

Thurrock - An ambitious and collaborative community which is proud of its heritage and excited by its diverse opportunities and future

Corporate Parenting Committee

The meeting will be held at **7.00 pm** on **1 June 2021**

Council Chamber, Civic Offices, New Road, Grays, Essex, RM17 6SL.

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Arrangements have been made for the press and public to watch the meeting live via the Council's online webcast channel: www.thurrock.gov.uk/webcast

Membership:

Councillors Abbie Akinbohun (Chair), Jennifer Smith (Vice-Chair), Adam Carter, Susan Little, Sara Muldowney, Georgette Polley, Jane Potheary and Kairen Raper

Chair of the Children in Care Council

Vice Chair of the Children in Care Council

Annie Guidotti, Thurrock Open Door

Sharon Smith, Chair, The One Team, Foster Carer Association

Jenny Josling, Vice-Chair, The One Team, Foster Carer Association

Substitutes:

Councillors John Kent, Maureen Pearce, Joy Redsell and Elizabeth Rigby

Agenda

Open to Public and Press

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To approve as a correct record the minutes of the Corporate Parenting Committee meeting held on 2 March 2021.

3 Items of Urgent Business

To receive additional items that the Chair is of the opinion should be considered as a matter of urgency, in accordance with Section 100B (4) (b) of the Local Government Act 1972.

4 Declaration of Interests

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Queries regarding this Agenda or notification of apologies:

Please contact Kenna Victoria Healey, Senior Democratic Services Officer by sending an email to Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk

Agenda published on: **21 May 2021**

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DECLARING INTERESTS FLOWCHART – QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF

Breaching those parts identified as a pecuniary interest is potentially a criminal offence

Helpful Reminders for Members

- *Is your register of interests up to date?*
- *In particular have you declared to the Monitoring Officer all disclosable pecuniary interests?*
- *Have you checked the register to ensure that they have been recorded correctly?*

When should you declare an interest at a meeting?

- **What matters are being discussed at the meeting?** (including Council, Cabinet, Committees, Subs, Joint Committees and Joint Subs); or
- If you are a Cabinet Member making decisions other than in Cabinet **what matter is before you for single member decision?**



Does the business to be transacted at the meeting

- relate to; or
- likely to affect

any of your registered interests and in particular any of your Disclosable Pecuniary Interests?

Disclosable Pecuniary Interests shall include your interests or those of:

- your spouse or civil partner's
- a person you are living with as husband/ wife
- a person you are living with as if you were civil partners

where you are aware that this other person has the interest.

A detailed description of a disclosable pecuniary interest is included in the Members Code of Conduct at Chapter 7 of the Constitution. **Please seek advice from the Monitoring Officer about disclosable pecuniary interests.**

What is a Non-Pecuniary interest? – this is an interest which is not pecuniary (as defined) but is nonetheless so significant that a member of the public with knowledge of the relevant facts, would reasonably regard to be so significant that it would materially impact upon your judgement of the public interest.

Pecuniary

If the interest is not already in the register you must (unless the interest has been agreed by the Monitoring Officer to be sensitive) disclose the existence and nature of the interest to the meeting

If the Interest is not entered in the register and is not the subject of a pending notification you must within 28 days notify the Monitoring Officer of the interest for inclusion in the register

Unless you have received dispensation upon previous application from the Monitoring Officer, you must:

- **Not participate or participate further in any discussion of the matter at a meeting;**
- **Not participate in any vote or further vote taken at the meeting; and**
- **leave the room while the item is being considered/voted upon**

If you are a Cabinet Member you may make arrangements for the matter to be dealt with by a third person but take no further steps

Non- pecuniary

Declare the nature and extent of your interest including enough detail to allow a member of the public to understand its nature



You may participate and vote in the usual way but you should seek advice on Predetermination and Bias from the Monitoring Officer.

Our Vision and Priorities for Thurrock

An ambitious and collaborative community which is proud of its heritage and excited by its diverse opportunities and future.

1. **People** – a borough where people of all ages are proud to work and play, live and stay
 - High quality, consistent and accessible public services which are right first time
 - Build on our partnerships with statutory, community, voluntary and faith groups to work together to improve health and wellbeing
 - Communities are empowered to make choices and be safer and stronger together

2. **Place** – a heritage-rich borough which is ambitious for its future
 - Roads, houses and public spaces that connect people and places
 - Clean environments that everyone has reason to take pride in
 - Fewer public buildings with better services

3. **Prosperity** – a borough which enables everyone to achieve their aspirations
 - Attractive opportunities for businesses and investors to enhance the local economy
 - Vocational and academic education, skills and job opportunities for all
 - Commercial, entrepreneurial and connected public services

Minutes of the Meeting of the Corporate Parenting Committee held on 2 March 2021 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillors Elizabeth Rigby (Chair), Steve Liddiard (Vice-Chair), Daniel Chukwu, Barry Johnson, Sue Shinnick and Jennifer Smith

Annie Guidotti, Thurrock Open Door
Sharon Smith, Chair, The One Team, Foster Carer Association
Jenny Josling, Vice Chair, The One Team, Foster Carer Association

Apologies: Shelia Murphey, Director of Children's Services
Rafael Antunes, Chair, Children in Care Council
Christopher Bennett, Vice Chair, Children in Care Council

In attendance: Joseph Tynan, Assistant Director of Children's Services
Naintara Khosla, Strategic Lead for Looked After Children
Dan Jones, Service Manager for Fostering and Adoption
Mandy Moore, Strategic Lead for Business Intelligence
Keeley Pullen, Head Teacher for the Virtual School
Kenna-Victoria Healey, Senior Democratic Services Officer

Before the start of the Meeting, all present were advised that the meeting was being live streamed to the Council's online webcast channel.

33. Minutes

The minutes of the Corporate Parenting Committee held on 5 January 2021 were approved as a correct record.

34. Items of Urgent Business

There were no items of Urgent Business.

35. Declaration of Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

36. Children's Social Care Performance

The Strategic Lead for Business Intelligence presented the report on pages 15 to 32 of the agenda to Members which provided information on the performance across children looked after and after-care. In doing so she touched on a number of topics including the number of children looked after,

care leavers, looked after children missing episodes, Initial Health Assessments, the number of children adopted, permanency planning, Care Leavers in Education Employment or Training, and Fostering placements.

Councillor Smith thanked officers for the report and enquired as to the percentage of children who were returned to live with their birth parents following foster care. It was explained unfortunately officers did not have the information to hand however it would be circulated outside of the meeting.

Members enquired as to the measures in place to reduce the number of missing episodes for looked after children. The Strategic Lead for Looked After Children explained each missing episode had been recorded within the report and this could sometimes be as little as half an hour to an hour where a child or young person was late home or not home and passed a curfew. She continued to explain there was a strong robust process in place along with joint working with a multi-agency partnership. The Committee further heard there were weekly missing meetings with partners such as Essex police and liaison with the Thurrock community safety colleagues to discuss any missing episodes.

It was enquired as to the reasons some children went missing and officers advised having spoken and engaged with young people sometimes, they found it difficult to be away from their birth family and sometimes they just wanted some time on their own. It was explained there were a number of reasons for a child to go missing, however each child had a Return Home Interview with an independent person, someone who was not be their social worker, so to be able to understand why the child went missing.

RESOLVED that Members of the Corporate Parenting Committee;

1.1 Noted the areas of improvement in Children's Social Care and note the work that is undertaken to ensure good and improving performance.

1.2 Noted the impact of COVID 19 on performance.

37. Health Assessments Corporate Parenting Committee

The Strategic Lead for Looked After Children presented the report and in doing so updated Members on Thurrock's timeliness of Initial Health Assessment and Review Health Assessments.

She continued to advise that when a child or young person came into care, they must have an Initial Health Assessment, this was a statutory requirement for all looked after children. The health assessment was to be completed within 20 working days of the child coming into care, with Social Care providing a referral within five working days and notifying health colleagues of a child becoming looked after.

Members heard how in October 2020 twelve Initial Health Assessment appointments were required and all but one was completed within the timescale, in November 2020 three out of twelve Initial Health Assessment appointments were delayed, two of these were the children who were placed out of the Thurrock area, and in December 2020 there were two out of six children who did not receive their Initial Health Assessment within timescale. Officers explained that moving forwards they were committed to reaching 90% plus of all Initial Health Assessments to be held within timescale and were working closely with health colleagues to ensure this happened.

Councillor Chukwu enquired as to why there was a delay in the health assessment as mentioned within the report. The Strategic Lead for Looked After Children explained that the children in question were placed outside of the area and therefore escalation was made to the health team where the children were residing highlighting the importance of their Initial Health Assessment. She continued to explain if necessary and there were appointments available, Thurrock children would be brought back into the area for their assessment to be completed.

RESOLVED:

That Corporate Parenting Members noted the areas of improvement in Children's Social Care and the work that is being undertaken with Health colleagues to ensure good and improving performance with IHAs and RHAs.

38. Support Provided to Foster Carers during Covid-19

The Service Manager for Fostering and Adoption presented the report to members on pages 41 to 46 of the agenda. In doing so he explained that Foster Carers had a unique role to play throughout the pandemic. They were supporting children not only being placed into care but also with being in and out of school and the fostering team were doing the best they could to support each foster family's individual needs.

He continued by thanking all of Thurrock's Foster Carers for their continued support and for opening their homes to the borough's children who needed it most.

The Chair of Committee Councillor Rigby, thanked officers for the report and echoed officers thanks to Foster Carers for all of the support and care they were giving to the young people in their care.

RESOLVED

That Corporate Parenting Members were informed about the support provided to Foster Carers approved by Thurrock Council during the Covid-19 Pandemic

39. Update on the actions of the Virtual School service during lockdown

The Headteacher of the virtual school for looked after children presented the report to members which provided an overview of the work the virtual school had been doing to promote the educational outcomes of looked after children during the lockdown period.

Members heard all early year's settings had remained open to all children and were currently expected to operate as normal, it was explained they were currently 265 young people aged between 3 and 18 who are eligible for accessing educational placements at different establishments across the borough.

It was further explained for preschool and school age children, social workers had been discussing with families the individual circumstances surrounding school attendance, a joint decision had been made with parents to consider the educational need for looked after children in getting them back into the classroom. Most post 16 college students had been offered online educational packages by the colleges with some students being able to access face-to-face learning and having access to their college's pastoral team should it be required.

The Headteacher of the virtual school continued to advise Members that personal education plan meetings were continuing to take place as normal to ensure that the statutory part of the care plan was maintained and education was formally monitored throughout this time. This meant that teachers were able to monitor attendance, educational targets and assessment data to help promote good educational outcomes.

The Chair of the Committee Councillor the Rigby enquired how looked after children were performing with regard to education and learning. It was explained that children were missing their friends at school and the social side of school, and although schools are finding it challenging to complete assessments with the lockdown, however measures had been put in place for these to continue.

RESOLVED

That the Corporate Parenting Committee used the information provided in this report to evaluate the response of the Virtual School team and to scrutinise the support that is being provided to our service users.

40. Corporate Parenting Communicating with Members

The Strategic Lead for Looked After Children addressed Members outlining to them the roles and responsibilities of being a Corporate Parent. She continued by explaining Thurrock had a good approach to its Corporate Parenting role, providing information to Members and looked after children, their progress and the performance of the children look after, placements and after-care service.

She continued by stating to be a good Corporate Parent required the understanding and knowledge to know what was happening to young people and children within the council's care. For Thurrock this meant insuring information collected by agencies about children in care and the care experience by young people, was used to the best advantage of its young people and therefore shared information with partners appropriately.

It was commented by Members that the Councillor role for being a Corporate Parent was not understood by all Elected Members. It was therefore suggested that mandatory training should be scheduled for all newly Elected Members. Councillor Johnson commented that he had visited the Children in Care Council in his role as Portfolio Holder for Housing and should he continue with this role he was more than happy to attend another meeting to discuss any issue with the young people who attended. The representative for Thurrock Open Door who also attended the Children in Care Council welcomed Members to attend their meetings which were held monthly, and it was agreed details of these meeting would be circulated outside of the meeting.

During discussions Members heard how officers were focusing on new marketing strategies such as social media to advertise for new foster carers. Members heard that the foster carer community was very supportive of each other and officers hoped to increase this. The Vice-Chair of the One Team Foster Care Association assured Members social media outlets were used for advertising and the links for such advertising could be shared. She continued by saying she was pleased to see the positive nature in seeking new platforms to advertise on and was excited to see the new branding launch.

RESOLVED that:

- 1.1 Members are updated on their Corporate Parenting Responsibilities.**
- 1.2 Considered and noted the options for raising the profile of Corporate Parenting activities in Thurrock.**

41. Corporate Parenting Committee Work Programme 2020/2021

The Committee discussed the work programme, and agreed to a number of reports being included on the Work Programme including:

- Childrens Service Performance Report
- Update on the Youth Offending Service, the Youth Justice Plan and the role of the Service for Children Looked After
- Report for Members on Missing Children, Child Exploitation, Return Home Interviews and Contextual Safeguarding focussed on Children Looked After
- Thurrock Fostering Service: Recruitment

RESOLVED

That the Corporate Parenting Committee agreed for the Work Programme to be updated and include the reports discussed.

The meeting finished at 8.19 pm

Approved as a true and correct record

CHAIR

DATE

Any queries regarding these Minutes, please contact Democratic Services at Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk

1 June 2021		ITEM: 5
Corporate Parenting Committee		
Children's Social Care Performance		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Non-key	
Report of: Anna Watkins, Business Intelligence Analyst Mandy Moore, Business Intelligence & Data Analytics Manager		
Accountable Assistant Director: Janet Simon, Interim Assistant Director of Children's Social Care and Early Help		
Accountable Director: Sheila Murphy, Corporate Director of Children's Services		
This report is: Public		

Executive Summary

This report provides information on the performance across Children Looked After and Aftercare. The overall performance for the service is good and this is within the context of COVID-19 and the lockdown restrictions which have been in place over the period April 2020 to March 2021.

Thurrock continues to provide services to approximately 301 Children Looked After (CLA) and approximately 286 Care Leavers. Children and young people are visited regularly and there are notable improvements with the management of missing children, which reflects good partnership with the police and Thurrock Community Safety. The work with health colleagues continues to ensure that there is a focus on Initial Health Assessments for children entering into care.

The Care Leaving Service reflects a trajectory of good performance. There continues to be a focus on continuing improvement of the service, particularly to keep in touch and support young people into employment or education and to ensure they have the right accommodation to meet their needs.

Children are generally placed with foster carers or where possible family members. To support children being placed locally in their communities and recruit foster carers there is a new fostering brand and recruitment campaign.

It has been previously reported to Corporate Parenting Committee that permanency planning has been particularly impacted by COVID-19. There have been delays in timetabling for final court hearings. The court have agreed to prioritise cases where the care plan is one of adoption, to prevent the delay for younger children in court cases.

1. Recommendation(s)

1.1 That Members note the areas of improvement in Children’s Social Care and note the work that is undertaken to ensure good and improving performance.

1.2 Note the impact of COVID 19 on performance.

2. Introduction and Background

2.1 This report provides a summary of Children’s Social Care performance. It highlights key demand indicators for Children Looked After such as the number of children who are looked after, benchmarking data and key performance indicators.

2.2 Thurrock produces a number of data sets and performance reports to meet its internal and external reporting requirements. The data in this report is from the At a Glance monthly performance report, regional benchmarking data and national data sets. External reporting requirements include the annual statutory data return to the Department for Education (DfE) that all Local Authorities must provide.

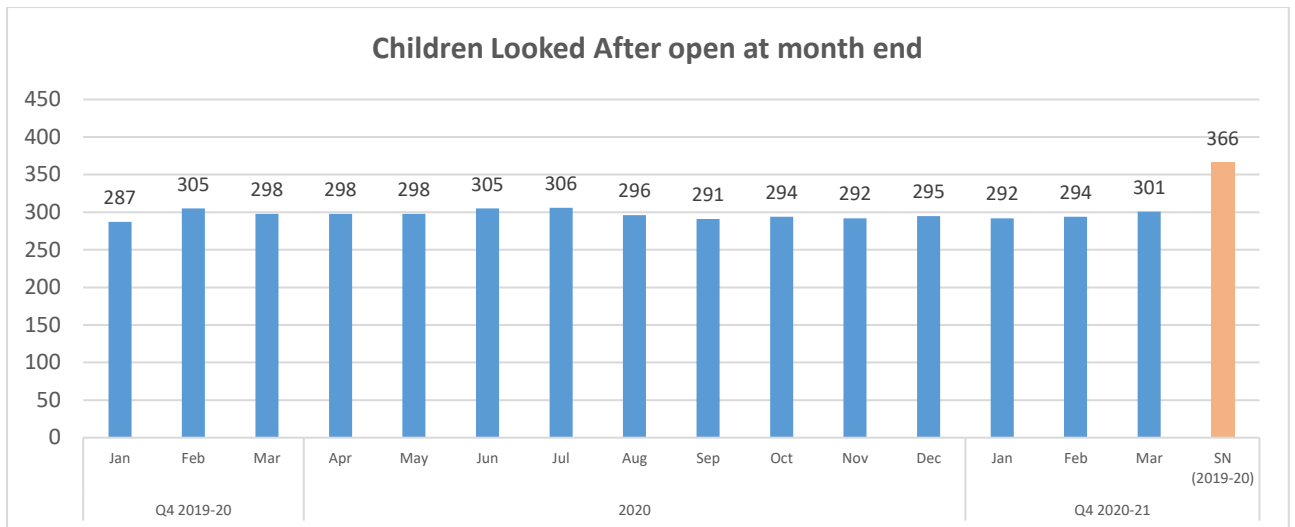
2.3 This data has been presented and discussed with the Children & Families Performance Group.

