

17 November 2022		ITEM: 7
Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee		
Children's Social Care Performance – Quarter 2 2022-23		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Non-key	
Report of: Anna Watkins, Business Intelligence Analyst		
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 shows that:

- Between July and September 2022, the number of The Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) contacts received was 1,323 compared to 1,359 in the same period in 2021.
- Between July and September 2022, the number of referrals was 494 compared to 559 between July and September 2021.
- 94% of the children and families' assessments were completed in timescale compared to 90% in 2021. This shows a consistent performance.
- As at end of September 2022, the number of children subject to a Child Protection Plan was 83 compared to 106 in September 2021. Children subject to a Child Protection plan are carefully reviewed and does fluctuate each quarter, therefore this decrease does not present any concern.

In Q2 2022-23, the number of Child Protection episodes starting was 20 compared to 42 in the same period in 2021. In Q2 2022-23. Child protection episodes ending was 44 which is in line with 42 in Q2 2021-22.

- Between July and September 2022, 77 cases were stepped down. This shows 31% drop when comparing to the same period in 2021-22. 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 2, 2022-23 (Jul-Sep 2022). 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.

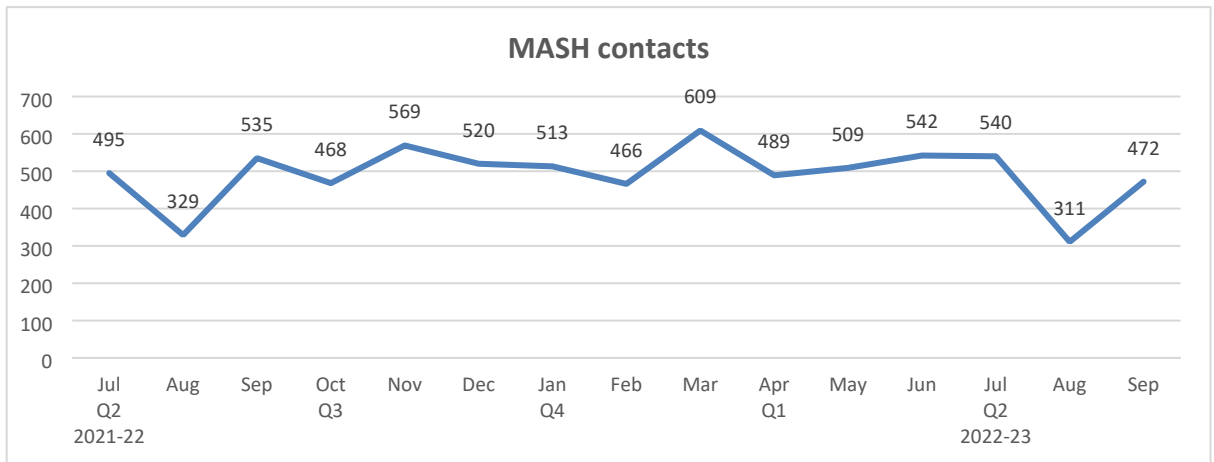
This data has been presented and discussed with the Children & Families Performance Group.

3. Thurrock Performance data

3.1 MASH Contacts

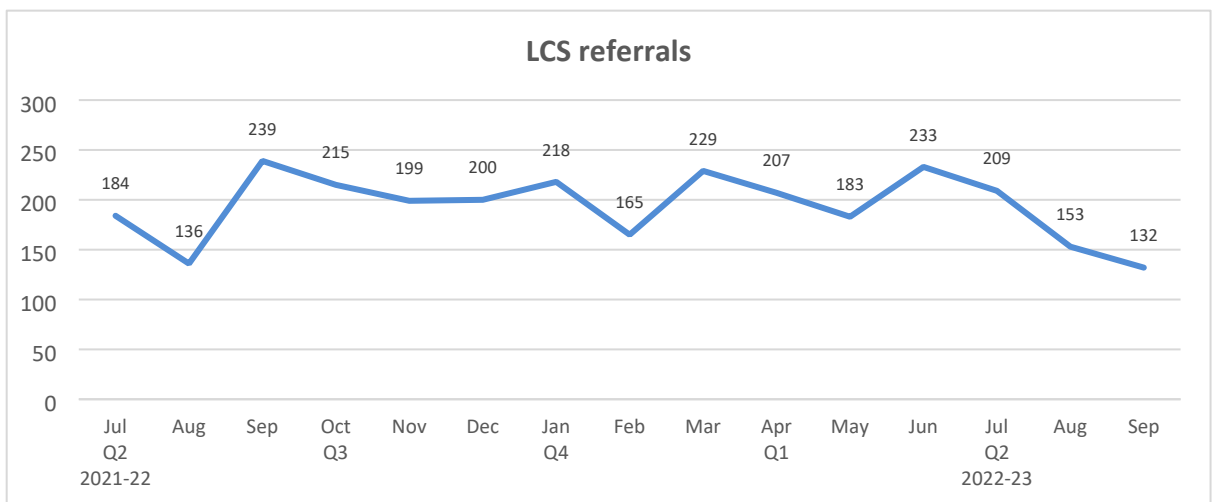
Between July and September 2022 (Quarter 2), the number of MASH contacts received was 1,323 which is in line with 1,359 in the same period in 2021.

Of the total contacts of 1,323 received in the period, 39% resulted in no further action and the remaining required some level of intervention.



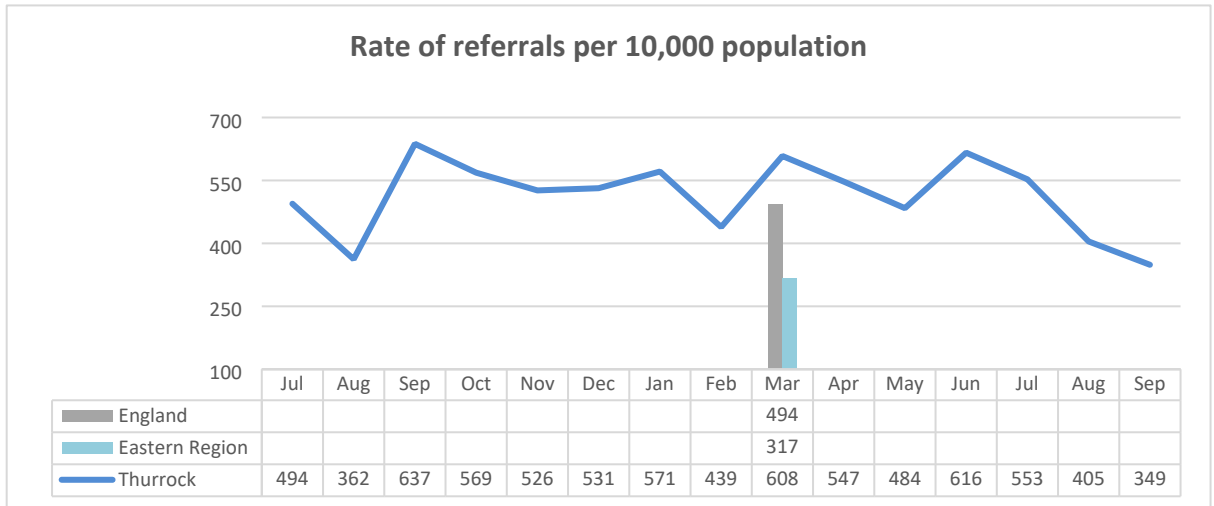
3.2 Referrals

Between July and September 2022, the number of referrals was 494 compared to 559 in the same period in 2021. This shows 11% drop in number of referrals when comparing the two quarters. Between 01 April 2021 to 31 March 2022, there were 2,462 LCS referrals compared to 2,601 in the previous year. This shows a marginal drop of 5%. The below shows the number of referrals since Q2 2021-22.



