



# Annual Corporate Parenting Board Report 2018-2019 London Borough of Merton

Issue Date	Authors	Date Of the Next Review	Lead officer
January 2020	Shirley Gounder, Linda Goodhew Roberta Evans Kate Jennings Georgia Iliopoulou Michelle Waldron John Walsh	January 2021	EI Mayhew

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## **Executive Summary**

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

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

As a Corporate Parenting Board we want to understand what we are doing well, what our areas of challenge are and the actions that we will take to address these challenges. This report presents activity and performance data from 2018-19 and identifies the Board's priorities for the year ahead.

## **2018 -19 Highlights**

- We continue to have a population of children looked after that has a high proportion of adolescent young people. The report sets out that whilst a high number of these are unaccompanied asylum seeking young people, factors such as housing and anti-social behaviour are also impacting on the number of adolescents in our care.
- There has been a decrease in the number of new admissions into care, however the age profile of children looked after in Merton differs from the national picture with Merton caring for a large number of older children looked after aged 16 years and over.
- Merton has seen a decrease in the percentage of children in the 'Black' and 'White' ethnicity categories and an increase in mixed heritage and any other ethnic background groups.
- Children being accommodated due to a disability has decreased, whilst there has been a small increase in children being accommodated due to parental disability or illness.
- The number of children entering Merton's care decreased for the third successive year. There were 73 admissions, a 16% decrease on 2017/18. Of those entering care 47% were aged over 16, compared to 20% nationally, and 37% pan London. Unaccompanied asylum seekers accounted for 35% of all new starters, and all but one of these unaccompanied asylum seeking young people were aged 16 plus.
- Of those in care on 31 March there was little variance in the number subject to a care order (a one child decrease to 97) or those accommodated under Section 20 (a one child decrease to 48).
- The average duration for a child in care proceedings rose by 4 weeks to 35 weeks, with 34% of proceedings completing within 26 weeks, down from 48% in 2017/18.

- The Family Drug and Alcohol Court (FDAC) Service has now been decommissioned following a review of cost effectiveness and impact. There are 3 families that are currently in active FDAC proceedings and 3 families in pre-proceedings under FDAC.
- There has been ongoing positive use of staying put arrangements. This increases the young person's stability and security and supports them through the transition to adulthood. Foster carers providing staying put are permitted to continue fostering but most are unable to accept new foster children due to lack of an additional bedroom. In 2018 -19, 7 young people leaving care entered into 'Staying Put' arrangements. If we include care leavers aged 19 plus, there were 17 'staying put' arrangements recorded during the year.
- There has been a small rise in use of agency foster carers compared to the previous year. This relates to the increased number of older teenagers being accommodated. A targeted recruitment drive has been implemented to address the changing needs of the Children Looked After population.
- Information from our case management system suggests placement stability as at 31 March 2019 Merton was 2% above the national figure at 71%. Merton's reported performance improved by 40% in 2015 and the rate has remained within the 68% - 71% range for the past four years. However, we are currently treating these figures cautiously as issues with the quality of this data and recording practices have recently come to our attention.
- Adoption performance continues to be a strength in terms of clear planning and management oversight of cases. We will need to adjust parts of our service and some of our processes next year as we transfer our Adoption Team and most of their functions to the South London Regional Adoption Agency.
- The CSC CAMH Team is embedded in the service and continues to offer an excellent service to children, young people, carers and practitioners. The contract for this provision ends in the summer of 2020. A review will be required to inform the future arrangements.
- Good progress has been made to ensure that the voice of care experienced children and young people is heard, with the outcome of the 'Bright Spots' consultation being used to update our Pledges and to inform the Children Looked After and Care Leavers Strategies.

## Priorities 2019-2020

We published a Looked After Children Strategy and a Care Leavers' Strategy this year. The table below summarises our strategic objectives.

### Summary of strategic objectives

Looked after Children Strategy	Care Leaver strategy
Looked After Children have their voices heard and their views respected.	Care Leavers have their voice heard, feel respected and valued and know their rights and entitlements.
Looked After Children feel safe and have stability.	Leaving care and leaving well – promoting the wellbeing of Care Leavers.
Looked After Children have good health and well-being.	Ensure that Care Leavers are prepared for the practical and financial components of independence.
Looked After Children are supported to be aspirational and achieve their full potential in education and take part in hobbies of interests of their choice.	Enable Care Leavers to live in the community, safely and securely whilst developing and maintaining healthy supportive relationships.
Looked After Children develop trusting and supportive relationships and maintain links with important people in their lives.	Raise aspirations of Care Leavers so that they are motivated to reach their full potential.
Looked After Children are supported to leave care and to transition into adulthood.	

Based on the analysis in this annual report and our broader understanding of our children looked after and care leavers, we will be focussing on the following actions as our priorities for the year ahead:

Action	Impact
Improve the number of children experiencing Placement Stability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Greater service oversight and focus on matching long term for those children who remain in care.</li> <li>• Early identification of placements likely to disrupt.</li> <li>• Partnership working to stabilise placements</li> </ul>

<p>Improve the take up of Strength and Difficulty Questionnaires (SDQ) with children looked after and young people.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased number of children with SDQ taking place</li> <li>• Emotional wellbeing will be identified earlier and action plans in place to address areas of concern.</li> <li>• Improved emotional wellbeing, referral, and access to services.</li> </ul>
<p>Improve outcomes for young people who are Not in Education Employment or Training ('NEET') by raising corporate aspirations</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved outcomes for young people who are 'NEET'.</li> <li>• Increased number of young people engaging in Education, Employment and Training</li> <li>• Improved corporate aspirations across service areas</li> <li>• Maximising resources and opportunities</li> </ul>
<p>Improve preparation for independence for Care Leavers</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pathway plans will identify clear routes and objectives to transition from dependent to independent</li> <li>• Care leavers will have access to a housing pathway that will meet their need.</li> <li>• Less reliance on Semi Independent Accommodation.</li> </ul>

## 1. Context

1.1 This report sets out an annual update on the corporate parenting arrangements in Merton: focusing on activity and performance during April 2018- March 2019. It advises members on key legislation and guidance alongside key performance indicators for Children Looked After and Care Leavers.

## 2. The Legal Framework

2.1. The Children Act 1989 and the Leaving Care Act 2000 place clear statutory duties upon the Council to protect children from suffering significant harm and to provide continued financial and transition support to care leavers aged up to 21 (or 25 if in full time education) and subsequently to all care leavers up to the age of 25. Underpinning corporate parenting is a wide range of national policies, guidance, regulations and legislation, which are subject to change by High Court rulings, such as the Southwark ruling in 2009.

2.2. The revised care planning regulations and guidance including The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 2: Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Volume 3: Planning Transition to Adulthood for Care Leavers and the Statutory Guidance on Securing Sufficient Accommodation for Children Looked After March 2010: place increased emphasis on effective care planning with a focus on the child, and are designed to improve the quality and consistency of care planning, placement and case review for LAC. They also aim to improve the care and support provided to care leavers.

2.3. The Volume 3: Planning Transition to Adulthood for Care Leavers (Revised May 2013) sets out expectations for local authorities in respect of planning and arranging suitable accommodation for the transition to independent living, including 'accommodation with former foster carers (Staying Put arrangements)'. The Staying Put legislation places a legal duty on local authorities to support every care leaver who wants to stay with their foster carers until their 21st birthday. The opportunity to 'stay put' should apply equally to young people that have been cared for by foster carers from the local authority or independent fostering services.

2.4. In 2014 the Children and Families Act 2014 was introduced. The Act takes forward a commitment to improve services for vulnerable children. It reforms the systems for adoption, LAC, family justice and special educational needs.

2.5. The Children and Social Work Act 2017, Section 3 requires Local Authorities to provide Personal Advisors to care leavers up until they reach the age of 25, from April 2018. Previously services to care leavers ceased when a care leaver was 21 unless they engaged in further education where it was extended to the age of 25.

2.6. Effective corporate parenting requires knowledge and awareness of the needs of children and young people who are looked after and the services that they receive. This is a shared responsibility for the Council as a whole. The role of the corporate parent is:

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



### 3. Merton Background

- 3.1. Merton is an outer London borough situated in south west London, covering 14.7 square miles. Merton has a total population of 200,543 including 47,499 children and young people aged 0-19 (Census 2011). The number of 0-19 year olds is forecast to increase by 4,450 (9%) by 2018, within which we forecast a 30% increase of children aged 5 to 9 (3,390).
- 3.2. Predominantly suburban in character, Merton is divided into 20 wards and has three main town centres: Wimbledon, Mitcham and Morden.
- 3.3. The local Family Poverty Needs Assessment shows that Merton is a relatively affluent borough, ranking as the fourth least deprived authority of London's 33 boroughs. 13% of children aged under 16 are living in low income families. However, a characteristic of the borough is the difference between the more deprived east (Mitcham / Morden) and the more affluent west (Wimbledon). There are a number of pockets of deprivation within the borough mainly in the eastern wards and some smaller pockets in the central wards. These wards have multiple deprivation, with high scores on income deprivation, unemployment and limited educational attainment.
- 3.4. Fifty-two per cent of Merton's total population is Black, Asian or Minority ethnic (BAME) this is expected to increase further to 57% by 2018. 63% of people 0-19 are from BAME communities. Pupils in Merton schools are more diverse still, with 68% from BAME communities, speaking over 120 languages (2017). The borough has concentrations of Urdu speaking communities, Sri Lankan, South African and Polish residents.
- 3.5. Children Looked After are those children and young people aged 0-18 years who cannot safely remain with their family and are cared for by the local authority. The local authority has continuing legal and financial responsibilities to many of these children until they are 25 years old. This includes all unaccompanied asylum seeking children and children with disabilities who are receiving more than 75 days of respite care per year.
- 3.6. There are clear thresholds for admitting children into care and for all children significant attempts should have been made to support the child or young person to remain with their family or within their community. To enable children to remain at home or return home FFT, functional family therapy, and MST, multi systemic therapy is delivered through the Positive Families Partnership (PFP).
- 3.7. As at 31 March 2019 there were 157 Children looked after in Merton which represents a 1.9% increase from 2018 (154 children). In England and Wales there were 78,150 Children looked after as at March 2019, an increase of 3.6% from 2018 (75,420). In addition, Merton had 166 young people aged 18-25 years accessing leaving care services, making Merton a corporate parent to over 320 vulnerable children and young people.

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

4.1. The Children and Young Persons Act (2008) reinforces the message that the while council is responsible for all outcomes for children looked after by a local authority. To ensure this council wide ownership, the Corporate Parenting Board is chaired by the Chief Executive London Borough Merton.

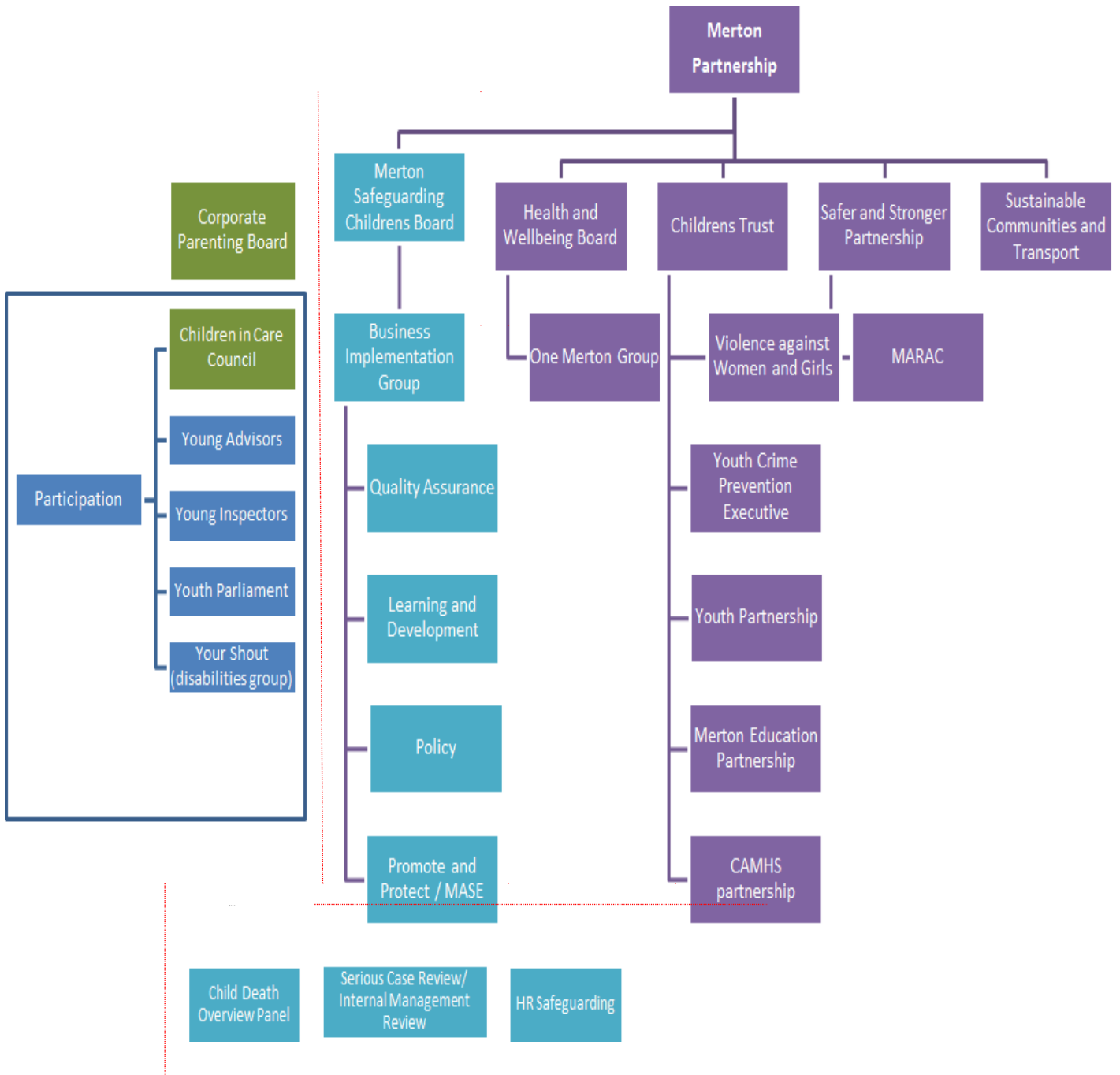
4.2. The Corporate Parenting Board is comprised of senior managers and officers from education, health, housing, social care and elected members and is chaired by the Chief Executive London Borough Merton, ensuring a high level of scrutiny and cross directorate responsibility for delivery of our priorities.

4.3. The Board meets 4 times each year.

4.4. Over the past year the Board has considered reports on topics including:

- Educational progress of Children looked after
- Health outcomes of children looked after
- Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children
- Placement Stability
- Voice of the child and care leaver / participation
- Children Looked After Placement Sufficiency
- CAMHS
- Trends in the care population
- Adoption
- Number of cases in proceedings and outcomes
- Independent Reviewing Service, impact and outcomes

## 5. Merton's Strategic Policy Framework and Governance Structures



## **6. Children Looked After and Care Leavers Pledge**

Following the Bright Spots consultation in 2018, further consultation work with our care experienced children and young people was undertaken during 2018-19 to refresh the Council's Pledges and underpin the new Children Looked After and Care Leaver Strategies 2019 - 2022. These are outlined in the table below.

### **Our Pledge to Children in Care and those with care experience**

- 1) Your voice will be heard, what you say matters.
- 2) You will have somewhere safe to call home.
- 3) We will help you with your worries and fears.
- 4) We will do the best we can to support you, so you can do your best at school, have hobbies and interests and time for fun.
- 5) We will make sure you have people in your life who are important to you and someone you can trust.
- 6) We support you to learn how to take care of yourself and we will be there for you, if you need us, right up until you are an adult aged 25.

