

19 March 2024		ITEM: 7
Corporate Parenting Committee		
Children's Social Care Performance 2023-24		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Non-Key	
Report of: Janet Simon – Assistant Director, Children's Social Care and Early Help.		
Accountable Assistant Director: Janet Simon – Assistant Director, Children's Social Care and Early Help.		
Accountable Director: Sheila Murphy – Executive Director of Children' Services		
This report is Public		
Version: Final		

Executive Summary

This report provides information on the performance across Children Looked After and Aftercare. The overall performance for the service is good, this report focusses on data for Quarter 3 (September to December) 2023-24.

At the end of Q3 2023-24, 291 children were looked after by Thurrock Council, a further 260 young adults were receiving services from Aftercare. Children and young people are visited regularly, and the management of missing children is consistent and 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.

The Care Leaving Service continues to be a focus for improvement, 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 and feel safe in the environments they live in.

Children are generally placed with foster carers or, where possible, with family members. Thurrock Council continues to embed it's 'Think Family' approach to reduce the need for children to enter care. Foster Care recruitment continues to develop local placements for children.

Commissioner Comment:

None

1. Recommendation(s)

- 1.1 That members note improvements in Children's Social Care and note the work that is undertaken to ensure good and improving performance.

1.2 Members scrutinise the performance data and provide challenge to the service as required on how, as corporate parents we provide appropriate services, keep children and young people safe and promote good outcomes.

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 and Care Leavers, 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 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.

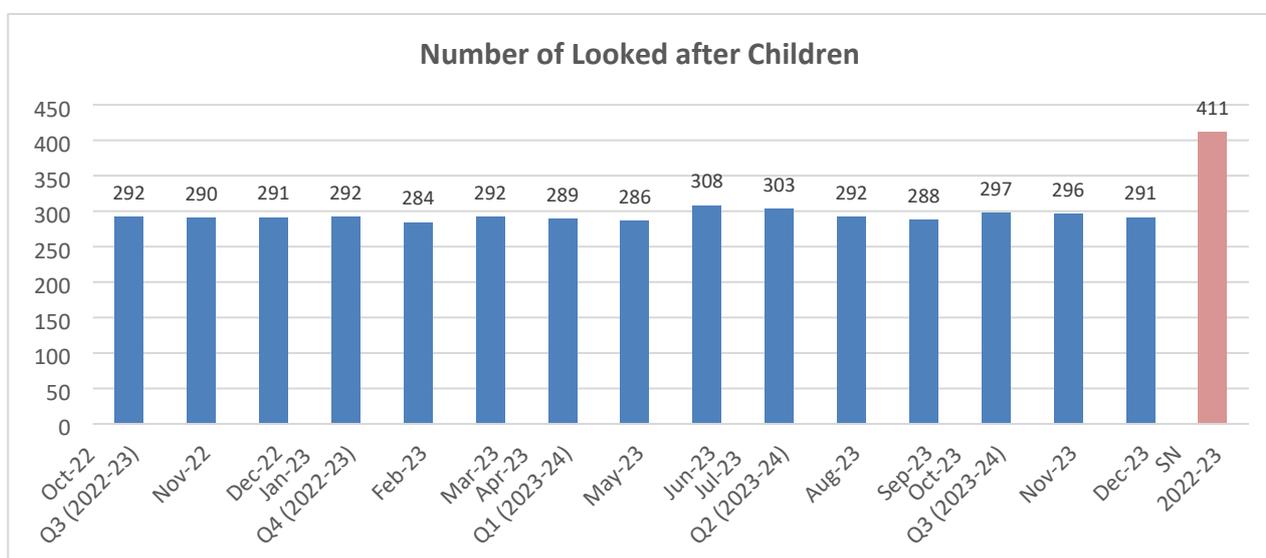
2.3 This data has been presented and discussed with the Children & Families Performance Group.

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. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

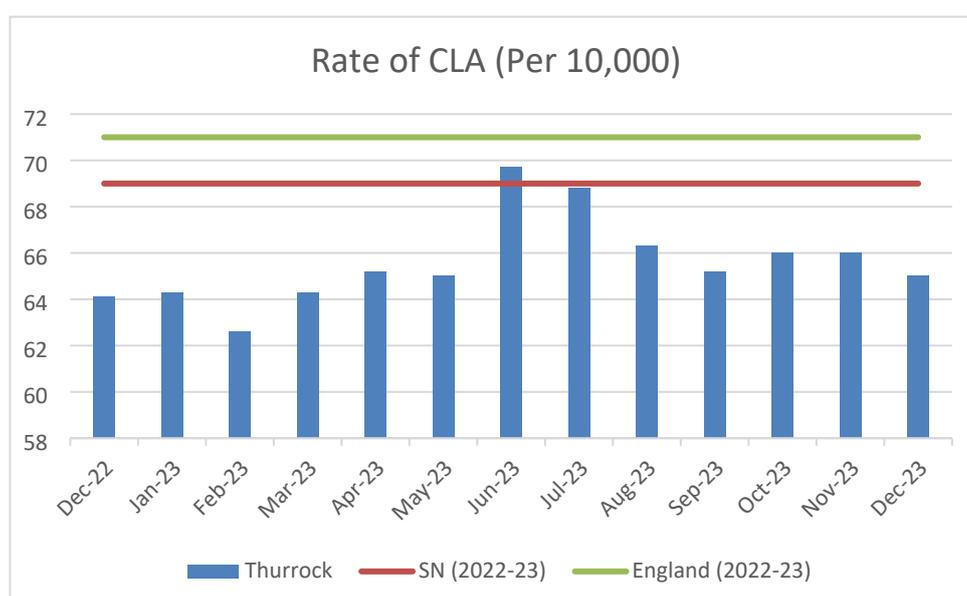
3.1 Number of Children Looked After (CLA)

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 there are regular reviews of children entering care. Where safe and appropriate, children are returned to their families. Thurrock’s Children in Care numbers have remained relatively stable year to date from 288 in April 2023 to 291 in December 2023 with two peaks in June and July. The end of Quarter 3, as at end December 2023, saw an increase of 3 to 291 from 288 as at the end of September 2023 (Quarter 2). During December 10 children entered care, of these 3 were UASC and the remainder entered care as the result of safeguarding action by Thurrock Council and its partners.



3.2 The Rate of Children Looked After per 10,000 population

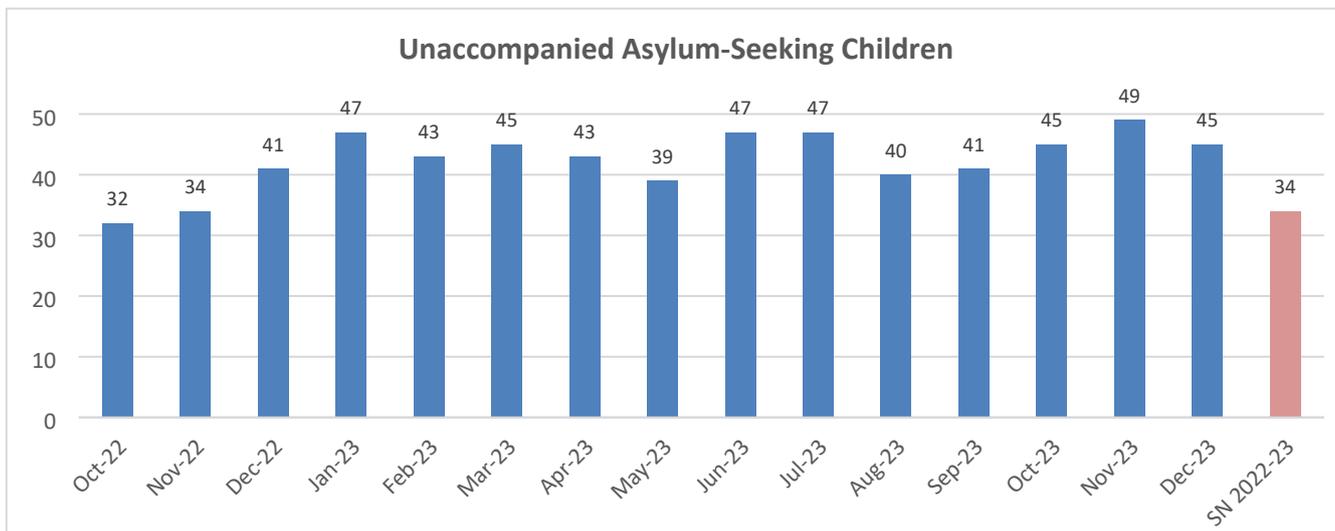
The graph below shows the rate of Children Looked After per 10,000 of the child population of under 18-year-olds in Thurrock. At the end of March 2023 there were 292 Children Looked After in Thurrock with the rate of 66 per 10,000. Based on the latest available benchmarking data (2021-22), Thurrock is below the Statistical Neighbour average of 69 and England average of 71 as at the end of December 2023. This demonstrates the work throughout the service to make sure the right children are coming into care and working with families to keep children within their family network/home where it is safe to do so. These numbers are despite the rise in numbers of UASC as a result of the national threshold rising. 291 children looked after at the end of December, equates to 65 per 10,000 population, this remains below the statistical and national outturn stated above.



