

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

# Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The meeting will be held at **7.00 pm** on **16 June 2022**

**Committee Room 2, CO3, Civic Offices, New Road, Grays, RM17 6SL**

## Membership:

Councillors Adam Carter (Chair), George Coxshall (Vice-Chair), Alex Anderson, Martin Kerin, Srikanth Panjala and Graham Snell

Sarah Barlow, Church of England Representative  
Kim James, Chief Operating Officer, HealthWatch Thurrock  
Nicola Cranch, Parent Governor Representative

## Substitutes:

Councillors John Kent, Augustine Ononaji, Maureen Pearce, James Thandi and Lynn Worrall

## Agenda

Open to Public and Press

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<b>1 Apologies for Absence</b>	
<b>2 Minutes</b>	<b>5 - 20</b>
To approve as a correct record the minutes of Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 8 February 2022.	
<b>3 Items of Urgent Business</b>	
To receive additional items that the Chair is of the opinion should be considered as a matter of urgency, in accordance with Section 100B (4) (b) of the Local Government Act 1972. To agree any relevant briefing notes submitted to the Committee.	
<b>4 Declaration of Interests</b>	

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

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

Agenda published on: **8 June 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 Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 8 February 2022 at 7.00 pm

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**Present:** Councillors Sara Muldowney (Chair), Graham Snell (Vice-Chair), Abbie Akinbohun (*arrived 7.04pm*), Alex Anderson, John Kent (substitute) and James Thandi

Councillors Fraser Massey and Sue Sammons

Sarah Barlow, Church of England Representative  
Nicola Cranch, Parent Governor Representative

**Apologies:** Councillor Lee Watson  
Sally Khawaja, Parent Governor Representative

**In attendance:** Lucy Boatman, Youth Support Worker  
Lauren, Youth Cabinet Representative  
Tiffany Bright, Inspire – Skills Manager  
Priscilla Bruce-Annan, Local Safeguarding Children Partnership (LSCP) Business Manager  
Jenny Coles, Independent Chairperson & Scrutineer Thurrock LSCP  
Kate Kozlova-Boran, Strategic Lead – Employability and Skills  
Michele Lucas, Assistant Director Education and Skills  
Sheila Murphy, Corporate Director Children's Services  
Sarah Williams, Strategic Lead – Education Support Service  
Lucy Tricker, Senior Democratic Services Officer

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

The Chair stated that there was a time limit for the use of the Beehive venue, which was 9.30pm. She explained that if items on the agenda were not concluded by 9.30pm, the meeting would be adjourned and would recommence at the first meeting of next municipal year.

### **42. Minutes**

There minutes of the meeting held on 11 November 2021 and 1 December 2021 were approved as a true and correct record.

### **43. Items of Urgent Business**

There were no items of urgent business. The briefing note submitted to the Committee regarding the work of Inspire was agreed.

### **44. Declaration of Interests**

There were no declarations of interest.

*Councillor Akinbohun arrived at 7.04pm.*

#### **45. Youth Cabinet Update**

The Youth Cabinet Representative provided their update and explained that they were working on the 'Make Your Mark' challenge, which helped young people with mental health difficulties around Thurrock. She explained that Youth Cabinet were also working with the Education and Wellbeing in Schools Service to develop a questionnaire regarding young people's mental health to ensure the campaigns would be the most effective. She stated that they were also working with Essex Police on the 'Speak Out, Speak Up, Speak Big' campaign to produce a video regarding crime that would be posted on social media as the Youth Cabinet had found that current Essex Police videos aimed at young people had not been engaging. She added that Youth Cabinet were also going into schools to debate and educate young people on hate crime, and were producing a leaflet in partnership with the Hate Crime Officer, which was aimed at 9-13 year olds and would explain hate crime and how to report it.

The Assistant Director Education and Skills questioned how the work of Youth Cabinet and Essex Police could link with schools. The Youth Cabinet Representative explained that Youth Cabinet were engaging in the 'Make your Mark' campaign by promoting the work of Essex Police in schools and making posters. The Chair asked how Youth Cabinet were working to improve engagement between schools and the 'Make your Mark' campaign. The Youth Cabinet Representative replied that the 'Make your Mark' campaign would be promoted on social media and would be discussed within schools. The Chair thanked Youth Cabinet for their hard work throughout the year, and for their continued attendance at Children's O&S Committees.

*The Youth Cabinet Representative and Youth Support Worker left the meeting at 7.09pm.*

#### **46. Items Raised by Thurrock Local Safeguarding Children Partnership: Progress Update on Peer Review & Case Review - Action Plans**

The LSCP Business Manager introduced the report and stated that it provided an update on the work of the LSCP and the progress that had been made on action plans. She stated that the Partnership were currently working on updating the service's priorities. She commented that the current priorities included neglect, participation and engagement, and violence and vulnerability. She explained that this work included consulting with frontline practitioners regarding their emerging concerns, and she hoped the new priorities would be agreed by the end of March 2022. She explained that a roundtable meeting had been held in December 2021 regarding the new priorities, and a frontline practitioner questionnaire had been circulated, which



would close on Friday 18 February. She explained that once the feedback had been analysed, the Partnership would then choose the new priorities based on this and other factors, and would work with the Health and Wellbeing Board and Community Safety Partnership to ensure the new priorities would support their ongoing work. She stated that identified priorities for 2022-24 would need to be processed via the LSCP governance processes, but that the Partnership had been working with the Safeguarding Adults Board, the Health and Wellbeing Board, and the Community Safety Partnership to devise and agree a shared priorities document. She explained that the document would be dynamic so that it could be updated as boards and partnerships updated their priorities.

The LSCP Business Manager added that in October 2021 a Children's Social Care conference entitled 'Building Better Connections' had taken place, during which 140 people, including frontline practitioners and Councillors, had discussed the emerging theme of extra-familial harm. She added that the Partnership were also undertaking audits as per their annual audit schedule during which deep dives were conducted into randomly selected cases to ensure the Partnership was performing well, highlighting areas of good practice, and identifying areas that needed additional work. She explained that if certain areas were identified as needing additional work, a re-audit may be undertaken later on in the year to closely monitor the Partnerships progress. She added that the LSCP Business team were collating the Safeguarding in Education audits. She commented that a report was currently being written and any learning would be shared directly with schools and via learning and development events.

The LSCP Business Manager moved on and stated that the LSCP also commissioned a detailed Thematic Review of Serious Youth Violence and Gang Related Violence, which was a result of an incident between two young people. She explained that the LSCP worked with an external reviewer to see what areas had worked well and what lessons could be learnt. She stated that the report regarding this thematic review would be published at the end of February or early March, and multi-agency meetings would be called to discuss the recommendations from this review. She added that the LSCP had also formed a Neglect Sub-Group, which was a multi-agency partnership group to reduce neglect in Thurrock and ensure that a framework was in place to meet this aim. She commented that due to the detailed work of the group, this priority and Sub-Group might be rolled over into the next municipal year.

The LSCP Business Manager stated that the report included RAG rated appendices outlining the work undertaken on case reviews. She explained that the Sam and Kyle Case Review had identified eighteen actions, sixteen of which were now green or blue, and two of which were amber. She stated that the two amber recommendations were currently progressing and the recommended reflective practice sessions had been developed and would run in February, April and June 2022. She stated that these sessions would bring multi-agency practitioners together to discuss complex cases. She moved on and explained that the Frankie Case Review from 2020 had recommended fourteen actions, all of which were green or blue, barring one which was

amber. She stated that the team were working on the amber recommendation which related to children whose parents had received custodial sentences, and the team were currently looking at best practice and how they could do things differently. She stated that the Peer Review was now complete and the Leo Case Review published in February 2021 had eleven completed recommendations and three amber recommendations, which still had ongoing work. She stated that one amber recommendation from this Case Review was to ensure that the Think Families approach was being followed, and Thurrock's LSCP were working with Essex County Council and Southend Borough Council to ensure it was embedded throughout the county. She added that all three authorities had been working together to produce a podcast and additional resources for frontline practitioners, which was available on the LSCP website. She mentioned that Southend, Essex and Thurrock Councils would also be holding a Think Family Summit in the Spring/Summer 2022, and survey with schools was being undertaken in relation to recommendation 1.2 to find out what information they receive. The LSCP Business Manager summarised and stated that the Shae and Ashley Case Review was currently being signed-off through the LSCP governance processes.

The Independent Chairperson and Scrutineer Thurrock LSCP stated that the action plans would be embedded and supported in schools through the ongoing thematic reviews. She added that multi-agency partners would also be looking at all of the relevant records from Serious Case Reviews to ensure a strong framework was implemented. The Chair thanked officers for their report and felt that it had been easy to see the information and had been easy to scrutinise. She queried the timeframe for recommendations from Case Reviews to be implemented. The LSCP Business Manager replied that the development of the recommendations could take time due to data collection, but this differed on a case by case basis. She added that a rapid review was completed immediately after the incident, but the standard turnaround time for a full Case Review was approximately one year. The Corporate Director Children's Services added that the turnaround time for Case Reviews could be delayed due to external processes, for example coroner's investigations and police enquiries, as these had to finish before LSCP Case Reviews could be published. The Independent Chairperson and Scrutineer Thurrock LSCP added that actions would be adopted as soon as possible following an incident, and although it might take time for the final report to be published, recommendations may have been put into place and embedded before publication. The Chair thanked officers for this clarification and asked that all Serious Case Reviews come before the Committee, as it was a standing item on the agenda.

Councillor Anderson felt pleased to see that frontline workers would be included as part of the consultation regarding identifying LSCP priorities for 2022-24, and asked what the target participation levels would be. The LSCP Business Manager replied that the team usually aimed for approximately 50% frontline worker participation.

**RESOLVED: That the Committee:**

**1. Noted the update on the work of the LSCP and the progress made on Action Plans to date.**

*The LSCP Business Manager, and Independent Chairperson and Scrutineer Thurrock LSCP left the meeting at 7.31pm.*

**47. Verbal Update: Written Statement of Action - Outcome of Re-Visit**

The Assistant Director Education and Skills introduced the report and stated that it outlined the recent Ofsted revisit report that would be published on Thursday. She explained that Ofsted had felt that Thurrock had made sufficient progress on all areas since the inspection in 2019, and although there was some further work to be completed, she and the team felt pleased with the report. She explained that she had uploaded all of the relevant Children's O&S reports and appendices to Ofsted, and the Ofsted inspector had reported that these had been useful and had been pleased that O&S had shown a keen interest in the progress of the recommendations. She felt that lots of hard work had gone into the re-visit and many partners had been included. She stated that the team worked hard to ensure the child was always at the centre of the service and the team made a difference in children's lives. The Corporate Director Children's Services added that she had felt it had been a fair report and good things had been achieved by the team. She felt that there were some areas to improve, but lots of hard work had been undertaken so far.

The Chair felt pleased to see that Thurrock had made sufficient progress on all recommendations and that the Committee had been helpful in ensuring this had happened. She thanked officers for their hard work over the past few years and congratulated them on their achievement. Councillor Snell echoed the Chair's comments and thanked the team for their excellent work.

**48. Home to School Transport**

The Strategic Lead Education Support Service introduced the report and stated that it provided an overview of home to school transport. She explained that Thurrock Council had a statutory duty to ensure children between the ages of 5 and 16, and in some cases young people up to age 25 with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), could get to school. She stated that currently Thurrock Council assisted 1161 pupils get to school, either through contracted bus routes, train ticket reimbursement, or payments to parents for fuel. She stated that the Council were committed to ensuring sustainable home to school travel for children, and the team were currently undertaking a review of school routes, including those that had previously been deemed unsafe.

The Strategic Lead Education Support Service explained that the team were considering introducing travel training for young people in education that had complex SEND needs. She felt that this would help some young people with

SEND become more independent as they would have someone accompanying them on their route to and from school for a minimum of three months, with a view to them completing an assessment and becoming able to travel on their own. She stated that for those children with highly complex needs, for example children attending Beacon Hill Academy, all passenger transport would be retained. She added that the team were also introducing a new IT module that would help support transport providers and contracted route drivers.

The Strategic Lead Education Support Service moved on and explained that although the team were considering all routes to school, no decision had been taken yet, in particular no decision regarding the route from East Tilbury to St Cleres. She explained that the team regularly reviewed and investigated routes to schools and would continue to consider potential alternative options for travel, for example pupils utilising the train service. She stated that no conclusions or decisions had been agreed, but legal advice was being sought to determine which routes had the potential to be made safe. She stated that the team would be talking to parents, Councillors and the school before any decision was made. She explained that currently six buses took children from East Tilbury to St Cleres, and the team would be looking at all safety and capacity aspects, and had undertaken a professional risk assessment. She explained that the eligibility criteria for free home to school transport would remain the same and therefore any child with a low income family, or who lived more than three miles away from their school, would be eligible to apply for free travel.

The Strategic Lead Education Support Service explained that for some post-16 students who would not be able to utilise contracted travel anymore, the travel training programme would be offered, which would help improve their independence. She added that the team were currently working with year 11 students regarding travel training, but this would be lowered so year 9 students would also be able to access the programme. She added that the team were also focussing on sustainable travel, for example pupils utilising bus and train services, which would reduce carbon emissions. She added that the team were also considering introducing personal travel budgets which would be given directly to parents and would allow parents to choose the most suitable transport for their child and would give parents more freedom. She stated that the personal travel budgets would be given directly to parents before the start of term, which would ensure that no parent would be in financial difficulty waiting for reimbursements. She stated that this work would be completed in four to six weeks, and would be ready for introduction by September 2022.

The Strategic Lead Education Support Service added that the team were also recruiting a behaviour support specialist who would support children who had behavioural issues and needed support travelling to and from school. She stated that the specialist would travel with them to school and ensure that their journey was comfortable and not stressful. She summarised and stated that a travel survey had been given to St Cleres in December 2021 to provide an insight into pupils and parents travel patterns and safety, and emphasised

that as there would be no change in policy, the Council did not need to undertake a more formal consultation.

The Chair opened the debate and stated that there were some good proposals contained within the report, such as the travel training programme, but felt concerned regarding other proposals. She questioned the overspend of the home to school transport budget. The Corporate Director Children's Services replied that the service was overspent by approximately £800,000 and the proposal to remove school buses from East Tilbury to St Cleres would save approximately £200,000. She stated that the decision to consider all available routes was to ensure that children travelled to school in the best way, and that currently no routes were being stopped. She added that the team had to be mindful of budget pressures, but the overspend would not be solely saved through travel training or the removal of contracted bus services. She stated that the team would support SEND children to travel differently.

