

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

Corporate Parenting Committee

The meeting will be held at **7.00 pm** on **5 September 2023**

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

Membership:

Councillors Paul Arnold (Chair), Vikki Hartstean (Vice-Chair), Adam Carter, John Cecil, Georgette Polley, Cici Manwa and Augustine Ononaji

Laura Hall, Thurrock OpenDoor, Children In Care Council
Wendy Caswell, Chair, The One Team, Foster Carer Association
Jackie Enifer, Vice-Chair, Thurrock One Team Foster Care Association
Representative

Substitutes:

Councillors Gary Collins, Jack Duffin, James Halden, Sara Muldowney and Sue Shinnick

Agenda

Open to Public and Press

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1 Apologies for Absence	
2 Minutes	5 - 10
To approve as a correct record the minutes of the Corporate Parenting Committee meeting held on 18 July 2023.	
3 Items of Urgent Business	
To receive additional items that the Chair is of the opinion should be considered as a matter of urgency, in accordance with Section 100B (4) (b) of the Local Government Act 1972.	
4 Declaration of Interests	

5	Children's Social Care Performance 2023-24	11 - 28
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Queries regarding this Agenda or notification of apologies:

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

Agenda published on: **25 August 2023**

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DECLARING INTERESTS FLOWCHART – QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF

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

Helpful Reminders for Members

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

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

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



Does the business to be transacted at the meeting

- relate to; or
- likely to affect

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

Disclosable Pecuniary Interests shall include your interests or those of:

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

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

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

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

Pecuniary

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

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

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

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

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

Non- pecuniary

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

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

Our Vision and Priorities for Thurrock

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

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

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

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

Minutes of the Meeting of the Corporate Parenting Committee held on 18 July 2023 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillors Paul Arnold (Chair), Vikki Hartstean (Vice-Chair), Adam Carter, John Cecil, Georgette Polley, Cici Manwa and Augustine Ononaji

Wendy Caswell, Chair, The One Team, Foster Carer Association
Jackie Enifer, Vice-Chair, The One Team, Foster Carer Association

Apologises: Laura Hall, Thurrock Open Door

In attendance: Shelia Murphy, Corporate Director of Children's Services
Janet Simon, Assistant Director, Children's Social Care and Early Help
Dan Jones, Strategic Lead, Looked After Children
Clare Moore, Strategic Lead for the Youth Offending Service and Prevention
Keeley Pullen, Keeley Pullen, Headteacher of the Virtual School for Children
Ines Paris, Designated Lead Safeguarding Nurse
Liz Shields, Service Manager Adoption Service
Peter Turner, Chair of the Fostering and Adoption Panel
Tina Russel, Assistant Director SET CAMHS and Partnerships
Donna Noble, Business Support Officer, Legal and Governance

Before the start of the Meeting, all present were advised that the meeting was being recorded.

1. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 21 March 2023 were approved as a true and correct record.

2. Items of Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

3. Declaration of Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

4. Children's Social Care Performance 2022-23

The Assistant Director for Children's Social Care and Early Help presented the report found on pages 9 to 30 of the agenda.

Members discussions focused on the Initial Health Assessments and the timeliness of their completion for Thurrock's children and young people within care. They sought assurances that improvements continued to be made including meeting timescales for Initial Health Assessments.

Members requested that regular updates on Initial Health Assessments were presented to the Committee.

RESOLVED:

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

5. Adoption Statement of Purpose

The Strategic Lead, Looked After Children introduced the report found on pages 31 to 62 of the agenda.

Throughout discussions the following were discussed:

- The adoption team assisted with providing the support services to adoptees and adopters. Along with support for special guardians and the children placed with them, as this was a similar framework. It therefore sat within the same team and officers had access to services via a commissioned framework of service providers.
- It was explained a guardianship arrangement could be in place until the age of 18 years old and effectively within a special guardianship, your birth parents are still your parents, although you may not have lived with them for a period of time.
- An adoption was lifelong and was a full legal change within a family, and so the adopted family would become parents and grandparents to the child.

RESOLVED:

That the Members of the Committee review Thurrock's Adoption Statement of Purpose.

6. Thurrock Fostering Statement of Purpose

The Service Manager for the Fostering and Adoption Service presented the report found on pages 63 to 92 of the agenda.

Members thanked officers for the report and enquired if in the next version of the Fostering Statement of Purpose a section could be included on whistle blowing.

During discussions, the Committee heard how each child had an allocated social worker who had regular visits and as part of those visits, they have to make sure they see the child on their own, spend time with them to go through direct work with them.

The Chair thanked officers for the report and commented it showed the excellent work and underlined the hard work that went on the service, which was very much appreciated.

RESOLVED:

That the Members of the Committee review and note Thurrock's Fostering Statement of Purpose

7. Fostering and Adoption Annual Panel Report 2022-2023

The Chair of the Fostering and Adoption Panel Introduced the report found on pages 93 to 108 of the agenda. Members heard how within the last year the panel had strengthened the membership of the panel and the Chair of Panel was pleased to say they were a much more representative group of individuals.

Members heard how the Council worked with a registered adoption agency who were specialist in inter country adoption and should Thurrock residents wish to pursue inter country adoption, the first step was to make an initial inquiry with the adoption team and were then passed on to the specialist agency who could provide further advice.

It was explained when it came to schools and liaising with teachers, the panel would rely on documentation and information packs supplied by either the school, child's social worker or the child themselves.

RESOLVED:

That the Members of the Committee review the report of the Independent Chair of the Thurrock Fostering and Adoption panel.

8. Recruitment of Foster Carers

The Service Manager for the Fostering and Adoption Service presented the report found on pages 109 to 120 of the agenda.

During which the following was highlighted:

- The majority of Thurrock's looked after children lived in foster placements, and officers felt it was really important for children to have the opportunity to be within a family setting.
- Two households had already approved this financial year and they already had children living with them.

- There were currently eight families in assessment for become foster carers.
- Recruitment was generally through word of mouth, from current foster carers who were already fostering, speak to people within their networks. This also assisted with retainment of foster carers.
- The draft retention guide had been circulated to carers for their comments and was progressing well.

RESOLVED:

- 1. That Members are updated on the current progress in Fostering Recruitment**
- 2. That Members are aware of the key areas for improvements.**
- 3. That Members are aware of the challenges the local authority is experiencing in recruiting foster carers and what we are doing to address these.**

Members agreed to suspend standing orders to allow them to continue to the end of the agenda.

9. Joint Report on Initial Health Assessments for Looked After Children (Update)

The Strategic Lead, Looked After Children presented the report found on pages 121 to 130 of the agenda.

Throughout discussions the below points were raised:

- It was good to see that improvement was continuing to be made regarding Initial Health Assessments, with the last two months recording growth within performance.
- There was a higher number of children who came into care in June than usual, for the same figures previously for the number of children coming into care in a month officers would have to look at 2020 figures.
- As it was June there were 28 days to complete the IHA and for those who came in the last two weeks of the month some of their IHA were still pending, however there was still time to complete these.

RESOLVED:

- 1. Members note the improved performance in the first two months of the first quarter and the positive impact of the additional capacity provided by the ICB to NELFT**
- 2. Members are aware of the further steps being taken to improve performance**

10. Work Programme

Members discussed the work programme and asked that the following reports be included:

- Update from the Children in Care Council
- Regular updates on Initial Health Assessments for Looked After Children

The meeting finished at 9.27 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**

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5 September 2023		ITEM: 5
Corporate Parenting Committee		
Children’s Social Care Performance 2023-24		
Wards and communities affected:	Key Decision:	
All	Non-key	
Report of: Mandy Moore, Business Intelligence & Data Analytics Manager		
Accountable Assistant Director: Janet Simon, Assistant Director, Children’s Social Care and Early Help		
Accountable Director: Sheila Murphy, Corporate Director of Children’s Services		
This report is: Public		

Executive Summary

This report provides information on the performance across Children Looked After and Aftercare. The overall performance for the service is good, this report focusses on data of Quarter 1 (April to June) 2023-24.

At the end of Q1 2023-24, 308 children were looked after by Thurrock Council, a further 279 young adults were receiving services from Aftercare. Children and young people are visited regularly, and the management of missing children is consistent and reflects good partnership with the police and Thurrock Community Safety. Timeliness of Initial Health Assessment remains an area for improvement and focus with health partners.

Improving outcomes for Care Leavers remains an area of focus and development, particularly supporting young people to achieve independence and accessing education, employment and training.

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

1. Recommendation(s)

- 1.1 That members note improvements and good practice and areas for improvement and development in Children's Social Care and note the work that is undertaken to ensure good and improving performance.**
- 1.2 Members provide challenge and support to the service to continually promote good outcomes for children.**

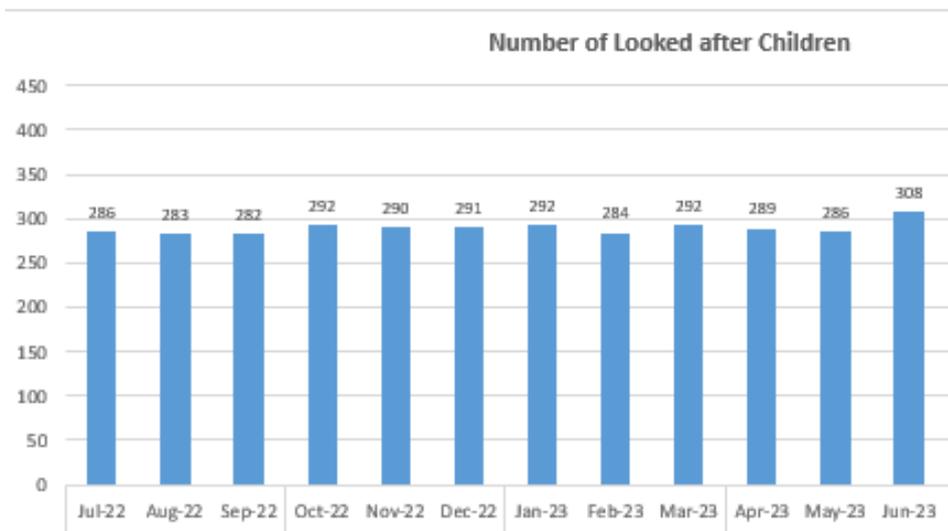
2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1 This report provides a summary of Children's Social Care performance for children who are looked after and leaving care. It highlights key demand indicators for Children Looked After such as the number of children who are looked after, benchmarking data and key performance indicators.
- 2.2 Thurrock produces a number of datasets and performance reports to meet its internal and external reporting requirements. The data in this report is from the 'At a Glance' monthly performance report, regional benchmarking data and national data sets. External reporting requirements include the annual statutory data return to the Department for Education (DfE) that all Local Authorities must provide.
- 2.3 This data has been presented and discussed with the Children & Families Performance Group.
- 2.4 Teams and Managers use the data to understand and respond to changes in activity levels, to monitor and respond to the quality and timeliness of services and to collate information about how well children are doing. The information is also discussed with front line workers.

3. Performance Data for Children Looked After

3.1 Number of Children Looked After (CLA)

The graph below shows the number of children who were Looked After at the end of each month. 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. Thurrock's Children in Care numbers have remained relatively steady year to date from 294 in April 2022 to 292 in March 2023. The end of Quarter 1, as at end June 2023, saw an increase of 16 up to 308 Children in Care. During June, 30 children entered care, of these 9 were UASC and the remainder entered care as the result of safeguarding action by Thurrock Council and its partners.

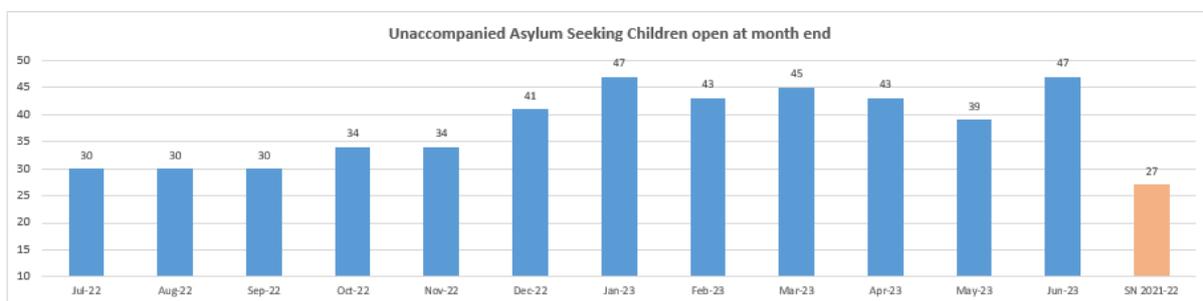


3.2 Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC)

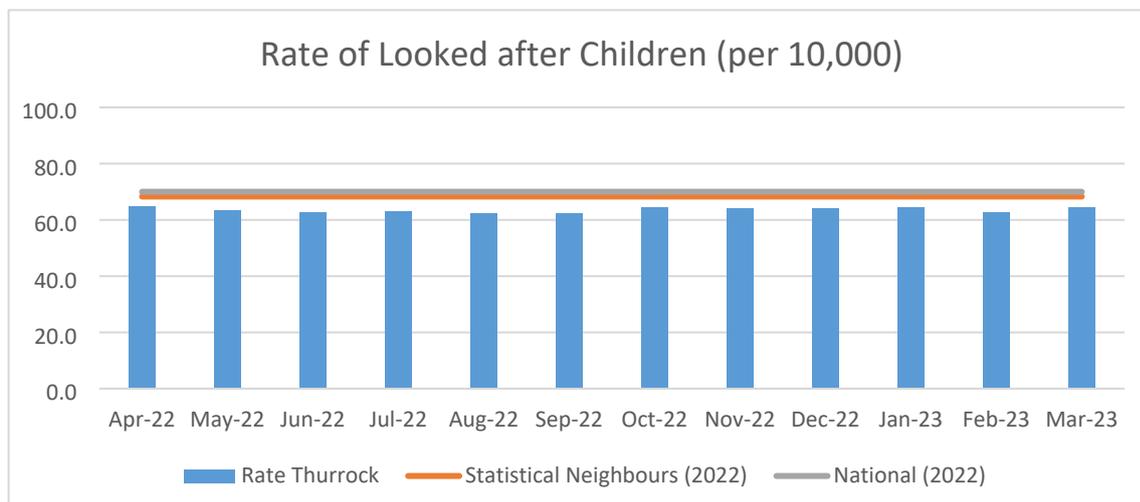
UASC are a subset of Thurrock's Children Looked After population. As an authority with ports of entry Thurrock has a steady amount of new UASC. The National Transfer Scheme (NTS) protocol for UASC first began operating in 2016 which formed a voluntary agreement between local authorities in England to ensure a fairer, more equitable distribution of unaccompanied children across local authorities. After February 2022 all local authorities have been directed to participate in the NTS (mandated NTS). Thurrock has quota of 44 children. This means that Thurrock has to accept transfers of UASC in the scheme if we are below 44 UASC in our Child Looked After population. This represents an increased demand for placements, social work time and After Care support on a long-term basis. As at end June 23 Thurrock had 47 UASC children, three children were pending transfer.

When a local authority reaches its allocated number there are arrangements in place for new arrivals to be transferred via the National Transfer Scheme (NTS). The NTS is operated by Central Government with the Home Office is responsible for administration of the scheme.

The below graph shows the number of UASC that were looked after at the end of each month since July 2022.

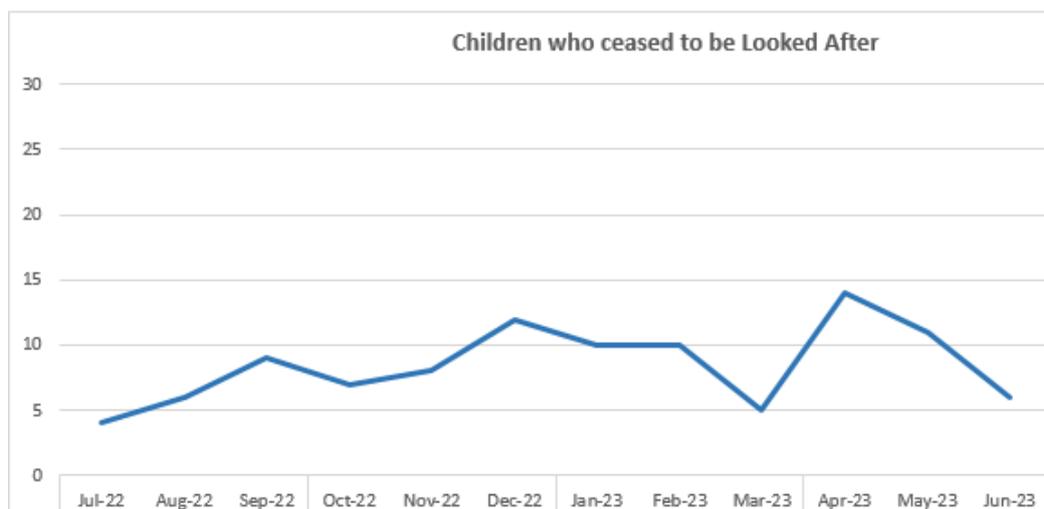


Children Looked After in Thurrock with the rate of 64.3 per 10,000. Based on the benchmarking data 2022, Thurrock is below the Statistical Neighbour average of 68.3 and England average of 70 as at the end of March 2023. This demonstrates the work throughout the service to make sure the right children are coming into care and working with families to keep children within their family network/home where it is safe to do so. These lower looked after children numbers are despite the rise in numbers of UASC as a result of the national threshold rising. June's increase to 308 children in care, equates to 67.9 per 10,000 population, this remains below the statistical and national outturns stated above.



3.3 Children Looked After episodes ceased

It is normal for the number of children leaving care to fluctuate. Between April 2022 and March 2023, 97 children ceased to be looked after compared to 125 in the same period in 2021-22. During Q1 2023-2024 25 children ceased to be looked after.



The most common reason for children ceasing to be looked after was children returning home to live with their parents.

There are four factors contributing and impacting on the numbers of children in care in Thurrock:

- Numbers of children entering care
- Numbers of children leaving care
- Numbers of UASC entering care

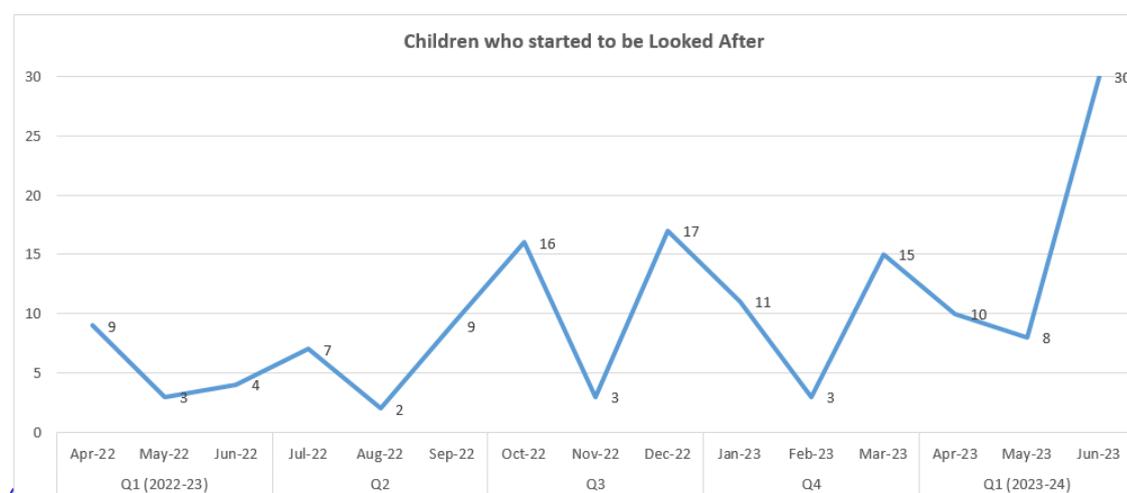
- Numbers of UASC who remain looked after by Thurrock

The below charts show entries in and exits out of care over the last few years including the changing trajectory of the UASC population in line with the rise from 0.07% to 0.1%.

	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	Q4 2022-23 (Jan-Mar)	Q1 2023-24 (Apr-Jun)
Total number Entering Care	203	242	150	121	29	48
UASC entering Care	91	75	36	38	12	11
Exiting Care	211	235	148	122	25	31
Number of CLA at end of reporting period	290	298	298	295	292	308
UASC Population at end of reporting period (% of CLA population)	31 (10.6%)	23 (7.7%)	24 (8%)	28 (9.4%)	39 (13%)	47 (15%)

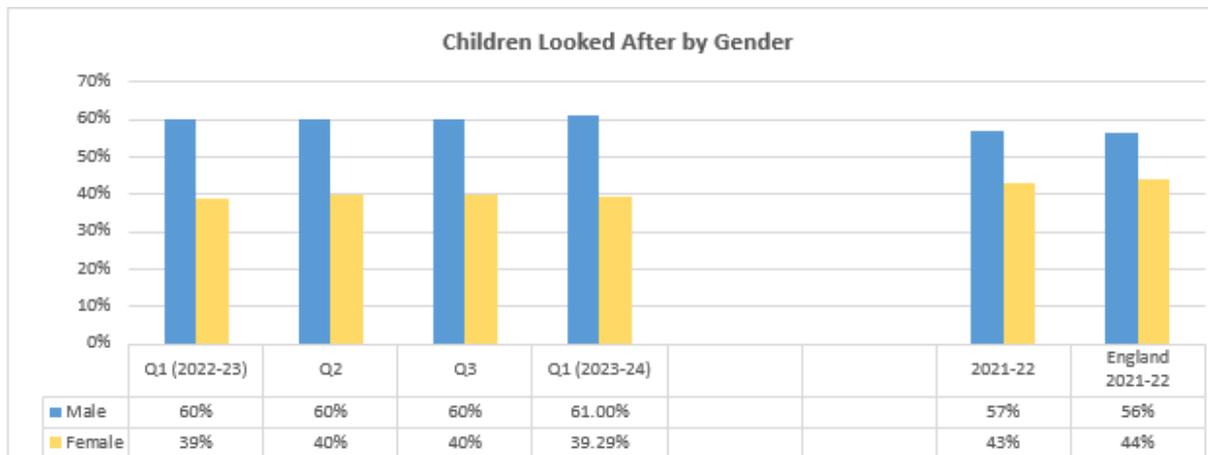
3.4 Children Looked After episodes started

It is normal for fluctuations to be seen with children starting episodes of care, this is shown by the graph below. There was however a sharp increase during June 2023 of 30 children starting an episode of care. The graph below demonstrates June was an exception month for the number of children entering care. This reflects 9 UASC children and the 21 other children reflects large sibling groups.



3.5 Children Looked After by Gender

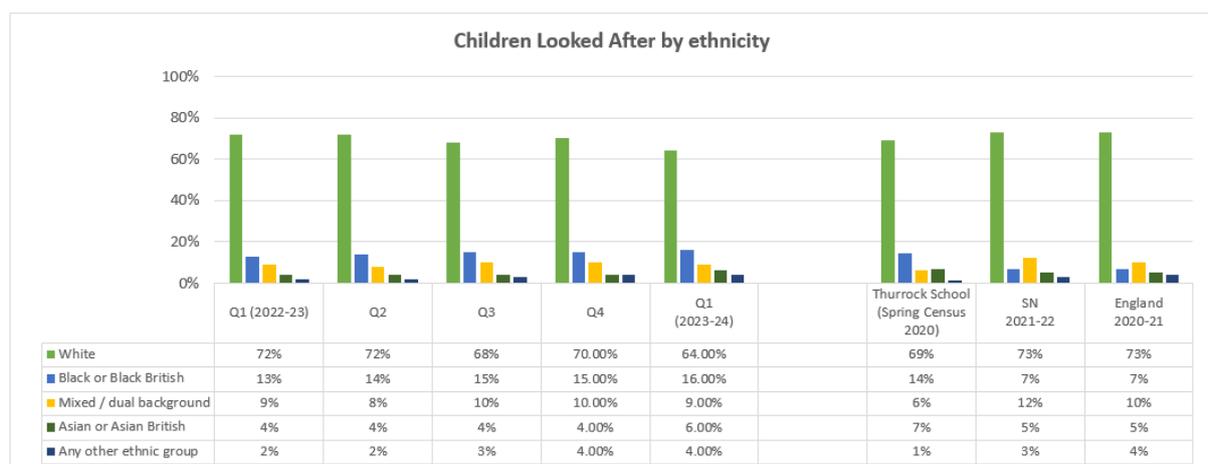
Based on the benchmarking data in 2021-22, the gender breakdown is slightly above Statistical Neighbours and England averages as of June 2023, which is likely a reflection of our percentage of UASC, who are predominately males.



