

My Family, My Future, My Merton

“A place where children and young people feel they belong, stay safe and can thrive.”

Merton Children and Young People's Plan 2024 - 2028



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

 LONDON BOROUGH OF **MERTON**

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If you would like to find out more about the plan or ways you can get involved, please email youth.participation@merton.gov.uk or follow us on Instagram @myvoicemerton

Welcome from the Participation and Engagement team

The Participation and Engagement team at Merton Council are responsible for hearing the views of children and young people across Merton. The team includes Young Inspectors and social care “Expert by Experience” Trainers, who are young people from Merton, who ensure professionals working with children and young people are actively providing opportunities for feedback on service delivery.

In 2023, the Participation and Engagement team launched a survey to hear from children and young people in Merton on the key themes that were important to them. The survey was aimed at 8–24-year-olds who either lived in Merton, studied here, or spent time socialising here.

To ensure they reached as many young people as possible the survey was shared with colleagues across our education provisions, youth services and voluntary sector.

Focus groups were also facilitated across the community to ensure all children and young people could share their views, such as those with a Special Educational Need or a Disability or with care experience.

The survey was open across the summer holidays, and they managed to get over 2350 responses. This is fantastic, so thank you to everyone who responded or took part in the focus groups!

As a young person you may be wondering *what happens after I complete a survey?* Once the survey closed, the team at Merton Council looked at all the responses they received and everything young people told us. They looked to see if there are any similarities or key differences in the responses received. Following that, they shared the findings with decision-makers, including those that work for the NHS and MET Police, and created this new plan with the aim of improving the lives of children and young people across Merton. We have also shared findings with Merton Youth Parliament.

The plan you are about to read is a result of what we heard; it will explain what the Council aims to achieve by 2028, and how we will do that by working together.



To find out more about the Participation and Engagement team, you can follow them on Instagram @myvoicemerton, or email them on youth.participation@merton.gov.uk

Welcome from Merton Youth Parliament

Hello from Merton Youth Parliament! We are a group of young people aged 11-19 who live or study in Merton. We are proud to represent the values of young people in our borough! We are passionate about listening to our peers – we run surveys, focus groups and we are always speaking to our fellow young people, and we speak to decision makers to hold them to account.



In 2022-2023 we ran campaigns on topics including climate change, violence against women and girls and youth inclusion. This was all based on young people's feedback. As part of this, we allocated funding to local community organisations like the National Trust, to create new opportunities for young people to get involved in activities in the borough. We also attended bystander training with the Youth Council for Kingston & Richmond.

The children and young people's plan survey that was carried out in 2023 gave us a good insight into what young people think of our borough. We studied this data, and we agreed between us that the biggest priorities for young people are:

- Substance Misuse
- Mental Health
- Public Safety

We will now go on to create three campaigns around these themes and hope you will get involved where you can. Our priorities are mirrored by other young people up and down the country, and we are proud to be at the forefront of positive change!

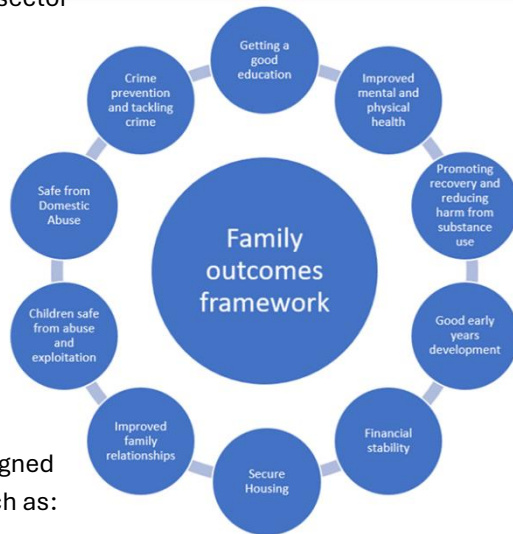
For more information on Merton's Youth Parliament, you can follow us on Instagram using the handle [@merton_youth_parliament](#) or email the Participation and Engagement team on youth.participation@merton.gov.uk