Councillor Kent queried the total budget of the home to school transport team. The Corporate Director Children's Services replied that the approximate budget was in excess of £1million. Councillor Kent felt that £800,000 was a large overspend and queried if a £150,000 savings projection had already been agreed for next years' budget. He also queried what specific COP26 sustainability goals would be met through the home to school transport proposals. He asked how many tonnes of carbon emissions would be saved through the planned removal of the school buses. He felt that a baseline level of carbon emissions data needed to be collected before the team could decide if the removal of the school buses would be environmentally beneficial. The Strategic Lead Education Support Service replied that the team were currently looking into sustainable travel and overall COP26 goals, but that sustainable travel had been an important part of the summit. She stated that the team could look into the baseline air quality figures to determine the impact of the school buses. Councillor Kent moved on and asked if a mode of transport could be deemed as a safe route to school, rather than a physical route. He questioned if the current school bus from East Tilbury to St Cleres had been deemed unsafe. The Strategic Lead Education Support Service stated that a mode of transport, for example buses or trains, could be deemed as a safe route to school. She added that the current contracted bus route had been deemed to be a safe route to school, but other forms of transport such as the walking route, were in the process of being determined safe or unsafe. She added that currently 376 pupils utilised the current bus service between East Tilbury and St Cleres. Councillor Kent asked if children eligible for free transport would be reassessed after the introduction of the new personal transport budget. The Strategic Lead Education and Support Service responded that parents had to reapply for home to school transport on a yearly basis, but applicants would be offered a personal transport budget if appropriate. She emphasised that the same eligibility criteria for free home to school transport would remain. Councillor Kent felt that the travel training programme was a good idea, but questioned why nineteen children had been identified as eligible, eleven had started the programme and only one child had successfully completed it. The Strategic Lead Education Support Service replied that some children could take longer to complete the programme and

the three children listed in the report were still in the process of completing their training. She stated that it could take up to six months for some children to become fully confident travelling independently. Councillor Kent asked if the results from the survey with St Cleres could be shared with the Committee. The Strategic Lead Education and Support Service replied that she would share the results to the Committee, but stated that the main outcomes had been that children did not know their options for safe travel to school. She highlighted that the response rate had been low, and it had mostly been completed by parents rather than children.

Councillor Anderson queried what the benchmark was for eligibility for free travel. The Strategic Lead Education Support Service replied that any parent on income support or whose child attended a school more than three miles away could apply for free home to school transport. Councillor Sammons stated that the majority of children who utilised the bus service from East Tilbury to St Cleres lived more than three miles from the school, so would remain eligible for free transport. She felt that therefore the bus service would need to continue running to ensure children eligible for free transport could get to school. She felt that by removing the contracted buses, emissions would increase as parents would be more likely to drive their children to school, which could equate to an additional three hundred cars on the road. She felt that it would also increase safety concerns near St Cleres as parents would struggle to park. She added that the platform at East Tilbury train station was small, and was often full with children travelling to or from other schools or commuters, and an additional 300 students would increase safety concerns on the platform. The Strategic Lead Education Support Service replied that the team were considering all routes and all options, and were thinking about all potential alternatives.

Councillor Snell echoed comments from Councillor Sammons and felt that the proposed removal of the bus service would increase the number of parents driving their children to school. He asked if the team had considered keeping the bus service but asking children ineligible for free transport to pay. The Strategic Lead Education Support Service replied that every option was being considered and the team would communicate any decisions or proposed decisions to the Committee. Councillor Massey stated that as Ward Councillor for East Tilbury he had concerns regarding the removal of the bus service. He confirmed that no officers had walked the route between East Tilbury and St Cleres and felt that the route in its current state could not be declared safe. He asked if the legal advice being sought from the team was from the Council's internal lawyers or an external law group. The Strategic Lead Education Support Service replied that the team were consulting with the Council's internal legal team and external counsel. Councillor Massey highlighted the government requirements for a safe walking route, and stated that a route needed to have a kerb to be declared safe, and the route between East Tilbury and St Cleres did not have a kerb. The Chair sought clarification that there was only one road from East Tilbury to St Cleres and this road would need to be declared as a safe walking route before the bus service could be cancelled, and the Strategic Lead Education Support Service agreed that this was the case. She added that the decision for a walking route to be

declared safe had to be based in law and the team would look at all options before a decision was made.

The Parent Governor Representative added that by removing contracted transport, attendance and attainment at St Cleres could fall as some parents would not drive their children to school, and some children would not have the motivation to find other alternative routes. She asked if the Council would ensure that the direct travel payment to parents was only used for the intended purpose. The Strategic Lead Education Support Service replied that the team would be working to ensure that the payments would only be used for travel, and were developing a system for this purpose.

Councillor Snell echoed Councillor Massey's comments and stated that the government had outlined the necessary amenities along a road before it could be declared safe. He felt that currently the road did not meet this criteria, for example there were no kerbs, and therefore did not feel that it could be declared safe by the legal team. The Chair agreed with this comment as the road did not have a grass verge or kerb, which meant children would have to travel through farmer's fields, and there was no street lighting or drainage systems. Councillor Sammons added that when the road was being litter picked by the Cleaner and Greener team, traffic management systems had to be implemented and one lane of the road closed to ensure their safety. The Strategic Lead Education Support Service agreed that the current road between East Tilbury and St Cleres could not be declared a safe route in its current state as there was no verge or pathway. She emphasised that the Council would not put children at risk travelling to or from school, and were simply considering all options and alternatives.

Councillor Akinbohun asked if there was any way the route could be made safe as some children and young people preferred walking. Councillor Massey felt that if the route was improved with adequate kerbing and lighting, it could be made safe for children to walk, but it was not safe in its current state. The Strategic Lead Education Support Service replied if there was investment into kerbs or cycle paths along the route that it could be made safe. She explained that this could come in future with the proposed developments in East Tilbury, which would increase the number of houses in the area and improve local infrastructure.

The Chair asked why only one young people had completed the travel training programme. The Assistant Director Education and Skills replied that it had been a challenge to get young people enthused about the scheme. She stated that young people had been excited about the prospect of the scheme, but the team had struggled to get young people to engage once the scheme had been developed and rolled out. She explained that this was why the team had decided to roll the scheme out to younger children, starting in year nine. She added that the Council had also been working closely with parents to better understand how they worked with their child on travel training to build partnership working. She stated that the pandemic had also unsettled parents whose child travelled via public transport to school, and this had made it more difficult to engage. The Chair felt pleased that the scheme was being rolled

out to younger pupils with complex needs. She highlighted that some children with very complex needs would be unable to travel independently even with the scheme in place. Councillor Kent added that the Council had a statutory duty to ensure that children could get to school safely, particularly those children with SEND and complex needs. He felt that any proposed changes should be centred on the child and minimising disruption to young people's educations, by ensuring that SEND children could travel to school in a stress-free environment. The Assistant Director Education and Skills stated that the team worked in partnership with schools and parents to ensure that the child remained at the centre of the service.

The Chair proposed an additional recommendation reading "The Committee agree that the route between East Tilbury and St Cleres School is an unsafe walking route for children." This additional recommendation was agreed unanimously.

**RESOLVED: That the Committee:**

**1. Reviewed and commented upon the work undertaken related to Home to School Transport and Post 16 SEND Transport in relation to the areas outlined within this report.**

**2. Agreed that the route between East Tilbury and St Cleres School is an unsafe walking route for children.**

*The Strategic Lead Education Support Service, and Councillors Massey and Sammons left the meeting at 8.31pm.*

**49. Education and Skills Operating Model**

The Assistant Director Education and Skills introduced the report and stated that it had been requested by the Committee in October 2021 and outlined the new operating model for the education and skills team. She stated that the Council remained committed to skills training for people aged 0-99, including early years and adult learning. She stated that a review had been undertaken that had helped to realign the work done by the team, particularly since all schools bar one had become academies. She explained that as a new teaching hub had been opened at Harris Academy, some posts within the team had been removed as their function was now undertaken by the schools themselves, including governor development training.

The Assistant Director Education and Skills commented that the Council had also been looking at repetitive tasks, such as data entry, and how this could be effectively streamlined. She explained that the team had therefore merged SEND data systems, and this had been highlighted by Ofsted as good practice. She explained that the nurseries previously run by Thurrock Council were now out to procurement, which would finish in March. She added that recently the team had been focusing on children that were electively home educated (EHE), as following COVID approximately eighteen children had not returned to school for mental health and anxiety reasons. She explained that



these children had all returned to school now, but highlighted that the team were factoring in the impact of COVID when meeting with pupils, particularly those year 11 pupils who would be taking their GCSEs this year.

The Assistant Director Education and Skills explained that the Education Support Service had been streamlined, as it was now under one strategic lead. She added that the Inspire programme was also continuing well, as it attracted significant external funding, and was currently in the middle of a programme regarding young people aged 16-25 that were not in employment, education or training (NEETs). She stated that currently the number of young people whose whereabouts in the system was unknown was zero, thanks to the hard work of the Inspire team. The Assistant Director Education and Skills explained that the adult community college was also under operating under a new model, as they had relocated to the South Essex College building and had mobilised their online learning platforms quickly at the start of the pandemic.

Councillor Anderson asked if the Council made contact with new EHE cases, and if a parent could be deemed unfit for home education. The Assistant Director Education and Skills replied that all EHE parents were met with and RAG rated. She added that if a parent was RAG rated red the team would encourage parents to consider other options for schooling, and would be continually monitored in partnership with the parent. She stated that during COVID the number of EHE parents had significantly increased, and robust processes had been put in place. She stated that there were local forums for EHE parents who supported each other, but EHE was not suitable for all families and routes back into formal education would be provided. Councillor Anderson felt it was good to see that the Council supported EHE as an option for parents, and that it was monitored and parents were engaged with.

The Church of England Representative questioned what measures were put in place to ensure home education was in line with the levels taught in schools and the general curriculum. The Corporate Director Children's Services replied that there was little legislation regarding EHE, but changes to the legislation were a current priority for Ofsted. She explained that statutorily the Council had to undertake one visit per year to an EHE parent, but the team could not insist the parent was teaching the general curriculum. She felt it was a concern, both within Thurrock and nationally, that EHE children were not up to the average attainment levels for their age range. The Strategic Lead Employability and Skills added that the Inspire team worked closely with young people at risk of NEET, and explained that this year the Council had utilised career advisors to work with approximately twenty young people on an individual basis to discuss career advice, mental health and wellbeing.

Councillor Akinbohun questioned if there was a set curriculum for an EHE child. The Corporate Director Children's Services explained that the parent of an EHE child chose what to teach and did not have to follow the curriculum. She added that the parent had to evidence that there was a form of education taking place to EHE officers. The Chair questioned the number of EHCPs within the borough and if this was above the national average. The Assistant

Director Education and Skills replied that there were approximately 1800 children in Thurrock with an EHCP which was above the national average. She stated that the Council closely monitored the level of EHCP requests, particularly in early years' cohorts due to the potential impact of COVID. She stated that the early years' team had been working with children in early years' who were at risk of an EHCP to determine if there was an actual need or if the child was experiencing difficulties due to lack of socialization and learning during the pandemic. The Chair highlighted that case workers under the new model had 150 cases, and questioned what the figure had been before. The Assistant Director Education and Skills replied that under the old model caseworkers had approximately 350 cases, but new staff had been employed under the new model. She explained the number of caseworkers had doubled from five to ten, two new supervisors had been employed, and a new post had been created for a Tribunals Officer, who would also lead on quality assurance. She added that there had also been investment in the Preparing for Adulthood team, which had increased from one to four officers. She stated that these new hires would reduce the stress placed on caseworkers and other colleagues. The Assistant Director Education and Skills added that the overall staffing level had had to be reduced due to budgetary pressures, but no staff had been lost in the SEND team. She stated that staffing levels had been reduced by removing vacant posts and by not filling posts where people had retired.

**RESOLVED: That the Committee:**

**1. Scrutinised the operating model outlined in the report and offered support and challenge.**

**50. Children's Social Care Operating Model**

The Corporate Director Children's Services introduced the report and stated that it followed on from the previous report as it reported on savings within the new Children's Services operating model. She explained that the Children's Services team would be operating under the Think Families approach as of 1 April 2022, which would help address demand across the service. She highlighted point 3.2 of the report and stated that the Think Families approach considered the whole family within health and social care, which would help to improve outcomes for children, and build stronger relationships within families. The Corporate Director Children's Services explained that the Think Families approach did not just consider close family, but could also mean neighbours or family friends that were important to the child in question, and would help support parental networks and open broader conversations for struggling families. She explained that if a family were becoming known to Children's Services, the team would ask the families what could be done to assist them and a consultation would begin with parents, family members, and partners such as schools and hospitals.

The Corporate Director Children's Services highlighted point 3.4 of the report and mentioned that learning and feedback from team members had informed the new model and the team had focussed on what the service could deliver

to parents and children. She explained that under the old model Children's Services had had to employ external agencies to undertake child assessments, but this was now being brought in-house and colleagues were undertaking the necessary training to complete these assessments. She added that the Think Families approach would connect families and build relationships that would be beneficial for the child, and would be based at the Oaktree Centre as this was a more inviting environment for children than the Civic Offices. The Corporate Director Children's Services stated that under the old model the team had used the Family Group Conferencing system, whereby staff members had to undertake specific certification for this and the model had to be absolutely applied. She stated that this system had been time intensive as all named individuals had to be met with separately before a group meeting could take place. She explained that under the new operating model, the team would be utilising the Family Group Network approach that had been developed in New Zealand, and ensured the family found their own solutions to problems, with the help of professionals. She stated that this approach empowered families, strengthened networks and was in line with best practice guidance.

The Chair thanked officers for their comprehensive report and felt it was good to see how the new model would affect children and their families. She felt that it was a sensible way of finding cost-saving measures, whilst also enhancing the experience for families. She felt that having colleagues who could assess and help children would improve the experience for children who could then form bonds with their case worker. Councillor Snell echoed the Chair's comments and felt that official meetings were not the most suitable solution for all families in crisis. He highlighted point 3.8 of the report and asked how the Council were going to ensure that men and fathers were attending parenting programmes. The Corporate Director Children's Services replied that officers would work individually with fathers to ensure they attended the necessary programmes. She added that the team were also devising new men only programmes that would be more tailored to the needs of fathers and would hopefully reduce the stigma associated with fathers attending parenting programmes.

Councillor Kent felt pleased to see that the Council were undertaking the Think Families approach. He asked what the impact of reducing caseloads on frontline workers would be, and if there would be a clear line of sight between managers and frontline workers. The Corporate Director Children's Services replied that the Think Families approach would not reduce the role of social workers, who currently had approximately 14-15 cases each. She added that social worker managers had no more than six reports at any one time, which would help to ensure good oversight. She stated that the Think Families approach would only be implemented if there was a low degree of risk to a child. She stated that if a child at risk presented to the Council then they would not be involved in Think Families and would work with a designated social worker.

**RESOLVED: That the Committee:**

**1. Received the report.**

**2. Commented on the contents of the report.**

**51. Inspire - Head Start Housing: Supporting Care Leavers**

The Inspire Skills Manager introduced the report and stated that the Head Start Housing (HSH) programme had been piloted in 2016 and provided care leavers with a tailored approach to housing. She stated that the programme had launched in December 2018 and had outlined the strategy for transitional housing for care leavers, before they entered the private rental or social housing market. She explained that in 2018 there had been 30 beds allocated to HSH for exclusive use by care leavers, and this had been expanded when the Council had purchased an additional three properties that provided an extra twelve beds. She explained that HSH Officers sourced and managed properties, and provided basic furniture and amenities, such as beds, curtains, Wi-Fi and water, and helped care leavers access the Local Council Tax Scheme. She stated that when the report had been written there had been an occupancy rate of 95.56%, but this had now increased and there were currently two rooms available, both of which were undergoing maintenance before they could be re-let.

