

16 June 2022		ITEM: 9
Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee		
Children's Social Care Performance – Quarter 4 2021-22		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Non-key	
Report of: Marc Rhodes, Business Intelligence Manager		
Accountable Assistant Director: Janet Simon, Assistant Director Children's Social Care and Early Help		
Accountable Director: Sheila Murphy, Corporate Director of Children's Services		
This report is Public		

Executive Summary

This report needs to be read in the context of the continuing impact of COVID-19 and the impact this 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 2022, the number of Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) contacts received was 1,546 which is in line with Q4 2020/21 (1,546).
- Between January and March 2022, the number of referrals was 614 compared to 665 between January and March 2021. This appears to be in line with the drop in MASH contacts; the conversion rate of contacts to referral was 43% for Quarter 2 2020 and 41% for Quarter 2 2021.
- In March 2022, 93.5% of the children and families assessments were completed in timescale compared to 95% in March 2021 showing consistent performance.
- As at end of March 2022, the number of children subject to a Child Protection Plan was 110 compared to 110 at the end of March 2021. The figure has remained stable throughout the year. The Child Protection Surgery robustly reviews children subject to a CP plan to ensure the right children are receiving this service. Also there has been audits of Children in Need and MASH audits to provide re-assurance regarding thresholds and that the right children are receiving the right services.

- In Q4 2021-22, the number of Child Protection episodes ending was 49 which is in line with the same quarter in 2020-21 when the number of episodes ended was 50. This is in line with the stability of child protection figures observed within the past year. Every month any child protection plan that has been open for a year is reviewed to ensure that children do not remain on a plan for any longer than is necessary and that any issues relating to drift or the need to escalate based upon the concerns are addressed.
- Since April 2021, the number of cases being stepped down to Early Help has remained consistent. Between January – March 2022, 108 cases were stepped down compared to 106 in the same period between January - March 2021. 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.**

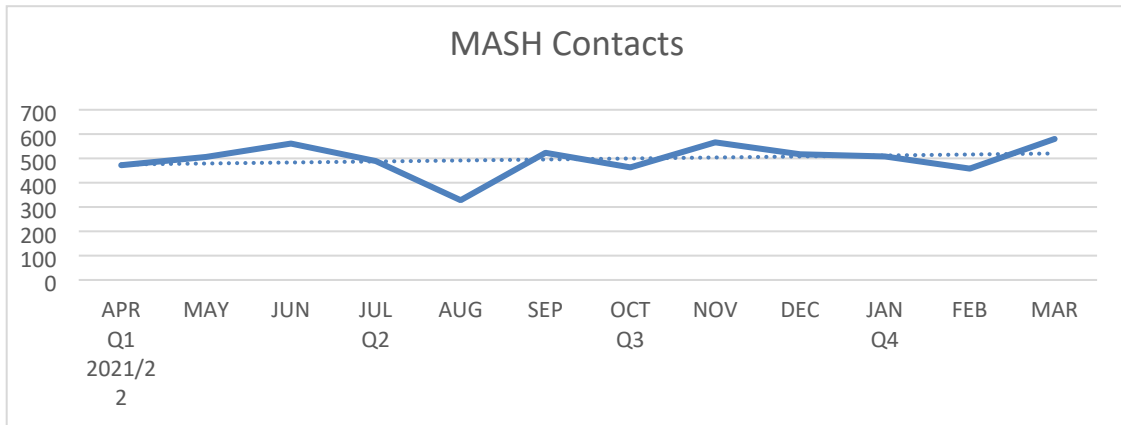
2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1 This report provides a summary of Children’s Social Care performance for Quarter 4, 2021-22 (January – March 2022). It highlights key demand indicators such as number of contacts, 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.
- 2.3 This data has been presented and discussed with the Children & Families Performance Group.

3. Thurrock Data

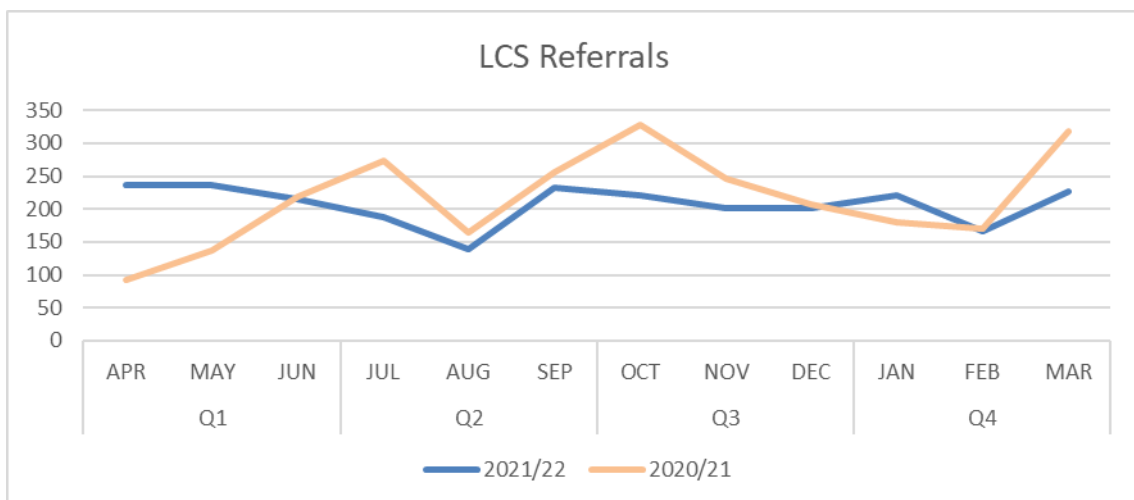
3.1 Contacts

3.1.1 Between Jan 2022 and March 2022 (Quarter 4), the number of MASH contacts received was 1,546 which is the same as in Quarter 3 (1546) showing no change when comparing the two quarters. From April 2021 to March 2022 there were 5,971 MASH contacts, which shows a marginal increase when compared to the same period in 2020/21 (5,755).