Our Children’s Trust

Merton Children’s Trust is a partnership made up of people and services working towards making Merton the best place for children to grow up, study, work and socialise in. This includes:

- Children, young people and families
- Health providers
- Education settings
- Local authority – including services for children, families and adults, public health, environment, and sport & leisure.
- Voluntary & community sector
- Police

Across all our partnerships, we are working towards the 10 Supporting Families outcomes:



Our plan also remains closely aligned with other partnership plans, such as:

- [SEND Strategy](#)
- [Early Help Strategy](#)
- [Corporate Parenting Strategy](#)
- [Merton Safeguarding Children Partnership business plan.](#)

Our commitment to our children and young people

We will continue:

- **Being ambitious** – for our children and young people and enabling them to achieve their own ambitions.
- **Being inclusive** - in everything we do, to meet the needs of all our children and young people.
- **Collaborating** – working together, including with our children and young people, to deliver things in response to what we’ve heard and continue to hear.
- **Celebrating** – the diversity of our children and communities, and their achievements.
- **Improving** - learning about best practice across Merton and in other areas, to keep making our services better for children, young people and families.
- **Communicating** – sharing what we are doing and the difference it is making to the things children and young people told us “You Said... We Did”.

Did you know?



97% of Merton young people aged 16-17 are in education or training, the 5th best in England, and 97% of Merton pupils attended schools graded good or better by Ofsted in 2023.



Young people are part of Merton Council's Scrutiny Panels and Health & Wellbeing Board, working with and challenging staff and elected members.



Merton is one of the safest London boroughs and saw a reduction of 16.7% in knife offences and 25.1% in personal robbery at Jan 24 compared to previous 12 months*.



4 in 5 children in Reception and 2 in 3 children in Year 6 are at a healthy weight in Merton, similar to the national average.



2,488 children and young people living in Merton have Education, Health & Care Plans (4% of all 0 to 24-year-olds).



In Merton, 147 children are in care and there are 210 care experienced young adults - this is lower than national rates.



69% of 2-5-year-olds in Merton achieved a Good level of development in 2023, above the national average.



Children and young people who attend Merton schools perform better than their peers nationally in most exams and assessments, including those with SEND.

Developing the plan

May-June 2023

- Review of the Children & Young People Plan 2019-2023
- Consultation with Young Inspectors on survey

July-September 2023

- Survey shared with children, young people, families and stakeholders such as schools
- Focus groups delivered across the community, which included hearing from SEND young people

October-December 2023

- Analysis of survey and focus group findings
- Findings shared with the Children’s Trust Board in December for overview and next steps
- Findings shared with Merton Youth Parliament to support their campaign planning



February-March 2024

- Stakeholder workshop to highlight key findings and draft priorities
- Draft plan shared with the Children’s Trust Board

April-May 2024

- Revisions to draft plan made in preparation for the Children’s Trust Board in June

Understanding the plan

This page will help children, young people, and adults alike to understand what the plan is saying.

The next few pages show information about the six outcome areas for children and young people in Merton, which are:



Every year, the Children's Trust will build an annual action plan to show all the specific activities and tasks they will undertake to achieve these things. Young Inspectors and other young people will help to challenge services to make sure they are making a real difference and doing what they said they would!

These boxes show direct quotes from children and young people in Merton

Under each of these outcome areas, we have shown:

- **What we know about this in Merton** – this includes some key things that we know from data about children, young people and families in Merton, relating to the theme of the outcome area.
- **What we have already achieved** – this shows some of the things we are proud of achieving from the Children & Young People Plan for 2019-2023.
- **What our Children & Young People said** – this shows the things that children and young people told us were important to them about the outcome area. This is from when we spoke to them about their experiences living, socialising, working and studying in Merton during 2023.
- **What we will do in response** – this shows the things that the Children's Trust and services working with children, young people and their families in Merton will do next, based on what children and young people told us.

Being Healthy

“live well mentally and physically.”

“dude, we need more skateparks.”

“Childrens activities outside of school are too expensive. In primary school the after-school clubs were too expensive as well.”

