

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 **1 March 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
Annie Guidotti, 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

Agenda

Open to Public and Press

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1 Apologies for Absence	
2 Minutes	5 - 10
To approve as a correct record the minutes of the Corporate Parenting Committee meeting held on 4 January 2022.	
3 Items of Urgent Business	
To receive additional items that the Chair is of the opinion should be considered as a matter of urgency, in accordance with Section 100B (4) (b) of the Local Government Act 1972.	
4 Declaration of Interests	

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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

Agenda published on: **21 February 2022**

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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 4 January 2022 at 7.00 pm

- Present:** Councillors Jennifer Smith (Vice-Chair), Adam Carter, Sara Muldowney, Georgette Polley and Kairen Raper
- Laura Hall, Thurrock Open Door
Jenny Josling, Vice-Chair, The One Team, Foster Carer Association
Sharon Smith, Chair, The One Team, Foster Carer Association
Jennifer Smith (Vice-Chair), Adam Carter, Sara Muldowney, Georgette Polley and Kairen Raper
- Apologies:** Councillors Abbie Akinbohun (Chair), Elizabeth Rigby and Lynn Worrall and Christopher Bennett.
- In attendance:** Janet Simon, Assistant Director, Children's Social Care and Early Help
Ruth Murdock, Strategic Lead Of Quality Assurance And Reviewing
Kate Kozlova-Boran, Strategic Lead for Employability and Skills
Dan Jones, Fostering Service Manager
Clare Moore, Strategic Lead for the Youth Offending Service and Prevention
Keeley Pullen, Head Teacher for the Virtual School for Looked after and previous 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.

Following the Council's constitution as both the Chair and Vice-Chair were unable to preside over the meeting, the Senior Democratic Services Officer invited nominations from Members to elect a Chair for this meeting only.

Councillor Muldowney was nominated and elected as the Chair for the Corporate Parenting Committee held on 4 January 2022.

19. Minutes

The minutes of the Corporate Parenting meeting on 23 November 2021 (14 September 2021) were approved as a correct record.

20. Items of Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

21. Declaration of Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

22. Children's Social Care Performance – Quarter 2 2021-22

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

Councillor Carter commented on the timeliness of social worker visits and enquired as to the reason there was a dip in performance compared to the same time of the previous year. The assistant director of children social care and early help commented that the dip could be down to a number of reasons including coming out of Covid, children being on holiday or simply not being available on a given date. She continued by stating although the performance was not poor it was definitely in focus to keep improving.

Councillor Raper enquired as to the spread of children who went missing. Within the report it stated 16 of the 28 individual children who went missing, were missing for 24 hours or less. The Strategic Lead for the youth offending service prevention advised Members that 81% of children who were missing and were looked after children were missing for less than 24 hours. Councillor Raper further enquired as to how many children had been missing for over 24 hours. Officers advised that the majority of missing episodes were less than 24 hours, there was 1 missing child the council was working with the police to find and he was an unaccompanied asylum seeker who had been missing for 20 days.

Councillor Muldowney Chair for the meeting enquired of the work officers in the Council carried out with regards to the youth detention accommodation, as figures showed between April 2020 and March 2021 75% of children were from the Black, Asian, and minority ethnic community (BAME). Members heard how this was a national issue and not just a local issue, officers where monitoring data which was submitted on a quarterly basis along with working with Essex Police and young people before any crime had been committed. In addition to this the local authority was working with schools to be able to prevent crime rather than after any offences had occurred.

RESOLVED:

- 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.**

23. Children In Care Council Update

As the Chair of the Children in Care Council had sent his apologies to the meeting, the Chair of the meeting sought Members agreement to defer the item to the next meeting to allow Christopher to speak at the Committee.

This was agreed by all Members.

RESOLVED:

The report is to be deferred to the next meeting of the committee on Tuesday 1st March.

24. Fostering Recruitment Strategy Update November 2021

The fostering service manager presented the report to members which was on pages 43 to 50 of the agenda.

Councillor Carter welcomed the report and commented on the positive news that as of November 2021 there were eleven fostering households in assessment, he continued by stating as outlined within the report if successful this would be 16 new placements.

Members discussed the data presented within the report and were advised compared to the previous year there had been fewer enquires, however there had been an increase in marketing and promotion which had led to an improved number of applications. It was asked by Councillor Carter as to whether Thurrock was in line with its statistical neighbours. The fostering service manager explained officer didn't always see those figures however could circulate figure from across the region.

RESOLVED:

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

25. Independent Reviewing Officer Annual Report

The Strategic Lead of Quality Assurance and Reviewing presented the report on pages 51 to 78 of the agenda.

Councillor Raper commented on the feedback from Looked after Children with regards to the number of children who didn't know what was within their plan. The Strategic Lead of Quality Assurance and Reviewing agreed with the comments made by Members and commented that when speaking with children, they understood what their plan was and what was involved however

the wording of the question caused some confusion for them. She continued to explain that moving forwards images were to be included to help make the plans more child friendly.

During discussions Foster Carers explained everything was included within the child's plan and it was a lot for young children to take in. It was further explained that if the plans were more age appropriate it might make them less scary for children to look at or want to look at. Officers explained that following feedback from children in care with regards to their plans, there would be a change in the language used and feedback taken back to the service as the questions didn't capture what officers were looking for.

RESOLVED:

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

26. National Care Leaver Advisors Visit

The Assistant Director for Children's Social Care Early Help presented the reports outlines on pages 79 to 84 of the agenda, which documented the visit of Mark Riddle MBE to Thurrock.

Councillor Muldowney enquired as to whether this was the key shift to make the Council exceptional more parenting and less corporate. The Assistant Director for Children Social Care in Early Help explained young people and children within care should feel that the care is about them and that we as Corporate Parents were with them every step of the way.

It was enquired by Councillor Raper as to whether Mark Riddle met with members of the corporate parenting committee. It was noted that on this occasion Mr Riddle did not meet with Elected Members however it could be arranged for the second visit, this was seconded and supported by Councillor Polley.

During discussions Members asked as to whether the champion model was something which was to be introduced in Thurrock and whether officers felt eight board meetings a year was deliverable. Members heard her conversations with Members in the first instance along with partners from multi agencies would need to be heard before a decision could be made. It would be ambitious to presume that by moving to the model would enable Thurrock to deliver everything however it if officers where to look at this route it would need the support a partners within health employment and education.

It was enquired as to whether the plan would be to replace the Corporate Parenting Committee with a champion model. The Assistant Director for Children in Social Care Early Help explained these were ideas following the report from Mark Riddle and as yet no decisions had been made to replace the Corporate Parenting Committee.

RESOLVED:

- 1.1 Members of the committee note the feedback provided and the recommendations for Corporate Parenting Committee made by Mark Riddle.**
- 1.2 Members note the work of Officers to progress these recommendations.**

27. The Annual Report of the Virtual School Headteacher for Children Looked After – Academic Year 2020-2021

The report of the head teacher from virtual school for looked after children ripped off though was presented to members as outlined on pages 85 to 131 of the agenda.

During discussions members raised concerns such as children refusing to go to school and to the reasons behind this. The Virtual School Head Teacher explained there could be a number of reasons for a child to refuse to go to school and at present there had been no school refusers as children could complete online learning. She continued to explain that the virtual school was working with not only the Local Authority but with Foster Carers who child may refuse to attend school, if this was to happen it was important to find out why the child was refusing to attend school and in some cases an action plan for a phased return was produced.

The Virtual School Head Teacher continued to advise they were working with schools and offering as much support as possible for young people to keep them attending school, however it was also important to remember that some young people thrived with the online learning and some miss the interaction open in school when schools are closed due to COVID.

Councillor Raper thanked the Virtual School Head Teacher for her report and sought if the tutoring service was offered on a one to one basis and who offered the service. The Virtual Head Teacher explained that currently equal teaching was being used to offer the tutoring service on a one to one basis and as part of the service level agreement it was asked all tutors beTQS qualified.

RESOLVED:

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.

28. Corporate Parenting Committee - Work Programme 2021/2022

The Corporate Parenting Committee discussed the work programme at pages 133 to 135 of the agenda.

RESOLVED:

That the work programme be updated to reflect the following:

- **Deferral of Children In Care Council Annual Report to the March meeting.**

The meeting finished at 8.49 pm

Approved as a true and correct record

CHAIR

DATE

**Any queries regarding these Minutes, please contact
Democratic Services at Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk**

1 March 2022	ITEM: 5
Corporate Parenting Committee	
Children In Care Council Update	
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Non Key
Report of: Annie Guidotti , CICC Project Worker Open Door Christopher Bennett, Chair Children in Care Council	
Accountable Assistant Director: Janet Simon, Interim Assistant Director Children’s Social Care and Early Help	
Accountable Director: Sheila Murphy, Corporate Director, Children’s Services	
This report is Public	

Executive Summary

This report provides 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, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder, or 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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1 March 2022		ITEM: 6
Corporate Parenting Committee		
Children’s Social Care Performance – Quarter 3 2021-22		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Non-key	
Report of: Anna Watkins, Business Intelligence Analyst & Naintara Khosla, Strategic Lead Children Looked After (CLA)		
Accountable Assistant Director: Janet Simon, Assistant Director, Children’s Social Care and Early Help		
Accountable Director: Sheila Murphy, Corporate Director, Children’s Services		
This report is: Public		

Executive Summary

This report provides 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 3 of 2021-22 (October to December 2021).

