine enquiry, our audit on the lived experience of Domestic Abuse undertaken in November 2021 found there is still some further work to do on these themes.

- With 'Think Family' being a feature of several of our learning reviews in children and adults practice (including the MSCP Ananthi and Eddie reviews), the Partnership focused on 'Think Family' as a priority at the Joint Conference with the Adults Board. The Domestic Abuse and Think Family sub-group will be following up further actions in 22-23. The MSCP are also planning some follow up scrutiny work on family networks to support with this further in 22-23.
- Several areas of learning from the local child safeguarding practice reviews were followed up with reassurances in our Section 11 audit for 21-22.

Learning from national reviews

During 2021-22 there was also considerable learning for safeguarding partnerships nationally, with the publication of the [Child Protection in England report](#) following the tragic deaths of Arthur Labinjo-Hughes and Star Hobson.

The Merton Safeguarding Children Partnership undertook reassurance with partners to ensure that the learning from these reviews were embedded. Responses were sought from across the Partnership and reported to the Executive. Several areas of improvement were already underway. For example, the MSCP are in the process of reviewing the local bruising policy to ensure it is up to date and includes risks to older children. Bruising was considered as a topic at the Full Partnership in February 2022, and some additional training and awareness raising sessions are being developed for 2022-23.

² The Merlin system was created as a vehicle for police officers to deal with vulnerability. This allowed the recording and sharing of concerns with partners in order to effectively safeguard members of the public. An MPS employee records

their findings in a Merlin which is then processed according to the type of report written.

In March 2022, the sad case of Child Q in Hackney reminded us of the ongoing concerns around the adultification of Black children and the importance of professional challenge across partnerships. The MSCP published our statement on Child Q to help reassure professionals, children and families. As a Partnership we reviewed partners' processes and practice with reports to the Executive and the Full Partnership. Given the importance of this topic and the feedback locally that adultification of Black children can be less well understood among professionals especially outside of safeguarding roles, the MSCP has commissioned training from Listen Up to be delivered during 2022-23. We have also asked our Scrutineers to undertake thematic scrutiny on this topic during 2022-23.

Child Death Overview Panel (Summary of Caseload 2021-22)

The Merton Safeguarding Children Partnership works alongside the Child Death Overview Panel, which reviews all child deaths in Merton. A full report of activity of the Child Death Overview Panel can be found in the CDOP annual report.

National consultation concluded that for CDOPs to be effective, reviews need to cover a sufficiently wide geographical area to produce meaningful data on the cause and demographics of child deaths. South West London (SWL) Child Death Review partners implemented this guidance and started regional operations in September 2019. The amalgamation of panels provides a larger cohort of information to enable better detection of themes, analysis of trends and learning to prevent future child deaths in line with national trends. Therefore the data provided is on a SWL level.

In 2021-22 there were 64 new notifications of child deaths for SWL, which is a reduction of 16 deaths from last year's 80 notifications of child deaths (2020-21). Nationally there were 3,068 notifications of child deaths for 2020-21 which is 361 fewer deaths than the previous year. One identified trend was a marked reduction over the winter months, which may have been due to social distancing and other

public health measures put in place in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. This trend is also reflected in SWL.

In terms of the management of the CDOP process, as of 1 April 2022, there were 64 open cases, with 81 Child death reviews in 2021-22 being completed and closed. This is similar to the previous year of 78 completed child death reviews being closed and 61 open cases. Each case is kept open until all investigations are complete and then the case is reviewed by the CDOP Panel for closure. This means that some cases may remain open for an extended period of time until coroners inquests, serious incidents etc. have been completed.

Learning from audit

During 21-22, the MSCP launched a new audit programme to further embed its commitment to continuous improvement, and to ensure it meets expectations set out in [Working Together 2018](#) to learn from multi-agency audits.

Section 11

The MSCP undertook a Section 11 audit during 21-22 (one of the recommendations/requirements of Working Together) to help organisations in Merton undertake their own quality assurance processes to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. 16 organisations submitted an online audit tool response and attended a peer review session with our Scrutineer and Young Scrutineer.

The Section 11 found that there were significant strengths in Merton with regards to safeguarding children and young people. This included clearly stated organisational safeguarding responsibilities, clear accountability frameworks, awareness of

information sharing procedures, and Safer Recruitment practice and LADO³ processes.

The audit found less confidence from partners in embedding a culture of listening to children and taking into account their wishes and feelings. There were also other areas where agencies felt there could be further development, including: assurance in addressing issues of Equality and Diversity; practitioners' confidence in engaging with professional healthy challenge; and analysing and reporting the impact of training on practice and outcomes for children and young people.

During the Section 11 process, several multi-agency and single agency actions were identified, and these will be followed up in a further peer review meeting with the scrutineers in 22-23. More information can be found in our [Section 11 learning summary](#).

Multi-agency audits

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

The first pilot audit was held in August 2021 on Non-Accidental Injury⁴ and followed on from learning from the Baby Grace review and our Scrutineer's thematic scrutiny on NAI earlier in the year.

- The pilot audit concluded that agencies had
- acted promptly to safeguard children
 - worked collaboratively with the family
 - provided an enhanced offer of support

³ Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) – for more information see the MSCP website: [Managing allegations against adults who work with children \(LADO\) - Merton Safeguarding Children Partnership \(mertonscp.org.uk\)](#)

- and that there was appropriate use of routine enquiry.

However, the audit identified some possible areas for improvement, including the need for senior managers to be available in the Out of Hours (OOH) service, which was followed up with this service.

The second audit on Domestic Abuse and the lived experience of young people was held in November 2021. The audit found several areas of good practice, including agencies acting promptly to make referrals, resulting in timely interventions to protect children. It also identified strong communication and information sharing between agencies, including with neighbouring boroughs. There was also evidence of additional needs being proactively identified and acted upon.

Learning for the Partnership included reviewing how robust interventions are in addressing domestic abuse and to ensure there is proactive engagement with parents. The audit also identified that there is more we can do as a Partnership to ensure the voice of the child is recorded. The recommendations from the audit are being overseen by the QA sub-group, and relevant actions have been added to the workplan for the Domestic Abuse and Think Family sub-group.

Due to the Children's ILACS inspection in March 2022, the third audit on contextual safeguarding has been rescheduled to July 2022.

⁴ Non-Accidental Injury is **a term that is used to describe a number of different physical injuries or abuse to a child**. The term describes any injury that is said to have been inflicted. This means that it cannot simply be an injury that occurred unintentionally or unexpectedly.

Learning and Development

Training Programme 2021/22

The MSCP training programme continued to be overseen by the Policy and Training sub-group. Following a disruptive year in 2019-20, which impacted the delivery of training in that year.

With ongoing uncertainty around Covid advice to stay at home, the MSCP continued to deliver the majority of its training programme for 2021 virtually. The MSCP was able to deliver more events and attendance at events was considerably higher than the previous year. Feedback from partners indicated that the option to access training remotely enabled more partners to participate in the training.

The training programme is mostly delivered in house, by a range of partners across the MSCP. Courses and training themes are derived from sub-group work plans and recommendations (via Policy & Training Sub-Group), as well as from learning from case reviews. The training programme for 21/22 included training modules on our three thematic priorities, as well as a range of core safeguarding training. It included new courses to respond to emerging concerns, for example Understanding Eating Disorders course and targeted safeguarding training for local Madrassahs.

During 21/22, the MSCP also introduced 'Lunch and Learns' to share bitesize learning from emerging themes from our learning reviews, which have been successful in engaging higher numbers of delegates from a wider range of partners.

In 2021, the MSCP also delivered an [Early Help Summit](#) to formally launch the new Early Help Strategy and Effective Support Model, alongside the Effective Support for Families training (highlighted below in Early Help and Neglect).

The MSCP also delivered a joint conference with the Merton Safeguarding Adults Board on the themes of 'Think Family' and 'Transitional Safeguarding'. These themes were jointly agreed by representatives from the MSCP Policy and Training sub-group and the MSAB Learning and Development sub-group.

In addition, during 21-22, the MSCP also oversaw delivery of the Reducing Parental conflict e-learning training and are working with the provider to identify impact. This work will be further developed under the Domestic Abuse and Think Family sub-group during 22-23, with further training courses on reducing parental conflict to be delivered via a train-the-trainer approach.

Impact of our Training Programme

During the 2021/22 period, the MSCP offered 51 occurrences of 34 separate events. We offered a total of 1,399 training places; we had 1,032 bookings and 760 attended, an attendance rate of 74%. This brings the MSCP back in line with pre-pandemic training delivery (in 2019-20 there had been 77 occurrences, attended by 601 people).

The services with the highest number of attendees at MSCP training events during 2021/22 were London Borough of Merton Children Schools and Families (Education and Children's Social Services), Central London Community Healthcare Trust (CLCH), the Voluntary and Community and Faith group sector (VCS) and Education (schools, colleges and nurseries). The Policy and Training sub-group monitors attendance at training by agencies regularly and follows up with agencies where take up is lower.

Evaluation

The Policy and Training sub-group continues to use its Training Evaluation and Impact Analysis Framework, as endorsed by the London Safeguarding Board as good practice. Improving the rate of return for evaluation forms was a priority during 21-22. To date, 56

evaluation forms were returned via the Learning Management System. To help improve the return rate, completion of the evaluation form is now a mandatory requirement for receiving certification but work to encourage completion of evaluations will continue into 22-23. The MSCP ensures continuous improvement by providing summaries of evaluation feedback to trainers, so it can inform the development of the training programme.

Feedback from participants indicated that courses met their needs and participation was encouraged. Of the 56 evaluations returned through the Learning Management System, 98% of participants stated that trainers were well informed and encouraged participation. 95% agreed or strongly agreed that the training course met its aims and 87% agreed or strongly agreed that the course gave them a better understanding of the subject. The majority of participants strongly agreed that the course would help inform future practice. Below are some extracts from comments received.

"I work within sexual health and everything I learnt can be applied to my day-to-day role". (Key Principles in Responding to Young People's lived experiences of Sexual Violence)

"I know of services Merton has to offer. I feel I can recommend and refer to services now. I feel more comfortable if I need to speak to a victim. (Domestic Violence and Abuse)

"Greater knowledge and understanding of contextual factors that children and young people experience in their lives" (Contextual Harm)

I highly recommend this course because it equips you with the knowledge on how to deal with certain situations. These situation are nerve wrecking at the start but you gain confidence once you learn the process and realise there is support. (LADO)

The joint conference with the multi-agency safeguarding children partnership and adults board was attended by over 100 people. It provided an opportunity to share practice between children and adults' practitioners, particularly on Think Family and transitional safeguarding. Some of the feedback from delegates about how it would support their practice are as follows:

"By thinking about how MDT models around families really help and how the teenage brain develops in neurotypical as well as atypical young people. Another excellent course, thank you." (Integrated Safeguarding: Working Together to Safeguard Adults and Children)

"Having a greater awareness of how my organisation can work with partners to enable effective adult safeguarding." (Integrated Safeguarding: Working Together to Safeguard Adults and Children)

"I have a better understanding of The Think Family Model and how to work with young people acknowledging their brain development and the impact it has on their decision making." – (Integrated Safeguarding: Working Together to Safeguard Adults and Children)

The themes, content and scope of the MSCP training programme, and the sub-group workplans, is developed with a close association to the multi-agency data and its analysis. It is also informed from multi-agency practice from audits and learning reviews. From the 2021-22 year, each of the sub-groups conduct performance monitoring as standing items on their agenda in a move to ensure that trends and themes identified are better developed, understood and responded to. Where training gaps are identified the Business Support Unit will work with the Policy and Training sub-group towards finding suitable training.

Improving Dissemination of Learning

During 21-22, the MSCP also reviewed and developed ways in which we can share learning with the wider Partnership. This included a review of the MSCP website to ensure content for professionals is up to date, accurate and reflects best practice. The MSCP also launched a new bi-monthly news bulletin to help share local, regional and national safeguarding news and best practice with partners. Partners have fed back that they find this helpful and use it to keep up to date with the MSCP's training offer and to understand learning from learning reviews and audits.

Early Help and Neglect

One of the MSCP's priorities for 2021-22 was Early Help and Neglect. A dedicated sub-group, comprising a range of partnership agencies progressed actions to improve our early help offer and response to neglect.

What have we achieved this year?

We launched our [Early Help Strategy](#) and [Effective Support for Families](#) Model guidance and documents in 20-21 and focused on embedding the approach with partners during 21-22. Our Early Help strategy was informed by stakeholder engagement and feedback from children, families and practitioners.

The new integrated 'Children and Families Hub' went live in October 2021, integrating the way in which the Council responds to children and family needs at targeted Early Help and statutory levels. To support the new arrangements the MSCP held an Early Help Summit in November 2021, chaired by our Independent Person. It was attended by over 70 delegates from across our partnership and provided partners, stakeholders and practitioners an opportunity to reflect on the strategy and early help priorities and how to embed these in practice.

We also used evidence and information from local and national data to develop our vision. As part of our Early Help strategy, we are focusing on three priority outcome areas:

1. Fewer children and families require support from specialist services (and reduction in number of children in need).
2. More babies/children meet the expected stage of development for their age

3. More children/young people attend school regularly and fewer are excluded

During 21-22, we developed our early help performance dashboard to ensure we are able to monitor our progress against our three priority outcome areas and the impact on children and families. Our Early Help Performance Dashboard reports to every Early Help and Neglect Sub-group, using [predictive 'turning the curve' modelling](#).

Multi-agency partners also reviewed the [MSCP's Neglect Strategy and toolkit](#), which supports partners to identify and recognize neglect of children and young people. It included engagement with practitioners specifically on adolescent neglect, as this is recognized as a less well understood area. The Partnership launched the new Neglect Strategy and Toolkit at the February 2022 Full Partnership. The Neglect Toolkit aims to support practitioners in the early identification and assessment of neglect and in recognizing the impact of the cumulative harm caused by neglectful experiences on children and young people.

What difference have we made?

With our focus on embedding our "Effective Support for Families in Merton" model and guidance we delivered a comprehensive training programme during 2021-22. We delivered 9 sessions to the Partnership, with over 100 attendees from a wide range of partners. Feedback from this training has been positive and encouraging, with the majority of attendees saying that the training was either very or extremely relevant to their role (80%) and would recommend the training to their colleagues (93%).