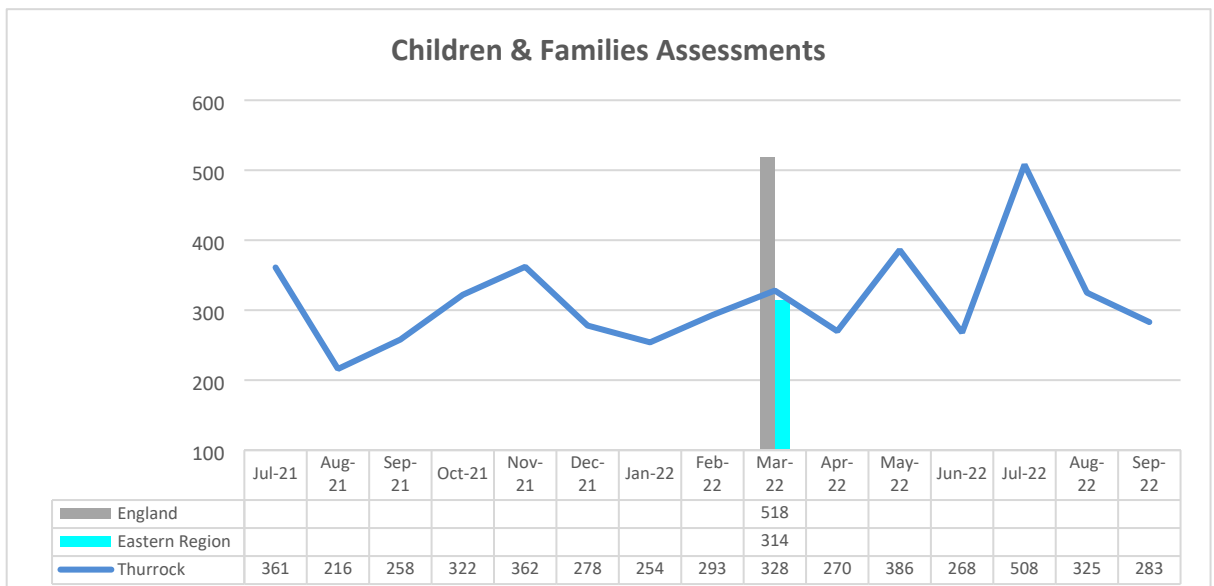
3.3 Rate of referrals

As at the end of September 2022, the rate of referrals per 10,000 was 349 compared to 637 in September 2021. Based on benchmarking 2021-22 data, Thurrock is below the England rate of 494 and above Eastern Region rate of 317.



3.4 Children & Families Assessments

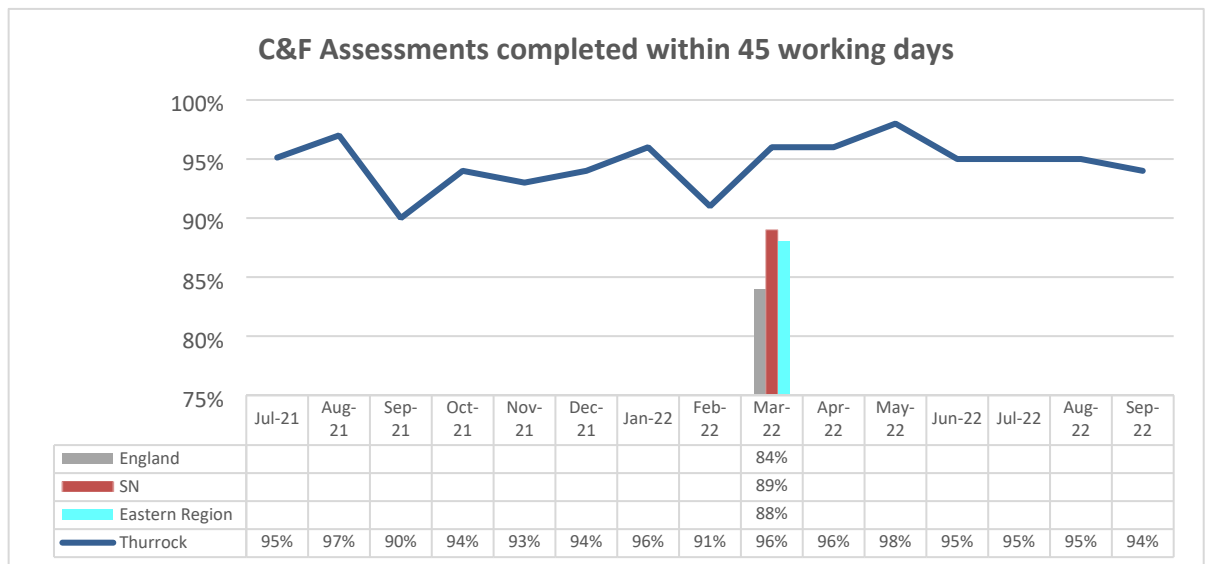
Between July and September 2022, 1,116 assessments were completed compared to 835 in the same quarter in the previous year. This shows 34% increase in Q2 2022-23. The graph below shows the number of assessments completed over time.



3.5 Children & Families Assessments completed in timescale

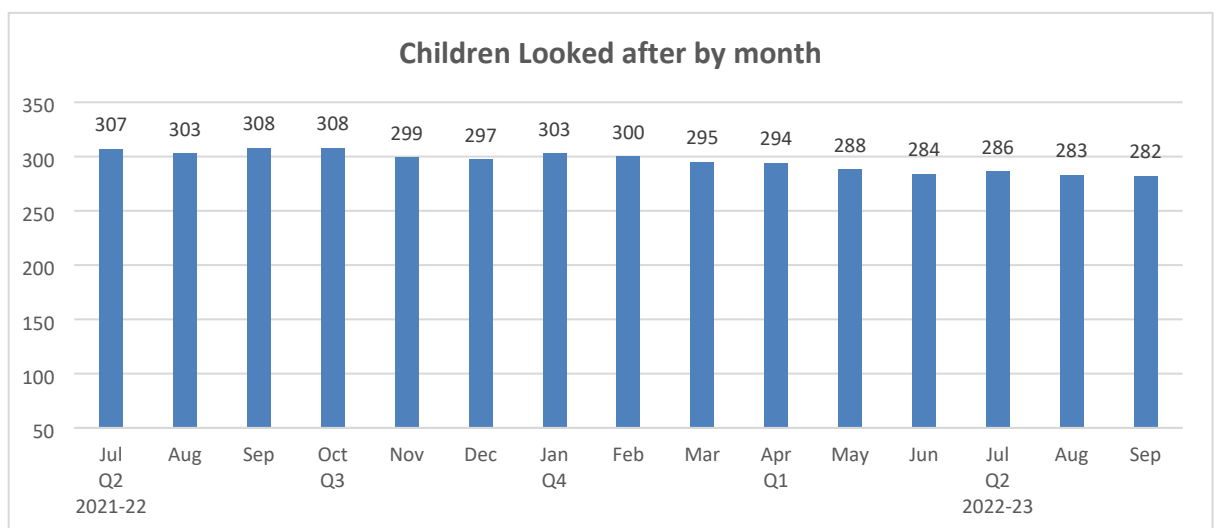
The number of assessments completed in timescale continues to show good performance at 94% as at end of September 2022.

