



# MERTON SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN PARTNERSHIP

**Annual Report 2019-2020**

## Foreword by Executive Partners

2019-2020 has been a time of considerable change for Merton's safeguarding arrangements. In May 2019 we formally ratified the new partnership agreements which signaled the beginning of a programme of work to implement the changes ushered in by the Children and Social Work Act 2017 and Working Together 2018. Under the new local arrangements, there are the three statutory partners: the Local Authority (London Borough of Merton), the Clinical Commissioning Group (NHS South West London CCG), and the Police (South Area BCU, Metropolitan Police). These partners meet regularly and form the Executive Group.

In Merton, we are fortunate that the work of the Executive Group is supported by the active involvement from many other agencies who have a role in safeguarding children. We are immensely grateful to all members who serve on the Full Partnership Board, chair subgroups, serve on task & finish groups, participating in audits, deep dive reviews and practice reviews, and committing to assuring that agencies and services in Merton are effective in safeguarding children and promoting their welfare.

In February 2020, we said goodbye to our long-standing Chair Keith Makin. We welcomed Guy Collings as new Chair and Sarah Lawrence as Independent Scrutineer in February 2020. However, Guy Collings who took up this role in February 2020 withdrew his position in August 2020 for personal reasons and the Partnership has functioned without a permanent Independent Chair since.

During the period of this report, we have made Early Help a priority. We started this work by conducting a baseline audit the findings of which will inform the development of our Early Help strategy due in 2020/21. In addition, the MSCP has continued its strong leadership in relation to the embedding of a contextual safeguarding approach into local practice to better safeguard older children from extra-familial factors that relate to all forms of exploitation and risks of extremism and radicalisation.

The MSCP last published a serious case review in 2017. We published the serious case review into the death of Child D in February 2020 following the conclusion of the judicial process. Child D died in November 2017. Sadly, in the reporting period a further two incidents met the criteria for a local

safeguarding practice review. These are now underway and will report in 20/21. In addition, the partnership undertook a local practice review concerning an adolescent.

We recognise that these tragic circumstances need to be reviewed and are vital to strengthen practice where needed and prevent future serious child safeguarding incidents. The MSCP's two-yearly S.11 audit was due in 19/20 but has been delayed due to the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdown. This will be resumed as soon as practical.

And so we ended 2019-20 in an unprecedented fashion, amid a devastating, global pandemic, and here in the UK, in lockdown. The LSCP has continued with business as usual as much as possible, with the board and subgroup meetings taking place virtually. The partnership has come together at these exceptionally challenging times and worked together with partners across South-West London to ensure agency responses to the pandemic were co-ordinated and focused on ensuring the safety of children and young people. It is evident that the legacy of Covid will be with us for a long time, and we will look to adapt our working arrangements accordingly.



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# WORKING TOGETHER STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

## What is a local safeguarding partnership?

### The Children's Social Work Act 2017 and Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018

The purpose of these local arrangements is to safeguard and promote the welfare of children, and also to work together to identify and respond to the needs of children in the area. The legislation shares the responsibility for these arrangements between the Local Authority, the Police and the Clinical Commissioning Group across an agreed geographical area [Merton].

Other 'relevant' agencies also have a duty to safeguard children and young people under the Children's Act 2004. A list of relevant agencies in Merton can be found at the end of this report.

The Local Safeguarding Children Partnership (Merton Safeguarding Children Partnership '**MSCP**') are responsible for Local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews, formally known as Serious Case Reviews. This includes arrangements to identify serious child safeguarding cases which raise issues of importance in relation to the area, and for those cases to be reviewed under the supervision of the safeguarding partners. To read more about learning from case reviews and actions taken as a consequence to strengthen safeguarding arrangements and practice click [here](#).

The MSCP as a multi-agency partnership work to keep all children and young people safe in their homes and communities, and to fulfil their potential. The Partnership coordinates the work of all

agencies and ensures that this work is effective in achieving the best outcomes for Merton's children and young people.

Merton Safeguarding Children Partnership published new arrangements in accordance with statutory requirement in June 2019. The full arrangements can be read [here](#).

## The Annual Report

At least once in every 12 month period, the safeguarding partners must prepare and publish a report on what the safeguarding partners and relevant agencies for the local authority area have done as a result of the local safeguarding arrangements, and outline how effective those arrangements have been in practice.

