

nThurrock - 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 **4 January 2023**

**Council Chamber, Civic Offices 3, New Road, Grays, Essex, RM17 6SL.**

### Membership:

Councillors Paul Arnold (Chair), Adam Carter (Vice-Chair), Maureen Pearce, Georgette Polley, Kairen Raper and Lee Watson

Christopher Bennett, Chair, Children in Care Council  
Laura Hall, Thurrock Open Door  
Chair, The One Team, Foster Carer Association  
Jenny Josling, Vice-Chair, The One Team, Foster Carer Association

### Substitutes:

Councillors George Coxshall, Martin Kerin, Steve Liddiard and Joycelyn Redsell

### Agenda

Open to Public and Press

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<b>1 Apologies for Absence</b>	
<b>2 Minutes</b>	<b>5 - 10</b>
To approve as a correct record the minutes of the Corporate Parenting Committee meeting held on 6 September 2022.	
<b>3 Items of Urgent Business</b>	
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.	
<b>4 Declaration of Interests</b>	

<b>5</b>	<b>Children's Social Care Performance 2022-2023</b>	<b>11 - 34</b>
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<b>10</b>	<b>The Annual Report of the Virtual School Headteacher for Children Looked After – Academic Year 2021-2022</b>	<b>125 - 178</b>
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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](mailto:Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk)

Agenda published on: **20 December 2022**

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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 6 September 2022 at 7.00 pm

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**Present:** Councillors Adam Carter (Chair), Maureen Pearce (Vice-Chair), Paul Arnold, Kairen Raper (via Microsoft Teams) and Lee Watson

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

**Apologies:** Councillor Georgette Polley, Laura Hall, Christopher Bennett, Sharon Smith and Sheila Murphy

**In attendance:** Janet Simon, Assistant Director, Children's Social Care and Early Help  
Ewelina Sorbjan, Assistant Director for Housing Management  
Dan Jones, Strategic Lead, Looked After Children  
Clare Moore, Strategic Lead for the Youth Offending Service and Prevention  
Luke Froment, Social Care Service Manager (left at 7.53pm)  
Nikola Rickard, Designate Nurse for Looked After Children  
Tina Russel, Assistant Director SET Camhs and Partnerships  
Kenna-Victoria Healey, Senior Democratic Services Officer

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

### 10. Minutes

The minutes of the Corporate Parenting meeting on 19 July 2022 were approved as a correct record, subject to noting the following were in attendance at the meeting, Nikola Rickard Designate Nurse for Looked After Children, and Ewelina Sorbjan Assistant Director for Housing Management.

### 11. Items of Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

### 12. Declaration of Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

### 13. Children's Social Care Performance 2022-23

The Assistant Director for Children's Social Care and Early Help presented the report found on pages 11 to 34 of the agenda.

The Chair of the Committee thanked Officers for the report which highlighted and included a number of positive elements. He sought clarity on the timeline for adoption as looking back over the years in 2019 to 2020, Thurrock were under the average time between entering the adoption service and moving in with an adoptive family.

The Assistant Director for Children's Social Care and Early Help explained it could take just one case for the figures to go out and this could be for different reasons and sometimes this takes a little more time to complete the process. If that meant Officers had to persevere to find right placement for that child or young person, by taking a little bit longer as a result of officers completing the right searches and finding the right family then that was right thing to do.

During discussions Councillor Watson raised a query with regard to the number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, within the report it had been stated there was to be an increase in the number of unaccompanied asylum seekers the local authority would be expected to take under their care. She continued by asking how many children Thurrock would be expected to accept in one go. Officers explained there had been an increase of 0.1% and this took the Councils number from 31 to 45. Members were advised the announcement was still very recent and Officers were to meet with colleagues in the Home Office to discuss the news, however at this stage Officers commented it was not looking likely that the authority would have to accept 14 children or young people all at once.

Members also discussed the 'Think Family' service which went live in April 2022 and supports early intervention and was evidence based in the hope there be fewer children within the care system. The Committee heard the service had already received 114 referrals, which enabled Social Workers across the service to meet and assess the support needed by young people and children who were potentially at risk of entering the care system, this could include looking for a family member for the child to stay with while any concerns could be assessed.

## **RESOLVED**

**That members note improvements and areas for improvement in Children's Social Care and note the work that is undertaken to ensure good and improving performance.**

### **14. Adoption Statement of Purpose**

The Strategic Lead for Looked After Children presented the report found on page 35 to 62 of the agenda.

Councillor Watson thanked Officers for the report and sought an update on the current vacancies. The Strategic Lead for Looked After Children advised the Committee at present officers were recruiting and the advert was out for permanent roles, with the closing date for applications on 12<sup>th</sup> September which would be followed by interviews.



During discussions it was confirmed that given the nature of the roles and enhanced DBS enhanced check would be required for the four posts.

## **RESOLVED**

**That the Members of the Committee are informed about Thurrock's Adoption Statement of Purpose.**

### **15. After Care Service Report**

The Social Care Service Manager introduced the report found on page 63 to 72 of the agenda.

Following questions from the Committee it was explained the pipeline coming through, officers knew there was likely to be an increase in the number of cases coming into the aftercare service based on the figures they currently had. The Social Care Service Manager continued by advising there was a business case which was currenting being explored, looking at increasing resources in within that the team to include an additional two PAs.

He further commented that Officers completed some great work in terms of looking at older cohorts and the possibility of closing some of those cases appropriately, although there was still some work to do in terms of those cases.

Members heard in terms of mediation that to keep young people in their placements, there was a lot of work which went into discussions with the young people themselves and with their foster carers right from the age of 16 years old around Staying Put arrangements. The Social Care Service Manager advised there were a number of young people who are in Staying Put arrangements, which basically means that they remain in their foster placement post 18. He continued by commenting officers had received some success with Staying Put arrangements and extended those arrangements, particularly where young people were in education.

Responding to a question from Members the Assistant Director for Housing Management advised that officers would not necessarily keep any properties vacant waiting for young people when leaving care. However, in turn within the stock officers were able to identify properties which would be available and would encourage young people leaving care to bid for property if this was something they wished to do, so assisting them to take active part within that process.

## **RESOLVED**

**That the Members of the Committee are informed about Thurrock's Aftercare service.**

## **16. Performance Report on Initial Health Assessments for Looked After Children**

The Strategic Lead, CLA introduced the report found on page 73 to 80 of the agenda. Following this the Designate Nurse for Looked After Children talked Members through her presentation.

The Chair of the Committee commented that in March 18% of children who reached 28 days in care received an initial health assessment within 20 working days, however since then the figure has not gone above 18%. He queried how this was the case, given funding available to clear the backlog. The Designate Nurse for Looked After Children explained this was due to the availability of paediatricians. She continued by explaining recruitment was also looked at as an option to try and help clear the backlog of children waiting their initial health assessment.

The Designate Nurse for Looked After Children further commented it was important to remember health colleagues were not allowed to prioritise Thurrock children over other children who come into care from other areas.

During the discussion Councillor Watson sought information on how the resources were being distributed across the boroughs by Nelft. She further enquired how the Council could monitor Nelft to ensure funding and support was being delivered equally. The Designate Nurse for Looked After Children advised they worked with Nelft, met them regularly on a monthly basis and were currently awaiting a report on how the additional funding was spent.

### **RESOLVED**

**That members are aware of the work that has taken place, and areas for improvement in completing Initial Health Assessments and note the work that is being undertaken to ensure improving performance.**

## **17. Joint Housing Protocol for Care Leavers**

The Strategic Lead, Looked After Children presented the report which could be found on pages 81 to 86 of the agenda.

### **RESOLVED**

- 1. For the Committee to note the statutory duties of the Local Authority to support young people in obtaining suitable accommodation and how we plan to meet these duties.**
- 2. For the Committee to have oversight of the joint protocols and be involved in the ongoing review of delivery across Children's Services and Housing Services.**

**18. Children in Care Council Update - to follow**

As the Chair of the Children In Care Council and the Children In Care Council Project Worker had sent their apologies to the meeting, the Chair of the Committee advised Members he had agreed to defer the item to the January meeting.

**RESOLVED:**

**That the report be deferred to the next meeting of the Committee on Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> January.**

**19. Corporate Parenting Committee Annual Report 2021/2022**

The Senior Democratic Services Officer introduced to the report which was to be found on pages 87 to 98 of the agenda. It was explained as the previous Chair of the Committee was no longer an Elected Member, the report was written on behalf of the Vice-Chair.

**RESOLVED**

- 1. That the contents of the Corporate Parenting Annual Report 2021/2022 be noted.**
- 2. That the Corporate Parenting Annual Report be referred to Full Council, to share the work of Committee and their main achievements for 2021/2022 municipal year.**

**20. Work Programme**

The Corporate Parenting Committee discussed the work programme detailed within the agenda. Members requested the following items be included on the work programme:

- NELFT Report
- Mark Riddle Returning Visit
- Mental Health Report

**RESOLVED**

**The following reports be included on the work programme for 2022/2023:**

- 3.NELFT Report – January 2023**
- 4.Mark Riddle Returning Visit – March 2023**
- 5.Mental Health Report – March 2023**

**The meeting finished at 8.25 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](mailto:Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk)**

<b>4 January 2023</b>		<b>ITEM: 5</b>
<b>Corporate Parenting Committee</b>		
<b>Children’s Social Care Performance 2022-2023</b>		
<b>Wards and communities affected:</b> All	<b>Key Decision:</b> Non-key	
<b>Report of:</b> Anna Watkins, Business Intelligence Analyst		
<b>Accountable Assistant Director:</b> Janet Simon, Assistant Director, Children’s Social Care and Early Help		
<b>Accountable Director:</b> Sheila Murphy, Corporate Director, Children’s Services		
<b>This report is:</b> Public		

## Executive Summary

This report provides information on the performance for Children Looked After and Care Leavers. The overall performance for the service is good. This report focusses on data up to the end of Quarter 2 in 2022-23.

At the end of Q2 2022-23, 282 children were looked after by Thurrock Council, a further 257 young adults were receiving services from the Aftercare team. Children and young people are visited regularly and seen and spoken to alone where appropriate to do so. Children who go missing are managed consistently and this reflects good partnership with the police and Thurrock Community Safety.

Improvement is required in the timeliness of Initial Health Assessment which is an area of focus with health partners and solutions have been identified to address performance in this area to ensure children’s health needs are assessed.

An area of focus in the Aftercare team is care leavers being seen regularly, keeping in touch, and supporting young people into employment or education and have the right accommodation to meet their needs.

Most children who are looked after are placed with foster carers or, where possible, with family members. Thurrock Council continues to develop it’s ‘Think Family’ approach to reduce the need for children to enter care or help them to return to their families where it is safe to do so. Recruitment of foster carers continues to be a priority in Thurrock and finding appropriate local placements for children.

It has been previously reported to Corporate Parenting Committee that permanency planning has been particularly impacted by COVID-19 which has had an impact on performance and timetabling for final court hearings. We continue to see upward pressure due to the duration of care proceedings being 40+ weeks (the target is 26 weeks)

## **1. Recommendation(s)**

### **1.1 That members note improvements and areas for improvement in Children's Social Care and note the work that is undertaken to ensure good and improving performance.**

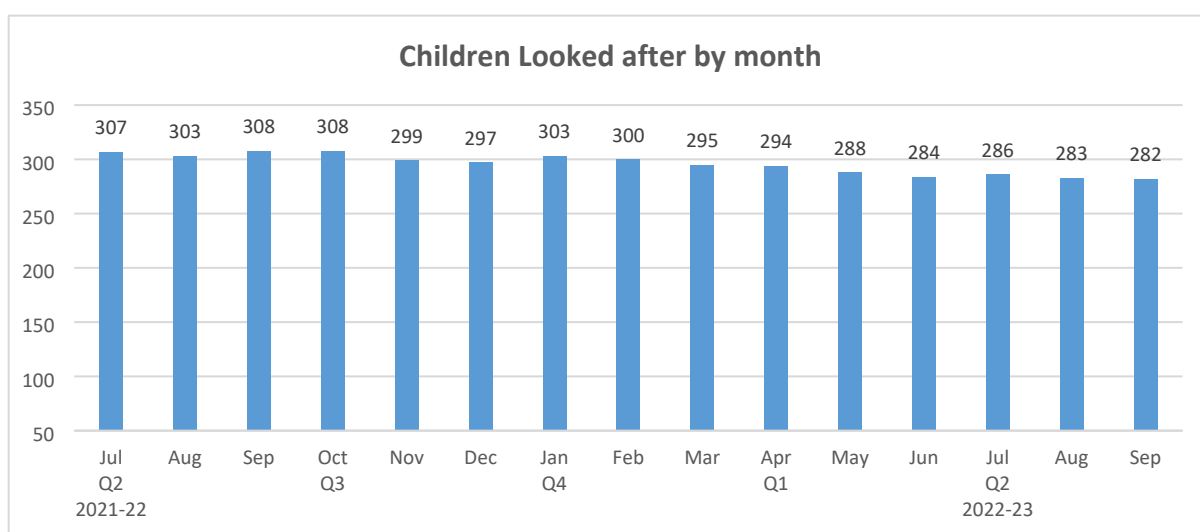
## **2. Introduction and Background**

- 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 and their outcomes. 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. There is monitoring of children who may need to become looked after and regular reviews of children entering care. The numbers of children becoming looked after have seen a lower trajectory in the first two quarters of 2022/23. We can expect this to change upward in the autumn as UASC are transferred into Thurrock (See s.3.2).



#### 3.2 Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC)

UASC are a subset of the Children Looked After number above. Local Authorities through agreement have a simple formula to ensure a fair distribution of the responsibility for looking after unaccompanied children. Each local authority has a 0.07% ceiling for how many UASC and unaccompanied asylum-seeking children a region or local authority is reasonably expected to be looking after at any time, as a proportion of its total number of children.

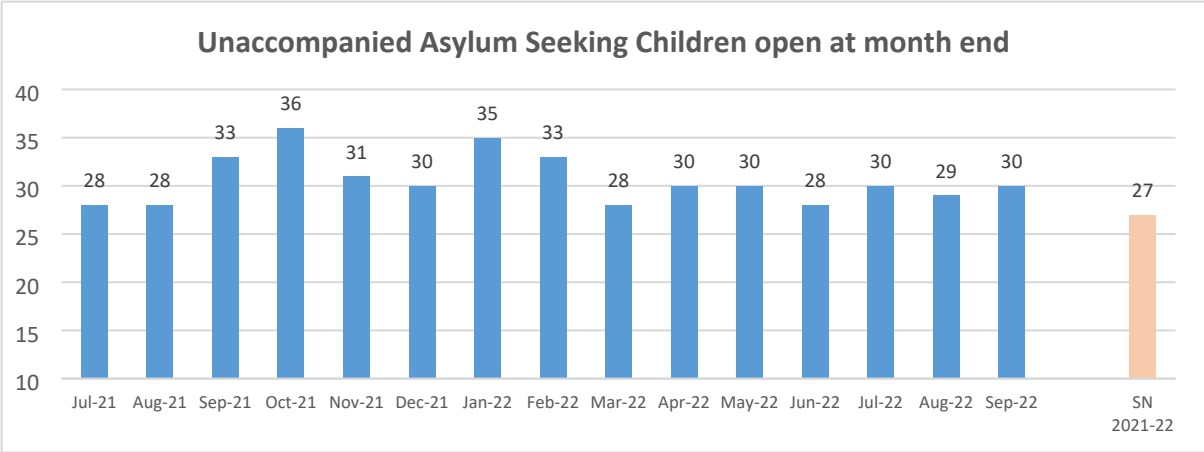
Thurrock's allocated number was 31 children; this has now been uplifted by the Home Office to 45 children. This means that Thurrock will now receive transfers in from other authorities and these will likely be from migrant processing centres in Kent. This will increase demand for placements, social work time and After Care support on a long term basis. Over the last year there have been fewer children arriving at Thurrock Ports/found in vehicles in Thurrock as the preferred route appears to have been through Dover. Between July and September 2022, there were 5 new UASC arrivals into Thurrock compared to 10 in the same period in 2021.

When a local authority reaches its allocated number there are arrangements in place for new arrivals to be transferred via the National Transfer Scheme

(NTS). The NTS replaced, the Eastern Region<sup>1</sup> Transfer scheme in July 2021 and works efficiently and effectively with the transfer of UASC usually within 10 days of arrival.

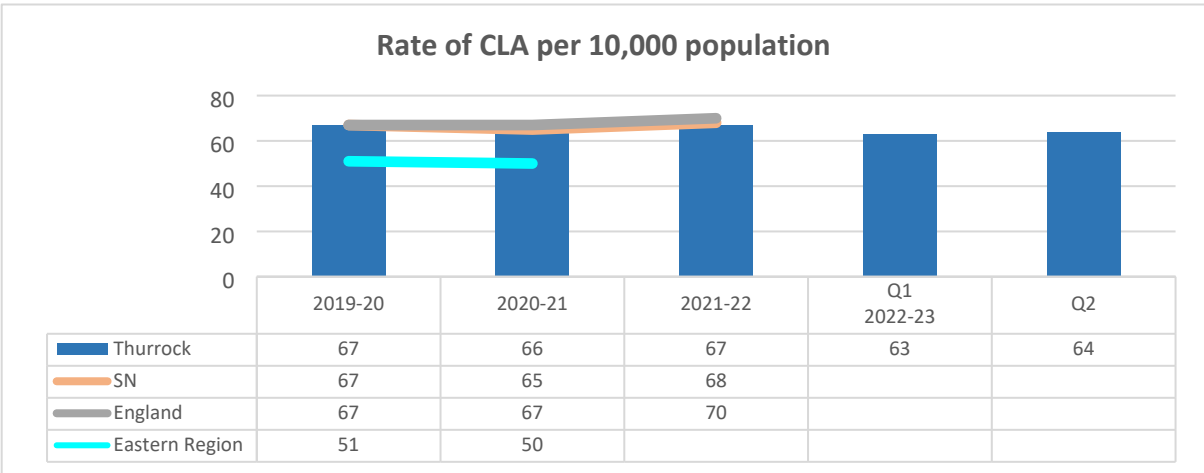
The NTS is operated by Central Government with the Home Office responsible for administration of the scheme. The Eastern Region Co Coordinator liaises with the Home Office co-ordinator.

The below graphs show the number of UASC that were looked after at the end of each month.



### 3.3 The Rate of Children Looked After 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 September 2022 there were 282 Children Looked After in Thurrock with the rate of 64 per 10,000. Based on the benchmarking data 2022, below the Statistical Neighbour average of 68 and England average of 70.

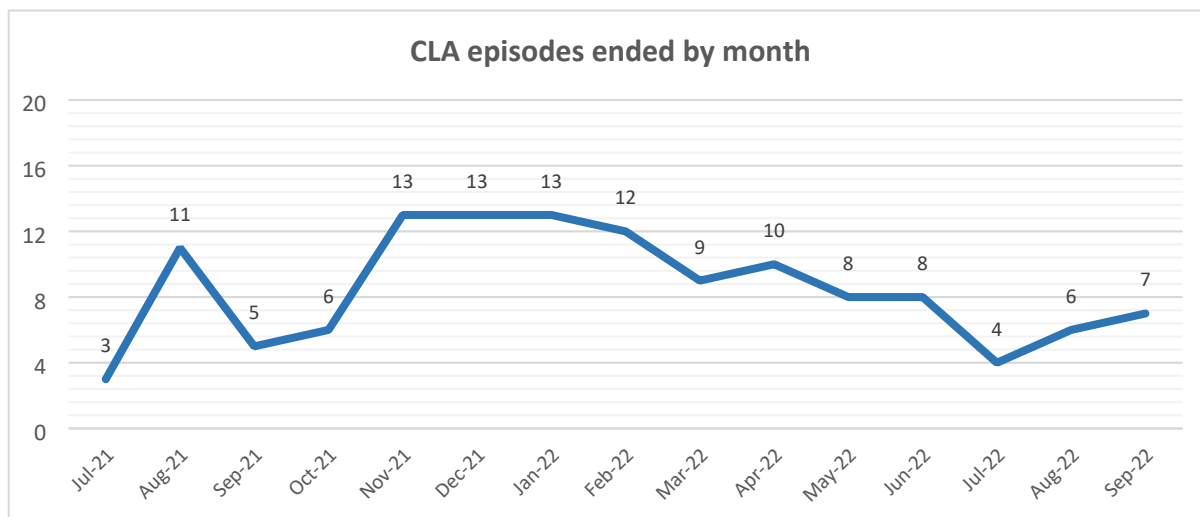


<sup>1</sup> The Eastern Region comprises of Bedford Borough, Cambridgeshire, Central Bedfordshire, Hertfordshire, Luton, Norfolk, Peterborough, Southend, Suffolk and Thurrock Local Authorities



### 3.4 Children Looked After episodes started and ended

It is normal for the number of children leaving care to fluctuate. Between July and September 2022, the number of Thurrock children who ceased to be looked after was 17.



The most common reason for children ceasing to be looked after was children returning home to live with their parents.

There are four factors contributing and impacting on the numbers of children in care in Thurrock:

- Numbers of children entering care
- Numbers of children leaving care
- Numbers of UASC entering care
- Numbers of UASC who remain looked after by Thurrock

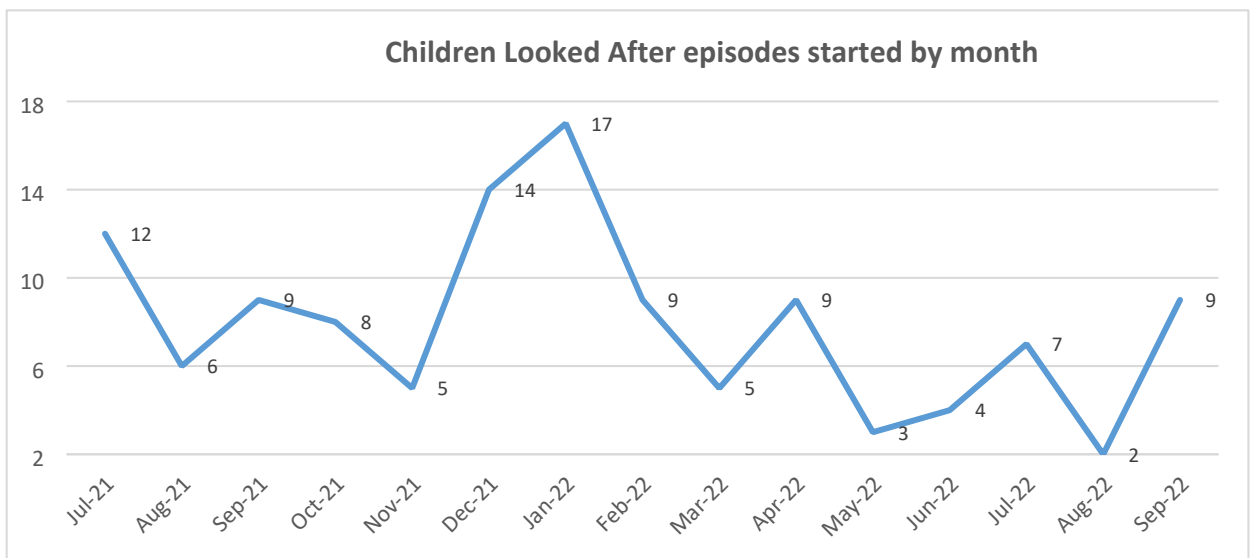
The below chart shows entries and exits in and out of care over the last few years and evidence fewer numbers of UASC entering care. As identified earlier in this report we expect to see this number increase in line with the change in the number UASC allocation

	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	Q2 2022-23 (Jul - Sep)
Total number Entering Care	203	242	150	121	18
UASC Care (% of total CLA population)	91 (44.8%)	75 (30.9%)	36 (24.0%)	38 (31%)	5 (1.8%)
Exiting Care	211	235	148	122	17

Number of CLA at end of reporting period	290	298	298	295	282
Average UASC Population at end of reporting period	39	23	21	28	30

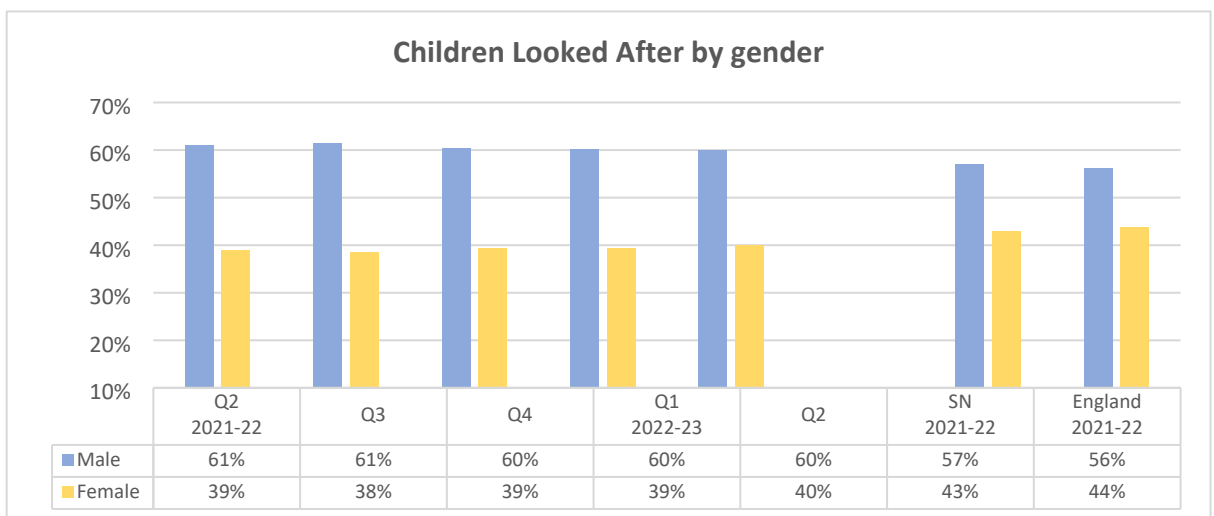
All cases are reviewed to ensure the correct children come in to care and court proceedings are only issued where necessary. Children and Families are supported to remain together to stabilise families who may be in crisis.

### 3.5 Children Looked After episodes started



### 3.6 Children Looked After by gender

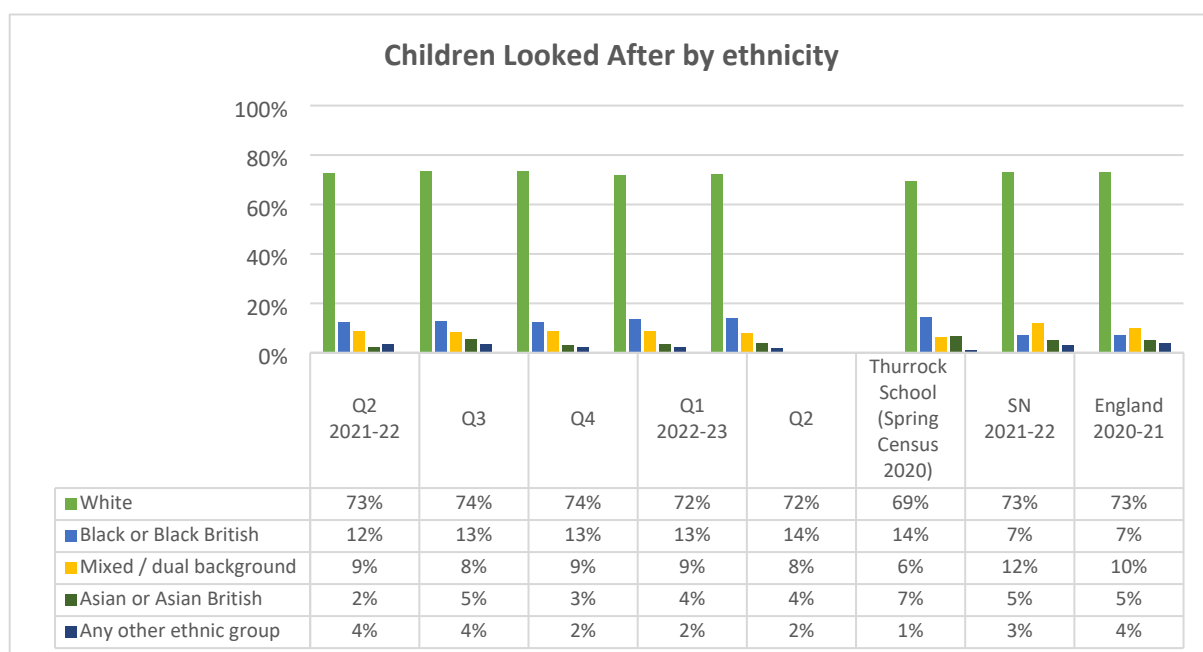
Based on the benchmarking data in 2021-22, the gender breakdown is in line with the Statistical Neighbour and England averages as of September 2022.



### 3.7 Children Looked After by ethnicity

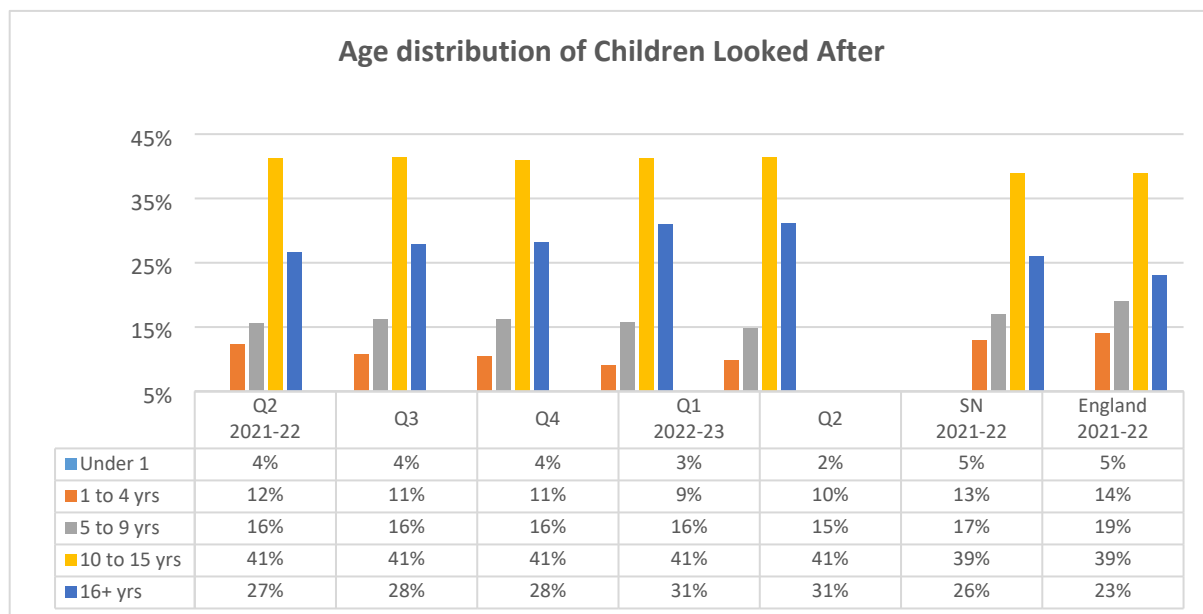
Thurrock's Children Looked After are predominantly White which is in line with Thurrock's School Census in Spring 2020 and the Statistical Neighbour and England averages.

The percentages of Black or Black British children in care in Thurrock is 14%. This figure is significantly higher when compared to the Statistical Neighbour and National average of 7% but in line with the demographics of the population in Thurrock compared to statistical neighbours and national data. The schools census 2020 (which is the most recent information) indicated that 14% of the children living in Thurrock were Black or Black British, compared to 7% for the National and Statistical Neighbour averages. This data is also likely influenced by the number of UASC in Thurrock which accounts for 10% of the CLA population at the end of March 2022 and 57% (16) of the UASC population were described as Black



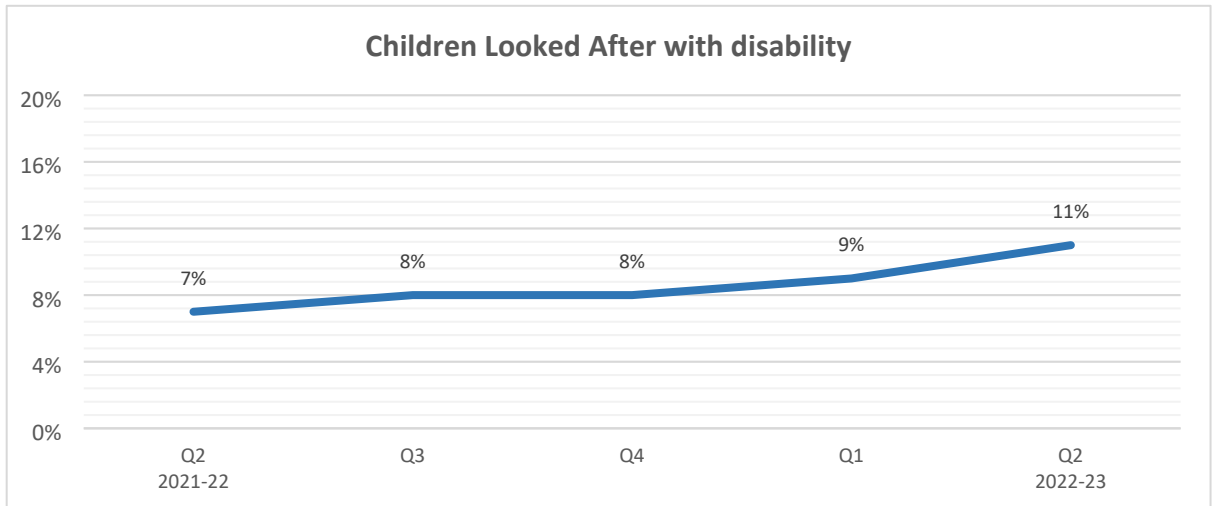
### 3.8 Children Looked After age profile

Based on the benchmarking data as of March 2022, the age profile of the Children Looked After cohort remains mostly stable and in line with the Statistical Neighbour and England averages. However, since July 2021, we have seen a 4% increase in the number of 16+ years. When comparing the 16+ with SN and England, Thurrock is above the Statistical Neighbour average of 26% and the England average of 23% as at the end of Q2 2022-23.



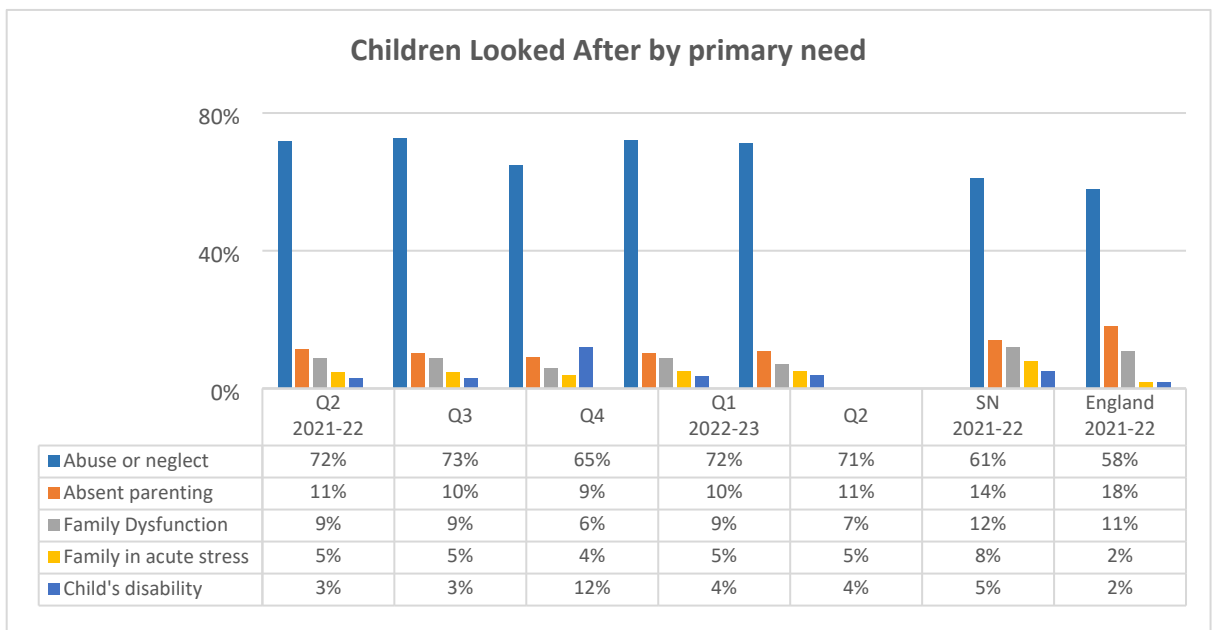
### 3.9 Children Looked After with a disability

The number of children looked after with a disability has risen by 4% since April 2021. At the end of September 2022, 31 (11%) of the total CLA cohort were recorded as having a disability. 24 of these children were boys aged two and over and 7 girls aged 12 and over. 13 of 31 disabled children were placed within 20 miles or less from their home.



### 3.10 Children Looked After by Primary Need

Most children become Looked After because of the significant harm they are experiencing or likely to experience. Where possible, Social Care provide support and intervention to enable families to remain together and ensure that children only become looked after, when absolutely necessary.

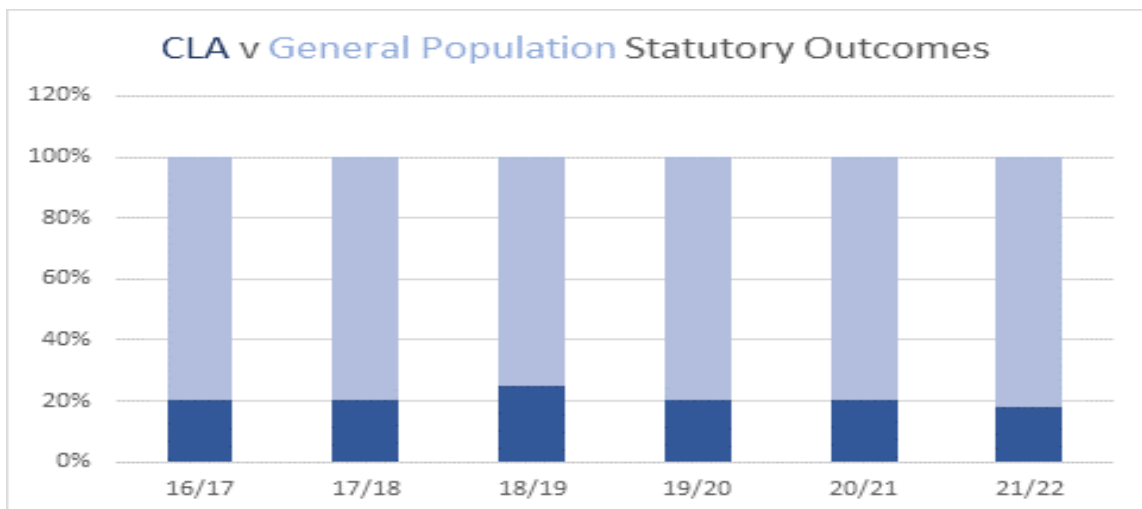


## 4. Number of CLA open to the Youth Offending Service (YOS)

### 4.1 Statutory Interventions

A statutory intervention is undertaken 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.

During quarter 2 of 2022-23 there were 30 children open to the Youth Offending Service on statutory outcomes, 5 (16%) of these were looked after children (1,7% of CLA population). The 5 looked after children represented 17% of the young people open to YOS and were all white British.



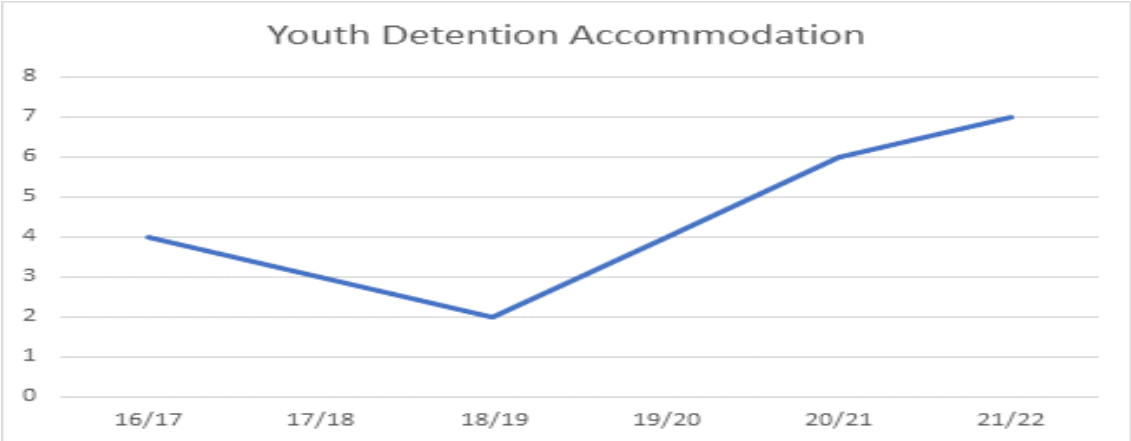
The above graph represents the percentage of Children Looked After versus the total number of young people in the Youth Justice System for the last five years. Despite an increase from 20% to 30% in 2018-19 the numbers of Children Looked After has been relatively static at or around 20%. There were no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

### 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.

2 children were subject to Youth Detention Accommodation Orders during quarter 1 of 2022-23, both were from the Black and Minority Ethnic community. Both young people are now serving custodial sentences. At the end of the second quarter there were no young people placed on remand.

The over representation of BAME young people in the Criminal Justice system is recognised as a national issue. Essex wide, we are working with our partners to identify the root causes for over representation via the Essex Criminal Justice Board. Locally we are monitoring the numbers of black children coming to the Out of Court Disposal Panel, where early intervention and diversion can be offered. The data in relation to our BAME young people in custody, on Court Orders, or receiving diversion intervention is scrutinised via the Youth Crime Governance Board on a quarterly basis and is a priority within our Youth Justice Board Plan 2021-24.



**4.3 Out of court disposal panel**

During Q2 for 2022/23 the out of court disposal panel dealt with 17 offences relating to 17 Thurrock children, of which 0 children had looked after status.

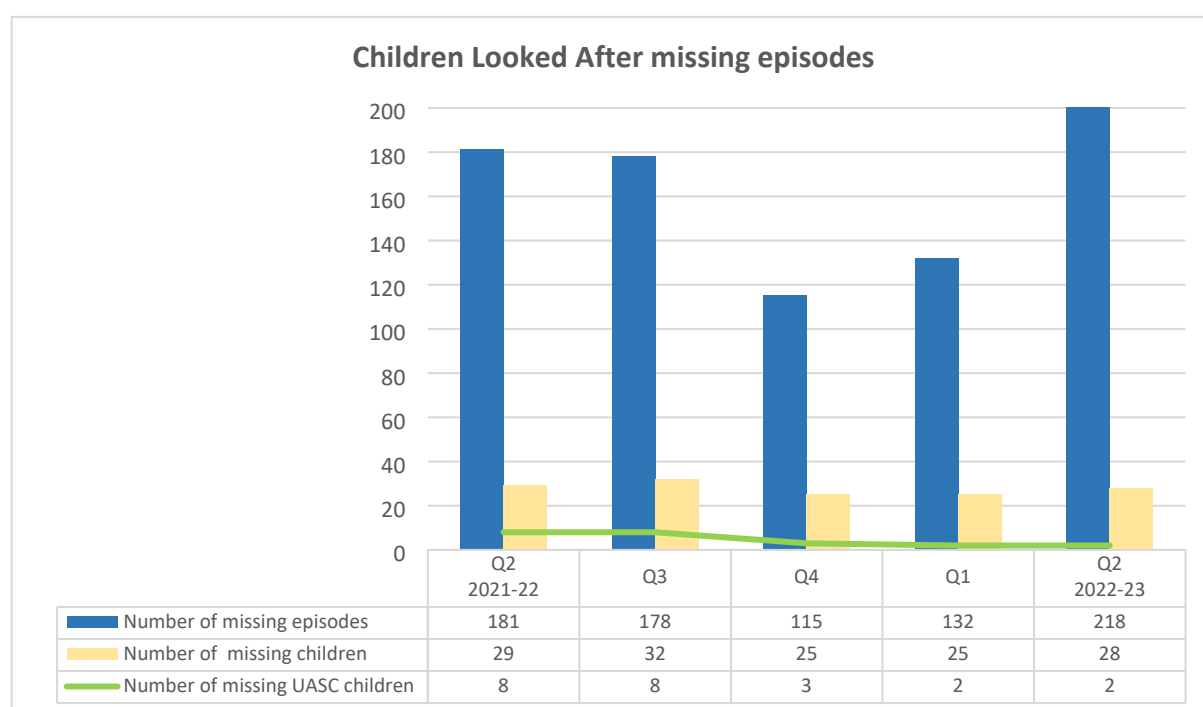
Thurrock YOS and Essex Police are committed to the national protocol<sup>2</sup> aimed to reduce the criminalisation of Children Looked After. This approach will be supported with a local pan-Essex protocol to ensure there is a focus on diverting any child (where possible) who is Looked After from the Criminal Justice System.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-protocol-on-reducing-criminalisation-of-looked-after-children>

## 5. Children Looked After missing episodes started

The graph below shows the number of missing episodes started and the count of the individual children who went missing between July 2021 and September 2022. The most common reasons for children going missing is that they have stayed out past their curfew with friends or are with their families.

