

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

Executive Summary

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

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

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

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

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

1. Recommendation(s)

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

1.2 Note the impact of COVID 19 on performance.

2. Introduction and Background

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

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

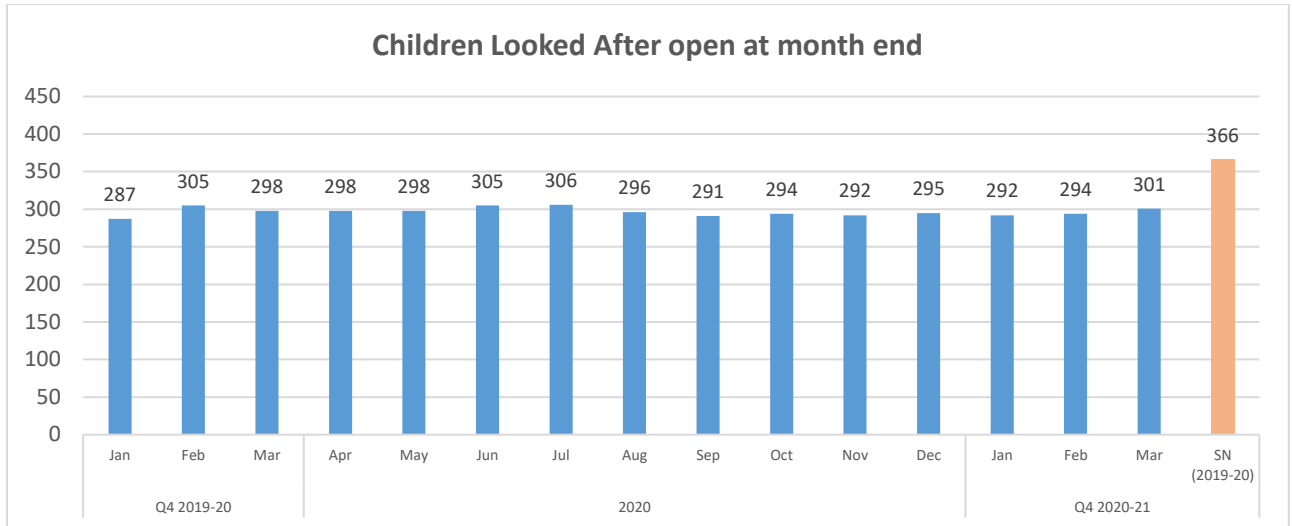
2.3 This data has been presented and discussed with the Children & Families Performance Group.

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

3. Performance Data for Children Looked After

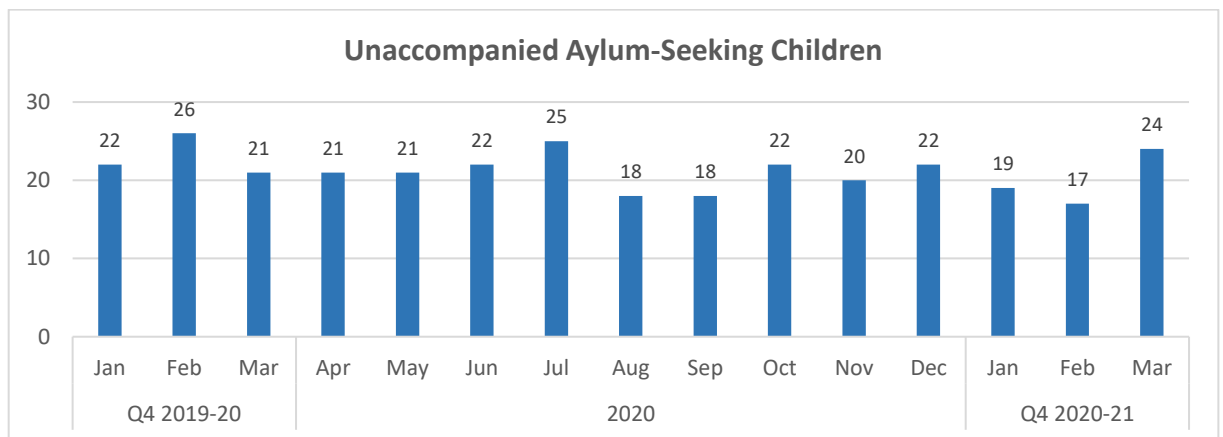
3.1 Number of Children Looked After (CLA)

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



3.2 Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC)

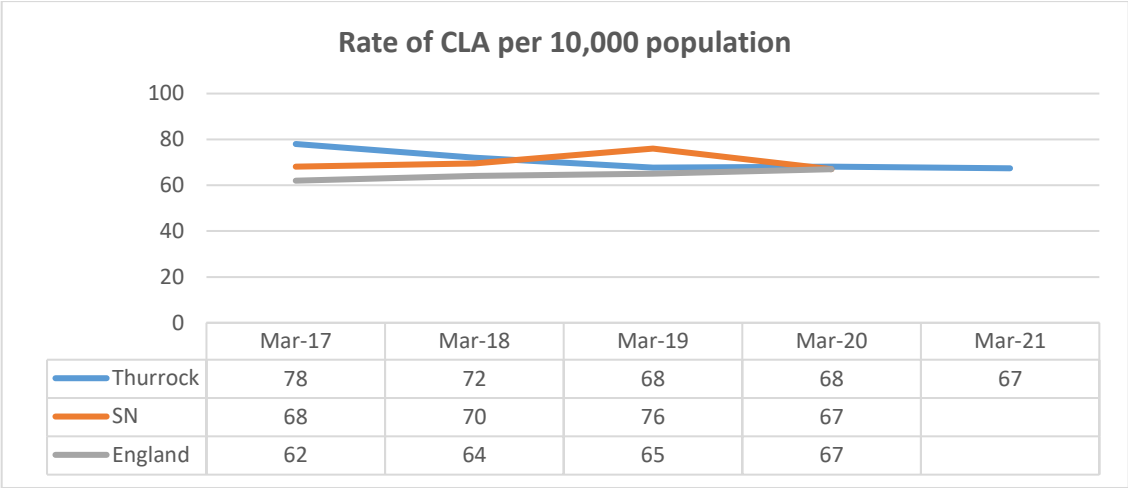
UASC are a subset of the Children Looked After number above. Local Authorities through agreement have determined a simple formula to ensure a fair distribution of the responsibility for looking after unaccompanied children. Each authority's ceiling for UASC is 0.07% based on an analysis of total child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