This report will provide an update against the partnership's key priority areas outlined in the partnership's business plan<sup>1</sup>. These are:

1. **Early Help**
2. **Think family: Domestic Abuse and Neglect**
3. **Contextual Safeguarding**

In addition, this report will provide an update on the Board's statutory functions in relation to **the provision of multi-agency safeguarding training**, and **learning from serious incidents**. T

Finally, the report also looks at the ways in which the partners have sought and utilised feedback from children and families to inform their work and influence service provision.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.mertonscp.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/MSCB-Annual-Report-2018-2019.pdf>

## Priority 1: Early Help

Providing early help is more effective in promoting the welfare of children than reacting later. Early help means providing support as soon as a problem emerges, at any point in a child's life, from the foundation years through to the teenage years. Early help can also prevent further problems arising; for example, if it is provided as part of a support plan where a child has returned home to their family from care, or in families where there are emerging parental mental health issues or drug and alcohol misuse.

Effective early help relies upon local organisations and agencies working together to:

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- identify children and families who would benefit from early help
- undertake an assessment of the need for early help
- provide targeted early help services to address the assessed needs of a child and their family which focuses on activity to improve the outcomes for the child

Local authorities, under section 10 of the Children Act 2004 have a responsibility to promote inter-agency co-operation to improve the welfare of all children.

The MSCP's priority is to ensure that there is clear coordination and quality assurance of early help with effective integration between the Early Help, the MASH and First Response services with a shared focus on the journey and experience of the child and family.

In 2019-2020 the Partnership worked to develop a shared understanding of Early Help which focuses on targeted support

for vulnerable children and their families and this is aligned to the Merton Child, Young Person and Family Well-Being Model.

The CCG undertook a multi-agency audit on behalf of the partnership. Key findings include:

- Information sharing between agencies
- Better alignment in planning and delivery of interventions with children and their families
- The need to consider the role of the third sector

Early help in Merton is currently provided through a number of services from schools, community and faith groups, health services and those delivered directly by the councils Children, Schools and Family department.

The Local Authority has reshaped existing services and introduced its Family Wellbeing Service with a view to provide targeted support for children and families.

The priority for 2020-2021 will be to act on the findings identified by the audit. There will be a particular focus on embedding shared referral routes and pathways by re-modelling the front door, as well as revising and embedding the Merton Wellbeing model (threshold document).

## Priority 2a : Think Family – Neglect

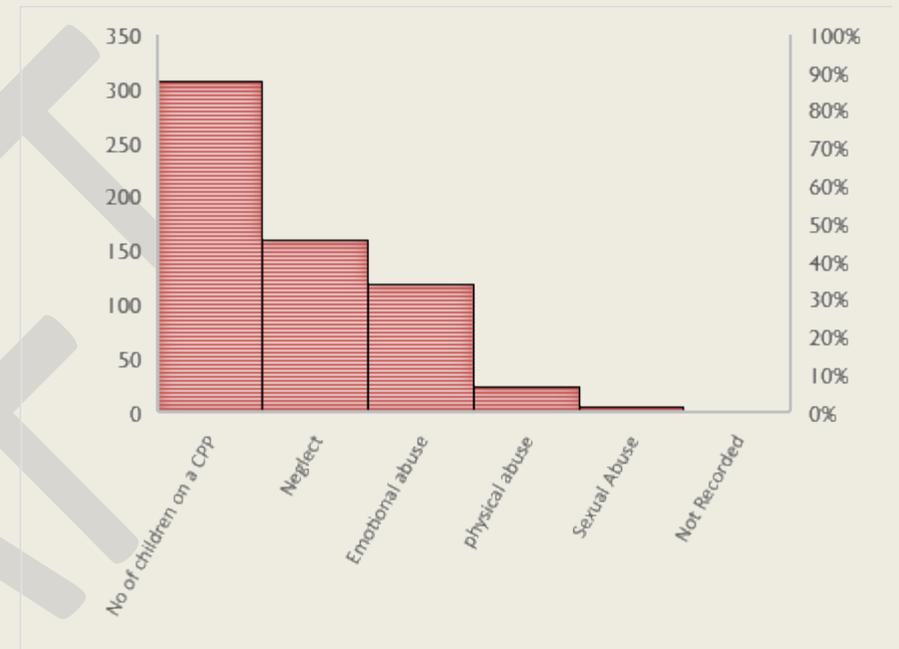
'Think Family' represents the MSCP's joined up approach to working with families, both children and adults, so that families' needs are assessed holistically and there is a coordinated response to assessed needs.