Thurrock continues to provide services to approximately 300 Children Looked After (CLA) and approximately 314 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 continuing impact of COVID 19 on some areas of performance.**

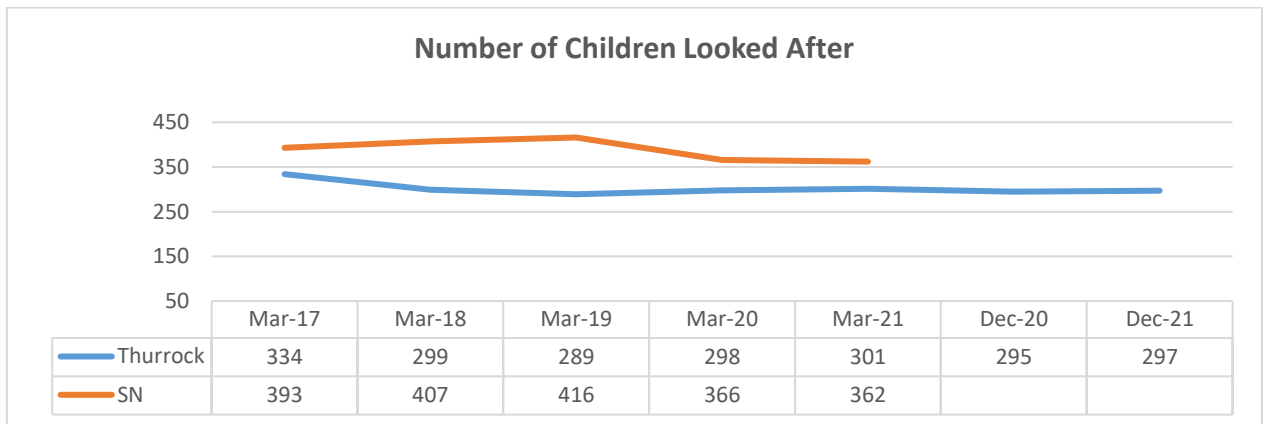
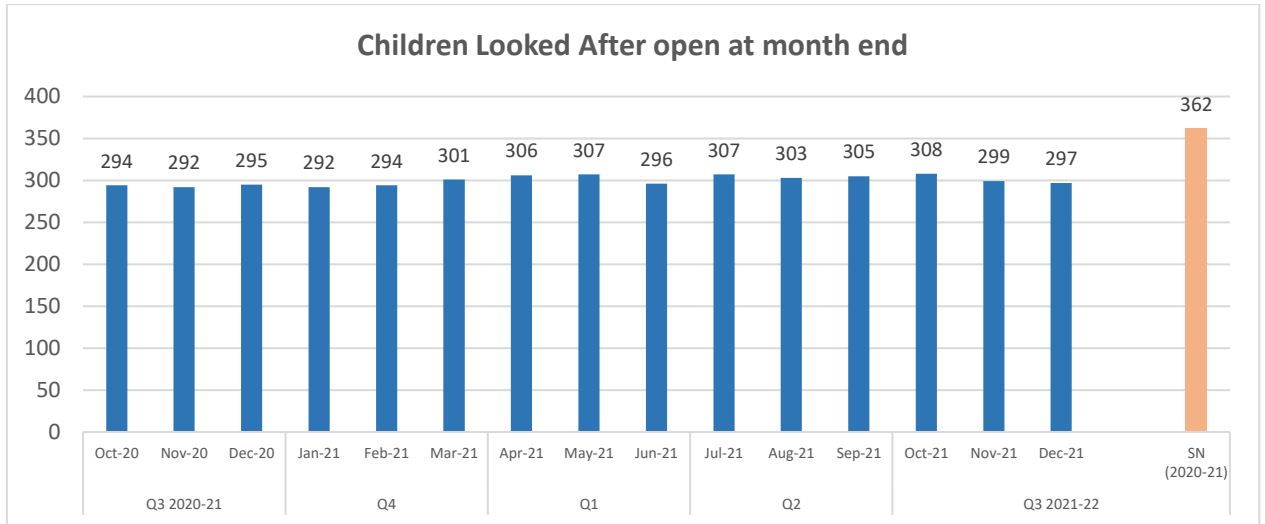
2. Introduction and Background

- 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 practitioners.

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 decrease in quarter 3. 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)

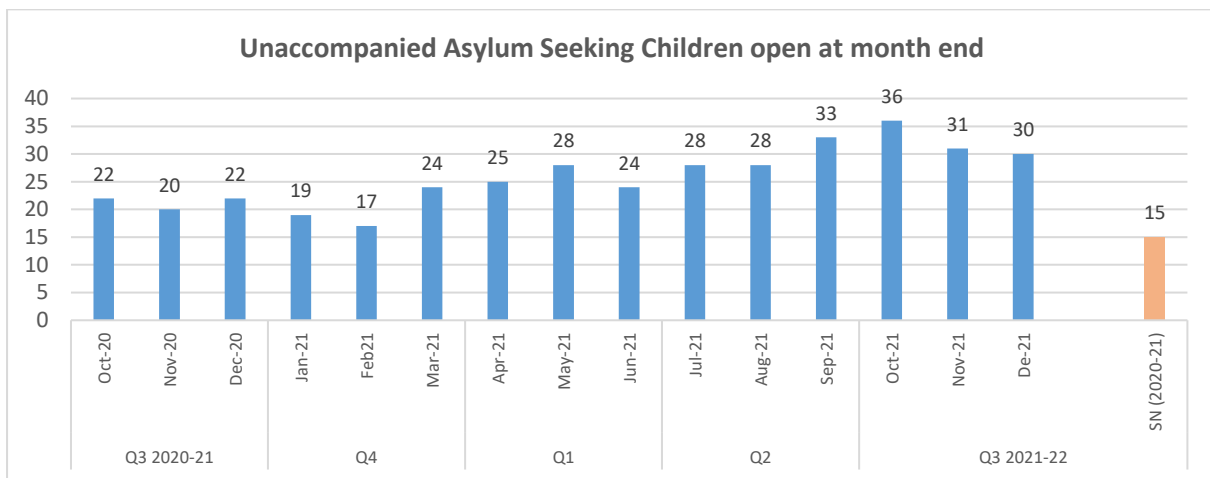
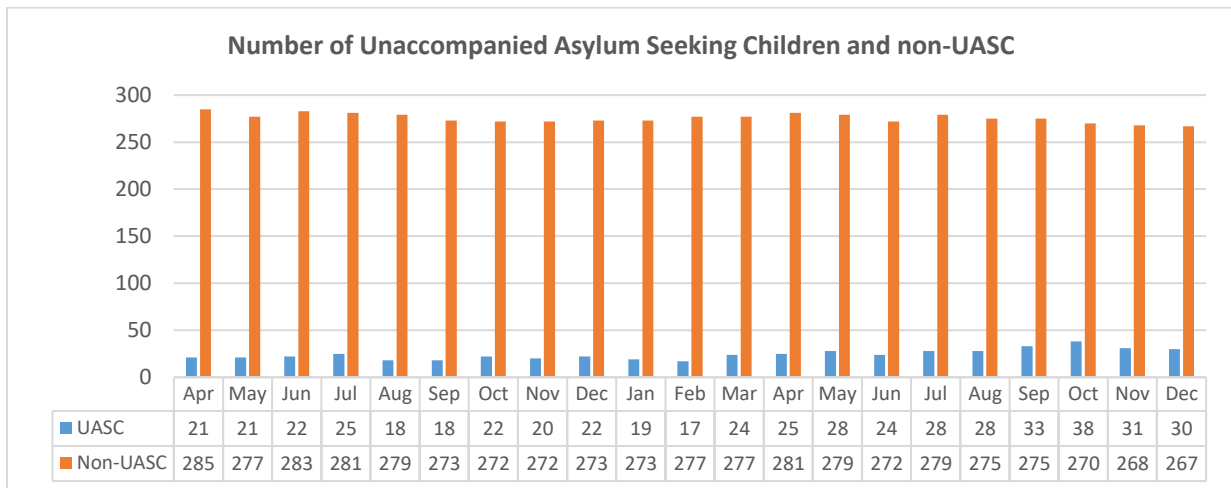
UASC are a subset of the Children Looked After number above. Local Authorities through agreement have a simple formula to ensure a fair distribution of the responsibility for looking after unaccompanied children. Each local authority has a 0.07% ceiling for how many UASC and unaccompanied asylum seeking 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. 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 October and December 2021, there have been 6 new UASC arrivals into Thurrock. There is ongoing work with the Home Office to ensure timely and smooth transition for this cohort if Thurrock's allocation of UASC is exceeded

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 Region¹ Transfer scheme in July 2021 which worked efficiently and effectively with the transfer of UASC usually within 10 days of arrival.

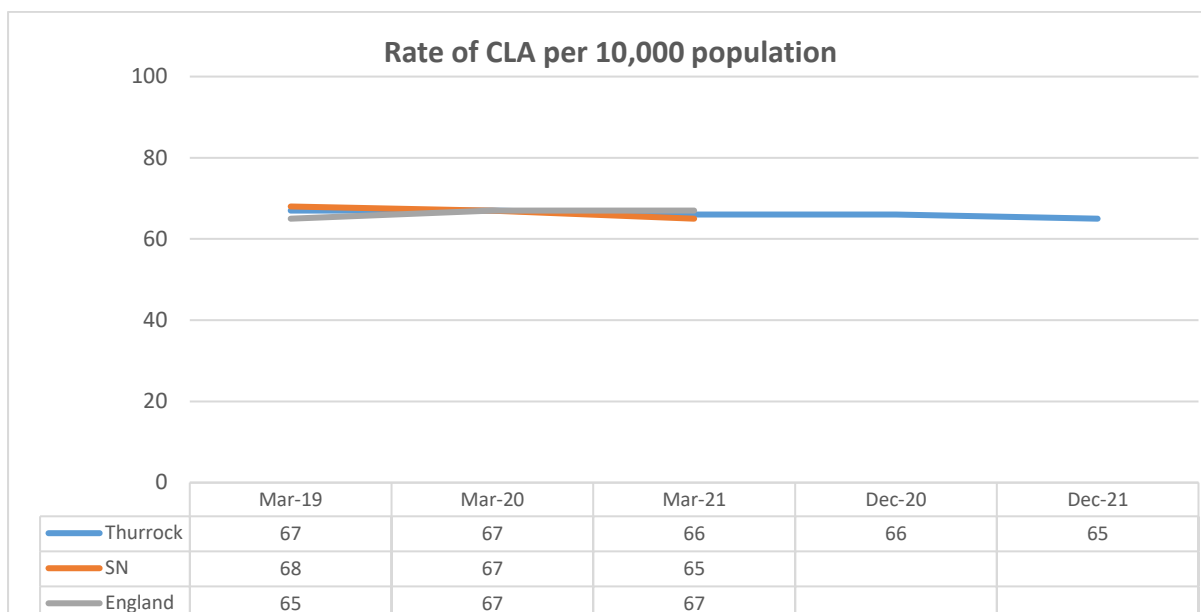
The NTS is operated by Central Government with the Home Office responsible for administration of the scheme. The Eastern Region Co Coordinator who previously ensured the smooth transfer process in the region is no longer responsible for the transfers, however their role is to liaise with the Home Office 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 December 2021 there were 300 Children Looked After in Thurrock with the rate of 65 per 10,000. Based on the benchmarking data 2021, Thurrock is in line with the Statistical Neighbour average of 65 and below England averages of 67 as at the end of December 2021.

