

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 **6 September 2022**

Committee Room 2, Civic Offices 3, New Road, Grays, Essex, RM17 6SL.

Membership:

Councillors Adam Carter (Chair), Maureen Pearce (Vice-Chair), Paul Arnold, Georgette Polley, Kairen Raper and Lee Watson

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 George Coxshall, Martin Kerin, Steve Liddiard 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 19 July 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: **26 August 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 19 July 2022 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillors Adam Carter (Chair), Paul Arnold, George Coxshall (Substitute for Georgette Polley), Kairen Raper and Lee Watson

Apologies: Councillors Maureen Pearce (Vice-Chair) and Georgette Polley

In attendance: Shelia Murphey, Corporate Director of Children's Services
Janet Simon, Assistant Director, Children's Social Care and Early Help
Dan Jones, Strategic Lead, Looked After Children
Kate Kozlova-Boran, Strategic Lead, Learning and Skills
Tiffany Bright, Inspire Skills Manager
Clare Moore, Strategic Lead for the Youth Offending Service and Prevention
Kenna-Victoria Healey, Senior Democratic Services Officer

Before the start of the Meeting, all present were advised that the meeting was being live streamed to the Council's website.

1. Minutes

The minutes of the Corporate Parenting meeting on 1 March 2022 were approved as a correct record.

2. Items of Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

3. Declaration of Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

4. Children's Social Care Performance 2021-22

The Assistant Director for Children's Social Care and Early Help presented the report which was on pages 9-34 of the agenda.

Councillor Raper thanked Officers for the report and referring to page 9 of the agenda enquired who carried out the visits to children and young people and how regular these were. The Assistant Director for Children's Social Care and Early Help explained it could be agreed as part of their looked after review that a child be visited every 12 weeks. She continued to advise there was a range of different frequencies and even if a visit frequency was 6 weeks, it

didn't mean the child would only be visited every six weeks. Ultimately it would depend on the circumstances for the child and what they needed.

The Chair of the committee commented he was pleased to see improvement with regards to missing episodes and asked Officers how this was achieved. The Strategic Lead for Learning and Skills advised they were able to realign the delivery of the services from Inspire and so concentrated the delivery on the return to home interviews. Members heard more personal advisors had been brought into the service and face to face delivery had been increased.

She continued to explain it was made sure that Officers went out to the homes to see the young people face to face, and to support those relationships. The idea was that young people would start trusting the Inspire careers advisors and then missing episodes would decrease because there was a trust between the young person and Inspire.

RESOLVED

- 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.**
 - 2. Note the impact of COVID 19 on some areas of performance.**
- 5. Children Looked After and Care Leaver Sufficiency Strategy Update**

The Strategic Lead for Looked After Children presented the report which was on pages 35 to 86 of the agenda.

RESOLVED

That Members review the update within this report of the Children Looked After and Care Leavers Placement Sufficiency Strategy January 2021 – 2024.

6. Report on Initial Health Assessments for Looked After Children

The Strategic Lead for Looked After Children presented the report which was on pages 87 to 94 of the agenda.

The Chair of the Committee commented it was worrying that the numbers were quite low. He continued by saying at Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee last week a report was presented which showed the target for 2021/ 2022 was 80%. He enquired what was being done to get this key KPI back on track.

The Assistant Director for Children's Social Care and Early Help told the Committee there had been a lot of work around Initial Health Assessments and from this Officers had managed to improve performance. She continued

to advise when assessing children for their Initial Health Assessment, firstly the child had to be referred to the health authority which had to be completed within five working days and performance in that area was sitting around 80%.

Members heard some of the issues Officers were experiencing was being able to provide health assessments for children who were placed outside of Thurrock. If they were close enough, wherever possible Officers tried and arrange for them to come back into the area for the assessment to be completed. Conversations were being had weekly with Health colleagues about what the Council could do to support them and what actions were being taking to improve.

Nickola Rickard, Designate Nurse for Looked After Children in Mid and South Essex commented, she felt it was important to reflect this was a national issue as nationally initial health assessment providers were struggling to complete them within the 28 day time frame. Some of the reasons for this were still related to COVID, and there was a national shortage of paediatricians with the skill set to undertake these specialist health assessments. She continued by stating for the children who were placed out of area, the provider team will contact the designated nurse to ensure that wherever possible, children were being seen in a timely way and any barriers were being addressed.

The Corporate Director of Children's Services stated she felt it was fair to say the completion of assessments not on time was not acceptable. She advised Members Officers had been working really hard on this for almost three years following the Councils last Ofsted inspection, which was in 2019.

She continued by saying it was important for the referrals to made early so they could be completed and advised Members the report was to be presented the Health and Well-being Board where there were more strategic health partners.

It was agreed to keep the item on the agenda for monitoring.

RESOLVED

- 1. That Members are aware of the work that has taken place, and areas for improvement in completing Initial Health Assessments, and note the work that is being undertaken to ensure improving performance.**
 - 2. Note the impact of COVID 19 on this area of performance.**
- 7. Inspire - Head Start Housing: Supporting Care Leavers**

The Inspire Skills Manager presented the report which was on pages 95 to 100 of the agenda.

Councillor Watson thanked Officers for the report and enquired as to how many voids had been allocated per year from the HRA housing stock to care leavers.

The Inspire Skills Manager explained when a property was returned to the voids team and should Inspire have a need for it, then housing released the property to them. Members heard a strategy was agreed when Head Start was first launched in December 2018 and was to come to an end in December 2023, during this time Inspire had been gifted 33 beds.

She continued by mentioning Housing reached 30 beds very early on and so the strategy was refreshed, to align it with the Housing Strategy and this was launched earlier this year. It was commented that on average, of the 30 beds over the last four years 7.4 void beds had been made available to Care Leavers.

During the discussion Officers assured the Committee that no care leaver would be made homeless as part of the pilot.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

8. Corporate Parenting Strategy

The Strategic Lead for Looked After Children presented the report which was on pages 101-126 of the agenda.

RESOLVED

That the Committee note their responsibilities as Corporate Parents.

9. Work Programme

The Corporate Parenting Committee discussed the work programme detailed within the agenda.

Members requested that an update be brought on Initial Health Assessments to the next meeting in September 2022.

RESOLVED

That the Corporate Parenting Committee agreed the work programme as outlined within the agenda and agreed that an update report on Initial Health Assessments be brought to the next meeting in September 2022.

The meeting finished at 7.47pm

Approved as a true and correct record

CHAIR

DATE

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

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6 September 2022	ITEM: 5
Corporate Parenting Committee	
Children’s Social Care Performance 2022-23	
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Non-key
Report of: Anna Watkins, Business Intelligence Analyst	
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 this report focusses on data of 2022-23. Whilst the restrictions relating to COVID-19 have now lifted there continues to be some impact on services demonstrated in the report.

At the end of the first quarter of 2022-23, 284 children were looked after by Thurrock Council, a further 273 young adults were receiving services from Aftercare. Children and young people are visited regularly, and the management of missing children is consistent and reflects good partnership with the police and Thurrock Community Safety. Improvement is required in the timeliness of Initial Health Assessment which is an area of focus with health partners

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

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

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.**

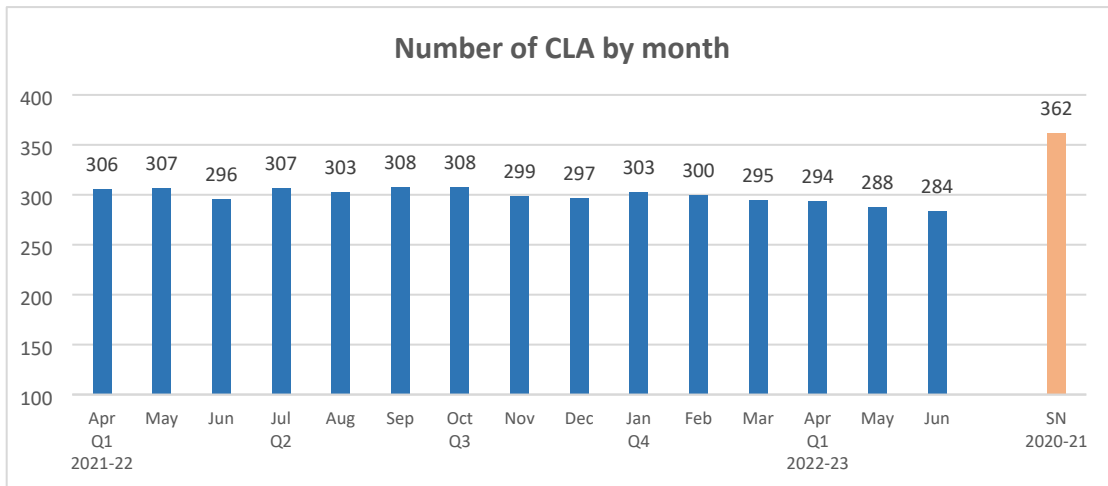
2. Introduction and Background

- 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. Since June 2021, the number of children looked after has seen a 7% decrease. 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)

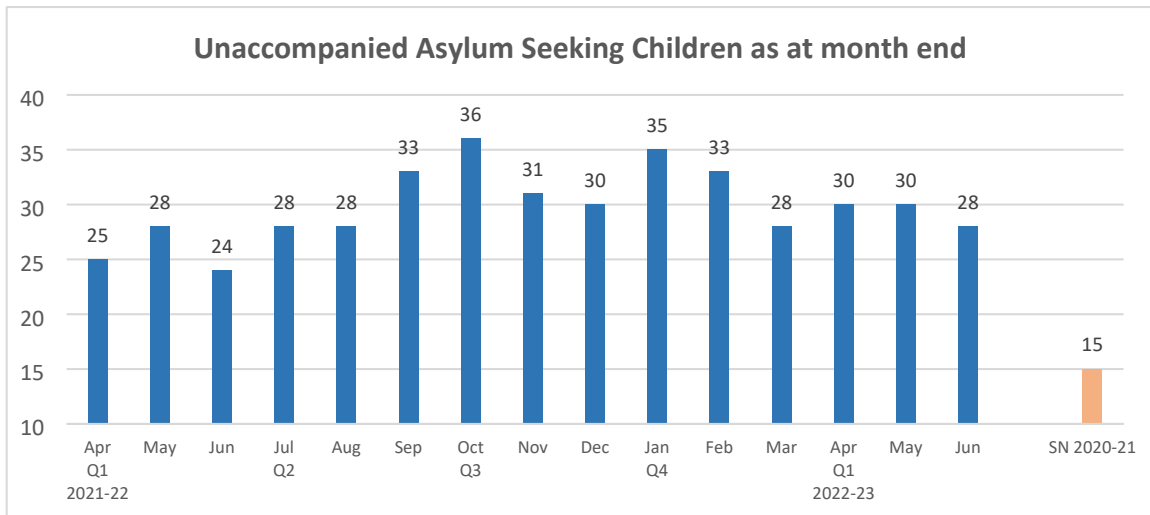
UASC are a subset of the Children Looked After number above. Local Authorities through agreement have a simple formula to ensure a fair distribution of the responsibility for looking after unaccompanied children. Each local authority has a 0.07% ceiling for how many UASC and unaccompanied asylum-seeking 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. Over the last year there have been fewer children arriving at Thurrock Ports/found in vehicles in Thurrock as the preferred route appears to have been through Dover. Between April and June 2022, there have been 4 new UASC arrivals into Thurrock compared to 12 between April and June 2021. 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.

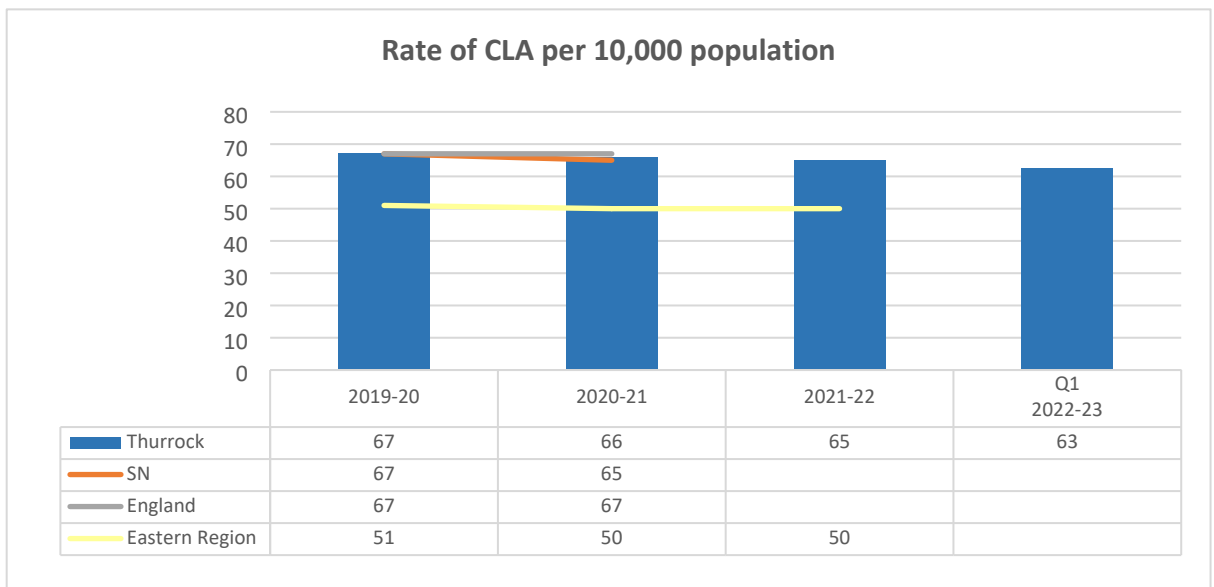
The NTS is operated by Central Government with the Home Office responsible for administration of the scheme. The Eastern Region Co Coordinator who previously ensured the smooth transfer process in the region is no longer responsible for the transfers, however their role is to liaise with the Home Office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

¹ The Eastern Region comprises of Bedford Borough, Cambridgeshire, Central Bedfordshire, Hertfordshire, Luton, Norfolk, Peterborough, Southend, Suffolk and Thurrock Local Authorities



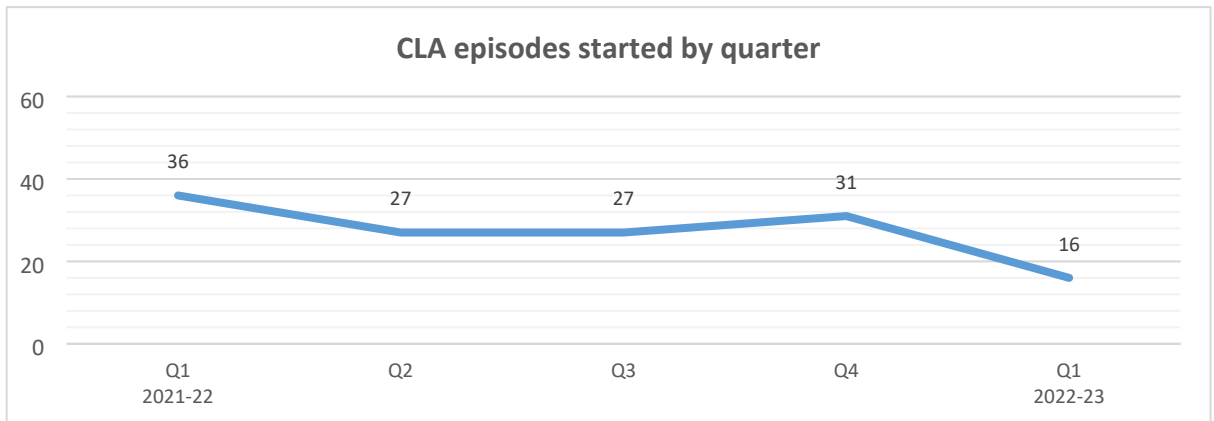
3.3 The Rate of Children Looked After per 10,000 population

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 June 2022 there were 284 Children Looked After in Thurrock with the rate of 63 per 10,000. Based on the benchmarking data 2021, Thurrock is below the Statistical Neighbour average of 65 and England average of 67 as at the end of June 2022.



3.4 Children Looked After episodes started and ended

It is normal for the number of children leaving care to fluctuate. Between 01 April 2021 and 31 March 2022, the number of Thurrock children who ceased to be looked after was 125.



The most common reasons for children looked after episodes ending in 2021-22 were child returning home to live with their parents.

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

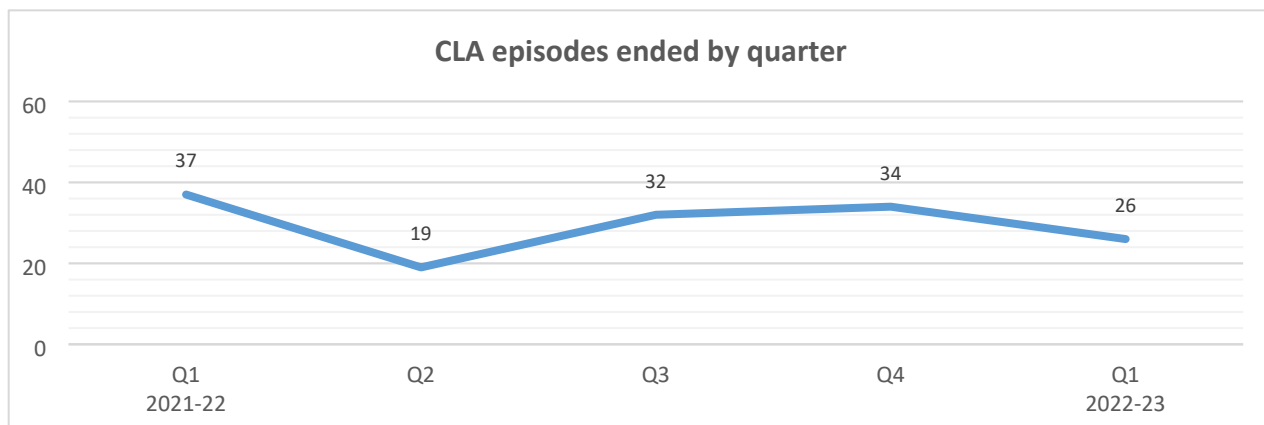
- Numbers of children entering care
- Numbers of children leaving care
- Numbers of UASC entering care
- Numbers of UASC who remain looked after by Thurrock

The below chart shows entries and exits in and out of care over the last few years and evidence 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 2022-23 (Apr – Jun)
Entering Care total	203	242	150	121	16
Entering Care UASC (% of CLA population)	91 (44.8%)	75 (30.9%)	36 (24.0%)	38 (31%)	4 (2.5%)
Exiting Care	211	235	148	122	26
No. of CLA at end of reporting period	290	298	298	295	284
Average UASC Population	39	23	21	28	28

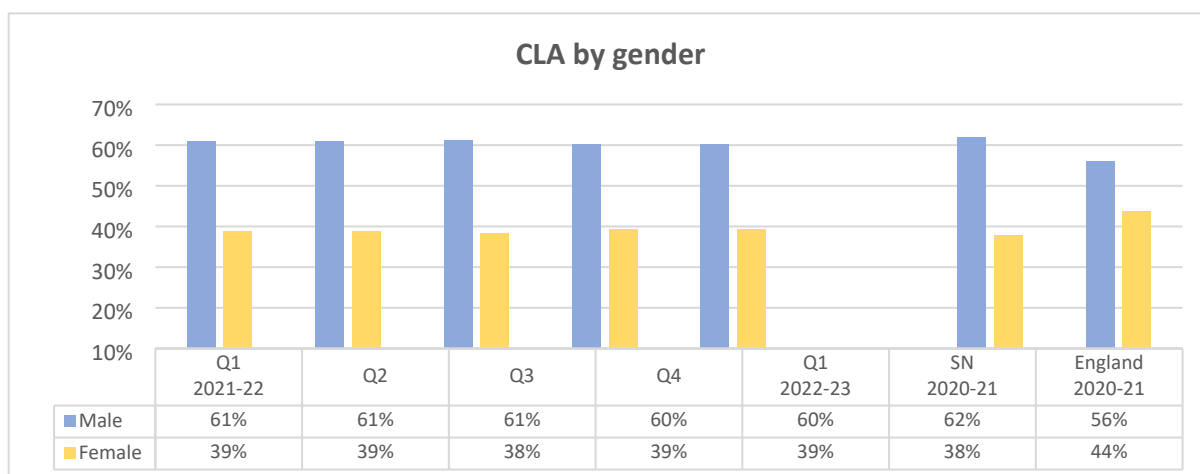
All cases are reviewed to ensure the correct children come in to care and court proceedings are only issued where necessary. Children and Families are supported to remain together to stabilise families who may be in crisis.