The Inspire Skills Manager stated that the HSH Strategy had required refreshing in 2021 as the Council currently tried to encourage care leavers to remain in Thurrock, which was not what was best for some young people. She stated that the team were now working to continue to help young people who wanted to move out of the borough, and in the next five years the team would exchange all private rental HSH properties for council stock. She added that the team were also working hard to develop neglected sites across the borough into single bed units, with the possibility of care leavers being involved in the construction and design of these units.

Councillor Kent thanked officers for their hard work on the report and queried the forecasted overspend of the service. He queried if the HSH strategy was sustainable in the medium to long term. The Inspire Skills Manager replied that the spend of the HSH transitional accommodation had increased during COVID, and the current overspend was £900,000. She stated that the commissioning team were working with HSH officers to invite providers to tender to supply housing. She added that there were currently more than 50 beds for care leavers, which cost the Council £156 per bed, per week, which she felt was sustainable for the long term and met current levels of demand. She added that the HSH team would work with colleagues in Children's Social Care and Housing to mitigate any financial issues if they arose. The Corporate Director Children's Social Care added that the £900,000 overspend was a part of the overall Children's Social Care overspend.

**RESOLVED: That the Committee:**

**1. Reviewed the cross-directorate working to improve the quality of services to care leavers regarding housing options.**

**2. Supported and promoted innovative ways to engage children in care and care leavers to prepare for independent living including entry into employment.**

**52. Work Programme**

The Senior Democratic Services Officer stated that under the scrutiny review, any relevant motions that had been agreed at Full Council would be brought before Committee for their oversight. As this was the last meeting of the municipal year, there were no items to add to the Work Programme.

**The meeting finished at 9.28 pm**

Approved as a true and correct record

**CHAIR**

**DATE**

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

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**Children's Services**  
**Overview and Scrutiny Committee Meeting**  
**June 2022**  
**Youth Cabinet Update Report**

**Purpose of the report:**

The Youth Cabinet would like to provide the committee with an update of their work.



- 1.1 **Make your Mark Campaign** – In February the Make your Mark campaign took place where Thurrock young people voted on a topic they cared about the most. Results of the national voting were released in early March. After 434,492 young people voted from over 780 schools, colleges and youth groups we now know that health and wellbeing is the biggest issue facing young people in the UK. At our Working Group meetings, the cabinet have been exploring ideas of how they can support the theme and promote health and well-being to Thurrock young people. Members are currently working towards setting up well-being walks in the summer for 11- 17 year olds. These walks will be run by Youth Cabinet members with the support of Youth Workers. Promotion on when these walks will take place will shortly be released.
- 1.2 **Interview Panel opportunities** – Youth Cabinet members have had the opportunity to sit on two interview panels recently. One Stakeholder panel for two Assistant Director roles and a Children's Panel for a Deputy Team Manager role for Think Family Services. Members who sat on the panel found the experience to be enlightening. They enjoyed seeing what it was like from an interviewer's perspective and gained some valuable insight into the how interviews take place. All good experience for when they eventually go for interviews as young adults themselves. Members were also invited to create interview questions which they found to be an empowering experience as it allowed them to have their say and enquire how the interviewee would make positive impacts for young people within their role.

- 1.3 **Thurrock Youth Cabinet Elections Outcome** – Youth Cabinet Elections took place in March, we now have new members in the roles of Vice Chairperson, Chairperson and Member of Youth Parliament. Up to date information of the new members can be found on the Thurrock Council website including when our monthly meetings take place.
- 1.4 **Youth Cabinet Recruitment Drive** – In March the lead Youth Worker for Thurrock Youth Cabinet embarked on a recruitment drive around Thurrock schools/sixth forms and colleges to increase cabinet numbers. As a result of the visits, we had 3 new members join the Youth Cabinet in April. If you know a young person who would like to part of the Youth Cabinet, please ask them to email [youthcabinet@thurrock.gov.uk](mailto:youthcabinet@thurrock.gov.uk)
- 1.5 **British Youth Council June Convention** – Good news from the BYC arrived recently that they had a grant approved to run a face to face convention in London at the end of June 2022. Members of the Thurrock Youth Cabinet are delighted that such events are starting to take place again post pandemic. The lead Youth Cabinet worker is currently organising the finer details to take members to the event. The day will be an opportunity for the young people to network with other areas, attend workshops, listen to guest speakers, join campaign workshops on health and votes at 16, Make your Mark focus sessions and much more.
- 1.6 **11- 19 Strategy Meeting** - The Youth Cabinet chair and vice chair continue to attend, update and promote the Youth Cabinet at this meeting to highlight the positive work being achieved to schools Head Teachers.

**For any questions regarding this update report, please contact:**

**Name:**

**E-mail:**



<b>16 June 2022</b>	<b>ITEM: 6</b>
<b>Children’s Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee</b>	
<b>Items Raised by Thurrock Local Safeguarding Children Partnership: Progress Update on Peer Review and Case Review - Action Plans</b>	
<b>Wards and communities affected:</b> All	<b>Key Decision:</b> N/A
<b>Report of:</b> Priscilla Bruce-Annan, Local Safeguarding Children Partnership Business Manager	
<b>Accountable Assistant Director:</b> Janet Simon, Assistant Director Children’s Social Care and Early Help	
<b>Accountable Director:</b> Sheila Murphy, Corporate Director, Children’s Services	
<b>This report is public.</b>	

## Executive Summary

This report presents Overview and Scrutiny Committee Members with the identified Partnership Priorities for 2022 – 2024, an update on the range of work of the LSCP and progress made on case review action plans.

The responsibilities of the LSCP are laid out in Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018. The purpose of these local arrangements is to support and enable local organisations and agencies to work together in a system where:

- children are safeguarded and their welfare promoted
- partner organisations and agencies collaborate, share and co-own the vision for how to achieve improved outcomes for vulnerable children
- Organisations and agencies challenge appropriately and hold one another to account effectively
- there is early identification and analysis of new safeguarding issues and emerging threats
- learning is promoted and embedded in a way that local services for children and families can become more reflective and implement changes to practice
- Information is shared effectively to facilitate more accurate and timely decision making for children and families’.

Serious Case Reviews (SCRs) were established under the Children Act (2004) to review cases where a child has died and abuse or neglect is known or suspected. SCRs could additionally be carried out where a child has not died, but has come to serious harm as a result of abuse or neglect. The aim of SCRs was to establish

learning for agencies and professionals to improve the way that they work together to safeguard children.

Working Together to Safeguard Children (DfE, 2018), changed the structure of SCRs, these reviews are now known as Local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews (LCSPRs). Responsibility for learning lessons lies with a national panel – the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel (the Panel) – and with local safeguarding partners.

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

**1.1 That the Committee note the Partnership priorities for 2022 – 2024, update on the work of the LSCP and the progress made on Action Plans to date.**

## **2. Thurrock LSCP Priorities 2022 - 2024**

2.1 In order to identify the Partnership Priorities for 2022 – 2024, the Independent Chair Scrutineer and Statutory Partners considered the multi-agency data received during the year 2021 – 2022, case audit outcomes, national and local reviews and the results of consultation with multi-agency frontline practitioners. The Partnership have agreed five priorities for 2022 – 2024.

### **2.2 Neglect**

To reduce the incidences of child neglect within the borough through a multi-agency approach and further reduce repeat incidents of neglect. We will do this by delivering the work identified in the Thurrock LSCP Neglect Strategy 2021-2024, which will be driven by the Neglect Group.

### **2.3 Violence and Vulnerability**

Child Exploitation, Domestic Abuse, Harmful Sexualised Behaviour and Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) are areas of focus for the LSCP. We will continue our work with the Thurrock VAWG group and Southend, Essex and Thurrock (SET) partners to reduce the prevalence of those experiencing violence and exploitation in these areas.

### **2.4 Think Family**

We know families do not exist in isolation, by using a ‘Think Family’ and wider contacts approach we can secure better outcomes for children, young people and their families. Working with partners to co-ordinate support and interventions and co-producing plans with the family we are better placed to achieve this. Families will experience a system of joined up safeguarding and support.

### **2.5 Transitions and Transfers**

Bridging the gap between points of transition are important in the continuity of safeguarding children and young people. In responding to the need during times of developmental life stages and when children, young people and families move, we are adopting a transitional approach to safeguarding. To do

this we will work with our partners to develop knowledge and our collective response at these crucial times.

## **2.6 Emotional Health and Well Being**

To protect and promote the emotional health and Well Being of children, young people, families and the multi-agency workforce we are focussed on support in schools, colleges and workplace settings. We will invest in our resources and workforce development and acknowledge that the last few years have been difficult for all.

## **3. Update on LSCP Work**

- 3.1 The Learning and Development programme for 2022/23, has been refreshed and provides for learning based on statutory requirements, learning arising from local and national reviews, case audits and emerging areas where knowledge and skills are recognised. Managing Allegations Against Staff, Extra-familial Harm and Child Exploitation training are among sessions added or updated on the programme.
- 3.2 Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018, sets out the requirement for sports clubs and organisations to have safeguarding arrangements in place. The joint LSCP and National Working Group (NWG) Safe to Play campaign focuses attention on safeguarding in sports clubs and organisations and raises the awareness of this in education settings, children, young people and families. A Safe to Play Conference is to be held in July 2022, for sports clubs and organisations to promote safeguarding and support the development of safeguarding arrangements.
- 3.3 Ongoing work on the annual audit schedule ensures continuous improvement in quality assurance and hearing the voice of the child and family through engagement and participation.
- 3.4 Thurrock LSCP commissioned an external thematic review into Serious Youth Violence and Gang Related Activity. In addition, a separate Deep Dive case audit was conducted and aligned with the review. The learning and recommendations arising from this review will be published in June 2022. Once published all identified learning will be disseminated across the partnership and a multi-agency action plan devised to meet the recommendations arising from the review.
- 3.5 Local Safeguarding Partnerships have a statutory obligation to publish an annual report, setting out what has been done as a result of the safeguarding arrangements, its effectiveness, and impact. This includes work on any child safeguarding practice reviews that have been conducted. The report for 2021/22 is being compiled for publication in the autumn 2022.
- 3.6 In response to the national learning reviews from Bradford, City & Hackney, Croydon and Solihull, the LSCP has created a multi-agency plan of the

combined findings to gather what is currently in place and what more can be done to mitigate the risks to children and young people in Thurrock.

#### **4. Case Reviews and Peer Review Action Plan Update**

All case review action plans are developed through meetings attended by multi-agency representatives, to identify actions required by the partnership to address the recommendations. These action plans have been ratified through the LSCP Learning Practice Review Group, Management Executive Board and Statutory Partners.

- 4.1 **Sam & Kyle Serious Case Review Action Plan**  
The Sam and Kyle Action Plan is now completed and has been signed off by the Independent Chair and Statutory partners as business as usual.
- 4.2 **Frankie Serious Case Review Action Plan**  
Frankie Action Plan is now completed and has been signed off by the Independent Chair and Statutory partners as business as usual.
- 4.3 **Peer Review Action Plan**  
The Peer Review Action Plan is now completed and has been signed off by the Independent Chair and Statutory partners as business as usual.
- 4.4 **Leo Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review Action Plan**  
Leo Action Plan lists twelve recommendations that are further divided into sub-sections totalling 14 actionable areas. 13 out of the 14 areas are now complete. The remaining 1 action links to work on Think Family and is being progressed to completion.
- 4.5 **Shae and Ashley Local Health Review (LHR) Action Plan**  
This action plan was agreed and ratified through the LSCP Learning Practice Review Group, Management Executive Board and Statutory Partners in the last cycle of meetings.  
The learning from Shae and Ashley LHR lists ten recommendations that are further divided into sub-sections totalling 14 actionable areas. Work has started on the actions and 2 actions are completed.
- 4.6. The LSCP is currently considering the findings from the recently published National Panel reviews on Star Hobson (Bradford) and Arthur Labinjo-Hughes (Solihull) along with the Independent Review of Children's Social Care written by Josh MacAlister.

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

- 5.1 None

#### **6. Reasons for Recommendation**

6.1 To inform members of the Partnership Priorities for 2022 – 2024, the range of work carried out by Thurrock LSCP and update members on case review action plans and the Peer Review Action Plan. The action plans are multi-agency documents that are monitored through the LSCP governance structure.

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

7.1 Not applicable.

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

8.1 There is no impact.

**9. Implications**

**9.1 Financial**

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

There are no substantial financial implications arising from the action plan which have not been accounted for in the LSCP budgets and delivery plan.

The LSCP is funded by the three statutory partners and small contributions from other members of the partnership.

**9.2 Legal**

Implications verified by: **Mark Bowen**  
**Interim Head of Legal Services**

The Children and Social Work Act 2017 and Working Together 2018 dissolved the requirement for Local Safeguarding Children's Boards (LSCB). The three Strategic Partners, determined under the Children and Social Work Act 2017, comprise Thurrock Council, Essex Police and Thurrock Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG). Thurrock's new arrangements as the LSCP, came into effect on the 7th May 2019.

The statutory criteria for a serious child safeguarding case is set out in Children Act 2004 (as amended by the Children and Social Work Act 2017) with statutory guidance in Working Together 2018. The commission and oversight of the review of these cases, (a local child safeguarding practice review formerly Serious Case Review) and the auditing and monitoring of the 'programme of action' following the findings of the review continues to be the role of the LSCP.

Independent scrutiny is required by the Act as a part of the local safeguarding arrangements.

### 9.3 **Diversity and Equality**

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

Supporting our children and young people who are disadvantaged is a key strategic priority for Thurrock Council. The Partnership promotes practice to achieve equality, inclusion and diversity, and will carry out its duties in accordance with the Equality Act 2010 and related Codes of Practice and Anti-discriminatory policy. All Partners are signed up to these principles.

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

No implications identified.

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

None.

### 11. **Appendices to the report**

None.

### **Report Author:**

Priscilla Bruce-Annan

Business Manager

Thurrock Local Safeguarding Children Partnership

<b>16 June 2022</b>	<b>ITEM: 7</b>
<b>Children’s Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee</b>	
<b>The Care Review of Children’s Social Care and the National Safeguarding Panel review of child protection</b>	
<b>Wards and communities affected:</b> All	<b>Key Decision:</b> Non-key
<b>Report of: Janet Simon:</b> Assistant Director Children’s Social Care and Early Help	
<b>Accountable Assistant Director:</b> As above	
<b>Accountable Director:</b> Sheila Murphy, Corporate Director for Children’s Services	
<b>This report is Public</b>	

## Executive Summary

This report provides an overview to Children’s Overview and Scrutiny of the key significant National Reviews undertaken in children’s social care and child protection practice and both published during the last week of May.

The care review ([Final Report - The Independent Review of Children's Social Care \(independent-review.uk\)](https://www.independent-review.uk) ) and its final recommendations (eighty recommendations) are presented as a once in a generation opportunity for radical change. The review calls on the government to be ambitious for children and to play a more active role in creating the conditions for success both in the design and delivery of services and for children’s rights and outcomes.

The National Safeguarding Panel published its national learning review into the tragic deaths of Arthur Labinjo-Hughes and Star Hobson. ([National review into the murders of Arthur Labinjo-Hughes and Star Hobson - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)) A set of chronic challenges that get in the way of child protection work were identified during the review, these relate to practice and practice knowledge; system processes; leadership and culture; and wider service context.

