

Children and Families' Voice Framework

End of Year Review 2017/18

Merton Children's Trust

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Merton Children's Trust's Children and Families' Voice Framework 2017-19 restates and refines our commitment to put children, young people and families at the centre of our approach, to delivering services which have a positive impact; it follows on from the User Voice Strategy implemented in 2014. The framework recognises the importance of the voice of families in the context of our refreshed Wellbeing Model and "Think Family" approach, which aims to enable families to manage their own affairs and strengthen their own resilience. The framework represents our systemic approach to working with children, young people and families, believing that listening and allowing true participation will enable us and them to deliver better outcomes.

1.2 This end of year review is a summary of user voice activity and its positive impact on outcomes for children and families during 2017/18. It ensures that the key governance groups, including the Children's Trust and the Merton Safeguarding Children Board, are able to monitor and evaluate user voice activity to inform the continuous improvement of children's services. It also forms part of our commitment to share good practice across agencies, illustrating that children and families' participation is central to practice, service planning and delivery.



2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY










2.1 This is the first year of the implementation of the Children and Families' Voice Framework. In line with the recommendations for the year (2017/18) put forward by the User Voice Strategy end of year review 2016/17:










- ✓ services in the Children's Schools and Families' Department have maintained an annual programme of 'user voice' activity as a core element of service planning;
- ✓ a good range of partners across Merton's Children's Trust have made contributions to reporting and information sharing activity;
- ✓ we have reviewed and reduced our reporting schedule from quarterly to annually to better meet the needs of Merton's Children's Trust;
- ✓ and continued to share good practice across Merton's Children's Trust.






2.2 In direct response to the participation of children, young people and families, the following developments and improvements have been made this year:

2.2.1 Positive impact of participation on children, young people and families.

How have children, young people and families participated?	What has been the impact of their participation?
Commitment 1: Delivering on our participation promise.	
 Merton Youth Parliament (MYP) conducted consultations with a broad range of children and young people who fed back that their top concerns are: crime, gangs and health and safety.	✓ MYP developed a 'Manifesto' work programme that focused on these top concerns: preventing crime, gang awareness and health and safety.
 Young people who spend time in and around Mitcham Library told local youth workers that they feel unwelcome in the library and local shops and that 'no one cares about us'.	✓ We set up of a new youth group in Mitcham library to ease tensions with library staff and to support young people to feel more welcome in their community.

How have children, young people and families participated?	What has been the impact of their participation?
 Young people who are supported by the My Futures NEET team said that they would like to go to University but thought they 'could not afford it'.	✓ The team set up a new 'University programme' to take NEET young people on University visits to find out about grants and funding and to learn about student life.
 Pupils at Abbotsbury Primary School were consulted on how school outcomes in writing and literacy could be improved.	✓ The school used the pupils' feedback to inform the implementation of new activities and resources to support pupils' writing and literacy ; these are presented in poster form in each classroom.
 Young people who attend a range of LGBT+ groups in Merton and Wandsworth fed back their views on how to support Trans pupils in schools.	➤ Development of a Trans Inclusion Toolkit for schools in Merton and Wandsworth to promote good practice in supporting Trans pupils, informed by young people's feedback .
<u>Commitment 2 – Child focused: enabling children and young people who are service users to influence improvements to our systems, services and processes. These changes will improve things for all our young service users.</u>	
 Children, young people and families were involved in consultations and focus groups to inform the development of a number of key strategies which will be implemented this year.	➤ The following strategies address the expressed views and needs of our users: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) Strategy 2018. • Looked After Children Strategy 2018. • Young Carers' Multi-agency Strategy 2018-21. • SEN and Disabilities High needs strategic review 2018.
 Young people who attend the Transforming Families (TF) young people's forum said they would like more access to positive activities.	✓ The TF team organised a go-karting trip for young people
 Young people involved with the Youth Justice Service (YJS) expressed a range of ideas for improvements to the service, via the Youth Board forum for young people.	✓ The YJS implemented these ideas for development including: sending reminders (via email or letter) for home visits; making sure that the youth board meetings do not clash with college commitments; and fixing the intercom at the front door.
 Young people supported by our commissioned services were able to participate in a range of ways in the services they used including being involved in: committees, advisory groups, forums, service reviews, and volunteering.	✓ Young service users led the following activities across our commissioned services: service evaluation, planning and improvement; decision making about finances and strategy; recruitment; publicity; and the development of web based information and advice.
 Young people who attend the Uptown Youth Service told youth workers that some of their siblings have learning or physical disabilities and would like to attend, but feel they need extra support	✓ Uptown set up a new 'Saturday Step Up' inclusive session at Uptown youth centre , supported by peer mentors
<u>Commitment 3 - Delivering on Merton's approach to casework practice: Putting the wishes and feelings of children and young people who are subject of a plan, at the centre of decision making and planning. These changes will improve things for the individual child and their circumstances.</u>	
 During the feedback process after their Child Protection Conference one young person said that they found the conference environment unwelcoming and they had not had the opportunity to express themselves.	✓ A number of improvement actions are now in place: face to face feedback to be taken from young people after each conference; feedback to go to the Chair of the conference immediately after the meeting and any concerns to be followed up prior to the next meeting; and continued work to identify more child and family friendly conference venues.

How have children, young people and families participated?	What has been the impact of their participation?
 In their Youth Justice self-assessment one young person who had been involved in serious organised crime (SCO), said that they are interested in setting up a clothing business.	✓ The team took this to the project board who are responsible for supporting young people involved in SOC, who identified a clothing design company to offer a work experience placement to the young person.
 During the foster carers' review process a number of foster carers' children said that they feel they are not able to spend enough time with their parents.	✓ This issue was raised with the relevant foster carers and positive solutions were implemented to ensure that their own children's needs are met.
 Through the 'Let's talk' process between looked after children and their carer, one child identified that they were anxious about their upcoming exams, and another said that they wanted more contact with their family and were worried about being adopted.	✓ The feedback was shared with the children's social workers to inform their planning and further discussions with young people, to ensure that any issues are addressed .
Commitment 4 - Think Family: enabling families, parents and carers to influence change which empowers them to manage their own affairs, impact decisions about their children and ultimately deliver better outcomes	
 A mother and practitioner using the Signs of Safety approach worked together to create a 'Words and Pictures' story board about how her mental health has impacted on her ability to look after her son.	✓ The mother is able to have conversations with her son about her mental health, and she is able to use the story board again whenever he needs to talk about the situation and why he is not living at home.
 During an audit of children's plans one parent fed back that they had not agreed to a Children in Need Plan, and another said that they had not been involved in its development, and did not agree with the plan for closure.	✓ An action is included in the audit action plan to ensure that information is provided to families on the issue of consent .
 Parents who attend the Mencap Kids First forum for parents of children with SEND fed back that they are concerned that Special Educational Needs coordinators in schools are inconsistent in applying for EHCPs.	✓ Streamlined the Education, Health and Care Plan application (EHCP) process, and delivered training in schools for senior case officers on delivering an effective assess, plan and review process for pupils with SEND
 Our Merton Information, Advice and Guidance Service for SEND has fed back that parents are concerned about their child's support needs in education post-16.	➤ We are now developing a support approach for the South Thames College consortium (post-16 education) on ECH planning.
 Parents who attend the Transforming Families (TF) parents' forum fed back a range of ideas for improvements to the service.	➤ The TF team are implementing a number of developments : supporting families to access advocacy to support them in meetings with professionals including the school; ensuring that new families are reassured that endings will be well prepared and appropriate, as this is embedded in TF practice; and developing an information resource such as a leaflet to advertise the service in the local community.
 Parents who attended a workshop to raise awareness of the 'county lines' drug supply issue, said that they needed: support to establish open communication with their young person and implement 'tough' parenting; more information on the county lines issues; and access to activities outside their home.	✓ We have a range of parenting programmes, support sessions, and awareness raising sessions in schools for years 5 and 6.

How have children, young people and families participated?	What has been the impact of their participation?
 Feedback in this year's foster carers survey has highlighted a number of recommendations for improvements to our fostering service.	➤ We are now implementing an action plan for improvements to our support to foster carers including: training for children's social work teams on the need to work closely with foster carers; minimising inaccuracies in fostering payments; maximising the use of available placements; regular feedback from carers and exit interviews to aid in retention.
 An audit of casework of the Early Year's Supporting Families Team identified that that a low number of casework documents included a family map and action plan of specific and achievable child led outcomes.	➤ Actions are now in place to ensure that family maps are regularly updated and reviewed, and that actions set during supervision are shared with parents.
 Adopters fed back that they would have liked to have heard adopters' experiences of the adoption process, rather than social workers, when they started their adoption journey.	✓ We delivered a 'meet the adopter' drop in session to enable potential adopters to meet current adopters to hear about their experience of adopting in Merton.
 One parent who attended the community led 'fun and fit' club at Phipps Bridge centre was able to talk informally about some concerns and issues regarding herself and her children.	✓ We were able to identify that the children needed some specific support and were able to refer the family to an appropriate local service.
<u>Commitment 5 - Building capacity across the Children's Trust to engage in good quality, ethical and impactful 'user voice' activity,</u>	
 The Children and Young People's Occupational Therapy (CYOT) team have produced a 'patient story' based on the experience of a parent whose child has ASD. It includes the patient's recommendations for preventing the problems the young person and family endured before input by CYOT.	➤ The team are implementing: additional parent training sessions on 'meltdowns' and other similar issues for children and young people with ASD; increasing OT involvement in education in setting; and delivering a teacher training day at local Universities on supporting children with OT needs on school.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR 2018/19

3.1 The following are recommendations for the implementation of the Children and Families' Voice Framework during 2018/19.