Participants told us how it had made a difference to their work with children and families:

“It has helped me think more deeply about the trauma and patterns families have and how this can impact the young people we work with”

“My team are now more aware of what support for families is in the borough.”

“A family is now being given the right support due to myself and the school understanding the procedures and who to refer to”

“Having the training has helped me to empower families to access the extra support they may need.”

In February and March 2022, Merton's Children's Services were inspected by Ofsted under the Inspecting Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) framework. The findings evidenced the impact of the MSCP's early help strategy and effective support model.

“Children and their families benefit from responsive well-coordinated universal and targeted early help services, helping to reduce harm. A recently updated coherent multi-agency strategy underpins the delivery of these services. This supports a system-wide relationship-based professional practice approach that is aligned to the social work model. Skilled and specifically trained early help practitioners use a variety of tools to build relationships with children and help them to express their wishes and concerns.”

What will we do next?

Priorities for the Early Help and Neglect sub-group in 22-23 will be:

- To continue to embed and promote the Effective Support for Families Model. We will also review the impact of the Early Help strategy and Neglect Toolkit, and refresh the strategy and guidance as required.
- Develop our multi-agency early help approach further, using resource secured through grant funding, e.g. Supporting Families, Reducing Parental Conflict and Family Hubs.
- Continue to develop our Data Maturity work through the Insights to Intervention Project
- Develop further our work with partners to improve school attendance as part of our Early Help key priorities
- Embed the ICON programme across Merton's safeguarding system
- Strengthen our governance arrangements and alignment with key strategic work across our Partnership

Domestic Abuse & Think Family

What have we achieved this year?

The MSCP's Domestic Abuse and Think Family sub-group has oversight of work on domestic abuse from across the Partnership. This has included regular reporting from representatives from the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) and Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Boards. The group has also overseen and driven forward actions from the MSCP's ['Baby Grace' LCSPR](#), which featured learning for the Partnership on identifying and addressing risk of domestic abuse and promotion of Clare's Law.

April 2021 saw the [Domestic Abuse Act 2021](#) receive Royal Assent, which brings in some significant changes. The Act provides a statutory definition of domestic abuse for the first time and explicitly recognises children as victims of domestic abuse. The MSCP has worked with Safer Merton, who are leading a dedicated group overseeing the implementation of the Act locally with a dedicated Domestic Abuse Act Officer and working with Housing colleagues on progressing the Housing Duty.

Merton's multi-agency MARAC panel coordinates the partnership's response to the most complex/high risk domestic abuse cases using a range of statutory and non-statutory agencies.

The sub-group have developed a dedicated multi-agency performance dashboard to help monitor outcomes in this area, including regularly reviewing MARAC data.

What difference have we made?

In 2021/22 the MARAC considered 636 high risk and complex cases involving domestic abuse, 639 children were identified as part of these discussions.

There has been a continued increase in the number of cases discussed at MARAC since 2020 to date, an increase of 35% since 2019-2020. The rise in repeat cases being seen by MARAC across the three reporting years has also continued and we believe this was due to COVID lockdowns and DA increasing during this period. The number of children identified as in the household for 2021-22 is also the highest when compared to 2018-19 and 2019-20.

Figure 1: An overview of MARAC cases 2019/20 – 2021/22

Year	Number of Cases Discussed	Number of Repeat cases	% repeat cases	Number of children in the household
2019-20	410	162	39%	376
2020-21	576	234	41%	557
2021-22	636	301	47%	639

Multi-agency partners continue to deliver a strong response to domestic violence over the period, initiatives have included:

Independent Domestic Violence Advocates [IDVA's]

The work of Merton's IDVAs continued throughout 2021-22. Having introduced a case worker within the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH - now Children and Families Hub) the three IDVAs and Complex Needs IDVA in the community have seen an increase in case referrals. This arrangement remains under review and reports regularly to the Domestic Abuse and Think Family sub-group.

The IDVAs role includes sourcing safe/emergency accommodation, referrals to Safeguarding and/or MARAC, accompanying service users to court, information provision around criminal justice system, signposting for legal advice including clients with no recourse to public funds, and emotional support. It is

recognised that the IDVA role plays a pivotal role in supporting and managing domestic violence issues.

As a result of the pandemic, the One Stop Shop confidential weekly drop-in service for people experiencing domestic abuse was forced to close due to social distancing rules. However, it did manage to operate on a virtual basis during the pandemic and has reopened in November 2021.

The IDVA service received 769 referrals between April 2021 and March 2022 (compared to 691 the previous year), of which 283 were high risk. 93 of the total referrals came from Social Care services. In addition:

- Intensive support to 5 clients by the MASH DV caseworker during April 2021 to March 2022, representing 6 or more significant contacts, e.g., appointments, joint appointments, telephone-based RIC and ISSP completion.
- Medium support the MASH DV caseworker provided 63 clients with 2-5 significant contacts
- Single contact and advice provision was provided to 7 clients by the MASH DV caseworker
- 3 clients were uncontactable and 1 client declined support

Domestic Abuse Disclosure Scheme – Clare’s Law

The overall aim of Clare’s Law is to help people to make a more informed decision on whether to continue a relationship and provide help and support when making that choice; or have recently separated. Learning from Merton’s Baby Grace Review suggested that Merton would benefit from increased promotion of Clare’s Law locally. As a result, the MSCP has worked with other partners to deliver awareness raising activity, promoting the law in our newsbulletin as well as raising awareness of local training coordinated by the Police.

280 professionals attended the Police-led training and, since the training, 43 Clare’s Law requests have been made in Merton.

Operation Encompass

Has been implemented successfully at many schools in Merton and informs school settings of incidents of domestic abuse involving children on roll in order that Designated Safeguarding Leads and key staff are aware of this context when supporting and working with their children.

Training

Over the course of 2021-22, the MSCP Training programme also delivered two Domestic Violence and Abuse virtual training courses, attended by 14 participants. This is slightly lower than the previous year. However, the MSCP plans to return to quarterly delivery of training in 22-23, which should see numbers increase again. For those who attended the training sessions, the feedback was very positive, with all delegates saying they would recommend the course to a colleague.

“I know of the services Merton has to offer. I feel I can recommend and refer to services now. I feel more comfortable if I need to speak to a victim.”

The Domestic Abuse and Think Family sub-group also supported the planning of a Joint Conference with the Merton Safeguarding Adults Board. One of its themes was ‘Think Family’. The first half of the conference focused on family safeguarding and the importance of adopting a ‘Think Family’ approach to safeguarding. The MSCP heard from Sue Williams from Hertfordshire County Council, and Programme Director for The Centre for Family Safeguarding Practice, on the family safeguarding model. It also provided an opportunity to consider the Think Family themes that have arisen from local reviews such as Eddie, Ananthi and Basita (Domestic Homicide Review, DHR).

There has been some highly positive feedback and partners have told us they would welcome further resources to work with their staff on developing think family approaches. As such, the Domestic Abuse and Think Family sub-group are developing further training resources that can be shared across the Partnership.

Ofsted's inspection of Merton's Children's Services highlighted the positive impact 'Think Family' work is having for Merton's families. Following the findings from our learning reviews, we acknowledge that there is still further work to be done locally, and we will continue to progress with our plans during 2022-2023:

"Assessments using Merton's strengths-based social work model help identify the impact of parental mental illness, domestic abuse, substance misuse and the neglect of children.

Thoughtful and sensitive work with children during the assessment is supporting them to cope with and navigate entrenched parental difficulties. Trauma-informed therapeutic practice that assists professional thinking and approaches through systemic reflection and evaluation is augmented effectively by good-quality management direction and specialist consultants.

Exceptional examples were seen of social workers sensitively using bespoke direct work tools to evaluate the impact of parental vulnerabilities, while keeping a clear focus on children's need to remain safe. Social workers act to routinely involve fathers in assessments and plans. Care is taken to understand parental and family histories, cultural heritage and each child's unique and diverse needs."

What will we do next?

In 2022-23, the Domestic Abuse and Think Family sub-group will be further developing and embedding our work around 'Think Family'; working with Safer Merton in the preparation for and

implementation of the Domestic Abuse Act locally; and taking forward actions from our recent domestic abuse audit.

Contextual Safeguarding

What have we achieved this year?

The Promote and Protect Young People (PPYP) sub-group has led on the Partnership's work to support a coordinated, embedded approach to contextual safeguarding. In addition to operational innovations, the partnership oversaw the development and monitoring of a multi-agency Contextual Safeguarding Strategy and Action Plan. This has led to several positive developments locally including:

- Clarifying referral pathways for adolescents via promotion of Merton's thresholds and referral routes through a comprehensive training programme (Effective Support Model).
- Delivery of regular training on contextual harm to safeguarding partners through 2021-22.
- Continuing to develop and promote our work on online safety, through regular training and refresh of our policy and resources.
- Identifying and training four contextual harm champions
- Developing and establishing the new Multi-Agency Child Exploitation (MACE) panel to replace MARVE, as outlined in the [Pan-London Child Exploitation Operating Protocol \(2021\)](#). The MACE Panel went live in November 2021 and helps to ensure swift identification of children at risk using screening tools. It is also supporting leaders locally to understand trends in the borough, which are regularly reported to the PPYP for oversight. Ofsted recognised that these multi-agency meetings were '*used constructively to share information*' and that '*management decisions are clear about next steps*'.

- Contextual Safeguarding working group for Designated Safeguarding Leads in schools and rolling out St. Giles Trust workers in schools to support relationship building and confidence.
- Delivery of child sexual exploitation day event with over 50 attendees, who heard directly from a Merton Young Resident about her lived experience of CSE.
- Development and publication of a refreshed [parents pack](#), in conjunction with other Southwest London boroughs to support parents whose children have experienced exploitation.

Multi-agency panels to support children and young people at risk of contextual harm (MACE, pre-MACE and Missing Panel) have retained strong multi-agency membership, engagement, partnership and attendance. The focus continues to consider the needs of young people, not just the criminal and protection elements. As a partnership, we identified patterns and peer networks through mapping and intelligence sharing, which underpins joint interventions.

As a partnership, we consider the young person's journey and support networks, which informs our wrap around plans and support for families. For high-risk young people, we explored emerging themes, locations and trends. Further development is taking place to strengthen the voice of young people, how this might reflect their concerns compared to professionals, demonstrate where they lead contextual harm plans.

During 2021-22, the PPYP worked with Performance colleagues to develop a comprehensive performance dashboard, which regularly reports to the sub-group. This helps the PPYP understand the contextual risks to children and young people in Merton, including child sexual exploitation and child criminal exploitation, children missing education and also missing (from home or placement) among others. The improvements in multi-agency data collection and

performance reporting have also supported our multi-agency panels such as MACE.

While there have been lower numbers of referrals/young people discussed at MACE, it is expected that the Pre-MACE and MACE panel arrangements will enable the most high-risk young people to be presented. The highest category theme for MACE referrals continues to be child criminal exploitation. Referrals for child sexual exploitation have recently decreased, which may not be due to risk decreasing but issues of understanding and identification of CSE. As a result, training and consultation sessions have increased to address this.

Merton's Children Social Care service continues to develop its contextual safeguarding approach, having previously been successful in its bid to the [London Scale Up project](#). An approach which develops safety planning has been developed and is in consultation with partners, which will be a priority into 2022/23. New assessments and tools are continuing to be embedded and this is supported by MSCP delivered training on contextual harm.

Following the abduction and murder of Sarah Everard and the establishment of the 'Everyone's invited' online platform for testimonies of sexual harassment, abuse and misogyny in schools, the MSCP continued to proactively respond to safeguarding concerns regarding sexual violence and harassment.

In June 2021, Alison Jerrard, Headteacher at Ricards Lodge High School, spoke to multi-agency partners at the Full Partnership about the challenges faced by schools. The MSCP's Scrutineer and Young Scrutineer undertook thematic scrutiny activity on sexual harassment in schools during 2021, which identified strong practice in schools in Merton, and identified some recommendations for improving practice. The findings are due to be finalised and fed back to the MSCP in 2022-23 and the partnership will then take forward any recommendations.

What difference have we made?

The new multi-agency MACE has enabled partners to better understand practice and risk for young people. We have identified:

- Emerging evidence of good information sharing across boroughs and between partners. Evidence that professionals can confidently tell the child's story, identify exploitation and risk and strengthen interventions with families.
- Consistent lead professional attendance at pre-MACE and improved communication with partners via contextual harm newsletters and better systems for updating screening tools.
- For a small number of young people open to Pre-MACE for extended periods, this reflects changing patterns of risk and the need for more time for these young people to build relationships and embed plans.
- The need for some reviews of strategic boards to reduce duplication, which will take place in 22-23.
- Case studies showing significant positive change – for example, one young person who was at significant risk of exploitation and involvement with Police. Following a strong partnership approach, and integrated, wraparound support for the young person, he was stepped down following positive outcomes.

Merton Safeguarding Children Partnership were pleased to see the work of Children's Social Care, alongside its partners, recognised by Ofsted in their inspection of Children's Services:

"Work with vulnerable adolescents and those at risk of exploitation is helping to keep them safer. Emerging risks to

young people are identified early using screening tools. Effective multi-agency arrangements ensure that there is swift identification of children at risk. Evidence of individualised skilful direct work is helping children understand risks posed to them, helping them develop strategies to exit harmful situations. Established professional partnerships and good management support strengthen the response to risk across communities and are helping practitioners engage young people in danger of extra-familial sexual and criminal exploitation. While contextual risks remain very real for young people, there is evidence of professionals persistently making an impact with their work.”

What will we do next?

The Partnership will continue to develop and embed its approach to contextual safeguarding in 22-23, with a refreshed strategy focusing on making improvements in the following areas:

- Our practice
- Our data and systems
- Our partnership and risk management forums
- Our quality assurance

Looked After Children and Care Leavers

When a child comes into care, the council becomes their 'Corporate Parent', the term means the collective responsibility for providing the best possible care and safeguarding for the children in our care.