¹ 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

The number of children leaving care is a fluctuating position. Four factors contribute and impact on the numbers of children in care in Thurrock; Between January and December 2021, the number of Thurrock children who ceased to be looked after was 123.

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

CLA Episodes ending are influenced by children achieving permanence through Adoption, Special Guardianship Orders (SGO), and Child Arrangement Orders (CAO), returning to their parents care or simply turning 18 and becoming adults.

The most common reason for care episodes ending in Thurrock in 2021-22 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 2020-21. The cohort of UASC will have ended as they transfer to other local authorities as part of the national transfer mechanism and where young people become adults at 18 and move into the Aftercare Service.

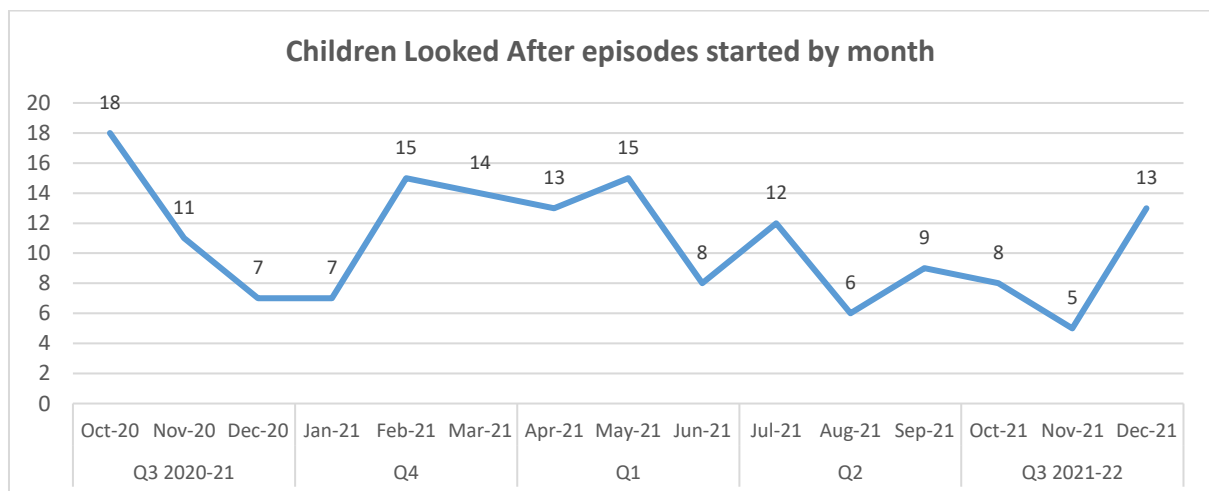
There is currently a delay in the timeliness of court proceedings, preventing children from leaving care and progressing to their permanent placement (Adoption, SGO or returning home). One of the reasons for this is as a result of the impact of COVID which has contributed to delays in concluding

proceedings for children. 17 cases out of the total of 49 as at February 2022 were over 40 weeks.

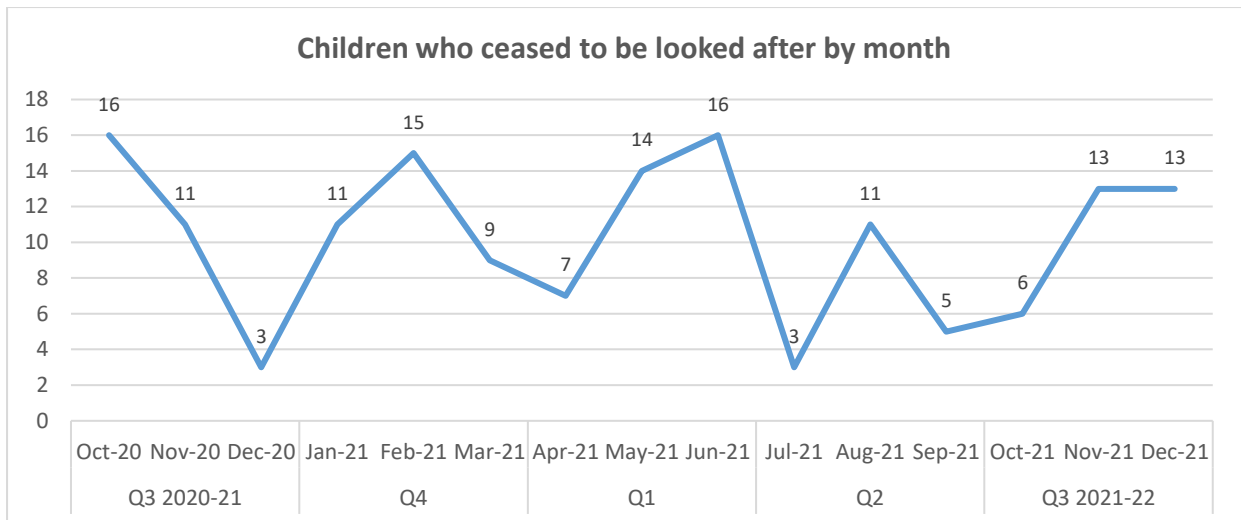
The below chart shows entries in and exits out of care over the last few years and evidences fewer numbers of UASC entering care in Thurrock and a stabilising of UASC numbers in line with 0.07 of the child population and transfers taking place appropriately.

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22 (Q1, Q2 & Q3)
Entering Care total	203	242	150	88
Entering Care UASC (% of CLA population)	91 (44.8%)	75 (30.9%)	36 (24.0%)	20 (23.0%)
Exiting Care	211	235	148	32
CLA No, at end of reporting period	290 Reduction of 8	298 Reduction of 8	298 No change	300
Average UASC Population	39	23	21	29

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

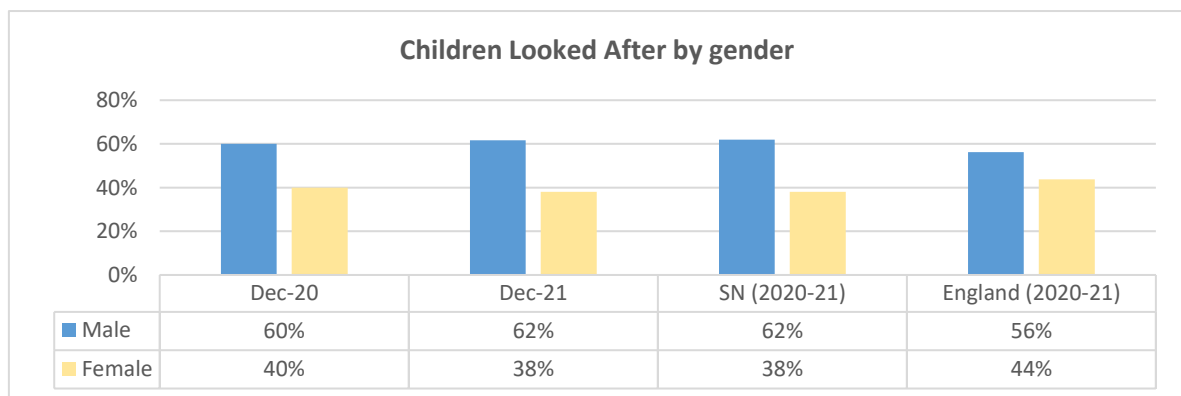


3.5 CLA episodes ended in month



3.6 CLA by gender

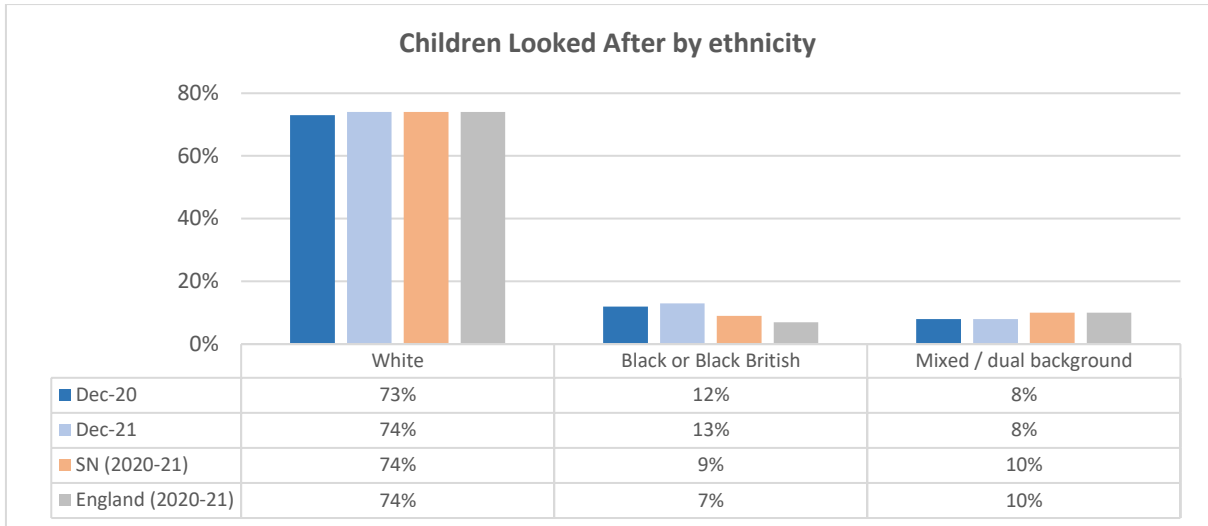
Based on the benchmarking data in 2020-21, the gender breakdown is in line with the Statistical Neighbour and England averages.



