

<b>2 March 2021</b>		<b>ITEM: 5</b>
<b>Corporate Parenting Committee</b>		
<b>Children's Social Care Performance</b>		
<b>Wards and communities affected:</b> All	<b>Key Decision:</b> Non-key	
<b>Report of:</b> Anna Watkins, Business Intelligence Analyst		
<b>Accountable Assistant Director:</b> Joe Tynan, Assistant Director of Children's Social Care and Early Help		
<b>Accountable Director:</b> Sheila Murphy, Corporate Director of Children's Social Care and Early Help		
<b>This report is:</b> Public		

### **Executive Summary**

This report provides information on the performance across Children Looked After and Aftercare. The overall performance for the service is good and this is within the context of COVID-19 and the lockdown restrictions which have been in place over the period March 2020 to December 2020.

Thurrock continues to provide services to approximately 295 Children Looked After (CLA) and approximately 281 Care Leavers. Children and young people are visited regularly and there are notable improvements with the management of missing children, which reflects good partnership with the police and Thurrock Community Safety. The work with health colleagues continues to ensure that there is a focus on Initial Health Assessments for children entering into care.

The Care Leaving Service reflects a trajectory of good performance. There continues to be a focus on continuing improvement of the service, particularly to keep in touch and support young people into employment or education and to ensure they have the right accommodation to meet their needs.

Children are generally placed with foster carers or where possible family members. To support children being placed locally in their communities, there is a drive to promote the recruitment of Thurrock based foster carers.

Permanency planning has been particularly impacted by COVID-19, as some children have not been able to progress to their permanent placements as there are delays in final court hearings. The court have agreed to prioritise cases where the care plan is one of adoption, to prevent the delay for younger children in court cases.

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

**1.1 That members note the areas of improvement in Children's Social Care and note the work that is undertaken to ensure good and improving performance.**

**1.2 Note the impact of COVID 19 on performance.**

## **2. Introduction and Background**

2.1 This report provides a summary of Children's Social Care performance. It highlights key demand indicators for Children Looked After such as the number of children who are looked after, benchmarking data and key performance indicators.

2.2 Thurrock produces a number of data sets and performance reports to meet its internal and external reporting requirements. The data in this report is from the At a Glance monthly performance report, regional benchmarking data and national data sets. External reporting requirements include the annual statutory data return to the Department for Education (DfE) that all Local Authorities must provide.

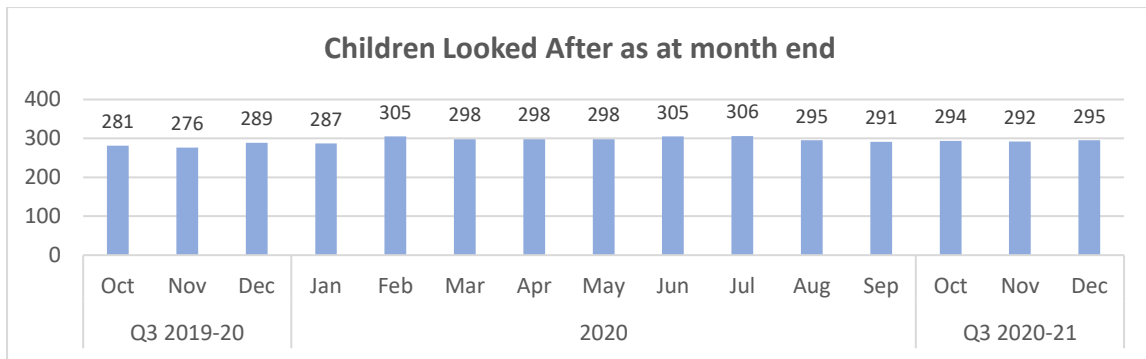
2.3 This data has been presented and discussed with the Children & Families Performance Group.

2.4 Teams and Managers use the data to understand and respond to changes in activity levels, to monitor and respond to the quality and timeliness of services and to collate information about how well children are doing. The information is also discussed with front line workers.

## **3. Performance Data for Children Looked After**

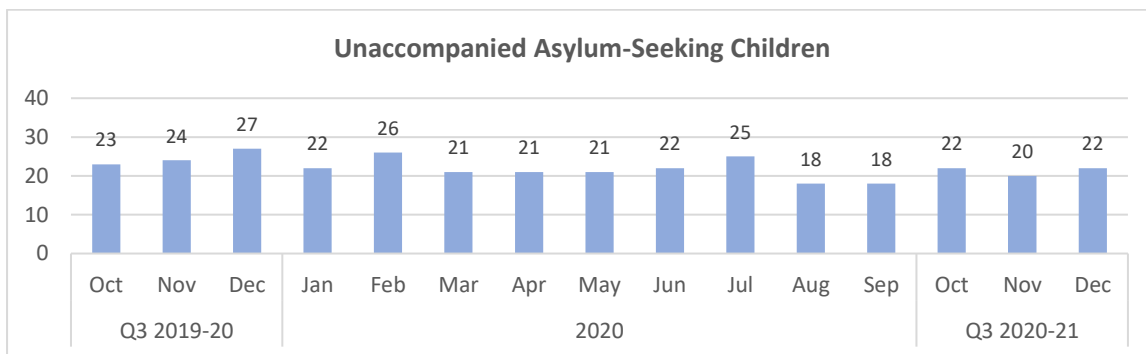
### **3.1 Number of Children Looked After (CLA)**

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



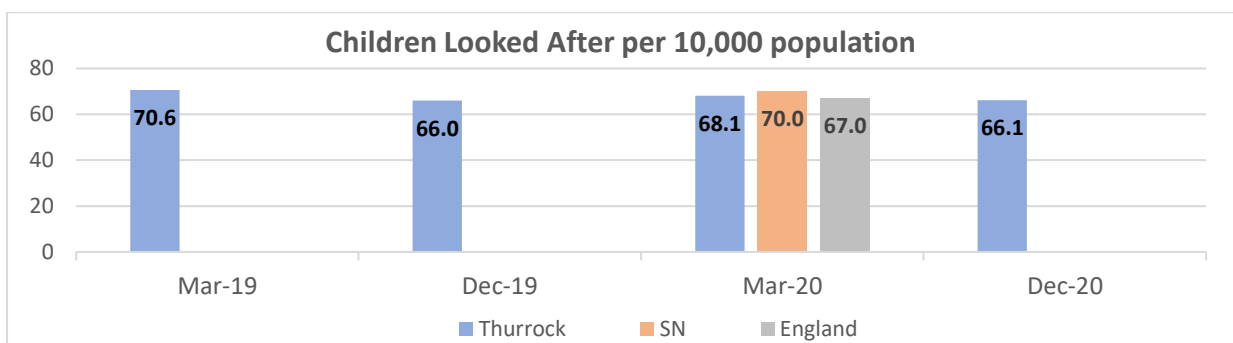
### 3.2 Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC)

UACS are a subset of the Children Looked After number, above. There has been a reduction in the entry of UASC into Essex Ports as the preferred route appears to have been through Dover currently.