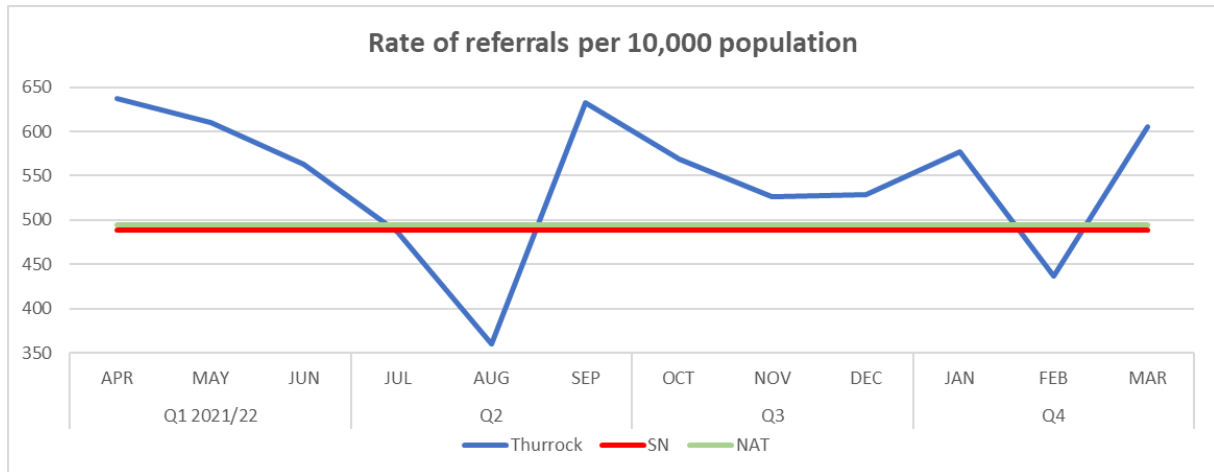
3.2 Referrals

3.2.1 Between January 2022 and March 2022, the number of referrals were 614 compared to 624 between October 2021 and December 2021 (Quarter 3). This indicates a marginal drop in number of referrals. From April 2021 to March 2022 there were 2,487 LCS Referrals, which shows a marginal decrease when compared to the same period in 2020/21 (2,598).



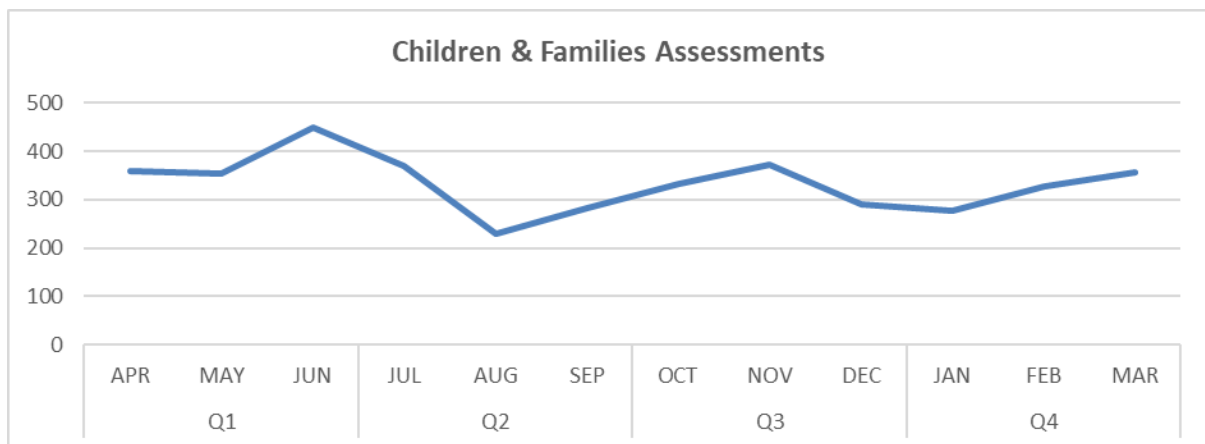
3.3 Rate of referrals

3.3.1 As at 31 March 2022, the rate of referrals per 10,000 was 605.5 compared to 629.3 as at 31st March 2021 indicating a marginal decrease. Based on benchmarking 2020-21 data, Thurrock is above the Statistical Neighbour rate of 489 and the England rate of 494.



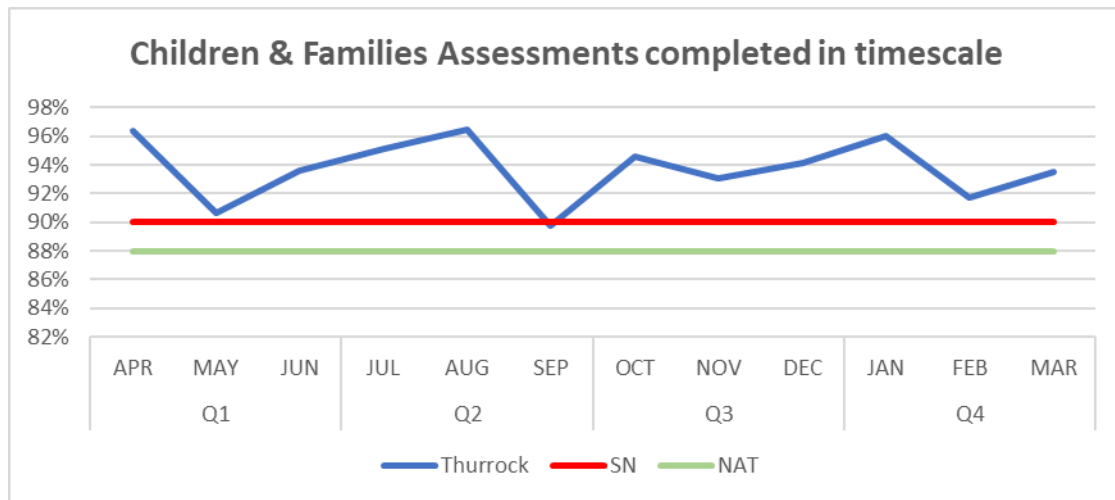
3.4 Children & Families Assessments

3.4.1 Between January to March 2022, 958 assessments were completed compared to 1,093.3 in the same quarter in 2020-21. This indicates a 14% decrease when comparing the two periods.