The benchmarking data in March 2021-22 shows that at the end of Q2 2022-23. Thurrock was above Statistical Neighbour average of 89%, the England average of 84% and Eastern Region average of 88%.



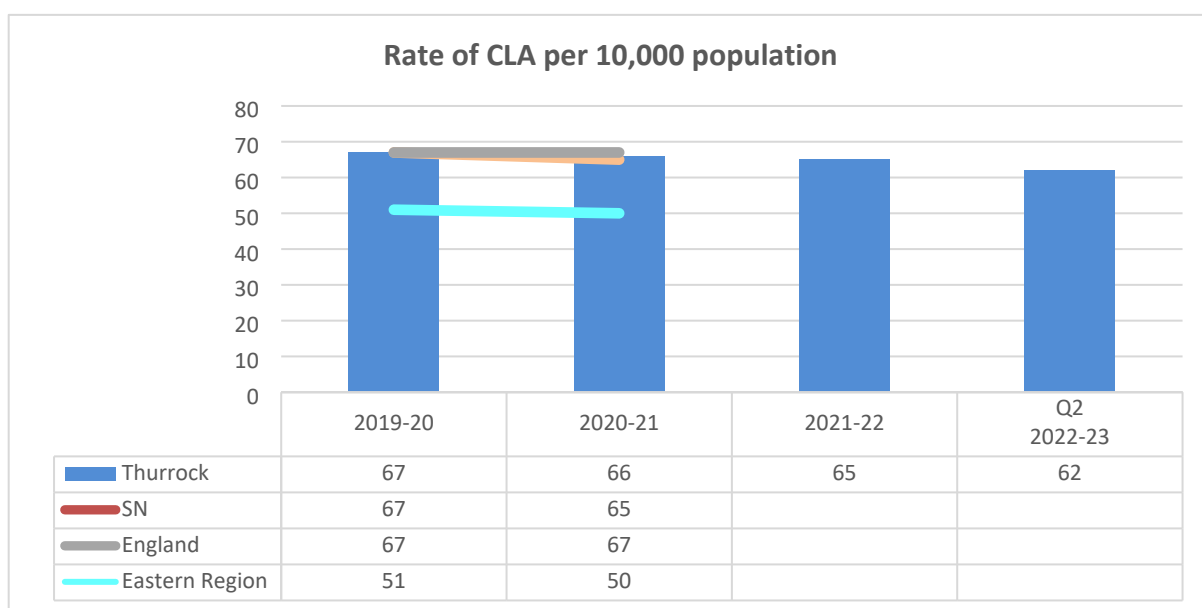
4. Children Looked After (CLA)

The graph below shows the number of children who were Looked After at the end of each month. 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. Care entries have been lower over June July and August. We can expect this to change upward in the autumn as case are heard at court and UASC are transferred in to Thurrock (See s.4.2).



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 September 2022 there were 282 Children Looked After in Thurrock with the rate of 62 per 10,000. Based on the benchmarking data 2021, Thurrock is below the Statistical Neighbour average of 65 and England average of 67 as at the end of September 2022.



4.2 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.

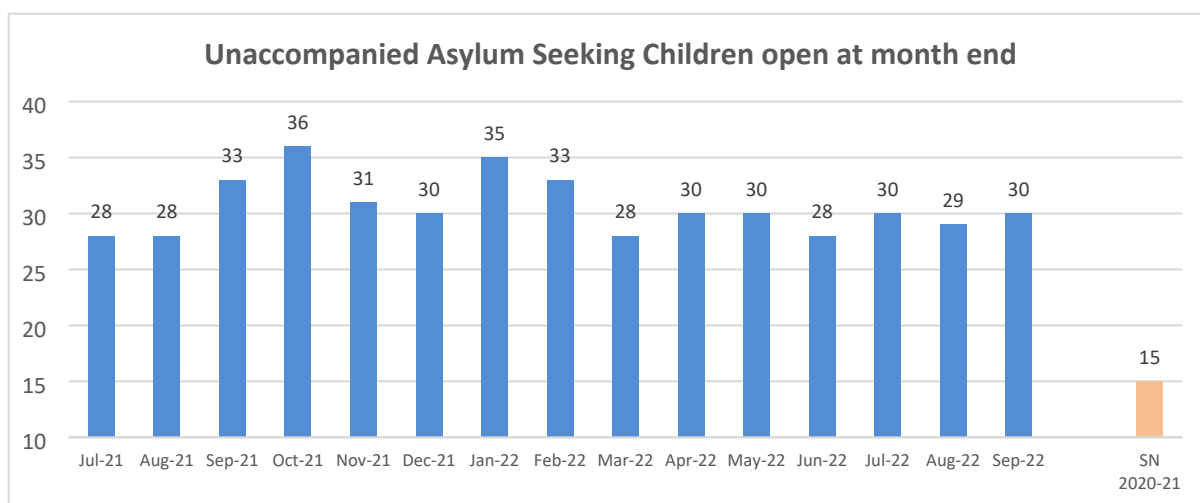
Thurrock's allocated number was 31 children; this has now been uplifted by the Home Office to 45 children. This means that Thurrock will now receive transfers in from other authorities and these will likely be from migrant processing centres in Kent. This will increase demand for placements, social work time and After Care support on a long term basis. This will impact more in Q3. Over the last year there have been fewer children arriving at Thurrock Ports/found in vehicles in Thurrock as the preferred route appears to have been through Dover. Between July and September 2022, there were 5 new UASC arrivals into Thurrock compared to 10 in the same period in 2021.

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.

The below graph shows the number of UASC that were looked after at the end of each month since July 2021.



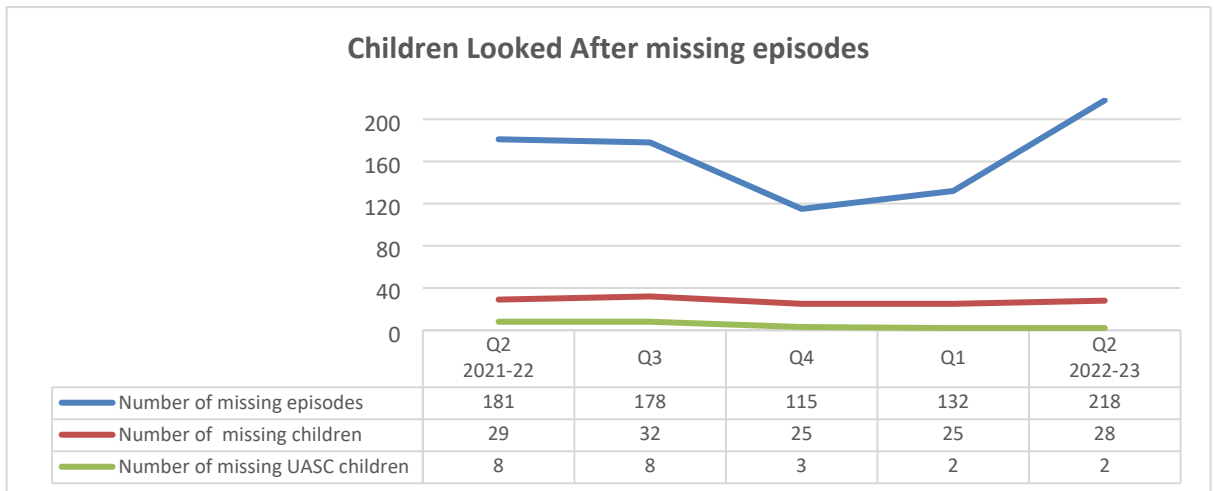
4.3 Children who ceased to be looked after

It is normal for the number of children leaving care to fluctuate. Between July and September 2022, 17 children ceased to be looked after and is in line with the same period in 2021 when 21 children ceased to be looked after.