3.5 Children Looked After episodes ended



3.6 Children Looked After by gender

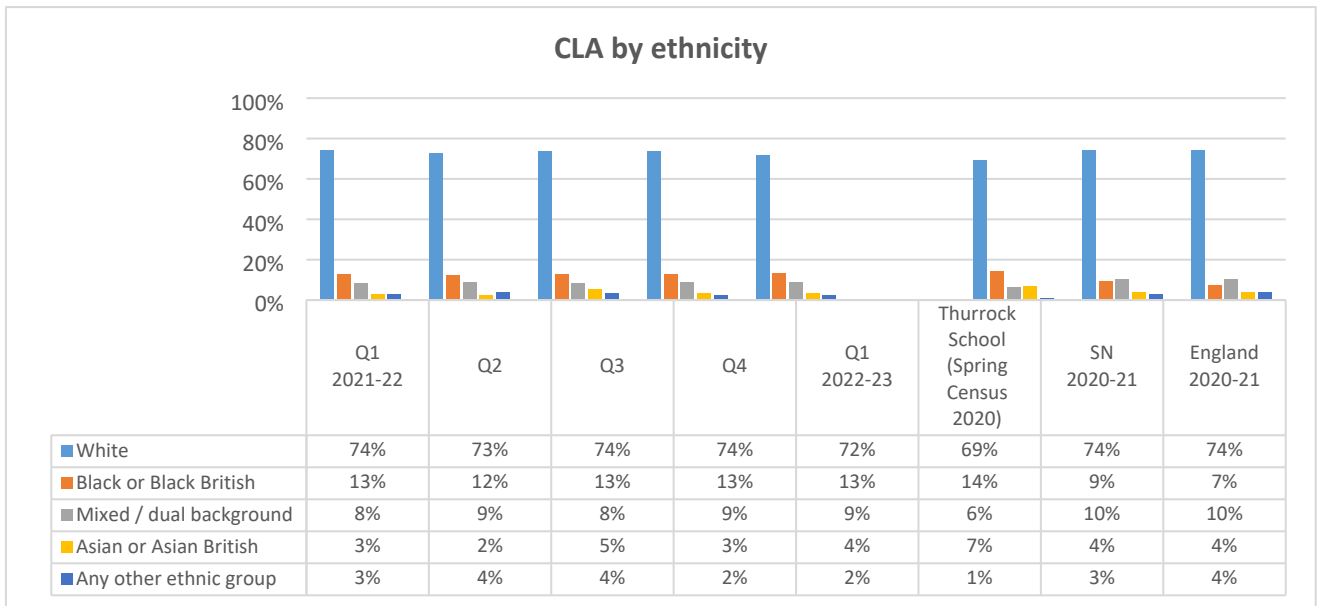
Based on the benchmarking data in 2020-21, the gender breakdown is in line with the Statistical Neighbour and England averages as of June 2022.



3.7 Children Looked After by ethnicity

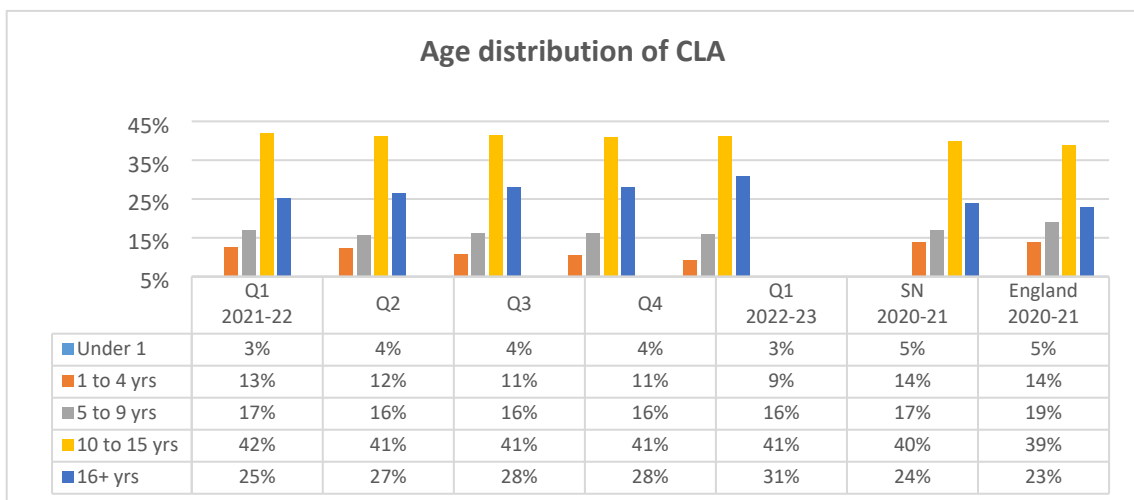
Statistical Neighbour and England averages are included. However, for Thurrock, school census data provides a more appropriate comparison, given the population of Thurrock.

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



3.8 Children Looked After age profile

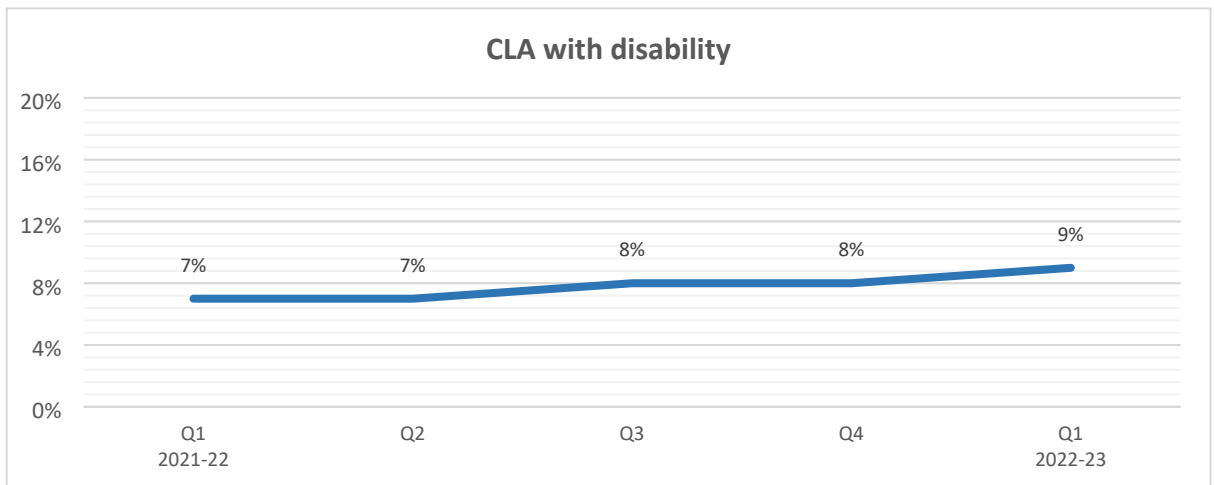
Based on the benchmarking data as of March 2021, the age profile of the Children Looked After cohort remains mostly stable and in line with the Statistical Neighbour and England averages. However, since June 2021, we have seen a 6% increase in the number of 16+ years, 3% represents UASC. When comparing the 16+ with SN and England, Thurrock is above the Statistical Neighbour average of 24% and the England average of 23% as at the end of Q1 2022-23.



3.9 Children Looked After with a disability

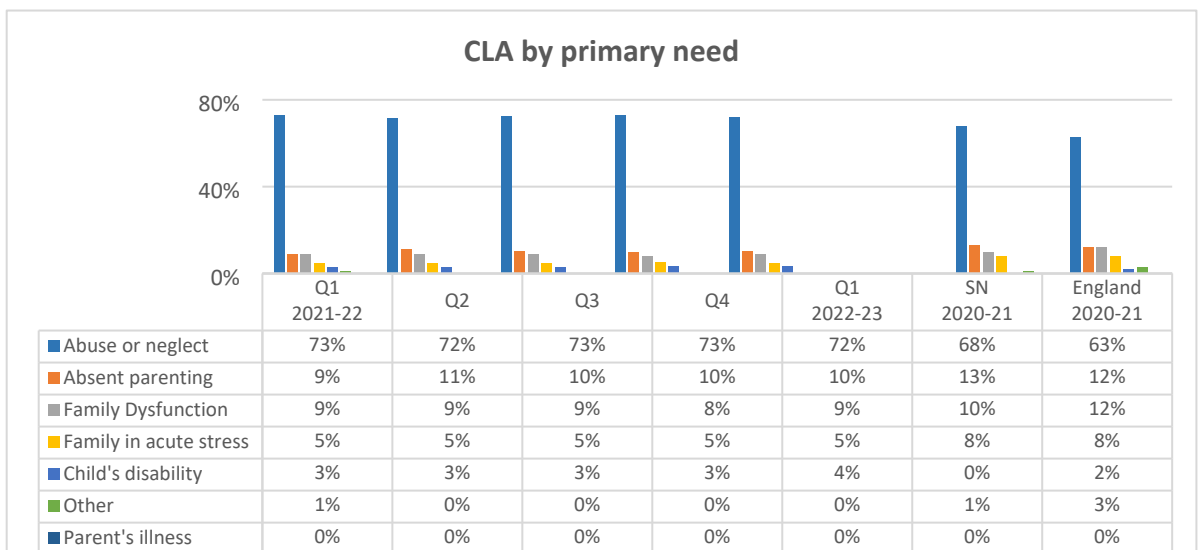
The number of children looked after with a disability has remained relatively stable since April 2021. At the end of June 2022, 26 of the total CLA cohort were recorded as having a disability. 20 of these children were boys aged

seven and over and 6 girls aged 12 and over. 20 of 26 children were placed within 20 miles or less from their home.



3.10 Children Looked After by Primary Need

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



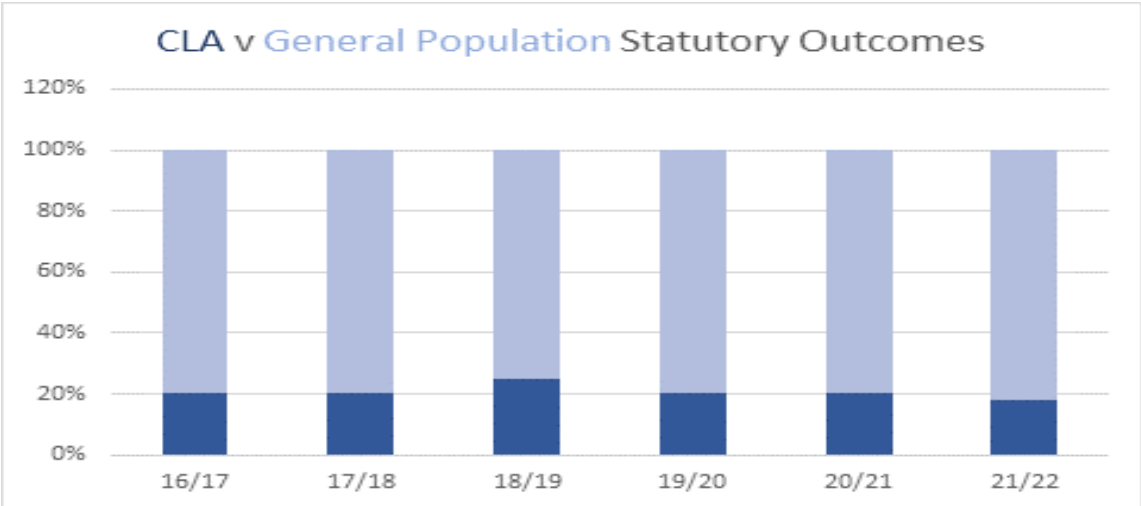
4. Number of CLA open to the Youth Offending Service (YOS)

4.1 Statutory Interventions

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

During the first quarter of 2022-23 there were 18 children open to the Youth Offending Service on statutory outcomes, 2 of these were looked after children both of which were looked after by Thurrock. The 2 looked after children represented 11% of the young people open to YOS and were both white British.

The number of Children Looked After over the last five years has been relatively static at around 20%.



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.

4.2 Youth Detention Accommodation

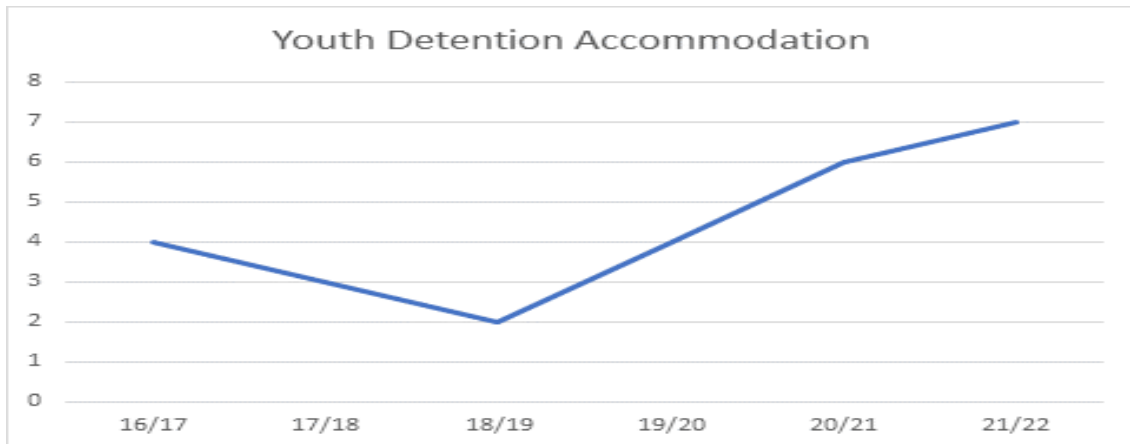
Under the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012, any child that is made subject to a Youth Detention Accommodation Order (remand in custody) by the Courts automatically becomes looked after by the local authority.

Of the 2 children made subject to Youth Detention Accommodation Orders during the first quarter of 2022-23 both were from the BAME community. This is reflective of over representation of BAME children in the criminal justice system.

The over representation of BAME young people in the Criminal Justice system is recognised as a national issue.

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 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.



4.3 Out of court disposal panel

During the first quarter of 2022/23 the out of court disposal panel dealt with 6 offences relating to 6 Thurrock children, of which 0 children had looked after status.

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.

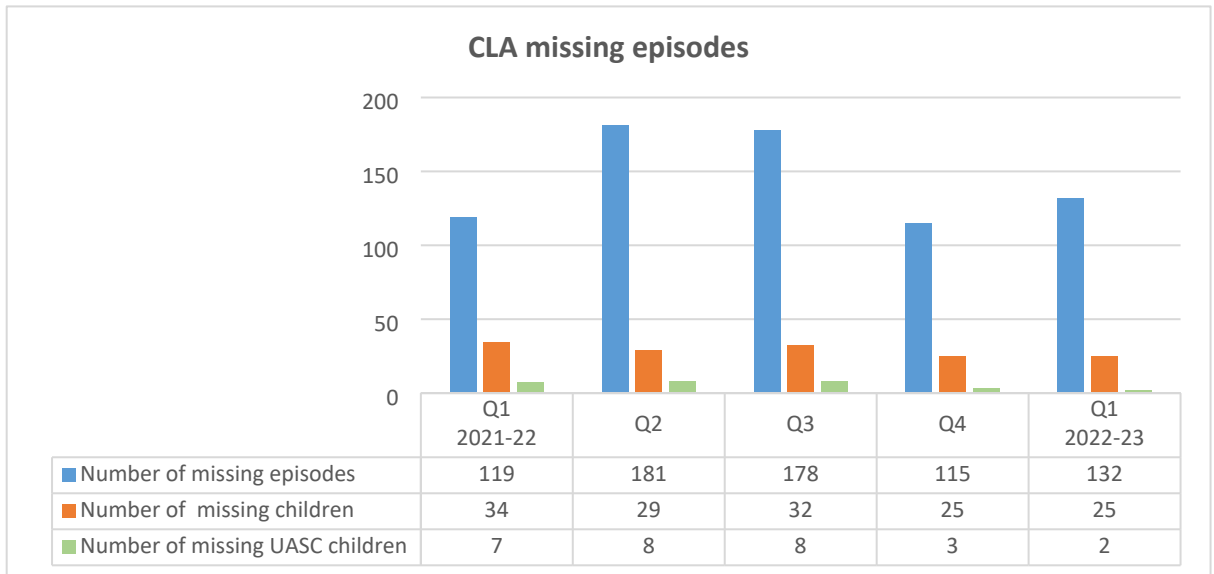
5. Children Looked After missing episodes started

The graph below shows the number of missing episodes started and the count of the individual children who went missing between April 2021 and June 2022. In 2021-22, The most common reasons for children going missing is that they have stayed out past their curfew with friends or are with their families.

Between April and June 2022, there were total of 132 missing episodes compared to 119 missing episodes in the same period in 2020-21; this represents a 10% increase in the number of missing episodes since June 2021. However, the number of young people that went missing has fallen by 26% since June 2021.

The chart below shows the number of missing episodes and the count of the individual children who went missing between April 2021 and June 2022.

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

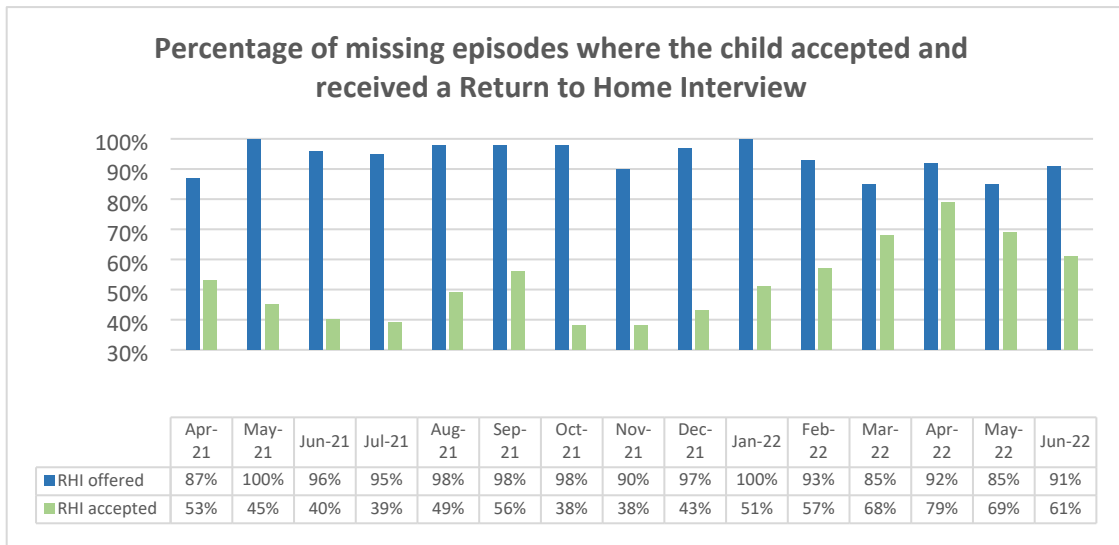


5.1 Children Looked After return to home interview (RHI)

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 also discuss missing incidents with children. There is a network of support provided to children to try to engage with them and understand the reasons for their missing episodes. The Participation Team have been able to engage and seek feedback from young people and this has been invaluable.