What we know about “Being Healthy” in Merton

An estimated 9% of children are living with Mental Health Disorders.

The detection rate for chlamydia was 2% of young people aged 15-24 years old - higher than those aged 25 years or above (0.26%), but similar to national rates for same age group.

1 in 5 children in Reception are living overweight or obese, and this rises to 1 in 3 children in Year 6.

57,000kg of food provided by the Council, Wimbledon Foodbank and Community Fridge Network between Oct 2022 and June 2023.

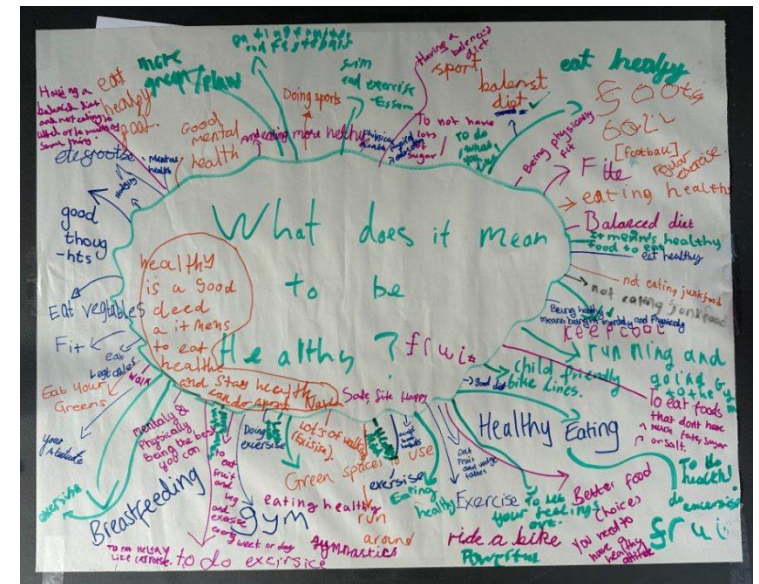
162 referrals to new Children and Young People’s Social Prescribing pilot by Oct 23; 75% for mental health.



On improving the mental health of children & young people

“More services and extra services just for children in care”

“An easy way for everyone to access support for mental health if they don’t have access to internet.”



Being Healthy

What we have already achieved

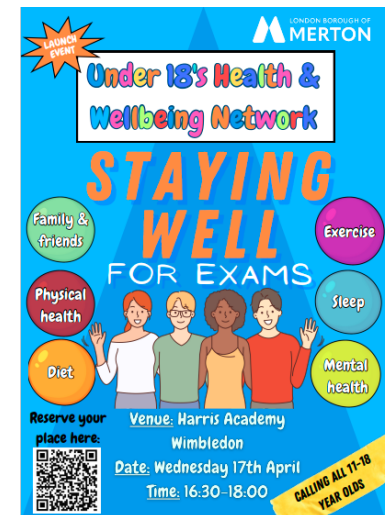
- All Merton schools have a linked mental health team
- Training on ‘Raising the Issue of Weight’ and Youth Mental Health First Aid for frontline staff working with children, young people and families
- Youth Mental Health Awareness Raising sessions offered to young people
- Children’s Social Prescribing and self-referring through Off the Record.
- Foodbanks in youth clubs, Food and Toiletries Pantry for Care Leavers, and health eating courses at special school

What our Children & Young People said

- Young people felt that schools overwhelmingly do provide them with opportunities to lead a healthy lifestyle.
- However, they felt the cost of healthy foods/drinks can prevent them from living a healthy lifestyle.
- Mental health was a clear priority, and more girls than boys feel as though their mental health is not supported in schools, colleges, or employment.
- Only 42% of young people reported that they would know which services to go to if they had a concern about sexual health.
- 22% of young people aged 16 and over do not know where to go if they were worried about their physical health

What we will do in response

- 1) Continue prioritising mental health and wellbeing, by ensuring current offer is promoted well and accessible to all young people who need it, and reviewing that it is meeting their needs, including encouraging membership of the Under 18 health and wellbeing network.
- 2) Focus on healthy eating in our education settings, and work with partners to increase access to affordable, healthy food.
- 3) Encourage young people to be physically active and get involved in sports/new activities through Borough of Sport.
- 4) Raise awareness with young people around sexual health and physical health, including where to go for support.



