

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

Corporate Parenting Committee

The meeting will be held at **7.00 pm** on **5 January 2021**

Due to current government guidance on social-distancing and the COVID-19 virus the Corporate Parenting Committee on 5 January 2021 will be held virtually online. The press and public will be able to watch the meeting live via the Council's online webcast channel: www.thurrock.gov.uk/webcast

Membership:

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

Rafael Antunes, Chair, Children in Care Council
Christopher Bennett, Vice Chair, Children in Care Council
Annie Guidotti, Open Door
Sharon Smith, Chair, The One Team, Foster Carer Association
Jenny Joslin, Vice Chair, The One Team, Foster Carer Association

Substitutes:

Councillors Luke Spillman, Gary Collins, Bukky Okunade and Lynn Worrall

Agenda

Open to Public and Press

	Page
1 Apologies for Absence	
2 Minutes	5 - 12
To approve as a correct record the minutes of the Corporate Parenting Committee meeting held on 1 September 2020.	
3 Items of Urgent Business	
To receive additional items that the Chair is of the opinion should be considered as a matter of urgency, in accordance with Section 100B (4) (b) of the Local Government Act 1972.	

4	Declaration of Interests	
5	Children's Social Care Performance	13 - 30
6	Children Looked After and Care Leaver Sufficiency Strategy	31 - 80
7	Independent Reviewing Officer - Annual Report	81 - 110
8	The Annual Report of the Virtual School Headteacher for Children Looked After - Academic Year 2019-2020	111 - 158
9	Joint Housing Protocol for Care Leavers	159 - 188
10	After Care Report	189 - 202
11	Corporate Parenting Committee Work Programme 2020/2021	203 - 206

Queries regarding this Agenda or notification of apologies:

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

Agenda published on: **18 December 2020**

Information for members of the public and councillors

Access to Information and Meetings

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DECLARING INTERESTS FLOWCHART – QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF

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

Helpful Reminders for Members

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

When should you declare an interest *at a meeting*?

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



Does the business to be transacted at the meeting

- relate to; or
- likely to affect

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

Disclosable Pecuniary Interests shall include your interests or those of:

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

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

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

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

Pecuniary

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

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

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

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

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

Non- pecuniary

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



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

Our Vision and Priorities for Thurrock

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

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

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

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

Minutes of the Meeting of the Corporate Parenting Committee held on 1 September 2020 at 7.00 pm

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

Rafael Antunes, Chair, Children in Care Council
Christopher Bennett, Vice Chair, Children in Care Council
Annie Guidotti, Thurrock Open Door
Sharon Smith, Chair, The One Team, Foster Carer Association
Jenny Josling, Vice Chair, The One Team, Foster Carer Association

In attendance: Councillor Joy Resell, Previous Chair of the Corporate Parenting Committee
Michael Addo-Boateng, Interim Developmental Role (DNLAC) & Safeguarding Children Specialist Nurse (Lead for CDR)
Jane Foster- Taylor – NHS and Thurrock CCG
Sheila Murphy, Corporate Director of Children's Services
Mandy Moore, Strategic Lead - Business Intelligence
Naintara Khosla, Strategic Lead, Looked After Children
Janet Simon, Strategic Lead, Looked After Children
Joseph Tynan, Interim Assistant Director of Children's Services
Kenna-Victoria Healey, Senior Democratic Services Officer

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.

11. Minutes

The minutes of the Corporate Parenting Committee held on 2 June 2020 was approved as a true and correct record.

12. Items of Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

13. Declaration of Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

14. Children's Social Care Performance

The Strategic Lead for Business Intelligence introduced the report, and in doing so Members heard how the data within the report referred to Quarter 1

2020-20 with comparisons to the same quarter in the previous year. Statistical neighbour and England averages had been made wherever possible.

She continued to inform the Committee how the data presented was obtained from the “At a Glance” monthly performance reporting, regional benchmarking data and national data sets and was presented and discussed with the Social Care Senior Management Team.

Members were then provided with a summary of Children’s Social Care performance and taken through the report, where it was explained the report described the current activity levels and performance of Children’s Social Care services in responding to the needs of vulnerable children.

The Chair of the Committee thanked Officers for the report and asked Members if they had any questions. The Vice-Chair of the Children In Care Council enquired as to why they were more males than females within foster care. The Strategic Lead for Looked After Children commented that as a receiving local authority of unaccompanied asylum seeking children, there happened to be more males than females, in turn this contributed to the number of looked after children in the borough.

Members queried care leavers accommodation, as to whether this was shared or their own. Officers explained that a report had been taken to the Health and Well-Being board, which explained that care leaver’s accommodation depended on the needs of the care leaver. There were different types of accommodation which included, staying on with foster carers, renting their own property, or even living with other care leavers. It was further confirmed during discussions that support required by care leavers was given as much as possible.

RESOLVED:

- 1. That members noted areas of improvement in Children’s Social Care and work undertaken to manage demand for statutory social care services**
- 2. For any specific areas of interest to be flagged for inclusion/expansion within the next report.**

15. Fostering Statement of Purpose

The Strategic Lead for Looked After Children introduced to report and doing so, explained that the fostering service was registered with OFSTED and complied with the relevant legislation. She continued to inform Members that the statement of purpose was an annual report which set out the aims and objective of the service as a whole.

Members heard how statement related to the fostering service which was provided by a number of teams such as placement support team and the placement assessment team.

Councillor Johnson thank Officers for their report and sought as the report was an annual report, if Officers could highlight any changes or amendments. It was explained the changes from last year included the structure of the service which had increased to 4 teams this included a new recruitment team and a team to complete events. Officers explain that any changes had been made to meet the needs of the service and the young children they supported.

Ms Foster-Taylor the representative for the NHS and Thurrock CCG observed that as two out of three children were placed outside of the borough it was sometimes difficult to manage placements if children were not placed inside of the borough. The Strategic Lead for Looked After Children explained as much as possible children were placed either with a family member or within the Thurrock boundary, this was confirmed by the Director of Children's Services.

The Chair of the Foster Carer Association commented that the service received by foster carers was good and support was always given when required.

RESOLVED:

That members of the Committee are informed and aware of the Council's Fostering Statement of Purpose.

16. Adoption Statement of Purpose

The Strategic Lead for Children Looked After introduce the report and in doing so, explained that the adoption service had been brought back in house to the Council just over a year ago.

Members were advised that the council was part of Adopt East which was an alliance adoption services which included areas such as Essex, Hertfordshire, Suffolk, Southend, Norfolk and Bedfordshire. By being part of Adopt East enabled children being adopted to be matched to families without a delay, as well as ensuring that all decisions regarding placements were made in the best interest of the child.

Councillor Redsell sought confirmation that the service had been brought back into the Council. Officers confirmed that it was, to which Councillor Redsell commented this was good to see and thanked the Officer for her report.

RESOLVED:

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

17. Children in Care Council Update

The representative of the Children in Care Council and Opendoor presented the report on behalf of the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Children in Care

Council, in doing so, she explained meetings had been held via zoom and had been successful with the Children in Care Council inviting different people to join in with discussions on many different topics which were of high importance to young people.

Members heard how some of the people invited to join the Children in Care Council's meetings included managers of Thurrock Council as well as the Portfolio Holder Education and the Director of Children's Services. It was commented that the Children in Care Council wanted to invite more people and to increase their members.

Councillor Redsell enquired as to whether the Children in Care Council had thought to invite Elected Members to their meeting, as Corporate Parents it was important for them to hear from young people within Care.

The Vice-Chair of the Children in Care Council commented that the more people contributed to their meetings, it meant different viewpoints could be discussed and this could overall assist the Children in Care Council when discussing their own experiences.

The Chair of the Children in Care Council informed the committee that the next meeting they were discussing the OFSTED inspection and would be happy to take any feedback back to members their members. Councillor Johnson advised both members of the Children in Care Council there were nine Cabinet Members who each looked after a specific service of the Council, should they wish to invite them he was sure they would be more than happy to attend a meeting, for example he was the Portfolio Holder for Housing and he was always more than happy to attend a meeting.

The Director of Children's Services stated it was important for Members and Officers on the Corporate Parenting Committee to hear of any issues or concerns that young people may have and for them to ask questions was positive, as it gave officers the chance to provide the answers they were looking for and if necessary improve the service offered to young people.

Councillors Liddiard and Redsell confirmed that it was not only important for portfolio holders to be involved but also for young people to know their local councillor of which very few did and although Portfolio Holders had a specific role there were other members who sat on Committees who could also ask questions on behalf of the young people

RESOLVED:

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

18. Initial Health Assessments

The report was introduced by the Strategic Lead for Looked After Children during which she commented on the OFSTED inspection from November 2019, which highlighted the delay in timely initial health assessments. It was commented that since November changes had been made and referrals were to be made within five days and health assessments completed within 20 working days.

Members were advised that weekly meetings took place where officers looked at health assessment data and tried to streamline the service in order to meet the needs of children coming into their care, an example of this was parents being asked to sign a section 20 when a child came into the care of the Council.

During discussions the Committee heard in for April 2020/2020 there had been a slight dip in performance of initial health assessments being completed and also for April 2020 referrals, however it was believed this was contributed by COVID-19. Members then head how for June and July 2020 improvements had been made for referrals and assessments to be completed.

RESOLVED:

That the Members of the Committee are informed about the efforts made by Health and Children's Services to improve the timeliness of Initial Assessments for Children Looked After.

19. Looked After Children Health Report

The representative for the NHS and Thurrock CCG introduced the report and in doing accepted the point made of children being placed miles away from their local area, however to place children within the Essex footprint was difficult. Members heard how Covid-19 had impacted on the resources for the NHS this included the re-deployment of staff, who hopefully would be coming back in house in the coming weeks.

Members queried as to the risks identified within the report and questioned they were in fact a failing rather than a risk. It was commented that there was a problem nationally, however it was agreed that officers needed to do better and this was being looked into with Council Officers and other health providers.

It was queried as to why there were so many people needing to be involved within health assessments for Looked after Children and commented that if the system was streamlined improvements and deadlines could be better met.

The Chair of the Foster Carer Association agreed that the health assessments ran lot better previously, it was also important that officers not only for the

Council but within the health services understood it was not always possible for a Foster Carer to ensure their young people attend an assessment on a particular date, as some Foster Carers were looking after more than one young person. It would therefore help if there was more flexibility.

During the discussions the Director of Children's Services welcomed joint working with health professionals and confirmed their assistance if required was always available.

RESOLVED:

That the Members of the Committee are informed about how the above duties are being met.

20. Corporate Parenting Committee Strategy 2020 - 2022

The Strategic Lead for Children Looked After, addressed the Committee firstly explaining, the term 'corporate parent' was broadly understood in relation to how local authorities should approach their responsibilities for looked after children and care leavers. However, it was vital that all parts of a local authority beyond those directly responsible for care and pathway planning recognise they have a key role too.

Members were notified the corporate parenting principles were intended to secure a better approach to fulfilling existing functions in relation to looked after children and care leavers and for the local authority to facilitate as far as possible secure, nurturing, and positive experiences for looked after children and young people and enable positive outcomes for them.

It was discussed how during 2019 the Corporate Parenting Committee agreed that training should be given to all elected members to help develop their knowledge of being a corporate parent.

The key priorities which included children remaining cared for within the family where is safe to do so, young people staying within the foster placement until they're ready to leave I feel that they are prepared to live independently and involve children and young people in decisions that affect their lives as maximise the opportunity for them to make their own choice, were explained to the Committee.

Councillor Liddiard commented on consultations with counsellors in that he still felt that regardless of training mini elected members did not understand their role when it came to being a corporate parent. He suggested they needed to be a change of communications for elected members such as short videos or soundbites which could be sent either via email or other forms such as text message. Cancel red-cell agreed in the members needed to be involved more however she also prize offices for her farm for me to have come since it started.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee note their responsibilities as Corporate Parents.

21. Corporate Parenting Committee - Annual Report 2019/2020

The Senior Democratic Services Officer introduced the report which highlighted the work of the Committee over the last year and asked that Member's refer the report to Full Council for all Members to see the work of the Committee.

Members heard how the report included an overview to being a Corporate Parent, key points to improving the outcomes for Looked After Children and what makes Corporate Parenting effective.

Councillor Redsell, the Chair of the Committee for 2019-2020, commented that she welcomed the report and the hard work which had been undertaken over the years. She continued to state that it was important to share the work of the Committee with all Elected Members.

RESOLVED:

- 1. That the contents of the Corporate Parenting Annual Report 2019/2020 be noted.**
- 2. That the Corporate Parenting Annual Report be referred to Full Council, to share the work of Committee and their main achievements for 2019/2020 municipal year.**

22. Corporate Parenting Committee Work Programme 2020/2021

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

- Health Assessment Review
- Report on the way to communicate with Elected Members and Advertising

The Chair of the Committee took the opportunity to thank Councillor Resell for all of her hard work as the previous Chair of the Committee.

Councillor Redsell thanked the Chair and wished her the best of luck as the new Chair of the Corporate Parenting Committee, she also thanked all of the officers for their hard work.

RESOLVED:

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

The meeting finished at 8.57 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**

5 January 2021	ITEM: 5
Corporate Parenting Committee	
Children’s Social Care Performance	
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Non-key
Report of: Anna Watkins, Business Intelligence Analyst	
Accountable Assistant Director: Joe Tynan, Assistant Director of Children Social Care and Early Help	
Accountable Director: Sheila Murphy, Corporate Director of Children’s Services	
This report is: Public	

Executive Summary

This report should be read in the context of the global pandemic Covid-19 and the impact this has had on the work carried out by Children’s Social Care since the initial lockdown in March 2020.

Thurrock provides a service to approximately 300 Children Looked After (CLA) and approximately 275 Care Leavers. There is good overall performance and the performance of both the Children Looked After and Aftercare Services is improving. Children are being visited regularly.

There is a continued focus on improving Care Leavers keeping ‘In touch’ with Aftercare Service and ensuring these young people are in education or employment.

The Fostering Recruitment Service is seeking to recruit more Foster Carers in Thurrock. This will support children being placed closer to home. There have been significant delays in court proceedings as a result of the global pandemic, which has resulted in delays for some children who need adoption or alternative permanent placements.

The number of children who went missing during the period from June to September 2020 has decreased, along with the number of missing episodes.

1. Recommendation(s)

- 1.1 That members note the areas of improvement in Children's Social Care and the work undertaken to manage demand for statutory Social Care Services.**
- 1.2 For any specific areas of interest to be flagged for inclusion/expansion within the next report.**

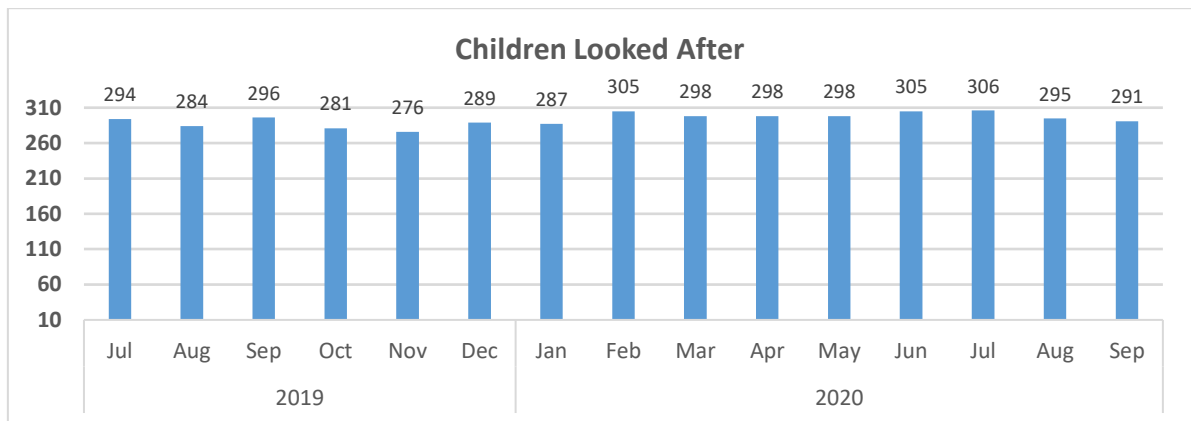
2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1 This report provides a summary of Children's Social Care performance. It highlights key demand indicators for Children Looked After, such as the number of Children Looked After, benchmarking data and key performance indicators.
- 2.2 Thurrock produces a number of data sets and performance reports to meet its internal and external reporting requirements. The data in this report is from the At A Glance monthly performance report, regional benchmarking data and national data sets. External reporting requirements include the annual SSDA903 data return to the Department for Education (DfE) that all Local Authorities must provide.
- 2.3 This data has been presented and discussed with the Children & Families Performance Group.
- 2.4 Teams and Managers use the data to understand and respond to changes in activity levels and to monitor and respond to the quality and timeliness of services and information about how well children are doing. The information is also discussed with front line workers.
- 2.5 The data in this report is from the monthly performance reporting (At A Glance), regional benchmarking data and national data sets. This data has been presented and discussed with the Social Care Senior Management Team and the Corporate Director's Performance Group. Data has not yet been published in relation to statistical neighbours and national averages for 2019-20.

3. Performance Data for Children Looked After

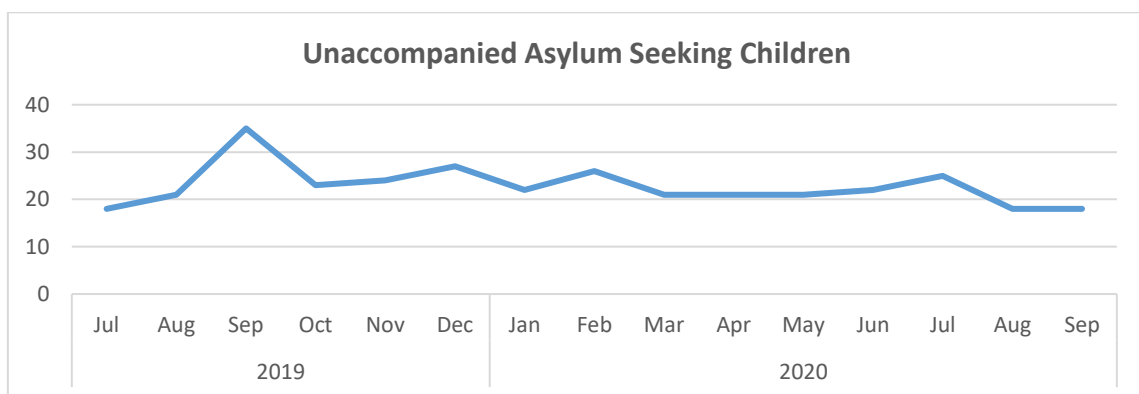
3.1 Number of Children Looked After (CLA)

The graph below shows the number of Children who were Looked After (CLA) at the end of each month. The numbers have remained stable. The small fluctuations are normal and to be expected. There is monitoring of children who may need to become Looked After and there are regular reviews of children entering care. Where possible, children are returned to their family where safe and appropriate. Once a child ceases to be Looked After the council is still responsible for those children who are placed in Special Guardianship families. This is a good permanent alternative for children to remain with their families. However, the Council remains financially responsible for these children.



3.2 Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC)

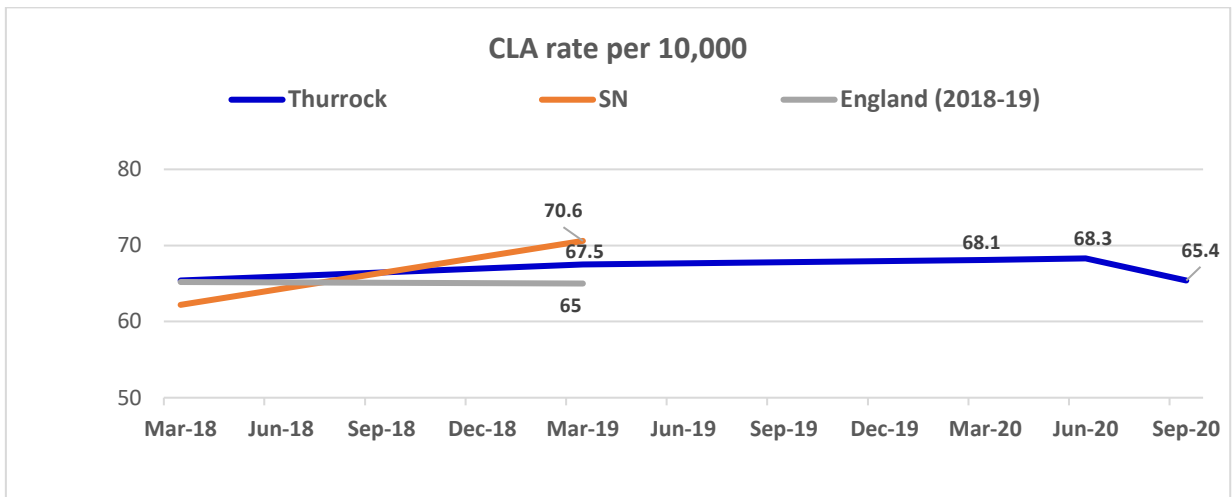
UACS are a subset of the CLA numbers above. Thurrock is part of the Eastern Region Transfer Scheme and will accept up to 28 UASC children (this number is determined by the DfE). There has been a reduction in the entry of UASC into Essex Ports as the preferred route has been through Dover. However, there is an expectation the number will increase as the weather deteriorates through the winter months.



3.3 The Rate of CLA per 10,000 population

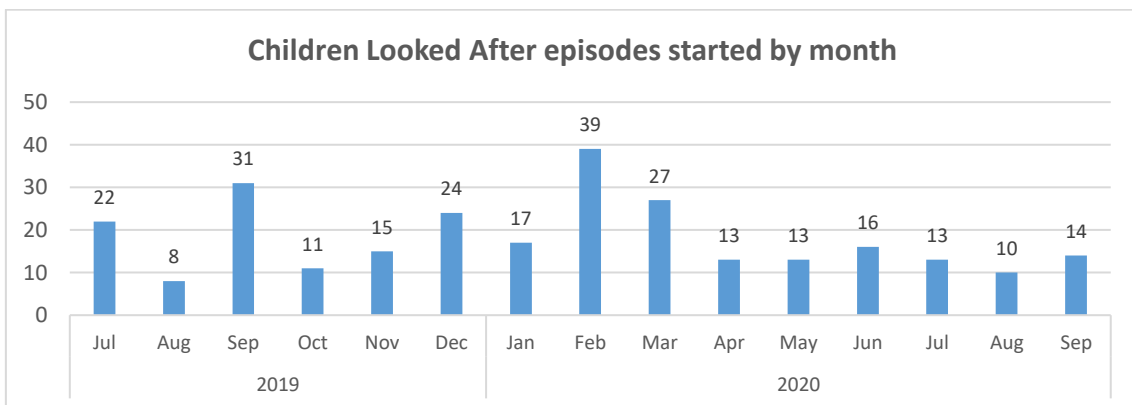
The graph below shows the rate of CLA per 10,000 population of under 18 year olds in Thurrock at each year end 2018, 2019, 2020 and end of quarter Q2 2020-21.

Based on the 2019 benchmarking data available, in Q2, Thurrock is below its statistical neighbours' rate of 70.6 and only slightly above the England average of 65.



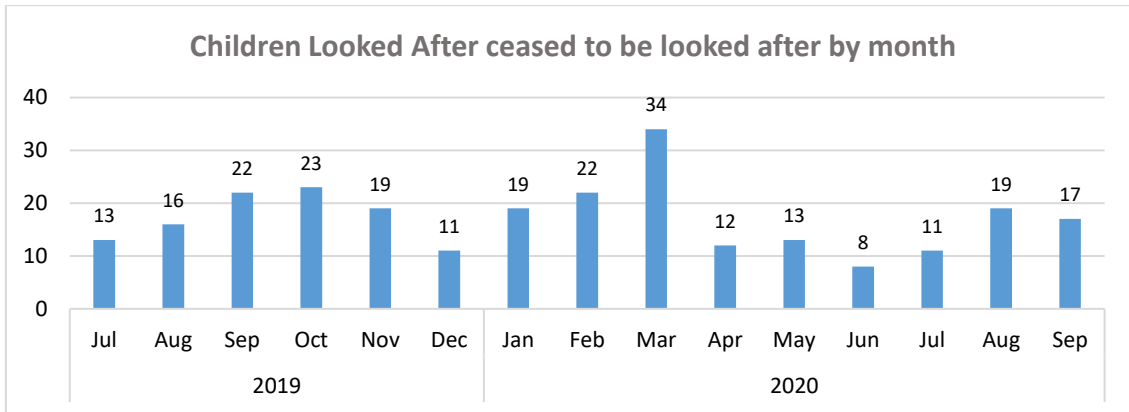
3.4 CLA episodes started by month

It is normal for the number of Children Looked After to fluctuate month to month. This fluctuation and the relatively small numbers makes it difficult to identify significant trends. However, there has been a decrease since the start of the pandemic. Also, of the 14 children who started to be Looked After in Q2 of 2020-21, 9 were UASC. This compares to 27 in Q2 of 2019-20. All cases are reviewed to ensure the correct children come in to care and court proceedings are only issued where necessary.



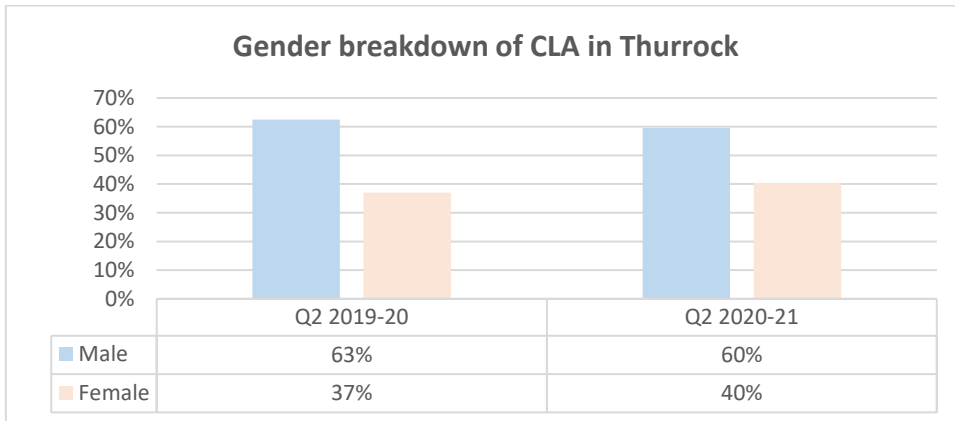
3.5 CLA episodes ended by month

Similarly, it is normal for the number of children leaving care to fluctuate. This fluctuation and the relatively small numbers makes it difficult to identify significant trends. However, there has been a decrease since the start of the pandemic. In part, this is due to a delay in court proceedings, which has prevented children from leaving care and progressing to their permanent placements (via Adoption, Special Guardianship or returning home).



3.6 CLA by Gender

Based on the latest 2018-19 benchmarking data available, the gender breakdown is in line with the England average and the 3% change since last year brings Thurrock closer to the England average.

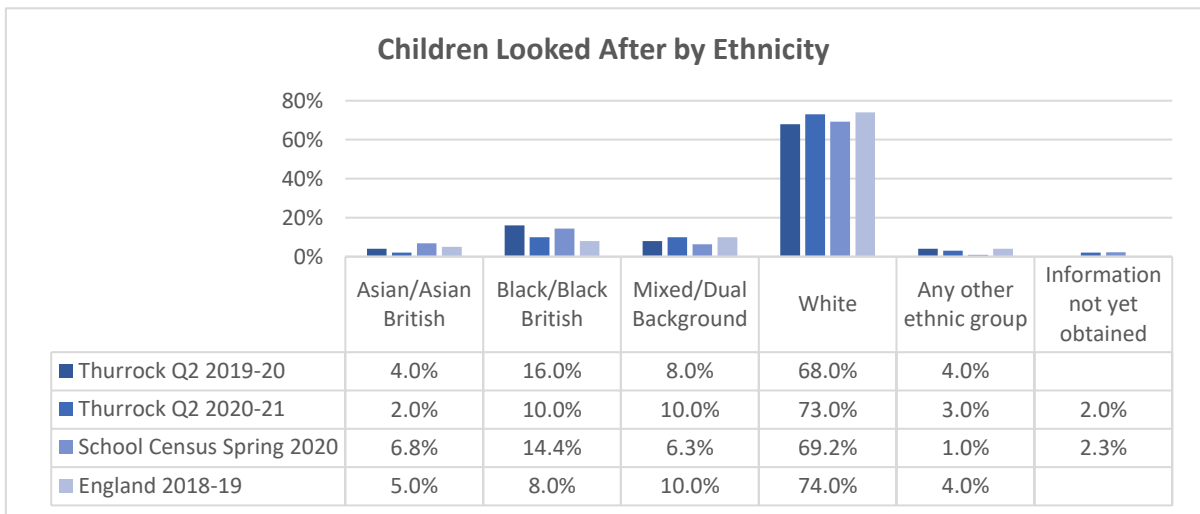


3.7 CLA by Ethnicity

Thurrock’s Children Looked After are predominantly of White ethnicity, which is in line with Thurrock’s School Census in Spring 2020 and CLA national average of 2018-19.

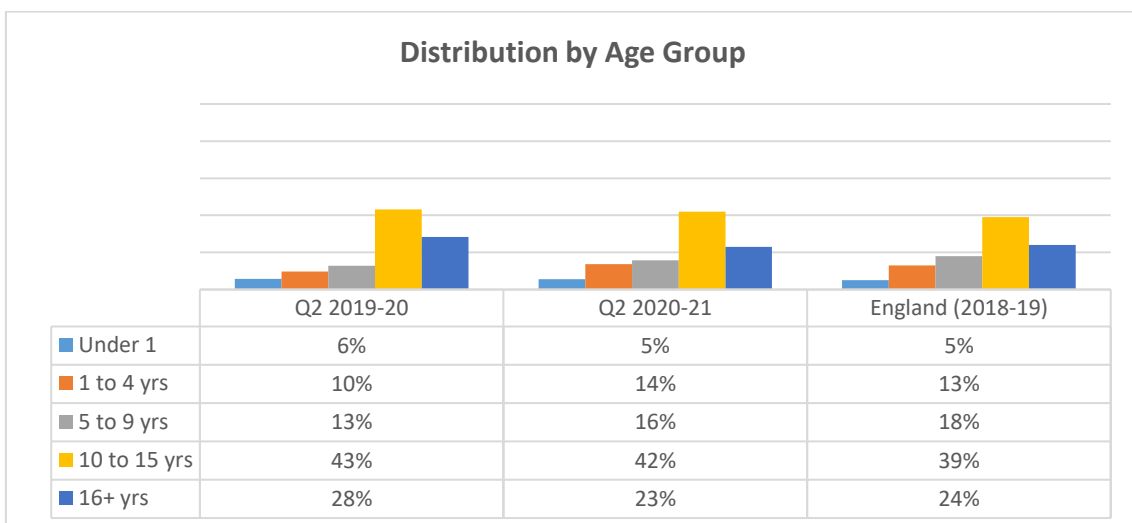
While the number of Asian/Asian British and Black/Black British children has decreased since last year, there have been no issues noted that have influenced this change.

The Black Lives Matter agenda has refocused Social Work Practice to ensure appropriate consideration of cultural issues.



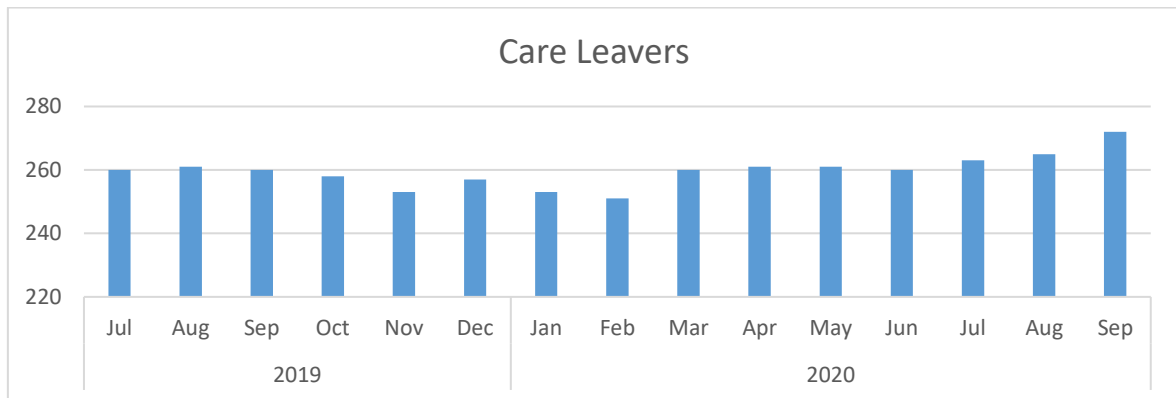
3.8 CLA Age Profile

The age profile of the CLA cohort remains mostly stable and in line with England averages. There has been an increase of the 1 to 4 and 5 to 9 age groups. This has partly been caused by delays in final Court Hearings due to the pandemic.



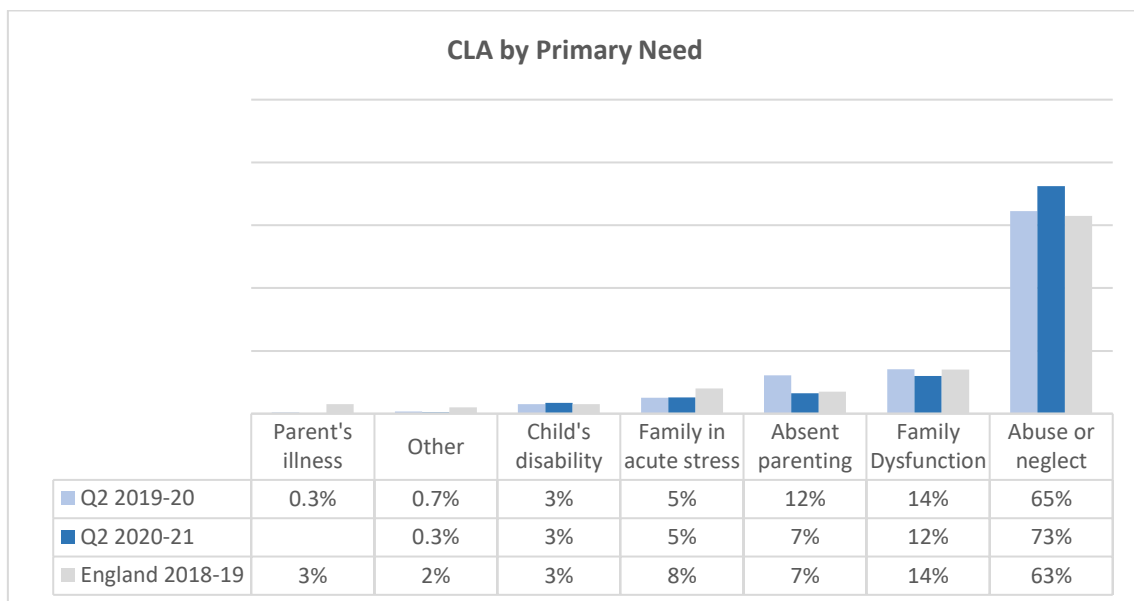
3.9 Care Leavers

The graph below shows the number of young people who receive a Care Leaving service at the end of each month. The data illustrates that the number of Care Leavers is increasing. This is partly due to legislative changes that have placed additional responsibilities upon Care Leaving services, including the duties within the Children and Social Work Act 2017. Section 3 of the Act now requires Local Authorities to appoint a Personal Adviser for Care Leavers (who request one) up until the age of 25.



3.10 CLA by Category of Need

There has been an increase in children within the 'Abuse or Neglect' category of need. This is due to most children becoming Looked After when they are at risk of significant harm. Social Care are providing support and intervention to reduce family breakdown and to enable children to remain in their families, where it is safe to do so.



3.11 Number of CLA open to Youth Offending Services

In 2019-20 there were 87 children open to Youth Offending Service (YOS), of which 13 were Children Looked After, representing 15% of the open cases. Out of the 13 children, 39% were from a White ethnic background.

In Q2 2020-21, there were 38 open cases to YOS, of which 6 were Children Looked After, representing 16% of the total open cases and 4 of these children were from a White ethnic background.

Both of the above figures consist of statutory and diversion interventions.

The throughput of the YOS has been significantly affected this year as a result of pandemic, and consequently the closure of the Youth Courts.

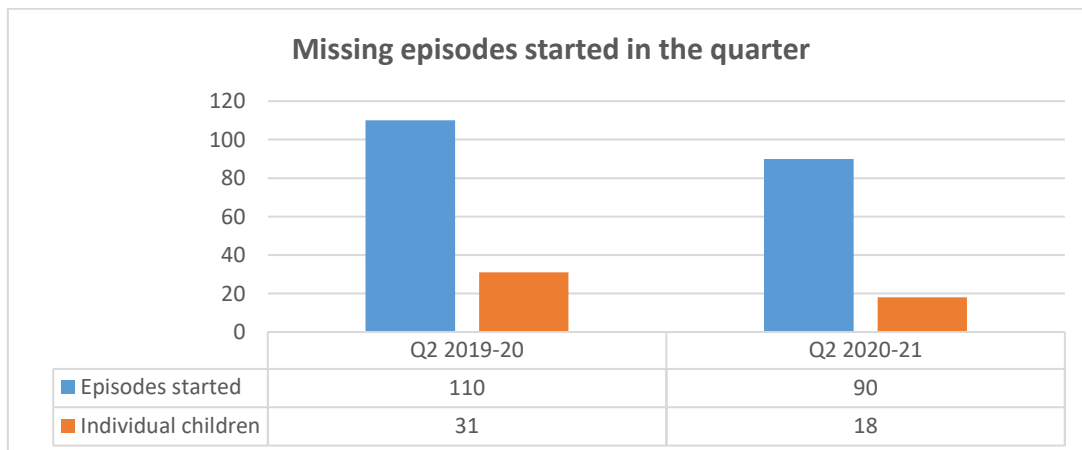
A recent analysis of Thurrock CLA and the Criminal Justice System indicated that 67% of CLA's in the criminal justice system became Looked After post offending and entering the Criminal Justice System.

The data from the 2019-20 cohort is more reflective of the recent position, with a CLA figure of around 20%. This has been relatively static over the last 5 years.

3.12 CLA missing episodes started

The graph below shows the number of missing episodes started in Q2 and the count of the individual children that went missing. Both missing episodes and the number of children who went missing have reduced since last year.

There has been a strong focus on Missing Children in partnership with Essex Police and, with the Contextual Safeguarding approach being embedded, this has supported an increase of liaison with Community Safety Partners.

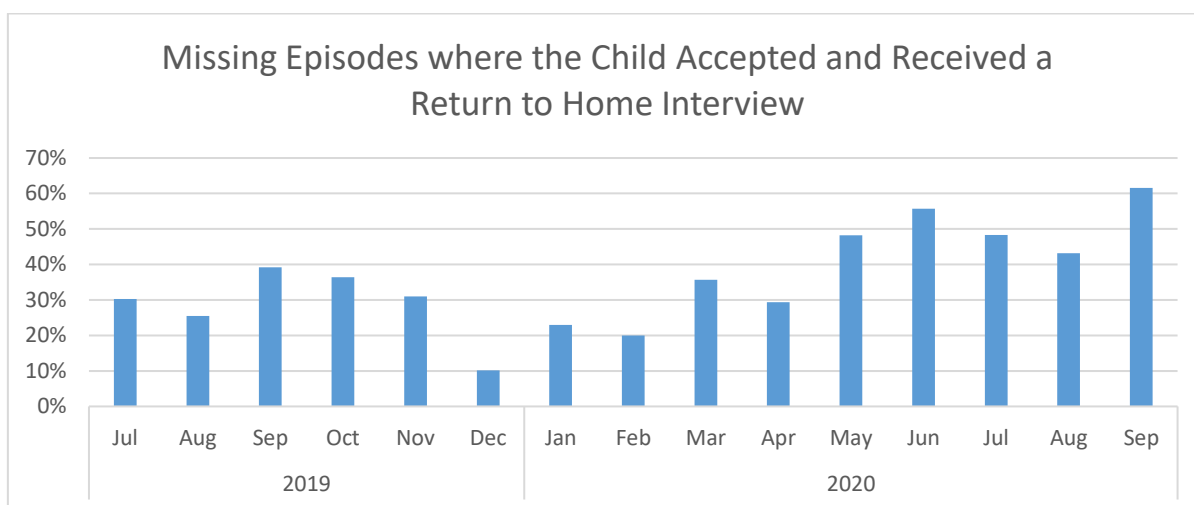


3.13 CLA Return Home Interview

All children are offered an independent Return Home Interviews (RHI) within 72 hours following each missing event, with the aim to understand the young person's circumstances and the risks they may be experiencing, including modern day slavery and grooming. Since 1st April 2020, Inspire Youth Hub have been commissioned to undertake RHIs.

The reasons young people go missing can vary from "not being settled in placement" to the "draw of friends". Foster Carers, Social Workers and other involved key professionals discuss missing incidents with the young person. There is ongoing work to increase the engagement of young people in their return home interviews and to decrease missing episodes. The Participation Team have been engaging and seeking feedback from young people and this has been invaluable. A key message for Social Workers has been to listen and understand the issues from the young person's perspective.

During September 2020, Return Home Interviews were accepted and undertaken for 62% of Missing episodes. This compares to 39% in the same month last year.

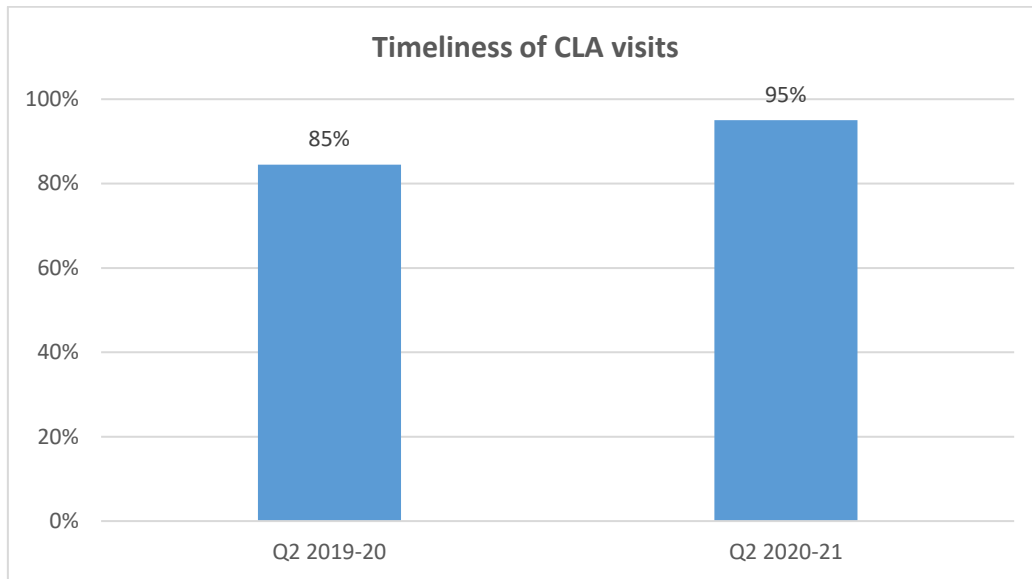


3.14 Timeliness of Social Worker visits

Social Workers are required to visit the child within one week of the start of any placement. Visits are then undertaken at a frequency which is agreed within the child's Care Plan. This frequency can vary from 20 to 65 working days.

The performance has improved since last year and there is focused work to ensure this performance is maintained. The current performance of 95% of visits undertaken in timeframe is very good, however there are a few occasions when visits are sometimes undertaken late, such as due to

practical reasons. There are processes in place to ensure that overdue visits take place as soon as possible after the due date.



3.15 CLA Initial Health Assessments (IHA)

Initial Health Assessments (IHAs) have been identified as an area for development and there has been good joint working with Health Partners to ensure that children's IHAs are completed within the timeframe of 20 working days after entering care. During September 2020 the number of IHAs completed within 20 working days was 75% compared to 50% in September 2019.

The corporate target for this Key Performance Indicator has been set at 80% and we continue to monitor our progress through monthly performance meetings.

3.16 CLA in Education

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

3.17 CLA Strengths & Difficulties Questionnaires (SDQ)

Thurrock is required to collect SDQ scores for children who are aged between 4-18 years annually. We have set an ambition to do this more frequently to ensure regular monitoring of emotional and mental wellbeing. A high scores indicates that the Care Plan and mental wellbeing of the child should be reviewed by the SDQ panel with the aims of:

- Ensuring that all CLA exhibiting SDQ scores of 17 and above, receive a service and planned support for their emotional and mental health.
- Identifying an early intervention service for CLA with scores of 13 to 17.

The SDQ panel meets monthly and the panel includes representatives from Children’s Social Care, the Virtual School, EWMHS and CLA Nurses.

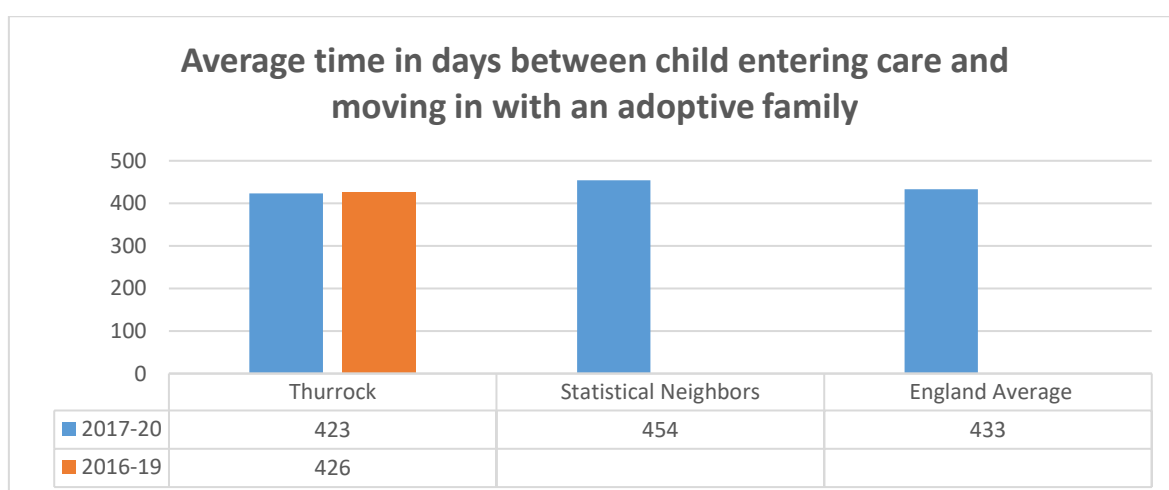
The average SDQ score in Q2 of 2020-21 was 14.3 compared to 14.2 in Q2 of 2019-20.

3.18 Number of Children Adopted

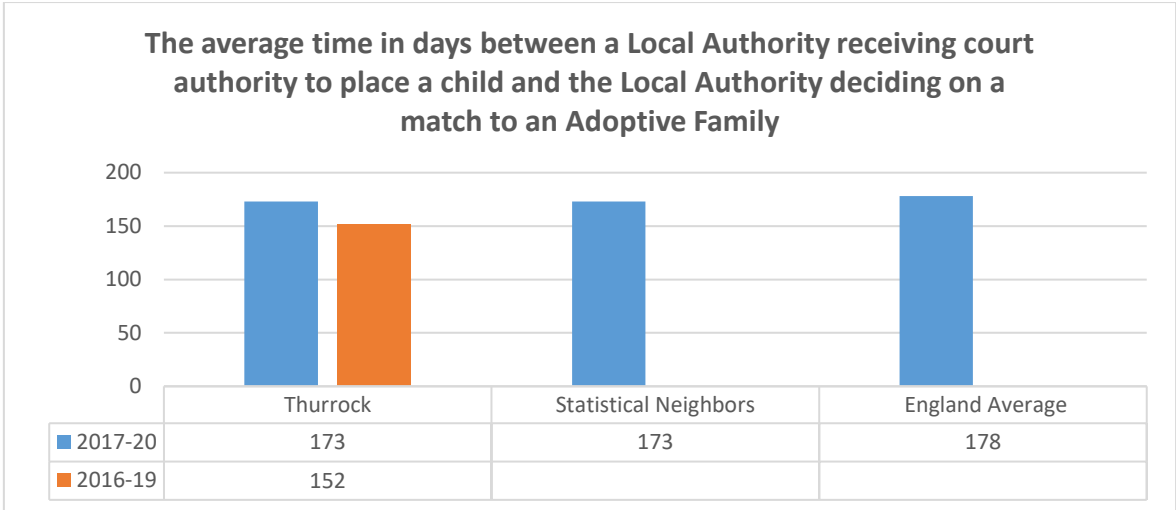
During the year 2019-20, a total of 15 children were adopted, therefore meeting Thurrock’s target of 15. The Adoption Service has worked effectively to place children for adoption. The service anticipates a greater number of Adoption Orders in the second half of the financial year, as court proceedings have been impacted by the pandemic.

3.19 Timeliness of Adoption

Thurrock is performing on target in relation to the 3 year average time for a child to be adopted. Our 2020-21 target is set at 426 days and at the latest available reporting at the end of June 2020, it was 426 days. Comparing our Statistical Neighbours and England averages below, Thurrock’s performance is good.



This chart shows the number in days (3 year average) for the period of 2016-19 and the most recent data of 2017-20. The graph below shows that Thurrock is performing better than the England average and the statistical neighbour average in 2015-18.



3.20 CLA Permanency

Purposeful early permanency planning continues to ensure that children are in the right placement at the right time to meet their needs. Where appropriate, all efforts are made to place children within their wider family network (Connected Carers), if they can no longer live in parental care, and are only Looked After outside of their family and wider network if this is the only viable option.

At the end of Q2 2020-21, 19% of the total CLA cohort were under the age of five. The majority of children under five are moved on to permanent placements with Connected Carers or Adoptive Families and are progressed through the court.

3.21 CLA placement distance

It is good practice to ensure that children remain within their communities. In 2020-21, 72% of the CLA cohort were 20 miles or less from their homes, compared to 73% in Q2 2019-20. With the continued focus on Fostering Recruitment and the Thurrock Council Tax Rebate offered to Foster Carers, the Service has an expectation that new local Foster Carers can be recruited.

3.22 Care Leavers

A Care Leaver, as defined in the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000¹, is a person who has been ‘Looked After’ or ‘in Care’ for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14, and who was in Care on their 16th birthday.

