

Corporate Parenting Strategy 2019-2022



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1. Foreword

In Merton, we are passionate about making sure that children and young people in our care and young people with care experience lead safe, healthy and happy lives and that they can achieve their full potential. As corporate parents, we work hard to ensure that this passion drives a firm commitment to take action from everyone who works with our children and young people, so that they are afforded the same care, security, stability, and sense of being loved as any parent would want for their child.

At the very heart of this strategy are the views of our children and young people who have shared their experience of being cared for by us. This strategy addresses the things that they said would make a real difference to the quality of their lives, such as improving the stability of their homes and supporting them to develop good relationships with people who are important to them.

It is critical that we support children to develop their independent living skills and support networks which will sustain them into and through their adulthood. This year, we have improved the support and opportunities for young people entering employment or seeking apprenticeships, whilst also seeing an increasing number of young people heading off to university. Over the next three years, we will work closely with the Children in Care Council and our care experienced young people to ensure that we continue to provide support such as life skills coaching and developing appropriate housing options.

Our Social Workers and Personal Advisors provide support and guidance to help remove some of the practical barriers that young people face as they move into adulthood and will work with other agencies to help our care experienced young people gain access to wider support services.

This strategy recognises the contribution of Merton Children's Services and our partners in identifying specific areas of practice where improvements could prevent children from entering care. It also identifies how we can do more to increase positive outcomes both for children already in our care, through either returning home, being adopted, living with a Special Guardian, and those who have left our care (where they have reached adulthood) – by leading successful, independent, lives.

We will continue to review our pledges to our children and young people taking into consideration any changes that may occur locally or nationally, so that the service we offer meets our statutory duties whilst being innovative and aspirational.

We are ambitious for, and proud of, all children and young people in our care and those with care experience. By working together, we are confident that they will have bright futures.



**Councillor Eleanor Stringer,
Cabinet Members for Children, Schools and Families**

2 Introduction

This Corporate Parenting Strategy 2019-2022 has been developed to ensure that the Corporate Parenting Principles outlined in the Children and Social Work Act 2018 are embedded in our practice. It focusses on achieving the best outcomes, and outlines what we expect of ourselves as corporate parents and what children and young people in our care and those with care experience can expect from us.

Our values are that all children should grow up and achieve within their own families and networks when it is in their best interests and is safe enough for them to do so.

Merton's services for children in care form part of a comprehensive continuum of support for children and young people who may be facing difficulties at home. These range from family support to intensive community interventions or seeking permanent alternative care. In taking this approach we remain committed to ensuring that children only enter care when it is absolutely necessary for their safety and wellbeing. When we must exercise our powers to remove children from their homes in order to protect them, we seek to ensure that care proceedings are timely and our planning is robust to achieve permanence for every child. Our priority will always be to achieve permanence for children in their extended family or network wherever possible.

When children and young people leave our care we will consistently strive to ensure they reach their potential and develop into stable, self-confident and well-supported adults. We will continue to offer ongoing support and assistance for them to manage adult responsibilities until the age of 25 years.

We will ensure that our care experienced young people are equipped with practical independent living skills and have the knowledge to access a range of services including housing, health, employment, education, leisure, benefits and other community services.

By involving our partners and young people's family and social networks, we will ensure coordinated services are provided so that children and young

people feel safe in their homes, in the community, and are able to form and maintain trusting relationships through nursery, school, college and beyond.

The views and opinions of our children and young people are central to every stage of the planning we do with them as their corporate parents. We will ensure that we listen to what they say, review our practice, make effective decisions on their behalf and feed back to them in order that they feel valued and their voices heard.



3 Our Corporate Parenting Responsibilities

When a child comes into care, the council becomes their Corporate Parent. Put simply, the term ‘Corporate Parent’ means the collective responsibility of the council, elected members, employees, and partner agencies, for providing the best possible care and safeguarding for the children in our care.

Effective corporate parenting requires knowledge, awareness and an interest in the needs of children and young people in our care and those who have left our care. This is a shared responsibility for the council as a whole.

The role of the corporate parent is:

- To have the highest ambitions for the children in our care and ensure that they grow up feeling loved and cared for, in the same way as we want this for the children in our own families.
- To receive and consider accurate and timely management information reports on the numbers, characteristics and needs of children in our care and young people with care experience;
- To receive and consider reports demonstrating how effective Merton is serving children and young people in our care and those with care experience 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 in our care and those with care experience and members of the Children in Care Council;
- To monitor and review progress of the pledge and strategic action plan;
- To ensure that decisive action is taken to address any shortcomings in the services provided to children and young people in our care and those with care experience.

The Children in Care Council (CICC) directly supports the Corporate Parenting Board to measure and monitor the effectiveness and quality of Corporate Parenting in Merton. Its purpose is to provide young people with a forum to collectively voice their ideas and views; to challenge Merton’s care and support; influence service improvements and drive change; contribute to the development of strategic plans and hold their corporate parents to account. We have the highest ambitions for all Merton children and young people and want those in our care or leaving our care to be well looked after and prepared for adult life. These ambitions are set out in our Pledge to children in our care and young people with care experience.