The MSCP's work in relation to Think Family covers a broad range of issues that impact on family life with a priority focus on protecting children who are at risk of domestic abuse by working effectively with families, including victims and perpetrators of abuse to create and sustain a safe parenting environment.

In 2019-20 the Merton Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub received 6227 contacts from professionals and the public concerned about children and young people. 1724 of these contacts were referred for further investigation. Of these referrals 439 met the threshold for a statutory safeguarding enquiry under Section 47 of the Children Act 2004. Of these children 307 were placed on a 'child protection plan'

In Merton the most prevalent type of primary abuse is neglect, with 52% of Child Protection Plans being for this type of abuse. The number of children under five years old on a child protection plan where neglect was a factor is comparatively low at 5%.

Figure 1: Children Subject to Child Protection Plan by type of abuse 2019-2020



During 2019/20, the partnership considered a revised Neglect strategy and toolkit. A number of agencies are already using the toolkit to identify and evidence neglect. This improves the quality of multi-agency working.

Further work is required to align the neglect toolkit with existing practice models in social care and health.

### Police

Throughout the year, the South West Business Command Unit [SW BCU] supports front line officers to identify and report concerns around children who are at risk of neglect via 'Merlins'. Attention is paid to the quality of Merlins in order that concerns relating to a child's environment and presentation are clearly explained and described within the report

## Central London Community Health

CLCH complies with its legal duty under the Children Act 2004 by having in place Named Nurses for Safeguarding Children (NNSC) in all boroughs. NNSC have statutory responsibilities, as identified in Working Together to Safeguard Children (2018) and the SAAF (2019) to support staff in recognising and championing the needs of children, including responding to possible abuse or neglect.

As senior practitioners, the NNSC are experts in child development, child maltreatment and managing safeguarding concerns in a multiagency forum.

## Epsom and St. Helier Hospitals:

The Safeguarding Children team are key contributors to many Local Safeguarding Children's Partnership subgroups to ensure children in the boroughs are kept safe from neglect, abuse and all forms of exploitation.

## Priority 2b: Think Family and Domestic Abuse

The MSCP works to support co-ordinated approaches to children who are at risk of domestic abuse with the aim of creating and sustaining a safe parenting environment.

Merton's MARAC (multiagency risk assessment committee) is a panel that coordinates the partnership's response to the most complex/high risk domestic abuse cases using a range of statutory and non-statutory agencies.

In 2019–2020 the MARAC considered 410 high risk and complex cases involving domestic abuse, 376 children were identified as part of these discussions.

There has been an increase in the number of cases discussed at MARAC between 2018-19 to 2019-20. There was a slight rise in repeat cases being seen by MARAC across the two reporting years. Although more children were identified as in the household for 2018-19 than 2019-20, the percentage of children open to children's social care was less than 2019-20.

**Table 1: MARAC cases 2019/20 – Overview**

| Year    | Number of Cases Discussed | Number of Repeat cases | % repeat cases | Number of children in the household |
|---------|---------------------------|------------------------|----------------|-------------------------------------|
| 2018-19 | 369                       | 133                    | 36%            | 437                                 |
| 2019-20 | 410                       | 162                    | 39%            | 376                                 |

Partners have delivered a strong response to domestic violence over the period, initiatives have included:

## Independent Domestic Violence Advocates [IDVA's]

LBM Merton has introduced a case worker within the Multi-agency Safeguarding Hub [MASH] along with four community IDVA's who support victims of domestic abuse.

There is a dedicated IDVA worker for Sutton and Merton based in St. Helier Hospital, whose role includes sourcing safe/emergency accommodation, referrals to Safeguarding and/or MARAC, accompanying service users to court, information provision around criminal justice system, signposting for legal advice including clients with no recourse to public funds, and emotional support.

It is recognised that the IDVA role plays a pivotal role in St. Helier Hospital in supporting and managing domestic violence issues, not only in dealing with concerns re: patients but also with staff.

The number referrals to IDVA demonstrates a significant increase of 174% (these are referrals and contacts for advice). The majority are referrals made into IDVA. There were 188 cases where children are in the family, 135 MARAC referrals, and 183 identified as high-risk cases. The referrals involving children are significantly high.