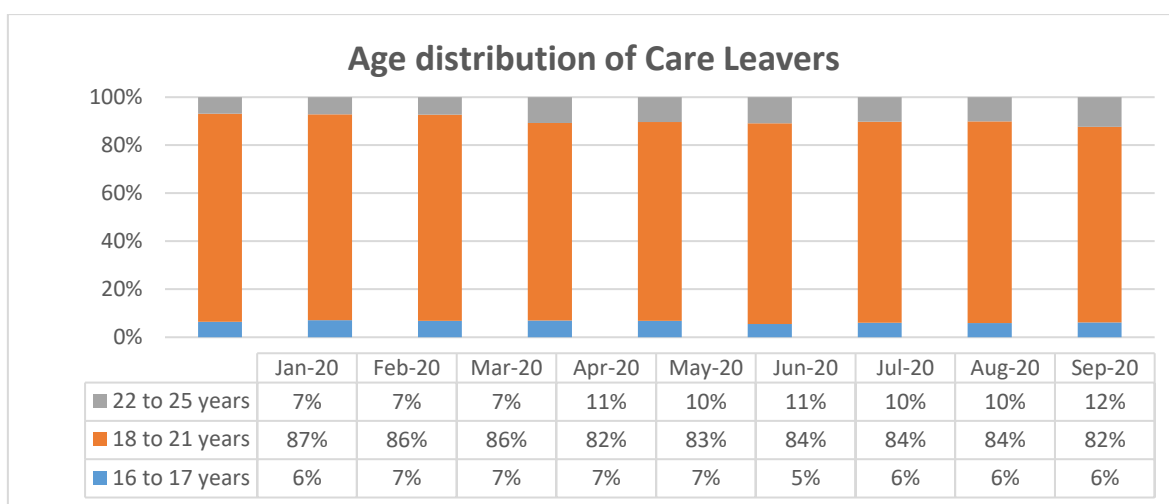
A young person's status as a Care Leaver can be divided into the following:

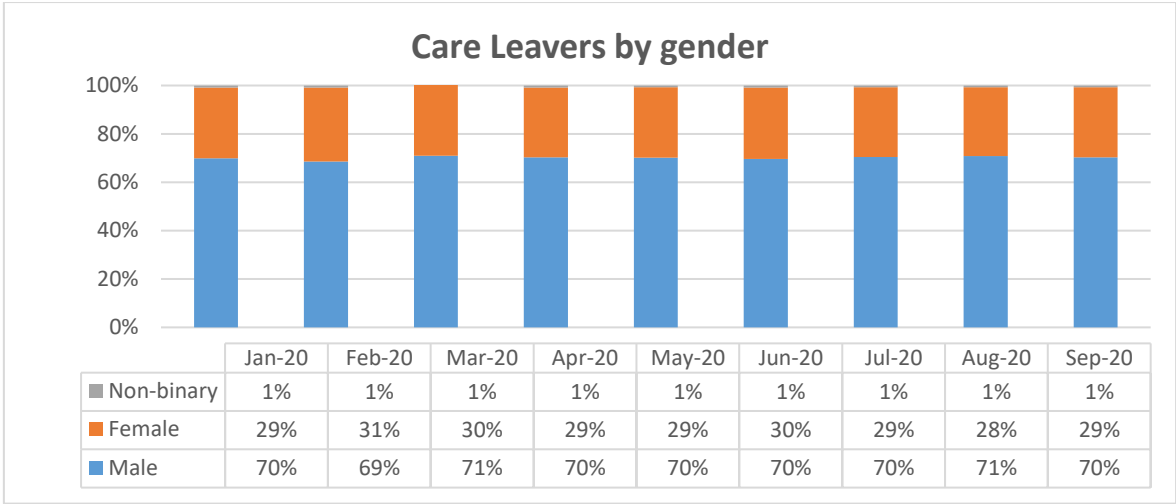
¹ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/35/contents>

- Eligible Child - a young person who is 16 or 17 and who has been Looked After by the Local Authority/Health and Social Care Trust for at least a period of 13 weeks since the age of 14, and who is still Looked After
- Relevant Child - a young person who is 16 or 17 who has left Care after their 16th birthday and before leaving Care was an Eligible Child
- Former Relevant Child - a young person who is aged between 18 and 25 (or beyond if being helped with education or training) who, before turning 18 was either an Eligible or a Relevant Child, or both

As at the end of March 2020, 260 Care Leavers were being supported and were receiving an Aftercare Service. This is an increase on the numbers from the previous year and this cohort now has a wider remit as all Care Leavers can request support services until the age of 25 under the Children and Social Work Act 2017.

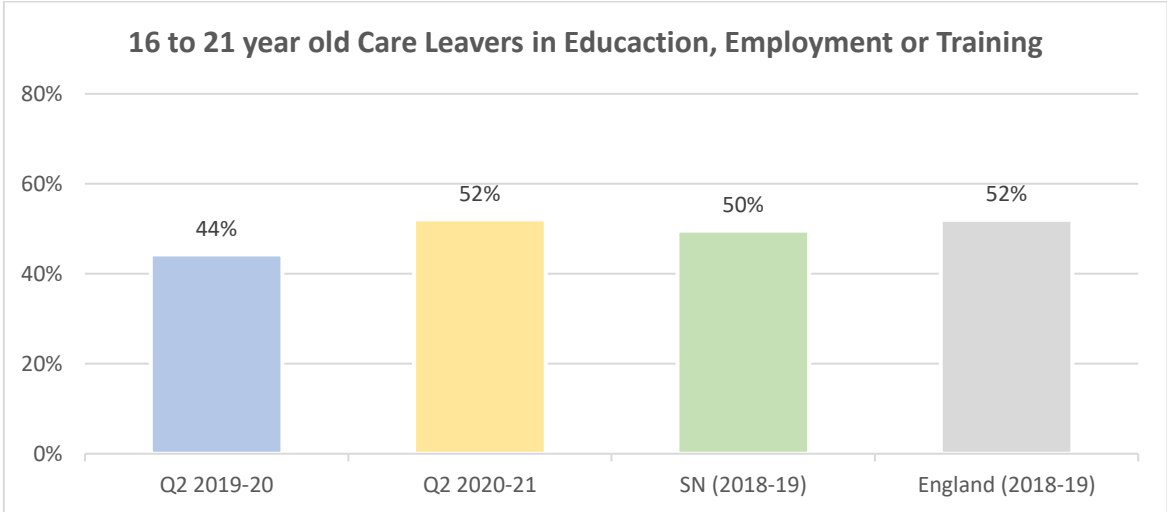
The charts below shows the Care Leaver cohort between January and September 2020 broken down by age groups and gender.





3.23 Care Leavers age 16-21 years in Education, Employment or Training (EET)

At the end of Q2 of 2020-21, 52% of the Care Leavers aged 16 to 21 years old were in part-time or full-time education, employment or training, compared to 44% in Q2 of 2019-20. In Q2 of 2020-21, Thurrock is above its Statistical Neighbours and in line with England average published in 2018-19.

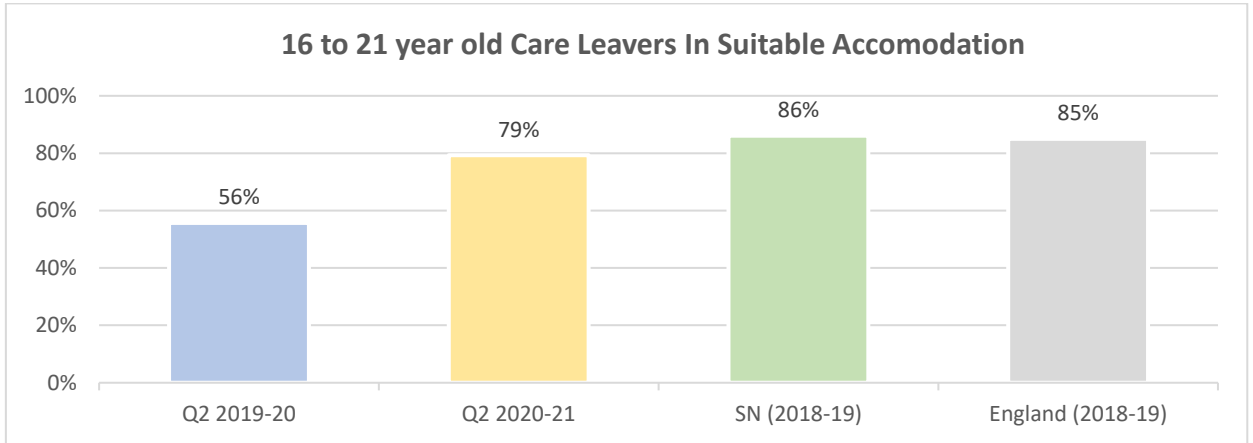


3.24 Care Leavers age 16 to 21 years in Suitable Accommodation

The number of 16 to 21 year old Care Leavers who were reported to be in suitable accommodation was 79% in Q2 of 2020-21. This compared to 56% at the end of 2019-20. However, this is still below statistical Neighbour's and England averages but shows an improving trajectory.

There is increased housing support to young people supported by Aftercare Service, from Head Start Housing and Thurrock Housing Department. The

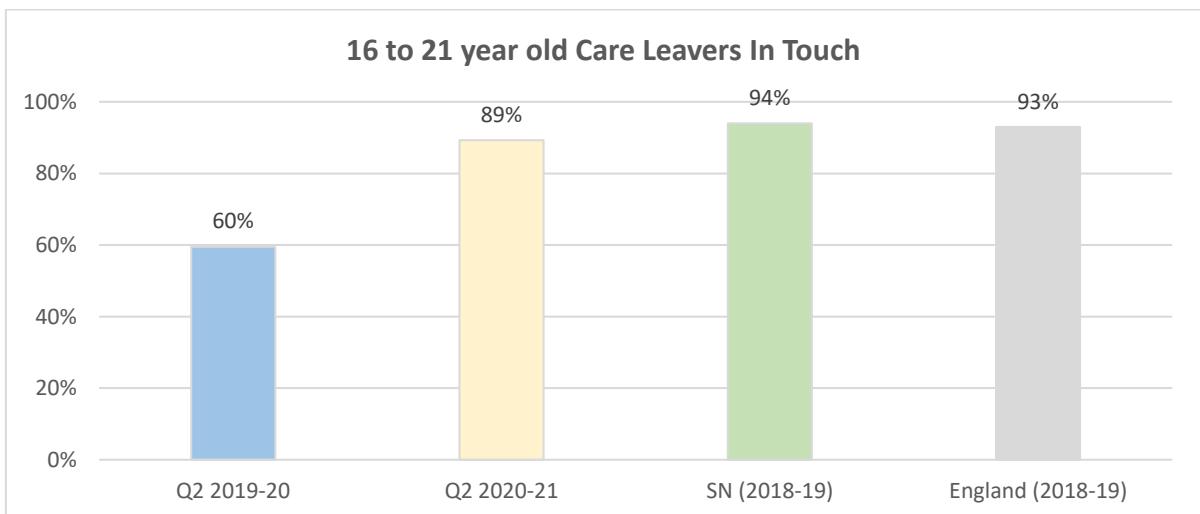
'Housing Offer' to Care Leavers has been updated with the Joint Housing Protocol 2020, ensuring good partnership working with clear pathways for young people to access housing, as well as ensuring they are prepared for their tenancies.



3.25 Care Leavers age 16-21 years 'In Touch'

Local Authorities are expected to stay in touch with Care Leavers and provide statutory support to help the Care Leaver to transition to living independently.

At the end of Q2 of 2020-21, Thurrock was in touch with 89% of Care Leavers, compared to 60% in 2019-20. While the performance is improving, continued focus will enable Thurrock to be in line with Statistical Neighbours and the England average.



3.26 CLA Fostering

Most CLA are placed with Foster Carers. We recruit and support our own Foster Carers but also have to use some Foster Carers who work for

Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs) to get the right match for a child. In 2019-20, we met the target of a net gain of 15 carers.

Our position as at the end of Q2 of 2020-21 is as below:-

Number of new carers approved between April 20 – Sep 20 (Q2)	6
Number of mainstream fostering applications currently in progress	10
Number of children currently placed in Thurrock fostering households	113

4. Reasons for Recommendations

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

5. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

5.1 Not applicable

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

6.1 Not applicable

7. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and Community impact

7.1 None

8. Implications

8.1 Financial

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

There were no financial implications identified.

8.2 Legal

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

There were no Legal implications identified.

8.3 Diversity & Equality

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

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

9. **Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder**
- Not applicable
10. **Background papers used in preparing the report** (including their location on the Council’s website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):
- Not applicable
11. **Appendices to the report**
- None

Report Author(s):

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Clare Moore, Strategic Lead, Youth Offending Service and Prevention, Children’s Services
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5 January 2021	ITEM: 6
Corporate Parenting Committee	
Children Looked After and Care Leaver Sufficiency Strategy	
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Non-key
Report of: Sue Green, Strategic Lead Commissioning; Naintara Khosla, Strategic Lead Looked After Children; Marc Rhodes, Business Intelligence and Data Analytics Manager	
Accountable Assistant Director: Joe Tynan, Assistant Director of Children Social Care and Early Help	
Accountable Director: Sheila Murphy, Corporate Director Children's Services	
This report is Public	

Executive Summary

This report is to provide members with an overview of the Children Looked After and Care Leaver Sufficiency Strategy to ensure and the duties the Council has with regard to this are met. A copy is provided in the appendices to this report.

The local authority has a duty, so far as is reasonably practicable, to secure sufficient accommodation within the authority's area, which meets the needs of children that the local authority are looking after, and whose circumstances are such that it would be consistent with their welfare for them to be provided with accommodation that is in the local authority's area.

The quality of placements strongly relates to children and young people 'doing well' and having stability in care. It is therefore the aim of this strategy to ensure that, across all areas of our services supporting children who are looked after and our care leavers, we aspire to achieve the best possible placements and housing provision for our young people.

There are six key priorities set as a part of this strategy:

- The voice of children and young people is at the heart of planning
- Achieving placement stability and permanence
- Recruitment and support of foster carers
- Commissioning and partnership working
- Developing the offer for care leavers
- Developing the offer for our most vulnerable children

1. Recommendation(s)

1.1 That members support the delivery of the Children Looked After and Care Leavers Placement Sufficiency Strategy January 2021 – January 2024.

1.2 That members note the information contained in the report and accompanying strategy.

2. Introduction and Background

2.1 Section 22G of the Children Act 1989 (amended by the Children and Young Persons Act 2008) places a general duty on local authorities to secure, so far as reasonably practicable, sufficient accommodation within the authority's area, which meets the needs of children that the local authority are looking after, and whose circumstances are such that it would be consistent with their welfare for them to be provided with accommodation that is in the local authority's area.

2.2 This report and accompanying strategy builds on the long term vision for the development of our sufficiency duty that has been set out in previous years. This version provides a three year plan from January 2021 to January 2024 to support planning and commissioning as needed.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

3.1 The overall context for meeting the Duty is set out in the statutory guidance, (Sufficiency: Statutory guidance on securing sufficient accommodation for Children Looked After 2010) which states that:

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

3.2 Working with the Participation and Engagement Team we have been able to ensure that the views of children and young people have been included in the development of this strategy. To further develop this one of the key priorities of the strategy is ‘To ensure the voice of children and young people is at the heart of planning’, this will be ongoing as the strategy is delivered.

3.3 Sufficiency Duty Statutory Guidance describes the accommodation required for a child looked after that, so far as is reasonably practical:

- is near the child's home;
- does not disrupt his/her education or training;
- enables the child to live with an accommodated sibling;
- where the child is disabled, is suitable to meet the needs of that child; and
- is within the local authority's area, unless that is not reasonably

practicable.

- 3.4 As at the end of March 2020 there were 298 Children Looked After in Thurrock which shows a reduction from 72.0 per 10,000 in 2018 to 68.1 per 10,000 in 2020, this is lower than our statistical neighbour average of 76.0 per 10,000 but higher than the England average of 65.0 per 10,000 based on the most recent data available (2018-19).
- 3.5 The highest percentage of children in care in Thurrock are those aged 10-15 years, this has remained broadly stable over recent years with this age group representing 40.6% of the children in care population as at 31st March 2020.
- 3.6 The majority of Children Looked After (78.9%) have a placement in a foster care setting, this is a slight increase from 2019 (75.1%). These placements are provided through in-house foster placements and placements through commissioned Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA's) and breakdown of fostering placements is also provided in the strategy.
- 3.7 We want to ensure the right children are in our care, that they are in the right placements and that they transition into adulthood feeling support with the skills to progress to independent living. We want our Children Looked After and care experienced young people to feel settled, secure and stable and aim to do this through robust permanency planning and placement stability.
- 3.8 The performance on placement stability and educational attainment at KS2 & 4, including school attendance, is above that of our statistical neighbours and national performance for Children Looked After.
- 3.9 There is a recognition that there is a slight decrease in the numbers of Children Looked After who are placed both within the borough and within 20 miles of their home. As at end March 2020, 71.5% of children and young people are placed within a 20 mile radius of their home compared to 74.5% in 2019 and 79.3% in 2018. The geographical 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.
- 3.10 Placements over 30 miles tend to be of a specialist nature where there are few providers available to meet specific needs. The children who are placed in residential care have specialist needs and are unable to settle within a foster family environment. They generally have extensive trauma histories and foster families can be challenged with the presenting needs of these children. Residential care offers safe care to some older adolescence who can be subject to grooming from gangs and experience exploitation.
- 3.11 In 2020-21 and 2021-2022 if the numbers of Children Looked After remain at 298 (as at March 2020), an increased fostering recruitment campaign would seek to increase fostering capacity by approximately 20 households and reduce the number of children placed over 20 miles from Thurrock and in

other types of placement by at least 20 Children Looked After. The Thurrock placement need is also focussed on the recruitment of fostering households that will be able to provide for and manage sibling groups locally as this is currently where we often have difficulty securing a local placement.

- 3.12 Getting the right support for care leavers is a priority for Thurrock as this supports transition into adulthood. A number of interlinked projects have already commenced that bring together partners such as Housing, Adult Services, Headstart and Children's Services to identify and meet support needs and find housing solutions locally.
- 3.13 As at the end of March 2020, 276 care leavers, including those 16-18 being supported, were receiving an aftercare service. This is a slight increase from March 2019 but this is largely dependent on the age of children in care. The majority of Children Looked After are supported by the leaving and aftercare team on turning 18. Working closely with the Aftercare team, Headstart Housing provides transitional accommodation whilst young people develop the independence skills required to manage social housing.
- 3.14 The Headstart Programme has increased the availability of local accommodation. This in turn provides improved access to support, training and employment and access to services. Now managing a portfolio of 114 beds, including 42 supported by key workers, the service provides a tailored approach to support young people to develop.
- 3.15 The strategy provides an overview of costs, however as a part of the ongoing market development work through the commissioning team this will be further analysed in partnership with other local authorities. Changes to the team will support this further scrutiny and market negotiation within the quality standards that we have set.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1 The Children Looked After and Care Leavers Placement Sufficiency Strategy is a Statutory Duty of the Council and provides a framework for the development of high quality placements to meet the identified need.

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

- 5.1 The views of children and young people were obtained through the existing mechanisms in place through the Participation and Engagement Team and will be used as services are developed.

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

- 6.1 This report relates to the following corporate priorities in particular:

People – a borough where people of all ages are proud to work and play, live and stay.

This means:

- 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

7. Implications

7.1. Financial

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

The provision of high quality, cost effective placements is a priority in meeting our duties for Children Looked After and Care Leavers. Whilst this strategy does not have savings targets attached, any savings that are achieved will contribute to the costs of earlier intervention and increased demand.

7.2. Legal

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

Section 22G of the Children Act 1989 (amended by the Children and Young Persons Act 2008) places a general duty on local authorities to secure, so far as reasonably practicable, sufficient accommodation within the authority's area, which meets the needs of children that the local authority are looking after, and whose circumstances are such that it would be consistent with their welfare for them to be provided with accommodation that is in the local authority's area.

The Local Authority is required to have regard to the statutory guidance in exercising this duty and the guidance gives the context for this as follows:

“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 critical success factor in relation to the delivery of better outcomes for looked after children.” (Sufficiency: Statutory guidance on securing sufficient accommodation for looked after children 2010).

The Local Authority also needs to have regard to the Corporate Parenting Principles in Section 1 of the Children and Social Work Act 2017.

7.3. **Diversity and Equality**

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

Access to placements that meet the needs identified are key to improving outcomes for Children Looked After and Care Leavers. This strategy outlines key factors such as ethnicity, gender, age and provides an analysis of these to aid planning.

Placement planning addresses the individual diversity needs of children placed and the supervising social workers assist foster carers to ensuring appropriate oversight and supervision is in place. In some situations where a cultural match has not been possible, foster carers' support network (Independent Reviewing Officers, Social Workers, and Independent Visitors) can provide and contribute to the information and care that foster families need to provide appropriate support.

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 - Children Looked After and Care Leavers Placement Sufficiency Statement

Report Author:

Sue Green

Strategic Lead Integrated Commissioning and Transformation, Children's and Adult's Commissioning

Children Looked After and Care Leavers Placement Sufficiency Strategy

January 2021 - 2024

This version date
Version number
Review Frequency
Next review date

08/12/2020
Final
Every 3 Years
December 2023

Contents

		Page
1.0	Introduction	3
2.0	Sufficiency Duty: Legal Context	4
3.0	Thurrock- Our Vision	4
4.0	Thurrock – The Place	5
5.0	Thurrock Priorities	5
6.0	What Children and Young People Tell Us	6
7.0	Placement Needs Analysis	8
7.1	Profile of Children Looked After	8
7.2	Age of Children Looked After	9
7.3	Gender of Children Looked After	10
7.4	Ethnicity Breakdown	10
7.5	Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children	11
7.6	Legal Status of Children Looked After	13
7.7	Placement Stability, SGO's and Adoption	14
7.8	Placement Stability	15
8.0	Educational Attainment	17
9.0	Children Looked After with Disabilities	18
10.0	Transition to Adult Services	19
11.0	Care Leavers	19
12.0	Placement Availability	22
13.0	Accommodation for Care Leavers and Vulnerable Young People	25
14.0	How Children Looked After and Care Leavers Feels About Where They Live	26
15.0	Placement Costs	29
16.0	Gap Analysis	26
17.0	Key Priorities	30
18.0	Measuring Success	39
Appendix 1	Our Pledge to Children Looked After	41
Appendix 2	Charter for Care Leavers	43

1.0 Introduction

Children and Young People in Care are one of the most vulnerable groups in our society. It is our priority to ensure that all children and young people in our care and their families receive the best possible support. This strategy outlines a review of the needs of our Children and Young People who are Looked After and Care Leavers by Thurrock Council and our approach to addressing these.

Meeting the needs of Children Looked After and Care Leavers is the responsibility of the local authority as corporate parents and a priority across the council and its partners. It is the responsibility of the local authority as corporate parents, to support each of our care leavers as individuals in order to enable them to achieve their maximum potential.

Our vision is to provide sufficient high quality placements for children and young people which understand their aspirations and ambitions and can support them to fulfil their potential. We aspire for our Care Leavers to have all the necessary skills and support to make a successful transition to adulthood and independence at a time that is right for them individually.

We want to make sure that we have appropriate placement and accommodation options, both now and in the future, that support our looked after children to achieve the best possible outcomes, whilst ensuring best use of available resources.

By working together across the service and with our partners responsible for Children Looked After we are focused on delivering the services children and young people need and deserve to live safe, happy, healthy and successful lives.



Joe Tynan, Assistant Director Children's Social Care and Early Help

2.0 Sufficiency Duty: Legal Context

Section 22 of the Children Act 1989 (amended by the Children and Young Persons Act 2008) places a general duty on Local Authorities to secure, so far as reasonably practicable, sufficient accommodation within the authority's area, which meets the needs of children that the Local Authority are looking after, and whose circumstances are such that it would be consistent with their welfare for them to be provided with accommodation that is in the Local Authority's area.

Sufficiency Duty Statutory Guidance describes the accommodation required for a Child Looked After that, so far as is reasonably practical:

- is near the child's home;
- does not disrupt his/her education or training;
- enables the child to live with an accommodated sibling;
- where the child is disabled, is suitable to meet the needs of that child; and
- is within the local authority's area, unless that is not reasonably practicable.

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 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

This document builds on the long term vision for the development of our sufficiency duty that was set out in the Sufficiency Strategy 2019/20. This version provides a three year plan from January 2021 to January 2024.

3.0 Thurrock – Our Vision

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

When a child becomes Looked After, the Local Authority becomes their “Corporate Parent” responsible for them during their period as a child who is looked after and when they leave care. Every parent wants the best for their child. In Thurrock, we believe that where possible and in children’s best interest, children should live with their families or their communities. It is not always possible for children to remain with their families due to risk of harm or because they have been harmed.

We want to ensure the right children are in our care, that they are in the right placements and that they transition into adulthood feeling support with the skills to progress to independent living. We want our Children Looked After and care experienced young people to feel settled, secure and stable and aim to do this through robust permanency planning and placement stability.

Members and senior leaders in the Council are committed to providing the best possible services and ensuring that children within Thurrock remain safe. Members from all parties support Children’s Social Care and provide support and challenge through the Corporate Parenting Committee.

4.0 Thurrock - The Place

There are 29,898 children on the school roll (School Spring Census 2020). There are an estimated 44,650 children and young people under the age of 18 years in Thurrock accounting for 25.6% of the population (ONS Mid 2019 estimates). The population of children and young people is expected to increase by 11.2% in the next ten years.

Alongside existing increases in the child population in Thurrock, there is expected to be a rapid economic and housing growth over the next decade. It is expected that the population of children and young people aged 0 – 25 years will rapidly increase as a result. It is highly likely, therefore, that the numbers of Children Looked After in Thurrock will also grow. In order to account for this expected population growth, the local Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) population projections take into account the levels of job and housing growth expected to take place in Thurrock in the coming years to provide a more realistic forecast of population growth than the standard Office for National Statistics (ONS) forecasts.

It is estimated that from the baseline year of 2014 the child population (0 – 17 years) will grow by 19% by 2024 and 35.4% by 2037. By comparison, the child population of England is projected to grow by just 13.3% by 2024 and 19.2% by 2037. This is around half of the rate of growth expected in Thurrock over the next 20 years.

5.0 Thurrock Priorities

People – a borough where people of all ages are proud to work and play, live and stay.

This means:

- 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

Place – a heritage rich borough which is ambitious for its future

This means:

- 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

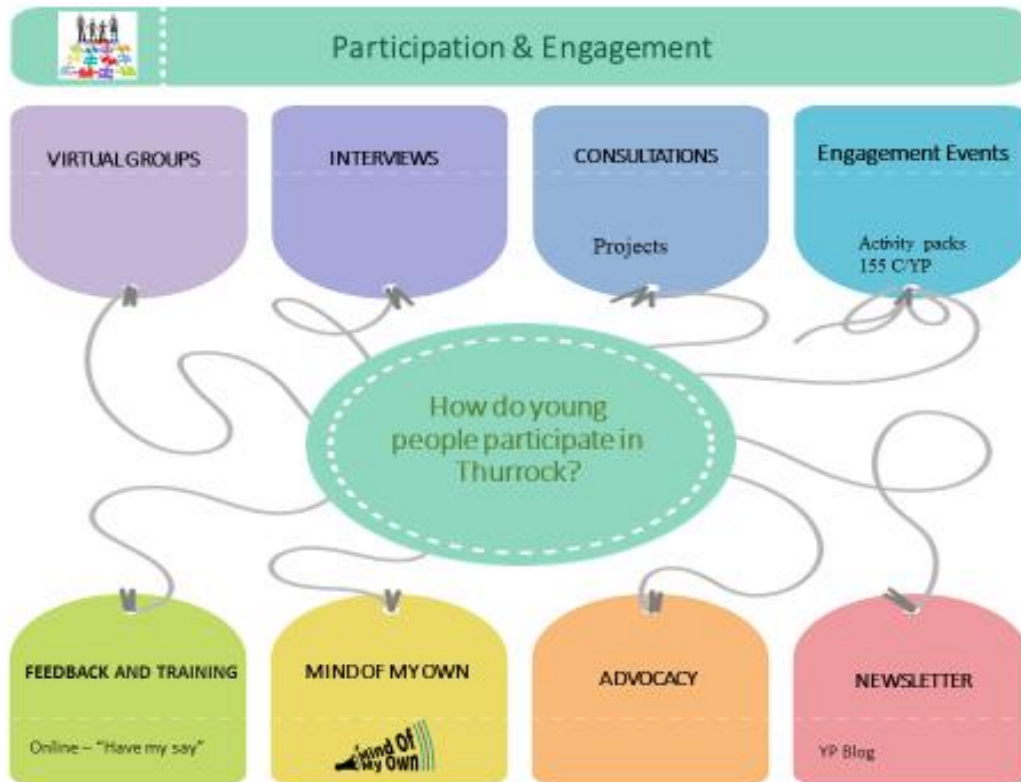
Prosperity – a borough, which enables everyone to achieve their aspirations

This means:

- 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

6.0 What Children and Young People Tell Us

There is a commitment to create a culture of listening to children and young people; understanding what they want from the services they receive so that our work is relationship based and informed by listening to the voice of our children. This commitment includes the development of sufficient accommodation which meets the needs of Children Looked After and Care Leavers. Feedback is via the Participation and Engagement Team who routinely collect the views of children and young people through a variety of methods and use this information to ensure the voice of children and young people is at the heart of planning and delivering services. Some of the ways the Participation and Engagement Team do this are illustrated below, these were developed with children and young people:



We want all Children Looked After and Care Leavers and to be healthy, safe and happy, do well at school, training or employment and enjoy good relationships with their peers. We want our young people to be able to make the most of leisure opportunities, hobbies and interests, and to grow towards adulthood equipped to lead independent lives and to make their way as adults into higher education, good careers and jobs, and achieve financial security.

The quality of placements strongly relates to children and young people 'doing well' and having stability in care. It is therefore the aim of this strategy to ensure that across all areas of our services supporting Children Looked After and our Care Leavers, we aspire to achieve the best possible placements and housing provision for our young people.

Children can be in care for varying lengths of time. Some children are unable to return to live with their parents because to do so would mean that they would likely suffer further harm, abuse and/or neglect. When children become Looked After in Thurrock, we will work hard to make sure that they are not further disadvantaged and that the care we provide is better than the care they have previously received. We will provide high quality care in a foster placements with a family or, where necessary a high quality residential setting.

We want to enable our children and young people to be involved in decisions affecting their lives, along with their parents and carers. We will work with our Children Looked

After and our young people who have left care to shape how we manage and organise the resources and services that support them.

When the Council’s five year commissioning exercise commenced it included engagement and consultation with young people who experienced being “Looked After” they used the following key words to describe the features of a good service:

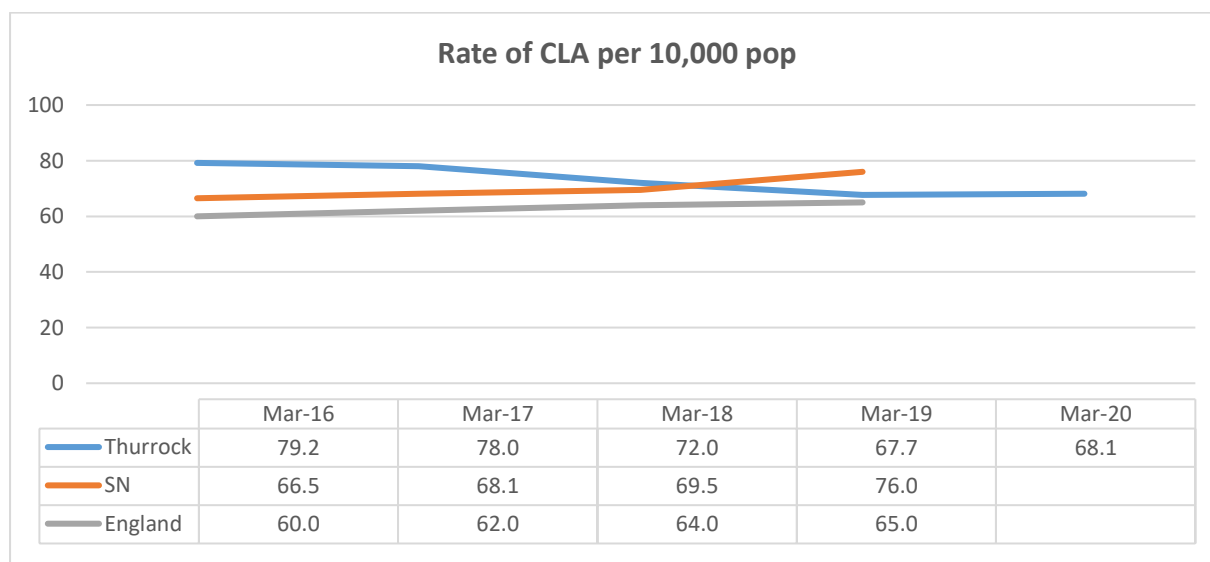
Trust	Listening	Structured
Communication	Helping	Transparency
Supporting	Understanding	Knowledge

This feedback was reflected in the specification that sets out the requirements for providers and this remains in place. The expanded participation and engagement of children and young people who are looked after and care leavers will be used to contribute the development of new placement commissioning on an ongoing basis.

7.0 Placement Needs Analysis

7.1 Profile of Children Looked After (CLA)

As at the end of March 2020 there were 298 Children Looked After in Thurrock which shows a reduction from 72.0 per 10,000 in 2018 to 68.1 per 10,000 in 2020, this is lower than our statistical neighbour average of 76.0 and higher than the England average of 65.0 per 10,000 based on the most recent data available (2018-19).



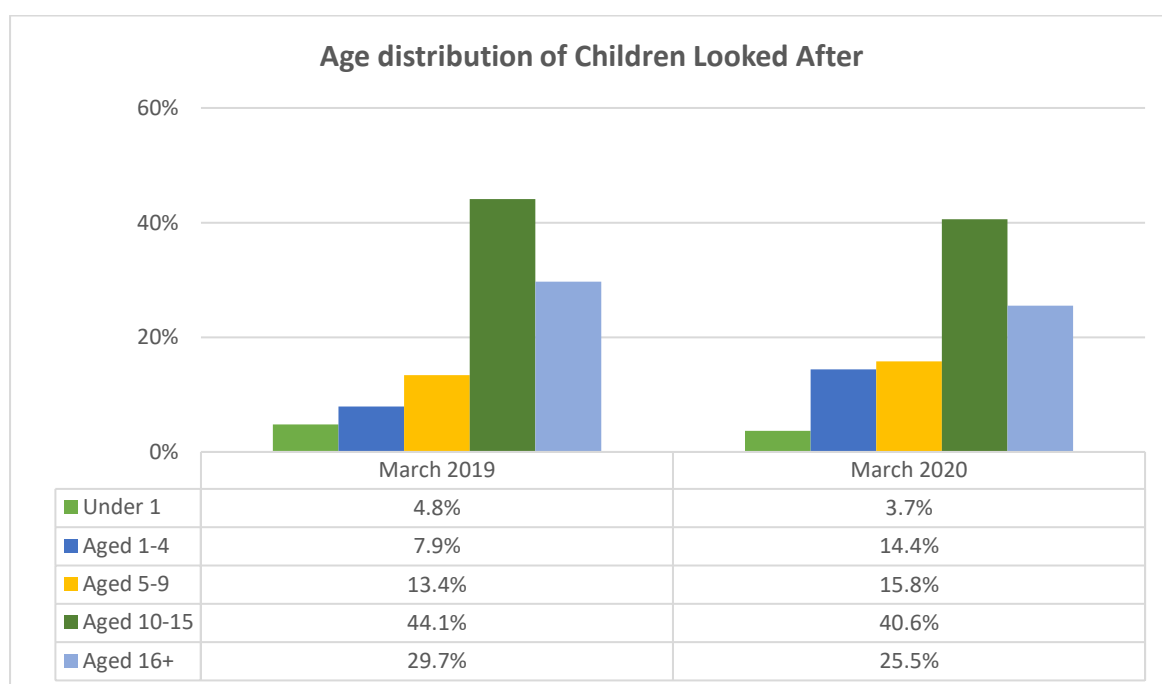
The child (0-17 years) population has been increasing in Thurrock at a much faster rate compared to the national average. This higher rate of growth is expected to continue in the future in part due to the high level of economic and housing development currently taking place. It is likely that there will therefore, be a

proportionate increase in the numbers of Children Looked After in Thurrock, even if the rate per 10,000 remains constant. The 19% predicted growth in the population of children and young people in Thurrock by 2024 compared to 13.3% for England needs to be considered when planning support and placements.

The implementation of the Brighter Futures Strategy aims to provide support earlier and reduce the number of children entering the care system, alongside this is the Families Together Team who work with children and young people aged from 10-17 years and their families to help families learn together safely and learn to overcome difficulties. The investment in these programmes will help to mitigate the likelihood of increasing demand of children becoming looked after due to increased population.

7.2 Age of Children Looked After

The highest percentage of children in care in Thurrock are those aged 10-15 years, this has remained broadly stable over recent years with this age group representing 40.6% of the children in care population as at 31st March 2020.



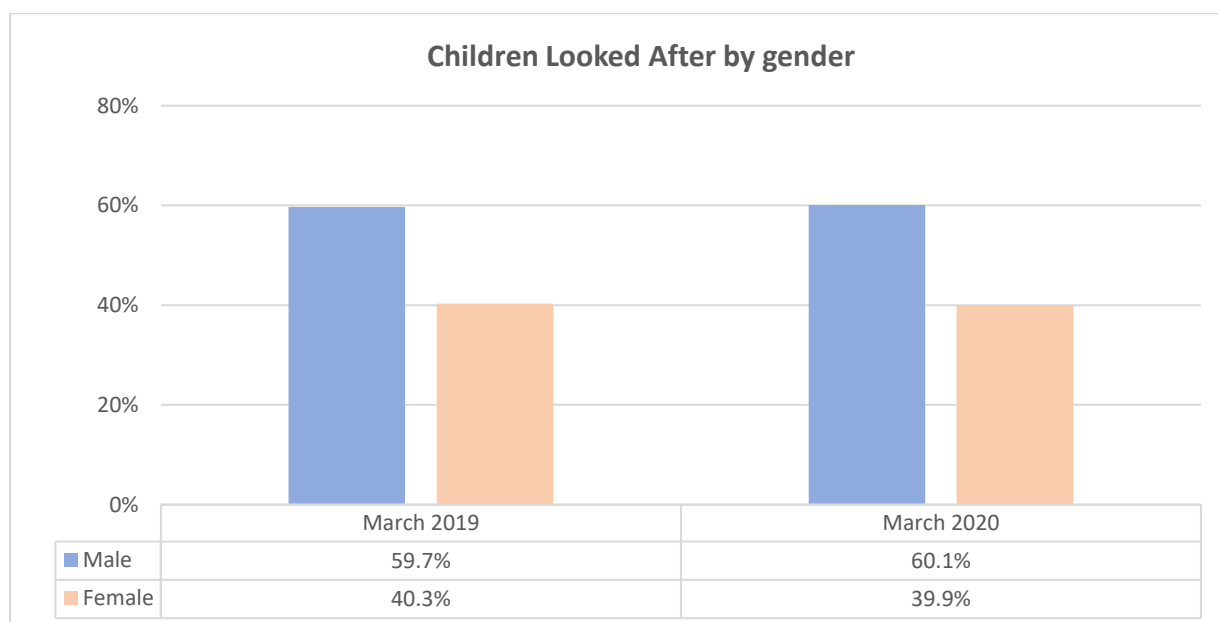
	March 2019	March 2020
Under 1	14	11
Aged 1-4	23	43
Aged 5-9	39	47
Aged 10-15	128	121
Aged 16+	86	76

This data on age breakdown is used in planning services and support. This is particularly important in planning likely demand for Care Leaver support services

including housing and wider support needs. The number of children and young people is monitored to identify the numbers that turn 16 and 18 per month along with those moving into independence, this helps with case load management and the provision of support.

7.3 Gender of Children Looked After

There are a larger number of male Children Looked After than female although the numbers remain broadly similar from 2019 to 2020.

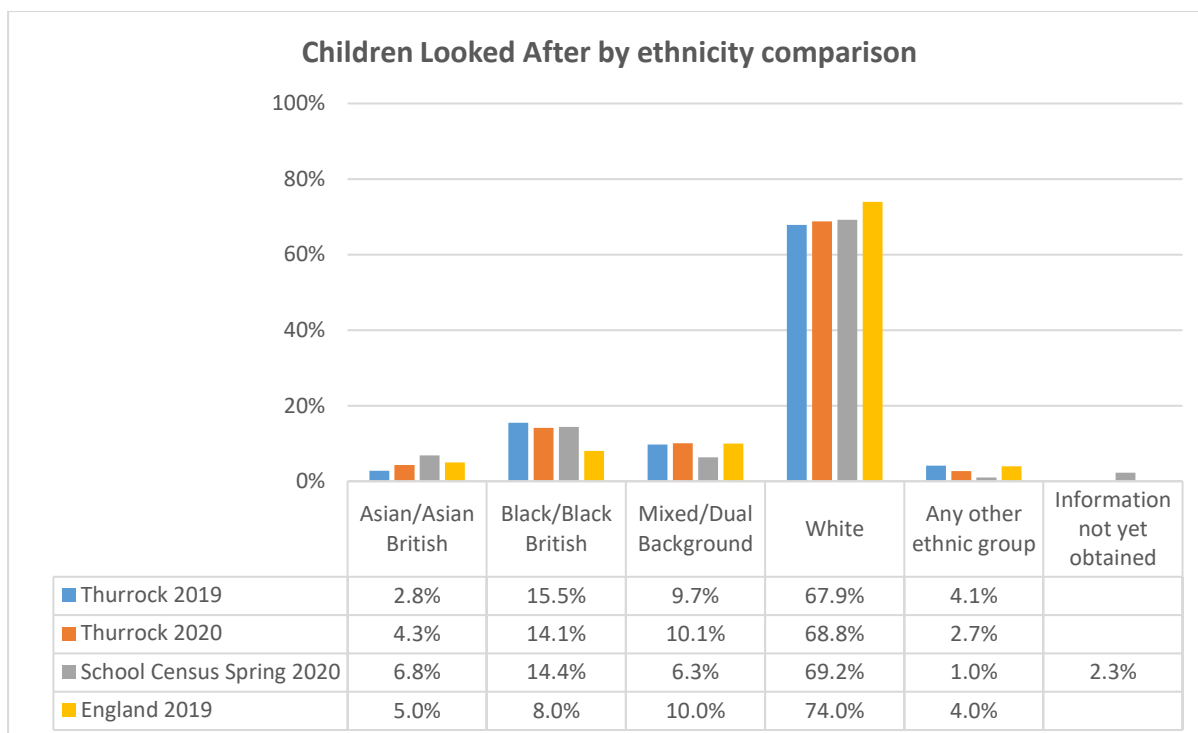


	March 2019	March 2020
Male	173	179
Female	117	119

Male Children Looked After can be more difficult to find suitable placements for and also on average adoption takes longer than for female Children Looked After. We closely monitor this data and assess any increase in risks if the gender breakdown changes.

7.4 Ethnicity Breakdown

The ethnicity of Children Looked After remains broadly similar from the data held in 2019 and as illustrated below, this is broadly similar to the general population of children in Thurrock.



Comparison with England 2019 data shows that a higher percentage of Black/ Black British children are Children Looked After, in Thurrock however this is consistent with the percentage of Black/ Black British children in the general Thurrock population. The percentage of Children Looked After who are of Mixed/ Dual background is slightly higher than the Thurrock general population data however this is in line with the England 2019 trend.

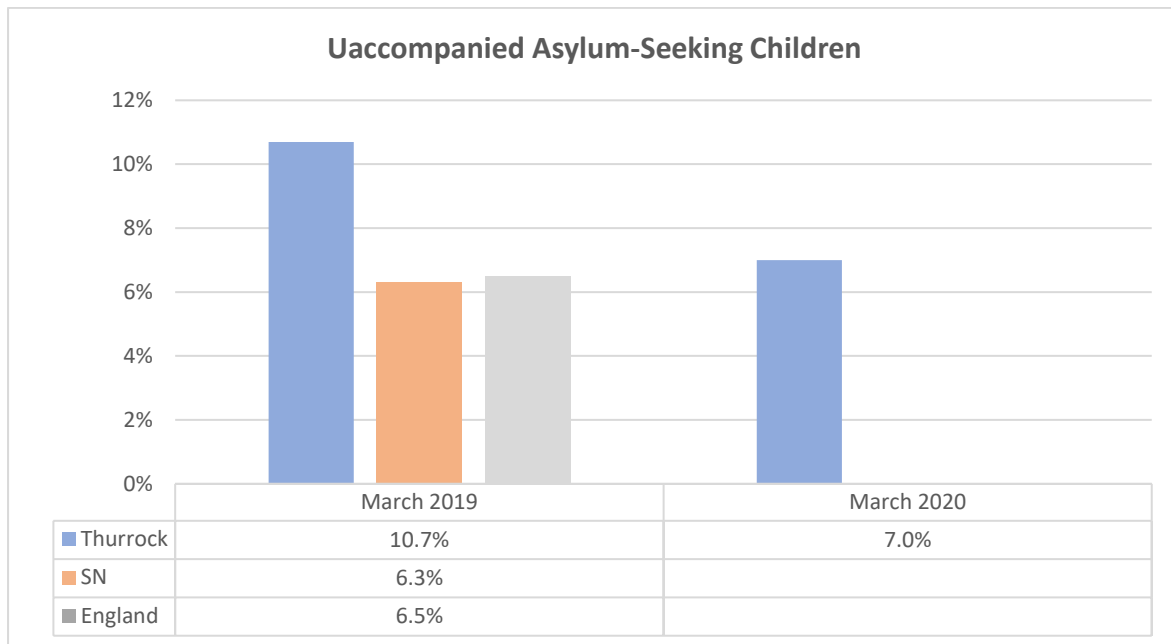
Placement planning addresses the individual diversity needs of children placed and the supervising social workers assist foster carers to ensuring appropriate oversight and supervision is in place. In some situations where a cultural match has not been possible, foster carers' support network (Independent Reviewing Officers, Social Workers, and Independent Visitors) can provide and contribute to the information and care that foster families need to provide appropriate support.

7.5 Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Children (UASC)

We have reducing numbers of UASC Children Looked After who are 16+ reducing from 25 in 2019 to 16 in 2020. The overall number of UASC has reduced representing 7.0% of our Children Looked After population. At the end of March 2019, the number of UASC was 31 compared to 21 in 2020, the majority of these children are aged 16+.

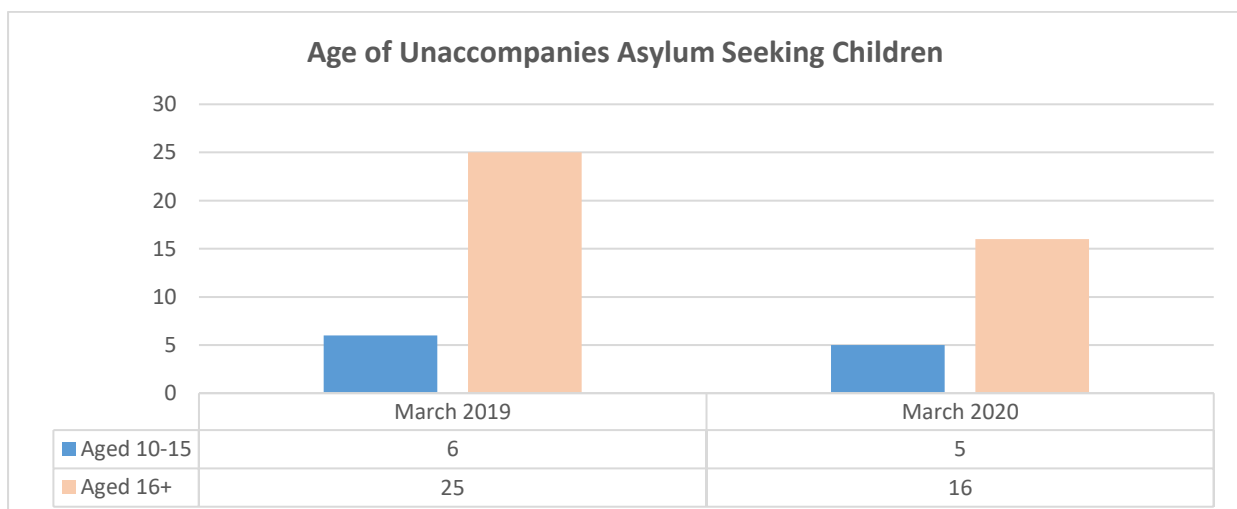
The Eastern Region Transfer Scheme provides a regional response to meeting the accommodation and support needs of UASC, this is not part of a national scheme. Through this we have an allocation of 0.07 as a part of the total cohort of UASC. Locally this translates to 28 children and young people and we continue to

accommodate and receive UASC from the Eastern Region to meet our 0.07 allocation.



	March 2019	March 2020
Thurrock	31	21
SN (2018-19)	26	not available
England (2018-19)	5,070	not available

Number of Children Looked After who are Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children and % of Children Looked After Total.

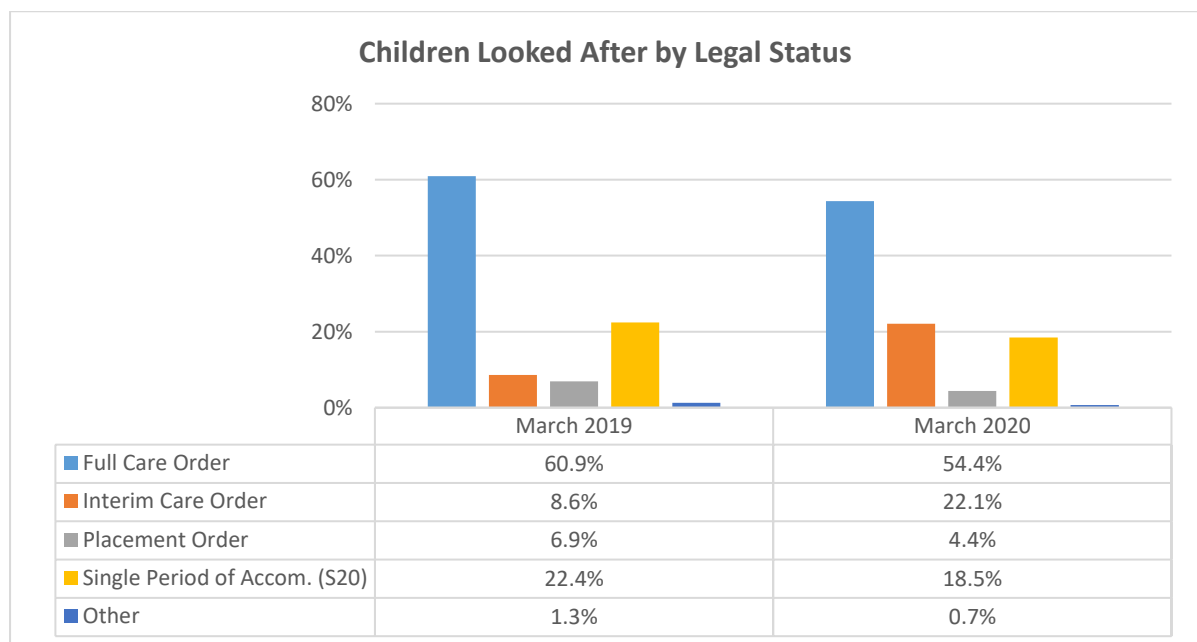


For Care Leavers who are Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children, the Headstart Housing Programme referred to later in this document has increased the availability of local accommodation. This in turn provides improved access to support, training

and employment and access to services. Additional details of the support available are outlines later in this document.

7.6 Legal status of Children Looked After

As of March 2020 there were 66 of children who were subject to care proceedings. This is an increase on the March 2019 figure of 25. There were 176 number of children who became subject to a Care Order in March 2019 and 162 in March 2020. There is a focus on ensuring the Order reflects the status of a Looked After Child so Placement with Parents Regulations are an exceptional placement, very small numbers of children placed in this way.

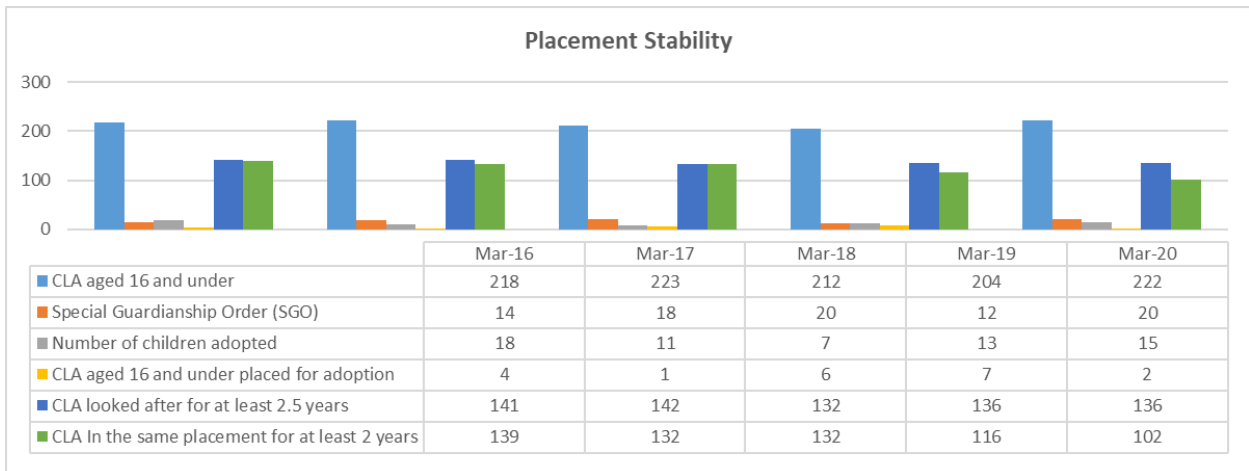


	March 2019	March 2020
Full Care Order	176	162
Interim Care Order	25	66
Placement Order	20	13
Single Period of Accom. (S20)	65	55
Other	4	2

There has been an impact on court proceedings as a result of COVID and this will impact 2020/21 adoption timescales and plans for permanency as Final Hearings have been delayed and proceedings are taking longer than the Public Law Outline of 26 weeks for conclusion.