2.4 Teams and Managers use the data to understand and respond to changes in activity levels, to monitor and respond to the quality and timeliness of services and to collate information about how well children are doing. The information is also discussed with front line workers.

3. Performance Data for Children Looked After

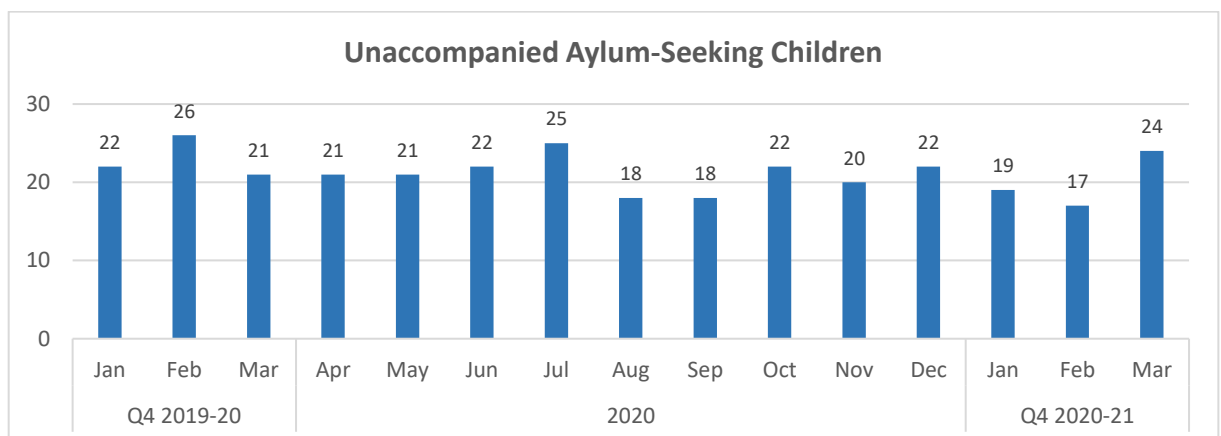
3.1 Number of Children Looked After (CLA)

The graph below shows the number of children who were Looked After at the end of each month. The numbers have remained stable. The small fluctuations are normal and to be expected. There is monitoring of children who may need to become Looked After and there are regular reviews of children entering care. Where possible, children are returned to their family where safe and appropriate.



3.2 Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC)

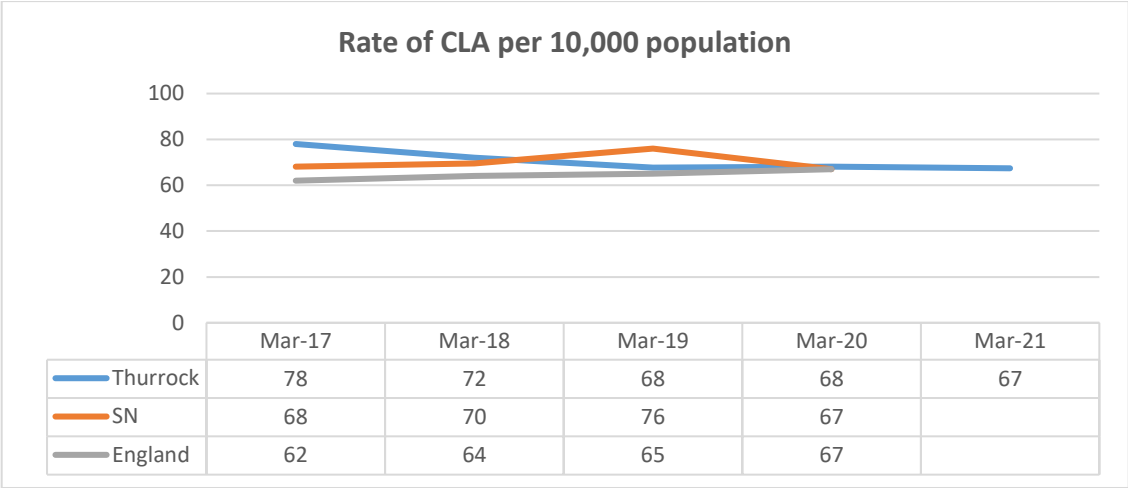
UASC are a subset of the Children Looked After number above. Local Authorities through agreement have determined a simple formula to ensure a fair distribution of the responsibility for looking after unaccompanied children. Each authority's ceiling for UASC is 0.07% based on an analysis of total child population which for Thurrock is now 31 children. There has been a reduction in the entry of UASC into Essex Ports as the preferred route appears to have been through Dover. However in the last quarter we have had 9 new arrivals in Thurrock which has shown in an increased number of UASC in our CLA cohort to 24.



3.3 The Rate of CLA per 10,000 population

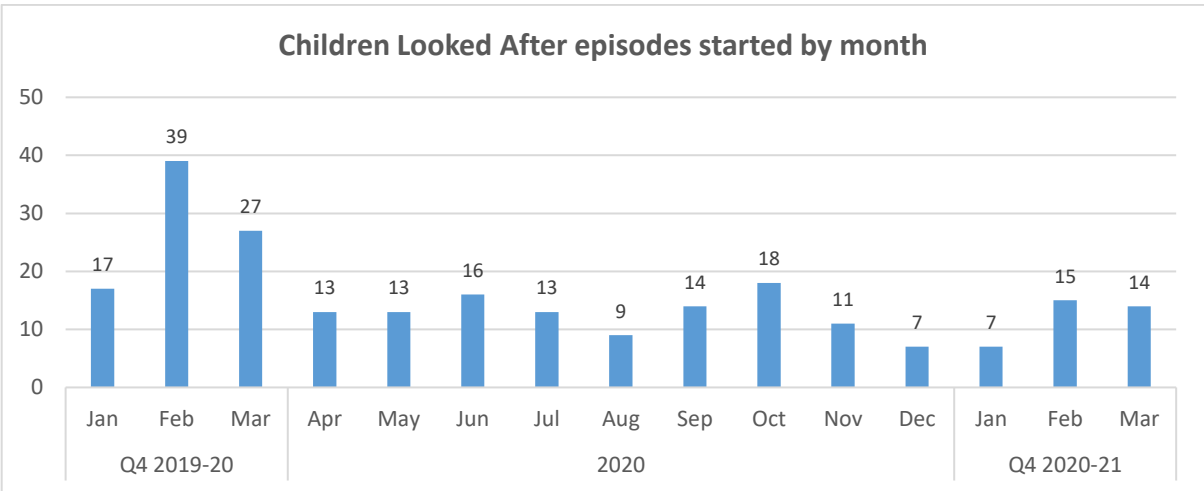
The graph below shows the rate of Children Looked After per 10,000 population of under 18 year olds in Thurrock. At the end of March 2021 there were 301

Children Looked After in Thurrock which shows a rate of 67 per 10,000 of children who are looked after. Based on benchmarking data, Thurrock is in line with the Statistical Neighbour average of 67 and the England average of 67 as at the end of March 2020.



3.4 CLA episodes started in month

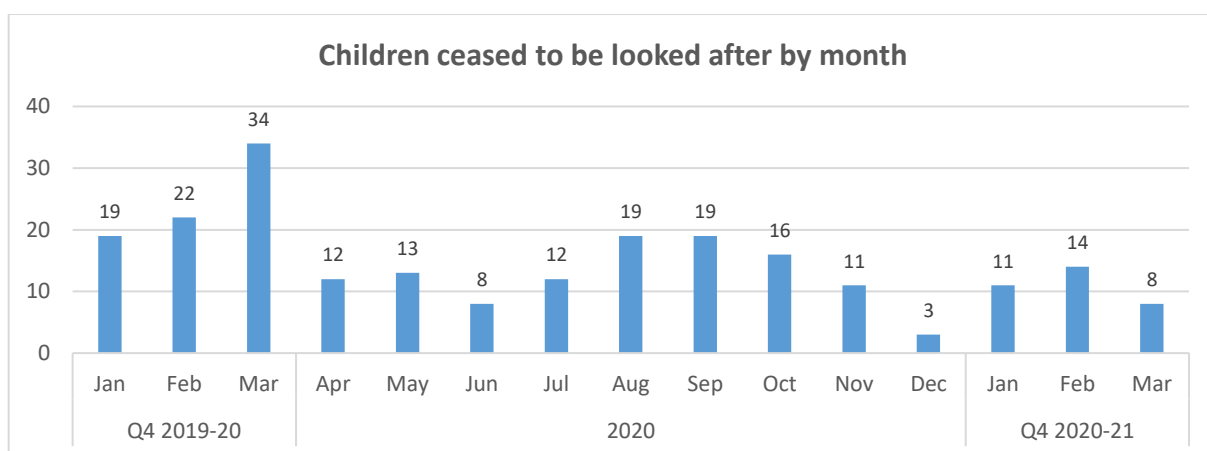
It is normal for the numbers of children entering care to fluctuate. The fluctuation and the relatively small numbers make it difficult to identify significant trends. However, there has been a decrease in the number of children entering care since the start of the pandemic. For example, 36 children started to be looked after between January and March 2021. This compares to 83 children who started to be looked after between January and March 2020. All cases are reviewed to ensure the correct children come in to care and court proceedings are only issued where necessary. The reduction in the numbers entering care may be related to the COVID 19 lockdown that was in place between January 2021 and March 2021. The numbers of children entering care is being monitored as lock down restrictions ease and the numbers of children open to Childrens Social Care may potentially increase.



3.5 CLA episodes ended in month

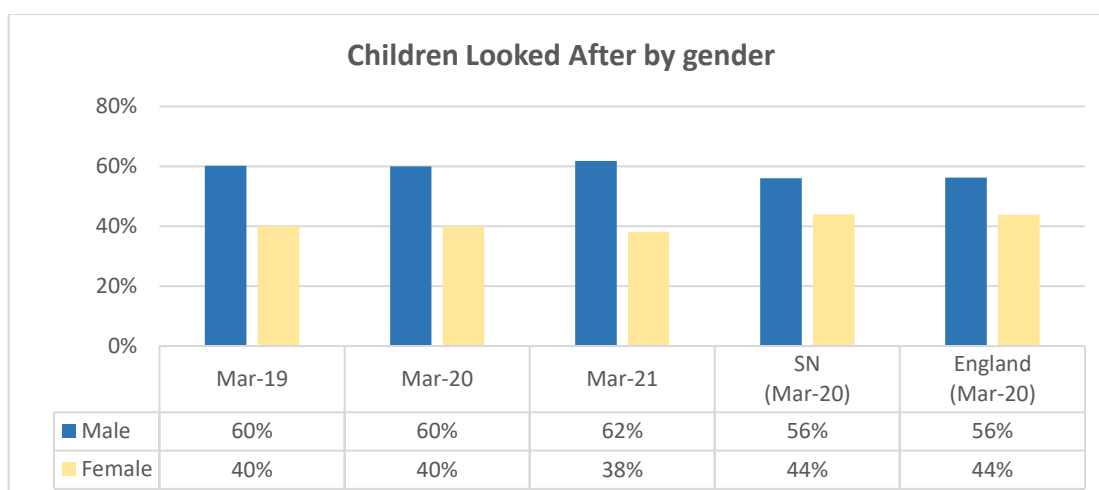
It is normal for the number of children leaving care to fluctuate. The fluctuation and the relatively small numbers make it difficult to identify significant trends. However, there has been a decrease in the number of children leaving care (and entering care) since the start of the pandemic. Between April 2020 and March 2021, 146 children ceased to be looked after compared to our statistical neighbour of 159 in 2019-20.

This decrease is partly due to delay in the timeliness of court proceedings, preventing children from leaving care and progressing to their permanent placement (Adoption, SGO or returning home).



3.6 CLA by gender

Based on the benchmarking data in 2019-20, the gender breakdown is in line with the Statistical Neighbour and England averages.

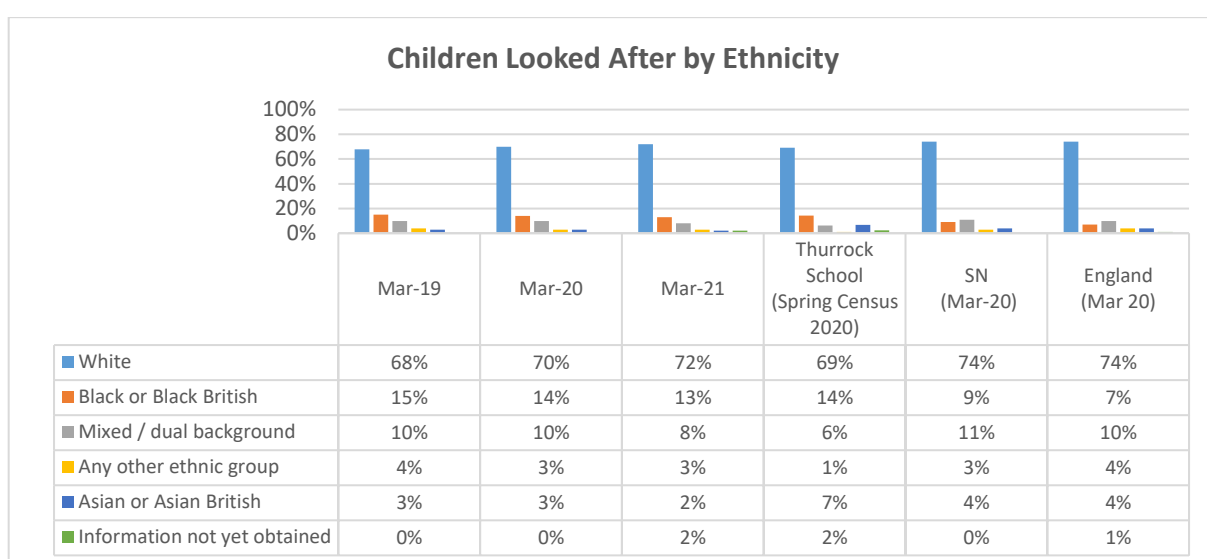


3.7 CLA by ethnicity

Statistical Neighbour and England averages are included. However, for Thurrock, school census data provides a more appropriate comparison, given the population of Thurrock.

Thurrock's Children Looked After are predominantly White which is in line with Thurrock's School Census in Spring 2020 and the Statistical Neighbour and England averages.

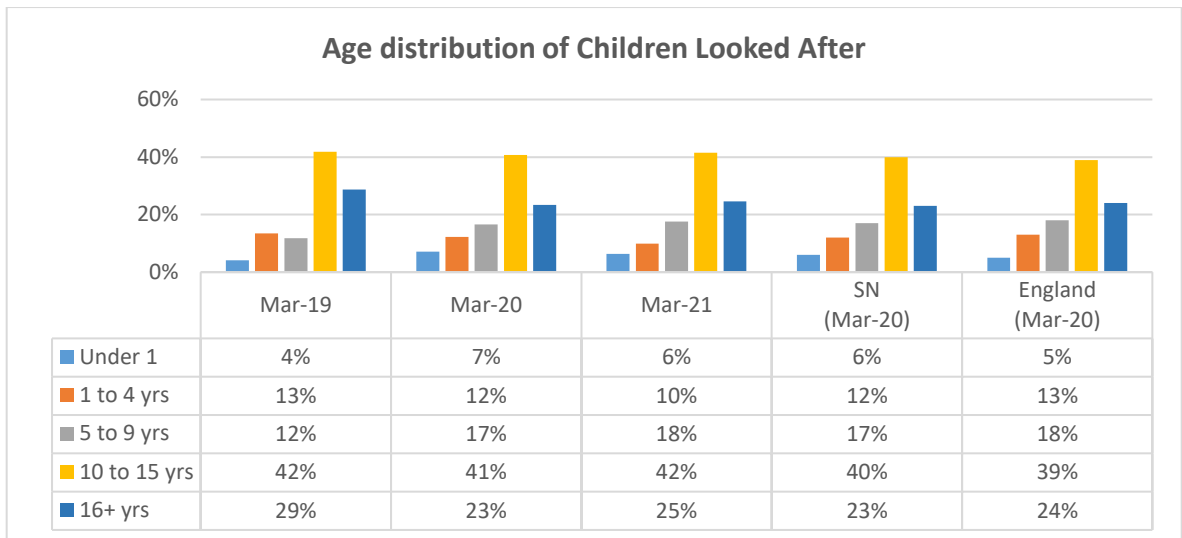
While the numbers of Children Looked After who are Asian/Asian British and Black/Black British have slightly decreased since March 2019, there have been no particular issues influencing this change.



3.8 CLA age profile

The age profile of the Children Looked After cohort remains mostly stable and in line with the Statistical Neighbour and England averages. Since 2019, there has been an increase in the number of children who are aged 5 to 9 years.

