



London Borough of Merton

# **Report and recommendations arising from the scrutiny task group review of the recruitment and retention of teachers in Merton**

## **Overview and Scrutiny Commission**

### **January 2018**

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### **Acknowledgements**

The task group would particularly like to thank the headteachers, newly qualified teachers and council officers who shared their experiences and thoughts with us.

All contributors are listed in Appendices 1 and 2 of this report.

<b>Index</b>	<b>Page</b>
<b>Foreword by the Chair of the Task Group</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Executive summary</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>List of recommendations</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>The national picture</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>The local context</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Findings - recruitment</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Findings – “the Merton offer”</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Findings - housing</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Findings - retention</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Concluding remarks</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>What happens next?</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Appendices</b>	
Appendix 1: list of written evidence	
Appendix 2: list of oral evidence	

### **Chair's foreword**

At the beginning of January, UCAS reported that applications for teacher training courses were down by one third on the previous year, threatening to make an already tight supply situation even worse in the future.

Merton schools are not immune from these pressures, and the decision to undertake a review of teacher recruitment and retention stems from concerns expressed to us by headteachers themselves.

What do we have going for us in Merton? The turnaround in the academic performance of our schools over the past 15 years is perhaps our biggest success story, and one that has been of enormous benefit to the life chances of our children. So we should celebrate that, and make sure newly qualified teachers know they will be gaining exceptional teaching experience if they start their careers in Merton.

As is often the case, we found that we have many benefits to offer teachers coming to Merton, but we don't always publicise them as well as we might. So several of our recommendations are to communicate what's already available more effectively – discounts on leisure facilities and health benefits, for example.

But we cannot ignore the prohibitive cost of housing in balancing the case for and against coming to teach in Merton. We take the view that home ownership is probably out of reach for anyone on a teacher's salary, and focussed our recommendations instead on the rental market, where teachers would be reliable tenants for both private and public landlords (including Merantun Development, Merton's own property company), justifying 3 – 5 year tenancy offers. More controversially, we make the case for subsidising rents in Merton properties where we wish to retain excellent teachers whom we might otherwise lose.

This review has packed in a lot of work in a short timeframe, interviewing witnesses and gathering evidence, in order to complete before council business is suspended for the local elections in May. Deadlines impose a useful discipline, but the burden has fallen squarely on Julia Regan, our hard working scrutiny officer who has turned this review around in record time. On behalf of all the members of the task group, I would like to record our grateful thanks to Julia.

**Councillor Peter Southgate**  
**Chair, Overview and Scrutiny Commission**

## **Executive Summary**

The task group was set up in order to investigate the difficulties that schools in Merton were experiencing with the recruitment and retention of teachers. The task group was also asked to consider how Merton Council and its partners could assist schools with the recruitment and retention of high quality staff.

The report is evidence based, drawing on and reflecting the wide range of written and oral evidence received. In particular, the task group has taken into account the experiences and views of local headteachers and newly qualified teachers. Task group members also spoke to council officers and received information about teacher recruitment and retention nationally.

The task group found that headteachers' experiences of recruitment and retention in Merton are similar to the national picture. Recruitment has been a particular challenge for headteachers, with the main barriers reported to be national issues (pay, status, workload) , lack of candidates and the cost of living in the local area. Retention is a lesser challenge, with a particular pinchpoint when teachers are about three years into their career and at a point when they no longer wish to continue living in short term rented or shared accommodation.

The task group noted that good school performance has a positive impact on both recruitment and retention and were therefore encouraged by evidence of sustained improvement in performance in Merton schools and the high proportion of schools that have been rated "good" or "outstanding" by Ofsted.

The task group found that the council already has appropriate systems and structures in place for teacher recruitment. It has made recommendations aimed at using these more effectively and promoting them more widely to headteachers.

Similarly, there is a range of benefits already on offer to teachers, so the task group has made recommendations to re-invigorate their promotion as well as encouraging governing bodies to organise activities that would promote staff health and wellbeing.

The cost of local accommodation was found to be a key factor affecting both recruitment and retention. The task group has made a number of recommendations that are intended to improve teachers' experience of the private rented sector, including the proposed introduction of an interest free loan to assist teachers with payment of rent deposits.

The task group's recommendations run throughout the report and are listed in full overleaf.