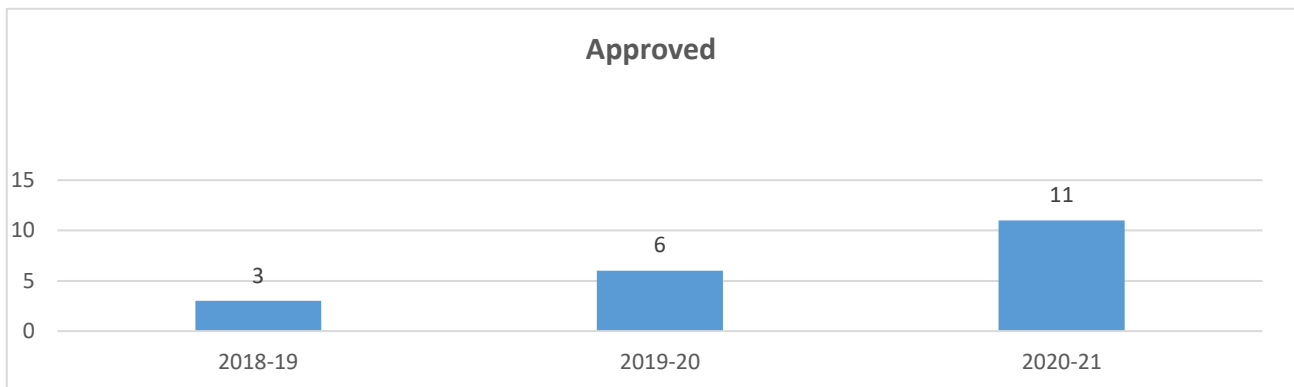
7.7 Placement stability, Special Guardianship Orders (SGO's) and Adoption

More children achieved permanency through adoption in 2019-20 in Thurrock and an increased number are identified for 2019-20 with adoption as a potential permanence plan. A total of 15 children were adopted in 2019-20 compared to 13 in 2018/19.

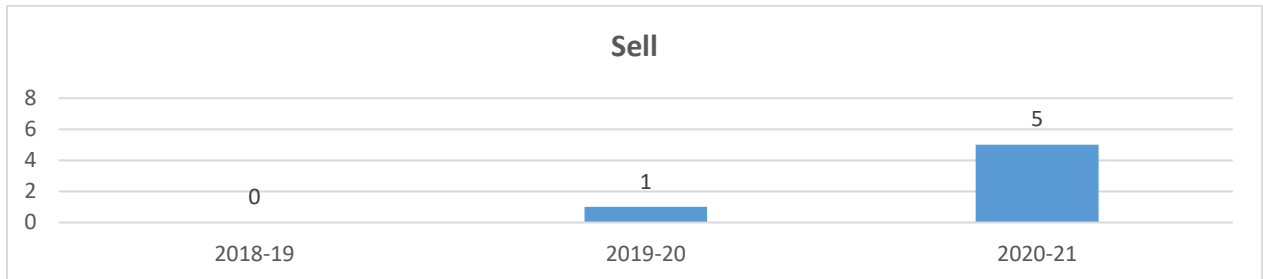


Thurrock Council are part of an alliance with Adopt East. Adopt East is a regional adoption alliance which brings together the professionalism, skills and expertise of eight local authorities and two voluntary adoption agencies from across the East of England.

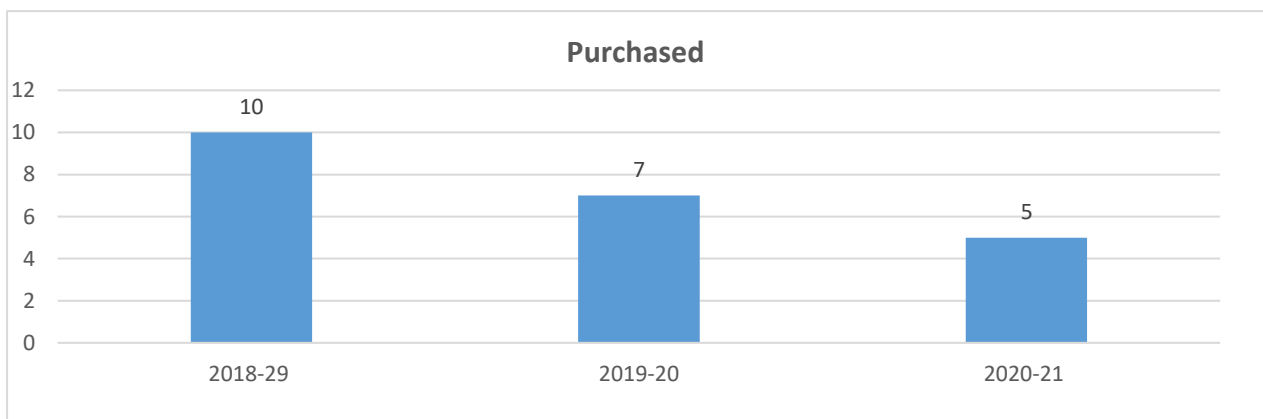
The Adopt East Alliance is committed to delivering the highest quality adoption service to children and families throughout our region. We work with families in Southend, Thurrock, Essex, Suffolk, Norfolk, Bedford Borough, Adoption Plus, Hertfordshire and Luton. The scale of our organisation means that Thurrock children waiting for adoption have access to a large number of adopters. By working collaboratively, we are able to share best practice avoiding any unnecessary delay. Adoption performance through the in house team is reflected in the data below. There is a positive trend in the number of adopters recruited with 11 in 2020/21, a significant increase from 2018/19 (3) and 2019/20 (6).



In common with many Local Authorities in the region, where we recruit local adopters who may not want/ be suitable to adopt local children we are able to transfer these or 'sell' to other Local Authorities in recognition of the costs we have incurred in approving them as adopters. We also purchase adopters to support the matching process and increase adoptions. This data is shown below, costs vary due to many factors such as the needs of the child, number of siblings, and ages of the children.



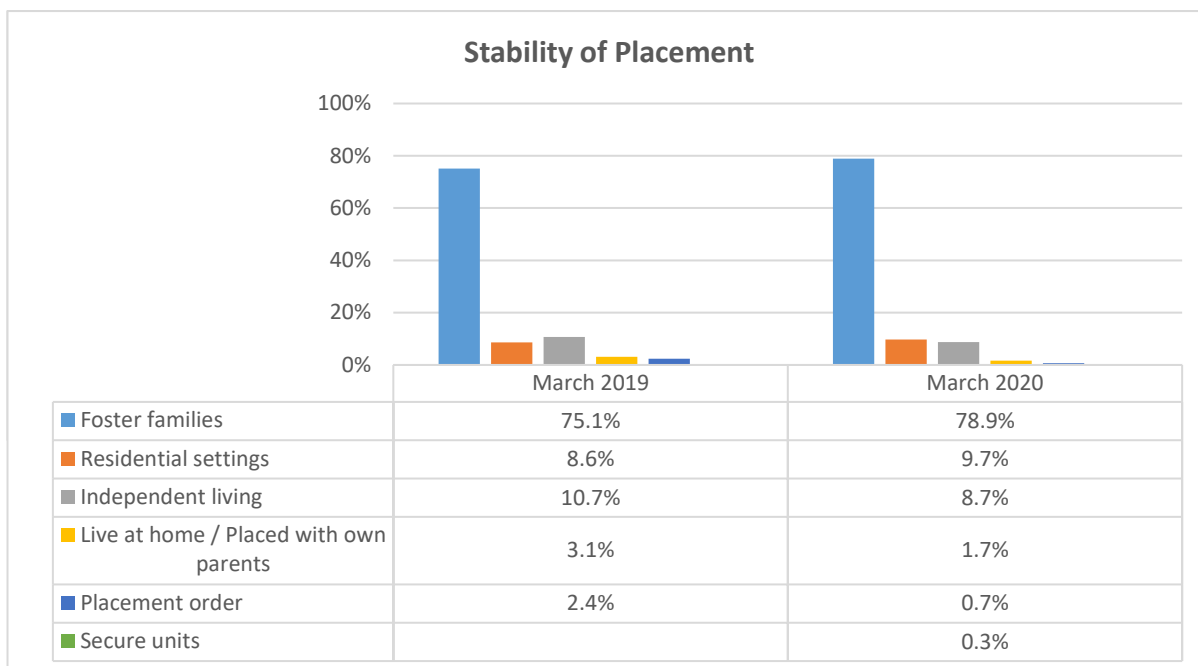
How many adopters we have purchased in the last 3 financial years. How much this has cost in 2020/21 we have also developed the Fostering to adopt programme and have an initial 3 cases that have resulted in adoption.



In 2020/21 we have also developed the Fostering to Adopt Programme and have an initial 3 cases that have resulted in adoption.

7.8 Placement Stability

Although it is sometimes necessary to move a child to provide them with a better placement our aim is to minimise the number of times each child changes placement as this can be very disruptive, we describe this as achieving permanence for that child. To achieve permanence it is essential that all our teams work effectively together to support each placement. Permanence can be achieved in a number of ways, including adoption, Special Guardianship Order, Child Arrangement Order or matched for long term fostering. Each of these options gives the chance for the child to achieve stability and achieve their potential. We know that placement stability is an important factor in how well our Children Looked After are doing, the performance on placement stability is shown below.



	March 2019	March 2020
Foster families	218	235
Residential settings	25	29
Independent living	31	26
Live at home / Placed with own parents	9	5
Placement order	7	2
Secure units		1

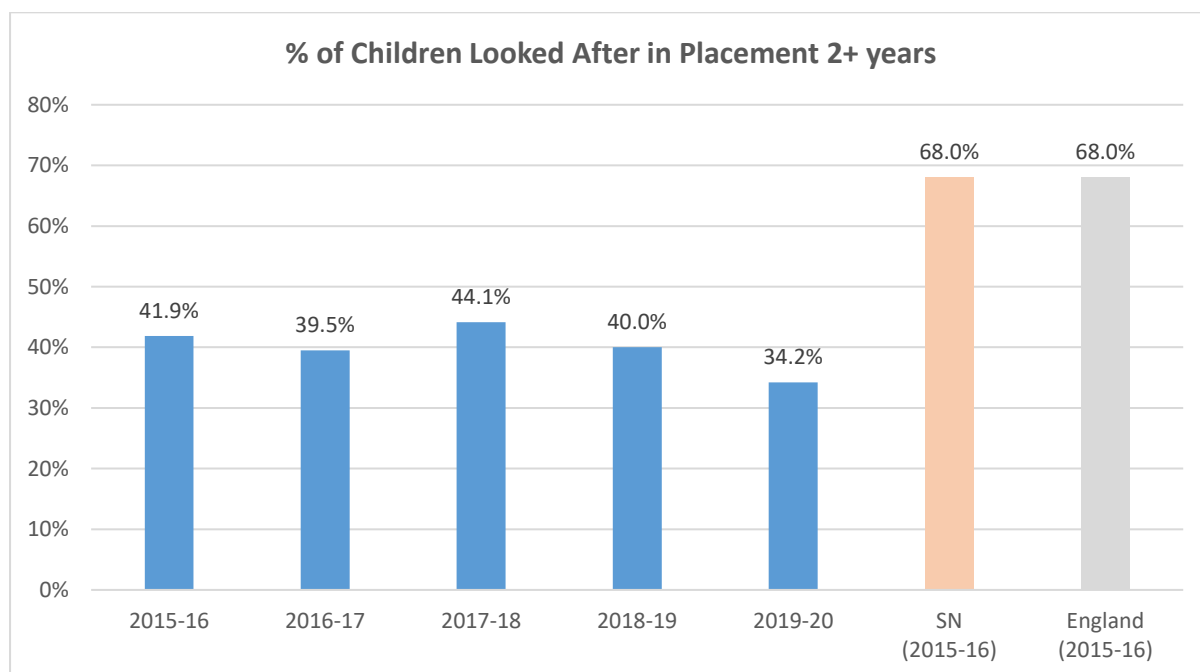
The performance across the factors shown in the chart above has remained relatively stable and maintaining and improving this is a priority.

In addition, a key measure of placement stability is also the percentage of children with three or more moves in a year. Thurrock's performance over recent years has been improving and in 2018/19 (the most recent published data) performance was better than national and our statistical neighbours. A part of achieving this is based on the quality of providers in place, the increase in in house-foster carers and the activity in recent years to set local standards and encourage providers on to the framework through the select list is a part of this.

The chart below provides a comparison of the 3 or more placements data with our statistical neighbours and national (latest published data). There has been a significant improvement over recent years, this is routinely monitored.

The percentage of Children Looked After who have been in a placement for 2 + years has reduced in recent years as permanency planning has been further developed. Thurrock has significantly lower numbers than our statistical neighbours and England data.

The chart below gives an indication of how long current Children Looked After have been in their placement and is used in permanency planning and placement stability.



	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Thurrock	139	132	132	116	102

8.0 Educational Attainment of Children Looked After

There are also strong indications that placement stability is also a factor in the educational attainment of Children Looked After, whilst the factors that determine this are too diverse to measure at a child level there are some key performance indicators that provide the direction of travel. These are outlined below.

The Head Teacher of the Virtual School ensures that Children who are Looked After have access to education and works closely with the Social Work teams and other professionals. They hold and publish a range of data on attainment however for the purposes of this document we are reporting on two of the key stages. School attendance data is also shown below.

School Attendance 2019	
Average attendance CLA	96.9%
All Thurrock Children Attendance	94.9%

Key Stage 2

The combined reading, writing and maths scores remain consistent with 50% of Children Looked After achieving the expected levels in 2019 and 2018. This

compares with the national level of 35% in 2018 and 37% in 2019. The comparison with all Thurrock children is shown in the table below.

2019 Key Stage 2 Exam Analysis: 12+ months in care	Thurrock CLA	Thurrock ALL	National CLA	National ALL	National Disadvantaged	National Non - Disadvantaged
Reading, Writing & Maths combined %	50%	70%	37%	64.9 %	51%	71%

Key Stage 4

The 2019 KS4 Attainment 8 Score for Thurrock Children Looked After was 23.20 compared to a national Children Looked After score of 17.9. For Thurrock Children Looked After, this is an improvement from the 2018 score of 19.7.

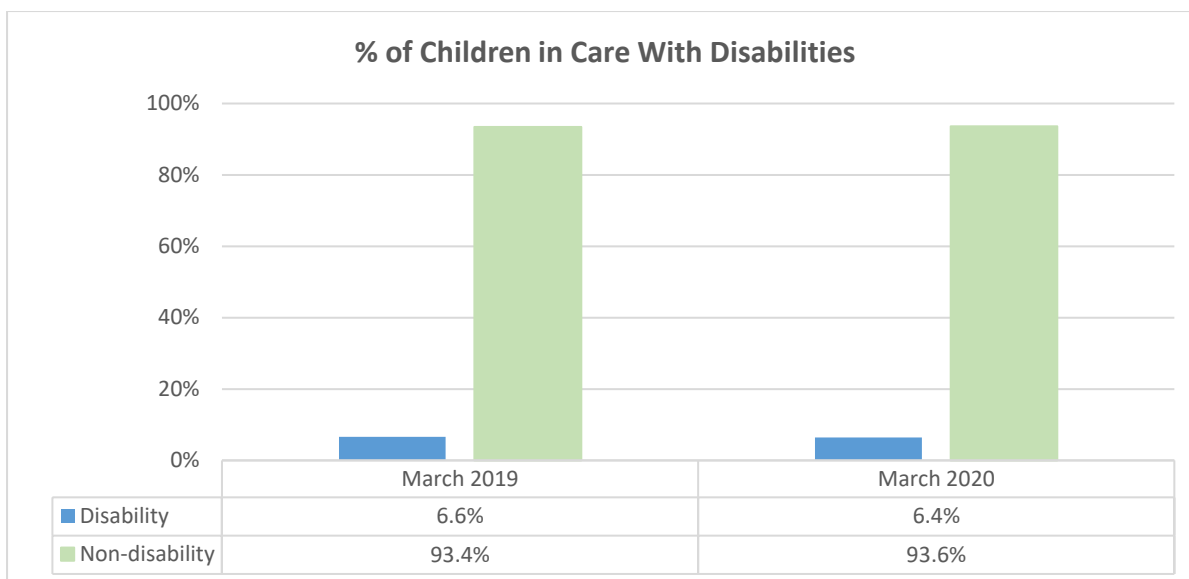
The 2019 KS4 Progress 8 Score for Thurrock Children Looked After was -1.09 compared to a national Children Looked After score of -1.47. For Thurrock Children Looked After, this is an improvement from the 2018 score of -1.42

The chart below shows the 2019 data, including a comparison with all Thurrock children.

2019 Key Stage 4 Exam Analysis: 12+ months	Thurrock CLA	Thurrock ALL	National CLA	National ALL	National Disadvantaged	National Non – Disadvantaged
Attainment 8 Score	23.20	42.90	17.90	44.80	36.80	50.50
Progress 8	-1.09	-0.10	-1.47	-0.08	-0.45	0.13

9.0 Children in Care with Disabilities

6.4% of our Children Looked After as at the end of March 2020 had a disability as defined by the Children Act 1989 (Section 17 Part 11), this number remains broadly static against previous years although there has been a slight reduction in recent months and this will be reflected in the next published data. Although this group make up a comparatively small proportion of the wider cohort of Children Looked After, they usually have complex needs and so it is essential that we can provide placements, which are able to meet their needs and provide them with the support they need to thrive. The specialist nature of the care needs of this group, the national shortage of provision and the need for an effective transition to Adult Services where appropriate make this a key group to consider with regards to planning of provision.



	March 2019	March 2020
With disability	19	19
No disability	271	279

10.0 Transition to Adult Services

Transition is complex as young people move from Children’s Services into adult provision and it is important that those involved in support work closely together to reduce concerns about the change from children’s to adult provision. Support across Adult Social Care Services is offered in a number of different ways guided by the Care Act 2014, ranging from support and advice, early intervention and prevention to delivery of support to meet complex needs. Most young people who utilise adult services will be those who have complex challenges such as learning disabilities, physical disabilities and mental health challenges. A Preparing for Adulthood Strategy has been written to support young people and their families and an implementation plan for this strategy will be developed in partnership with young people, their families, education, health, social care and the wider community. We want to ensure that young people are placed at the heart of our Better Care Together Agenda which focuses on community, place, strengths and integrated approaches. We have identified within our Market Development Strategy that there will be a steady increase in the numbers of people between 18 to 65 who will have learning disabilities and autism and as such our planning for future supports reflects this.

11.0 Care Leavers

The definition of Care Leavers includes young people who have left care post 18 but also children who have not left care but have become eligible for support post the age of 18.

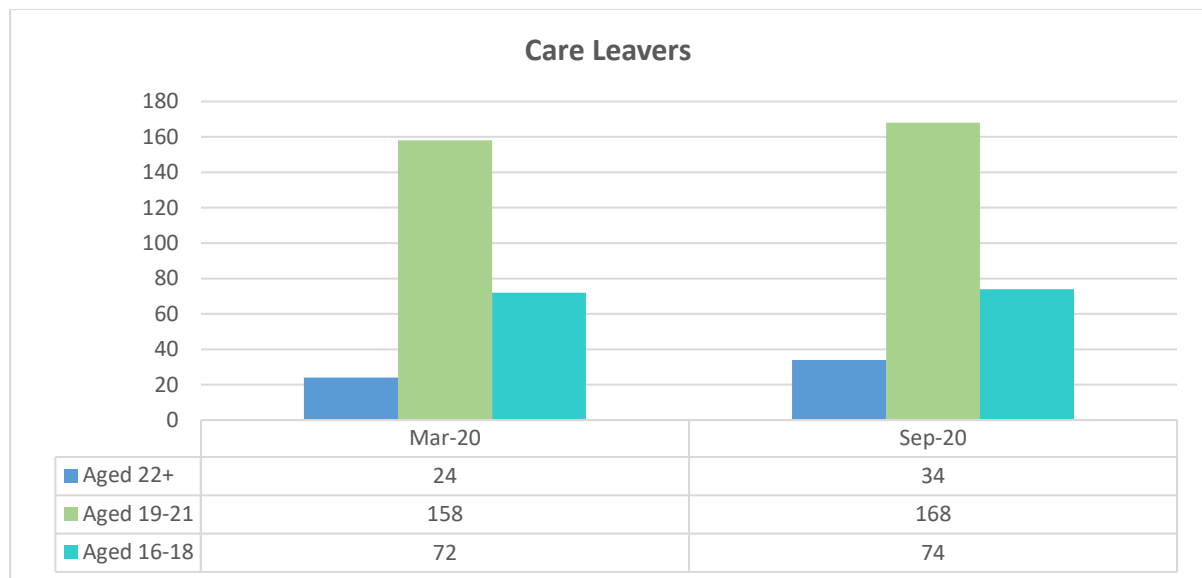
Eligible children within the meaning given by paragraph 19B of Schedule 2 to the Children Act 1989. Eligible children are young people aged 16 and 17 who have been

Looked After for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14 and are still being Looked After.

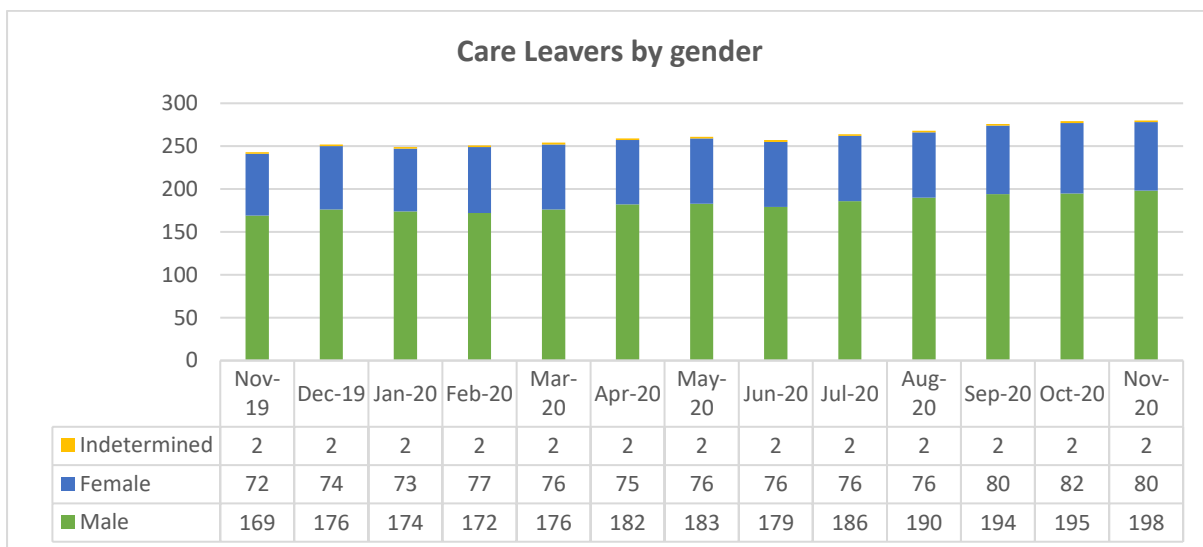
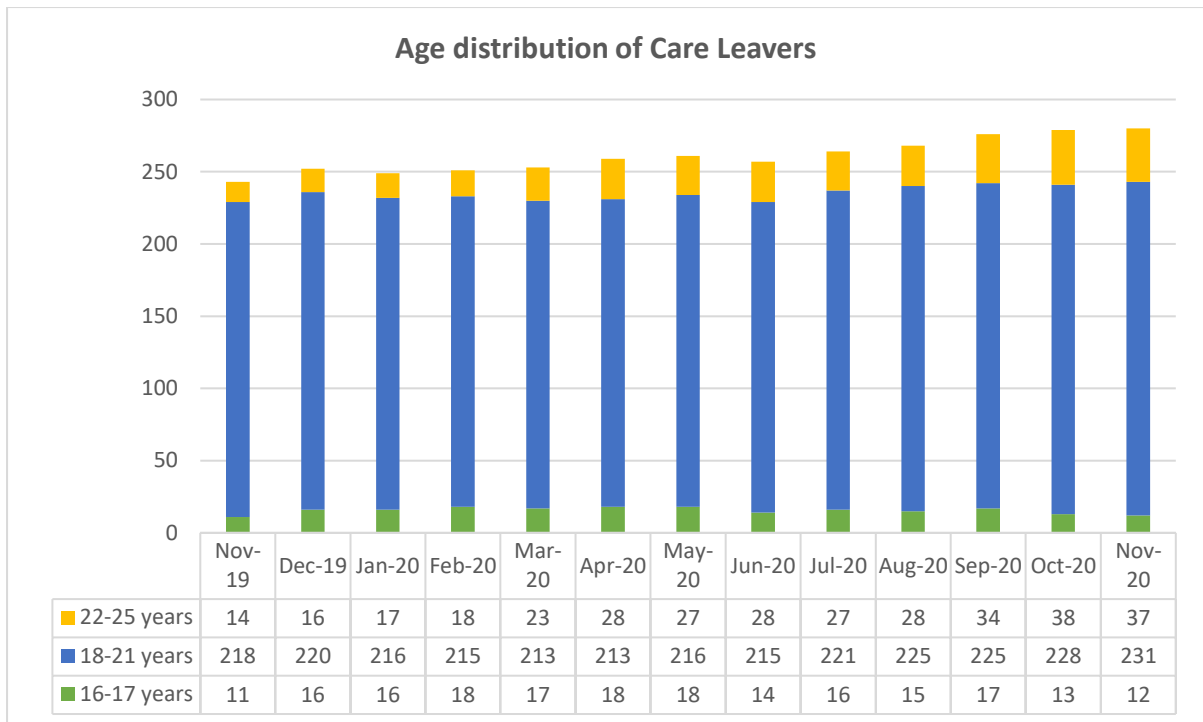
Relevant children within the meaning given by section 23A(2) of the Children Act are children who are not being Looked After by a Local Authority, but was, before last ceasing to be Looked After, an eligible child, and is aged 16 or 17.

Former relevant persons within the meaning given by Section 23C (1) of the Children Act 1989 are young people aged between 18-25 who have been either eligible or relevant children or both.

As at the end of March 2020, 276 Care Leavers, including those 16-18 being supported, were receiving an Aftercare Service, this is a slight increase from March 2019 but this is largely dependent on the age of children in care.



Getting the right support for Care Leavers is a priority for Thurrock as this supports transition into adulthood. A number of interlinked projects have already commenced that bring together partners such as Housing, Adult Services and Children’s Services to identify and meet support needs and find housing solutions locally. The data below aids the planning of this as we can see that the number of 22-25 year olds increased in recent years and this will impact particularly on providing support for the move to independent living for this cohort.

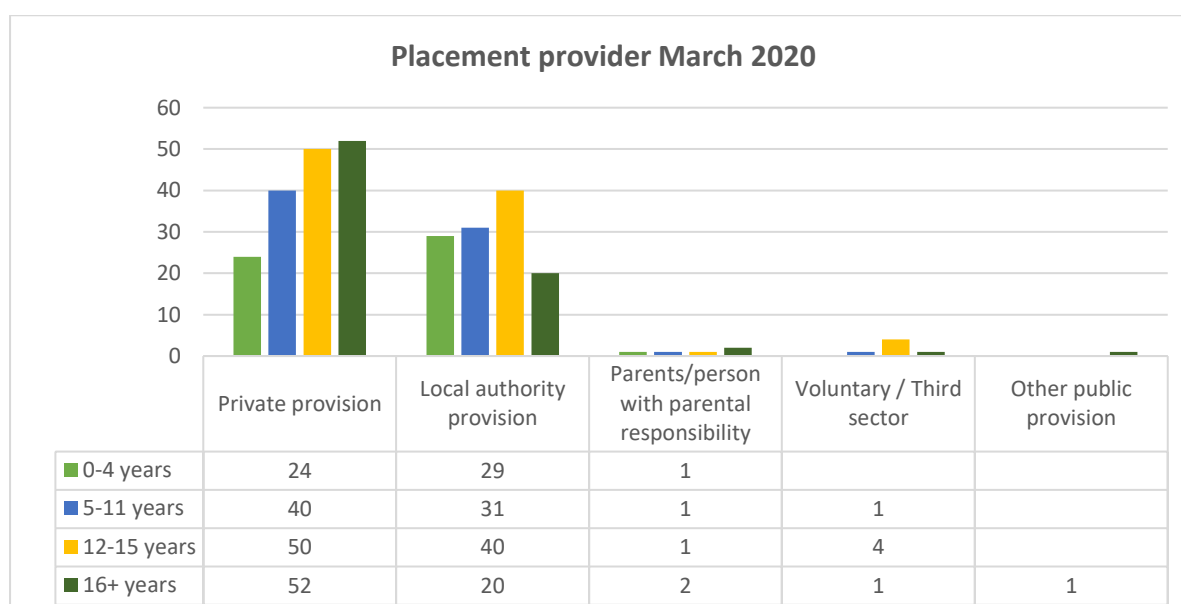
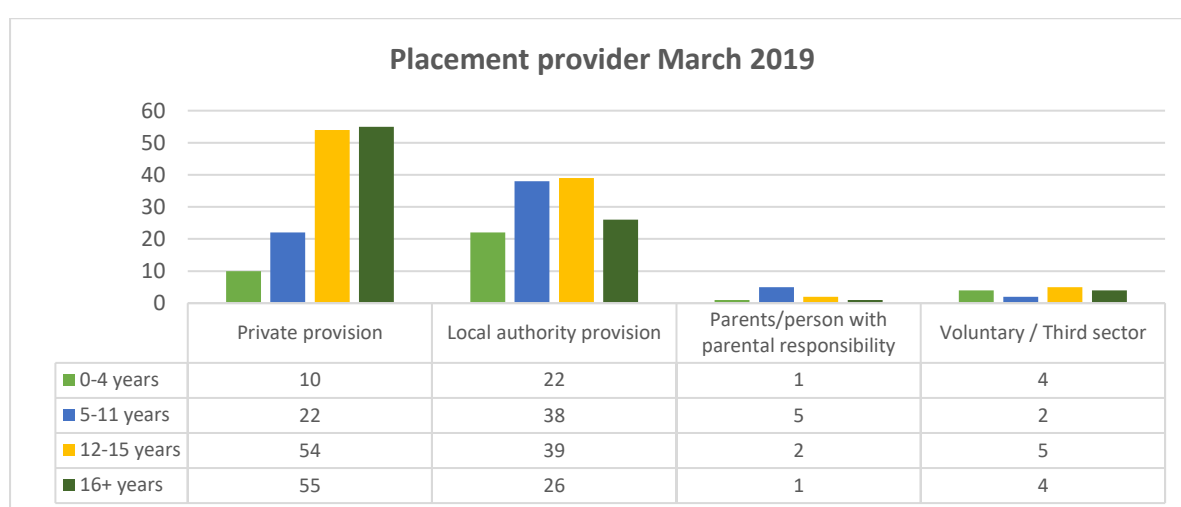


The high percentage of Children Looked After aged 10-15 years means that demand for Aftercare services is likely to remain high and due to the increasing local population this may increase over the coming years. A profile of when Care Leavers aged 16-17 years turn 18 is shown below for the period January 2021 to March 2022. This only provides an estimate due to other factors but is useful in managing support needs.

Jan -21	Feb -21	Mar -21	Apr -21	May -21	Jun -21	Jul -21	Aug -21	Sep -21	Oct -21	Nov -21	Dec -21	Jan -22	Feb -22	Mar -22
1	0	2	0	2	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	2

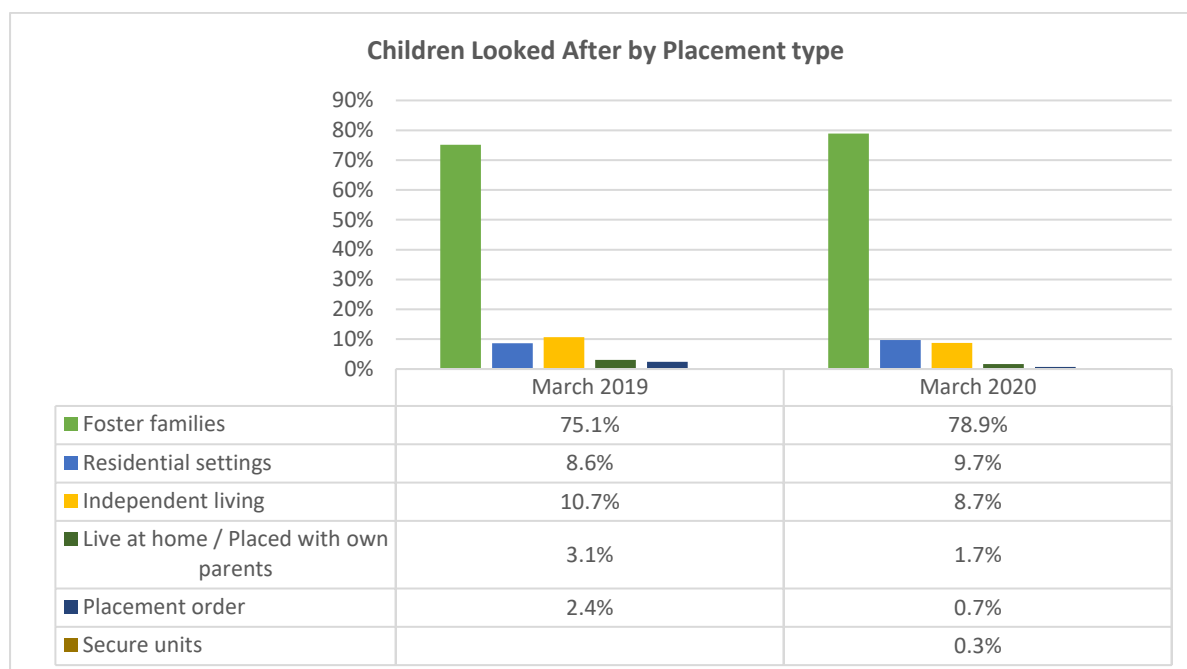
12.0 Placement Availability

As of March 2019 there were 218 of children in fostering households; 119 of which were IFA and 99 of which were in house. In March 2020 the number of children in fostering households was 235 and 117 were IFA and 118 were in house. In 2020-21 and 2021-2022 if the numbers of Children Looked After remain at 298 (as of March 2020), an increased fostering recruitment campaign would seek to increase fostering capacity by approximately 20 households and reduce the number of children placed over 20 miles from Thurrock and in other types of placement by at least 20 Children Looked After. The Thurrock placement need is focussed on the recruitment of fostering households that will be able to manage sibling groups locally as this is currently where we often have difficulty securing a local placement.



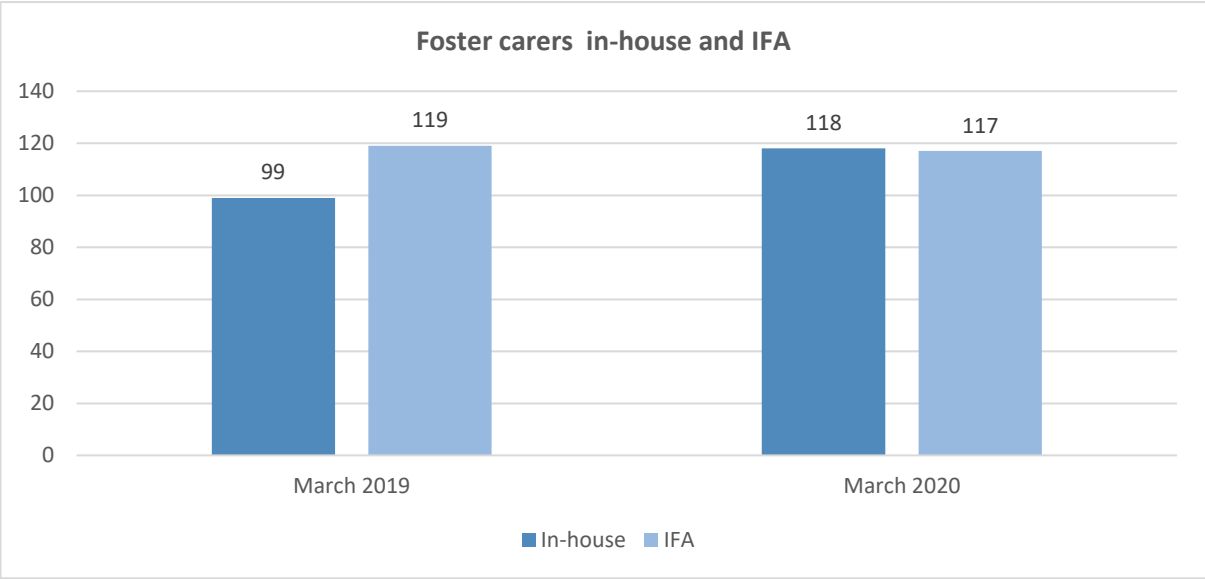
The majority of Children Looked After (78.9%) have a placement in a foster care setting, this is a slight increase from 2019 (75.1%). These placements are provided through In-house foster placements and placements through commissioned

Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA's) and breakdown of fostering placements is also provided.



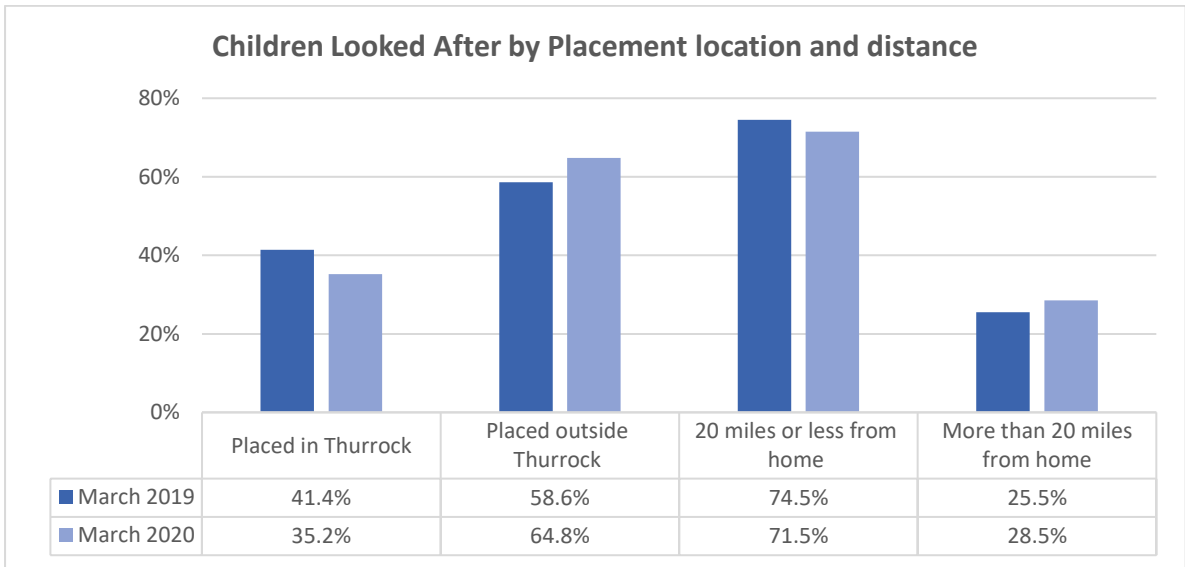
	March 2019	March 2020
Foster families	218	235
Residential settings	25	29
Independent living	31	26
Live at home / Placed with own parents	9	5
Placement order	7	2
Secure units		1

A further breakdown of the fostering placements is shown below. The increasing number of in-house foster carers reflects the recruitment activity the team have been undertaking. This supports the provision of local placements and value for money. IFA placements are recruited through the select list provision of which there is still a need however the offer of local provision that meets individual needs has priority over carers further away.



Thurrock operates a select list and annually invites providers to become a part of that framework. This has led to the development of a Thurrock specific contract that better meets the needs of children and young people in the borough. There are currently 13 Semi Independent providers, 7 Residential providers and 19 Independent Foster Agencies as a part of the framework. Placements are made under the framework where possible but where this is not possible, usually due to the need for specialist or emergency placements then they are spot purchased.

The nature of the residential care market has resulted in a lower number of this type of placement on the select list. This is replicated in Local Authorities across the Country; the majority of residential placements are spot purchased for individual children however the same terms and conditions apply regardless of the contract type. It remains a priority to recruit high quality placement types, suitable to individual needs as close to the local authority as is practicable.



	March 2019	March 2020
Placed in Thurrock	120	105
Placed outside Thurrock	170	193
20 miles or less from home	216	213
More than 20 miles from home	74	85

There is a recognition that there is a slight decrease in the numbers of Children Looked After who are placed both within the Borough and within 20 miles of their home. As at end March 2020, 71.5% of children and young people are placed within a 20 mile radius of their home compared to 74.5% in 2019 and 79.3% in 2018. The geographical 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.

Placements over 30 miles tend to be of a specialist nature where there are few providers available to meet specific needs. The children who are placed in residential care have specialist needs and are unable to settle within a foster family environment. They generally have extensive trauma histories and foster families can be challenged with the presenting needs of these children. Residential care offers safe care to some older adolescence who can be subject to grooming from gangs and experience exploitation.

The renewed Thurrock fostering campaign with the additional benefits for Thurrock foster carers to receive council tax rebate will support the focus on local recruitment of carers so children can remain within their communities. This assists with the continuity of school and support ensuring links to families and environment. We are hoping that an inclusive and diverse approach to the fostering recruitment will also assist in placing children within culturally matched placements and offer familiarity with family customs and placement within familiar communities.

We now have one standard Thurrock Select List. Individual/ spot purchases will only be utilised if a placement cannot be found from the Select List, and in these cases will still be subject to a standardised set of contract terms and conditions.

The exception to this is the limited number of Special Educational Needs placements made with Residential Non-maintained Special Schools and Colleges where the National Contract is used. Thurrock is also a part of the Children's Cross Regional Arrangements Group, this brings a collective approach to monitoring and fee negotiation to those providers who are members.

13.0 Accommodation for Care Leavers and Vulnerable Young People

The majority of Children Looked After are supported by the Aftercare Team on turning 18. At the end of September 2020, 276 Care Leavers were receiving an Aftercare service. Working closely with the Aftercare team, Headstart Housing provides transitional accommodation whilst young people develop the independence skills required to manage social housing. Now managing a portfolio of 114 beds, including

42 supported by key workers, the service provides a tailored approach to support young people to develop. The portfolio includes:

Homelessness: A joint project between Children's services and Housing is in place to offer accommodation for young people who meet the relevant criteria. For young people, this consists of:	
Hostel 1	5 beds primarily for young people aged 16/17 years who have declared themselves homeless and are assessed by Housing as being so. Mediation support is also offered to try to support the young person to return home. If rooms are empty they can be used as emergency supported accommodation while a suitable placement is found.
Hostel 2	9 beds available to Headstart Housing/ Aftercare for former Children Looked After aged 17-25 years. Support is provided to a maximum of 25 hours per week and is allocated based on individual needs.
Young Parents Support Project: This project provides accommodation and parental support	
Accommodation and Support across 2 hostels	For 20 young women plus support for a further 5 women aged 16-25 who are pregnant or who have children under 5. The project is open to Thurrock residents and any current or former Thurrock Council Child Looked After.
Move on flats	2 flats housing 4 young families
Other Accommodation for Care Leavers Where Appropriate	
Local accommodation	A mix of Council housing stock and the use of private landlords

There remains a shortage of:

- Post 18 low need 24/7 Supported Accommodation
- Post 18 medium / high need CQC Registered accommodation
- Floating support for Care Leavers aged 18-25 years old.

Joint working has already commenced across Children's, Adults, Housing and Public Health to integrate commissioning and identify opportunities to better use existing funding.

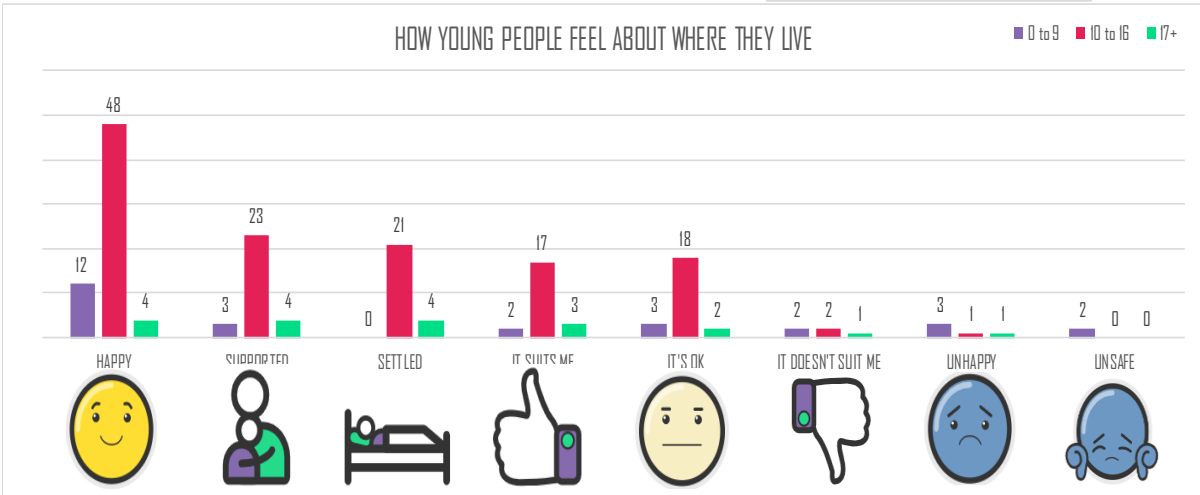
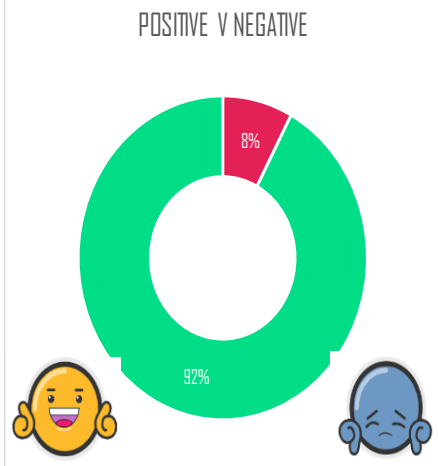
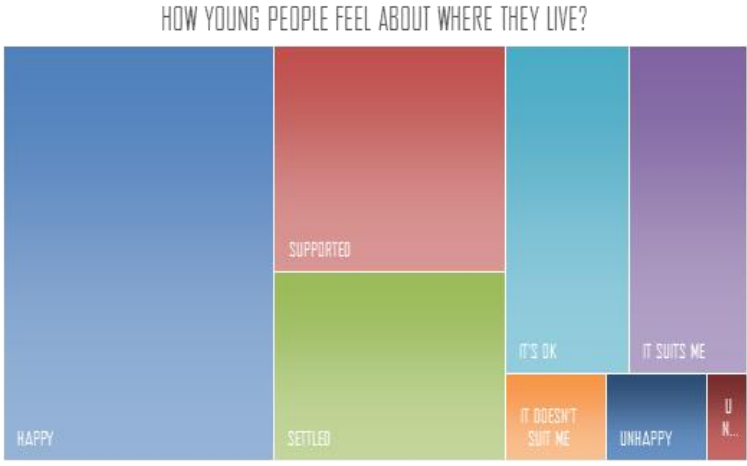
14.0 How Children Looked After and Care Leavers Feel About Where They Live

The following diagrams summarise how children and young people who are Looked After feel about where they live and their local area, they were gathered by the Participation and Engagement Team. It is broken down to show the different age groups and the individual aspects of their responses. We can see that 92% feel positive about where they live and 86% feel positive about their local area. In addition the majority of children in each age group say they feel safe where they live.

HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT WHERE YOU LIVE?

OVERALL

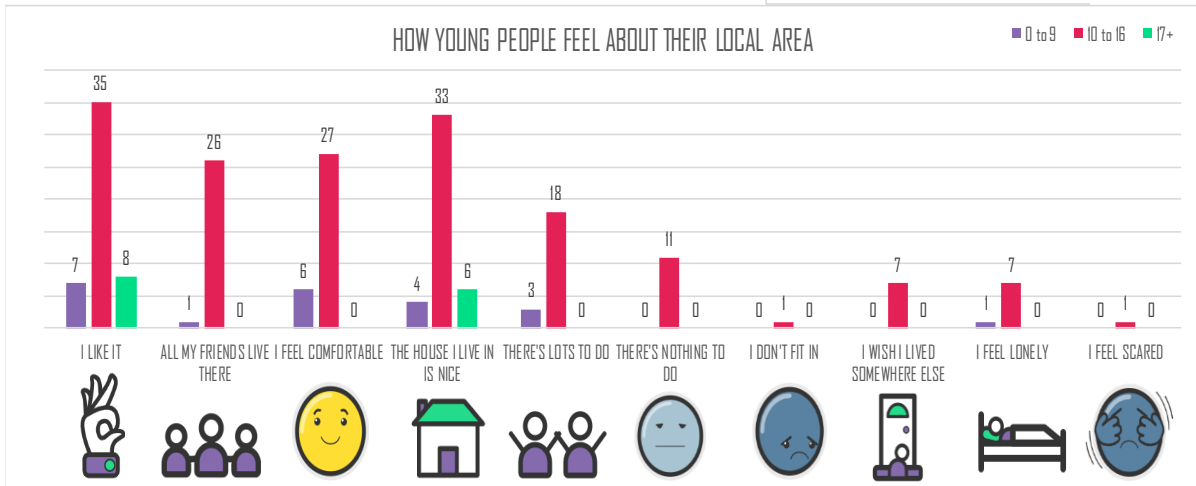
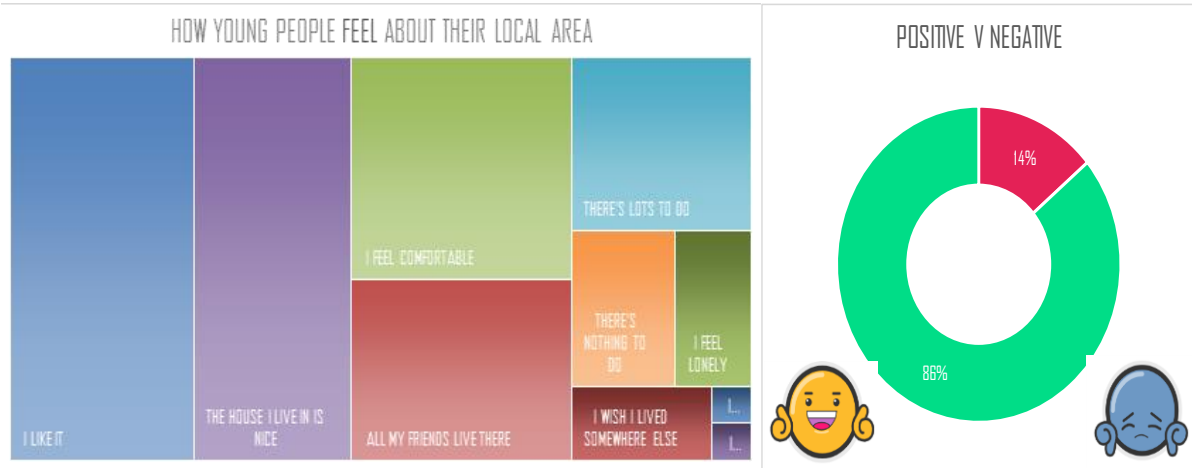
TOTAL NUMBER OF RESPONSES 108



HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT YOUR LOCAL AREA?