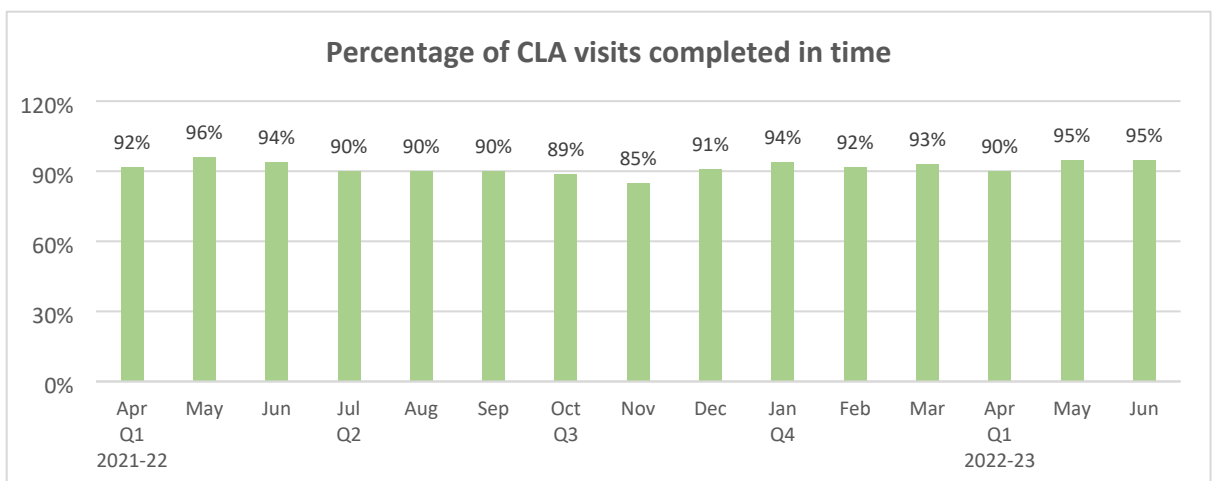
Between April and June 2022, the average take up was 69% by all young people who were offered a RHI compared to 44% between April and June 2021. The offer of an RHI via Inspire is not always accepted by young people for several reasons including not wanting to reveal their whereabouts when missing and not believing that they were missing but 'out'. All young people who have a missing episode are reviewed at the weekly Risk Management Meeting.

The graph below shows the percentage of return to home interviews taken up by young people through Inspire since April 2021. There continues to be a small number of CLA with a large number of episodes who have consistently refused return home interviews. We continue to review how Inspire engage this cohort of young people and alternatives such as whether there is anyone within the network better placed to have these conversations when they return from missing episodes, including their social worker and how this information is captured. This has increased the amount of Return Home Interviews completed and has ensured that young people are given the opportunities to share whether there are any safeguarding issues in relation to exploitation that needs to be addressed. that offer.



5.2 Timeliness of Social Worker Children Looked After visits

Social workers are required to visit a child/young person within one week of the start of any placement. Visits are then due in accordance with the time agreed within the Care Plan. This can vary from 20 to 65 working days, permitted within regulations. 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 April and June 2022 was 93% compared to 94% between April and June 2021.



5.3 Children Looked After Initial Health Assessments (IHA)

Every child who becomes looked after should have an Initial Health Assessment within 20 working days of entering care. To achieve good performance for this indicator, there is reliance on working with Thurrock Social Workers, parents and placement providers, Thurrock health care providers, and other health providers for children placed outside of Thurrock.

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

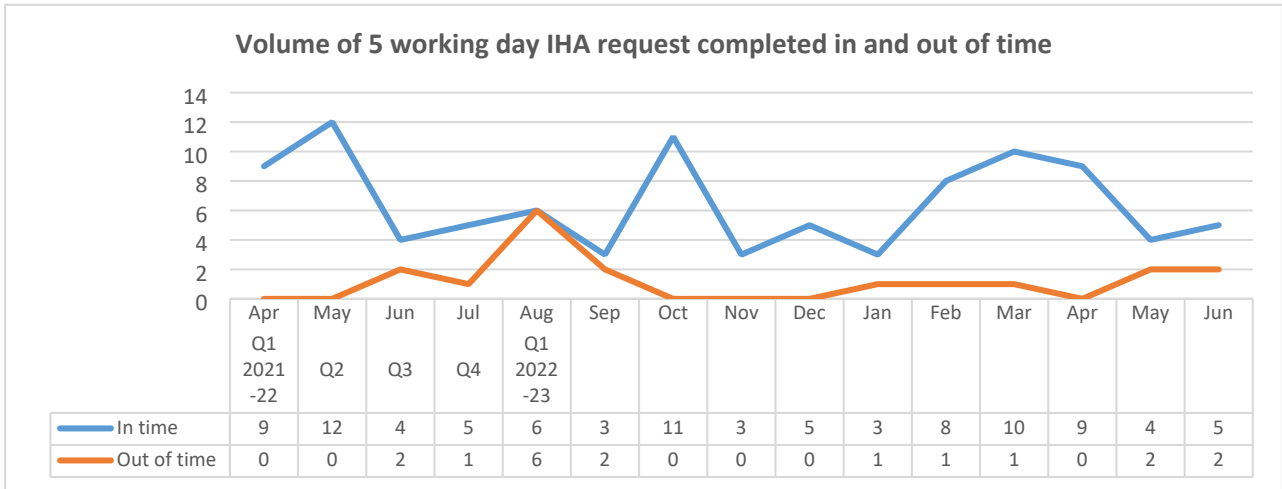
- Whether the referral for an initial health assessment is made by the local authority within 5 days
- An initial health assessment takes place within 20 working days of a child entering care.

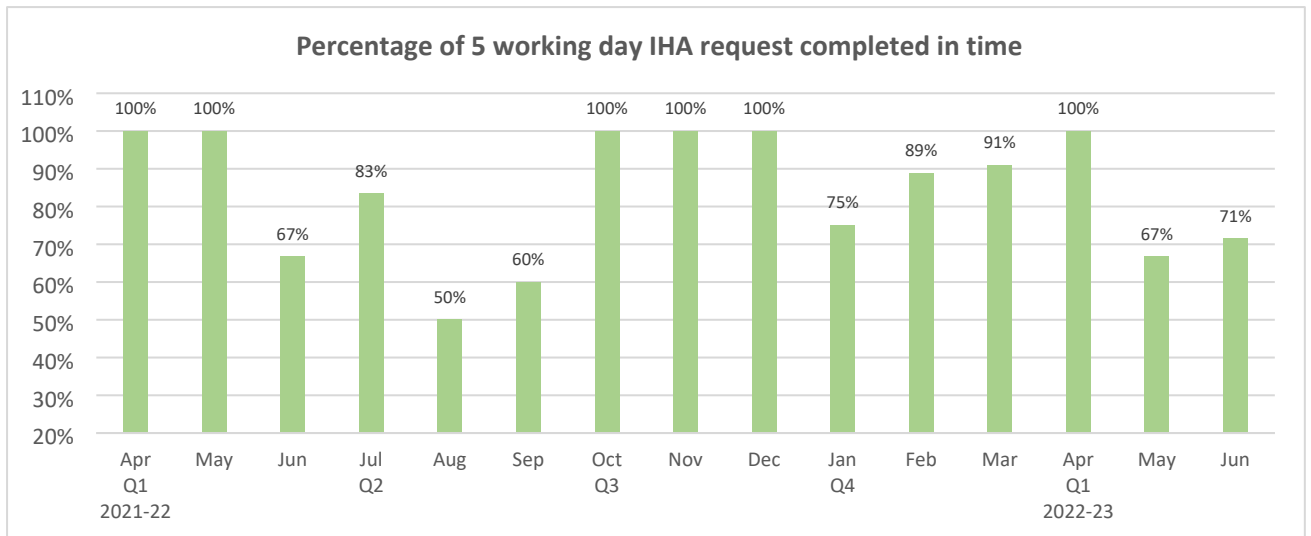
Sometimes notifications for an IHA cannot be processed if parents have not provided consent for medical treatment and there is no court order which gives the Local Authority responsibility for consenting to health care. There is a weekly IHA tracking meeting to ensure that there is a focus on meeting 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.

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

The timeliness of referrals from social care to health is important to the timeliness of initial health assessments. Performance for IHA requests being sent to Health showed a sustained improvement in the 12 month period between 01 April 2021 and 31 March 2022, with 84.8% of notifications being made within 5 working days. The numbers of IHA requests required each month can be small and therefore fluctuations can be impacted on by very small numbers

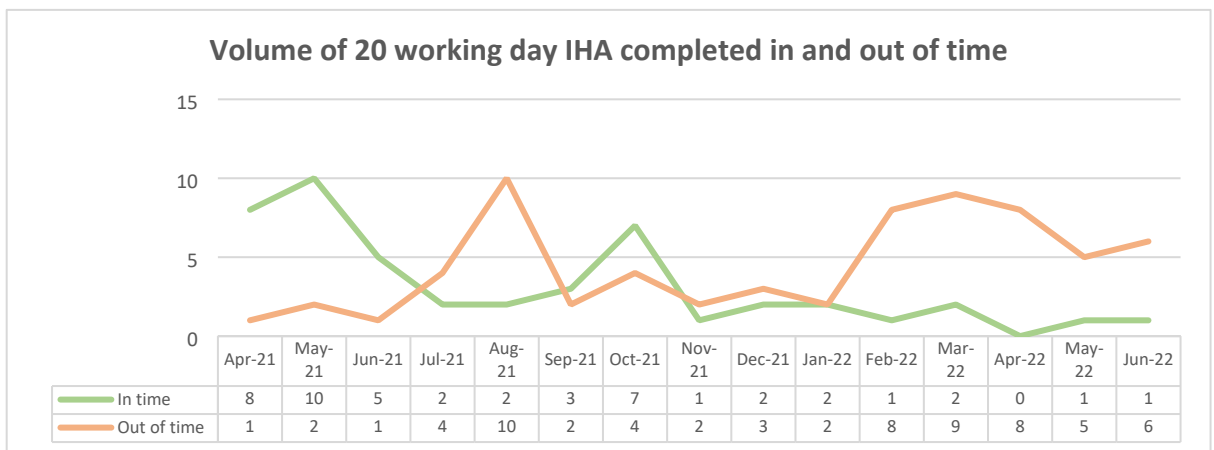
Between April and June 2022 of the 22 children who started a Looked After episode requiring a referral to health for an initial health assessment, 18 (81.8%) children were referred for an initial assessment within the timescale of 5 working days

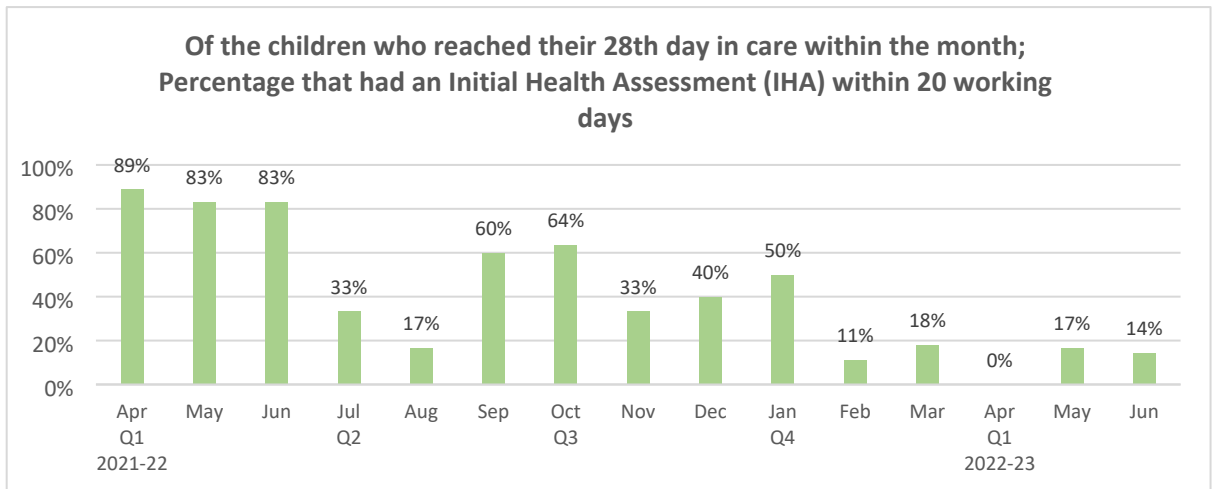




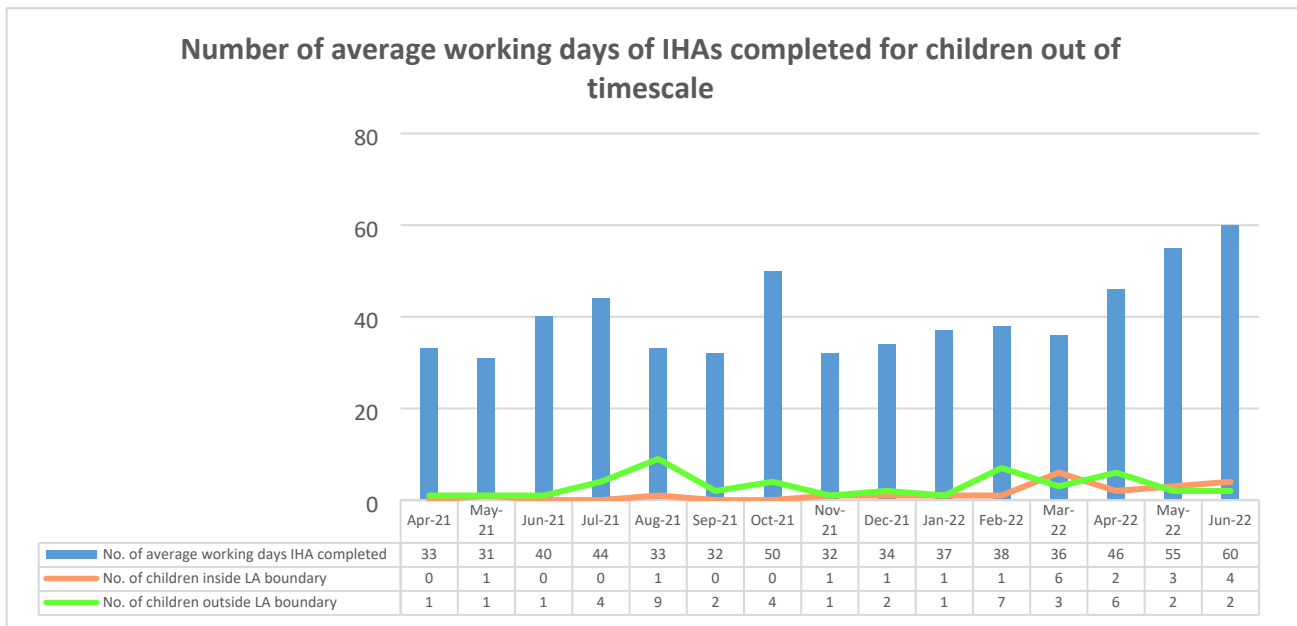
5.5 Initial Health Assessment taken place within 20 working days of a child entering care

The percentage of initial assessments completed in time between 01 April 2021 and 31 March 2022 was 48.4%. In the first quarter between March and June 2022, of the 22 children who started a Looked After episode, 3 (13.6%) children received an initial health assessment within 20 working days. A separate report is provided by health addressing this area and actions being taken.





The below chart shows the number of average working days from entry into care to the completion of an IHA where the IHA was completed out of timescale which range from 31 – 60 days.



5.6 Children Looked After 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.

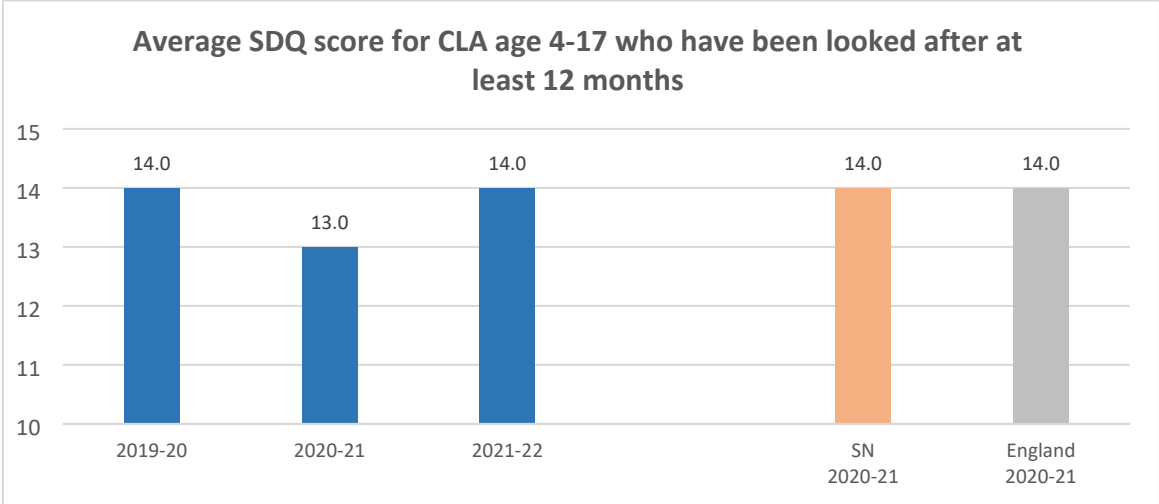
In addition to the annual report, the Virtual School Head teacher and her team members provide reports to the Governing Body every term. These detail a range of information such which is provided to ensure that we are held accountable, and that the delivery of services is efficient. (Please see Agenda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

5.7 Children Looked After Strengths & Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ)

SDQ scores are a measure which provides an indication of the mental wellbeing of Looked After Children. Thurrock has a statutory responsibility to collect SDQ scores annually for all children aged 4-17 who have 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.

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

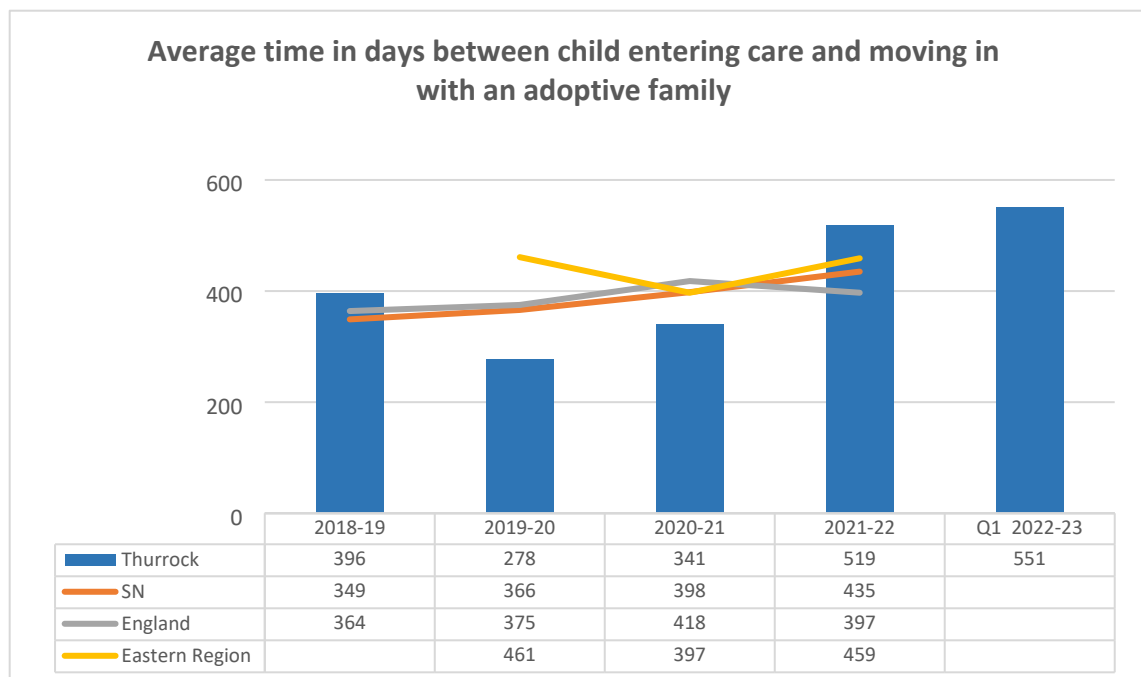
Between 01 April and June 2022, there were a total of 5 children who have either been adopted or placed in adoptive placements. There was a total of 22 children waiting to be adopted as at end of June 2022.

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 June 2022, Thurrock's average was 551 days.