## 7. Update on Priorities from 2018-2019

Action	Update	RAG
Develop the Children Looked After Strategy	The Children Looked After and Care Leavers Strategies for 2019-2022 have been completed and published. The Bright Spots consultation underpinned a review of the previous 32 Pledges. There are now 6 Pledges to our care experienced children and young people which have been published.	
Develop the Care Leavers Strategy		
Enhancement of the Local Offer for Care Leavers	The Local Offer was published in December 2018 and has been promoted online through Merton Directories and Young Merton. The offer continues to be developed to update information and reflect changes to available support and services.	
Reinvigoration of Children in Care Council	In 2018-2019, the Children in Care Council and Participation for care experienced children and young people was commissioned through Jigsaw4U. Improved levels of participation remained a challenge. At the end of 2018 – 19 it was decided to transfer the Children in Care Council and participation work to the Council's Participation and Engagement Service. This will remain a priority for 2019-20.	
For children whose care plan is long term foster care, priority will be given to matching children with Merton Council foster carers.	<p>There has been a recruitment drive to recruit in house foster carers with a continued target of 20 further families in 2018. This is to enable all children and young people to be placed local to Merton. We successfully recruited 12 Mainstream Foster carers, 3 Connected Persons, and 3 Supported Lodgings Carers.</p> <p>Further to this is the development of the Permanence Policy, which will create a culture of 'Merton First' in respect of future matched placements for children and young people.</p>	

## 8. Corporate Parenting Performance Activity 2018-19

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

Numbers and rates of children looked after as at 31 March 2019

	2015		2016		2017		2018		2019	
	Number	Rate per 10,000	Number	Rate per 10,000	Number	Rate per 10,000	Number	Rate per 10,000	Number	Rate per 10,000
Merton	156	34	163	35	152	33	154	33	157	33
London	9,980	52	9,860	51	9,900	50	9,890	49	10,030	50
National	69,470	60	70,400	60	72,590	62	75,420	64	78,150	65

England and London totals are rounded to the nearest 10.

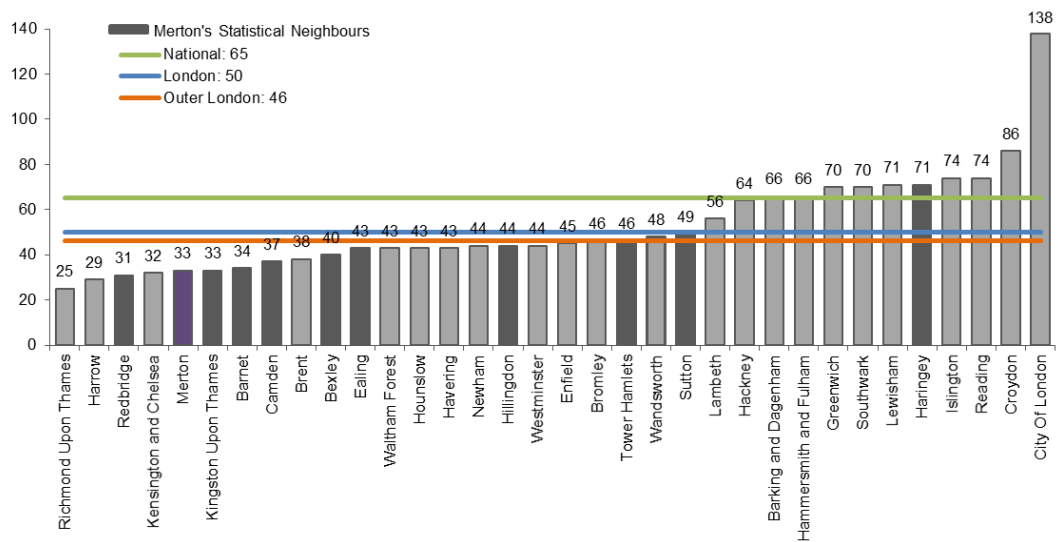
8.1. The number of children looked after has continued to rise nationally and this trend is also seen in Merton where 157 children were in care on 31 March 2019, a three child increase on 2018. Apart from the 2016 outlier of 163, the borough has seen a consistent profile of 150 – 157 across the past five years. It is anticipated that this number will rise in 2019-20 as a result of the increase to the number of unaccompanied asylum seeking children Merton will care for as agreed by our elected members through the London Labour Council's Group.

8.2. The rate of children in care per 10,000 resident children remained at 33 for the third consecutive year, this is at variance with the pan London and outer London rates which had both seen a one-point dip in 2018. For reference, the 2019 London rate was 50, the outer London rate 46. Merton continues to have the second lowest rate per 10,000 amongst its statistical neighbours, and there are only six local authorities in England with a lower rate (four in London). The London and National rates per 10,000 have both risen by 2% in 2019, and the outer London rate by 4.5%.

### Rate per 10,000 population of Children Looked After against Merton's Statistical Neighbours 2019<sup>1</sup>



### Rate per 10,000 population of Children Looked After against Merton's Statistical Neighbours and all London Boroughs 2019<sup>2</sup>

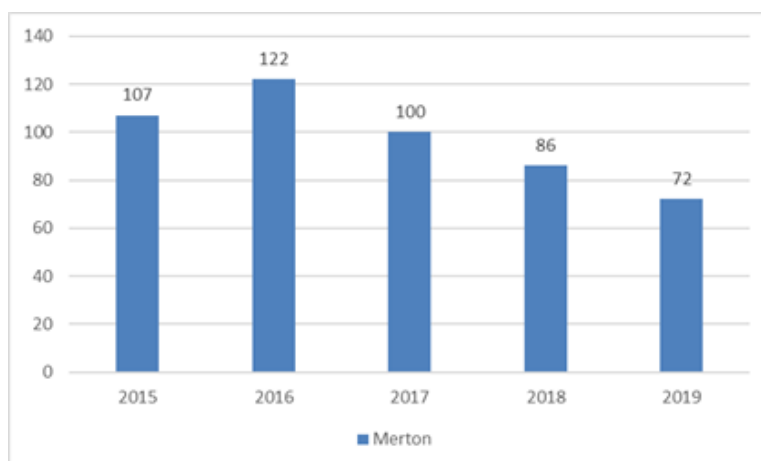


8.3. For a third successive year the number of children entering Merton's care decreased, by 16% on 2018. There were 73 new admissions into care, relating to 72 children.

<sup>1</sup> Applying the ONS Mid-Year 2018 estimates as per the Department for Education methodology

<sup>2</sup> Note on 2019 City of London data: the majority of City looked after children are UASC aged 16 plus and the impact on the rates per 10,000 of the closure of the Croydon pan London Rota in autumn 2018 is most marked here.

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

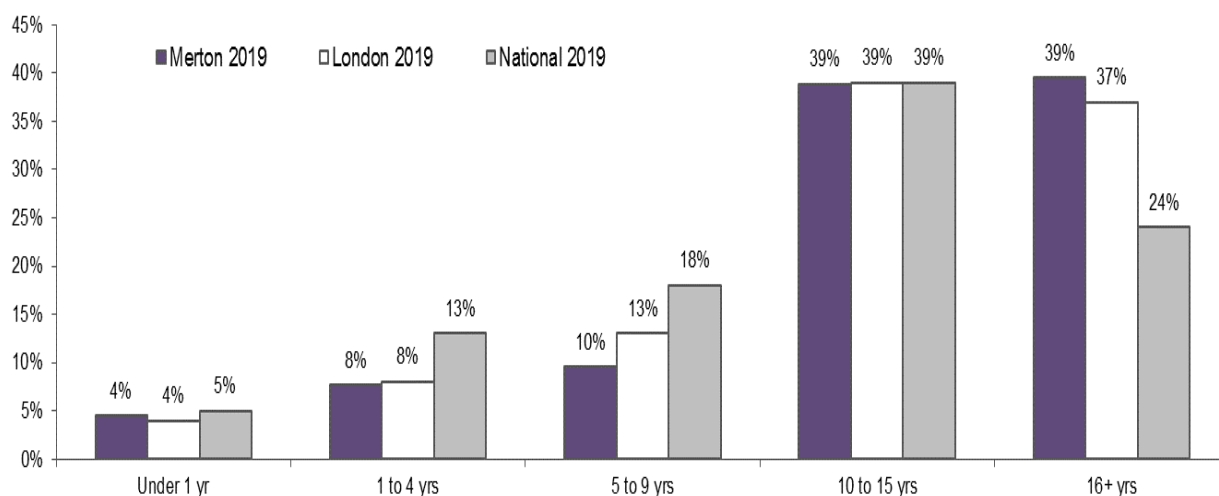


Source 903 data. Note this is the number of children, some children may be admitted into care more than once in year.

8.4. During 2017 -18 31% of new entrants to care had been aged 16 years and over, this rose again this year to 47%, 27 ppt above the national average (20%), and 10ppt above the pan and outer London rates (37%). Unaccompanied asylum seeking children accounted for 35% of all new entrants, of those 25 young people all but one were aged 16 or 17 years-old.

8.5. The age profile of children looked after by Merton continues to differ from the national picture with Merton caring for a large number of young people aged 16 and over. At 31 March 2019, 39% of our children looked after were aged 16 and 17 years, a 5ppt increase on 2018, and 2ppt above the pan London rate. The 2019 national rate was 24%. Merton saw downturns in the proportions of 1 to 4 year-olds (to 8%) and 5 to 9 year-olds (to 10%) in care and both of these age groups were below the national rates (13% and 18% respectively). The proportion of 1 to 4 year-olds was on a par with the London rate.

## Percentage of children looked after by age group compared to London and National as at 31 of March 2019





## 9. Gender, Age and Ethnicity of children looked after at 31 March 2019

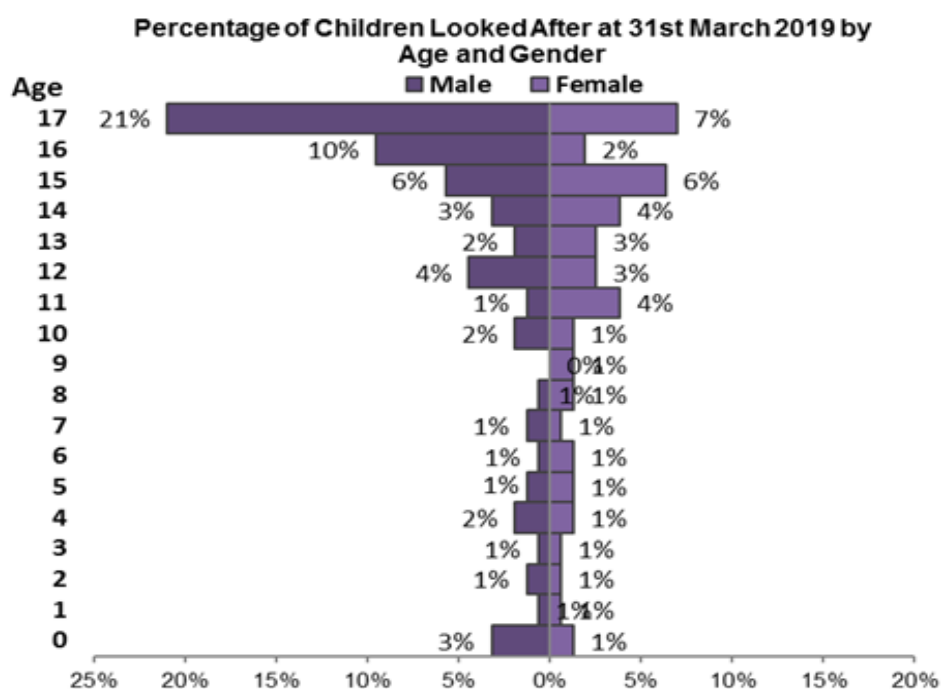
9.1. The table below highlights the high proportion of older children in Merton's care: 62 young people aged 16 and 17 years were in care at 31 March, (of which 44 were 17 years-old). This equates to 39% of all those in care, 2ppt above the London rate (37%) but 15ppt above the national rate (24%). Across the past five years the Merton profile for this age group had ranged from 58 to 65 young people (37% to 41%), apart from 2018 which had seen a low of 54 (34%).

9.2. Twenty-nine (47%) of the 16 and 17 year-olds accommodated at 31 March had been entered care as unaccompanied asylum seeking children.

**Age of children looked after by year as at 31 March 2019**

Merton	Age (in years)																	
	(number of Children Looked After, as at 31 <sup>st</sup> March)																	
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
2015	6	3	5	4	3	0	3	6	4	4	10	7	5	10	10	18	26	32
2016	4	5	4	3	3	3	2	4	7	4	7	9	10	7	11	15	30	35
2017	5	2	4	2	3	4	3	3	3	8	8	5	10	10	6	13	21	42
2018	6	4	2	6	5	4	3	3	3	5	8	12	6	10	14	10	24	29
2019	7	2	3	2	5	4	3	3	3	2	5	8	11	7	11	19	18	44

Source: SSDA 903



9.3. The breakdown of the gender/age data highlights the fact that our older children looked after cohort is significantly over-represented by males (the majority of

unaccompanied asylum seeking children referrals received relate to males). The graph above shows the dominance of 17 year-old males at 21% of the children in care at 31 March 2019, and 70% of this group were unaccompanied asylum seeking children. For reference, in 2018 17 year-old males had constituted 12% of children in care. By comparison, 17 year-old females had only increased by 1ppt on 2018.

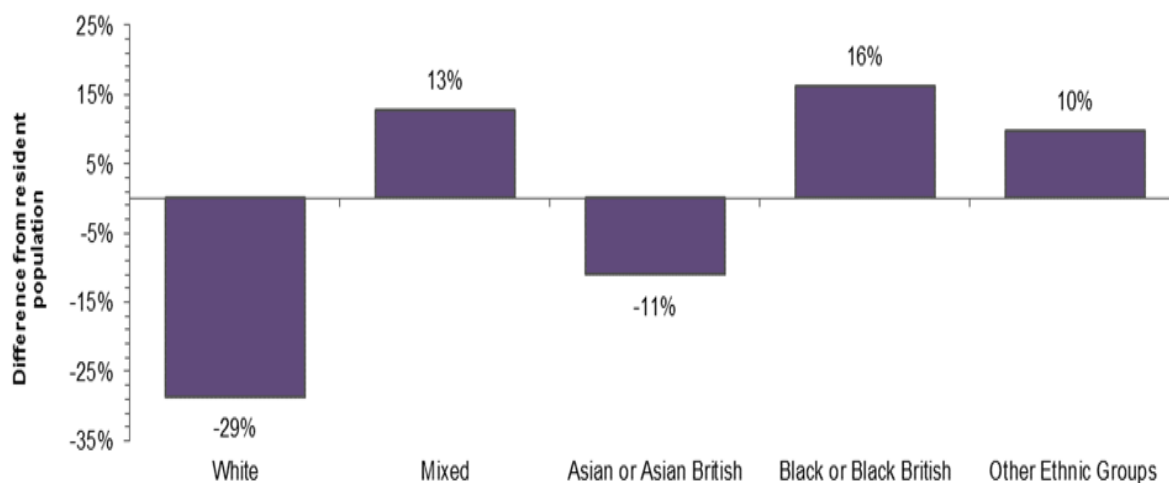
9.4. This 9ppt rise in 17 year-olds has contributed to an 8ppt rise in the overall proportion of males in care, from 53% in 2018 to 61%. Across London the number of males rose by 1ppt to 60%, but the national rate remained consistent at 56%.

<b>Gender</b> <i>(percentage of children looked after)</i>		
	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>
Merton 2019	61%	39%
London 2019	60%	40%
National 2019	56%	44%

9.5. The rate of children in care aged 10 years and over has remained fairly consistent since 2015, at 76% -78%, with a 73% outlier in 2018. In 2019 the rate was 78% compared to the pan London and outer London rate of 76%, and the national rate of 63%. This comparative pattern continues with the number and proportion of children aged 0-4, which saw rates of 11% to 13% across the past five years, with a 15% outlier in 2018. The 2019 rate was 12%, on a par with the pan and outer London rate, but 6ppt below the national rate.