3.7 CLA by ethnicity

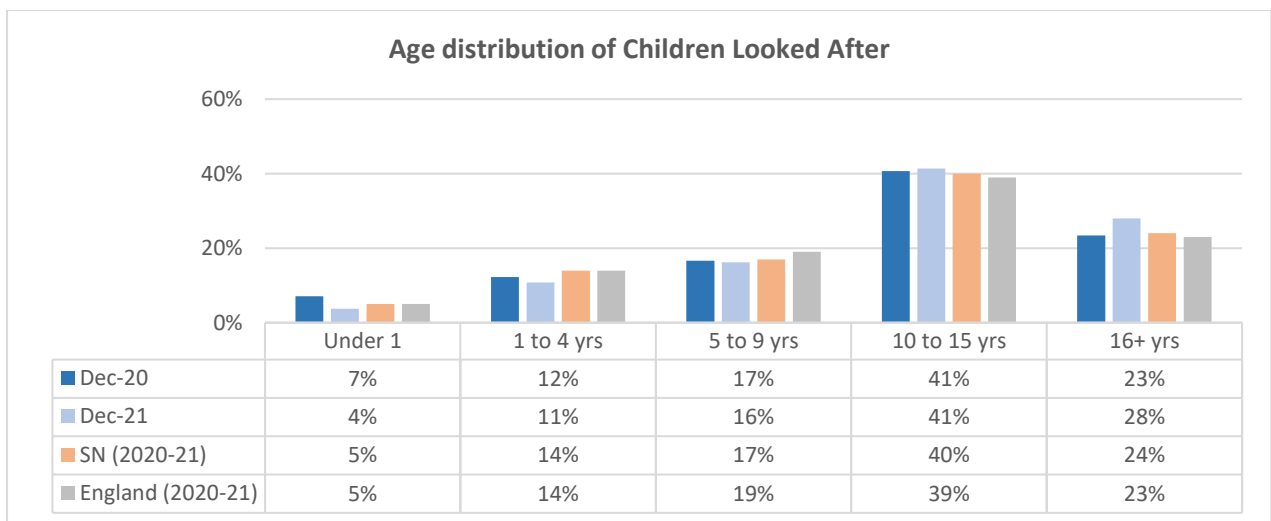
Thurrock's Children Looked After are predominantly White/British which is in line with Thurrock's School Census in Spring 2020 and the Statistical Neighbour and England averages as at March 2021.

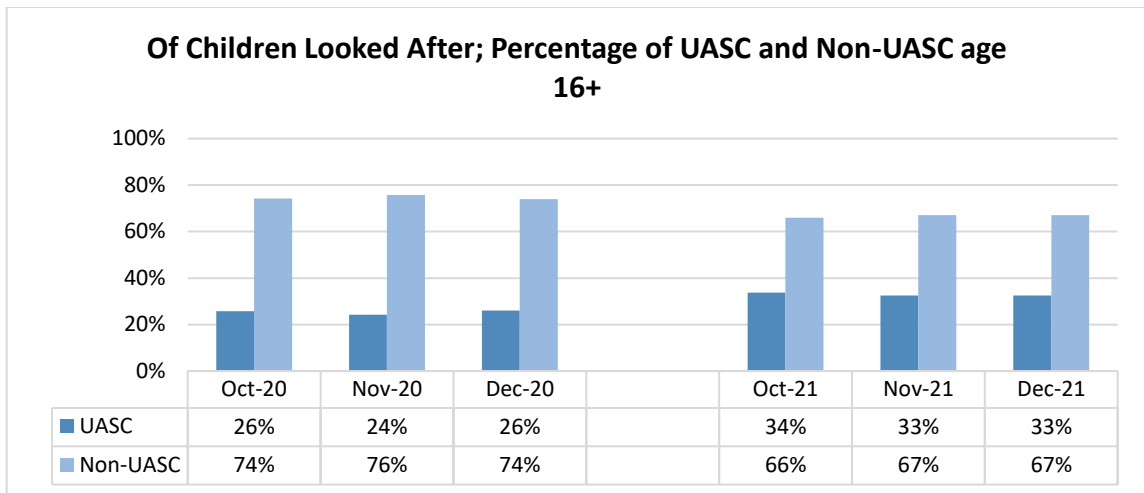
While the numbers of Children Looked After who are Black/Black British have slightly decreased since December 2020, there have been no particular issues identified which are influencing this change.



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 December 2020, the number of 16+ Children Looked After has increased by 5%.

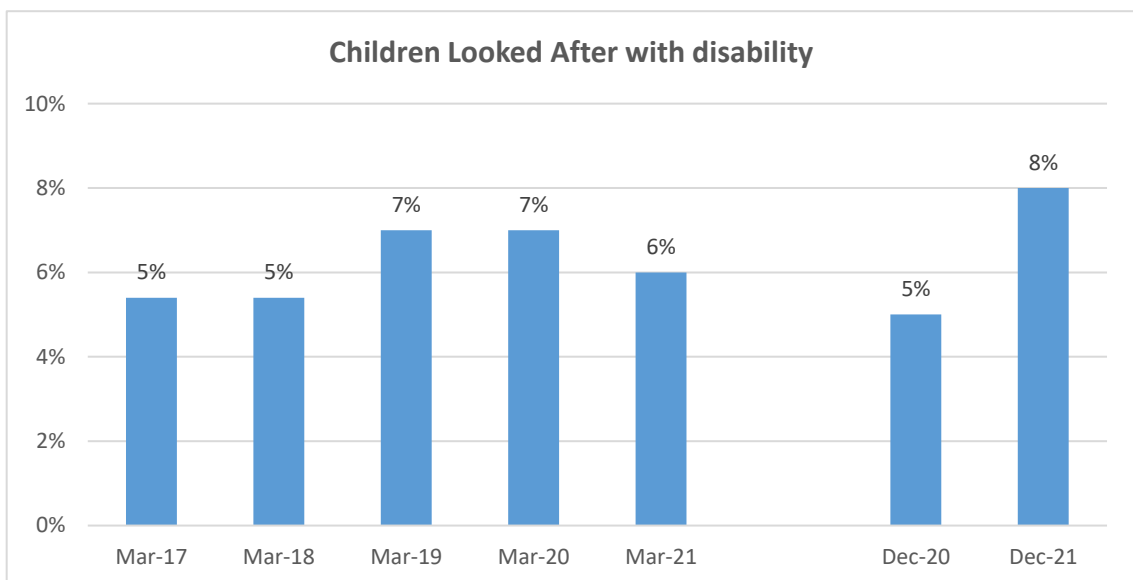




Since December 2020, the percentage of UASC 16+ has increased by 7% in December 2021.

3.9 CLA with a disability

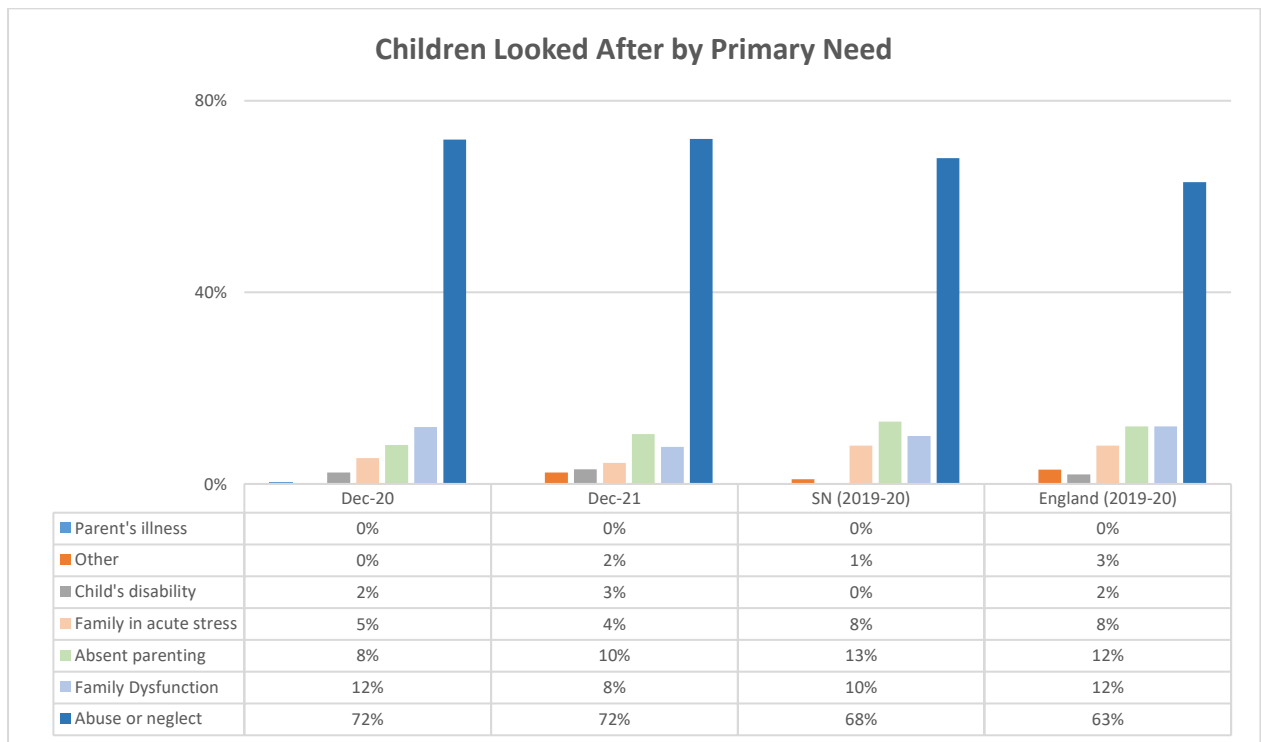
The number of children looked after with a disability has remained relatively stable since December 2020. At the end of December 2021, 24 of the total CLA cohort were recorded as having a disability. 21 of these children were boys aged seven and over and 3 girls aged 12 and over.



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 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.

There are currently 2 children in custody in youth detention accommodation (remand in custody). Both of these cases are long term remands and the financial costs linked to the accommodation are the responsibility of the local authority.