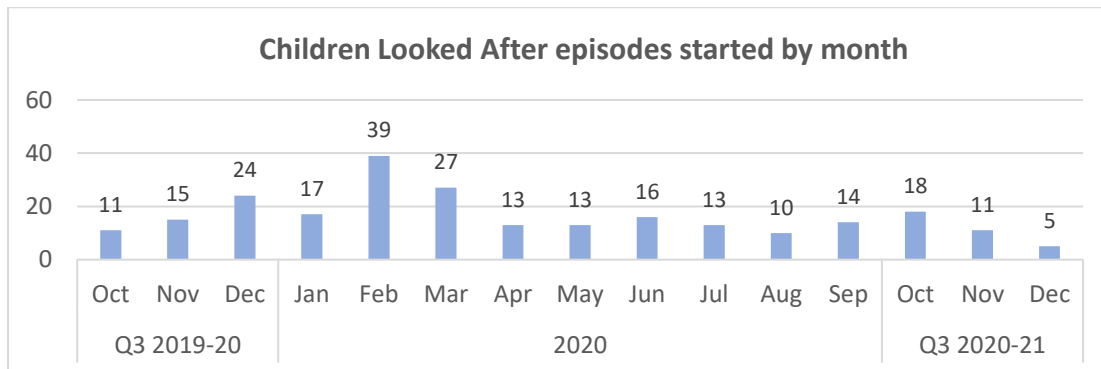
### 3.3 The Rate of CLA per 10,000 population

The graph below shows the rate of Children Looked After per 10,000 population of under 18 year olds in Thurrock. Based on benchmarking data, Thurrock is below the Statistical Neighbour average of 70 and the England average of 67 as at the end of March 2020.



### 3.4 CLA episodes started in month

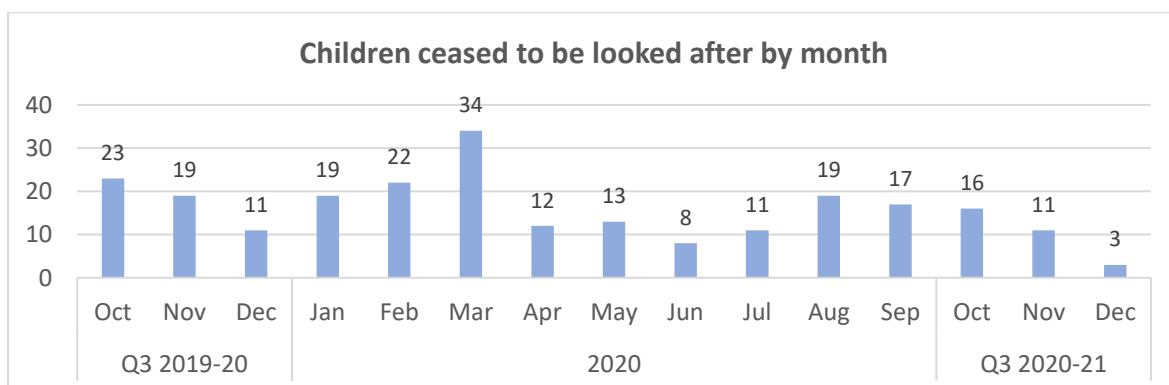
It is normal for the numbers of children entering care to fluctuate. The fluctuation and the relatively small numbers make it difficult to identify significant trends. However, there has been a decrease in the number of children entering care since the start of the pandemic. For example, 34 children started to be looked after between October and December 2020. This compares to 50 children who started to be looked after between October and December 2019. All cases are reviewed to ensure the correct children come in to care and court proceedings are only issued where necessary.



### 3.5 CLA episodes ended in month

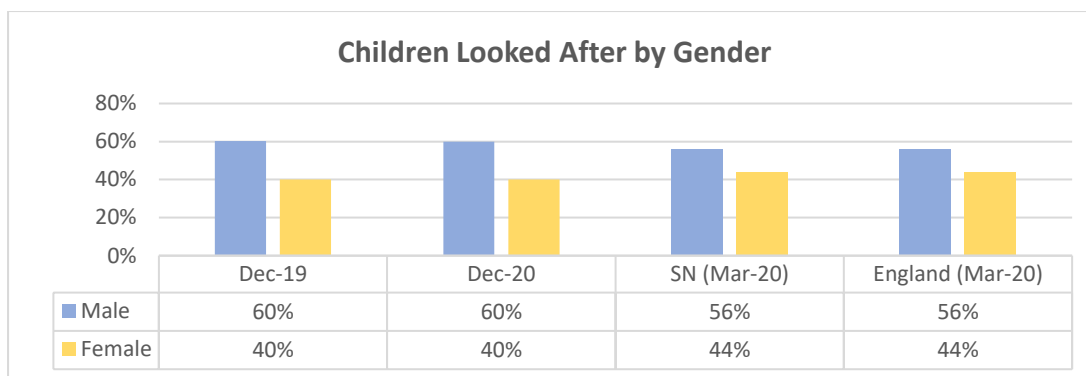
It is normal for the number of children leaving care to fluctuate. The fluctuation and the relatively small numbers make it difficult to identify significant trends. However, there has been a decrease in the number of children leaving care since the start of the pandemic.

This decrease is partly due to delay in the timeliness of court proceedings, preventing children from leaving care and progressing to their permanent placement (Adoption, SGO or returning home).



### 3.6 CLA by gender

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

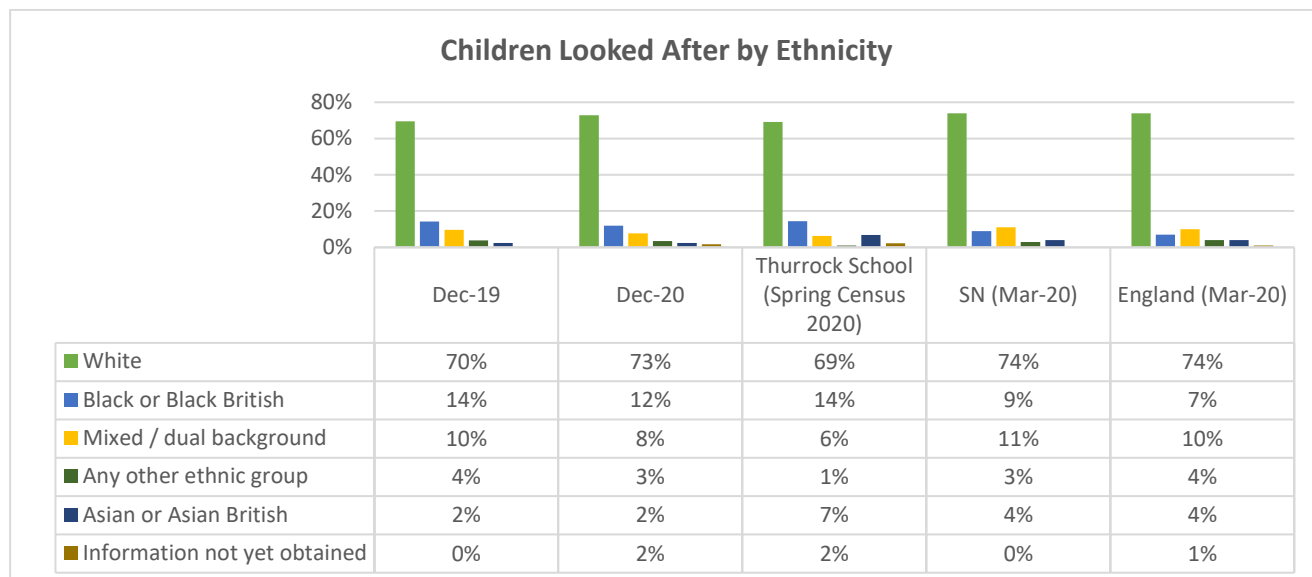


### 3.7 CLA by ethnicity

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.

