

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

# Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The meeting will be held at **7.00 pm** on **2 July 2019**

**Committee Room 1, Civic Offices, New Road, Grays, Essex, RM17 6SL**

## Membership:

Councillors Bukky Okunade (Chair), Jennifer Smith (Vice-Chair), Abbie Akinbohun, Alex Anderson, Garry Hague and Elizabeth Rigby

Lynda Pritchard, Church of England Representative  
Kim James, Chief Operating Officer, HealthWatch Thurrock  
Nicola Cranch, Parent Governor Representative  
Paula Robinson, Parent Governor Representative

## Substitutes:

Councillors Daniel Chukwu, Steve Liddiard, David Potter and Joycelyn Redsell

## Agenda

Open to Public and Press

	<b>Page</b>
<b>1 Apologies for Absence</b>	
<b>2 Minutes</b>	<b>5 - 18</b>
To approve as a correct record the minutes of Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 12 February 2019.	
<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</b>	<b>Declaration of Interests</b>	
<b>5</b>	<b>Thurrock New Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements</b>	<b>19 - 42</b>
	This item is reserved to discuss any issues raised by the Thurrock Local Safeguarding Children Partnership.	
<b>6</b>	<b>Youth Cabinet Update</b>	
<b>7</b>	<b>SEND Inspection Outcome</b>	<b>43 - 60</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>Semi Independent Supported Accommodation Sufficiency</b>	<b>61 - 68</b>
<b>9</b>	<b>Fostering and Adoption Annual Panel Report</b>	<b>69 - 82</b>
<b>10</b>	<b>Children's Social Care Performance Report</b>	<b>83 - 94</b>
<b>11</b>	<b>Work Programme</b>	<b>95 - 98</b>

**Queries regarding this Agenda or notification of apologies:**

Please contact Wendy Le, Democratic Services Officer by sending an email to [Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk](mailto:Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk)

Agenda published on: **24 June 2019**

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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 Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 12 February 2019 at 7.00 pm

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**Present:** Councillors Bukky Okunade (Chair), David Potter (Vice-Chair), Alex Anderson, Abbie Akinbohun, Garry Hague and Elizabeth Rigby

Nicola Cranch, Parent Governor Representative  
Paula Robinson, Parent Governor Representative  
Lynda Pritchard, Church of England Representative

**In attendance:** Rory Patterson, Corporate Director of Children's Services  
Sheila Murphy, Assistant Director Children and Families  
Michele Lucas, Interim Director of Learning, Skills and Inclusion  
Kate Kozlova-Boran, Strategic Lead of Learning  
Malcolm Taylor, Strategic Lead of Inclusion  
Andrea Winstone, School Improvement Manager  
Claire Pascoe, Child Sexual Exploitation Manager  
Alan Cotgrove, Thurrock LSCB Manager  
Wendy Le, Democratic Services Officer

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Before the start of the Meeting, all present were advised that the meeting may be filmed and was being recorded, with the audio recording to be made available on the Council's website.

### **36. Minutes**

The minutes from the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 4 December 2018 were approved as a correct record.

### **37. Items of Urgent Business**

There were no items of urgent business.

### **38. Declaration of Interests**

The Church of England Representative declared a non-pecuniary interest on agenda item 11 as she was the Chair of Thameside Children's Centre.

### **39. Youth Cabinet Update**

The Youth Cabinet Representatives were unable to attend the meeting to provide an update.

### **40. Items Raised by Thurrock Local Safeguarding Children Board**

Alan Cotgrove, Thurrock Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB), provided the Committee with an update on the work undertaken which included:

#### The Walk Online roadshow

- This was taking place on 5, 6 and 7 March 2019 at the Civic Hall in Blackshots. The roadshow catered towards years 5 and 6 and out of all the Thurrock primary schools, only 4 would not be attending. Over 4,000 children would be in attendance over the 3 days of the roadshow. The roadshow aimed to raise awareness and teach children on social media and internet safety and gang related issues. Essex Police and the Youth Offending Service would be providing their support on the roadshow and Youth Cabinet had helped on the information to be given out at the roadshow.
- A goody bag would be handed out at the roadshow which was shown to the Committee. Goodies included stationery, a variety of colouring books which told a story on the issues covered in the roadshow, a 'Be Smart' on the internet game sheet and a safeguarding word search.
- A sealed adult pack was also included in the goody bag which contained a letter inviting parents and carers to the adult roadshow on 23 May 2019 to be held in the afternoon and evening. The adult roadshow aimed to raise awareness of apps and games used by young people.
- Questionnaires would be undertaken with children at the Walk Online roadshow and data to be shared with schools and the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC). A similar game to 'Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?' would also be played at the roadshow to help gather data on children's knowledge on the raised issues.

#### Social care work

- LSCB had been working with the police and voluntary services on Black, Minority and Ethnic (BME) Groups safeguarding awareness sessions and were looking to roll this out across the Borough.

#### Partnership work

- LSCB had been supporting and working together with the Thurrock Community Safety Partnership on the gang related conference.
- A Signs of Safety course, Interfamilial and Safeguarding course had been completed.
- Work on the new safeguarding arrangements was ongoing.

Thanking Alan Cotgrove for the report, the Chair opened the item up to the Committee for questions.

Regarding the safeguarding information to be provided at the Walk Online roadshow, Councillor Hague questioned if the information would also be available online or if there would be an app for it. In reply, Alan Cotgrove said LSCB was looking into going digital with the information and would be changing the LSCB website to contain an age appropriate section with this type of information.

On the 4 schools that would not be attending the roadshow, Lynda Pritchard, Church of England Representative, asked if the LSCB had accepted the 4 schools would not attend and sought the LSCB's thoughts on this. Alan Cotgrove reassured the Committee that the LSCB had spoken with the schools and that the schools were running their own programmes in house. He went on to explain that the roadshow and similar events were often used by schools as a launch pad to start their own programmes. LSCB carried out quality assurance tests on these programmes through audits with schools.

Councillor Akinbohun asked what subjects would be covered in the Walk Online roadshow. Alan Cotgrove said the event was targeted towards years 5 and 6 and raising awareness on internet safety was increasingly targeted toward the lower pupil years. The campaign had begun off the back of a case of a murdered child in Thurrock and since then, a lot of work had been undertaken in different age groups. Councillor Akinbohun followed up by asking whether feedback was gathered from children. Confirming this was the case, Alan Cotgrove went on to say LSCB communicated with schools for feedback and LSCB would contact schools 6 months later with the gathered data to address raised issues. Although the knowledge was instilled in children, it relied on self-enforcement from children.

#### **41. Thurrock New Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements**

Presented by Alan Cotgrove, the report informed the Committee that the current requirements of the Local Safeguarding Children's Boards would be dissolved and new safeguarding arrangements would need to be put in place to meet statutory requirements. For Thurrock, a new partnership would be formed consisting of 3 strategic partners which would be Thurrock Council, Essex Police and Thurrock Clinical Commissioning Group. This new arrangement would be known as Thurrock Local Safeguarding Children's Partnership (LSCP) which would come into effect on 7 May 2019. Updates on the new partnership would be brought back to the Committee.

Commenting that the changes appeared to be structural, Councillor Hague sought clarification on what the main operational changes would be and the benefits. Alan Cotgrove explained the operational changes would benefit the outcomes of the LSCB and auditing would help on quality assurance. Part of the reasons for the change to LSCBs was because some across the country had required improvement. Thurrock's new LSCP would have a business plan

in place around safeguarding and there would be scrutiny taking place on the work of the partnership.

The Chair queried on what the changes were in the management of the structure. In answer, Alan Cotgrove said the current arrangement safeguarding arrangements focused on the local authority. With the change, the focus would be on the three partnerships and each one would have equal footing. All three were accountable to their relative inspecting authorities: Care Quality Commission, the police, Committees etc. A business support team would remain in place to support the new partnership.

Paula Robinson, Parent Governor Representative, sought clarification on whether the business support team was part of Thurrock Council. Confirming this was the case, Alan Cotgrove went on to say the LSCB received an annual contribution from the local authority and once distributed, the responsibilities would remain the same. Over the coming year, the new safeguarding arrangements would be reviewed.

On the three partners, Lynda Pritchard questioned who the boss would be and if LSCB were confident that the partnership would run smoothly. Giving reassurance, Alan Cotgrove stated the current LSCB was successful and achieved good outcomes for young people. Over the coming year, with the new safeguarding arrangements, chairing of the boards would be chaired by different groups and all three partners would agree collectively on plans going forward. The partnership was an 'even blend' and there would be no one group leading another.

In the event of a conflict of interest, Councillor Akinbohun questioned what the solution would be and also who would have the power to dissolve the partnership. Alan Cotgrove explained there would be a consensus on the decisions to be made. If issues were to arise, investigation would be undertaken by an independent review board.

The Chair sought clarification that an update on the new arrangements would be brought back to Committee which Alan Cotgrove confirmed. Adding to this, Rory Patterson, Corporate Director of Children's Services, explained the Committee would continue to have a role in safeguarding arrangements and scrutiny was expected on the new LSCP. The three partners would need to work together to ensure good safeguarding arrangements and Thurrock Council was well invested in this. Safeguarding was dynamic so it was important for the service to continue to develop and improve as time went on. Strategic approaches had to be adapted with time and opportunities to engage with the local community on safeguarding issues had to be sought to enable the service to influence and shape safeguarding in a meaningful way.

With regards to Ofsted requirements, the Chair asked if the other partners would be inspected. Rory Patterson explained Ofsted would look at children's social care but not the safeguarding arrangements with the partners although there may be some commentary featured on the partnership. The Chair went on to ask if this meant the service had gained more responsibility. Answering

that there was always a lot of responsibility in children's social care, Rory Patterson went on to say developments were always required in safeguarding. Judgements on safeguarding in past Ofsted inspections may have worked in one year but may not necessarily work in the next year, hence the requirement to continually develop.

**RESOLVED:**

**That the Childrens Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered and provided comment on the new safeguarding arrangements.**

**42. Update on Recommendations from Social Care Services Review**

Rory Patterson presented the report which outlined the outcomes of the 6 recommendations that had arisen from the independent investigation into the whistleblowing allegations in 2018. Recommendations 1, 4, 5 and 6 had been implemented, recommendation 2 would be updated at the next Committee meeting and recommendation 3 would be monitored through the new safeguarding arrangements and would be reported back to Committee.

Giving thanks for the report, the Chair asked for a flowchart of the dispute resolution process that was undertaken in recommendation 3.

Councillor Hague said it was reassuring to know that the whistleblowing allegations had been unsubstantiated. He questioned whether there were any concerns on the outcomes that had come out from the investigation. In reply, Rory Patterson said there was always a concern on how people were working 'on the ground'. The service had an effective multi-agency service hub (MASH) who worked closely together and concerns were addressed on differences of opinions. Following up, Councillor Hague sought confirmation on whether the service was confident in 'keeping on top of issues' following the investigation. With a firm yes, Rory Patterson reassured the Committee that the management team had been strengthened to ensure oversight of the service which was important and front line staff were well supported as always. A recent focused visit had also reported that the service was performing well.

On recommendations 2 and 3, Lynda Pritchard noted these would be reported back to Committee. However, she sought clarification on how the Committee would be able to scrutinise the actions within the report as per paragraph 4.1. Rory Patterson explained that the Committee was expected to look at the impact of the service and maintenance required of the service. A rigorous quality assurance programme was in place to audit cases to ensure the service was working well. The Committee was provided with data and performance details of the service to help give the Committee an idea of what was working well in the service enabling them to perform scrutiny duties.

Following up, the Chair suggested the Committee be provided with key performance indicators (KPIs) which would point the Committee to what needed to be looked at. Instead of just reading reports, charts would be useful

to give a clearer picture of the service's performance. Sheila Murphy, Assistant Director of Children and Families, invited the Committee to visit the social care team and suggested the Committee speak with staff. She thought this idea would enable the Committee to gain a deeper understanding of Children's Services and identify what other reports they would wish to see in future committee meetings.

On recommendation 3, Paula Robinson commented that partnership working between social workers and managers required the balancing of needs and working creatively on difference of opinions. She asked how confident staff were in using the dispute resolution process and how well supported they were. Sheila Murphy answered that a number of staff briefings were held in different parts of the building to ensure confidentiality. Sheila Murphy attended these and asked staff to openly raise concerns and issues that they had. Drop-in sessions and listening services were also held and support was offered through her blog. She went on to say staff had approached her with ideas and issues so was confident staff had a number of different ways to contact senior staff members.

On Liquidlogic Children's System (LCS), Paula Robinson agreed that it was a difficult system to use. Rory Patterson explained that the system needed developing but there was no upgrade available. There had been improvements made but work flows within the system could cause delays. The service had tried to cut down on bureaucratic levels to provide more support for social workers and the service was working with colleagues in the eastern region to improve on systems although LCS was one of the better systems.

Referring to paragraph 2.5(b), Councillor Akinbohun questioned whether the service checked if staff read and understood the mini booklet on learning reviews. Alan Cotgrove answered the mini booklets were provided because the learning reviews were usually 30 – 40 pages long so the mini booklets were a summary of these. Booklets were sent to frontline staff and it was the responsibility of the MASH to cascade these. The service could ask for evidence that the mini booklets were cascaded to staff as a way to check that they had read the booklets.

Agreeing with Lynda Pritchard's earlier point on scrutinising actions, Councillor Hague asked how performance management process would be shown as undertaking best practice within KPIs. Rory Patterson replied that comparative exercises were undertaken against neighbouring authorities and local authorities in the eastern region. The results of these exercises encouraged the service to develop further and the service had just agreed to send data to the Department for Education to show how well the service was performing. The gathered data could help the Committee to ask questions and gain an idea of the technical issues within the service. Quality assurance was carried out through audit programmes, the performance of social workers and the success of workshops.

Following up, Councillor Hague said the Committee wanted to be sure that they were performing good scrutiny. Rory Patterson suggested that reports could be brought to Committee on certain subject areas. Further training on KPIs and the service could be provided to the Committee in the new municipal year.

Noting the amount of time spent on data accumulation, Councillor Rigby questioned whether social workers 'crunched numbers'. Giving assurance, Rory Patterson confirmed social workers did not 'crunch numbers'. Social workers would input data into the LSC and other staff members would build a narrative on the given data. Each manager was provided with a dashboard with this narrative and data in their areas of work and social workers were to focus on their work.

**RESOLVED:**

**That the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted the progress made in implementing the recommendations from Whistleblowing Review.**

**43. Post - 16 Landscape in Thurrock**

Presented by Kate Kozlova-Boran, Interim Strategic Lead of Learning, the report provided a positive picture of the post-16 landscape. Post-16 year olds included young people who were not in education, employment or training (NEET). The service had made substantial progress in reducing the number of NEET from 13.8% in 2008 to 1.7% in 2018 and young people differed in this timeline. Additional resources may be needed to support the 1.7% NEET.

Councillor Akinbohun questioned how the service was realigning to meet the needs of the NEET in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In answer, Kate Kozlova-Boran said careers advice was provided in 85% of schools which would prevent young people from falling into NEET.

On paragraph 3.1, Councillor Anderson questioned why the figure of 2.0% in August 2018 had increased significantly to 8.8% in one month. Kate Kozlova-Boran explained that it had been due to the arrival of unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) in which the service had lost sight of. Local authorities had an obligation to report UASC on their systems within 24 hours and although the UASC had run away and not returned, they would still remain on the system, thus contributing to the jump in percentage.

Councillor Akinbohun asked if students had gone on gain placements in prestigious universities. Kate Kozlova-Boran announced that two young people had received placements in Oxford University and Cambridge University. One had been given a confirmed placement following their A Level results and the other one had been offered a conditional placement dependent on their A Level results in August 2019. Pleased to hear this, Councillor Akinbohun went on to say young people who were not doing so well should also be encouraged and supported. Kate Kozlova-Boran stated

children from the 9 identified disadvantaged wards of Thurrock were supported and the National Outreach Programme also supported these children.

The Chair questioned whether additional funding had been sought yet. Michele Lucas, Interim Assistant Director of Learning, Skills and Inclusion answered successful funding had been secured through the service's 'On Track Thurrock' programme. The service wanted the best for Thurrock's young people and external funding was sought on a regular basis. A report would be brought back on high level apprenticeships.

Lynda Pritchard queried how the Committee could help to further the service's cause in the post-16 landscape and for looked after children (LAC). Kate Kozlova-Boran answered the service had been adding to and realigning services to LAC as well as encouraging them to join the Duke of Edinburgh programme. Specialist tutors were brought in to support LAC who was underachieving. There was also a 'Next Steps' programme for LAC which supported LAC into getting ready for the working world and a range of other programmes were in consideration for LAC.