- Children, Schools and Families Department to continue to maintain an annual programme of 'user voice' activity as a core element of service planning.
- Continue to expand input from a range of partners across Merton's Children's Trust, into reporting and information sharing activity.
- Continue to report annually on activity to senior managers (DMT, Children's Trust, and MSCB).
- Continue to share good practice across Merton's Children's Trust.

4. COMMITMENT ONE - DELIVERING ON OUR PARTICIPATION PROMISE: PROVIDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE TO INFLUENCE MERTON THE PLACE.

4.1 We are committed to providing a range of participation opportunities for all children and young people who live, study or work in Merton in order to influence policy on key issues, which affect their lives. We have a dedicated Youth Participation and Engagement team responsible for implementing Merton's Participation Promise: enabling children and young people to be listened to; take responsibility; be involved in making choices and decisions; and be involved in how we spend money for children's services and other public services. Notable examples this year are as follows:

Facilitating young people's forums (including 'pupil voice' in schools), and youth led service delivery.

4.2 This year **Merton's Youth Parliament (MYP)** has continued to influence and be part of the democratic processes of the local authority. This year's MYP manifesto commitments were formulated in direct response to the Young Residents' Survey 2017 and a consultation conducted by MYP with young people at the Mitcham carnival. **Young people told the MYP that they should address the following areas of concern in their work:**

- Preventing crime, with a focus on knife crime, hate crime and theft in school...
- Gang awareness...
- Health and safety

How did the MYP respond?

Implemented the MYP manifesto, which led to following areas of success:

- ✓ **Delivered a gangs 'think tank' event for young people** to address crime prevention and gang awareness – this included a discussion about concerns about gang activity, and learning about the 'myths' and 'consequences' of being in a gang; and a Q&A session with a panel of professionals on why people join gangs, why they are dangerous, and strategies for preventing gang crime.
- ✓ **Merton youth lifesavers first aid training event** – sixty young people were trained by St John's ambulance in first aid. The purpose is to increase the capacity of the community to deliver potentially lifesaving intervention including CPR, and assisting someone having an asthma attack.

4.3 In their annual report the MYP highlighted that their involvement in the forum has enabled them to develop the following skills:

- ☺ **Teamwork** – 'ice breaker' activities and a residential enabled us to work as a team - *'we feel that this was key to us being able to work together well' and leading to 'multiple successes'*.
- ☺ **Leadership** – all members have had leadership opportunities such as chairing meetings and sub groups, *'this has given everyone a chance to take charge and learn how to manage a group'*.
- ☺ **Communication** – within the group this developed over time; *'these interactions became friendships built on respect and trust'*.
- ☺ **Confidence and self-esteem** – *we developed confidence over time by being as 'active and involved as we can'*.

4.4 This year the MYP also delivered a 'Student Action Day' involving around 100 students from the Children's Parliament and a number of secondary schools. The purpose of the event was for students to work together to discuss issues of concern and to devise an action plan of 'solutions'.

What were the main areas of concern discussed by the young people?

- Seeking advice and information on **sexual health**...
- **Environment** - Recycling at home and school; litter; traffic pollution...
- **Crime** – feeling safe on the streets later at night.

What solutions did young people put forward?

- **Sexual health clinics** need to advertise where young people will see it, and the venue should be private; apps and online information.
- More **recycling** and waste bins in schools, and controlling food portions to reduce waste.
- Environment officers to be present and **fine those who litter**.
- **Reducing traffic** around schools.
- **More Police** visible in and around schools.
- **Better street lighting**.

4.5 This year our **Youth Participation and Engagement Team** has continued to respond to the expressed needs of Merton's children and young people, in order to support positive engagement and well-being.

Young people who spend time in Mitcham library said that staff had barred them for what they deemed unacceptable behavior. Young people reported that they felt that *'no one cares about us'* and that they are *not welcomed locally in the library and shops*.

How did the Youth Participation and Engagement Team respond?

- ✓ To build improved relationships the team delivered youth engagement activities at the library, with the young people and staff taking part. This developed into a youth group at the library, which will be transferred to the Phipps Bridge Youth Centre.
- ✓ In response to this project, library staff and young people had a greater understanding of each other's perspectives and one member of staff said that they are now **'really happy to come to work'**.

4.6 Our **My Futures Education Training and Employment (ETE)** team work with young people who are NEET (not in education, training or employment), or who are at risk of NEET. Each year they provide a summer scheme for young people, providing opportunities for positive activities.

Since summer 2017, this scheme has involved young people themselves as peer mentors. The mentors help to plan the scheme, including trips and activities that are inspiring, improve team work, communication, self-belief and confidence, as well as model good behaviour and attitude.

Young people told the **ETE team** that they are keen to go to University, but didn't feel they could ever afford to go.

How did the ETE Team respond?

- ✓ Introduced a 'University programme' supporting young people to attend workshops at local Universities to find out about courses, application process, funding, grants and continued support once on campus. This helped to dispel myths about funding and gave an opportunity to spend a day on campus as an insight into Uni life.

- ☺ "I didn't really know what UCAS was before this workshop, I now understand it and have decided I definitely want to go to University now." Female 16
- ☺ "I really appreciate how understanding you are, it makes a change from all the other adults who just get angry with me all the time about stuff like this, thank you." Male 17
- ☺ "I am coming to realise that I struggle with showing gratitude. I am grateful for your support and the support provided by My Futures. You have been a great help with a lot. Referring me to counselling helped a lot too." Male 18

4.7 Schools across the borough are committed to providing opportunities for children and young people to contribute to the continuous improvement of teaching and learning in schools, service developments that will improve children's lives, and to learn about and take part in all levels of the democratic process. The school review process involves feedback from pupils, which is then addressed by school leaders. Examples of the impact of this process include:

- Pupils requested that the school carry out a pupil survey, in order that the school has a more comprehensive understanding of their perceptions about school.
- Pupils said that the school should scrutinise the cost of after school clubs to ensure that no pupil is disadvantaged on the basis that their family cannot afford the cost

This year **Abbotsbury Primary School** organised a range of participation opportunities for their pupils, with the following impact:

- *Pupils in Key Stage 2 shared their ideas about how best to support their writing skills, and boys' literacy skills – two areas for development highlighted by analysing school attainment and progress data...*
- *The school's 'Feeling Safe' survey showed that children were overwhelmingly positive that they felt safe at school, and know who they could go to for help. Some younger children said that they feel scared to see the foxes on the school field and are worried by the fire alarm...*

What did the school and pupils do?

- ✓ Included the pupils' ideas about the activities and resources that best support their writing and literacy, in the school development plan, and presented in poster form in each classroom.
- ✓ Older children suggested having 'role play' sessions on fire safety and the purpose of the fire alarm.
- ✓ Older children created a documentary on foxes and their habitat, and introduced a soft toy fox as a class reward, both to create a more positive image of foxes.

Another example is the work of **Harris Academy Morden** whose 'Student Leadership Team' and 'School Council' allow students to make a positive contribution to their learning environment and to develop their own leadership qualities; and give teachers a better understanding of students' insights and capabilities. In response to the discussions and work of these two student groups, the following developments have been made in the school:

- ✓ Healthier snacks now provided for revision classes.
- ✓ Improved spiritual, moral, social and cultural development curriculum for Key Stage 4.
- ✓ Used 'Jack Petchey' funding to improve the sports facilities, including new football nets and basketball courts.

Enabling young people to take part in consultations and surveys, which inform service and strategy developments

4.8 This year we have developed a **Young Carers Multi Agency Strategy** for 2018-21 in consultation with young carers and their families. The strategy illustrates that while young carers value their role in their family, there are some negative aspects of their caring role, and, it is nationally recognised, many young carers experience poor outcomes. The strategy brings together all agencies in joint actions to prevent young carers being involved in inappropriate caring and to offer the support they need to learn, develop and thrive and to enjoy positive childhoods and youth. **In the consultation on the strategy young carers said they want professionals to:**

- *Listen to them (particularly in respect of the knowledge they hold in relation to the person they care for)...*
- *Ensure that their own health needs alongside the health **needs of their family were addressed...***
- *Be able to access activities and opportunities enjoyed by their non-caring peers...*
- *Periodically 'check-in' on them to check they are 'ok' in relation to their own well-being...*

How did we respond?