4.4 CLA who go missing

Between July and September 2022, there were total of 218 missing episodes represented by 28 individual children. The below chart shows the trend for missing episodes since Q2 2021-22.

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

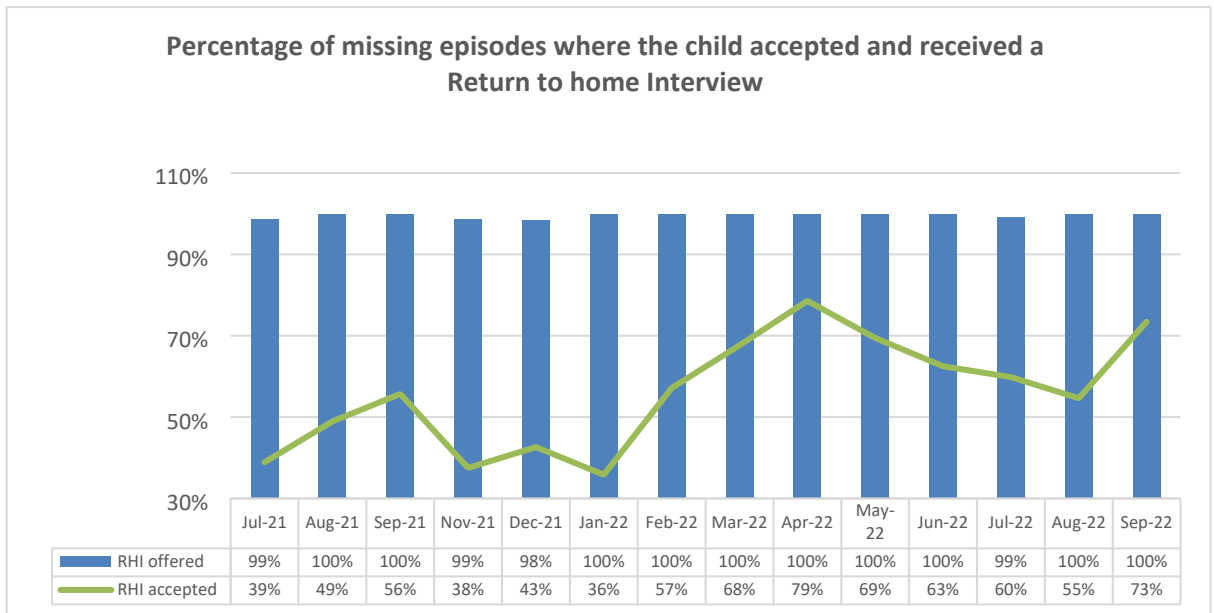


4.5 CLA return to home interview (RHI)

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 also 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.

As at end of September 2022, the percentage of children offered a return to home interview was 100% of which 72% accepted and received an interview compared to 56% in September 2021. This represents 16% increase in interviews being accepted and received. 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.

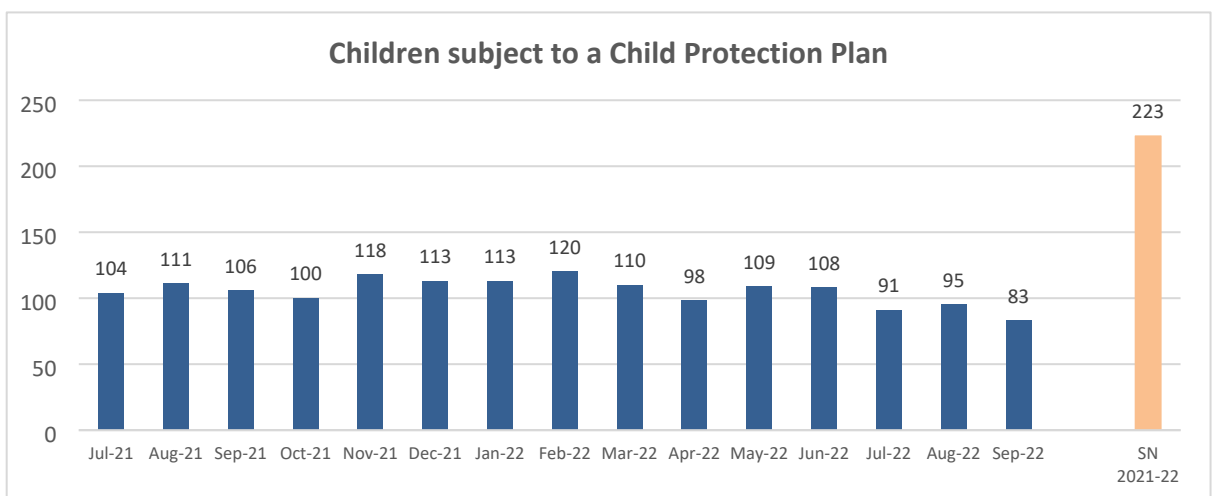
The graph below shows the percentage of return to home interviews taken up by young people through Inspire since July 2021. There continues to be a small number of CLA with a large number of episodes who have consistently refused return home interviews. We continue to review how Inspire engage this cohort 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. This has increased the amount of Return Home Interviews completed and has ensured that young people are given the opportunities to share whether there are any safeguarding issues in relation to exploitation that needs to be addressed. that offer.