Following up, Lynda Pritchard asked whether there was 'joined up thinking' on starting the process of LAC programmes earlier and if funding was an issue. Andrea Winstone, School Improvement Manager, replied that the 'Brilliance Club' took disadvantaged children to visit universities. Lynda Pritchard felt that LAC should be high on the priority list and asked for a report to be brought back to the Committee on 'joined up thinking' on LAC programmes.

Councillor Akinbohun suggested the service work with other bodies such as fitness instructors to enable young people to channel their energy to prevent them from committing anti-social behaviour acts. Kate Kozlova-Boran answered that youth clubs were available for young people and there was the Prince's Trust programme for 16-25 year olds. Councillor Akinbohun questioned if youth clubs and the Prince's Trust Programme was promoted enough to young people. In answer, Michele Lucas confirmed that the Youth Offending Service helped with promotion. The service was aware of certain groups of young people and was trying to target these groups to encourage them to progress and move on. There were a range of programmes available to young people through Inspire which could be brought back to the Committee for an update.

#### **RESOLVED:**

- 1.1 That the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee endorsed and supported the current approach to the Post-16 provision in Thurrock.**
- 1.2 That the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee reviewed and evaluated the current approach around the current services to vulnerable, SEND, LAC learners through an innovative**

**individualised, young person led and sustainable targeted support programme.**

#### **44. Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Update**

The report was presented by Malcolm Taylor, Strategic Lead of Inclusion which provided the Committee with an update on the services for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). A self-evaluation on the work undertaken by the service in conjunction with the Thurrock Clinical Commissioning Group had helped to identify the following key areas:

- SEND Population;
- Placement;
- Participation in Decision Making;
- Identifying Children and Young People's Needs;
- Making High Quality Provision; and
- Transition to Adulthood.

Councillor Akinbohun asked for examples of the opportunities available to post-16 SEND children. Malcolm Taylor answered the opportunities included continuing on to college and support to go onto an apprenticeship or other identified training. Education Health and Care (EHC) Plans would ensure needs were met which focused on more than just education as plans included access to employment and other opportunities.

Following up, Councillor Akinbohun queried whether the service spoke with employers to encourage them to give employment opportunities to young people with SEND. Explaining that this was covered in the Equality Act 2010, Malcolm Taylor went on to say this increased opportunities for young people with SEND. The service also worked with Lifestyle Solutions and had local employers who were supportive.

Noting the key priorities were just actions, Lynda Pritchard felt the report was difficult to read and follow as each action point was not set in the next paragraph following a key priority. Malcolm Taylor explained that the key priorities related to the strategy and the report gave a summary of the self-evaluation with identified action points.

Praising the service on the overall good improvement, the Chair asked if there was a performance target for the service to work toward. Malcolm Taylor answered that Thurrock has always been a high performing local authority and there had been some concern on completing a high target figure with the 20 week timeframe for children and young people with SEND on EHC plans. Parents and carers wished for plans to carry on beyond the 20 week target and the service worked with parents and young people to ensure a positive outcome.

**RESOLVED:**

**That Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered the self – evaluation of the support for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities.**

**45. Update on Brighter Futures Children's Centres Service**

Prior to the start of the report, Wendy Le, Democratic Services Officer, gave a brief outline of the Committee's site visits to the Tilbury Children's Centre on 21 January 2019 and 11 February 2019. In both site visits, the Committee was given a tour of the centre and had observed a Stay and Play session taking place. Play workers were on hand to support children and parents playing together. Tilbury Children's Centre was the biggest Children's Centre but other Children's Centres were just as busy despite the size.

The Update on Brighter Futures Children's Centres Service report was presented by Andrea Winstone which focussed on the improvements made to the Children's Centres service following a review in January 2017. Services had always been available to parents with children up to the age of 5 but the new delivery model extended support to parents with children up to the age of 11. New services were designed as a result. There are a number of services that could be developed within the Children's Centres and the service continued to look for new partners to deliver these services.

Nicola Cranch, Parent Governor Representative, mentioned that she had used Children's Centres in the past and had attended short term courses which had resulted in poor retention rates. Andrea Winstone explained that Children's Centres had improved in the last couple of years. Continuing on, Nicola Cranch thought it was shocking that 69% of parents felt confident in giving their children a healthy snack after attending a course on healthy eating. Paula Robinson said that this could be due to people's understanding as everyone understood learning differently. Andrea Winstone added that parents attended the course without much prior knowledge on the topic so for 69% of those that had attended to have gained confidence through the learning was good.

The Chair declared a non-pecuniary interest due to her being a member of the Thameside Advisory Board.

Lynda Pritchard was pleased to see an improvement on the structure of programmes run and the buildings of Children's Centres. There was a good relationship between schools and Children's Centres. Agreeing with this, Councillor Hague felt it was important for Children's Centres to support parents with children from birth to provide them with support and skills. Councillor Hague went on to ask how people were signposted to a Children's Centre. Andrea Winstone explained that once children were registered with a health visitor, this would also register them with a Children's Centre. Monthly timetables were sent out with the month's scheduled programmes and Children's Centres worked with 45 different partners. Referrals also came from schools, doctors and MASH.

Commenting on the success of the Children's Centres, Paula Robinson advised the service not to overload staff with work. Andrea Winstone answered that Parental Outreach Workers (POW) were able to share the workload to ensure no referrals were turned away. For people waiting for a POW, they were assigned to someone until a POW was available.

**RESOLVED:**

**That the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted the improvements to the Brighter Futures Children's Centre Services.**

**46. Update Report On Child Sexual Exploitation and Missing Children**

Claire Pascoe presented the report which outlined the actions being undertaken by Thurrock Social Care in their response to child sexual exploitation (CSE) and associated exploitative harm. The service had taken significant steps to identify and tackle CSE through awareness training within the Council and local community. For young people and children who decline to engage with statutory services, Operation Goldcrest will, as of April 2019, be piloted to support these young people aged 13 – 18. The pilot is planned to run for 12 to 18 months and if successful, it would be rolled out throughout Essex and potentially nationally. Claire Pascoe recommended that the Committee read the embedded link in paragraph 8.

Councillor Akinbohun queried the percentage of children that confided in the service. Claire Pascoe answered that the statistics were hard to gather because children may confide in different people and help services. People had to be aware of the type of language used towards children and their responses to children who were confiding in them which was what the service was focusing on. This could set the conditions in how children felt in confiding in people.

Councillor Hague asked how information was shared nationally. Responding that the government system had no method to track information, Claire Pascoe went on to say this was a concerning issue. She could only speak on a local level in that the service shared information through the relevant pathways and reported to the National Crime Agency who provided annual statistics around trafficking referrals to the National Referral Mechanism, (NRM), from public bodies, including Local Authorities. Councillor Hague went on to ask what procedures were being looked at to share information nationally. Claire Pascoe answered that the government was aware of the issue and was looking into a solution. There were issues in a procedure particularly in the area of county lines.

*The Committee agreed to suspend standing orders to 21.45 to enable the Committee to finish the agenda.*

On the figures given on paragraph 3.3.1, Councillor Anderson questioned how the figures had fared historically. Claire Pascoe replied that the given figures was an area to develop on and had appeared to have increased. A CSE

assessment tool was used to assess CSE and child criminal exploitation (CCE) and currently, the main point was to ensure risks were spotted and perpetrators were targeted.

On spotting risks, Rory Patterson stated that young social workers were taught to identify the signs of abuse. He went on to say that there was a positivity behind the gathered data as it helped agencies to identify issues and trends which could be joined up to missing children data. Risks were no longer looked at within families only as was the traditional method but instead peer groups, external surroundings and other families had to be looked at. Referring back to an earlier point, Rory Patterson reiterated that safeguarding approaches had to be dynamic and other factors had to be taken into consideration.

Councillor Akinbohun asked how the service could benefit non English speakers. Claire Pascoe explained that translators were used and with the project on raising awareness with hotel staff, interpreters were being considered as local hotels had a diverse employment of staff who spoke different languages. Councillor Akinbohun went on to suggest the service consider employing staff within the service who spoke the same language to ensure trust and to encourage the hotel staff to speak openly with people working within the service. Claire Pascoe answered that this could be considered as the Council had a diverse workforce. Adding to this, Paula Robinson explained that social workers were trained to build relationships and despite cultural and language differences, they were still able to build trust.

The Chair felt it was reassuring for the Council to have a dedicated CSE Officer employed. She went to ask if the service worked together with the LSCP. Alan Cotgrove answered that Claire Pascoe attended MASH meetings and also linked in with the Southend, Essex and Thurrock group and pan Essex. Rory Patterson added that he chaired the gang related group in the Council, the operational arm of which Claire Pascoe also attended.

#### **RESOLVED:**

**That the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted the work being carried out by Children's Social Care to tackle Child Sexual Exploitation and Missing Children.**

#### **47. Work Programme**

The Committee discussed reducing the agenda down in future meetings in the new municipal year to enable the Committee to spend more time on items to be covered and analysed. It would be best to focus on key areas.

**The meeting finished at 9.38 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)**

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<b>2 July 2019</b>	<b>ITEM: 5</b>
<b>Children’s Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee</b>	
<b>Thurrock New Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements</b>	
<b>Wards and communities affected:</b> All	<b>Key Decision:</b> N/A
<b>Report of:</b> Alan Cotgrove, Thurrock Local Safeguarding Children Partnership (LSCP) Manager	
<b>Accountable Assistant Director:</b> Sheila Murphy, Assistant Director of Children’s Services	
<b>Accountable Director:</b> Roger Harris, Corporate Director of Adults, Housing and Health	
<b>This report is Public</b>	

## **Executive Summary**

The Children and Social Work Act 2017 and Working Together 2018 dissolves the requirement for Local Safeguarding Children’s Boards and requires new arrangements to be put into place. Government Guidance was also published during 2018 to assist in the transitional process.

The three Strategic Safeguarding Partners, determined under the Children and Social Work Act 2017, comprise of Thurrock Council, Essex Police and Thurrock Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG). The three Partners were required to publish an Implementation Document setting out the new Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements (MASA) three months prior to its implementation.

The Implementation document of the new arrangements had to be published no later than June 2019 and implemented no later than September 2019. Thurrock’s Implementation document was presented to this Committee in February 2019 then published and came into effect on 7 May 2019.

The new arrangements will be referred to as Thurrock Local Safeguarding Children’s Partnership (Thurrock LSCP).

Following the implementation of the new arrangements workshops were delivered to our partner agencies, explaining in more detail the changes and expectations of their involvement. A shortened version of that presentation is included within these papers (Appendix one)

As part of the changes there is no longer a requirement for an Independent Chair. The Safeguarding Partners are required to put in place a scrutiny process that challenges but is also supportive of the Partnerships aims.

As part of the scrutiny process, Thurrock LSCP request that the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee accept a quarterly report from the Partnership on its contribution to safeguard Thurrock Children and also receive an Annual report from Thurrock LSCP on its effectiveness.

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

- 1.1 The Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the changes to multi agency safeguarding children arrangements in Thurrock. From 7 May 2019.**
- 1.2 The Childrens Overview and Scrutiny Committee receive a quarterly report from the Thurrock LSCP.**
- 1.3 The Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee receive an Annual report from the Thurrock LSCP.**
- 1.4 The Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee consider and provide comment on the new safeguarding arrangements effectiveness.**

## **2. Introduction and Background**

- 2.1 The Thurrock Local Safeguarding Children Board (Thurrock LSCB) was introduced following requirements set out in The Children Act 2004 and has been supporting multi-agency safeguarding arrangement and their statutory responsibilities for Thurrock.
- 2.2 The Children and Social Work Act 2017 Bill received Royal Assent on 27 April 2017 and requires changes to the current local safeguarding arrangements.
- 2.3 The Government (DfE) provided guidance to support Partners during the transitional arrangements and Working Together 2018 was published in April 2018 setting out the final details expected of the new arrangements.
- 2.4 Thurrock LSCB set up a Strategic Group of the three Partners in December 2017 to develop the new safeguarding requirements as Government guidance became available during 2018.
- 2.5 The new arrangements will be referred to as Thurrock Local Safeguarding Children Partnership (Thurrock LSCP).
- 2.6 The main areas of change under the new arrangements are:
  - The name changes to Thurrock Local Safeguarding Children Partnership (Thurrock LSCP).

- Statutory Partners change from five to three.
- Serious Case Reviews change to become Local or National Child Practice Reviews.
- The Child Death Review process is now a separate arrangement (from September 2019).
- No requirement for an Independent Chair.
- Multi-function independent scrutiny process to be introduced.
- Some structure changes to the existing LSCB.

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

3.1 This is a statutory requirement

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

4.1 To ensure the Council meets its statutory duties with regard to Childrens Safeguarding

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

5.1 A consultation process with agencies involved in safeguarding children in Thurrock has been taking place during the transitional arrangements

5.2 Two safeguarding summits have taken place with Essex and Southend Safeguarding Children Board to agree working across Essex arrangements

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

6.1 This report impacts on the following corporate priorities:

- People: a place where people of all ages are proud to work and play, live and stay;
- Place: a heritage rich Borough which is ambitious for its future;
- Prosperity: a Borough which enables everyone to achieve their aspirations.

6.2 There are no Local Authority policy changes proposed as part of the new arrangements

### **7. Implications**

#### **7.1 Financial**

Implications verified by: **Nilufa Begum**  
**Management Accountant**

There are no additional financial implications for the new safeguarding arrangement. The Local Authority contribution currently to the safeguarding

arrangements remain in place and will be reviewed during the next financial year.

## 7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Stephen Smith**  
**Team Leader (Social Care)**

The Council are required to ensure that the new safeguarding arrangements meet the statutory requirements. No other legal implications have been identified.

## 7.3 Diversity and Equality

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

The new safeguarding arrangements and implementation Plan applies to all Children and families. There are no known negative implications arising for groups or individuals with protected characteristics.

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

None

## 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):

- Working Together 2015 (Government Document)
- The Children and Social Work Act 2017 (Legislation)
- Child Death Review – Statutory guidance October 2017 (Government Document)
- Changes to Statutory Guidance: Working Together to Safeguard Children and new Regulations February 2018 (Government Document)
- Local Safeguarding Transitional Arrangements April 2018(Government Document)
- Working Together 2018(Government Document)
- Local Safeguarding Partner (Relevant Agencies) (England) Regulations 2018 (Government Document)
- SET Procedures

## 9. Appendices to the report

- Appendix 1: Thurrock LSCP new arrangements slide presentation

**Report Author:**

Alan Cotgrove

LSCP Manager

Thurrock Local Safeguarding Children Partnership

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# Thurrock Local Safeguarding Children Partnership

New Safeguarding Arrangements

# The Legal Framework

- The new Multi Agency Safeguarding Arrangements are statutory
- Required to be in place by September 2019
- An implementation document was published in February 2019 and agreed by the DfE
- Thurrock transition took place on 7<sup>th</sup> May 2019
- Replaces the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB)
- Will be known as Thurrock LSCP - Local Safeguarding Children Partnership
- The relevant legislation for the new arrangements is:
  - The Child and Social Work Act 2017
  - Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018 (statutory guidance)
  - Local Safeguarding Partners (Relevant Agencies) Regulations 2018
  - Children Act 2004 as amended



# The Legal Framework

- That legislation determines the three local Safeguarding Partners to be :
  - Thurrock Council
  - Essex Police
  - Thurrock Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG)
- The Executive functions for the Safeguarding Partners will be:
  - Director of People Services – Thurrock Council
  - Head of Public Protection – Essex Police
  - Chief Nurse – Thurrock Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG)
- The Safeguarding Partners determine who will be included in the arrangements
- Those other agencies will be known as Relevant Agencies
- Relevant Agencies must comply with the new arrangements

# Relevant Agencies and Members

- ❖ National Probation Service
- ❖ Local Authority Housing
- ❖ Youth Offending Team
- ❖ NELFT
- ❖ Essex Fire and Rescue Service
- ❖ All Secondary Education Establishments
- ❖ All Further Education/Colleges Establishments
- ❖ East of England Ambulance Service NHS Trust
- ❖ Local Authority Lead member Children Services
- ❖ Adult Social Care
- ❖ Basildon & Thurrock University Hospital
- ❖ Essex CRC
- ❖ CAFCASS
- ❖ All Primary Education Establishments
- ❖ Specialist Schools/PRU
- ❖ Voluntary Sector
- ❖ Early years Settings
- ❖ Lay Member
- ❖ Essex Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust (EPUT)