3.6 Children Looked After by Ethnicity

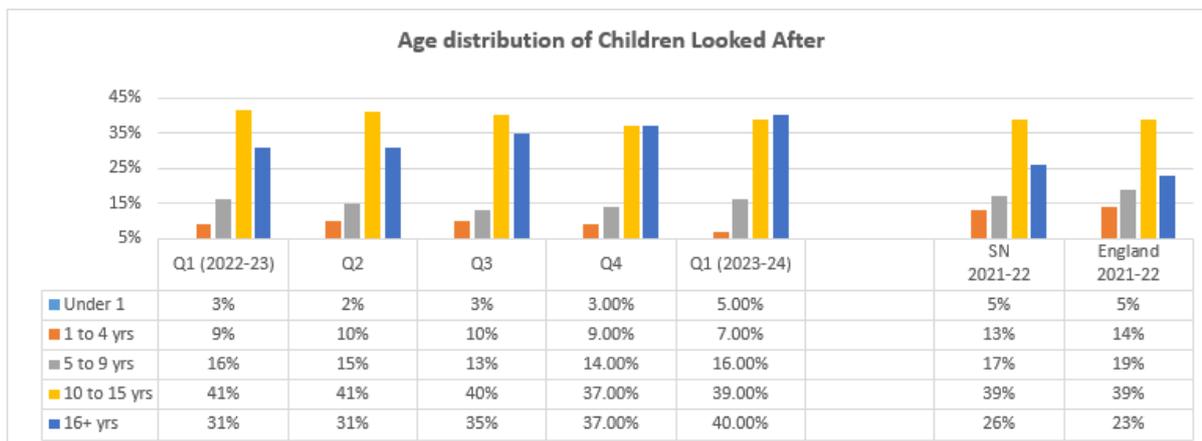
Statistical Neighbour and England averages are included. However, for Thurrock, school census data provides a more appropriate comparison, given the population of Thurrock.

Thurrock's Children Looked After are predominantly White which is in line with Thurrock's School Census in Spring 2020 and the Statistical Neighbour and England averages. Quarter 1 2023-24 outturn saw a slight increase in Black or Black British and Asia or Asian British, a slight decrease in Mixed/dual background and a 6% decrease in White ethnicity.



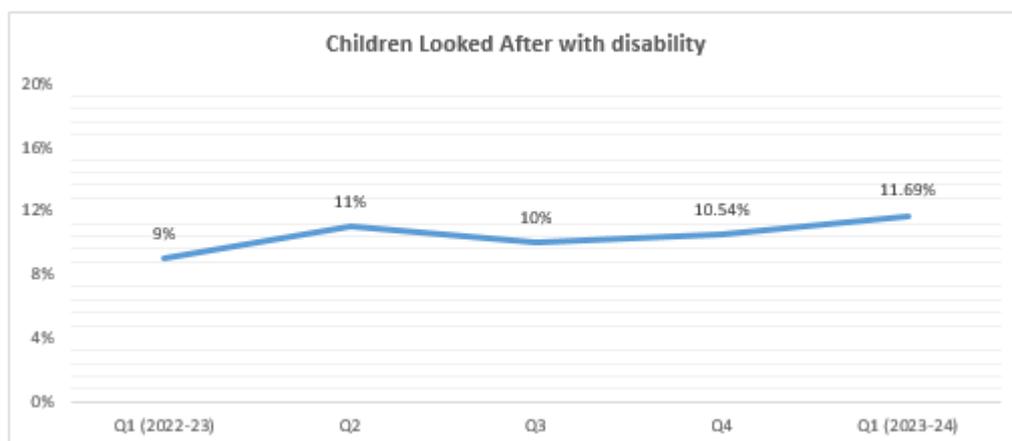
3.7 Children Looked After age profile

Based on the benchmarking data as of March 2023, the age profile of the Children Looked After cohort remains mostly stable and largely in line with the Statistical Neighbour and England averages. We are however, seeing a larger percentage in age group 16+ years a lower percentage in age group 1 to 4 years, when compared to both statistical neighbours and national outturns for 2022.



3.8 Children Looked After with a disability

The number of children looked after with a disability has remained relatively stable since April 2022. At the end of June 2023, 36 (11.69%) of the total CLA cohort were recorded as having a disability. Approximately two thirds of those children are male. 69% of those disabled children were placed within 20 miles or less from their home.

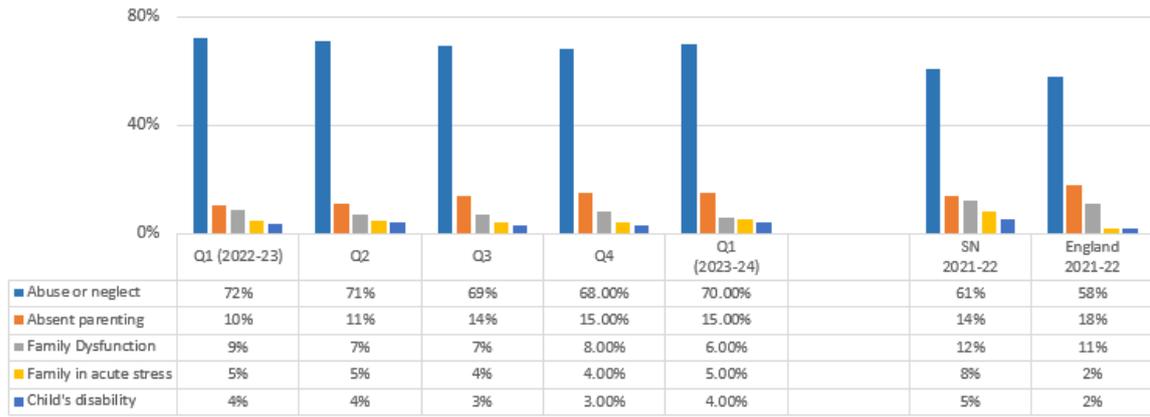


3.9 Children Looked After by Primary Need

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

The table below shows the primary need indicated for the child to be in care. Thurrock has a higher percentage recorded as 'Abuse or Neglect' and lower percentage recorded as 'Family Dysfunction' than statistical neighbours and national benchmarks; this is in line with previous quarters.

Children Looked After by primary need



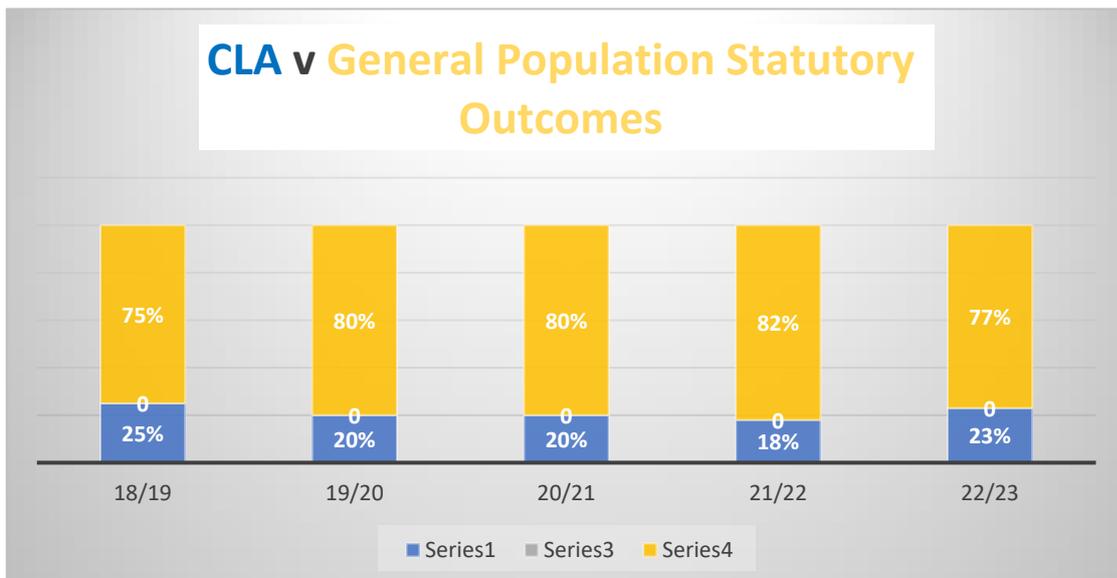
4. Number of CLA open to the Youth Offending Service (YOS)

4.1 Statutory Interventions

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

For the first quarter of 2023/24 there were 8 children open to the Youth Offending Service on statutory outcomes, 2 of these were looked after children at the start of their intervention. The 2 looked after children represented 25% of the young people open to YOS, however the numbers are low so this will affect the percentages.

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



The above graph represents the percentage of Children Looked After versus the total number of young people in the Youth Justice System for the last five years. There has been a slight increase since the last financial year but overall, the figure has remained relatively static.

4.2 Youth Detention Accommodation

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

No children were made subject to Youth Detention Accommodation during the first quarter of 2023/24. However, we currently have 1 young person subject to Youth Detention Accommodation. This young person was CLA prior to the Remand in custody.

4.3 Out of court disposal panel

During the first quarter of the 2023/24 financial year the out of court disposal panel dealt with 11 offences relating to 11 Thurrock children, of which no children had looked after status.

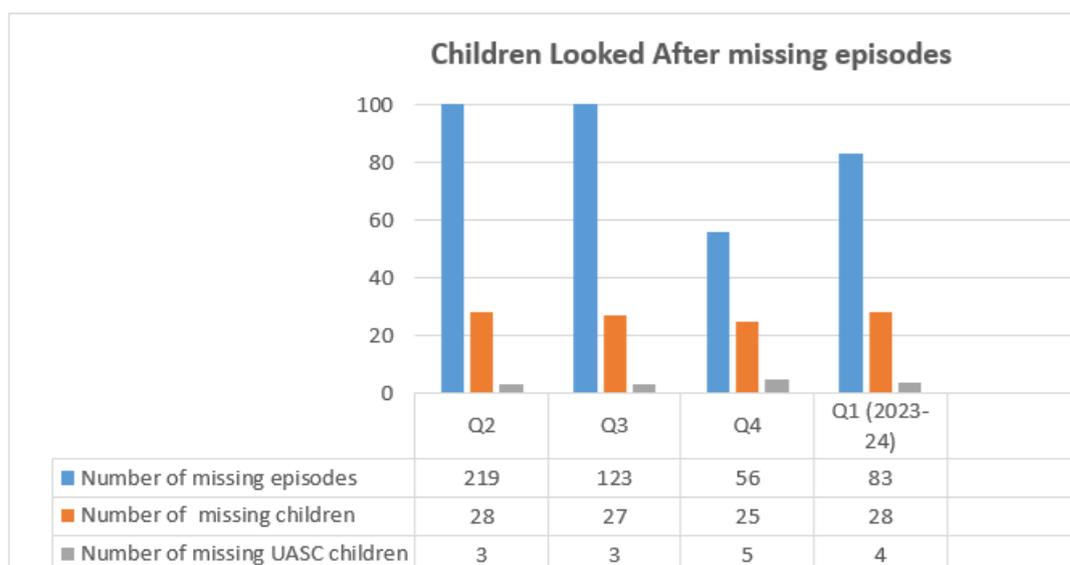
Thurrock YOS and Essex Police are committed to the national protocol¹ aimed at reducing the criminalisation of Children Looked After. This approach will be supported with a local pan-Essex protocol to ensure there is a focus on diverting any child (where possible) who is Looked After from the Criminal Justice System.

5. Children Looked After missing episodes started

The graph below shows the number of missing episodes started and the count of the individual children who went missing between April 2022 and June 2023. The most common reasons for children going missing is that they have stayed out past their expected return home time with friends or are with their families.

Between April 2022 and March 2023, there were total of 492 missing episodes which represented 50 individual children. This is a reduction on the previous year when there were a total of 566 episodes.

During Quarter 1, April to June 2023 there were a total of 83 missing episodes which represented 28 individual children, 4 of which were UASC.



The majority of children going missing remains for short periods of time and relates to older children (16 and over) staying out later than an agreed return home time. Younger children who are missing are reported to the Police at an earlier stage of the day and risk assessed. Strategy meetings continue to track reasons for missing episodes missing episodes are that they are all spending time with friends and/or family. Others are seeking to spend extended periods of time with friends/partners.

When children are reported missing the majority return within 24 hours, i.e. if reported at 11pm they are back in placement by the next day most are back before the next morning. The majority are aged 17. Small numbers of children may spend longer periods away from placement.

5.1 **Children Looked After return to home interview (RHI)**

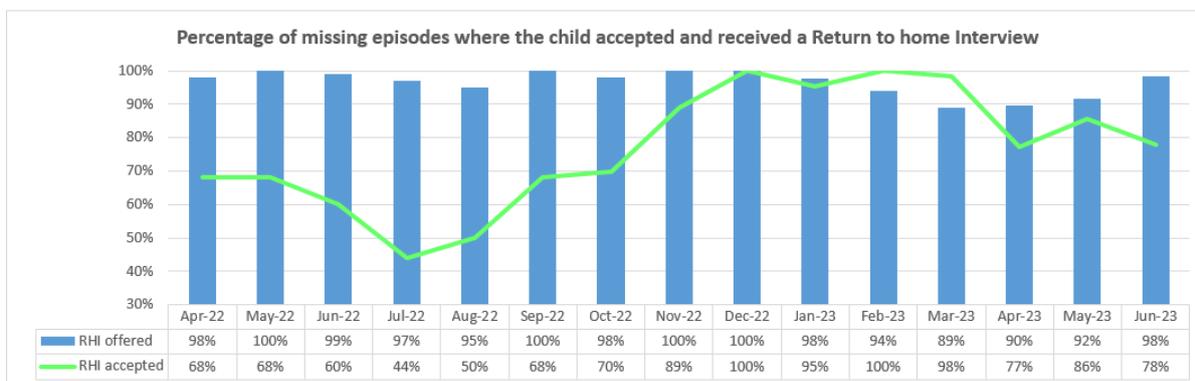
Since April 2020, Inspire Youth Hub were commissioned to undertake independent Return Home Interviews (RHI). All children are offered a RHI within 72 hours following each missing episode, with the aim of understanding the young person's circumstances and the reasons why they go missing. Key Workers from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

During Quarter 1, April to June 2023 there were a total of 83 missing episodes which represented 28 individual children. Many of the children are missing for a few hours and have stayed out later than their agreed return time. Over 90% of the children and young people were staying with friends, or family. The others have refused to say where they have been, or who with. Over 80% of the children that went missing were aged 16 and 17 years old, with the majority being male young people.

As at the end of June 2023, the percentage of children offered a return to home interview was 98% of which 78% accepted and received an interview compared to 60% in June 2022. The offer of an RHI 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 Missing Children Panel.

The graph below shows the percentage of return to home interviews taken up by young people since April 2022 and shows, in the main, an improved picture of children accepting and receiving a RHI. There continues to be a small number of CLA who have consistently refused return home interviews. We continue to review 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. This has increased the amount of Return Home Interviews completed and has ensured that young people are given the opportunities to share whether there are any safeguarding issues in relation to exploitation that needs to be addressed.

From April 01 2023, the RHI Service transferred from Inspire to being overseen and provided by the Child Exploitation and Missing Team.



5.2 Timeliness of Social Worker Children Looked After visits

Social workers are required to visit a child/young person within one week of the start of any placement. Visits are then due in accordance with the time agreed within the Care Plan. This can vary from 20 to 65 working days, permitted within regulations. The average visits completed in time between April 2022 and March 2023 was 94% compared to 91% in 2021/22 representing a 3% increase. During Q1 2023-24 95.5% of visits were completed in timescale.



5.3 Children Looked After Initial Health Assessments (IHA)

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

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

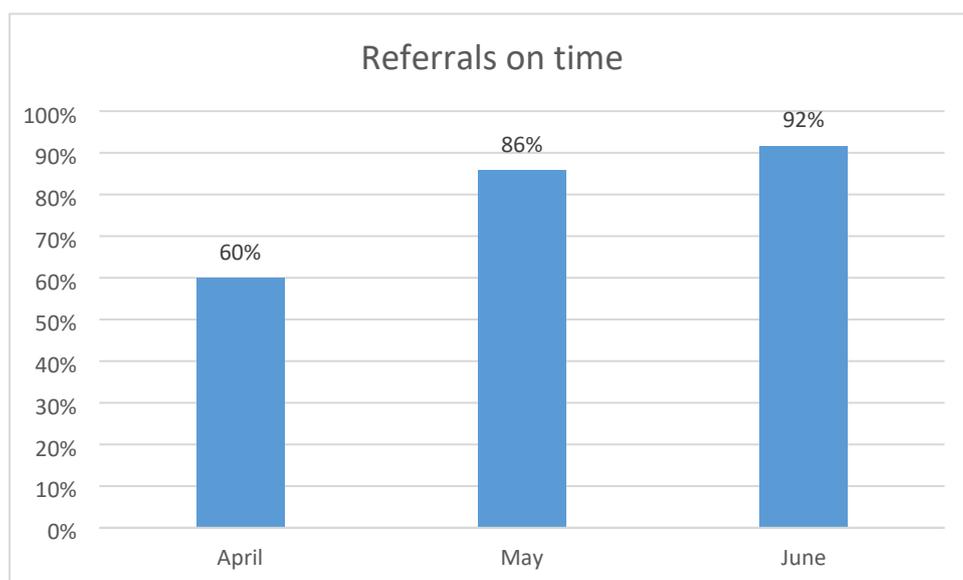
- Whether the referral for an initial health assessment is made to health providers by the local authority within 5 working days
- The initial health assessment takes place within 20 working days of a child entering care.

Notifications for an IHA cannot be progressed if parents have not provided consent for medical treatment and there is no court order which gives the Local Authority shared parental responsibility for consenting to health care. There is a weekly IHA tracking meeting to focus on meeting the need for children to have a statutory initial health assessment within 20 working days.

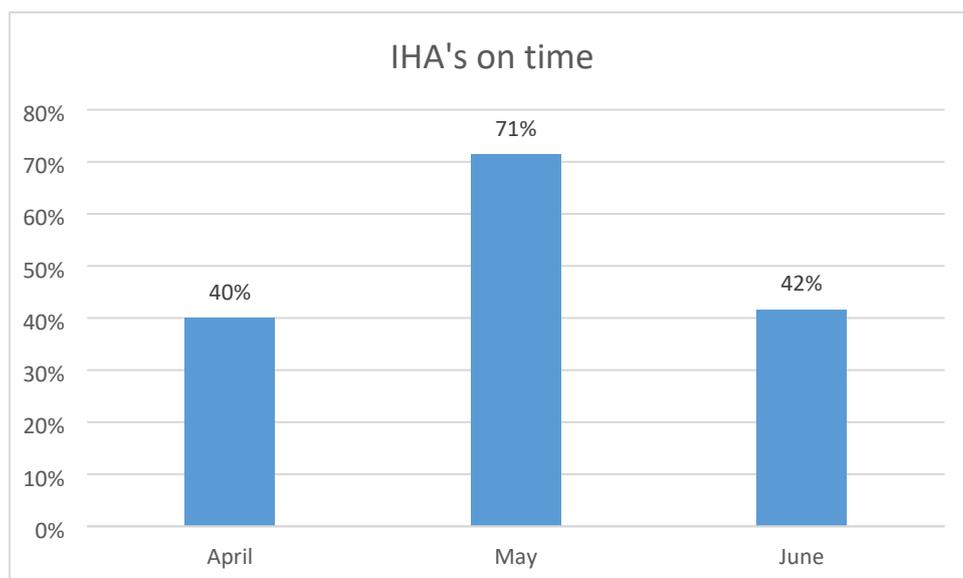
The numbers of IHA requests required each month can be small and therefore fluctuations can be impacted on by very small numbers. The following table sets out the number of children who became looked after to Thurrock Council and those who remained in Thurrock's care long enough for an IHA to be required.

	April	May	June
Number entering care	10	8	30
In care less than 28 days	0	1	6
Children Requiring an IHA	10	7	24

The following chart sets out the percentage of IHA referrals that were completed on time



The following Chart sets out the Initial health assessments that were completed on time



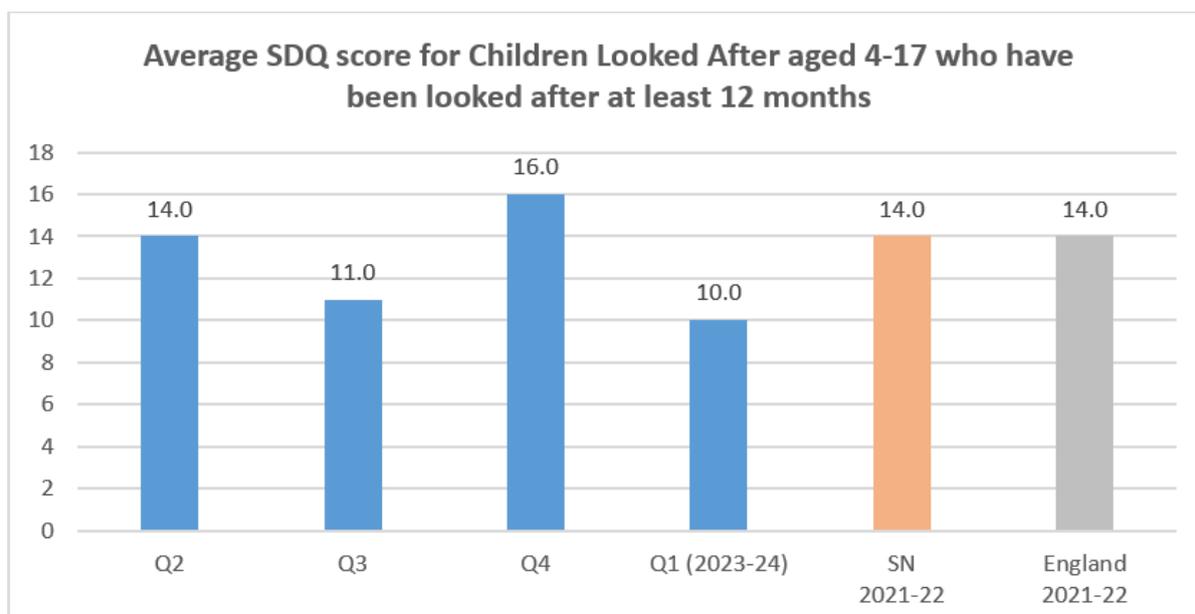
The effect of additional 'in area' capacity can be seen in some improved performance. This capacity is only available in the NELF area and when children are placed outside of this area there is still limited capacity affecting the timeliness of IHA's.

5.4 Children Looked After Strengths & Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ)

SDQ scores are a measure which provides an indication of the mental wellbeing of Looked After Children. Thurrock has a statutory responsibility to collect SDQ scores annually for all children aged 4-17 who have continuously been looked after for at least 12 months. Thurrock Childrens Services collate the SDQ scores termly via the Personal Education Plan supported by the Virtual School and Children's Social Care collecting the views of carers, school staff and children.

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

The average scores for Quarter 1 2023-24 are 10.0 which is below our Statistical Neighbour and National benchmarks, but in line with Quarter 3 2022-23. The mental wellbeing of Children Looked After is being appropriately reviewed, with support and intervention provided as necessary.



6. Adoption

As at the end of Q1 2023-24, there were 1 child adopted and 5 children were placed with prospective adopters.

6.1 Timeliness of Adoption

The average duration of care proceedings nationally has been over 40 weeks. The President of the Family Division re-launched the Public Law Outline process in January 2023 with a view to reducing the length of proceedings towards the 26 weeks statutory time limit.

The timeliness of adoption is measured as a 3 year rolling average, it is the length of time from the child entering care to moving in with an adoptive family. The average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family adjusted for foster carer adoptions, for children who have been adopted (days), as at end of Quarter 1 2023-24 was 498 days; this is an improvement on March 23 position of 560 days.

Based on 2021-22 benchmarking data, Thurrock is above the National average of 397 days and the Statistical Neighbour average of 435 days, and Eastern Region of 459 days. It is important to note that this measure relates to a relatively small number of children so a very small number of children experiencing a delay can impact on the data. Care proceedings have seen significant delays; court availability, and family members being identified late. We are working towards reducing the duration of care proceedings through early planning and close monitoring.

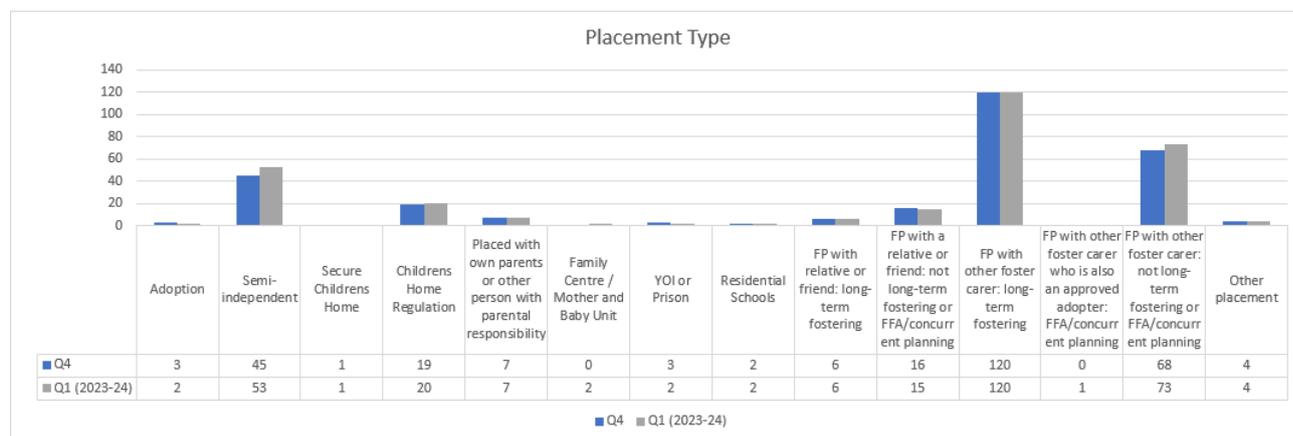
As at Q1 2023-24, the average time between an LA receiving court authority to place a child and the LA deciding on a match to an adoptive family (3 year average) is 177 days, this is slightly higher than March 2023 average of 106 but an improved position on March 2022, which was 265 days. Based on 2021-22 benchmarking data, Thurrock is below the National average of 196 days.