In Q2 2022-23 (Jul-Sep), there were total of 218 missing episodes represented by 28 individual children compared to 181 missing episodes in the same period in 2020-21; this represents a 20% increase in the number of missing episodes since Q2 2021-22. The majority of missing episodes relate to young people who are late home or who are missing for less than 24 hours and who are aged 16 and over.



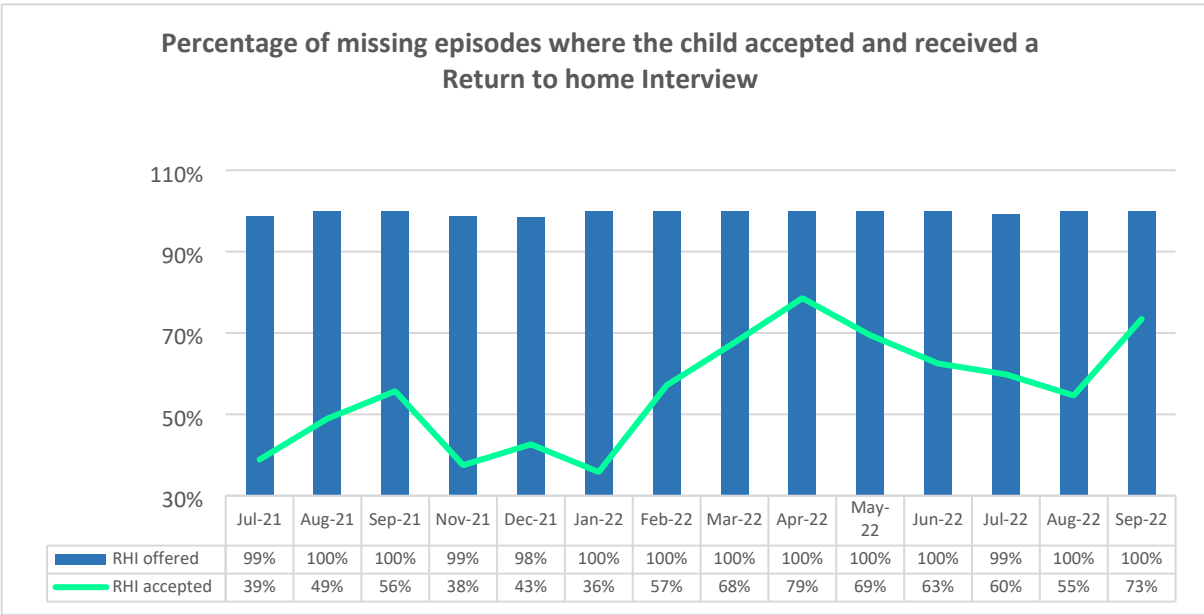
### 5.1 Children Looked After return to home interview (RHI)

Since 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 also 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.



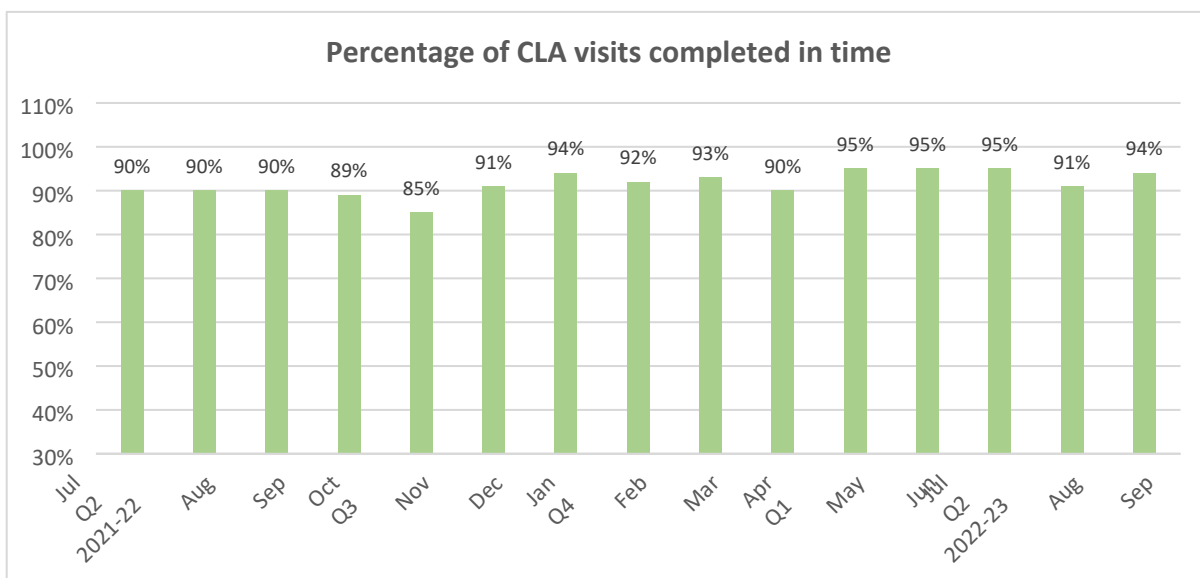
As at end of September 2022, the percentage of children offered a return to home interview was 100% of which 73% accepted and received an interview compared to 56% in September 2021. The offer of an RHI via Inspire is not always accepted by young people for several reasons including not wanting to reveal their whereabouts when missing and not believing that they were missing but 'out'. All young people who have a missing episode are reviewed at the weekly Risk Management Meeting.

The graph below shows the percentage of return to home interviews taken up by young people through Inspire since July 2021. There continues to be a small number of CLA with a large number of episodes who have consistently refused return home interviews. We continue to review how Inspire engage this cohort of young people and alternatives such as whether there is anyone within the network better placed to have these conversations when they return from missing episodes, including their social worker and how this information is captured. This has increased the amount of Return Home Interviews completed and has ensured that young people are given the opportunities to share whether there are any safeguarding issues in relation to exploitation that needs to be addressed. that offer.



**5.2 Timeliness of Social Worker Children Looked After visits**

Social workers are required to visit a child/young person within one week of the start of any placement. Visits are then due in accordance with the time agreed within the Care Plan. This can vary from 20 to 65 working days, permitted within regulations. There has been a slight dip in performance in the last quarter and there is focused work within the service to ensure sustained improved performance and that children are seen and spoken to. The average quarterly visits completed in time between July and September 2022 was 93.5% compared to 89.4% in the same quarter in 2020-21 representing 4% increase.



### 5.3 Children Looked After in Education

Due to the COVID 19 pandemic, all national academic testing was cancelled. In line with Department for Education guidance, schools will not be publishing their data for 2021.

The annual report of the Virtual School Head teacher is a key document which must be produced as part of reporting arrangements. The 2019-20 report was presented to Corporate Performance Board in January 2021.

In addition to the annual report, the Virtual School Head teacher and her team members provide reports to the Governing Body every term. These detail a range of information such which is provided to ensure that we are held accountable, and that the delivery of services is efficient. (Please see Agenda item 8 within Corporate Parenting Committee Pack January 21)

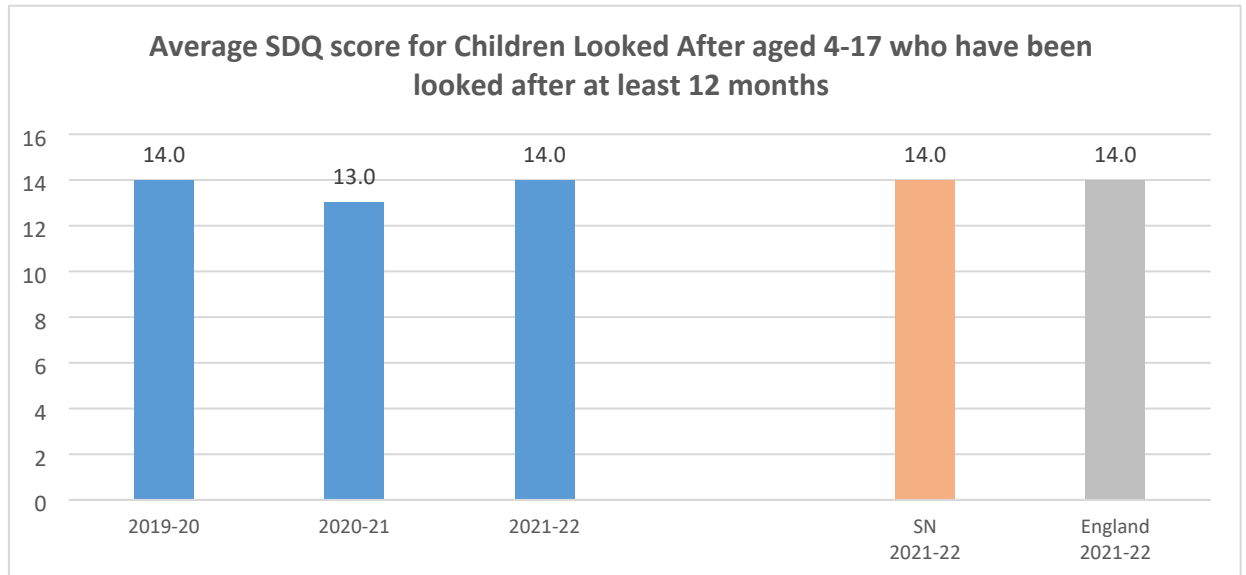
### 5.4 Children Looked After Strengths & Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ)

SDQ scores are a measure which provides an indication of the mental wellbeing of Looked After Children. Thurrock has a statutory responsibility to collect SDQ scores annually for all children aged 4-17 who have continuously been looked after for at least 12 months. Thurrock Childrens Services collate the SDQ scores termly via the Personal Education Plan supported by the Virtual School and Children's Social Care collecting the views of carers, school staff and children.

For each child where their score indicates a level of need (scoring 13 or higher) their case is individually reviewed by a multi-agency panel to ensure appropriate services are in place. Children benefit from a suite of local services including EWMHS, Kooth (online Counselling) and commissioned therapeutic

services. For children placed out of area NHS provision or commissioned services are secured.

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.



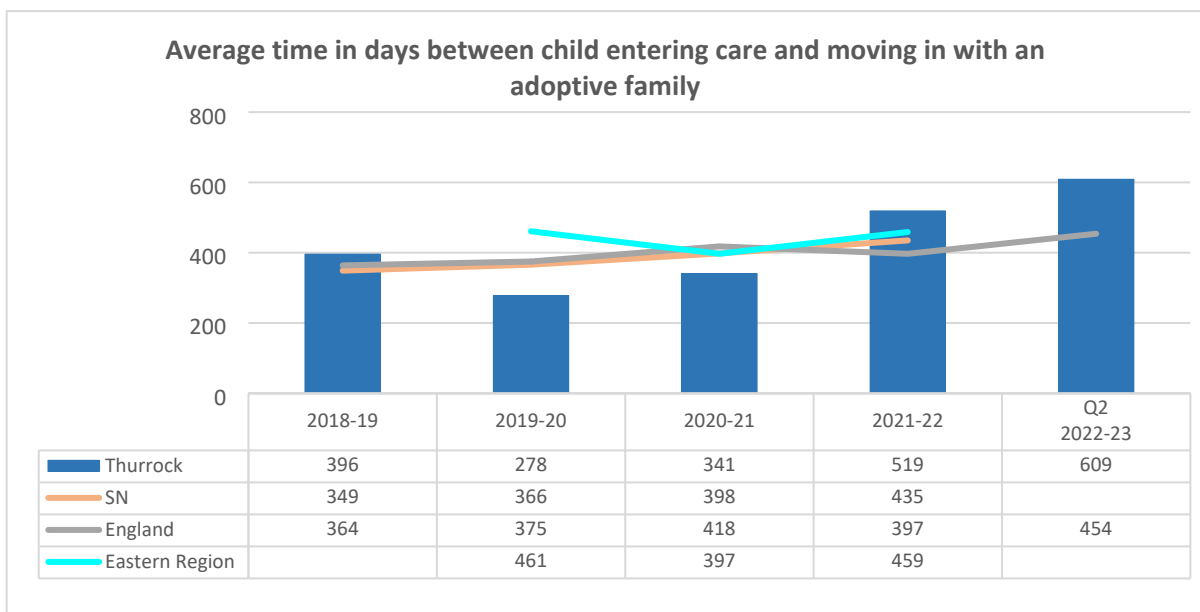
## 6. Adoption

As at the end of Q2 2022-23, there were 5 children adopted and 9 matched with prospective adopters.

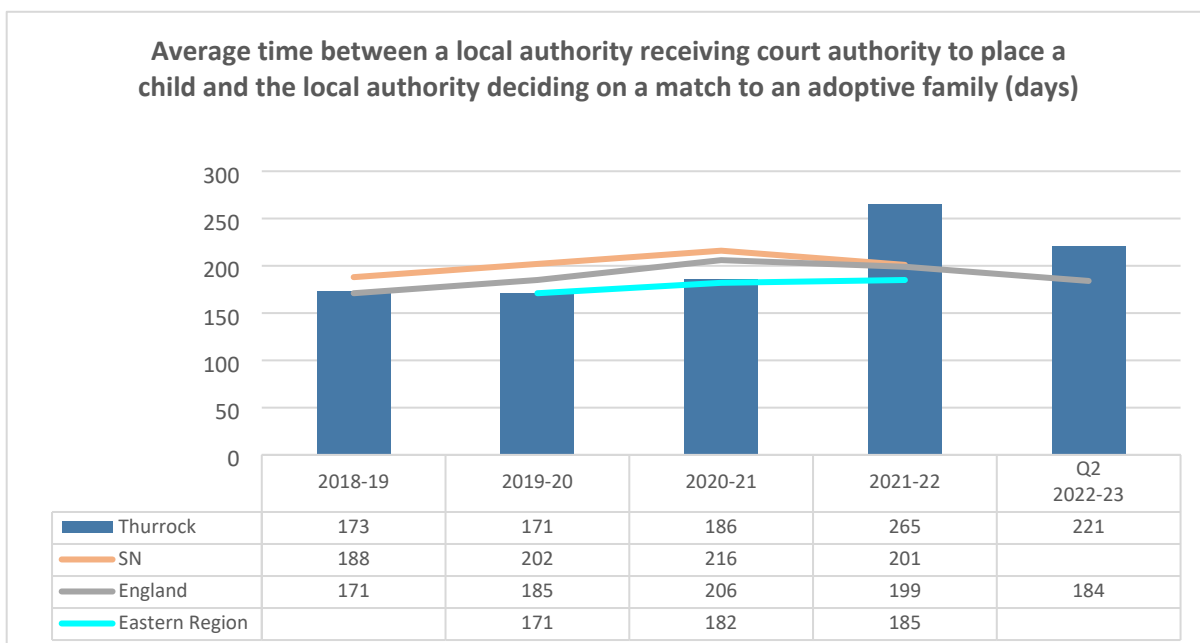
### 6.1 Timeliness of Adoption

The timeliness of adoption is measured as a 12-month rolling average, it is the length of time from the child entering care to moving in with an adoptive family. As at end of Q2 2022-23, Thurrock's average was 609 days. Based on the Q2 2022-23 data, Thurrock is above the National average of 454 days. The 2022-year end benchmarking data shows that Thurrock is above the Statistical Neighbour average of 435 days and Eastern Region of 459 days as at the end of Q2 2022-23.

Care proceedings have seen significant delays; court availability and family members being identified late. For a small group of children there are longer adoption journeys and these lift our average. We will continue to see upward pressure due to the duration of care proceedings being 40+ weeks (the target is 26)



As at end of Q2 2022-23, the average time in days between Thurrock receiving a Placement Order (court authority) to place a child with the adoptive family was 221 days. Based on Q2 2022-23 data, Thurrock is above the National average of 184 days and based on 2021-22-year end data, Thurrock is marginally above the Statistical Neighbour average of 201 days, the England average of 199 days and Eastern Region of 185 days as at the end of Q2 2022-23.



This is an area for the Service to focus to ensure there is timely matching and placing of children with their adoptive families. There has been delays in timetabling of final hearings for Placement Orders, and further delay because of birth parents re-applying to the court to revoke Placement Order, sometimes as

soon as the Order has been made. The application by birth parents to revoke a Placement Order or appeal can prevent the placement of children with adoptive families. Due to the small numbers involved, the average can be impacted in exceptional circumstances by an individual case causing an increase in the average time between a court order being made and matching.

## 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. Securing placements where needed 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.

Of the total CLA cohort of 282, 16% (44) children were aged 0-5 as at end of September 2022. Most children under 5 years who are not able to return home, are moved on to permanent placements through adoption or permanent alternative carers. There were significant delays in court proceedings and children being subject to court proceedings for longer periods, and transition to their permanent homes being delayed.

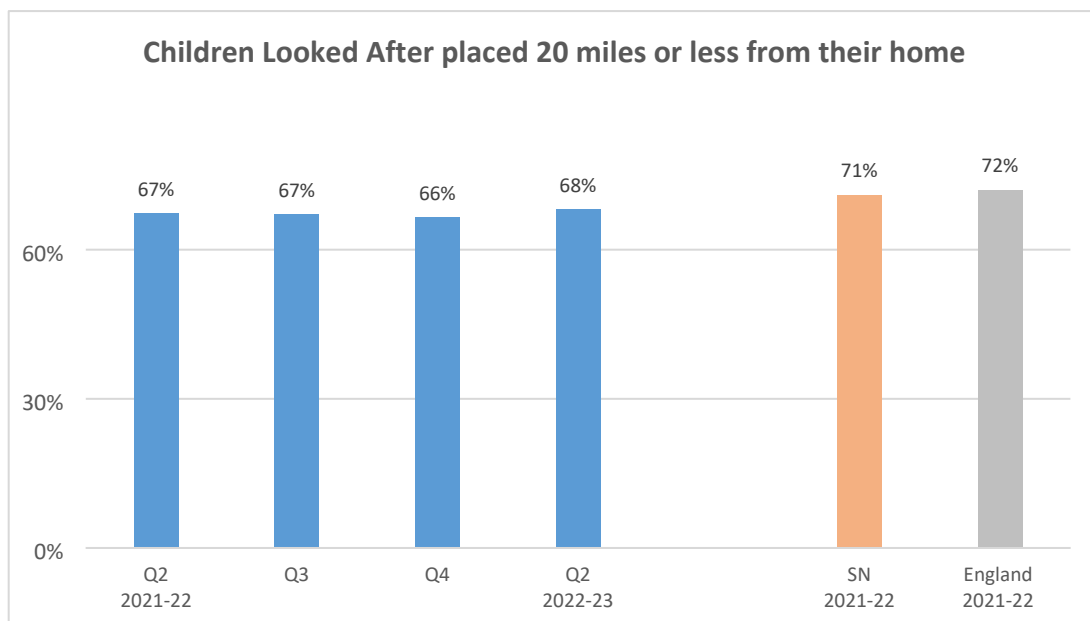
## 6.3 **Children Looked After placement distance**

It is good practice to ensure that children remain within their communities. At the end of September 2022, 68% of the Children Looked After cohort were placed within 20 miles or less from their homes, which represents 192 of 282 Children Looked After. Based on the latest benchmarking data available in March 2022, Thurrock reflects performance close with the Statistical Neighbour average of 71% and the National average of 72%.

This is an area of intense focus for the Placement Service. The fostering recruitment campaign seeks to increase local placements. However, it is not only Thurrock Local Authority who are finding the recruitment of local foster carers a challenge. Local placements are not available from Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA) or Residential care homes. There is a national shortage of fostering and residential care<sup>3</sup>, (the interim report published by the Competition and Markets Authority, October 2021, has noted the pressure on Local Authority placement services) and the local authority continues to seek Ofsted registered provision and sometimes this is outside of the Thurrock and Essex area.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/childrens-social-care-market-study-interim-report/interim-report>.



## 7. Care Leaving Service

The graphs below show the **OC3 care leaver cohort** (Relevant and Former Relevant Children whose 17th, 18th, 19th, 20th or 21st birthday falls within Financial Year) of Young People aged 16-25 years who are in receipt of a Care Leaving service. There have been 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.

A Care Leaver, as defined in the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000<sup>4</sup>, 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.

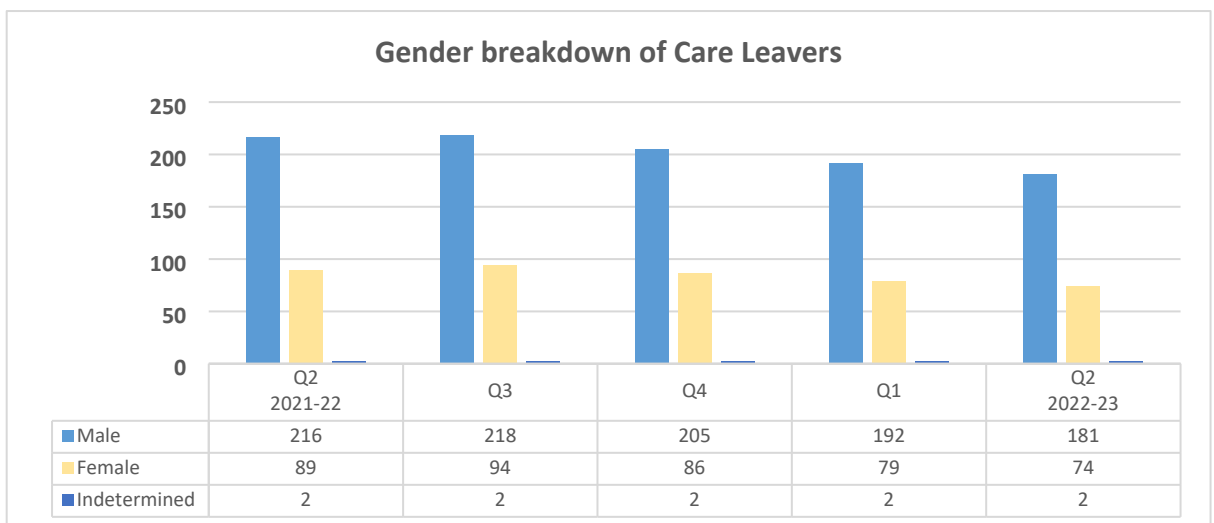
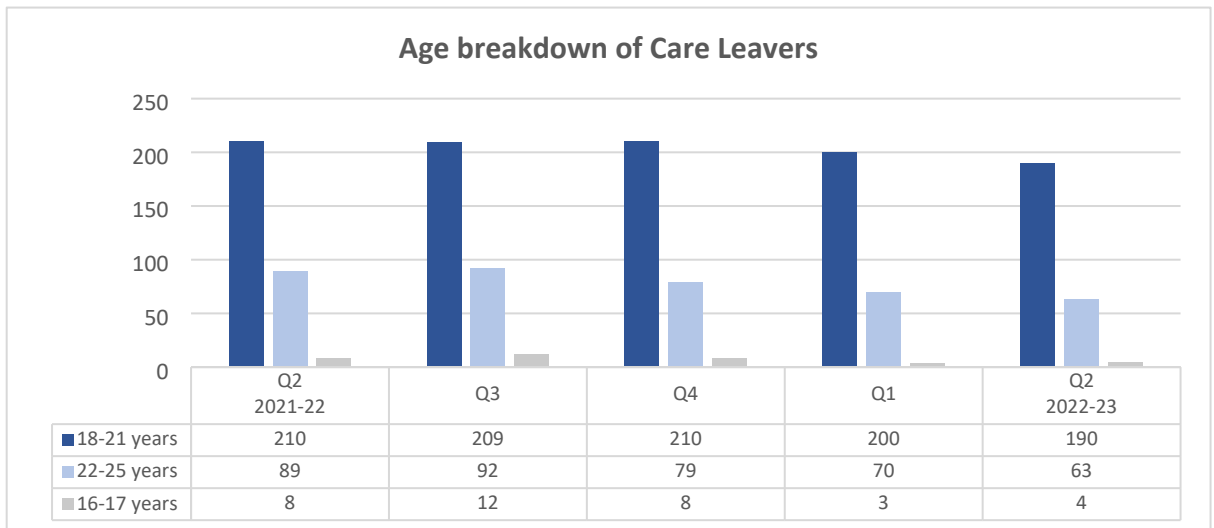
A young person's status as a care leaver can be divided into the following:

- 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.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/35/contents>

As at end of September 2022, 257 Care Leavers were being supported and were receiving an Aftercare service. This is a drop from the previous year of 298 as a result of the Service undertaking a review of open cases to ensure the young people open actually needed the support. 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.

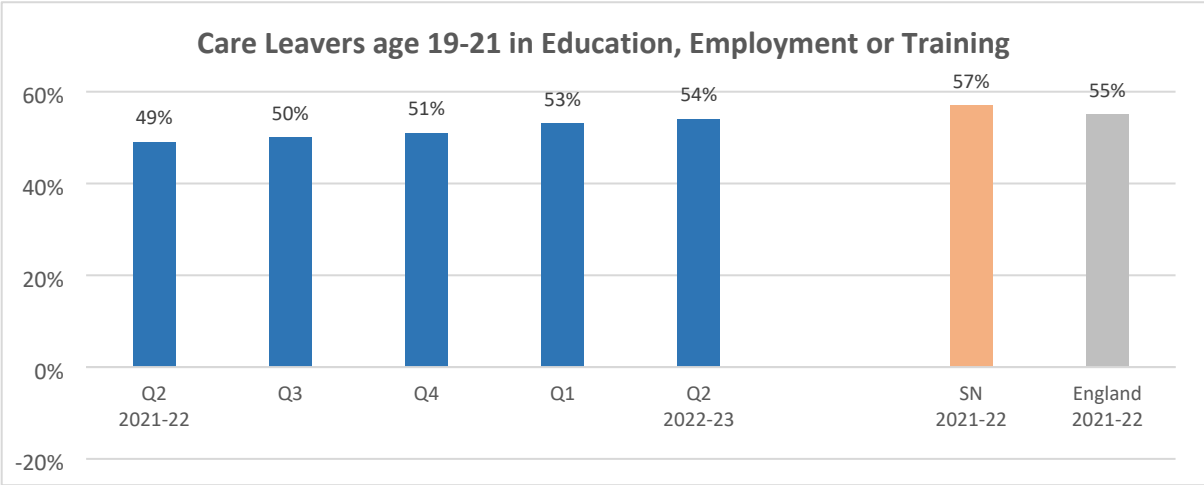
The charts below show the Care Leaver cohort broken down by age groups and gender.



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

At the end of Q2 2022-23, 54% of the Care Leavers aged 19 to 21-year-old were in part or full-time education, employment or training compared to 49% in September 2021 which brings Thurrock in more line with the Statistical Neighbour average of 57% and the England average of 55%. 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.

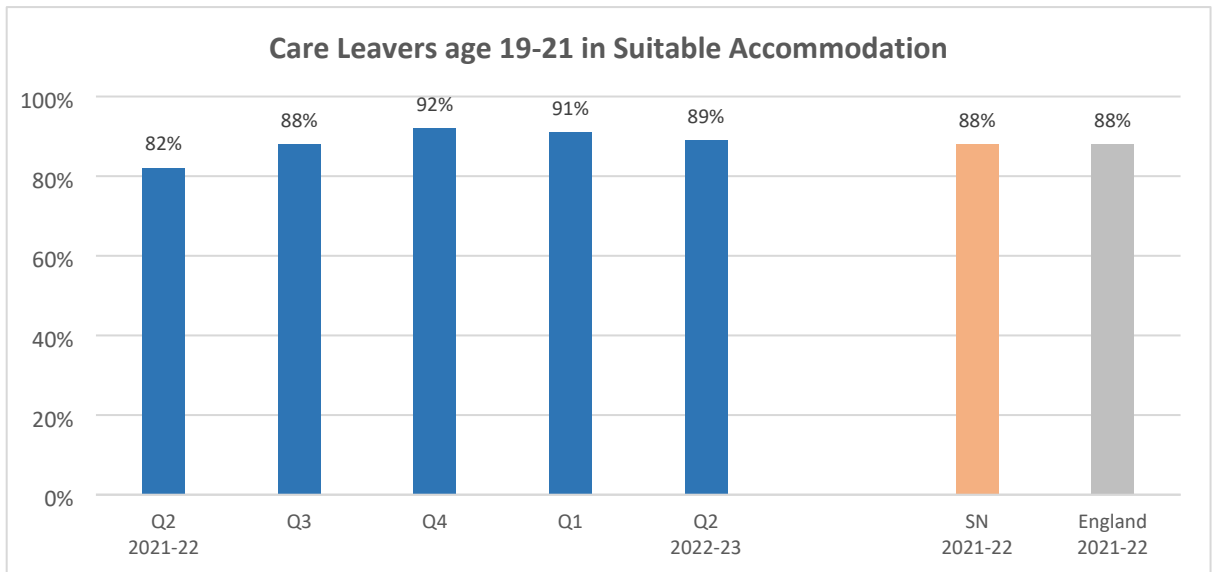


**7.2 Care Leavers age 19 to 21 years in Suitable Accommodation**

Q2 2022-23 shows that the percentage of 19 to 21-year-old Care Leavers reported to be in suitable accommodation is 89%. Thurrock is in line with the Statistical Neighbour and England average of 88% based on 2022 benchmarking data. There are some care leavers who are not in touch with the service, as well as those whose accommodation is unsuitable. Reasons for accommodation being deemed unsuitable include care leavers who are UASC and missing, young people declining to say where they are living or care leavers who are in prison.

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.

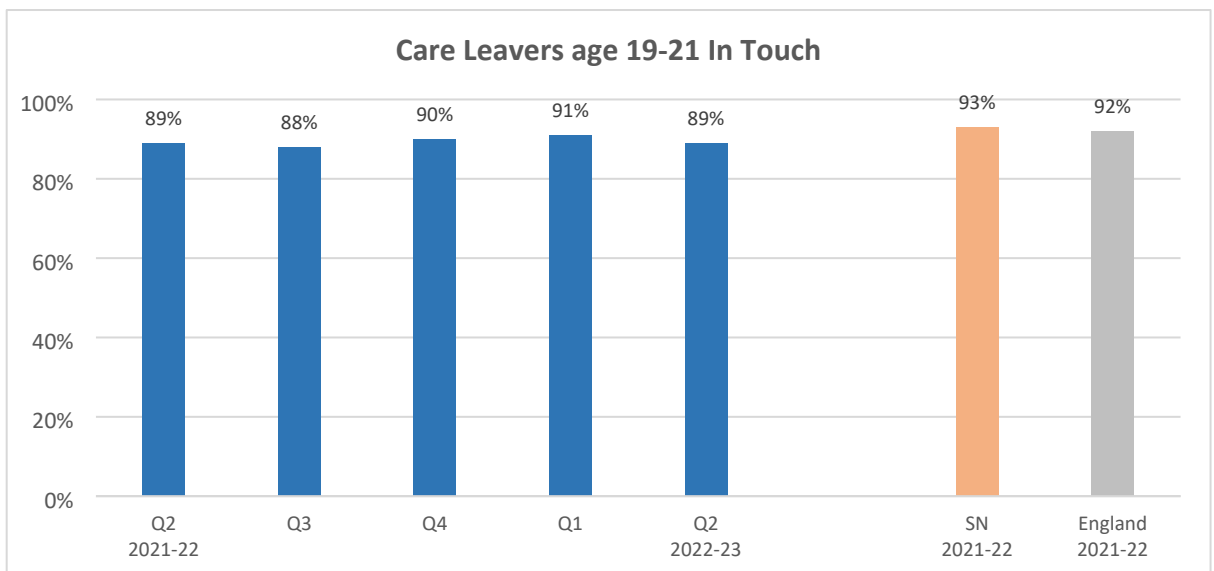




### 7.3 Care Leavers age 19-21 years 'In Touch'

Local Authorities are expected to stay in touch with Care Leavers and provide statutory support to help care leaver's transition to living independently.

At the end of Q2 2022-23, Thurrock was in touch with 89% of Care Leavers. Thurrock's performance is marginally below the Statistical Neighbour average of 93% and the England average of 92% based on 2021-22 benchmarking data. The reason for the percentage that are not in touch is mainly due to the cohort of missing UASC.



## **8. Reasons for Recommendations**

8.1 Children's Overview & Scrutiny Board Members to note and comment on current performance position.

## **9. Consultation** (including Overview & Scrutiny, if applicable)

9.1 Not applicable

## **10. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance, and community impact**

10.1 None

## **11. Implications**

### **11.1 Financial**

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

The Children services budget continues to face increased financial pressures arising from placement costs, with limited supply of specialist provisions increasing the cost required to be paid. The Councils MTFS continues to provide support within a challenging financial climate

### **11.2 Legal**

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

No implications identified.

### **11.3 Diversity & Equality**

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

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.

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

Not applicable

12. **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

13. **Appendices to the report**

None

**Report Author:**

Daniel Jones, Strategic Lead, Children Looked After, Children's Services

Clare Moore, Strategic Lead, Youth Offending Service and Prevention, Children and Family Services

Statistics: Anna Watkins, Business Intelligence Analyst, Children's Services

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<b>4 January 2023</b>	<b>ITEM: 6</b>
<b>Corporate Parenting Committee</b>	
<b>Children In Care Council Update</b>	
<b>Wards and communities affected:</b> All	<b>Key Decision:</b> Non Key
<b>Report of: Laura Hall, CICC Project Worker, Kim Synclair Operations Director and Charlotte Hearn Co-ordinator</b> Chair Person: Christopher Bennett	
<b>Accountable Assistant Director:</b> Janet Simon, Assistant Director Children’s Social Care and Early Help	
<b>Accountable Director:</b> Sheila Murphy, Corporate Director Children’s Services	
<b>This report is Public</b>	

## Executive Summary

The Children in Care Council is facilitated and run by Open Door, who are commissioned by Thurrock Council. This update report is to update the Committee on the work done and their engagement with the Service.

### 1. Recommendation(s)

**1.1 That the Committee note the work carried out by the Children in Care Council, the purpose, and the role of the Children in Care Council, and to establish what corporate parents need to do to help the Children in Care Council achieve their aims and objectives**

### 2. Introduction and Background

2.1 The Children in Care Council is a group for young people who are care leavers or currently cared for by Thurrock Council. It is facilitated by Open Door and gives children and young people the chance to shape and influence the parenting that they receive at every level and the opportunity to have a say about the things that really matter in their lives. The group helps to shape the overall strategy for Children Looked After and Care Leavers.

This report provides a summary of the work carried out by the Children in Care Council over the period of one year specifically from August 2021 until August 2022

- 2.2 Open Door, an independent services provider, are commissioned by Thurrock Council to ensure the members of the Children in Care Council (CICC) are able to meet at regular intervals, currently monthly and discuss, debate and be consulted about various issues and possible Policy changes. The CICC is open to young people whether they are currently a Child Looked After or care experienced. The role of the Council is to be consulted on many varying issues that may be put to them. They have been asked to provide their collective views on a range of issues, this year these included COVID and vaccination discussions, promotion of CICC through a new animation video and a range of other issues. This is arranged by a request being made through the Project Worker asking for a slot on the Agenda to attend a meeting to ask specific questions. The subject of the discussion and the questions are put to members prior to the visit to ensure the members are fully aware of what is being asked of them.

In addition to our members, CICC also has a regular attendee, Carly Banks who is the Thurrock Participation Officer. Briefly, her role is to ensure the young people are being listened to should they wish to raise any issues that may be affecting young people in care generally and to bring information to the members about any events or changes that may be happening in the future. She also takes information about issues discussed back to Management in Thurrock.

### **3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options**

- 3.1 The report is required to update Thurrock Council of the progress of the Children in Care Council and its findings and plans to ensure the voice of the child is truly being heard.
- 3.2 This report includes a period of transition as the previous worker has now retired and the project has recently been taken over by a very enthusiastic and experienced worker who has a good knowledge of the care system and wishes to see the group develop to a larger more participatory group which can not only be consulted with but one that can also bring CICC issues to the attention of the Council. With the support of local authority and the joint meetings which have been attended we see the CICC going from strength to strength.
- 3.3 As previously stated our group meets monthly but we have capacity to include speciality meetings for example to any newly elected Counsellors of Thurrock to meet with CICC and to discuss the specific roles of each elected Cllr and how it may impact on the life of a young person in care or as a care leaver. This would also enable the members to ask questions around any issues or thoughts they may have about the future and hopefully reach a collaboration between the two for future good practice.
- 3.4 Our meetings are run by the Chairperson who was elected by votes from the members and is Christopher Bennett. Christopher runs the agenda to ensure

we keep to time and do not allow things to run over. Also, he takes minutes and works closely with the Project Worker to produce minutes and the agenda for the next meeting. He attends all Corporate Parenting Committee Meetings and returns to the CICC monthly meetings with interesting updates. Christopher however is now leaving for university, so discussions have begun regarding the election of a new chairperson.

- 3.5 Membership numbers stand currently at around 8 due to a large cohort of previous members transitioning into aftercare and turning 18. After discussions within the CICC they felt that a new younger group would be more productive and be able to provide more insight into life in care currently. We have made great efforts to encourage new members to come forward through various projects including Carly Banks Participation Officer who has worked with an animation company who, alongside some young people, have put together a short, animated video. She briefed the members about this project, and they were very interested as they would like to encourage new members of all ages to attend our meetings going forward. We have also created new promotional items such as leaflets which include a rewritten introduction by the current CICC members. Please see details below:

*Hello!*

*We are a friendly group of young people who are or have been in care. This meeting is ours; we chair it ourselves and decide what we want to talk about and what affects us. We sometimes have guests like senior managers from Thurrock Council who want to hear our voice and keep us updated with any changes that might have been made because of us. This feels good because we are being listened to. Our experiences can help make a difference for other young people in care.*

*OUR VIEWS AND OUR VOICES ARE IMPORTANT.*

*We meet once a month in Grays or you can join online if you can't make it in person.*

*You should join the Children in Care Council because you can connect with new people, make friends, have fun but also have your say and make a change. Since being in the group, we have grown in confidence and received lots of support. Most of all we don't feel 'different' because we all know what it is like to be in care.*

*We hope to see you soon and make a difference together!*

*From,*

*The Children in Care Council"*

- 3.6 During the pandemic we were able to continue with the CICC meetings via zoom. Due to the success of this we have continued to offer the opportunity for hybrid meetings, this allows members of the CICC who are placed out of the borough to still join remotely and have their voice heard.
- 3.7 The CICC have a cohort of 8 members currently and some previous older CICC members who attend when they can. Generally the average attending each meeting is 5. The age varies from 15 upwards, 50% are male and 50% are female. One young person was asked to write a small entry for this report on their short time at CICC.

*“I joined the CICC three months ago after my mentor spoke to me about it. I have already been involved in discussions around COVID and how that affected me living in foster care as well as helping to make decisions for upcoming events. I like that I can have my say and make a difference”*

- 3.8 The project worker attends the monthly meetings with Carly Banks of the Go East- Eastern Region Participation Leads where many topics of interest to CICC are discussed and this information is taken back to the monthly meetings. These form Agenda Items for discussion with group members. This enables us to ensure that Thurrock CICC are also dealing with Regional issues that come to light. The CICC representative also attends local focus groups and ensures, during the CICC meetings, that young people are being respectful of each other, and they allow everyone to have their say. Recently a buddy system has been agreed for the group to ensure any new members voices are not overtaken by more confident speakers. The buddy is to make a space for the new young person to be heard.
- 3.9 The CICC are also due to be taking part in some scheduled social events to help combat isolation and make it more of an attractive group for young people to join. Some of these events used to take place pre-covid and will be reintroduced. Young people will be asked to identify a number of areas they would wish to discuss further over the coming year such as Mental Health, transport etc.

#### **4. Reasons for Recommendation**

- 4.1 To ensure members are aware of the work carried out by the Children in Care Council.

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

- 5.1 We have continued with the questionnaire that visitors to the group should complete before a meeting was agreed . This has proved to be helpful and assist the group in knowing what to expect from the visitor and allow them to respond accordingly.
- 5.2 The group have confirmed that they enjoy the group and also the social element this provides.
- 5.3 The agreed CICC WhatsApp group works well and allows members to get regular updates especially if members are unable to attend.
- 5.4 CICC have and continue to discuss issues such as COVID and its impact, the transitions of coming into and leaving care, local amenities for young people of Thurrock as well as many other subjects.



5.5 Due to a period of transition we have not had any Thurrock Council visitors attend the most recent meetings but another staff member from Open Door have attended to ask for the CICC's views on some upcoming events. We hope that this will change going forward as we continue to promote and improve the current CICC. It is still agreed that a maximum of 30 minutes is assigned for guests to attend.

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

6.1 When making key decisions about corporate policies the impact of decisions on young people and our corporate parenting responsibilities should be considered and our children and young people prioritised.

## **7. Implications**

### **7.1 Financial**

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

No financial implications

### **7.2 Legal**

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

The Council must have regard to the corporate parenting principles in the Children and Social Work Act 2017 which include:

(a) to act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and well-being, of those children and young people.

(b) to encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings.

(c) to take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people.

(d) to help those children and young people gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners.

(e)to promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people.

(f)for those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work.

(g)to prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living.

### 7.3 **Diversity and Equality**

Implications verified by: **Roxanne Scanlon**  
**Community Engagement and Project**  
**Monitoring Officer**

The Service is committed to practice, which promotes inclusion and diversity, and will carry out its duties in accordance with the Equality Act 2010 and related Codes of Practice and Anti-discriminatory policy

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

Prioritisation of Corporate Parenting will have a direct impact on the outcomes for Children who are Looked After.

### 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):

- Children and Social Work Act 2017

### 9. **Appendices to the report**

- None

#### **Report Author:**

Laura Hall, CICC Project Worker

Kim Synclair Operations Director

Charlotte Hearn Co-ordinator

<b>4 January 2023</b>	<b>ITEM: 7</b>
<b>Corporate Parenting Committee</b>	
<b>Independent Reviewing Officer Annual Report</b>	
<b>Wards and communities affected:</b> All	<b>Key Decision:</b> N/A
<b>Report of:</b> Ruth Murdock, Strategic Lead of Quality Assurance and Reviewing Trevor Willis Service Manager, Safeguarding and Reviewing	
<b>Accountable Assistant Director:</b> Janet Simon, Assistant Director, Children’s Social Care and Early Help	
<b>Accountable Director:</b> Sheila Murphy, Corporate Director, Children’s Services	
<b>This report is public</b>	

## Executive Summary

The purpose of this document is to meet the statutory requirement for the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Manager to produce a report for the scrutiny of the Corporate Parenting Committee.