3.3 The Rate of CLA per 10,000 population

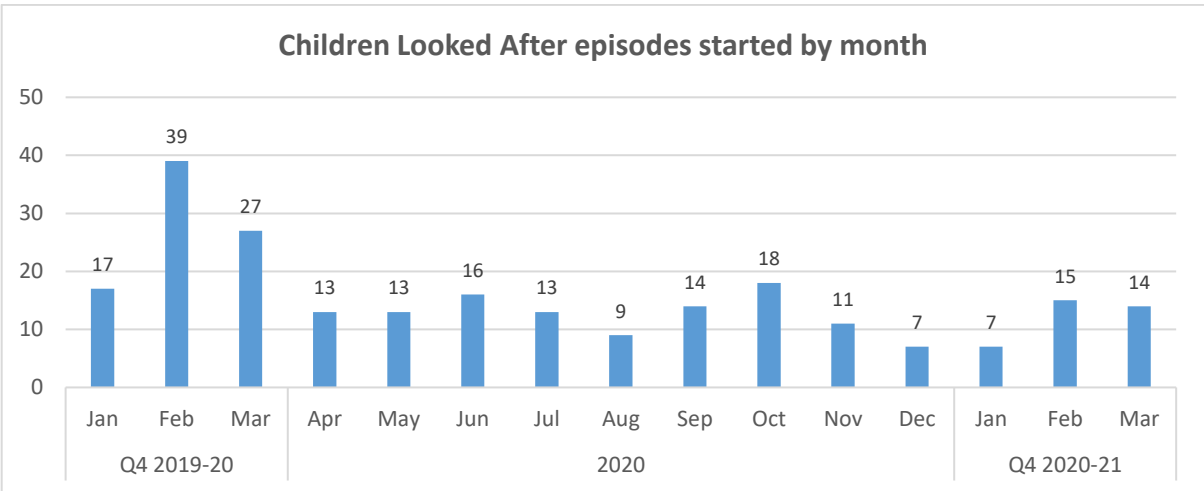
The graph below shows the rate of Children Looked After per 10,000 population of under 18 year olds in Thurrock. At the end of March 2021 there were 301

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



3.4 CLA episodes started in month

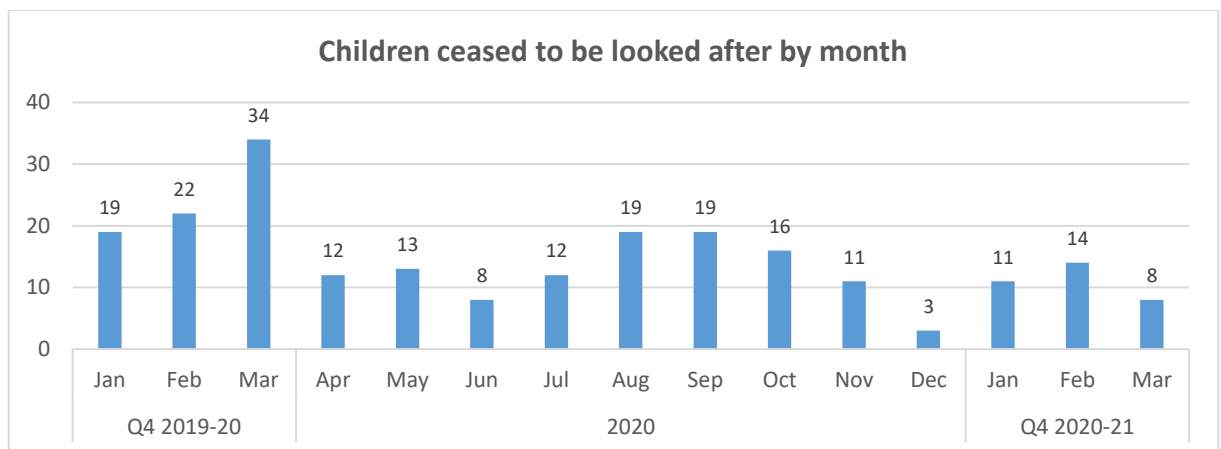
It is normal for the numbers of children entering care to fluctuate. The fluctuation and the relatively small numbers make it difficult to identify significant trends. However, there has been a decrease in the number of children entering care since the start of the pandemic. For example, 36 children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



3.5 CLA episodes ended in month

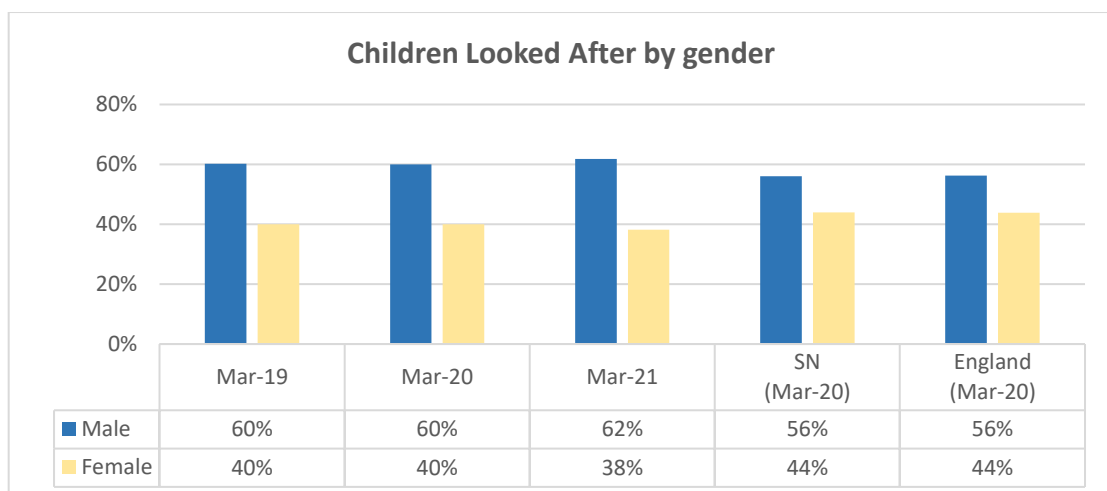
It is normal for the number of children leaving care to fluctuate. The fluctuation and the relatively small numbers make it difficult to identify significant trends. However, there has been a decrease in the number of children leaving care (and entering care) since the start of the pandemic. Between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