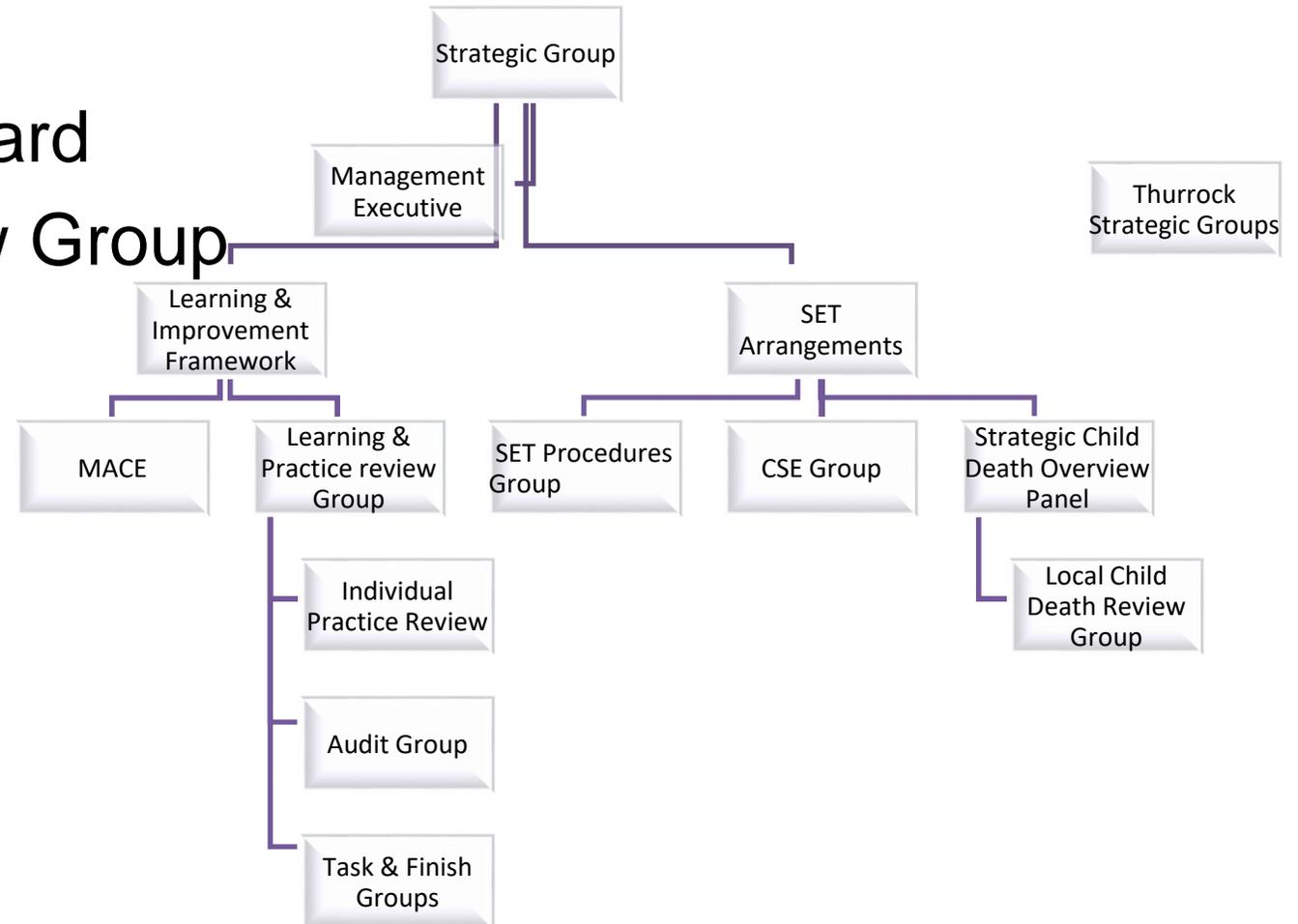
# The next stage

- The new arrangements have taken into account:
  - Good practice from the previous LSCB
  - The statutory requirements that must be provided under the new legislation and guidance
  - The demands being made on all organisations and agencies
- We will
  - Publish a Constitution of the operational processes and policies
  - Publish a Delivery Plan that drives the activity of the Partnership

# Structure of the Partnership

- Strategic Group
- Management Executive Board
- Learning & Practice Review Group
- MACE
- Audit Group
- Individual LPR Groups
- Task & Finish Groups
- SET Arrangements

Page 30



# Other Meetings

## Thurrock

- Health & Well Being Board
- Adult Safeguarding Board
- Community Safety Partnership
- Childrens Overview & Scrutiny Committee
- Youth Crime Governance Board
- Strategic Gang Related Violence Group

## SET Meetings

- SET Procedures Group
- SET Domestic Abuse Board
- SET CSE Strategic Group
- SET Strategic Child Death Overview Panel
  
- New Regional Group
- New National Group

# Partnership Funding

- The Safeguarding Partners are accountable to ensure adequate funding and resources are available for the Partnership to function
- There is a shared responsibility between the Safeguarding Partners and Relevant Agencies (WT2018) to make that happen
- Relevant agencies will be notified of expectations for
  - Funding
  - Accommodation
  - Services
  - Resources
- The contributions proportionate with the organisations role

# Some differences LSCB v LSCP

- Greater focus on outcomes and impact
- Serious Case and Managed Reviews cease
- Learning Reviews - Local & National Reviews
- Change in criteria for reviews
- New Rapid Review process – Tighter deadlines
- SET Procedures will change
- Independent scrutiny
- Delivery Plan drives our activity



# Independent Scrutiny – Multi-Function

- Unlike the LSCB – no longer have an Independent Chair
- Safeguarding Partners required to have a process that challenges but is also supportive of the Partnerships aims
- Need to identify the impact and effectiveness of the Partnerships contribution to safeguarding Thurrock Children

## In support of that requirement

- The Partnership are required to produce an Annual Report of its activity and effectiveness which has to be independently scrutinised
- Important that we capture the learning, challenges made and impact
- Our activities will be captured through our Delivery Plan
- This will be the driver and measure of our activity
- Not to be seen as a process but the means to achieving impact



# Scrutiny – Multi Function

To ensure that what we are undertaking is effective, we will seek challenge and reflection from:

- Each member organisation of the Partnership
- Youth Cabinet
- 2 Lay People
- Independent themed reviews of impact relating to
  - Early support
  - CIN
  - CP
  - LAC
- Independent commissioned review of the Partnerships effectiveness
- Report to the LA Childrens Overview & Scrutiny Committee

# Child Learning & Practice Reviews

## - Rapid review Process

There are two referral pathways for a Rapid Review

1. A mandatory notification of a serious incident to the Partnership from the LA
  2. Notification by any organisation of a serious incident that may warrant a Local Child Practice Review or other type of review
- A Rapid Review meeting must take place within 15 days of notification to the Partnership
  - Organisations involved will be asked to provide as much detail as possible for the Rapid Review
  - The outcome of the Rapid Review has to be sent to the National Panel within 5 days of completion
  - National Panel aims to respond within 15 days
  - New reporting processes have been put in place to facilitate this

# 1. Mandatory Review

Where the LA knows:-

- A child has been abused or neglected  
OR
- Suspects that a child has been abused or neglected  
AND
- That child dies or is seriously harmed in Thurrock  
OR
- A child that normally resides in Thurrock dies or is seriously injured outside England

The LA must notify the National Panel and the Safeguarding Partners within 5 days of becoming aware the incident has occurred

ALSO

The LA must also notify the Secretary of State and Ofsted where a Looked after Child has died whether or not abuse or neglect is known or suspected

## 2. Local Practice Reviews

When a serious incident is identified the Safeguarding Partners must consider if the case meets the criteria for a Local Child Practice Review

- The criteria includes if a case
  - Highlights or may highlight improvement needs – including improvements previously highlighted
  - Recurrent themes in local cases
  - Highlights or may highlight concerns over two or more organisations or agencies working together
  - On referral to the National Panel they consider a local review appropriate
  - The Safeguarding Partners have concerns over actions of a single agency
  - Where there has been no agency involvement
  - Involvement of more than one authority area or family has moved around
  - Involving an institutional setting

# Role of the National Panel

- Receive all notifications of serious incidents, completed Rapid Review meetings and pre-publication copies of all reviews
- Identify and oversee reviews of serious child safeguarding cases which are complex or of national importance
- Currently consider between 20-40 cases at each meeting
- Although Statutory Panel – The decision for a review rests with the local Safeguarding Partners
- Aim to respond within 15 days of receiving a Rapid Review report

# National Reviews

- National Panel have instigated their first national review
- Adolescents and Criminal Exploitation.
- Appointed a pool of national reviewers
- This national review includes a Thurrock SCR
- National reviewers attended Thurrock to meet with staff
- Also meet with family members
- Look at similar cases



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<b>2 July 2019</b>	<b>ITEM: 7</b>
<b>Children’s Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee</b>	
<b>SEND Inspection Outcome</b>	
<b>Wards and communities affected:</b> All	<b>Key Decision:</b> N/A
<b>Report of:</b> Michele Lucas, Assistant Director of Education and Skills	
<b>Accountable Assistant Director:</b> Michele Lucas, Assistant Director of Education and Skills	
<b>Accountable Director:</b> Roger Harris, Corporate Director of Adults, Housing and Health.	
<b>This report is</b> Public	

## Executive Summary

In March 2019 the local area, including the local authority, the CCG, and schools, underwent a joint inspection of special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). This is an inspection in which Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) focused on how well the local area had introduced the SEND reforms from 2014 and the support that is provided for children and young people with special educational needs in line with the statutory code of practice.

The Inspection findings concluded that the leaders in the local area had not made enough progress in the introduction of the reforms and as a result were issued with a Written Statement of Action.

As a result of the findings the local area is required to produce a written statement of action (WSOA) on how it will tackle the following areas of significant weakness:

- Inaccurate and incomplete records and ineffective oversight mean that leaders did not know the whereabouts of some children and young people and what provision they have.
- Quality assurance is not rigorous enough to ensure effective governance and oversight across the provision and services for 0 to 25-year-olds with SEND. Leaders are reliant on working relationships rather than processes. Leaders are over reliant on the limited information given to them by educational providers about the quality of the provision they purchase.
- EHC plans and the annual review process are of poor quality. The local authority has no system in place to make sure that relevant professionals and services are notified when EHC plans need reviewing or updating. Professionals are not routinely informed of requests to submit written

information within specified timescales. Too often, EHC plans are out of date and do not accurately reflect the needs or views of children and young people, or the views of the families. The information from EHC plans and annual reviews is not used to inform the commissioning of services, particularly, but not exclusively, for young people between the ages of 19 and 25 years.

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

**1.1 That O&S to note the work that has been undertaken to prepare our statement of action as a result of the result SEND inspection.**

**1.2 That O&S to monitor the progress of the statement of action in preparation for our re-inspection**

## **2. Introduction and Background**

2.1 In 2014 central government introduced a new system for supporting children and young people with additional needs – this moved away from the previous Statement of Special Educational Needs to a more holistic approach and the introduction of Education Health and Care plans (EHCP).

2.2 One of the key areas initially was the conversion process from the previous Statement of Special Educational Needs into an EHCP – Thurrock had just under one thousand statements of special educational need that needed to go through the review and conversion process resulting in the new EHC plans. The new plans have a central focus on the participation of children and young people and their parents/carers in the decision making and a strong focus on high aspirations and improving outcomes.

2.3 The introduction of the EHCPs meant that a whole system change was required in both the development and review of the plans and, as such, Thurrock invested in developing the partnership arrangements. The recent inspection did acknowledge that Thurrock has strong partnership working and particular strengths in the work with children in their early years. The report also highlighted the strong performance of educational outcomes across all year groups.

2.4 The report also identified the significant increase in demand for EHC plans – many parents expressed the view that unless they had a plan they would not be able to access the appropriate support needed for their child. At the time of the inspection there were 1562 EHCPs a significant increase in workload for the team. This is clearly not what the reforms seek to achieve. Thurrock has worked with its schools on the support that is provided at SEND support where pupils do not have an EHCP. Thurrock will be further developing its engagement work and training in this area with both parents/carers and schools to address support in school and its link to resources and outcomes.

2.5 The inspection identified areas for further development across the local area. These areas were in line with the local area's self-assessment and are being worked through as part of an ongoing improvement process.

2.6 At the time of the Inspection there had already been a significant improvement in the statutory service's delivery of EHC Plans within the statutory 20 week timescale, at 94% - this is above the national average.

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

3.1 The Local Authority has to submit a WSOA by 12<sup>th</sup> August 2019 this will then be reviewed by Ofsted. The WSOA will cover the three areas for concern raised in the inspection and nothing more. However, other areas of development are monitored through the SEND Development Action Plan. Once approved the LA has 18 months before local area is re-visited Ofsted on the areas outlined in the letter. This is not a re-inspection. There will also be monitoring visits by the Department for Education Regional Advisors to monitor progress against the WSOA.

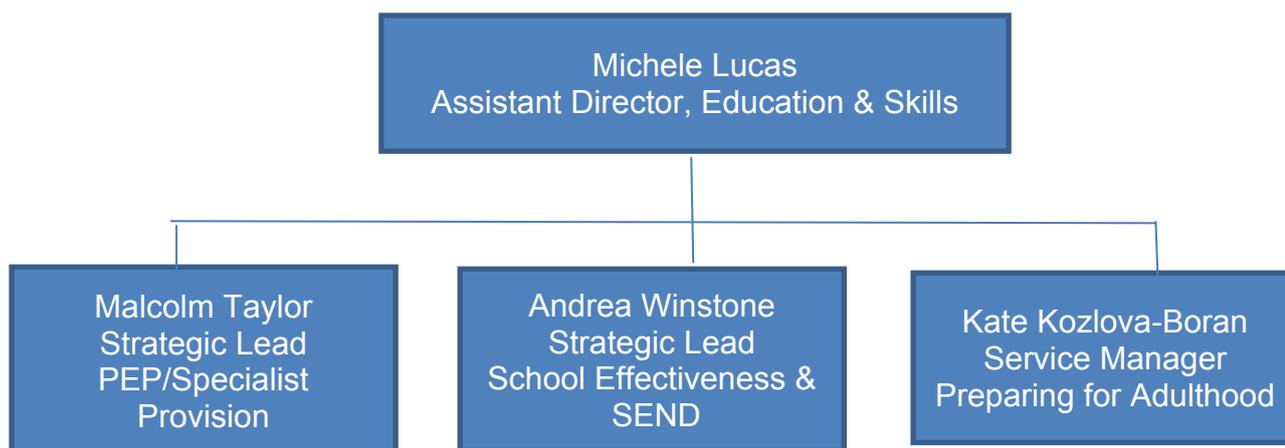
3.2 **The effectiveness of record keeping** – we are currently reviewing the current systems and processes that are used to support children and young people with SEND requirements. Clearly the report identified that electronic record keeping was not strong enough and, as a result, we are increasing the resources in this area and implementing recommendations that were identified within a previous health check.

3.3 **The quality of provision** - we are strengthening the monitoring and review of all specialist in-borough and out-borough provision to ensure that the children and young people are receiving high quality provision that ensures they are meeting their educational outcomes. This work will also include a review of our current quality assurance framework and how we are implementing this across the service.

3.4 **The quality of education healthcare plans and annual reviews** - the LA recognised some of the challenges related to the increased demand and, as a result, increased the staffing capacity in the SEND department by 50%. We have also introduced further capacity into our preparing for adulthood team. The team is in the process of undertaking extensive training to ensure that the plans are within timeframes and that the annual reviews are undertaken as outlined in the guidance.

The whereabouts of all children is monitored on a monthly basis as is the nature of the provision they are attending. The whereabouts of all children and young people with SEND are tracked and monitored by the Strategic Lead for SEN.

3.5 A review of the management oversight has been undertaken and outlined below is the new management team with responsibility for this area of work:-



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

- 4.1 The Portfolio Holder for Education and Health will chair a SEND Development Board which will be attended by the Corporate Director, senior representatives from the CCG, head teachers, and parent representatives. This Board will oversee progress against the WSOA and the wider action plan for SEN.

In addition, it is proposed that Children’s Overview and Scrutiny are part of the overall governance structure for the monitoring of the Written Statement of Action.

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

- 5.1 Children’s Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee

#### **6. IMPACT ON CORPORATE POLICIES, PRIORITIES, PERFORMANCE AND COMMUNITY IMPACT**

- 6.1 This report contributes to the following corporate priorities:  
- create a great place for learning and opportunity

#### **7. IMPLICATIONS**

##### **7.1 Financial**

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

Additional resources have been identified to ensure that we implement the change programme that is being developed to support children with special needs. This will be monitored alongside the written statement of action to

ensure that they have been targeted in the appropriate place to see improved outcomes for children and young people.

In addition, the Dedicated Schools Grant in 2018/19 prioritised resources to make permanent the additional capacity required to respond to the increase demand in EHCP.

## 7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Lindsey Marks**  
**Deputy Head of Legal**

The Committee is asked to note the report content under the remit of the Committee's terms of reference and powers.

## 7.3 Diversity and Equality

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

Supporting our children and young people who have special education al needs is a key strategic priority for Thurrock Council. We have recently redesigned our work around how we engage with children young people and parents/carers who require additional support. To support with this work we have recently recruited an engagement officer who will be working with local stakeholders to enable us to gain feedback and how we can ensure it is linked to the service transformation that we are undertaking.