Staying Safe

What we know about “Staying Safe” in Merton

2,025 children were in need of help and protection during 2022-23, around 50% due to abuse or neglect. This is lower than seen nationally.

13,959 total notifiable offences recorded by the Police in Merton in the 12 months up to Sep 2023. Although this was an increase of 0.5%, it is lower than the London-wide increase of 5.7% and the rate of offences per 1,000 (67.6 compared to 101.7).

Merton has a very low rate of first time entrants into Youth Justice system, at 122 per 100,000 young people aged 10-17 in 2022, compared to 165 across London

110 young people up to age of 24 years received treatment for substance misuse from Catch 22 Risk & Resilience Service in 2022-23 in Merton.

There were 520 children living in households of the 546 cases that were discussed at Merton’s multi-agency domestic abuse panel (MARAC) during 2023-24.

“there are a lot of people about where ever you are so if you are in danger it is easy to call for help”



“Under the bridge near our school, I see people dealing drugs, vaping and smoking”



Drawn by: www.sandrahowgate.com

Staying Safe

What we have already achieved

- Workshops delivered to youth clubs, secondary schools, football coaching sessions, school staff and primary schools jointly with police on different themes including Stop & Search and transition to secondary school.
- Young people's voice within serious violence duty strategy and review on preventing the adultification of black children
- Set up VAWG (Violence Against Women and Girls) safety zones, enhanced police visibility, and ran bystander training for Youth Parliament
- School projects run by St Giles for young women and girls at risk of exploitation
- Fearless campaign to encourage young people to report crime anonymously



What our Children & Young People said

- Crime and Violence is a recurring theme that children and young people are concerned about
- Although most young people enjoy the green spaces and parks in Merton there were many recurring comments about safety in parks regarding cleanliness, gangs, crime and substance misuse
- Of the 20% of young people who felt there were unwelcoming places or spaces in their local community, substance misuse was one of the top four themes



What we will do in response

- 1) **Work with young people to make them feel safer in their local community and parks, including linking our Young Inspectors into our Community Safety Partnership's Violence Against Women & Girls and Safer Streets work.**
- 2) **Work with young people, including those at risk of offending, to increase take-up of positive opportunities.**
- 3) **Work with Public Health and health providers to deliver messaging around the risks of substance misuse and vaping.**
- 4) **Create more opportunities to build better relationships between our young people and MET police.**
- 5) **Improve communication with young people around public safety and promote ways for children and young people to report where they feel unsafe.**

Enjoying and Achieving

What we know about “Enjoying & Achieving” in Merton

69% of children in Merton achieve a good level of development in Early Years, which is lower than before the Pandemic.

Children from poorer backgrounds are at risk of poorer development. In Merton, children who are eligible for free school meals are more likely to underperform than all other pupils.

Merton has seven different libraries across the Borough.

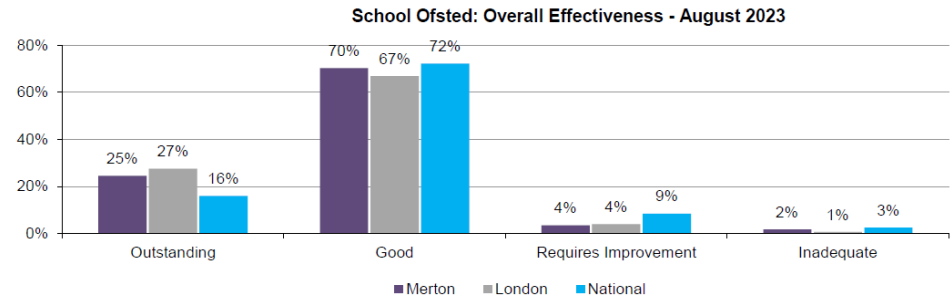
Around 4% of children in Merton have an Education, Health, and Care Plan which means they need additional support to achieve their goals.

