

1 March 2022		ITEM: 6
Corporate Parenting Committee		
Children's Social Care Performance – Quarter 3 2021-22		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Non-key	
Report of: Anna Watkins, Business Intelligence Analyst & Naintara Khosla, Strategic Lead Children Looked After (CLA)		
Accountable Assistant Director: Janet Simon, Assistant Director, Children's Social Care and Early Help		
Accountable Director: Sheila Murphy, Corporate Director, 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 and some of the performance is within the context of COVID-19 and the lockdown restrictions which have been in place over the period; this report focusses on Quarter 3 of 2021-22 (October to December 2021).

Thurrock continues to provide services to approximately 300 Children Looked After (CLA) and approximately 314 Care Leavers. 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. The work with health colleagues continues to ensure that there is a positive focus on Initial Health Assessments for children entering into care.

The Care Leaving Service continues to be a focus for improvement, 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, with family members. To support children being placed locally in their communities and recruit foster carers there is a new fostering brand and recruitment campaign.

It has been previously reported to Corporate Parenting Committee that permanency planning has been particularly impacted by COVID-19. There have been delays in timetabling for final court hearings. The court has 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 improvements and areas for improvement in Children's Social Care and note the work that is undertaken to ensure good and improving performance.

1.2 Note the continuing impact of COVID 19 on some areas of 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.

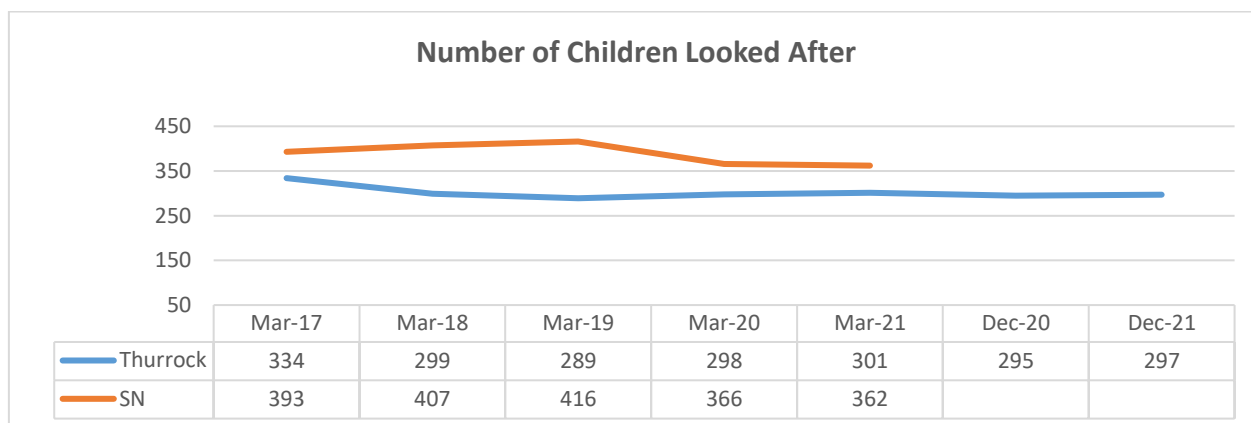
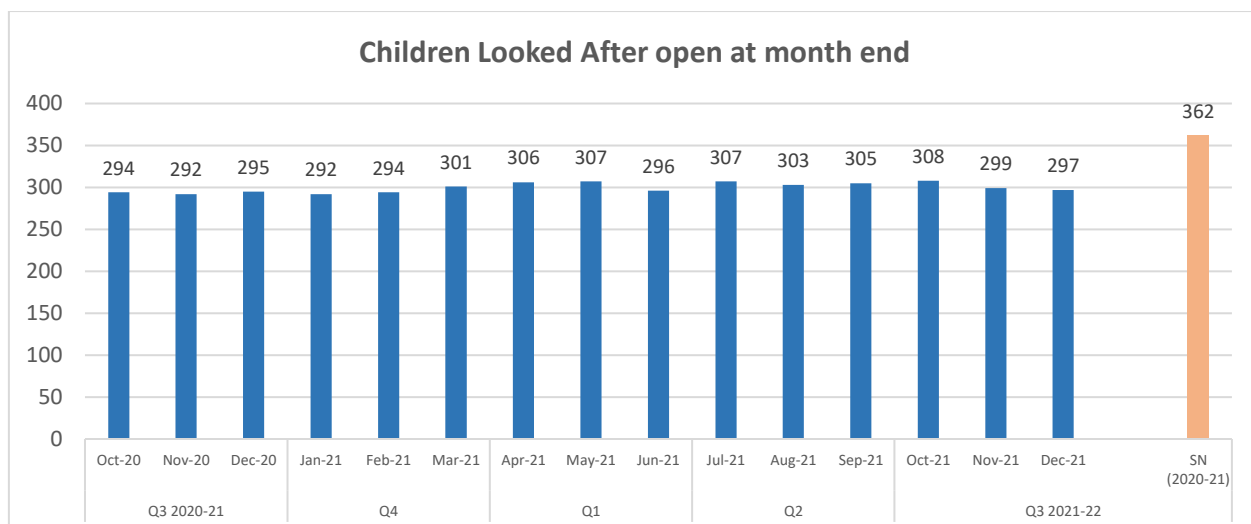
2.3 This data has been presented and discussed with the Children & Families Performance Group.

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 practitioners.

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 of children have shown a sustained small decrease in quarter 3. 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)

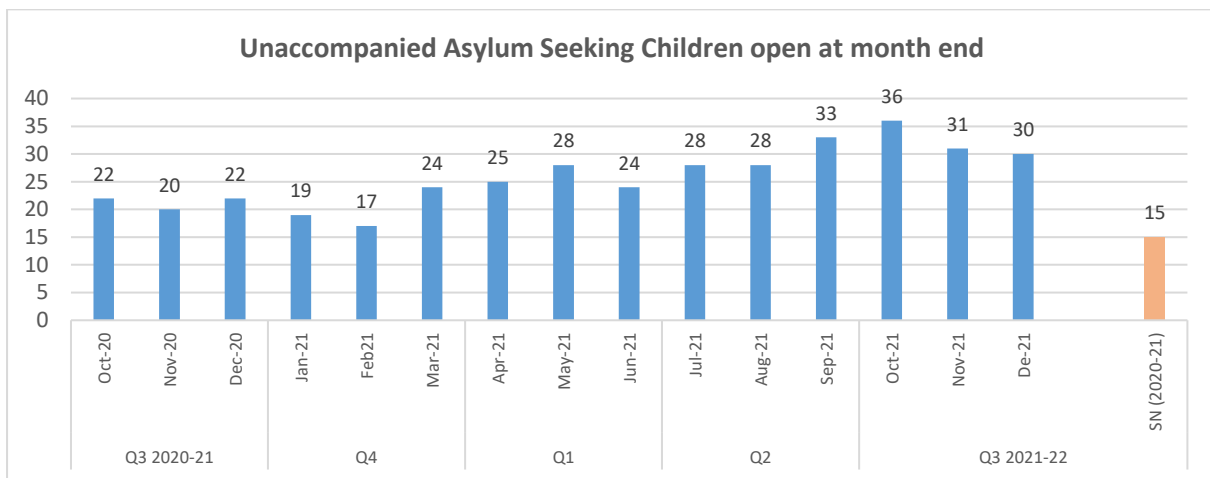
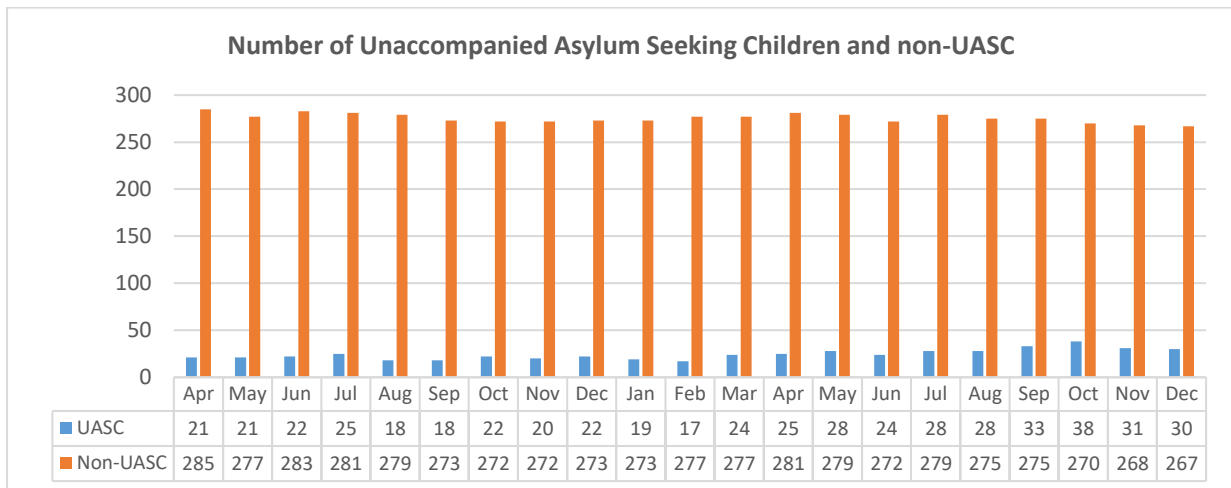
UASC are a subset of the Children Looked After number above. Local Authorities through agreement have a simple formula to ensure a fair distribution of the responsibility for looking after unaccompanied children. Each local authority has a 0.07% ceiling for how many UASC and unaccompanied asylum seeking children a region or local authority is reasonably expected to be looking after at any time, as a proportion of its total number of children.

