

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 **4 January 2022**

**Training Room, The Beehive Community Resource Centre, West Street, Grays, RM17 6XP**

### Membership:

Councillors Abbie Akinbohun (Chair), Jennifer Smith (Vice-Chair), Adam Carter, Sara Muldowney, Georgette Polley, Kairen Raper, Elizabeth Rigby and Lynn Worrall

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

### Substitutes:

Councillors John Kent, Maureen Pearce and Joycelyn Redsell

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### Agenda

Open to Public and Press

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<b>1 Apologies for Absence</b>	
<b>2 Minutes</b>	<b>5 - 10</b>
To approve as a correct record the minutes of the Corporate Parenting Committee meeting held on 23 November 2021 (14 September 2021).	
<b>3 Items of Urgent Business</b>	
To receive additional items that the Chair is of the opinion should be considered as a matter of urgency, in accordance with Section 100B (4) (b) of the Local Government Act 1972.	
<b>4 Declaration of Interests</b>	

<b>5</b>	<b>Children’s Social Care Performance – Quarter 2 2021-22</b>	<b>11 - 34</b>
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<b>10</b>	<b>The Annual Report of the Virtual School Headteacher for Children Looked After – Academic Year 2020-2021</b>	<b>85 - 132</b>
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**Queries regarding this Agenda or notification of apologies:**

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

Agenda published on: **23 December 2021**

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2. You are recommended to wear a face covering (where able) when attending the meeting and moving around the council offices to reduce any chance of infection. Removal of any face covering would be advisable when speaking publically at the meeting.
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Whilst the Council encourages all who are eligible to have vaccination and this is important in reducing risks around COVID-19, around 1 in 3 people with COVID-19 do not have any symptoms. This means they could be spreading the virus without knowing it. In line with government guidance testing twice a week increases the chances of detecting COVID-19 when you are infectious but aren't displaying symptoms, helping to make sure you do not spread COVID-19. Rapid lateral flow testing is available for free to anybody. To find out more about testing please visit <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/testing/regular-rapid-coronavirus-tests-if-you-do-not-have-symptoms/>

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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 14 September 2021 at 7.00 pm

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- Present:** Councillors Abbie Akinbohun (Chair), Adam Carter, Sara Muldowney, Kairen Raper and Elizabeth Rigby.
- Laura Hall, Thurrock Open Door  
Sharon Smith, Chair, The One Team, Foster Carer Association  
Jenny Josling, Vice-Chair, The One Team, Foster Carer Association
- Apologies:** Councillors Jennifer Smith (Vice-Chair), Georgette Polley and Jane Potheary
- In attendance:** Sheila Murphy, Corporate Director of Children's Services  
Janet Simon, Interim Assistant Director, Children's Social Care and Early Help  
Ruth Murdock,  
Naintara Khosla, Strategic Lead, Looked After Children  
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.

### **9. Minutes**

The minutes of the Corporate Parenting meeting on 1 June 2021 were approved as a correct record.

### **10. Items of Urgent Business**

There were no items of urgent business.

### **11. Declaration of Interests**

There were no declarations of interest.

### **12. Children's Social Care Performance – Quarter 1 2021-22**

The Assistant Director of Children's Social Care and Early Help presented the report which was on pages 13/36 of the agenda.

Councillor Carter sought clarification as to the number of asylum seeking children within the Council's care as the figures in the report were different to those mentioned. The Assistant Director of Children's Social Care and Early help explained these were more up-to-date figures as the report was written

for the September meeting. Councillor Carter asked if these figures could be circulated to Members of the Committee.

Referring to 4.2, youth detention accommodation Councillor Muldowney commented it was worrying to see an increase of knife crime involving young people and enquired as to what the Council was doing to prevent this. The Assistant Director of Children's Social Care and Early Help explained the Council were looking into the overrepresentation of the BAME young people in the criminal justice system as this was a national issue not just within Thurrock. She continued to advise that research into the area evidenced that young black males were not always given the same opportunities as young white males from the police or the courts. She continued to advise that the Council had strategic meetings with a variety of partners including Health, Police and Education service to help identify young people who could be at risk of joining gangs and the possibility of going through the criminal justice system.

The Director of Children Services echoed the comments made by the Assistant Director in that officer were working with a variety of partners, and seeking to fund outreach work with schools. She continued to explain that by working with secondary schools to identify those children who could be at risk of antisocial behaviour or even joining gangs, with early help and support this could stop children being excluded from school. She commented that great work had been completed with the Olive Academy and the Community Safety Team had been working with the Police to help the prevention of gangs within the borough. Councillor Muldowney commented she was pleased to see a good focus on the prevention and support of young people.

**RESOLVED:**

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

**2. Note the impact of COVID 19 on performance.**

**13. Adoption Statement of Purpose**

The Strategic Lead Looked after Children and Placements presented the report found on page 37 to 58 of the agenda.

Councillor Muldowney thanked officers for the report and enquired as to what the differences were from the statement of purpose for 2021/2022 to the previous year. The Strategic Lead Looked After Children and Placements referred members to 4.13 of the appendix and explained that the Council recognised the importance of continuing contact for children with birth families and a further change within the statement was that the Council now made arrangements for ongoing contact either direct or indirect between the child and their birth family, unless there were exceptional circumstances to prevent this.



It was further enquired if there was a difference of outcome between children who were fostered and those who were adopted. The Strategic Lead Looked after Children and Placements explained there was a significant difference as when a child was going through the adoption process there was a strict checklist which had to be followed. She continued by explaining once an adoption order had been made that child would then be part of that family unit.

Members were further advised that the council was part of adopt East, an alliance of adoption services and voluntary adoption agencies which included Essex, Suffolk, Southend and Norfolk. The Strategic Lead Looked after Children and Placements explained when a child was in foster care they still remained a looked after child until they were 18 and a care leaver. There were also statutory duties the Council must fulfil for a child who was with a foster family this included Initial Health Assessments.

**RESOLVED:**

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

**14. Fostering Statement of Purpose**

The Strategic Lead Looked after Children and Placements presented the report on pages 59 to 86.

Councillor Carter thanked for the Strategic Lead for her report and enquired following the last meeting where Members and officers discussed the rebranding of recruiting Foster Carers, he asked how officers were getting on with this and for an update on any new foster carers. Strategic Lead Looked After Children and Placements was pleased to advise Members since April 2021 the Council had approved five new fostering households, and there were currently 12 applications going through the assessment process. She continued that although there had been less enquiries, there were more families being put through to the assessment stage and the Council had still received an increase in enquiries to the previous year.

Councillor Rigby enquired as to whether officers were monitoring where most of the enquiries were coming from such as social media. The Strategic Lead Looked after Children and Placements explained officers were keeping KPIs and tracking which of the media outlets were most effective. She stated since the rebranding approach officers wanted to try everything from newspapers to the Councils website to billboards. There were discussions too advertise via online outlets such as social media. Previously recruitment would take place in the form of word of mouth and people talking with current foster carers.

The Chair of the Committee asked as to what the incentives were for someone to become a foster carer for Thurrock. It was explained that one incentive was that if a foster carer lived within the borough, subject to criteria, their council tax would be paid by the Local Authority. The Strategic Lead

Looked after Children and Placements continued by advising in addition there was a great fostering community who supported not only new members but each other on a daily basis.

Members then heard from the Foster Carers on the Committee, who explained that before a child was placed within their care they would receive a phone call from the Authority to explain the child's background and to enquire if they felt the child would match within their family. It was up to the Foster Carer with the information they had, to make the decision whether they would accept the child. It was commented that both foster carers felt it was a great job, and exciting as not knowing what could come next, sometimes you could have a child for a short period of time and other times it could be a number of years. Members heard how the foster carers wouldn't do the role that they did if they didn't love being able to support these children and young people as it was not only difficult for the foster child but also on their own families as they were also accepting a child to be part of their family.

**RESOLVED:**

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

**15. Independent Visitor Service for Looked After Children**

The Strategic Lead for Quality Assurance and Reviewing Children Social Care presented the report to the committee which was found on page 87 to 96.

The Chair of the Committee enquired as to how the independent visitors were recruited. The Strategic Lead for quality assurance and Reviewing Social Care explained that Thurrock Opendoor made the necessary enquiries and the independent visitor would be paired with the young person depending on the requirements needed. She continued by advising all independent visitors received training before being introduced to the young person.

Councillor Raper thanked officers for the report and enquired how this support had been previously offered to children. It was explained the strategic Lead for Quality Assurance and Reviewing Children's Social Care has been within her role for the last three years and for this time the service had been offered alongside Thurrock Opendoor.

**RESOLVED:**

**The Committee understands the duties as Corporate Parents regarding Independent Visitors for children who are looked after.**

**The Committee has the opportunity to scrutinise practice against questions set out by the National Independent Visitor Network ([ivnetwork.org.uk](http://ivnetwork.org.uk)) hosted by Barnardo's.**

## **16. Children in Care Council Update**

As the Chair of the Children In Care Council and the Children In Care Council Project Worker had sent their apologies to the meeting, the Chair of the Committee asked members if they would be in agreement to defer the item to the January meeting to allow Christopher to speak to the Committee.

This was agreed by all members.

### **RESOLVED:**

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

## **17. Corporate Parenting Committee Annual Report 2020/2021**

The Senior Democratic Services Officer introduced to the report which was to be found on pages 105 to 116 of the agenda.

Councillor Rigby the Chair of the Corporate Parenting Committee for 2020/2021 commented that she welcomed the report as it informed all Members as to the work of the committee. She continued by thanking officers for their hard work.

### **RESOLVED:**

**That the contents of the Corporate Parenting Annual Report 2020/2021 be noted.**

**That the Corporate Parenting Annual Report be referred to Full Council, to share the work of Committee and their main achievements for 2020/2021 municipal year.**

## **18. Corporate Parenting Committee Work Programme**

The Corporate Parenting Committee discussed the work programme at pages 117/118 of the agenda.

### **RESOLVED:**

**That the work programme be updated to reflect the following:**

- **Sufficiency Placement Report be moved to 1<sup>st</sup> March 22**
- **Report on KPI within the foster department – 4<sup>th</sup> January 2022**
- **Report following DFE visit and report on care leavers including its recommendations – 4<sup>th</sup> January 2022**

**The meeting finished at 8.13pm**

Approved as a true and correct record

**CHAIR**

**DATE**

Any queries regarding these Minutes, please contact  
Democratic Services at [Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk](mailto:Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk)

<b>4 January 2022</b>	<b>ITEM: 5</b>
<b>Corporate Parenting Committee</b>	
<b>Children’s Social Care Performance – Quarter 2 2021-22</b>	
<b>Wards and communities affected:</b> All	<b>Key Decision:</b> Non-key
<b>Report of:</b> Anna Watkins, Business Intelligence Analyst	
<b>Accountable Assistant Director:</b> Janet Simon, Assistant Director, Children’s Social Care and Early Help	
<b>Accountable Director:</b> Sheila Murphy, Corporate Director of Children’s Services	
<b>This report is:</b> Public	

## Executive Summary

This report provides information on the performance across Children Looked After and Aftercare. The overall performance for the service is good and some of the performance is within the context of COVID-19 and the lockdown restrictions which have been in place over the period; this report focusses on Quarter 2 of 2021-22 (July to September 2021).

Thurrock continues to provide services to approximately 308 Children Looked After (CLA) and approximately 307 Care Leavers. Children and young people are visited regularly and the management of missing children is consistent and reflects good partnership with the police and Thurrock Community Safety. The work with health colleagues continues to ensure that there is a positive focus on Initial Health Assessments for children entering into care.

The Care Leaving Service continues to be a focus for improvement, particularly to keep in touch and support young people into employment or education and to ensure they have the right accommodation to meet their needs.

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

It has been previously reported to Corporate Parenting Committee that permanency planning has been particularly impacted by COVID-19. There have been delays in timetabling for final court hearings. The court has agreed to prioritise cases where

the care plan is one of adoption, to prevent the delay for younger children in court cases.

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

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

**1.2 Note the impact of COVID 19 on some areas of performance.**

## **2. Introduction and Background**

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

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

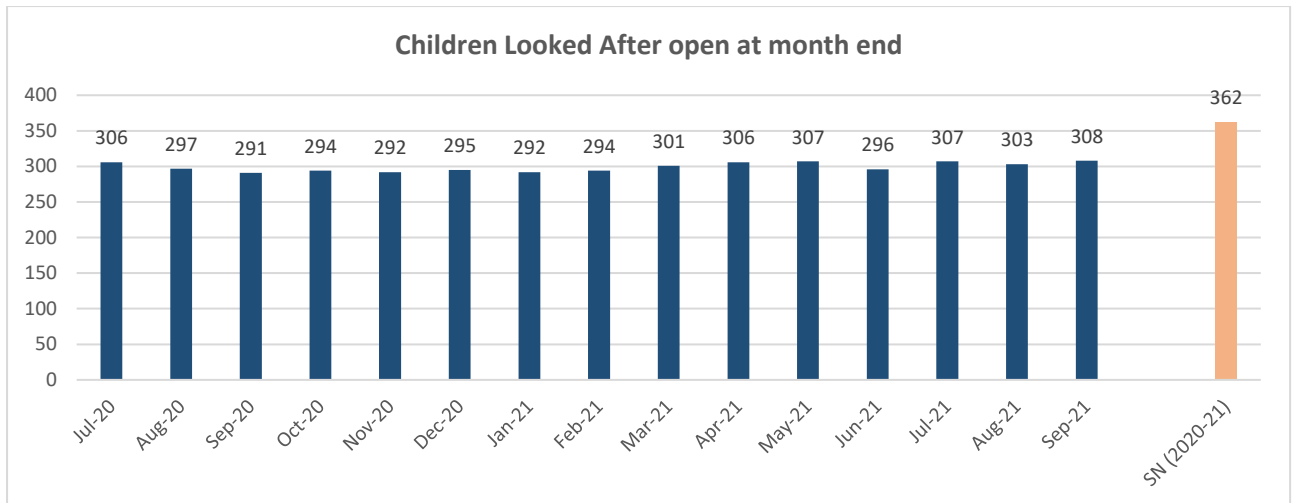
2.3 This data has been presented and discussed with the Children & Families Performance Group.

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

### 3. Performance Data for Children Looked After

#### 3.1 Number of Children Looked After (CLA)

The graph below shows the number of children who were Looked After at the end of each month. The numbers of children have shown a sustained small increase in quarter 1 & 2. Increases in looked after numbers are explored further in this report. There is monitoring of children who may need to become Looked After and there are regular reviews of children entering care. Where possible, children are returned to their family where safe and appropriate.



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

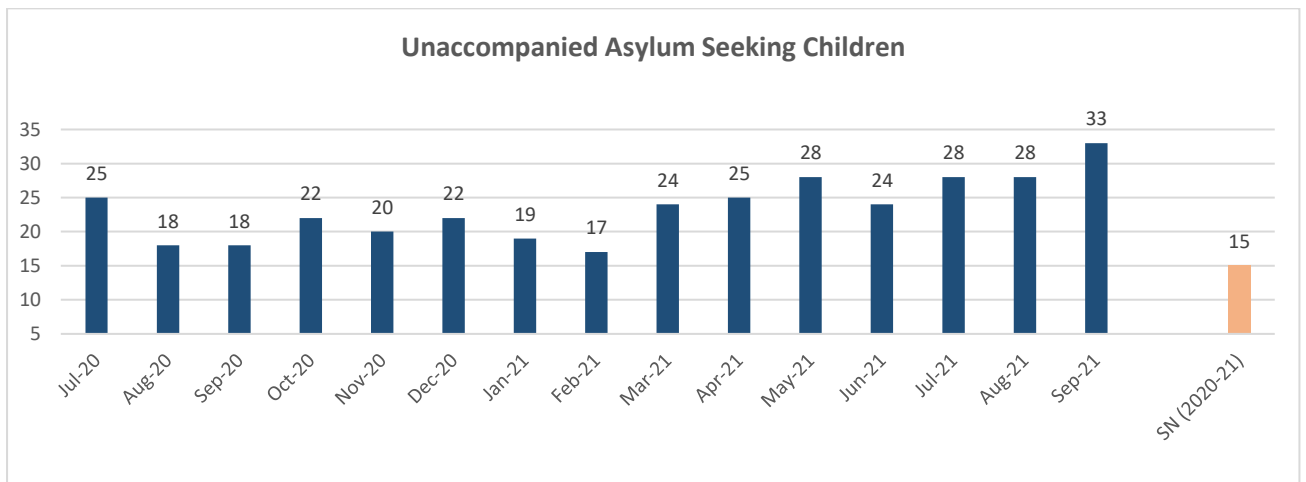
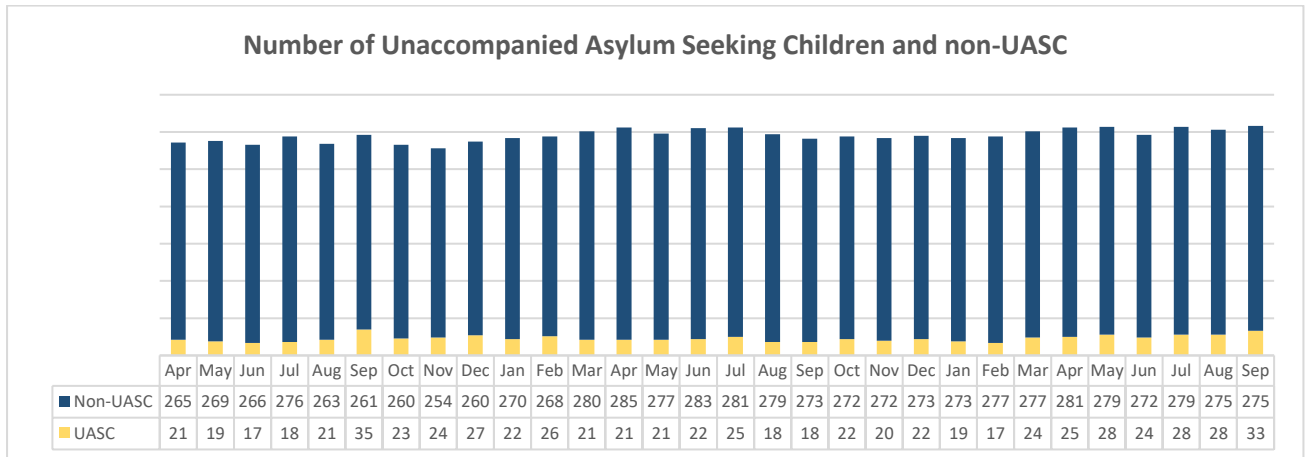
UASC are a subset of the Children Looked After number above. Local Authorities through agreement have a simple formula to ensure a fair distribution of the responsibility for looking after unaccompanied children. Each local authority has a 0.07% ceiling for how many UASC and unaccompanied asylum seeking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

Thurrock's allocated number is 31 children and was previously 27. There was a reduction in the entry of UASC into Essex Ports in 2020 to 2021 as the preferred route appears to have been through Dover. Between July and September 2021, there have been 8 new UASC arrivals into Thurrock. This increased the CLA cohort of UASC to 33 in September 2021. There is ongoing work with the Home Office to ensure timely and smooth transition for this cohort.

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

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

The NTS is operated by Central Government with the Home Office responsible for administration of the scheme. The Eastern Region Co Coordinator who previously ensured the smooth transfer process in the region is no longer responsible for the transfers, however their role is to liaise with the Home Office co-ordinator.

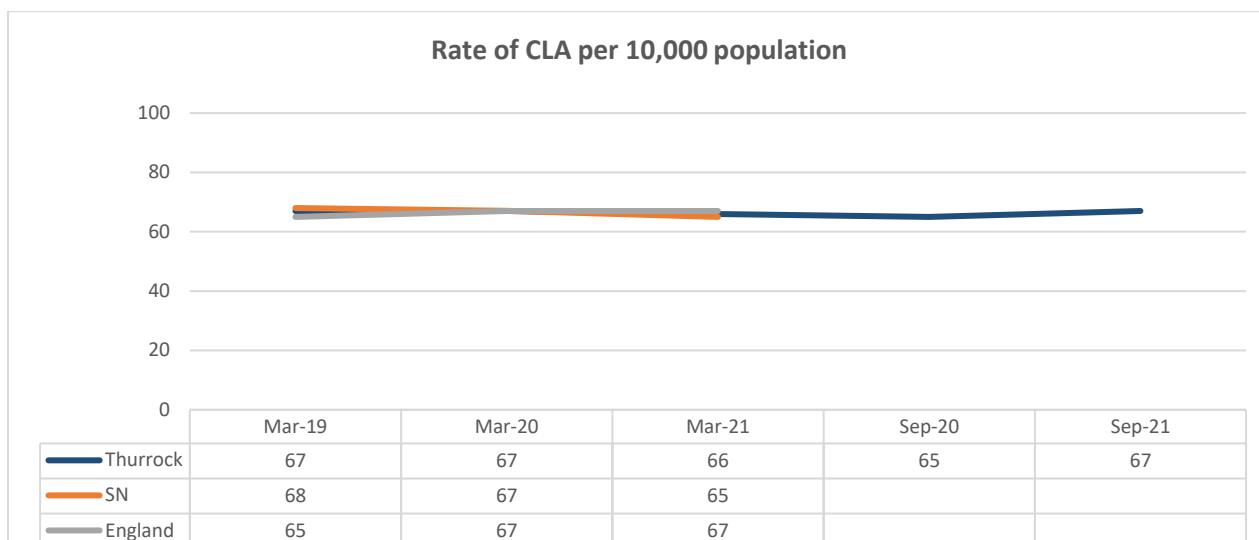


### 3.3 The Rate of CLA per 10,000 population

The graph below shows the rate of Children Looked After per 10,000 population of under 18 year olds in Thurrock. At the end of September 2021 there were 308 Children Looked After in Thurrock with the rate of 67 per 10,000. Based on the benchmarking data 2021, Thurrock is above the Statistical Neighbourhood average of 65 and in line with England averages of 67 as at the end of September 2021.

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





### 3.4 CLA episodes started and ended

It is normal for the number of children leaving care to fluctuate. During 2020-21, the number of Thurrock children who ceased to be looked after was 148, 33 were UASC compared to 235 during 2019-20 when 88 were UASC.

The most common reason for episodes ending in 2020-21 was children returning home to live with parents, relatives, or other person with parental responsibility and moving to an independent living arrangement. Similarly this was the case in 2019-20.

There is currently a delay in the timeliness of court proceedings, preventing children from leaving care to their permanent placement (Adoption, SGO or returning home). This is a direct result of COVID which has caused delays in concluding proceedings for children. 21 cases out of the total of 53 as at November 2021 were over 40 weeks.

Four factors contribute and impact on the numbers of children in care in Thurrock;

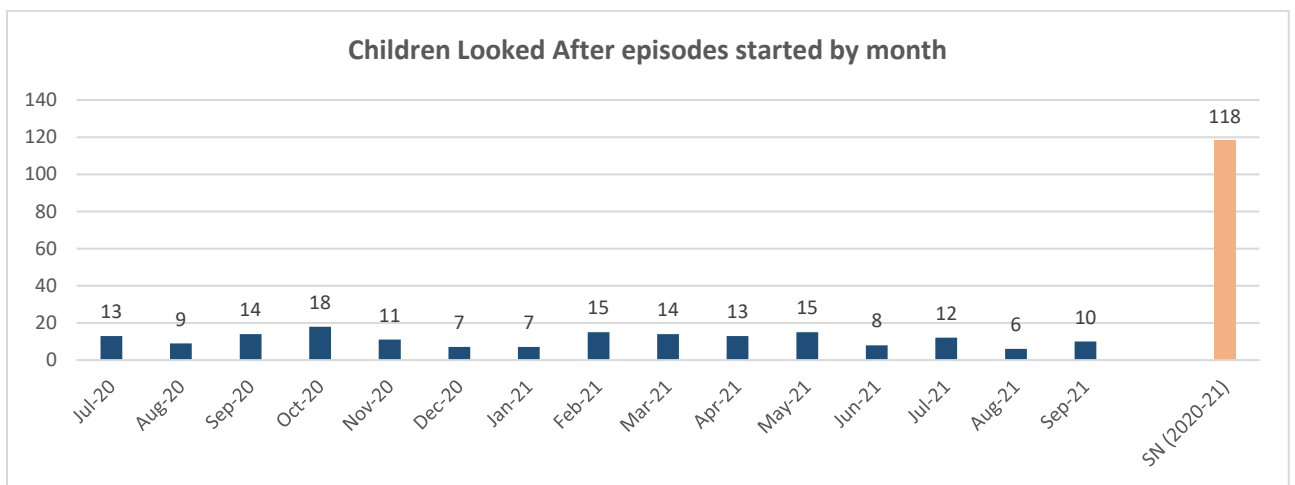
- Numbers of children entering care
- Numbers of children leaving care
- Numbers of UASC entering care
- Numbers of UASC who remain looked after by Thurrock

The below chart shows entries and exits in and out of care over the last few years and evidences fewer numbers of UASC entering care in Thurrock and a stabilising of UASC numbers in line with 0.07 of the child population and transfers taking place appropriately.

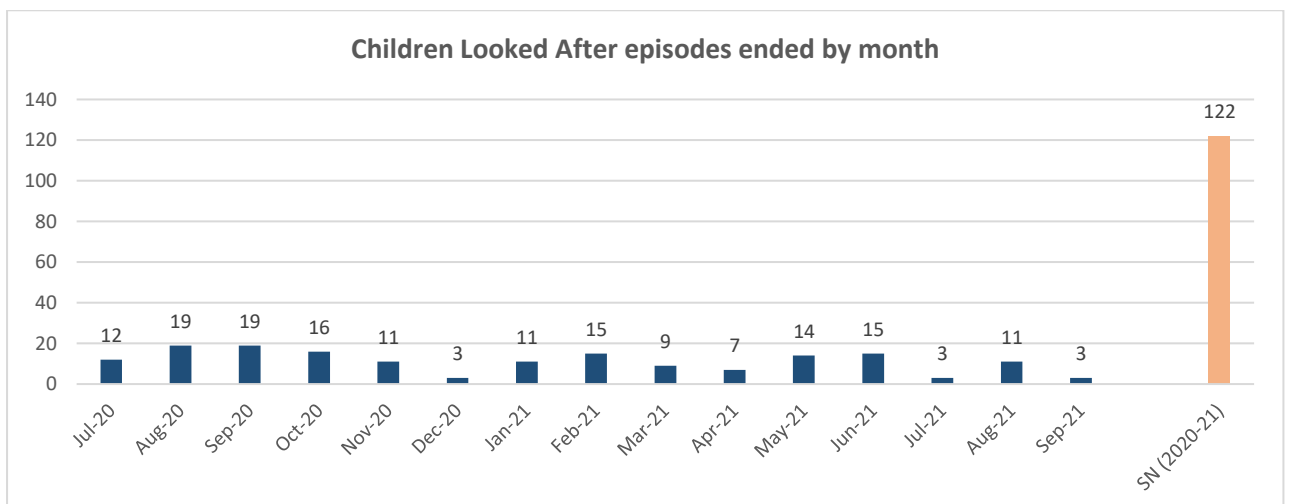
	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22(Q1 &2)
Entering Care total	203	242	150	63

Entering Care UASC (% of CLA population)	91 (44.8%)	75 (30.9%)	36 (24%)	20 (31.7%)
Exiting Care	211	235	148	56
CLA No, at end of reporting period	290 Reduction of 9	298 Reduction of 8	298 No change	305 Increase of 7
Average UASC Population	39	23	21	27.8

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

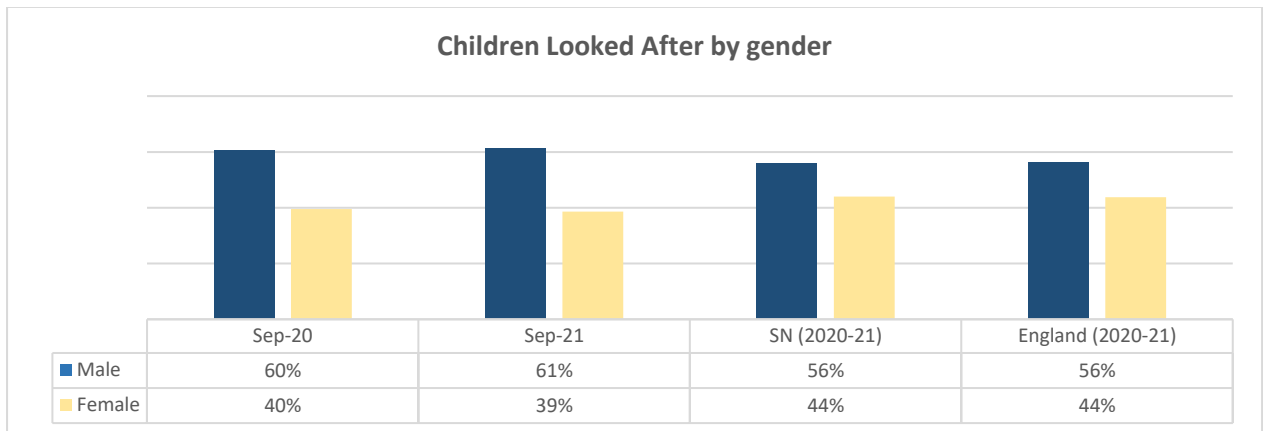


### 3.5 CLA episodes ended in month



### 3.6 CLA by gender

Based on the benchmarking data in 2020-21, the gender breakdown is in line with the Statistical Neighbour and England averages.