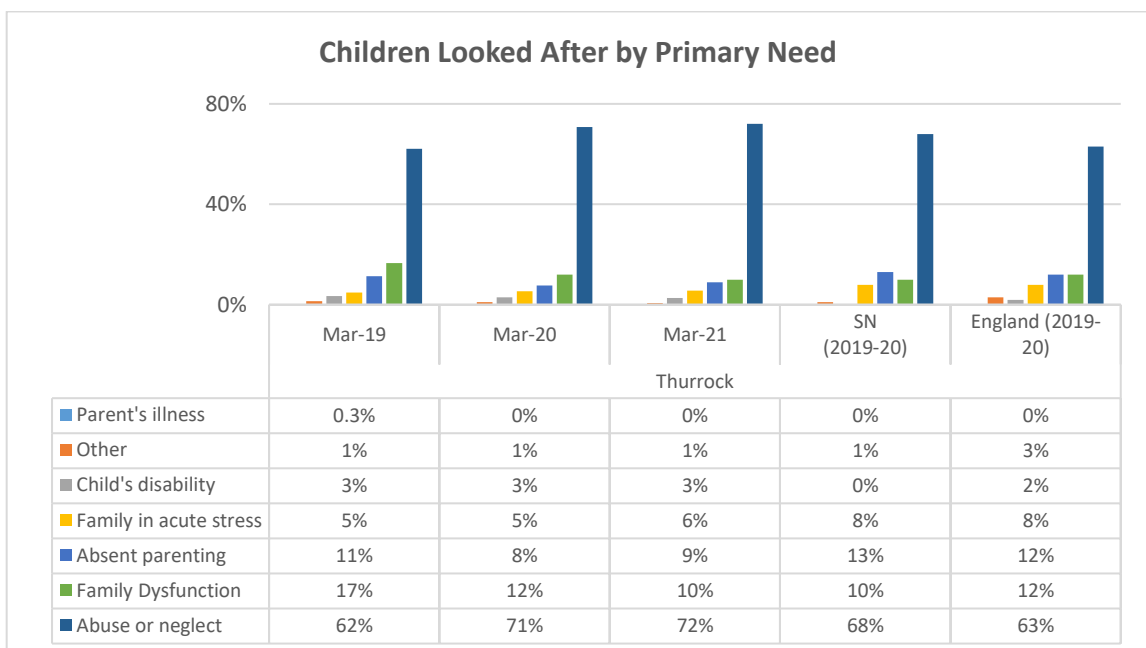
This has partly been caused by delays in final court hearings. Children are not able to move to their final permanent placement (SGO, Adoption) where court proceedings are continuing.



3.9 CLA by Category of Need

There has been a slight increase in the percentage of children becoming Looked After as a result of 'Abuse or Neglect'. The majority of children become Looked After as a result of the significant harm they are experiencing or likely to experience. Where possible, Social Care are providing support and intervention from Social Workers and the Families Together service to enable families to remain together and ensure that children only become looked after, when absolutely necessary. Thurrock works to minimise the use of the 'Other' category.

Local Authorities use slightly different definitions of the categories and this makes it hard to meaningfully benchmark.



The percentages in the graph above relate to 290 Children Looked After as at 31 March 2019, 298 children as at 31 March 2020 and 301 children as at 31 March 2021.

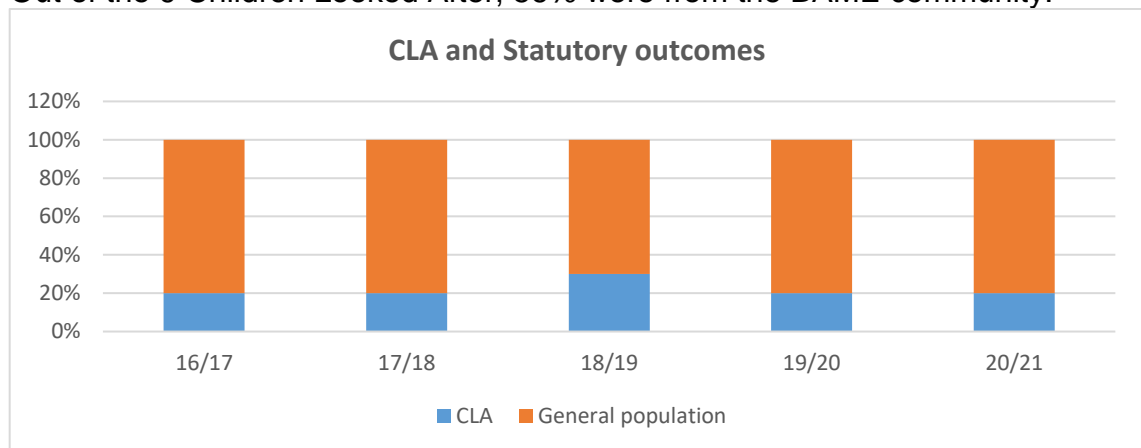
4. Number of CLA open to Youth Offending Service

4.1 Statutory Interventions

A statutory intervention is when a child has been convicted by the courts or made subject to a Youth Caution or Youth Conditional Caution and consequently has YOS intervention.

In 2020-21 (Financial Year April 20 – March 21) there were 46 children open to the Youth Offending Service on statutory outcomes, out of which 9 were Children Looked After, representing 20%. However, 2 of these children were looked after by other authorities and placed in Thurrock.

Out of the 9 Children Looked After, 56% were from the BAME community.



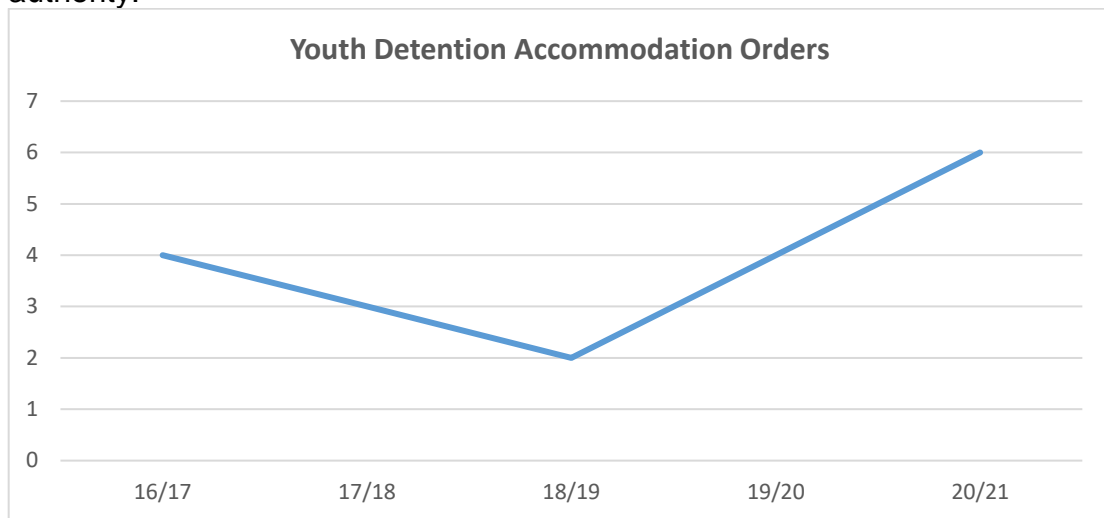
The above graph represents the percentage of Children Looked After versus the total number of young people in the Youth Justice System for the last five years. Despite an increase from 20% to 30% in 2018-19 the numbers of Children Looked After has been relatively static at around 20%. There were no notable reasons for the increase in 2018-19.

The throughput of the Youth Offending Service in 2020-21 has been significantly affected by COVID-19 and the closure of the Courts. This has resulted in delays of children being sentenced and lower numbers of young people being referred to YOS for statutory intervention.

4.2 Youth Detention Accommodation

Under the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012, any child that is made subject to a Youth Detention Accommodation Order (remand

in custody) by the Courts automatically becomes looked after by the local authority.



Thurrock has seen a significant increase in Youth Detention Accommodation Orders in 2020-21 with 6 children gaining CLA status through the criminal courts.

Of the 6 children made subject to Youth Detention Accommodation Orders in 2020/21 5 (83%) were from the BAME community. This is reflective of over representation of children from the BAME community in the criminal justice system and in particular the figures in relation to children in custody, locally and nationally.

4.3 Out of court disposal panel

During 2020-21 the out of court disposal panel dealt with 43 offences relating to 33 children, of which 5 children had looked after status. This equates to 15% and is in line with the percentage of children looked after from Thurrock in the criminal justice system. All 5 children were diverted away from the criminal justice system with identified support from the YOS partnership.

Thurrock YOS and Essex Police are committed to the national protocol¹ aimed to reduce the criminalisation of Children Looked After. This approach will be supported with a local pan-Essex protocol to ensure there is a focus on diverting any child (where possible) who is Looked After from the Criminal Justice System.

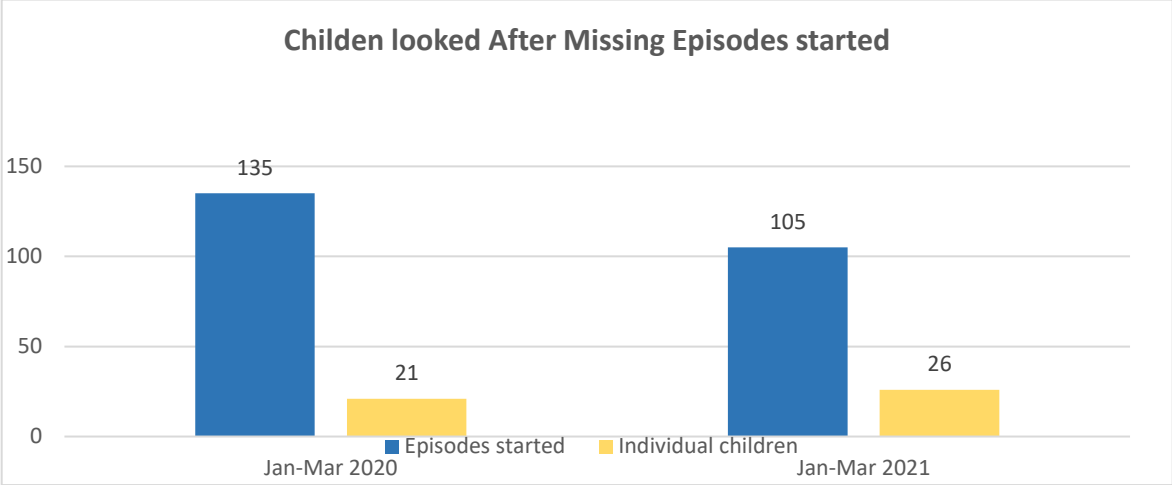
5. CLA missing episodes started

The graph below shows the number of missing episodes started and the count of the individual children who went missing between January and March 2021.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-protocol-on-reducing-criminalisation-of-looked-after-children>

It is of note that the number of missing episodes and the number of children who went missing have reduced since March 2020.

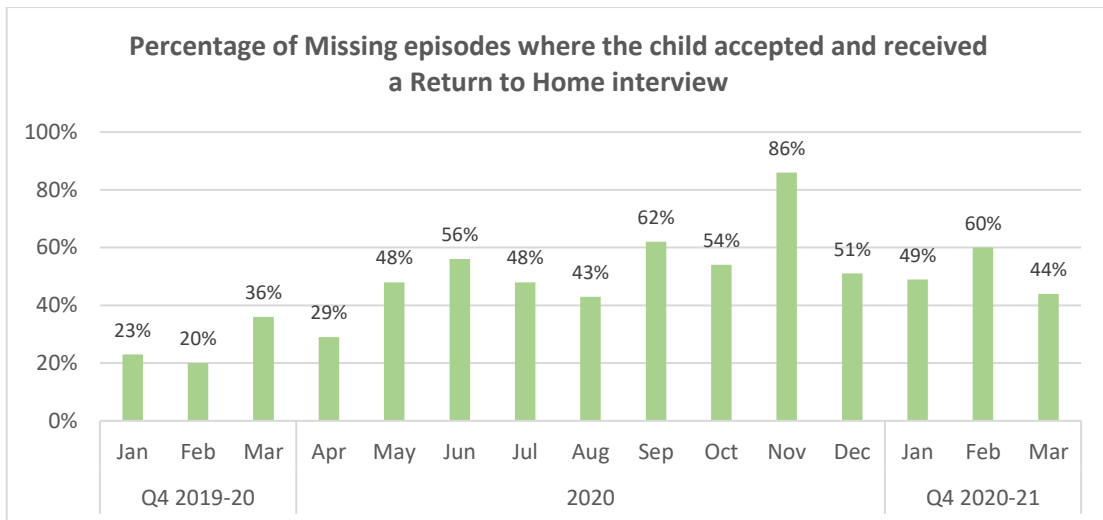
There has been a strong focus on Thurrock missing children and good joint working with the multi-agency partnership. There is a weekly missing meeting with partners that includes Essex Police and liaison with Thurrock Community Safety colleagues. A Contextual Safeguarding approach has been embedded which is assisting with the partnership working and social work practice.



5.1 CLA return to home interview

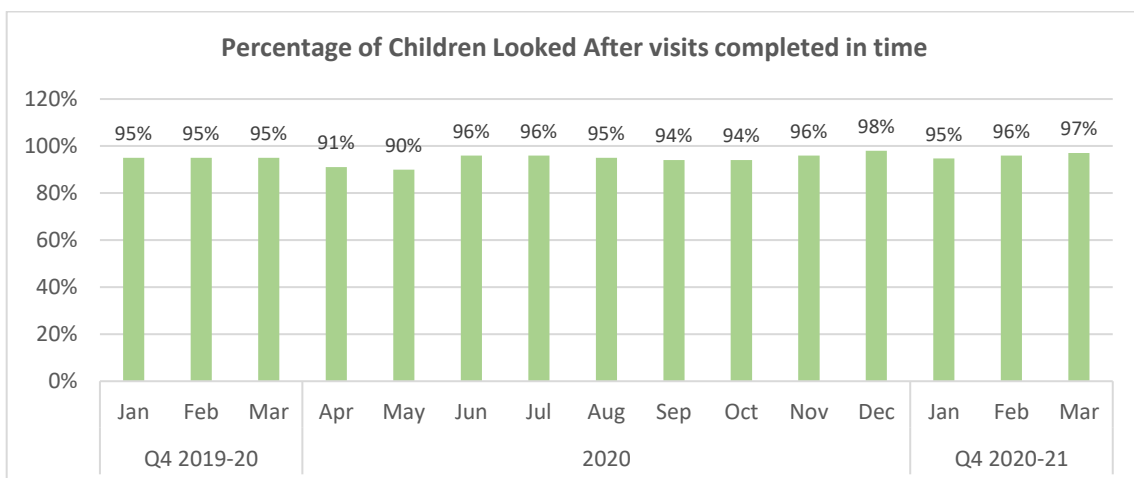
Since 1 April 2020, Inspire Youth Hub have been commissioned to undertake independent Return Home Interviews (RHI). All children are offered a RHI within 72 hours following each missing event, with the aim of understanding the young person’s circumstances and the reasons why they go missing. Key Workers from placements, Foster Carers and Social Workers will discuss missing incidents with children. There is a network of support provided to children to try to engage with them and understand the reasons for their missing episodes. The Participation Team have been able to engage and seek feedback from young people and this has been invaluable.

The offer of an RHI is not always accepted by young people. Since April 2020 Inspire Youth Hub are managing to increase the numbers of young people who engage with the RHI service.



5.2 Timeliness of social worker visits

Social workers are required to visit the child within one week of the start of any placement. Visits are then due in accordance to the time agreed within the Care Plan. This can vary from 20 to 65 working days. Performance has improved since last year and there is focused work to ensure this performance is maintained. 97% is very good performance as there are often practical reasons for a visit being late and there are safeguards to ensure that missed visits take place quickly after the due date.

