



# **Annual Corporate Parenting Report 2016-2017**

## **London Borough of Merton**

### **Corporate Parenting Board December 2017**

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## Executive Summary

We are committed to ensuring all our looked after children and young people are given every opportunity to experience a safe, healthy and happy life in which they achieve their potential. We will make every effort to ensure they are able to grow up in a stable and supportive environment with a sense of belonging. We will make available the widest range of placements in order to support the individual needs of our looked after children and where they can feel cared for and cared about.

Our role as corporate parents is significant and far reaching and we will exercise this with commitment and accountability across all areas of the council and partnership. Through this we will consistently ensure all our young people reach their potential, develop into independent, self-confident adults and enjoy their place in society.

As a Corporate Parenting Panel we need to understand what we are doing well, what our areas of challenge are and the actions that we will take to address these challenges. This report presents activity and performance data from 2016-17 and identifies the priorities for the year ahead.

- We continue to have a LAC population that has a high proportion of adolescent young people. The report sets out that whilst a high number of these are unaccompanied asylum seeking young people, factors such as housing and anti-social behaviour are also impacting.
- The improvement planning in place in our 14+ Team has seen a significant impact in outcomes for our care leavers in terms of ETE and housing. We are also in touch with a greater number of care leavers and are able to evidence the benefits of relationship based practice.
- Our fostering recruitment campaign has been successful, but we are still facing a challenge to recruit carers for our adolescent cohort.
- We have seen an improvement in children's participation in their reviews and the IRO Team is now working to embed a child centred model for LAC Reviews.
- Placement stability has seen significant improvement over the last year, and the development of the LAC Permanence Team has meant that our stable LAC now have the attention of a focused team who are working hard to develop relationships with children, carers and parents.
- Adoption performance continues to be a strength in terms of clear planning and management oversight of cases. As a result of embedded processes adoption placements are achieved in a timely manner.
- The CSC CAMH Team is now well embedded in the service and offering an excellent service to children, young people, carers and practitioners
- Good progress has been made to ensure that the voice of the child in care is heard, with the development of the LAC and Care Leaver Pledge, the Care Leavers Survey.

## Priorities 2017-2018

Based on the analysis in this annual report and our broader understanding of our looked after children and care leavers we have identified the following actions as our priorities for the year ahead;

Action	Impact
Develop the LAC and Care Leavers Strategies for 2018-21	<p>To continue to secure timely permanence for children who become looked after.</p> <p>Where children need to remain looked after, their emotional well being will be a priority.</p> <p>To narrow the gap in outcomes between looked after and other children by supporting them with educational support, through the virtual school, to enable the children and young people to reach their full potential academically.</p> <p>High quality care, emotional support and relationships will be provided to Looked After Children and Care Leavers to allow them to feel in control of their lives and be able to overcome the barriers they may face, including learning independent and life skills to assist with their transition to leaving care and young adulthood.</p> <p>Leaving Care Services for Care Leavers are developed and resourced up to the age of 25.</p>
Enhancement of the Local Offer for Care Leavers	Young People are provided with local information that assist them in preparing for adulthood and independent living
Reinvigoration of Children in Care Council	<p>To provide a voice for children in care from specific age groups, including children with SEN and disabilities and children placed out of borough.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• under 11s;</li> <li>• 11 to 16;</li> <li>• 16 plus</li> <li>• Care Leavers</li> </ul>

	<p>Looked After Children and Care Leavers will monitor or implement the Pledge to bring together service users and providers, to influence decisions about services for children in care and to develop skills of the children and young people involved.</p>
<p>For children whose care plan is long term foster care, priority will be given to matching children with in house foster carers.</p>	<p>In House foster carers provide high quality placements that meet the assessed needs of children placed with them, in line with the Care Plan.</p> <p>Supervising Social Workers monitor the work of foster carers and provide appropriate and timely support and supervision.</p> <p>The Permanence team will work closely with the child, birth family and foster family throughout the child's journey through foster care.</p>

## **1. Context**

- 1.1 This report sets out an annual update on the corporate parenting arrangements in Merton: focusing on activity and performance during 2016-17. It advises members on key legislation and guidance alongside key performance indicators for Looked after Children and Care Leavers.

## **2. The Legal Framework**

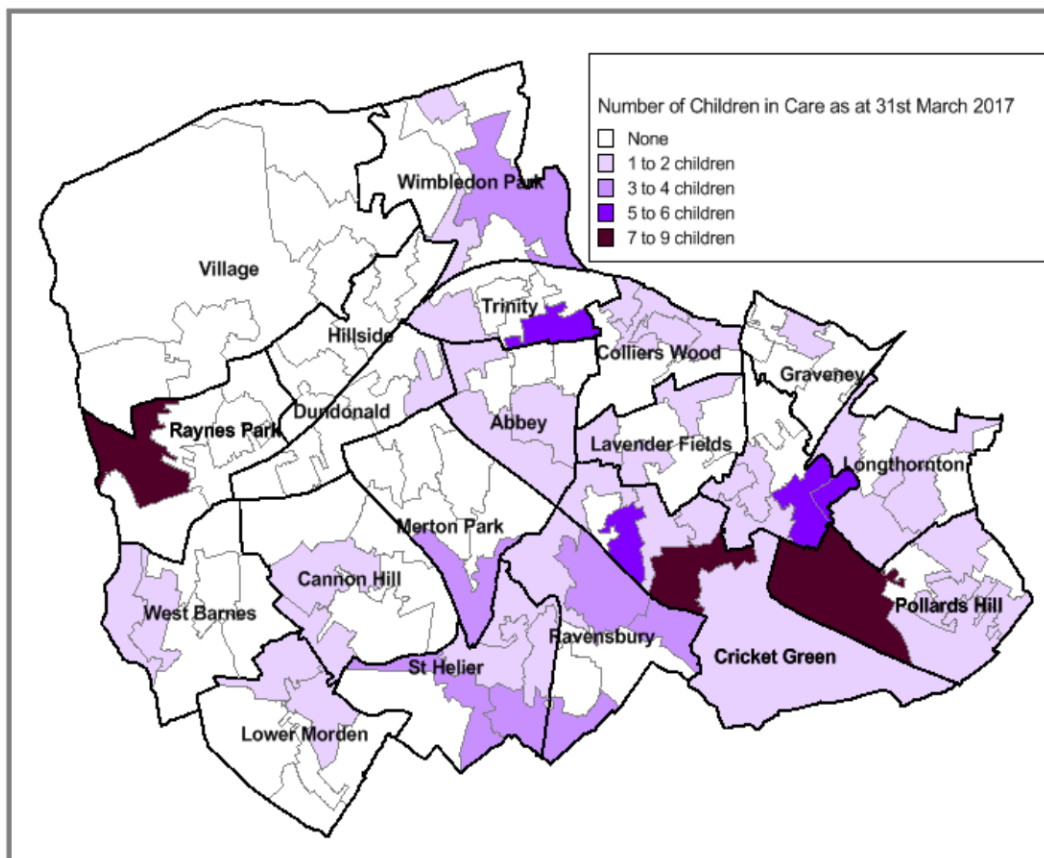
- 2.1 The Children Act 1989 and the Leaving Care Act 2000 place clear statutory duties upon the Council to protect children from suffering significant harm and to provide continued financial and transition support to care leavers aged up to 21 (or 25 if in full time education). Underpinning corporate parenting is a wide range of national policies, guidance, regulations and legislation, which are subject to change by High Court rulings, such as the Southwark ruling in 2009.
- 2.2 The revised care planning regulations and guidance, including The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 2: Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Volume 3: Planning Transition to Adulthood for Care Leavers and the Statutory Guidance on Securing Sufficient Accommodation for Looked After Children March 2010, place increased emphasis on effective care planning with a focus on the child, and are designed to improve the quality and consistency of care planning, placement and case review for looked after children. They also aim to improve the care and support provided to care leavers.
- 2.3 In 2014 the Children and Families Act 2014 was introduced. The Act takes forward a commitment to improve services for vulnerable children. It reforms the systems for adoption, Looked after Children, family justice and special educational needs.
- 2.4 The Volume 3: Planning Transition to Adulthood for Care Leavers (Revised May 2013) sets out expectations for local authorities in respect of planning and arranging suitable accommodation for the transition to independent living, including 'accommodation with former foster carers (Staying Put arrangements)'. The Staying Put legislation places a legal duty on local authorities to support every care leaver who wants to stay with their foster carers until their 21st birthday. The opportunity to 'stay put' should apply equally to young people that have been cared for by foster carers from the local authority or independent fostering services.
- 2.5 Effective corporate parenting requires knowledge and awareness of the needs of children and young people who are looked after and the services that they receive. This is a shared responsibility for the Council as a whole. The role of the corporate parent is:
  - a. To receive and consider accurate and timely management information reports on the numbers, characteristics and needs of looked after children and care leavers;

- b. To receive and consider reports demonstrating how effectively Merton is serving it's looked after population through the provision of services and targeted initiatives;
- c. To receive briefings on new national and local initiatives designed to improve children and young people's life chances;
- d. To gain knowledge of services based on direct involvement and opportunities to meet and gain the views of stakeholders, especially listening to the views of children and young people looked after and members of the Children in Care Council;
- e. To monitor and review progress on the delivery of the Pledge to children looked after and care leavers; and
- f. Ensure that decisive action is taken to address any shortcomings in the services provided to children and young people.