## List of task group's recommendations

	Responsible decision making body
<b>Recommendation 1</b> (paragraph 25)	
We recommend that Cabinet should confirm that it is committed to continuing to celebrate the successes of Merton's schools in order to attract teachers of the highest quality and to promote local schools as the first preference for parents seeking an excellent education for their children.	Cabinet
<b>Recommendation 2</b> (paragraph 30)	
We recommend that the School Effectiveness Partnership Board should consider a more proactive and personalised approach to match applicants in the Eteach talent pool with specific school vacancies in order to increase its effectiveness.	School Effectiveness Partnership Board
<b>Recommendation 3</b> (paragraph 37)	
We recommend that, once the government has released details, the School Effectiveness Partnership Board should consider if the teacher apprenticeship scheme could be implemented in Merton.	School Effectiveness Partnership Board
<b>Recommendation 4</b> (paragraph 55)	
We recommend that the School Effectiveness Partnership Board should promote a wide range of recruitment routes to assist headteachers with advertising vacancies in their schools.	School Effectiveness Partnership Board
<b>Recommendation 5</b> (paragraph 66)	
We recommend that the provision of a flu vaccine to school staff should be included in a service level agreement so that headteachers can assess the costs and benefits of taking up this service.	Cabinet
<b>Recommendation 6</b> (paragraph 69)	
We recommend that Cabinet should encourage school governing bodies to organise activities in their school that would promote the general health and wellbeing of school staff. The council's Public Health team would be able to provide advice to governing bodies if required.	Cabinet

<b>Recommendation 7</b> (paragraph 72)	
We recommend that Cabinet publicise to school staff and explain how to take up the existing council staff discount on annual memberships at Canons Leisure Centre, Morden Park Pools and Wimbledon Leisure Centre.	Cabinet
<b>Recommendation 8</b> (paragraph 75)	
We recommend that all the benefits that are currently available to teachers and other school staff should be publicised to all school staff and clearly documented on all relevant webpages. This should include the interest free season ticket loan, purchase of a bicycle through the Cycle to Work Scheme (salary sacrifice) and nursery/childcare vouchers.	Cabinet
<b>Recommendation 9</b> (paragraph 82)	
We recommend that Cabinet should ask the Head of Housing Needs and Strategy to write to local housing associations to ask if they have any “hard to let” properties that could be made available to teachers at an affordable rent (including short term assured tenancies).	Cabinet
<b>Recommendation 10</b> (paragraph 84)	
We further recommend that Cabinet consider whether the 3-5 year private rental tenancies that will be available through the Local Authority Property Company from 2019/20 could be offered to teachers in the first instance, thus offering teachers an element of financial security.	Cabinet
<b>Recommendation 11</b> (paragraph 87)	
We recommend that Cabinet should explore the business case for supporting the retention of excellent teachers in the borough by offering a small number of private rented properties through the Local Authority Property Company to such teachers at a reduced rent.	Cabinet
<b>Recommendation 12</b> (paragraph 89)	
We recommend that Cabinet should ask the Head of Housing Needs and Strategy to approach the Landlords Forum with a “good tenant offer” whereby the council would guarantee a supply of teachers as private tenants for a fixed number of years in return for a reduced rent.	Cabinet
<b>Recommendation 13</b> (paragraph 92)	
We recommend that Cabinet should ask the Head of Housing Needs and Strategy to provide school staff with a list of shared ownership schemes that might be suitable for teachers, whilst not recommending any scheme in particular.	Cabinet

<b>Recommendation 14</b> (paragraph 96)	
We recommend that Cabinet consider setting up a rent deposit scheme that would operate in a similar way to the existing season ticket loan. This would provide teachers with an interest free loan that would be paid back to the council in a set number of instalments.	Cabinet
<b>Recommendation 15</b> (paragraph 99)	
We recommend that the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel should receive a briefing on the Mayor of London's London Living Rent initiative in order to identify potential benefits for Merton residents	Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel
<b>Recommendation 16</b> (paragraph 103)	
We recommend that the School Effectiveness Partnership Board should consider how best to build on the effective programme of continuous professional development that is already being delivered. The Board could consider the role of local colleges and universities in further enhancing the options available, including through use of the Apprenticeship Levy.	School Effectiveness Partnership Board



## **Report of the Scrutiny Task Group Review of the Recruitment and Retention of Teachers in Merton**

### **Introduction**

#### *Purpose*

1. This issue was initially drawn to the attention of the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel by the headteacher of the Priory School. The headteacher highlighted the difficulties that schools in Merton were experiencing with the recruitment and retention of teachers in particular but also other members of staff. She said that although there was evidence that this was not unique to Merton, she believed that there were measures that could be taken at a local level that would alleviate the situation.
2. The Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel, mindful that this is a cross-cutting issue, particularly in relation to housing supply, referred the matter to the Overview and Scrutiny Commission.
3. The Commission, mindful of the relatively short timescale for this review, agreed to establish a task group with very focussed terms of reference:
  - To identify the issues that impact on the recruitment and retention of staff in Merton's schools;
  - To consider how Merton Council and its partners can assist schools with the recruitment and retention of high quality staff in Merton's schools.