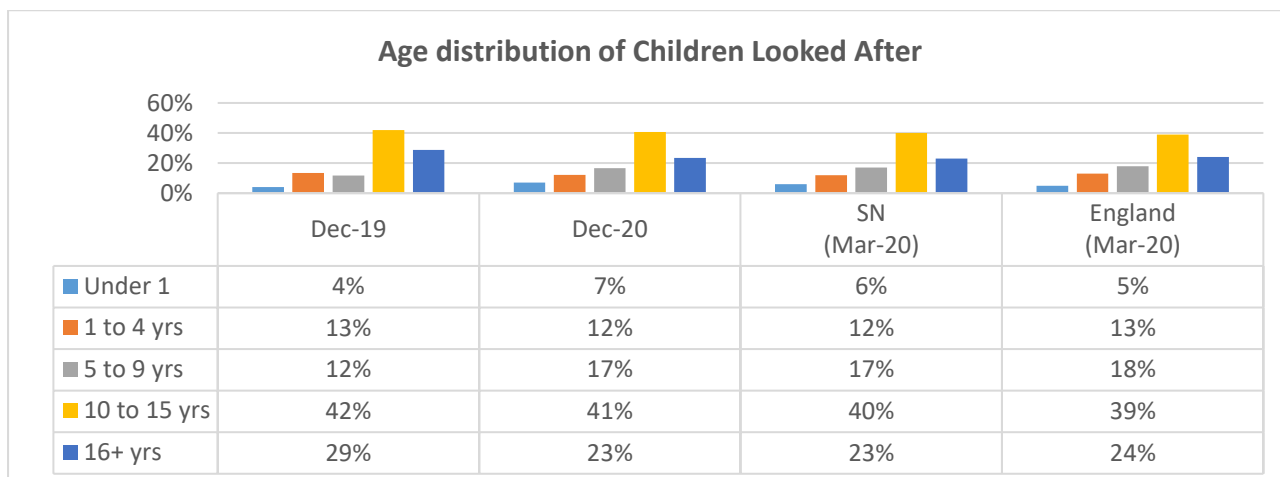
While the numbers of Children Looked After who are Asian/Asian British and Black/Black British have slightly decreased since December 2019, there have been no particular issues influencing this change.



### 3.8 CLA age profile

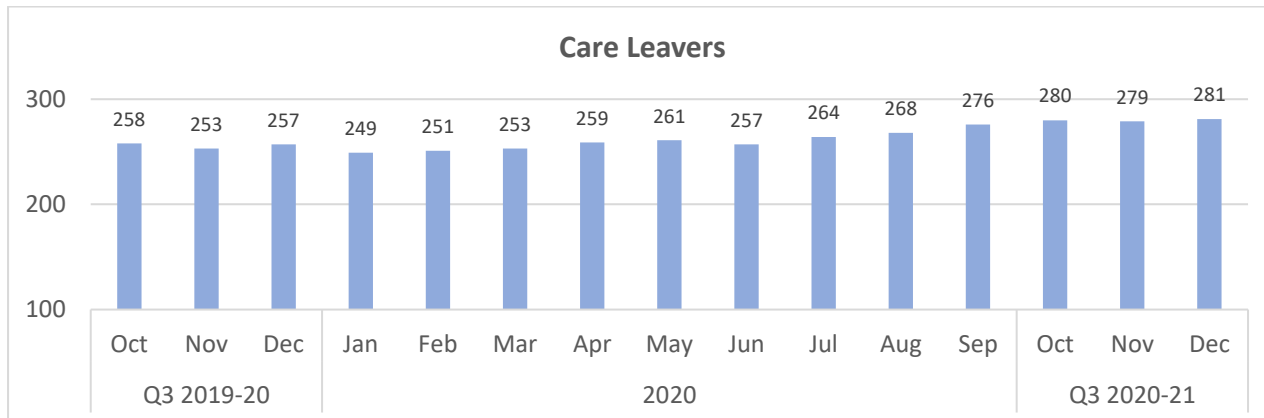
The age profile of the Children Looked After cohort remains mostly stable and in line with the Statistical Neighbour and England averages. There has been an increase in the number of children who are aged 5 to 9 years. This has partly been caused by delays in final court hearings. Children are not able to

move to their final permanent placement (SGO, Adoption) where court proceedings are continuing.



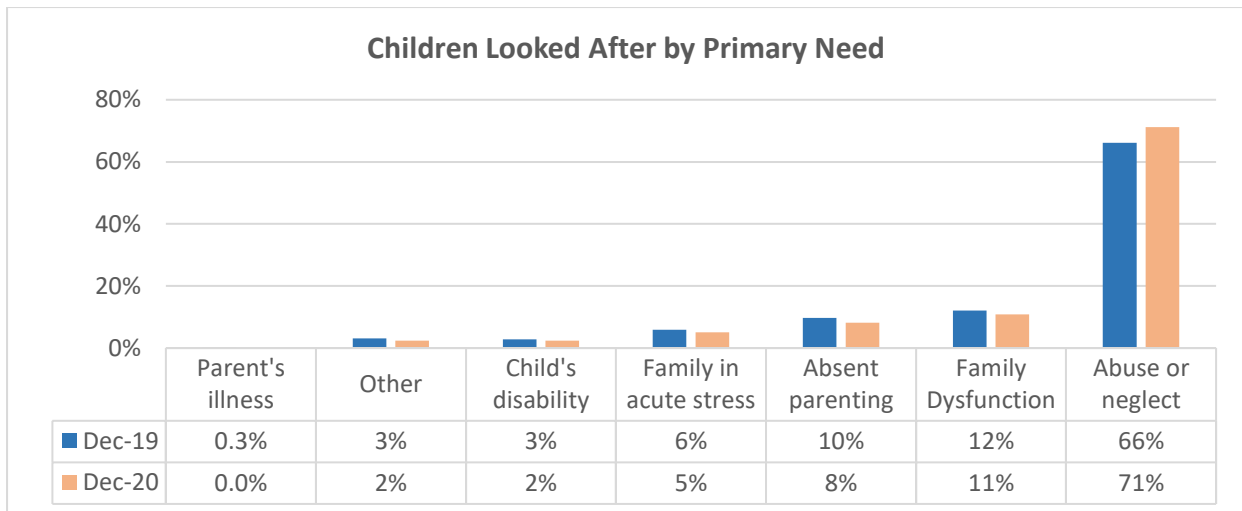
### 3.9 Care Leavers

The graph below shows the total number of Young People age 16-25 years who are in receipt of a Care Leaving service. The numbers are increasing and this is due to legislative changes that have placed additional responsibilities upon Care Leaving services (Children and Social Work Act 2017). Section 3 of the Act now requires Local Authorities to appoint a Personal Adviser for Care Leavers (who request one) up until the age of 25.