6.2 Children Looked After placement distance

The Local Authority has a statutory duty to provide children with placements within its area unless it is not reasonably practicable to do so under the Children Act 1989. Placements out of area must be approved by the nominated person and placements 'at a distance' must be agreed by the Director of Children's Services.

At the end of June 2023, 72% of the Children Looked After cohort were placed within 20 miles or less from their homes, which represents 223 out of 308 children looked after. Based on the latest benchmarking data available in March 2022, the national average for those placed 20 or more miles from their home was 16% and statistical neighbours was 21.8%, so at 28% Thurrock is currently above those.

The chart below provides a breakdown by placement type as at end of Quarter 2 2022-23 and Quarter 1 2023-24.



7. Care Leaving Service

The table below shows the care leaver cohort (Relevant and Former Relevant Children whose 17th, 18th, 19th, 20th or 21st birthday falls within Financial Year) and Young People aged 16-25 years who are in receipt of a Care Leaving service. Local authorities have a legislative duty to appoint a Personal Adviser for Care Leavers from the age of 16-21 and up until their 25th birthday if required.

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

As at end of June 2023, 279 Care Leavers who were relevant or former relevant were being supported and were receiving an Aftercare service. The charts below show the Care Leaver cohort broken down by age groups:

Care Leaver Age	Total	%
16	1	0
17-18	53	19
19-21	144	52
22-25	81	29
	279	

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

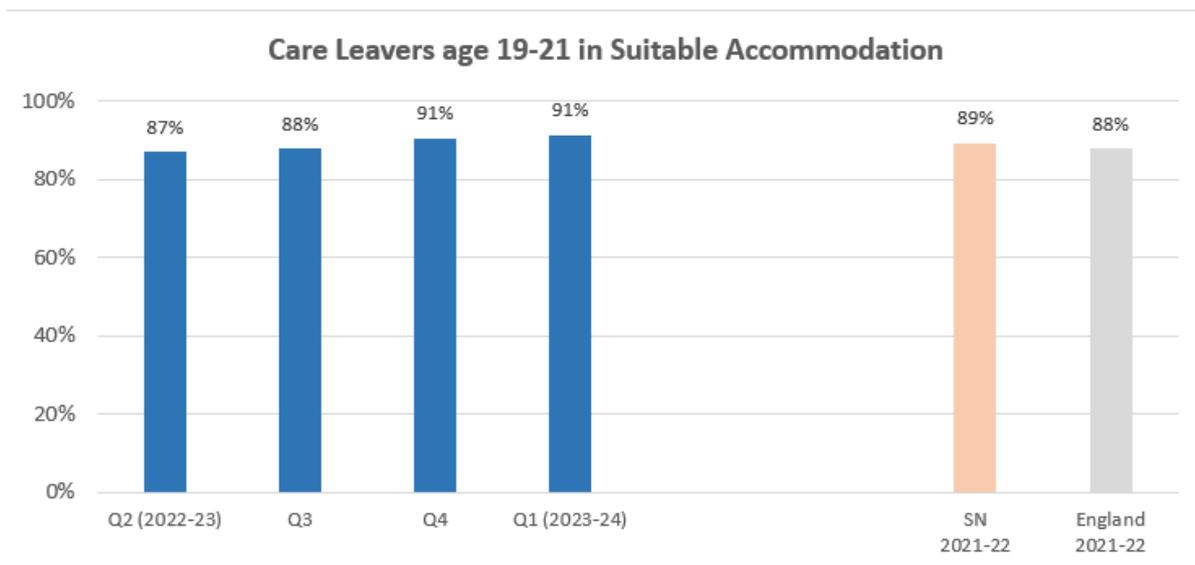
At the end of Q3 2023-24, 55% of the Care Leavers aged 19 to 21-year-old were in part or full-time education, employment or training compared to 52% at the end of March 23 September, which brings Thurrock more in line with the Statistical Neighbour average of 57% and the England average of 55%. To strengthen 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.

7.2 Care Leavers age 19 to 21 years in Suitable Accommodation

Q1 2023-24 shows that the percentage of 19 to 21-year-old Care Leavers reported to be in suitable accommodation is 91%. Thurrock is marginally above the Statistical Neighbour average of 89% and England average of 88% based on 2022 benchmarking data. There are some care leavers who are not in touch with the service, as well as those whose accommodation is unsuitable. Reasons for accommodation being deemed unsuitable include care leavers who are not in touch with the service or missing, young people declining to say where they are living or care leavers who are in prison.

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

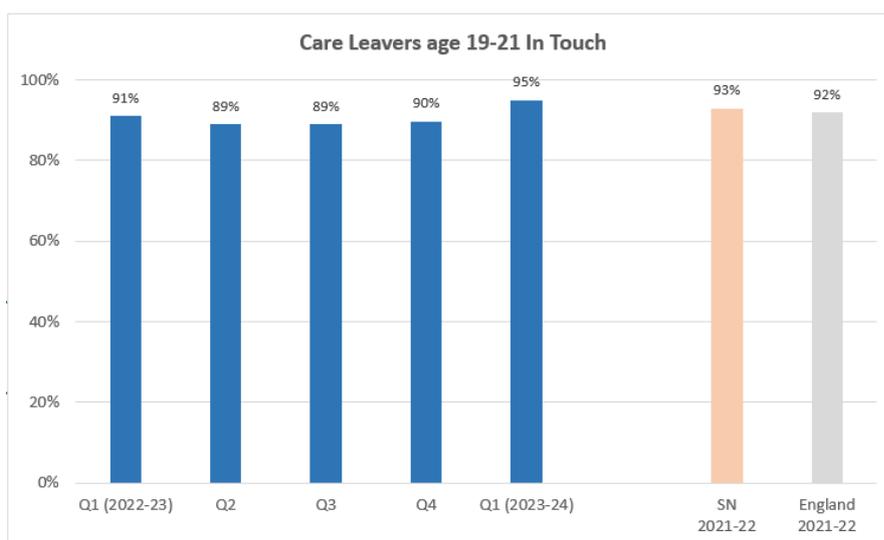
Increased housing support is being provided to young people by the Aftercare Service, Head Start Housing and Thurrock Housing Department. The 'Housing Offer' to Care Leavers has been updated with the Joint Housing Protocol 2020, ensuring good partnership working with clear pathways for young people to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



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

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

At the end of Q1 2023-24, Thurrock was in touch with 95% of Care Leavers, this is a 5% improvement on March 23 outturn of 90%. Thurrock's performance is now above the Statistical Neighbour average of 93% and the England average of 92% based on 2021-22 benchmarking data. The reason for the percentage that are not in touch is mainly due to the cohort of missing UASC.



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

8.1 Not applicable

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

9.1 None

10. Implications

10.1 Financial

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

There are no financial implications within the report.

The Services outlined above are provided through the Children Social Care 2023/24 budget of £34.5m.

10.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Petrena Sharpe**
Safeguarding Lawyer, Team Leader

There are no legal implications identified within the report.

10.3 Diversity & Equality

Implications verified by: **Natalie Smith**
Strategic Lead, Community Development

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.

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

- Not applicable

11. 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

12. Appendices to the report

- None

Report Author:

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

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

5 September 2023		ITEM: 6
Corporate Parenting Committee		
Joint Housing Protocol for Care Leavers		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Non-Key	
Report of: Dan Jones, Strategic Lead CLA		
Accountable Assistant Director: Janet Simon, Assistant Director Children’s Social Care and Early Help		
Accountable Director: Sheila Murphy, Corporate Director of Children’s Services		
This report is Public		

Executive Summary

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

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

The joint protocol is updated annually and has been reviewed between Housing and Children Social Care. The protocol has been updated this year:

- to ensure a smoother application journey
- to avoid care leavers being at risk of arrears and reduce risk of eviction
- to ensure that the position of our young people vulnerable to homelessness is clear and arrangements for emergency accommodation are in place
- To ensure that matters raised by officers are resolved quickly and joint meetings are used for continuous improvement

1. Recommendation(s)

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

2. Introduction and Background

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

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

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

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

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

2.4 A copy of the updated Joint Housing Protocol is appended to this report in Appendix One for members reference. Key changes are:

- Early alert for arrears so support can be put in reduce the risk of eviction.
- Clarification of Thurrock Council's position on care experienced young people vulnerable to homelessness or presenting as homeless.
- Amendments to Procedural aspects and the Pathway Plan to reduce administration
- Updated escalation process

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

3.1 The Joint Housing Protocol has been reviewed and updated for the financial year 2023/24. The following sets out its operational impact and highlights the effect the changes are having. It reflects the current effective joint work between Housing and Children's Social care. Joint meetings between housing and after-care teams at an operational and strategic level are held so that there is regular oversight of young people's progress to being allocated a Council property. Working relationships are effective and these forums work to address needs.

- 3.2 Prior to being offered a Thurrock Council Property, young people must demonstrate a readiness for tenancy. This is an objective of the Pathway Planning process alongside joint work from the Personal Advisor and Housing Officers. The Pathway plan should identify what the post-18 arrangements are and young persons readiness to live independently in line with their wishes. It's recognised that for some young people, they will not be ready to live independently at 18 and there are a range of alternative provisions to support them¹:
- Remaining with their Foster Carer under a 'Staying Put' Arrangement
 - Living in semi-supported accommodation
 - Living in 'Head-Start Housing'
 - Choosing to live within their own family
 - Attending university
 - Supported by Adult Services in a CQC registered home or Shared Lives arrangements (for young adults with significant additional needs)
- 3.3 Housing Officers and Personal Advisors support young people through the application process and offer training on tenancy maintenance. This supports young people with the information and advice they need to obtain and maintain a lease. There are additional practical offers on home maintenance. This training has been developed jointly and rolled out successfully in the last 12 months.
- 3.4 Since the last report on the Joint Housing Protocol to the Committee (September 2022). Thurrock Council's 'Head-Start Housing' Programme has moved to be led and managed within the Housing Service. Head-Start provides shared accommodation to care experienced young people. The aim of this accommodation is to act as a steppingstone on the journey towards achieving independent living. There are several properties in the local area. These properties are furnished and are provided with white goods and Wi-Fi access.
- 3.5 The Head Start housing staff are focused on building relationships with the young people, supporting them to live independently, to understand the expectations around paying rent and regular bills, providing guidance around practical tasks relating to living independently. We continue to work with residents in Head-Start and a residents meeting is planned for the 14 August 2023 to seek their views on what would assist them further.
- 3.6 Currently care experienced young people are unable to make an application for housing prior to their 18th Birthday. A number of young people may be ready to be responsible for a tenancy with the support available to them through the Aftercare Team at 18 and the service's aim is to work with Housing towards a position where young people are able to start their

¹ The Corporate Parenting Committee was updated on these arrangements in detail in March 2023. Members can find the relevant report here:

<https://democracy.thurrock.gov.uk/documents/s37878/Housing%20Options%20for%20Care%20Leavers.pdf>

application earlier to allow them to access accommodation at 18 and reduce delay and a potential move for a young person before they move into their accommodation.

It is essential that preparation is made early for those aged 16-17 who are in a position to live independently at age 18. Others are supported post-18 until they are ready. Care experienced young people are awarded priority banding and have the right to bid by choice. From the end of Q1 2022/23 to the end of Q4 2023/24 22 care experienced young people have achieved a Council Tenancy. At the end of June 2023 there were 29 young people bidding for a property, one of whom has been offered a property. To support young people with bidding a lead Personal Advisor has access to the bidding system so any issues can be quickly raised.

- 3.7 There are a number of young adults already living in secured tenancies with Thurrock Council. Housing Colleagues have developed a pre-eviction process and identify young adults who are care leavers so that they can be jointly supported to avoid eviction. The Joint Housing Protocol has been updated to ensure an 'early alert' when Care Leavers with Thurrock Council tenancies are showing arrears. This is so financial advice, support from a personal advisor and intervention if required can be offered to a young person well before the arrears become overwhelming. Close joint working has been effective in stabilising tenancies.
- 3.8 Thurrock Council has continuing responsibility to support young people leaving care up to the age of 25 and we have a clear expectation that no care experienced young person eligible for After Care Services should be left street homeless. To this end, existing resources have been jointly pooled to provide a shared budget from which emergency accommodation can be provided to those over 21 years to the age of 25. This provides a safety net whilst their housing needs are assessed and plans for further accommodation are agreed whatever their entitlement.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

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

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

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

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

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

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

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

There are no financial implications to this report. The budget for children leaving care is included within the Children and Families 2023/24 £34.5m allocation.

7.2 Legal

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

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

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

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

The Local Authority must have regard to the Corporate Parenting Principles in Section 1 of the Children and Social work Act 2017 in the exercise of functions in relation to Looked after, relevant and former relevant children. The legal implications have also been reviewed from a housing perspective and there are no further implications to be added than those already stated.

7.3 Diversity and Equality

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

The Service is committed to practice, which promotes inclusion and diversity, and will carry out its duties in accordance with the Equality Act 2010 and related Codes of Practice and Anti-discriminatory policy. The service recognises that a range of communities and groups of people may have experienced obstruction or the impact of prejudice when accessing services including Social Care and Housing services. A Community Equality Impact Assessment will be completed to assess any positive or negative impact as a result of the protocol. Both Services are committed to support all children in the care of Thurrock Council to access housing.

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

- None

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

- Report on Housing Options for Care Leavers:
<https://democracy.thurrock.gov.uk/documents/s37878/Housing%20Options%20for%20Care%20Leavers.pdf>

9. Appendices to the report

- Joint Housing Protocol 2023/24

Report Author:

Dan Jones

Strategic Lead, Children Looked After

Joint Housing Protocol

for

Care Leavers in Thurrock

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

INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

The purpose of this protocol is to set out how Thurrock Council, Children's Services and Housing Services will work together to provide an effective, consistent and co-ordinated response to Care Leavers in order to meet their housing and support needs and help them get the best start in life.

As well as setting out the roles, responsibilities and arrangements for achieving planned supportive transitions to independent living for Children's Social Care and Housing Service, this protocol will help to promote and safeguard the wellbeing of young people, ensuring that, when young people are ready to live independently, their housing needs are met and that they have the skills, knowledge, help and support to sustain their tenancies.

1. YOUNG PEOPLE AFFECTED BY THIS PROTOCOL

This protocol relates to young people who are owed a duty by Thurrock Council under the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000.

The purpose of the Act is to ensure that young people do not leave care until they are ready and that, when they have left care, they receive the support they require.

Under the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000, Children's Social Care has a duty towards 'Eligible', 'Relevant' and 'Former Relevant' children and a duty to provide support which includes appropriate housing (see **Appendix A** for definitions).

The [DfE Statutory guidance](#) on applying corporate parenting principles to looked after children and care leavers stresses the importance of joint working in supporting care leavers to navigate their way through the transition to adulthood:

Good preparation, a gradual transition and flexible ongoing support are key to helping care leavers achieve a successful move to independent living. Effective and proactive local authorities establish joint working arrangements between children's services, housing and other specialist services to help care leavers prepare for the realities of living independently, involve them in planning and decisions about their housing options, ensure suitable housing and support is in place, and are ready to respond with contingency arrangements if things do go wrong. (Applying corporate parenting principles to looked after children and care leavers - Chapter 2).

In Thurrock, around 80 young people, aged 16 or 17, are accommodated by Thurrock Children's Social Care are eligible for a care leaving service and will require support to access appropriate independent accommodation at the age of 18. There are also a number of young people (living in independent or supported housing, or remaining with foster carers under a Staying Put arrangement) who are aged 18 – 25, being supported by Children's Social Care and will, at some time, want to live independently and will require their own home.

2. SIGNATORIES TO THIS PROTOCOL

This Protocol has been developed and agreed by Thurrock Council Children's Social Care and Housing Solutions Service. It describes the joint working arrangements that have been agreed to ensure that, in Thurrock we provide a consistent and co-ordinated response to care leavers, including Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC), who are in need of accommodation and tenancy related support.

3. A CONSISTENT, CO-ORDINATED RESPONSE

It is essential that Children's Social Care and the Housing Solutions Service play a full and active role in assessing, assisting, and supporting care leavers, and that the housing needs of care leavers are addressed and planned for before the young person leaves care.

In order to meet care leavers' housing and support needs, Children's Social Care and Housing Services must work collaboratively and proactively with housing and

support providers to ensure an adequate range and supply of accommodation to meet the assessed needs of relevant children and other care leavers.

Children's Social Care will actively encourage young people to remain in a care setting until they are ready to live independently and will ensure that, by the time the young person is ready to leave care, they have acquired the vital skills and provided with additional support to successfully manage tenancies and live independently.

The objective is to find the most suitable accommodation for Care Leavers. This includes confirming that it is appropriate to each young person's individual circumstances and needs and that if social rented housing is required, the young person is supported to submit a housing application early enough to be offered housing when they are ready to live independently.

This Protocol aims to build upon existing good practice and will:

- Improve the way in which care leavers experience the transition from being "looked after to independence and how they are referred to, and access housing and support services
- Improve working relationships between organisations and assist their understanding of one another's roles and responsibilities
- Ensure that Thurrock Council meets its statutory duties towards care leavers
- Standardise processes and procedures that are easy to follow
- Achieve greater consistency with support plans and access to services
- Fully utilise the skills, knowledge and resources of Children's Social Care and Housing Services in order to deliver effective and sustainable solutions for care leavers

4. PRINCIPLES UNDERPINNING THIS PROTOCOL

All of the signatories to this Protocol have agreed the following principles:

- The safety and welfare of the young person leaving care is paramount
- Every effort will be made through a joined-up response to identify homelessness risk early and act to prevent it through early intervention and effective multi agency working providing a quick, safe, joined up response for

care leavers who do become homeless

- Agencies will work together to assess and meet the needs of care leavers, and they will share information effectively
- Young people leaving care will be kept informed of all progress and decisions made
- Where a care leaver is homeless or at risk of becoming homeless, a lead professional will work with them. This will be their personal advisor
- Bed and Breakfast accommodation will not be used to house any 16- and 17-year-olds. Children's services have a duty alongside housing and will therefore ensure they are provided with suitable accommodation that meets their needs

Support to young people will be in line with the [Care Leavers Accommodation and Support Framework](#) . There are five stages to the framework which reflect the journey of a young person as they leave care

- Training young people on tenancies and the housing market
- Involving young people in planning their accommodation
- Reducing the housing crisis by having emergency options
- Commissioning of a wide range of housing types
- Developing skills and confidence ahead of a move to independent living

5. MONITORING, EVALUATION AND REVIEW OF THIS PROTOCOL

To ensure that it remains relevant and effective, this Protocol will be reviewed 6 months after the date that it comes into effect, and then annually.

Children's Social Care will initiate the review and will be responsible alongside Housing colleagues for the monitoring and evaluation of the Protocol. If there are any changes to roles and responsibilities, the Protocol will be reviewed, amended and agreed by all parties.

Organisations and services involved with this Protocol are asked to provide feedback and performance information that can be collated and shared to improve services and inform and support collective commissioning intentions in Thurrock.

The Protocol can also help gather evidence to show, for example, the number of care leavers in Thurrock who are at risk of or homeless or in need of housing, and the number of care leavers whose tenancies break down. This evidence may highlight the need for new services and/or the remodelling or replacement of existing services.

6. WORKING TOGETHER TO ASSESS AND MEET THE HOUSING AND SUPPORT NEEDS OF CARE LEAVERS

The success of this Protocol is dependent on the efficient and effective sharing of information between organisations.

In order to accurately assess and meet a young person's needs, information relevant to their housing and support needs must be shared between Children's Social Care, Housing Solutions and housing support providers.

The young person's written permission must be sought before the exchange of information can take place and this permission should be obtained at the earliest opportunity and forwarded to the Housing Solutions Service for their records as part of the young person's application for housing.

Not all of the information in the young person's Pathway Plan is relevant to their housing application. However, it is expected that the care leaver will give their permission for all **relevant** information to be shared. The Personal Advisor will seek this permission and share the appropriate sections of the pathway plan with Housing Solutions.

Children's Social Care will share information about care leavers for the purpose of identifying and referring those young people and facilitating the subsequent joint assessment of their accommodation and support needs. Children's Social Care and the Housing Solutions Service will share general information in order to support the review and evaluation of the effectiveness of the Protocol.

Although all care leavers must be asked for their permission to have their details shared – and may withdraw their permission at any time – all staff need to be aware of their information sharing obligations in relation to the safeguarding of young people and be familiar with national guidance.

All information sharing must comply with the requirements of the Data Protection Act 2018, Thurrock Council's Information Sharing Protocol and the relevant Housing procedures in respect of confidentiality of information.

7. THE PATHWAY PLAN

The young person's Pathway Plan will identify their housing and support needs and what action is required in order to prepare the young person for independent living.

The Pathway Plan must reflect the young person's current circumstances, provide a clear analysis of the needs of the young person and set out how these needs will be met.

When Children's Social Care completes the Housing Referral Form (now included in the Pathway Plan), with the young person a copy of the relevant section(s) of the Pathway Plan will be attached and the team will work collaboratively and proactively with the Housing Allocations Team to ensure that the young person's needs and circumstances are fully understood and reflected in the Housing Needs Assessment.

The information in the Pathway Plan and Housing Needs Assessment will inform the multi-agency approach that Children's Social Care, the Housing Solutions Service and other housing and support providers will adopt in meeting the young person's housing needs.

This multi-agency assessment will identify the specific needs of the young person and will be informed, as appropriate, by meetings with all parties including the young person.

8. PREPARING CARE LEAVERS FOR INDEPENDENT LIVING

Children's Social Care will actively encourage young people to remain in a protective environment until they have developed appropriate life skills, at their own pace, and are ready to move to independent accommodation, rather than at a specific age.

There is a lot that can be done to prepare young people, emotionally and practically, for independence and managing on their own. Social Workers and Personal Advisers will help young people to make informed choices about the type of accommodation that is best suited to them and the nature of the support they will need in order to sustain it.

The Social Work and After Care Teams will work alongside each young person to help them plan for their future, help them develop confidence in their ability to live independently, and help them develop the skills required to successfully maintain their own tenancy. This work will be recorded in the young person's Pathway Plan.

9. HOUSING OPTIONS FOR CARE LEAVERS

Thurrock Housing Protocol (Care Leavers)

When a young person reaches the age of 18 years they are no longer 'in care' and they can access their own accommodation and hold a tenancy. Childrens Social Care's duty to provide the care leaver with regulated accommodation will end when the young person reaches the age of 18.

There is a need to review individual young people's needs through the pathway plan and to ensure appropriate oversight of accommodation support. As every young person develops at their own pace, and some young people will need more time than others, it is not assumed that all young people will be ready to live independently when they reach the age of 18.

Depending on whether or not the young person is ready to live independently, there are a number of accommodation options available to young people who are aged 18 or over including:

- Remaining with former foster carers under a Staying Put arrangement
- Moving into supported accommodation (including but not limited to 'Headstart Housing')
- Moving into social rented housing
- Moving into other independent living situations such as shared accommodation with other young people.
- If the young person requires it, appropriately registered accommodation supported by Adult Social Care (e.g. CQC registered provision)
- Shared Lives arrangements and;
- Where a young person remains in full time education or is at University. Children's Social Care will support the young person to access adequate funds to secure accommodation suitable to their needs during term time and will support them to access accommodation during the holiday periods.

For those young people who are aged 18 or over and are not yet ready for independent living, remaining with former foster carers or moving into supported housing may offer the best options for meeting their housing and support needs.

It is important, however, that Children's Social Care sends a Housing Referral Form to the Housing Allocations Team as soon as it is agreed that the young person will join the local Housing Register. For some children a referral will be completed as part of the pre-18 pathway plan.

Where an application is to be made for social rented housing, Housing Allocations will liaise with Children's Social Care and the young person to discuss the young person's housing options, the applications process and how social rented housing is allocated. As well as helping the young person to apply for housing, the Housing Service will monitor and oversee the rehousing process to ensure that a suitable offer is made on time.

Remaining with former foster carers (Staying Put)

Some young people may wish to remain living with their foster carer(s) when they reach the age of 18 and are no longer 'in care'.

A 'Staying Put' arrangement is only possible if the young person and foster carer are both happy with it – and it is essential that both parties understand the implications of the agreement they are entering into. Staying Put can provide the young person with the time they need to improve their independent living skills or complete their studies.