Thurrock's allocated number is 31 children. There was a reduction in the entry of UASC into Essex Ports in 2020 to 2021 as the preferred route appears to have been through Dover. Between October and December 2021, there have been 6 new UASC arrivals into Thurrock. There is ongoing work with the Home Office to ensure timely and smooth transition for this cohort if Thurrock's allocation of UASC is exceeded

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 replaced, the Eastern Region¹ Transfer scheme in July 2021 which worked efficiently and effectively with the transfer of UASC usually within 10 days of arrival.

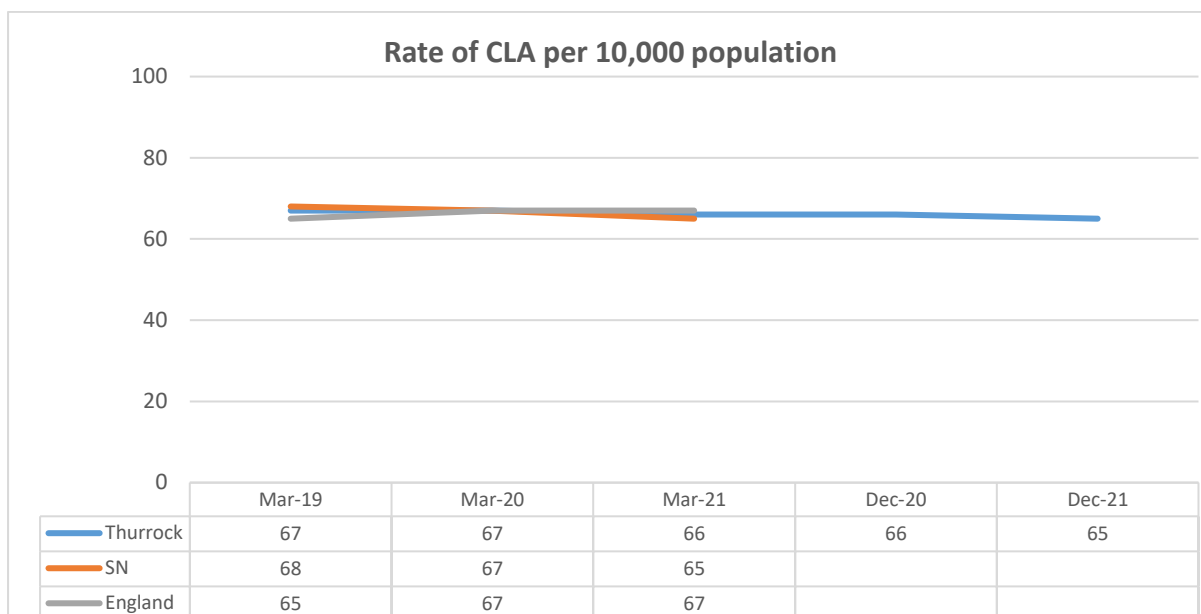
The NTS is operated by Central Government with the Home Office responsible for administration of the scheme. The Eastern Region Co Coordinator who previously ensured the smooth transfer process in the region is no longer responsible for the transfers, however their role is to liaise with the Home Office co-ordinator.



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. At the end of December 2021 there were 300 Children Looked After in Thurrock with the rate of 65 per 10,000. Based on the benchmarking data 2021, Thurrock is in line with the Statistical Neighbour average of 65 and below England averages of 67 as at the end of December 2021.

¹ The Eastern Region comprises of Bedford Borough, Cambridgeshire, Central Bedfordshire, Hertfordshire, Luton, Norfolk, Peterborough, Southend, Suffolk and Thurrock Local Authorities



3.4 CLA episodes started and ended

The number of children leaving care is a fluctuating position. Four factors contribute and impact on the numbers of children in care in Thurrock; Between January and December 2021, the number of Thurrock children who ceased to be looked after was 123.

- Numbers of children entering care
- Numbers of children leaving care
- Numbers of UASC entering care
- Numbers of UASC who remain looked after by Thurrock

CLA Episodes ending are influenced by children achieving permanence through Adoption, Special Guardianship Orders (SGO), and Child Arrangement Orders (CAO), returning to their parents care or simply turning 18 and becoming adults.

The most common reason for care episodes ending in Thurrock in 2021-22 was children returning home to live with parents, relatives, or other person with parental responsibility and moving to an independent living arrangement. Similarly this was the case in 2020-21. The cohort of UASC will have ended as they transfer to other local authorities as part of the national transfer mechanism and where young people become adults at 18 and move into the Aftercare Service.

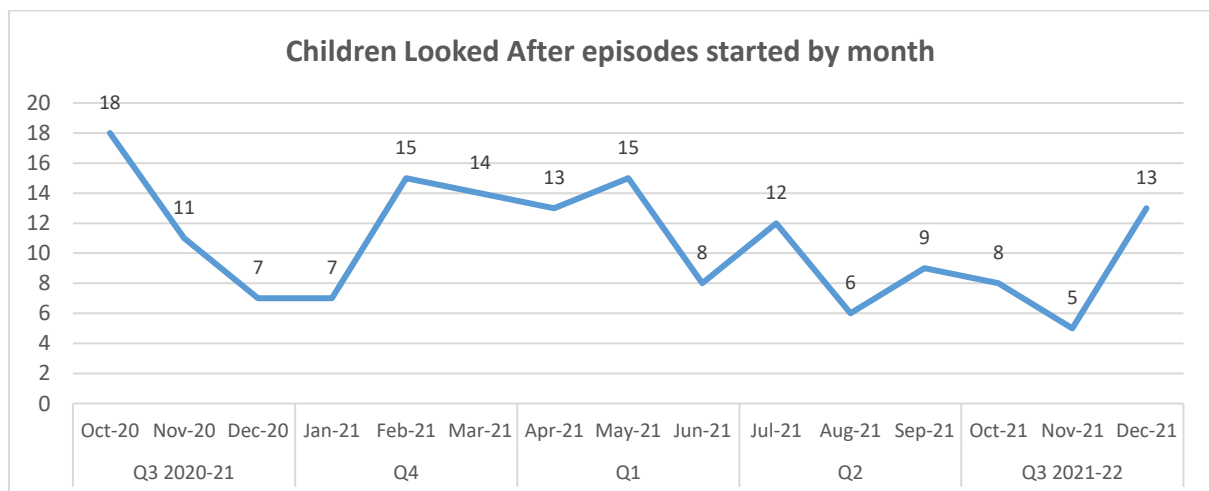
There is currently a delay in the timeliness of court proceedings, preventing children from leaving care and progressing to their permanent placement (Adoption, SGO or returning home). One of the reasons for this is as a result of the impact of COVID which has contributed to delays in concluding

proceedings for children. 17 cases out of the total of 49 as at February 2022 were over 40 weeks.

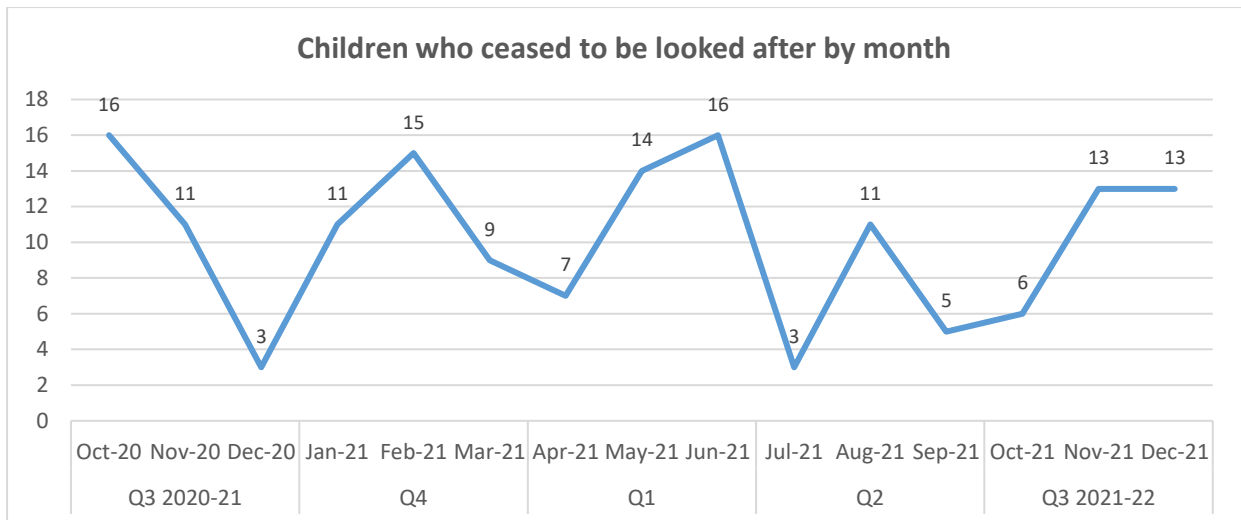
The below chart shows entries in and exits out of care over the last few years and evidences fewer numbers of UASC entering care in Thurrock and a stabilising of UASC numbers in line with 0.07 of the child population and transfers taking place appropriately.

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22 (Q1, Q2 & Q3)
Entering Care total	203	242	150	88
Entering Care UASC (% of CLA population)	91 (44.8%)	75 (30.9%)	36 (24.0%)	20 (23.0%)
Exiting Care	211	235	148	32
CLA No, at end of reporting period	290 Reduction of 8	298 Reduction of 8	298 No change	300
Average UASC Population	39	23	21	29

All cases are reviewed to ensure the correct children come into care and, court proceedings are only entered into where necessary. Children and Families are, where possible, supported to remain together to stabilise families who may be in crisis.