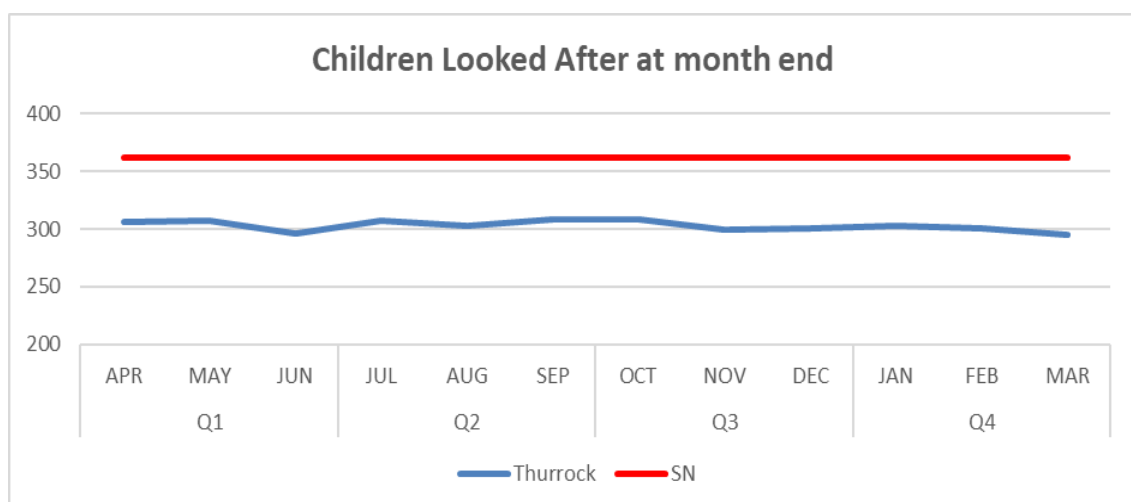
3.5 Children & Families Assessments completed in timescale

3.5.1 The number of assessments completed in timescale continues to show good performance at 93.5% as at 31 March 2022. The benchmarking data in 2021-22 shows that Thurrock remains above the Statistical Neighbour average of 90% and National average of 88%.



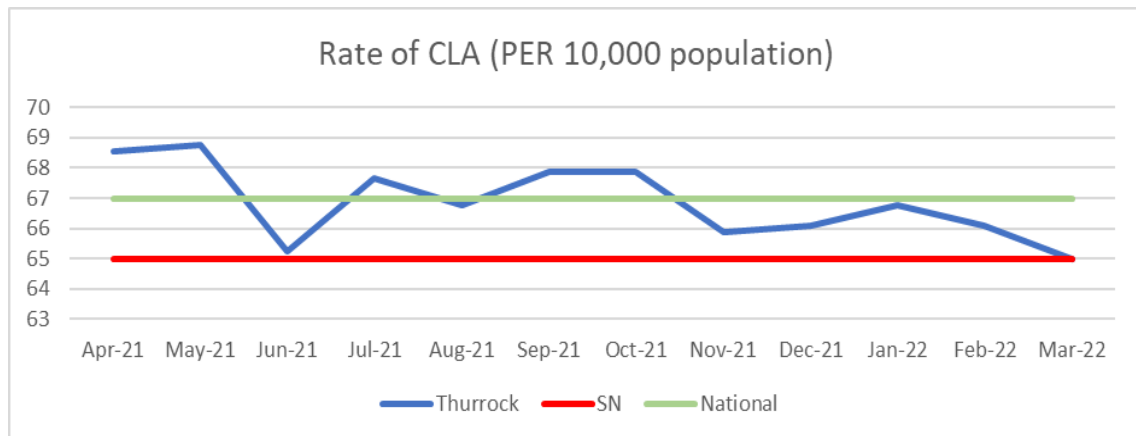
4. Children Looked After (CLA)

4.1 The graph below shows the number of children who were Looked After at the end of each month. The numbers have remained stable and 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.



4.2 The rate of CLA per 10,000 population

4.2.1 The graph below shows the rate of Children Looked After per 10,000 population of under 18 year olds in Thurrock. At 31 March 2022 there were 294 Children Looked After in Thurrock which shows a rate of 64 per 10,000 of children who are looked after. Based on 2020-21 benchmarking data, Thurrock is marginally below the National rate of 67 rate and in line with the Statistical Neighbour rate of 65.

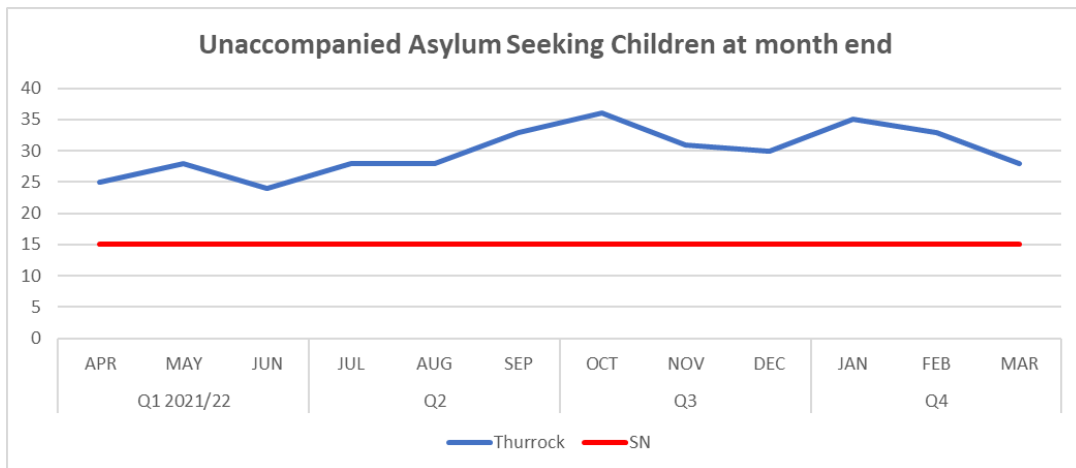


4.2.2 It is anticipated that our number of looked after children will increase slightly over the next quarter to be within our usual range of 290-300 looked after children.

4.3 Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Children (UASC)

4.3.1 UASC are a subset of the Children Looked After number above. Local Authorities through agreement have determined 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.