Between 01 April 2020 and 31 March 2021, the number of children subject to Youth Detention Accommodation (YDA) was under 5. 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.

4.2 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.

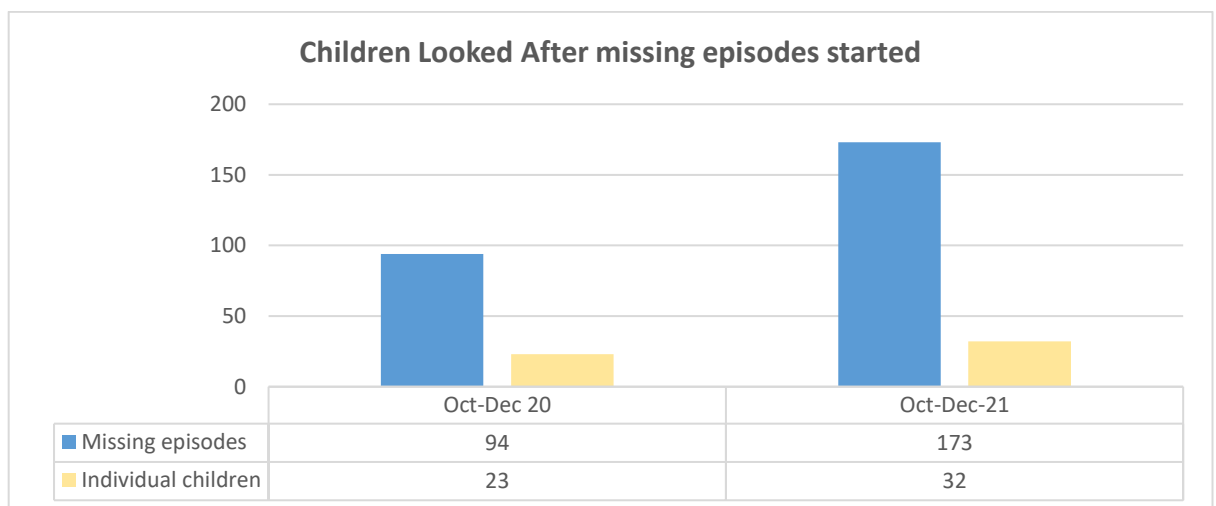
Thurrock YOS and Essex Police are committed to the national protocol² aimed to reduce the criminalisation of Children Looked After. This approach will be supported with a local pan-Essex protocol to ensure there is a focus on diverting any child (where possible) who is Looked After from the Criminal Justice System.

The Out of Court Disposal Panel continues to receive referrals from the Police, whereby we have been able to divert increasing numbers away from Statutory interventions. At Q3 2021-22 the out of court disposal panel has so far dealt with 46 offences relating to 42 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 October and December 2021.

Between October and December 2021, there were a total of 173 missing episodes compared to 94 missing episodes in the same period in 2019-20; this represents an 84% increase in the number of missing episodes. The number of young people that went missing has also seen an increase from 23 to 32 representing 39% increase in December 2021.



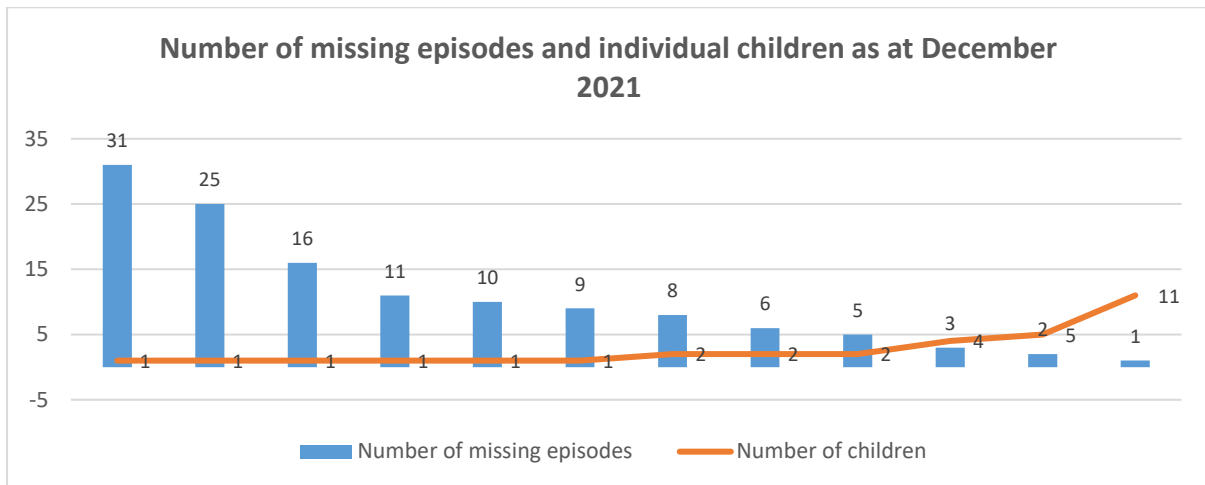
Between October and December 2021:-

- 5 children had between 10 and 31 missing episodes
- 7 children between 5 and 9 episodes

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

- 20 children between 1 and 3 missing episodes

The most common reason for children going missing was contact with family and friends, representing 45% of missing episodes between October and December 2021.



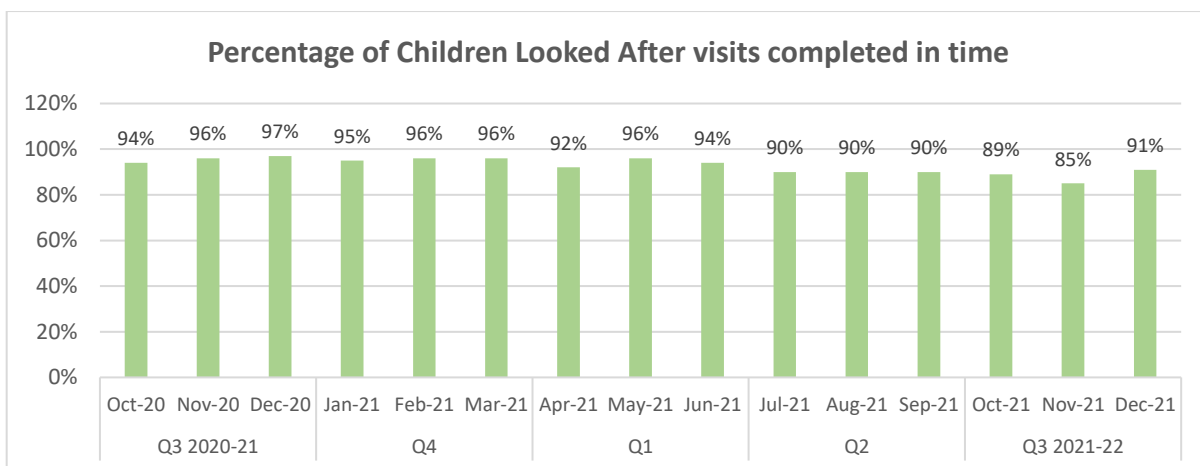
5.1 CLA return to home interview (RHI)

Since April 2020, Inspire Youth Hub have been commissioned to undertake independent Return Home Interviews (RHI). All children continue to be 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.

Between October and December 2021, the average take up of formal Return Home Interviews by Inspire was 37%. Alongside the RHI’s completed by Inspire, Key Workers from placements, Foster Carers and Social Workers as well as police meet with young people to 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. In addition all young people who have a missing episode are reviewed and discussed at the weekly Risk Management Meeting.

5.2 Timeliness of social worker visits

Children Looked After are visited and seen and spoken to regularly. Their visiting schedules vary depending on their care plan and needs and the frequency of visits as per their plan is tracked through performance data. Performance year to date is good at 91% with some inconsistency in October and November which has been addressed through a clear focus and drive within the service.



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. This is an area of focus following Thurrock's Ofsted Inspection in 2019.

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.

