

<b>15 June 2023</b>		<b>ITEM: 8</b>
<b>Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee</b>		
<b>Children's Social Care Performance – Quarter 4 2022-23</b>		
<b>Wards and communities affected:</b> All	<b>Key Decision:</b> Non-key	
<b>Report of:</b> Marc Rhodes, Business Intelligence & Data Analytics Manager - Performance, Quality & Business Intelligence		
<b>Accountable Assistant Director:</b> Janet Simon, Assistant Director Children's Social Care and Early Help		
<b>Accountable Director:</b> Sheila Murphy, Corporate Director of Children's Services		
<b>This report is Public</b>		

## Executive Summary

This report shows that:

- Between January and March 2023, the number of The Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) contacts received was 1,747 compared to 1,584 in the same period in 2022.
- Between January and March 2023, the number of referrals was 608, similar to the same period in 2022 at 613
- Between January and March 2023, 99% of Child and Family assessments were completed in timescale compared to 93.1% during the same period in 2022. This is an increase of 5.9% and is evidence of improved performance.
- As at end of March 2023, the number of children subject to a Child Protection Plan was 107 compared to 110 at the end of March 2022. Children subject to a Child Protection plan are carefully reviewed and does fluctuate each quarter, therefore this small decrease does not present any concern.
- In Quarter 4 2022-23, the number of Child Protection episodes starting was 43 compared to 44 in the same period in 2022. In Quarter 4 2022-23. Child protection episodes ending was 26 compared to 49 in Quarter 4 2021-22. Although this is a significant decrease in the number of episodes ending, this does not present a concern, as the numbers are expected to fluctuate and as identified above plans are reviewed regularly.

- In Quarter 4 2022-23, 68 cases were stepped down to Early Help compared to 108 in the same period in 2021-22. There remains a concerted effort to ensure that children and families receive the correct level of support and advice and where a case no longer requires statutory intervention Early Help support is offered as appropriate.
- 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. Performance 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 and areas requiring further development as well as challenges in Children’s Social Care.**

**1.2 That members note the 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, 2022-23 (Jan-Mar 2023). It highlights key demand indicators such as numbers 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 (which are available for the previous year).

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

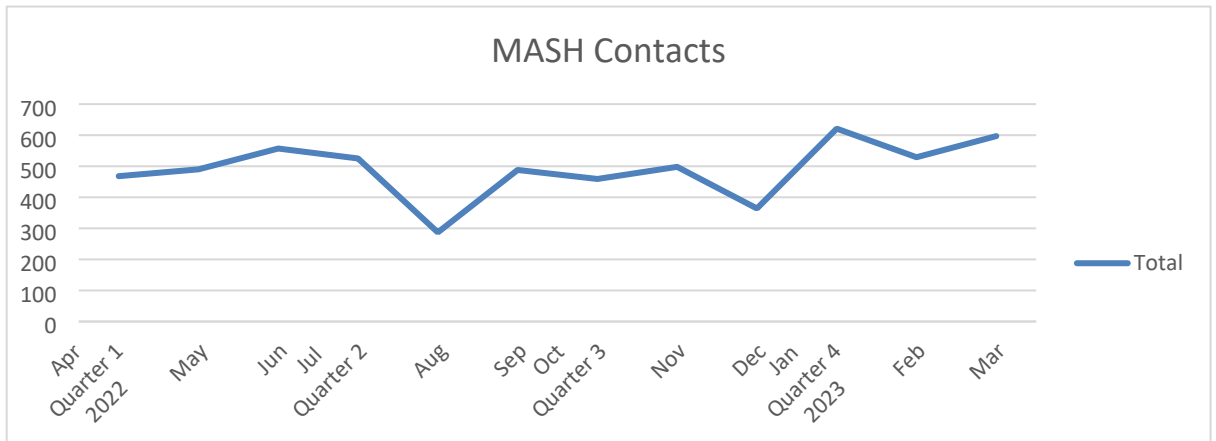
## **3. Thurrock Performance Data**

### **3.1 MASH Contacts**

Between January and March 2023 (Quarter 4), the number of MASH contacts received was 1,747 which is an increase on 1,584 in the same period in 2022. The number of contacts into MASH do fluctuate on a monthly basis and can be impacted upon by school holidays, and training and awareness raising within the partnership.

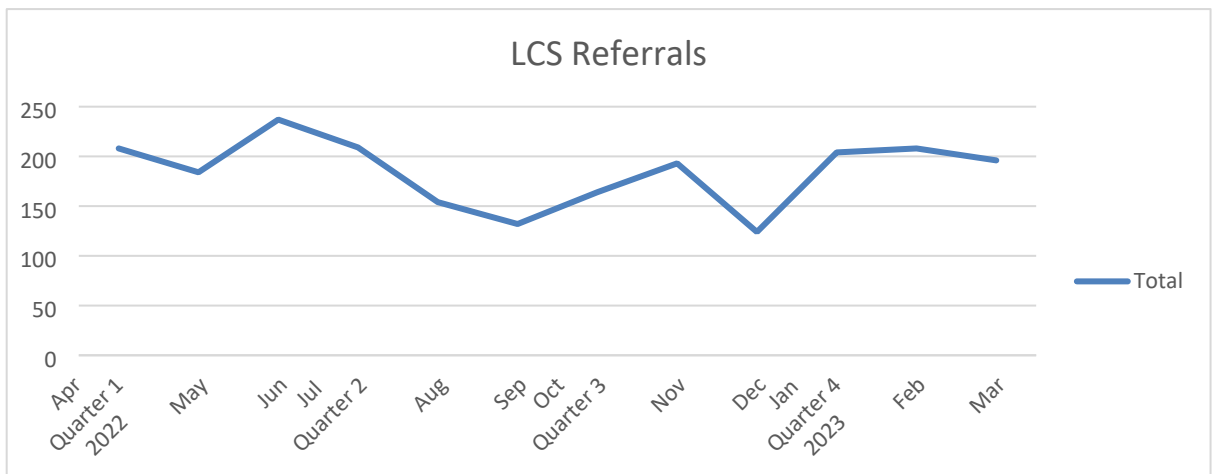
Of the total contacts of 1,747 received in the period, 45.7% resulted in no further action and the remaining required some level of intervention. The

number of contacts resulting in no further actions remains relatively consistent each month.