Children in Merton are less likely to be in care when compared to other boroughs. In 2020/21, 30 out of every 10,000 children in Merton are in care, compared to 47 in London and 67 Nationally.

Merton continues to buck the trend in increases of the number of children entering care nationally. The children-in-care population in Merton has been declining over the last four years. The number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in our care, has also declined, but at a lower rate to Merton residents.

Provisional data shows more boys are in care than girls (55.7% vs 44.3%). We also know that proportionally more Merton children enter care at a later age when compared to London and national averages. Provisional data for 2021/22 also shows Black/Mixed children are over-represented in our care population. On 31st March 2022, the percentage of black/mixed-race is 43%; this compares to one in ten under-18s in Merton's general population. By contrast, only 6% of our children in our care are from an Asian background. This compares to just under 20% of Merton's under-18 population.

There are many reasons why a child may become looked after, in Merton for 2021/22, the main reasons for entering care are abuse or neglect. This has remained static for the last 6 years. Absent parenting is the second biggest reason why a child became looked after in 2021/22.

For care leavers, provisional data shows, as at 31st March 2022, 96% of our care experienced young people between the ages of 19 and 21 were 'in touch' with the Local Authority; this compares with 91% nationally as of 31st March 2021. The percentage of young people in suitable accommodation increased substantially from 66% in 2015 to

89% in 2021, faring better than London and national comparators. Provisional calculations show performance remains in line with last year.

74% of our care experienced young people, according to provisional reports, were in education, employment or training during 2021/22. This is an increase from 61% at the end of last year.

[Merton's Corporate Parenting Strategy 2019-22](#) offers an overview of strategic multi-agency priorities.

In their recent inspection of Merton's services for children in need of help and protection, Ofsted said of children in care and care leavers:

"Children in care and young people leaving care in Merton receive outstanding care and support. Teams of highly committed, ambitious and determined professionals work extremely well together to help children to remain safe and achieve in life."

Annex 1: MSCP Budget and Spend 2021/22

MSCP Budget 2021-22 – Contributions by agency

London Borough of Merton	84,750
Merton CCG	55,000
Metropolitan Police	5,000
Total	144,750

MSCP Spend 2021-22

		Spend	Budget	Variance
Staffing:	<input type="checkbox"/> Salaries	89,882.57	88,970	912.57
	<input type="checkbox"/> Independent Posts	17,420.31	20,000	-2,579.69
Training		6,445	13,710	-7,265
Learning Reviews		3,889.28	3,890	-0.72
Supplies and Services (Office costs)		15,173.18	18,180	-3,006.82
Total		132,810.34	144,750	-11,939.66

Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Date: 10 November 2022

Subject: Child Healthy Weight Programme Update

Lead officer: Julia Groom, Consultant in Public Health

Lead member(s): Cllr Brenda Fraser, Cabinet Member Children's Services, and Cllr Sally Kenny, Cabinet Member Education and Lifelong Learning

Contact officer: Sanjana Jio – Senior Public Health Principal

Recommendations:

- A. That the Panel review and consider progress to date on addressing child healthy weight and tackling health inequalities;
 - B. Review future priorities and opportunities as identified in the Child Health Weight action plan;
 - C. Consider how Members can champion promoting the voice of children and young and reducing health inequalities in child healthy weight.
-

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1. The purpose of this report is to update Members on the local context, approach, progress and priorities for children and young people's (CYP) healthy weight in Merton and request that the Panel considers how Members can support promoting the voice of CYP and reducing inequalities in child healthy weight in the borough.

1.2. Living with obesity in childhood has profound impacts on health and life chances. Obesity in childhood is a significant risk factor for poor physical and mental health in childhood and is a significant risk factor for diabetes and other health conditions into adulthood.

1.3. Child healthy weight is a major health inequalities issue. The COVID pandemic has had a negative impact on child healthy weight and mental health and has resulted in an increase in children being overweight and living with obesity. In addition, the cost of living crisis is likely to have a negative impact on child healthy weight. This highlights the urgent need to tackle these major public health challenges.

1.4. Actions plans to tackle childhood obesity and support child healthy weight have had a positive impact over the recent years, with a number of successes achieved, despite the restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic.

1.5. Future opportunities include harnessing the focus on Merton as the borough of sport, adopting an 'Actively Merton' partnership approach to physical and social activity, increasing support to address food poverty, adopting a whole borough approach to promoting breast feeding, enhancing communications and engagement, working with young people and families.

2 DETAILS

CHILD WEIGHT OVERVIEW

2.1. Childhood obesity is a significant risk factor for poor physical and mental health and the COVID-19 pandemic has had a negative impact on children's weight resulting in an increase in overweight and obesity. Stigma associated with obesity can be particularly severe for children and young people and can also lead to disordered eating, avoidance of physical activity and avoidance of support.

2.2. In Merton in 2019/20, nearly 1 in 5 children aged 4-5 years were overweight or living with obesity. Like nationally, during the primary school years, levels increase significantly and just over 1 in 3 children aged 10-11 years in Merton were overweight or living with obesity, an increase of 17%. By the time young people reach adulthood this increases further, with 1 in 2 adults in Merton classified as overweight or obese.

2.3. National data for 2021/22 indicates that the prevalence of obesity remains higher than any year up to 2019/20. Locally data shows a higher proportion of children in East Merton wards are living with obesity compared to West Merton wards and the inequality gap in obesity between the east and west of the borough has been steadily increasing since 2008/09. New national analysis tracking children between the first and last year of Primary school shows that out of the 85% of children who were a healthy weight in Reception, 20% moved to a higher weight category by Year 6, and for more deprived areas this was 24%.

2.4. About half of children and young people aged 5-16 years in Merton are not physically active enough, equal to 16,326 residents. Physical activity is associated with numerous health benefits for children, including muscle and bone strength and quality of sleep, and there is also evidence that physical activity and participating in organised sports and after school clubs is linked to improved academic performance.

IMPACT OF CHILDHOOD OBESITY

2.5. Living with obesity in childhood has **profound impacts on the health and life chances** of children including increasing the risk of developing a range of adverse physical health conditions such as type 2 diabetes, respiratory problems, cardiovascular disease, liver diseases, cancer and musculoskeletal pain.

2.6. The National Paediatric Diabetes Audit reported year on year increases in the numbers of children with Type 2 diabetes and that higher risk was found in girls, those of **Black Asian Minority Ethnic background** and those living in the **most deprived areas**.

2.7. These conditions have long-term consequences that can severely impact children's quality of life. There is a two-way association between **poor mental health and obesity** which emerges in mid-childhood and adolescence (from age 7 to 14yrs) stemming from young people's self-esteem and experiences of living in environments that promote obesity.

2.8. The **economic cost** of overweight and obesity is substantial; based on pre-pandemic figures it is estimated that the cost to wider society of obesity across the life-course is £27 billion and that the NHS spent £5.1 billion on obesity related ill health annually.

MERTON'S CHILD HEALTHY WEIGHT INEQUALITY CHALLENGES

2.9. Childhood obesity is a major health inequalities challenge, both nationally and in Merton. There are disparities in relation to deprivation, ethnicity and gender, and there are disproportionate impacts in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic, cost of living crisis and climate change emergency.

2.10. Deprivation: There is an association between deprivation and childhood obesity where children in the most deprived areas, tend to have significantly higher obesity rates than those in the least deprived areas.

2.11. Between 2017/18 to 2019/20, the average prevalence of overweight and obesity in children in Year 6 ('excess weight') was 35.5%, however prevalence in the 30% most deprived wards in Merton (a proxy for East Merton) was 43.1%, higher than the 30% least deprived wards in Merton (a proxy for West Merton) at 25.6% - this is a gap of 17.5%. This gap in overweight and obesity prevalence has gradually been increasing as healthy weight has increased in the West of the borough and reduced in the East, and over the past 9 years the gap has increased by 9% (from 2008/09 to 2010/11, when it was 8.4%), see Figure 1 below.

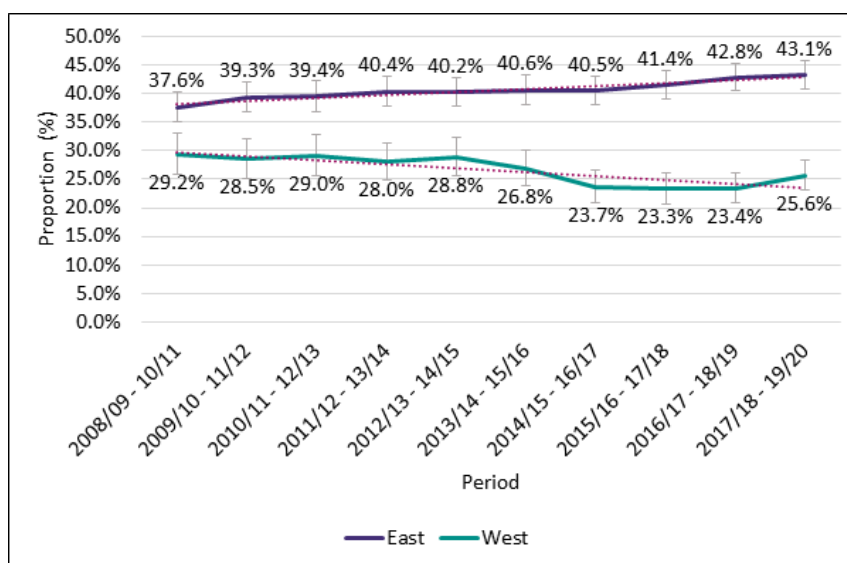


Figure 1. Prevalence of overweight (including obesity) in Year 6 children by 30% Most Deprived (East Merton) and 30% Least Deprived (West Merton), 2008/09 - 2019/20. Source: OHID, Public Health Profiles

2.12. The Merton wards with the highest prevalence (over 25%) of Year 6 children living with obesity (including severe obesity) were in East Merton and included Ravensbury, Cricket Green, Pollard's Hill, Longthornton and Figge's Marsh. Figure 2 below, shows the difference in obesity prevalence between wards in Merton.

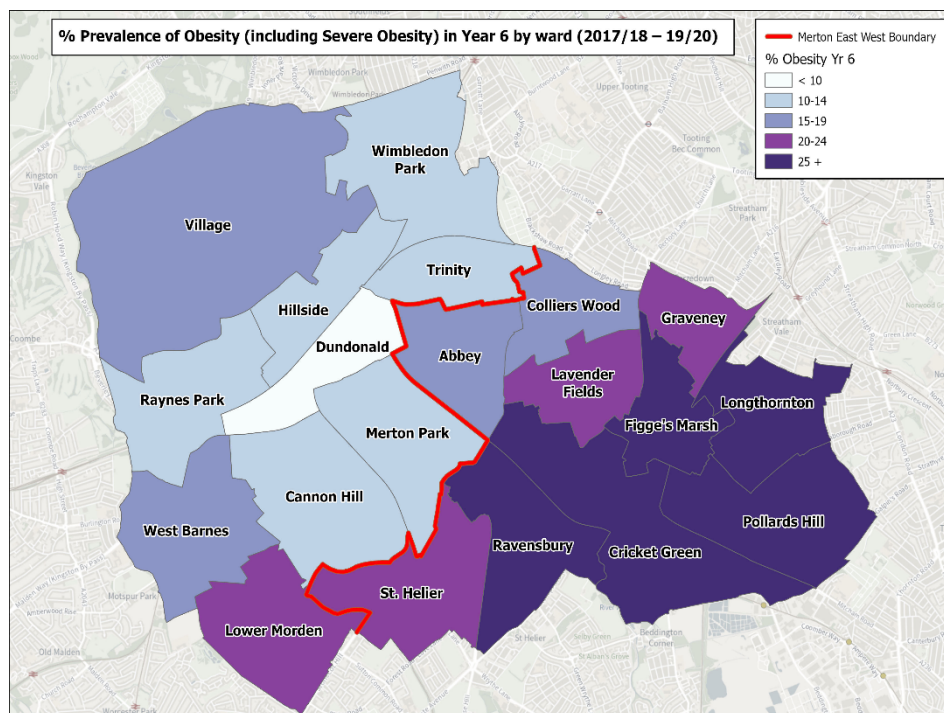


Figure 2. Prevalence of obesity (including severe obesity) in Year 6 (2017/18 – 2019/20) by ward

2.13. **Ethnicity:** In Reception, Black children are significantly more likely to have higher obesity rates compared to those from White and Asian ethnic backgrounds. In Year 6, Black and Asian children are significantly more likely to have higher obesity rates than those from White background.

2.14. **Gender:** In 2021/22, national data shows that there was a higher rate of overweight and obesity among boys in Year 6 at 41%, compared to girls at 35%, and although local data has not been published, we expect to see a similar pattern based on previous trends.

2.15. **COVID-19 Pandemic:** Stay-at-home guidance, the move to online education and closures of leisure facilities disrupted children’s routines and led to negative impacts on sleep, nutrition, isolation and physical activity levels for children and young people. The economic impact of the pandemic may also have impacted families’ ability to maintain healthy weight through accessing and being able to afford healthier food options.

2.16. Mental health needs amongst young people have increased during the pandemic. National survey findings indicate that 1 in 6 children had a probable mental health disorder in 2021, compared to 1 in 9 pre-pandemic. Nearly 2 in 5 children aged 6 to 16 years and over half of 17 to 23 year olds had experienced a deterioration in mental health since 2017.

2.17. The recent [Young People’s Survey](#) in Merton showed that over a third of young residents worried about their mental health during lockdown. Feeling bored and isolated, they spent a lot more time on screens during lockdown, with habits that might continue.

2.18. Eating disorders and disordered eating in children and young people increased during the pandemic. National survey findings indicate that the proportion of children and young people with possible eating problems have increased since 2017. This is

reflected in urgent referrals for treatment for eating disorders among young people, which have increased nationally by almost two thirds since before the pandemic a pattern mirrored in South West London.