### **3. Merton Background**

- 3.1 Merton is an outer London borough situated in south west London, covering 14.7 square miles. Merton has a total population of 200,543 including 47,499 children and young people aged 0-19 (Census 2011). The number of 0-19 year olds is forecast to increase by 4,450 (9%) by 2018, within which we forecast a 30% increase of children aged 5 to 9 (3,390).
- 3.2 Predominantly suburban in character, Merton is divided into 20 wards and has three main town centres: Wimbledon, Mitcham and Morden. A characteristic of the borough is the difference between the more deprived east (Mitcham / Morden) and the more affluent west (Wimbledon). There are a number of pockets of deprivation within the borough mainly in the eastern wards and some smaller pockets in the central wards. These wards have multiple deprivation, with high scores on income deprivation, unemployment and limited educational attainment.
- 3.3 Fifty two per cent of Merton's total population is Black, Asian or Minority ethnic (BAME) this is expected to increase further to 57% by 2018. 63% of people 0-19 are from BAME communities. Pupils in Merton schools are more diverse still, with 68% from BAME communities, speaking over 120 languages (2017). The borough has concentrations of Urdu speaking communities: Sri Lankan; South African; and Polish residents.
- 3.4 Looked After Children (LAC) are those children and young people aged 0-18 years who cannot safely remain with their family and are cared for by the local authority. The local authority has continuing legal and financial responsibilities to many of these children until they are 21 (or 25 if in full time education). This includes all unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) and children with disabilities who are receiving more than 75 days of respite care per year.

- 3.5 There are clear thresholds for admitting children into care and in all cases significant attempts should have been made to support the child or young person to remain with their family or within their community. In Merton an Edge of Care and Rehabilitation Panel ensures management oversight of care planning in the decision making to accommodate a child or rehabilitate them home.
- 3.6 As at 31 March 2017 there were 152 Looked After Children in Merton which represents a 6.7% decrease from 2016 (163 children). In England and Wales there were 72,670 looked after children as at March 2017, an increase of 3.2% from 2016 (70,440). In addition Merton has 151 young people aged 18-25 years accessing leaving care services, making Merton a corporate parent to over 303 vulnerable children and young people.
- 3.7 The local Family Poverty Needs Assessment shows that Merton is a relatively affluent borough, ranking as the fourth least deprived authority of London's 33 boroughs.
- 3.8 57% of the LAC population came from an area of deprivation (Indices of Deprivation Affecting Children Index 2015 bottom 30%), an increase of 3% from 2016. The majority of children looked after as at 31 March lived in wards, pre intervention, in the east and south of the borough.

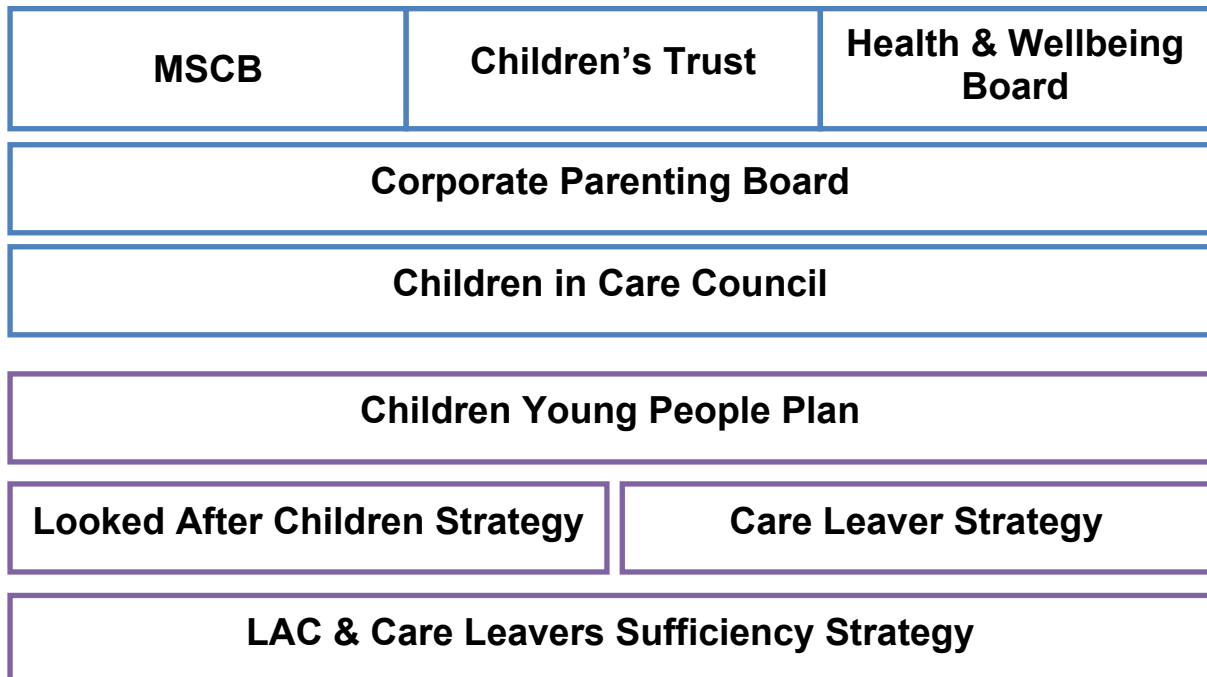


Source: SSDA903



#### 4. Corporate Parenting – Roles and Responsibilities

- 4.1 The Children and Young Persons Act (2008) reinforces the message that all outcomes for children looked after by the local authority. To ensure this council wide ownership Corporate Parenting Board is chaired by the Chief Executive London Borough Merton.
- 4.2 The Corporate Parenting Board is comprised of senior managers and officers from education, health, housing, social care and elected members and is chaired by the Chief Executive London Borough Merton, ensuring a high level of scrutiny and cross directorate responsibility for delivery of our priorities.



- 4.3 The Board meets 6 times each year.
- 4.4 Over the past year the Board has considered reports on topics including:
- Educational progress of looked after children
  - Health outcomes of looked after children
  - Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children
  - Placement Stability
  - Voice of the child
  - LAC Sufficiency
  - CAMHS
  - Assessments of young people aged 16 & 17 years presenting as homeless
  - Trends in the care population

## 5. LAC and Care Leavers Pledge

### A pledge to children in care and care leavers in Merton

We promise to support you to:



#### Your health

- Ensure you are registered with a GP and Dentist.
- Provide advice, guidance and support on substance misuse, sexual health and mental health.
- Run courses on cooking health meals
- Make a financial contribution towards leisure activities.
- Explain to you about why you have a health assessment.

#### Your safety and support

- Maintain positive relationships with your family.
- Help you to understand your rights.
- Make safe choices and take reasonable risks in a safe and supportive environment.
- Prepare for meetings and accompany you when you ask.
- We will talk to you about the information we share about you.
- We will support you to identify the right placement.

#### Your voice

- Provide regular information on the advocacy service.
- Meet with me after meetings to discuss what has been agreed.
- We will come with you to appointments when you ask us to.
- Encourage you to give us feedback and when necessary to make a complaint.
- We will make you aware of your options and support you in making choices.

#### Your education and training

- Make sure that you have access to IT and other equipment to support your education and training.
- Celebrate your success.
- Provide an education pack to let you know about the Virtual School.
- Make sure that you get extra study support if you need it.
- Develop a post 18 PEP.
- More training and apprenticeship opportunities.
- Provide information on the financial support that you are entitled to.
- Access English and Maths tuition.

#### Your finances

- Make you aware of your financial entitlements as a child in care or care leaver.
- Provide advice and guidance in respect of benefits and budgeting.
- Help you to prepare to leave care and live independently.
- Access the best possible education and training.
- Help you develop life skills/work towards your goals.

#### Your rights

- We will support you to access good quality legal advice.
- We will support you to attend meetings with solicitors and the Home Office.
- We will provide information on the law and your rights.

[merton.gov.uk/lookedafter](http://merton.gov.uk/lookedafter)

## 6. Update on Priorities from 2016-2017

Action	Update	RAG
Development of a Care Leaver Hub	The Care Leaver Hub has yet to be developed. Currently on going work is taking place to source premises to establish this project.	
Development of a Care Leaver Forum	The Care Leaver Forum has yet to be developed	
Development of Participation for all ages	New opportunities for participation have been developed and are highlighted through the regular User Voice reports, this will be an ongoing theme in the Looked After and Care Leavers Strategy 2018 -2021.	
Development of a Placements Panel	Placement Panel has been developed and is attended and chaired by the Head of Services across the services. Placement Panel tracks placements to ensure that the placement is meeting the specific needs of the child or young person in placement.	
Signs of Safety Approach is incorporated into the work of the LAC Teams	<p>Social workers in the permanence team and 14 plus team have attended the Signs of Safety training and two of the 14 plus managers have attended the 5 day training and are Signs of Safety leads.</p> <p>Signs of Safety and Signs of Success underpins the work undertaken with Looked After Children and Care Leavers, it is incorporated into the every day practice and is used as a tool in supervision to assist the social worker in the care planning.</p>	

## 7. Corporate Parenting Performance Activity 2016-2017 (SSDA 903)

### Section 1: Looked After Children Cohort Overview (Numbers and Characteristics)

#### Numbers and rates of children looked after as at 31st March

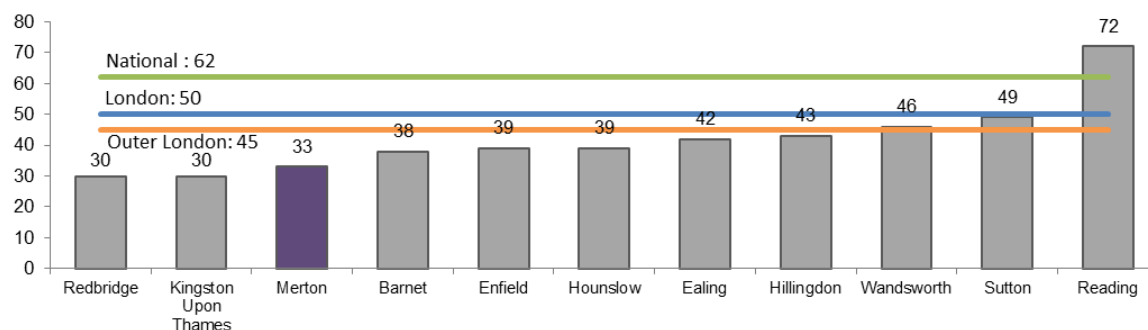
	2013		2014		2015		2016		2017	
	Number	Rate per 10,000	Number	Rate per 10,000	Number	Rate per 10,000	Number	Rate per 10,000	Number	Rate per 10,000
Merton	139	31	150	34	156	34	163	35	152	33
London	10,080	54	10,110	54	9,980	52	9,860	51	9,910	50
National	68,060	60	68,810	60	69,480	60	70,440	60	72,670	62

England and London totals are rounded to the nearest 10.