### **Design Council Domestic Abuse project**

LBM Merton has been working with the design council to discuss new ideas around how as a partnership we can design processes and structures to address domestic abuse, and in particular keep children and families safe. This project has generated a range of new suggested new processes which are now being considered and implemented.

### **The Building Better Relationships Programme**

Provides victim support by female safety officers and works with perpetrators to reduce repeat offending. However, there is currently a gap in service provision for perpetrator programmes where the case has not been taken through the criminal justice system. This is being monitored by the newly formed Think Family and Domestic Abuse subgroup.

### **Operation Encompass**

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

**South West London Mental Health Services** have introduced a [domestic abuse In-site](#) page to provide staff with resources and links to support practice in safeguarding.

Staff from the Rose ward led Trust's first domestic abuse conference in December 2019, over a hundred staff attended to hear from a range

of speakers and benefit from the opportunity to hear about resources and approaches.

**Central London Community Health** have systems in place to support CLCH staff in responding to cases of domestic violence and abuse to ensure the physical and emotional wellbeing of children who witness abuse and also the victim/survivor. CLCH safeguarding team

In October 2019 CLCH held the fourth annual safeguarding conference, which was attended by 250 delegates from within CLCH and also from external partner agencies. There were presentations from national and local speakers including rethinking the model of managing domestic abuse and learning disability.

### **Epsom and St. Helier Hospitals:**

There has been a significant increase in Safeguarding referrals to Merton Local Authority, 46%. This has been a result of greater intervention, and emphasis on the 'hidden' children during Safeguarding Children training across the Trust. These are children whose parents present with domestic abuse, substance misuse and mental health crises. Moreover, the promotion of the Think Family principles in training, which recognises and promotes the importance of a whole-family approach, and awareness raising of Domestic Abuse, has further compounded the increase in referrals.

## **Priority 3: Contextual Safeguarding**

The Partnership is committed to work with all agencies to ensure that there is a highly coordinated multi-agency and whole-council approach to a range of adolescent risks that occur in contexts beyond the family home (e.g. neighbourhood, schools, local shopping centres, youth venues etc.). These risks include child criminal exploitation, child sexual exploitation, serious youth violence, peer on peer abuse, harmful sexual behaviour and other overlapping forms of harm.

There was a spike in Serious Youth Violence incidents at the start of 2019/20 with a consistent decline throughout the year. Merton has a history of experiencing spikes in incidents and joint assessment and planning (with specialist workers and police) has contributed to the identification of those involved followed by engagement and reduction.

On average Merton receives more referrals for child sexual exploitation than child criminal exploitation. Types of exploitation are primarily online, boyfriend/girlfriend relationship and lone adult for CSE, for CCE exploitation predominately involves drug dealing and peers.

The council's Adolescent and Family Service has specialist workers that deliver exploitation and gangs interventions. The council-funded **Risk and Resilience Service**, delivered by Catch22, provides a holistic response to exploitation, missing and substance misuse. The tendering and award process involved the engagement of young advisors and the new contract commenced in March 2020.

In 2019-20 Merton delivered the Early Intervention Youth Fund project with a 'Responsive Community Engagement Team' (ReCET). This was a collaborative project across Adolescent and Family Service, Safer Merton and Education Inclusion / Participation Team. The **ReCET team** enhanced the offer of detached youth work, alongside Catch22 and local sports activities.

Figure 2: Child Sexual Exploitation – Referrals by Type (2019/20)