Following a comprehensive consultation exercise in 2018* and the development of the Corporate Parenting Strategy 2019 – 2022 and our Children and Young people’s Plan (2019 - 2023), we have simplified our pledges to children in care and care experienced young people and aligned them with the outcomes our young residents and Young Inspectors developed for all children and young people in Merton – these are outlined in the table below. This alignment underlines our commitment to achieve the same outcomes for children in our care or with care experience as their Merton peers.

Our Pledge to Children in Care and our Care Experienced Young people	
<i>Corporate Parenting Pledge</i>	<i>Children’s Trust Outcome</i>
1) Your voice will be heard, what you say matters.	Getting involved, having a say.
2) You will have somewhere safe to call home.	Staying safe.
3) We will help you with your worries and fears.	Being Healthy.

* Please see annex for a summary of findings.

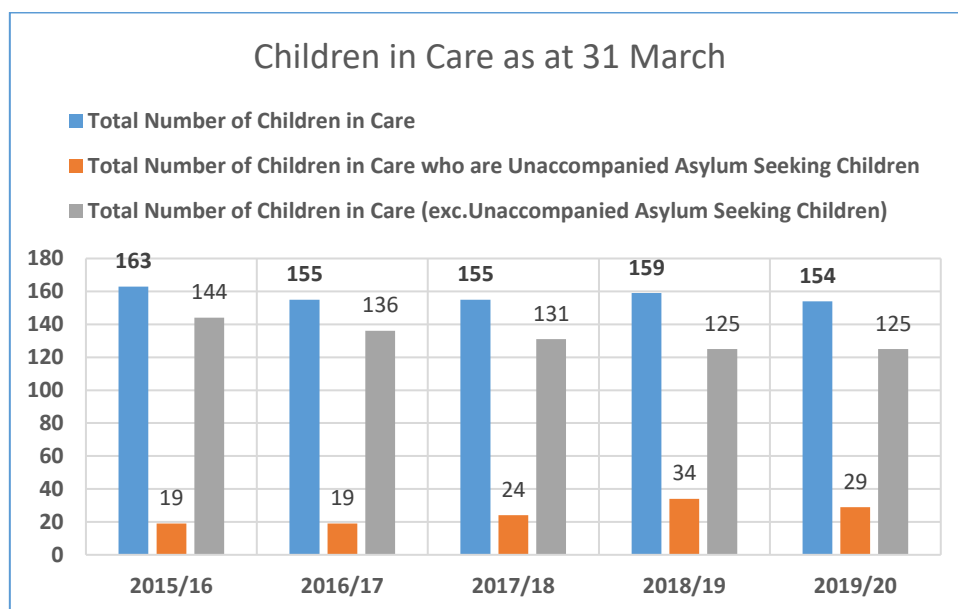
4) We will do the best we can to support you, so you can do your best at school, have hobbies, interests and time for fun.	Enjoying and achieving.
5) We will make sure you have people in your life who are important to you and someone you can trust.	My Merton.
6) We support you to learn how to take care of yourself and we will be there for you, if you need us, right up until you are an adult aged 25.	Becoming independent.

4 The National and Local Context

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.

Merton has bucked the trend in increases of the number of children entering care nationally. The children in care population in Merton has remained stable over the last five years. When accounting for the increase in the number of unaccompanied asylum seeking children in our care, children in care from Merton’s resident population has actually declined.

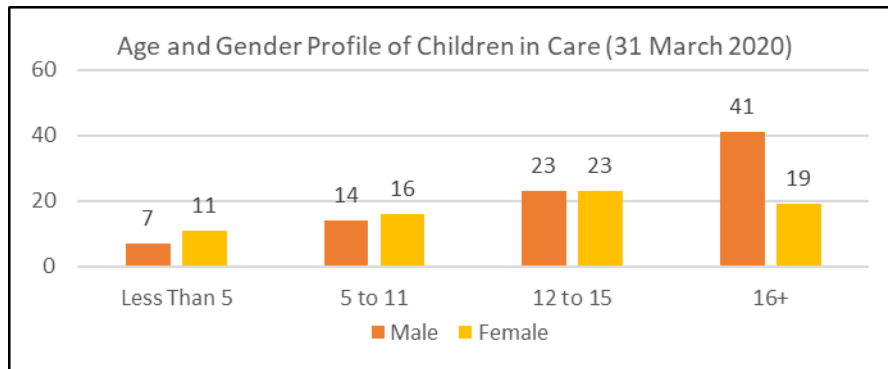
Table 1: Number of children who started to be looked after during the year ending 31st March 2020



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

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. In 2019/20, 46% of children entering care were over the age of 16. This compares to 20% nationally, and 37% pan London.