## 7.4 Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Section 17, Risk Assessment, Health Impact Assessment, Sustainability, IT, Environmental

None

## 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: OFSTED letter of SEND Inspection

## **Report Author:**

Michele Lucas

Assistant Director of Education and Skills  
Children's Services

10 April 2019

Mr Rory Patterson  
Director of Children's Services  
Thurrock Council  
Civic Offices  
New Road  
Grays  
Essex  
RM17 6SL

Mandy Ansell, Chief Officer, Thurrock Clinical Commissioning Group  
Helen Farmer, Thurrock Clinical Commissioning Group  
Michele Lucas, Local Area Nominated Officer

Dear Mr Patterson

### **Joint local area SEND inspection in Thurrock**

Between 4 and 8 March 2019, Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC), conducted a joint inspection of the local area of Thurrock to judge the effectiveness of the area in implementing the disability and special educational needs reforms as set out in the Children and Families Act 2014.

The inspection was led by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors from Ofsted, with a team of inspectors including an Ofsted Inspector and a children's services inspector from the Care Quality Commission (CQC).

Inspectors spoke with children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), parents and carers, local authority advisers and National Health Service (NHS) officers. Inspectors visited a range of providers and spoke to leaders, staff and those responsible for governance about how they were implementing the special educational needs reforms. Inspectors looked at a range of information about the performance of the local area, including the local area's self-evaluation. Inspectors met with leaders from the local area for health, social care and education. They reviewed performance information and evidence about the local offer and joint commissioning.

As a result of the findings of this inspection and in accordance with the Children Act 2004 (Joint Area Reviews) Regulations 2015, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector (HMCI) has determined that a written statement of action is required because of significant areas of weakness in the local area's practice. HMCI has also determined that the local authority is responsible for submitting the written statement to Ofsted.

This letter outlines our findings from the inspection, including some areas of strengths and areas for further improvement.

## **Main findings**

- Leaders have been too slow to implement the 2014 disability and special educational needs reforms. Leaders' assessment of the local area's performance identifies the same areas of weakness identified by inspectors, and plans are in place to address some of the weaknesses. However, leaders acknowledge that there was a lack of capacity to put things right quickly and a long way to go to make sure that the 2014 reforms are properly implemented.
- There is an over-reliance on individual professionals taking appropriate actions, and a lack of robust systems and processes to drive improvement. Parents and carers who expressed their views during the inspection feel that professionals do not help them enough. They often feel frustrated and bereft of help because emails and phone calls to professionals are not responded to. Consequently, there are children, young people and their families who are not getting their entitlement to the information, services and support needed.
- Parents and carers are routinely the driving force behind formal assessments and reviews of provision for their children. For example, health professionals are more likely to be invited to key meetings and their specialist reports inform the education, health and care (EHC) plans if parents and carers intervene. This often leads to action, but also results in inequality between the experiences of different families.
- An electronic patient-recording system is used widely across different health services. However, some general practitioners (GPs) remain reluctant to give health professionals access to patient information, which inhibits effective information sharing relating to children and young people with SEND. This weakness was the subject of a recommendation in Thurrock's 2015 CQC review of services for children looked after and safeguarding (CLAS).
- The quality of EHC plans and annual reviews is poor. Plans do not accurately describe the needs of, and provision for, the children and young people. This misinformation applies to EHC plans for those in special schools and independent schools, as well as other provision.
- The provision for children and young people aged 19 to 25 years, and for those in independent schools, or out-of-borough provision, is not well thought out and/or quality assured.
- Checks are not rigorous enough to make sure the needs of children and young people are met and their well-being protected. Too often, the electronic records of educational placements are out of date and/or inaccurate. The inaccuracies make it difficult to track where the children and young people are placed.

- During this inspection, inspectors identified nine children or young people whose whereabouts could not be quickly confirmed. Leaders immediately recognised the seriousness of the situation and made urgent enquiries to check the safety of those identified. By the end of the inspection, the whereabouts of all nine children or young people were confirmed.
- Elected members of the council are informed frequently about the local area's work for children and young people with SEND. The councillor responsible for advocating the achievements and well-being for children and young people makes sure that this work has a high profile and is debated routinely. Similarly, issues related to SEND are discussed frequently at meetings between senior leaders.
- Thurrock has a strong partnership approach to joint commissioning of services for children and young people with SEND. There are examples of strong practice where needs assessments and collective responsibilities have successfully steered service developments and redesign. There are, however, areas where commissioning has been retrospective rather than needs led, or not sufficient for what is needed, such as the provision for 19 to 25-year-olds.
- Services to support children in their early years are well coordinated. Children's needs are identified swiftly, and the children and their families receive support quickly.

## **The effectiveness of the local area in identifying children and young people's special educational needs and/or disabilities**

### **Strengths**

- The needs of the youngest children, often with the most complex needs, are identified quickly and sensitively. Identification leads swiftly to offers of professional support and advice.
- For children with genetic disorders or those born prior to 33 weeks, the neonatal intensive care unit pathway ensures babies are seen by physiotherapists within a month. Many of the children's physical challenges are successfully addressed within their first year.
- Health visitors make good use of the two-and-a-half-year-old check to identify emerging developmental needs. Where indications of speech, communication and language needs (SCLN) are identified, professionals offer immediate advice and guidance, which can pre-empt the need to refer to specialist speech and language therapy (SALT) for assessment, and resolve low-level concerns.
- All children commencing primary education have their hearing and vision assessed, which is effective in identifying needs and facilitating children's access to sensory support at an early stage. Those already identified with a hearing or

visual impairment often have an EHC plan prior to starting school, which helps staff set up the appropriate support and reassure parents and carers.

### **Areas for development**

- There is a misconception held by parents, carers and professionals across all services and agencies that a medical diagnosis is needed before they can access support and/or get an EHC plan. Parents and carers often resort to making a formal referral for assessment and arranging support privately.
- Professionals across health, education and care give unhelpful advice to parents and carers about whether they will get an EHC plan or a statutory assessment. Parents and carers are often advised not to bother trying for a statutory assessment.
- Parents and carers understand that they will need to wait for appointments for their child to commence assessment for autism spectrum disorder and/or attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ASD/ADHD), but are frustrated that they hear nothing after referrals are made. They are left feeling anxious about whether referrals have been accepted or lost.
- Health visitors' developmental checks of children aged two-and-a-half-years are not integrated with the reviews by nursery staff in line with national expectations. In some cases, nursery settings do share their development check information with health visitors, but only on an ad hoc basis. The introduction of integrated developmental checks is at a very early stage.
- It is not easy for health professionals and managers to identify from case records when meetings and reviews relating to SEND have taken place, which reduces effective operational oversight and governance.
- The transfer of statements of special educational needs to EHC plans was not completed in time for the March 2018 deadline.
- Too many EHC plans are of poor quality. Many statements of special educational needs were converted to EHC plans to meet statutory timeframes too close to the deadline. In some case, information was simply, and inappropriately, cut and pasted directly from the old document to the new one.
- EHC plans do not accurately describe the needs of the children and young people, and the voice of the parents, carers, children and young people are too often lost. In too many cases, information is out of date or the school named as the provision is inaccurate.
- When EHC plans have specialists' reports as appendices, rather than integrating the information within the plan, the information is not seen as an integral part of the plan and reduces the usefulness of the plan.

- The effective design and implementation of EHC plans are too reliant on individual people, including parents and carers, rather than robust processes. When professionals come together to tailor support for children, young people and their families, this most frequently happens as the result of direct liaison between professionals or parents and carers pushing for action, rather than formal requests or clear processes subject to effective managerial oversight.
- In January and February 2019, 100% of the statutory assessments were completed within 20 weeks as required. However, prior to that, too many took too long to complete.

### **The effectiveness of the local area in assessing and meeting the needs of children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities**

#### **Strengths**

- The early years offer for the youngest children with SEND is strong. Children and their families have good access to a wide range of services for health and education, through the Healthy Family Service, children's centres, private and voluntary provision, the Early Help Service and the Portage Service. There are well-publicised drop-ins for children with SCLN.
- Professionals offering support to young children and their families make referrals to specialist services promptly when needed, which successfully gets the help to where it is needed.
- Continuous assessment and support work well when children move to early years provisions, where staff are trained by the portage service or the SALT team.
- The 'All About Me' document supports the 'tell it once' approach well for the youngest children with SEND. Many parents, carers and professionals like the document and take every opportunity to update it as children's needs and interests change. The documents have been in place for long enough now for school staff to use them in key stage 1. Professionals find using the document as the basis for discussion particularly helpful for multi-disciplinary meetings.
- When children looked after are placed in schools out of borough and need an assessment for ASD, wherever possible, they come back to Thurrock for the assessment. This service maintains the contact with local clinicians. If placed further afield and there are protracted waiting times, the CCG spot-purchases the assessment, which means that support can be accessed quickly.
- There is good access to specialist integrated therapies assessments and consistently good performance against the 18-week target for assessments. The multi-disciplinary team has a well-established process, which has been strengthened by the addition of specialist health visitors and specialist school nurses. The team works successfully with staff in special schools and responds

promptly to the rapidly changing needs of individuals. Co-case working and joint appointments across SALT, physiotherapy and occupational therapy are routine practice.

- School staff welcome the on-site support from the emotional well-being and mental health service (EWMHS) and outreach support from the special schools. The practitioners help staff understand and support the needs of children and young people, particularly those who do not meet the criteria for direct support from the service.
- The mental health service for children and young people has undergone significant transformation. This is as a result of a detailed needs assessment together with close collaboration between partners. There is now an integrated, system-wide approach under the EWMHS. Waiting times have significantly reduced, with more than 90% of children and young people seen within 18 weeks and 58% seen in less than six weeks.
- In response to the need for support for those children and young people, particularly in primary schools, with social, emotional and mental health needs, a new school well-being service (SWS) has been co-produced. Expectations are high that the programme is what is needed to support schools, children, young people and their families.
- In response to a growing need for language support for those known to the youth offending service (YOS), all YOS professionals are trained in SCLN. In addition, a new jointly funded post for SALT is to be established in the YOS.
- The SEND panel operates a robust structure for meetings and decision making. There is a shared understanding of the panel's work, which is valued by school leaders. The educational psychology service adds weight to the process and is fully committed to the coordinated approach.
- The local offer website invites parents, carers and young people to feed back on what is available and has a useful 'you said, we did' format to show what has changed as a result of their feedback. Information about the local offer is available in different languages and formats and has useful links to the local offers of neighbouring areas.

### **Areas for development**

- Leaders are unsuccessful in ensuring the effective sharing of the local offer of provision with parents, carers, children and young people. Too many families are not aware of the local offer. Those who do know about it say that the local offer either fails to include all aspects of support available or is unsuitable for what they need.
- Joint commissioning of services to support individual children and young people with SEND is common practice, but is sometimes reactive rather than pre-

planned. Providers on the ground identify areas of unmet need and respond to these. This approach detracts from the strong strategic overview of what is needed, affordable or good practice. Parents and carers use the provision initially and then must fight for it to be commissioned over the longer term. This leaves parents and carers caught between services and not clear about where funding is coming from.

- The designated doctor for children looked after has not yet met with the designated clinical officer (DCO). Strategic plans have not been developed and shared sufficiently to make sure that the work for those with SEND and who are also children looked after is closely aligned.
- The community children's nursing service has a very low level of understanding of the reforms, and its roles and responsibilities within the arrangements. Staff have not received suitable training. Given that this service provides daily support for children with highly complex needs in schools, this service is not as fully engaged as it needs to be.
- Health professionals are not sufficiently proactive in ensuring they influence the content and quality of EHC plans. Strategic monitoring and oversight are not developed well enough to ensure that EHC plans set out clear details about what provision needs to be put in place for optimal outcomes for the children and young people.
- Finalised, reviewed and updated EHC plans are not routinely shared with the health practitioners working with the children and young people. Across health services, EHC plans are not uploaded quickly enough onto case records, which means that the plans are not routinely available to inform day-to-day practice.
- Annual reviews of EHC plans and provision do not do the job for which they were designed. They are a constant source of frustration for parents, carers and professionals. Not all the relevant services and professionals, some of whom are working very closely with children and young people with highly complex needs, are routinely invited to contribute to meetings. The review paperwork is completed diligently by school leaders, but amendments are not followed up by the local authority. Too many EHC plans have not been amended appropriately for two years.
- Most of the youngest children undergoing assessment within the ASD pathway are seen within 18 months, which is too long a wait, although an improvement in recent years. When older children and young people are identified for an ASD assessment, they are seen sooner by a paediatrician.
- The education support and advice provided to those children and young people identified for SEN support who do not receive an EHC plan are not detailed enough. The support is too reliant on the expertise of special educational needs coordinators (SENCOs). The quality of support provided by SENCOs is too variable.

- Too often, time and energy are wasted when children and young people do not get an EHC plan initially but do so when information is resubmitted to the SEND panel. The confidence of parents, carers and professionals suffers when the SEND panel does not have the information needed to make a firm decision the first time, or when the quality of a referral is not good enough, and therefore unsuccessful.
- Leaders do not know whether the quality of the educational provision in independent schools and other out-of-borough provision meets the needs of the children and young people. There are no systematic checks or visits to the provision. The information on the EHC plans is out of date and inaccurate, sometimes naming the wrong provision.
- Leaders did not have an accurate record of the whereabouts of some of the children and young people at the time of the inspection. They were only alerted to this fact by inspectors. Since September 2018, for those who are looked after, there are records of systematic checks on attendance and well-being.
- Young people over the age of 19 years are not getting the provision and support they need to build and develop skills towards early adulthood and make sure that they have equal opportunities as their non-SEND peers. The young people say that they are bored and do not know what is available for them. Level 1 courses are often repeated because of lack of suitable progression. Students attend college for only part of each week and opportunities for work experience are scarce.
- The support for those children and young people with social, emotional and health needs in primary schools is of current concern to leaders. The newly commissioned SWS will be rolled out from September 2019.

## **The effectiveness of the local area in improving outcomes for children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities**

### **Strengths**

- Although still much lower than those with no SEND, the academic progress for children and young people with SEND from their individual starting points is improving.
- In 2018, in eight schools, the proportion of pupils with SEND achieving at least expected progress at the end of key stage 2 was the same as national non-SEND pupils. In the previous year, this was the case for only two primary schools. For the same measure at the end of key stage 1, the proportion rose from one school in 2017 to six in 2018.

- Children looked after with SEND often make as much progress from their starting points as all pupils nationally when in long-term placements. Their rate of attendance is close to national averages.
- There are several examples of children and young people who have been well supported by professionals to move from being educated at home to joining a school in a timely way.
- Where goal sheets have been developed with therapists, parents and carers identify positive outcomes for their children in terms of specific changes and improvement to the quality of family life.
- The Sunshine Centre is helping children and young people with complex needs to have fun, socialise and make friends. The befriending group successfully enables young people with disabilities who are mainly in mainstream schools to become confident in using money, travelling around the local area more independently and eating out.
- The Inspire Centre provides a welcoming, safe and secure haven for young people with SEND. Those who, for a long time, have struggled to find their place within the education system, and others who are not ready for college or employment, often find success academically and socially.
- The Open Door's 12-week, time-limited mentoring programme is helping young people to settle back home, build self-confidence and self-regulate their emotional well-being.
- Parents and carers using the outreach services from the children's centres report immediate, positive changes in their children's social and language development.

### **Areas for development**

- Information about how well children and young people achieve in their personal development is not collected in ways that inform the local area's strategic work.
- Too many children and young people with SEND move between schools because their parents and carers are encouraged by professionals to do so, or to seek provision that has a good reputation to meet needs and that is inclusive for their children, specialist or otherwise.
- Too many managed moves for children and young people with SEND are unsuccessful, particularly in secondary schools.
- Exclusions for children and young people with SEND have increased, particularly in primary schools.
- Absence rates are higher for those with SEND than those with no SEND. Persistent absence for all children and young people in the local area has reduced, but has increased for those identified with SEND.

**The inspection raises significant concerns about the effectiveness of the local area.**

The local area is required to produce and submit a written statement of action to Ofsted that explains how the local area will tackle the following areas of significant weakness:

- Inaccurate and incomplete records, and ineffective oversight mean that leaders did not know the whereabouts of some children and young people and what provision they have.
- Quality assurance is not rigorous enough to ensure effective governance and oversight across the provision and services for 0 to 25-year-olds with SEND. Leaders are reliant on working relationships rather than processes. Leaders are over reliant on the limited information given to them by educational providers about the quality of the provision they purchase.
- EHC plans and the annual review process are of poor quality. The local authority has no system in place to make sure that relevant professionals and services are notified when EHC plans need reviewing or updating. Professionals are not routinely informed of requests to submit written information within specified timescales. Too often, EHC plans are out of date and do not accurately reflect the needs or views of children and young people, or the views of the families. The information from EHC plans and annual reviews is not used to inform the commissioning of services, particularly, but not exclusively, for young people between the ages of 19 and 25 years.