Moving into supported housing

Some care leavers will need supported housing to meet their needs. Supported housing is provided in various forms, ranging from shared houses or flats (where young people share all or some of the facilities) to supported housing schemes where young people live together, but may have their own flat) and individual, self-contained flats and houses. Residents of supported housing are provided with on-site or floating support.

During their stay in supported housing, the young person is able to practice budgeting, cooking, cleaning and maintaining daily routines. Support that they will receive will be included in their support plan and Pathway Plan.

The experience of living in supported housing plays an important role in building the young person's confidence and ensuring that they are prepared and ready for independent living when they move into their own accommodation. It also helps Children's Social Care to identify any specific needs that the young person has and to determine how these needs can best be addressed and met.

Moving into social rented housing

For some care leavers, social housing will represent the most appropriate housing option when they are ready for independent living. In order to be allocated a property, the young person will need to complete a housing application and join the local Housing Register. They will also need to arrange for Children's Social Care to

provide the Allocations Team with confirmation that they are ready for independent living.

Thurrock Council operates a choice based lettings system guided by the Housing Allocations Policy. (See **Appendix D**). The policy recognises care leavers as a priority group and awards a reasonably high priority.

10. APPLYING FOR SOCIAL RENTED PROPERTY

Although care leavers can make a housing application without the active involvement of Children's Social Care or Housing Solutions Services, one of the primary objectives of this Protocol is to ensure that care leavers who require social housing are offered suitable accommodation at the time they need it and are provided with all of the advice, help and support they require in order to successfully manage and sustain their tenancies.

Housing Allocations and Children's Social Care have therefore agreed that, when a care leaver requires social rented housing, Children's Social Care will complete the online housing register application with the young person. This will be followed by a completed referral form (integrated into the Pathway Plan) and e-mail it to the Allocations Team mailbox housingreg@thurrock.gov.uk

Within 5 working days of receiving the Housing Referral Form, the Allocations Team will confirm its receipt, review its contents, request any additional information or documentation that is needed, and confirm the approval.

Care leavers will be actively encouraged to agree to the involvement and support of the After Care Team in their housing application. A young person will normally only receive an offer of social housing where it is assessed that they are ready for independent living and the young person's prospective landlord is satisfied that they are going to be able to comply with their tenancy conditions.

The services will work together in the best interests of the young person and ensure that the decisions made by Housing regarding care leavers is fair and reasonable.

The Allocations Officer will ensure that:

- The young person has made an online housing application
- All supporting evidence has been provided and the young Person's housing application has been registered, assessed and verified
- The young person is eligible and qualifies for social housing

- Children's Social Care has provided written confirmation of whether or not the young person is ready for independent living and, if they are not yet ready, when they are likely to be ready

Until there is confidence that the care leaver is ready for independent living, the young person will not be actively considered for an offer of housing and they will not be able to bid for housing through the choice based lettings scheme.

11. Working Together to sustain tenancies for Care Leavers

In order to ensure that care leavers get the best start in life and achieve a smooth transition to independent living, it is essential that Children's Social Care, the local Housing Service and other social landlords communicate well, work proactively and collaboratively to sustain the tenancies of young people. They will also ensure that the young person is supported in applying for benefits or the housing element of universal credit where appropriate.

Before a care leaver is rehoused, Children's Social Care and Housing will ensure that the young person is aware of their tenancy obligations such as paying the rent and service charges, keeping the property in a good and clean condition, and behaving in a reasonable manner and that they understand the likely consequences of breaching their tenancy conditions.

As part of their preparations for independent living, a care leaver will have a bank account, a birth certificate, a passport and National Insurance Number.

How social rented housing is allocated

When there is shared understanding that a care leaver is ready for independent living, the application will be verified and made active on the Housing Register. This means that, from that point onwards, the care leaver will be actively considered for any suitable social rented housing that becomes available.

Thurrock operate a choice based lettings scheme and advertise most of the vacant social rented housing on the internet. Except where it is decided that a property should be offered to an applicant as a 'direct let', housing applicants will normally only be considered for a property if they are suitable for it and if they 'bid' for it. A shortlist will be compiled of the 'bidders' with the highest priority.

The applicant at the top of the shortlist will be invited to view the property. If it is a housing association home, applicants at the top of the shortlist will be nominated to the housing association which will then invite them to a viewing.

When a care leaver is shortlisted for social rented housing, they will be invited (with Thurrock Housing Protocol (Care Leavers))

their allocated Social Worker or Personal Advisor) to an accompanied viewing of the property which will be undertaken by the social landlord's Housing Officer or Lettings Officer.

During the accompanied viewing, the young person and their Social Worker or Personal Advisor will receive a guided tour of the accommodation, will be briefed on the landlord's expectations and conditions of tenancy (including the rent and service charges), will be told about local facilities and services, and will have the opportunity to ask questions. After the viewing, the care leaver will decide whether or not the property is suitable.

Benefits and Young People's Contributions:

Young people who are Care Leavers are expected to fund their rent/housing costs through their income. To that end Personal Advisors should ensure young people have claimed all relevant benefits alongside any income they receive from work.

An application for Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support should be completed if the young person is unemployed or receiving a low income. Universal Credit awards contain a housing costs element which helps with rent and potential service charges.

The Care Leavers Council Tax Discount will be applied automatically. If this does not apply the Personal Advisor should ensure any single person discount is applied for and the criteria for any other council tax exemption is checked (e.g. student occupation). A requirement of receiving the Care Leavers Council Tax Discount is that any other reductions the young person may be entitled to have been applied for.

Where young people are required to make a contribution to their post 18 placement (e.g. in a 'staying put' arrangement) and required to make a contribution to the placement it should follow the following formula up to age 25:

Young people in arrears

Living independently is challenging for all young people due to the high costs of living and relatively low incomes that they can obtain. Rent arrears in any form of tenure are a real risk and it is important that the signs that a care leaver is struggling are identified at an early stage. The Rental Income Team will advise the After care Team Manager via aftercare@thurrock.gov.uk and Personal Advisor when arrears reach £300 so that action can be taken to jointly engage with the young person and put in place steps to reduce the debt.

Some young people may have multiple debts and it is important that they are referred to relevant debt advice services to help them manage their finances. Cases that are more complex and are at risk of possession action will be taken to the

Tenancy Management Panel to agree joint action plans to try and prevent escalation of eviction proceedings.

Young people at imminent risk of homelessness

Homelessness should be avoided through working together. No young person should be evicted from their home without it being clear what action has taken place to prevent this by all parties and what the subsequent plan is. If any care leaver makes a homelessness application, the Housing Solutions Service will inform the After Care Team, investigate the reasons for the young person's homelessness and decide whether or not the care leaver is owed a housing duty under the homelessness legislation. If it decides that the young person has caused their homelessness, the Housing Solutions Service will normally only be required to accommodate them for a period of up to 28 days.

If the care leaver is found to be intentionally homeless, a copy of the decision letter will be sent to the After Care Team and the young person's Pathway Plan will be updated. The After Care Team will work proactively with the young person and the Housing Solutions Team to prevent eviction or homelessness.

Consideration will be given to the reasons why the care leaver has been evicted and the support that was put in place prior to them losing their home. If such a decision is to be made it can result in any rehousing duty being discharged and will therefore require the authorisation of a Strategic Lead to ensure that such a decision is balanced and references the vulnerabilities and support needs of the young person.

Refusing an offer of accommodation:

If a young person feels that the property allocated to them is not suitable, they should mention this to the housing officer at the time of the viewing, but should accept the offer of accommodation and request a review of suitability of accommodation. This will ensure that if the review goes against them, they still have a home. If they refuse the offer, and request a review which goes against them, they will not be made another offer of accommodation, and may be without a home. This is a situation that both Housing and Children's Social Care would like to avoid.

The young person will be provided with support to address concerns regarding the accommodation, where the review decision is that the property offered to the young person is a suitable and reasonable offer.

Before the social landlord is able to provide the care leaver with a formal offer of tenancy, it will need to be satisfied that the young person is ready for independent living and will be able to successfully manage and sustain their tenancy.

In order to satisfy the social landlord that the care leaver is ready, Children's Social Thurrock Housing Protocol (Care Leavers)

Care will ensure that the support identified in the young person's Pathway Plan is in place and it will specify exactly who is responsible for providing the support and how it will be reviewed. It will also share with the social landlord the relevant parts of the Pathway Plan.

Signing the tenancy agreement

When the social landlord is satisfied that the care leaver is ready to take on the tenancy an appointment will be made to meet with the young person and their Social Worker or Personal Advisor to complete the tenancy 'sign up'.

During the interview, the social landlord's Housing Officer will describe the contents of the tenancy agreement, the care leaver's rights and responsibilities as a tenant, and the likely consequences of any breach of the tenancy conditions. They will also provide the young person with their contact details and information about the social landlord's services.

As part of the 'sign up', the Housing Officer will normally help the care leaver to complete an application for Housing Benefit. Proof of identity, income and savings will be required.

During the interview, the care leaver's Social Worker or Personal Advisor with the young person will talk to the Housing Officer and agree the timing and frequency of the follow-up interviews and home visits that will be undertaken by Children's Social Care and the social landlord.

In order to ensure that the young person has settled in well, and to identify the need for any additional advice, help or support, Children's Social Care will visit the care leaver in their new home within 10 working days of them moving in. The Housing Officer will also visit (with Children's Social Care or on their own) within 4 weeks of their tenancy start date.

The exact timing and frequency of the follow-up interviews and home visits undertaken by Children's Social Care and the Housing Officer during the first 12 months of the care leaver's tenancy will depend on the specific needs and circumstances of the young person. However, during the first year, it is expected that Children's Social Care will meet with the care leaver in their home at least once every 8 weeks and the Housing Officer will meet with the care leaver in their home at least once every 12 weeks.

Help in setting up home

The more prepared that a young person is when leaving care, the more successful their move will be and the more confident they will become.

All care leavers are entitled to a Leaving Care Grant of £2,000 to help them set up home when they have secured an offer of independent accommodation. The grant can be used to purchase household furniture, bedding, a cooker, a fridge and other essential items. Although the money is not paid directly to the young person, their Personal Advisor will work with them to ensure that their needs are met.

When a care leaver has secured an offer of independent accommodation, their Social Worker or Personal Advisor will arrange for their 'Leaving Care Grant' monies in advance of the young person's tenancy start date.

12. Communication, joint working and problem solving

It is essential that, from the outset, Children's Social Care and the social landlord work proactively and collaboratively to support the care leaver in sustaining their tenancy.

Good communication, effective joint working and outcome focused problem solving will all play a vital role in ensuring that Children's Social Care and the social landlord are aware of any difficulties that the young person is having and are able to provide imaginative solutions to the problems they are experiencing.

During the tenancy 'sign up', the Social Worker / Personal Advisor and the Housing Officer will exchange their contact details and the contact details of their organisations. They will agree on the liaison arrangements and the timing and frequency of the follow-up interviews and home visits that will be undertaken by Children's Social Care and the social landlord.

As well as agreeing to work together to address any problems or concerns, Children's Social Care and the social landlord will agree to alert one another, at an early stage, if problems do occur or they are concerned about the care leaver's behaviour or wellbeing.

An early alert or referral will enable Children's Social Care and/or the social landlord to assess the care leaver's situation and work with them to address and resolve any problems before they become so serious as to put the young person's tenancy at risk.

It is the responsibility of Children's Social Care and the social landlord to work with care leavers, and with one another, to sustain tenancies and prevent homelessness. Possession proceedings should only ever be initiated after Children's Social Care has had the opportunity to meet with the tenant and landlord to try and resolve any problems and there has been concerted efforts made by each responsible agency to prevent this.

There may, on occasion, be disagreement between workers in Children's Services and officers in Housing or Revenues and Benefits on how the protocol is being administered or on how a young person is being advised and supported. If these cannot be resolved by team managers, then they should be escalated to the service managers for resolution. Lessons learnt will be shared with staff at the monthly joint housing meetings.

DEFINITION OF CARE LEAVERS

Definitions

The Local Authority has a duty towards eligible, relevant, former relevant and qualifying children:

- **Eligible children** a young person still in care aged 16 and 17 who have been looked after for (a total of) at least 13 weeks from the age of 14.
- **Relevant children** a young person aged 16 or 17 who have already left care, and who were looked after for (a total of) at least 13 weeks from the age of 14 and have been looked after at some time while 16 or 17.

The leaving care provisions of the Children Act require that relevant children are provided with, or maintained in, suitable accommodation unless the local authority is satisfied that their welfare does not require it. To be suitable, accommodation must be reasonably practicable for the young person given their needs and the local authority must be satisfied as to the suitability of any landlord. These arrangements should be detailed in the young person's active pathway plan.

Generally it would not be appropriate for 16 or 17 year olds to be given the responsibility of sustaining their own tenancy without appropriate support, nor would bed and breakfast accommodation be considered suitable

- **Former relevant children** a young person aged 18-25 who have been **eligible** and/or **relevant** children in care - young people who are looked after by a Local Authority either through a compulsory care order or remanded or accommodated by voluntary agreement including accommodation under section 20 of the Children Act.

Social services have a duty to assist a former relevant child, to the extent that their welfare or education/training requires it, by contributing to the expenses of living near the place where they are working, looking for work, or receiving education or training

- **Persons qualifying for advice and assistance** a person who is aged at least 16 but is under 25, with respect to whom a special guardianship order is in force (or was in force when they reached 18) and was looked after immediately before the making of that order, or at any time after reaching the age of 16 but while he was still a child was, but is no longer, looked after, accommodated or fostered

- **Vacation accommodation**

If a former relevant child is in full-time higher education or residential further education in accordance with their pathway plan, and their term-time accommodation is not available, the responsible authority has a duty to provide accommodation during vacations, or to pay the young person enough to secure accommodation for themselves. This could enable a care leaver to continue in education and not become homeless during the holidays. The duty continues for as long as they continue to pursue the course of education.

- **Staying Put arrangements**

Where a former relevant child and their local authority foster carer wish to continue to live together after the child ceases to be looked after, the responsible local authority has a duty to monitor any such 'staying put' arrangement, and to provide advice, assistance and support to enable the arrangement to continue.

LEGISLATION AND GUIDANCE

This provides a short summary of the provisions of the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 and Parts 6 & 7 of the Housing Act 1996¹, as amended).

The Leaving Care Act has two main aims:

1. To ensure that Young People do not leave care until they are ready.
 2. To ensure that they receive more effective support once they have left.
- Young people's experience of leaving care should be properly planned and Care Leavers should not become homeless when they reach the age of 18 and should have a Housing Plan.
 - Young people should be properly prepared for independent living and the monitoring / support systems should be put in place to ensure that they are able to successfully manage and sustain their tenancies.
 - Young People leaving care should not become homeless from their social rented housing.

The following list of legislation informs the duties and responsibilities of the Local Authority:

- Housing Act 1996 - [Part 6 \(Allocations\)](#) and [Part 7 \(Homelessness\)](#), as amended by the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017
- [Homelessness \(Priority Need for Accommodation\) \(England\) Order 2002](#)
- [Children Act 1989](#)
- [Children \(Leaving Care\) Act 2000](#)
- [Children and Social Work Act 2017](#) - sections 1, 2 and 3

The following is a list of statutory guidance that this document refers to:

- [Homelessness code of guidance](#)
- [Applying corporate parenting principles to looked after children and care leavers](#)
- [Children Act 1989: care planning, placement and case review](#)
- [Children Act 1989: transition to adulthood for care leavers](#)
- [Local offer guidance](#)

Personal Housing Plan

Title	First name	Surname	DOB	Gender	NI number	Customer id

Dear

You attended the local authority and a personal assessment of your current housing circumstances was undertaken by on the because you have a housing need and approached the authority for assistance. As part of the assessment the local authority has taken into account:

- The circumstances causing your homelessness
- The housing needs of you and your household
- The type of accommodation your household requires
- Any support needs you or your household need to secure and retain accommodation

Set out below is the Personalised Housing Plan detailing the outcome of the assessment including steps that we discussed and the actions you, your Personal Advisor and the Housing team of the Local Authority will take in order to address your housing situation.

Basic assessment information

From our basic assessment we believe your situation to be as follows:

- List of situational issues
-
-
-

Other agencies

This plan can be shown or shared with any other agencies/relatives/friends who are helping you so they are aware of your housing need and how the local authority is trying to assist you. The details below are the support needs identified as part of your assessment and who is providing support currently.

Support Needs	Agency/relative involved	Support being Offered	Date of Review

When is the customer likely to become homeless?

When you think you will become homeless (or threatened with homelessness):

Actions already taken

The action you have already taken to resolve your housing issues is:

-
-

Wishes to resolve your housing situation

Your wishes to resolve your housing situation:

e.g. Assistance with finding suitable accommodation

-
-
-

Actions/reasonable steps

We have agreed the following **Personal Housing Plan (PHP)** to help you remain in your current home or secure alternative accommodation. Please keep your allocated officer updated on what you have done. Your officer will also keep you updated.

What actions/reasonable steps the Housing Options Officer will do next:

Action type	Content	Date to be achieved	Date achieved

What actions/reasonable steps your Personal Advisor/After Care will take next:

Action type	Content	Date to be achieved	Date achieved

What actions/reasonable steps you need to take:

Action type	Content	Date to be achieved	Date achieved	Client accepted	Recommended or required

Leaflets/website information

Details of any leaflets / website information provided to you will be listed here:

-
-
-
-

Any other information/advice provided

Any other information / advice provided to you will be listed here:

-
-
-

Tailored Advice

This is tailored advice to support you.

-
-
-

Date PHP to be reviewed by Officer and Customer

Location	Date and time	With office	PA present Y/N

Appointments arranged

Any appointments arranged for you will be listed here:

Date..... Time..... Venue.....

A checklist of additional information required

Please provide documented proof of the following to the Council:

Type	Document	Household member	Date Provided

Agreement

The Personalised Housing Plan has been drawn up for both you and the council to carry out all the steps that have been agreed on the plan. You should make sure you attend any appointments that are arranged for you and take any action that you agreed to do on the plan. If you cannot do something that is on the plan then make sure you tell your Personal Advisor and Housing straight away and explain why you cannot do it.

We will review this plan on the (INSERT DATE) in order to evaluate the appropriateness of the plan and any steps recorded. If your circumstances change, for example you become homeless or your health needs change, then your Personalised Housing Plan will be reviewed. Make sure you inform your Personal Advisor and Housing Officer as soon as you are aware of any changes in your circumstances so that they can look at the plan with you again, agree new actions or add to the existing actions to be taken.

I (**INSERT NAME**) confirm that this is an accurate summary of my housing options interview and I understand the options available to me. I agree to the actions set out for both my household and the officer agree to take.

Customer signature:

Name:

Date:

Personal Advisor signature

Name:

Date:

Housing Options officer signature:

Name:

Date:

APPENDIX D

HOUSING ALLOCATIONS SCHEME

The link below provides the full details of the Housing Allocation Scheme;

<https://www.thurrock.gov.uk/sites/default/files/assets/documents/housing-allocation-scheme-v04.pdf>

DRAFT

5 September 2023		ITEM: 7
Corporate Parenting Committee		
After Care Service Report		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Non-Key	
Report of: Luke Froment, Service Manager After Care		
Accountable Assistant Director: Janet Simon, Assistant Director Children's Social Care and Early Help		
Accountable Director: Sheila Murphy, Corporate Director of Children's Services		
This report is Public		

Executive Summary

This report is to update Members of the Corporate Parenting Committee on Thurrock's After Care service, its roles, and responsibilities to Care Leavers and Eligible Care Leavers who are looked after by the local authority, and how we are meeting these duties.

The Aftercare Service works with young people in Thurrock aged 16-25 who meet the criteria for care leaving services. The whole Council is a 'Corporate Parent' to our young people and continues to have responsibilities towards these young people up to the age of 25. Our ambition is that young people leaving care are prepared for independence, feel safe in their homes and encouraged and supported to reach their potential as adults.

1. Recommendation(s)

1.1 That the Members of the Committee are informed about Thurrock's Aftercare service and the support offered to Care Leavers.

1.2 Members of the Committee promote Corporate Parenting

1.3 Members to provide feedback and challenge to the service in meeting its duties and achieving good outcomes for our young people.

2. Introduction and Background

2.1 The Children and Social Work Act 2017 introduced 3 provisions in respect of Care Leavers:

- A duty on local authorities which requires them to offer **Personal Adviser** support to all care leavers towards whom the local authority has

duties under section 23C of the Children Act 1989, up to age 25. This includes care leavers who return to the local authority at any point after the age of 21 up to age 25 and request such support.

- A duty on local authorities to consult on and then publish their '**local offer**' for care leavers, which sets out both care leavers' legal entitlements and the additional discretionary support that the local authority provides; and
- A duty on local authorities which requires them to have regard to seven '**corporate parenting principles**', that will guide the way in which the local authority provides its services to children in care and care leavers.

Seven principles for Corporate Parenting:

- To act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and well-being, of those children and young people;
- To encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings;
- To take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people;
- To help those children and young people gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners;
- To promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people;
- For those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work; and
- To prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living.

2.2 All young people receiving a leaving care service fall within one of the following categories:

- Eligible – aged 16 or 17 and currently looked after and have been for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14 and ending after reaching the age of 16.
- Relevant – aged 16 or 17, not currently looked after, previously Eligible but left care after 16th birthday. Relevant status ceases if a young person is living consistently for 6 months or more with a parent or someone with parental responsibility. Status resumes if this arrangement ceases.
- Former Relevant - Aged 18 up to the age of 25 who were in care on reaching 16th birthday and previously an Eligible or Relevant child.
- Qualifying for Advice and Assistance – aged 18-21 (up to 25 if in education) and were in care for less than 13 weeks on or after your 16th birthday.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

3.1 Owing to a change in government policy; since the introduction of 'Extending Personal Adviser support to all care leavers to age 25 Statutory guidance for local authorities' in February 2018, all care leavers are entitled to receive a service up to age 25, whereas prior to this, statutory involvement typically ended at 21 unless the young person remained in education.

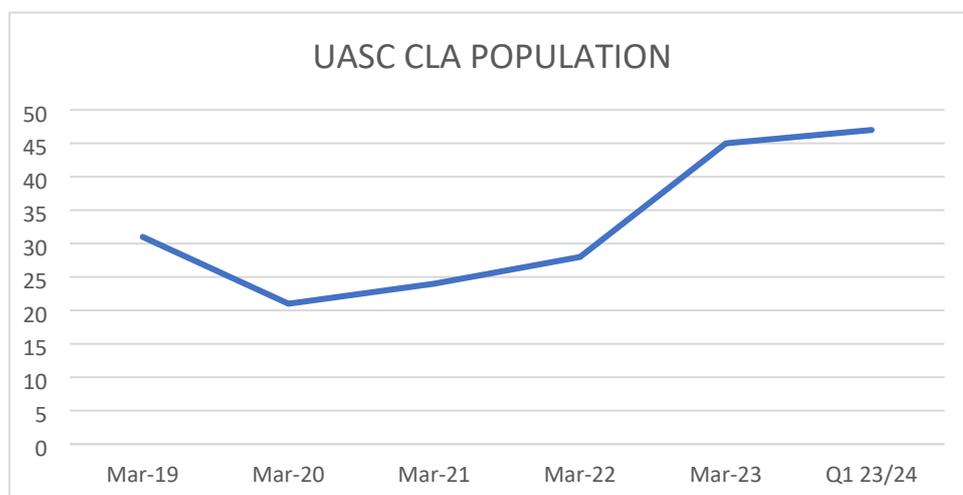
[Extending Personal Adviser support to all care leavers to age 25 \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)

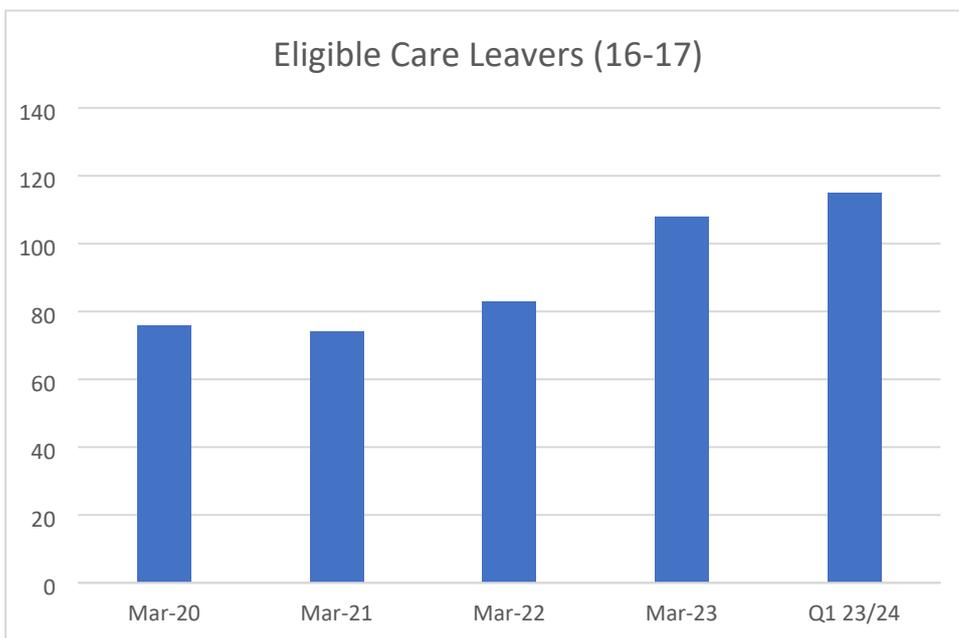
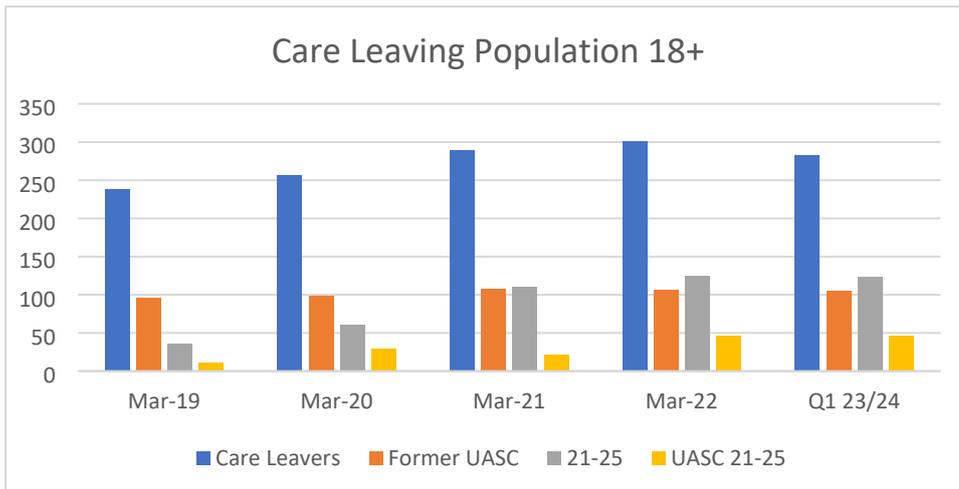
3.2 The complexity of the issues care leavers present with are vast and require personal advisors to have a range of knowledge and experience. Many care leavers reach 18 without a significant support network and the PA may well be the main support.

