

13 July 2021		ITEM: 12
Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee		
Children's Social Care Performance – Quarter 4 2020-21		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: No	
Report of: Anna Watkins, Business Intelligence Analyst		
Accountable Assistant Director: Janet Simon, Interim Assistant Director, Children's Social Care		
Accountable Director: Sheila Murphy, Corporate Director of Children's Services		
This report is Public		

Executive Summary

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

This report shows that:

- Between January and March 2021, the number of The Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) contacts received was 1,461 compared to 1,565 between January and March 2020. This represents a 7% drop in the number of quarterly contacts received as a direct result of COVID-19 and the national lockdown.
- Between January and March 2021, the number of referrals was 483 compared to 760 between January and March 2020. This represents 36% drop in referrals received between January and March 2021. This is in line with the reduction in contacts but indicates a slightly higher percentage of contacts being treated as a referral.
- In March 2021, 95% of the children and families assessments were completed in timescale compared to 93% in March 2020, showing marginal improvement in performance.

- As at 31 March 2021, the number of children subject to a Child Protection Plan was 110 compared to 173 on 31 March 2020. Since March 2020, we have seen the number of Children subject to a Child Protection Plan reduce by 36%. The numbers of children ending a Plan has been consistent over the last two years but there has been a decline in the numbers of children being made subject to a Plan in comparison to the two previous years.
- There is service lead oversight of all plans that have been in place for 9-12 months. These cases are reviewed by CP chairs and Service Managers to ensure plans are appropriate and are progressing.
- Since March 2020, we have seen an increase in the number of cases being stepped down to Early Help. As at the end of March 2021, 106 cases were stepped down compared to 55 in March 2020. This represents 93% increase in cases being stepped down.
- There has been a concerted effort to ensure that children and families receive the correct support and advice following statutory involvement by Children's Social Care, where there remains a need for a lower level of support.
- The Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) continues to support a shared understanding and management of threshold decisions. Children and families receive the right help at the right time and the response to family difficulties is proportionate to risk.

All data continues to be monitored on a monthly basis to ensure that decision-making within the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) remains robust and ensures families are supported by the most appropriate service.

1. Recommendation(s)

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

2. Introduction and Background

This report provides a summary of Children's Social Care performance for Quarter 4 2020-21 (January to March 2021). It highlights key demand indicators such as number of contacts, benchmarking data and key performance indicators.

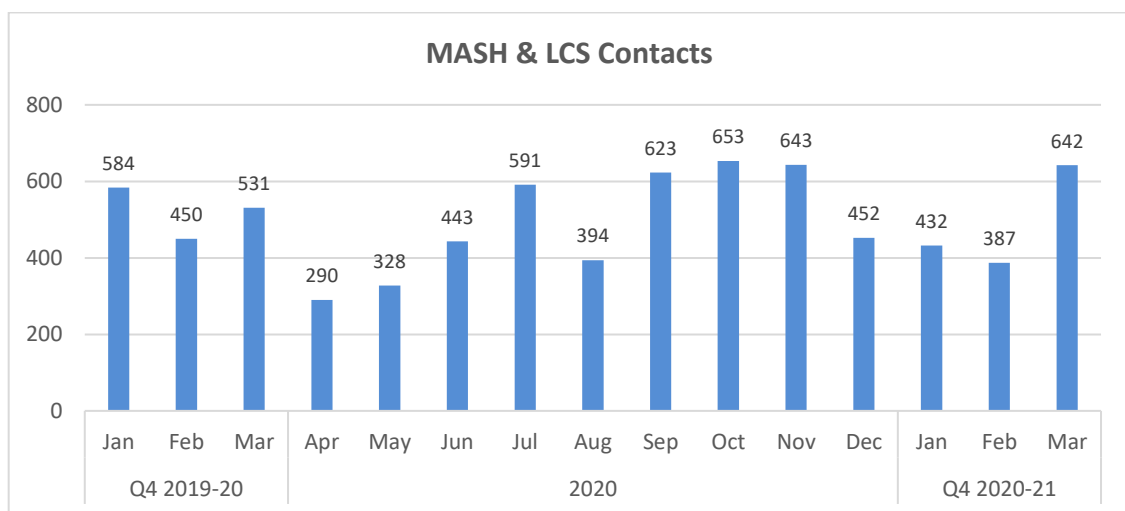
Thurrock produces a number of data sets and performance reports to meet its internal and external reporting requirements. The data in this report is from the 'At a Glance' monthly performance report, regional benchmarking data and national data sets.

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

3. THURROCK DATA

3.1 Contacts

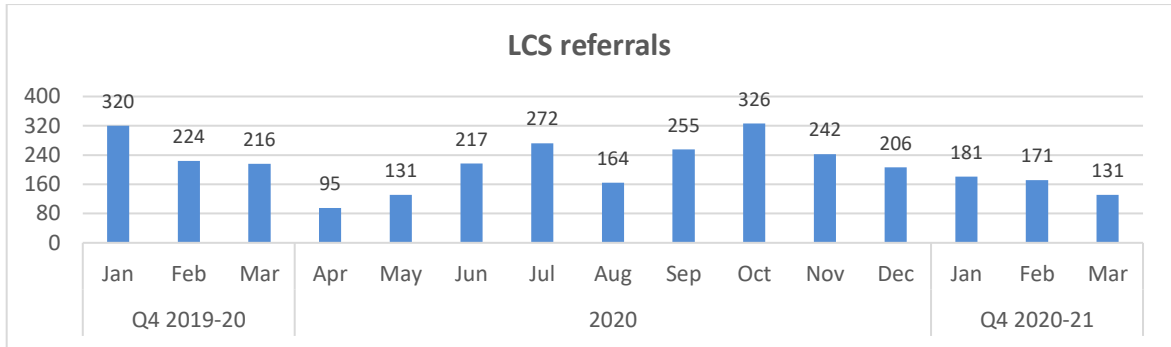
Between January and March 2021, the number of MASH contacts received was 1,461 compared to 1,565 between January and March 2020 representing 7% drop in the number of contacts. It appears this is directly in relation to the emergence of COVID-19 and the subsequent national lockdown with numbers of contacts reducing at points where restrictions were more noted.