OVERALL

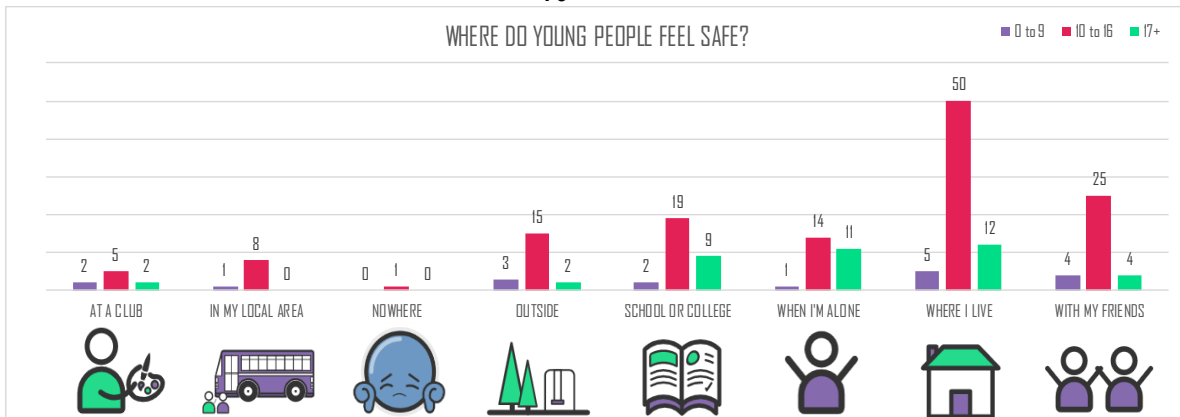
TOTAL NUMBER OF RESPONSES 77



WHERE DO YOU FEEL SAFE?

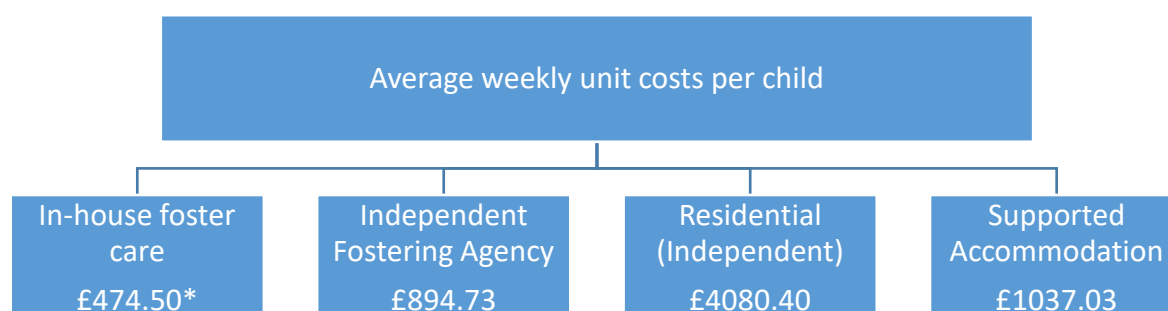
OVERALL

TOTAL NUMBER OF RESPONSES 76



15.0 Placement Costs

Provided below is the average weekly unit cost per child in each different placement type. These costs will vary based on the needs of the child and the placement type required with significant variations between the minimum and maximum cost, especially for placements out of area. This breakdown is designed to provide an overview.



In house foster placements provide the most cost efficient placement type* (support costs are met in house) and are generally provided locally, these are followed by Independent Foster Agency placements. We always seek to place children in foster care where possible with priority given, subject to the child's need, to placements within a 20 mile radius, the next level of priority is to those providers who are a part of the Select List/ framework. To support to use of foster care we have the local in house recruitment drive along with the annual select list to support an increase in Independent Foster Agencies. Residential care is only used for specialist or emergency use. The cost of all placements are based against a framework of costs dependent on the level of need. Whilst it is recognised that costs will be dependent on the need and availability a pricing framework is used regardless of if the placement is from a framework or spot purchased. It remains a priority to reduce placement costs whilst maintaining the right level of care for children and young people.

There is limited comparator data available for the last 12 months however a report 'Price Trends and Costs of Children's Homes – February 2020' indicates that the average weekly cost for an education inclusive residential placement is £3,970 which is broadly similar to the rate we currently pay. It remains a priority for us to achieve value for money and the Commissioning team work on placement costs will be ongoing.

16.0 Gap analysis

The development of the Brighter Futures commissioned parenting offer should focus on the reduction of 10-15 year olds entering the care system by ensuring there is a clear pathway from the Children's Centre support offered into other forms of support.

Edge of care support for 10-15 year olds particularly must remain a focus as this is the consistently the largest cohort of Children Looked After.

The high levels of Care Leavers combined with the cohort of 10-15 year olds who will become Care Leavers in the coming years means that there is a risk of a shortage of post 18 accommodation in the local area, this should be a focus for development through the existing programmes.

Post 18 support has been identified as a priority through a number of areas of work along with the joint programme of commissioning to meet the increasing levels and complexity of needs. These programmes should continue to align to reduce duplication and maximise the use of resources.

Permanence remains a priority for Thurrock Children Looked After, adoption numbers are increasing however this must remain a focus to meet the demand for adoption permanency.

Whilst the Children Looked After number is lower than our statistical neighbours, the local projected population growth particularly of children means that even if our rate per 10k remains the same we are likely to see an increase in the number of Children Looked After. The development of in-house foster carers is important as these carers often allow for local placements. The recruitment activity should be matched to any % population growth and also provide opportunities for local placements for sibling groups.

We need a range of providers to meet different placement needs, currently there is a shortage of residential and IFA's providers locally who are part of the select list. Market development activity should aim to increase this when the Framework opens annually.

The majority of residential placements are more than 20 miles from Thurrock, we must work with providers based closer to Thurrock to address this.

The number of Children Looked After who experience 3 or more moves in a year should continue to be a focus, the placement development work will support this.

The costs per placement vary significantly, there is a need for improved step down processes and fee negotiation to achieve value for money to allow us to invest more of our budget in supporting our children who are looked after.

17.0 Key Priorities

Across all of the services we deliver, we seek to make sure that all decisions are centred on the views and needs of the child. We also aim to make sure that our time is focussed on achieving the right outcomes for our children who are looked after to achieve these aims.

Placement type and the age of our children in care population have recently been relatively constant. The numbers of children in care have decreased in line with our

statistical neighbours but are predicted to increase as the local population does. If we are to achieve the best outcomes for all these children we need to ensure that all our placement services are fit for purpose and continue to grow and develop.

There are six main strands to our strategy, these are a continuation of the work developed in recent years:

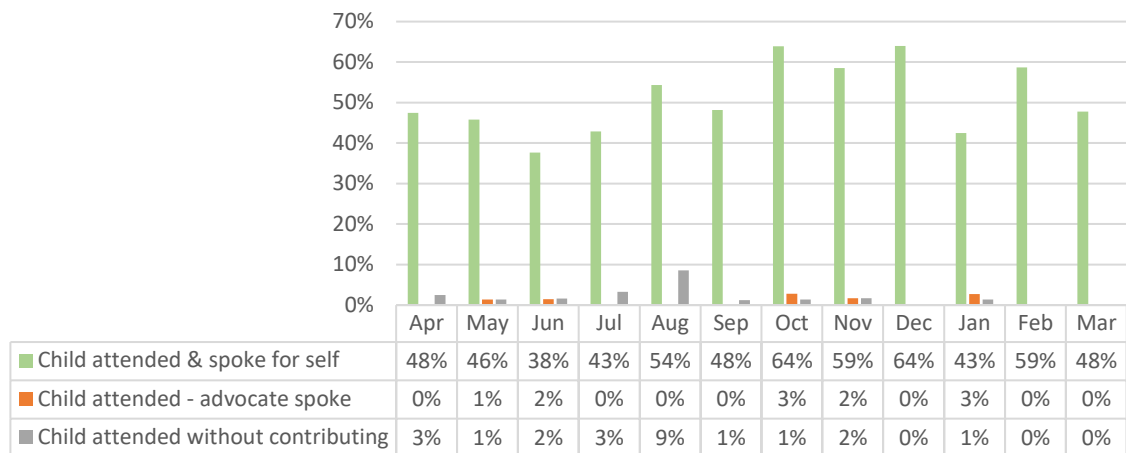


Priority 1: The voice of children and young people is at the heart of planning.

We feel it is of importance to listen to our children and young people and this measured in a number of ways including:

- Children and young people are able to comment on their placement through the engagement of the Participation and Engagement Team
- Children and young people report that they feel happy where they live

Percentage of children participating in CLA reviews between April 2019 and March 2020



The Mind of My Own App is one of the ways children and young people can feedback how they feel about their placement, the following comments were taken from the feedback when asked how they felt/ what they liked:

- Enthusiastic
- Get on well
- Safe, happy, part of the family
- School
- Computer access, hobbies, activities
- Personal space
- Excited
- Enjoy time together, they are good at listening
- I talk to them if I am worried, they care about me
- Calm
- The other kids, food, money, friends, school, Wi-Fi
- Safe
- Safe and settled
- Its ok, part of the family

When asked about the things we could do better, children and young people feedback the following comments below:



Young Voices



Next steps

- To create a culture of listening to children and young people and hearing back from them about the services they receive and improving our relationships with them.
- The ideas from children, young people and their families contributing to the shaping of service development and service improvements
- Ensuring the voice of the child is at the heart of assessment, planning and intervention
- Ensuring that children who are looked after and children who are subject to a Child Protection plan know they can ask for an advocate and are supported to attend/contribute to conferences and reviews
- Ensure that all internal processes are focused on the child and maximise the impact of money spent to ensure that the best outcomes are achieved.
- Ensure that all processes are efficient and minimise any potential wasting of resources.

Priority 2 – Achieving Placement Stability and Permanence

As a part of our national reporting, this indicator measures the percentage of Children Looked After aged under 16 at who have been looked after continuously for at least 2.5 years who were living in the same placement for at least 2 years, or are placed for adoption and their adoptive placement together with their previous placement together last for at least 2 years.

More children achieved permanency through adoption in 2019-20 in Thurrock and an increased number are identified for 2019-20 with adoption as a potential permanence plan. A total of 15 children were adopted in 2019-20 compared to 13 in 2018/19.

Where possible, we want all our children to be in placements which provide them with long term placement stability, and where appropriate to leave care.

We describe this as achieving permanence for that child. Although it is sometimes necessary to move a child to provide them with a better placement our aim is to minimise the number of times each child changes placement as this can be very disruptive. To achieve permanence it is essential that all our teams work effectively together to support each placement. Permanence can be achieved in a number of ways, including adoption, special guardianship order, child arrangement order or matched for long term fostering. Each of these options gives the chance for the child to achieve stability and achieve their potential.

Ensure there is sufficient support available for children to achieve their long term care plans to prevent Children Looked After remaining in placements which may not best meet their needs.

Next steps

- Continually review all placements to understand where there is opportunity to support permanence or where a child might be better served by moving to a different placement.
- Improve the placement review process to ensure all placements are regularly brought before the placement panel for review and all options for that child are considered at this time so each child is able to move towards permanence where appropriate.
- Ensure all children who are at the edge of care and those becoming looked after are part of a Family Group Conference/Meeting.
- Put in place necessary support for our carers and children in care to enable long term placements. This covers placement support such as therapeutic intervention to ensure the carer's home can meet the needs of the children placed with them.
- Raise awareness of and assist carers to apply for Special Guardianship Orders wherever suitable to ensure that this option is available to achieve permanence for children who are Looked After.
- Improve our offer of life story work for children.
- Review all approved connected carers to see whether an SGO would be more

appropriate to meet the child's long term needs.

To recruit sufficient adopters, maintain existing placements as the number of available adopters continues to fall across the UK and further develop our adoption support services to achieve and secure improvements in service delivery.

Next Steps

- Implementation of the Adoption Recruitment Strategy.
- Raise awareness of support for those who have adopted through more effective use of social media.
- Increase targeted support groups for families to allow early intervention where a placement might be at risk of breaking down.
- Maintain quality and quantity of matches through a review of processes to ensure they are robust and achieve what is right for the child
- Increase our early intervention and therapeutic offer to provide the additional support for adopters funded through the Adoption Support Fund (government funding to provide therapeutic support to adoptive families)

Priority 3 – Recruitment and Support of Foster Carers

There are three main types of foster care available to our children who are looked after. Where possible we keep children with people they already have some form of relationship with, this type of placement is Family and Friends Foster Care. When a child is first referred to us we will speak to any proposed carers to assess whether they will be able to provide the support that child needs. If we cannot find a suitable related carer, we will try to place them with one of our Thurrock 'in-house' carers. Only where we cannot identify an in-house placement to meet their needs will we then look to place them with an Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) as these placements are more likely to be outside of Thurrock.

It is a priority for us to significantly increase the number of children placed with Thurrock Council foster carers as placements are more likely to be local and carers will have access to local clinical support and specialist training along with local supervising social workers, however we value the role that independent fostering placements have in meeting the diverse needs of our Children Looked After. We have set a target to increase in house placements by 20 year on year and increase the proportion of children placed locally with in-house carers. The importance of placing children and young people with foster carers where appropriate means that we will also continue to recruit from the independent sector as a part of the commissioned framework.

In 2019/20 the service was successful in recruiting 19 fostering households. At the beginning of COVID-19, recruitment had good momentum. The fostering recruitment strategy highlights the key areas which result in the increased recruitment of fostering households. Enquiries are steady but progression to application is slower as applicants deal with the uncertainty of COVID-19. This is a similar experience to other authorities and is confirmed in the feedback from our

Eastern Region colleagues. The decision to provide a Council Tax rebate for Thurrock foster carers provides financial support as well as emphasising the value Thurrock places on the fostering community and the care they provide to Thurrock Children. The fostering recruitment campaign is being updated to create new marketing opportunities, the idea is to focus on our local communities, enhance the profile of Thurrock and our excellent offer to increase successfully approved fostering households.

Next Steps

- To ensure that there are more foster carers recruited than resign or are de-registered so that the total number of foster care households increases year on year.
- Increasing local engagement and raising awareness of fostering with Thurrock through an updated fostering recruitment campaign and brand.
- To increase the number of independent foster carers on the select list to further increase the availability of foster care placements

Priority 4: Commissioning and Partnership Working

Thurrock continues to place and match all those children and young people requiring a placement. Children would benefit from increased choice in placements that support their education and proximity to Thurrock. In order to support placement choice, a newly refreshed fostering campaign is being launched with the additional offer of Council Tax rebate.

The enhanced placements offer is supplemented through the annual placement commissioning review which has enabled Thurrock to develop a framework of providers who have clear quality frameworks bringing a consistent approach to the commissioned provision which includes IFAs and residential care. Whilst this has been successful, there is still a need to spot purchase foster and residential provision.

Close working such as the partnership between Children's and Housing to support Care Leavers accommodation and support is providing a range of opportunities to jointly commission provision. In addition, we work closely with the Thurrock Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) particularly for cases where there are significant care needs. Residential places are currently purchased according to need and where appropriate, agreed through a joint decision making process. It is acknowledged that where there are complex needs the market drives the cost and availability of provision, this is an issue facing local authorities across England and continues to be a priority for us to address. Placements for children with significant health needs are jointly funded with the Continuing Care team in the Clinical Commissioning Group.

The Mind of My Own app is being used to consult with young people around their health and the health services they receive in order to feed back to the Children Looked After Health Steering group.

Commissioning is an ongoing part of the development of a range of service however there are some key areas that need a specific focus, either because they are not already commissioned or where the challenges of these need a partnership approach. These are outlined below:

Next steps

- Continue to ensure children and young people contribute to the planning and quality assurance of the services they access
- To continue to improve our market development strategies as a part of the relationship with providers and the procurement of placements
- The joint commissioning of an integrated support offer for Care Leavers and Children Looked After
- Increase the number of in-house carers to meet our ambition to place more children with Thurrock Council carers
- A higher proportion are in placements located within 20 miles of Thurrock through the development of the work with placement providers, including IFA's, residential providers, providers of supported accommodation
- Increased value for money in placements by reviewing and improving spend outcomes
- Increase placement stability through the continued development of the select list and associated quality assurance frameworks and risk assessments locally and regionally
- Pilot new models of step down approaches for residential and foster care
- To further develop placements for a higher level of complexity of need through all placement types
- To commission specialist SEND/ Residential provision in partnership with the local Clinical Commissioning Group
- To develop a joint quality assurance process across agencies to support high quality provision

Priority 5: Developing the offer for care leavers

To support young people as they move into our leaving and aftercare team we have the following services in place:

Inspire – Education Employment and Training: We have dedicated personal advisors who support young people into education employment and training, this includes our outstanding Prince's Trust team programme which supports young people who lack confidence to progress into other learning pathways.

Inspire – Headstart Housing: Recognising the need to ensure that young people entering into the Aftercare Service require suitable accommodation we have developed our own housing support team to provide a range of housing opportunities. Young people coming into the leaving care service have priority around social housing however, for some young people they are not ready to take on a tenancy and as such we provide a range of alternative accommodation until they are able to access their own social housing. A newly developed Housing Protocol has been developed to ensure there is suitable accommodation for all Care Leavers.

Next steps

- Develop the work through joint work between Headstart Housing and Housing to improve our accommodation offer to Care Leavers and ensure that there is sufficiency of accommodation for Thurrock Care Leavers with different levels of support needs.
- As accommodation is provided through a range of different types of providers we are working to extend the processes we have implemented for semi-independent accommodation for 16-18 year olds to standardise what we offer for care leavers
- Working with the Aftercare Team and Inspire to provide a range of support for those aged 18 and over to ensure they are able to continue to meet their potential once they cease to be looked after
- To develop a jointly commissioned support offer for those aged 18+ who need additional support to be able develop independence as an adult
- Put in place a supported lodgings offer through recruitment of foster carers who can provide a bed to those who are aged 18 and over within a family environment.
- Support the early identification of young people leaving care who are planning to move to live with birth relatives.
- Integration of the Corporate Parenting Duty in the Housing Offer to ensure young people in Aftercare are no longer intentionally homeless.
- Transition planning: Work closely with Adult Services to ensure they are aware of those young people who have housing and care issues
- Develop Housing Plans for all young people in Aftercare
- Develop UASC and specific 18+ support

Priority 6: To develop the early support offer available to our most vulnerable children

Earlier support for families has been shown to prevent the escalation of issues and where possible keep children at home. It also aids families by providing advice and helps to avoid confusion and duplication for families who need information advice and help. It also provides families with the tools to help them solve their own problems and also be more resilient in the future while making sure they know where they can go for help when they need it.

This support is delivered across a range of services however the Brighter Futures and Thurrock Families Together Teams work to provide a support offer to families to prevent children and young people becoming looked after. Families Together also provide placement stability support to enable foster carers to provide consistent and enhance care. There are a range of commissioned services that also provide support including: Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health Service with consultant psychologist offering advice on the management of trauma issues, support with parenting for carers (SGO, connected carers and foster carers). Foster carers are encouraged to access the Coram parenting support offering access to a range of accredited parenting programmes. Also, support to Aftercare and new parents to enhance their skills and prevent social care intervention.

Next steps

To continue to develop early support to address the demand driven nature of preventative work which results in us not being able to provide support early enough to some of our most vulnerable children by:

- Continued implementation of the Brighter Futures Strategy to identify opportunities for integration with partners so that we can target services more effectively to the most vulnerable.
- Providing the right support at the right time to children and their families with a focus on the commissioned offer.
- Providing Edge of Care and Reunification support for children and young people.

18.0 Measuring Success

There is not a 'one size fits all' approach to supporting families in the community or for improving outcomes for Children and Young People who are looked after. Different cohorts of children require different approaches. This strategy has identified some of the key challenges we face in meeting our sufficiency duty and actions proposed to make sure we are best placed to meet these challenges and deliver financially sustainable services.

The impact of the work to improve sufficiency will be mainly measured through the outcomes for the children and young people in placements, through feedback from them as a part of their individual reviews and through different methods of participation and engagement.

We will base our success on the extent to which:

The rate of CLA per 10K population reduces year on year due to earlier intervention.
The number of children and young people placed within a 20 mile radius of Thurrock increases.
There is an increase in adoption permanence year on year.
There is a reduction in the number of children experiencing 3 or more moves per year.
The number of Thurrock in-house Fostering Placements increases by at least 20 carers.
There is an increase in all types of provider included on the Thurrock Select List and a cost analysis is completed as a part of this exercise.
A jointly commissioned support offer for care leavers is in place.

There is an increase in the availability of accommodation for Care Leavers within a 20 mile radius of Thurrock.

There is a jointly commissioned SEND/ Residential offer in place.

Appendix 1

This is the current version of the Pledge however this is due to be updated and the most recent version can be found on the Council website.

Our Pledge to Children Looked After

Our pledge

Our pledge makes 5 promises to children and young people in our care. These cover:

- health
- education
- reaching potential
- positive relationships
- leaving care

The pledge was written by young people and has been adopted throughout the council.

It applies to all children and young people, from birth to their 18th birthday, who are in our care. Some apply to those leaving care from the age of 18 up to 21 years, or 25 years in certain cases.

The pledge applies regardless of sex, race, sexual orientation, disability, age, ability or background. It applies wherever young people are placed, whether this is inside or outside Thurrock.

Our 5 promises

We promise to work to help you to develop healthily by:

- helping you to keep fit and healthy and giving you the resources and information on how best to equip yourself to continue to develop
- making sure you are given support to have regular health and dental checks
- having social workers support you in all aspects of your development and giving you every opportunity to flourish

We promise to do everything we can to keep you safe and feel important to us while in care by:

- making staff available to speak to you when you need to contact them to discuss your problems, anxieties and achievements
- involving you in decisions and plans that are made that will affect your current and future life
- not changing your social worker unless absolutely necessary
- giving you advice and support to stay safe both within your home and community

- calling you back within 24 hours

We promise to help you reach your dreams while in care by:

- celebrating your achievements and recognising your goals and helping to push you further while in care
- supporting you to attend and achieve in education
- providing you with good educational opportunities that best meet your abilities
- providing you with a translating dictionary in your language when you first come into care if your first language is not English
- giving you the same opportunities available to young people who are not Looked After

We promise to support your positive relationships and social activities by:

- giving priority when you ask to stay with friends and relatives away from your normal placement
- aiding you in having easy access to libraries, youth clubs and positive activities
- giving you access to an independent visitor/ mentors
- supporting you in being heard throughout the local authority across all departments

We promise to prepare you for adult life and leaving care by:

- supporting you financially up until the time you start work or are entitled to claim benefits
- providing you with a grant to help you settle into your own accommodation when you leave care
- supporting you in higher education at university
- helping you with support to seek employment and training
- helping you with transport for attending education and Children Looked After appointments
- supporting you to apply for all documentation and providing you with necessary

Appendix 2

This is the current version of the Charter however this is due to be updated and the most recent version can be found on the Council website.

Charter for care leavers

We have a responsibility to children and young people in our care, and to our Care Leavers.

Our charter for Care Leavers was written jointly with a group of young people. It is a set of principles and promises to care leavers.

We will respect and honour your identity

We will:

- support you to develop your own identity, respect your background and accept your culture and beliefs
- treat you as an individual, taking into consideration your own values and personal needs

We will believe in you

We will:

- support you to pursue your goals in whatever ways we can
- believe in you, celebrate you and help you overcome limiting barriers

We will listen to you

We will:

- respect and strive to understand your point of view
- be honest with you and place your needs, thoughts and feelings at the heart of all decisions about you

We will support you

We will:

- do our best to support you in achieving your goals, dreams and aspirations
- provide you with the support that you require with education, training and employment to succeed in life

We will help you find a home

We will:

- keep you safe and well by working alongside you to help you find the most appropriate place to live and prepare you for independent living
- do everything we can to prepare you for a smooth transition to adulthood and help you to be where you want to be

We will inform you

We will:

- point you in the right direction and journey alongside you at your own pace
- help you to be the driver of your life and not the passenger

5 January 2021		ITEM: 7
Corporate Parenting Committee		
Independent Reviewing Officer Annual Report		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: N/A	
Report of: Ruth Murdock, Strategic Lead of Quality Assurance and Reviewing		
Accountable Assistant Director: Joe Tynan, Assistant Director of Children's Social Care and Early Help.		
Accountable Director: Sheila Murphy, Corporate Director of Children's Services		
This report is public		

Executive Summary

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

This document should be read in conjunction with the "*Thurrock Children's Services, Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Annual Report*" for 2019 – 2020 (see Appendix 1)

1. Recommendation(s)

1.1 For the Corporate Parenting Committee to review and comment on the IRO Annual report 2019 - 2020 and the recommendations in the report.

2. Introduction and Background

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

The IRO has a number of specific responsibilities, including:

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

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

2.2 During the reporting period, the Thurrock IRO Service has remained stable; there have been 2 changes of personnel but the handovers were conducted such that there was no gaps in service for children and young people. The Service comprise of five permanent Independent Reviewing Officers.

The average caseload for IROs is 60 – with a variance between 57 and 62.

During the performance year April 2019 – March 2020, the IRO Service conducted a total of 940 reviews. This is an increase of 185 reviews (24.5%) when compared to the number of reviews conducted the previous year. The performance, in respect of reviews being held within timescale, improved during the year, with the final average being 97.5% of reviews held within timescales; an increase of 4.5% when compared to last year.

This year, children and young people participated in person, or through an advocate, or by another means in 94.6% of their reviews (excludes children under 4 years of age). This was an improvement on last year's performance of 84.0%.

At the end of 2018/19, there was a marked improvement in reports completed by IROs within timescale. This has continued throughout 2019/20 with the timeliness of the reports completed by IROs ranging from 94.4% to 100.0%. For the period April 2019 to March 2020, 97.6% of reports were completed within timescale.

2.3 Profile of Children and Young People in Care in Thurrock

Section 9 of the main report provides a detailed analysis of the characteristics of children moving through the Care System in Thurrock.

Key points from this are:

- There has been a reduction on the number of Children Looked After since 2016; with a rate of 81 per 10,000 (in 2016) to 66.7 per 10,000 (in 2020).
- There has been a reduction in the number of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children.
- There are more boys Looked After in Thurrock than girls, although the

proportion of males has decreased by 21% this year.

- The ethnic distribution of Children Looked After has changed; the proportion of Black British children who are Looked After is now lower than Black British children in the total school population, although there is an over-representation of children from mixed / dual backgrounds.
- There continues to be a significant reduction in the use of Voluntary Accommodation (Section 20 CA1989), which is positive.
- 70% of Children Looked After live within 20 miles of their home address, although the complex needs of some children results in it not being possible to find local placements. The majority of children not placed in Thurrock are placed in neighbouring boroughs of Essex, Greater London or Kent.
- There has been an increase in the number of children achieving permanency through adoption.

2.4 Feedback from Children and Young People about the IRO service

At a recent activity day, the views of children and young people were sought by the IRO Service. The main feedback from children and young people about the IRO Service and the Review Process was as follows:

- 100% of children or young people wanted their reports shared with them in advance of their meeting.
- Only 16% of children felt the School Nurse should be at their review and only 50% wanted their Teacher to attend.
- 91% of children stated that they would like to participate in their review and 41% stated they would like to chair their own reviews.
- 75% of young people stated they would like their IRO to make contact with them between their reviews.
- Young people were not too worried about the length of time that their review meeting takes, however 80% of them stated that they would not like their reviews to take place at their school.

This feedback has been instrumental in helping the IRO Service to shape how reviews are conducted going forward, so that information is gathered outside of the meeting and fewer professionals need to attend; issues which are important to the young person are discussed; to work towards young people chairing their own reviews, deciding where the meeting should be held and participate in setting the agenda; and IROs will be undertaking mid-way visits to the children and young people.

3 Issues Options and Analysis of Options

None

4 Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1 To inform members of the work of the Independent Reviewing Officer Service during 2019-2020. The report also updates members with the recommended work plan for the IRO service during 2020 – 2021.

5 Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

Not Applicable

6 Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community

Not Applicable

7 Implications

7.1 Financial

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

There are no financial implications associated with this report.

7.2 Legal

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

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

7.3 Diversity and Equality

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

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

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

Not Applicable

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

Not Applicable

9. Appendices to the report

- Appendix 1 - IRO Annual Report 1 April 2019 – 31 March 2020

Report Author:

Ruth Murdock
Strategic Lead Quality Assurance and Reviewing

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

ANNUAL REPORT

1st April 2019 – 31st March 2020

Contents

1. Introduction and Purpose of the Annual Report	3
2. Reporting period	3
3. The Legal, Statutory and National context of the IRO role	3
4. Local context – Thurrock Council as a Corporate Parent.....	4
5. Thurrock Council IRO Service	4
6. IRO Caseload and Service Performance	5
6.1 IRO caseloads.....	5
7. Number of Child and Young Person in Care Reviews	6
7.1 Children and Young People’s Participation in Reviews	7
7.2 Completion of Review Reports	9
8. The Use of Feedback and Consultation forms.....	10
9. Profile of Children and Young People in Care in Thurrock.....	10
9.1 Numbers of Children in Care	10
9.2 Gender of Children and Young People in Care	11
9.3 Ethnicity of Children and Young People in Care	12
9.4 Time in Care for Children and Young People.....	14
9.5 Legal Framework for Children in Care.....	14
9.6 Placement location of Children and Young People in Care.....	16
10. Use of Special Guardianship Orders and Child Arrangement Orders	17
11. IRO Service impact on the Outcomes for Children and Young People.....	18
11.1 Dispute Resolutions and Escalation.....	18
11.2 Formal Disputes Raised 2019-2020	19
11.3 IRO Compliance Checklist	19
12. Feedback from the Children in Care about the IRO Service	19
13. IRO Service objectives in: 2019-2020.....	20

1. Introduction and Purpose of the Annual Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to meet the statutory requirement for the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Manager to produce a report for the scrutiny of the Corporate Parenting Committee, established by the IRO Handbook (2010).
- 1.2 Following presentation to the Thurrock Corporate Parenting Committee, Overview and Scrutiny and the Thurrock Safeguarding Children's Partnership, this report will be placed on the Council website as a publically accessible document.
- 1.3 Where possible, this Report refers to Children Looked After (CLA). Such use reflects the views and wishes of children and young people about their own identity and the way in which they prefer to be referred to by professionals.

2. Reporting period

This report covers the period from 1st of April 2019 until the 31st of March 2020. Some of the data sets may vary slightly from those published by Children's Social Care due to minor variations in the timeframe for data capture.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

4. Local context – Thurrock Council as a Corporate Parent

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

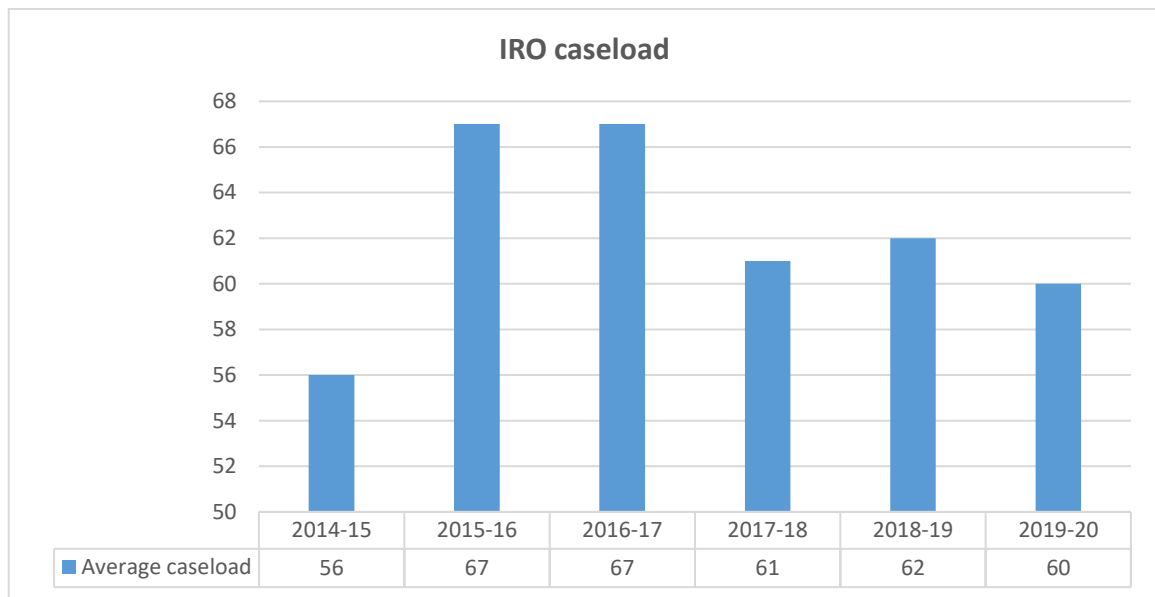
The IRO service plays a key role in monitoring and supporting plans to achieve this ambition.

5. Thurrock Council IRO Service

- 5.1 During the reporting period, two IROs have been appointed to fill vacancies within the service, however during that time all reviews were completed within timescales. Since the appointments, the IRO service has remained stable. There have been no periods of prolonged absence. The Service continues to comprise of five, permanent Independent Reviewing Officers, all of whom are experienced social work practitioners with social work management experience.
- 5.2 All five IROs working for the Service are qualified Social Workers registered with Social Work England and subject to regular Disclosure and Barring enhanced checks. All have relevant and appropriate skills, bringing to the role specialist knowledge and experience. All have substantial experience of effective direct work with children and young people.
- 5.3 There are two female and three male IROs and the IROs come from diverse backgrounds, ensuring young people in our care can be allocated to IROs across a range of ethnic groups.
- 5.4 All five of the IROs act independently of Thurrock Childrens Social Care and are not involved in preparation of care plans or the management of cases and have no control over resources allocated to a case.
- 5.5 During the reporting period the IROs were line managed by the Strategic Lead for Quality Assurance and latterly by the Service Manager for Safeguarding and Quality Assurance.

6. IRO Caseload and Service Performance

6.1 IRO caseloads



- 6.2 The average IRO caseload remained stable throughout the year with IROs having on average 60 cases, ranging between 57 and 62 cases.
- 6.3 To contextualise the caseloads, the IRO handbook suggests that an average IRO caseload should be between 50 - 70 children and young people for a full time post (FTE). However, the average IRO caseload is a crude indicator of the work undertaken by the IROs, as children and young people’s circumstance and situations vary in complexity, and the distance that needs to be travelled to placements. Children who are recently accommodated, placed at distance, involved in care proceedings or have placement disruption require a higher level of scrutiny and oversight than children who are in long-term, settled foster placements. There additionally needs to be enough flexibility in the service to respond to peaks in demand and associated workload, whilst maintaining a focus on quality and oversight.
- 6.4 The caseloads within Thurrock are thought to be manageable, based upon the complexity of the role carried out by the IRO.

7. Number of Child and Young Person in Care Reviews

Due in month	2019									2020			Total
	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	
Total due	73	86	65	54	85	71	75	66	52	88	43	107	865
*Total held	80	76	62	98	44	87	89	62	85	76	78	103	940
Total held In timescale	79	76	61	94	44	86	86	62	84	76	78	103	929
Percentage of total due held in timescale	99 %	98 %	98 %	98 %	99 %	92 %	96 %	95 %	100 %	100 %	100 %	98 %	97.8% (yearly average)
Held In quarter	218			229			236			257			
Percentage held in timescale	99%			98%			98%			100%			

* The number held and number due vary due to CLA reviews being moved due to placement moves, school holidays or specific incidents.

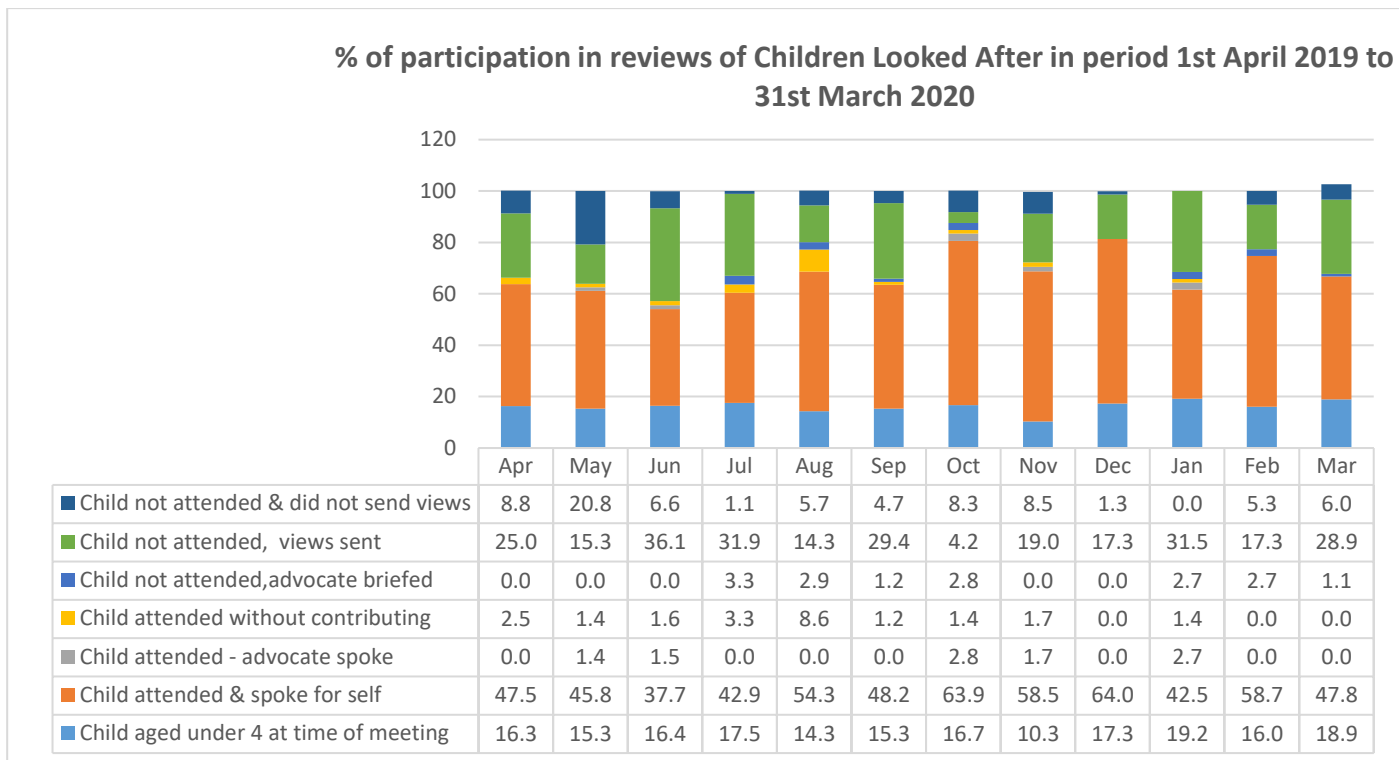
During the performance year April 2019 – March 2020, the IRO service conducted a total of 940 reviews. This is an increase of 185 reviews (24.5%) when compared to the number of reviews conducted the previous year. The performance, in respect of reviews being held within timescale, improved during the year, with the final average being 97.5% of reviews held within timescales an increase of 4.5% when compared to last year.

In the small number of cases not held on time, these were the factors which affected performance:

- The IRO service not being notified early enough that children had become looked after and therefore, there was a delay in booking the 1st review meeting
- Human error regarding the date of the review resulting in the review being missed
- Problems on the day of the review, IRO, Social Worker, Carer, or report not available and so the review had to be cancelled

It is important to acknowledge that there will always be factors that result in reviews being delayed such as staff sickness or the need to change the date of a review so as to meet the needs and requirements of the child or young person however, it is important that, wherever possible, reviews are held in a timely manner and reviews are scheduled at 5 months and 2 weeks so as to take account of any unexpected delays and allow for reviews to be rescheduled.

7.1 Children and Young People’s Participation in Reviews



The monthly breakdown indicates that in the vast majority of reviews, young people attended reviews and spoke for themselves. This reflects the proactive approach taken by the IRO Service to actively engage with young people and involve them in the review process. This commitment is represented in the yearly totals with the numbers of children attending their review and speaking for themselves, increasing by 18% when compared to figures for 2018/19.

Participation	Total 2017-18	Total 2018-19	Total 2019-20
Not Recorded	105	0	0
PN0 Child aged under 4 at time of meeting	85	100	142
PN1 Child attended & spoke for self	332	372	439
PN2 Child attended - advocate spoke	5	3	10
PN3 Child attends and conveys his/her view symbolically (non-verbally)		2	
PN4 Child attended without contributing	4	5	14
PN5 Child not attended, advocate briefed with views	12	3	59

PN6 Child not attended, views sent	122	159	163
PN7 Child not attended & did not send views	83	103	40
Grand Total	750	747	1,137

The yearly totals indicate that there has been a significant increase in the numbers of children using an advocate to express their views (PN5) compared to previous years. This may in part be due to the outcomes of the 2018/19 key objectives, to ask the advocacy provider Open Door to contact every child over the age of 7 entering the Care System, paying dividend in terms of their involvement in the review process. The totals in participation exceeds the number of reviews as there are occasions whereby a child or young person may be recorded in two categories for example a child may not attend a review but sends their views in, as well as being represented by an advocate.

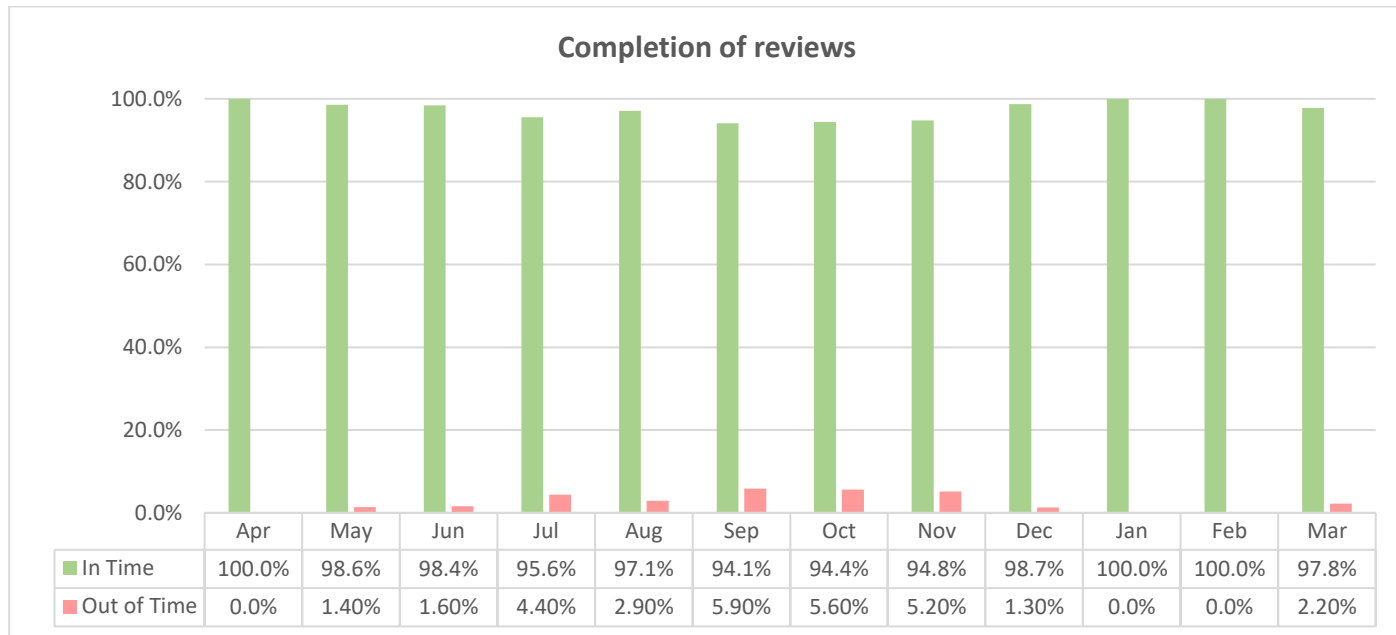
This year, children and young people participated in person, or through an advocate, or by another means in 94.6% of their reviews (excludes children under 4 years of age). This was an improvement on last year's performance of 84.0%.

Children or young people who did not attend their review, or send their views (PN7), equated for only 3.5% of the total information recorded, compared to 13.8% for the previous year and is perhaps a further indication of the ongoing commitment by the IRO service to actively engage young people in the review process.

Whilst only a small percentage, it is important to scrutinise those children or young people who did not attend their reviews. The reasons given for this figure related to older children making an informed choice not to attend their reviews or young people refusing to engage with the process and routinely going missing. In these circumstances the IROs work closely with the connected network of the young person to gain as full a picture of the child's life as possible.

The increase in participation of children and young people was a key objective of the 2018/19 report, highlighting the need to develop the use of the "Mind of my Own" app and work closely with the Childrens Participation Officer and Children in Care Council. The data provided indicates that this has been somewhat successful, however it is important that this remains an ongoing focus.

7.2 Completion of Review Reports



On completion of the child’s review, the IRO is expected to complete a report on the Children’s Social Care computer system (LCS). The report provides a note of the review and its discussions and the recommendations made in the review. The target for having these review outcome reports completed and distributed to young people, parents and professionals is within 20 working days of the review.

At the end of 2018/19, there was a marked improvement in reports completed by IROs within timescale. This has continued throughout 2019/20 with the timeliness of the reports completed by IROs ranging between 94.4% to 100.0%. For the period April 2019 to March 2020, 97.6% of reports were completed within timescale.

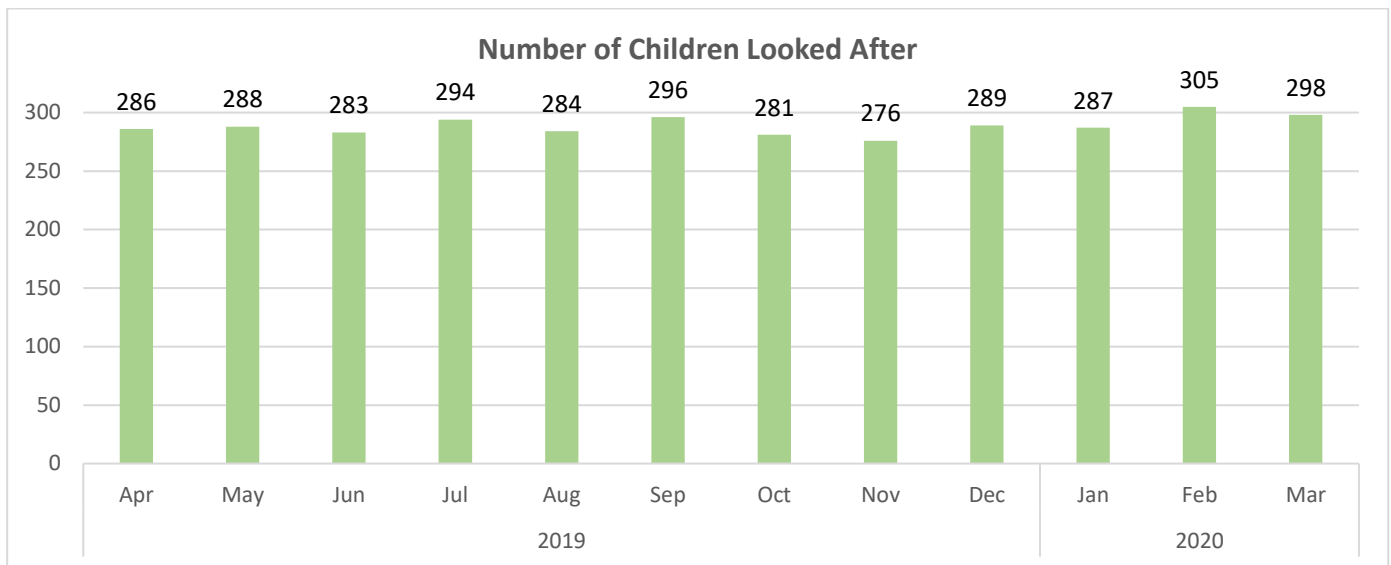
8. The Use of Feedback and Consultation forms

The IRO service continues to actively promote the Mind of my Own app which allows young people to express their opinion directly in to the Review process. There have also been activity days held for Children Looked After and young people where the IRO service played an active role in seeking the views of children and young people regarding the review process.

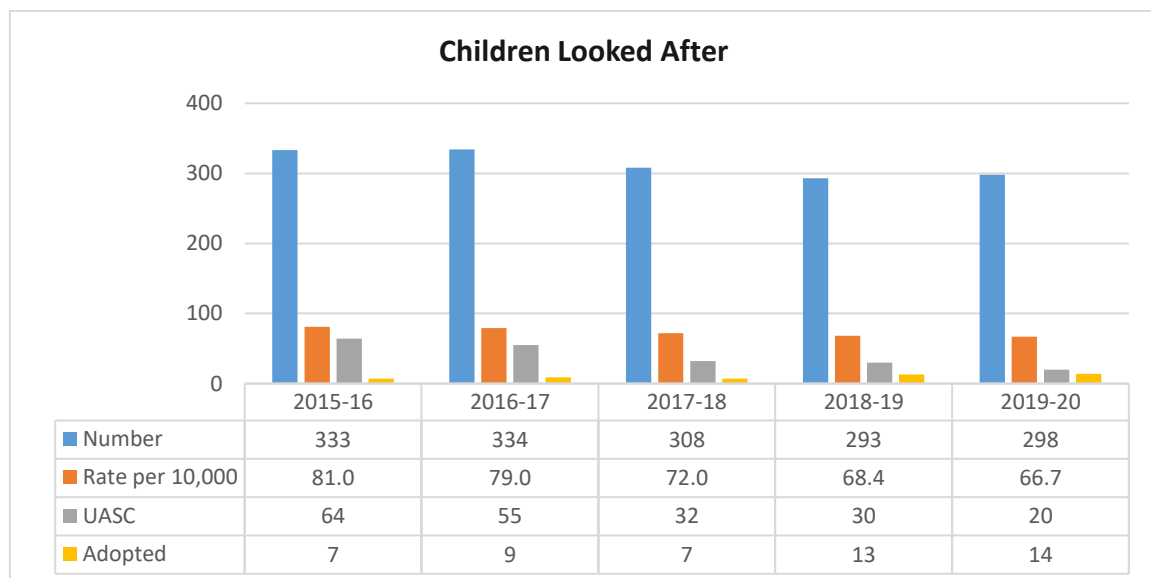
The compliance checklist has also recently been reviewed and will be used as a discussion tool with Allocated Social Workers to consult with them regarding strengths as well as areas for development in practice. The information gathered from these forms will also help shape practice by identifying trends and patterns within the service.

9. Profile of Children and Young People in Care in Thurrock

9.1 Numbers of Children in Care



The monthly breakdown for the number of Children Looked After has remained relatively consistent throughout the year ranging between 305 and 276.



Of the 12 million children living in England, just over 400,000 (3%) are in the Social Care System at any one time. More than 75,000 of these children are Children Looked After across England. This is an increase of 28.0% in the last decade. That said however, the number of Children Looked After in England has declined by 0.1% to 75,370, compared to 75,420 last year.

Figures in Thurrock have increased by 5 children since 2018/19, however, the figure per 10,000 has slightly decreased due to an increase in the population in Thurrock.