3.3 Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC)

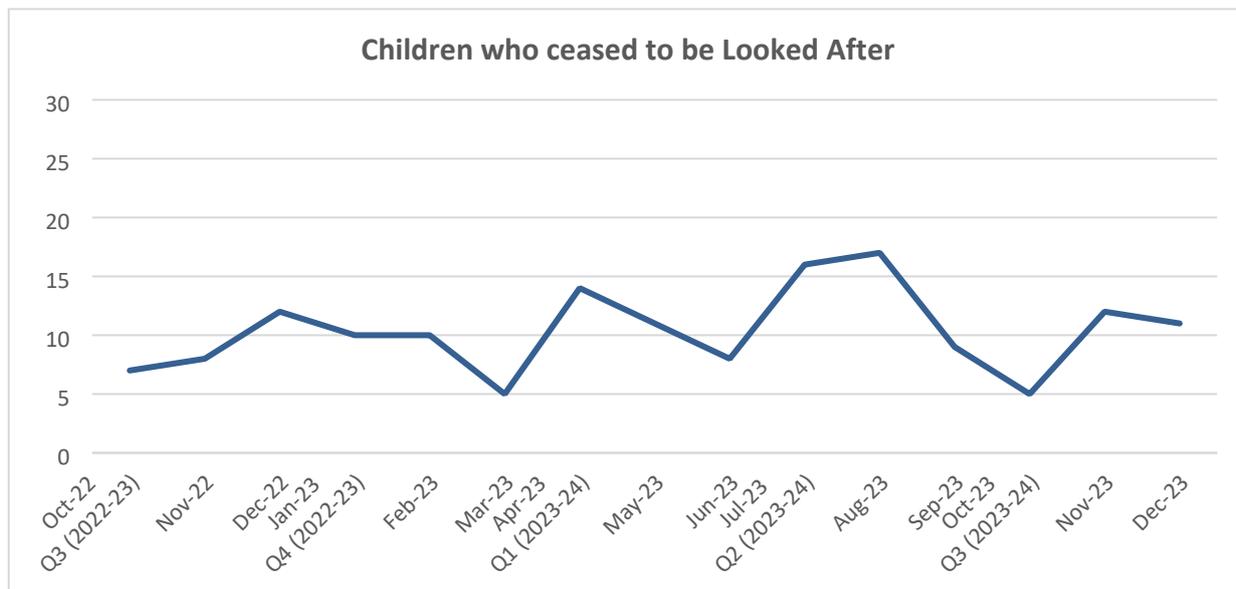
UASC are a subset of Thurrock's Children Looked After number. As an authority with ports of entry, Thurrock has a steady number of new UASC. The National Transfer Scheme (NTS) protocol for UASC first began operating in 2016 which formed a voluntary agreement between local authorities in England to ensure a fairer, more equitable distribution of unaccompanied children across local authorities with a threshold of 0.07% of the local child population. After February 2022 all local authorities have been directed to participate in the NTS. From August 2022 the operating threshold was increased representing an increase from 0.07 to 0.1%. For Thurrock this represented an increase in both the UASC and CLA population of 17 children with the threshold rising from 27 to 44 UASC. This means that Thurrock has to accept transfers of UASC in the scheme if we are below 44 UASC in our Child Looked After population. This represents an increased demand for placements, social work time and After Care support on a long-term basis. As at end December 23 Thurrock had 45 UASC children.

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 is operated by Central Government with the Home Office responsible for administration of the scheme. The below graph shows the number of UASC that were looked after as at the end of each month since October 2022.



3.4 Children Looked After episodes ceased

It is normal for the number of children leaving care to fluctuate. Between April 2022 and March 2023, 97 children ceased to be looked after compared to 125 in the same period in 2021-22. During Q2 2023-2024 42 children ceased to be looked after, and during Q3 2023-24 28 children ceased to be looked after.



The most common reasons for children ceasing to be looked after was remaining with current carers and care being taken over by another LA in UK.

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

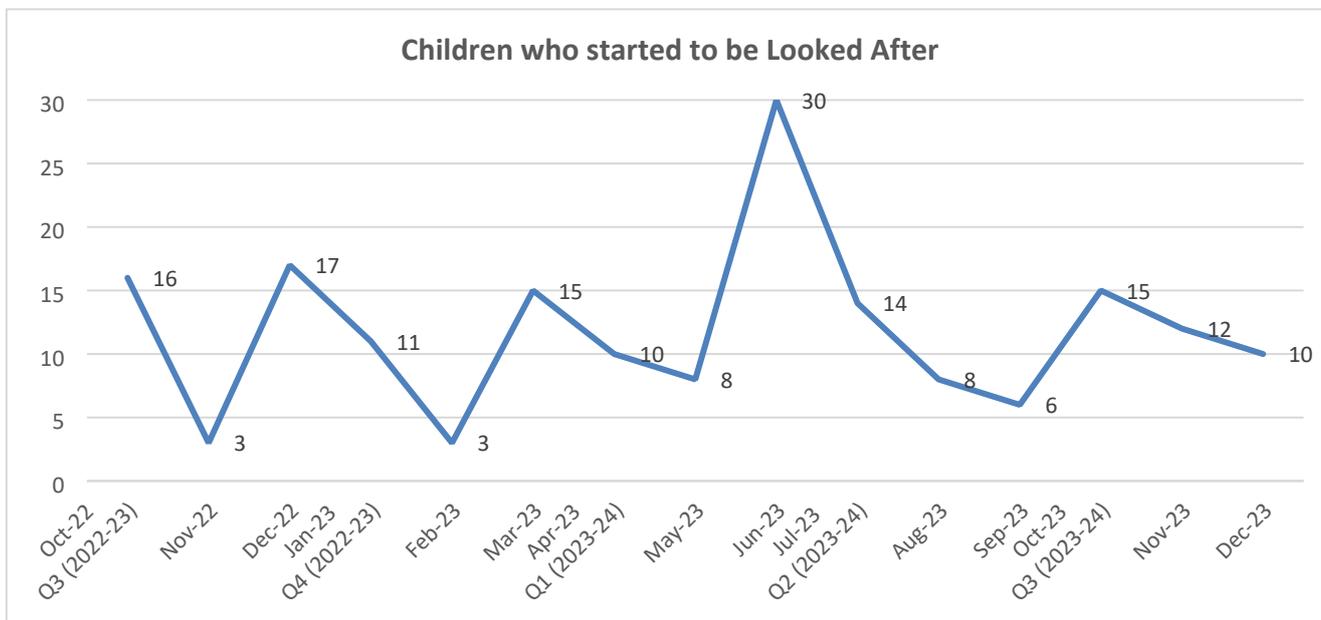
- Numbers of children entering care
- Numbers of children leaving care
- Numbers of UASC entering care
- Numbers of UASC who remain looked after by Thurrock

The below charts show entries in and exits out of care over the last few years including the changing trajectory of the UASC population in line with the decline from 39% entering care in Q2 to 27% in Q3.