3.3 Supporting care leavers to lead safe and fulfilling lives whilst achieving their potential, spans across the whole Council. As Corporate Parents, it is our duty to ensure we support care leavers to live within safe and supportive communities in affordable housing and have access to the right support to achieve their outcomes. If we get the support right at the earliest opportunity, there is a stronger chance of reducing the level of our involvement with care leavers at 21 and providing a broader support offer to care leavers up to 25. Care leavers who are fulfilling their potential will be better placed to contribute to society.

3.4 Thurrock Aftercare Service supports Care Leavers who are Eligible children aged 16 – 17, Former Relevant, 18-25 and a small number of Relevant 16/17 year olds and Qualifying Care Leavers. Demand within the service has seen an increase over the last 5 years. Reasons for the reasons described above and demonstrated in the graphs below and include;

- Increased number of UASC (Predominantly aged 16+)
- Increased numbers of adolescents entering the care system
- Increased numbers of young people needing additional support post 21.





3.5 In response to increasing demand as higher numbers of children looked become eligible care leavers, and Thurrock’s UASC population has increased the service has adapted and is currently going through a reorganisation which will be embedded by end of September 2023. The new structure has effectively increased the number of Personal Advisors (PA) by 2 full time posts to 14. There will be 1 senior practitioner, 1 PA with housing specialism and 2 team managers who will supervise the PA’s and senior practitioner.

3.6 Personal advisors are allocated to and work with young people eligible for a care leaving service from the age of 16 to 25 establishing a positive working relationship and supporting transitions planning. At the end of Q1 2023/24 383 young people were open to CSC and eligible for Care Leaving Support and another 16 due to become eligible within 12 weeks. Children aged 16 and 17 years are also supported by their allocated Social Workers.

3.7 For young adults open who are aged 21-25 conversations are held as to how best to support them to successful outcomes as independent adults who feel safe and secure and able to manage their needs. Sometimes this includes

allocating a PA to support them in specific areas. The aim of the service is to make sure that all young people up to the age of 25 feel confident and able to seek support when needed, are assured that the service is always open and available to them and that the right young people are receiving support at the right time.

- 3.8 The number of young people open to the Aftercare Service is expected to increase based on the rising age of children currently in care, increased UASC quota from 0.07 to 0.1% of the child population and numbers of young people in care anticipated to turn 16 in the next twelve months.

4. External review

- 4.1 In June 2023 Thurrock children's services invited experienced external reviewers to undertake a "good practice stock take" with the service. The aim of this was to provide an objective benchmark from which further service development can be a focus. This has supported plans for improving outcomes for our Care Leavers and identified;

- the local authority has many of the fundamentals of good practice in place
- young people are seen regularly and spoken to
- plans are in place for young people
- managers have robust systems to monitor issues such as the timeliness of visits and the completion of pathway plans and have made improvements in these systems
- young people value the relationships that they have with their Personal Advisors
- workers show tenacity about seeing young people
- quality support with housing and practical matters offered to young people.

- 4.2 As with any review, areas for development were identified which include;

- holistic and co-produced pathway plans promote best outcomes and support young people to fulfil their potential
- recording which strongly reflect the young person's voice, identity and wishes
- improved understanding for young people aged 16 and 17 about the role of the PA
- continued improvement in transition planning and earlier engagement with Adult Services.
- Development of mental and emotional health offer to young adults.
- Promotion and development of the local offer to ensure it is well understood by young people
- Increased input from young people in service development

4.3 These recommendations have been incorporated into service development plans and which will be overseen at an Aftercare Board chaired by the Assistant Director attended by senior managers from partner organisations and council directorates, to ensure there is appropriate momentum behind ongoing development work.

5. Aftercare service priorities over the next 12 months

5.1 Consultation with young people

There has been some developing work alongside care leavers looking at their experiences. Some of the themes explored relate to coming into care and endings. The views and experiences of young people have been shared with social workers in order to support developing practice and have been used to create resources for other children to help them understand their journey. A Care Leaver Forum is in development following initial meetings with the service, senior managers and young people.

5.2 We continue to look at ways to embed consultation with young people into our practice and have an annual schedule of events in place to ensure that there are ongoing opportunities to get face to face engagement and to collect feedback from care leavers on a range of issues throughout the year.

5.3 We are exploring options for a youth hub which will provide a space for care leavers to support them in their independence, life skills and meet with the service – a “home from home”.

5.4 Personal Advisors in put 16-18

Planning for young people prior to their 18th birthday is a key area for the after-care service. The After Care team are allocated to work with young people aged 16 and 17 who also have an allocated social worker. The role of the PA in this period is getting to know the young person supporting them to understand their rights and supporting the allocated social worker to understand the needs of the child as they approach adulthood and to ensure that appropriate plans are in place to meet needs arising out of accommodation, education, employment, wellbeing and safeguarding.

5.5 To empower the PA and bring their expertise to the fore they are asked to attend the Looked After Child (LAC) reviews from 16 in order to ensure that their expertise is included in planning that reflects the transition needs and plans for the Child. This ensures close working between the allocated social worker and the PA and means that the LAC review has an excellent understanding of issues around transition planning from early on. The PA should also be invited to supervision with the child's Social Worker at regular intervals between 16-18 to input on the Plan.

5.6 Independent Reviewing Officers now lead the first pathway plan review after the age of 18. This allows their continued oversight and support as plans they have overseen pre-18 are put in to place.

6. Accommodation

6.1 Accommodation for young people where they feel safe is an area of focus for the Aftercare service. There are two strands to this work:

- Seeking to match young people appropriately and to reduce the need for multiple moves post 18
- Sufficiency of accommodation for care leavers

6.2 To strengthen practice in this area a panel meets weekly to consider the “transition pipeline” and ensure that:

- Young people approaching 18 have a clear plan in relation to their accommodation
- Young people in Head Start Housing (HSH) accommodation are making progress with applications and move on into social housing
- Former Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) are making progress in regard to asylum applications, and we are aware of any negative decisions from the Home Office that mean the young person is Appeals rights exhausted (ARE)
- Young people who are eligible to apply for social housing do so
- Young people in prison have support at the point they are due to be released

6.3 We are also working closely alongside housing colleagues and meet regularly at a joint housing forum to ensure close and more effective working to ensure that care leavers receive the best housing offer possible.

6.4 The agenda for this meeting is informed by the expressed views and needs of our care leavers, where they have experienced difficulties relation to acquiring social housing or in the practicalities of maintaining their property and tenancy the aftercare team are able to raise issues on behalf of care leavers, advocate and work with housing colleagues to find effective solutions.

6.5 A current example of a joint piece of work is a two-bedroom property let to CSC and subsequently licensed to former UASC who, given they have no recourse to public funds, would otherwise be residing in HSH accommodation. This has enabled the young people to move on into a more appropriate living arrangement and increased capacity in HSH resource available to other care leavers.

6.6 By the end of June 2022 there were 45 care leavers over the age of 18 who had achieved their own social housing with the support of the Aftercare Service and housing team, by the end of June 2023 this number had risen to 63. During this same period a further cohort of young people have been housed in alternative accommodation including specialised placements funded by adult social care where additional needs have been identified.

6.7 Over the last year, the After-care service and Housing have been delivering training sessions open to care leavers aimed at providing information about

the process of obtaining and maintaining a social housing tenancy. There is an ongoing commitment to deliver regular sessions as part of our annual schedule of events. This includes a presence from PA's and increased support for young people to attend these sessions. With this additional support, engagement from our young people has increased, with 17 young people in attendance at the most recent session.

- 6.8 A further avenue of support for care leavers is to prevent homelessness but, where young people do find themselves homeless past the age of 21 a strengthened offer has also been agreed between children's services and housing colleagues which means that any Care Leaver in this position will be temporarily housed without delay and will be offered a private tenancy following the statutory period of assessment (56 days).
- 6.9 Thurrock Council seeks to ensure that all care leavers have suitable accommodation either through our own provision or by the young person's own arrangements. Monthly meetings are established with key teams and strategic leaders within Thurrock Council to ensure that this accommodation needs are met.

7. Pathway Planning

- 7.1 The pathway plan is the document at the heart of all practice to support care leavers. The plan is regularly reviewed and identifies the needs of the young person and actions to meet those needs.

- 7.2 A new pathway plan has been developed by the aftercare team in conjunction with our systems team, Care leavers have been consulted. The new pathway plan covers the information that is required by Section 23E of the Children Act 1989, the Care Leavers (England) Regulations 2010 as amended by the Care Planning and Care Leavers (Amendment) Regulations 2014. The new format seeks to achieve a number of outcomes:

- To bring the voice of our young people to the fore in their own planning and support through the use of language in the document which addresses the young person directly and provides them an opportunity to be clear about their views and wishes in all areas.
- To reduce duplication for social workers and PA's by incorporating a number of documents into one overarching piece of work – this includes housing needs, transition planning, risk assessment and triple planning for those young people awaiting a decision regarding their immigration status.
- To strengthen and further embed signs of safety practice in the work that we do with care leavers through the use of language in the document and the use of "scaling questions" that can be used to understand the progress made by each young person from one pathway plan review to the next.

- 7.3 The document is now live and the impact of this is being assessed in practice. There is an ongoing focus in relation to pathway planning and a number of strands in order to ensure plans reflect the current circumstances of the young

person, champions the young person’s voice and is a good reflection of the work that is taking place to support the young person’s wishes and ambitions. The changes in the structure within the service will provide greater management oversight to support this work.

8. The Local Offer

8.1 Thurrock Council’s local offer to young people leaving care is published on the council website¹. It can be accessed at any time by our care leavers and includes a specific financial offer setting out very clearly what care leavers can expect to receive as part of their support package.

8.2 We are updating our current Local Offer to strengthen the support we offer across the board taking into consideration value to the care leaver cohort alongside cost to the local authority. To inform this piece of work we have considered feedback from young people.

9. Education

9.1 Data in relation to engagement of our Care Leavers in education and employment that the Covid 19 pandemic had a significant impact.

9.2 Thurrock is slightly below statistical neighbours and national performance at the end of Q1 2023/24:

	Thurrock	Statistical Neighbor	National
Education, Employment or Training (EET): 17–18-year-old	64.7%	66%	66%
Education, Employment or Training (EET): 19–21-year-old	56.6%	57%	55%

9.3 We are working alongside colleagues from the Inspire Youth Hub to ensure that care leavers needs, and interests are understood and that they are appropriately matched to opportunities that they are likely to want to engage in and that they find motivating and stimulating.

9.4 There is a weekly meeting currently between Inspire and the Aftercare team where plans to provide support to young people who are currently NEET are agreed and tracked. This forum is being strengthened with the introduction of greater input from inspire.

9.5 There is also a pilot project ongoing to identify a small cohort of young people and work alongside them intensively to support them into employment of training.

10. Performance

- 10.1 Alongside the substantial developmental work within the service, we are mindful of the need to ensure best quality practice in our support of care leavers.
- 10.2 Timeliness of Pathway plans continues to be an area of focus. Performance in this area has been consistently good for a sustained period. In the last year, from the end of June 2022 – end of June 2023 92% of pathway plans have been completed in time in the Aftercare Service. This performance has been maintained in the first quarter of 2023/24.
- 10.3 It is incumbent upon the Local Authority to stay “in touch” with care leavers. This means that we need to make contact with them at least every three months and understand the current circumstances relating to their accommodation and employment status. The practice in this area is consistently good but has improved further in recent months with the service staying in touch with over 95% of care leavers at the end of June 2023.

11. Reasons for Recommendation

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

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

- 12.1 None

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

- 13.1 All local authorities must have regard for 7 corporate parenting principles when discharging its functions to children cared for and care leavers. This offer needs to set out what support local authorities will provide to care leavers across the council/commissioning partners.

14. Implications

14.1 Financial

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

Included in the 2023/24 budget is funding to support young people transition to independence. This is a combined approach between, Children Social Care, Housing and Adult services.

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

14.2 Legal

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

This report provides Corporate Parenting Committee the opportunity to review and monitor the Council's performance as a Corporate Parent. The Council is under a duty to have regard to the corporate parenting principles under Section 1 of the Children and Social Work Act 2017 in relation to young people aged under 25 who are relevant or for relevant children in addition to children who remain looked after.

The duties to care leavers are set out in the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000, associated regulations and statutory guidance. This includes a duty to arrange a personal advisor for each Looked After child who is an 'eligible' child i.e. a child who is 16 or 17, who has been looked after for a period of 13 weeks. The personal advisor role can continue until the age of 25. Further the Council is under a duty to undertake an assessment of an eligible child's needs and prepare a pathway plan. This must be kept under review. The Council has a duty to take reasonable steps to keep in touch with a former relevant child.

14.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Natalie Smith**
Strategic Lead for Community Development

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

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

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

- None

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

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

16. Appendices to the report

- None

Report Author:

Luke Froment

Service Manager, CLA and After Care

5 September 2023	ITEM: 8
Corporate Parenting Committee	
Report on Transitions to Adult Services for Care Leavers and Children in Care	
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: None
Report of: Iyobosa Osunde, Principal Social Worker and Strategic Lead, Adult Social Care Dan Jones, Strategic Lead, CLA	
Accountable Assistant Director: Janet Simon, Assistant Director, Children’s Social Care and Early Help	
Accountable Director: Sheila Murphy, Director of Children’s Services	
This report is Public	

Executive Summary

The Report and its appendix set out the role and performance of Thurrock Council in relation to supporting young people in care or leaving care to be assessed for and be provided with Adult Social Care Services.

Planning for transitions to Adult Services starts early and initial screening assessments are provided. If a full Care Act Assessment of a young person who is looked after is required, this should be completed by age 17. This enables the young person to have a clear plan and a smooth transition to Adult Services.

1. Recommendation(s)

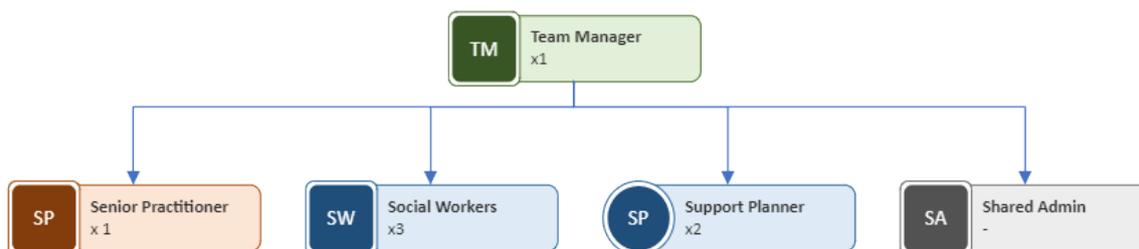
1.1 Members of the committee review the work of the CLA Service and Preparing for Adulthood Team in meeting the Council’s role as a Corporate Parent. In relation to the work done for Children in Care and Care leavers to transition to Adult services where it is appropriate to do so.

2. Introduction and Background

2.1 The Preparing for Adulthood (PFA) team is a dedicated team in Adult Social Care (ASC) with skilled social workers and support planners which is particularly critical for young people with SEND and looked after children so

that they are supported to have a smooth and seamless transition from children into adult services where this appropriate.

- 2.2 The Team works with professionals and carers involved with Young People to understand what their ongoing care and support needs might be when they turn 18. The team is established as follows:



- 2.3 The team is managing some vacancies currently. This can affect assessments and a waiting list managed to prioritise urgent referrals. The team manager post is being covered by the Senior Practitioner alongside case work duties. Recruitment to vacancies is active and it is hoped that the vacant posts will be filled soon.
- 2.4 The current caseload of the team is 202 young people who have a range of needs and backgrounds. Children in care and care leavers are part of the service user group and referrals are made in line with the transitions process.
- 2.5 Young People can decide to dip in and out of the service if they prefer to, however, the team provides long term case management intervention as and when required until they are 25 and then transfer to the appropriate Community Led Support Team in ASC.
- 2.6 The Care Act 2014 offers carers more rights & protection both for themselves and for the adult they care for. The PFA team work within the Care Act 2014 guidance to ensure that Young Person's wellbeing is at the centre and focus in all they do to achieve their outcomes and aspirations.
- 2.7 The Care Act places a duty on local authorities to conduct transition assessments for children, children's carers, and young carers where there is a likely need for care and support when the Young Person turns 18 and a transition assessment would be of 'significant benefit'.
- 2.8 Also, Thurrock Council must give information and advice to Young People and families who wants it, not just Young People who have their care and support paid for by the LA. There are Young People that require support with signposting to the relevant organisation – voluntary or governmental agencies.

2.9 When necessary, the team ensures that Young People are safeguarded from abuse, implementing clear risk management plans to manage and identify ways to minimise risk.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

3.1 The PFA Team's involvement and the transition process begins when practitioners attend Education, Health, Care Plan meetings in year 9 with partner agencies and families to contribute to the planning of young people's care and support plan and provide the relevant information about adult services. In most cases the team will attend year 10 and start setting targets to meet identified outcomes.

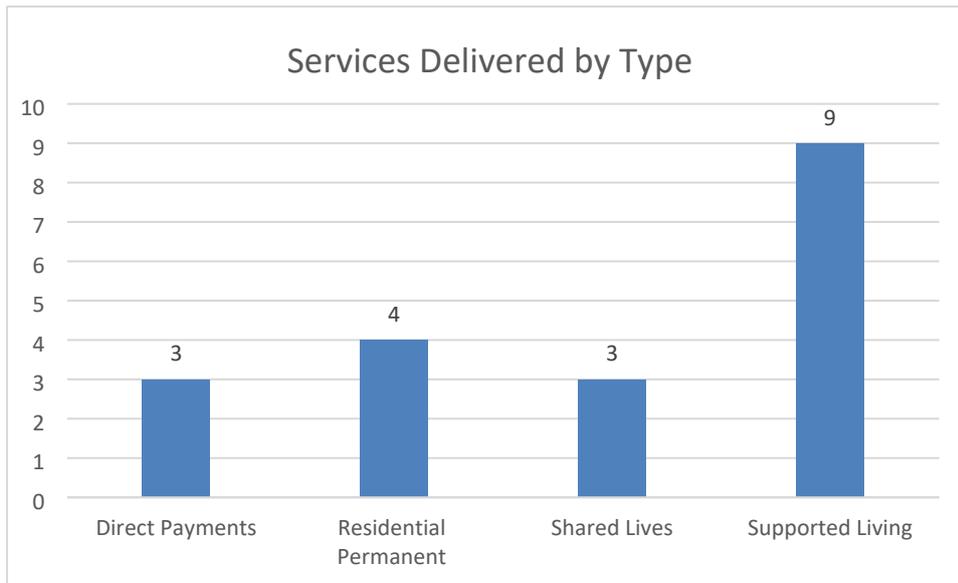
3.2 Year 11 is very crucial as some Young People may leave school after the year. The Team works closely with the Young People, families, schools, and children services, After Care Services (in the case of looked after child) to start information gathering that will inform the adult assessment.

3.3 For Young People transitioning that are looked after, work is jointly carried out with the Aftercare team. There is an updated Transitions Policy of Children Looked After and Care Leavers which includes a whole council approach. This helps to clarify what is expected of each service when the Young Person leaves care.

3.4 For all children in our care aged 16, as part of pathway planning a referral to adult services should be considered. When Adult Services could be required, this triggers a brief screening assessment from the Preparing for Adulthood Team. A full assessment is dependent on the outcome of this initial assessment. In the event a full assessment is required the target is to complete this prior to the 17th Birthday with a proposed package (if applicable).

3.5 If an Adult Social Care Service is agreed for a young person aged 17, then the allocated work from the PFA team will continue to be involved and complete a handover process. They will take the lead from age 18 supported in conjunction with the After Care Service.

3.6 Since 01 April 2022, 33 young people have received assessments from the Preparing for Adulthood Team. There are 19 young people who were previously looked after who are receiving services. The following chart provides an overview of the services provided:



3.7 Adult Services provides vital support to our most vulnerable care experienced young people including those with disabilities. The commissioned services reflect those needs and the ongoing need for day to day support in living in the community.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

4.1 The report sets out the operation of the Preparing for Adulthood process and the assessment outcomes in relation to Looked After Children and Care Leavers.

4.2 Members of the committee have the opportunity to review the information and raise any queries.

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

5.1 None

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

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

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

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

There are no financial implications to this report. The services outlined are statutory and have allocated budgets within Adult Services

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Petrena Sharpe**
Safeguarding Lawyer (Team Leader)

The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 introduced requirements on Local Authorities to plan for looked after children so that they have the support they need as they make their transition to the responsibilities of adulthood.

The Care Act 2014 places a duty on Local Authorities to conduct transition assessments for children, children's carers and young carers where there is a likely need for care and support after the child in question turns 18 and a transition assessment would be of significant benefit.

7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Natalie Smith**
Strategic Lead for Community Development

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

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

- Looked after children and Care leavers

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

- None

9. Appendices to the report

- Transitions protocol

Report Author:

Iyobosa Osunde, Principal Social Worker and Strategic Lead, Adult Social Care

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TITLE:	Transitions, Children Looked After and Care Leavers
DATE:	January 2022
AUTHOR:	Strategic Lead: Children Looked After and Placements
APPROVED:	Sheila Murphy Corporate Director CSC and Education Ian Wake Corporate Director Adults, Housing and Health
DATE OF NEXT REVIEW:	January 2024
VERSION:	Version 1
Modified:	

Transitions Children Looked After and Care Leavers Thurrock Council

**PLANNING EXCELLENT TRANSITIONS FOR THURROCK YOUNG
PEOPLE**

**A WHOLE COUNCIL APPROACH
'MORE PARENTING LESS CORPORATE'**

Naintara Khosla

TRANSITION FLOWCHART

This flowchart outlines the process for young people who are or who have been looked after and are Care Leavers. The flowchart incorporates the responsibilities of the Aftercare Service, commissioners, Head Start Housing and Housing Solutions including Housing Allocations, Adults Services (including Mental Health), Education and Childrens Services.

Principles

The Council has a responsibility to provide services as a Corporate Parent. This embodies a culture of supporting young people and treating them in a way you would if they were your own children. This approach should mean that bureaucratic processes are overridden and decisions are made with the child's needs in mind and as a priority. For example the term intentionally homeless would not be applicable to care leavers.

These principles have been endorsed and agreed across the Directors for Adult, Housing, Education and Childrens Services

Childrens Social Care: Planning Transitions

All young people who are turning 18 in the preceding 12 months will have their care plan for independence confirmed at **Placement Panel**.

The Service Manager Aftercare is responsible for the Pipeline Tracker being updated and all young people appropriately being presented to panel.

