

7 March 2018		ITEM: 6
Corporate Parenting Committee		
Children's Social Care Performance		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Not Applicable	
Report of: Iqbal Vaza, Strategic Lead, Performance Quality Assurance and Business Intelligence		
Accountable Assistant Director: Sheila Murphy, Assistant Director Children's Care & Targeted Outcomes		
Accountable Director: Rory Patterson, Corporate Director Children's Services		
This report is Public		

Executive Summary

Thurrock has experienced a high level of demand placed on its statutory social care service for children. Considerable work has been undertaken by the department in managing this demand through improving its early intervention service and managing the front door (MASH) more effectively. There has been a reduction in the number of contacts and referrals; easing the demand pressure of children becoming looked after and children being placed on a child protection plan.

The number of care leavers in suitable accommodation has reduced.

An area of focus is the number of children that have been adopted in this financial year. Four children have been adopted at the end of January 2018 and we expect a minimum of 5 children to be adopted by the end of the year with a possibility of 3 more children being adopted bringing the year total to 8 as a maximum. Performance for 2018/19 will be much improved with at least 15 children being adopted in this year.

1. Recommendation(s)

- 1.1 Corporate Parenting Committee to note the areas of improvement in children's social care, work undertaken to manage demand for statutory social care services and highlight areas of further investigation for deep dive studies.**
- 1.2 Corporate Parenting Committee to note a new inspection framework has been introduced by Ofsted for children's social care.**

2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1 This report provides a summary of children’s social care performance. It highlights key demand indicators such as number of contacts, trend analyses, benchmarking data and key performance indicators.
- 2.2 Thurrock produces a considerable number of data sets and performance reports to meet its internal and external reporting requirements. It is essential that one version of performance information is used by the whole system; from case workers to the senior management team. The data in this report is from the latest performance digest (January 2018), regional benchmarking data (quarter 2 position) and national data sets based on 16/17 financial year. This data had been presented and discussed with the social care senior management team and Corporate Director’s Performance Group.

3. Contacts and referrals

- 3.1 Thurrock is managing its demand placed on the front door (MASH) of children’s social care well. Since Oct 2017 there has been an increase in the number of contacts compared to the previous year, however Thurrock is still forecasted to perform better than the East of England average. Thurrock’s referral and assessment rate is below comparator groups. In 2015/16, Thurrock had one of the highest assessment rates at 713 per 10,000 of the child population. This has been reduced to 505 per 10,000 of the child population (see fig 2).