### 3.10 CLA by Category of Need

There has been a slight increase in the percentage of children becoming Looked After as a result of 'Abuse or Neglect'. The majority of children become Looked After as a result of the significant harm they are experiencing or likely to experience. Where possible, Social Care are providing support and intervention from Social Workers and the Families Together service to enable families to remain together and ensure that children only become looked after, when absolutely necessary. Thurrock works to minimise the use of the 'Other' category. Local Authorities use slightly different definitions of the categories and this makes it hard to meaningfully benchmark.



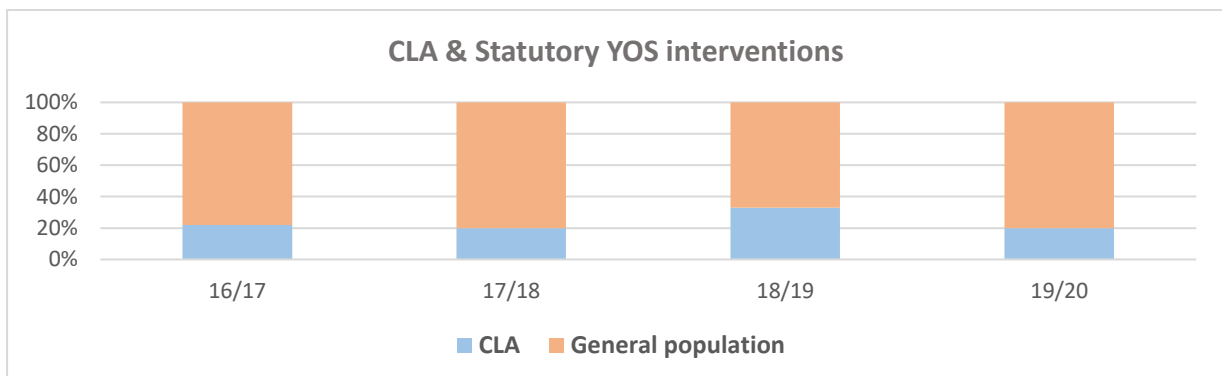
The percentages in the graph above relate to 257 Children Looked After in December 2019 and 281 children looked after in December 2020.

### 3.11 Number of CLA open to Youth Offending Services

#### Statutory Interventions

A statutory intervention is 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.

In 2019-20 (Financial Year April 19 – March 20) there were 63 children open to the Youth Offending Service on statutory outcomes, out of which 13 were Children Looked After, representing 20%. Out of the 13 Children Looked After, 38% were from the BAME community.



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 four years. Despite an increase from 20% to 30% in 2018-19 the numbers of Children Looked After has been relatively static at around 20%. There were no notable reasons for the increase in 2018-19.

The throughput of the Youth Offending Service in 2020 has been significantly affected by COVID-19 and the closure of the Courts. This has resulted in

delays of children being sentenced and lower numbers of young people being referred to YOS for statutory intervention. Thurrock YOS is working with the Court Service to review if any actions can be taken to reduce the backlog in the Courts.

A recent analysis of Thurrock CLA and their prevalence in the Criminal Justice System indicated that 67% of Children Looked After had committed offences prior to entering care. Further analysis is being undertaken to understand the criminal offences of young people who are in care.

### Diversion Strategy

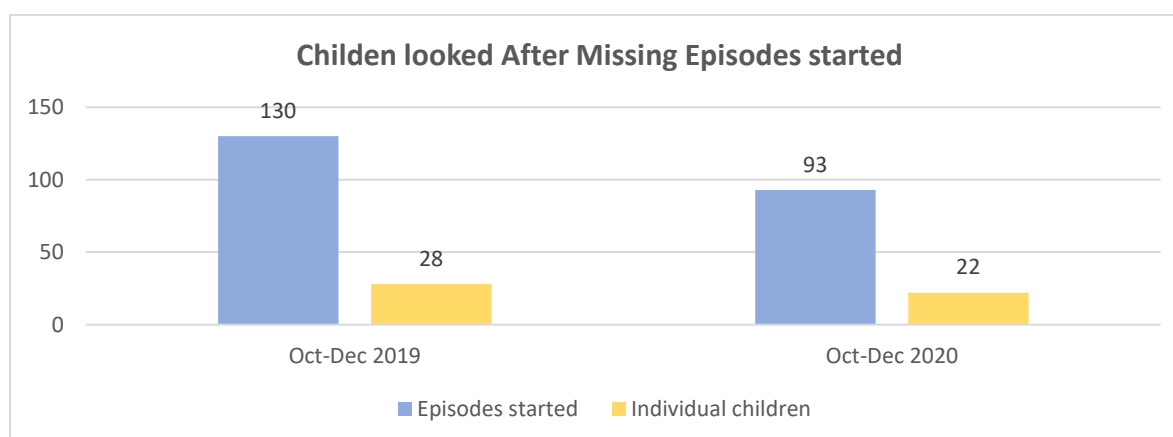
In 2019 Thurrock YOS implemented its new diversion strategy. This enables young people to work with YOS through diversionary interventions rather than statutory orders. Children Looked After are a priority for diversionary interventions. In the period, October 2020 to December 2020, 8% (3) of Looked After young people were made subject to diversion interventions.

Thurrock YOS and Essex Police are committed to the national protocol<sup>1</sup> aimed to reduce the criminalisation of Children Looked After. This approach will be supported with a local pan-Essex protocol to ensure there is a focus on diverting any child who is Looked After from the Criminal Justice System.

### 3.12 CLA missing episodes started

The graph below shows the number of missing episodes started and the count of the individual children who went missing between October and December 2020. It is of note that the number of missing episodes and the number of children who went missing have reduced since December 2019.

There has been a strong focus on Thurrock missing children and good joint working with the multi-agency partnership. There is a weekly missing meeting with partners that includes Essex Police and liaison with Thurrock Community Safety colleagues. A Contextual Safeguarding approach has been embedded which is assisting with the partnership working and social work practice.