1. All young people must be presented to Placement Panel as they turn 17 years to confirm their accommodation plan and the contingency plan for their accommodation
2. Placement Panel will confirm the accommodation plan for the young person

The options include:-

- i. Staying Put with foster carers, with the rate agreed and the length of time the young person is likely to remain staying put
- ii. Remaining with independent commissioned providers; most likely to be 16+ semi-independent provision. The young person will have positive and important enduring, safe, relationships with staff. This provision will most likely suit the young people with highest needs or risks.
- iii. Living in shared accommodation with appropriately matched young people. Matching is the responsibility of the Aftercare Service, ensuring account has been taken of risk assessments and individual young people's needs. Homes that are shared will be provided by Thurrock Housing Department or Head Start Housing

- iv. The CLA and Aftercare Service preparing the young person for living independently in social housing; this includes all documentation required to 'bid' for social housing
 - v. Shared Lives for those vulnerable adults with additional needs. This requires a referral to Adults Transition Panel, with agreement to be sought for Adult brokerage to undertake a placement search. Budget and payment for Shared Lives placement needs to be in place prior to the young person moving into accommodation
 - vi. Adult UASC without immigration status are considered for either individual properties which are licensed by Childrens Services or houses where young people can share until they are in a position to 'bid' for social housing when they receive their immigration status
3. Presentation to Placement Panel will include a copy of the latest pathway plan with the accommodation and living arrangements sections fully completed
 4. Placement Panel agreement must be in place prior to any referral to Head Start Housing (HSH) and the type of HSH provision confirmed at panel in line with the assessed independence needs of the young person.
 5. The **Head Start Housing Transition Panel** must oversee the offer of all HSH provision, so there is appropriate matching and utilisation of resources. The pathway plan must be submitted for the HSH Transition Panel. In the absence of an available Panel date, a decision to place a young person in any HSH provision may only be confirmed by the Strategic Lead for Aftercare Services
 6. The young person must then be presented to the next available panel to confirm the decision making and timescales for progression to independent accommodation
 7. The Head Start Housing Transition Panel chair has strategic oversight of the accommodation available along with the appropriate care planning

Transitions Pipeline Tracker



Pipeline for
Transitions February

The panel processes for young people who are becoming adults are in place to ensure young people are assured of their living arrangements, financial entitlements and access to services as they turn 18 years. The Pipeline Tracker is in place to follow the journey of young people from age 17 until they have been able to secure their own accommodation usually through social housing tenancies. It tracks all young people who require permanent accommodation. Strategic overview of the Pipeline Tracker is in place with weekly meetings chaired by the Service Manager, Team Manager and Senior Practitioners (Aftercare Service) and HSH colleagues are also able to attend. The tracker is updated and provides the agenda for both Placement Panel and Head Start Housing Transition Panel.

The Head Start Housing Tracker



Headstart Housing
Properties.obr

The HSH Tracker provides all the information on accommodation available and provided by Head Start Housing. This is held and managed by Finance. There is a monthly meeting to review the budget and ensure there is value for money in relation to the utilisation of HSH properties including commissioned provision, (Sanctuary Supported Accommodation) and Head Start Housing units. The meeting is attended by Head Start Housing Strategic Lead, SCS Strategic Lead along with representatives from Aftercare and HSH. The meeting projects potential VOIDS and the Aftercare Service can plan for young people to be matched into short term accommodation and plan transitions.

Readiness for Tenancy Panel



Tenancy Readiness
Panel 6.1.22 - tracke

The young people are presented to the Readiness for Tenancy Panel so the numbers and types of accommodation are known in advance so Housing colleagues can plan their support for young people. Young people are supported to manage their tenancies and avoid homelessness. Thurrock believe that Care Leavers are rarely made intentionally homeless; in circumstances where a young person is struggling and at risk of intentional homelessness their Personal Advisor can make representations to panel so this would be avoided.

Principles of Transition Planning

- The young person should be supported to transition from a 'child looked after' into adulthood. The care and parenting should be the same as that afforded to any child being cared for by a reasonable parent

'Care leavers should expect the same level of care and support that others would expect from a reasonable parent. The local authority responsible for their care should make sure that they are provided with the opportunities they need, which will include offering them more than one chance as they grapple with taking on the responsibilities of adulthood'¹.

CA1989 Transitions Guidance.

- The young person's views about the care they receive is taken into account as part of the transition process and includes where they would like to live

1

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1051441/CA1989_Transitions_Guidance.pdf

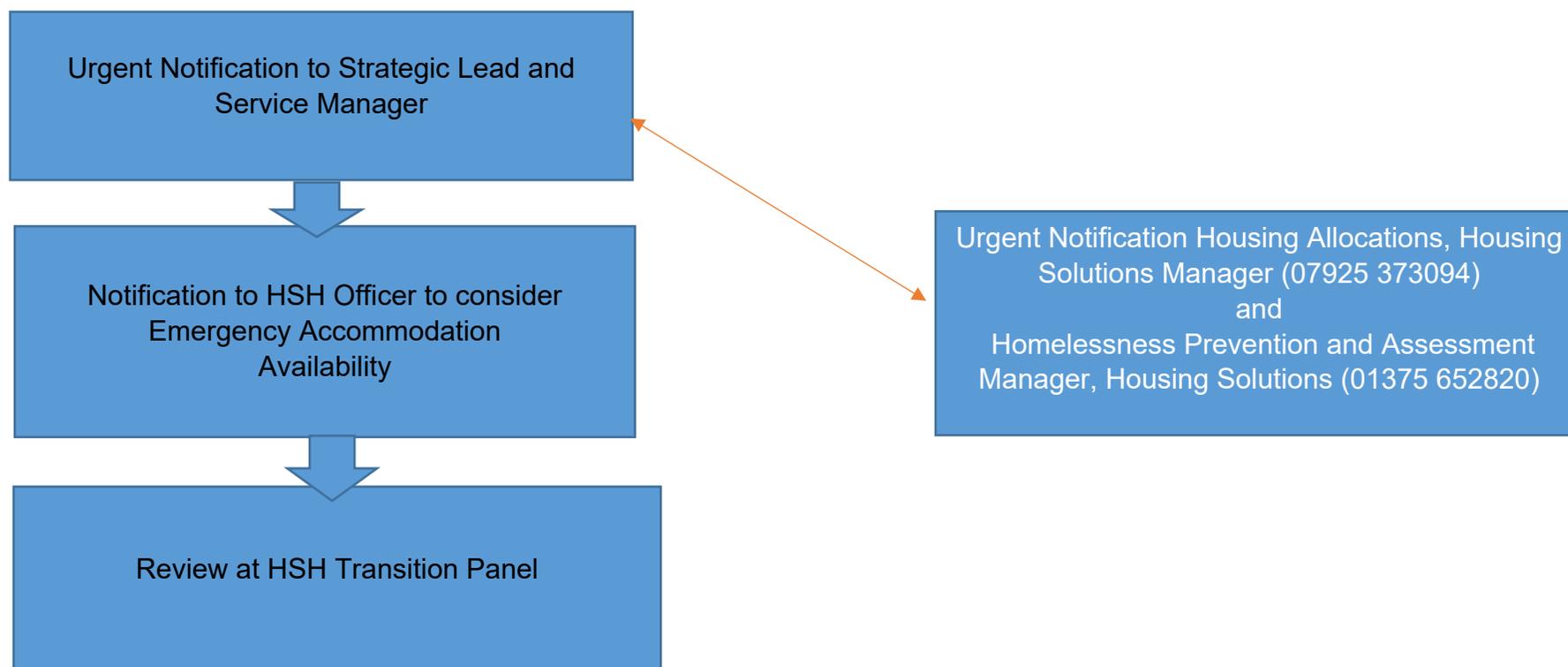
- Young people should be afforded stability with their accommodation being maintained as far as possible
- HSH is short term accommodation which assists young people to gain independence skills, develop confidence, develop maturity and understanding of the responsibilities that come with a tenancy. Its purpose is not to provide long term lets
- Intentional Homelessness for young people who achieve social housing tenancies should be avoided. Thurrock Council resources will be provided to ensure the necessary support to enhance successful tenancies.
- All young people at risk of homelessness, who are in social housing, should be presented to the Readiness for Tenancy Panel so this can be avoided.
- 'Direct Offers' which are available from Housing Allocations must be suitable for care leavers which includes an environment and accommodation that is reflective of a place a reasonable parent would want their child to live.

Flowchart Homelessness for young people aged 18+ with Care Leaver Status²

Young person who is a care leaver is considered Homeless when they have reached the age of 18 and have no suitable accommodation will be provided with suitable accommodation.

Homeless young person with Care Leaver Status

The young person who is homeless can access support from Aftercare Service up to the age 25, regardless of whether they have an allocated Personal Advisor or not. Housing Solutions must consider their responsibility to provide accommodation to homeless young people with care leaving status.



² The Local Authority has a duty towards eligible, relevant, former relevant and qualifying children

Planning for transition of young people from Childrens Services into Adult Services.

Childrens Social Care will:

1. Provide a list of young people who will be reviewed at Adults Transition Panel in the year they turn age 18. The transition form attached at Appendix 1 is completed in advance of the Adults Transition Panel. This should be completed within 3 months either side of the 17th Birthday. For CLA this should coincide with their LAC review
2. The Adults Transition Panel will manage all those young people who require assessment and services either for Adult Mental Health or for Adult Services.
3. Dates for the Adults Transition Panel will be set at an interval of not less than every 2 months. There may be occasions where it is necessary, due to the numbers of cases for review, the Panel operates more often.
4. The Adults Transition Panel will be responsible for the administration and minute taking for the panel.
5. The care plans for the young people will be clear and timescales for assessment will be agreed. Following consideration at transitional panel, adult services will complete a draft needs assessment and formally agree that adult services will be involved post 18. This decision will be reflected in the minutes of the transitional panel which will be uploaded onto the young persons file by their allocated social worker.

Transition Panels Decision Making

Young Person aged 16 and 17 years Assessed by Childrens Services as having additional needs
(SEN with EHCP, Services from EMWHS, meets CWD criteria)



Referral to Childrens Services Placement Panel

Transition paperwork and pathway plan completed
Confirmation of the primary and contingency plan for post 18
Placement panel agree

1. Referral to Adults Transition Panel (Young People with additional needs)
2. Referral to Headstart Housing and Accommodation Panel for matching to appropriate post 18 accommodation.
3. Referral to Readiness for Tenancy Panel, in preparation for the Young Person to have their own tenancy



**Adults Transition Panel
confirm agreement for an
assessment under the
Care Act 2014**

**Referral to Head Start
Housing and
Accommodation Panel**

**Readiness for
Tenancy Panel**

Terms of Reference Head Start Housing Transition Panel

Head Start Housing Transition Panel

Purpose of Panel

1. Young people can progress into HSH accommodation with the oversight of the panel
2. Ensure appropriate matching for young people and their accommodation needs. Prioritises young people for supported accommodation based on risk assessment, vulnerability and need
3. HSH Transition Panel assesses matching and ensures the risks are manageable for young people placed in supported accommodation (commissioned contracts) or Houses of Multi Occupancy
4. Confirm VOIDS and HSH contracted and commissioning availability
5. Support progression of young people developing and enhancing their independence skills
6. Review of care plans for young people who are in HSH, ensure care plans are progressed to Social Housing and Independence Tenancies
7. Confirm the young people bidding and those who require Direct Housing Offers from Thurrock Housing, ensuring appropriate progress to social housing/independence and ensure referral to the Readiness for Tenancy Panel
8. HSH Transition Panel also oversees Adult UASC ensuring appropriate recourse to public funds is in place and immigration needs are met including tracking immigration appeals and completing as necessary Human Rights Assessments for All Rights Exhausted
9. Review benefit claims and particularly ensure Housing Benefit is being claimed appropriately
10. Aftercare Service, through line managers hold responsibility for care planning and decision making to ensure accommodation is the right 'fit' and provision for a young person with the young person included at all points of the discussion about their future accommodation needs.

Frequency

1. HSH Transition Panel is held weekly and Chaired by the Strategic Lead Aftercare
2. The Service Manager Aftercare is the vice chair
3. 1 x month the Transition Panel meets with finance to review the HSH accommodation for budget and void purposes
4. Once every quarter the applications for Housing Benefit are reviewed to ensure all young people are claiming as necessary and it is being paid to HSH

Outcomes

Ensure young people are supported to only move when necessary and reducing the number of moves will create stability; recognising that suitable accommodation is key to successful employment, training and education. Young people are able to report

they experience positive transitions where they know what their plan is and where they will live.

Terms of Reference Readiness for Tenancy Panel

Purpose of the Meeting

- To ensure that our young people have been prepared to take on a tenancy; the accommodation section of the pathway plan has been discussed and completed with the young person
- Confirm that young people have the appropriate skills and knowledge to support managing their tenancy
- Identify areas where the young person requires support or there are areas for their development, with an appropriate package of support to ensure success
- A team around the young person is available (Housing Allocations, Tenancy support, Housing Safeguarding and Aftercare Services) for young people to successfully manage their tenancy and provide reassurance they have help whilst they are developing into adulthood
- Confirm that young people understand the application and process for becoming social housing residents and the responsibilities that accompany tenancy agreements

Participants on the panel:

HSH lead, Team Manager Aftercare/Senior Practitioners Aftercare, Housing Allocations and Housing Support

- The Personal Advisors for the young person will present the outline of the support provided to the young person and discuss the completed Accommodation Section of the pathway plan. Young people will be given the opportunity to attend if they wish, but this is not expected.

Frequency:

The panel will meet on a monthly basis on the first Thursday of the month between 9.30-11.30am

Meeting Structure:

- The panel participants will review the accommodation plans for young people who have been prepared and are ready for social housing
- The Aftercare Team Manager will be responsible for setting the agenda and agreeing those young people whose plans are to be presented each month
- The meeting agenda will be shared with the panel members one week prior to the meeting with the agreed accommodation support plans for the young people
- The meeting participants are able to timetable for cases to return to the panel as necessary.

Outcome

- Partnership working across Thurrock to ensure appropriate Team around the young person to improve support for care experienced young people to manage their tenancies
- Earlier intervention to prevent tenancy disruptions

Escalation Process

The escalation process can be used where there are differing views about the readiness of a young person for a tenancy or there is delay in progressing tenancies.

Initial resolution should be attempted at the level of Service Manager from Childrens Services and Housing Allocations

Where agreement cannot be reached and further oversight is necessary the Strategic Lead for Housing and for Aftercare will review each case and agree a way forward.

Resolution will normally be at Strategic Lead level and rarely will require escalation to Assistant Director.

Directorate: Childrens Social Care: Lead Officer, Aftercare Strategic Lead;

Directorate: Adults, Housing, Health: Lead Officer, Housing Strategic Lead

Thurrock Council

Adult Social Care

Transitions Funding and Challenge Panel - Terms of Reference:

1. Purpose, aim and Principals of the Panel:

The purpose of this document is to provide information of a new proposed funding and challenge panel for disabled children and young people transitioning into adult social care from 17 years age.

The Panel's aim is to oversee and plan for a smooth transfer to adult services for children who will or will likely require continued services. In line with expectations in the 2017 Children and Social Work Act that all services should work more closely together to promote the health and well-being of children and young people, families and carers. It also puts into consideration the Care Act 2014 requirements in regards to the young people transitioning into Adult services and Preparing for Adulthood. We aim to demonstrate clear signs of success under the Signs of Safety practice model.

Our Aims are:

- Confirmation from Adults (within 3 months either side of the 17th Birthday. For CLA this should coincide with their LAC review) of budget and care responsibility for future care needs when the threshold is met.
- Responsibility will pass to Adults (where agreed) when Young Person turns 18 years
- Personal Advisor will remain allocated to support with the Aftercare Legislation and relationship support for the young person
- Children and their families should have a clear, agreed and understood assessment and a plan for services prior to the child turning 18
- Children and their families experience continuous service in line with the agreed plan where it is identified they may be in need of Adult Social Care support
- To raise aspirations, expectations and encourage thinking from an early age about what the future might look like for the young people
- To promote a focus on outcomes that support the young people to manage as independently as is appropriate with the use of the assessed and required resource.

The panel is guided by the Well-being principals, as follows

- Personal dignity
- Physical, and mental health and emotional well-being
- Protection from abuse and neglect
- Control by the individual of their day to day life
- Participation in work , education, training and recreation
- Social and economic well-being
- Domestic, family and personal relationships
- Suitability of accommodation
- The individual's contribution to society- volunteering, community engagement.

The outcomes from panel should be

- An assessment is undertaken and there is an agreed SMART plan in place, this will be finalised no later than three months prior to the 18th birthday this plan may be reviewed and updated at subsequent panels, until the child is aged 18 years or services are no longer required
- If it is assessed that the case will not progress to Adult Services, the child, their family and carers are updated on the progress of the plan
- If it is assessed that the young person will require commissioned services from adult services, the case will be presented to the adult resource panel.
- There is clarity on the Preparing for Adulthood role and SEN within the EHCP review closest to the 18 birthday
- There is an adults social worker allocated by the 17th birthday so there is a smooth transition of professional relationships from Childrens Services to Adult Services.
-

2. Frequency and recording:

The Transition panel will meet once every 6? weeks (this will be subject to review after 6 months)

Outcome, decisions and actions are added to documents on LCS and LAS for each child by the allocated worker(s).

The administrator in children services will maintain a spreadsheet of children's referred and check this against LCS dashboard information for Looked After Children and children open to CWD aged over 16

The administrator will provide a list of children who are not referred to panel to be checked by the relevant team managers to ensure all appropriate referrals have been made.

3. Agenda and Referrals to Adults Transition Panel

The administrator will add children to the agenda at 16.5 years where the child is:

- Open to the Children with Disabilities Service
- Referred to the panel by their social worker in other services

Referrals can be made for any case of concern by any of the agencies attending by emailing the Panel admin in Adult services Transitionsdfa@thurrock.gov.uk with the child's details and brief reasons for referring

The draft agenda will be sent to the chair two weeks prior to panel and the agenda sent out to invitees 1 week prior to panel

The transitions referral form should be completed prior to the first panel the child attends and be updated as panel's progress. It's the responsibility of the child's Social Worker to update this form and it should be reviewed by the team manager responsible for the case

4. The panel

Chair: Head of Adult Social Care & vice chair Service Manager for CWD
Supported by a designated PA.

Standing Members are invited from the following teams/agencies:

- Strategic Lead Adults
- Team Manager Transitions: Preparing for Adulthood Team
- Allocated Workers from Transition: Preparing for Adulthood Team
- Team Manager for the child (social work to attend if not available)
- Service Manager for After Care
- NELFT Lead Adults
- Thurrock Coalition ULO
- Corporate Finance Team
- Contracts Manager Adults
- Contract Manager Children
- Virtual School Representative
- SEN Representative
- Commissioning Representative
- LAC Heath Nurse

If the usual representative cannot attend then an appropriate person from that service should attend

5. Funding decisions:

If additional Children's Service funding is required as the result of a decision at Transition Panel the case should progress to TARP panel for multi-agency review

If additional Adult's Service funding is required as the result of a decision at Transition Panel the case should be progressed by adults to the appropriate resources panel

6. Escalation

All members of the panel and referrer may escalate unresolved issues to:

- Individual cases should be referred to the responsible Strategic Leads and an issues resolution meeting arranged
- Strategic issues should be referred to the CLA steering group

7. Review of Terms of reference

This was last reviewed September 2022
Lead Officer: Strategic Lead Adult Social Care

Appendix 1 Transition Document

TRANSITIONS PLANNING TEMPLATE GUIDANCE FOR SOCIAL WORKERS and MINUTE TAKERS

1. The Transitions Template ('template') is designed to provide a record of each child's transitions planning journey towards adulthood and independence and will be used at Adult Service's Transition Panel (ATP)
2. The template should be completed by the social worker prior to an Adults Transition Panel, for young people aged at least 16 years and above.
3. Subsequently, social workers will update the template before each Adults Transition Panel.
4. The template should be submitted to the Panel Administrator or ATP Chair 2 working days before the meeting.
5. Panel Administrators will aim to circulate templates and the Agenda to attendees at least 1-2 working days prior to each meeting.
6. By using the template to provide a 'running record', actions that remain outstanding will not be lost but will be carried forward until they are completed, and there should be less duplication for social workers in terms of providing background information to meetings. The Chair of each meeting will agree when actions can be removed from the template.
7. Minute takers will use the template provided by the social worker to record key discussion points and actions set by each Adults Transitions Panel.
8. Following each meeting, within 2 working days minute takers/social worker will upload the updated template into Documents on LCS making reference to it in the child's case note.

Transitions Planning Template and Checklist For use in Adults Transition Panel

Attendees/ Apologies	Name	
		Transitions Worker
		Child's Social Worker
		Minute Taker
		<i>(Please delete those not invited)</i>

Type of Meeting:	Adults Transition Panel
------------------	--------------------------------

Child's Name:	
Ethnicity:	
Parent Passport Father Mother	
UK Citizenship or settled status Eligibility:	
Dob:	
LCS ID:	
Siblings:	
Legal and Eligibility status	<p>Legal Status:</p> <p>Open to CWD</p> <p>CIN</p> <p>CP</p> <p>Looked After S20 S31</p> <p>CARE LEAVING STATUS Eligible</p>

	<p>Relevant</p> <p>Former Relevant</p> <p>Qualifying</p>	
<p>Date of last CE Risk Assessment and Score</p> <p>Risks</p>		
<p>Current placement:</p>	<p>Current placement address and provider</p>	
	<p>Total placement cost and Staying Put Rate</p>	
	<p>Head Start Housing Rate</p>	
	<p>Housing Benefit Claimed/Paid to Landlord</p>	
	<p>Housing Benefit Claimed and Paid to YP</p>	
	<p>Shared Lives</p>	
	<p>CQC Registered Care/Provider/Residential School</p>	
<p>If a care package (respite) or direct payments are being provided please provide the weekly hours and costs breakdown here:</p>		
<p>Proposed post 18 plan including date of Adult Assessment under the Care Act 2014 and respite services:</p>		
<p>Date of EHCP/review. Confirmation a copy is on the file</p>		

EET plan with September offer	
Readiness for work and any support (e.g. work experience, apprenticeships)	
Outcomes to be achieved: (How would we know that continued services have made a difference)	

Social Worker:	
Adult Social Worker (3 months prior to 18 years)	
Team:	
Personal Advisor:	
Supervising Social Worker (if applicable)	Date of Joint Visit and updated placement agreement: Outline Transition/Staying Put arrangements
Transitions planning: What is working well?	
What are we worried about? Issues causing delay	

Date of ATP:	
PRACTICE CHECKLIST	UPDATES
Independence Assessments including Adult Assessment Mental Health/Learning Disability Completion dates/delay reasons to be included:	

Details and Date of Referral to Adult Services/Adult Mental Health	
Planning and arrangements to meet the young person's independence skills needs Including progress through the BWW Thurrock Care Leaver Local Offer www.thurrock.gov.uk/bigwideworld	
Planning and arrangements to meet the young person's housing needs including information about matching (who are the other young people in the property) and type of shared accommodation facilities.	
Confirm Budget for Accommodation	HSH Aftercare Placements Adult Services
Contingency planning for young person if primary housing option does not progress	
Young person's views	
Planning and arrangements to meet the young person's Mental and Emotional Health needs	
Planning and arrangements to meet the young person's physical health needs including disability, including cultural and identity needs	
Date of Final CLA Review or CIN meeting prior reaching 18 years	
Notes and Actions <i>(with timescales and lead person)</i>	

5 September 2023	ITEM: 9
Corporate Parenting Committee	
Report on ‘Staying Put’ Policy and Provision in Thurrock	
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Non-Key
Report of: Dan Jones, Strategic Lead CLA	
Accountable Assistant Director: Janet Simon, Assistant Director, Children’s Social Care and Early Help	
Accountable Director: Sheila Murphy, Director of Children’s Services	
This report is Public	

Executive Summary

When children who are looked after turn 18, they cease to be ‘looked after’ legally as they are adults. Some young people in agreement with their foster care may decide that they wish to stay living in the placement under a Staying Put arrangement. It is important to note that on turning 18 this becomes an arrangement rather than a placement facilitated by the local authority.

The intention of Staying Put arrangements is to ensure that young people can remain with their former foster carers until they are prepared for adulthood, can experience a transition akin to their peers, avoid social exclusion and be more likely to avert a subsequent housing and tenancy breakdown.

Thurrock’s Staying Put Policy sets out what the local authority will do and what support it will provide to young people and their foster carer in a Staying Put arrangement. The updated policy is attached as an appendix to the report. for Members comments and review.

The report further sets out the current operation of the Policy and the impact it has for young people leaving care.