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



3.6 CLA by gender

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

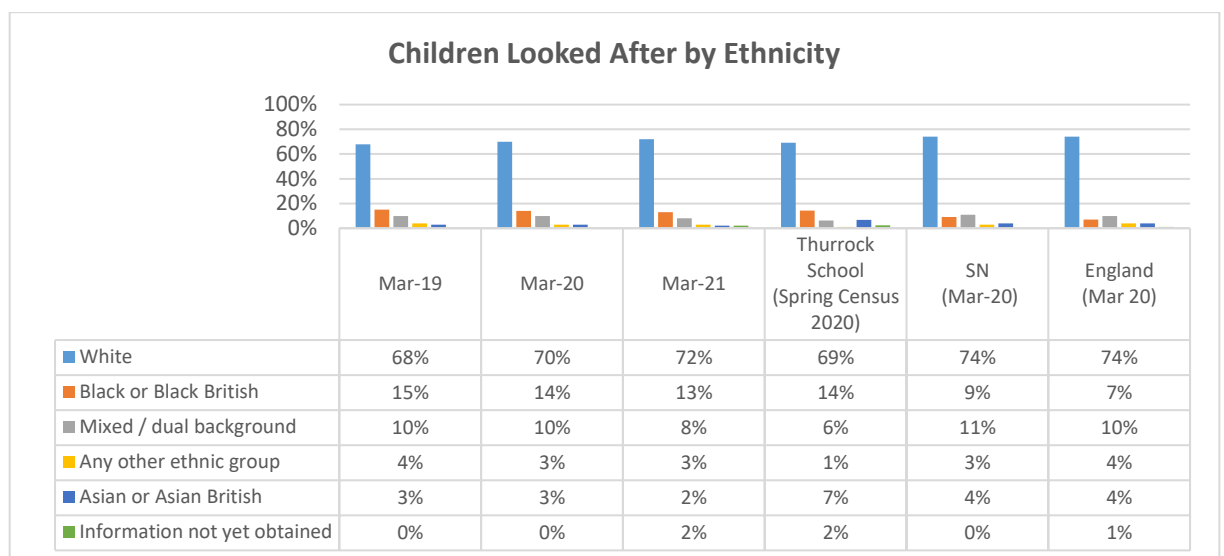


3.7 CLA by ethnicity

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

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

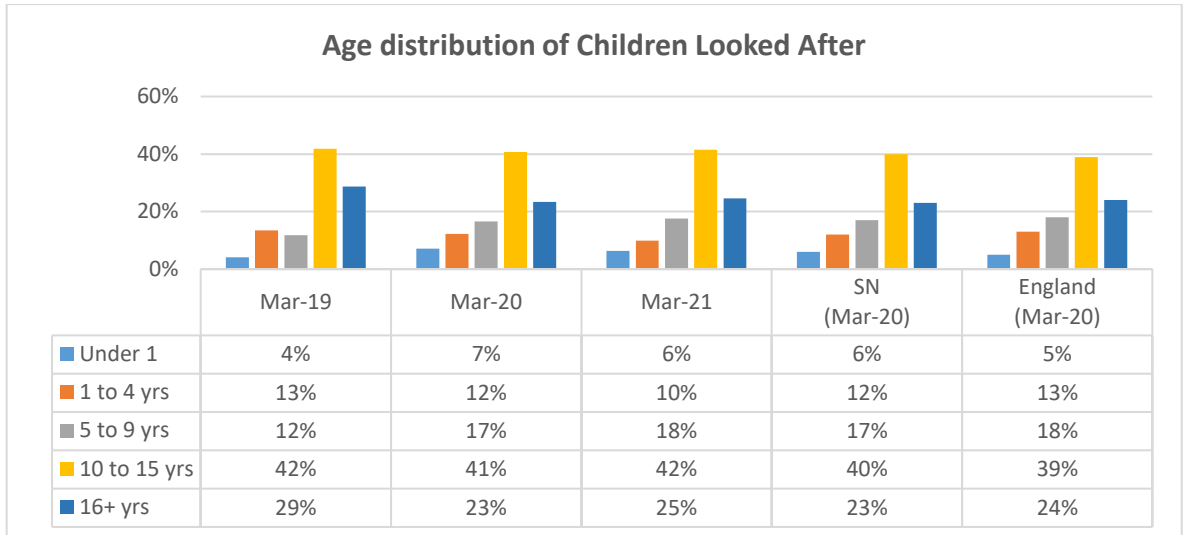
While the numbers of Children Looked After who are Asian/Asian British and Black/Black British have slightly decreased since March 2019, there have been no particular issues influencing this change.



3.8 CLA age profile

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

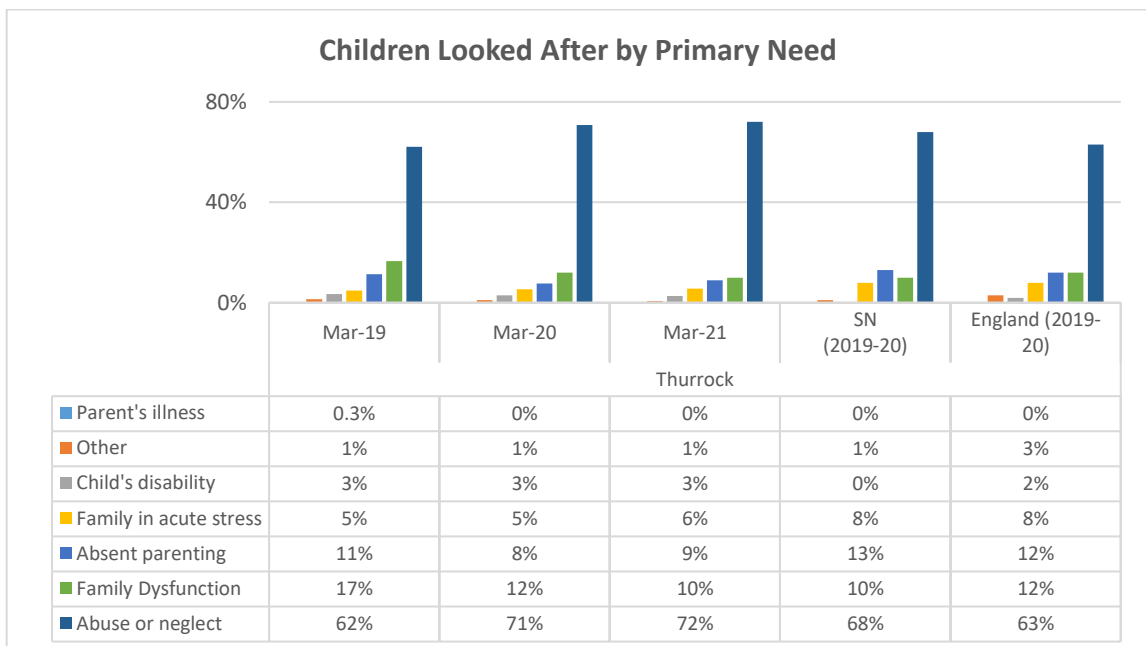
This has partly been caused by delays in final court hearings. Children are not able to move to their final permanent placement (SGO, Adoption) where court proceedings are continuing.