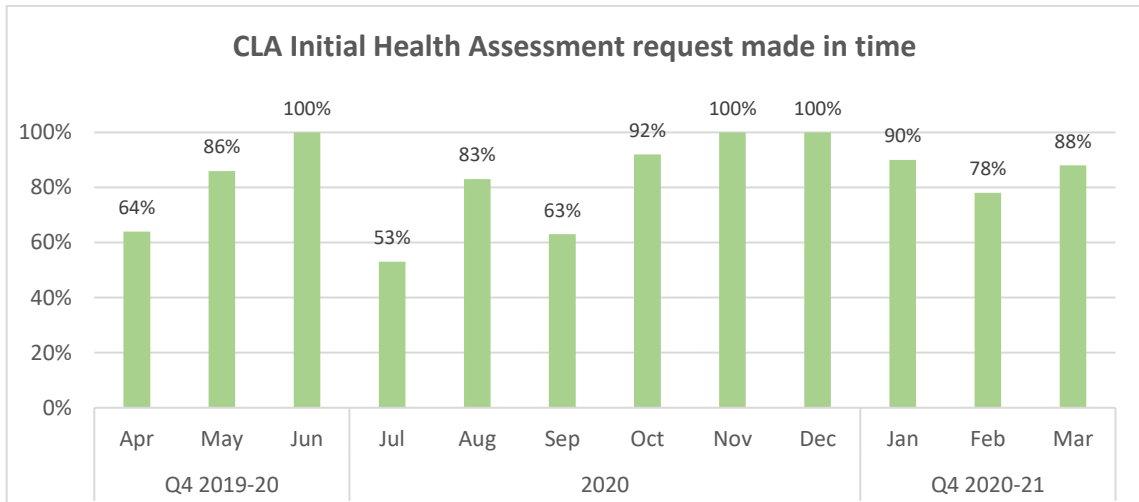


5.3 CLA Initial Health Assessments (IHA)

Every child who becomes looked after should have an Initial Health Assessment within 20 days of entering into care. To achieve good performance for this indicator, there is reliance on working with Thurrock Social Workers, the children's families, Thurrock health care providers, and also other health providers (including those who are in Youth Offending Institutions, YOI) for children placed outside of Thurrock. Sometimes notifications for IHA cannot be processed if parents have not provided consent for medical treatment and

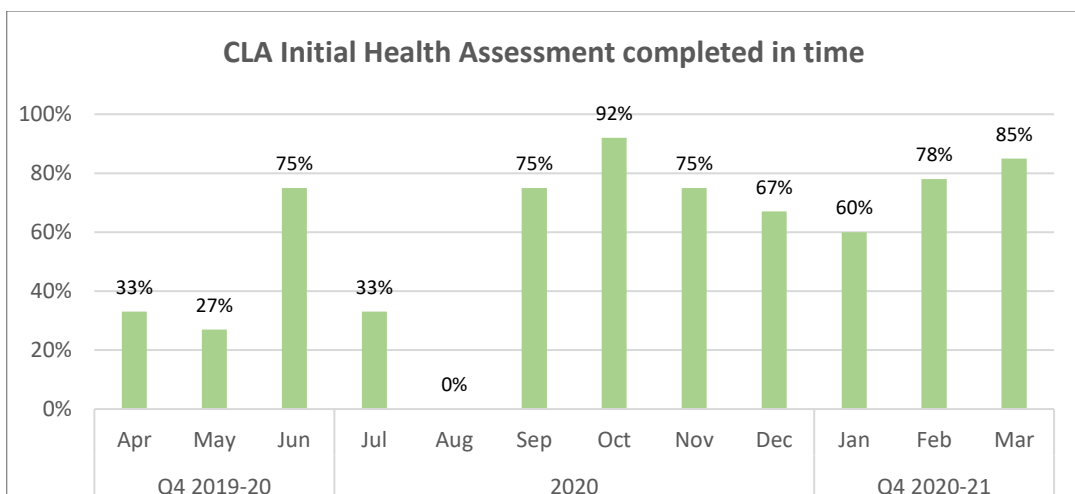
there is no court order which gives the Local Authority responsibility for consenting to health care. There is a weekly IHA tracking meeting to ensure that there is a focus on meeting the 5 day target to notify Health that a child has become looked after and to ensure that an Initial Health Assessment is offered and completed with 20 working days.

The chart below shows that between April 2020 and March 2021 there was variable performance for IHA requests being sent to Health. There was improved performance in the period October 2020 to December 2020, with over 90% of notifications being processed within 5 days.



The chart below reflects the timeliness of IHA appointments being completed within 20 days in the period April 2020 to March 2021. The performance has improved in the period September to December 2020; despite there being additional pressures in the Health Service due to COVID-19.

In some circumstances an IHA appointment was offered by Health within 20 days; however there are occasions when the initial appointment offered was not taken up.



5.4 CLA in Education

Children Looked After continue to make good educational progress, with better than national average figures for attainment for Thurrock's Children Looked After and performance this year being in the top 25% of Local Authorities.

5.5 CLA Strengths & Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ)

SDQ scores are a measure which provides an indication of the mental wellbeing of Looked After Children. SDQ scores are collated annually for all children aged 4-18. The care plans for children are reviewed by the SDQ panel. During COVID-19 the average scores have not increased and the mental wellbeing of Children Looked After is being appropriately reviewed, with support and intervention provided as necessary.

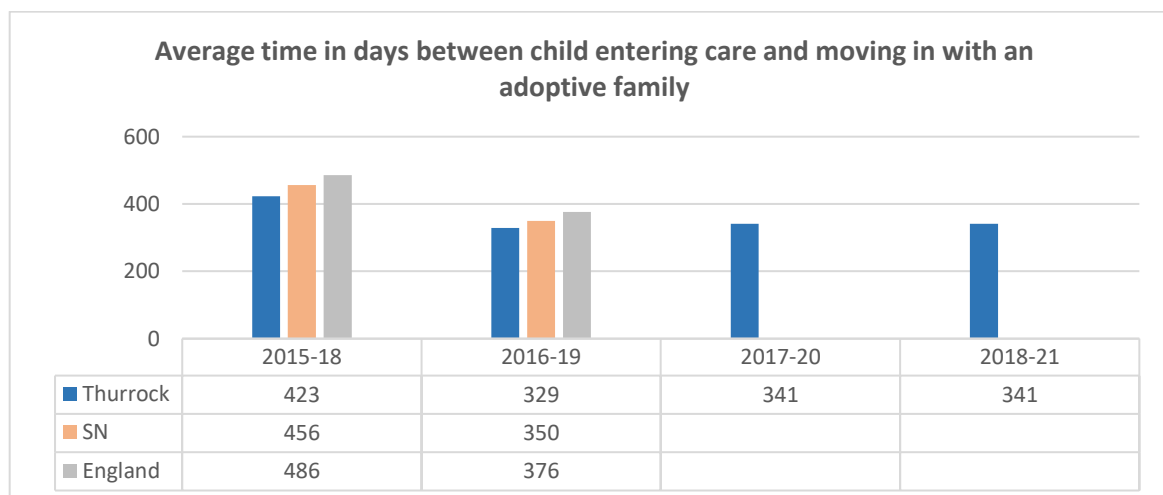
6. Number of children adopted

Between 01 April 2020 and 31 March 2021, a total of 8 children were adopted. 6 children are placed in adoptive placements and have adoption hearings planned. There are a further 11 children with a care plan for adoption and they are awaiting a Court decision.

Due to COVID-19, there has been a significant delay in court proceedings which has impacted on the numbers of children adopted or placed for adoption in the period April 2020 to March 2021. There are likely to be an increased number of children adopted through 2020-22, with increased court hearings as the pandemic eases.

6.1 Timeliness of Adoption

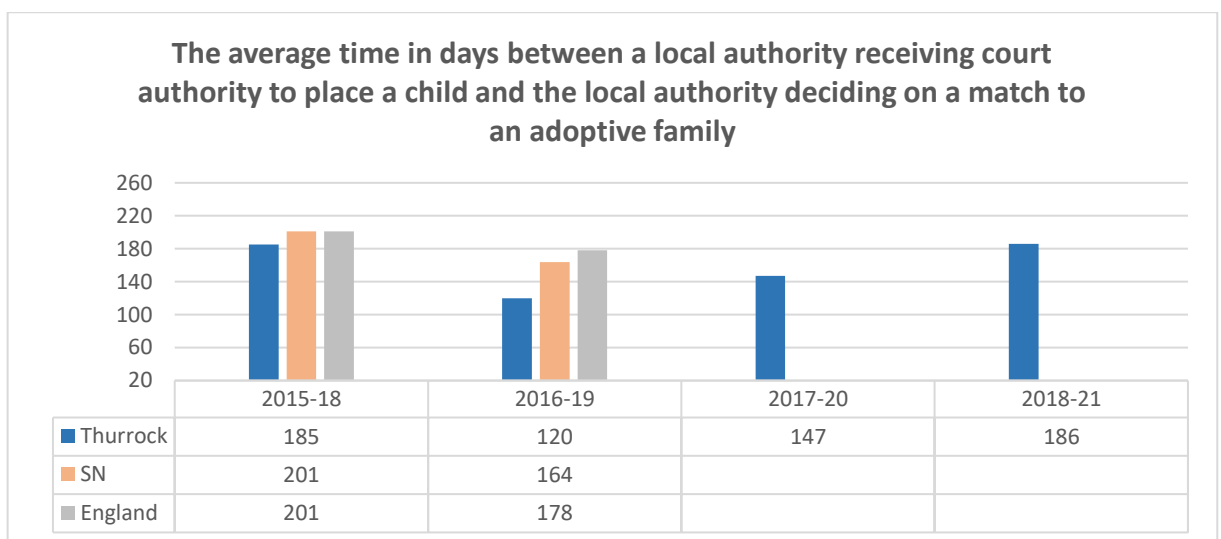
This measure is the average length of time from the child entering care to moving in with an adoptive family. The performance is currently good at 341 days.



This measure has now been adjusted to include foster carers who adopt children that are placed with them. The average time for a child entering care and being placed with their adoptive family (including foster carers who adopt children who are placed with them) is 266 days for adoptions completed in 2018-2021.

This measure is the timeliness of finding a family for a child once Thurrock has received authority from the court. The average time in days between Thurrock receiving court authority to place a child with the adoptive family was 186 days.

Compared to the Statistical Neighbour and England 3-year averages of 2016-2019, Thurrock's performance is good. This is an area for the Service to focus as the impact of COVID 19 will affect the timeliness of children being placed for adoption.



6.2 CLA permanency

Purposeful early permanency planning continues to ensure that children are in the right placement at the right time to meet their needs. Placement and supporting children, where appropriate, to remain at home with their families is the priority. Children are placed for adoption only once all family and friend options have been exhausted.

In March 2021, 16% of the total CLA cohort were under the age of five. The majority of children under five are moved on to permanent placements through adoption or permanent alternative carers. There have been significant delays, as a result of COVID-19, resulting in children being subject to court proceedings for longer periods, and transition to their permanent homes being delayed.

6.3 CLA placement distance

It is good practice to ensure that children remain within their communities. In March 2021, 71% of the Children Looked After cohort were 20 miles or less from their homes, compared to 72% in March 2020. With the continued focus on Fostering recruitment and the Thurrock Council Tax Exemption Offer, the Service has an expectation that more local Foster Carers can be recruited.

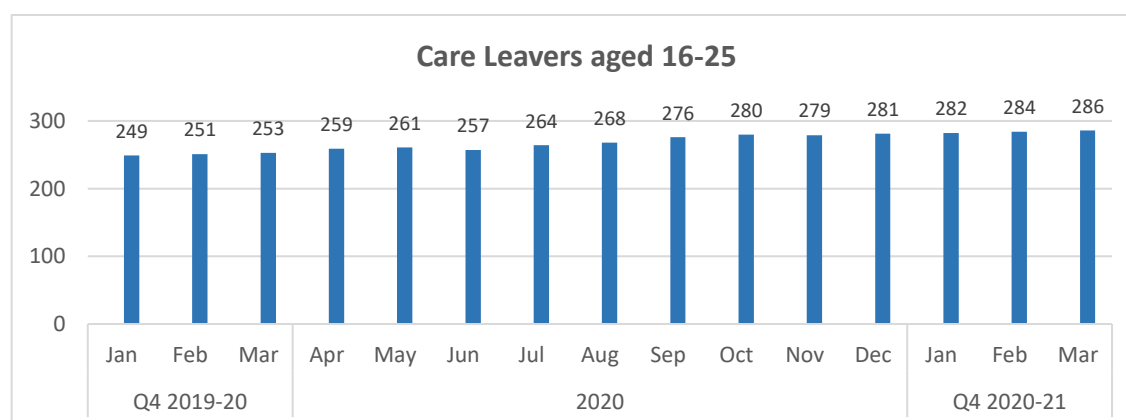
7. Care Leaving Service

A Care Leaver, as defined in the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000², is a person who has been 'looked after' or 'in care' for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14, and who was in care on their 16th birthday.

A young person's status as a care leaver can be divided into the following:

- Eligible child - a young person who is 16 or 17 and who has been looked after by the local authority/health and social care trust for at least a period of 13 weeks since the age of 14, and who is still looked after.
- Relevant child - a young person who is 16 or 17 who has left care after their 16th birthday and before leaving care was an eligible child.
- Former relevant child - a young person who is aged between 18 and 25 (or beyond if being helped with education or training) who, before turning 18 was either an eligible or a relevant child, or both.

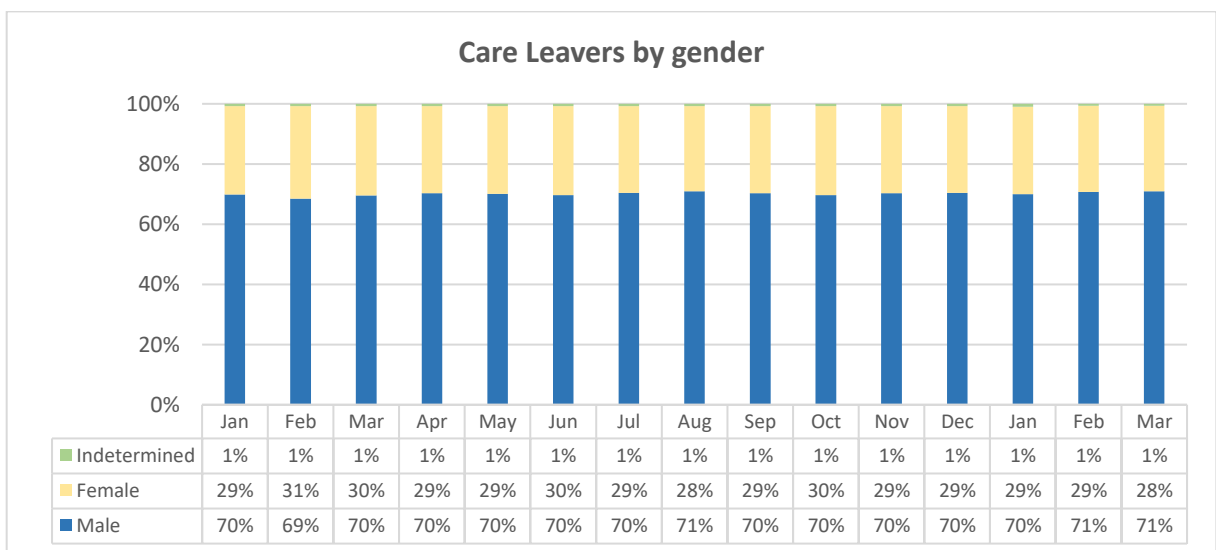
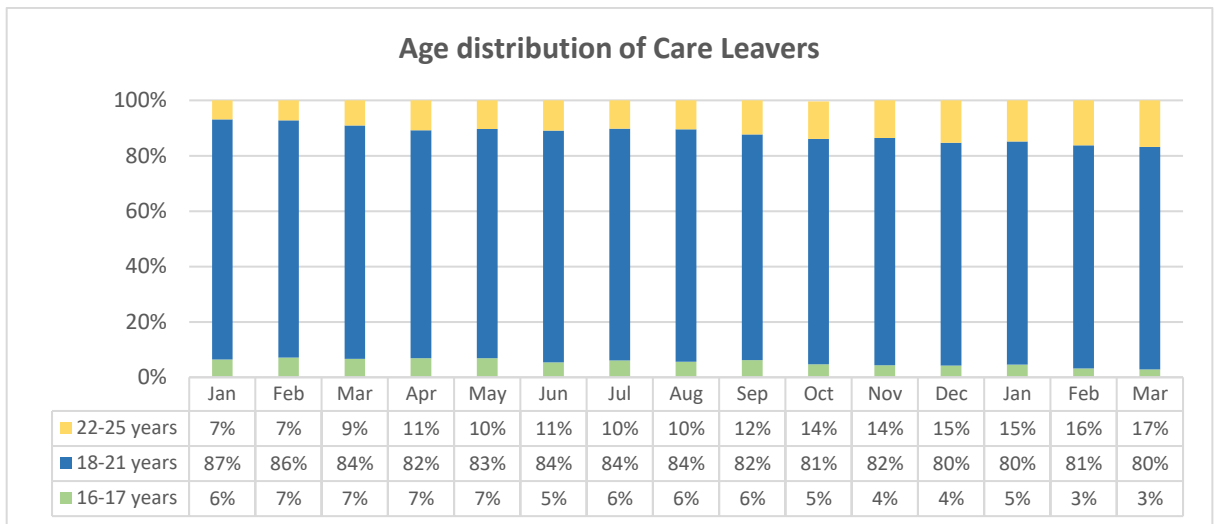
The graph below shows the total number of Young People age 16-25 years who are in receipt of a Care Leaving service. The numbers are increasing and this is in part due to legislative changes that placed additional responsibilities upon Care Leaving services (Children and Social Work Act 2017). Section 3 of the Act now requires Local Authorities to appoint a Personal Adviser for Care Leavers (who request one) up until the age of 25.



² <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/35/contents>

In March 2021, 286 Care Leavers were being supported and were receiving an Aftercare service. This is an increase from the previous year and this cohort now has a wider remit as all Care Leavers can request support services until the age of 25, under the Children and Social Work Act 2017.

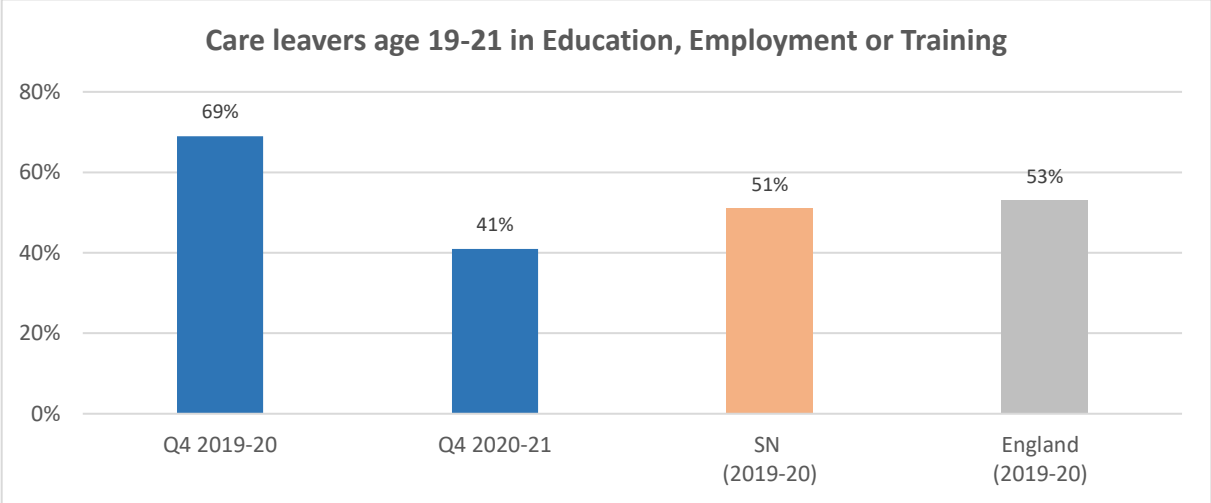
The charts below show the Care Leaver cohort between January 2020 and March 2021, broken down by age groups and gender.