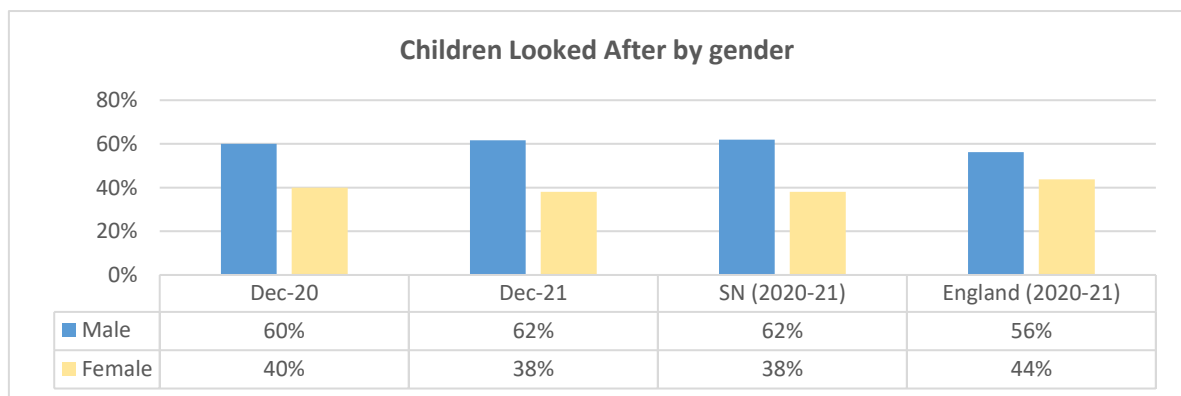


3.5 CLA episodes ended in month



3.6 CLA by gender

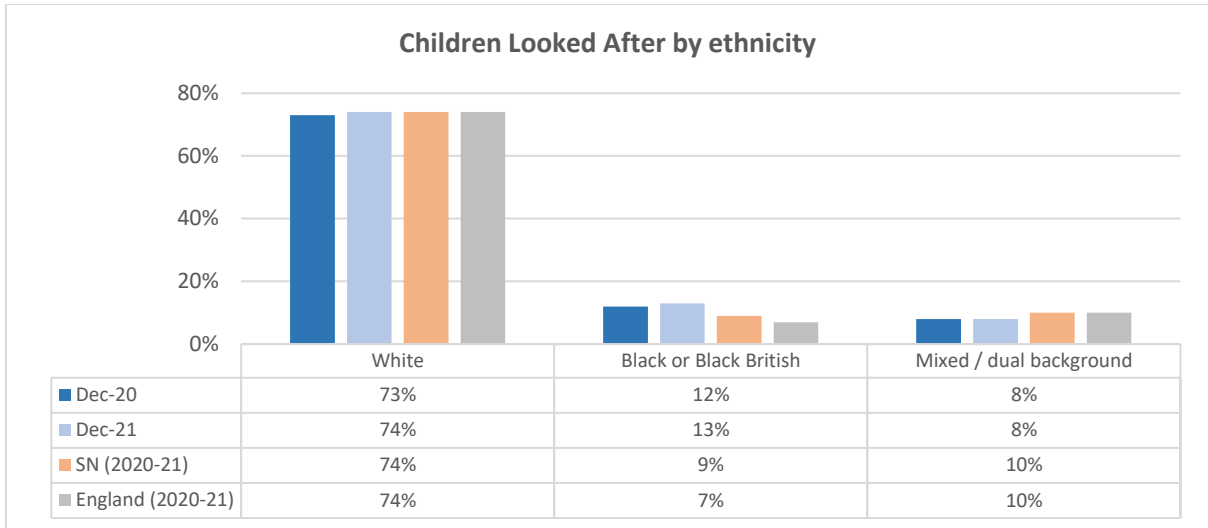
Based on the benchmarking data in 2020-21, the gender breakdown is in line with the Statistical Neighbour and England averages.



3.7 CLA by ethnicity

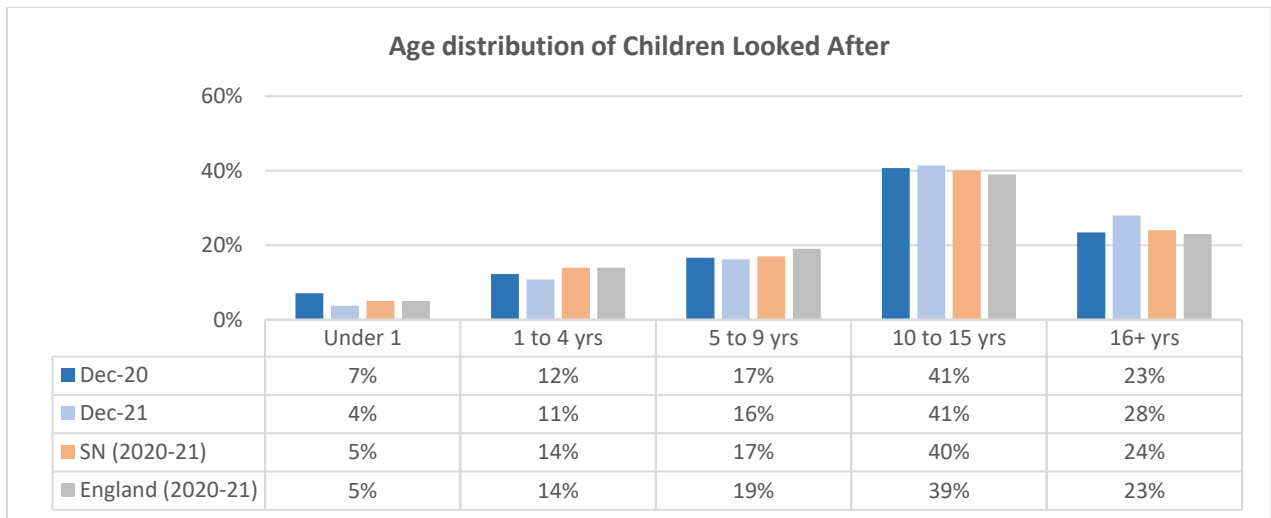
Thurrock's Children Looked After are predominantly White/British which is in line with Thurrock's School Census in Spring 2020 and the Statistical Neighbour and England averages as at March 2021.

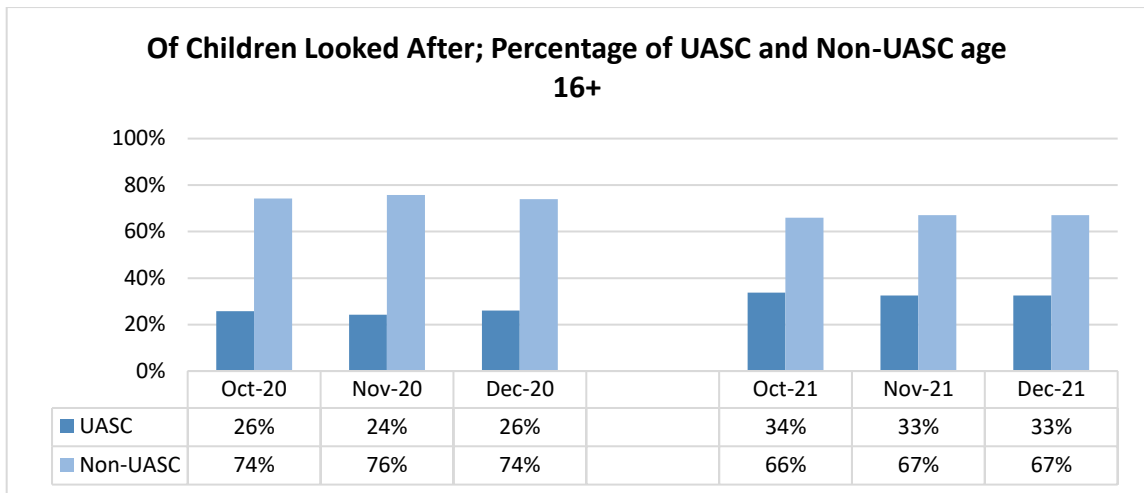
While the numbers of Children Looked After who are Black/Black British have slightly decreased since December 2020, there have been no particular issues identified which are influencing this change.



3.8 CLA age profile

Based on the benchmarking data as at March 2021, the age profile of the Children Looked After cohort remains mostly stable and in line with the Statistical Neighbour and England averages. Since December 2020, the number of 16+ Children Looked After has increased by 5%.