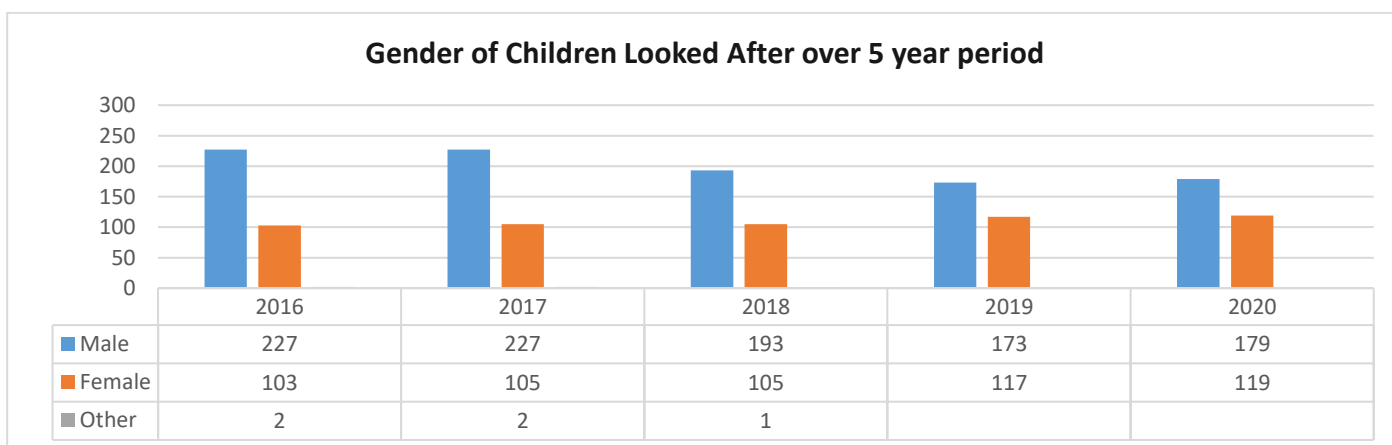
There has been a significant decrease in the numbers of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) coming to the attention of the Local Authority and becoming Looked After, falling by 33.3%. from the figures presented in the 2018/19 report. This differs from the national

picture for UASC whereby the number of UASC increased by 11.0%. Despite this decline in numbers Thurrock still remains a high point of entry. During the reporting period there were 81 UASC arriving in Thurrock, however many of these young people were transferred to other local authorities in the Eastern Region under the auspices of the National Transfer Protocols Scheme. This agreement between 11 Local Authorities within the Eastern Region has proved successful in ensuring that the numbers of UASC within any local authority are equitable.. This has led to total number of UASC and young people in Care are similar, representing 6% nationally and 6.7% in Thurrock of the total number of the children and young people in Care.

Most UASC are male (90%), 85.0% are aged 16 and over, and 87.0% have a primary need of absent parenting. UASC are not distributed evenly around the country. Local Authorities with points of entry to the country, for example Kent and Croydon, have much larger numbers of UASC than other Local Authorities. Thurrock, due to its location and proximity to London, as well as the local port, places Thurrock firmly as one of these points of entry. However, as mentioned above, there is an Eastern Region agreed scheme in place to help redistribute UASC across the Region.

4.6% of children leaving care were adopted during the year 2019/20, a modest increase on the figures presented in the 2018/19 report. Recent data indicates that nationally, the number of Placement Orders (legislation which permits a child to be placed for adoption) decreased by 14% compared to 2018/19. Thurrock has fewer children adopted than its statistical neighbours. In 2019 the Leadership Team introduced a new Permanency Planning process to identify and scrutinise the permanency plans for children in proceedings. Where there are no other options within the family and the needs of all siblings are balanced, Thurrock will seek to place children for adoption in a timely way. This scrutiny process ensures plans are robust and was noted in the OFSTED inspection as a feature of good practice. Longer term we can anticipate a changing picture in the number of children adopted, as the impact of COVID-19 and the national decreasing trend for adoption affects plans for children locally.

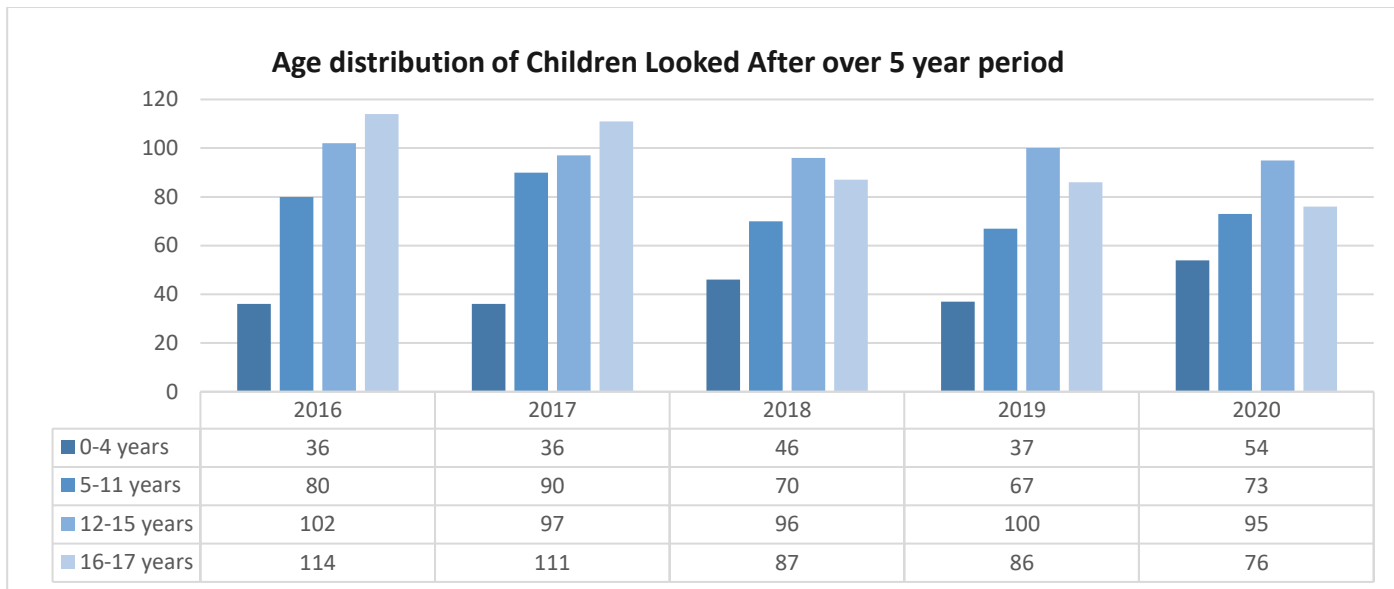
9.2 Gender of Children and Young People in Care



The number of males in care in the last 5 years has exceeded the number of females. Interestingly, 2019/20 represents the lowest number of males in care and the highest number of females. The number of females has increased by 15.3% during this period, whilst the number of males has decreased by 21.1%. This may be, in part due to the decreasing number of UASC who remain as CLA.

Nationally, just over half are male (56%) and 44% are female, similar to 2018/19.

However there is still a higher proportion of boys Looked After. Factors which can be affecting this relate to issues such as youth offending, perceived aggressive behaviour and non-school attendance, all of which put boys at higher risk of entering care.



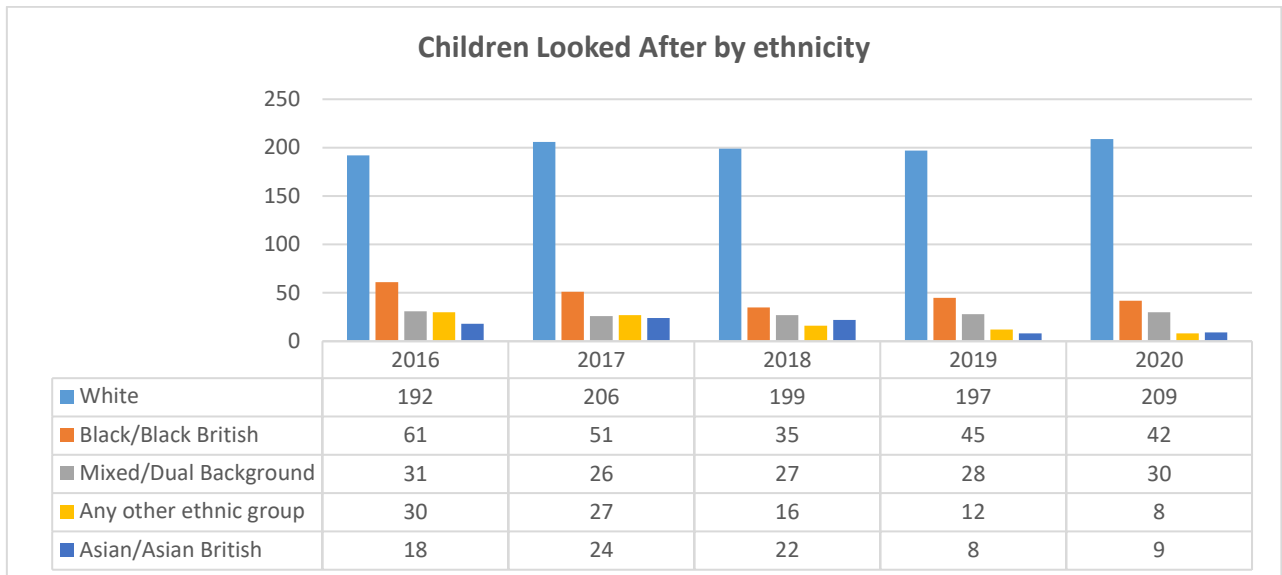
Over the 5 year period detailed above, the age distribution of Children Looked After has seen children in the 12-15 year old age bracket represent the largest proportion of Children Looked After for the third consecutive year. Children aged between 0–4 years has seen the largest increase when compared to figures for last year (45.9%). However this still remains the category with the least number of children. This may be as a result of Thurrock’s ongoing commitment to working with families, especially parents of younger children to provide them with every opportunity to remain within their family unit.

Nationally the largest age group (39.0%) are aged 10-15 years; 24.0% are aged 16 years and over; 18.0% are aged 5-9 years, 13.0% are aged 1-4 years and 5.0% are aged under 1 year. Over the last 5 years the national average age of Children Looked After has been steadily increasing.

9.3 Ethnicity of Children and Young People in Care

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

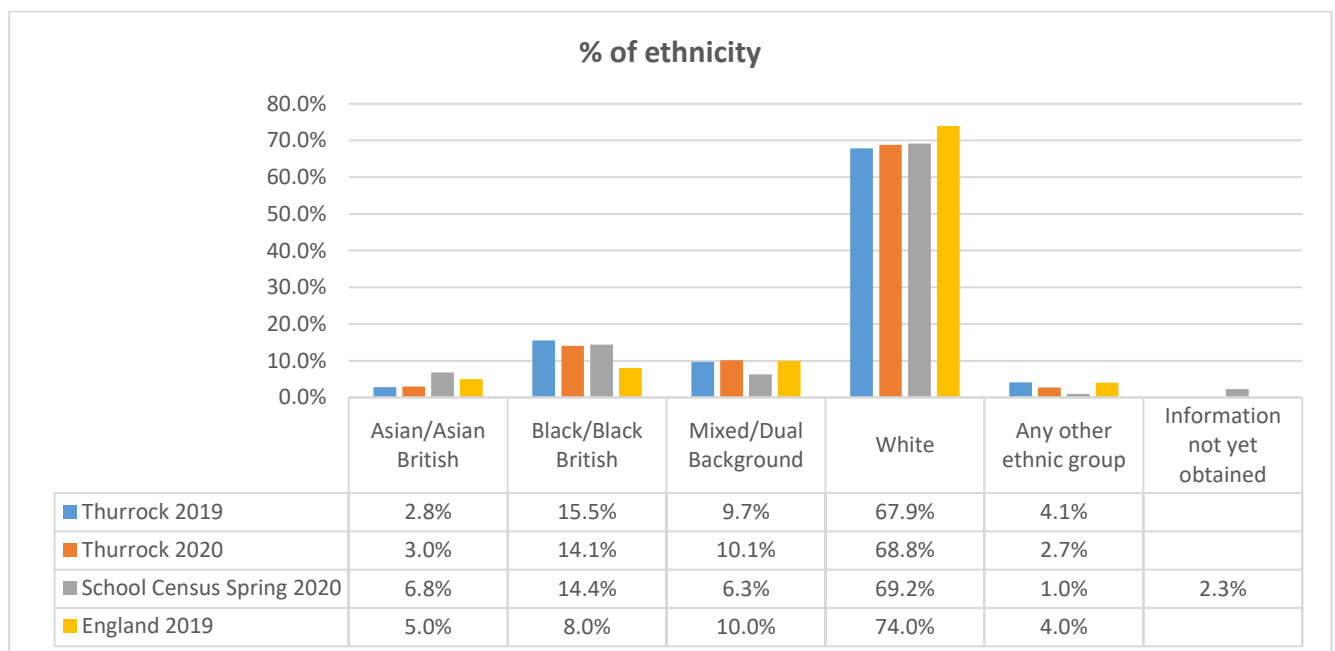
Racial and cultural identity is an important aspect of identity for many Children Looked After. The assessment of each individual child’s needs alongside the child’s own views will determine the actions which should be put into the care plan to ensure that s/he is able to develop a strong sense of identity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



The recorded information regarding the ethnicity of children and young people Looked After has shown little or no change on a month-by-month basis.

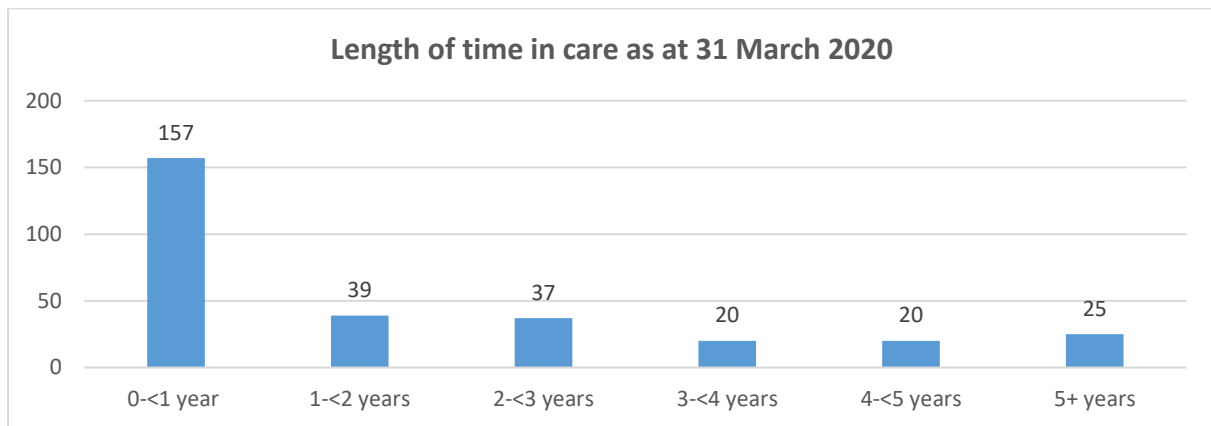
Consideration needs to be given to the specific demographics of the ethnic population in Thurrock, however, further exploration is required regarding the differences in this data to ensure that the interventions offered to families are equitable and consistent with regards to the application of thresholds and the expectations of families regarding the care of their children.

The graph below shows that the percentage of Black/Black British children in care in 2020 is 14.1% which is below Thurrock school census of 14.4% but above national average of 7.6% based on the latest benchmarking data available in 2018-19. Ethnicity data is not available at statistical neighbour level.



The data indicates that based upon the 2020 school census, Black/Black British children are not over-represented in the Care System however, there is over-representation from children from a mixed/dual background.

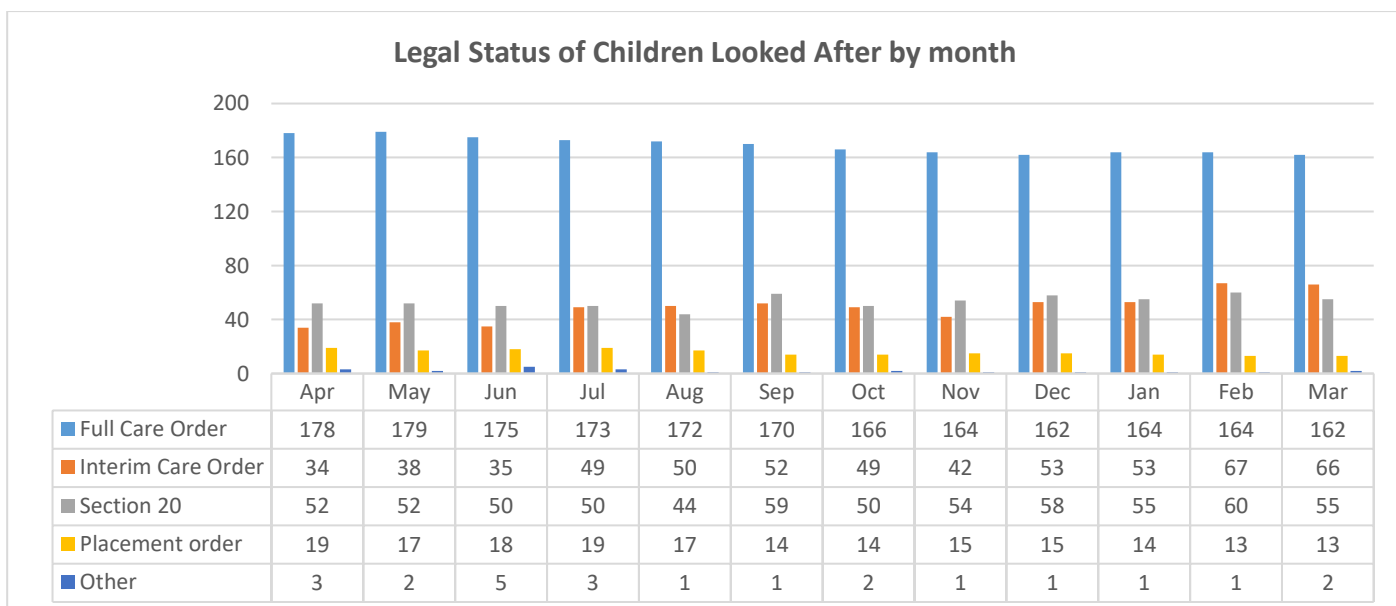
9.4 Time in Care for Children and Young People



This above graph shows that last year’s trend has continued with fewer children remaining in care long-term and the majority of children coming into care for between 1 and 3 years. The total for children being in care for less than a year on the 31st March 2020 is greater than all of the other parameters added together.

The challenges for the IRO Service are in ensuring that there are effective permanency plans for all children and ensuring cases do not drift. There is also a need to work with long-term foster carers to explore whether a Special Guardianship arrangement would be more appropriate for a child who is in placement, and would be likely to remain in long-term foster care.

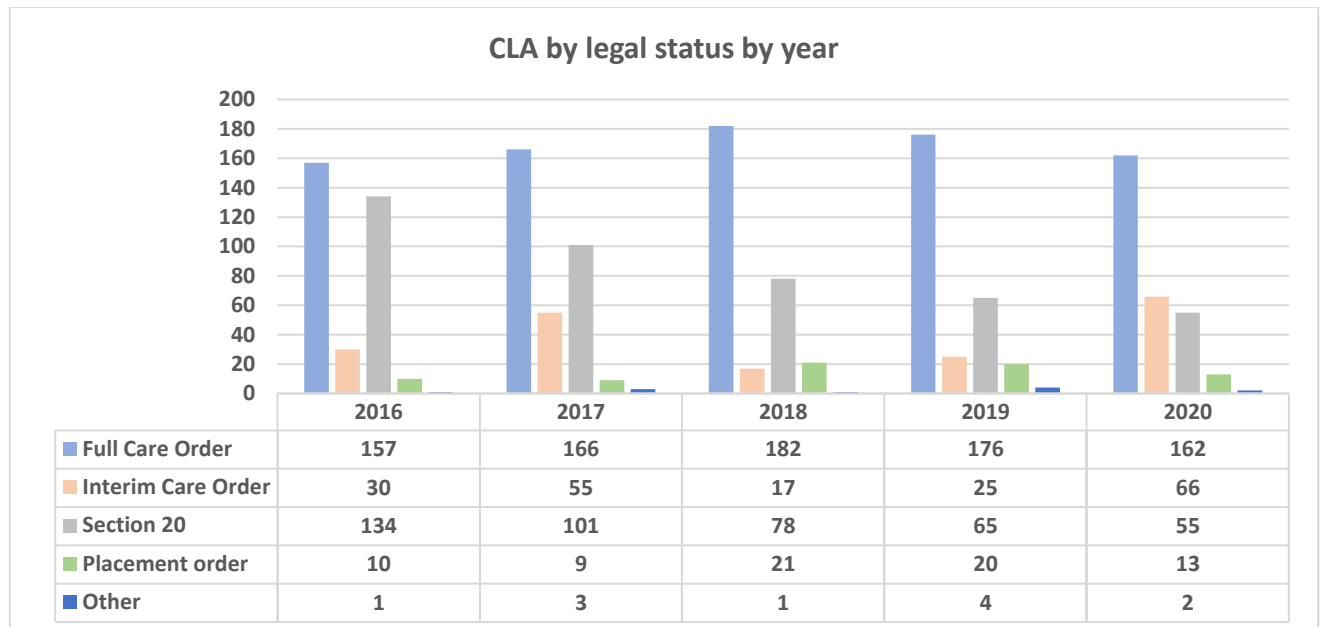
9.5 Legal Framework for Children in Care



Nationally 75.0% of Children Looked After were cared for under a Care Order, 18.0% under Section 20, 7.0% on a Placement Order and less than 0.5% on other types of orders.

Thurrock shows similar results with 76.5% of children cared for under a Care Order, 18.5% under Section 20, 4.4% on a Placement Order and 0.7% on other types of Order.

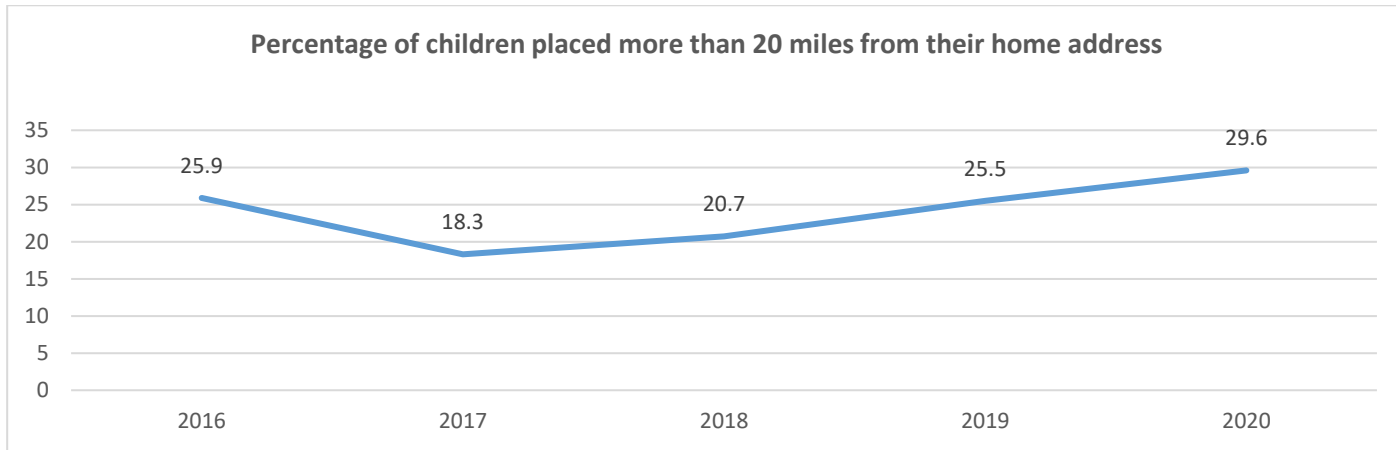
The majority of Children Looked After by Thurrock are subject, or have previously been subject, to legal proceedings, where they have suffered some form of abuse or neglect and the accommodation is being used to protect them from further harm and to secure permanency for these children.



Interestingly since 2016 data, it shows that the use of Interim Care Orders has overtaken the use of section 20 agreements. This may be due to a number of factors relating to the complexity of the safeguarding concerns managed by frontline services and the ability or willingness of parents to agree to S20 to manage the risk. Alternatively, this may also be an indication of changing practices within the teams regarding the use of Interim Care Orders to manage and assess risk, in line with the Munby Judgements relating to S20 in so far that it should only be used for short term arrangements and not longer than 6 months.

The challenge for the IRO Service is to ensure that plans are being carried out in timescales, regardless of the legal framework for their accommodation. Plans should meet the children’s needs, ensuring stability and security for children, and empower them to achieve the best possible outcomes.

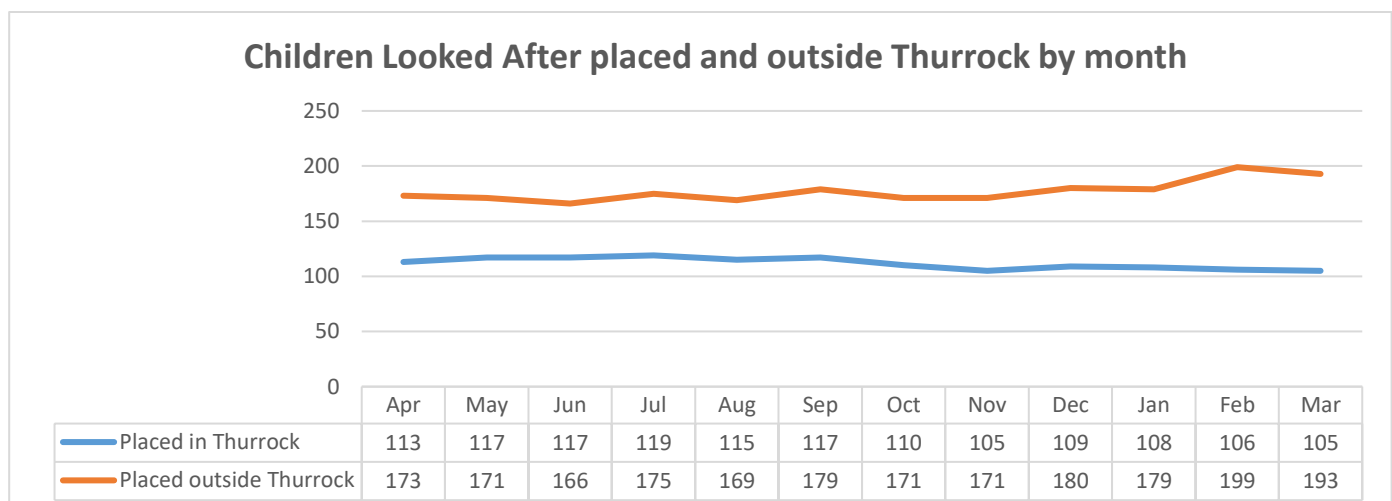
9.6 Placement location of Children and Young People in Care

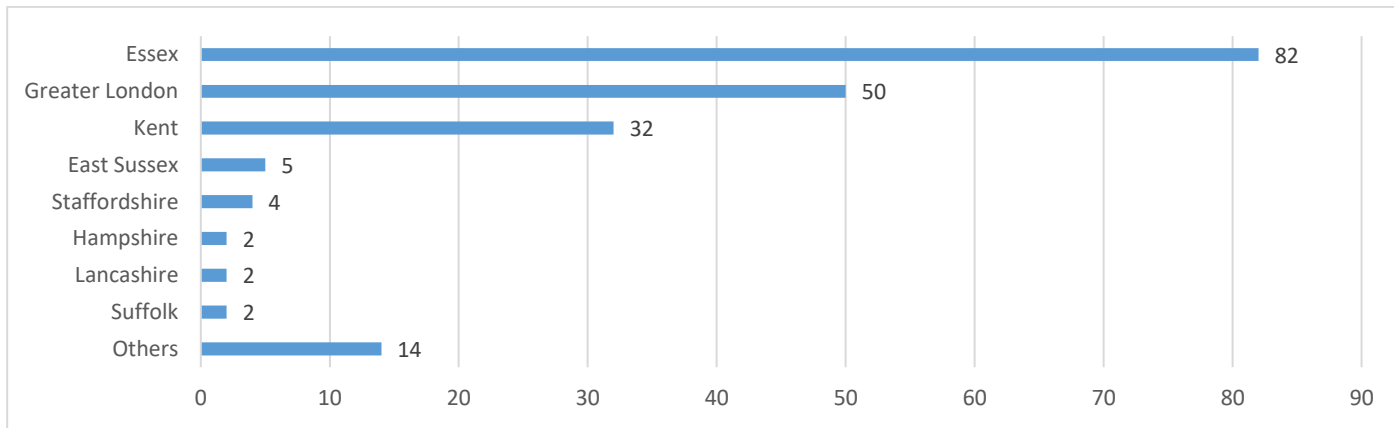


The number of children placed more than 20 miles away from their home has continued to rise and currently stands at just under 30.0%, this compares to 17% for statistical neighbours. The service recognises the need for every effort to be made to place children as close to their home and community as possible, so far as is consistent with their need to be safeguarded, or to have access to specialist therapeutic services.

Consideration, however, needs to be given to the finite resources available within Thurrock (for example specialist provision, residential units and schools) to meet the complex needs presented by children and young people entering the Care System, as well as the need for some young people to be placed a significant distance away from the area to ensure their safety and protection.

However there are a number of children who are placed just outside this 20 mile radius in Kent and Essex as well as some children who are placed within their family, however this is more than 20 miles away from Thurrock.





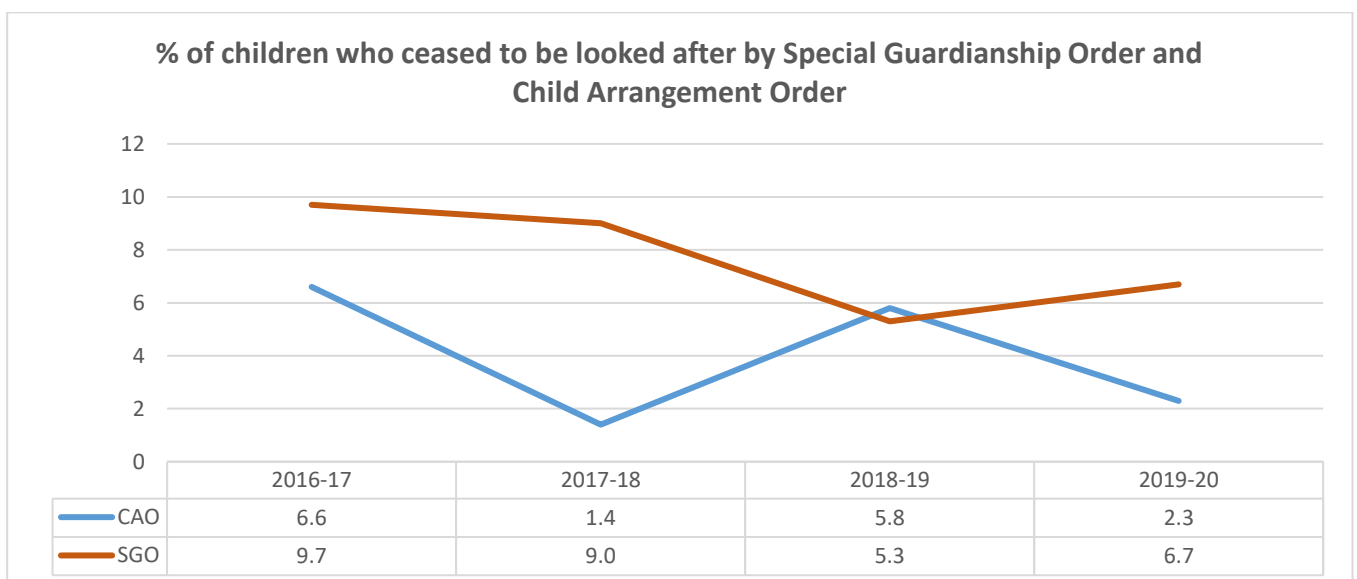
There are some Children Looked After who have complex and extreme behavioural support needs. For these children there are very limited local options for appropriate placements within Thurrock due to the nature of the needs, and these children are often placed some distance away from Thurrock due to these limitations in resources.

Placements are reviewed weekly in Thurrock and the IRO Service plays an active role at this meeting to ensure that the needs of young people and children are the paramount consideration when considering the type and location of placement.

10. Use of Special Guardianship Orders and Child Arrangement Orders

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

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



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

Compared to last year in Thurrock, 6.7% of children left care through Special Guardianship, representing an increase of 1.4%, and 2.3% through Child Arrangement Orders, representing 2.5% reduction.

It is also worth noting that the complexity of the risks faced by children and young people coming in to care may mean that a Child Arrangement Order or a Special Guardianship Order may not initially be appropriate.

The IRO service will continue to carefully scrutinise Children’s plans to consider the possibility of using Special Guardianship and Child Arrangement Orders.

11. IRO Service impact on the Outcomes for Children and Young People

11.1 Dispute Resolutions and Escalation

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

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

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

Thurrock’s IRO’s are actively encouraged to manage most disagreements on an informal basis which has proved effective. More often than not, discussion with Social Workers and their Managers is effective in achieving the progress required.

In July 2018 the IRO Service developed a compliance checklist which is completed at each review and shared with the Social Worker, Team Manager and, if required, the Service Manager. This has recently been reviewed to focus specifically upon the timeliness of reports

and the progression of care plans. It is envisaged that this will allow areas of practice which normally lead to disputes to be identified earlier and thus be resolved at an informal level.

The IRO Service has recently made closer links with frontline services, with specific IROs being allocated to specific teams. This has allowed for the IROs to attend team meetings to inform them of processes and expectations. It is hoped that by building these working relationships, this will again allow for areas of concern to be addressed at an earlier stage on an informal basis. Early indications show that this has reduced the use of the dispute resolution process for simple process issues.

11.2 Formal Disputes Raised 2019-2020

The IRO Service recorded 12 completed dispute resolutions, which related to the following issues:

Number	Area of Practice Raised
2	Challenge raised regarding provision of education not meeting the needs of the child/young person.
3	Issues raised with regards failure of the Local Authority to adequately progress the agreed care plan for the child/young person.
1	Challenge to Local Authority plan for contact.
5	Challenge raised with regards to the suitability of the placement provided to the child/young person.
1	Challenge raised regarding Deprivation of Liberty.
1	Challenge raised regarding support provided by the Local Authority concerning assisting a young person with legal and practical issues relating to citizenship.

There were no disputes, which had to be referred to the Corporate Director of Children Services, or the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS).

11.3 IRO Compliance Checklist

The IRO Checklist was introduced in July 2018 and has been used as a way of providing a monthly 'dip sample' into the quality of services provided to Children Looked After.

As mentioned earlier, the Compliance Checklist has been recently reviewed to focus specifically upon timeliness of reports and progression of care plans. This will allow the service to offer scrutiny and insight into key areas of performance, as well as being more responsive to requests from the service and to assist in gathering data in other areas.

12. Feedback from the Children in Care about the IRO Service

At a recent activity day, the views of children and young people were sought by the IRO Service. Feedback from that session indicated that 100% of children or young people wanted their reports shared with them in advance of the meeting, and children reported that on occasions they had not seen the reports prior to the review.

Only 16% of children felt that the School Nurse should be at their review and only 50% wanted their Teacher to attend. This feedback has helped the IRO Service to shape how reviews are conducted so that more information can be gathered outside of the review process, to limit the amount of adults in attendance and ensure that issues which are important to the young person, are discussed.

91% of children interviewed stated that they would like to participate in their review and 41% stated they would like to chair their own reviews. The IRO Service are keen to move towards young people chairing their reviews on a regular basis and are actively exploring ways to facilitate this.

75% of young people have stated that they would like their IRO to make contact with them between their reviews. In light of this, IROs are actively encouraged to undertake visits to see young people, in consultation with the Social Worker, so the young person does not feel overwhelmed by visits.

Young people were not too worried about the length of time that their review meeting takes, however 80% of them stated that they would not like their reviews to take place at their school. It is agreed that, wherever possible, reviews will no longer take place at schools.

13. IRO Service objectives in: 2019-2020

1. Work with the Children's Participation Officer and Children in Care Council to improve the participation of children and young people in reviews

Close links have been made with the Participation Officer to establish a working partnership whereby the IRO Service plays an active role in promoting the involvement of children and young people. The Mind of My Own app, which is actively promoted to Social Workers as well as children and young people, allows them to share their views regarding the review process. The IRO Service is also involved in participation days arranged by the Participation Officer and will use these as an opportunity to seek the views of children and young people. These events will ascertain how the Service can improve practice to ensure that the child or young person is central to the review process.

2. Review the Dispute Resolution Process to ensure that IROs are maximising their impact on improving outcomes for children and young people

The dispute resolution service has recently been reviewed, and is being embedded in the working practices of the IRO Service and is in the process of being added to the electronic recording systems.

3. Continue to embed and learn from the implementation of Mind of My Own as a communication tool

The work on the Mind of My Own app, which will facilitate children and young people to communicate their views regarding their review, remains ongoing. The App is firmly embedded in the working practices surrounding the review process, however it is recognised that further work is needed to ensure that this is routinely used, allowing young people to open their own account through the App to share their views.

4. Continue to improve the quality of children in care plans and pathway plans through joint training and working, with some focus on planning towards transitions and re-unification

This has been explored through the reflective practice sessions that have been co-chaired by the IROs, focussing on these issues to raise standards in this area. It is recognised that this is an ongoing area of development.

5. Develop the use of the Signs Of Safety/Signs Of Success model within the IRO Service

Signs of Safety is used across Thurrock. It is recognised that the IRO Service is yet to fully embed this in to the review process during the reporting period. There are clear plans in place to develop a range of ways to undertake reviews and provide a written record of the meeting using the language of Signs of Safety. Recordings of the meetings will focus on what's going well, what are we worried about and what do we need to change. It is planned that this new way of managing reviews will be piloted in 2020-21 with a view to implementation in the upcoming year 2021/22.

6. Review the impact of compliance checklists and use them to improve culture around preparation for reviews

As mentioned above, the compliance checklist is currently under review and focusses upon the timeliness and quality of reports. The checklist will allow for data to be gathered and compiled, to present to management, to ascertain patterns regarding performance, as well as to share learning.

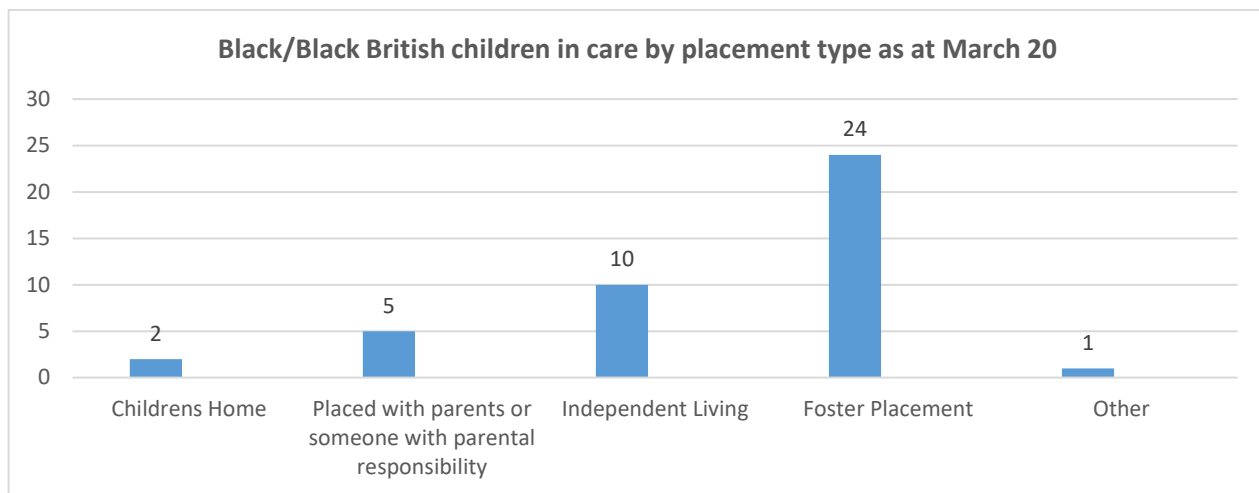
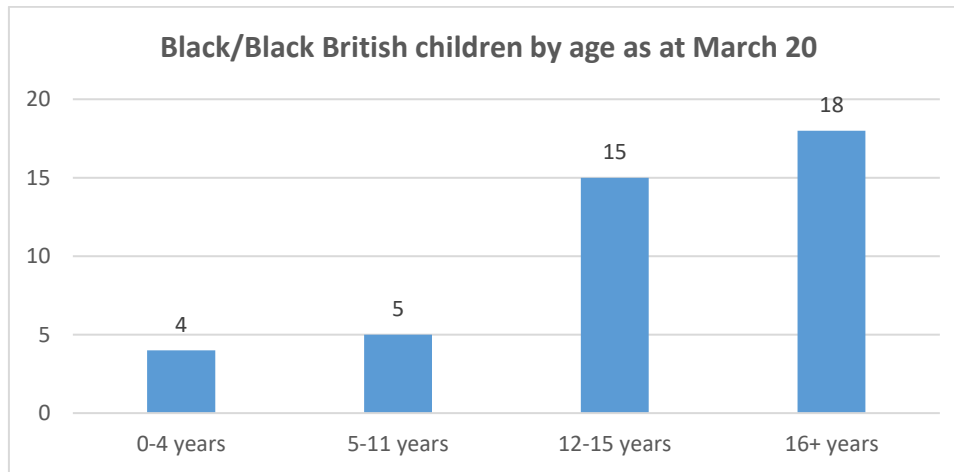
7. Develop the role of IRO with regard to the Public Law Outline work (PLO) and Permanency Planning Processes

Links have been developed with Legal Services who regularly attend team meetings to ensure that the IRO Service is up to date with the PLO process, as well as any other Legal processes relevant to the service.

8. Develop the child focus of reviews

As raised in point 5, there are plans to implement new ways of recording the Review in line with the ethos of Signs of Safety. It is planned that much of the information can be gathered outside of the review so that the meeting can focus upon issues that the child or young person would like to talk about. It is envisaged that this will reduce the amount of time that is spent undertaking the review and allow for the child or young person to play a more active role in deciding the agenda.

9. Review the reasons for Black/Black British children coming into care alongside the quality of services to meet their needs



As outlined in the table above, the number of children from Black/Black British backgrounds coming into care are not over-represented when compared to the 2020 schools census. The graph above represents the numbers of children from a Black/Black British background and the types of placement.

Due to local availability, there are times when the needs of children are met cross-culturally, however there is extensive work offered to these families by the Fostering and Adoption Services to address this, including mandatory on line training, and further services are planned for example direct face to face training focussed on diversity and meeting the needs of children from a range of backgrounds. The teams are constantly looking to recruit foster carers from all ethnicities, to ensure that the cultural needs of children coming into care in Thurrock are catered for.

During 2019-20, 19 Black/ Black British children came into care, 42% of those children are no longer in care. 17 were of Black African Heritage. The majority were older children (68% teenagers) and 42% were Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children. 6 children were of primary age and these were 2 family groups of younger children; one family group of 4 were placed with extended family members, the other family group of 2 are no longer Looked After. The reasons that the children came into care (with the exception of those seeking asylum) were due to concerns about abuse or neglect linked to parental domestic abuse, mental health or addiction, or there were concerns about the young person’s behaviour and/or involvement in gangs or criminal exploitation.

Objectives for 2020/21

1. IROs to play an active role in promoting Mind of My Own to children and young people and encouraging them to open and use their own accounts.
2. The IRO Service to become actively involved in linking with the frontline teams in a consultancy capacity and attending team meetings at least quarterly, to provide information regarding the Looked After process.
3. To provide assistance and advice regarding housing transitions for young people leaving care and becoming 18 years, for both mainstream leaving care and children with disabilities transitioning to Adult Social Care.
4. IROs to work proactively with Social Workers and Managers to minimise escalations, to avoid tension between the Social Workers/Managers and IRO Service.
5. IRO's to design a child-friendly CLA Review record which will be more accessible to children.
6. The IROs to play an active role with Social Work teams to ensure permanency is achieved for Children Looked After without delay.

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5 January 2021	ITEM: 8
Corporate Parenting Committee	
The Annual Report of the Virtual School Headteacher for Children Looked After – Academic Year 2019-2020	
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: All
Report of: Keeley Pullen, Headteacher of the Virtual School for Children Looked After	
Accountable Assistant Director: Michele Lucas, Assistant Director Education and Skills	
Accountable Director: Sheila Murphy, Corporate Director of Children’s Services	
This report is public	

Executive Summary

Supporting the educational achievement of our Children Looked After (CLA) is a key priority for Thurrock Council. Every council must have a Virtual School Head to be responsible for ensuring that the statutory guidance ‘Promoting the Educational Achievement of Looked After Children and Previously Looked After Children’ (DFE February 2018) is implemented and adhered to.

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

The annual report of the Virtual School Headteacher details the broad scope of services provided. The annual report has been presented to and approved by the Virtual School Governing Board as part of the meeting held on 18th November 2020. It pays particular attention to the Virtual School response to the challenges presented by the Covid 19 pandemic.

This Corporate Parenting report details a brief summary of the content of the annual report and should be read in conjunction with Appendix 1.

1. Recommendation(s)

1.1 The Committee approves the Annual Report of the Virtual School Headteacher for the academic year 2019-2020 and uses this information to acknowledge, evaluate and, if appropriate, challenge the services that are provided for all CLA.

2. Introduction and Background

2.1 The annual report of the Virtual School Headteacher is a key document which must be produced as part of reporting arrangements. This report includes the wide variety of services that the virtual school team provides and the additional measures that were taken to support our pupils, carers and schools during the national lockdown period.

2.2 This particular report will not contain attainment data. Due to the Covid 19 pandemic, all national academic testing was cancelled. Individual teacher assessed grades were provided for our Key Stage 4 and 5 pupils by their schools/colleges. In line with Department for Education guidance, schools will not be publishing their data for 2020.

2.3 In addition to the annual report, the Virtual School Headteacher and her team members provide reports to the Governing Body every term. These detail a range of information such which is provided to ensure that we are held accountable and that the delivery of services is efficient.

3. Summary of Report Headlines

3.1 Cohort Numbers

The numbers of pupils who were in the Virtual School cohort have remained at a relatively constant number over the academic year. The numbers of children coming into care and leaving care are fairly even between the two. Covid 19 has not affected the duties of social care nor how they responded to children in crisis. This has meant that children are still being placed in care or leaving care as planned.

3.2 Attendance

Our pupils' rates of attendance prior to Covid 19 were very good. The attendance figure of 96.3% represents attendance of school age pupils up until the national lockdown. There was a steady increase in attendance during the first part of the academic year up until lockdown. There was also an increase in unauthorised attendance. This was due to some pupils who came into care with existing unauthorised absence. Overall we have seen good rates of attendance and this has continued into the current autumn term 2020 as rates are 97% thus far.

3.3 Exclusion

There have been no permanent exclusions of CLA for over a seven year period. Wherever possible we encourage schools to avoid fixed term exclusions (FTE). 16 school age pupils out of the cohort of school age pupils have experienced a fixed term exclusion (FTE) during the course of the year. This equates to 7.9% of the cohort. When comparing this to national exclusion data, secondary school fixed term exclusions in the Statistical First release of August 2019 stands at 10.13%. The virtual school figure of 7.9% is still below this national figure, however, we are always aiming to reduce the number.

3.4 Pupils with a Special Educational Need or Disability

In total for Thurrock Children Looked After 39% of the whole cohort has been identified as having either an Education Health Care Plan or receiving additional help as SEN Support. The Statistical First Release data for the academic year 2019/20 for England showed that for all children 3.3% had an EHCP and 12.1% had SEN Support. This means that statistically, Thurrock CLA have a higher level of need compared to all children nationally. However, when we compare Thurrock CLA with all CLA nationally in 19/20, there were 55.9% of children with a special educational need. 27.2% had an EHCP and 28.7% had SEN Support. Therefore, compared to CLA nationally, Thurrock has fewer pupils with SEND.

The Virtual School team work closely with the SEND departments and schools/colleges where our pupils live. By closely monitoring every Personal Education Plan for our CLA and through ensuring that this plan is reviewed every term, we can ensure that the right levels of intervention are in place for our children and young people. Education plans are linked to the overall outcomes as specified in the EHC Plan. This promotes a holistic approach to setting targets and improving progress.

3.5 Children Missing Education (CME)

A child is deemed as missing education if they are not in receipt of a full-time educational provision. During the course of the academic year, the team have worked with a range of professionals to keep the numbers of CME to a very low number. The data for this is shown in the annual report section 9, page 20. We have a clear process which is followed in order to prevent delay in finding a suitable school place. Where pupils are missing education, tuition is put into place within 5-10 days depending upon the individual circumstances of the case. At the end of the academic year we had 5 pupils who were CME, all were in receipt of home tuition until a school place was found for September 2020. There were also some examples of excellent practice where some out of borough primary schools placed our CME onto their roll despite being closed. They were able to provide online learning for our pupils and as soon as the schools re-opened, they begun transitioning into the classroom.

3.6 Attainment of Children Looked After

Due to the cancellation of all testing and exams for the year 2020, there is no attainment data to report. In line with Department for Education guidance, the Virtual School will not be publishing any data linked to testing or exams. However, the progress and outcomes of all our pupils was still monitored very

closely for this academic year and particular support has been provided for those transition from year 6-7 and year 11-12. We have worked with schools and colleges to support our pupils as they move to a new educational establishment.

We have also worked with Designated Teachers to ensure that pupils who were affected by the cancellation of exams were supported and assessed fairly to provide a positive next step pathway. We contacted each school and discussed how they were going to be approaching the teacher assessment process and asked the Designated Teachers in that school to advocate for our looked after pupil. We did this to ensure that those who were making the decisions, were also reflective of the uniqueness of the situation and the challenges that our CLA face.

3.7 Personal Education Plans

It is a minimum requirement that every CLA aged 3-18 years must have a Personal Education Plan that is reviewed at least every 6 months. We require that this is reviewed more frequently and so a plan is produced every school term. At the end of the academic year PEP compliance rates were 99% with only 1 pupil who had not had a PEP within the designated timescale. This was due to mitigating circumstances and the PEP was booked urgently to ensure it was compliant. Our PEP compliance figures remain above national average and despite Covid 19, we insisted that every child/young person had an up to date educational document during the summer term.

3.8 Support During the National Lockdown

A number of measures were taken when the announcement to close schools happened in March 2020. Despite working virtually, the service adopted a business as normal approach to operations and made adaptations where necessary to ensure that there was no disruption to our roles and responsibilities. The annual report details the specific actions that were taken. A few of the key actions were:

- Most significantly the decision to maintain tuition for those pupils requesting it, despite the cancellation of testing. This was for years 6, 11 and 13. This helped to support transition into the next year and provided our children and young people with the message that their education still mattered.
- Providing tuition for the forthcoming year groups of years 5 and 10 to help them for when they returned to school. The aim of this was to ensure they would not be disadvantaged for the 2021 testing period.
- Adapting the format of the Personal Education Plan to ensure that education was still provided and monitored during lockdown.
- Ensuring that there was an emphasis on the support for transition for all pupils as they returned to education for the summer term or for their new classes in the autumn term.
- The provision of laptops by the Virtual School to key pupils, before the Government scheme was announced, to ensure that pupils had access to IT resources to maintain their learning.

- Provision of ideas, resources and telephone support for foster carers to help with their new role of educating our children and young people at home.

4. Overall Comment on the Annual Report

- 4.1 The annual report provides an overview of the broad range of services and responsibilities undertaken by the Virtual School team. This is challenging and immensely rewarding and our work focusses on obtaining the best possible outcomes for our pupils.

5. Reasons for Recommendation

- 5.1 It is requested that the Committee agree the recommendations and uses the reporting mechanisms to support and challenge the work of the Virtual School on behalf of Children Looked After

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

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

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

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

This report asks that the Committee notes the increasing demand of services for Children Looked After and the range of services provided as detailed in the annual report. This financial demand was increased during the lockdown period as we provided additional tuition to pupils who needed this and access to IT resources. Additionally we maintained our financial commitment to those pupils entering the post 16 phase of their education by carrying over the Pupil Premium Plus funding to assist them in college. This is reflected in the allocation of the Pupil Premium Plus top slice which is evidenced in the annual report.

7.2 Legal

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

This report asks that the Committee scrutinises the duties and responsibilities of the Virtual School as detailed in the annual report. No decision is required. The Council is required by s22(3A) of the Children Act 1989, as amended, to promote the educational achievement of looked after children and also for

relevant children under Section 23ZZA (1) of the same Act The Children and Families Act 2014 amended s22 to require the Council to appoint an officer to ensure that the duty is properly discharged. There is statutory guidance “Promoting the education of looked after children and previously looked after children” that must be followed in meeting this duty.