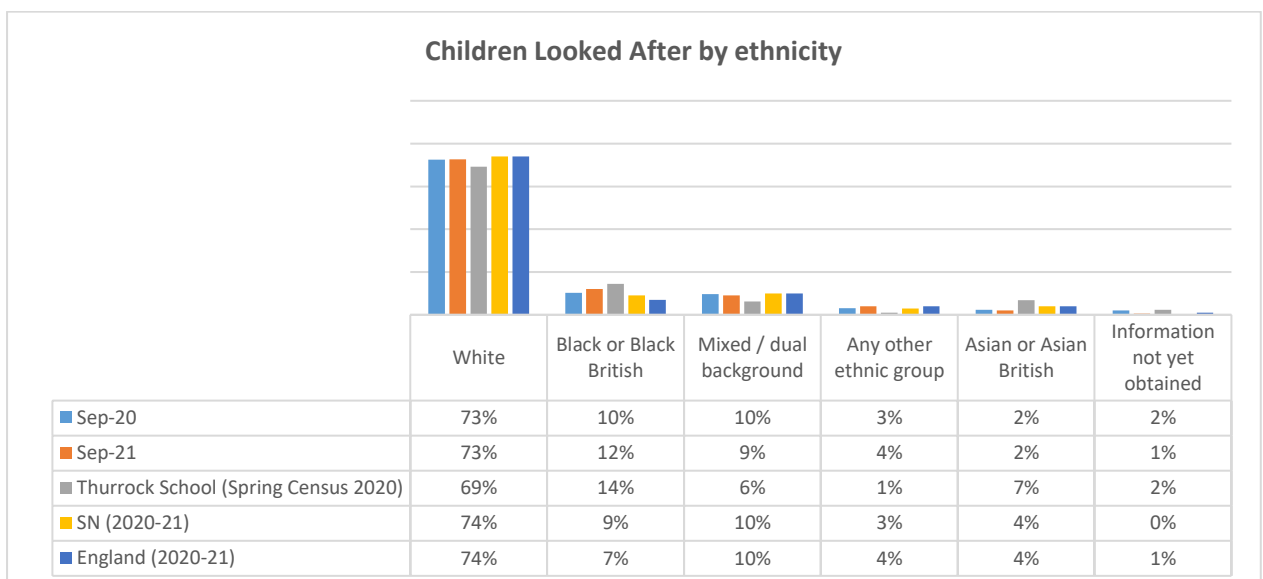


### 3.7 CLA by ethnicity

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

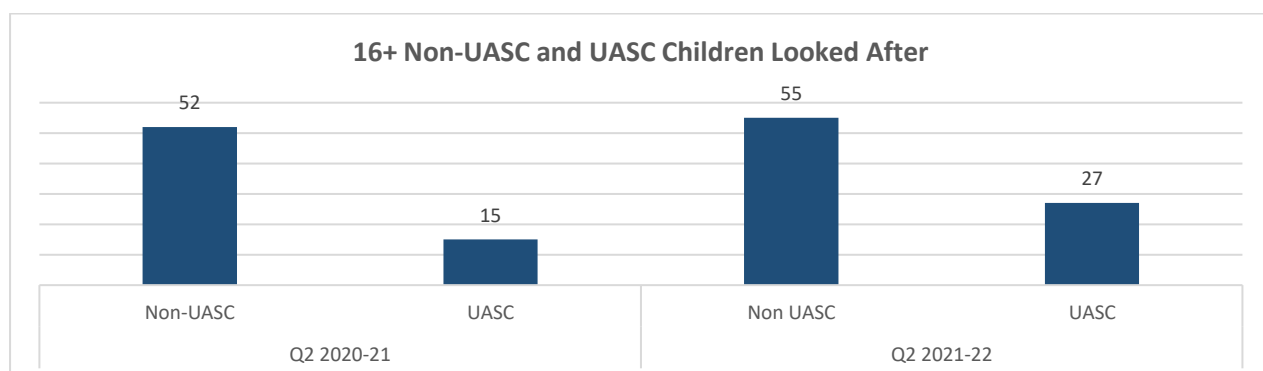
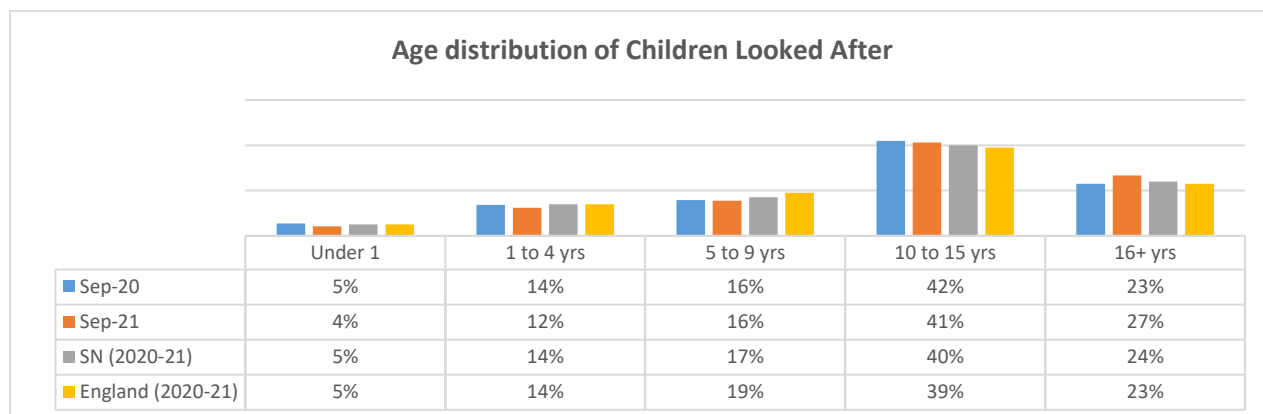
Thurrock's Children Looked After are predominantly White which is in line with Thurrock's School Census in Spring 2020 and the Statistical Neighbour and England averages as at March 2021.

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



### 3.8 CLA age profile

Based on the benchmarking data as at March 2021, the age profile of the Children Looked After cohort remains mostly stable and in line with the Statistical Neighbour and England averages. Since September 2020, the number of 16+ Children Looked After has increased by 4%. This increase is directly related to number of UASC who are predominantly male increasing from 15 in September 2020 to 27 in September 2021.

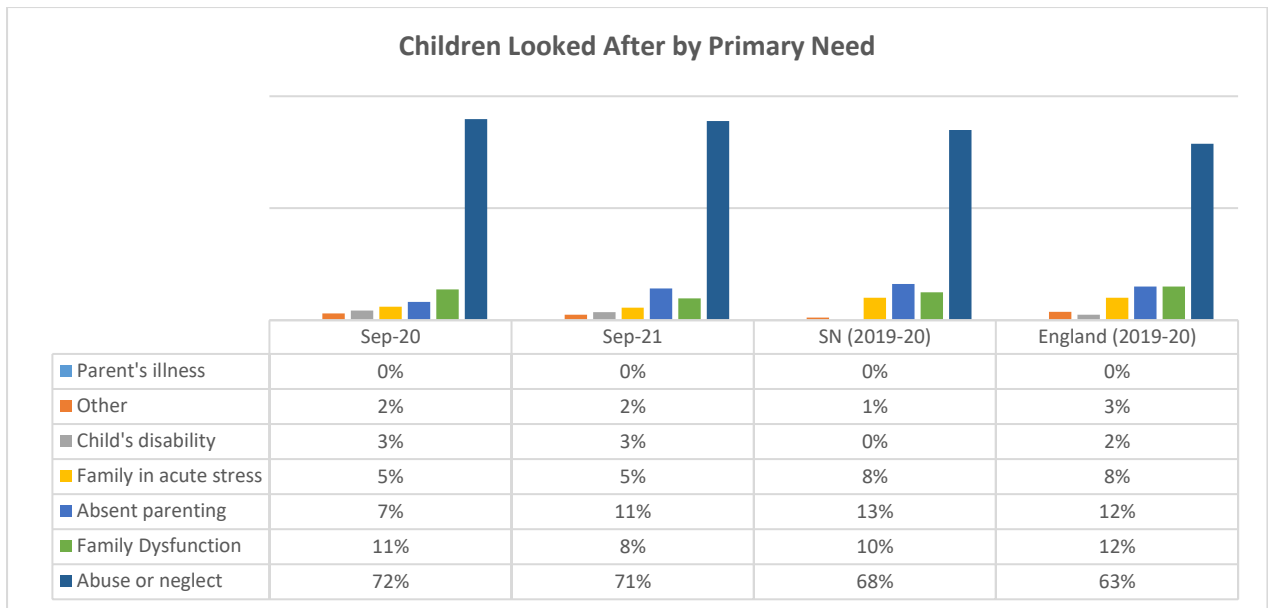


### 3.9 CLA with a disability

The number of children looked after with a disability has remained stable since September 2020. At the end of September 2021, 22 of the total CLA cohort were recorded as having a disability. 19 of these children were boys aged seven and over and three girls aged 11 and over. All 19 of these children were placed within 20 miles or less from their home. One case with two children is subject to care proceedings.

### 3.10 CLA by Category of Need

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

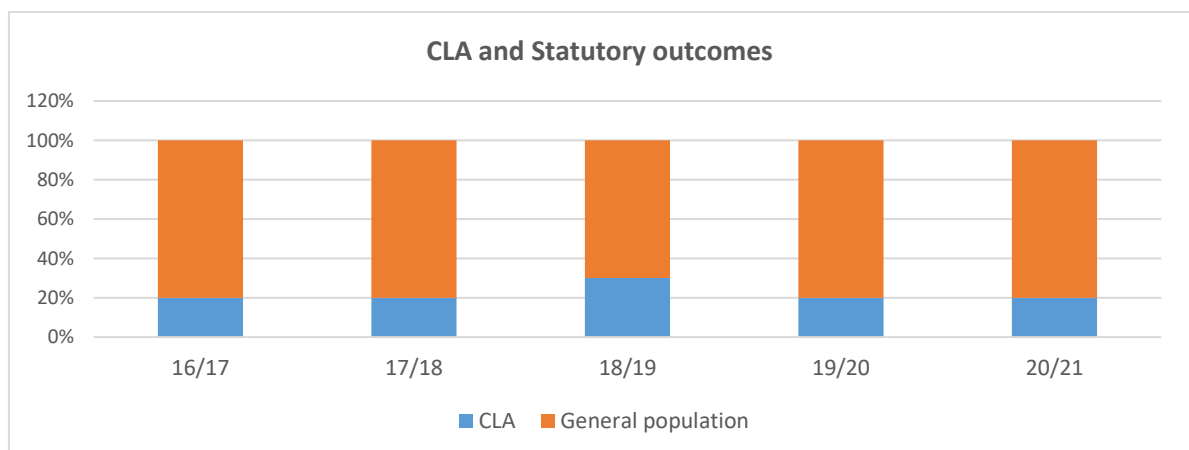


#### 4. Number of CLA open to the Youth Offending Service (YOS)

##### 4.1 Statutory Interventions

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

Between April 2020 and March 2021, there were 46 children open to the Youth Offending Service on statutory outcomes, 9 of these were looked after children of which 7 were looked after by Thurrock. The 9 children looked after represented 20% of the young people open to YOS, 56% were from a Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic background (BAME).



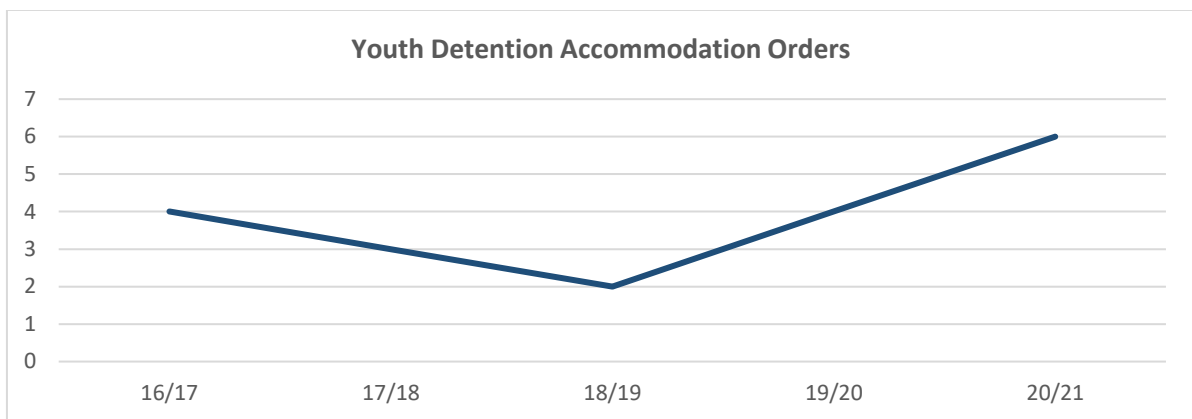
The above graph represents the percentage of Children Looked After versus the total number of young people in the Youth Justice System for the last five years. Despite an increase from 20% to 30% in 2018-19 the numbers of

Children Looked After has been relatively static at around 20%. There were no notable reasons for the increase in 2018-19.

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

#### 4.2 Youth Detention Accommodation

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



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

Between 01 April 2020 and 31 March 2021, the number of children subject to Youth Detention Accommodation (YDA) was under 5. 75% of these children are from the BAME community. The majority of the Remands into custody were made in the first four months of 2021 when there was a rise in gang related violence and knife crime.

The over representation of BAME young people in the Criminal Justice system is reflected nationally. Research into this area evidences that young black males children are not always given the same opportunities for Diversion (Early Intervention), as young white male children, from the Police and the Courts.

Essex wide, we are working with our partners to identify the root causes for over representation via the Essex Criminal Justice Board. Locally we are monitoring the numbers of black young children coming to the Out of Court

Disposal Panel, where early intervention and diversion can be offered. The data in relation to our BAME young people in custody, on Court Orders, or receiving diversion intervention is scrutinised via the Youth Crime Governance Board on a quarterly basis and is a priority within our Youth Justice Board Plan 2021-24. The Essex wide Criminal Justice Board is also sponsoring some work in this area.

#### **4.3 Out of court disposal panel**

In 2020-21, the out of court disposal panel dealt with 43 offences relating to 33 Thurrock children, of which 5 children had looked after status. All 5 children were diverted away from the criminal justice system with identified support from the YOS partnership.

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

At Q2 2021-22 the out of court disposal panel has dealt with 33 offences relating to 24 children.

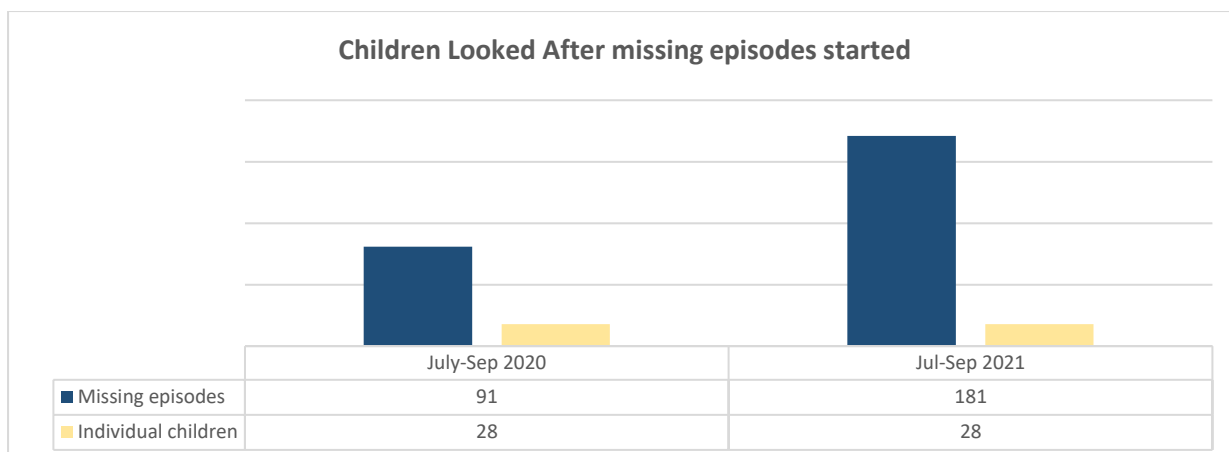
#### **5. CLA missing episodes started**

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

Between July and September 2021, there were total of 181 missing episodes compared to 91 missing episodes in the same period in 2019-20 reflecting lower level of missing at the height of COVID. The number of young people that went missing has remained at 28 for both 2019-20 and 2020-21.

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



Between July and September 2021:-

- 7 children had between 10 and 28 missing episodes
- 6 children between 3 and 8 episodes
- 15 children between 1 and 2 missing episodes

The most common reason for children going missing was contact with family and friends, representing 52% of missing episodes in September 2021.

Out of the 28 individual children who went missing, 16 went missing for 24 hours or less and 5 of these children went missing for 2 hours or less

### 5.1 CLA return to home interview (RHI)

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

Between July and September 2021, the average take up was 48% by all young people offered a RHI compared to 60% between July and September 2020. The offer of an RHI via Inspire is not always accepted by young people for a number of reasons including not wanting to reveal their whereabouts when missing and not believing that they were missing but out. All young people who have a missing episode are reviewed at the weekly Risk Management Meeting.

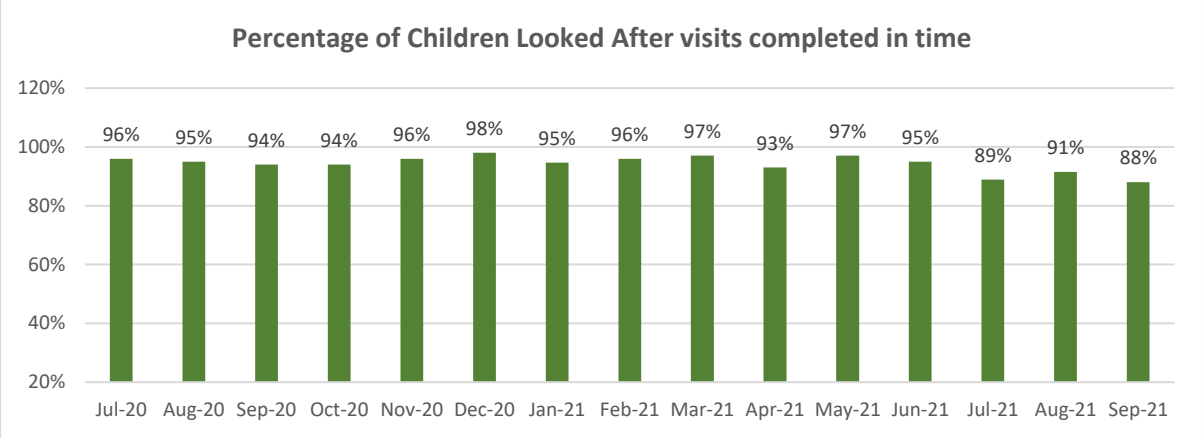
The graph below shows the percentage of return to home interviews taken up by young people through Inspire over the last 12 months. There has been an increase in the number of missing episodes in a cohort of 7 young people who have consistently refused return home interviews. We are reviewing how we



engage this cohort of young people and alternatives such as whether there is anyone within the network better placed to have these conversations when they return from missing episodes including their social worker and how this information is captured. Part of this review will include gaining an understanding from young people about what works for them, what the barriers are to taking up a return home interview and working with representatives from the National Working Group who are supporting Inspire to improve the take up of that offer

**5.2 Timeliness of social worker visits**

Social workers are required to visit a child/young person within one week of the start of any placement. Visits are then due in accordance to the time agreed within the Care Plan. This can vary from 20 to 65 working days, permitted within regulations. There has been a slight dip in performance in the last quarter and there is focused work within the service to ensure sustained improved performance and that children are seen and spoken to. The average quarterly visits completed in time between July and September 2021 was 89% compared to 95% between July and September 2020.



**5.3 CLA Initial Health Assessments (IHA)**

Every child who becomes looked after should have an Initial Health Assessment within 20 working days of entering into care. To achieve good performance for this indicator, there is reliance on working with Thurrock Social Workers, the children’s families, Thurrock health care providers, and other health providers for children placed outside of Thurrock. Sometimes notifications for an IHA cannot be made if parents have not provided consent for medical treatment and there is no court order, which gives the Local Authority responsibility for consenting to health care. There is a weekly IHA tracking meeting to ensure that there is a focus on meeting the 5-day target to notify Health colleagues that a child has become looked after and to ensure that an Initial Health Assessment is offered and completed within 20 working days.

Performance for IHA requests being sent to Health have shown a sustained improvement in the 12 month period between October 2020 and September

2021, with 84% of notifications being made within 5 working days. The numbers of IHA's requests required each month can be small and therefore fluctuations can be impacted on by very small numbers

Two performance measures inform the data and success in children having an initial health assessment in time;

- Whether the referral for an initial health assessment is made by the local authority within 5 days
- An initial health assessment takes place within 20 working days of a child entering into care

### **Impact of Covid**

One initial Health Assessment was delayed because of self-isolation due to Covid.

Three initial assessments were delayed due to sickness or capacity in health services.

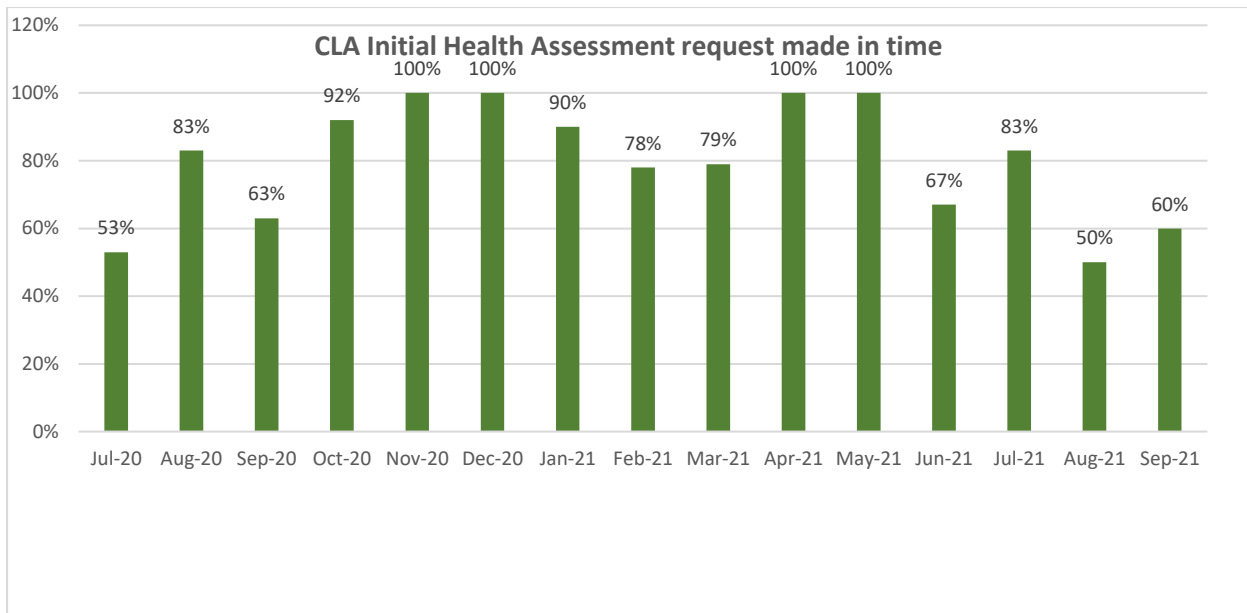
### **IHA request made to health by social care within 5 days of child becoming looked after.**

The average percentage completed in time from April to September 2021 was 77.6%

Between April and September 2021 there were eleven children with a delayed referral. Reasons for delays included; parents refusing or delaying in providing written consent; procedural issues such as a child moving placement and the paperwork needing to be resubmitted and; request for consent being late or a child who is able to give consent refusing or going missing.

### **Initial Health Assessment taken place within 20 working days of a child entering care**

The average percentage of initial assessments completed in time between April and September 2021 was 60%. Reasons for delays in children having an initial health assessment in time included parents refusing or delaying in providing written consent; procedural issues such as a child moving placement and the paperwork needing to be resubmitted; capacity within health due to sickness, and other reasons such as clashes in appointments for the young person or a child being ill.



#### 5.4 CLA in Education

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

The annual report of the Virtual School Head teacher is a key document, which must be produced as part of reporting arrangements. The Virtual school report is on this evening's committee meeting.

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

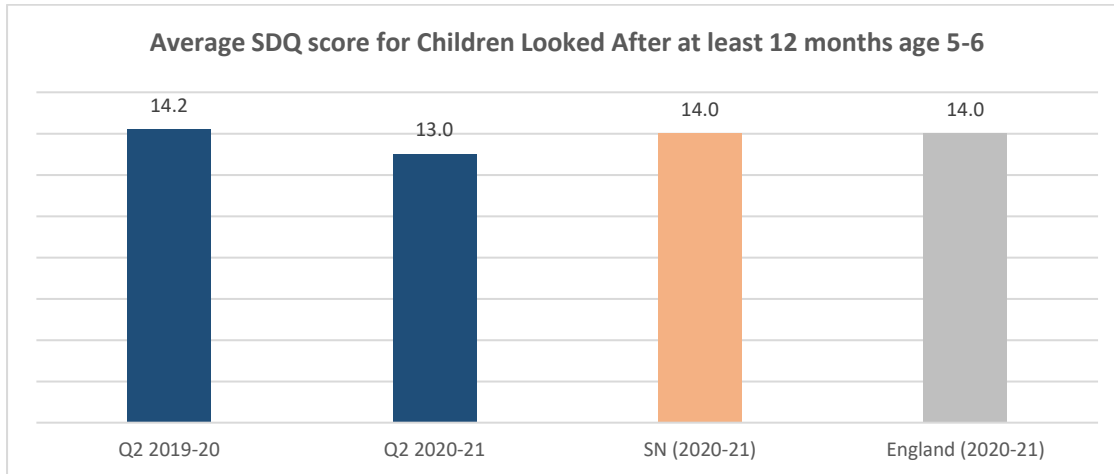
#### 5.5 CLA Strengths & Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ)

SDQ scores are a measure which provides an indication of the mental wellbeing of Looked After Children. Thurrock has a statutory responsibility to collect SDQ scores annually for all children aged 5-16 who have been in our care for more than 12 months. Thurrock Childrens Services collate the SDQ scores termly via the Personal Education Plan supported by the Virtual School and Children's Social Care collecting the views of carers, school staff and children.

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

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

Comparing quarterly average scores shows some variability but a generally improving trend. During COVID-19 the average scores have not increased and the mental wellbeing of Children Looked After is being appropriately reviewed, with support and intervention provided as necessary.



## 6. Number of children adopted

Between 01 April and 30 September 2021, a total of 5 children were adopted. 8 children are currently placed in adoptive placements and 2 have adoption hearings planned.

There are 3 children subject to Placement Orders but are not yet placed with an adoptive family; 2 children have been linked with prospective adopters and progressing to matching and one child is waiting for the outcome of an application for permission to revoke the Placement Order.

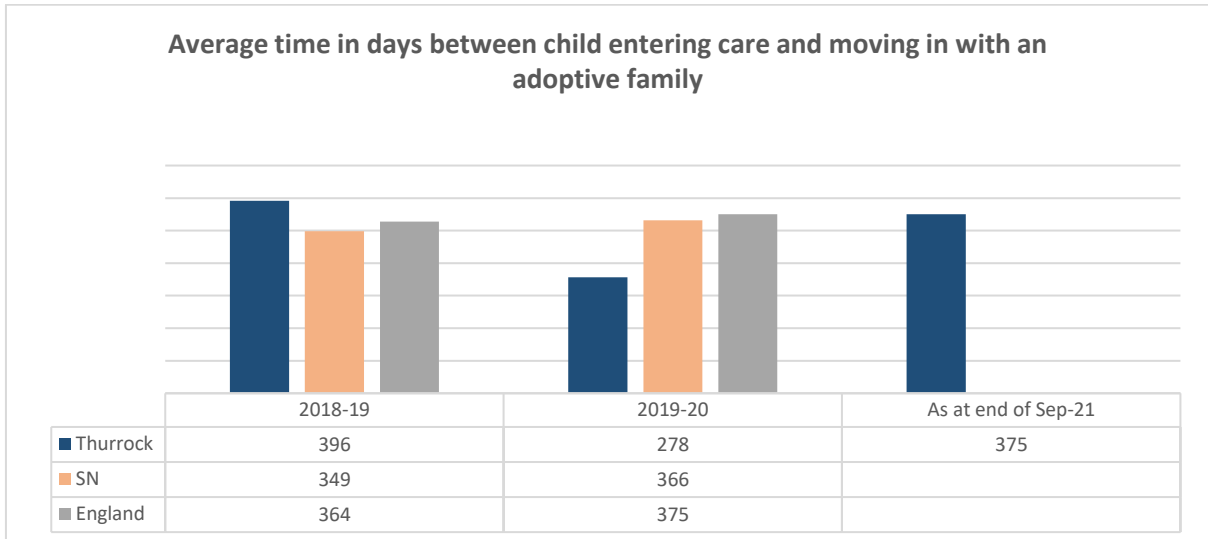
Between April and September 2021, 5 children subject to Placement Order have been subject to legal challenge by the birth parents; 4 of these children are now placed in their adoptive placements; and the legal outcome for 1 child is awaited.

There are 6 children who are waiting for a final hearing with a care plan for adoption (i.e. Care Order and Placement Order) and there are 9 children with an Agency Decision Maker (ADM) decision for adoption who are still in proceedings.

### 6.1 Timeliness of Adoption

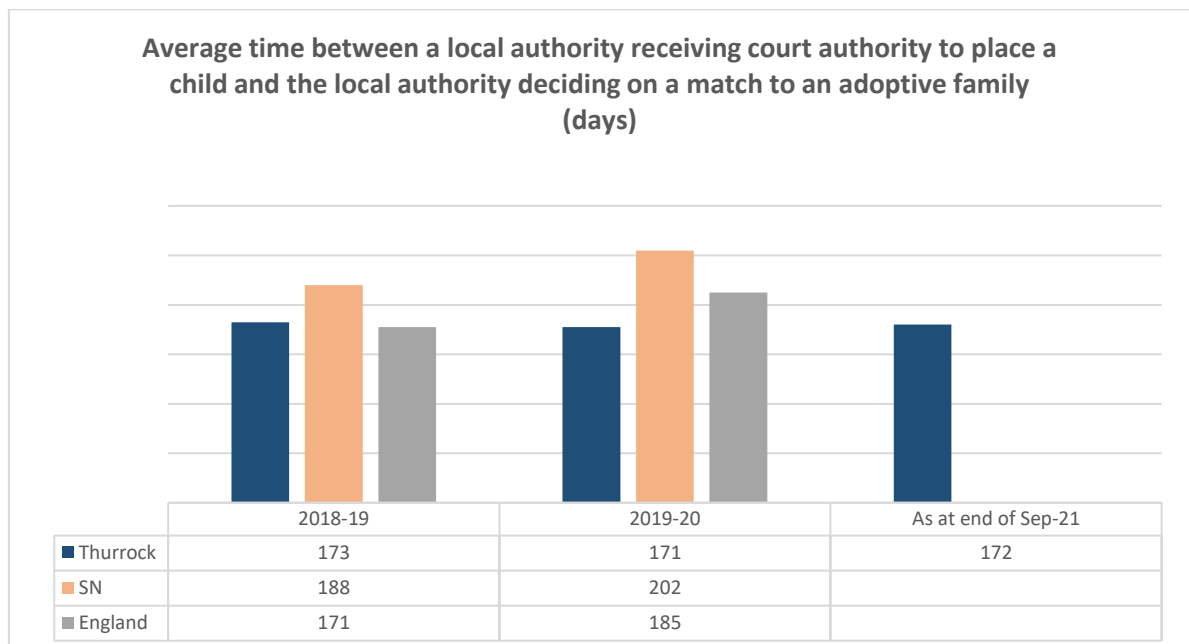
The timeliness of adoption is measured as a 12 month rolling average; it is the length of time from the child entering care to moving in with an adoptive family. As at end of September 2021, Thurrock's average was 375 days.

Based on the latest benchmarking data as at the end of March 2020, Thurrock is marginally above the statistical neighbour average of 366 days and in line with England average of 375 days.



As at end of September 2021, the average time in days between Thurrock receiving a Placement Order (court authority) to place a child with the adoptive family was 172 days.

Based on the benchmarking data as at end of March 2020, Thurrock is below our statistical neighbour average of 202 days and England average of 185 days, which is positive performance.



The impact of COVID 19 will affect the timeliness of children being placed for adoption due to the delays in timetabling of final hearings for Placement Orders, and further delay as a result of birth parents re-applying to the court to revoke Placement Order, sometimes as soon as the Order has been made. The application by birth parents to revoke a Placement Order prevents the placement of children with adoptive families. There can be a further appeal if the birth family do not agree with the chosen adoptive placement.

## 6.2 CLA permanency

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

As at the end of September 2021, there were 56 (18%) children aged 0-5, the total cohort of CLA being 308. The majority of children under five who are not able to return home, are moved on to permanent placements through adoption or permanent alternative carers. There have been significant delays, as a result of COVID-19, resulting in children being subject to court proceedings for longer periods, and transition to their permanent homes being delayed.

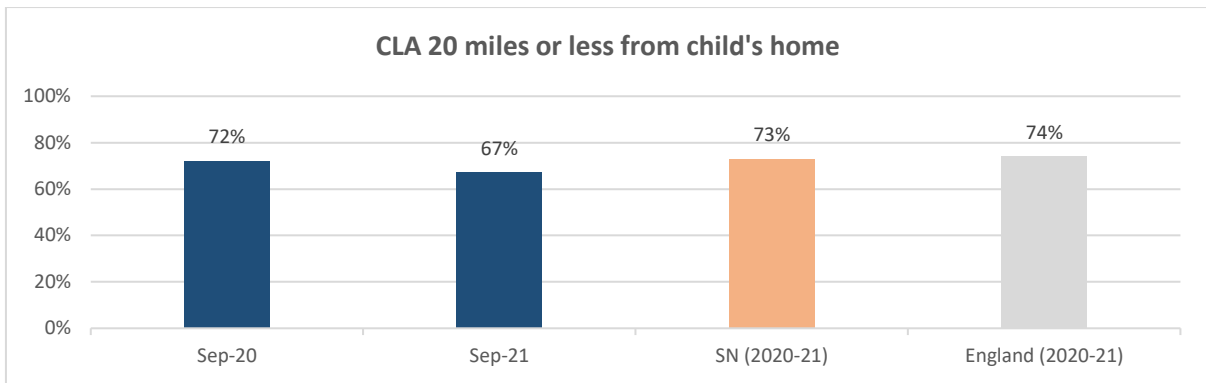
## 6.3 CLA placement distance

It is good practice to ensure that children remain within their communities. At the end of September 2021, 67.2% of the Children Looked After cohort were placed within 20 miles or less from their homes, which represents 207 of 308 children looked after. Based on the latest benchmarking data available in March 2021, it reflects the national average of 74%.