3.2 Referrals

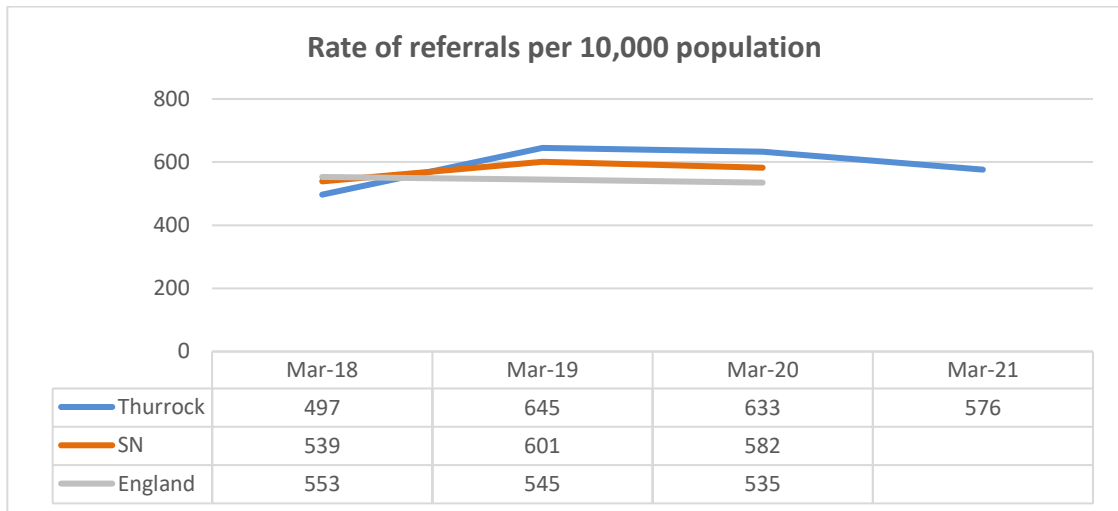
Between January and March 2021, the number of referrals were 483 compared to 760 in the same period in 2019-20. This represents a 36% decrease in number of referrals.

This reduction in referrals again coincides with the beginning of lockdown and at times when restrictions have been increase and is in part due to the disruption of face-to-face schooling for most local children, thus reducing the number of referrals usually made by schools who provide approximately a third of our referrals.



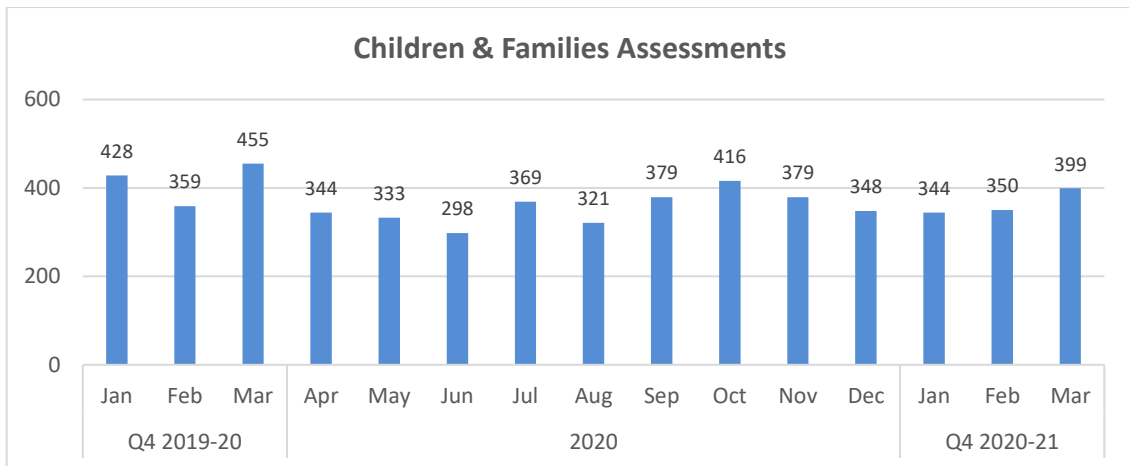
3.3 Rate of referrals

As at March 2021, the rate of referrals per 10,000 was 576 compared to 633 in 31 March 2019-20. Based on benchmarking 2019-20 data, Thurrock is slightly below the statistical neighbor rate of 582, however, above the England rate of 535 in March 2021. The possible reasons for this decrease in referral rates is discussed above.



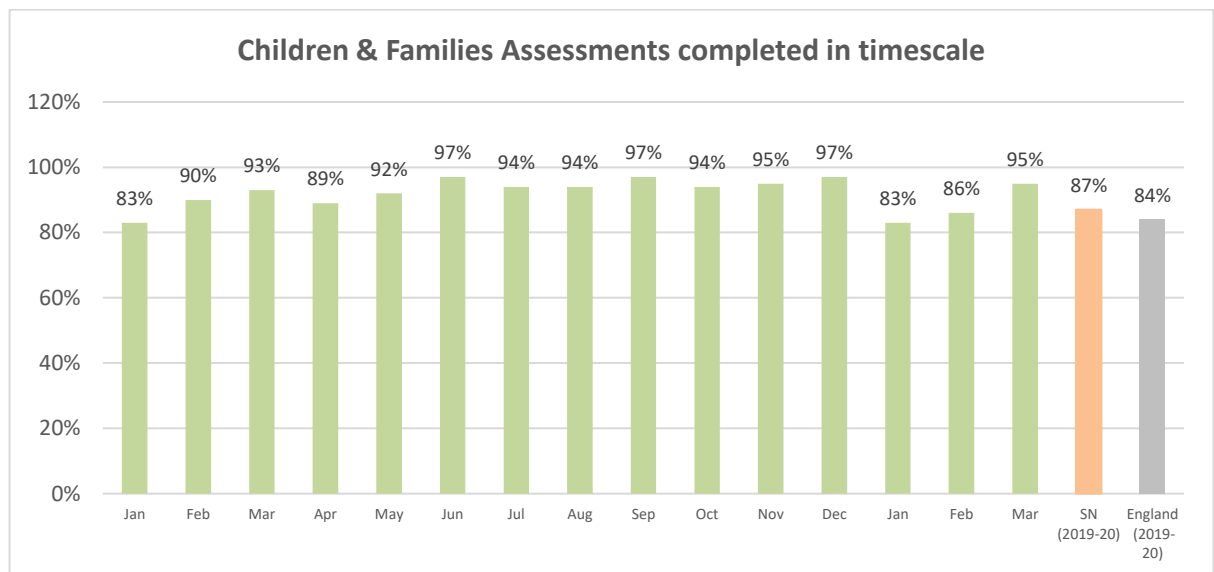
3.4 Children & Families Assessments

Between January and March 2021 1,093 assessments were completed compared to 1,242 between January and March 2020. This represents 12% drop in the number of assessments completed between January and March 2021.