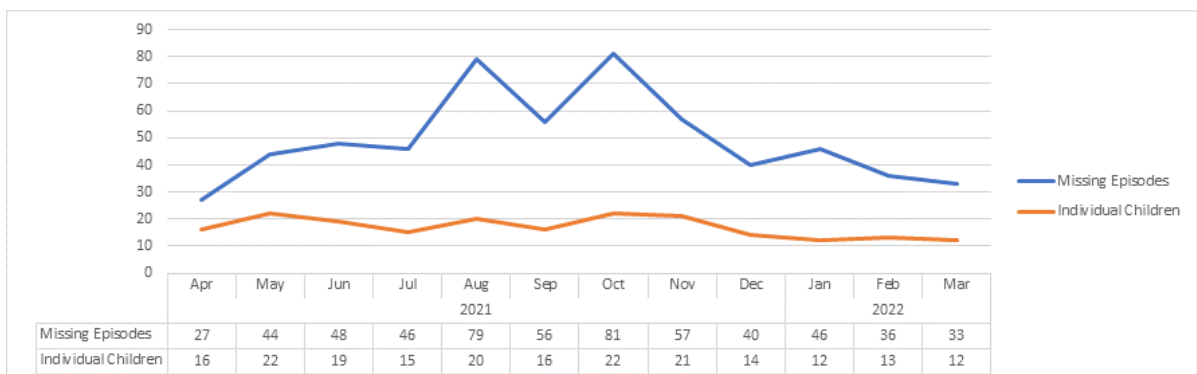
4.3.2 Thurrock's allocated number was 28, however, this has now increased to 31 children. As at 31st March 2022, there are 28 UASC Children looked after.



4.3.3 Thurrock continues to be a port of entry for unaccompanied children, and we anticipate returning to at or above the ceiling of 31 children within the next quarter.

4.4 CLA missing episodes started

4.4.1 The graph below shows the number of missing episodes started and the count of the individual children who went missing between April 2021 and March 2022. There is an observed increase in the number of Missing Episodes throughout quarter 2 and into Quarter 3, gradually decreasing again through Quarter 3 and 4, however, the number of individual children that have gone missing has remained relatively stable. The number of missing looked after children between January 2022 and March 2022 was 25 with 115 missing episodes. Three children accounted for 62 of the 115 missing episodes; these stances are carefully tracked via regular strategy meetings to identify the reasons for the episodes and how these can be managed. The most common reason for children going missing was contact with family and friends, representing 54% of missing episodes. Downward trends reflects changes in circumstances for a small group of children with a high number of missing episodes.

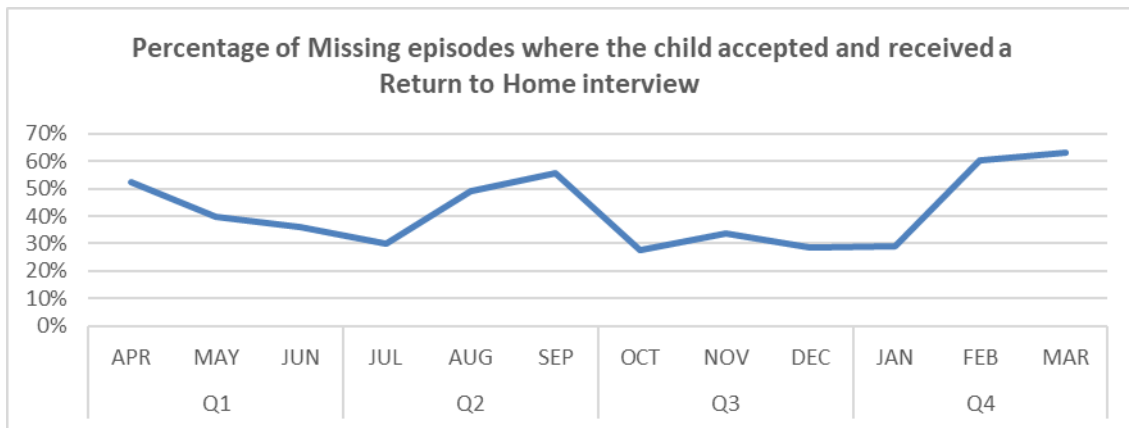


4.4.2 The length of a missing episode varies. A missing episode is not always indicative of a high level of risk. As an example, a sixteen-year-old child will be reported missing if they do not return home when expected and have not contacted their carer, but they may only be late home due to, a missed train,

wishing to stay out longer with friends or have a flat mobile phone. Nevertheless, each instance is reported and carefully monitored. A multi-agency escalation process is used to address any instances of concern ensuring partners like the Police are involved and join us in safeguarding children.

4.5 **CLA return to home interview (RHI)**

- 4.5.1 Since 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.
- 4.5.2 Between January and March 2022, the average take up was 50% by all young people offered a RHI which is in line with the same period in 2020. The offer of an RHI via Inspire is not always accepted by young people for several reasons including not wanting to reveal their whereabouts when missing and not believing that they were missing but out. All young people who have a missing episode are reviewed at the weekly Risk Management Meeting.
- 4.5.3 The graph below shows the percentage of return to home interviews taken up by young people through Inspire over the last 12 months. There has been an increase in the number of missing episodes in a cohort of 7 young people who have consistently refused return home interviews. We are reviewing how we engage this cohort of young people and alternatives such as whether there is anyone within the network better placed to have these conversations when they return from missing episodes including their social worker and how this information is captured. Part of this review will include gaining an understanding from young people about what works for them, what the barriers are to taking up a return home interview and working with representatives from the National Working Group who are supporting Inspire to improve the take up of that offer.