9.6. The majority of children looked after by Merton are from a 'White' background, but this group is under-represented in relation to the resident population by 29%. 'Asian' children are also under-represented by 11%. Children from 'Mixed', 'Black' and 'Other' ethnic backgrounds are over-represented (by 13%, 16% and 10%) in our looked after population and this is likely to reflect the increase in the numbers of UASC. At 31 March 2019 the UASC cohort self-identified as: 18 Other; 10 Black; three White; and one Asian.

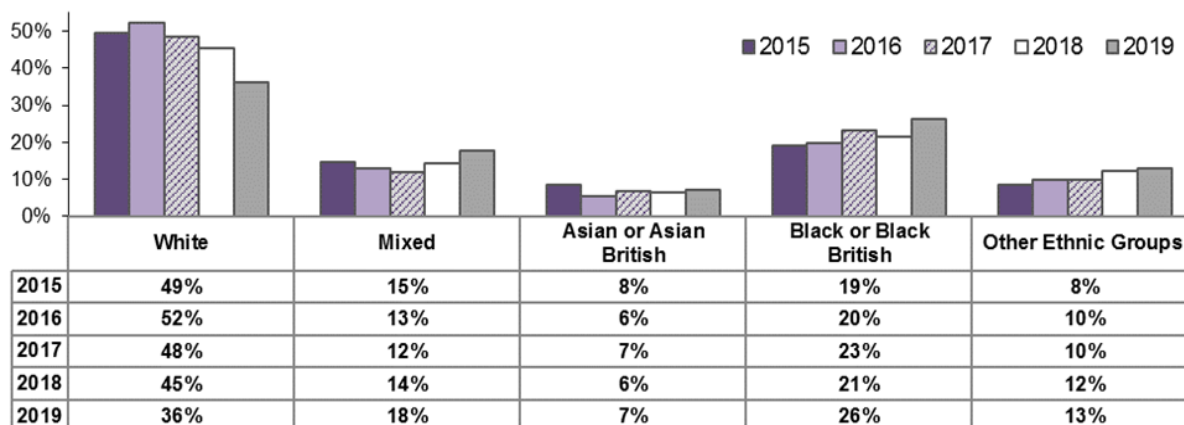
### Difference in Ethnic Group of children looked after as at 31st March 2019 from the Merton Resident Population 2011



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

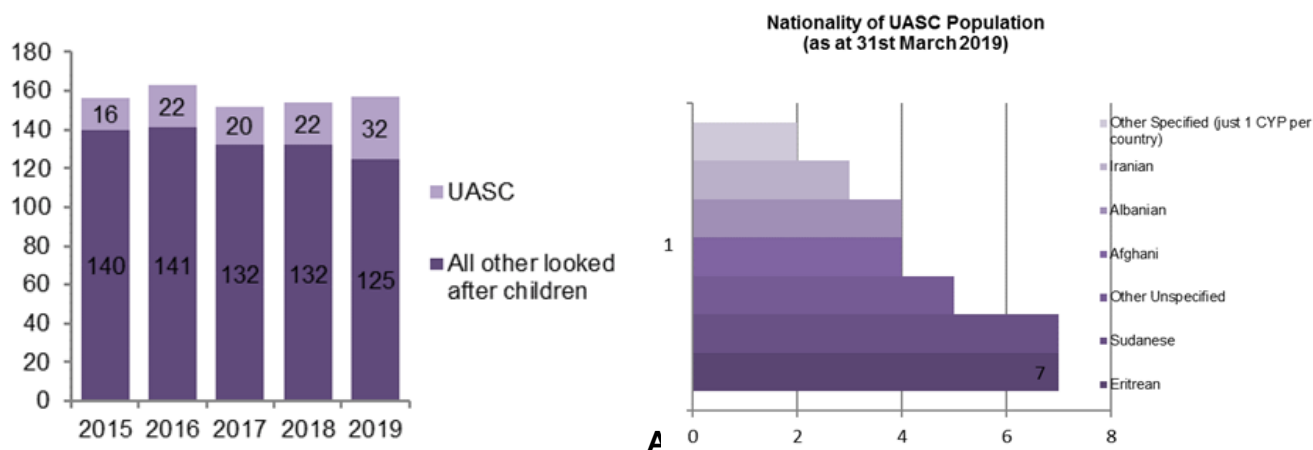
9.7. The trend data shows a change in the ethnic origin of our children looked after in 2019, with Merton seeing an annual decrease only in the percentage of children in the 'White' category. The largest annual percentage growth (5ppt) has been in the 'Black' category, which had seen a decrease in 2018. The 'Mixed' category rose by 4ppt, 'Asian' and 'Other' both by 1ppt.

### Percentage of Children Looked After by Ethnic Origin from 2015 to 2019



9.8. The following graphs highlights the increase in UASC populations. For reference, in 2012 the UASC population was 6% of the overall children looked after cohort. In 2019 this has risen to 20%, a 6ppt rise on 2018, and just 1ppt above the outer London rate. In 2019 the national rate of UASC remained at 6% for a fourth consecutive year, whilst the London and outer London rates both rose by 2ppt to 17% and 19% respectively.

9.9. Although those identifying as of Other Ethnic Groups' constitute only 13% of the general children looked after population, 56% of UASCs identified as 'Other' and this group continues to be the largest in the UASC cohort. Eritreans remain the dominant cohort (7)



	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Merton	107	122	100	86	72
% increase / decrease yoy	26%	14%	-18%	-14%	-16%

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

9.10. The number of children starting to be looked increased locally and nationally between 2013 and 2016, but Merton has since seen a year-on-year contraction, with 16% fewer children starting care during 2018/19 than the previous year. Of note is that: 75% of new starters were male; 35% were UASC: and 47% were aged 16 or 17 years-old.

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

Merton	Age (in years)																	
	(number of children who started to be Looked After; ages on entering care)																	
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
2015	8	3	4	3	2	2	3	2	5	7	2	1	4	4	15	13	17	12
2016	11	3	5	1	6	3	4	3	2	5	4	2	7	4	7	11	19	25
2017	8	4	4	2	3	2	2	2	2	9	1	3	7	1	7	8	18	17
2018	9	3	1	3	3	3	4	0	3	3	2	4	2	5	7	7	17	10
2019	12	1	4	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	3	2	2	1	3	8	21	13

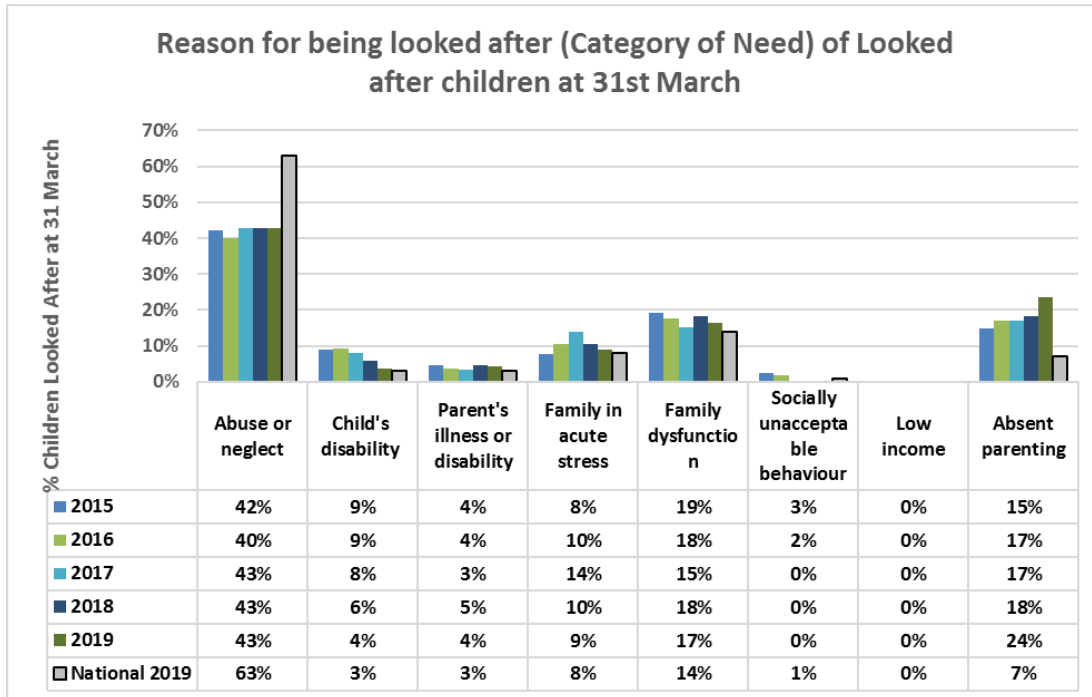
Only the first occasion on which a child started to be looked after in the year has been counted.

## 10. Reason for being looked after

10.1. When a child comes into care their primary need is collected and the table below shows that the proportions of children in each group have remained fairly stable. There is a significant difference between our local rate, of those in care at 31 March, who entered care due to absent parenting (24%) and the 2019 national rate (7%). Since 2015 our local rate for this category has increased by 9ppt,

including a 6ppt increase since 2018. This reflects the increasing numbers of UASC coming into Merton's care.

10.2. In contrast, and for a third year, those in care due to abuse or neglect remains at 43%, compared to the national rate of 63%. All other categories saw a 1 to 2ppt decrease, and were within 1ppt of the 2019 national average, except for family dysfunction which was 3ppt above the national rate.



## 11. Legal status of children looked after

11.1. In 2018-19 we have seen an increase in the numbers and proportion of children looked after on a care order with 12 (8%) on Interim Care Orders (ICO) and 85 (55%) on Full Care Orders (FCO). The proportion on ICOs is below the 2019 London and national rates (14% and 16% respectively), whilst the rate of FCOs lies between the London rate of 48% and the national 59%. For reference, the London and National rates have seen very little variance on 2018, with just a 1% rise in London ICOs, and a 1% increase in the rates of National FCOs. In 2019, the total proportions on a care order were Merton 63%, London 62% and national 75%.

11.2. Inversely there has been small (1ppt) annual decrease in the proportion accommodated under section 20 agreements as at 31 March 2019, but at 31% Merton is still comparable to the London rate of 33%, although well above the 18% national average.

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

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Merton	105	117	113	85	70
% increase / decrease year on year	4%	11%	-3%	-25%	-18%

Source: SSDA 903

11.3. During 2018/19 70 children and young people ceased to be looked after. Therefore there has been a year-on-year reduction in the numbers entering and leaving Merton's care across the past three years from 2017, whilst the number in care at 31 March has seen small annual increases in the same period.

11.4. In the same period there has been an increase in the number of children and young people who have been in care at least two and a half years at 31 March. Therefore since 2017 Merton has seen less turnover in children looked after and a decrease in the proportion of short term accommodation.

	2016	2017	2018	2019
Number of children looked after 31 March	163	152	154	157
Number of children in care at least 2.5 years at 31 March	30	30	36	41
Percentage in Care at least 2.5 years	18.4%	19.7%	23.4%	26.0%

11.5. The table below reflects the age related care pathways of those ceasing care. Although only 32 young people left care on reaching adulthood on their 18th birthdays, the lowest number in over five years, they are still the largest cohort (46%) of those leaving care in 2018/2019, compared to 32% nationally. The impact of UASC being accepted into care in the older age group, and remaining to transition to care leavers at 18 is a factor.

11.6. Twenty children left care before they were six (29%). For those aged 0-five year's permanence is found outside of the care system either through reunification, placement with relatives or adoption. Within this cohort, children ceasing care aged one- to four-years-old were the second largest national cohort at 22%, in Merton they were the third largest at 14% (10 children).

11.7. The age group most likely to remain in care is the 5 to 12-year old cohort most of whom are subject to care orders and permanently matched with foster carers. Within this cohort, 13% of children ceasing care nationally were aged five to nine years-old, compared to 9% in London but 4.3% in Merton.

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

Merton	Age (in years)																		
	<i>(number of children who ceased to be Looked After; age on leaving care)</i>																		
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
2015	3	5	8	1	5	0	4	1	2	3	2	2	1	2	7	7	2	8	42
2016	5	6	5	2	8	1	1	3	2	3	5	2	1	4	6	7	7	7	42
2017	2	8	5	4	3	0	2	2	3	4	3	2	6	4	3	7	7	10	38
2018	5	1	2	1	2	2	2	3	1	2	1	0	1	2	5	2	4	6	43
2019	8	4	3	3	0	2	0	0	1	0	2	4	1	0	2	4	1	3	32

\*by number of children not number of episodes

## Reason for children leaving care\*

	Merton						
	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	London 2019	National 2019
Adoption (E11, E12)	8%	9%	10%	11%	6%	6%	12%
Died (E2)	1%	0%	1%	0%	0%	Suppressed	Suppressed
Care taken over by another LA in UK (E3)	0%	0%	2%	0%	0%	5%	2%
Returned home to live with parents/relatives** (E4)	0%	39%					
Return home to live with parents/relatives as part of the care planning process (E4A)			48%	14%	17%	19%	20%
Return home to live with parents/relatives which was not part of the care planning process (E4B)			7%	12%	4%	7%	4%
Left care to live with person with no parental responsibility (E13)	3%	3%	4%	4%	7%	5%	6%
Residence Order (or from April 2014 a child arrangements order) Granted (E41)	1%	2%	0%	0%	1%	2%	4%
Special Guardianship Order (E43, E44)	4%	2%	4%	4%	0%	9%	13%
Special Guardianship order made to carer other than former foster carer, who was/are relative or friend (E47)					13%		
Moved to independent living (E5, E6)	35%	19%	22%	32%	27%	20%	16%
Transferred to residential care funded by Adult Social Services (E7)	2%	1%	1%	5%	6%	3%	2%
Sentenced to custody (E9)	1%	2%	3%	2%	0%	2%	1%
Accommodation on remand ended (E14)	0%	1%	0%	0%	1%	1%	1%
Age assessment determined child aged 18 or over (E15)	1%	0%	1%	1%	0%	1%	1%
Child moved abroad (E16)	0%	2%	0%	1%	0%	Suppressed	Suppressed
Care ceased for any other reason (E8)	7%	21%	12%	15%	17%	20%	18%

\*by number of children not number of episodes

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

11.8. In 2019 the number of young people leaving care at 18 to move to independent living dropped to its lowest level (17 young people) in over five years, but still accounted for 27% of those leaving care, compared 16% nationally. This reflects the higher proportion of older young people in our children looked after cohort. For comparison, the London and outer London rates were 20% and 24% respectively.



11.9. A total of 15 children (21%) left care to return to home to live with their parents or relatives, (a 5ppt decrease on 2018). But, looking at the sub-groups: 17% returned home as part of their care plan and 4% not as part of their care plan. The benchmark 2019 national rates for these sub-groups were 20% and 4%, and the London rates were 19% and 7%.

11.10. The number of those ceasing care in 2019 due to adoption was 6% (4 children), again the lowest number at Merton in over five years, but at 6% of all those leaving care during 2018/19 it is on a par with the pan London rate, but half the national rate of 12%.

## **12. Staying Put (year ending 31 March)**

12.1. 'Staying Put' relates to young people who have turned 18 and left care in the year ending the 31 March, who are eligible for care leaver support and remain with their former foster carers 3 months after their 18th birthday. In 2018 -19, seven young people leaving care entered into 'Staying Put' arrangements. If we include care leavers aged 19 plus, there were 17 'stayed put' placements recorded during the year.