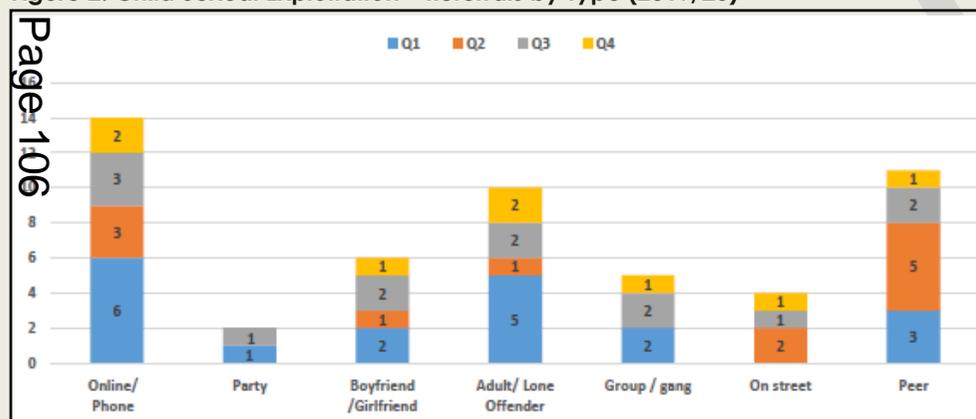


Figure 3: Child Criminal Exploitation – Referrals by Type (2019/20)



A Contextual Engagement manager was funded alongside ReCET engaging two locations in assessments and stakeholder planning meetings and the engagement of three schools in school assessments. The assessments and planning included the engagement and voice of young people alongside the voice of communities and school staff.

The SW BCU introduced an **Adolescent Risk Team (ART)** in 2019. The ART manages and supports a cohort of children and young people regarding county lines, criminal exploitation and harmful sexual behaviour. An investigating officer is allocated, and engages with the young person attends strategy meetings, shares information and addresses new information, intelligence or incidents of concern.

The **MARVE** [Multagency Risk, Vulnerability and Exploitation panel for child sexual [CSE] and criminal exploitation [CCE] provides robust multi-agency oversight. At monthly meetings, it considers referrals for young people at risk of all forms of exploitation. The panel is chaired by the South West Business Command Unit [SWBSCU] often those young people referred to the MARVE are open to police and are at risk of contextual harm.

In 2019/20, the MARVE Terms of Reference were updated to ensure that all contexts of harm receive partnership oversight.

At strategic level, the MSCP's **Promote and Protect sub-group** has oversight of this priority. Over the year a performance dashboard has been developed and used to help professionals understand what risk outside of the home looks like for young people and adolescents in Merton.

The focus for 2020-21 is the development of the Contextual Safeguarding Strategy and a toolkit of assessment and planning tools with guidance for social workers.

**Children who go missing** SW BCU reviewed its response to missing children as a result of a child death from early 2020. Changes to the process have been implemented which has resulted in a significant improvement in the response to missing episodes and SW BCU has been found to be the top performing BCU in the MPS by HMIC and Dedicated Inspection team. Children open to the MARVE who are reported missing are immediately allocated to the Missing persons Unit. We complete operational debriefs around specific missing cases to learn from and reflect on our actions and decisions and seek to continuously improve in this crucial area of business.

## Children in Particular Circumstances

### Child Protection

In January 2019 Ofsted considered the local authority's arrangements for children who need help and protection. Specifically, inspectors looked at the 'front door' arrangements for the service that considers contacts and referrals, including decision-making within the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH). They also considered transfers to and from early help services, the effectiveness of child protection enquiries, the quality of assessments and the plans to meet children's needs.

*Work within the MASH remains a 'strong area of practice, as it was when the local authority was last inspected in 2017. It is well established, with effective multiagency engagement, and partners' contributions lead to timely and proportionate responses to the risks identified at the time of referral. Assessments are comprehensive and analytical, and lead to clear plans that help to improve children's and families' circumstances.'*

Whilst this inspection was focussed on Local Authority responses, there were a number of findings relevant to the wider partnership, including:

- Thresholds of need are clearly understood by staff and partners and they are applied consistently.
- When the threshold for statutory services is not met, children and families have the benefit of a highly effective offer of early help.
- Most strategy discussions involve relevant partner agencies and demonstrate good use of family history and multiagency information. Child protection enquiries are timely, with comprehensive and analytical assessments informing decisions.

- Assessments of children's needs are generally of a good quality, are timely, comprehensive, and are informed by history and research.
- Good engagement and participation from wider professional networks lead to effective multi-agency plans.

On 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020, 91 children had a child protection plan. This translates into a rate of 19.2 which is significantly lower than the England average (42.8) or compared to statistical neighbours (36.25).

### Looked After Children and Care Leavers

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

Children in Merton are less likely to be in care when compared to other boroughs. In 2019/20, 33 out of every 10,000 children in Merton are in care, compared to 44 in Merton's statistical neighbouring authorities and 65 nationally.

More boys are in care than girls (55% vs 45%). We also know that proportionally more Merton children enter care at a later age when compared to London and national averages.