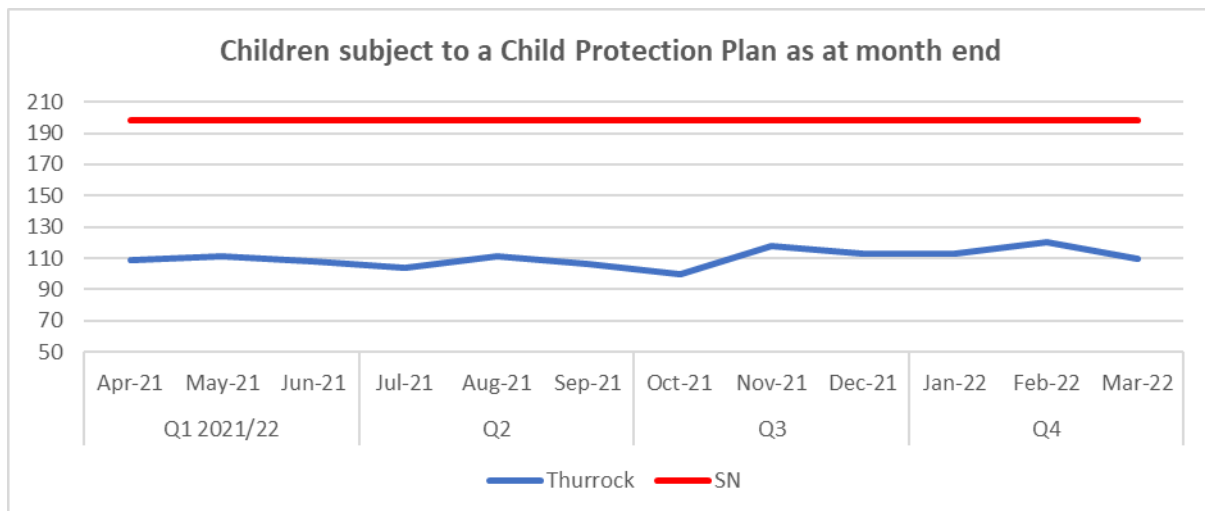


5. Children Subject to a Child Protection Plan (CPP)

5.1 Number of Children subject to Child Protection Plan

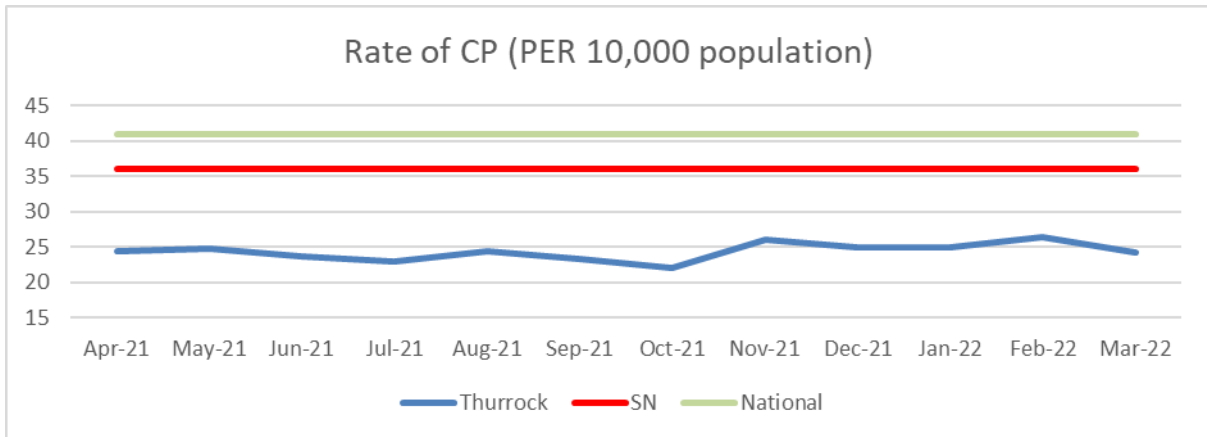
5.1.1 As at 31 March 2022 the number of children subject to a Child Protection Plan was 110 which is in line with the same period in 2020 (110).

5.1.2 Based on 2020-21 benchmarking data, Thurrock is below the Statistical Neighbour of 198.



5.1.3 As at 31st March 2022, the rate of children subject to a Child Protection Plan was 24.2 per 10,000 population compared to 24.6 as at end of March 2020. Based on the benchmarking data 2020-21, Thurrock is below the Statistical Neighbour average of 36 and England average of 41 in September 2021. As the rate has been consistent since December 2020 and there are mechanisms in place to provide reassurance that the right children are subject to child protection plans for example the Child protection surgery, periodic audits of children subject to child in need plans, multi-agency audits of Early Help cases and MASH cases. There is a continued commitment throughout

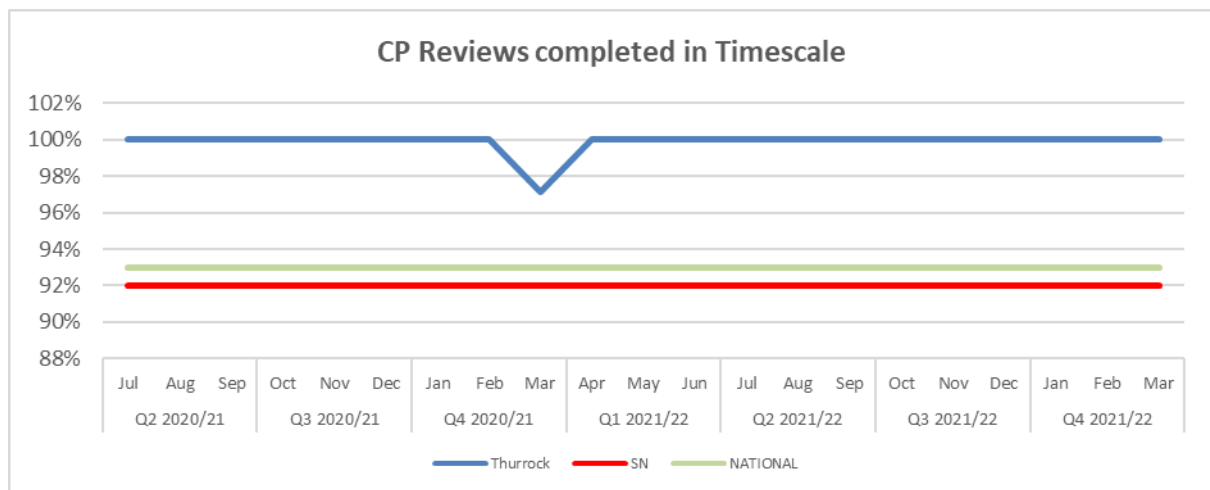
Thurrock to ensure that that families are given every opportunity to resolve issues and achieve sustainable change as safely as possible whilst ensuring that intrusion into family life is kept as low as possible. In light of this the use of Child Protection planning is constantly reviewed to ensure that it is consistent and proportionate.



5.1.4 The introduction and further embedding of the Signs of Safety practice model which is strengths-based approach to working with families and a focus on timely decision making for children has helped to maintain the number of children with a plan.