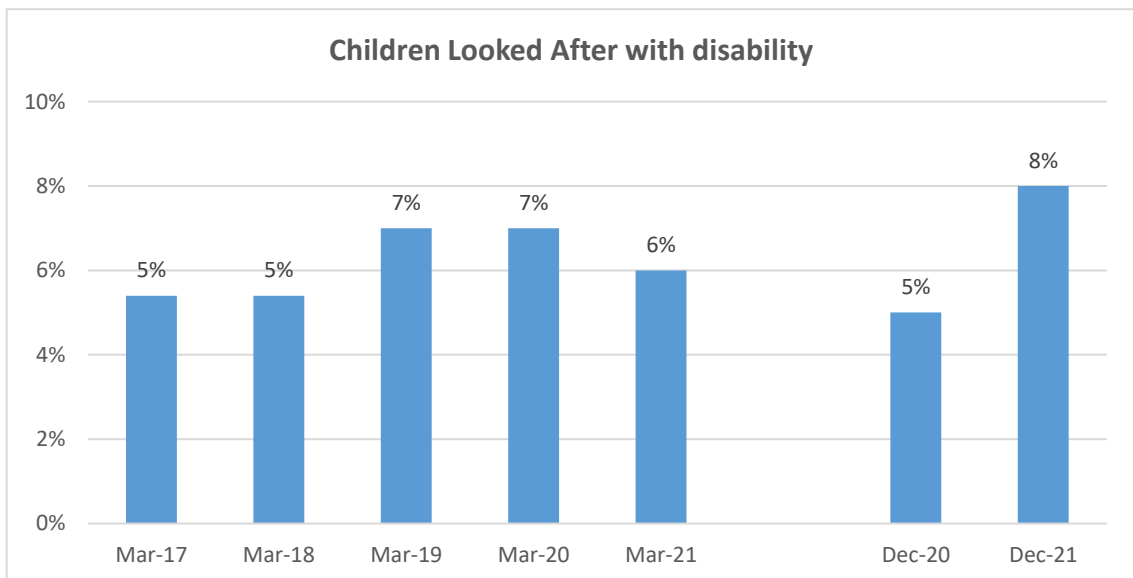




Since December 2020, the percentage of UASC 16+ has increased by 7% in December 2021.

3.9 CLA with a disability

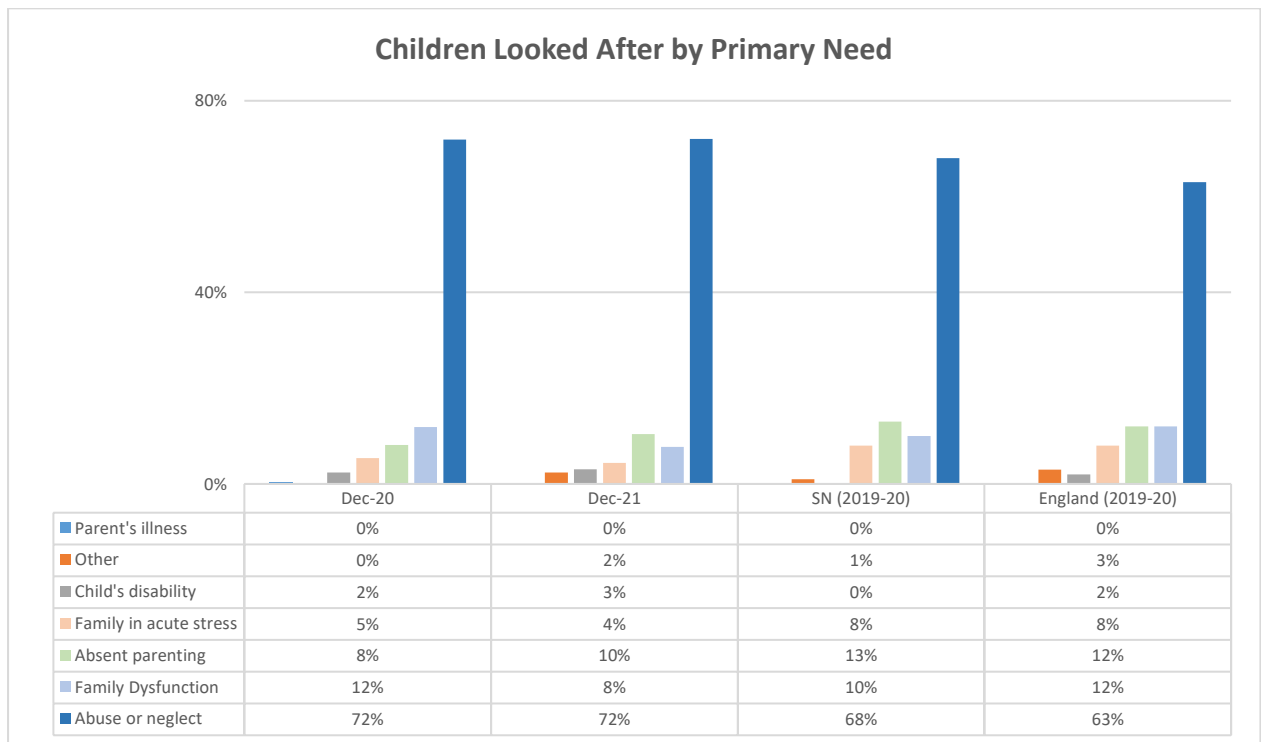
The number of children looked after with a disability has remained relatively stable since December 2020. At the end of December 2021, 24 of the total CLA cohort were recorded as having a disability. 21 of these children were boys aged seven and over and 3 girls aged 12 and over.



3.10 CLA by Category of Need

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 provide support and intervention to enable families to remain together

and ensure that children only become looked after, when absolutely necessary.



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

4.1 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.

There are currently 2 children in custody in youth detention accommodation (remand in custody). Both of these cases are long term remands and the financial costs linked to the accommodation are the responsibility of the local authority.

Between 01 April 2020 and 31 March 2021, the number of children subject to Youth Detention Accommodation (YDA) was under 5. The majority of the Remands into custody were made in the first four months of 2021 when there was a rise in gang related violence and knife crime.

4.2 Out of court disposal panel

In 2020-21, the out of court disposal panel dealt with 43 offences relating to 33 Thurrock children, of which 5 children had looked after status. All 5 children were diverted away from the criminal justice system with identified support from the YOS partnership.

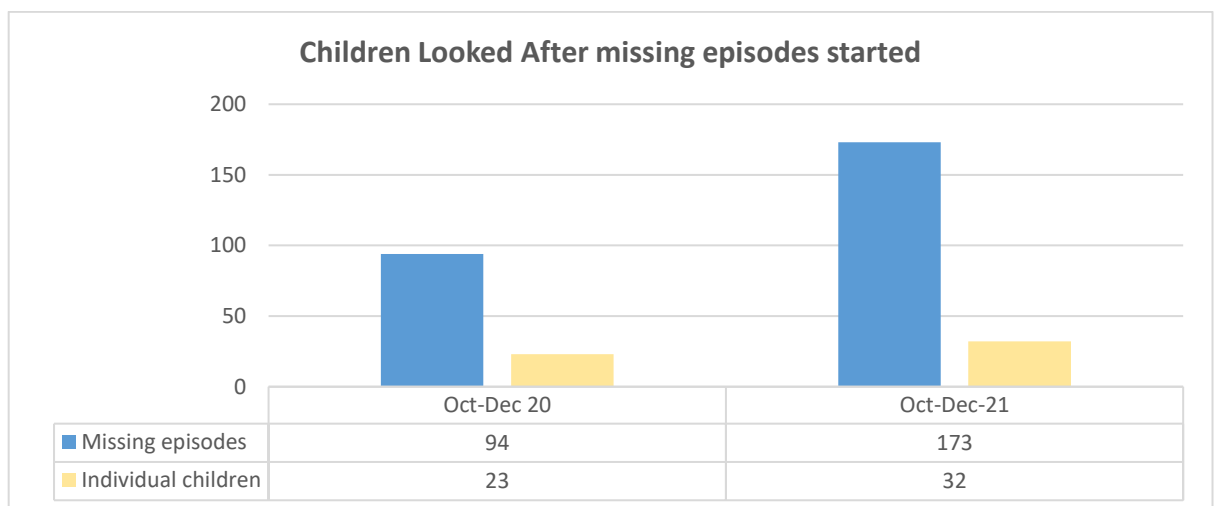
Thurrock YOS and Essex Police are committed to the national protocol² aimed to reduce the criminalisation of Children Looked After. This approach will be supported with a local pan-Essex protocol to ensure there is a focus on diverting any child (where possible) who is Looked After from the Criminal Justice System.

The Out of Court Disposal Panel continues to receive referrals from the Police, whereby we have been able to divert increasing numbers away from Statutory interventions. At Q3 2021-22 the out of court disposal panel has so far dealt with 46 offences relating to 42 children.

5 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 2021.

Between October and December 2021, there were a total of 173 missing episodes compared to 94 missing episodes in the same period in 2019-20; this represents an 84% increase in the number of missing episodes. The number of young people that went missing has also seen an increase from 23 to 32 representing 39% increase in December 2021.



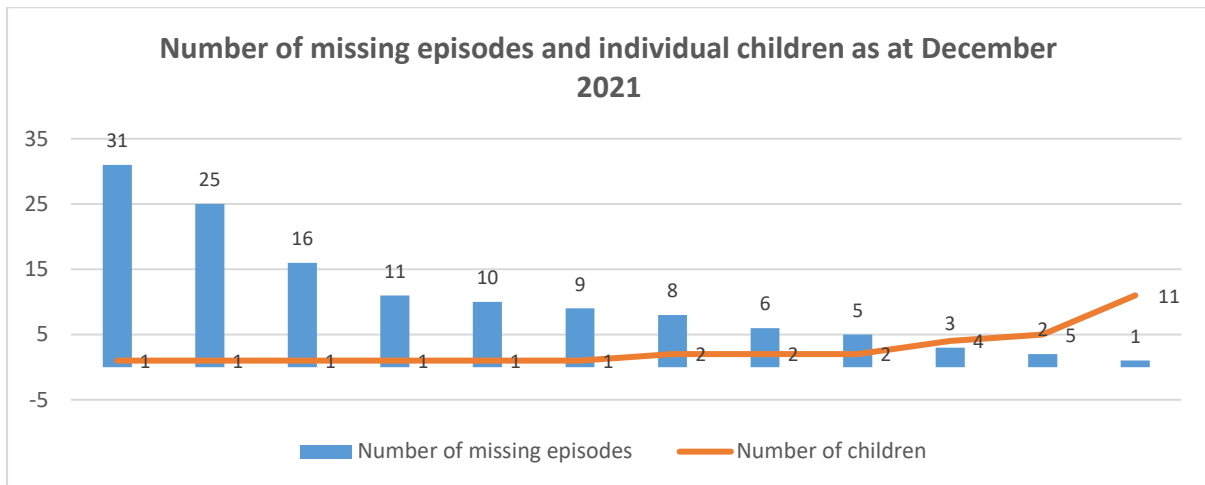
Between October and December 2021:-

- 5 children had between 10 and 31 missing episodes
- 7 children between 5 and 9 episodes

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-protocol-on-reducing-criminalisation-of-looked-after-children>

- 20 children between 1 and 3 missing episodes

The most common reason for children going missing was contact with family and friends, representing 45% of missing episodes between October and December 2021.