This document should be read in conjunction with the *“Thurrock Children’s Services, Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Annual Report”* for 2021 – 2022 (see Appendix 1)

### 1. Recommendation(s)

**1.1 For the Corporate Parenting Committee to review and comment on the IRO Annual report 2021 - 2022 and the recommendations in the report.**

### 2. Introduction and Background

2.1 The appointment of an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) for a child or young person in the care of the Local Authority is a legal requirement under S.118 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002.

The IRO has a number of specific responsibilities, including:

- promoting the voice of the child
- ensuring that plans for Children Looked After are based on a detailed and informed assessment, are up to date, effective and provide a real and genuineresponse to each child’s needs
- making sure that the child understands how an advocate could help and his/her entitlement to one

- offering a safeguard to prevent any 'drift' in care planning for Children Looked After and the delivery of services to them; and
- monitoring the activity of the Local Authority as a Corporate Parent in ensuring that care plans have given proper consideration and weight to the child's wishes and feelings and that, where appropriate, the child fully understands

2.2 During the reporting period, the Thurrock IRO Service has remained stable; there have been no changes of personnel. The Service comprises of five permanent Independent Reviewing Officers.

The average caseload for IROs is 60 – with a variance between 58 and 61.

During the performance year April 2021 – March 2022, the IRO Service conducted a total of 933 reviews. This is an increase of 69 reviews (7.9%) when compared to the number of reviews conducted the previous year. The performance, in respect of reviews being held within timescale, improved during the year, with the final average being 100% of reviews held within timescales; an increase of 1.6% when compared to last year.

This year, children and young people participated in person, or through an advocate, or by another means by providing their views in the majority of reviews. Only 1.7% of reviews were conducted (for children over the age of 4) where they did not attend nor send their views. Children and young people are encouraged to feed back their views by the 'Mind of My Own' App alongside speaking with their carers, allocated social workers and IRO.

For the period April 2021 to March 2022, 99.1% of review reports were completed within timescale by the IRO's.

2.3 Profile of Children and Young People in Care in Thurrock

Section 8 of the main report provides a detailed analysis of the characteristics of children moving through the Care System in Thurrock.

Key points from this are:

- The monthly breakdown for the numbers of children looked after has remained relatively stable and consistent throughout the year ranging from 308 to 294. The rate of Looked After Children per 10,000 for March 2022 represents 65 children per 10,000, this is in line with national data and slightly below statistical neighbours. (66 per 10,000)
- The number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children has risen by 4 to 28 (representing 9.5% of the total cohort) as of March 2022

when compared to the same period in 2021.

- The number of children adopted has remained the same as last year (8 children).
- There are more boys Looked After in Thurrock than girls (61% and 39% respectively)
- Black British children are not overrepresented in the looked after population at 12% (2022 figures) which compares to the school census data (2020) of 14%, although children from mixed/dual heritage backgrounds are 9% compared to the school census data of 6.3%
- The majority of children looked after are subject to legal orders at 77% which compares to national data (78%) and shows a desire to achieve permanence and stability for children
- 66.4% of Children Looked After live within 20 miles of their home address. The complex needs of some children results in it not being possible to find local placements. The majority of children not placed in Thurrock are placed in neighbouring boroughs of Essex, Greater London or Kent

#### 2.4 Feedback from Children and Young People about their care plans

At a recent involvement event a number of young people were asked about their plans. 47% knew what the plan was for them and their family, 60% felt involved in making the plan and 76% thought the plan would help make things better.

IROs continue to look at creative and interactive ways of involving children and young people, including how reviews are recorded in a more accessible and personal format.

### 3 Issues Options and Analysis of Options

None

### 4 Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1 To inform members of the work of the Independent Reviewing Officer Service during 2021-2022. The report also updates members with the recommended work plan for the IRO service during 2022 – 2023.

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

Not Applicable

## **6 Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community**

Not Applicable

## **7 Implications**

### **7.1 Financial**

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

There are no financial implications associated with this report.

### **7.2 Legal**

Implications verified by: **Judith Knight**  
**Interim Deputy Head of Legal**

Section 118 Adoption and Children Act 2002 introduced the concept Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs). Since 2004 all Local Authorities have been required to appoint IROs. The Children and Young Persons Act 2008 extends the IRO's responsibilities from monitoring the performance by the Local Authority of their functions in relation to child's review to monitoring the performance by the Local Authority of their functions in relation to a child's case as set out in sections 25A - 25C of the Children Act 1989. The intention is that IRO's should have an effective independent oversight of the child's case and ensure that the child's interests are protected throughout the care planning process. The IRO Handbook provides clear guidance on the IROs' role in and processes around the case review. The IRO Handbook is statutory guidance and includes the requirement that an annual report is produced for the Corporate Parenting Panel covering the matters set out in paragraph 7.11 of that document.

The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England)(Amendment) Regulations 2021, which amended the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) 2010, from 9<sup>th</sup> September 2021 prohibits children under 16 being placed in 'other arrangements' save in some very limited circumstances. In essence, a child under 16 must be placed with a parent or other connected person, a foster parent or in a registered children's home otherwise the placement is unlawful.

### **7.3 Diversity and Equality**

Implications verified by: **Rebecca Lee**  
**Team Manager Community Development and Equalities**

An overview of the profile and diversity of children and young people in care in Thurrock is set out in section 2.3 of this report.

The Service is committed to practice which promotes inclusion and diversity, and will carry out its duties in accordance with the Equality Act 2010 and related Codes of Practice and Anti-discriminatory policy. Members of the service represent diverse backgrounds and heritage and are able to promote equality and diversity.

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

Not Applicable

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**

- Appendix 1 - IRO Annual Report 1 April 2020 – 31 March 2021

**Report Author:**

Trevor Willis  
Service Manager Safeguarding, Reviewing and Child Protection

Ruth Murdock  
Strategic Lead Quality Assurance and Reviewing

**Thurrock Children's Services  
Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO)**

**ANNUAL REPORT**

**01 April 2021 – 31 March 2022**



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## **1. Introduction and Purpose of the Annual Report**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to meet the statutory requirement (IRO Handbook 2010) for the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Manager to produce a report for the scrutiny of the Corporate Parenting Committee.

Where possible, this Report refers to Children Looked After (CLA) which reflects the views and wishes of children and young people in Thurrock about their own identity and the way in which they prefer to be referred to by professionals.

## **2. Reporting period**

This report covers the period from April 2022 to March 2023.

## **3. The Legal, Statutory and National context of the IRO role**

- 3.1 The appointment of an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) for a child or young person in the care of the Local Authority is a legal requirement under s.118 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002.
- 3.2 In March 2010 the IRO Handbook was issued, providing Local Authorities with statutory guidance on how the IROs should discharge their duties. Significantly, the Handbook stated:

*The IRO has a new role conferred upon them to monitor the child's case as opposed to monitoring the review, effectively monitoring the implementation of the Care Plan between reviews (at para. 3.74)*

The Handbook goes on to state that the primary role of an IRO is:

*To ensure that the care plan for the child fully reflects the child's current needs and that the actions set out in the plan are consistent with the local authority's legal responsibilities towards the child (at para. 2.10)*

- 3.3 In discharging this role, the Handbook notes (at para. 2.14) that the IRO has a number of specific responsibilities, including:
- *promoting the voice of the child*
  - *ensuring that plans for looked after children are based on a detailed and informed assessment; are up to date; effective and provide a real and genuine response to each child's needs;*
  - *making sure that the child understands how an advocate could help and his/her entitlement to one;*
    - *offering a safeguard to prevent any 'drift' in care planning for children looked after and the delivery of services to them; and*

- *monitoring the activity of the local authority as a corporate parent in ensuring that care plans have given proper consideration and weight to the child's wishes and feelings and that, where appropriate, the child fully understands*

#### **4. Local context – Thurrock Council as a Corporate Parent**

4.1 As a Corporate Parent, the Council is ambitious to ensure that children achieve the best possible outcomes while in the care of the authority. We aim wherever possible for children to be cared for either within their own family or wider networks. However, when it is felt that this is not a safe or suitable option all efforts are made to find children a long term permanent home.

The IRO service plays a key role in monitoring and supporting plans to achieve this ambition.

#### **5. Thurrock Council IRO Service**

- 5.1 During 2021/22, staffing within the IRO services has remained stable. There have been no periods of prolonged absence or sickness. The service continues to comprise of five, permanent full-time members of staff.
- 5.2 All five IROs working for the Service are qualified Social Workers registered with Social Work England and subject to regular Disclosure and Barring Service enhanced checks. All have relevant and appropriate skills, bringing to the role specialist knowledge and experience-
- 5.3 There are two female and three male IRO's and the IRO's come from diverse backgrounds, ensuring young people in our care can be allocated to IRO's across a range of diverse groups.
- 5.4 All five of the IROs act independently of Thurrock Social Care and are not involved in preparation of children in care plans or the management of children in care cases or have any control over resources allocated to a case.
- 5.5 There have been no complaints received about the IRO service and conduct of the CLA reviews.

#### **6. IRO Caseload and Service Performance**

##### **6.1 IRO caseloads**

	<b>2018/19</b>	<b>2019/2020</b>	<b>2020/21</b>	<b>2021/22</b>
Average caseload	62	60	60	59

Caseload range	44-68	57-62	58-61	57-61
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6.2 The average IRO caseload has been consistent in the past four years with a caseload average of 59 children and young people. This is in line with the IRO handbook which states that an average IRO caseload should be between 50 - 70 children and young people for a full-time post (FTE). Children and young people's circumstance and situations vary in complexity, and the distance which needs to be travelled to placements. Children who are recently accommodated, placed at distance, involved in care proceedings or have placement disruption require a higher level of scrutiny and oversight than children who are in long term settled foster placements.

6.3 IRO's may also have additional responsibilities which are shared amongst the team in addition to chairing reviews, such as sitting on, and advising on panel supporting the delivery of training.

## 7. Number of Child and Young Person in Care Reviews

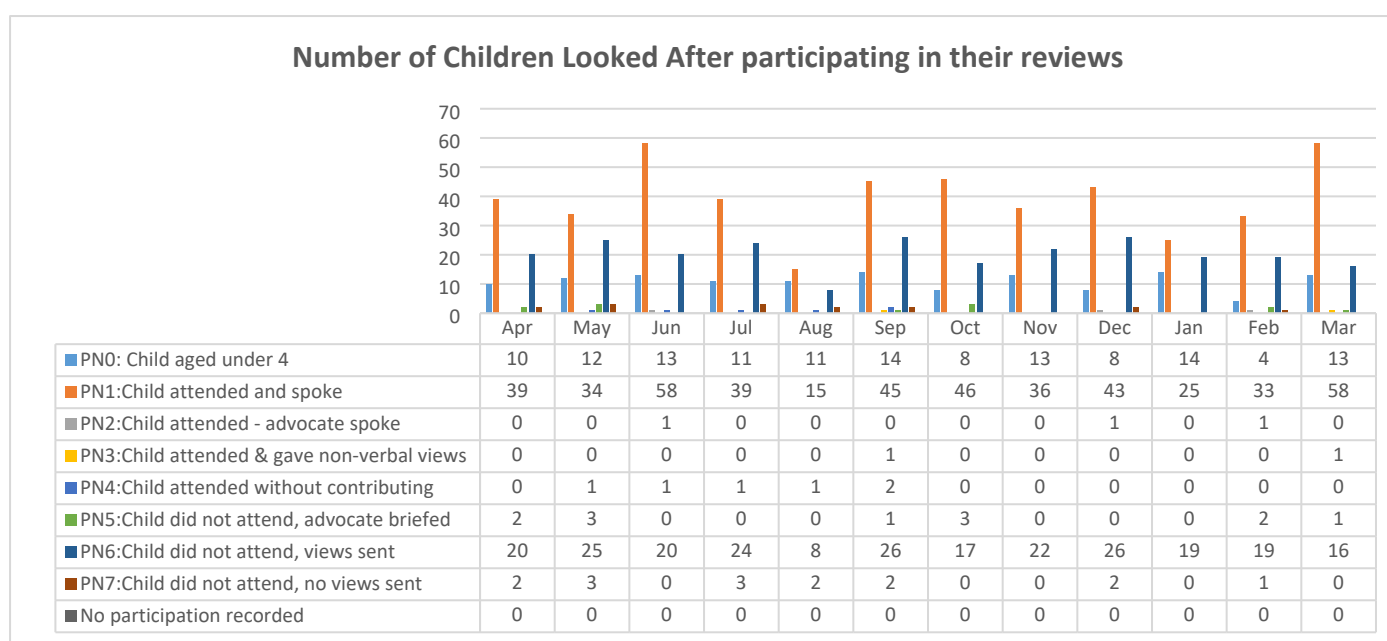
	2021									2022			Year to Date
Due in month	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	
Total held	74	91	96	79	42	96	80	74	82	67	55	97	933
Total held In timescale	74	91	96	79	42	96	80	74	82	67	55	97	933
Percentage of total held in timescale	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Held In quarter	261			217			236			219			933
Percentage held in timescale	100%			100%			100%			100%			Average 100%

During the performance year April 2021 – March 2022, the IRO service conducted a total of 933 reviews. This is an increase of 69 reviews (An increase of 7.9%) when compared to the number of reviews conducted the previous year. The performance, in respect of reviews being held within timescale, improved during the year, with the final average being 100% of reviews held within timescales an increase of 1.6% when compared to last year.

The high performance in this area is due to the work of the whole team including Business Support as well as the IRO's in ensuring that reviews are held within

timescales. Reviews are booked at five months to accommodate any unforeseen issues that arise or the need to change the date of a review to meet the needs and requirements of the child or young person.

## 7.1 Children and Young People’s Participation in Reviews



Ensuring that each review fully represents the views of the child is important and that children and young people are encouraged wherever appropriate, to take part in their reviews. From the data above, it is clear that the vast majority of reviews were attended by children and they spoke for themselves. This reflects the proactive approach taken by the IRO service in ensuring that the child remain at the centre of every meeting. There are, however, occasions where children are either unable or unwilling to attend their meetings and therefore efforts are made by the IRO’s to ensure that the children’s views are explored and shared at the meeting. Often this is done through the use of the Mind of My Own app and through face-to-face visits or phone conversations.

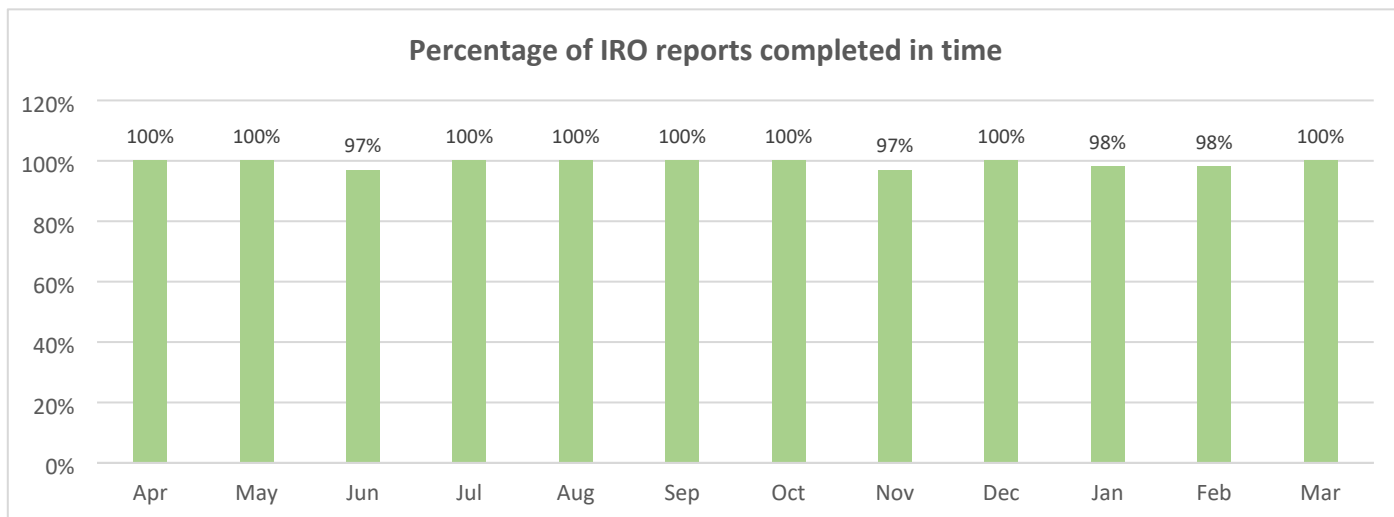
Whilst children and young people are given the option to attend their meeting, their attendance is not mandatory. Therefore, the IRO service continues to look at creative ways to gather the views of children and young people in a meaningful way. This involves offering children a number of ways to share their views in a manner that suits them. Whilst most children are keen to see their IRO face to face, there has been an increase (particularly with older young people) for their IRO to contact them over TEAMS on a video call. There remains an appetite for IRO’s to engage with children and young people in more creative ways, utilising all resources available to them.

<b>C &amp; YP Participation in Reviews</b>	<b>2018-19</b>	<b>2019-20</b>	<b>2020-21</b>	<b>2021-22</b>
Child aged under 4	100	142	151	131
Child attended and spoke	372	439	459	471
Child attended - advocate spoke	3	10	0	3
Child attended & gave non-verbal views	2	0	0	2
Child attended without contributing	5	14	10	6
Child did not attend, advocate briefed	3	59	20	12
Child did not attend, views sent	159	163	209	242
Child did not attend, no views sent	103	40	15	15
No participation recorded	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>747</b>	<b>867</b>	<b>864</b>	<b>882</b>

The performance over the last four years indicates a consistently increasing number of children and young people participating in their meeting and expressing their views.

The IROs ensure that both parents, where possible, are consulted and invited to the review. The parent's views are taken into account in the review meeting and they receive a copy of the record, where appropriate.

## 7.2 Completion of Review Reports between March 21 to April 22.



On completion of the child's review the IRO is expected to complete a report on the child's electronic file. The report provides a note of the review and its discussions, and the recommendation made in the review. There is an expectation that review outcome reports are completed and distributed to young people, parents and professionals within 20 working days of the review.

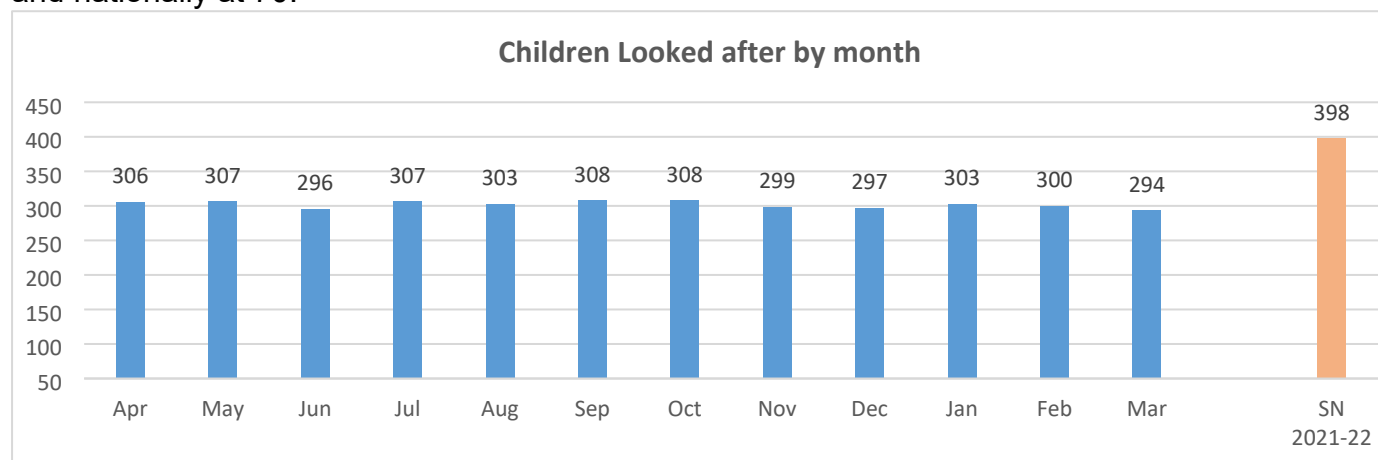
The number of reviews completed within timescale for the period April 2020 March 2021 range between 97 - 100% and on average 99.1% of reports were completed within timescale an increase of 1.5% when compared to last year. It is important that reports are completed within time scales and provided to young people. Timeliness of reports is regularly scrutinised by the service manager and where appropriate issues of late reports are brought to the attention of the IRO and acted on as a priority.

The review process is supported by an efficient and professional business support unit and the IROs ensure that they visit or speak to children/ young people and will discuss how they experienced the review meeting and how/where they would like it conducted.

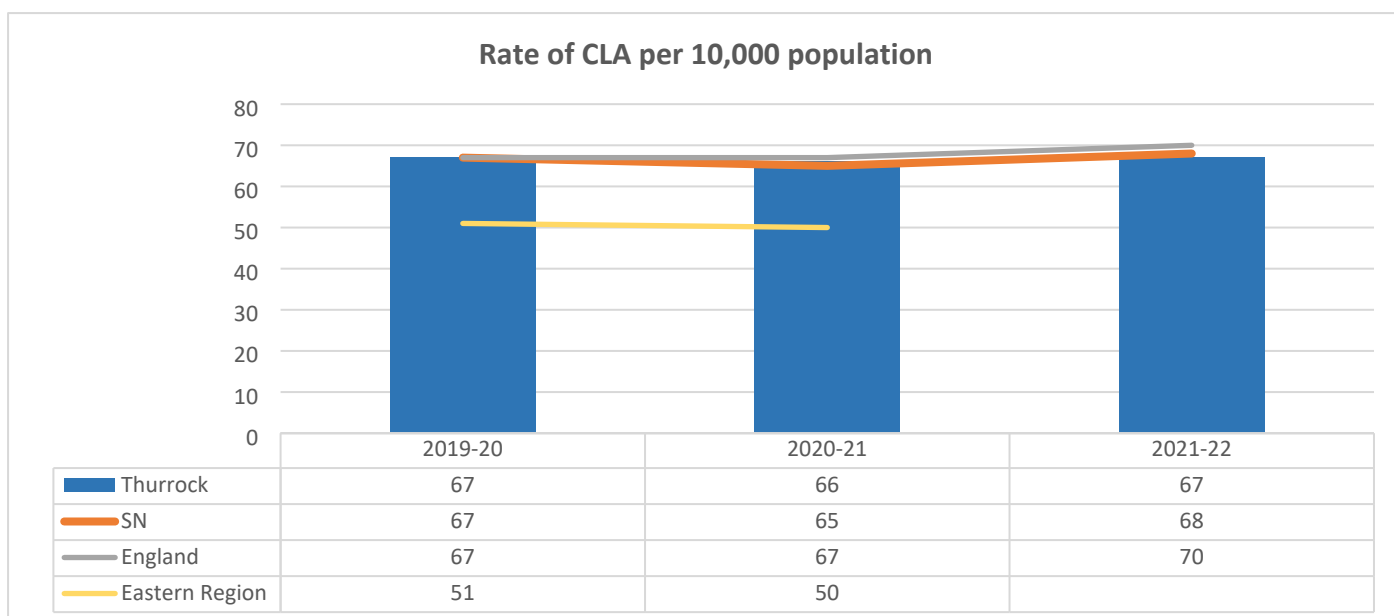
## 8. Profile of Children and Young People in Care in Thurrock

### 8.1 Numbers of Children in Care

Thurrock's number of children looked after is at the lower end of the statistical neighbour average. The monthly breakdown for the numbers of children looked after has remained relatively stable and consistent throughout the year ranging between 294 and 308. The rate of Children Looked After at the end of March 2022 per 10,000 of the child population was 67 which is in line with statistical neighbour at 68 and nationally at 70.





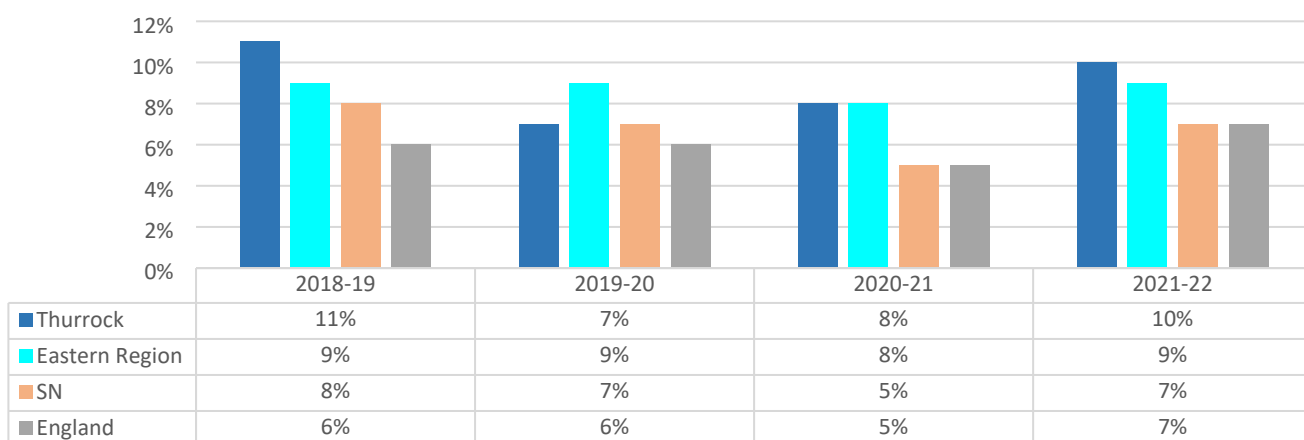


Total numbers compared to last year have dropped by 1.3% compared to 1% for statistical neighbours.

	Year end				
	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22
Total cohort	308	293	298	298	294
Rate per 10,000 population	72	68	67	67	65
Number of UASC	32	30	20	24	28
Adopted	7	13	14	8	8

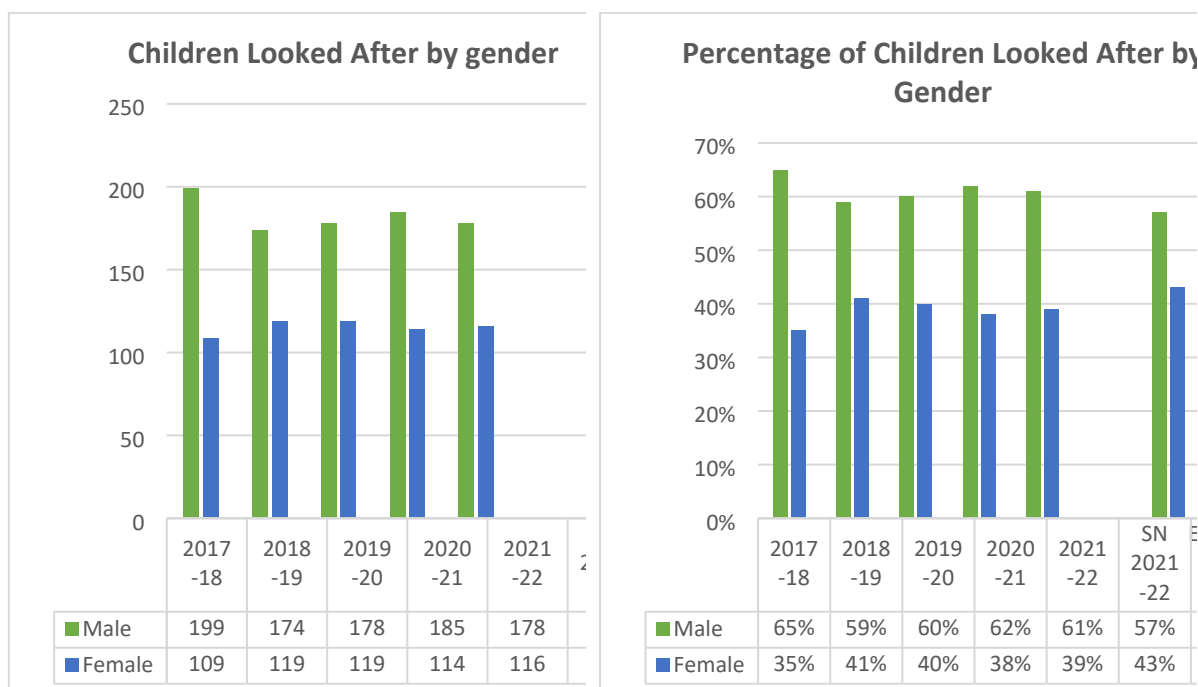
The number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children rose by 4 young people at the end of March 2022 (representing 10% of the total cohort) when compared to the same period in the previous year and is above statistical neighbour, regional neighbours and national numbers.

### % of children looked after at year end who are Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children



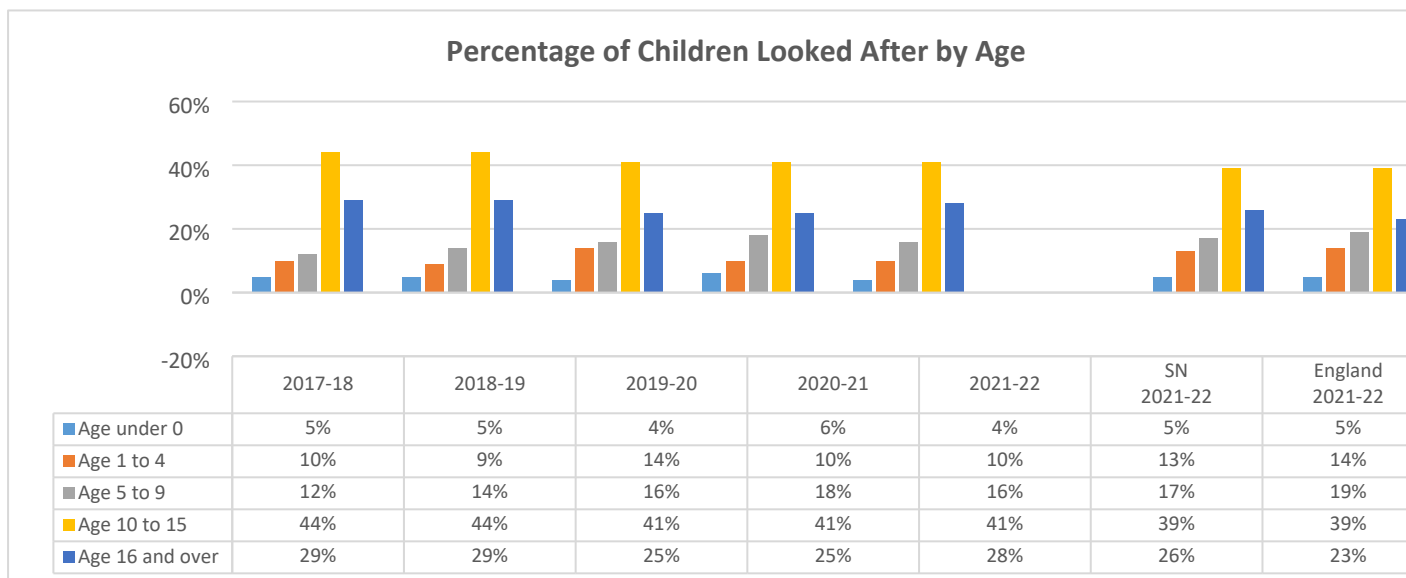
The number of children adopted has stayed the same. Nationally there has been a 3% rise in Adoption Orders. (Adoption and Special Guardianship Leadership Board - Headline Measures Q4 2021-2022). Given this small increase we would expect the adoption numbers in Thurrock to be similar. The local authority continues to explore adoption as a parallel plan for all children under the age of ten. Continued scrutiny is provided by the IRO service to see whether any delay is avoidable

### 8.2 Gender of Children and Young People in Care



The number of males in care continues to exceed the number of females. Figures for 2022 indicated that 61% of children in care were male, whilst 39% were female. This

is most likely due to the number of UASC, the majority of which are males and at the end of March were 10% of our total CLA figure.



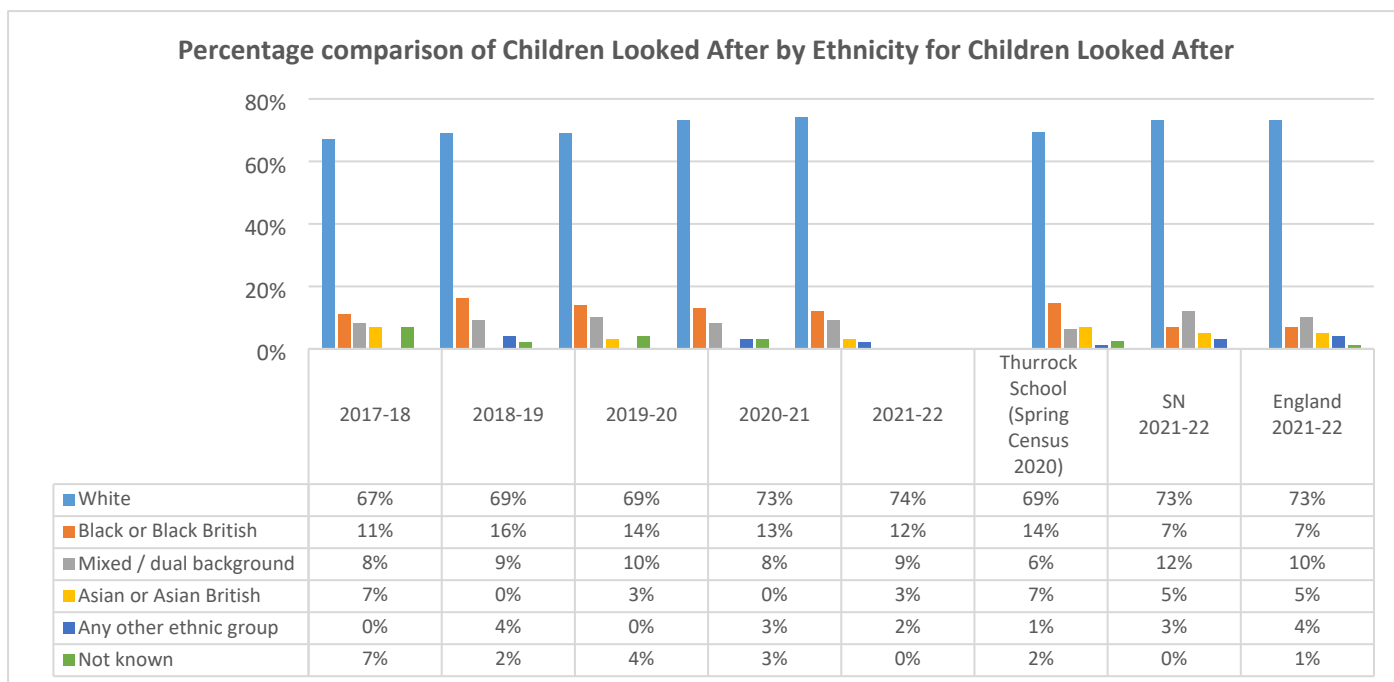
The age distribution of children looked after continues to see children in the 12 to 15-year-old age bracket represent the largest proportion of children looked after.

The numbers of children looked after in the 16 to 17-year-old age bracket is the only range that has increased when compared to last year. This is likely down to a larger proportion of young people turning 16 within the year, however changes within the age brackets are very slight.

### 8.3 Ethnicity of Children and Young People in Care

Identity is a core factor considered within the dimensions on developmental need (Care Planning Guidance 2015). This concerns the child's growing sense of self as a separate and valued person. It is important for a child who is in care to know who they are and where they have come from, and to understand, as far as they are able, why they are being cared for away from home. Race, religion, age, gender, sexuality and disability all contribute to a child's sense of identity, as well as feelings of belonging and acceptance by family, peer group and wider society, including other cultural groups. The importance of understanding who we are and where we come from is recognised in good social work practice, for example through undertaking life story work or other direct work.

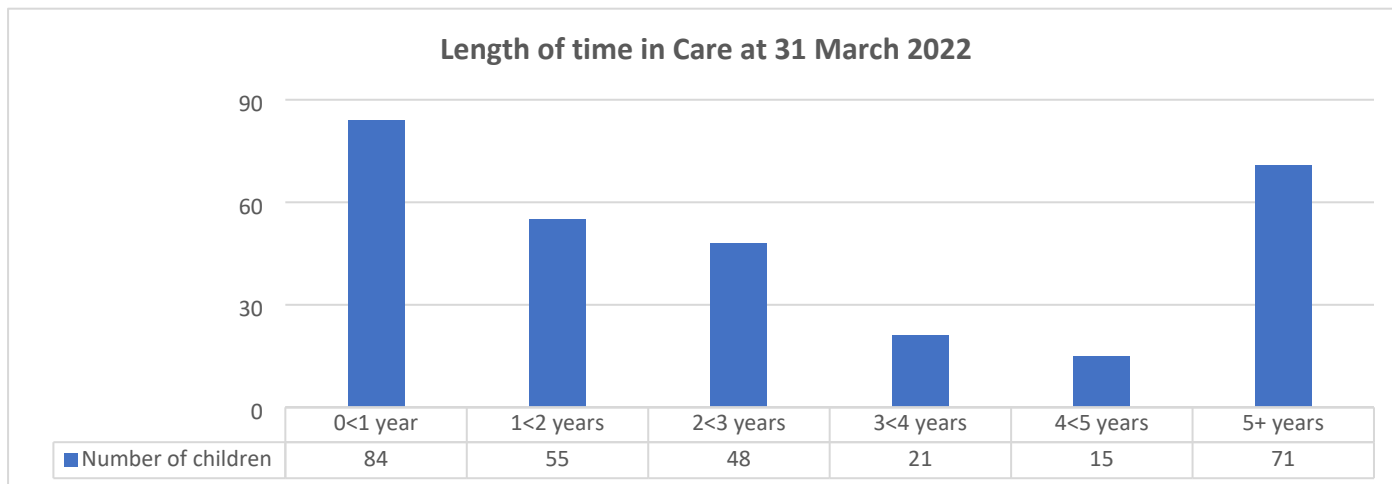
Racial and cultural identity is an important aspect of identity for many Children Looked After. The assessment of each individual child's needs alongside the child's own views will determine the actions which should be put into the care plan to ensure that they are able to develop a strong sense of identity and self-esteem. This will act not only as a strong protective factor against unhealthy risk-taking behaviours but enable the child to maximise their talents. Disabled children may also need particular help in developing a positive sense of identity in the face of negative public stereotypes about disability.



The recorded information regarding the demographics of the ethnicity of children and young people Looked after has shown little or no change on a yearly basis with children who are recorded to come from a “White” background representing the vast majority of children Looked After in Thurrock in Thurrock (74%) which is in line with the rest of England. When comparing data over the past 5 years there has been little change in the demographics relating to the ethnicity of the children in care in Thurrock.

The percentages of Black or Black British children in care in Thurrock is 12%. This figure is significantly higher when comparing to the Statistical Neighbour and National average of 7% but in line with the demographics of the population in Thurrock compared to statistical neighbours and national data. The schools census 2020 (which is the most recent information) indicated that 14% of the children living in Thurrock were Black or Black British, compared to 7% for the National and Statistical Neighbour averages. This data is also likely influenced by the number of UASC in Thurrock which accounted for 10% of the CLA population at the end of March 2022 and 57% (16) of the UASC population were described as Black.

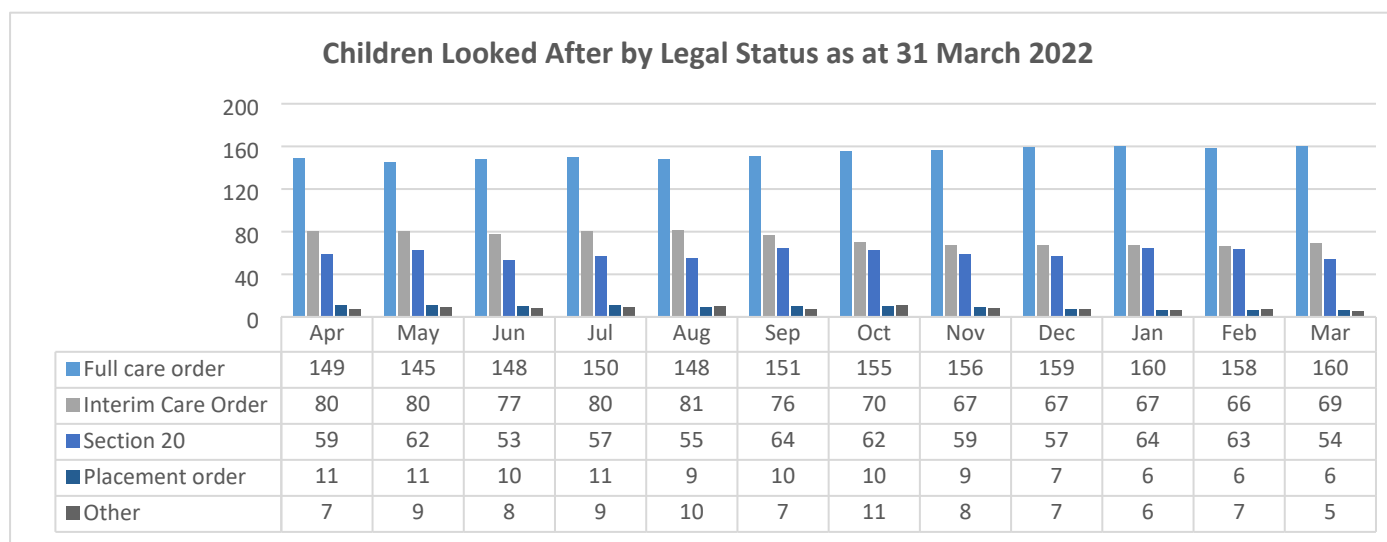
## 8.4 Time in Care for Children and Young People



It is recognised that the best place for children is within the care of their families, if this is safe. The longer that children remain in care the more problematic it becomes for them to return to the care of their families. It is therefore important that the IRO service continue to scrutinise the care plans that are put in place for children and young people to ensure that planning does not drift and that children do not remain in care for any longer than is necessary.

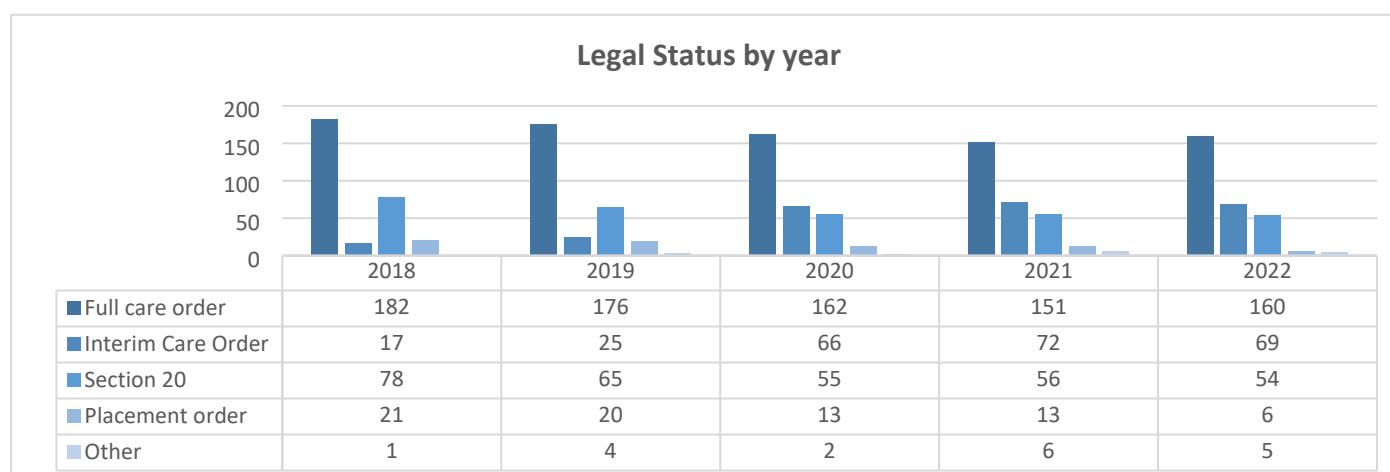
Where children have been in care for longer than five years it is important that the IRO's closely scrutinise the care plan that has been developed for the young person and explore whether there are more appropriate ways of ensuring permanency for a young person, working with foster carers to explore the possibility of an SGO where children have been in placement for a long time.