A series of recommendations are put forward in the report, including: the creation of child protection units; development of a new set of multi-agency standards for child protection; greater clarity around the role and responsibilities of MASAs; changes to inspection; peer review; improved use of data and information sharing; a multi-agency leadership programme; and, a new National Child Protection Board, which is accountable to a cross-ministerial group.

### 1. Recommendation(s)

- 1.1 **That the Overview & Scrutiny Committee are involved in discussing the Review(s) proposals and recommendations and the impact these will have on service delivery over the next few years.**
- 1.2 **Overview & Scrutiny to provide challenge and input into the development of the recommendations through the government consultation, and to be involved in the reshaping of children's social care services in the next five years.**

## **2. Introduction and Background:**

### **The Care Review**

2.1 The Care Review is a very detailed document running to over 270 pages. There are over eighty recommendations. This will be a complex review to put into practice, likely to require legislative changes, financial investment and major changes to practice in children's social care and early help services. The review author has suggested a five year timescale to make the reforms and changes he is suggesting. This is a very new report and the contents are still being worked through, however, the following are the main recommendations being put forward:

- Focus on 'family help' (to replace current early help and child in need/section 17 support)
- More support for kinship carers to help children stay with extended families, including allowances and legal aid
- Recommendation that schools should be statutory safeguarding partners
- Calls for government to better align it's policies and funding streams
- Focussed action on improving data quality and sharing (including reviewing all the data collected from councils to ensure it's actually useful)
- More advocacy for parents and children
- Powers for Ofsted to oversee finances of private providers and take action where there is significant financial risk
- Reducing bureaucracy for social workers
- Investment in expanding and professionalising the children's homes workforce

2.2 The recommended investment to deliver the review's ambition is £2.6billion over four years (£46 million in year one, rising to £233 million in year four). That breaks down to:

- £2bn in family help
- £23 million to bring parity between support for foster carers and kinship carers (those with formal court orders only)
- £76 million to recruit 9,000 more foster carers over three years
- £253 million investment in workforce

2.3 Key elements of the review's suggestions are:



- A comprehensive reform programme called *Relationships Protect*, overseen by a National Reform Board including sector leaders and those with lived experience
- A National Children’s Social Care Framework, which would outline the objectives, principles and outcomes expected of children’s social care, and would sit alongside a ‘balanced scorecard’ of indicators for learning and improvement by councils, and a series of practice guides outlining evidence-based approaches to achieving the outcomes (similar to NICE guidelines in medicine)
- The Early Career Framework, which all social workers would go through – a five year programme in which social workers work in family help but take modules of increasing specialisation until they can become “Expert Child Safeguarding Practitioners” after five years, which includes higher pay and the ability to take on child protection cases.

#### 2.4 Some of the more radical suggestions are:

- Introduction of up to 20 Regional Care Cooperatives, owned and run by councils, to take over all commissioning and running of children’s placements including foster care and secure provision. (The review does not recommend eliminating profit-making, though says that ideally we shouldn’t have profit-making and in an ideal world the RCCs will build so much of their own provision we won’t need private provision anymore)
- Removing the roles of Independent Reviewing Officer and Regulation 44 visitors, replacing these with independent, opt-out advocacy for children in care.
- Making care-experience a protected characteristic in equalities legislation
- Legislating that all placements for children in care provide “care” – that is, ruling out what is currently “unregulated” for all under 18s rather than just under 16s, though building in flexibility to the regs to allow for more independence for older children
- Move youth justice policy to the DfE and eradicate use of Young Offender Institutions and Secure Training Centres within a decade (replace with secure children’s homes and secure schools)
- Introduction of national pay scales for social workers

#### 2.5 Some key things that are missing from the review report include:

- The role of health. Mental health in particular is woven throughout the report but it’s very light on actual recommendations, especially when it comes to health’s role in the provision of placements for children with complex needs.
- Recruitment and retention of social workers – there’s a lot on redesigning training and career development for social workers, but the proposed Early Career Framework is seen as a bit of a blanket answer to actually keeping people in the profession

- Anything on the employment status of foster carers

2.6 Government has done its initial response – it lists key initial plans as:

- Setting up a National Implementation Board of sector experts and people with experience of leading transformational change, and with experience of the care system;
- Working with local authorities to boost efforts to recruit more foster carers, ensuring children have access to the right placements at the right time;
- Reframing and refocusing the support social workers receive in the early part of their careers, particularly to enhance their skills and knowledge in child protection;
- Joining up data from across the public sector to increase transparency – both between safeguarding partners and to the wider public, setting out more detail later this year; and
- Developing a National Children’s Social Care Framework, which will set direction for the system and point everyone to the best available evidence to support families and protect children.

### **3. The National Child Safeguarding Review into Child Protection**

3.1 The National Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel published its review into the tragic deaths of Arthur Labinjo-Hughes and Star Hobson on 26 May 2022.

3.2 The report makes a number of local and national recommendations. It also contains a set of important practice issues that all Safeguarding Partners need to consider and assure themselves that they are being dealt with effectively in their local area. These are:

- Robust multi-agency strategy discussions are always being held whenever it is suspected a child may be at risk of suffering significant harm.
- Sufficient resources are in place from across all agencies to allow for the necessary multi-agency engagement in child protection processes e.g., strategy discussions, section 47 enquiries, Initial Child Protection Conferences.
- There are robust information sharing arrangements and protocols in place across the Partnership.
- Referrals are not deemed malicious without a full and thorough multi-agency assessment, including talking with the referrer, and agreement with the appropriate manager. Indeed, the Panel believes that the use of such language has many attendant risks and would therefore discourage its usage as a professional conclusion.
- The introduction of multi-disciplinary teams to work together on child protection referrals, assessments and through to child protection conference and proceedings if required.

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

- 4.1 Both of these reviews will be developed in conjunction with each other as the recommendations overlap. The proposed changes to children's services are far reaching. There will be opportunity for debate and input into the final recommendations over the coming three months. These will lead to significant change in how services are delivered to and with vulnerable children and families going forward for the next generation. Committee will need updating papers over the coming municipal year.

## **5. Reasons for Recommendation**

- 5.1 To ensure that Children's O&S is kept informed of the changes to the children's social care landscape both within Thurrock and across the country.

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

- 6.1 The Government will consult on both Reviews and their recommendations over the coming three months. This will allow opportunity to input into the final outcome for the recommendations and any funding decisions to support the recommendations.

## **7. Impact on Corporate Policies, Priorities, Performance and Community Impact**

- 7.1 There will be an impact on Council Policies and performance as and when the Reviews recommendations are agreed by the Government and are then developed into legislation and guidance.

## **8. Implications**

### **8.1 Financial**

Implications verified by: **David May**  
**Strategic Lead Finance - Schools & DSG**

At this stage no financial implications. This will be kept under review.

### **8.2 Legal**

Implications verified by: **Gina Clarke**  
**Corporate Governance Lawyer & Deputy Monitoring Officer**

The review sets out wide ranging recommendations and findings for national government and safeguarding partners to give greater protection to children at risk of serious harm. The government intends consult widely on the findings of the review to directly inform reform and any legislative, policy or practice

changes which would impact on the Council. Once the consultation gets underway, the Council will have the opportunity to provide views to government on issues included in the consultation.

### 8.3 Diversity and Equality

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

There are no direct diversity and equality implications within this report. The development of the recommendations will reshape children's social care in a way that should benefit children and families, particularly those that are vulnerable.

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

None

## 9. Appendices to this report:

Appendix 1: [Final Report - The Independent Review of Children's Social Care \(independent-review.uk\)](http://independent-review.uk)

Appendix 2: [National review into the murders of Arthur Labinjo-Hughes and Star Hobson - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)

These appendices can be found online at the above web addresses, but have not been included in the agenda due to their size.

### Report Author

Janet Simon

Assistant Director

Children's Social Care & Early Help

<b>16 June 2022</b>	<b>ITEM: 8</b>
<b>Children’s Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee</b>	
<b>Education National Drivers: Schools White Paper, SEND &amp; AP Green Paper, Levelling Up, Skills Act, Schools Admission and Attendance Guidance</b>	
<b>Wards and communities affected:</b> All	<b>Key Decision:</b> Non-Key
<b>Report of:</b> Andrea Winstone, Strategic Lead School Effectiveness & SEND	
<b>Accountable Assistant Director:</b> Michele Lucas, Assistant Director Education & Skills	
<b>Accountable Director:</b> Sheila Murphy, Corporate Director for Children’s Services	
<b>This report is</b> Public	

## Executive Summary

This report provides an overview to Children’s Overview and Scrutiny of the key significant papers that are part of the Government’s Levelling Up Agenda. The report will outline the key policy documents and give an overview of what that means for Thurrock children and young people.

The key national drivers are in the form of an Educational White Paper, Special Education Needs and Alternative Provision Green Paper, recent Acts of Parliament, Policy Paper or guidance. These are outlined below:

- Schools White Paper: Opportunity for all: Strong schools with great teachers for your child (28/03/2022)
- Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and Alternative Provision (AP) Green Paper: Right support, right place, right time. (29/03/2022)
- The Skills and Post 16 Education Act (28/04/2022)
- Working together to improve school attendance guidance (06/05/2022)

### 1. Recommendations

**1.1 That the Overview & Scrutiny Committee recognises the amount of change and amendments to education over the next few years.**

**1.2 Overview & Scrutiny to provide challenge around how the proposed and new changes to the educational landscape support Thurrock children and young people.**

## 2. Introduction and Background

2.1 As part of the Government's Levelling Up Agenda there have been a significant number of announcements made in recent months. This paper is for information on the different aspects of these announcements.

### **Schools White Paper: Opportunity for all: Strong schools with great teachers for your child (issued 28/03/2022)**

2.2 Schools will identify children who need help, provide targeted support via a range of proven methods such as small group tuition, and keep parents informed about their child's progress.

2.3 The Parent Pledge will support the government's Levelling Up mission for education, previously set out in the Levelling Up White Paper, for 90% of primary school children to achieve the expected standard in Key Stage 2 reading, writing and maths by 2030.

2.4 A second ambition for secondary schools aims to see the national average GCSE grade in both English language and maths increase from 4.5 in 2019 to 5 by 2030.

2.5 The Schools White Paper sets out a series of new measures to support the delivery of these ambitions, including:

- Schools will offer a minimum school week of 32.5 hours by September 2023
- Ofsted will inspect every school by 2025, including the backlog of 'outstanding' schools that haven't been inspected for many years
- By 2030 all children will benefit from being taught in a school in, or in the process of joining, a strong multi-academy trust, which will help transform underperforming schools and deliver the best possible outcomes for children.
- At least £100m to put the Education Endowment Foundation on a long-term footing so they can continue to evaluate and spread best practice in education across the country

2.6 Other plans in the White Paper to deliver on the children's attainment at the end of primary and secondary include:

- 500,000 teacher training and development opportunities by 2024
- £30,000 starting salaries to attract and retain the best teachers
- Payments to recruit and keep talented physics, chemistry, computing and maths teachers working in disadvantaged schools
- A register for children not in school to make sure no child is lost from the system
- Every school to have access to funded training for a senior mental health lead to deliver a whole school approach to health and wellbeing

- Oak National Academy becoming a government body with sole focus on supporting teachers to deliver the very best lesson content
- Up to 6 million tutoring courses by 2024 and action to cement tuition as a permanent feature of the school system
- The school system working as a whole to raise standards with trusts responsible for running schools while local authorities are empowered to champion the interests of children and to be given legal powers to establish trusts and to request their non-academy schools join a trust, where that is the right approach for local schools.

### **3. SEND and Alternative Provision Green Paper: Right support, right place, right time. (Issued 29/03/2022)**

3.1 On March 29th 2022 the government launched their much anticipated SEND and Alternative Provision Review Green paper.

3.2 This outlines the changes they are proposing to improve the lives of children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities.

3.3 The review focuses on SEND alongside alternative provision and outlines some suggested key changes. These include:

- A desire to increase early intervention for children with SEND and introduce a single system combining SEND and alternative education provision.
- The creation of new national standards across education, health and care to build for a higher performing SEND system.
- A national framework for councils for banding and tariffs of high needs support to offer clarity on the level of support expected and try to put the system on a financially sustainable footing in the future.
- A legal duty on councils to introduce “local inclusion plans” across early years, schools and post-16 education with health and care services in a bid to provide greater clarity over which agency has responsibility for services.
- The creation of a “local inclusion dashboard” which will set out the role and responsibilities of partners offering provision for children and young people with SEND aged 0 to 25.
- An updated Local Area SEND Inspection Framework from Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission will be used to hold local authorities to account over failures to create inclusion plans.
- Education, Health and Care plans (EHCP) to be moved online, to make them more flexible, reducing bureaucracy and supporting parents to make informed choices via a list of appropriate placements tailored to their child’s needs, meaning less time spent researching the right school.
- Plans to “streamline” the redress process which will mean tribunals will only be used for the most challenging cases.
- The green paper also puts forward a raft of proposals to improve mainstream provision for pupils with SEND based on plans highlighted

in the recent schools white paper including a duty on all schools to part of a multi-academy trust by 2030 and plans to increase total investment in core schools budgets by £7bn by 2024/25. (CYP Now, 2022)

3.4 This is a 16 week consultation and anyone can make comments on these proposed changes up until the 22nd July 2022, 11:45pm. Thurrock has utilised its engagement and participation group to gain feedback and prepare a response to the Green Paper – this will be approved by the SEND Development Board which is chaired by the Director of Children’s Services.

#### **4. The Skills and Post 16 Education Act (28/04/2022)**

4.1 The government’s key strategic priorities around Post 16 Education

- To legislate for reforms that the government say will transform post-16 education and training, boost skills and get more people into work as set out in the government’s Skills for Jobs white paper.
- To deliver on the ambition to bring closer together the further and higher education systems.
- To support the Prime Minister’s Lifetime Skills Guarantee, as part of the blueprint for a post-16 education system that will ensure everyone, no matter where they live or their background, can gain the skills they need to progress in work at any stage of their lives.
- To increase productivity, support growth industries and give individuals opportunities to progress in their careers.
- To put beyond doubt the Office for Students’ ability to regulate in relation to minimum requirements for quality.

4.2 What does the Government say the main benefits of the Bill are?

- Offering adults across the country the opportunity to retrain throughout their lives through the Lifetime Skills Guarantee, helping them to gain in-demand skills and open up further job opportunities.
- Realigning the system around the needs of employers so that people are trained for the skills gaps that exist now and, in the future, in sectors the economy needs, including construction, digital, clean energy and manufacturing.
- Improving the quality of training available by making sure that providers are better run, qualifications are better regulated, and that providers’ performance can be effectively assessed.

4.3 What does the Government say the main elements of the Bill are?

- To put employers at the heart of the post-16 skills system through local skills
- improvement plans, by enabling employers and providers to collaborate to develop skills plans aimed at ensuring local skills provision meets local needs.



- To introduce the powers needed for the Lifelong Loan Entitlement, which will give individuals access to the equivalent of up to four years' worth of student loans for level 4–6 qualifications that they can use flexibly across their lifetime, at colleges as well as universities.
- To strengthen the system of accountability by extending existing powers for the Secretary of State to intervene where colleges have failed to meet local needs, to direct structural change where required to secure improvement, and by amending the regulation of post-16 education and training providers to ensure quality.
- To put beyond doubt the ability of the Office for Students to determine minimum requirements for quality by reference to absolute performance levels for student outcomes, and to use these when it makes decisions on registration and compliance.