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

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



## 7. Care Leaving Service

A Care Leaver, as defined in the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000<sup>4</sup>, is a person who has been 'looked after' or 'in care' for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14, and who was in care on their 16th birthday.

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

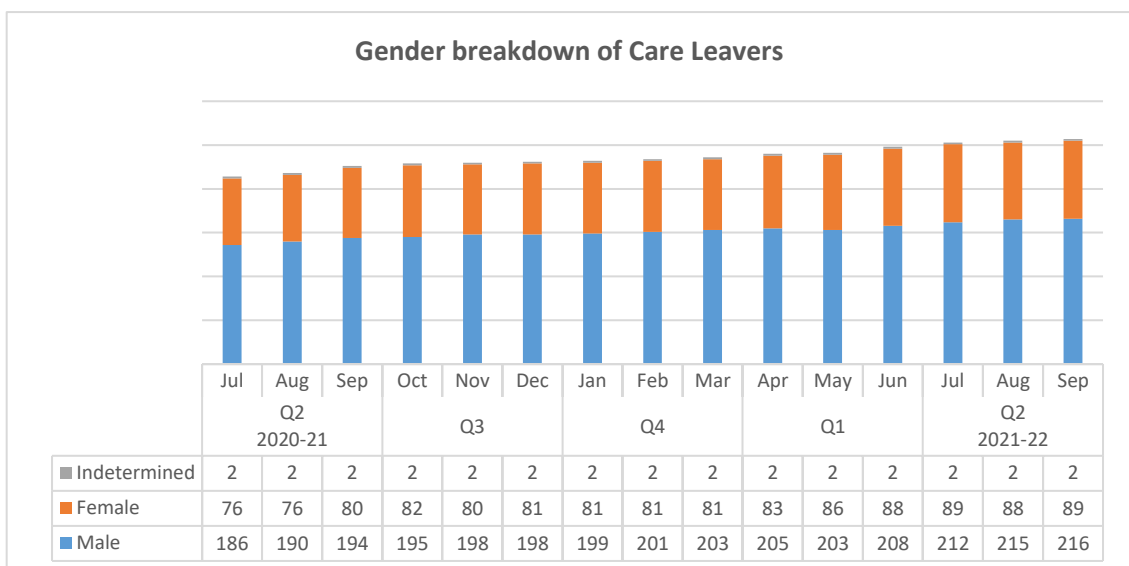
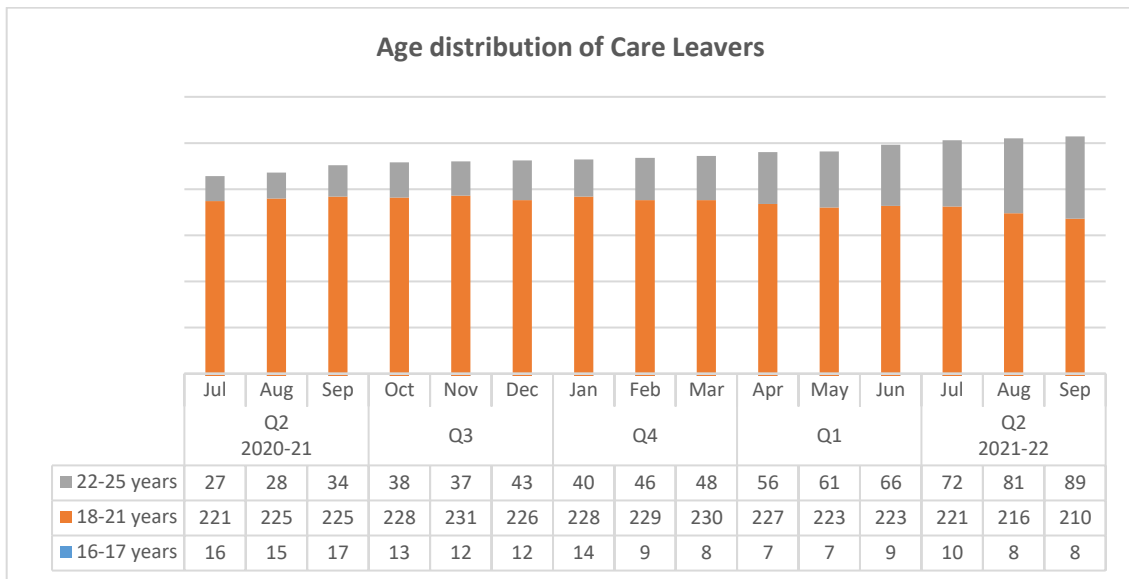
- Eligible child - a young person who is 16 or 17 and who has been looked after by the local authority/health and social care trust for at least a period of 13 weeks since the age of 14, and who is still looked after
- Relevant child - a young person who is 16 or 17 who has left care after their 16th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

The graph below shows the total **care leaver cohort** (Relevant and Former Relevant Children whose 17th, 18th, 19th, 20th or 21st birthday falls within Financial Year) of Young People age 16-25 years who are in receipt of a Care Leaving service. The numbers are increasing and this is in part due to legislative changes that placed additional responsibilities upon Care Leaving services (Children and Social Work Act 2017). Section 3 of the Act now requires Local Authorities to appoint a Personal Adviser for Care Leavers (who request one) up until the age of 25.

As at end of September 2021, 307 Care Leavers were being supported and were receiving an Aftercare service. This is an increase from the previous year and this cohort now has a wider remit as all Care Leavers can request support services until the age of 25, under the Children and Social Work Act 2017. The chart below reflects the increased number of care leavers aged 22 and above from 34 care leavers in Quarter 2, 2020-21, to 89 care leavers in Quarter 2 2021-22.

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

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

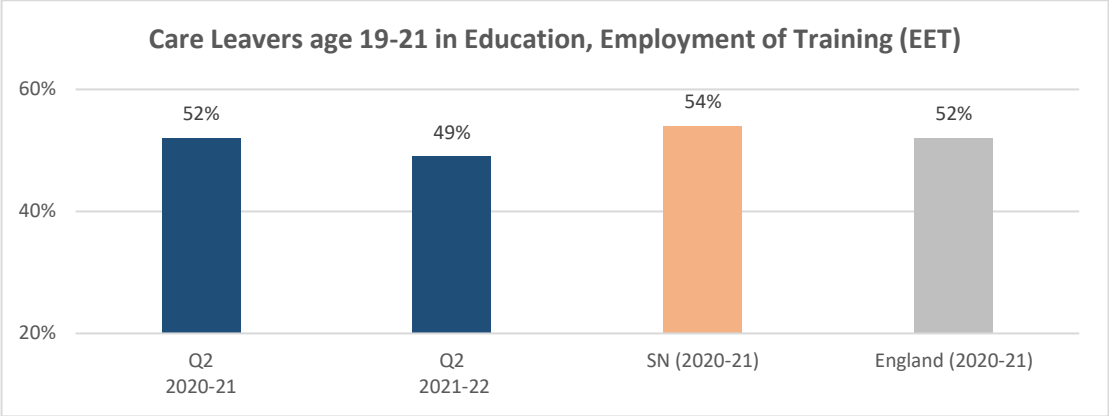


### 7.1 Care Leavers age 19-21 years in Education, Employment or Training (EET)

At the end of September 2021, 49% of the Care Leavers aged 19 to 21 year old were in part or full time education, employment or training compared to 52% in September 2020. The decrease in performance for 2020-21 can be singularly attributed to COVID. To strengthen oversight and planning to ensure our young people have support and opportunities for Education, Employment and Training (EET) there are two monthly panels which focus on pre and post 18 year olds who do not have an EET offer. These panels are attended by the Aftercare Service, Inspire Youth Hub and the Virtual School. The panel seeks to understand the issues for individual young people and align their interests to an EET offer. The panel discussions have highlighted the impact of COVID-19 on



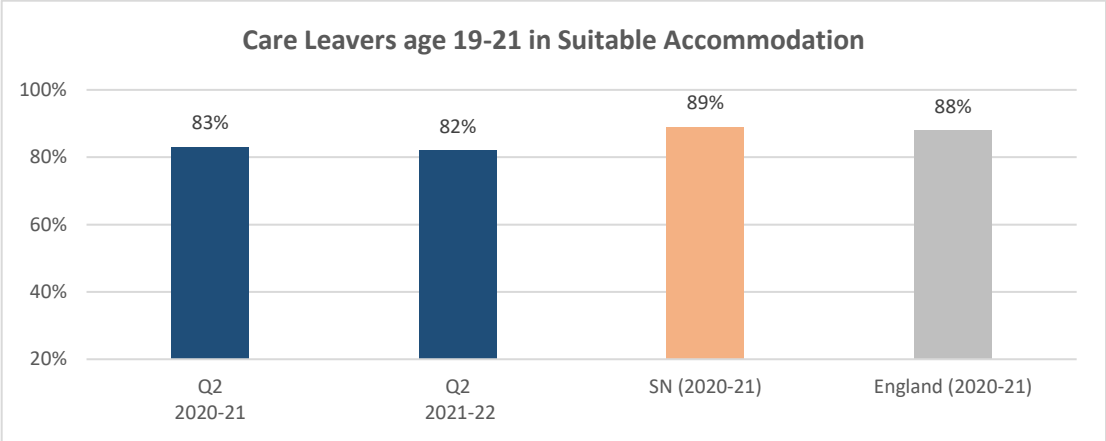
Young People which has limited opportunities to engage in work experience and continue with employment.



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

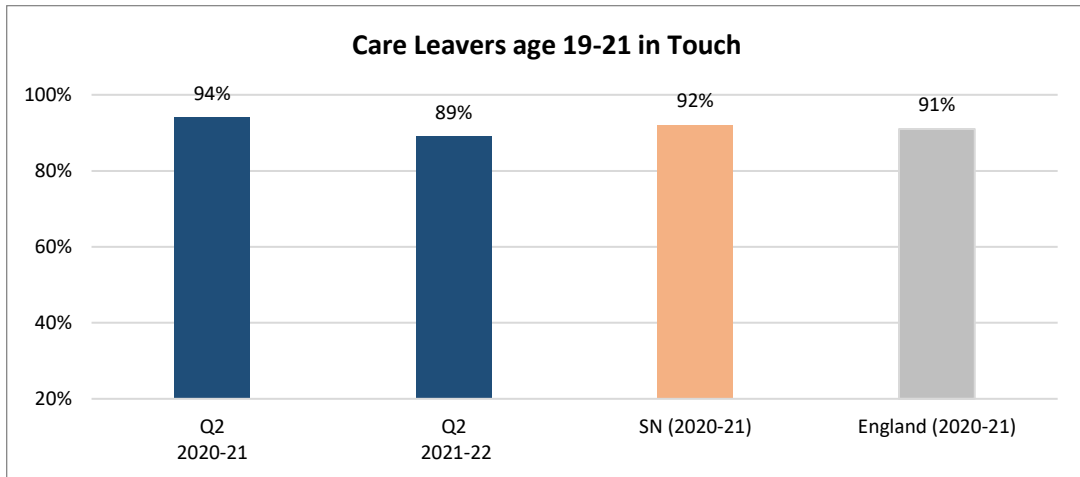
At the end of September 2021, the number of 19 to 21 year old Care Leavers reported to be in suitable accommodation was 82%. There are some care leavers who are not in touch with the service. Reasons for accommodation being deemed unsuitable include care leavers who are UASC and missing, young people declining to say where they are living or care leavers who are in prison.

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



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

Local Authorities are expected to stay in touch with Care Leavers and provide statutory support to help care leaver's transition to living independently. At the end of September 2021, Thurrock was in touch with 89% of Care Leavers. Thurrock's performance is slightly below the statistical neighbour average of 92% and England average of 91% at the end of September 2021.



## 8. Reasons for Recommendations

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

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

9.1 Not applicable

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

10.1 None

## 11. Implications

### 11.1 Financial

Implications verified by:

**David May**  
**Strategic Lead Finance**

No implications identified

## 11.2 Legal

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

No implications identified

## 11.3 Diversity & Equality

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

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

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

- applicable

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

- Not applicable

## 13. Appendices to the report

- None

### Report Author:

Naintara Khosla - Strategic Lead, Children Looked After, Children's Services

Anna Watkins - Business Intelligence Analyst, Children's Services

Daniel Jones - Service Manager, Fostering, Adoption & Placements Service, Children's Services

Jason Read - Operations Manager, Youth Offending Service, Children's Services

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<b>4 January 2022</b>	<b>ITEM: 6</b>
<b>Corporate Parenting Committee</b>	
<b>Children In Care Council Update</b>	
<b>Wards and communities affected:</b> All	<b>Key Decision:</b> Non Key
<b>Report of:</b> Annie Guidotti , CICC Project Worker Open Door Christopher Bennett, Chair Children in Care Council	
<b>Accountable Assistant Director:</b> Janet Simon, Interim Assistant Director Children’s Social Care and Early Help	
<b>Accountable Director:</b> Sheila Murphy, Corporate Director Of Children’s Services	
<b>This report is Public</b>	

## Executive Summary

This report provides an overview of the work of the Children In Care Council with some illustration of the issues consulted about over the past year.

The report outlines that the CiCC is made up of 12 young people most of whom are older young people/ care leavers. Meetings are held monthly and over the past 12 months a range of visitors have met with the CiCC including the Director of Children’s Services, Assistant Director, Portfolio holder, Strategic Lead Looked After Children and Service Manager for Adoption and Fostering.

The CiCC have been consulted about the pledge to looked after children and the Services to care leavers

The CiCC work collaboratively with the Participation and Engagement Officer in Children’s Social Care, planning events and recruitment campaigns to involve more children and young people in the CiCC. Currently there is a project to involve children and young people in an animation project to create a promotional short film.

### 1. Recommendation(s)

**1.1 That the report of the Children In Care Council report be noted.**

## **2. Introduction and Background**

- 2.1 This report provides a summary of the work carried out by the Children in Care Council over the period of one year specifically from August 2020 until August 2021
- 2.2 Open Door, an independent Thurrock Charity, is commissioned by Thurrock Council to establish and facilitate the Children In Care Council (CICC) which meets at regular intervals, currently monthly, to inform the consultation process and enable this group to discuss, debate and have their views considered about various pertinent issues and Thurrock Council policies.

The CICC is open to Thurrock young people whether they are currently a Child Looked After or Care Experienced.

The CICC receives regular visits from Council Officers who may present plans, policies and questions they wish to be considered by the young people.

They have been asked to provide their collective views on a range of issues, and have this year reviewed the Thurrock Pledge and a document issued to all Care Leavers - The Big Wide World.

CICC have discussed issues around rent difficulties, housing problems, feelings of isolation and many other topics.

The process for consultation with the CiCC is a request made to the Project Worker to create a slot in the agenda for the visitor, with detail of the subject they wish to discuss and any ask specific questions. The subject of the discussion and the questions are put to the members prior to the visit to ensure the members are fully aware of what is being asked of them.

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

While the group meetings are scheduled to take place on a monthly basis it does have the capacity to include additional special meetings. For example: the CICC members invitation made to newly elected Thurrock Counsellors to meet and discuss specific roles of each elected Cllr and how it may impact on the life of a young person in care/care leaver. This will also enable the members to ask questions around any issues or thoughts they may have about the future.

2.3 Our meetings are run by the Chairperson - Christopher Bennett was elected by the CICC members. Christopher runs the agenda to ensure we keep to time, he takes minutes and works closely with the Open Door Project Worker to produce minutes and the Agenda for the next meeting. He attends all Corporate Parenting Committee Meetings and keeps the CICC members updated on their activity.

2.4 Membership numbers stand currently at around 12 and reflect mainly those who are approaching or are cared for by After Care Services.

We have made a great effort to encourage new members to join the CICC but this has proved to be very challenging, particularly over the past year. The CICC members are anxious to encourage new members to come forward and join them and have discussed at length:

- What does a member feel about being part of the CICC
- What do you feel you want to say to encourage new membership
- Have you noticed any changes in yourself as a result of being part of the CICC.

We are currently developing a recruitment strategy which includes a letter has been written by the members to be sent out to all young people in care.

Thurrock Council recognised the difficulties in recruiting to the group and agreed to fund the animation theatre company to do some workshops with members and young people interested in animation. This will result in a short film using voices and avatars of the young people which will undoubtedly encourage new membership.

Open Door is planning to hold an activity week for young people that will help promote the CICC and encourage opportunities later in the year.

2.5 With the many restrictions put in place because of the Covid 19 pandemic it became difficult to continue face to face meetings with venues closed to us. We introduced Zoom meetings and continued to meet monthly while increasing contact with members of the group to reduce isolation. Using video conferencing tools we were able to include more members who had only been able to attend if they were in the area. We included new Thurrock members who are currently living in Leicester and Chelmsford.

During the last year it has been evident that the members were struggling from time to time due to the Covid restrictions, learning from home and not being able to socialise with friends and they have advised at meetings that they have enjoyed getting together and also having a little time at the end to chat together.

Members felt it would be good to ensure they had contact between meetings and asked for a CICC WhatsApp group could be set up which has been a good source of contact.

- 2.6 CICC have a membership of 12 members and generally can have an average of around 8 members attending each meeting. They range from students at school, college, university and employed. One member recently wrote this about his experience of CICC.

*“Being a member of CICC for the past 3 years has been one of my proudest achievements. It provided me a route and link to take my cause of advocating for Children in Care to a national level by becoming an Ambassador for A National Voice. That allows me to become a panellist to England’s independent children in care review. I also mentioned it in my University application as it demonstrates many valuable skills that they are looking for in a candidate. CICC is a great way to build your confidence and C.V.”*

This particular member has been accepted into Oxford University for History and Economics LV11 and this was confirmed when he received his grades of triple A\*

He has advised us that he intends to continue to attend CICC meetings.

The CICC have members who are currently at University, one studying Medicine and has recently brought us news of her travels and placement in Uganda. She is now home and planning the continuation of her studies to become a Doctor.

- 2.7 The Open Door Project Worker role includes attending monthly meetings Go East- Eastern Region Participation Leads where many topics of interest to CICC are discussed.

This information is taken back to our monthly CICC meetings for discussion with group members. This enables us to ensure that Thurrock CICC is also dealing with Regional issues. The Project Worker also attends local focus groups.

The Project Worker ensures during the CICC meetings that young people are being respectful of each other and they allow everyone to have their say. Recently a buddy system has been agreed for the group to ensure any new members voices are not overtaken by more confident speakers.

- 2.8 CICC members met with the Ofsted Inspectors in November 2019 and the Inspectors felt they were made very welcome. Overall, they were positive meeting the young people but felt they could become a little too focussed on their own personal experiences. This was heard and debated, and members talked about the resilience that they required sometimes to help them through



their care experience. Some had a very positive outcome and others not so positive but they agreed to keep this in mind for future discussions. From that we put in place the questionnaire that visitors to the group should complete before a meeting is agreed. This enables us to be advised in advance of the content of the questions that would arise and assists the young people to have time for thought and reflection before they welcome the visitor.

- 2.9 Members have welcomed many guests including the Assistant Director who asked what it was like to be in CICC and what they think was being done well and what could be improved.

The Chair highlighted the need for more members to come forward to help give a more balanced view.

A member of CICC advised that he felt a lack of support at his transition time from care to after care as he was still concentrating on his studies while making the move into semi independence.

When asked if members felt they were being listened to and felt they were making a difference they advised that yes in many ways they did.

After the meeting it was agreed future meetings will be extended to two hours per month with a time limit of 30 minutes for guests to attend.

We welcomed the Strategic Lead for CLA. During discussion members identified that they felt there was a gap in the provision of information provided to care leavers who wished to move on to University. A focus group was suggested, and 3 members offered to be part of that focus group as they had experience in this. We were advised that the After Care Team would be tasked with this and would make contact. Meetings were arranged by After Care and the Youth Hub to discuss all aspects of a young people's requirements on this route and the result is that a final meeting to decide how this information will be provided to all care experienced young people will take place.

In March 2021 CICC welcomed Corporate Director of Childrens Services and Cllr Halden, Cabinet Member for Childrens Services and Adult Social Care. Various topics were discussed including housing, the highs and the lows young people in the group had experienced. Virtual Schools were praised for their input especially through the last months of difficult times. Members felt teachers in general could be more positive with the aspirations of young people in care. Some members felt that positivity could come from many places including Social Workers, Personal Advisors. Our guests advised they would take this information back to Thurrock and said they had enjoyed meeting with the members. The members certainly enjoyed talking and being listened to by our guests.

The CICC was consulted on how members felt it would be best to attract new Foster Carers from the Service Manager Adoption & Fostering. He presented

possible plans for this and asked for comments. The group of members chose what they felt was the best logo and made suggestions as to where advisements could be placed in the Borough.

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

- 3.1 The report is required to update Thurrock Council of the progress of the Children in Care Council and its findings and plans for the future to ensure the voice of the child is truly being heard.

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

- 4.1 The Local Authority have a duty to ensure that children in care are supported and their views and wishes are taken into account when planning services. The Commissioned Service provided by Open Door enables Looked After Children can be involved in the CiCC.

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

- 5.1 The CiCC have been consulted in the completion of this report.

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

- 6.1 The report is compatible with the Councils policies and priorities, and consultation with looked after children and care experienced young people will improve community relationships.

### **7. Implications**

#### **7.1 Financial**

Implications verified by: **Jonathan Wilson**  
**Assistant Director of Finance**

The service is commissioned by the Council and this covers the costs for venue hire, refreshments, travel, activities and staff time

#### **7.2 Legal**

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

There are no legal implications within the report.

### 7.3 Diversity and Equality

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

The CiCC is open to all looked after children and care experienced young people. The practice and principles of the CiCC are in keeping with the council's policies regarding equality, diversity and inclusion.

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

Looked After Children

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

- None

### 9. Appendices to the report

- None

### Report Author:

Annie Guidotti

Project Worker

Thurrock Open Door

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<b>4 January 2022</b>	<b>ITEM: 7</b>
<b>Corporate Parenting Committee</b>	
<b>Fostering Recruitment Strategy: Update November 2021</b>	
<b>Wards and communities affected:</b> All	<b>Key Decision:</b> Not applicable
<b>Report of:</b> Dan Jones, Service Manager Fostering	
<b>Accountable Assistant Director:</b> Janet Simon, Assistant Director, Children's Social Care and Early Help.	
<b>Accountable Director:</b> Sheila Murphy, Corporate Director of Children's Services	
<b>This report is</b> Public	

## Executive Summary

This report provides the Corporate Parenting Committee with an outline of the fostering recruitment being undertaken and includes Key Performance Indicators reflecting the impact of the new brand with the implementation of the new marketing campaign.

### 1. Recommendation(s)

- 1.1 **Members are updated on Thurrock's Fostering Recruitment Strategy and its impact on the numbers of foster carer approvals.**
- 1.2 **Members note the marketing activities being undertaken so opportunities are created to increase the recruitment of foster carers**

### 2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1 This report is prepared by way of an update to the Fostering Recruitment Report presented to Corporate Parenting Committee in June 2021. The Committee were informed about the plan to update Thurrock Council's Fostering Brand and the steps being taken to attract and increase the recruitment of Foster Carers.
  - 2.1.1 We accept applicants from any background who are able to meet the National Minimum Standards for fostering and offer a safe loving home to a child. The recruitment process usually takes about four months from application to approval. This is shorter if the applicant is already an approved foster carer from another agency.

2.1.2 The Communications Team, Web Team and IT have been working with the Fostering Recruitment team to ensure the marketing campaign for foster carers is prioritised. Activity has included:

- Advertising in the Council Tax Leaflet and this was sent to every address in Thurrock in March 2021
- Appropriate recruitment materials are in place across the Borough with 29 banners (as at Herringham School, Blackshots Pool, Grays Methodist Church) strategically placed to attract and raise public awareness in relation to the Thurrock Fostering recruitment. This is reviewed monthly to ensure there is a continuous high profile of the campaign across the Borough
- There has been an increase in online advertising and using new outlets which has included the Mail-Online covering South Essex Area
- There is new lamp-post advertising which has been completed for Crown Road to Grays Train Station
- There has been a newly developed campaign video produced with the Fostering Network, launched nationally, Thurrock have agreement with Lakeside so the video is being played on a large screen, this was in place throughout November 2021
- Direct engagement with the community at local events (e.g. Parkrun, community days, attending Lakeside)
- The corporate website has been updated and there are links to simplified forms and easier transfer to Thurrock Fostering from other agencies. The website has the colourful brand with videos and personal testimonies of foster carers
- There is a joint venture with another Local Authority to promote fostering recruitment on Sky TV. The impact of this new marketing is being monitored as it was initiated in November 2021

2.1.3 Increased marketing and promotion in Quarter 2 has led to improved application numbers and enquiries from a low point as the country has moved out of lockdown. Thurrock Council continues to be in urgent need of increasing the foster carer community; the recent improvement in the number of new applications is very welcome, and we continue to create opportunities so a greater volume of applications are made to grow our overall number of foster carers. In addition to the above, further marketing is planned to support this including roundabouts and continually updating of the website

## 2.2 **Outcomes**

There are increased enquiries as a result of launch of the new campaign. In August 2021 we received the highest number of applications in a 12 month period and, as of November 2021, there are **11** fostering households in assessment. This should generate approximately **16** placements for children (subject to successful full assessment)

**Advertising impact (year to date compared to last year):**

	April	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Total YTD	2020/21
Facebook/Google/Social Media	0	1	7	0	1	2	2	2	15	57
Banners	0	0	2	0	1	3	1	3	10	6
Roundabouts	n/a	n/a	0	0	0	0	2	2	4	N/a
Events/Stalls	n/a	n/a	0	1	3	2	0	2	9	2
Thurrock Council Website	4	4	4	6	4	3	5	4	34	40
Council Tax Booklet/leaflet	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	1
Lamp-posts	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	1	2	3	N/a

**Progress of applications (year to date compared to last year):**

	April	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Total YTD	2020/21
Number of households attending Information Sessions	4	3	3	3	1	2	6	3	25	Not collected
Number of Enquiries	1	8	15	11	16	13	11	17	92	188
Number of IVs completed	3	5	3	6	6	9	4	4	40	74
Number of Applications Received	0	2	1	0	8	1	2	1	15	31
Number of applications dropped out	3	3	4	2	0	2	0	0	14	10
Numbers of approved foster carers	2	0	1	0	1	1	0	1	6	11
Transfer from IFA to Thurrock	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	2

<b>30/11/2021</b>
<b>In House</b>

<b>Total number of Fostering Households</b>	<b>85</b>
<b>Number of children placed with in house carers</b>	<b>109</b>
<b>IFA</b>	
<b>Number of children placed with IFA carers</b>	<b>119</b>

### 2.3 Offer

Thurrock Council has a highly competitive support offer for our foster carers. Foster carers approved by Thurrock Council receive:

- Priority for local placements for Thurrock children.
- Regular social work and clinical psychological 1:1 time and support
- An established fostering community with formal and informal support groups

Thurrock provides the following financial support per child per week

<b>Child's Age</b>	<b>Allowance only</b>	<b>Allowance + Care Skills fee</b>	<b>Allowance + Care Skills Plus fee</b>	<b>High need rate (Enhanced allowance and fee)</b>
<b>0 to 4</b>	£147	£347	£397	£497
<b>5 to 10</b>	£168	£368	£418	£518
<b>11 to 15</b>	£210	£410	£460	£560
<b>16+</b>	£252	£452	£502	£602

In addition, Foster Carers who live in Thurrock and Foster a Thurrock child for a minimum number of days per annum have their Council Tax waived.

## 3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

- 3.1 Since the launch of the new brand the number of applications has been steadily increasing and there is recovery from 2019/2020 when Covid impacted significantly on the recruitment and marketing of foster carers. In November 2021 Ofsted released a report on the national picture for Fostering<sup>1</sup>. That report highlights the continued national shortage of foster placements and confirms the challenges Thurrock has faced are not unique to our Local Authority.

<sup>1</sup> • Fostering in England 2020 to 2021: main findings - <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/fostering-in-england-1-april-2020-to-31-march-2021/fostering-in-england-2020-to-2021-main-findings>



The Ofsted report highlights key issues:-

- The number of approved Foster Carers across England is not keeping up with demand despite the highest level of approvals; *Thurrock has slightly fewer foster carers but the number of children in placement has remained stable*
- Nationally enquiries to foster are at an all-time high but conversion to application is falling; *Thurrock is not reflecting the national picture and has a good conversion rate to application*
- 20% of approved placements nationally are unavailable; *Thurrock's rate of placements being unavailable is lower than the national rate at 12%.*

3.2 The Ofsted report reviewed national data following the pandemic. Covid-19 has impacted people's readiness to foster because of either its impact on individuals' families or in their concern that fostering may increase risks around contracting Covid-19.

3.3 Thurrock Council will need to continue to attract members of the public into fostering. This will require further development of our marketing approach including using a range of media to generate interest and enquiries.

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

4.1 Members to note and consider the options available

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

5.1 We consult monthly with our foster carers via a group focussed on recruitment. Their views and ideas are included in our planning.

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

6.1 The Communications Team have supported the recruitment of Foster Carers and we would want this to continue with foster care recruitment being a corporate priority with marketing being innovative and wide ranging.

## **7. Implications**

### **7.1 Financial**

The increased recruitment of foster carers will assist in the reduction of Independent Fostering Agencies and support the Council with their own cohort of foster carers.

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

A key part of the Looked after Children Strategy and Medium Term financial plan is to increase the number of foster carers.

### **7.2 Legal**

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

The Council has a duty under Section 22G of the Children Act , so far as reasonably practicable, to secure accommodation for children that it is looking after in the Council's area, which meets the needs of those children: where this is consistent with those children's welfare.

The ways that the Council may provide that accommodation is set out in Section 22C of the Children Act 1989 and this includes the provision of foster placements. The placement, so far as reasonably practicable, must:

- a) Allow the child to live near the child's home
- b) Not to disrupt the child's education or training
- c) To enable siblings to live together
- d) Meet a disabled child's particular needs
- e) Is within the Council's area

Any recruitment strategy for foster carers should assist the Council in fulfilling these duties.

### 7.3 Diversity and Equality

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

Applications to foster are welcomed from anyone of any background who wishes to apply. They are assessed against the National Minimum Fostering Standards and individual needs, circumstances etc. are addressed in detail.

The Fostering Service is committed to furthering equality, promoting diversity and eliminating discrimination in all its forms. We are committed to placing the needs of children first; to recognise children, young people and carers as individuals, and to treat our service users, carers and partner agencies with dignity and respect. We are also is committed to raising the profile of equality and diversity issues across the Council.

The Fostering Service actively and consciously values diversity and difference, and seeks to provide a high quality service and fair and equal treatment for all our carers, children and young people. Our approach to promoting equality and diversity is to provide bespoke services, with due consideration and sensitivity to the complex needs of children and young people and families. Increasing the numbers of foster carers provides greater choice of placements for looked after children and improved matching of children with carers. This will support our Thurrock children to fulfil their potential as they have homes providing stability.

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

Good practice is to place children in care in their local community where possible to do so. Unless the number of local foster placements are increased this could lead to children being placed further away.

### 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):

- Thurrock Fostering Statement of Purpose
- Payments to Foster Carers Policy
- Fostering in England 2020 to 2021: main findings - <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/fostering-in-england-1-april-2020-to-31-march-2021/fostering-in-england-2020-to-2021-main-findings>

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

- None

**Report Author:**

Dan Jones

Service Manager

Fostering, Adoption and Children with Disabilities Service

<b>4 January 2022</b>	<b>ITEM: 8</b>
<b>Corporate Parenting Committee</b>	
<b>Independent Reviewing Officer Annual Report</b>	
<b>Wards and communities affected:</b> All	<b>Key Decision:</b> N/A
<b>Report of:</b> Trevor Willis Service Manager, Safeguarding, Reviewing & Child Protection Ruth Murdock, Strategic Lead of Quality Assurance and Reviewing	
<b>Accountable Assistant Director:</b> Janet Simon, Assistant Director, Children’s Social Care and Early Help	
<b>Accountable Director:</b> Sheila Murphy, Corporate Director of Children’s Services	
<b>This report is public</b>	

## Executive Summary

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

This document should be read in conjunction with the *“Thurrock Children’s Services, Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Annual Report”* for 2020 – 2021 (see Appendix 1)

### 1. Recommendation(s)

**1.1 For the Corporate Parenting Committee to review and comment on the IRO Annual report 2020 - 2021 and the recommendations in the report.**

### 2. Introduction and Background

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

The IRO has a number of specific responsibilities, including:

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

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

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

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

During the performance year April 2020 – March 2021, the IRO Service conducted a total of 864 reviews. This is a decrease of 76 reviews (8%) 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 98.4% of reviews held within timescales; an increase of 0.9% when compared to last year.