Yours sincerely

<b>Ofsted</b>	<b>Care Quality Commission</b>
Paul Brooker Regional Director	Ursula Gallagher Deputy Chief Inspector, Primary Medical Services, Children Health and Justice
Heather Yaxley HMI Lead Inspector	Jan Clark CQC Inspector
Mary Rayner Ofsted Inspector	

Cc:  
The Department for Education  
Thurrock Clinical Commissioning Group  
The Director of Public Health for Thurrock local area

The Department of Health and Social Care  
The National Health Service, England

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<b>2 July 2019</b>	<b>ITEM: 8</b>
<b>Children’s Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee</b>	
<b>Semi Independent Supported Accommodation Sufficiency</b>	
<b>Wards and communities affected:</b> All	<b>Key Decision:</b> N/A
<b>Report of:</b> Sue Green, Strategic Lead of Children’s Commissioning and Service Transformation	
<b>Accountable Assistant Director:</b> Sheila Murphy, Assistant Director of Children’s Services	
<b>Accountable Director:</b> Roger Harris, Corporate Director of Adults, Housing and Health	
<b>This report is public</b>	

## **Executive Summary**

The local authority has a statutory duty under S.22G of the Children Act 1989 to secure sufficient accommodation for looked after children. Semi-independent accommodation for 16-18 year olds is currently unregulated and this report outlines the work that had been undertaken to ensure that the placements provided are of good quality, this was identified as a priority in the last sufficiency audit.

The recent commissioning exercise has, for the first time, established a select list of providers that provides a consistent quality standard as well as setting a framework of fees and charges. Clearer monitoring requirements have been set as a part of this commissioning exercise particularly for the semi-independent supported accommodation providers. A set of commissioning intentions seeks to continue to develop this work and will be delivered over the coming year.

- 1. Recommendation(s)**
  - 1.1 That members note the progress made to date to increase the provision of good quality semi-independent accommodation.**
  - 1.2 That members agree the commissioning priorities outlined in paragraph 3.10.**
- 2. Introduction and Background**

2.1 The local authority has a statutory duty under S.22G of the Children Act 1989 to secure sufficient accommodation for looked after children. The key areas that need to be addressed in relation to meeting the Duty are:

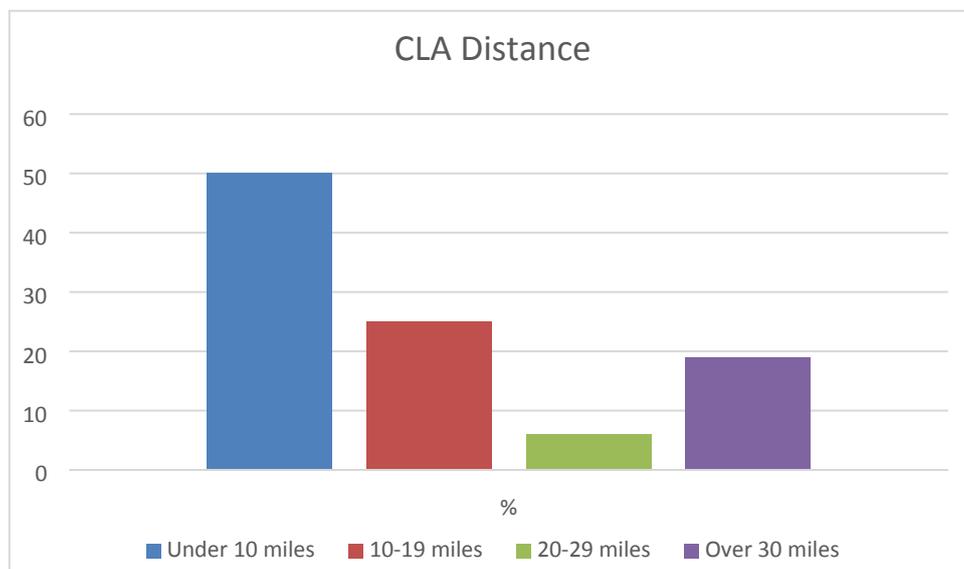
- The number of accommodation providers in the area
- A range of accommodation capable of meeting different needs
- That the local authority is active in managing the market
- That the commissioning strategy is part of the market management
- That the Duty applies not just to meeting the needs of looked after children and young people but also children at risk of care or custody
- Sufficiency includes providing early intervention and prevention services that help support children and families.

2.2 This report has a particular focus on how the local authority meets its duty for 16-18 year olds requiring semi-independent accommodation as this is unregulated and was identified as a priority in the previous sufficiency analysis.

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

3.1 The number of children in care is reducing from its peak in 2017 of 334 to 285 at the end of March 2019. This is due to a number of contributory factors including the reduction of unaccompanied asylum seeking children due to the national protocols introduced and the introduction of the Early Help strategies that aim to provide support at an earlier stage.

3.2 75% of placements are within a 20 mile radius, this is broadly similar to 2017. Those placed over 30 miles has increased slightly from 16% to 19% but the recent procurement activity will not yet have had an impact on securing placements closer to Thurrock. The size of Thurrock means that those children not placed in the Borough are generally in neighbouring or nearby authorities such as Essex, Southend, London Boroughs of Barking and Dagenham, Havering and Redbridge



- 3.3 During 2018 a full procurement exercise was held for all residential provision, independent fostering placements, mother and baby placements and semi-independent accommodation. This allowed us to set up a framework of providers to meet individual needs and reduces, although does not remove spot purchasing
- 3.4 Nationally concerns have been raised about the market for semi-independent accommodation particularly as this is unregulated and it was a priority that the procurement exercise addressed this locally.
- 3.5 Organisations applying to be a provider for Thurrock are expected to meet high quality standards and The aim of the service is to provide “Supported Accommodation” and “Support” for Young People aged 16-18+ (up to a maximum age of 25 by exception) in five distinct groups:
- Young People aged 16-17 who are deemed suitable to reside in Supported Accommodation to prepare them for independent living and do not have any care needs (as defined in Ofsted guidance)
  - Young People who are looked after children as unaccompanied asylum seekers aged 16-17 to prepare them for independent living and do not have any care needs (as defined in Ofsted guidance)
  - Young People who are homeless aged 16-17 and do not have any care needs (as defined in Ofsted guidance)
  - Young People aged 16-17 who are leaving secure accommodation / youth offending institutes or (police custody pending a court hearing) and do not have any care needs (as defined in Ofsted guidance)
  - Young People aged 18 with no recourse to public funds for short periods
- 3.6 In 2018 we commissioned supported accommodation for young people aged 16 and 17, and in some cases aged up to 25 with agreement from the Council. The aim of the provision in most cases was as a transition between either Foster Care or Residential Care to work towards independent living at age 18.
- 3.7 The expected quality levels set for semi-independent accommodation were high and of the 53 providers that tendered for this work, 40 were failed, this is a reflection of the importance of this. The select list is opened annually so we are hoping that the number of locally based providers continues to increase.
- 3.8 Our monitoring processes include a minimum of an annual visit that is unannounced where the quality standards are monitored, this frequency is increased based on risk. Where concerns are raised an unannounced visit is made on the same or next day and on the day of the visit a decision is made on suspension or termination depending on the concerns. If young people need to be moved this is arranged immediately.

3.9 Young people are also looked after through residential and fostering placements, particularly where there is a need for care as well as support. We have identified that there is a need to develop models that strengthen the links between different types of care to support children as they move towards adulthood such as the transition between fostering and semi-independent provision there may still be care needs as defined by Ofsted but there is also a need to prepare for independence. Semi-independent accommodation is not regulated to provide this but we are working with some providers to become registered and meet with transition.

3.10 As a part of the ongoing work to increase the sufficiency of provision we have identified the following commissioning intentions:

- To further develop 16+ provision generally plus where there are care needs rather than just support.
- To further develop the existing area risk assessment work focussed on CSE, Gang and knife crime
- To increase the number of residential providers particularly where there are high needs
- To develop provision to support the step down from secure and high needs provision addressing the gap between care and support
- Develop the work through Headstart Housing to improve our accommodation offer to care leavers
- To continue to improve our market development strategies as a part of further procurement work
- To increase the take up of current in house foster care placements and to increase the number of placements available
- To continue to reduce spot purchasing through the annual procurement exercise recognising this may always be needed to meet specific needs
- To consider block purchasing where need has been identified to improve the offer and reduce costs

3.11 The impact of the work to improve sufficiency will be mainly be measured through the outcomes for the children and young people in placements including through feedback from children and young people as a part of their individual reviews. However, the following indicators will also provide some information on how well our duty to provide sufficient places to meet needs is being met:

- Placement stability
- Distance to placement
- Number of placements through framework against number of placements spot purchased
- Average cost per placement per type

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

4.1 The local authority has a statutory duty under S.22G of the Children Act 1989 to secure sufficient accommodation for looked after children.

4.2 As semi-independent accommodation for young people aged 16-18 years is unregulated the need to have a robust quality framework supported through the commissioning of placements is paramount. A commissioning exercise was carried out in 2018 for all types of placements and a framework is now in place. The next phase of commissioning builds on this exercise and also on the range of services available to young people to support the transition to adulthood.

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

5.1 During the Council's commissioning exercise engagement and consultation with young people who have experienced being "looked after" they used the following key words to describe the features of a good service:

Trust	Listening	Structured
Communication	Helping	Transparency
Supporting	Understanding	Knowledge

This feedback was reflected in the specification that sets out the requirements for providers.

5.2 As a part of ongoing consultation, the views of young people will be gathered through the newly appointed Participation and Engagement Officer. A JSNA product on the needs of children who are looked after is also being developed and this will inform any future service provision.

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

6.1 This report impacts on the following council priorities:

- People: a borough where people of all ages are proud to work and play, live and stay.
- Prosperity: a borough which enables everyone to achieve their aspirations

## 7. Implications

### 7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **David May**  
**Management Accountant**

The need to achieve value for money whilst providing high quality placements that meet individual needs is crucial. The recent work to commission a framework of providers will reduce spot purchasing and regularise the fee levels paid particularly for semi-independent support accommodation and the annual opening of the contract for new providers will strengthen this.

## 7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Lindsey Marks**  
**Deputy Head of Legal**

The work outlined in this report contributes to the local authority statutory duty on sufficiency. The Sufficiency Duty (the “Duty”) is outlined in S.22G of the Children Act 1989, as follows:

“General duty of local authority to secure sufficient accommodation for looked after children

(1) It is the general duty of a local authority to take steps that secure, so far as reasonably practicable, the outcome in subsection (2).

(2) The outcome is that the local authority are able to provide the children mentioned in subsection (3) with accommodation that—

(a) is within the authority's area; and

(b) meets the needs of those children.

(3) The children referred to in subsection (2) are those—

(a) that the local authority are looking after,

(b) in respect of whom the authority are unable to make arrangements under section 22C(2), and

(c) whose circumstances are such that it would be consistent with their welfare for them to be provided with accommodation that is in the authority's area.”

The overall context for meeting the Duty is set out in the statutory guidance, (Sufficiency: Statutory guidance on securing sufficient accommodation for looked after children 2010) which states that:

“Securing sufficient accommodation that meets the needs of looked after children is a vital step in delivering improved outcomes for this vulnerable group. Having the right placement in the right place, at the right time, is a vital factor in improving placement stability, which in turn is a critical success factor in relation to the delivery of better outcomes for looked after children.”

The key areas that need to be addressed in relation to meeting the Duty are:

- The number of accommodation providers in the area
- A range of accommodation capable of meeting different needs
- That the Local Authority is active in managing the market
- That the commissioning strategy and practice is part of the “market management”
- That the Duty applies not just to meeting the needs of “looked after” children and young people but also children at risk of care or custody

Sufficiency includes providing early intervention and prevention services that help support children and families

### 7.3 **Diversity and Equality**

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

By strengthening the requirements on providers to provide a diverse range of support and care the individual needs of children and young people can be better met. Clear standards are set out through the specifications on the requirements of providers and they are expected to evidence they are meeting these.

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

None

### 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**

None

### **Report Author:**

Sue Green

Strategic Lead for Children's Commissioning and Service Transformation

Children's Services

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<b>2 July 2019</b>	<b>ITEM: 9</b>
<b>Children’s Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee</b>	
<b>Fostering and Adoption Annual Panel Report</b>	
<b>Wards and communities affected:</b> All	<b>Key Decision:</b> N/A
<b>Report of:</b> Dan Jones, Service Manager Adoption, Fostering and Placements	
<b>Accountable Assistant Director:</b> Sheila Murphy, Assistant Director of Children’s Services	
<b>Accountable Director:</b> Roger Harris, Corporate Director of Adults, Housing and Health	
<b>This report is Public</b>	

## Executive Summary

This report is to provide members of the Committee with an update on Thurrock’s Adoption and Fostering Panel.

### 1. Recommendation(s)

**1.1 That the members of the Committee are informed about the function and activities of Thurrock’s Adoption and Fostering Panel.**

### 2. Introduction and Background

2.1 This Reports sets out the function and work undertaken by Thurrock’s Adoption and Fostering Panel in the last year.

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

3.1 Thurrock’s Adoption and Fostering Panel Annual Report 2018/19 is attached at appendix 1.

### 4. Reasons for Recommendation

4.1 Members of the Committee are aware of how the Thurrock Council are meetings its statutory duties in relation to Adoption.

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

None

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

None

## **7. Implications**

### **7.1 Financial**

Implications Verified by: **Michelle Hall**  
**Management Accountant**

There are no financial Implications to this report.

### **7.2 Legal**

Implications Verified by: **Lindsey Marks**  
**Deputy Head of Legal Social Care & Education**

Children Act 1989 (as amended);

- sets out the duties for local authorities in terms of services to be provided to children in need
- makes provisions with respect to fostering
- establishes the principle that children are best looked after within their families.

Care Standards Act 2000 (as amended) and National Minimum Standards (NMS)

- NMS for Adoption are issued under this Act – together with the adoption regulations, they provide the framework for the conduct of adoption agencies and adoption support agencies
- NMS for Fostering Services – together with the regulations relevant to the placement of children in foster care, these NMS provide the framework for the conduct of fostering services
- NMS are used by Ofsted during inspections.

### **7.3 Diversity and Equality**

Implications Verified by: **Rebecca Price**  
**Community Development Officer**

The Adoption and Fostering Panel 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**

None

**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 - Thurrock Adoption and Fostering Panel Annual Report 2018/19

**Report Author:**

Dan Jones

Service Manager for Adoption, Fostering and Placements

Children's Service

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## Thurrock Adoption and Fostering Panel Annual Report 2018/19

### **1. Introduction and overview**

This extended report contains details of the work undertaken by the Thurrock Council Adoption and Fostering Panel during the years 1st January 2018 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2019. This has been done to bring our annual report in to line with the financial year and so our reporting is consistent. The Panel is constituted to consider both fostering and adoption cases which allows us to respond to the changing needs of local children.

Thurrock Council is responsible for the Panel financing, administrative support and overall good functioning. However, the Panel is entirely independent as regards its recommendations. The Panel can only make **recommendations** to Thurrock; it is the authority that has the legal duty to take the actual decision, having taken full account of the Panel's recommendations and the reasons for them.

The Panel is available to meet on a fortnightly basis and to hold an extra meeting if there is a need to consider any matter on an urgent basis. In 2019/20 the Panel will continue meeting twice per month to accommodate the increasing panel business covering both fostering and adoption. Panel members need to undertake hours of careful reading prior to the meeting making the timely dispatch of agenda papers well in advance of each meeting vital.

The Panel holds business and training sessions to update knowledge on relevant professional and legal developments in fostering and adoption. During the year the Agency Advisor/Fostering Manager provided a briefing to all panel members on the development of the service. We will continue to keep under review and strengthen as necessary the central list of those available for Panel membership. The panel member appraisals will help the fostering service identify the additional perspectives that could help develop Panel effectiveness.

### **1.2 Fostering Service:**

Thurrock Council is a Fostering Agency that provides a foster care service for children and young people who are 'looked after' by the Council. There are also looked after children and young people placed with relatives or friends of their family. These carers are known as Family and Friends Carers.

Thurrock also provides a service for children and young people who are not 'looked after' but, usually because they have disabilities, can benefit from short period of care by what are known as Shared or Short Break Carers.

In all these situations, the carers legally must be assessed and approved by the Council for whatever role they wish to undertake. Each role involves the care of children who are away from their parents and carries considerable day to day responsibility for vulnerable children who are sometimes going through very difficult times in their lives. Thurrock Council has invested in recruiting and supporting Foster Carers and the Recruitment Strategy is seeing the work of panel increase over time.