Black children are over-represented in our care population compared to Merton's general population. However, the number of children in care recorded as black or black British has decreased from 2018-19 to 2019-20 from 26.4% (n 42) 22.7% (n45).

The total number of children who started to be looked after during year ending 31 March 2020 is slightly lower than 2018-19 from 159 to 154 children. The number of children in care who are

unaccompanied asylum seekers is also slightly lower from 21% (n34) to 19% (n29) children in care.

There are many reasons why a child may become looked after, in Merton for 2019/20 the principle reason was due to abuse or neglect increasing from 43.3% (n69) to 46.7% (n72). This has remained fairly consistent over the past five years.

Absent parenting is the second biggest reason why a child became looked after in 2019/20 affecting 22% (n34) of all children becoming looked after, a small reduction from 2018/19 at 23.8% (n38) respectively.

Health services for Looked after Children in Merton are provided by Epsom and St Helier NHS Trust (ESHHT) and Central London Community Health Care Trust (CLCH). The Looked after Children's health team has demonstrated a strong performance rating in regard to the delivery of initial and review health assessments.

- 79 initial health assessments (IHA) were completed in 2019-2020 of which 81% were completed within statutory timescales
- 118 review health assessments (RHAs) were completed in 2019-20
- 95.7% of one year statutory review health assessments were completed above the national figure achieved of 82%.

Where children are placed in foster care, there is a trend of more children being placed in foster care outside of the borough than in Merton the past five years. However, the number of children placed outside of borough has decreased in 2019-20, 42.1% (n 67) to 39.6% (n61).

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

## Learning from case reviews

During 19/20, the partnership oversaw one Serious Case Review<sup>2</sup>. Child D died in November 2017. D lived with her mother, father and older brother. At the time of her death D she was 7 years of age. D's father pleaded guilty to her murder in April 2018.

The MSCP commissioned a review of the case by an independent author who found that 'at the time of D's murder there was no information available to suggest that D or her family were at risk. Her death could not have been predicted.' The report was published in January 2020. The full report is available on the MSCP's website.

### What we did in response to the review

The MSCP took a range of actions in response to the review including:

- We developed a training pack and briefing notes on good practice working with interpreters, coercive control and disguised compliance. These were delivered by agencies across Merton to their workforces.
- Enhanced training was put in place by St Georges NHS Mental Health Trust on mental health assessments following attempted suicide, increased awareness raising on protective factors and risks.
- The multi-agency mental health protocol was reviewed.

### Recent Learning from Practice

The LSCP last published a serious case review in 2017. In the reporting period a further three incidents met the criteria for a local child safeguarding practice review. We outline these below.

**Table 2: Practice Reviews 2019/20 – Overview**

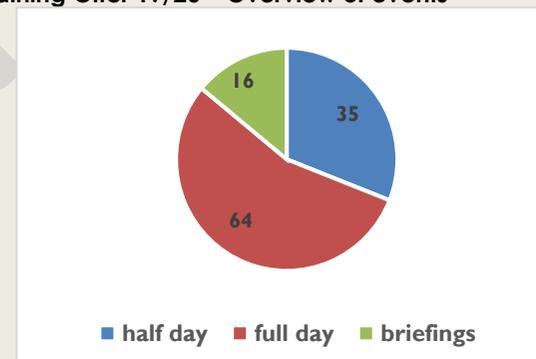
| Case Ref | Date of incident        | Type of incident  | Partnership Response     |
|----------|-------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------|
| Child E  | 07/05/2019              | Serious self-harm | Local Partnership Review |
| Child F  | 19/04/2019              | Serious Injury    | LSCPR                    |
| Child G  | 02/09/2017 <sup>3</sup> | Child Death       | LSCPR                    |

These reviews are now underway and will report in 20/21.

## MSCP Training

The MSCP's training offer is extensive. From 1st April 2019 to 31st March 2020 we offered 32 separate events and a total of 115 occurrences (just over 9 separate training events per month) offering a total of 2,496 places. The majority of events (64) were full day events.