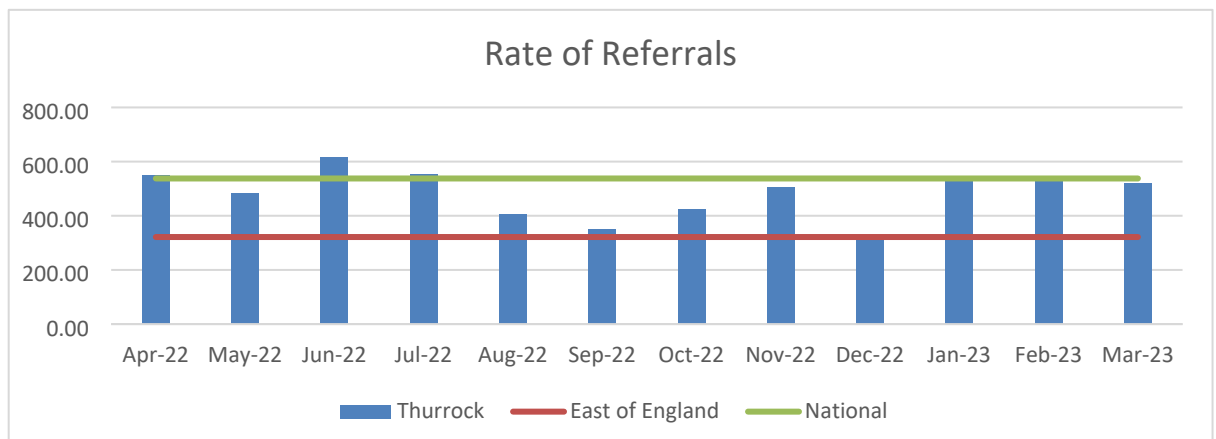
### 3.2 Referrals

Between January and March 2023, the number of referrals was 608 similar to 613 in the same period in 2022. Between 01 April 2022 to 31 March 2023, there were 2,213 LCS referrals compared to 2,480 in the previous year, which is an 11% drop in Referrals. The number of referrals each month does fluctuate, as demonstrated in the below graph which shows the number of referrals in 2022-23.



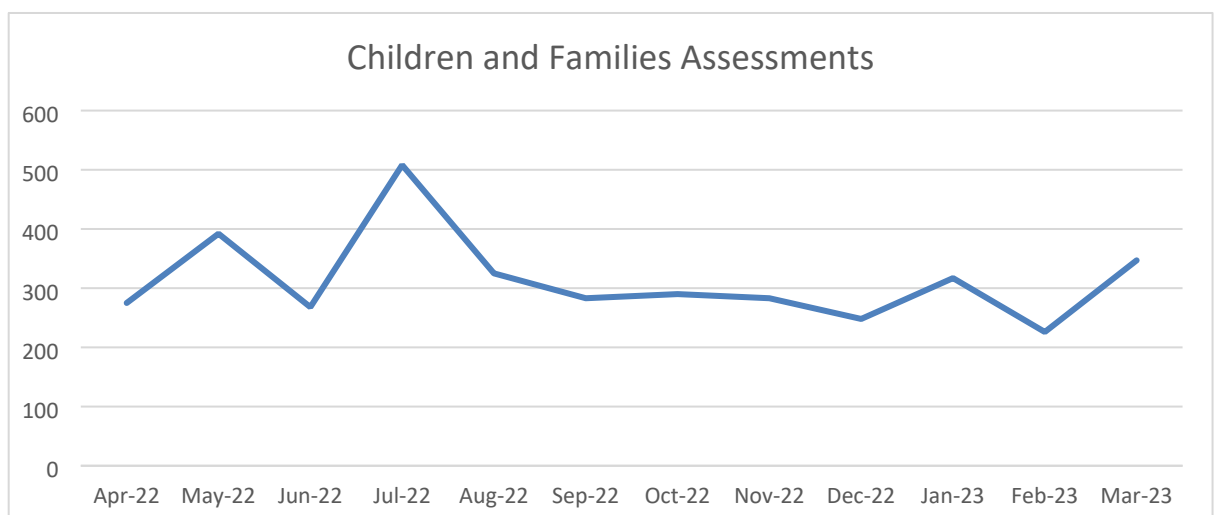
### 3.3 Rate of referrals

As at the end of March 2023, the rate of referrals per 10,000 was 518.3 compared to 546 in March 2022. Based on benchmarking 2022 data, Thurrock is below the England rate of 537.7 and above East of England rate of 321.5. This demonstrates that we are more in line with the average England rate, than the East of England rate.



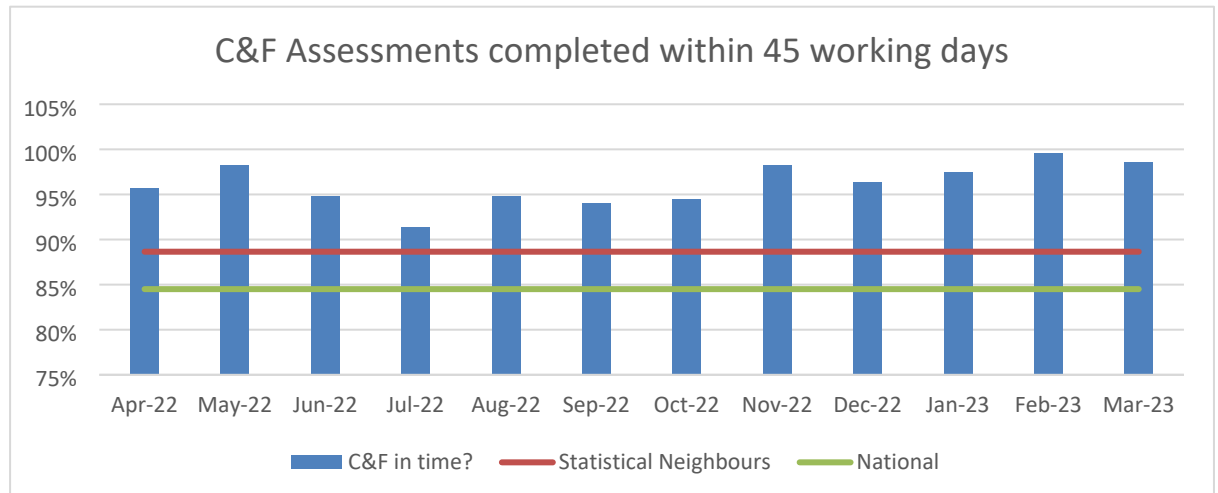
### 3.4 Children & Families Assessments

Between January and March 2023 890 assessments were completed compared to 958 in the same quarter in the previous year. This shows 7% decrease in Q4 2022-23 when compared with the same period in the previous year. The graph below shows the number of assessments completed over time. Numbers of assessments completed are expected to fluctuate over time as they will depend on when assessments are due, numbers of cases open to CSC and referrals.