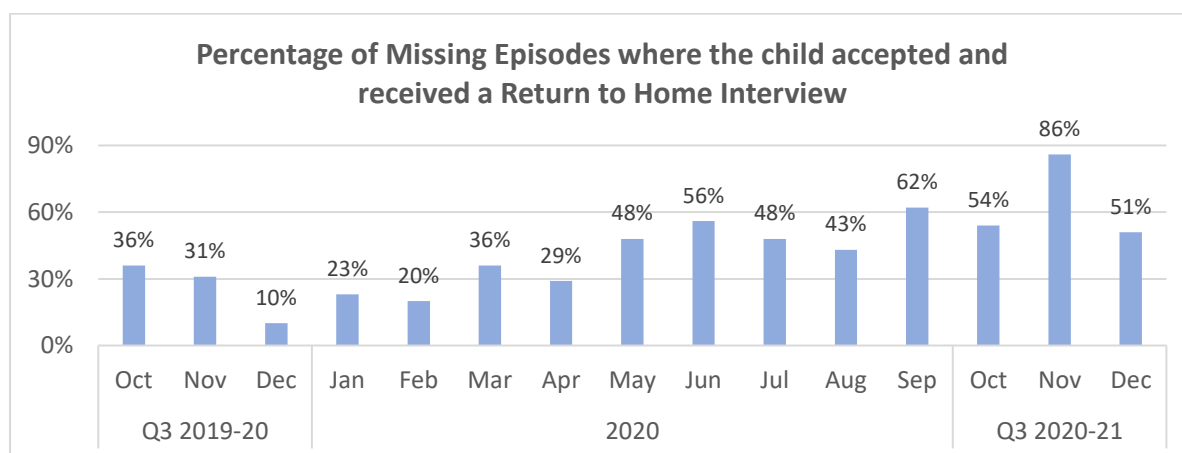
<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-protocol-on-reducing-criminalisation-of-looked-after-children>



### 3.13 CLA return to home interview

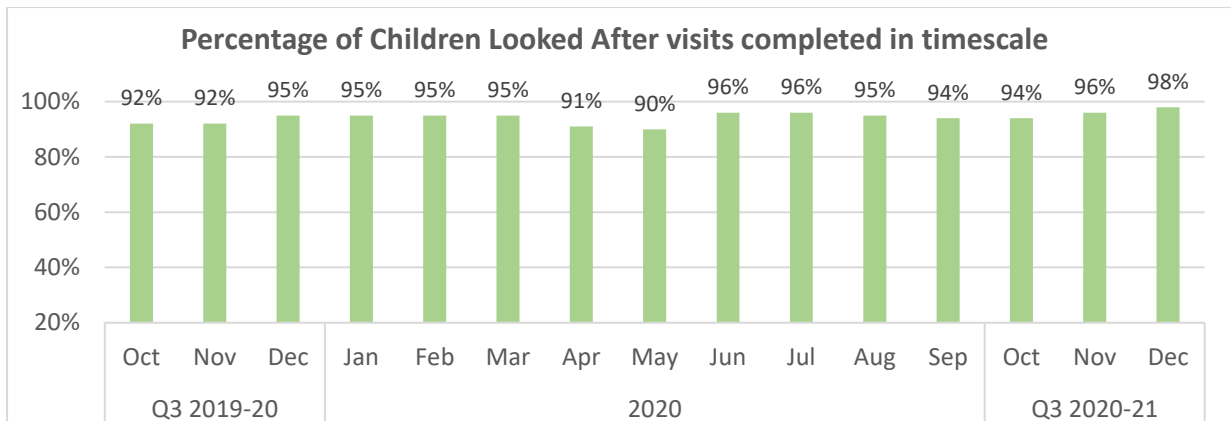
Since 1 April 2020, Inspire Youth Hub have been commissioned to undertake independent Return Home Interviews (RHI). All children are offered a RHI within 72 hours following each missing event, with the aim of understanding the young person's circumstances and the reasons why they go missing. Key Workers from placements, Foster Carers and Social Workers will discuss missing incidents with children. There is a network of support provided to children to try to engage with them and understand the reasons for their missing episodes. The Participation Team have been able to engage and seek feedback from young people and this has been invaluable.

The offer of an RHI is not always accepted by young people. Since April 2020 Inspire Youth Hub are managing to increase the numbers of young people who engage with the RHI service.



### 3.14 Timeliness of social worker visits

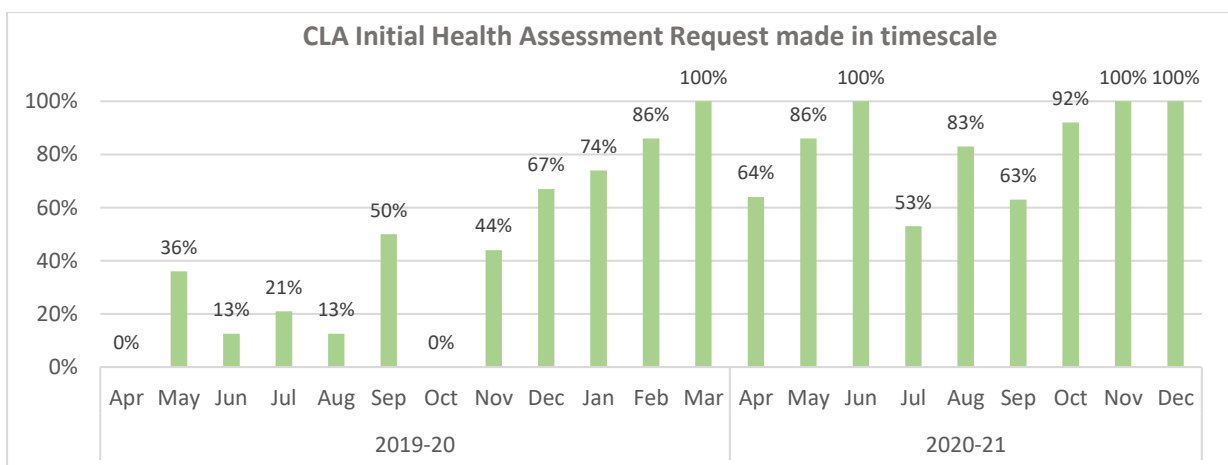
Social workers are required to visit the child within one week of the start of any placement. Visits are then due in accordance to the time agreed within the Care Plan. This can vary from 20 to 65 working days. Performance has improved since last year and there is focused work to ensure this performance is maintained. 98% is very good performance as there are often practical reasons for a visit being late and there are safeguards to ensure that missed visits take place quickly after the due date.



### 3.15 CLA Initial Health Assessments (IHA)

Every child who becomes looked after should have an Initial Health Assessment within 20 days of entering into care. To achieve good performance for this indicator, there is reliance on working with Thurrock Social Workers, the children’s families, Thurrock health care providers, and also other health providers for children placed outside of Thurrock. Sometimes notifications for IHA cannot be processed if parents have not provided consent for medical treatment and there is no court order which gives the Local Authority responsibility for consenting to health care. There is a weekly IHA tracking meeting to ensure that there is a focus on meeting the 5 day target to notify Health that a child has become looked after and to ensure that an Initial Health Assessment is offered and completed with 20 working days.