We developed the Young Carers' Strategy to include the following actions in the implementation plan:

- Young carers views inform their needs assessment and they develop their own care plan in partnership with their family and key professionals
- Young carers are considered as a priority group for access to key health services, especially mental health related services
- Young carers are supported to develop care packages appropriate to their caring role and which engage them in a range of activities.
- Educational establishments regularly identify and refer young carers using assessment tools and periodically 'check-in' on young carers.

4.9 Merton Council's **Public Health Team and Merton Clinical Commissioning Group** have developed an **Autism Strategy for 2018-23** which sets out how the borough will support and deliver services to people of all ages, who have autism. As part of the consultation process Merton's Participation and Engagement Team conducted a focus group with a number of young people who have a diagnosis of ASD (autistic spectrum disorder) who are supported in mainstream school. The group looked at each of the six themes of the strategy and gave their views via an open discussion:

On the six themes outlined in the strategy, young people said:

1. *The assessment process should be quick and not repetitive...*
2. *Young people with autism should be involved in the design and delivery of services...*
3. *Work experience placements should be longer, to give both the young person and employer time to understand fully what it is like for someone with autism in a work environment...*
4. *There should be support for families and carers...*
5. *We would like access to information about activities and opportunities, made available via schools...*
6. *Apart from those who work with people with autism, most people do not understand autism well and this can lead to exclusion...*

How did we respond?

The borough's **Autism Strategy** actions include:

- Redesign local referral, assessment and support services to meet the needs of children and young people and their families who may need diagnosis of an autistic spectrum disorder.
- Actively involve people with autism, families and carers in co-designing services and take steps to promote equality.
- Review existing opportunities for supporting students with autism in further education and look to improve these opportunities, with a specific focus on preparing for employment and independent living.
- Review opportunities to improve support for families and carers of people with autism, such as strengthening signposting, peer support networks, advocacy services and direct work with families and short breaks
- Strengthen the 'local offer' for children, young people and adults to provide a single point of access to clear, comprehensive information about local services
- Deliver autism awareness training as part of equality and diversity, to NHS and Merton Council staff, and staff in other organisations, developed by those with autism.

4.10 Our **School Improvement Team** supports schools to implement good practice and progress in tackling homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying, and has achieved a 'Stonewall rating' of 1st in London and 13th out of 39 local authorities. As part of this work this year the team, in partnership with colleagues from Wandsworth, supported young people to deliver a conference for schools and colleges on supporting LGBTQ+ children and young people in education. Young people delivered two presentation and discussion sessions which looked at 'gender identity' and 'a guide for teachers and parents on how to support your child if they are on the LGBTQ+ spectrum'. In addition, the team, also in conjunction with Wandsworth

has gathered feedback from Trans young people who attend various LGBT+ groups in Merton and Wandsworth on the development of a Trans Inclusion Toolkit for schools in both boroughs. The toolkit sets out guidance and good practice for schools to ensure that Trans pupils are included and supported. The toolkit is currently being piloted in a number of schools as a final consultation, and will be implemented in the Spring of 2019. Key issues raised by young people, which have been used to inform the toolkit are as follows:

- *'Teaching staff must be sanctioned for intentionally using the wrong names and pronouns of students'*
- *'Each member of staff in school should have to complete individual training on trans issues. They should have to pass this test to stay teaching in schools. It could be a recognised qualification, which is advertised, so students know who is safe to be approached'*
- *'Legislation should be introduced to protect trans people who come out to specific staff members. It should be that the young person must consent to other staff being informed and the young person must have the final say'*
- *'It would be useful to be able to select different pronouns on school and college applications and then easy for them to modify on their database. The pronoun 'they' should be an option'.*

4.11 Merton Public Health commissioned a local 'Great Weight Debate Merton' to engage with residents, particularly in the East of the borough to work with them to understand the issues and opportunities in tackling childhood obesity. Nearly 75% of respondents to the survey believed that tackling childhood obesity should be a top or high priority. The following issues were raised: residents said there is a link between childhood obesity and the availability of cheap unhealthy food; parents said that while Merton's parks and green spaces are an asset they have safety concerns about letting their children play outside; young people said there is cheap unhealthy food in schools, and there should be access to lessons on healthy eating and cooking skills. As part of the project, 31 recommendations have been produced, with parents, adults and young people also asked to come up with solutions to tackle childhood obesity in Merton:

- *Produce useful and practical advice and guidance around healthier eating and cooking including meal planning and recipe advice).*
- *Encourage low cost and free activities that let families be physically active together and with their community.*
- *Work with schools to encourage healthy eating and cooking education in lessons.*
- *Help families "buddy up" to get healthy and physically active together.*

Supporting young people to take part in activities that have a positive impact on their lives and the community.

4.12 Merton's Volunteer Police Cadets (VPC) group is run by the Merton Police Youth Engagement Officer and aims to empower young people, presenting them with new opportunities and a chance to make a significant positive difference in their communities, and to operational policing. During the year, VPCs have participated and supported the community in a broad range of events and activities. This is what they said about their involvement:

- ☺ **Support crew for the London Marathon** - *"This is one of the best days in Cadets, everyone pulling together to help each other, and it's been great to cheer on the runners, they're amazing!"*
- ☺ **Army exercise weekend** - *"This is completely different to anything we've done before, we have learnt a lot. It's been great to see how our Army colleagues operate and see the kit they use. I even got medically evacuated to a helicopter whilst role-playing an injured civilian!"*
- ☺ **National Police Air Service (NPAS) visit** - *"This has really opened our eyes to the complex and demanding job our colleagues do, and seeing inside the helicopter, with so much tech in a small area, I really admire what they do. Thank you NPAS for an amazing day, and all you do for units on the ground!"*

develop a variety of skills, volunteer and get involved in sports. In April this year, nearly 387 Merton young people were presented with certificates and badges, by local dignitaries, for their Duke of Edinburgh (DofE) award achievements.

- ☺ At 61%, Merton has enjoyed one of the highest completion rates in London this year.
- ☺ The young people from 13 secondary schools across the borough were recognised for their perseverance and hard work, which meant they completed the awards over 12 months at bronze, silver and gold levels.
- ☺ One of the pupils who achieved their gold level award is now working as a part time youth worker at the Open Award Centre, helping others to take part in the DofE scheme.

5. COMMITMENT TWO - CHILD FOCUSED: ENABLING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WHO ARE SERVICE USERS TO INFLUENCE IMPROVEMENTS TO OUR SYSTEMS, SERVICES AND PROCESSES. THESE CHANGES WILL IMPROVE THINGS FOR ALL OUR YOUNG SERVICE USERS

5.1 We are committed to enabling children and young people who are users of children's services to influence improvements to systems. To support this we have built in a number of processes including dedicated capacity to support the engagement of our looked after children and care leavers and child protection (CP) cohorts. We aim to empower service users to shape and improve services and processes. We want to learn from individual experiences to influence improvements for all service users. Notable examples of user voice activity this year include:

Enabling users to take part in research and consultations that inform service and strategy developments.

5.2 To inform this year's development of our refreshed **Looked After Children Strategy** we commissioned a Coram Voice: Your Life, Your Care survey. Thirty seven percent of our LAC (52) took part in the survey and gave the following positive feedback about the support they receive from Merton Council as their corporate parent:

- ☺ The majority (94%) of children and young people felt safe in their homes 'all or most of the time', in comparison 75% of children in the general population felt 'totally safe' at home.
- ☺ The majority (96%) of children and young people had a good friend. This was similar to their peers (97%) in the general population.
- ☺ All of the youngest children trusted their carers 'all or most of the time' or 'sometimes', felt that their carers noticed how they were feeling, liked school, and got to have fun at the weekends.
- ☺ All of the 8-11yrs trusted their social worker and knew that they could ask to speak to their social worker on their own.
- ☺ A significantly higher proportion of young people (11-18yrs) were happy with contact arrangements with their fathers compared with their peers across 13 other LAs.
- ☺ A higher proportion of young people in Merton liked school (84%) and felt that their carers showed an interest in their education (97%) compared to their peers in the general population.
- ☺ Compared to the general population, a higher proportion of young people in Merton were happy with their appearance, felt that the things they did in their lives were worthwhile and felt positive about their future.

Looked after children who responded to the survey said:

- They **only sometimes get to have fun** and have the opportunity to go out (38%)...
- They want to **know more about why they are in care** (29%)...
- They are 'sometimes' or 'all or most of the time' **worried about their feelings or behaviour** (52%)...
- They **do not like their bedroom** - linked to safety, sense of identity and feeling a sense of belonging (higher than nationally)...
- They are **sometimes afraid to go to school because of bullying** (15%)

In response, we have used the following suggested actions to inform the new Looked After Children Strategy:

- Ask children and young people what they want to do at the weekends and in their spare time.
- Help children understand why they are in care.
- Continue to ask about worries children have about their feelings and behaviour.
- Work with carers to ensure children and young people are happy with their bedrooms, and that young people's feelings are taken into account.
- Continue to work with schools to identify and help children who feel bullied at school, and support children and young people to make and keep friendships.