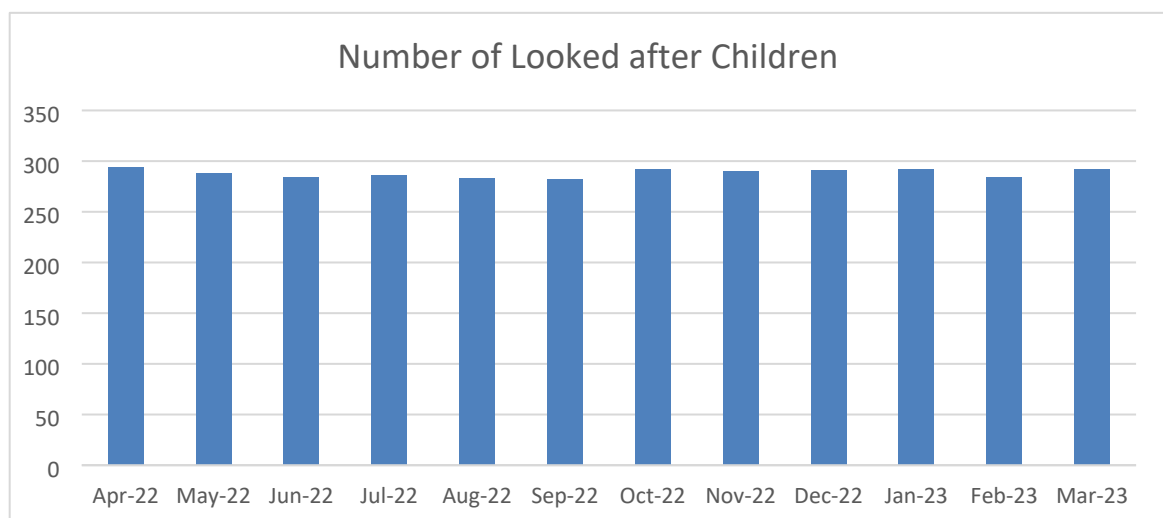
### 3.5 Children & Families Assessments completed in timescale

The number of assessments completed in timescale continues to show very good performance at 99% as at end of March 2023. This is above Statistical Neighbours (89%) and the England average (84%)



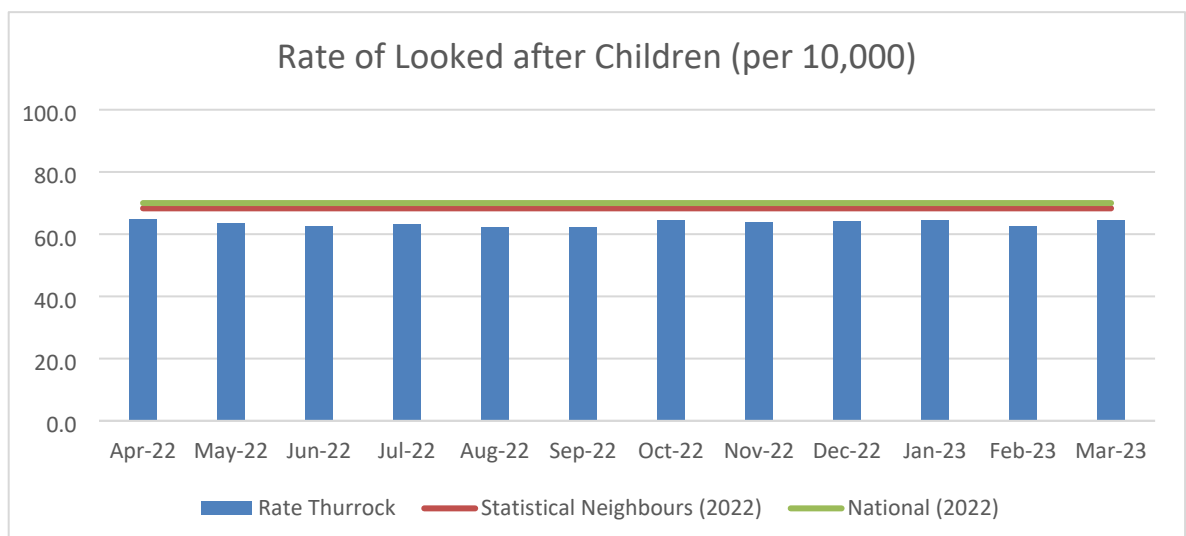
### 4. Children Looked After (CLA)

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 supported to remain in their families or if they need to come into care to return to their family where safe and appropriate. The overall number of children looked after at the end of March 2023 was 292. This is in line with the overall figure from March 2022 (293) but a greater proportionate UASC and the lower entry in to care for resident children reflects the trend seen in previous years



#### 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 2023 there were 292 Children Looked After in Thurrock with the rate of 64.3 per 10,000. Based on the benchmarking data for 2021/22, Thurrock is below the Statistical Neighbour average of 68.3 and National average of 70 as at the end of March 2023. This is a reflection of the work in the service to safely keep children at home or in their families.



#### 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 0.1% 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 44 children.

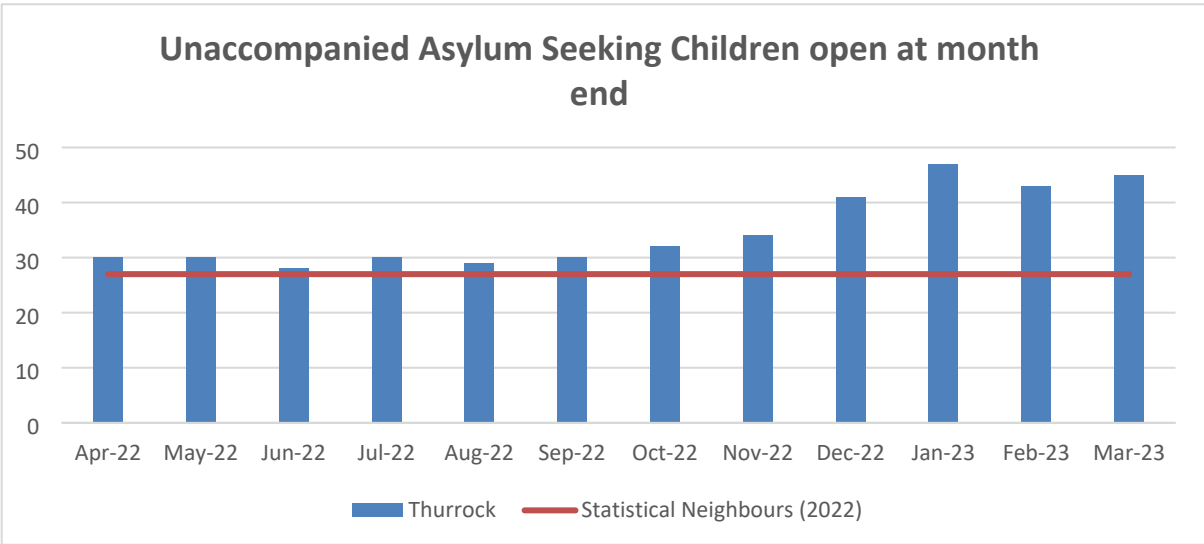
On 31<sup>st</sup> May 2023, there were 38 young people who were UASC looked after by Thurrock Council. This is lower than our quota of 44 children and is the result of young people turning 18. We therefore expect to receive transfers in through June and July 2023

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 Region<sup>1</sup> 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 April 2022. The rise is due to an uplift in our UASC quota from 31-44 children. The Statistical Neighbour data does not yet reflect the quota uplift and will adjusted when the more recent data is released. It anticipated that the trend will be up.