	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	Q1 2023-24 (Apr- Jun)	Q2 2023-24 (Jul- Sept)	Q3 2023-24 (Oct – Dec)
Total number Entering Care	203	242	150	121	99	48	28	37
UASC entering Care	91	75	36	38	33	11	11	10
Total number Exiting Care	211	235	148	122	97	33	42	28
Number of CLA at end of reporting period	290	298	298	295	292	308	288	291
UASC Population at end of reporting period (% of CLA population)	31 (10.6%)	23 (7.7%)	24 (8%)	28 (9.4%)	44 (15%)	47 (15%)	41 (14%)	45 (15%)

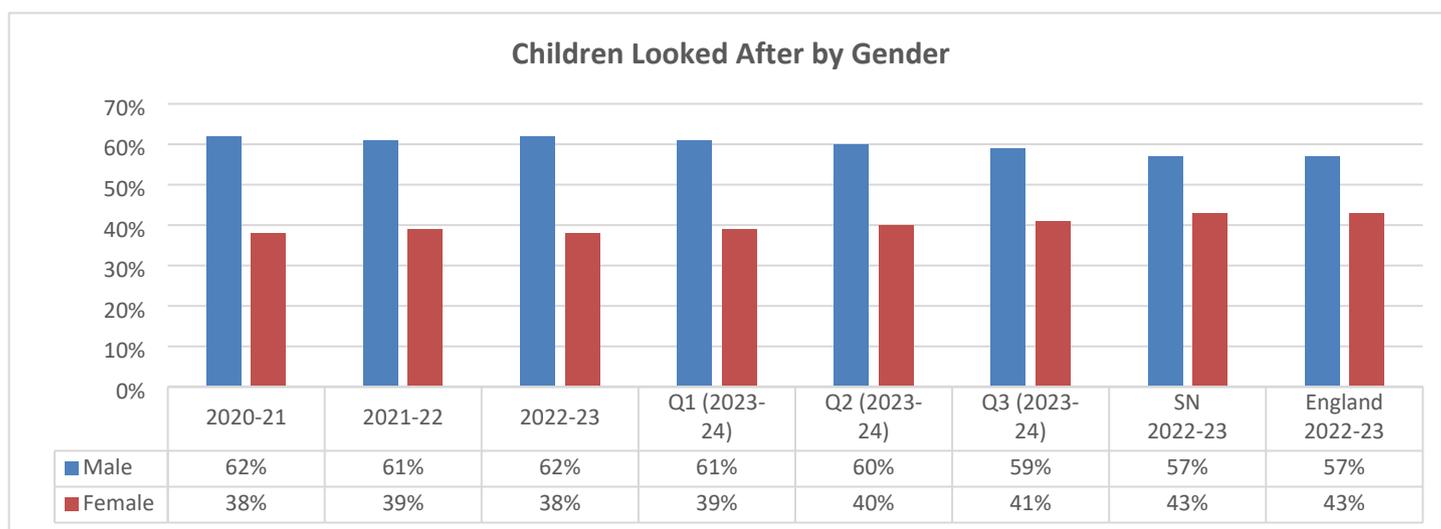
3.5 Children Looked After episodes started

It is normal for fluctuations to be seen with children starting episodes of care, this is shown by the graph below. There was however a sharp increase during June 2023 of 30 children starting an episode of care. The graph below demonstrates June was an exceptional month for the number of children entering care due to 9 UASC arrivals and safeguarding action in respect of larger sibling groups. In Q2 and Q3 the numbers for children starting episodes of care have returned to normal levels following the spike in June.



3.6 Children Looked After by Gender

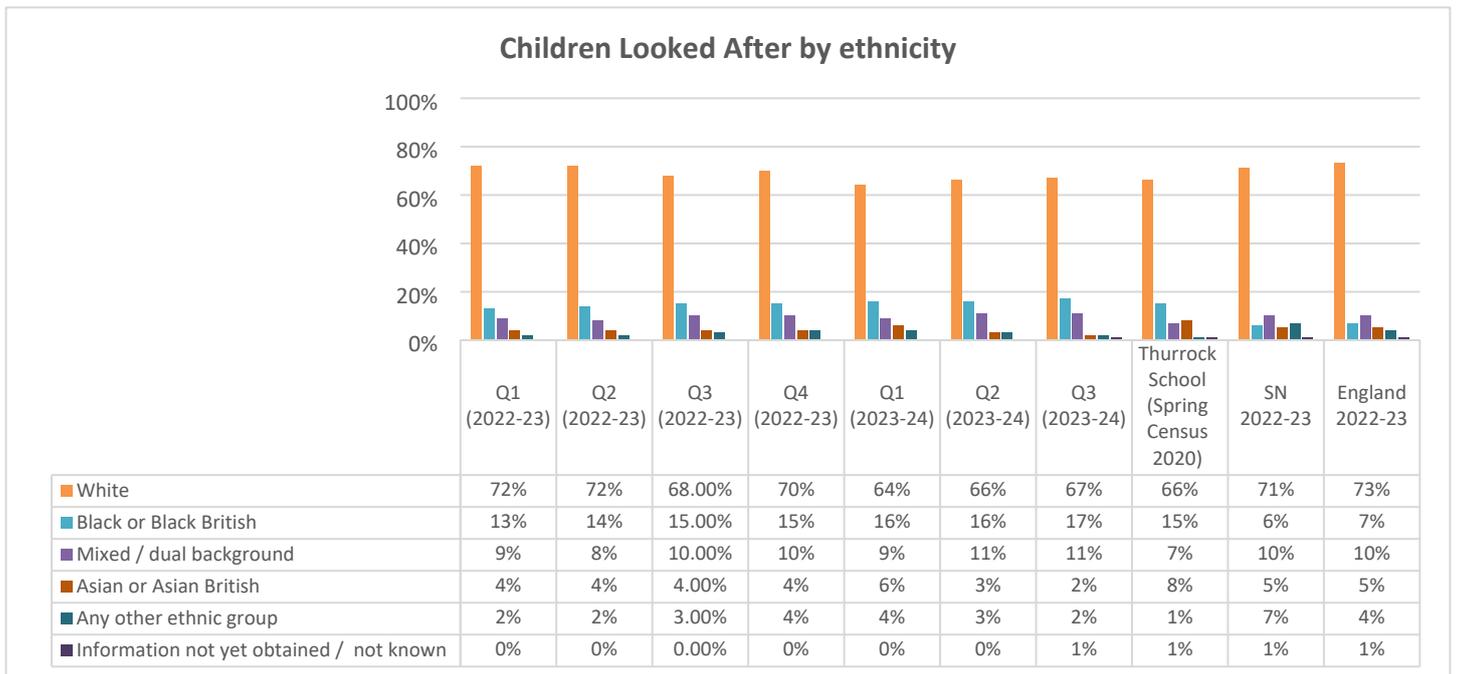
Based on the benchmarking data in 2022-23, the gender breakdown for males is slightly above Statistical Neighbours and England averages as at the end of December 2023, which is a reflection of our percentage of UASC, who are predominately males.