5.3 Our **14+ Team** continues to provide support and activities for unaccompanied asylum seeking children and young people in order to help them to build resilience, independence,

friendships, experience of life and culture in their new home. This year's events have included a games night at a local coffee shop and a trip to Twenty20 cricket at the Oval. Plans are in place for a residential to the Isle of Wight during summer 2018, a visit to the Houses of Parliament, and a trip to the theatre.

Facilitating user forums for vulnerable children who are in receipt of services.

5.4 Merton's Children in Care council is a forum for looked after children and care leavers to meet and discuss issues in order to influence service improvements and positive outcomes for young people. Topics discussed this year include: Housing; budgeting; 'Staying Put' in foster care; LAC reviews; Independent Reviewing Officer service; health, emotional well-being and support when you leave car; growing up undocumented, and homelessness.

In addition, the questions included in the Your Life Your Care survey (see 4.2 above) were discussed with the CiCC before the survey was finalised and implemented.

5.5 This year the **Transforming Families (TF) Team** have continued to facilitate meetings for young people who they are working with, to give feedback on their views of the service. Positive feedback from one such meeting included the following:

- ☺ *Workers are always clear about the purpose of meetings with the young person, and always discuss the plan for the following session.*
- ☺ *Young people like the fact that the main focus of the work is on moving things forward and 'getting things done'.*
- ☺ *Young people enjoyed taking part in activities and felt this helped them to build a good relationship with their worker.*
- ☺ *Young people placed Transforming Families as 8/9 on a scale of 1-10.*

A number of suggestions for developments were highlighted by the young people:

- *An opportunity for a residential trip...*
- *More opportunities to take part in a range of activities such as 'go karting' or 'quad biking'...*

How did we respond?

- These suggestions have been discussed within the team, and in the first instance, a trip to a go karting centre has been arranged for later in the year.

5.6 The Youth Justice Youth Board (for young people involved with the Youth Justice Service) has continued to meet regularly this year, discussing issues for improvement which have been added to a formal action plan for implementation by the youth justice team. Here are examples of the impact of young people's feedback over the year:

At the Youth Board forum young people said:

- *If different workers have different roles then they should focus on their remit (specialist workers don't need to ask about family issues, case workers need to spend time to know me)...*
- *Home visits feel awkward especially in front of family. Be mindful of who is around. Don't treat like an investigation. Being taken out for lunch would be nice...*
- *Send letters / reminders for visits early enough...*
- *Fix the microphone/ intercom at the front door. Door doesn't work properly...*
- *Review when Youth board is held in September as this clashed with College 'sign up'...*

How did the Youth Justice Team respond?

- ✓ Manager discussed the issue with the specific workers involved, and their line manager. This is now an action in YJS team plan.
- ✓ 'Home visit' issues are now actioned in the team plan for ongoing monitoring.
- ✓ 'Timescale of visit letters/ reminders' issue now actioned in the team plan for ongoing monitoring.
- ✓ Contacted the facilities Manager and raised the issue with the council's health and safety group.
- ✓ Youth board is now set in advance during school holidays and poster put up in reception.

Supporting users to take part in recruitment, training and development.

5.7 Our **Foster Carer Learning and Development team** continues to support young people who care leavers to **run workshops for prospective foster carers** delivered as part of the assessment process. This is widely enjoyed and appreciated by carers as an opportunity to talk with young people about the impact of fostering.

Learning from serious case reviews

5.8 **Merton Safeguarding Children Board's Learning and Improvement System** ensures that as a result Serious Case Reviews (SCRs), there is a process of widely disseminating lessons learned. In addition, focus of attention is paid to ensuring that the child's voice is central to the review process. As a result of the Serious Case Review 'Child B', commissioned by the MSCB at the end of 2015, there have been a number of significant service improvements informed by the voice of the child. Child B (age 16) was seriously assaulted by their mother resulting in significant injury. B's mother had a long history of mental illness, including in-patient and community based mental health services. B had been on child protection and child in need plans and was a young carer:

During the SCR process 'child B' said:

- *I started to care for my Mum when she was unwell, when I was in primary school. No-one told me to look after her. But I had to look after her, even from a young age'...*
- *'I was left to get on with it. **Mental health** workers stopped coming to the house – when they had come it had put Mum and me at ease'...*
- *'My Father found it hard to accept that my Mother got ill. He believed in **traditional beliefs** and that mother's illness was because she had been 'bewitched' or because of 'black magic'...*
- *'Young Carers (**Carers' Support Merton**) understood – I didn't have to pretend; 'I could feel like rubbish' – they had talking sessions about a physical or mental illness which were very helpful, and didn't focus on any one person. The focus was not just on me. I didn't feel pitied'..*

In response to Child B's views the following have been implemented:

- ✓ A revised multi agency Young Carers Strategy which addresses the need for **early identification, assessment and support.**
- ✓ New multi agency protocol to meet the needs of children and unborn children whose parents or carers have **mental health problems.**
- ✓ Work with practitioners on understanding **culture and belief.**
- ✓ Increased work with **Carers Support Merton** on supporting young carers.
- ✓ A presentation of Child B's views at the MSCB Conference which was focused on: *No Wrong Door A spotlight on parental mental health.*

5.9 Merton's **Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub** is the single point of contact for all safeguarding concerns regarding children and young people in Merton. At this year's MSCB Conference the service sought feedback from professionals about their satisfaction with the service. Feedback included the following:

- ☺ *supportive whenever they call for consultation.*
- ☺ *MASH social care workers understand thresholds.*
- ☺ *open and always willing to help.*
- ☺ *we receive feedback from the MASH following referrals.*

Supporting commissioned and other partner services to ensure that young people's participation is central to their work

5.10 All of our **children and young people's commissioned services** are required to adhere to the Merton Participation Promise. Participation and participatory activity is monitored as a part of the quarterly monitoring process. These services include Advocacy and Independent Visiting; Boys and Young Men's Service; Children Missing from Home or Care and CSE; Risk and Resilience Service; Short-breaks services for Children with Disabilities; Young Carers; Support to PSHE delivery in schools.

The report '**The Review of the Impact of Commissioned Voluntary Services 2017/18**' sets out how young people participated in the work of these services over the year:

- ✓ Early stage development of a care leavers website to disseminate advice and information on a range of issues.
- ✓ Involved in their own care planning.
- ✓ Involved in committees, advisory groups and forums regarding service decisions (at local agency and partnership level).
- ✓ Establishment of a new Young Leaders Committee and the coordination of secret shopper reviews of METRO youth services in line with the 'You're Welcome' accreditation.
- ✓ Formal and informal service evaluations which include young people.
- ✓ Involved in service needs assessments with regard to type and location of activities; including participation in design of diversionary interventions to reduce a group of young people from going missing together.
- ✓ Recruitment of staff, service publicity and design.
- ✓ Volunteering activities including administrative tasks.
- ✓ Decision making regarding activities, service spend and strategy design.
- ✓ Committee members tracking and monitoring decisions made with young people and reporting progress back to young people.
- ✓ A young person participating in 'Think Family' safeguarding conference and achievements celebrated with young people in a variety of forms.
- ✓ Development of web-based media such as through Jigsaw and Young Carer's websites.

5.11 The **Uptown Youth Service** is part of the borough's youth offer delivered by the voluntary and community sector. They provide a dance academy, youth club and learning centre. Participation opportunities for young people provided by the service include: opportunity to volunteer within the youth club as trainee youth workers or session support; and support to sign up for the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme. In addition, young people's views and ideas are sought through group discussions with members, management and youth work staff used to shape service delivery and program of activities.

- *Young people said that some of those attending the service had siblings with learning or physical disabilities who felt they could not attend the club...*
- *They suggested that current young club members could act as befrienders to help young people with SEN or disabilities to feel supported in accessing the service...*

How did Uptown respond?

- ✓ Targeted training was offered via the short breaks team and Merton Youth Service to skill up staff and youth volunteers in safeguarding and disabilities; autism, inclusion; and diversity.
- ✓ The new '**Saturday Step up**' inclusive youth club session was introduced.

6. COMMITMENT THREE - DELIVERING ON MERTON'S APPROACH TO CASEWORK PRACTICE: PUTTING THE WISHES AND FEELINGS OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WHO ARE SUBJECT OF A PLAN, AT THE CENTRE OF DECISION MAKING AND PLANNING. THESE CHANGES WILL IMPROVE THINGS FOR THE INDIVIDUAL CHILD AND THEIR CIRCUMSTANCES.