3.9 CLA by Category of Need

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

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



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

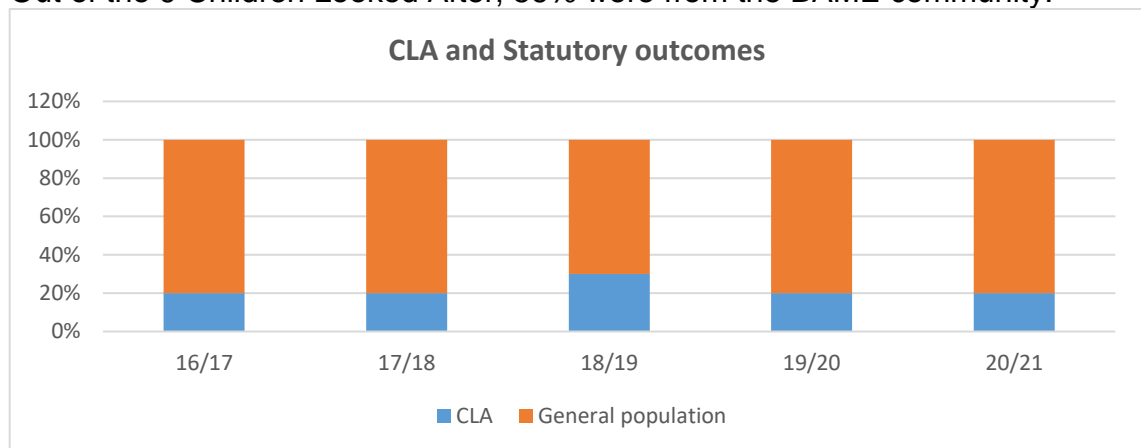
4. Number of CLA open to Youth Offending Service

4.1 Statutory Interventions

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

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

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



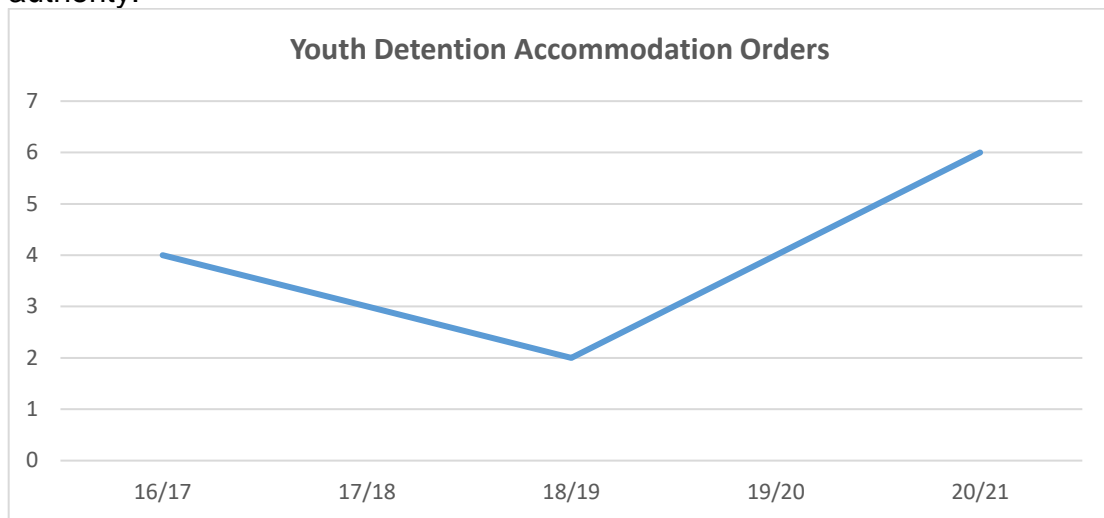
The above graph represents the percentage of Children Looked After versus the total number of young people in the Youth Justice System for the last five years. Despite an increase from 20% to 30% in 2018-19 the numbers of Children Looked After has been relatively static at around 20%. There were no notable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