3.7 Children Looked After 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.

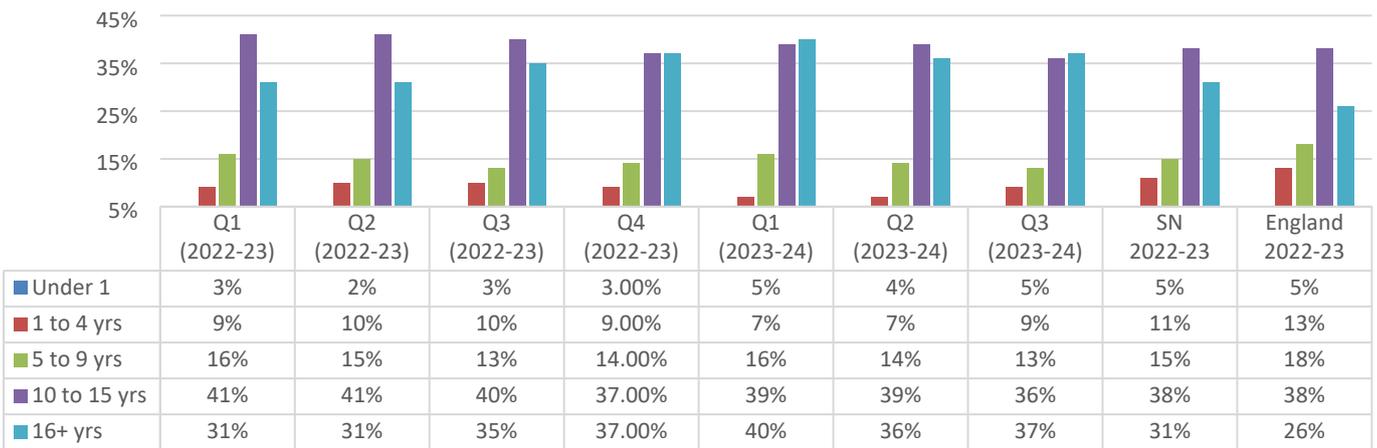
Thurrock’s Children Looked After are predominantly White which is in line with Thurrock’s School Census in Spring 2020 and the Statistical Neighbour and England averages. Quarter 3 2023-24 outturn saw a decrease in Asian or Asian British and a 1% increase in White ethnicity.



3.8 Children Looked After age profile

Based on the benchmarking data as of March 2023, the age profile of the Children Looked After cohort remains mostly stable and largely in line with the Statistical Neighbour and England averages. We are however, seeing a larger percentage in age group 16+ years and a lower percentage in age group 1 to 4 years, when compared to both statistical neighbours and national out-turns for 2022 - 23. To some extent this reflects Thurrock’s status as a point of entry for UASC given all most all are aged 15+ years. It also reflects the larger age span of some sibling groups. Permanence outside of care is more regular for younger children as opposed to permanence via long term fostering.

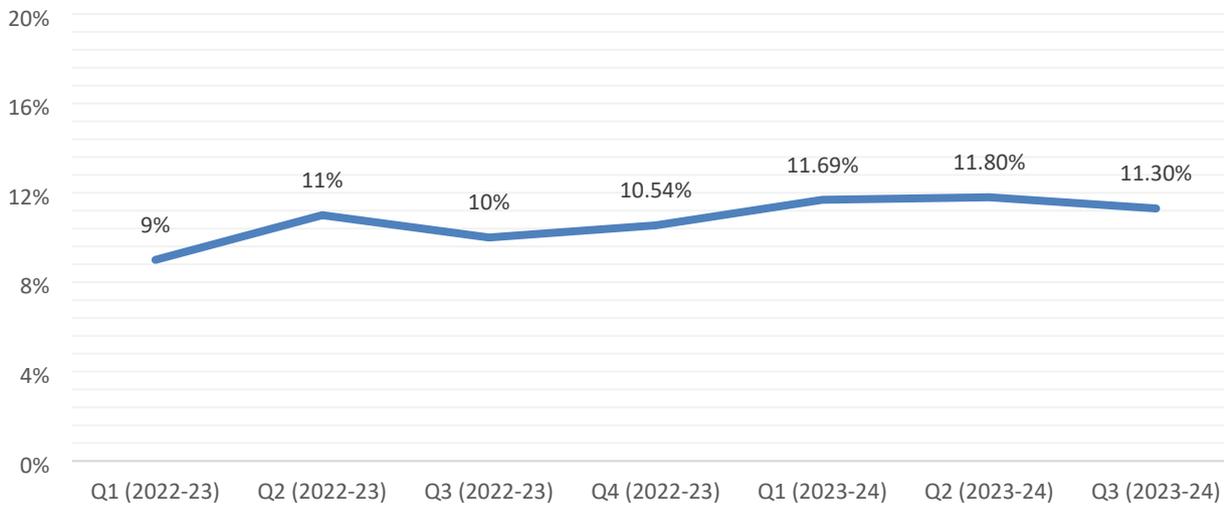
Age distribution of Children Looked After



3.9 Children Looked After with a Disability

The number of children looked after with a disability has remained relatively stable since April 2022. At the end of December 2023, 33 (11.3%) of the total CLA cohort were recorded as having a disability. 23 of those children are male. 73% of those disabled children were placed within 20 miles or less from their home.

Children Looked After with disability

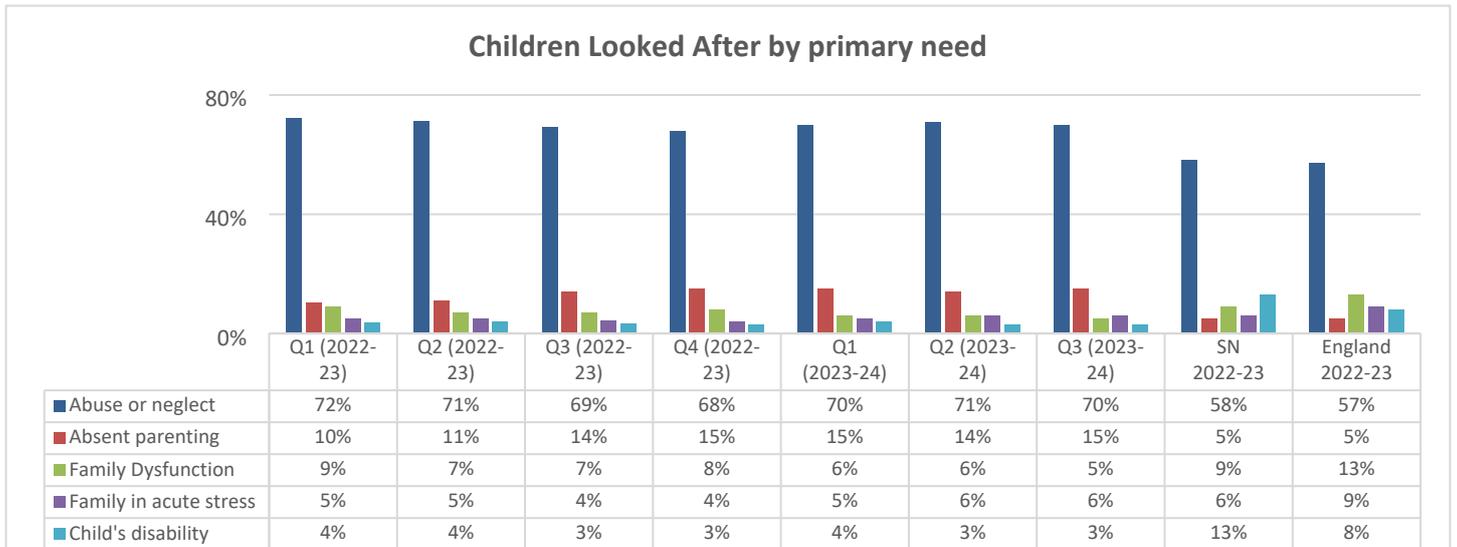


3.10 Children Looked After by Primary Need

Most children became 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.

The table below shows the primary need indicated for the child in care. Thurrock has a higher percentage recorded as 'Abuse or Neglect' and lower percentage recorded as 'Family

Dysfunction' than statistical neighbours and national benchmarks; this is in line with previous quarters.