Fig 1

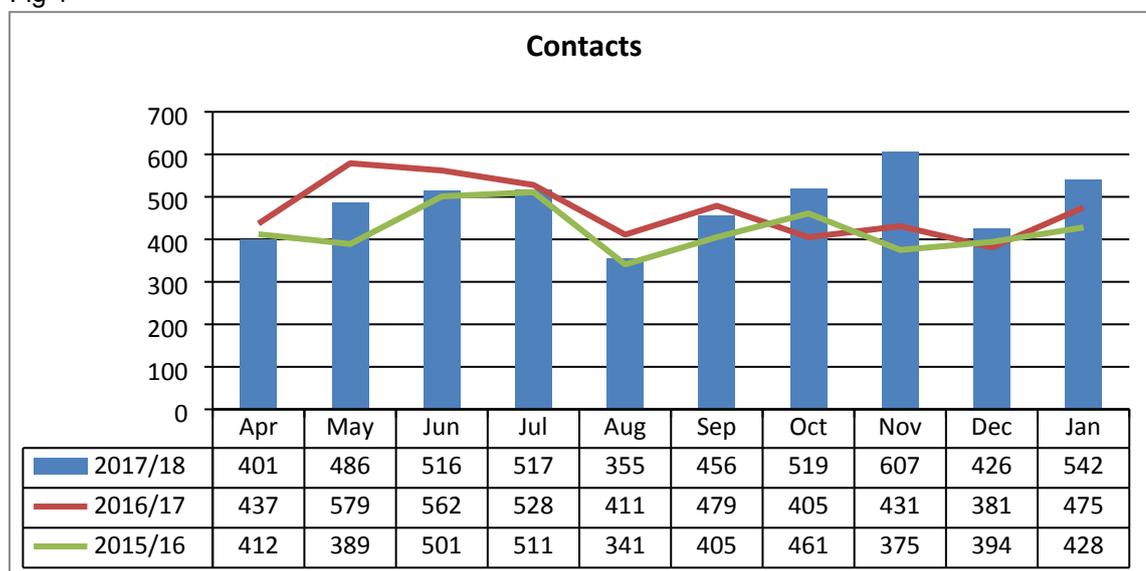
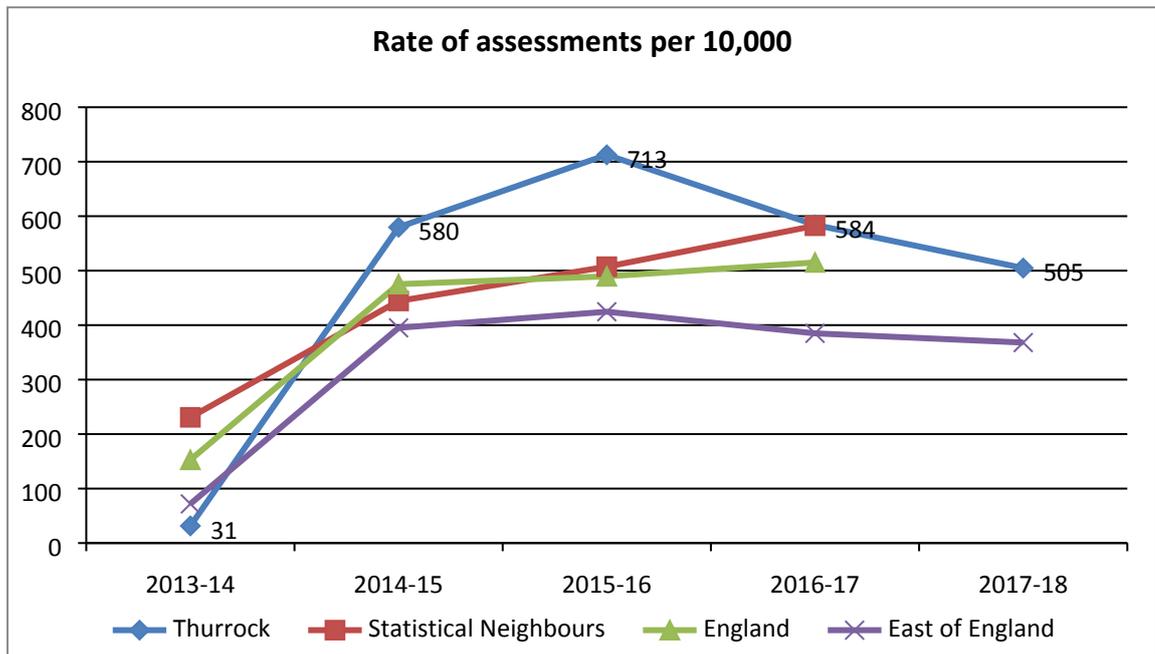
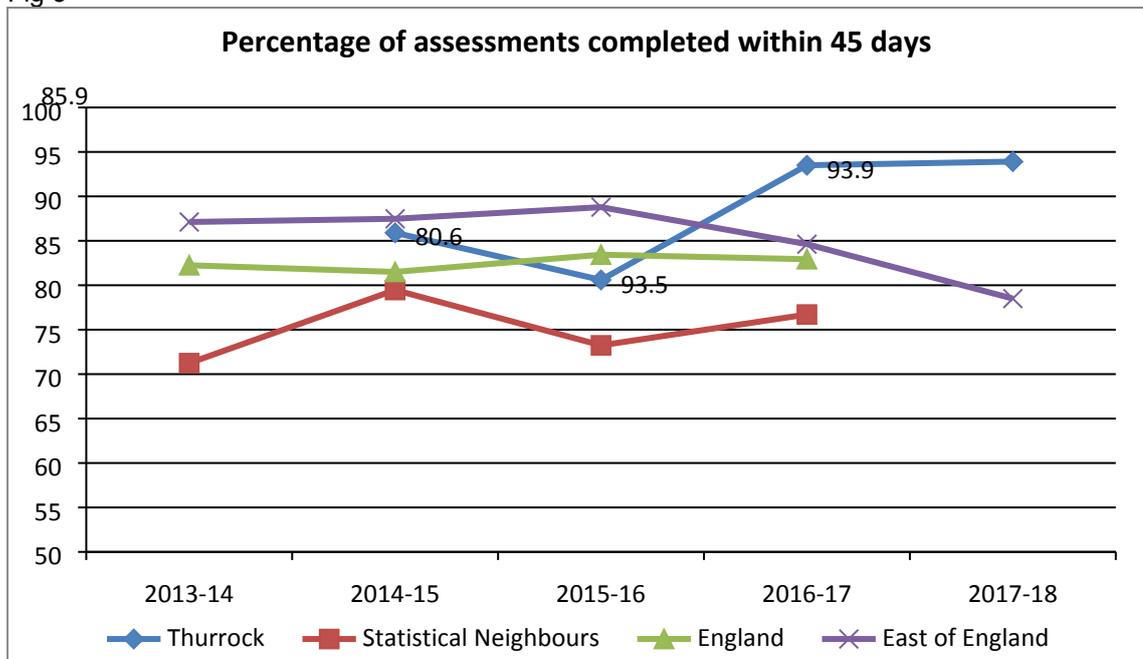