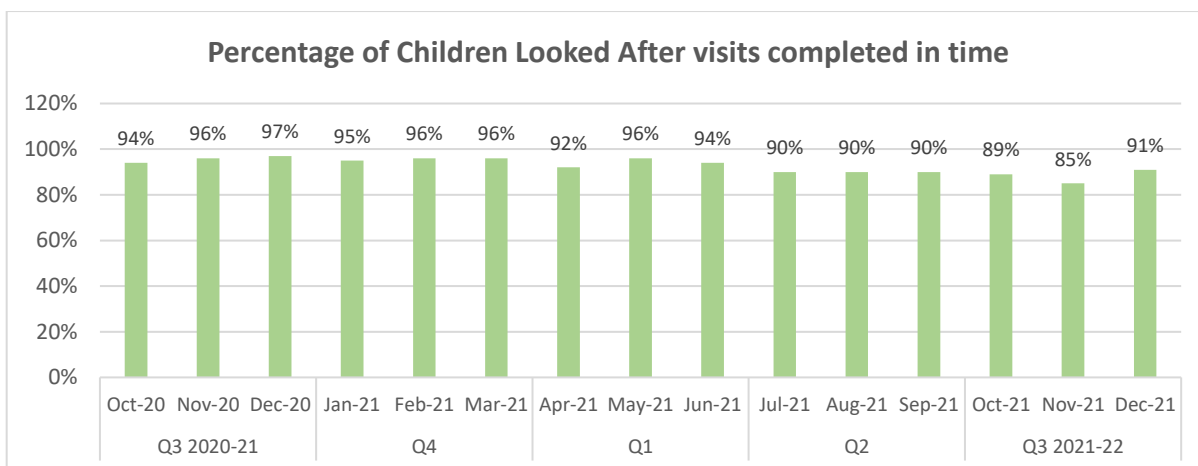
5.1 CLA return to home interview (RHI)

Since April 2020, Inspire Youth Hub have been commissioned to undertake independent Return Home Interviews (RHI). All children continue to be 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.

Between October and December 2021, the average take up of formal Return Home Interviews by Inspire was 37%. Alongside the RHI's completed by Inspire, Key Workers from placements, Foster Carers and Social Workers as well as police meet with young people to 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. In addition all young people who have a missing episode are reviewed and discussed at the weekly Risk Management Meeting.

5.2 Timeliness of social worker visits

Children Looked After are visited and seen and spoken to regularly. Their visiting schedules vary depending on their care plan and needs and the frequency of visits as per their plan is tracked through performance data. Performance year to date is good at 91% with some inconsistency in October and November which has been addressed through a clear focus and drive within the service.



5.3 CLA Initial Health Assessments (IHA)

Every child who becomes looked after should have an Initial Health Assessment within 20 working days of entering into care. This is an area of focus following Thurrock's Ofsted Inspection in 2019.

Two performance measures inform the data and success in children having an initial health assessment in time;

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

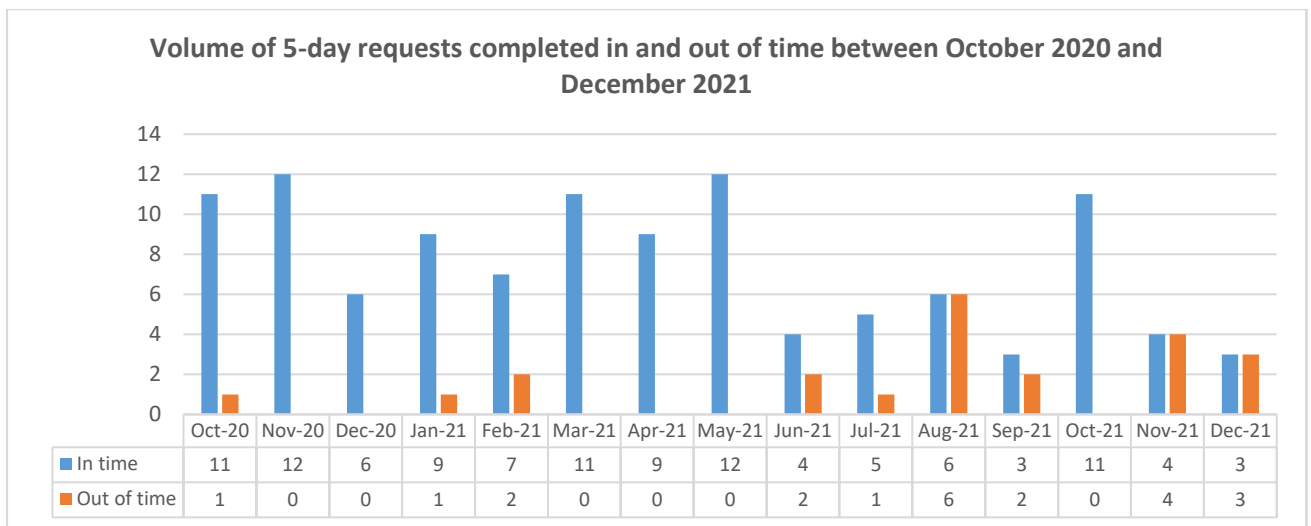
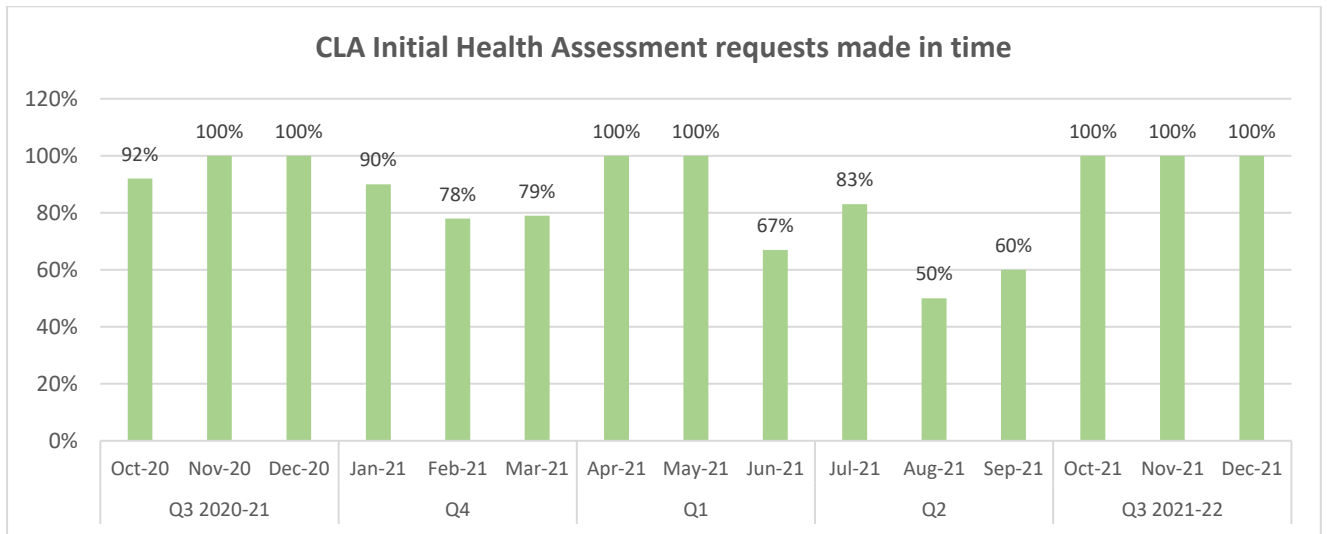
To achieve good performance working relationships between Thurrock Social Care and Health Providers is key. A weekly IHA tracking meeting is held across the partnership to ensure that there is a focus on meeting the 5 day target to notify Health colleagues that a child has become looked after and to ensure that an Initial Health Assessment is offered and completed within 20 working days.