6.1 We want to ensure that vulnerable children and young people are supported to participate meaningfully in the assessment, planning and review processes for their case. Effective engagement with them will improve things for those individual children and their circumstances. We are committed to making sure that our approach will meet the diverse needs of our children, including that which relates to their cultural and ethnic backgrounds. This is in line with our practice model: an approach to assessing and managing risk and promoting well-being and stability based on a 'systemic' culture, in which services are child and family led and responsive to their needs. Notable examples of user voice activity this year include:

Using child centred practice approaches for assessment, planning and review

6.2 The voice of Merton's children and young people with a child protection (CP) plan – Children and young people are supported to **participate in their CP Conference** either by ensuring that their views are included in the social worker's report (the most common method), by attending in person (children 12 or over), by being represented by an independent advocate. Decisions made about a child's care are more likely to meet their needs when directly informed by the child's expressed views, wishes and feelings. Our Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Report for 2017/18 includes a good practice example from a CP Conference Chair, of the impact that the inclusion of the child's voice via an advocate had on the decisions that were made about their care:

- ☺ Young person would like to have attended the child protection conference but declined because of her parents. She met with the social worker and subsequently an advocate from Jigsaw4U and provided a comprehensive written statement for the conference.
- ☺ Social worker listened to the young person, completed a thorough assessment and within a short period of time initiated care proceedings. The young person has said they feel they have been listened to, supported and feel relatively safe - CP Chair

During the year, eight of the 12 children and young people who attended their conference gave feedback on their experience.

What did they say about their experience?

- *They were happy or very happy with their conference, scaling at 9 or 10 (out of 10) for all aspects...*
- *They had the opportunity to meet with the Chair beforehand and all felt prepared and understood what the conference was about...*
- *The had the opportunity to say what they wanted to say and felt listened to...*
- *One young person did not feel that he had the opportunity to express himself or that he was involved in the plan. He found the environment unwelcoming...*

The following improvement actions are now in place to improve children's participation in their CP conference:

- Face to face feedback to be taken from young people after each conference.
- New participation officer to obtain more in depth views from children and young people who do not attend conferences.
- Feedback to go to the Chair of the conference immediately after the meeting and any concerns to be followed up prior to the next meeting.
- Continued work to identify more child and family friendly conference venues.
- Letters from Chairs to children to advise them directly of the outcome of the conference.

6.3 The voice of Merton's looked after children and young people – The IRO report for 2017/18 also states that during the year:

- ☺ 99% of reviews for looked after children were conducted within the statutory timescale.
- ☺ 99% of children and young people participated in their review.

The most common method for young people's views to be represented in their LAC review was by **young person attending the meeting and speaking for themselves – 68%**. In addition, IROs have a responsibility to seek the views of individual children who do not wish to attend their reviews and to find out what they would like to assist them in putting forward their views. In having these conversations the age, ability and communication requirements of the individual child is taken into account, as is the venue, participants and timing of the review. The following feedback from a looked after young person highlights the positive impact of the IRO having been consistent in the young person's life.

- ☺ *"IRO, for as long as I have known you, you have never changed, you've always been kind, thoughtful and made these meetings enjoyable. So thank you". "17 Years and what a 17 Years it's been but I made it somehow so thank you all".*

6.4 Merton's Foster Carer Review process gathers information from foster carers, their children, and from looked after children, in order to develop and continuously improve the support offer delivered by Merton's Fostering Supervision Team. Over the year feedback has been positive, and where issues have been raised these have been addressed:

Looked after children said:

- ☺ *They are in the main happy in their placements and are forming relationships within their fostering families.*
- ☺ *They feel safe and secure; their foster carers and their foster carer's extended families support them.*
- ☺ *They are encouraged to take part in activities and hobbies, and to develop life skills and make plans for the future.*

Foster carers' children said:

- *They are positive about living in a fostering household, meeting new children, playing with them, taking them out and seeing them develop...*
- *They felt it was good to know that they were helping...*
- *A number of adult children were keen in their roles as back-up carers and were looking forward to attending training.*
- *A number of children raised concerns about not being able to spend time with their parents as it seemed that the foster child's needs came first...*

What happened in response to the concerns?

- ✓ *The issues were raised with the foster carers at their review and positive solutions were implemented to ensure that their own children's needs are met.*

Foster carers said:

- ☺ *They are happy with the support and services they receive from the fostering team including their supervising social worker.*
- ☺ *They receive excellent support for them and their foster child from Merton's Virtual School for LAC.*
- ☺ *They receive invaluable support from CAMHS.*
- ☺ *They feel valued and appreciated.*

6.5 In addition, looked after children are able to give feedback during the **‘Let’s Talk’ process** that is a conversation that takes place between the child (aged 5-15 years) and their carer. A dip sample of the ‘let’s talk’ forms over the year highlights the following themes:

- **On education** – *all the children were in full time education, and most felt ‘happy’ and ‘positive’ about at school or college. One young person expressed anxiety about upcoming exams...*
- **On placements** – *all the children were happy in their placements reporting that they take part in a range of activities and get help with home work. One young person said ‘it’s like a family. Thank you for helping me with everything’ another said ‘it was the best place’ and another said it was ‘cool’...*
- **On the care plan** – *A number of children said that they were not aware of their care plan. A good proportion said that they were happy with their reviews and felt ‘listened to’. In one case the child said they wanted more contact with their family and were scared of being adopted...*

How did the fostering service respond?

- ✓ This feedback has been shared with the children’s social workers to inform their planning and further discussions with young people, to ensure that any issues are addressed.

6.6 Our **Youth Justice Service (YJS) assessments** are informed by a self-assessment completed by the young person themselves, which sets out their views on the support they need. An audit of this process completed in November 2017 (based on orders starting between May and November 2016) showed that **86% of cases have a completed young person’s self-assessment**. This is a very good increase since the audit completed in November 2015 (based on orders starting between March and October 2015) where 36% of cases had a completed young person’s self-assessment. In addition, a recent report of assessments, completed between April and June 2018, shows a further **increase to 93%**.

The YJS is part of the delivery of the Serious Organised Crime (SOC) Project that aims to support young offenders who have been involved in serious organised crime, by engaging them in employment and training. Information from the young person’s self-assessment is used to match the young person with an employment/ training opportunity in which they are interested.

In their self-assessment one young person said that they are interested in setting up a clothing business...

- ✓ In response, the YJS took this to the SOC project board who were able to identify a clothing design company to offer a work experience placement to this young person.

Providing advocacy support for children and young people in care or on a child protection plan

6.7 We commission **Jigsaw 4u, a voluntary sector organisations, to offer advocacy support** to Merton’s looked after children and those on a child protection plan. The 2017/18 commissioned services annual report pack identifies the following take up of the service:

- ☺ In excess of the target of 45, 53 children and young people on a CP plan engaged with the advocacy service.
- ☺ All of the target 45 looked after children engaged with the advocacy service.

Positive feedback from these young people about the impact of the service include the following:

- ☺ *Because my advocate was with me, I didn't get angry. No one had contacted me for 3 weeks, the advocate called and I met with her, she helped me get my views across and I'm now in a new placement and regularly getting my food vouchers.'*
- ☺ *'My advocate is a good person and is really good at helping young people. She can speak for me whenever I want her to in meetings'.*
- ☺ *'My advocate got my opinions out loud, made people listen to me and got what I asked for'.*
- ☺ *'She stayed with me at my LAC review, took the time to help me understand what was being said - thank you Jigsaw'*

6.8 As part of our **quality assurance processes** in children's social care, an audit of a sample of cases is conducted every two months. The June 2018 audit report illustrates that in 21 'children's plans' ('Stepdown'; children in need; child protection, looked after children and 'pathway') reviewed, there was very good evidence of children and families' engagement in the development of the plan. The overall grades of the plans were: Good' 62 %; 'Requires Improvement' 33%; and 'Inadequate' 5%. Regarding children and families' engagement, the following was highlighted:

- ☺ Children and young people's voices were well evidenced in the majority of the 'children's plans' reviewed.
- ☺ The majority of 'children's plans' evidenced collaboration with parents and carers and were written to be easily understood.
- ☺ 57% of the sample group of children and families contributed their views to the audit process.

The audit report illustrates that overall, children and families' voices were taken into account in the development of plans. Two notable examples of the impact of this are as follows:

- ☺ An 8 year old was supported to express her views and this led to the escalation of her case to the child protection process.
- ☺ In response to a mother's feedback, that she felt that there was still more work to do to support her and her family a child protection plan remained in place.

In addition, the report includes feedback by families during the audit process, on the **positive impact of the 'children's plan'**:

- ☺ A young person said that she *is aware of the LAC plan and is happy with it. She says her social worker listens to her and she feels she can always speak to her if she is not happy about any aspect of her care plan.*
- ☺ A mother said that she is happy with the supportive relationship with the social worker. The support provided under the child protection plan *has been positive, her eldest daughter has been regularly attending school and there has been a marked improvement in her behaviour.*

One of the recommendations of the audit report is in response to feedback from two parents:

- A mother felt that she had not been part of developing the CIN Plan and was now not in agreement with the plan for closure...
- A mother said that at the Initial Child Protection Conference she felt like she was on trial and that the power was being given to her elder child. She did not agree to a CIN Plan but felt she did not have a choice...

