

Care Leavers Strategy 2019-2022



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1 Foreword

We take our role as Corporate Parents seriously and we are committed to ensuring that children who were looked after and become Care Leavers are afforded the same level of care and support as other young people receive from their parents.

To do this we will provide Care Leavers with a Personal Advisor. This person will provide support and guidance to Care Leavers to help them remove some of the practical barriers that they face as they move into adulthood and will work with other agencies to help the young person gain access to wider support services.

This strategy has taken into consideration the views of Merton Care Leavers who were consulted on their experience of leaving care. It includes plans to address what they said would make a difference and improve the quality of their lives. In addition to Care Leavers' views Merton's Children's Services and partner agencies also identified specific areas of practice they felt could be improved or introduced to increase positive outcomes for Care Leavers. By working together and listening to the voice of Care Leavers we are confident our young adults will have improved future prospects and improved stability, enhancing their lives.

Over the next two years we will work closely with our Care Leavers to ensure that we are consistently meeting their needs. We will continue to review our Local Offer taking into consideration any changes that may occur locally and in legislation so that the service we offer matches the needs of young adults and provides the best outcomes.



Kelly Braund

Councillor Kelly Braund, Cabinet Member for Children's Services

2 Introduction

The aim of this strategy is to ensure that Care Leavers have the best possible care and support to live as normal a life as they are able to within the context of having to be independent at a much earlier age than many of their peers.

We will consistently strive to ensure all our young people reach their potential, develop into independent, self-confident adults. We strongly believe that all Care Leavers should have a positive experience of leaving care and should continue to receive on-going support from their Personal Advisor to assist them to deal with adult responsibilities.

When young people are ready to leave care we will ensure that they are equipped with practical independence skills and have the knowledge to access a range of services including housing, health, employment, education, leisure, benefits and other community services. We recognise that leaving care can trigger feelings of isolation and loneliness and at these time the young person's life may become unstable or disrupted, therefore we will ensure that the services offered are approachable, accessible and treat the Care Leavers with respect.

We will ensure high expectations for our Care Leavers are shared widely and genuinely. By involving our partners, we will ensure coordinated services are provided so that our Care Leavers feel safe in their homes and in the community, are able to have or maintain a trusted relationship, achieve at higher education or college, gain and sustain employment and generally have a positive experience of adult life.

The views and opinions of our Care Leavers are central to the planning we do for them as Corporate Parents, we will ensure that we listen to what they say and review our practice accordingly. Decisions about their lives and future will be made with them, not for them, in order that they feel valued and listened to.

3 Our Strategic Vision for Care Leavers

We have high expectations for our Care Leavers and we want them to have high aspirations and believe in themselves. We want all of the young people in our care to be well looked after and prepared for adult life. We will offer our Care Leavers practical and emotional support into adulthood to ensure they feel safe, experience good physical and well-being so that they can fulfil their potential in life.



4 Strategic Priorities for Merton Care Leavers 2019– 2022 and the Corporate Parent Principles

The Strategic priorities and corporate parent principles have been developed through consultations and feedback from our care leavers, their views are supported and informed by a number of consultations that took place with partner agencies, personal advisors, social workers and senior managers involved in supporting and providing services. The corporate parent principles as set out in section 1 of the Children and Social Work Act 2017, states that Local Authority must have regard to the seven needs identified in the Children Act when exercising their functions. The Principles have been paired with the Council's Five Priorities to ensure that we fulfil the request of Care Leavers and carry out our corporate parent responsibilities.

1 Care Leavers have their voice heard, feel respected and valued and know their rights and entitlements.

Corporate Parent Principle - to encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings. To take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people and to help those children and young people gain access to, and make the best use of services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners.

2 Leaving care and leaving well - promoting the emotional wellbeing of Care Leavers

Corporate Parent Principle - to act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and wellbeing of those children and young people.

3 Ensure that Care Leavers are prepared for the practical and financial components of independence.

Corporate Parent Principle - to prepare young people for adulthood and independent living.

4 Enable Care Leavers to live in the community, safely and securely whilst developing and maintaining healthy supportive relationships.

Corporate Parent Principle - for those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work.

5 Raise aspirations of Care Leavers so that they are motivated to reach their full potential.

Corporate Parent Principle - to promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people.