7.1 Care Leavers age 19-21 years in Education, Employment or Training (EET)

In March 2021, 41% of the Care Leavers aged 19 to 21 year old were in part or full time education, employment or training compared to 69% in March 2020. Compared to the statistical neighbour and England averages in 2019-20, Thurrock was performance was good in 2019-20; the decrease in performance for 2020-21 can be singularly attributed to COVID. To strengthen oversight and planning to ensure our young people have support and opportunities for Education, Employment and Training (EET) there are two monthly panels which focus on pre and post 18 year olds who do not have an EET offer. These

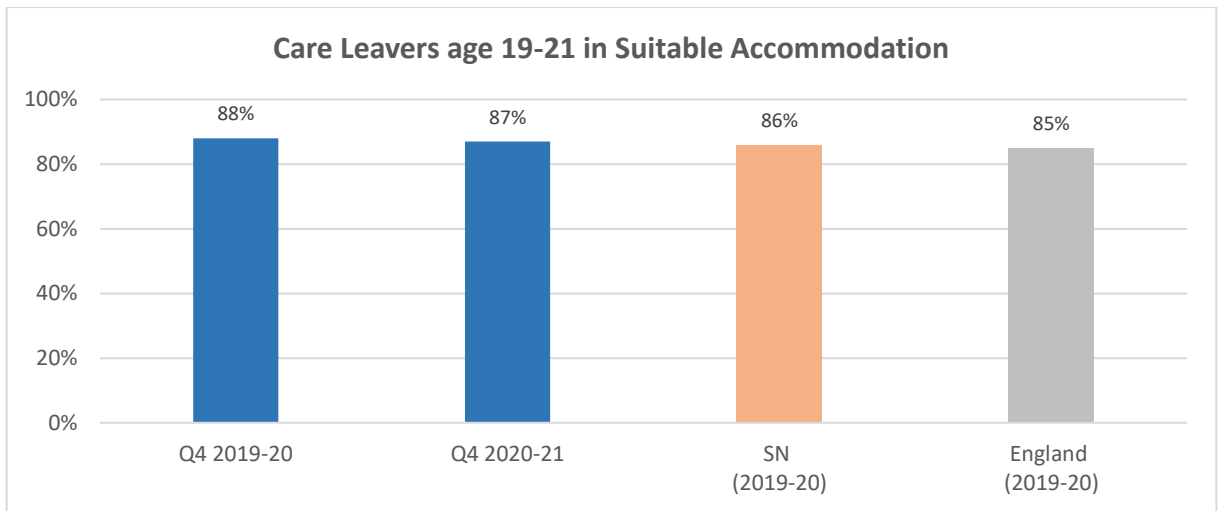
panels are attended by the Aftercare Service, Inspire Youth Hub and the Virtual School. The panel seeks to understand the issues for individual young people and align their interests to an EET offer. The panel discussions have highlighted the impact of Covid 19 on Young People which has limited opportunities to engage in work experience and continue with employment.



7.2 Care Leavers age 19 to 21 years in Suitable Accommodation

In March 2021, the number of 19 to 21 year old Care Leavers reported to be in suitable accommodation was 87%, slight decrease from 88% in March 2020. Thurrock's performance against bench marking data remains slightly higher than the Statistical Neighbour average of 86% for 2019-20 and England average of 85% for 2019-20.

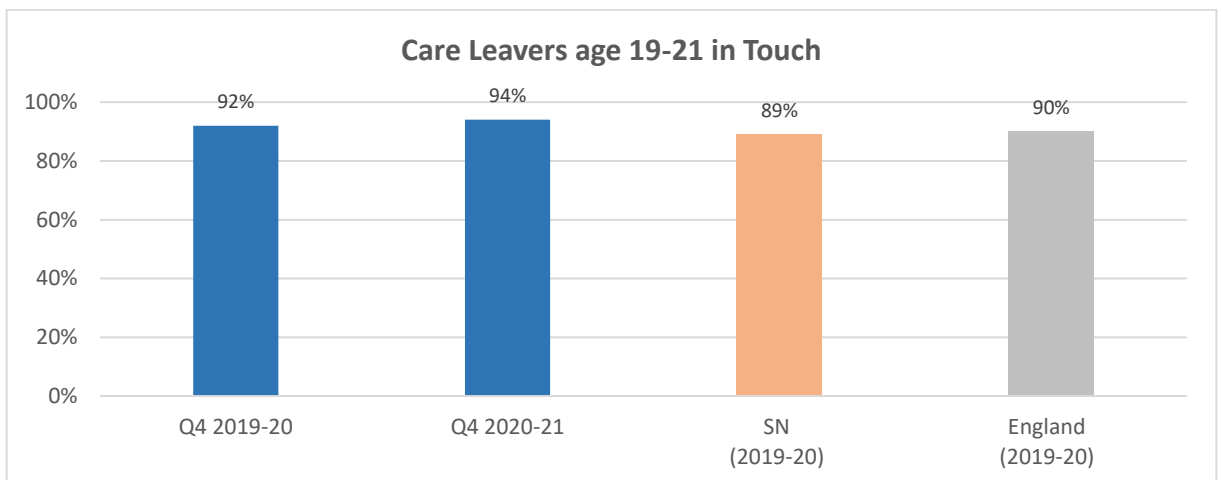
Increased housing support is being provided to young people by the Aftercare Service, Head Start Housing and Thurrock Housing Department. The 'Housing Offer' to Care Leavers has been updated with the Joint Housing Protocol 2020, ensuring good partnership working with clear pathways for young people to access housing, as well as ensuring they are prepared for their tenancies.



7.3 Care Leavers age 19-21 years 'In Touch'

Local Authorities are expected to stay in touch with Care Leavers and provide statutory support to help the care leaver transition to living independently. At the end of March 2021, Thurrock was in touch with 94% of Care Leavers, which is slightly above 92% in March 2020. Thurrock's performance is good with consistent performance above both the statistical neighbour average of 89% and England average of 90% for both 2019-20 and 2020-21.

While the performance is improving, continued focus should enable Thurrock to be in line with statistical neighbours and the England average.



8. CLA Fostering

At the end of March 2021 there were 301 Children Looked After in Thurrock. In March 2020 the total number of children in fostering households was 235; 117 were being cared for by Independent Fostering Agencies and 118 were cared for by Thurrock approved Foster Carers. In March 2021 there were 89 Thurrock

approved fostering households providing 119 children with a foster family. The average age of an approved foster carer for Thurrock is 53 years old. There has been very little fluctuation in the numbers of children who are cared for by Thurrock foster carers.

8.1 Recruitment

Over the period 2019-21 recruitment activity has been successful. Table 3 reflects the changes in fostering recruitment and those who are no longer registered as carers.

Financial Year	Fostering Households newly registered	Fostering Households no longer registered
2019-20	19	15
2020-21	11	14

It is natural for some fostering households to retire or decide to end their fostering career depending on changes in their own family circumstances. Of the 14 households that left Thurrock fostering in 2020-21:

- 5 households decided to retire from fostering
- 4 households were de-registered in line with the Fostering Regulations.
- 3 Households moved home, at such a distance they could not continue
- 2 Households resigned due to other changes in their circumstances at home

It is of note that no Thurrock foster carers resigned from Thurrock in order to transfer to another fostering agency. Applicants are assessed so they meet the National Minimum Standards³ for fostering and can offer a safe, loving home to a child. The recruitment process usually takes about four months from receipt of an application to foster, until approval at Fostering Panel. Timescales are reduced if the applicant is already an approved foster carer from another agency. To approve foster carers a detailed assessment of applicants is undertaken which includes interviews with applicants' personal referees and criminal record checks and medicals checks are also completed.

9. Reasons for Recommendations

9.1 Corporate Parenting Committee to note and comment on current performance position.

10. Consultation (including Overview & Scrutiny, if applicable)

10.1 Not applicable

³https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/192705/NMS_Fostering_Services.pdf

11. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact

11.1 None

12. Implications

12.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **David May**
Strategic Lead Finance

There are no financial implications identified within the report.

12.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Judith Knight**
**Interim Deputy Head of Legal Social
Care & Education**

There are no Legal implications identified within the report.

12.3 Diversity & Equality

Implications verified by: **Natalie Smith**
**Strategic Lead: Community
Development and Equalities**

There are no direct diversity and equality implications arising from this report. However, the service does collect diversity monitoring data for looked after children, this data is given within this report. The data is utilised to consider issues of equality and to ensure that performance considers the impact on children with protected characteristics

12.4 Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder

Not applicable

13. Background papers used in preparing the report (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

- Not applicable

14. Appendices to the report

- None

Report Author:

Naintara Khosla, Strategic Lead, Children Looked After, Children's Services

Anna Watkins, Business Intelligence Analyst, Children's Services

Daniel Jones, Service Manager, Fostering, Adoption & Placements Service,
Children's Services

Jason Read, Operations Manager, Youth Offending Service, Children's Services

Marc Rhodes, Business Intelligence & Data Analytics Manager, Children's Services

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1 June 2021	ITEM: 6
Corporate Parenting Committee	
Update on the Youth Offending Service, Youth Justice Plan and the role of the Service for Children Looked After	
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Non-key
Report of: Clare Moore, Strategic Lead Youth Offending Service and Prevention	
Accountable Assistant Director: Janet Simon Interim Assistant Director, Children’s Social Care and Early Help.	
Accountable Director: Sheila Murphy, Corporate Director Children’s Services	
This report is Public	

Executive Summary

This report gives an overview of the Youth Offending Service (YOS) and the impact that the Pandemic has had on the Courts and service delivery. This report will set out the six strategic priorities identified by the Youth Crime Governance Board (YCGB) for the Youth Justice Plan, 2021-2024. The report will also provide information and data on the role of the YOS with Children Looked After.

1. Recommendation(s)

- 1.1 **That Members note the contents of this report and consider the continued improvements made.**
- 1.2 **For Members to identify any specific areas that they would like additional information for any subsequent reports**

2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1 The YOS is based in Corringham, close to the Town Centre. It is fully staffed with experienced permanent workers and a number of seconded staff from the Probation Service, Inspire Youth, Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health Services (EWMHS), Drug and Alcohol Service, Essex Police and Speech and Language Therapists. The Team also has a specialist Gangs and Child Exploitation Worker, who works alongside Children’s Social Care.
- 2.2 The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic has meant that the YOS has had to deliver services to young people in different ways for the last year, as the office base had been closed for long periods of time. The YOS have been

creative to ensure that young people have been able to complete the work for their Court Orders and have every chance not to repeat offending behaviours.

2.3 Every 3 years, the Youth Crime Governance Board has to complete a Strategic Plan for the Youth Justice Board of England and Wales, as part of the grant agreement. The priorities for the next three years are:

- Violence and Vulnerability
- Education, Training and Employment
- Diversion and Out of Court Disposals
- Early Help and Prevention
- Effective Partnerships
- Evidence Based Practice

Two themes are evident within the six priorities; these themes focus on the disproportionality of BAME youths and looked after children within the criminal justice system.

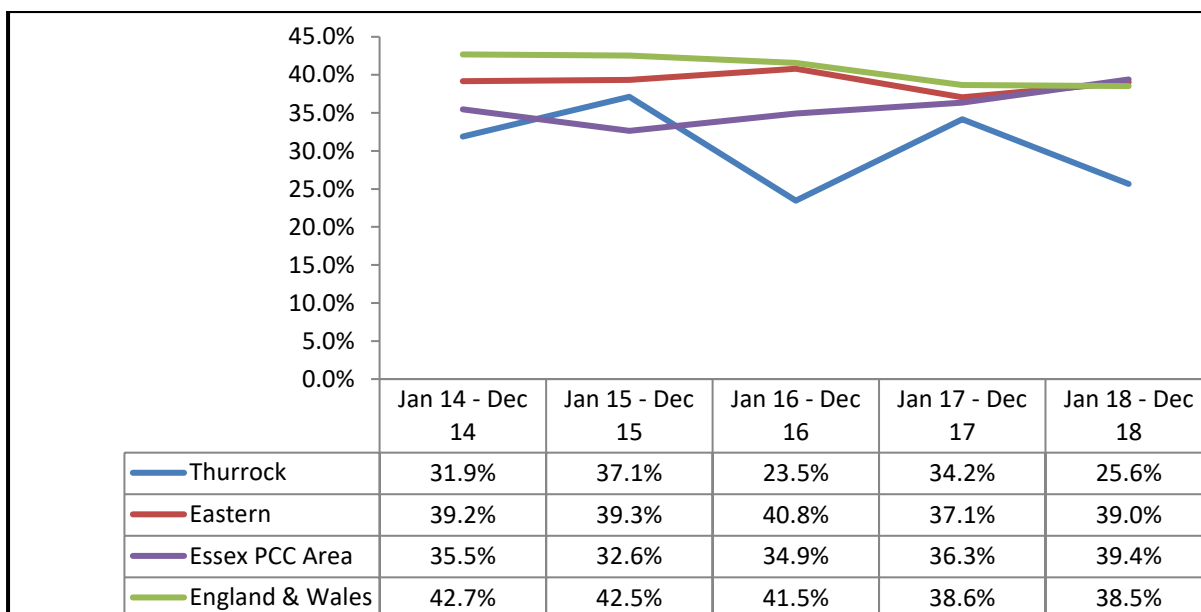
3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

3.1 Re-offending – Ministry of Justice (MOJ) data

	Thurrock	South East	Essex	Family	England
Quarterly (latest data)	25%	38.5%	34.5%	38.2%	37.1%
Aggregated yearly	25%	39%	39.4%	38.2%	37.1%

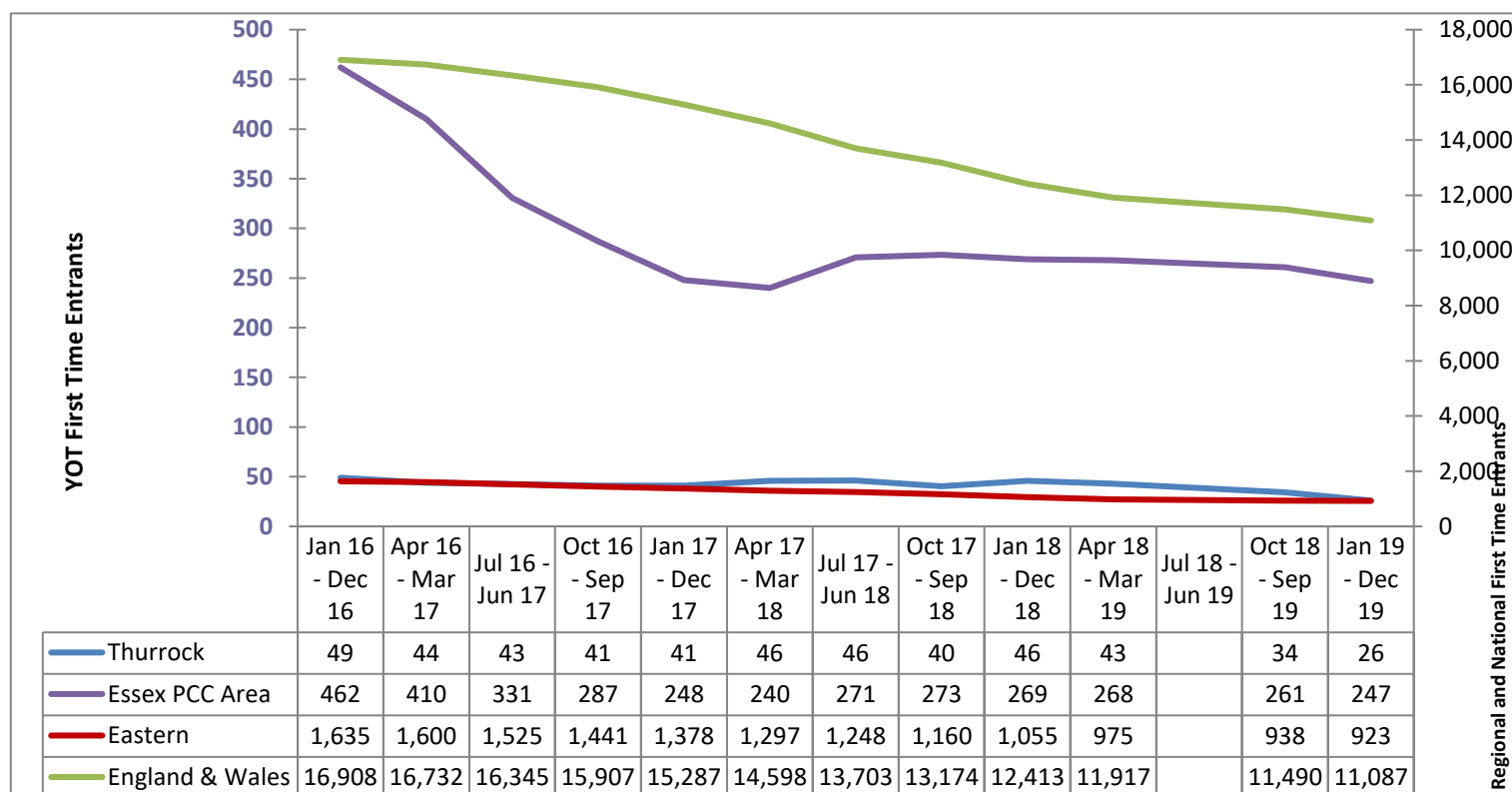
3.2 The table above shows the latest, published, re-offending data by the Ministry of Justice. This is for April 2019 - March 2020, published in April 2021. Thurrock YOS continues to outperform all of its comparators and is over 10% below the national average.