## **5. Working together to improve school attendance guidance (06/05/2022)**

5.1 This is guidance from the Department for Education (DfE). This guidance is non-statutory, and has been produced to help schools, trusts, governing bodies, and local authorities maintain high levels of school attendance. Following public consultation earlier this year, and subject to Parliament, the Secretary of State has committed to this guidance becoming statutory when parliamentary time allows (this will be no sooner than September 2023).

5.2 All local authorities are expected to:

- Rigorously track local attendance data to devise a strategic approach to attendance that prioritises the pupils, pupil cohorts and schools on which to provide support and focus its efforts on to unblock area wide barriers to attendance.
- Have a School Attendance Support Team which provides the following core functions free of charge to all schools (regardless of type):
- Communication and advice: regularly bring schools together to communicate messages, provide advice and share best practice between schools and trusts within the area.
- Targeting Support Meetings: hold termly conversations with schools, using their attendance data to identify pupils and cohorts at risk of poor attendance and agree targeted actions and access to services for those pupils.
- Multi-disciplinary support for families: provide access to early help support workers to work intensively with families to provide practical whole-family support where needed to tackle the causes of absenteeism and unblock the barriers to attendance.
- Legal intervention: take forward attendance legal intervention (using the full range of parental responsibility measures) where voluntary support has not been successful or engaged with.
- Monitor and improve the attendance of children with a social worker through their Virtual School.

- 5.3 Many local authorities will need time to transition to meet these expectations, including those that need to revise or bring to an end to models of trading or service level agreements. Therefore, whilst local authorities should meet these expectations as far as possible for academic year 2022-2023, the School Attendance Support Team should be available to all schools free of charge (and free from any service level agreement) by no later than September 2023.

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

- 6.1 The landscape in which education is delivered is being reviewed and as a result we will be working closely with all our schools to ensure they are ready for the proposed changes. The Green paper includes many things as a local authority we have been working on as we reform our SEND service which resulted in our most recent Ofsted inspection removing all our previous serious weaknesses.

## **7. Reasons for Recommendation**

- 7.1 To ensure that Children's O&S is keep informed of the changes to the educational landscape both within Thurrock and across the country.

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

- 8.1 There is a [public consultation](#) on the SEND & AP Green Paper which has been extended to 11:45 on 22 July.

## **9. Impact on Corporate Policies, Priorities, Performance and Community Impact**

- 9.1 There is likely to be an impact on Council SEND Policies and performance as and when the SEND Green paper is developed into legislation and guidance.
- 9.2 The Working together to improve school attendance will also have an impact on Council policy and processes. The Education Welfare Service will be looking closely at how they can meet the additional responsibilities placed upon the service once this becomes legislation. It is likely further resources will be required to meet statutory responsibilities.

## **10. Implications**

### **10.1 Financial**

Implications verified by: **David May**  
**Strategic Lead Finance - Schools & DSG**

The Local Authority receives no school improvement funding due to the Academisation programme. However, we do still have a number of statutory

duties and funding for this work is provided within the Dedicated Schools Grant which is overseen and agreed by Thurrock's Schools' Forum. The extended responsibilities of the Virtual School Headteacher has been funded by section 31 grant. It is likely that the Council will require further grant funding to be able to fulfil the extended responsibilities around improving school attendance.

## 10.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Allison Thiele-Callan and Daniel Longe for and on behalf of Legal Department (LLBD)**

### **Schools White Paper: Opportunity for all: Strong schools with great teachers for your child**

The White Paper reflects proposed governmental changes and there are no confirmed legislative changes at present. Should legislation be implemented as per proposals, then the potential legal implications could include:

- Local authorities being able to establish new multi academy trusts.
- Powers to direct all schools, including academies, to admit pupils that are out of school.
- Establish appropriate arrangements so that parents can fulfil duty to register home-educated children with the LA.

### **Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and Alternative Provision (AP) Green Paper: Right support, right place, right time**

The Green Paper reflects proposed governmental changes and there are no statutory amendments or new legislation at this time. Should legislation be implemented as per proposals, then key potential legal implications could include:

- A duty to meet any new national standards across education, health and care.
- A duty to implement nationally agreed banding and tariffs of high needs funding.
- A legal duty to introduce "local inclusion plans" across early years, schools and post-16 education with health and care services in a bid to provide greater clarity over which agency has responsibility for services.

### **The Skills and Post 16 Education Act**

- The Act focuses on requirements on relevant institutions and whilst the Act impacts on the local community, there are limited direct legal requirements on the Local Authority.
- There may be limits placed on funding authority to pay certain providers, if applicable conditions apply, to which the LA should be aware.

### **Working together to improve school attendance guidance**

Whilst this guidance is non-statutory, it would be deemed that a Local Authority should have appropriate consideration of the recommendations. Should the guidance become statutory, as has been indicated as a possibility, then the specific legal implications of any implemented legislation would need to be considered.

The guidance provides that as a minimum all local authorities are expected to:

- Rigorously track local attendance data to devise a strategic approach to attendance that prioritises the pupils, pupil cohorts and schools on which to provide support and focus its efforts on to unblock area wide barriers to attendance.
- Have a School Attendance Support Team which provides the following core functions free of charge to all schools (regardless of type):
- Communication and advice: regularly bring schools together to communicate messages, provide advice and share best practice between schools and trusts within the area.
- Targeting Support Meetings: hold termly conversations with schools, using their attendance data to identify pupils and cohorts at risk of poor attendance and agree targeted actions and access to services for those pupils.
- Multi-disciplinary support for families: provide access to early help support workers to work intensively with families to provide practical whole-family support where needed to tackle the causes of absenteeism and unblock the barriers to attendance.
- Legal intervention: take forward attendance legal intervention (using the full range of parental responsibility measures) where voluntary support has not been successful or engaged with.
- Monitor and improve the attendance of children with a social worker through their Virtual School.

### 10.3 **Diversity and Equality**

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

Ensuring children and young people have a good place to learn is at the heart of the Local Authority's commitment to our children and young people. We work hard to ensure that we are providing the best life chances relating to education and the strong partnership arrangements have further imbedded this strong ethos across our local communities.

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

None

**11. Appendices to this report:**

None

**Report Author:**

Andrea Winstone

Strategic Lead School Effectiveness and SEND

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<b>16 June 2022</b>	<b>ITEM: 9</b>
<b>Children’s Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee</b>	
<b>Children’s Social Care Performance – Quarter 4 2021-22</b>	
<b>Wards and communities affected:</b> All	<b>Key Decision:</b> Non-key
<b>Report of:</b> Marc Rhodes, Business Intelligence Manager	
<b>Accountable Assistant Director:</b> Janet Simon, Assistant Director Children’s Social Care and Early Help	
<b>Accountable Director:</b> Sheila Murphy, Corporate Director of Children’s Services	
<b>This report is</b> Public	

## Executive Summary

This report needs to be read in the context of the continuing impact of COVID-19 and the impact this had on the work carried out by Children’s Social Care since the initial lockdown at the end of March 2020.

This report shows that:

- Between January and March 2022, the number of Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) contacts received was 1,546 which is in line with Q4 2020/21 (1,546).
- Between January and March 2022, the number of referrals was 614 compared to 665 between January and March 2021. This appears to be in line with the drop in MASH contacts; the conversion rate of contacts to referral was 43% for Quarter 2 2020 and 41% for Quarter 2 2021.
- In March 2022, 93.5% of the children and families assessments were completed in timescale compared to 95% in March 2021 showing consistent performance.
- As at end of March 2022, the number of children subject to a Child Protection Plan was 110 compared to 110 at the end of March 2021. The figure has remained stable throughout the year. The Child Protection Surgery robustly reviews children subject to a CP plan to ensure the right children are receiving this service. Also there has been audits of Children in Need and MASH audits to provide re-assurance regarding thresholds and that the right children are receiving the right services.

- In Q4 2021-22, the number of Child Protection episodes ending was 49 which is in line with the same quarter in 2020-21 when the number of episodes ended was 50. This is in line with the stability of child protection figures observed within the past year. Every month any child protection plan that has been open for a year is reviewed to ensure that children do not remain on a plan for any longer than is necessary and that any issues relating to drift or the need to escalate based upon the concerns are addressed.
- Since April 2021, the number of cases being stepped down to Early Help has remained consistent. Between January – March 2022, 108 cases were stepped down compared to 106 in the same period between January - March 2021. There has been a concerted effort to ensure that children and families receive the correct support and advice following statutory involvement by Children’s Social Care, where there remains a need for a lower level of support.
- The Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) continues to support a shared understanding and management of threshold decisions. Children and families receive the right help at the right time and the response to family difficulties is proportionate to risk.
- All data continues to be monitored on a monthly basis to ensure that decision-making within the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) remains robust and ensures families are supported by the most appropriate service.

**1. Recommendation(s):**

- 1.1 That Members review the areas of improvement in Children’s Social Care and work undertaken to date to manage demand for statutory social care services.**

**2. Introduction and Background**

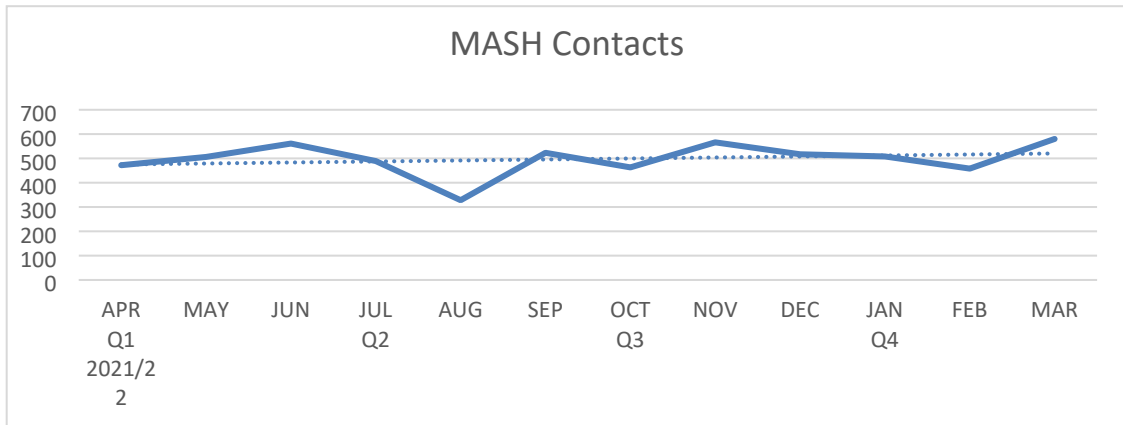
- 2.1 This report provides a summary of Children’s Social Care performance for Quarter 4, 2021-22 (January – March 2022). It highlights key demand indicators such as number of contacts, benchmarking data and key performance indicators.
- 2.2 Thurrock produces a number of data sets and performance reports 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.
- 2.3 This data has been presented and discussed with the Children & Families Performance Group.



### 3. Thurrock Data

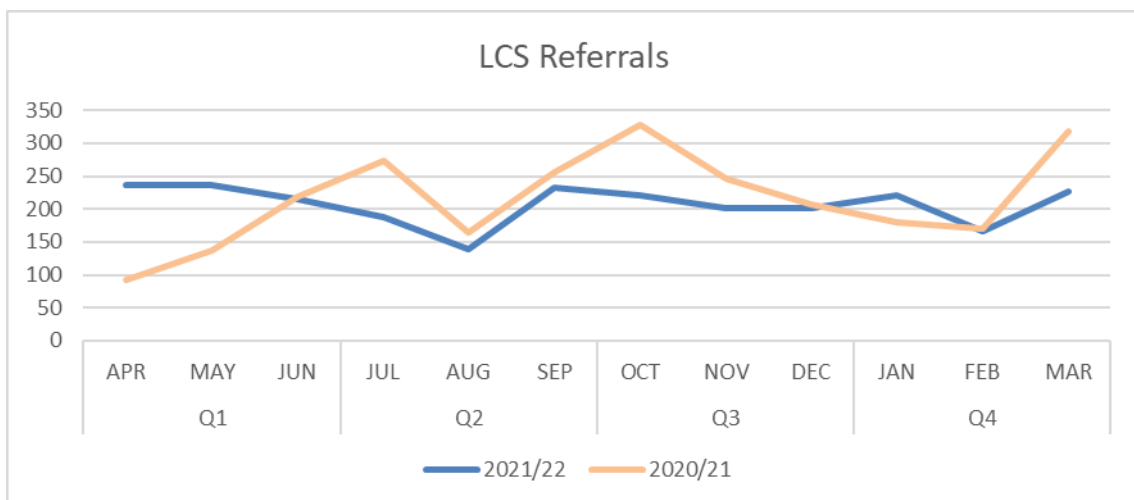
#### 3.1 Contacts

3.1.1 Between Jan 2022 and March 2022 (Quarter 4), the number of MASH contacts received was 1,546 which is the same as in Quarter 3 (1546) showing no change when comparing the two quarters. From April 2021 to March 2022 there were 5,971 MASH contacts, which shows a marginal increase when compared to the same period in 2020/21 (5,755).



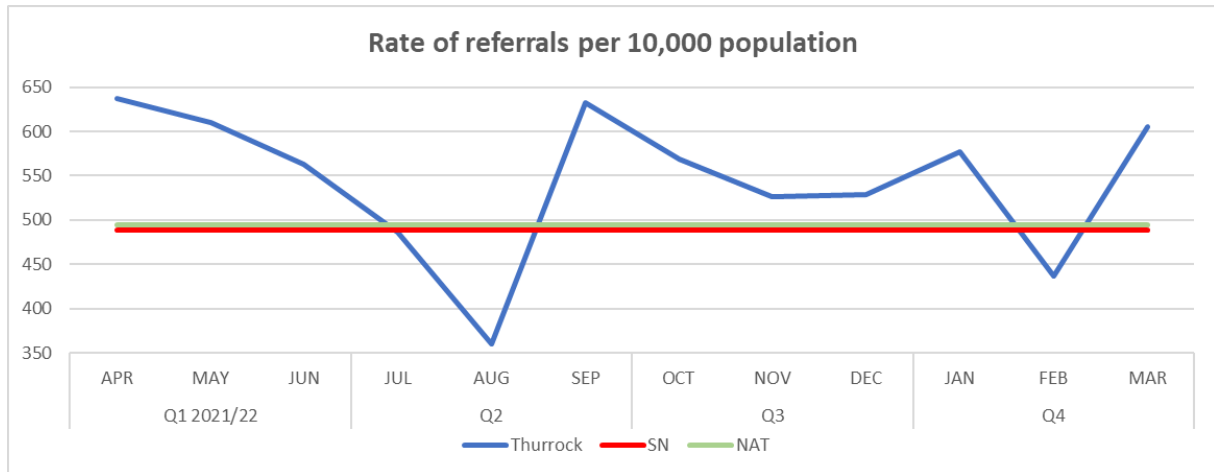
#### 3.2 Referrals

3.2.1 Between January 2022 and March 2022, the number of referrals were 614 compared to 624 between October 2021 and December 2021 (Quarter 3). This indicates a marginal drop in number of referrals. From April 2021 to March 2022 there were 2,487 LCS Referrals, which shows a marginal decrease when compared to the same period in 2020/21 (2,598).