5 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



6 The National and Local Context

Nationally, the number of Children Looked After continues to rise. At the end of March 2018, there were 75,420 Children Looked After in England, up 4% from March 2017. In this same period, Merton had a 1.3% increase in its Children Looked After numbers from 152 to 154. In 2018/19 Merton's Care Leaving Service supported 197 young people aged 18 to 25 years.

Merton's services for Care Leavers were rated 'Good' in Merton's Ofsted Single Inspection (July 2017). A number of positive findings showed that:

- Care Leavers are supported well and develop the skills that they need to live independently and to achieve their career and education goals.
- Social workers and personal advisors know and understand young people's individual circumstances and needs well, managing known risks and developing effective plans with partners.
- Planning is effective and detailed for the large majority who have an up-to-date Pathway Plan with young people effectively involved in developing these.
- Workers in the dedicated 14Plus Team form trusting and productive relationships with young people describing them as approachable and supportive.

The 14Plus Team provides a Looked After and Care Leavers service for young people aged 14-25. Young people are provided with a social worker and/or personal advisor to assess their needs and help to actively plan for their future. The 14Plus Team, with assistance from the Child Looked After Nurse, CAMHS and the Virtual School, works to promote good outcomes for this cohort through multi-agency Pathway Plans, which identify required support and how that support can be implemented to achieve good outcomes and independence. Advice guidance and practical assistance, is provided in relation to education, school/college, work/apprenticeships, training, health issues, leisure, money, transport, family and housing.

Merton makes significant efforts to stay in contact with its Care Leavers and keeping in touch is well managed and monitored. In 2018, 86% of those aged 19-21 were 'in touch' with the Local Authority (in line with national data). The percentage of young people in suitable accommodation has increased substantially from 66% in 2015 to 87% in 2018, faring better than London and national comparators. Strong links with the internal placement providers has improved transition to independent living and housing options. Merton's 'Staying Put' policy has been refreshed which offers Care Leavers the opportunity to remain with their foster carer whilst continuing in education / training and moving into adulthood. There has been an increase in the number of young people accessing this option.

A Care Leavers Local Offer has been developed covering health and well-being, relationships, education and training, employment, accommodation and participation in society. This is published as part of the Young Merton Directories and continues to be developed with up-to-date information.

Government statistics have shown that Care Leavers are three times more likely not to be in education, employment or training (NEET) than other young people. A significant gap remains between the educational achievement of this cohort and their peers and this area continues as a priority focus. In 2018, 38% of 19, 52% of 20 year-old and 38% 21 year-old Care Leavers were NEET (figures similar to National data). The Virtual School provides a range of individual and group-based support services to improve engagement. Management oversight has been enhanced to increase education, training and employment opportunities via improved tracking and cross-departmental agency working.

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 between 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*.

8 **Care Leavers will experience a number of transitions as they become older and are no longer considered a looked after child.**

Not all transitions or experiences are negative, some experiences are considered exciting others are greeted with anticipation and some experiences are different to what the young person expected.

A Care Leaver may experience some of the following transitions:

- Out of school or pressure to continue to go to school / higher education.
- Supported financially to live in their foster home until they are 18. Once they have turned 18 they are responsible to contribute to their housing costs. Leaving the foster home could impact on the Care Leavers ability to sustain the relationships, staying put helps to bridge the gap from looked after to care leaver.
- A return to previously severed family relationships; for Care Leavers up until they are 18 the statutory intervention can help manage relationships the young person has with their birth families, once 18, adjusting to unsupervised relationships with their birth family could be overwhelming for the young person.
- Once a young person is 18 years of age they have greater responsibility for maintaining their tenancy and resolving issues around their accommodation.
- From receiving pocket money to receiving subsistence, benefits, wages or an educational allowances.
- From having housing provided, to having to maintain housing and a tenancy.
- From having health appointments arranged and supported to attend to being responsible for one's own health.
- From being supported by adults where they live to living independently.
- Adjusting to a reduced number of professional relationships.
- At the age of 18, financial responsibilities change both for the Care Leaver and for those providing care.

In addition to this there are added factors, for example, unaccompanied asylum young people with an uncertain future and matters of gender, sexuality, disability, unresolved childhood trauma triggered by any of the above.