3.3 Thurrock YOS also reports on local data and this is the performance that is recorded on the corporate score card. This data is dynamic and is a good predictor of future MOJ published data. It identifies and tracks a cohort of children for a period of 12 months. There is a 3 month drag on this data to allow for the criminal justice process. As of Quarter three 2020 – 21, the re-offending rate is **7%**. This figure is accumulative through the tracked period.



Thurrock is a small YOS and consequently has a small quarterly and yearly cohort compared to most YOS', therefore annual data can be erratic. Performance remains good with Thurrock outperforming all comparators and being below the national average since 2014 - 2015.

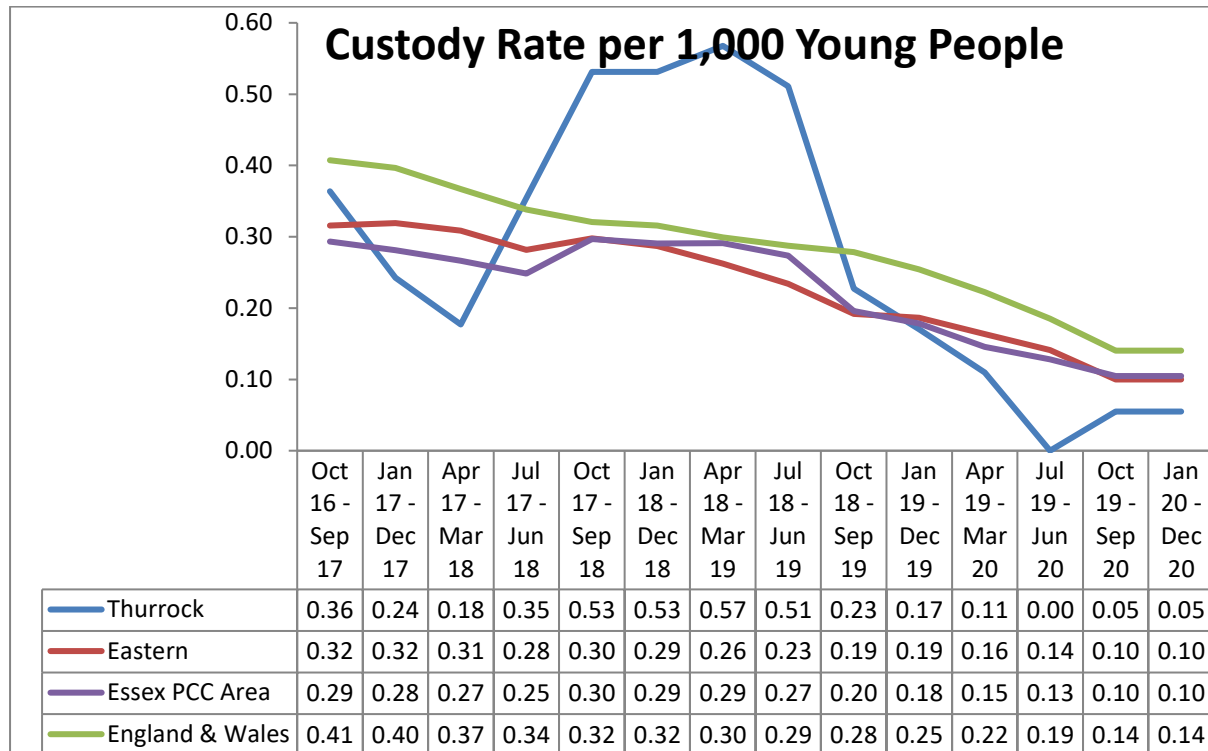
3.4 First Time entrants Jan 2019 - Dec 2019



First time entrants were relatively static for some time as a result of the introduction of preventative services in 2011. However, this financial year has

seen initially the closure of the Youth Courts, as a result of Covid-19 restrictions and then a delay in processing cases to conclusion. This meant a reduction for the first two quarters. Latest indications from Essex Court Service state that there is a 117% back log in the overall court system, although this figure is not exclusive to youth cases.

3.5 Use of Custody



The final custody figure for 2020/21 was 0.05 (per 1000 young people) which is below the national average of 0.14 per and our identified comparators. This only applies to those young people sentenced to custody and not those remanded/made subject to Youth Detention Accommodation.

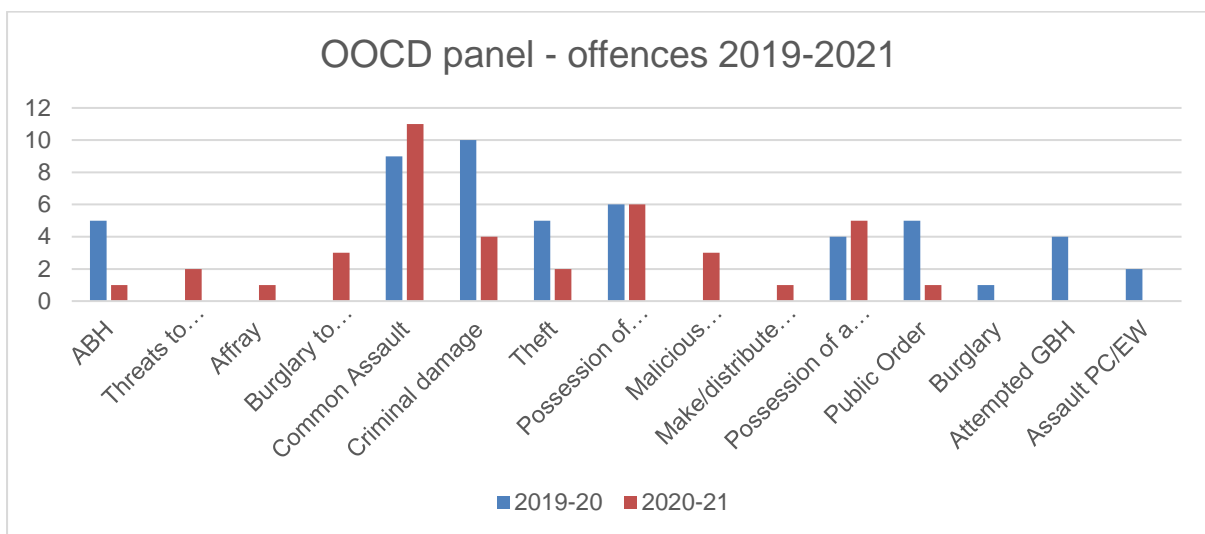
Since this data was finalised, 2 young people have received custodial sentences and 3 young people have been remanded in custody awaiting trial. Whilst on remand, these young people are classified as Children Looked After.

3.6 Children Looked After

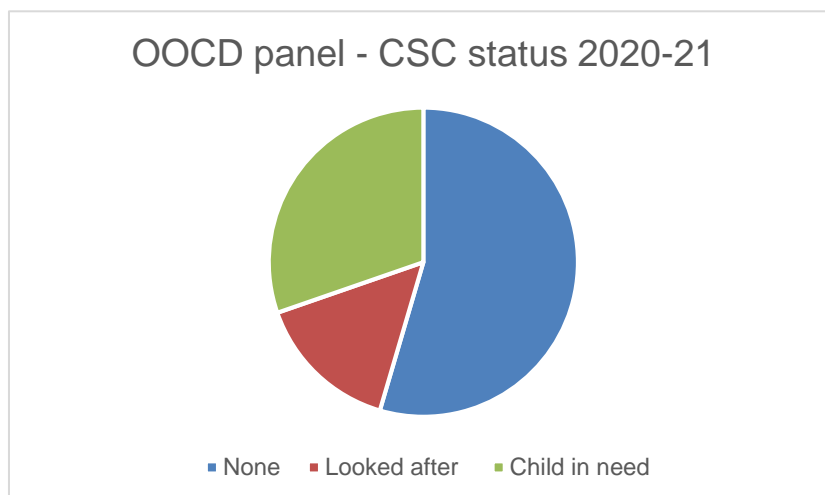
Children looked after (15) accounted for 20% of statutory outcomes in 2019-20. This figure has remained static for 2020-21. There is no nationally published comparator for the period, but Children Looked After remain over represented, despite the introduction of a national protocol to reduce the criminalisation of Children Looked After. During the period 2020/2021, one Child Looked After was made subject to a custodial sentence and three children have achieved a looked after status, because of youth detention accommodation (remand). These are included in the data.

3.7 Out of Court Disposals

- The Out Of Court Disposal (O OCD) panel is a multiagency panel that aims to divert children from future involvement in the criminal justice system in the best interests of the child and the criminal justice system. It will make decisions in respect of children who have made full admissions to committing low level offences and who are not serious or prolific offenders.
- Offences deemed suitable for an Out Of Court Disposal are those offences, which have a Gravity score of 1, 2 or 3 (low to medium in seriousness of offence). Offences which are Gravity score 4 (medium to high in seriousness) will continue to be excluded unless in exceptional circumstances and will be referred to the CPS for a charging decision



During 2020-21, the O OCD panel dealt with 43 offences relating to 33 children. In line with Court ordered interventions, the most common offences were those under the violence against the person act. It should be noted that the period in question, and particularly the throughput, was initially affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. This is the first year we have had comparative data in relation out of court disposals.



3.8 Out of Court Disposal Panel - Social Care Status

44% of the children were open to Children's Social Care at the time of the offence. 10 with Children in need status, 5 with Looked After status (were CLA at the time of the offence). Concerns were raised at the presentation of the Q2 data as to whether Children Looked After were receiving the same opportunities for diversion away from the criminal justice system as the general population. This has now increased to 15% from 0% in Q2, which is an improvement.

3.9 The Youth Justice Plan (YJP) 2021 - 2024 has recently been signed off by the Youth Crime Governance Board and the delivery of the Plan will be monitored via the Board.

The Plan sets out our strategic priorities and the following vision for the Thurrock Youth Justice Partnership:

- Thurrock YJP recognises the needs of the children it works with and will increase their resilience by providing a multi-agency response designed to prevent offending, safeguard children and protect the community.
- The Youth Justice Board maintain their vision that identifies children as children and highlights the need to build on their strengths to allow them to make a constructive contribution to society.
- Thurrock YJP shares the YJB vision and remains committed to the Youth Justice Aims set out in the current YJB strategic plan which underpins our strategic priorities.
- A child first approach is central to the YJB's vision alongside effective prevention which focuses on the child's needs and strengths. Thurrock YJP will continue to promote a child first approach and develop its diversion services in line with the YJB's values.
- People remain a priority for Thurrock Council where partnerships work together to improve health and well-being and this remains integral to our vision as the demography of the borough continues to change along with its offending cohort and nature of offending.
- The Plan sets out the main areas of focus and activity against priorities that are realistic in the current environment. Similarly, this plan takes into account the reduction in resources.
- The work of Thurrock YOS set out within this plan is directly linked to the priority to reduce overall levels of crime and anti-social behaviour in line with the local Community Safety Partnership targets. There is also a close alignment to the local Public Health plan around violence and vulnerability

Please refer to Appendix 1 - Plan on a Page.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1 Corporate Parenting Committee to note and comment on the performance of the Youth Offending Service in relation to looked after children and the contents of the Youth Justice Plan 2021-2024.

5. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

- 5.1 Not applicable

6. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact

- 6.1 None

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **David May**
Strategic Lead Finance

The increase in Remand costs will have an impact on the Youth Offending Team budget for 2021/2022, as it had for 2020/2021. The costs are unavoidable, as the Courts make these decisions.

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Judith Knight**
Interim Deputy Head of Legal (Social Care and Education)

The Council has a statutory duty under Section 40(1) of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 to submit an annual youth justice plan which sets out:

- How youth justice services in their area are to be provided and funded
- How the youth offending team will be composed and funded, how it will operate and what functions it will carry out.

The provision of youth justice is subject to National Standards for Children in the Youth Justice System. The Youth Justice Board is responsible for oversight of these standards.

7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Natalie Smith**
Strategic Lead: Community Development and Equalities

Although the number of looked after children that go into custody is relatively small, we know that they are significantly overrepresented. A recent survey of young people in custody, suggested that as much as one third of boys and nearly two thirds of girls have been in the care system at some point in their lives. We also know that children with care experience entering custody have particular needs. A thematic inspection undertaken by HM Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP) identified that young people with care experience were more likely to report problems on arrival in custody, have substance misuse problems, and emotional and mental health problems. It is therefore important to consider whether current custodial services are responsive to the particular needs of this cohort and that they continue to receive support from their corporate parent.

7.4 Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder, or Impact on Looked After Children)

The delays in the Court processes due to Covid-19 has had an impact on when the YOS provide interventions and support to young people. Some young people have been waiting up to 2 years for Sentencing in Court, causing delay in interventions and in some cases increases in offending behaviours.

8. Background papers used in preparing the report

- Data Report of Jason Read April 2021
- Youth Justice Plan 2021-2024 to be published on the Council website, once approved by the Youth Justice Board

9. Appendices to the report

- Youth Justice Plan 2021-2024 Plan on a Page

Report Author:

Clare Moore

Strategic Lead Youth Offending Service and Prevention

Children and Family Services



Priority one
Violence & Vulnerability
Safeguard children and young people who are vulnerable to exploitation by organised criminal gangs.

Priority two
Effective partnerships
Partnership working will be strengthened in its delivery by utilising local expertise, pooling resources and producing data across the partnership to develop shared objectives, reflecting on our unique status as a unitary council as we work with key but more distant agencies

Priority three
Education, Training & Employment
We are committed to collaborate with partner agencies to reduce the number of children and young people excluded from education; to deliver tailored, sustainable training and employment opportunities; and to facilitate seamless transitions between these services, ensuring there is a clear plan for all young people as they leave the YJ system

Priority four
Prevention & support
There is a commitment to the continued development of preventative interventions with our Community, Universal services, Early Help, housing, partners and providers to reduce first time entrants and improve life chances and opportunities at the earliest point in time.

Priority five
Evidence based practice
The services delivered for children and young people should be evidence based and will be delivered by developing innovative practice, analysing local desistance needs and adapting recognised national trends in youth justice, and using evidence to apply pressure to parts of the system, which presents delays

Priority six
Diversion
By using a child focused approach through active participation and feedback, we will, where possible divert children and young people away from the criminal justice system.

Core statement
With outstandingly low rates of reoffending, Thurrock YOS wishes to push forward and focus more on a whole system approach to addressing whole families and community to deter gang activity and lead people to more healthy life outcomes.

- Listen to Voice of the Child/ young person
- Embed contextual safeguarding
- Embed Trauma informed practice EWMHS
- O OCD Essex police YJ team
- Enhanced Parenting Support
- Essex PFCC office RJ hub
- Learning from QA, National Reviews and research

- Suitable housing
- Effective Resettlement & transitions
- Monitor Disproportionality
- Speech & language Emotional health
- Restorative justice and Reparation
- Recommendations from the Public Health Report
- Reduce exclusions from Education

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1 June 2021	ITEM: 7
Corporate Parenting Committee	
Report for Members on Missing Children, Child Exploitation, Return Home Interviews and Contextual Safeguarding focussed on Children Looked After	
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Non-key
Report of: Clare Moore Strategic Lead Youth Offending Service and Prevention	
Accountable Assistant Director: Janet Simon, Interim Assistant Director Childrens Social Care and Early Help	
Accountable Director: Sheila Murphy, Corporate Director Childrens Services	
This report is: Public	

Executive Summary

This report provides members of the Corporate Parenting Committee with an overview in relation to Children Looked After that are at risk of Child Exploitation, frequently Missing from Care, Return Home Interviews and the approach of Contextual Safeguarding to reduce risk and disrupt activities that place children at risk of harm.

Staff across Social Care, Youth Offending and Early Help are committed to supporting children who are at risk of criminal and sexual exploitation and with our partners aim to minimise risks using a multi-agency approach.

Ofsted undertook an inspection of Children’s Services in November 2019 with an overall outcome of “Good”. Ofsted identified the following needed improvement:

Alignment and effectiveness of systems that support children at risk of criminal and sexual exploitation and children missing from home and care, to ensure that children can tell their stories.