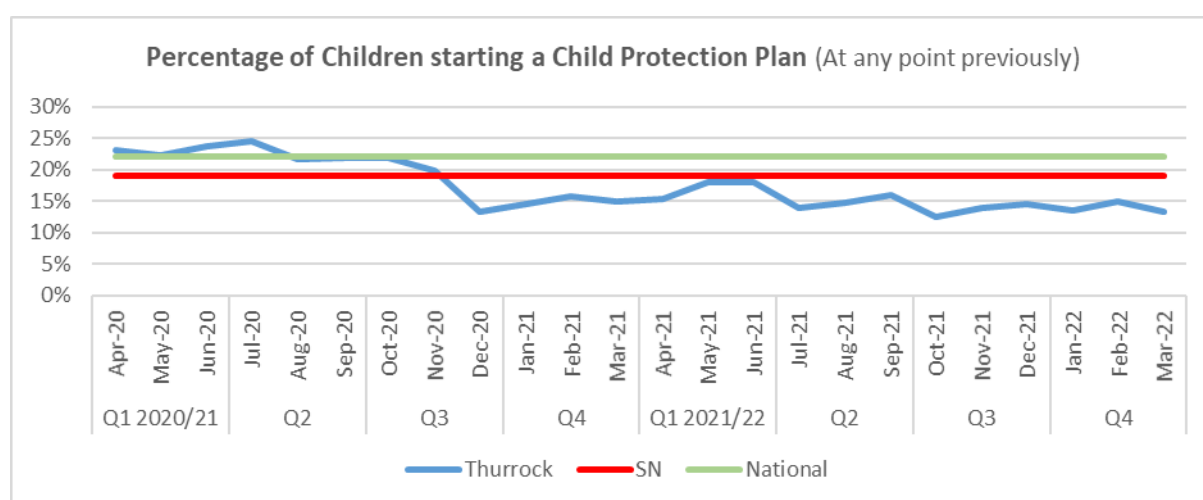
5.2 Child Protection reviews

5.2.1 Child Protection plan reviews completed on time continue showing good performance. As at 31 March 2022 100% of reviews were completed in timescale. Compared to 2020-21 benchmarking data, Thurrock is performing above the Statistical Neighbour average of 92% and the England average of 93%. This performance is maintained by systematic and clear planning which is driven by clear business administrative processes.



5.3 Repeat Child Protection Plan

5.3.1 As at 31 March 2022, the percentage of children subject to repeat Child Protection Plan (at any point previously) was 13% compared to 14.9% as at 31st March 2020. As at 30 September 2021, the number of Children starting a repeat Child Protection Plan (at any point previously) was 27 children which is in line with March 2020 (27). Based on the latest benchmarking data available in 2020-21, Thurrock is below the statistical neighbour average of 19% and below England average of 22% as at 31st March 2022. Children who are subject to a repeat plan are closely monitored, with requests agreed by the Strategic Lead to ensure that repeated Child Protection intervention is proportionate and effective.



6. Care Leaving Service

6.1 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.

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

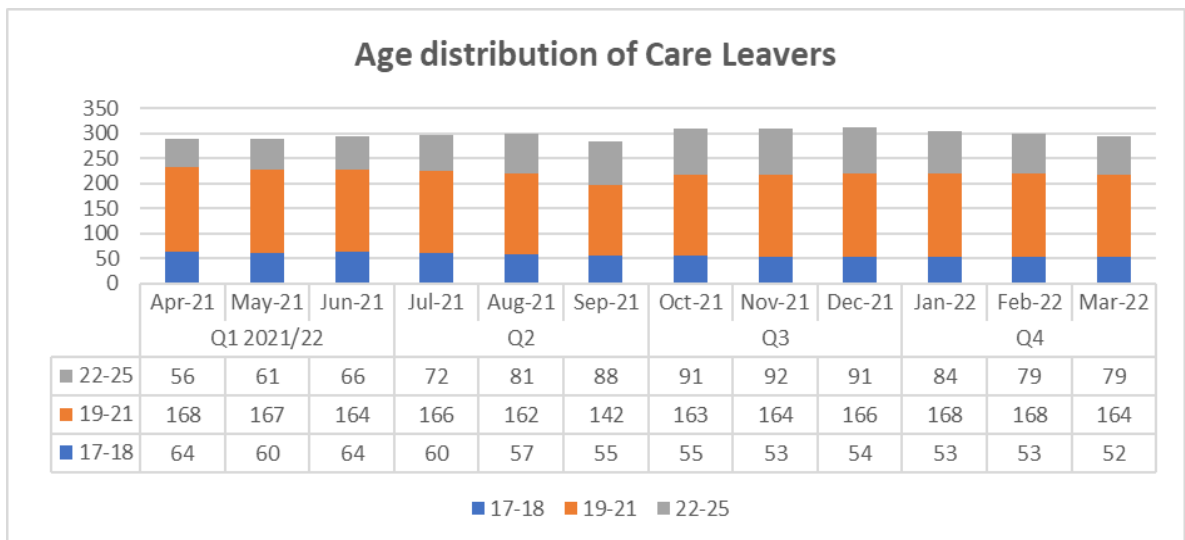
- Eligible child - a young person who is 16 or 17 and who has been looked after by the local authority/health and social care trust for at least a period of 13 weeks since the age of 14, and who is still looked after.
- Relevant child - a young person who is 16 or 17 who has left care after their 16th 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.

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

6.3 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.

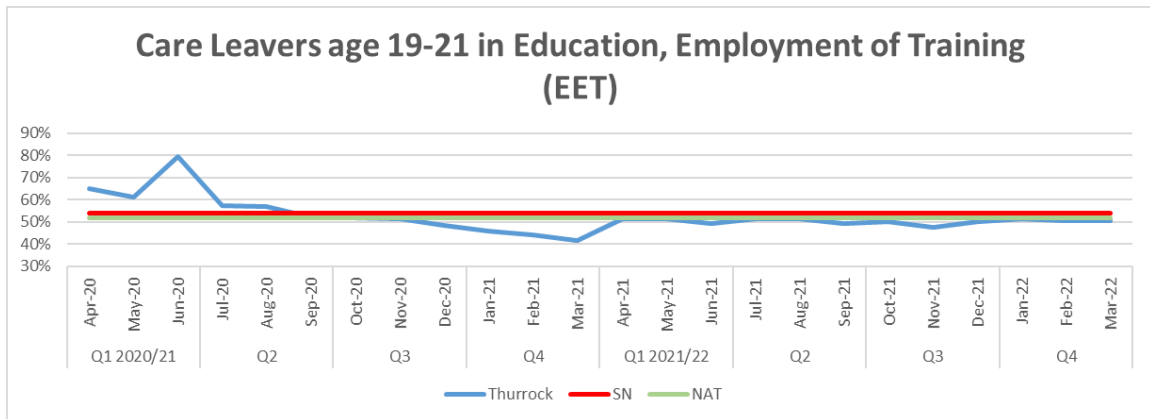
6.4 As at end of March 2022, 295 Care Leavers were being supported and were receiving an Aftercare service. This is a marginal increase from the previous year and this cohort now has a wider remit as all Care Leavers can request support services until the age of 25, under the Children and Social Work Act 2017.