9 The Strategic Priorities in Action, what we have done and what we will do.

9.1 Care Leavers have their voice heard, feel respected and valued and know their rights and entitlements.

Corporate Parent Principles - to encourage those young people to express their views, wishes and feelings, to take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those young people, to help those children and young people gain access to, and make the best use of services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners.

We have the responsibility to ensure that we listen to the wishes and feelings of Care Leavers and take their views into account when making decisions. This responsibility extends from their personal advisors to senior decision makers and council members.

All Care Leavers have rights and those rights include, the right to a Needs Assessment, a Pathway Plan, a Personal Adviser until they are 25, support with finding somewhere appropriate to live with a setting up home allowance, financial help towards the costs of education and training, involvement in all major decisions, the ability to make a formal complaint, an advocate and the right to view the files and information written about the Care Leaver.

Merton 14plus Service has recently secured a Pilot with the Early Intervention Project, South London Refugee Association, to work with up to 20 young people. This will enable our unaccompanied Care Leavers to achieve the outcome of their immigration status more efficiently, to move on from semi-independent accommodation, gain employment or claim benefits and to develop lifelong trusting relationships. To complement this work, we have secured funding from the controlling Migration fund to support our Care Leavers to transition into the community to make friends and build networks.

What have we done

- Commissioned Coram Baaf to undertake a Care Leavers consultation.
- Involved Care Leavers in undertaking consultations and to sit on interview panels.
- Developed a Local Offer for Care Leavers up to the age of 25.
- Engage Care Leavers in the development of the Local Offer on the web page.
- Supported Jigsaw4U to develop a Web Page on leaving care information
- Successfully extended our PA service to Care Leavers up to the age of 25.
- Engage in a pilot to support our Care Leavers with timely asylum claims and link worker support to reduce the period of time they will experience uncertainty.



What we will do

- Work with Care Leavers to design a Local Offer Leaflet.
- Ensure Care Leavers understand their rights and how to access the services and support they are entitled to receive.
- Capture the views of young adults with disability to inform the development of the transition from children services to adult services and improve on our partnership working.
- Support Care Leavers to have confidence to access social networks and websites safely.
- Increase referrals to mentors, independent visitors and advocates in order that Care Leavers receive appropriate advice and support.
- Ensure that Pathway Plan reviews are meaningful and future targets are realistic and specific, by giving young people the opportunity to be actively involved in making future plans.
- Develop a Care Leavers consortium to ensure that our Care Leavers continue to shape and influence the services to Care Leaver.

Measuring our success

- % of Care Leavers with a Pathway Plan
- % of Pathway Plans reviewed 6 monthly with the Care Leaver
- % of Care Leavers offered and have access to advocacy services

9.2

Care Leavers report being involved and consulted in planning their future

Leaving care and leaving well - promoting the Emotional Wellbeing of Care Leavers

Corporate Parent Principle - to act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and well-being, of those children and young people.

The health and wellbeing of Looked After Children and young people – that is, their physical health, and social, educational and emotional wellbeing – is influenced by nearly all aspects of their lives and the care they receive. Experiences early in life may have long-term consequences for health and social development. Some Looked After Children and young people have positive experiences in the care system and achieve good emotional and physical health, do well in their education and go on to have good jobs and careers. However, Looked After Children are more likely to have experienced deprivation and poverty as a result of low family income or parental unemployment. About 60% of children and young people who are looked after in England are reported to have emotional and mental health problems and a high proportion experience poor health, educational and social outcomes after leaving care.