## Section 2: Care Processes

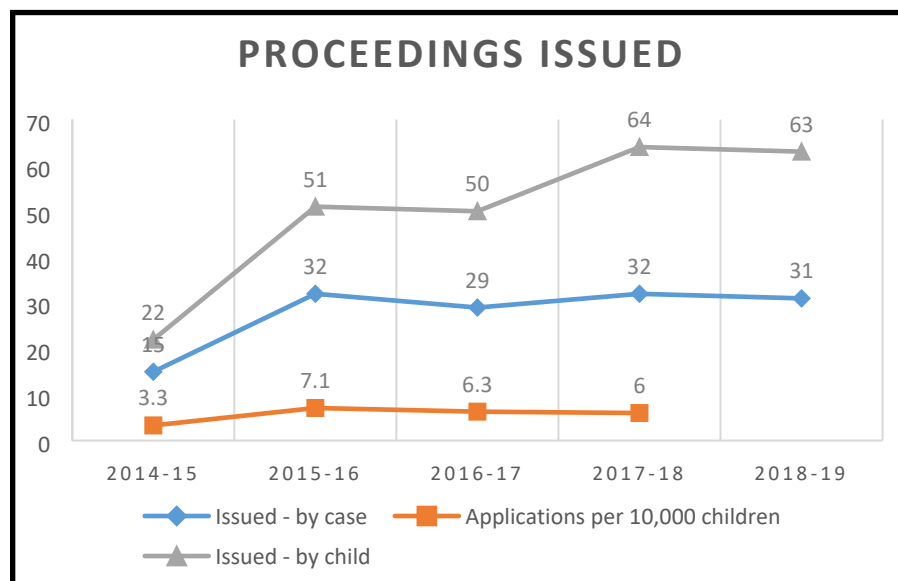
### 13. Timeliness of care proceedings when taking children into care

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

13.2. Between April 2018 and March 2019 we issued proceedings for 31 families consisting of 63 children. During the same period, we concluded proceedings of 35 families involving 73 children. At 31 March 2019 we had 37 children subject to care proceedings. At the same date there were a further 22 children subject to pre-proceedings (or awaiting an initial pre-proceedings meeting). In total this represented 32% of the 184 children subject to child protection plans on the same date.

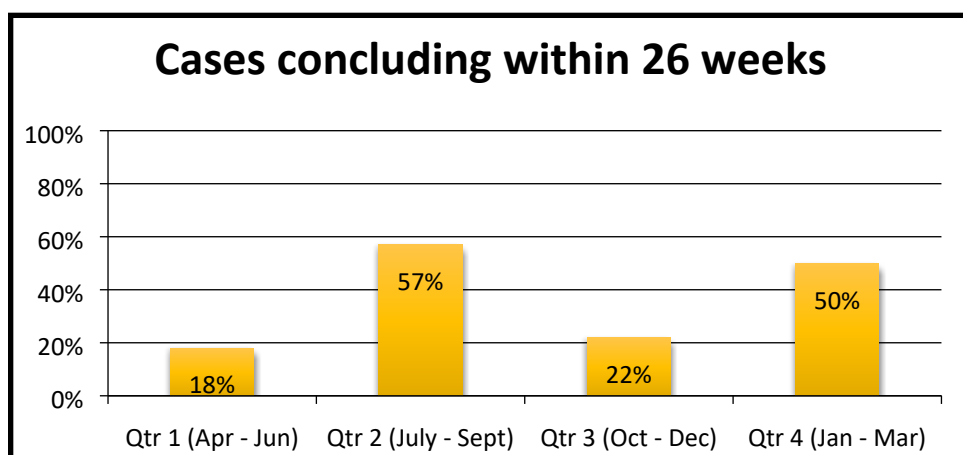
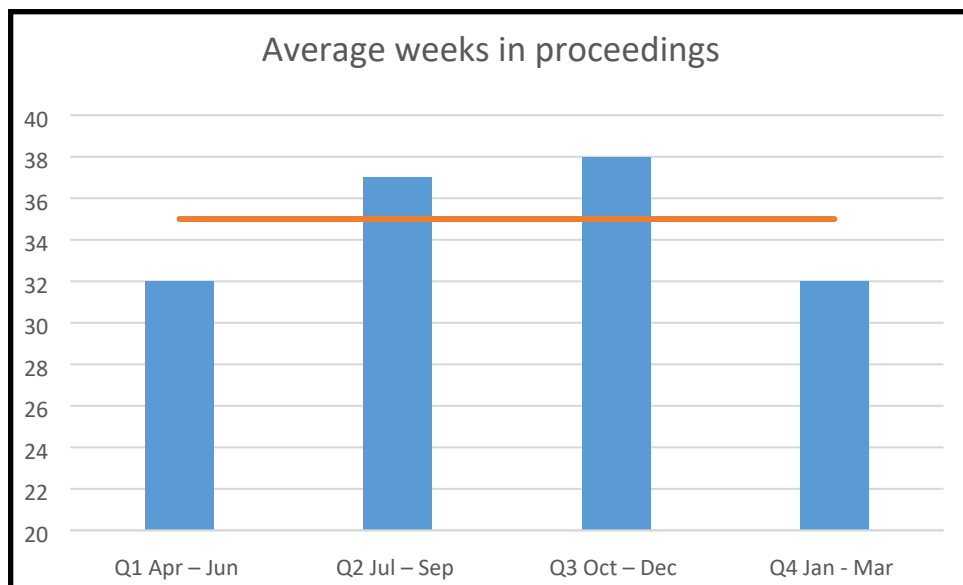
13.3. Our average number of weeks in proceedings for the year was 35 weeks – this is an increase of 4 weeks on the previous year. This average was within a range of 14 to 77 weeks. 34% of the cases concluding this year did so within the 26 week timeframe set by the Public Law Outline 2014. This is down from 48% in 2017/8.

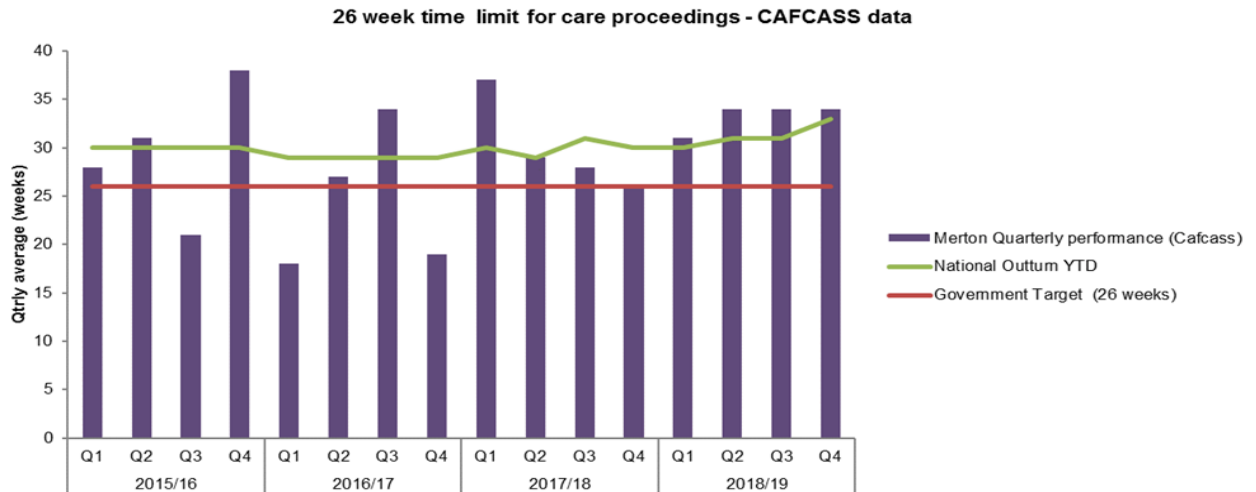
13.4. Of the 31 cases in which we issued care proceedings this year, 9 of these were issued by the First Response Service, 2 by the Vulnerable Children's Team and 18 by the Safeguarding and Care Planning Service. A further 2 families started care proceedings in other boroughs and were designated to Merton. By way of comparison, during the previous year 2017-18, we issued proceedings for 32 families consisting of 64 children. This indicates consistent application of thresholds for issuing proceedings. As shown in the chart below, the number of families where proceedings were issued per year has remained stable over the last 4 years although the number of children this involves has risen.



13.5 Between April 2018 and March 2019 we have concluded proceedings for a total of 35 families involving 73 children. This is a significant increase on the previous year, in which we concluded proceedings for only 29 families with 47 children. This has had the positive effect of bringing down the number of families currently in proceedings from 21 in April 2018 to 16 in April 2019.

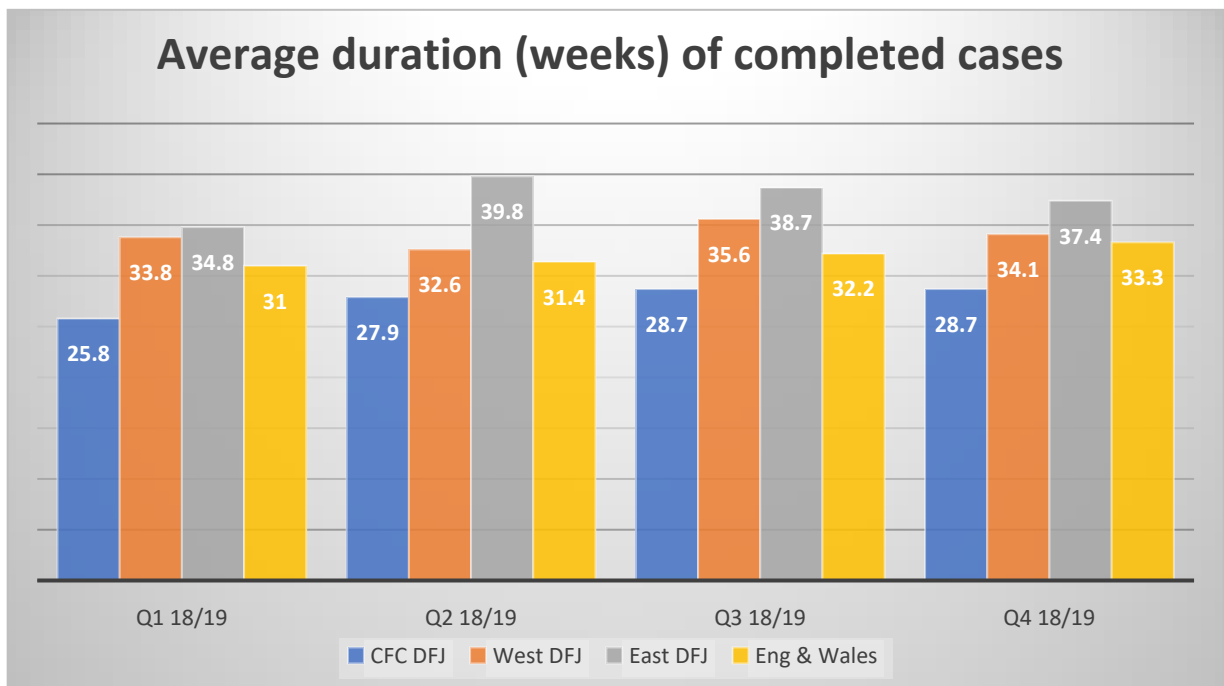
13.6 As indicated by the red line in the graph below, our average weeks in proceedings across the year is 35. This is a rise in comparison to last year where our average was 31 weeks.





13.7 Since the Q3 report was finalised no new data has been released regarding our performance compared with other authorities using the same court, nor our geographical neighbours. At that time we were performing slightly above average.

13.8 The below graph indicates the relative performance of the West London Family Court over the last year, whereby it can be seen that we were performing above the average for WLFC in Q1 and 4, and below in Q2 and 3.

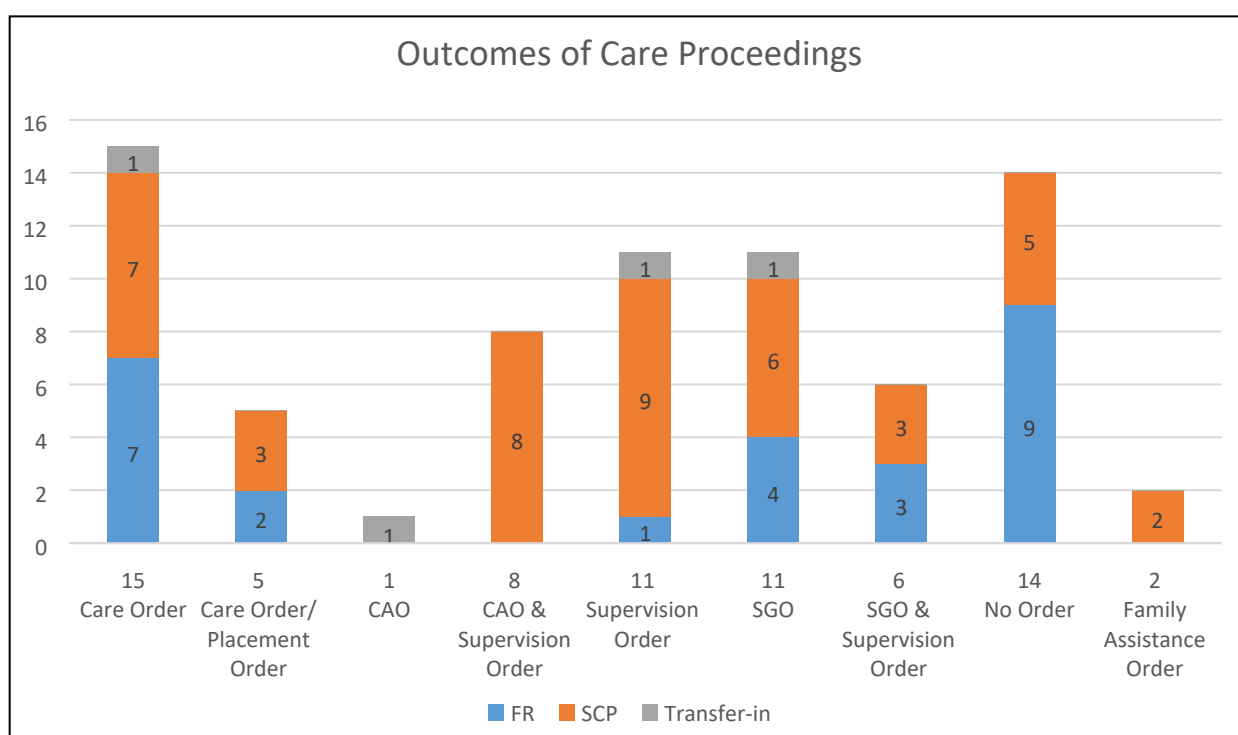


(Source: Public Law Performance Bulletin, May 2019)

## 14 Outcome of proceedings

14.1 Merton has been effective in securing approval for all but four of the final care plans put before the Court this year (73 plans submitted - 95% approved). For 2 children, supervision orders were sought and family assistance orders were granted. For another family we recommended no order was necessary for an older child who could consent to voluntary accommodation and a care order was made. For the final family, we sought a care order for one child in a brother / sister group of three children, where the plan for the other two was a special guardianship order. This decision was finely balanced and the Court ruled in favour of all the children being reunited in a family arrangement.

14.2 The graph below indicates the outcomes achieved across the 73 children whose proceedings concluded between April 2018 and March 2019.



Despite such a large increase in concluded proceedings this year, fewer children have been permanently separated from their birth and wider families compared to last year. We have had 2 fewer care orders made to us than in the previous year (31% of the orders made, down from 37%).

The Safeguarding and Care Planning Service's approach is to hold family safety meetings/Family Group conferences for all families where there are interventions under child protection, court and pre-proceedings to support families to identify solutions to increase safety for their children. Early identification of family members who could provide alternative care means children can remain in their families and do not have to wait for a permanent plan to be realised i.e. through care proceedings.

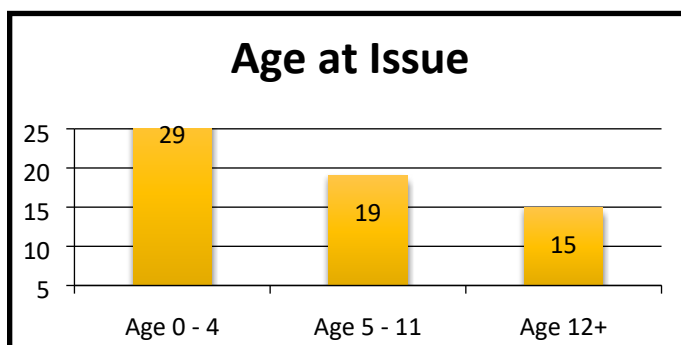
14.3 A similar number of care and placement orders were achieved in this year as last year (7% of orders made, down from 11%). Whereas 39% of the children for whom we

achieved orders last year achieved permanence within their birth or wider families that figure rose to 72% this year. This increase may reflect Merton's approach to working alongside families to find solutions from within the family network that increase safety for children.