## 8.5 Legal Framework for Children in Care



According to the latest benchmarking data in 2021-22, nationally 78% of Children Looked After were cared for under a Care Order (Full or Interim Care Order), 17% under Section 20, and 5% on a Placement Order. Statistical neighbours showed similar data with 76% of Children Looked After were cared for under a Care Order (Full or Interim Care Order), 17% under Section 20, and 7% on a Placement Order.

Data for Thurrock shows 77% of children cared for under a Care Order, 18% under Section 20, and 4% on a Placement Order. The majority of Children Looked After by Thurrock are, or have been, subject to legal proceedings where they have suffered some form of abuse or neglect and the accommodation is being used to protect them from further harm and to secure permanency for these children.

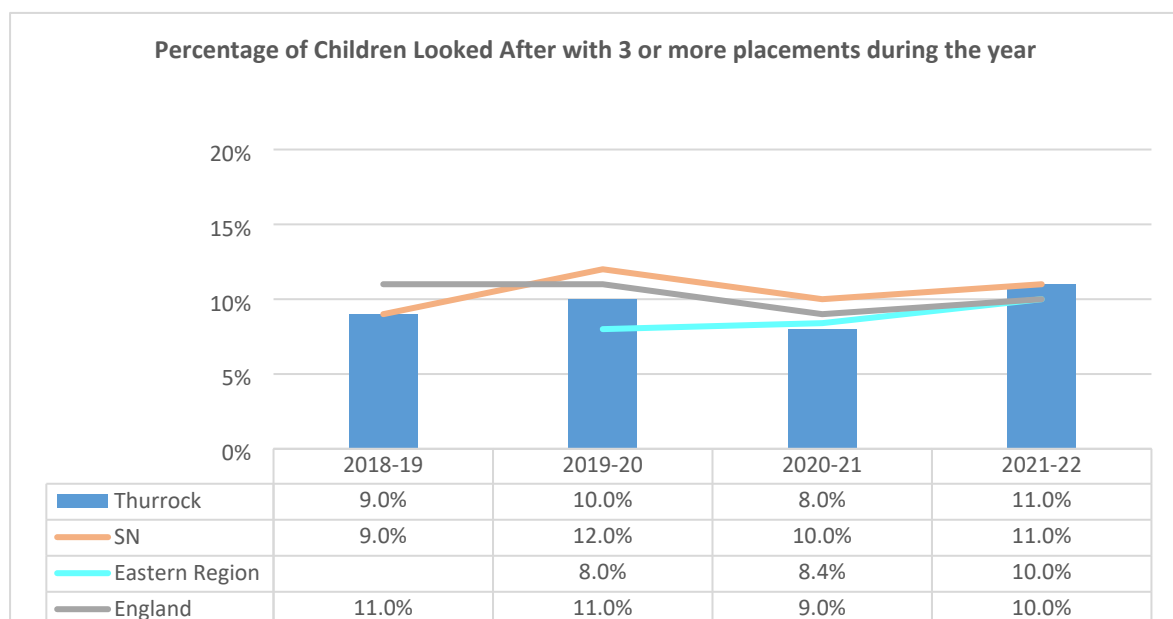


It is important that wherever possible any form of intervention that is offered to families is done so at the lowest possible level. Section 20 agreements allow the local authority to place a child in care with parental agreement. The threshold that must be crossed for a Full or Interim Care Order to be granted is contained within

S31 of the Children Act. The Court may grant an Interim Care Order if it has reasonable grounds to believe that the child is suffering or is likely to suffer significant harm, or a Full Care Order if the child is, or is continuing to suffer significant harm. This harm must be due to the care being provided to the child by his parents, or because the child is beyond parental control. Under S20 of the Children Act, parents have the right to remove their child from the placement, which may result in a level of insecurity and instability for children. The use of care orders continues to exceed the use of section 20 requests for children looked after. This pattern indicates that there is a desire to achieve permanency and stability for children. Since 2020 the number of children on interim care orders has exceeded the number of children placed under section 20. It is suggested that this is a further indication of the desire for children looked after in the Thurrock area to have stability and security when it comes to their future and their placements.

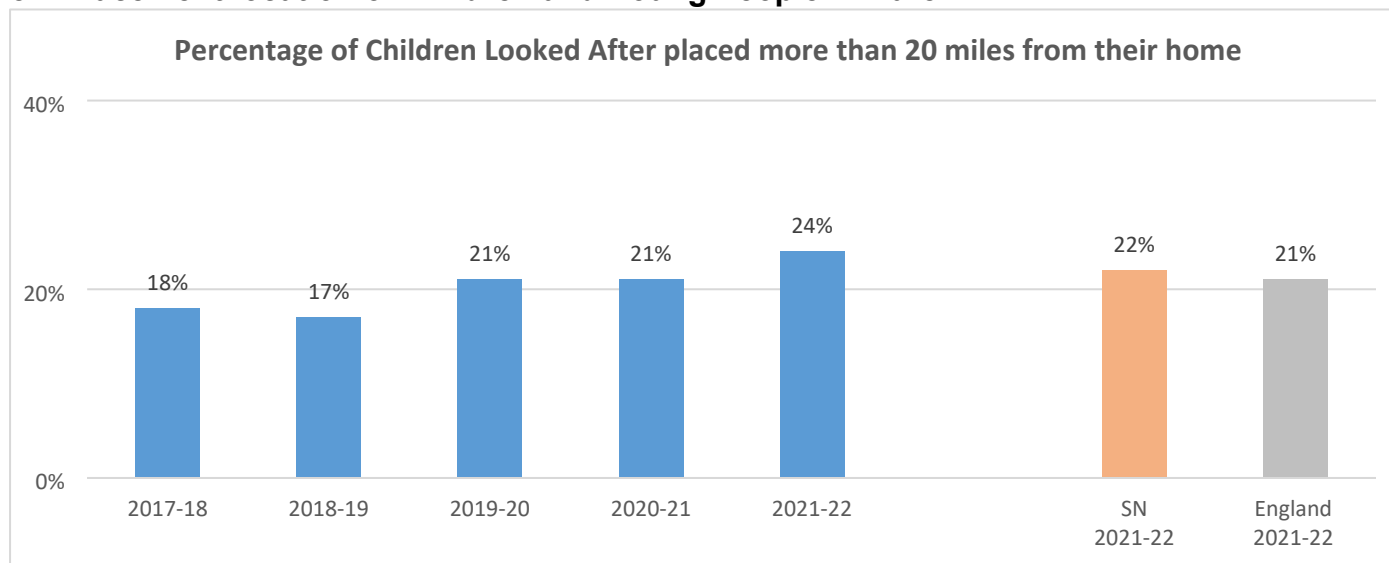
The challenge for the IRO service continues to be one that ensures that the plans that are developed for children are carried out within reasonable time scales and that the legal framework that children are placed under does not have an impact upon the stability that is required to allow them to achieve successful outcomes.

## 8.6 Placement Stability of Children and Young People in Care



The percentage of children who have had three or more placements in the year 2021 to 2022 has increased by 2.6% and at 11% is in line with statistical neighbours and slightly higher than the Eastern Region and National performance at 10%. It is not conducive for children to experience a number of placements and the security and stability provided by a consistent placement provides children with regular access to education friendship groups and local amenities as well as provides him with the opportunity to build positive relationships with carers. Nationally there is a shortage of placements available particularly for children with complex needs. Thurrock is working towards increasing the number of placements locally which are able to meet these needs.

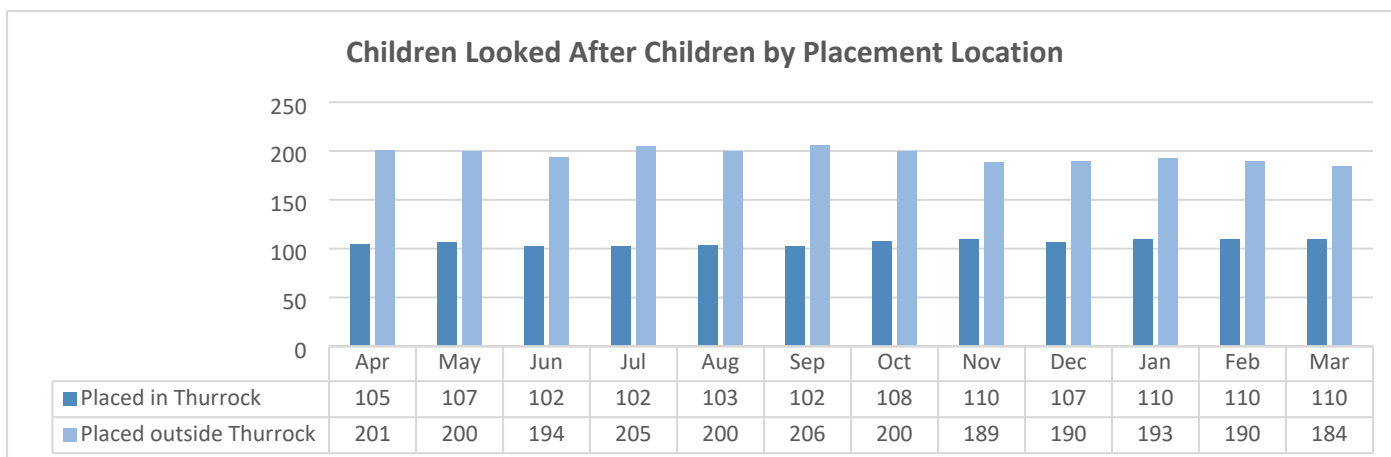
### 8.7 Placement location of Children and Young People in Care



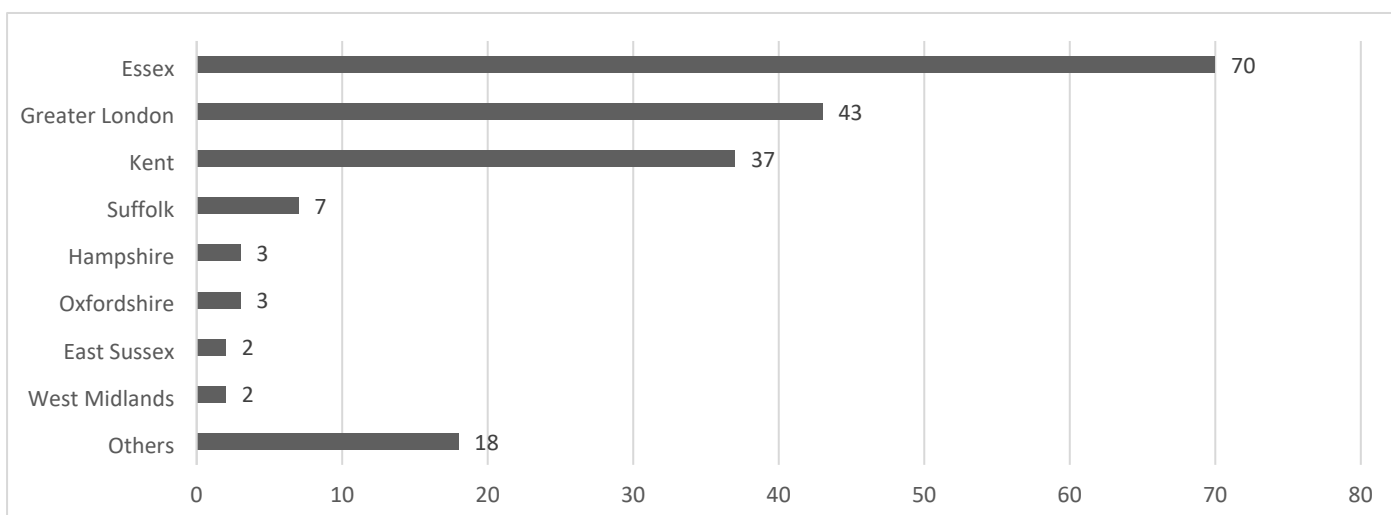
The number of children placed more than 20 miles away from their home has risen by 4.4%. The service recognises the need for every effort to be made to place children as close to their home as possible so far is consistent with the need to be safeguarded as well as to ensure that they have continued access to specialist therapeutic services what education provision.

Consideration needs to be given to the number of available services with in Thurrock that have the capacity to meet the complex needs of children coming into the care system as well as the need for some of these young people to be placed a significant distance away from Thurrock to ensure their safety and continued development combined with a national shortage of placements resulting in fewer options available to the service.





The IRO service recognises that where possible children and young people need to remain within the Thurrock area, close to their family, schools and friends. There are however, occasions where children need to be placed outside of Thurrock, because of the need for a specialist placement that meets the complex needs of the child or young person, for their own safety or simply because of availability within the local area.

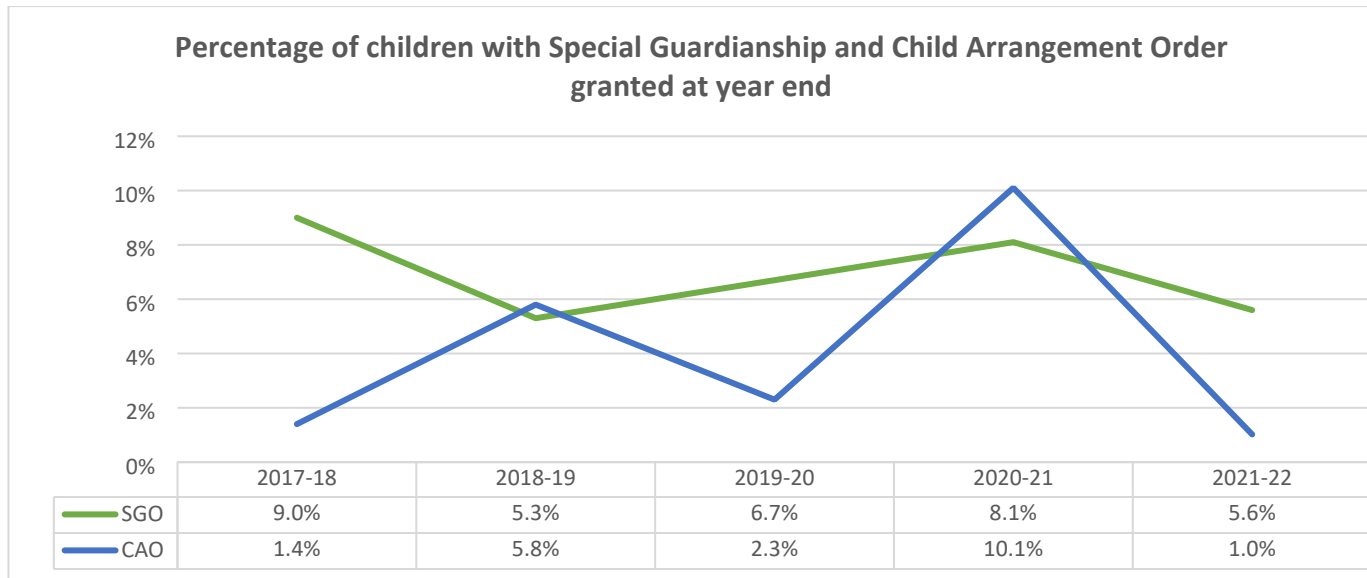


Most children and young people are placed within Essex, Greater London and Kent and children and young people in these placements are regularly reviewed and scrutinised in order to ensure that their needs continue to be met.

## 9. Use of Special Guardianship Orders and Child Arrangement Orders

A Special Guardianship Order (SGO) is an order appointing one or more individual to be a child's 'special guardian'. It is a private law order made under the Children Act 1989 and is intended for those children who cannot live with their birth parents and who would benefit from a legally secure placement.

It is a more secure order than a Child Arrangements Order (CAO) because a parent cannot apply to discharge it unless they have the permission of the court to do so, however it is less secure than an Adoption Order because it does not end the legal relationship between the child and his/her birth parents. The Adoption and Children Act 2002 introduced Special Guardianship Orders. Both an SGO and CAO are routes to permanence for children.



Special Guardianship Orders and Child Arrangement Orders can be used when looking placing a child away from parents with friends or family members and offer a child a more “normal” childhood experience. They are also used to convert long-term fostering arrangements, providing for a higher degree of commitment from the carer and long-term permanency for children.

5.6% of children left care through a Special Guardianship Order representing a decrease of 2.5% when compared to last year and contrasts with national figures that saw an overall rise of 6%. There has been a significant decrease in the number of CAO granted, however scrutiny of these figures indicates that there are a number of requests still in proceedings that will be recorded in the data for next year.

Because the numbers are relatively small that conclude by way of a CAO small changes in the number can make quite a difference to the percentage share.

The complexity of the needs of children coming into care may mean that a special guardianship order or a child arrangement order is not suitable however it is important that the IRO service continues to robustly scrutinise the situation of each child and young person to ensure that children and young people do not remain in care unnecessarily however do experience stability and security.

## **10. IRO Service impact on the Outcomes for Children and Young People**

## **Dispute Resolutions and Escalation**

One of the key functions of an IRO is to oversee the needs and rights of every young person in the care of the Local Authority. This responsibility is outlined in the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2015 and IRO Handbook 2010. Every child in care has an Independent Reviewing Officer appointed to ensure that their Care Plan fully reflects their needs and that the actions set out in the plan are consistent with the Local Authority's legal responsibilities towards them as a child or young person in care.

An IRO will ensure that the wishes and feelings of the child are given due consideration by the Local Authority throughout the whole time the child is in care and will monitor the performance of the Local Authority in relation to the child's case. On occasions this means that it will come to the attention of the IRO that there is a problem in relation to the care of a child or young person, for example in relation to planning for the care of the child, or the implementation of the plan or decisions relating to it, resource issues or poor practice by the Social Worker. When this happens, the IRO is required to seek a resolution.

It is acknowledged that the resolution of disputes can be time consuming and can create tensions between the IRO and the Local Authority. Nevertheless, the child's allocated IRO is personally responsible for activating and seeking a resolution, even if it may not be in accordance with the child's wishes and feelings if, in the IRO's view, it is in accordance with the best interest and welfare of the child, as well as his or her human rights. In compliance with the IRO Handbook 2010 there is in place a formal Dispute Resolution Process whilst acknowledging and giving primacy to informal resolution where possible.

Thurrock's IRO's manage most disagreement and challenge very effectively and on an informal basis. In most of the cases discussion with social workers and their managers is effective in achieving the progress required.

It is recognised that there are occasions when this is not possible and in line with the guidance in the IRO handbook, the IRO will undertake a formal dispute.

The IRO Service recorded, 11 completed dispute resolutions. All the disputes raised were about concerns with regards to the adequate development/progress of the young persons agreed care plan. All of the disputes raised were resolved to the satisfaction of the IRO. IROs continue to attend the placement panel in an advisory capacity and to ensure the IROs views are taken into account in the discussion.

There were no disputes which had to be referred to the Corporate Director of Children Services or CAFCAS.

### **11. Feedback from the Children in Care about the IRO Service.**

The IRO service is proactive in using the Mind of My Own App to gain the views of children as well as seeking their views directly.

Following on from previous years the IRO service were keen to find out about how children and young people feel about their plans. Data was gathered alongside the Participation and Engagement service that indicated that whilst most children felt that their plan would make things better for them just over half either didn't know or sort of knew the plans for them.

	Yes	No	Sort of	Answered by
<b>Do you know what is in the plan for you and your family?</b>	21 (47%)	19 (42%)	5	45
<b>Have you been involved in making the plan?</b>	24 (60%)	14 (35%)	2	40
<b>Do you think the plan will help to make things better?</b>	35 (76%)	2	9 (20%)	46

In light of this information the IRO service has changed the wording of the plans shared at Reviews to use less jargon and use a section "what we agreed we will do" in review reports in the hope that this will make things easier for children and young people to distinguish their plans.

## **12. IRO Service objectives in: 2021-2022**

### **1. To fully embed new ways of presenting minutes from reviews.**

The IRO service recognises that the Review is the child or young person's meeting and continually looks at ways to present minutes in ways that are meaningful and relevant to children and young people. IRO's use a selection of methods ranging from Magazine style minutes, direct letters and formal minutes addressed directly to the young person. IRO's continually share information with each other regarding how minutes are written to learn from each other.

### **2. To utilise new technologies to assist in communicating with, and, conducting reviews for children and young people in line with their views and wishes.**

Most reviews are carried out face to face and the IRO service believes that this is the best way to conduct any meetings. There are instances however when older young people request that meetings are held via Teams. Whilst this may not be ideal it is important to recognise that the meeting is for the young person and if the use of technology assists their participation, then the IRO is keen to embrace this. Where there are situations where the young person's requests a review over Teams the IRO will always try and follow this up with a face to face visit.

**3. To play an active role in the assessment and reduction in the use of unregistered/unregulated placements.**

The IRO service plays an active role in making sure that wherever possible the placements for children and young people are appropriate and registered. There are occasions when children and young people need to be placed in unregistered placement because of an emergency or due to a shortage of availability. Where unregistered placements are used, IRO's exercise extra vigilance to ensure that the placement meets the needs of the young person by undertaking monthly visits as these placements may, on occasion, be in breach of Care Planning guidelines.

**4. To contribute proactively to the transitions process for children and young people on the verge of leaving care.**

The IRO service works closely with frontline services to ensure that young people are prepared for adulthood and leaving care. IRO's are routinely ensuring that transition planning forms part of the Review process and is clearly recorded. There are aspects of the transition process that the IRO service are yet to become familiar with however meetings have taken place to better understand this and it is agreed that IRO's will undertake a further review after the young person's 18<sup>th</sup> birthday to ensure that transition plans are in place.

**5. To assist in the development of support packages available to children attending university.**

There were 21 children attending University who were Looked After Children. The IRO service continues to strongly advocate for young people to attend university where appropriate and if they meet the requirements. In discussion with the IRO service the policies surrounding the provision of support for young people attending University is supportive and appropriate.

**6. The IRO service to work with the Participation and Engagement service at the Young Voices Consultation days to obtain specific feedback about what they want from their reviews and IRO and act on this as appropriate.**

The IRO service is currently developing information alongside young people and the participation and engagement service to ensure they are clear regarding the role of the IRO and understand the purpose of the review process. Please also see section 11.

**13. IRO Service Objectives 2022-2023**

**To contribute proactively to the transitions process for children and young people on the verge of leaving care.** The IRO service will continue to discuss transition planning within the review process for any child over the age of 16, to ensure that transition planning takes place in a timely manner. The IRO service will also look at supporting the Leaving and Aftercare Service by implementing a further review for children after their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday to ensure that the transition plan is being carried out.

**The IRO will improve representation and participation of service users at CLA Review meetings. The IRO will collect feedback from service users about their LAC Review experience to help improve the LAC Review meetings.** The IRO service has recently implemented a QR code that is attached to the review correspondence provided to young people. It is hoped that analysis of this information in the coming year will allow for the service to be more responsive to the understanding the experience of young people.

**To ensure that there is no delay in the plans for children with regards to long-term linking.** There are discussions within the Review where any child has been in Foster Care for more than a year if long term linking is a plan that can be pursued. The IRO service will ensure that there are clear timescales for this to be completed and that this is checked at the midway reviews and provide the views of the IRO in a timely manner.

**IRO service to strategically support and where necessary challenge & help the CLA service prepare care plans and review reports on time.** The IRO service recognises that there are significant pressures on frontline teams however it is important that plans and reports are provided on time. The IRO service will continue to maintain links with frontline teams and look at ways that they can support teams.

**To take an active role in the provision of training to raise awareness of the role and remit of the IRO.**

The IRO service will explore avenues to make practitioners more aware of the role of the IRO in terms of the Quality Assurance aspect of the position. A request has been made to be included in the induction programme for new starters and the IRO service will continue to build relationships with practitioners by being linked with service areas.

<b>4 January 2023</b>	<b>ITEM: 8</b>
<b>Corporate Parenting Committee</b>	
<b>Joint Report on Initial Health Assessments for Looked After Children</b>	
<b>Wards and communities affected:</b> All	<b>Key Decision:</b> None
<b>Report of:</b> Helen Farmer – Interim Director of Babies, Children and Young People Mid and South Essex Integrated Care Board Dan Jones – Strategic Lead CLA (Child Looked After)	
<b>Accountable Assistant Director:</b> Janet Simon, Assistant Director, Children’s Social Care and Early Help	
<b>Accountable Director:</b> Sheila Murphy, Corporate Director of Children’s Services	
<b>This report is</b> Public	

## Executive Summary

When a child become looked after by Thurrock Council, it is a statutory requirement that they receive an assessment of their health within 20 working days; this is known as an Initial Health Assessment (IHA). The IHA must be completed by a medical practitioner and is coordinated jointly between Thurrock Council and the NHS.

Whilst all children requiring an IHA are offered an appointment there continues to be a range of improvement measures, children are not having their initial health assessments consistently carried out within the statutory timeframe.

There are a range of factors that delay the IHA appointment however a key challenge is the lack of capacity available to provide IHAs to all children placed in the local area.

To improve the delivery of IHAs the following actions are being taken:

- The ICB is commissioning additional capacity via an alternative provider.
- The tracking system is being updated to an electronic and cross agency solution
- Weekly monitoring meetings will initially be chaired by the Assistant Director for children’s social care and early help with a clear and agreed escalation process.

## 1. Recommendation(s)

### 1.1 Members are aware of the continuing performance issues with Initial Health Assessments and the action being taken by Children's Services and the NHS to improve this

## 2. Introduction and Background

2.1 When a child becomes looked after by Thurrock Council there is a duty under the *Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010* to undertake an assessment of their health needs within 20 working days of accommodation. This is referred to as the Initial Health Assessment. There are two steps to the completion of an IHA:

- Social Care must refer the child within 5 days of becoming looked after
- The child attends the Initial Health Assessment appointment within 20 working days of becoming looked after.

Following the appointment, a report is sent to the Social Worker and ensures those caring for the child understand their health needs.

2.2 The Health Service local to where the child is living in care is responsible for the IHA appointment. It is not permissible for Health Services to prioritise children from their own area. This means that Thurrock based health services have to offer Paediatric IHA appointments to all children who are newly placed in Thurrock whether they are in our care or the care of another local authority.

2.3 Almost all children receive an IHA but there has been a fluctuation in the ability to deliver this within the statutory timeframe. This has been a persistent issue and was raised in the 2019 Ofsted Inspection of Children's Services.

Current Joint performance for this financial year is:

### **Children entering care requiring an IHA from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2022 – 14<sup>th</sup> November 2022**

- **53** children entered care in the financial year

### **Referrals to Health by Thurrock Council**

- **36** (68%) Children were referred for an IHA on time by Thurrock Council
- **17** were referred outside of that time frame
- The average time for a referral to be made is 6 working days

Thurrock Council refers the majority of children for an IHA within the agreed timeframe and the average figures indicate that when this is not achieved the delay is not significant (one working day)

### **Initial Health Assessments Completed by Health Services**

- **44** have received an IHA, **11** of these were on time, **33** were overdue
- **2** children left Care before their IHA was due
- **1** Child refused their IHA



- **6 IHA's** are within timescales and pending at the time of writing
- The average time for an IHA to be completed is **41 days** from entering care, the target is **20 working days**

Almost all children receive their IHA apart from those who refuse or leave care. Most children will receive their Initial Health Assessment.

The issues driving current delay are:

- Lack of available Paediatric Appointments in placement area
- Missed first appointments (via child declining or carer availability)
- Lack of an available interpreter
- Changes of placement
- Lack of or late parental consent

### **3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options**

- 3.1 This section focuses on the delivery of the Initial Health Assessment (IHAs) and the current challenges faced by our NHS provider NELFT (North East London Foundation Trust) and other providers externally in delivering within the statutory timeline. The report describes the plans in place to address this challenge in the short and long term.

*Promoting the health and wellbeing of looked-after children* Department for Education and Department of Health (Updated 2018) provides the statutory guidance for local authorities and Integrated Care Boards (ICBs). Although it is the Authority who has the responsibility for ensuring a health assessment of physical, emotional and mental health needs is carried out, the NHS has a significant role to play in ensuring the timely and effective delivery of health services to looked-after children.

There are three key approaches to this being achieved:

1. commissioning effective services,
2. delivering through provider organisations, and
3. through individual practitioners providing coordinated care for each child.

The IHA should result in a health plan being available for the first statutory review completed by the independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) which must happen 20 days from when the child comes into care. The Guidance stipulates that the IHA must be carried out by a Medical Practitioner and cannot be delegated. The guidance also includes instructions regarding the assessment process itself.

NHS England wrote to all CCGs (Clinical Commissioning Groups) in February 2022 and in this acknowledged the challenge of providing IHA's for children when placed out of area and confirmed that all health teams have a duty to see children for IHAs within 20 days regardless as to where they first became looked after e.g. if a child from Thurrock is placed in Northamptonshire, the

time frame remains the same and if a child from Bedford is placed in Thurrock the timeframe applies. Local Children must not be given priority over other Local Authority Children.

This reaffirmed the position of the CCG (Clinical Commissioning Group) and now ICB and NELFT in holding this stance of best practice for all children irrelevant of the responsible Authority being internal to the ICB or external.

This is relevant locally as although the numbers of children looked after in Thurrock have remained stable the numbers placed in Thurrock from other areas has increased significantly.

The table below demonstrates the demand and capacity challenges for North East London Foundation Trust (NELFT) and the Integrated Care Boards current Commissioning arrangements. It illustrates that although the current capacity is adequate for Thurrock children coming into care the numbers of children placed locally from out of area are a causal factor for the challenges in regard to the compliance with statutory timeframes for all children in care.

<b>Timeframe</b>	<b>Thurrock</b>	<b>Basildon and Brentwood &amp; OOA</b>	<b>Total IHAs</b>
Jan- Dec 2021	61	105	166
Jan-June 2022	27	75	92
July – September 2022	12	37	49

It is important to note that the ICB, NELFT and the Council Officers work collaboratively to track and monitor all Thurrock children on a weekly basis. All children and young people are seen at the earliest opportunity. Regular exception reports capture the reasons for any breaches. This has led to improvement in coordination, root cause analysis of the issues and confirmation of a joint responsibility.

For children placed outside of Thurrock, officers proactively engage with NHS providers in their area to support transfer of care and track delivery of IHAs but have little influence on pressures on their local services.

A revised escalation plan process has been agreed between the Designate Nurse role in the ICB and Local Authority Looked after children’s team. This will be supported by the new designate Medical Officer for Looked After Children and the designates who will be able to work across networks and with their counterparts in other areas.

It has been recognised the current manual tracking arrangements for IHAs needs to progress from a manual and labour-intensive approach, thus subject to risk through human error and dependency, to a cross agency digital approach. NELFT have been leading on this development on a county wide approach and the pilot phased is to be launched early in 2023

The ICB and NELFT have been in discussions and monitoring the situation closely. In February 2022, the ICB approved financial resource for NELFT to secure additional capacity through locum or overtime arrangements. Unfortunately, this has not been successful due to the scarcity of locums and agency in this specialist workforce and current pressures on the service.

As an immediate short-term solution, the ICB are now in discussions with an alternative provider to deliver additional capacity of 100 IHA across Mid and South Essex acknowledging the same pressures are being experienced across our partnership. Subject to approval this should be in place by January 2023. The new ICB landscape and the development of the Community Provider Collaborative across Mid and South Essex provides the opportunity to design a sustainable longer-term solution.

The current commissioning and delivery models across Mid and South Essex have been reviewed and options are currently being appraised to ensure value for money, effective delivery, greater integrated care and most importantly an improved experience and outcome for children and young people.

#### **4. Reasons for Recommendation**

- 4.1 Health and Wellbeing Board are informed that Children who require an Initial Health Assessment receive one, but these are not being consistently carried out within statutory timescales. Performance in this area has remained inconsistent since 2019
- 4.2 Health and Wellbeing Board are informed of the current steps being taken to improve this which includes, increased Paediatric capacity, an electronic referral process and tracking to avoid delay. These changes will be implemented over the next six months and will not yet be evident in our performance data

#### **5. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact**

- 5.1 Our Corporate target is for 90% of Initial Health Assessments to be completed in 20 working days of entering care

#### **6. Implications**

##### **6.1 Financial**

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

The are no financial implications for this report

## 6.2 Legal

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

The Council has general duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of any child that it looks after under Section 22(3) of the Children Act 1989 and it must have regard to the Corporate Parenting Principles in Section 1(1) of the Children and Social Work Act 2017.

The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010 set out the detailed legal requirements in caring for Looked after Children. The timescales for health are set in regulation 7 which provides for the Council to make arrangements for the health assessment by the child's first review, and for a written report of the health assessment to be provided as soon as soon as reasonably practicable.

## 6.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Roxanne Scanlon**  
**Community Engagement and Project Monitoring Officer**

The Service is committed to practice, which promotes equality, diversity and inclusion, and will carry out its duties in accordance with the Equality Act 2010, Public Sector Equality Duty and related Codes of Practice and Anti-discriminatory policy. The service recognises that a range of communities and groups of people may have experienced obstruction or the impact of prejudice when accessing services including Social Care and Health services. Both Services are committed to support all children in the care of Thurrock Council to access Initial Health assessments, individual arrangements are made where required to meet needs and address individual concerns

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

- Impact on looked after children

## 7. 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):

- None

## 8. Appendices to the report

- None

**9. Key points of interest within appendices**

- None

**Report Author:**

Helen Farmer - Interim Director of Babies, Children and Young People MSE ICB

Dan Jones – Strategic Lead CLA

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<b>4 January 2023</b>	<b>ITEM: 9</b>
<b>Corporate Parenting Committee</b>	
<b>Children Looked After Health Report</b>	
<b>Wards and communities affected:</b> All	<b>Key Decision:</b> None
<b>Report of:</b> Nickola Rickard, Designated Nurse for Looked After Children Mid and South Essex Integrated Care Board	
<b>Accountable Assistant Director:</b> Yvonne Anarfi, Assistant Director of safeguarding MSE ICB	
<b>Accountable Director:</b> Linda Moncur, Director of Safeguarding MSE ICB	
<b>This report is</b> Public	

## **Executive Summary**

The attached report describes and analyses the outcomes, achievements and challenges regarding the health outcomes for looked after children for 2022/23. The report provides a local and national overview for comparison

- 1. Recommendation(s)**
  - 1.1 That the Children Looked After Health Report be noted**
  - 1.2 That members are aware of the key areas for improvements.**
- 2. Introduction and Background**
  - 2.1 Within Appendix 1
- 3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options**
  - 3.1 Within Appendix 1
- 4. Reasons for Recommendation**
  - 4.1 Within Appendix 1
- 5. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)**
  - 5.1 None

## **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 Corporate Finance Resources and Place delivery.**

There are no financial implications, however any costs associated with this report need to be met from existing resources.

### **7.2 Legal**

Implications verified by: **Petrena Sharpe**  
**Safeguarding Lawyer**

The Local Authority, has a duty under section 22(3) (a) of the Children Act 1989 to safeguard and promote the welfare of Looked After Children, including eligible children and those placed for adoption, regardless of whether they are placed in or out of the authority or the type of placement. This includes promoting the child's physical, emotional and mental health and acting on any early signs of health issues. In accordance with the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010 every Looked After Child should have a health assessment so that a health plan can be developed to reflect the child's health needs and be included as part of the child's overall care plan. As corporate parent, the local authority must ensure that children and young people receive the health care services they require as set out in their health plan. This includes medical and dental care treatment as well as advice and guidance on personal health care and health promotion issues. The Local Authority should advise the provider health team (NELFT) when a child is initially accommodated.

The relevant Integrated Care Board and NHS England have a duty to cooperate with requests from the Local Authority to undertake health assessments and provide any necessary support services to Looked After Children. This should be done without any undue delay and irrespective of whether the placement of the child is an emergency, short term or in another Integrated Care Board. This also includes services to a child or young person experiencing mental illness. Both the Local Authority and relevant Integrated Care Board should develop effective communications and understandings between each other as part of being able to promote children's wellbeing.



7.3 **Diversity and Equality**

Implications verified by: **Rebecca Lee**

**Team Manager- Community Development and Equalities Adults, Housing and Health Directorate**

The Service is committed to practice, which promotes inclusion and diversity, and will carry out its duties in accordance with the Equality Act 2010 and related Codes of Practice and Anti-discriminatory policy.

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

- Impact on Looked After Children

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):

- **None**

9. **Appendices to the report**

- Appendix 1 – CLA Health Report

**Report Author:**

Nickola Rickard - Designated Nurse for Looked After Children Mid and South Essex Integrated Care Board

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Mid and South Essex  
Integrated Care  
System



Mid and South Essex

# Promoting the Health & Wellbeing of Thurrock Looked after Children 2021-2022

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## Mid and South Essex Integrated Care Board MSE ICB (Thurrock) Report

# Promoting the Health & Wellbeing of Thurrock Looked After Children (LAC) 2021-2022

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## Executive Summary

This annual report describes the challenges and achievements in identifying and improving the health and wellbeing of our looked after children (LAC) during the reporting period 2021/2022. The terms Children in Care (CIC) and LAC are used interchangeably throughout the report. Please refer to the last slide (Appendix 1) for a list of abbreviations that are used throughout the report.

Thurrock partners should come together more to deliver the joint Department of Health and Department for Education (DFE) statutory guidance: [Promoting the health and wellbeing of looked-after children \(2015\)](#)

This statutory guidance is issued under section 10 & 11 of the Children Act 2004 and sets out how local authorities, CCGs (Now Integrated Care Board/ICB) and NHS England and Improvement (NHSEI) are required to work together to promote the health and wellbeing of LAC

The Health Pledge commits us to helping our children and young people be physically and emotionally healthy. This can only be fully achieved when we are working in partnership and hear the voices of children and young people.



## Executive Summary continued

The past year has continued to be challenging for our children and young people, their carers and professionals. We have not been able to achieve all of our ambitions for our children, some of this is a result of the pandemic. There have been challenges in meeting the statutory timeframes for Health Assessments this is an ongoing resource issue that as a strategic team we are addressing. There is a separate report that is being presented to the committee on the 4<sup>th</sup> Jan 2023 by Dan Jones (Strategic Lead - CLA I Children's Services) and Helen Farmer (Interim Director for Children and Young people and LD Mid and South Essex ICB)

This item will not be covered in detail in this report.

This report identifies and analyses the profile of our LAC population, governance arrangements that are in place and the risks to children and young people if we are unable to meet our statutory requirements.

Next steps, considers what we can and should do in the coming months/years to realise our ambitions for our children and young people and how we can involve them in shaping their health offer.

# The Function and responsibility of Mid and South Essex ICB as Corporate parents and equal Partners

Under the Children Act (1989, 2004) ICB's have a duty to comply and cooperate with requests from the Local Authority to assist them in providing support and services for LAC.

In order to discharge this duty effectively NHS Commissioners must ensure that the services they commission can meet the particular needs of these children so that they are able to access a range of universal and specialist services without undue delay.

# Introduction

***‘If we were to truly replicate what a family is for the child who’s being Looked After by the state, if the state was truly to provide that, it would give them the best of everything.’***

**Lemn Sissay - Poet and Care Leaver**

Page 6  
The report will describe how the health needs of Thurrock’s Looked after children have been met during the reporting period April 2021 March 2022, the report also considers challenges risks and next steps.



# Introduction continued

This is the first health annual report since 2019 due to the COVID 19 Pandemic.

During the reporting period there have been many successes with the development of positive working relationships across the partnership.

Extra funding was provided to address the backlog of Initial health assessments

Progress has been made in developing the care leavers offer

Dental training for health teams to support early identification of dental needs and the provision of the most current advice on maintenance of good oral hygiene.

Training for GP's/social workers and the wider network on the needs of Looked after Children.

## Introduction continued

It is noted that there have been challenges in meeting the Statutory timelines for health assessments – the reasons are multifaceted and are proactively being addressed, It should be noted that the quality of the health assessments remain high.

Strategic support and advice is provided to the partnership by the Designated Nurse and the Designated Doctor for Looked After Children (LAC)

The MSE ICB ( Mid and South Essex Integrated Care Board) commissions Initial Health Assessments for Children in Care from NELFT ( North East London Foundation Trust). Review health assessments are commissioned by Public Health Thurrock – a recent Health Needs assessment was undertaken by Thurrock Public health which outlined much of the positive achievements and suggestions on the way forward.

## Introduction continued

The NELFT team has two staff nurses who undertake the review health assessments for children placed in area and oversee children who are placed out of area. NELFT Community Paediatricians undertake the IHA's (Initial Health Assessments) The health team has been a relatively static workforce providing consistency to children and young people for their RHA's in Thurrock.

# Recommendations from previous annual report 2019

- 1. It is requested that whilst there are ongoing concerns around the compliance of meeting statutory targets for Initial Health Assessment this issue should remain as a standing agenda item for the Corporate Parenting Committee.***

***Page 90 It is requested that due to the significant reduction in the reported number of children having an up to date dental check and being fully immunised, this area of care is kept as a standing agenda item to be monitored by the committee***

*It is requested that whilst there are ongoing concerns around the compliance of meeting statutory targets for Initial Health Assessment this issue should remain as a standing agenda item for the Corporate Parenting Committee.*

**The Committee has been provided a recent report on IHA's please see below narrative from this report that reflects actions taken to address this issue.**

'When a child become looked after by Thurrock Council, it is a statutory requirement that they receive an assessment of their health within 20 working days; this is known as an Initial Health Assessment (IHA). The IHA must be completed by a medical practitioner and is coordinated jointly between Thurrock Council and the NHS.

Whilst all children requiring an IHA are offered an appointment there continues to be a challenge to deliver within the 20 working days statutory requirement.

Despite a range of improvement measures, compliance remains inconsistent.

There are a range of factors that delay the IHA appointment however a key challenge is the lack of capacity available to provide IHAs to all children placed in the local area. '

As has been reported previously, other factors impact on timeliness including delayed referral to the health team, limited availability and reliability of interpreters, Children not brought to appointments or declining assessments.

## To improve the delivery of IHAs the following actions are being taken:

- The ICB is commissioning additional capacity via an alternative provider
- The tracking system is being updated to an electronic and cross agency Digital solution
- Weekly monitoring meetings will continue with an agreed escalation process

*2. It is requested that due to the significant reduction in the reported number of children having an up to date dental check and being fully immunised, this area of care is kept as a standing agenda item to be monitored by the committee –*

Please refer to slide 36 towards on dental health. There is no longer dental registration as such, children and adults are required to book an appointment with the dentist of their choice.

It has not been possible to accurately reflect the numbers of children who are fully immunised as the data does not allow us to draw an accurate conclusion. This is an area for future improvement.

The SET (Southend Essex and Thurrock ) Designate Nurses have developed a health pledge to ensure we are continuing to address unwarranted variation and to improve the health outcomes for Children in care and care leavers. The following slides describe some of the achievements made during this reporting period.

# QUALITY AND PERFORMANCE :

- Review of ICB contracts where IHA performance is below requirement.
- Options appraisal for different models of IHA provision shared with Executive Nurses
- IHA Digital solution progressing
- LAC nurses invited to complex placement planning meetings
- RHA Audit undertaken in Thurrock



# Emotional health and wellbeing/mental health

- Numerous services procured across SET for emotional health and wellbeing
- Involved in procurement of SET CAMHS – CYP Digital platform
- Looked at quality performance indicators for within SET CAMHS contract for LAC
- Training provided that encompassed Trauma Informed Care

# Voice of children/young people and engagement

- IHA audit reflected views and feelings of the children within the IHA process
- Provision of a blended approach on an individual basis to maintain contact with a young person, based on their choice, to support with engagement with health services deemed hard to reach
- Engagement with care leavers regarding their views on accessibility of health and the language we use

# Commissioning of services

- Escalation pathway for risk of placement breakdown endorsed by SCN and is being shared with Providers
- Escalation pathway developed for provider services to ensure health needs of LAC living out of area are met
- Health is well reflected in the new Essex Co-parenting strategy

# Children with Special Educational Needs and Disability

- Clear process within universal services for identifying LAC with SEND and oversight of EHCP (Education and Healthcare Plans)
- Specific MCA (Mental Capacity Act) training for specialist practitioners within 0-19 service to embed as 'practice as normal'
- Awareness raising of LPS (Liberty Protection safeguards) and implications for 16–17-year-olds
- Working group exploring pathways for sharing MCA between health and children social care

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# Governance Arrangements

6 weekly meetings are held with the Provider (NELFT) and the ICB to review challenges and implement solutions with the involvement of commissioners as appropriate.