What have we done

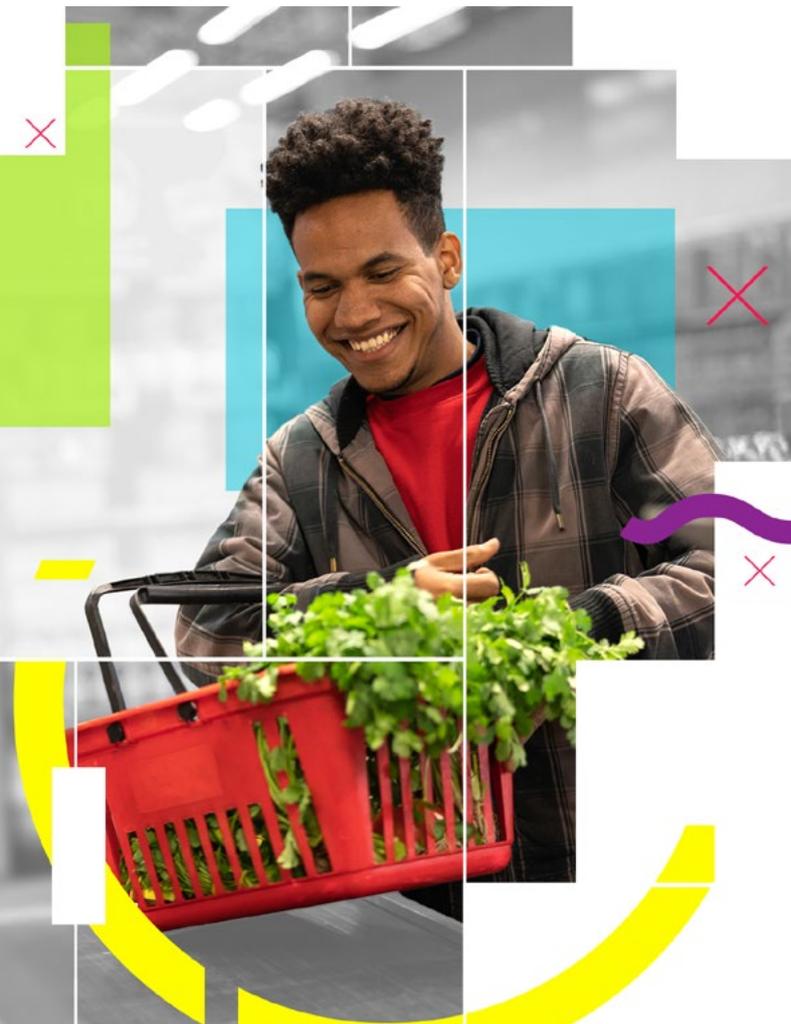
- Produced a health passport for Care Leavers explaining their health history.
- Ensured early identification of young people transitioning to adult services.
- Offered CAMHs consultation to rising Care Leavers and social workers and personal advisors.
- Undertook a consultation so that we can understand and act on our Care Leavers' needs.
- Have a named worker in Catch 22 Team to support our Care Leaver cohort with drug screening and substance misuse interventions.

What we will do

- Provide robust and effective management oversight of young people transitioning through to care leaving services have every aspect of their needs considered in their pathway plan, to ensure a greater degree of success as they approach adulthood.
- Ensure pathway plans for unaccompanied asylum children take into consideration their immigration status and prioritise outstanding immigration issues with the Home Office to secure their future plans.
- Broaden the Merton Mental Health Strategy to offer services to Care Leavers up to the age of 25.
- Offer workshops to Care Leavers, to encourage healthier food choices and to increase confidence and knowledge in healthier lifestyles.
- Develop our relationships with adult services, to ensure planned transitions to adult services starts at 14 and is tracked through the young person's journey.
- Improve on the health summaries to include support with EHCP.
- Develop Looked after Nurse Health Service to include health consultations to Care Leavers up until the age of 25.

Measuring our success

- % of Care Leaver consultations offered by CAMHs, if requested
- % of Care Leavers with a Health Summary
- % of young people Leaving Care aware of the Local Offer
- Immigration applications are timely and all young people's status are tracked



9.3 Ensure that Care Leavers are prepared for the practical and financial components of independence.

Corporate Parent Principle - to prepare young people for adulthood and independent living.

Young people face a complex mix of challenges as they go through their journey in care. For Care Leavers who have mental health issues, learning difficulties, have experienced the criminal justice system, or struggled to stay on at school, they are more likely to face an insecure future especially if they are not able to secure employment or further their education, this will impact on their emotional wellbeing.

Evidence that having a trusted adult providing support in a young person's life can mitigate some of the impact of abuse and other adverse experiences of childhood.

Social networks are important to our health. Good relationships with friends and family and peers allows young people to feel supported and enables them to develop skills and good levels of self-esteem and resilience when facing new situations. Living independently requires a Care Leaver to manage their money, pay their bills on time and live on a budget. Experience of care does not always enable the young person the opportunity to understand how household income is managed. Without proper money management support, Care Leavers can be without the skills to know how to manage their income. Financial education around money and money management is an essential component of transitioning to independence.