Fig 2



3.2 Thurrock is one of the best performing authorities in completing its assessments within timescale (see fig 3). It also has a low percentage of repeat referrals. In summary the front door of social care is being managed efficiently and work undertaken by the service to reduce demand has been reflected in the data.

Fig 3



3.3 Looked after children

3.4 The number of looked after children has reduced by 8 (see fig 4, Jan 18: 313, Jan 18: 338) in comparison to the same position last year. This is attributed to a reduction in asylum seeking children from 61 to 32 (see fig 5).

Fig 4

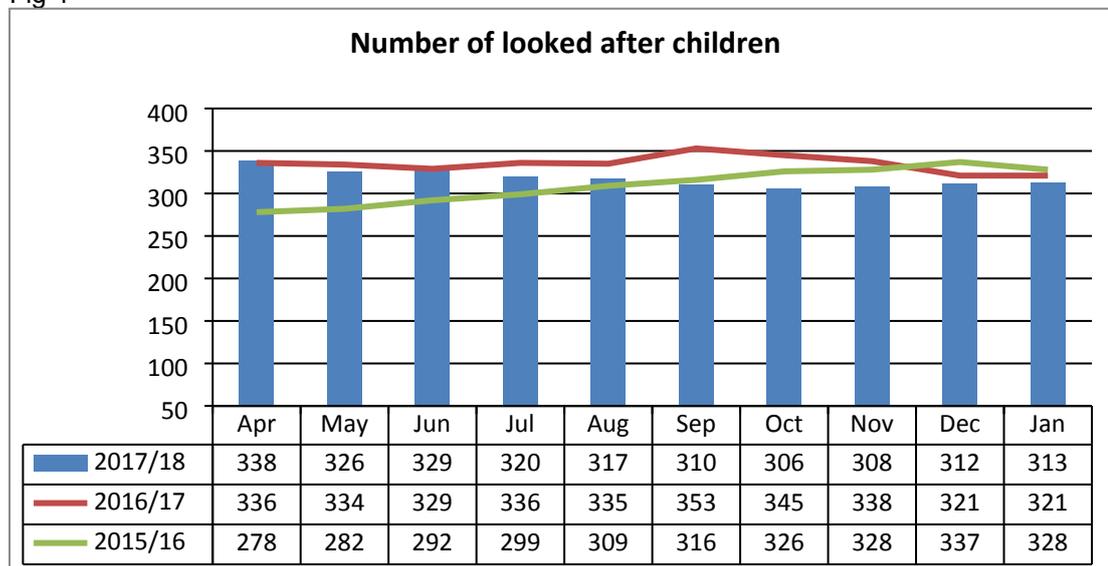
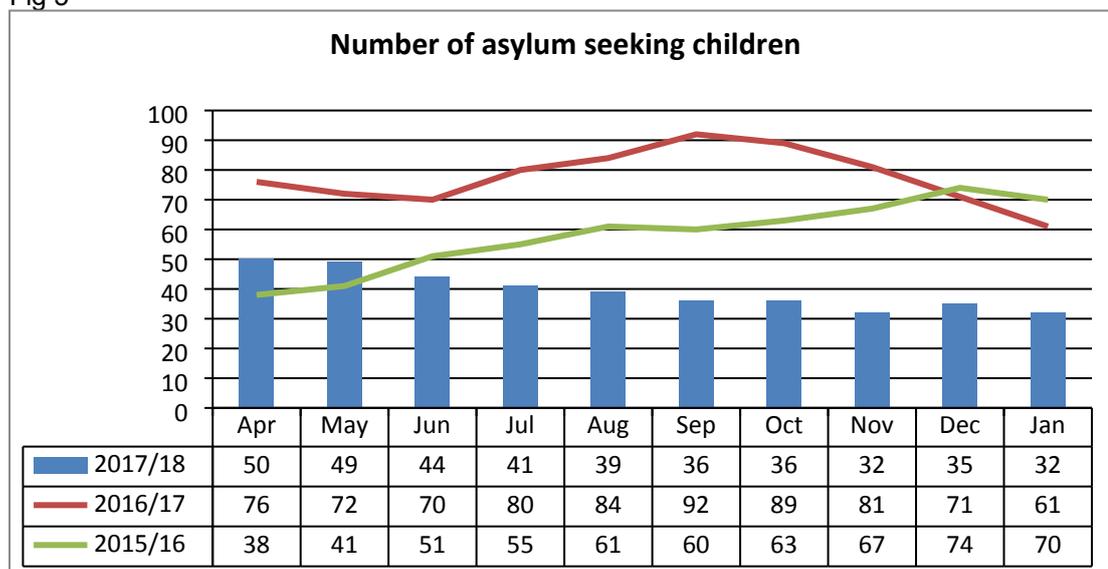