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

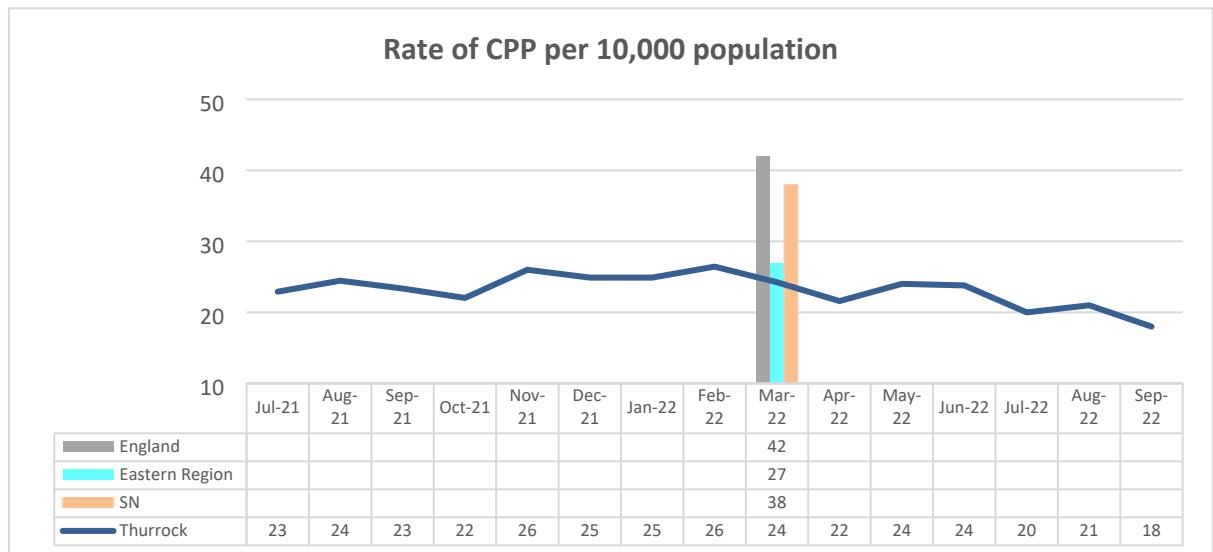
5.1 Number of Children subject to Child Protection Plan

At the end of September 2022, the number of children subject to a Child Protection Plan was 83 compared to 106 in September 2021. Based on 2021-22 benchmarking data, Thurrock remains below the Statistical Neighbour of 223. Whilst the figure for September may be low, it is important to acknowledge that this figure of 83 coincides with the school summer holidays and historical data points to a decline in numbers from August to September. Additionally, number of children subject to a Child Protection Plan have been significantly lower than statistical neighbours for several years. It is in line with high performing Local authorities in the Eastern Region.



5.2 The rate of CPP per 10,000 population

At the end of September 2022, the rate of children subject to a Child Protection Plan was 18.3 per 10,000 population compared to 23.4 in September 2021. Based on the benchmarking data 2021-22, Thurrock is below the Statistical Neighbour rate of 38.0 and England rate of 42.0. Despite being lower than statistical neighbours, average figures for the Eastern region are currently 26 per 10.00 at the end of Qu 1.

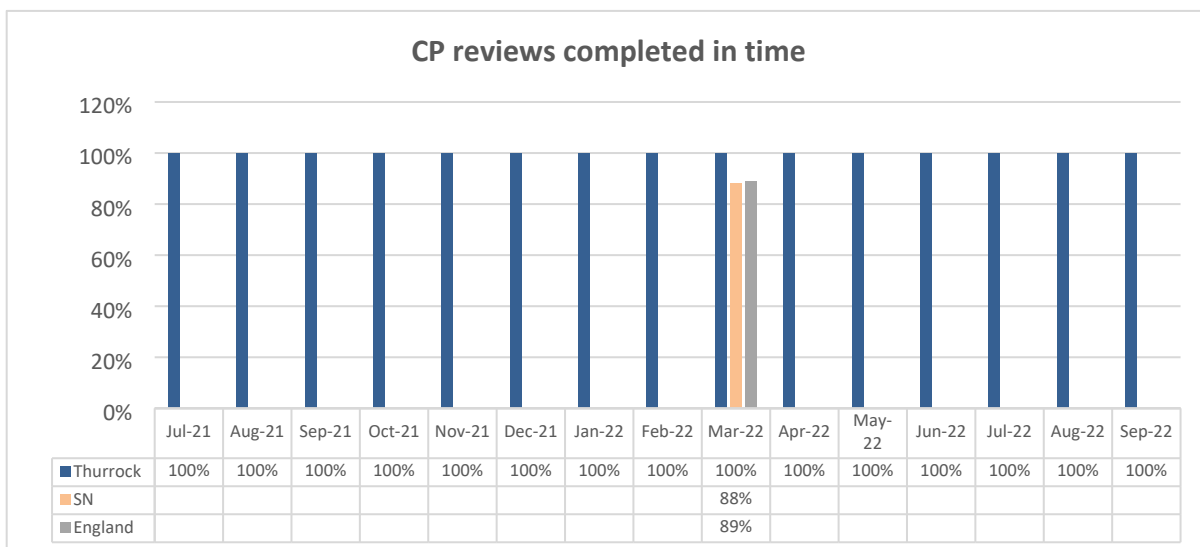


The introduction and further embedding of the Signs of Safety practice model which is strengths-based approach to working with families and a focus on timely decision making for children has helped to reduce the number of children with a plan.

5.3 Child Protection reviews

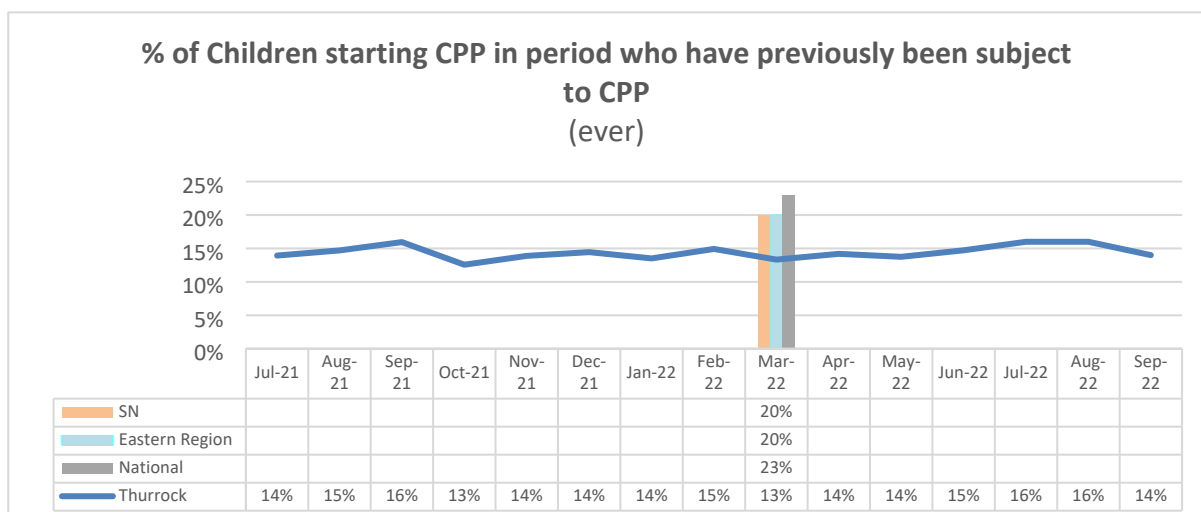
Child Protection plan reviews completed on time continue showing good performance. The below graph shows the overall trend since July 2021.

Compared to 2021-22 benchmarking data, Thurrock continues to perform above the Statistical Neighbour average of 88% and the England average of 89%.



5.4 Repeat Child Protection Plan

At the end of September 2022, the percentage of children subject to repeat Child Protection Plan (at any point previously) was 14% compared to 16% in September 2021. 2021-22 benchmarking data shows that in September 2022, Thurrock is below the Statistical Neighbour average of 20% and England average of 23% and Eastern Region average of 20%. This would indicate that the Child Protection plans have been effective in bringing about sustained change, as re-referrals are occurring less than comparators.



6. Care Leaving Service

The graphs below show the **OC3 care leaver cohort** (Relevant and Former Relevant Children whose 17th, 18th, 19th, 20th or 21st birthday falls within Financial Year) of Young People aged 16-25 years who are in receipt of a Care Leaving service. There have been 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.