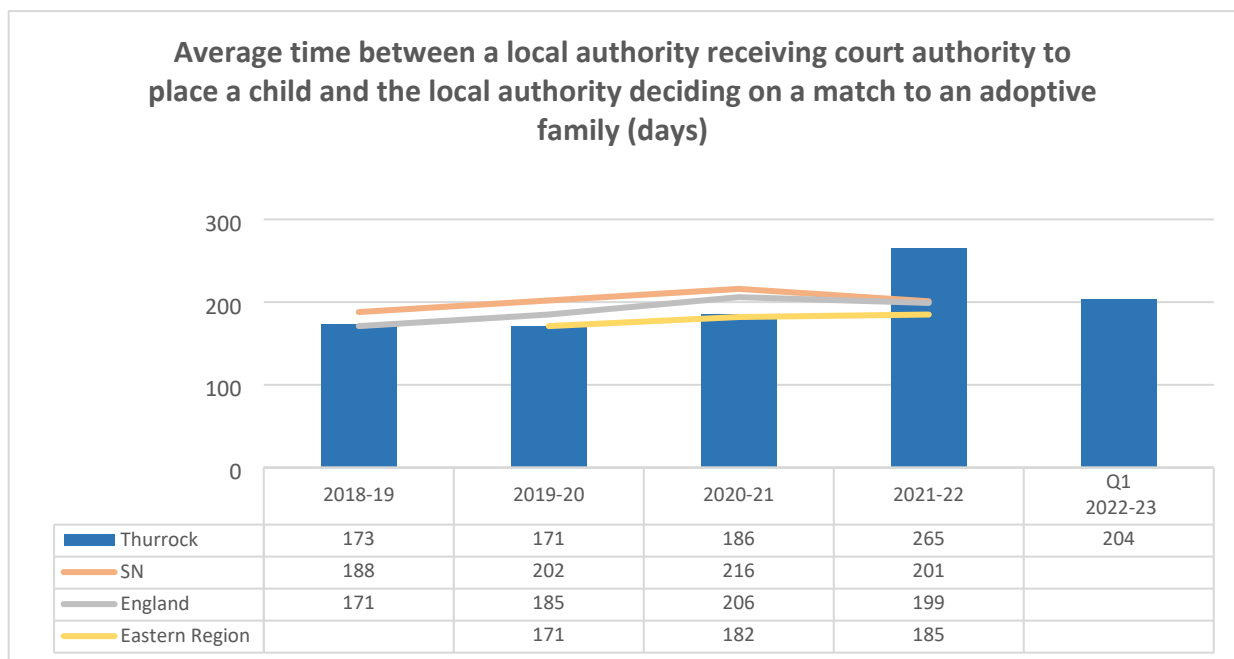
Care proceedings have seen significant delays due to covid; court availability and family members being identified late.

Based on the latest benchmarking data as at the end of March 2022, Thurrock is above the Statistical Neighbour average of 435 days, England average of 397 and Eastern Region of 459 days as at the end of Q1 2022-23.



As at end of June 2022, the average time in days between Thurrock receiving a Placement Order (court authority) to place a child with the adoptive family was 204 days.

Based on the latest benchmarking data 2021-22, Thurrock is marginally above the Statistical Neighbour average of 201 days, the England average of 199 days and Eastern Region of 185 days as at the end of Q1 2022-23.



This is an area for the Service to focus to ensure there is timely matching and placing of children with their adoptive families. The impact of COVID 19 has affected the timeliness of children being placed for adoption due to the delays in timetabling of final hearings for Placement Orders, and further delay because 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 or appeal if they do not agree with the chosen adoptive placement can prevent the placement of children with adoptive families. Due to the small numbers involved, the average can be impacted in exceptional circumstances by an individual case causing an increase in the average time between a court order being made and matching.

6.2 Children Looked After permanency

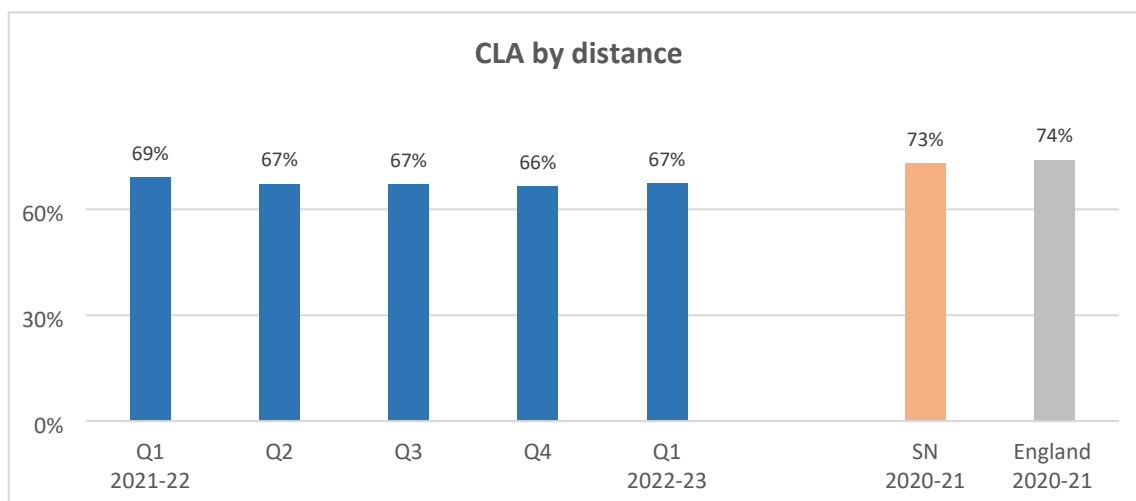
Purposeful early permanency planning continues to ensure that children are in the right placement at the right time to meet their needs. Securing placements where needed and supporting children, where appropriate, to remain at home with their families is the priority. Children are placed for adoption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

As at the end of June 2022, there were 41 (14%) children aged 0-5 of the total CLA cohort of 284. Most children under 5 years who are not able to return home, are moved on to permanent placements through adoption or permanent alternative carers. There were significant delays, because of COVID-19, resulting in children being subject to court proceedings for longer periods, and transition to their permanent homes being delayed.

6.3 Children Looked After placement distance

It is good practice to ensure that children remain within their communities. At the end of June 2022, 67% of the Children Looked After cohort were placed within 20 miles or less from their homes, which represents 191 of 284 children looked after. Based on the latest benchmarking data available in March 2021, Thurrock reflects performance close 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 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.



7. Care Leaving Service

The graphs below show the **OC3 care leaver cohort** (Relevant and Former Relevant Children whose 17th, 18th, 19th, 20th or 21st birthday falls within Financial Year) of Young People aged 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.

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

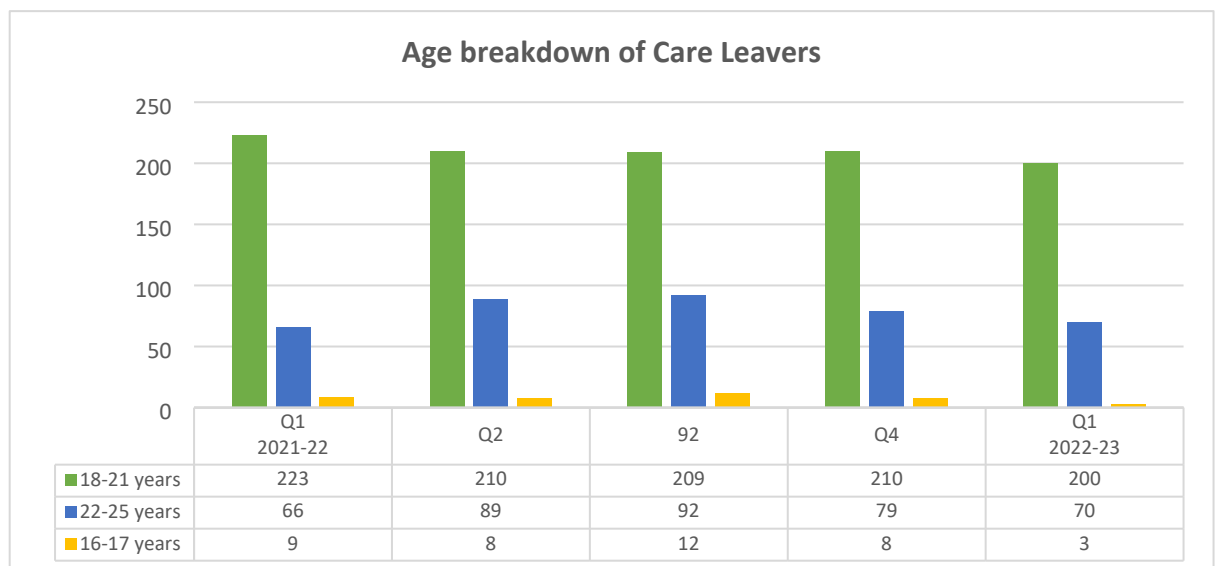
A Care Leaver, as defined in the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000⁴, is a person who has been 'looked after' or 'in care' for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14, and who was in care on their 16th birthday.

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.

As at end of June 2022, 273 Care Leavers were being supported and were receiving an Aftercare service. This is a marginal drop from the previous year of 298 and this cohort now has a wider remit as all Care Leavers can request support services until the age of 25, under the Children and Social Work Act 2017.

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

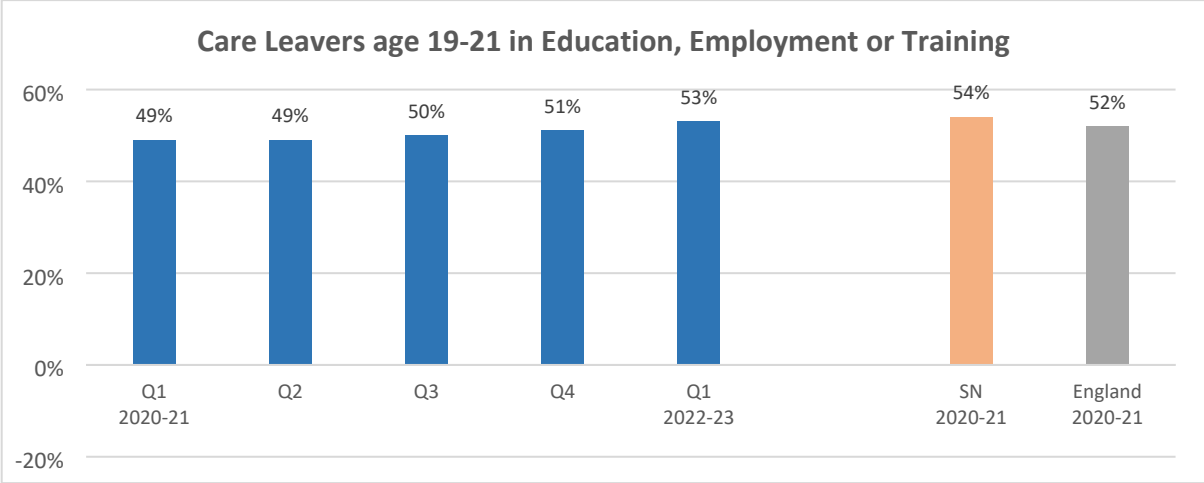


7.1 Care Leavers age 19-21 years in Education, Employment or Training (EET)

At the end of June 2022, 53% of the Care Leavers aged 19 to 21-year-old were in part or full-time education, employment or training compared to 49% in June 2021. Thurrock is in line with the Statistical Neighbour average of 54% and the

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

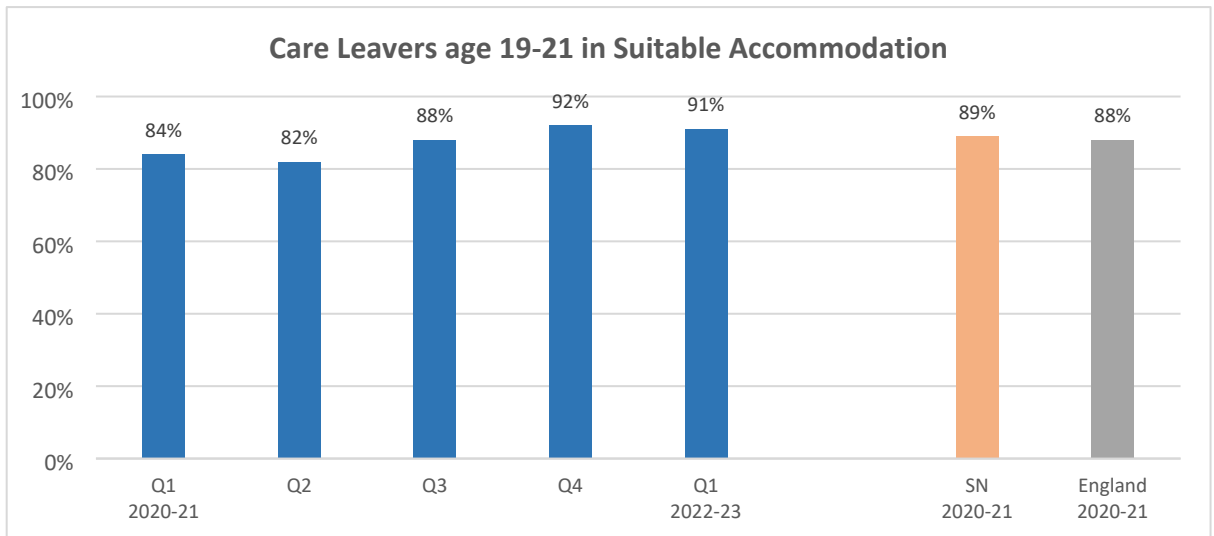
England average of 52%. To strengthen oversight and planning to ensure our young people have support and opportunities for Education, Employment and Training (EET) there are two monthly panels which focus on pre and post 18-year-olds who do not have an EET offer. These panels are attended by the Aftercare 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 June 2022, the number of 19 to 21-year-old Care Leavers reported to be in suitable accommodation was 91%. Thurrock is above the Statistical Neighbour average of 89% and the England average of 88% based on 2021 benchmarking data. There are some care leavers who are not in touch with the service, as well as those whose accommodation is unsuitable. Reasons for accommodation being deemed unsuitable include care leavers who are UASC and missing, young people declining to say where they are living or care leavers who are in prison.

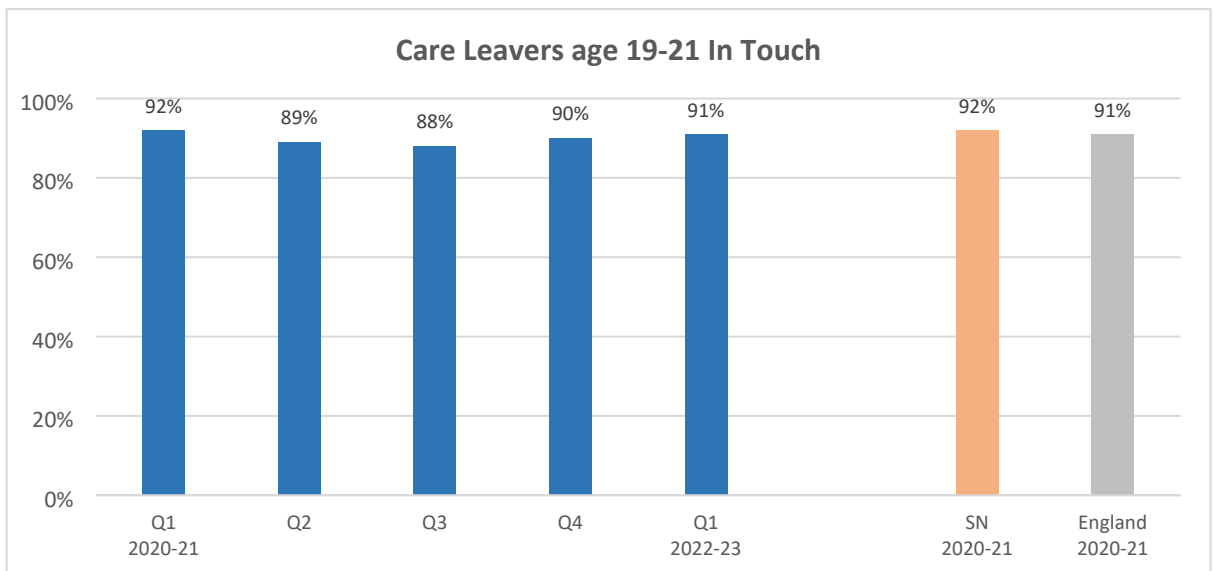
Increased housing support is being provided to young people by the Aftercare Service, Head Start Housing and Thurrock Housing Department. The 'Housing Offer' to Care Leavers has been updated with the Joint Housing Protocol 2020, ensuring good partnership working with clear pathways for young people to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



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

Local Authorities are expected to stay in touch with Care Leavers and provide statutory support to help care leaver's transition to living independently.

At the end of June 2022, Thurrock was in touch with 91% of Care Leavers. Thurrock's performance is in line with the Statistical Neighbour average of 92% and the England average of 91%. 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

The Children services budget continues to face increased financial pressures arising from placement costs, with limited supply of specialist provisions increasing the cost required to be paid. The Councils MTFS continues to provide support within a challenging financial climate

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

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:

Daniel Jones, Strategic Lead, Children Looked After, Children's Services

Clare Moore, Strategic Lead, Youth Offending Service and Prevention, Children and Family Services

Statistics: Anna Watkins, Business Intelligence Analyst, Children's Services

6 September 2022	ITEM: 6
Corporate Parenting Committee	
Adoption Statement of Purpose	
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Non-Key
Report of: Sally Medbury – Team Manager Adoption Service Dan Jones, Strategic Lead CLA	
Accountable Assistant Director: Janet Simon – Interim Assistant Director Children’s Services	
Accountable Director: Sheila Murphy – Corporate Director of Children’s Services	
This report is Public	

Executive Summary

This report is to update members of the Committee on Thurrock Council’s Adoption Statement of Purpose which is reviewed annually. Members are advised that the Adoption statement of purpose now reflects the Adopt East Regional Adoption Alliance and is in common with regional partners.

1. Recommendation(s)

1.1 That the Members of the Committee are informed about Thurrock’s Adoption Statement of Purpose.

2. Introduction and Background

2.1 The Adoption Statement of Purpose fulfils the requirement of Standard 17 and 18 of the Adoption Minimum Standards (Care Standards Act 2000) and Regulation 2 of the Local Authority Adoption Services (England) Regulations 2005.

2.2 Members are advised that the Adoption Statement of Purpose should be reviewed annually, and the current statement is attached.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

3.1 Thurrock’s Adoption statement of purpose 2022-2023 is attached.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

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

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

- 5.1 None

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

- 6.1 None

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

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

There are no financial implications.

7.2 Legal

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

National Minimum Standards (NMS) for Adoption are issued under this Act – together with the adoption regulations, they provide the framework for the conduct of adoption agencies and adoption support agencies.

7.3 Diversity and Equality

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

The Adoption Service is committed to practice which promotes **equality, diversity and inclusion**, and will carry out its duties in accordance with the Equality Act 2010 and related Codes of Practice and Anti-discriminatory policy. Staff members are from diverse backgrounds and heritage. Marketing and recruitment materials are designed to ensure adopters irrespective of **characteristics including** age, sex, gender, ethnicity, culture, religion, sexual orientation and disability are welcomed.

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

None

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

- None

9. **Appendices to the report**

- Appendix 1 - Thurrock Adoption Statement of Purpose

Report Author:

Sally Medbury – Team Manager Adoption

Dan Jones – Strategic Lead CLA

Children's Services

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THURROCK COUNCIL ADOPTION SERVICE

In Alliance with



**Adopt East
Thurrock Council
Adoption Agency
Statement of Purpose**

2022-2023

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1. Introduction

This Statement of Purpose sets out the principles, values and aims and objectives of Thurrock Council Adoption Agency. It contains information about the service, how it is monitored and operates to benefit children.

Our overarching aim is to provide secure and loving homes to children in need of permanence via adoption and to support those children and their families as long as is needed. We offer child-led and adopter friendly services by an experienced and motivated professional team.

Thurrock Council Adoption Service is a registered Adoption Agency and is subject to the Adoption Agency Regulations (AAR) 2005 and subsequent amendments (2012). Thurrock Council Adoption Agency is part of the Adopt East Alliance. Thurrock Council Adoption Agency is also referred to as Adopt East Thurrock, evidencing to the adoption community that they are part of Adopt East operating in the Thurrock Local Authority area. However, the registered name of the agency remains Thurrock Council Adoption Agency.

The Statement of Purpose provides information for children and young people, birth relatives, prospective and approved adopters, elected members, adoption panel members' staff, members of the public and other stakeholders.