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

4.2 Youth Detention Accommodation

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

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



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

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

4.3 Out of court disposal panel

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

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

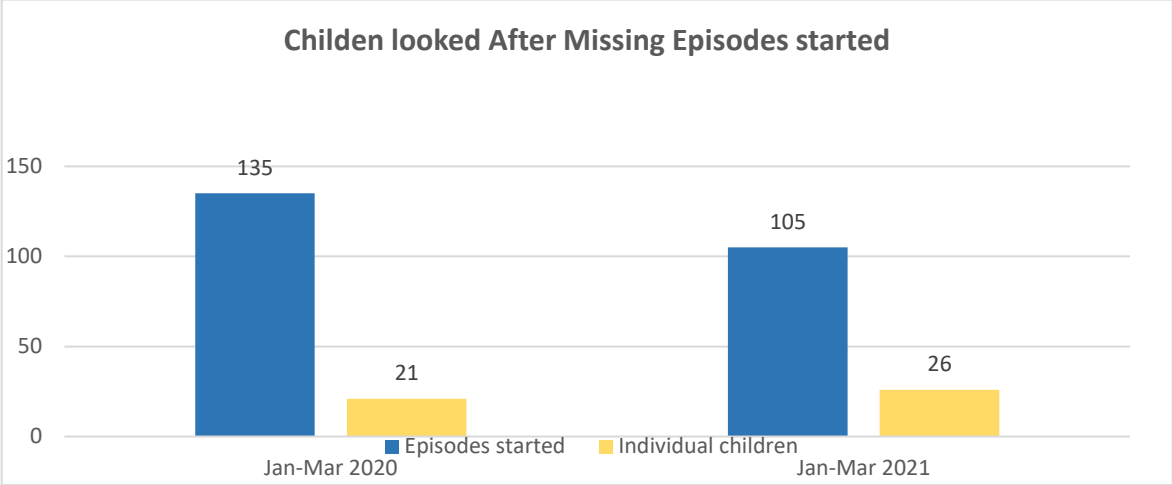
5. CLA missing episodes started

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

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

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

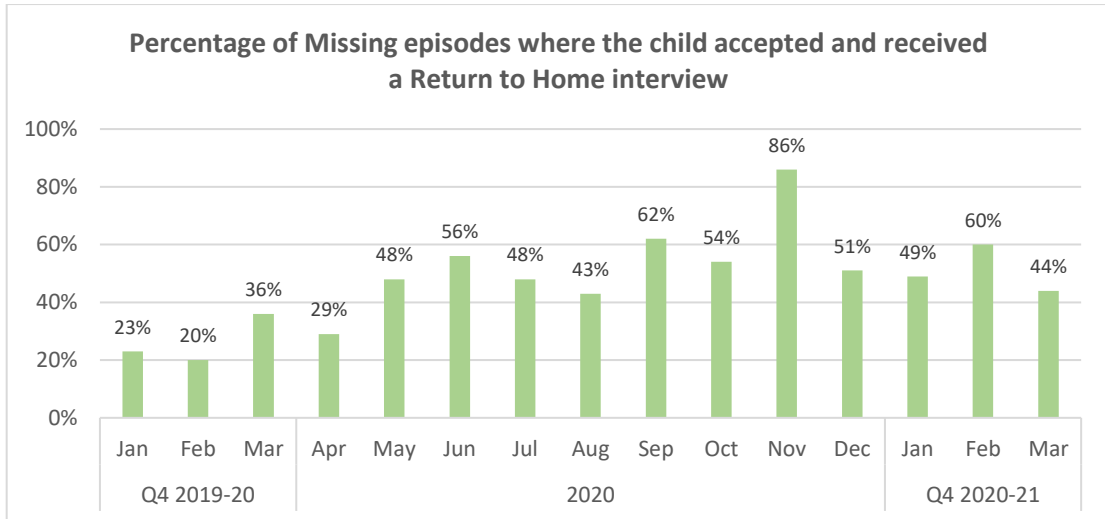
There has been a strong focus on Thurrock missing children and good joint working with the multi-agency partnership. There is a weekly missing meeting with partners that includes Essex Police and liaison with Thurrock Community Safety colleagues. A Contextual Safeguarding approach has been embedded which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



5.1 CLA return to home interview

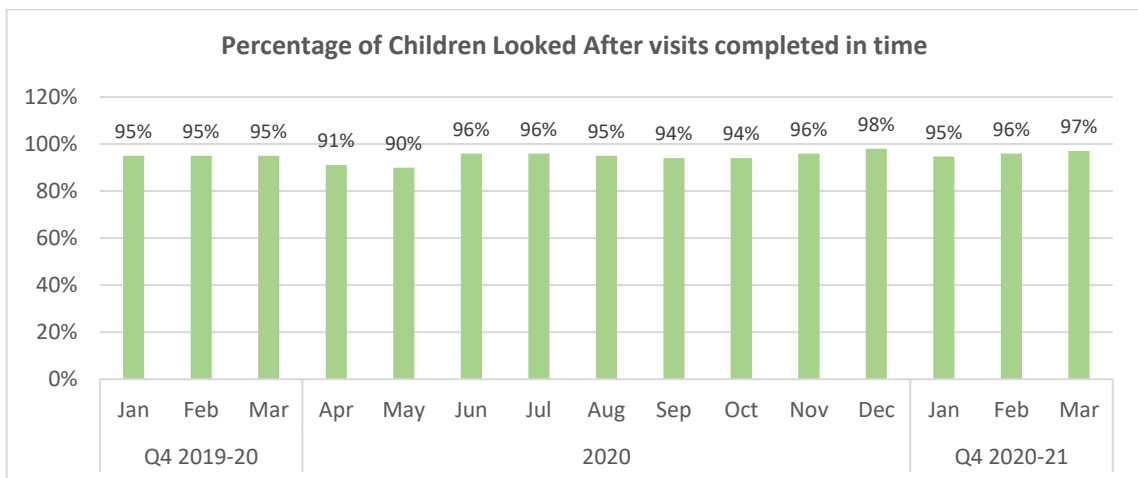
Since 1 April 2020, Inspire Youth Hub have been commissioned to undertake independent Return Home Interviews (RHI). All children are offered a RHI within 72 hours following each missing event, with the aim of understanding the young person’s circumstances and the reasons why they go missing. Key Workers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