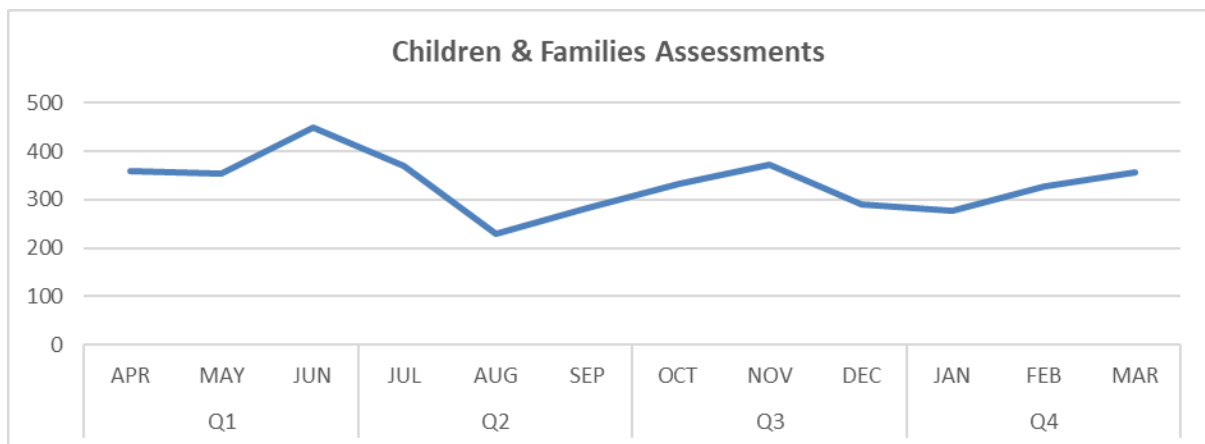
### 3.3 Rate of referrals

3.3.1 As at 31 March 2022, the rate of referrals per 10,000 was 605.5 compared to 629.3 as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021 indicating a marginal decrease. Based on benchmarking 2020-21 data, Thurrock is above the Statistical Neighbour rate of 489 and the England rate of 494.



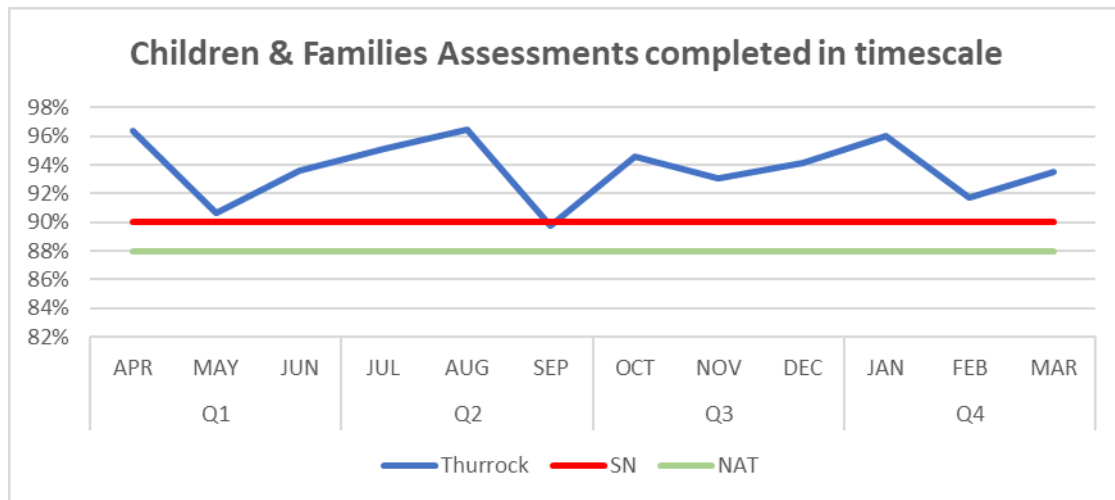
### 3.4 Children & Families Assessments

3.4.1 Between January to March 2022, 958 assessments were completed compared to 1,093.3 in the same quarter in 2020-21. This indicates a 14% decrease when comparing the two periods.



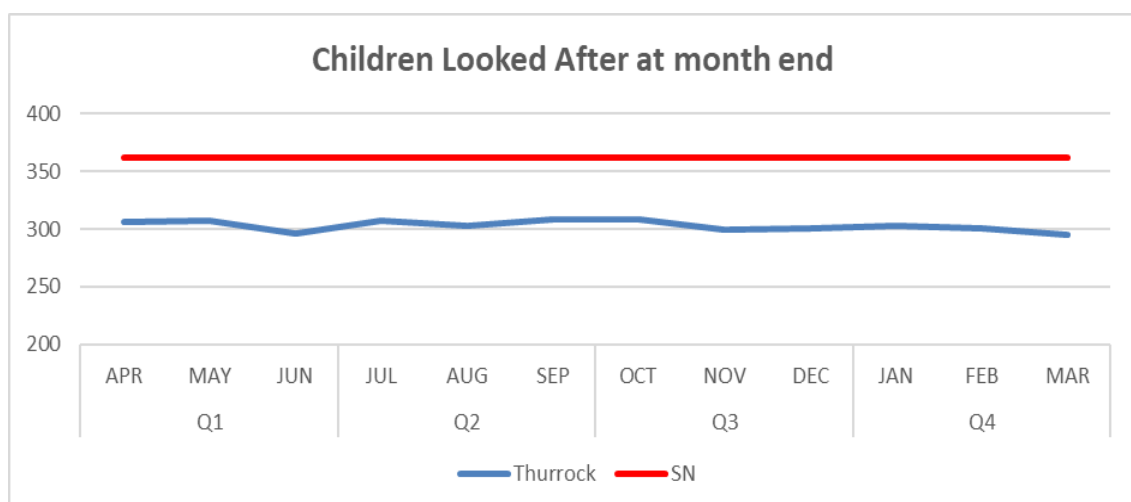
### 3.5 Children & Families Assessments completed in timescale

3.5.1 The number of assessments completed in timescale continues to show good performance at 93.5% as at 31 March 2022. The benchmarking data in 2021-22 shows that Thurrock remains above the Statistical Neighbour average of 90% and National average of 88%.



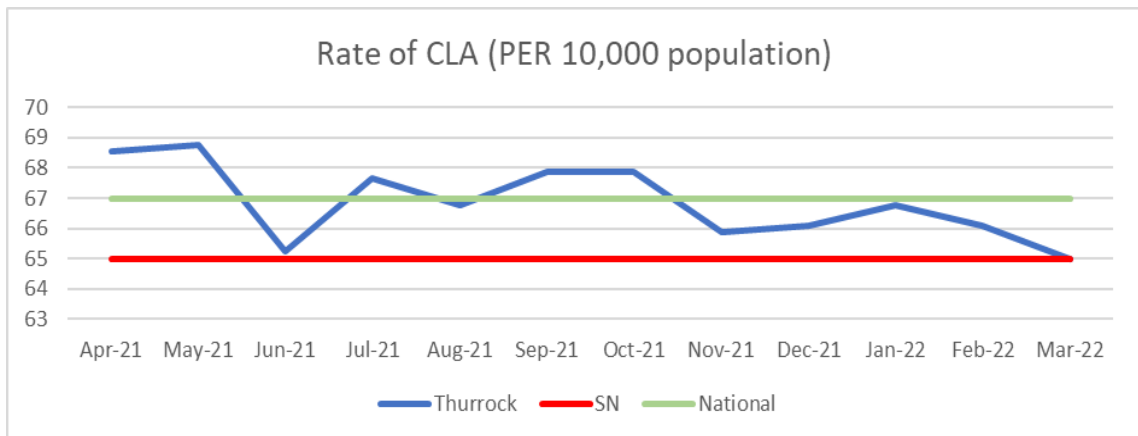
### 4. Children Looked After (CLA)

4.1 The graph below shows the number of children who were Looked After at the end of each month. The numbers have remained stable and small fluctuations are normal and to be expected. There is monitoring of children who may need to become Looked After and there are regular reviews of children entering care. Where possible, children are returned to their family where safe and appropriate.



## 4.2 The rate of CLA per 10,000 population

4.2.1 The graph below shows the rate of Children Looked After per 10,000 population of under 18 year olds in Thurrock. At 31 March 2022 there were 294 Children Looked After in Thurrock which shows a rate of 64 per 10,000 of children who are looked after. Based on 2020-21 benchmarking data, Thurrock is marginally below the National rate of 67 rate and in line with the Statistical Neighbour rate of 65.

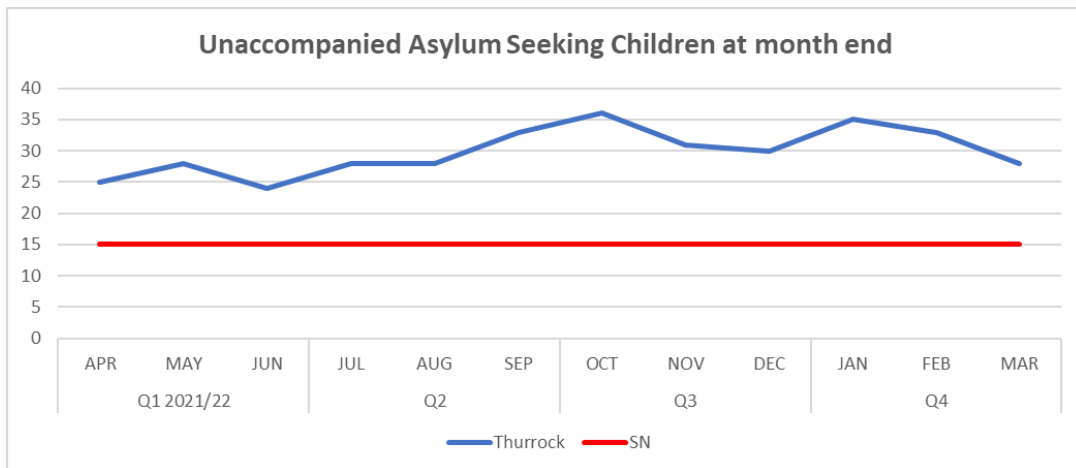


4.2.2 It is anticipated that our number of looked after children will increase slightly over the next quarter to be within our usual range of 290-300 looked after children.

## 4.3 Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Children (UASC)

4.3.1 UASC are a subset of the Children Looked After number above. Local Authorities through agreement have determined 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.

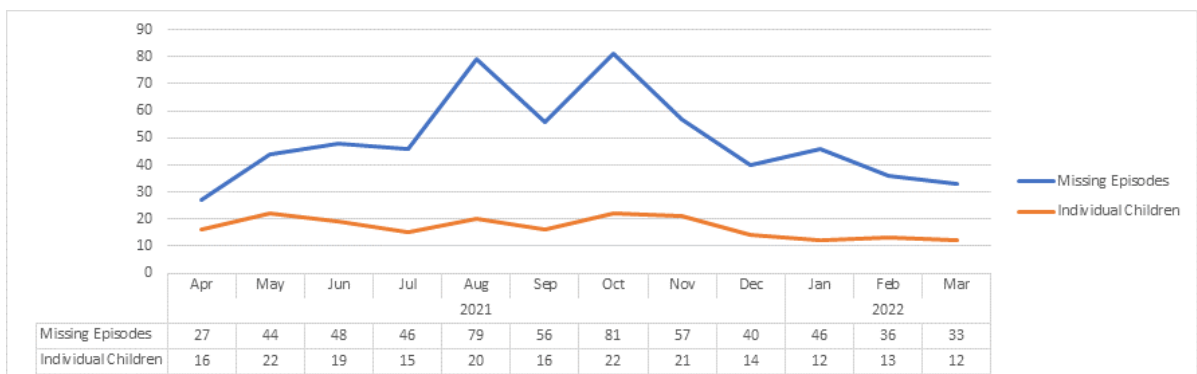
4.3.2 Thurrock's allocated number was 28, however, this has now increased to 31 children. As at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022, there are 28 UASC Children looked after.



4.3.3 Thurrock continues to be a port of entry for unaccompanied children, and we anticipate returning to at or above the ceiling of 31 children within the next quarter.

#### 4.4 CLA missing episodes started

4.4.1 The graph below shows the number of missing episodes started and the count of the individual children who went missing between April 2021 and March 2022. There is an observed increase in the number of Missing Episodes throughout quarter 2 and into Quarter 3, gradually decreasing again through Quarter 3 and 4, however, the number of individual children that have gone missing has remained relatively stable. The number of missing looked after children between January 2022 and March 2022 was 25 with 115 missing episodes. Three children accounted for 62 of the 115 missing episodes; these stances are carefully tracked via regular strategy meetings to identify the reasons for the episodes and how these can be managed. The most common reason for children going missing was contact with family and friends, representing 54% of missing episodes. Downward trends reflects changes in circumstances for a small group of children with a high number of missing episodes.

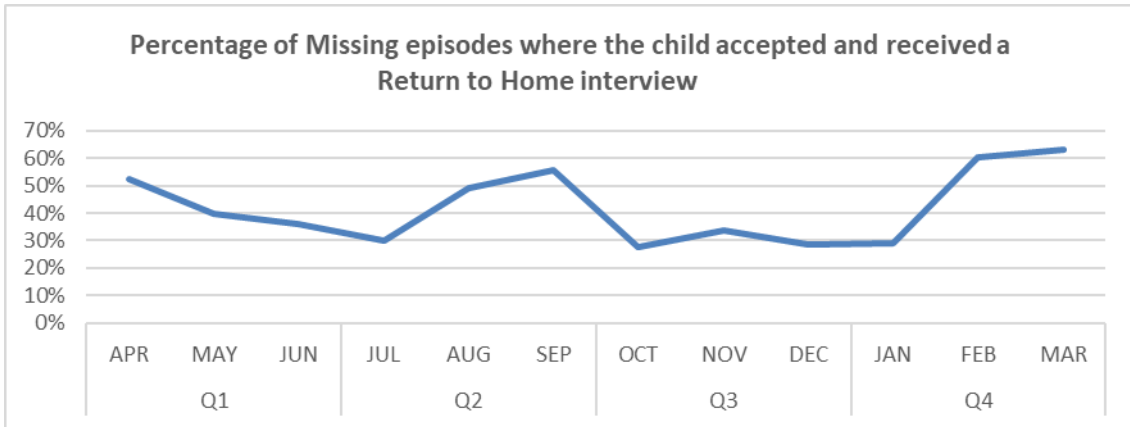


4.4.2 The length of a missing episode varies. A missing episode is not always indicative of a high level of risk. As an example, a sixteen-year-old child will be reported missing if they do not return home when expected and have not contacted their carer, but they may only be late home due to, a missed train,

wishing to stay out longer with friends or have a flat mobile phone. Nevertheless, each instance is reported and carefully monitored. A multi-agency escalation process is used to address any instances of concern ensuring partners like the Police are involved and join us in safeguarding children.