Fig 5

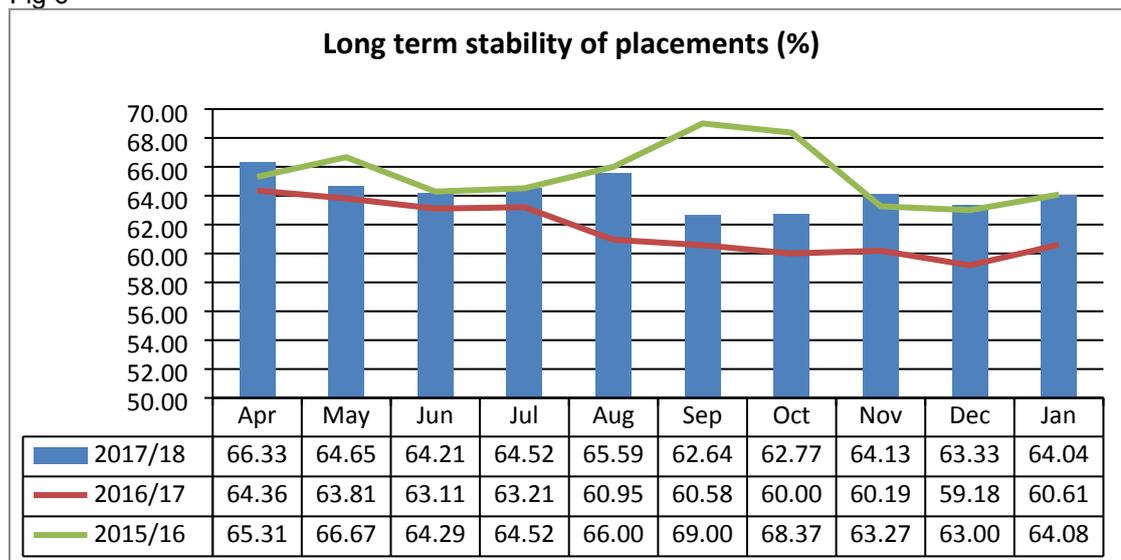


3.5 As a rate, Thurrock is closing more looked after children cases than its comparator group and the East of England average. Given the high rate of looked after children this is a good position. Thurrock is also reducing the flow of new looked after children, with 14 fewer cases than the previous year. However the rate of new looked after children is still higher than its comparator group. The service continues to monitor all new looked after cases ensuring correct thresholds are being applied and children are only being looked after where necessary