2. Legal Context

The Adoption Service complies with all relevant legislation:

- The Children Act 1989
- Standard 18 of the Adoption Minimum Standards 2011 (Care Standards Act 2000)
- The Adoption and Children Act 2002
- Local Authority Adoption Service (England) Regulations 2003
- The Inter-Country Adoption (Hague Convention) Regulations 2003
- The Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005
- The Adoption and Children (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2005
- The Adoption Support Services Regulations 2005
- Adoption Agencies (Panel and Consequential Amendments) Regulations 2012.
- The Care Planning, Placement and Case review and Fostering Services (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013
- The Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013
- National Minimum Standards (Adoption Services) 2014
- The Statutory Adoption Guidance amended 2014
- The Children and Families Act 2014
- Special Guardianship Regulations 2005 amended by Special Guardianship (Amendment) Regulations 2016

The framework is designed to ensure the service is accountable and defines practice and actions undertaken within the service.

3. Aims and Objectives

The Adoption Act 2002 promotes adoption as a permanence option for Children in Care. The Act places the needs and welfare of the child at the centre of the adoption process, with the welfare of the child being the paramount consideration for a court or adoption agency in all decisions relating to their adoption.

Adopt East Thurrock supports the ethos that children and young people are best able to develop close and enduring relationships within a family setting. Adopt East Thurrock aims to ensure that all children whom they place within adoptive families will experience stability, security and quality of care throughout their childhood and into their adulthood.

Where children from Thurrock Local Authority are unable to live within their birth family and a plan for adoption is agreed, the Adoption Agency aims to identify an adoptive family who will promote the child's wellbeing through the provision of the highest possible standards of care in line with their individual assessed needs.

The objectives of Adopt East Thurrock are to:

- Meet the requirements of the Adoption and Children Act 2002, associated standards, regulations and guidance
- Ensure the needs, wishes, welfare and safety of the child are at the centre of the adoption process as outlined in the Welfare Checklist (Adoption and Children Act 2002: s1)
- Support the process of timely decision making for children in relation to permanence options including the use of Early Permanence Placements
- Promote best practice in adoption through the provision of advice and support children's social work colleagues with the care planning process
- Undertake high quality marketing, recruitment and assessment of prospective adopters able to meet the diverse needs of children for whom adoption is the plan
- Ensure that recruitment of prospective adopters is targeted to meet the diverse needs of children with a plan for adoption
- Offer timely information and advice to members of the public enquiring about adoption
- Ensure the assessment and preparation of adoptive families is comprehensive and robust in order that adopters are aware of and prepared to meet the needs of children for whom adoption is the plan
- Provide child centred, needs lead matching, transition and placement processes for children
- Provide a comprehensive adoption support service for adopted children and young people and their parents, adopted adults and birth family members
- Support the provision of other permanent placements such as Special Guardianship
- Recognise that all children and young people are unique individuals and therefore offer them the individual support and care that they need
- Ensure all staff involved in adoption have the appropriate level of skill, knowledge and experience to deliver an effective service
- Regularly review and evaluate to ensure services delivered are of the highest possible standard, are compliant with the Adoption National Minimum Standards and associated legislation and continue to meet the needs of the children and families in receipt of our services.

4. Values and Vision

Thurrock Children's Services has a vision that Thurrock is a place where people of all ages, particularly the most vulnerable, are able to lead happy, independent lives and fulfil their potential. With this in mind, Adopt East Thurrock aims to provide services that meet the individual needs of Children in Care for whom adoption is the plan as identified through the assessment, care planning and reviewing process. This will include the identification and provision of wraparound support, education and health provision, and additional therapeutic intervention, in order to enable children to reach their full potential.

The values which underpin the work of the service as an adoption agency are outlined in the Adoption Minimum Standards 2014 which aim to ensure the following:

- The service is anti-discriminatory and anyone accessing the service is treated with courtesy, respect and dignity.
- All enquiries to the service are managed in a timely and efficient manner.
- Adopt East Thurrock will work in partnership with other Adopt East partners, Regional Adoption Agencies, Local Authorities and Voluntary Adoption Agencies to promote positive outcomes for children.
- In recognition of the lifelong implications of adoption, the service will ensure that appropriate support services are available to all those whose lives are impacted by adoption, i.e., children and young people, adopters, adopted adults and birth family members.
- All those accessing services from Adopt East Thurrock will be made aware of how to comment or complain about the service they receive and have access to external complaints mechanisms as required by legislation, regulation and guidance.
- The service recognises that all children and young people are unique individuals and therefore will offer them the individual support and care they need.

5. Management and Organisational Structure

Governance responsibility for Thurrock Council Adoption Agency rests with the elected members. The Adoption Agency forms part of Thurrock Children's Services directorate. The Directorate is headed by the Director of Children's Services, Shelia Murphy. The structure chart below shows the structure of Thurrock Council Adoption Agency.

Janet Simon, Assistant Director – Children's Social Care, has overall responsibility for the Adoption Service and is Thurrock's Agency Decision Maker.

Tel: +44 (0) 1375 652231

Email: jsimon@thurrock.gov.uk

Janet's qualifications include a Post Graduate Diploma Social Work and she is registered with Social Work England. Janet has worked in management roles since 2006.

The Strategic Lead responsible for adoption services is Dan Jones. Dan is also the Agency Decision Maker for the Fostering Service

Tel: +44 (0) 1375 652763

Email: drjones@thurrock.gov.uk

Dan is a qualified and registered Social Worker, he has an LLB Law gained in 2003 from Cardiff University, a Bsc Social Work gained in 2010 from the University of Lincoln and a post graduate certificate in Applied Social Work Practice: Children and Families from the University of Bedfordshire. Dan has previously worked for the NSPCC, Central Bedfordshire Council, and Buckinghamshire County Council. He has experience in all aspects of Fostering and Adoption services as well as experience in therapeutic and harmful sexual behaviour services

The post of Service Manager responsible for the Adoption Service is currently vacant and a recruitment process is ongoing.

Alongside the governance structure of Thurrock Council Adoption Agency, Adopt East – Thurrock also has a governance structure in place as part of the Adopt East Alliance. Through a formal collaboration agreement, Thurrock Council forms part of the Adopt East Alliance.

The Alliance has a governance structure by way of three management boards:

- Directors for Children Services Board
- Senior Leadership Board
- Regional Practice Board

Team Manager – Sally Medbury

Sally Medbury is the Manager for the Adoption Team in Thurrock. She qualified as a social worker in 2001 and holds the DIPSW, BSc in Social Work and the Post Qualifying Child Care Award. She has extensive experience as a social worker and has worked across Children's Services within Local Authority's across London and Essex. Sally was the adoption family finding senior practitioner in Thurrock from 2014 and was appointed as Adoption Team Manager in 2018.

Staff members are social work qualified with access to appropriate training, supervision and support. The social workers specialise in either family finding, adopter recruitment and assessment or adoption support work. They are able to work across the 3 teams where necessary. Staff members are from diverse backgrounds and heritage and are able to promote equality and diversity.

Staff hold the minimum qualification of CQSW / Dip SW or equivalent and nearly all staff possess a university degree.

All Social Work qualified staff are registered with Social Work England.

The Adoption Team is an established and experienced team with the majority at senior practitioner level who are committed to providing a high-quality service.

The culture of the team is of continual learning and all staff are encouraged to extend their qualifications by attending relevant training.

Social workers are supported in their roles by administrative / specialist staff providing dedicated support in the following areas:

- Letterbox Contact exchange
- Tracking Stage 1 and Stage 2, adoption enquiry and assessment processes
- Management information and tracking
- Processing of Adoption Support Fund (ASF) administration
- Processing post order allowances
- Supporting with the recruitment of prospective adopters

The role of the Adoption Support Services Adviser (ASSA) is undertaken by the Adoption Manager who often delegates elements of this role to Senior Practitioners.

The service has Fostering and Adoption Panels which meet fortnightly. One Adoption Panel Advisor and administrator coordinate panel activity, including the quality assurance of reports presented to Panel, maintenance of the Panel member central list and scheduling panels to meet the needs of the service in respect of adopter approvals and matches.

Adopt East – Thurrock Council Adoption Agency

Lynn Carpenter - Chief Executive

Shelia Murphy – Executive Director for Children’s Services

Janet Simon – Assistant Director of Children’s Services

Dan Jones – Strategic Lead for CLA

Vacant – Fostering, Adoption. Placements and CWD Service

Andra Marc - Adoption Panel Advisor

Peter Turner - Independent Adoption Panel Chair

2 FTE – Fostering and Adoption Recruitment Officers

Sally Medbury
– Adoption
Team Manager

1 FTE Business
Support

5 FTE Senior
Practitioners

1 FTE Social
Worker

2 FTE Life Story
Workers /
Letterbox
Co-ordinators

1 FTE Financial
Assessment
Officer

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Head of
Adopt East

6. Services Provided by Adopt East Thurrock

The Adoption Teams deliver services that enhance the recruitment, assessment and training of adopters, the speedy and safe placement of children and appropriate follow-on support. Adopt East Thurrock recognise the lifelong implications of adoption for children, adopters and birth family members and undertakes to provide support throughout the adoption life cycle, including services for adopted adults wishing to access their birth records.

Adopt East as a whole recruit, assess and approve a range of adoptive families in sufficient numbers to meet the needs of Adopt East children for whom adoption is the plan including children with harder to place characteristics and sibling groups. Adopters are not limited to providing a family for Adopt East children but are also encouraged to look nationally for a child / children.

The service undertakes Family Finding activity for Thurrock Local Authority children to ensure early permanence planning for children where adoption is a primary or parallel plan is given appropriate priority. The service is responsible for the identification of matching requirements for children to ensure a match with the most appropriate adoptive family is achieved in a timely manner.

Adoption support services are provided for adopted children and young people, adoptive families, adopted adults and birth family members, recognising the lifelong journey for all parties as follows:

- Counselling, information and support for birth parents whose children have a plan of adoption
- Counselling for adopted adults in accordance with Schedule 2 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002. Those wanting intermediary service to track birth relatives are signposted to appropriate independent agencies
- Assessments of adoption support needs pre and post order and when appropriate will make applications to the Adoption Support Fund to support the provision of therapeutic services for adopted children and their families
- Comprehensive adoption support for those affected by adoption in line with the Adoption Support Services Regulations, both prior to and after an Adoption Order has been made. This will include adoptive family's unknown to the Agency who reside in the borough and request adoption support assessments three years after their Adoption Order was granted. Likewise, the team provides adoption support to adoptive families who have placements of Thurrock children but live outside of our area for a period of three years after the granting of the Adoption Order.

7. Recruitment, Preparation, Assessment and Support to Prospective Adopters

The following is a summary of Adopt East Thurrock procedure for the recruitment, preparation, assessment and support of prospective adopters.

Enquiries

The Adoption Agency provides a duty service to respond to enquiries from prospective adopters. Prospective adopters contacting the service are provided with written information about adoption within five working days.

Once an initial enquiry has been completed, prospective adopters will be invited to an Adoption Information Meeting which are delivered virtually or face to face on a monthly basis. At the events, enquirers will be provided with 'real time' data about the numbers of children waiting, their age groups, and if they are to be placed as siblings across Adopt East.

Following the information meeting, a social worker will contact the participants for an adopter-led discussion, to enable social workers to get to know participants better and to help them make decisions about their readiness.

Should the enquirer decide to proceed to the next stage of the process, they will be sent a Registration of Interest form and once completed and returned, the Business Support Officer will process statutory checks and references. They will also be advised of the next steps to being Stage One.

Stage One Assessment

Once the Registration of Interest is returned, the enquirer will be given further information about Stage One of the assessment process, including: the Stage One Agreement form, information about statutory checks and Preparation Training.

Every effort is made to complete the work of Stage One within two months, unless there are clear reasons why it needs to take longer, for example when a statutory check is delayed.

Stage One of the process is 'adopter-led'. Prospective adopters will be able to contact the Adoption Recruitment & Training team for support during this stage of the process. Adopt East Thurrock endeavour to support prospective adopters in Stage One to broaden knowledge of adoption and children's needs and offer advice on how they can build on this knowledge and experience to support their role as adoptive parents.

Prospective adopters are offered Preparation Training in Stage One with additional, optional modules prior to commencing Stage Two and post approval as appropriate. The training is designed to help prospective adopters to assess their own capacity and motivation to adopt a child by providing information, stimulating discussion and meeting experienced adopters.

Prospective adopters will also be invited to attend an additional training session about Early Permanence. The training is designed to help people understand the role of an

Early Permanence Carer, how it differs from traditional adoption placements and the foster components of Early Permanence including contact, work with parents and the role of the Local Authority. The training includes meeting with experienced Early Permanence Carers, reflecting on their own capacity and motivation to adopt a child via an early permanence arrangement. This allows an element of self-selection for prospective adopters who, having completed the Early Permanence training module, are able to decide whether or not early permanence is right for them.

Prospective adopters will also be given the opportunity to attend the Adopt East adopting siblings virtual training if they wish.

None of the Preparation Training is formally assessed. However, if specific concerns arise, these will be shared with the individual after the groups, and with the assessing social worker. The group leaders write a brief, descriptive comment on the applicant's participation in the groups for inclusion in the Prospective Adopter's Report.

Statutory Checks

All statutory checks, including DBS checks and medicals are taken up as soon as the Registration of Interest is accepted. Applicants are aware that negative police/statutory checks may affect their application and, in some case, may result in rejection. References are taken up with Local Authorities where the applicants have lived over the past 10 years or longer if they have previously parented children whilst living within another Local Authority area. Applicants are advised to inform us of any adverse history or medical condition which any of these checks may reveal. If applicants work with or have previously worked with children or vulnerable adults, employers are asked whether there are any concerns of a safeguarding nature. This includes any voluntary work undertaken.

Other checks include employer checks, contacting adult children of the applicant/s and former partners with whom the applicant has lived with will also be sought.

Adoption Medical

Applicants will be asked to have their Adoption Medical as soon as their Registration of Interest is received. The Medical Advisor may follow up any concerns with the GP/hospital consultant. They will provide a summary of the applicant's medical information and any contra-indications to them becoming adoptive parents. The Medical Advisor's opinion is taken into account in assessing the applicants' suitability to progress to Stage One alongside other information.

After 2 months and once all Stage One training is complete, an End of Stage One review meeting will be held with the applicants with two Adoption Senior Practitioners in order to discuss the progress of the application and the applicants experience of the process so far. A Stage One report will be written to summarise the information gathered. If checks and references are not yet complete the applicants will be given additional resources and advice for further learning.

Once all statutory references and checks are returned, this information will be reviewed by the Adoption Manager and Social Worker to ascertain whether we have sufficient information for the prospective adopters to continue on to Stage Two of the adoption

process. Alongside whether or not they, and the agency, feel the timing is right for them to progress with their application.

At this point prospective adopters can choose, if they wish, to take a break of up to six months between Stage One and Stage Two of the process. Sometimes as an adoption agency we may recommend a break, to also give time to resolve any housing, employment or other issues that may arise.

If a decision is made by the agency during or at the end of Stage One that the prospective adopter is not suitable to progress to Stage Two Assessment, this will be discussed with the prospective adopter and a written explanation of this decision will also be sent to them.

Stage Two Assessment

The agency and prospective adopters will jointly agree a provisional start date for Stage Two. An assessing social worker is allocated, and a Stage Two Agreement meeting is held with the allocated social worker to plan the assessment and schedule presentation of the assessment to the Adoption Panel.

During Stage Two, if issues arise which the assessing social worker or manager believe might mean an applicant may not be approved by Panel, we may present a 'brief report' to Panel, setting out the concerns and their reasoning. Applicants may make representations in person or writing to Panel. If Panel recommends that the application should not be completed, and the Agency Decision Maker (ADM) is subsequently 'minded' deciding that the assessment should not be completed, the ADM will issue a 'qualifying determination', and inform the applicants of their options. The applicants are entitled to ask for their application to be reconsidered by the Adoption Panel, or to go the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM). The recommendation of the subsequent Adoption Panel or of the IRM is then referred back to the ADM, who will consider all the information and reach a decision which will be final. If the applicants wish to make representations to the agency without accessing the IRM they have 45 days to make these representations in writing.

Applicants see their Prospective Adopters Report (PAR) and may contribute to it/correct factual information or attach their own written comments. They will usually have up to five working days to complete this and are invited to attend the adoption panel at the time their suitability as adopters is considered.

In the course of the assessment, the topics listed in the PAR are covered, and if a couple, each applicant is expected to undergo at least one individual interview. Any children of the applicant/s will be involved in the assessment and their views obtained in an age-appropriate manner.

Interviewing Members of Extended Family/Adult Children

If members of the extended family are expected to play a particular role in an adopted child's life (e.g., by providing day care for a working parent) they will be interviewed.

Where possible adult children of the applicant/s, including those who live away from home, are interviewed. Where an interview is not possible, adult children will be written to seeking their comments on their parent's plans. The comments of adult children are taken

seriously. They do not have an automatic veto, but their views are considered and followed up. If we can obtain their permission, their comments are shared with the applicants.

Where there are previous significant relationships or where applicants have jointly parented a child with a former partner, that partner will be contacted to request their view or concerns they may have about the applicant's ability to keep a child safe. If this is not possible/appropriate, an attempt to seek corroborative evidence will be made and the reason will be explained in the assessment report and the Panel will take a view of all the circumstances.

Referees

At least three personal referees will be interviewed for a single applicant and four for couples. Two of these should be a family member for each applicant. Additional referees may be needed if there are issues about a particular stage in the applicant's life about which we need to obtain another view. A written summary of each interview is made. Consent to share the references will be discussed during the reference visit and also when shared in writing.

Second Time Applicants/Returning applicants

Second time applicants may be eligible for a fast-track process, for example the time elapsed since their previous adoption. Their assessments will build on their experience and concentrate on issues that the previous placement has raised as well as considering the needs of their existing child/ren and their needs in relation to a new placement.

Enquiries from second time adopters or foster carers wishing to be considered to adopt a child in their care will be offered an information sharing visit, sometimes called initial visit, to explore their current circumstances and the timing of their enquiry.

Following the information sharing visit, the social worker will write up a report of the visit indicating whether they recommend that the enquirer is invited on to Stage One. This will then be passed to the Team Manager for approval within 10 working days. A copy of this report and recommendation will be sent to the prospective adopter. If the decision is to invite them onto Stage One they will be sent a Registration of Interest Form (ROI). For second time adopters and foster carers, Stage One and Stage Two of the assessment process can run in parallel if appropriate following a positive recommendation from the information sharing visit.

As with first time enquirers if the recommendation is not to invite the enquirer to commence Stage One they will be informed of they will also receive a copy of the initial visit report and be advised of the reasons for the recommendation.

Adoption Panel

Once the Prospective Adopter Report is completed, this is presented to the Adoption Panel to consider the application. The Panel then make a recommendation in relation to the applicants' suitability to be approved as adopters. The recommendation is considered by the Agency Decision Maker, who makes the decision. If the applicant is dissatisfied with the outcome, they may make representations directly to the agency or via the Independent Review Mechanism. The procedure for applications that go to the IRM is outlined above.

Once the Agency Decision Maker has made a decision in respect of the prospective adopters' suitability to adopt, they will be advised verbally by their social worker and in writing within five working days of the decision being made.

This represents the end of Stage Two.

Early Permanence Placements

Applicants who want to consider early permanence placements will be dually approved as prospective adopters and foster carers. This allows a child / children to be placed with them initially under fostering regulations, prior to the courts providing permission to place for adoption. This process will be discussed with adopters during their Stage Two Assessment and again at the point that an Early Permanence Placement is identified.

In some cases where there is an identified child, the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010 were amended (in 2013) to allow approved prospective adopters to be given temporary approval as foster carers for a named child as set out in regulation 25A.

Review of Approved Adopters

The adoption team aim to match approved adopters and children at the earliest opportunity, working proactively with adopters to enable safe and timely placements to be made. The focus is on securing the right placements for children which may mean there is an interval between an adopter being approved and a child being placed.

Adopt East Thurrock are members of Adopt East Regional Adoption Alliance and as such share details of children and adopters waiting for placements in order to secure timely placements of children from across the Adopt East Region. As part of this alliance, waiting adopters will be invited to attend regional events in relation to children waiting for placements and will be supported to consider potential links with these children as appropriate.