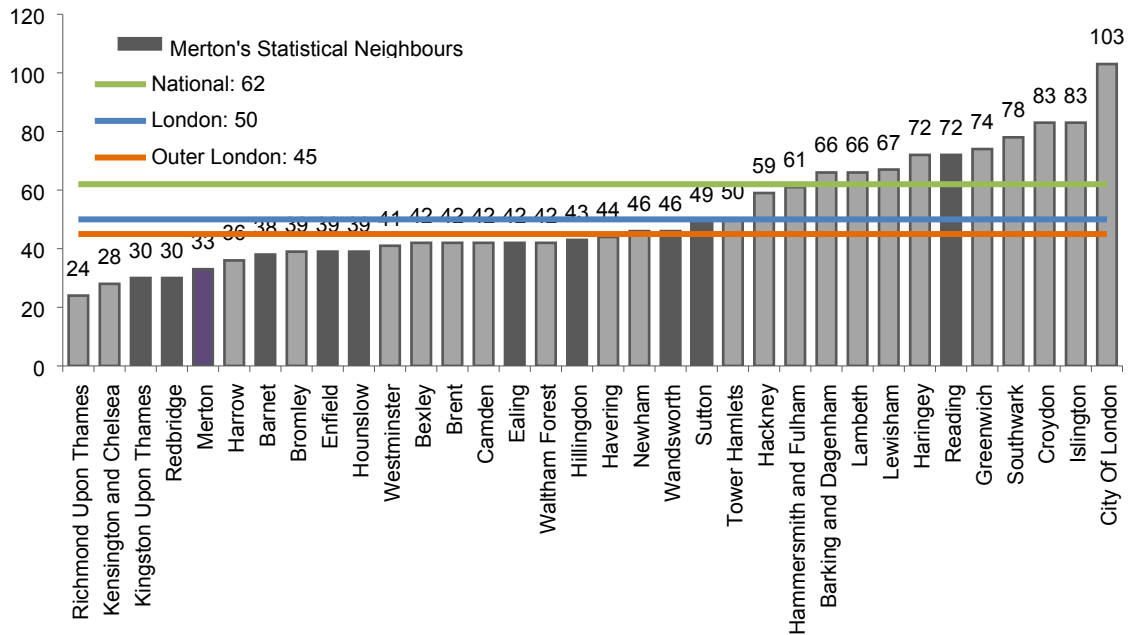
7.1 The number of looked after children has continued to rise nationally, with Merton seeing a decline in numbers at 31<sup>st</sup> March. There were 152 looked after children as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2017, a decrease of 6.7% compared to March 2016. Outer London has also seen a 2.2% decrease since March 2016.

7.2 In the year 2016-17 there were 106 new admissions into care (relating to 100 children). An 18% decrease on 2016. 57% of starters were still in care at the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2017, and a large proportion of starters (35%) were aged 16 and over. This is double the national proportion of starters in this age range. Whilst Merton has seen a rise in its looked after child population in previous years and a decrease in 2017, the rates per 10,000 population remains stable and we continue to have one of the lowest LAC populations when compared to our statistical neighbours. Merton has the 2<sup>nd</sup> lowest rate amongst its Statistical Neighbours. There are only seven (four in London) local authorities with a rate per 10,000 less than Merton.

#### Rate per 10,000 population of Children Looked After against Merton's Statistical Neighbours 2017

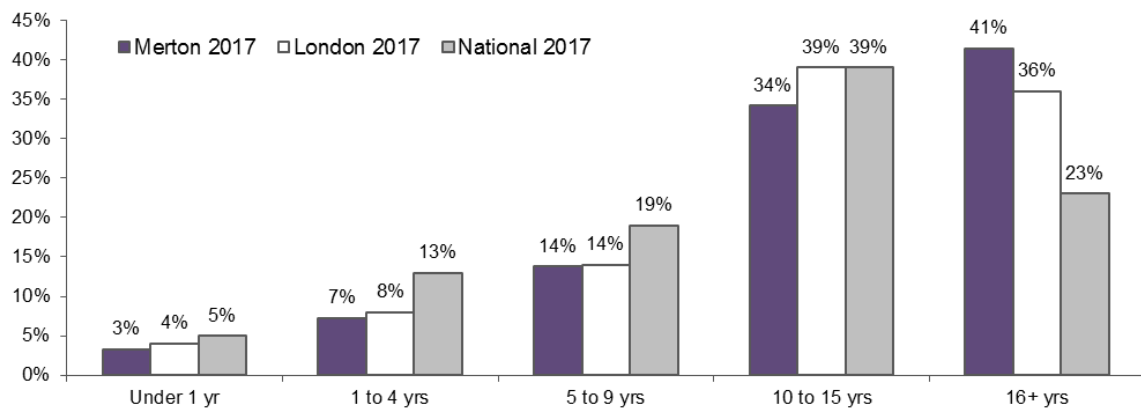


**Rate per 10,000 population of Children Looked After against Merton's Statistical Neighbours and all London Boroughs 2017**



7.3 As set out in the bi-monthly LAC Cohort Corporate Parenting Reports the age profile of children looked after in Merton differs from the national picture with Merton caring for a large number of older looked after children aged 16 and over. At 31 March 2017 41% of our looked after children were aged 16 and 17 compared to 23% nationally. The inverse trend is reflected in the 0 to 15 year olds.

**Percentage of children looked after as at 31st of March 2017 by age group compared to London 2017 and National 2017**



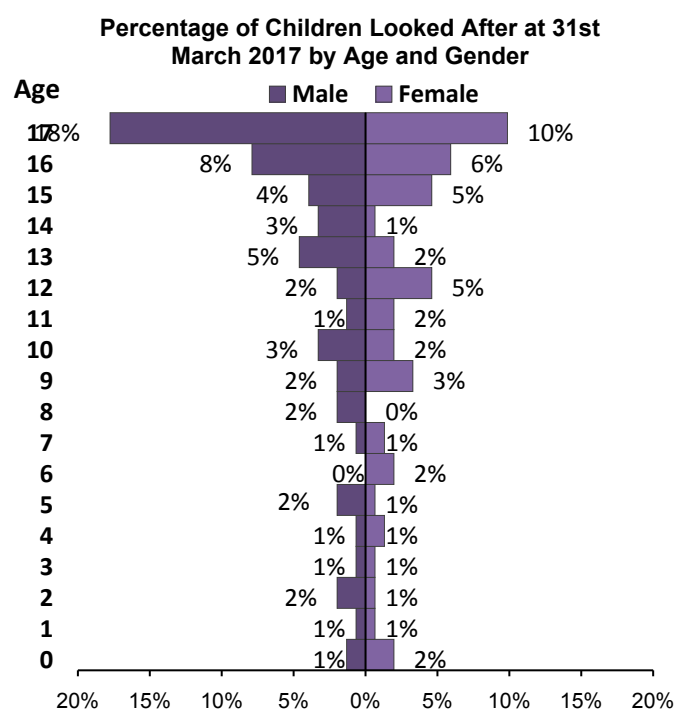
## Gender, Age and Ethnicity of Looked After Children

- 7.4 The table below shows the increase in the older population over the previous 5 years. Review of the local information shows that of the thirty-five 16 and 17 year olds accommodated in 2016-17, sixteen were accommodated due to their UASC status.

### Age of children looked after by year as at the year end 2017

Merton	Age (in years)																	
	<i>(number of Children Looked After, as at 31<sup>st</sup> March)</i>																	
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
2013	7	6	5	2	4	4	2	2	7	5	5	6	2	8	9	16	25	24
2014	8	6	4	5	0	2	5	3	2	7	5	6	8	1	15	12	22	39
2015	6	3	5	4	3	0	3	6	4	4	10	7	5	10	10	18	26	32
2016	4	5	4	3	3	3	2	4	7	4	7	9	10	7	11	15	30	35
2017	5	2	4	2	3	4	3	3	3	8	8	5	10	10	6	13	21	42

Source: SSDA 903



Gender		
<i>(percentage of Children Looked After)</i>		
	Male	Female
Merton 2017	56%	44%
London 2017	59%	41%
National 2017	56%	44%

Overall, 56% of the LAC population is male and 44% female.

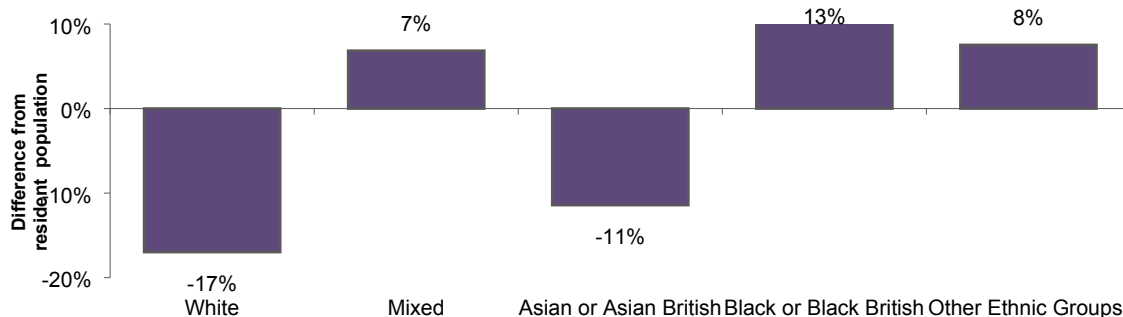
The breakdown of the gender / age data highlights the fact that our older LAC cohort is significantly over-represented by males (the majority of UASC and LASPO referrals received relate to males).