This year, children and young people participated in person, or through an advocate, or by another means by providing their views in the majority of reviews. Only 2% of reviews were conducted (for children over the age of 4) where they did not attend nor send their views. Children and young people are encouraged to feed back their views by the 'Mind of My Own' App alongside speaking with their carers, allocated social workers and IRO.

For the period April 2020 to March 2021, 97.6% of review reports were completed within timescale by the IRO's.

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:

- The monthly breakdown for the numbers of children looked after has remained relatively stable and consistent throughout the year ranging from 306 to 291. The rate of Looked After Children per 10,000 for March 2021 represents 67 children per 10,000, this is in line with national data and slightly above statistical neighbours. (65 per 10,000)
- The number of unaccompanied asylum seeking children has risen slightly by 4 (representing 8% of the total cohort) as of March 2021, this is still lower than previous figures between 2014 and 2019

- The number of children adopted has fallen by just over 2.2% from the previous year; nationally figures have fallen by 4%
- There are more boys Looked After in Thurrock than girls (62% and 38% respectively)
- Black British children are not over represented in the looked after population at 14.1% (2020 figures) which compares to the school census data of 14.4%, although children from mixed/dual heritage backgrounds are 10.1% compared to the school census data of 6.3%
- The majority of children looked after are subject to legal proceedings at 75% which compares to national data ( 77%) and shows a desire to achieve permanence and stability for children
- The number of children placed more than 20 miles away from their home has fallen slightly by 0.4%. with 70% of Children Looked After living 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

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

At a recent involvement event a number of young people were asked about their views surrounding their care plans. 95% of children were optimistic about their care plans believing that they would either help or “sort of” help them. 65% of children were either involved or “sort of” involved in the development of their plans.

Only 58% of children knew or “sort of” knew what was in their plan and it is the focus of the IRO service to ensure that moving forward reviews clearly indicate to children and young people what their care plan is and how they can be involved in the development of this plan.

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

### 3 Issues Options and Analysis of Options

None

### 4 Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1 To inform members of the work of the Independent Reviewing Officer Service during 2020-2021. The report also updates members with their recommended work plan for the IRO service during 2021 – 2022.

## **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 (Social Care and Education)

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: Roxane 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 Inequalities, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder, and Impact on Looked After Children

Not Applicable

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

- Not Applicable

9. **Appendices to the report**

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

**Report Author:**

Trevor Willis  
Service Manager Safeguarding, Reviewing and Child Protection

Ruth Murdock  
Strategic Lead Quality Assurance and Reviewing

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

**ANNUAL REPORT**

**01 April 2020 – 31 March 2021**

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## 1. Introduction and Purpose of the Annual Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to meet the statutory requirement 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 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 the 1<sup>st</sup> of April 2020 until the 31<sup>st</sup> of March 2021 and includes in year data and year end data.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

4.1 As a Corporate Parent, the Council is ambitious to ensure that children achieve 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 this reporting period, the IRO services remained stable. There have been no periods of prolonged absence or sickness.
- 5.2 The service is comprised of five, permanent full time members of staff. All five IROs working for the Service are qualified Social Workers registered with Social Work England and subjected to regular Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) enhanced checks. All IRO's have relevant and appropriate skills, bringing to the role specialist knowledge and experience.
- 5.3 There are two female and three male IRO's from diverse backgrounds, ensuring young people in our care can be allocated to an IRO's across a range of ethnic groups.
- 5.4 IRO's act independently to the local authority and are not involved in preparation of children in care plans or the management of children in care cases nor do they have any control over resources allocated to a case.
- 5.5 During the reporting period the IROs were line managed by the Service Manager for Safeguarding and Quality Assurance.

## 6. IRO Caseload and Service Performance

### 6.1 IRO caseloads

	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/2020	2020/21
Average caseload	56	67	67	61	62	60	60
Caseload range	58-62	62-67	60-68	62-65	44-68	57-62	58-61

6.2 The average IRO caseload remained identical to the previous year, with IRO's having on average 60 cases, ranging between 58 and 61 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). Children and young people's circumstance and situations vary in complexity, and the distance which needs to be travelled to placements can vary considerably. Children who are recently accommodated, placed at distance, involved in care proceedings or have a placement disruption require a higher level of scrutiny and oversight than children who are in long term settled foster placements. There 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 manageable based upon the the number suggested in the IRO handbook and the complexity of the role carried out by the IRO. In addition IRO's contribute to panels, support the delivery of training and are part of the management audit programme.

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

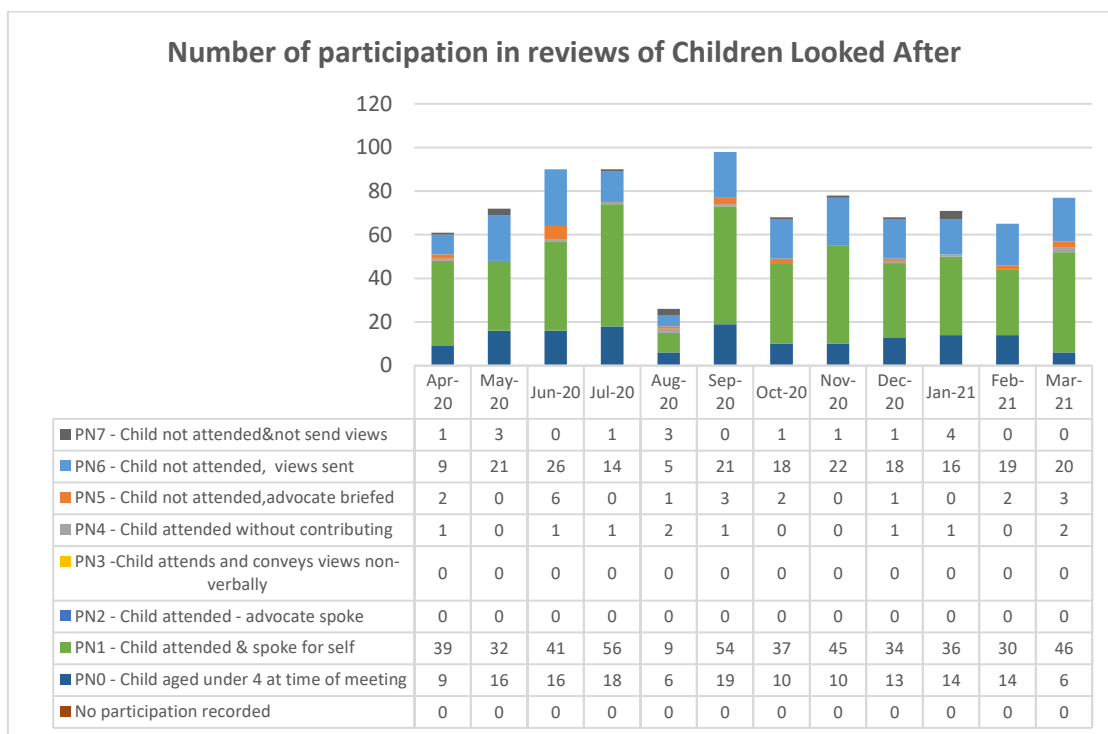
	2020									2021			Year to Date
Due in month	Apr	Ma y	Ju n	Jul	Au g	Se p	Oc t	No v	Dec	Ja n	Fe b	Mar	
Total held	61	72	90	90	26	98	69	78	69	73	59	79	864
Total held In timescale	61	72	89	90	23	97	63	77	69	72	58	79	850
Percent age of total due held in timescale	100 %	100 %	99 %	100 %	89 %	99 %	91 %	99 %	100 %	99 %	98 %	100 %	
Held In quarter	223			214			216			211			864
Percent age held in timescale	99.5%			98%			97%			99%			Average % 98.4

During 2020/21, the IRO service conducted a total of 864 reviews. This is a decrease of 76 reviews (8%) when compared to the number of reviews conducted the previous year. There are factors that will contribute to this decrease in numbers such as a reduction in the numbers of children entering care (children on entering care have reviews more frequently in their first year of being looked after). 164 children entered care in 2020/21 in comparison to 242 during 2019-2020. The performance in respect of reviews being held within timescale, improved during the year, with the final average being 98.4% of reviews held within timescales an increase of 0.9% from the previous year.

Wherever possible, reviews are held in a timely manner and are arranged to take place 1 month before their due date so as to accommodate any unexpected postponements or delays. There will always be factors that result in reviews being delayed such as 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.



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



The represented views of the child in each review is a priority and children and young people are encouraged wherever appropriate, to take part in their reviews. There are occasions where children are either unable or unwilling to attend their review meetings and when this happens efforts are made by the IRO service to support children's views being shared at the meeting. This may be done through the use of the Mind of My Own Application, through face to face visits, or phone conversations. Attendance for children at their Reviews is not mandatory. The service is exploring other ways to creatively obtain the views of children and young people in a meaningful way. This may involve undertaking an activity with a young child or young person.

From the data in the chart above it is clear that the vast majority of reviews are well attended by children who spoke for themselves or young people sent their views. This reflects the proactive approach taken by the IRO service in ensuring that the child remains at the centre of every meeting.

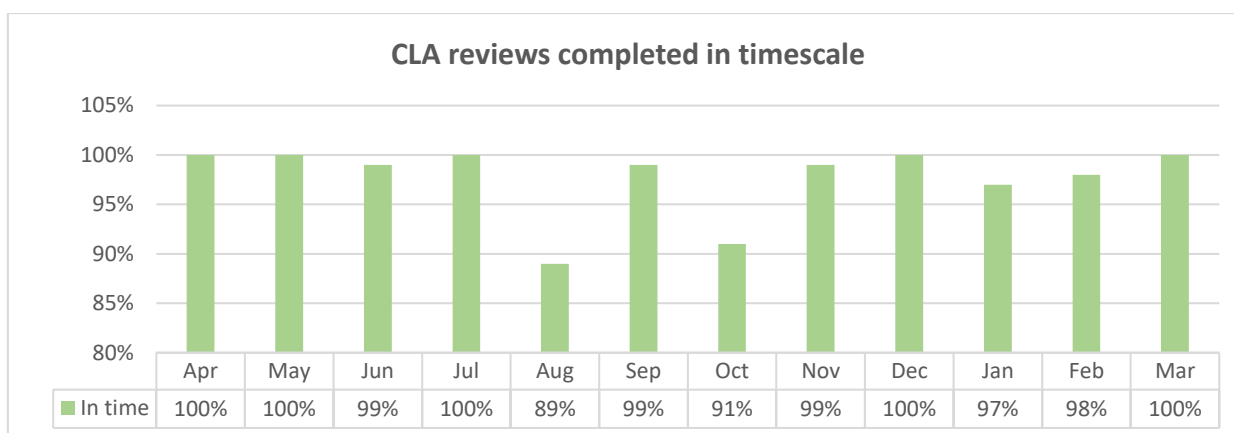
<b>Participation</b>	<b>Total 2017/2018</b>	<b>Total 2018/19</b>	<b>Total 2019/2020</b>	<b>Total 2020/2021</b>
Not Recorded	105	0	0	0
PN0 Child aged under 4 at time of meeting	85	100	142	151
PN1 Child attended & spoke for self	332	372	439	459
PN2 Child attended - advocate spoke	5	3	10	0
PN3 Child attends and conveys his/her view symbolically ( non-verbally)		2		0
PN4 Child attended without contributing	4	5	14	10
PN5 Child not attended, advocate briefed with views	12	3	59	20
PN6 Child not attended, views sent	122	159	163	209
PN7 Child not attended & did not send views	83	103	40	15
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>750</b>	<b>747</b>	<b>1,137</b>	<b>864</b>

The yearly totals indicate that there has been a continued increase in the number of children and young people attending their meeting to express their views. Encouragingly there has also been a decrease in the number of children who neither attended nor sent views for their meeting (PN7). Contributing to this improved performance is the increased focus and prioritisation of children's' participation along with reviews being held virtually over Microsoft Teams during lockdown which for some young people is a more acceptable way of attending and participating in their meetings.

All children and young people are offered the use of an Advocacy Service. The use of the Advocacy Service this year to support a child's views being represented at their review when compared to previous years has fallen (PN5). It is not clear what the reason for this has been but contributory factors may be the impact of Covid on the ability of Advocates to meet face to face with children and the use and take up of hybrid meetings facilitating the contribution of some young people.

The number of young people who have not attended or sent their view has reduced in 2019/20 and 2020/21 by over 60%. Although only a relatively small number it is important to the reasons for this. Feedback obtained from the IRO's with regards to this indicates that often this is due to older young people who do not wish to take part in their reviews or a small number of young people who are missing at the time of the review. In each case the IRO will attempt to speak to the young person either face to face or over the telephone to obtain their views and ensure that these are shared at their Review.

## 7.2 Completion of Review Reports



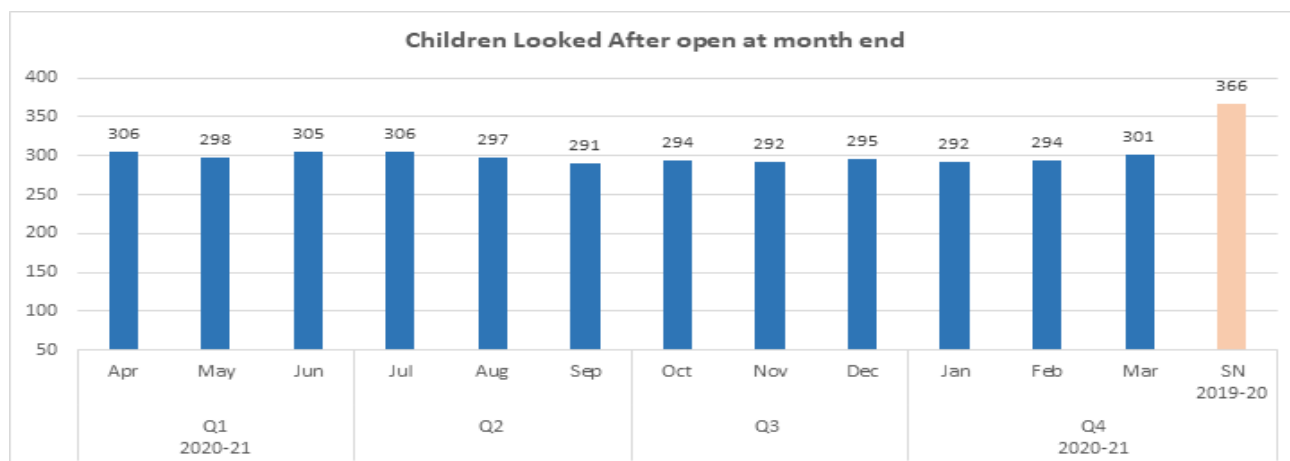
On completion of the child's review the IRO completes a report on the children's social care recording system (LCS). The report provides a record of the review and its discussions, the outcomes and recommendation made in the review. The target for having these review outcome reports completed and distributed to young people, parents and professionals is within 20 working days of the review. An average of 97.6% of reviews were completed within timescale during 2020/21. The reduced percentage of reviews completed within timescale during August (3) is due in part to summer holidays and the impact of annual leave and in October (6) short term staff sickness. Timeliness and providing reports to young people within time scales is a priority and the timeliness of social work reports is regularly scrutinised by the IRO service and where appropriate, issues of late reports are brought to the attention of the Service Manager and acted on as a priority.

## 8. The Use of Feedback and Consultation forms

Efforts are being made to encourage children and young people to make use of the "how was my meeting" feature on the Mind of My Own App. During the upcoming year, we are seeking to find out more about children's views through engagement events, both face to face and virtually.

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

### 9.1 Numbers of Children in Care



The monthly breakdown for the numbers of children looked after has remained relatively stable and consistent throughout the year ranging from 291 to 306. Thurrock's rate of Looked after Children per 10,000 in March 2021 represents 67 children per 10,000; this is in line with national and statistical neighbour data for 2019/20 (67 per 10,000). Total cohort figures for this year are the same as figures for year-end last year and the rate per 10,000 remained the same.

	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Total cohort - At year end	284	333	334	308	293	298	298
Rate per 10,000 population – At year end	71	81	79	72	68	67	67
Number of UASC - At year end	39	64	55	32	30	20	24
Adopted - At year end	13	7	9	7	13	14	8

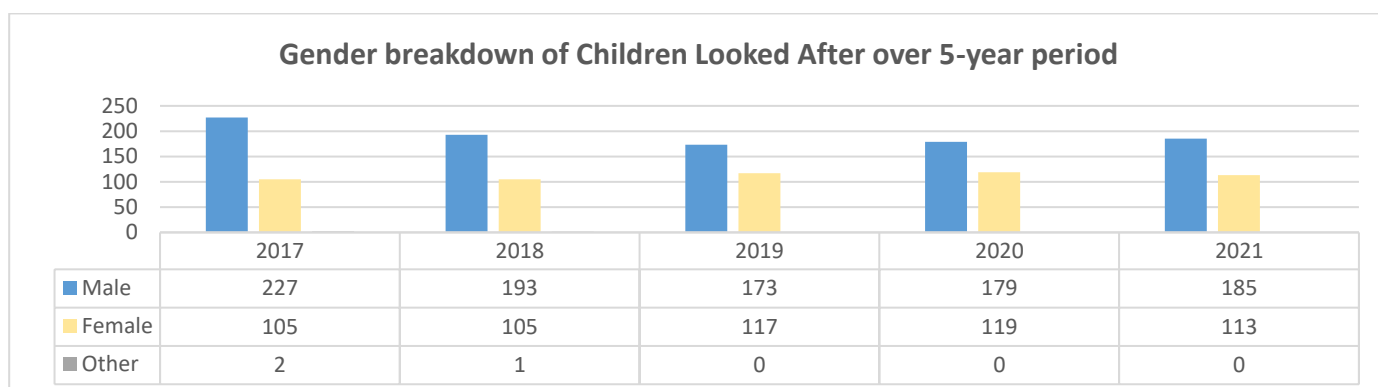
The number of unaccompanied asylum seeking children at year end has risen slightly by 4 from the previous year and the UASC population represents 8% of the total cohort.

UASC are a subset of the Children Looked After number as identified above. Local Authorities through agreement have a simple formula to ensure a fair distribution of the responsibility for looking after unaccompanied children. Each local authority has a 0.07% ceiling for how many UASC and unaccompanied asylum seeking children a region or local authority is reasonably expected to be looking after at any time, as a proportion of its total number of children. Thurrock's allocated number is 31 children. When a local

authority reaches its allocated number there are arrangements in place for new arrivals to be transferred via the National Transfer Scheme (NTS). The NTS replaced, the Eastern Region<sup>1</sup> Transfer scheme in July 2021 which worked efficiently and effectively with the transfer of UASC usually within 10 days of arrival.

The number of children adopted has fallen by just over 2.2% from the previous year. Nationally figures have fallen by 4%. Thurrock has been impacted by delays in the court process during the Covid-19 Pandemic (e.g. limited judicial availability, delayed expert assessment etc.). This has meant fewer proceedings concluding with placement orders within the year. Continued oversight and tracking has assisted in ensuring that delay is minimised and at the time of writing this report there are no children with placement orders who are not linked for adoption.

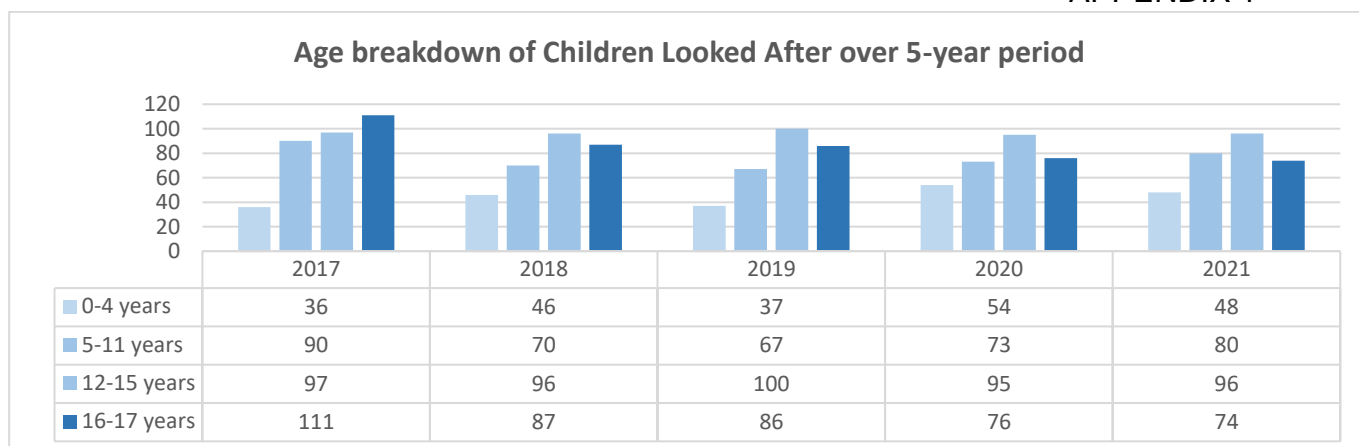
## 9.2 Gender of Children and Young People in Care



The number of males in care continues to exceed the number of females. The number of males in Care has risen slightly, however the number of females coming in to care has fallen for the first time since 2018. Figures for 2021 indicated that 62% of children in care were male, whilst 38% were female.

Nationally, just over half are male (56%) and 44% are female, similar to previous years, there is still a higher proportion of boys looked after in Thurrock. Factors which can be affecting this relate to boys and young men being more predisposed to issues such as youth offending, aggression, violence and non-school attendance, all of which put boys at higher risk of coming into care.

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



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

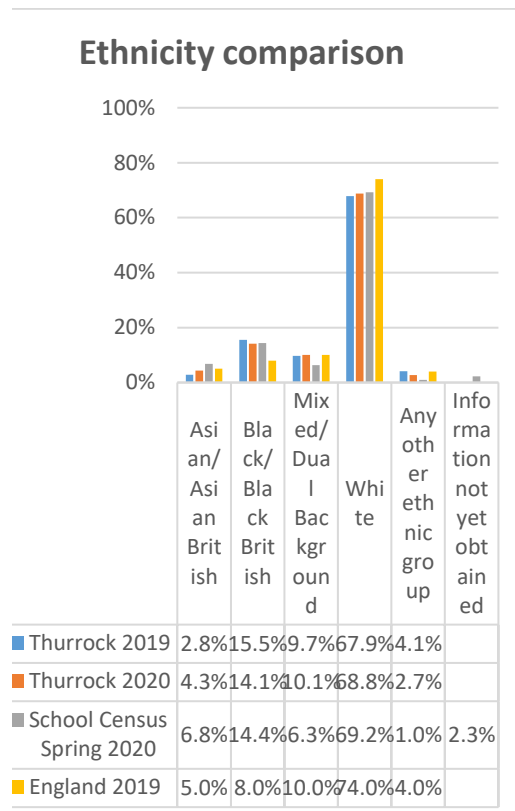
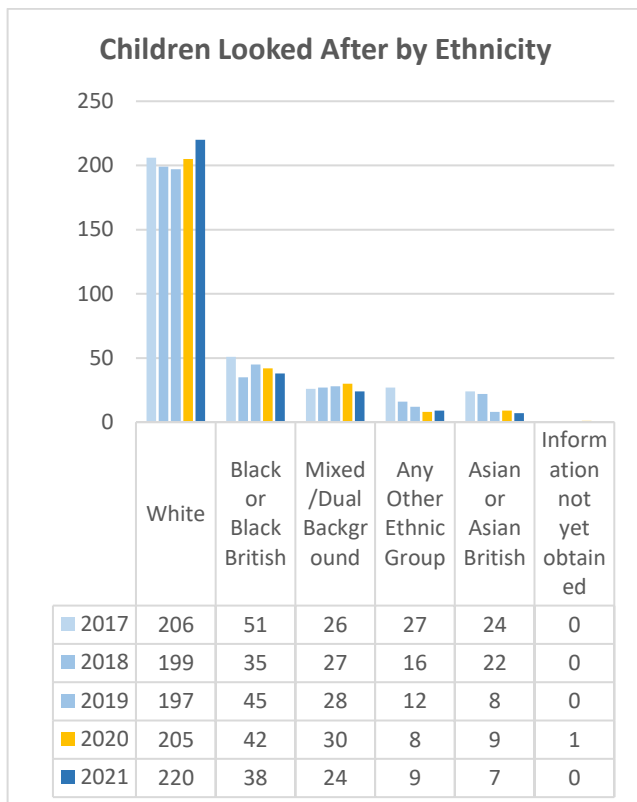
The numbers of children looked after in the 16 to 17 year old age bracket has remained stable over the last two years and this has demonstrated a sustained shift over the last five years. In 2017 children aged between 16 and 17 years represented the highest number of children looked after. Since then this age bracket has continued to be the second highest. Numbers of children looked after aged 5-11 has shown a sustained growth over the last three years.

### 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.

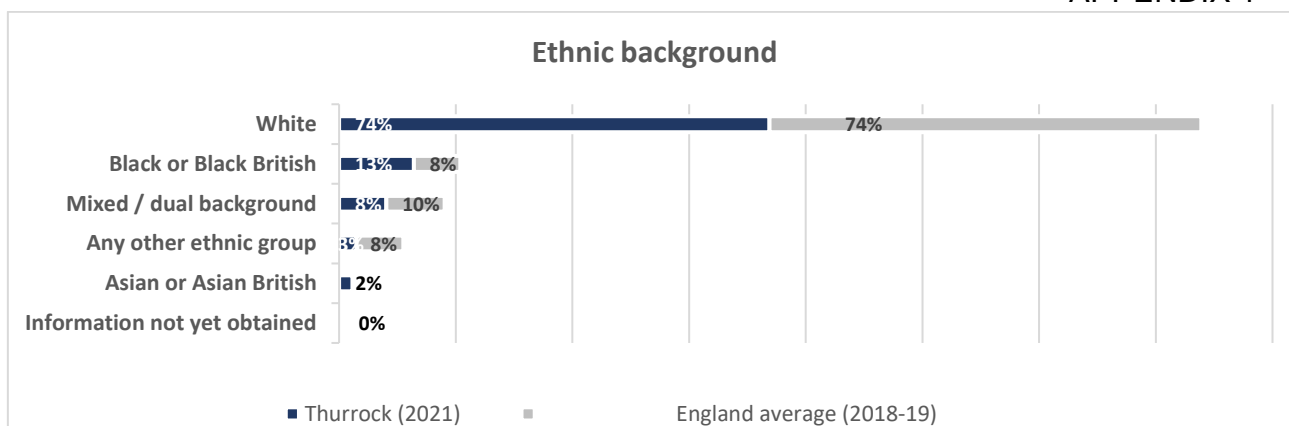
Racial and cultural identity is an important aspect of identity for many Children Looked After. The assessment of each individual child's needs alongside the child's own views will determine the actions which should be put into the care plan to ensure that s/he is able to develop a strong sense of identity 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.

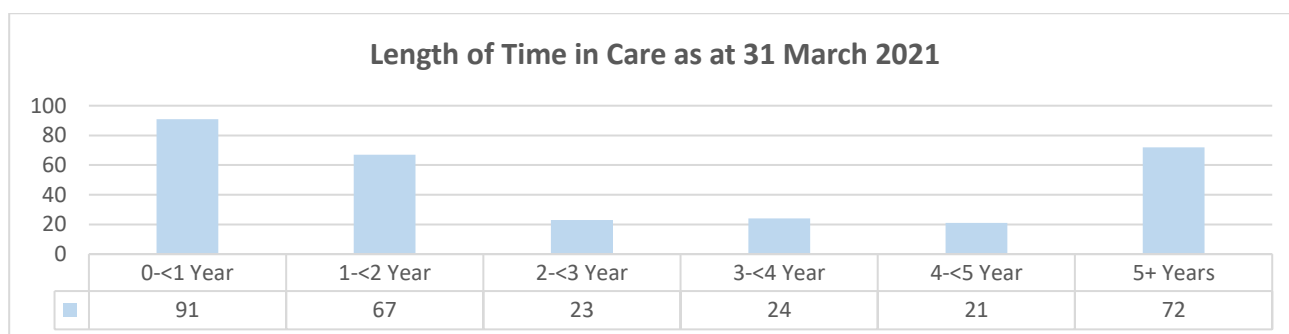


The recorded information regarding the demographics of the ethnicity of children and young people Looked after has shown little or no change on a yearly basis with children who are recorded to come from a “white” background representing the vast majority of children Looked After in Thurrock (74%). Nationally this figure is in line with the rest of England.

The percentages of Black or Black British children in care in Thurrock is 13%. This figure is 5% higher than the figures for the rest of England. When looking at these figures it is important to consider the demographic of the ethnic population within Thurrock, especially when compared to other parts of Essex with Black or Black British children representing 14.1% of the relevant population in Thurrock in the 2020 census, 6.1% higher than the figures for England recorded in 2019 (most recent data) . It is however important to ensure that the intervention offered to families from a Black or Black British background is equitable and consistent with regards to expectations and application of thresholds.



#### 9.4 Time in Care for Children and Young People

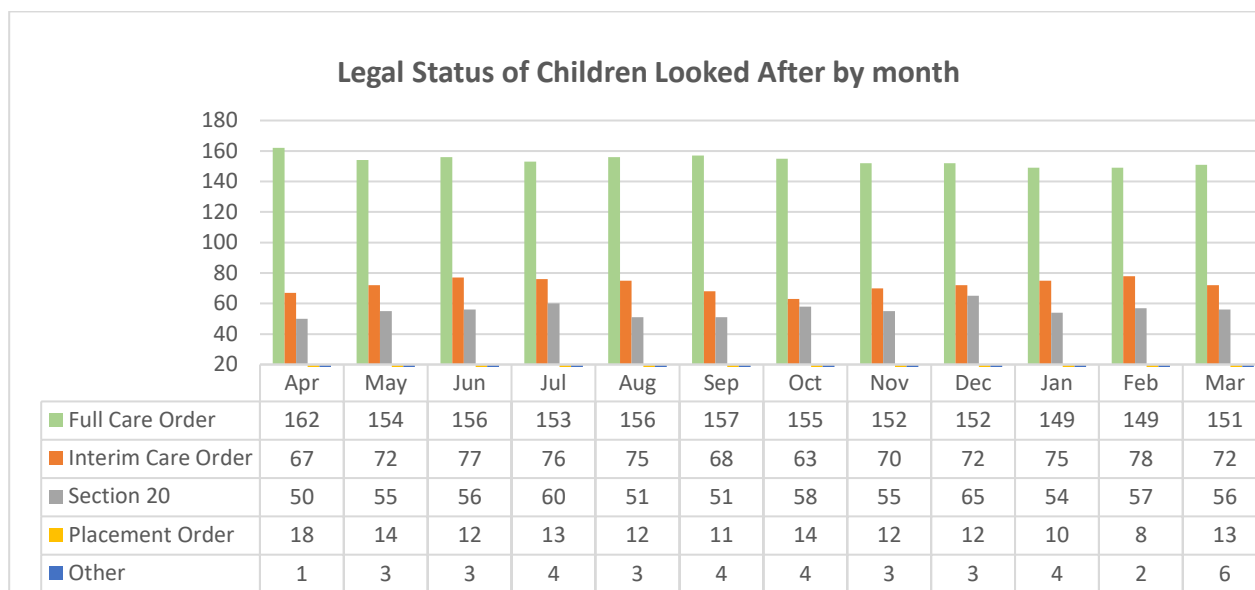


It is recognised that the best place for children is placed within the care of their families, as long as this is safe. The longer that children remain in care the more problematic it becomes for them to return to the care of their families. It is therefore important that the IRO service continue to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

Where children have been in care for several years, it is particularly important that the IRO's closely scrutinise the care plan that has been developed for the young person and explore whether there more appropriate ways of ensuring permanency for a young person, such as working with foster carers to explore the possibility of a Special Guardianship Order where children have been in placement for a long time.