Table 2: Age and Gender Profile (31st March 2020)

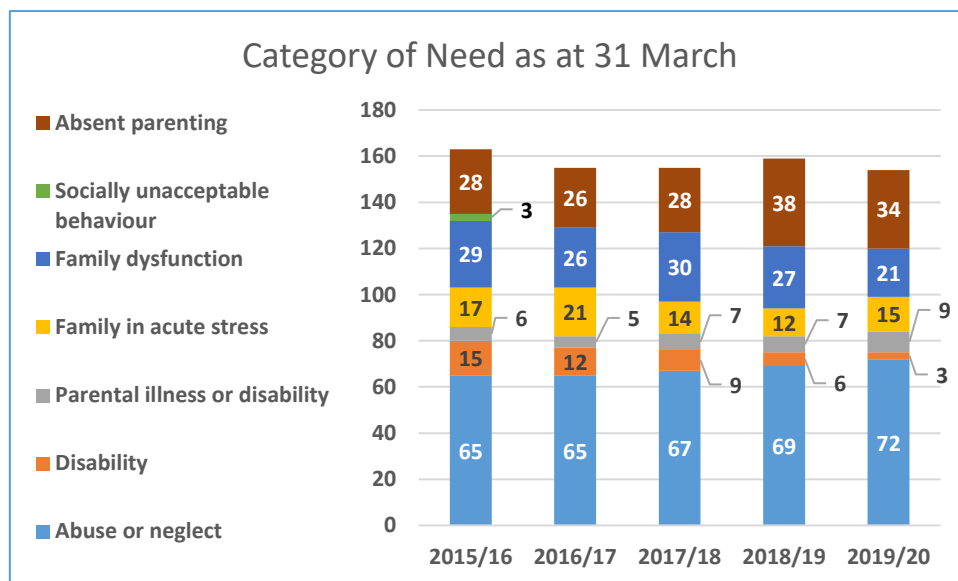


Source 903 data (19/20)

Black children are over-represented in our care population. On 31st March 2020, one in four children in our care was black/mixed-race. This compares to one in ten under-18s in Merton’s general population. By contrast, only 3% of our children in our care were from an Asian background. This compares to just under 20% of Merton’s under-18 population

The main reasons for entering care are abuse or neglect. This has remained static for the last 5 years.

Table 3: Reason for entering care



Source 903 data (19/20)

In March 2020, 83% of our care experienced young people between the ages of 19 and 21 were ‘in touch’ with the Local Authority (in line with national performance). The percentage of young people in suitable accommodation has increased substantially from 66% in 2015 to 87% in 2020, faring better than London and national comparators. 55% of young people leaving our care are in education, employment or training. This is an increase from 48% at the end of 2018/2019 and 45% at the end of 2017/2018.

5 Making a difference to children in our care and those with care experience – our strategic priorities (2019 – 22)

1. *Your voice will be heard, what you say matters*

All children in care have a right to have their wishes and feelings heard when decisions about their futures are being made. This right is enshrined in international law in Article 12 of the United Nation Convention on the Rights of the Child, and in domestic law through the Children' Act 1989

In January 2020, the Corporate Parenting Board reiterated the challenges in establishing participation through our Children in Care Council and agreed actions to improve this; this is now a priority for the Corporate Parenting Board. It was also agreed that, subject to an invitation, the Assistant Director for Children's Social Care will attend the Children in Care Council to listen to the experiences, views, and ideas of participants.

What we have done:

- Commissioned Coram BAAF to undertake a Children in Care and Care Leavers consultation. 44% of Care Leavers responded to the survey and were reflective of the population of care experienced young people in Merton. Young people reported they were predominantly satisfied with their leaving care worker and most young people had a good understanding of why they had been in care.
- Involved young people with care experience in undertaking consultations and to sit on interview panels.
- Ensured that the Children in Care Council is represented on the Corporate Parenting Board.
- Changed the time our Corporate Parenting Board is held so that children and young people can attend after they have finished their school, college or work day.
- Developed a Local Offer for young people leaving our care up to the age of 25.
- Engaged young people with care experience in the development of the Local Offer on the web page.
- Supported Jigsaw4U to develop a Web Page on information for children who are leaving care
- Developed and maintained a well-attended coffee evening and range of networking events for separated children and young people seeking asylum to support their voice and access to services
- Established an annual residential weekend for our separated and asylum seeking children and young people
- Located the participation support for our Children in Care Council within our Participation Service so that our children in care and care experienced young people can participate in the wider range of participation activities in Merton and draw upon the support of Merton young residents.

What we will do:

- We will use a comprehensive range of tools to engage with children and young people to ensure that their voice is recorded in: referrals; assessments; care plans; court statements and court care plans; personal education plans (PEPs); health assessments; supervision records; fostering and adoption records; and in pathway plans.
- Each of our children in care will have access to an independent advocate to consult with, represent their views and / or advocate on their behalf.
- We will develop the Children in Care Council involving children with disabilities, unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, and children placed out of borough. The Children in Care council will play a key role in scrutinizing and developing services provision.

- When we undertake audits of our practice we will contact children to ask them about their experiences of our intervention and support. We will use this feedback to celebrate good practice and take action to improve things we could have done better.

2. *You will have somewhere safe to call home*

Children and young people need to live somewhere they feel safe and cared for: a place they can call home; a place free from abuse and harm; and a place where they feel free and confident to express their views. Providing stability relies on identifying the right placement for a child early in their time in care whilst ensuring that individual and family needs are properly assessed and support services are provided enabling a safe return home or early permanence.