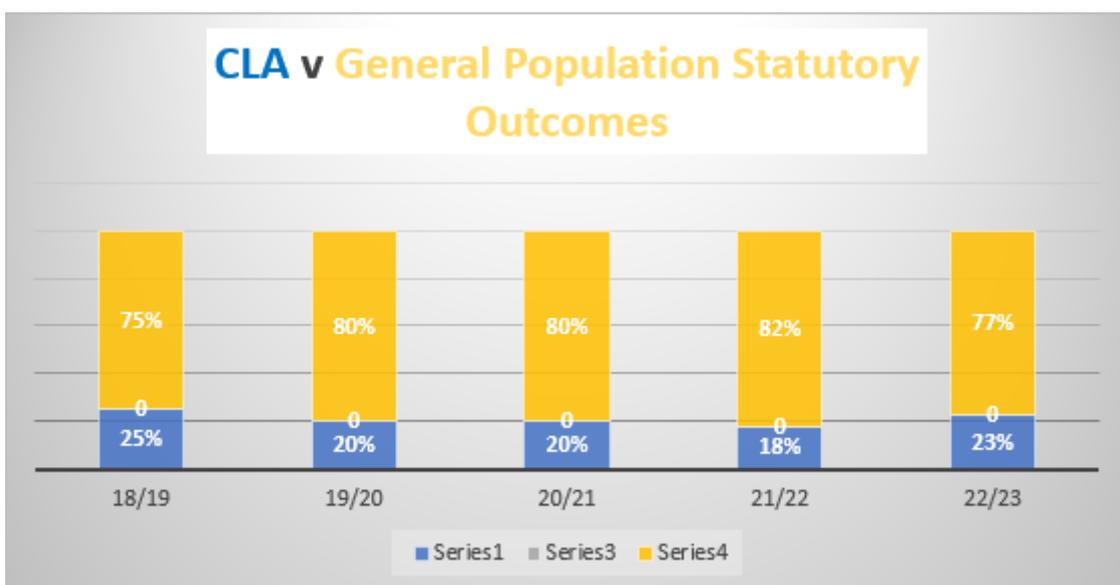


4. Number of CLA open to the Youth Offending Service (YOS)

4.1 Statutory Interventions

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

As at the third quarter of 2023/24 there were 31 children recorded as having statutory outcomes with Thurrock YJS and 6 of these children were looked after. The 6 looked after children represented 19% of the young people completing statutory interventions. This is in line with the trend for the last five years.



represents the percentage of Children Looked After versus the total number of young people in the Youth Justice System for the last five years. There has been a slight increase since the

last financial year but overall, the figure has remained relatively static. It needs to be taken into consideration that the numbers overall are very small, so this will reflect the in the percentages.

There is further analysis within the CLA and Youth Justice paper at this meeting.

4.2 Youth Detention Accommodation

Under the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012, any child made subject to a Youth Detention Accommodation Order (remand in custody) by the Courts automatically becomes looked after by the local authority.

No new children were made subject to Youth Detention Accommodation during the third quarter of 2023/24. However, we currently have 1 young person already subject to Youth Detention Accommodation. The young person is classified as CLA due to his remand in custody.

4.3 Out of court disposal panel

As at the third quarter of the 2023/24 financial year the out of court disposal panel dealt with 45 offences relating to 44 Thurrock children, of which one child had looked after status.

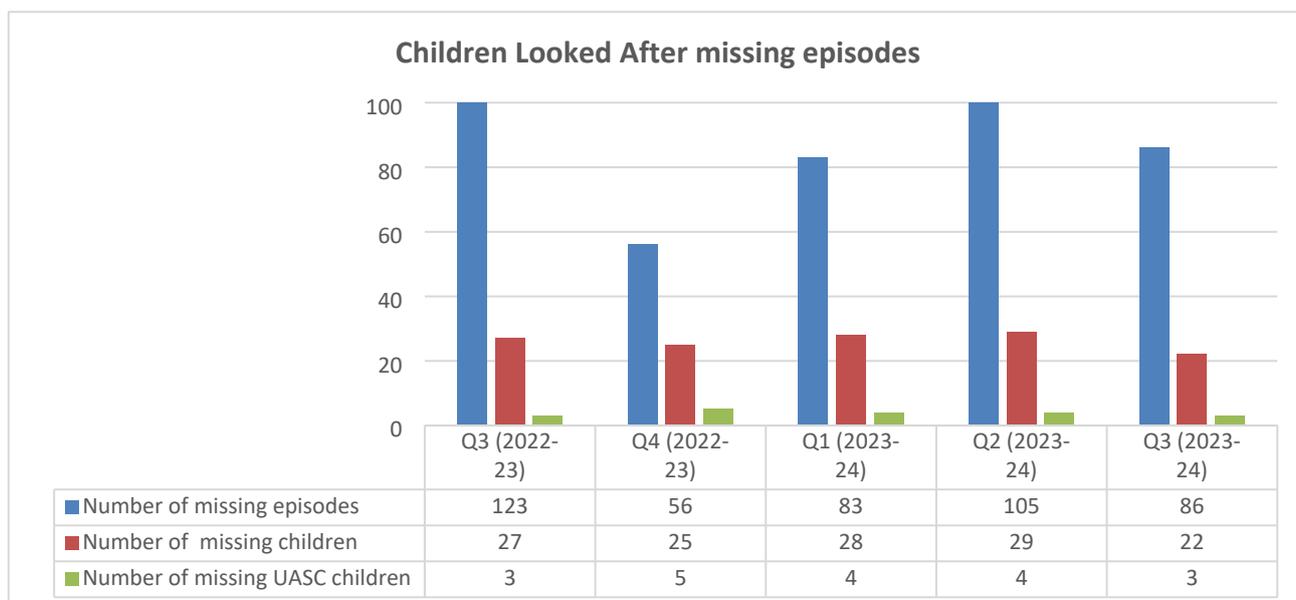
Thurrock YJS and Essex Police are committed to the national protocol aimed at reducing the criminalisation of Children Looked After. This approach will be supported with a local pan-Essex protocol to ensure there is a focus on diverting any child (where possible) who is Looked After from the Criminal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

5. 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 October 2022 and end of December 2023. The most common reasons for children going missing is that they have stayed out past their expected return home time with friends or are with their families.

Between April 2022 and March 2023, there were a total of 530 missing episodes which represented 52 individual children. This is a reduction on the previous year when there were a total of 566 episodes.

During Quarter 3, October to December 2023 there were a total of 86 missing episodes started which represented 22 individual children, 3 of which were UASC.



The majority of children going missing remains for short periods of time and relates to older children (16 and over) staying out later than an agreed return home time. Strategy meetings continue to track reasons for missing episodes.

When children are reported missing the majority return within hours and within 24 hours. The majority are aged 17. Small numbers of children may spend longer periods away from placement.

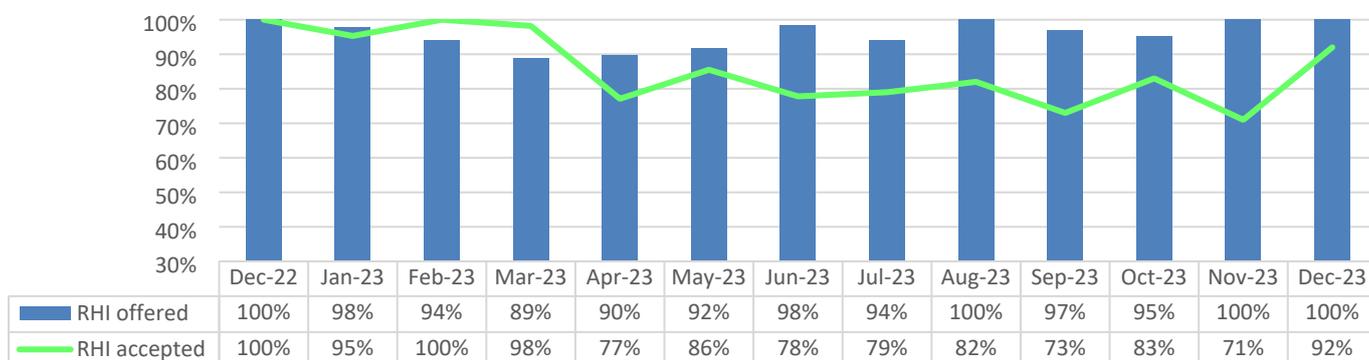
5.1 Children Looked After return home interviews (RHI)

Children are offered a RHI within 72 hours following each missing episode, 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 for service provision.