7.3 **Diversity and Equality**

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

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

7.4 **Other implications (where significant)**

There are no implications as a result of this report

8. **Conclusion**

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

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

- ‘The Educational Progress of Looked After Children in England: Linking Care and Educational Data’ ADCS
- ‘Promoting the Educational Achievement of Looked After Children and Previously Looked After Children’ DFE February 2018
- ‘Statistical First Release SEN 2019/2020’ Published 2/7/2020 at gov.uk <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/special-educational-needs-in-england>

10. **Appendices to the report**

- Annual Report of the Virtual School Headteacher Academic Year 2019/2020

Report Author:

Keeley Pullen BA (Hons), PGCE, NPQH

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

**Annual Report of
the Virtual School
Headteacher
Academic Year
2019/2020**

Contents Page

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

1. Purpose of the Report
2. Role of the Virtual School
3. Mission Statement
4. Guidance documents developed by the Virtual School
5. Corporate Parenting Committee
6. Current Contextual Data
 - Numbers of children by Year Group
 - Numbers of pupils attending alternative/specialist provision
 - Numbers of CLA with SEND
 - School Placement of CLA by OFSTED classification July 2020
7. Attendance of Children Looked After
8. Exclusions
9. Children Missing Education
10. Child Sexual Exploitation
11. Attainment and Analysis of Children Looked After Data – no data for 2020
12. Summary of Analysis for all Key Stages
13. Case studies of pupils
14. School Improvement Priorities
15. Allocation and Impact of Pupil Premium Plus
16. Quality Assurance of Personal Education Plans
17. Post 16 update
18. Not in Education Employment or Training
19. Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children
20. Virtual School Governing Body
21. Virtual School Specific Actions and Response to the Lockdown
22. Additional strategies to support the educational progress of Thurrock Looked After
23. Professional Development of VS Staff
24. Report Author

Summary of the Annual Report 2019-2020

During the course of this academic year the work of the Virtual School adapted to the challenges presented by the Covid 19 pandemic.

The academic year can be separated into pre and post Covid and the report reflects this shift in the delivery of services and the change in the needs of our service users.

There certain key aspects to this report which can be highlighted. These being:

- Up until the pandemic the attendance rates for Children Looked After were 96.3%, this has seen another increase from previous years. The unauthorised absence rate has reduced to 1.2% from the previous year too.
- Fixed Term Exclusions have reduced from the previous year.
- The response of the Virtual School team to support the pupils affected by the closure of schools and the national lockdown, was swift and decisive.
- We maintained the tuition support that pupils were accessing and increased it for those that needed support. We provided extra support to those transitioning out of Years 6, 11 and 13.
- All tests and exams were cancelled. Therefore, the report does not contain 2019/20 testing and exam data.
- Data Analysis of the profile and needs of our children/young people with Special Educational Needs and Disability has enabled the Virtual School to provide more challenge and support to schools to meet the needs of our pupils.
- There were some real successes during the lockdown period where schools were able to admit our pupils who were in need of a school place. This helped to keep the Children Missing Education rate at a low number.
- Remote and virtual learning approaches enabled more Designated Teachers and Social Workers to attend the training sessions that were provided by the Virtual School. These were well attended. In one week alone, 60 teachers were trained in Trauma and Attachment.
- Despite the national lockdown, we were able to take advantage of there being more online meetings and communication with a range of people linked to our pupils. This saved travelling time and enabled the virtual school team to attend more meetings than they were usually able to. All professionals that were working with us, worked smarter.
- The format of the Personal Education Plan was changed within 2 weeks of the lockdown announcement. This meant that the document was flexible to meet the requirements of either home, remote or in school learning. This also ensured that PEP compliance and quality remained high.

The following report will now detail the work of the Virtual School during the academic year, both pre and post lockdown.

1. **Purpose of the Report**

The purpose of this report is to detail the work of the Thurrock Virtual School for the academic year 2019-20.

Due to the Covid 19 pandemic and the nationwide lockdown, all testing was cancelled for this academic year.

The annual report will be reflective of the unprecedented time that is reportable during this academic year. This report will be provided for the Governing Body to approve in the autumn term 2020 and will subsequently be presented to the Corporate Parenting Committee in January 2021.

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

A separate document is available named the Roles and Responsibilities of the Virtual School. For the purpose of this report a brief outline will be provided. The Department for Education document: Promoting the education of looked after children and previously looked after children [February 2018] details the roles and responsibilities of Virtual School Heads (VSH). In summary it specifies that:

Parents want their children to have the best start in life and to reach their full potential. As corporate parents, local authorities should have equally high aspirations for the children they look after.

As leaders responsible for ensuring that the local authority discharges its duty to promote the educational achievement of their looked-after children, Directors of Children's Services and Lead Members for Children's Services should ensure that:

- top priority is given to creating a culture of high educational aspirations and that the authority strives for accelerated progress and age-related attainment or better for looked-after children;
- looked-after children have access to a suitable range of high quality education placement options and that, when commissioning services for them, the authority takes account of the duty to promote their educational achievement;
- VSHs are in place and that they have the resources, time, training and support they need to discharge the duty effectively;
- VSHs have robust procedures in place to monitor the attendance and educational progress of the children their authority looks after; and
- the authority's Children in Care Council [CiCC] regularly considers the educational experiences as reported by looked-after children and is able to respond effectively to any issues.

The VSH should be the lead responsible officer for ensuring that arrangements are in place to improve the educational experiences and outcomes of the authority's looked-after children, including those placed out-of-authority.

VSHs should ensure the educational attainment and progress of children looked after by the local authority are monitored and evaluated as if those children attended a single school.

The VSH should ensure that there are effective systems in place to:

- maintain an up-to-date roll of its looked-after children who are in school or college settings, and gather information about their education placement, attendance and educational progress;
- ensure sufficient information about a child's mental health, SEN or disability is available to their education setting so that appropriate support can be provided;
- inform Headteachers and designated teachers in schools if they have a child on roll who is looked-after by the VSH's local authority.
- ensure social workers, designated teachers and schools, carers and IROs understand their role and responsibilities in initiating, developing, reviewing and updating the child's PEP and how they help meet the needs identified in that PEP;
- ensure up-to-date, effective and high quality PEPs that focus on educational outcomes, and that all looked-after children, wherever they are placed, have such a PEP;
- avoid drift or delay in providing suitable educational provision, including special educational provision, and unplanned termination of educational arrangements through proactive, multi-agency co-operation. Where this requires negotiation with other authorities this should be completed in a timely manner and with the best interest of the child as paramount;
- ensure the educational achievement of children looked after by the authority is seen as a priority by everyone who has responsibilities for promoting their welfare; and
- report regularly on the attainment, progress and school attendance of looked-after children through the authority's corporate parenting structures.

[Pages 8 and 9 of Promoting the education of looked after and previously looked after children DFE 2018]

The Virtual School has overall responsibility for monitoring, supporting and providing interventions to ensure that Children Looked After [CLA] achieve the best possible outcomes. We achieve this by:

- Coordinating and quality assuring all Personal Education Plans [PEP]
- Monitoring and challenging schools to make effective use of the Pupil Premium Plus grant
- Tracking the academic progress, attendance and exclusions of CLA
- Using our tracking data to highlight individuals who are not on target to achieve their predicted outcomes and ensuring that the correct educational support is provided
- Ensuring that Special Educational Needs or Disability [SEND] needs are identified and supported appropriately
- Implementing a range of targeted interventions to raise academic standards
- Providing support and challenge to students, schools/colleges and carers
- Ensuring effective educational transition is in place between schools or specialist providers

- Encouraging our young people to high aspirations about their future and remove barriers to further education
- Leading training for Foster Carers, Designated Teachers, Social Workers, school governors and providing bespoke training where appropriate to educational staff
- Celebrating the achievement of our pupils

Staffing of the Virtual School

Mrs Keeley Pullen – Virtual School Headteacher

Mrs Grace Page – Virtual School Operations Co-Ordinator

Ms Rebecca Prince – Early Years and Primary Education Adviser

Ms Gemma Lilley – Secondary Education Adviser

Miss Lee-Anne Jenkins – Post 16 Education Adviser

Mrs Tina McGuinness – Administrator for the Virtual School

Additional Services [commissioned by Virtual School in 2019-2020]

Welfare Call – to monitor the attendance of our CLA

EGov Digital Solutions – an electronic platform for Personal Education Plans

TLC Live – provision of online tuition on a 1-1 basis

Fleet Tuition Service – for provision of 1-1 tuition

Prospero – for provision of 1-1 tuition

3. **Mission Statement**

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

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

The Virtual School provides additional support, advice and guidance over and above the universal services that all Thurrock children and young people can access, alongside direct support to the children themselves. We believe there should be no educational gaps between attainment and potential and there should be a narrowing of the gap between attainment and national standards.

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

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

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

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

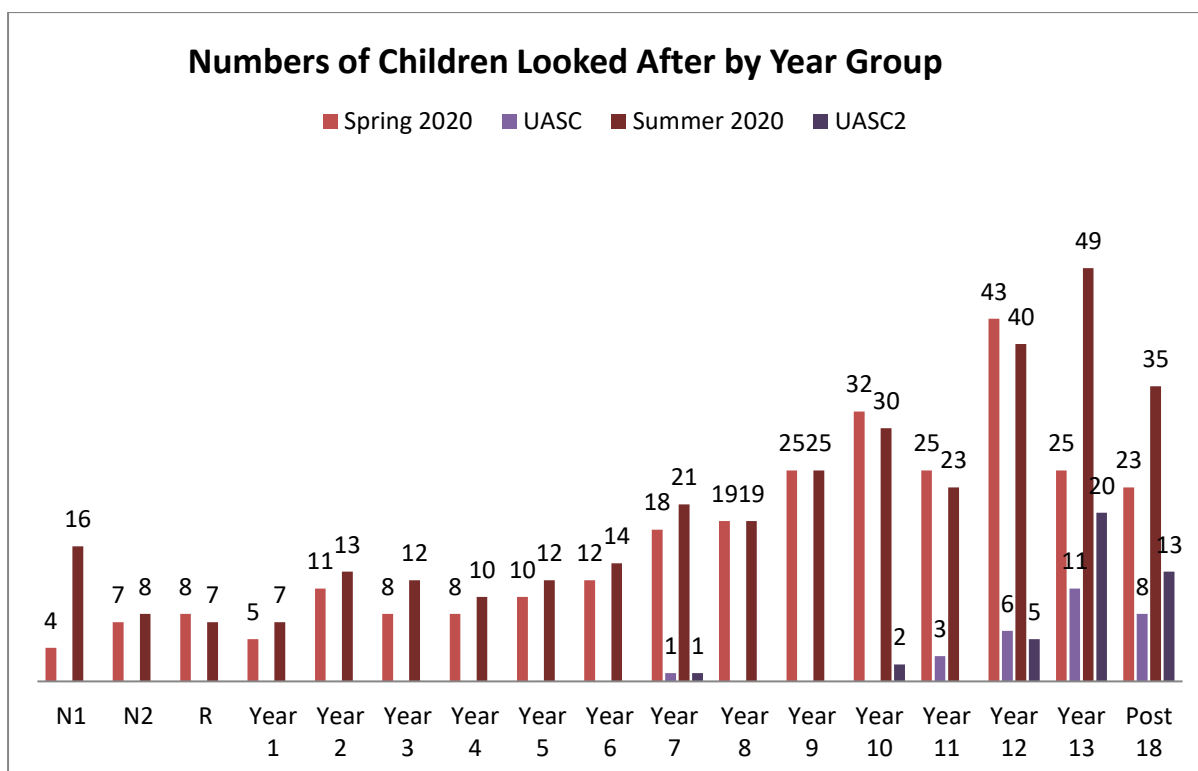
- Thurrock Virtual School Pupil Premium Policy
- Thurrock Virtual School Exclusion Guidance for Schools
- Thurrock Virtual School Exclusion Guidance for Colleges
- Thurrock Virtual School Attendance Policy
- Thurrock Virtual School Anti-Bullying Policy
- PEP Protocol for Social Workers and Designated Teachers – Schools, Colleges and Early Years
- PEP Flowchart for Social Workers
- Quality Assurance Process Flowchart
- Quality Assurance Criteria for PEPs
- Completing Attainment on EPEP
- EPEP and Target Setting
- Roles and Functions of the Virtual School
- Phonics Resources Packs for Foster Carers
- Quality Assurance Process of Education Provision
- Social Worker guidance for high quality PEP minutes
- Child Missing Education Policy/Process
- Thurrock Virtual School Safeguarding Policy
- Thurrock Virtual School Previously Looked After Children Policy
- Pupil Premium Spending Strategy Document 2019/2020 and 2020/2021
- Covid 19 Personal Education Plan and Guidance for Completion

Additional Documents:

- School Improvement Plan 2019-2020
- Headteacher Termly Reports for Governors 2019-2020
- Phase Teacher Termly Reports for Governors 2019-2020

5. **Corporate Parenting Committee**

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

6. **Current Contextual Data****Number of Looked After Children by Year Group [Updated July 2020]**

There are a total of 306 pupils aged 3-18 years old this is an increase from the previous term. Out of this 306 pupils the figure of UASC is 29 pupils which equates to 9.4%.

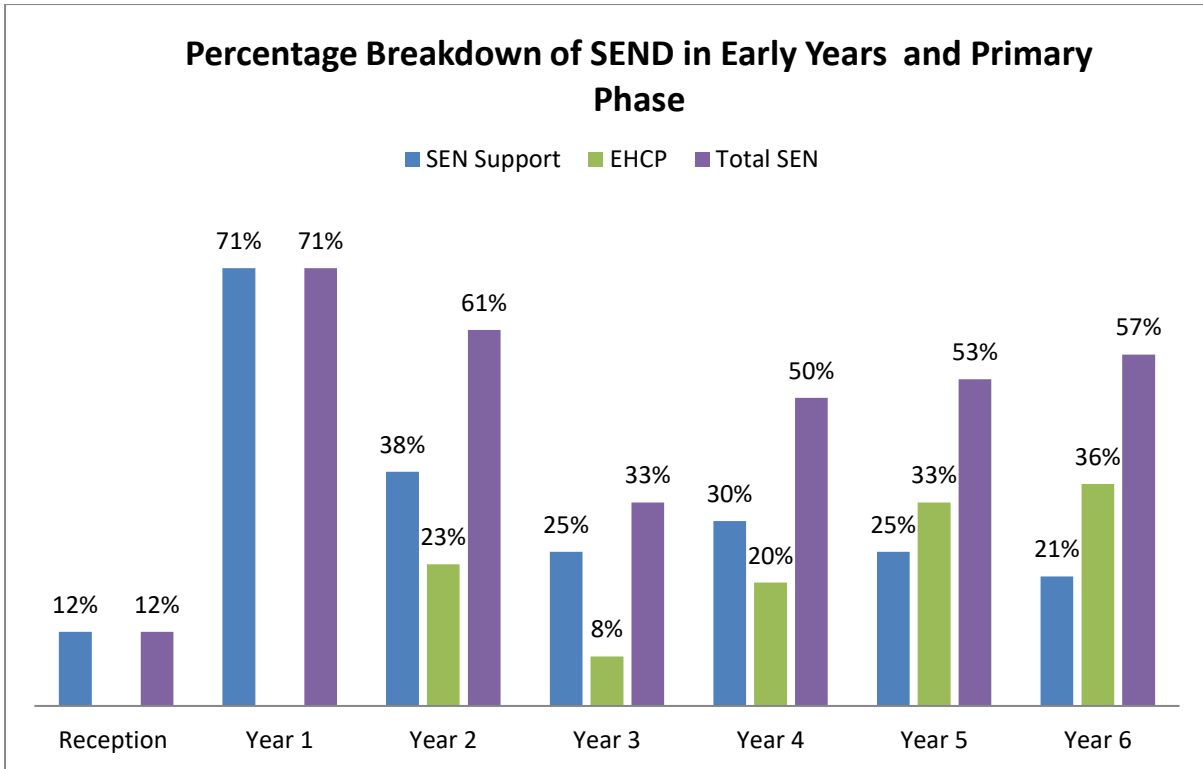
Covid 19 has not affected the duties of social care nor how they respond to children in crisis. This has meant that children are still being placed in care or leaving care as planned.

Number of Pupils in Alternative Provision/SEND School/Specialist Provision by Year Group

N1	N2	R	YR 1	YR 2	YR 3	YR 4	YR 5	YR 6	YR 7	YR 8	YR 9	YR 10	YR 11	YR 12	YR 13
0	0	0	0	1	0	1	2	3	5	0	7	10	5	5	0

Number of CLA with a Special Educational Need or Disability**Early Years and Primary Phase Numbers**

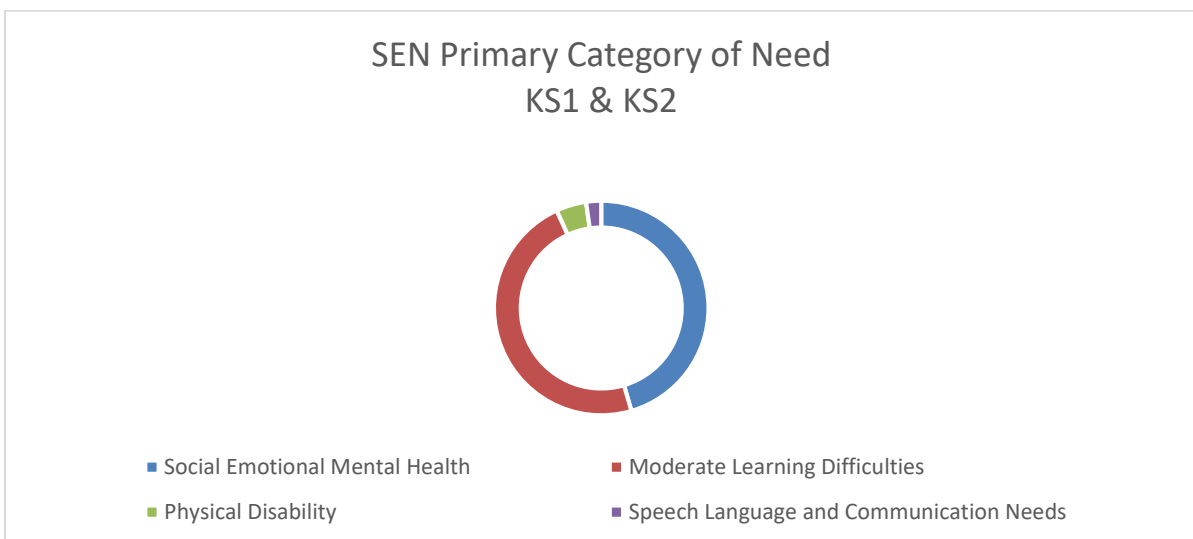
Yr R	Yr 1	Yr 2	Yr 3	Yr 4	Yr 5	Yr 6
2	6	10	6	5	7	8



The diagram above illustrates the percentage of each year group that has CLA with SEND. This is above the national average for schools and year groups and represents the challenges faced by Children Looked After. Further comparative data against national averages will be detailed further in this report.

SEN Primary Category of Need

The information in the diagram and tables below details the primary areas of need that our Early Years and Primary CLA pupils have. It is important that these areas of need are tracked as this ensures that the appropriate interventions and support are provided by the professionals who work with them.

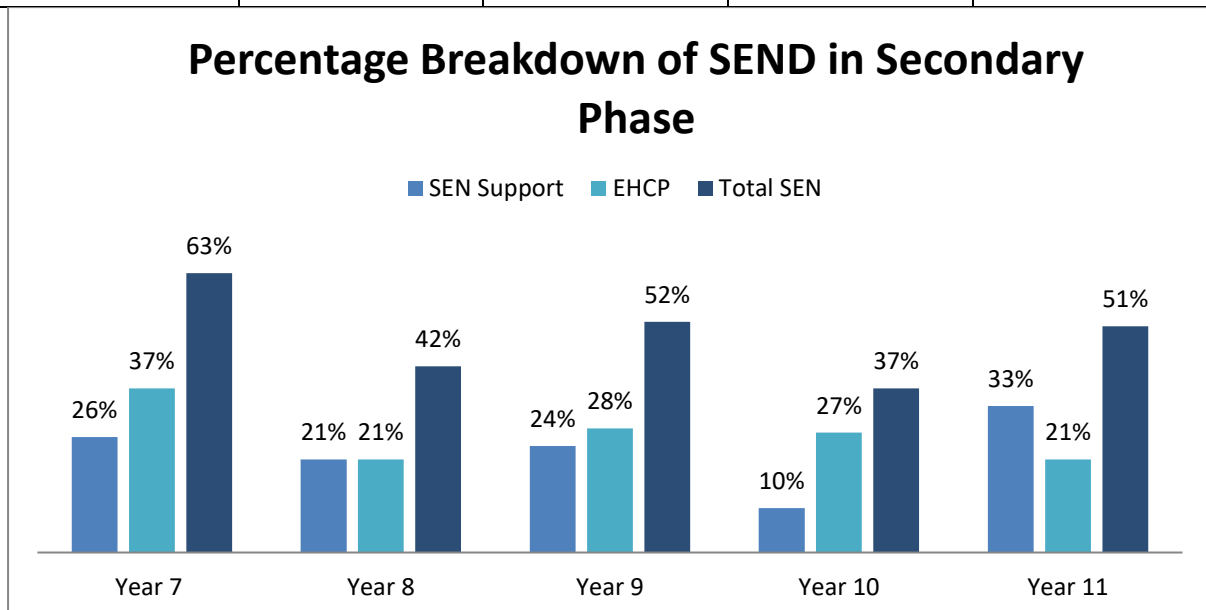


Phase	Category of Need	Number of Pupils
KS1 and KS2	Social Emotional Mental Health	20
	Moderate Learning Difficulties	21
	Physical Disability	2
	Speech Language and Communication Needs	1

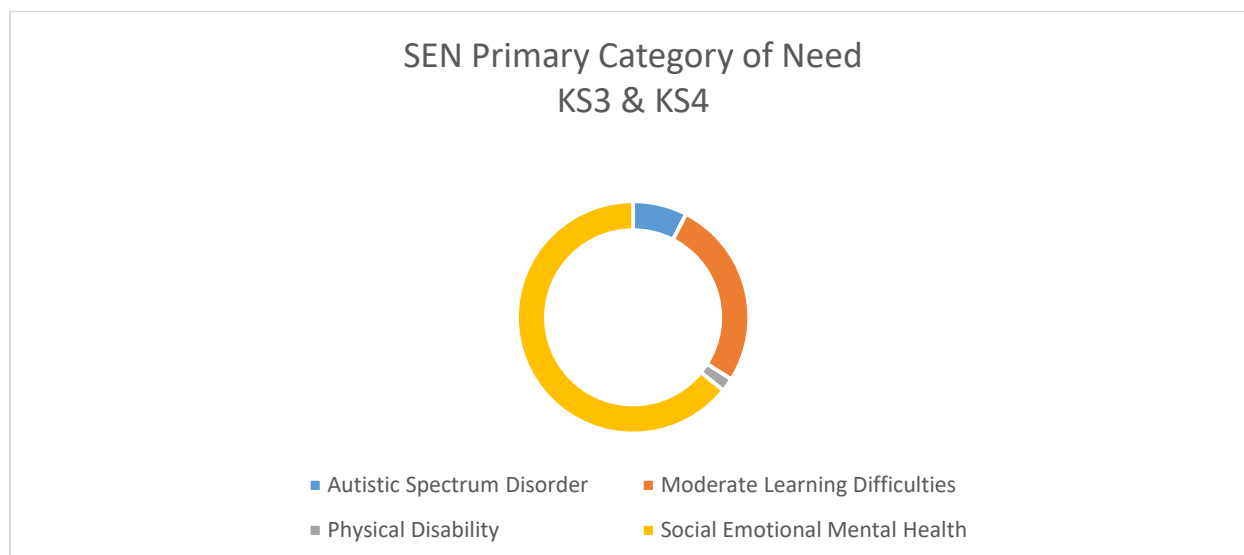
As can be seen in the diagram above there are two main areas of need, these being Social, Emotional and Mental Health [SEMH] and Moderate Learning Difficulties [MLD]. There are reasons that these areas may be prevalent in Children Looked After. It is quite common for Children Looked After to have experienced some form of trauma and attachment difficulties prior to becoming looked after. It is also quite common for children and young people to have missed schooling and so there are gaps in their learning. By identifying the areas of need, it is then more possible to provide support and interventions to enable progress and support learning and development.

Secondary Phase Key Stage 3 and 4 Numbers

Yr 7	Yr 8	Yr 9	Yr 10	Yr 11
11	8	12	8	12



The diagram above illustrates the percentage of each year group that has CLA with SEND. This is above the national average for schools. The diagram below further illustrates the categories of primary need for this cohort of pupils. In this cohort of young people, it is possible to see that SEMH and MLD are again take precedent as a primary category of need for these pupils.



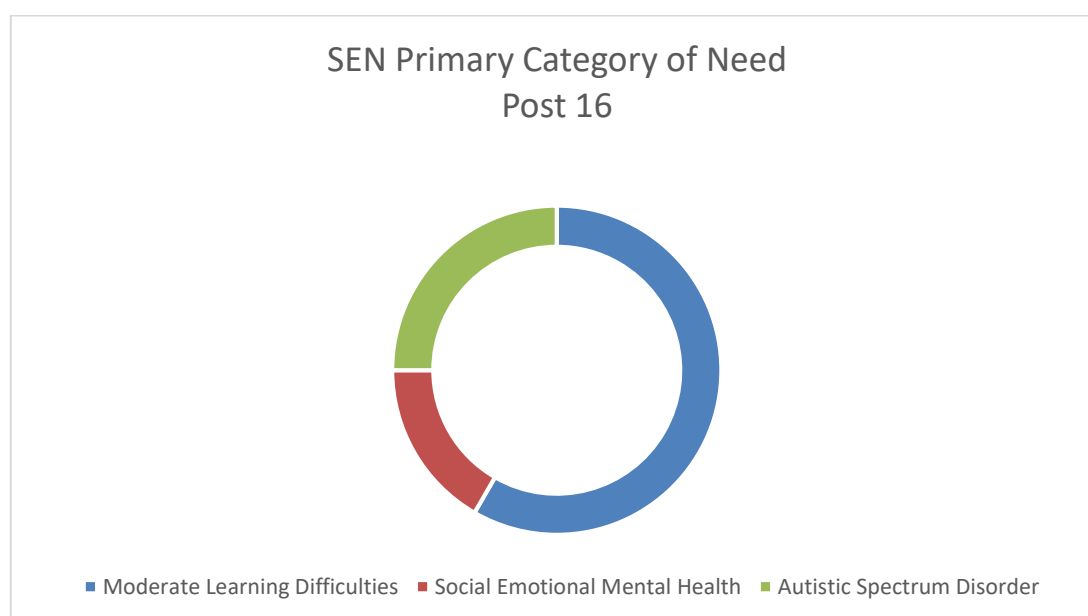
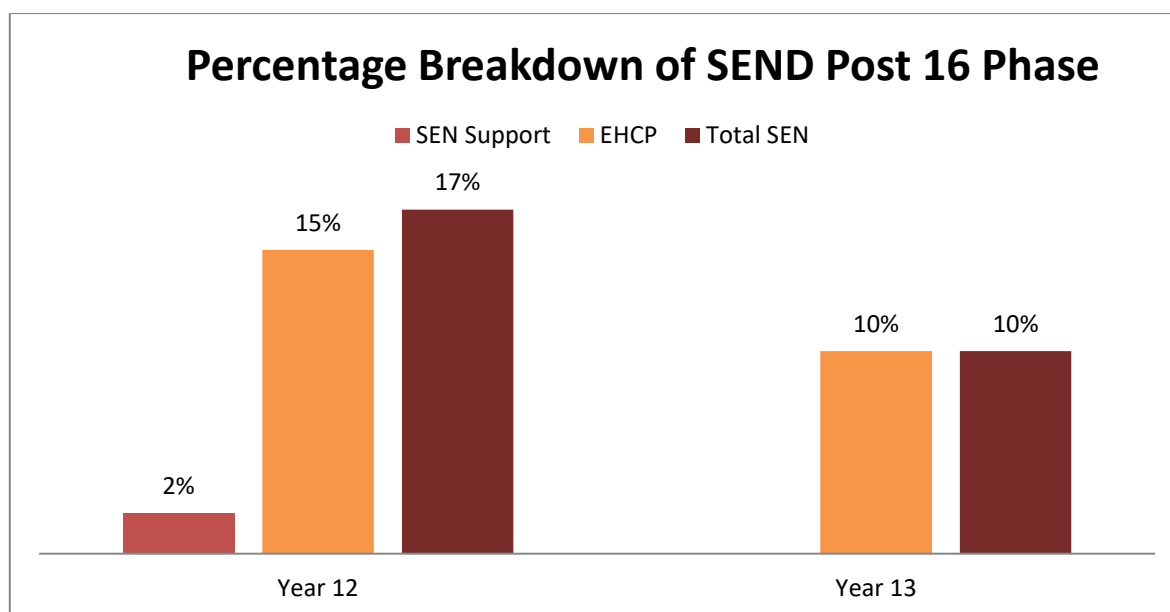
Phase	Category of Need	Number of Pupils
KS2 and KS3	Autistic Spectrum Disorder	3
	Moderate Learning Difficulties	13
	Physical Disability	1
	Social Emotional Mental Health	31
	Specific Learning Difficulties	3

Post 16 Phase

Post 16 Phase Numbers

Yr 12	Yr 13
7	5

As pupils progress into Post 16 education it is possible to see that fewer pupils are given additional SEN support in their post 16 provisions. It is usual to see that it is only the young people who have more significant needs continue to have this classification. Many of our pupils transition into post 16 education successfully. Those students with higher Education Health and Care Plan needs have specialised support. Effective transition into post 16 education is essential in ensuring that the right level of support is provided. Whether this be through specific teaching resources or deployment of adults or interventions.

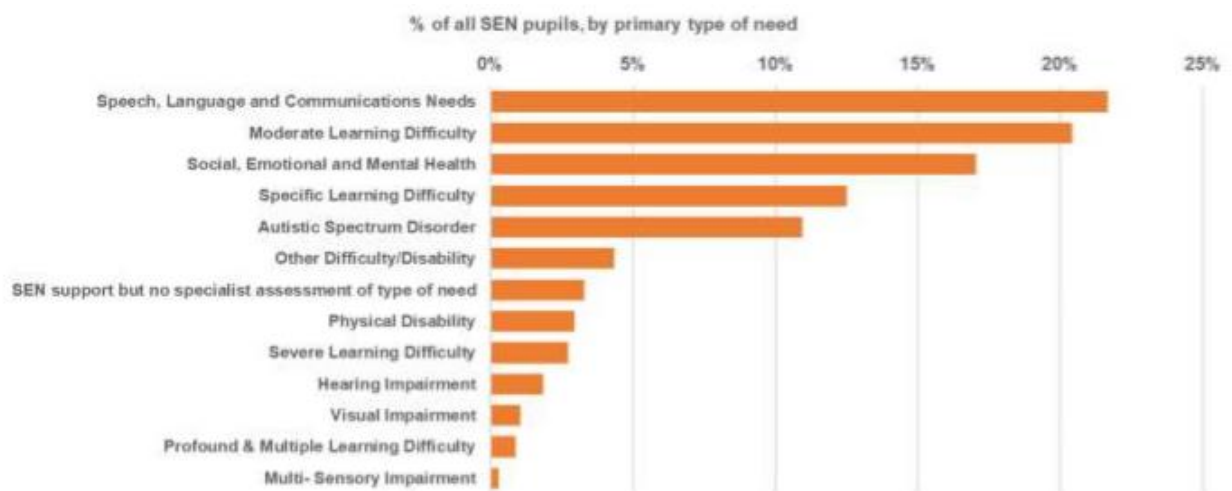


Phase	Category of Need	Number of Pupils
Post 16	Moderate Learning Difficulties	7
	Social Emotional Mental Health	2
	Autistic Spectrum Disorder	3

It would seem that as the students transition into post 16 the prevalence of SEMH needs diminishes. This could be for a number of reasons including that they are maturing in their development and more able to manage their emotions within a post 16 education context.

Comparison of Children Looked After Data with National Data Sets for SEND

The following information provides details of all pupils in the country who have SEN. This data is collected nationally and forms part of the Statistical First Release. This data shows that across all pupils with SEN, Speech, Language and Communications Needs is the most common primary type of need at 22% of pupils. This had previously been Moderate Learning Difficulty, which has decreased to 20%. This varies dramatically from Thurrock Children Looked After data whose primary area of need is Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH). As discussed above, this is most likely the case due to the impact of trauma and insecure attachments. In the figures below in Figure B: Speech, language and communication needs is the most common type of need among SEN pupils in State-funded primary, secondary and special schools, England, January 2019



Source: School census, January 2019

National statistics for all pupils show that, among pupils on SEN support, Speech, Language and Communications Needs is also the most common type of need, at 23%.

Of those with an EHC plan, Autistic Spectrum Disorder remains the most common primary type of need with 29% of pupils with an EHC plan having this primary type of need. This has increased from 28% in January 2018.

Figure C: The distribution of each primary type of need varies greatly between those who are identified as SEN Support, compared to those with an EHC plan State-funded primary, secondary and special schools, England, January 2019



Source: School census, January 2019

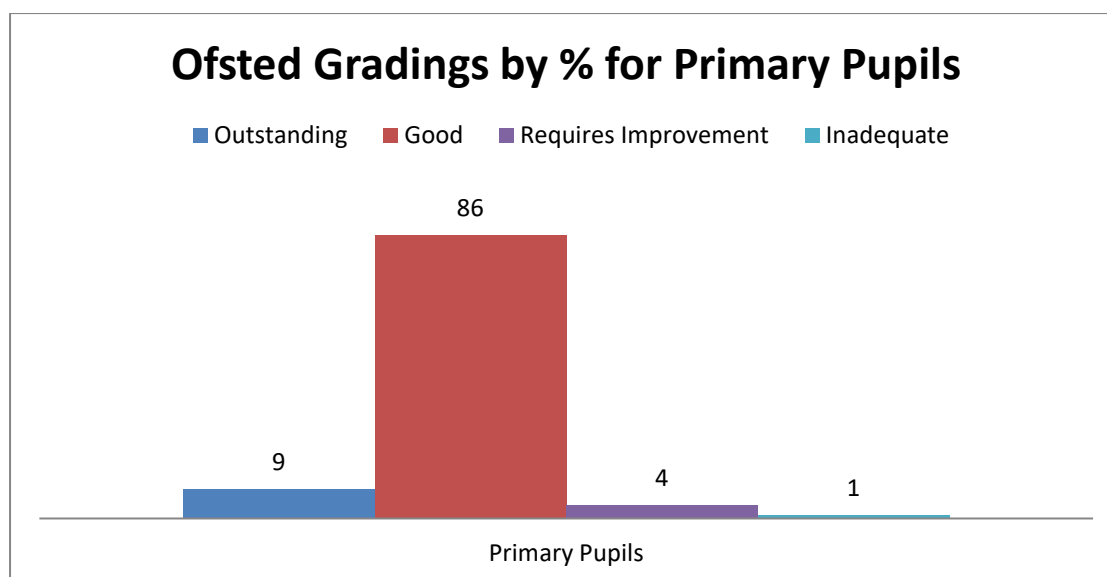
For CLA to Thurrock, the data for Children with a diagnosis of Autistic Spectrum Disorder [ASD] is very small compared to the national average. Thurrock CLA with a diagnosis of ASD is 12% compared to 29% nationally. Whereas, Thurrock CLA whose primary area of need is SEMH is 63% compared to 13.3% nationally of all children.

In total for Thurrock Children Looked After 39% of the whole cohort has been identified as having either an Education Health Care Plan or receiving additional help as SEN Support. The Statistical First Release data for the academic year 2019/20 for England showed that for all children 3.3% had an EHCP and 12.1% had SEN Support. This means that statistically, Thurrock CLA have a higher level of need compared to all children nationally. However, when we compare Thurrock CLA with all CLA nationally 9/20, there were 55.9% of children with a special educational need. Data shows that 27.2% had an EHCP and 28.7% had SEN Support. Therefore, compared to CLA nationally, Thurrock have fewer pupils with SEND.

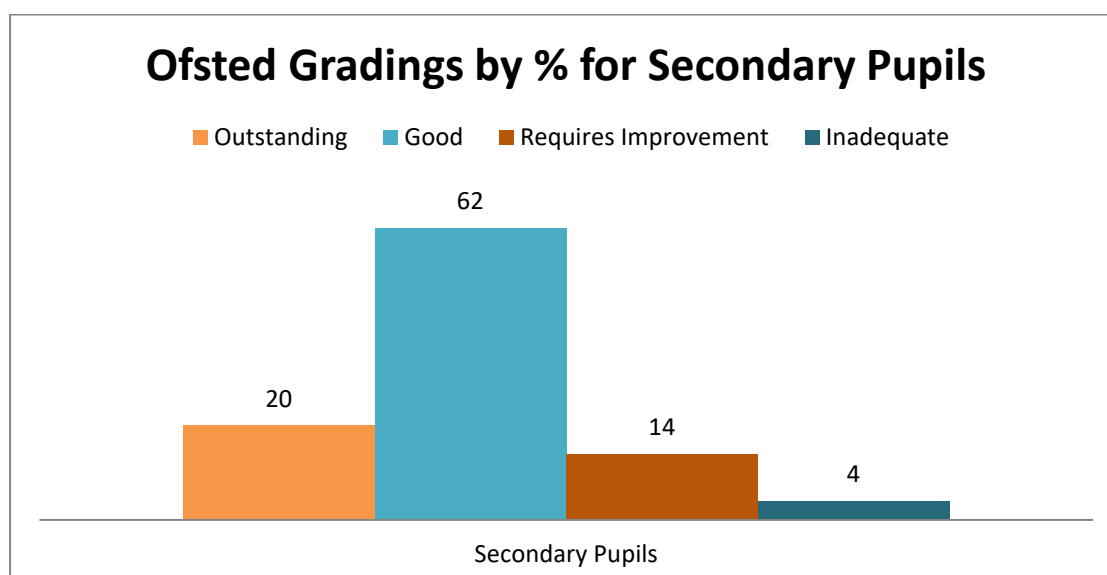
School Placement of CLA by OFSTED classification July 2020

It is important that our CLA attend a school that is graded by Ofsted as Good or Outstanding. Therefore, we track the grading of each school and educational establishment that our pupils attend. We only ever place a pupil into a school that has a grading of Requires Improvement if there are no other possible solutions. For example, if a child was placed in a stable care placement but there were no good schools in the area. Wherever possible, we seek places in good schools. There are situations where a pupil may be in a good school that then receives a poor Ofsted grading. We would not automatically move a pupil if they were happy and succeeding and if they were being well supported. However, we ensure that schools are closely monitored every term to ensure that our children and young people were making progress. The data below illustrates the gradings of schools our pupils attend.

Primary Phase



Secondary Phase

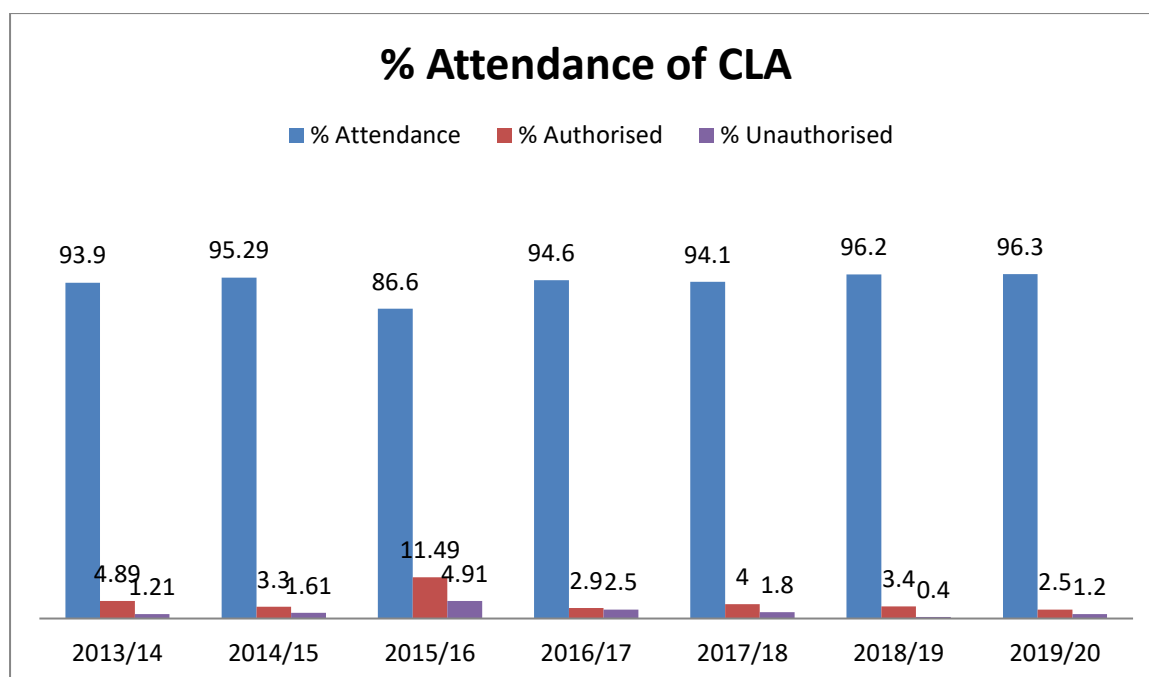


Overall School Ofsted Grading Year R to Year 11 is:

- 87% of pupils attend a school graded good or above this has increased on the previous year from 85.5%
- 71.6% attend a good school
- 15.3% attend an outstanding school
- 10% attend a school that requires improvement
- 3.1% attend an inadequate school

Schools graded less than good are visited by the Virtual School every term. This activity was still in place up until the point when schools were closed and we were in a national lockdown due to the Covid 19 Pandemic.

7. Attendance



The attendance figure of 96.3% represents attendance of school age pupils up until the national lockdown. There was a steady increase in attendance during the first part of the academic year up until national lockdown. There was also an increase in unauthorised attendance. This was due to some pupils who came into care with existing unauthorised attendance.

As a matter of course, the Virtual School track attendance through the collection of daily attendance data via an external provider called Welfare Call and through every pupils' Personal Education Plan. Any pupil who has attendance which is below 90% is classed as having persistent absence. Our attendance data is favourable compared to all schools nationally. Termly attendance data is reported to governors and the key stages are represented individually and then overall attendance rates are also reported.

In the academic year 2019-2020 up until the national lockdown there were 12 pupils who had persistent absence below 90% this equates to 6.3% of school age pupils, which is below the national average for CLA which is 10%. There are a number of pupils who had poor attendance prior to coming into care and they entered care in the late autumn term of 2019 and early spring term of 2020. A pastoral support programme is always put in place for students who are refusing to attend school and the Virtual School works closely with foster carers, social workers and their schools to support the child/young person. Attendance is also discussed at the PEP meetings and action plans of support are put in place.

Attendance is monitored daily through the use of Welfare Call. The Virtual School team monitors the attendance of priority CLA as identified by the Virtual School on a

weekly basis. Attendance monitoring for all pupils is conducted by the Virtual School Headteacher on a weekly basis to identify any concerns. The Virtual School receives daily updates from Welfare Call for any pupil who is absent or excluded. If a pupil is absent and this is unauthorised the social worker and foster carer is contacted by Welfare Call to find out the reason why s/he is not at school. This system compliments the safeguarding measures that are in place for individual schools and prevents delay when a student may be missing.

The Virtual School is supportive of the DFE Absence protocols and only supports holiday or absence in term time in extenuating circumstances and supports the school of the particular pupil if they are given an unauthorised absence if planned absence is taken without the school's consent. An attendance policy is in place and this is reviewed by the Headteacher annually and put forward to the Governing Body to approve.

During the national lockdown the virtual school quickly ascertained who would be participating with their school/college offer if it was provided. We maintained fortnightly or weekly contact with care placements to ensure that we were able to track the level of educational offer that was being provided. For those school age children who could access their school, we commissioned Welfare Call to check attendance. This was also in addition to the schools providing weekly data to the local authority and the DFE.

8. **Exclusions**

There have been no permanent exclusions of CLA for over a seven year period. Wherever possible we encourage schools to avoid fixed term exclusions [FTE]. After managing to reduce the FTE rate to the lowest it had been over a five year period in 2017/18 it has continued to increase.

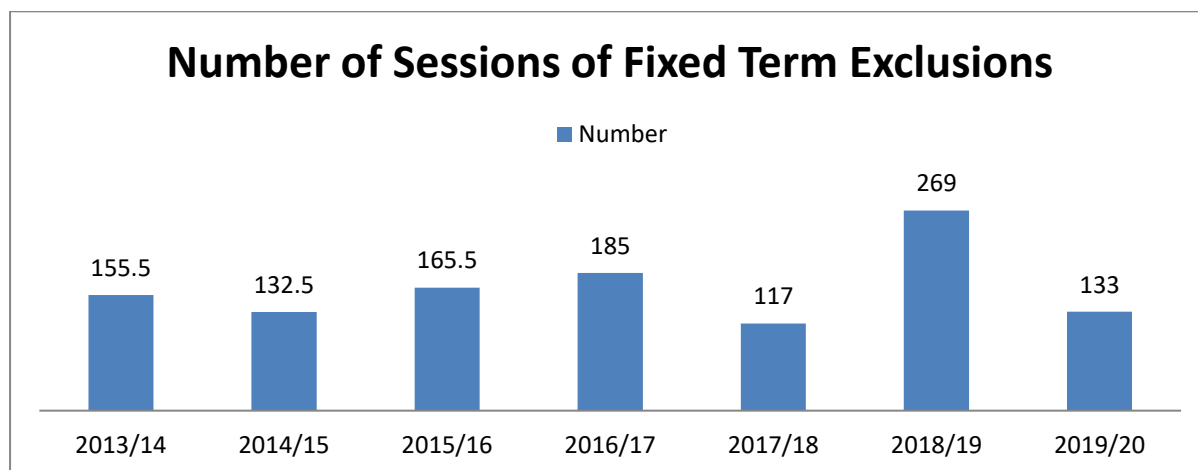
16 school age pupils out of the cohort of school age pupils have experienced a fixed term exclusion (FTE) during the course of the year. This equates to 7.9% of the cohort. This had increased from the previous 3.8% in the autumn term 2019. When comparing this to national exclusion data, secondary school fixed term exclusions in the Statistical First release of August 2019 stands at 10.13%. The 7.9% is still below this national figure, however, we are always aiming to reduce the number. There were some incidences this academic year of some new into care having a FTE both before and after becoming looked after. It would seem that this behaviour could have been communicating a more significant need relating to their home life and then responding when becoming looked after. The Virtual School work with schools to reduce fixed term exclusions, however, some of our pupils are participating in activities that would warrant the need for exclusion. We have managed to negotiate alternatives to exclusion off site through measures such as:

- Internal support
- Action plan meetings when excluded

- Alternative provision

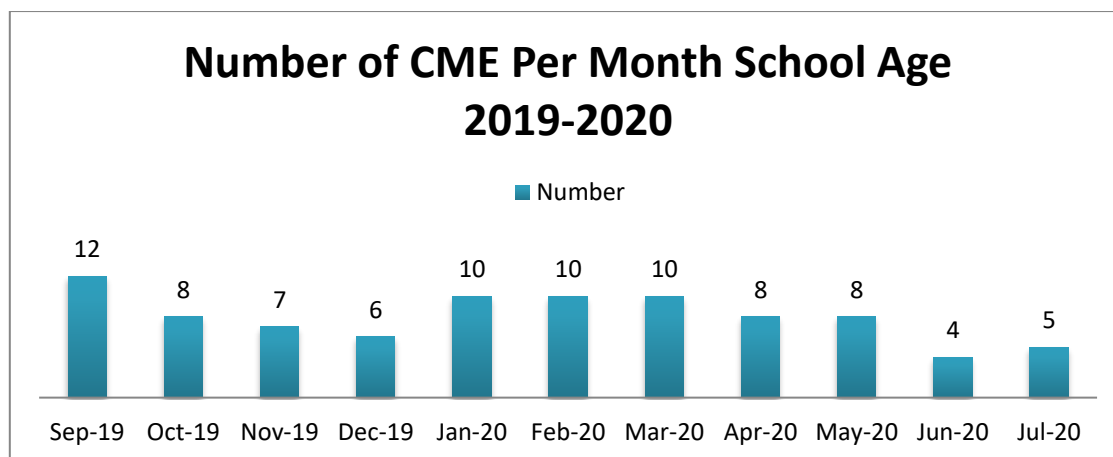
As a Virtual School we have planned clear actions to continue to reduce FTE. These being to:

- Continue to monitor FTE and continue to actively reduce the amount through support and challenge
- Offer Trauma and Attachment training to key staff who are experiencing behavioral difficulties with our pupils.



9. Children Missing Education [CME]

The Local Authority carefully monitors any child missing education for those CLA placed in and out of borough. The Virtual School produces weekly data for any child who is missing education due to lack of a school place or through extended absence. This data is shared and discussed in Directors Management Team monthly. Monthly CME data is available and provided to Governors on a termly basis. The Virtual School takes action which is individualised to meet the needs of the pupils and where necessary, works with the Admissions Team, Inclusion Manager and SEN Service teams in Thurrock and other boroughs to secure school places or alternative provision. For pupils who are without an educational placement, a Personal Education Plan [PEP] meeting is held to plan actions for how to secure education provision. Wherever possible the Virtual School provides tuition through commissioned tuition services whilst a student is between educational placements. In the academic year 2018/2019 a procedure was written to detail the specific process for the steps taken by all professionals to support the placement of CME in appropriate provision. This is in place and we use this to ensure that we can provide a timely response to supporting those pupils who may be CME.



The table highlights a fluctuation of figures and this very much depends on the profile of pupils coming into care and whether they have education prior to becoming looked after or if they have to move away from their school due to placement availability in borough. The figures are relatively low, however, the virtual school staff work very hard to access education as soon as they are made aware that there is a child missing education. It is more difficult to access education if a child/young person has Special Educational Needs because due to the consultation process. Covid 19 presented a further challenge because many schools suspended their admissions processes during the national lockdown. However, he had some very positive cases which were a success as some out of borough schools enrolled our pupils onto their school roll and then provided home learning for them during the lockdown period. The Virtual School were very supportive of this excellent practice that was pupil focussed and these schools were proactive in supporting our pupils.

10. **Child Sexual Exploitation [CSE]**

Particular attention is paid to Children Missing Education through lack of school place or poor attendance as this is a potential factor for making a pupil vulnerable and higher risk of CSE. The Virtual School works very closely with all services to minimise the risk of child sexual exploitation for our children/young people in and out of borough. The authority holds a fortnightly meeting where a range of partners from health, youth offending services, WIZE Up, the police, mental health, education welfare and education attend. In this meeting all vulnerable pupils are discussed and actions are directed to provide the necessary support. The Virtual School attend Strategy Meetings when required to discuss pupils at risk of CSE and when they are missing from placement. Separate data is available through the social care liquid logic children's system which details every child/young person's CSE risk assessment and actions taken to support them. This data is held and reported separately from this document. The Virtual School is not responsible for collating this data but can access it if required. The Virtual School has a clear Safeguarding Policy which considers CSE as part of this in line with Thurrock processes and policy.

11. Attainment Data of CLA

During to the cancellation of all testing and exams for the year 2020, there is no attainment data to report.

In line with Department for Education guidance, the Virtual School will not be publishing any data linked to testing or exams. However, the progress and outcomes of our pupils was still monitored very closely for this academic year and particular support has been provided for those transition from year 6-7 and year 11-12. We have worked with schools and colleges to support our pupils as they move to a new education establishment.

We have also worked with Designated Teachers to ensure that pupils who were affected by the cancellation of exams were supported and assessed fairly to provide a positive next step pathway. We contacted each school and discussed how they were going to be approaching the teacher assessment process and asked the Designated Teachers in that school to advocate for our looked after pupil. We did this to ensure that those who were making the decisions, were also reflective of the uniqueness of the situation and the challenges that our CLA face.

Planned interventions as a result of 2020

The Virtual School will continue with key actions that were begun last year and some additional measures are being taken.