The proportion of 16-17 year olds not in education, employment, or training is 2.5% which is better than the London average of 4.0%.

“Sometimes when I am stuck, they explain it in a way that makes more sense than just key words.”

“yes but it is hard as a kid there is so much pressure.”

“Not much explanation of how to bridge the gap from education to employment”



Enjoying and Achieving

What we have already achieved

- There has been a big focus on addressing racial inequalities, including refreshing the Black Lives Matter and Race Equalities Champions Forums.
- Combatting digital exclusion through purchasing 240 laptops for children and young people, and continuing to work with the Department for Education and Dons Local Action to ensure children have digital access.
- 720 enrollments onto the Duke of Edinburgh's Award in 2022-23, with over 10,764 hours of volunteering,
- A successful Holidays Activities and Food programme with over 1,800 children participating over Summer 2023.
- A fantastic Beat The Street Initiative with over 22,300 residents participating.



What our Children & Young People said

- Children feel mostly supported in doing well and succeeding. Some children don't always feel supported, and this is more likely for children who are aged between 13-15 years old, boys are less likely to feel supported than girls and non-binary children, and are more likely to be from a white European background than other ethnicities.
- Children think that Merton is a good and fun place to study, but they do feel stressed, under pressure, and that there aren't enough opportunities to achieve and do well.
- Libraries are a key area of underdevelopment in Merton, with over half of children saying that they never visit their local library.
- Children care about living in a clean and healthy environment, feeling supported in succeeding emotionally and academically, and with opportunities in the future.



What we will do in response

- 1) Continue to support all of our children to be and feel included in their education and employment at all stages.
- 2) Keep focusing on improving opportunities to better prepare children and young people for their next stages in education and adult life, including for the groups of young people who feel less supported.
- 3) We will better promote our library offer to young people and their families.
- 4) Continue working towards every child attending good or better rated provisions.
- 5) Increase the number of young volunteers working in community programmes.



Getting Involved, Having a Say



“I'm a 14 year old Secondary School student, I don't have any impact on politics”

“i was school council and i made some amazing changes”

What we know about “Getting Involved, Having A Say” in Merton

Over 2350 children and young people responded to our 2023 survey to influence this plan

Over 130 young people engaged in our youth voice forums during 2023, including Youth Parliament and Our Voice children in care council, alongside our new SEND Youth Advisory Forum and primary-age Children's Parliament

Created a new Expert by Experience Trainer role for care-experienced young people to deliver training to professionals

Strong parent/carer group Kids First, with representatives on 12 partnership meetings and projects including the SEND Governance Board

8 Young Inspectors working for the council, who are part of the council's key decision-making meetings and projects, including for children's services, the safeguarding children partnership and public health

“they are good organisations which help children but need more children to make more of a difference”



“i dont think our voices are getting heard much from just surveys”



“i havent seen anything happen as a result.”

“Everyone will be happier in the end as absolutely everyone has a say”

Getting Involved, Having a Say

What we have already achieved

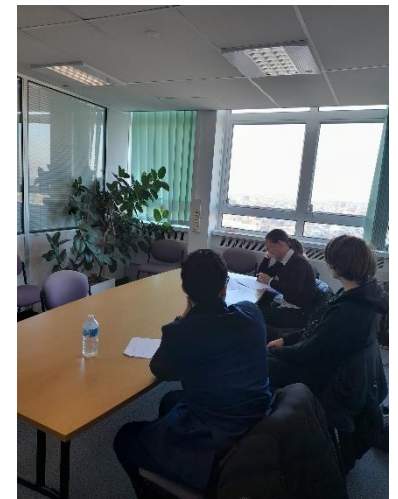
- Created new engagement platforms to hear from more children & young people; these include having a presence on Instagram, attendance at events such as Mitcham Carnival, and launching two newsletters for young people
- Young Inspectors delivered new pledges for care-experienced children & young people on immigration and moving home with dignity
- Created a bespoke new role for young people with care-experienced, titled Expert by Experience Trainers
- SEND Youth Advisory Forum members met with decision-makers and Councillors who sit on the SEND Governance Board
- Merton Youth Parliament chairs co-delivered the MET Police's 'New MET for London Youth Event'