The Coram BAAF survey found that the majority of our children and young people reported they felt safe and settled in their homes; with 94% of children aged between 4 and 8 feeling safe in their homes 'all or most of the time'.

41% of Care Leavers were living in rented accommodation (flat or house). Just over a third (35%) were in supported accommodation and 12% were living with foster carers. A third (34%) of the Care Leavers did not feel that their current living arrangements were right for them. 31% of the young people said they did not always feel safe at home, and 40% did not always feel settled.

What we have done:

- Maintained a weekly Missing Children's panel to review all children, including those looked after in and by Merton, that had a missing episode in the previous week. This ensures the processes for Police debrief and Independent Return Home interviews are completed.
- Set up a Multi-agency Risk, Vulnerability and Exploitation (MARVE) panel to identify and map those young people at serious risk of exploitation or harm to themselves and others.
- Ensured young people who are in education have stable lives by providing housing around term times
- Care experienced young people are supported in their new tenancies with a Setting up Home Allowance.

What we will do:

- We will use our Practice Model to support us in building positive relationships with children and families to help parents and carers create solutions so that their children can remain at home or be safely reunited when it is in their best interest.
- We will use children's networks to better support children on the edge of care to safely remain with their family. We will use early family network meetings and safety planning to reduce the number of children experiencing short or repeated entrances to care.
- We will focus on securing permanent families and homes for children at the earliest point. Our planning for children will drive the identification and matching of children with potential long term carers and ensure that the right supports are in place to secure long term stability.
- We will make sure that there is variety in accommodation for young people to develop their independent living skills. When young people are ready to have their own tenancies, we will make sure that they are supported to maintain them and settle into their own homes.

3. We will help you with your worries and fears

We know that children in care are up to four times more likely to experience mental ill health compared to children in the general population*. Consequences of poor mental health for children in our care include a greater risk of instability within their relationships, where they live and poor educational outcomes. We also know that children often enter the care system with a poorer level of physical and mental health than their peers, and their longer-term outcomes remain worse*.

In Merton, the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) Team is embedded in the Children's Social Care & Youth Inclusion Service and continues to offer clinical therapeutic systemic interventions to children, young people, carers and practitioners. The contract for this provision ended in the summer of 2020 and we are reviewing this provision, alongside our contract for delivery of Multi-Systemic Therapy for children on the edge of care, to inform our future arrangements. This review is due in the autumn of 2020.

The Coram BAAF survey found that, 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, with 94% of young people (aged 12-18) and 78% of children (aged 5-11) feeling that their life was improving.

Compared to population norms and children aged 11-18yrs in care in Merton, care experienced young people scored less favorably on the well-being scales. Nearly one in three (30%) reported high levels of anxiety with young women more likely to report feeling anxious than young men. 12% had 'always' or 'often' felt lonely in the previous few weeks – similar to the proportion reported by peers (10%) in the general population; 23% were identified as having low well-being. They had higher stress scores than peers in the general population. 17% of young women reported that they disliked their appearance. Nearly a fifth (19%) of care experienced young people reported low levels of happiness the previous day.

What we have done:

- Produced a health passport for care experienced young people explaining their health history.
- Ensured early identification of young people transitioning to adult services.
- Offered CAMHS consultation to rising care experienced young people, their social workers and personal advisors.
- Have a named worker in Catch 22 Team to support our care experienced young people with drug screening and substance misuse intervention

What we will do:

- Children's physical and emotional health needs are assessed and identified early to ensure appropriate supports are put in place. We will make sure that foster carers and practitioners have a good understanding of trauma informed practice.
- We will ensure that there is a wide range of support services including advocacy, independent visitors, mentors to meet a variety of children/ young person's needs. Including specialist services for mental health, substance misuse, exploitation & offending.
- Pilot a new approach to screening and early identification of emotional wellbeing and mental health needs for our children entering care

* The Mental Health Foundation 2002, 'The mental health of looked-after children: Bright Futures – Working with Vulnerable Young People'

(https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/sites/default/files/mental_health_looked_after_children.pdf)

4. We will do the best we can for you, so you can do your best at school, have hobbies and interests and time for fun

In Merton we have high aspirations for our children in care and young people with care experience. The proportion of care experienced young people in education, employment or training; choosing to attend studies beyond A-Level; or in higher education is greater than the national and pan-London average.

Our Virtual School provides a dedicated service for children in our care from their early years and beyond leaving care wherever they live or are educated. This includes liaising with specialist teams in the council where children have additional learning needs and/or disabilities. Children and young people all have access to high quality schooling, education or training provision.

The Virtual School closely monitors school attendance, progress and attainment and will ensure each child has a Personal Education Plan that is up to date and reflects individual learning styles and preferences.

The Coram BAAF report showed that 84% of young people in Merton like school. Financial difficulties and constraints were frequently mentioned by young people as causing them concern and restricting them from being able to do the things they enjoyed. Care experienced young people were more than twice as likely to be finding things 'quite' or 'very' difficult financially, compared to 18-24 year olds in the general population (16% vs. 7%).