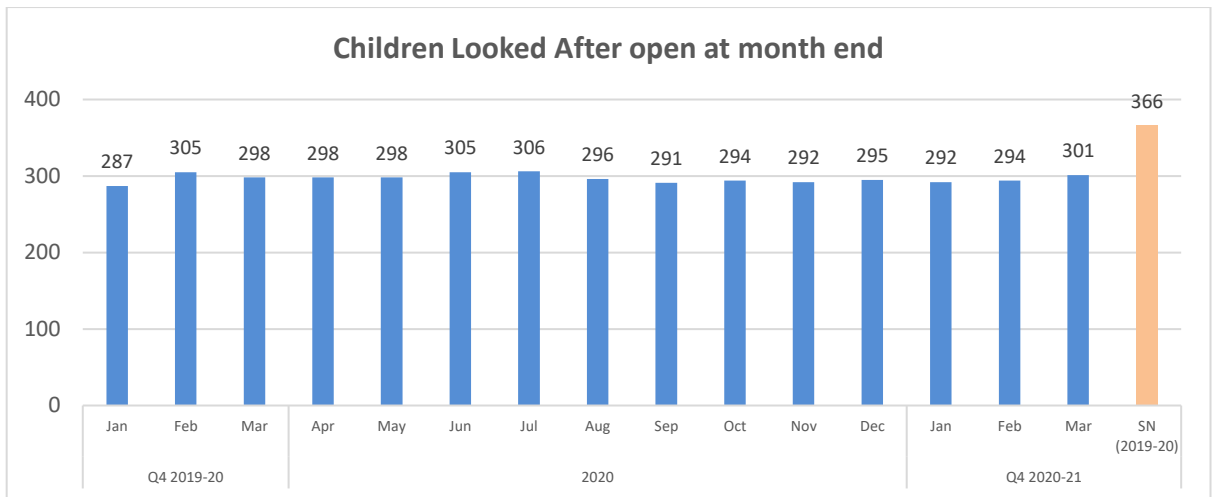
3.5 Children & Families Assessments completed in timescale

The number of assessments completed in timescale continues to show good performance at 95% as at 31 March 2021. This shows a marginal increase from 93% since 31 March 2020. The benchmarking data in 2019-20 shows that Thurrock's performance is above the statistical neighbor average of 87% and England average of 84% in March 2021.



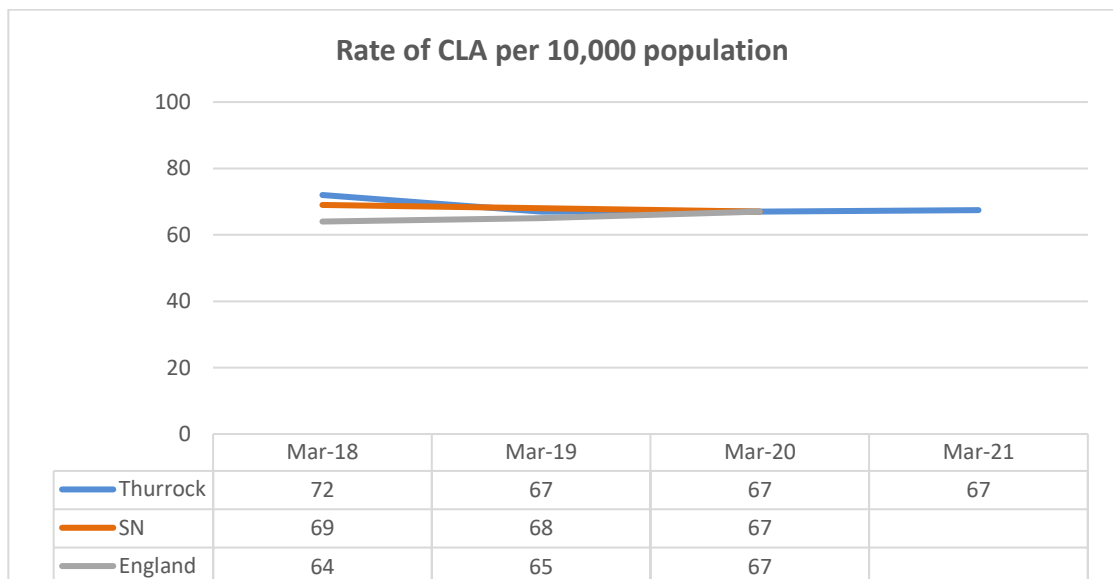
4. Children Looked After (CLA)

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 to make sure the right children are coming into care at the right time. Permanency Plans for children are tracked via a weekly permanency tracking panel.



4.1 The rate of CLA per 10,000 population

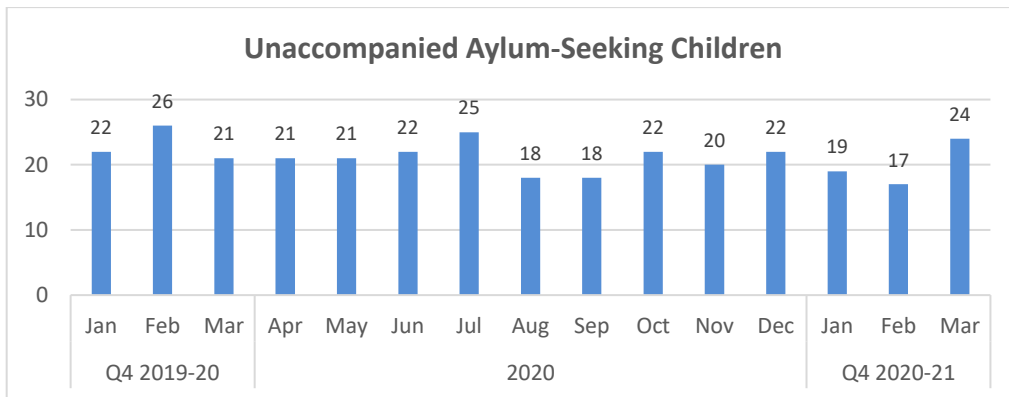
The graph below shows the rate of Children Looked After per 10,000 population of under 18 year olds in Thurrock. At the end of March 2021 there were 301 Children Looked After in Thurrock which shows a rate of 67 per 10,000 of children who are looked after. Based on benchmarking data 2019-20, Thurrock rate per 10,000 is in line with the Statistical Neighbour and England averages of 67 in March 2021.