3.6 Placements

3.7 Thurrock performs well in placing looked after children in stable placements. The percentage of children with 3 or more placement moves in the financial year is 7.32%, which is below the England average. In terms of long term stability, 64% (see fig 6) of looked after children under the age of 16 and have been in the same placement for more than 2 years. Thurrock is forecasting that this position will improve to 68% by the end of the financial year which will be within the range of its comparator group

Fig 6



3.8 Thurrock has made significant improvements in placing children within Thurrock. It now has 40% (126 children) placed within Thurrock, which is 8% points higher than the position last year. This is both cost effective and ensures children are closer to their families and community where they also have access to good schools and other local services. Thurrock's target is to have at least 50% of placements within borough which will bring it in line with its comparator group.

3.9 Looked after children reviews

3.10 The Independent Reviewing (IRO) Service provides a statutory function providing scrutiny, challenge and oversight for all children in the care of the local authority, where ever they may be placed in the country. Part of the oversight is achieved by chairing looked after children (LAC) reviews. This is a statutory requirement placed upon the local authority.

Statutory timescales are prescribed and all local authorities are required to adhere to these timescales, ensuring robust and timely oversight and intervention. The current performance for the service as of 15/1/2018 is that 89.1% of reviews have been completed within the expected timescale. This compares with statistical neighbour data of 90.5% and national data 90.6%

(this data is end of year data for year end 2016/7 and therefore not a direct comparison.

Some of the reasons for reviews not taking place on time has been down to appearances in court, sickness of either a foster carer or officer. Close scrutiny is being focused on this performance indicator. The projection and trajectory by the end of year, is that performance will match or surpass statistical and national indicators.

3.11 Looked after children missing

3.12 Thurrock had 4 looked after children missing from placement in December 17, which is below the average for this financial year. To date, Thurrock has had 220 instances of looked after children missing from placement. It is forecasting 277 for the end of the financial year, which is below its comparator group (361).

3.13 Adoptions

3.14 From April 2017 to 13/02/2018, eighteen children have achieved permanency either through Adoption or a Special Guardianship Order. Adoption figures have been impacted upon by additional factors including the Essex ruling which affects timeliness of adoption orders being made where a birth parent is opposing the order and subsequent legal advice for the cases. This has caused additional delay in cases of up to four months. Another factor which has affected timeliness of permanency for children is family member coming forward once a decision has been made that children cannot return to parents. One of the reasons for this is that family members often don't want to come forward earlier so that they are not seen to be competing with or undermining parent's attempts to retain care of their children.

Since April 2017, 26 Children have had an Agency Decision Maker (ADM) decision with a plan for adoption;

- 1 application for a Placement Order following the ADM was denied by the court and the child subsequently returned home on a Supervision Order.
- 10 children currently have an ADM decision for adoption awaiting the outcome of the final hearing in care proceedings.
- 15 children have been made subject to a Placement Order since April 2017 to 13th February 2018.

In addition to the 15 children made subject to a Placement Order since April 2017, there were also 4 children subject to a Placement Order from 2016/17 and 2 children with an ADM for adoption totalling 21 children of which;

- 5 – children have been Adopted since April 2017 to February 2018
- 1 – Foster carer is making the application to adopt the child direct to the court supported by the local authority