➤ In response, the audit report 'actions' state that information should be provided to families on the issue of consent.

7. COMMITMENT FOUR - THINK FAMILY: ENABLING FAMILIES, PARENTS AND CARERS TO INFLUENCE CHANGE WHICH EMPOWERS THEM TO MANAGE THEIR OWN AFFAIRS, IMPACT DECISIONS ABOUT THEIR CHILDREN AND ULTIMATELY DELIVER BETTER OUTCOMES

7.1 We are committed to enabling families to manage their own affairs and strengthen their own resilience. This is evident in our refreshed Wellbeing Model and “Think Family” approach. Feedback from families through audits, learning reviews and serious case reviews has taught us that actively engaging those who are difficult to engage is critical if we are to support the meaningful empowerment of our vulnerable groups. We are continuing to develop our skills and tools to enable effective engagement through a variety of methods. Notable examples of user voice activity this year include:

Supporting families to influence casework and case reviews.

7.2 This year practitioners across Children’s Social Care have continued to embed **the Signs of Safety (SoS)** approach into Merton’s safeguarding services. SoS offers a collaborative approach to children’s safeguarding starting with practitioners who perceive themselves as agents of change, working with families to generate their own solutions. Two case studies produced this year describe the use of the ‘Words and Pictures’ tool within the ‘Signs of Safety’ approach in work with families:

A **‘Words and Pictures’** activity was undertaken by practitioners (not allocated to the case), working with the mother. Together they created a visual narrative about how the mother’s mental ill health has impacted on her ability to provide safe and consistent care to her youngest son and his siblings. It included the court proceedings process and decision making about whether the child could remain at home, go into foster care or be placed with family. The final illustration was a combined representation of the concerns and worries of the family and the local authority.

The practitioner said that the key areas of positive impact of the ‘Words and Pictures’ process were as follows:

- ☺ “The best thing about the work was the creativity it gives you and the family when trying to explain their lived experience. The process when done **correctly empowers the service user** and invites them to be the expert of their story”.
- ☺ “Mum said that it has **helped her have conversations with her son** about her mental health and that they have read the story often when he has needed reminding about her mental health or why he is not living at home.
- ☺ Mum has asked that a story board be done for each of her other children as she thinks they each need one too and it has been so helpful for her other son that she thinks it will be helpful for each of them and the worries are different.
- ☺ Mum said at first she thought this process was a waste of time because professionals had already told her son why he wouldn’t be living at home, but now **sees how valuable it is and what a difference it has made**”.

The second case study describes how a **words and pictures** story was created with mum, which was read by her to the children, to help them to understand the situation. Two older children in the family completed a **‘safety house’** which helped them to think of rules for their house. Mum created her own **safety plan** for when dad visited and then the whole family worked on a safety plan together that they could all follow. In response to the process the mother said:

- ☺ ‘It’s getting **down to the point**, and having **a connection with the family** and understanding their dynamics which I really feel you did which helped us to **move forward to a better place**. We now have our lives back.’

7.3 Parents are supported to participate in child protection conferences in order for their views to be heard and for them to be at the centre of decision making and planning. After each conference the parent is asked to give feedback on how well they were prepared for the conference, their experience of the meeting, and how well they feel their child's views were taken into account. A short report on feedback from parents in the first quarter of 2018/19, focusing on responses to the statement '***The wishes and views of my child were an important part of the meeting***', highlights the following:

'The wishes and views of my child were an important part of the meeting'

- *Eight of the nine parents who gave feedback on their Initial CP Conference rated their level of satisfaction on this statement as 8/10 or above...*
- *14 of the 18 parents who gave feedback on their CP review rated their level of satisfaction as 8/10 or above...*

The following improvement action is now in place to improve parents' feedback on the CP conference:

- Minimum of two independently facilitated conversations per week to obtain more qualitative feedback – this will be helpful in identifying issues where the satisfaction level is low.

7.4 The Merton Information, Advice and Support Service for SEN and Disabilities (MIASS) continues to receive very high levels of requests for support from parents and increasingly from schools and other professionals seeking specific guidance and information around SEN and disabilities. A survey of 50 users of the MIASS for SEND, conducted during quarter one of 2017/18 showed a high level of satisfaction with the service, with 92% saying that the information, advice and support given 'made a great deal of difference'. Positive feedback includes:

- ☺ *We've always found the MIASS officer's knowledge and advice to be invaluable – parent.*
- ☺ *Thank you for your help. I really appreciate it. It is all much clearer now - new SENco in school.*
- ☺ *Just a kind note to say thank you, K started his new school last week and he is loving it...could not have done it without your help - parent who used the EHCP transfer process to move their child to a more suitable school.*

A Post-16 Information Advice and Guidance Worker provides a support service as part of the MIASS. The role supports young people with SEN and disabilities post 16, in the transition into adulthood via further training and ultimately towards employment opportunities. A case study produced during the year illustrates how listening to the young person's views was key to the positive outcome:

A year 11 pupil dropped out of their ARP (additional resource provision) in a mainstream school, and were effectively NEET (not in education training or employment). The service met with the young person and their parent over a number of sessions, and after some disagreement between the two, managed to come to a consensus about the most appropriate setting. The service ensured that the young person's new EHCP (education, health and care plan) represented their personal outcomes and aspirations for their journey into adulthood, and included the name of a suitable setting.

Over the year, feedback to the MIASS regarding the post 16 service has included the following:

- ☺ *Thanks so much for your help, I really appreciate everything you do. Parent of 18 year old with very complex needs and ASD.*
- ☺ *Many thanks again to the support ... You were really a great help. We'll keep you posted of any further developments.*

7.5 Our **Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Integrated Service** uses a range of ways to ensure that the voice of children and families is central to service planning and delivery. The service works closely with the Kids First forum for parents of children with SEND on all aspects of the Children and Families Act SEND reforms. Key examples of the impact of this over the year are as follows:

Parents from the Kids First Forum

said that they are concerned that Special Educational Needs coordinators in schools are inconsistent in applying for EHCPs...

How did we respond?

- ✓ SENCo working group streamlined the EHCP application process.
- ✓ Delivered training in schools for senior case officers on an effective assess, plan and review process (including for children at SEN support level).

The **Kids First Forum** also gave in depth feedback on their assessment of the effectiveness of local arrangements for children with SEND, across each of the three aspects of the upcoming SEND inspection by Ofsted and CQC (identification, meeting needs, and improving outcomes). Parents highlighted the following **positive aspects** of the support they receive:

Identification:

- ☺ Experience of having CAMHS therapists on site or all in the same centre really helps, for example at Cricket Green School which has a Speech and Language Therapy department in school.
- ☺ Merton Autism Outreach Service is a great service.

Meeting needs:

- ☺ Quality of EHC Plans in Merton is higher than other local authorities.
- ☺ All Merton Mencap services including Kids First and Talk Autism.

Improving outcomes:

- ☺ Travel training.
- ☺ Short breaks.

They also highlighted a **broad range of issues and areas for improvement**. In response to this Kids First now meets regularly with key senior members of staff to further discuss and focus down on the issues raised. One recurring theme raised by parents at these meetings relates to pathways for children with Autistic Spectrum Disorder; this had led to a review of ASD pathways.

7.6 The service also works closely with our **Merton Information Advice and Support Service for SEN and Disabilities** (MIASS) (see 6.5 above), to ensure that any feedback from families of children with SEND is fed into service improvements. A key example of the impact of this over the year is as follows:

The MIASS has feedback that there has been an increase in people contacting the service about their child's support needs post-16...

How did we respond?

- We are developing a support approach for South Thames Consortium (post-16 education) on Education, Health and Care planning.

7.7 This year the **Transforming Families (TF) Team** have continued to facilitate regular meetings for parents who are working with the team, to give feedback on their views of the service. If parents are unable to attend forums the team manager will conduct a feedback

session via telephone or visit, to ensure that their views are also heard. This year's feedback on the service by parents has been very positive:

- ☺ *Allocated practitioner explains the service well...*
- ☺ *TF supports families to have a voice in multi-agency meetings...*
- ☺ *Practitioners work closely with the child ensuring that their views are heard, to bring about change...*
- ☺ *The 'helping families' approach puts the families' views first...*
- ☺ *TF workers are consistent and keep regular contact with the family and families 'believe things can change'...*
- ☺ *'The stability and support from my worker led to my own inner strength to change'.*

Parents raised the following suggestions for improvements:

- *A TF leaflet explaining and advertising the service in the community would be useful...*
- *An advocacy service for families who need to attend professionals meetings, for example at school, would be beneficial...*
- *The ending of the service for a family should be well prepared and feel 'natural', rather than be because of a prescribed timescale...*

How did we respond?