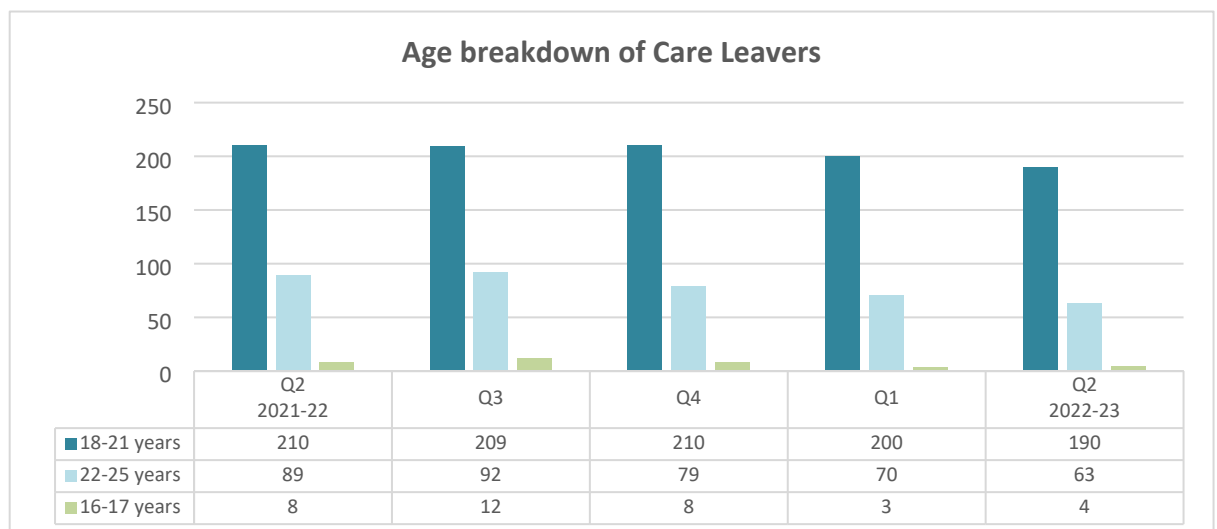
A Care Leaver, as defined in the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000², is a person who has been 'looked after' or 'in care' for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14, and who was in care on their 16th birthday.

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

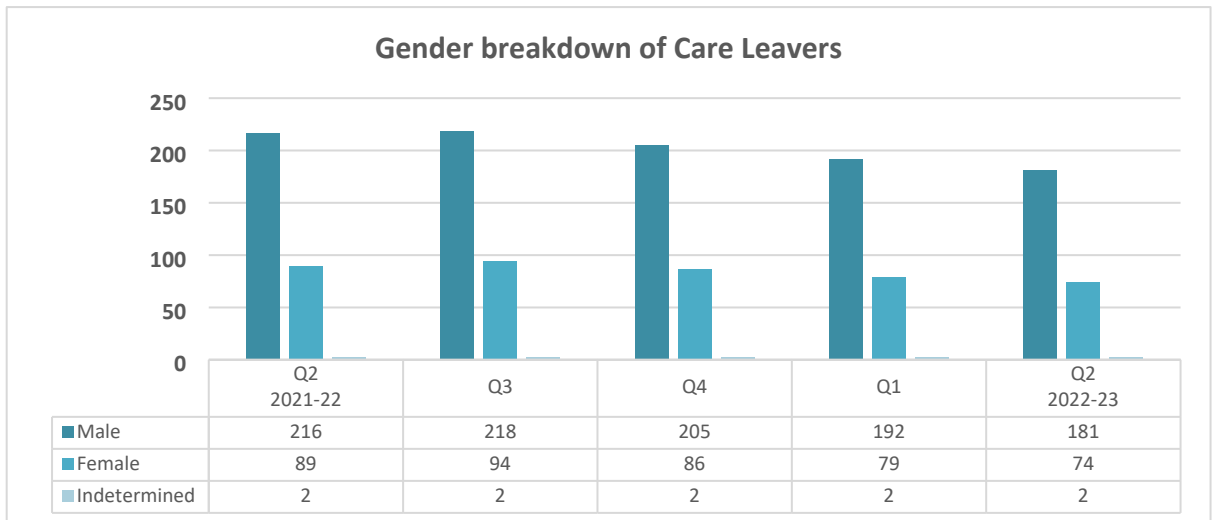
- Eligible child - a young person who is 16 or 17 and who has been looked after by the local authority/health and social care trust for at least a period of 13 weeks since the age of 14, and who is still looked after.
- Relevant child - a young person who is 16 or 17 who has left care after their 16th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

As at end of September 2022, 257 Care Leavers were being supported and were receiving an Aftercare service. This is a drop from the previous year of 298 as a result of the Service undertaking a review of open cases to ensure the young people open actually needed the support 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 charts below show the Care Leaver cohort broken down by age and gender.

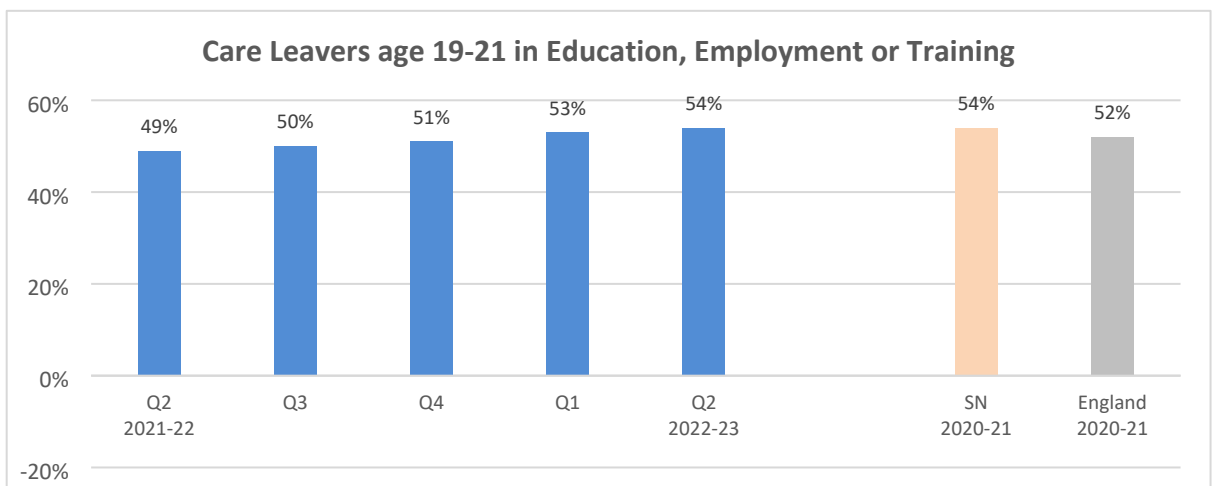


² <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/35/contents>



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

At the end of Q2 2022-23, 54% of the Care Leavers aged 19 to 21-year-old were in part or full-time education, employment or training compared to 49% in September 2021. Thurrock is in line with the Statistical Neighbour average of 54% and the England average of 52%. 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.