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



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

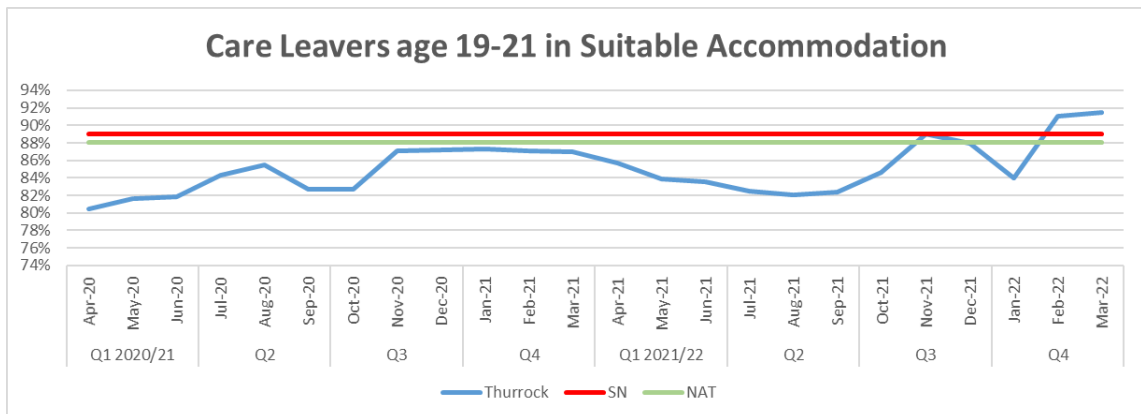
6.6.1 At the end of March 2022, 50.6% of the Care Leavers aged 19- to 21-year-old were in part- or full-time education, employment or training compared to 41.4% in March 2021. To strengthen oversight and planning to ensure our young people have support and opportunities for Education, Employment and 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.



6.7 Care Leavers age 19 to 21 years in Suitable Accommodation

6.7.1 At the end of March 2022, the number of 19 to 21 year old Care Leavers reported to be in suitable accommodation was 91.5%. There are some care leavers who are not in touch with the service and their 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.

6.7.2 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.

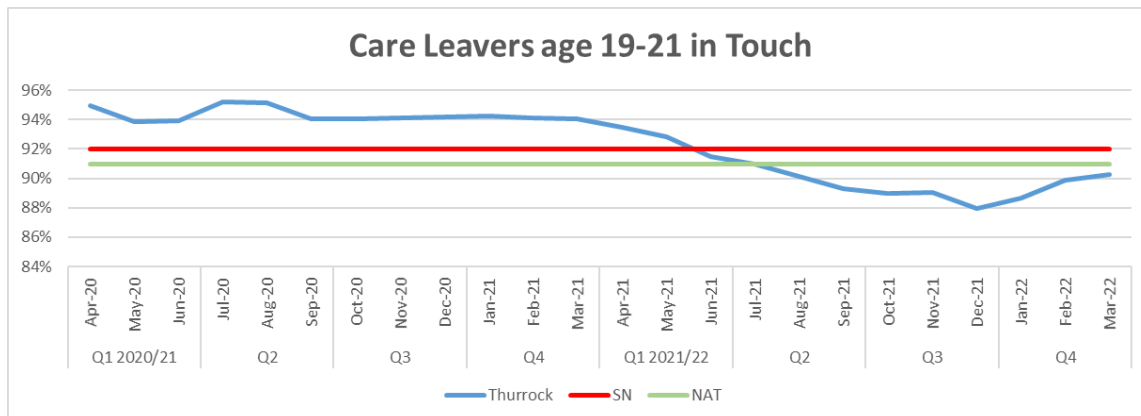


6.7.3 There is consistent improvement over the course of the last two years with regards to the measure.

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

6.8.1 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 March 2022, Thurrock was in touch with 90.2% of Care Leavers.

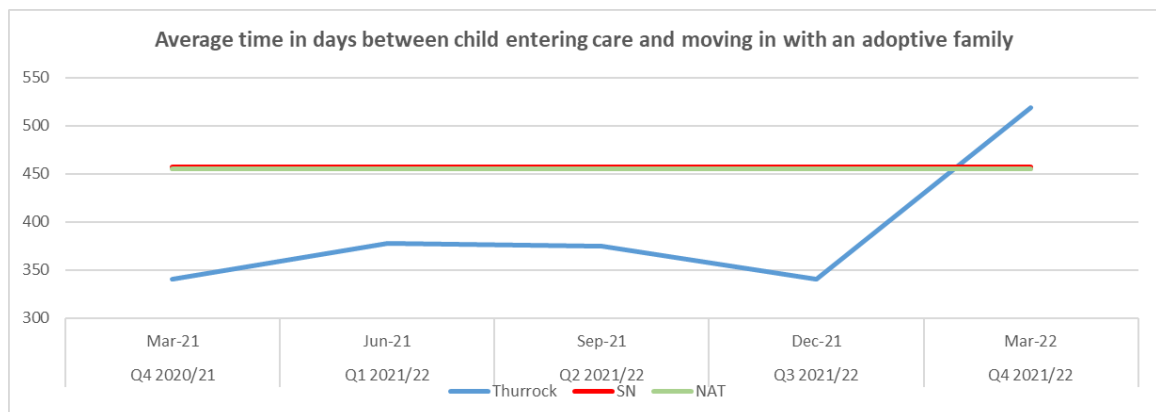
6.8.2 Thurrock's performance is slightly below the statistical neighbour average of 92% and England average of 91% at the end of March 2022.