4.2 Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Children (UASC)

UASC are a subset of the Children Looked After number above. Eastern Region Local Authorities have agreed a transfer protocol which shared responsibility for looking after unaccompanied children. Each authority's ceiling for UASC is 0.07% based on an analysis of total child population which for Thurrock is now 31 children. There had been a reduction in the entry of

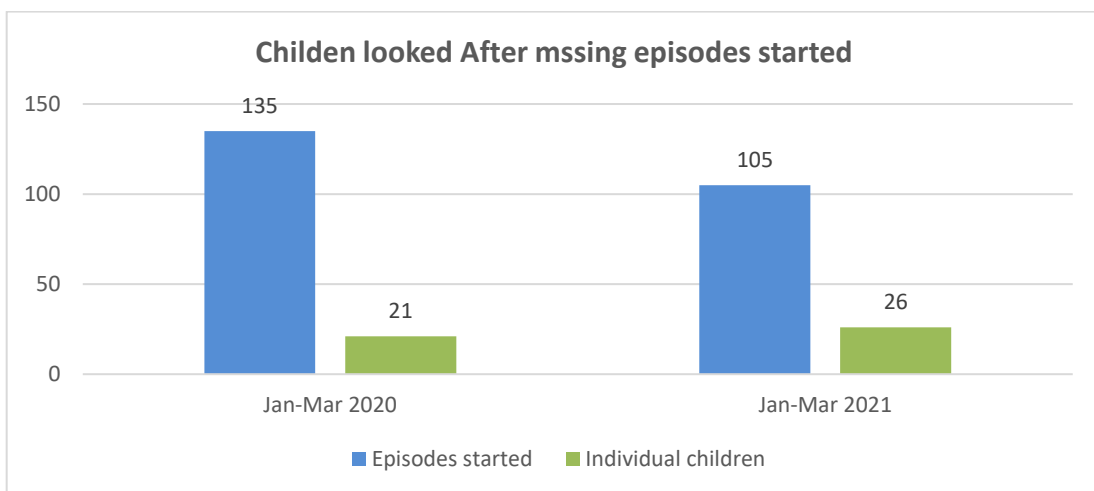
UASC into Essex Ports as the preferred route was through Dover. However, in the last quarter Thurrock received 9 new arrivals in Thurrock which has shown in an increased number of UASC in our CLA cohort to 24 in March 2021.



4.3 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 January and March 2021. It is of note that the number of missing episodes has reduced since March 2020.

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 which includes Essex Police and Community Safety colleagues. A Contextual Safeguarding approach is assisting with the partnership working and social work practice.



4.4 Return Home Interviews (RHI)

Since 1 April 2020, Inspire Youth Hub have been commissioned to undertake independent Return Home Interviews (RHI). All children are offered a RHI

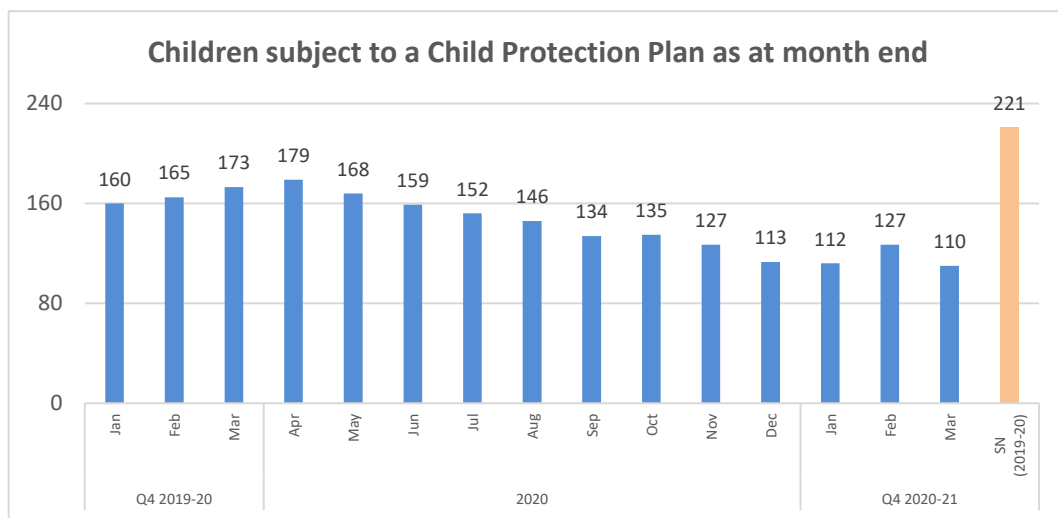
within 72 hours following each missing event, with the aim of understanding the young person’s circumstances and the reasons why they go missing. Key Workers from placements, Foster Carers and Social Workers will discuss missing incidents with children. There is a network of support provided to children 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 who have said they go missing as they want to spend time with their siblings.

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.

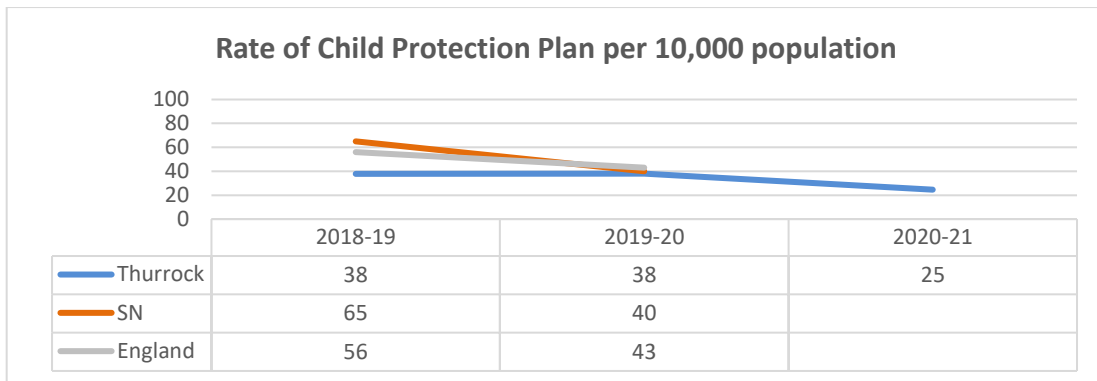
5. Children Subject to a Child Protection Plan (CPP)

5.1 Number of Children subject to Child Protection Plan

As at the end of March 2021, the number of children subject to a Child Protection Plan was 110 compared to 173 at the end of March 2020. Since March 2020, we have seen the number of children subject to a Child Protection Plan reduce by 36%. Based on 2019-20 benchmarking data, Thurrock is below the statistical neighbour of 221.