**Figure 4: MSCP Training Offer 19/20 – Overview of events**



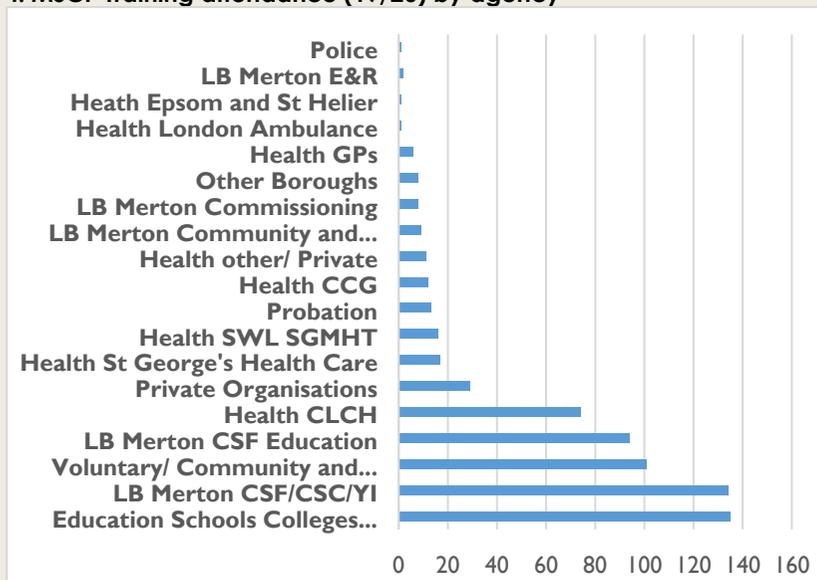
We recorded 973 bookings with 676 staff attending (69%). We had 216 cancellations (22%) and 297 DNAs (31%) 31% of events were half day, 55% full days and 14% briefings.

The services with the highest number of attendees at MSCP training events were London Borough of Merton Children Schools and Families and Children's Social Services, Education and the Voluntary Community and Faith group sector.

<sup>2</sup> This review was undertaken under Working Together 2014 given the date of Child D's death.

<sup>3</sup> Commissioning of LSCPR delayed due to ongoing judicial processes.

Figure 4: MSCP Training attendance (19/20) by agency



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The most popular courses were Introduction to Child Protection. The Child Protection Process and Refresher, Trauma Informed Practice, Local Authority Designated Officer training, and Tools for the Jewels.

Figure 3: MSCP Training attendance (19/20) by event



The extensive multi-agency training offered is supplemented by single-agency training.

The MSCP's Policy and Training sub-group provided strategic oversight of this areas of the board's work.

## Changes to the Merton Children Safeguarding Partnership Arrangements since April 2019

In May 2019, the MSCP formally adopted changes ushered in by the Social Work Act 2017. These are outlined in the MSCP's Partnership Agreement. The Partnership agreement can be found

here: <https://www.mertonscp.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Merton-Safeguarding-Children-Partnership-Agreement-Final-June-2019.pdf>

As part of the introduction of new partnership arrangements, the Partnership introduced three new posts with the aim of supporting the core duty to promote the welfare of children and monitor the strength of partnership working. These are:

- An Independent Person – to act as chair
- An independent scrutineer
- A young scrutineer

Following an extensive recruitment campaign, the Partnership appointed a chair and independent scrutineer who took up post in February 2020. The recruitment of a young scrutineer did not progress as well, and this will be a priority for 20/21.

## Annex 1: MSCP Budget and Spend 2019/20

### MSCP Budget 2019/20 – contribution by agency

|                     |                |
|---------------------|----------------|
| LB Merton           | £147,680       |
| Merton CCG          | £55,000        |
|                     | £8,000*        |
| Metropolitan Police | £5,000         |
| Cafcass             | £550           |
| LFB                 | £500           |
| <b>Total:</b>       | <b>216,730</b> |

\*CCG contribution to case review costs.

### MSCP Spend 19/20

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|                              |                |
|------------------------------|----------------|
| <b>Staffing</b>              | <b>97,954</b>  |
| LBM Salaries                 | 90,613         |
| Independent Chair            | 7,341          |
| <b>Training</b>              | <b>38,934</b>  |
| Training Officer             | 34,704         |
| External Training            | 2,302          |
| Room Hire                    | 1,928          |
| <b>Case Reviews</b>          | <b>1,950</b>   |
| <b>Supplies and Services</b> | <b>11,284</b>  |
| <b>Total</b>                 | <b>150,122</b> |
| <b>Budget Variance</b>       | <b>35,288</b>  |