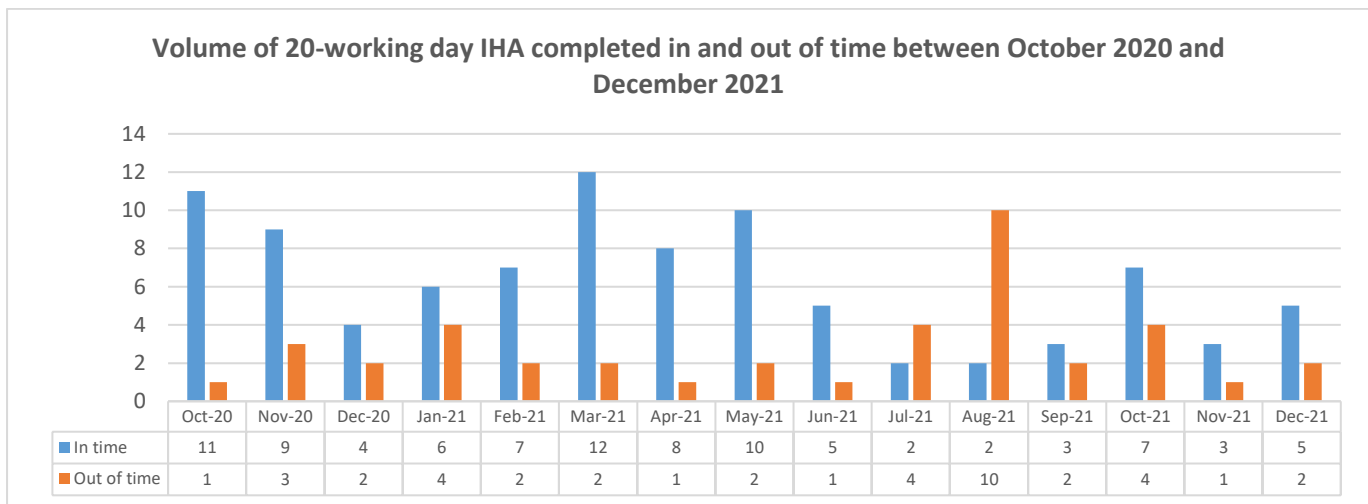
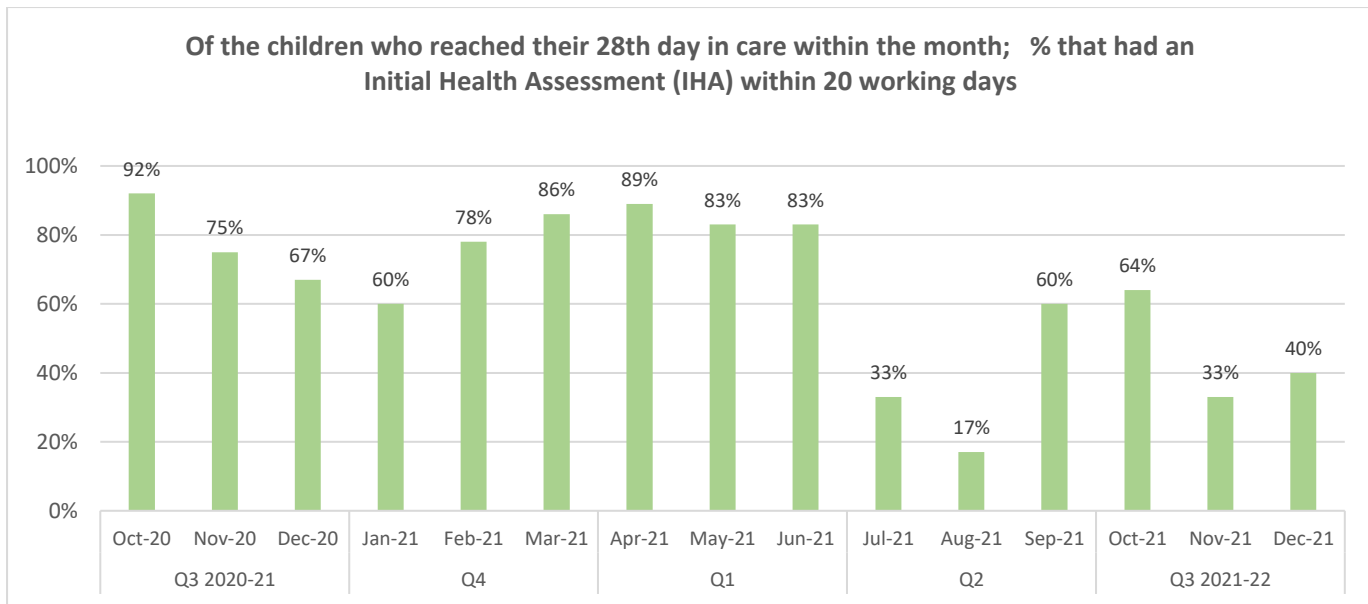
Notifications for an IHA cannot be processed if parents have not provided consent for medical treatment and there is no court order which allows the Local Authority to consent to health care.

Performance for IHA requests being sent to Health have shown a sustained improvement in Quarter 3 October to December 2021 with performance at 100%. Notifications for an IHA cannot be processed if parents have not provided consent for medical treatment and there is no court order which allows the Local Authority to consent to health care.

The below tables sets out performance across the two areas for achieving timeliness for IHA's. The average percentage of referrals made by social care to health within 5 days April December was 83.8% with 58% completed in time falling significantly below the corporate performance target of 80%. Work

is ongoing with health partners to achieve all children entering care receiving a timely health assessment.





5.4 CLA in Education

Due to the COVID 19 pandemic, all national academic testing was cancelled. In line with Department for Education guidance, schools will not be publishing their data for 2021.

The annual report of the Virtual School Head teacher is a key document which must be produced as part of reporting arrangements. The 2019-20 report was presented to Corporate Performance Board in January 2021.

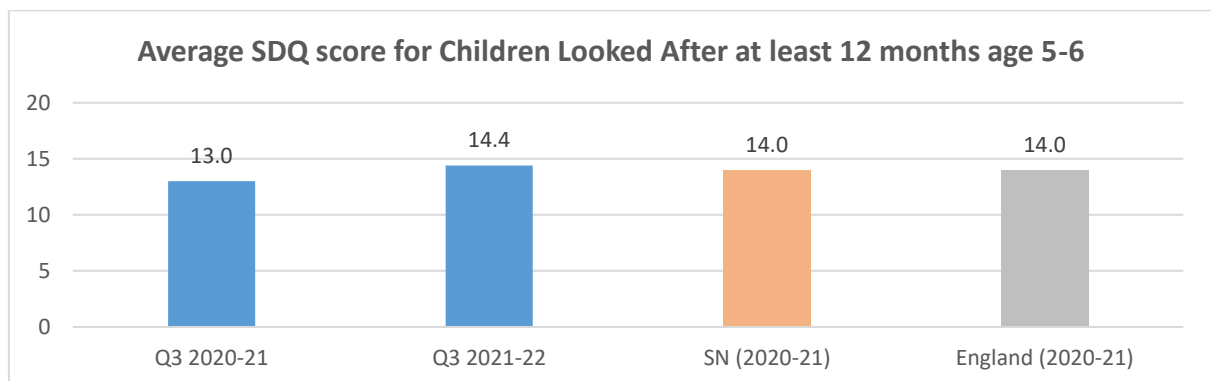
In addition to the annual report, the Virtual School Head teacher and her team members provide reports to the Governing Body every term. These detail a range of information such which is provided to ensure that we are held accountable and that the delivery of services is efficient. (Please see Agenda item 8 within Corporate Parenting Committee Pack January 21).

5.5 CLA 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 5-16 who have been in our care for more than 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.

Comparing quarterly average scores shows some variability but a generally improving trend. 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.



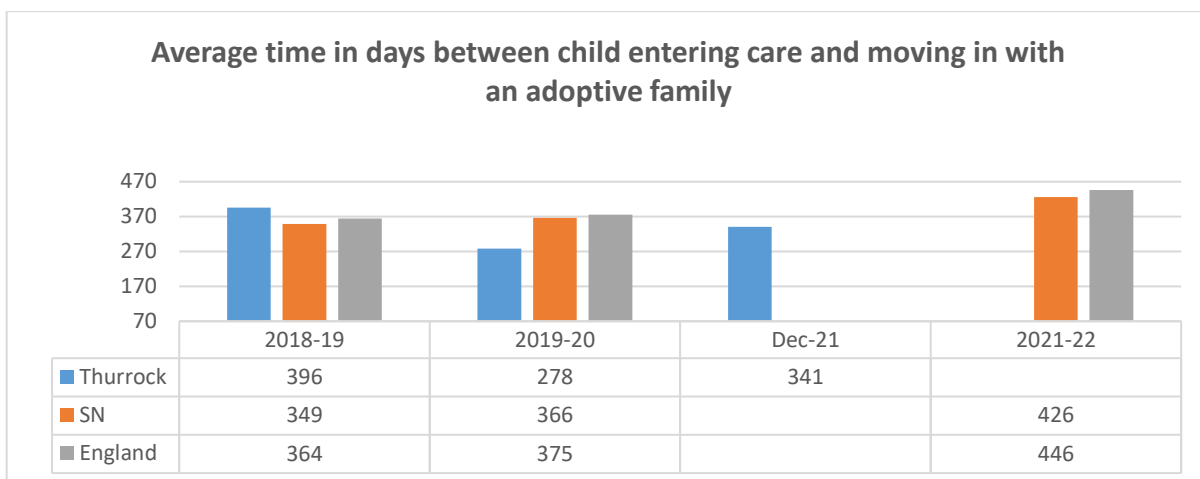
6 Number of children adopted

Between 01 April and February 2022, there are a total of 14 children who have either been adopted or placed in adoptive placements.