Whilst Thurrock needs to recruit foster carers to give such vulnerable children the

security and skilled care they need, fostering is a challenging task that has a major impact on the family life of those involved and is not for everyone. Care needs to be taken to ensure that the right people are approved, properly supported and provided with ongoing training and that there are regular reviews of their continued suitability. Thurrock is fortunate to have some very experienced and skilled carers who undertake excellent work with children.

During the above period, the Panel acted in accordance with the Fostering Services Regulations 2011. In summary, the primary duties require the Panel to:

- *Consider applications for approval and recommend whether or not a person is suitable to act as a foster carer and if so the terms on which they should be approved (e.g., number and age of children to be placed).*
- *Consider all first annual reviews of newly foster carers and any subsequent reviews referred to it by the fostering service and recommend whether or not the foster carers remain suitable to act as such, and if the terms of approval remain appropriate.* The Thurrock Panel invites carers to attend the first review consideration. Whilst the authority carries out an internal review each subsequent year, the Panel invites carers to attend a Panel review consideration every three years.
- *Consider Family and Friends Carer cases.* The above duties apply in these situations because when a child who is looked after by Thurrock and placed by the authority with such people, the approval must be under Fostering Regulations.
- *Oversee the conduct of assessments carried out by the fostering service. Advise on and monitor the effectiveness of the procedures for undertaking reviews of foster carers.* The Panel takes these duties very seriously. Whilst there is no legal requirement (unlike Adoption Panels) for there to be an Agency Adviser, the Panel strongly supports Thurrock's decision to have one.
- *Give advice and make recommendations on any other matters or cases referred by the fostering service.* This general quality assurance role is an important aspect of the Panel's functioning. Panel has no role in the operational management of the service, but it does have access to information about the complex issues the service is dealing with and at times it is useful to comment on specific cases or on themes that have emerged during Panel discussions.
- As part of this latter function, the Panel also considers and makes recommendations on the following.
  - *Consider reports following allegations made against carers.*
  - *Consider all proposals by the authority that a carer's approval be terminated.*
  - *Consider exemptions to the terms of approval, normally when it is proposed that the usual maximum of three children be exceeded.* This can take place when, for example, to keep a group of siblings together in addition to other children already in placement. This duty relates to any carer living in Thurrock irrespective of who holds their registration as a carer. This could be another local authority or an Independent

Fostering Agency.

### **1.3 Adoption Services:**

Thurrock Council is also a registered Adoption Agency providing the full suite of adoption services. There has been a change in how Thurrock Council delivers these services during the reporting period. From January 2018 – August 2018 Adoption Services were delivered through a partnership with Coram and since then Thurrock Council has begun to deliver all adoption services directly through the establishment of a new Adoption Team.

This presents an experienced panel with some new or returning challenges: whilst the panel has been considering matching for adoption, the approval of adopters is a function which has, again, become part of practice. The panel is supported in this by the panel advisor who is distinct from the fostering advisor.

The composition of the Panel is in accordance with the Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005 and 2014. Thurrock Council has a “central list” of people with a wide range of experience and diverse backgrounds and a good mix to ensure equal opportunity and anti-discriminatory practices. The number and background of Panel members is under continual review to reflect the makeup of the local community and bring additional experience to the Panel. During this last year individuals with a professional background in education, health and adoption have been appointed to the central list. An individual previously in care will shortly be joining the central list. There are monthly meetings with additional meetings arranged as and when it is necessary to do so to ensure continuity of panel core business and functions.

Although not Panel members, the Agency Advisor and Panel Administrator provide vital specialist support to the work of the Panel and attend all meetings. Panel members greatly value the very professional service provided by these colleagues.

The Panel made recommendations on the following issues:

- Recommend the approval of a match between a child/ren and approved adopters
- Change of approval from adoption to long term fostering
- Since 1st November 2018 the Panel also considers applications from individuals and couples to become approved adopters.
- The Panel also considers applications for individuals and couples to adopt children from overseas.

## **2. PANEL MEMBERSHIP**

The Adoption and Fostering Panel consists of people with a wide range of relevant personal and professional experience. Current and former foster carers (not for Thurrock), people who were placed in foster care themselves when children and others with experience of working in and managing children's and fostering services, including children with disabilities, voluntary and community organisations. We have panel members who were adopted as children and who have adopted children

bringing the appropriate lived experience to our deliberations. The number of panel members is under continual review to reflect the make-up of the diverse and changing local community in Thurrock and bring additional experience to the Panel. A number of new panel members have been recruited.

An overview of the panel membership is as follows:

<b>Role</b>	<b>Background</b>
Panel Chair	Previous Service Manager of children services in Essex.
Panel Vice Chair	Fostered and then adopted as a child, within her family. Also an ex-teacher.
Panel Member	Adoption Social Worker, has previously fostered and then adopted two children.
Panel Vice Chair	Adoption Social Worker, previously Team Manager for the adoption Team at Barking and Dagenham.
Panel Member	Ex Teacher and Ex Foster Carer
Panel Member	Previous Team Manager for CAFCAS Social Worker.
Panel Member	Ex Midwife
Panel Member	Ex Midwife
Panel Member	Elected Member

Panel members are appraised annually by the Chair and the relevant panel advisor (see section 3). These are designed to help each member reflect on their work and identify areas for further training. The reviews were helpful in discussing issues that often cannot be pursued in similar depth during Panel consideration of specific agenda items, as we need to focus on the issue at hand. The reviews also provided an opportunity for reflection on how the Panel approaches the task. There was a clear view that team working continued to be good and that each member felt able to express his or her views freely before an agreed recommendation was reached. The Panel Chair and Agency Adviser feel that the Thurrock Fostering Panel has a strong and experienced membership with a good range of personal and professional perspectives.

The Chair also receives an appraisal with the relevant advisor and the Service Manager for Fostering, Adoption, Placements and Contact

Although not Panel members, the Agency Advisers and the Panel Administrator provide vital specialist support to the work of the Panel and attend all meetings. Panel members greatly value the very professional service provided by these colleagues.

The agency advisors are as follows:

<b>Name</b>	<b>Role</b>	<b>Background</b>
Julia Sutton	Panel Advisor for Fostering	Fostering Assessment Team Manager
Sally Medbury	Panel Advisor for Adoption	Adoption Team Manager

### **3. Panel Practice**

Thurrock Council tries to ensure that the confidential agenda papers are sent out in good time (ideally more than 5 working days in advance of the meeting) for members to carefully read the material. At the meeting, the Panel firstly considers the documentation relating to each proposal, ensuring that the legally necessary statutory checks, references and documentation are in place to allow the matter to proceed. There is then a preliminary but focused discussion about the key aspects of the application or review, drawing on the range of perspectives available within the Panel membership. After identifying areas for further discussion, we then meet with the relevant social worker and the individuals involved. As indicated, we always invite those applying to become carers, with approved carers at their annual review and then every three years.

The Panel then recommends a course of action. As indicated, the Panel makes recommendations, it does not take decisions. The minutes of panel are passed on to the relevant Agency Decision Maker for them to consider. The Agency Decision Makers are separate for Fostering and Adoption cases:

<b>Name</b>	<b>Role</b>	<b>Background</b>
Janet Simon	ADM - Fostering	Strategic Lead – Looked After Children
Sheila Murphy	ADM - Adoption	Assistant Director – Children’s Services

### **4. Foster Carer Approvals**

During the dates considered in this report, the Thurrock Panel received twenty recommendations relating to applications for approval; thirteen households for general fostering able to provide placements for twenty seven children in total. There were seven Connected Persons Carer households for twelve children during the year. All wished to be considered as foster carers. Thurrock welcomes and encourages applications from all sections of the community and the Panel met with applicants of differing ethnicities, ages and sexual orientation. Some nine foster carer applications are currently being assessed so it is anticipated that we shall see a rise in applications to panel in 2019.

Prospective carers are usually asked questions about their experience of the preparation and assessment process and their views about the age and number of children they see joining their family. An important area is that of considering the impact of fostering on any existing children in the home. This can sometimes turn out to be a challenging issue for carers to manage, as the placement of a child with complex needs into a family group will inevitably have an impact on everyone in the family. The impact can be very positive in nature, but the reality is that it can at times be less positive for some birth children and lead to placement breakdown or a withdrawal from fostering. Panel members have a responsibility to ensure that the best decisions possible regarding timing of approval, the appropriate age range and the type of support that the carers will need are reached.

Fostering is a demanding and challenging task and whilst we need more carers, the assessment has to identify potential strengths and weakness so that the right decisions are taken and that carers have identified areas for further training and development. As indicated, fostering is not for everyone and Panel has a duty to explore any areas of concern directly with applicants and occasionally will ask for further reflection or information before a final recommendation is made.

Occasionally the Panel may need to recommend that an application should not be successful. This was not necessary during the last 12 months. If the Decision Maker agrees with such a recommendation, the applicant has a right to appeal internally or access a national Independent Review Mechanism Panel. The final decision rests with Thurrock. To date the Thurrock Panel has not had any decisions about approval matters referred to the IRM.

All applicants will have been through preparation group sessions where they will have heard at first hand (including from experienced Thurrock carers) about the task and then completed an individual assessment process. There is clear evidence from reports presented to Panel that the Thurrock introductory preparation groups are carefully planned and delivered, providing a good basis for the detailed assessment.

There is good dialogue between the Panel and the agency concerning issues that need to be covered in the assessment reports. This has contributed to the high standard of analysis by the assessing social workers. We continue to encourage the fostering service in its efforts to improve the standards of assessment and the consistent maintenance of good standards, particularly in relation to analysis. Over the year the panel has found all assessment reports to be of a high standard.

All applicants are asked to complete an evaluation form reflecting their experience of the preparation/assessment process and attendance at panel. During the last year there was a 100% return rate and all the feedback was extremely positive. In relation to Panel all applicants considered they were treated respectfully, their application considered objectively and they were given an opportunity to discuss their experience to date in some depth.

## **5. Foster Carer Reviews**

The Panel considered thirty two foster carer annual reviews during the period. With one exception the carers concerned attended all the reviews. In all cases the Panel was legally required to consider if the foster carer continued to be suitable for approval.

First annual reviews continue to be presented on time and it is clear from the reports that carers have an allocated supervising social worker, receive regular supervision

and have access to ongoing training provided by Thurrock. This first review provides a focused opportunity for Panel to see how potential has developed into reality. The review material and discussion with the carers can provide a picture of what life is like for a looked after child in the foster household and help Panel identify areas for development in practice standards and areas for further training. Panel members encourage the fostering service to obtain and consider the views of foster children and birth children of the foster children. We feel that this this is vital, as we need to hear the voices of looked after children and of birth children who share their home and lives with foster children who are often going through a confusing and unsettled period in their young lives. The Panel were particularly keen to ensure that newly approved carers are well supported.

The three yearly reviews will provide an opportunity for a longer term reflection on how carers are developing and gaining experience in different areas of fostering. This process can lead to a reflection on changes of approval terms as the review can provide the necessary evidence for an increase in numbers or change to age range. The overall standard of review material was excellent. All reviews presented to panel were completed within statutory timescales and there is a significant improvement in gaining feedback from fostering household members, children's social workers and the children and young people themselves.

## **6. Approval of Prospective Adopters**

The Panel has considered three agency applications to be approved as prospective adopters since January. These have been largely applications from Foster Carers wishing to adopt a looked after child in their care. As a Panel we have been satisfied with the quality of the assessment work done and the rationale for recommendation is clear.

The panel has also considered the suitability of three applicants for intercountry adoption. This presents with a range of matters that panel needs to consider and has generated much discussion. One case was deferred by the Agency Decision Maker for further work, favouring a minority position on that panel. Although, by majority, panel had recommended approval a helpful discussion took place with the ADM and the Chair which clarified matters. The deferment was agreed.

## **7. Adoption Matches**

Since January 2018, thirteen children were presented to panel, four of which were made up of two sibling pairs. It is notable that despite the diverse make up of Thurrock; all of the children considered were white British. Two children were placed soon after birth with their existing foster cares and adoption would provide them with consistency of care. These were concurrent placements.

With Thurrock Council regaining its adoption services we anticipate changes in our work as an adoption panel

## **8. Other Panel Duties**

The Panel has often considered the formal resignation of carers via a full hearing; as the Fostering Regulations 2011 do not require a formal Panel consideration and recommendation, Panel is now notified of resignations and the reasons. Foster carers are free to resign and after 28 days, it takes full legal effect. In cases where

there are matters of care concern, the Foster Carer's registration is brought to panel for a formal recommendation. All the de-registrations during the last 12 months were at the request or agreement of the carers except in two cases where there were concerns about standards of care. Panel was able to give a recommendation in both these matters and in one case our view was accepted, the other is following a right of appeal via the IRM.

It is inevitable that each year a number of carers will retire after lengthy service, move to another area, or decide after a period of service that changed family circumstances such as the birth of a child or health difficulties mean that fostering is no longer viable. Some de-registrations are due to very positive child centred reasons such as the carers adopting the child in their care or being granted a Court Order such as Special Guardianship that removes the child from public care and gives the carers direct legal responsibility for the care of the child within their family.

As indicated above, the Panel is occasionally asked to recommend an exemption to the usual maximum of three children in placement. Although it is not a legal requirement for the Panel to be directly involved, Thurrock rightly regards this as good practice.

The Panel will occasionally be asked to consider whether a foster child's placement with carers should become permanent, the intention being that the carers commit to looking after the child until independence.

The Panel also has an important quality assurance role. From reports and discussions and feedback from foster carers the Panel have identified some practice issues and recommended policy and practice reviews. In previous years, the panel highlighted the importance of ensuring that the children looked after savings scheme was fully monitored. This year it recommended that the foster carer's Welcome Pack was reviewed and updated; this is being done.

## **9. Panel Development**

Thurrock's Fostering and Adoption Panel is experienced in all relevant matters of its work and has an appropriate level of stability. We are continually working to improve the operation of the panel and the following represents the next steps in our development

## 9.1 Development Plan

Outcome	Means	Responsible Individual(s)	Target date
1) Panel is able to learn from the experience of those attending	Feedback forms to be reviewed and to include all attendees and there is some systemic collection and review of feedback	Chair and Service Manager	August 2019
2) Good Practice is identified and shared	A good practice bank, accessible to the social work teams, will be created. Where the panel has identified work of a very high standard the chair shall direct the Panel Administrator to add it to the good practice bank.	Chair and Service Manager	August 2019
3) Panel has an active input in to the development and improvement of the service	Panel & Business meetings will be re-convened to be quarterly and include the relevant managers. The purpose of the meeting shall be to ensure thematic issues can be addressed and relevant policies agreed	Chair, Service Manager, Panel Advisors and ADMs	November 2019
	QA – written feedback on each case will be shared with the TM and SM responsible	Chair	September 2019
4) Panel membership reflects the community and current practice	Our panel is in a good position in terms of the experience of its membership but we recognise that development of membership is key. The central list will be opened up to encourage further applications	Chair	September 2019
5) The panel standing agenda and minutes reflect the full function of panel and the work done	Our panel agenda and minutes accurately reflect the cases considered but we do not always capture the wider work of panel. The agenda and minutes will be updated to reflect this	Chair and Service manager	July 2019



<b>2 July 2019</b>	<b>ITEM: 10</b>
<b>Children’s Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee</b>	
<b>Children’s Social Care Performance</b>	
<b>Wards and communities affected:</b> All	<b>Key Decision:</b> N/A
<b>Report of:</b> Mandy Moore, Business Intelligence & Data Analytics Manager, Performance Quality Assurance and Business Intelligence	
<b>Accountable Head of Service:</b> Sheila Murphy, Assistant Director of Children’s Services	
<b>Accountable Director:</b> Roger Harris, Corporate Director of Adults, Housing and Health	
<b>This report is Public</b>	

## Executive Summary

This report shows that:

- The number of referrals received each month (on average) has increased by 33% from 17/18.
- Children Looked After (CLA) has reduced
- The number of assessments completed in the month has increased, on average, by 90 per month (against 17/18 monthly averages)
- Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (USAC) have reduced
- The number of children on a child protection plan has reduced and is in line with comparator groups

This shows that good performance has continued in areas such as assessments completed within 45 days, despite the increase in demand, and that performance has improved in relation to the number of children on a child protection plan.

### 1. Recommendation(s)

**1.1 That members comment on the areas of improvement in Children’s Social Care and work undertaken to manage demand for statutory social care services.**

### 2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1 This report provides a summary of Children’s Social Care performance. It highlights key demand indicators such as number of contacts, benchmarking data and key performance indicators.

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 performance digest for April 2019, which reflects March 2019 performance, regional benchmarking data and national data sets.

This data has been presented and discussed with the Social Care Senior Management Team and at the Corporate Director’s Performance Group.