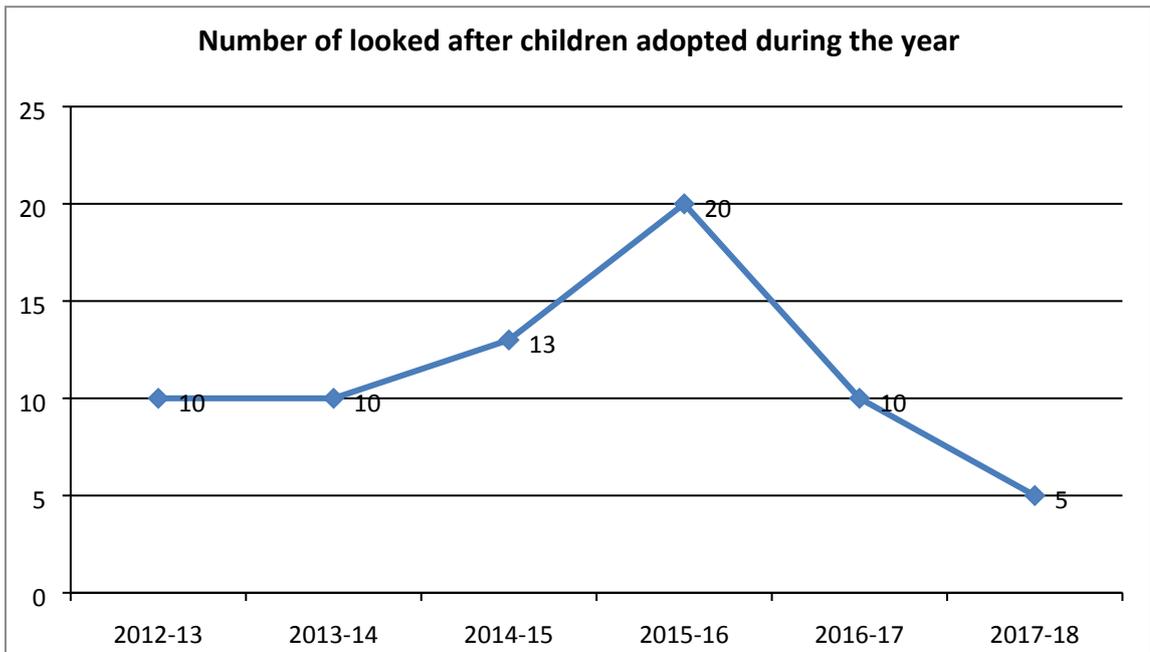
- 3 – Children to be presented to panel for matching within the next 1 - 4 weeks
- 2 – Children are having introductions to their perspective adoptive family and will be placed by 19/02/18
- 3 – Children have applications made for an adoption order and hearings are in the next 4 weeks
- 1 – Child is placed with their adopters, awaiting adoption order application date.
- 1 – Child placed with their prospective adopters, with an initial application for adoption order date set for 21/02/2017
- 5 - Children have been made subject to Placement Orders within the last 8-10 weeks and matches with prospective adopters are being pursued. No children are awaiting a match with a prospective adoptive family with a Placement Order older than 3 months.

If the three adoption order applications which are court timetabled for March 2018 are unchallenged then orders are likely to be made in respect of these children before the end of March bringing the total adoption figure to 8 for 2017/18.

Applications for Placement Orders have been successful which would indicate that Placement Orders will be made for the majority of children with an ADM decision of adoption and subsequently matched with adopters. Going into 2018/19 there will be at least 23 children with an ADM decision of adoption or a Placement Order.