What our Children & Young People said

- 40% of young people felt they had enough opportunities to have a say in how the local community and the wider borough of Merton is run; 37% were unsure and 23% said they didn't.
- Although 67% of young people who responded had heard of any of the “having a say” opportunities listed in the survey, 33% had not.
- Children and young people who are Age 13+, have a disability or diagnosed with SEN are amongst the least likely to feel like they have a say in how the local community and the wider borough of Merton is run

What we will do in response

- 1) Share ideas and best practice in participation and engagement across our communities and services.
- 2) Prioritise young people’s voices being heard when decisions are made and encourage young people to get involved in local democracy.
- 3) Develop a communication plan to feedback to young people on what difference their views are making (You Said, We did).
- 4) Encourage Board members to get involved in the delivery of youth voice opportunities, working closely with young people, and considering ways to better gather the voices of younger children and their parents/carers.
- 5) Work with young people who have a disability or special educational need to create better opportunities for them to have a say on their local community and how services are run in Merton.



Supporting Futures

What we know about “Supporting Futures” in Merton

83.3% of Merton residents aged 16-64 years old are considered economically active.

12% of children in Merton live in absolute low-income families, which can affect wellbeing and attainment but overall most children in Merton are healthy and have a good start in life.

House prices in Merton are increasing, which is worsening the affordability.

In Merton 2020-21, 44% of children in care's emotional wellbeing was identified as a cause for concern. This is higher than the London value of 30.5%.

The indirect impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic is still presenting challenges to children across the Borough.

"Mabey in school still teach normal lessons but maybe we could also do some lessons about earning money and things like that"

When asked *Looking to the future, what do you think is important for children and young people to succeed?*

“more available jobs and affordable food and housing..”

“Cleaner air, cleaner streets and better government”

“Job opportunities for care leavers etc”

“Inspiration!!”



Supporting Futures

What we have already achieved

- SEND Youth Advisory Forum met with colleagues from Transport for London to highlight the challenges of travelling independently or across Merton’s infrastructure
- Peer-to-peer leaflet created by care leaver’s forum to support those leaving care and moving into their own homes
- Supporting young people to develop their skills through T-level work experience placements at Merton Council;
- Focus on offer for SEND young people, including the HAF programme and establishing SEND Employability Forum
- Motivate Merton programme led by Merton Connected & the council, with 10 partners, offered support to 313 vulnerable young people in Merton in Year 1, including 121 mentoring, employment guidance and independent living skills
- My Things Matter Pledge for care leavers and transitioning into new places

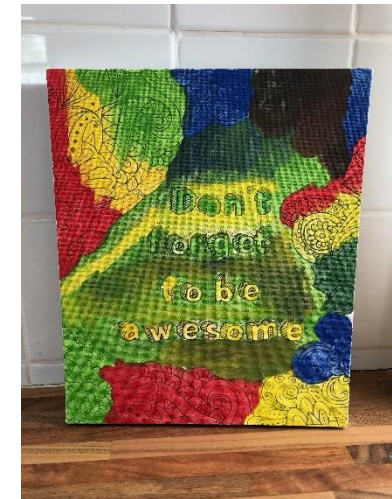


What our Children & Young People said

- We found that most young people who are supported by professionals have a good relationship with them.
- There is confidence that children are getting the skills they need to become independent, however they don’t always feel listened to or supported.
- We found that overall, young people in Merton were content with the support they were getting in building up life skills but there are specific concerns such as support for carers, carer leavers, and better communication overall.
- Children want better communication to know about opportunities available.
- Children also want to be heard and involved in decision-making.