6.1 Timeliness of Adoption

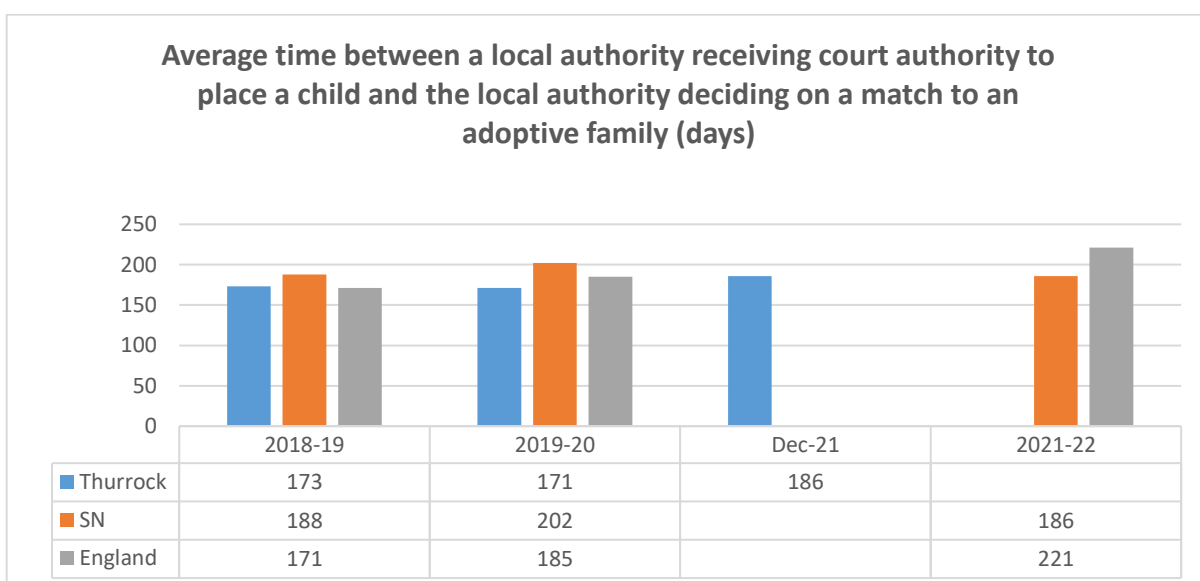
The timeliness of adoption is measured as a 12 month rolling average, it is the length of time from the child entering care to moving in with an adoptive family. As at end of December 2021, Thurrock's average was 341 days.

Based on the latest benchmarking data as at the end of March 2020, Thurrock is below the statistical neighbour average of 366 days and England average of 375 days in December 2021. This is good performance for Thurrock.



As at end of December 2021, the average time in days between Thurrock receiving a Placement Order (court authority) to place a child with the adoptive family was 186 days, and this is again good performance.

Based on the benchmarking data as at end of March 2020, Thurrock is below our statistical neighbour average of 202 days and in line with England average of 185 days.



This is an area the Service is focussing on to ensure there is timely matching and placing of children with their adoptive families. The impact of COVID 19 will affect the timeliness of children being placed for adoption due to the delays in timetabling of final hearings for Placement Orders, and further delay as a result of birth parents re-applying to the court to revoke Placement Order, sometimes as soon as the Order has been made. The application by birth parents to revoke a Placement Order prevents the placement of children with adoptive families. There can be a further appeal if the birth family do not agree with the chosen adoptive placement.

6.2 CLA permanency

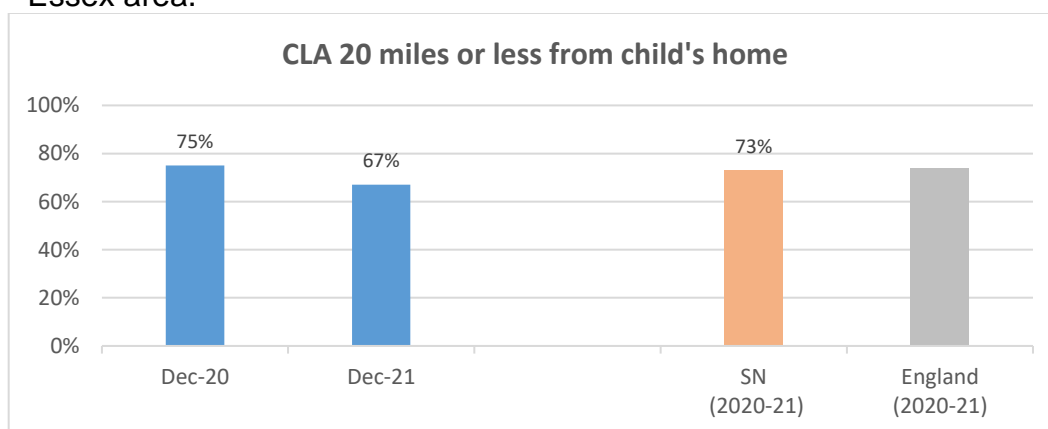
Purposeful early permanency planning continues to ensure that children are in the right placement at the right time to meet their needs. Securing placements where needed and supporting children, where appropriate, to remain at home with their families is the priority. Children are placed for adoption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

As at the end of December 2021, there were 56 (16%) children aged 0-5, the total cohort of CLA being 297. The majority of children under five who are not able to return home, are moved on to permanent placements through adoption or permanent alternative carers. 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.

6.3 CLA placement distance

It is good practice to ensure that children remain within their communities. At the end of December 2021, 67% of the Children Looked After cohort were placed within 20 miles or less from their homes, which represents 199 of 298 children looked after. Based on the latest benchmarking data available in March 2021, Thurrock reflects performance almost in line with the national average of 74%.

This is an area of intense focus for the Placement Service. The fostering recruitment campaign seeks to increase local placements. However it is not only Thurrock Local Authority who are finding the recruitment of local foster carers a challenge. Local placements are not available from Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA) or Residential care homes. There is a national shortage of fostering and residential care³, (the interim report published by the Competition and Markets Authority, October 2022, has noted the pressure on Local Authority placement services) and the local authority continues to seek Ofsted registered provision and sometimes this is outside of the Thurrock and Essex area.



³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/childrens-social-care-market-study-interim-report/interim-report>.

7 Care Leaving Service

A Care Leaver, as defined in the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000⁴, 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.

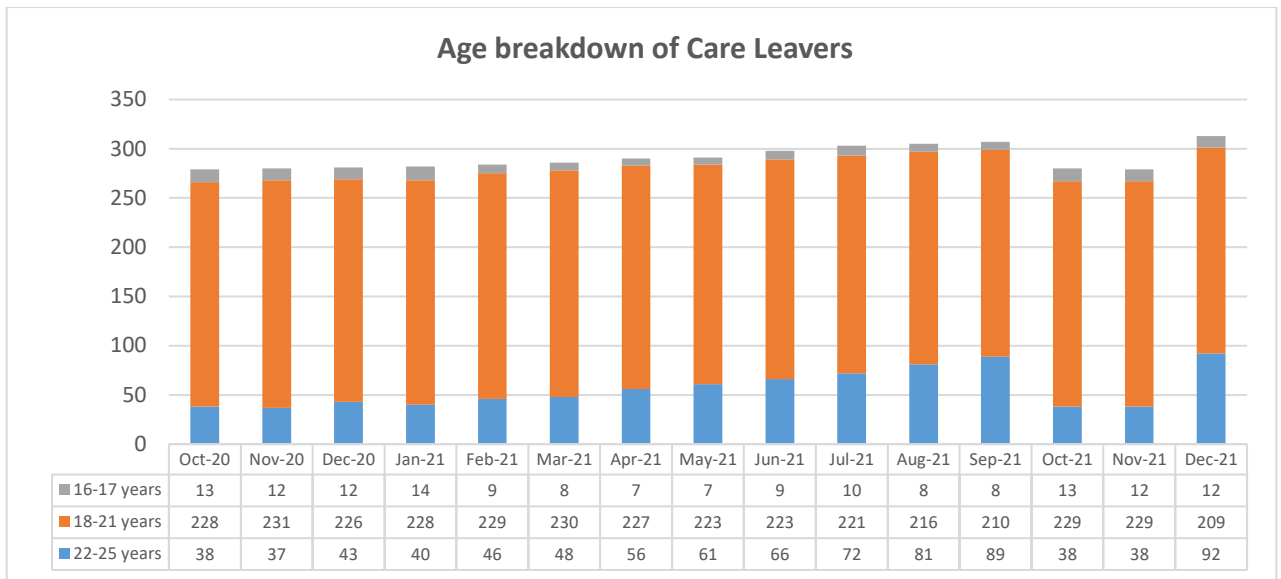
A young person's status as a care leaver can be divided into the following:

- 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.