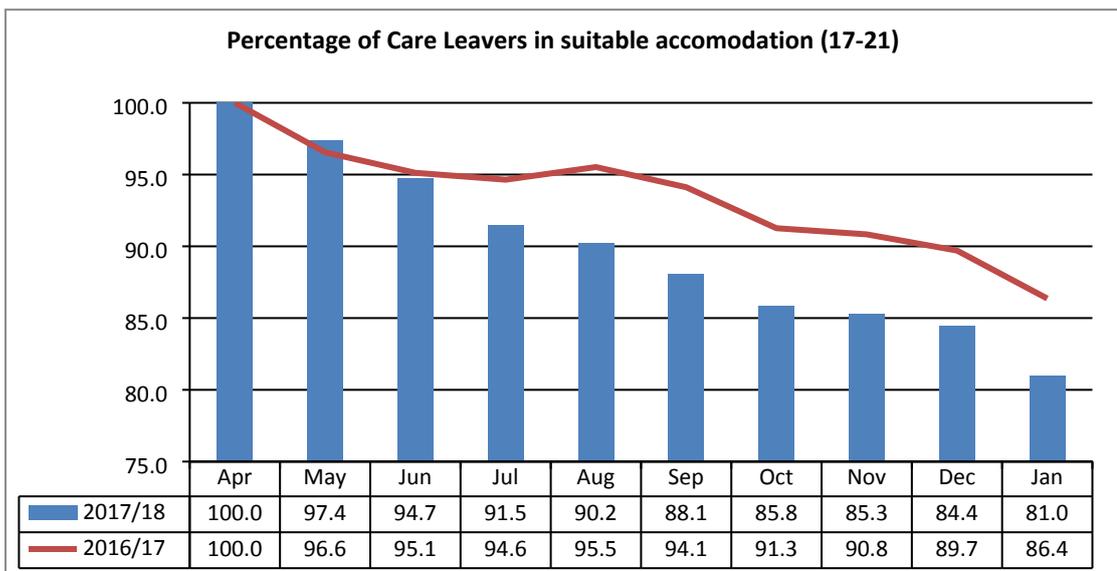
Given the number of children placed with prospective adopters, awaiting matching panel or with an ADM decision awaiting a final hearing and, identified dates / actions to progress permanency plans for this cohort of children, the projected figure of adoptions for 2018/19 is a minimum of 15 children.

- 3.15 Timeliness has now much improved. The average number of days between a child coming into care and being placed with an adoptive family is 239, which is good performance and is below (ie good) the east of England average.



3.16 Care Leavers

3.17 Considerable work has been undertaken since the last report to Corporate Parenting in ensuring the data is updated on the status of care leavers. As a result the percentage of care leavers in education, employment and training has improved to 65.5%. Although this is below the target of 70%, it is above the 16/17 position (61.9%). Since May 2017 the percentage of care leavers in suitable accommodation has been lower than last year (see fig 10).



3.18 Housing remains one of the key challenges for young people who are Leaving Care, to address this we have developed the Head Start Housing Programme – which will look to support vulnerable young people into HMO's this

programme will offer a range of support to ensure that the transition into independent living can be achieved. The current position shows that we have 0.6% in unsuitable accommodation – the rest of the data relates to young people who have gone missing from the LA – a significant percentage of these are made up of our unaccompanied asylum seeking young people and this is recognised nationally as an issue. Due to how we report we also have a percentage of young people who chose to disengage with the after care service and as such we are not aware of where they live so are shown as unknown on the data return. We continue to ensure that we try and keep in touch with young people who have made the choice to disengage and are proactively identifying ways of providing a range of accommodation to meet the needs of young people leaving care

3.19 The service has recently been realigned and is integrated with the Inspire Youth Hub services. This has opened up a number of opportunities for young people leaving care to access services in their transition to adulthood. Some further work is required in ensuring all children leaving care have a pathway plan. This area is being addressed by the senior management team in the leaving care service and looked after children teams.

3.20 **Case file audits**

3.21 All local authorities are required to carry out regular audits on case files and feedback learning into front line practice. To date, 187 case file audits have been completed. Work has been undertaken by the service to ensure that learning from these cases is communicated to social workers and their team managers.

3.22 **Child Sexual Exploitation**

3.23 There is a report before Corporate Parenting Committee this evening regarding Child Sexual Exploitation and Missing children.

3.24 **Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS)**

3.25 The current single inspection framework (SIF) for children's services ended in December 2017 and has been replaced with the new inspection of local authority children's services (ILACS) framework, which started in January 2018. Under ILACS, local authorities will be required to share their self-evaluation at the annual engagement meeting with Ofsted.

4. **Reasons for Recommendation**

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

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

5.1 Not Applicable.

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

6.1 Not Applicable.

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Nilufa Begum**
Management Accountant

No Financial Implications

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Lindsey Marks**
Deputy Head of Legal Services

No Legal Implications

7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Natalie Warren**
Community Development and Equalities Manager

Although there are no direct Diversity or Equality Implications arising from this report, the overall improvements documented have a positive impact on children and young people

7.4 Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder)

- Not Applicable.

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

- N/A

9. Appendices to the report

- Not Applicable.

Report Author:

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Strategy, Communications and Customer Services