#### *What the task group did*

4. The task group has had four formal meetings plus two discussions with primary and secondary school headteachers. It has received a presentation on the national picture and the local context plus a number of background policy documents.
5. The task group sent a questionnaire to headteachers about their experiences of recruitment and retention. Newly qualified teachers were surveyed to find out what had attracted them to Merton and what factors would influence whether they stayed or moved elsewhere in future. The task group also wrote to local teaching unions inviting them to submit their views.
6. Appendix 1 lists the written evidence received by the task group and Appendix 2 contains a list of witnesses at each meeting.
7. This report sets out the task group's findings, conclusions and recommendations. The task group's recommendations run throughout the report and are set out in full in the executive summary at the front of this document.

## The national picture

8. The State of Education Survey Report, 2016, found that 62% of headteachers nationally (76% for secondary schools) reported that recruitment and retention of teaching staff had been a difficult area to manage over the previous 12 months. The Survey found that recruitment and retention of teachers was reported to be the second highest concern for the next 12 months, after budget pressures.
9. The Survey found that 56% of heads in London schools stated they were facing a shortage of teachers compared to 37% nationally. Again the percentage was higher for secondary schools than for primary.
10. Headteachers reported that the biggest challenge they faced when recruiting teachers is the quality of applications (40%), followed by the low number of applications (21%). The demographics of the local area was less of a challenge (7%) as was school location (5%).
11. The main reason given for teachers leaving was to take up a job at another school. Workload pressures and retirement were also significant reasons for leaving. Relocation was cited as a factor by 31% of secondary heads and 24% primary heads; family reasons were cited by 7% secondary heads and 22% primary heads.
12. Governing bodies reported that they had taken a variety of steps to retain staff, including development opportunities, flexible working, non-monetary rewards or incentives and reduced paperwork or teaching hours.
13. The House of Commons Education Select Committee published a review report in February 2017 on the recruitment and retention of teachers. The Select Committee considered supply-side factors as well as workload and professional development. They called for evidence based policies to improve the supply and retention of high quality teachers and recommended that school leaders should carry out exit interviews to better understand staff turnover.
14. The Select Committee found that the government has failed to meet its recruitment targets and recommended that, whilst continuing to seek to recruit sufficient new teachers, the government should also place more emphasis on improving teacher retention as a cost effective way of addressing supply as well as strengthening the pool of teachers to draw on for leadership positions. A number of recommendations were aimed at improving continuous professional development. The review also urged the government and Ofsted to recognise their role in increasing workload, which has been cited as a factor for teachers leaving the profession.

## The local context

15. Merton primary and secondary headteachers reported to us that recruitment had been a difficult area to manage over the past 12 months. Retention was reported as slightly less difficult to manage than recruitment, particularly in primary schools
16. Headteachers reported that the key challenges and barriers to recruitment include national issues (pay, status, workload), lack of candidates and the cost of living in local area. Our discussion with secondary headteachers revealed the difficulties they experience in competing with Academy chains that can offer an enhanced salary and benefits package, new buildings, sixth forms and professional development programmes.
17. We noted that Merton schools have an advantage over neighbouring outer London boroughs of being able to pay the inner London weighting allowance (worth £2,000) to teachers.
18. The cost of accommodation was reported to be a key barrier for retention in both primary and secondary schools. Workload, salary and burnout were also cited as factors by primary heads. Secondary heads cited competition/poaching from other schools and the demands of the role.
19. We found that the pinch points for retention in both primary and secondary schools occur when teachers reach a point in their lives at which they wish to have more permanent accommodation arrangements and/or start a family. Often this will result in teachers moving away from the borough.
20. We heard that good school performance has a positive impact on teacher recruitment and retention. Merton, in having a high proportion of schools rated “good” or “outstanding” by Ofsted, therefore should have an advantage in being able to attract good teachers to work in the borough. Conversely, when a school is rated as “requiring improvement”, this can be destabilising for the school and lead to a high turnover of staff.
21. We were also pleased to hear that Merton has benefitted from the retention of a number of excellent headteachers for many years.
22. The council’s Children Schools and Families Department has put in place a number of mechanisms to support school effectiveness and these also have an impact on recruitment and retention. Strategic oversight of recruitment to maintained schools in Merton is provided by the School Effectiveness Partnership Board. The Board’s predecessor commissioned the production of a website to encourage teachers to work in Merton. The Board is currently reviewing the content of the

website and focussing on ways to support schools with recruitment and retention.