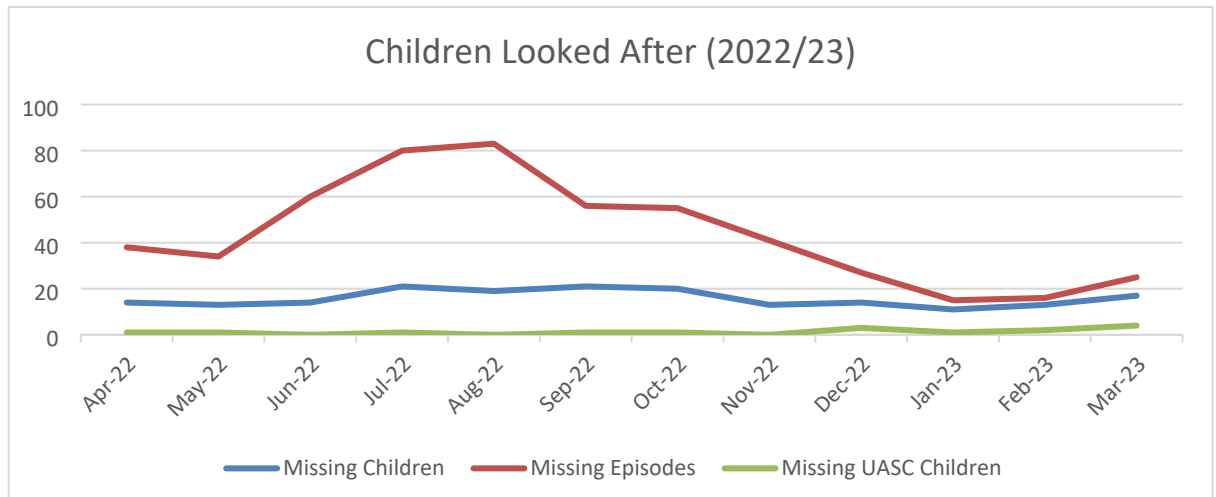
### 4.3 Children who ceased to be looked after

Between January and March 2023, 25 children ceased to be looked after which is 31% less when compared to the same period in 2022, where 36 children ceased to be looked after. It is normal for the number of children leaving care to fluctuate as care episodes ending reasons range from adoption to young people reaching the age of 18.

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

#### 4.4 CLA who go missing

Between January and March 2023, there were total of 56 missing episodes represented by 41 individual children. The below chart shows the trend for missing episodes in 2022/23.



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

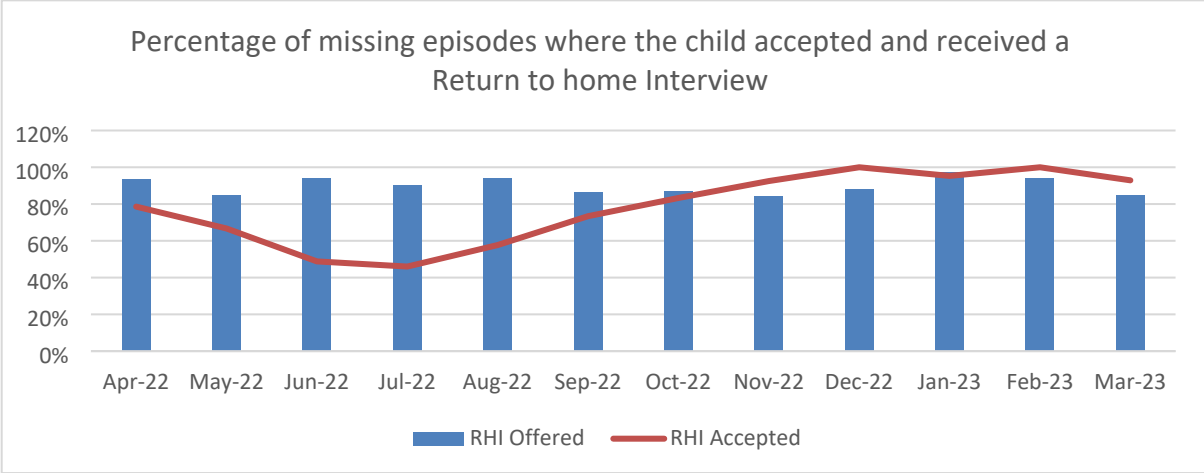
Since April 2020, Inspire Youth Hub have been commissioned to undertake independent Return Home Interviews (RHI). All children are offered a RHI within 72 hours following each missing event, with the aim of understanding the young person's circumstances and the reasons why they go missing. Key Workers 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



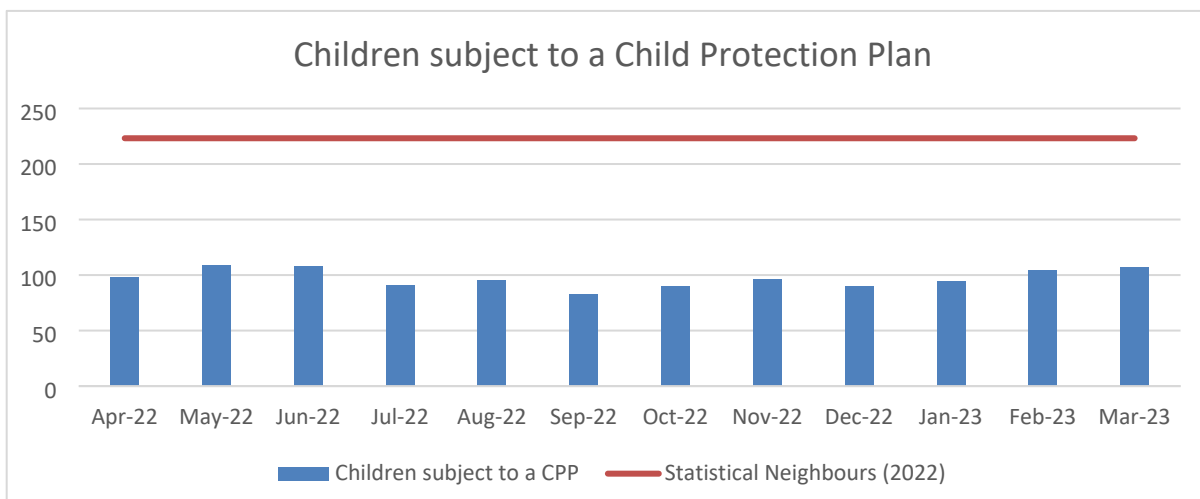
captured. This has increased the amount of Return Home Interviews completed and has ensured that young people are given the opportunities to share whether there are any safeguarding issues in relation to exploitation that needs to be addressed. that offer.