Where there is a significant change of circumstance, or if approved adopters have not had a child placed within a year of being approved (and similarly if they wait for a further period of a year without a placement) a review of their circumstances will be undertaken including:

- Placements that have been considered and why no placement resulted
- Significant changes in circumstances
- Changes in relation to the characteristics of children for whom the adopter wishes to consider
- The applicants' views and wishes
- Information from updated statutory checks – DBS updates
- Making a recommendation as to whether to continue the approved status of the adopter/s or not

If, as a result of the review, there is a recommendation to terminate the approval, adopters will be provided with a copy of report, and will be able to add their comments to it. This will then be presented to the Adoption Panel, which adopters will be invited to attend. As with the original approval process the Panel will make a recommendation regarding the

adopters' continued suitability which will then be considered by the Agency Decision Maker (ADM). If the adopters do not accept the ADM decision, the representations procedure or referral to the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM) is available at this stage as at the initial approval stage.

Family Finding and Matching Children with Adopters

The adoption team are responsible for undertaking all Family Finding activity for children referred to the service. This may include, where necessary, undertaking activity required to secure an Inter-Agency placement for a child for whom no internal match is available e.g. attendance at activity days, exchange days and referral to Linkmaker.

Decisions regarding progression of matches will be based upon the ability of adopters to meet the assessed needs of the child which will be recorded and evidenced via a linking meeting held between a combination of the child's social worker, adopters' social worker, family finding social worker, adoption and childcare team managers, and chaired by a service manager.

Adopters are supported by their social worker to make an informed decision as to whether or not a proposed match is right for them and their family. They are provided with written information and assessments about the child's needs and experiences, have an opportunity to meet the child's current foster carer and other key professionals involved with them including their social worker. They will also be provided with an opportunity for consultations with the agency Medical Adviser. Child Appreciation Days will also be convened for some children.

Matches of children with prospective adopters are made on the basis of a child's holistic needs, including age, emotional and behavioural development as well as ethnicity, race and religion. A placement will not be delayed in order to find an exact ethnic/religious match if a family is available who can meet the child's other needs. However, transracial adopters will need to demonstrate how they can promote a child's positive sense of identity and this is a key matching consideration.

Social workers within the adoption team work closely with children's social workers and foster carers to support the assessment of the needs of individual children and those within a sibling group to determine whether they are placed together or separately, and if to be separated, how each child's needs will be met in terms of attachments within the sibling groups and ongoing keeping in touch planning.

Any plans for post adoption keeping in touch (contact), direct or indirect, with the children's birth parents, siblings or relatives will be made after an assessment of the child's needs and any associated risks the birth family members may represent. Any proposed keeping in touch plans will be discussed with prospective adopters as part of the matching process.

Proposed matches between adopters and specific children will be presented to the Adoption Panel for consideration and recommendation and the Agency Decision Maker will make the decision in respect of the match.

Matching and placement of children with Early Permanence Carers will follow a similar process although there is often limited information available about a child's health and development at the point that specific placements are being considered and matching will

be driven by the agencies understanding of the child's background family factors and antenatal experience against the matching considerations that adopters have indicated during their assessment process that they would feel able to manage.

8. Adoption Panel

Adoption Panel Arrangements

The Adoption Agency Regulations require that all Adoption Agencies must establish a Panel to consider the circumstances of children who may require adoption, the suitability of prospective adopters and the placement of approved children with specific adopters. The Panel makes recommendations to Adopt East Thurrock's Agency Decision Maker. The role of the Agency Decision Maker is undertaken by the following:

- Janet Simon – Assistant Director of Children's Services
- Dan Jones – Strategic Lead for CLA

The Adoption Agency Advisor, in consultation with the Independent Chair, will ensure that the training needs of Panel Members are regularly considered and that opportunities for training are provided.

The Adoption Agency Advisor ensures that there is a balanced representation on the Panel. In line with the requirements of the Adoption Minimum Standards, a 'Central List' of Adoption Panel Members has been established.

All Panel members, including the Independent Chairperson, will be subject to annual appraisals.

9. Monitoring of Children's Plans

Adopt East Thurrock undertakes close tracking of cases, through the Gateway Stage (PLO) and care proceedings, to ensure assessments and decision making is timely, so that where a child's plan is Adoption, Placement Order applications are made within timescales.

Parallel/Permanency Planning begins at the PLO stage and is tracked by the adoption team. Permanency Tracking Panels (PTP) are also held weekly for children subject to care proceedings and enables the service to consider best options available for securing permanency planning in a timely manner.

In reaching a decision about adoption, Adopt East Thurrock will consider the views and wishes of the child, his or her family and current carers in conjunction with assessments completed of birth family or potential connected-person carers.

When considering a particular adoptive placement for a child, Adopt East Thurrock will look carefully at the assessed needs of that child and the parenting capacity of the adoptive family to ensure that it is the best available match and that it will meet the assessed needs of the child. Arrangements for transitioning children to adoptive carers will be undertaken through a planned process that takes account of the individual circumstances and needs of the child and adopters.

10. Preparation of Children for Adoption

The child's social worker, family finding social worker and foster carer will work together to prepare children in an individualised age appropriate manner and may include use of the Adopt East – Thurrock's Guide to Adoption, story books about adoption, various direct work activities to ascertain the child's wishes and feelings.

Once a match has been identified, presented to the Fostering and Adoption Panel for consideration and agreed by the ADM, a family book will be provided to the child to begin the transition process. For very young children and babies, laminated pictures, toys and books with voice recordings of the adopters, and items of clothing or a soft toy from the adopters' home are also introduced to the child as a means of promoting a sensory link for them.

In line with the age and understanding of individual children, visual calendars are prepared and provided to the child to support their understanding of the process and timeframes and what will be happening on each day.

Every child placed for adoption should have a Life Story Book and a Later Life Letter within ten days of an Adoption Celebration Hearing being granted in line with Thurrock Council's policy and procedure and statutory guidance. The Later Life Letter is provided by the child's social worker and the Adoption Team Life Story Worker will provide the Life Story Books. Every effort is made to provide the child with the fullest possible family history in order to help the child make sense of their family heritage, including use of photographs and artwork / drawings.

The Later Life Letter gives the child an explanation of why he/she was adopted and the reasons and actions that led up to this decision being made. This should include, wherever possible, the people involved in the decision making, and the facts at that time. The letter is in addition to the child's Life Story Book and not a substitute for the book.

11. Support to Placements

All adopters have an allocated adoption social worker who, wherever possible, will be the same worker throughout their process of approval, matching and placement. Once a placement has been made, the child's social worker will hand over to the adoption family finding social worker who will then be involved in supervising and supporting the child in placement.

Children placed for adoption by Adopt East Thurrock will be subject to statutory reviews in accordance with the Adoption & Children Act 2002. This will involve an Independent Reviewing Officer from the Local Authority who will ensure that all aspects of the child's welfare and plans for his/her future are progressing satisfactorily.

Based on assessments carried out under the Adoption Support Regulations, there may be a need to provide financial support to some adoptive families, subject to certain conditions. To fulfil this, the Local Authority has a means tested scheme for the payment of financial support in specified circumstances. Any payments agreed are subject to annual review.

Where a placement for adoption ends in an unplanned way, the Adoption Agency will convene a disruption meeting to consider what has happened and to help with planning for the future. Reports of placements that end in this way and the outcome of subsequent meetings will be shared with the Adoption Panel in order to support learning and practice development.

12. Adoption Support – Birth Parents

It is acknowledged that most birth parents will find it difficult to accept that they can no longer parent their children and that an adoption placement represents the best outcome for the child. As an Adoption Agency, Adopt East Thurrock fully supports the principle that birth parents and birth families are entitled to services which recognises the lifelong implication of adoption.

The child's social worker and adoption social workers have a key role in supporting birth families. Birth parents are offered counselling and support, where the purpose of the support is to ensure that the alternatives to adoption have been explored and the implications of adoption are fully discussed. It also offers birth parents the opportunity to express their views in relation to the plans for the child, and to be involved in planning for the child's future wherever possible. Where the offer of support is accepted, the social worker makes the necessary arrangements for a referral for independent support to be made.

Counselling and support to birth parents includes the following areas:

- Explaining the key stages of the adoption process and likely timescales
- Explaining the role of the Adoption Panel/Agency Decision Maker
- Explaining the role of CAFCASS in witnessing consent or acting as the Children's Guardian
- Explaining how the Adoption Contact Register works and how an adopted adult may seek information about the birth family in the future or register a wish not to be contacted
- Explaining how prospective adoptive parents are assessed
- Ascertaining the parent/s' views on the adoption plan, including the selection of the adoptive family, any specific ethnic, cultural or religious needs of the child, and any plan to separate a sibling group. Their views on these issues should be considered and balanced with the needs of the child
- Where there is parental consent for the adoption, explaining the process for giving their written consent to an adoptive placement or advance consent to the adoption (including the role of CAFCASS), their right to state that they do not wish to be informed of an adoption application, and that they have the right to withdraw their consent to an adoptive placement at any time up to the making of an adoption application, but the restriction of their rights to do so after an adoption application has been made
- Ascertaining the parent/s' views on post-placement and post-adoption keeping in touch including whether they would wish to meet the adoptive family and, if so, how they might prepare for this
- Where birth parents refuse or decline to accept counselling and/or support, the child's social worker records the attempts made to persuade the parents and the reasons for their refusal.

13. Adoption Support – Adopters and Adopted Children

Adoption support is defined as including:

- Assessment of adoption support needs
- Financial support to adopters, following an assessment of need
- Priority access to social housing, and access to additional support to cover a spare room whilst adopters wait for their child to arrive in their new home
- Priority admission for school places, including academies and free schools
- Services to enable groups of adoptive children and adoptive parents to discuss matters relating to adoption
- Assistance, including mediation, with keeping in touch agreements between adopted children and their birth parents or others with whom they share a significant relationship
- Therapeutic services for adopted children
- Assistance to adoptive parents and children to support the adoptive placement and enable it to continue
- Assistance to adoptive parents and children where a placement disrupts or is at risk of disruption
- A range of support services, including access to counselling, information and advice for both adoptive parents and their children, who may have complex needs
- Applications to the Adoption Support Fund as appropriate following an assessment of their adoption support needs

Adopt East Thurrock recognises the importance of supporting adopters and their families to access a wide range of support provision, to ensure placement stability, and to help secure positive lifelong outcomes for the child.

At the point of matching, all children must have an adoption support plan which sets out both the prospective adopters and child support needs including one-off expenses or ongoing financial support if assessed as appropriate. Where on-going financial support is provided, the adopters will undergo a financial assessment and annual review once finance is agreed.

Following the granting of an Adoption Order, the adoptive family can approach the Local Authority for an assessment of their adoption support needs until their children are aged 18 or 25 years if they have a statement of educational need.

14. Adoption Support Fund

On the 01 May 2015, the government launched the Adoption Support Fund (ASF). The fund has been established to help to pay for therapeutic services for children up to and including the age of 21 years (or 25 with a SEN statement) who have been adopted from Local Authority Care in England or adopted from Wales but living in England.

On 14 January 2016, the government announced that the fund could also be applied for to provide therapeutic support to children from the point at which they are placed with their adoptive families. It is important to note that the fund is not a right for all adopted children but is based upon assessed need.

In order to access the fund, families will need to have an assessment of their adoption support needs completed by the Local Authority. If the social worker undertaking the

assessment identifies those therapeutic services would be beneficial, they can then make an application to the fund on behalf of the family and, if successful, the fund will release the money to the Local Authority subject to monthly invoicing. From 01 April 2016, the fund was also made available to families who have adopted children from outside England from other UK countries and via inter-country adoption arrangements.

Adopt East Thurrock are responsible for undertaking assessments of adoption support needs pre and post order, and families and other professionals are able to refer to the service to request such an assessment by contacting the Adoption Duty Social Worker on [01375 652647](tel:01375652647) / PostadoptionSGO@thurrock.gov.uk or pre-Adoption Order talking to their adoption social worker.

15. Intercountry Adoption

Adopt East Thurrock will refer applicants for intercountry adoption to a commissioned provider (The IAC) who will assess and liaise with the Department for Education when required.

Applicants wishing to adopt a child from another country will be provided with information about the IAC service and adopting domestically. Applicants must satisfy the requirements and procedures of their country of choice.

All local authorities are now required to provide a comprehensive adoption support service. Intercountry adopters and intercountry adoptive children are entitled to an assessment of their needs for adoption support. Services which may be provided include counselling, advice, information, therapeutic services, services to ensure the continuation of a relationship, and services to assist in case of disruption of adoption placements. The IAC Advice Line number is **020 8447 4753** or email is info@icacentre.org.uk
Ofsted Unique Reference Number is – SC386048

16. Non-Agency and Stepparent Adoption

These are adoptions which have not been arranged by an adoption agency and include stepchildren, adoption by other relatives/significant others and children conceived with the involvement of a donor or surrogate.

Adopt East Thurrock will give advice and guidance to those wishing to adopt a stepchild or another relative/significant other and will explore with enquirers whether or not adoption is the most appropriate legal order for the child.

Checks and references will be undertaken prior to an application to the Court. An allocated worker will be assigned to undertake the assessment and complete the Annex A report for court.

17. Special Guardianship Support Services

Every child needs to feel secure and settled in a family that loves and values them. That means strong attachments to adults who are committed to them long-term, who support their development, and who guide them through childhood to adulthood. A Special Guardianship Order is a way of providing a legally secure foundation for those carers who

are caring for a child who is unable to live with their parents. When making a decision regarding an Order, the welfare of the child is of paramount consideration.

Under the Adoption and Children Act 2002, financial support and other services may be available for the Special Guardian, the child and the birth parents. However, if a child is not (or was not) looked after by a Local Authority, then there is no entitlement to an assessment for Special Guardianship Support Services, although it is possible to make a request for this assessment.

Thurrock Council may be able to make arrangements for the provision of Special Guardianship Support Services which may include:

- Mediation to assist with new or existing contact arrangements
- Counselling and advice and information
- Access to support groups
- Therapy services
- Training for the Special Guardian to meet the needs of the child
- Financial assistance following an assessment of need

The Adoption Agency is responsible for the provision of support services for Special Guardians for duration of up to three years following granting of the Order for families who live outside of Thurrock Borough. After three years, the Local Authority where the family reside are responsible for the provision of needs assessments and services.

18. Complaints

In seeking to constantly improve the quality of the adoption services, Thurrock Council welcomes and encourages feedback from service user's providers and partner agencies as an opportunity to learn lessons and put matters right. We also welcome comments or compliments as a way of learning about our practice and use them as an integrated part of our Quality Assurance processes.

Thurrock Council recognises that children, their birth parents, adoptive parents, prospective adopters and special guardians are best placed to identify the strengths and deficiencies of the adoption service and therefore, to inform the changes and developments needed to ensure continuing improvement.

The majority of such complaints will be dealt with under a complaints procedure established in line with **The Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006** and the statutory guidance "**Getting the Best from Complaints**".

There is a framework in place for responding to and ensuring that the views of the parties in the adoption process are heard. All parties are advised of Thurrock Council's complaints procedure

In most situations, areas of potential tension or conflict can be minimised through careful planning, open communication and early discussion/negotiation involving the child's social worker and/or the adoption social worker, as appropriate.

Any of the parties in the adoption process can use the complaints procedure if they have a dissatisfaction or concern with the service provided. This includes a complaint by:

- Any child who has been placed for adoption or placed under a special guardianship by the council - including adults who were formally adopted.
- A birth parent of a child who has been or is being adopted or is or will be subject to a Special Guardianship Order
- Adoptive parents
- Prospective adoptive parents during the preparation and assessment process and after approval whilst awaiting a placement
- One person on behalf of another e.g. an adoptive parent on behalf an adopted child
- Anyone granted a Special Guardianship Order or is seeking one

Applicants to become adopters who are turned down for approval on the recommendation of the adoption panel and/or the decision of the agency decision maker are able to ask for their case to be referred to the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM). Details of this process with timescales will be made available to applicants during preparation and assessment.

The IRM has the following timescales:

- Applicants have 40 working days from the date of the letter confirming the panel's decision, to decide to contact the IRM.
- The adoption agency will be contacted to produce relevant documentation within
- 10 working days.
- The IRM will set up a panel within 3 months of the application.

Contact details for the IRM are as follows:

The Independent Review Mechanism Contract Manager
 Unit 4, Pavillion Business Park,
 Royds Hall Road
 Leeds, LS12 6AJ
 Tel: 0845 450 3956
 Email: irm@irm.org.uk
www.independentreviewmechanism.org.uk

Information about the complaints procedure can be obtained from:

Complaints,
 Thurrock Council,
 Civic Offices,
 New Road,
 Grays,
 RM17 6SL
 Tel: 0800 021 3016
 Email: complaints@thurrock.gov.uk

Information is also available on <https://www.thurrock.gov.uk/how-to-complain/children-and-young-peoples-social-care-complaints>

Thurrock Council has applied a clear policy defining complaints and how they are dealt with.

19. Allegations in Respect of Children Placed for Adoption

Allegations in respect of children placed for adoption are dealt with in accordance with LSCB procedures and Adopt East Thurrock's procedures for managing allegations regarding such children.

The Southend, Essex and Thurrock (SET) Safeguarding and Child Protection Procedures can be accessed online at -

<https://www.thurrock.gov.uk/childrens-care-professionals-processes/child-protection-procedures>

20. Reviewing the Statement of Purpose

This Statement of Purpose will be reviewed annually, but may be amended at any time, in the light of major legislative or policy changes. This review will be carried out by the Service Manager for Adoption. This Statement of Purpose will next be reviewed in April 2023.

21. The Registration Authority

The Registrations Authority is:

Ofsted Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester
M2 7LA
Tel: 08456 404045
Email: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

Thurrock's Ofsted Unique Reference Number is – SC057173

22. Contacts

For more information about Adopt East – Thurrock's Adoption Service please contact:

Adopt East – Thurrock
Thurrock Adoption Agency
Civic Offices
New Road
Grays
Essex
RM17 6SL
Tele: 0800 652 1271
Email: fostering.adoption@thurrock.gov.uk
Web Address: www.thurrock.gov.uk

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6 September 2022	ITEM: 7
Corporate Parenting Committee	
After Care Service Report	
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Non-Key
Report of: Luke Froment – Service Manager After Care	
Accountable Assistant Director: Janet Simon – Assistant Director Children’s Social Care and Early Help	
Accountable Director: Sheila Murphy – Corporate Director of Children’s Services	
This report is Public	

Executive Summary

This report is to update Members of the Corporate Parenting Committee on Thurrock’s After Care service.

1. Recommendation(s)

1.1 That the Members of the Committee are informed about Thurrock’s Aftercare service.

2. Introduction and Background

2.1 The aftercare service works with young people in Thurrock who are formerly Children Looked After.

2.2 All children who are over 18 and leaving care fall within one of the following categories:

- former relevant child, entitled to: Personal Advisor, Pathway Plan (regularly reviewed), assistance with employment, education or training, assistance with accommodation, help with living costs.
- qualifying care leavers, entitled to: Help with living expenses, advice and assistance.

2.3 All local authorities have a duty under the Children Act 1989, and subsequent legislation, to prepare children for leaving care. Thurrock Council must publish information relating to what support it offers to care leavers (the Local Offer). It

also has duties and powers to assist care leavers depending on their age, when they left care, and for how long they were in care.

2.4 In carrying out any duty to a care leaver who is a relevant or former relevant child under the age of 25, the whole of Thurrock Council (not just children's services) must:

- act in the young person's best interests, and promote her/his physical and mental health and well-being.
- encourage care leavers to express their views, wishes and feelings, and take them into account.
- help those young people gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners.
- promote high aspirations in, and seek to secure the best outcomes for care leavers.
- ensure the safety of care leavers, and stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work.
- prepare them for adulthood and independent living .