14.4 There has been a surprising increase in the number of children for whom no orders were made this year. This is up from 0 last year (9 in 2016/7) to 14 (19% of orders made). 4 of these related to children aged 16+ who were part of brother / sister groups where other orders were made but about whom as individuals it was not considered appropriate to seek an order. Similarly a further 4 of these related to younger brothers or sisters of teenagers in 2 families where the eldest child was made the subject of an order but the local authority assessed the care of the younger children as suitable. One further no Order relates to a single child about whom concerns arose during the life of another order and those concerns were returned to the Court.

14.5 The remaining 5 children were split across 2 families. For both of these families the decision to issue proceedings was made early on in the work with the family. It may have been that additional social work intervention could have prevented these families from entering care proceedings, but at the time it was agreed that the risks could not be managed without this legal framework.

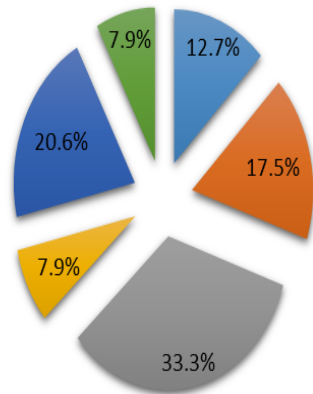
14.6 Whereas last year the majority of children were aged 5-11 years at the time of issue, this year the majority of children were aged 0-4. This age group represents 40% of the children in proceedings, yet only 5 placement orders were made (20% of children in that age group). Last year the same age group represented 31% of the cohort, with 5 placement orders made (25% of the children in that age group).



## Demographics

The chart below shows that black, Asian and mixed ethnicities made up 50.8% of our care proceedings cohort this year (based on issued cases). This figure has risen sharply from 26.5% last year. This compares with a projected 57% of the Merton population as a whole (as projected for 2018 from the 2011 census data) and 52% of children subject to CP plans in Merton at 31 March 2019.

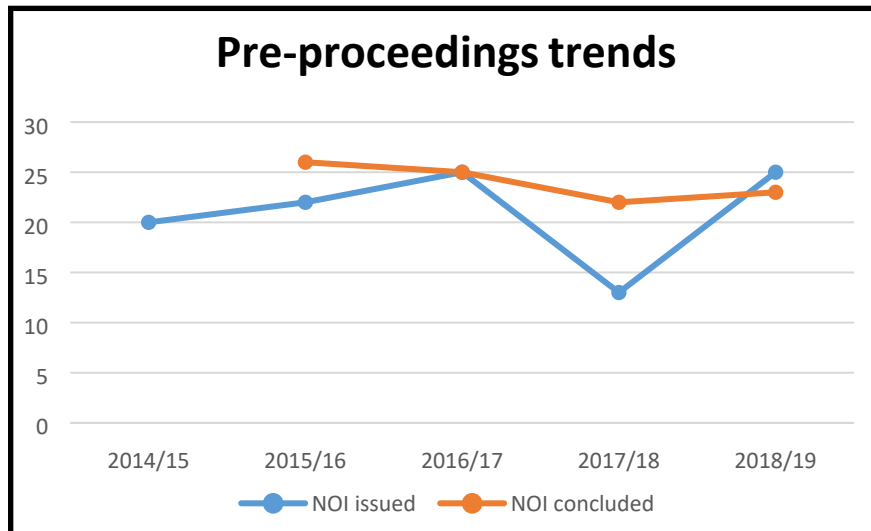
### Ethnicity of Children in Proceedings



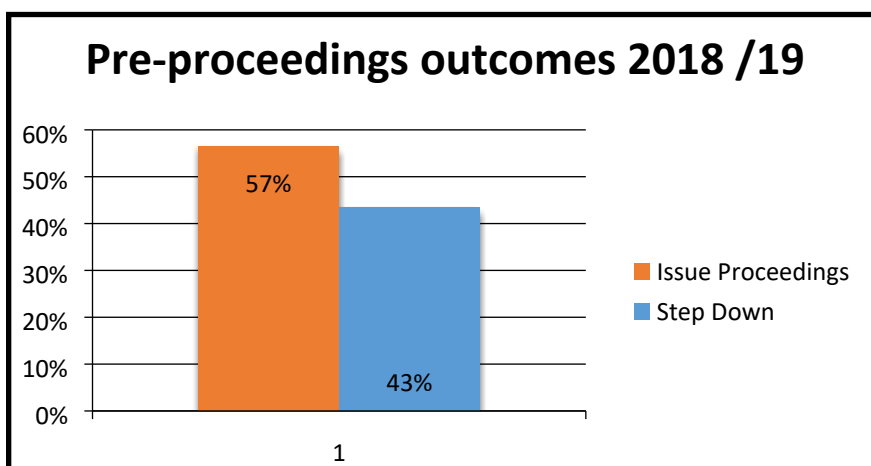
- Black Ethnicities
- Asian Ethnicities
- White British
- White Other
- Mixed Ethnicities
- Other / Not Stated

## 15 Pre-proceedings Performance

15.1 Since April 2018 we have entered pre-proceedings on 25 families. This is a significant rise compared with the 13 families in the previous year, although, as the graph below demonstrates, this is in line with previous years. We have concluded pre-proceedings in 23 families. This compares with 22 last year.



15.2 The average length of children in pre-proceedings is 27 weeks across all cases this year. This is comparable to the 26 weeks last year. Where pre-birth babies with a plan to issue at birth are excluded from the data the remaining children have spent an average of 30 weeks in pre-proceedings this year, compared with 28 weeks last year. Pre-proceedings children are tracked monthly by the Safeguarding and Care Planning Head of Service. A reduction in the length of weeks under pre-proceedings is indicated to reduce the length of these to 14 weeks as advised in the statutory guidance.



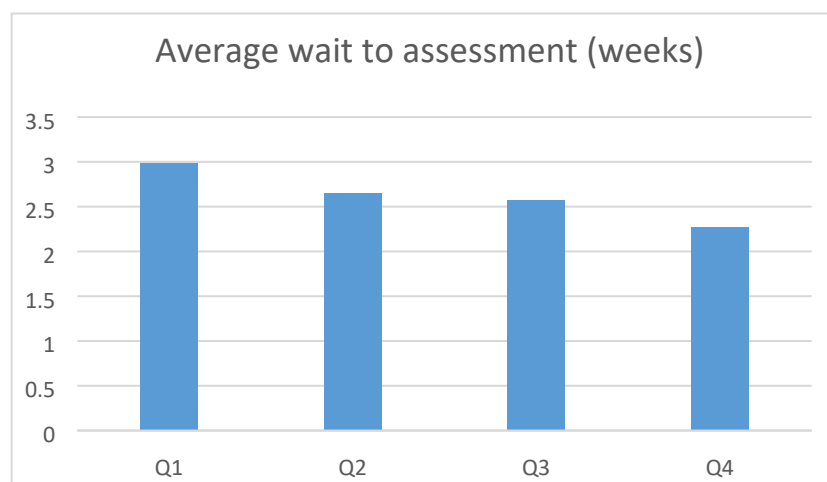


## 16 Family Drug and Alcohol Court (FDAC)

16.1 Between April 2018 and March 2019 we have used FDAC for 2 families in care proceedings (following periods of pre-proceedings, one in FDAC, the other not) and 3 further families in pre-proceedings. This figure is in line with Merton's allocation of 5 FDAC places a year although it should be noted that the FDAC year runs from January-December rather than April-March. The information provided below is taken from FDACs annual report (December 2018) and relates to both Merton and other children and families they work with from all the local authorities involved in the partnership.

### 16.2 Referral waiting times

FDACs average waiting time between the first intake meeting (i.e. the pre-proceedings meeting or initial hearing) and the assessment date has gradually reduced over the year (see below). This duration is affected by bulges in referrals, staff availability for assessment and parents' engagement with appointments and meetings.



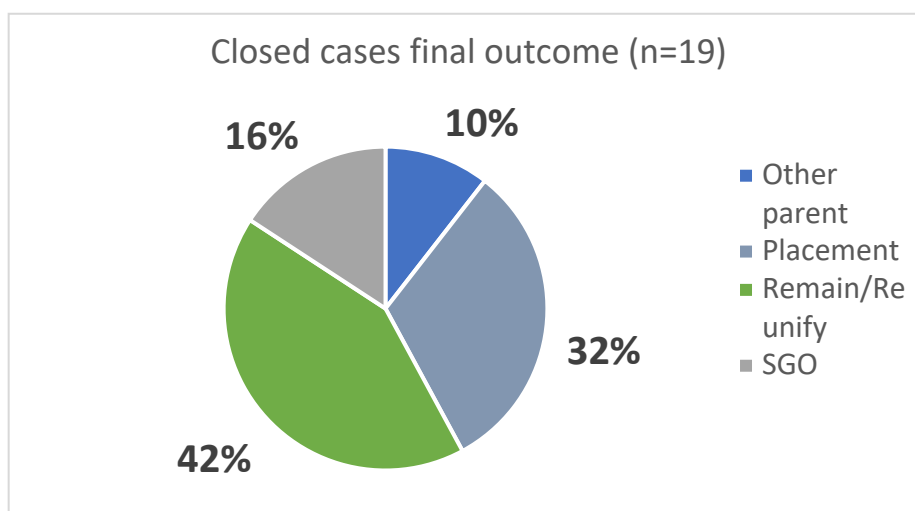
### 16.3 Case duration

FDAC has concluded proceedings for 19 cases since January 2018 of families under FDAC. This will include Merton families. Over their first year, the average duration of the FDAC proceedings has been 29.8 weeks with a range of 21 weeks to 47 weeks. It is important to note that this may not be the whole duration of the proceedings cases as some cases commenced before transferring into FDAC. This figure also does not reflect all the cases issued as the longer running cases will not have concluded yet. Therefore it could be expected that the average will rise in the coming months.

The percentage of proceedings cases that ended in 26 weeks or under (FDAC proceedings) was 33.3%. This is comparable to Merton's own 34%. For reference, the two Merton cases that are included in these statistics came in at 30 weeks (Q3) and 44 (Q4).

## 16.4 Outcomes

Final orders have been made in 19 FDAC cases, which is just over a third of their caseload and includes 2 Merton families.



When compared with Merton's own data on court outcomes it can be seen that in Merton's cohort 72% of children achieved permanence within their birth families, while for the FDAC this figure is 68%. 42% of children exiting the FDAC remain living with, or return to live with, the parent they were living with at the beginning of the process. For Merton's families this figure is 37%.

Analysis of the use of the FDAC indicates that there doesn't appear to be a significant impact on either the length of proceedings or the outcome in terms of whether children remain within their birth families. It is noted that this is the first year of the FDAC partnership and there have inevitably been some teething problems that have contributed to delay. These include staffing in the FDAC, increased waiting times for assessments due to office moves, unpredictable fluxes in referral rates and drift in pre-proceedings work due to lack of clarity around roles and expectations. It is hoped that the impact of these issues will lessen with time and translate into reduced delay. It should also be noted that only 19 of the 57 families referred to FDAC had concluded by December 2018 therefore once the remaining outcomes are included FDAC performance statistics there may be a change to the impact FDAC can demonstrate.

## 17 Children Looked After Reviews

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

Merton	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Timely Reviews	95.8%	98.7%	97.2%	95.6%	94%**

Source: SSDA 903 \*\* provisional 903 data, yet to be validated by DfE

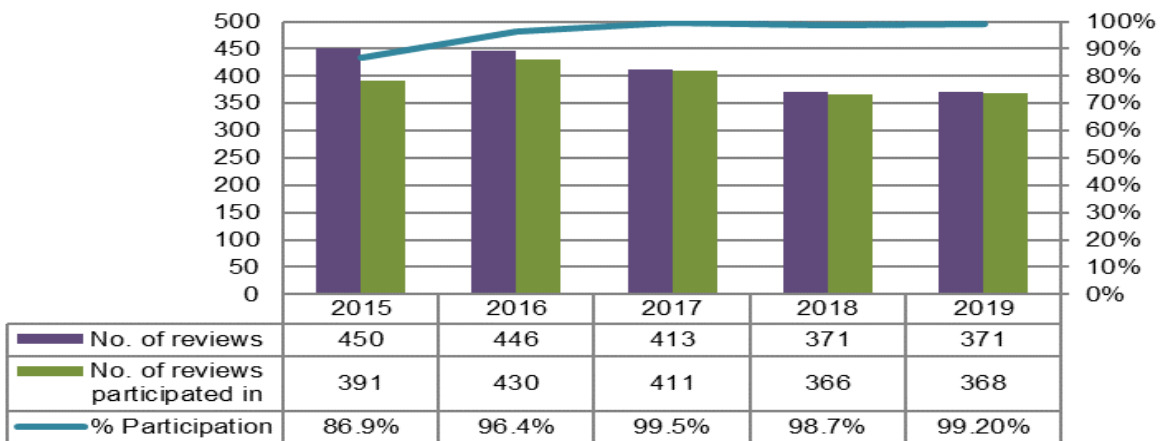
Notes: The DfE do not publish national comparisons for this indicator. The indicator only includes children who had been in care continuously for 4 weeks as at 31 March. 2019: provisional data

17.1 In 2018-19, there were 59 initial reviews and 319 second or subsequent reviews took place, of which 6% were reviewed out of time.

17.2 Communication and embedding of practice standards were fully implemented in 2019 to ensure all reviews are on time and the voice of the child or young person is at the centre. The escalation process has been strengthened and work has taken place to formally track records where escalation occurred. In relation to those escalations or challenge outside of the formal process (positive challenge), we have embedded a collaborative approach in terms of communication and promoting the rights of young people.

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

**Participation in LAC reviews (LAC aged four+)**



Source: SSDA 903

Notes: The DfE do not publish national comparisons for this indicator. As per DfE guidelines the data excludes reviews with a participation method of 'Child aged under 4 at the time of the review' as children under 4 are not required to participate in their reviews.

17.3 Participation of children in their looked after reviews was identified as a priority area in 2015-16 and following the 2017 Ofsted inspection. Whilst observed that performance in previous years has not met the standard and ambitions we wanted for our young people, both service and improvement plans have been implemented to focus on the following areas:

- With children and young people to get their views on participation in Children Looked After reviews. For example, who they want at the meeting, agenda or where it should be held
- Ensure that all plans, including child in need, child protection, care plans for children looked after, and pathway plans, consistently contain specific actions, achievable timescales, and clear, measurable outcomes.
- Affirming practice standards and embedding Signs of safety and the practice model into day to day practice and outcomes for children and young people
- Training for practitioners working with non-verbal children
- Guidance on promoting participation, ensuring the young person's voice is central to the meeting
- Improved data quality

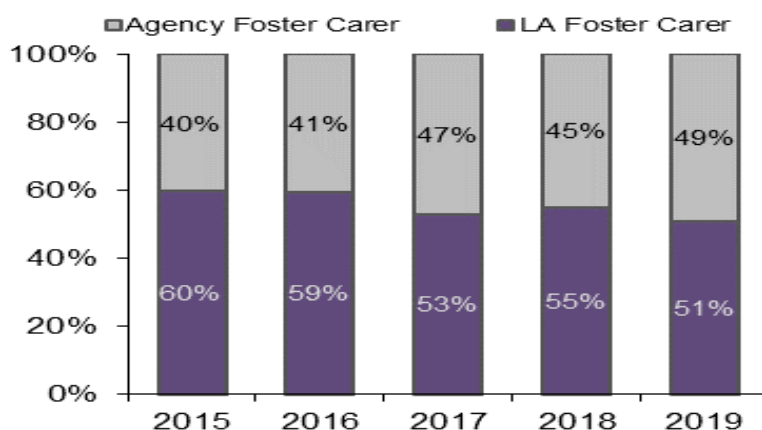
- 17.4 The success of this improvement plan and the on-going commitment from practitioners is evidenced in the improved performance data since 2015/6 and for this year at 99% (based on the 371 reviews, for children aged four and above, at which a participation code was recorded). Children looked after attended 79% of reviews, and at 76% of reviews the child actually spoke for themselves. Children did not attend 21% of reviews, but in all but three instances their views were conveyed by an advocate or other facilitative medium.
- 17.5 Participation for children and young people looked after was delivered from Jigsaw4u between 1 July 2018 and 31 March 2019. After considering the outcomes achieved for young people and the availability of advocates for young people in care, it was agreed, after the end of the 2018-19 reporting year, to transfer the participation aspect of this work to Merton's own Participation and Engagement Services. Jigsaw4u remain involved with advocacy and supporting care experienced young people.