#### **4.5 CLA return to home interview (RHI)**

- 4.5.1 Since April 2020, Inspire Youth Hub have been commissioned to undertake independent Return Home Interviews (RHI). All children are offered a RHI within 72 hours following each missing event, with the aim of understanding the young person's circumstances and the reasons why they go missing. Key Workers from placements, Foster Carers and Social Workers will discuss missing incidents with children. There is a network of support provided to children to try to engage with them and understand the reasons for their missing episodes. The Participation Team have been able to engage and seek feedback from young people and this has been invaluable.
- 4.5.2 Between January and March 2022, the average take up was 50% by all young people offered a RHI which is in line with the same period in 2020. 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.
- 4.5.3 The graph below shows the percentage of return to home interviews taken up by young people through Inspire over the last 12 months. There has been an increase in the number of missing episodes in a cohort of 7 young people who have consistently refused return home interviews. We are reviewing how we engage this cohort of young people and alternatives such as whether there is anyone within the network better placed to have these conversations when they return from missing episodes including their social worker and how this information is captured. Part of this review will include gaining an understanding from young people about what works for them, what the barriers are to taking up a return home interview and working with representatives from the National Working Group who are supporting Inspire to improve the take up of that offer.

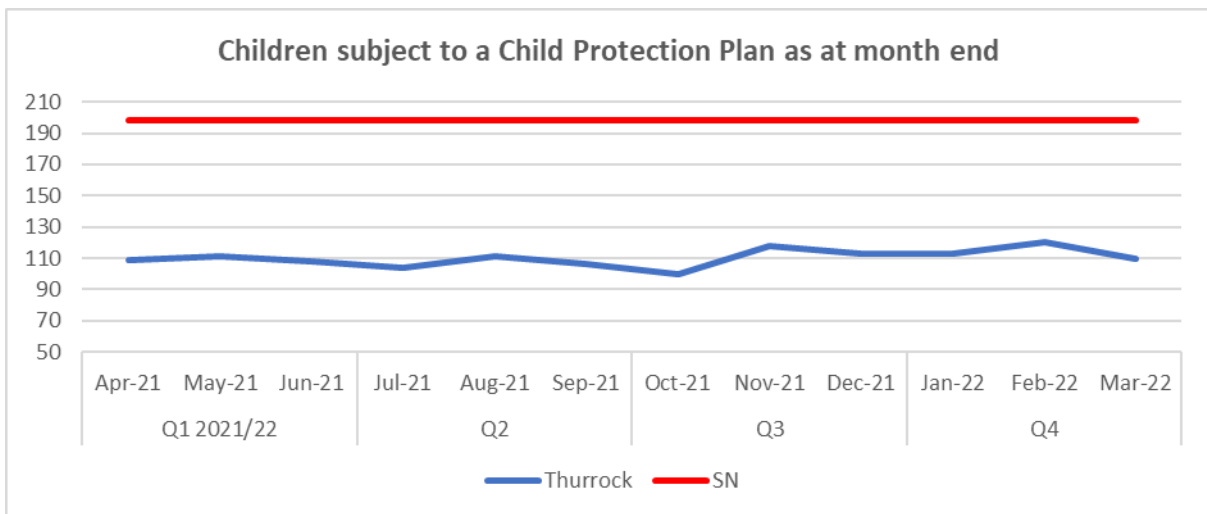


**5. Children Subject to a Child Protection Plan (CPP)**

**5.1 Number of Children subject to Child Protection Plan**

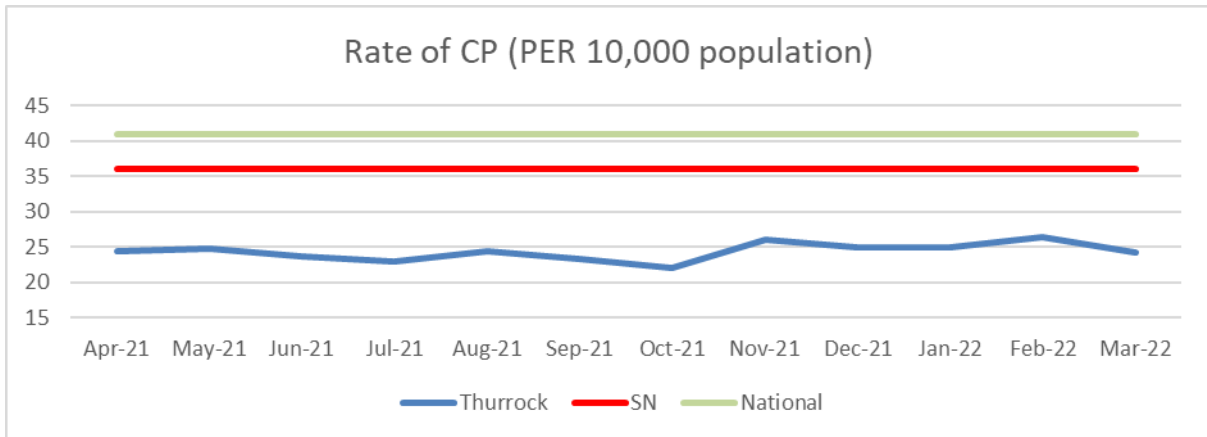
5.1.1 As at 31 March 2022 the number of children subject to a Child Protection Plan was 110 which is in line with the same period in 2020 (110).

5.1.2 Based on 2020-21 benchmarking data, Thurrock is below the Statistical Neighbour of 198.



5.1.3 As at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022, the rate of children subject to a Child Protection Plan was 24.2 per 10,000 population compared to 24.6 as at end of March 2020. Based on the benchmarking data 2020-21, Thurrock is below the Statistical Neighbour average of 36 and England average of 41 in September 2021. As the rate has been consistent since December 2020 and there are mechanisms in place to provide reassurance that the right children are subject to child protection plans for example the Child protection surgery, periodic audits of children subject to child in need plans, multi-agency audits of Early Help cases and MASH cases. There is a continued commitment throughout

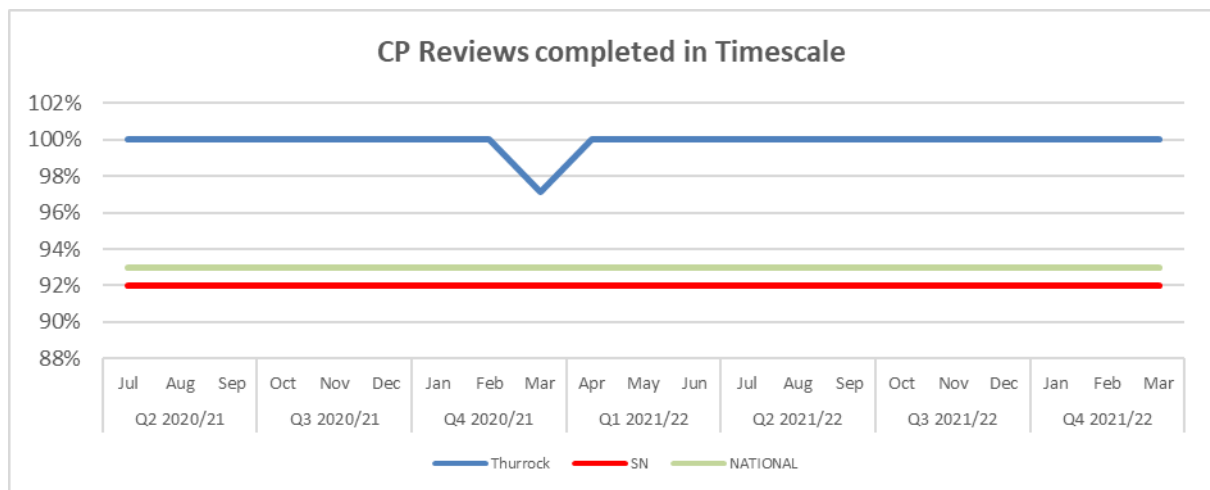
Thurrock to ensure that that families are given every opportunity to resolve issues and achieve sustainable change as safely as possible whilst ensuring that intrusion into family life is kept as low as possible. In light of this the use of Child Protection planning is constantly reviewed to ensure that it is consistent and proportionate.



5.1.4 The introduction and further embedding of the Signs of Safety practice model which is strengths-based approach to working with families and a focus on timely decision making for children has helped to maintain the number of children with a plan.

## 5.2 Child Protection reviews

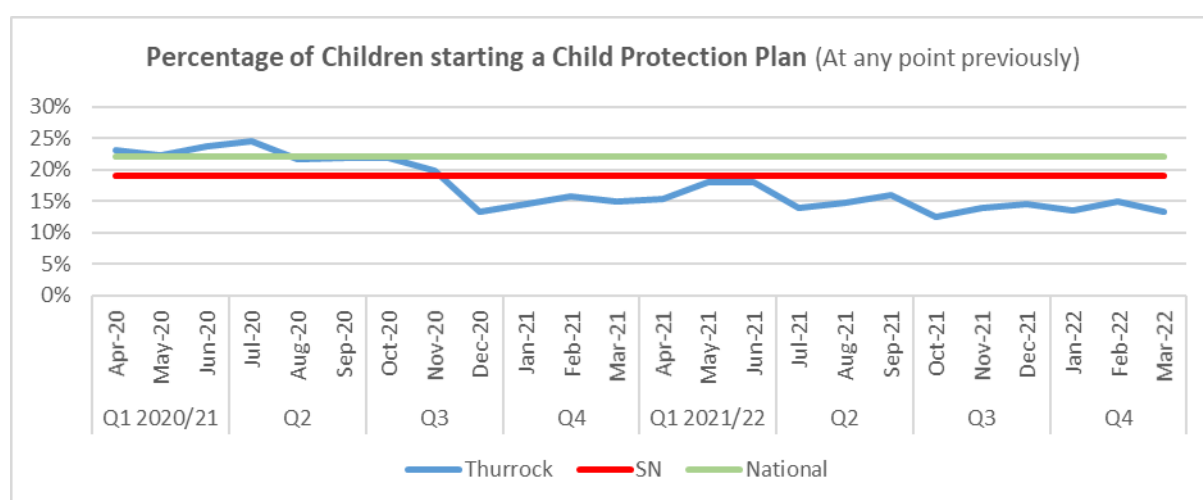
5.2.1 Child Protection plan reviews completed on time continue showing good performance. As at 31 March 2022 100% of reviews were completed in timescale. Compared to 2020-21 benchmarking data, Thurrock is performing above the Statistical Neighbour average of 92% and the England average of 93%. This performance is maintained by systematic and clear planning which is driven by clear business administrative processes.





## 5.3 Repeat Child Protection Plan

5.3.1 As at 31 March 2022, the percentage of children subject to repeat Child Protection Plan (at any point previously) was 13% compared to 14.9% as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020. As at 30 September 2021, the number of Children starting a repeat Child Protection Plan (at any point previously) was 27 children which is in line with March 2020 (27). Based on the latest benchmarking data available in 2020-21, Thurrock is below the statistical neighbour average of 19% and below England average of 22% as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022. Children who are subject to a repeat plan are closely monitored, with requests agreed by the Strategic Lead to ensure that repeated Child Protection intervention is proportionate and effective.



## 6. Care Leaving Service

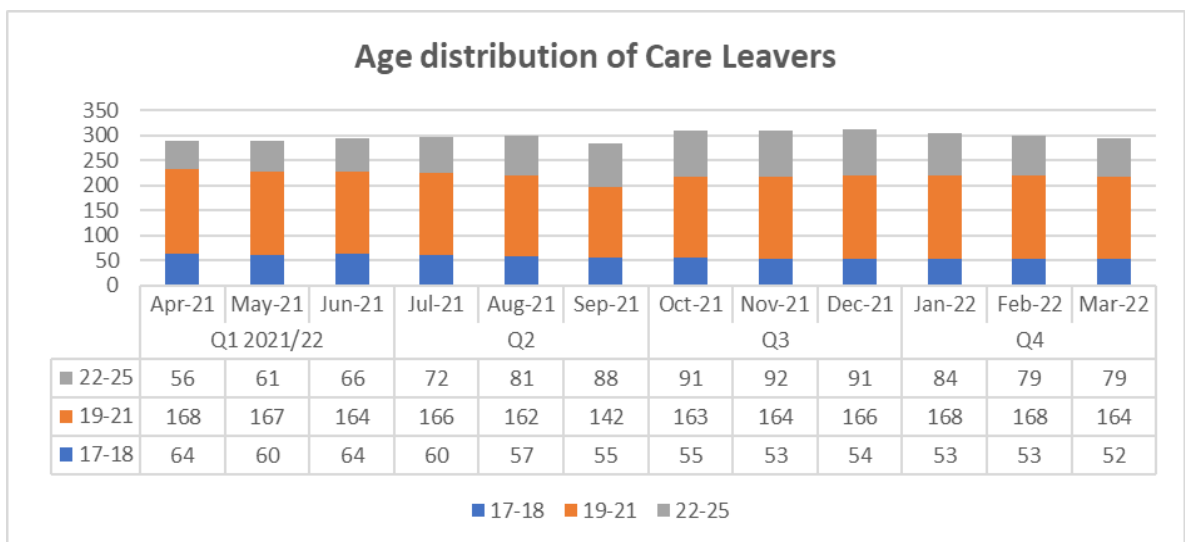
6.1 A Care Leaver, as defined in the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000<sup>1</sup>, is a person who has been 'looked after' or 'in care' for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14, and who was in care on their 16th birthday.

6.2 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.

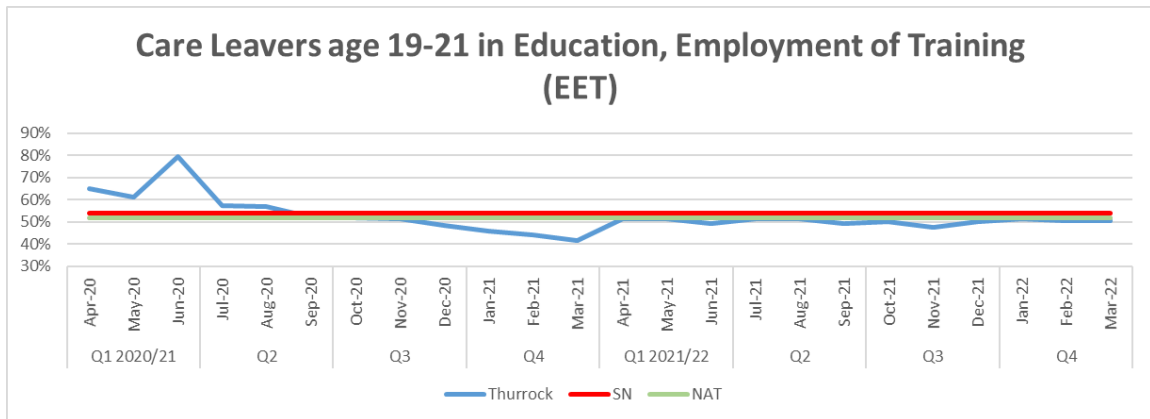
<sup>1</sup> <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/35/contents>

- 6.3 The graph below shows the total OC3 care leaver cohort (Relevant and Former Relevant Children whose 17th, 18th, 19th, 20th or 21st birthday falls within Financial Year) of Young People age 16-25 years who are in receipt of a Care Leaving service. The numbers are increasing and this is in part due to legislative changes that placed additional responsibilities upon Care Leaving services (Children and Social Work Act 2017). Section 3 of the Act now requires Local Authorities to appoint a Personal Adviser for Care Leavers (who request one) up until the age of 25.
- 6.4 As at end of March 2022, 295 Care Leavers were being supported and were receiving an Aftercare service. This is a marginal increase from the previous year and this cohort now has a wider remit as all Care Leavers can request support services until the age of 25, under the Children and Social Work Act 2017.
- 6.5 The charts below show the Care Leaver cohort broken down by age groups.