A weekly tracking meeting is held between the LA and the Provider to ensure good oversight on the progress of initial and review health assessments

Designate Nurse meets Bi monthly with the Safeguarding Clinical Network for Looked after Children to progress our commitment to reducing unwarranted variation for all looked after children.

The ICB provides training and advice to GP forums and Local operational Groups to ensure the health needs of LAC and care leavers are met.

# Monitoring Activity and Progress

Activity is monitored with regards to:

- Initial and review health assessments- timeliness and quality
- Immunisation uptake
- Dental checks
- Optician checks
- Registration with GP
- Health care plans outcome

# Numbers and ethnicity of Children in care in Thurrock

	As at 31 March 2021		As at 31 March 2022
<b>Number of Children Looked After</b>	<b>301</b>		<b>295</b>
<b>Category of need (reason for entering care)</b>	<b>Abuse &amp; neglect</b>	<b>221</b>	<b>214</b>
	<b>Child's disability</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>10</b>
	<b>Family in acute stress</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>14</b>
	<b>Family dysfunction</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>21</b>
	<b>Socially unacceptable behaviour</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
	<b>Absent parenting</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>Age</b>	<b>0-4 years</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>43</b>
	<b>5-11 years</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>78</b>
	<b>12-15 years</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>91</b>
	<b>16-17 years</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>83</b>
<b>Gender</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>186</b>	<b>178</b>
	<b>Female</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>117</b>
<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>White</b>	<b>218</b>	<b>216</b>
	<b>Black or Black British</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>36</b>
	<b>Mixed / Dual background</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>25</b>
	<b>Asian or Asian British</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>9</b>
	<b>Any other ethnic background</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>7</b>
	<b>Information not yet obtained</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>2</b>

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In the UK children are more likely to be in care if they are: a) Male, Black or of mixed ethnicity. Children are less likely to be in care if they are Female (44% of the looked after population in England are Female...population of under 18 female is 49%). [ <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/media/1622/statistics-briefing-looked-after-children.pdf>] last accessed Dec 2022

In Thurrock in 2022 there was a slight decrease in the Male population of looked after children but males still represent 60% of the overall cohort and females represent 39.6% of the overall cohort which is less than the National figure of 49%. The Female population increased slightly, reasons for this are not fully understood at a local or national level.

Thurrock's LAC population is 73% 'White', 12.2% are Black British. This is reflective of the national picture.

Whilst the above is the data available to us for children looked after by Thurrock it does not give us an understanding of the whole LAC population who live in Thurrock as many Separated migrant children from other local authorities are placed here.

Further detail on ethnicity and gender can be found in the next slide.



# Ethnicity and gender of Looked after children

The gender imbalance has been increasing in some nations. For example, in England there was an increase of 14% for looked after boys between 2015 and 2019, compared to an increase of 10% for girls. This difference is likely to have largely been driven by an increase in unaccompanied asylum-seeking children over this period, the majority of whom are male (DfE, 2019).

Proportion of looked after child population that is from an Asian background 4.6%

Proportion of under-18 population that is from an Asian background 10.0%.

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Little is known about why certain minority ethnic groups are overrepresented whilst others are underrepresented within the care system. Research has identified a number of potential causes, including: lack of access to appropriate support services, greater unwillingness in some cultures to report concerns about a child's safety, or greater uncertainty among child welfare professionals about how to respond appropriately to the needs of families from certain ethnicities.

[ <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/media/1622/statistics-briefing-looked-after-children.pdf>] last accessed Dec 2022

# Children placed at a distance

	31 March 2021	31 March 2022
20 miles or less from home	213	196
More than 20 miles from home	88	99

33% of children are placed more than 20 miles from home this is an increase of almost 4% in the reporting period. This can cause delays in Initial health assessments being undertaken as there are additional administrative process' involved in referring to the receiving health team. This is closely monitored in the joint weekly tracking meeting.

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## Health assessment outcomes

Health assessments aim to identify and address health needs and include the formulation of a Health Action Plan. The Health Action Plan (HAP) is shared with the GP/ IRO/Social worker/Foster carer and young person dependent upon their age, it is essential the HAP is consulted regularly to ensure health needs are met in partnership. Outcomes will also be captured through joint planned audit programmes.

Improved data collection systems are continually being developed to capture outcomes from health assessments and to facilitate a clearer understanding of the health needs of Thurrock Children in Care. Please refer to the slide 26 on most common health needs and Profile of health needs.

The health team continue to offer a range of other clinical services to support and improve the health of children in care. These include health promotion, provision of sexual health advice, facilitating access to smoking cessation programmes, referrals to and supporting young people at risk of Child Sexual Exploitation and those struggling with alcohol and substance misuse.

# An overview of the Health Needs of Thurrock LAC

	Male	Female	Total numbers	% of LAC population Thurrock	National Prevalence
Epilepsy	10	3	13	4.4%	1 in 103
Pregnancy	N/A	5	5	1.7%	
ASD	35	9	44	15%	1 in 100
Diabetes	1	1	2		1 in 700-1000
ADHD	42	10	52	17.6%	8-10% of population
Asthma	32	30	62	21%	1 in 11

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# Asthma

As a partnership we know that when young people enter the care system they are more likely than their peers to have unmet health needs due to adverse childhood experiences and more specifically neglect.

Due to the significant delay in the timeliness of initial health assessments as a system we are at risk of compounding the issue of missing and/or failing to address unmet needs in a timely manner.

Let's consider the implications of a delayed response/identification of health needs for a child with one of the top health needs in our LAC population i.e. Asthma.

According to the data there are a total of 62 children with a diagnosis of asthma this is 21% of the current looked after child population of Thurrock . Of these 30 are female and 32 are Male. If asthma is not reviewed and managed appropriately it can have a significant impact on children and young people.

The next slide explains in more detail why this may be important.

## Asthma continued

In Thurrock in 2021 301 children were looked after, a rate of 66 for every 10,000 children. This is higher than East of England region (49 per 10,000) and is similar to England (67 per 10,000). **Originally published on PHE Fingertips: September 2020 Accessed: December 2022**

Whilst it is not the case for all children in care, many are likely to have had experiences which make them more vulnerable and leaving them at risk of poorer outcomes than children who are not looked after.

Children in care have been found to have lower educational attainment across all age groups as well as poorer mental and physical health. In the case of asthma it is more prevalent within more deprived communities, and those living in more deprived areas of England are more likely to go to hospital for their asthma. Those from disadvantaged socio-economic groups are more likely to be exposed to the causes and triggers of asthma, such as smoking and air pollution. Asthma requires self-management, which is harder to embed in groups with lower health literacy.

[Health inequality and asthma | Asthma UK](#) [last accessed December 2022]

## Asthma continued

Whilst we cannot assume being looked after means you will have poorly controlled asthma there are multiple factors that could increase the likelihood of inconsistent care and treatment, for example the highest reason children come into care in Thurrock is neglect.

Asthma is used here as an example of a long term condition that requires a consistent approach to its management which can only be achieved if children are assessed regularly and supported in the management of their health needs.

# What is ADHD ?

*ADHD is a mental health condition that is defined through analysis of behaviour. People with ADHD show a persistent pattern of inattention and/or hyperactivity–impulsivity that interferes with day-to-day functioning and/or development*

**Childhood ADHD:** In the UK, a research survey of 10,438 children between the ages of 5 and 15 years found that 3.62% of boys and 0.85% of girls had ADHD [\[Journal of Attention Disorders\]](#). Global prevalence is considered to be between 2 and 7% with an average of 5%. [\[The Lancet\]](#) [\[About ADHD | ADHD UK\]](#)  
Last accessed Dec 2022

According to the data provided for children aged 5-18 years 14% of Thurrock male looked after children have ADHD and 3.3% of females, according to NICE (National Institute clinical excellence) Looked after children are more likely than the general population to have ADHD. However this alone would not account for the significant difference more needs to be done to understand the figures.

**[<https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng87>] last accessed December 2022**



# Emotional health and wellbeing

Understanding the emotional and behavioural needs of looked-after children is important. Local authorities are required to use the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) to assess the emotional well-being of individual looked-after children.

The SDQ is an internationally validated brief behavioural screening questionnaire about 4-16 year olds. It exists in three parts: one for the carer, another for the child's teacher and a third part for the child.

[Promoting the health and well-being of looked-after children - update note added to start in August 2022 \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#) [last accessed November 2022]

SDQ's are routinely completed for CYP in Thurrock. No further analysis of mental health and emotional wellbeing will be included within this annual report as it will be reported separately by the experts in this field.

# Separated Migrant Children

Separated migrant Children are young people aged under 18, who have applied for asylum in their own right and are separated from both parents and/or any other responsible adult.

Thurrock has **28** separated children (aged 18 or under) a small increase on 2021 when there were **24**

The majority of these young people are male which is in line with national findings. Exact numbers of gender percentages was not available at the time of writing this report.

The journeys made by these young people to the UK may have involved human trafficking and been fraught with danger and uncertainty, often against a background of abuse, trauma and loss in their home country.

# Thurrock Separated Migrant Children

	As at 31 March 2021		As at 31 March 2022
<b>Number of Separated Migrant Children</b>	<b>24</b>		<b>28</b>
<b>Country of Origin</b>	<b>No Report Available</b>		
<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>White</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
	<b>Black or Black British</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>12</b>
	<b>Mixed/Dual background</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>6</b>
	<b>Asian or Asian British</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
	<b>Any other ethnic background</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>
	<b>Information not yet obtained</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Age</b>	<b>12 to 15 years</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>2</b>
	<b>16 to 17 years</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>26</b>

# Separated Migrant Children continued

Use of interpreters is the norm for initial health assessments in this cohort of children, the availability and reliability of interpreters has at times meant assessments needed to be rescheduled.

Health needs that require specific consideration for separated migrant children are routine childhood immunisation, screening for blood borne viruses, likelihood of long-term malnutrition and risks of refeeding syndrome, exposure to sexual exploitation and sexual health needs.

The initial health assessment often identifies anxiety, poor sleep, poor hydration, headaches and skin conditions as well as, incomplete or unverified immunisation status.

# Separated Migrant Children continued

A better understanding is needed of the health needs of SMC to ensure that services are in place that are able to respond appropriately to their often complex needs.

The Pandemic has led to a delayed regional response to the unwarranted variation for this very vulnerable group. SET have included the needs of this group in their strategy for reducing unwarranted variation over the next two years.

A revised Blood born virus/infection screening pathway for Children and Young people who live across Essex is being addressed by SET Safeguarding clinical network for LAC designated health professionals.

# Care Leavers

		As at 31 March 2021	As at 31 March 2022
<b>Number of Care Leavers</b>		<b>286</b>	<b>297</b>
<b>Gender</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>203</b>	<b>207</b>
	<b>Female</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>88</b>
	<b>Other</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>White</b>	<b>132</b>	<b>141</b>
	<b>Black or Black British</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>63</b>
	<b>Mixed/Dual background</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>24</b>
	<b>Asian or Asian British</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>31</b>
	<b>Any other ethnic background</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>36</b>
	<b>Information not yet obtained</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>

## Care Leavers offer

The numbers of care leavers has increased in the reporting period most noticeably in the 22-25 years age bracket.

All care leavers receive a letter from the health team that details how they can access their health information and register with a GP/Dentist etcetera when they reach 18 years. There is currently a cross agency working group (CLA steering group with ICB representation looking at how we can develop the offer to our care leavers making it more robust.

In the next reporting period it is hoped that we will be able to offer eligible care leavers free prescriptions.

SET designated professionals have included care leavers as a specific group whose needs should be considered more closely in their pledge to improve outcomes for all care leavers in our geographical footprint.

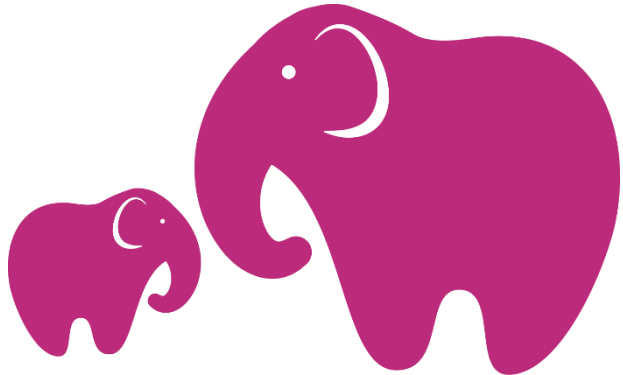
# Dental health

There have been many challenges with dental registration throughout the pandemic and into this reporting period for the population as a whole.

Social workers and carers have been supported by health colleagues to enable children to access dental care. NHSE/I completed a pilot study with dentists to ensure LAC were given priority.

There was a list of dental surgeries in the region who were taking part in the project shared with colleagues across the system. <https://protect-eu.mimecast.com/s/bhDHCvgR6TLIWQqtowQxc?domain=google.com>

A program to raise awareness of dental health known as 'Lift the Lip' was implemented and training offered to all LAC teams across Southend Essex and Thurrock





# Voice of the child – What young people have said about their assessment and interaction with their nurses

**“It has helped me to feel better about myself and increase my confidence”**

**I am more aware of healthy eating, getting good sleep and exercise”;**

**They feel it keeps track of their health and offers them support and advice**

**The assessments focus on YP’s mental and physical wellbeing**

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**They like the LAC nurses who complete the assessments and feel comfortable to ask questions or ask for advice/ support**

**Young people feel listened to and involved in the process**

**“The nurse kept me focused on not smoking”;** **“I’ve cut down on games and have a better routine”**

# Conclusion and recommendations

There has been much progress and many achievements to be proud of as has been described within this report. However, we need to be more ambitious for our children and young people and push forward with addressing the ongoing issues with data and workstreams to ensure Thurrock looked after children are supported in being the best they can be with the right support at the right time.

The following recommendations are consistent with the findings of the author when analysing the data and reviewing the recommendations from SET Looked after Children clinical network.

## Recommendations

- Continued monitoring and action to address IHA (Initial Health Assessments) delays.
- Maintain close working relationships with commissioners and contracts teams to ensure we continue to meet the needs of children and young people.
- Continue to work on gaining a clearer understanding of the health needs of separated children and care leavers through audit of their health record and work with the performance teams to build on data collection to accurately profile these groups of young people.
- Embedding Care leaver health summary process’.

## Recommendations continued

- SDQ (Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire) pathway to be agreed and embedded in practice so there is a clear understanding of and actions taken to address emotional wellbeing.
- Ensure Thurrock LAC benefit from the expertise and strategic work being undertaken by the SET Clinical network
- Listening, responding to and capturing the voice of our children and young people. Involving them wherever possible in shaping and influencing their health offer
- Improved data collection to accurately reflect the position on dental checks and immunisations

# Appendix 1 Abbreviations

**EWB/MH = Emotional Wellbeing/Mental Health**

**PH = Physical health**

**YP = Young Person**

**CYP= Children and Young People**

**IHA = Initial Health assessment**

**RHA = Review health assessment**

**IRO = Independent reviewing Officer**

**SDQ= Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire**

**OOC = Out of County**

**SW = Social Worker**

**LAC = Looked after Children (Legal definition)**

**CIC = Children in Care**

**SMC = Separated Migrant Children**

**ADHD = attention deficit hyperactivity disorder**

**ICB = Integrated care board**

**CCG = clinical commissioning group**

**ASD = Autistic Spectrum disorder**

**SET = Southend Essex and Thurrock**

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<b>4 January 2023</b>	<b>ITEM: 10</b>
<b>Corporate Parenting Committee</b>	
<b>The Annual Report of the Virtual School Headteacher for Children Looked After – Academic Year 2021-2022</b>	
<b>Wards and communities affected:</b> All	<b>Key Decision:</b> No
<b>Report of:</b> Keeley Pullen – Headteacher of the Virtual School for Children Looked After and Previously Looked After Children	
<b>Accountable Assistant Director:</b> Michele Lucas, Assistant Director for Education and Skills	
<b>Accountable Director:</b> Sheila Murphy - Corporate Director of Children’s Services	
<b>This report is public</b>	

## Executive Summary

Every council must have a Virtual School Head to be responsible for ensuring that the statutory guidance ‘Promoting the Educational Achievement of Looked After Children and Previously Looked After Children’ (Department for Education February 2018) is implemented and adhered to.

The Virtual School monitors and supports the educational progress and outcomes for Children/Young People Looked After (C/YP LA) irrespective of where they are placed, in or out of borough. The responsibility covers pupils aged between 3 years and 18 years and this includes those who have left care during an academic year. It is also required to provide information, advice and guidance to Previously Looked After Children (PLAC) and their families when requested.

The annual report of the Virtual School Headteacher details the broad scope of services provided. The report is very detailed to enable the committee and Ofsted to be aware of our work and scrutinise the service. It is a statutory document which forms part of the Annex A documentation required by Ofsted during an Inspection of Local Authority Children’s Services. This Corporate Parenting report details a summary of the content of the annual report and should be read in conjunction with Appendix 1.

### 1. Recommendation(s)

- 1.1 **The Committee approves the Annual Report of the Virtual School Headteacher for the academic year 2021-2022 and uses this information**

**to acknowledge, evaluate, scrutinise and, if appropriate, challenge the services that are provided for all C/YP LA.**

## **2. Introduction and Background**

- 2.1 The annual report is a key document which summarises the wide variety of services that the virtual school team provides. It details the broad scope of information for corporate parents to consider how the council promotes good educational outcomes for our children and young people who are looked after.
- 2.2 The annual report is segregated into sections and a summary overview is provided for the report. This is the first time that pupils have undergone formal testing and exams since the pandemic and this updated attainment data is provided for 2022. There are also references to the Local Authority Interactive Tool (LAIT) which shows historical data for comparisons against other local authorities and national data sets. This enables corporate parents to compare our council's performance against others'.
- 2.3 In addition to the annual report, the Virtual School Headteacher and her team members provide reports to the Governing Body every term. These detail a range of information which is provided to ensure that we are held accountable and that the delivery of services is cost effective and efficient.

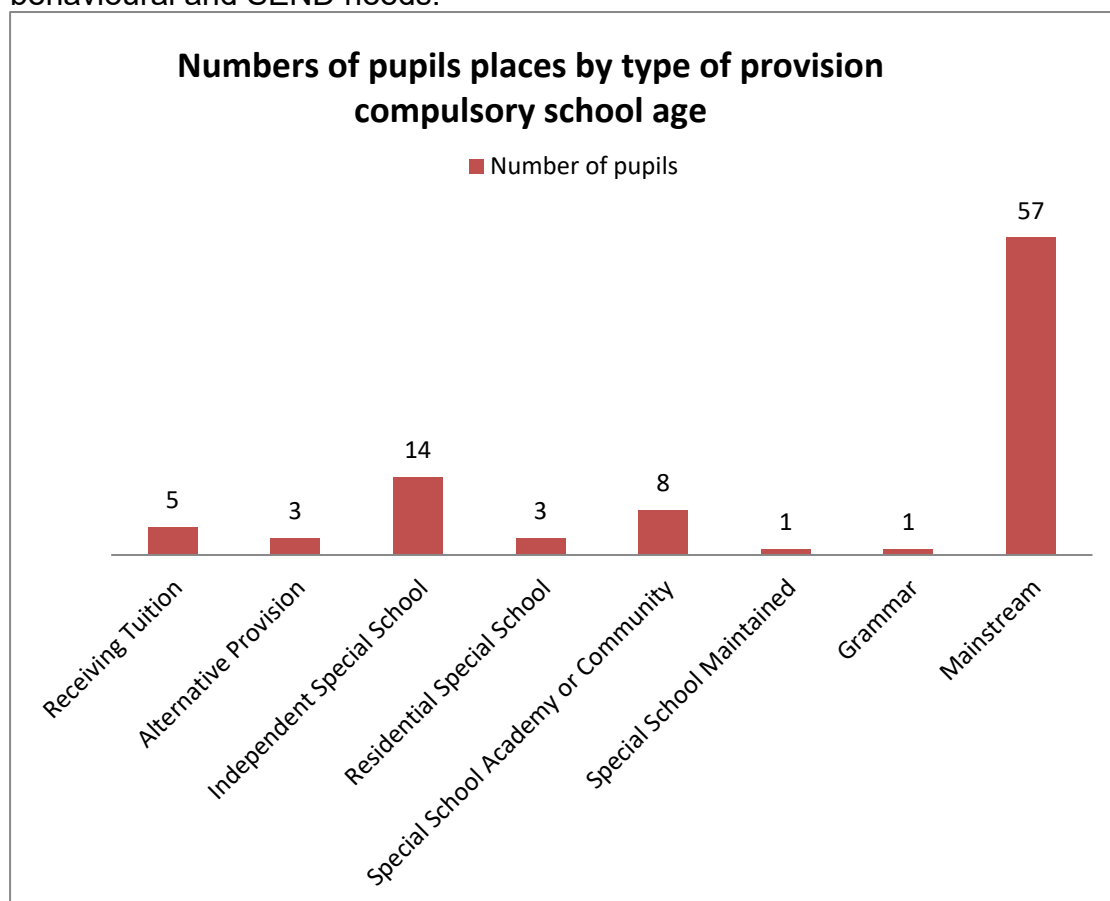
## **3. Summary of Report Headlines**

- 3.1 Cohort Numbers (Page 7 Appendix 1)  
At the end of the academic year 21/22, the number of pupils aged 3-18 years in the Virtual School cohort were 292. This has decreased compared to the previous year. During the academic year, 8 pupils left care and 40 entered care.
- 16 Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) entered care during this academic year and in total there were 35 UASC. This equates to 11% of the cohort which was a decrease of 1% from the previous year.
- 3.2 Special Educational Needs (Page 9-13 Appendix 1)  
There were 196 school age pupils at the end of the academic year. In total 92 pupils (46.9%) were categorised as having a Special Educational Need or Disability. Of these 92 pupils, 56 pupils (61%) have an Education and Health Care Plan and 36 pupils (39%) have SEN support.
- It is important that the categories of primary and secondary need are ascertained during any Personal Education Plan meeting to ensure that the right targeted support is provided by their educational establishment or by additional services.
- Social, Emotional Mental Health (SEMH) and Moderate Learning Difficulties (MLD) are prevalent categories of need. This can usually be attributed to being as a result of previous trauma and adverse childhood events that our pupils have experienced. It is essential that this is highlighted with the



professionals working with the children to ensure that provision matches need.

Below is a graph detailing the type of provision attended for the pupils with SEND. It can be seen that 57 pupils (61.9%) of this group are attending a mainstream school. There are some whose needs are very specific and require specialist support in a setting which is matched to these needs. These are either as part of a day school or residential special school. There is a mixture of pupils attending 52 week and 38 week per year education settings. In addition, there are some pupils receiving tuition whilst awaiting a school place and a small number are in alternative provision to support their behavioural and SEND needs.

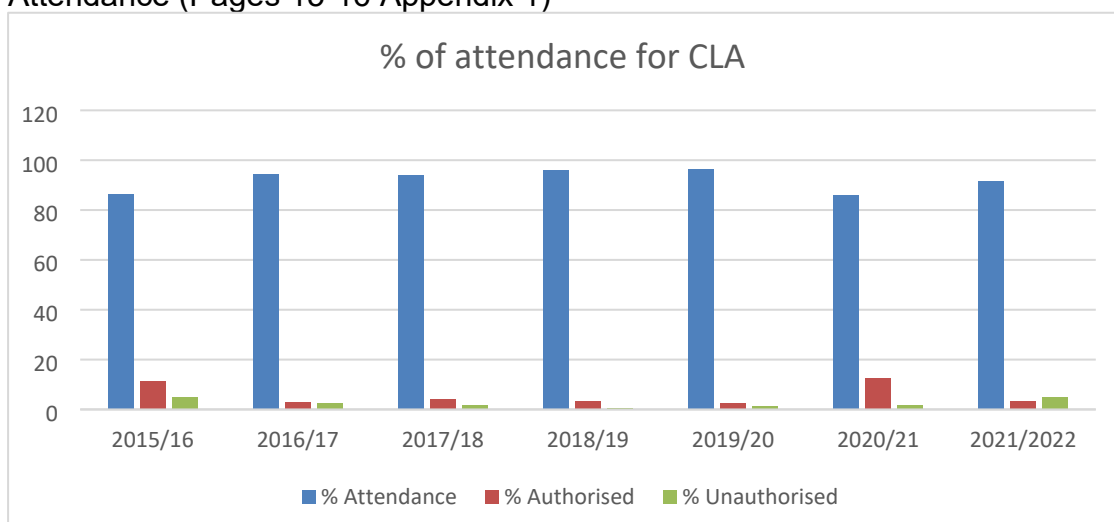


There are a number of actions we have taken during this year to support our SEND cohort:

- Our educational psychologist continues to work with the Virtual School for two days per week. This is to provide training, challenge, support and assessments where necessary to meet needs. This has led to more consultations with schools and social care where needs and strategies have been identified.
- Completion of provision maps for all pupils with SEND to check that interventions are meeting need. By doing this we are able to address any gaps in provision and look at ways to maximise progress.

- Promoting greater aspiration for our pupils. This enable schools to be focused on ensuring that our pupils are striving for accelerated progress.
- Focusing on academic and social, emotional and physical progress. This means we can celebrate all aspects of our children/young people’s development.
- Using specific assessment programmes to look at evidencing pupil progress in addition to the Personal Education Plan.
- Use of the Boxall profile system (where appropriate) to provide an assessment tool for SEMH needs and to provide strategies for interventions
- Use of the Access to Inclusion toolkit with schools to support those children and young people who have behavioural difficulties and/or trauma and attachment needs which may be a barrier to learning and engagement. This system enables practitioners to use strategies to support our children and young people in their education setting.
- The impact of these systems has been that the Virtual School has been able to provide teaching strategies used by education practitioners to be more effective and to support pupils to overcome their barriers to learning.

### 3.3 Attendance (Pages 15-16 Appendix 1)



The attendance figure of 91.8% represents attendance of school age pupils across the academic year. Authorised absence decreased from the previous year which indicates that less time was taken for sickness and there were no forced school closures due to Covid 19. However, unauthorised absence has increased due to increased persistent absence of 35 pupils. Persistent absence is counted when a pupil has an attendance rate of less than 90%. Nationally there are more incidences of persistent absence. In addition to this, national attendance rates have declined and so we are in line with national trends. The impact of Covid 19 has meant that pupils are now refusing to go to school and some are preferring to learn at home. As a result of this the Virtual School have been working intensively with our pupils who have had persistent absence and worked creatively with social

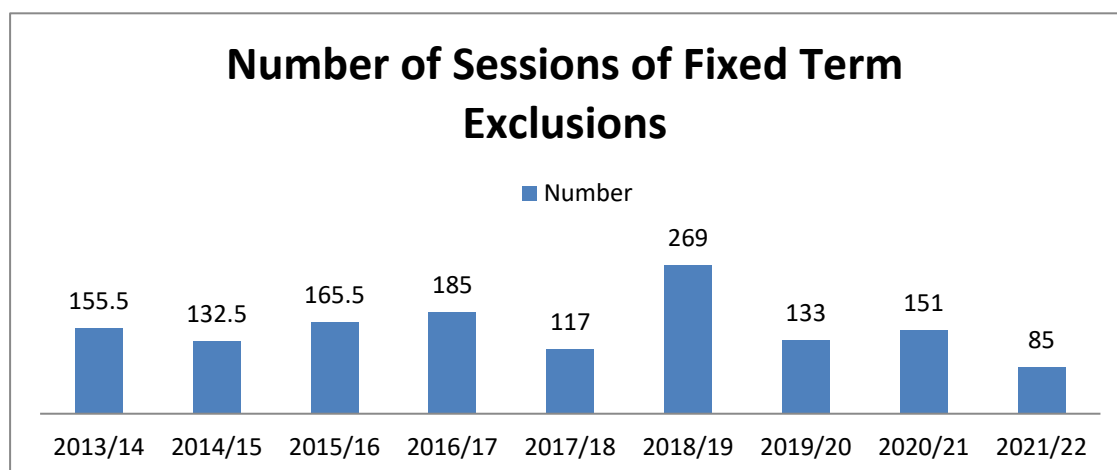
workers to try to encourage better attendance. For example, by commissioning specialist provision and vocational learning experiences for pupils who are refusing academic/more conventional schooling.

### 3.4 Exclusion (Pages 16-17)

There have been no permanent exclusions of CLA for over a ten year period. Wherever possible we encourage schools to avoid fixed term exclusions [FTE]. In the academic year 2021/22 FTE has reduced. Data shows that we had 42.5 days of exclusion for school age pupils. This equates to 85 sessions compared to 151 the previous year. There were 12 school age pupils out of the CLA cohort that have experienced a fixed term exclusion (FTE) during the course of the year. This equates to 6.1% of the total school age cohort and has decreased by 4% the previous year. This is a positive sign that behaviour interventions and Trauma and Attachment training for schools is beginning to make an impact.

As a Virtual School we have planned clear actions to continue to reduce FTE. These being to:

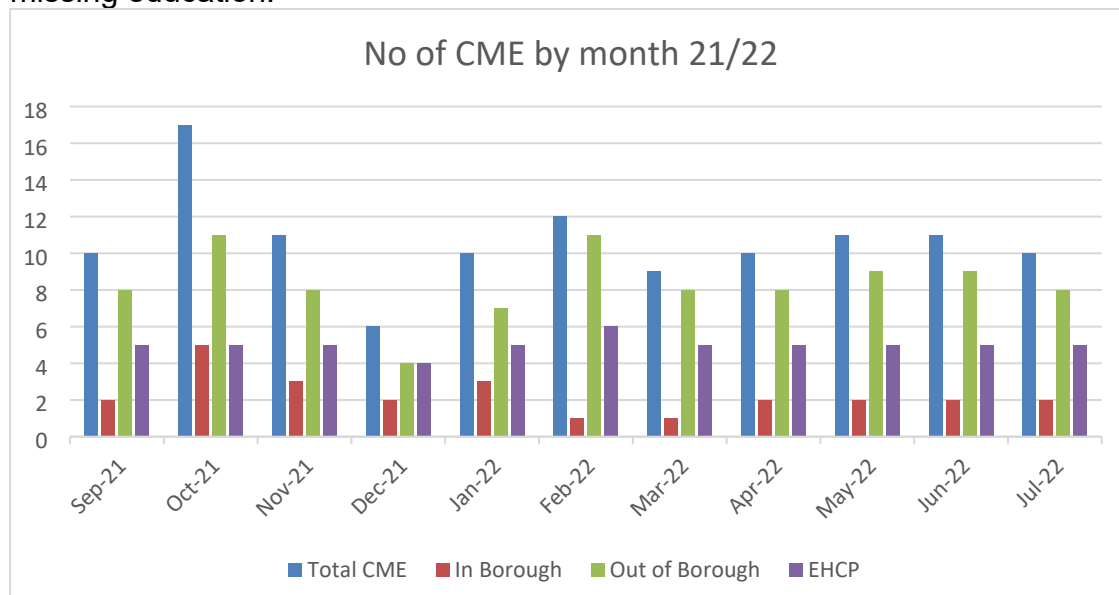
- Continue to monitor FTE and continue to actively reduce the amount through support and challenge
- Offer Trauma and Attachment training to key staff who are experiencing behavioural difficulties with our pupils
- Use of the Access to Inclusion Toolkit to enable schools to better understand the underlying cause of the behaviour
- Provision of intensive Trauma and Attachment training to key schools that has experienced high levels of exclusion. This has led to a significant reduction in excluding behaviour and a re-framing of their behaviour policies.



### 3.5 Children Missing Education (CME) (Pages 18-19 Appendix 1)

A child is deemed as missing education if they are not in receipt of a full-time educational provision. As outlined in the data our Children Missing Education was impacted by placement moves. We recognise that as a Virtual School change in placements do occur and work hard with our social work colleagues to minimise the impact this has on the child or young person's learning opportunities.

The diagram highlights a fluctuation of figures and this very much depends on the profile of pupils coming into care and whether they have education prior to becoming looked after or if they have to move away from their school due to placement availability in borough. The virtual school staff work very hard to access education as soon as they are made aware that there is a child missing education.

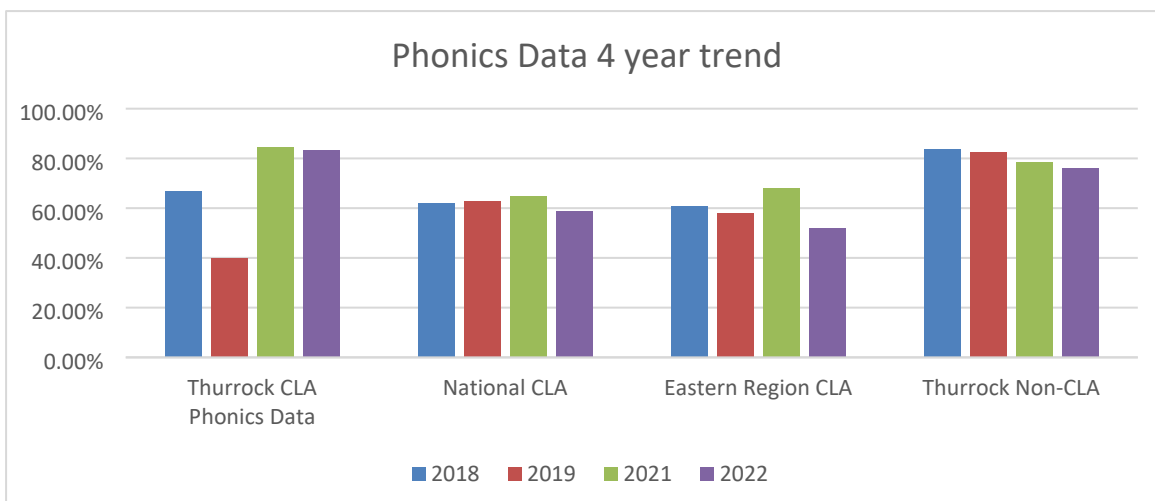


The Virtual School has a clear policy that we should make every effort to ensure that children are receiving a good education at a school which meets their needs. Whenever a child is missing education, 1-1 tuition is provided for 10-15 hours per week, this intervention is monitored by the staff within the Virtual School.

### 3.6 Attainment of Children Looked After (Pages 19-24)

Our Year 1 pupils were formally tested using the Phonics screen. 83% of the Year 1 cohort reached the expected standard. This is shown in the table below.

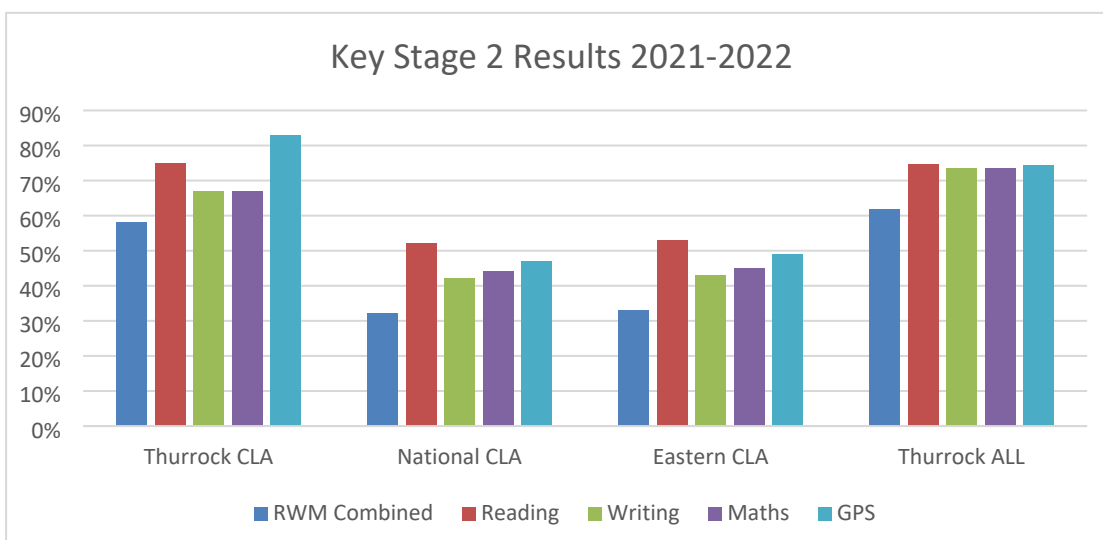
Phonics Data				
	Thurrock CLA	National CLA	Eastern Region CLA	Thurrock Non-CLA
2018	66.70%	62%	61%	83.90%
2019	40%	63%	58%	82.70%
2021	84.60%	65%	68%	78.40%
2022	83.30%	59%	52%	76.20%



In 2019 we started to expand our offer of phonics resources and advice to Nursery, Reception and Year 1 pupils. We also used PP+ top slice to purchase additional resources for pupils in the early years and KS1. These included phonemes, diagraphs, trigraphs etc which would help to boost what they could do in the home.

The vast improvements in data are beginning to show. We believe that this is a direct result from using the resources we provided as well as asking schools to track phonics scores and school based interventions within the Personal Education Plans of these key year groups.

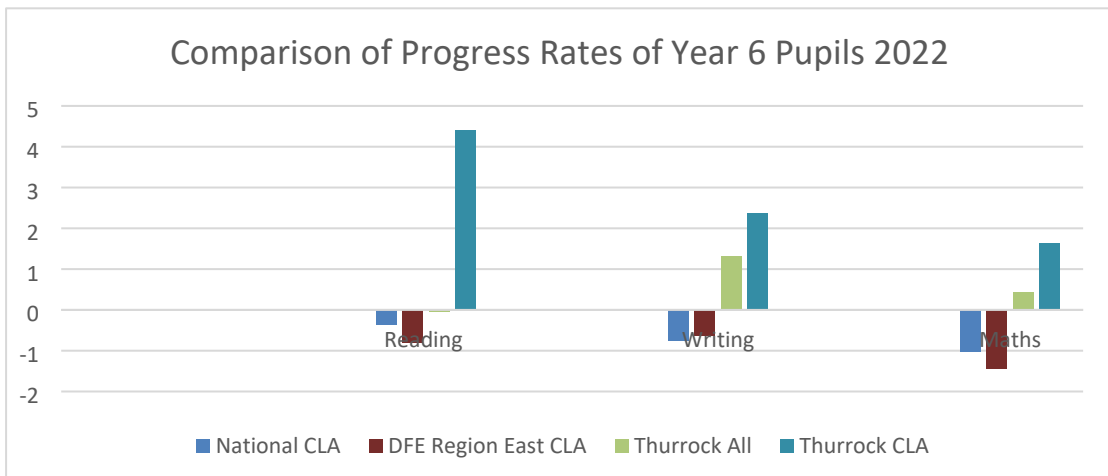
### Key Stage 2 Standardised Tests



The graph shows how well our Thurrock CLA have performed compared to CLA across the country. They have also closed the gap in reading and GPS against all Thurrock pupils and are only 3% away from all Thurrock pupils for RWM combined.

Our CLA also accomplished very good rates of progress. Progress is measured against their previous attainment when in Key Stage 1 and then

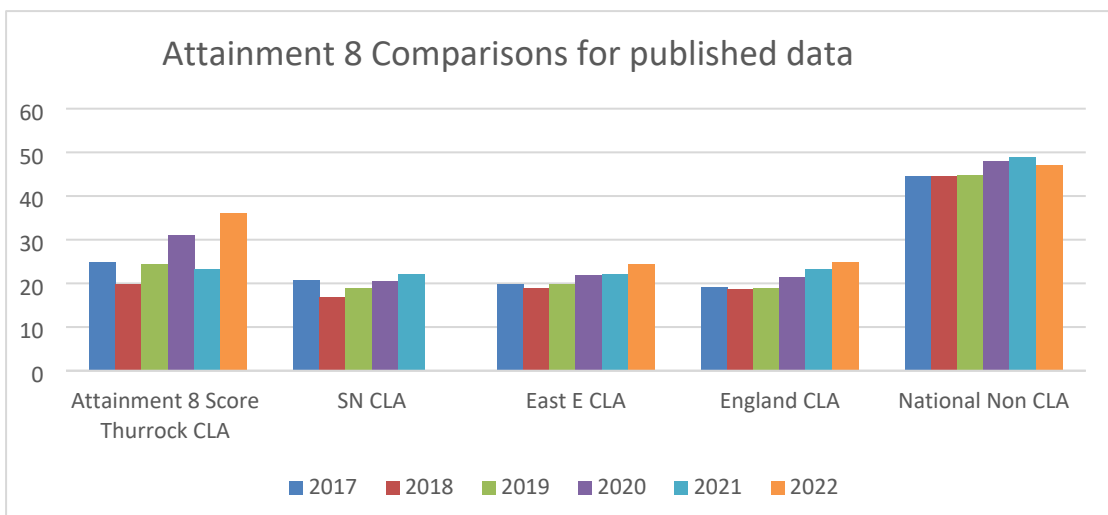
measured against the attainment achieved in Key Stage 2. Good rates of progress are above the baseline which is 0 points. This is illustrated in the graph below.



Thurrock CLA made better rates of progress than National and Eastern region CLA and better progress than that of all Thurrock children. The Virtual School team commissioned the use of extra tuition for our pupils. We used government tuition grants which enabled us to extend the amount of tuition we would usually provide with the Pupil Premium Plus top slice money. This tuition has enabled our pupils to make accelerated progress and provide them with a good footing to starting secondary school.

## Key Stage 4 GCSE Results

### Attainment 8



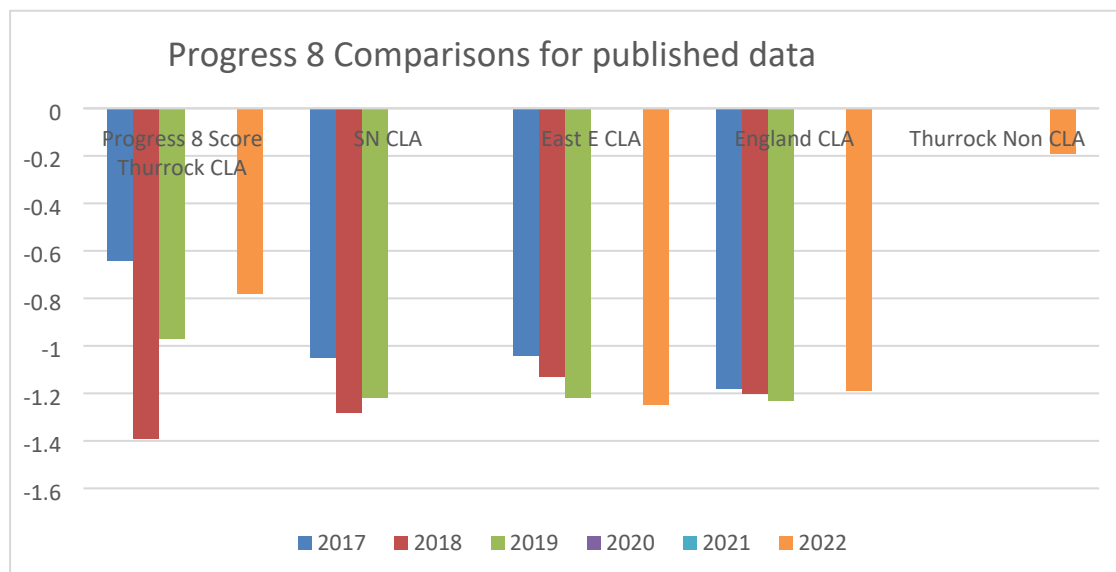
The above chart shows the improved performance of Thurrock CLA since 2017. We need to recognise that the size of the cohort fluctuates and we have seen an increase of UASC entering Year 11 and the majority of these young people are not able to sit GCSEs.