23. We were delighted to hear that recent figures released by the Department for Education showed that Merton was joint top in the country (with Brent) for progress towards GCSE, made between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4 (Progress 8). We hope that this success will encourage teachers to work in Merton and parents to send their children to Merton schools.
24. We were pleased to hear that the Department for Education Progress 8 study findings have already been publicised and that the good reputation of schools has resulted in an increase in the number of parents who are choosing a Merton school as the first preference for their child.
25. **We recommend that Cabinet should confirm that it is committed to continuing to celebrate the successes of Merton's schools in order to attract teachers of the highest quality and to promote local schools as the first preference for parents seeking an excellent education for their children. (recommendation 1)**

## Task Group's Findings - Recruitment

### Recruitment routes and methods

26. A number of different recruitment routes are available to schools, as set out in the paragraphs below. Our discussion with headteachers revealed that they will often pursue several routes either simultaneously or consecutively in order to maximise the number and quality of applicants. Primary and secondary heads reported difficulties in attracting sufficient high quality applicants.
27. Eteach website  
Eteach works with over 7,500 schools and colleges and last year advertised more than 65,000 jobs to its 1.5 million registered candidates, who made 5 million job searches and 1 million site visits each month.
28. Merton has a service level agreement with Eteach. Each school that is registered with Eteach has a microsite on which its vacancies are advertised together with information about the school. Eteach also provides an NQT "talent pool" on which NQTs can log their CVs and that can be accessed by schools that are registered with Eteach
29. The council's bespoke website has an automatic link to direct applicants to the Eteach site:  
Council website <http://www.mertonteacherrecruitment.org.uk/>  
  
E teach home page <http://www.eteachgroup.com>  
  
Eteach microsite  
<https://www.eteach.com/microsite/contentpage.aspx?empno=3651&clusterid=735&pagetype=-10> (this is the Merton page that is accessed through link from the Merton website)
30. We understand that the School Effectiveness Partnership Board might have the scope to encourage a more proactive and personalised approach to be taken in matching applicants in the Eteach talent pool with specific school vacancies. We would like to encourage the Board to consider this and other measures that could be taken to increase the effectiveness of schools' use of Eteach.
31. **We therefore recommend that the School Effectiveness Partnership Board should consider a more proactive and personalised approach to match applicants in the Eteach talent pool with specific school vacancies in order to increase its effectiveness. (recommendation 2)**
32. Teach Wimbledon
33. Teach Wimbledon is a borough-wide consortium of 15 schools working in conjunction with the council and with Roehampton University to provide a direct route into teaching. It is open to applicants who have a 2:1 degree. Those who are successful at interview are allocated a host

school in which they work whilst also attending Roehampton University to study for a PGCE. Last year all 10 graduates from Teach Wimbledon subsequently got jobs in Merton schools (2 secondary and 8 primary).

34. SCITT
35. Another route in to teaching is school centred initial teacher training (SCITT) which has its own accreditation leading to a PGCE qualification – currently offered at Aragon Primary School. Open to all schools in the borough.
36. Apprenticeships
37. We understand that the new apprenticeship scheme could provide a route for newly qualified teachers but, to date, the scheme has been rather confusing, not well advertised and has a short timescale that has limited take-up. At present there are only two providers. The scheme has the potential to be very attractive to teachers as participants would be paid whilst studying and training.
38. **We recommend that, once the government has released details, the School Effectiveness Partnership Board should consider if the teacher apprenticeship scheme could be implemented in Merton.. (recommendation 3)**
39. Recruitment Agencies
40. Agencies actively recruit trainee teachers in colleges and encourage them to apply for teaching positions through the agency rather than direct to schools. The advantage to the applicant is that they only have to fill in one form in total rather than one per school.
41. Schools that don't recruit through an agency are therefore in competition with the agency to find the best teachers. Schools that do use an agency face considerable financial costs through the fee charged by the agency. We also heard that there is a lack of support from the agency post-placement.
42. We heard that these specialist recruitment agencies are a relatively new phenomenon and are having a particular impact on recruitment to secondary schools. The secondary headteachers told us that they would like local universities to encourage students to apply direct to schools and not through recruitment agencies.
43. We discussed whether it would be possible for Merton to set up its own recruitment agency with a single application form to encourage teachers to apply to Merton schools. On balance, our view is that a more effective use of ETeach as recommended above would be more cost effective for schools than contributing to the establishment and operation of a Merton recruitment agency.