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



5.2 Timeliness of social worker visits

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

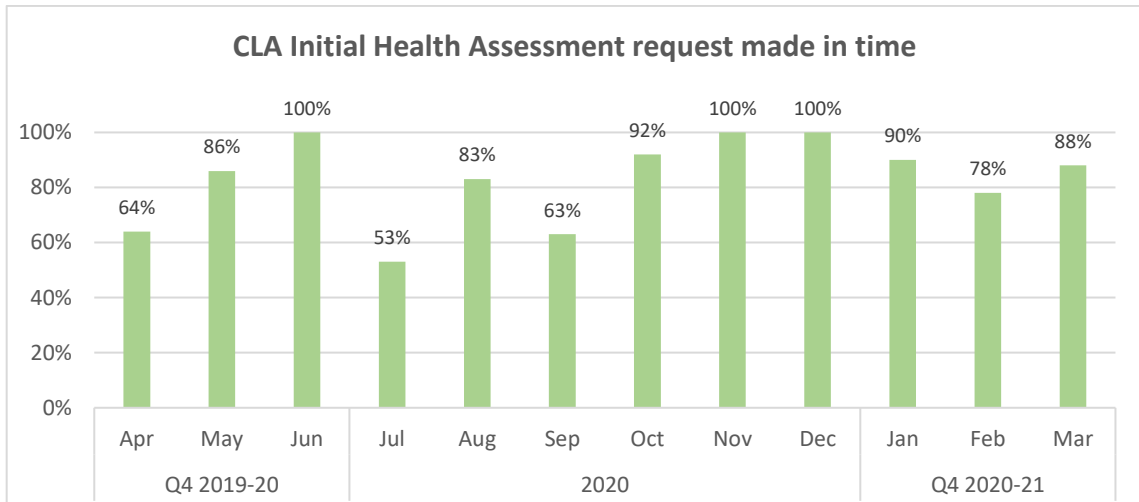


5.3 CLA Initial Health Assessments (IHA)

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

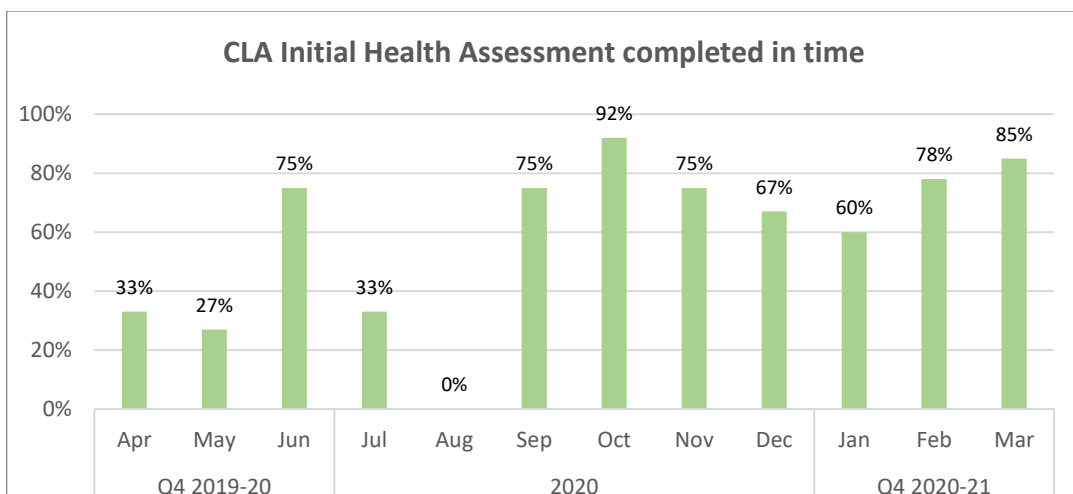
there is no court order which gives the Local Authority responsibility for consenting to health care. There is a weekly IHA tracking meeting to ensure that there is a focus on meeting the 5 day target to notify Health that a child has become looked after and to ensure that an Initial Health Assessment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

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



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

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



5.4 CLA in Education

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

5.5 CLA Strengths & Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ)

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

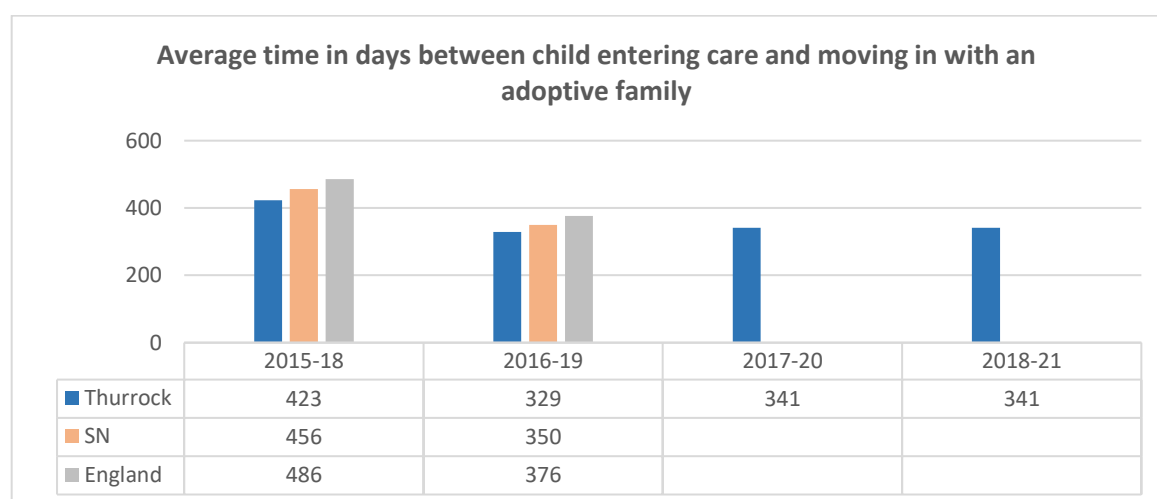
6. Number of children adopted

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

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

6.1 Timeliness of Adoption

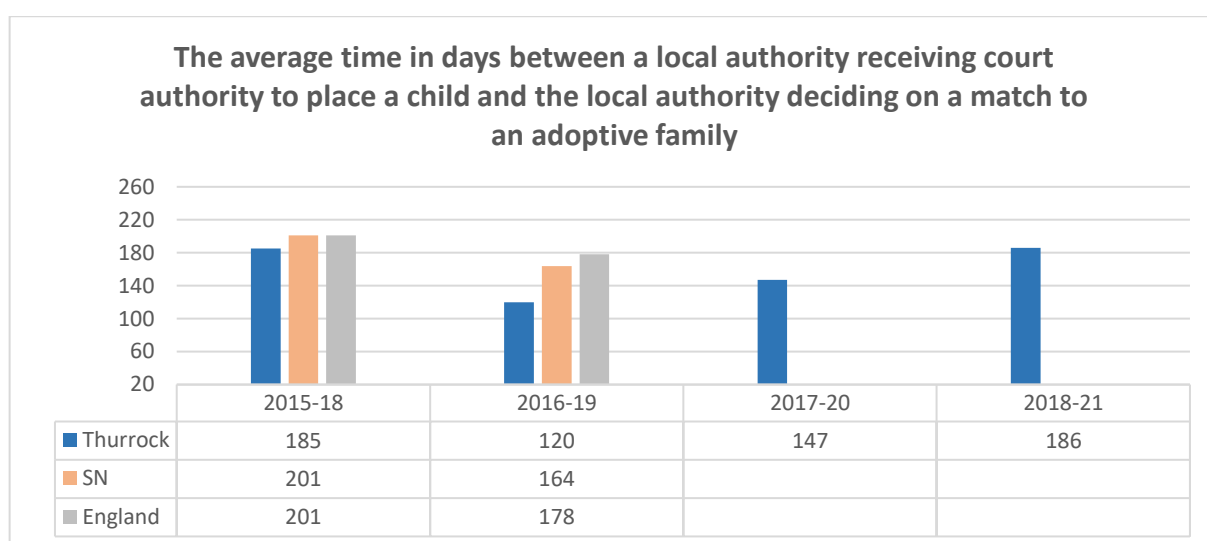
This measure is the average length of time from the child entering care to moving in with an adoptive family. The performance is currently good at 341 days.