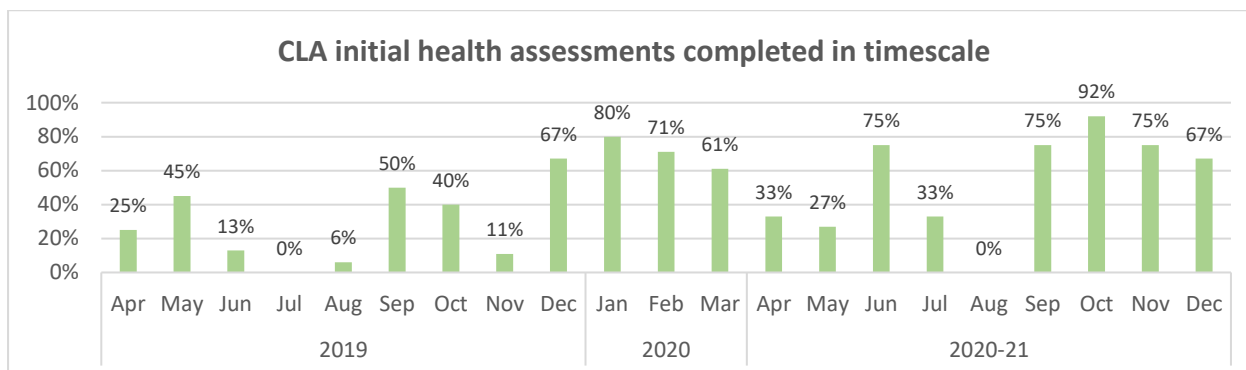
The chart below shows that between April 2019 and December 2020 there was variable performance for IHA requests being sent to Health. There was improved performance in the period October 2020 to December 2020, with over 90% of notifications being processed within 5 days.



The chart below reflects the timeliness of IHA appointments being completed within 20 days in the period April 2019 to December 2020. The performance

has improved in the period September to December 2020; despite there being additional pressures in the Health Service due to COVID-19.

In some circumstances an IHA appointment was offered by Health within 20 days; however there are occasions when the initial appointment offered was not taken up. Please see separate report on health assessments presented to this Committee.



### 3.16 CLA in Education

Children Looked After continue to make good educational progress, with better than national average figures for attainment for Thurrock's Children Looked After and performance this year being in the top 25% of Local Authorities.

### 3.17 CLA Strengths & Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ)

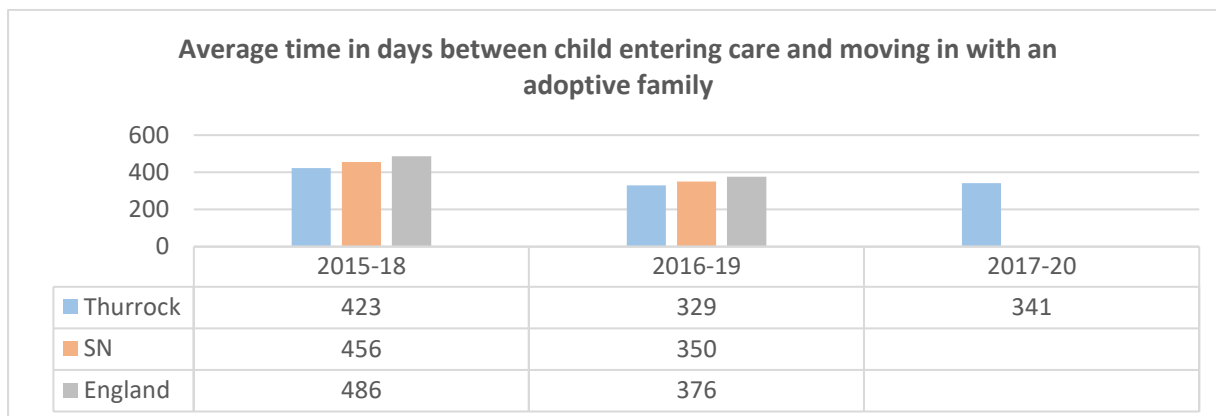
SDQ scores are a measure which provides an indication of the mental wellbeing of Looked After Children. SDQ scores are collated annually for all children aged 4-18. The care plans for children are reviewed by the SDQ panel. During COVID-19 the average scores have not increased and the mental wellbeing of Children Looked After is being appropriately reviewed, with support and intervention provided as necessary.

### 3.18 Number of children adopted

Between 1 April 2019 and 31 March 2020, a total of 15 children were adopted; this met Thurrock's target of 15. In the period April to December 2020, 4 children have been adopted; 9 children are placed in adoptive placements and have adoption hearings planned between January 2021 and March 2021. There are a further 15 children who have plans for adoption currently in court proceedings. Due to COVID-19, there has been a significant delay in court proceedings which has impacted on the numbers of children adopted or placed for adoption in the period April 2020 to December 2020. There are likely to be an increased number of children adopted through 2021 - 2022, with increased court hearings as the pandemic eases.

### 3.19 Timeliness of Adoption

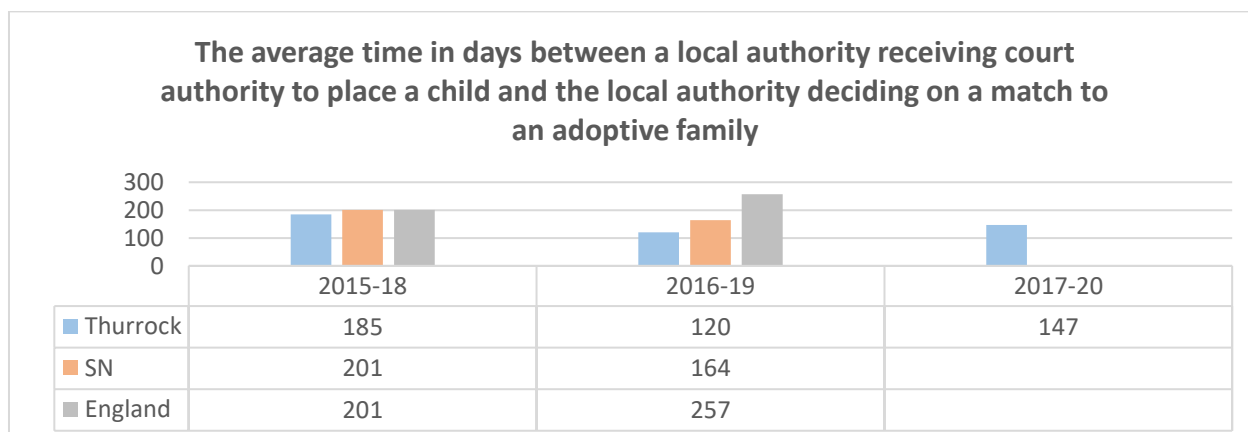
This measure is the average length of time from the child entering care to moving in with an adoptive family. Our 2020-21 target is set at 426 days for a child to be placed with their adoptive family, therefore performance is currently good at 341 days.