7.5 The age profile has continued to change over the past four years, with a plateau in the number and proportion of older children. 76% of children were aged 10 years and over in 2017 compared with 68% in 2013 (comparing with 62% and 56% nationally). There has been a reduction in the number and proportion of children aged 0-4 from 17% in 2013 to 11% in 2017 (comparing with 24% to 18% nationally).

- 7.6 The majority of children looked after in Merton are from a white background. This is a lower proportion than the general resident population (by 17%). There are fewer Asian or Asian British than the all persons Merton population. Children from Mixed ethnic backgrounds, Black or Black British heritage and 'Other Ethnic

Groups' are over-represented in our looked after child population and this is likely to reflect the increase in the numbers of unaccompanied asylum seeking children.

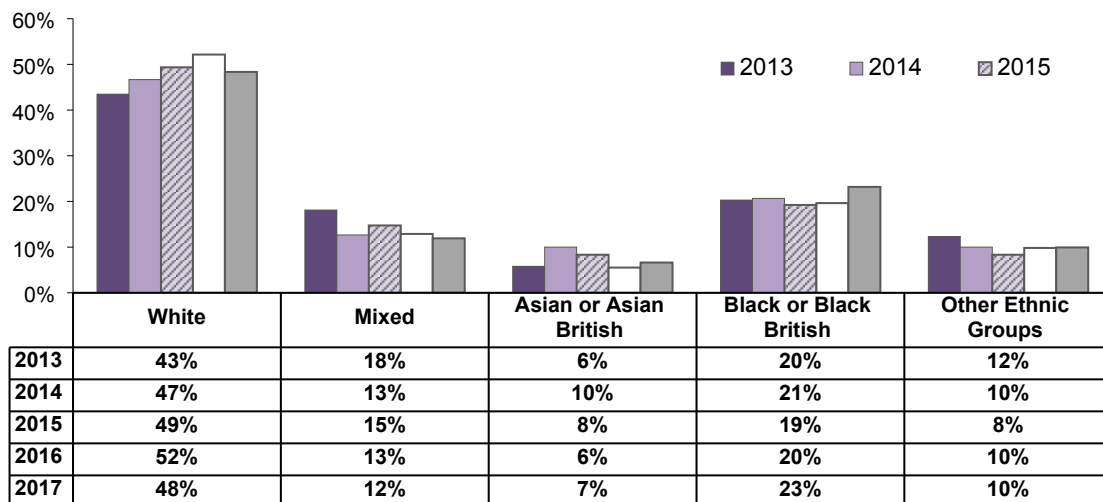
### Difference in Ethnic Group of Looked After Children as at 31st March 2017 from the Merton Resident Population 2011



Note: Other Ethnic Groups is a census defined category and represents a number of ethnic groups where ethnic heritage cannot be defined in the Asian, Black White or Mixed groups. The category includes Afghanistani, Arab, Chinese, Egyptian, Filipino, Iranian, Iraqi, Japanese, Korean, Kurdish, Latin / South / Central American, Lebanese, Malay, Moroccan, Polynesian, Thai, Vietnamese, or Yemeni.

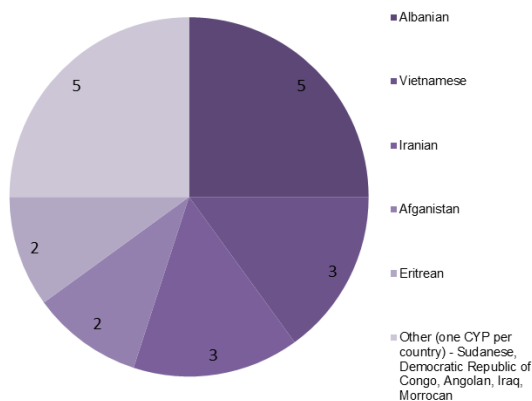
7.7 The trend data shows a change in the ethnic origin of our looked after children in 2017. Merton has however seen a decrease in the percentage of children in the 'Mixed' and 'White' categories and an increase in Black or Black British heritage groups.

### Percentage of Children Looked After by Ethnic Origin from 2013 to 2017



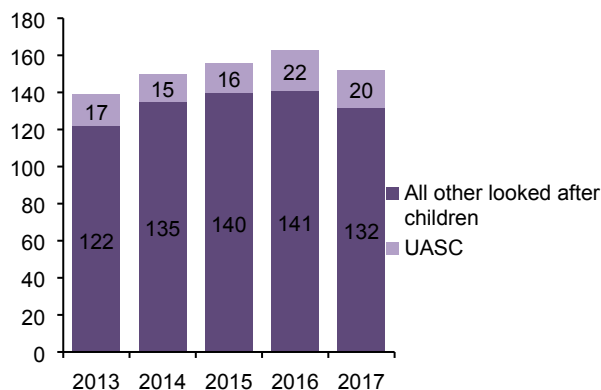
The graph on the left highlights the increase in LAC and UASC populations since 2013 and the decrease in numbers in 2017. In 2012

Nationality of UASC Population  
(as at 31st March 2017)



the UASC population was 6%, 12% in 2013 of the overall LAC cohort. In 2017 this has risen to 13%, which is greater than the national figure of 6%. Two thirds of all unaccompanied asylum seeking children are located in London and the South East.

The ethnicity section of this report demonstrates a large proportion of LAC in the category of 'Other Ethnic Groups', this reflects the number of UASC within the overall cohort.



2017 has shown UASC of increased nationality diversity, with ten nationalities in comparison to four nationalities in 2016.

### Number of Children who started to be Looked After during the year ending 31st March

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Merton	92	114	107	122	100
% increase / decrease year on year	8%	24%	-6%	14%	-18%

Source: SSDA 903. Only the first occasion on which a child started to be looked after in the year is counted.

7.8 The number of children starting to be looked after in Merton has had fewer new starters in 2016-17, following an increase locally and nationally since 2013. This represents an 18% decrease in children starting care in 2016-17 compared to 2015-16. Whilst there are fewer children starting to be looked after, the 16-17 age group proportionally has a greater number of starters. 46% of the 16 and 17 year old children starting to be looked after were UASC.



## Age of Children who started to be Looked After during the year ending 31st March

Merton	Age (in years)																	
	<i>(number of children who started to be Looked After; ages on entering care)</i>																	
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
2013	10	2	1	1	1	3	0	3	1	0	5	1	1	5	9	10	24	15
2014	13	5	5	3	4	1	3	5	3	1	3	4	2	7	9	7	22	17
2015	8	3	4	3	2	2	3	2	5	7	2	1	4	4	15	13	17	12
2016	11	3	5	1	6	3	4	3	2	5	4	2	7	4	7	11	19	25
2017	8	4	4	2	3	2	2	2	2	9	1	3	7	1	7	8	18	17

### Reason for being looked after

7.9 When a child becomes looked after their primary need is collected and the table below shows that the proportions of children in each group have remained fairly stable. The significant difference between our local and the national data is the absent parenting category which reflects the number of UASC.

Merton	Category of Need							
	Abuse or neglect	Child's disability	Parent's illness or disability	Family in acute stress	Family dysfunction	Socially unacceptable behaviour	Low income	Absent parenting
2013	37%	6%	6%	6%	23%	2%	0%	20%
2014	41%	5%	6%	7%	20%	3%	0%	17%
2015	42%	9%	4%	8%	19%	3%	0%	15%
2016	40%	9%	4%	10%	18%	2%	0%	17%
2017	43%	8%	3%	14%	15%	0%	0%	17%

### Legal status of looked after children

7.10 In 2016-17 we have seen an increase in the numbers and proportion of Looked After Children on a care order (20 children, 16%) and this is in line with the national trend, however we have a lower proportion of our looked after children subject to such orders than nationally (Merton data for 2017 was 58% of children on ICO's and Full Care Orders, National data was 69%). Inversely there has been a decrease in the proportion accommodated under section 20 agreements as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2017, although this is a higher proportion of children subject to such orders than National.

### Number of Children who ceased to be Looked After during the year ending 31st March

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Merton	85	107	105	117	113
% increase / decrease year on year	-16%	26%	-2%	11%	-3%

Source: SSDA 903

7.11 The number of children who ceased to be looked after in 2016-17 has decreased by 3% when compared to 2016-17. 113 care episodes ceased during the year

ending 31 March 2017. The number of children who ceased to be looked after has increased for those aged 1 (8 children), 3 (4 children), 12 (6 children) and 17 (10 children).

7.12 The table below reflects the age related care pathways of the majority of the children and young people ceasing care. The greatest number of children leaving care are those reaching adulthood at age 18 who are moving into the care leaver cohort. For those aged 0-5 year’s permanence is found outside of the care system either through reunification, placement with relatives or adoption. The age group most likely to remain in care is the 5-12 year cohort most of whom are subject to care orders and permanently matched with foster carers.