1. Recommendation(s)

- 1.1 **This report provides the Members of the Corporate Parenting Committee with an overview into the work that has taken place since January 2020 and the improvement journey. There is a commitment from staff to implement these changes, with areas of good practice. Members are asked to note the contents of this report and the provision of support given to young people at risk of exploitation.**

2. Introduction and Background

2.1 Following the Ofsted Inspection in November 2019, Childrens Services commissioned a consultant with a focus on Child Exploitation to undertake some improvement work with the service for 3 months. This included:

- A review and rewrite of the Child Exploitation (CE) and Vulnerability Risk Assessment tool, so that Social Workers had clarity about the factors that placed a child at risk. The tool included scaling to identify those children at low, medium and high risk
- A planning tool that brought together the partnership to help safeguard young people at medium and high risk
- A Strategy Meeting template that provided guidance to the Social Worker of the additional professionals required to disrupt and reduce risks
- Training to staff on how to use the new templates and an introduction to Contextual Safeguarding which is an approach to assessing and planning for abuse that occurs outside of the family home in schools, the community and via peer groups. In order to do this effectively, it needs the input from professionals from a wider network that includes Community Safety, the Police, Youth Offending Service, Housing, Trading Standards and Licensing
- Improved data reporting on CE and Missing Children

2.2 Further changes to practice have taken place, which includes:

- Monthly Tracking meetings looking at individual cases within the Child and Family Assessment Teams, Family Support Teams and Children Looked After Teams
- A refresh of the weekly Risk Management Meetings (RMM) and multi-agency meetings to discuss Missing Children and plan for their safety
- A change in April 2020, of the commissioned service for Return Home Interviews to INSPIRE, with clear performance indicators, that are monitored monthly
- Ongoing training for Children's Social Care staff on Gangs, CE and Contextual Safeguarding that are delivered quarterly
- Training to taxi drivers and hotel staff on CE and how to identify and report concerns

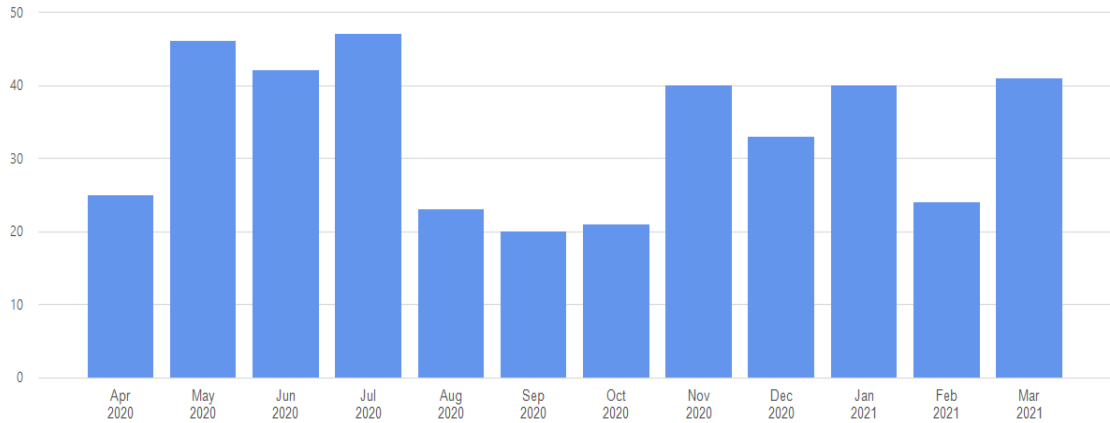
- Recruitment of a CE and Missing Children Manager to co-ordinate and support individual workers with case management
- Recruitment of a Gangs and CE senior practitioner in the Youth Offending Team that works alongside Case Managers and Social Workers, to support and upskill them in working with high risk cases
- Additional support to schools and colleges to identify young people and their peer groups at risk and provide interventions
- Audits of cases where CE and Missing Children are the focus, improvements in practice have been evidenced
- Bi monthly Contextual Safeguarding reports which identify those children most at risk and the places and peer groups that they associate with in order to disrupt activities
- Extensive mapping, including the early identification of young people who may be involved with or on the periphery of gang activity in Thurrock involving partner agencies to support diversion, disruption and enforcement activities
- CE Champions identified within the Social Work teams to drive performance and interventions
- A number of Operations across Thurrock, Southend and Essex that includes targeted support on trains and at transport hubs to identify young people at risk

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

3.1 Missing Children

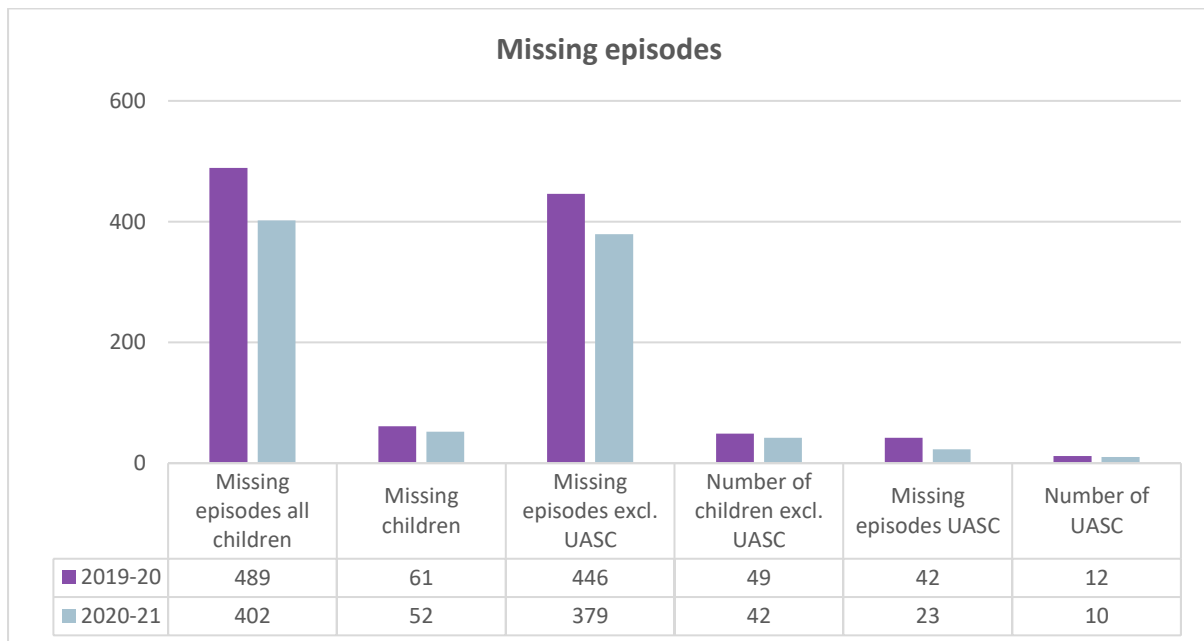
Thurrock records all missing episodes for Children Looked After. These episodes may be for an hour or less rather than days. Foster carers and placement providers are required to follow the Council's procedures and report young people missing to the police and advise the service if they are unaware of the young person's whereabouts e.g. if a child was not home by an agreed time. Once a child returned home, a return home interview will be held with the child through Inspire. Often the same children have had a repeat episode of missing. Each episode is recorded which contributes to the overall number.

The below graph demonstrates a fluctuating picture in the number of missing episodes across the year. In 2020/2021 we had a total of 402 missing episode relating to 52 children (including 10 Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking children). 400 of these episodes were for short periods and the young people returned to their placements. 2 Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking were missing from care on 31st March 2021



Apr 2020	May 2020	Jun 2020	Jul 2020	Aug 2020	Sep 2020	Oct 2020	Nov 2020	Dec 2020	Jan 2021	Feb 2021	Mar 2021	Total
25	46	42	47	23	20	21	40	33	40	24	41	402

The table below is a comparison of performance in 2020/21 to the previous year and shows a reduction in missing episodes, the numbers of children who have had a missing episode, and a significant reduction in the proportion of missing episodes in the UASC cohort.

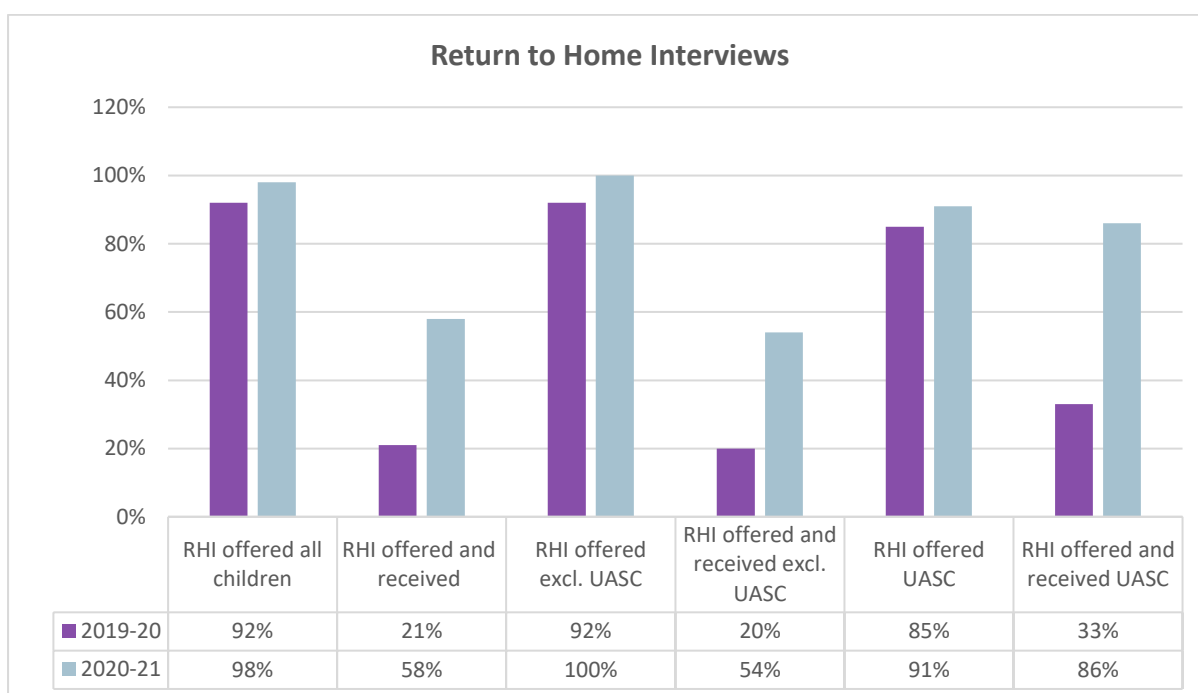


3.2 Return Home Interviews (RHI):

Return Home Interviews are an opportunity for young people who go missing to talk about why they go missing, to share where they have been, with who and any other details they may want to share about the episode including their reasons for going missing. Examples of reason given by young people for

going missing include; *'I want to be with friends', 'I don't like my placement.'* *'My placement is too far away' and 'I have been placed there without any discussion'.* The completed RHI's, are of good quality, and are used towards contextual safeguarding, planning and mapping exercises and are shared with the Social Workers to support their work with their children.

A referral for a Return Home Interview is made as soon as a child is no longer missing. The expectation is that these will be completed by Inspire who provide the service, within 72 hours of receipt. The data below demonstrates an improvement in performance in relation to the number of RHI's offered and interviews taken up and compares performance over the last two years;



3.3 Oversight and planning for children considered at risk of exploitation

Contextual Safeguarding

Is an approach to understanding, and responding to, young people's experiences of significant harm beyond their families. It recognises that the different relationships that young people form in their neighbourhoods, schools and online can feature violence and abuse.

Thurrock has four operational structures overseen by the Thurrock Local Safeguarding Childrens Partnership, Community Safety Partnership and the Thurrock Violence and Vulnerability Board which supports the sharing of information and planning together using a contextual perspective;

Thurrock Multi Agency Child Exploitation (MACE) Meetings

Meets every six weeks and collates information and data from partners to help to identify developing CE and exploitative concerns across the Borough to

inform collaborative strategic and operational response to safeguard, protect victims and to target, and disrupt with a view to prosecute possible perpetrators.

Risk Management Meeting (RMM)

Multi-agency forum held weekly which reviews the cases of all weekly reported missing episodes; those who are assessed to be at high risk of CSE / CE, or those children who are currently being exploited. The RMM provides an opportunity for the multi-agency network to share information and plan.

Child Exploitation tracker Meetings

An internal operational CE tracker meeting which supports social workers and their managers with CSE/CE cases ensuring strategy meetings, CE Risk & Vulnerability assessments and risk management plans are completed and that these processes are supporting the care planning and safeguarding of children and young people at risk of exploitation.

Gang Related Violence Forum (GRV)

The GRV is a YOS led multi-agency forum which meets monthly and has oversight of gang nominals and those that are at risk/being exploited across the borough. Multi-agency plans are developed and put in place to reduce the risk of harm, manage safety and wellbeing and look at gang exit strategies.

3.4 Impact of the work undertaken

- Audits outcomes highlight that the work done so far regarding CE has improved our practice over the last year. Practitioners are becoming familiar with CE issues and the safety planning to support this
- The Exploitation Manager is reaching out to various agencies to continue raising awareness of CE through training and multi-agency meetings. This is supporting positive relationships as well as identifying crucial hotspots and patterns of concern. There are monthly meetings with the Community Safety Partnership, Police, Trading Standards and any other relevant partners to advise them of any concerns and action required to minimise and disrupt risk
- The number of Thurrock children going missing has declined year on year over the last three years
- There is good management oversight of missing cases and children are routinely offered return home interviews
- There are effective strategic responses to operational information, which can be evidenced within the SET and multi-agency partnership approaches to child exploitation

- Practitioners are familiar with the CE Champions across Children & Families and are actively seeking advice. There has been 45 separate consultations in the last 3 months
- Information arising from return home interviews are being used to inform strategic safeguarding approaches such as identifying spaces, places and peer group associations that have led to some successful planning in disruption from other agencies.
- Operational link between the CE & Missing Lead encouraging information sharing and opening up links with partner agencies including detailed information sharing at the Risk Management meetings which have led to robust multi-agency safety plans being implemented to reduce risks.
- The involvement with several SET projects aims to support raising the awareness of 'hard to reach' agencies and providing a consistent approach
- The ongoing delivery of the training is continuing to develop practice in understanding exploitation, not just with our partner agencies, but also internally with practitioners and is receiving positive feedback.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1 Members of the Committee are updated and aware of the developments and improvements in practice in both the operational and strategic management of Missing Children and children and young people at risk of exploitation.

5. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

Not applicable

6. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact

- 6.1 The work undertaken in relation to Missing and Exploited Children meets the recommendations by Ofsted in the Inspection report, November 2019, and the statutory expectations, which are also aligned with Thurrock priorities of People, Place and Prosperity.
- 6.2 The work within the service supports our vulnerable young people to access the opportunities, including education and training provided by Thurrock and its community to live safely from harm.

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **David May**
Strategic Lead Finance

There are no financial implications.

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Judith Knight**
Interim Deputy Head of Legal (Social Care and Education)

The Council has a duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of Looked After Children under Section 22 of the Children Act 1989. Further it has the duty to make arrangements with other agencies to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.

The Council must have regard to the Statutory Guidance on 'children who run away or go missing from home or care' in exercising its functions.

7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Natalie Smith**
Strategic Lead: Community Development and Equalities

Young people who are or have been looked after are more disadvantaged and face more difficulties than their peers in achieving independence. They often become independent at a younger age and have to cope with major challenges and changes in their lives in a much shorter time and with less support than their peers. Looked after Children are also more likely to be involved with the Criminal Justice System, have addictions, mental health issues and difficulty forming attachments.

7.4 Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder, or Impact on Looked After Children)

The immediate risks/ impact associated with CLA going missing include:

- No means of support or legitimate income - leading to high risk activities

- Involvement in criminal activities
- Victim of abuse
- Victim of crime, for example through sexual assault and exploitation
- Alcohol/substance misuse

8. Background papers used in preparing the report (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

Not applicable.

Report Author:

Clare Moore

Strategic Lead, Youth Offending Service and Prevention

Children's Services

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1 June 2021		ITEM: 8
Corporate Parenting Committee		
Corporate Parenting: Fostering Recruitment Strategy		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Not Applicable	
Report of: Naintara Khosla Strategic Lead CLA, Aftercare and Placements		
Accountable Assistant Director: Janet Simon Interim Assistant Director Children Social Care and Early Help		
Accountable Director: Sheila Murphy Corporate Director Childrens Services		
This report is Public		

Executive Summary

This report provides an outline to the Corporate Parenting Committee of the Fostering Recruitment Strategy. The Fostering Service has, in conjunction with the Communication Service, refreshed the Thurrock Fostering Brand; with the launch of the new brand the marketing strategy has also been updated. This report provides the highlights of the changes and an outline of the events that are planned to create increased opportunities for the recruitment of foster carers.