## 18 Section 3: Placements

18.1 During 2018/19 Merton's children looked after were placed in a range of settings including family homes (foster care, family/parental, placed for adoption); semi- and independent living placements; residential care homes; family centres/mother and baby units; children's homes (including secure); and one young person in a youth offending unit.

18.2 At 31 March 2019, 78% of children looked after by Merton were placed in foster care. There was no change, therefore, on last year's percentage rate, whereas the national rate had decreased by 1ppt to 72%, and the London rate by 2ppt to 70%. Of the 122 children in foster care, 12 were placed with relative(s) or friend(s). Of the 110 children placed with 'other' foster carers: 51% were placed with in-house carers, a 4ppt decrease on 2018, and 49% with Agency foster carers. The chart below evidences the 9ppt increase in those placed in external agency provision over the past five years.

**Fostered\* Children looked after as at 31st March 2019**



*\*Excludes children placed with family or friends*

This continues to be an area of scrutiny for us due to the impact on budget and the fact that agency placements are often outside of the borough. The most common use of agency placements is for adolescents, as a number of our in house carers are only approved to take foster children up to the age of 10 years.

The Access to Resources Service is committed to targeted recruitment of teenage carers; however, there is a Pan London challenge with many agencies and neighbouring Local Authorities competing for the same and small number of prospective carers. During the period of 2018/19, 12 Merton foster carers, and 3 Connected Person Carers were recruited. 3 Supported Lodgings carers were also recruited.

## Placement Type for Children Looked After as at 31 March 2019

Merton	Placement Type							
	Foster Placement	Placed for Adoption	Placement with Parents	Other Placement in the Community	Secure Units, Children's Homes and Hostels	Other Residential Settings	Residential Schools	Other Placement
2015	69%	4%	1%	0%	22%	2%	1%	0%
2016	66%	4%	0%	1%	26%	1%	1%	0%
2017	71%	3%	2%	0%	21%	1%	1%	0%
2018	78%	0%	3%	0%	19%	0%	0%	0%
2019	78%	1%	1%	2%	12%	7%	0%	0%
London 2019	70%	2%	2%	7%	16%	3%	Suppressed	Suppressed
National 2019	72%	3%	7%	4%	12%	1%	<0.5%	1%

Source: SSDA903

Notes: Foster placement – Foster placement with relative and friends or with LA or agency foster carers

Other placement in the community – Living independently and residential employment

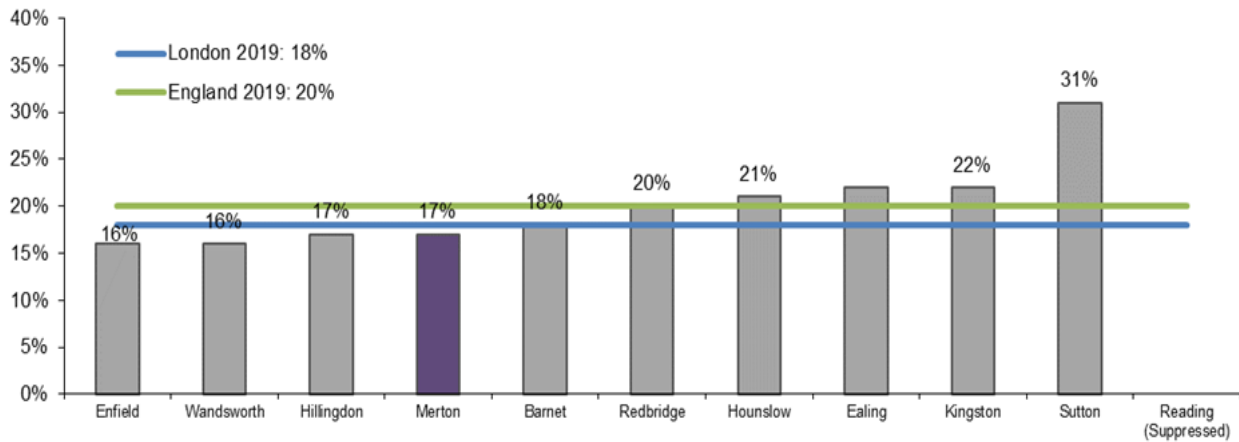
Secure units, children's homes and hostels – Secure units, homes and hostels subject to Children's Homes regulations and homes and hostels not subject to Children's Homes regulations (this includes supported lodgings)

Other residential settings - Residential care homes, NHS Trust providing medical/nursing care, Family centre or mother and baby unit, and Young offenders institution or prison.

18.3 The proportion of children in 'other residential settings' in 2019, at 7% is significantly above the average seen at Merton between 2015 – 2018, as well as the 2019 national and London averages of 1% and 3%. We continue to consider these figures cautiously due to concerns being raised around the incorrect coding of children's placements. For example, the 7% increase mentioned is due to seven children who were placed in residential care homes which would previously have been recorded as 'Children's Homes and Hostels'.

18.4 Between 2018 and 2019 the proportion of children looked after placed in 'secure units, children's homes and hostels' saw a further 7ppt decrease to 12%, bringing it in line with the 2019 national average of 12%, and below the 16% pan London average. Of the 19 young people in this cohort: 11 were in semi-independent accommodation (all aged 16 and 17 years-old, and including six unaccompanied asylum seeking children); seven in children's homes; and one in a secure children's home.

**Percentage of Children Looked After as at 31 March placed more than 20 miles from where they used to live; Merton, Statistical Neighbours, London and National 2019**



Source:SSDA903. Note: UASC are excluded from the measure

18.5 At 31 March 2019 17% of Merton’s Children Looked After were in placements more than 20 miles from where they used to live, compared to 19% in 2018, comparable to the pan London average of 18%, and just below the national rate of 20%. Merton is ranked 3rd (joint) amongst its 11 statistical neighbours, although Reading’s data has been suppressed.

18.6 72.7% of all new Children Looked After placements made in 2018-19 were within a 10-mile radius of the child’s home and 60% within a 5-mile radius. Although the proportion living within 5 miles is unchanged from 2018, those within 10 miles have reduced by 5.3ppt. Merton has increased the proportion of placements beyond each of these key distances since 2017, but this is due to finding the appropriate placement to meet the needs of the children.

18.7 For some young people placements away from their home community are a key part of the care plan as a result of anti-social behaviour/risk management. For some the needs of the young people are such that they require specialist placements which are not available in Merton or surrounding boroughs. A more detailed analysis of these placements will be available in Merton’s Sufficiency Strategy for Children Looked After and Care Leavers.

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

	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>
Merton	17%	14%	10%	16%	12%	8%
National	11%	11%	10%	Not available	10%	10%

Source: SSDA 903

Note: From 2016 if a child and their carer/s move to a new address this is no longer counted as a placement move. If a child is placed for adoption with their existing foster carer this is also not counted as a placement move.

18.8 8% of Merton children in care as at 31 March had three or more placement moves during 2018-19. This is a 2ppt decrease (improvement) on 2018, and an 8ppt improvement on 2017. It is also below the 2019 national and London rate of 10% and 11% respectively. Caution should be applied to this data as we have recently become aware of some data integrity issues which are being rectified.

**Long Term Stability: those in care for at least 2.5 years at 31 March, in a stable placement for at least two years (under 16 years-old)**

	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>
Merton	40%	68%	71%	69%	71%
National	Not available	Not available	Not available	70%	69%

Source: SSDA 903

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

18.9 Long-term placement stability is measured for all those under 16 years-old who have been in care continuously for at least two and a half years at 31 March. In 2019 41 children were eligible for this measure, and of those 71% had been in the same placement for at least two years. This is above our 2018 rate of 69%, and above the 2019 national and London rates of 69% and 68% respectively. Caution should be applied to this data as we have recently become aware of some data integrity issues which are being rectified.



18.10 The service continues to implement measures to increase placement stability as identified from a review of placement stability in 2015. The improvement plan actions implemented and embedded are:

- All requests for placement moves in the 14+ Team to be approved by the Head of Service
- Permanence Team to have responsibility for children on Care Orders
- A CAMHS in Social Care Team is established and provides reflective case discussion with Social Care Teams.
- Analysis of risk factors supports placement planning and results in early identification of placement instability

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

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
<b>Number of children</b>	26	19	16	4	0
<b>Number of episodes</b>	673	483	349	104	0

Source: SSDA903. Short-term breaks, also referred to as respite care, must include at least one night away from home but cannot exceed 17 days of continuous care, or 75 days within a 12-month period.

18.11 No Merton child was reported on the 2019 annual return as having been accommodated under an agreed series of short-term breaks. For reference, the Merton rate had been declining year-on-year since a peak of 26 children in 2015, and just four children had been subjects of such agreements in 2018. It is likely that this decline is linked to the changes in the way Brightwell is used to support children with additional needs.

## 19 Missing from Care

Merton	2016/17			2017/18			2018/19		
	Number of children	% of all LAC	Number of episodes	Number of children	% of all LAC	Number of episodes	Number of children	% of all LAC	Number of episodes
Children who were missing during the year	46	18%	232	24	10%	171	20	9%	82
Children who were away from placement without authorisation during the year	22	9%	41	14	6%	31	10	4%	16
Children who were 'missing' and / or 'away without authorisation' during the year	50	19%	273	29	12%	202	24	11%	202

Source: SSDA 903

19.1 The table above shows that the number of children going missing, or being away from their placement without authorisation, has decreased for a third consecutive year.

19.2 Twenty children were missing from placement (9% of children looked after) at total of 82 episodes, with 11 children having more than one episode in year. The

2019 national and London rates of children looked after going missing from their placement were higher, at 11% and 14%. Of these 20 children, five had more than five missing episodes, including three children missing ten or more times in year. Those three children accounted for 52% of all missing and away episodes throughout the year.

19.3 Ten children looked after were 'away' during the year (4% of children looked after) a total of 16 episodes, including three children away two or more times. The Merton rate was equable to the 3% seen nationally in 2019, and below the London rate of 9%. No child was recorded as away from placement more than four times.

19.4 Of the thirty children missing or away, 24 recorded at least one episode of each type of absence.

19.5 Following the update of the Children Missing from Care and Home Protocol a weekly multi agency missing meeting has been established. This has resulted in a timelier sharing of information in respect of the children reported as missing from home and care. Strategy meetings are convened for children who go missing from care and there is embedded practice of escalation of cases to senior management.

19.6 There is a weekly operational missing panel chaired by a Head of Service to discuss all children who have been (or are still) missing from home or care. The panel ensures a robust and coordinated approach between police, children's services and other agencies in response to children missing from home or chair.

19.7 The majority of incidents were short; 66.3% lasted two days or less (this is below Merton's 2018 rate of 84% and the 2019 national rate of 89%) 6% of missing episodes related to a period of less than 24 hours (compared to 34.5% nationally). Two missing episodes were still open at 31 March.

19.8 Of those episodes with a returned date, no children or young people were missing for extended periods (98 days+); and the last time an extended missing period was recorded was in 2016/17. Two young people were recorded as missing for five weeks and three for between 14 and 17 days. In these instances, regular strategy meetings are convened to ensure sharing of intelligence between professionals.

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

	Age at start of absence											
	Numbers						Percentages					
	10	13	14	15	16	17	10	13	14	15	16	17
All episodes	1	2	2	21	24	48	1.0%	2.0%	2.0%	21.4%	24.5%	49.0%
Missing	1	2	2	19	21	37	1.0%	2.0%	2.0%	19.4%	21.4%	37.8%
Absent	0	0	0	2	3	48	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	2.0%	3.1%	49.0%

Source: SSDA 903

## 20 Section 4: Permanency

- 20.1 The Government continues to monitor timeliness through review of quarterly and annual returns and the adoption scorecard process. The focus of the adoption scorecard is on local authorities and the adoption process for children. As a result of the increased scrutiny in the monitoring of children's plans, we have seen a steady improvement in the timeliness of the child's journey through to adoption.
- 20.2 In the year 2018/19, of the 70 children ceasing care, four were adopted. At 6% of those leaving care, Merton's 2019 performance is on a par with the London average and was half the national average of 12%.
- 20.3 Another nine children looked after were made subject of a Special Guardianship Order. At 13% of all children leaving care during the year this appears on a par with the 2019 national rate, however, all nine were made to carers who were family or friends. The national and London average for this sub-category was just 4%. This indicates that no Special Guardianship orders were made to children's foster carers.

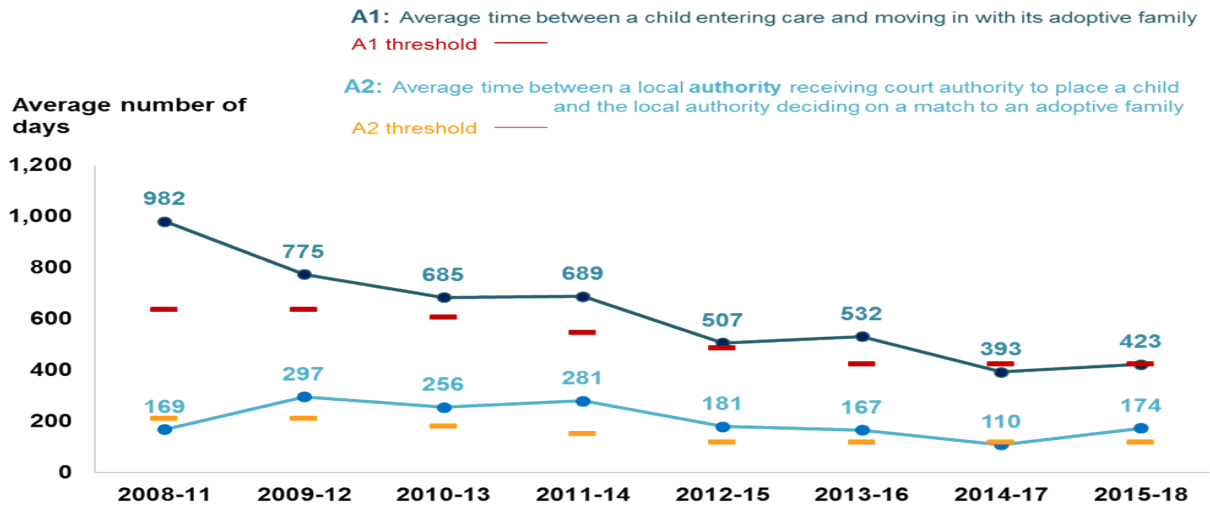
### **Number of Children Looked After Who Were Adopted or Made Subject of a Special Guardianship Order during the Year ending 31 March**

	2016	2017	2018	2018	2019
Adoptions	8	11	11	9	4
Special Guardianship Orders	4	2	5	3	9
Merton Total	12	13	16	12	13

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

- 20.4 For children who have been adopted, Merton's published three year rolling (2015-18) average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family is 423 days, which is lower than the national average of 486 days. Merton was ranked first in its statistical neighbour group, which had an overall 2015-18 average of 632 days. The 2016-19 published data will be available by March 2020 and Merton can expect its new three-year average to rise significantly as two children adopted in 2019 had been in care for several years. Additional information on this cohort of children is available in the Adoption and Permanency 6 Monthly Reports.

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



2016-19 scorecard will be available March 2020.

## 21 Section 5: Health

21.1 As the table below shows, all three health outcomes for children who had been in care for at least one year at 31 March 2019 all saw performance reduce, to their lowest levels in five years, but all three are within 1 – 3ppt of the London and national rates for 2019, except for up-to-date immunisations which were 7% below the national rate.