We are continuing to:

- Attend Year 10 and Year 11 PEP meetings
- Ensure that schools provide robust Pupil Premium Plus information
- Link the quality of the PEP with release of Pupil Premium Plus funding
- Provide additional home tuition from the April 2020 for our Year 10 and Year 5 pupils
- Triangulate data predictions with further evidence such as work sampling
- Access exam stress counselling where necessary
- Provide support for Post 16 pathways
- Targeting tuition for particular students who are on the cusp of 4/5/C grades which will be additional to that received by the Pupil Premium Plus in school
- Complete home visits for particularly vulnerable students
- Provide intensive pastoral support alongside their school for high priority cases for those at risk of poor performance due to social and emotional difficulties.
- Provide Year 11 with revision stationary packs for the autumn term
- Continue to provide tuition support for those requesting this for resits in year 12
- Use Pupil Premium Plus funding from the summer term 2020 to be carried over to the autumn term 2020 to support post 16 pathways and enable the provision of resources to aide post 16 study

- Look at what additional support may be needed for KS4 to support English in particular to support progress and attainment in this area.

In addition we are:

- Providing termly Designated Teacher Forums and social worker forums to promote the educational outcomes of pupils by communicating key messages and training and to provide information advice and guidance for individual cases
- Supporting social care to minimise the change of school or college when there are placement changes

12. Summary of Actions for all Key Stages to improve 2021 data

Key Headlines of Actions for Supporting Testing in 2021

What are we doing to improve academic performance?

- Provision of Literacy Book Trust home learning resources to those aged between 3-13 years
- Provision of tuition for year 11 which started in the summer term 2020 of year 10
- Provision of tuition for year 6s over the summer term and in the summer holidays for those who requested this to support the transition into year 7
- Conducting termly school visits [due to Covid these may be virtual] for key year groups of children and those who are not making expected progress
- Creation of action plans for those pupils who are not making progress
- Creation of a specific section of the Personal Education plan
- Provision of tuition for those requesting it in Year 12 to support the transition into post 16 learning
- Evidencing the work of the Virtual School through PEPS, visit notes and case notes
- Development of SEND support materials to further improve the outcomes for this group of children
- Development of a range of interventions for certain year groups and needs
- Continuing the interventions and key actions developed over the previous years to build upon good practice and successful outcomes.
- Embedding the of the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaires [SDQ] for every pupil from year R to 17 years old and triangulating scores with other professionals to identify specific intervention

13. Case Studies

Case studies provide some insight into the individual work that is complete by members of the Virtual School to improve outcomes for children and young people.

Primary Phase Case Study

Background to case

This looked after child became CLA approximately 2 years ago. He had huge gaps in early developmental learning and milestones. He had virtually no early learning experiences and had experienced horrific trauma before coming into the care of the local authority. He started school in Thurrock in Reception and was extremely below the recognised developmental milestones by at least 2 years.

The Virtual School provided support to the school and social care to check how he was being supported in school through Personal Education Plans. We also supported with the application of an Education Health Care Plan [EHCP] to further support his learning and development needs. This was in the Spring of 2019.

Despite very high levels of support, the child was finding it difficult to cope in a mainstream environment and was at risk being excluded from the school. The Virtual School education adviser attended an emergency annual review of the Education and Health Care plan [EHCP] to prevent exclusion.

In the autumn term a place was secured at a specialist resource provision in Thurrock however the social care plan had changed and he was moved to a long term foster care placement in Sussex. Once he moved placements, applications for specialist school placements began. This process proved to be very difficult. Tuition was secured for him whilst he waited for a specialist school place.

This child was out of school for some months but just before Easter 2020 a place was found and the adviser worked with the Headteacher of the new school to secure a start date and transition plan.

Key Actions Taken By the Virtual School Adviser

- Liaised with school teams, foster care, and social care by attending PEPs, LAC reviews, annual reviews and professionals meeting.
- Wrote a letter of support for the school to help with the EHCP application.
- Supported the school with the collation of EHCP application materials and evidence.
- Attended school meetings and provided staff with resources and strategies to help them support the child in the classroom and around the school.
- Supported social care with specialist school choices once child had moved.
- Liaised with Sussex Special Educational Needs department on a weekly basis to keep in communication with progress of specialist school searches.
- Tuition was organised and the tuition reports were monitored each week and the carer was spoken to regarding progress or concerns.
- Liaised with fostering agency and supervising social workers keeping communication open and informing them of progress.
- Liaised with specialist schools in the Sussex area.

- Supported Sussex SEN with communicating with Thurrock SEN.
- Supported social care in finding a school for the child that would match needs.
- Liaised with the new school for starting dates, enrollment and transition arrangements.

Outcomes

- An appropriate specialist provision was found.
- The child is now attending school full time.
- Transport was also secured for this school placement for the child as it is some distance from the home.
- The care placement is now a lot more settled.
- The child is very, very happy in the new school and his needs are being supported appropriately.
- The new school, at his first PEP, commented on how he has adapted, settled and is developing relationships and trust with members in the school.

Impact

- Settled care provision where the young man is happy and secure.
- A very happy child who is engaging in school activities and is trying really hard.

Secondary Phase Case Study

Background to case

This young person is an Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Child who has been in care for 5 years. The Home Office queried the age assessment and ruled that the young man was a year younger than was first presented. This meant that at the end of secondary school, the young person was told that the Year 11 year had to be re-taken. He had planned to leave school this year to go to post 16 education. However, as his age had now changed. These post 16 options were no longer available until 2021.

Key Actions Taken By the Virtual School Adviser

- Met with the young person to gain views, opinions and long term goals.
- Extended tuition offer to include additional support for English.
- Purchased English as an Additional Language App to support English development.
- Contacted many post-16 and bespoke education offers to learn what could be made available for this young person.
- Organised meetings with all professionals to discuss what a provision could look like for this young man for the forthcoming academic year.
- Presented costings of various scenarios to the existing school and social care.

- Plans were put in place to facilitate a bespoke curriculum around the needs, abilities and wishes of the young person

Outcomes

- Virtual school signposted foster carer and school to some options for next year, this included a construction course which met young person's requirements to take construction after school. Young person is to retake year in current school and taking part in 2 days of construction level 1 and 2 at another site.
- Tuition provided by the Virtual School will continue to ensure language needs continue to be supported.

Impact

- Re-entering GCSEs and functional skills will provide the young person with the opportunity to retake courses that he otherwise would not have passed. This will improve his post 16 options and outcomes. The construction course is accredited and will allow him to move on to higher level construction course at post 16.

Post 16 Phase Case Study

Background to case

The young person had experienced difficulties during her secondary education. The young person had very low attendance and following being placed into care in year 9, she became a school refuser. Before completing year 11, the young person had experienced two manager moves and attendance and engagement improved. However, despite this progress, she did not achieve the grades she was predicted in her GCSE exams.

For post 16, the young person enrolled at a local college and started a level 1 course. Unfortunately she was not able to access her first choice of course. Due to low numbers for enrolment on this chosen course of study, the college were not able to facilitate this course running. This meant our young person had to start studying for her second choice subject and was required to re-sit GCSE maths and English alongside this. As a result of this, the college started to raise concerns quite early on in the term that attendance and punctuality were poor. This then led to a number of behaviour concerns and our young person was placed on stage 1 behaviour plan.

Despite an initial improvement, our young person began to miss lessons again and stopped completing work in class and missed all deadlines on assignments and modules. As a result she, was eventually put on a stage 2 behaviour plan. This threatened her place at college and her chance of going back to the same college the following academic year.

Key Actions Taken By the Virtual School Adviser

- Organised meeting with the college to discuss current concerns.
- Attendance at PEP meeting for the young person
- Discussion with young person about the current situation and to gain her views. In this conversation she became very upset and felt the concerns were not justified.
- Gathered evidence from the college to show the young person to reaffirm concerns as to why things have escalated and then discussed possible reasons as to why.
- Attendance at a stage 1 behaviour meeting and supported the college and young person to set realistic targets for her.
- Shared information about our young person with her class tutors and discussed strategies regarding engagement that had been previously successful.
- Organised and attended a collaborative review meeting with the carer, Designated Teacher, the head of faculty and the young person.
- Text messages sent to our young person to stay in touch and ensure attendance at classes.
- Regular contact with the Designated Teacher and teaching staff to check on attendance and completion of work.
- Attendance at stage 2 disciplinary meeting and stage 2 review.
- Advocated for our young person at all meetings to prevent further suspensions or an exclusion from the college altogether.

Outcomes

- The young person had her voice heard and had been a part of all meetings.
- Concerns were discussed and a pro-active approach was taken, particularly once relevant information has been shared with tutors.
- A collaborative approach to working with the young person and adapting new strategies to promote engagement were taken.
- Realistic targets were set on the stage 1 plan and subsequently when moved to a stage 2 plan.
- Regular communication between the adviser and the teaching staff in place.
- Outcomes of recent review meetings were very positive, tutors have been more positive and attendance and punctuality improved.

Impact

- Young person avoided an escalation to a stage 3 behaviour plan and potential withdrawal from college.
- Young person has a realistic plan in place to follow to ensure successful terms at college.
- Achievable targets were in place and young person was aware of, and has been a part of, the process and target setting.
- Professional network for the young person remains in place and communication is robust.
- Young person has now completed all work which has been submitted for assessment. Anticipated progression to next level at this college.

14. **School Improvement Priorities**

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

Key Priorities for 2019-2020 were

To improve achievement of all pupils by:

[KP 1] Improving the attainment and progress of Children Looked After (CLA) to be in line with or above the national average outcomes for CLA for all Key Stages

Due to Covid 19 and the lack of national testing. It is not possible to measure this target due to lack of data. Our past 3 years of historical national data shows an improving picture year on year and we our children perform better at national testing compared to CLA nationally. The gap against non-CLA is also closing over this 3 year period.

Using the Key Stage 4 results that have been provided to us by schools, our CLAs in Year 11 in 2020 have also improved their performance compared to previous years.

What Next?

- *Plan for academic year 2020-2021 in relation to supporting transition back to education, improving attendance and supporting progress.*
- *Monitoring and implementing interventions for the academic year.*
- *Monitoring how schools are using the 'Catch Up' funding to support pupil progress*
- *Use of Pupil Premium Plus to support any gaps in provision*

[KP 2] Reduce the number of fixed term exclusions across the academic year to maximise educational outcomes

Our attendance rates have improved again this year up until the national lockdown period. The rate of fixed term exclusions was also reducing from the previous year and the amount of CLA excluded is below the national figure.

What Next?

- *Monitor the rate of exclusion and reasons for exclusion in forthcoming year*
- *Provide challenge and support where exclusions are taking place*
- *Develop strategies and possible interventions to support behaviour*
- *Provide trauma and attachment training to schools/colleges in order to provide a more trauma informed approach*

[KP 3] Continue to embed processes of measuring the progress of CLA pupils in each cohort as evidenced through quantitative data and soft outcomes data so that poor progress can be supported

This is now fully embedded into the work plan of the virtual school. A range of data is produced which measures attainment and progress data from schools. Additionally individual progress towards the achievement of PEP education targets is in place. The Virtual School have purchased a programme called B Squared for SEN pupils which measures small steps of progress. This was purchased in February 2020 and we had just started using this with some schools when the lockdown occurred. However, we have plotted all of our pupils onto this system and we are using this programme to monitor the small steps of progress made by SEN pupils.

What Next?

- *Embedding B Squared as a form of assessment to use alongside existing measures used by schools*
- *Change the attainment and achievement section of the PEP to enable schools/colleges to have a more cohesive approach to recording this data onto the PEP*
- *Adapt the extra support section of the PEP to create a provision map of interventions for all our pupils in order that we can identify gaps, challenge these gaps and then work at developing support to address them.*
- *Create phase data packs each term which detail a range of data to evidence progress and identify gaps*

[KP 4] Continue to raise the profile of mental health and interventions to support the outcomes of CLA

The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire [SDQ] score is now fully embedded in the practice for schools and colleges to record every term as part of the PEP. Social care have requested for this to become standard practice for social workers and carers too so that there is a triangulation of up to date scores every term. We share our data with social care and this is used to aide discussions at the monthly SDQ panel meeting. The Virtual School attend this meeting to discuss pupils in need of the most help.

During Covid 19 the PEP was amended to include specific questions relating to the impact of the lockdown on mental health and well-being. There were also sections about physical health as these can have a direct correlation. The virtual school worked closely with carers to support any areas they or their children/young people needed support with.

The Virtual School also made contact with the School Emotional Well-Being Team to access any resources they were providing. The Virtual School provided a list of resources and ideas to carers to do at home with their children and young people to promote positive emotional well-being.

We also provided Trauma and Attachment training to over 60 school and college practitioners to enable them to have a more trauma informed approach when their students returned to school.

The impact of lockdown was also considered in terms of the provision of enhanced transition plans for those pupils that needed this.

What Next?

- *Continue to collect and track SDQ data for all pupils*
- *Attendance at monthly SDQ panel*
- *Creation of a new section on the PEP to include a signs of safety approach where the PEP minutes reflect discussions about mental health and well-being and where support is needed.*

[KP 5] Continue to embed processes to support the provision of educational duties linked to Previously Looked After Children [PLAC]

The Virtual School has a personalised approach to this for the families that may require our support. This is on a case work basis where we can offer information, advice and guidance in line with our statutory duties.

What Next?

- *Need to continue to develop ways of sharing information to a broader audience*
- *VS team need to attend specific PLAC training e.g. with adoption agencies or BAAF – this did not happen last year due to Covid 19*

[KP 6] Continue to embed process of quality assurance of educational provision

In the academic year 2019-2020 the Virtual School commissioned an independent adviser to quality assure all of the alternative provision that our pupils attended. This was in order to ensure that these provisions were providing a good quality of education. As a virtual school we conducted a range of visits to schools/colleges to monitor provision and we evidenced this challenge and support in visit notes. We also RAG rated every establishment that our pupils attended.

When Covid 19 occurred the Quality Assurance was maintained in a virtual format and the Virtual School attended over 90% of all PEP meetings to monitor provision during the lockdown period.

Where appropriate the Virtual School team provided direct challenge to schools in order to ensure that they had provision which our most vulnerable young people could attend. This prevented care placements from ending due to pressures caused by children and young people not attending school.

What Next?

- *Continue school/college based visits (this may be virtually due to Covid)*
- *Track schools/colleges that need to have more formal contact*
- *RAG rate settings according to quality of provision and provide challenge and support for those causing concern.*

16. **Allocation and Impact of the Pupil Premium**

The management of the Pupil Premium Plus grant for Children Looked After is detailed in the DFE guidance [Pupil premium grant 2019 to 2020: conditions of grant](#) and [Pupil premium: virtual school heads' responsibilities](#).

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

Settings receive £1,800 which is released in three equal installments of £600 every term. The Virtual School Headteacher tracks spending on a termly basis in line with the quality assurance process of PEPS. This tracking centres on how this money is raising the achievement of the child/young person and assesses if funds are being used appropriately. This process, alongside the PEP process is supporting the pupil to have targeted support and intervention which directly affects and plans for his/her academic and overall school achievement with a personalised approach. It is enabling the Virtual School to be updated on progress data and enables discussion with the school to centre on appropriate intervention. This system promotes accountability and improved dialogue in how to raise attainment and achievement and narrow the gap. [Separate Pupil Premium documentation is available on request].

In June 2020 the Virtual School Headteacher presented a detailed Corporate Parenting report which showed the individual spending for each year group. It also shared the detailed spending of the pupils premium plus top slice and provided a strategy for the spending 2020/2021

Overview of Spending by the Virtual School

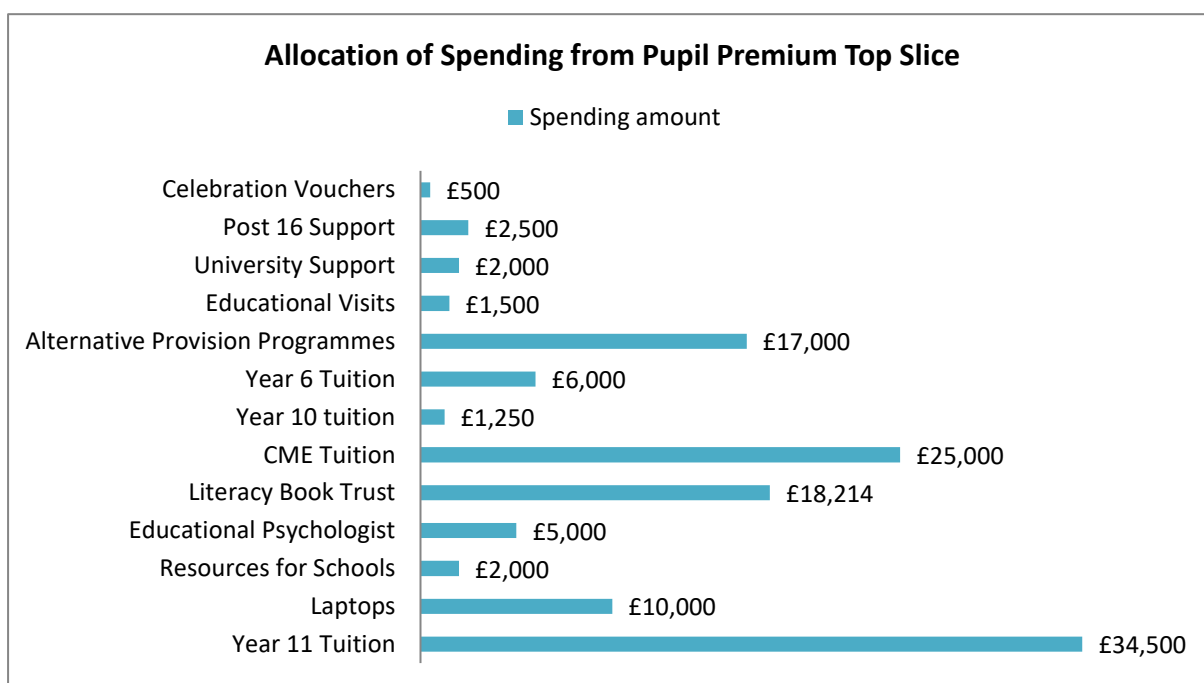
The Virtual School top sliced £500 per pupil for the academic year and used this to provide resources to support the most vulnerable in the cohort. In the financial year 2019-2020 this has amounted to £125,500. Of this £125,464 has been spent at the close of the financial year.

It is important to note that the allocations from the DFE are based upon the number of looked after children during the period of the census. It does not take into consideration the number of pupils who leave care during a year, or who come into care. All of these pupils are eligible for PP+, even if they are in care for 1 day. As mentioned above we were allocated funding for 251 pupils. This figure was based upon the census return.

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

When a pupil leaves care during an academic year the school/educational placement receives the remaining amount of PP+ up to the sum of £2,300. This is to cover any shortfall in funding in the interim between leaving care and being eligible for PP+ funding for being Previously Looked After [PLAC]. Schools are able to claim for additional funding to meet the needs of the pupil in excess of the allocated £1,800. This is used to support those pupils who have high needs and need significant intervention to remain in school. This has proved to be a very successful use of the top slice as this has ensured that we have had zero permanent exclusions.

Additional funding from the PP+ top slice has also been used to provide a range of specific interventions detailed in the next section and further plans for this are shown in the spending strategy plan for 2020-2021 which was shared with the Governing Body.



Further information is available in the Corporate Parenting Report and subsequent appendices dated 9th June 2020.

It is relevant to note that during the national lockdown. Schools were advised that if our pupils were attending the establishment or that the school needed PP+ for additional support, they could apply for the £600 for the summer term. However, schools were also advised that they could decide to defer the summer term payment and apply for £1200 in the autumn term. The rationale for this is to provide additional resources at the time they will be needed to support transition back into school and additional educational interventions if necessary to support progress.

17. Quality Assurance of Personal Education Plans

The Personal Education Plan [PEP] is a key document to support the child's/young person's education. Where possible the Virtual School attends specific PEP meetings. This is further detailed in the Roles and Functions of the Virtual School document. It is also important that the Virtual School attends PEP meetings for particularly vulnerable students or when a potential issue has been identified. For example, concern with progress. The Virtual School team is responsible for Quality Assuring [QA] every PEP. We have introduced a specific protocol around PEP quality assurance and this has been shared with those who have joint responsibility for the PEP. PEP compliance rates have improved and now are consistently operating at 95% and above compliance for every child aged 3 to 18 years. A range of documents have been produced to aid the completion of high quality paperwork and the robust procedures have enabled to quality of PEP to improve.

PEP Compliance Data – Autumn Term

Month	Overall Compliance	Early Years - N2	Primary	Secondary	Post 16
Sep-19	96%	50%	94%	97%	93%
Oct-19	99%	90%	98%	100%	99%
Nov-19	94%	85%	100%	98%	71%
Dec-19	93%	100%	100%	96%	80%
Jan-20	93%	67%	95%	97%	85%
Feb-20	97%	50%	100%	97%	96%
Mar-20	91%	50%	84%	90%	90%
Apr-20	93%	71%	99%	91%	88%
May-20	93%	87%	99%	94%	85%
Jun-20	98%	100%	100%	97%	100%
Jul-20	93%	100%	96%	91%	91%
Aug-20	99%	100%	100%	100%	99%

The data in the table above represents the percentage of pupils aged between 3-18 who had a Personal Education Plan in time frame. As of the end of the academic year there was 1 pupil who did not have a PEP that had been reviewed in timescale.

Quality of Personal Education Plans

Month	Overall Good Quality %	% Amber	% RED	Not graded
Sep-19	75%	13.00%	8%	4%
Oct-19	71%	11%	14%	4.00%
Nov-19	68%	11%	11%	9.80%
Dec-19	64%	12%	17.50%	6%
Jan-20	64%	12%	11%	13%

Feb-20	67%	9%	17%	7.00%
Mar-20	67%	9%	17%	7.00%
Apr-20	74%	5%	16%	5%
May-20	79%	4%	11%	6%
Jun-20	81%	2%	6%	9%
Jul-20	86%	4%	5%	5%
Aug-20	86%	4%	5%	5%

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

At the end of August 2020, there were 21 children/young people who had a poorly graded PEP. The reason for this is due to not meeting the criteria standards that are in our Quality Assurance Guidelines. A PEP is rated as red if there are no minutes or if the PEP lacks the child's views. This is an issue which needs to be addressed in the forthcoming academic year.

What Next?

- Quality of PEPs remains a focal point for improvement. In the forthcoming year the VS will continue to provide PEP training and support to social workers, schools and colleges.

18. **Post 16 Update**

The Virtual School supports pupils who have left Year 11 and are moving onto the next stage of their education. Pupils take a variety of paths either through level 1, 2 or 3, FE or HE qualifications. Others combine apprenticeships with obtaining qualifications. Every pupil is supported appropriately to create the next step that is suitable for them. Conversations regarding post 16 pathways are discussed in Year 10. Transition is discussed before the student leaves Year 11 and students are supported with applying for college positions and courses. After the students receive their qualifications they are further supported to apply for places again if they were unsuccessful with their original choice and all can access support from the Virtual School 16+ Education Adviser if necessary with activities such as applying for a bursary, receiving additional tuition, interventions and attendance at disruption meeting with colleges and employers. Further Education Personal Education Plans are put in place for every student, even those without an educational placement. The Virtual School works closely with the aftercare team to support pupils in Year 13 and beyond. In the Year 2018/19, 12 pupils are currently in university with a further 5 who started in 2019/2020. We are expecting that for the academic year 2020-2021, 3 pupils will be starting university.

During Covid 19 we supported our year 11s who were transitioning into year 12 with tuition if they requested this. This was to support their re-sits and preparation for year 12 study. Our Year 11's did not access school during the national lockdown so the pupil premium plus funding has been carried over so that the £600 can support them in their Post 16 studies.

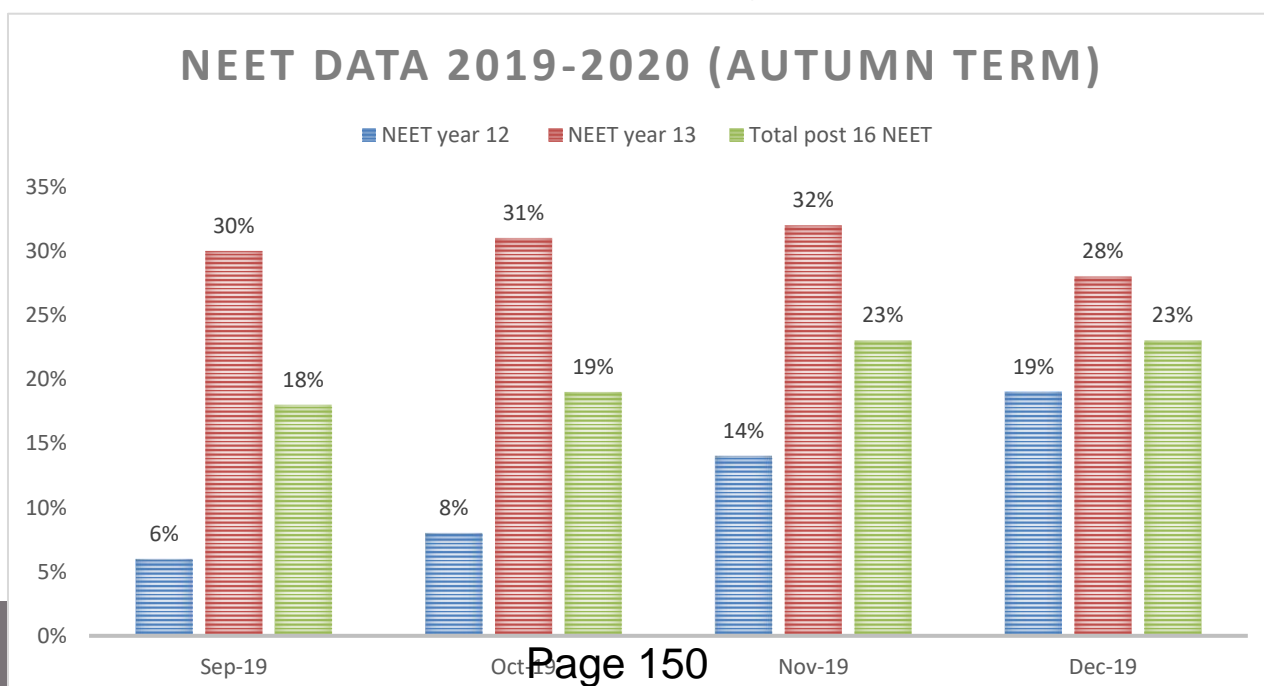
Extensive transition work took place over the summer period to ensure that our Year 11s who were transitioning into Year 12 were supported and that they had the opportunity to discuss their plans moving forward. The Virtual School Headteacher wrote to every Year 11 to explain what the cancellation of their exams really meant and how we would be supporting them moving forward. Our Year 12s and 13s were also supported in terms of their next steps and how they could complete their college courses during lockdown.

19. **Not in Education Employment or Training [NEET]**

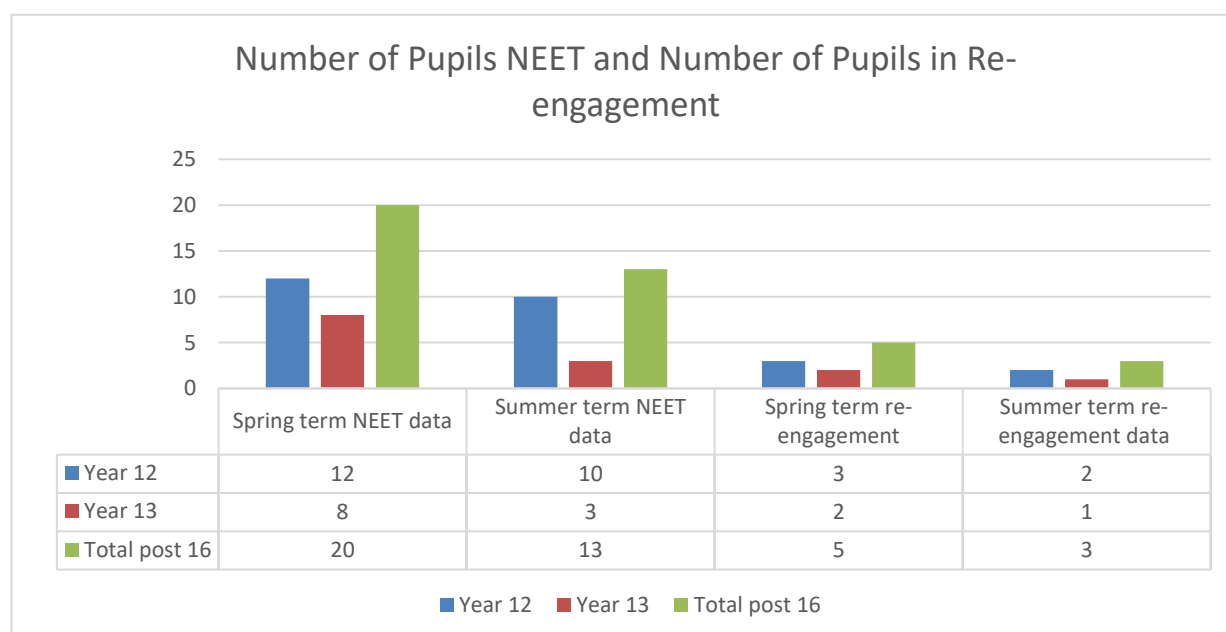
The Virtual School closely monitors any post 16 young person who has CLA status and who is NEET. They are monitored fortnightly and the Post 16+ Education Adviser works with the young person, social care, personal advisors and local colleges and businesses to create the best possible opportunity for the young person to be placed in education, employment or training. NEET data is provided to the Virtual School Governing Body every term as part of the Headteacher's report. The NEET and EET figures supplied in the graph below are specifically only for the children in the Virtual School cohort and would therefore see high in comparison with the national figures. In the summer term, data for those who are NEET but taking part in engagement activities, as defined by the DFE, have been included.

Not in Education, Employment or Training Data

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



	Number of Young People	%
Year 12 NEET Spring Term	12	30
Year 13 NEET Spring Term	8	16
Total Cohort NEET Spring Term	20	23
Year 12 Re-engagement Spring Term	3	7.5
Year 13 Re-engagement Spring Term	2	4
Total Cohort Re-engagement Spring Term	5	6
Year 12 NEET Summer Term	10	25
Year 13 NEET Summer Term	3	6
Total Cohort NEET Summer Term	13	15
Year 12 Re-engagement Summer Term	2	5
Year 13 Re-engagement Summer Term	1	2
Total Cohort Re-engagement Summer Term	3	3



Across the course of the academic year 2019-2020 there was a reduction in NEET data by 5% for Year 12 and by 10% in Year 13.

What Next?

- Ensure that all NEET pupils have a NEET action plan which is reviewed every month
- Provide challenge to semi-supported accommodation key workers to ensure they are promoting EET to our young people

- Liaise with social care to check that mental health and well-being is being supported
- Create a monthly NEET strategy meeting where cases can be discussed and problem solved to support the young person

20. **Support for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children**

This year has seen a decreased demand for the Virtual School team to support Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children [UASC]. We currently have 9.4% of our cohort classified as UASC. The Eastern Region sharing protocol arrangements have enabled young people to be transferred to boroughs with fewer numbers than Thurrock. The number of UASC coming into Thurrock has not reduced, however, they now move to other boroughs. Our existing UASC pupils continue to do well in their colleges and schools and those who have been with us for over 12 months are making good progress with their English. One of our UASC has started university this year and achieved high teacher assessed grades.

20. **Virtual School Governing Body**

The Virtual School Governing Body [GB] was formed in the autumn term 2016. Meetings are held once per term. The Governing Body is used to hold the Virtual School to account and ensure that the team are maximising positive outcomes for CLA.

The members of this GB 2019/2020 were:

Chair: S Murphy [Director of Children's Services]

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

Headteacher: K Pullen [Virtual School]

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

In Borough School Representative Primary: N Shadbolt [HT Aveley Primary School]

Out of Borough School Representative: Vacancy

Out of Borough School Representative: Vacancy

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

Social Care Representative: L Froment – Service Manager Children Looked After Services

Staff Governor: G Page [Operations Co-Ordinator for the Virtual School]

The purpose of the Governing Body [GB] is to hold the VSHT to account and to ensure that clear and regular lines of reporting are in place. The VSHT prepares a range of documentation for the GB to approve and to question the strategy and decisions made by the VSHT.

In addition the VSHT reports to the Corporate Parenting Committee on a regular basis.

21. **Virtual School Specific Actions and Response to the Lockdown**

It was essential that the Virtual School were able to maintain support, advice and challenge to ensure that our Children Looked After were supported educationally during the national lockdown period. The Virtual School took certain measures to meet the changing demands of the service during this time.

Staffing

In terms of staffing we maintained existing levels of staffing. There were 2 members of staff and their families who were showing Covid symptoms very early on the lockdown period. These staff and their families were diagnosed with and treated for chest infections. The staff were able to work through their period of isolation and were not reported as needing to take sickness leave.

All Virtual School staff have remained working from home since the period of lockdown began. This has been in line with Thurrock Council policy. Before lockdown commenced, we had all performed a trial run in working from home to check that the systems could support this. We have provided our admin assistant with a work mobile to ensure that all calls to the work phone in the office can be redirected.

Arrangements for Home Working

All staff in the Virtual School were provided with the necessary equipment to continue to perform their roles in a virtual environment. They continued to attend meetings virtually and this was very beneficial to the work of the team. They were managing to complete more contacts with children and schools. This was due to the virtual nature of meetings which meant they did not spend time travelling to destinations.

Within the first week of lockdown, the VSHT completed a workstation assessment with staff and requested that they purchase a separate keyboard, a laptop stand and a separate mouse. Staff well-being and health and safety during this time has been addressed through formal 1-1 monthly sessions and weekly phone calls or group virtual meetings.

All team, pupil progress and strategic planning meetings have taken place virtually and this has been business as usual.

Emotional and physical health and well-being has been discussed and supported in order that staff are using available resources and planning their diaries to ensure that there are taking the relevant well-being breaks. They have been accessing the Thurrock resources and training that has been offered.

Virtual School Service

We considered this to be business as usual in all aspects of our work and we have worked creatively to achieve this. Personal Education Plan meetings took place and Virtual School staff led on these. The team were able to attend key meetings using conference calls or Microsoft teams so strategy meetings, LAC reviews, EHCP reviews, Risk Management Panel, Placement Panel, SDQ panel and LAC Health Steering group were attended. With less travel, the staff have had more capacity to attend more meetings.

Usual processes were maintained including the quality assurance of PEPs, tracking pupils, supporting admissions and ensuring that individual needs are being met. A key aspect of the work has also been to challenge and support when we have found that needs are not being met.

Covid 19 Strategy and Virtual School Response

There were a number of actions that the Virtual School took as the result of schools closing and lockdown being imposed.

For example:

- A letter of guidance was sent to social care and the carers to decide whether or not children and young people would be accessing an educational offer.
- Every family and social worker was contacted to check the status of children/young people.
- Every pupil was RAG rated to gauge the level of concern we would have and highlight where our initial support/challenge needed to be focus on.
- Carers were asked to provide daily or weekly updates to inform the VS as to the progress that was being made as pupils stayed at home,
- The team created a COVID 19 PEP which catered for pupils being educated at home.
- The team created a suggested list of activities and online learning sites to access for each phase.
- The team created a set of mental health activities and access to support to provide carers and pupils with information.
- The carers have been contacted to provide SDQ data to the Virtual School as part of the termly PEP so that we can then highlight those pupils needing the most emotional well-being support.
- Year 11 and Year 13 pupils were written to regarding the assessment arrangements as exams were cancelled. Tuition support remained in place for those who requested it.

- Year 6 pupils have maintained their tuition offer for those requesting it to support transition into year 7.
- Current Year 5 and Year 10 pupils started their tuition offer to support assessments taking place in 2021.
- Those children who were CME have had their tuition offer continued until a school place was found.
- For some pupils, they needed to access school and so the VSHT challenged schools to extend provision in order to alleviate pressure on the care placement.
- Some of our CME who were allocated school places during lockdown were supported by the school they joined.
- The VSHT delivered laptops to those assessed as most needed (this was prior to the government laptop announcement).
- The team maintained telephone contact with those children needing support or to support their carers on educational matters.
- The Virtual School Headteacher provided a range of virtual Designated Teacher forum training
- The Virtual School Headteacher spoke with Councilor Holden regarding safeguarding the mental health of our children and he was also very interested to find out about the actions we were taking during the lockdown period.
- Supported transition back into schools/colleges where an educational offer is present to encourage our pupils to access their educational environment.

The VSHT attended a variety of Eastern region and National meetings to look at strategic responses since the Covid outbreak and was also able to share elements of our good practice with the Her Majesty's Inspector who inspected Children's Services.

The majority of our carers worked with their children and young people really effectively and were able to support them at home.

Additionally some schools were able to provide an excellent service of support and access to 'in-school experiences'.

The Virtual School priorities changed during lockdown to meet the unprecedented event that the Covid 19 Pandemic presented. These changed to reflect the needs at the time. These were to:

- Ensure that every pupil had an up to date PEP for the summer term
- Ensure that where an educational offer was in place, for as many pupils as possible to attend.
- Ensure that transition plans were in place for all key transition groups across the school.
- Focus on transition support for those pupils who may be experiencing difficulties.
- Ensure that key SEND actions are still in place during this time. E.g. EHCP reviews, appeals, consultations.

- Reduce the number of Children Missing Education.
- Be there for any carer, child or young person who needed our help.

22. **Additional Strategies to support the educational progress of Thurrock Children in Care**

Working in Partnership with other Teams in Thurrock Council and out of borough councils. Since the national lockdown these working relationships are managed through virtual means.

The Virtual School works with a range of teams within Thurrock to enable the best possible outcomes for our CLA. These include School Improvement and Inclusion, Social Care, Special Educational Needs including Educational Psychologists, Fostering, Health, Admissions and Education Welfare. This cohesive approach works together around the child/young person to create a supportive, knowledgeable level of service aimed at serving the best interest of the CLA.

The Virtual School also works with the relevant teams in other boroughs for our CLA who are placed out of borough.

Foster Carer Forums

These provide opportunities to share good practice, provide key messages and obtain valuable feedback and insight into the factors affecting the CLA. The VSHT has been meeting at Foster Carer support groups to provide key information about Pupil Premium Plus and Electronic Personal Education Plans. Foster carer forum meetings started in Spring Term 16 and will continue to happen once per term. These covered a range of topics including using EPEP. In addition the VSHT attends new foster carer forums and provides induction training. Moving forward, most training opportunities will be held virtually.

Designated Teacher Forums

As with the Foster Carer forums, the aim of this is to disseminate key messages, improve lines of communication, foster good partnership working and discuss issues affecting our CLA in schools. These are held every half term by the Virtual School Head. Moving forward, all training is provided virtually.

General Support for Foster Carers and Designated Teachers

The Virtual School provides a range of telephone and face to face advice and support and prides itself on being able to deliver a good level of service. Our approachable manner enables us to have good relationships with these key professionals to enable us to work together for the best outcomes of our pupils.

Social Worker Training and Support

The Virtual School adopts a flexible and responsive approach to the support and training needs of our social workers. The Virtual School Head attends briefings and team meetings with social care to disseminate good practice.

Liaison with Schools

This is a vital part in supporting the CLA as the Virtual School works closely with in and out of borough schools to ensure that pupils are supported within their educational placement. We offer support and advice on a range of areas such as behaviour, raising attainment and narrowing the gap. The Virtual School provides challenge and makes schools accountable to their statutory duties to ensure that pupils are treated and supported appropriately to meet their varying needs. Part of this also includes providing training to school governors if requested.

Book Trust Letterbox

In order to promote enjoyment and pleasure in reading and improve reading outcomes the Virtual School works in partnership with the Letterbox Club. The Letterbox Club is an award-winning programme managed by Book Trust, in partnership with the University of Leicester, which aims to provide enjoyable educational support for Looked After Children aged 3-13 years. Children and young people in care to Thurrock are enrolled onto the programme which entitles them to a colourful parcel of books, maths activities, stationery and other complementary materials once every month for six months, from May to October. All of the books in the parcels have been carefully selected by the panel at Book Trust for the children in the programme. The distribution of these was postponed during lockdown and the resources will start to be sent home in September 2020.

Advice and Guidance for previously looked after children

The Virtual School also provides advice and guidance for those pupils who were previously looked after. This would be particularly relevant for adopted children and their schools and families to ensure that their needs are appropriately supported. In line with the statutory guidance, the team have met with schools and parents to support the needs of their child/young person.

Attendance at PEP Meetings

Wherever possible and if appropriate, the Virtual School attends PEP meetings to model good practice, raise accountability, monitor the pupils' education and provision and ensure that the PEP process is thorough in supporting the CLA's education. We endeavour to attend the first PEP for every new CLA pupil and attend PEP meetings for those pupils who may be experiencing difficulties in their learning. PEPs are now being held virtually which provides the team with more capacity to attend more meetings due to less travel.

Tuition Services

Many schools use tuition as part of their pupil premium spend. There are occasions when additional tuition is needed. The Virtual School commissions the services of Fleet Tuition, Equal Education and Prospero. The One to One Tuition Programme for CLA was created to provide additional academic support for children who are not currently reaching their potential or may be missing school. Generally one-one tuition is used to help pupils who face academic barriers in any subject and the Virtual School works closely with schools, foster carers, social workers and the pupil to ensure that the right tuition is matched to needs. It is not possible to provide one-one tuition for every pupil and so this resource is targeted to suit needs and support requirements.

Attendance Monitoring

Thurrock Virtual School commissions the services of an external provider called Welfare Call to monitor the attendance of all of our Children Looked After in and out of borough attending schools and colleges. All pupils are monitored on a daily basis. If pupils are not attending school an alert is created to ascertain where the pupil is and why they are not at school. This promotes the safeguarding of our pupils and promotes good attendance. It also enables the Virtual School to monitor any exclusions, attendance or punctuality issues. The Virtual School has a clear Attendance Policy which provides a rationale behind why attendance is given high priority and this can be read in conjunction with this report.

22. **Professional Development of VS Staff**

As a Virtual School we take professional development very seriously as it enables us to reflect on our practice and improve our service. Our team have continued to access a range of online courses during the academic year. The VSHT is continuing to complete a masters degree relating to professional practice and care experienced children. Our Early Years and Primary adviser has started a course to become an attachment lead teacher. Additionally all staff have accessed training linked to Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, PREVENT and Fraud Awareness.

23. **Author of this report**

Keeley Pullen BA [Hons] PGCE NPQH

Headteacher of the Virtual School for Thurrock Children Looked After

Submission date for Governors Thursday 12th November 2020

Submission date to Corporate Parenting Committee January 2021

5 January 2021	ITEM: 9
Corporate Parenting Committee	
Joint Housing Protocol for Care Leavers	
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Not Applicable
Report of: Janet Simon, Strategic Lead Child in Need and Child Protection	
Accountable Assistant Director: Joe Tynan, Assistant Director of Children's Social Care and Early Help	
Accountable Director: Sheila Murphy, Corporate Director of Children's Services	
This report is Public	

Executive Summary

This report sets out how the Local Authority will meet its statutory duties and responsibilities to young people leaving care to support them into independent living as Adults.

Protocols should clearly lay out the processes followed by Local Authorities that support Care Leavers to transition to independent living and avoid homelessness.

1. Recommendation(s)

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

2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1 Local Authorities have a responsibility for developing and effectively delivering a joint protocol setting out how the authority will deliver the local accommodation offered to Care Leavers and prevent homelessness.
- 2.2 The [Homelessness code of guidance](#) was revised in 2018 to reflect changes introduced by the HRA. [Chapter 22 of the Code](#) focusses specifically on Care Leavers. The Code outlines the importance of joint working when planning housing options for Care Leavers and states that:

By working together, Housing Services and Children's Services can better ensure that as a corporate parent, the appropriate accommodation and support is available to Care Leavers. (Homelessness code of guidance - Chapter 22: Care Leavers).

Furthermore, the guidance also advises that authorities should have in place joint protocols which clearly outline jointly held corporate parenting responsibilities for Care Leavers. Joint protocols should cover:

- arrangements for achieving planned, supportive transitions to independent living
- identifying homelessness risk early and acting to prevent it
- providing a quick, safe, joined up response for Care Leavers who do become homeless

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

3.1 None

4. Reasons for Recommendation

4.1 To inform members of the work being carried out jointly between Children's Services and Housing to meet the housing needs of Thurrock's Care Leavers.

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

5.1 The protocol will be shared with Care Leavers and the Children in Care Council and their comments invited which will be incorporated into subsequent reviews.

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

6.1 Young People who have been in care of the Local Authority are a corporate responsibility and will have an impact on wider corporate policies and performance.

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

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

There are No financial implications to this report.

7.2 Legal

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

The Local Authority is required under section 2 of the Children and Social Work Act 2017 to publish a local offer, which sets out the services and the support available for care leavers.

The local offer should include information on how care leavers are supported to access suitable accommodation, including the support available from housing services. Joint housing protocols should be aligned with the local offer and can help to ensure that the commitments to support Care Leavers to access and sustain accommodation are met. Local Authorities should consider providing a link to the joint protocol within the local offer so that Care Leavers, advocates and other professionals can have access to the document.

The Local Authority is required to have regard to the Homelessness Code of Practice and this Code advises Children's Services and housing to have joint protocols for Care Leavers.

The provision of social housing to Care Leavers is undertaken in line with the Council's Housing Allocation Scheme as set out at Section 8 of the attached protocol.

The Local Authority must have regard to the Corporate Parenting Principles in Section 1 of the Children and Social work Act 2017 in the exercise of functions in relation to Looked after, relevant and former relevant children.

7.3 Diversity and Equality

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

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

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

This policy has implications for Children Looked After and the housing support they will receive from their Corporate Parents as they transition into adulthood.

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):

- [Care Leavers Offer - Thurrock](#)
- <https://www.thurrock.gov.uk/sites/default/files/assets/documents/housing-allocation-scheme-v04.pdf>

9. Appendices to the report

- Appendix 1 – Joint Housing Protocol. Included within protocol:
 - Appendix A – Definitions of Care Leavers
 - Appendix B – Legislation and Guidance
 - Appendix C – Personal Housing Plan
 - Appendix D – Housing Referral Form
 - Appendix E – Housing Allocation Scheme

Report Author:

Janet Simon

Strategic Lead Child in Need and Child Protection

Joint Housing Protocol

for

Care Leavers in Thurrock

Housing Protocol for Care Leavers who are in need of housing and tenancy related support

INTRODUCTION

Young people will have different emotions about leaving care and living independently. Some young people are excited about branching out on their own, taking the first steps to being fully independent. Some young people will be anxious about where they will live, some are nervous about living on their own, some are afraid they will be lonely and some young people will experience a mixture of all these feelings.

Thurrock Council are Corporate Parents for our young people who are leaving care and embarking on the journey to independence. Corporate parenting means local authorities doing the most they can for looked after children and care leavers, to give them the same opportunities as other children and promote the best possible outcomes for them.

Children's Social Care and the Housing Solutions Service have statutory duties to young people leaving our care, and other statutory and voluntary agencies provide a range of services to support them.

The purpose of this protocol is to set out how Thurrock Council, Children's Services and Housing Services will work together to provide an effective, consistent and co-ordinated response to Care Leavers in order to meet their housing and support needs and help them get the best start in life.

As well as setting out the roles, responsibilities and arrangements for achieving planned supportive transitions to independent living for Children's Social Care and Housing Service, this protocol will help to promote and safeguard the wellbeing of young people, ensuring that, when young people are ready to live independently, their housing needs are met and that they have the skills, knowledge, help and support to sustain their tenancies.

1. YOUNG PEOPLE AFFECTED BY THIS PROTOCOL

This protocol relates to young people who are owed a duty by Thurrock Council under the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000.

The purpose of the Act is to ensure that young people do not leave care until they are ready and that, when they have left care, they receive the support they require.

Under the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000, Children's Social Care has a duty towards 'Eligible', 'Relevant' and 'Former Relevant' children and a duty to provide support which includes appropriate housing (see **Appendix A** for definitions).

The [DfE Statutory guidance](#) on applying corporate parenting principles to looked after children and care leavers stresses the importance of joint working in supporting care leavers to navigate their way through the transition to adulthood:

Good preparation, a gradual transition and flexible ongoing support are key to helping care leavers achieve a successful move to independent living. Effective and proactive local authorities establish joint working arrangements between children's services, housing and other specialist services to help care leavers prepare for the realities of living independently, involve them in planning and decisions about their housing options, ensure suitable housing and support is in place, and are ready to respond with contingency arrangements if things do go wrong. (Applying corporate parenting principles to looked after children and care leavers - Chapter 2).

In Thurrock, around 80 young people, aged 16 or 17, are accommodated by Thurrock Children's Social Care are eligible for a care leaving service and will require support to access appropriate independent accommodation at the age of 18. There are also a number of young people (living in independent or supported housing, or remaining with foster carers under a Staying Put arrangement) who are aged 18 – 25, being supported by Children's Social Care and will, at some time, want to live independently and will require their own home.

2. SIGNATORIES TO THIS PROTOCOL

This Protocol has been developed and agreed by Thurrock Council Children's Social Care and Housing Solutions Service. It describes the joint working arrangements that have been agreed to ensure that, in Thurrock we provide a consistent and co-ordinated response to care leavers, including Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC), who are in need of accommodation and tenancy related support.

3. A CONSISTENT, CO-ORDINATED RESPONSE

It is essential that Children's Social Care and the Housing Solutions Service play a full and active role in assessing, assisting and supporting care leavers, and that the housing needs of care leavers are addressed and planned for before the young person leaves care.

In order to meet care leavers' housing and support needs, Children's Social Care and Housing Services must work collaboratively and proactively with housing and support providers to ensure an adequate range and supply of accommodation to meet the assessed needs of relevant children and other care leavers.

Children's Social Care will actively encourage young people to remain in a care setting until they are ready to live independently and will ensure that, by the time the young person is ready to leave care, they have acquired the vital skills and provided with additional support to successfully manage tenancies and live independently.

The objective is to find the most suitable accommodation for Care Leavers. This includes confirming that it is appropriate to each young person's individual circumstances and needs and that if social rented housing is required, the young person is supported to submit a housing application early enough to be offered housing when they are ready to live independently.

This Protocol aims to build upon existing good practice and will:

- Improve the way in which care leavers experience the transition from being "looked after to independence and how they are referred to, and access, housing and support services
- Improve working relationships between organisations and assist their understanding of one another's roles and responsibilities
- Ensure that Thurrock Council meets its statutory duties towards care leavers
- Standardise processes and procedures that are easy to follow
- Achieve greater consistency with support plans and access to services
- Fully utilise the skills, knowledge and resources of Children's Social Care and Housing Services in order to deliver effective and sustainable solutions for care leavers

4. PRINCIPLES UNDERPINNING THIS PROTOCOL

All of the signatories to this Protocol have agreed the following principles:

- The safety and welfare of the young person leaving care is paramount
- Every effort will be made through a joined up response to identify homelessness risk early and act to prevent it through early intervention and effective multi agency working providing a quick, safe, joined up response for care leavers who do become homeless

- Agencies will work together to assess and meet the needs of care leavers, and they will share information effectively
- Young people leaving care will be kept informed of all progress and decisions made
- Where a care leaver is homeless or at risk of becoming homeless, a lead professional will work with them. This will be their personal advisor
- Bed and Breakfast accommodation will not be used to house any 16 and 17 year olds. Children's services have a duty alongside housing and will therefore ensure they are provided with suitable accommodation that meets their needs

Support to young people will be in line with the [Care Leavers Accommodation and Support Framework](#) . There are five stages to the framework which reflect the journey of a young person as they leave care

- Training young people on tenancies and the housing market
- Involving young people in planning their accommodation
- Reducing the housing crisis by having emergency options
- Commissioning of a wide range of housing types
- Developing skills and confidence ahead of a move to independent living

5. MONITORING, EVALUATION AND REVIEW OF THIS PROTOCOL

To ensure that it remains relevant and effective, this Protocol will be reviewed 6 months after the date that it comes into effect, and then annually.

Children's Social Care will initiate the review and will be responsible alongside Housing colleagues for the monitoring and evaluation of the Protocol. If there are any changes to roles and responsibilities, the Protocol will be reviewed, amended and agreed by all parties.

Organisations and services involved with this Protocol are asked to provide feedback and performance information that can be collated and shared to improve services and inform and support collective commissioning intentions in Thurrock.