1. Recommendation(s)

- 1.1 **Members are updated on the Thurrock's Fostering Recruitment Strategy and the brand.**
- 1.2 **Note the marketing activities to create opportunities to develop increased recruitment of foster carers.**

2. Introduction and Background

2.1 Thurrock Fostering Recruitment

There is a statutory requirement to ensure there is sufficiency of placements for Thurrock Looked After children. The overall context for meeting the sufficiency duty is set out in the statutory guidance:

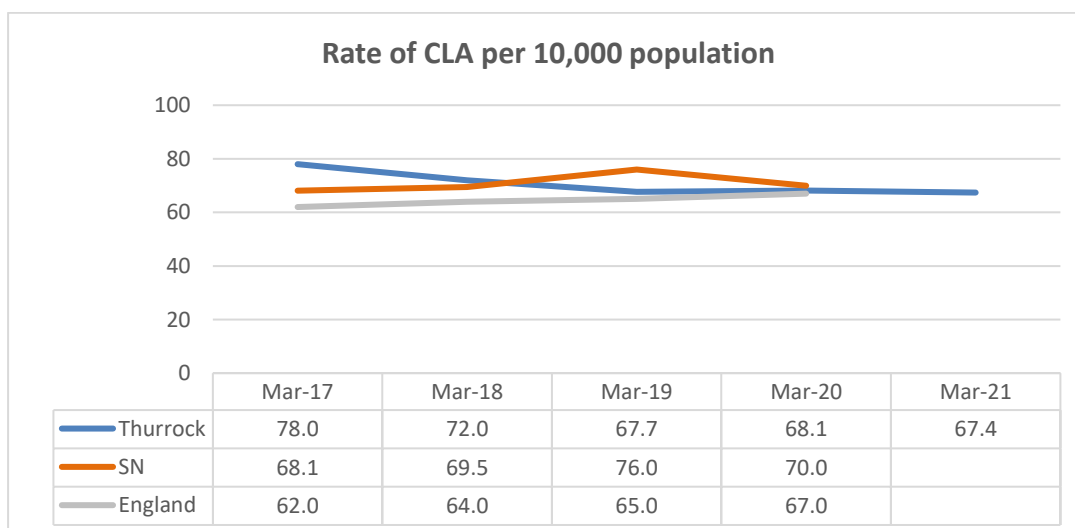
“Securing sufficient accommodation that meets the needs of Children Looked After is a vital step in delivering improved outcomes for this vulnerable group. Having the right placement in the right place, at the right time is a critical

success factor in relation to the delivery of better outcomes for Children Looked After.”

When a child is unable to live with their birth family there are a range of options that can be considered to meet their needs whilst they are living away from home. This could be to live with foster carers, or reside in the care of family friends or family of the child (these carers are known as ‘connected persons’); live in a residential home or, for some older children over the age of 16 years they are able to live in supported accommodation. The service is dedicated to ensuring children enter into Thurrock’s care only when they need our care and that they are looked after in the right placement. Young people should be able to have secure, stable and settled placements so they can transition into adulthood with the skills to progress to independent living. This report focusses on the approach of Thurrock’s Fostering Service to ensure sufficiency of Thurrock in-house foster carers.

At the end of March 2021 there were 301 Children Looked After in Thurrock which shows a rate of 67.4 per 10,000 of children in Thurrock. Based on benchmarking data, Thurrock is below the Statistical Neighbour average of 70 and in line with the England average of 67. In March 2020 the total number of children in fostering households was 235 (78%); 117 (39%) were being cared for by Independent Fostering Agencies and 118 (39%) were cared for by Thurrock approved Foster Carers. In March 2021 there were 89 Thurrock approved fostering households. The average age of an approved foster carer for Thurrock is 53 years old.

Graph 1 Rate of CLA per 10,000 population



Ethnicity of Children in care and Our Foster Carers

Table 1: Children’s Ethnic Backgrounds:

Ethnicity	Number	%
Any other ethnic group	8	2.7%
Asian or Asian British	9	3.0%
Black or Black British	42	14.1%
Information not yet obtained	4	1.3%
Mixed/Dual background	30	10.1%
White British	205	68.8%

Table 2: Foster Carers Ethnic Background:

Carers by Ethnicity	Number	%
Any other Ethnic Group	0	0.00%
Asian British	2	1.32%
Asian Indian	2	1.32%
Asian Other	0	0.00%
Asian Pakistani	0	0.00%
Black African	5	3.31%
Black British	1	0.66%
Black Caribbean	9	5.96%
White and Black Caribbean	0	0.00%
White British	137	90.73%
White Other	2	1.32%

The data shows that Thurrock’s Foster Carers are less likely to be an ethnic and cultural match for the population of looked after children. We therefore need our marketing and recruitment materials to reflect the diversity of our community and the groups we are seeking to become Thurrock Foster carers.

Recruitment Data

Over the period 2019-2021 recruitment activity has been successful, and the number of children placed with Thurrock Foster Carers remains broadly the same. Table 3 reflects the changes in fostering recruitment and those who are no longer registered as carers.

Table 3 Fostering Recruitment Figures

Financial Year	Fostering Households newly registered	Fostering Households no longer registered
2019/20	19	15
2020/21	11	14

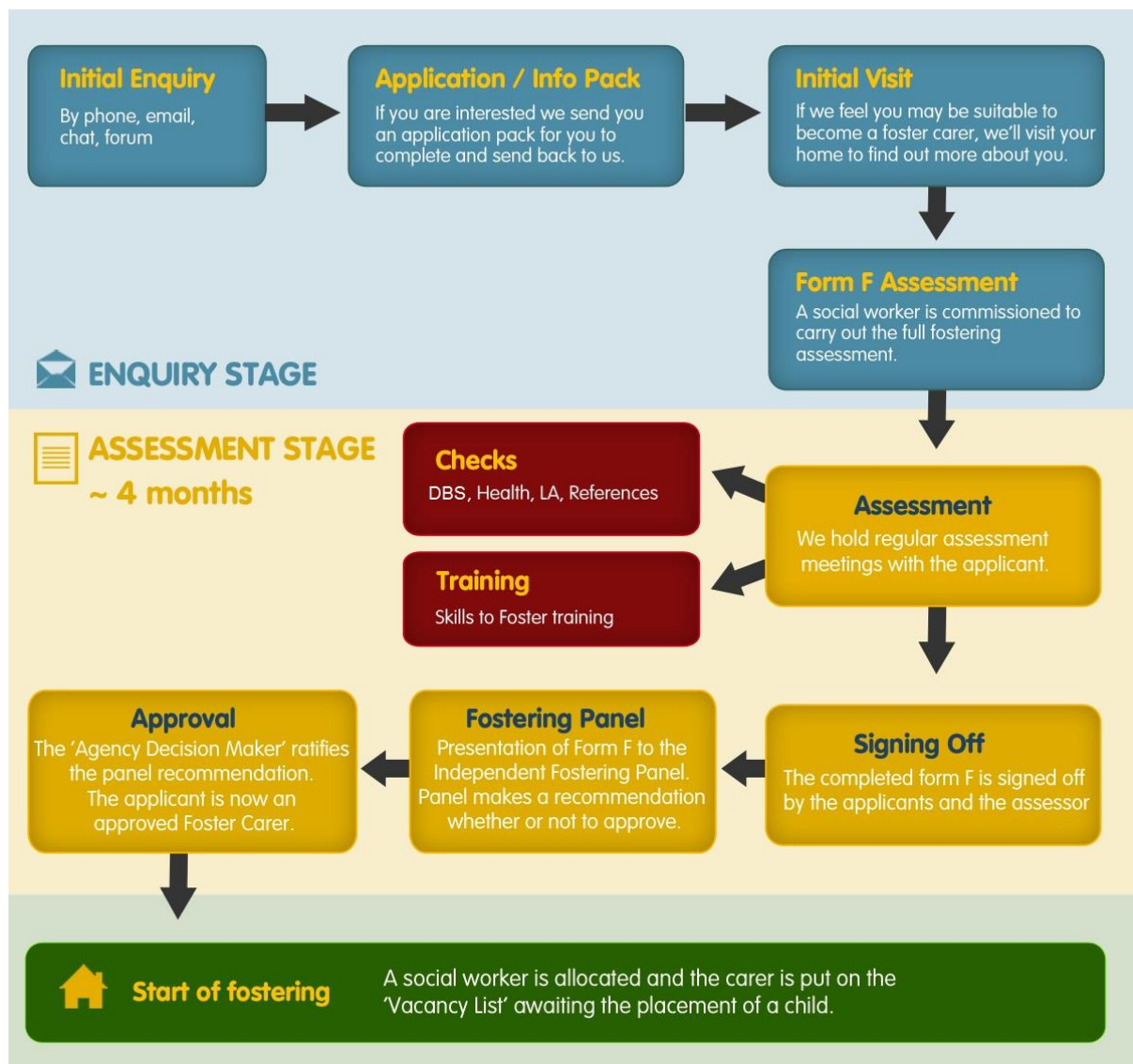
It is natural for some fostering households to retire or decide to end their fostering career depending on changes in their own family circumstances. Of the 14 households that left Thurrock fostering in 2020/21:

- 5 households decided to retire from fostering
- 4 households were de-registered in line with the Fostering Regulations.
- 3 Households moved home, at such a distance they could not continue
- 2 Households resigned due to other changes in their circumstances at home

It is of note that no Thurrock foster carers resigned from Thurrock in order to transfer to another fostering agency. There were 2 transfers from other agencies to Thurrock Fostering. Applicants are assessed against the National Minimum Standards¹ for fostering and their ability to offer a safe, loving home to a child. The recruitment process usually takes about four months from receipt of an application to foster, until approval at Fostering Panel. Timescales are reduced if the applicant is already an approved foster carer from another agency. To approve foster carers a detailed assessment of applicants is undertaken which includes interviews with applicants' personal referees and criminal record checks. Medicals checks are also completed. Applicants who wish to foster are considered from a range of diverse backgrounds.

¹https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/192705/NMS_Fostering_Services.pdf

Flowchart Outlining the Process of Thurrock Foster Care Recruitment



In the financial year 2021-2022 the fostering recruitment campaign seeks to increase fostering capacity by approximately 20 households and reduce the number of children placed with Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA); Thurrock children would benefit from being placed within Thurrock or within 20 miles of their home. A priority for Thurrock fostering recruitment is to focus on recruiting fostering households that will be able to care for brothers and sisters placed together.

The focus on the recruitment of new Thurrock fostering households endeavours to ensure sufficiency given the 19% predicted growth in the population of children and young people in Thurrock by 2024 compared to 13.3% for England.

Table 4 below reflects the high attrition rate at each stage of the fostering recruitment process. There is good attendance at the Information Sessions and the Recruitment Team are completing a significant number of Initial Visits (IVs). There have been 11 approved fostering households (who are able to have up to 15 children if they are siblings) in period April 2020 to March 2021. The disappointing number of new households recruited reflects the impact of COVID 19 during the year, as there has been a reduction in the direct engagement with the public, as well as the inability to plan participation events in the community including festivals and promotional events at Lakeside. The promotional events provide an increase number of enquiries. The 11 approved fostering households were generated from 88 enquiries. Extrapolating this data would indicate that for 22 fostering household approvals there would need to be in excess of 170 enquiries.

The new brand and enhanced media campaign will promote Thurrock fostering and should increase enquiries, attendance at the information sessions and also the IVs. This should, in turn, generate an increase in the numbers of Thurrock approved fostering households. The Service are monitoring the recruitment activity to understand the impact of the new brand and ensure the marketing approach is effective.

**Table 4
Recruitment Key Performance Indicators for Fostering Recruitment**

Applications	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	March	Total
Number of households attending Information Sessions	N/A	N/A	5	0	3	5	0	3	2	8	5	8	39
Number of Enquiries	34	14	12	12	12	19	9	17	8	15	15	21	88
Number of IVs completed	17	6	5	2	7	5	4	3	7	4	6	8	74
Number of Applications Received	4	4	3	3	2	1	0	5	2	0	4	3	31
Number of applications dropped out	0	1	1	1	0	2	0	3	0	1	1	0	10
Numbers of approved foster carers	1	2	0	1	2	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	11

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

3.1 Fostering Brand



The Thurrock Fostering Service has developed a new brand which is known and identifiable as specific to Thurrock Fostering. The brand promotes inclusivity and diversity utilising a multi-coloured brand which is symbolic of rainbow for LGBTQT and NHS England, it is hoped this will appeal to all sections of the community and encourage recruitment from across the Borough. The Service particularly welcomes applications from residents in the Borough but is also seeking to support carers from other areas to join Thurrock's fostering community. The launch of the new brand has been developed to coincide with the Council Tax rebate offer to Thurrock foster carers. Council Tax rebate has provided Thurrock with a competitive offer for carers and a marketing edge to the offers available from other fostering providers.

To enhance the marketing of the new brand the fostering recruitment team along with colleagues from Communications Department have ensured there has been relentless promotion of the new brand. This has included a new look fostering section on the Thurrock Council website² providing easy access to the fostering section of the website. The Registration of Interest forms have also been reviewed and this is twinned with the dates for the information sessions. Whilst COVID 19 has impacted on the ability of the fostering recruitment team to be community based impacting on the number of new foster carers; there has been the opportunity to utilise the online approach. This has reflected a slow increase in attendance at information sessions that

² <https://www.thurrock.gov.uk/fostering>

are being held online. This trend is being monitored to understand if this is a preference for those wishing to become foster carers.

Future marketing opportunities include expanding the use of the internet; COVID 19 has increased the use of online information as a preferred means of communication. Information sessions have increased to twice a month. The launch of the new brand has also seen the promotion of Thurrock fostering recruitment on social media, Facebook, Council Twitter feed and Spotify. The recruitment team have also continued the use of Thurrock's fostering hashtag #makeadifference.

The Fostering Recruitment Service have been exploring the use of online news feeds to advertise, both in Essex and other newsfeeds for nearby, surrounding areas. Consideration has also been given to including the fostering recruitment offer on the Thurrock internet jobs page, however staff remain responsive to telephone enquiries. This increased use of online marketing opportunities is twinned with the use of Radio adverts. Consideration has been given to further marketing opportunities as we emerge out of lockdown, these include the use of Bus Shelters and Roundabouts to continue the increased awareness of the brand.

There will be continuous review of the marketing opportunities with the ongoing recruitment planning meetings which are held monthly with Communications colleagues. These meetings monitor Performance Indicators and the work to promote and build the brand and the effectiveness of marketing. There is a fostering recruitment action plan with a calendar of key events, and dates for advertising are planned in advance. This includes Fostering Fortnight which is a national campaign led by The Fostering Network; this year it runs from 10th – 23rd May and the theme is #whywecare highlighting how foster carers can transform young lives. Foster Care Fortnight receives around 900 pieces of media coverage each year and Thurrock implements a media plan before and throughout the event

Participation and Children in Care Council (CiCC) and Foster Care Association

The new Thurrock Fostering Brand has been shared with the CiCC and the Thurrock Foster Care Association and they have been positive about the new images which promotes an inclusive approach.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1 Members to consider and note the options available.

5. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

- 5.1 There is consultation with Children in Care Council who meet monthly; Foster Care Association, care experienced young people and Inspire.

6. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact

6.1 N/A

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **David May**
Strategic Lead, Finance

The increased recruitment of foster carers will assist in the reduction of Independent Fostering Agencies and support the Council providing children who are looked after with increased choice as the cohort of Thurrock foster carers grows.

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Judith Knight**
Interim Deputy Head of Legal (Education and Social Care)

The Council has a duty under Section 22G of the Children Act 1989 to take such steps, so far as reasonably practicable, to provide looked after children with accommodation in the area which meets the needs of those children. The Council must have regard to, in meeting this duty, the benefit of having a sufficient number and range of providers in the area.

7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Roxanne Scanlon**
Community Engagement and Project Monitoring Officer Adults, Housing & Health

The refreshed branding and marketing strategy is designed to attract and recruit foster carers from a wide range of diverse backgrounds. This will ensure there are a range of care options for children and young people and provide increased opportunities so they can be placed in culturally matched families. The updated fostering brand has created a more inclusive image and ensures that fostering recruitment has a greater reach to a broad range of communities.

7.4 Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder, or Impact on Looked After Children)

The fostering recruitment is crucial for looked after children to support their placement choice, remaining in their own communities, near their families and supports maintaining consistency with local education attendance.

8. Background papers used in preparing the report (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

- Not Applicable

9. Appendices to the report

- Not Applicable

Report Authors:

Naintara Khosla Strategic Lead CLA, Aftercare and Placements

Dan Jones Service Manager Placements

Work Programme

Committee: Corporate Parenting

Year: 2021/2022

Dates of Meetings: To Be Confirmed at Annual Council (26 May 2021)

Topic	Lead Officer	Requested by Officer/Member
June 2021		
Childrens Service Performance Report	Mandy Moore	Officers (Agreed with Chair)
Update on the Youth Offending Service, the Youth Justice Plan and the role of the Service for Children Looked After	Clare Moore/Jason Read	Officers (Agreed with Chair)
Report for Members on Missing Children, Child Exploitation, Return Home Interviews and Contextual Safeguarding focussed on Children Looked After	Clare Moore/Seema Moules	Officers (Agreed with Chair)
Thurrock Fostering Service: Recruitment Strategy	Dan Jones / Naintara Khosla	Officers (Agreed with Chair)
Work Programme	Democratic Services Officer	Standard Item
September 2021		
Fostering Statement of Purpose	Janet Simon / Daniel Jones	Officers
Adoption Statement of Purpose	Janet Simon/Dan Jones	Officers
Children in Care Council Update	Open Door	Officers
Children's Social Care Performance	Mandy Moore	Officers

Corporate Parenting Committee – Annual Report 2019/2020	Democratic Services Officer	Officers
Work Programme	Democratic Services Officer	Standard Item
5 January 2022		
Children’s Social Care Performance	Mandy Moore	Officers
Sufficiency Placement	Sue Green	Officers
Independent Reviewing Officer – Annual Report	Ruth Murdock	Officers
Annual Report of the Virtual Schools	Keeley Pullen	Officers
Work Programme	Democratic Services Officer	Standard Item
2 March 2022		
Children’s Social Care Performance	Mandy Moore	Officers
Work Programme	Democratic Services Officer	Standard Item

Clerk: Kenna-Victoria Healey

Last Updated: March 2021