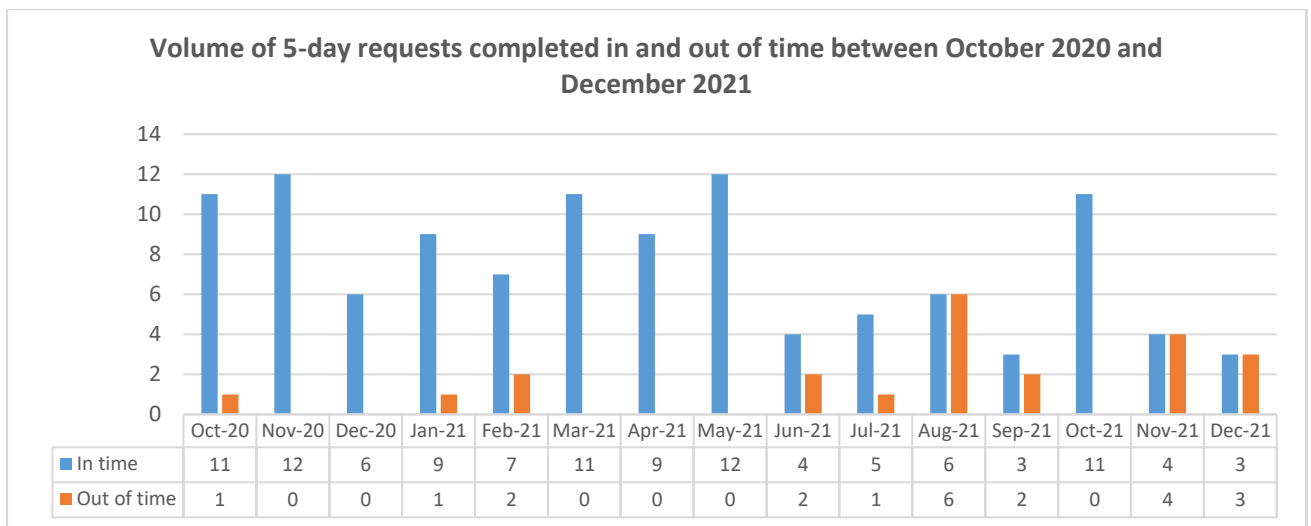
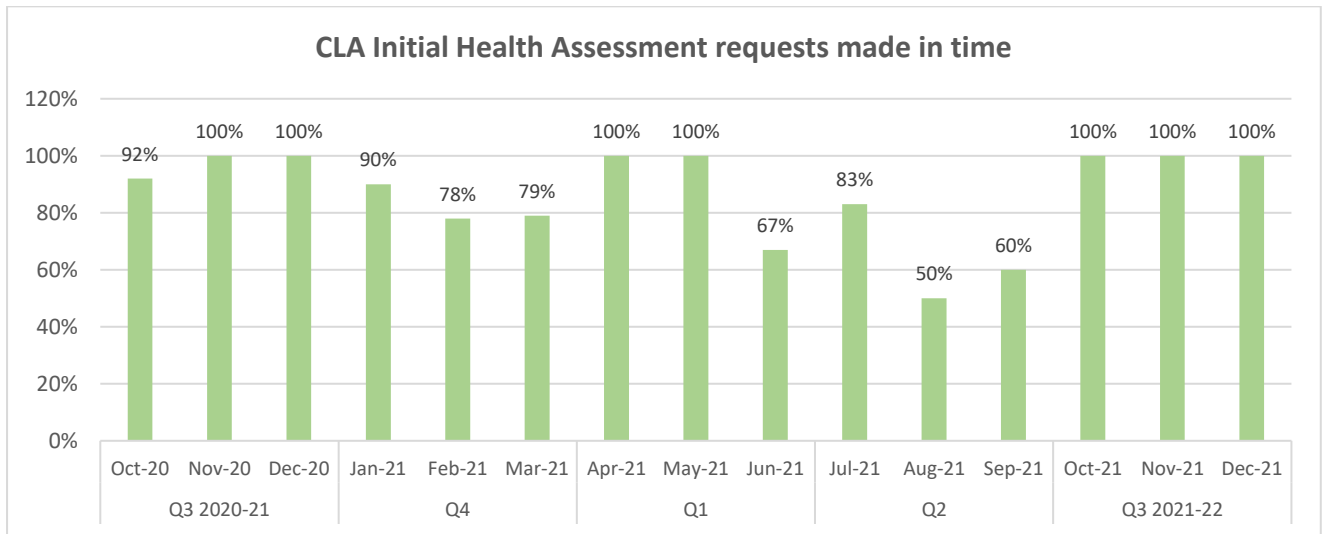
To achieve good performance working relationships between Thurrock Social Care and Health Providers is key. A weekly IHA tracking meeting is held across the partnership to ensure that there is a focus on meeting the 5 day target to notify Health colleagues that a child has become looked after and to ensure that an Initial Health Assessment is offered and completed within 20 working days.

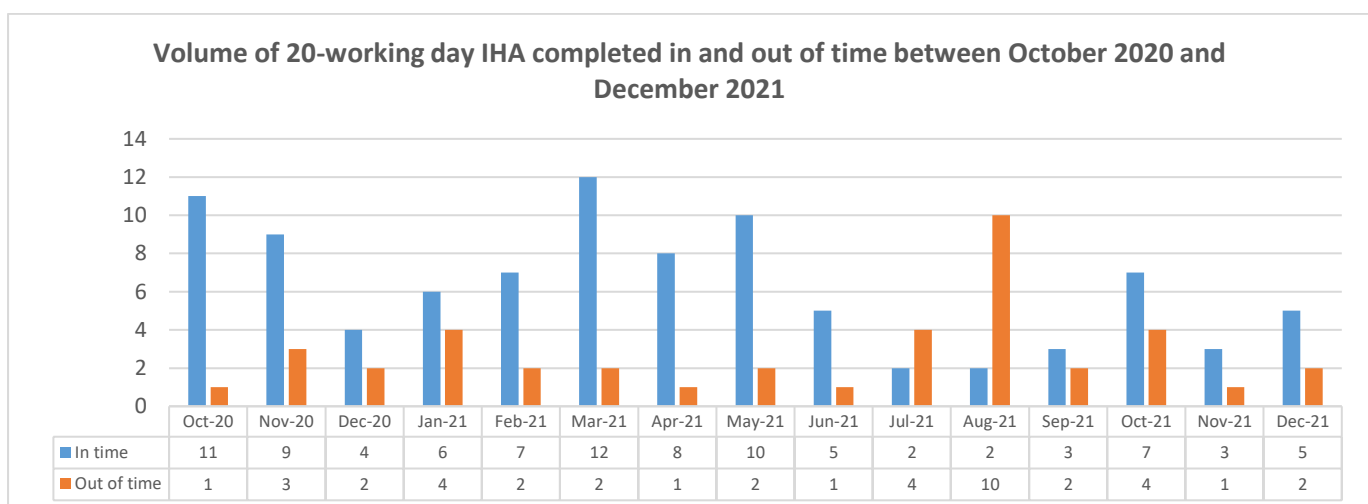
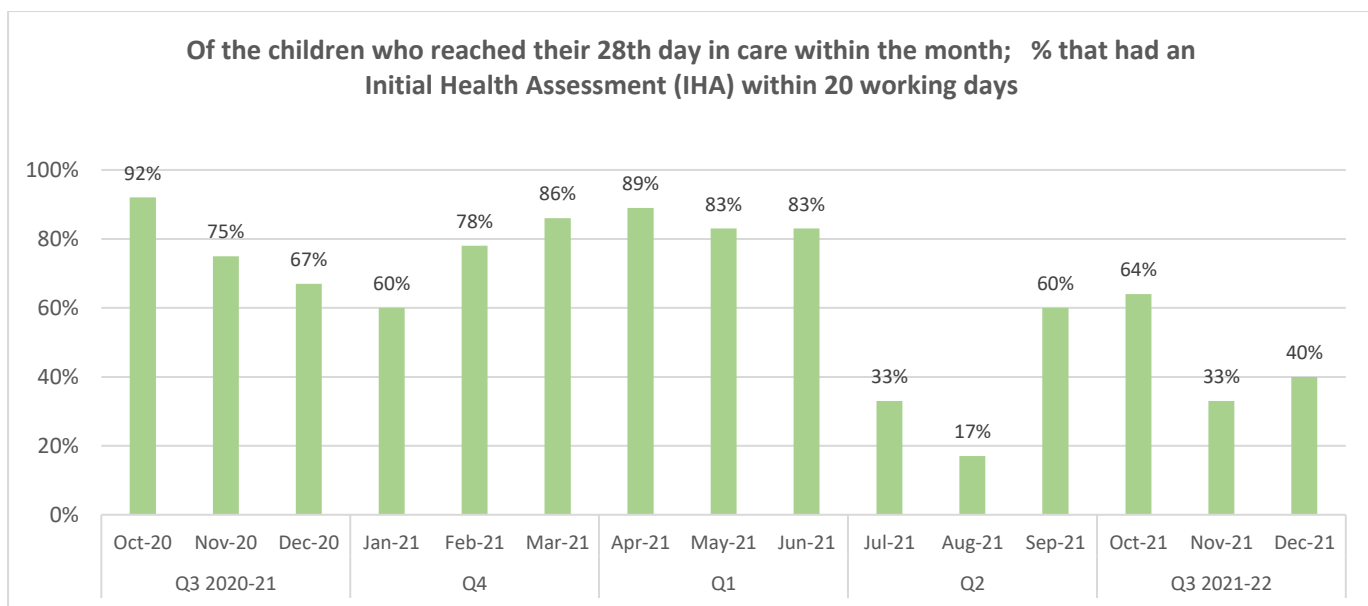
Notifications for an IHA cannot be processed if parents have not provided consent for medical treatment and there is no court order which allows the Local Authority to consent to health care.

Performance for IHA requests being sent to Health have shown a sustained improvement in Quarter 3 October to December 2021 with performance at 100%. Notifications for an IHA cannot be processed if parents have not provided consent for medical treatment and there is no court order which allows the Local Authority to consent to health care.

The below tables sets out performance across the two areas for achieving timeliness for IHA's. The average percentage of referrals made by social care to health within 5 days April December was 83.8% with 58% completed in time falling significantly below the corporate performance target of 80%. Work

is ongoing with health partners to achieve all children entering care receiving a timely health assessment.





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 2019-20 report was presented to Corporate Performance Board in January 2021.

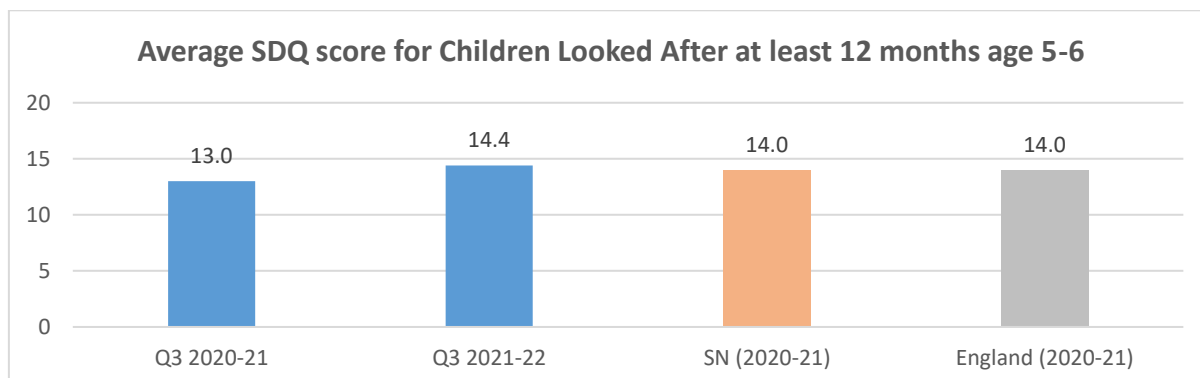
In addition to the annual report, the Virtual School Head teacher and her team members provide reports to the Governing Body every term. These detail a range of information such which is provided to ensure that we are held accountable and that the delivery of services is efficient. (Please see Agenda item 8 within Corporate Parenting Committee Pack January 21).

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.