This measure has now been adjusted to include foster carers who adopt children that are placed with them. The average time for a child entering care and being placed with their adoptive family (including foster carers who adopt children who are placed with them) is 266 days for adoptions completed in 2017-2020.

This measure is the timeliness of finding a family for a child once Thurrock has received authority from the court. The average time in days between Thurrock receiving court authority to place a child with the adoptive family was 147 days.

Compared to the Statistical Neighbour and England 3-year averages of 2015-18, 2016-19 and 2017-20, Thurrock's performance is good.



### 3.20 **CLA permanency**

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

In December 2020, 19% of the total CLA cohort were under the age of five. The majority of children under five are moved on to permanent placements through adoption or permanent alternative carers. There have been significant delays, as a result of COVID-19, resulting in children being subject to court proceedings for longer periods, and transition to their permanent homes being delayed.

### 3.21 **CLA placement distance**

It is good practice to ensure that children remain within their communities. In December 2020, 74% of the Children Looked After cohort were 20 miles or less from their homes, compared to 70% in December 2019. With the continued focus on Fostering recruitment and the Thurrock Council Tax Exemption Offer, the Service has an expectation that more local Foster Carers can be recruited.

### 3.22 **Care Leavers**

A Care Leaver, as defined in the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000<sup>2</sup>, is a person who has been 'looked after' or 'in care' for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14, and who was in care on their 16th birthday.

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

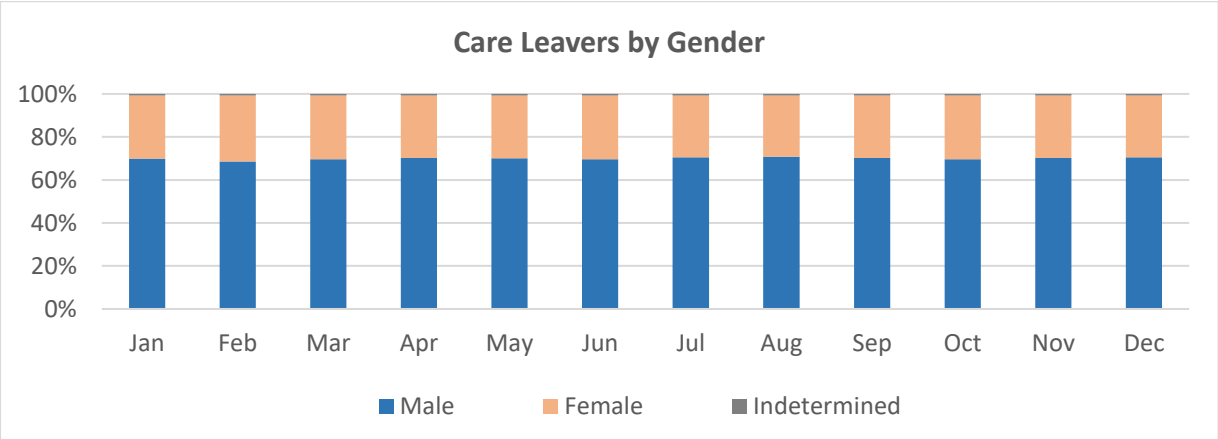
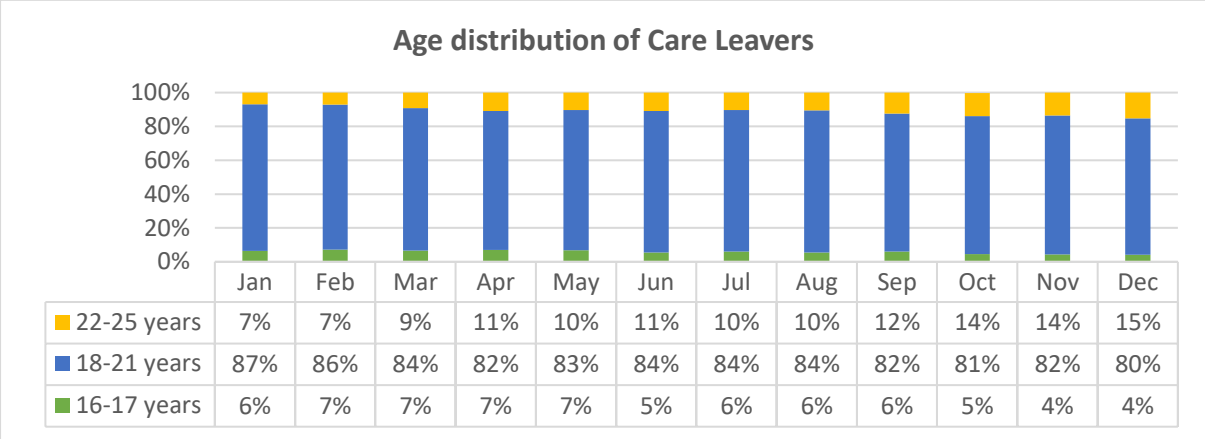
- Eligible child - a young person who is 16 or 17 and who has been looked after by the local authority/health and social care trust for at least a period of 13 weeks since the age of 14, and who is still looked after.
- Relevant child - a young person who is 16 or 17 who has left care after their 16th birthday and before leaving care was an eligible child.
- Former relevant child - a young person who is aged between 18 and 25 (or beyond if being helped with education or training) who, before turning 18 was either an eligible or a relevant child, or both.

In December 2020, 281 Care Leavers were being supported and were receiving an Aftercare service. This is an increase from the previous year and this cohort now has a wider remit as all Care Leavers can request support services until the age of 25, under the Children and Social Work Act 2017.

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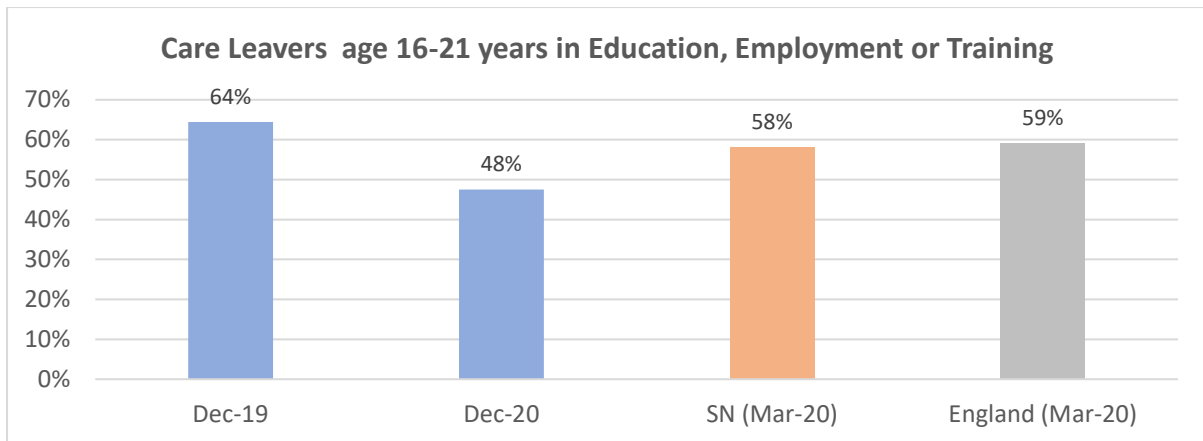
<sup>2</sup> <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/35/contents>

The charts below show the Care Leaver cohort between January and December 2020, broken down by age groups and gender.