44. Recruitment fairs
45. These are hosted by local universities and are a useful way to identify strong candidates and encourage them to apply for NQT jobs in Merton schools. We were advised that headteacher attendance at these fairs is particularly helpful, though we acknowledge that this requires a considerable time commitment from heads. We discussed whether it might be helpful for Merton to host a recruitment fair locally (as Croydon has done). This would have the advantage of enabling more headteachers to attend but the disadvantage that students might be less likely to travel to attend in Merton.
46. We were advised that recruitment agencies are increasingly advertising online and through social media as well as attending recruitment fairs.
47. Teaching placements and NQTs
48. Successful recruitment of excellent teachers is facilitated through the identification of promising teaching graduates as early as possible in the “supply chain”, particularly through well supported teaching placements so that they are more likely to subsequently apply for a job in a Merton school.
49. Merton schools have established good links with local colleges and universities, particularly Roehampton University. This has led to trainee teachers being sent on placements and schools have been able to encourage good ones to apply for permanent positions as newly qualified teachers (NQTs).
50. Merton generally employs around 100 NQTs each year. We emailed the current NQTs to find out what had attracted them to apply for a job in Merton and what would be likely to encourage them to stay.
51. Of the 35 NQTs who responded to our survey, 8 said that their PCGE placement in a Merton school had been a significant factor in choosing to stay in Merton. They had enjoyed the placement and wished to stay either in the same school or another school in Merton.
52. A number of the NQTs already lived in Merton or nearby and so were attracted by the convenience of the journey to work – views differed on what “nearby” constitutes, for some it was up to an hour’s journey and for others it was living in the vicinity of the school. Some of the NQTs cited the quality of the schools as a reason for working in Merton.

The council’s role in supporting recruitment of teachers

53. We were advised that the council already has appropriate systems and structures in place for teacher recruitment but there is scope to use these more effectively through addressing co-ordination and capacity issues. The School Effectiveness Partnership Board would be the most

appropriate way to progress this, hence recommendations 1 and 2 in the preceding sections.

54. We were told by headteachers that the “teaching in Merton” webpages jobs section of the council’s website was hard to find. However, the council’s website has been recently re-designed and when we looked at it we found that the dedicated webpage is now only two clicks from the council’s homepage, which makes it easy for potential applicants to find all the relevant information.
55. From our discussion with primary headteachers it was clear that some headteachers were not aware of all the potential recruitment routes that they could draw on. We understand that the School Effectiveness Partnership Board is compiling this information.
56. **We recommend that the School Effectiveness Partnership Board should promote a wide range of recruitment routes to assist headteachers with advertising vacancies in their schools. (recommendation 4)**



## Task Group Findings – the Merton Offer

57. Our discussions with headteachers found that they would appreciate some support from the council in promoting the benefits of working in Merton and providing employee benefits such as discounts in local shops, gyms and access to mental and physical wellbeing initiatives. Their view was that such an offer would help to attract newly qualified teachers to work in Merton.
58. We were informed by the Head of HR that a “Merton Offer” already exists that brings together a number of benefits available to Merton officers that are also available to teachers. These are set out below. We welcome these and have made recommendations to enhance some aspects of the offer as well as a recommendation to publicise the offer to existing school staff and potential applicants.
59. Kaarp Employee Discount Scheme
60. This provides Merton officers and school staff with discounts for a wide range of products and services (holidays, entertainment, health and fitness, motoring, travel, finance...).
61. Employee Assistance Programme
62. Merton’s Employee Assistance Programme enables staff to speak to someone in confidence about work or personal matters. Information sheets are available on a wide range of subjects that might impact on health or wellbeing at home or at work.
63. The service is available to staff in the 40 schools who have purchased the relevant service level agreement at a cost of around £4.50 per employee.
64. Flu vaccine
65. Frontline staff, including health and social care employees, are eligible for a free flu vaccine as part of the council’s contract with its occupational health provider.
66. Schools could purchase this service at a cost of around £7.50 per employee, thereby potentially reducing the level of sickness and making a saving on the cost of supply cover.
67. **We recommend that the provision of a flu vaccine to school staff should be included in a service level agreement so that headteachers can assess the costs and benefits of taking up this service. (recommendation 5)**
68. Merton Health Day
69. A twice yearly event for staff in the Civic Centre providing a mini health check and information from a wide range of health and wellbeing practitioners. These are well attended by staff and feedback has been very positive. We recognise the logistical constraints but would like to

see similar opportunities provided to staff in schools – these could be organised by governing bodies to address the particular needs and circumstances of staff within that school.