**Age of Children who ceased to be Looked After during the year ending 31st March\***

Merton	Age (in years)																		
	<i>(number of children who ceased to be Looked After; age on leaving care)</i>																		
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
2013	3	1	4	1	2	1	0	4	1	1	2	1	1	4	1	1	9	5	2
2014	4	5	10	4	3	5	1	5	2	3	3	1	2	5	2	9	6	9	2
2015	3	5	8	1	5	0	4	1	2	3	2	2	1	2	7	7	2	8	4
2016	5	6	5	2	8	1	1	3	2	3	5	2	1	4	6	7	7	7	4
2017	2	8	5	4	3	0	2	2	3	4	3	2	6	4	3	7	7	10	3

\*by number of children not number of episodes

7.13 Children ceasing care to return home to live with parents/relatives has remained stable in 2017 (42%). Nationally a 27% of children ceasing care returned home, in London 30%. In 2017, 22% of Merton’s looked after children moved to independent living, whilst an increase of 3% from 2016, a reduction of 32% on 2015; this nevertheless remains above the national of 15% and reflects the higher proportion of older young people in our LAC cohort.

### Reason for children leaving care\*

Merton	Reason for children leaving care*															
	Adoption (E11, E12)	Died (E2)	Care taken over by another LA in UK (E3)	Returned home to live with parents/relatives** (E4)	Return home to live with parents/relatives as part of the care planning process (E4A)	Return home to live with parents/relatives which was not part of the care planning process (E4B)	Left care to live with person with no parental responsibility (E13)	Residence Order (or from April 2014 a child arrangements order) Granted (E41)	Special Guardianship Order (E43, E44)	Moved to independent living (E5, E6)	Transferred to residential care funded by Adult Social Services (E7)	Sentenced to custody (E9)	Accommodation on remand ended (E14)	Age assessment determined child aged 18 or over (E15)	Child moved abroad (E16)	Care ceased for any other reason (E8)
2013	5	0	0	43			0	0	3	21	2	4	0	0	0	7
2014	10	0	1	52			0	3	4	27	0	3	0	0	0	7
2015	8	1	0		33	7	3	1	4	37	2	1	0	1	0	7
2016	11	0	0		40	6	4	2	2	22	1	2	1	0	2	24
2017	11	1	2		41	6	4	0	5	25	1	3	0	1	0	13

\* by number of children not number of episodes

\*\* from 2015 this reason for ceasing was replaced by E4A and E4B

### Staying Put (year ending 31<sup>st</sup> March)

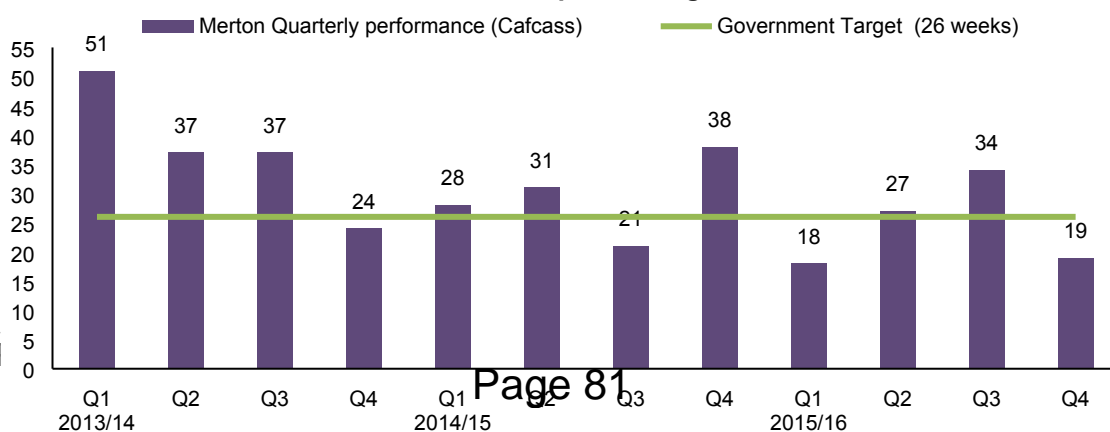
7.14 'Staying Put' relates to young people who have turned 18 and left care in the year ending the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2017, eligible for care leaver support and remaining with their former foster carers 3 months after their 18th birthday. In 2016-17, 4 young people entered into 'Staying Put' arrangements.

### Section 2: Care Processes

#### Timeliness of care proceedings when taking children into care

7.15 A revised Public Law Outline introduced in April 2014 set out streamlined case management procedures for dealing with public law children's cases. Under revised legislation care and supervision proceedings must be completed 'without delay and within twenty-six weeks'. This places an increased emphasis on pre-proceedings work and the quality of assessments.

26 week time limit for care proceedings - CAF/CASS data



7.16 As indicated in the above graph there continues to be progress made in improving the timeliness of Care Proceedings. Merton's average case duration for 2016-17 was 25 weeks compared to 2015-16 where the average case duration was 30 weeks. This is compared to the national average of 29 weeks and London wide average of 32 weeks.

7.17 Over the past two years, there has been a strong focus on Pre-Proceedings cases, which has contributed to reducing the overall duration of Care Proceedings cases. System improvements in the previous year and a review of all court related cases, combined with an increased focus on the interface between key teams and partners is helping to improve performance.

#### Looked After Children reviews

##### Percentage of Children Looked After as at 31st March reviewed on time

Merton	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Timely Reviews	95.9%	96.5%	95.8%	98.7%	97.2%

Source: SSDA 903

Notes: The DfE do not publish national comparisons for this indicator. The indicator only includes children who had been in care continuously for 4 weeks as at 31<sup>st</sup> March.

7.18 In order to ensure that LAC reviews are held in a timely manner we established a clear understanding of the practice standard and introduced an escalation process for all reviews going outside of timescales.

##### Percentage of reviews participated in during the year

Merton	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
No. of reviews	328	407	450	446	413
No. of reviews participated in	303	356	391	430	411
% Participation	92.4%	87.5%	86.9%	96.4%	99.5%

Source: SSDA 903

Notes: The DfE do not publish national comparisons for this indicator. Excludes reviews with a participation method of 'Child aged under 4 at the time of the review'.

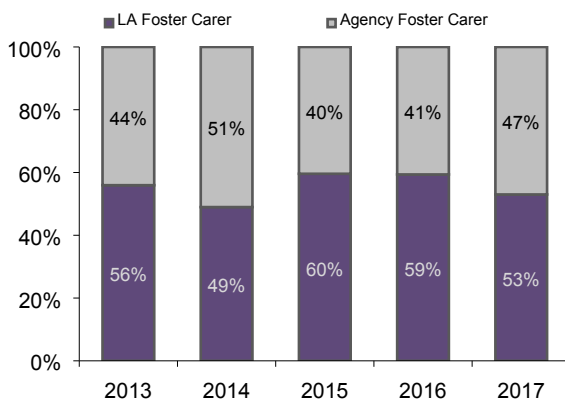
7.19 Participation in LAC reviews was identified as a priority area in 2015-16 due to the year on year decline in performance that had been noted. An improvement plan was put in place that focused on the following areas:

- Consultation with children and young people to get their views on participation in LAC reviews
- Affirming practice standards
- Training for practitioners working with non-verbal children
- Guidance on promoting participation
- Improved data quality

The success of this improvement plan and the on-going commitment from practitioners is evidenced in the improved performance data on 2016 for this year at 99.5%.

### Section 3: Placements

7.20 Children are looked after in a variety of settings; foster care, children’s homes, residential special schools, Youth Offending Institutes, and a small number are in hospital settings. At 31 March 2017, 71% of looked after children (108 children) were placed in foster care. This is below the national figure of 74%. 53% children were placed with in house foster carers; this is a decrease on the previous year. This continues to be an area of scrutiny for us due to the impact on budget, but also due the fact that agency placements are often outside of the borough. The most common use of agency placements is for adolescents, as a number of our in house carers are only approved to take foster children up to the age of 10 years. The Access to Resources Service is committed to targeted recruitment of teenage carers; however, there is a Pan London issue with many agencies and Local Authorities competing for a small number of carers.



#### Fostered\* Looked After Children as at 31st March 2017

\*Excludes children placed with family or friends

#### Placement Type for Looked After Children as at 31st March 2017

Merton	Placement Type							
	Foster Placement	Placed for Adoption	Placement with Parents	Other Placement in the Community	Secure Units, Children's Homes and Hostels	Other Residential Settings	Residential Schools	Other Placement
2013	89	5	5	8	22	8	1	1
2014	104	5	1	1	34	3	2	0
2015	108	7	2	0	34	3	2	0
2016	108	7	0	1	43	2	2	0
2017	108	5	3	0	32	2	2	0
London 2017	7,180	230	170	660	1,380	270	30	Suppressed

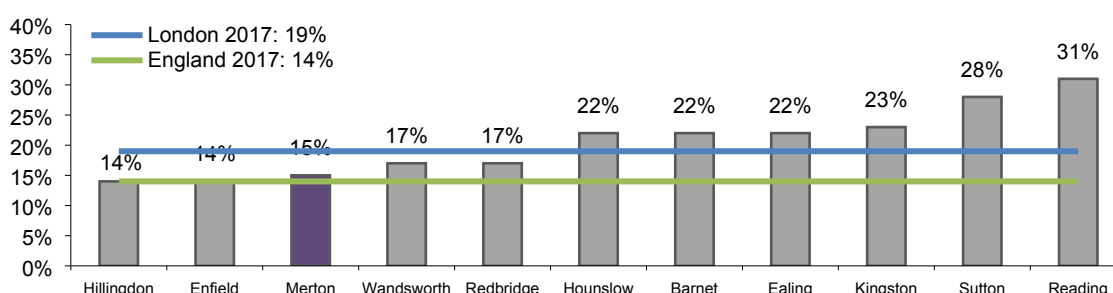
National 2017	53,420	2,520	4,370	3,090	7,890	1,080	130	160
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Source: SSSA903

Note: 'Secure units, children's homes and hostels' – Secure units, homes and hostels subject to Children's Homes regulations and homes and hostels not subject to Children's Homes regulations (this includes supported lodgings). 2013 only- 'Other Placement' includes children missing from their placement.