2.19. **Cost of living crisis:** The rising costs of fuel, food and other essentials are combining with existing disadvantage and vulnerability and putting many households at greater risk of both immediate hardship and reduced opportunity and wellbeing. Food poverty is a driver of poor physical and mental health, including chronic diet-related conditions such as obesity and cardio-vascular disease. Food poverty is not always associated with obesity, however the opposite is often the case, with families experiencing food poverty often having to rely on cheap, poor quality food and less fruit and vegetables, which means that child hunger and obesity often co-exist. For children, experiencing food insecurity can limit their development and affect their ability to concentrate and engage in school, impacting their educational attainment and long-term life chances.

2.20. The Young people's survey highlighted that one in ten young people has had to skip meals during the pandemic because there wasn't enough food, while one in twenty went a whole day without eating. Additionally different groups disproportionately are impacted by food poverty. Nationally, emerging evidence on the impact of cost of living increases shows that families are cutting back particularly on fruit and vegetables and fuel poverty leads to more cold food which undermines healthy cooking.

2.21. **Climate change emergency:** There are close links between action to tackle healthy weight and actions to tackle climate change, for example, walking, cycling, active travel, food growing and promoting water. The Merton Climate Change action plan focuses on achieving a zero carbon targets with thematic area priorities on the Green Economy, Building and Energy, Transport and Greening Merton.

2.22. The Young people's survey highlighted that young people value the parks and green spaces in Merton and want to have a say and play a role in how they are developed. Action to tackle the food and physical environment can be challenging and contentious, such as restricting vehicle access through the school street programme, however by working in partnership and co-creating solutions with residents, including children and young people, we have the best opportunity for sustainable change.

WHAT WE ARE DOING LOCALLY TO IMPROVE CHILD HEALTHY WEIGHT AND REDUCE INEQUALITIES

2.23. Obesity is a complex problem and there is no single solution. Evidence indicates that a comprehensive programme that focusses on delivering population wide changes across aspects of the physical, food and cultural environment is most likely to be successful and cost effective, together with approaches with specific communities and groups. This has informed our approach in Merton.

2.24. We have collaborated and engaged at a London level, through the development of the GLA plan '[Every Child a Healthy Weight](#)' which sets out 10 ambitions for

London, and the London Obesity Network¹. At a South West London level there are opportunities to take a more strategic approach following the creation of the Integrated Care Partnership.

2.25. Reducing Childhood Obesity in Merton has been a key priority within the Health and Well-being Strategy since 2015, alongside tackling diabetes, and is also a priority for the Merton Health and Care Together partnership. Merton’s Child Healthy Weight Action Plan (CHWAP) is endorsed by the Health and Wellbeing Board and the Children’s Trust Board (CTB).

2.26. The Merton Child Healthy Weight Action Plan is based on a review of the evidence, engagement with residents in East Merton (The Great Weight Debate Merton) and more recently the Merton Youth survey as well as considerable partnership working over the past 5 years through a Child Healthy Weight steering group.

3 MERTON CHILD HEALTHY WEIGHT ACTION PLAN (CHWAP) 2022-2025

3.1. Merton’s CHWAP consists of 3 key themes, progress against each theme is set out below:

Merton Child Healthy Weight Action Plan (2022-2025)		
Theme 1: Making Child Healthy Weight Everyone’s Business	Theme 2: Supporting Children, Young People and their Families	Theme 3: Healthy Place

3.2. Theme 1: Making child healthy weight everyone’s business:

- 50 schools in Merton have registered for the **Healthy Schools London** programme (of these, 18 schools have progressed to achieve the Bronze award, Silver = 9, Gold = 3), and 87 early years settings are registered for **Healthy Early Years** London Programme (‘First Steps = 53 settings, Bronze = 10, Silver = 3) which both support healthy eating and physical activity in settings.
- 31 schools in Merton undertaking a **daily/active mile programme** as part of their schools physical activity programme (in addition to PE curriculum) and 35 schools meeting CMO Active 30:30 target.
- 12 organisations in Merton are signed up to **Sugar Smart**, an initiative aiming to help organisations reduce sugar consumption.
- A **new school meals’ contract** has been awarded which includes nutritional outcomes and a move to more plant-based menus (two meat free days a week where schools can opt-out if preferable).
- **Face-to-face and online workshops for front line staff** working with CYP, to increase awareness and confidence of staff in talking about weight and

actions they can take to promote healthy environments and signposting to support.

- **'Merton Can'** is a campaign to increase activity across the life-course from babies and toddlers, children and young people to adults, pregnancy, and older adults. 'Try 22 in 2022' resources were launched earlier this year (digital and print versions click [here](#)).

3.3. **Theme 2: Supporting children, young people and their families:**

- Investment in Merton's **Food Poverty Action Plan** has ensured the continuation of Merton's Community Fridge Network and coordination of local efforts to reduce food poverty, through Sustainable Merton. Across the network between October 2021 to May 2022 nearly 4000 food parcels were distributed (approximately 27,218kg of food).
- **Local Healthy Start Voucher scheme** booklet has been developed and are being disseminated via Sustainable Merton and Children's Centres to increase access for families with young children to vouchers for free fruit, vegetables, milk and vitamins.
- Community Health Services, which include Health Visiting, have achieved and maintained the **UNICEF Baby Feeding Friendly** Initiative (accreditation Stage 3).
- New **'Stay and Play' pilot supporting Breastfeeding** for postnatal mothers from ethnic minority groups who may also be experiencing low mood and/or socially isolated (starting in November delivered by Central London Community Health).
- School Nurses deliver the **'Family start' programme**, a weight support service for children and their families to achieve healthy lifestyle and reduce their weight (particularly those identified through the National Child Measurement Programme)
- The **Holiday Activities and Food (HAF)** programme provides support to children in receipt of free school meals through holiday periods. Organisations delivering this locally have been supported through healthy food advice, training on talking about child weight and a wellbeing booklet for partners and families. This year in Merton, 1,015 children participated in HAF programmes over the summer holidays.
- **Children and Young People's Social Prescribing pilot** is being implemented for those identified as living with obesity and/or those with low level emotional health, taking a holistic approach to support reducing weight and improving emotional health. The pilot is taking place with East Merton Primary Care Network (PCN) and will be independently evaluated.

3.4. **Theme 3: Healthy place - shaping the places we live, learn, work and play and influencing choices on the food we eat:**

- Merton's **Climate Strategy and action plan** contributes to tackling child healthy weight, committing to active travel and increasing and protecting existing vegetation like trees, including the **school streets programme (adopted by 15 schools)**, which has the benefit of both reducing air pollution and promoting physical activity.

- The Council's **Local Plan** was inspected during June-October 2022 and is expected to be adopted in 2023. Once this happens the Plan's policy for managing and monitoring new fast-food takeaways within 400 meters of schools will become planning policy.
- **Water fountains** have been installed in Mitcham, Colliers Wood, Morden and Raynes Park and Wimbledon which in part support drinking water rather than sugary drinks.
- A Transport for London (TFL) style **advertising policy** aiming to tackle unhealthy advertising and promote wellbeing has been adopted in Merton.
- A **School Superzone pilot** will be testing out ways to make the environment around schools healthier, an initial pilot school has been funded by the GLA and further application for a second pilot has been submitted. In addition, 10 schools have been funded locally to make 'jumpstart' improvements, such as developing a school garden or open space.
- A Tri-borough **healthy catering commitment** has been agreed across Merton, Richmond and Wandsworth Councils. This initiative will survey current food standards in area in which it is difficult to buy affordable or good-quality fresh food and with the highest child obesity levels, in order to design interventions. A Tri-borough officer will coordinate progress.
- A **Green Social Prescribing pilot** has been commissioned through the 'Walk and Talk' programme and offers free social walking groups in Merton parks on a weekly basis open to all ages. Since March 2022 over 1,000 people have taken part in walks across Merton, with over 2,000 miles walked and over 4 million steps.
- Additional funding was allocated to the Merton Giving Fund, for Green Social Prescribing, launched in May 2022. This has provided small grants to seven local organisations to support residents' physical and mental health via pilot projects connecting with nature and taking place outdoors such as Pollards Gardening and History Walks at Commonsides Community Development Trust.

FUTURE PLANS AND OPPORTUNITIES

3.5. Current actions to address inequalities in child healthy weight will continue and, working with Merton Young Inspectors, we will seek out opportunities to strengthen our approach in 2023, this includes:

- Refresh and strengthen the **Merton Food Poverty Action Plan** and invest further in local voluntary and community organisations to deliver a food response for residents facing food insecurity which also addresses the stigma associated with hardship.
- Develop a borough wide approach to promoting breastfeeding by working towards **UNICEF Baby Feeding Friendly Gold** award, led by Community health service providers, which requires support from all sectors and leadership within Merton.
- Building on Merton's commitment to becoming a **Borough of Sport**, promote inclusive activity for all children and young people.

- **Actively Merton** – the first exemplar from Merton's Health in All Policies (HiAP) approach, which aims to support residents to be more physically and socially active in the way that they want. This will raise awareness of existing activities and sporting assets and develop new highly visible evidence-based interventions, such as **beat the street** which connects residents to activities and builds upon digital and face to face connectors in the community. It applies an evidence-based 'gaming' approach and leads to long term behaviour change by creating a social norm around walking and cycling.
- **Evaluate our children and young people social prescribing pilot** and explore opportunities for ongoing sustainability, working closely with NHS partners.
- Working with Young Inspectors, refresh and develop an inclusive **communications and engagement plan**, which includes CYP friendly resources, signposting and more peer led support. Plus a new 'Try 23 in 2023' campaign is being developed, part of the 'Merton Can' approach, to signpost to 23 activities in the borough for residents to try.
- Look for opportunities in the '**Every Child a Healthy Weight** – London Action Plan' to strengthen our approach in Merton, including opportunities for inward investment in the borough.

4 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

4.1. N/A

5 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED

5.1. Engagement was undertaken through the 'Great Weight Debate Merton (2017), which engaged 2,100 residents and stakeholders in the east of the borough; and the Young People's Survey on the impact of COVID (2021), which engaged 2,073 young people via a survey and 200 young people via focus groups and interviews, and through stakeholder engagement via the child healthy weight steering group.

6 TIMETABLE

6.1. Timetable for work is as per the Child Healthy Weight Action Plan deadlines.

7 FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS

7.1. The Child Healthy Weight Action Plan is being implemented within existing resources of all partners.

8 LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

8.1. N/A

9 HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS

9.1. Inequalities are detailed in the main report above.

10 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

10.1. N/A

11 RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

11.1. N/A

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

12.1. N/A

13 BACKGROUND PAPERS

- [The Impact of Covid19 on young people in Merton - Final.pdf](#)
- [every child a healthy weight.pdf \(london.gov.uk\)](#)

Committee: Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel

Date: 10th November 2022

Wards: All

Subject: Departmental Update

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

Lead member(s): Cllr Brenda Fraser, Cabinet Member Children's Services, and Cllr Sally Kenny, Cabinet Member Education and Lifelong Learning

Contact officer: Maisie Davies - Head of Performance, Improvement 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 The report provides members of the panel with information on key developments affecting the Children, Schools and Families Department, and not covered elsewhere on the agenda. It focuses on those aspects of particular relevance to the department.

2 DETAILS

CHILDREN, SCHOOLS & FAMILIES

2.1 It has been another busy period in Children, Schools and Families. Since the last departmental update, we have had our SEND re-visit following our Joint Area SEND Inspection in 2019. We also held our SEND conference, which was attended by a wide range of partners. Further information is provided in the rest of this report.

SEND Re-visit

2.2 Merton was notified on Monday 3rd October of our SEND re-visit following our Joint Area SEND Inspection in 2019. The purpose of the re-visit was to determine whether Merton has made sufficient progress in addressing the three areas of weakness detailed in our Written Statement of Action. Inspectors also looked at the impact of the pandemic on children and young people with SEND and the local SEND system.

2.3 Before arriving onsite inspectors reviewed a suite of evidence, which had been prepared by Merton Children, Schools and Families and our partner agencies, especially our health colleagues in South West London Integrated Care Board (ICB). Inspectors were onsite from Monday 17th to Wednesday 19th October. They met with Merton's parents' forum, Kids

First, children and young people from Cricket Green and Melrose Primary, and two of our young inspectors. They also held focus groups with professionals from a range of agencies, including the local authority, health and education partners.

- 2.4 The re-visit provided an opportunity for all our partners working with children and young people with SEND to demonstrate how we have made improvements across the three WSoA improvement areas. We are proud of the collaborative efforts made by all partners to contribute their evidence and views to the re-visit. We are also particularly grateful to children, young people and parents who contributed their views as part of the process.
- 2.5 Inspectors have provided provisional and confidential verbal findings and aim to share a first draft of their formal letter to the local area within 10 working days for review of accuracy. The final letter is expected to be published within 33 working days from the end of the inspection (early December).

SEND Conference

- 2.6 On Tuesday 11th October, Merton held its first annual SEND Conference, 'SEND is everybody's business'. The SEND conference brought together a wide range of partners, attended by over 170 professionals working within a range of agencies including from Education, Health and Social Care. Alongside the Director of Children's Services, the conference was opened by Mark Creelman, Locality Executive Merton and Wandsworth in the South West London ICB, Cllr Brenda Fraser, Lead Member for Children's Services, and Cllr Sally Kenny, Lead Member for Education and Lifelong Learning.
- 2.7 Sukpal Uppal, Participation Manager, started the first half of the conference by sharing the voices of children and young people through Merton's Young Residents Survey 2021, and the next steps for developing our participation work with children and young people with SEND. We were also pleased that Debbie Orton, our challenge partner from the Department for Education, was able to talk to the aims and ambitions of the SEND Green Paper, setting the national context. We were delighted too to hear from April McDevitt, a parent representative from our local Kids First parent/carers forum, who shared the work of the forum and the impact they have had on local strategy and practice.
- 2.8 In the second half of the conference, Elizabeth Fitzpatrick, Assistant Director for Education and Early Help and Mike Procter, Director of Transformation for Merton and Wandsworth, South West London ICB talked about our approach to SEND in Merton. This was followed by a multi-agency panel who discussed what was working well and what are our biggest challenges locally. The range of agencies represented, including Children, Schools and Families; Adults Social Care, SW London ICB, Central London Community Health, and Education demonstrated the collaborative approach to SEND in Merton. Both halves of the conference

allowed time for group discussions and feedback, which will be taken forward into our partnership SEND strategy.