- The development of a leaflet is under discussion with the team manager.
- The service is investigating accessing local advocacy/ support services.
- Reassured new families that endings will be well prepared and appropriate, as this is embedded in practice.

7.8 This year, **Merton's Transforming Families and the Youth Justice Service** hosted a workshop to raise awareness amongst parents and professionals about serious youth violence and child criminal exploitation. A key driver for the workshop was the growing concern about the involvement of Merton young people as 'runners' in the 'county lines' drug supply issue. A young person attended the session to share their experience of overcoming the challenges and temptation of 'street life'. After a discussion session, parents requested the following support to better enable them to prevent their children from being involved in criminal exploitation:

- *Support to establish open communication with their children, including more oversight and understanding of the media content they consume – social media, video games, and music - so that children can experience the love and nurture of a caring family...*
- *Support for parents to be 'tough' - setting the foundation of 'clear boundaries, morals and values'...*
- *Access to affordable positive activities outside the home...*
- *County Lines awareness raising sessions in schools...*

How did we respond?

- ✓ Our Parenting Officer is being trained to run the 'Who's in charge?' parenting programme addressing child to parent violence and understanding the potential negative impact of social media, video games and music.
- ✓ Parents have completed a Gangs Resistance Empowerment Awareness Training to equip them with ways to regain their confidence in parenting teens, and supporting their children to resolve conflict.
- ✓ The team have secured funding to deliver Purposeful Empowered Parents creative art therapy session at Phipps Bridge youth centre.
- ✓ Gangs, youth justice, and CSE workers have delivered sessions to primary years 5 and 6 on 'county lines' and how to stay safe on the streets and online.

Enabling users to take part in consultations and surveys, which inform service and strategy developments.

7.9 During the year we conducted an online survey asking parents, headteachers and SENCos, and other professionals working with children and young people to feedback their views on the local education provision for children and young people with SEN and disabilities, to shape future priorities and service developments. The information is currently being used to inform our SEN High Needs Strategic Review.

Positive feedback about current education provision for children and young people with SEN and disabilities includes the following:

Parents:

- ☺ 64% **were able to find an educational placement** for their child which was a reasonable distance from their home, and which met their needs.
- ☺ **75% were satisfied or better** with the support given by their child's nursery/ school/ college as set out in the EHCP.
- ☺ **68% were satisfied or better** with their child's education provision's access to equipment and resources.
- ☺ **69% were satisfied or better** with the qualifications on offer to their child by the school/college.

Head teachers/ SENCos:

- ☺ 66% agreed that the **physical infrastructure** of their education provision is sufficient to meet the current needs of children with SEND

Professionals:

- ☺ 69% of professionals agree that in general, education providers make **reasonable adjustment** to include children with SEND.

The following issues were highlighted as areas for development:

Parents:

- 77% - Merton **does need to develop additional in borough provision...**
- 58% - additional provision should be by **new specialist basis within mainstream schools...**

Head teachers/ SENCos:

- 65% - Merton needs to develop **additional provision in borough** focussing on ASD, SEMH (social, emotional and mental health), and SLCN (speech, language and communication)...
- 87% - staff would benefit from **additional training** including working with children with specific needs such as ASD, SLCN and SEMH; adapting curriculum delivery; developing children's weaker skills; SEND identification, planning and review; and working with families whose child has an EHCP...

Professionals:

- 82% - Merton needs to develop **additional provision in-borough**; they state the same focus as that expressed above by head teachers...
- 50% - staff in education provisions would benefit from **additional training**; they state the same focus of training as that expressed above by head teachers...

➤ In response, this information will be used to inform Merton's **High Needs Strategic Review**, and set priorities.

7.10 Each year we conduct a foster carers survey with the aim of ensuring an up to date knowledge of the views of Merton's foster carers, and to identify areas of practice and support that could be improved to ensure that they are assisted to undertake their challenging role. This year's survey highlighted the following areas of success:

- ☺ 84% of respondents describe their level of satisfaction with the fostering service as 'good' or 'very good'.
- ☺ 72% would encourage others to foster with Merton.
- ☺ 92% rate their supervising social worker as excellent, very good or good – this is an increase on last year and higher than national.
- ☺ 92% rate the training support offered as good to excellent - this is an increase on last year and higher than national.
- ☺ 86% state that the support provided by the Virtual School was good or very good – an increase on last year.
- ☺ 81% said the service given by the LAC Health was good to very good – an increase on last year.

In addition, results from the survey have led to a number of recommendations:

- While 68% of respondents rated the **child's social worker** as good, very good or excellent, *this is a decrease from 78% in the previous year...*
 - While the majority - 76% - of carers were happy with the service provided by the **payment team**, *a third of respondents stated that payments were sometimes/ occasionally inaccurate...*
 - While carers were happy overall with the matching of **placements** 38% *felt they had not been given all the information they needed to care for the child*, and 54% *of carers had no placement when they could have taken one...*
 - Whilst the vast majority of carers are happy with the service, 25% of foster carers said they had **considered resigning...**
- Guidance and training for **children's social work teams** so that they are aware of the need to work more closely with foster carers.
 - Review **internal finance processes** to minimise the numbers of inaccuracies in payments to foster carers.
 - Review the **placement process** to maximise the use of available placements and ensure carers have accurate relevant information to care for any child in their care.
 - Regular individual and group discussions with carers to identify potential areas that may aid the **retention of foster carers**.
 - **Exit interviews** offered to all foster carers considering resigning from the service, to collect data on which to consider future support provided.

Enabling feedback by families, and carers on their level of satisfaction with services.

7.11 **Central London Community Healthcare NHS Trust (CLCH)** collects information about patients' level of satisfaction with children's health services via the Patient Reported Experience Measures survey, and by 'friends and family test' comment cards. The end of year (March 2018) CLCH Quality report shows the following high levels of user satisfaction on a range of indicators:

- ☺ Proportion of patients who were treated with **respect and dignity** – 99%
- ☺ Friends and family test - percentage of people that would **recommend the service** – 94%
- ☺ Proportion of patients whose care was **explained in an understandable** way – 97%
- ☺ Proportion of patients who were **involved in planning their care** – 93%
- ☺ Proportion of patients rating their overall experience as **good or excellent** – 94%
- ☺ Proportion of patients' **concerns (PALS)** responded to within **5 working days** – 98%

7.12 Our **Early Years, Childcare and Children's Centres** service provides an early help and evidence based model of early years, early education and learning, and family support, in partnership with a range of providers across all sectors including health, care, and education. This year's service review (2017/18) reports on the reshaped service delivery model which was launched in April 2017, using a new performance framework. The reports illustrates high levels of positive feedback from families who have used the broad range of services provided:

- ☺ 88% of families asked, said that they were **satisfied with the service they received** from a group programme.
- ☺ 95% of families said they had experienced **improved outcomes** after attending a programme or service.
- ☺ For all individual programmes - supporting families team; evidence based parenting programmes; ELT programmes; and children's centre courses - **a very high proportion of parents said they had experienced improved outcomes**, well above the target of 85%.
- ☺ **Improved outcomes include:** feeling more confident in, and enjoying caring for their child; understanding their child's needs; feeling able to support their child's development in learning and play; managing behaviour; and knowing how to access further support.

The **0-5 Supporting Families' team (SFT)** plans and delivers support and services for children under 5 years old and their families.

- ☺ 100% of families asked, said that they were **satisfied with the service they received** through SFT casework.

This year the Supporting Families Team has received a number of compliments from users:

- ☺ *I would like to thank the Family Support Worker for doing such a great job of supporting a family through transition into our nursery class... her input has helped a lot with meeting the child's needs **and she has clearly been a huge support to the parents (from a primary school).***
- ☺ *Everything that has been discussed has been fantastic, the support I am getting has been a learning curve for me, thank you (parent on completion of the CASA process).*

An audit of SFT casework was conducted during the year focusing on seven cases with 6 graded as good, and one graded as requires improvement. In terms of evidence in the audit of the families' participation in the case work process the audit report identifies good evidence of 'persistence in engaging families in the intervention'. However, one area for improvement was identified:

There is evidence in only one case reviewed of a family map and action plan, which reflects the assessment and contains specific and achievable child led outcomes. The audit report highlights the following for development:

- Family maps to be reviewed and updated throughout intervention, and during case management supervision.
- Strengthen process to ensure that actions set during supervision are shared with parents.

One example of an evidenced based parenting programme offered by the service is **Incredible Years**. This aimed at priority families to help them to understand their child's needs and how they can best support them.

- ☺ 100% of parents reported improved outcomes after attending an evidence based parenting programme.