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

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

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



6.2 CLA permanency

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

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

6.3 CLA placement distance

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

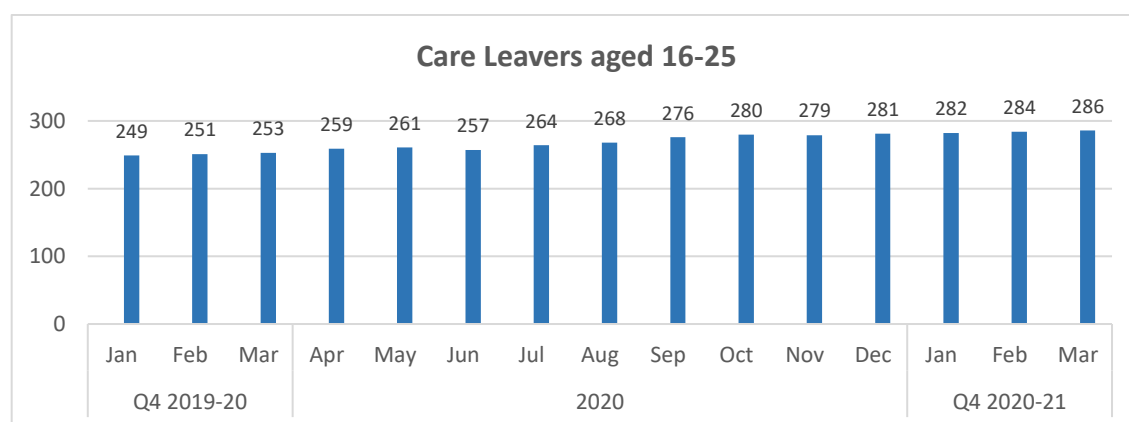
7. Care Leaving Service

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

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

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

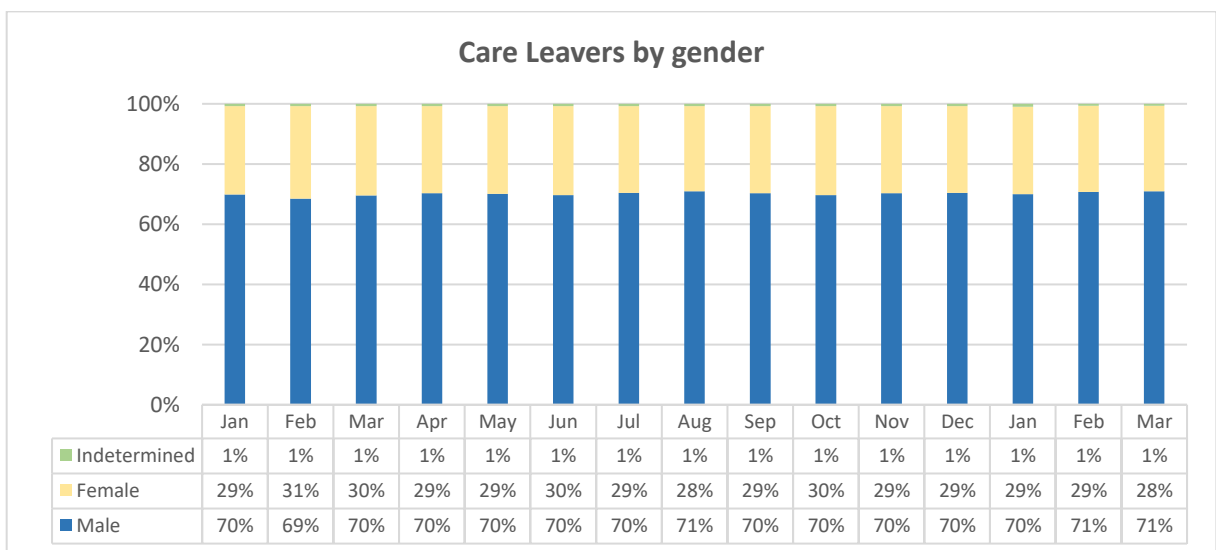
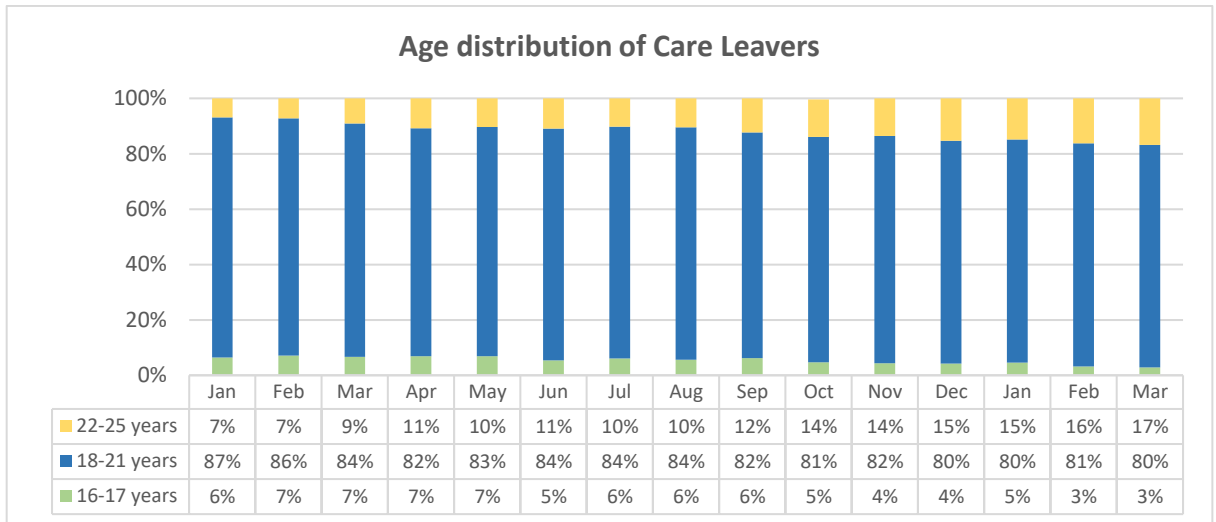
The graph below shows the total number of Young People age 16-25 years who are in receipt of a Care Leaving service. The numbers are increasing and this is in part due to legislative changes that placed additional responsibilities upon Care Leaving services (Children and Social Work Act 2017). Section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