Supporting Schools

School Ofsted Inspections

- 2.9 Since the last children and young people's overview and scrutiny panel meeting, there have been three further inspections by Ofsted in the autumn term: Harris Academy Merton had a graded inspection in September 2022 and remains an Outstanding School. Wimbledon Park Primary was also inspected in September, the report has not yet been published. Hatfield Primary was inspected just before autumn half term.
- 2.10 Additionally, the reports for schools inspected in the summer term have been published:
- There was no change to the overall judgement of Outstanding at Rutlish as a result of its Section 8 inspection; the next inspection will be a full inspection;
 - West Wimbledon is a Good school after its S5 graded inspection in May 2022 and this evidences the strengths of the school's leadership and federation arrangements (the school had been judged Requires Improvement in 2018);
 - St Teresa's continues to be a Good school.

School Places Strategy

- 2.11 In Autumn 2021 this committee considered the draft School Places Strategy document, which was then subject to consultation with all schools, and formally adopted in December 2021. The plan has now been updated to reflect 2022 data and is attached as an appendix to this report.
- 2.12 The document outlines the continued fall in demand for primary school places and the council has already facilitated the reduction in the published admission number by 13 forms of entry from 2016 to the present 2022/23 reception year entry. The council's strategy continues to be 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 unless 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 The significantly increased pupil numbers at secondary age have now flowed through the 11-16 age group and will reach 6th form age next year. In 2021/22 we operated below the recommended minimum surplus level of 5% in Year 7 and this is also expected in 2022/23.
- 2.14 However, the lower numbers flowing through primary schools will reach year 7 by next September (2023) and so there is concern there will be surplus places and a need to eventually reduce the capacity of some schools.
- 2.15 With regard to special school provision, as part of the High Needs ‘safety valve’ intervention programme agreed with the DfE a series of new expansions are being implemented over the next 5 years, including the proposal for a new special Free School. This is on top of the successful opening of Whatley Campus this September.

Supporting Vulnerable Children

Supporting Vulnerable Children and with Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities

- 2.16 As at the 1st September 2022, Merton currently maintains 2,482 EHCPs.
- 2.17 As of the 1st September, the service has received 277 requests for an EHCNA (Education, Health and Care needs assessment) since January 2022. In this calendar year the LA has agreed to undertake 248 EHCNAs and agreed to issue 170 EHCPs (Education, Health and Care Plan).
- 2.18 The EHCNA process should be completed within 20 weeks. As of 1st September, the year to date timeliness for completing an EHCNA is at 77% in the total number of EHCPs being issued within 20 weeks.
- 2.19 Following the annual review processes this calendar year the Local Authority has ceased to maintain 148 EHC Plans. 98 children and young people with an EHCP moved out of Merton to another Local Authority and seven moved abroad. In addition, 51 children and young people with an EHCP moved into Merton and their plan was adopted.
- 2.20 The new SEN Structure of the four SEN Teams (Assessment Team/Early Years, Primary Team, Secondary Team and the Post 16 Team) has gone live. The focus of the Primary, Secondary and Post 16 Team will be to ensure that statutory timescales of the EHCP Review process are met and

to improve the quality of EHCPs. An annual review dashboard is being developed to monitor attendance and statutory timescales. Once this is finalised key data sets will be included in the department update.

Safety Valve

- 2.21 Addressing the growth in the number of EHCPs is a key part of the Safety Valve plan. As the figures above demonstrate, we are still assessing and approving new plans, but we are applying our policy more consistently.
- 2.22 As we reported in the last departmental update, we submitted our second quarterly report to DfE in September. We have now received confirmation that they have accepted our report and progress and have released the second quarterly payment of £875k. There are two further instalments of £875k due this year.

Contextual Safeguarding

- 2.23 The service continues to respond to incidents and conflicts between groups and gangs in the borough and neighbouring boroughs, some of which involve school aged children. This involves detailed individual safety planning with families, working in partnership with professionals across the network, including police, social workers, youth justice workers, youth workers, neighbouring boroughs, schools and colleges. Senior officers from the Council continue to meet with senior police officers, to agree joined-up communications plans for schools and the community, in consultation with Safer Merton, as well as ensuring additional senior police representation at key strategic and operational meetings.

Sexual Harassment in Schools Scrutiny

- 2.24 As part of the Merton Safeguarding Children Partnership's statutory requirements under Working Together 2018, the partnership has appointed three posts to provide independent scrutiny of the MSCP's arrangements - an Independent Chair, Independent Scrutineer and Young Scrutineer. As part of their role, the Independent Scrutineers scrutinise and contribute to the MSCP annual report, which is included under item four on this agenda.
- 2.25 The Scrutineers also undertake thematic scrutiny focusing on important topics for the MSCP. Earlier this year the Scrutineers completed their thematic scrutiny on how well the MSCP are working with partners to respond to sexual harassment in schools and colleges. The scrutiny activity took place across four days and involved a light touch literature review, focus groups with students, a survey to schools, and meetings with school leaders, and other MSCP partners.
- 2.26 In June 2022, the scrutineers presented their findings to the MSCP's Full Partnership. They were able to directly report the views of children they

had met with as part of the scrutiny, many of whom highlighted the importance of trusted adults in reporting sexual harassment.

- *“We have to trust the people before we’d tell them or report sexual harassment. If we have a bad experience before it puts us off telling them something so personal”*
- *“I’d speak [to] my history teacher, I trust her”*
- *“I would always speak to my friends first...”*
- *“School makes our feelings feel valid, e.g. they say ‘banter’ is not an excuse”*

2.27 Two young people from Merton College attended the June Full Partnership to talk about their co-produced campaign against sexual harassment. The meeting provided an opportunity to share good practice and learn from the findings of the Scrutineers.

2.28 The scrutineers also made some recommendations for improvement, highlighting the importance of a coordinated approach across partners and the provision of spaces for agencies to learn from each other’s good practice in this area. Recommendations also included updating our multi-agency harmful sexual behaviour policy, ensuring equitable provision of safer schools officers across school type, and continuing to develop and promote innovative ways that children can report sexual harassment.

2.29 The MSCP is responding to the scrutiny with oversight from the Quality Assurance and Practice Review sub-group, which regularly monitors progress against scrutiny recommendations. The harmful sexual behaviour policy is being reviewed by a range of partners, including representation for special schools to ensure it is inclusive. The DSL forum enables sharing between schools of good practice and the MSCP is also ensuring sexual harassment and the local context is included in our MSCP training programme. The Scrutineers have also raised their findings directly with the Police, who are considering the findings around equitable distribution of safer schools officers.

Adultification Scrutiny

2.30 The MSCP Scrutineers’ next theme is the adultification of children and young people within safeguarding practice. This scrutiny activity is currently underway and a survey has been circulated to a wide range of professionals to capture their views. The Scrutineers will ensure they also speak to key leads across the Partnership, and also to children and young people. The scrutiny findings are expected to be ready to present to the Full Partnership in the New Year.



Merton School Places Planning Strategy 2022-2027

(subject to annual review)

Updated October 2022

Introduction and summary of position

In Autumn 2021 Merton set out its draft school places strategy as a formal document; this was considered by Merton's Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel on 29 September, was then subject to consultation with all schools, and formally adopted in December 2021. This is an update of the 2021 plan with updated forecasting information. However, the general position has not changed since last year so this is an update of information rather than any proposed change in strategy.

This revised plan sets out the existing supply and demand for school places, and projections based on the annual review in summer 2022. After a commentary on the basis of projections it has three sections: primary school, secondary school, and specialist provision.

The next formal review will be in summer 2023 as part of the timetable for the council's annual school places ("SCAP") return to the Department for Education.

As summary of the position on supply and demand of school places is as follows:

Primary school places

From the mid-2000s there was a rising demand for primary school places, requiring an extensive expansion programme. However, 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.

Reception year numbers decreased in 2021/22 for the sixth consecutive year and, after a plateau in 2022/23, further falls are expected from 2023/24. The extent of the further fall is dependent on the forecast model used. As the lower numbers flow to all year groups, the total primary school roll by the GLA forecast model is 14,242 in 2026/27, nearly 3,000 less than the 2017/18 peak. Our 'pupil retention' modelling suggests it will be 13,021, so 4,000 less than the 2017/18 peak.

The council has already facilitated the reduction in the published admission number by 13 forms of entry from 2016 to the present 2022/23 reception year entry. However, based on the GLA forecast, if there are no reductions the Year R surplus will be 20% by 2026/27, and 25% based on our pupil retention model.

This document sets out the strategy for managing the surplus places

Secondary school places

The significantly increased pupil numbers reached secondary age through the 2010s and the Year 7 roll has since 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.

In 2021/22 we operated below the recommended minimum surplus level of 5% in Year 7 and this is also expected in 2022/23.

However, the lower numbers flowing through primary schools will reach year 7 by next September (2023) and so there is concern there will be surplus places and a need to eventually reduce the capacity of some schools.

The level of demand continues to be dependent on the pupil retention from year 6, as there is extensive cross border movement.

The significantly higher pupil numbers reach 6th form age from next September (2023) and there will be significantly increased demand.

Special School provision

There has been a more than doubling increase in the number of EHCPs over the last 7 years, from 1075 in January 2016 to 2467 in January 2022 (SEN2 count).

The council has been active in implementing special school expansion in recent years. However, this has not been sufficient keep up with the increase in demand and the council still places more children with EHCPs to independent sector provision than most councils. As part of the High Needs 'safety valve' intervention programme agreed with the DfE in early 2022 a series of new expansions are being implemented over the next 5 years, including the proposal for a new Special Free School

Background

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 (2019, 2020, 2021 and 2022). 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.

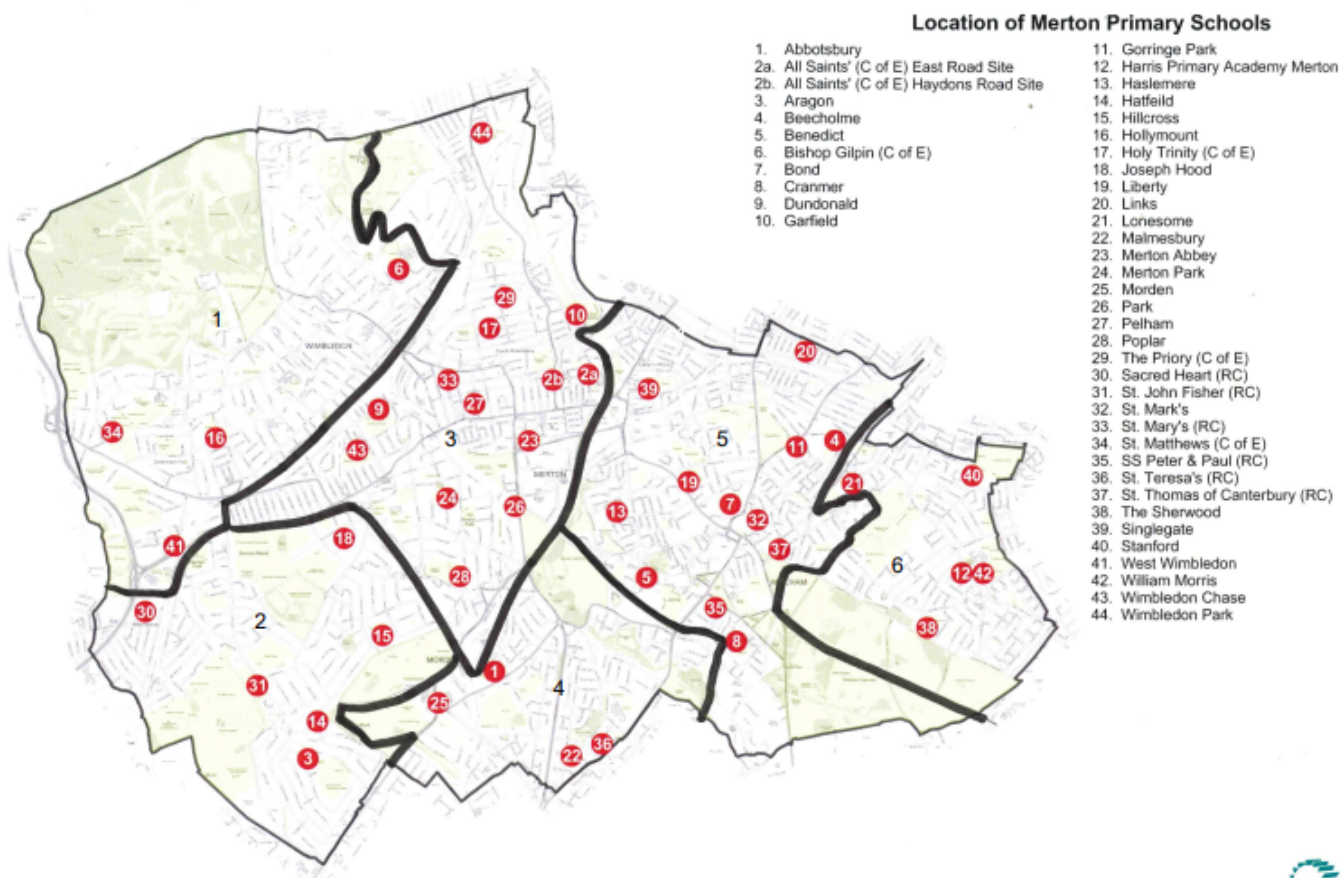
While last year the GLA forecasts did not seem to reflect the full changes in migration patterns there has been an adjustment this year and so the GLA forecasts for primary age are for a greater fall than last year. However, they are still higher than Merton's simple pupil retention model that does not take into account 'child yield' from additional housing.