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

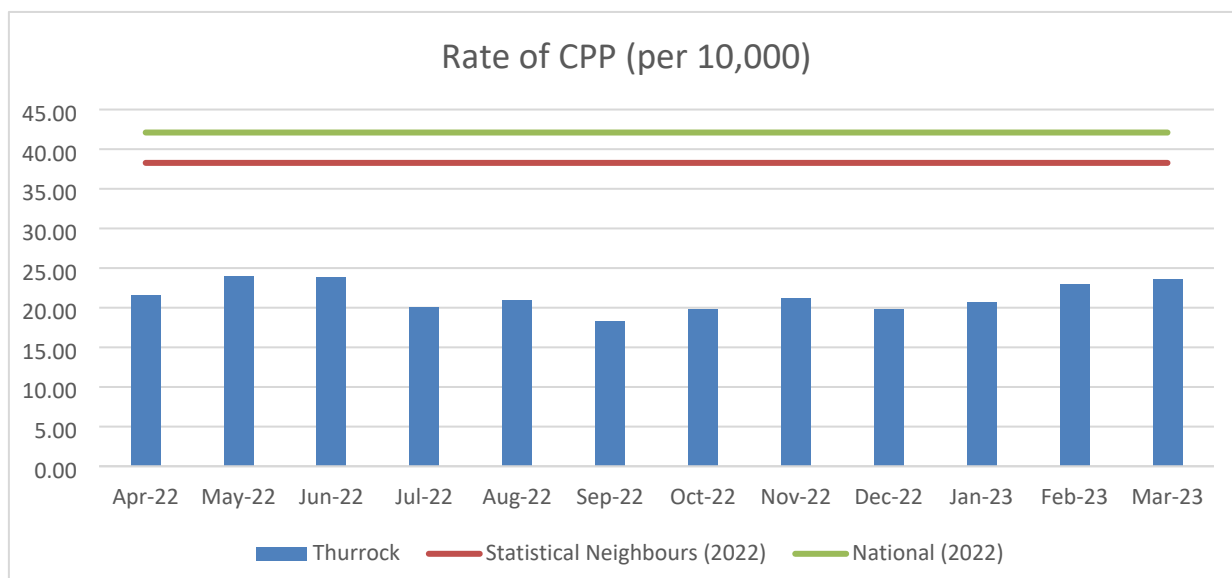
**5.1 Number of Children subject to Child Protection Plan**

At the end of March 2023, the number of children subject to a Child Protection Plan was 107 compared to 110 in March 2022. 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 March 2023, the rate of children subject to a Child Protection Plan was 23.6 per 10,000 population compared to 24.2 in March 2022. Based on the benchmarking data 2021-22, Thurrock is below the Statistical Neighbour rate of 38.0 and England rate of 42.0. Child Protection Plans are regularly reviewed through the CP surgery, also and external review focussing on CP & CIN in January noted that the appropriate thresholds were in place and the right children were subject to CP plans.



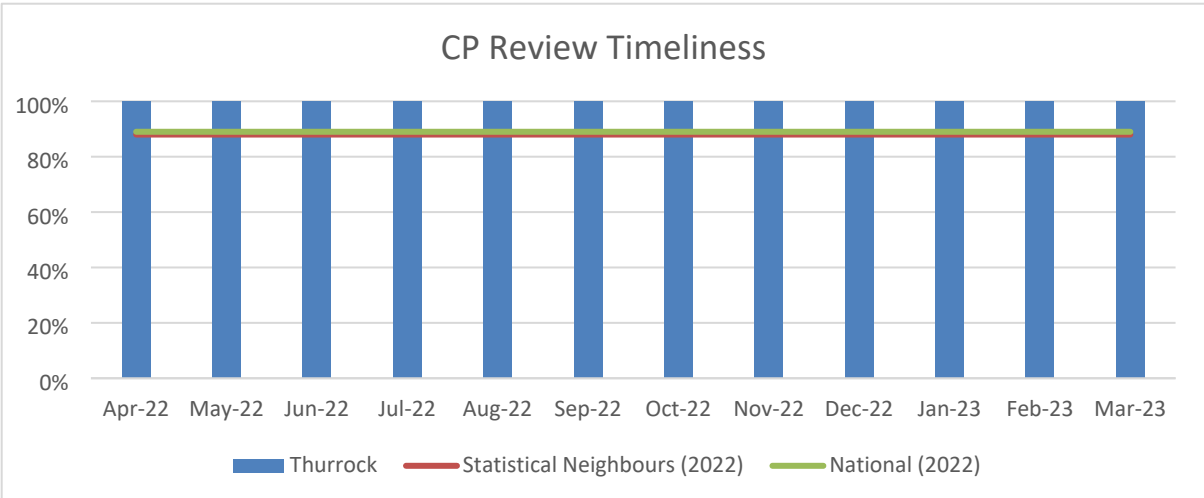
The further embedding of the Signs of Safety practice model (strengths based approach) through training events, such as timelines and trajectories, and the development of champions across the service has helped to maintain the number of children with a plan at a rate of approximately 100 on average across the year. There has also been the introduction of an independent chair

focussing on CIN meetings bringing greater consistency in the application of Thresholds. During 22-23 a programme of training in systemic practice was provided assisting social workers and managers to engage through the use of relationship based questions

### 5.3 Child Protection reviews

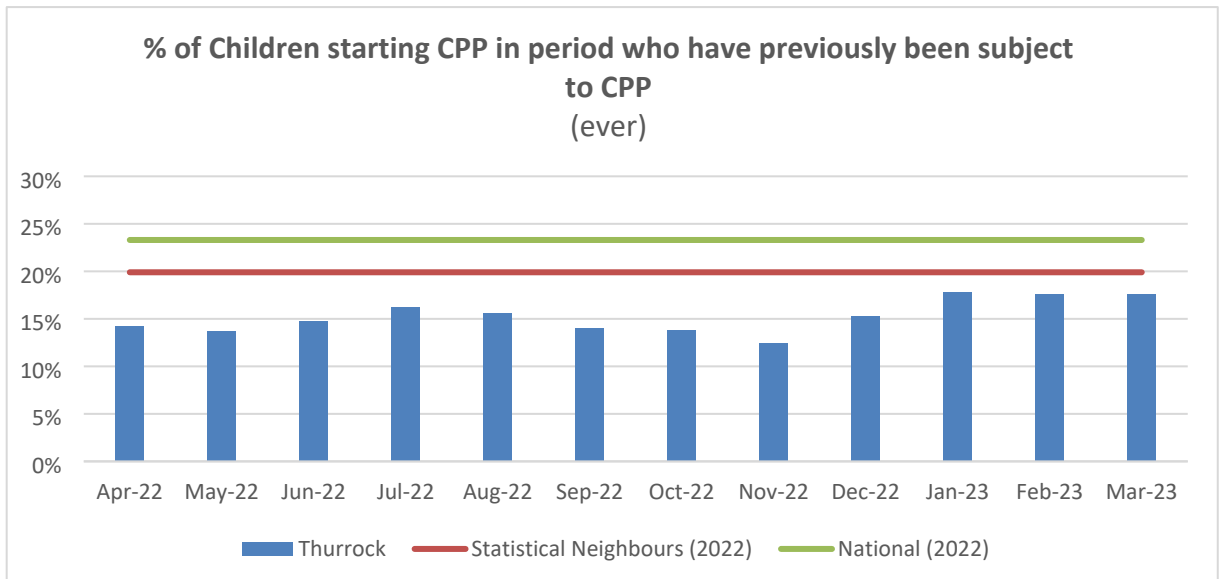
Child Protection plan reviews completed on time continue showing good performance. The below graph shows the overall trend for 2022/23.