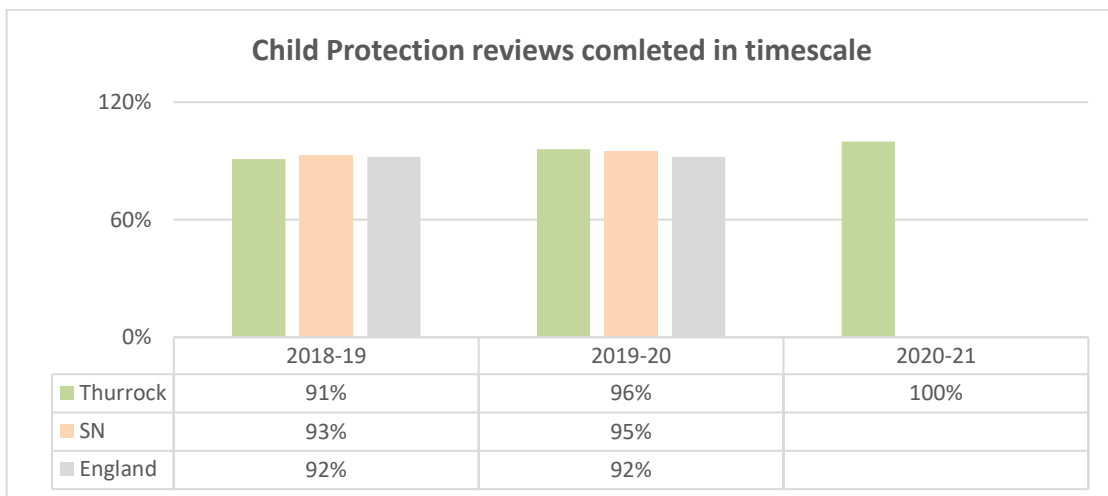
As at 31 March 2021, the rate of children subject to a Child Protection Plan was 25 per 10,000 population compared to 38 as at 31 March 2020, which is below statistical neighbour of 40 and England average of 43 based on the latest data in 2019-20. The variance of rates across the statistical neighbour group is from 19 to 71 per 10,000.



The introduction and further embedding of the Signs of Safety practice model which is a strengths based approach to working with families and a focus on timely decision making for children has helped to reduce the number of children with a plan. In addition there is a sharp focus on making sure that children are receiving support at the right level at the right time along with strong management oversight on cases whichever threshold they meet.

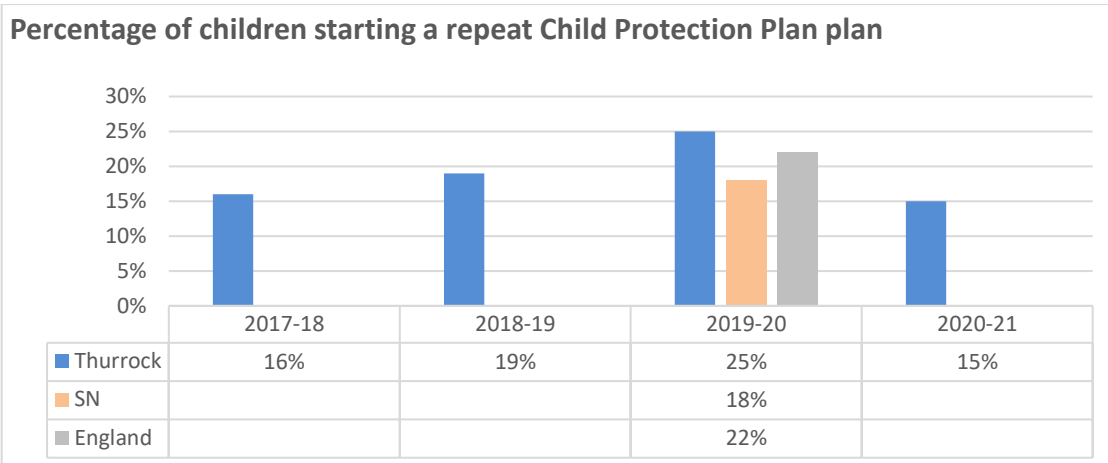
5.2 Child Protection reviews

Child Protection plans reviewed on time continues to show a good performance at 100% at the end of March 2021.



5.3 Repeat Child Protection Plan

As at 31 March 2021, the percentage of children subject to repeat Child Protection Plan (at any point previously) was 15% compared to 25% in March 2020. As at 31 March 2021, the number of Children starting a repeat Child Protection Plan (no time limit) was 27 children compared to 54 in March 2020 representing a 50% reduction. Based on the latest benchmarking data available in 2019-20, Thurrock is lower than the statistical neighbour average of 18% and England average of 22%.



6. Care Leaving Service

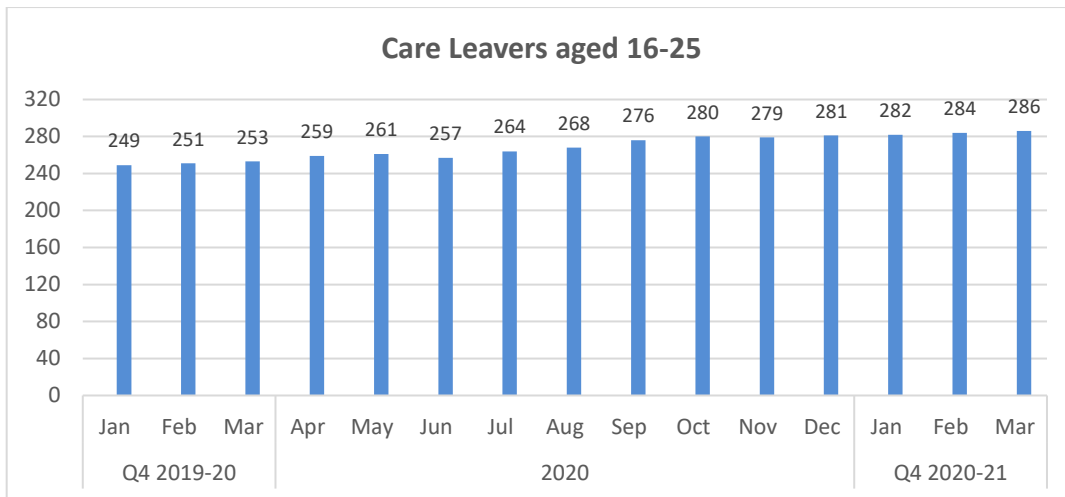
A Care Leaver, as defined in the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000¹, is a person who has been 'looked after' or 'in care' for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14, and who was in care on their 16th birthday.