What we have done:

- Our Virtual School offers extensive educational support beyond the statutory school age
- The Virtual School supports children in care and care experienced young people who are in and out of the Borough to access further and higher education courses
- There is an identified named teacher who works closely with neighbouring colleges and universities to help them understand the needs of our care experienced young people to ensure holistic sustained support.
- We have a dedicated named worker from the Virtual School Team to support our care experienced cohort with their NEET status to prepare the young person for employability.
- We offer a small financial incentive 'Education Engagement' payment that we offer to young people who engage in education.
- When required we provide laptops for all young people engaged in education post statutory school age for a period of more than 12 weeks.
- We offer comprehensive educational support to unaccompanied asylum seeking young people who are supported to attend ESO and the Beats programmes to enhance their qualifications
- Created a Maximisation and Independent Officer post to support young people leaving our care with their housing benefit needs.
- Obtained funding to offer recreational activities in the community with a specific focus on providing assistance to unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and young people to transition into the community.
- Supported and planned an annual residential trip for unaccompanied asylum seeking children and young people to develop friendships and widen their network.

What we will do:

- We will develop systems to ensure that child-level educational data is updated frequently and regularly outside of PEP reviews, in order to enable swift and effective actions to prevent further disruption to progress and in order to celebrate achievements as they occur.
- We will strengthen relationships with other services in order to ensure understanding of respective roles and to reinforce good working practice.

- We will develop clear processes for input into decisions regarding placement moves in order that educational provision is considered a priority. Where possible, we will undertake parallel planning, to identify the best provision and prevent delay in accessing a school place, so that placement and school moves are aligned.
- We will work closely with schools to increase the understanding of the care system, through training, advice and guidance.
- We will raise our levels of challenge to schools in tackling any low expectations or lack of ambition for our children in care and care experienced young people
- We will introduce an Early Years-specific PEP for 2, 3 and 4 year olds, ensuring that their individual educational needs are identified, supported and monitored closely.
- We will develop a Post 16 model as a PEP through consultation with care experienced young people, those in care and formally through the Children in Care Council.
- We will continue to support young people after they leave care to further their aspirations in education, training and employment

5. We will make sure you have people in your life who are important to you and someone you can trust

Arrangements for children and young people to keep in touch with their birth family members are given careful consideration at the care planning stage and are constantly reviewed as part of the child's review. Family time is determined by the needs of the child and what is in their best interest and is changed over time to meet the child's continuing needs and wishes.

Permanence Plans ensure that children are supported to develop a sense of belonging and identity that addresses the complex and varied meanings of "family" that they have experienced, whilst in care, and going on into adulthood.

The Coram BAAF survey found that the majority (96%) of children and young people had a really good friend. This was similar to their peers (97%) in the general population.

Friends, leaving care workers, brothers and sisters were the most often identified types of people who provided care experienced young people with emotional support. On average young people had three types of people they identified in their lives as providing emotional support. The proportion of care experienced young people (97%) who reported having at least one good friend was comparable with that recorded by young adults (98%) in general population studies.

Most Care Leavers (89%) had a trusted person in their lives; while a high figure, this is less than their peers in general population (98%). Almost all young people (97%) reported having someone who believed in them: a higher proportion than in 6 other LAs (85%). This is a Bright Spot of good practice.

What we have done:

- Support children and young people to spend time with family members where it is safe to do so
- Plan for long term relationships
- Work with the virtual school to ensure each child is given the opportunity to speak to a trusted adult in school
- Commission the Jigsaw4U befriending service (for those aged 8 – 18 years) to match adults to vulnerable children in care and provide real help for the child who may be going through a difficult time.

What we will do:

- We will strive to nurture the relationships between children and their families throughout their time in care with a view to reunification where appropriate or alternatively the establishment of healthy lifelong relationships,
- We will enhance our support to foster carers in managing children’s development into adolescence to ensure that children achieve stability of home life.
- Each child in care or young person will understand how they came to be looked after through direct work, words and pictures and an information letter. Life story books and later life letters will be prepared for all children who require this to make sense of their identity.
- Ensure that children and care experienced young people have access to befriending and advocacy services. We will assist young people to develop good support networks and sustain significant relationships to support them into and during their adulthood and to reduce the likelihood of experiencing loneliness, isolation or lack of confidence.

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

We have maintained and strengthened our services for care experienced young people to support them as they become adults by using our Practice Model to develop long lasting proactive relationships.

Care experienced young people in Merton reported high levels of trust (90%) in care workers: a higher proportion compared to those in 6 other LAs where 77% ‘all or most of the time’ trusted their worker. This was highlighted as a Bright Spot of good practice.

The majority of comments in the survey, revealed high levels of satisfaction with the support provided by leaving care workers, who were variously described as *attentive, responsive, available* and *empathetic*.

We have an Income Maximisation Officer who supports Care Leavers with their benefits, running successful sessions with our young people prior to them leaving care. Our housing department and placements team work together to review the housing needs identified in the Pathway Plans of our Care Leavers and young people rising 18, to drive forward housing nominations and arrangements for young people who are ready to move into their own home.

There is more that needs to be done. We know that – as in many other London boroughs – access to sustainable housing in Merton is a challenge.