21.2 The rate of children with up-to-date immunisations reduced 9ppt to 80%, this was comparable to the 2019 London average of 81%, but below the national 87%. But, both the London and national rates had 2-3ppt rises on 2018. The number of older UASC coming into Merton's care may be a contributory factor as these young people usually arrive without medical records.

21.3 Although the rate of dental check-ups completed fell by 5ppt, at 84% they were between the London (83%) and national (85%) averages which had remained fairly consistent with their 2018 rates, with only the national rate rising, by 1%.

21.4 The annual health assessment (AHA) rate fell by 10ppt from the 2018 rate, compared to the London and national rates which increased by 1% and 2% respectively. But at 88% the Merton rate is just 2ppt below the national rate, and 3 below the London.

### **Health Care of children looked after continuously for at least 12 months at 31 March**

Merton	Looked After for at least 12 months	Children whose Immunisations were up-to-date	Children who had their Teeth Checked by a Dentist	Children who had their Annual Health Assessment
2015	87	86%	95%	94%
2016	94	81%	93%	91%
2017	94	82%	88%	96%
2018	88	89%	89%	98%
2019	104	80%	84%	88%
London 2019	6,360	81%	83%	91%
National 2019	54,590	87%	85%	90%

Source: SSDA903

21.5 The Children Looked After Health Team is situated within the Children Looked After Service and this supports communication between practitioners. The team regularly attend participation events and work hard to build relationships with our children looked after.

21.6 The Children Looked After Health Operational Group meets on a bi-monthly basis. The purpose of this group is to understand and champion the health needs of Children looked after and Care Leavers in Merton and respond to the Merton Health Needs Assessment for children looked after. In 2018 we have focussed on the following areas

- Reviewing the Children Looked After health process and procedures
- Quarterly performance relating to health assessments
- Care Leaver health passports

21.7 Research shows that more than one in four children who have been in care has significant levels of maladjustment<sup>3</sup> (Buchanan and Ten Brinke, 1997), with over 67% of those in the care system and 96% in children's homes having clinical level of psychiatric illness<sup>4</sup> (McCann, James, Wilson, and Dunn, 1996).

21.8 Emotional and behavioural health is determined by the average score of Children Looked After for whom a Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) was completed. The Department for Education benchmark the average scores for those aged between 5 and 16 at 31 March (although the 'eligible child' cohort extends to four year-olds) only. A low average score is deemed 'good'.

21.9 Across 2018/19 Merton saw an improvement in its average score and the percentage of SDQs submitted for eligible children, giving it performance rates above both the London and national averages. There was a programme of training sessions for practitioners and a process agreed for the escalation of any scores over 17.

21.10 Merton's 2019 average score for 2019 was 12.8, comparable to the London average (12.9) and within the 'normal' range of 0 to 13. The 2019 national average was 14.2, just within the borderline range of 14 – 16. For reference, in 2018 Merton's average score had been 15.9, compared to London and national averages of 13 and 14.2 respectively.

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<sup>3</sup> Buchanan, A. & Ten Brinke, J-A (1998) *Recovery from Emotional and Behavioural Problems*. NHS Executive, Anglia and Oxford. University of Oxford

<sup>4</sup> <sup>2</sup>McCann, J., James, A., Wilson, S., & Dunn, G. (1996) Prevalence of psychiatric disorders in young people in the care system. *British Medical Journal* 313, 1529-30

**Emotional and Behavioural Health of Children Looked After (SDQ scores of 'eligible' children in care aged 5 to 16 at 31 March)**

Statistical Neighbours	As at 31st March (Merton, Statistical Neighbours, London and National 2019)		
	Percentage of Eligible Children for whom an SDQ score was submitted	Average Score (a low average score represents the best)	Average Score Rank (1st=Lowest, 11th=Highest)
Barnet	100%	13.3	5
Ealing	86%	12.8	2
Enfield	91%	10.8	1
Hillingdon	81%	13.2	4
Hounslow	93%	13.9	8
Kingston Upon Thames	69%	15.3	11
<b>Merton</b>	<b>93%</b>	<b>12.8</b>	<b>2</b>
Reading	90%	14.6	10
Redbridge	72%	13.8	7
Sutton	92%	13.5	6
Wandsworth	79%	14.3	9
London 2019	85%	12.9	
National 2019	78%	14.2	

Source: SSDA 903. Average Score of Children Looked After for whom a Strengths & Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) was completed.

21.11 In 2019 Merton's average score saw the authority placed second in its statistical neighbour group, with Enfield in first place with an average score of 10.8. In 2018 Merton had been placed 11th, but scores had been submitted for just 66% of eligible children, compared to the 93% submitted in 2019. In comparison, the National rate of scores submitted remained at 78%, and the London rate increased, but by just 3%, from 82% in 2018.

21.12 The table below sets out the SDQ scores for Merton children looked after within the DfE benchmarking cohort, by age cohort and gender. The group with the highest proportion of scores in the 'cause for concern' bracket were four to nine year-olds (47%).

**Emotional and behavioural health of Children Looked After by age group and gender (DfE benchmark cohort scores)**

Merton	Age at 31 <sup>st</sup> March			Gender	
	5 - 9	10 - 15	16	Male	Female
0-13 (normal)	8	23	4	17	18
14-16 (borderline cause for concern)	0	6	2	4	4
17+ (cause for concern)	7	18	1	15	11
No SDQ Score Submitted	0	4	1	3	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>35</b>

*Source: SSDA 903*

21.13 The Merton CAMHS in Social Care provides an integrated mental health service within Children’s Social Care, as part of the engagement, assessment, planning and interventions alongside Social Care professionals.

21.14 The Service works as part of a multi-agency response to improve the quality of life for children and young people who have a wide range of presenting social, psychological and mental health needs. The Service provides effective, evidence-based interventions as part of the clinical and social response to meeting the emotional and mental health needs of these vulnerable children and young people. The Service also assists and supports Social Workers to implement new approaches to their work.

21.15 During the period 2018 and 2019 there was 58 consultation requests related to children looked after, 36 (62%) progressed to a referral to the CAMHS team. Those consultations that did not progress to a referral, received appropriate consultations that included guidance and support to Social Workers and Supervising Social Workers, Psychoeducation around trauma and attachment difficulties to help the network understand the children’s and young people’s presentation and network meetings with a view of bringing stabilisation to the network around the child.

21.16 Additionally, the team also facilitated reflective practice sessions across the Children’s Social Care division to 21 groups, including groups for Social Workers, associated practitioners and groups for Team Managers. The team developed and ran a 6-day workshop for Foster Carers called “Therapeutic Parenting”, based of principles of the Empathic Parenting, PACE (playfulness, acceptance, curiosity and empathy) and research on developmental trauma.



## 22 Section 6: Offending

22.1 Children subject to a Youth Court Order will often present with a number of complex needs, with 15- 20% of the caseload being Looked After. However, the children will usually be looked after for less than 12 months, either as s20 voluntary accommodation or due to a remand by the Youth Court. The offending behaviour is often one of many presenting needs and can, on occasion, lead to the break down in the home environment. The multiagency response is robust in attempting to avoid care. A small number of children who are looked after for more than 12 months will receive a formal disposal.

### Offending by children who had been looked after continuously for at least 12 months at 31 March

<b>Merton</b>	<b>Number of children looked after for at least 12 months and aged 10 or older at 31 March</b>	<b>Number and percentage convicted or subject to a final warning or reprimand during the year</b>	
2015	68	3	4%
2016	75	2	3%
2017	75	1	1%
2018	74	4	5.4%
2019	81	4	4.9%
London 2019	5,150	190	4%
National 2019	38,110	1,290	3%

22.2 For all children looked after and care leavers where there is an identified risk of offending or re-offending, both the care/pathway plan and placement plan should include details about the support that will be provided to prevent this. The IRO will ensure that care plans adequately address this aspect of the child's needs, and will raise a challenge where a young person's needs are not being adequately assessed in regard to risk of offending / reoffending. The Youth Justice team works closely with the allocated team to ensure joint working and planning that supports desistance from offending by accessing education, emotional and behavioural interventions. .

## 23 Section 7: Education

23.1 For a complete picture of Education outcomes of Merton's children looked after population please refer to 'The Virtual School Annual Report'<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> Available February 2020

## 24 Section 8: Care Leavers aged 19-21 years

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

24.2 From 2014 the care leaver cohort included in DfE benchmarking data has been those aged 19, 20 and 21. At 31 March 2019 Merton had 129 care leavers in this cohort, a rise of one young person on 2018, but a 39% increase on 2015.

### Numbers of care leavers

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
19-21 year olds	93	106	123	128	129

Source: SSDA 903

24.3 As per the national 19 to 21 year-old care leaver cohort, the majority of Merton care leavers are male (66%) and this rate is unchanged from 2018, whereas the national proportion has risen 1ppt to 60%. In 2019 the proportion of 20 year-olds in the cohort decreased at Merton by 5% to 29%, whereas the 2019 national rate rose by 1%. In contrast the proportion of 19 year-olds at Merton rose this year by 6% to 36%, which is in line with the national rate that remained at 35%.

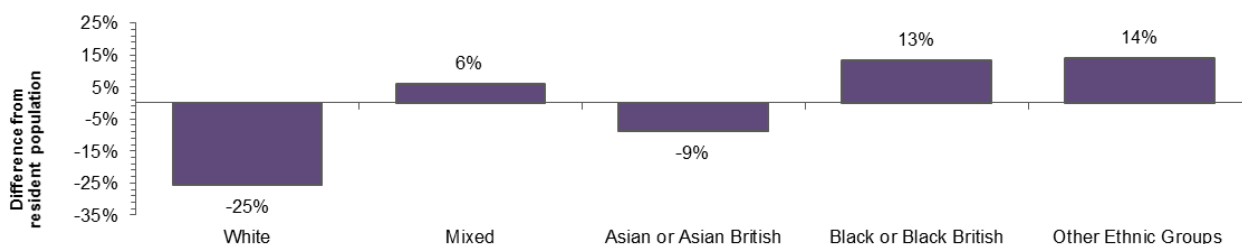
### Age and gender of Care Leavers

	Age (as at 31st March)			Gender	
	<i>(percentage of Care Leavers)</i>			<i>(percentage of Care Leavers)</i>	
	19	20	21	Male	Female
Merton 2019	36%	29%	34%	66%	34%
National 2019	35%	34%	31%	60%	40%

Source: SSDA 903

24.4 As per the ethnic profile of our children looked after, there is an under-representation of those of a ‘white’ background of -25% compared to the demographic profile of Merton’s resident population, although the variance was -28% in 2018. The only category over-represented, in comparison to the local population, which has seen an increase in 2019 is the ‘Other’ group, which has risen 4 ppt. This cohort is often represented by Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children.

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



Source: SSDA 903

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

## 25 Care Leavers in Touch 2019

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

Merton	Number	%	National
Yes	116	90%	89%
No	2	2%	7%
Service No Longer Required	8	6%	2%
Young Person Refuses Contact	3	2%	2%
Young Person Returned Home	0	0%	Not available

Source: SSDA 903

25.2 Merton was in touch with 90% of Care Leavers, in line with the National rate of 89%. The main reason for not being in touch is due to the young people no longer requiring services. This cohort is often represented by those seeking refugee status with the Home Office and being Appeal Rights Exhausted. If a Human Rights Assessment finds that there are no barriers to return to their home country and therefore would not be left destitute then services will cease. Some young people may be supported to obtain travel documents to support a return to their home country and taken to a deportation centre, others may be referred to the National Association of Asylum Seekers.

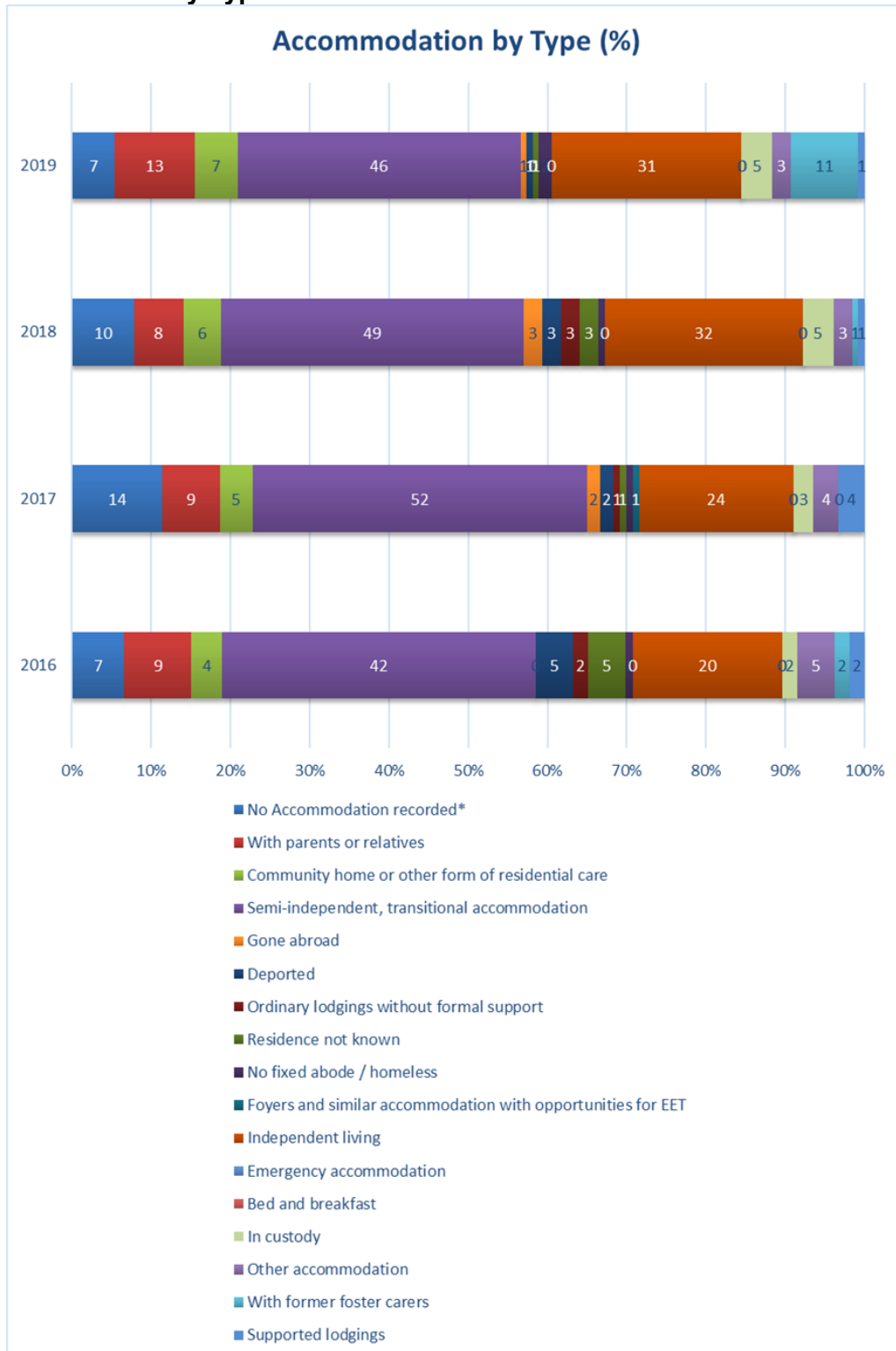
## 26 Care Leavers accommodation

26.1 The legal framework for care leavers aims to make sure that they receive the

right support and services in their transition to adulthood, including access to accommodation. General homelessness legislation also provides a safety net for young care leavers experiencing homelessness.