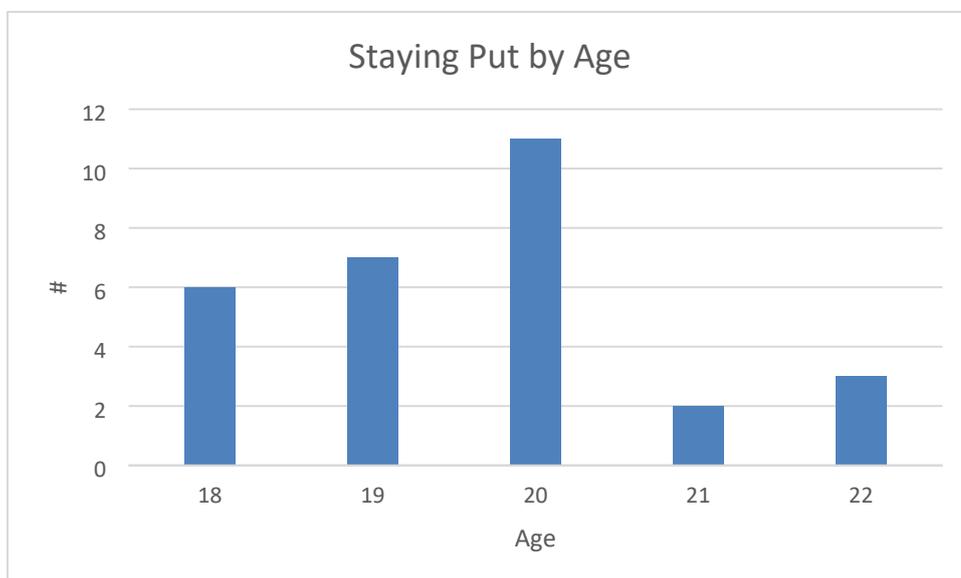
- 1. Recommendation(s)**
- 1.1 Members are informed on the updated Staying Put Policy.**
- 1.2 Members review and comment on the policy and note the Council’s responsibility as a Corporate Parent.**

2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1 Since 2014, young people leaving care at age 18 have been able to remain with their former foster carer. This is termed Staying Put arrangement and requires the following:
- Both the Young Person and the Foster Carer agree to the arrangement post 18
 - The young person must be a 'former relevant child'
 - The young person should have lived with the foster carer prior to age 18 although there is no minimum period required
- 2.2 Thurrock Council has a detailed Staying Put Policy in line with national guidance. This sets out how the service should support young people and Foster Carers to plan for and live together under a Staying Put arrangement.
- 2.3 Discussion should start with the young person and foster carer regarding the option of staying Put as early as possible, ideally before the young person reaches the age of 16. The option of Staying Put should be identified within the young person's first Care Plan / Pathway Plan completed after their 16th birthday.
- 2.4 The policy sets out the expectations for each of the specific roles involved. The policy also sets out the financial offer to foster carers and young people. It is important to note that Foster Carers do not have the same duties towards young adults they do to children and are not providing care. The policy has some specific protections and provisions to ensure young people are supported:
- For those who turn 18 and are in full time education, the carers' pre-18 payment is protected until the end of the academic year
 - For those in further education or enrolled in the military, carers receive a retainer payment whilst the young person is away so they can come home when needed (full rate is paid whilst at home)
 - Depending on their income and circumstances, young people contribute to their Staying Put arrangement, through a weekly contribution to their 'keep' and, if applicable, housing benefits
- 2.5 The Policy sets out a living together agreement that ensures everyone involved is in agreement with the terms of the Staying Put provision. Young people are supported by personal advisors who oversee the arrangement post 18.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

- 3.1 Staying Put is commonly used for young people who need it in Thurrock Council. As of 31 July, there are 29 young people being supported in staying put arrangements. The age profile of these arrangements is as follows:-



- 3.2 Staying Put is mostly used by those aged 18-20 and this reflects the journey of our young adults to independence. Many young people move on from staying put arrangements. We have found the early planning is critical to successful staying put placements, the policy outlines the stages of planning. We find the young people and carers can be uncertain about plans post-18 as next steps may depend on other events (e.g successfully achieving grades, starting a job etc). So planning continues up to the 18th Birthday for some young people.
- 3.3 'Staying Put' only applies to former foster placements and does not apply to semi-independent accommodation or children's homes. There are currently 80 children aged 16 and 17 looked after by Thurrock Council. Of those, 24 are in fostering arrangements where staying put is a possibility. For those in other placements different schemes are available (Shared Lives, Head Start, Adults Services etc).
- 3.4 Staying put provides a useful bridge into adulthood and reflects family life. The updated policy clarifies the roles and expectations on all involved.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1 The report and attached policy sets out Thurrock Council's staying put offer and practice guidance.

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

5.1 None

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

6.1 Looked After Children and Care Leavers

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

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

The attached policy sets out Thurrock's financial commitments to a Staying Put Arrangement. This is budgeted for within the planned spend for internal placements.

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Petrena Sharpe**
Safeguarding Lawyer (Team Leader)

Section 23CZA – arrangements for certain former relevant children to continue to live with former foster parents was inserted into the Children Act 1989 by The Children and Families Act 2014. This introduced a new duty on Local Authorities in England to advise, assist and support fostered young people to stay with their foster families when they reach 18, if both parties agree.

Under the *Care Leavers (England) Regulations 2010; Planning Transition into Adulthood for Care Leavers Guidance*, the Local Authority must provide information about extending placements post 18.

Under Section 19BA of the Children Act 1989 Local Authorities have a specific duty to consider the possibility of staying put when undertaking the assessment of the young person's needs within 3 months of their 16th birthday.

7.3 **Diversity and Equality**

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

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

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

- None

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

- None

9. **Appendices to the report**

- Appendix 1: Staying Put Policy

Report Author:

Dan Jones – Strategic Lead CLA

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TITLE:	STAYING PUT POLICY Ensuring stability for young people through staying with their foster carers into adulthood
DATE:	October 2022
AUTHOR:	Daniel Jones Strategic Lead Children looked After
APPROVED:	Ruth Murdock Strategic Lead Quality Assurance and Reviewing
DATE OF NEXT REVIEW:	October 2023
VERSION:	V2
Modified:	

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Section 1 Introduction

This policy sets out Thurrock Council's Children's Services approach towards promoting and supporting its young people in foster care that remain with their former foster carer(s) under staying put arrangements once they reach their 18th birthday. This policy is applicable to all young people, including unaccompanied asylum seeking, should they be accepted by the home office to have a leave to remain status in the United Kingdom, in the care of Thurrock Council, who are living with their former foster carer(s) on their 18th birthday. The foster carer(s) may be Thurrock in house foster carers, connected person's carers or Independent Fostering Agency carers. This policy has been written under the intention that it is read in conjunction with Thurrock Council's Leaving Care Policy and the Care Leavers Local Offer.

Section 2 Legal framework and the definition of a staying put arrangement

This policy builds upon the statutory guidance on staying put which is contained in the May 2014 revision of the Children's Care Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 3. Planning transition and adulthood for Care Leavers should be read in conjunction with the statutory guidance. It is also supported by staying put arrangements for Care Leavers aged 18-years and above to stay with their foster carer(s). This is a joint guidance produced by the Department for Education, Department for Work and Pensions and Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs. This provides more detail relating to many of the financial aspects around staying put arrangements.

2.1 The definition of a staying put arrangement

Simply stated 'staying put' is a looked after child continuing to live with their foster carers after the age of 18 in an arrangement supported by Thurrock Council. Staying put arrangements should replicate as far as possible a 'normal family life'. The foster carer(s) are required to care for any child or young person placed with them as though they were a member of their family, this expectation should carry through into staying put arrangements. All families have different rules, expectations and ways of doing things. Considering this, staying put arrangements should take this into account and be sufficiently flexible to be tailored to individual circumstances and needs.

For a staying put arrangement to be agreed the following must be true;

- The carer(s) were acting as foster carer(s) to the young person immediately prior to their 18th birthday. This assumes that the foster carer(s) were approved in accordance with the Fostering Service (England) Regulations 2011, and the young person had been placed with them by Thurrock Council;
- A young person is assessed to be an eligible child, with the meaning of paragraph 19B (2) of Schedule 2 of the Children's Act 1989, immediately before they reach 18-years old;
- The staying put arrangement is set out in the child or young person's pathway plan;

When a staying put arrangement ends:

Staying put is an agreement between the carers, the young person and Thurrock Council via it's after care service. Any party may terminate the agreement with no less than 28 days notice. Staying put arrangements will automatically end as follows:

- When a young person becomes 21-years old
- When a young person ceases to reside within the household.
- Specific arrangements apply if:
 - the young person attends university and lives away or
 - is enrolled in the military or
 - turns 18 during their final academic year in statutory education

Thurrock Council as a local authority has a significant statutory obligation to:

- Monitor and support staying put arrangements, these are reflected throughout this policy;
- Support its Care Leavers whether they decide to participate in a staying put arrangement. This is detailed in the Children Act 1989 statutory guidance. A former relevant child who is

pursuing further education or training may be entitled to support until they turn 25-years old. However, beyond their 21st birthday this cannot be identified as a staying put arrangement.

It is important to understand that government departments have differing approaches to defining staying put within the statutory framework applicable to their area of responsibility. The definition given above comes from the Children Act 1989 and is one which gives English local authorities a duty to monitor and support, as outlined within this policy.

Section 3 Guiding principles

Staying put arrangements will be most effective when underpinned by clear principles as detailed within the practice guidance below:

3.1 Best interests

The best interests of the young person should be at the heart of decision making in relation to staying put arrangements. This enables them to have the best possible opportunities to lead successful lives.

3.2 Permanency means in to adulthood

Foster carers recruited to care for children and young people through permanency, will be advised from the point of their initial application and training that young people will be required to be supported and cared for up until 21-years old. This is advised to ensure there is a clear culture and understanding from our foster carers, when committing to permanency for a child or young person, that they will be supporting them into adult life and must be provided with information on financial implications that this commitment may have for their household.

3.3 Support

Support to both foster carers and young people should be geared to their specific circumstances and needs. Foster carers should be enabled to develop the skills best required to help the children and young people in their care to do well in life and promote a culture of supporting young people into independent living, through learning the essential skills, such as budgeting and personal care.

3.4 Clear information

Foster carers and young people should be provided with clear information regarding the support available from Thurrock Council and its Fostering Service. This is to provide them with support on choices, such as if they wish to enter a staying put arrangement. This will always include information around financial arrangements and implications for benefits and tax. This is a joint responsibility of the Independent Reviewing Officer at reviews, the social worker for the young person and fostering social worker. Foster carers will be able to access training regarding staying put opportunities and other accommodation options.

3.5 Early planning

Early planning for staying put arrangements is crucial. Arrangements should be considered as part of the care planning process and from the time that a long-term foster placement is planned, and permanency planning is undertaken. Decisions in principle about whether staying put is an option should take place with the young person and their foster carer(s). This discussion and decision should be clearly recorded on the young person's pathway plan and care plan and reviewed at each subsequent review meeting by the Independent Review Officer. The young person's 16th birthday is the time when their pathway plan should be completed, including decisions in principle that lie around whether a staying put arrangement is in their best interest. This discussion should take place with the young person and their foster carer(s) to provide them with enough time to consider all implications, expectations and requirements or to identify alternative placements should a staying put arrangement be identified as not viable. By the time that the young person turns 17 ¹/₂-years old, there must be a planning meeting to finalise arrangements with the foster carer, young person and provider. The responsibility for arranging the relevant meeting is described in Section 6

3.6 Equal opportunities

To maximise the opportunity for young people to participate in staying put arrangements within a Fostering Service, both local authorities and agencies, should carry out everything possible to ensure all foster carers have equal opportunities to become staying put carers. This includes family and friend foster carers and those approved by independent fostering agencies.

3.7 Flexibility

Arrangements should be sufficiently flexible to enable support to be provided over and above the minimum legal requirements and recognise that the relationship between a foster carer and young person will not always end at 21-years old or when a staying put arrangement ceases.

Section 4 Criteria for staying put and arrangements for disabled young people

There are no specific or altered 'eligible' criteria standards or requirements for entering into a staying put arrangement and all young people can remain with their foster carer(s). However, the young person's needs must be met should they have a disability. Should the young person require a higher-level of support than can be provided through the staying put offer then, it may be identified as appropriate to consider placing the young person in a Shared Lives placement.

If the Children in Care team are working with a young person with complex needs, there must be planning and assessment at aged 16, to establish whether the young person meets the criteria for adult social care including the 16-25- year-old team. If the young person's foster carer(s) wish to continue supporting them and it is in the best interest of the young person to remain with their foster carer(s), then the foster carer(s) will need to apply to be assessed by the Shared Lives team that are registered with the Care Quality Commission. The placement should be agreed at the at the decision-making panel. Children's and Adult Services should work together using the Transition policy, to ensure the best possible transition to adult life for our young people.

Section 5 Preparation for a staying put arrangement

At the first Children in Care review after the young person turns 16-years old, they should receive their 16+ pathway plan. To ensure enough time is available to make the necessary planning arrangements for extending a placement to turn into an arrangement beyond a young person's 18th birthday, the young person's social worker must take full responsibility to ensure that appropriate meetings take place. Before discussing "Staying Put" with a young person a meeting should be held involving the supervising social worker, child's social worker and the foster carer to explore their views on "Staying Put". These initial discussions should not include the child until the foster carer has indicated that staying after the age of 18 is a viable option.

The meeting should involve a discussion on the potential impact on the foster carers' financial circumstances should the placement continue as a "Staying Put" arrangement after the young person's 18th birthday and their understanding of the following;

- The procedures and requirements for extending a foster care placement into a "Staying Put" arrangement
- The young person's financial and benefit responsibilities associated with remaining in a "Staying Put" arrangement
- The changes and implications in the funding arrangements for foster carers associated with a "Staying Put" arrangement on any welfare benefits they may be in receipt of and on their income tax and national insurance contributions.
- The foster carer/s requirement to inform their mortgage provider/landlord and their household/buildings insurer that the foster child is "Staying Put".

If, having considered the above, the Foster carer is able to offer staying put the allocated social worker will discuss 'Staying Put' with the young person including what this will mean for them in practical terms and responsibilities this can then be incorporated into the pathway plan. Clear information on the funding for a staying put arrangement must be given to the foster carer(s) and young people at this stage though financial arrangements should be confirmed at age 17 years and six months

Should it be decided that a staying put arrangement is not viable or should the young person advise that they do not wish to take up the staying put offer, the social worker will need to scope out the options that are available for this young person and meet individually with them to explore these other options for them to incorporate this into their pathway plan. The social worker will carry out a needs led assessment and formulate a plan which will be drawn up to prepare the young person to acquire their independent living skills that are required to move into independent or semi-independent living. Once this is incorporated into their pathway plan it will continue to be reviewed and discussed during reviews. This decision and future planning will form a basis of the ongoing statutory review of the care and pathway plan.

A needs led assessment will be carried out and formulated into a pathway plan that will be drawn up to prepare the young person to acquire their independent living skills. It is expected that the young person should be supported to continue developing a range of skills by the carers and after care service, this includes;

5.1 Relationships

Getting on with neighbours, understanding acceptable and unacceptable behaviour and when and how to communicate with relevant professionals.

5.2 Emotional resilience

Managing isolation, where to go for support and building self-esteem. Access to therapeutic and support services

5.3 Finance and budgeting

Opening a bank account, safe borrowing and managing debt, understanding basic finance products, benefits, budgeting for priority bills, household appliances and everyday shopping on a budget.

5.4 Cooking

Cooking healthily on a budget, understanding nutrition and its overall impact on health.

5.5 Managing a home

Washing, ironing, cleaning, basic DIY, operating appliances and what is allowed within a tenancy agreement.

5.6 Supporting education, training and employment

Supporting education, employment and training whilst understanding the range of options available to the young person around this. Understanding strengths and areas for personal development; developing job skills, understanding jobs, volunteering pathways, available support, understanding bursaries, other financial support; where to go for advice, understanding the impact of work on benefits and the amount they will be expected to contribute to the arrangement. Staff can offer support too. Should the young person be in year-13 then they will have a named Virtual School Thurrock support officer to help them with this. Once they are in year-14 their personal adviser can link with their 18+ leaving care ETE (Education Training and Employment) Support Officer for guidance.

When a staying put arrangement is agreed and the child turns 18, the former foster carers are 'staying put providers' which is separate from being registered foster carers. The providers will receive an income from Thurrock Council and, usually, a contribution from the young person. When the young person turns 18-years old, they will enter into a private licence agreement that details their entitlement to remain in the staying put accommodation provider's household until 21-years old. This licence is between the staying put accommodation provider and the young person.

Section 6 Professional roles

6.1 Fostering social worker

The fostering social worker will lead the discussions at the initial scoping meeting and support the foster carer(s) or provider throughout the implementation of the staying put arrangement process. This will also ensure the foster carer(s) have been made fully aware of the implications for themselves and the young person. Any changes in decisions made by the foster carer(s) of the young person should be taken to the statutory review process.

6.2 Young person's social worker

The young person's social worker will support the young person throughout the development of the staying put arrangement process and ensure the young person is aware of the implications and expectations of the arrangement. Should the young person decide to decline a staying put arrangement, they will be supported in seeking alternative accommodation and support options. A plan will be in place for the transition into accommodation, this plan will be in place and agreed by the first Children in Care review after the young person turns 16-years old and finalised by their final Children in Care review before they turn 18-years old. Young people must not be left in a position of being unsure on their accommodation options, should they decide to not proceed with a staying put arrangement. Where there is a lack of knowledge around housing and its availability, Housing Service should be approached, and options be discussed. Their social worker will also support in applying for housing benefits, income support, universal credit or any other benefits they may be entitled to receive.

6.3 Personal adviser

To aid the transition for our young people into the Care Leaving Service, their allocated personal adviser will be assigned to them from the age of 16-years old. The young person's allocated personal adviser will work alongside their allocated social worker to form a positive relationship with and understanding of them before moving to the Care Leavers Service. This positive relationship building will be accomplished by attending meetings with the young person, clarifying any financial support changes once they turn 18-years old, answering queries relating to and planning for accommodation and supporting their access to education, training and employment. During this period, their allocated social worker remains as the lead professional until the young person turns 18-years old and has fully transferred to the Care Leavers Service, where this will then be their allocated personal adviser. Once the young person has been transferred to the Care Leavers Service, their personal adviser is able to provide them with advice and support whilst getting in contact with them at least every 3 months and arrange to have a face to face meeting at least every 8-weeks. Their personal adviser will facilitate a meeting to complete the young person's pathway plan with their attendance and aim to have the young person's aims and wishes implemented in this and supported. The pathway plan meeting should include the views of the staying put provider, should this be the pathway planned, to ensure that they are also working towards the same goals with the young person and providing support around this adequately. The young person's personal adviser will coordinate the provision of additional services, where necessary, and support the young person to ensure they make the most of the support and services available to them. Their personal adviser will remain informed in the young person's progress and wellbeing through regular updates from the young person, and other stakeholders involved in their support. Their personal adviser will be able

to provide information around financial entitlement and support to aid them in managing their finances effectively, including daily outgoings. In addition, they can aid in relation to housing options that are available to the young person and support in identifying further/higher-education, employment or training.

6.4 The Service Manager

Staying Put is overseen by the Service Manager for the after care service who is responsible for ensuring that staying put arrangements are compliant with the needs and requirements of Thurrock Council. The Service Manager will manage and take responsibility for any serious issues in the service and will support the rest of the team in ensuring a positive outcome and delivery.

6.5 Foster carer(s)

The role of the foster carer(s) is to be present at the early planning meetings that commence at the age of 16-years old and receive pathway plan notes to enable them in supporting the path of the children and young people that they look after. The foster carer(s) check with the young people that they have all the information that they require in formatting and language that is appropriate for them to understand. Foster carer(s) will assist in the decision making on whether it is in the best interest for the young person to transfer into a staying put accommodation arrangement and assist them in seeking further information on this to aid in their decision-making process. The foster carer(s) ensure that they receive adequate and comprehensive information on the financial implications of staying put, at the earliest time possible. They will also ensure the young person understands the implications of the new arrangement, should they decide to transfer to a staying put arrangement and ensure they are aware that they are no longer in foster care and are now on the path to becoming independent and therefore they are renting a room within their former foster carer(s) household, under an agreement as part of their first step to independence in adulthood.

6.6 Independent Reviewing Officer(s)

The Independent Reviewing Officer chairs the Children in Care review before the young person turns 16-years old. This meeting should confirm whether the young person has received or when they will receive their 16+ pathway plan pack. The pathway plan review held after the young person's 16th birthday should confirm whether they will consider entering a staying put agreement or not. The social worker should ensure the staying put arrangement is reflected in the pathway plan and this should be checked. This plan should be a live document setting out the different services and how they will be provided to meet the young person's individual needs and requirements in full. During the review the Independent Review Officer will ensure that the young people who are eligible to enter a staying put arrangement are fully aware of this process, expectations and support whilst understanding their entitlements. If a staying put arrangement is identified as unsuitable for a young person, then the Independent Review Officer should be informed of the other transition options that are available to them and their preferred option. If it is felt and identified that a young person may be eligible for adult services when they reach 18-years old, then their social worker should refer them to this service, such referral should take place at the earliest opportunity where additional needs are identified and no later than the young person's 17th Birthday. A review meeting will take place to finalise the staying put arrangement at 17 1/2 - years old. The Independent Review Officer will continue to review and monitor the young person's pathway plan to ensure there is no drift in the care planning and that a robust transition plan is in place.

Section 7 Funding

The fee payable to the staying put accommodation provider will be dependent on the amount agreed with the local authority at the time and such payments will commence directly following the cessation of their fostering payments to avoid further financial difficulties for the staying put accommodation provider and the young person.

The payment to the staying put provider (former foster carer) is made up of a contribution from Thurrock and the young person. At age 18 it is expected that the young person will cover the costs of their savings, clothing, pocket money, travel for leisure and school, and holidays from their income.

The Staying Put rate to carers covers as follows:

The Staying Put Home:

- A suitable bedroom for the young person
- Extra heating costs
- Extra lighting
- Extra decorating costs
- Contribution to Home Contents Insurance
- Contribution to Car insurance (fully comprehensive)

Food:

- Standard food requirements
- Special dietary needs

Toiletries:

- All basic toiletries (Shower gel, soap, toothpaste and brush)
- All basic skin & hair products

Education costs:

Those aged 18 plus may still be in education and it is expected that staying put carers will support and assist continuing education. The staying put allowance account for assistance with

- Basic Stationary
- Attending meetings at college etc.
- Occasional assistance in getting to and from the education setting

Employment costs:

Those aged 18 plus may still be in work or paid apprenticeship and it is expected that staying put carers will support and assist young adults in employment. The staying put allowance account for assistance with

- Basic Stationary
- Occasional assistance and support to attend work

Transport:

- All the transport costs including public transport that are incurred in normal family life
- It is anticipated that the young person will fund their own transport to school/college/work but it is understood they may on occasion need assistance from the carer in the form of transport

All Religious Needs Including:

- Prayer books/equipment
- Dietary needs

Telephone/Internet:

It is anticipated that at age 18 most young people will have a mobile phone. They will need to budget for the purchase of credit or contracted mobile phone from their income. It is expected that the staying put carers would provide the following in addition:

- Access to a telephone to call family members and professionals
- Access to the internet

Payments Table:

Age	Education/employment status	Payment to carers	Notes
18 years	Completing statutory education	Matches fostering payment paid prior to 18 until the 31 st July after the 18 th Birthday	For this group the young adults would not be expected to make a contribution
18 years – 21 years	In further education	£246.44	If the young person lives away for their education the payment is £100pw with no contribution whilst the young person is away and reverts to the usual payment when at home with the provider.
18 years to 21 years	In employment/seeking employment	£246.44	If the young person lives away for their education the payment is £100pw with no contribution whilst the young person is away and

			reverts to the usual payment when at home with the provider.
21 years to 25 Years	Any	£246.44	If the young person lives away for their education the payment is £100pw and reverts to the usual payment when at home with the provider for a period of at least a week.

Young people, in all circumstances, must claim all benefits they're entitled to and should be supported to do this by their allocated social worker or personal adviser. Thurrock Council will fund their arrangement in full should there be any delay in benefits being received. However, this will then be claimed back once the young person is in receipt of their full benefit amount.

Where a young person is aged 18-years old and is eligible for welfare benefits, including housing benefit and department for work and pension benefits, this amount will be deducted from the contribution and used towards the cost of the staying put arrangement. Where a young person is eligible for welfare benefits, these must be claimed. The housing benefits should be paid directly to the staying put provider and not directly to the young person. The benefit allowances received will be reviewed as part of the young person's pathway plan process and by their personal adviser after they turn 18-years old. Consideration should be given to ensure that applications for benefits do not discourage a young person from obtaining or maintaining part or full-time employment.

- Please see 7.2 below for how contributions are calculated

The allocated social worker or personal adviser (after the young person's 18th birthday) must support the young person to claim all available benefits to support Thurrock Council in maximising their funding.

The remaining amount of income support or universal credit will be to cover pocket money and clothing, including any privileges they may like, for example, mobile phone, extra curricula activities and more; the foster carer(s) will not be required to cover this in maintenance. This should be covered in detail during the arrangement agreement meeting.