As at the end of December 2023, the percentage of children offered a return to home interview was 100% of which 92% accepted and received an interview. The offer of an RHI 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 Missing Children Panel.

The graph below shows the percentage of return to home interviews taken up by young people since December 2022 and shows, in the main, a reasonably consistent picture of children accepting and receiving a RHI. There continues to be a small number of CLA who have consistently refused return home interviews. We continue to review how to 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.

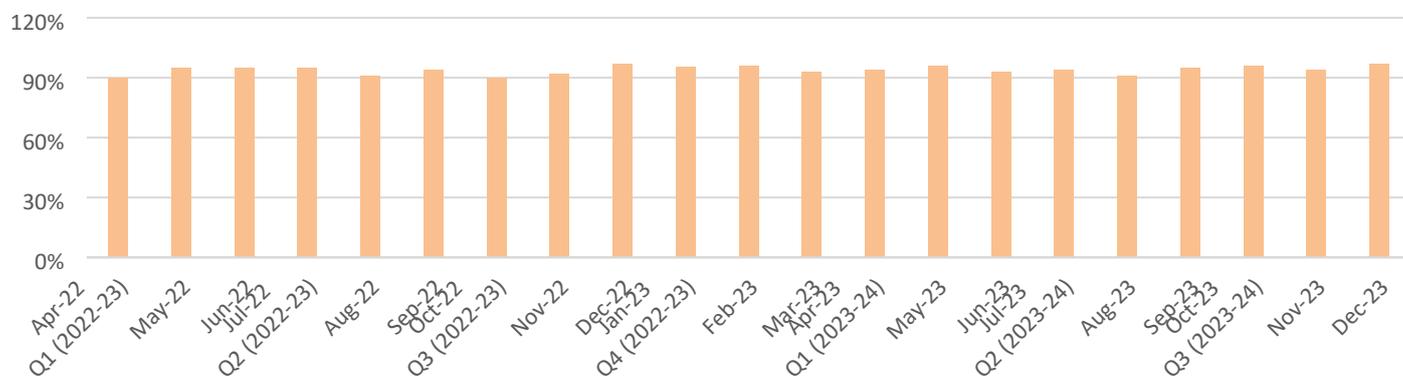
Percentage of missing episodes where the child accepted and received a Return to home Interview



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. The average visits completed in time between April 2022 and March 2023 was 94% compared to 91% in 2021/22 representing a 3% increase. During Q3 2023-24 an average of 97% of visits were completed in timescale.

Percentage of CLA visits completed in time

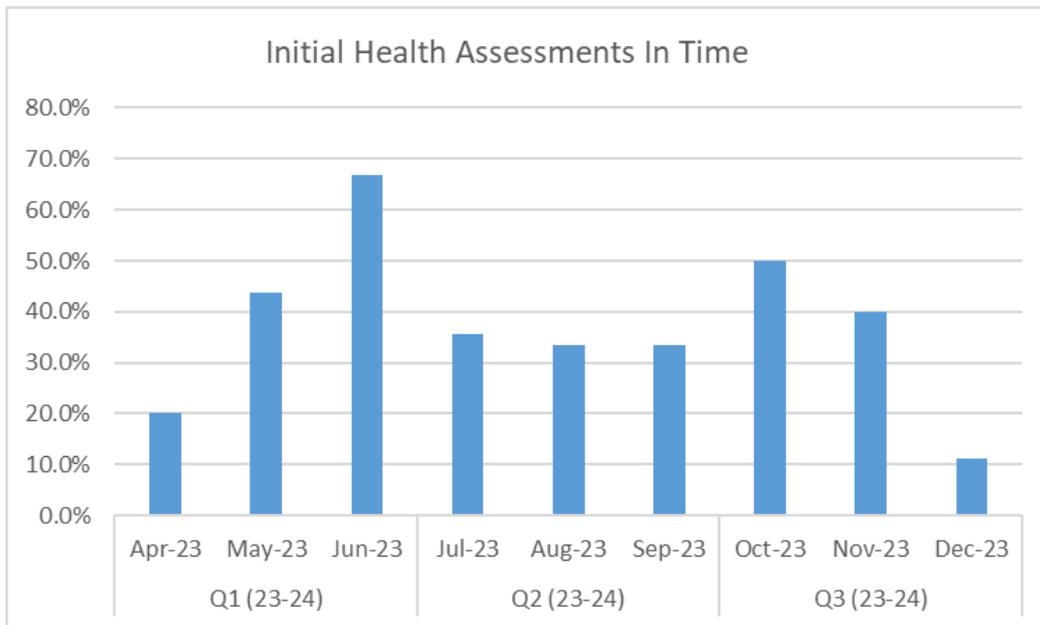


5.3 Children Looked After Initial Health Assessments (IHA)

Performance for IHA's being completed within the statutory time frame continues to be of significant concern. This has been escalated at the highest levels of the ICB and an urgent response is due to be delivered. A verbal update will be provided at the meeting.

Our advice remains that no child should wait for medical treatment or assessment on the basis an IHA is due. Children should be registered with a G.P. on coming in to care and steps made to ensure any health needs are met from the appropriate resources (Health visitor, G.P. etc)

In Q3 20 CLA Initial Health Assessments were completed, 30% of these were completed within the statutory timeframe (20 working days of becoming looked after), this is a slight decrease compared to Q2 when 38 CLA Initial Health Assessments were completed, 34.2% in time.

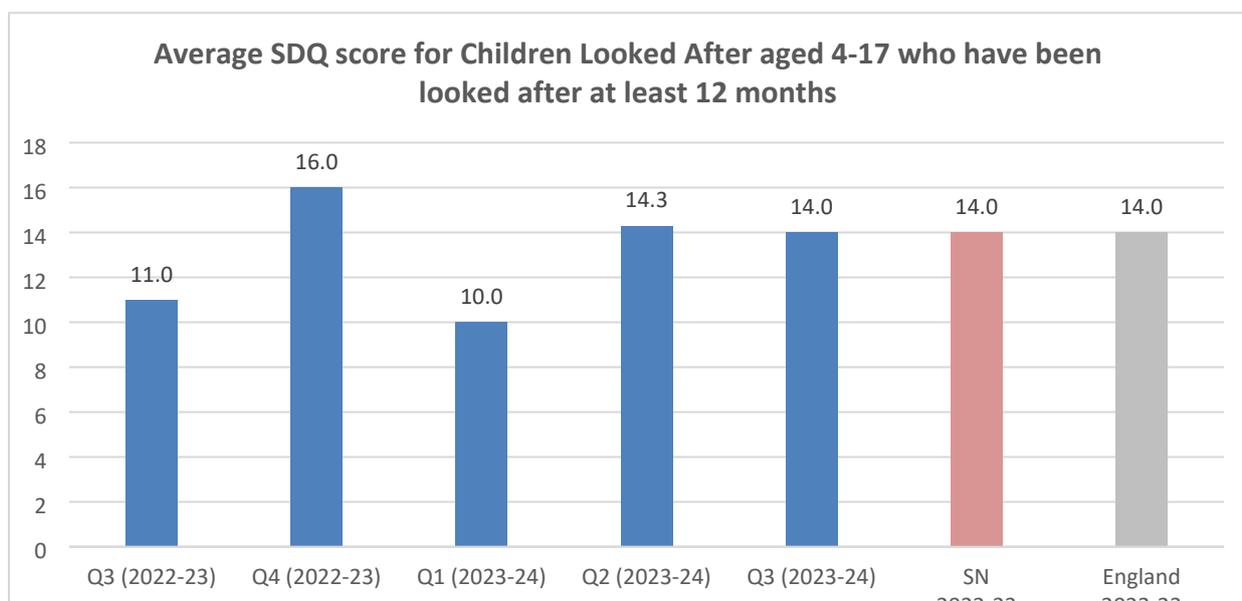


5.4 Children Looked After Strengths & Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ)

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.