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.

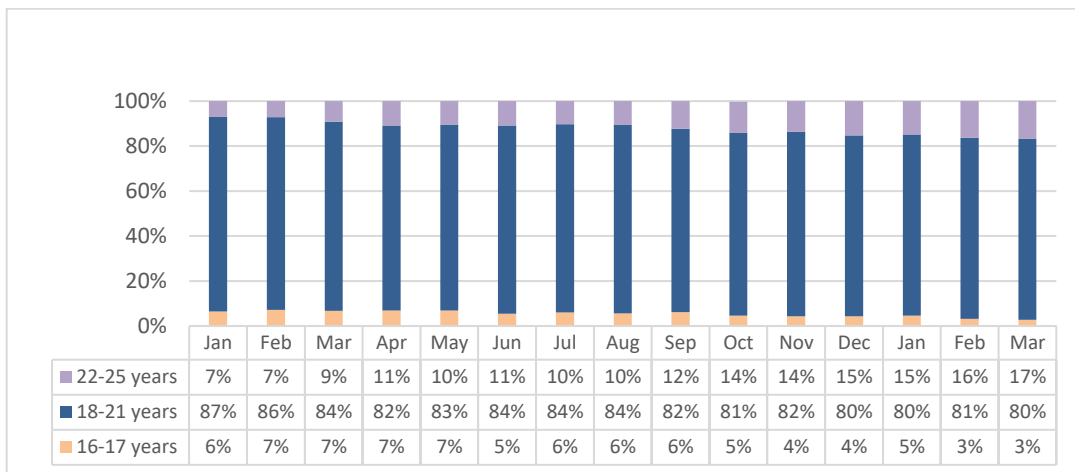
The graph below shows the total number of Young People age 16-25 years who are in receipt of a Care Leaving service.

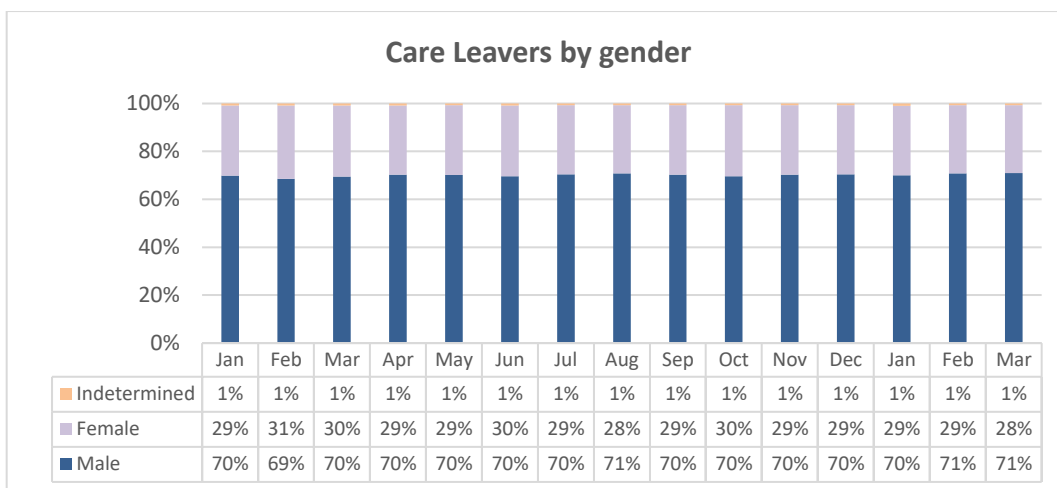
¹ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/35/contents>



In March 2021, 286 Care Leavers were being supported and were receiving an Aftercare service. There has been a steady increase in our numbers of care leavers throughout the year including our numbers of young people aged over 21 and under 25 requesting a service. The percentage of care leavers over 21 requesting a service has increased from 9% of the Care Leavers receiving a service in March 2020 to 17% in March 2021.

The charts below show the Care Leaver cohort between January 2020 and March 2021, broken down by age groups and gender.





6.1 Employment, Education and Training (EET)

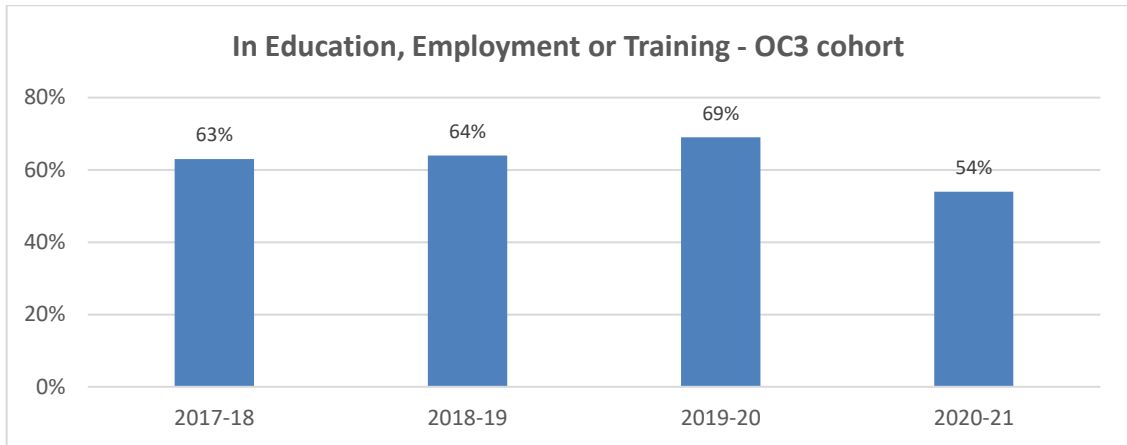
The cohort used for this measure is the DfE OC3 cohort. The OC3 cohort is defined as all 'Relevant' and 'Former Relevant' Care Leavers that have their 17th, 18th, 19th, 20th or 21st birthday within the financial year. The terms 'Relevant' and 'Former Relevant' are DfE categories that are assigned depending on the time in care. The OC3 cohort is used for this measure so that it matched DfE published data.

There is a focus on the needs of our Aftercare population to ensure they have the opportunities necessary for ongoing education, training and employment. The rate of care leavers in education, employment or training (EET) for March 2021 is 54%, a reduction from 69% at the same time in 2020.