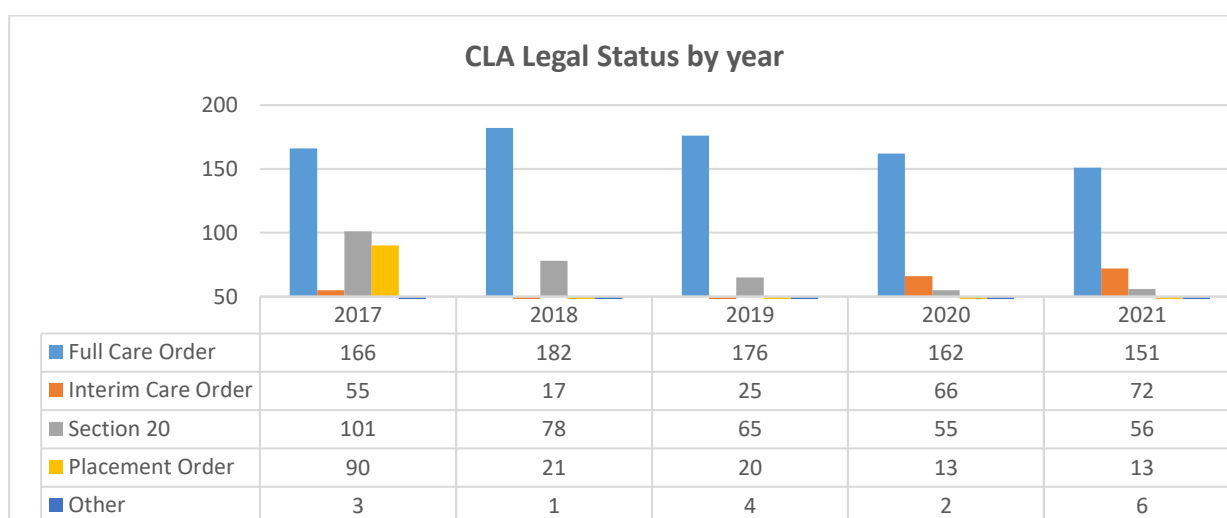
## 9.5 Legal Framework for Children in Care



Nationally 77.0% of Children Looked After were cared for under a Care Order (Full or Interim Care Order), 17.0% under Section 20, 6% on a Placement Order and less than 1% on other types of orders.

Thurrock shows similar results with 74.8% of children cared for under a Care Order, 18.8% under Section 20, 4.3% on a Placement Order and less than 1% on other types of Order.

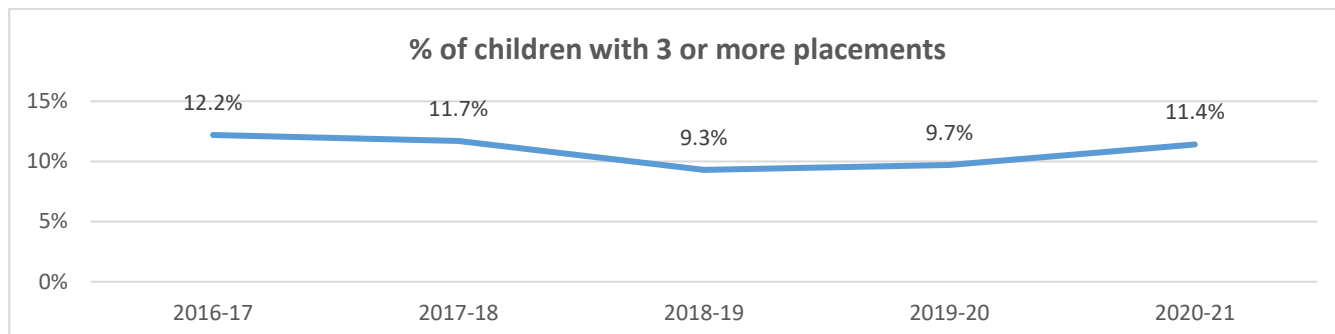
The majority of Children Looked After by Thurrock are/have been subject to legal proceedings where they have suffered some form of abuse or neglect and the accommodation is being used to protect them from further harm and to secure permanency for these children.



A priority for the IRO service is ensuring that Care Plans which are developed for children in care are progressed and carried out within reasonable timescales and that the legal framework that children are placed under does not have an impact upon the

stability that is required to allow them to achieve successful outcomes. Year-end figures evidence a sustained decrease in the use of section 20 and an increased use of Care Orders to secure stability, security and permanency for children.

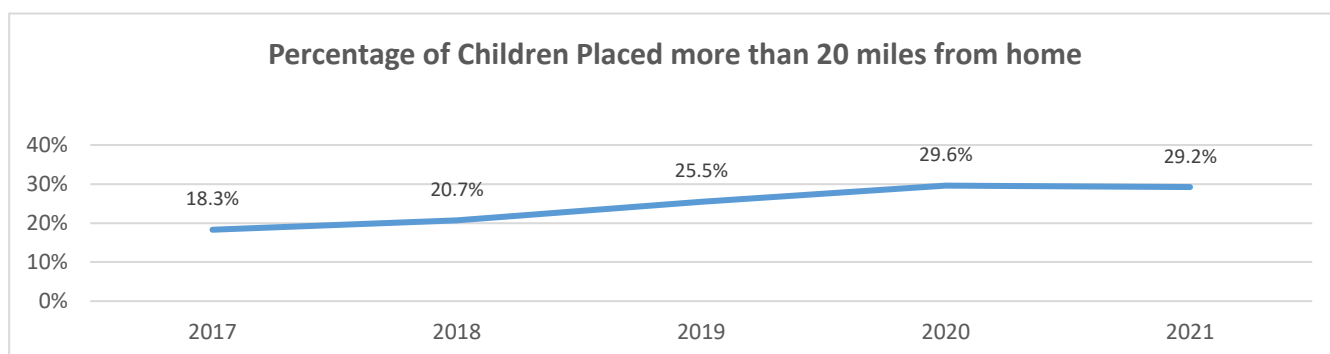
### 9.6 Placement Stability of Children and Young People in Care



The percentage of children who have had three or more placements in the years 2020/21 has increased slightly by 1.7%. The number of placement moves a child experiences will impact on the security and stability that a child can achieve when provided with a consistent placement and regular access to education, friendship groups and local amenities as well as providing the opportunity to build positive relationships with carers.

During Covid lockdown significant strain was placed upon all families and this experience would have been the same for children placed in the care of Thurrock Council, and in particular those children placed in residential children's homes. It is felt that the impact of Lockdown restrictions, may, in part provide an explanation for the slight increase in placement moves. In addition and impacting on this is to this there has also been a lack of foster and residential placement sufficiency nationally.

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

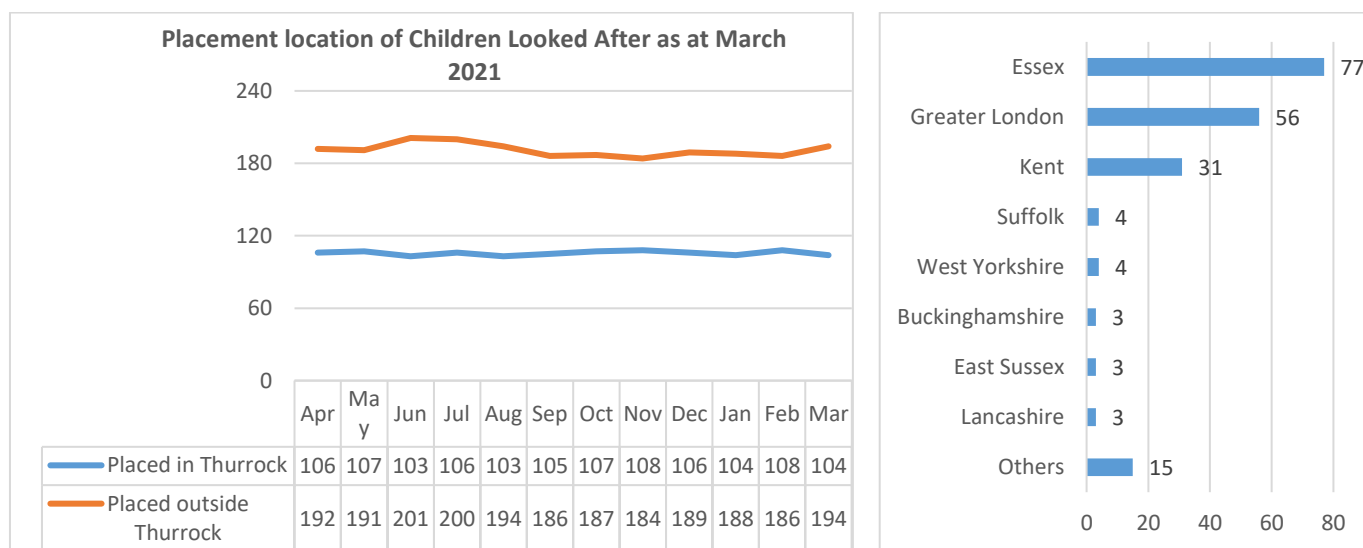


Given their life experiences, there are a number of children who are looked after who have complex needs whether these be behavioural or emotional. It is important that all children looked after are supported in the right environment where their needs will be appropriately met. At times to achieve this there are times when children are placed a long way from home.

71% of children looked after by Thurrock are placed within 20 miles of their home with the majority of children and young people placed within Thurrock, Essex, Greater London and Kent. The number of children placed more than 20 miles away from their home has

fallen slightly by 0.4%. The service recognises the need for every effort to be made to place children as close to their home community as possible as well as ensuring that they have continued access to specialist therapeutic services and appropriate education provision.

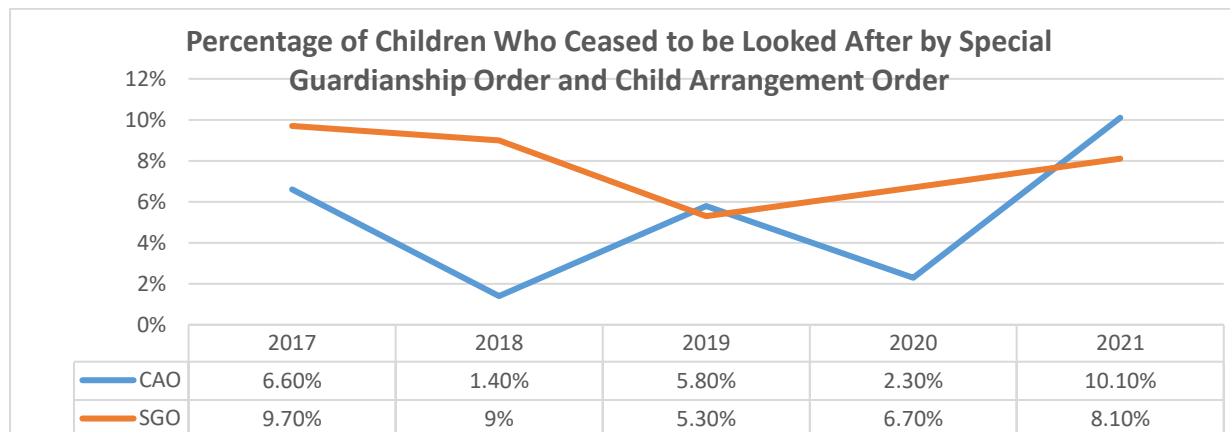
Consideration needs to be given to the number of available services with in Thurrock that have the capacity to meet the complex needs of children coming into the care system as well as the need for some of these young people to be placed placed at distance to meet their needs; to ensure their safety and continued development. The IRO service offers independent scrutiny over placements to ensure that they meet the needs of children and young people.



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



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, 8.10% of children left care through special guardianship in 2020/21 representing an increase of 1.4%.

Numbers for children subject to a child arrangement order have increased significantly from 2.3% to 10.10% this represents a 7.8% increase. Scrutiny over the use of child arrangement orders indicated that the use of family group conferences and family network meetings have identified family members to care for their children, family members coming forward when they heard about the cases going to court or during the public law outline (PLO) process.

In addition, the Local Authority supports families with a one off legal fee to seek legal advice to consider CAO or SGO. This enables them to make an informed decision of the order that is most appropriate for them and the child. The increase in numbers of children leaving care through orders other than care or placements orders that demonstrates a continued improvement of children leaving care through orders which provide permanency

A Special Guardianship Order or a Child Arrangement Order may not always be suitable for children, and it is important that the IRO service continues to robustly scrutinise the situation of each child and young person to ensure that children and young people do not remain in care unnecessarily and experience stability and security.

## **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 in care has an Independent Reviewing Officer appointed to ensure that their Care Plan fully reflects their needs and that the actions set out in the plan are

consistent with the Local Authority's legal responsibilities towards them as a child or young person in care.

An IRO will ensure that the wishes and feelings of the child are given due consideration by the Local Authority throughout the whole time the child is in care and will monitor the performance of the Local Authority in relation to the child's case. On occasions this means that it will come to the attention of the IRO that there is a problem in relation to the care of a child or young person 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.

Resolution of disputes can be time consuming and can create tensions between the IRO and the Local Authority. The child's allocated IRO is personally responsible for activating and seeking a resolution, even if it may not be in accordance with the child's wishes and feelings if, in the IRO's view, it is in accordance with the best interest and welfare of the child, as well as his or her human rights. In compliance with the IRO Handbook 2010 there is in place a formal Dispute Resolution Process. Thurrock's IRO's manage most disagreement and challenge very effectively and on an informal basis. More often than not, discussion with social workers and their managers is effective in achieving the progress required.

### **11.2 Formal Disputes Raised 2020-2021**

As identified above wherever possible it is the intention of the IRO service to resolve any disputes informally, discussing concerns with social workers and team managers to try and reach an agreeable resolution as quickly as possible. It is, however, recognised that there are occasions when this is not possible and in line with the guidance in the IRO handbook, the IRO will undertake a formal dispute.

The IRO Service recorded, 11 completed dispute resolutions, which were about the following issues.

<b>Number</b>	<b>Area of Practice Raised</b>
1	Challenge raised regarding provision of education not meeting the needs of the child/young person.
10	Issues raised with regards failure of the Local Authority to adequately develop/progress the agreed care plan for the child/young person.

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

### **11.3 IRO Compliance Checklist**

An 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.

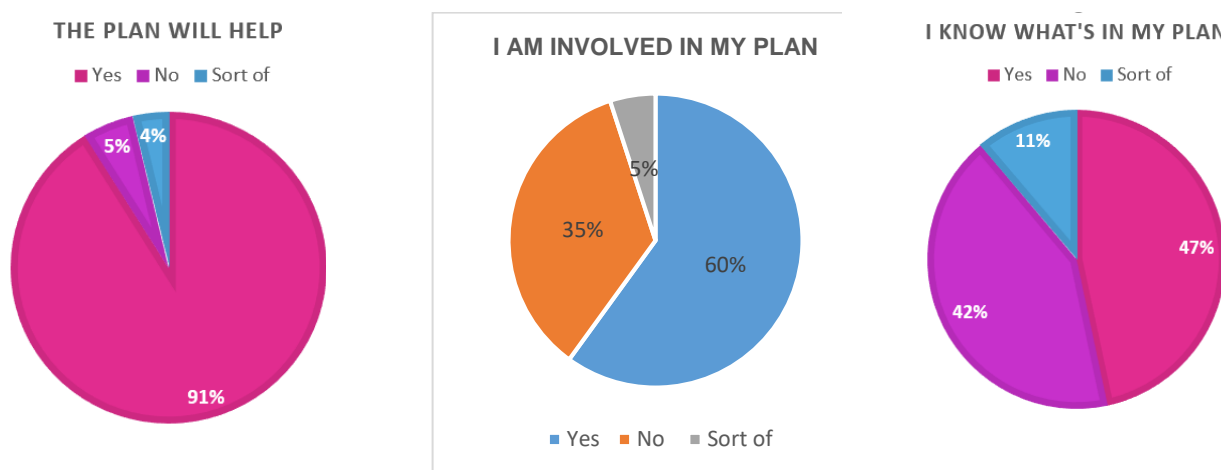
Information from the IRO compliance checklist is regularly presented at management and performance meetings. It is intended that the checklist is to be used as a tool for learning,

highlighting positive practice as well as areas for development. One aspect where the compliance checklist has been particularly useful has been in working with teams to address issues of timeliness relating to the provision of social work reports for review meetings.

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

At a recent involvement event a number of young people were asked about their views surrounding their care plans. 95% of children were optimistic about their care plans believing that they would either help or sort of help them. 65% of children were either involved or sort of involved in the development of their plans.

Only 58% of children knew or sort of knew what was in their plan and it is the focus of the IRO service to ensure that moving forward reviews clearly indicate to children and young people what their care plan is and how they can be involved in the development of this plan.



Anecdotally children and young people were asked by the service manager about their IRO and the feedback was extremely positive with young people indicating the in the main they knew who their IRO was and had a positive relationship with them.

## **13. IRO Service objectives in: 2020-2021**

### **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.**

There has been 57 accounts opened by young people this year (an increase of 79%) resulting in 251 contacts with the Mind of My Own service. This has enabled the involvement service to gather information regarding the experiences of children and young people about their reviews, their emotional wellbeing as well as information about their placements and relationships.

**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.**

The IRO service has taken an active role in forming relationships with frontline teams. This has involved attending team meetings to share information with regards to expectations from the IRO service with regards to the role of the social worker in the Review Process. The impact on Lockdown restrictions has meant that some of these meetings have taken place virtually rather than face to face.

**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.**

The IRO service now sit on placements and transition panels to provide independent advice and oversight for young people leaving care and 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.**

Wherever possible disputes are resolved at an informal level through the use of conversations with social workers and managers. The dispute resolution process that has been built in to LCS allow for a number of “pause points” to allow for reflection for the IRO to ensure that any disputes raised are done so in line with the guidance in the IRO handbook and seek positive solution focused outcomes for children and young people. It is not envisaged that this process was to ever be used to inhibit the IRO service from raising disputes or providing challenge where appropriate however it was recognised that disputes needed to be raised in such a way that empowered and promoted the ongoing role of the allocated social worker.

**5. IRO’s to design a child-friendly CLA Review record which will be more accessible to children.**

A lot of work has been undertaken in this area and records of reviews are now being presented using caricatures and pictures as well as letters based upon a child or young persons age and status.

**6. The IROs to play an active role with Social Work teams to ensure permanency is achieved for Children Looked After without delay.**

This is an ongoing goal. The IRO service recognise that it is important that children and young people do not remain unclear with regards to their plan and wherever possible decisions regarding their long term future are made quickly and safely. IRO’s continue to use the Review process, midway reviews and where necessary the dispute resolution process to achieve this. The majority of disputes raised during this period were with regards to the lack of progress made on a young persons Care Plan, indicating the focus of the IRO service to address issues of delay for children and young people when it comes to ensuring permanency.

**IRO Service Objectives 2021-2022**

1. To fully embed new ways of presenting minutes from reviews.
2. To utilise new technologies to assist in communicating with, and, conducting reviews for children and young people in line with their views and wishes.
3. To play an active role in the assessment and reduction in the use of un-regulated placements.
4. To contribute proactively to the transitions process for children and young people on the verge of leaving care.
5. To assist in the development of support packages available to children attending university.
6. The IRO service to work with the involvement service at the Young Voices Consultation days to obtain specific feedback about what they want from their reviews and IRO and act on this as appropriate.



<b>4 January 2022</b>	<b>ITEM: 9</b>
<b>Corporate Parenting Committee</b>	
<b>National Care Leaver Advisor's Visit</b>	
<b>Wards and communities affected:</b> ALL	<b>Key Decision:</b> N/A
<b>Report of:</b> Naintara Khosla, Strategic Lead, CLA	
<b>Accountable Assistant Director:</b> Janet Simon, Assistant Director Children's Social Care and Early Help	
<b>Accountable Director:</b> Sheila Murphy Corporate Director Children's Services	
<b>This report is</b> Public	

## Executive Summary

Mark Riddell MBE is the National Implementation Adviser for Care Leavers appointed by the Department for Education and was invited to Thurrock to conduct an external review of Thurrock's After Care Services on 26 and 27 October 2021. Mark is an advocate for Aftercare Services and supports Local Authorities to imaginatively fulfil and extend their corporate parenting responsibilities.

During his visit to Thurrock, Mark Riddell met with senior leaders including the Chief Executive, Corporate Director for Children, Lead Member for children and the Leader of the Council. He also met with young people, and staff members.

In his feedback, Mark Riddell reflected on the positive Council wide approach to Corporate Parenting that Thurrock undertakes; he also suggested some areas for innovating our Corporate Parenting approach. This report outlines the feedback and recommendations made by Mark Riddell towards an outstanding Care Leaving Service.

### 1. Recommendations

**1.1 Members of the committee note the feedback provided and the recommendations for Corporate Parenting Committee made by Mark Riddell.**

**1.2 Members note the work of Officers to progress these recommendations.**

## **2. Introduction and Background**

2.1 Mark Riddell visited Thurrock in October 2021 and met with the Aftercare Service operational staff and the senior leadership team. He was also able to meet with our young people who are Care Leavers. Following the visit Mark provided feedback on what he considered was going well in the service and, the areas where Thurrock could develop and enhance their offer to young adults as they leave care.

2.2 In his letter<sup>1</sup> to the Chief Executive Mark Riddell stated:

‘I was very impressed by the leadership and management approach that was ambitious, aspirational and I got a real sense of passion and commitment to have a better offer for care leavers across the whole service area. What I also saw and heard was many examples where I felt the service was ‘pitching’ above good and that the corporate approach and in particular the team approach stood out with workers who were highly responsive to the needs of care leavers’;

He also noted

‘The Corporate Parenting Board has strong buy-in from elected members and a few key partners.’

2.3 Mark Riddell outlined principles for Thurrock to consider which would enhance the Aftercare offer to young adults. Mark Riddell’s promotes a Corporate Parenting approach that is active, participative and challenging, with elected Members ‘championing’ specific areas (Housing, IT, Adult Services) to enhance the life chances and opportunities afforded to care leavers.

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

3.1 Mark Riddell has set out a detailed suggested framework for Thurrock to implement which will create the conditions for the Aftercare Service to become great. He proposes the development of a ‘Champion Model Approach’ which introduces themed Boards, with a strengthening of Board Membership.

3.2 The Champion Model Approach supports elected Members championing a particular themed area: Health, Housing, Employment, Education, Training (EET) voice of the young people. The Members have the opportunity to meet with operational staff and also care leavers to fully understand their journey and story that will inform policy review and change. The Champion Model approach proposes up to eight Boards a year, with the potential for one Board celebrating the successes of a multi-agency approach to the local offer and another Board looking at the data and outcomes for Care Leavers. In respect of understanding the voice of care leavers in the Champion Model

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<sup>1</sup> Mark Riddell letter to Lyn Carpenter National Advisor Feedback Letter Thurrock 26 and 27 October 2021

Approach Thurrock could consider employing a Care Leaver Champion/Ambassador who would involve care leavers and represent their views and assist in driving forward the offer from each partner agency.

- 3.3 He suggest that adopting a Champion Model approach would mean a refresh of the membership of the Corporate Parenting Board to ensure that all key partner agencies are represented at the Board level. This would include Department for Work and Pensions, Housing and Health formalising the offer from these agencies would also benefit Care Leavers.
- 3.4 Whilst there would be representation on the Board from these agencies, key work streams would be progressed; which would be reported to the Board. These areas include:-
  - a) To develop a 'whole council' offer by organising an event to co-ordinate Council departments being asked to make an offer to care leavers.
  - b) To hold an event with key partner agencies to detail and formalise their care leaver offer.
  - c) Undertake work with the IT department to develop and create a digital offer to care leavers, ensuring this is part of the Local Offer.
- 3.5 Mark Riddell outlines examples and outcomes from the focus on these areas through the themed Boards as follows:-
  - a) A Health offer to care leavers 18yrs to 25yrs, the offer would be specific about the support to care leavers and would be pitched below the threshold for an adult service or adult mental health service intervention. The health offer being supplement for example with free prescriptions, financial support for dental prostheses and glasses.
  - a) An emotional wellbeing worker could assist with supporting care leavers with their mental health.
  - b) Consider a Care Leaver Champion or Ambassador being employed, to provide insight into the voices of care leavers.
  - c) A joint Housing and DWP Protocol which outlines the offer to Care Leavers.
  - d) Review the Council Tax Exemption so that it includes young people up to age 25 and to include young people who are working.
  - e) A Leisure Pass for all care leavers with a Plus One.
  - f) A 21yrs to 25yrs offer which includes UASC, care leavers entering and leaving custody and young parents.

- g) A university offer that is above the statutory offer, allowing support for post graduate study.
- h) Additional capacity to reduce caseloads further and/or create avenues for career progression in the leaving care service.
- i) To review paperwork that PA's have to complete.
- j) To consider a 'strengths based' approach to Pathway Plans that incorporates the use of scaling questions.

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

- 4.1 Members to comment on and the suggested proposals outlined by Mark Riddell.

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

- 5.1 Mark Riddell met with young people who were Thurrock experienced care leavers. They were very positive about the relationships with their Personal Advisors (PA) and they make a real difference to young people. They would like to have the potential for going out more with their PAs to have lunch or coffee. These opportunities for young people would be part of a regular parent / child relationship and replicating this sense of normality would enhance the positive relationship that young people have with their PA.

They raised some issues in relation to areas that could be improved for Care Leavers:-

- a) The university offer was an area young people felt strongly could be improved and support young people, not only for the degree course, but to enhance the offer for post graduate study.
- b) There was a desire for more information for young people who were parents themselves; how and where to access early help parenting support.
- c) Increase the choice of accommodation options
- d) Publicise the Local Offer, ensure this is well known promoting it whilst young people are still looked after and before they becoming Care Leavers. The local offer to include gym membership opportunities, and driving lessons.
- e) Increase Employment, Education and Training (EET) opportunities so they match with the interests of young people.

The Aftercare Service will be addressing the areas for development to ensure feedback from young people is taken into consideration and there is a clear response to the issues they have raised.

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

6.1 Mark Riddell's proposals outline a cohesive Council approach to Corporate Parenting which challenges all Council departments to become focussed on providing an improved Corporate Parenting offer to Care Leavers.

## **7. Implications**

### **7.1 Financial**

Implications verified by: Implications To Follow

Financial implications of all the recommendations will need to be fully reviewed and costed.

### **7.2 Legal**

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

There are no legal implications directly arising from this report.

### **7.3 Diversity and Equality**

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

Thurrock has an inclusive approach to all its Care Leavers with an offer that ensures all young people are treated with respect, their individual diversity needs are considered including LGBTQ, race, ethnicity, religion, nationality and culture.

### **7.4 Other implications: Staff, Health Inequalities, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder, and Impact on Looked After Children**

Improving the offer to Care Leavers will support better outcomes ensuring there is a focus on Council work experience, employment opportunities, stability in the accommodation offer and a review of the university offer.

**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):

- N/A

**9. Appendices to the report**

- None

**Report Author:**

Naintara Khosla Strategic Lead CLA, Aftercare, Placements and CWD.

<b>4 January 2022</b>	<b>ITEM: 10</b>
<b>Corporate Parenting Committee</b>	
<b>The Annual Report of the Virtual School Headteacher for Children Looked After – Academic Year 2020-2021</b>	
<b>Wards and communities affected:</b> All	<b>Key Decision:</b> No
<b>Report of:</b> Keeley Pullen, Headteacher of the Virtual School for Children Looked After and Previously Looked After Children	
<b>Accountable Assistant Director:</b> Michele Lucas, Assistant Director of Education and Skills	
<b>Accountable Director:</b> Sheila Murphy, Corporate Director of Children’s Services	
<b>This report is public</b>	

## Executive Summary

Every council must have a Virtual School Head to be responsible for ensuring that the statutory guidance ‘Promoting the Educational Achievement of Looked After Children and Previously Looked After Children’ (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. It 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. It is a statutory document which forms part of the Annex A documentation required by Ofsted during an Inspection of Local Authority Children’s Services.

The report has been presented to and approved by the Virtual School Governing Board as part of the meeting held on 11<sup>th</sup> November 2021.

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 2020-2021 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 is a key document which summarises the wide variety of services that the virtual school team provides. It details the broad scope of information for corporate parents to consider how the council promotes good educational outcomes for our children and young people who are looked after.
- 2.2 This particular report will not contain attainment data for 2021. Due to the ongoing presence of the Covid 19 pandemic, all national academic testing was cancelled for 2020 and 2021. Individual teacher assessed grades were provided for our Key Stage 4 and 5 pupils by their schools/colleges. Some validated data from 2019 and 2020 has been provided within the report to supplement the lack of data provided in the previous annual report 19/20. The source of this data has come from the Local Authority Interactive Tool (LAIT).
- 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 (Page 7 Appendix 1)  
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. The number of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) increased over the year and in particular this increase occurred in Year 11 and in the summer term. Overall our UASC data increased from 9.4% to 12%. Additional education measures were created to support these young people such as an online learning app, IT resources for those needing access and tuition.
- 3.2 Attendance (Pages 15-17 Appendix 1)  
The pandemic affected attendance rates for Children Looked After. In normal circumstance we usually have a healthy attendance rate of above 95%. However, illness, rules around self-isolation and school closures have made an impact. This has been seen across the country for the majority of schools. Overall attendance rates were 85.9% with 12.48% of absence being unauthorised. There were in total 9,077 school days lost due to school closures for the school age pupils. This is a significant amount and all efforts are being made to provide our pupils with the support necessary to support any learning that was missed.



### 3.3 Exclusion (Pages 17-18)

There have been no permanent exclusions of CLA for over an eight year period. 21 school age pupils out of the CLA cohort have experienced a fixed term exclusion (FTE) during the course of the year. This equates to 10.6% of the cohort. This is above the national figure 3.76% of all pupils in England for data 2019/2020. There is currently no comparative data of CLA exclusion rates or a rate for 2020/2021. The DFE recommends that the published data for 2019/20 is treated with caution due to the pandemic. More national statistical updates will be available in July 2022. The VSH takes every exclusion seriously and a clear process and set of actions is applied to reduce all exclusions of CLA pupils.

### 3.4 Pupils with a Special Educational Need or Disability (Pages 8-13)

In summary there are 102 school age pupils who are on Virtual School SEND register. This has increased from 88 pupils in February 2021.

This equates to 44.5% of the school age cohort (Nursery 2 to Year 11) which has increased from 39% for the previous academic year. This is high compared to all national pupils but still remains below the national average for CLA which for 19/20 was 55.5% according to the SFR (SEN Statistical First Release).

National published data for all children in 2020/21 shows that, 3.7% of school age children have an EHC Plan and 12.2% are identified as SEN Support. This provides a combined figure of 15.9% which is far lower than our Thurrock CLA data of 44.5%.