The average scores for Quarter 3 2023-24 are 14 which is in line with our Statistical Neighbour and National benchmarks. The mental wellbeing of Children Looked After is being appropriately reviewed, with support and intervention provided as necessary.



Timeliness of Adoption

The average duration of care proceedings nationally has been over 40 weeks. The President of the Family Division re-launched the Public Law Outline process in January 2023 with a view to reducing the length of proceedings towards the 26 weeks statutory time limit.

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. The average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family adjusted for foster carer adoptions, for children who have been adopted (days), as at end of Quarter 3 2023-24 was 638 days; this is an increase on the September 23 position of 585 days.

Based on 2022-23 benchmarking data, Thurrock is above the National average of 480 days. It is important to note that this measure relates to a relatively small number of children so a very small number of children experiencing a delay can impact on the data. Care proceedings have seen significant delays; court availability, and family members being identified late. We are working towards reducing the duration of care proceedings through early planning and close monitoring.

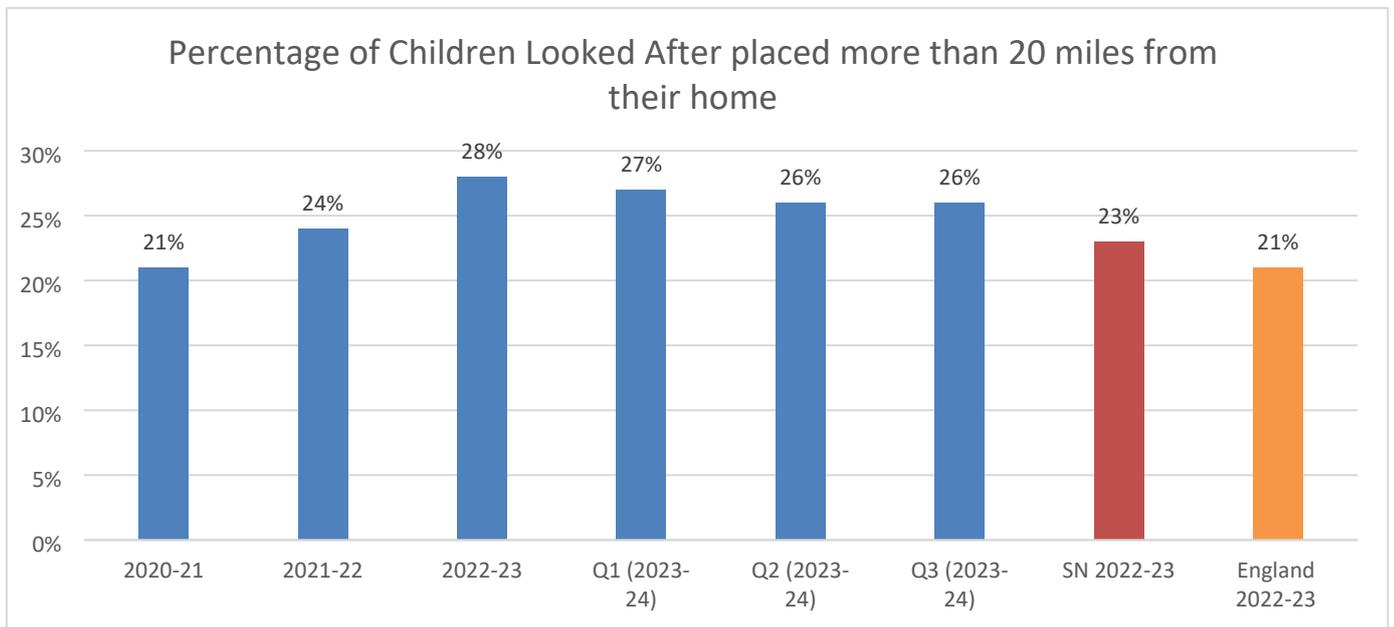
As at Q3 2023-24, the average time between an LA receiving court authority to place a child and the LA deciding on a match to an adoptive family (rolling 12 months) is 102 days, this is slightly lower than the September 2023 average of 106. Based on 2022-23 benchmarking data, Thurrock is below the National average of 197 days.

6.2 Children Looked After placement distance

The Local Authority has a statutory duty to provide children with placements within its area unless it is not reasonably practicable to do so under the Children Act 1989. Placements out of area must be approved by the nominated person and placements 'at a distance' must be agreed by the Director of Children's Services.

At the end of December 2023, 74% of the Children Looked After cohort were placed within 20 miles or less from their homes, which represents 216 out of 291 children looked after. Based on the latest benchmarking data available for 2022-23, the national average for those placed

more than 20 miles from their home was 21% and statistical neighbours was 23%, so at 26% Thurrock is currently above these. We continue to work hard to ensure that wherever possible, children are placed close to their community.



The chart below provides a breakdown by placement type as at end of Quarter 1 2023-24, Quarter 2 2023-24 and Quarter 3 2023-24.

	Adoption	Semi-independent	Secure Childrens Home	Childrens Home Regulation	Placed with own parents or other person with parental responsibility	Family Centre / Mother and Baby Unit	YOI or Prison	Residential Schools	FP with relative or friend: long-term fostering	FP with a relative or friend: not long-term fostering or FFA/concurrent planning	FP with other foster carer: long-term fostering	FP with other foster carer who is also an approved adopter: FFA/concurrent planning	FP with other foster carer: not long-term fostering or FFA/concurrent planning	Other placement
Q1 (2023-24)	2	53	1	20	7	2	2	2	6	15	120	1	73	4
Q2 (2023-24)	3	45	0	23	8	2	1	1	6	13	104	3	75	4
Q3 (2023-24)	1	50	0	22	8	1	1	1	5	22	95	4	77	4

7. Care Leaving Service

The table below shows the care leaver cohort (Relevant and Former Relevant Children whose 17th, 18th, 19th, 20th or 21st birthday falls within Financial Year) and Young People aged 16-25 years who are in receipt of a Care Leaving service. Local authorities have a legislative duty to appoint a Personal Adviser for Care Leavers from the age of 16-21 and up until the age of 25 if required.

A Care Leaver, as defined in the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000¹, 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.

As at end of December 2023, 260 Care Leavers were being supported and receiving an Aftercare service. The charts below show the Care Leaver cohort broken down by age groups:

Care Leaver Age	Total	%
16	4	1
17-18	69	27
19-21	128	49
22-25	59	23
	260	

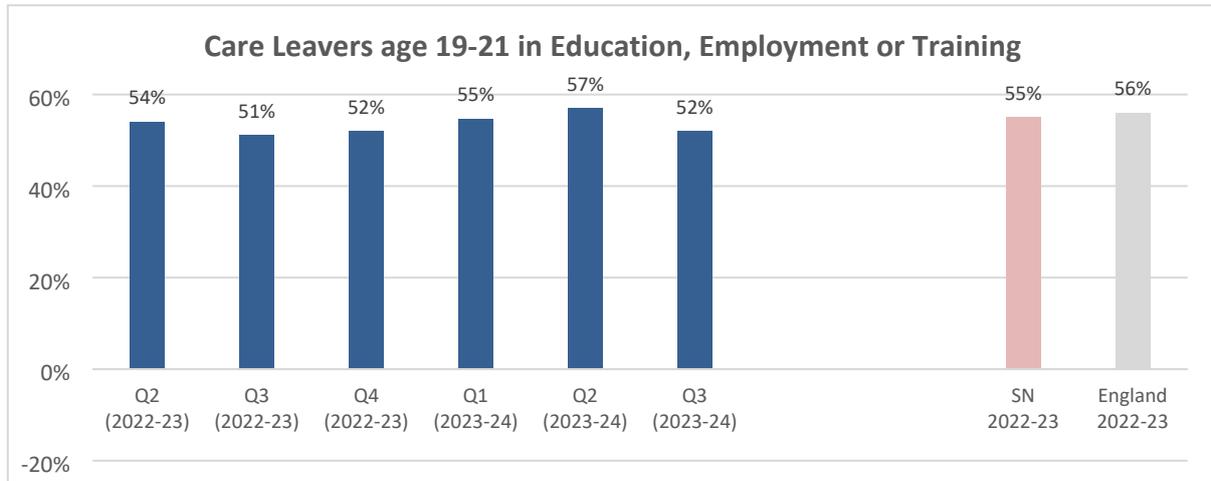
7.1 Care Leavers age 19-21 years in Education, Employment or Training (EET)