7.21 Merton has a greater proportion of children placed under the category 'secure units, children's homes and hostels' than nationally. A large proportion of this cohort are young people living in supported lodgings (44%) which are classified within this group.

**Percentage of Children Looked After as at 31st March placed outside the Local Authority boundary and more than 20 miles from where they used to live; Merton 2017 and Statistical Neighbours 2017**



7.22 15% of Merton's looked after children are placed outside the local authority boundary and more than 20 miles from where they used to live, compared to 14% nationally. Merton is 3<sup>rd</sup> amongst its 11 statistical neighbours. 81% of all new LAC placements made in 2016-17 were within a 10 mile radius of the child's home and 67% of all LAC placements were within a 5 mile radius. Merton has reduced the proportion of placements beyond each of these key distances since 2016.

7.23 For some young people placements away from their home community are a key part of the care plan as a result of anti-social behaviour/risk management. For some the needs of the young people are such that they require specialist placements which are not available in Merton or surrounding boroughs. For all children being placed outside of the borough the Head of Service and DCS is required to sign off agreement for the placement. Care plans for these children and young people are reviewed to ensure that where possible young people are supported to return to their home community at the earliest opportunity. A more detailed analysis of these placements will be available in Merton's 'Securing Sufficient Accommodation Statement for Looked After Children and Care Leavers' refresh autumn 2017.

**The percentage of Children Looked After at 31st March with three or more placements during the year ending 31st March**

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Merton	16%	17%	14%	10%	16%

National	11%	11%	11%	10%	Not available
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Source: SSDA 903

Note: Missing episodes are included in figures for 2013 to 2014. From 2016 if a child and their carer move to a new address this is no longer counted as a placement move. If a child is placed for adoption with their existing foster carer this is also not counted as a placement move.

7.24 16% of Merton looked after children in care as at 31<sup>st</sup> of March had three or more placement moves during 2016-17. This is a higher proportion as reported nationally and in the previous two years, but is in line with performance during 2013 and 2014.

7.25 71% of Merton's looked after children are in stable placements; the technical definition of stability is defined by the DfE as the percentage of children looked after as at 31<sup>st</sup> March aged under 16 who have been looked after continuously for at least 2.5 years who were living in the same placement for at least 2 years.

#### Percentage of Looked After Children with stability in their placement

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Merton	64%	58%	40%	68%	71%
National	67%	67%	Not available	Not available	Not available

Source: SSDA 903

Note: The percentage of Children Looked After aged under 16 at 31<sup>st</sup> March who had been looked after continuously for at least 2½ yrs, who were living in the same placement for at least 2 yrs, or are placed for adoption and their adoptive placement together with their previous placement last for at least 2 yrs

7.26 We have seen a significant improvement in placement stability over the past two years following the implementation of an improvement plan informed by the Placement Stability Analysis Report completed in April 2015. The improvement plan focused on the following areas:

- All requests for placement moves in the 14+ Team to be approved by the Head of Service
- Development of a Permanence Team to have case management responsibility for children on Care Orders
- The LAC CAMHS Team to be established
- Analysis of risk factors supports placement planning and results in early identification of placement instability

#### Children accommodated under an agreed series of short-term breaks

Short-term breaks, also referred to as respite care, must include at least one night away from home but cannot exceed 17 days of continuous care, or 75 days within a 12 month period.

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Number of children	5	3	26	19	16
Number of episodes	21	34	673	483	349

7.27 Sixteen children were accommodated under an agreed series of short-term breaks during 2016-17, a decrease from 19 in 2015-16.

## Missing and absent from placement

	2015/16			2016/17		
	Number of children	% of all LAC	Number of episodes	Number of children	% of all LAC	Number of episodes
Children who were missing during the year	43	16%	102	46	18%	232
Children who were away from placement without authorisation during the year	17	6%	48	22	9%	41
Children who were 'missing' and / or 'away without authorisation' during the year	48	18%	150	50	19%	273

Source: SSDA 903

7.28 Following the update of the Children Missing from Care and Home Protocol and establishing a weekly multi agency missing meeting, there has been more timely sharing of information in respect of the children reported as missing from home and care. Strategy meetings are convened on children who go missing from care and there is embedded practice of escalation of cases to senior management. This all contributes to improved case management and learning to support an

7.29 Most missing incidents were short: 83% lasted two days or less (this is below the national figure of 89%); and 17% of missing episodes related to a period of less than 24 hours.

- 9 children were missing or absent from placement 10 or more times throughout the year and were accountable for 55% of all absences
- 16 children were missing or absent from placement more than 5 times throughout the year and were accountable for 73% of all absences.
- 38 children were missing or absent from placement more than once throughout the year and were accountable for 96% of all absence.

7.30 During the year, two young people were missing for extended periods (98 days+). Where young people are missing for extended periods we convene regular strategy meetings to ensure sharing of intelligence between professionals. Where appropriate, referrals are made to the national mechanisms due to concerns relating to trafficking.

### Missing and absent by age at start of period of absence

	Age at start of absence											
	Numbers						Percentages					
	12	13	14	15	16	17	12	13	14	15	16	17
<b>All episodes</b>	2	12	10	36	111	102	1%	4%	4%	13%	41%	37%
<b>Missing</b>	2	12	9	33	87	89	1%	5%	4%	14%	38%	38%



<b>Absent</b>	0	0	1	3	24	13	0%	0%	2%	7%	59%	32%
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Source: SSDA 903

Additional information on our missing cohort is available in the Missing from Home and Care Annual Report 2016-17.

### Children at risk of CSE

7.31 For the year 2016-17 there were 18 children with a looked after children episode in the year whose cases were reviewed at the multi-Agency Sexual Exploitation Meeting: all female. An additional five care leavers (all female) were discussed in 2016-17.

7.32 Five new CSE referrals were made in 2016-17 for children with a LAC episode in the year, where there were known or suspected concerns for sexual exploitation. Some of the key characteristics are set out below:

- The ethnicity of the young people was as follows: one White British; one Black African heritage; two Black Caribbean heritage and one other black background.
- At referral the ages of these young people were: one aged 15; two aged 16 and two aged 17.
- One of the young people had been made the subject of an interim care order and the remaining four were accommodated under Section 20.
- During 2016-17 these young people had multiple placements incorporating foster care, supported lodgings, Children's home, NHS placement, independent living and placed at home. Changes of placement were made as a planned part of the child's care plan and was a move to a placement that meets the child's assessed needs. One was at Carer requests placement end due to child's behaviour and one the child has asked to move to another placement.
- Of the four LAC episodes that remained open at the 31<sup>st</sup> March, all placements were out of Merton in neighbouring boroughs.

7.33 In all the cases there was evidence of the involvement and support from the specialist services delivered by Jigsaw4U, Barnardo's, MOPAC and CAMHS; providing direct work and consultation to address concerns as young people were reported missing, through to detailed relationship based work to address self-esteem and risk awareness.

### Section 4: Permanency

7.34 The Government continues to monitor timeliness through review of quarterly and annual returns and the adoption scorecard process. The initial focus of the adoption scorecard is on local authorities and the adoption process for children. As a result of the increased scrutiny in the monitoring of cases, we have seen a steady improvement in the timeliness of the child's journey through to adoption.

7.35 In the year 2016-17, eleven looked after children were adopted and five were made subject of a Special Guardianship Order. Whilst children ceasing care

through this permanency route (14%) is below the national rate (30%), performance is good when considered against the age cohort of our looked after children.

**Number of Looked After Children Who Were Adopted or Made Subject of a Special Guardianship Order During the Year ending 31st March**

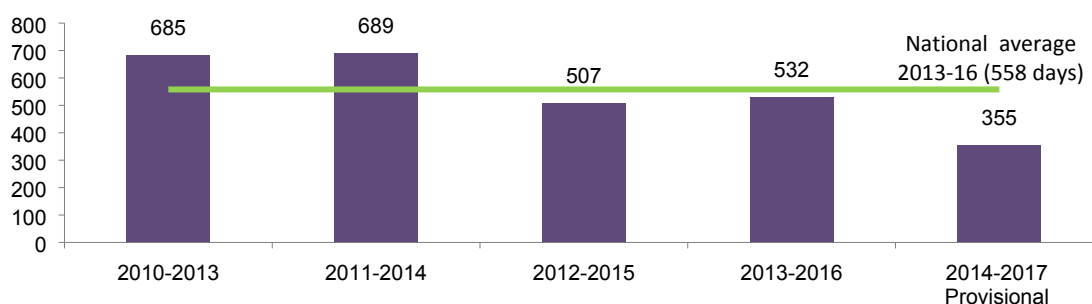
	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Adoptions	5	10	8	11	11
Special Guardianship Orders	3	4	4	2	5
Merton Total	8	14	12	13	16

Source: Children in Care and Adoption Performance Tables and SSSA 903

7.36 For children who have been adopted, the projected three year rolling (2014-17) average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family is 355 days, which is lower than the 2013-16 national average of 558 days. Additional information on this cohort of children is available in the Adoption and Permanence 6 Monthly Reports.

**National adoption scorecard A1 indicator which presents the three year rolling average during which children enter and moving in with their permanent carers**

**A1: Average time (days) between entering care and moving in with adoptive family, for children who have been adopted - three year rolling average performance**



2016-17 data is provisional therefore the three year average for 2014-17 is estimated and not yet published.

7.37 Additional information on this cohort of children is available in the Adoption and Permanence 6 Monthly Reports.

**Section 5: Health**

7.38 Health outcomes in 2016-17 for dental checks and annual health assessments are above national average. Immunisations are slightly below national and this is likely to reflect the large proportion of unaccompanied asylum seeking children within the cohort.