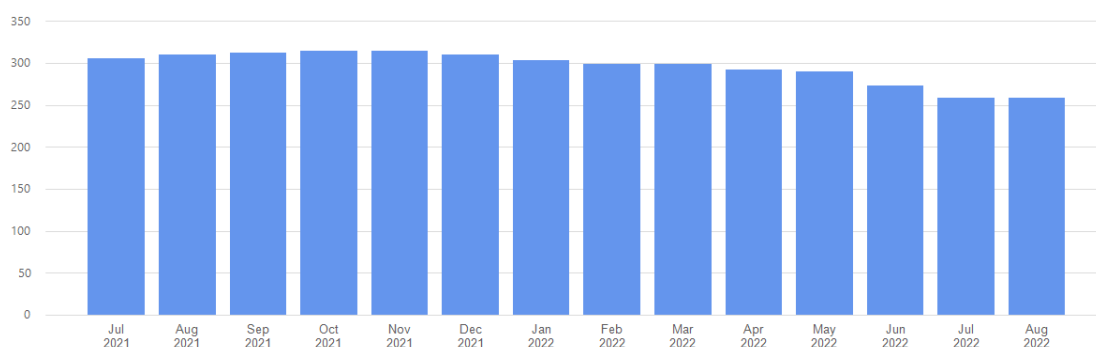
3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

3.1 The Aftercare Service is established at 12 Full time Personal Advisors (PAs) and 2 full time Senior Practitioners who supervise the PAs. Currently there are three PA vacancies in the team; a recruitment process is live with a good number of suitable applicants to fill these posts. Personal advisors are allocated to children at age 16 to support transitions planning, they continue to work with them up to the age of 25. The After Care team is currently supporting 307 children and young people aged 16-25 years. Children aged 16 and 17 years are also supported by their allocated Social Worker.

3.2 The caseloads remain higher than desirable with the total workload in the Service at 254 care leavers and 87 16–17-year-olds as of 09.08.2022 giving an average caseload of 28 when fully staffed. Case review continues for those young adults open who are aged 22-25; The Service Manager and Team Manager continue to focus on this cohort to ensure that the right young people are being supported. 25 such cases have closed to the Aftercare service since the end of May 2022.

3.3 The impact of this focus can be seen in the overall number of care leavers open to children's service. Between December 2021 and July 2022 overall case numbers have reduced by 52 cases; from 393 to 345.

Care leavers Cohort, over 18 - Open at Month End



- 3.4 Despite this work the caseloads in the service remain higher than is optimal – this is significantly impacted upon by vacancies in the Personal Advisor (PA's) roles in the team.
- 3.5 Permanent recruitment is currently underway to address this shortfall along with exploration of increasing the number of PAs by two for a temporary period to address the increase in demand that is expected over the next 9 months. The number of young people open to after care is expected to increase based on the rising age of children currently in care and anticipated new admissions in to care over the age of 16 in the next twelve months
- 3.6 There are currently 27 children aged under 18 who are being solely held in the Children Looked After (CLA) service and do not yet have an allocated PA, this is a temporary arrangement pending recruitment of PAs.

4. Transitions

Planning for transitions is a key area for the after-care service. The team work with children from the age of 16 and are allocated as secondary worker between 16-18. The role of the PA in this period is to support the allocated social worker to understand the needs of the child as they approach adult hood and to ensure that appropriate plans are in place to meet needs arising out of accommodation, education, employment, wellbeing and safeguarding.

- 4.1 To empower the PA and bring their expertise to the fore they are asked to attend the Looked After Child (LAC) reviews from 16 and to work with the social worker to complete a report identifying the transition needs and plans for the Child. This ensures close working between the allocated social worker and the PA and means that the LAC review has an excellent understanding of issues around transition planning from early on.

5. Accommodation

- 5.1 Accommodation is an area of focus for the Aftercare service. There are two strands to this work:
- Seeking to match young people appropriately and to reduce the need for multiple moves post 18.
 - Sufficiency of accommodation for care leavers.
- 5.2 To strengthen practice in this area a panel is meeting weekly to consider the “transition pipeline” and ensure that:
- Young people approaching 18 have a clear plan in relation to their accommodation.
 - Young people in Head Start Housing (HSH) accommodation are making progress with applications and move on into social housing.
 - Former Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) are making progress in regard to asylum applications, and we are aware of any negative decisions from the Home Office that mean the young person is Appeals rights exhausted (ARE).
 - Young people who are eligible to apply for social housing do so.
 - Young people in prison have support at the point they are due to be released.
- 5.3 In the final quarter of 2021/22 a joint piece of work was completed between Children’s services and Headstart to move young people on to secure tenancies through a direct offer. Housing services provided significant support to prioritise these properties to ensure young people could move on. The continued joint working between Aftercare, Headstart and Housing Solutions is focussed on ensuring young people are supported to apply for, bid for and are supported to move into Thurrock Council property where they are eligible to do so.
- 5.4 We are also working closely alongside housing colleagues and meet regularly at a joint housing forum to ensure close and more effective working to ensure that care leavers receive the best housing offer possible. We are exploring creative solutions to ensure that care leavers are able to move on into social housing at the point they are ready to do so.
- 5.5 One such piece of work is a two-bedroom accommodation let to the local authority and subsequently licensed to two former UASC who, given they have no recourse to public funds, would otherwise be residing in HSH accommodation. This has enabled the young people to move on into a more appropriate living arrangement and increased capacity HSH resource available to other care leavers. It is hoped that this can be replicated to give our cohort of former UASC the ability to move on into independent living while Home Office decisions are pending.

- 5.6 By the end of June 2022 there were 45 care leavers over the age of 18 who had achieved their own social housing with the support of the aftercare service and housing team.
- 5.7 In September, the After-care service and Housing will be delivering the initial training session open to care leavers aimed at providing information about the process of obtaining and maintaining a social housing tenancy. There is a commitment to deliver regular sessions, providing access to recorded sessions to care leavers and carers/accommodation providers and facilitating targeted training for those young people on the verge of receiving their own social housing.
- 5.8 The whole of Thurrock Council has a statutory duty to provide housing to care leavers. Monthly meetings are established with key teams and strategic leaders in within Thurrock Council to ensure that this duty is met.

6. Pathway Planning

- 6.1 The pathway plan is the document at the heart of all practice to support care leavers. The plan is regularly reviewed and identifies the needs of the young person and actions to meet those needs.
- 6.2 A new pathway plan is being developed by the aftercare team in conjunction with our systems team, Care leavers have been consulted. The new format seeks to achieve a number of outcomes:
- 6.3 To bring the voice of our young people to the fore in their own planning and support through the use of language in the document which addresses the young person directly and provides them an opportunity to be clear about their views and wishes in all areas.
- 6.4 To reduce duplication for social workers and PA's by incorporating a number of documents into one overarching piece of work – this includes housing needs, transition planning, risk assessment and triple planning for those young people awaiting a decision regarding their immigration status.
- 6.5 To strengthen and further embed signs of safety practice in the work that we do with care leavers through the use of language in the document and the use of “scaling questions” that can be used to understand the progress made by each young person from one pathway plan review to the next
- 6.6 The document is currently with the systems team for final amendments before it undergoes a period of testing with practitioners and will be in use by the end of September.

7. The Local Offer

- 7.1 Thurrock Council's local offer to young people leaving care is published on the council website¹. It can be accessed at any time by our care leavers and now includes a specific financial offer setting out very clearly what care leavers can expect to receive as part of their support package.
- 7.2 There were some recommendations made by government advisor, Mark Riddell, at the end of 2021 following a visit to Thurrock. These recommendations are being considered alongside the outcome from a piece of consultation work with some of our Care Leavers attending university. We are seeking to explore what recommendations could be added to our current Local Offer to strengthen the support we are able to offer across the board taking into consideration value to the care leaver cohort alongside cost to the local authority. The aim is to have as effective a local offer as possible within the resources available.

8. Education

- 8.1 Data in relation to engagement of our Care Leavers in education and employment shows that the Covid 19 pandemic had a significant impact. We are working hard alongside colleagues from the inspire youth hub to recover from this and ensure that care leavers need, and interests are understood and that they are appropriately matched to opportunities that they are likely to want to engage in and that they find motivating and stimulating.

9. Performance

- 9.1 Alongside the substantial developmental work within the service, we are mindful of the need to ensure best quality practice in our support of care leavers.
- 9.2 Timeliness of Pathway plans continues to be an area of focus. Since July 2021 85% of pathway plans undertaken in the after-care service have been completed within timescale – this is slightly above the current target of 80% however it is recognised that there is room for improvement. In July and August 2022 over 90% of plans have been completed within timescale.
- 9.3 It is incumbent upon the Local Authority to stay “in touch” with care leavers. This means that we need to make contact with them at least every three months and understand the current circumstances relating to their accommodation and employment status. The practice in this area is consistent over the last twelve months with Thurrock staying in touch with over 90% of care leavers. It should be noted that we do have a cohort of long term historical missing UASC where we have no means to contact, and this does impact on this area of performance. Nevertheless, this is very good performance.

¹ <https://www.thurrock.gov.uk/young-people-leaving-care/when-you-leave-care>

10. Reasons for Recommendation

10.1 Members of the Committee are sighted on developments within the aftercare service.

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

11.1 None

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

12.1 None

13. Implications

13.1 Financial

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

In 2021/22 Headstart Housing spent approximately £0.972m on accommodation with support. In this financial year the contracts for these providers have ended and the young people have been transferred to Adults Social services to prepare them for independent living.

The ongoing issue in regard to sufficiency of accommodation for care leavers poses a financial risk to the Local Authority.

13.2 Legal

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

The Local Authority is under a duty to have regard to the corporate parenting principles under Section 1 of the Children and Social Work Act 2017 in relation to young people aged under 25 who are relevant or for relevant children in addition to children who remain looked after. This Act also require the Council to publish its Local Offer for care leavers.

The Local Authority must have regard to the statutory guidance on this duty. Applying corporate parenting principles to looked-after children and care leavers (publishing.service.gov.uk).

The duties to care leavers are set out in the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000, associated regulations and statutory guidance DfE

(publishing.service.gov.uk). The Council is under a duty to arrange a personal advisor for each Looked After child who is an 'eligible' child i.e a child who is 16 or 17, who has been looked after for a period of 13 weeks. The personal advisor role can continue until the age of 25.

The Council is under a duty to undertake an assessment of an eligible child's needs and prepare a pathway plan. This must be kept under review. The Council has a duty to take reasonable steps to keep in touch with a former relevant child.

13.3 **Diversity and Equality**

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

The Service is committed to practice, which promotes **equality, diversity and inclusion**, and will carry out its duties in accordance with the Equality Act 2010, **Public Sector Equality Duty** and related Codes of Practice and Anti-discriminatory policy. The service recognises that care leavers may have experienced obstruction or the impact of prejudice when accessing services including Social Care.

The Child Looked After and Aftercare services are committed to support all children in the care of Thurrock Council to be safe and well and to reach their potential. Individual needs assessments and plans are made for each care leaver taking consideration of their identity, culture, history and social needs.

Happy otherwise to verify subject to the report writers willingness to agree the small changes. As an aside, I advise a CEIA for both the Statement of Purpose and Joint Housing Protocol if they haven't already been completed by the service.

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

None

14. **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):

Big Wide World guide (Local Offer): <https://www.thurrock.gov.uk/young-people-leaving-care/leaving-care>.

15. Appendices to the report

- None

Report Author:

Luke Froment

Service Manager – CLA and After Care

Children's Services

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6 September 2022		ITEM: 8
Corporate Parenting Committee		
Performance Report on Initial Health Assessments for Looked After Children		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Non-Key	
Report of: Dan Jones – Strategic Lead Children Looked After		
Accountable Assistant Director: Janet Simon – Assistant Director Children’s Social Care and Early Help		
Accountable Director: Sheila Murphy – Corporate Director of Children’s Services		
This report is Public		

Executive Summary

This report is to update Members of the Corporate Parenting Committee on actions taken by Children’s Social Care and Health colleagues to address the timeliness of Initial Assessments for Children who are Looked After. This update report is in response to the Committee’s request from the meeting held on the 19 July 2022 and is focussed on Initial Health Assessment Performance.

1. Recommendation(s)

1.1 Those members are aware of the work that has taken place, and areas for improvement in completing Initial Health Assessments and note the work that is being undertaken to ensure improving performance.

2. Introduction and Background

2.1 When a child becomes looked after by Thurrock Council there is a duty under the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010 to undertake an assessment of their health needs within 28 days of accommodation. This is referred to as the Initial Health Assessment and must be carried out by a registered medical practitioner who is ideally a paediatrician. The Initial Health Assessment (IHA) identifies existing health problems and deficits in previous healthcare and provides a baseline for managing the child’s future health needs.

2.2 Joint work with partners in Health is required to complete these assessments. There are clear arrangements in place with local Health partners, Referrals for IHA should be completed within 5 working days of becoming looked after and

sent to Health. The IHA appointment will then be arranged, the child seen and assessed within 28 days (20 working days) of entering care and a subsequent report sent to the local authority.

- 2.3 The timely completion of IHA's is an improvement area for Thurrock Council that was identified in our last full Ofsted inspection in 2019. Since then, considerable work has been undertaken to ensure our processes are clear and there is a weekly joint scrutiny meeting which considers and discusses all children who are due an IHA including any barriers and how to overcome these. This has continued consistently through-out the Covid-19 pandemic. Despite this high level of oversight, meeting the above timescales presents a number of issues for health and social care.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

- 3.1 The local authority, through its Corporate Parenting responsibilities, has a duty to promote the welfare of Looked after Children, including those who are eligible, and those children placed in pre-adoptive placements. This includes promoting the child's physical, emotional, and mental health.
- 3.2 Every Looked After Child needs to have an up-to-date health assessment so that a health care plan can be developed to reflect the child's health needs and be included as part of the child's overall Care Plan.
- 3.3 Health assessments are a statutory requirement and should be carried out within 28 days of entering care and then at a minimum of:
- 6-monthly intervals for babies and children under 5 years of age; and
 - Annually for those aged 5 years and over.
- 3.4 Local Authorities and local Health partners should have arrangements in place to support the completion of statutory health assessments for Looked After Children within statutory timescales, irrespective of whether the placement of the child is an emergency, short term or in another area. Where children are looked after due to being remanded in custody, health assessments are undertaken by the unit in which they are remanded. These children are included in the figures presented but sit outside of the usual health arrangements.
- 3.5 The Local Authority should always advise health colleagues when a child is initially accommodated and there should be effective communication and understanding between each other as part of being able to promote children's wellbeing.
- 3.6 In the first quarter of the financial year 2022/23, **16** children became looked after. **13** Children were pending an IHA at the 31 March 2022 totalling **29** children due an IHA:

- **22 Children** received an Initial Health Assessment
- **4 Children** became looked after, after the 6th May meaning the IHA's were due outside of the first quarter
- **1 Child** was looked after for less than 28 days
- **3 Children** had overdue IHA's pending at the end of the first quarter

3.7 Of the **16** children who became looked after in Q1:

- 6 received an IHA by the end of Q1.
- 7 children were placed within Thurrock
- 9 were placed outside of Thurrock
- 14 were placed within 20 miles of their home address
- 4 were UASC
- The children were placed in the following areas:
 - Thurrock
 - Redbridge
 - Essex
 - Luton
 - Milton Keynes
 - Havering

3.8 The majority of children entering care receive Initial Health Assessments though these are not completed on time. Where a child does not receive an IHA, there are clear reasons. The table below identifies the completion dates and delay reasons for the IHAs (Initial Health Assessments) for the 16 children entering Thurrock's Care during Q1:

#	Date entering care	Date IHA completed	Notes/Delay reasons:
1	05/04/22	22/08/22	First appointment offered 23 rd June, and then cancelled as an interpreter was unavailable – re-booked for 22 nd Aug 2022
2	11/04/22	-	IHA refused by child
3	13/04/22	10/08/22	3 IHA appointments offered, first was missed due to child's anxieties, 2 nd due to the paediatrician being ill. IHA completed on third attempt.
4	20/04/22	09/06/22	First Appointment offered out of time.
5	21/04/22	13/06/22	First Appointment offered out of time
6	21/04/22	-	In care for less than 28 days
7	22/04/22	20/05/22	IHA completed in time
8	27/04/22	28/04/22	IHA at YO1
9	27/04/22	27/06/22	First Appointment offered out of time.
10	05/05/22	30/06/22	First Appointment offered out of time

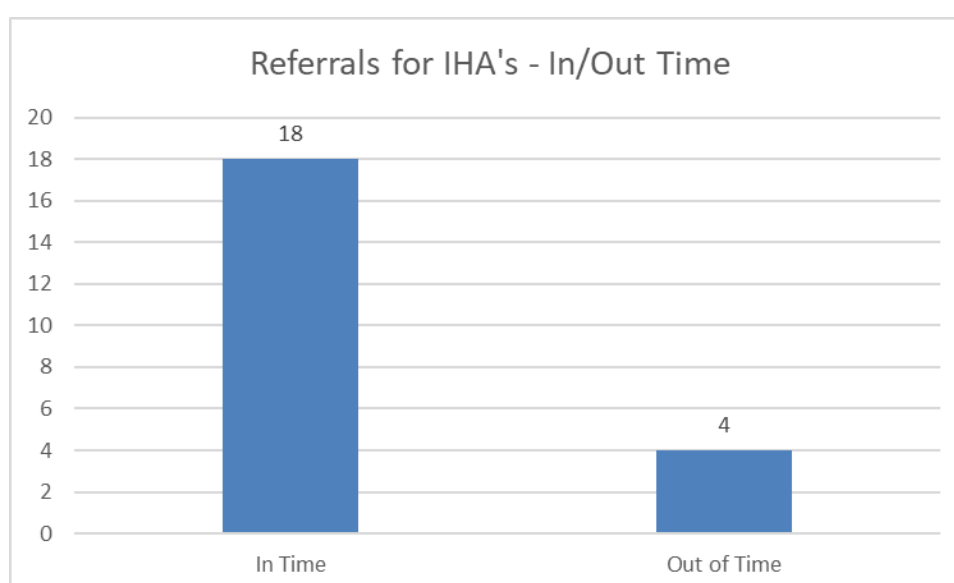
11	12/05/22	06/06/22	IHA completed in time
12	27/05/22	10/08/22	Parents did not consent to IHA initially. Appointment further delayed due to the paediatrician being ill. Completed on third appointment
13	17/06/22	-	First appointment for these sibs was 14 th July. This was missed due carers refusal to attend at very short notice. Next appointment not available until September 2022
14	17/06/22	-	
15	17/06/22	-	
16	23/06/22	08/08/22	First appointment delayed as carer and child on holiday

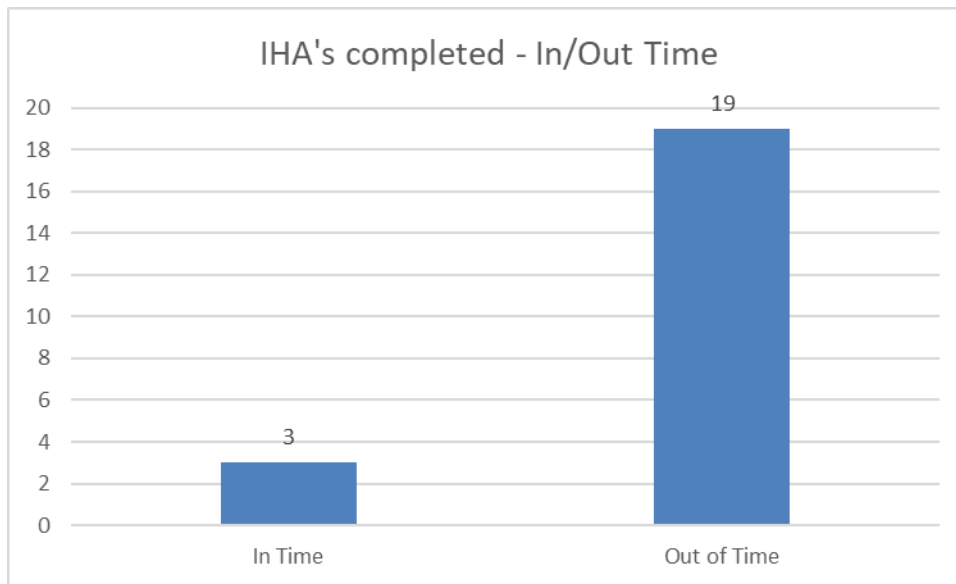
3.9 Most children are referred for their Initial Health assessment within the 5 working day referral window. Referrals are tracked weekly to ensure children receive an IHA even when this occurs out of timescales.

3.10 Timeliness of IHAs remain a key area of focus with weekly oversight from Senior Managers in Health and Children's Social Care. 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 working days.
- An initial health assessment takes place within 20 working days of a child entering into care.