What have we done

- Offered independent workshops and income maximisation advice and support.
- Involved Children Looked After and Care Leavers in foster care training to enable carers to understand the needs of adolescence and
- Supported Care Leavers to remain with their

foster carer through the Staying Put initiative to receive continued support in a family environment.

- Worked with financial support services who act as money managers for Care Leavers.
- Supported young people to take part in National Citizen Service (NCS) to develop their peer relationships and develop their self-esteem.
- Exempted Merton Care Leavers resident in the borough from Council Tax until the age of 25.

What we will do

- Redesign the Pathway Plan with Care Leavers to focus on outcome based smart care planning.
- At the first statutory review following a 16th birthday we will explore staying put arrangements with the carer, and revisit this 6 monthly, being realistic to the changes in the relationship and that these plans do change over time and ensure the right support is in place.
- Work closely with foster carers to ensure that young people are supported at home to learn independence skills and review the 'My Passport to Independence' document to ensure independent skills are known and understood.
- Ensure through training and targeted recruitment carers have specific knowledge of caring for young people with additional needs, e.g. young adult with SEN or disability and young people who are asylum seekers.
- Ensure all plans for the transition to adulthood are recorded in the pathway plan and reviewed with the young person to ensure they are actively involved and understand their care plan post 18.
- Support young people to understand the entitlements and benefits associated with renting and sharing housing and sustaining a tenancy and (if appropriate) apply to claim Universal Credit prior to their 18th birthday.

- Ensure moving to independent accommodation does not interfere or coincide with A-level exams.
- Ensure Pathway Plans for Unaccompanied Asylum Care Leavers includes and plans for the outcome of their immigration claim, including if permission to remain is not granted.

Measuring our success

- Number of young people staying put
- % of foster carers with specific knowledge and training of young people with additional needs. (UASC training)
- % of Care Leavers leave care with savings
- % of Care Leavers offered financial support and advice prior to their 18th Birthday.

9.4 Enable Care Leavers to live in the community, safely and securely whilst developing and maintaining healthy supportive relationships.

Corporate Parent Principle - for those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work.

From the age of 18 young people are no longer legally in care or looked after and fostering arrangements and legislation no longer applies. Therefore, we need to be aware of any risks associated with offending, going missing, becoming sexually or criminally exploited and we need to do all we can to reduce those risks before the young person leaves care. We need to ensure the young person is equipped to keep themselves safe and have access to support and help if needed.

Care Leavers are a vulnerable group who may have particular needs around housing and homelessness. Rising demand for social housing is making it increasingly difficult for young people to find accommodation as they enter adulthood. Young people without a safety net can find housing particularly stressful, then may rely on benefits and low cost housing which can lead to inadequate living situations. When a Care Leaver is facing a potential breakdown in their living situation, it is important to take action quickly to prevent them becoming homeless.

Care Leavers are an invisible minority within the Criminal Justice System. Legislation, including the Children Act 1989 and Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000, has made few significant improvements in outcomes for these Care Leavers.

It is important to support the young person to build up a network that could include previous foster carers, independent visitors or a trusted adult, who may be able to encourage the young person to alert their PA they have difficulties.



What have we done

- Maintained % of keep in touch with Care Leavers.
- Set up a new 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.
- Created a Maximisation and Independent Officer post to support Care Leavers with their housing and housing benefit needs.
- Obtained funding to offer recreational activities in the community. Assisted Unaccompanied Asylum Care Leavers to transition into the community.
- Supported and planned an annual residential trip for unaccompanied asylum Looked After Children and Care Leavers to develop friendships and widen their network.
- Ensured young people who are in education have stable lives by providing housing around term times.
- Extended our services and support to Care Leavers up to the age of 25.

What we will do

- Prioritise assisting young people to develop good support networks and sustain significant relationships to reduce the impact of loneliness, lack of confidence and isolation.
- Ensure the contracts of commissioned Services are subject to significant scrutiny.
- Develop housing pathways and consider different models of more affordable shared accommodation options for young people and a range of options for suitable housing.
- Develop a joint protocol between leaving care services and housing services which identifies how we will work together to avoid homelessness and housing crisis amongst Care Leavers.