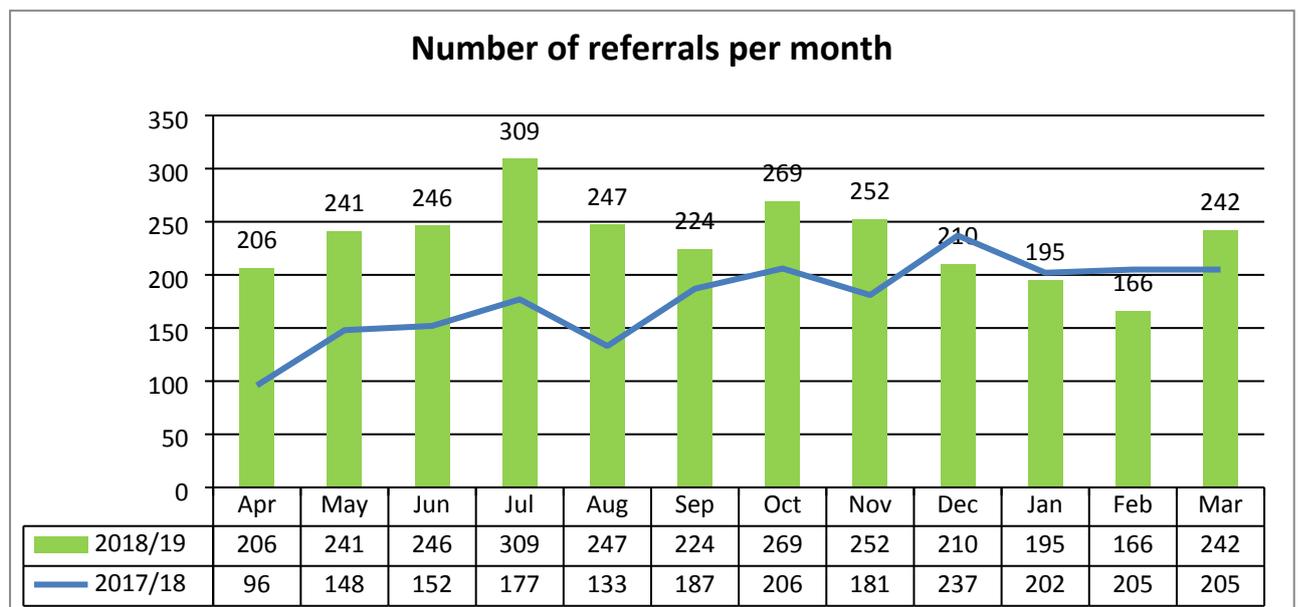
### 3. PERFORMANCE

#### 3.1 Referrals & Assessments

There has been an increase of referrals received in March 2019, this is balanced by the decrease in February 2019. In Quarter 4 2017/18 the monthly average was 204 in 2018/19 the monthly number of referrals was 201, this number has remained constant.

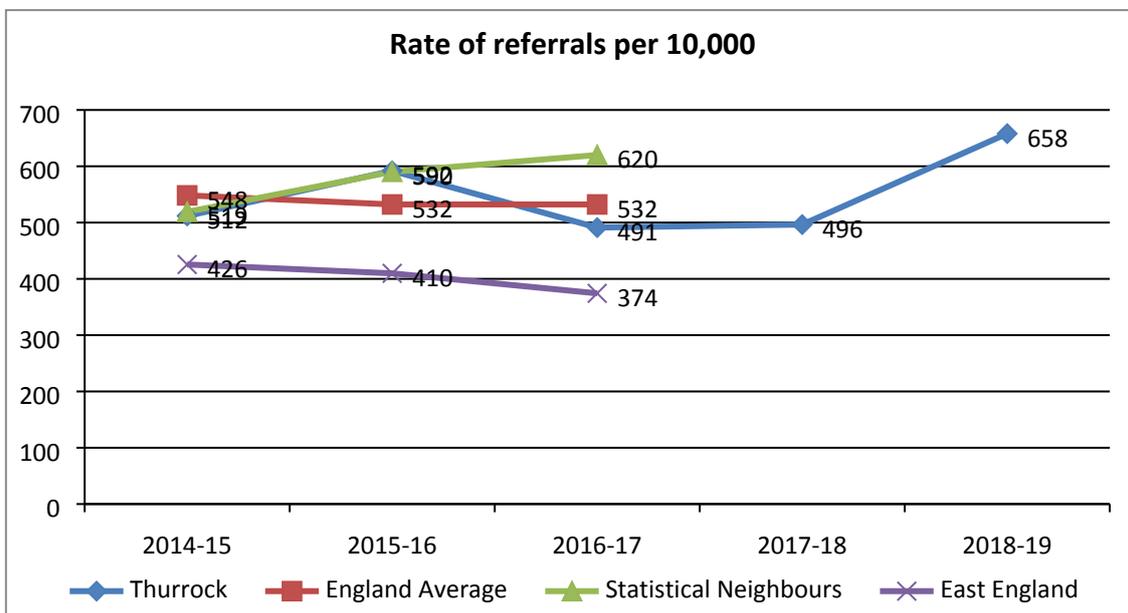
In year however, on average there has been an increase of 57 referrals per month, from 177 during 17/18 to 234 referrals per month during 18/19.

This is also in line with the increase of contacts received by the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH), which increased from 5764 contacts during 2017/18 to 7074 during 2018/19.



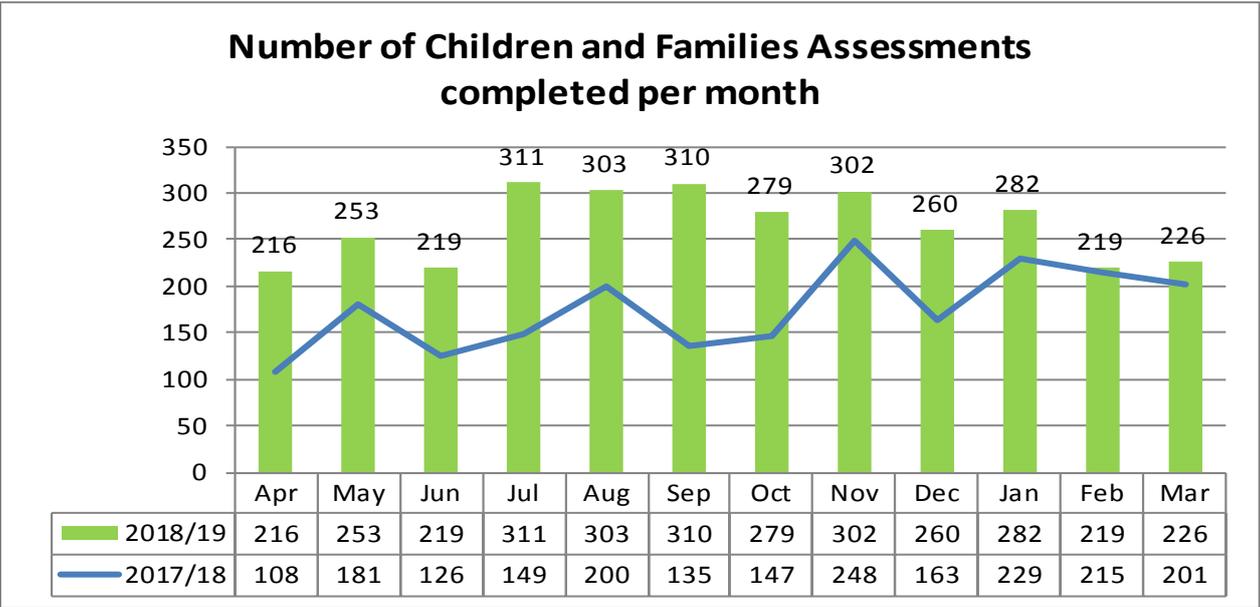
In relation to rate of referrals per 10,000 of the population Thurrock has routinely been below the England average and that of our statistical neighbours’.

Our percentage of children referred within a one year period for 2018/19 was 12.9%, our statistical neighbors' outturn for 2017/18 was 22.10%; therefore our performance is very good in this area.

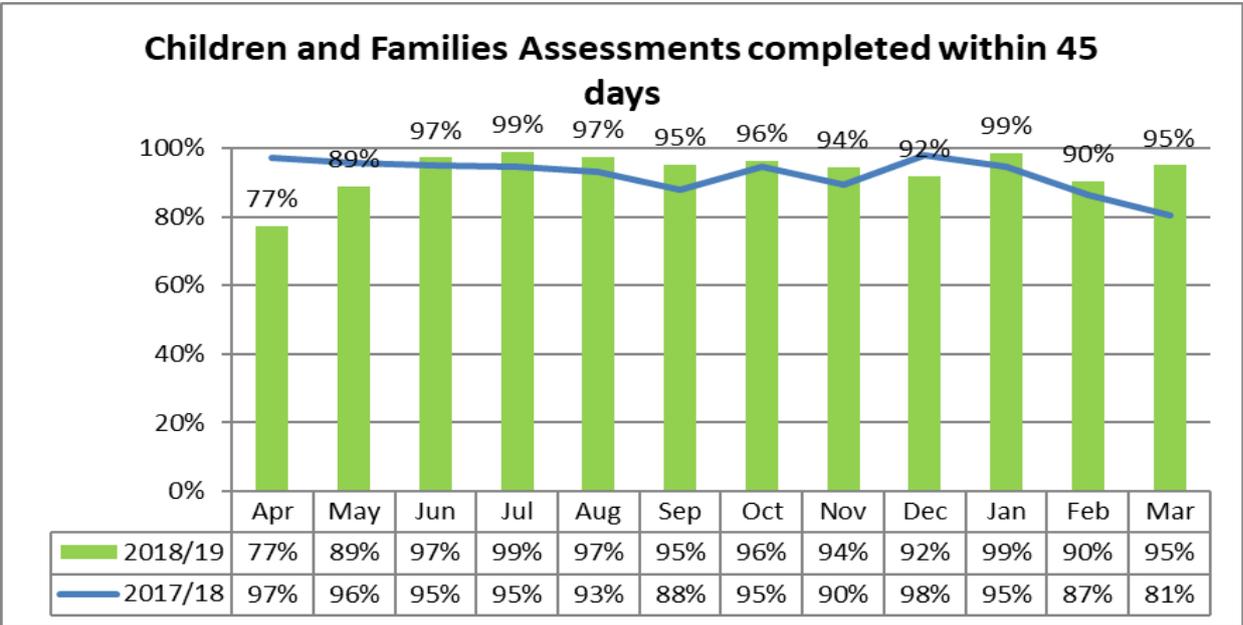


Rate of referrals per 10,000	Year	Thurrock	England Average	Statistical Neighbours	East England
	2014-15	512	548	519	426
	2015-16	592	532	590	410
	2016-17	491	532	620	374
	2017-18	496	552	610	362

The latest position shows 226 completed assessments for March 2019, compared to 201 the same month last year. The monthly average for 2018/19 has increased from 2017/18 with 90 more assessments being completed each month. The increase in number of contacts and referrals would be a key factor in this increase.



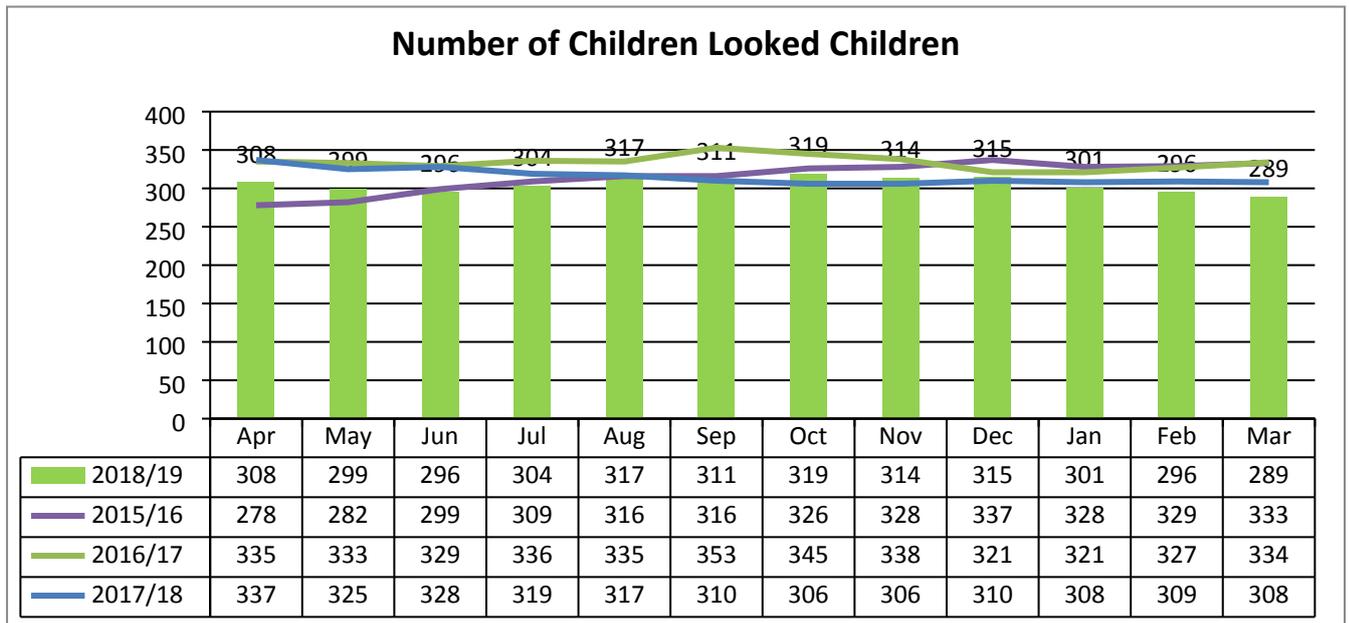
Good performance in this area has continued, with 95% of assessment being completed within 45 days. This is particularly of note given the increase in referrals and assessments experienced by the teams. For 2017/18 our statistical neighbours achieved an average of 80.7% of assessments in time.



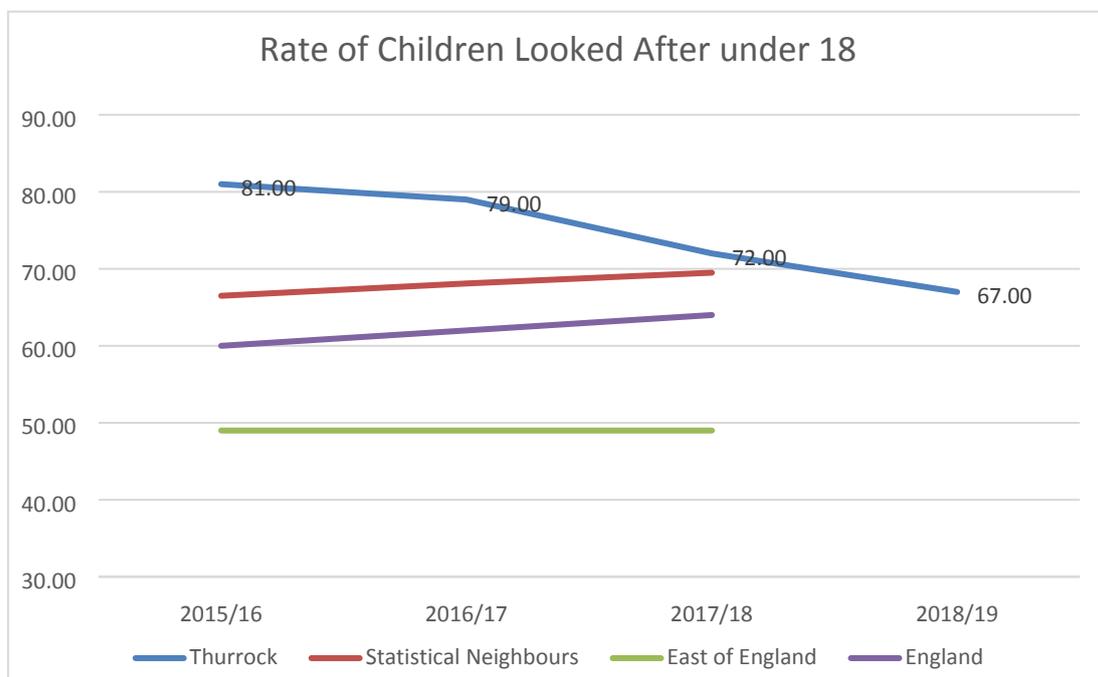
### 3.2 Children Looked After

For a period of seven months during 2018/19 we consistently had over 300 children looked after. For Quarter 4 (January to March) in previous years this was also the case. However, since February 2019 we have reduced that number with 289 children looked after as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2019. This decrease is

partly attributed to the 'signs of safety' assessment process and the dispersal of UASC across the Eastern Region.