7.39 The LAC Health Team is situated within the LAC Service and this supports communication between practitioners. The team regularly attend participation events and work hard to build relationships with our looked after children. Following the LAC Health JSNA additional capacity has been created in the team in recognition of the increase in LAC numbers in recent years.

7.40 The LAC Health Strategic Group meets on a bi-monthly basis. The purpose of this group is to understand and champion the health needs of Children Looked After and Care Leavers in Merton and respond to the Merton Health Needs Assessment for Looked After Children. For 2017-18 there will be an increased focus on early flagging of LAC approaching their eighteenth birthday in order to ensure that their health passport is completed on time.

**Health Care of Children Looked After (LAC continuously for at least 12 months, ending 31 March)**

Merton	Looked After for at least 12 months	Children whose Immunisations were up-to-date	Children who had their Teeth Checked by a Dentist	Children who had their Annual Health Assessment
2013	84	90%	99%	83%
2014	83	95%	83%	95%
2015	87	86%	95%	94%
2016	94	81%	93%	91%
2017	94	82%	88%	96%
London 2017	6,380	82%	84%	92%
National 2017	49,750	84%	83%	89%

Source: SSDA903

7.41 Research shows that more than one in four children who have been in care has significant levels of maladjustment<sup>1</sup> (Buchanan and Ten Brinke, 1997), with over 67% of those in the care system and 96% in children’s homes having clinical level of psychiatric illness<sup>2</sup> (McCann, James, Wilson, and Dunn, 1996).

7.42 Emotional and behavioural health is determined by the average score of children looked after children for whom a Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire was completed. The average score for 2017 was 14.6, which is higher than the national average of 14.1. A low average score is deemed ‘good’.

7.43 To promote practice improvement in the use of SDQ tools we have run training sessions for practitioners and agreed a process for the escalation of scores over 17.

<sup>1</sup> Buchanan, A. & Ten Brinke, J-A (1998) *Recovery from Emotional and Behavioural Problems*. NHS Executive, Anglia and Oxford. University of Oxford

<sup>2</sup> McCann, J., James, A., Wilson, S., & Dunn, G. (1996) Prevalence of psychiatric disorders in young people in the care system. *British Medical Journal* 313, 1529-30

## Emotional and Behavioural Health of Looked After Children

Statistical Neighbours	As at 31st March (Merton, Statistical Neighbours, London and National 2017)		
	Percentage of Eligible Children for whom an SDQ score was submitted	Average Score (a low average score represents the best)	Average Score Rank (1st=Lowest, 11th=Highest)
Barnet	70%	12.9	4th
Ealing	92%	12.7	3rd
Enfield	90%	13.9	6th
Hillingdon	94%	11.7	1st
Hounslow	100%	13.6	5th
Kingston Upon Thames	n/a	n/a	n/a
<b>Merton 2017</b>	<b>94%</b>	<b>14.6</b>	<b>7th</b>
Reading	89%	17.2	10th
Redbridge	85%	12.3	2nd
Sutton	97%	15.0	8th
Wandsworth	80%	15.4	9th
London	84%	13.7	-
National	76%	14.1	-

Source: SSDA 903

Average Score of Children Looked After for whom a Strengths & Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) was completed.

- 7.44 The Merton CAMHS in Social Care provides an integrated mental health service within Children's Social Care, as part of the engagement, assessment, planning and interventions alongside Social Care professionals.
- 7.45 The Service works as part of a multi-agency response to improve the quality of life for children and young people who have a wide range of presenting social, psychological and mental health needs. The Service provides effective, evidence-based interventions as part of the clinical and social response to meeting the emotional and mental health needs of these vulnerable children and young people. The Service also assists and supports Social Workers to implement new approaches to their work.
- 7.46 Additionally, the service provides Reflective Practice to Social Workers and their managers, as well as consultation and training in a systemic approach to working.

### Emotional and behavioural health of looked after children by age group and gender

Merton	Age at 31 <sup>st</sup> March			Gender	
	4 - 9	10 - 15	16+	Male	Female
0-13 (normal)	9	16	16	20	21
14-16 (borderline cause for concern)	2	6	4	6	6

17+ (cause for concern)	5	14	8	20	7
No SDQ Score Submitted	0	1	10	7	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>38</b>

Source: SSDA 903

## Section 6: Offending

### Offending by children who had been looked after continuously for at least 12 months at 31<sup>st</sup> March

Merton	Number of children looked after for at least 12 months and aged 10 or older at 31 March	Number and percentage convicted or subject to a final warning or reprimand during the year	
		Number	Percentage
2013	54	6	11%
2014	62	6	10%
2015	68	3	4%
2016	75	2	3%
2017	75	1	1%
London 2017	5,140	280	5%
National 2017	35,110	1,580	5%

Source: SSDA 903

7.47 Looked after children are nearly twice as likely to be cautioned for or convicted of an offence than their peers<sup>3</sup> and, although estimates vary, it is thought that nearly a third of children in custody have been looked after<sup>4</sup> at some point in their lives. It is therefore important that local strategies are in place to encourage positive behaviour amongst looked after children who may be at risk of offending and that measures to divert them from involvement with the youth justice system are clearly identified. Fostering services and children's homes should have an approach to care that manages children's behaviour and minimises any police involvement.

7.48 For all looked after child and care leavers where there is an identified risk of offending or re-offending, both the care / pathway plan and placement plan should include details about the support that will be provided to prevent this. The Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) should ensure that care plans adequately address this aspect of the child's needs, and should raise a challenge where a young person's needs are not being adequately assessed, resulting in the possibility of their becoming, or continuing to be, involved in offending behaviour.

<sup>3</sup>Outcomes for looked after children by local authorities in England as at 31 March 2012

<sup>4</sup> HM Prisons Inspectorate thematic inspection of children and young people in custody

## Section 7: Education

7.49 For a complete picture of Education outcomes of Merton’s Looked After Children population please refer to ‘The Virtual School Annual Report’.

## Section 8: Care Leavers aged 19-21

7.50 Children’s Social Care has a range of duties and powers to provide after care advice and assistance to these young people, and to those who have been accommodated by other specified agencies. Good corporate parents will provide young people with help and support to access education, employment and training opportunities and to find accommodation suitable to their needs.

7.51 Merton has 123 care leavers aged 19, 20 and 21 years old. This increase has a direct relationship with the increasing number profile of 16 and 17 year old looked after children in previous years.

7.52 In 2013-14 the DfE amended the cohort of Care Leavers considered in the SSD903 to include young people aged 20 and 21 (from the traditional care leavers aged 19), and this should be taken into account when considering the year on year comparator data.

### Numbers of care leavers

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
19-21 year olds	20	93	93	106	123

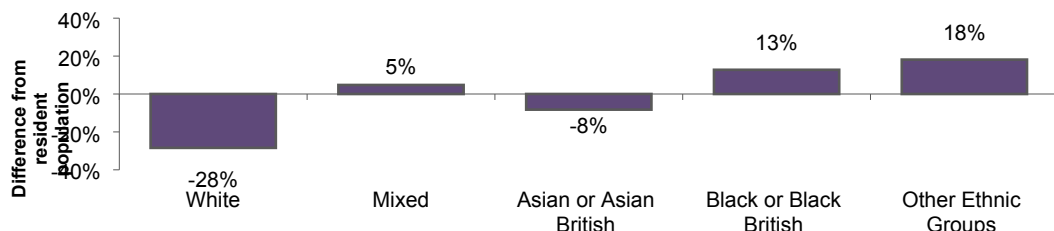
Source: SSDA 903

### Age and gender of Care Leavers

	Age (as at 31st March) <i>(percentage of Care Leavers)</i>			Gender <i>(percentage of Care Leavers)</i>	
	19	20	21	Male	Female
Merton 2017	36%	37%	28%	61%	39%
National 2017	35%	33%	32%	58%	42%

Source: SSDA 903

### Ethnic Group Difference of Care Leavers from the Merton Resident Population



Source: SSDA 903

Note: Other Ethnic Groups is a census defined category and represents a number of ethnic groups where ethnic heritage cannot be defined in the Asian, Black White or Mixed groups. The category includes Afghanistani, Arab, Egyptian, Filipino, Iranian, Iraqi, Japanese, Korean, Kurdish, Latin / South / Central American, Lebanese, Malay, Moroccan, Polynesian, Thai, Vietnamese, or Yemeni.

7.53 The DfE SSD903 return gathers ‘in touch’ information for all care leavers aged 19, 20 and 21 years. For this return the definition is that there is ‘contact’ between the local authority and the young person eligible for care leaver support around 3 months before and one month after the young person’s birthday.

#### Care Leavers in Touch

Merton	Number	Percentage %	National
Yes	105	85%	87%
No	8	7%	8%
Service No Longer Required	7	6%	3%
Young Person Refuses Contact	0	0%	2%
Young Person Returned Home	3	2%	Not available

Source: SSDA 903

7.54 The legal framework for care leavers aims to make sure that they receive the right support and services in their transition to adulthood, including access to accommodation. General homelessness legislation also provides a safety net for young care leavers experiencing homelessness.

7.55 The legislation most relevant to care leavers' accommodation needs is the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000, which imposes accommodation duties on local authorities to support certain categories of looked-after children and care leavers.

7.56 Accommodation is to be regarded as suitable if it provides safe, secure and affordable provision for young people.

#### Percentage of Care Leavers in Suitable Accommodation

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Merton	85%	66%	80%	91%	87%
London	82%	83%	83%	82%	79%
National	88%	77%	81%	83%	84%

Source: SSDA 903

Note: In 2014 the DfE extended the care leaver cohort to include 20 and 21 year olds. As a result the figures for 2013 include only to 19 year olds whilst the figures for 2014 and 2015 include Care Leavers aged 19-21.