**70. We recommend that Cabinet should encourage school governing bodies to organise activities in their school that would promote the general health and wellbeing of school staff. The council's Public Health team would be able to provide advice to governing bodies if required. (recommendation 6)**

71. Leisure centres

72. Merton Council staff receive a discount on annual memberships at Canons Leisure Centre, Morden Park Pools and Wimbledon Leisure Centre. This discount is already available to staff working in Merton schools. However, feedback from headteachers indicates that school staff may not be aware of their eligibility for this discount.

**73. We recommend that Cabinet publicise to school staff and explain how to take up the existing council staff discount on annual memberships at Canons Leisure Centre, Morden Park Pools and Wimbledon Leisure Centre. (recommendation 7)**

74. Other

75. Teachers already have access to an interest free season ticket loan, purchase of a bicycle through the Cycle to Work Scheme (salary sacrifice) and nursery/childcare vouchers.

**76. We recommend that all the benefits that are currently available to teachers and other school staff should be publicised to all school staff and clearly documented on all relevant webpages. This should include the interest free season ticket loan, purchase of a bicycle through the Cycle to Work Scheme (salary sacrifice) and nursery/childcare vouchers. (recommendation 8)**

## Task Group Findings - Housing

77. Primary and secondary headteachers regard the cost of local accommodation as a key barrier to recruitment and retention. They have suggested that the council could help by:

- Providing support with finding accommodation for teachers at the start of their careers
- seeking affordable housing options for teachers
- promoting the benefits of working in Merton

78. During our discussion with headteachers, they stressed that newly qualified teachers typically houseshare for the first two to three years and then seek to move on to their own place. Headteachers asked whether it would be possible to offer a shared ownership scheme (or similar) to teachers who have worked in Merton for a minimum of three years in order to provide an incentive to stay.

79. When we asked the newly qualified teachers (NQTs) about what factors would determine whether they stayed in Merton, the cost of housing was by far the most significant factor for almost every respondent:

*“very hard to rent in Merton due to cost”*

*“buying a house is a bit of a far off fantasy that may or may not happen”*

80. Our discussion with the Head of Housing Needs and Strategy and the Head of Future Merton plus information about house prices locally have made it clear that purchasing property on the open market is out of the reach of most teachers working in Merton and this is particularly the case for those at the start of their careers.

81. We have therefore focussed our thoughts on measures that could be taken to improve teachers’ experience of the private rented sector. We understand that rental property is still relatively affordable in Merton compared to other parts of London but it is subject to greater demand than ever before.

82. We do recognise that there are other groups of key workers and vulnerable groups in Merton who would also benefit from access to truly affordable housing. These groups were not included in the remit of this task group review and we have therefore confined our recommendations to teachers. In responding to our recommendations, Cabinet will no doubt bear these competing demands in mind.

**83. We recommend that Cabinet should ask the Head of Housing Needs and Strategy to write to local housing associations to ask if they have any “hard to let” properties that could be made available to teachers at an affordable rent (including short term assured tenancies). (recommendation 9)**

84. We heard that the Local Authority Property Company had been established to develop new purpose built properties for private rent that would provide an income stream for the council. A proportion of these would be affordable and would be managed by a housing association.
- 85. We further recommend that Cabinet consider whether the 3-5 year private rental tenancies that will be available through the Local Authority Property Company from 2019/20 could be offered to teachers in the first instance, thus offering teachers an element of financial security. (recommendation 10)**
86. We were informed that the Local Authority Property Company (LAPC) is a private company so would not be able to offer a discounted rent to teachers. The Company's business plan and decision making sits with the LAPC board and is not part of the council's usual decision making processes. If the council were to take a decision to offer discounted rents then profitability of the LAPC and income to the council would be reduced. If the Council sought to subsidise housing for teachers via the LAPC, Merton Council would have to cover the cost differential, not the LAPC.
87. We are not persuaded that it would be impossible for the council to provide discounted rent to teachers, although we do accept that this would be a political decision for Cabinet to consider whilst balancing the needs of other groups of key workers and the impact that a discounted rent would have on the revenue stream that would be generated for the council.
- 88. We therefore recommend that Cabinet should explore the business case for supporting the retention of excellent teachers in the borough by offering a small number of private rented properties through the Local Authority Property Company to such teachers at a reduced rent. (recommendation 11)**
89. We discussed the feasibility of brokering a deal with private landlords to encourage them to rent to teachers at a reduced rent in return for a guarantee from the council that they would have a supply of teacher tenants for a fixed number of years, thus ensuring good tenants, a fixed income from the properties and no voids.
- 90. We recommend that Cabinet should ask the Head of Housing Needs and Strategy to approach the Landlords Forum with a "good tenant offer" whereby the council would guarantee a supply of teachers as private tenants for a fixed number of years in return for a reduced rent. (recommendation 12)**
91. We also discussed the potential for teachers to take advantage of shared ownership schemes. One such option is Share to Buy which is