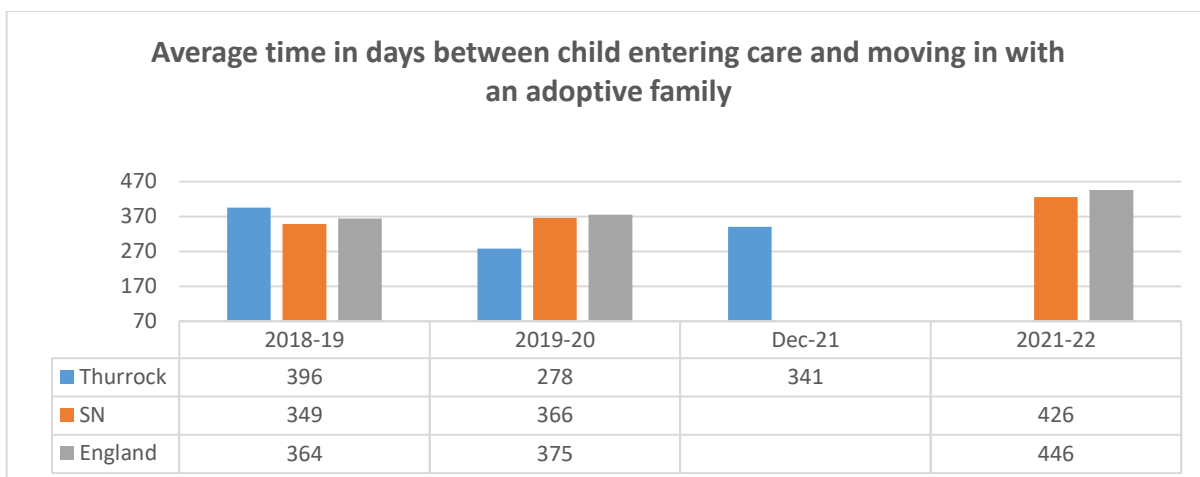
6 Number of children adopted

Between 01 April and February 2022, there are a total of 14 children who have either been adopted or placed in adoptive placements.

6.1 Timeliness of Adoption

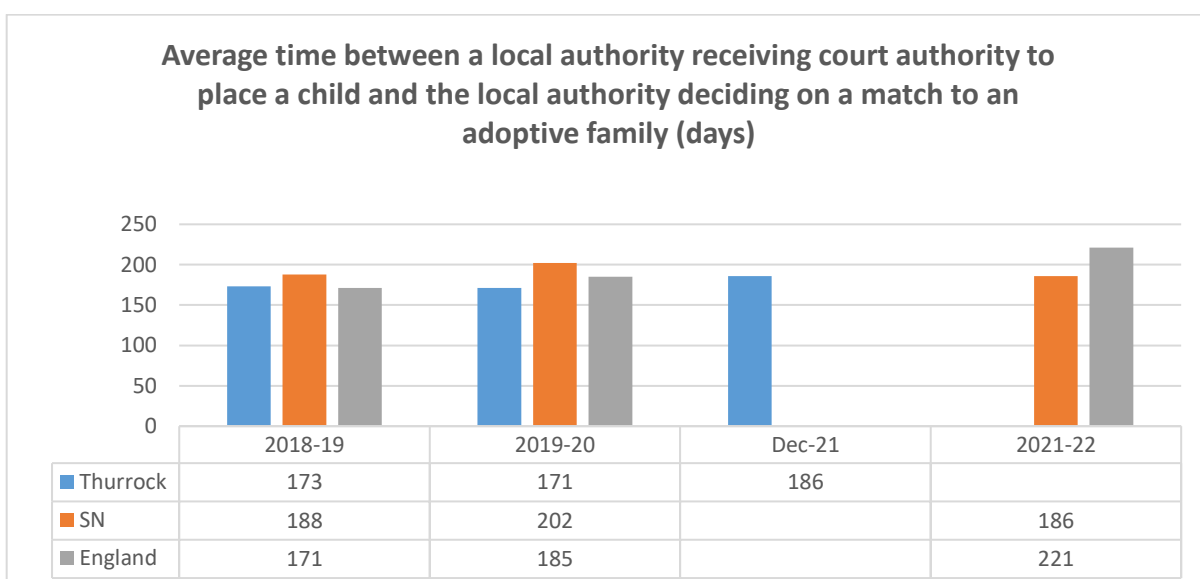
The timeliness of adoption is measured as a 12 month rolling average, it is the length of time from the child entering care to moving in with an adoptive family. As at end of December 2021, Thurrock's average was 341 days.

Based on the latest benchmarking data as at the end of March 2020, Thurrock is below the statistical neighbour average of 366 days and England average of 375 days in December 2021. This is good performance for Thurrock.



As at end of December 2021, the average time in days between Thurrock receiving a Placement Order (court authority) to place a child with the adoptive family was 186 days, and this is again good performance.

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



This is an area the Service is focussing on to ensure there is timely matching and placing of children with their adoptive families. 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

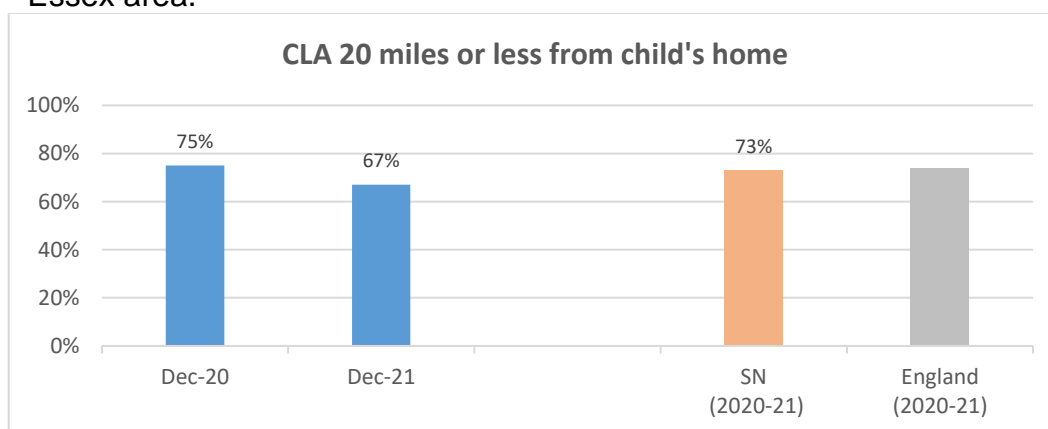
Purposeful early permanency planning continues to ensure that children are in the right placement at the right time to meet their needs. Securing placements where needed and supporting children, where appropriate, to remain at home with their families is the priority. Children are placed for adoption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

As at the end of December 2021, there were 56 (16%) children aged 0-5, the total cohort of CLA being 297. 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 December 2021, 67% of the Children Looked After cohort were placed within 20 miles or less from their homes, which represents 199 of 298 children looked after. Based on the latest benchmarking data available in March 2021, Thurrock reflects performance almost in line with 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 care³, (the interim report published by the Competition and Markets Authority, October 2022, 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.



³ <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 2000⁴, 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.

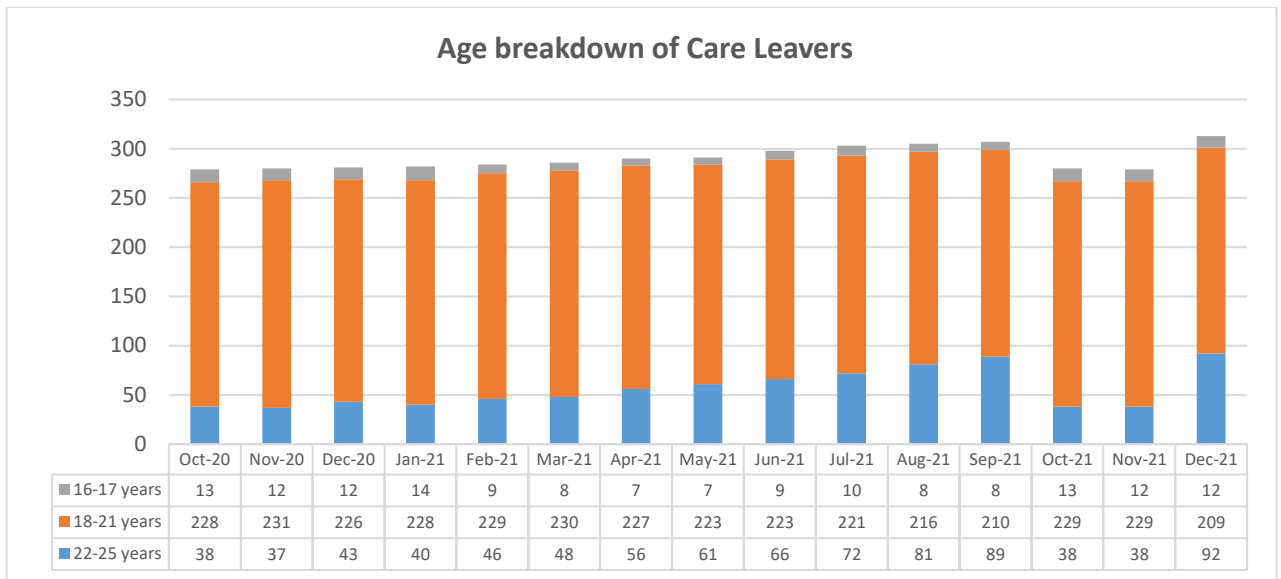
A young person's status as a care leaver can be divided into the following:

- 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.