7. Adoption

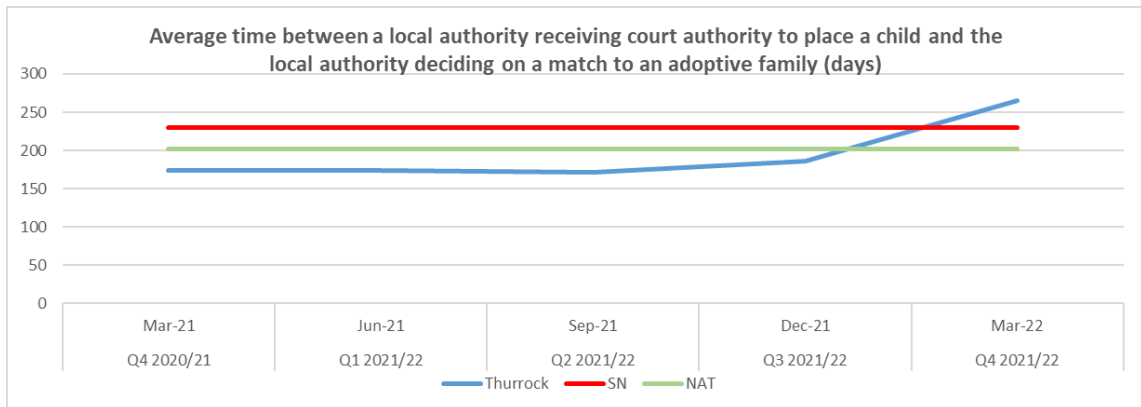
7.1 Timeliness of Adoption

7.1.1 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 March 2022, Thurrock's average was 519 days. Based on the latest benchmarking data 2021, Thurrock is above the Statistical Neighbour average of 457 days and England average of 455 days. The graph below shows that there is a steep increase in the average time taken from entering care to adoption; there is significant statistical impact by the adoption journey of one child.



7.1.2 As at end of March 2022, the average time in days between Thurrock receiving a Placement Order (court authority) to place a child with the adoptive family was 265 days.

7.1.3 Based on the latest benchmarking data in 2021, Thurrock is above the Statistical Neighbour average of 230 days and England average of 202 days.



7.1.4 The impact of COVID 19 on the local Court has been to reduce Court capacity leading to much longer sets of proceedings. Although the pandemic is over, the capacity issues persist. Considerable delays are noted between Issues Resolution Hearing and final hearings. Senior officers meet with the lead family Judge monthly to review and identify cases of concern so they can be prioritised. As timescales for proceedings have increased this has allowed time for continued work with families leading some ADM (Agency Decision Maker) decisions to be reviewed.

7.1.5 As a result, the 12-month rolling average from children becoming looked after to placement with adopters has extended, our three-year average is 364days. There is an exceptional case which when excluded from the data changes the 12-month rolling average to 419 days, meaning that vast majority of children who require adoption are placed within target timescales.

7.1.6 There were 8 adoption orders in 2021/22 which is the same as the previous financial year. We anticipate this number rising this year as proceedings conclude and court delays are addressed. Thurrock now has its own pool of adopters and strong regional working arrangements which means we can search and link with adopters in anticipation of a final hearing more effectively. In the last year, half of the placement orders granted have been subject to robust challenge by parents which has impacted matching and placement. Thurrock is tracking these cases carefully and takes legal advice to minimise delay.

7.2 **CLA permanency**

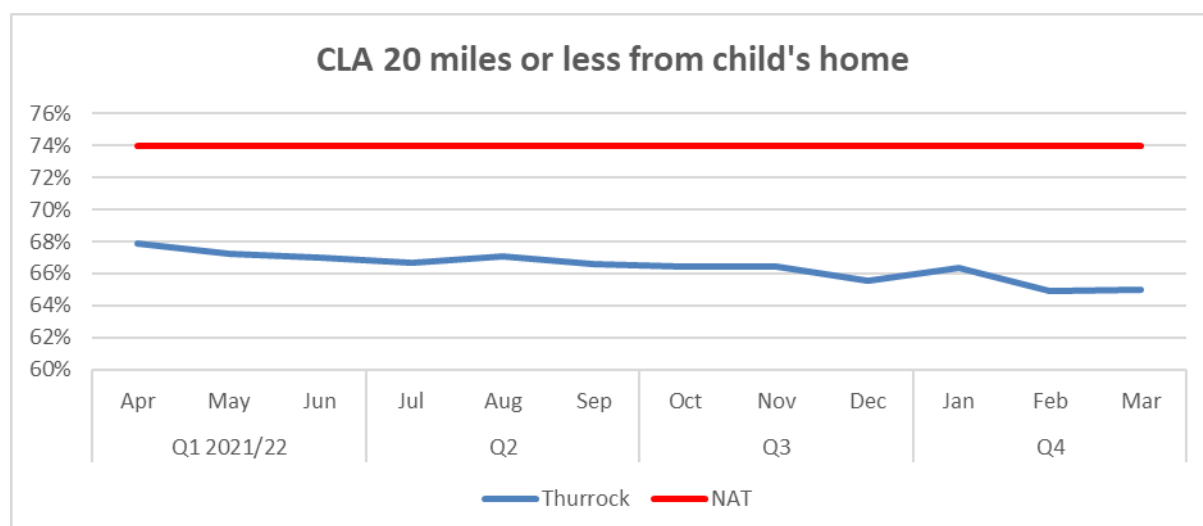
7.2.1 Purposeful early permanency planning continues to ensure that children are in the right placement at the right time to meet their needs. Securing placements where needed and supporting children, where appropriate, to remain at home with their families is the priority. Children are placed for adoption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

7.2.2 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. The court capacity issue continues to impact as discussed above. Thurrock continues to progress all options for permanency for looked after children during the court proceeding or their first period in care if voluntarily accommodated which continues until the outcome is known. For children who are subject to full care orders, the Fostering Panel Advisor tracks and promotes long term fostering matches. 21 children have been long-term matched with their foster carers in Q4 of 21/22.

7.3 CLA placement distance

7.3.1 It is good practice to ensure that children remain within their communities. At the end of March 2022, 65% of the Children Looked After cohort were placed within 20 miles or less from their homes, which represents 187 of 287 children looked after. Based on the latest benchmarking data available in March 2021, the national average is 74%.

7.3.2 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 care², (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.



² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/childrens-social-care-market-study-interim-report/interim-report>.

8. Reasons for Recommendations

8.1 Children's Overview & Scrutiny Board Members 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, Crime and Disorder, 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

Report author

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Children's Services