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 March 2023, the percentage of children subject to repeat Child Protection Plan (at any point previously) was 18% compared to 13.3 at the end of March 20232. 2021-22 benchmarking data shows that in March 2023 Thurrock is below the Statistical Neighbour average of 20% and England average of 23%. This would indicate that the Child Protection plans have been effective in bringing about sustained change, as repeat child protection plans are occurring less than comparators. In order to scrutinise repeat CPs we conducted an audit of repeat plans in Feb 2023 and compared it to a similar audit in 2020. This indicated that although CP plans were repeats for the same reason in most cases, it was less likely to be due to mental health and substance mis-use concerns and more associated with domestic violence, although the incidence of this had also declined. In addition, it is notable that very few cases have repeat plans within 2 years of the previous CP plan. Repeat plans are also considered in the CP surgery which is attended by the allocated SW team and the CP chair.



## 6. Care Leaving Service

The graphs below show the Relevant and Former Relevant Children whose 17th, 18th, 19th, 20th or 21st birthday falls between 1<sup>st</sup> April 2022 and 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023 who are in receipt of a Care Leaving service. For young people aged over 21 years, Local Authorities are required to appoint a Personal Adviser for Care Leavers who require and wants to receive support

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

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

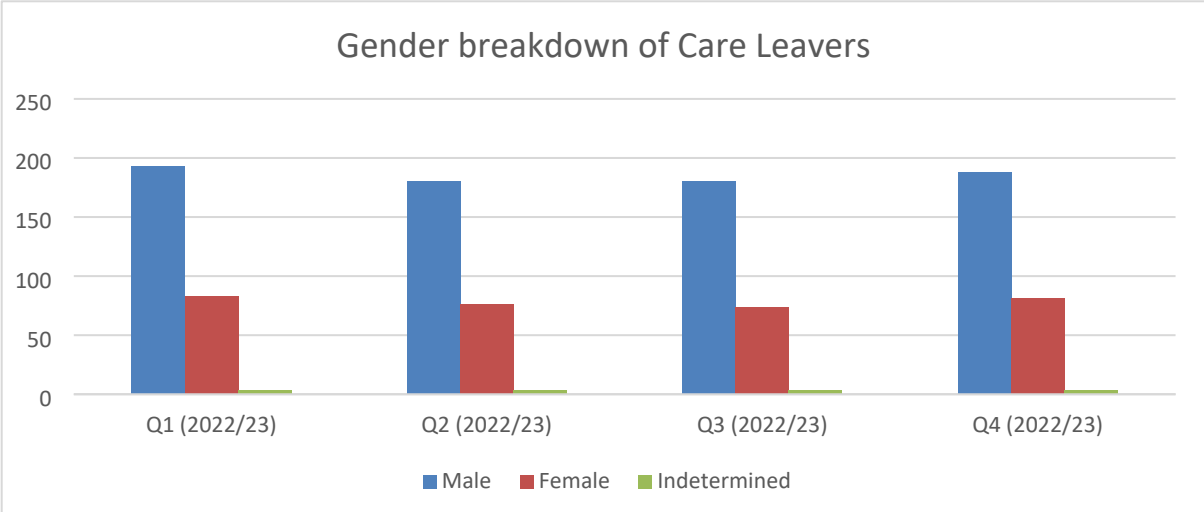
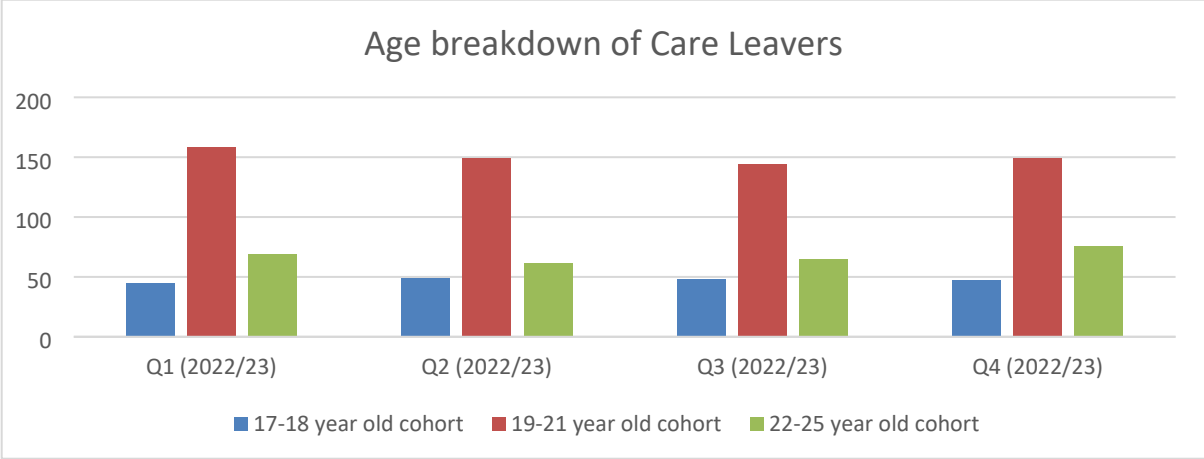
- Eligible child - a young person who is 16 or 17 and who has been looked after by the local authority/health and social care trust for at least a period of 13 weeks since the age of 14, and who is still looked after.
- Relevant child - a young person who is 16 or 17 who has left care after their 16th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

As at end of March 2023, 270 Care Leavers were being supported and were receiving an Aftercare service. This is a slight reduction from the previous year of 295. The Service reviews open cases of young people aged over 21 to

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

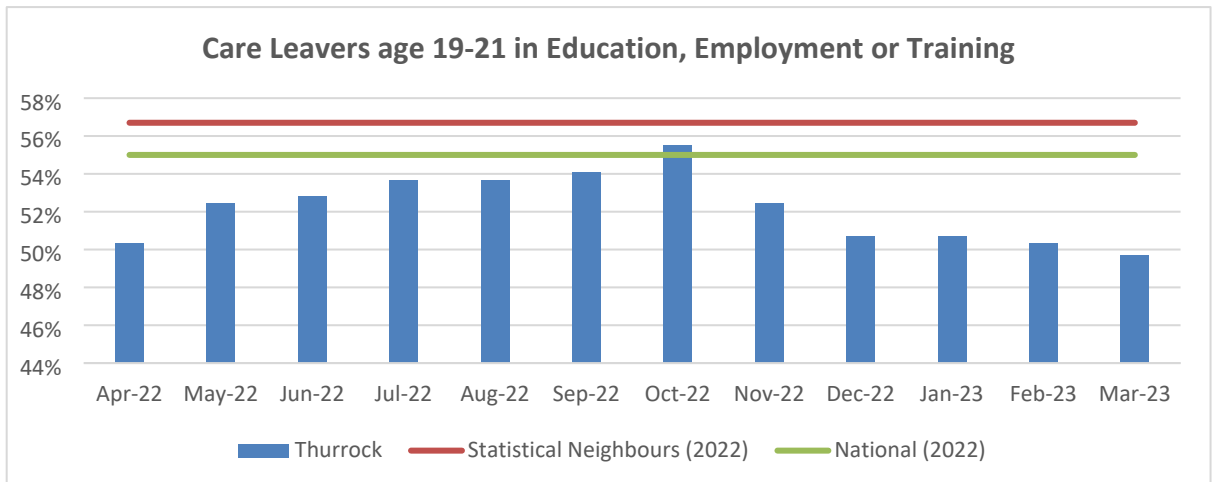
make sure they are receiving the right support and continue to need and want a service.