What we have done:

- Successfully extended our Personal Advisor service to young people leaving our care up to the age of 25.
- Offered independent workshops and income maximisation advice and support.
- Involved children in care and care experienced young people in foster care training to enable carers to understand the needs of adolescence.
- Supported care experienced young people to remain with their foster carer through our Staying Put initiative to receive continued support in a family environment.
- Worked with financial support services who act as money managers for care experienced young people.
- Supported young people to take part in National Citizen Service (NCS) to develop their peer relationships and develop their self-esteem.
- Exempted Merton’s care experienced residents from Council Tax until the age of 25.

- Engage in a pilot to support our children with care experience with timely asylum claims and link worker support to reduce the period of time they will experience uncertainty about their immigration status.

What we will do:

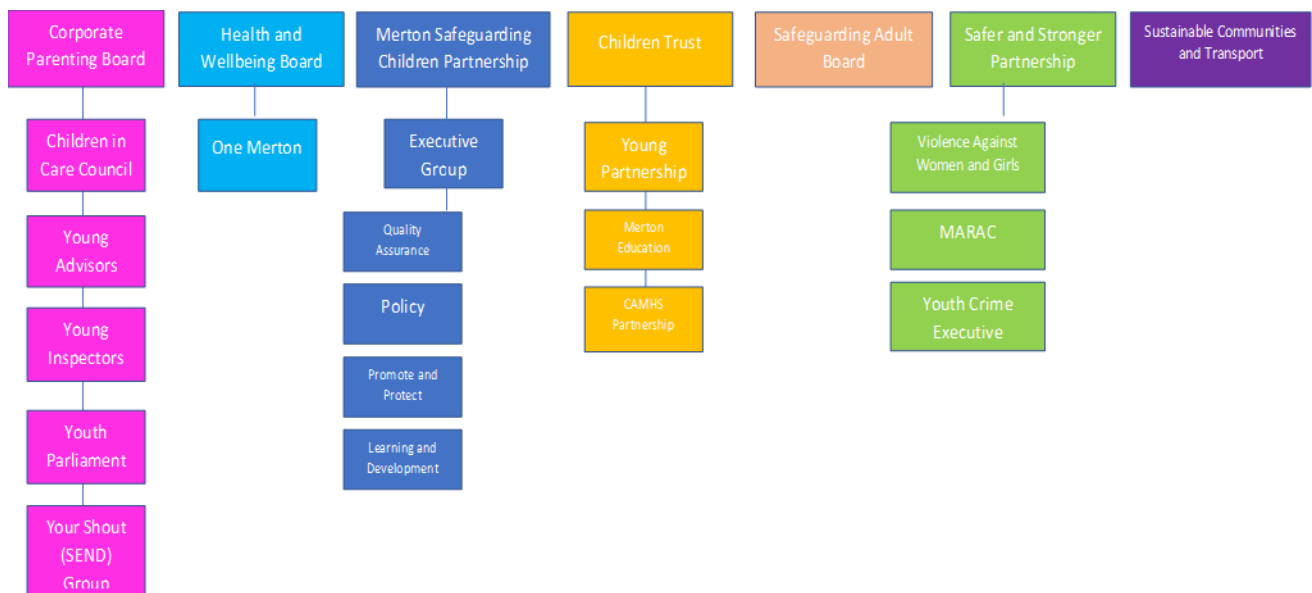
- We will make sure that children and young people are supported and prepared to live and thrive in their own accommodation.
- Young people who are eligible for adult services will be identified early and have a planned transition from children’s to adults’ social care
- We will assist young people to develop good support networks and sustain significant relationships to reduce the impact of loneliness, isolation or lack of confidence as they grow into adulthood.

6 Making it happen – Merton’s Governance and Strategic Partnerships

The Children and Young People’s Plan (2020 – 2022) sets out our ambitions for all children and young people in the borough, including those in care or with care experience. This strategy is endorsed by the Children’s Trust, the Merton Safeguarding Children Partnership and the Corporate Parenting Board.

The Corporate Parenting Board is comprised of children in care and care experienced young people, participation officers, senior officers from across the council and partners representing education, health, housing, social care and elected members. The Board is chaired by the Chief Executive and attended by the Lead Member for Children, Schools and Families. This ensures robust scrutiny and cross directorate responsibility for delivery of the priorities articulated in this document.

Overview – Merton’s Governance Structure



This strategy is supported by an action plan the delivery of which is overseen by the Corporate Parenting Board. This action plan is reviewed annually within the Corporate Parenting Annual Report.

Annex 1 - Definitions

The legal definition of a Care Leaver comes from The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 which states that a Care Leaver is someone who has been in the care of the Local Authority for a period of 13 weeks or more spanning their 16th birthday.

Categories that the law uses:

Eligible child

- Young person aged 16 and 17
- You will have been looked after for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14
- You are still looked after

Former relevant child age 18-21

- Young person aged 18-21 who has already been an eligible child
- Former relevant child age 21-25
- Young person aged 21-25 who has already been an eligible child

Once a former relevant child becomes 21 you can choose whether to continue to have support. If you want support after age 21, this can continue until you are 25.