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

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

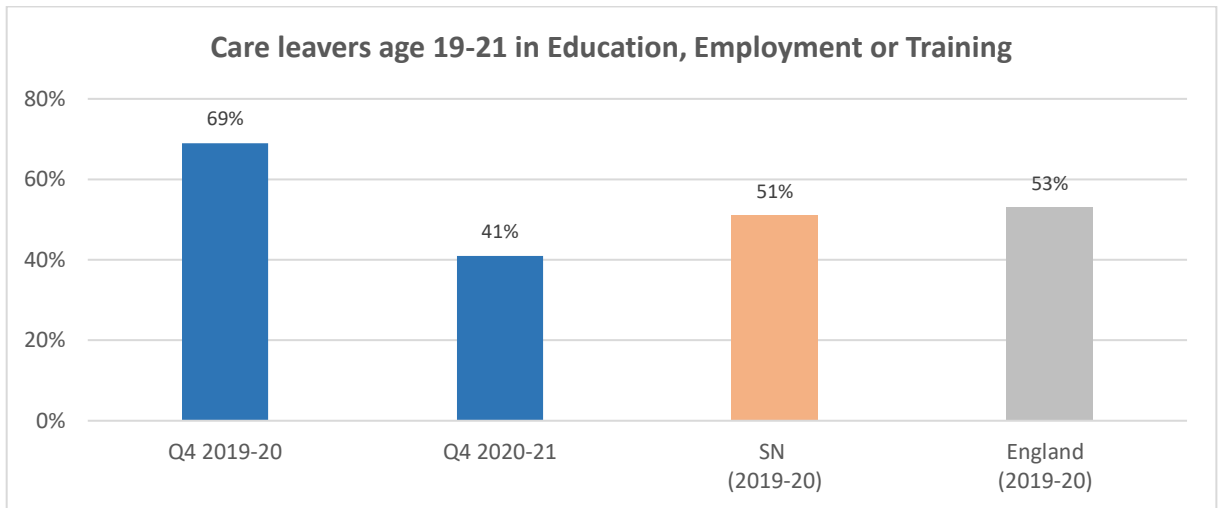
The charts below show the Care Leaver cohort between January 2020 and March 2021, broken down by age groups and gender.



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

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

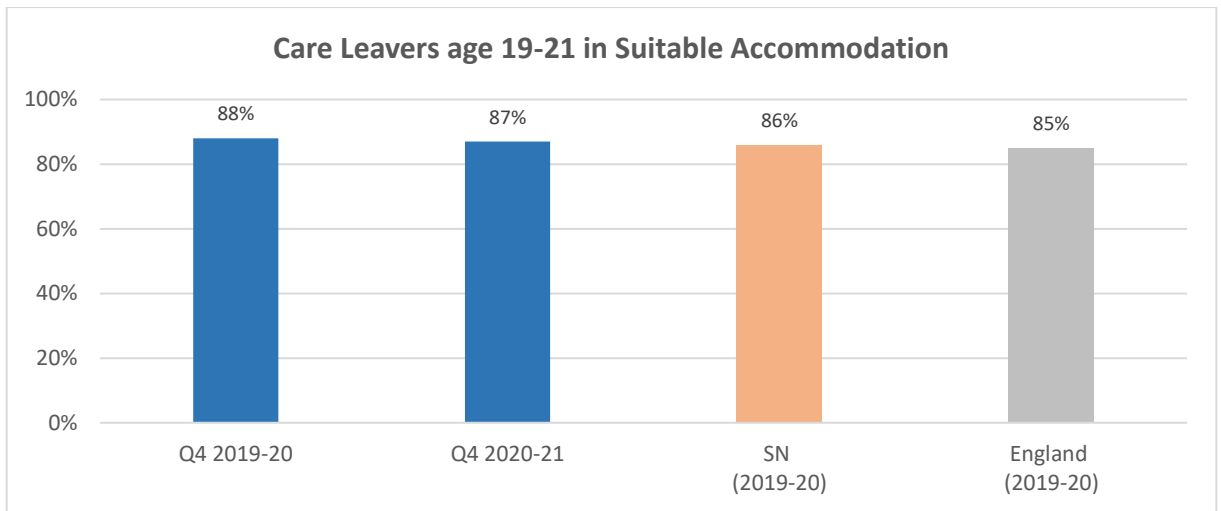
panels are attended by the Aftercare Service, Inspire Youth Hub and the Virtual School. The panel seeks to understand the issues for individual young people and align their interests to an EET offer. The panel discussions have highlighted the impact of Covid 19 on Young People which has limited opportunities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



7.2 Care Leavers age 19 to 21 years in Suitable Accommodation

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

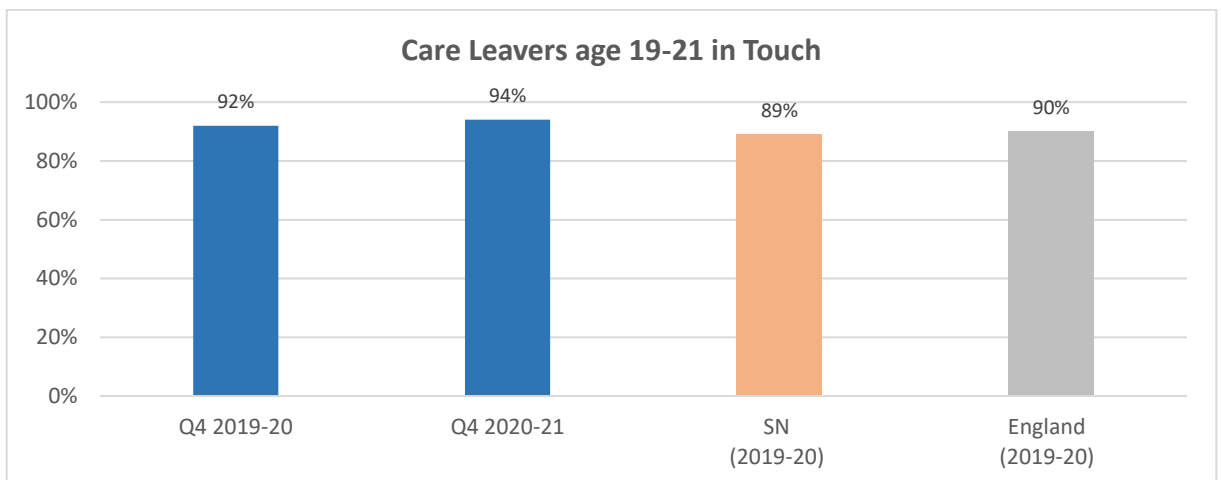
Increased housing support is being provided to young people by the Aftercare Service, Head Start Housing and Thurrock Housing Department. The 'Housing Offer' to Care Leavers has been updated with the Joint Housing Protocol 2020, ensuring good partnership working with clear pathways for young people to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



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

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

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



8. CLA Fostering

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

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

8.1 Recruitment

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

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

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

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

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

9. Reasons for Recommendations

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

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

10.1 Not applicable

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

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

11.1 None

12. Implications

12.1 Financial

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

There are no financial implications identified within the report.

12.2 Legal

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

There are no Legal implications identified within the report.

12.3 Diversity & Equality

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

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

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

Not applicable

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

- Not applicable

14. Appendices to the report

- None

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