7.57 With an increased focus on improving outcomes for care leavers we have seen an improvement over the years 2014 to 2017 in this area of performance, above national and London. An aspect of this improvement relates to our improved ‘in touch’ performance which means that we have a better knowledge of where our young people are living. The LAC Sufficiency Statement is designed to enable a forward looking view of the accommodation needs for care leavers in the future, based on historic and known cohort information: this statement is refreshed on an annual basis. The improved performance also reflects the collaborative working arrangements between Children’s Social Care and Housing.

7.58 Housing and Children’s Social Care managers meet on a monthly basis to review placements for all 18+ care leavers to ensure the early identification of young people who are ready to be nominated for their own housing.

7.59 To ensure that young people are prepared to manage their own tenancy we run ‘Independent Living Skills Workshops’ in the following areas:

- My Bank
- Cooking
- DIY
- My Drive

7.60 The success of these workshops and the support offered to our young people is evidenced by the fact that there have been no tenancy disruptions in the past 2 years.

7.61 Merton has a high number of care leavers living in suitable accommodation (87%) compared to the national figure (84%). Of the six deemed to be living in unsuitable accommodation, five were serving custodial sentences and one was living with no fixed abode.

#### Accommodation by Type

Merton	Accommodation																
	No Accommodation recorded*	With parents or relatives	Community home or other form of residential care	Semi-independent, transitional accommodation	Supported lodgings	Gone abroad	Deported	Ordinary lodgings without formal support	Residence not known	No fixed abode / homeless	Foyers and similar accommodation with opportunities for EET	Independent living	Emergency accommodation	Bed and breakfast	In custody	Other accommodation	With former foster carers
2013	3	2	0	7	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	0	0	1	1
2014	27	1	1	5	15	0	0	0	0	0	0	33	0	2	4	0	5
2015	14	11	0	26	5	0	4	6	3	1	1	17	1	0	3	0	1
2016	7	9	4	42	2	0	5	2	5	1	0	20	0	0	2	5	2
2017	14	9	5	52	4	2	2	1	1	1	1	24	0	0	3	4	0

\* In line with DfE guidance, ‘No accommodation recorded’ includes care leavers who are not in touch or have refused contact, those who have died and those who have returned home.

#### Percentage of Care Leavers in Education, Employment or Training

The percentage of care leavers who were in education, employment or training

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Merton	60.0%	47.0%	44.1%	58.3%	60.0%
National	Not Available	Not Available	Not Available	49.0%	49.6%

Source: SSDA 903



Note: In 2014 the DfE extended the care leaver cohort to include 20 and 21 year olds. As a result the figures for 2011-2013 include only to 19 year olds whilst the figures for 2014 and 2015 include Care Leavers aged 19-21.

7.62 A good standard of education is a key driver towards achieving positive employment outcomes in adulthood. However, there remains a significant gap between the educational achievements of care leavers and their peers.

**Percentage of Care Leavers in Education, Employment or Training: Merton Compared to National**

	19 year olds		20 year olds		21 year olds	
	Merton	National	Merton	National	Merton	National
In higher education i.e. studies beyond A level	5%	5%	12%	6%	6%	7%
In education other than higher education	43%	28%	21%	16%	9%	11%
In training or employment	16%	22%	30%	26%	36%	26%
Not in education, training or employment	30%	37%	28%	42%	27%	41%
Information not known	7%	7%	9%	10%	21%	14%

7.63 In the past year we have made further progress with our care leavers cohort engaged in education, however it is important to note that this relates to a broader cohort and further work is being undertaken to consider the performance of different age cohorts. This area continues as a priority focus for us as a significant impact outcome for our young people. A deeper analysis of this data identifies that 23% (10 young people) are NEET due to illness / disability and pregnancy / parenthood and it is likely that this has impacted in their capacity to take up an ETE opportunity.

7.64 The ETE worker, working as part of the Virtual School to support a targeted group of care leavers both on 1:1 and group work basis has supported performance in this area above national.

**8. Voice of the Child in Care**

8.1 With the appointment of a new Participation Manager during 2016-17, there has been a range of activities and increased support given to the Child in Care Council and developed a programme of activity delivered in 2016-17 and for future years. This has significantly improved the engagement of young people in their reviews and developing opportunities to ensure that young people's voices are heard throughout the work within Children, Schools and Families as reported to meetings of the Corporate Parenting Board through the User Voice reports.

8.2 Some key successes over the past year include:

**Children in Care Council**

8.3 The role of the Merton Child in Care Council is as follows:

- Provide a voice for the wider population of children looked after and care leavers
- Help to monitor and implement the Merton Pledge
- Bring together service users and senior managers to influence positive change
- Develop skills and confidence building

8.4 The Children in Care Council directly supports the Corporate Parenting Board to measure and monitor the effectiveness and quality of 'Corporate Parenting' in Merton.

8.5 The Child in Care Council generally meets at the Civic Centre on a monthly basis and there is an established core membership of 6 young people. This year in response to the feedback received from the care leaver survey we have held themed meetings on housing, health, e-safety and the Child in Care website. We extend the membership to themed meetings to ensure that all young people have the opportunity to participate. In 2015-16 we have also used the Child in Care Council meetings to consult on the following developments within the service:

- Participation in LAC Reviews
- Financial Provision for Care Leavers
- LAC and Care Leaver Pledge
- JSNA LAC Health Review

### **LAC Health Study as part of Health Needs Assessment**

8.6 The aim of this piece of work was to capture the voices of Looked After Children and Care Leavers in the care of Merton about three key issues: young people's health care needs; accessing the child and adolescent mental health service (CAMHS); and how young people are supported through transitions.

8.7 The consultation undertaken with a number of Looked after Children and Care Leavers reported the following:

- Looked after Children, Care Leavers their parents and/or guardians are very much aware of who and where to go to if they need any support or advice to access any health care services, in relation to having their health care needs met. Findings from the responses were that there were no barriers to accessing services to meet their health needs. Many children and young people commented on going to either their social worker, family or friends for support and advice.
- Those placed out of the borough reported that they require more support and involvement to receive a more inclusive and participatory service, especially when they move between different areas for placements. The data collected from this study also shows that there is a need for greater consistency in making sure that children and young people in care, who are placed out of the area, have access to key services that support their health, education, well-being and development.

8.8 The overall needs assessment report made a number of recommendations relating to overall findings to be monitored by the Merton Clinical Commissioning Group and London Borough of Merton.

### **Celebrating Success Events**

8.9 We have held 2 Celebrating Success Events in the year 2015-16 for 5-12 and 13+ young people. Both events were well attended by children, young people and their carers. All children and young people were presented with certificates celebrating their individual achievements.

### **Bi-monthly drop-in sessions**

8.10 Since 2015 the 14 Plus Team has been running monthly sessions at a local coffee shop between 5-8pm for Unaccompanied Asylum seeking young people. These sessions alternate between social events and workshops attended and facilitated by different organisations. The sessions provide the opportunity for young people to meet other young people from different cultures and backgrounds who have had similar experiences. The purpose of the group is to allow them to experience a sense of belonging and familiarity and also to build social networks and a sense of being part of a community. These sessions strengthen the relationship between the young person and their social workers and helps built trust with the 14+ Team. The activities provide them with the opportunity to improve their independent living skills and English skills and gain insight from other organisations. These sessions have a good regular attendance of up to 15 young people.

### **Review of children and young people's participation in LAC Reviews**

8.11 The key messages being fed back from these consultations were that children and young people wanted to be able to choose the venue for their LAC review and for the meeting to be held at a time convenient to them. There was also a request for children and young people to be more involved in the planning for the meetings so that they were child centred and strengths focused.

8.12 The children and young people stated that:

- They often don't know who is coming to the review and would like to be more involved in agreeing who should attend.
- They wanted to meet the IRO prior to the LAC review meeting so that the ITO could get to know the young people rather than judge them on what they had read; 'we aren't always as we appear on paper'.
- They wanted more forward looking reviews; they felt that all too often the reviews focused on the past.

8.13 The IRO Team are now looking to adopt a good practice model which has been successfully piloted by the Participation Service in Sheffield. This model will

support children and young people to feel that they are at the centre of the review meeting and have a strong influence in the shaping of their care plan.

### Communication with children and young people

8.14 We currently commission an independent advocacy service from Jigsaw 4U to provide support to Looked After Children to ensure that their voice is heard and is central to decisions made about their care. We receive feedback from the advocacy service when there are specific issues or areas that need addressing.

#### Over all referrals Figures by Quarter

	April 17-June 17	July 17 - Sept 17	Oct 17 - Dec 17	Jan 17 - Mar 17	Total	Target for Year
Child Protection Referrals	23/actual work 19	22/actual work 12	19/actual work 10		64 referrals/actual work 41	45
LAC review referrals	8 actual work 8	11/ actual work 10	14/actual work 12		33 referrals actual work	45 33 referrals/actual work 30
Advocacy referrals	5/actual work 5	5/actual work 4	8/actual work 8		18 referral actual work 17	12
Total	36/actual work 31	38/actual work 26	41/actual work 30		115 referrals actual work 88	102

- There are currently 11 children who are receiving a regular Independent Visitors, the visits can include meetings at the young person's home or attending social events and outings.
- Quarterly Monitoring reports are provided by Jigsaw 4U and Quarterly Monitoring Meetings take place with Children's Services to discuss the quality of work undertaken by the project and to understand the themes and issues relevant to Children Looked After Children who are provided with the Jigsaw Service.

8.15 Where issues are raised by individual children the advocate will liaise with the relevant social work team to seek resolution.