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

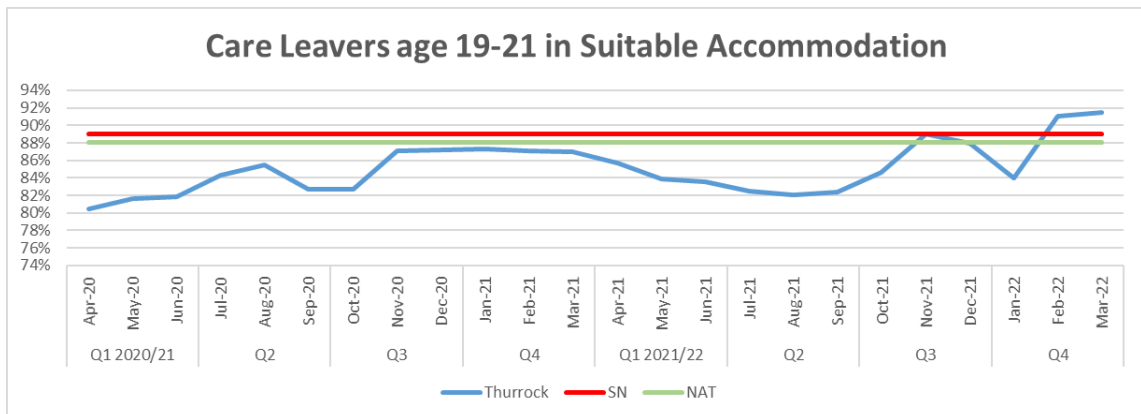
6.6.1 At the end of March 2022, 50.6% of the Care Leavers aged 19- to 21-year-old were in part- or full-time education, employment or training compared to 41.4% in March 2021. To strengthen oversight and planning to ensure our young people have support and opportunities for Education, Employment and 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.



## 6.7 Care Leavers age 19 to 21 years in Suitable Accommodation

6.7.1 At the end of March 2022, the number of 19 to 21 year old Care Leavers reported to be in suitable accommodation was 91.5%. There are some care leavers who are not in touch with the service and their 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.

6.7.2 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.

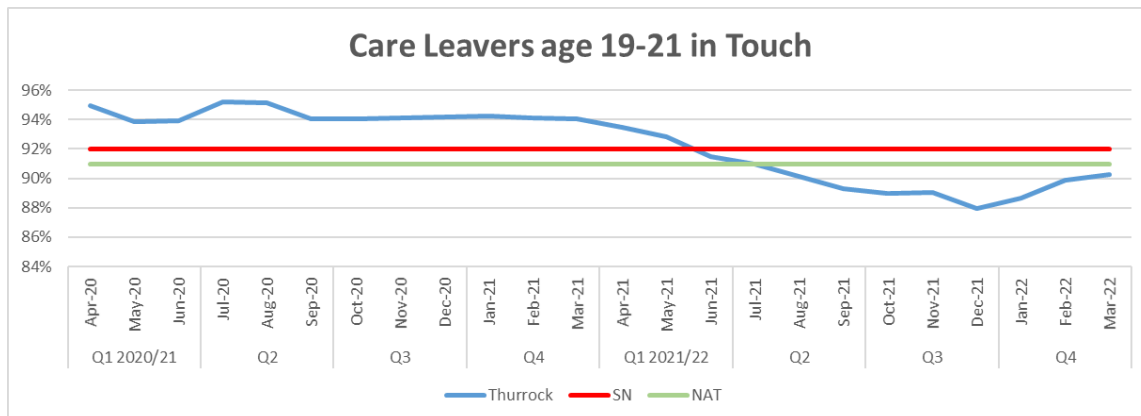


6.7.3 There is consistent improvement over the course of the last two years with regards to the measure.

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

6.8.1 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 March 2022, Thurrock was in touch with 90.2% of Care Leavers.

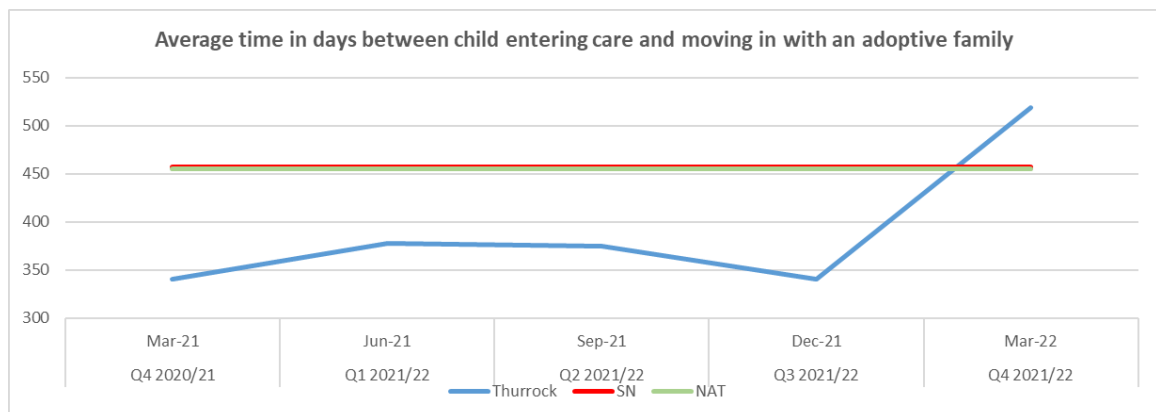
6.8.2 Thurrock's performance is slightly below the statistical neighbour average of 92% and England average of 91% at the end of March 2022.



## 7. Adoption

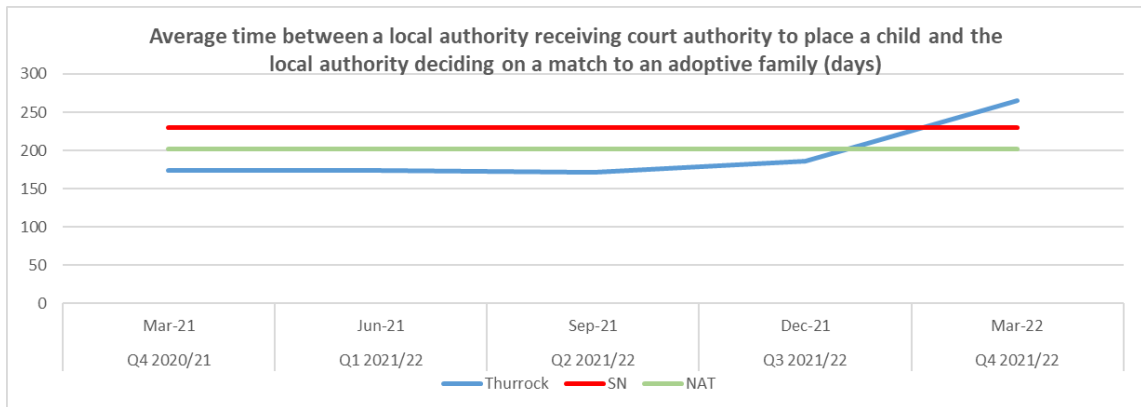
### 7.1 Timeliness of Adoption

7.1.1 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 March 2022, Thurrock's average was 519 days. Based on the latest benchmarking data 2021, Thurrock is above the Statistical Neighbour average of 457 days and England average of 455 days. The graph below shows that there is a steep increase in the average time taken from entering care to adoption; there is significant statistical impact by the adoption journey of one child.



7.1.2 As at end of March 2022, the average time in days between Thurrock receiving a Placement Order (court authority) to place a child with the adoptive family was 265 days.

7.1.3 Based on the latest benchmarking data in 2021, Thurrock is above the Statistical Neighbour average of 230 days and England average of 202 days.



7.1.4 The impact of COVID 19 on the local Court has been to reduce Court capacity leading to much longer sets of proceedings. Although the pandemic is over, the capacity issues persist. Considerable delays are noted between Issues Resolution Hearing and final hearings. Senior officers meet with the lead family Judge monthly to review and identify cases of concern so they can be prioritised. As timescales for proceedings have increased this has allowed time for continued work with families leading some ADM (Agency Decision Maker) decisions to be reviewed.

7.1.5 As a result, the 12-month rolling average from children becoming looked after to placement with adopters has extended, our three-year average is 364days. There is an exceptional case which when excluded from the data changes the 12-month rolling average to 419 days, meaning that vast majority of children who require adoption are placed within target timescales.

7.1.6 There were 8 adoption orders in 2021/22 which is the same as the previous financial year. We anticipate this number rising this year as proceedings conclude and court delays are addressed. Thurrock now has its own pool of adopters and strong regional working arrangements which means we can search and link with adopters in anticipation of a final hearing more effectively. In the last year, half of the placement orders granted have been subject to robust challenge by parents which has impacted matching and placement. Thurrock is tracking these cases carefully and takes legal advice to minimise delay.

## 7.2 **CLA permanency**

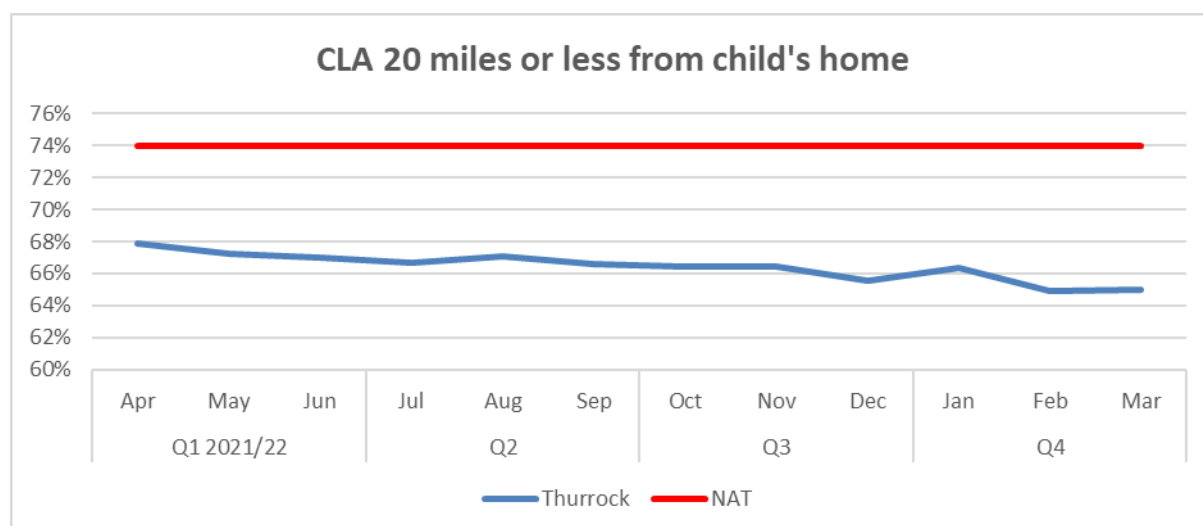
7.2.1 Purposeful early permanency planning continues to ensure that children are in the right placement at the right time to meet their needs. Securing placements where needed and supporting children, where appropriate, to remain at home with their families is the priority. Children are placed for adoption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

7.2.2 The majority of children under five who are not able to return home, are moved on to permanent placements through adoption or permanent alternative carers. The court capacity issue continues to impact as discussed above. Thurrock continues to progress all options for permanency for looked after children during the court proceeding or their first period in care if voluntarily accommodated which continues until the outcome is known. For children who are subject to full care orders, the Fostering Panel Advisor tracks and promotes long term fostering matches. 21 children have been long-term matched with their foster carers in Q4 of 21/22.

### 7.3 CLA placement distance

7.3.1 It is good practice to ensure that children remain within their communities. At the end of March 2022, 65% of the Children Looked After cohort were placed within 20 miles or less from their homes, which represents 187 of 287 children looked after. Based on the latest benchmarking data available in March 2021, the national average is 74%.

7.3.2 This is an area of intense focus for the Placement Service. The fostering recruitment campaign seeks to increase local placements. However it is not only Thurrock Local Authority who are finding the recruitment of local foster carers a challenge. Local placements are not available from Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA) or Residential care homes. There is a national shortage of fostering and residential care<sup>2</sup>, (the interim report published by the Competition and Markets Authority, October 2022, has noted the pressure on Local Authority placement services) and the local authority continues to seek Ofsted registered provision and sometimes this is outside of the Thurrock and Essex area.



<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/childrens-social-care-market-study-interim-report/interim-report>.

## **8. Reasons for Recommendations**

8.1 Children's Overview & Scrutiny Board Members to note and comment on current performance position.

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

9.1 Not applicable

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

10.1 None

## **11. Implications**

### **11.1 Financial**

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

No implications identified.

### **11.2 Legal**

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

No implications identified.

### **11.3 Diversity & Equality**

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

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

11.4 **Other implications (where significant)** – i.e. Staff, Health Inequalities, Sustainability, 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**

Marc Rhodes

Business Intelligence Manager

Children's Services



**Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee  
Work Programme 2022/23**

Dates of Meetings: 16 June 2022, 13 September 2022, 17 November 2022, 17 January 2023, 14 March 2023

<b>Topic</b>	<b>Lead Officer</b>	<b>Requested by Officer/Member</b>
<b>16 June 2022</b>		
Youth Cabinet Update – Briefing Note	Angela Surrey	Standing Item
Items Raised by Thurrock Local Safeguarding Partnership Board: Progress Update on Peer Review and Case Review – Action Plans	Priscilla Bruce-Annan	Standing Item/ Members
Education National Drivers: Schools White Paper, SEND & AP Green Paper, Levelling Up, Skills Act, School Admission and Attendance Guidance	Sheila Murphy	Officers
The Care Review into Children's Social Care and the National Safeguarding Panel Review of Child Protection	Sheila Murphy	Officers
Children's Social Care Performance – Quarter 4 2021-22	Janet Simon	Chair
Work Programme	Democratic Services	Standing item
<b>13 September 2022</b>		
Youth Cabinet Verbal Update	Angela Surrey	Standing Item

Items Raised by Thurrock Local Safeguarding Partnership Board	Priscilla Bruce-Annan	Standing Item
Fostering Recruitment Update	Janet Simon	Members
2021/22 Annual Complaints and Representations Report – Children’s Social Care	Lee Henley	Officers
Work Programme	Democratic Services	Standing item
<b>17 November 2022</b>		
Youth Cabinet Verbal Update	Angela Surrey	Standing Item
Items Raised by Thurrock Local Safeguarding Partnership Board	Priscilla Bruce-Annan	Standing Item
Educational Attainment Data 2021/22	Michele Lucas	Members
Fees and Charges Pricing Strategy 2023-24	Kelly McMillan	Officer
Work Programme	Democratic Services	Standing Item
<b>17 January 2023</b>		
Youth Cabinet Verbal Update	Angela Surry	Standing Item
Items Raised by Thurrock Local Safeguarding Partnership Board	Priscilla Bruce-Annan	Standing Item
Work Programme	Democratic Services	Standing item
<b>14 March 2023</b>		
Youth Cabinet Update	Angela Surrey	Standing Item

Items Raised by Thurrock Local Safeguarding Partnership Board	Priscilla Bruce-Annan	Standing Item
Work Programme	Democratic Services	Standing item
<b>Briefing Notes</b>		
N/A	N/A	N/A

**Updated:** 28<sup>th</sup> March 2022

**Clerk:**

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