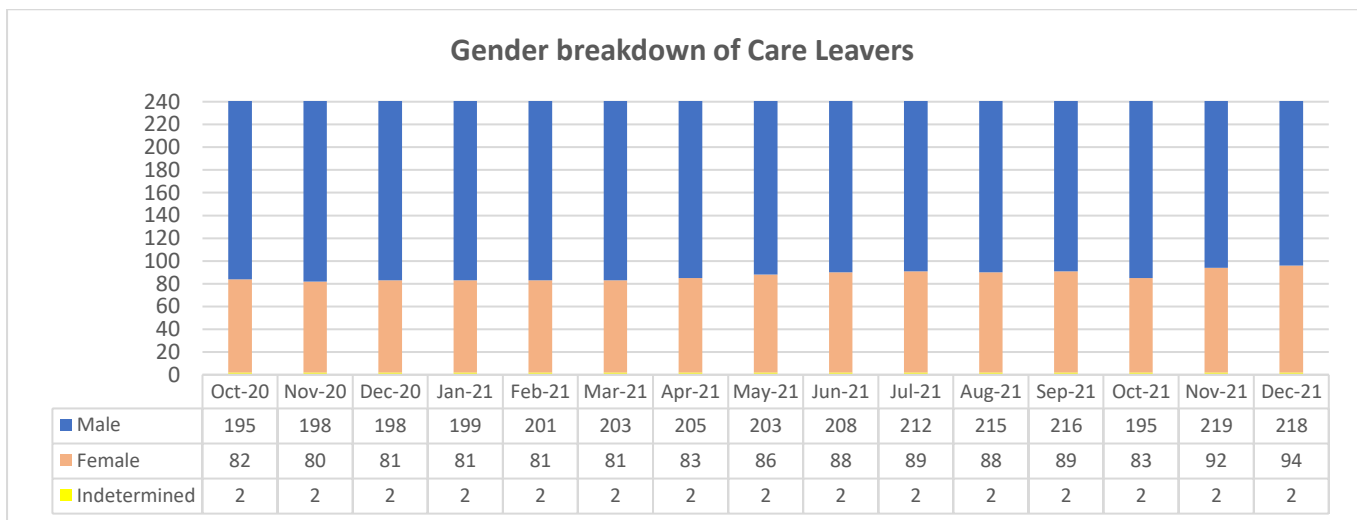
The graph below shows the total **OC3 care leaver cohort** (Relevant and Former Relevant Children whose 17th, 18th, 19th, 20th or 21st birthday falls within Financial Year) of Young People age 16-25 years who are in receipt of a Care Leaving service. The numbers are increasing and this is in part due 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 December 2021, 314 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 43 care leavers from December 2020-21, to 92 care leavers in December 2021-22.

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

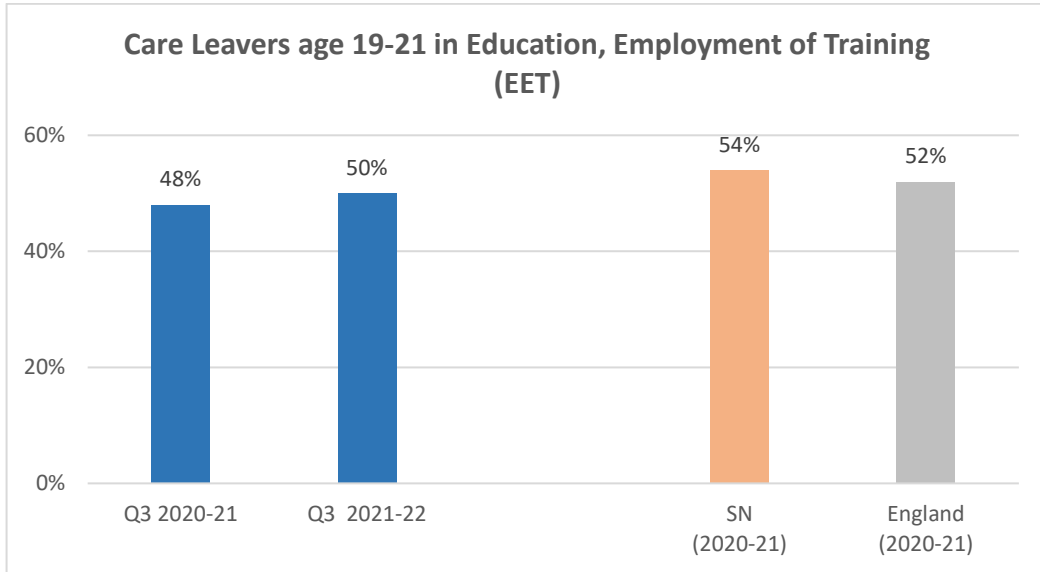


The charts below show the Care Leaver cohort broken down by age groups and gender.



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

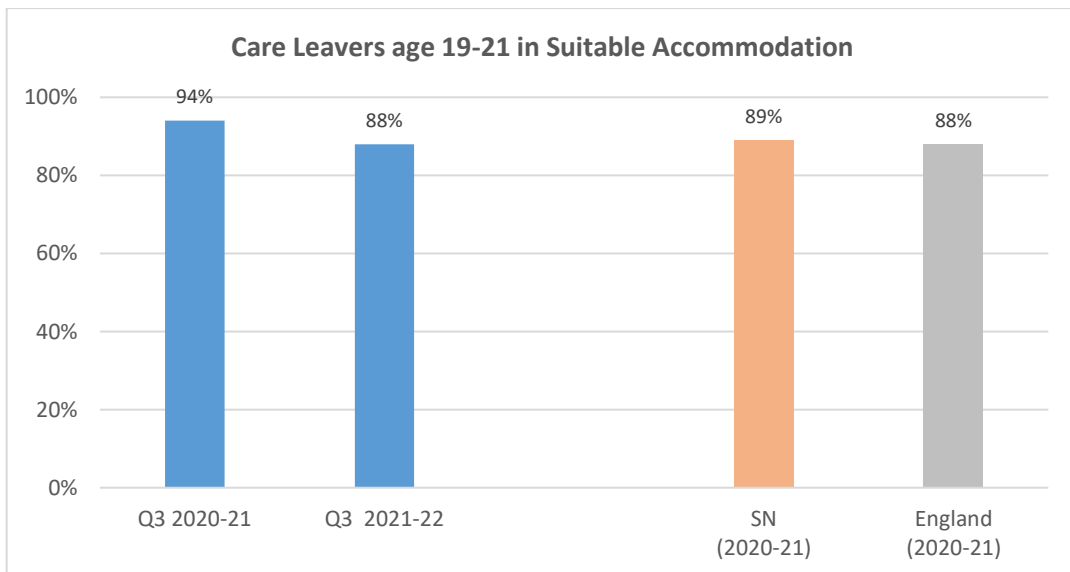
At the end of December 2021, 50% of the Care Leavers aged 19 to 21 year old were in part or full time education, employment or training compared to 48% in December 2020. To strengthen oversight and planning to ensure our young people have support and opportunities for Education, Employment and Training (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

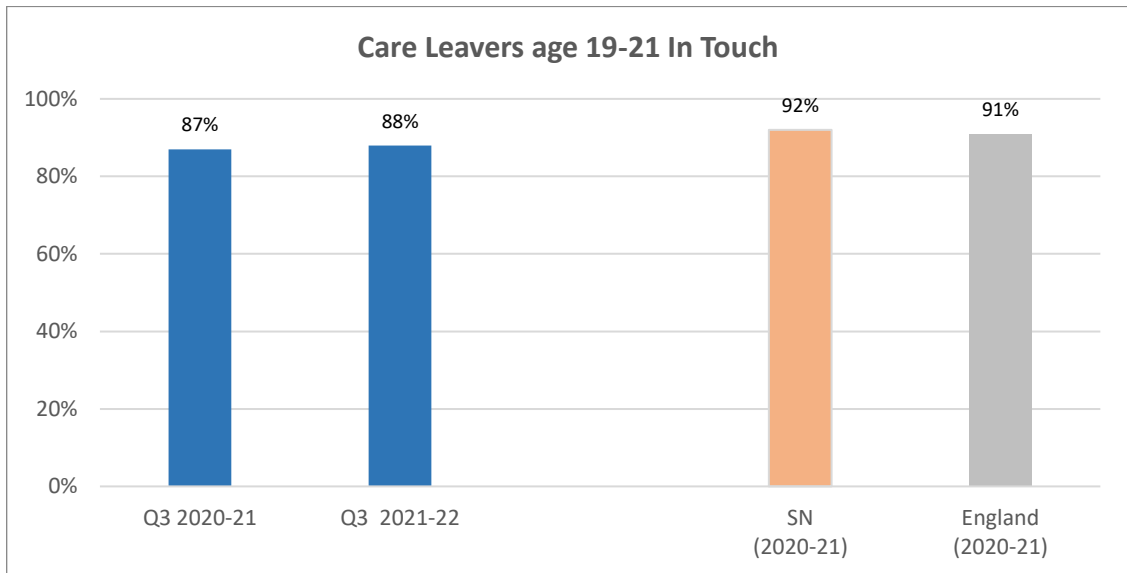
At the end of December 2021, the number of 19 to 21 year old Care Leavers reported to be in suitable accommodation was 88%. There are some care leavers who are not in touch with the service, as well as those whose accommodation is unsuitable. Reasons for accommodation being deemed unsuitable include care leavers who are UASC and missing, young people declining to say where they are living or care leavers who are in prison.

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



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

Local Authorities are expected to stay in touch with Care Leavers and provide statutory support to help care leaver's transition to living independently. At the end of December 2021, Thurrock was in touch with 88% of Care Leavers. Thurrock's performance is slightly below the statistical neighbour average of 92% and England average of 91% at the end of December 2021. This is mainly due to the cohort of missing UASC.



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**

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, and Impact on Looked After Children

Not 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

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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
1 June 2021		
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
14 September 2021		
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
Independent Visitors	Ruth Murdock	Officers

Corporate Parenting Committee – Annual Report 2019/2020	Democratic Services Officer	Officers
Work Programme	Democratic Services Officer	Standard Item
4 January 2022		
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
Report on KPI within the Foster Department	Dan Jones/ Naintara Khosla	Members
Report following DFE visit on Care Leavers and its recommendations	Janet Simons/ Clare Moore	Officers
Work Programme	Democratic Services Officer	Standard Item
1 March 2022		
Children in Care Council Update	Chair Children in Care Council & Thurrock Open Door	Officers (Deferred from September Meeting)
Children’s Social Care Performance – Quarter 3 2021/22	Mandy Moore	Officers
Work Programme	Democratic Services Officer	Standard Item
Next Municipal Year		
Sufficiency Placement	Sue Green	Officers