**3.23 Care Leavers age 16-21 years in Education, Employment or Training (EET)**

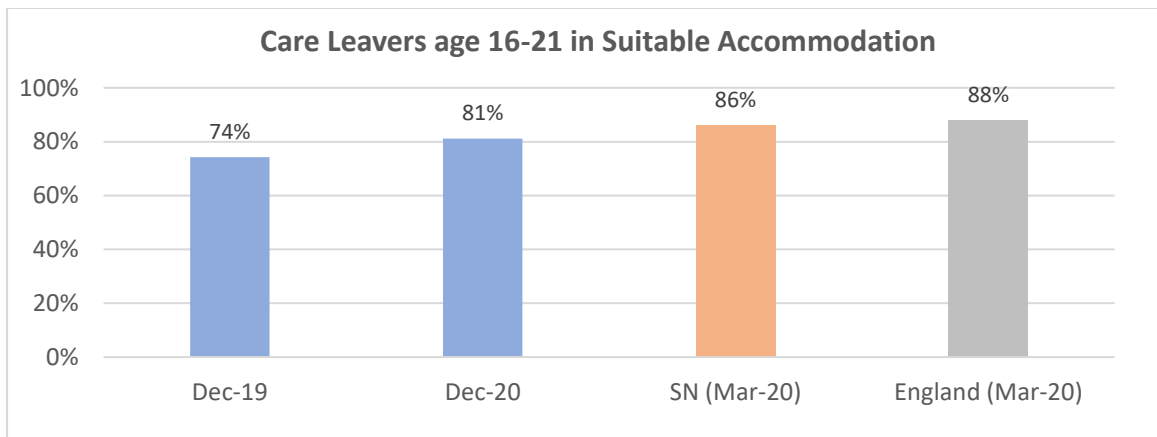
In December 2020, 47% of the Care Leavers aged 16 to 21 year old were in part or full time education, employment or training compared to 64% in December 2019. Performance in 19/20 was above statistical neighbour and England average. However, COVID-19 has impacted on the employment situation for young people nationally. To strengthen oversight and planning to ensure our young people have 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 Inspire Youth Hub and Virtual School. The panel seeks to understand the issues for individual young people and aligned their interests to an EET offer. The panel discussions have highlighted the impact of Covid 19 on Young People which has limited particularly, opportunities to engage in work experience and employment opportunities.



### 3.24 Care Leavers age 16 to 21 years in Suitable Accommodation

In December 2020, the number of 16 to 21 year old Care Leavers reported to be in suitable accommodation was 81%. This compared to 74% in December 2019. However, this is still marginally below statistical neighbour and England averages, but shows an improving trajectory.

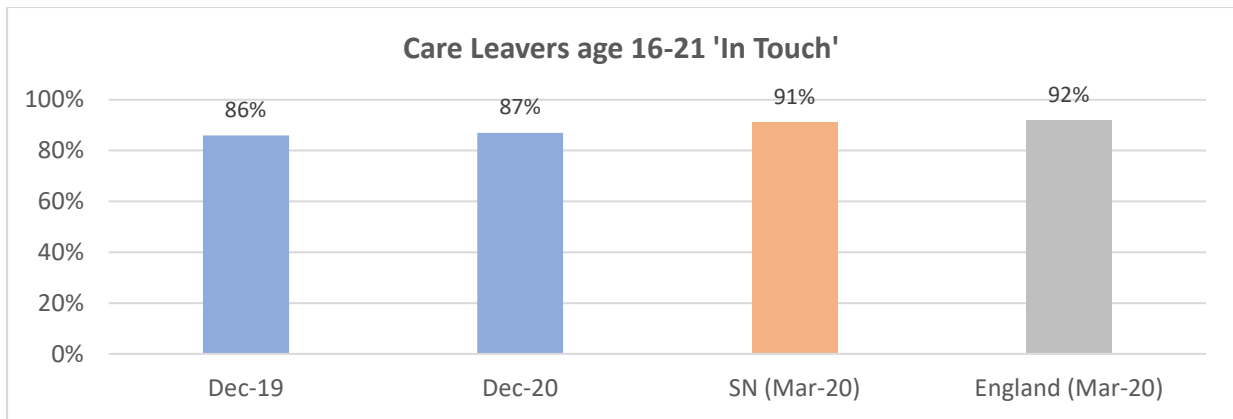
Increased housing support is being provided to young people by the Aftercare Service, Head Start Housing and Thurrock Housing Department. The 'Housing Offer' to Care Leavers has been updated with the Joint Housing Protocol 2020, ensuring good partnership working with clear pathways for young people to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



### 3.25 Care Leavers age 16-21 years 'In Touch'

Local Authorities are expected to stay in touch with Care Leavers and provide statutory support to help the care leaver transition to living independently. At the end of December 2020, Thurrock was in touch with 87% of Care Leavers, compared to 86% in December 2019.

While the performance is improving, continued focus should enable Thurrock to be in line with statistical neighbours and the England average.



### 3.26 CLA Fostering

Most children who are Looked After are placed with Foster Carers. The Thurrock In-House Fostering service provides support and supervision to foster carers. There are 92 fostering households providing 117 placements as at the end of January 2021. In 2019-20, we met the target of a net gain of 15 carers. There have been 8 foster carers recruited in the period April 2020 to December 2020. We expect to meet the target of 15 new fostering households by March 2021.

## 4. Reasons for Recommendations

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

## 5. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

- 5.1 Not applicable

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

- 6.1 Not applicable

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

- 7.1 None

## 8. Implications

### 8.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Michelle Hall**  
**Management Account**

There are no implications identified within the report.



## 8.2 Legal

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

There are no implications identified within the report.

## 8.3 Diversity & Equality

Implications verified by: **Becky Lee**  
**Community Development and Equalities**

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

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

- Not applicable

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

- Not applicable

## 11. Appendices to the report

- None

### Report Author(s):

Anna Watkins, Business Intelligence Analyst, Children's Services

Marc Rhodes, Business Intelligence & Data Analytics Manager, Children's Services

### Service contributions:

Naintara Khosla, Acting Strategic Lead, Children Looked After, Children's Services

Daniel Jones, Service Manager, Fostering, Adoption & Placements Service, Children's Services

Jason Read, Operations Manager, Youth Offending Service, Children's Services