During the year the service has received a broad range of positive feedback about the Incredible Years programme from parents, highlighting improved outcomes which include understanding their child's needs, better communication within the family, and feeling that their concerns and issues can be shared and heard:

- ☺ *I have a greater understanding of what my baby is learning when we play together and I feel better equipped to cope with issues that arise.*
- ☺ *I used to think my son was just being very naughty but not any more, I now understand his behaviour much more"*
- ☺ *One parent reports that by attending the course together they are better able to understand where their partner 'is coming from' and that their partner has 'their own way of putting in place limits and boundaries for the children'; they are now 'on the same page'.*
- ☺ *I felt comfortable sharing my worries and it made me feel more confident as a parent.*
- ☺ *I was listened to*
- ☺ *You will feel more confident and you will have time to think about your personal happiness and find time for yourself.*

7.13 The **Adoption and Permanence Team** asks adopters to complete a feedback form to assess level of satisfaction at various stages of the process. The most recent bi annual report from the team (March 2017) shows that adopters are very positive about their experience of each stage of the adoption process:

- ☺ *We were allowed to progress at our own pace with a great deal of support and clarification (stage 1).*
- ☺ *Some great training and lots covered (preparation training).*
- ☺ *Questions brought up a lot and helped us to reflect on how best we could support a child, we discussed together and with our support network.*
- ☺ *We knew exactly what to expect [regarding adoption panel] and had a positive experience.*
- ☺ *Our social worker gave us a great deal of time, patience and expertise; having the same one throughout made a difference.*

Adopters who have been through the whole adoption process feedback that at the start of their journey it was most useful to hear from adopters about their experiences, rather than social workers...

In response:

- ✓ The Adoption Team delivered a 'meet the adopter' drop in session to celebrate this year's national adoption week.
- ✓ Adopters shared their experiences with prospective adoptive parents and answered their questions about the adoption application and approval process, how children are matched to adoptive parents and about family life with their adopted child.

Supporting families and the wider community to lead on delivering services which benefit children and families

7.14 Over the year our **Education Inclusion Service** has delivered two projects which aim to empower the community to run local services, including greater involvement in youth provision. This aims to help build confidence in vulnerable local families who have not historically accessed services.

The Monday Fun and Fit Club at Phipps Bridge is run by local parent volunteers for themselves and for their children. Parents attend the club with their children aged 6+, accessing circuit training and any other healthy activities whilst the children can take part in arts and crafts, play games and table tennis. The members of the club also support youth service events, volunteer for the youth centre and decide what they would like to see happening at the centre. The following shows the positive impact for one family, of attending the club, and how we were able to listen and respond to her expressed needs:

- By coming to the club, one parent was able to form relationships with other local people and improve her social support networks. Her children enjoyed spending time with their mum and siblings whilst having fun and meeting other young people.
- At the club she was able to **talk informally about some concerns and issues regarding herself and her children.**

- ✓ As the mother felt able to talk about her issues, we were able to identify that the children needed some specific support and were able to refer the family to an appropriate local service.

The **Adventure Play Ground** coffee morning is run by volunteers and supported by the Salvation Army. The APG benefits from the community meeting at their venue as they have become good supporters of the playground and increased membership. The volunteers are able to learn new skills, build their social networks and improving confidence.

8. COMMITMENT FIVE - BUILDING CAPACITY ACROSS THE CHILDREN'S TRUST TO ENGAGE IN GOOD QUALITY, ETHICAL AND IMPACTFUL 'USER VOICE' ACTIVITY, THE LEARNING FROM WHICH IS SHARED WITH ALL STAKEHOLDERS, INCLUDING PARTICIPANTS.

8.1 We are committed to supporting services across Merton's Children's Trust to build their capacity to facilitate participation opportunities for the children and families with whom we work. This includes supporting commissioned services to ensure that young people's participation is central to their work, and sharing good practice across the borough in order to continuously improve engagement methods. This approach aims to maximise expertise and fully utilise our shared capacity. Notable examples of user voice activity this year include:

Good practice guidance and training for services, on meaningful and ethical participation

8.2 During the year Merton Mencap's **Kids First parent forum** has refreshed its good practice guidance including a code of conduct for the Kids First Steering Group, and the roles and duties of a Kids First representative. The purpose of these documents is to clearly set out the role of Kids First in ensuring that the voices of children with SEN and disabilities are represented in the borough, and to have clear guidelines on confidentiality and conflicts of interest.

8.3 This year **Merton's Participation and Engagement Team** have continued to support a number of Children's Trust services to develop their 'user voice' approaches. This has included:

- Reviewing the **SENDIS** Education, Health and Care Plan process to ensure that it captures the views of children and their families and, with the help of members of MYP, exploring the best ways to implement participation opportunities for young people with SEN and/or disabilities (SEND).
- Meeting **Catch22**, who are commissioned to provide a range of services to support young people, to advise on monitoring and evaluating 'user engagement' approaches.

Supporting commissioned services to ensure that young people's participation is central to their work.

8.4 As part of the contract monitoring process, **Merton's Commissioning Team** collects evidence each quarter from the commissioned providers, on the services they have delivered. This includes information on user voice activity and impact. Each year the team produces a report which details the impact that commissioned providers have had on children and young people, including information about how they have supported young people's participation.

This report '**The Review of the Impact of Commissioned Voluntary Services 2017/18**' sets out the range of ways in which commissioned services meet the Merton 'Participation Promise to Children and Young People', and gives a number of examples of the positive impact of this work (see section 4.10 above for a summary). It is circulated to senior managers across the Children's Trust (via Children's Trust Board and MSCB), in order to evidence our commitment to user voice in all services, and to share good practice.

Completing the feedback loop to those who participate in 'user voice' activities, and sharing learning from user voice activity across organisations and across the Children's Trust.

8.5 **Merton Kids First** forum for parents of children and young people with disabilities or special needs produce their own **termly newsletter** for members and practitioners. The content of the newsletter is guided by requests from members for information and advice. Articles this year have included an overview of 'self harming behaviour'; feedback from the local authority on SEND reforms; events; publications; and information on local and national support organisations.

8.6 Merton is part of the **South West London Adoption Consortium (SWLAC)**, which offers advice and support to adoptive families through every step of the adoption process and beyond. SWLAC produces a regular newsletter for adoptive families covering news, adoption experiences, feedback from adopters about the adoption process, dates Adoption UK support meetings, and other local support.

8.7 **Central London Community Healthcare NHS Trust (CLCH)** puts together '**patient stories**', the key themes from which, including staff learning points and action plans, are **shared at the beginning of all senior management meetings, including at the Trust's Board of Directors, and at team and service-level meetings.** Patient stories are narratives of individuals' healthcare experiences, told by an adult, young person or child service user, or someone close to them, such as a relative or carer, which can be positive, negative, or combine elements of both. Here is an example of the positive feedback from a 'patient story' from June 2018 based on the experience of a user of the Children and Young People's Occupational Therapy Team (CYPOT).

What was positive about your experience with the CYPOT?

- ☺ *The speed in which we were seen following GP referral...*
- ☺ *Parent training – empowering and educating parents and giving them hope...*
- ☺ *Communication from therapist was really effective, and child and parent felt listened to and understood...*
- ☺ *Were offered practical solutions that helped...*
- ☺ *Confident in the advice given by therapist...*
- ☺ *Integrated working with TAMHS [targeted mental health in schools]...*

In addition, the patient fed back a number of recommendations for preventing the problems the young person and the family had endured before input from CYPOT. This information has been used to inform a number of actions for the team to take forward over the following year:

- After school the young person had 'huge meltdowns' as a response to feeling over stimulated and anxious while at school – *'as a family we were finding this very difficult to cope with'...*
- The OT sent her support and strategy recommendations for the young person to the school TAMHS worker – *'I would love to see more OT input in liaising with the schools, following up with the schools to ensure that all recommendations are put in place... bring more awareness of OT'...*
- *'I feel training on awareness of children's differing needs and OT should be part of teacher training as they [teachers] are often not aware'.*

In response, the CYOT team are taking forward the following actions:

- Additional parent training sessions focussing on managing 'meltdowns' and other smaller issues.
- OT to be involved with education in setting.
- Deliver a teacher training day at local Universities on supporting children with OT needs in school.

8.8 **Young Merton Together** online e-magazine is published termly and includes articles focusing on user voice activity and impact across Merton's Children's Trust. This is communicated to all levels of Merton's children's workforce. This year each of the termly editions included an average of 10-12 user voice related articles that represent each of the strategy commitments. The magazine, which receives around **13k hits in its first month of publication**, is distributed to professionals and staff who work with children, young people and families across the borough. This aims to ensure that all organisations take children and young people's views into account, and apply learning from external 'user voice' activity where relevant, to their own service planning and delivery.

9. FURTHER 'USER VOICE' RESOURCES:

- Children and Families' Voice Framework 2017-19
- Merton CSF - 'Participation Framework for Commissioned Services'
- [Participation Promise to Merton's Children and Young People](#)
- [We've got your back with 32 pledges](#) – A pledge to children in care and care leavers in Merton.
- Children in Care Council - Principles for Participation.
- [Merton's Practice Model for Social work.](#)
- [Merton's Quality Assurance Framework.](#)
- [Young Merton Together.](#)

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