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

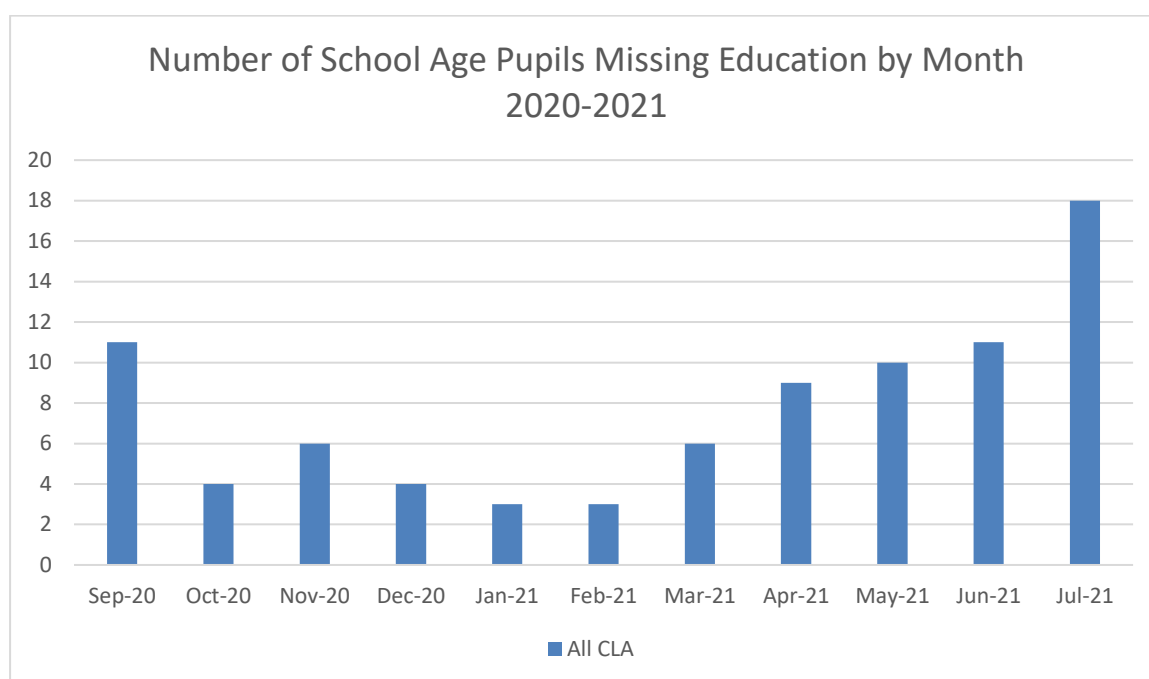
- Recruitment of a senior educational psychologist to work with the Virtual School for two days per week. This is to provide training, challenge, support and assessments where necessary to meet needs.
- Using specific programmes to look at evidencing pupil progress in addition to the Personal Education. B Squared is a SEN programme which is used to track our pupils.
- Use of the Boxall profile system to provide an assessment tools for SEMH needs and to provide strategies for interventions
- Use of the Access to Inclusion toolkit with schools to support those children and young people who have behavioural difficulties and/or trauma and attachment needs which may be a barrier to learning and engagement. This system enables practitioners to use strategies to support our children and young people in their education setting.
- The impact of these systems has been that the Virtual School has been able to look at suggesting teaching strategies used by education practitioners to be more effective and to support pupils to overcome their barriers to learning.

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) (Pages 18-19)

A child is deemed as missing education if they are not in receipt of a full-time educational provision. The data shows that the amount of Children Missing Education was affected by placement moves, so that due to a change in geographical location for care meant there was a change of school. Numbers for CME rose sharply in July 2021. This is attributed in part to 8 UASC coming into care and needing school provision.



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

### 3.6 Attainment of Children Looked After (Pages 19-23)

Due to the cancellation of all testing and exams for the years 2020 and 2021, 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 virtual school still maintained the programme of additional 1-1 tuition for pupils in those key year groups who are tested to help prepare them for their next stages in education.

The Local Authority Interactive Tool (LAIT) has provided some data and this has been detailed in appendix 1 document. The latest published data set for Key Stage 2 pupils (Year 6 pupils) was in 2019 and this showed that Thurrock CLA were rated 3<sup>rd</sup> in the country for attainment in reading, writing and maths

combined with 58% of CLA achieving the expected standards.(Please refer to Page 20 on the Annual Report – Appendix 1)

For Key Stage 4 data, this was available for 2020 in the LAIT. Overall Thurrock CLA achieved good attainment 8 scores and are ranked 5<sup>th</sup> in the country for this set of results. More significantly is the data relating to achieving grade 4-9 in English and maths for GCSEs with 47% achieving this and enabling Thurrock to be 1<sup>st</sup> in the national CLA rankings. (Please refer to Pages 20-23 on the annual report for data)

### 3.7 Support during the National Lockdowns 2020-2021

The annual report details the specific actions that were taken. (Please see Page 34 in Appendix 1). 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.
- Additionally we started tuition for Year 5 and 10 early so that we could prepare them for 2022 testing.
- Ensuring that Personal Education Plan meetings continued so that education was still provided and monitored during any period of lockdown.
- Ensuring that there was an emphasis on the support for transition for all pupils as they returned to face to face and a more structured timetable.
- The provision of laptops by the Virtual School to key pupils to ensure that pupils had access to IT resources to maintain their learning.
- Setting up a process whereby we could assess and monitor the quality of offer for education during the lockdown. This supported high expectations of engagement and challenged all professionals to ensure that education remained a high priority.
- Provision of ideas, resources and telephone support for any professional or family to support the education of our children and young people at home or in school.
- Creating a flexible approach to the use of pupil premium plus funding so that new approaches to school interventions could be used to support progress of pupils.
- We were still able to maintain our commitment to supporting reading in the home by providing Letterbox Book Trust resources for pupils in Nursery 2 through to Year 4. Kindles were also purchased to provide reading experiences for older pupils from Year 5 through to Year 13. Not every pupil has been allocated a kindle. Thus far they have been

distributed to those who have requested this as part of their Personal Education Plan.

### 3.8 Use of Resources

The use of the funding obtained from the Pupil Premium Plus grant enabled the VSH to allocate significant resource for tuition in order to support the progress of pupils. The allocation of IT resources such as laptops enabled our pupils to complete virtual classes and additional work so that would not be detrimentally affected by the impact of school closures or the need to isolate as part of a class bubble.

## 4. Overall Comment on the Annual Report

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

4.2 Additional information for the Corporate Parenting Board to be aware of relates to the proposed extension of the role of the Virtual School Head. In June 2021 the DFE announced, following the Children in Need Review (2019) that, the role of the Virtual School Head is to be extended to become the strategic lead for promoting the education for children with a social worker. The DFE have provided £100,000 to Thurrock Council as part of a section 31 grant which is to support with the planned project. Thurrock Virtual School is working on developing strategy to support educational outcomes. We have currently employed a senior manager to lead on this 6 month project and will be evaluating the impact of this work in the academic year 2021-2022. The guidance relating to this extension can be found in 'Promoting the education of children with a social worker. Virtual School Head role extension' DFE (June 2021). The VSH has supplied the Governing Body of the Virtual School with information relating to the planned work and outcomes for this project.

## 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 increased significantly during the academic year in order to provide 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 (Page 26).

### 7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Judith Knight**  
**Interim Deputy 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. 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" (2018) that must be followed in meeting this duty. For the forthcoming year 2021-2022, the Committee will need to monitor the work linked to the extension of the Virtual School Head role for children with a social worker.

### 7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Becky 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.

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

8.1. There are no implications as a result of this report

**9. Conclusion**

9.1 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.

**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):

- 'The Educational Progress of Looked After Children in England: Linking Care and Educational Data' ADCS
- 'Promoting the Educational Achievement of Looked After Children and Previously Looked After Children' DFE February 2018
- 'Promoting the education of children with a social worker. Virtual School Head role extension' DFE (June 2021)
- 'Local Authority Interactive Tool' – last updated 25/11/2021 [Local authority interactive tool \(LAIT\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)

**11. Appendices to the report**

- Appendix 1 - Annual Report of the Virtual School Headteacher Academic Year 2020-2021

**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 2020-2021**

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

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6. Current Contextual Data
  - Numbers of children by Year Group
  - Contextual information of CLA with Special Educational Needs and Disability
  - School Placement of CLA by OFSTED classification July 2021
7. Attendance of Children Looked After
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14. Allocation and Impact of Pupil Premium Plus
15. Quality Assurance of Personal Education Plans
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17. Not in Education Employment or Training
18. Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children
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20. Virtual School Specific Actions and Response to Covid 19
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22. Professional Development of VS Staff
23. Report Author



### **Summary of the Annual Report 2020-2021**

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

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

- Attendance rates have been affected by the ongoing pandemic and as such overall attendance has declined. However, unauthorised absence has only increased by .4 which highlights that most absence was due to illness or periods of self-isolation in line with Covid 19 protocols
- Fixed term exclusions rates are steady and pupils and schools are being supported to reduce these. There have been no permanent exclusions of CLA
- The number of children in care for our cohort has increased as has the number of pupils identified as having a Special Educational Need
- There has been an increase in the number of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children from 9.4% to 12% of the cohort
- Interventions have been targeted to maximize impact on learning and development for all age ranges
- Attainment data that has been shown in the report is using data from the Local Authority Interactive Tool. This is showing that Thurrock CLA continue to perform at a high standard compared to national CLA and have high rankings for our performance
- No testing data is available for 2021 due to the pandemic
- The Virtual School provided every support and challenge possible to promote the educational needs of our pupils in response to the ongoing challenges caused by the pandemic. This is reflected in our commitment to provide additional tuition and digital technology to support learning.
- As a result of the impact of Covid 19 we allocated £252,985 for additional tuition to cover April 2020 through to August 2021.
- The Virtual School team have taken advantage of the reduced need for travel and as such have been able to attend more meetings virtually and to support and challenge more settings and professionals
- There have been high expectations set for all professionals to support CLA in their educational progress. The pandemic has not been seen as an excuse to allow for poor provision. This has been challenged and supported throughout the year by the Virtual School team.

1. **Purpose of the Report**

The purpose of this report is to detail the work of the Thurrock Virtual School for the academic year 2020-2021. It details the work of the Virtual School Head and the team and forms part of the statutory reporting processes. This document is used as part of Annex A documentation which is presented to OFSTED in times of inspection.

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

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

**Staffing of the Virtual School 2020-2021**

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

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

Additional Documents:

- School Improvement Plan 2020/2021
- Headteacher Termly Reports for Governors 2020/2021
- Phase Teacher Termly Reports for Governors 2020/2021
- 3 year Strategic Plan

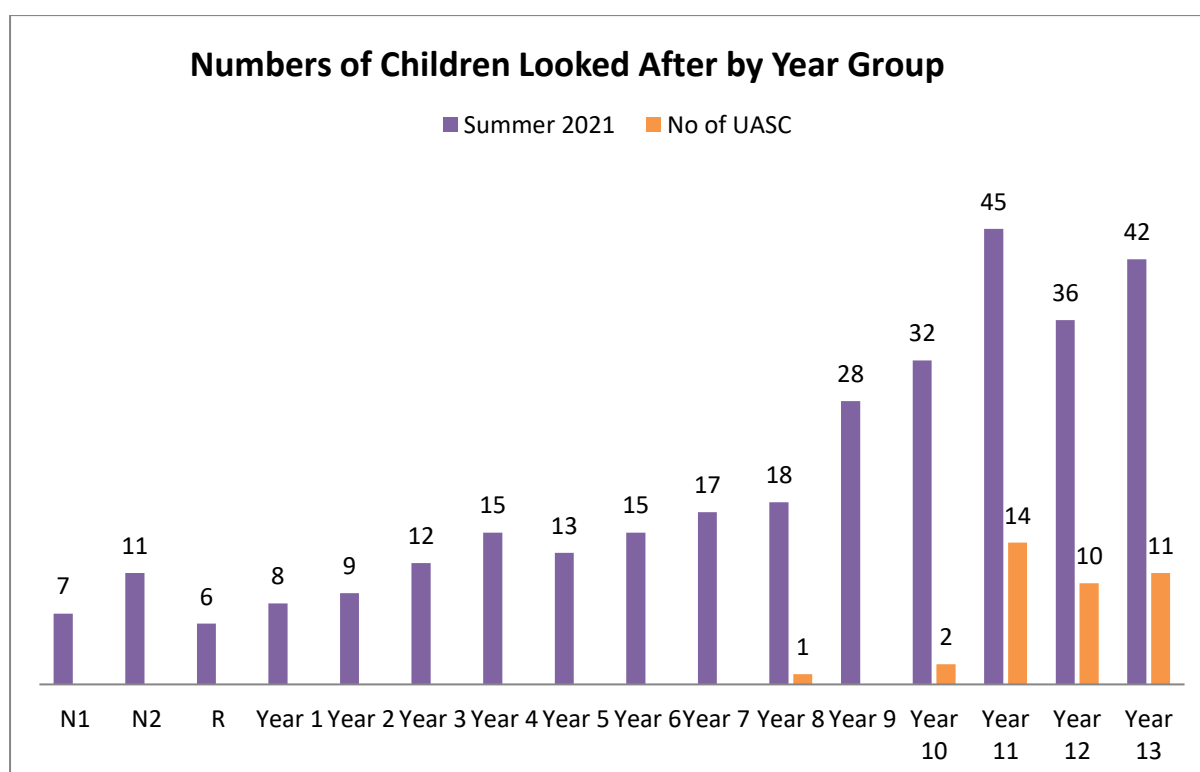
#### 5. **Corporate Parenting Committee**

The Virtual School Headteacher [VSH] is accountable to the Corporate Parenting Committee for the educational achievement of Children Looked After [CLA]. The Committee exists to ensure that all elements of the Council work together 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 2021]



At the end of the academic year 20/21, the number of pupils aged 3-18 years in the Virtual School cohort were 314. This has seen an increase on the previous year. Of this total figure, 38 pupils were Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children [UASC]. This equates to 12% of the cohort. This is an increase from 9.4% which was reported in the previous year. Many of the UASC in Year 11 joined in the summer term and were provided with home schooling due to the lack of education provision available at that time of the year.

### Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children

The data for this cohort of young people is increasing, see above. This is particularly the case for young people arriving in the spring and summer term who are in Year

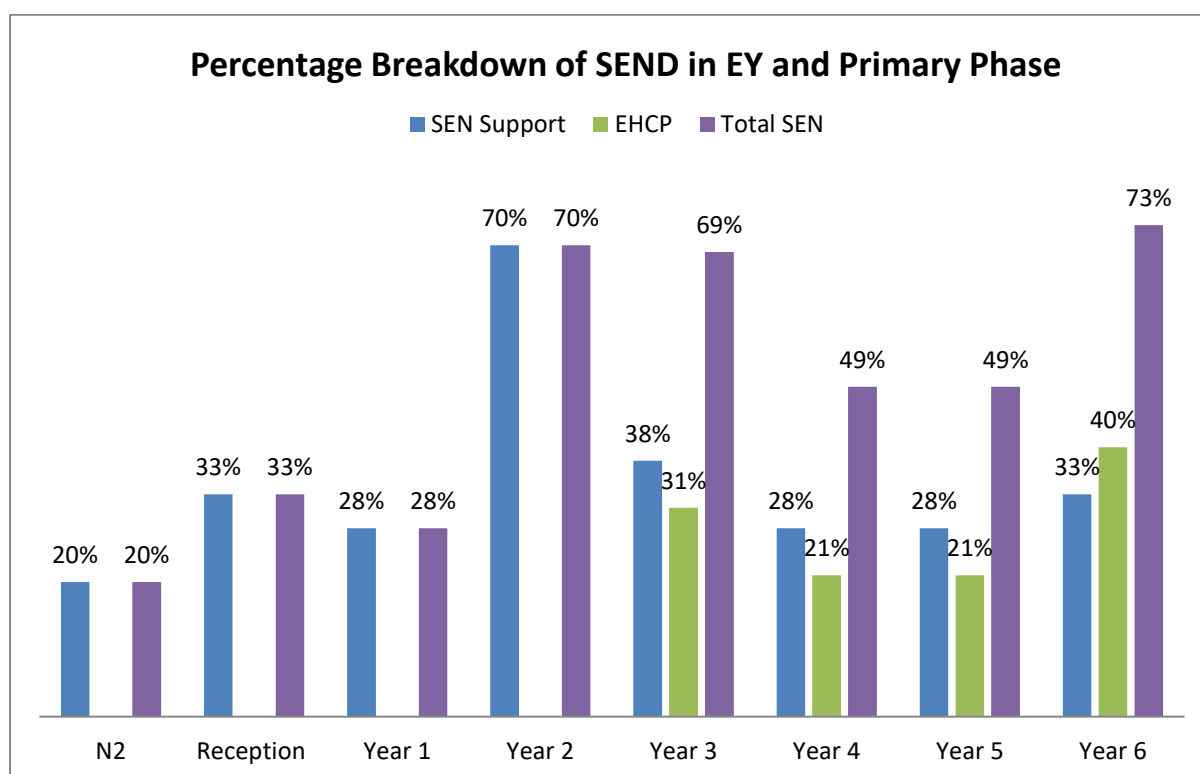
11. The later the young people arrive in the academic year, the more challenging it is to provide them with a school place.

As such we have provided them with an online English for Speakers of Other Languages [ESOL], IT equipment and a 10 weeks 1-1 ESOL tuition package to support education. College applications have been made and all have places for September 2021. Further information is shown in section 18 pf the report.

### Number of CLA with a Special Educational Need or Disability

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

#### Primary Phase Data

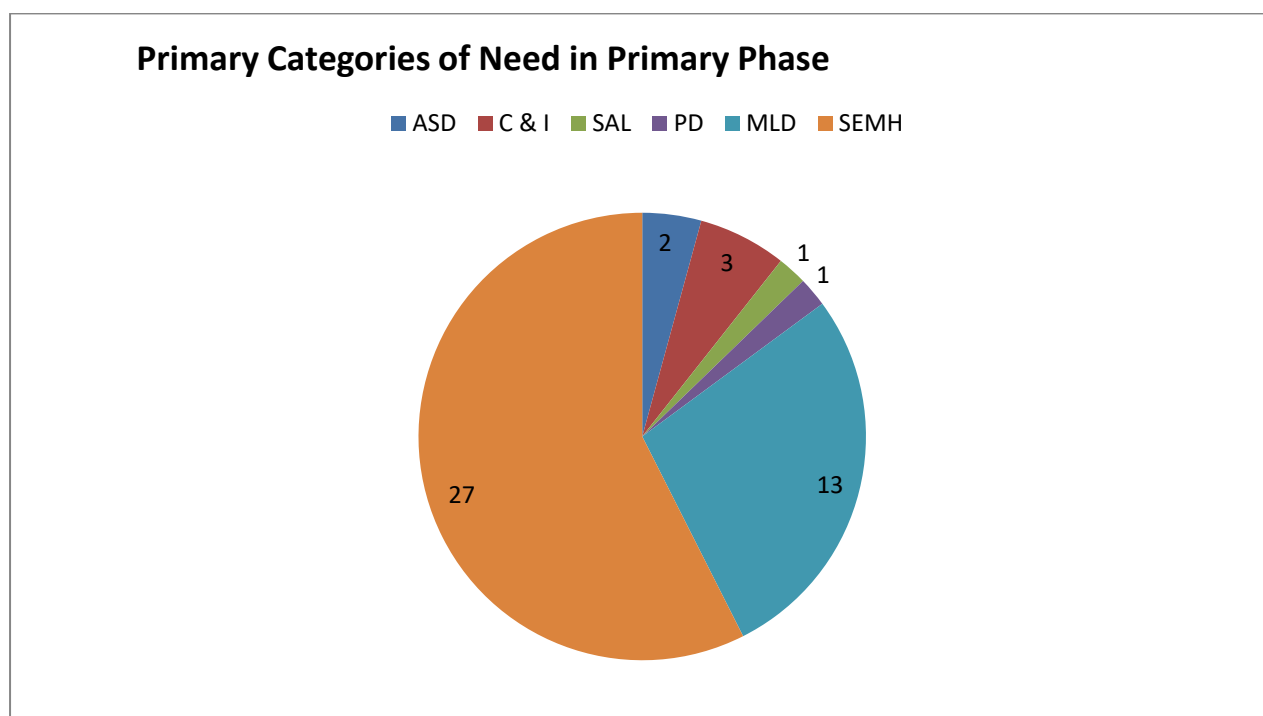


There are 89 pupils in Year N2 to Year 6. Of these there are 30 receiving SEN Support which equates to 33.7% of the primary cohort and 17 pupils (19%) have an education healthcare plan. In total 47 pupils or 52.8% of the primary cohort has currently been identified as having a special educational need. This figure has now increased and is close to the national CLA figure of 55.5%. There have been

increases in the Sen Support and EHCP status of our cohort. The highest proportion of SEN can be found at the end of KS1 and KS2. This means that these year groups will need particular help with transition into September 2021.

### Categories of Need in Primary Pupils CLA Cohort

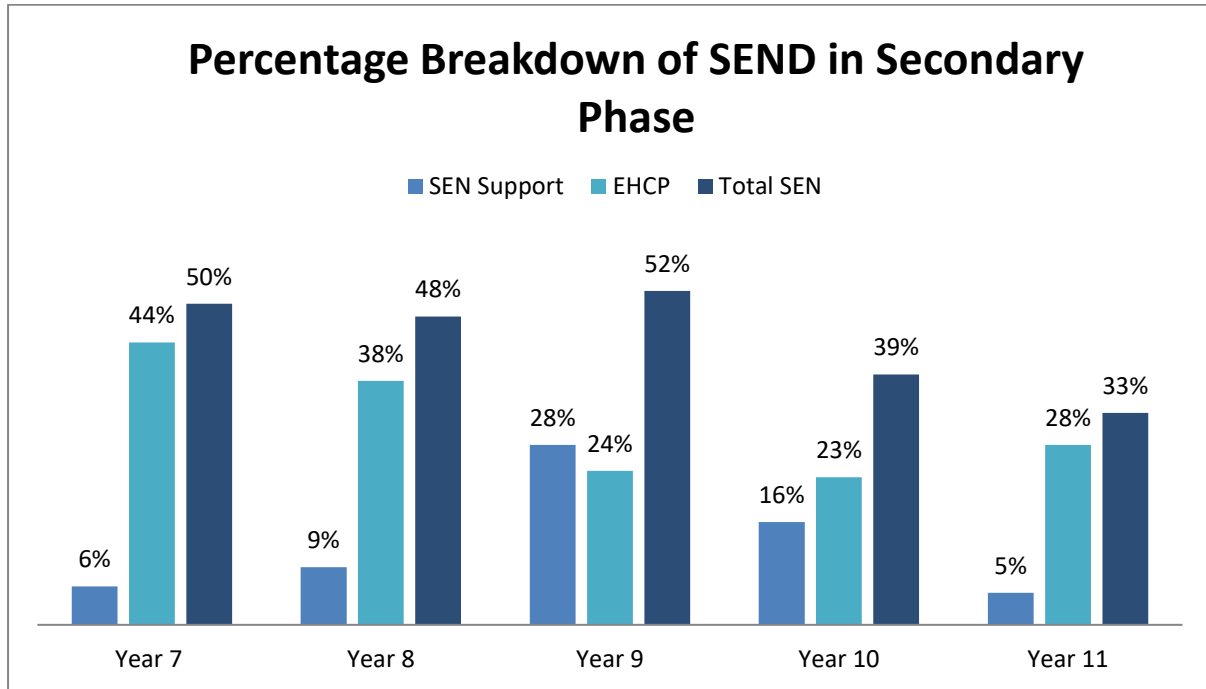
It is important that the categories of primary and secondary need is ascertained during any Personal Education Plan meeting to ensure that the right targeted support is provided by their educational establishment or by additional services. Social, Emotional Mental Health and Moderate Learning Difficulties are prevalent categories of need in this Primary age phase. This can usually be attributed to being as a result of previous trauma and adverse childhood events that our pupils have experienced. It is essential that this is highlighted with the professionals working with the children to ensure that provision matches need.



Phase	Category of Need	Number of Pupils
KS1 and KS2	Social Emotional Mental Health (SEMh)	27
	Communication and Interaction (C & I)	3
	Moderate Learning Difficulties (MLD)	13
	Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD)	2
	Physical Disability (PD)	1
	Speech Language and Communication Needs (SLCN)	1

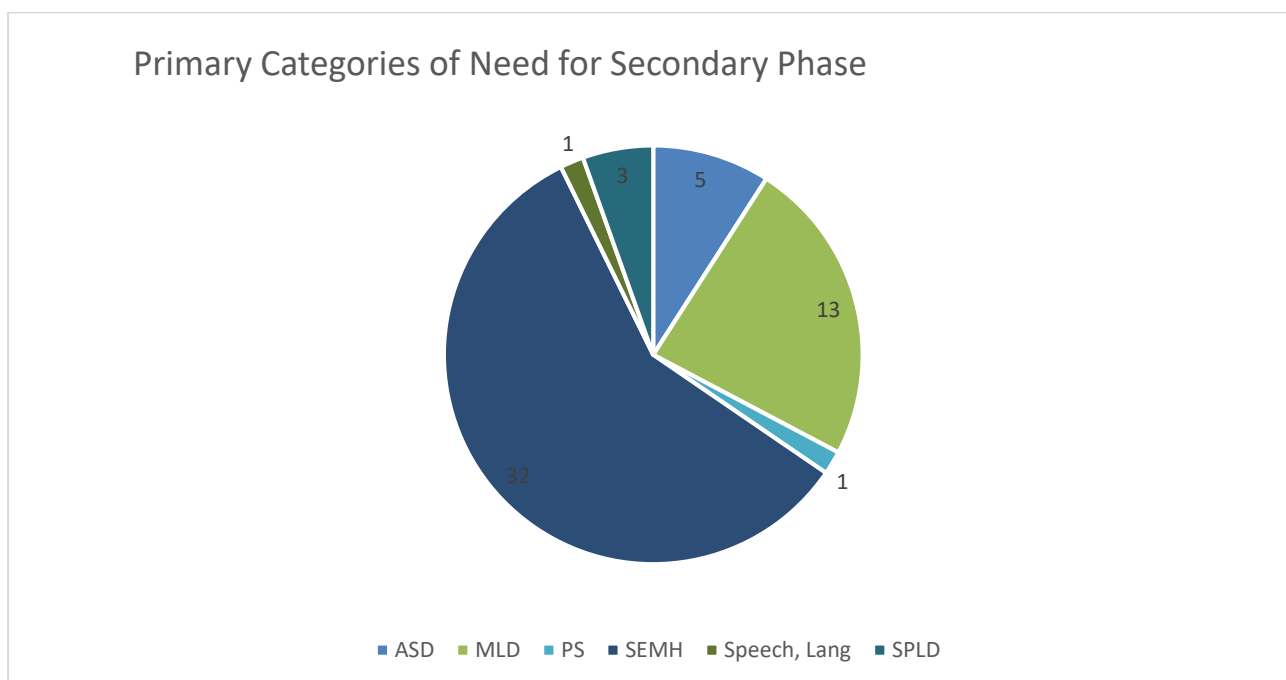
**Secondary Phase**

There are 140 pupils in Year 7 to Year 11. Of these there are 16 receiving SEN Support in school which equates to 7% of the secondary cohort and 39 pupils (27.8%) have an EHC plan. In total 55 pupils or 39.3% of the secondary cohort has currently been identified as having a special educational need which requires support and intervention.



**Secondary Phase Categories of Need**





Phase	Category of Need	Number of Pupils
KS2 and KS3	Autistic Spectrum Disorder	5
	Moderate Learning Difficulties	13
	Physical Sensory	1
	Social Emotional Mental Health	32
	Speech, Language and Communication	1
	Specific Learning Difficulties	3

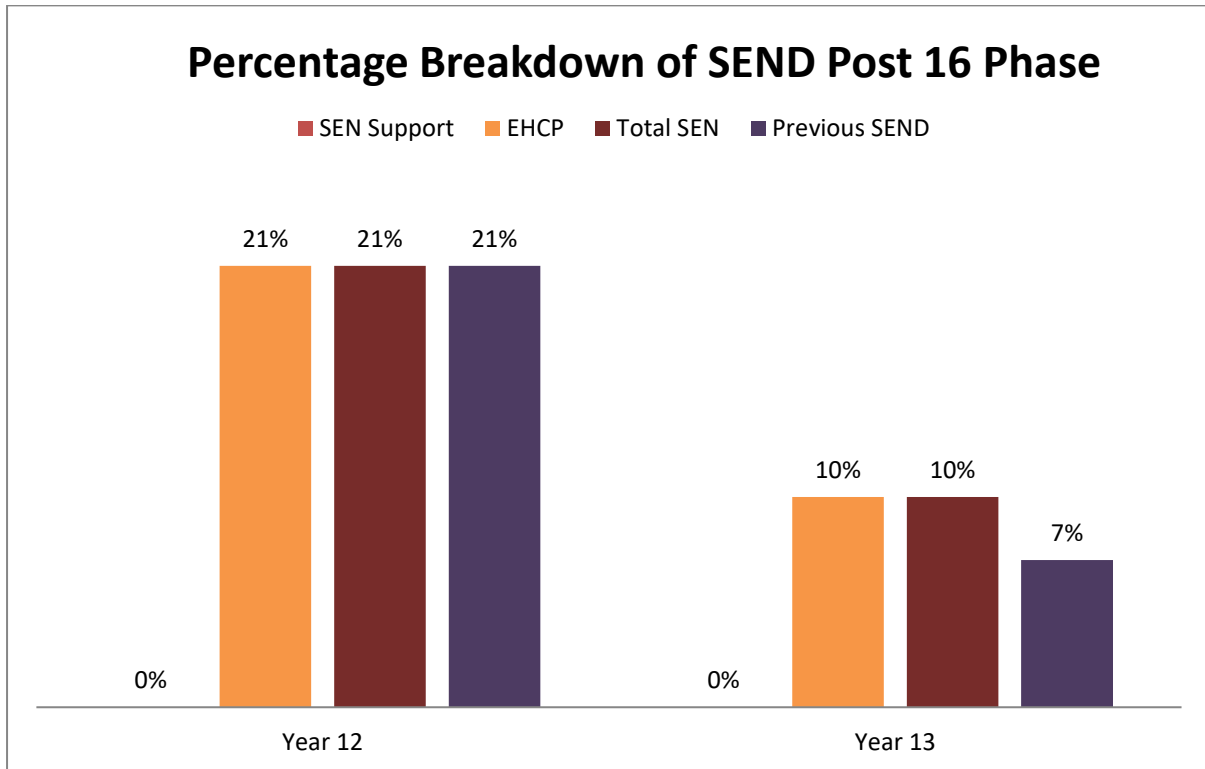
The prevalence of SEMH needs is very high for this phase. This shows how significant this area is for CLA pupils.

In summary there are 102 school age pupils who are on Virtual School SEND register. This has increased from 88 pupils in February 2021.

This equates to 44.5% of the school age cohort (Nursery 2-Year 11) which has increased from 39% for the previous academic year. This is high compared to all national pupils but still remains below the national average for CLA which for 19/20 was 55.5% according to the SFR (SEN Statistical First Release).

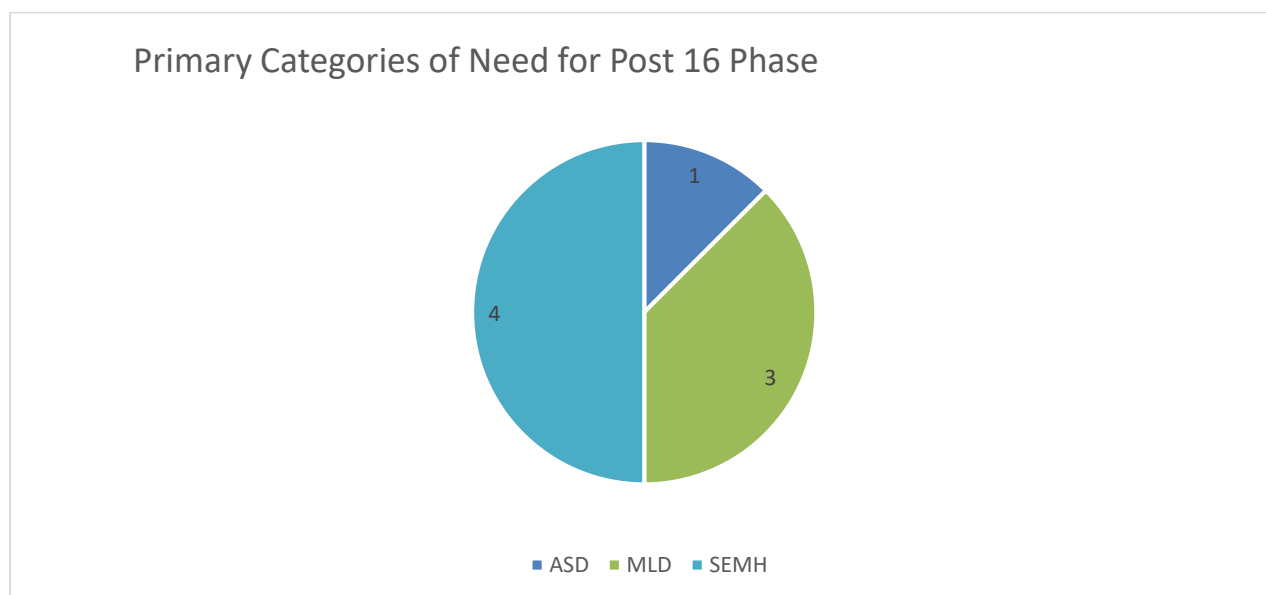
National published data for all children in 2020/21 shows that, 3.7% of school age children have an EHC Plan and 12.2% are identified as SEN Support. This provides a combined figure of 15.9% which is far lower than our Thurrock CLA data of 44.5%.