This cohort needs a focus to ensure that there can be recovery and increased numbers of young people entering into EET, as lock down is eased. A working group is linked with Inspire to review individual young people and their placement needs with individual profiles being developed to support this. It is a challenge in the current pandemic to ensure and facilitate employment and training opportunities. Support with education and accessing online learning is being facilitated with laptops. We are reviewing the needs of our Aftercare population to ensure they have the opportunities necessary for ongoing education, training and employment.

There is a close alignment between the Aftercare Service and the Inspire Youth Hub, a partnership which aims to bring about improvements in the number of young people in education, employment and training. The On-Track Thurrock Programme continues to offer a bespoke programme to ensure that Care Leavers can access education, employment and training. The offer of one-to-one support, face to face, from the Inspire Hub is continuing (subject to risk assessment) for both emotional wellbeing and employment advice. Consideration is being given to the participation agenda and a care experienced young person would benefit from an apprenticeship in this area. This could be funded from the Aftercare grant.

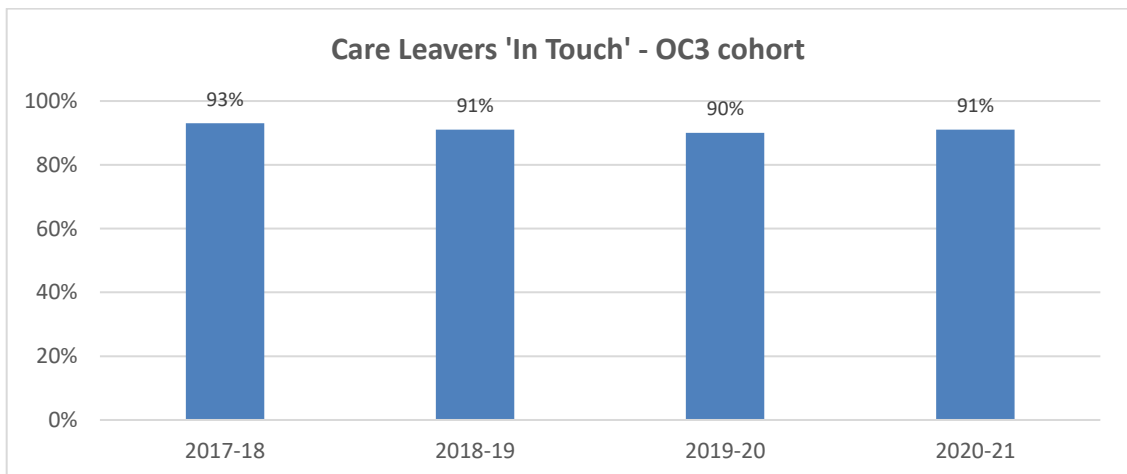
Thurrock offers access to the Prince's Trust programme, which enables young people to build their confidence and have access to apprenticeship opportunities so they can engage in the local communities in which they live.



*** 2020/21 data still subject to data cleansing and may change before being published by the DfE later in 2021**

6.2 In Touch

The OC3 cohort is used for this measure is for the same reasons as noted above. Local Authorities are expected to stay In Touch with Care Leavers and provide statutory support to help the young person transition to living independently. The In Touch record for Thurrock is 91% for the year 2020-21.

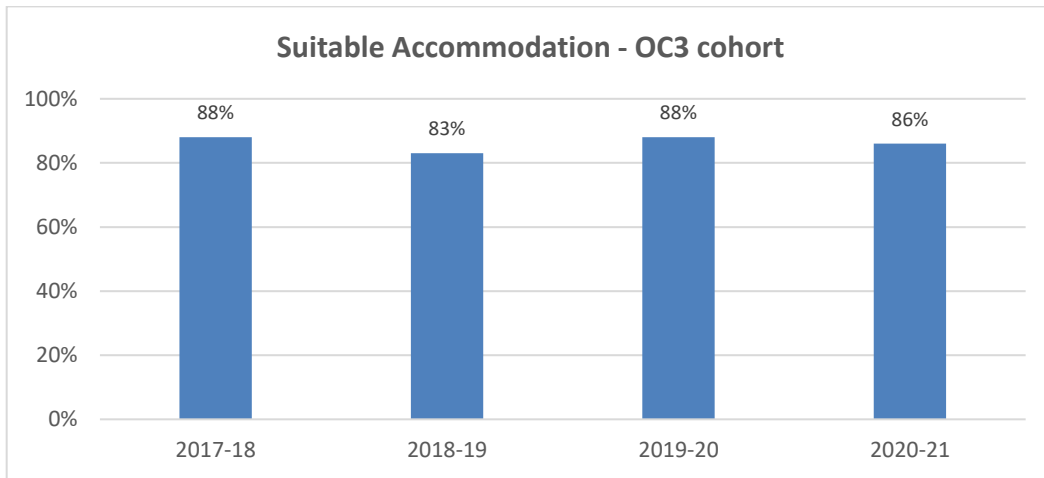


*** 2020/21 data still subject to data cleansing and may change before being published by the DfE later in 2021**

6.3 Suitable Accommodation

The OC3 cohort is used for this measure and for same reasons as above. The majority of Thurrock Care Leavers are in suitable accommodation. In 2020-21 there were 86% of care leavers who were In Suitable Accommodation; of the others 19 were not In Touch with and 9 were recorded to be in unsuitable

accommodation, (5 were in custody, 8 were UASC missing and 1 was incorrectly recorded).



*** 2020/21 data still subject to data cleansing and may change before being published by the DfE later in 2021**

7. Adoption

7.1 Number of children adopted

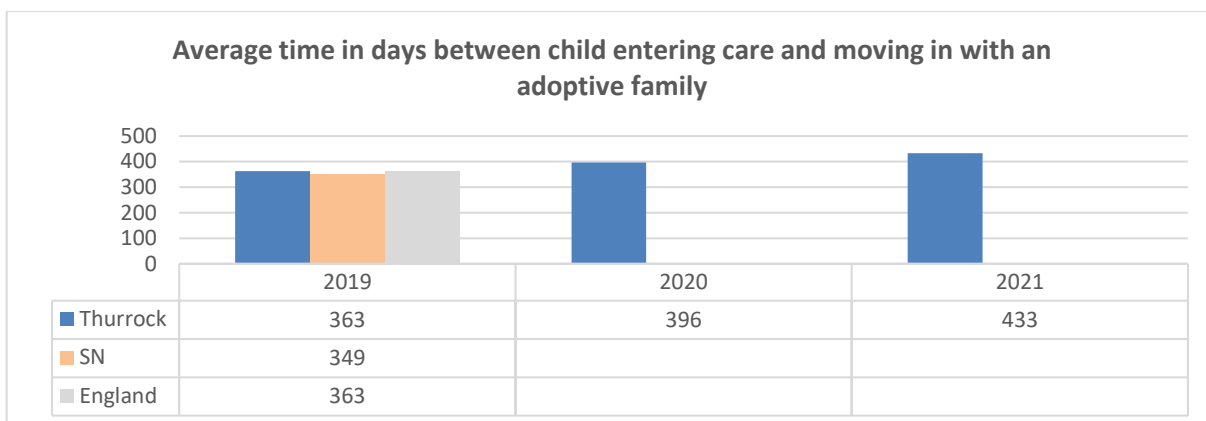
Between 01 April 2020 and 31 March 2021, a total of 8 children were adopted. In the period January 2021 to March 2021, 4 children have been adopted; 6 children are placed in adoptive placements and have adoption hearings planned. There are a further 11 children with a care plan for adoption awaiting a Court decision.