the official portal of FIRST STEPS, the Mayor of London's affordable home ownership scheme :

<https://www.shareto-buy.com>

92. Our view is that shared ownership can be an expensive option. However, we don't wish to preclude teachers from making informed choices and therefore recommend that information about such schemes is made available to them.
93. **We recommend that Cabinet should ask the Head of Housing Needs and Strategy to provide school staff with a list of shared ownership schemes that might be suitable for teachers, whilst not recommending any scheme in particular. (recommendation 13)**
94. We considered whether it might be feasible to build accommodation for teachers on school land, or to use school caretaker homes that were surplus to requirements. There are many obstacles to proceeding along these lines, not least safeguarding issues as well as regulations regarding changing the use of school playing fields. Also, if the housing was on council land it would be subject to right to buy and the council's other housing needs priorities and therefore not necessarily available for teachers. Any further consideration would require detailed work over a period of time.
95. Finally, we wondered about the feasibility of issuing a council-backed bond as an investment vehicle for local residents that could be used to provide loans for mortgage deposit for teachers who have worked for Merton for a certain number of years and who undertake to remain for a further given number of years.
96. The Director of Corporate Services suggested that it may be possible to set up a loan scheme for teachers who need financial support to meet the costs of a private rental deposit. This scheme could operate rather like the season ticket loan that is already available to council staff – this provides an interest free loan that is then repaid in ten equal instalments.
97. **We recommend that Cabinet consider setting up a rent deposit scheme that would operate in a similar way to the existing season ticket loan. This would provide teachers with an interest free loan that would be paid back to the council in a set number of instalments. (recommendation 14)**
98. The Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Environment and Housing drew our attention to the Mayor of London's work to develop a London Living Rent, badged as a new type of affordable housing for middle-income Londoners. The aim is to use monies from the Affordable Homes Funding to build housing that will be offered at a lower than market rate rent for tenancies of a minimum of three years. Tenants will be

supported to build up savings to buy a home either through shared ownership or outright purchase.

- 99. We recommend that the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel should receive a briefing on the Mayor of London's London Living Rent initiative in order to identify potential benefits for Merton residents (recommendation 15)**

## **Task Group's Findings - Retention**

### Training and development

100. The newly qualified teachers who responded to our questionnaire overwhelmingly cited housing as the most important factor in their decision to leave or stay in Merton schools. Other factors were pay and promotion opportunities as well as opportunities for continuous professional development
101. We heard that Merton provides a lot of continued professional development opportunities for teachers, including school based, Merton-specific tailored training and through partnership arrangements with neighbouring boroughs (South London School Effectiveness Partnership) to provide training as well as offering free network meetings.
102. One constraint is that it is increasingly difficult for headteachers to release teachers from school to attend courses. Also, schools have limited funds for continued professional development. There is potential to augment budget through bids for specific funding for training – for example, some of the primary school clusters have employed someone to develop bids for the delivery of specific projects or curriculum activity. Similarly, the Mitcham Town primary school cluster has a longstanding offer for teachers to undertake a locally delivered MA programme in conjunction with a local university.
- 103. We recommend that the School Effectiveness Partnership Board should consider how best to build on the effective programme of continuous professional development that is already being delivered. The Board could consider the role of local colleges and universities in further enhancing the options available, including through use of the Apprenticeship Levy. (recommendation 16)**

### Succession planning

104. Responses from primary headteachers to our questionnaire indicated that a strategic approach to succession planning would be helpful in regard to the retention of excellent teachers. A particular area on which headteachers would like to see a focus is on mentoring and training for those who have completed the year following the NQT year.
105. We were assured that, further to the conclusion of the scrutiny task group that reviewed succession planning, the recommendations had been actively taken forward through a number of initiatives including a training programme for those aspiring to become headteachers (taken up by 42 deputy headteachers), targeted training for women and future leaders from black and minority ethnic backgrounds as well as specific discussions with individual schools.