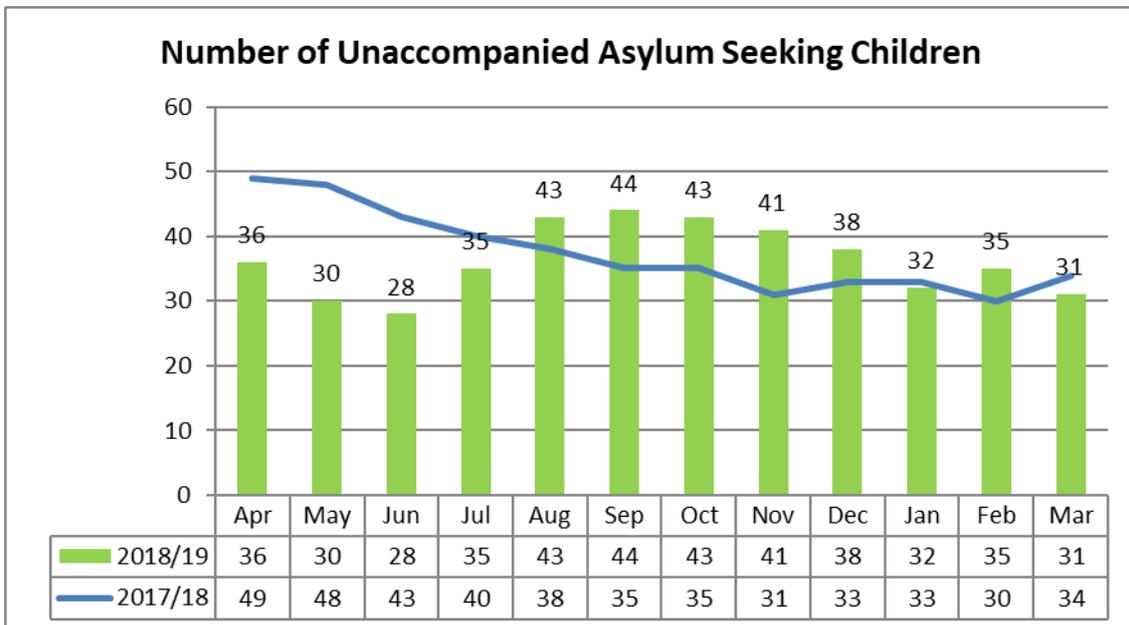
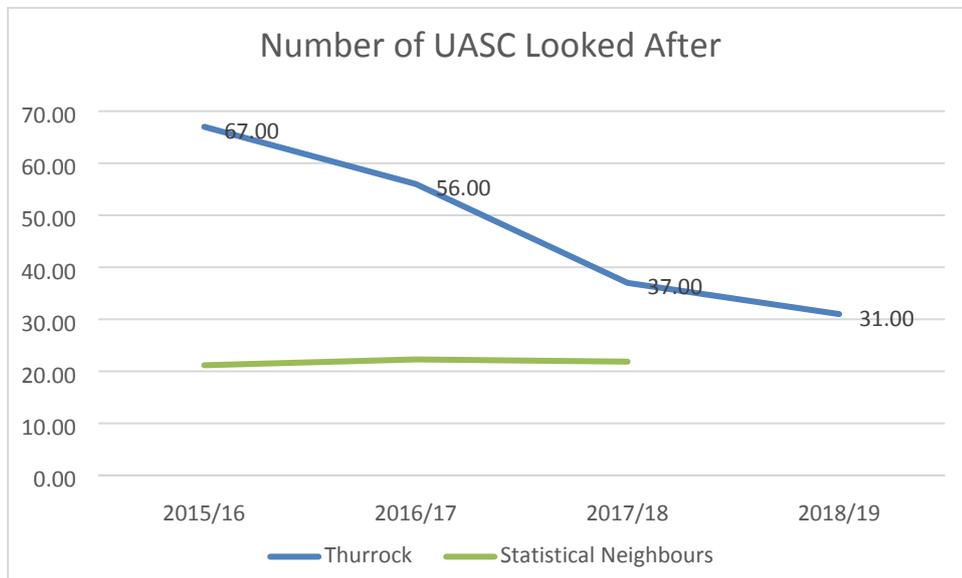


Whilst we have not yet received published 2018-19 outturns for benchmarking purposes a recent report produced by the Eastern Region indicated that our rate of children looked after per 10,000 of the population (at 67), will bring Thurrock marginally above the national average rate of 64.



For March 2019 97.1% of our children on a child protection plan were reviewed on time, this performance has been fairly consistent with a monthly average of 96.2% across the year, which is above our statistical neighbours' outturn for 2017/18 (achieving 91%).

The number of Un-accompanied Asylum Seeking Children has reduced to 31 as at end of March 2019 compared to 37 as at March 2018. In year the figure increased from 36 up to 44 in September 2018. For 2017/18 our statistical neighbours had an outturn of 22, a performance target has been set to reduce this number further to be in line with our statistical neighbours.



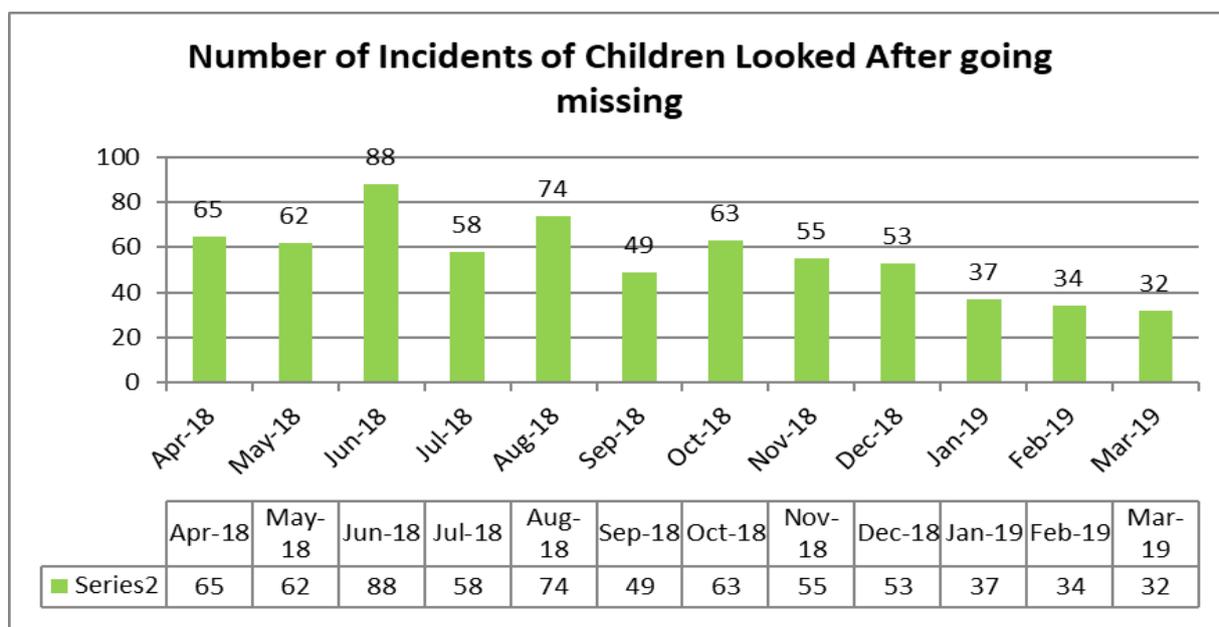
### 3.3 Fostering

The focus has continued on the use of in-house foster placements as opposed to independent fostering agencies through our recruitment programme. Performance as of March 2019 for in-house fostering provision is as follows:

Area	Number
Number of new carers approved	8 approved during 2018/19
Number of mainstream fostering applications currently in progress	8
Number of current fostering households	81 (140 foster carers)

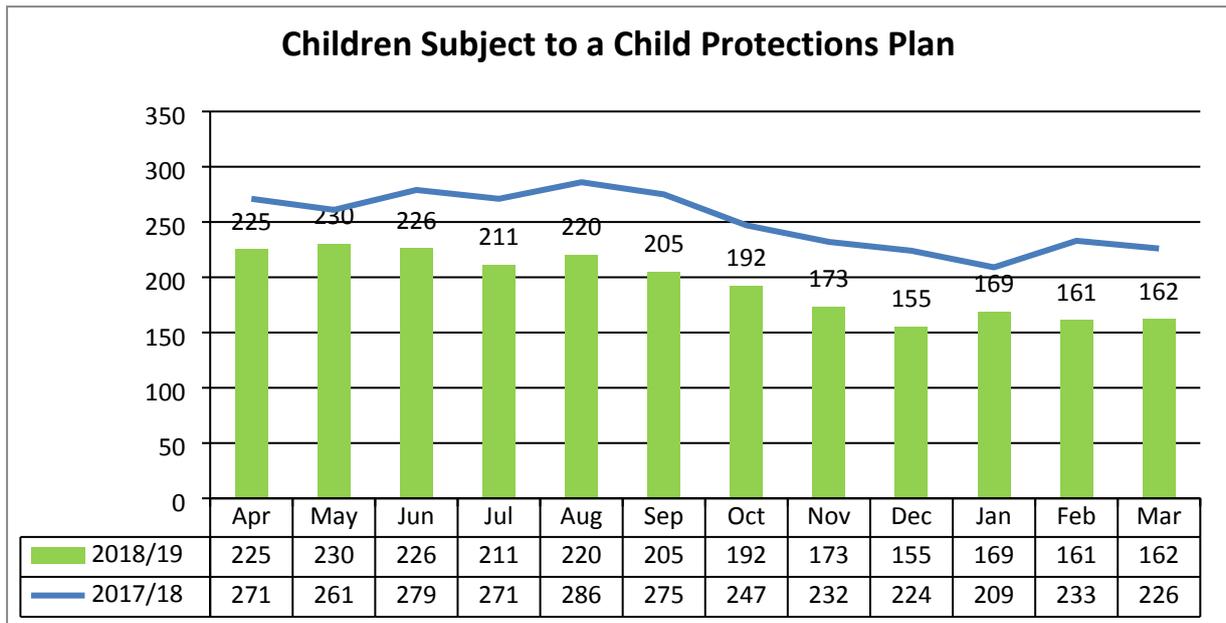
### 3.4 Children Looked After (CLA) Missing

During March 2019 we had a total of 32 missing incidents relating to 19 children (including 3 Un-accompanied Asylum Seeker children). All of these children were missing for short periods and have returned to their placements.

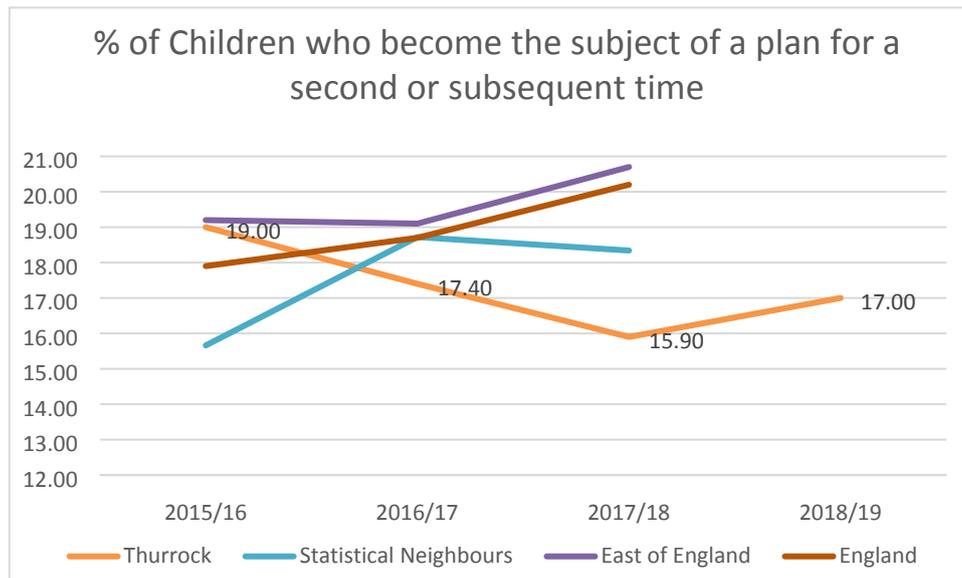


### 3.5 Children Subject to a Child Protection Plan

The number of children subject to a Child Protection Plan has reduced to 162 for March 2019. This has been a steady decrease from 271 in April 2018 to 225 at the end of 2017/18 and then further reducing throughout 2018/19. As aforementioned, the introduction and embedding of the Signs of Safety practice model and the development of a more strengths based approach to working with families has helped to reduce the number of children with a plan. Given the previous high rate of Child Protection Plans this is good performance and now in line with statistical neighbours.



Thurrock's percentage of children subject to a second or subsequent time on a Child Protection Plan has reduced to 16.9%. This is below our comparator group (18%) for 2017/18. The service will continue to monitor the number going back on a plan.



### 3.6 Care leavers

As at the 31st March 2019 81% of our care leavers are in suitable accommodation, this is an increase of 4% from end of year outturn for 2017/18 of 77%.

We have also seen an increase in the percentage of our care leavers in education, employment or training (EET) with 5% more (65%) as at March 2019 to the 60% reported for March 2018.

### 3.7 Adoption

Year	Number of children adopted
2014/15	11
2015/16	19
2016/17	11
2017/18	7
2018/19	13

There were 7 adoptions completed in 2017/2018. A significant factor for this lower performance has been changes to case law which has stressed that adoption should only be used as a last resort where no other order will do. Due to improved permanence practice during 2018/19, 13 children were adopted this year 2018/19.

Currently there are 21 children with a decision for adoption, 20 of these children have Placement Orders and 11 of these children have been matched and placed as at 31/03/2019.

We are performing well in relation to the average time (in days for a child to be adopted). For the month of March 2019 our average time was 396 days – this is an improvement on both previous years and reducing the gap against the national average outturn for 2017/18, which was 378.6 days. We have significantly improved our performance in this area and exceeded the target set for 2018/19 of 500 days.

Indicator Definition	2016/17 Outturn	2017/18 Outturn	March 2019 Outturn	2018/19 Target
Average time (in days) for a child to be adopted (3 year average)	565 days	527 days	396 days	500 days

## 4. Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1 Children's Overview and Scrutiny Committee are asked to comment on the current performance position.

## 5. Consultation

N/A

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

N/A

**7. Implications**

**7.1 Financial**

Implications verified by: **Michelle Hall**  
**Management Accountant**

No financial implications

**7.2 Legal**

Implications verified by: **Lindsey Marks**  
**Deputy Head of Legal Social Care and Education**

No legal implications

**7.3 Diversity and Equality**

Implications verified by: **Natalie Warren**  
**Community Development & Equalities Manager**

Whilst there are no direct E&D implications arising from this report, the service collects and utilises data to consider issues of equality and to ensure that performance considers the impact on children with protected characteristics.

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

N/A

**7.5 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)**

N/A

**8. Appendices to report**

None

**Report Author:**

Mandy Moore

Business Intelligence & Data Analytics Manager

Performance Quality Assurance and Business Intelligence

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**Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee  
Work Programme 2019/20**

Dates of Meetings: 2 July 2019, 8 October 2019, 3 December 2019, 4 February 2020

<b>Topic</b>	<b>Lead Officer</b>	<b>Requested by Officer/Member</b>
<b>2 July 2019</b>		
Thurrock New Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements	Alan Cotgrove	Standing item
Youth Cabinet Update	Pat Kielty	Standing Item
SEND Inspection Outcome	Michele Lucas	Chair
Semi Independent Supported Accommodation Sufficiency	Sue Green	Officer
Fostering and Adoption Annual Panel Report	Janet Simon	Officer
Children's Social Care Performance	Jackie Groom/Mandy Moore	Standing item
<b>8 October 2019</b>		
Items Raised by LSCP	Alan Cotgrove	Standing item
Youth Cabinet Update	Pat Kielty	Standing Item
Independent Reviewing Officer Annual Report	Ruth Murdock	Officer
Local Authority Designated Officer Annual Report	Ruth Murdock	Officer

LSCP Business Plan	Alan Cotgrove	Officer
Local Offer for Care Leavers	Janet Simon	Officer
Improving Primary School KPIs	Michele Lucas	Corporate O&S Chair
Children's Social Care Performance Report	Jackie Groom/Mandy Moore	Standing item
<b>3 December 2019</b>		
Items Raised by LSCP	Alan Cotgrove	Standing item
Youth Cabinet Update	Pat Kielty	Standing Item
Outcome of Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services	Roger Harris/Sheila Murphy	Officer
Update on School Wellbeing Service	Michele Lucas	Members
High level apprenticeships	Michele Lucas	Members
Children's Social Care Performance Report	Jackie Groom/Mandy Moore	Standing item
<b>4 February 2020</b>		
Items Raised by LSCP	Alan Cotgrove	Standing item
Youth Cabinet Update	Pat Kielty	Standing Item
Outcome of Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (if the report hasn't been published by 3 Dec, which is a possibility)	Roger Harris/Sheila Murphy	Officer
Update on Free School Programme	Michele Lucas/Sarah Williams	Members

Inspire Update	Michele Lucas	Members
Children's Social Care Performance Report	Jackie Groom/Mandy Moore	Standing item

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