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 PRIMARY SCHOOLS WITH PLANNING AREAS



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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 2021/22. 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 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	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	2021 /22
Reception	1937	2140	2229	2285	2651	2599	2547	2627	2628	2524	2437	2305	2370	2279	2189
Year 1	1885	1929	2148	2228	2313	2612	2577	2532	2591	2595	2465	2392	2250	2283	2201
Year 2	1816	1885	1921	2115	2227	2284	2557	2554	2509	2535	2529	2420	2322	2204	2231
Year 3	1801	1835	1859	1905	2093	2197	2224	2502	2486	2455	2463	2450	2338	2237	2110
Year 4	1781	1773	1833	1830	1901	2082	2149	2209	2458	2419	2385	2417	2414	2241	2156
Year 5	1789	1778	1742	1832	1817	1888	2028	2109	2156	2407	2393	2339	2374	2311	2185
Year 6	1794	1762	1756	1725	1837	1817	1848	2024	2081	2113	2378	2363	2270	2311	2274
Primary Total	12803	13102	13488	13920	14839	15479	15930	16557	16909	17048	17050	16686	16338	15866	15346

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 19.6% surplus places in spring 2022. However, because admission numbers have been reduced the percentage was only 11.6% 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 school still offering to less than 600 metres on offer day.

MERTON PRIMARY SCHOOLS AND PLANNING AREA – SURPLUS AGAINST NET CAPACITY AND AGAINST RECEPTION YEAR ADMISSION NUMBER 2021/22

	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.

Total PA1	1309	1490	181	12.1%	180	182	-2	-1.1%
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PA2:Hatfeild, Joseph Hood, Hillcross, Aragon, Sacred Heart RC, St John Fisher RC

Total PA2	2364	2928	564	19.3%	390	361	29	7.4%
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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

Total PA3	4666	5648	984	17.4%	765	708	57	7.5%
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PA4: Morden, Abbotsbury, Malmesbury, St Teresa's RC

Total PA4	1369	1431	84	5.9%	210	179	31	14.8%
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PA5: Beecholme, Bond, Benedict, Links, Haslemere, St Mark's Primary, Singlegate, Cranmer, Gorringe Park, Liberty, St. Peter and Paul RC, St Thomas of Canterbury RC

Total PA5	4137	5652	1515	26.8%	660	554	106	16.1%
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PA6: Harris Primary Academy Merton, Stanford, Lonesome, The Sherwood, William Morris

Total PA6	1501	1890	407	21.5%	270	205	65	24.1%
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Total all borough	15346	19039	3735	19.6%	2475	2189	286	11.6%
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Actions to date to reduce surplus places (by planning area)

The recent fall in the primary school roll, especially 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 13 schools have reduced their admission number over the last 6 years (Within the last year two further added plus Priory fully decreasing by a form of entry - FE)

MERTON PRIMARY SCHOOLS THAT HAVE REDUCED THEIR ADMISSION NUMBER SINCE 2015

	2015 PAN*	2022 PAN	
West Wimbledon	60	30	Schools Adjudicator agreed Dec 2020 (ARP in spare space)
Hillcross	90	60	Included in School Admission arrangements from 2020
Merton Abbey	60	30	Included in School Admission arrangements from 2019
Park	60	30	Officially changed for new provider
The Priory C of E	60	30	Schools Adjudicator agreed to 45 in Jan 2021 then to 30 in Jan 2022

Benedict	60	30	Unofficial cap in 2019 and 2020. Officially changed for new provider
Cranmer	90	60	Included in School Admission arrangements from 2022 (ARP in spare space)
Goringe Park	90	60	Included in School Admission arrangements from 2019
Liberty	90	60	Included in School Admission arrangements from 2020
St Thomas of Canterbury	90	60	Included in School Admission arrangements from 2021
Stanford	60	30	Permanent change to school capacity with ARP
Bond	60	30	Schools Adjudicator agreed Jan 2021
SS Peter and Paul	60	30	Schools Adjudicator agreed Jan 2021
Total	930	540	Total reduction of 390 Year R places (13FE)

Note - PAN is "published admission number"

Merton forecasts submitted to DfE in July 2022

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 2022 were as follows:

MERTON PRIMARY SCHOOLS – WHOLE BOROUGH SCAP FORECASTS JULY 2022

Forecasts	Reception	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total
2021/22 (actual)	2189	2201	2231	2110	2156	2185	2274	15346
2022/23	2201	2139	2168	2189	2067	2112	2154	15030
2023/24	2163	2193	2129	2153	2177	2058	2107	14979
2024/25	2091	2110	2169	2108	2132	2160	2055	14825
2025/26	2013	2035	2075	2138	2086	2114	2151	14613
2026/27	1946	1957	2006	2047	2113	2068	2105	14242

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 SCAP PROJECTIONS AND NO CHANGE

Year actual and forecast	Total roll	Net capacity	Surplus	Surplus %	R admission No.	R roll	Surplus R	Surplus R %
2021/22 (actual)	15346	19039	3735	19.6%	2475	2189	286	11.6%
2022/23	15030	19039	4009	26.7%	2430	2201	229	10.4%
2023/24	14979	19039	4060	27.1%	2430	2163	267	12.3%
2024/25	14825	19039	4214	28.4%	2430	2091	339	16.2%
2025/26	14613	19039	4426	30.3%	2430	2013	417	20.7%
2026/27	14242	19039	4797	33.7%	2430	1946	484	24.9%

Therefore without further action (some of which will be apparent in 2023 with opening of ARPs in spare space and so reducing the official net capacity) there will be 33% surplus of physical space and 25% against Reception year admission number.

However, our pupil retention model based purely on retention from live births up to 2021 and forecast live births thereafter suggests a reception roll of only 1820 by 2026/27, suggesting further action may be required. However it should be recognised that live birth data is only available up to the 2021 calendar year so forecasts in 2025/26 have an element ($\frac{1}{3}$) of forecasts births, and it is entirely based on forecast births from 2026/27.

MERTON PUPIL RETENTION PROJECTIONS OCTOBER 2022

	R	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total
2021/22 (actual)	2189	2201	2231	2110	2156	2185	2274	15346
2022/23	2197	2116	2150	2144	2037	2092	2137	14874
2023/24	2111	2122	2068	2064	2066	1976	2049	14456
2024/25	1998	2039	2074	1985	1991	2006	1936	14029
2025/26	1938	1930	1993	1991	1915	1932	1964	13663
2026/27	1855	1872	1886	1913	1920	1858	1892	13197
2027/28	1813	1792	1830	1811	1845	1863	1820	12775

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

MERTON PRIMARY SCHOOLS – FORECASTS BY PLANNING AREA JULY 2022

PLANNING AREA 1

Forecasts	Reception	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total
2021/22 (actual)	182	181	186	195	188	185	192	1309
2022/23	177	178	181	184	193	186	179	1279
2023/24	164	177	177	181	184	193	184	1261
2024/25	170	162	177	177	181	186	189	1243
2025/26	164	167	162	176	178	183	180	1210
2026/27	158	160	167	163	177	178	177	1180

PLANNING AREA 2

Forecasts	Reception	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total
2021/22	361	329	356	311	324	333	350	2364
2022/23	348	353	325	349	306	318	326	2325
2023/24	331	348	353	323	349	307	317	2328
2024/25	328	326	349	350	323	348	305	2329
2025/26	315	322	325	345	350	322	344	2324
2026/27	309	309	321	322	344	346	319	2270

PLANNING AREA 3

Forecasts	Reception	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total
2021/22	708	687	694	646	656	631	644	4666
2022/23	699	692	675	682	632	641	617	4638
2023/24	691	696	688	672	678	629	635	4689
2024/25	672	670	685	680	664	669	621	4663
2025/26	654	648	655	674	669	655	658	4612
2026/27	628	627	634	643	662	659	642	4494

PLANNING AREA 4

Forecasts	Reception	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total
2021/22	179	199	200	190	194	206	201	1369
2022/23	187	172	197	196	187	191	204	1334
2023/24	178	184	171	195	195	186	192	1301
2024/25	169	172	182	170	194	195	189	1270
2025/26	165	162	171	180	169	195	197	1238
2026/27	160	157	161	170	179	169	200	1195

PLANNING AREA 5

Forecasts	Reception	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total
2021/22	554	590	575	559	583	617	659	4137
2022/23	580	543	576	562	543	568	612	3984
2023/24	598	578	539	570	555	538	569	3947
2024/25	563	583	567	531	559	548	542	3893
2025/26	529	549	566	556	519	548	552	3819
2026/27	511	519	535	554	543	514	551	3726

PLANNING AREA 6

Forecasts	Reception	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total
2021/22	205	215	220	209	211	213	228	1501
2022/23	210	202	213	217	206	208	216	1471
2023/24	201	210	201	211	216	205	210	1452
2024/25	190	197	208	200	211	214	209	1428
2025/26	187	188	196	207	201	211	221	1410
2026/27	181	185	188	196	208	203	217	1378

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, as agreed in autumn 2021, is as follows:

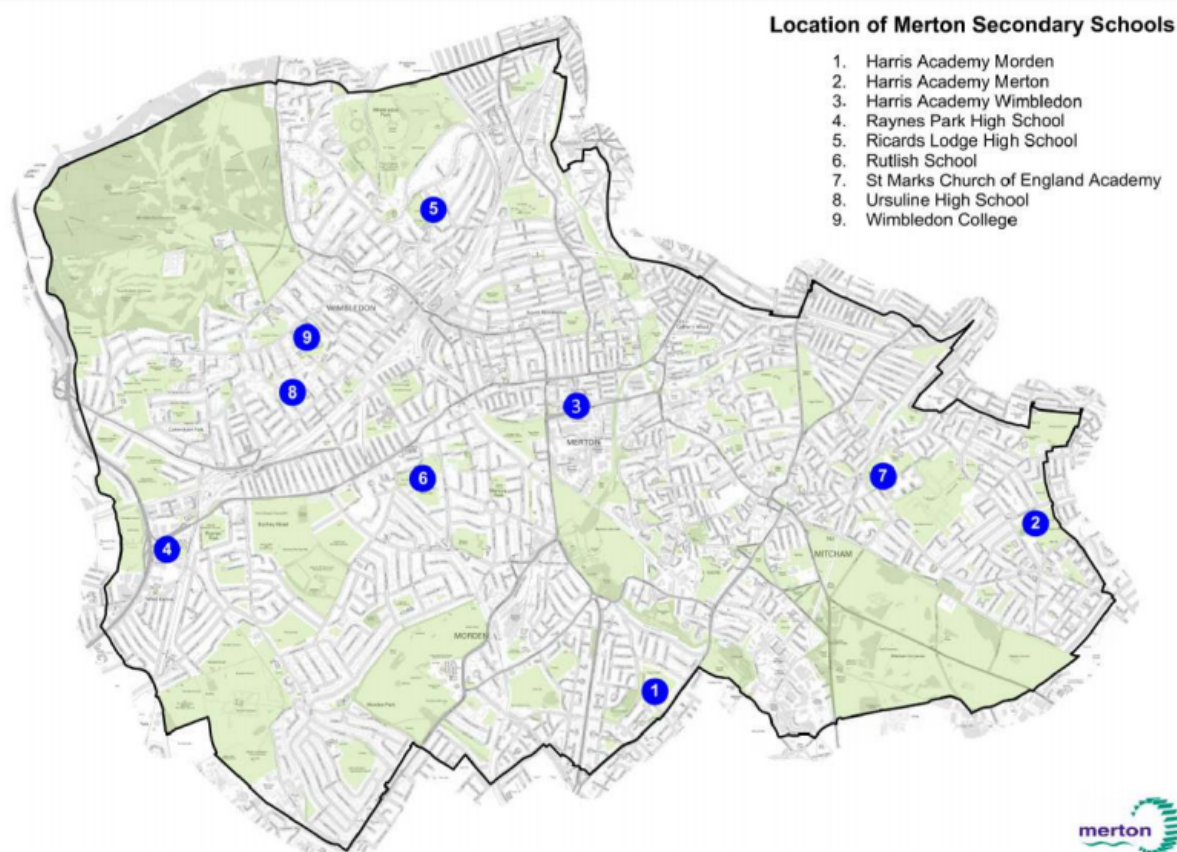
- Continue to encourage schools to reduce admissions numbers to multiples of 30 for education efficiency when practical to do so
- Encourage schools to work in cluster areas with the council to agree reductions in admission numbers at an area level
- Consider use of compatible alternative uses for space 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 unless 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

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 3 years it has recovered and last year it was 80%. Based on draft October 2022 census and admissions allocation information a further moderate rise is expected for 2022/23, to around 81.5%.

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

2009 /10	2010 /11	2011 /12	2012 /13	2013 /14	2014 /15	2015 /16	2016 /17	2017 /18	2018 /19	2019 /20	2020 /21	2021 /22
87.6 %	85.5 %	84.5 %	79.2 %	80.6 %	80.7 %	78.0 %	74.8 %	74.3 %	74.9 %	79.5 %	79.4 %	80.0 %

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 from next September (2023) 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 2009/10 TO 2021/22

Academic year	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Year 7	1544	1502	1457	1454	1465	1492	1578	1556	1569	1782	1878	1803	1848
Year 8	1608	1547	1516	1450	1459	1462	1482	1553	1547	1593	1767	1854	1795
Year 9	1556	1618	1573	1508	1440	1450	1451	1477	1564	1587	1583	1722	1811
Year 10	1573	1551	1630	1571	1503	1446	1454	1419	1460	1573	1534	1557	1713
Year 11	1576	1540	1548	1590	1532	1497	1416	1403	1383	1497	1518	1508	1530
Year 12	412	606	609	699	856	805	754	239	774	716	724	814	849
Year 13	309	298	398	455	499	657	632	585	616	700	643	665	727
Secondary Year 7 - 11	7857	7758	7724	7573	7399	7347	7381	7408	7523	8032	8280	8444	8697
Secondary Year 12+	721	904	1007	1154	1355	1462	1386	824	1390	1416	1367	1479	1576
Secondary Total	8578	8662	8731	8727	8754	8809	8767	8232	8913	9448	9647	9923	10273
Year 6/7 Transfer Rate (%)	87.6 %	85.5 %	84.5 %	79.2 %	80.6 %	80.7 %	78.0 %	74.8 %	74.3 %	74.9 %	79.5 %	79.4 %	80.0 %

Current level of surplus places in secondary school

The table below provides:

- The total roll (January 2022 school census)

- The Net capacity
- The surplus and surplus percentage
- The current Year 7 admission number
- The Year 7 roll
- The Year 7 surplus and surplus percentage

This shows that against net capacity there were 5.7% surplus places in spring 2022, and 3.2% in year 7 against published admission number. Based on draft October 2022 census figures we expect the Year 7 surplus to be less than 3% in 2022/23. These numbers are therefore below the 5% that is considered the ideal level.