However, we have achieved our highest attainment 8 score since 2017 and for 2022 it was 36.1. Attainment 8 data would suggest that we are doing better than our statistical neighbours and nationally against CLA cohorts. We are also starting to close the gap against non-looked after pupils.

### Progress 8 Scores

	Thurrock CLA	Statistical Neighbours CLA	Eastern Region CLA	England CLA	Thurrock Non-CLA
2017	-0.64	-1.05	-1.04	-1.18	-0.07
2018	-1.39	-1.28	-1.13	-1.2	-0.19
2019	-0.97	-1.22	-1.22	-1.23	-0.03
2020					
2021					
2022	-0.78		-1.25	-1.19	-0.19

There is no data for 2020 and 2021 due to the pandemic. However, the data that is represented for 2022 would show that our Progress 8 score is improving since 2018.



In 2022 - Of those pupils in care for 12+ months who were eligible to take GCSEs  
 80% passed English Grade 4 or above, 45% Passed English Grade 5 or above  
 45% passed Maths Grade 4 or above, 30% passed Maths Grade 5 or above  
 45% passed Maths and English combined at Grade 4 or above, 25 % passed Maths and English combined grade 5 or above

More comparative data will be made available using the LAIT document and further published data.

### **Key Headlines of Actions for Supporting Testing in 2023**

What are we doing to improve academic performance?

- Provision of Literacy Book Trust home learning resources to those aged between 3-9 years old
- Provision of 1-1 tuition throughout Year 11 in maths, English and science
- Provision of 1-1 tuition for Year 10 pupils starting in the spring term of year 10
- Provision of 1-1 tuition for year 5 starting in the spring term of year 5
- Provision of 1-1 tuition in maths and English throughout year 6 for this year group
- Conducting termly school visits for key year groups of children and those who are not making expected progress
- Creation of action plans for those pupils who are not making progress
- Provision of tuition for those requesting it in Year 12 to support the transition into post 16 learning
- Evidencing the work of the Virtual School through PEPS, visit notes and case studies
- Development of SEND support materials to further improve the outcomes for this group of children
- Provision of phonics resources for N2 through to Year 2 pupils
- Provision of kindles to promote reading
- Provision of maths resources for Years 4 and 5 to support the testing of multiplication knowledge.

#### 3.7 Allocation and Impact of the Pupil Premium (Pages 30-34 Appendix 1)

The Virtual School received PP+ funding for 231 pupils aged from Year Reception to Year 11. This figure is based upon the SDA903 census return by social care. This was 20 pupils fewer than the previous year. The Virtual School top sliced £545 per pupil for the academic year and used this to provide resources to support the most vulnerable in the cohort. This equates to the top slice being £125,895 for the year 21/22.

In total £499,055 was distributed to schools based upon the number of eligible pupils and extra funded support (including pupils who left care in the year). This left a further sum of £88,840 to support pupils in the virtual school and schools that needed extra funding (see breakdown of funding below). Of the pupils who were without a school place, they were provided with additional tuition which exceeded the £2545 per pupil. We also ensured that once they had a school place, pupil premium plus was paid to the new school.



In total interventions that were used to raise educational outcomes were £207,495. The breakdown of spending can be viewed on pages 32/33 of Appendix 1.

### 3.8 Children with a Social Worker (CWSW)

In June 2021 the Department for Education published non-statutory guidance which extends the role of the Virtual School Head to support educational outcomes for CWSW. A grant of £100,000 was allocated for the academic year starting in September 2021. We have used this funding to recruit a project manager to lead on developing a Thurrock wide strategy for supporting and challenging schools and social care to improve the educational outcomes for this vulnerable group. We have also used the additional funding to provide Thurrock schools with intensive trauma and attachment training and consultancy to support all pupils in schools. In addition to this, books and licences to the Access to Inclusion software have been purchased for all Thurrock schools to enable them to plot behaviours of pupils in their school and support them using the suggested strategies. This has proved very successful with our CLA and we have extended this to all schools to use as they require. We have just employed an additional staff member within the team to provide greater capacity and support the opportunity for greater impact. The DFE grant has continued into the academic year 22/23. It is hoped that this guidance will become statutory so that we can continue the project.

## 4. Overall Comment on the Annual Report

- 4.1 The annual report provides an overview of the broad range of services and responsibilities undertaken by the Virtual School team. This is challenging and immensely rewarding and our work focusses on obtaining the best possible outcomes for our pupils.
- 4.2 This particular Corporate Parenting Report has provided key headlines to the main body of detail that is contained in the annual report.

## 5. Reasons for Recommendation

- 5.1 It is requested that the Committee agree the recommendations and uses the reporting mechanisms to support and challenge the work of the Virtual School on behalf of Children Looked After, Previously Looked After Children and Children with a Social Worker.

## 6. Impact On Corporate Policies, Priorities, Performance And Community Impact

- 6.1 This report relates to the council priority to create a great place for learning and opportunity.

## 7. Implications

### 7.1 Financial

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

This report asks that the Committee notes the increasing demand of services for Children Looked After and the range of services provided as detailed in the annual report. The scope of work has expanded for the Virtual School Head. The number of professionals needed to enact the new non-statutory duties and support the Virtual School Head are DFE funded. This funding could cease and therefore, the role/impact would have to be paired down.

### 7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Daniel Longe**  
**Principal Solicitor for Children, Adult and Education (LBB) on behalf of Thurrock**

This report asks that the Committee scrutinises the duties and responsibilities of the Virtual School as detailed in the annual report. No decision is required. The Council is required by s22(3A) of the Children Act 1989, to promote the educational achievement of looked after children and S22(3B) of the Children Act 1989 further imposes a duty on local authorities to appoint an officer to ensure that the duty is properly discharged. There is statutory guidance "Promoting the education of looked after children and previously looked after children" (2018) that must be followed in meeting this duty. For the forthcoming year 2022-2023, the Committee will need to continue to monitor the work linked to the extension of the Virtual School Head role for children with a social worker.

### 7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Roxanne Scanlon**  
**Community Engagement and Project Monitoring Officer**

Supporting the improved educational attainment of Children Looked After targets Thurrock's most vulnerable young people. Data is collated to understand the profile of young people supported. Individual plans are informed by each young person's personal needs, including equality and diversity as well SEND and emotional health needs.

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

There are no implications as a result of this report.

**8. Conclusion**

8.1 In summary, the above report details the variety of actions and impact of the work of the Virtual School team. It provides an account of the key data and narrative that council members should be informed of in order to judge the quality of the work of the Virtual School.

**9. 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):

- 'The Educational Progress of Looked After Children in England: Linking Care and Educational Data' ADCS
- 'Promoting the Educational Achievement of Looked After Children and Previously Looked After Children' DFE February 2018
- 'Promoting the education of children with a social worker. Virtual School Head role extension' DFE (June 2021)
- 'Local Authority Interactive Tool' – last updated [Local authority interactive tool \(LAIT\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)

**10. Appendices to the report**

- Annual Report of the Virtual School Headteacher Academic Year 2021-2022

**Report Author:**

Keeley Pullen BA (Hons), PGCE, NPQH

Head Teacher of the Virtual School for Children Looked After. Children's Services

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# **Annual Report of the Virtual School Headteacher Academic Year 2021-2022**

## **Contents Page**

**A summary of the key highlights is provided before the full report**

1. Purpose of the Report
2. Role of the Virtual School
3. Mission Statement Virtual School
4. Guidance documents developed by the Virtual School
5. Corporate Parenting Committee
6. Current Contextual Data
  - Numbers of children by Year Group
  - Contextual information of CLA with Special Educational Needs and Disability
  - School Placement of CLA by OFSTED classification July 2022
7. Attendance of Children Looked After
8. Exclusions
9. Children Missing Education
10. Attainment and Analysis of Children Looked After Data
11. Summary of Analysis for all Key Stages
12. Case studies of pupils
13. School Improvement Priorities
14. Allocation and Impact of Pupil Premium Plus
15. Quality Assurance of Personal Education Plans
16. Post 16 update
17. Not in Education Employment or Training
18. Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children
19. Virtual School Governing Body
20. Staffing
21. Additional strategies to support the educational progress of Thurrock Looked After
22. Professional Development of VS Staff
23. Report Author

## **Summary of the Annual Report 2021-2022**

The period of reporting is from September 2021 to August 2022.

There are certain key aspects to this report which can be highlighted as part of this summary. These being:

- Overall attendance has improved this year 21/22. Attendance of Thurrock Children Looked After overall was 91.8%. Absence data shows that 3.5% was unauthorised and 4.8% of absences were authorised. Comparisons with national CLA data shows that our unauthorised data is 2.2% lower than national. This is also reflected in the percentage of pupils with persistent absence (PA). This means that their attendance rate was below 90% for the academic year. For Thurrock CLA, 32 pupils or 20.4% were deemed as a persistent absentee. This is 3% below the national figure.
- National data for Autumn 2021 shows that PA rates were 23.5% for all pupils. Nationally there has been an increase in persistent absence (i.e below 90% attendance). The complete attendance data nationally will be available in March 2023.
- Fixed term exclusion rates have decreased significantly this year as an impact of our behaviour intervention work.
- There have been no permanent exclusions of CLA in this reportable period.
- The number of children in care for our cohort has decreased during the academic year compared to the previous year.
- There has been a reasonably stable rate in the number of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children at 11%. This is down 1% from the previous year.
- There were 196 school age pupils at the end of the academic year. In total 92 pupils (46.9%) were categorised as having a Special Educational Need or Disability. Of these 92 pupils, 56 pupils (61%) have an Education and Health Care Plan and 36 pupils (39%) have SEN support.
- 83.6% of pupils attend a school graded good or above. This has decreased from last year's figure of 87.6%
- Interventions have been targeted to maximise impact on learning and development for all age ranges
- The use of 1-1 tuition for key year groups has resulted in good attainment levels at key stages 2 and 4. This is an effective intervention to support progress and attainment.
- The Year 1 phonics screen has had excellent success again this year with over 80% reaching the 'working at' standard. This has been due to the resources we have sent to the home for Nursery pupils through to year 2 to promote phonics and reading.
- Attainment data is showing that Thurrock CLA continue to perform at a high standard compared to national CLA and have high rankings for our performance.
- Case studies have highlighted some of the impact that our work has had this year on the educational lives and outcomes of our children and young people.

## 1. **Purpose of the Report**

The purpose of this report is to detail the work of the Thurrock Virtual School for the academic year 2021-2022 and forms parts of the statutory reporting processes. This report is used as part of Annex A documentation which is presented to OFSTED in times of inspection.

## 2. **The Role of the Thurrock Virtual School**

A separate document is available named the Roles and Responsibilities of the Virtual School. This details the roles and actions that are taken in line with our statutory duties. The specific duties can be found in the Department for Education (DFE) document: Promoting the education of looked after children and previously looked after children [February 2018].

In addition to this, new guidance was provided by the Department for Education in June 2021. This related to the extension of duties of the Virtual School Head Teacher (VSH) to develop strategies to support the educational outcomes for Children with a Social Worker (CWSW). This non-statutory role came into effect in September 2021. The document relating to this is 'Promoting the education of children with a social worker. Virtual School Head role extension' (DFE: 2022)

### **Staffing of the Virtual School 2021-2022**

Mrs Keeley Pullen – Virtual School Headteacher

Mrs Grace Page – Virtual School Operations Co-Ordinator (left Thurrock in October 2021)

Ms Rebecca Prince – Early Years and Primary Education Adviser

Ms Gemma Lilley – Secondary Education Adviser

Miss Lee-Anne Jenkins – Post 16 Education Adviser

Mrs Tina McGuinness – Administrator for the Virtual School

Mrs Mary Ward – Project Manager for Children with a Social Worker (CWSW) – started employment in October 2021

Mrs Mikaela Seddon - Virtual School Operations Co-Ordinator (started employment 27/6/2022)

Mrs Laura Dawson – Educational Psychologist (with the Virtual School for 2 days per week)



### 3. **Mission Statement**

At the core, is the aspiration to ensure that children and young people are provided with every opportunity to learn effectively and develop their skills, knowledge and understanding so they are able to make informed choices about their futures from a range of options. This range will be at its widest when children succeed in their schools and are provided with the ambition, resilience and opportunity to optimise their learning within and beyond the school.

The Virtual School believes that every child and young person has a right to a childhood and has the right to a first class education that enhances their life chances as an adult. We believe that Children Looked After and Young People (CLA/YP) should be given every opportunity to aspire to be the best they can.

The Virtual School provides additional support, advice and guidance over and above the universal services that all Thurrock children and young people can access. In addition we provide information advice and guidance for Previously Looked After Children/Young People. In 2021-2022 we have also begun to develop Thurrock wide strategies which will be targeted at supporting Children with a Social Worker (CWSW)

We believe there should be no educational gaps between attainment and potential and there should be a narrowing of the gap between attainment and national standards.

The main outcomes we want for our children and young people accord with the Thurrock Children and Young People's Plan and are that CLA/YP:

- value themselves and grow up to be fair, tolerant and supportive, learning to respect others and enjoy the respect of others;
- are engaged in and are challenged by high quality education and enjoyable learning experiences;
- are able to show resilience and cope with change;
- are not disadvantaged by circumstance, poverty, disability or race;
- seek out and engage in opportunities for self-improvement, with the guidance and support of multiagency teams;
- achieve recognised and appropriate qualifications in line with their academic potential, so they access a wide range of training, employment and further education opportunities when they leave school, allowing them to take an active and full role in society as adults.

To achieve this, The Virtual School will work in partnership with schools, carers, educational settings and social care to create a high quality educational experiences for Children Looked After and Young People.

#### 4. **Guidance Documents Developed by the Virtual School**

- Thurrock Virtual School Pupil Premium Policy
- Thurrock Virtual School Exclusion Guidance for Schools
- Thurrock Virtual School Exclusion Guidance for Colleges
- Thurrock Virtual School Attendance Policy
- Thurrock Virtual School Anti-Bullying Policy
- Thurrock Virtual School Safeguarding Policy
- PEP Protocol for Social Workers and Designated Teachers – Schools, Colleges and Early Years
- PEP Flowchart for Social Workers
- Quality Assurance Process Flowchart
- Quality Assurance Criteria for PEPs
- Completing Attainment on EPEP
- EPEP and Target Setting
- Roles and Functions of the Virtual School
- Phonics Resources Packs for Foster Carers
- Quality Assurance Process of Education Provision
- Social Worker guidance for high quality PEP minutes
- Child Missing Education Policy/Process
- Thurrock Virtual School Safeguarding Policy
- Thurrock Virtual School Previously Looked After Children Policy
- Pupil Premium Spending Strategy Document 2021/2022
- Tuition Policy
- Laptop Policy

Additional Documents:

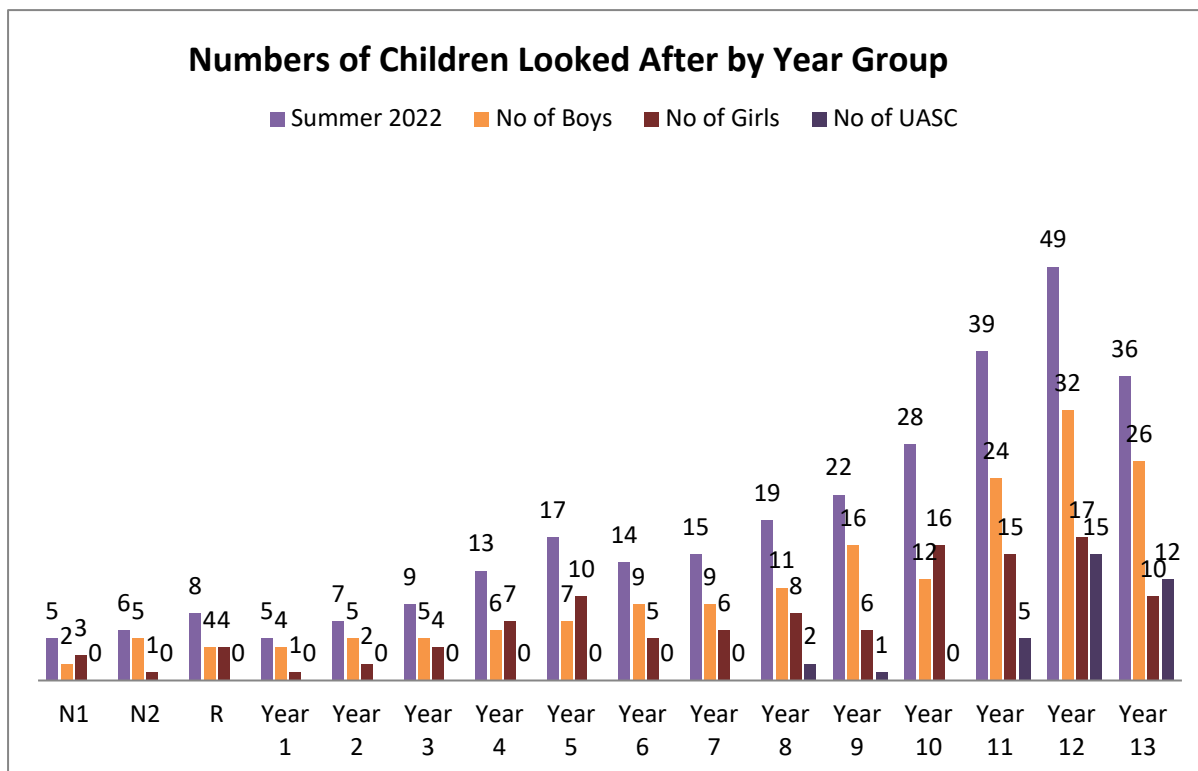
- School Improvement Plan 2021/2022
- Headteacher Termly Reports for Governors 2021/2022
- Phase Teacher Termly Reports for Governors 2021/2022
- 3 year Strategic Plan 2021-2024

#### 5. **Corporate Parenting Committee**

The Virtual School Headteacher [VSH] is accountable to the Corporate Parenting Committee for the educational achievement of Children Looked After [CLA]. The Committee exists to ensure that all elements of the Council work together so that CLA/YP in Thurrock et the best possible service that can be offered. The Committee promotes the role of all Councillors as corporate parents and provides the robust vehicle for their mandate to be exercised on behalf of young people. This committee meets quarterly and managers from different sectors of social care and education present reports and recommendations as part of a cycle. This process acts as a measure of accountability and supports the development of strategy and policy for meeting the statutory requirements for children in care.

## Current Contextual Data

### Number of Looked After Children by Year Group [Updated July 2022]



At the end of the academic year 21/22, the number of pupils aged 3-18 years in the Virtual School cohort were 292. This has decreased compared to the previous year. During the academic year, 8 pupils left care and 40 entered care.

16 Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) entered care during this academic year and in total there were 35 UASC. This equates to 11% of the cohort which was a decrease of 1% from the previous year.

### **Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC)**

Numbers have remained fairly consistent with the previous year. In order to support our UASC who were school age, we provided them with online English for Speakers of Other Languages [ESOL], IT equipment and 10 weeks 1-1 ESOL tuition package to support education. There were 5 young people who stayed with Thurrock care services. There were additional young people who came into Thurrock but these were distributed to other local authorities as part of the sharing protocol.

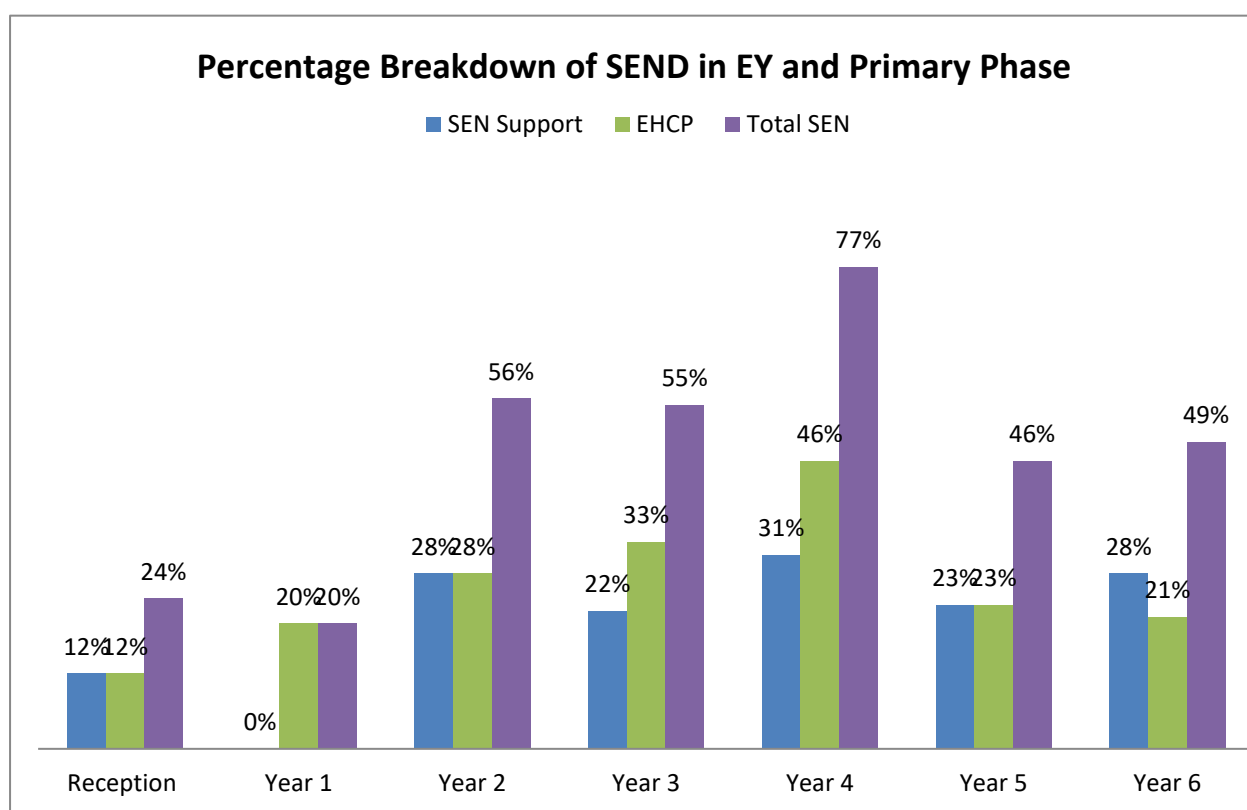
College applications were made to ensure that there was post-16 provision to support the young people. These young people who have transitioned into Year 12 have obtained college places and they are completing ESOL in Years 12 and 13.

## Number of CLA with a Special Educational Need or Disability (SEND)

This data is maintained throughout the year and is used to target specific actions, interventions, support and challenge. By strategically looking at this data, we are able to pinpoint areas of need and check that educational provision is supporting the individual needs of these pupils.

### Primary Phase Data for SEND

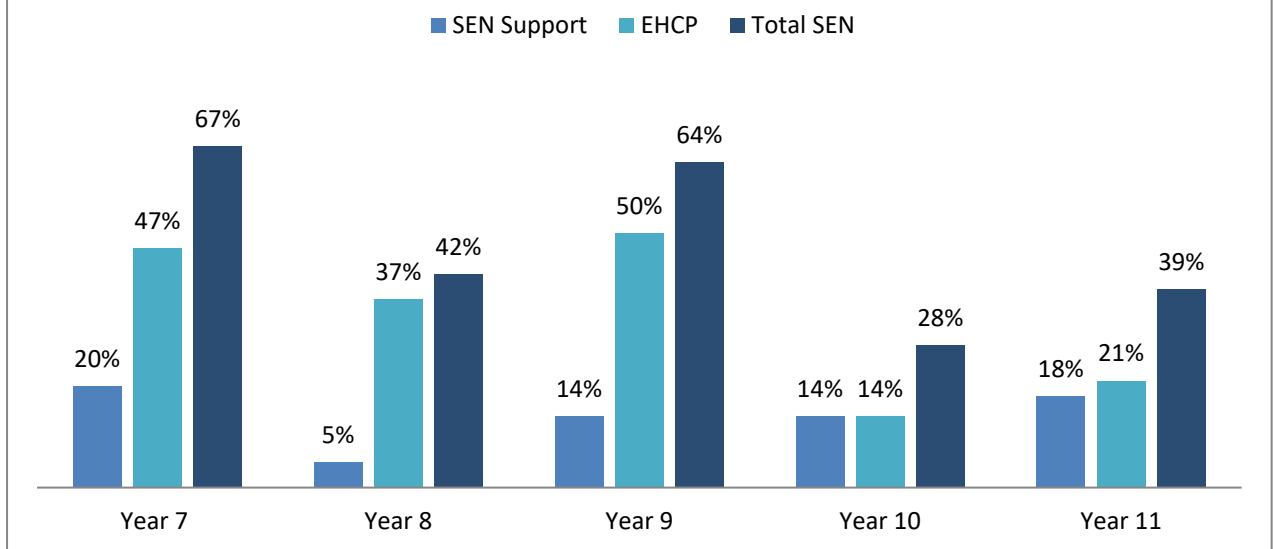
In total there were 73 pupils from Reception through to Year 6. Of that, 19 pupils (26%) have an Education Health Care Plan and 18 pupils (24.6%) are categorised as needing additional SEN Support.



In total 37 pupils or 50.6% of the primary cohort has currently been identified as having a special educational need. This figure has decreased compared to the previous year. This is also 5% below the national CLA with SEND figure of 55.5%.

The largest group in Primary phase with SEND was in Year 4. We have looked at needs and are going to target their Year 5 tuition (extra tuition which is funded through Pupil Premium Plus) to start sooner in the following academic year 22/23. This tuition will remain until the end of Year 6 in 2024. The current Year 5 also started their tuition early in preparation for when they reach Year 6. This begun after February half term in 2022 and will remain in place until the end of 2023.

## Percentage Breakdown of SEND in Secondary Phase



Of the 123 pupils in Years 7-11, 55 pupils have been identified as having SEND. This equates to 44.7% of the Key Stage 3 and 4 Phase. There are 37 pupils (30%) with an EHCP and 18 pupils (14.6%) who have SEN Support. The highest volume of pupils in each year group was in Year 7. Particular attention was paid to the transition of these pupils into secondary schooling and what their needs were and how they could be supported in their new setting. Pupils in Year 9 have also seen a high rate. With this in mind, we have made the decision to start the Year 10 tuition earlier in the year in 22/23 so that those who need additional support can be boosted to support them to reach national age related expectations.

### **SEND Data Overall for Statutory School Age Year R to Year 11**

There were 196 school age pupils at the end of the academic year. In total 92 pupils (46.9%) were categorised as having a Special Educational Need or Disability. Of these 92 pupils, 56 pupils (61%) have an Education and Health Care Plan and 36 pupils (39%) have SEN support.

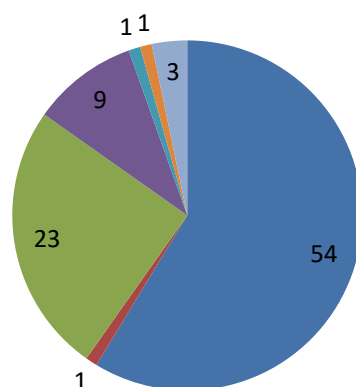
### **Primary Categories of Need Statutory School Age Year R to Year 11**

It is important that the categories of primary and secondary need are ascertained during any Personal Education Plan (PEP) meeting to ensure that the right targeted support is provided by their educational establishment or by additional services.

Social, Emotional Mental Health (SEMH) and Moderate Learning Difficulties (MLD) are prevalent categories of need. This can usually be attributed to being as a result of previous trauma and adverse childhood events that our pupils have experienced. It is essential that this is highlighted with the professionals working with the children to ensure that provision matches need.

## Primary Categories of Need for Compulsory School Age Pupils Year R to Year 11

- Social Emotional Mental Health (SEMH)
- Physical Sensory (PS)
- Moderate Learning Difficulties (MLD)
- Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD)
- Physical Disability (PD)
- Profound Learning Difficulties (PLD)
- Speech Language and Communication Needs (SLCN)

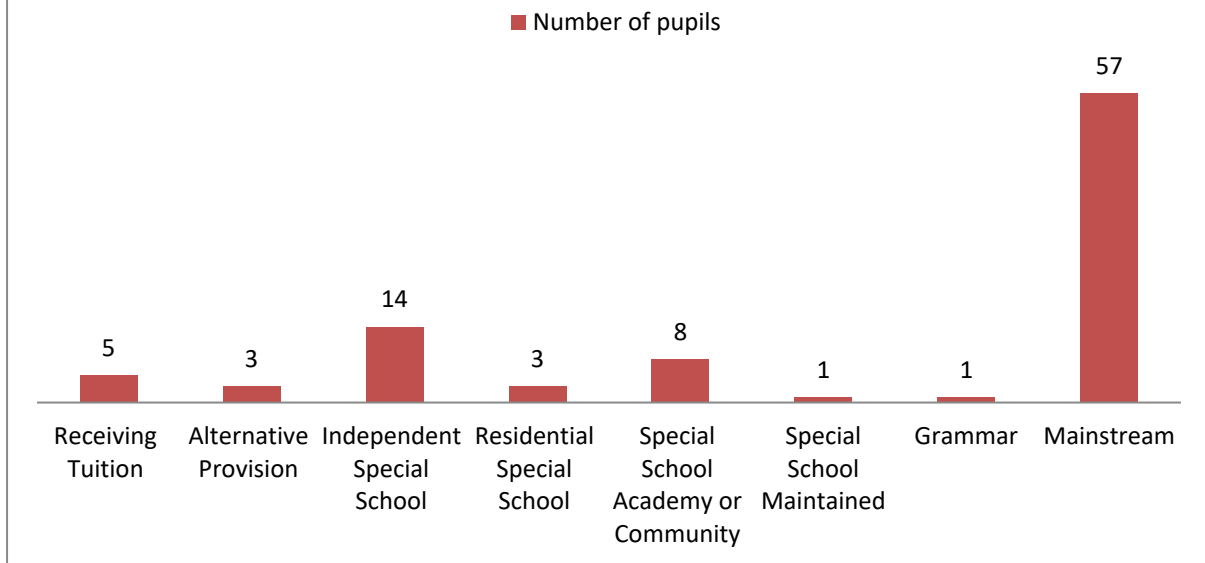


Primary Category of Need for School Age Pupils	Number of Pupils
Social Emotional Mental Health (SEMH)	54
Physical Sensory (PS)	1
Moderate Learning Difficulties (MLD)	23
Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD)	9
Physical Disability (PD)	1
Profound Learning Difficulties (PLD)	1
Speech Language and Communication Needs (SLCN)	3

### **Type of Placement Attended by School Age Pupils who have an Identified SEND**

Below is a table detailing the type of provision for the pupils with SEND. It can be seen that 57 pupils (61.9%) of this group are attending a mainstream school. There are some whose needs are very specific and require specialist support in a setting which is matched to these needs. These are either as part of a day school or residential special school. There is a mixture of pupils attending 52 week and 38 week per year education settings. In addition, there are some pupils receiving tuition whilst awaiting a school place and a small number are in alternative provision to support their behavioural and SEND needs.

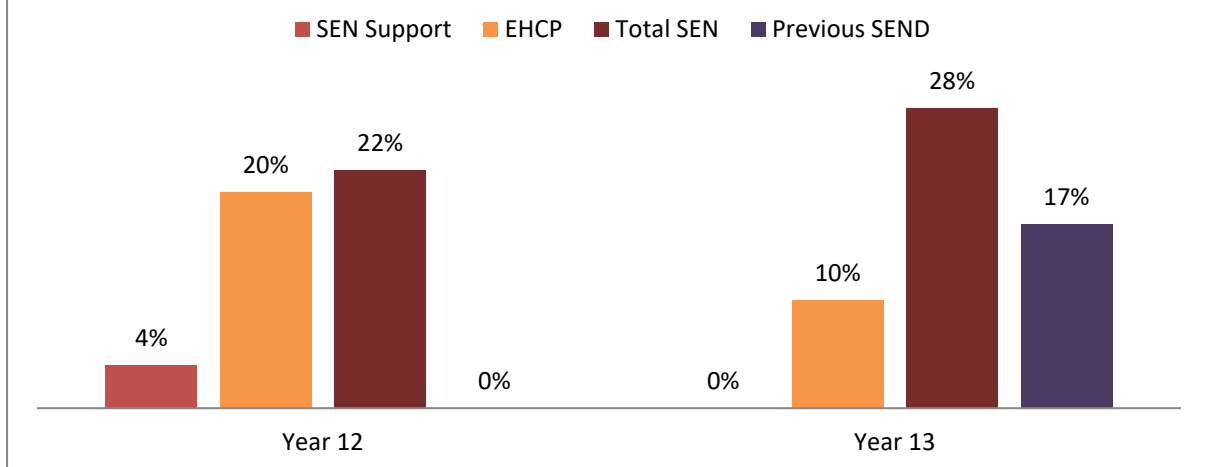
### Numbers of pupils places by type of provision compulsory school age



### Post 16 Phase

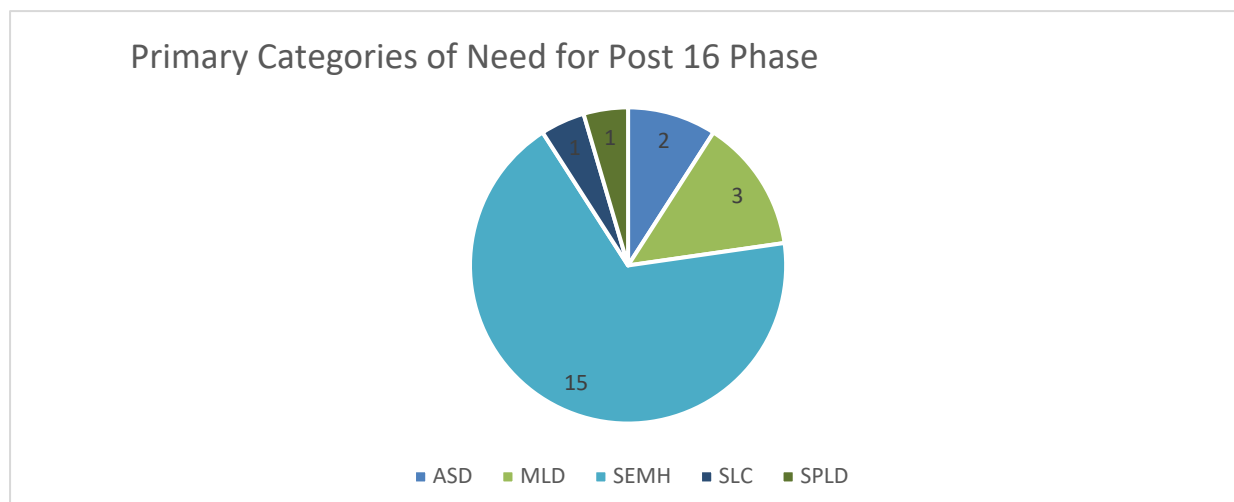
For those young people with SEND who are in the post 16 phase, years 12 and 13, they move to the Preparing for Adulthood (PFA) Team. The Virtual School work closely with this team to support transition and educational placements when these young people have left school. We still continue to monitor their education as well as ensuring there is a review of the Education, Health Care Plan and that this supports the next steps for our young people. For many of our young people, they are able to manage within a mainstream college setting with smaller classes and targeted support. However, some young people do require continued intensive support for their needs and as such they would attend a specialist placement.

### Percentage Breakdown of SEND Post 16 Phase



In summary there are 22 post 16 young people (including those who are 18 years old) who are currently on the Virtual School SEND register. This equates to 25.8% of the post 16 cohort. 14 pupils (16.4%) of the total cohort have an EHCP and are having services provided to support their needs.

### **Post 16 Phase Categories of Need**



Phase	Category of Need	Number of Pupils
Post 16	Moderate Learning Difficulties (MLD)	3
	Social Emotional Mental Health (SEMHS)	15
	Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD)	2
	Speech, Language and Communication (SLC)	1
	Severe, Profound Learning Difficulties (SPLD)	1

### **Overall Actions to Support Pupils with SEND**

There are a number of actions we have taken during this year to support our SEN cohort:

- Our educational psychologist continues to work with the Virtual School for two days per week. This is to provide training, challenge, support and assessments where necessary to meet needs. This has led to more consultations with schools and social care where needs and strategies have been identified.
- Completion of provision maps for all pupils with SEND to check that interventions are meeting need. By doing this we are able to address any gaps in provision and look at ways to maximise progress.
- Promoting greater aspiration for our pupils. This enables schools to be focused on ensuring that our pupils are striving for accelerated progress.
- Focusing on academic and social, emotional and physical progress. This means we can celebrate all aspects of our children/young people's development.
- Using specific assessment programmes to look at evidencing pupil progress in addition to the Personal Education Plan.

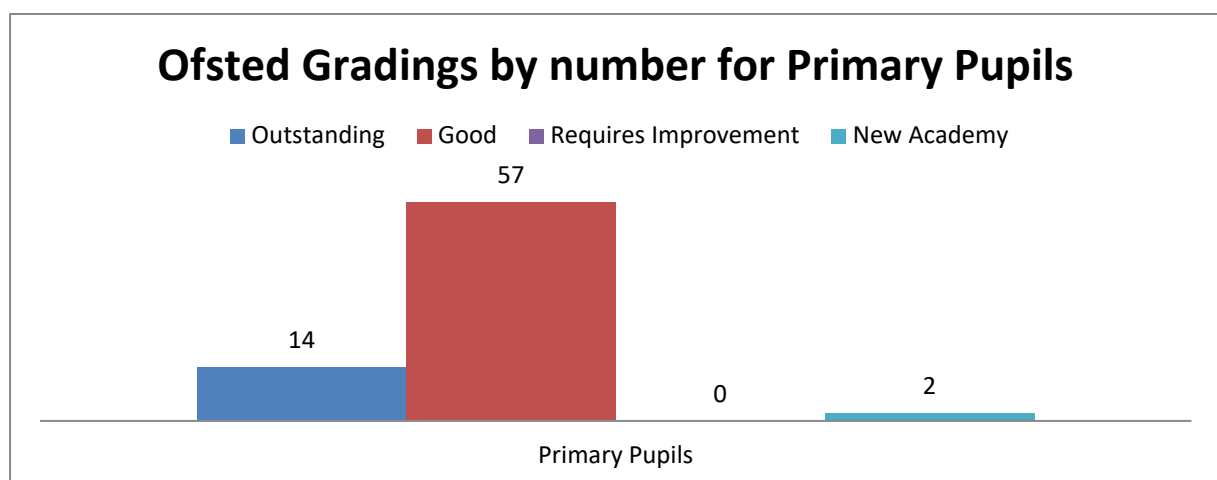


- Use of the Boxall profile system (where appropriate) to provide an assessment tool for SEMH needs and to provide strategies for interventions
- Use of the Access to Inclusion toolkit with schools to support those children and young people who have behavioural difficulties and/or trauma and attachment needs which may be a barrier to learning and engagement. This system enables practitioners to use strategies to support our children and young people in their education setting.
- The impact of these systems has been that the Virtual School has been able to provide teaching strategies used by education practitioners to be more effective and to support pupils to overcome their barriers to learning.

### **School Placement of CLA by OFSTED classification July 2021**

It is important that our CLA/CP attend a school that is graded by Ofsted as Good or Outstanding. Therefore, we track the grading of each school and educational establishment that our pupils attend. If a pupil has to change school, we do our upmost to ensure that applications are made to schools that are rated good or above by Ofsted. However, we only ever place a pupil into a school that has a grading of Requires Improvement if there are no other possible solutions. For example, if a child was placed into a stable care placement but schools in that local area were graded as below good. Although our first priority would always be to find a good school. There are situations where a pupil may be in a good school that then receives a poor Ofsted grading. We would not automatically move a pupil if they were happy and making good progress and if they were being well supported. However, we ensure that schools are closely monitored every term to check that pupil progress is good. The data below illustrates the gradings of schools our pupils attend.

#### Primary Phase

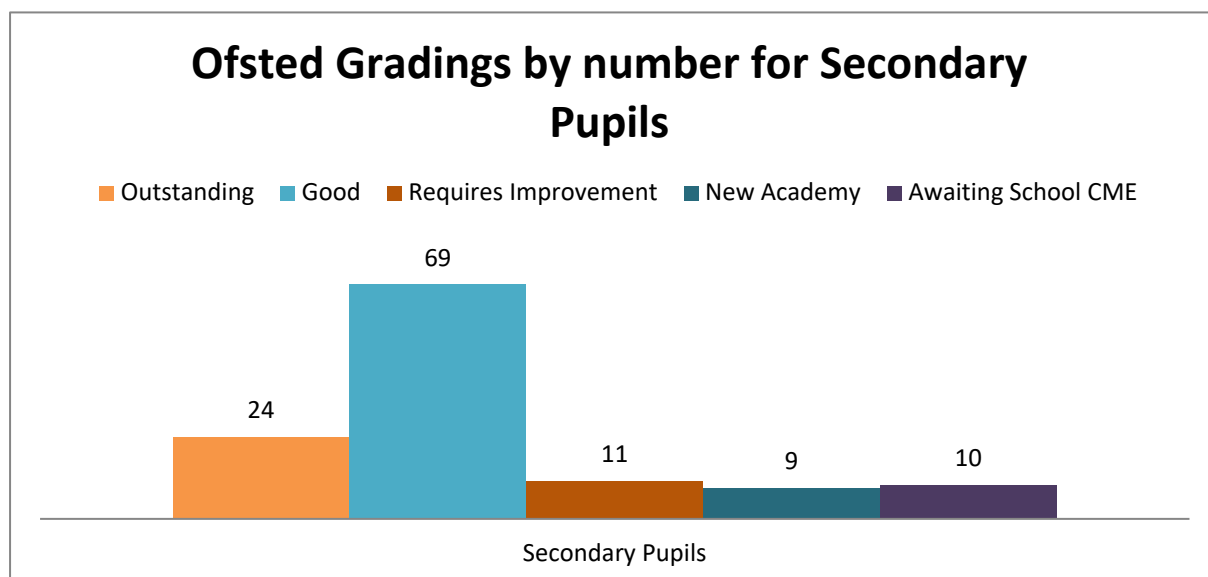


The diagram above shows the number of pupils in the Primary phase who are attending different graded schools.

This equates to 78% attending a school rated GOOD, 19% attending an Outstanding school and 2.7% attending a recent academy converter which are awaiting an Ofsted

grading. **In total 97% of our Primary aged pupils attend a school graded good or above.**

## Secondary Phase



The diagram above shows the number of pupils in the Secondary phase who are attending different graded schools.