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



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

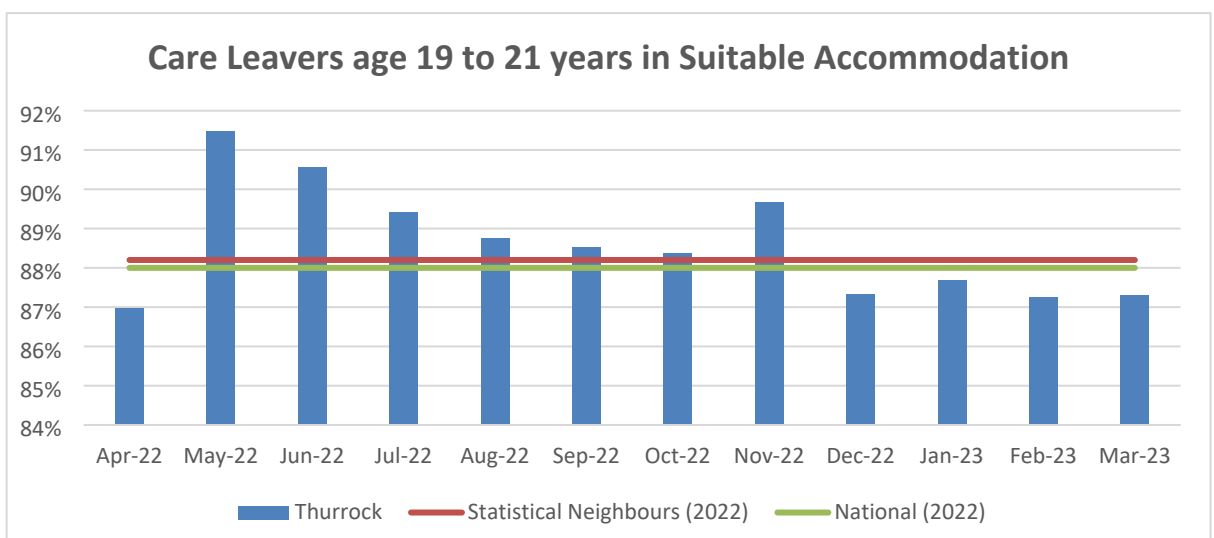
At the end of Q4 2022-23, 50% of the Care Leavers aged 19 to 21-year-old were in part or full-time education, employment or training compared to 50.6% at the end of Q4 in 2021/22. Thurrock is below the Statistical Neighbour average of 57% and the England average of 55%. To strengthen oversight and planning 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 March 2023, the percentage of 19 to 21-year-old Care Leavers reported to be in suitable accommodation was 87%. Thurrock is slightly below the Statistical Neighbour average of 88% and the England average of 88% based on 2022 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 and a small number of care leavers who are in prison.

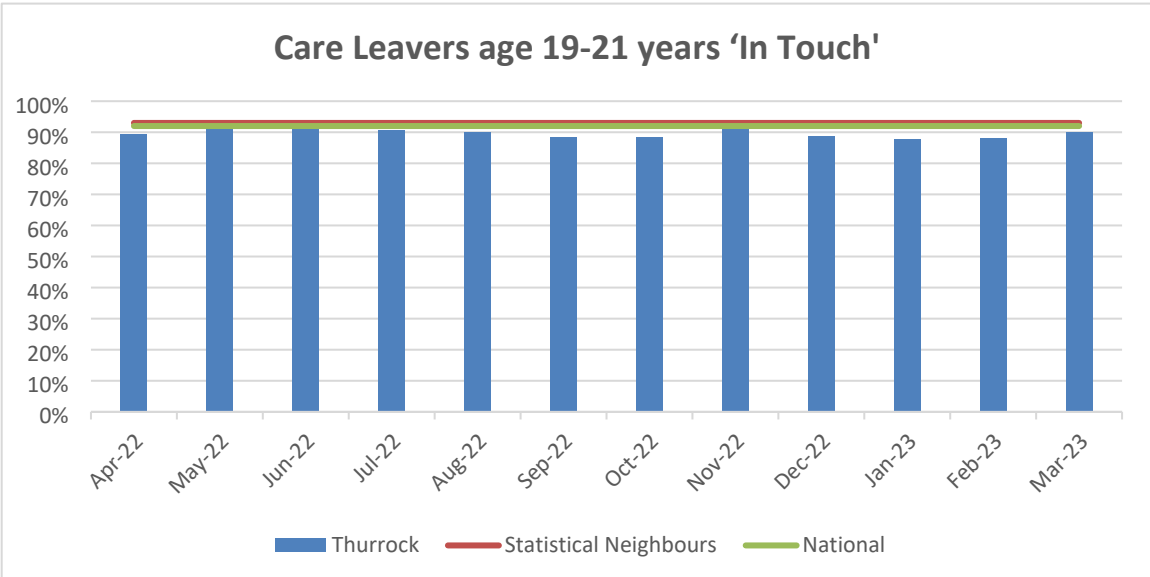
Increased housing support is being provided to young people by the Aftercare Service, Head Start Housing and Thurrock Housing Department. The 'Housing Offer' to Care Leavers has been updated with the Joint Housing Protocol 2020, ensuring good partnership working with clear pathways for young people to 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 March 2023, Thurrock was in touch with 89% of Care Leavers. Thurrock's performance slightly below the Statistical Neighbour (93%) and England average of 92%.

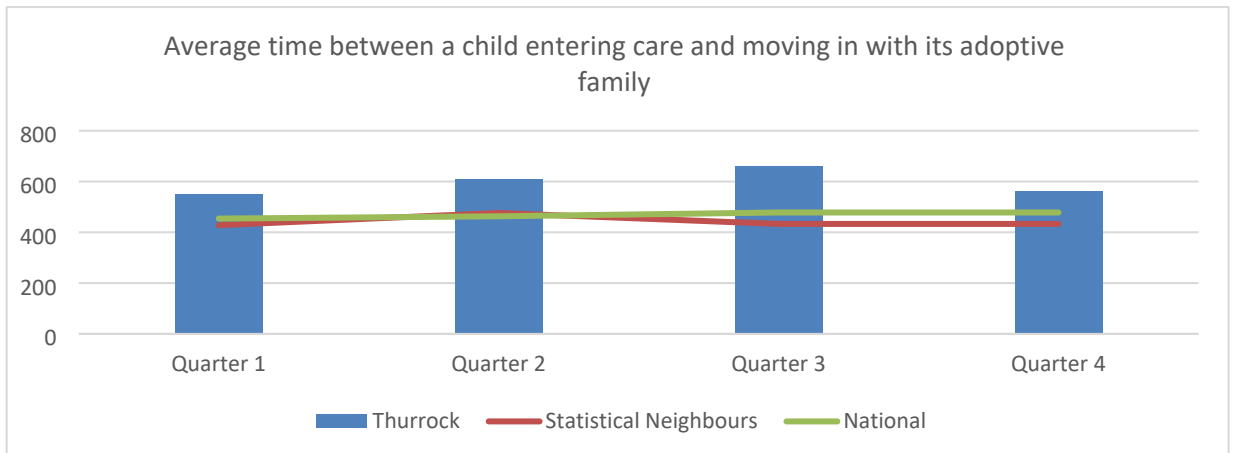


### 7.0 Adoption

As at the end of Q4 2022-23, there were 14 children adopted and 4 matched with prospective adopters. The service continues to progress links for children with placement orders as quickly as possible and progress in monitored via monthly review.