### **Post 16 Phase**



In summary there are 8 post 16 young people (including those who are 18 years old) who are currently on the Virtual School SEND register. This equates to 10% of the post 16 cohort, all of whom have an EHCP. There are a number of young people who have previously had SEN support or an EHCP but are not currently using services.

### Post 16 Phase Categories of Need



Phase	Category of Need	Number of Pupils
Post 16	Moderate Learning Difficulties	3
	Social Emotional Mental Health	4
	Autistic Spectrum Disorder	1

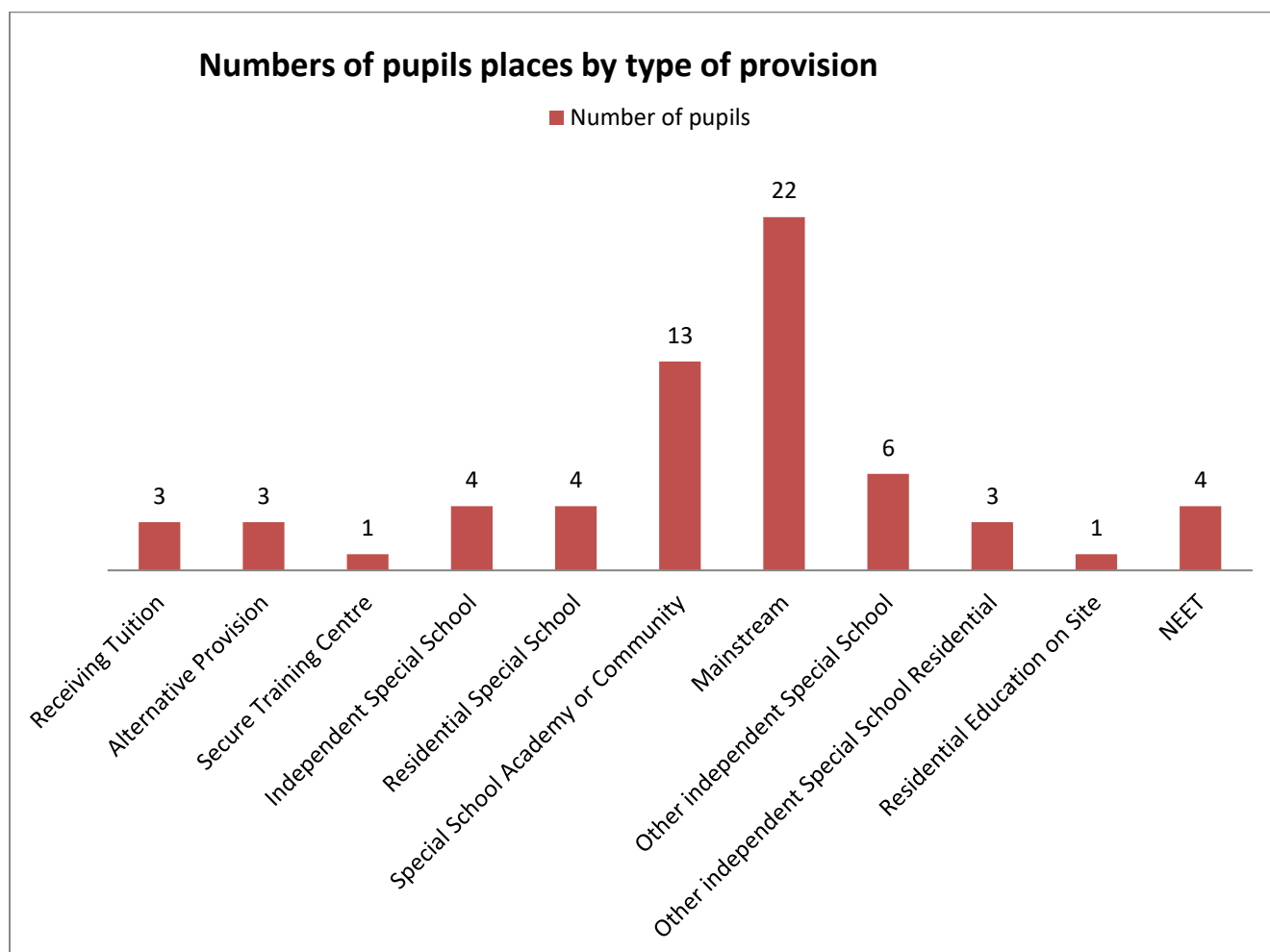
### SEND Summary

In summary Virtual School whole cohort statistics for School and Post 16 pupils:

- 64 pupils (27.9%) with an EHC Plan.
- 46 pupils (20%) are on a SEN Support Plan
- In total 110 have been identified as having a current special education need
- This equates to 33% of the cohort from N2 to Year 13
- Nationally the most common primary type of need is Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) with 30% of those having an EHC Plan having this need. However, the most common type of need of our CLA is Social, Emotional and Mental Health.

EHCP Education Provision for 64 EHCP pupils

Below is a table detailing the type of provision for the pupils with an Education Health and Care Plan. It can be seen that 22 pupils (34.3%) of this group are attending a mainstream school or college. There are some whose needs are very specific and require specialist support in a setting which is matched to these needs. These are either as part of a day school or residential special school. There is a mixture of pupils attending 52 week and 38 week per year education settings.



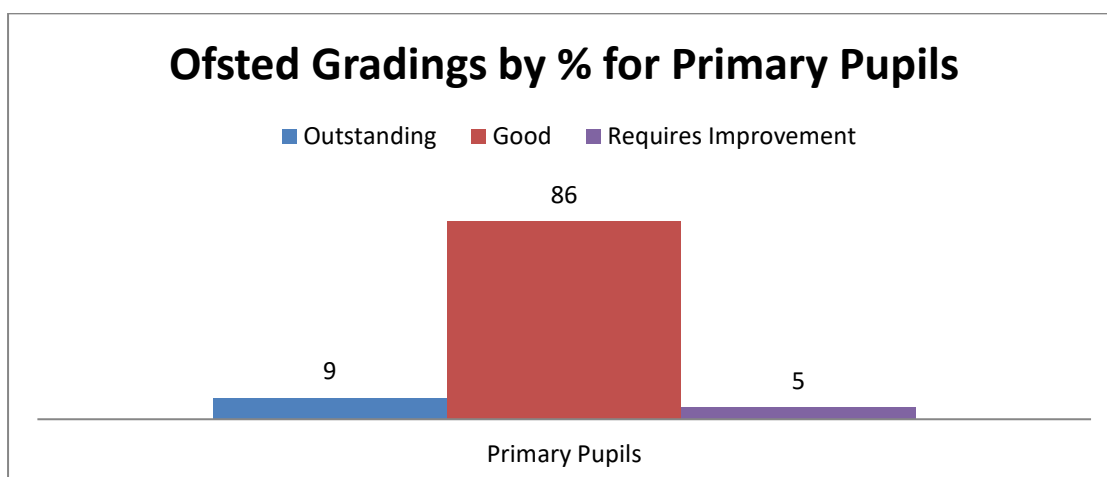
There are a number of actions we have taken during this year to support our SEN cohort:

- Recruitment of a senior educational psychologist to work with the Virtual School for two days per week. This is to provide training, challenge, support and assessments where necessary to meet needs.
- Using specific programmes to look at evidencing pupil progress in addition to the Personal Education. B Squared is a SEN programme which is used to track our pupils.
- Use of the Boxall profile system to provide an assessment tools for SEMH needs and to provide strategies for interventions
- Use of the Access to Inclusion toolkit with schools to support those children and young people who have behavioural difficulties and/or trauma and attachment needs which may be a barrier to learning and engagement. This system enables practitioners to use strategies to support our children and young people in their education setting.
- The impact of these systems has been that the Virtual School has been able to look at suggesting teaching strategies used by education practitioners to be more effective and to support pupils to overcome their barriers to learning.

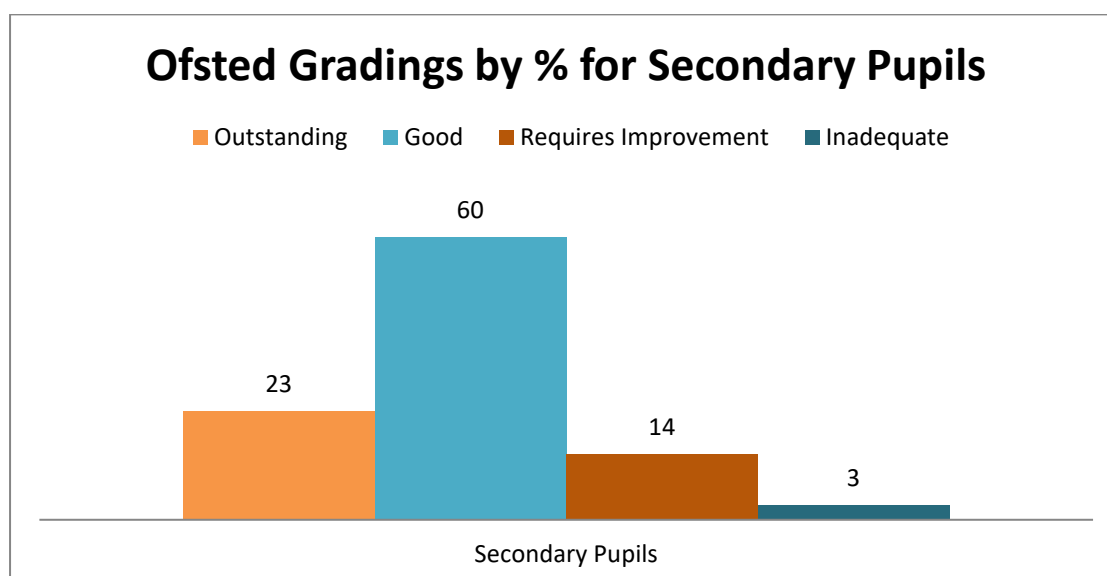
## School Placement of CLA by OFSTED classification July 2020

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 into a stable care placement but schools in that local area were graded as below good. Although our first priority would always be to find a good school. 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 making good progress and if they were being well supported. However, we ensure that schools are closely monitored every term to check that pupil progress is good. The data below illustrates the gradings of schools our pupils attend.

### Primary Phase



### Secondary Phase

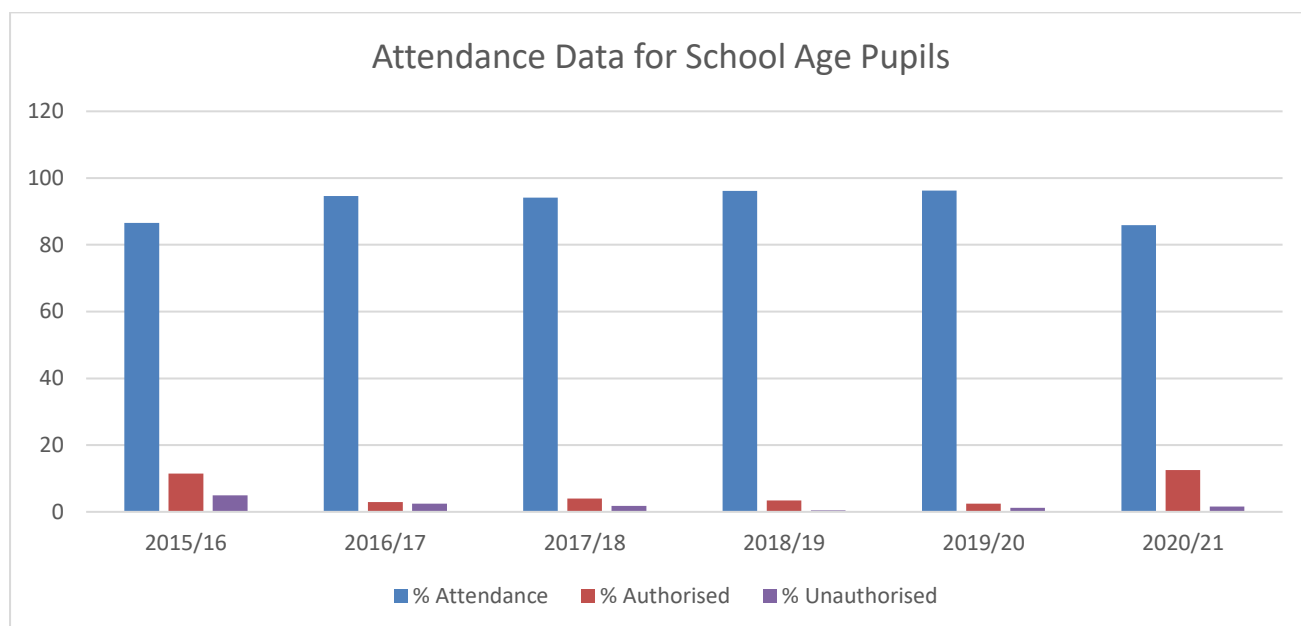


Overall School Ofsted Grading Year R to Year 11 is:

- 87.6% of pupils attend a school graded good or above. This has remained static from last year's 87%
- 70% attend a good school, slight reduction from last year's 71.6%
- 17.6% attend an outstanding school, an increase from 15.3% last year
- 10.6% attend a school that requires improvement, static data compared to last year
- 2% attend an inadequate school, a reduction from 3.1% last year

**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. The Virtual School attend the PEPs for all pupils placed in schools less than good.**

## 7. Attendance



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

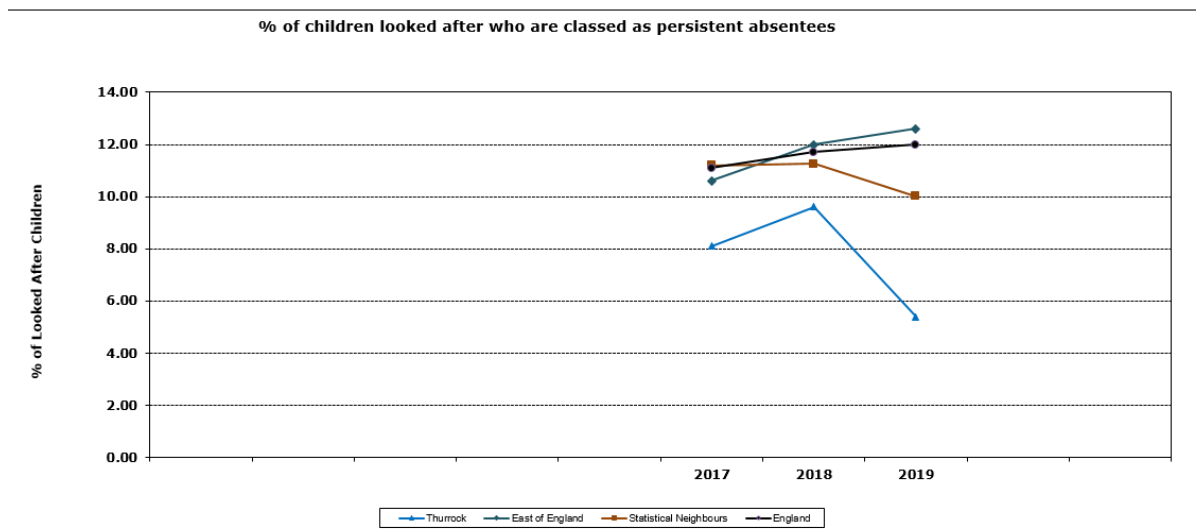
The attendance figure of 85.9% represents attendance of school age pupils across the academic year. This includes periods of lockdown and school closures due to the pandemic. Attendance rates have been affected by school closures and illness with 12.47% of absences being authorised. In total for all pupils in the academic year, there were 9,077.5 days lost due to closures or self-isolation of year groups. The impact of the pandemic has been significant. Unauthorised absence has remained fairly static but there has been a slight increase from 1.4% in 19/20 to 1.6% in 20/21.

Across the school year (including lockdowns and other Covid 19 measures) 86 pupils had attendance that was below 90%, this is known as persistent absenteeism. However, 15 (8.1%) of these 86 pupils were school refusers which affected their attendance. The remaining pupils were absent due to other mitigating circumstances such as illness.

The impact of the pandemic has led to pupils not wanting to return to school when they were able to. They preferred to remain at home and needed additional support and challenge to attend school. For those pupils, actions plans were put in place and mentors were assigned. Not all pupils took up the offer of a mentor, but those that did and who worked with their schools to overcome anxieties, were able to return to school successfully.

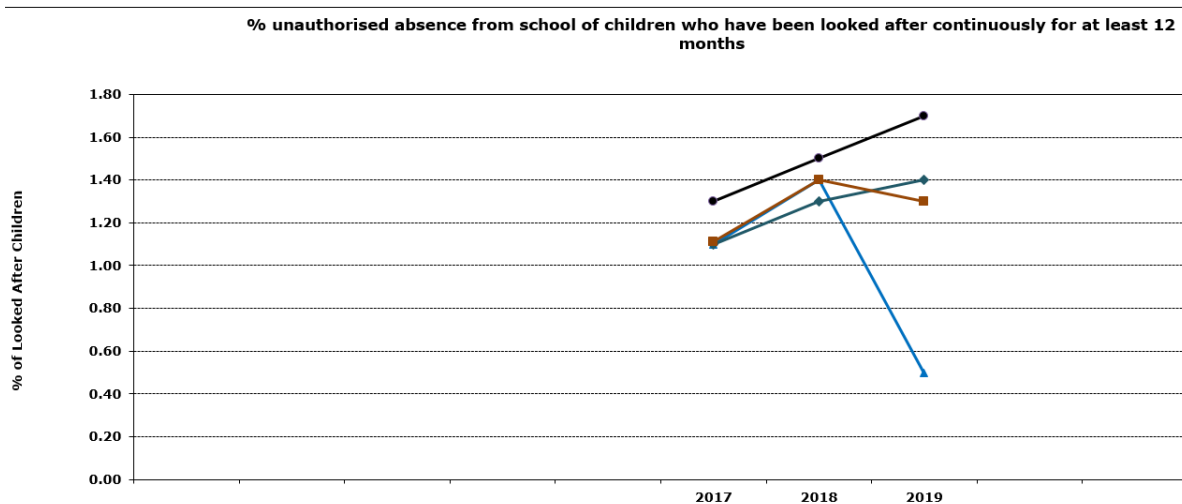
There are specific actions which have taken place and which are planned for the next academic year to mitigate the impact of Covid 19. These are evidenced in the School Improvement Plans and Head Teacher reports to the Virtual School Governing Body.

The Virtual School Head has very high expectations and standards relating to school attendance and this can be evidenced through our past performance compared to other local authorities. The published data in the Local Authority Interactive Toolkit shows that Thurrock Children Looked After are ranked as second in the country for the lowest overall absence rates against all other Local Authorities with 5.4% of pupils being classed as a persistent absentee. The national average for CLA being 12%.



Published data from the LAIT for unauthorised absence in 2019 shows Thurrock as ranked number 1 in the country for the lowest rate of unauthorised absence for children in care as this was 0.50%. This is illustrated in the graph taken from the LAIT.





## 8. Exclusions

There have been no permanent exclusions of CLA for over an eight 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 remained above that low figure.

21 school age pupils out of the CLA cohort have experienced a fixed term exclusion (FTE) during the course of the year. This equates to 10.6% of the cohort. This is above the national figure 3.76% of all pupils in England for data 2019/2020. There is currently no comparative data of CLA exclusion rates or a rate for 2020/2021. The DFE recommends that the published data for 2019/20 is treated with caution due to the pandemic. More national statistical updates will be available in July 2022.

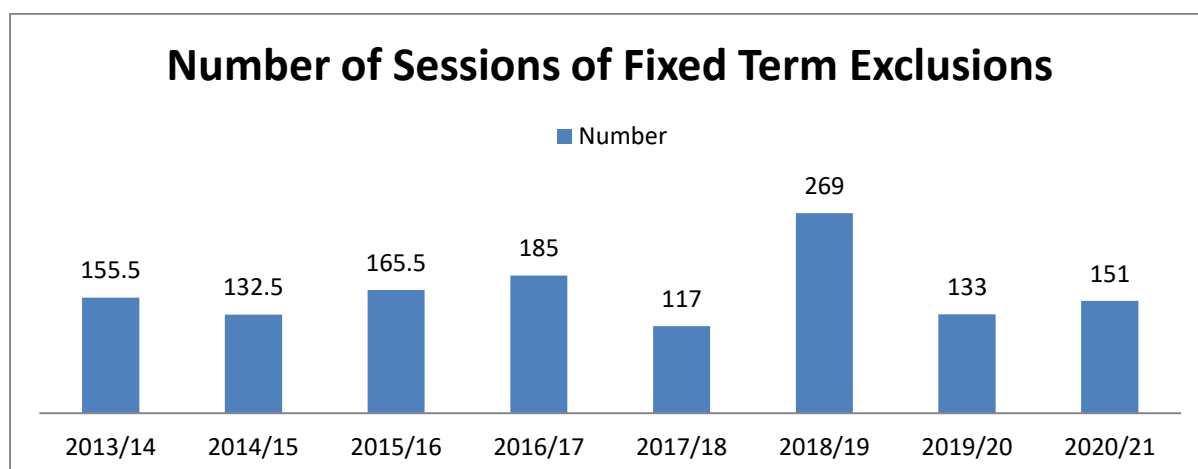
There were some incidences this academic year of some new into care having a FTE both before and after becoming looked after. It would seem that this behaviour could have been communicating a more significant need relating to their home life and then responding when becoming looked after. The Virtual 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
- Managed moved

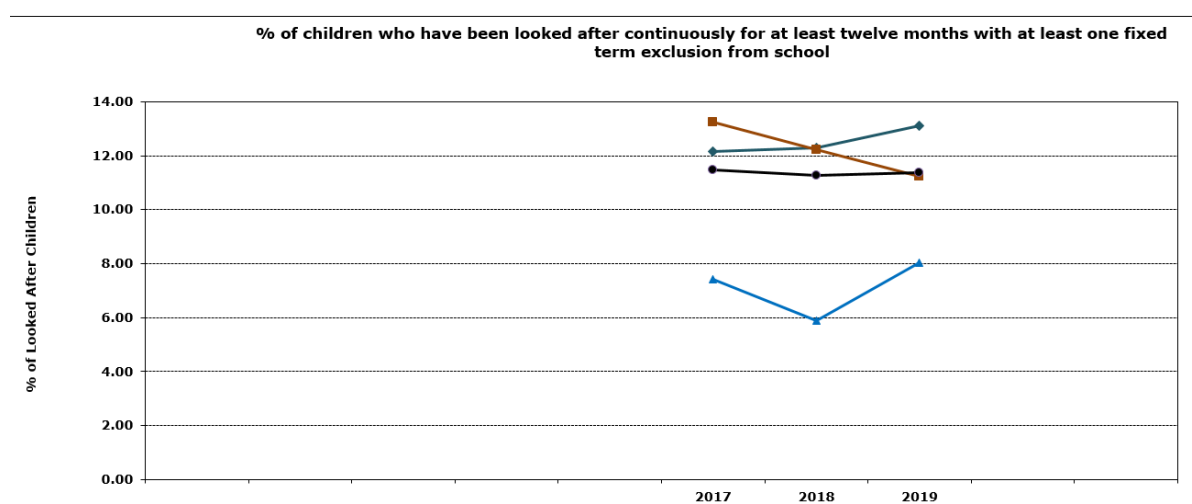
As a Virtual School we have planned clear actions to continue to reduce FTE. These being to:

- Continue to monitor FTE and continue to actively reduce the amount through support and challenge

- Offer Trauma and Attachment training to key staff who are experiencing behavioral difficulties with our pupils.



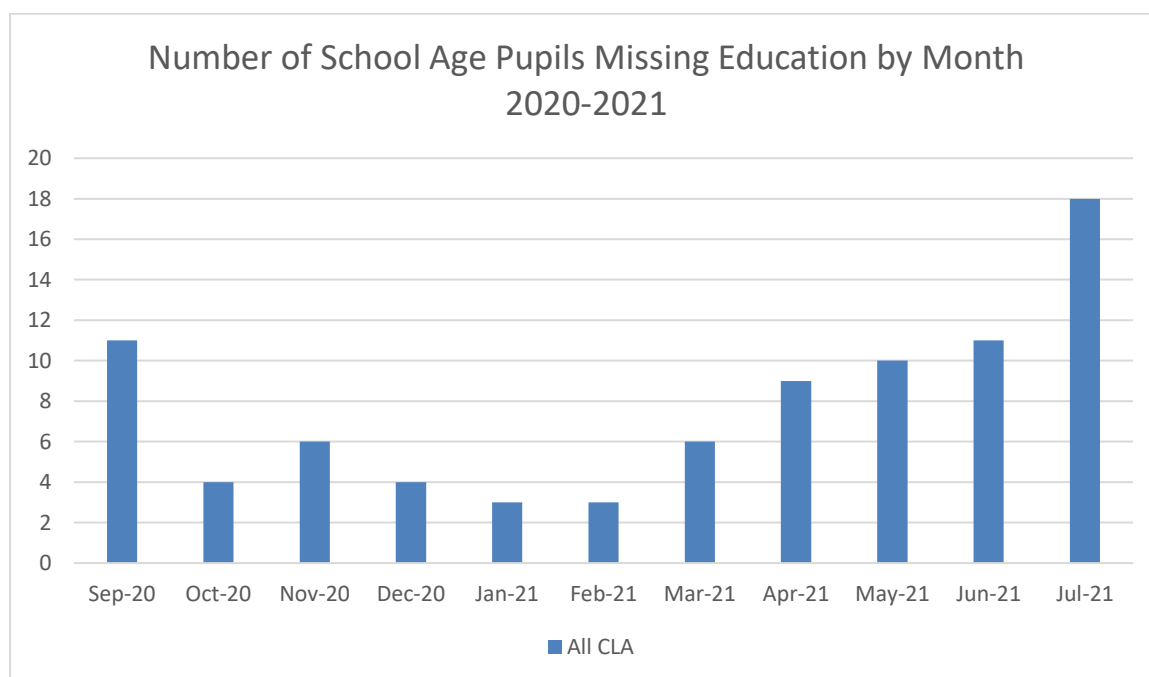
The LAIT tool data for the 3 year period 2016-2019 (the latest set of published data) shows that Thurrock CLA for 12+ months continued to have exclusion rates below the national averages for CLA. This is illustrated in the LAIT graph below. It also ranked Thurrock as 15<sup>th</sup> in the Country for lowest FTE rates.



## 9. Children Missing Education [CME]

The Local Authority carefully monitors any child missing education for those CLA placed in and out of borough. The Virtual School produces weekly data for any child who is missing education due to lack of a school place or through extended absence. This data is shared and discussed in Directors Management Team monthly. Monthly CME data is available and provided to Governors on a termly basis. The Virtual School takes action which is individualised to meet the needs of the pupils and where necessary, works with the Admissions Team, Inclusion Manager and SEN Service teams in Thurrock and other boroughs to secure school places or alternative provision. For pupils who are without an educational placement, a Personal

Education Plan [PEP] meeting is held to plan actions for how to secure education provision. Wherever possible the Virtual School provides tuition through commissioned tuition services whilst a student is between educational placements. The increase in CME in July was mainly attributable to 8 UASC entering care into the summer term. The biggest challenge for securing education is when those pupils with an EHC Plan move out of borough and an alternative provision is sought. The processes within the SEND Code of Practice, do not enable action to be completed in a timely manner. This matter is discussed weekly at SEN Priority Panel.

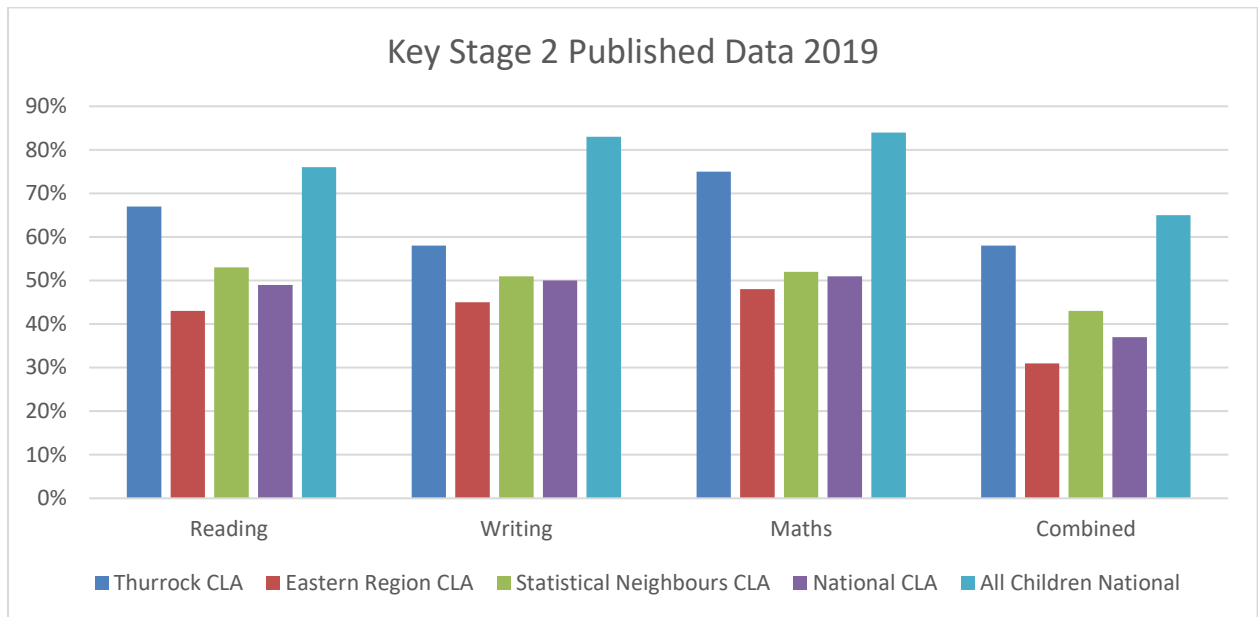


The table highlights a fluctuation of figures and this very much depends on the profile of pupils coming into care and whether they have education prior to becoming looked after or if they have to move away from their school due to placement availability in borough. The virtual school staff work very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

#### 10. Attainment Data of CLA

During to the cancellation of all testing and exams for the year 2020 and 2021, 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, some data has been made available on the Local Authority Interactive Tool (LAIT) based upon 2019 tests for Key Stage 2 and Teacher Assessment data for Key Stage 4 in 2020. This data can be classed as validated and can therefore be shared with Governors and the Corporate Parenting Committee.