What we will do in response

- 1) **Continue strengthening our partnership working across services for young people to support our young people as they transition to adulthood, including for our care leavers.**
- 2) **Clearer, more easily accessible information on education, employment & training opportunities, including through work experience and apprenticeship opportunities and improved careers advice.**
- 3) **Improve access to financial support and helping young people make informed choices.**
- 4) **Embed Supporting Families Outcome Framework to move towards whole family working.**
- 5) **We will work with young carers to improve how we support them and their families.**



My Merton

“There is a lot going into the air, but I am not sure what Merton is doing to stop it”



“I want more spaces available to people like me!” – disabled children

What we know about “My Merton”

5,000 residents took part in Merton's Big Sports Day in 2023

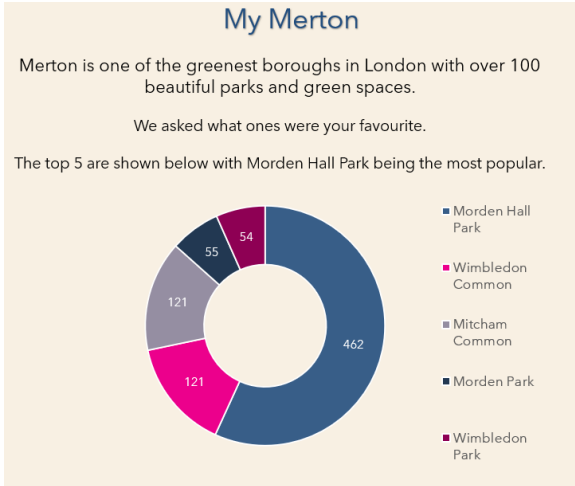
18,175 people played our Beat The Street game for a school team, and 46% of less active children became more active

2022 monitoring results confirmed that air pollution in Merton still exceeds the National Air Quality objectives in some locations, almost entirely along main roads and associated with traffic.

Merton has one of the highest proportions of green space out of the 32 London boroughs, but it is not equally distributed across the borough.

Transport accessibility across the Borough is uneven, with transport links generally better in the West compared to the East.

“Free places and things to do/visit.”
(When asked “What would you like to change about Merton?”)



What we have already achieved

- Improvement works to Merton's youth centres and anti-social behaviour work in schools
- Young people's voices heard in air quality plan and Schools Street scheme set up with traffic exclusion zones
- Environmental subgroup of the Merton Youth Parliament set up in 2022; focus on reducing litter in green spaces
- Merton Youth Partnership working across the community to better support young people e.g. mentoring scheme
- Borough of Sport ambitions launched and lots of activity underway to encourage young people to be active



What our Children & Young People said

- Air pollution and climate change are a concern. Many felt they did not know what Merton is doing about it.
- Crime and Violence is a recurring theme that children are concerned about
- The cost of living crisis is having an impact across the borough with many wanting free things to do and places to visit accessible to everyone
- It is felt that the cleanliness of areas in Merton make children and young people feel unwelcome and unsafe
- Children and young people enjoy the green spaces and parks in Merton with the majority feeling that they are looked after well. There were, however, many things about parks that make young people feel unsafe



What we will do in response

- 1) Promote a healthier and safer environment across the borough, including considering ways for young people to get involved in keeping their local community spaces clean and tidy, and designing spaces that work for them
- 2) Work with partners to combat climate change and challenge poor air quality, with a focus on spaces that young people spend lots of their time in
- 3) Review and promote our local offer for young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) with young people and their families, with the aim of providing a range of affordable activities that meet young people's needs
- 4) Promote a range of fun and affordable activities, including through our Borough of Sport and statutory youth offer.
- 5) Promote Merton Family Hub - connecting families and young people with access to help, when and where they need it - and enabling the best Start for Life for babies and younger children



Next steps

Develop an annual action plan:

Each year, agencies and services who work with children, young people and families across Merton will pull together an action plan showing how they will deliver the activities listed in this plan. These are listed under “What we will do in response” for each outcome area and based on what young people told us.



Feedback on what difference this is making:

We will share regular updates on the progress we are making to deliver what young people have told us, via the council and partner social media platforms and other forums like our Youth Parliament and Our Voice children in care council.



Continue to hear from you:

You will also be able to keep feeding back to us and sharing your ideas for what’s next, through various forums as outlined above and through your Young Inspectors.



In the meantime, if you would like to find out more about the plan or ways you can get involved in this work, please email youth.participation@merton.gov.uk or message us on Instagram @myvoicemerton