- To develop a 'staying close' policy and actively increase the number of care leavers in staying put and supported lodgings.
- Ensure that Care Leavers who have experienced trauma, previous exploitation or remain vulnerable to crime and gangs, know how to access continued support to keep themselves safe.
- Probation and Youth Engagement Services are involved in identifying accommodation options that are suitable for Looked After Children and Care Leavers immediately on release from custody.

Measuring our success

- % of Care Leavers in Suitable Accommodation
- % of Care Leavers keeping in touch
- % Merton Resident Care Leavers are exempt from Council Tax
- Number of Care Leavers in custody, with a Personal Advisor have a Pathway Plan that reflects their needs.

9.5

Raise aspirations of Care Leavers so that they are motivated to reach their full potential.

Corporate Parent Principles - to promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people.

Too many Care Leavers are not in education, employment and training, or are long term unemployed. There are significant challenges for many young people taking their first steps into the work environment. Some local authorities and charitable organisations – working independently and with Job Centre Plus – have increased the number of Care Leavers they have supported into employment, education and training through focussed action and support. Levels of unemployment at 19 have remained high over the past 10 years at roughly 30% of all Care Leavers, twice the average for their age group.

A good standard of education is a key driver towards achieving positive employment outcomes in adulthood, however there remains a significant gap between the educational achievement of Care Leavers and their peers.

There are several factors that impact on poor education results for Children Looked After. Around one quarter have a statement of Special Educational Needs compared to 2.8% of the general population. The majority of children have changed schools more than once and almost 20% have changed schools 3 or more times. 6% of Care Leavers go into higher education nationally compared to 11% of the general population.

What have we done

- Our Virtual School offers extensive educational support beyond the statutory school age.
- The Virtual School supports Care Leavers and Children Looked After in and out of 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 Leavers to ensure holistic sustained support.

- We have a dedicated named worker from the Virtual School Team to support our Care Leaver 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 to 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 ESOL and the Beats programmes to enhance their qualifications. Subsequently once status is determined we support all Care Leavers into employment or training.

What we will do

- Young people aged 16+ will be supported to write a CV, to maximise opportunities for apprenticeships and employment offers.
- Leaving Care aspirations and planning for EET is recorded in the Pathway Plan and reviewed 6 monthly.
- We will promote effective communication between the agencies and services to maximise opportunities for Care Leavers who are parents, experience mental ill health and adults with disabilities.
- We will accompany our Care Leavers to interviews, appointments and job centre meetings as and when to support with engagement.
- As part of our Local Offer and to strengthen our statutory duties, the Virtual School will provide educational consultations to Care Leavers up

to the age of 25, including educational careers, finance, budget planning, student housing, bursary and loans.

- We will develop a corporate EET offer to include a number of targeted apprenticeships to Care Leavers.
- Each year there will be an achievements event to acknowledge and celebrate Care Leavers who have aspired and achieved.

Measuring our success

- % of Care Leavers In Touch attending full-time or part-time higher education
- % Care Leavers In Touch in full-time or part-time training or employment