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 March 2021. There are likely to be an increased number of children adopted through 2020-22, with increased court hearings as the pandemic eases.

7.2 Timeliness of Adoption

Average time in days between child entering care and moving in with an adoptive family

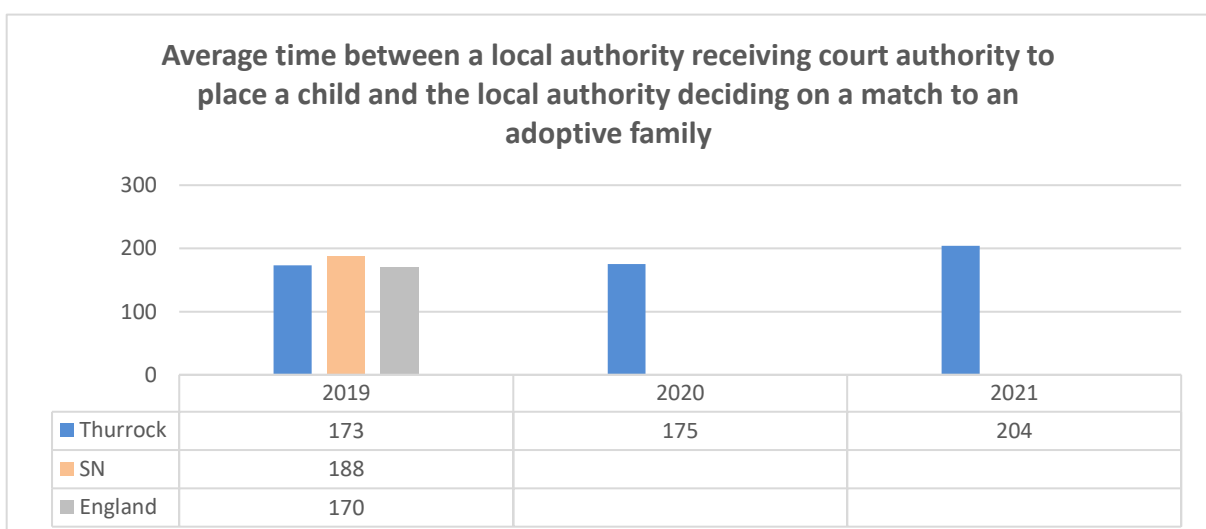
The current performance is 433 days and the service would seek to ensure that children move to their adoptive family as soon as possible and to align performance with our SN.



Average time between a local authority receiving court authority to place a child and the local authority deciding on a match to an adoptive family

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 204 days for adoptions completed in 2020-21.

Based on the 2019 published benchmarking data, Thurrock is performing marginally above the Statistical Neighbour average of 188 and England average of 170 in March 2021. This is an area for the Service to focus as the impact of COVID 19 will affect the timeliness of children being placed for adoption.



7.3 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 March 2021, 16% 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.

7.4 CLA placement distance

It is good practice to ensure that children remain within their communities. In March 2021, 71% of the Children Looked After cohort were 20 miles or less from their homes, compared to 72% in March 2020. 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.

8. CLA Fostering

At the end of March 2021 there were 301 Children Looked After in Thurrock. In March 2020 the total number of children in fostering households was 235; 117 were being cared for by Independent Fostering Agencies and 118 were cared for by Thurrock approved Foster Carers. In March 2021 there were 89 Thurrock approved fostering households providing 119 children with a foster family. The average age of an approved foster carer for Thurrock is 53 years old. There has been very little fluctuation in the numbers of children who are cared for by Thurrock foster carers.

9. Recruitment

Over the period 2019-21 the number of children placed with Thurrock Foster Carers remains broadly the same. Table 3 reflects the change in fostering recruitment and those who are no longer registered as carers.

Financial Year	Fostering Households newly registered	Fostering Households no longer registered
2019-20	19	15
2020-21	11	14

It is natural for some fostering households to retire or decide to end their fostering career depending on changes in their own family circumstances. Of the 14 households that left Thurrock fostering in 2020-21:

- 5 households decided to retire from fostering
- 4 households were de-registered in line with the Fostering Regulations.
- 3 Households moved home, at such a distance they could not continue
- 2 Households resigned due to other changes in their circumstances at home

It is of note that no Thurrock foster carers resigned from Thurrock in order to transfer to another fostering agency. Applicants are assessed so they meet the National Minimum Standards² for fostering and can offer a safe, loving home to a child. The recruitment process usually takes about four months from receipt of an application to foster, until approval at Fostering Panel. Timescales are reduced if the applicant is already an approved foster carer from another agency. To approve foster carers a detailed assessment of applicants is undertaken which includes interviews with applicants' personal referees and criminal record checks and medicals checks are also completed. Applicants who wish to foster are considered from all backgrounds and walks of life, a diverse range of carers supports meeting the needs of Thurrock children.

10. Reasons for Recommendations

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

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

11.1 Not applicable

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

12.1 None

13. Implications

13.1 Financial

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

No implications identified.

13.2 Legal

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

No implications identified.

²https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/192705/NMS_Fostering_Services.pdf

13.3 Diversity & Equality

Implications verified by: **Becky Lee**
**Team Manager, 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.

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

Not applicable

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

Not applicable

15. Appendices to the report

None

Report Author(s):

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

Ruth Murdock, Strategic Lead, Quality Assurance, Children's Services

Clare Moore, Strategic Lead, YOS and Prevention, Children's Services

Sam Nour, Strategic Lead, Safeguarding, Children's Services

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

Anna Watkins, Business Intelligence Analyst, Children's Services