## Concluding remarks

106. We are very grateful that so many headteachers and newly qualified teachers took the time to write and/or speak to us. Hearing their experiences and views first hand has been invaluable in helping us to understand the challenges and barriers that they face and to identify measures that may help to address these.
107. We found that good school performance has a positive impact on both recruitment and retention and were therefore encouraged by evidence of sustained improvement in performance in Merton schools and the high proportion of schools that have been rated “good” or “outstanding” by Ofsted. We have recommended that Cabinet continue to celebrate these successes so that this will encourage high quality teachers to apply to work in Merton schools.
108. We found that recruitment has been a particular challenge for headteachers, with the main barriers reported to be national issues (pay, status, workload), lack of candidates and the cost of living in the local area. Retention is a lesser challenge, with a particular pinchpoint when teachers are about three years into their career and at a point when they no longer wish to continue living in short term rented or shared housing.
109. We found that the council already has appropriate systems and structures in place for teacher recruitment. However there is scope for using these more effectively and promoting them more widely to headteachers so that they are fully aware of all available recruitment routes. We have made recommendations to assist with this.
110. We were pleased to find that there is already a wide range of benefits on offer to teachers and have made recommendations to assist with the promotion of these to candidates, teachers and headteachers. We were impressed by information given to us regarding staff health days held in the Civic Centre and have therefore made a recommendation to encourage governing bodies to organise activities that would promote their staff health and wellbeing.
111. We were struck by the impact that the cost of housing locally has on the recruitment and retention of teachers. We have made a number of recommendations that are intended to improve teachers’ experience of the private rented sector, including the proposed introduction of an interest free loan to assist teachers with payment of rent deposits.
112. We are well aware that there are many other groups of key workers and vulnerable groups in Merton who are similarly affected. However, as these groups were not included in our remit, we have confined our recommendations to teachers. We understand that the council’s Cabinet will need to bear these competing demands, wider responsibilities and financial pressures in mind when considering their response to our recommendations.



### **What happens next?**

113. This task group was established by the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Commission and so this report will be presented to its meeting on 25 January 2018 for the Commission's approval.
114. The Commission will then send the report to the Council's Cabinet on 19 February 2018 for initial discussion.
115. Once Cabinet has received the task group report, it will be asked to provide a formal response to the Commission within two months.
116. The Cabinet will be asked to respond to each of the task group's recommendations, setting out whether the recommendation is accepted and how and when it will be implemented. If the Cabinet is unable to support and implement some of the recommendations, then it is expected that clearly stated reasons will be provided for each.
117. The lead Cabinet Member (or officer to whom this work is delegated) should ensure that other organisations to whom recommendations have been directed are contacted and that their response to those recommendations is included in the report.
118. A further report will be sought by the Commission six months after the Cabinet response has been received, giving an update on progress with implementation of the recommendations.

## **Appendices**

### **Appendix 1: written evidence**

Recruitment and retention of teachers – the national picture – powerpoint presentation, Jane McSherry, Assistant Director of Education, 23 October 2017

Recruitment and retention of teachers, House of Commons Education Committee, Fifth Report of Session 2016-17

State of Education Survey Report 2016

Questionnaires received from 6 primary headteachers and 3 secondary headteachers in Merton

Questionnaires received from 35 newly qualified teachers (NQTs) working in Merton schools

### **Appendix 2: list of oral evidence**

Jane McSherry, Assistant Director of Education, 23 October, 13 November, 11 December 2017 and 4 January 2018

Ewan Morrison, School Improvement Adviser – Professional Development, 13 November 2017

Kim Brown, Head of Organisational Development and HR Strategy, 1 December 2017

Steve Langley, Head of Housing Needs and Strategy, 11 December 2017

Paul McGarry, Head of Future Merton, 11 December 2017

Yvette Stanley, Director of Children Schools and Families, 4 January 2018

Councillor Caroline Cooper-Marbiah, Cabinet Member for Education, 4 January 2018

Caroline Holland, Director of Corporate Services, 4 January 2018

Councillor Martin Whelton, Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Environment and Housing, 4 January 2018

Discussion with secondary school headteachers, Chaucer Centre, 21 November 2017, Councillors Agatha Akyigyina and Joan Henry

Discussion with primary school headteachers, Chaucer Centre, 28 November 2017, Councillors Agatha Akyigyina, Joan Henry and Peter Southgate