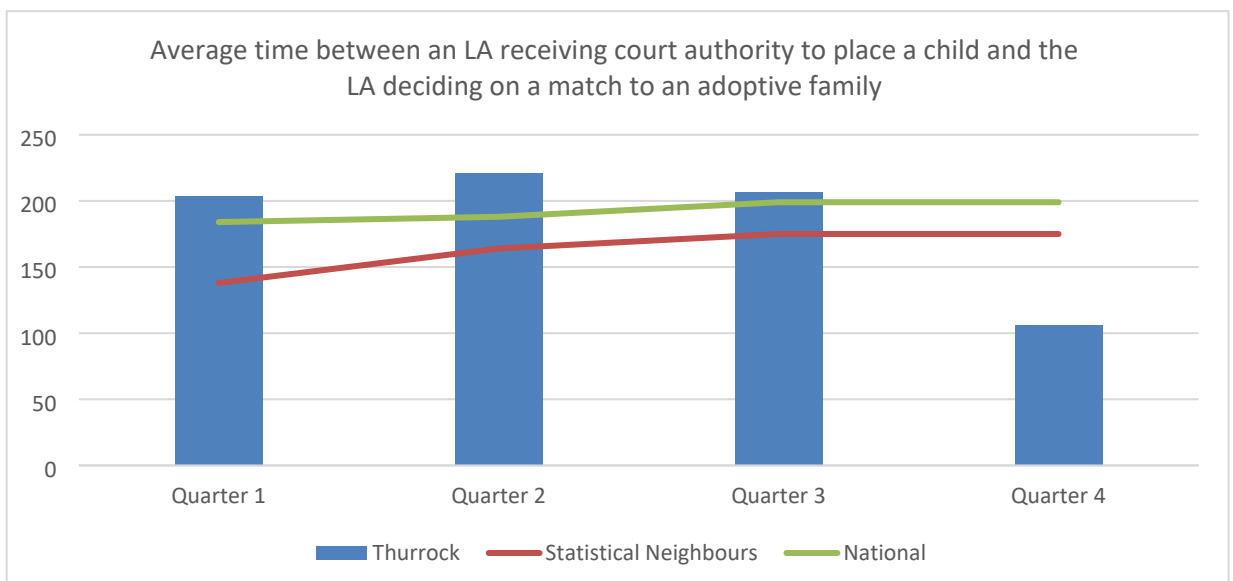
### 7.1 Timeliness of Adoption

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 Q4 2022-23, Thurrock's average was 560 days. Thurrock is above the National average of 478 days and above the Statistical Neighbour average of 433 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 50+ weeks (the target is 26)

As at end of Q4 2022-23, the average time in days between Thurrock receiving a Placement Order (court authority) to place a child with the adoptive family was 106 days. This is an improvement and ahead of the national figure at Q4 of 199 days.



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. 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

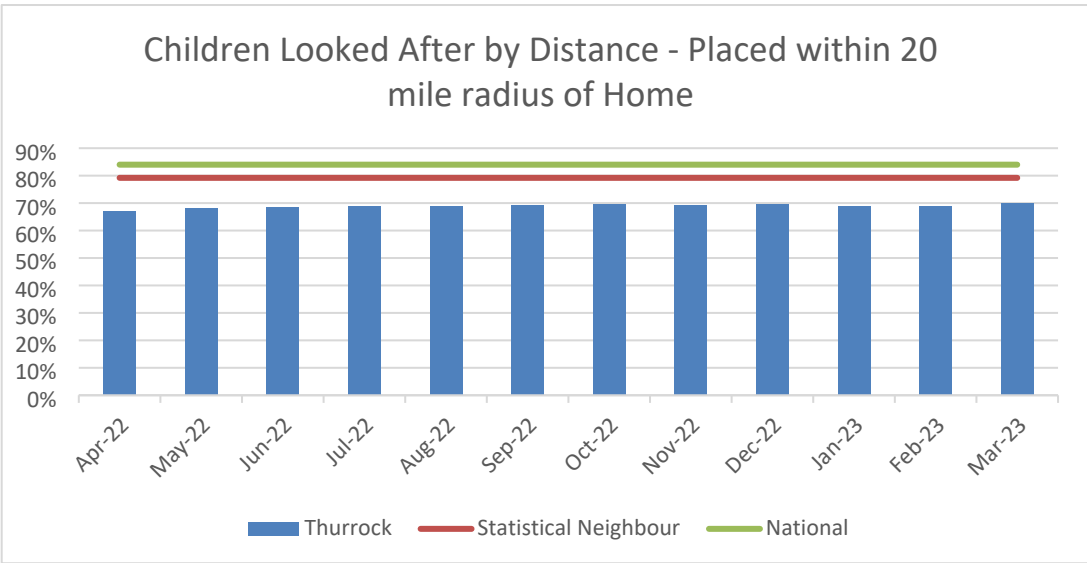
Purposeful early permanency planning continues to ensure that children are in the right placement at the right time to meet their needs. Securing placements where needed and supporting children, where appropriate, to remain at home with their families is the priority. Children are placed for adoption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

Of the total CLA cohort of 292 as at the end of Q4 2022-23, 14.6% (43) 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 March 2023, 71% of the Children Looked After cohort were placed within 20 miles or less from their homes, which represents 206 of 292 children looked after. Based on the latest benchmarking data available (2021/22), Thurrock is below the national average of 84%.

Nationally there are fewer placements (foster care and residential placements



## **7.4 Placement Sufficiency**

Placement Sufficiency is an area of intense focus for the Local Authority. The fostering recruitment campaign seeks to increase local placements. The recruitment and retention of foster placement and residential placements is a local and national challenge. Thurrock Council has commissioned two children's homes locally with a provider to provide additional sufficiency for registered provisions. Both homes were registered in November 2022 providing placements for Thurrock children. Both homes were inspected by Ofsted in May 2023 were rated Good. The local authority continues to seek Ofsted registered provision locally but sometimes this is outside of the Thurrock and Essex area.

## **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