**Key Stage 2 Data from the LAIT**

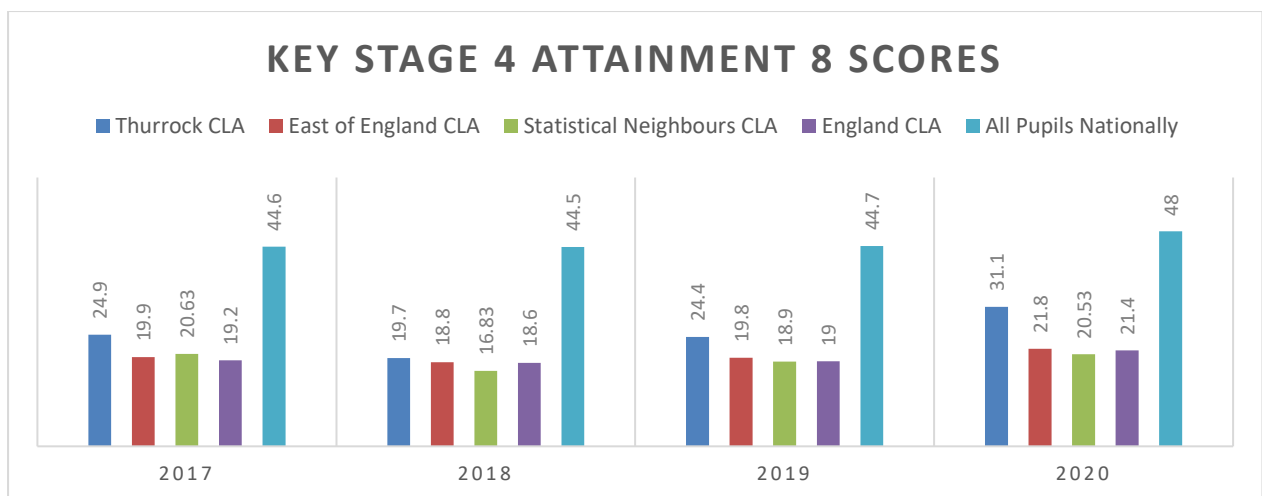


For the last set of published data for pupils in care for 12+ months the Key Stage 2 attainment data is shown the above chart (2019). Thurrock CLA have outperformed all other CLA comparators and attainment is better than eastern region, statistical neighbour and all CLA in England. **Thurrock Local Authority CLA was ranked 3<sup>rd</sup> in the country for the best combined results for reading, writing and math and was only 7% below the national average combined score for all children.**

**Key Stage 4 Data from the LAIT**

**Attainment 8 Scores**

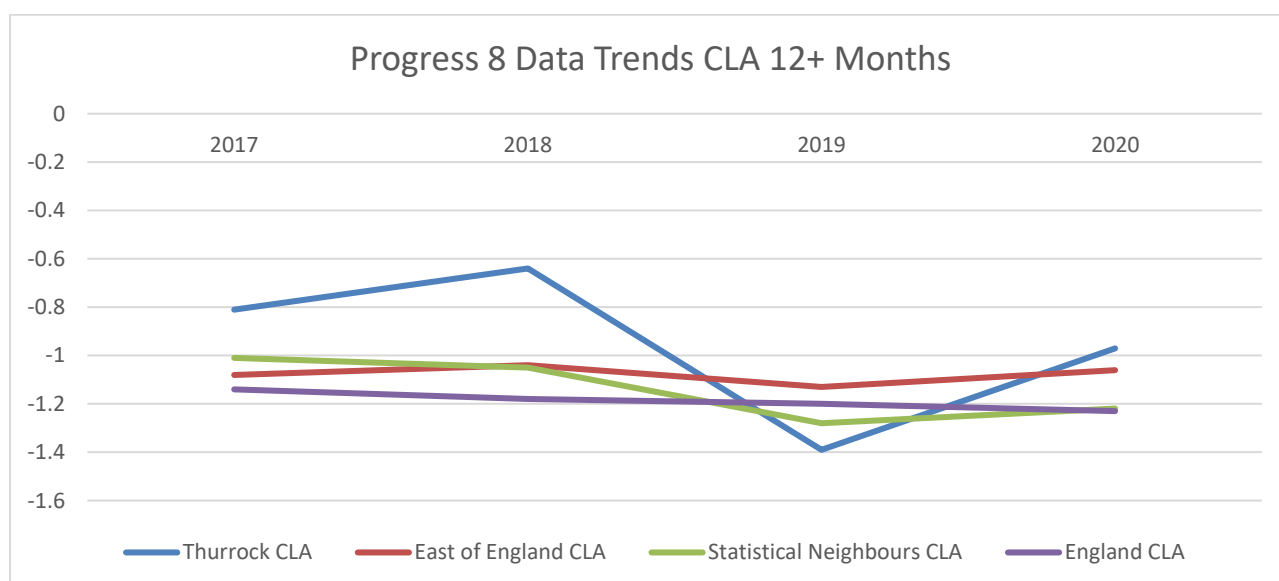
In Key Stage 4 there has been some data made available for 2020 from the LAIT. **Attainment 8 scores have been ranked as being ranked 5<sup>th</sup> in the country for Attainment 8 scores for CLA compared to all other Local Authorities.**



The above chart shows the improved performance of Thurrock CLA over a 3 year period using data for CLA in care 12+ months. This data shows that Thurrock CLA are closing the gap over non-looked after peers as well as performing above other CLAs in comparative criteria.

### Progress 8 Scores

Progress 8 would be an area for development for **Thurrock CLA as we are ranked 35<sup>th</sup> in the country out of LAs for performance in this area.** Our performance in Progress 8 measures is better than our statistical neighbours, eastern region and England CLA but we would still like to do better. Performance is illustrated below. For context in this report, the closer the lines are to zero, the better.

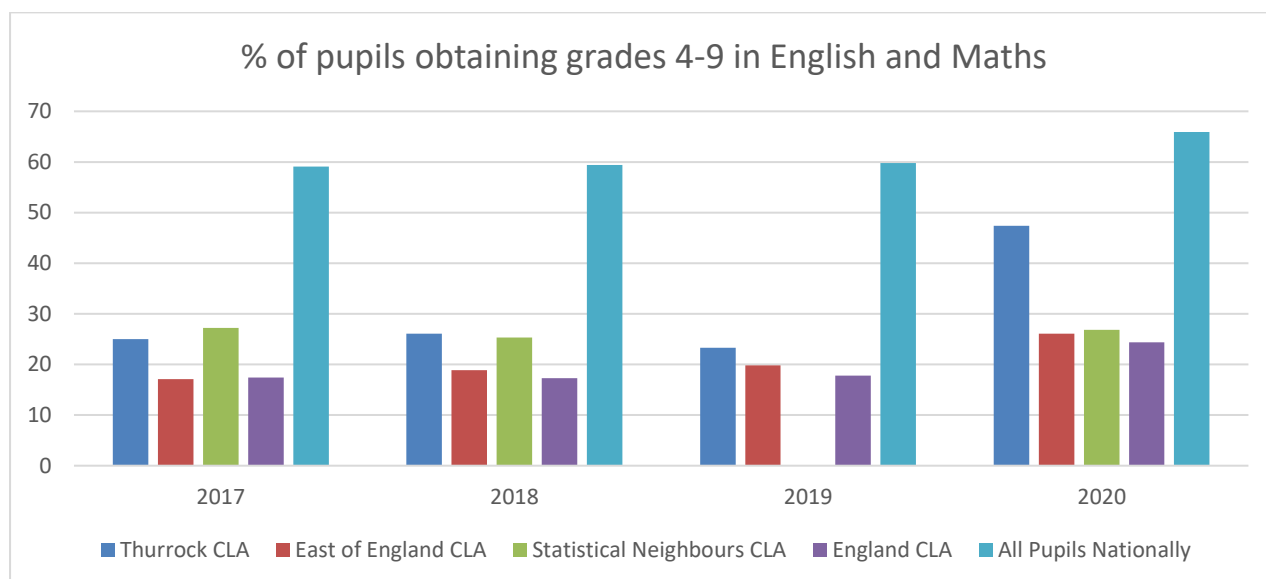


### Key Stage 4 English and Maths Combined

In 2020 Thurrock CLA performed particularly well in obtaining Maths and English grades 4+ combined. **The LAIT data for pupils in care for 12+ months ranks us as Number 1 out of all local authorities in the country for CLA pupils.**

We have consistently performed better than the East of England, our statistical neighbours and all CLA across a 3 year period. We must note however, that this data is very cohort specific and is affected by the contextual make-up of the Year 11 cohort for each year.

The chart below details the comparative data over a 4 year period.



### Data for 2021

As yet there is no reportable data for 2021. In line with the DFE guidance and the publication of national data, the Virtual School Head Teacher will report further data when available. There was no testing in 2021, however, pupil progress and attainment was still monitored very carefully throughout the year for all pupils.

Due to the effects of the pandemic and subsequent disruption to education this has caused. The Virtual school continues to work closely with schools/colleges to ensure that our pupils make progress and barriers to learning are identified and addressed.

### 11. Summary of Actions for all Key Stages to improve 2022 data

#### Key Headlines of Actions for Supporting Testing in 2022

What are we doing to improve academic performance?

- Provision of Literacy Book Trust home learning resources to those aged between 3-9 years old
- Provision of 1-1 tuition throughout Year 11 in maths, English and science
- Provision of 1-1 tuition for Year 10 pupils starting in the summer term of year 10
- Provision of 1-1 tuition for year 5 starting in the summer term of year 5
- Provision of 1-1 tuition in maths and English throughout year 6 for this year group
- 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
- 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 use 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

## 12. Case Studies

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

## 13. School Improvement Priorities

These are detailed in the Virtual School Improvement Plan which is updated at the start of every academic year. Priorities are identified and actions are detailed related to targets and actions which form the basis of the Virtual School's work 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 2020-2021 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. However, in the attainment section above the published data that we have available is showing a very positive picture in terms of meeting this improvement priority. Data for 2021 is not yet available and this will be limited due to testing being cancelled for 2021.*

*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.*

*What Next?*

- *Plan for academic year 2021-2022 will continue to focus on progress and intervention.*
- *Use of Pupil Premium Plus to support any gaps in provision*
- *Continue with Virtual School 1-1 tuition offer for key year groups of pupils to support testing in 2022*

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

*Our exclusion rates remain low compared to the national average and this years' data is a more realistic view of the cohort and their behaviour profile. We are continuously looking at pupil behaviour and supporting schools to reduce the number of fixed term episodes. The use of the Access to Inclusion Toolkit has supported schools to be able to look at the behaviours of our pupils and develop strategies to support certain behaviours in class.*

*What Next?*

- *Monitor the rate of exclusion and reasons for exclusion in forthcoming year*
- *Provide challenge and support where exclusions are taking place*
- *Continue to 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] Further embedding 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

*A range of data is produced which measures attainment and progress data from starting points and this is tracked using quantifiable data as well as individual pupil progress against their personal targets. For SEN pupils, schools are providing reports which detail all elements of progress and these are used to inform personal education plans and EHC plans. B Squared is used for pupils that require this measurement. The Personal Education Plan data section was changed to meet the different assessment recording methods used by schools. An extra support section to the PEP has also enabled the creation of provision plans for pupils which details interventions and the impact of these on pupil progress.*

*What Next?*

- *Ensuring that support and resources are targeted appropriately by individual schools to maximize pupil progress, particularly in light of addressing any gaps in learning caused by the impact of Covid 19.*



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

*The detailed tracking of emotional health and well-being and the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire [SDQ] are now fully embedded as part of the termly Personal Education Plan [PEP] process. Pupils who are needing extra support for mental health are accessing this in a variety of ways including in school counselling, play therapies or access to external therapeutic support which is commissioned by social care. Where appropriate schools are using the PP+ grant to support needs. There is a dedicated section within the PEP which provides the opportunities to discuss mental health needs using the signs of safety approach. This has enabled there to be a focussed conversation about this and enable plans for support to be made.*

*What Next?*

- *Continue to collect and track SDQ data for all pupils*
- *Continued attendance at monthly SDQ panel to discuss concerns, needs and support for pupils with high scores*
- *Continue to provide Trauma and Attachment training for educational professionals*

[KP 5] Developing interventions which will impact pupil progress

*There has been a focus on interventions that could be provided virtually in order to ensure that Covid 19 and the associated measures were not a barrier to intervention. When educational establishments were closed, there was an increased focus on blended and online learning. Levels of engagement with this were carefully tracked each week. When pupils were in schools an approach which supported a creative approach interventions was suggested. Schools were able to keep the PP+ money and Primary schools received more PP+ to support an increased focus on interventions, once Covid restrictions were lifted.*

*As a virtual school our interventions used digital technology such as laptops and kindles to support learning as well as the trials of some reading interventions that were online such as Zookeeper. Our Unaccompanied Asylum seekers were provided with 1-1 tuition for ESOL, especially those without schooling as well as access to an online language tool called Flashacademy.*

[KP 6] Continue to embed processes of quality assurance of educational provision - particularly relating to remote/virtual working

*Due to the Covid 19 restrictions and Thurrock policy of Agile Working the Quality Assurance work has been conducted virtually. Educational establishments were not in a position to welcome external visitors and so the Virtual School team attended all meetings online. The positive aspect of this was that we were able to attend more meetings due to not having to travel. The Virtual School rate each educational establishment according to various criteria and support and challenge is targeted to ensure that education provision is matching the needs of our pupils.*

[KP 7] Provision of support and challenge to all professionals to minimise the impact of Covid 19 on our students

*We achieved this through changing processes and policies within the Virtual School. For example, by changing certain aspects of the Personal Education Plan. One major action was relating to the second and third national lockdowns. Every school and college had to provide a weekly report about their pupils. This report was used to gauge the frequency and quality of educational provision as well as the level of engagement or our pupils. This enabled us to target challenge and support appropriately, as well as providing additional resources if necessary. This was in the form of tuition or electronic equipment to support learning. Any barriers to learning were identified and actions were taken to address these.*

*What next?*

- *Continue to monitor any effects of the pandemic on pupils' academic progress or emotional well-being*
- *Hold educational establishments to account to ensure they have robust recovery plans for our pupils.*

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

The management of the Pupil Premium Plus grant for Children Looked After is detailed in the DFE guidance [Pupil premium grant 2020 to 2021: 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 centers on how this money is used to raise the achievement of the child/young person and assesses if funds are being used appropriately. This process, alongside the PEP process is supporting the pupil to have targeted support and intervention which directly affects and plans for his/her academic and overall school achievement with a personalised approach. It is enabling the Virtual School to be updated on progress data and enables discussion with the school to center on appropriate intervention. This system promotes accountability and improved dialogue in how to raise attainment and achievement and narrow the gap. [Separate Pupil Premium documentation is available on request].

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

The Virtual School received PP+ funding for 251 pupils aged from Year Reception to Year 11. This figure is based upon the SDA903 census return by social care. The Virtual School top sliced £545 per pupil for the academic year and used this to provide resources to support the most vulnerable in the cohort. This equates to the top slice being £136,795.

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

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

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

The majority of funding this academic year was spent on 1-1 tuition for pupils. This is funded at £55 per hour of tuition. During the course of the academic year we have commissioned maths and English tuition for all year 6 pupils to support with testing and then continued this through to the end of year 6 to support transition into Year 7. Year 5 tuition was started early to mitigate the potential disruption to education caused by Covid 19. Year 11 were provided with tuition in maths, English and science (if requested) and this continued through to the end of the year to support with year 12. Additionally, year 10s started their tuition early. Some year 12s maintained the tuition that was provided throughout Year 11 (2019/2020) to support them with GCSEs. As a result of the impact of Covid 19 we allocated £252,985 for additional tuition to cover April 2020 through to August 2021. Funds for this were taken from our core budget and pupil premium plus top slice.

Funding was also directed at providing digital technology to any pupil that needed this. All pupils were assessed to see if they needed a laptop to support them with their studies and home tuition packages. We provided laptops costing a total of £16,918 to support those needing access to devices to support learning.

Kindles were purchased for pupils from year 4 upwards. A kindle for primary pupils has been pre-loaded with a subscription to Kindle reading programme. Additionally

kindles and reading vouchers have been purchased to support reading for key stages 3,4 and 5. This set of resources was £7,500

The Letterbox Booktrust home learning resources were also provided to all pupils in year groups Nursery 2 to Year 9. We allocated £11, 263 for this resource.

Additionally we commissioned mentoring services from Open Door which has provided 1-1 mentoring support for an identified group of pupils who needed additional support. This resource was £7,897.

For post 16 we also commissioned tutoring to support students who were Not in Education, Employment or Training. This was for fifteen 1-1 sessions to support with confidence building, CV writing, interview techniques etc. These pupils were out of borough and so were not able to access Inspire in Thurrock and were reluctant engagers with the services. This mentoring has provided a good outcome for and supported these young people into employment.

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

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

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

#### PEP Compliance Data for Academic Year 2020-2021

Month	Overall Compliance	Early Years - N2	Primary	Secondary	Post 16
Sep-20	98.40%	N/A	100%	100%	94%
Oct-20	95%	100%	100%	97%	85%
Nov-20	90%	60%	91%	97%	78%
Dec-20	92%		88%	97%	90%
Jan-21	96%	67%	95%	98%	96%
Feb-21	98%	94%	97%	99%	96%
Mar-21	97%	100%	100%	98%	92%
Apr-21	94%	100%	97%	95%	86%
May-21	96%	100%	97%	94%	93%

Jun-21	93%	89%	90%	96%	95%
Jul-21	96.00%	100%	100%	97%	93%
Aug-21	No data as all completed				

### Quality of Personal Education Plans

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

PEP quality has been affected by Covid 19 which has caused staff absence in schools and within the social care team. This has meant that certain parts of the PEP were not completed within timeframe which led to a grading of poor quality. The Virtual School have continued to provide training to professionals throughout the academic year to support with completing a good PEP.

Month	Overall Good Quality %	% Amber	% RED	Not graded
Sep-20	81%	5%	4%	10%
Oct-20	76%	5%	8%	11%
Nov-20	76%	6%	11%	7%
Dec-20	70%	8%	13%	8%
Jan-21	69%	8%	15%	8%
Feb-21	70%	7%	15%	7%
Mar-21	70%	6%	16%	8%
Apr-21	72%	7%	15%	6%
May-21	69%	8%	15%	8%
Jun-21	72%	9%	15%	4%
Jul-21	62%	12%	24%	2%
Aug-21	No data as all completed			

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

What Next?

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

- Pupil Premium Plus funding will be withheld from schools if the education section is not to a high standard.

#### 16. **Post 16 Update**

The Virtual School supports pupils who have left Year 11 and are moving onto the next stage of their education. Pupils take a variety of paths either through level 1, 2 or 3, FE or HE qualifications. Others combine apprenticeships with obtaining qualifications. Every pupil is supported appropriately to create the next step that is suitable for them. Conversations regarding post 16 pathways are discussed in Year 10. Transition 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.

#### University Students

Although the Virtual School does not hold responsibility for these students we still like to support our young people as they leave care and head off to university. This is in the form of IT resources and vouchers for their living costs as they leave Year 13. There are currently 19 care leavers aged 18-21 years at university with a further 9 students aged 22-25. It remains the aspiration of Thurrock Council that as many care leavers as possible can access higher education if they choose to.

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

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

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

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

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

### Barefoot E Learning for NEET Young People

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

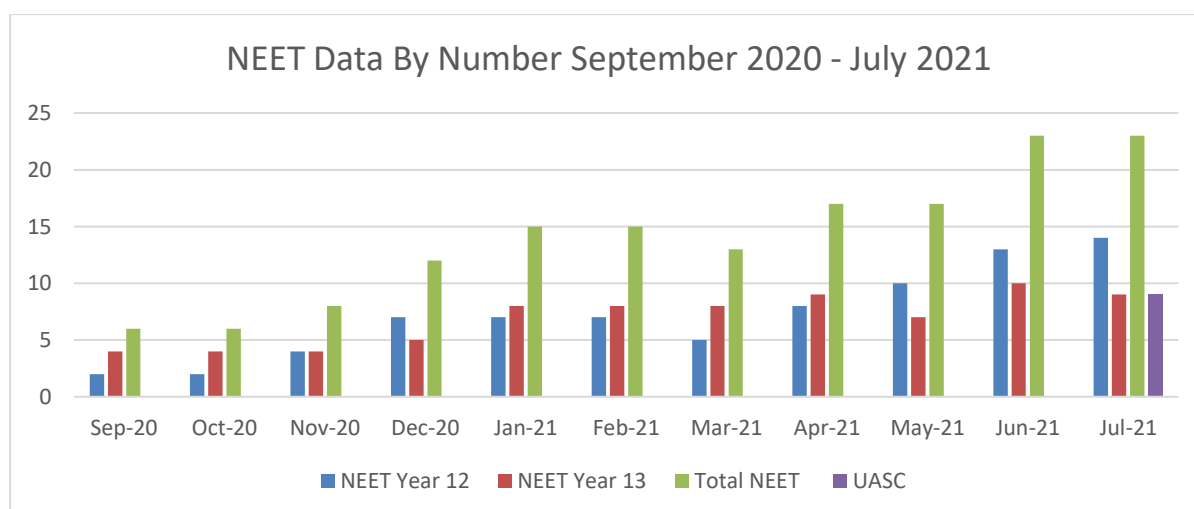
### Contact with NEET Young People

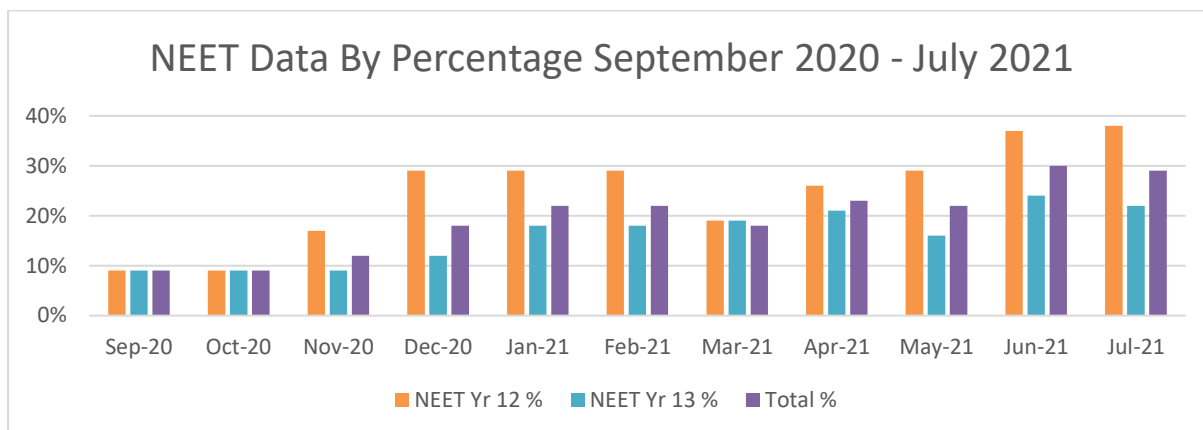
The post 16 adviser contacts every NEET young person every week/fortnight. Some young people require more contact than others and so this could be several times per week.

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.

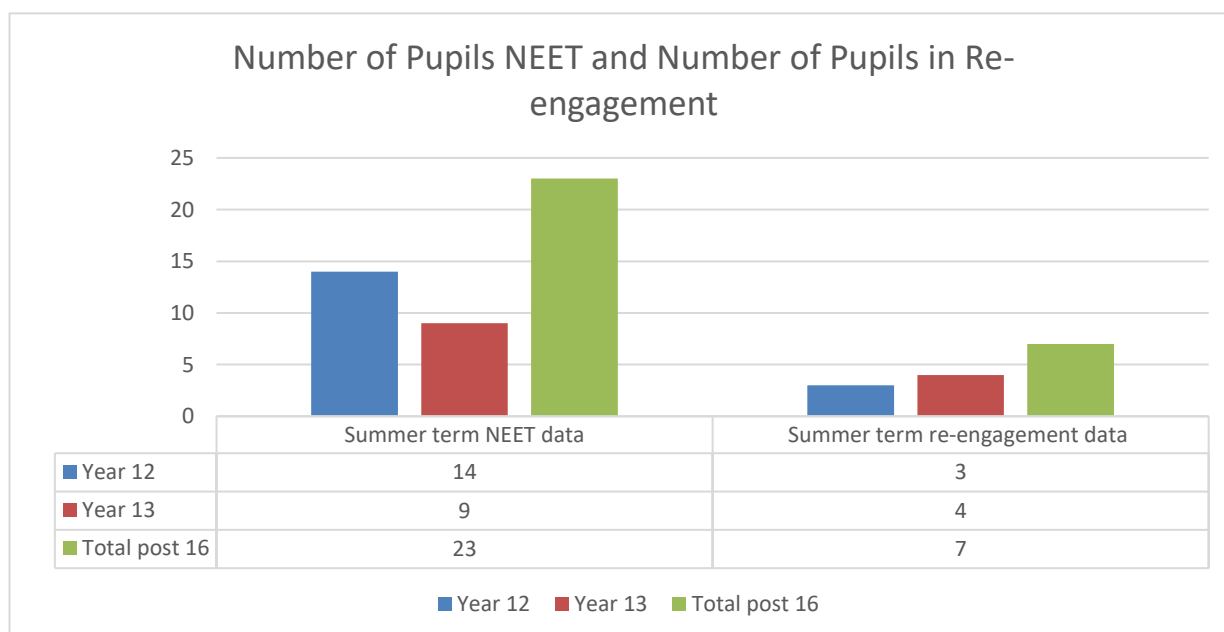
### **Not in Education, Employment or Training Data**

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.





The NEET figures increase towards the end of the year has reflected that 9 unaccompanied asylum seeking young people came into the country and could not access a college placement due to the time of year. These young people were supported with online learning packages until a college provision was found. Strategies for NEET support are noted above in this report. Some NEET young people have been involved with re-engagement activities. This is summarised for the summer term 2021 below.



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



### 18. Support for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children

This year has seen an increased demand for the Virtual School team to support Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children [UASC]. We currently have 12% of our cohort classified as UASC. This was an increase from 9.4% the previous year. The regional sharing protocol arrangements have enabled young people to be transferred to boroughs with fewer numbers than Thurrock. The number of UASC coming into Thurrock has not reduced and as some of our previous UASC have left care, Thurrock Local Authority are distributing fewer young people to other boroughs. This year we have created a set protocol to support the educational needs of these young people. Including 1-1 tuition if of school age and the provision of online learning packages to all young people. The priority with all is to obtain school or colleges placements as soon as possible to promote the learning of English. We have also created stationary packs and are purchasing dictionaries to support language. Our older UASC pupils continue to do well in their colleges and schools and those who have been with us for over 12 months are making good progress with their English. One of our UASCs will be starting Oxford University in October 2021. We have provided him with English support since he first came to us aged 15 years old. With hard work and high aspirations, our young people can achieve a great deal.

### 19. Virtual School Governing Body

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

The members of this GB 2020/2021 were:

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

Headteacher: K Pullen [Virtual School]

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

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

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

Out of Borough School Representative: Vacancy

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

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

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

Staff Governor: 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.

## 20. Virtual School Specific Actions and Response to Covid 19

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. A brief summary of key actions is below:

- Every pupil was monitored for their education offer during the national lockdown periods. This covered our pupils from Nursery 2 through to year 13 who were placed both in and out of borough
- Support for transition back into face to face education was provided
- Attendance was monitored during the academic year and where ever possible, attendance in an educational building was maintained
- Guidance was provided to all carers and social workers to advise on the Local Authorities' position regarding education for our children in care. This guidance advised that the ideal situation would be for all of our Children Looked After (CLA) to access a face to face education offer if provided. However, it took into consideration that we needed to make decisions based on a case by case basis which meets the needs of pupils and the current home situations. For example, if their foster carer was shielding
- There was a clear expectation that every CLA was provided with an education offer, whether face to face, or online. If teachers requested that pupils attend school/college we were supportive of this decision
- Every school/college Designated Teacher was required to complete a 1 page summary sheet every week which informed the Virtual School team of the situation and assessed the levels of attendance and engagement in learning
- For those who attended school, Welfare Call attendance monitoring continued to contact the schools on a daily basis to obtain live attendance data

- Foster carers and social workers were required to provide us with updates around their children and young people. This was in order to triangulate a range of perspectives and information around provision and engagement in learning
- Each week, the VS team members RAG rated their cohort based upon offer, engagement, quality of work, concerns raised etc. This approach enabled us to provide support and challenge in the appropriate manner and target resources accordingly
- In terms of monitoring mental health, we continued to request for the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) to be completed as part of the Personal Education Plan (PEP) process to ensure that conversations and actions are taking place to support emotional well-being.
- The Virtual School attended a monthly SDQ meeting which takes places with social care, the virtual school and EWMHS to discuss distribution of support for mental health
- Personal Education Plan meetings continued throughout the year (i.e. every term for every pupil) to ensure that this statutory part of the care plan is maintained and that education is formally monitored through this process
- All tuition offers were maintained and increased for pupils in key year groups. A total of £252,985 was spent on tuition from April 2020-August 2021 thereby demonstrating our commitment to addressing any negative effects that the pandemic has had on educational progress
- We provided our carers with a range of resources, tips, website links and guidance for our different phases of education to provide additional learning activities whilst at home
- Maintained the Letterbox distribution of books and home learning packs for Years Nursery 2 to Year 9
- Provided all professionals with regular updates to promote a good level of communication with schools, colleges, carers and social workers
- Up until March 2020 we had spent £21,000 on digital technology to support learning with a further £16,918 until the end of the year in July 2021
- Where pupils needed to be accessing face to face education, we challenged the relevant professionals to ensure that an offer was provided
- Allowed for schools to be creative in how they managed Pupil Premium Plus to support the needs of our pupils on an academic and social level.

### **Staffing**

In terms of staffing we maintained existing levels of staffing for the academic year 2020/21. All Virtual School staff remained working from home in line with Thurrock policy.

### **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.

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

**Working in Partnership with other Teams in Thurrock Council and out of borough councils. 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 Effectiveness, Social Care, Special Educational Needs including Educational Psychologists, Fostering, Health, Admissions and Education Welfare. This cohesive approach works together around the child/young person to create a supportive, knowledgeable level of service aimed at serving the best interest of the CLA.

The Virtual School also works with the relevant teams in other boroughs for our CLA who are placed out of borough. Actions to work with a range of partners included:

- Provision of training to Designated Teachers
- Provision of training to social workers
- Phone call support for foster carers, social workers and teachers
- Frequent liaison with educational establishments
- Provision of training, information advice and guidance for professionals and parents linked to Previously Looked After Children
- Attendance at the Children in Care Council when invited

**Additional Services [commissioned by Virtual School in 2020-2021]**

Welfare Call – to monitor the attendance of our CLA

EGov Digital Solutions – an electronic platform for Personal Education Plans

Fleet Tuition Service – for provision of 1-1 tuition

Prospero – for provision of 1-1 tuition

Teaching Personnel – for provision of 1-1 tuition

Open Door – Provision of 1-1 mentoring for pupils

Currys PC World – Provision of Digital Technology to support learners

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. Her dissertation is based upon student perspectives linked to the impact of 1-1 tuition. Our Early Years and Primary adviser has successfully completed a course to become an attachment lead teacher.

23. **Author of this report**

Keeley Pullen BA [Hons] PGCE NPQH

Headteacher of the Virtual School for Thurrock Children Looked After and Previously Looked After Children

**Submission date for Governors** Thursday 11<sup>th</sup> November 2021

**Submission date to Corporate Parenting Committee** 4<sup>th</sup> January 2022

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# Work Programme

**Committee:** Corporate Parenting

**Year:** 2021/2022

**Dates of Meetings:** 1 June 2021, 14 September 2021 (postponed to 23 November 2021), 4 January 2022 and 1 March 2022

Topic	Lead Officer	Requested by Officer/Member
<b>1 June 2021</b>		
Childrens Service Performance Report	Mandy Moore	Officers (Agreed with Chair)
Update on the Youth Offending Service, the Youth Justice Plan and the role of the Service for Children Looked After	Clare Moore/Jason Read	Officers (Agreed with Chair)
Report for Members on Missing Children, Child Exploitation, Return Home Interviews and Contextual Safeguarding focussed on Children Looked After	Clare Moore/Seema Moules	Officers (Agreed with Chair)
Thurrock Fostering Service: Recruitment Strategy	Dan Jones / Naintara Khosla	Officers (Agreed with Chair)
Work Programme	Democratic Services Officer	Standard Item
<b>14 September 2021</b>		
Children's Social Care Performance	Mandy Moore	Officers
Fostering Statement of Purpose	Janet Simon / Daniel Jones	Officers
Adoption Statement of Purpose	Janet Simon/Dan Jones	Officers
Children in Care Council Update	Open Door	Officers

Independent Visitors	Ruth Murdock	Officers
Corporate Parenting Committee – Annual Report 2019/2020	Democratic Services Officer	Officers
Work Programme	Democratic Services Officer	Standard Item
<b>4 January 2022</b>		
Children’s Social Care Performance	Mandy Moore	Officers
Independent Reviewing Officer – Annual Report	Ruth Murdock	Officers
Annual Report of the Virtual Schools	Keeley Pullen	Officers
Fostering Recruitment Strategy Update November 2021	Dan Jones/ Naintara Khosla	Members
National Care Leaver Advisors Visit	Janet Simons/ Clare Moore	Officers
Work Programme	Democratic Services Officer	Standard Item
<b>1 March 2022</b>		
Children’s Social Care Performance	Mandy Moore	Officers
Sufficiency Placement	Sue Green	Officers
Work Programme	Democratic Services Officer	Standard Item

Clerk: Kenna-Victoria Healey



Last Updated: December 2021

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