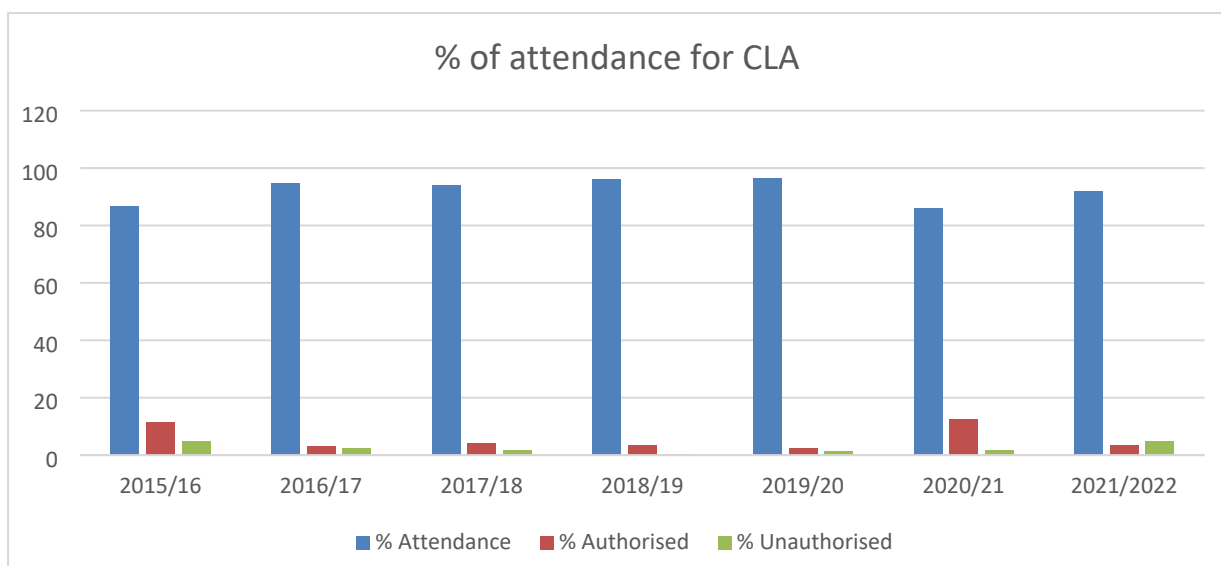
This equates to 56% attending a school rated Good, 19.5% attending an Outstanding school, 8.9% attend a school with a Requires Improvement grade and 7.3% are attending a recent academy converter which are awaiting an Ofsted grading. **In total 75.5% of our Secondary aged pupils attend a school graded good or above.**

Overall School Ofsted Grading Year R to Year 11 is:

- 83.6% of pupils attend a school graded good or above. This has decreased from last year's figure of 87.6%
- 64.2% attend a good school, slight reduction from last year's 70%
- 19.3% attend an outstanding school, an increase from 17.6% last year
- 5.6% attend a school that requires improvement, this has decreased from last year's data which was 10.6%
- 0% of pupils attend an inadequate school, this has reduced from 2% last year
- 5.6% of pupils are attending a school which is awaiting an Ofsted grade due to recent academy conversion
- 5.1% are receiving tuition in the home due to waiting for a school place.

**The Virtual School attends the PEPs for all pupils placed in schools less than good and provide additional challenge and support for schools where applicable.**

## 7. Attendance



	% Attendance	% Authorised	% Unauthorised
2015/16	86.6	11.49	4.91
2016/17	94.6	2.9	2.5
2017/18	94.1	4	1.8
2018/19	96.2	3.4	0.4
2019/20	96.3	2.5	1.2
2020/21	85.9	12.48	1.62
2021/22	91.8	3.5	4.8

The attendance figure of 91.8% represents attendance of school age pupils across the academic year. Authorised absence decreased from the previous year which indicates that less time was taken for sickness and there were no forced school closures due to Covid 19. However, unauthorised absence has increased due to increased persistent absence of 35 pupils. Persistent absence is counted when a pupil has an attendance rate of less than 90%.

Nationally there are more incidences of persistent absence. In addition to this, national attendance rates have declined and so we are in line with national trends. The impact of Covid 19 has meant that pupils are now refusing to go to school and some are preferring to learn at home.

As a result of this the Virtual School have been working intensively with our pupils who have had persistent absence and worked creatively with social workers to try to encourage better attendance. For example, by commissioning specialist provision and vocational learning experiences for pupils who are refusing academic/more conventional schooling.

Every pupil who had low attendance had an action plan to improve their engagement with school. We had some successes but there were some pupils that were very hard to motivate and engage.

We are putting attendance high on our agenda for school improvement for the year 2022/23 and looking at developing Emotional School Based Avoidance training and advice which can be used by schools, social workers and foster carers.

We are currently waiting on national data from the Local Authority Interactive Tool to look at our rankings across all local authorities for attendance and persistent absence. This data will be reflected in reporting to Governors as soon as this is available.

## 8. Exclusions

There have been no permanent exclusions of CLA for over a ten year period. Wherever possible we encourage schools to avoid fixed term exclusions [FTE]. In the academic year 2021/22 FTE have reduced.

**Data from 2021/22 shows that we had 42.5 days of exclusion for school age pupils. This equates to 85 sessions.**

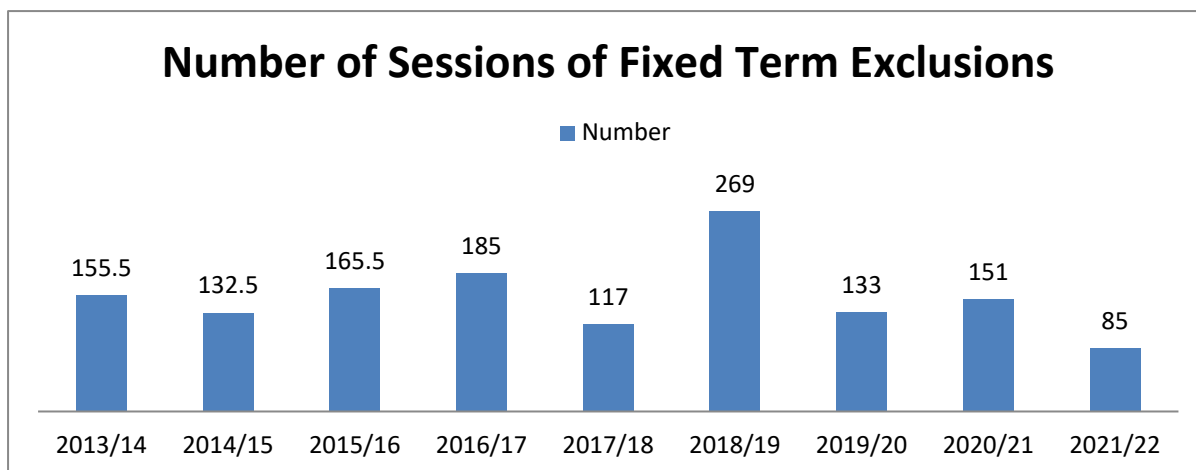
There were 12 school age pupils out of the CLA cohort have experienced a fixed term exclusion (FTE) during the course of the year. **This equates to 6.1% of the total school age cohort and has decreased by 4% the previous year.**

There were some incidences this academic year of some new into care having a FTE both before and after becoming looked after. It would seem that this behaviour could have been communicating a more significant need relating to their home life and then responding when becoming looked after. The Virtual School works with schools to reduce FTE, however, some of our pupils are participating in activities that would warrant the need for exclusion. We have managed to negotiate alternatives to exclusion off site through measures such as:

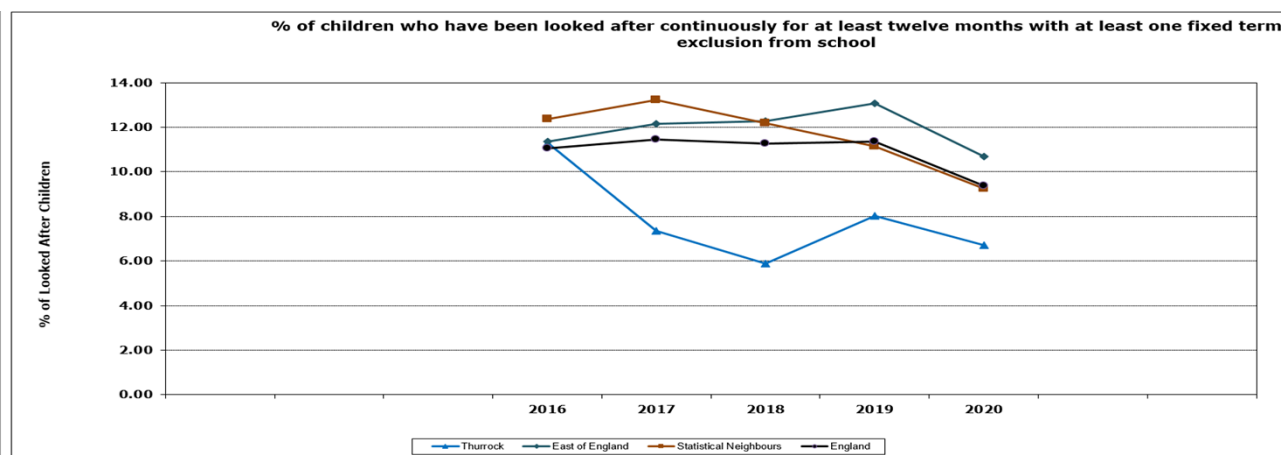
- Internal support
- Action plan meetings when excluded
- Alternative provision
- Managed moved

As a Virtual School we have planned clear actions to continue to reduce FTE. These being to:

- Continue to monitor FTE and continue to actively reduce the amount through support and challenge
- Use of the Access to Inclusion Toolkit to enable schools to better understand the underlying cause of the behaviour
- Provide of intensive Trauma and Attachment training to key schools that has experienced high levels of exclusion. This has led to a significant reduction in excluding behaviour and a re-framing of their behaviour policies.



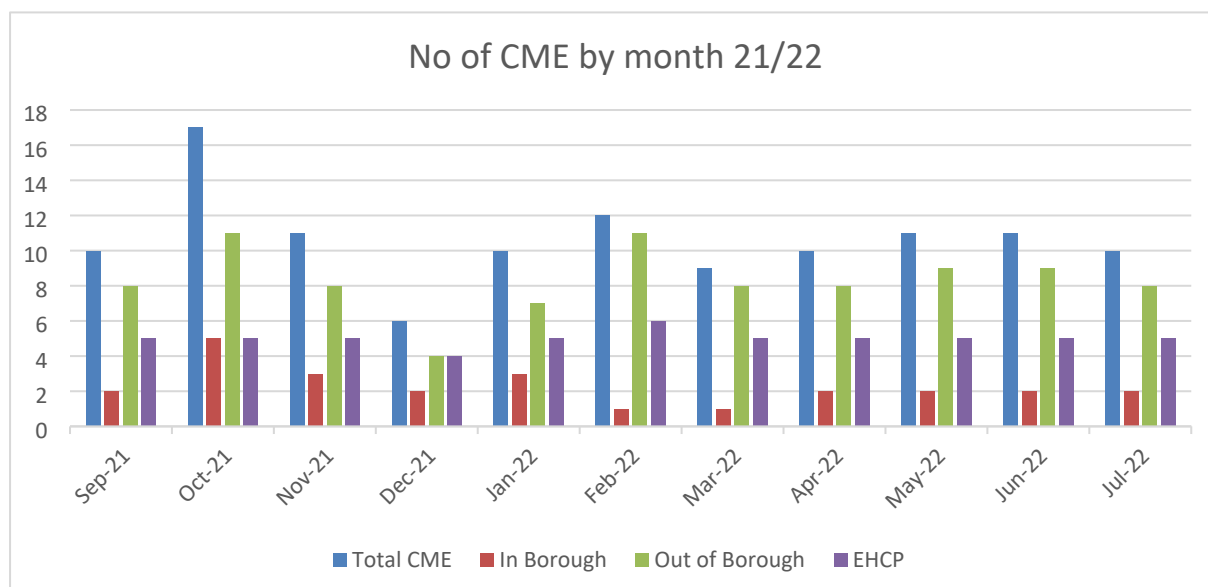
The Local Authority Interactive Tool (LAIT) data for the 4 year period 2016-2020 (the latest set of published data) shows that Thurrock CLA for 12+ months continued to have exclusion rates below the national averages for CLA. This is illustrated in the LAIT graph below. It also ranked Thurrock as 19<sup>th</sup> in the Country for lowest FTE rates.



## 9. Children Missing Education [CME]

The Local Authority carefully monitors any child missing education for those CLA/YP placed in and out of borough. The Virtual School produces weekly data for any child who is missing education due to lack of a school place or through extended absence. This data is shared and discussed in Directors Management Team monthly. Monthly CME data is available and provided to Governors on a termly basis. The Virtual School takes action which is individualised to meet the needs of the pupils and where necessary, works with the Admissions Team, Inclusion Manager and SEN Service teams in Thurrock and other boroughs to secure school places or alternative provision. For pupils who are without an educational placement, a Personal Education Plan [PEP] meeting is held to plan actions for how to secure education provision. Wherever possible the Virtual School provides tuition through commissioned tuition services whilst a student is between educational placements. The biggest challenge for securing education is when those pupils with an EHC Plan move out of borough and an alternative provision is sought. The consultation processes and changes of local

authorities do not enable action to be completed in a timely manner. This matter is discussed weekly at SEN Priority Panel.



The diagram highlights a fluctuation of figures and this very much depends on the profile of pupils coming into care and whether they have education prior to becoming looked after or if they have to move away from their school due to placement availability in borough.

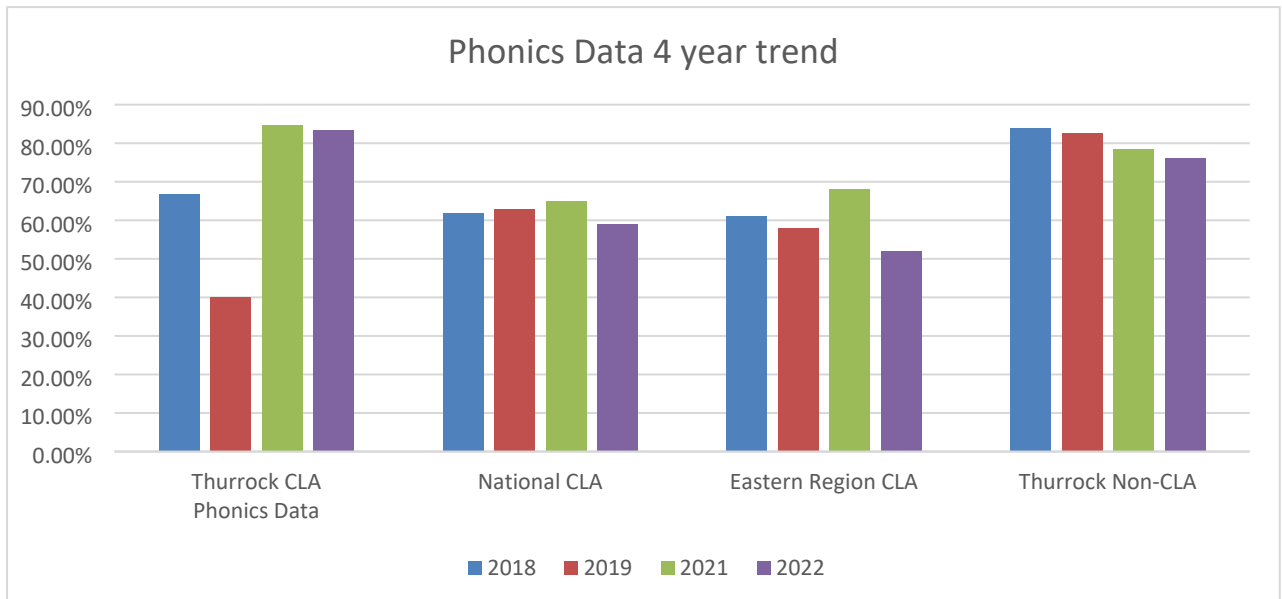
#### 10. Attainment Data of CLA

Due to the cancellation of all testing and exams for the year 2020 and 2021, there was no official attainment data to report. The academic year 2021-2022 saw the reintroduction of formal testing and exams and results we based upon these rather than teacher assessment.

#### 2022 Phonics – Year 1 Pupils aged (5 and 6)

4 year 2 pupils re-took their phonics tests in 2022. Matched data in NCER database shows that 100% of these pupils passed. This table highlights the comparison between pupils looked after to Thurrock, national and eastern region CLA data and compares it against the performance against all Thurrock pupils and national non-looked after pupils.

	Thurrock CLA	National CLA	Eastern Region CLA	Thurrock Non-CLA
2018	66.70%	62%	61%	83.90%
2019	40%	63%	58%	82.70%
2021	84.60%	65%	68%	78.40%
2022	83.30%	59%	52%	76.20%



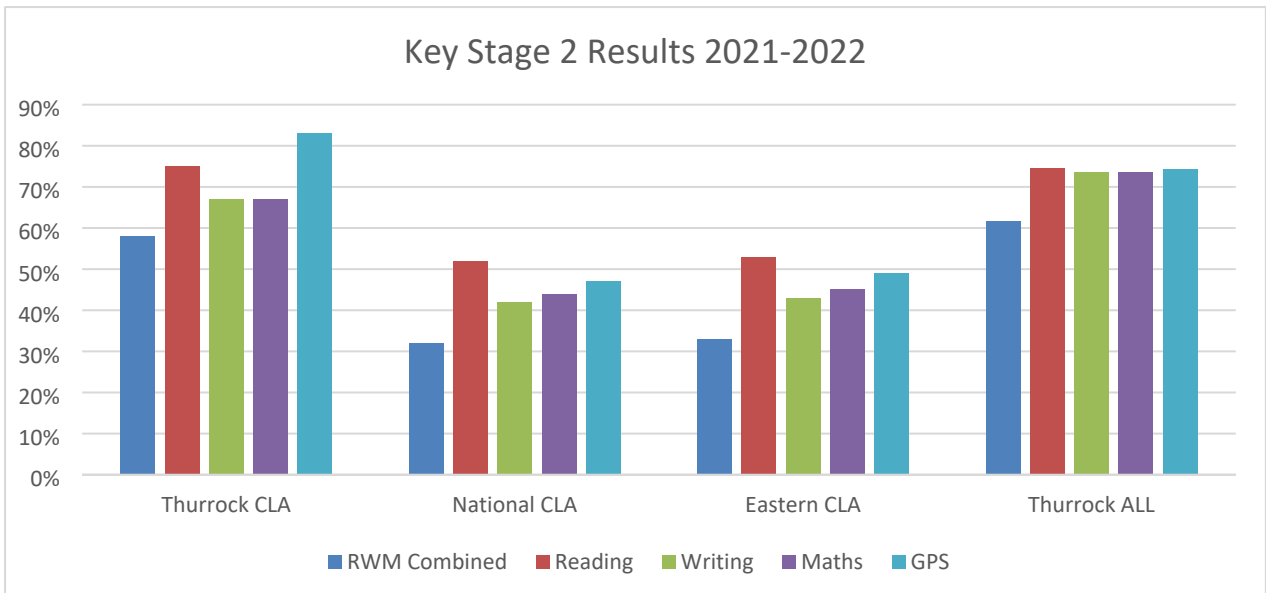
In 2019 we started to expand our offer of phonics packs and practical resources to Nursery, Reception and Year 1 pupils. We also used PP+ top slice to purchase additional resources for pupils in the early years and KS1. These included phonemes, diagraphs, trigraphs etc which would help to boost what they could do in the home.

The vast improvements in data began to show. We believe that this is a direct result from using the resources we provided as well as asking schools to track phonics scores and school based interventions within the Personal Education Plans of these key year groups.

### Key Stage 2 Data (This is for pupils in Year 6)

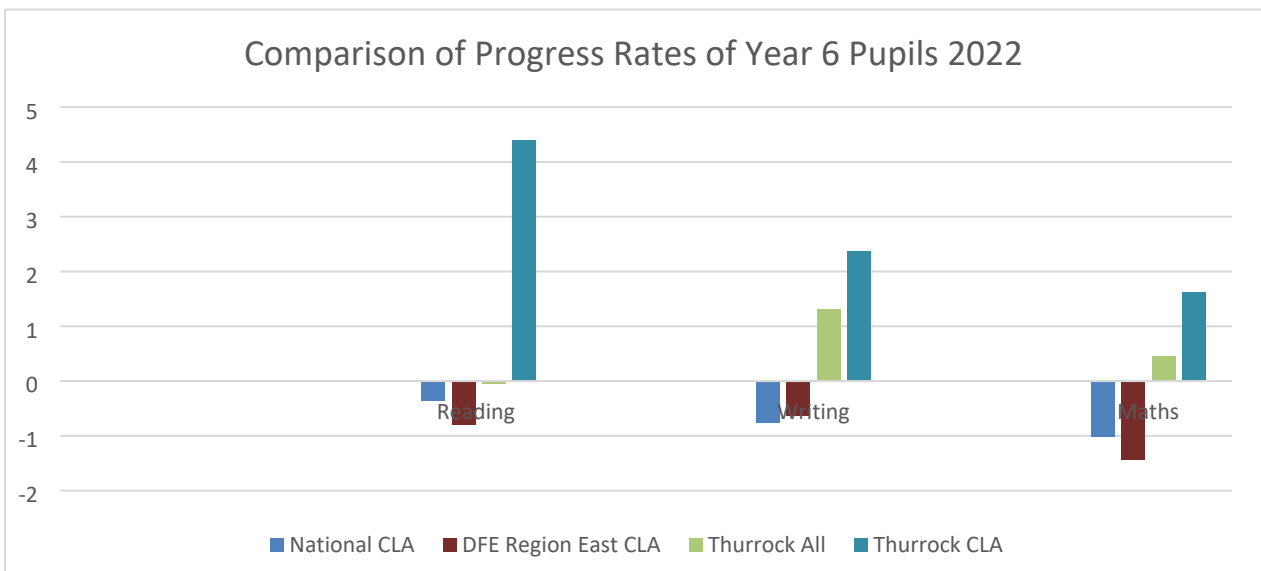
Formal testing took place in May 2022. The Local Authority Interactive (LAIT) does not yet have the data for comparisons and so the data detailed below has been extracted from the Department for Education matched data using a data tool called NEXUS/NCER.

KS2 Benchmark (CLA) (Keypas)													2022   Keypas   Matched pupils only					
Cohort	CLA Matches	RWM*		Avg. SS	READING			WRITING TA		Avg. SS	MATHS			GPS				
		≥ Exp	High		< Exp	≥ Exp	High	≥ Exp	GDS		< Exp	≥ Exp	High	Avg. SS	< Exp	≥ Exp	High	
NCER National (CLA)	3,830	100.0%	32.0%	1.0%	100.9	47.0%	52.0%	13.0%	42.0%	3.0%	99.1	54.0%	44.0%	7.0%	100.3	52.0%	47.0%	11.0%
DfE Region - East (CLA)	290	100.0%	33.0%	2.0%	101.4	47.0%	53.0%	15.0%	43.0%	4.0%	99.3	53.0%	45.0%	8.0%	100.8	50.0%	49.0%	13.0%
Local Authority - Thurrock (all schools)	2,542	0.6%	61.7%	9.2%	104.7	24.3%	74.5%	27.0%	75.0%	17.2%	104.2	25.2%	73.6%	23.2%	105.5	24.7%	74.4%	29.6%
Virtual School - Thurrock	12	100.0%	58.3%	8.3%	104.5	25.0%	75.0%	33.3%	66.7%	8.3%	101.5	33.3%	66.7%	16.7%	104.7	16.7%	83.3%	16.7%



The graph shows how well our Thurrock CLA have performed compared to CLA across the country. They have also closed the gap in reading and Grammar Punctuation and Spelling against all Thurrock pupils and are only 3% away from Thurrock all pupils for Reading, Writing and Maths combined.

Our CLA also accomplished very good rates of progress. Progress is measured against their previous attainment when in Key Stage 1 and then measured against the attainment achieved in Key Stage 2. Good rates of progress are above the baseline which is 0 points. This is illustrated in the graph below.



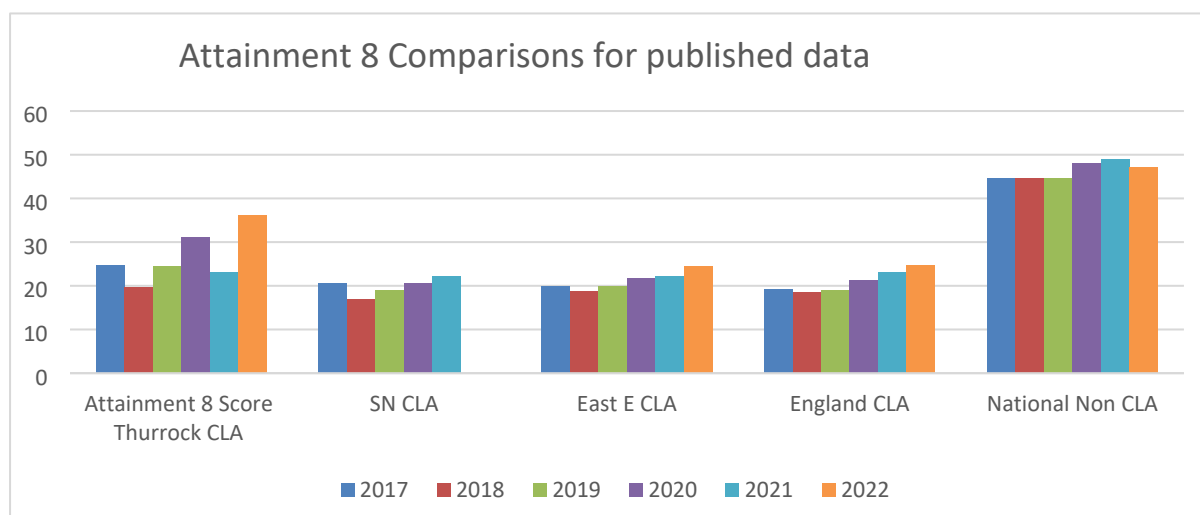
Thurrock CLA made better rates of progress than National and Eastern region CLA and better progress than that of all Thurrock children. The Virtual School team commissioned the use of extra tuition for our pupils. We used government tuition grants which enabled us to extend the amount of tuition we would usually provide with the Pupil Premium Plus top slice money. This tuition has enabled our pupils to make



accelerated progress and provide them with a good footing to starting secondary school.

## **Key Stage 4 Data (Year 11 GCSE)**

### **Attainment 8 Score**



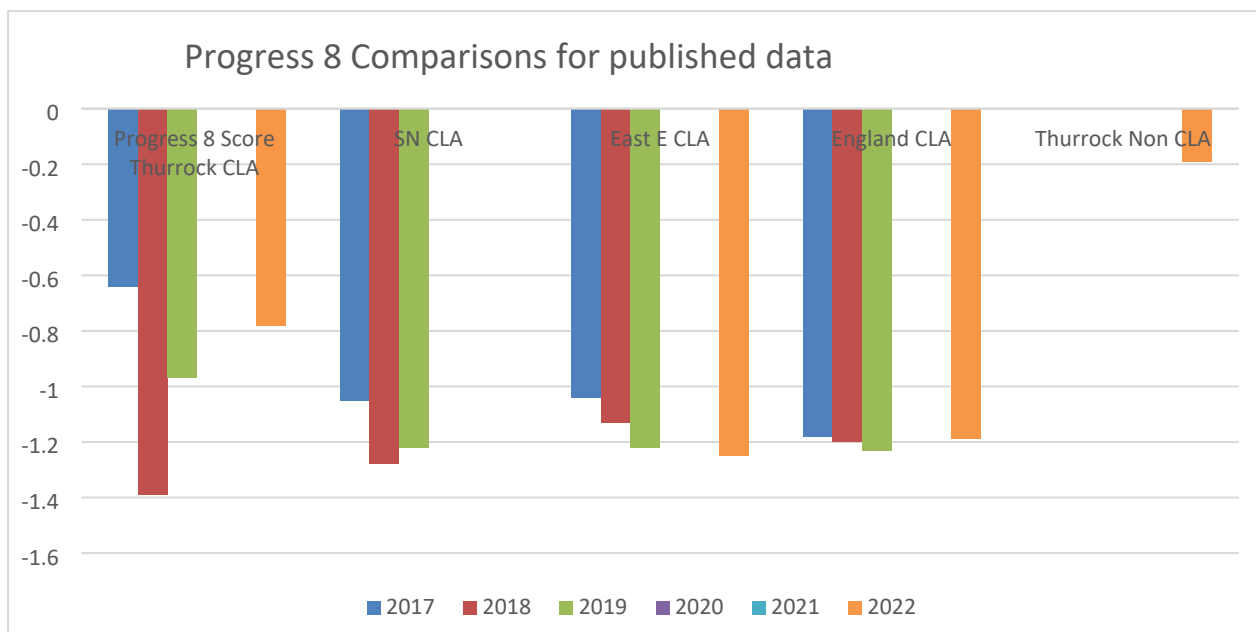
The above chart shows the improved performance of Thurrock CLA since 2017. We need to bare in mind that the size of the cohort fluctuates and we have seen an increase of UASC entering Year 11 and the majority of these young people are not able to sit GCSEs.

However, we have achieved our highest attainment 8 score since 2017 and for 2022 it was 36.1. Attainment 8 data would suggest that we are doing better than CLA with our statistical neighbours and nationally against CLA cohorts. We are also starting to close the gap against non-looked after pupils.

### **Progress 8 Scores**

	Progress 8 Score Thurrock CLA	SN CLA	East E CLA	England CLA	Thurrock Non CLA
2017	-0.64	-1.05	-1.04	-1.18	-0.07
2018	-1.39	-1.28	-1.13	-1.2	-0.19
2019	-0.97	-1.22	-1.22	-1.23	0.03
2020					
2021					
2022	-0.78		-1.25	-1.19	-0.19

There is no data for 2020 and 2021 due to the pandemic. However, the data that is represented for 2022 would show that our Progress 8 score is improving since 2018.



### **Key Headlines for Key Stage 4 Data**

#### **Whole cohort statistic (Including those not entered for GCSE's due to reason such as SEND and all those currently in care)**

23% of the cohort Passed Combined Maths and English Grade 4 or above

13% of the cohort passed combined Maths and English Grade 5 or above

44% of the cohort passed English Grade 4 or above

23% of the cohort passed English Grade 5 or above

23% of the cohort passed Maths grade 4 or above

16% of the cohort passed Maths grade 5 or above

#### **GCSE Entries Statistics (Relating to the cohort entered for GCSEs)**

80% passed English Grade 4 or above, 45 % passed English GCSE Grade 5 or above

45% passed Maths Grade 4 or above, 30% passed Maths GCSE Grade 5 or above

45% passed Maths and English Combined at Grade 4 or above, 25 % passed Maths and English Combined at Grade 5 or above

#### **In care for 12 Months +, Whole Cohort (Including those not entered for GCSE)**

46% passed English Grade 4 or above, 24% passed English Grade 5 or above

24 % passed Maths Grade 4 or above, 15% passed Maths Grade 5 or above

24% passed Maths and English Combined at Grade 4 or above, 12 % passed Maths and English Combine at Grade 5 or above

### **In care for 12 Months +, and entered for GCSEs**

80% passed English Grade 4 or above, 45 % Passed English Grade 5 or above

45% passed Maths Grade 4 or above, 30% passed Maths Grade 5 or above

45% passed Maths and English combined at Grade 4 or above, 25 % passed Maths and English combined grade 5 or above

More comparative data will be made available using the LAIT document and further published data.

### 11. **Summary of Actions for all Key Stages to improve 2023 data**

What are we doing to improve academic performance?

- Provision of Literacy Book Trust home learning resources to those aged between 3-9 years old
- Provision of 1-1 tuition throughout Year 11 in maths, English and science
- Provision of 1-1 tuition for Year 10 pupils starting in the spring term of year 10
- Provision of 1-1 tuition for year 5 starting in the spring term of year 5
- Provision of 1-1 tuition in maths and English throughout year 6 for this year group
- Conducting termly school visits for key year groups of children and those who are not making expected progress
- Creation of action plans for those pupils who are not making progress
- Provision of tuition for those requesting it in Year 12 to support the transition into post 16 learning
- Evidencing the work of the Virtual School through PEPS, visit notes and case notes
- Development of SEND support materials to further improve the outcomes for this group of children
- Development of a range of interventions for certain year groups and needs
- Continuing the interventions and key actions developed over the previous years to build upon good practice and successful outcomes
- Provision of phonics resources for N2 through to Year 2 pupils
- Provision of kindles upon request to promote reading
- Provision of maths resources for Year 4 and 5 to support multiplication testing.

## 12. Case Studies

Case studies provide some insight into the individual work that is completed by members of the Virtual School to improve outcomes for children and young people. Each phase leader provides a case study for the Governing Body every term as part of our reporting and accountability mechanisms. These can be seen in reports to Governors.

**Here is a sample of some we have collected over the year**

### Secondary Phase Adviser

**Background:** Two Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) arrived together, they were brothers, one was 16 years old and one 13 years. I attended the Personal Education Plan meetings. Both young people have had a very traumatic journey to the UK, fleeing persecution in their country. The younger brother was visibly traumatised, holding teddy bear and the hand of his brother throughout the meeting. He became upset when school was mentioned, began crying and shaking, young person had never left the side of his mother at home, never attended school and was kept at home at all times, he has lost his primary care giver and was very upset at the thought of going to school and leaving his brother's side.

**Action:** I reassured him that we would take it slowly, we would try school when he felt ready and we would arrange it in a way that he felt safe. Began introducing tuition, both boys asked for tuition together, but this wasn't appropriate due to age difference, I organised for tutor to take both boys separately but allow the sibling to remain in the room, this worked really well and we built up confidence to eventually having tuition with the other out of the room. When he was more settled in placement and felt safer we began to look at schools, organised school visits and virtual tours with brother by his side. By this time the older brother has started college and reassured his sibling that he would always return and was having positive experiences in college. Needs were shared, a new school was identified, and gradual start arranged.

**Impact:** He is now attending school on his own with English as Additional Language intervention, supplementary tuition remains in place and the young person is doing well and is gaining in confidence and independence.

### Primary Phase Adviser

**Background:** The young girl came into care in Feb 2020 just before the pandemic at 9yrs and 7mths old. Due to where the foster placement was located, she started at a new school. At this point (Year 4) she had a reading age of 7yrs and 10 months and was working at a high Year 1 low Year 2 level. This is below national expectations. She has witnessed significant trauma and neglect and had been out of school for over a year. She has always had a thirst for learning and was excited about going to school. By the Spring term of the following year she was working at the top end of Year 4 level

emerging Y5. She was making good progress. She was not on track to reach age related expectations.

**Action:** Tuition was put in place from Easter in Year 5 through to Year 6 (May 22).

A Personal Education Plan meeting was held in May 2022 just before SATs whereby the predictions for SATs were looking like she may not get the age related expectation results and was working in a high Year 5 and a low Year 6 level for writing and Maths and a low to middle Y6 level for Reading but was still very close.

However, her results from national testing showed that she reached expected standards for her age and stage.

Results	Reading- 101 - Expected	Writing- Expected	Maths- 108 - Expected	GPS- 109 Expected
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**Impact:** Significant confidence in her learning and her ability to learn and try things out. Has a thirst for learning and is engaged in all areas of her learning. Is inquisitive and happy. Has now settled well into Y7. From her starting point, her baseline was working at over two years behind her peers. Has made accelerated progress. Settled in placement and in school.

#### Post 16 Adviser

**Background:** A young man came in to care in April 2017 and was quickly moved to a residential site where education was provided on site in the form of a small school for children and young people who had an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP). He was very settled in this placement and an enhanced transition took place for post 16 education and he successfully transitioned into an outdoor based course for his first year of post 16. However, his placement broke down in June of 2022 and he was moved to another placement. Due to this, he was also unable to complete his course and was frustrated by this and stated that he didn't want to engage in any further education.

**Action:** There were a number of intensive meetings and varying forms of communication which took place between myself and a college that I had identified. I believed that the college could meet his needs. I was able to source a college placement which could support him. I then had to convince the young person that that this was a positive step. I worked with the social worker, and we visited the young person to discuss the benefits of education and reintegration back into college. We then jointly visited the college for a tour, supported with enrolment and provided support and reassurance relating to the day-to-day routine.

**Impact/Outcomes:** The young man started college and is receipt of an education. There has been a significant improvement in his confidence, and he is much happier.

We will be reviewing progress in November 2022 when he was the annual review of his EHCP.

### 13. **School Improvement Priorities**

These are detailed in the Virtual School Improvement Plan which is updated at the start of every academic year. Priorities are identified and actions are detailed related to targets and actions which form the basis of the Virtual School's work. The aim of this document is to promote the raising of educational outcomes for all of our Children Looked After and Young People. This is reviewed every half term and reports to the Governing Body detail progress towards each priority. These can be found in additional documents which are produced termly for the Governing Body.

#### **Key Priorities for 2021-2022 were**

To improve achievement of all pupils by:

[KP 1] Increasing the use of diagnostic/screening tools to meet needs and ensure that interventions match academic, social and emotional needs

This has been developed across the course of the academic year and is being used for pupils that have the greatest need. We have been using a tool called Access to Inclusion (AIT) which enables professionals to plot the behaviours of the child/young person onto an assessment grid. This then provides professionals with an insight into the type of attachment style the C/YP may have. It then develops a programme of support and interventions which could be used to help behaviour and enable the pupil to be more settled at home and in the school.

This has worked very well with the pupils who have been assessed and we have also extended licences to all Thurrock schools as we feel that this tool can support a range of needs of all pupils.

For some pupils we have also been using the Boxall Profile which is based on assessing Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) aspects of behaviour. This has provided us with a different option and suggestions, although we have had more success with using the AIT as this is more user friendly for teachers and other professionals.

The impact of these tools has been that there is a greater common understanding and language to support our pupils and the SEMH needs.

Schools have felt more confident to try strategies of support which have gone further than the usual ones which may have traditionally been used.

It has also seen a reduction in the number of Fixed Term Exclusions.

## [KP 2] Continuing to embed processes of quality assurance of educational provision

Staff have been working with a range of schools and settings across the academic year both face to face and virtually. We have approximately 138 different education settings that we work with across the year. Every school is rated by us depending upon the quality of the Personal Education Plans as well as the educational offer that they provide. A range of factors such as aspiration, use of additional funds and behavioural support are also included in the criteria that we assess against. We then target our intervention, support and challenge depending upon the rating given for that setting.

We have a clear focus relating to pupil progress and so we provide more support and challenge when pupil progress is not in line with expectations.

On the whole we have excellent relationships with schools and settings, and this enables us to advocate for our children and young people. We have found that this critical friend and supportive approach enables schools to trust our judgements and listen to our advice.

This model has meant that more schools and settings have been RAG rated Green due to the targeted work we have completed.

## [KP 3] Continuing to provide support and challenge to all professionals to ensure that provision meets need and accelerates pupil progress

This key priority is closely linked with KP 2. Our work involves liaising with a range of professionals. We provide challenge to professionals if we have evidence which shows that educational success is not being prioritised.

Much of the scrutiny we do is through the quality assurance of the Personal Education Plan. This enables the team to look at areas for development for the child/young person and to check that provision is supporting needs and driving pupil progress.

Our day-to-day work involves working with carers, schools, social workers and other partners to enable plans and actions to be focussed on educational matters. We also have formal ways to do this by attending panels such as placement panel, emotional well-being panels and children missing education meetings, as well as attendance at strategic groups. We also provide written guidance, policies and training to enable all colleagues to understand our processes and our vision for improving outcomes.

## [KP 4] Focussing on pupils who may have persistent absence and explore strategies to overcome barriers to attendance

We have worked extensively with our children and young people who have had poor school attendance. We have triangulated strategy with carers, schools and social workers to encourage good attendance and remove the potential barriers. Every case has been unique and we have had some successes. However, there have been some pupils who have been very resistant to physically attending an education setting and

so we have had to work creatively with their placement to source appropriate educational experiences.

Every pupil has an action plan for attendance and every pupil is contacted by their school and the Virtual School to check that they are safe. It has also been very important that the young person has been 'kept in mind' and knows that there are key adults that are concerned for their welfare.

We have planned to look at emotional based school avoidance and focus on this issue for the forthcoming academic year. This is a national issue in light of the pandemic where pupils are now refusing to attend school and they may have emotional and mental health reasons for doing so. Therefore, this remains a big focus for us moving forward.

[KP 5 ] Developing a strategy to address the new requirements around supporting children with a social worker CIN/CP

A new staff member joined the team in October 2021 with the sole responsibility for developing a strategic approach to improving outcomes for children with a social worker. This is a trial project that is being funded by the Department for Education. Much of the work completed in this academic year has focussed on:

- Informing relevant teams and professionals within Thurrock about the expectations of the new duties
- Sourcing the relevant data relating to Children With a Social Worker (CWSW). This being for example, attendance, attainment, exclusion
- Analysing data for patterns, strengths and areas for development
- Establishing contacts and working parties from schools and social care to have a joint working approach
- Liaising with a range of professionals in a different way. We have many established relationships in place relating to our CLA work but needed to look at the broader aspect of CWSW via their Children in Need or those subject to a Child Protection Plan
- Provision of training in the form of trauma and attachment for all schools
- Purchasing resources for Thurrock schools which supports them to assess and intervene for those pupils with SEMH difficulties. This has been with the Access to Inclusion Toolkit
- Working creatively with the MASH team to establish better understanding between schools and the MASH processes
- Working with social care and school and health partners to re-write the threshold document
- Attendance at 0-11 and 11-25 Strategy Groups to promote the new duties and develop strategic ways of working linked to the new duties
- Working with national and eastern region virtual schools to look at best practice and developing strategies with the most impact

We recognise that there is still a lot to accomplish with this. We are hoping that this will become statutory, and that greater guidance will be provided to schools and other



professionals from the Department for Education (DFE) which will enable our expectations to become statutory rather than voluntary. We have employed another member of staff to support with this project who will be starting with us in the autumn term 2022. This person has worked with the Virtual School and social care before so has many relationships already embedded. Additionally, it will provide extra capacity to visit every Thurrock school personally to provide a consultancy approach.

[KP6] Continuing to focus on the needs of, and provision for, SEN pupils to support learning and development

This year we have embedded a range of processes to track pupil progress for SEND. We have been using B Squared for this as well as looking at the social and emotional aspects of learning.

Every pupil with SEND has a provision map which details the support that is received within school and with wider services. We have used this to track interventions and check that they are supporting need and driving progress.

In addition to this, our termly progress data tracking sheets are updated to measure progress and if pupils are not making sufficient progress, this is followed up by a member of the VS team.

Many specialist education settings are using their own assessment methods to evidence progress e.g. milestones and so it is essential that VS staff speak with settings to gauge progress. In addition, we attend every annual review of an EHCP where possible and we link very closely with Thurrock SEND team to joint casework pupils.

There are two designated case workers in the SEND team who manage the EHCP work linked to our Looked After Children. We implemented that to ensure that there was good communication processes between SEND, social care and ourselves. This has worked very effectively.

#### 14. **Allocation and Impact of the Pupil Premium**

The management of the Pupil Premium Plus grant for Children Looked After is detailed in the DFE guidance [Pupil premium grant 2021 to 2022: conditions of grant](#) and [Pupil premium: virtual school heads' responsibilities](#).

The Pupil Premium Plus Policy details the rationale and method behind the allocation of this funding.

Settings receive £1,800 which is released in three equal installments of £600 every term. The Virtual School Headteacher tracks spending on a termly basis in line with the quality assurance process of Personal Education Plans (PEP). This tracking centers on how this money is used to raise the achievement of the child/young person and assesses if funds are being used appropriately. This process, alongside the PEP

process is supporting the pupil to have targeted support and intervention which directly affects and plans for his/her academic and overall school achievement with a personalised approach. It is enabling the Virtual School to be updated on progress data and enables discussion with the school to center on appropriate intervention. This system promotes accountability and improved dialogue in how to raise attainment and achievement and narrow the gap. [Separate Pupil Premium documentation is available on request].

### **Overview of Spending by the Virtual School**

The Virtual School received PP+ funding for 231 pupils aged from Year Reception to Year 11. This figure is based upon the SDA903 census return by social care. This was 20 pupils fewer than the previous year. The Virtual School top sliced £545 per pupil for the academic year and used this to provide resources to support the most vulnerable in the cohort. This equates to the top slice being £125,895 for the year 21/22.

A minimum of £352,800 was distributed to schools based upon the number of eligible pupils and extra funded support. This may have been more for schools that required extra funding and was dependent upon individual cases. Of the pupils who were without a school place, they were provided with additional tuition which exceeded the £2345 per pupil. We also ensured that once they had a school place, pupil premium plus was paid to the new school.