The Protocol can also help gather evidence to show, for example, the number of care leavers in Thurrock who are at risk of or homeless or in need of housing, and the number of care leavers whose tenancies break down. This evidence may highlight the need for new services and/or the remodelling or replacement of existing services.

6. WORKING TOGETHER TO ASSESS AND MEET THE HOUSING AND SUPPORT NEEDS OF CARE LEAVERS

The success of this Protocol is dependent on the efficient and effective sharing of information between organisations.

In order to accurately assess and meet a young person's needs, information relevant to their housing and support needs must be shared between Children's Social Care, Housing Solutions and housing support providers.

The young person's written permission must be sought before the exchange of information can take place and this permission should be obtained at the earliest opportunity and forwarded to the Housing Solutions Service for their records as part of the young person's application for housing.

Not all of the information in the young person's Pathway Plan is relevant to their housing application. However, it is expected that the care leaver will give their permission for all **relevant** information to be shared.

Children's Social Care will share information about care leavers for the purpose of identifying and referring those young people and facilitating the subsequent joint assessment of their accommodation and support needs. Children's Social Care and the Housing Solutions Service will share general information in order to support the review and evaluation of the effectiveness of the Protocol.

Although all care leavers must be asked for their permission to have their details shared – and may withdraw their permission at any time – all staff need to be aware of their information sharing obligations in relation to the safeguarding of young people, and be familiar with national guidance.

All information sharing must comply with the requirements of the Data Protection Act 2018, Thurrock Council's Information Sharing Protocol and the relevant Housing procedures in respect of confidentiality of information.

7. THE PATHWAY PLAN

The young person's Pathway Plan will identify their housing and support needs and what action is required in order to prepare the young person for independent living.

The Pathway Plan must reflect the young person's current circumstances, provide a clear analysis of the needs of the young person and set out how these needs will be met.

When Children's Social Care completes the Housing Referral Form (see **Appendix D**), with the young person a copy of the relevant section(s) of the Pathway Plan will be attached and the team will work collaboratively and proactively with the Housing Allocations Team to ensure that the young person's needs and circumstances are fully understood and reflected in the Housing Needs Assessment.

The information in the Pathway Plan and Housing Needs Assessment will inform the multi- agency approach that Children's Social Care, the Housing Solutions Service and other housing and support providers will adopt in meeting the young person's housing needs.

This multi-agency assessment will identify the specific needs of the young person and will be informed, as appropriate, by meetings with all parties including the young person.

8. PREPARING CARE LEAVERS FOR INDEPENDENT LIVING

Children's Social Care will actively encourage young people to remain in a protective environment until they have developed appropriate life skills, at their own pace, and are ready to move to independent accommodation, rather than at a specific age.

There is a lot that can be done to prepare young people, emotionally and practically, for independence and managing on their own. Social Workers and Personal Advisers will help young people to make informed choices about the type of accommodation that is best suited to them and the nature of the support they will need in order to sustain it.

The Social Work and After Care Teams will work alongside each young person to help them plan for their future, help them develop confidence in their ability to live independently, and help them develop the skills required to successfully maintain their own tenancy. This work will be recorded in the young person's Pathway Plan.

9. HOUSING OPTIONS FOR CARE LEAVERS

When a young person reaches the age of 18 years they are no longer 'in care' and they can access their own accommodation and hold a tenancy. Children's Social Care's duty to provide the care leaver with regulated accommodation will end when the young person reaches the age of 18.

There is a need to review individual young people's needs through the pathway plan and to ensure appropriate oversight of accommodation support. As every young person develops at their own pace, and some young people will need more time than others, it is not assumed that all young people will be ready to live independently when they reach the age of 18.

Depending on whether or not the young person is ready to live independently, there are a number of accommodation options available to young people who are aged 18 or over including:

- Remaining with former foster carers under a Staying Put arrangement
- Moving into supported housing
- Moving into social rented housing
- Moving into other independent living situations such as shared accommodation with other young people.
- Shared Lives arrangements and;
- Where a young person remains in full time education or is at University. Children's Social Care will support the young person to access adequate funds to secure accommodation suitable to their needs during term time and will support them to access accommodation during the holiday periods.

For those young people who are aged 18 or over and are not yet ready for independent living, remaining with foster carers or moving into supported housing may offer the best options for meeting their housing and support needs.

It is important, however, that Children's Social Care sends a Housing Referral Form to the Housing Allocations Team as soon as it is agreed that the young person will join the local Housing Register.

Where an application is to be made for social rented housing, Housing Allocations will liaise with Children's Social Care and the young person to discuss the young person's housing options, the applications process and how social rented housing

is allocated. As well as helping the young person to apply for housing, the Housing Service will monitor and oversee the rehousing process to ensure that a suitable offer is made on time.

Remaining with former foster carers (Staying Put)

Some young people may wish to remain living with their foster carer(s) when they reach the age of 18 and are no longer 'in care'.

A 'Staying Put' arrangement is only possible if the young person and foster carer are both happy with it – and it is essential that both parties understand the implications of the agreement they are entering into. Staying Put can provide the young person with the time they need to improve their independent living skills or complete their studies.

Moving into supported housing

Some care leavers will need supported housing to meet their needs. Supported housing is provided in various forms, ranging from shared houses or flats (where young people share all or some of the facilities) to supported housing schemes where young people live together, but may have their own flat) and individual, self-contained flats and houses. Residents of supported housing are provided with on-site or floating support.

During their stay in supported housing, the young person is able to practice budgeting, cooking, cleaning and maintaining daily routines. Support that they will receive will be included in their support plan and Pathway Plan.

The experience of living in supported housing plays an important role in building the young person's confidence and ensuring that they are prepared and ready for independent living when they move into their own accommodation. It also helps Children's Social Care to identify any specific needs that the young person has and to determine how these needs can best be addressed and met.

Moving into social rented housing

For some care leavers, social housing will represent the most appropriate housing option when they are ready for independent living. In order to be allocated a property, the young person will need to complete a housing application and join the local Housing Register. They will also need to arrange for Children's Social Care to provide the Allocations Team with confirmation that they are ready for independent living.

Thurrock Council operates a choice based lettings system guided by the Housing Allocations Policy. (See **Appendix E**). The policy recognises care leavers as a priority group and awards a reasonably high priority.

10. APPLYING FOR SOCIAL RENTED PROPERTY

Although care leavers can make a housing application without the active involvement of Children's Social Care or Housing Solutions Services, one of the primary objectives of this Protocol is to ensure that care leavers who require social housing are offered suitable accommodation at the time they need it and are provided with all of the advice, help and support they require in order to successfully manage and sustain their tenancies.

Housing Allocations and Children's Social Care have therefore agreed that, when a care leaver requires social rented housing, Children's Social Care will complete the online housing register application with the young person. This will be followed by a completed Housing Referral Form (see **Appendix C**), attach a copy of the relevant section(s) of the young person's Pathway Plan and e-mail it to the Allocations Team mailbox housingreg@thurrock.gov.uk.

Within 5 working days of receiving the Housing Referral Form, the Allocations Team will confirm its receipt, review its contents, request any additional information or documentation that is needed, and confirm the approval.

Care leavers will be actively encouraged to agree to the involvement and support of the After Care Team in their housing application. A young person will normally only receive an offer of social housing where it is assessed that they are ready for independent living and the young person's prospective landlord is satisfied that they are going to be able to comply with their tenancy conditions.

The services will work together in the best interests of the young person and ensure that the decisions made by Housing regarding care leavers is fair and reasonable.

The Allocations Officer will ensure that:

- The young person has made an online housing application
- All supporting evidence has been provided and the young Person's housing application has been registered, assessed and verified
- The young person is eligible and qualifies for social housing
- Children's Social Care has provided written confirmation of whether or not the

Thurrock Housing Protocol (Care Leavers)

young person is ready for independent living and, if they are not yet ready, when they are likely to be ready

Until there is confidence that the care leaver is ready for independent living, the young person will not be actively considered for an offer of housing and they will not be able to bid for housing through the choice based lettings scheme.

11. Working Together to sustain tenancies for Care Leavers

In order to ensure that care leavers get the best start in life and achieve a smooth transition to independent living, it is essential that Children's Social Care, the local Housing Service and other social landlords communicate well, work proactively and collaboratively to sustain the tenancies of young people. They will also ensure that the young person is supported in applying for benefits or the housing element of universal credit where appropriate.

Before a care leaver is rehoused, Children's Social Care and Housing will ensure that the young person is aware of their tenancy obligations such as paying the rent and service charges, keeping the property in a good and clean condition, and behaving in a reasonable manner and that they understand the likely consequences of breaching their tenancy conditions.

As part of their preparations for independent living, a care leaver will have a bank account, a birth certificate, a passport and National Insurance Number.

How social rented housing is allocated

When there is shared understanding that a care leaver is ready for independent living, the application will be verified and made active on the Housing Register. This means that, from that point onwards, the care leaver will be actively considered for any suitable social rented housing that becomes available.

Thurrock operate a choice based lettings scheme and advertise most of the vacant social rented housing on the internet. Except where it is decided that a property should be offered to an applicant as a 'direct let', housing applicants will normally only be considered for a property if they are suitable for it and if they 'bid' for it. A shortlist will be compiled of the 'bidders' with the highest priority.

The applicant at the top of the shortlist will be invited to view the property. If it is a housing association home, applicants at the top of the shortlist will be nominated to the housing association which will then invite them to a viewing.

When a care leaver is shortlisted for social rented housing, they will be invited (with their allocated Social Worker or Personal Advisor) to an accompanied viewing of the property which will be undertaken by the social landlord's Housing Officer or Lettings Officer.

During the accompanied viewing, the young person and their Social Worker or Personal Advisor will receive a guided tour of the accommodation, will be briefed on the landlord's expectations and conditions of tenancy (including the rent and service charges), will be told about local facilities and services, and will have the opportunity to ask questions. After the viewing, the care leaver will decide whether or not the property is suitable.

Refusing an offer of accommodation:

If a young person feels that the property allocated to them is not suitable, they should mention this to the housing officer at the time of the viewing, but should accept the offer of accommodation and request a review of suitability of accommodation. This will ensure that if the review goes against them, they still have a home. If they refuse the offer, and request a review which goes against them, they will not be made another offer of accommodation, and may be without a home. This is a situation that both Housing and Children's Social Care would like to avoid.

The young person will be provided with support to address concerns regarding the accommodation, where the review decision is that the property offered to the young person is a suitable and reasonable offer.

Before the social landlord is able to provide the care leaver with a formal offer of tenancy, it will need to be satisfied that the young person is ready for independent living and will be able to successfully manage and sustain their tenancy.

In order to satisfy the social landlord that the care leaver is ready, Children's Social Care will ensure that the support identified in the young person's Pathway Plan is in place and it will specify exactly who is responsible for providing the support and how it will be reviewed. It will also share with the social landlord the relevant parts of the Pathway Plan.

Signing the tenancy agreement

When the social landlord is satisfied that the care leaver is ready to take on the tenancy an appointment will be made to meet with the young person and their Social Worker or Personal Advisor to complete the tenancy 'sign up'.

During the interview, the social landlord's Housing Officer will describe the contents of the tenancy agreement, the care leaver's rights and responsibilities as a tenant,

and the likely consequences of any breach of the tenancy conditions. They will also provide the young person with their contact details and information about the social landlord's services.

As part of the 'sign up', the Housing Officer will normally help the care leaver to complete an application for Housing Benefit. Proof of identity, income and savings will be required.

During the interview, the care leaver's Social Worker or Personal Advisor with the young person will talk to the Housing Officer and agree the timing and frequency of the follow-up interviews and home visits that will be undertaken by Children's Social Care and the social landlord.

In order to ensure that the young person has settled in well, and to identify the need for any additional advice, help or support, Children's Social Care will visit the care leaver in their new home within 10 working days of them moving in. The Housing Officer will also visit (with Children's Social Care or on their own) within 4 weeks of their tenancy start date.

The exact timing and frequency of the follow-up interviews and home visits undertaken by Children's Social Care and the Housing Officer during the first 12 months of the care leaver's tenancy will depend on the specific needs and circumstances of the young person. However, during the first year, it is expected that Children's Social Care will meet with the care leaver in their home at least once every 8 weeks and the Housing Officer will meet with the care leaver in their home at least once every 12 weeks.

Help in setting up home

The more prepared that a young person is when leaving care, the more successful their move will be and the more confident they will become.

All care leavers are entitled to a Leaving Care Grant of £2,000 to help them set up home when they have secured an offer of independent accommodation. The grant can be used to purchase household furniture, bedding, a cooker, a fridge and other essential items. Although the money is not paid directly to the young person, their Personal Advisor will work with them to ensure that their needs are met.

When a care leaver has secured an offer of independent accommodation, their Social Worker or Personal Advisor will arrange for their 'Leaving Care Grant' monies in advance of the young person's tenancy start date.

12. Communication, joint working and problem solving

It is essential that, from the outset, Children's Social Care and the social landlord
Thurrock Housing Protocol (Care Leavers)

work proactively and collaboratively to support the care leaver in sustaining their tenancy.

Good communication, effective joint working and outcome focused problem solving will all play a vital role in ensuring that Children's Social Care and the social landlord are aware of any difficulties that the young person is having and are able to provide imaginative solutions to the problems they are experiencing.

During the tenancy 'sign up', the Social Worker / Personal Advisor and the Housing Officer will exchange their contact details and the contact details of their organisations. They will agree on the liaison arrangements and the timing and frequency of the follow-up interviews and home visits that will be undertaken by Children's Social Care and the social landlord.

As well as agreeing to work together to address any problems or concerns, Children's Social Care and the social landlord will agree to alert one another, at an early stage, if problems do occur or they are concerned about the care leaver's behaviour or wellbeing.

An early alert or referral will enable Children's Social Care and/or the social landlord to assess the care leaver's situation and work with them to address and resolve any problems before they become so serious as to put the young person's tenancy at risk.

It is the responsibility of Children's Social Care and the social landlord to work with care leavers, and with one another, to sustain tenancies and prevent homelessness. Possession proceedings should only ever be initiated after Children's Social Care has had the opportunity to meet with the tenant and landlord to try and resolve any problems and there has been concerted efforts made by each responsible agency to prevent this.

Homelessness should be avoided through working together. No young person should be evicted from their home without it being clear what action has taken place to prevent this by all parties and what the subsequent plan is. If any care leaver makes a homelessness application, the Housing Solutions Service will inform the After Care Team, investigate the reasons for the young person's homelessness and decide whether or not the care leaver is owed a housing duty under the homelessness legislation. If it decides that the young person has caused their homelessness, the Housing Solutions Service will normally only be required to accommodate them for a period of up to 28 days.

If the care leaver is found to be intentionally homeless, a copy of the decision letter will be sent to the After Care Team and the young person's Pathway Plan will be updated. The After Care Team will work proactively with the young person and the

Housing Solutions Team to prevent eviction or homelessness.

DEFINITION OF CARE LEAVERS

Definitions

The Local Authority has a duty towards eligible, relevant, former relevant and qualifying children:

- **Eligible children** a young person still in care aged 16 and 17 who have been looked after for (a total of) at least 13 weeks from the age of 14.
- **Relevant children** a young person aged 16 or 17 who have already left care, and who were looked after for (a total of) at least 13 weeks from the age of 14, and have been looked after at some time while 16 or 17.

The leaving care provisions of the Children Act require that relevant children are provided with, or maintained in, suitable accommodation unless the local authority is satisfied that their welfare does not require it. To be suitable, accommodation must be reasonably practicable for the young person given their needs and the local authority must be satisfied as to the suitability of any landlord. These arrangements should be detailed in the young person's active pathway plan.

Generally it would not be appropriate for 16 or 17 year olds to be given the responsibility of sustaining their own tenancy without appropriate support, nor would bed and breakfast accommodation be considered suitable

- **Former relevant children** a young person aged 18-25 who have been **eligible** and/or **relevant** children in care - young people who are looked after by a Local Authority either through a compulsory care order or remanded or accommodated by voluntary agreement including accommodation under section 20 of the Children Act.

Social services have a duty to assist a former relevant child, to the extent that their welfare or education/training requires it, by contributing to the expenses of living near the place where they are working, looking for work, or receiving education or training

- **Persons qualifying for advice and assistance** a person who is aged at least 16 but is under 25, with respect to whom a special guardianship order is in force (or was in force when they reached 18) and was looked after immediately before the making of that order, or at any time after reaching the age of 16 but while he was still a child was, but is no longer, looked after, accommodated or fostered

- **Vacation accommodation**

If a former relevant child is in full-time higher education or residential further education in accordance with their pathway plan, and their term-time accommodation is not available, the responsible authority has a duty to provide accommodation during vacations, or to pay the young person enough to secure accommodation for themselves. This could enable a care leaver to continue in education and not become homeless during the holidays. The duty continues for as long as they continue to pursue the course of education.

- **Staying Put arrangements**

Where a former relevant child and their local authority foster carer wish to continue to live together after the child ceases to be looked after, the responsible local authority has a duty to monitor any such 'staying put' arrangement, and to provide advice, assistance and support to enable the arrangement to continue.

LEGISLATION AND GUIDANCE

This provides a short summary of the provisions of the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 and Parts 6 & 7 of the Housing Act 1996¹, as amended).

The Leaving Care Act has two main aims:

1. To ensure that Young People do not leave care until they are ready.
 2. To ensure that they receive more effective support once they have left.
- Young people's experience of leaving care should be properly planned and Care Leavers should not become homeless when they reach the age of 18 and should have a Housing Plan.
 - Young people should be properly prepared for independent living and the monitoring / support systems should be put in place to ensure that they are able to successfully manage and sustain their tenancies.
 - Young People leaving care should not become homeless from their social rented housing.

The following list of legislation informs the duties and responsibilities of the Local Authority:

- Housing Act 1996 - [Part 6 \(Allocations\)](#) and [Part 7 \(Homelessness\)](#), as amended by the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017
- [Homelessness \(Priority Need for Accommodation\) \(England\) Order 2002](#)
- [Children Act 1989](#)
- [Children \(Leaving Care\) Act 2000](#)
- [Children and Social Work Act 2017](#) - sections 1, 2 and 3

The following is a list of statutory guidance that this document refers to:

- [Homelessness code of guidance](#)
- [Applying corporate parenting principles to looked after children and care leavers](#)
- [Children Act 1989: care planning, placement and case review](#)
- [Children Act 1989: transition to adulthood for care leavers](#)
- [Local offer guidance](#)

Personal Housing Plan

Title	First name	Surname	DOB	Gender	NI number	Customer id

Dear

You attended the local authority and a personal assessment of your current housing circumstances was undertaken by on the because you have a housing need and approached the authority for assistance. As part of the assessment the local authority has taken into account:

- The circumstances causing your homelessness
- The housing needs of you and your household
- The type of accommodation your household requires
- Any support needs you or your household need to secure and retain accommodation

Set out below is the Personalised Housing Plan detailing the outcome of the assessment including steps that we discussed and the actions you, your Personal Advisor and the Housing team of the Local Authority will take in order to address your housing situation.

Basic assessment information

From our basic assessment we believe your situation to be as follows:

- List of situational issues
-
-
-

Other agencies

This plan can be shown or shared with any other agencies/relatives/friends who are helping you so they are aware of your housing need and how the local authority is trying to assist you. The details below are the support needs identified as part of your assessment and who is providing support currently.

Support Needs	Agency/relative involved	Support being Offered	Date of Review

When is the customer likely to become homeless?

When you think you will become homeless (or threatened with homelessness):

Actions already taken

The action you have already taken to resolve your housing issues is:

-
-

Wishes to resolve your housing situation

Your wishes to resolve your housing situation:

e.g. Assistance with finding suitable accommodation

-
-
-

Actions/reasonable steps

We have agreed the following **Personal Housing Plan (PHP)** to help you remain in your current home or secure alternative accommodation. Please keep your allocated officer updated on what you have done. Your officer will also keep you updated.

What actions/reasonable steps the Housing Options Officer will do next:

Action type	Content	Date to be achieved	Date achieved

What actions/reasonable steps your Personal Advisor/After Care will take next:

Action type	Content	Date to be achieved	Date achieved

What actions/reasonable steps you need to take:

Action type	Content	Date to be achieved	Date achieved	Client accepted	Recommended or required

Leaflets/website information

Details of any leaflets / website information provided to you will be listed here:

-
-
-
-

Any other information/advice provided

Any other information / advice provided to you will be listed here:

-
-
-

Tailored Advice

This is tailored advice to support you.

-
-
-

Date PHP to be reviewed by Officer and Customer

Location	Date and time	With office	PA present Y/N

Appointments arranged

Any appointments arranged for you will be listed here:

Date.....Time..... Venue.....

A checklist of additional information required

Please provide documented proof of the following to the Council:

Type	Document	Household member	Date Provided

Agreement

The Personalised Housing Plan has been drawn up for both you and the council to carry out all the steps that have been agreed on the plan. You should make sure you attend any appointments that are arranged for you and take any action that you agreed to do on the plan. If you cannot do something that is on the plan then make sure you tell your Personal Advisor and Housing straight away and explain why you cannot do it.

We will review this plan on the **(INSERT DATE)** in order to evaluate the appropriateness of the plan and any steps recorded. If your circumstances change, for example you become homeless or your health needs change, then your Personalised Housing Plan will be reviewed. Make sure you inform your Personal Advisor and Housing Officer as soon as you are aware of any changes in your circumstances so that they can look at the plan with you again, agree new actions or add to the existing actions to be taken.

I **(INSERT NAME)** confirm that this is an accurate summary of my housing options interview and I understand the options available to me. I agree to the actions set out for both my household and the officer agree to take.

Customer signature:

Name:

Date:

Personal Advisor signature

Name:

Date:

Housing Options officer signature:

Name:

Date:

APPENDIX D

HOUSING REFERRAL FORM

This is the Referral Form that Children’s Social Care will send to the Housing Service (with the relevant sections of the Pathway Plan) for a Care Leaver.

Priority for Social & Welfare Grounds – Care Leavers	
Applicants Name	
Application number	
Age	
Current Address	
Type of Accommodation young person is living in and date moved in	
Brief history: (Housing history, sharing accommodation, background etc.)	
Rent Account History/ Rent Arrears: (rent arrears, adherence to repayment plans etc.)	
Current support needs / risks: (Budgeting, Maintaining a tenancy, Legal, Self-care etc.)	

Vulnerability:
What support is the applicant currently receiving:
Future required support package: (Claiming benefits, Managing accommodation etc.)
Inappropriate and preferred areas for applicant to live (Prefers Grays, areas to avoid)
Additional Comments:
Referring officer name and contact details:

Priority awarded:	
Signed	
Date	

APPENDIX E

HOUSING ALLOCATIONS SCHEME

The link below provides the full details of the Housing Allocation Scheme;

<https://www.thurrock.gov.uk/sites/default/files/assets/documents/housing-allocation-scheme-v04.pdf>

5 January 2021	ITEM: 10
Corporate Parenting Committee	
Aftercare Report	
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Non Key
Report of: Naintara Khosla, Strategic Lead CLA	
Accountable Assistant Director: Joe Tynan, Assistant Director Children’s Social Care and Early Help	
Accountable Director: Sheila Murphy, Corporate Director Children’s Services	
This report is Public	

Executive Summary

This report provides Members of the Corporate Parenting Committee with an update about the service provision by Thurrock Aftercare Service to young adults who have previously been in the Local Authority’s care. The Aftercare Service transferred to Children’s Social Care in July 2019 and sits within the remit of the Strategic Lead for Children Looked After and Aftercare.

Ofsted undertook an inspection of Thurrock’s Children’s Services in November 2019 which provided independent scrutiny confirming that overall the experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers were graded ‘Good’. Ofsted noted there was a need to ensure better partnership working with Adult Social Care colleagues to support transition arrangements for Care Leavers, and particularly for those with additional needs.

Practitioners who are working with Care Leavers are committed to their young people and there are areas of good practice; there is a strong commitment to further enhance the service, and an Aftercare operational plan will be implemented to identify areas for further development.

1. Recommendation(s)

- 1.1 **This report provides Members of the Committee with an overview of the services provided to our young adults. Members are asked to note the contents of the report and the service provision to young adults in the Thurrock Aftercare Service.**

2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1 Thurrock Council acts as 'Corporate Parent', providing the care, services and concern for children and young people that is expected of all good parents. As Corporate Parent, we are aspirational for our children and young people in care, supporting them to achieve in all areas of their lives and ensuring a smooth transition to adulthood. Thurrock is committed to listening to children and young people, involving them in decision making and service development. As Corporate Parent, we seek to improve the opportunities for young people and ensure they have the best possible care in both their childhood and as Care Leavers.

What it means to be a 'Care Leaver' (including those young people who have been Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children - UASC):

A care leaver, as defined in the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000¹, is a person who has been 'looked after' or 'in care' for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14, and who was in care on their 16th birthday.

A young person's status as a Care Leaver can be divided into the following:

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

Under the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000, Local Authorities are required to provide all eligible Care Leavers with a Pathway Plan and both a personal adviser and ongoing financial assistance. In May 2013 the government published further guidance for Local Authorities with regards to arrangements for facilitating Care Leavers to "stay put" in their foster placements after they reach the age of 18 years. 'Staying Put' arrangements enable young people to remain with their former foster carers to help ensure that they are adequately prepared for adulthood.

What it means to be an Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Child

Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children and young people have often faced significant hardship, trauma and separation from family members before arriving in this country. Arrival is by various means and methods, from families

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

paying agents to facilitate their travel by aeroplane or car, or by being smuggled, trafficked and hidden in vehicles or shipping containers.

On arrival, Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children and young people often have no identified parent or family member providing care or support, making them extremely vulnerable to exploitation, trafficking, offending and ill health. The Local Authority is responsible for undertaking an assessment to understand their age and circumstances; provide care for them as Children Looked-After and subsequently to provide Aftercare support.

Legislative changes have placed additional responsibilities upon Thurrock Aftercare Services, including the duties within the Children and Social Work Act 2017. Section 3 of the Act requires Local Authorities to appoint a Personal Adviser for Care Leavers (who request one) up until the age of 25, regardless of whether the young person intends to pursue education or training. The Local Authority also has a duty to carry out an assessment of the young person's needs and to provide the necessary advice and support. Further, there is an expectation that the Local Authority publishes its 'Local Offer', detailing how it can meet its responsibilities to Care Leavers. Thurrock's local offer is in place and a review and consultation with Care Leavers is planned for June 2021.

The Homeless Reduction Act 2017 places a duty on Local Councils to prevent and relieve homelessness. There is increased housing support to young people supported by Aftercare Service, from Head Start Housing and Thurrock Housing Department. The 'Housing Offer' to Care Leavers has been updated with the Joint Housing Protocol 2020, ensuring good partnership working with clear pathways for young people to access housing, as well as ensuring they are prepared for their tenancies.

Transition to Adulthood

We want to ensure young people are effectively supported during their transition from childhood to adulthood, so they are fully prepared to participate in their local communities. As some Looked-After Children and Care Leavers have additional needs, there is a need for strong partnership working with colleagues in Adult Services, to ensure positive transitions for vulnerable young people leaving care. The Preparing for Adulthood team (PFA) is under the umbrella of Adult Social Care. The service offers all young people aged 14 to 25 years (with special educational and care planning needs) a professional to advise the young person and their parents or carers about options and opportunities for the future. The Joint Protocol between Aftercare and Preparing for Adulthood Team is being finalised; this Protocol seeks to improve communication and joint working. It will promote good transitional arrangements, as there will be a shared approach to implementing care packages, including specialist supported accommodation.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

3.1 Care Leavers

Table 1 Thurrock Care Leaver Population

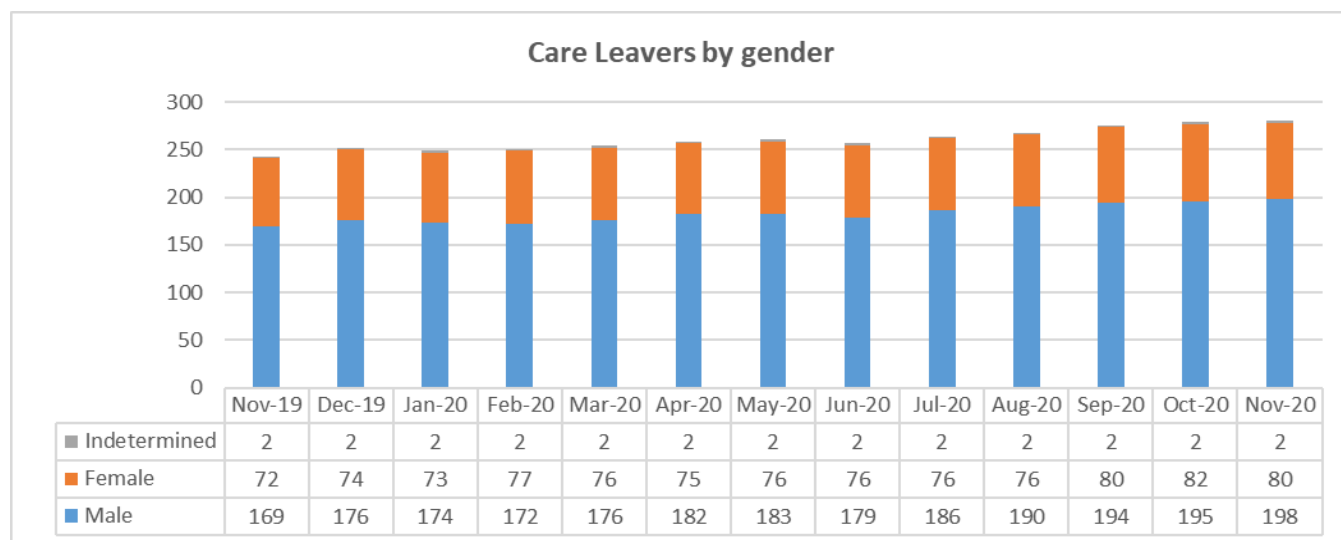
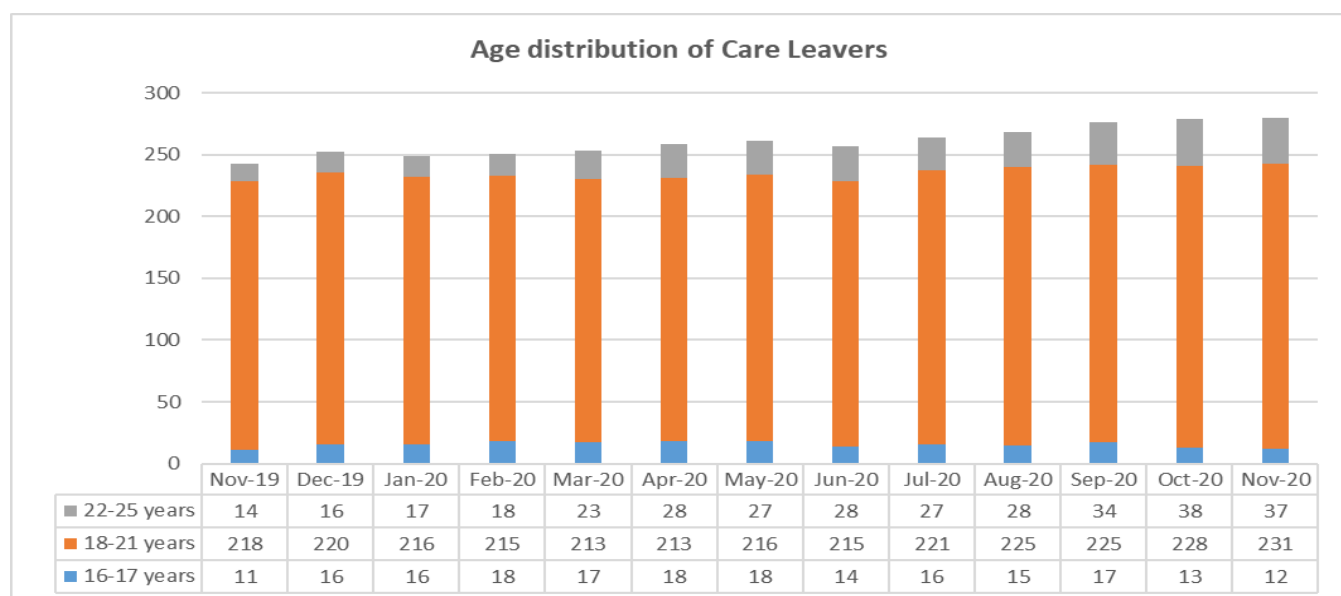


Table 2 Age of Care Leaver Cohort



As of 30 November 2020, there were a total of 274 Care Leavers (open cases) aged between 16 and 25 years. Young people aged between 16 – 17 years remain Looked-After and have both an allocated Personal Advisor and a Social Worker. There has been an increase of 17 Care Leavers in the period November 2019 to November 2020. Thurrock’s UASC numbers remain steady as there is an Eastern Region Transfer Scheme in place. Local Authorities have an allocation of UASC of 0.07 of the total number of Children

Looked-After; in Thurrock this equates to 28 UASC who are Looked-After. We currently are meeting the requirements of our 0.07 allocation.

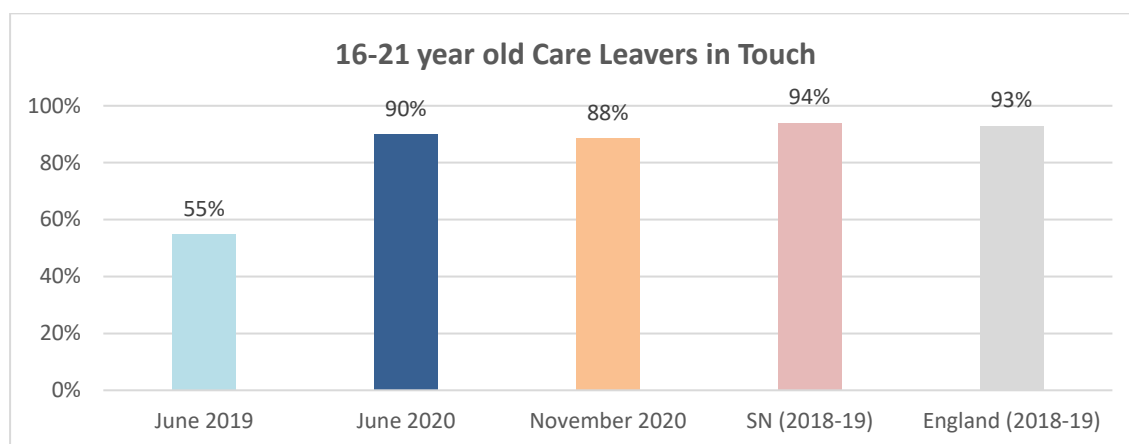
This report provides a summary of the Care Leaver cohort and the relevant data.

In Touch

Local Authorities are expected to stay in touch with Care Leavers and provide statutory support to help the young person transition to living independently. The In Touch record for Thurrock has been reflecting an improving trend. In November 2019, the In Touch record for all Care Leavers aged 16-25 was 85.2% and in November 2020 this increased to 90.1%. The trajectory of improvement has been consistently over 90% since May 2020.

In Table 3 the cohort of Care Leavers referenced are those aged between 16 to 21 years which is the data provided to the Department of Education and allows for comparison to statistical neighbours and to the England average. This is an area where continued focus should support improvement so Thurrock is in line with statistical neighbours and the England average.

Table 3 16 - 21 year old Care Leavers In Touch



Pathway Plans

Pathway Plans being completed in timescales have been on a trajectory of improvement. In November 2019 the completion of Pathway Plans (for the total cohort 16-25 years) in timescales, was at 42.0% and in November 2020 this was at 86.3% which equates to six Pathway Plans completed out of timescales. Four of these were within the CLA service where they cannot be completed in timescales due to a glitch in the reporting system; there is a plan for this to be remedied. Two plans were out of time for those Care Leavers over the age of 18 years. This is overall good performance.

Suitable Accommodation

The majority of Thurrock Care Leavers aged 16 - 25 years are in suitable accommodation. In November 2019 this was 82.8%, with a slight increase to 89.1% in November 2020. There is a good Offer to Care Leavers, supporting them to access suitable housing. Twenty-one Care Leavers are not recorded as being in suitable accommodation; these are made up of young people who do not wish to be in contact with the service, and long-term, missing UASC. This cohort is recorded as not being in touch, or in education, employment and training.

Table 4 Care Leavers aged 16 -21 in Suitable Accommodation

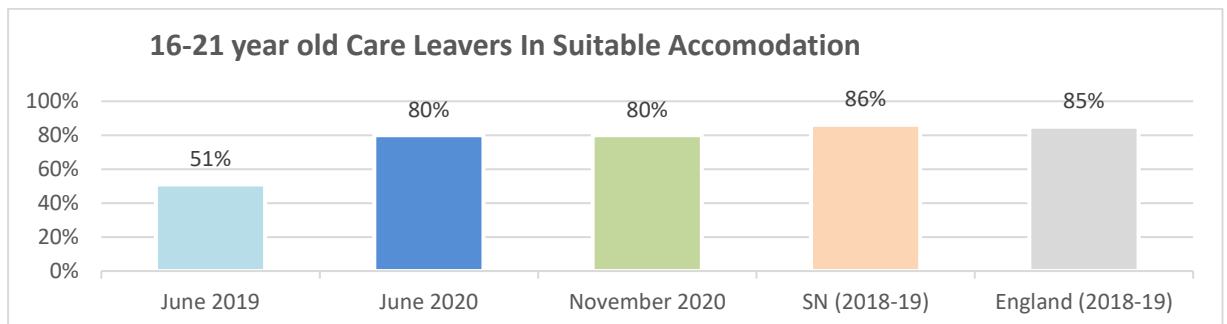
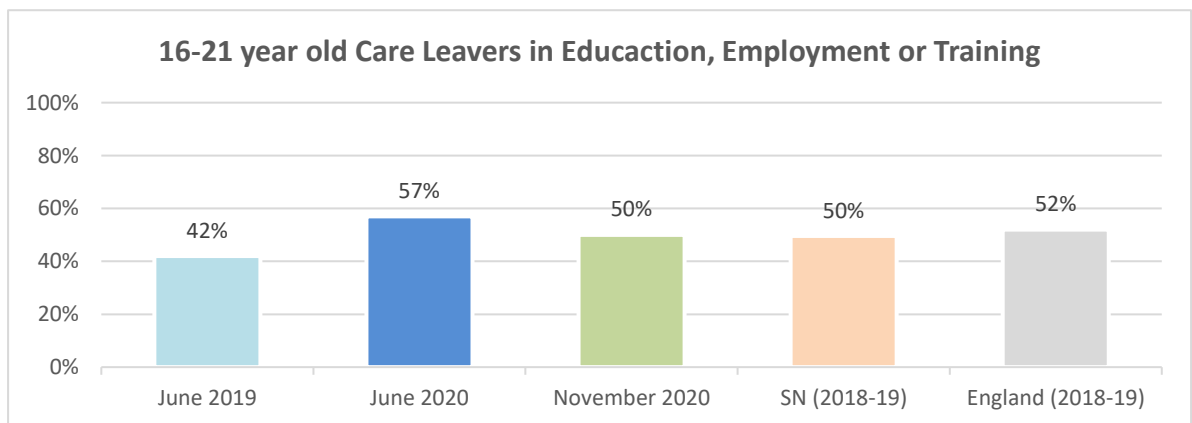


Table 5 Education, Employment and Training Opportunities for Care Leavers



We are reviewing the needs of our Aftercare population to ensure they have the opportunities necessary for ongoing education, training and employment. The November 2020 data for the total number of Care Leavers (age up to 25) not in education, employment or training is 49.8%, with no significant change in the last 3 months. A working group is linked with Inspire to review individual young people, their work placement needs, and their individual profiles are being developed. There is a close alignment between the Aftercare Service and the Inspire Youth Hub, a partnership which aims to bring about improvements in the number of young people in education,

employment and training. The On-Track Thurrock Programme continues to offer a bespoke programme to ensure that Care Leavers can access education, employment and training. The offer of one-to-one support from the Inspire Hub is continuing for both emotional wellbeing and employment advice.

Thurrock offers access to the Prince's Trust programme, which enables young people to build their confidence and have access to apprenticeship opportunities so they can engage in the local communities in which they live.

3.2 General Update on Activities and Support for Care Leavers

Through the pandemic there has been a focus on the wellbeing for Care Leavers and particularly their mental wellbeing. The Wellbeing Offer was launched during Care Leavers' week, 27 October 2020. The offer includes WhatsApp groups, mindfulness sessions and Zoom meetings. The Inspire Youth Hub is open for direct one-to-one sessions, as well as virtual sessions to support young people. The information and service offer to young people is provided with a monthly newsletter (Appendix 1). The Aftercare Service is supporting vulnerable young people in a variety of ways to stay connected, keep them informed and to reassure them of the availability of services.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1 Members of the Committee are updated and aware of the Aftercare Service Offer to young people who are Care Leavers. Members to note the performance and the services, including the Wellbeing Offer, provided to Care Leavers.

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

- 5.1 Care Leavers are consulted on the service provision and the Wellbeing Offer with a monthly newsletter and Zoom meetings.

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

- 6.1 The work undertaken with Care Leavers, as noted above, is set within the statutory expectations which are also aligned with Thurrock priorities of People, Place and Prosperity. The work within the Aftercare Service supports our Care Leavers to access the opportunities, including work and education, provided by Thurrock and its community.

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

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

The report outlines the statutory expectations for Care Leavers that are delivered from core budget provision.

7.2 Legal

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

The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 amends the Children Act 1989 and sets out the Local Authority's functions in relation to children leaving care.

The Local Authority must have regard to the corporate parenting principles in the Children and Social Work Act 2017 when carrying out its functions in relation to Looked After Children, Relevant Children and former Relevant children.

The Corporate Parenting principles are:

- (a) to act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and well-being, of those children and young people;*
- (b) to encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings;*
- (c) to take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people;*
- (d) to help those children and young people gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners;*
- (e) to promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people;*
- (f) for those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work;*
- (g) to prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living.*

7.3 **Diversity and Equality**

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

The Aftercare population includes Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children whose needs are met by the Children Looked After Service and the Aftercare Service. This cohort of young people have particular needs which are addressed through the work of the Personal Advisors in the care leaving service. The Personal Advisors ensure young people have their immigration needs met through legal representation and liaison with the Home Office.

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

- None

8. **Background papers used in preparing the report**

- None

9. **Appendices to the report**

- Appendix 1 - Care Leaver Newsletter

Report Author:

Naintara Khosla
Strategic Lead Children Looked After and Aftercare

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★ AFTERCARE ★

Bringing you the latest news and updates

What's happening?

WhatsApp group

Aftercare have launched a brand new group exclusively for care leavers!

This group is aimed at creating a sense of friendship and socialising during isolation. We all have things we can positively learn from each other so let's start by making new friends and moving forward. Share tips on cooking, budgeting and support available within your community.

If you would like to be added to the care leavers WhatsApp group let your Personal Advisor know and we will do the rest!

Monthly Hub Meetings

Monthly event meetings are going to be happening via Zoom/WhatsApp for care leavers and as soon as we can we will host these in person!

We will be looking at doing quizzes, wellbeing sessions, and mindfulness/yoga and much more. If you are interested let your allocated personal advisor know and they will be able to keep you in the loop!

Upcoming in Thurrock

FREE ONLINE 48hrs OF MINDFULNESS

This course is a short-term commitment each day and can be slotted around your existing commitments. It is pre-recorded so you can watch in your own time sent via your emails.

Mindfulness simply means to live in the 'present' in your thoughts, actions and behaviours and scientific research shows it's hugely effective to boost focus, productivity and connection whilst reducing stress and overwhelm. The best part is that it can all be achieved with bite sized actions. You can complete this short program with just 15 minutes a day.

If you're someone:

- Feeling the strain of isolation or working from home
- Finding it challenging to remain focused or productive
- Feeling overwhelmed by our current environment
- Wanting to learn how to better communicate and connect to others
- Who'd love to learn the secrets of 'switching off' at night and being able to relax, even during busy times.

This 48-hour bite-sized Mindfulness course can be completed at your own leisure and if you love it, there are more programs for you to enjoy. Tap into pre-recorded videos sharing Mindfulness expertise, all for FREE! You'll be sent the bite sized materials to your inbox.

LINK TO SIGN UP FOR THE EVENT BELOW:

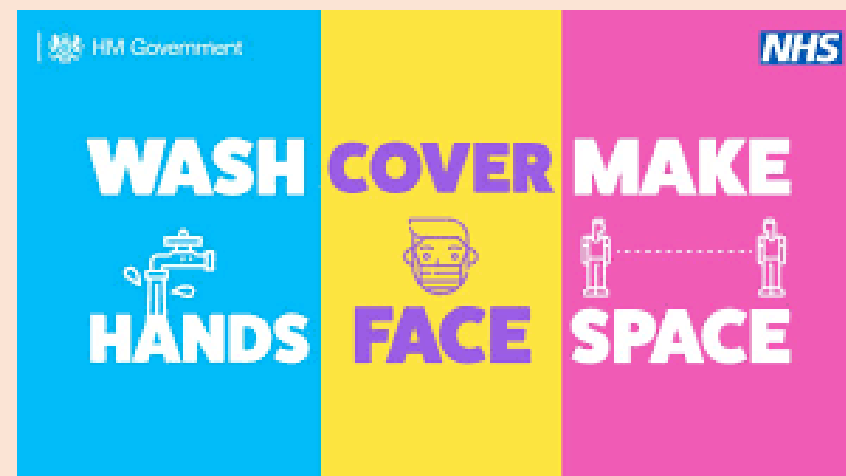
<https://www.eventbrite.com.au/e/48-hours-of-bite-sized-mindfulness-tickets-103177633078?utm-medium=discovery&utm-campaign=social&utm-content=attendeeshare&aff=escb&utm-source=cp&utm-term=listing>

COVID UPDATES

LOCAL TIERS NOW IN PLACE

See the Gov.uk link below for more information, specific to your area.

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/local-restriction-tiers-what-you-need-to-know>



NEW RULES

Curbs after Dec 2

TIER ① MEDIUM

- All businesses not currently shut can stay open
- Table service only at pubs and restaurants. 10pm last orders
- Rule of 6 (inside and outside pubs)
- Schools, unis, gyms, places of worship open
- 15 guests at weddings, 30 guests at funerals
- Live events limited to 50% capacity or 4,000 outdoors / 1,000 indoors

TIER ② HIGH

- Households can't mix indoors
- Households can mix outdoors if sticking to Rule of 6
- Pubs must serve 'substantial meals' or close
- You may only sit inside a pub with your own household
- You may sit outside a pub in mixed households as long as you stick to Rule of 6
- Last orders by 10pm and must close by 11pm
- Schools, unis, gyms, places of worship open
- Live events limited to 50% capacity or 2,000 outdoors / 1,000 indoors

TIER ③ VERY HIGH

- Households can't mix (indoors or most outdoor places)
- Pubs and restaurants to stay shut but deliveries, takeaways and drive-thru allowed
- Schools, unis, gyms, places of worship open
- Wedding receptions banned
- No overnight stays outside area unless necessary
- Live events banned

SUPPORT BUBBLES

Support Bubbles are a great way to ensure that adults who live alone, or single parents who do not live with another adult over the age of 18, can get help, support and companionship in a safe a coronavirus compliant way.

A support bubble is a close support network between a household with only one adult or a household with one adult and one or more people who is under the age of 18 (or were under 18 before 12 June) and any other household of any size and makeup.

Once you are in a support bubble you can think of yourselves as one household and can visit and maintain close contact as if you all live together.

No household can be in more than one support bubble and once a bubble has been formed it cannot be changed at any time.

What's new?

Job club

Will run weekly from 14th of December, the hour long sessions will cover various topics:

- Applying and looking for jobs and apprenticeships.
- Interview skills
- Transferrable skills
- Writing a CV
- Short courses to improve skills
- Applying for college and university

Resources will be available for you to look over at your own leisure and then live supported offered via google classrooms from Personal Advisors Colin D and Mark F. Dates and times will be sent out in December to all care leavers. If you would like further information please e-mail : Colin or Mark

IYH (Inspire Youth Hub)

We are open for face to face, telephone and online appointments.

Face to Face - You can book to see Colin or Mark on Tuesdays or Wednesdays within four appointment slots each day at 10:00, 11:00, 13:00 or 14:00.

Telephone and virtual appointment using Google classroom are available other days of the week.

Colin and Mark are able to support with any Education, Employment or Training needs you have and can be contacted by phone; Colin 0*****5 / Mark 0*****0 / Inspire Youth Hub 0*****5

THURROCKS GOT TALENT!

Monday 21st December 2020 –
online event! 3PM

Have you got a talent you could showcase? You could be in with a chance of winning £100. Poetry, art, singing, dancing, comedy, juggling, Tik-Toks

Send your video to Carly B on
WhatsApp on 0*****3

The video should be no more than 1
minute long and event will take
place online on Dec 21st at 3PM.



USEFUL CONTACTS

The Samaritans

08457 90 90 90

Or call 116 123 free from any phone

<http://www.samaritans.org>

The Samaritans operate 24 hours a day and are here to support you and listen to you, not to judge or tell you what to do.

Time2Talk

Free counselling service for young people

Counselling is by appointment only.

This can be arranged simply by phoning **01327 706706**

Please be aware that they do have a waiting list.

<https://www.time2talk.org.uk/>

Inspire Youth Hub

Inspire can continuously support you with the Education, Employment and Training needs. Inspire work to help you better yourself and chances of employment as well as provide support with access to training and education alongside helping with CV's and applications.

If you feel you require any support please contact your Personal Advisor or speak to the youth hub on: **0*****5**

Wize – Up Thurrock

Wize-Up is a young people's service in Thurrock for Substance misuse. Unit 2, Centre for Business, 2 George St, Grays RM17

TEL: [01375 376111](tel:01375376111)

Work Programme

Committee: Corporate Parenting

Year: 2020/2021

Dates of Meetings: 2 June 2020, 1 September 2020, 5 January 2021 and 2 March 2021

Topic	Lead Officer	Requested by Officer/Member
2 June 2020		
Children's Social Care Performance	Mandy Moore	Officers
Overview of Academic Year 2019/20	Keeley Pullen	Officers
Pupil Premium Plus report	Keeley Pullen	Officers
Update on Ofsted Recommendation – Timeliness of Initial Health Assessments	Janet Simon	Members – requested a further update following the March 2020 meeting.
Support provided to Care Leavers and Children Looked After during COVID19	Janet Simon / Luke Froment	Officers
Update on the support provided to Foster Carers during COVID19	Janet Simon / Dan Jones	Officers
Work Programme	Democratic Services Officer	Standard Item
1 September 2020		
Fostering Statement of Purpose	Janet Simon / Daniel Jones	Officers
Adoption Statement of Purpose	Janet Simon/Dan Jones	Officers

Corporate Parenting Committee Strategy 2020 - 2022	Janet Simon/Joe Tynan	Officers
Children in Care Council Update	Open Door	Officers
Children's Social Care Performance	Mandy Moore	Officers
LAC Health Report	Anne Kavanagh	Officers
Children Looked After Initial Health Assessments	Janet Simon / Yvonne Anarfi (Designated Nurse CLA)	Officers
Corporate Parenting Committee – Annual Report 2019/2020	Democratic Services Officer	Officers
Work Programme	Democratic Services Officer	Standard Item
5 January 2021		
Children's Social Care Performance	Mandy Moore	Officers
Sufficiency Placement	Sue Green	Officers
Independent Reviewing Officer – Annual Report	Ruth Murdock	Officers
Annual Report of the Virtual Schools	Keeley Pullen	Officers
Joint Housing Protocol for Care Leavers	Janet Simon	Officers
Aftercare Report	Naintara Khosla	Officers
Work Programme	Democratic Services Officer	Standard Item

2 March 2021		
Children's Social Care Performance	Mandy Moore	Officers
Health Assessment Review	Naintara Khosla	Members
Report on the way to communicate with Elected Members and Advertising	Joe Tynan & Naintara Khosla	Members
IHA/RHA Report	Helen Farmer / Michael Addo-Boateng	Officers/Members
Work Programme	Democratic Services Officer	Standard Item

Clerk: Kenna-Victoria Healey

Last Updated: December 2020

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