7.1 Young people attending further education/enrolled in the military and returning to their staying put accommodation during holiday periods

Young people living away from their foster carer(s) household for temporary periods of time, for example, attending higher education courses, should not preclude young people from remaining in a staying put arrangement. It is recognised that supporting a staying put arrangement enables the continuation of familial relationships that provides the young person with security and stability that they require whilst they are focusing on education and their future aspirations. Should this be the

case then the staying put providers will be paid the standard rate, and rent, for the time that the young person stays with them during the holiday period and during term time they will be eligible to receive £100pw

7.2 Calculating the young person's contribution and the total payment to the carer

It is envisaged that on becoming 18 children will have been appropriately prepared to meet some of their own needs and have some budgeting skills. With the exception of young people in statutory education it's assumed that staying put carers will have to provide less than they would have done under a fostering arrangement. When in receipt of benefits or earned income the young person is expected to offer a minimum contribution of £12 per week. Those young people not able to claim benefits and not employed will have an income provided by Thurrock Council and should still contribute the minimum amount.

The total payment to the staying put provider should equal £246.44 per week and is made up of a combination of a contribution from the young person, and a contribution from Thurrock. Housing benefit should be paid directly to the provider and is in addition to the £246.44

Use the following table to calculate the young person's contribution

Weekly Income after tax/NI or, benefit payment	Weekly Contribution
Up to £79.09	£12.00
£79.10-£90.00	£14.00
£90.01 - £100.00	£16.00
£100.01 - £125	£20.00
£125.01 - £150	£24.00
£150.01 - £300	£30.00
£300.01 - £400	£50.00

Once in receipt of benefits/income the weekly contribution should be calculated on a monthly basis by multiplying the weekly contribution by 52 and dividing by 12. The young person should be supported by the Personal Advisor to set up a standing order for this amount

7.3 Housing benefit/universal credit housing

Where possible this should be paid directly to the staying put provider. If this is not possible the young person should be supported to include this amount in their standing order.

Section 8 Independent fostering agencies

Young people placed in independent fostering agency arrangements will be considered against the same staying put criteria as Thurrock foster care placements. Thurrock Council will ensure that the process as detailed within this policy involves the independent fostering agency at all key stages. It is expected that independent agency foster carers(s) will be paid at the same staying put rate as Thurrock foster carer(s) in line with what is documented within this policy. If a fostering agency, including Thurrock offers other ancillary benefits of being a registered foster carer then this is not part of the staying put payment.

There will be the same expectation of independent agency foster carer(s) should they be offering permanency. They are provided with staying put information in line with the expectation for the young person to be able to stay there until 21-years old. When entering into permanency agreements with Thurrock Council, independent fostering agencies enter into the agreement on the basis that when the young person turns 18-years old, the foster carer(s) will transfer to the Thurrock staying put funding structure. Thurrock Council do not commit to funding arrangements at an independent fostering agency rate for staying put accommodation arrangements.

Once the placement panel have formally acknowledged the decision made by the young person and their foster carer(s) to enter into a staying put accommodation agreement after they turn 18-years old, the independent fostering agency will be notified then requested to ensure their foster carer(s) formally notify the Independent Fostering Agency of their change in circumstance. It is expected that independent fostering agencies that Thurrock Council commission arrangements with, will fully embrace the legislative and good practice guidance associated with staying put

Section 9 Income tax and national insurance issues for staying put arrangements

All foster carer(s) and staying put accommodation providers must register with Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs as self-employed. The simplified tax arrangements apply and foster carer(s) and staying put accommodation providers will continue to be able to claim under their existing simplified tax arrangement. Where young people remain living with their former foster carer(s) under a staying put arrangement, the income tax and national insurance framework and liabilities that apply are set out in the Shared Lives carers guidance. The Shared Lives qualifying care relief guidance sets out that staying put accommodation providers receive tax exemptions up to a given qualifying amount for each staying put young person living with them. The staying put qualifying rate mirrors the system and amounts that applied when the arrangement was previously a foster care placement.

The staying put exemption does not affect any income from other sources, for example, employment and investments. Such other income will be taxed in the normal way. Staying put carers, including foster carers, should note that they may be able to claim working tax credit which is administered by Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs. Staying put care is counted as work for tax credit purposes. The staying put accommodation provider's taxable income is used to assess the amount of tax credits that they are entitled to receive. Where they receive less in staying put payments than the tax-free allowance, their income from providing a staying put accommodation is treated as nil for this purpose. This will mean they get the highest rate of working tax credit.

Impact(s) of a staying put accommodation arrangement on single occupancy council tax discount receivers

9.1 Council tax implications

Single staying put accommodation providers who claim single occupancy council tax discount may lose this reduction as a result of having a young person over 18-years old living in their home and is deemed under council tax regulations and criteria as an adult. Where this occurs, the staying put accommodation provider will need to notify their social worker so that the increase in council tax payments can be acknowledged through the local resources panel and reimbursed by the department.

This amount will be added to the arranged payment(s) to the staying put accommodation provider under the staying put arrangement. Please note that not everyone over the age of 18 living in a household counts as an adult for council tax purposes; there are the following exceptions:

- Children and young people under 18-years old;
- Those children and young people on an apprenticeship scheme;
- 18 and 19-year old's in full-time education;
- Full-time college and university students;
- Young people under 25-years old who get funding from the skills funding agency or young people's learning agency;
- Student nurses;
- Foreign language assistants that are registered with the British Council;
- Young people with a severe mental impairment;

- Live-in carers who look after someone who isn't their partner, spouse or child under 18-years old;
- Diplomats.

9.2 National insurance

The same class 4 national insurance contributions apply in line with fostering.

9.3 No recourse to public funds

No Recourse to Public Funds means that a person will not be able to work or claim most benefits, tax credits or housing assistance that are paid by the state. Asylum seeking young people may have no recourse to public funds but will still meet the criteria for a care leaving service and can access "Staying Put" in the same manner as young people who have a positive asylum decision or, who are British Citizens. In these circumstances Thurrock Council will be responsible for their housing benefit contribution.

3.4 Payments and Benefit Issues for "Staying Put Providers"

This section covers the rules regarding payments to "Staying Put Providers" that are in receipt of a means tested benefit/s. National Insurance benefits are not affected by this income.

Payments made to the "Staying Put" provider from Thurrock Council under section 23C of the Children Act 1989 via the young person, or directly to the carer/s on behalf of the young person are disregarded when calculating the carer's entitlement to means tested welfare benefits.

The section 23C payment is disregarded in its entirety in circumstances where young people continue to live as a member of their former foster carer's family. Where young people contribute to the arrangement through a rent liability and pay this directly, or via a claim for housing benefit (which requires a commercial arrangement) the element of the payment from a source other than the section 23C element is taken into account when calculating the impact on the "Staying Put Providers" own welfare benefit claim. The section 23C element will always be disregarded when calculating the "Staying Put Providers" welfare benefit entitlement.

3.5 Under Occupancy or Bedroom Tax

If the provider claims housing benefit in their own right and has one 'spare' bedroom, the amount of housing benefit they are allowed will be reduced by 14% of the rent and any eligible service charges. If they have two or more spare bedrooms, they will lose 25%. Rules around spare bedrooms are strict and these changes only apply to working age people claiming housing benefit. This is termed Under Occupancy or Bedroom Tax. "Staying Put" young people are exempt and will not incur an 'Under Occupancy' or bedroom tax charge on the "Staying Put" carers.

Payments from Children's Services to young people under Section 17, Section 20, Section 23, Section 24 and Section 31 (Children Act 1989), do not count as income for benefit purposes. Payments made to young people and passed to former foster carer/s from section 23C (Children Act 1989) are disregarded in the assessment of the former foster carer/s' income for benefit purposes, if the young person was formerly in the claimant's care, is aged 18 or over and continues to live with the claimant within a non-commercial family type arrangement.

3.6 Connected Carers who provide staying put placements

Young people living in a connected care arrangements who wish to continue with a "Staying Put" arrangement are not always eligible to claim housing benefit on reaching the age of 18 because of the familial relationship. In situations where a young person is not eligible to claim Housing Benefit,

Thurrock Council will pay the rent element of the “Staying Put” arrangement (subject to a claim having been rejected and the matter being appealed). Whether the claim is rejected or not, will depend on the District Council housing benefit department deeming the relative a former foster carer or a close relative.

The Personal Advisor should always support the housing benefit claim through liaising with the Housing Benefit department and provide evidence which makes it clear that the relative was caring for the young person under a fostering arrangement and that they are registered foster carers for this purpose. Where necessary the PA should assist the young person to make an appeal where their application is turned down.

Section 10 Staying put health and safety

The same health and safety principles that applied under the foster placement will continue and they must ensure the appropriate home insurance has been implemented for their role as a staying put accommodation provider, this includes their vehicle having a current MOT and business insurance. The staying put accommodation provider must ensure that they have advised their insurance company of young people being welcomed into their home under an agreement, so they are able to advise of the need to have business cover for their home or any other essential requirements.

Section 11 Monitoring and reviewing arrangements and safeguarding measures

The staying put arrangements should be reviewed as part of the young person's pathway plan on a 6-month basis, this is to ensure that any implemented targets are being met. The pathway plan review will ensure the young person is developing and acquiring independent living skills. This should also record any problems or difficulties that have emerged, what is working well in the arrangement and future plans. A review can be arranged earlier, if it is needed, by an agreement between the young person, staying put accommodation provider and personal adviser.

11.1 Safeguarding measures

Where a young person reaches the age of 18 and fostered children are also living in the placement (or will be placed in the future), all aspects of the legislation relating to fostering continue to apply and govern the regulation of the household

The same safeguarding measures that apply under the foster placement will continue to apply during the staying put accommodation use period. Should the former foster carer(s) continue to be foster carer(s), the young person that they are providing staying put accommodation for will need to undergo a DBS check as they will become an adult living in the home. This DBS check is the responsibility of the approving fostering agency should foster carers continue to be registered after a staying put arrangement has started.

If the former foster carer(s) are still registered at Thurrock Council as foster carer(s) their DBS checks will continue routinely. Thurrock will be responsible for ensuring all staying put former foster carer(s) have an up to date DBS check. Any adult safeguarding concerns must be referred to Thurrock Council's adult safeguarding service in line with the Thurrock safeguarding adult board procedures.

11.3 Support to Staying Put Providers

All "Staying Put" providers will be allocated a named supervising fostering social worker.

For Thurrock approved Foster Carers; In situations where foster children are placed in the household, or may be placed in the future and the "Staying Put" provider will remain registered as a foster carer, their existing supervising fostering social worker will continue to support the overall arrangement (Fostering and "Staying Put").

For Foster Carers approved by other agencies Thurrock will offer a supervising social worker in respect of the staying put arrangement

The following will also be offered:

- A return to the Fostering Panel to discuss changes in the household arrangements and any plans for future deregistration and/or agreeing a period of fostering inactivity if a carer is not taking any further fostering placements (on a temporary or permanent basis).
- A yearly review of the "Staying Put" carer and the overall arrangement by the Team Manager for the after care service
- Safeguarding and risk assessment checks on household members and regular visitors;
- Health and safety checks in line with the standards applied to foster carer placements;

- Regular supervision from a member of the fostering service at a frequency of no less than every 3 months;
- The opportunity to attending appropriate training and support groups.

11.4 Continued registration as foster carers

Thurrock approved foster carers have the option to remain registered as carers even if the only provide care under a staying put arrangement. It is the Foster Carers responsibility to ensure they continue to meet the expectations of being a foster carer, such as training etc. even if many of the other requirements do not apply as there is no looked after child. Their continued approval is monitored by the annual review process.

Foster carers approved by fostering agencies other than Thurrock will need to discuss their continued registration with their approving agency

11.5 Recording Information – “Staying Put” Carers

“Staying Put” providers should keep a log/diary of significant events with dates and times in case a situation arises with a “Staying Put” young person where information needs to be shared. Information being recorded should be shared with the young person. Young people should also be informed that the log/diary/information will only be shared with other professionals on a ‘need to know’ basis.

Where the carer ceases to be a foster carer, their fostering recording file will become a “Staying Put” recording file. Foster carers that provide foster care and “Staying Put” will have a “Staying Put” section within their fostering file

Section 12 Ending the staying put arrangement

The staying put arrangement can be terminated at any time before the young person reaches their 21st birthday. This could be done by either the young person or the staying put accommodation provider by providing 28-days' notice. A planning meeting should therefore be held to prepare for the young person's transition into new accommodation. When planning to end a staying put arrangement it is important to remember that as the young person reaches 21-years old they will no longer qualify for requiring priority need for housing. Considering this, it is essential that plans are made in advance, to maximise the young person's opportunities to be considered for social housing.

Staying put placements will end at:

- 21 years of age for children without a disability (unless in full time education this can continue up to the end of the academic year after the 21st birthday)
- 25 years of age for children with a disability who have been assessed by adult services and deemed not to meet the criteria

Should the young person wish to remain with the staying put provider, it will become a private arrangement between them, and no funding will be provided by Thurrock Council. However, the young person can request support from a Personal advisor, to continue until up to the age of 25 years. There will be circumstances where a planned ending from a staying put arrangement, to independence within the community does not work out and returning to the foster carer is in the best interest of the young person. Should this option be available, within a 4-week period, a young person may be able to return to their previous staying put arrangement and the original payment arrangement will resume. In these circumstances, the arrangement will continue to be considered as staying put accommodation.

Staying Put' – Living Together Agreement (Young People Aged 18 remaining in Staying Put Arrangements)

This Living Together Agreement provides a framework that sets out the house rules and expectations of young people and their carers where young people remain living with their former foster carer/s after their 18th birthday and under a “Staying Put” Arrangement.

The Living Together Agreement should be based on the information set out in the preceding Placement Plan and the agreements set out in any ‘Delegated Authority’ framework. Whilst the Living Together Agreement is a formal document setting out everyone’s expectations, the majority of house rules and expectations will be the same as those in place prior to the young person’s 18th birthday; so most of the requirements will remain broadly the same. However, reaching the age of 18 and adulthood is a good opportunity to revisit all of this and see what needs to change.

The Living Together Agreement is a flexible document and should be used to set out tasks, expectations and house rules which help the “Staying Put” arrangement run smoothly. This should be reviewed every 6 months at the time of reviewing the Pathway Plan.

In order to ensure that everyone knows what is expected of them this should be completed prior to a young person’s 18th birthday and be signed and linked to the young person’s Pathway Plan. Ideally it should be discussed and completed at the last statutory CLA review meeting.

The Living Together Agreement contains three main areas:

1. Responsibilities of everyone who signs the agreement.
2. House rules and support.
3. Payments.

The information in this document should cover all the day to day arrangements that are needed to ensure that the positive aspects of fostering transfer to the “Staying Put” Arrangement.

Please sign the Living Together Agreement after discussing and agreeing everyone’s expectations.

Signed copies of this document should be given to each person to keep and a copy should be placed in the young person’s file.

1. Responsibilities

1.1 Young Person

- Engage in the support detailed in the 'House Rules and Support' Section (below) and the Pathway Plan in order to develop independence skills.
- Behave in a reasonable way, showing respect for my carer(s), their property, neighbours, other children/young people in the placement and the local community.
- Not behave in a manner that causes upset and/or harm to others or that would be deemed anti-social.
- Keep to any house rules set out in this Living Together Agreement.
- It is recommended that with the agreement of the staying put carer, a living expenses contribution is paid weekly (equivalent to 15% of your income), either from earnings or benefits or a combination of earnings and benefits.
- Let my leaving care personal adviser / social worker and Staying Put Provider know in advance if I wish to end the Staying Put arrangement.
- Maintain my room, furnishings and fittings in good order (and be responsible for replacing any items that are damaged and/or stolen).
- Contact my leaving care personal adviser/social worker if I would like to change this Living Together Agreement or raise concerns/make a complaint.

Please detail any specific agreements in relation to the young person wishing to have another person staying overnight (one or two nights only at any one time) in the same bedroom. The arrangement/agreement, for another person to stay overnight, can only be agreed by the Staying Put Provider

1.2 Staying Put Provider

- Provide a single fully furnished room to be paid for by the young person via earnings and/or housing benefit.
- Provide heating, hot water, lighting, food, house key (see specific arrangements Box on Page), and support.
- **Wi-Fi – Where the broadband is capped, permission is needed from the Staying Put Provider before any downloading or streaming may take place. Under no circumstances will the sharing or receiving of images of anyone under 18 be allowed. In the event of a breach this could jeopardise this agreement. See Link - <https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/uk-council-for-child-internet-safety-ukccis>**
- Inform the young person's leaving care personal adviser/social worker, fostering supervising social worker and the housing benefit department if the young person

ceases to reside at the accommodation in order to prevent overpayment of benefits.

- Respect confidentiality (within agreed parameters) at all times regarding personal details of the young person.
- Ensure the accommodation is of a good standard and allow annual household health and safety checks to be carried out.
- Inform the young person's leaving care personal adviser/social worker as soon as possible of any significant incidents and if the arrangement is likely to be disrupted/ end prematurely.
- **Provide adequate notice to end the "Staying Put" Arrangement. However, the young person is "an excluded Licensee" and where there are issues of personal safety or concern for the Staying Put Provider. Immediate notice can be given.**
- Ensure there is adequate insurance in place to cover acts of accidental damage, deliberate damage or theft.
- Ensure relevant staff /agencies are made aware if the young person is absent or missing.
- Ensure (in conjunction with Children's Services staff) an appropriate 'Safe Care'/'Safeguarding Plan' is in place to manage the impact on other / younger children in the household of any changes to the household.
- Provide support (as detailed below in the 'House Rules and Support' Section) to prepare the young person for independent living and adulthood.

Please detail any specific agreements, for example, how any other younger children are to be safeguarded.

1.3 Supervising Social Worker/Social Worker & Personal Advisor (Post 18)

- Inform Staying Put Provider(s) of any likely risks and advise on risk management and safe care.
- Carry out a DBS check for the young person and other household members. This must take place by the time the young person is 17 years and 3 months.
- Advise and assist the young person with a housing benefit claim.
- Advise and assist the young person with any other benefit claims and financial matters in order to maximize income.
- Advise and assist the young person with any applications for moving on to other accommodation.
- **Advise and suggest house rules (in addition or variance to those below).**

- Visit at regular intervals until the end of this Staying Put arrangement to provide support.
- Review this arrangement as part of the young person's Pathway Plan review.
- Review this Living Together Agreement and the 'House Rules and Support' Section (below) at least every six months.

Name of Young Person:

Date:.....

Name of Staying Put Provider:

Address: Postcode:.....

Young Person's date of birth:

Next of Kin:

Primary Language:

Young person's mobile number:

Carers' mobile/telephone number(s):.....

Supervising Social Worker:.....

Contact details:

Social Worker/Personal Adviser:

Contact details:

Team Manager/Duty name and contact details:

Emergency Duty number (Out of Hours):

Missing Persons Police number: **101**.....

GP details:

Any plans to change GP/Optician/Dentist. If so, by when?.....

Who will assist the young person?

1. What is the Proposed Move on Plan from the Staying Put Arrangement?

Is the young person registered on Thurrock housing list?

2. House Rules and Support

The points and headings set out below are not intended to be a definitive list; they provide a broad set of topics which should be discussed, clarified and expectations set out. It will be important to add other topics relevant to the individual Staying Put household.

Each household will have different rules and expectations, some of these will depend on who else lives in the household, for example, where younger foster children are living in the house, it may not be appropriate to have a boyfriend or girlfriend stay over.

Suggested Topics for discussion:

Issues regarding privacy, for example when it is acceptable to enter the young person's bedroom, which parts of the house are private, shared etc.

What time is the young person expected to return in the evening, what are the arrangements if the young person is going to be late, or wants to stay out overnight etc?

What are the arrangements for ascertaining the young person's whereabouts if they do not return on time?

What are the arrangements for reporting the young person missing if they cannot be located, how long would you continue to try to contact them before reporting them missing?

What are the arrangements for the young person having visitors and/or for friends staying overnight and/or boyfriends/girlfriends staying overnight - what is deemed acceptable?

What are the arrangements if the young person smokes, what are the rules on consuming alcohol?

The young person needs to seek the agreement of the Staying Put Provider prior to engaging into any financial contract or agreement that requires use of their home address. The Staying Put Provider must be advised before any financial contract or agreement is signed or entered into.

Support with the development of life skills.

Cooking and food preparation:

Laundry, ironing, household chores:

Budgeting and money management:

Progressing and renewing housing benefit claims are carried out by a Personal Advisor who will provide support to the Care Leaver.

Returning official forms (e.g. Electoral Roll register):

Remind the young person of any Health appointments that the Staying Put Provider is aware of.

Any specific health needs:

Attending 6th form, college or university open days etc.

Support with maintaining contact with family and extended family members.

Encourage the young person to pursue hobbies, leisure interests and sports activities.

Is the young person registered on the Thurrock Housing List?

Additional information

3. Payments

The payment calculator has been completed and the weekly amount payable to the staying Put provider is £

This is calculated as follows:

Calculating payment	Weekly Amount
Young Persons Contribution (to be set up as standing order)	
Thurrock's Contribution	
Housing Benefit Contribution (shared accommodation rate at August 2022 is £76.24)	
If answer to Q1 is 'no' Housing contribution from Thurrock	

If the answer to 'Q6' is yes, please add
in the weekly top up required

If the answer to Q7 is 'yes', please add in the weekly top up required	
Total to be paid to the Staying Put Provider	

Please note - this rate does not apply if the child is away at university, military training or is still in statutory education. These rates should be specified below.

Specific Arrangements to this Staying Put Agreement:

Signatures

Signed: (Young Person) Date: ...

Signed: (Staying Put Provider) Date:

Signed: (Social Worker/Personal Adviser Date:

.....

Signed: (Supervising Social Worker) Date:

Service Manager Agreement

Signed..... (Service Manager CLA) Date:.....

Appendix Two; Table to Calculate the Staying Put Payment

(Double click to access the spreadsheet and calculate the amount due, the below is just an example)

	Specific Circumstances Questions	Answers
1	Does the young person have recourse to public funds?	
2	Does the young person have a disability?	
3	If yes, has a referral to adult services been made?	
4	If they are entitled to adult services has a referral to shared lives been made?	
5	Does the young person intend to take up a place at university or in the military?	
6	Is the foster carer/Staying put provider going to incur additional Council Tax costs as a result of the staying put arrangement?	
7	Are the foster carer or Staying Put providers benefits affected by the staying put arrangement?	
8	Is the foster carer or staying put provider a relative of the child.	
9	If the foster carer or staying put provider is approved by a fostering agency other than Thurrock, has this agency been advised?	
10	What is the young person's weekly income after tax or their weekly benefit income?	Up to £79.09
	Calculating payment	Weekly Amount
	Young Persons Contribution (to be set up as standing order)	£12.00
	Thurrock's Contribution	£234.44
	Housing Benefit Contribution (shared accommodation rate at August 2022 is £76.24)	
	If answer to Q1 is 'no' Housing contribution from Thurrock	
	If the answer to 'Q6' is yes, please add in the weekly top up required	
	If the answer to Q7 is 'yes', please add in the weekly top up required	
	Total to be paid to the Staying Put Provider	£246.44

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Work Programme

Committee: Corporate Parenting

Year: 2023/2024

Dates of Meetings: 18 July 2023, 5 September 2023, 25 January 2024, 19 March 2024

Topic	Lead Officer	Requested by Officer/Member
18 July 2023		
Childrens Social Care Performance 22/33	Mandy Moore	Officers
Adoption and Fostering Panel Chairs Report	Dan Jones	Officers
Statement of Purpose Adoption	Dan Jones	Officers
Statement of Purpose Fostering	Dan Jones	Officers
Report on Initial Health Assessments for Looked After Children	Ines Parris / Dan Jones	Members
Fostering Recruitment	Liz Shields/Dan Jones	Officers
Work Programme	Democratic Services Officer	Standing item
5 September 2023		
Children's Social Care Performance 2022-23	Mandy Moore	Officers
Transitions to Adult Services for CLA	Dan Jones/Iyobosa Osunde	Officers
After Care Service Report	Dan Jones	Officers
Joint Housing Protocol for Care Leavers	Dan Jones /Housing	Officers
Verbal update – Children in Care Council	Open Door	Officers

Staying Put – Overview and outcomes report	Dan Jones	Members
Work Programme	Democratic Services Officer	Standing item
25 January 2024		
Children’s Social Care Performance	Mandy Moore	Officers
Independent Reviewing Officer – Annual Report	Ruth Murdock	Officers
Annual Report of the Virtual Schools	Keeley Pullen	Officers
Education and Employment for Care Leavers	Dan Jones/Kate Koslova-Boran	Members
Children Looked After and Care Leaver Sufficiency Strategy Update	Ceri Armstrong /Dan Jones	Officers
CiCC – Agenda item to be agreed with CiCC – e.g. pocket money, placement moves etc		Standing item
Corporate Parenting Committee Annual Report 2022/2023	Democratic Services	Members
Work Programme	Democratic Services Officer	Standing item
19 March 2024		
Children’s Social Care Performance 2022/2023	Mandy Moore	Officers
CLA Health Report	Ines Parris (ICB)	Officers
SET Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service Report for Children Looked After	Tina Russell (NELFT)	Officers
Children Missing from Care and Return Home Interviews	Mairead Morgan	Officers
CLA and the Youth Justice Service	Clare Moore	Officers

CiCC – Agenda item to be agreed with CiCC – e.g. pocket money, placement moves etc		Officers
Work Programme	Democratic Services Officer	Standing item

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