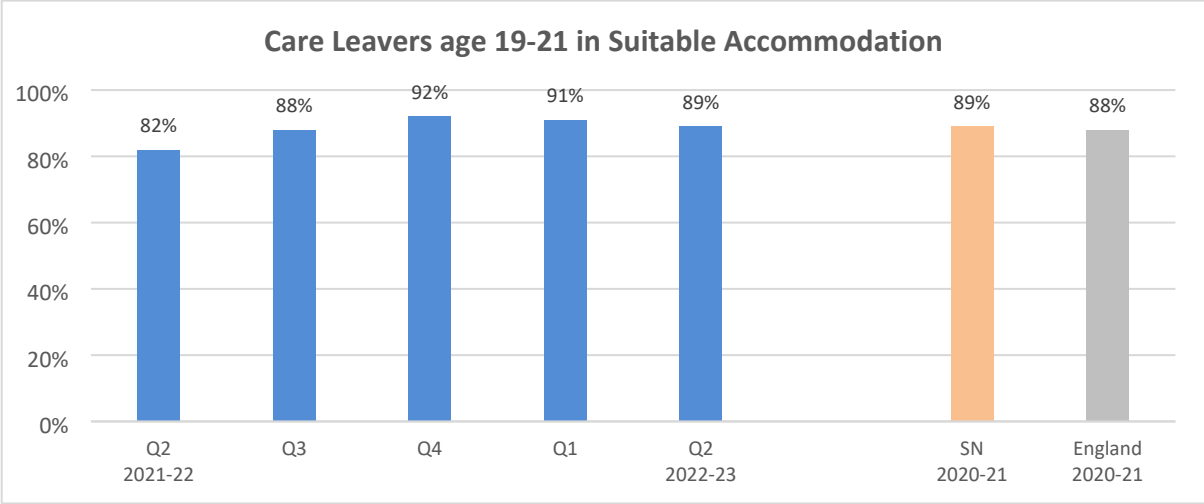


6.2 Care Leavers age 19 to 21 years in Suitable Accommodation

At the end of September 2022, the percentage of 19 to 21-year-old Care Leavers reported to be in suitable accommodation was 89%. Thurrock is in line with the Statistical Neighbour average of 89% and marginally above the England average of 88% based on 2021 benchmarking data. 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.

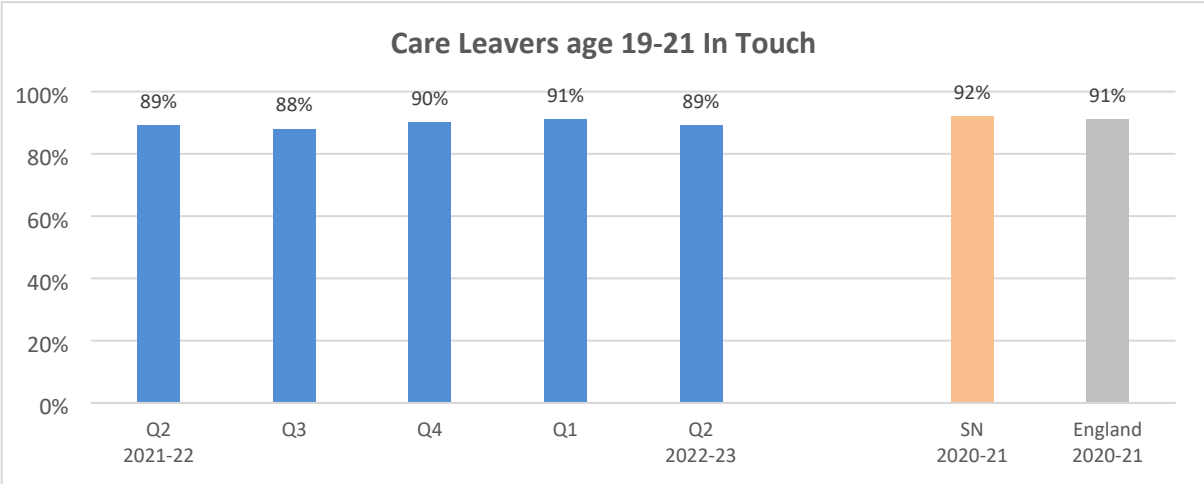
Increased housing support is being provided to young people by the Aftercare Service, Head Start Housing and Thurrock Housing Department. The 'Housing Offer' to Care Leavers has been updated with the Joint Housing Protocol 2020, ensuring good partnership working with clear pathways for young people to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



6.3 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 September 2022, Thurrock was in touch with 89% of Care Leavers. Thurrock's performance is in line with the Statistical Neighbour average of 92% and the England average of 91%.



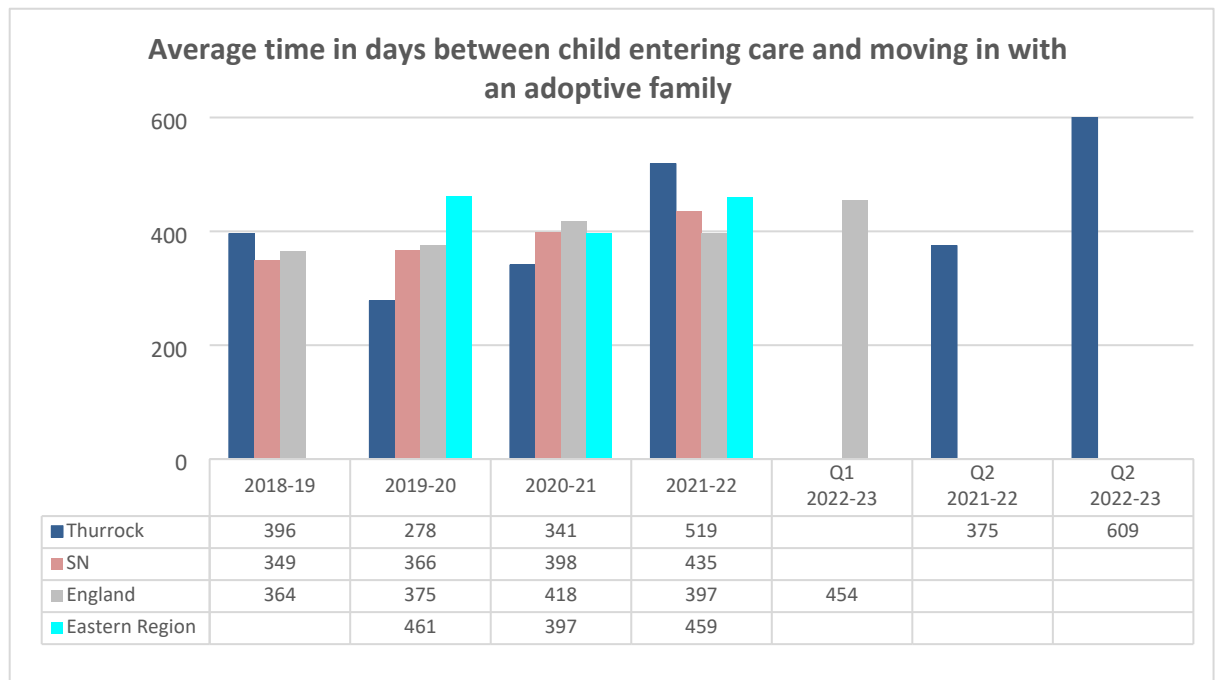
7. Adoption

As at the end of Q2 2022-23, there were 5 children adopted and 9 matched with prospective adopters.