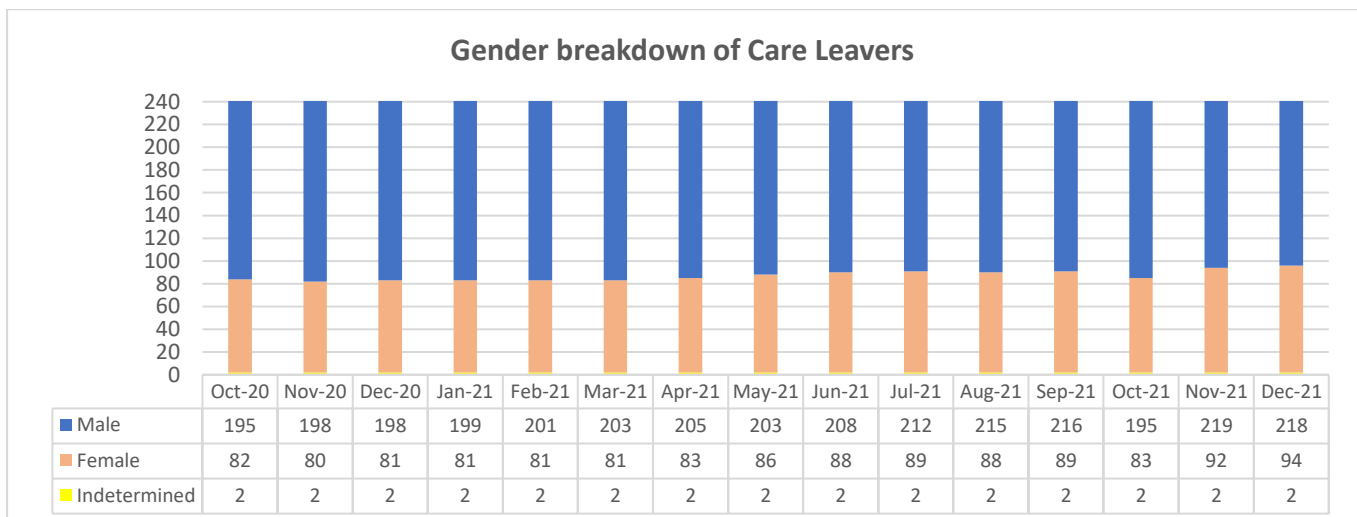
The graph below shows the total **OC3 care leaver cohort** (Relevant and Former Relevant Children whose 17th, 18th, 19th, 20th or 21st birthday falls within Financial Year) of Young People age 16-25 years who are in receipt of a Care Leaving service. The numbers are increasing and this is in part due to legislative changes that placed additional responsibilities upon Care Leaving services (Children and Social Work Act 2017). Section 3 of the Act now requires Local Authorities to appoint a Personal Adviser for Care Leavers (who request one) up until the age of 25.

As at end of December 2021, 314 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. The chart below reflects the increased number of care leavers aged 22 and above from 43 care leavers from December 2020-21, to 92 care leavers in December 2021-22.

⁴ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/35/contents>

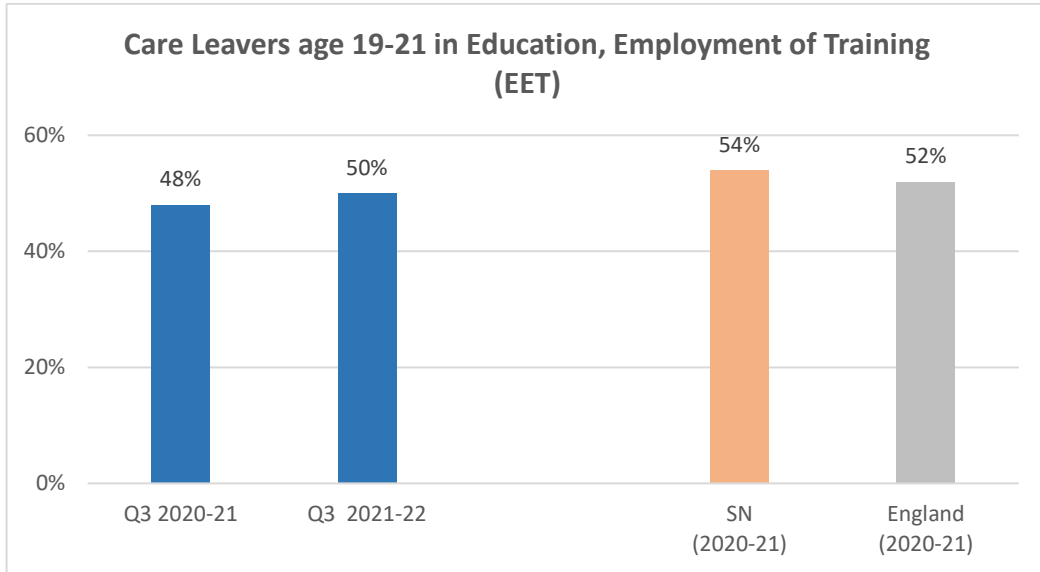


The charts below show the Care Leaver cohort broken down by age groups and gender.



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

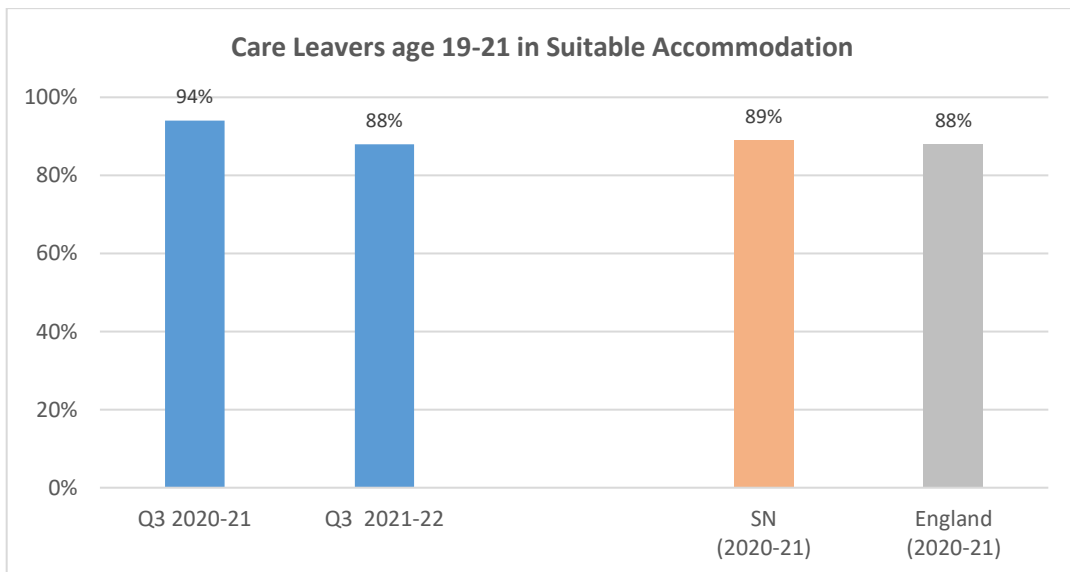
At the end of December 2021, 50% of the Care Leavers aged 19 to 21 year old were in part or full time education, employment or training compared to 48% in December 2020. To strengthen oversight and planning to ensure our young people have support and opportunities for Education, Employment and Training (EET) there are two monthly panels which focus on pre and post 18 year olds who do not have an EET offer. These panels are attended by the Aftercare Service, Inspire Youth Hub and the Virtual School. The panel seeks to understand the issues for individual young people and align their interests to an EET offer. The panel discussions have highlighted the impact of COVID-19 on Young People which has limited opportunities to engage in work experience and continue with employment.



7.2 Care Leavers age 19 to 21 years in Suitable Accommodation

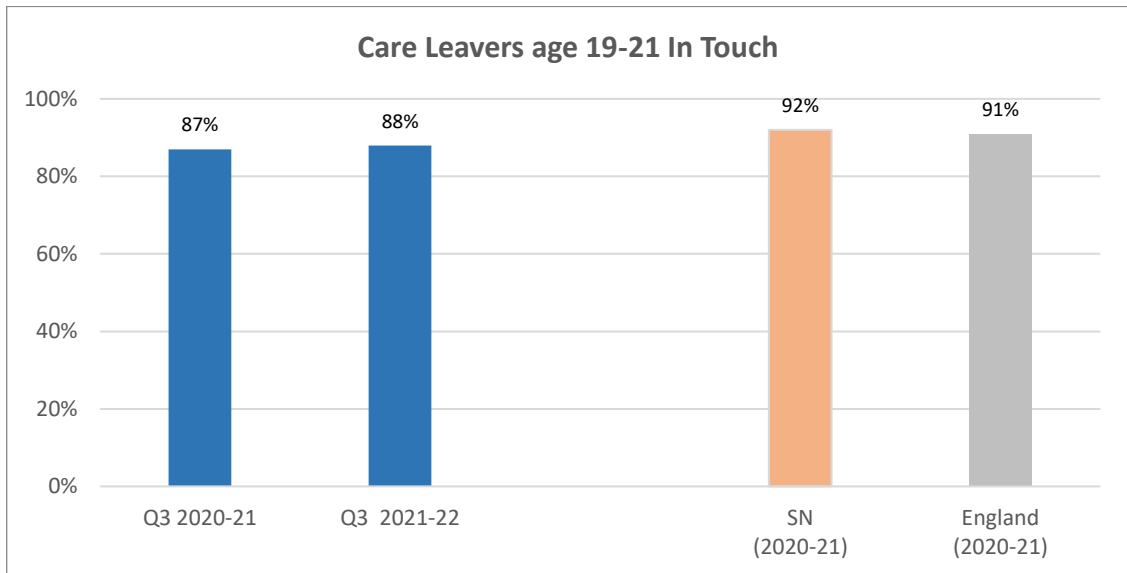
At the end of December 2021, the number of 19 to 21 year old Care Leavers reported to be in suitable accommodation was 88%. There are some care leavers who are not in touch with the service, as well as those whose accommodation is unsuitable. Reasons for accommodation being deemed unsuitable include care leavers who are UASC and missing, young people declining to say where they are living or care leavers who are in prison.

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 December 2021, Thurrock was in touch with 88% of Care Leavers. Thurrock's performance is slightly below the statistical neighbour average of 92% and England average of 91% at the end of December 2021. This is mainly due to the cohort of missing UASC.



8 Reasons for Recommendations

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

9 Consultation (including Overview & Scrutiny, if applicable)

9.1 Not applicable

10 Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact

10.1 None

11 Implications

11.1 Financial

Implications verified by:

David May

Strategic Lead Finance

No implications identified.

11.2 Legal

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

No implications identified.

11.3 Diversity & Equality

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

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

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

Not applicable.

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

Not applicable

13 Appendices to the report

None

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