Other categories of Care Leavers where you can choose to have advice, guidance and assistance.

Qualifying child

Young person age 16-25

- You were looked after, after the age of 16
- You are no longer looked after

Qualifying child: Special Guardianship Order

- Young person age 18-25

You were being looked after when a Special Guardianship Order was made

Annex 2: The Legal Context

This strategy has been informed by a range of recent policy developments and local strategies and commitments (not limited to the following) to ensure priority areas for improvement in Care Leaver services are addressed

Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000

This Act amended and clarified some sections of the Children Act 1989 dealing with the support needs of Care Leavers and the quality of planning for their transition from childhood and into adult independence.

Children and Young Persons Act 2008 and Care Leavers' (England) Regulations 2010

The 2010 Regulations clarified the requirement of the 2008 Act for Children Looked After moving from accommodation regulated by the Care Standards Act 2000 (or semi-independent accommodation) into other accommodation to have a statutory review of their care plan chaired by their Independent Reviewing Officer.

It also introduced the requirement for local authorities to pay a Higher Education Bursary for certain former relevant young people and the right of Care Leavers under 25 years of age wanting to access education or training to resume support from a personal adviser.

Children Act 1989: Transition to adulthood for Care Leavers, amended 2015

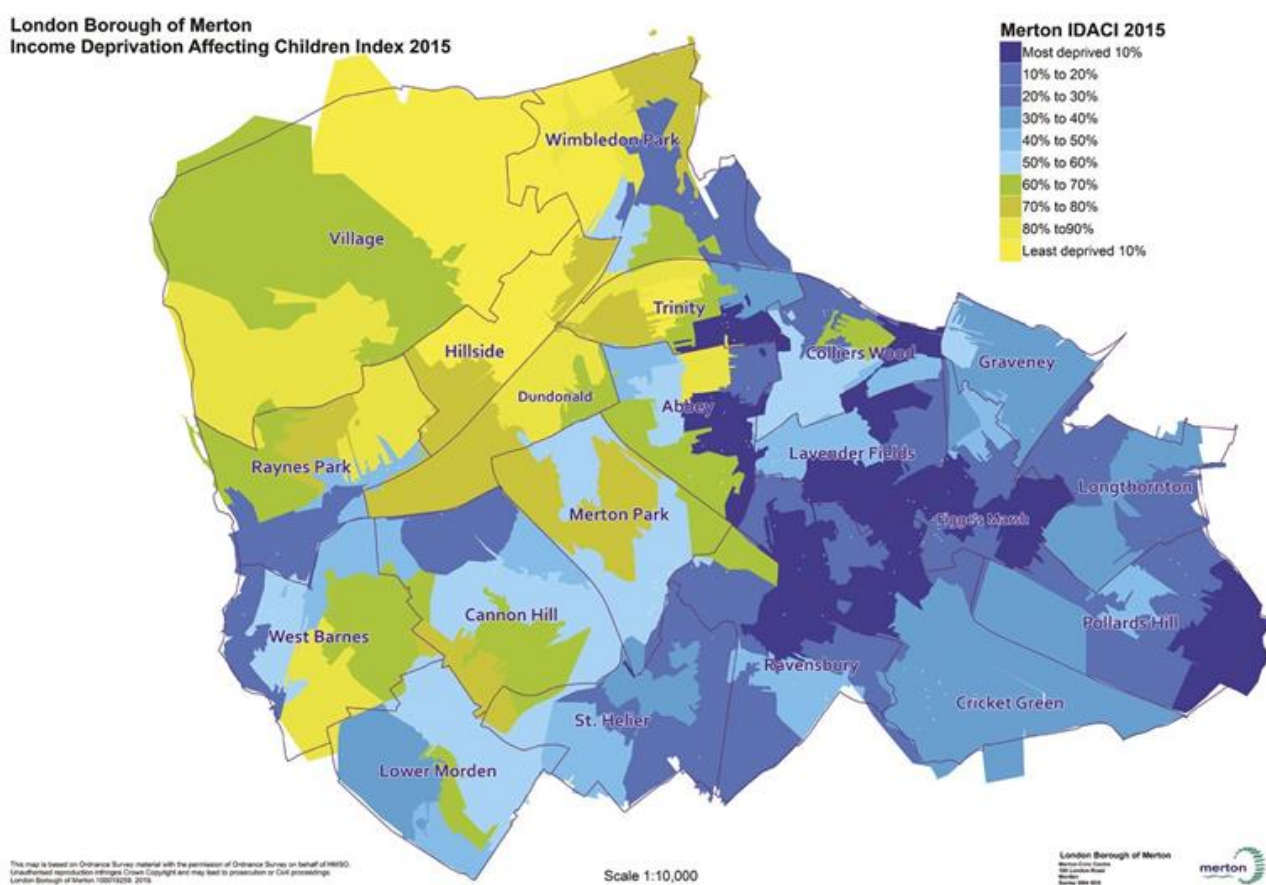
This guidance is an amendment to Volume 3 of the Care Act 1989 and an update of the last amendment in 2010. Addressed to personal advisors, social workers, managers, Directors of Children's Services, lead members, elected members, commissioners and relevant agencies, it is aimed at ensuring Care Leavers experience the same level of care and support as their peers experience from a reasonable parent.