10 Merton's Strategic Framework and Governance

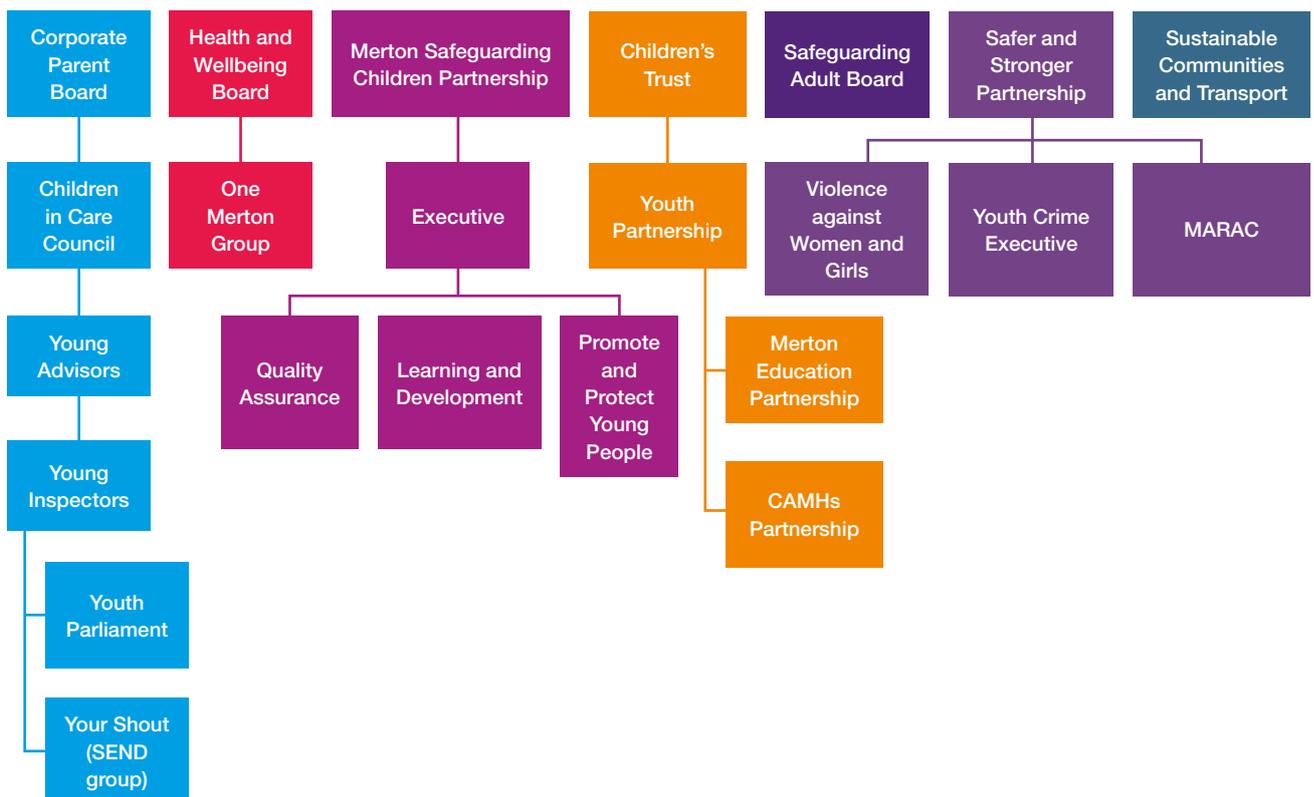
This Care Leaver Strategy is not a stand-alone publication.

- Our Children and Young People's Plan sets out our ambitions for our Children Looked After and this is enhanced by the Children Looked After Strategy and Care Leavers Strategy, which are both endorsed by the Children's Trust, the Merton Safeguarding Children's Board and the Corporate Parenting Board Partnership.

This Strategy will be reviewed each year by the Corporate Parenting Board. The Corporate Parenting Board is comprised of senior managers and officers from education, health, housing, social care and elected members. The Corporate Parenting Board is chaired by the Chief Executive, London Borough Merton and attended by the Lead Member and Director of Children Services. The Children in Care Council directly supports the Corporate Parenting Board to measure and monitor the effectiveness and quality of 'Corporate Parenting' in Merton.

The Board's role 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 supporting its Looked After Children 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.
- Ensure that decisive action is taken to address any shortcomings in the services provided to children and young people - Merton Governance (Governance Structure below).



11 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.

Keep on Caring: Supporting Young People from Care to Independence

Guidance to support progress against key issues for Care Leavers through the development of new ways of delivering support, making corporate parenting everyone's responsibility and driving system improvement.

Looked After Children Strategy 2018-21

Of particular relevance is Priority 6 detailing activity to strengthen services for Care Leavers as they become adults.

Securing Sufficient Accommodation for Looked After Children and Care Leavers

Sets out Merton's strategic approach and provides the necessary data and information to inform commissioning processes and partnership arrangements.

Merton's Staying Put Policy

Sets out the Local Authority's duty to monitor and maintain these arrangements with the intention of preparing young people for adulthood so that they can experience a transition akin to their peers, avoid social exclusion and avert housing breakdown.

Merton's Care Leaver Charter

Merton's formalised co-developed commitments to all Care Leavers.

Merton's 'Pledge' to Looked After Children and Care Leavers

The Council's formal set of promises, developed in consultation, to address the issues important to children and young people.

Merton's Children and Young People's Plan

Merton's Children's Trust plan to support collaborative partnership working to secure better outcomes in the well-being and safety of all children and young people in the borough.

Care Leavers Strategy 2019-2022



children and young people  **merton partnership**
working with merton's communities