MERTON SECONDARY SCHOOLS – SURPLUS AGAINST NET CAPACITY AND AGAINST YEAR 7 ADMISSION NUMBER 2021/22

2021/22	Total roll	Net capacity	Surplu s	Surplu s %	Year 7 admission No.	Year 7 roll	Surplu s Yr 7	Surplu s Yr 7 %
Total all 9 secondary schools*	10273	10918	626	5.7%	1909	1848	61	3.2%

*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 3-4 forms of entry within the next five years.

MERTON SECONDARY SCHOOLS – OFFICIAL SCAP JULY 2022

Forecasts	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	Total 7-11	Total 12-13
2021/22	1848	1795	1811	1713	1530	849	727	8697	1576
2022/23	1828	1840	1796	1801	1714	831	609	8979	1440
2023/24	1811	1823	1842	1790	1809	894	707	9075	1601
2024/25	1783	1801	1821	1828	1795	916	764	9028	1680
2025/26	1698	1768	1797	1804	1834	903	782	8901	1685
2026/27	1724	1687	1763	1782	1813	922	769	8769	1691
2027/28	1722	1713	1686	1749	1794	913	787	8664	1700
2028/29	1684	1713	1714	1672	1759	905	778	8542	1683

However, given the much lower numbers flowing through Merton primary schools there is the concern that the GLA model 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 81%, this projection shows that

year 7 numbers will fall sharply from 2023/24, such that by 2027/28 the fall will be equivalent to 10 forms of entry (FE) less than at present.

A detail not considered in the pupil projections is the increase in migration from Hong Kong. This has been more pronounced in the neighbouring Kingston and Sutton but may continue to increase demand for places in all year groups in Merton.

MERTON PUPIL RETENTION PROJECTIONS OCTOBER 2022

81% Pupil retention projections	7	8	9	10	11	Total 7-11	12	13	Total whole school
2021/22	1848	1795	1811	1713	1530	8697	849	727	10273
2022/23	1858	1848	1795	1811	1713	827	766	9025	10619
2023/24	1726	1858	1848	1795	1811	938	746	9038	10722
2024/25	1658	1726	1858	1848	1795	992	845	8885	10722
2025/26	1568	1658	1726	1858	1848	981	894	8658	10533
2026/27	1590	1568	1658	1726	1858	1011	884	8400	10295
2027/28	1532	1590	1568	1658	1726	1016	911	8074	10002

While the proposed new secondary Free School in Sutton was cancelled in summer 2021, with only the special school element remaining, there remains concern regarding the proposed opening of a new Voluntary Aided school in Kingston (Norbiton area) that is relatively close to the west of Merton. In June 2021 this was approved to open by Kingston Council but a planning application is yet to be submitted and it is not expected to open until at least September 2025.

Based on a fall in demand of 10FE, 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, with the proportions by percentage shown overleaf .

NUMBER OF MERTON RESIDENT EHCPs JANUARY 2016 TO JANUARY 2022 AND SCHOOL PLACEMENT TYPE (SEN 2 RETURNS)

	Jan 2016 Total Stateme nts and EHCPs	Jan 2017 Total Stateme nts and EHCPs	Jan 2018 Total Stateme nts and EHCPs	Jan 2019 Total Stateme nts and EHCPs	Jan 2020 Total EHCPs	Jan 2021 Total EHCPs	Jan 2022 Total EHCPs
Early Years (inc. Private & Voluntary Settings)	0	1	7	7	7	8	9
Mainstream School (inc. Academies)	422	461	526	584	682	816	832
ARP (Additional Resourced Provision)	110	111	116	125	125	133	160
State Funded Special School	358	388	416	440	474	520	550
Independent/Non-Maintained Provision)	132	153	176	228	305	367	393
Post 16 College and traineeships	25	93	183	212	194	268	340
Post 16 Specialist	10	25	44	37	40	44	46
Alternative Educative	15	10	22	28	44	37	3
No placement (including NEET and hospital schools)	3	0	28	51	57	59	134
Total	1075	1242	1518	1712	1928	2252	2467

Note the recording of NEETs etc. changed in 2018 and 2019

MERTON RESIDENT EHCPs JANUARY 2016 TO JANUARY 2022 – PROPORTIONS (PERCENTAGE) BY SCHOOL PLACEMENT TYPE (SEN 2 RETURNS)

	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 EHCPs	Jan 2021 Total EHCPs	Jan 2022 Total EHCPs
Early Years (inc. Private & Voluntary Settings)	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Mainstream School (inc. Academies)	39%	37%	35%	34%	35%	36%	34%
ARP (Additional Resourced Provision)	10%	9%	8%	7%	6%	6%	6%
State Funded Special School	33%	31%	27%	26%	25%	23%	22%
Independent/Non-Maintained Provision)	12%	12%	12%	13%	16%	16%	16%
Post 16 College and traineeships	2%	7%	12%	12%	10%	12%	14%
Post 16 Specialist	1%	2%	3%	2%	2%	2%	2%
Alternative Educative	1%	1%	1%	2%	2%	2%	0%
No placement (including NEET and hospital schools)	0%	0%	2%	3%	3%	3%	5%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

There has therefore been more than doubling in the number of EHCPs in the years from 2016 to 2022.

The council has been active in implementing special school expansion in recent years, increasing the number of special school placements from 358 to 520. The number of ARP places capacity in 2016 was 101 and by 2020 it had risen to 150. This has been 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.

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.

In autumn 2021 the DfE 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. As part of this the council has agreed a range of actions and this includes a significant increase in the number of local special school places, with additional capital funding provided. This includes in-principle support for a new special school although a detailed bid is required and was submitted at the end of October 2022.

The table overleaf summarises the expansions completed for September 2022 and planned over the next five years:

School	Additional places	
Melrose School/Whatley Avenue	*110	Project for 80 places completed autumn 2022
West Wimbledon Primary School	24	First phase completed for September 2022, second phase to be completed for September 2023
Hatfeild Primary School	10	Completed for September 2022
Cranmer Primary School	24	First phase completed for September 2022, second phase to be completed for September 2023
TBC	12	On hold pending review of demand
TBC Raynes Park High School	24	On hold pending a review of role of secondary school ARPs
TBC	24	On hold pending a review of role of secondary school ARPs
TBC Ricards Lodge	14	On hold pending a review of role of secondary school ARPs
TBC Rutlish	14	On hold pending a review of role of secondary school ARPs
Perseid School (SLD/PMLD)	28	Design work to progress shortly
New Free School	120	Bid submitted on 31 October 2022
	404	

Notes:

* 80 places delivered initially; expected to increase with possible 6th form

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Committee: Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Date: 10th November 2022

Wards: All

Subject: Performance Monitoring Report

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

Lead member(s): Cllr Brenda Fraser, Cabinet Member Children's Services, and Cllr Sally Kenny, Cabinet Member Education and Lifelong Learning

Contact officer: Maisie Davies, Head of Performance, Improvement 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 2022/23, up to 30th Sept 2022, as set out in the accompanying document, the Children & Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel Performance Index 2022/23.

2 DETAILS

Exception Report

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

No	Indicator	Rating	Service Commentary
7	% of reviews completed within timescale for Children with Child Protection Plans	A	This is an indicator that we monitor every month. Performance data shows that during Q4 we consistently reached our target of 99%. However, there has been a slight dip in performance from April 2022, which mirrors a trend seen towards the start of the last financial year. We continue to monitor the situation closely.
9	% of Children that became the subject of a Child Protection Plan	R	This indicator shows the % of children with an open CPP as at the end of the period who are the subject of a CPP for

	for the second or subsequent time.		<p>the second or subsequent time.</p> <p>Numbers rose from 14 in April to 22 in May and peaked at 29 this month. Despite the increase in actual numbers, the % remains at 24% due to an increase in the overall cohort. We are closely monitoring this indicator. </p>
13	Average number of weeks taken to complete Care proceedings against a national target of 26 weeks.	R	<p>Nationally a target of 26 weeks has been set for an authority to conclude court proceedings and to achieve a court decision. We always strive to meet the nationally set target of 26 weeks. Due to a small number of children in proceedings in Merton, delays with one family can skew our figures. See commentary below for further information.</p>
17	Stability of placements of Looked After Children (aged under 16) - length of placement (in care 2.5 years, placement 2 years)	R	<p>This indicator shows the stability of placements for those in care for 2.5 years or more.</p> <p>Our target is for 65% to have remained in the same placement for 2 years or more. Our current performance is at 60%, 4% lower than this time last year.</p> <p>The number of young people ceasing care when they reach their 18th birthday can impact this indicator and during the last quarter 6 young people turned 18.</p>
18	% of Looked After Children in foster placements who are placed with in-house foster carers	A	<p>Whilst an improvement can be seen from last quarter, we remain 2% below the target.</p> <p>Challenges with the recruitment of in-house foster carers is reflected in this indicator and performance is expected to increase in line</p>

			with an increase in the number of foster carers recruited.
27	Reception year surplus places	R	See commentary below.
28	Secondary school surplus places	R	See commentary below

Commentary

Indicator 13: Average number of weeks taken to complete Care proceedings against a national target of 26 weeks.

2.2. Nationally, the duration of care proceedings has increased. This is a result of court closures during the pandemic.

2.3. A range of influences impact on the duration of court proceedings – some of which are outside of the authority’s immediate control. These include court availability, the availability and timeliness of expert witness input, and the desire to engage effectively with the wider family network to explore alternatives (where appropriate and safe to do so).

2.4. The service has monthly court and PLO tracking meetings including legal representatives. On a quarterly basis, representatives from the Children and Families Court Advisory Services (Cafcass) attend. These meetings allow the authority to raise concerns about timeliness.

2.5. Since the last update, the Assistant Director Children’s Social Care and Youth Inclusion met with Merton’s link judge who commented very positively on Merton’s PLO work. There was an acknowledgement that achieving and maintaining 26 weeks timescales for care proceedings across London and across the country is problematic; impacted on by significant District Judge vacancy rates and delayed Court timescales. Some challenging and long-standing cases due to complexities and need for additional expert assessments; however, these are exceptional.

Indicator 27: Reception surplus places

2.6. This indicator is the total school reception roll against total operating admission numbers. Between December 2021 and March 2022, the percentage of surplus primary school places increased to 11.6% and has remained at this level during Q1 and Q2 2022, which is outside of our target range of 5-10%.

2.7. There is no official national benchmark on an appropriate level of surplus places. 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. 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 and so has been used for this indicator.

Indicator 28: Secondary school surplus places

2.8. Surplus places in secondary school year 7 remains at 3.2%, below the 5% target, hence has a red rating. However, as the lower roll numbers flow through from primary school there will be more surplus places in future years.

2.9. To reduce the surplus in primary schools, and within the context of the School Place Planning Strategy (which was brought to Scrutiny in autumn 2021), officers continue to review school admission numbers to reduce capacity, with two further schools reducing their reception intake from September 2022.

3 AMENDMENTS, CORRECTIONS AND DATA CAVEATS

Amendments, Corrections and Data Caveats

3.1. All data for 2021/22 are subject to EOY validation by the DfE.

3.2. We are currently unable to report against the following indicators:

No	Indicator	Service Commentary
6	% of quorate attendance at CPP conferences	Following amendments to the system workflow, as part of the Mosaic Repair Project, a report has now been built to extract this data and we are currently in the process of user acceptance testing.

3.3. Performance data is provided for the below indicators in the attached Index; however, the target and RAG rating for these indicators are under review to ensure they provide an accurate reflection of service performance across the year, as the data is cumulative. A brief service commentary is provided for information.

No	Indicator	Service Commentary
19	Number of in-house foster carers recruited	Merton places a large proportion of children with in-house foster carers. There were some challenges last year within recruitment due to the pandemic. We have refreshed our communication strategy for the new financial year. We aim to promote the Mocking Bird model and open a second cluster in 2023 which will help with recruitment.

22	% of total 0-5 year estimated Census 2011 population from areas of deprivation (IDACI 30%) whose families have accessed children's centre services (cumulative)	The proportion of children aged 0-5 years old from areas of deprivation whose families have accessed children's centre services has seen a decrease over the past two years in particular because of the impact of the pandemic. There is now a full face to face offer from Children's Centre staff for parenting programmes etc, which are being well used. This, with the return to face to face contact from Health Visitors and other partners (who are co-located in the Children's Centres), and the development of a Family Hub model (as promoted by the Government) should see numbers beginning to rise again over the next few years.
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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 2022/23.