When a pupil enters care at any point in the academic year, the educational setting immediately starts to receive PP+ funding for the term the pupil entered care. In some cases, the pupil may require additional funding for specific needs and to support the transition into care. This is allocated from the top slice. When a pupil moves school, the PP+ funding follows that child/young person to ensure that needs are met in their new setting.

When a pupil leaves care during an academic year the school/educational placement receives the remaining amount of PP+ up to the sum of £2,345. This is to cover any shortfall in funding in the interim between leaving care and being eligible for PP+ funding for being Previously Looked After [PLAC].

In line with our Pupil Premium Plus Policy, schools are able to claim for additional funding to meet the needs of the pupil in excess of the allocated £1,800. This is used to support those pupils who have high needs and need significant intervention to remain in school. This has proved to be a very successful use of the top slice as this has ensured that we have had zero permanent exclusions.

All of pupils who attended a school and were eligible to receive the funding were provided with the allocation of £1800. This was dependent upon the conditions of grant. For example, pupils in specialist independent schools would already have EHCP funding as well as school fees and so they would be double funded. However,

each application is carefully considered and if PP+ can support learning then we would allocate it.

Additional income was obtained for Children with a Social Worker. This was £100,000 but this funding was not to be allocated to individual children. The intended use for this money was to support the development of strategy to raise educational outcomes across Thurrock for CWSW. This grant has also been provided for the financial year 22/23.

An additional grant of 'catch up' tuition funding was also provided by the DFE and this was £20,792. This money went towards our tuition costs.

There was also £30,000 to support the information, advice and guidance role that we fulfil for Previously Looked After.

In total interventions that were used to raise educational outcomes were £207,495.

Spending Overview of Pupil Premium Plus using top slice and additional grants and Virtual School core budget

Resource	Cost	Justification of Spend
Letter Box Book Trust Reading Materials for Nursery to Year 4	£10,281.78	To promote reading activities in the home. Foster positive relationships in the home via games and joint activity. Make CLA feel special to have own post
Activity Day for CLA at Grangewaters (contribution from VS)	£994.50	This was a social care led event using our local council run outdoor and adventurous activities centre. Gave our CLA lots of fun opportunities to explore the outdoors, building relationships, developing resilience and confidence to try to new experiences.
Commission of AC Education to Provide Trauma and Attachment to schools via an 18 months intensive consultancy approach	£48,763.80	This training is being provided to Thurrock schools to support all Thurrock pupils and not just those who are looked after or for Children with a Social Worker. Not all schools have taken this offer up yet but there are a few that are able to start the programme in the next academic year 22/23. We were also able to part fund this using the CWSW funding as well as PP+ top slice.
Trauma and Attachment Books and the Access to Inclusion user licence	£10,931	This provided training and support materials for our out of borough schools that we work with as well as all Thurrock schools. Training was provided to schools across 3 days. We have more of this planned in the forthcoming year.
Provision of IT resources for Children/Young People Looked After	£18,854.68	These resources which include software and virus protection have been used to support the education of pupils. This enables them to

		complete online tutoring, home work and school led projects.
Tutoring	£119,611.60  We obtained an additional £20,792 from the DFE for catch up tuition. This was all spent and allocated to key year groups.	This tutoring involves the employment of 1-1 tutors who either work face to face or virtually with a range of our pupils across the year. The impact of tuition has been seen with the progress and attainment data for our key year groups. In addition to this we ensure that when a pupil is missing education (i.e with no school provision) tuition is used to support education whilst a provision is found. Additionally some of our Year 12 and 13 pupils have received tuition to help with exams or new courses. Our UASC pupils are also provided with online learning materials and tuition to support their learning of English.
Commissioning of Open Door Mentoring Services	£16,000	This service is used to support individual pupils with mentoring based upon needs. This is an intervention which is bespoke and works on different areas such as conflict resolution, gangs, self-esteem, choices etc. This is reserved for 10 pupils per academic year but we can commission more if necessary.
Equipment for pupils – dictionaries for UASC, Functional Skills workbooks for UASC, phonics packs for Nursery to Year 2 ages ranges, maths resources for Year 4 and 5, revision resources for year 10 and 11.	£912.37	Pupils are supported with the relevant materials they need to support home learning and revision. This is to support achievement in testing and home work.

Although the total amount of intervention funding exceeded our top slice amount, we were able to utilise some funding obtained in April 2022 when the new financial year started. We were also able to use some funding from the Children with a Social Worker grant as this is aimed at supporting all Thurrock schools and pupils. The PP+ is allocated across a financial year but we use the funds across an academic year. This means we are able to allocate resources to schools and pupils according to need. It is essential that all of this money is allocated because Thurrock would be obliged to pay back any underspend at the end of a financial year. The Virtual School Head is committed to spending this money carefully and that it has the maximum amount of impact on pupils as possible.

The majority of funding this academic year was spent on 1-1 tuition for pupils. This is funded at between £48 and £55 per hour of tuition, depending upon the tuition provider and the type of provision package.

Our tuition offer was:

- Year 5 tuition English and maths starting in February 2022
- Year 6 tuition for English and maths from September 21-May 22 – they had started their tuition in Year 5 the previous academic year
- Year 10 tuition English and maths and science starting in February 2022
- Year 11 tuition for English and maths from September 21-May 22 – they had started their tuition in Year 10 the previous academic year
- Tuition for any UASC without a school place in line with our Children Missing Education policy.
- Tuition for all pupils who were missing education. 15 hours per week to support learning until a school placement was secured.

As parting of the reporting process, The Virtual School Head submits spending overviews to the Governing Body of the Virtual School to detail the planned intent of top slice spending.

#### 15. **Quality Assurance of Personal Education Plans**

The Personal Education Plan [PEP] is a key document to support the child's/young person's education. Where possible the Virtual School attends specific PEP meetings. It is also important that the Virtual School attends PEP meetings for particularly vulnerable students or when a potential issue has been identified. For example, concern with progress. The VS team is responsible for Quality Assuring [QA] every PEP. Compliance data is shown in the table below. This shows that PEP compliance remained above 90% throughout the year, except for February which saw a decline in compliance. Some PEPs were out of timescale due to absence of staff in schools or in social care.

#### **PEP Compliance Data for Academic Year 2021-2022**

Month	Overall Compliance	Early Years - N2	Primary	Secondary	Post 16
Sep-21	93%	67%	93%	98%	87%
Oct-21	91%	83%	97%	95%	80%
Nov-21	97%	83%	99%	96%	84%
Dec-21	95%	83%	100%	98%	84%
Jan-22	95%	83%	100%	98%	84%
Feb-22	86%	98%	93%	80%	75%
Mar-22	90%	100%	92%	86%	82%
Apr-22	93%	100%	93%	94%	82%
May-22	96%	100%	93%	98%	80%
Jun-22	97%	100%	76%	96%	82%
Jul-22	98%	100%	94%	96%	84%

## Quality of Personal Education Plans

In addition to the PEP compliance data the Virtual School track the quality of PEPs. Every Personal Education Plan document is quality assured for each pupil for each term. We have a clear quality assurance framework which is shared with social workers and the schools/colleges.

PEP quality has remained a focus for improvement, and we have provided training, support and challenge to attempt to mitigate the production of a poor quality PEP. PEPS are only graded RED (poor quality) if there are no minutes or young person's views.

Month	Overall Good Quality %	% Amber	% RED	Awaiting Grading
Sep-21	65%	8.00%	21%	6%
Oct-21	67%	12%	19%	3%
Nov-21	74%	9%	12%	5%
Dec-21	71%	11%	13.00%	5%
Jan-22	74%	10%	11%	5%
Feb-22	76%	12%	12%	0%
Mar-22	79%	11%	10%	0%
Apr-22	80%	10%	10%	0%
May-22	82%	10%	8%	0%
Jun-22	74%	13%	13%	0%
Jul-22	76%	12%	12%	0%

Where a PEP has not been graded, this means it is waiting to be closed by the team before officially graded.

### What Next?

- Quality of PEPs remains a focal point for improvement. In the forthcoming year the VS will continue to provide PEP training and support to social workers, schools and colleges
- Pupil Premium Plus funding will be withheld from schools if the education section is not completed to a high standard
- In the following academic year, the team will be changing the format of Quality Assurance (QA) by putting the QA document within the PEP rather than as a standalone document. There are also some changes to the PEP minutes which will come into effect in September 2022. There will also be a thematic approach to quality assurance which will focus on certain aspects of the PEP rather than the whole document

- PEPs will still be scrutinised every term for the quality of educational targets and how they are linking to Pupil Premium Plus applications.

## 16. **Post 16 Update**

The Virtual School supports pupils who have left Year 11 and are moving onto the next stage of their education. Pupils take a variety of paths either through level 1, 2 or 3, FE or HE qualifications. Others combine apprenticeships with obtaining qualifications. Every pupil is supported appropriately to create the next step that is suitable for them. Conversations regarding post 16 pathways are discussed in Year 10. Transition conversations and post 16 aspirations are looked at as early as Year 9 and then finalised before the student leaves Year 11 and they are supported with applying for college positions and courses. All pupils should receive a careers interview before leaving school and our CLA also have access to careers advice via the Inspire Youth Hub team. After the students receive their qualifications, they are further supported to apply for places again if they were unsuccessful with their original choice and all can access support from the Virtual School 16+ Education Adviser if necessary. Such activities that are supported include applying for a bursary, receiving additional tuition, interventions and attendance at disruption meeting with colleges and employers. Further Education Personal Education Plans are put in place for every student, even those without an educational placement. The Virtual School works closely with the aftercare team to support pupils in Year 13 and beyond.

### University Students

Although the Virtual School does not hold responsibility for these students we still like to support our young people as they leave care and head off to university. This is in the form of IT resources and vouchers for their living costs as they leave Year 13. It remains the aspiration of Thurrock Council that as many care leavers as possible can access higher education if they choose to.

## 17. **Not in Education Employment or Training [NEET]**

The Virtual School closely monitors any post 16 young person who has CLA status and who is NEET. They are monitored at least fortnightly and the Post 16+ Education Adviser works with the young person, social care, personal advisors and local colleges and businesses to create the best possible opportunity for the young person to be placed in education, employment or training. NEET data is provided to the Virtual School Governing Body every term as part of the Headteacher's report.

### Not in Employment Education or Training [NEET] Strategy Meeting

Each month the virtual school team meet with social workers for NEET young people to discuss the cases. There is an action matrix which is created to detail all actions planned and then evaluate the impact of these. A representative from Inspire Youth Hub attends this meeting so there is a co-ordinated approach wherever possible. The aftercare team manager is also invited as well as the service manager of CLA. This

approach enables discussion and actions to be prioritised to support the young person back into EET.

### Barefoot E Learning for NEET Young People

This is an online course package which is used in addition to the offers provided by Inspire. Our young people are given this as an option to access a variety of academic and vocational courses which they can choose depending upon interests and their chosen next steps. Feedback from our young people has been that they have found this interesting and manageable to do. It has given them the confidence to try new things and to access this learning at their own pace. The total cost for this was £1,200 for the year and this has already proven to be beneficial for many students as an access back into education.

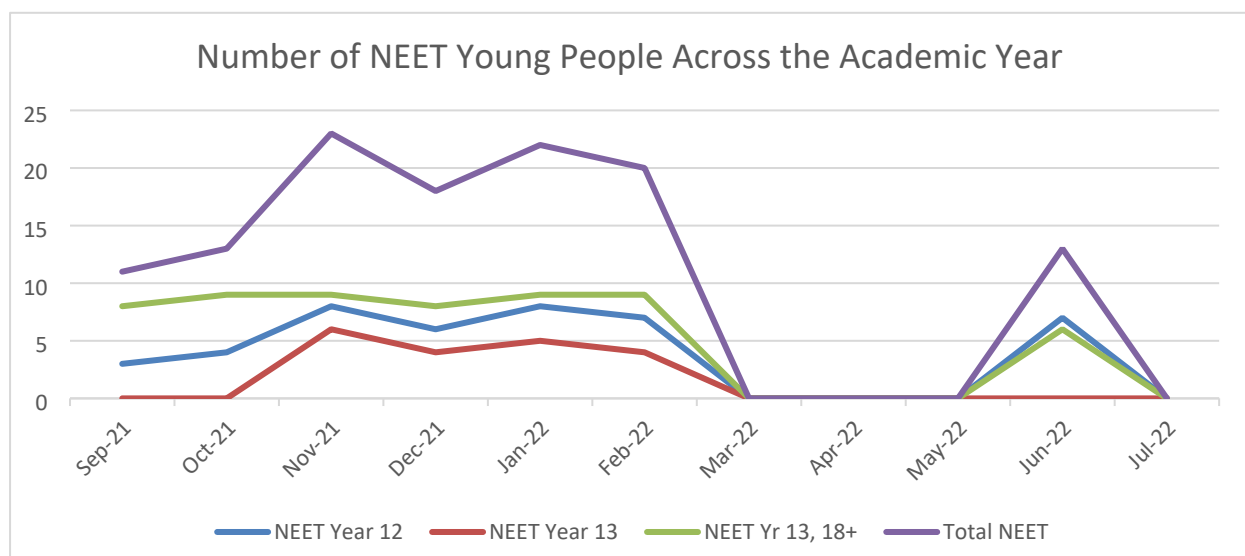
### Contact with NEET Young People

The post 16 adviser contacts every NEET young person every week/fortnight. Some young people require more contact than others and so this could be several times per week.

### **Not in Education, Employment or Training Data**

These figures include those who have recently come into care and those who have recently left care due to being 18 years old. If a pupil becomes 18 during Year 13, the Virtual School still monitors and supports alongside the aftercare team.

Strategies for NEET support are noted above in this report. Some NEET young people have been involved with re-engagement activities throughout the year and this has meant that they can complete some training and tuition.



What Next?



- Ensure that all NEET pupils continue to have a NEET action plan which is reviewed every month
- Provide challenge to semi-supported accommodation key workers to ensure they are promoting EET to our young people
- Liaise with social care to check that mental health and well-being is being supported
- Collection of Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire scores to check mental health is being supported

#### 18. **Support for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children**

There continues to be a demand for the Virtual School team to support Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children [UASC]. We currently have 11% of our cohort classified as UASC. The regional sharing protocol arrangements have enabled young people to be transferred to boroughs with fewer numbers than Thurrock. The number of UASC coming into Thurrock has not reduced and as some of our previous UASC have left care, Thurrock Local Authority are distributing fewer young people to other boroughs. This year we have continued to support the educational needs of these young people. This has included 1-1 tuition of school age pupils and the provision of online learning packages to all young people. The priority with all is to obtain school or college placements as soon as possible to promote the learning of English. We have also created stationary packs, provided dictionaries in native languages and Entry Level 1 and 2 materials to support with ESOL and basic maths and English. These have been well received by our young people. Our older UASC pupils continue to do well in their colleges and schools and those who have been with us for over 12 months are making good progress with their English.

We also saw that there was a need for our Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) to be adapted into different languages so that our young people could access this. We require all of our pupils to have up to date SDQ scores and so we needed for them to answer their own set of questions to triangulate against the scores from other professionals.

What Next?:

- Embed the use of assessment materials for our young people so that we can track English progress more easily – especially for those without a school/college placement
- Support settings to use this assessment material

#### 19. **Virtual School Governing Body**

The Virtual School Governing Body [GB] was formed in the autumn term 2016. Meetings are held once per term. The Governing Body is used to hold the Virtual

School to account and ensure that the team are maximising positive outcomes for CLA.

The members of this GB 2021/2022 were:

Chair: M Lucas [Assistant Director of Learning, Skills and Inclusion]

Headteacher: K Pullen [Virtual School]

In Borough School Representative Secondary: Dr S Asong [CEO Ortu Academy Trust]

In Borough School Representative Primary: M. Curtis [HT Somers Heath Primary School]

Out of Borough School Representative Designated Teacher: J Leamon [Dartford Grammar School for Girls]

Alternative Provision School Representative: M. Hunnisett (HT/CEO The Olive Academy)

Education Representative: A Winstone [Strategic Lead for School Effectiveness and SEND]

Post 16 Education Representative: K Kozlova-Boran – Service Manager Learning and Careers

Social Care Representative: L Froment – Service Manager Children Looked After Services

Staff Governor: members of the VS team take turns to attend.

The purpose of the Governing Body [GB] is to hold the VSHT to account and to ensure that clear and regular lines of reporting are in place. The VSHT prepares a range of documentation for the GB to approve and to question the strategy and decisions made by the VSHT.

In addition, the VSHT reports to the Corporate Parenting Committee on a regular basis.

## 20. **Staffing**

In terms of staff, one of our staff members left Thurrock in October 2021. The process of recruitment took a long time. A replacement for this team member started with us in late June 2022. Having one fewer member of the team placed significant strain on the team. In addition to this the Virtual School Head has had a period of long-term sickness which meant that the team had additional tasks. They were supported by the strategic lead and assistant director.

The recruitment of a member of staff to project manage the new additional duties of Children with a Social Worker has enabled the VSH to separate duties so that the

management of our CLA and PLAC work is maintained alongside a new programme which is being developed for CWSW. With the additional £100,000 grant that has been provided we have been able to present a business case for an additional full time staff member to work alongside the project manager to drive forward the CWSW agenda.

21. **Additional Strategies to support the educational progress of Thurrock Children in Care**

**Working in Partnership with other Teams in Thurrock Council and out of borough councils.**

The Virtual School works with a range of teams within Thurrock to enable the best possible outcomes for our CLA and Previously Looked After Children (PLAC). These include School Effectiveness, Social Care, Special Educational Needs including Educational Psychologists, Fostering, Health, Admissions and Education Welfare. This cohesive approach works together around the child/young person to create a supportive, knowledgeable level of service aimed at serving the best interest of the CLA.

The Virtual School also works with the relevant teams in other boroughs for our CLA who are placed out of borough. Actions to work with a range of partners included:

- Provision of training to Designated Teachers
- Provision of training to social workers
- Phone call support for foster carers, social workers and teachers
- Frequent liaison with educational establishments
- Provision of training, information advice and guidance for professionals and parents linked to Previously Looked After Children
- Attendance at the Children in Care Council when invited

**Additional Services [commissioned by Virtual School in 2021-2022]**

Welfare Call – to monitor the attendance of our CLA

EGov Digital Solutions – an electronic platform for Personal Education Plans

Fleet Tuition Service – for provision of 1-1 tuition

Prospero – for provision of 1-1 tuition

Teaching Personnel – for provision of 1-1 tuition

Equal Education – for provision of 1-1 tuition

TLC Live – for provision of 1-1 tuition

Open Door – Provision of 1-1 mentoring for pupils

Currys PC World – Provision of Digital Technology to support learners

Literacy Book Trust – provision of reading materials to pupils

National College – Provision of CPD for staff and provision of safeguarding materials, advice and guidance for foster carers and schools

Barefoot Learning – online courses for NEET young people to access a variety of training online linked to enabling them to be ready for work or education

Flash Academy – online learning materials for UASC pupils. This translates their own language and supports the learning of English vocabulary

22. **Professional Development of VS Staff**

As a Virtual School we take professional development very seriously as it enables us to reflect on our practice and improve our service. Our team have continued to access a range of online courses during the academic year. For new members to the team, they have complete all necessary training and induction modules as required by the council.

23. **Author of this report**

Keeley Pullen BA [Hons] PGCE NPQH

Headteacher of the Virtual School for Thurrock Children Looked After and Previously Looked After Children

**Submission date to Corporate Parenting Committee** 4<sup>th</sup> January 2023

**Submission date to the Virtual School Governing Body** March 2023

<b>4 January 2023</b>	<b>ITEM: 11</b>
<b>Corporate Parenting Committee</b>	
<b>Response to Urgent Actions 1 &amp; 2 of National Review – Children with Disabilities and Complex Health Needs Placed in Residential Settings</b>	
<b>Wards and communities affected:</b> All	<b>Key Decision:</b> None
<b>Report of:</b> Dan Jones, Strategic Lead, Child Looked After	
<b>Accountable Assistant Director:</b> Janet Simon, Assistant Director, Children’s Services and Early Help	
<b>Accountable Director:</b> Sheila Murphy, Corporate Director of Children’s Services	
<b>This report is</b> Public	

**Executive Summary**

The Government has commissioned a National Review of Schools for Children with Disabilities who are also registered as children’s homes. This is due to an investigation into the abusive treatment of children with disabilities placed at Wilsic and Fullerton Hall Schools. As part of this review all Local Authorities were directed to complete two urgent actions, summarised as:

1. To undertake Quality and Safety reviews on all children placed by the local authority in schools registered as children’s homes.
2. To undertake reviews of any Schools registered as Children’s Homes in their area where allegations had been made whether the local authority had children placed there or not.

Thurrock Council has completed the Quality and Safety reviews required in action one and Appendix 1 details this further.

In respect of the second action, Thurrock has no such registered schools within its local authority area.

The Quality and Safety Reviews identified some areas for improved oversight of Residential School placements but no children were found to be at a current risk of harm during the reviews.

**1. Recommendation(s)**

- 1.1 Members of the Corporate Parenting Committee are informed as to the outcomes of urgent actions one and two**

## **1.2 Members of the Corporate Parenting Committee are advised on the development work planned to develop our oversight of residential homes and schools for children**

### **2. Introduction and Background**

- 2.1 The vast majority of children are able to grow up in their families or family arrangements. Some children cannot remain at home due to the risk of harm they face. Other children cannot remain at home due to the impact of their disability or special educational needs. This latter group of children may require the services of a Specialist School that provides tailored education and residential care. Thurrock Council commissions such provision from private providers.
- 2.2 In March 2021, allegations were highlighted regarding two Specialist residential Schools, Fullerton House and Wilsic Hall schools in Doncaster. The allegations related to wide-spread abuse of children by staff employed there. Both schools are owned and operated by the Hesley Group. Local Authorities from all over the country made placements for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities at Wilsic Hall and Fullerton House.
- 2.3 The allegations were investigated, and sufficient evidence was found by Doncaster Council and Ofsted for Fullerton House and Wilsic to be closed and the children moved. Since then, there has been a significant Police investigation and Doncaster Council. The Government has commissioned a national review of residential schools for children with disabilities or complex health needs. The review has recently published its [‘Phase One’](#) Report and will publish a further report in the spring of 2023. The national review required all local authorities to take action in respect of two points detailed in Appendix one and in the original letter to Directors of Children’s Services (See Appendix 2).
- 2.4 As part of the ongoing review Thurrock Council, like all other local authorities, was asked to complete ‘Quality and Safety Reviews’ in addition to the checks that Thurrock Council routinely undertakes. Thurrock Council completed these reviews. Further detail on the actions taken and the outcomes are in the attached report.

### **3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options**

- 3.1 The report in Appendix 1 details how Thurrock Council has responded to urgent actions one and two. It also details the finding and further actions.
- 3.2 Members will note that one of the requirements set by the National Review is that the report is presented to the Corporate Parenting Committee for their review. To give some local context, Thurrock is currently supporting 3 children in such settings who are looked after. Each Child placed has an education and Health Care Plan which is overseen by the SEND service.

3.3 Looked after children have an allocated social worker, a care plan and an Independent Reviewing Officer. There are regular visits and review meetings to ensure the care plan is carried out and children are safe. These visits and meetings focus largely on the individual child and their experience of their placement. Placements are monitored via these visits and via monitoring visits by the Commissioning Team. All of these Specialist schools are inspected by and registered with Ofsted.

#### **4. Reasons for Recommendation**

4.1 Thurrock Council has responded to urgent actions one and two.

4.2 Thurrock Council has identified areas for improvement in the attached report.

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

5.1 None

#### **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**

There are no immediate financial implications of this report.

##### **7.2 Legal**

Implications verified by: **Daniel Longe**  
**Principal Solicitor, Children and Adult  
Safeguarding and Education on behalf of  
Thurrock Council**

The functions of local authorities in relation to children who are 'looked after' by them are set out in the Children Act 1989 and associated regulations and guidance. Specifically in relation to this information page, the principal regulation is the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulation 2010. The guidance which underpins this regulation can be found [here](#).

Local Authorities are under a statutory duty to secure the welfare and safety of children who are looked after by a local authority, regardless of whether such children are placed within or outside of the borough.

There are also strict regulations relating to the placement of children in regulated placements. The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2021 specifically prohibits local authorities from placing a child under the age of sixteen in an unregulated placement. Therefore, care must be taken not only to ensure that a placement is meeting the needs of the child, but also that they are not unregulated placements unless expressly sanctioned by an order of the High Court under the Inherent Jurisdiction.

Furthermore, additional care must be taken to scrutinise whether the children's liberty are not being deprived and if a deprivation is necessary that appropriate High Court Authorisations are obtained to deprive them of their liberty under the Inherent Jurisdiction. Care must also be taken to ensure that there are appropriate procedures and training in place for staff in dealing with children with complex needs and appropriate training for undertaking restraints and restrictions where necessary and where the requisite court authorisation is in place and are not exceeded.

There is also a duty upon local authorities to arrange for their looked after children to be visited wherever they may be placed. This statutory requirement is set at a minimum of 3 monthly intervals in accordance with reg 28 of the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulation 2010. Indeed, the letter from the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel, specifically requests that there be a visit to each child as part of the urgent review that local authorities have been requested to undertake.

You are being invited to consider the result of the urgent investigations requested of Thurrock Council of its children placed in Residential Schools registered as children's home. The outcome must be in line with the statutory regulations outlined above, being that the placements must be regulated and that they are adequately meeting the welfare and safety needs of the borough's looked after children who are placed there and that any deprivations are authorised by the High Court and that any restrictions are not excessive, and that the conditions of the children are not neglectful or inadequate.



### 7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Roxanne Scanlon**  
**Community Engagement and Project  
Monitoring Officer**

The Service is committed to practice, which promotes inclusion and diversity, and will carry out its duties in accordance with the Equality Act 2010 and related Codes of Practice and Anti-discriminatory policy.

The service recognises that a range of communities and groups of people may have experienced obstruction or the impact of prejudice when accessing services including Social Care and commissioned placements. Both Services are committed to support all children in the care of Thurrock Council to access Initial Health assessments, individual arrangements are made where required to meet needs and address individual concerns.

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

- Impact on Looked After Children
- Impact on Children with Disabilities

### 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):

- [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1113508/safeguarding\\_children\\_with\\_disabilities\\_in\\_residential\\_care\\_homes\\_phase\\_1\\_report.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1113508/safeguarding_children_with_disabilities_in_residential_care_homes_phase_1_report.pdf)

### 9. Appendices to the report

- **Appendix 1** - Response to Urgent Actions 1 & 2 of National Review – Children with disabilities and complex health needs placed in residential settings
- **Appendix 2** - National Review – Children with disabilities and complex health needs placed in residential settings – Urgent Actions

### Report Author:

Dan Jones Strategic Lead, Child Looked After

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**Response to Urgent Actions 1 & 2 of National Review – Children with disabilities and complex health needs placed in residential settings**

## Introduction

The Child Safeguarding Practice and Review Panel is undertaking a review into the safety of children with disabilities placed in specialist residential settings. The [Phase 1 Report](#) of this national review; *seeks to make sense of how and why a significant number of children with disabilities and complex needs came to suffer very serious abuse and neglect whilst living in three privately provided residential settings in the Doncaster area. The report brings into sharp relief how the voices and experiences of this group of children are too often marginalised, misrecognised, and hidden from public sight.*

All Local Authorities have been contacted by the Panel with two urgent actions for additional assurance about the safety and well-being of children living in similar types of placements.

1. Local Authorities to undertake 'Quality and Safety Reviews' for all children with complex needs and disabilities placed in residential specialist Schools registered as children's homes by 23/11/2022. In response.
2. Host Local Authority Designated Officers (LADO) for such specialist placements should review complaints and concerns for the last three years and ensure placing Local Authorities are updated of any outstanding enquiries regarding the homes.

## Review Process

Quality and Safety Reviews were completed for children who met the criteria as set out by the Panel. In addition we completed quality and safety reviews for children with a disability and/or and Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) placed in other residential settings.

The Panel set out areas which needed to be fully explored and addressed as below:

- *Children's communication plans are in place, updated and there is evidence of how they are used.*
- *Children have positive behaviour plans in place, and staff are trained and supported to use them.*

- *Children have accurate, up to date medication records and medications are securely stored and that there is appropriate use of medication (e.g., consider use of Pro Re Nata (PRN) medication).*
- *Children's physical and mental health needs are met and understood.*
- *Children are attending school and have clear progress targets.*
- *Children are supported to have the maximum contact with those who care about them, including parents/carers and siblings.*

*Reviewers will need to ensure they hear the voice of the child and know what their day-to-day experience of care is like by:*

- *Using the methodology of the communication plan to obtain the maximum opportunity of hearing directly about the child's experience, (this must include seeing the child face to face).*
- *Talking directly to families about the child and about how they experience the child's placement.*
- *Talking to key professionals in the child's life and ask about their experience of placement.*
- *Ensuring the child is seen in both home and school (where the child returns home).*

*Reviewers will need to ensure that the child is receiving a safe, quality placement by:*

- *Checking if any safeguarding issues have been raised and, if so, that these have been followed up appropriately. This will include looking at all notifications in the last 12 months and all physical intervention records and if necessary, ensure appropriate follow up is in place.*
- *Assuring themselves that liberty protection safeguards are in place where needed.*
- *Looking at staffing records to ensure children have the ratios agreed by the contract.*
- *Assuring themselves that all outstanding actions from Annual Reviews have been completed.*

All of the above actions were completed, reports completed for each child identified, and no current serious concerns or child protection matters were identified.

The review process began with scoping and confirming our cohort of children with complex needs and disabilities placed in residential specialist Schools registered as children's homes.

The Quality and Safety Reviews were led by Thurrock's Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO's) with support from key partners in line with the Panel's guidance. This provided independent completion of the reviews by skilled officers who had a clear escalation route. Where possible the Quality and Safety Reviews were completed as part of the CLA review process but where this was not possible the IRO took additional steps to complete the review outside of this process. Parents and providers were written to in preparation for each of the reviews

As part of the review feedback was sought from:

- The child
- The child's Parents
- The child's Social Worker
- SEND (Special Educational Needs & Disabilities)
- Health Partners

The IRO reviewed the Regulation 44 visits and records held by the relevant homes to ensure an overview of the children's experience was obtained.

In response to the second action, Thurrock does not currently have any residential specialist schools registered as children's homes. Thurrock's LADO was provided with details of children who fell within the scope of our review and contacted the relevant

authority's LADO for the children identified in response to the first action and sought re-assurance and identified no outstanding concerns

No new concerns about the conduct of a member of the workforce were identified during the review process in any of the settings which required Thurrock to share concerns with the host Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO). Two Reviews identified historic LADO referrals which Thurrock were aware of and which have been concluded with no further action required.

### **Review Outcomes**

The Quality and Safety Reviews largely identified good care that meets needs.

- Feedback from parents and professionals around the child expressed satisfaction with the care and education provided in the current settings.
- No current child protection concerns were identified during the Quality and Safety Reviews.
- There are no specialist schools registered as children's homes in Thurrock.
- No concerns were identified and notified by host authority LADO's regarding the settings in their areas where Thurrock children are in placement.
- Supervision of staff is timely and there is management oversight of incidents in placements.
- Reg 44 visits were generally positive. Where a child was placed in Wales, a Reg 80 report was seen and reviewed and was positive.
- Risk assessments for children were up to date
- Behaviour plans were in place and agreed with parents
- Contact for children was generally positive but the impact of COVID restrictions were noted.

- Complaints and incidents of concern appear to have been appropriately reported to the relevant agencies including the LADO and appropriate procedures followed. However the Review highlighted those referrals of concern may not always be known by the placing authority of other children in placement who are not deemed the subject of concern.
- The recording and dispensation of medication was noted as a concern due to errors made by staff during this Review in more than one child. These incidents appear to have been dealt with appropriately but highlighted a concern about how medication is managed in these arrangements and the need for further training in respect of dispensing medication.
- One provision had six notifications to Ofsted, one of which triggered a visit by the regulator the outcome indicated that these were dealt with appropriately by the provider.
- Staffing recruitment was identified as an issue. One home limited placements in response and the other used managers within the organisation which was positive as it provided continuity, but this was not sustainable long term.
- One parent expressed some concern about cultural matching of staff within the placement.

The review highlighted the following actions and key learning and development points to assist in improving practice in commissioning and monitoring such placements:

1. CLA Reviews to consider the wider functioning of the home which may have an impact on children in the setting and to embed the quality and safety review process into the child looked after review process.
2. Review to take place to look at the consistency in performance management in the areas of commissioning checks, and contract monitoring. This should include multi-agency feedback, commissioning visits and oversight.
3. During matching and reviews, how placements are able to meet the cultural needs of children should be explored.
4. A health led pathway to monitor and assess processes in place where the residential placement is responsible for dispensing medication



5. Placing Authority LADO to be advised when a child is placed in a specialist school which is a registered children's home and relevant checks to be completed with the host authority LADO.
6. A better understanding of the range of LADO referrals made to the Host authority when they do not relate to the placing authority's child but do relate to standards of care within homes.
7. This report and lessons from the Quality and Safety Review to be shared with the Local Safeguarding Children's Partnership (LSCP) and an action plan to be developed.
8. This report to be shared with Thurrock's Corporate Parenting Committee at the next available date.

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Dear Director of Children's Services

**National Review – Children with disabilities and complex health needs placed in residential settings**

**Urgent action required**

As you will be aware, the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel ("The Panel") is currently undertaking a national review into safeguarding children with disabilities and complex health needs in residential settings. The published Terms of Reference for the Review are [here](#).

The Review is considering the experiences of children placed in three specialist independent residential settings located in the Doncaster area (Fullerton House, Wilsic Hall and Wheatley House) and operated by the Hesley Group. The Review is being led by Dr Susan Tranter, supported by Dame Christine Lenehan, Director of the Council for Disabled Children (CDC), for the National Children's Bureau (NCB). The Review is being completed in two phases. We plan to publish our Phase One report in the autumn.

For the sake of clarity, the Review and this letter is focussed on children with disabilities and complex health needs who are looked after children and who are currently placed in residential specialist schools which are registered as children's homes. It is estimated that there are around 1,700 children nationally who would meet these criteria. This review is considering allegations of widespread abuse (and which are subject to a live criminal and associated investigation). We expect that families of children living in similar settings may rightly be concerned about the safety and welfare of their children if and when they learn about what has happened in the Hesley provision in Doncaster.

Phase One has considered the experiences of children placed in the Hesley provision in Doncaster. This includes developing an understanding of how children came to be placed in these settings, what happened to them and what factors and issues may have contributed to their experiences of abuse and neglect. Phase Two will consider the broader safeguarding needs of this group of children and young people and will make recommendations to

improve safeguarding policy and practice. Work on Phase Two will commence in late autumn and conclude by March 2023.

I have recently written to the Secretary of State for Education, providing him with an update on the emergent findings from Phase One of the Review and drawing his attention to three urgent actions that the Panel believes to be necessary. Responsibility for two of these urgent actions lies with Directors of Children's Services (DCSs) and the third action lies with OFSTED. This letter is therefore to advise you of the two actions that fall to DCSs and to ask for your cooperation in initiating them in the suggested timescale. This letter also provides you, for information, with a brief explanation of that third action.

Children in care with disabilities and complex health needs in specialist residential settings should be living in safe and good quality placements. However, the serious abuse and neglect revealed by this Review and the related criminal and associated investigation means that there is a need for additional assurance about the safety and well-being of children living in similar types of placements.

The Panel hope that you will work in collaboration with your local safeguarding partners, Integrated Care Systems (ICS) children's leads, NHSE regional leads or regional teams, the Department for Education (DfE) and the Panel to undertake the two relevant actions detailed below. We believe that these actions are essential to provide assurance that other children living in similar types of residential placements are safe and are receiving the most appropriate and high-quality care.

### **Urgent Action One**

- I. Directors of Children's Services to ensure that Quality and Safety Reviews are completed for all children with complex needs and disabilities currently living within placements with the same registrations (i.e., residential specialist schools registered as children's homes) to ensure they are in safe, quality placements. Please see Appendix A for a list of relevant points and questions to support these Reviews. These reviews can be incorporated into routine care review planning processes but should ensure that all the key points and questions identified in Appendix A are properly addressed. You will wish to ensure that the Reviews are carried out by and involve appropriate professionals. Reviews should apply to all children in such settings, that is those who are resident for part of the year as well as those who are resident for all of the year.
- II. This action should be led and overseen by the placing (i.e., home) local authority DCS. If a Review identifies concerns about the conduct of a member of the workforce, the placing local authority may need to share the concerns with the host Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) if the threshold has been met.
- III. DCSs are asked to provide an overview report on key findings and issues to both their local corporate parenting board and to local

safeguarding partners, together with assurance that the Quality and Safety Reviews have been completed.

- IV. DCSs are also asked to send a copy of this overview report on the Quality and Safety Reviews to the relevant DfE regional improvement support lead (RISL) (see Appendix B for a list). The Panel's national review has highlighted how information may be held locally but that it is also important to develop a fuller and more comprehensive picture of quality in these type of placements. This will also allow for regional and national assurance that these actions have been undertaken.

### **Urgent Action Two**

In relation to this group of children (as defined above), all Directors of Children's Services should ensure:

- I. That the host authority LADO for each individual establishment reviews all information on any LADO referrals, complaints and concerns over the last 3 years relating to the workforce in such establishments to ensure these have been appropriately actioned.
- II. The host authority LADO should then contact any local authorities who currently have children placed in the establishments in their area if there are any outstanding enquiries being carried out regarding staff employed in the home.

You are asked to confirm that urgent action two has been taken through the overview report that you will be providing to the DfE Regional Improvement Support Lead on Action One above. DfE in turn will confirm to the Panel that the Reviews have taken place.

### **Timescales for Actions One and Two**

The two actions above should be completed within **three months** from the date of this letter. We would then expect that the overview reports are completed and shared with local corporate parenting boards, safeguarding partners and your Regional Improvement Support Lead (RISL) for your area (see list at Appendix B) within a month of the completion of the actions.

### **Urgent Action Three**

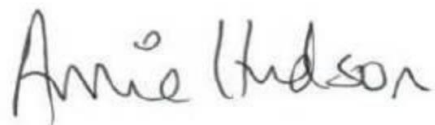
You will also want to note that Ofsted are being asked to conduct an immediate analysis of their evidence around workforce sufficiency focusing on its suitability, training, and support. More information will follow in the Panel's Phase One report due to be published in the autumn.

I am copying this letter to the Chairs of the Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) and the Business Manager for each area's Safeguarding Partners. I would request that the Business Manager forwards a copy of this letter to the relevant statutory partners. I would also request that you forward a copy of this letter to your local authority's Chief Executive for their information.

If you have any queries on any of the above, please email the relevant RISL for your area (as they have been fully briefed and can support you with any questions).

Thank you for your co-operation in this matter.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Annie Hudson". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly informal style.

---

Annie Hudson  
Chair of the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel

## Appendix A

The Quality and Safety Reviews will ensure that:

- Children's communication plans are in place, updated and there is evidence of how they are used.
- Children have positive behaviour plans in place, and staff are trained and supported to use them.
- Children have accurate, up to date medication records and medications are securely stored and that there is appropriate use of medication (e.g., consider use of Pro Re Nata (PRN) medication).
- Children's physical and mental health needs are met and understood.
- Children are attending school and have clear progress targets.
- Children are supported to have the maximum contact with those who care about them, including parents/carers and siblings.

Reviewers will need to;

Ensure they hear the voice of the child and know what their day-to-day experience of care is like by:

- Using the methodology of the communication plan to obtain the maximum opportunity of hearing directly about the child's experience, (this must include seeing the child face to face).
- Talking directly to families about the child and about how they experience the child's placement.
- Talking to key professionals in the child's life and ask about their experience of placement.
- Ensuring the child is seen in both home and school.

Reviewers will need to ensure that the child is receiving a safe, quality placement by:

- Checking if any safeguarding issues have been raised and, if so, that these have been followed up appropriately. This will include looking at all notifications in the last 12 months and all physical intervention records and if necessary, ensure appropriate follow up is in place.

- Assuring themselves that liberty protection safeguards are in place where needed.
- Looking at staffing records to ensure children have the ratios agreed by the contract.
- Assuring themselves that all outstanding actions from Annual Reviews have been completed.



## APPENDIX B

Names and contact details for the Regional Improvement Support Lead

<b>Region</b>	<b>RISL</b>	<b>Contact</b>
London	Céline Dignan Shannen Grant	<a href="mailto:Celine.dignan@education.gov.uk">Celine.dignan@education.gov.uk</a> <a href="mailto:Shannen.grant@education.gov.uk">Shannen.grant@education.gov.uk</a>
North West	Ivan West	<a href="mailto:Ivan.west@education.gov.uk">Ivan.west@education.gov.uk</a>
East of England	Jo Page	<a href="mailto:Jo.page@education.gov.uk">Jo.page@education.gov.uk</a>
South East	David Myers	<a href="mailto:David.myers@education.gov.uk">David.myers@education.gov.uk</a>
South West	Genevieve Cox	<a href="mailto:Genevieve.cox@education.gov.uk">Genevieve.cox@education.gov.uk</a>
North East	Sarah King	<a href="mailto:Sarah.king@education.gov.uk">Sarah.king@education.gov.uk</a>
Yorkshire and the Humber	Kate Gillan	<a href="mailto:Kate.gillan@education.gov.uk">Kate.gillan@education.gov.uk</a>
East Midlands	Stewart Bembridge	<a href="mailto:Stewart.bembridge@education.gov.uk">Stewart.bembridge@education.gov.uk</a>
West Midlands	Rachel Newton	<a href="mailto:Rachel.newton@education.gov.uk">Rachel.newton@education.gov.uk</a>

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# Work Programme

**Committee:** Corporate Parenting

**Year:** 2022/2023

**Dates of Meetings:** 19 July 2021, 6 September 2021, 4 January 2022 and 21 March 2022

Topic	Lead Officer	Requested by Officer/Member
<b>19 July 2022</b>		
Childrens Social Care Performance 2021-22	Mandy Moore	Officers
Children Looked After and Care Leaver Sufficiency Strategy Update	Catherine Wilson/Dan Jones	Officers
Corporate Parenting Strategy	Janet Simon	Officers
Report on Initial Health Assessments for Looked After Children	Dan Jones	Officers
Inspire - Head Start Housing: Supporting Care Leavers	Kate Kozlova-Boran	Officers
Work Programme	Democratic Services Officer	Standard Item
<b>6 September 2022</b>		
Children's Social Care Performance 2022-23	Mandy Moore	Officers
Adoption Statement of Purpose	Dan Jones	Officers
After Care Service Report	Luke Froment	Officers
Joint Housing Protocol for Care Leavers	Dan Jones /Ben Tovey	Officers
Children in Care Council Update	Open Door	Officers

Performance Report on Initial Health Assessments for Looked After Children	Dan Jones	Members
Corporate Parenting Committee Annual Report 2021/2022	Democratic Services	Members
Work Programme	Democratic Services Officer	Standard Item
<b>4 January 2023</b>		
Children's Social Care Performance	Mandy Moore	Officers
Independent Reviewing Officer – Annual Report	Ruth Murdock	Officers
CLA Health Report	Health Colleagues (Nikola Rickard/ Sharon Hall)	Officers
Annual Report of the Virtual Schools	Keeley Pullen	Officers
IHA & NELFT Report	Dan Jones/ Helen Farmer	Members
Children in Care Council Update	Chair Children in Care Council & Thurrock Open Door	Officers
Review into the Safety of Children in Residential School Settings	Dan Jones	Officers
Work Programme	Democratic Services Officer	Standard Item
<b>21 March 2023</b>		
Children's Social Care Performance	Mandy Moore	Officers
Mental Health Report	Tina Russel	Officers
Work Programme	Democratic Services Officer	Standard Item