3.11 In the first quarter of 22/23 for those **22** children who received IHA, referrals to health were largely made within timescales. Pressures continue in IHA in completion of IHA's within 20 working days from referral, as follows:





- 3.12 The timeliness for children placed outside of the local health area remains a challenge and where possible, children are brought back to our local health service for their IHA to avoid delay.
- 3.13 Once the referral is completed and accepted by health, an appointment is arranged, a report written by the Paediatrician and, finally, sent to Children's Social Care. The date the IHA assessment is physically completed is the date recorded for this measure. However, in order for this to be formally recorded as complete the report needs to be received by the local authority.
- 3.14 Initial Health Assessments remain a priority focus area for improvement for both Children's Social Care and Health partners. Progress continues to be reviewed weekly. The following are routes to improve performance:
- Service Manager oversight and managing weekly review meetings to ensure referrals are completed on time identify any barriers or themes to ensure they are addressed.
 - The local Health provider (NELFT) has increased the resources to create more appointments for IHA's to provide improved capacity for children placed in the local area.
 - Prioritising of IHA appointments with social workers leading on and ensuring children attend appointments and that carers understand that this is a priority to ensure children's health needs are met.
 - Health Colleagues are reviewing the escalation pathway so there is quicker resolution where children are placed in other areas.
 - The Multi-Agency CLA Steering Group continues to track performance monthly to escalate strategic issues.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

4.1 Members of the Committee are aware of Statutory Duty to complete Initial Assessments for all children and young people who come into care and how we are meeting these duties.

4.2 Members of the Committee are aware of the issues and steps being taken to improve these.

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

5.1 Consultation with NELFT in preparing this report.

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

6.1 None

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

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

There are no financial implications to this report

7.2 Legal

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

The Council has general duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of any child that it looks after under Section 22(3) of the Children Act 1989 and it must have regard to the Corporate Parenting Principles in Section 1(1) of the Children and Social Work Act 2017.

The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010 set out the detailed legal requirements in caring for Looked after Children. The timescales for health are set in regulation 7 which provides for the Council to make arrangements for the health assessment by the child's first review, and for a written report of the health assessment to be provided as soon as soon as reasonably practicable.

7.3 Diversity and Equality

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

The Service is committed to practice, which promotes **equality, diversity and inclusion**, and will carry out its duties in accordance with the Equality Act 2010, **Public Sector Equality Duty** and related Codes of Practice and Anti-discriminatory policy. The service recognises that a range of communities and groups of people may have experienced obstruction or the impact of prejudice when accessing services including Social Care and Health services. Both Services are committed to support all children in the care of Thurrock Council to access Initial Health assessments, individual arrangements are made where required to meet needs and address individual concerns.

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

- None

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

- None

9. Appendices to the report

- None

Report Author:

Dan Jones
Strategic Lead - Children Looked After
Children's Services

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6 September 2022	ITEM: 9
Corporate Parenting Committee	
Joint Housing Protocol for Care Leavers	
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Non-Key
Report of: Ben Tovey – Strategic Lead, Housing Solutions Dan Jones – Strategic Lead, CLA	
Accountable Assistant Director: Janet Simon – Assistant Director Children’s Social Care and Early Help	
Accountable Director: Sheila Murphy – Corporate Director of Children’s Services	
This report is Public	

Executive Summary

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

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

1. Recommendation(s)

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

2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1 Local Authorities have a responsibility for developing and effectively delivering a joint protocol setting out how the authority will deliver the local accommodation offered to Care Leavers and prevent homelessness.**

- 2.2 The Homelessness code of guidance was revised in 2018 to reflect changes introduced by the HRA. Chapter 22 of the Code focusses specifically on Care Leavers. The Code outlines the importance of joint working when planning housing options for Care Leavers and states that:

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

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

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

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

- 3.1 The Joint Housing Protocol has been in place since 2019. It has assisted in making responsibilities clear. Joint meetings between housing and after-care teams at an operational and strategic level are held so that there is regular oversight of the young people's progress to being allocated a Council property.
- 3.2 The allocations policy which dictates how social housing stock is allocated to those on the housing register, recognises that care leavers should be awarded a priority banding to secure independent accommodation by way of awarding a priority band 3. In recent years the Allocations team have gone further to offer support to those leaving care.

Care Leaver applications are fast tracked and so assessed within 2 working days. The team will support the care leaver and PA with documentation that is required and keep the PA updated at every stage. The team understand that some care leavers are unable to use the online bidding system, so we offer assisted bidding to ensure the care leaver does not miss out on any suitable properties and in some instances direct offers of accommodation have been made.

The housing service has also been supporting the After Care Team by providing monthly reports of care leavers housed and care leavers with a priority band 3 as well as having an active presence in the Readiness for Tenancy Panel and Care Leavers & Housing Joint Forum. These meetings have been invaluable for identifying individuals who require additional support as well as highlighting any hold ups in the process to make it smoother for everyone involved.

As a result of these interventions 36 care leavers have been rehoused into Thurrock social housing since 2021 with a mix of assisted and independent bidding and direct offers where circumstances dictated it. Currently there are 28 care leavers who are active on the housing register and have awarded a priority band 3. Out of those 28, 5 are under offer for a property, and are waiting for the void works to be completed.

3.3 Prior to being offered a Thurrock Council Property, young people must demonstrate a readiness for tenancy. They must also make the proper application via Thurrock's Housing system and in the vast majority of cases bid for a property. Currently care leavers are unable to make an application for housing prior to their 18th Birthday but they are encouraged to prepare the relevant evidence to support applications in advance of this date. Those who have just turned 18 are supported in other arrangements until they are able to find permanent housing, such as:

- Remaining with their Foster Carer under a 'Staying Put' Arrangement
- Living in semi-supported accommodation
- Living in 'Head-Start Housing'
- Choosing to live within their own family
- Attending university
- Supported by Adult Services in a CQC registered home or Shared Lives arrangements (for young adults with significant additional needs)

Young people leaving care can stay in these arrangements for varying period. The ultimate goal is to move on to a permanent arrangement.

3.4 Young people leaving care are prepared for leaving care at age 18 years. Transitions planning starts at age 16 years, this includes identifying plans for housing post 18 and developing the independence skills to do so. Housing Colleagues and Children's Services are delivering new and additional training to looked after young people aged 16 and over. The Tenancy Management Team and Rents & Welfare Team have provided fact sheets with a workshop set up for care leavers to attend to talk about the initial stages of commencing a tenancy and tenancy sustainment. These workshops will continue quarterly with the first being held in early September, Housing Solutions Team will offer training to better enable them to access the choice-based lettings system.

3.5 Young people leaving care whose immigration status is uncertain, may not be able to apply for a Thurrock Council Property. These matters lie with the Home Office and can take some time to resolve. Thurrock Council Children's Services have access to a limited number of Council owned properties that can be used in emergency circumstances. We are developing a 'licensee' arrangement so the young people can live in these properties, jointly supported by both services until their status is resolved. This is similar to the 'Head-Start' programme. It has the benefit of being a longer-term option and will reduce Thurrock's reliance on the private sector.

- 3.6 Thurrock Council has continuing responsibility to young people leaving care up to the age of 25. There are a number of young adults already living in secured tenancies with Thurrock Council. Housing Colleagues have developed a pre- eviction process and identify young adults who are care leavers so that they can be jointly supported to avoid eviction. This process is being developed further to ensure that any potential issues which could impact adversely on a care leaver's tenancy are identified as early as possible into the tenancy in order to avoid, for example any unnecessary rent arrears building up.
- 3.7 The Thurrock Housing Allocations Policy is subject to review and a consultation has been undertaken with Children's Social Care. The recommendations from Children's Social Care are:
- The process of applying for housing should be accessible prior to the age of 18 for looked after children so they can progress as required.
 - The 'direct offer' should be reviewed to offer greater flexibility to young people who will struggle to manage the application and bidding process.
 - The policy should be 'Trauma Informed'.
- 3.8 The Joint Housing Protocol is due for review and will be reviewed alongside the Housing Allocations Policy.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

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

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

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

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

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

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

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

There are no financial implications to this report.

7.2 Legal

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

Deirdre Collins
Prosecution Barrister

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

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

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

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

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

The legal implications have also been reviewed from a housing perspective and there are no further implications to be added than those already stated.

7.3 Diversity and Equality

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

The Service is committed to practice, which promotes **equality, diversity and inclusion**, and will carry out its duties in accordance with the Equality Act 2010, **Public Sector Equality Duty** and related Codes of Practice and Anti-discriminatory policy. The service recognises that a range of communities and

groups of people may have experienced obstruction or the impact of prejudice when accessing services including Social Care and Housing services. Both Services are committed to support all children in the care of Thurrock Council to access housing.

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

None

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

- None

9. **Appendices to the report**

- None

Report Author:

Ben Tovey – Strategic Lead, Housing Solutions

Dan Jones – Strategic Lead, CLA

6 September 2022	ITEM: 11
Corporate Parenting Committee	
Corporate Parenting Committee Annual Report 2021/2022	
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Non-Key
Report of: Kenna-Victoria Healey, Senior Democratic Services Officer	
Accountable Assistant Director: Janet Simon, Assistant Director of Children's Social Care and Early Help	
Accountable Director: Shelia Murphy, Corporate Director for Children's Services	
This report is public	

Executive Summary

This report introduces the Corporate Parenting Annual Report, which was requested by the Leader following a Member Training session in July 2019.

1. Recommendation(s)

- 1.1 **That the contents of the Corporate Parenting Annual Report 2021/2022 be noted.**
- 1.2 **That the Corporate Parenting Annual Report be referred to Full Council, to share the work of Committee and their main achievements for 2021/2022 municipal year.**

2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1 Each year Members are invited to a variety of training sessions, to assist them with their roles sitting on Committees. Following the Corporate Parenting Training held Wednesday 17 July 2019, it was requested that an Annual Report be produced detailing the work of Committee and their main achievements for that municipal year. The report is designed to inform residents of this work in an accessible and engaging format.
- 2.2 The last municipal year has seen the Corporate Parenting Committee tackle a wide range of topics, with Members leading on issues that have come to the fore both through their own research but also by understanding the issues that have arisen in the community.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

- 3.1 It is hoped that the format of the Annual Report will highlight to residents how the Corporate Parenting Committee have picked relevant community issues and how Members undertook work to form recommendations that positively affected these issues.
- 3.2 The report will be published on the Council's website and key community groups and participants from last year's work will be made aware of its publication directly.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1 The report outlines the positive work that has been undertaken during 2020/2021 and will be referred to Council for review in order for Members to comment on the overall work of the Corporate Parenting Committee.

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

- 5.1 The Chair of the Corporate Parenting Committee has been consulted on the contents of the report.

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

- 6.1 The positive impact of the work of the Corporate Parenting committee for 2020/2021, in driving forward issues in relation to looked after children and care leavers to ensure Members are fully involved and engaged in their Corporate Parenting responsibilities.

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

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

There are no direct financial implications arising out of this report.

7.2 Legal

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

The Children and Social Work Act 2017 introduced the corporate parenting principles and this are subject to statutory guidance
<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/>

attachment_data/file/683698/Applying_corporate_parenting_principles_to_looked-after_children_and_care_leavers.pdf

The report provides assurance that the Council is fulfilling its statutory duties.

7.3 **Diversity and Equality**

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

The Corporate Parenting Committee recognises the role and importance of diversity and equality and adheres to the Equality Act 2010 and related requirements. All work in 2021/2022 sought to include looked after children and care leavers as appropriate.

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

None.

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

- Agenda, Reports and Minutes of meetings of the Corporate Parenting Committee are available from:

<http://democracy.thurrock.gov.uk/thurrock/>

9. **Appendices to the report**

- Appendix 1: Corporate Parenting Annual Report 2021/2022

Report Author:

Kenna-Victoria Healey

Senior Democratic Services Officer

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Corporate Parenting

Annual Report

2021-2022

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What is Corporate Parenting?

Corporate Parenting describes the collective responsibility of the local authority to provide the best possible care and protection for children and young people who are Looked After. Effective corporate parenting requires a commitment from all Council employees and Elected Members. This responsibility was first set out in the Children Act 1989. Councillors have a lead role in ensuring that their Council acts as an effective Corporate Parent for every child in care by actively seeking high quality outcomes that every good parent would want for their child. Councillors need to aspire for looked after children in the same way that you would for your own children.

The role of the Corporate Parent is demanding. It requires energy, attention to detail and a willingness to engage with looked after children and care leavers in order to improve the services they use and their future outcomes. It is challenging to form a listening and learning relationship with vulnerable children but this is what we instinctively do for our own children and what we must consciously do for children entrusted to our care. As Officers of Thurrock Council we welcome scrutiny and challenge from Elected Members. By holding us to account we will continue to improve services and outcomes for looked after children and care leavers.

Every Member should:

Every Elected Member and manager within the Council, in conjunction with members of governing bodies of partner agencies, needs to:

- Be aware of their 'Corporate Parenting' role
- Have some knowledge of the profile and needs of looked after children and young people and care leavers
- Understand the impact on looked after children and young people of all Council decisions
- Receive information about quality of care and services children and young people are experiencing and consider if this would be 'good enough' for their own child
- Ensure that action is being taken to address any shortcomings in services and support for looked after children and young people and strive to continually improve outcomes

Key to improving the outcomes for looked after children

- It is with the Corporate Parent that responsibility and accountability for the wellbeing and future prospects of looked after children ultimately rest
- A good Corporate Parent must offer everything that a good parent would including stability
- It must address both the difficulties, which looked after children experience, and the challenges of parenting within a complex system of different services
- Equally, it is important that children have a chance to shape and influence the parenting they receive

What makes Corporate Parenting effective?

An effective Corporate Parent makes sure that looked after children and young people and care leavers have good care, nurture, health and well-being and life chances as they would expect and want for their own child. The Corporate Parent must act as a responsible parent. We believe that good, responsible parenting involves, but is not limited to:

- Making sure that children and young people have a strong sense of belonging
- Ensuring that they are cared about as well as cared for
- Supporting children and young people through school, college or work, being ambitious for them and helping them develop a sense of aspiration and belief
- Making sure children and young people are healthy and health-aware
- Making sure children and young people are actively listened to, respected and valued
- Encouraging them to develop and participate as citizens
- Encouraging them to form and sustain a range of healthy relationships
- Supporting them to manage their feelings and behaviours

In Local Authorities where services were effective, Ofsted found articulation of the leadership, ambition and objectives for looked after children.

In these authorities, they found that the Corporate Parenting Board/Panel:

- Demonstrated a strong cross-party commitment to looked after children, championing their rights.
- Had high aspirations for their Children Looked After and monitored their progress

- Planned for and prioritised the needs of Children Looked After, resulting in a greater focus on improving outcomes
- Actively engaged with their young people

Membership

The membership of Thurrock's Corporate Parenting Committee is made up of eight Councillors drawn from all the political parties of the Council. It also includes the Co-Opted members appointed by Council:

- A nominated representative from Open Door
- Chair and/or Vice-Chair of the Children in Care Council
- Chair of the Foster Carers Association
- Vice-Chair of the Foster Carers Association

Corporate Parenting Committee

It has been a pleasure to Vice-Chair the Corporate Parenting Committee in what has been another busy and inspiring year. The Committee started the year with an update on Corporate Parenting Fostering Recruitment Strategy, which outlined the work carried out on the Fostering Recruitment Strategy. The Fostering Service had, in conjunction with the Communication Service, refreshed the Thurrock Fostering Brand; with a launch of the new brand and the marketing strategy being updated. Members learnt the changes and events which were planned to create increased opportunities for the recruitment of foster carers.

In September, the Committee acknowledged a report on the Adoption and Fostering Statements of Purpose. During discussions it was explained,

The key priorities of the strategy included:

- Children remaining cared for within their family where it was safe to do so
- Young people staying within the foster placement until they are ready to leave and feel that they are prepared to live independently
- To involve children and young people in decisions that affect their lives and maximise the opportunity for them to make their own choice

The new year brought a report from the Children in Care Council which was presented by the Chair of the Children in Care Council (CICC) and their representative from Thurrock Open Door. We learnt that over the last 12 months due to the pandemic, the Children in Care Council (CICC) had taken the support of its members online as they were unable to meet with the young people they supported.

It was interesting to hear that once restrictions had been lifted members of the CICC were looking forward being able to meet face to face, as this was not only an important part of socialising but also assisted with recruitment within the group, as most of this was by word of mouth. The Thurrock Open Door representative explained that with meetings now being able to be held in person and therefore face to face, it was easier, to have interactive meetings which were more child lead which is what the CICC was all about. The Committee agreed it was important that young people were given the opportunity to speak and give their views and the CICC gave them the opportunity to promote their voices.

Following on from last year the Committee was kept informed as to Initial Health Assessments (IHA) the average percentage of referrals made by social care to health colleagues within 5 days between April – December 2020 was 83.8% with 58% completed in time, to ensure good performance is achieved working relationships between Thurrock Social Care and Health Providers is key. This is something the Committee is keen to keep an eye on to ensure that improvement is made over the next year.

Members acknowledged and thanked Officers for the presentation from the Independent Reviewing Officer on Children Looked After Reviews, it was pleasing to hear that Officers were engaging with young people to make the reviews more child

friendly and easier for them to understand. Following the Annual Report of the Independent Reviewing Officer which was presented in order to meet the statutory requirement. We discussed the timeliness of reviews and how they were being completed on time recording over 90% completed within timescales.

Throughout the year, Members requested a number of reports on a range of topics, such as:

- National Care Leaver Advisors Visit
- The Annual Report of the Virtual School Headteacher for Children Looked After - Academic Year 2020-2021
- Children's Social Care Performance
- Independent Visitor Service for Looked After Children
- Update on the Youth Offending Service, Youth Justice Plan and the role of the Service for Children Looked After

Finally, there had been a strong focus on the support given to our young people and the foster families who look after them. It is important that we remember the unique role they have to play not only throughout the pandemic but on a day to day basis. My thanks goes to all of Thurrock's Foster Carers for their continued support and for opening their homes to the borough's children who needed it most.

Thank you to Officers, Democratic Services and the outside organisations who sit on the committee for all their hard work and to fellow Councillors on the Committee.



Councillor Jennifer Smith

Vice-Chair of the Corporate Parenting Committee 2021/20/22

Looking Forward...2022/2023

Corporate Parenting Committee Members are dedicated to being Corporate Parents and are looking forward to working with Officers and the outside organisations who sit on the committee on new and updated reports in 2022/2023. Some of the topics to be explored are:

- Initial Health Assessments of Looked After Children
- Fostering & Adoption Reports
- Thurrock Fostering Service: Recruitment Strategy
- Children in Care Council Update
- Sufficiency Placement
- Annual Report of the Virtual Schools

Work Programme

Committee: Corporate Parenting

Year: 2022/2023

Dates of Meetings: 19 July 2021, 6 September 2021, 4 January 2022 and 21 March 2022

Topic	Lead Officer	Requested by Officer/Member
19 July 2022		
Childrens Social Care Performance 2021-22	Mandy Moore	Officers
Children Looked After and Care Leaver Sufficiency Strategy Update	Catherine Wilson/Dan Jones	Officers
Corporate Parenting Strategy	Janet Simon	Officers
Report on Initial Health Assessments for Looked After Children	Dan Jones	Officers
Inspire - Head Start Housing: Supporting Care Leavers	Kate Kozlova-Boran	Officers
Work Programme	Democratic Services Officer	Standard Item
6 September 2022		
Children's Social Care Performance 2022-23	Mandy Moore	Officers
Adoption Statement of Purpose	Dan Jones	Officers
After Care Service Report	Luke Froment	Officers
Joint Housing Protocol for Care Leavers	Dan Jones /Ben Tovey	Officers

Children in Care Council Update	Open Door	Officers
Performance Report on Initial Health Assessments for Looked After Children	Dan Jones	Members
Corporate Parenting Committee Annual Report 2021/2022	Democratic Services	Members
Work Programme	Democratic Services Officer	Standard Item
4 January 2023		
Children's Social Care Performance	Mandy Moore	Officers
Independent Reviewing Officer – Annual Report	Ruth Murdock	Officers
CLA Health Report	Health Colleagues	Officers
Annual Report of the Virtual Schools	Keeley Pullen	Officers
Work Programme	Democratic Services Officer	Standard Item
21 March 2023		
Children's Social Care Performance	Mandy Moore	Officers
Children in Care Council Update	Chair Children in Care Council & Thurrock Open Door	Officers
Work Programme	Democratic Services Officer	Standard Item