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Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel - Performance Index 2022/23

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

No.	Performance Indicators	Frequency	Target 2022/23	Benchmarking and trend			BRAG rating	Merton 2021/22 performance																	
				Merton 2021/22 (Subject to EOY Validation)	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	Apr-22	May-22	Jun-22	Jul-22	Aug-22	Sep-22
Assessments																									
1	Number of Early Help Assessments undertaken by the Authority	Monthly	Not a target measure	165	No benchmarking available	No benchmarking available	Not a target measure	5	16	9	24	22	18	14	13	12	6	16	10	6	8	15	11	14	12
2	% of Single Assessments authorised within the statutory 45 days	Monthly	91%	89%	87.6% (DfE 2020/21)	89% (DfE 2020/21)	Green	97%	92%	85%	66%	87%	85%	93%	94%	90%	99%	94%	95%	91%	94%	92%	97%	94%	94%
3	% of Education, Health and Care (EHCP) Plans issued within statutory 20 week timescale (YTD Calendar Year /Monthly)	YTD/Monthly	60%	TBC	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%	66%	68%	69%	71%	100%	100%	89%	81%	76%	75%	71%	77%	77%
Child protection																									
4	Child Protection Plans rate per 10,000	Monthly	Not a target measure	20.5	41.4 (DfE 2020/21)	36.3 (DfE 2020/21)	Not a target measure	37.1	36.3	32.5	30.0	30.8	27.8	28.1	26.8	24.9	22.0	22.0	20.5	21.2	24.1	23.3	21.6	24.7	25.3
5	Number of children subject of a Child Protection Plan	Monthly	Not a target measure	98	No relevant benchmarking available	No relevant benchmarking available	Not a target measure	176	172	154	142	146	132	133	127	119	105	105	98	101	115	111	103	118	121
6	% of quorate attendance at child protection conferences	Quarterly	95%	N/A	No relevant benchmarking available	No relevant benchmarking available	N/A			N/A			N/A			N/A			N/A			N/A			N/A
7	% of reviews completed within timescale for Children with Child Protection Plans	Monthly	99%	99%	93.2% (DfE 2020/21)	96.7% (DfE 2020/21)	Amber	100%	97%	95%	94%	95%	98%	100%	100%	97%	100%	100%	99%	98%	94%	95%	96%	97%	98%
8	% of Children subject of a CP Plan who had a CP visit within timescales in the month	Monthly	Not a target measure	96%	No relevant benchmarking available	No relevant benchmarking available	Not a target measure	97%	97%	95%	93%	99%	91%	89%	96%	82%	90%	94%	96%	94%	86%	90%	91%	88%	95%
9	% of Children that became the subject of a Child Protection Plan for the second or subsequent time	Monthly	<20%	14%	22.1% (DfE 2020/21)	18.4% (DfE 2020/21)	Red	16%	14%	16%	13%	14%	14%	13%	12%	11%	12%	14%	14%	14%	19%	24%	24%	25%	24%
Looked After Children																									
10	Looked After Children rate per 10,000	Monthly	Not a target measure	25.8	67 (DfE 2020/21)	47 (DfE 2020/21)	Not a target measure	30.0	30.6	31.0	30.6	30.0	29.7	29.1	28.9	27.6	26.4	26.4	25.8	26.4	26.2	25.1	25.6	25.8	25.8
11	Number of Looked After Children	Monthly	Not a target measure	123	No relevant benchmarking available	No relevant benchmarking available	Not a target measure	142	145	147	145	142	141	138	137	132	126	126	123	126	125	120	122	123	123
12	Number of UASC children and young people	Monthly	Not a target measure	19	No benchmarking available	No benchmarking available	Not a target measure	23	21	20	19	19	22	22	23	23	18	19	19	19	19	19	20	19	23
13	Average number of weeks taken to complete Care proceedings against a national target of 26 weeks	Quarterly	26 weeks	41	41 (CAFCASS 2020/21)	No relevant benchmarking available	Red			42			69			39		41				52			N/A
14	% of Looked After Children cases which were reviewed within required timescales	Monthly	96%	94%	Not published	Not published	Green	99%	96%	94%	94%	97%	96%	96%	96%	98%	98%	97%	94%	94%	94%	96%	96%	98%	96%
15	% of Looked After Children participating in their reviews in month (year to date) (excludes children aged 0 - 4)	Monthly	Not a target measure	90%	No relevant benchmarking available	No relevant benchmarking available	Not a target measure	94%	88%	91%	100%	83%	73%	88%	86%	90%	94%	100%	87%	100%	80%	93%	92%	91%	100%
16	Stability of placements of Looked After Children - number of placements (3 or more in the year)	Quarterly	11%	10%	9% (DfE 2021/22)	9% (DfE 2021/22)	Green			14.9%			12.7%			11.4%		10.3%				7.5%			4.9%
17	Stability of placements of Looked After Children (aged under 16) - length of placement (in care 2.5 years, placement 2 years)	Quarterly	65%	68%	70% (DfE 2020/21)	71% (DfE 2020/21)	Red			48%			64.4%			70%		68%				62%			60%
18	% of Looked After Children in foster placements who are placed with in-house foster carers	Quarterly	60%	67%	No relevant benchmarking available	No relevant benchmarking available	Amber			63%			58%			62%		67%				57%			58%
19	Number of in-house foster carers recruited	Quarterly	Target under Review	7	No relevant benchmarking available	No relevant benchmarking available	Target Under Review			1			2			2		2				1			2
20	Number of Looked After Children who were adopted (YTD)	Monthly	Not a target measure	3	No relevant benchmarking available	No relevant benchmarking available	Not a target measure	0	0	0	0	1	2	3	3	3	3	3	3	0	0	2	2	2	2
21	Number of Looked After Children for whom agency Special Guardianship Orders were granted (YTD)	Quarterly	Not a target measure	4	3800 (14% of those leaving care, DfE 2020/21)	420 (9% of those leaving care, DfE 2020/21)	Not a target measure			0			1			0		1				0			0

No.	Performance Indicators	Frequency	Target 2022/23	Benchmarking and trend			BRAG rating	Merton 2021/22 performance																	
				Merton 2021/22 (Subject to EOY Validation)	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	Apr-22	May-22	Jun-22	Jul-22	Aug-22	Sep-22
Childrens Centres and Schools																									
22	% 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	Target under Review	32%	No relevant benchmarking available	No relevant benchmarking available	Target Under Review				12%			24%			25%			32%			39%		46%
23	% outcome of School Ofsted inspections good or outstanding (overall effectiveness)	Quarterly	95%	N/A - C19	87% (30/04/2022)	94% (30/04/2022)	Green	Ofsted dashboard																	
24	Number of Primary* permanent exclusions (Number YTD Academic year)	Monthly	Not a target measure	0	4.9% (National exclusion statistics for AY 2019/20)	0.8% (National exclusion statistics for AY 2019/20)	Not a target measure	<5	<5	<5	<5	<5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	n/a	0	
25	Number of Secondary* permanent exclusions (Number YTD Academic year)	Monthly	Not a target measure	5	28.5% (National exclusion statistics for AY 2019/20)	14.6% (National exclusion statistics for AY 2019/20)	Not a target measure	<5	5	13	13	13	1	2	2	3	3	3	5	5	6	7	7	n/a	1
26	Secondary *** persistent absenteeism (10% or more sessions missed)	Annual	Not a target measure		14.8% (DfE AY 2020/21)	13.1% (DfE AY 2020/21)	Not a target measure	state funded secondary (inc city tech colleges, secondary academies, inc all academies and free schools)																	
27	% of Reception year surplus places*** (calculated October and January)	Reported Quarterly	5-10%	11.6% (Jan 2022)	No relevant benchmarking available	No relevant benchmarking available	Red			8.7%			11.1%			10.8%			11.6%			11.6%		11.6%	
28	% of Secondary school (Year 7) surplus places *** (calculated October and January)	Reported Quarterly	5-10%	3.2% (Jan 2022)	No relevant benchmarking available	No relevant benchmarking available	Red			5.6%			5.6%			3.0%			3.2%			3.2%		3.2%	
Young People and Services																									
29	Youth service participation rate	Annual	Not a target measure	N/A	No relevant benchmarking available	No relevant benchmarking available	Not a target measure																		
30	% of CYP (16 - 17 year olds) not in education, employment or training (NEET)	Monthly	Not a target measure	1.0%	2.8% (DfE 2020/21 based on Dec - Feb average)	1.8% (DfE 2020/21 based on Dec - Feb average)	Not a target measure	1.3%	1.4%	1.4%	1.4%	1.6%	1.4%	0.9%	1.3%	1.1%	1.1%	1.0%	1.0%	1.0%	1.0%	0.9%	0.9%	0.9%	1.2%
31	% of CYP (16 - 17 year olds) education, employment or training status 'not known'	Monthly	Not a target measure	0.9%	2.0% (DfE 2020/21 based on Dec - Feb average)	1.6% (DfE 2020/21 based on Dec - Feb average)	Not a target measure	1.2%	1.2%	1.2%	1.2%	1.6%	1.1%	12.8%	2.2%	1.2%	1.1%	0.9%	0.9%	1.2%	1.4%	1.2%	1.5%	1.5%	Not yet published
32	Number of First Time Entrants (FTEs) to the Youth Justice System aged 10-17 (cumulative)	Monthly	50	26	2.8 (rate per 10,000, 2021)	N/A	Green	3	4	8	10	13	14	16	18	20	23	24	28	0	2	4	5	8	10
33	Rate of proven re-offending by young people in the youth justice system - quarterly / annual (annual is 20/21)	Quarterly	Not a target measure	0	34.2% (2019/20 YJB pub)	41.8% (2019/20 YJB pub)	Not a target measure			45.5%			45.5%			40%			52.9%			27.3%			Expected 24 Oct or after
34	Number of families who will be eligible for support under Supporting Families programme.	Quarterly	Not a target measure	325	No relevant benchmarking available	No relevant benchmarking available	Not a target measure			100			175			250			325			50			130
35	% of commissioned services for which quarterly monitoring was completed	Quarterly	100%	100%	No relevant benchmarking available	No relevant benchmarking available	Green			100%			100%			100%			100.0%			100%			100%
36**	% agency social workers (HR data)	Quarterly**	Not a target measure		17.6% DfE Census Sept 2021	22.7% (DfE Census Sept 2020)	Not a target measure			28%			37%			N/A			N/A			N/A			N/A
37**	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) <i>Combines and replaces previous indicators 7 and 15</i>	Monthly**	Not a target measure	13.0	14.36 (DfE Census Sept 2021 - Awaiting validation)	14.6 (DfE Census Sept 2020)	Not a target measure	14	15	13	12	12	13	13	13	13	12	13	13	14	15	14	13	14	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.

Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel - Work Programme 2022/2023



This table sets out the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel work programme for 2022/23; the items listed were agreed by the Panel at its meeting on 22 June 2022. 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 Usaama Kaweesa
Vice-chair: Councillor Chessie Flack

Scrutiny Support

For further information on the work programme of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel please contact: -
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For more information about overview and scrutiny at LB Merton, please visit www.merton.gov.uk/scrutiny

Meeting date: 29 September 2022 (***Deadline for papers:*** 12pm, 20 September 2022)

Item/issue	How	Lead member and/or lead officer	Intended outcomes
Departmental update including update on: safety valve support given to pupils with English as an additional language. Attain Programme	Report to the Panel	Jane McSherry, Director of Children Schools, and Families	Review priority work streams within the Children Schools and Families Department.
SEND Strategy and Written Statement of Action	Report to the Panel	Elizabeth Fitzpatrick, Assistant Director of Education and Early Help	Scrutiny of the current SEND strategy
Performance monitoring	Basket of indicators	Head of Policy, Strategy and Performance	To review the basket of indicators
Work programme 2022/23	Written Report	Stella Akintan, Scrutiny Officer	To review the work programme and agree any changes

Meeting date: 10 November 2022 (**Deadline for papers:** 12pm 01 November 2022)

Item/issue	How	Lead member and/or lead officer	Intended outcomes
Merton Safeguarding Children Partnership Annual Report.	Report to the Panel	Independent Scrutineer Sarah Lawrence and Young Inspector.	Review the work of the Partnership.
Child Healthy Weight Programme.	Report to the Panel	Julia Groom, Consultant in Public Health	To Scrutinise the projects within this programme
Departmental Update	Report to the Panel	Jane McSherry, Director of Children Schools and Families	Review priority work streams within the Children Schools and Families Department.
Performance monitoring	Basket of indicators	Head of Policy, Planning and Performance	To review the Basket of indicators and highlight items of concern
Work programme 2022/23	Written Report	Stella Akintan, Scrutiny Officer	To review the work programme and agree any changes

Meeting date: 11 January 2023 (*Deadline for papers: 12pm 3 January 2022*)

Item/issue	How	Lead member and/or lead officer	Intended outcomes
Budget/business plan scrutiny	Written Report	Councillor Billy Christie, Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Services	To discuss and make recommendations to forward to Cabinet
Departmental update report including Speech and language services Alternative education provision Support for gifted and talented pupils	Written Report	Jane McSherry, Director of Children, Schools and Families	An overview of the key issues within the Children, Schools and Families Department.
Cabinet Member Priorities	Verbal Update	Councillor Sally Kenny, Cabinet Member for Education and Life Long Learning Councillor Brenda Fraser, Cabinet Member for Children's Services	To scrutinise the Cabinet Member's priorities and key areas of concern
Performance monitoring		Maisie Davies, Head of Policy, Planning and Performance	To review the Basket of indicators and highlight items of concern
Work programme 2022/23	Written Report	Stella Akintan, Scrutiny Officer	To review the work programme and agree any changes

Meeting date: 09 February 2022 (**Deadline for papers:** 12pm 31 January 2022)

Item/issue	How	Lead member and/or lead officer	Intended outcomes
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.
Mental health and wellbeing of children and young people	Written Report	Keith Shipman, Head of Education Inclusion	Panel to receive an update on this issue to ensure that services are meeting the needs of residents in Merton
Schools Standards Annual Report	Written Report	Elizabeth Fitzpatrick Assistant Director of Education and Early Help Keith Shipman, Head of Education Inclusion	To scrutinise attainment information
Merton Safeguarding Children Partnership	Written report	Aileen Buckton, Independent Chair of the MSCP	Review the work of the Partnership.
Performance monitoring	Basket of indicators	Maisie Davies, Head of Policy, Planning and Performance	To review the Basket of indicators and highlight items of concern
Topic suggestions for 2022/23	Written Report	Stella Akintan, Scrutiny Officer	To identify topics for the 2023/24 work programme

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

Item/issue	How	Lead member and/or lead officer	Intended outcomes
<p>Departmental Update Report:</p> <p>Care leavers accommodation</p> <p>Foster carer recruitment</p> <p>Support to young children (0-5), who have been identified as having significant special needs. including the Portage services</p>	<p>Report to the Panel</p>	<p>Jane McSherry, Director Children, Schools and Families</p>	<p>An overview of the key issues within the Children, Schools and Families Department.</p>
<p>Special Meeting on Cllr's Corporate Parenting Role - including presentation on Cllr Corporate Parenting responsibilities and Corporate Parenting Annual Report.</p>	<p>Report/Presentation</p>	<p>Jane McSherry, Director Children, Schools and Families</p>	<p>Review Corporate Parenting role and the work undertaken in this area.</p>
<p>Performance monitoring</p>	<p>Basket of indicators</p>	<p>Maisie Davies, Head of Policy, Planning and Performance</p>	<p>To review the Basket of indicators and highlight items of concern</p>