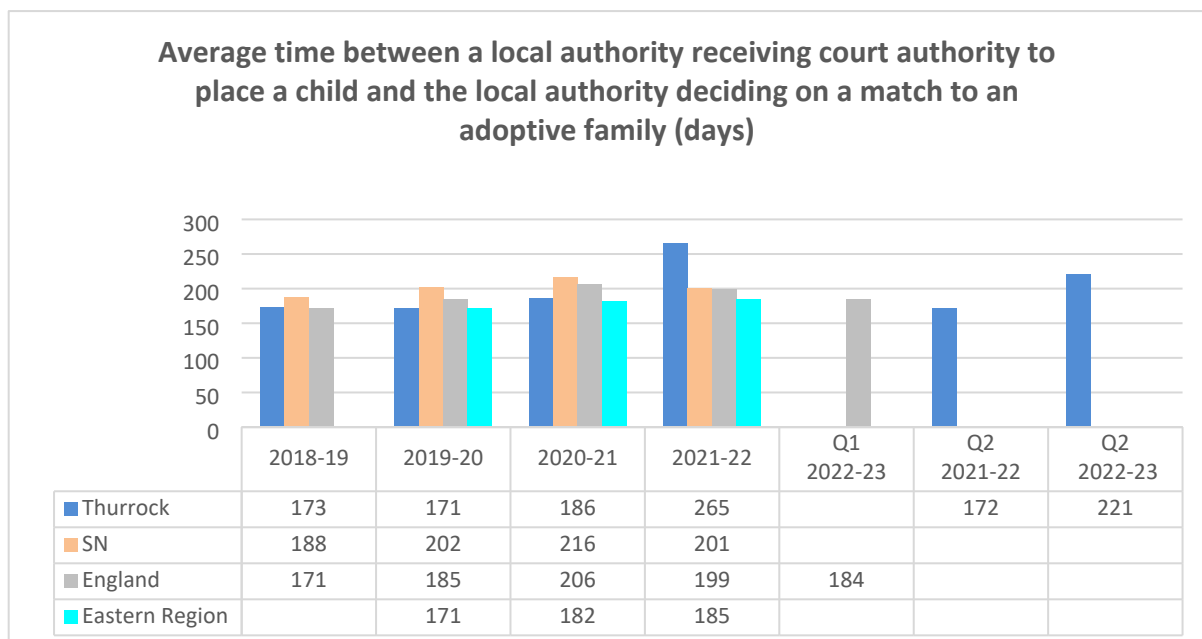
7.1 Timeliness of Adoption

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 Q2 2022-23, Thurrock's average was 609 days. Based on Q1 2022-23, Thurrock is above the National average of 454 days and based on year end 2021-22 data, Thurrock is above the Statistical Neighbour average of 435 days, England average of 397 and Eastern Region of 459 days.

Care proceedings have seen significant delays; court availability and family members being identified late. For a small group of children there are longer adoption journeys and these lift our average. We will continue to see upward pressure due to the duration of care proceedings being 40+ weeks (the target is 26)



As at end of Q2 2022-23, the average time in days between Thurrock receiving a Placement Order (court authority) to place a child with the adoptive family was 221 days. Based on Q1 2022-23 data, Thurrock is above the National average of 184 days and based on 2021-22-year end data, Thurrock is marginally above the Statistical Neighbour average of 201 days, the England average of 199 days and Eastern Region of 185 days as at the end of Q2 2022-23.



This is an area for the Service to focus to ensure there is timely matching and placing of children with their adoptive families. There has been delays in timetabling of final hearings for Placement Orders, and further delay because 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 or appeal can prevent the placement of children with adoptive families. Due to the small numbers involved, the average can be impacted in exceptional circumstances by an individual case causing an increase in the average time between a court order being made and matching.

7.2 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.

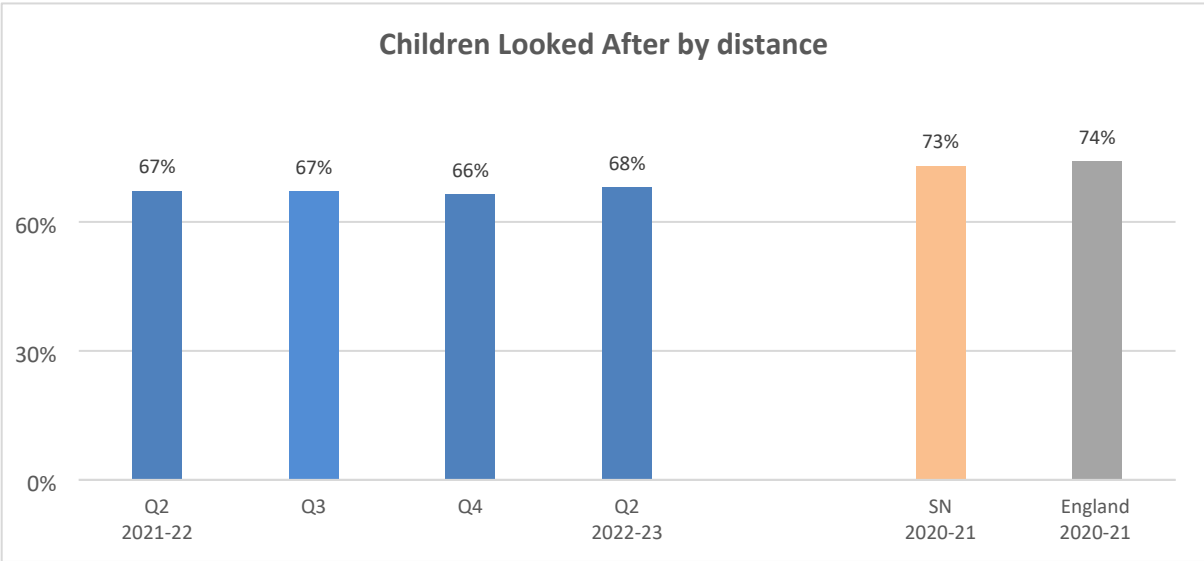
Of the total CLA cohort of 282 as at the end of Q2 2022-23, 16%(44) children were aged 0-5. Most children under 5 years who are not able to return home, are moved on to permanent placements through adoption or permanent alternative carers. There were significant delays in court proceedings and children being subject to court proceedings for longer periods, and transition to their permanent homes being delayed.

7.3 Children Looked After placement distance

It is good practice to ensure that children remain within their communities. At the end of September 2022, 68% of the Children Looked After cohort were placed within 20 miles or less from their homes, which represents 192 of 282

children looked after. Based on the latest benchmarking data available in March 2021, Thurrock reflects performance close 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 2021, 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>.

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 Services

No implications identified.

11.3 Diversity & Equality

Implications verified by: **Roxanne Scanlon**
**Community Engagement and Project
Monitoring Officer - Adults, Housing &
Health**

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:

Daniel Jones, Strategic Lead, Children Looked After, Children's Services
Clare Moore, Strategic Lead, Youth Offending Service and Prevention, Children and Family Services
Ruth Murdock, Strategic Lead, Quality & Assurance, Children's Services
Mairead Morgan, Strategic Lead, Safeguarding, Children's Services
Statistics: Anna Watkins, Business Intelligence Analyst, Children's Services