At the end of Q3 2023-24, 52% of the Care Leavers aged 19 to 21-year-old were in part or full-time education, employment or training compared to 57% at the end of September 23, which brings Thurrock below the Statistical Neighbour average of 55% and the England average of 56%. 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

¹ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/35/contents>

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



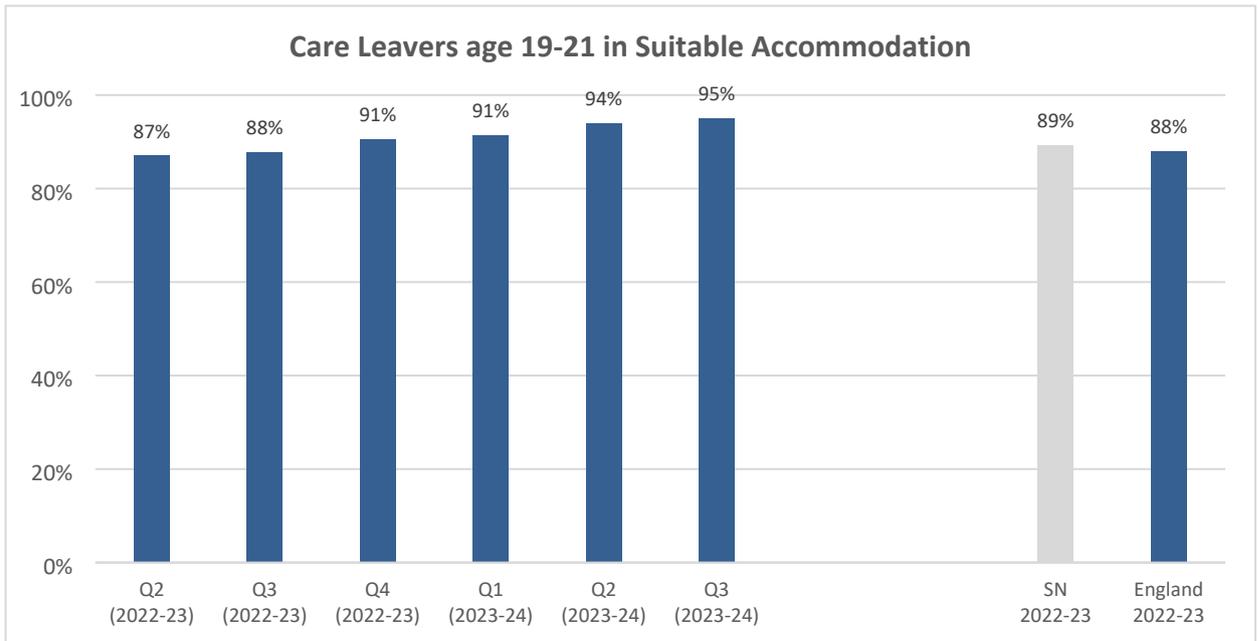
Care Leavers age 19 to 21 years in Suitable Accommodation

Q3 2023-24 shows that the percentage of 19 to 21-year-old Care Leavers reported to be in suitable accommodation is 95%. Thurrock is above the Statistical Neighbour average of 89% and England average of 88% based on 2022-23 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.

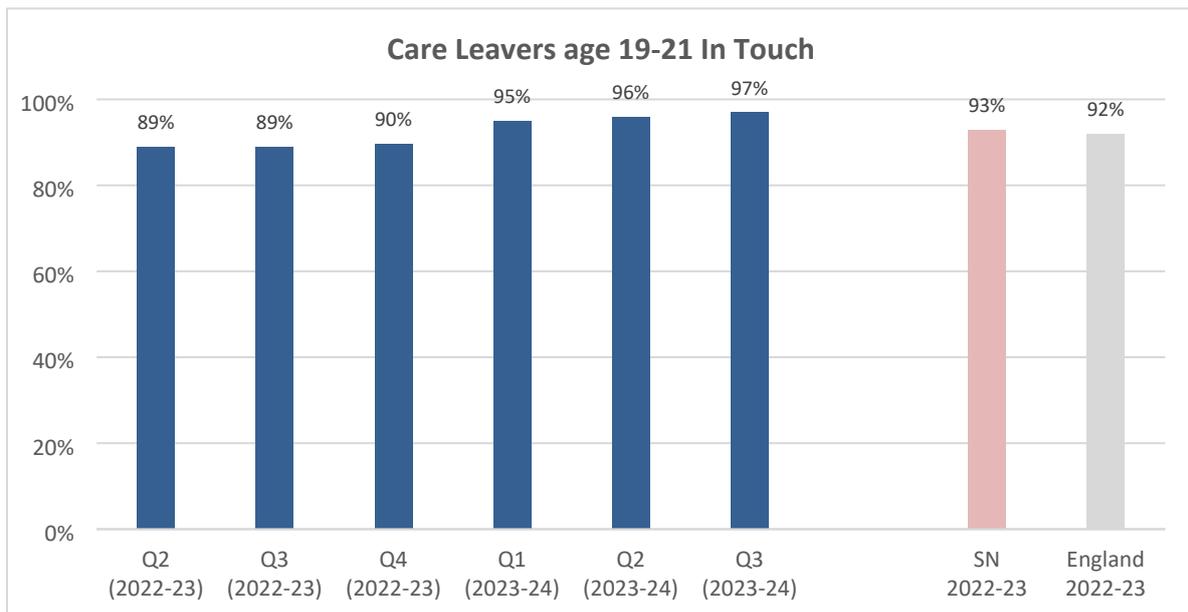
Increased housing support is being provided to young people by the Aftercare Service, Head Start Housing and Thurrock Housing Department. The 'Housing Offer' to Care Leavers has been updated with the Joint Housing Protocol 2020, ensuring good partnership working with clear pathways for young people to 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 Q3 2023-24, Thurrock was in touch with 97% of Care Leavers aged 19 to 21, this is a 1% improvement on the September 23 outturn of 96%. Thurrock's performance is above the Statistical Neighbour average of 93% and the England average of 92% based on 2022-23 benchmarking data. The reason for the percentage that are not in touch is mainly due to the missing former UASC.



8. Reasons for Recommendation

- 8.1 The performance data and narrative provided sets out progress in Q3 for members to review and challenge

9. Consultation (including Overview and 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

No financial implications. The cost of services are provided for within Children and Family Services revenue budget. In 2023/24 this is £35.6m.

Implications verified by: **David May**
Head of Financial Management
21 February 2024

11.2 Legal

The Council has general duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of any child that its 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 initial health assessments 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.

The first review must be within 20 working days of the date on which the child becomes looked after.

The assessments should be within this timescale to comply with the Local Authority's statutory duty.

Health bodies have a duty to co-operate with the Local Authority under Section 27 of the Children Act 1989.

Implications verified by: **Judith Knight**
Interim Deputy Head of Legal (Social Care and Education)
21 February 2024

11.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Rebecca Lee**

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

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 Risks

Thurrock Council & Mid and South Essex Integrated Care Board are not meet the statutory expectations for Initial Health Assessments for Looked After Children.

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

Looked after children – as set out in the report

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):

- None

13. Appendices to the report

- None

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