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

**Accommodation by Type**

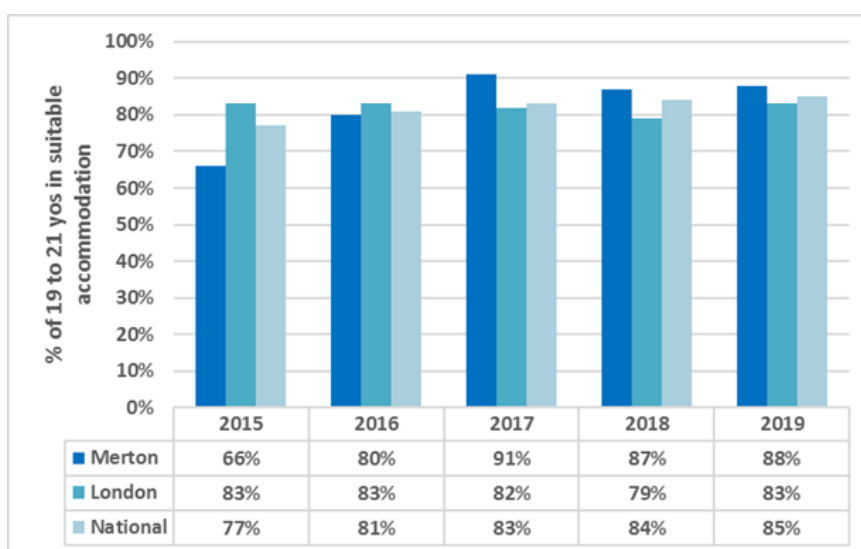


\*In line with DfE guidance, 'No accommodation recorded' includes care leavers who are not in touch or have refused contact, those who have died and those who have returned home.

26.3 The majority (36%) of care leavers were in semi-independent accommodation, significantly above the London average and national averages of 27% and 14%. The second largest cohort (24%) were independently living, but this was below the national (35%) and London (28%) rates. 10% were living with parents or carers; 9% were with their former foster carers; and 5% were in community homes or other forms of residential care: in all three categories the Merton rates were within 1ppt of the national average, and 2ppt above the London rates.

26.4 Accommodation is to be regarded as suitable if it provides safe, secure and affordable provision for young people. Since 2017 Merton has performed above London and National rates for those in suitable accommodation, and this continued in 2019, as seen in the table below.

**Percentage of Care Leavers in Suitable Accommodation**



Source: SSDA 903

Note: In 2014 the DfE extended the care leaver cohort to include 20 and 21 year olds. Please note that care leavers are excluded from the data if they have gone abroad, have been deported, have returned home or their residence is not known

26.5 6% of care leavers were in accommodation judged to be unsuitable, this is on a par with both the national and London rates for 2019. Of the eight Merton care leavers: five were in custody; two were of no fixed abode; and one was in accommodation rated unsuitable with a parent or carer. Placements considered as unsuitable can include: custody, no fixed abode, and some accommodation with parent/carer. There was no suitability information available for the other 6%, compared to 9% nationally and 10% pan London.

26.6 With an increased focus on improving outcomes for care leavers we have seen maintained levels of performance since 2017, above national and London. An aspect of this improvement relates to our improved 'in touch' performance which means that we have a better knowledge of where our young people are living. It also reflects the collaborative working arrangements between Children's Social Care and Housing.

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

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

- My Bank
- Cooking
- DIY
- My Drive

26.9 To improve our understanding of our care leavers’ experience of accommodation issues in February 2018 Merton commissioned Coram Baaf to undertake a consultation. This took place in the Summer of 2018 and the findings were used to inform the Care Leavers Strategy 2019– 2022.

## 27 Care Leavers in Education, Employment or Training

27.1 A good standard of education is a key driver towards achieving positive employment outcomes in adulthood.

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

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Merton	44.1%	58.3%	60.0%	45%	66%
National	Not Available	49.0%	49.6%	51%	47%

Source: SSDA 903

Note: In 2014 the DfE extended the care leaver cohort to include 20 and 21 year olds.

27.2 At 31 March 2019 66% of Merton care leavers aged 19 – 21 years-old were known to be in Education, Employment or Training (EET), well above the National and London averages of 52% and 54%. Of note, although Nationally and in London the proportion known to be EET declines between 19 year-olds and 21 year olds, in Merton it rises: from 64% of 19 year-olds, 63% of 20 year-olds to 70% of 21 year-olds. The 2019 National and London rates for EET 21 year-olds are 47% and 48% respectively.

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

	19 yr olds		20 yr olds		21 yr olds	
	Merton	National 2019	Merton	National 2018	Merton	National 2018
In higher education i.e. studies beyond A level	6%	5%	11%	7%	16%	7%
In education other than higher education	38%	30%	34%	19%	32%	12%
In training or employment	19%	23%	18%	26%	23%	28%
Not in education, training or employment	34%	35%	24%	40%	27%	41%
Information not known	2%	7%	13%	9%	2%	12%

27.3 11% of all Merton care leavers aged 19 - 21 were in Higher Education, compared to 8% in London and 6% nationally. Again, 21 year-olds outperformed the national and London averages: 16% of our 21 year-olds were attending studies beyond A-levels, compared to 7% nationally and 10% across London. In 2018 7% of Merton's 21 year-old care leavers had been in higher education.

27.4 35% of Merton 19 – 21 year-olds were in education other than higher education, compared to 21% nationally and 25% pan London, and here all year groups outperformed the London and national averages. 20% of Merton 19 -21 year-old care leavers were in training or employment, below the national (25%) and London (21%) rates.

27.5 29% (37 young people) of the cohort were Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET), compared to 39% nationally and 34% pan London. Of those known to be NEET: eight were NEET for maternity or parenting reasons; four due to illness or disability and 25 for other reasons. Although the rate of NEET 19 year-olds (34%) was equable with the 35% seen nationally, 24% of Merton's 20 year-old care leavers and 27% of 21 year-olds were known to be NEET, compared to 40% and 41% nationally.

27.6 In the past year we have made further progress with our care leavers cohort engaged in education, however it is important to note that this relates to a broader cohort and further work is being undertaken to consider the performance of different age cohorts. This area continues as a priority focus for us as a significant impact outcome for our young people.

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

## 28 Children at risk of CSE

28.1 In early 2018 a review of Adolescent Panels was undertaken to consider opportunities for streamlining the attendance and potential duplication across the partnership. This resulted in a Multiagency Risk, Vulnerability and Exploitation (MARVE) panel and protocol that includes oversight of Child Sexual Exploitation, Criminal Exploitation, Serious Youth Violence, Gangs and Persons of Concern. The first panel was held September 2018 and will be reviewed annually with oversight from Promote and Protect sub-group of the MSCP.

28.2 As part of the annual CSE self-assessment this now includes criminal exploitation and was completed May 2019.

28.3 In the period 2018/19 there were 39 referrals for all children for child sexual exploitation (18 more than the year before). The average age is 14.4 Years. Last year saw the highest number of referrals for boys (n4 compared to 2- in previous years and none the previous year).

28.4 The social care status and level of initial risk grading of those referred for child sexual exploitation was as follows:

Social Care Status	Level of Risk at time of referral				Total
	ICE	Low	Medium	High	
Assessment	4	18	5	1	28
Child in Need		3	1	2	6
Child Protection	1				1
Looked After		2	1		3
None (Step down)		1			1
<b>Total</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>39</b>

28.5 In 2018/19 there were 20 referrals for criminal exploitation. This is compared to 13 identified in 2017/18 and 5 in 2016/17. However, this was the first year when referrals could be made to the panel for criminal exploitation, in previous years the youth justice team was tracking young people arrested for Class A drugs and identified as potentially exploited. Therefore the previous year's figures do not include those identified as at risk of exploitation.

28.6 The social care status and level of risk (at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2018) is below for child criminal exploitation referrals

Social care status	Risk rating as at 31st March 2019				
	ICE	Low	Medium	High	Total
Child in Need	3	2			5
Child Protection			1	1	2
Looked After	2	2	2		6
Care Leaver		1			1
None	3	3	1		7
<b>Total</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>21</b>



28.7 Persons of concern of exploitation are tracked within the MARVE panel. This oversees the disruption activities, including Child Abduction Warning Notices (CAWN), proactively undertaken for high risk cases; police oversee these activities.

## **29 Catch22 Risk and Resilience, Missing and CSE service**

29.1 Catch 22 are commissioned to provide an integrated Risk and Resilience Service incorporating substance misuse prevention, sexual health and detached youth provision and are separately commissioned to provide a Missing from Home or Care and CSE service. The Risk and resilience service provides support and interventions for young people aged 24 and under who are living, are educated or spend social time in Merton, while the Missing and CSE service focuses on the delivery of return home interviews and follow-up interventions for young people aged under 18 with a high vulnerability risk and are Merton residents or are placed by Merton in neighbouring boroughs or up to one hour travel distance of Merton.

29.2 During 2018/19 Catch22 received 89 referrals related to 22 individuals who were LB Merton children looked after. Of these 22 individuals; 3 had 6 or more missing incidents. All were aged 17+ and had missing episodes from their placement to socialise/stay with boyfriend/girlfriend. The number of repeat episodes per individual is significantly lower than the previous year and is a testament to the effective 1:1 interventions delivered with these hard to engage young people as part of supporting these young people to reduce missing episodes. Further detail relating to the reasons for a missing episode is captured within the Catch22 Annual Report. 13 episodes related to breaking a care curfew for those in care and 6 cited a placement issue as a trigger for going missing.

29.3 Catch 22 provide support to young people at high risk of or experiencing CSE. Of the 30 cases engaged in 2018/19, 4 were children looked after and 14 were children in need and less than 4 were children in need of protection. All were provided with intensive support packages to address their specific needs.

29.4 While the number of Merton children looked after referred for CSE was n3, there was one young person who was referred while on a Child Need Plan but became looked after during the year.

## **30 Children subject to Trafficking- Service: Love 146**

30.1 Love146 is an international human rights organisation working to end child trafficking and exploitation through survivor care and prevention. Merton has worked with Love 146 to work with young people identified as having been trafficked into the UK and presenting as an unaccompanied asylum seeking child. In 2017/18 5 young people were referred and supported. In 2018/19 this reduced to 1 young person supported with key work hours. The reduction in referrals was due to a review of the use of specialist providers. When a high risk trafficked and unaccompanied young person is raised with the Head of Service then Love 146 will usually be the preferred specialist provider.

## 31 Children in Care Council (CICC)

31.1 The participation of children in care was commissioned to Jigsaw4u from July 2018 as a pilot project. The main focus of the pilot was to re-invigorate the existing Children in Care Council with the objectives to:

- Provide a voice for the wider population of children looked after and care leavers
- Help to monitor and embed the Merton Pledge
- Bring together service users and senior managers to influence positive change
- Develop skills and confidence building
- Support the Corporate Parenting Board to measure and monitor the effectiveness and quality of 'Corporate Parenting' in Merton.

31.2 The Child in Care Council met on a monthly basis with an established core membership of 12 young people, including 3 new recruits. Members drew-up a programme of events and activities to address their identified needs. Over the year this included:

- Establishing the purpose of and name for the CICC (Symphony).
- Co-production of training materials for newly qualified social workers to raise awareness of CICC and the importance of Advocacy.
- Informing the development of foster carers recruitment / advertising.
- Review of Merton's Children Looked After Pledge.
- Advised on the development of the Jigsaw website for young people living in care / living independently and the Council's Children in Care website.

31.3 Members contacted and invited speakers to the council to talk to them about issues or services they wished to develop their understanding of. The Head of the Virtual School and the Head of Children Looked After, Permanency and Placement, for example, were invited to speak. This gave participants an opportunity to ask questions regarding entitlements within education and children looked after processes / decision making processes that affect their care. It also led to further activities such as their involvement in Foster Carer Advertising.

31.4 This pilot concluded in June 2019 at the mutual agreement of both parties and was transferred to our in-house participation team from 1st July 2019.

## 32 Voice of the Child in Care

32.1 In March 2018 Coram BAAF undertook the Bright Spots well-being indicator consultation with children looked after in Merton. The survey identified the areas where children appear to be flourishing and where things could be improved, providing an evidence base of children's experience and wellbeing to inform service improvements.

- The majority of children and young people reported they felt safe and settled in their homes
- 94% of young people (aged 12-18) and 78% of children (aged 5-11) felt their life was improving.
- The majority (94%) of children and young people (4-18yrs) felt safe in their homes 'all or most of the time. The Children's Worlds survey found that 75% of children (8-13yrs) in the general population felt 'Totally safe' at home.
- Compared to the general population and other looked after young people a greater proportion of young people had very high scores (9 or 10) on the wellbeing scales.
- 84% of young people in Merton liked school
- The majority (96%) of children and young people had a really good friend. This was similar to their peers (97%) in the general population.

		Merton	2018 average in 13 LAs	Peers in general population (10-17yrs)
Life satisfaction	High scores	36%	34%	27%
	Low scores	7%	15%	5%
Happiness yesterday	High scores	39%	39%	26%
	Low scores	11%	19%	8%
Things done worthwhile	High scores	52%	36%	29%
	Low scores	0%	12%	6%
Positive about future	High scores	44%	35%	19%
	Low scores	4%	11%	7%

32.2 Our IRO Service is strengthening how we support and monitor both reviews and at midway points to ensure that every child's view and wish is heard in decisions about their care plans. Where there is delay or recommendations from reviews are not fully completed, the IRO will escalate the matter to the Team manager and Head of Service under the positive challenge approach or via formal Dispute resolution procedure.

- 32.3 We facilitate young people's forums and activities which link with and impact on the management of children's services and the adult democratic process. These include the CiCC, Youth Parliament, Young Advisors and Young Inspectors. Young Advisors recently completed a consultation on safety. Young Inspectors are currently working on projects related to service reviews / commissioning. All participation activities are offered to Children and young people in or coming in to care.
- 32.4 Feedback from children and young people across these strands of work have informed strategies including the Children and Young People's Plan and children's departmental service plans.

### **33 Enjoy and Achieve Events**

- 33.1 We have held several well attended Enjoy and Achieve events including a party in the park for children aged under 16 in the permanence team (2017 & 2018) a Residential Trip for UASC (unaccompanied asylum seeking children – 2017, 2018 & 2019). In 2017 a summer BBQ was held for young people aged 16 plus and this is planned to occur again in 2019. In addition to this several young people engaged in the National Citizen Service summer programme.

### **34 Monthly drop-in sessions**

- 34.1 Since 2015 the 14 Plus Team has been running monthly sessions (often) at a local coffee shop between 5-8pm. These sessions alternate between social events and workshops attended and facilitated by different organisations.
- 34.2 The sessions provide the opportunity for young people to meet other young people from different cultures and backgrounds who have had similar experiences. The purpose of the group is to allow them to experience a sense of belonging and familiarity and also to build social networks and a sense of being part of a community. These sessions strengthen the relationship between the young person and their social workers and helps built trust with the 14+ Team. The activities provide them with the opportunity to improve their independent living skills and gain insight from other organisations. These sessions have a good regular attendance of up to 15 young people. The purpose of the group is also to promote integration but primarily helps separated young people adapt to life in the UK. It also provides team managers and social workers with opportunity to monitor emotional well-being of young people, access opportunities for leisure and social interaction both locally and in London and also serves as a forum to improve English language skills.

## **35 Advocacy and Independent Visiting for Children Looked After**

- 35.1 Advocacy and Independent Visiting for Children Looked After, Care Leavers and those subject to Child Protection (CP). Conferences was commissioned to Jigsaw 4u for an initial period of 3 years from April 2017.
- 35.2 The purpose of the statutory service is to ensure that the interests of children and young people are promoted effectively and ensure their rights are respected and their views fully considered and reflected in decision making about their lives. It is also about ensuring that they are given assistance when making or intending to make a complaint.
- 35.3 The service is delivered by a core group of volunteers working with Merton Children Looked After and Care Leavers aged 10 years to 21. There is a discretionary agreement to work with sibling groups where agreed.
- 35.4 Jigsaw advocates act to capture the voice of young people and either represent their views on their behalf or enable young people to put their own voice across at conference or through the care review process. Advocates also provide feedback to the service when there are specific issues or areas that need addressing. Where issues are raised by individual children the advocate will liaise with the relevant social work team to seek resolution.
- 35.5 Over the year, advocates attended 36 Children Looked After reviews and 15 children and young people were matched with independent visitors. Jigsaw4u also supported young people with complaints but stated within their annual report that they had received very few from Children Looked After. More details on this and their service can be found in their annual report due to be submitted to the Board on 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2020.

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