Children and Social Work Act 2017

New duties entitling Care Leavers to support from a Personal Advisor (PA) up to age 25, the publishing of a 'Local Offer' and regard to 'Corporate Parenting Principles' that guide how they are supported across all Local Authority functions.

Annex 3: Merton as a Borough

Predominantly suburban in character, Merton is divided into 20 wards and has three main town centres: Wimbledon; Mitcham; and Morden. A characteristic of the borough is the difference between the more deprived east (Mitcham / Morden) and the more affluent west (Wimbledon). There are a number of pockets of deprivation within the borough mainly in the eastern wards and some smaller pockets in the central wards. These wards have high scores on income deprivation, unemployment and limited educational attainment. Merton has 39 Super Output Areas which are amongst the 30% most deprived areas across England for children. (Super Output Areas are used by the Office for National Statistics for many of its statistical outputs). This means 45% of Merton school pupils are living in an area of deprivation (30% most deprived, IDACI 2015). Since 2010 we have seen an increase of children who are eligible for free school meals.



The two main reasons why a child becomes looked after in Merton are abuse or neglect (43%) and absent parenting (22%): nationally abuse or neglect (62%) is the most dominant category, with family dysfunction (15%) next (this also represents 15% locally). This over representation of absent parenting can be accounted for by the higher numbers of unaccompanied asylum seeking children (accounting for around 20% of the Looked After Children cohort at a given time).

Annex 4: Consultation Feedback summary

Looked After Children Consultation ‘Your Life – Your Care’ and Care Leavers Consultation ‘Your Life Beyond Care’

In March 2018 Coram BAAF undertook the Bright Spots well-being indicator consultation with Looked After Children 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 (4-8yrs) felt safe in their homes ‘all or most of the time’. As a benchmark the Children’s World 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 score (9 or10) on the wellbeing scales
- 84% of young people in Merton like 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 are worthwhile	High scores	52%	36%	29%
	Low scores	0%	12%	6%
Positive about future	High scores	44%	35%	19%
	Low scores	4%	11%	7%

Care Leavers Consultation

In 2018 Coram Baaf, Bright Spots, undertook the consultation Your Life Beyond Care to obtain the views of Care Leavers in Merton on their well-being and what makes life good. The findings were reported back to the Local Authority in December 2018.

Key Findings 1: Young People who took part in the survey

44% of Care Leavers responded to the survey. Two-thirds were aged 18-20. 62% were from BAME backgrounds. 61% of Males completed the consultation, which reflects the current cohort of Male / Female care leavers. Young people reported they were predominantly satisfied with their leaving care worker and most young people had a good understanding of why they had been in care.

Key Findings 2: Accommodation and Finances

41% of Care Leavers were living in rented accommodation (flat or house). Just over a third (35%) were in supported accommodation and 12% were living with foster carers. A third (34%) of the Care Leavers did not feel that their current living arrangements were right for them. 31% of the young people said they did not always feel safe at home, and 40% did not always feel settled.

Financial difficulties and constraints were frequently mentioned by the young people, causing concern and restricting them from being able to do the things they enjoyed. Care Leavers were more than twice as likely to be finding things 'quite' or 'very' difficult financially, compared to 18-24 year olds in the general population (16% vs. 7%).

Key Findings 3: Relationships

Friends, leaving care workers and siblings were the most often identified types of people who provided the Care Leavers with emotional support. On average young people had three types of people they identified in their lives as providing emotional support. Just one young person reported having no one to provide them with emotional support. The proportion of Care Leavers (97%) who reported having at least one good friend was comparable with that recorded by young adults (98%) in general population studies. However fewer felt they had someone they could trust in their lives (Merton's Care Leavers: 89% vs. peers in the general population: 98%).

Key Findings 4. Emotional Well Being

23% of Merton's care-experienced young people were identified as having low well-being. Care Leavers had higher stress scores than peers in the general population. 17% of young women reported that they disliked their appearance. Nearly a fifth (19%) of the Care Leavers reported low levels of happiness the previous day. Compared to population norms and children aged 11-18yrs in care in Merton, Care Leavers scored less favorably on the well-being scales. Nearly one in three (30%) reported high levels of anxiety with young women more likely to report feeling anxious than young men. 12% of Care Leavers had 'always' or 'often' felt lonely in the previous few weeks – similar to the proportion reported by peers (10%) in the general population.

Bright Spots note when there are areas of particularly good feedback over that of other Local Authorities. They reported that;

Most Care Leavers (89%) had a trusted person in their lives. Almost all young people (97%) reported having someone who believed in them: a higher proportion than reported by Care Leavers (85%) in 6 other LAs. This is a Bright Spot of good practice.

Care-experienced young people in Merton reported high levels of trust (90%) in care workers: a higher proportion compared to Care Leavers in 6 other LAs where 77% 'all or most of the time' trusted their worker. This is a Bright Spot of good practice.

The majority of comments (20), revealed high levels of satisfaction with the support provided by leaving care workers, who were variously described as *attentive, responsive, available* and *empathetic*.